

8 THE NATION

Drought spreads despite good rain

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DESPITE widespread rain over the south-east of the continent at the weekend and again yesterday, drought continues to spread.

NSW Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald announced yesterday that 93.9 per cent of the state was in drought, up from 89 per cent in the month to May 30. Mr Macdonald described the figures, which cover conditions to June 30, as appalling.

Only the far northeastern corner of NSW remains satisfactory. Isolated regions in the far west, on the south coast and in the northern inland make up the 3.2 per cent of the state classed as marginal.

The Federal Bureau of Rural Sciences has declared farmers in areas covering almost all of NSW and Victoria, most of the southern half of Queensland, eastern South Australia and the northeastern wheatbelt and southern rangelands of Western Australia are eligible for exceptional circumstances support.

Rain in early June allowed some planting of winter cereals, oilseeds and pulses in NSW. "Rainfall over much of the state this past weekend gave our winter crops a bit of moisture to see them through the next few weeks," Mr Macdonald said.

A forecast 4.6 million hectares of winter crops would be harvested, beating last year's 4 million hectares.

In February, 32 per cent of the state was in drought and 40 per cent was satisfactory.

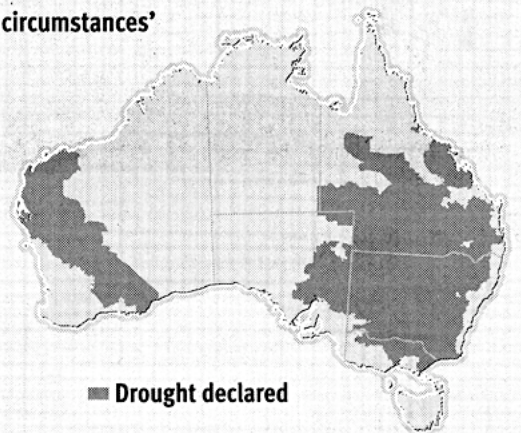
In the 24 hours to 9am yesterday, falls of up to 49mm were recorded in all states and territories. The heaviest were in far south-

CRACKS APPEARING

Regions declared in 'exceptional circumstances'

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Source: Bureau of Rural Sciences

east NSW and northeastern Victoria.

According to the Bureau of Meteorology, for the six months to the end of June, serious and severe deficiencies in rainfall persisted along the South Australia-Northern Territory border, in southern Queensland, northeastern parts of Victoria and Tasmania, and central-western and southern parts of NSW west of the ACT.

The southwestern tip of Western Australia recorded its driest start to any year.

In central NSW, and in Western Australia in a broad coastal zone from Cape Leeuwin to north of Geraldton, rainfall was the lowest on record.

In Queensland, 67 shires and almost 200 individual properties have been drought declared.

The three dams that supply Brisbane and the southeast Queensland region are now at less than 30 per cent capacity.

SEQWater operations manager Rod Drury said water levels in southeast Queensland were at record lows, with recent rain missing the catchment areas over the past week.

"We are crossing our fingers that we get some more of those winter lows moving across Australia," Mr Drury said yesterday.

"This is really the lowest (water levels) since Wivenhoe was built in 1985 — it's the lowest by quite a margin."

The bureau predicts near to average rainfall over Australia to the end of September, but it says the southwest of Western Australia has a 60 to 65 per cent chance of a drier-than-average period.