

A climate-focused edition of the Barossa Improved Grazing Group Bulletin

[View this email in your browser](#)



Natural Resources  
Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges



Natural Resources  
SA Murray-Darling Basin



## THE BIGG BULLETIN

# CLIMATE EDITION

Welcome to BIGG's monthly newsletter, which this month has a 'climate focus'. We have spoken to Dr Andrew Watkins at the Bureau of Meteorology and have advice for managing your pastures from Farmer John's Shaun Falkenberg and livestock advice from AgriPartner Consulting's Hamish Dickson.

But first, some great news! BIGG are the winners of the Ag Excellence Alliance 2018 PIRSA Grower Group Award! As you'll read below, this has given us the opportunity to offer a bus trip to the upcoming Fleurieu Forward Farming field day, so book your free seat now!

BIGG would also like to acknowledge funding support for this newsletter through the Soil Moisture Monitoring in Grazing Systems project via the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board's Sustainable Agriculture Industry Support scheme and the SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Board through the NRM Levies.

---

## AG Ex Grower Group Award

*by Ag Ex Alliance*

The highly valued Ag Ex Alliance Grower Group Award, sponsored by Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA), went to Barossa Improved Grazing Group (BIGG) for putting forward an educational proposal to benefit their members, the local and broader agricultural communities.



BIGG will put the \$5,000 towards two 'soil health' webinars and attendance of 25 members at a 'soil health' field day to be held by Fleurieu Forward Farming ([see below!](#)).

Chair Graham Keynes accepted the award from PIRSA Chief Executive, Scott Ashby on behalf of BIGG. Graeme acknowledged Brett Nietschke as the driver behind the project as well as being a significant contributor to BIGG.

“Healthy soils are fundamental to the sustainability of farming systems. They store and cycle water and nutrients effectively and provide optimal conditions for plant growth and health”, said Graham.

Scott Ashby congratulated the BIGG group on their quest to up-skill local producers in soil health practice and praised their collaborative approach to supporting and working with fellow grower groups.

## BIGG Bus Trip

### Fleurieu Soil Health Field Day Fun for Dairy, Beef and Sheep

Take this opportunity to sit back- enjoy the ride and learn all about soil health and network with producers on the Fleurieu at the upcoming Soil Health and Water Use Field Day.

When: Tuesday 15th May at Willow Creek



**BIGG Bus Trip: Leaving from Angaston Horse Park 6.15am.**

**Arriving Home: 6.00pm**

The field day will include presentations from **Keynote speaker Deane Belfield - [Regenerative Australian Farmers](#)** on 'biological vs chemical farming what's the difference, can they work together?' In addition FP Ag agronomist Greg Mitchell, Tom Nicholas from Healthy Soils Australia and the opportunity to learn what the Fleurieu beef, dairy and ag Bureaus are up to.

There will also be over 20 soil health exhibitor displays on liming sources, soil health ameliorants, soil moisture probes, native grasses and pasture health.

- Build resilience in your farming system
- Understand chemical vs biological farming
- See local dryland soil health trials and plant available water response
- Hear what has worked for local and national farmers to improve soil health
- See results from irrigated dairy trials
- Consider carbon credits

Tickets for the event cost \$25 and must be booked prior to the event. The bus trip is free thanks to AgEx Alliance.

View the [Full Agenda for the Field Day](#).

To book your **FIELD DAY TICKET** go to: <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/field-day-soil-health-and-water-use-tickets-44395587397?aff=eac2>

To book a **BUS TICKET**: contact Georgie Keynes: [georgie.keynes@biggroup.org.au](mailto:georgie.keynes@biggroup.org.au) / 0409 287 261

## What's the local forecast?

With no weather forecasting crystal ball available this autumn, producers need to be ready for anything this season.

BoM long-range forecast manager Andrew Watkins says the odds don't favour either good or poor conditions at this stage.



"There is no strong push to either very much wetter or very much drier weather at this stage, with all our key climate drivers sitting at neutral levels," he says.

This contrasts with the same time last year, where the odds were strongly favouring

drier and warmer conditions.

Dr Watkins says in the short term there are a few indicators for our region:

- May is expected to be warm, with odds of 60-70 per cent of exceeding normal daytime and night time temperatures, though these odds ease back towards 50 per cent for June.
- June could be on the drier side, with odds of less than 50 per cent of achieving median rainfall.

“On the whole though, the best we can say is we’re not likely to see extremes either way,” he says.

Despite this ‘neutral’ forecast, Dr Watkins urges growers to take a conservative approach to the season, and to take into consideration the low stored soil moisture.

“The Barossa is currently seeing decile one soil moisture – that is the soil moisture is lower than we’ve seen in 9 out of 10 years,” he says.

“Starting from such a low basis, a particularly good start to the season would be required to return to average soil moisture levels, and the forecast say the odds of that happening aren’t high.”

Dr Watkins says that climate models don’t perform as well in autumn, with accuracy increasing as winter starts. He advises producers to keep checking the long-range outlooks throughout the season to get the best picture of how the year may turn out.

If the neutral climate drivers persist, producers can make use of the Bureau of Meteorology's Rainfall Ranges tool, which presents a range of outcomes for the season based on the rainfall accumulation to date.

“The Rainfall Ranges tool works simply uses historical rainfall data, so in a neutral year it can give a rough idea of what you might get in a month or more time,” he says.

In the climate-change era, however, historical averages should always be taken with a grain of salt.

“In a year with no strong climate drivers, we would expect drier and warmer conditions than we would have seen 30 years ago,” Dr Watkins says.

He advises producers who want to use past data to predict future weather to stick to the past 30 years.

“A dataset of less than 30 years might not be enough to average out the swings, but

any more than 30 years and we're getting into data that isn't relevant to the climate anymore," he says.

Dr Watkins suggests the following resources may be of interest to BIGG members:

- The Conversation: [What does a 50:50 outlook tell me?](#)
- BoM tool: [Rainfall Ranges](#)

## How to handle uncertainty

What should a producer do with the neutral forecast coming from the Bureau of Meteorology?

AgriPartner Consulting Principal Livestock Consultant Hamish Dickson says the challenge this forecasts presents is *uncertainty*.

"This year could be dry, it could be average, it could be wet," he says.

"But we know there's an increasing likelihood of variability between and within seasons, so there's an increase in uncertainty for producers to deal with."

The strategies Hamish works through with his clients revolve around improving flexibility and reducing downside in a poor season, in three key focus areas, the first being the ability to make the most of reliable feed.

"Your pasture is your most cost-effective feed source, so producers should look at how well they are matching their pasture growth with livestock demand," he says.

While producers could traditionally get away with out of season lambing or calving, increasing production requirements and a reduction in reliable rainfall means it is critical that the business is set up so lambing and calving are at the right time of year.

Hamish's second focus area is breeding for improved growth rates.

"The quicker you can finish the animal, the lower the cost of raising it, and the more market opportunities that are available to you," he says.

"Obviously selecting rams and bulls is key, but producers can also apply their own selection pressure to their breeding stock to eliminate poor performers."



Hamish also points out that genetics requires a balance. Focusing only on growth rates leads to big and lean animals, which are less resilient to tough conditions, so producers should aim to balance growth rate with the ability to carry fat, to achieve the most resilient combination.

Finally, Hamish recommends producers have a plan for supplemental feeding, in case the season necessitates it. BIGG has recently published a webinar which provides a guide to designing and using containment lots.

The video can be found online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbwdb8\\_WUj0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbwdb8_WUj0)

**Contact Hamish:**

[hamish@agripartner.com.au](mailto:hamish@agripartner.com.au)

0427 446 499

[www.agripartner.com.au](http://www.agripartner.com.au)

## Shaun's pasture tips

We asked Farmer John's agronomy advisor Shaun Falkenberg for his key tips for optimising pastures this autumn.

Shaun suggested growers consider pests, nutrition and weed risks, along with choosing the best pasture varieties and mixes to suit your needs.

"With warmer conditions, producers should watch for early activity from Red Legged Earthmites," he says.

"Consider insecticide treatments prior to sowing for protection against these and Lucerne Flea, Blue Oat Mite and Cutworm."

Shaun advises nitrogen reserves may be low given large volumes of dry matter grown and removed over the past two years, but he says don't apply nutrients blindly.

"Perform soil testing, because there's no point in spending money on nutrients where they aren't required," he says.



"Consider weed cleanliness before sowing paddocks, so rotations can be used which allow the best herbicide options to control the weeds."

Shaun says sowing is the ideal time to analyse the seasonal feed supply and demand cycle and manipulate the feed to suit when the demand is highest.

When choosing pasture species, Shaun says soil, rainfall and temperature are all environmental factors to consider.

"Especially when experiencing prolonged seasonal rainfall breaks, it is timely to remember what we need, and when, from our pastures," he says.

"If forage is needed early, barley is quick to graze and recovers quickly, so grazing before growth stage 31 will still allow good grain returns for grain & graze options.

"Forage herbs are also a good addition to a pasture mix with their high nutritive value and rapid rumen degradation rates, along with solid dry matter production."

## From the Inbox...

- [SA Organics Recycling Association Barossa Seminar](#): Thursday 26 April, Tanunda.
- [Maximising early feed production for livestock](#) webinar: Thursday 26 April 8pm
- [Weather the Storm](#), Women together Learning workshop: Tuesday 8 May, Mount Pleasant.
- Lambex registrations are now open at [www.lambex.com.au](http://www.lambex.com.au). August 5-7, Perth.
- Download [Dr Danila Marini's presentation](#) about CSIRO's virtual fencing research from last months Angaston Ag Bureaus' Hogget Competition (pdf)

## Your BIGG Contacts

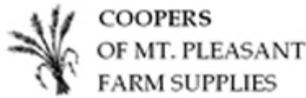
### Technical Facilitators:

[Brett Nietschke](#): 0432 804 389

[Georgie Keynes](#): 0409 287 261

### Communication Officer:

[Rebecca Barr](#): 0402 788 526



**Government of South Australia**  
Department of Environment,  
Water and Natural Resources

Copyright © 2018 Barossa Improved Grazing Group, All rights reserved.

[unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)



Follow BIGG on Facebook



Check our our Website

