

DRAFT MEDIA RELEASE - MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE

Minister announces delivery of advanced weather forecasting research for the GMS region

The minister for Agriculture, Kim Chance, today announced that the Gascoyne Murchison Strategy (GMS) has entered into a two-year collaborative project with the Queensland Centre for Climate Applications (QCCA) to improve seasonal forecasts for the GMS region.

“This initiative follows on from the recently completed work conducted for the GMS by the Centre for Water Research at the University of Western Australia. This has allowed predictions to be made of north-west cloudband activity, and hence rainfall, over the Gascoyne – Murchison region during winter” the Minister said.

“Forecasting rain is a pertinent issue for all land managers and if we can improve our predictions this will invariably help protect the rangelands during drought and will help managers increase productivity when seasons are good” Minister Chance added.

According to Ian Watson, Research Officer for the Centre for Management of Arid Environments, “the most recent forecast of cloudband activity for the Gascoyne – Murchison region, and for Australia as a whole, suggest that this winter the number of days in which the weather is affected by cloudbands will be about average. Therefore the amount of rainfall due to cloudband activity may also be about average, although this relationship is highly variable.”

The production implications of better forecasts will be investigated through pasture growth modelling and clever ways of delivering the information to pastoralists will be tested. “At the moment pastoralists can go to the newly developed Northwest Cloudband and Australian Rainfall website for more information which has been a great improvement in delivering the information” Ian said.

The first stage of the project will involve talking to pastoralists about the specific times of the year when improved forecasts would be of most benefit to their production systems. It may be that accurate forecasts can be made – but at the wrong time of the year.

The next stage will be to review at least ten existing forecast systems to determine how relevant they are to the GMS region. “Recent work has suggested that there is greater skill in this area than has been recognised. Once the outcome of this review is known a decision will be made as to whether existing systems can be “tweaked” for the GMS or whether new systems will need to be developed,” Ian added.

Mr Chance commented that “the two-year collaborative project with the QCCA has been initiated to readdress the imbalance of rainfall forecasting as much of the recent work in Australia has centred on the eastern states, with less emphasis on the west, particularly the north-west.”

For further information contact Ian Watson on 08 9690 2128 or iwatson@agric.wa.gov.au
<http://www.cwr.edu.au/~telcick/menu.html>