TAS FARM
INNOVATION HUB

SEASONAL UPDATE WEBINAR - RECAP
January 2026

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1 Key messages & actions

- **Peak irrigation is underway:** January is the highest plant water demand period. Hot days and high evapotranspiration mean irrigation needs are at their maximum. Delaying irrigation during this period quickly reduces soil water holding capacity and increases stress risk.

- **Do not underestimate crop water use:** Crops such as peas, poppies and irrigated pastures draw water deeper than expected. Root activity commonly extends beyond 50 centimetres, particularly in January. Shallow assessment can underestimate stress.

- **Irrigate early to maintain soil water holding capacity:** Early irrigation is about keeping soil pores open and functional, not just meeting plant demand (Figure 1). Once soils dry out, infiltration declines and preferential flow increases, making it difficult to refill the profile later.

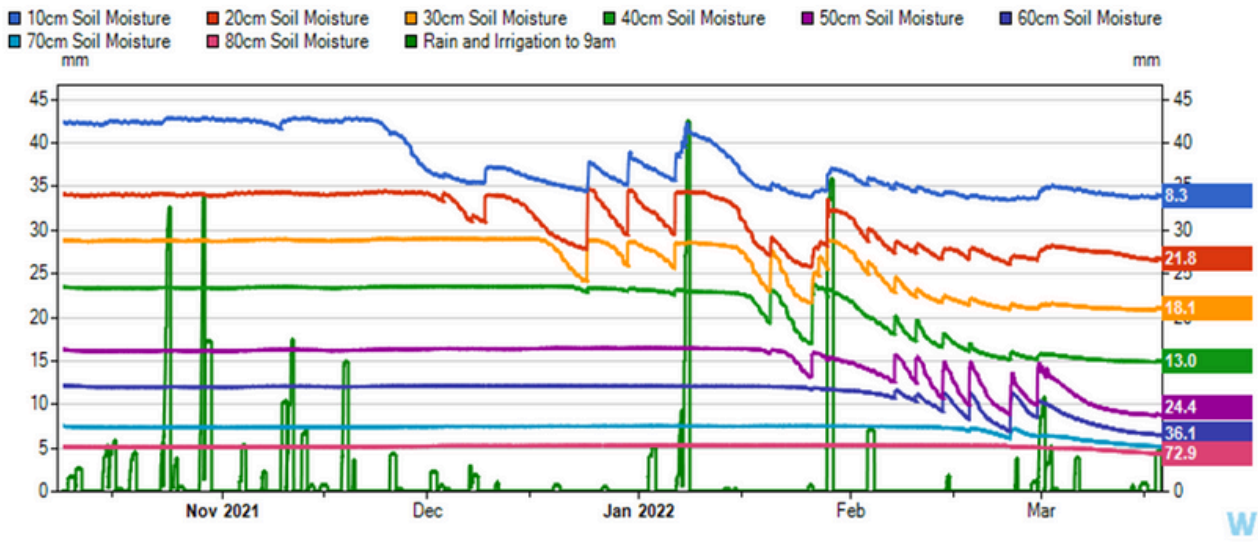

Figure 1 – Flow on effects that last all season. If soils are dried out too early, you can't get back to field capacity with irrigation and plants draw moisture from depth, as opposed to the top 30-40cm.

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- **ETo is a guide only:** Reference evapotranspiration must be adjusted for crop factor. Potatoes at canopy closure can exceed 1.2. Peas can reach 1.15 at peak growth. Just matching ETo means you may still fall behind in hot conditions due to a decrease in irrigation efficiency.

- **Irrigation amounts matter, not just frequency:** Small but frequent irrigations can fall well short of demand. Ryegrass trials showed significant soil moisture divergence between 10 millimetre and 17 millimetre applications, even within the same paddock.

- **Ignore small rainfall forecasts:** Rain under 10 to 12 millimetres should be treated as a bonus only. Base irrigation decisions on rainfall received, not rainfall forecast.

- **Walk paddocks and dig holes:** Irrigators running does not guarantee effective irrigation. Regularly inspect paddocks for runoff, dry zones and depth moisture. Dig beyond the top 20 centimetres to confirm infiltration.

Current Conditions & Regional Strategies

- **North West** – Soil moisture is similar to the same time last year, but spring rainfall was better timed, supporting prolonged vegetative pasture growth and strong fodder conservation.

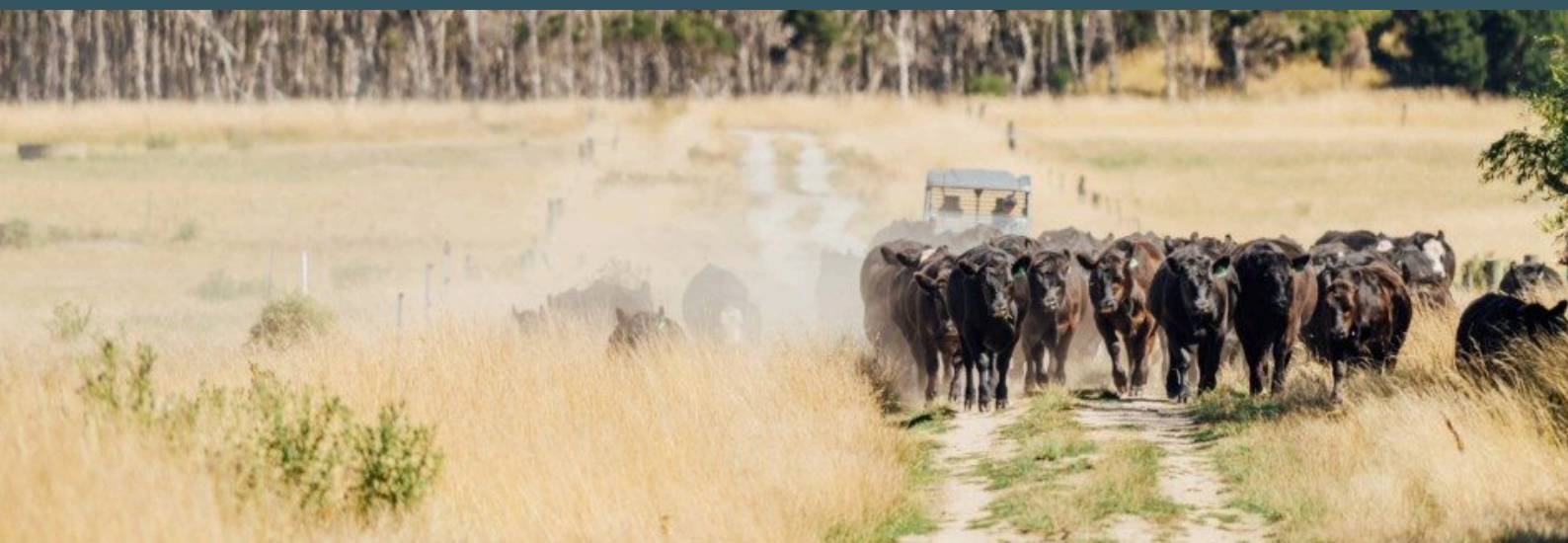
- **North East & Fingal Valley** – Conditions are tracking close to last year, with no remaining soil moisture buffer. Light soils are drying rapidly.

- **East Coast** - Conditions are characteristically dry and similar to recent seasons.

- **Northern Midlands** – Many areas are now drier than last year. Lower infiltration soils increase the risk of falling behind.

- **Southern Midlands, Coal & Derwent Valley** – Stored soil moisture is largely exhausted. Cracking soils mean rainfall now bypasses the root zone.

- **Flinders & King Islands** -Soil moisture is similar to or slightly below last year, but spring rainfall was well utilised.



2 Things to think / chat with your advisor about

- **Weekly irrigation targets:** come up with a rough guide as a starting point and make sure it matches plant water use with regular paddock walks.
- **Soil variability across paddocks:** monitor your different soil zones and in paddocks of high variability, it's OK to have a small wet area, so your lighter soil types don't dry out.
- **Depth of assessment:** dig past 30cm to ensure crops aren't having to supplement from subsoil moisture due to under irrigation.
- **Irrigation method and infiltration:** are your irrigations infiltrating your soils efficiently? Do you need to alter your irrigation strategy?
- **Ground preparation legacy effects:** is your paddock behaving differently to last year? Has challenging ground prep conditions changed your soil structure?
- **Autumn break readiness:** in your pastures, talk about soil variability across your farm and have you got features such as cracks to indicate how they may respond to an autumn break.

3 Tools & next steps

- **Track crop factor and ETo.** Sign up for the Weatherwise Forecast Updates from SWAN Systems to receive daily ETo data in your inbox.
- **Walk your paddocks weekly.**
- **Start planning for late summer and autumn.**
- **Optimising irrigation resources**: Ccase studies, factsheets and associated short explainer videos can all be found on the TAS Farm Innovation Hub website and YouTube.
- **Ag Logic Weather Station & Soil Probe Network:** Subscribe for real-time weather, soil moisture and ETo data. This supports more confident irrigation and fodder decisions, especially when conditions are changing rapidly. If you have requests for how you would like to see data displayed contact Ag Logic. Feedback helps improve how information is shared across the network.
- **Ag Logic Online Resources:** Short videos and guides from Ag Logic explain how to interpret soil moisture graphs, reference evapotranspiration (ETo) and crop evapotranspiration (ETc). These resources support decisions on when to start, pause and resume irrigation.

Next month's webinar: Friday 6 February, 1pm.
Register online: tasfarmhub.com.au/events