

# FOCUS ON FODDER

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Harrison Schuster  
delights Aussies  
again with Australia  
Day crop art.

See page 20



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                      |                                                       |    |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>AFIA NEWS</b>     | Update from our Chair                                 | 1  |
|                      | Building skills for the future of fodder              | 2  |
|                      | Hay Meetups 2026                                      | 3  |
|                      | Griffin Lanyon Legacy Tour                            | 5  |
| <b>INDUSTRY NEWS</b> | Hay prices in review                                  | 9  |
|                      | Have your say                                         | 11 |
|                      | Nuffield Scholarship                                  | 13 |
|                      | Innovation spotlight                                  | 14 |
|                      | What Australia's new gun laws mean for farmers        | 18 |
| <b>IN BRIEF</b>      | Art meets Ag                                          | 20 |
|                      | One of our own goes viral with Australia Day crop art | 20 |
|                      | Local Hero                                            | 20 |
| <b>CLIMATE</b>       | Warm and dry April to June outlook                    | 21 |
|                      | Climate drivers in Australia                          | 23 |



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## About AFIA

The Australian Fodder Industry Association (AFIA) is the national, independent voice for the Australian fodder industry, connecting the entire supply chain – from seed to feed.

The fodder industry is one of the most important industries in Australian agriculture, underpinning production in dairy, livestock, horticulture and other intensive industries. It is for this reason AFIA exists, and since its establishment in 1996, our network of members, sponsors, supporters and engaged participants has worked together to help the fodder industry grow.

Our priorities are focused on supporting our members by:

- building strong communities and understanding their needs
- promoting research and development
- addressing market and trade issues
- monitoring and communicating relevant biosecurity issues, and
- identifying new ways to grow the industry, both domestically and internationally.

AFIA is the central hub connecting the fodder supply chain across agriculture sectors, industry and governments. So please join us as we continue to extend our reach by attracting new members, identifying new market opportunities, producing events which educate and inform on relevant and timely topics, and to create a strong fodder industry that inspires future generations to drive this industry forward.



## AFIA NEWS

### Update from our Chair

It goes without saying that these are uncertain and interesting times for agriculture.

Global conflict continues to affect key inputs. Fuel remains volatile, and nitrogen supply is a growing concern. Many of you have already adjusted your cropping programs, with high-use nitrogen crops potentially out of rotation this season due to unreliable supply.

Those decisions will influence hay production, availability and pricing in the months ahead. We are monitoring developments closely and will continue to share supply and demand insights through our regular updates.

Within AFIA, Vanessa Curtis has moved on, and we thank her for her contribution. Be assured that it is business as usual. The team remains in place, and the Board is focused on stability and strong representation for members.

Our recent Hay Meetups, delivered with AEXCO across Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria, were a great success and confirmed that face-to-face forums still matter in this industry. The final silage-focused session in Goulburn, hosted by Board Member Harry Divall and sponsored by AFIA, was our largest to date. Across the series, we connected with more than 120 people nationally – an excellent result and one that shows strong engagement through our sector.

In February, the Griffin Lanyon Legacy Tour for young producers took place. It sold out quickly and was exceptionally well-received by all hosts and attendees. With the generous support of sponsors and members, the level of interest is proof that the next generation is ready to step forward. Ensuring they have clear pathways into leadership and meaningful involvement within AFIA will remain a priority for the Board.

The decision has also been made to postpone the 2026 AFIA Conference. This was not taken lightly. Sponsors have been briefed and have responded with understanding. Protecting the long-term strength of AFIA and our ability to remain the clear voice of the fodder industry comes first.

In its place, we are planning a 30-year anniversary dinner in July. We will share further details soon.

We have submitted a proposal to AgriFutures for a targeted training program focused on modern field machinery in the export fodder sector. The aim is to upskill, improve safety, and strengthen productivity across the supply chain. We feel AFIA is best placed to lead this initiative, drawing on the collective experience and leadership



Gavin Schuster



# AFIA NEWS

within our membership. If the application is successful, the program will help build long-term workforce capability in the export hay sector.

As we move through autumn, conditions will determine how the coming season takes shape.

Across Australia, hay producers continue to manage risk and adjust to shifting markets.

Staying connected and informed will remain critical in the months ahead.

Please reach out if you have questions or concerns – we're always happy to hear from you.

On behalf of the Board, I wish you well for the season ahead. May the skies be kind to you as we look forward to the autumn break.

---

Gavin Schuster  
Chair, AFIA

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## Building skills for the future of fodder

AFIA has submitted a proposal to AgriFutures for a targeted training program focused on modern field machinery in the export fodder sector.

The project, titled *The ART of export fodder: Attract, Retain and Train key staff for field machinery operations in the export fodder industry*, is designed to lift skills, improve safety and strengthen productivity across the supply chain.

If the proposal is supported, AFIA will deliver a two-day program for 24 participants. The training will combine clear, practical theory with hands-on learning to help staff operate increasingly complex and high-value machinery safely and effectively. Proposed locations

include Elmore, Rochester or the Dookie Campus of the University of Melbourne.

By equipping producers with practical skills and confidence, we aim to:

- Improve on-farm safety and reduce risk
- Lift operational efficiency and output
- Build long-term workforce capability
- Support knowledge sharing in workplaces.

We believe AFIA is well placed to lead this initiative, drawing on the experience within our membership. If funded, this program could also become a template for future training across both export and domestic fodder sectors.

We will keep you updated as the application progresses.



## Hay Meetups 2026

### FINISHING STRONG FOR THE SEASON AHEAD

*Our 2026 Hay Meetups have now wrapped up, and once again, they showed the strength of our industry when we get together.*

Across six events in Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria, more than 120 growers, contractors, advisers and supply chain members joined us. The Goulburn event recorded the largest sign-up of the series, proving that the appetite for practical conversation and new leadership in our sector is gaining momentum.

With the generous support of AEXCO, the Western Australia events focused on export hay and market diversification. Growers heard directly about changing global trade conditions and what this means for demand, standards and future opportunities.

AgriFutures supported the first five Hay Meetups, bringing current research and experienced speakers into the program. Michael Lamond from SLR Agriculture shared results from the 2025 hay trials. Kylie Chambers from DPIRD WA spoke on reducing fungal staining and weather damage in windrows. In Victoria, Mick Faulkner from Agrilink Agricultural Consultants outlined how dual-purpose cereals can create flexibility between grain and hay depending on the season.



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**Appetite for practical conversation and new leadership in the fodder sector is gaining momentum.**

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The Vater team at the Northam Hay Meetup.

We took a different approach in Goulburn and put the spotlight on silage. Thanks to new board member Harry Divall, who drove the event from the ground up, it recorded the biggest turnout of the series and centred on interactive machinery demonstrations in the feedlot. The feedback has been very positive, with strong engagement and practical discussion on how silage fits into today's mixed farming systems. Lallemand were also on-site to show attendees what to look for in their silage, with many actually getting their hands dirty!

# AFIA NEWS

We also thank our machinery sponsors, including AgWest, CNE Ag, Vater and O'Connors, who brought equipment on-site and spent time with growers discussing options suited to local conditions.



CNE Ag at the Northam Hay Meetup.

These meetups are about connection, momentum and backing each other in a changing industry. The enthusiasm this year, especially from younger operators and emerging leaders, gives real confidence about where the fodder sector is heading.

Thank you to everyone who took part and helped make the 2026 Hay Meetup series a success.



Hay Meetup in Clare, South Australia.

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## Griffin Lanyon Legacy Tour

### IT'S A WRAP FOR 2026

*A bus full of young farmers spent six full days on the road with a purpose: to gain real exposure to agriculture beyond their own farm gate.*

In February, the 2026 Griffin Lanyon Legacy Tour brought together 15 young people from across Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, travelling through western Victoria and South Australia.

Organised by Griffin's sister, Ella, and hosted by Col Radcliffe, Josh Lanyon and their families, the week was a tribute to Griffin's legacy – a young farmer deeply passionate about agriculture and his community.

### The itinerary covered serious ground

The group toured John Deere's Regional Distribution Centre and Krone Australia to understand machinery logistics and supply at scale. They pulled on PPE at Midfield Meats and saw first-hand what market specifications mean for producers. At Yumbah Narrawong Abalone Farm, they were challenged to think more broadly about what agriculture looks like across different systems and markets.

Time with Scott Campbell in Keith and with Matt and Tim Eckert in Meningie brought the conversation back to paddock-level decisions. There was open discussion about risk, scale, planning and how businesses evolve over time.

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**"The tour embodied everything that Griffin was."**

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The young farmers on the Griffin Lanyon Legacy Tour visited the John Deere Regional Distribution Centre to gain an understanding of machinery logistics and supply at scale.

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In Horsham, Greg Kuchel, Matt Bissett and Mick Stone shared practical insights on succession planning and the role networks play in building long-term careers.

A visit to Balco in Raywood connected everything back to fodder and to the supply chains that link growers to markets here and overseas. The tour ended in the bright lights of Melbourne, with a celebration dinner and a chance to kick off the boots.

## Support behind the scenes

AFA supported the tour behind the scenes, helping bring the right people together and keep the momentum moving.

We thank LocalAg, Feed Central and Balco – major partners of the tour. North West Ag Services, Schinckel Hayrakes, Hay Australia, Hay Guard and Naracoorte Seeds generously sponsored the evening events, helping create space for conversations that often stretched well past dinner. To the sites visited – John Deere RDC, Krone Australia, Midfield Meats, Yumbah Narrawong Abalone Farm, Campbell and Eckert Farms, Schinckel Hayrakes, Naracoorte Seeds, Farley Pastoral, BASF, and Balco – thank you for giving up your time to show our young producers what you do.

## Laying the groundwork

Conversations flowed easily throughout the week, from site visits to shared meals. What stood out was the openness across generations. Established producers were



That's a lot of twine! The tour group was welcomed by Krone Australia.



generous with their experience, and there was genuine interest in the younger group's thinking and questions. Even at 7 am over tea and toast!

As Ella Lanyon said of the tour, "It embodied everything that Griffin was."

The 2026 tour has finished, but the network built over those six days is only getting started. The group has already put plans in place to stay connected, and there is strong interest in continuing the tour next year.

If the curiosity and respect shown this week are any indication, our sector is in good hands.

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By Mel Butler

All photos supplied by Airley Mulraney



Discussion moved to the end user and feeding decisions at Farley Pastoral.



Conversations flowed easily at each visit, particularly over a bale of export hay (left) and outside a shed (below and above) at Balco.



# AFIA NEWS



The team at the Midfield Group were generous with their time (and cool PPE outfits) with the Griffin Lanyon Legacy Tour participants seeing first hand what market specifications mean.



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# INDUSTRY NEWS

## Hay prices in review

### HARVEST PRESSURE MEETS SUMMER PAUSE

*Supply surged, quality split the market and summer slowed trade*

From November through January, the hay market shifted out of spring harvest pressure and into a typical summer lull. Fresh supply built quickly, quality varied widely, and buyers stepped back once sheds were full.

Here is what shaped the domestic and export hay markets over the summer quarter and what it means as we move toward autumn.

#### November was defined by volume

Lower grain prices saw producers turn to cereal crops for hay production. As harvest ramped up across southern and eastern regions, online listings increased. Oversupply in some areas placed clear downward pressure on prices.

By late November, straw sat at its lowest level in more than 12 months. Many growers reported margins were getting tighter.

At the same time:

- Mixed harvest conditions led to wide quality variation.
- Hay left in paddocks during extended wet periods declined in feed value.
- Some lines were raked multiple times, particularly in parts of southern Victoria and the Riverina.
- Buyers became cautious and selective.

This created early signs of split pricing. Clean, early-baled cereal and vetch with strong feed tests held value, while grain-affected or weathered hay experienced a price decline.

Lucerne showed mixed signals:

- Premiums held in the Darling Downs for clean lines
- Prices eased in South Australia, where storm-damaged cuts increased lower-grade supply
- Southwest Western Australia reported firmer pricing due to scarcity and reliance on irrigation.

Demand overall remained patchy. Many livestock producers were running on silage or improved pasture, reducing immediate buying pressure.



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As harvest ramped up across southern and eastern regions, online listings increased. Oversupply in some areas placed clear downward pressure on prices

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# INDUSTRY NEWS



Unusually dry conditions near Mt Roland, Northwest Tasmania. Photo credit: Hayden Bean, Elders

## December saw a focus on quality

By December, baling was wrapping up across most southern regions. Attention shifted from cutting to testing, storing, and assessing feed value.

We noticed:

- Strong demand for high-protein cereal and vetch hay
- Oaten hay with solid protein tests moved quickly
- Lower-grade hay and straw remained harder to shift.

Widespread spring growth meant many dairy and mixed farmers were well-stocked heading into summer, reducing urgency.

Straw lifted slightly in New South Wales by around \$5 per tonne ex-farm, though it remained the lowest-cost fodder option nationally.

Lucerne continued to divide by region:

- Firm in southwest Western Australia where supply was tight
- Easing in south-east South Australia and north-west Tasmania due to poor early cuts and clearance of older stock.

Rainfall through parts of Victoria and Tasmania improved pasture conditions and reduced seasonal deficits. However, southern New South Wales, inland South Australia and parts of Queensland remained dry, with poor soil moisture limiting regrowth and follow-up cuts.

Water storage levels continued to trend lower year-on-year across several southern systems. This added weight to forward-planning discussions, even when immediate demand was light.

## In January, planning was interrupted by heat and fires

January brought extreme heat across southern Australia and heavy rainfall across northern Queensland.

Production slowed in many areas due to:

- Limited working windows in high heat
- Ongoing rainfall delays in parts of Queensland
- Labour and freight slowdowns post-holiday.

Trade was generally quiet – typical for summer. Most producers had wrapped up harvest before Christmas and shifted focus to fieldwork, on-farm maintenance, and planning for next season.

Prices remained mostly steady with only mild fluctuations; however, several observations emerged:

- Straw rose slightly from mid-December, offering some relief to growers facing rising input costs
- Lucerne yields were down in parts of South Australia and Tasmania, with some reporting only one cut instead of the usual two or three
- Fires in eastern Victoria removed significant pasture area, increasing supplementary feed requirements in affected zones. Early demand was filled locally to manage freight costs.

Heatwave conditions also increased the risk of haystack fires around this time. Regular monitoring became critical in several regions.

Many livestock producers began reviewing forward feed budgets in areas where water and soil moisture deficits remained. While buying urgency had not yet surged, conversations about autumn supply began to increase.



## Three key patterns we noticed at the national level

Across the quarter, we noticed three clear patterns:

### 1: Supply outpaced immediate demand

A strong harvest and spring growth meant that many regions were well-stocked from October onward, leading to lower prices than earlier in the year.

### 2. Quality defined value

Clean, quality tested, new-season hay kept prices stable, while weather-damaged or low-protein lines dropped the most. In the Hay Report, this is where min and max pricing per line comes in, giving us our midpoint, allowing for variations.

Example: Min/Max pricing in the weekly Hay Report

| Southwest Victoria – Cereal hay |         |         |          |         |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|----------|---------|
| Date                            | Minimum | Maximum | Midpoint | Change  |
| 10 Oct                          | \$380/t | \$520/t | \$450/t  | -\$10/t |
| 24 Oct                          | \$310/t | \$450/t | \$380/t  | -\$70/t |

### 3. Summer slowed everything down

As expected, trading thinned out over Christmas and the New Year, where the focus was on operations rather than buying or selling large volumes.

As always, rainfall remains the long-term driver. While parts of Victoria and South Australia received significant rain in February, easing drought pressure, that improvement sits outside this reporting window. From November to January, many southern regions were still managing tight soil moisture and declining water reserves.

Autumn rainfall will determine:

- The need for supplementary feeding
- Sowing confidence for new-season crops
- Forward hay demand into winter.



Dry dams. The effects of drought in southwest Victoria. Photo credit: Vic Dohle

## HAY REPORTS

### Have your say

We're reaching out for more member contacts in key hay regions. Our Hay Report, in collaboration with Dairy Australia, is crucial for showcasing hay and fodder pricing, supply, and demand across Australia. Your insights are essential to maintaining its accuracy and relevance in understanding our agricultural and economic landscape.

We're seeking contributors, especially from these regions:

- Queensland – Darling Downs
- Victoria – Gippsland
- New South Wales – north coast
- New South Wales – south coast (Bega Valley)

No commitment is required. Mel might call you from time to time to see what's happening in your region and with pricing, and to discuss any issues affecting you.

If you're interested in being part of this effort, please contact Mel, at [mel@afia.org.au](mailto:mel@afia.org.au).

# INDUSTRY NEWS

## Steady through summer: Export market overview

Across November, December and January, export hay demand remained consistent.

"Demand in the export market has remained constant through summer," says Rob Lawson, CEO of hay exporters, Balco Australia. "The same key influences are still there, but overall the program is moving as expected."

Australia remains on track to export around 1 to 1.2 million tonnes this season. Core destinations are unchanged: Japan, South Korea, China and Taiwan.

The main watch points through summer have been the same as in spring:

- A weakened Japanese yen, which is making feed imports more challenging for the Japanese dairy sector

- Higher domestic hay production in China, gradually reducing reliance on Australian imports.

And a new watch point:

- An emerging shift in South Korea, following supply disruptions in Spain

Spain, which supplies a large volume of hay into South Korea, has been dealing with an outbreak of swine flu. In response, the Korean Government has restricted imports from affected areas on health and safety grounds. That has shifted buying interest toward Australia.

While Japan and China continue to present challenges, Korea has provided support through the summer quarter.

From a grower perspective, feedback has been broadly positive. Export grades delivered solid returns from the last harvest, and exporters secured sufficient volume to carry supply through the year.

"We buy enough at harvest to see us through the whole year," Rob says. "That stability matters for our customers, and it ensures we can keep our people employed year-round."



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Silage on the move across Tasmania.

Photo credit: Hayden Bean, Elders

## What to watch next

Attention is now turning to the autumn break. Good rainfall in parts of Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia has been encouraging. If that pattern continues, it should set up the next hay season well.

Input costs, such as fuel and fertiliser, are starting to rise, and this will have an impact on margins and future yields. While this did not



define the summer quarter, it is a factor we are watching closely.

In the meantime, a few market signals are worth keeping an eye on:

- How quickly dry regions respond once rainfall arrives. Faster regrowth can ease short-term hay demand.
- Water storage levels in key irrigation zones. These numbers will guide lucerne decisions and cut frequency later in the year.
- Localised demand shifts, particularly in fire- or drought-recovery areas, where buying can pick up quickly once on-farm reserves tighten.
- Input costs, especially fertiliser and fuel. These will shape cutting decisions, crop area and overall hay volume heading into winter.

The full impact of uncertainty in global input markets is still unclear, but it will influence winter production decisions. Over the next six to eight weeks, autumn conditions and input costs will shape grower confidence, supply forecasts and the direction of hay demand as we move into winter.

By Mel Butler

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# INDUSTRY NEWS



Stripper header fronts 'pluck' off the heads leaving tall standing stubble. Photo credit: John Stevenson, Warakiri Cropping

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**Conserving stubble and minimal tillage are helping farmers retain precious moisture, keeping soils cooler and reducing evaporation throughout summer**

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## Innovation spotlight

*We take a look at the latest innovations in Australian agriculture, all with benefits for the fodder sector.*

### **Making moisture count in southern New South Wales**

Farmers in southern New South Wales are proving that with good planning and the right tools, it's still possible to bring in a crop, even during one of the driest years on record. Some areas near Griffith received 90 mm rainfall during the growing season (less than half their average annual rainfall), yet growers managed to harvest wheat, canola, barley and vetch.

Conserving stubble and minimal tillage are helping farmers retain precious moisture, keeping soils cooler and reducing evaporation throughout summer. Soil moisture probes are being used to guide



Optical spot spraying targets only the weeds, dramatically reducing herbicide cost and conserving soil water.

*Photo credit: Weed-It, Croplands Australia*

seeding decisions and withdraw paddocks that lack subsoil moisture at sowing.

In one area, investment in specialised stripper fronts is supporting retention of taller stubble. Others are using optical spot spraying technology targeting summer weeds to reduce herbicide use and better manage limited soil moisture.

### **How might this benefit the fodder industry?**

For fodder producers facing dry conditions and shorter growing windows, these practices offer real value. Stubble retention and moisture-based planning help make better use of limited rainfall.

Groundcover protects soil, enable timely sowing and supports early growth. Tools like moisture probes and weed sensors help target inputs where they will have the greatest impact.

In dry seasons, these systems can often be the difference between harvesting a paddock or writing it off. And some are manual adjustments to operations, without reliance on complex tech or a substantial outlay.



Adaptable, resilient strategies are becoming essential, especially where a few millimetres can decide the season.

Read more:  
ABC News



## Building better soils for cropping and fodder in Western Australia

A new round of soil trials is underway across the Western Australian wheatbelt to test how much deeper soil improvement can go.

The research is part of the Soil Water and Nutrition (SWAN) collaboration – a five-year initiative from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) and the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC). The focus is on improving water and nutrient use efficiency on the region's deep, sandy soils.

This next phase builds on 20 years of improvement efforts that turned previously marginal land into productive cropping country. Researchers are revisiting proven processes, such as deep ripping and stubble retention, and testing new tools like optical weed sensors and modified header fronts.

Trials are also assessing sodic soils, mulching options, and the cost-return of re-ripping. Potassium use efficiency is a known challenge on deep sands, and new experiments are exploring slow-release sources and better application timing to improve uptake.

The research will be backed by adoption pathways, focused on practical outcomes to help growers make better soil decisions for long-term productivity.

### What it might mean for fodder producers

**More biomass:** Improved soils support stronger feed growth in dry periods.

**Smarter inputs:** Better nutrient use means fertiliser spending goes further.

**Stronger roots:** Deeper profiles help fodder crops establish and hold up in tough spells.

**Clearer returns:** New data helps guide when re-ripping is worth the cost.

**More usable land:** Poorer soils may become viable for hay or pasture.

Read more:  
GRDC  
Ground  
Cover



## Virtual fencing is now approved across New South Wales and Victoria

Farmers in both New South Wales and Victoria can now legally use virtual fencing on cattle following the release of new regulations in each state. The approval brings New South Wales and Victoria in line with Tasmania and Western Australia, which already use the systems.

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Virtual fencing uses GPS collars to guide cattle and set paddock boundaries without permanent fences. Stock receive audio cues or pulses to stay within virtual zones, and farmers manage everything via a mobile App.

Systems typically include solar-powered collars, anchors or towers, and subscription-based data services. While set-up costs depend on property size and layout, they often align with a typical annual fencing budget. Once in place, ongoing costs are usually lower.



Cows wear GPS collars receiving audio cues or pulses in a virtual fencing setup. *Photo credit: ABC*

This technology can reduce labour and support more flexible grazing, but its reliability during bushfires, blackouts or signal black spots/dropouts remains under review. Many systems include satellite or local backups, but performance in emergency conditions is still being tested – an important consideration in fire-affected regions.

Regulations in both states focus on animal welfare, mandating gradual boundary shifts,

minimum age requirements, training for use, and the presence of a physical boundary. Only cattle are permitted under the current frameworks.

### What it means for mixed-use and fodder-focused farms

#### If you run cattle alongside fodder:

Virtual fencing can help you manage grazing more efficiently. Set virtual boundaries to protect hay paddocks, rotate stock with less labour, and move animals remotely in some emergency situations. But it is cattle-only for now and still requires a physical fence around the property.

#### If you grow fodder only:

There is no direct application at this stage. But if rules expand in future to include sheep or temporary lease setups, there may be opportunities to better protect crops and manage shared paddocks without investing in permanent fencing.

By Mel Butler

### Got something worth sharing?

If you're aware of a research project, farm trial or idea that's helping drive innovation in fodder, we'd love to hear about it. Simply scan the code below.

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## INDUSTRY NEWS

### What Australia's new gun laws mean for farmers

Following the tragic mass shooting at Bondi late last year, the Australian Government has introduced the most significant changes to firearms legislation since the Port Arthur massacre.

The new laws aim to improve public safety through tighter background checks, a national gun buyback scheme, and restrictions on imports of certain weapons and accessories. While these measures are designed to prevent violent crime, they also raise important questions for the people who use firearms as tools of trade, particularly farmers.

#### What's changing?

Under the federal reforms, passed in January 2026, we'll see:

- A national buyback of selected firearms and accessories, including higher-capacity magazines and certain attachments
- Tougher background checks, with better information sharing between agencies
- Import restrictions on specific firearms and accessories
- A proposal to limit ownership to four guns for recreational use and ten for primary producers and commercial purposes (subject to state legislation).

A national firearms register is also being fast-tracked, but won't be in place until at least 2027.

#### What about the buyback?

The buyback scheme is set to run until early 2028 and will be jointly funded by the federal and state governments. However, there's been pushback from some states, including Queensland and the Northern Territory, over cost-sharing and the scheme's delivery.

Each state will be responsible for collecting and processing surrendered weapons. The Australian Federal Police will oversee disposal. Precise compensation amounts remain unclear, with calls from producers and gun groups for market-value payments rather than scrap rates.

#### What it means for farmers

For many farmers, firearms are a necessary part of the job: used to manage pests, protect livestock, and work safely in isolated areas. Some also have firearms that have been in the family for generations, carrying personal or historical value alongside practical use.

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) has acknowledged the need for national safety but has pushed for a calm, consultative approach that takes food and fodder production, as well as animal care, into account.

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**"Firearms are an essential tool of trade for farmers. Reforms must enhance community safety without undermining the practical needs of agriculture."**

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As NFF President Hamish McIntyre said in a recent press release:

“Firearms are an essential tool of trade for farmers. Reforms must enhance community safety without undermining the practical needs of agriculture.”

Some producers may be impacted by ownership limits, especially if using multiple calibres for different jobs. Others are concerned about fairness in the buyback process and the potential for rushed state legislation.

### **Stay informed, stay engaged**

This is a complex space – and it is changing quickly.

We encourage all AFIA members to:

- Check for upcoming changes in your state or territory

- Ensure firearm licences are up to date and recorded correctly
- Stay connected with industry groups like AFIA and the NFF.

Like all Australians, farmers value community safety. But safety also includes ensuring we can do our jobs well, care for the land responsibly, and keep food systems secure.

This conversation is ongoing – an area to watch closely in the months ahead.

By Mel Butler

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## ART MEETS AG

*When farmers bring art and agriculture together, the results get people talking, and sometimes even go viral!*

### Festive hay bales light up the South West

A group of creative farmers in the Margaret River region once again wowed residents with their annual Christmas-themed bale art in December.

Along Vasse-Yallingup Siding Road and Mewett Road, decorated hay bales caught the eye of locals and visitors alike, bringing some festive spirit to the South West, a key hay-growing region and home to many AFIA members.

These clever displays have become a highlight for the community, showing just how far a few hay bales and a bit of imagination can go!

*Photo credits: Facebook*



## ONE OF OUR OWN GOES VIRAL WITH AUSTRALIA DAY CROP ART

Freeling farmer Harrison Schuster (son of AFIA Chair, Gavin Schuster) has captured national attention with a massive Australia Day mural tilled into his family's paddock and featured on our cover.

Featuring the Southern Cross, Aussie wildlife and an ANZAC soldier, the artwork spans hectares and is even visible from space! Harrison timed the artwork to coincide with Australia Day, planning for it to remain visible until Anzac Day as a tribute to both national days.

Covered by major news outlets, including news.com.au, this is not Harrison's first farm-based mural. In 2024, he created a 120 ha map of Australia. His work blends creativity with rural life and continues to put the town of Freeling on the map, achieving exactly what he set out to do.

How clever are AFIA people?



*Photo credit: ABC*

## LOCAL HERO

### Aussie Hay Runners

AFIA congratulates Linda Widdup founder of Aussie Hay Runners, named the 2026 Victorian Local Hero.

Over the past six years, Linda has built a volunteer network of 70 trucks delivering hay and livestock feed to farmers during drought and natural disasters. Many of our members have supported these efforts, helping get feed where it is needed most.

Her drive to raise funds, coordinate volunteers and manage the logistics behind each delivery is no small task. These hay runs support livestock, ease pressure on farm businesses and provide steady, practical help when conditions are tough.

It is a clear reminder that hay and fodder sit at the foundation of Australian agriculture, and it is good to see that role recognised.



# CLIMATE

## Warm and dry April to June outlook

### Temperature

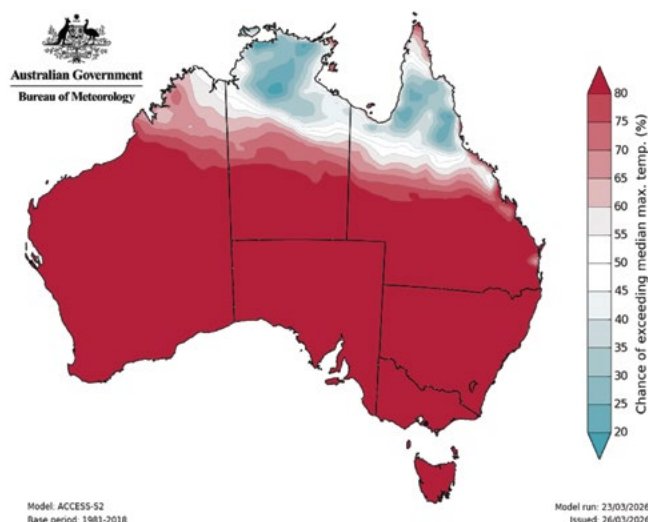
There is a greater than 50 per cent chance that maximum temperatures across the southern two thirds of Australia will be above average (image right). The likelihood increases to greater than 80 percent for western parts of Western Australia, eastern New South Wales and Tasmania, and north-eastern Victoria.

Overnight temperatures have a high chance of being above average across large parts of the eastern states, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. In other area there is no clear signal.

### Rainfall

In general, most of Australia, and in particular the fodder growing regions, rainfall is forecast to be below average. The exception will be far north Queensland and the northern half of the Northern Territory which is forecast to receive above average rainfall, with that most likely in April (see image next page). Coastal New South Wales and south-east Queensland the situation is unclear, with no clear indication for above or below average rainfall.

Adding to the challenges caused by geopolitical events around the world, the fodder industry is facing a greater than 50 per cent chance of unusually low rainfall, forecast for parts



Chance of exceeding median maximum temperature April to June 2026.

of the south-east and interior of the country. 'Unusually low' indicates rainfall that is in the driest 20 percent of years between 1981 and 2018.

### Root zone soil moisture

Higher than average temperatures enable crops to germinate and establish well, with excellent early growth, as long as the soil moisture is sufficient. The root zone soil moisture status for the month to the end of March sees an improvement for many regions



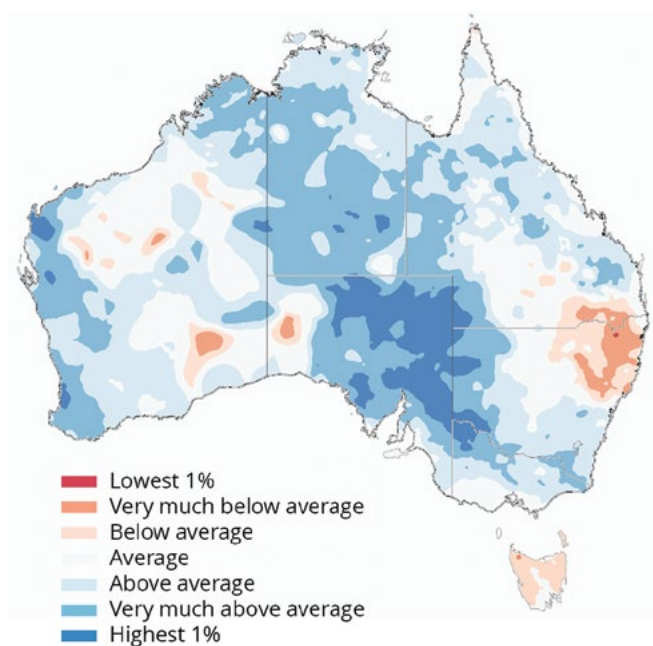
## HAY & FORAGE

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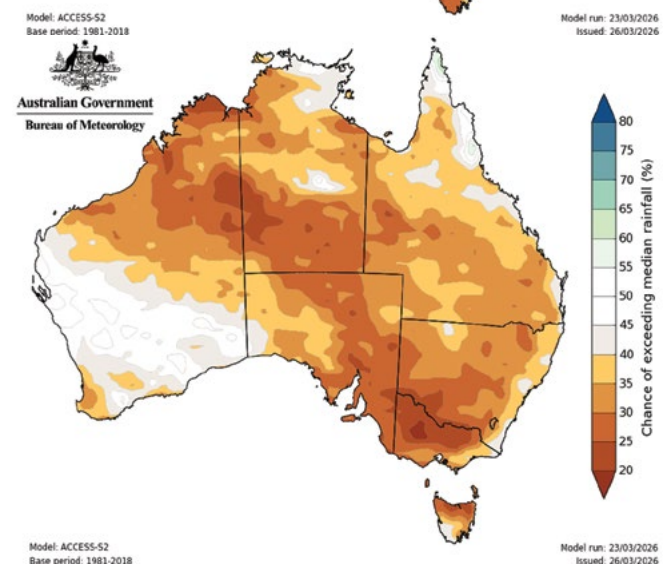
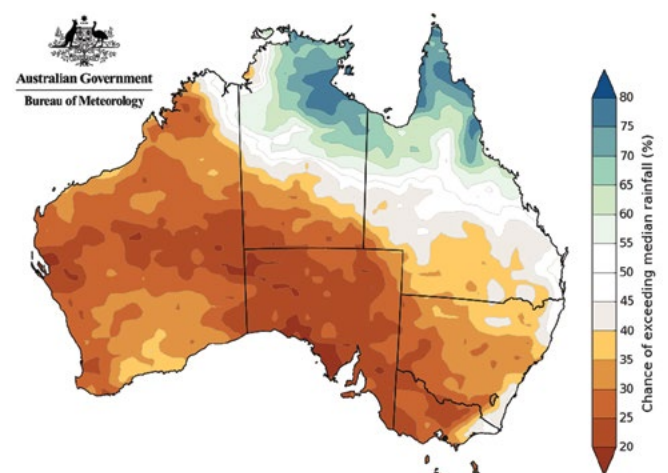
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# CLIMATE



Root zone soil moisture (top 1 m of soil) for the month to 30 March 2026. Source: Bureau of Meteorology, Australian water outlook

compared with November 2025, published in Summer Focus on Fodder. The exceptions are Tasmania which has gone from average or above, to average or below, and south-east Queensland and northern New South Wales where root zone soil moisture is now below- of very much below-average. With a drier and warmer than average outlook these regions are in a very challenging position at a critical time of the production season.



Chance of above median rainfall for April (top) and May (bottom) 2026.

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By Di Holding

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# Climate drivers in Australia

## THE MADDEN-JULIAN OSCILLATION

*This is the final of our series looking at the climate drivers monitored in Australia and used for medium- to long-range forecasting.*

Circling the globe every 30 to 60 days, the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) is a cycle of wind, pressure, cloud and rainfall variation in the tropics. It moves in an eastward direction and influences the timing, development and strength of major global monsoon patterns, including the Indian and Australian monsoons. The MJO can change the likelihood of wetter or dryer conditions on a weekly to monthly time-scale.

At the start of the monsoon season, if the MJO is close to Australia, it can encourage the monsoon trough to form, and cyclones are more likely to develop. During the season it can strengthen the monsoon trough and increase rainfall.

As the MJO moves away, north of Australia, it can cause a break in the monsoon, making tropical cyclones less likely to develop.

When the MJO moves over the central tropical Pacific, it brings more clouds and rain. At the same time, trade winds in the western-central Pacific tend to weaken. This can help initiate or strengthen El Niño. It can also weaken or disrupt La Niña.

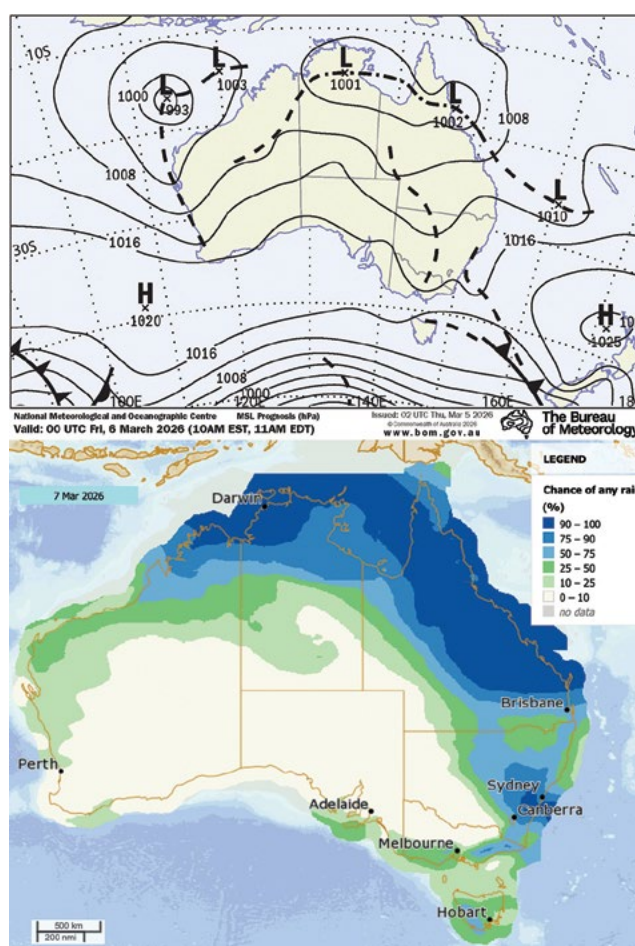
Most tropical rainfall comes from tall thunderstorms which have very cold cloud tops. Satellites can detect these cold cloud tops and are used to monitor the MJO.

### The MJO in March 2026

As of 28 February, the MJO has strengthened in the Maritime Continent region (the region between the Indian and Pacific Oceans including the archipelagos of Indonesia, Borneo, New Guinea, the Philippine Islands, the Malay Peninsula, and the surrounding seas), and is moderately strong which is likely

to enhance tropical activity and rainfall over northern Australia (see forecast maps below).

Most forecast models suggest that during the first week of March the MJO is likely to continue to move across the Maritime Continent and weaken. However, some models maintain its strength as it moves into the Western Pacific region.



The string of tropical lows across northern Australia on the synoptic forecast (top) and the forecast high chance of rain for 6/7 March 2026 illustrate the effect of the moderately strong Madden-Julian Oscillation in early March.

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