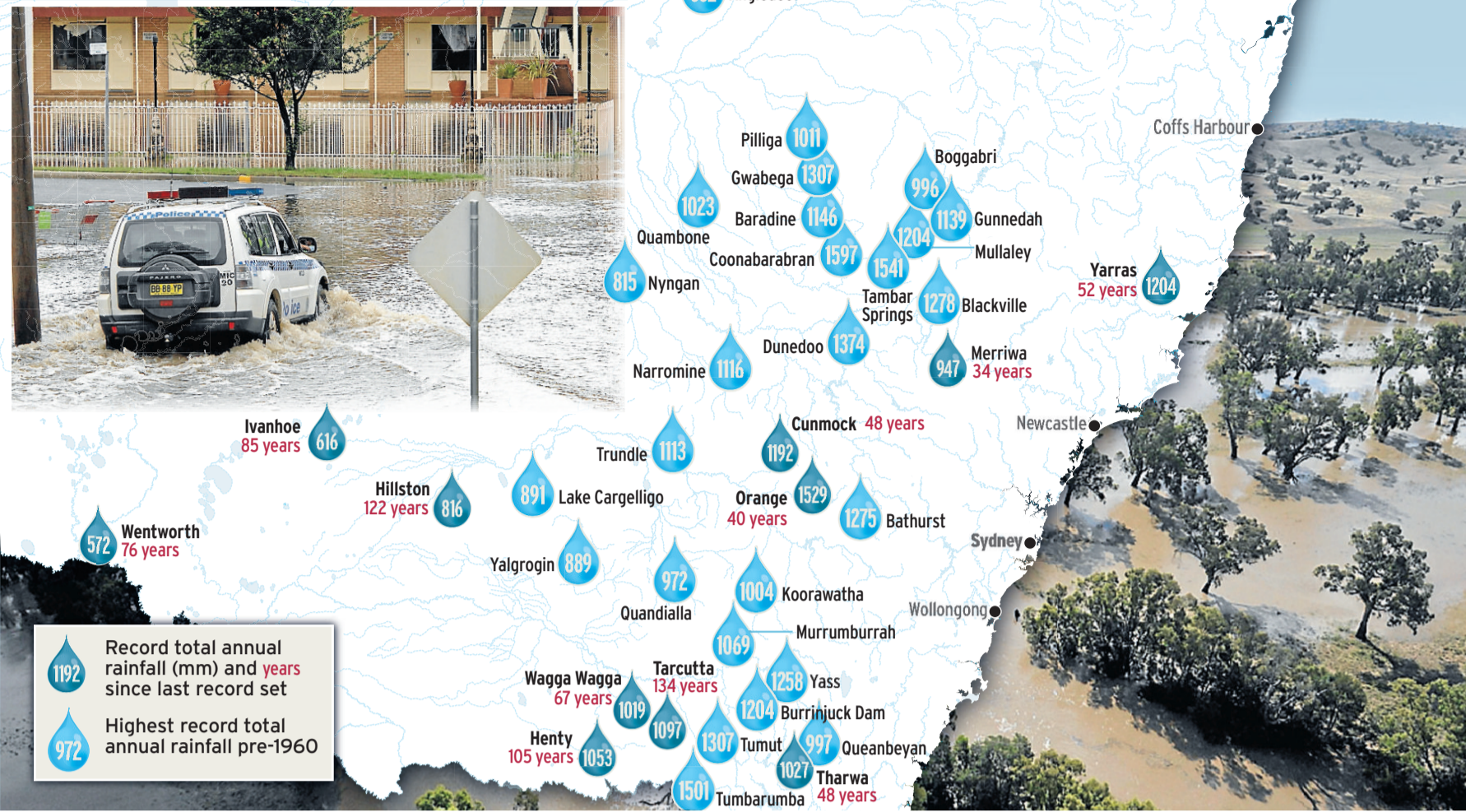


WEATHER

ANNUAL RAINFALL RECORDS SET LAST YEAR



Few siestas for the little Spanish girl who pattered on the plains

Hamish Boland Rudder

CLEAR skies last night were a rare counterpoint to the state's fourth-wettest year on record, and the wettest year in more than a century for towns such as Tarcutta, Hillston and Henty in the state's south and south-west.

The wetter, cooler conditions in NSW have been caused by a strong La Nina effect, whereby changing water temperatures in the Pacific Ocean increase cloud cover and rainfall over eastern Australia. The strength of the current La Nina has led to new rainfall records at a dozen weather stations, particularly west of the Great Dividing Range.

Wagga Wagga, Orange and Ivanhoe all exceeded their previous records. "It's been a remarkably wet year for much of eastern and central Australia," said Dick Whitaker, a senior meteorologist from the Weather Channel.

Coastal rainfall in NSW was generally close to the average. Sydney received 1153 millimetres over the year, the most since 2007 but still just below the average.

Almost all areas west of the mountains had falls that ranked in the top 10 per cent of years. Coonabarabran, Wentworth and Narromine had nearly double their yearly rainfall averages.

"A lot of the rain has been tropical and has come down from the north," said Mr Whitaker, explaining that with this weather pattern the Great Dividing Range "acts like a barrier", keeping rainfall over inland areas.

NSW began 2010 with more than 80 per cent of the state in drought, but by the beginning of December the drought was completely broken for the first time in almost a decade.

Wagga Wagga received 1019.2 millimetres in the year, almost double the annual average. It set a 54-year record and caused widespread flooding in March and early last month.

Andrew Dumaresq runs a 2200-hectare wheat and canola farm just outside Wagga and said that despite "all the doom and gloom" with floods and ruined crops, the outlook was generally "pretty positive".

"We needed a good flood and rains after a long drought," he said. "Hopefully now the drought's broken it'll stay broken for a while."

While Mr Dumaresq is rushing to harvest his wheat crop weeks late, his children, Chloe, 8, and Angus, 9, are enjoying the novelty of an overflowing creek they had never before seen water in.

"We tried to tell them, but the kids didn't believe it until they saw it," he said.

The National Farmers Federation president, Jock Laurie, said that even with floods delaying harvests, crops are still bigger than average, and the outlook for this year is promising.

"The rivers are full, the soil moisture levels are full, you couldn't ask for better conditions for growing," he said. "There's confidence that hasn't been there for a decade or so."

Forecasts indicate that the cooler, wetter weather will continue through summer, before La Nina breaks down in March and weather patterns return to normal.

Worst yet to come for crippled towns

Adam Carey

QUEENSLAND'S flood disaster has affected 200,000 people across more than half the state and crippled its mining sector. The Premier, Anna Bligh, has warned that the worst may be yet to come.

"This disaster is a long way from over," Ms Bligh said yesterday while touring the flood-affected regions with the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. Twenty-two towns had been flooded or isolated, Ms Bligh said.

Residents in Rockhampton and Condamine were evacuated, some forcibly, from their homes yesterday as the towns braced for the possibility of the worst flooding on record. The town of Emerald was 80 per cent under water after the Nogoa River rose to 16 metres.

Police have been deployed in Rockhampton and Emerald to prevent looting.

The Queensland Department of Community Safety, co-ordinating the flood response, reported yesterday afternoon that 1260 people had been evacuated from Emerald, 314 from Theodore, and 82 from Condamine.

"There are still many people out of their homes and not able to return," Ms Bligh said.

She said the damage bill would be substantial. "This recovery from this event is going to require literally billions of dollars from ... federal, state and local governments."

The mayor of Rockhampton, Brad Carter, said the city risked running out of fresh food.

Supplies such as bread, milk and fresh meat had sold out in many stores, he said, and efforts were under way to ship in more food before roads were cut off.

Road and rail links are expected to be severed today, and the airport is expected to be shut. The Fitzroy River is expected to reach nine metres today, and



Water receding ... Bundaberg yesterday afternoon. Photo: Jono Searle

Economic damage worsening

ECONOMISTS are looking beyond the immediate damage caused by the Queensland floods to see how the state's and nation's economies will be affected.

With more than 90 per cent of QR National's coal rail system not operating since Monday, and up to 30 coal mines closed due to flooding, estimates have suggested the flooding could reduce gross domestic

product by 0.5 per cent, or \$6 billion. Queensland Rail yesterday said coal hauls would be reduced until at least next month.

And while the Goonyella line was expected to reopen overnight, the potential damage to railroads and roads in flooded areas will not be known until waters recede. Most major ports remain open but there isn't much to ship.

rise to 9.4 metres, and possibly higher, on Tuesday. About 4000 properties in Rockhampton are expected to be affected.

In Bundaberg about 300 homes and 120 businesses were inundated when the Burnett River peaked at 7.9 metres on Thursday.

Some Condamine locals were reluctant to heed orders to get out of the town, the mayor of Western Downs, Ray Brown, said, but once the first people taken out by helicopter saw the scale of the flooding they told neighbours they should also leave.

Ms Gillard flew to Rock-

hampton and Bundaberg with Ms Bligh yesterday, but a planned visit to Emerald was abandoned. She said she was proud of the response she had witnessed to the disaster.

"This is the Queensland way, coming together, pulling together in times of difficulty. As devastating as these floods are, we are seeing a magnificent response."

Ms Gillard announced hardship payments for Queensland flood victims. Those whose homes have been flooded or damaged will be eligible for disaster relief payments of \$1000 for an adult and \$400 for a child.

Chaplains in schools are 'inadequately supervised'

From Page 1

Richards questioned the capacity of schools to supervise the chaplains. But her chief recommendation was to ban one-on-one pastoral care sessions after she found chaplains were going further than providing "a listening ear" to children experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

"In one instance a psychologist who later treated a student was of the opinion that the chaplain had provided psychological services without the required qualifications," she wrote. "The most salient point is that nobody knew what services were provided during one-on-one sessions, nor the appropriateness or quality of those services."

On her recommendation, the Commonwealth Ombudsman has agreed to examine the national supervision of the program by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

This investigation will focus on the department's procedures for keeping track of funds, monitoring compliance with guidelines, verifying information and handling complaints.

The program is under question on a number of other

fronts. The Queensland activist Ron Williams has begun a long-anticipated action in the High Court to test the legality of the scheme. The case is backed by the Australian Secular Lobby, advised by the leading Sydney silk Bret Walker and funded by public subscription.

Williams versus the Commonwealth of Australia will be the first big test of constitutional guarantees of separation of church and state since the DOGS case 30 years ago allowed federal funding of church schools.

One proposed line of attack is that no legislation has been passed to authorise the program. Chaplains are paid for out of the Education Department's kitty.

Meanwhile, a departmental "consultation process" announced in August 2009 to "develop options for government consideration of the future of the program" continues to limp along. A discussion paper promised in October-November has yet to appear.

A spokeswoman for the Schools Minister, Peter Garrett, said the paper was ready but was being held until the new year when "everyone concerned can participate in the discussion".

Ram bobs up

The ram's head that graced the shilling (10c) for 25 years is about to make a comeback. A \$1 coin, to be minted today, will feature the ram's head 72 years after it first appeared on the shilling. The original design was modelled on a champion merino at the annual Sydney Sheep Show in 1932. It came to be known as the Shilling Ram and its image appeared on the shilling until 1963.

Bushfire warning

The NSW Rural Fire Service is warning of increased fire risks in the west of the state as high rainfall levels encourage grass growth. The wet conditions have kept fire risks unseasonably low this summer but the Acting Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service, Rob Rogers, said conditions could change quickly.

Whaling hopes

Sea Shepherd activists have engaged Japanese whaling ships days after reaching the Antarctic, raising the anti-whaling group's hopes it will prevent a substantial kill this year. The activists found two harpoon ships from the four-vessel fleet on the Antarctic pack ice edge, about 1700 nautical miles south-east of New Zealand, the group said.

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TRADING HOURS
Saturday 1 January - 9am-6pm.* Sunday 2 January - 9am-6pm.* Monday 3 January - 9am-6pm.*†

*Lismore store open 9am-5pm, Berry St. North Sydney store closed, Taren Point store open 9am-4pm, Coffs Harbour store open 10am-3pm. †Five Dock store open 9am-7pm, Lismore and Taren Point stores open 10am-4pm, Coffs Harbour store open 9am-4pm, Berry St. North Sydney store closed, Dubbo and Wagga stores open 10am-5pm, Albury store open 9am-6pm, Nowra store open 9am-4pm, Orange store open 9am-5pm. ‡Lismore and Wagga Wagga stores open 8am-7pm.

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