

# AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS WHITE PAPER

## SUBMISSION BY THE TASMANIAN REGIONAL NRM ORGANISATIONS

17 APRIL 2014



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## 1. Overview - Agricultural competitiveness and Tasmania's regional NRM organisations

The benefit of the Agriculture Competitiveness White Paper to Tasmania is in the establishment of a national plan and path forward for agriculture that will help shape how we engage with stakeholders to deliver agricultural outcomes for Tasmania and Australia.

We see that having an affirmed Australian Government policy for agricultural competitiveness will also provide a policy framework for stakeholders at the national, state, regional and local levels to collaborate and help the advancement of agriculture.

Agriculture is important for Tasmania. We have a diverse and expanding agricultural sector covering vegetables, cherries, apples, berries, stone fruit, pyretherum, poppies, dairy, beef, wool, sheepmeat and aquaculture (salmon and oysters).

From a marketability point of view, Tasmania can claim a number of internationally renowned brands including cool climate wines, award winning whiskies, seafood and meat products.

Our internationally recognised tourism regions are linked to agricultural produce and the farm experiences that are available to tourists. Products such as boutique food, wine, whisky, beer and cider brands are growing in popularity as part of the food tourism movement.

Within small regional communities there is a growing focus on farmers markets, on marketability of locally grown produce and the value of 'place' as market differentiator (See Appendix 1: Increasing the viability of small producers: Sprout Tasmania case study).

Tasmania has the potential to expand production over the coming decades if the growth in markets eventuates as predicted, economic conditions in the State enable our farmers to be competitive and we have continued innovation in the value chain from the paddock to consumer.

The development of new irrigation schemes will provide opportunities for the region to grow its agricultural sector. These schemes will provide producers with the option to intensify production or change their enterprise mix if this is the path they wish to follow. In recognition of this, the state's regional NRM organisations are collaborating with irrigators, Tasmanian Irrigation, agribusinesses and research organisations to ensure these schemes are sustainable and have a long term future.

### Role of regional NRM organisations in Australia's agricultural competitiveness

Although not mentioned by the Issues Paper, **Regional NRM organisations** taken together across the nation are playing a pivotal role in Australia's agricultural competitiveness.

Sustainable agriculture, landcare and environmental programs delivered by regional NRM organisations support the competitive strength Australia has in the international marketplace as a 'clean, green' producer of food and fibre products.

Increasingly, consumers in the wealthy markets of north Asia, north America and the European Union are demanding that the food they consume and the clothes they wear comes from farming systems that are environmentally benign. Retailers are responding to consumer demands and are also requiring that the products that they sell meet high environmental standards. Access to these markets will continue to be fundamentally underpinned by sustainable natural resource use.

As regional NRM organisations, we are able to link our efforts to market signals by engaging our farming community and promoting awareness of the sustainability challenges. We value the input of farmers and their local knowledge into the solutions to meet those challenges. This enables us work

collaboratively with farmers to support their efforts in improving the condition of their natural resources.

## Our strengths to increase agricultural competitiveness

The three regional NRM organisations recognise there are significant opportunities to value add to an already growing Tasmanian agricultural sector, focused on work in the following areas:

- **Improving farm gate returns for farm businesses** by supporting sustainable farming systems with approaches to improve property planning, reduce input costs and value add to farm produce;
- **Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector** by promoting our ‘clean and green’ value through the Tasmanian supply chain and supporting farmers with sustainable production practices;
- **Enhancing the contribution of agriculture to regional communities** through our collaborative approach which builds partnerships with state and local government, industry, agricultural service providers and community organisations;
- **Improving the efficiency of and competitiveness of inputs to the agriculture value chain** – specifically focused on provision of knowledge and information especially in the delivery of skills, training and education and coordination of access and linkages to research and development opportunities;
- **Building opportunities to enhance agricultural exports and new market access** through the provision of, or links to, export and biosecurity information.

Our three regional NRM organisations share a common approaches that contribute to the competitiveness of Tasmanian agriculture. We have:

- A **shared objective** to ensure a sustainable future for Tasmania’s natural resources so that current and future generations can benefit long term;
- An understanding that **sustainable resource use** is critical to the long-term economic sustainability of Tasmanian agriculture;
- Recognition by the Australian Government that we are **key stakeholders in the delivery** of its sustainable agriculture and environmental investments to deliver regional outcomes;
- Funding provided by the Australian Government to host a **Regional Landcare Facilitator** and to deliver sustainable agriculture and landcare outcomes.
- A commitment to incorporating the **views of our regional communities** in the design and implementation of our investments in natural resource management; and
- Delivery of **natural resource management programs** consistent with regional NRM plans that align the efforts of the different levels of government, business and with the values and needs of our regional communities.

Our focus on sustainable agriculture helps producers to get the best from their natural resources in the long term by understanding and managing issues such as soil health, water quality and efficient use, biodiversity on farms, weed and pest control, biosecurity and reduction of emissions.

In Tasmania, this translates to marketability for producers. This is demonstrated by the of Tasmania's cool climate wines, its cherry exports to Asia, and the desirability of products such as Tasmanian dairy, beef and whisky.

Our work in promoting sustainable agriculture is underpinned by more than a decade of regional and local knowledge, the networks that we have established from national to the local community level, and by the knowledge broking and extension capacity we possess and deliver.

We have a strong commitment to address the sustainability of natural resource use at farm and landscape scales. This includes:

- Supporting the adoption of sustainable farming systems;
- Improving the health of agricultural soils to increase long term yields;
- Improving water quality and efficiency of use for increasing production;
- Increasing farm biodiversity and linking corridors across landscapes; and
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

## 2. Expanding Tasmanian Agriculture

Tasmania has the potential to expand agriculture over the coming decades. Providing markets grow and Tasmanian farmers are competitive in supplying those markets, significant areas of Tasmania which are currently used for extensive grazing could be converted to more intensive agriculture.

The missing ingredient in drier regions has been irrigation infrastructure to enable water to be delivered to areas where rainfall is low and variable. This is changing with large investment in irrigation infrastructure by the Australian and State Governments.

Tasmania has other competitive advantages that provide the conditions for it to expand agriculture. These include ideal climatic conditions for temperate crops and fruit and livestock, affordable agricultural land, skilled farmers that have shown flexibility to adapt, a strong agricultural services sector, highly capable research and development institutions, and strong biosecurity arrangements.

Tasmania has diversity of farm business models with successful large scale vegetable and orchard production, commercial broadacre cropping and grazing including dairying, and innovative value adding small landholders who produce branded meat, dairy products, wine, beer and whisky.

On the other hand, there are significant threats to expanding agriculture. Agricultural soils are generally fragile, prone to erosion, susceptible to increasing sodicity and salinity and subject to degradation and loss of fertility under intensive cropping.

Projected climate trend are for drying and warming over the century which will pose challenges for Tasmanian agriculture, although in a national sense it may provide opportunities for the growth of industries where production is under threat in other states such as wine grape growing.

The projected trends also indicate more frequent extreme events such as flooding in north-west Tasmania and droughts in the Midlands and southern Tasmania. The expansion of irrigation is a mitigating strategy, although over the longer term available water supplies may decline.

### Development of irrigation schemes

Depending on the growth in demand for produce and the ability of farmers to make a profit from supplying that produce, there is potential for agriculture to grow in all regions with the development of new irrigation schemes.

Tasmanian Irrigation Pty Ltd (TI) is the state-owned company responsible for the development and operation of the irrigation schemes funded by the State and Australian Governments. It operates 12 irrigation schemes and there are an additional 10 schemes which are in various stages of development from pre-feasibility study to construction.

The new schemes include the following:

- **The Circular Head Irrigation Scheme** is proposed to provide around 20,000 ML of irrigation water to the farming communities of Togari, Woolnorth, Montagu, Edith Creek, Roger River, Mella, Forest, and Irishtown in north-west Tasmania.
- **The Dial Blythe Irrigation Scheme** is proposed to supply 2,855 ML of water to an irrigable area of 8,630 in the farming communities of Penguin and West Pine in northern Tasmania.
- **The Kindred North Motton Irrigation Scheme** is in the final construction stage will supply 2,500 ML of water to an irrigable area of 8,483 ha of pasture and cropping land around the townships of Kindred, Sprent, Abbotsham, Forth, Gawler, Ulverstone and North Motton in northern Tasmania. Production in the area includes potatoes, vegetables (processed and fresh), poppies, cereals, pyrethrum, berries and dairy.
- **The Midlands Water Scheme** is currently under construction and is expected to begin operations during the 2014-15 irrigation season. The climate in the district is comparatively dry with an average rainfall of approximately 500 mm spread relatively uniformly throughout the year. The Scheme will provide up to 38 500 ML of irrigation water to an irrigable area of 55 484 hectares around the towns of Campbell Town, Ross, Tunbridge, Woodbury, York Plains, Oatlands, Mt Seymour, Jericho and Kempton. Current production includes poppies, cereals, canola, pasture seeds, lucerne, potatoes, and pasture for livestock finishing with potential for dairy conversions and perennial horticulture such as grapes on some sites, depending on the incidence of frost.
- **The North Esk Irrigation Scheme** will provide around 3,000 ML of water to an irrigable area of 16,545 ha in the farming communities of Evandale, White Hills and Relbia in northern Tasmania.
- **The Scottsdale Irrigation Scheme** is proposed to provide 8,600 ML of water to an irrigable area of 17,366 ha in the farming communities of Scottsdale, Bridport, Waterhouse in north-east Tasmania.
- **The Southern Highlands Irrigation Scheme** is proposed to deliver 6,500 ML of high reliability water to about 8,000 hectares of farming land around the town of Bothwell. The Southern Highlands region is a key cropping and grazing district, but is situated in one of the driest regions in the state. The lack of high reliability water stops the area from realising its full potential.
- **The Swan River Irrigation Scheme** will deliver 2,500 megalitre (ML) by pumping water from the Swan River in periods of higher river flows and store it in a dam adjacent to the river, close to the township of Cranbrook. The region on Tasmania's east-coast is a mixed farming area with grazing, irrigated cropping, and grape and walnut production. It has a consistently mild but dry climate and requires irrigation water to develop further. The region has developed as a significant wine production area and offers promising prospects for further wine industry developments and other perennial horticultural enterprises.
- **The South East Irrigation Scheme Stage 3** is currently under construction and is expected to begin operations during the 2015-16 irrigation season. It has the capacity to deliver 6,000 ML

of water annually to an irrigable area of 5,780 hectares. The scheme will service agricultural, horticultural and viticulture enterprises around the townships of Tea Tree, Campania, Orielton, Pawleena, Penna, Sorell and Forcett. Current production in the area includes cherries, apples, salad vegetables, wine grapes, apricots, olives and walnuts.

- **The Upper Ringarooma Irrigation Scheme** is currently in construction phase and is expected to begin operations during the 2015-16 irrigation season. It will supply 5,700 ML of water to an irrigable area of 10,177 ha. The district services pasture and cropping land around the townships of Ringarooma, Legerwood, Branxholm, Alberton, New River, Talawa and Forsyth Hill. Production in the area includes dairy, potatoes, vegetables (processed and fresh), poppies, wheat and pasture for livestock finishing.

Irrigators taking water from the schemes must complete a Farm Water Access Plan (Farm WAP) and must apply the water on farm only in accordance with the Farm WAPs. The Plans contain water, soil and biodiversity modules to ensure that the application of water accords with modern sustainability principles. The Farm WAP covers the area of land directly affected by the use of scheme water and the land must be managed in accordance with any recommendations or restrictions identified in the Farm WAP.

#### **Irrigation in Tasmania – role of the regional NRM organisations**

The three regional NRM bodies collaborate with Tasmanian Irrigation and irrigators in supporting farmers to manage their water, soils and farm landscapes sustainably and to help minimise on farm or off-site impacts. Our main focus is in providing information and developing knowledge and capacity through extension events, and where public benefits are involved, by support for on ground works and farm trials. In addition to on-farm activities, we have an interest in analysing and monitoring impacts at the catchment scale.

### **3. Mitigating threats to expanding agriculture**

#### **Declining soil health**

There is evidence that the health of Tasmania's soils supporting cropping and grazing industries is declining. The main issues are soil structure decline associated with long-term cropping, low soil pH, salinity and sodicity. Research (Cotching et al, 2002) found that 'a number of soil properties and agronomic variables were significantly correlated with crop yield and assay, but that these varied depending on crop and soil type.'

Research undertaken in the late 1990s and early 2000s indicated that comprehensive soil data needed to be collected to indicate the capacity of Tasmanian soils to sustain productive agriculture.

The Tasmania's Soil Condition Evaluation and Monitoring (SCEAM) project commenced in June 2004 as a joint initiative between the Southern, Northern and Cradle Coast NRM regions and the Natural Heritage Trust to:

- i. identify priority soil type and land use combinations at risk from degradation;
- ii. collect information to indicate soil condition for key land uses; and
- iii. set-up a network of reference sites for future monitoring.

The priority issues for the SCEAM project are:

- Erosion (and subsequent soil loss via wind and/or water);
- Structural decline;
- Salinisation;

- Soil pH changes;
- Decrease in soil organic carbon content; and
- Nutrient depletion.

SCEAM baseline sampling took place between 2004 and 2008 and a First Report Card was produced. A second round of sampling was undertaken between 2009 and 2013 with the Second Report Card release in 2014.

The key findings in Report Card 2014 are:

- Intensive cropping and perennial horticulture continue to put soil condition under pressure with an increase in the proportion of sites displaying degraded soil structure indicated by low aggregate stability and high bulk density.
- Soils in the southern region are naturally very strongly acidic, but this acidity has been addressed by farmers applying locally sourced lime or dolomite. There has been a considerable increase in the proportion of intensively cropped sites with pH (in water) exceeding 7.0 and lime applications could be reduced to allow the soils to fall back in the target range.
- Plant available phosphorous levels remain below optimum for nearly all soils used for pasture grazing.
- Elevated levels of exchangeable sodium (sodic soils) continue to occur at a small number of intensive cropping sites together with a number of new sites under perennial horticulture.

The Report Card indicates the need for careful management of soils by farmers to avoid damage to soil structure and plant productivity.

### **Mitigation of soil health problems**

Professor Johan Bouma (ABC Rural, 24 March 2014) stated that: *“We rightly raise alarms about the loss of 30-50 billion tonnes of soil per year [globally] due to soil erosion and degradation on the one hand, while we know on the other hand, that techniques to successfully combat these problems are available.”*

Soil health is a high priority sustainable agriculture issue for the Tasmanian regional NRM organisations. We fund extension events including field days, seminars and workshops for farmers and other stakeholders on understanding soil and farming practices to improve soil health.

With the release of the of the National Soils RD&E Strategy Securing Australia’s soil for profitable industries and healthy landscapes, Tasmania’s three NRM regions, Department of Primary Industries, Parks Water and Environment, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association and the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture will jointly design and deliver a statewide soil health extension program to maximise benefits to the state’s agricultural community and natural resources.

Our organisations has been active in soils extension over the past three years. Our priorities have been:

- **Salinity and sodicity management** through the publication of a comprehensive glovebox guide running of extension events for farmers and advisors:  
[http://www.nrmsouth.org.au/uploaded/287/15131714\\_54salinitygloveboxguide-t.pdf](http://www.nrmsouth.org.au/uploaded/287/15131714_54salinitygloveboxguide-t.pdf)
- **Carbon farming and reducing farm emissions** through a collaborative project with the sustainable outcomes consultancy RMCG, NRM North, and agronomy provider Serve-Ag. This

project is supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, as part of its Carbon Farming Futures Extension and Outreach program. The project is supporting farmers to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions in areas such as soil management, water and energy use efficiency, nutrient use efficiency, livestock nutrition and optimising feed quality.

- Establishing on-farm trials by adding new varieties of **biofumigant green manure (BGM) crops** into cash crop rotations (poppies and grains). Research and trial results from the US and several trials around Australia (including Tasmania) have demonstrated promising prospects for combatting declining soil fertility in intensive cropping and vegetable growing. The results also show improved organic soil carbon content, improved cash crop yields and reduced time between cash crop rotations.
- **Grazing management** through the publication of a *Guide to Planned Grazing*, the running of extension events for farmers and small landholders, and the establishment of on-farm trials with scientific monitoring of biophysical changes:  
[http://www.nrmsouth.org.au/uploaded/287/15131299\\_51nrmsouthplannedgrazingg.pdf](http://www.nrmsouth.org.au/uploaded/287/15131299_51nrmsouthplannedgrazingg.pdf)

Our organisations are committed to the continuation of the abovementioned initiatives over the current Australian Government funding period: 2013-14 to 2017-18. It is early days in the delivery of these, but some promising results are emerging as illustrated by the following case studies. These are small scale, but important demonstrations of what can be achieved on larger farms.

## Climate trends

The *Climate Futures for Tasmania* project undertaken by the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre, based at the University of Tasmania, provides the best available information to help Tasmanian farmers with long term climate trends.

[http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/climatechange/adapting/adapting\\_to\\_climate\\_change\\_in\\_tasmania/appendix\\_1\\_predicted\\_changes\\_to\\_tasmanias\\_climate](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/climatechange/adapting/adapting_to_climate_change_in_tasmania/appendix_1_predicted_changes_to_tasmanias_climate)

The project provides fine-scale climate information for Tasmania by downscaling six global climate models with two emission scenarios (high emissions scenario - A2 and lower emissions scenario - B1) to generate climate information from 1961 to 2100. This information helps to understand the changes at a local and regional level in Tasmania.

The projected trends are listed below:

### *Increasing temperature*

The project shows that the mean temperature in Tasmania has increased by more than 0.5°C since 1950. The increase has been greater for minimum temperatures (usually occurring overnight) than for maximum temperatures.

The spatial pattern of the trend in daily maximum temperature since 1961 is for greater change in the north-east and the interior, whereas daily minimum temperature has generally increased more on the north coast and less in the interior.

By 2100, Tasmania's temperature is projected to rise by approximately 2.9°C under the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s 'high emissions' scenario (A2), and by approximately 1.6°C under the 'low emissions' scenario.

Tasmania's projected temperature changes for both emissions scenarios are less than the projected Australian and global average temperature changes for the same period. This is largely due to the moderating influence of the Southern Ocean.

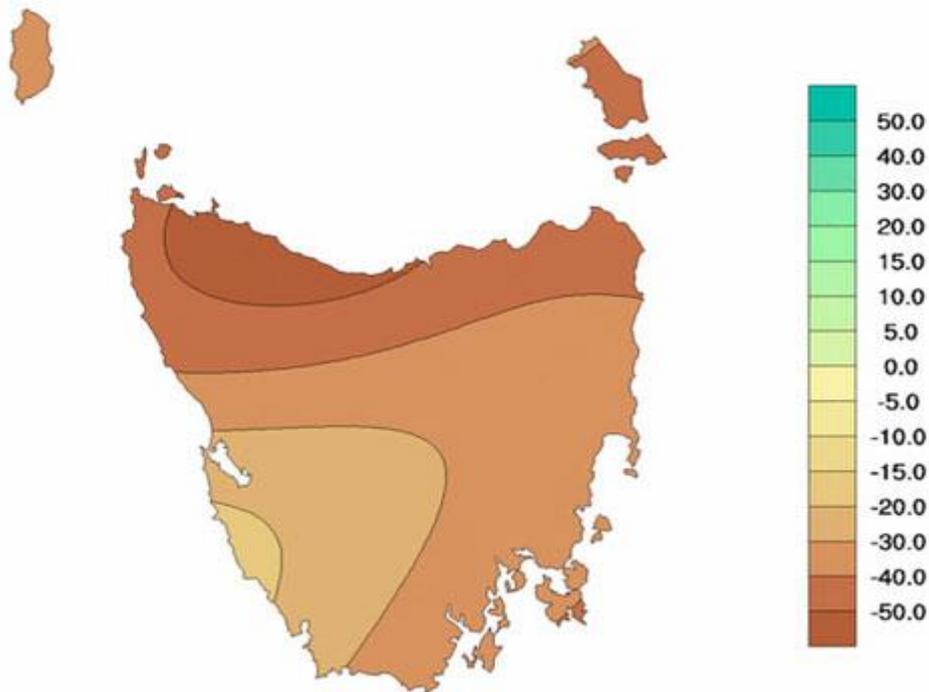
### *Changing rainfall and runoff*

Tasmania has experienced a downward trend in rainfall over the period 1970 to 1990 and this has continued until the present with the largest changes in Tasmanian rainfall being in autumn – see figures below:

Figure 1: Trend in Annual Total Rainfall, Tasmania

### Trend in Annual Total Rainfall

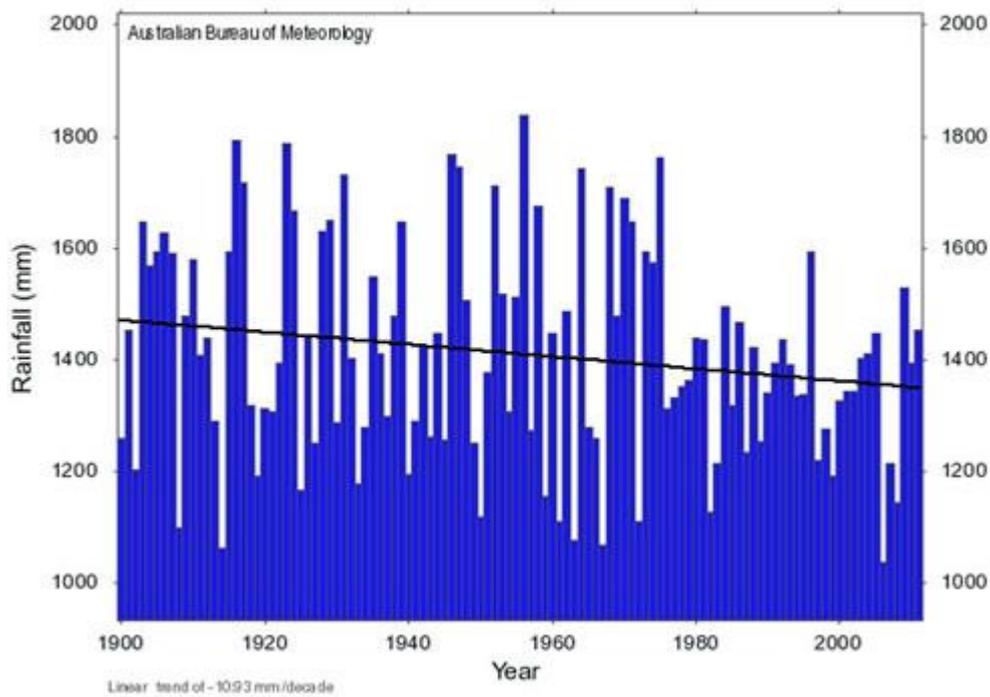
1970-2011 (mm/10yrs)



© Commonwealth of Australia 2012, Australian Bureau of Meteorology

Issued: 28/06/2012

### Annual Rainfall - Tasmania



There is no significant change to projected total annual rainfall over Tasmania under either the high emissions or low emissions scenarios. However, rainfall patterns across Tasmania and from season to season show significant changes under these emissions scenarios. Projections show a steadily emerging pattern of increased rainfall over Tasmania's coastal regions, and reduced rainfall over central Tasmania and in the north-west.

A slight increase is projected in the total amount of runoff in the State by 2100, although there is likely to be localised variations experienced. Runoff is projected to decrease markedly in the central highlands, which will impact on water catchments and therefore hydro-electric generation capacity in the region.

Runoff is likely to increase in the important agricultural regions of the Derwent Valley and the Midlands over the same period. Changes in rainfall and runoff patterns may also impact on water quality and availability for irrigation and drinking uses.

### *Increasing frequency and severity of extreme events*

Changes are expected to the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. Rainfall intensity and associated flooding is projected to increase across Tasmania, with longer dry periods in between heavy downpours. The number of extreme wet days could also increase by up to 25 per cent in both the south-west and north-east of the State.

The occurrence of hot summer days and heat waves is also projected to increase. The largest increases in extreme temperature are projected to occur in the spring and autumn months, with increases of greater than 4°C.

The number of heat waves (where maximum temperatures exceed 28°C for more than three consecutive days) at Launceston for example, is projected to increase progressively over the coming decades to twice per year on average. This is approximately four times more frequent than what is currently experienced.

### *Other changes*

Tasmania can expect a number of other changes:

- An increase in relative humidity around the coasts and a decrease over inland, and high-altitude regions, with a different pattern in each season;
- A reduction by approximately 50 per cent in the incidence of frost by the end of the century;
- A decrease in chill hours at sites below 500 m elevation, but an increase in chill hours at higher elevation sites;
- A modest increase in wind risk under a high emissions scenario of up to 25 per cent by 2090; and
- An overall reduction of less than 5 per cent in solar radiation (sunshine), comprising a decrease on the east coast and an increase on the west coast.

## Drought management

The regional NRM organisations believe that the impact of drought can be minimised with careful planning and decision making undertaken in:

- Preparing for drought
- Managing during drought, and
- Post drought recovery.

The outlook is that the frequency and spread of exceptionally hot and exceptionally dry years is likely to increase.

Projections indicate that:

- By 2010–2040, exceptionally low rainfall years are likely to affect about 10% of the region and occur about once every 12 years on average.
- By 2030, exceptionally low soil moisture years are likely to affect about 11% of the region and occur about once every nine years on average.

### ***Farm drought management***

During the 2006-2008 drought, NRM South and NRM North undertook a project funded by Woolworths and Landcare Australia to develop Drought Management Module to help farmers comprehend the impact of drought and to plan for and manage pre-drought, during drought and post drought.

The main aim of the project was to document and provide mechanisms to help farmers manage the risk of drought and its effect on their farm; the business, the land and the people. The project involved running a series of drought management workshops for farmers based on the NSW 'Profarm' courses. These workshops, extensive consultation with extension staff, farmers, a reference panel and the other Property Management Planning Framework (PMPF) modules have guided the development, layout and intent of this module.

This module links to and aligns with the statewide PMPF that Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) has overseen.

[http://www.nrmsouth.org.au/uploaded/287/15131005\\_36drought-facingthechalle.pdf](http://www.nrmsouth.org.au/uploaded/287/15131005_36drought-facingthechalle.pdf)

NRM South will continue to facilitate extension events that use material in the module and support farmers in planning for drought.

## Bushfires

Warming and drying climate trends for Tasmania are likely to create conditions where bushfires may become more frequent during summer and of greater intensity. Bushfires cause considerable damage to natural resources on farms, destroy valuable farm assets which are costly to replace and put severe pressure on the financial viability of the farm business as they attempt to recover.

Southern Tasmania was particularly affected by severe bushfires in the 2012 and 2013 summers. Many farms in the Derwent Valley, Tasman Peninsula and Sorell Municipality were burnt in the 2013 bushfires.

### **Bushfires**

NRM South initiated a Farm Bushfire Recovery Grants program to help farmers to:

- Rebuild boundary and internal fencing
- Rehabilitate pastures
- Take action to prevent wind and water erosion of exposed soils
- Replant shelter belts and windbreaks, and
- Manage weed infestations following the fires

We also provided grants for landholder groups to work together to undertake bushfire preparedness planning to become bushfire ready. Our approach to bushfire preparedness planning is to focus on the following aspects:

- Protecting the family and the home during a fire – eg, having non-combustible green areas around the home and a reliable water supply to protect the home, and having an evacuation plan for when it is necessary and safe to leave.
- Establishing laneways for livestock to be evacuated to a refuge area.
- Installing fire breaks around farm assets such as sheds, yards, fuel tank and equipment and machinery storage areas.
- Taking action to minimise the risk of a bushfire entering the property such as installing fire breaks around the boundary and crops and paddocks, and undertaking fuel reduction burns in bush on or surrounding the farm.

## **4. Conclusions**

Tasmania's NRM organisations have a unique position as a place of connectivity. We work with Australia, State and Local Government, community, business and industry and Landcare organisations. We 'trade' in knowledge, are trusted advisors in agriculture and the management of our natural resources, and have the flexibility to respond to a dynamic business environment.

There's no doubt further opportunity exists within Tasmania for agricultural expansion. Sustainable agriculture practices can play a pivotal role in harnessing this opportunity but they must be coupled with sound R&D, best practice examples, access to the latest knowledge, information and training in an environment that supports the needs of the farmers, and a firm plan for the future.

The opportunity exists for the White Paper to recognise the lead role that regional NRM organisations play in working with farmers and other stakeholders in improving the competitiveness of Australian agriculture and enabling a prosperous future for the sector.

Tasmania's regional NRM South's sustainable agriculture focus is on providing services which help farms to be profitable and industries to be competitive. We work with many different farm businesses in terms of enterprise mix, size and location of properties within the region. We do this through our Sustainable Agriculture and Regional Landcare Facilitation programs and the community engagement, capacity building and extension work of the Regional Facilitation Team.

We recognise the value of agriculture now and its increasing potential to support growth in the Tasmanian regional economies.

We propose the following actions, specific to the issues listed within the Paper:

- **Improving farm gate returns**
  - ***A focus on the science of sustainable agriculture***, demonstrated through the successes of existing productive farms and supported in partnership with organisations such as CSIRO, University of Tasmania and Sense-T. Delivered by the RLF;
  - ***Access to quality information about best practice farm management***, delivered by our Regional Facilitation team and extension events supported through the redeveloped nrmsouth.org.au portal (and associated app) focused squarely on the needs of farmers;
  - ***Access to farm business information*** provided through the redeveloped nrmsouth.org.au portal and linking to local organisations that can provide high quality services related to business management, succession planning, finance and marketing;
- **Agricultural competitiveness and expanding agricultural production**
  - ***Recognising the marketability of the value chain*** and adding value to producers through a local accreditation system for products. This could be linked directly to Brand Tasmania at farmgate level (it currently recognises Tasmanian produce at retail outlets). This also has marketability potential at an international scale.
- **Enhancing agriculture's contribution to regional communities**
  - ***Recognising NRM organisations as the key connectors*** within regional communities including local government and indigenous groups with capacity to focus on delivering economic returns to those communities;
- **Maximising competitiveness of inputs to the agriculture value chain**
  - ***Empowering NRM organisations in supporting agricultural producers to make informed decisions about inputs***. NRM organisations already possess significant knowledge around inputs such as skills development, enabling leading edge R&D and providing advice on inputs such as energy, water, resources and soil improvement. Increased capacity to do more of these activities and recognising that NRM organisations can link people to quality knowledge and information would be valuable.
- **Providing opportunity to enhance agricultural exports**
  - ***NRM organisations can provide a voice for agricultural producers*** around the value of biosecurity. In Southern Tasmania, NRM South advocates for and supports biosecurity protection for our producers and in consideration of what this means to our ability to export produce. This applies to agriculture but also to the protection of our natural assets as a benefit to tourism.

Additional opportunities exist in playing a role in assessing the impact of environmental legislation on agricultural producers, and being able to provide a balanced view of this position.

## Appendix 1: Increasing the viability of small producers: Sprout Tasmania case study.

Tasmania has many small producers who are becoming prominent in value adding from production to consumer. A prominent organisation that is facilitating this develop is Sprout Tasmania.

Sprout Tasmania (Sustainable Production Research and Training Inc) – <https://www.facebook.com/SproutTasmania>



Sprout was founded by Tony Scherer and Dr Alice Percy in late 2011, when they saw that there was a lack of support for small producers. Through Tony's wealth of industry knowledge and Alice's scientific background they started offering workshops and research services.

Today Sprout is a not-for-profit organisation that supports small local food producers who would like to get their ideas in the ground, growing and to market. They have expanded their Board of Management to bring diversity, provide a broader range of expert knowledge, build capacity and opportunity for the organisation and to be responsive to a wider community in Tasmania.

Change is needed in our food industry. Sprout envisages an increase in diversity of farms, a reduction in synthetic fertiliser and fungicides, an increase in small-scale farms, value added produce and local food systems. It will be essential for the agricultural industry to become resilient during climate change and changes to the export and trade rules.

Sprout offers:

- Workshops
- the Sprout Producers Program
- a vibrant on-line market place
- advocacy for small local producers
- events including industry information nights and conferences, such as Cross Pollinate (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Cross-Pollinate>).

Sprout Producers, with the assistance of Sprout, grow their produce as biologically as possible observing environmental and ethical standards in line with Sprout's ideals. Produce grown by Sprout Producers is given the Sprout "stamp of approval" which is currently seen in small grocery stores around Tasmania and on the menu at Tasmanian restaurants.

This is great for the Tasmanian community because local food:

- is fresher
- tastes better
- has a lower carbon footprint
- brings lesser known and heirloom varieties to the public
- supports local Tasmanian farmers
- supports the local economy
- creates a sense of community.

Sprout Producers care for their animals and the environment and the community by producing delicious, high quality, healthy, fresh food grown as ethically and biologically as possible. Sprout works with producers to help them grow and sell great food. Sprout's standards are stringent so producers work hard to earn and retain the Sprout Producer certification. By looking out for the Sprout Producer sticker, the community can easily choose great food from local producers.

### **Sprout Producers Program**

Whether producers are established growers or thinking about starting out with a market garden or specialised crop, Sprout offers a Program to guide and mentor producers, through the expertise of our Board, which has a range of skills in:

- agriculture and plant science
- soil health
- small and medium scale farming
- business planning
- marketing
- media and communications
- advocacy
- food retailing
- value-adding
- website development
- e-commerce.

The certification course is a two-day induction and accreditation, on-farm and in the class-room.

On-farm, Sprout talks to producers about their farm, hopes, dreams, disasters and anything else that they have experienced in their journey to becoming a grower. Sprout takes a look at farm practices in the context of Sprout's ethics and ideals, interviews producers and takes some photos so they can have a page on Sprout's website. In the classroom, Sprout holds sessions for between 6-12 Sprout Producers at a time covering topics such as:

- soil health
- diseases
- pest control
- ethics
- product presentation
- dealing with restaurateurs and retailers

After this certification growers become a Sprout Producer.

Additionally, during the first year as a Sprout Producer, they:

- Participate in four on-farm Sprout Producer days where they get to visit other Sprout Producers and see what issues they have and learn about how they do things, as well as sharing in the mentorship of a Sprout Board member on-site during the farm walk-through.
- Four free half-hour phone or Skype mentoring sessions on any area they need help in, such as:
  - seed selection;
  - pests and diseases;
  - soil preparation;
  - marketing;
  - finance;
  - e-commerce;
  - dealing with retailers and restaurants;
  - product quality; and
  - many more!

Once they have produced their first crop and are ready for market they get free access to our online store as well as a page on our website, and the right to bear the Sprout logo on your products for 12 months.

#### **Online marketplace**

Sprout's online marketplace is used by growers and producers to post their wares for sale to restaurants and small retail grocery stores. The marketplace is also a one-stop shop for retailers and restaurateurs where you can make links and relationships with new local growers, and easily and quickly place orders on-line rather than chasing your suppliers by text and phone.

*Sprout believes that by supporting small local producers we can generate a shift from conventional single crop and high input agriculture into a diverse food production system full of small sized producers and value-added businesses.*

## Appendix 2: Contact details

### NRM South

#### *Key contacts*

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03 6221 6111

Regional Landcare Facilitator - Ken Moore  
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0447 556 740

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 [@nrmsouth](https://twitter.com/nrmsouth)

 [www.facebook.com/nrmsouthTas](https://www.facebook.com/nrmsouthTas)

 [www.youtube.com/nrmsouth](https://www.youtube.com/nrmsouth)

### NRM North

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### Cradle Coast NRM

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NRM Executive Officer

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