Seasonal conditions insights snapshot

May 2026

Key points

May 2026 saw mixed seasonal conditions across Tasmania, with rainfall varying spatially and remaining below the long-term average overall – despite above-average falls in parts of the east and north east that helped ease conditions in previously dry areas. Temperatures were significantly above average, making May one of the warmest on record.

Soil moisture and hydrological conditions improved in the eastern half of the State following recent rainfall, with runoff returning to near-normal or above-average levels in many eastern catchments. However, below-average soil moisture and runoff persisted across parts of the north, east, west, and south-west, indicating incomplete recovery and ongoing vulnerability in these regions.

Over longer timeframes, rainfall deficiencies remain evident across much of Tasmania, particularly in central, eastern, and northern agricultural regions, although recent rainfall has eased conditions from very much below-average to below-average in some areas. The autumn season overall was drier and warmer than average, reinforcing sustained dry conditions.

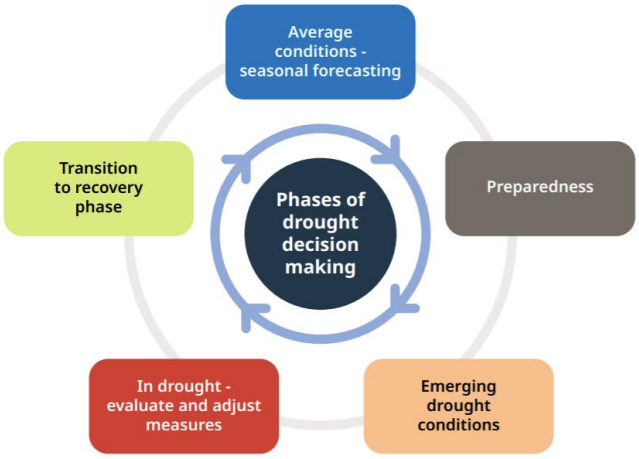
Agronomic conditions stabilised with recent rainfall supporting livestock prices, however, pasture growth has slowed in response to cooling temperatures. Economic conditions remain tight, with elevated input and transport costs placing pressure on margins despite some easing in fuel prices and strong prices in certain agricultural markets. Producer sentiment is mixed, reflecting improved seasonal conditions alongside ongoing financial pressures.

The Bureau of Meteorology outlook indicates a likelihood of below-average rainfall and above-average temperatures through winter, suggesting an ongoing risk of dry conditions.

Department of
Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania

Tasmanian
Government

Under the *Monitoring Seasonal Conditions and Drought Framework*, most regions are classified as experiencing average seasonal conditions, while the north east, south east, east coast and midlands remain in the 'preparedness' phase, reflecting continued exposure to dry conditions.



Drought Phases	Districts
Average Seasonal Conditions	Flinders Island, King Island, Circular Head, west coast, Derwent Valley, Central Highlands, Tasman Peninsula
Preparedness	North east, south east, east coast, midlands
Emerging Drought Conditions	Nil
In Drought	Nil

Primary (lead) condition indicator

Precipitation

In May 2026, Tasmania experienced below-average rainfall for parts of the west and south-west, above average for parts of the east and north-east, and average for most of the rest of the State. The statewide rainfall amounted to 109.3 mm, representing a 20 per cent deficit relative to the 1961-1990 average, despite some sites receiving highest total May rainfall on record. The pocket in the south west with very much below-average rainfall was deemed an anomaly by NRE Tas and the pocket is in a non-agricultural zone.

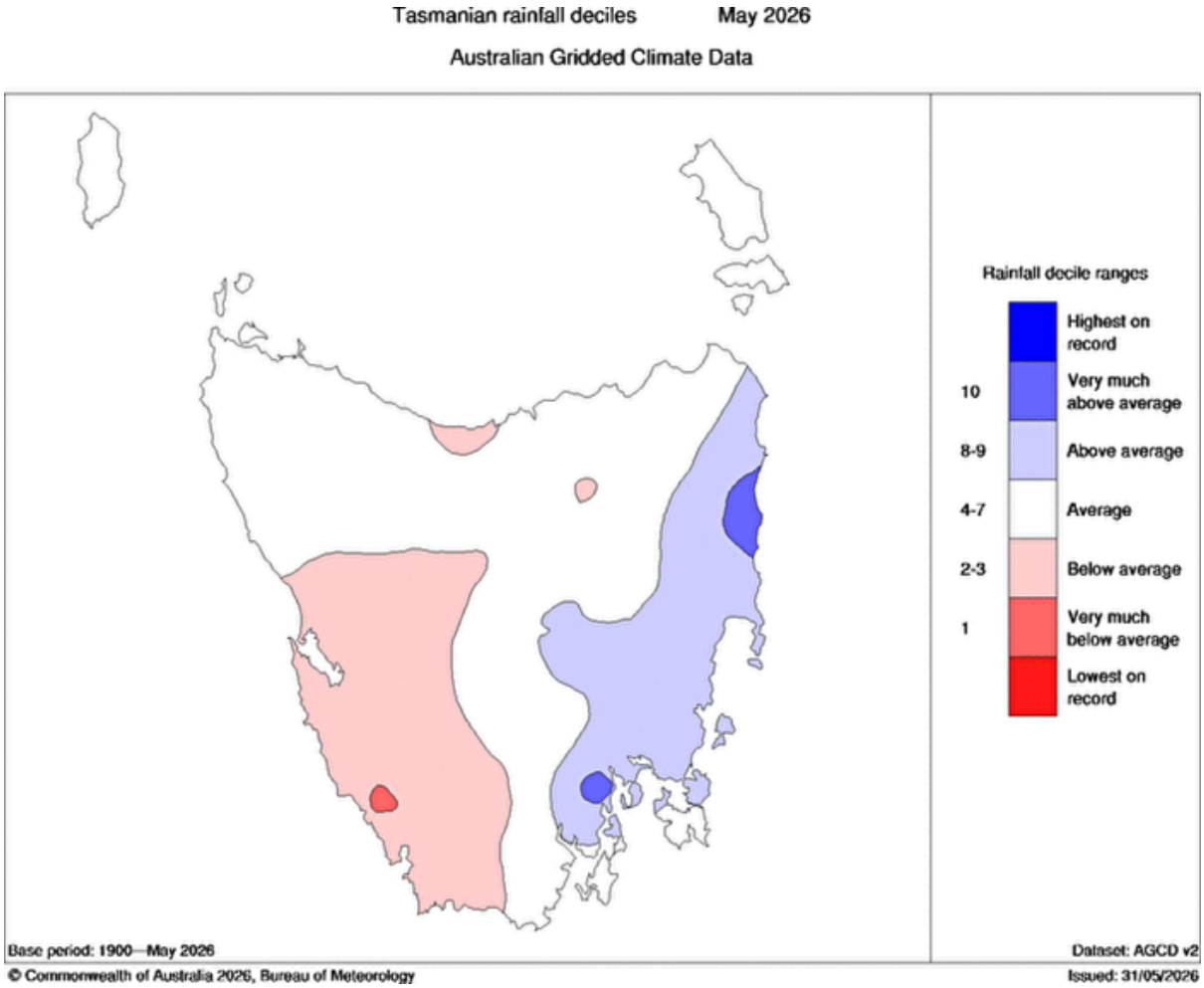


FIGURE 1: TASMANIAN RAINFALL DECILES FOR MAY 2026 FROM BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY

Temperature

Mean maximum temperatures in May were highest on record for most of Tasmania and very much above average for parts of the south-east and King Island. The State's area-averaged mean maximum temperature was 14.6 °C, which was 2.24 °C above the 1961–1990 average and the warmest on record for the month of May since 1910. Mean minimum temperatures in May were very much above average across the State.

The area-averaged mean minimum temperature was 6.7 °C, 1.69°C above 1961-1990 average. Overall, Tasmania's area-averaged mean temperature was 10.7 °C, 1.97 °C above the 1961–1990 average and second warmest on record for May since 1910.

BOM long-range forecast predicts an 80 per cent chance of an unusually warm winter.

3-monthly rainfall deciles for Tasmania

Over the past three months, much of eastern Tasmania and parts of northern Tasmania experienced average rainfall, with isolated areas receiving above average rainfalls, helping ease some preceding conditions. The rest of the State remained in below-average conditions. These dry conditions occurred alongside generally warmer-than-average day and night temperatures across most of the State. Together, the combination of rainfall shortfalls and variable temperatures contributed to sustained dry conditions across affected regions. The pocket in the south west around Low Rocky Point with very much below-average rainfall were deemed an anomaly by NRE Tas and the pocket is in a non-agricultural zone.

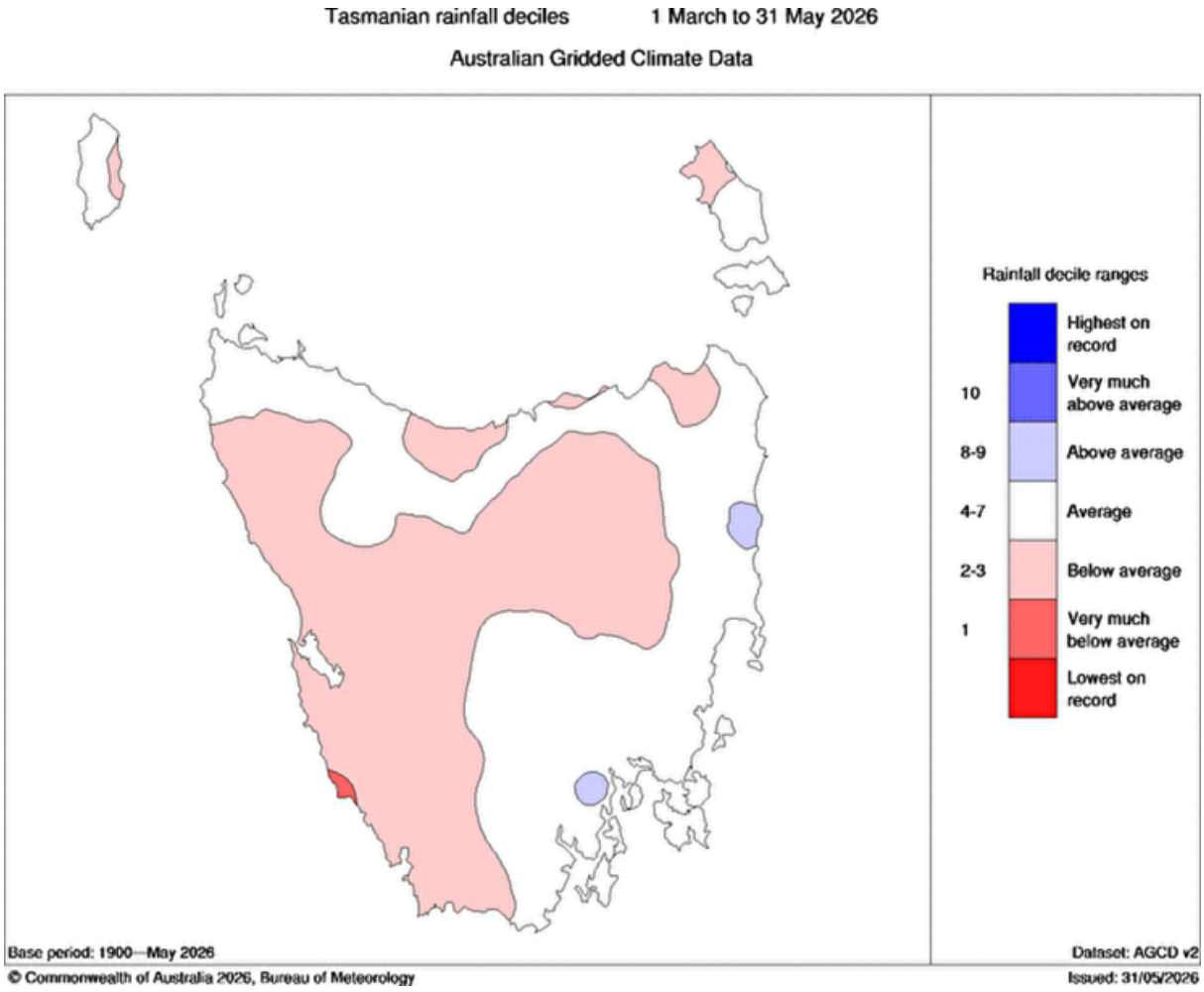


FIGURE 2: RAINFALL DEFICIENCIES FOR 3 MONTHS TO END MAY 2026 FROM BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY

12-monthly rainfall deciles for Tasmania

During the 12-month period from 1 June 2025 to 31 May 2026, large areas of Tasmania recorded below-average rainfall, particularly across much of the central, eastern, and northern agricultural regions, as indicated by decile rankings. Recent rainfalls eased conditions and elevated parts of the east coast and southern midlands from “very much below-average” to below-average conditions. Overall, a predominance of drier-than-normal conditions still persists across the State, but with more areas receiving average rainfalls, particularly in the northeast.

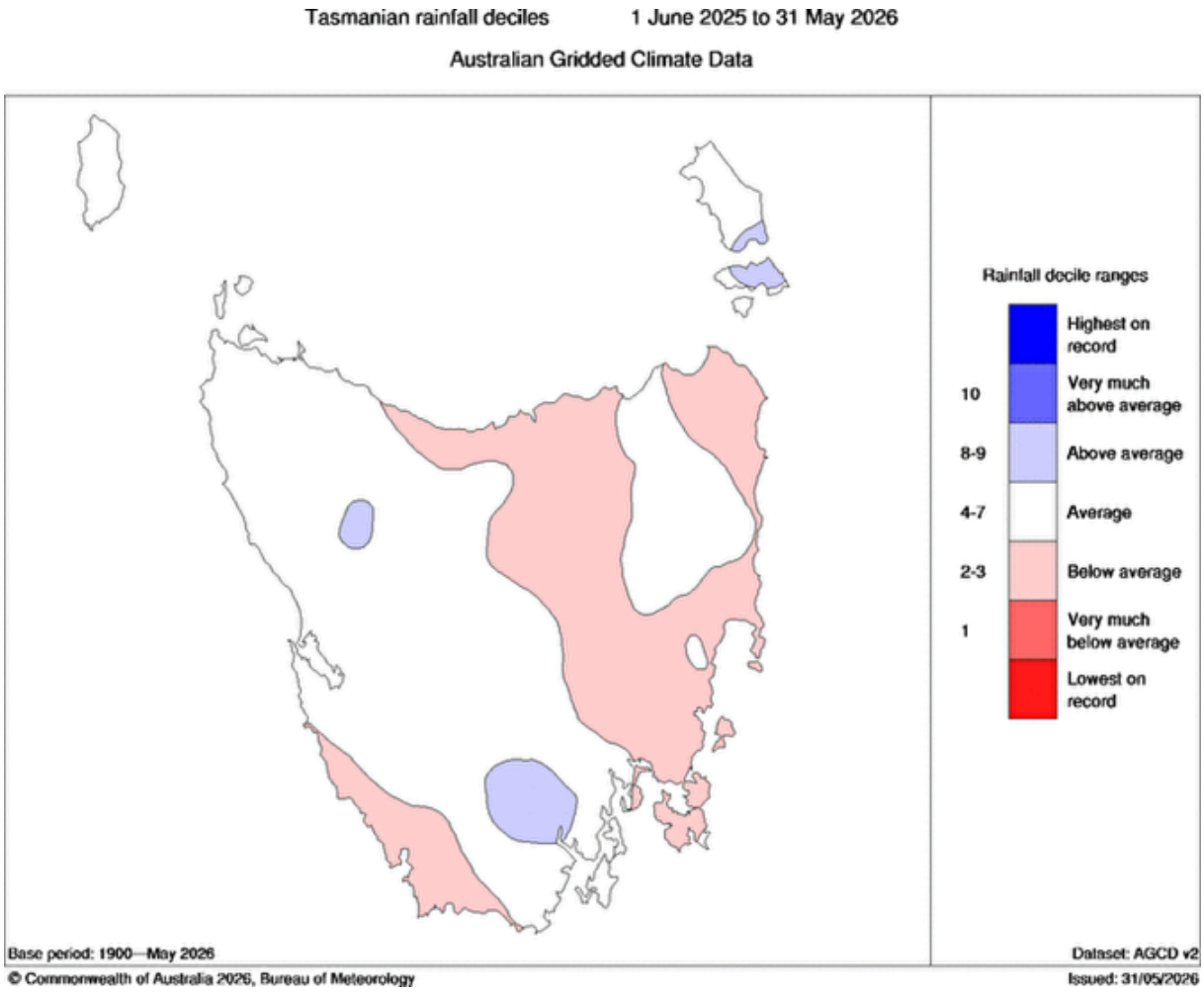


FIGURE 3: RAINFALL DECILES FOR THE 12 MONTHS TO END MAY 2026 FROM BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY

Season summary –autumn

Autumn 2026 in Tasmania saw below-average rainfall across much of the western half of the State and parts of the north east, while most remaining areas experienced near-average conditions. Overall, statewide rainfall averaged 263.8 mm, around 21 per cent below the long-term average, contributing to drier conditions in affected regions.

These conditions coincided with notably warm temperatures. Daytime temperatures were very much above average across most of the State, with some areas of the south and east coast recording their highest autumn mean maximum temperatures on record. Statewide, mean maximum temperatures were 1.29 °C above average at 16.6 °C, making it the equal second-warmest autumn since 1910.

Overnight temperatures were also warmer than average for most regions, with parts of the south and south-west recording their highest autumn mean minimum temperatures on record. The statewide mean minimum temperature was 7.6 °C, 0.69 °C above average and the equal ninth-warmest on record.

Together, these elevated daytime and overnight temperatures resulted in an overall mean temperature of 12.1 °C – 1.00 °C above average and the third-warmest autumn on record – reinforcing the persistence of unusually warm conditions alongside rainfall deficiencies during the season.

Long-range rainfall and temperature forecast

According to the Bureau of Meteorology long-range outlook issued on 28 May 2026, winter rainfall is likely to be below-average across much of southern, central, and eastern Australia, including eastern Tasmania, with probabilities generally between 60 per cent and 80 per cent. Some areas—including parts of south west Western Australia, southern South Australia, and the Murray–Darling Basin—also have an increased likelihood of unusually low rainfall. Elsewhere, there is no strong signal for either wetter or drier conditions, although June on its own shows a broader tendency towards below-average rainfall nationwide.

These drier signals are accompanied by a strong likelihood of warmer-than-average temperatures. Daytime temperatures are expected to be above average across most of Australia, with southern regions—particularly Tasmania—showing a high probability (greater than 70 per cent) of unusually warm maximum temperatures. Overnight temperatures are also likely to be above average across much of the country, with Tasmania among the region’s most likely to experience unusually high minimum temperatures.

Together, the outlook of reduced rainfall and elevated temperatures indicates a sustained risk of continued dry conditions through winter, particularly across southern and eastern regions including Tasmania.

Soil moisture:

Soil moisture also responded positively to the May rainfall, particularly along the east coast. Conditions there improved from very much below-average to below-average, signalling a partial but not complete recovery of soil water. However, below-average to very much below-average soil moisture continues through the Fingal Valley and midlands, where profiles remain notably dry compared with other regions. The western half of Tasmania is likewise still characterised by below-average soil moisture with localised very much below-average patches, suggesting that deeper soil layers have yet to fully recharge after the prolonged dry period.

Runoff:

Runoff conditions improved markedly in the eastern half of the State during May, following recent heavy rainfall. Most eastern catchments returned to near-normal runoff, with above average streamflow recorded around Triabunna, Orford and the Hobart surrounds, and very much above average runoff on kunanyi / Mt Wellington. In contrast, below-average runoff persisted across northern areas from Launceston through to Devonport and also affected parts of the west and south west, indicating ongoing hydrological stress in these regions despite improvements in the east.

Standardised Precipitation Evapotranspiration (SPEI):

The Standardised Precipitation Evapotranspiration Index (SPEI, 12-month scale) shows a broad return to normal conditions across most of Tasmania, including the east coast, which had been moderately dry in previous months. The recent rainfall has effectively broken the short-term dryness signal in these eastern districts on a 12-month basis. Only small residual pockets of moderately dry SPEI values now persist, most notably along parts of the south coast, where longer-term moisture deficits remain evident.

Five monthly indicator:

May 2026 marked a significant easing of dryness along Tasmania’s east coast, with strong runoff responses and improving soil moisture driven by substantial rainfall events. Long-term indicators now place most of the State, including previously stressed eastern districts, back within the normal range. Nonetheless, ongoing dryness in the north, midlands, Fingal Valley, and parts of the west and south west indicates that hydrological and soil moisture recovery is incomplete, and these regions remain vulnerable if follow-up rainfall through winter is limited.

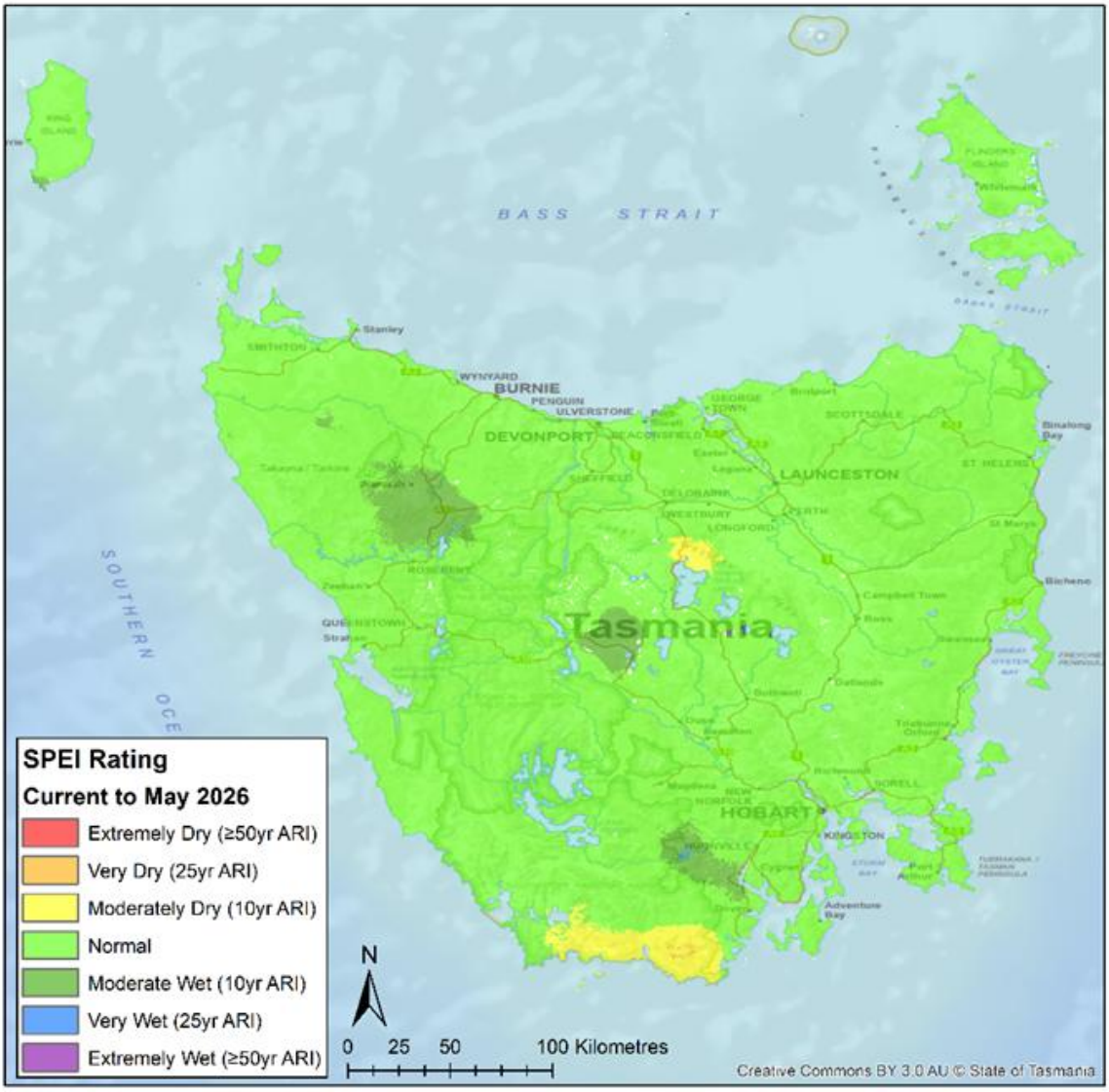


FIGURE 4: REGIONAL 12-MONTH STANDARDISED PRECIPITATION-EVAPOTRANSPIRATION INDEX (SPEI) TO END MAY 2026.

Secondary indicators

Hydrological monitoring

Key message: *Water access activity was typical for May, with a noticeable decrease in the number of restrictions and increase in the number of flood and opportunistic takes issued from May last year.*

NRE Tas water operations

During the reporting period, the Water Compliance Team conducted 50 assessments, resulting in:

- 21 restrictions.
- 3 flood take notices.
- 2 opportunistic take notices.
- 17 easements.
- No low flow warnings due to reduced river flows.

May 2026 brought rainfall totals below-average for parts of the west and south west, above average for parts of the east and north-east, and average for most of the rest of the State. While the State experienced rainfall totals below-average for much of the north and west and were close to average for much of the east during May 2025. This increase in total rainfall received by growing regions is reflected in the water access notice figures, as a decrease in the number of restrictions issued this year is noticeable.

The increase in rainfall totals is also reflected in increased number of flood and opportunistic takes issued. Flood take notices were issued for the Nile, South Esk and St Pauls Rivers. Giving the opportunity for Surety 8 licence holders to take water for storage. Opportunistic takes were issued for the South Esk and Swan Rivers. Providing opportunity for water users to take in excess of their normal water entitlements.

Tasmanian Irrigation (TI)

Tasmanian Irrigation (TI) delivered 5,639 megalitres of irrigation water to Tasmanian farmers in May 2026 – up approximately 32 per cent from May 2025.

The ongoing dry conditions, low relative soil moisture levels and above average temperatures through summer and early autumn resulted in high levels of demand for high surety irrigation water across the east, south east and midlands areas.

On a scheme-by-scheme basis, there were many schemes where record quantities of water were delivered this season. These included the South East Stage One, Don, Midlands, Swan, and Whitemore schemes.

The closing date on almost half of Tasmanian Irrigation’s schemes was extended, ensuring farmers could access much-needed irrigation water to finish last crops and maintain pasture productivity. TI has delivered 96,823 megalitres of water so far in the 2025-26 financial year at 1 June 2026.

Bureau of Meteorology streamflow observations for Tasmania

The Bureau of Meteorology's seasonal streamflow forecast indicates that northern Tasmania is likely to experience low streamflow conditions from May to July 2026. According to recent BOM long-range reporting, streamflow in April was low for most of north and north-eastern Tasmania. Near-median flows were observed in April in the remaining parts of north and the northwest and high flow observed in the far northwest.

Economic indicators

Key message: *Cost pressures remain high, despite some easing in global fuel prices.*

Inflation eased in April, with the annual rate falling from 4.6 per cent in March to 4.2 per cent. This moderation reflects stabilising – though still elevated – fuel costs. Inflation remains a key factor influencing interest rate settings, which in turn affect borrowing and repayment costs for producers.

Labour market conditions showed some softening, with Tasmania's unemployment rate at 5 per cent in April, while the national rate increased to 4.5 per cent. At the same time, reliance on international seasonal workers persists, with 3,070 PALM scheme workers in Tasmania in March, slightly down from February. The Fair Work Commission has lifted the national minimum wage and modern award wage rate which will add pressure on producer margins.

Currency movements remained relatively steady over May, with the Australian dollar strengthening marginally from USD 0.71 to 0.72 and rising slightly on a trade-weighted basis. This stability has helped offset some of the cost pressures from higher fuel and fertiliser prices. Global oil prices, however, were volatile during the month, declining from USD 108.17 to USD 91.12 per barrel as geopolitical tensions in the Middle East eased. Locally, Tasmania's fuel supply remains secure, with strong stock levels and 98 per cent of outlets fully supplied as at 26 May 2026.

Despite some relief in global fuel prices, shipping costs have risen significantly, increasing transport expenses and reducing the competitiveness of Tasmanian exports. This trend reflects higher fuel costs, constrained capacity, and strong demand for shipping containers. At the same time, fertiliser markets remain tight globally. Urea prices are still high, although national domestic demand is currently subdued due to the planting cycle and sufficient short-term supply. Looking ahead, concerns remain about securing fertiliser for future demand, particularly given uncertainty around global supply and export activity from key producers. The Tasmanian government has secured 20,000 to 25,000 tonnes from Indonesia to be shipped between now and the end of the year which will support certainty of supply.

In agricultural export markets, red meat export prices remain strong – especially in the United States, where limited domestic supply has pushed Australian beef prices 30 to 40 per cent higher than a year ago. However, some moderation is expected due to increased global supply. Dairy prices have shown modest growth, with the Global Dairy Trade Price Index rising slightly in mid-May.

Overall, agricultural businesses are facing increased pressure. Rising input and transport costs, coupled with ongoing global uncertainty, are leading many to defer investment, anticipate lower revenues, and experience financial strain.

Agronomic indicators

Key message: *Recent rains have lifted livestock prices, harvest season drawing to a close.*

Domestic supply of sheep on the mainland is expected to see an increase in supply pressure as producers manage dry conditions, recent rains have tempered that expectation. Farm-gate prices are expected to remain strong due increased processing capacity that has occurred over the last three years and reduced national flock will limit price moderation.

Cattle prices were expected to moderate in response to cattle turn-off rates due to dry conditions being experienced in parts of Australia. However, rainfall experienced in the last two weeks has made prices hold firm and prices are still higher than the same time last year.

Wool continues to see prices increase due to demand led growth for the use of producing winter, and technical performance apparel. The Eastern Market Index for wool is currently sitting 58.4 per cent higher year-on-year. Constrained wool production due to a lower national flock is providing additional support to the price providing a positive outlook.

Tasmanian fruit prices are 5 per cent lower year-on-year but 4 per cent higher for the year ending April 2026 compared to the 10-year average. Vegetable prices are 9 per cent higher year-on-year for the year ending April and 38 per cent higher than the 10-year average. However, the fruit and vegetable sector margins are being challenged by elevated input costs and how much pass-through of the production cost is sent to the customer.

Potatoes continue to be harvested. Favourable seasonal conditions extended the harvest window. Industry expects yields and quality to be good.

Tasmanian hay prices have remained relatively steady across the month of May with prices similar to April. The quality of silage has been reported to be good according to industry intelligence. Good silage availability in north west Tasmania is keeping silage in rations and limiting hay demand and keeping prices in check. Grain prices were relatively steady in May in the Tasmanian market. Pasture growth remained slow with temperatures dipping and some frost events encountered. As of 25 May 2026, leaf emergence rate remained steady 14 days per leaf. Overall, pasture growth across the State was mostly at median levels.

Wine grape production is almost complete. Due to challenging seasonal conditions, the time to berry maturation was extended and yields were challenged however quality is expected to be good. Endeavour Group will rationalise its wine grape production in Tasmania with industry insights suggesting there will be minimal impact on the sector.

The 2026-27 new season farm-gate milk prices opened at levels similar to last year. Though producers were hoping for a higher price, a softer international milk price tempered the domestic opening prices.

Social indicators

Key message: *Sentiment continues to be mixed as input prices remain high whilst seasonal conditions have improved marginally.*

There has been no change in the number of Regional Investment Corporation loans to Tasmania loan numbers for the month of April. Since 1 July 2018 RIC has approved 38 loans valued at over $44.5 million in Tasmania as of 30 April 2026.

As of 1 June 2026, the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) Farm Management Deposit (FMD) Rainfall Analyser indicates that there are currently no eligible FMD areas in Tasmania. The latest statistics from DAFF, as of 30 April 2026, indicates there are 767 FMD accounts for Tasmania with a total value of $105,715,000. This is a decrease of 1 account but an increase of $1,000 in the remaining accounts.

Sentiment amongst producers is mixed as they continue to be impacted by high input costs making some producers cautious and critically weigh their business decisions. Positively farm gate prices for select products remain strong and recent rains has relieved some pressure on businesses. Overall, industry remain cautious about the next production season.

Freight and logistics

Key message: *Regular freight movements reported however freight and logistic prices will influence movements.*

Cattle movements for King Island in May remain lower than average. Flinders continues to track as normal with movements being average. King Island cattle movements continue to be lower than last year due to favourable seasonal conditions supporting herd rebuilding.

Prepared by:

AgriGrowth Tasmania
Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania

June 2026

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