

Thursday 28 May

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Women to Study Weather

With some decent April – May rain across most of the Wimmera Mallee farmers have committed to another season and have almost finished their sowing programs. Sowing is a nervous time for grain growers. Climate and weather are always at the forefront of conversation: Will we get follow up rain? What is the outlook for the year? Can I expect average growing season rainfall? It is not possible to answer these questions with 100% confidence however there are several climate indicators that can help grain growers manage risk.

Southern Oscillation Index (www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au)

Recent trends in the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) can be used to calculate the probabilities of receiving above or below average rainfall at a particular location. This year, based on a rapidly rising SOI phase over March/April, the chance of exceeding average rainfall for the period of May through to July is 30 – 40% for much of the Wimmera Mallee. However as of 27 May the average SOI for the last 30 days was -9.16. A sustained negative SOI value (particularly across the winter months when the correlation is stronger compared to autumn) usually indicates that the trade winds are weakening, and therefore rainfall in eastern Australia will tend to be below average.

Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia

(www.agric.wa.gov.au/content/LWE/CLI/CLIMATE_INDEX.HTM)

Neutral conditions have developed rapidly in the Pacific over the last month. The most appropriate analogue years are the neutral years 1981, 1984, 2001, 2008 and the El Niño year 2006. There is an increasing probability that average to below average rainfall is the most likely outcome across much of Australia for the 2009 May to October growing season. Confidence in longer term predictions for this year will depend on what Indian Ocean sea surface temperature gradient develops in June, and whether a late El Niño forms.

These are just two examples of websites and indicators which can be used to help farmers understand and follow climate probabilities for the present growing season. The Department of Primary Industries also produces a monthly newsletter *The Break* where grain growers can access seasonal climate risk information in one easy location (www.dpi.vic.gov.au/climaterisk). The Bureau of Meteorology is also a good source of information for short and long term climate predictions (www.bom.gov.au).

On Wednesday 17 June the BCG will be holding a Women's Agronomy Workshop where De-Anne Price from DPI Horsham will present information on the seasonal outlook for 2009. She will also present information on understanding climate indicators to help grain growers manage risk. De-Anne's presentation will be followed by in-paddock field work, allowing participants to gain hands-on farming experience. The event will be held at the BCG conference room and is open to all women who are associated with farming in our region. Please contact BCG on (03) 5492 2787 for further information.