

# Fact Sheet: Seasonal Conditions and Drought – Tasmania

## March 2026

**This Fact Sheet summarises the Tasmanian Government’s approach to monitoring seasonal conditions and responding to drought, aligned with the National Drought Agreement (NDA).**

### **Q: What is drought?**

A: Drought in Tasmania means a prolonged, abnormally dry period when there is not enough water for users' normal needs. In general, this means an acute water shortage not caused by a man-induced temporary water imbalance, aridity or water scarcity.

Because people use water in so many ways, there is no universal definition of drought. It's measured in different ways and at different timescales:

- Meteorologists monitor the extent and severity of drought in terms of rainfall deficiencies (or shortages, compared to average rainfall for the period).
- Agriculturalists rate the impact on primary industries.
- Hydrologists examine surface and groundwater levels.
- Sociologists define it by social expectations and perceptions and the impact on the community.

Source: <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/drought/knowledge-centre/understanding.shtml#:~:text=Drought%20is%20a%20prolonged%2C%20abnormally,to%20meet%20our%20normal%20use> .

### **Q: How does the Tasmanian Government determine when Tasmania is in drought?**

A: Tasmania does not undertake a formal drought declaration process. The old 'exceptional circumstances' process was replaced in 2013 which means there is no longer the requirement to “draw lines on maps” to trigger support to farmers.

The **National Drought Agreement (NDA)** between the Australian, state and territory governments sets the agreed principles for how drought support will be rolled out to farmers and rural communities.

Over the past decade, national drought policy has reinforced that drought is not a singular or unexpected natural disaster event. Rather, managing for the risks of seasonal conditions, including periods of drought, in a changing climate requires regular monitoring, business and risk planning, adaptation and decisions on-farm.

This is even more strongly reflected in the proposed new NDA (2024) which prioritises objectives and outcomes that enhance long-term preparedness, sustainability, self-resilience and risk management for farming businesses and farming communities.

It also establishes that drought support should be provided through a phased approach to allow Governments to tailor the type or level of support provided to farmers and/or rural communities as seasonal conditions change. This means support can change over time and include:

- support measures available at all times to farmers facing hardship;

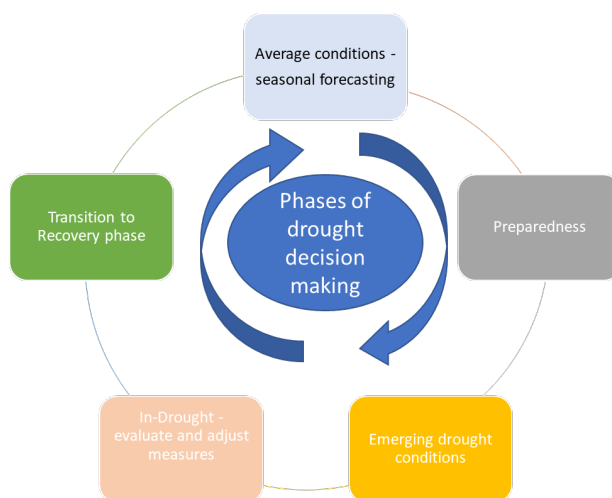
- increasing existing measures to address growing demand; and
- new measures are introduced to address identified needs e.g. in drought crisis support.

The new NDA does not explicitly specify in-drought support and processes. Instead, there is an emphasis on engaging stakeholders in design and delivery of policy and programs across the drought cycle, particularly initiatives that are co-funded by jurisdictions and the Australian Government as part of the Future Drought Fund (FDF).

Acknowledgement of First Nations people and the need to partner with them when developing and delivering drought policies and programs is also a key component of the new NDA.

**Q: How does the Tasmanian Government monitor seasonal conditions and drought?**

The Government now use a range of information to identify the changing climatic and environmental conditions to determine when different support measures can be triggered.



Tasmania uses a phased drought decision-making framework, similar to other jurisdictions, where we consider a range of indicators and trends over a 12 to 18 month timeframe to determine which phase of the seasonal or drought ‘cycle’ parts or all of Tasmania is currently in. Information is gathered across a range of meteorological, hydrologic, agronomic and socio-economic indicators. Meteorological data is sourced from the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and hydrological information produced through the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas).

Indicators used include (but are not limited to) rainfall and water, water restrictions, soil moisture, temperature, vegetation, pasture growth and forest fire danger indexes.



Regular *seasonal insights* reports are prepared by NRE Tas's AgriGrowth Tasmania for Government which also incorporate social and economic indicators.

This includes liaison with industry peak bodies and the industry and community representatives who are part of the Forum of Rural Stakeholders (FoRS).

AgriGrowth Tasmania also consults with and involves the [TAS Farm Innovation Hub](#), [Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture](#), and [Tasmanian Irrigation](#) to understand seasonal conditions and phases to guide what information is provided to Government and what support measures are needed.

As Tasmania moves through the various phases of seasonal conditions, including drought, the Tasmanian Government's response is guided by the ***Tasmanian Drought Guidelines*** (refer to Attachment 1).

**Q: What tools and information are available for Tasmanian farmers?**

Farmers and agri businesses can visit the NRE Tas webpage [Managing Seasonal Conditions](#) to find various checklists, tactics, tools to manage seasonal conditions and tips and strategies.

The NRE Tas website under "Agriculture" also has pages on:

[Dry and Drought Conditions](#)

[Hardship and other support](#)

Information and tools are also available from the [TAS Farm Innovation Hub](#). The Hub is one of eight established across Australia by the Commonwealth Future Drought Fund. The hub helps Tasmanian farmers, and those who support them, build relationships, access essential information, and build critical skills and knowledge to prepare for drought and climate change.

Other tools used to determine climatic conditions and indicators of drought include:

[Farming forecaster](#)

[Bureau of Meteorology Drought Statement](#),

[Climate Services for Agriculture](#) portal

[Farm Data Portal](#)



## SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE NOW

### **Q: What measures are currently available to farmers experiencing financial hardship due to the climatic conditions?**

A: Farming and related businesses can access support now to prepare for drought and other risks.

With support from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund (FDF), the Tasmanian Government is currently rolling out two programs:

1. The [Farm Business Resilience Program](#) provides subsidised business coaching and tools to farmers to plan for and manage drought, other risks and a changing climate. The Program gives farmers access to workshops and one-on-one support to consider their long-term goals, business management and risks, investment priorities, natural resource management, climate change, succession plans, sustainable irrigation, and farm safety.
2. [The Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program](#) is supporting regions to develop regional drought resilience plans to prepare for and manage future drought risks. Under this program, regional project coordinators will work in each of Tasmania's regions, partnering with regional development authorities, local government, industry, business and community stakeholders, to develop Regional Drought Resilience Plans for the North, North West and South.

**For those who may be experiencing financial hardship now, safety net measures such as income support also exist for individuals and families, no matter the reason.**

The [Rural Financial Counselling Service](#) provides confidential, independent financial counselling to eligible farmers, fishers, foresters and small related businesses who are experiencing or at risk of financial hardship. **Phone 1300 883 276**

Support measures can be found on the [National Emergency Management Agency](#) website and include:

- Farm Household Allowance to assist families experiencing financial hardship [Farm Household Allowance - DAFF \(agriculture.gov.au\)](#)
- Regional Investment Corporation low interest loans for drought recovery and preparedness [Regional Investment Corporation - Australian Government \(ric.gov.au\)](#)
- Farm Management Deposits Scheme. [Farm management deposits | Australian Taxation Office \(ato.gov.au\)](#)
- [Rural Alive and Well](#) If you or someone you know could use support call 1800 729 827 or fill in the online form at [www.rawtas.com.au/callbackrequest](http://www.rawtas.com.au/callbackrequest) .
- [Life Line](#) Do you need to talk to someone now?



Tasmanian  
Government

## DEVELOPMENTS IN NATIONAL AND STATE DROUGHT POLICY

### **Q: How has Tasmania historically managed drought policy?**

A: Tasmania's policy has been to align with the Australian Government policy relating to drought.

**Prior to 2013**, Tasmania worked with the Australian Government's Exceptional Circumstances (EC) declaration process providing information to the National Rural Advisory Council (NRAC). The system of declaring EC areas meant that there were boundaries or "lines on a map" where financial support was eligible to be provided. The mapping and selection process for these boundaries was assisted by the National Agricultural Monitoring Scheme (NAMS).

**In 2013**, a new Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between the Australian Government and jurisdictions outlined the arrangements for implementing national drought program reform, replacing the EC arrangements. This meant that there were 'no lines drawn on maps'. Instead, farmers needed to be located in an area with severe rainfall deciles over a defined period (as indicated by the Bureau of Meteorology data). Farmers also needed to provide evidence they were experiencing financial hardship to access support measures such as Farm Household Allowance and the Drought Concessional Loans.

**In 2015**, Tasmania established the *Tasmanian Drought Guidelines* (refer to Attachment 1) that aligned with the jurisdictional responsibilities under the IGA. The Guidelines outline the approach to what drought support that may become available in Tasmania.

**In 2015**, The Tasmanian Government established the [Water Resource Management During Extreme Dry Conditions Policy](#) which is a Ministerial Policy under Section 8 of the Water Management Act. It sets out water resource management procedures to be implemented in Tasmania during extreme dry conditions. This ensures an appropriate balance between consumptive water needs and environmental water needs under these circumstances.

**In 2016**, the *Tasmanian Drought Guidelines* were used to inform the Tasmanian Government's response to the drought conditions experienced in Tasmania.

**In 2018**, Australian, state and territory governments signed the National Drought Agreement (NDA). The NDA replaced the 2013 Intergovernmental Agreement on National Drought Program Reform and operates until 30 June 2024.

**From 2020**, the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund (FDF) provides an annual endowment of \$100 million to support initiatives to build drought resilience. The first four-year Drought Resilience Funding Plan guides the Fund's investment in drought resilience and preparedness projects from 2020 to 2024.

**In 2021**, as part of the FDF activities, the Tasmanian Government commenced rolling out the Farm Business Resilience Program that supports farmer preparedness for climatic conditions such as



drought through the development of farm business resilience plans. The first phase of the Program is currently being run until the end of 2025, through two delivery partners – RMCG and DairyTas. Negotiations are underway to potentially extend the Program in 2026.

**In 2024**, the Tasmanian Government provided the following support in line with the principles of the current NDA and consistent with the Tasmanian Drought Guidelines:

- Farmer extension program – King and Flinders Islands and mainland Tasmania statewide – workshops, one-on-one coaching sessions, information, and resources – managing dry times, feed budgeting, animal nutrition. Tas Farm Innovation Hub in collaboration with NRE Tas, along with Rural Business Tasmania and Rural Alive & Well participating as needed.
- \$171,000 through a joint funding initiative between NRE Tas, and the TAS Farm Innovation Hub, an Australian Government Future Drought Fund initiative to provide community drought support, including the employment of new King Island Community Drought Coordinators and an online Tasmanian Fodder Hub.
- \$20,000 to eligible farmers on King and Flinders Islands who are experiencing hardship as a result of extended dry conditions.
- King and Flinders Island Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme
- \$5,000 to eligible farm businesses for hardship for mainland Tasmania
- \$500,000 to the Rural Relief Fund administered by Rural Business Tasmania
- \$200,000 to Rural Alive and Well to support counselling outreach support
- Biosecurity Tasmania support – certification of permit holders for import of fodder; animal welfare support services; livestock transport guidelines interpretation
- \$1,500,000 for the Bass Strait Islands Water Resilience Program to deliver the King and Flinders Island Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme and the Bass Strait Islands Water Securities Strategies Project
- Infrastructure Tasmania – direct logistic, transport and supply chain (shipping) support and coordination
- Additional sailings of Bass Island Line to King Island
- Two King Island Livestock Supply Chain Round tables
- FarmPoint Hotline – NRE Farmpoint website and support from Agricultural Liaison Officers – “if you don’t know where to start, phone FarmPoint”



Attachment 1:

Tasmanian Drought Guidelines 2023

**Last approved by Cabinet November 2023**

Drought is one of a number of causes of hardship for farmers and rural communities. Tasmania will take an integrated approach consistent with the *National Drought Agreement* to reduce vulnerability and enhance preparedness for drought, response and recovery.

As Tasmania moves through the various phases of seasonal conditions, including drought, the Tasmanian Government's response is guided by:

1. Government policies and programs should support farming communities to prepare for, understand the likelihood of, and adapt to periods of drought, in a changing climate.
2. There will be no transaction-based measures and subsidies (such as feeding stock programs) except as relating to animal welfare (Guideline 3). Government will consider social and community support for even the most prepared when they are in need, however, transaction-based subsidies can cause market distortion, when the aim is to build ongoing preparedness, resilience and self-reliance.
3. Recognising community expectations with respect to animal welfare, the Government may consider providing support for livestock transport for sale or slaughter (not agistment), where there is a significant animal welfare threat and a genuine incapacity of the business to pay for the livestock transport.
4. When investing in research, development and extension programs, a Government priority is drought and climate change preparedness and/or increasing the capacity of farmers to adapt and change. This highlights the critical importance of ongoing landholder extension, training, demonstration and adoption activities.
5. Noting that the impacts of drought extend beyond the farm gate and across supply chains, there will be a coordinated delivery of social services (to individuals and community) and farm business support services through the regions in collaboration with National, State and Local Governments and other non-government entities.
6. Existing networks such as the Forum of Rural Stakeholders and the Agricultural Coordination Group will be used to provide guidance and coordination to ensure measures are integrated and responding to industry and community needs.

