

Climate variability – what’s happening?

Natural and large extremes in climate are a fact of life for Australian cattle and sheep producers. This could mean large differences in rainfall from one season to the next or big changes in the temperature over many years.

Changes in temperature and rainfall can have positive and negative effects on livestock production in different areas around Australia.

Some of these effects include:

- increased risks to the amount of meat that can be produced as a result of more extreme weather events (such as floods and droughts)
- pasture quality and growth might not be as high in some areas
- reduced stream flow and quality of water supply across southern Australia
- some crops producing more as they benefit from warmer conditions, but they may not respond well to less rainfall
- animals and crops being exposed to more heat-related stress and disease
- some pests moving south to cooler conditions
- more growth and spread of exotic weeds.

The cattle and sheep farming industry is investing in research and development to help farmers respond to changes in climate. One of the biggest developments is the ability to predict the weather more accurately over a long time. It is important for farmers to know what is happening now, but they need to be able to plan for the future too. This means they also need to know what the climate and weather will be doing over the next few months, or even years.