

# INDUSTRY BRIEF

## Bushfires January 2020 – Dairy industry impacts and response

Tuesday 14 January 2020

### OVERVIEW

This note provides an update on the impacts of fire on the dairy industry across East Gippsland, North East Vic, SA and NSW Far South and South Coasts based on information available today, 14 January 2019.

### SITUATION ANALYSIS

#### Known dairy industry impacts

The following summarises the known extent of impact on the dairy industry. At this stage we understand:

- A total of fewer than 100 dairy farms have been directly affected by fire across South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales
- Many more will be feeling the effects of fires having impacted road, phone, internet networks, the inflation of feed prices and continued water scarcity exacerbated by firefighting efforts in some areas
- The vast majority of dairy farms situated in and around fire affected areas now have milk pick-ups restored, in some cases with permits or tanker escorts where necessary
- According to milk processors, most directly affected dairy farms have been able to restore milking within 48 hours, many using generator power in the absence of mains access
- There was a significant number of dairy farms in NSW that while milking, did not have sufficient alternative power sources to cool milk and wash plant and therefore their output is not contributing to supply as the milk is being dumped, but all have now been connected to sufficient size generators to remedy this problem
- Coordination of emergency fodder distribution is working well to reach those in immediate need and strong coordination plans are now in place to direct donated fodder efficiently and equitably
- Overall, the loss of milking stock has been limited
- There has been significant loss of young dairy stock, including pregnant heifers who have slipped their calves as a result of the stress

#### Emergency response activity and weather outlook

Fire danger ratings will be in the low-moderate to high range in the coming days.

No significant heatwave or spike days across fire-affected sites in the next seven days with conditions generally warm and humid.

Widespread showers and thunderstorms through eastern Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland are forecast between 13-20 January.

There is forecast for heavy rainfall across fire-affected areas in Vic and south east NSW. This may bring an increased risk of flash flooding and water run-off. If the expected rainfall manifests there is potential for further impacts including landslips, water contamination and additional road closures.

## NSW

- The State of Emergency that was initiated on **Friday 3 January, ceased on Saturday 11 January**.
- All fires burning at the ADVICE level or below. Approximately **5.28 million hectares** have been burnt.
- Very strong winds were experienced in recent days but fire impacts did not worsen following forecast severe conditions on Friday 10 January.
- [NSW RFS](#) have publicly announced that it is safe to return to the region, which is critical for mitigating economic impacts caused by evacuations particularly for those businesses catering to tourists.
- There are **no fires of concern** today Tuesday 14 January, however high fire activity continues in the following areas:
  - Snowy Valleys – the Dunns Road, Mary’s Hill and Good Good fires
  - Snowy Monaro – the Rockton and Border fires
  - Greater Hume – the Green Valley fire
- Approximately **3200 customers are without power supply** due to fire impacts. Primary areas are the South Coast and Riverina & Slopes. Over 1,000 power poles have been damaged in the recent fires and this number is expected to rise. Restoration work will be completed as quickly as safety allows.
- Fuel supply has returned to normal in almost all south coast service stations.
- A total of **13,100 head of livestock** have been euthanised or confirmed deceased. The NSW Department of Primary Industries has advised that the majority of carcass assessment and destruction is being handled at the local level comfortably, however ADF assistance may be sought to dispose of carcasses in some locations.
- A total of **10,084 tonnes of fodder** have been distributed in the south-east. Distribution points have been established at Adelong, Holbrook, Bega, Moruya and Cooma, with some direct fodder deliveries also made.
- A ‘Boil Water Alert’ has been issued for the Brogo-Bermagui and Bemboka water supplies. Town water supplies in Batlow and Tumbarumba have been compromised and require filtering/boiling.

## Victoria

- There is one EMERGENCY WARNING for a fire at Cann Road Bridge north of Noorinbee. Five fires are burning at WATCH AND ACT level. All other fires are burning at ADVICE level or below.
- More favourable weather conditions are expected for the next five days, with suppressed fire danger. However, severe thunderstorms may occur from Wednesday 15 January with the risk of some flash flooding in eastern Victoria.
- At least **1,400,000 hectares** have been burnt in total.
- Initial mapping by Agriculture Victoria indicates that there are around **884 rural properties** impacted by the fires.
- Agriculture Victoria animal health teams have visited or contacted 616 properties and are reporting the loss of at least: **3500 livestock; 3982 hectares of hay and silage; and 29,359 hectares of pasture**.

- ADF heavy equipment and trucks are assisting in rehabilitation works in the North East. Activities include road clearing, burying livestock and supplementation of local authorities. A total of 200 personnel are currently deployed to the area, which includes Towong, Wodonga, Wangaratta and Mt Hotham. An additional 200 personnel will be arriving to assist as part of the additional equipment resourcing. ADF Essential Service Convoys are delivering essential supplies such as water, food and clothing as needs are determined.
- Power outages are affecting approximately **1600 customers** across bushfire impacted areas.
- The 'do not drink tap water' advice for the Buchan and Omeo water supplies remain in place. Bottled water has been provided to these communities. Treatment plants for both communities are now operating.

### South Australia

- A high-pressure system will develop south of the Bight early in the week. This will maintain stable weather across SA.
- Extensive road closures exist across Kangaroo Island.
- All fires are burning at ADVICE level or below.
- Estimated more than **300,000 hectares burnt** across fire grounds so far this season, including Kangaroo Island, the Adelaide Hills and Yorke Peninsula.

## INDUSTRY RESPONSE

Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) and NSW Farmers have taken a leading role in coordinating emergency and recovery supports, including fodder distribution, managing donations and communicating with industry which have been very effective at distributing resources where they are most needed.

Committees of regional dairy industry stakeholders involving state authorities, processors, SDFOs, RDPs, power and water utilities have been the focal point of coordination of response activities at the regional level, and will continue to be the engine of recovery planning.

RDPs in each of the eight Australian dairy regions do not have a role in emergency response activities but RDP staff play a vital role for the dairy industry as emergencies unfold, including making referrals to emergency relief and support, working closely with local milk processing companies who assume a key role in accessing dairy farmers for milk pick-ups, and keeping records of known impacts and offers of assistance and donations.

RDPs are also closely networked with local authorities through emergency response committees which include state authorities, emergency response agencies, farmer representative organisations, milk processors, and in some cases local utilities such as power and water companies. This collaboration with the relevant bodies ensures coordination, elimination of duplication and agreeing and allocating complementary roles and responsibilities as needs emerge.

### **Dairy Australia activity**

Dairy Australia's focus over recent weeks has been working with local authorities and processors to support farmers manage the impacts of fires on herds and minimise animal welfare issues. Some specific outcomes of this engagement include:

Mastitis management consultations – We quickly identified that power outages resulting in intermittent milking or extended period of inability to milk, would likely result in milk quality issues and mastitis emerging particularly amongst herds in fire affected areas of southern NSW. To help manage this, Dairy Australia sent a staff member and a consultant (Dr. Stephanie Bullen and Dr. Mark Humphris) to the South Coast region of NSW to assist with technical advice on acute animal health and milk quality issues for dairy farmers. This was requested by Neil Moss, Local Land Services Dairy Industry Liaison Officer in Bega and has been made available in other regions if required.

Cow parking resources - Dairy Australia prepared updated technical advice on best practice in cow parking, of particular interest to some farmers in NSW. For reference, cow parking differs from agistment in that it represents an arrangement where recipient farms continue to milk the herd they host. Milk processors Bega Cheese and Saputo Dairy Australia have assumed responsibility for facilitating matching of those in need with potential cow parking hosts and we have worked with them to produce a suite of communications tools to ensure the information is well to industry.

Relevant extension resources - Dairy Australia has collated and redistributed a package of extensions resources relevant to the immediate/short-term needs of fire affected farmers. Content includes technical advice on mastitis and milk quality, euthanasia, stock assessment, emergency planning and water/effluent management.

Fire preparedness communications – Whilst the threat to farms remains present across many fire affected areas, we have continued to prepare tailored fire preparedness communications with insights from the experience of dairy farmers over recent weeks.

## Recovery planning to date

Thanks to the easing of conditions, industry stakeholders across fire affected regions are now actively engaged in planning for recovery, including formulating proposals for dedicated recovery coordinator positions where necessary. Further detail will be provided late this week on what arrangements have been made.

In addition, Dairy Australia is working on the following initiatives for recovery:

Dairy Australia Bushfire Recovery Support - Looking to the recovery phase, Dairy Australia will deliver the 'Dairy Australia Bushfire Recovery Support' program, that is supported by one-on-one farm consultations. Consultants will focus on successful re-establishment of dairy farm operations and adjusting operational planning in-light of the impacts on the business. RDPs will act to connect dairy farms with one-to-one support from experienced advisors to assist in planning and budgeting following the impacts of bushfires, with a focus on feed budgeting (both availability and cost), water budgeting, cashflow budgeting and animal health and welfare.

Using an existing complement of specialised and experienced regional consultants, the adviser will conduct a face-to-face visit at a mutually agreed location and provide farmers with an action plan, followed up by Dairy Australia extension staff to enact the plan. All dairy farms impacted by recent fires are eligible for this service.

Technical advice – Dairy Australia is drawing together all relevant technical advice relevant to fire affected dairy farmers for use by extension staff and local stakeholders.

Dairy Industry Bushfire Recovery Directory online – We are working with regional and national stakeholders to develop a series of pages hosted on the Dairy Australia website, but co-branded, to act as a comprehensive directory of services, supports and resources for fire affected dairy farmers. The objective is to create a single reference point for farmers, industry representatives, extension staff, consultants, and other services providers and stakeholders to access information on all funding, services and support available to them, be they dairy specific or generic to fire affected communities with content presented by dairy region.

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*For reference, this briefing note has been sent to the national, state and regional industry stakeholders including state government agencies, regulators, milk processors, industry representatives and others.*