

Local Drought Committee Guidelines

Background and history

Local Drought Committees (LDCs) were established in 1982 to assist Stock Inspectors (now Biosecurity Inspectors) make recommendations to the Minister for Primary Industries (now the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries) on the need for regional council/shire declarations and revocations. Following changes in November 2008, the role of the Local Drought Committee Coordinator was transferred from the local Biosecurity Inspector for that region to the Department of Primary Industries (now Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF)) Climate Risk Coordinator.

The LDC process is an integral part of the State Government's response to drought. Therefore, it is important that a good working relationship exists between members and that declaration and revocation processes are conducted in a professional manner. It is imperative that all recommendations are conducted in line with the appropriate criteria and based on objective decision-making and free from bias.

The LDCs assess initial applications for Individually Droughted Property (IDP) declarations and make recommendations to the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries on area declarations or revocations. They also mediate and make recommendations relating to the payment of subsidies.

LDC's are based on regional council/shires or multiple regional council/shire areas and comprise local producers, representatives from the various primary production industry organisations operating that district, together with relevant DAF personnel.

The knowledge local producers have regarding the local environment, soil types, suitable stocking rates, pasture types and its availability (including the nutritional value) is invaluable in supporting fair and equitable decisions for all parties regarding drought declarations/revocations and assessing claims for assistance.

Official drought declarations will not be made in other than extreme drought events. To be eligible for a drought declaration, the property under assessment must meet the one in ten-to-fifteen year rainfall deficiency timeframe. The assessment compares rainfall recorded during the previous twelve months to historical data.

Recommendations made by LDCs are confidential until the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries has assessed them and an official announcement has been made.

If a property has been declared as an IDP, or is within a drought-declared regional council/shire, the property owner can apply for Queensland Government drought assistance including the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS).

Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS)

The intent of the present DRAS administered by the Queensland Government is:

- to help producers manage their livestock resource during drought;
- to assist in the return of stock to the property in the post-drought period.

The main objective of the scheme can be defined as ‘to maintain as far as possible the sustainable livestock resource of a property during drought, and assist in the return and restoration of that resource after drought’.

Droughts are caused by severe rainfall deficiencies and it is difficult to define when a drought commences and ends. A distinction has to be made between normal seasonal rainfall variations and severe rainfall deficiencies, which are called droughts.

For the purpose of providing assistance through DRAS, drought is considered to be a one in ten-to-fifteen year event.

The State Government recognises that prolonged and severe events may be impossible for many producers to cope with financially. Existing records suggest that there is a probability of a severe event of this nature occurring once in every ten to fifteen years. The Queensland Government’s drought policy indicates an extreme event of this nature is considered to be a drought.

The Queensland Government’s current Drought Policy is based on the concept of ‘self-reliance’. At the core of this policy is the requirement that primary producers adopt risk management strategies to minimise the impact of drought on their enterprise.

For livestock enterprises, these may include:

- selling stock at well above seasonal levels
- sending stock to agistment
- buying/leasing another property
- sending stock to a feedlot
- supplementary feeding of stock.

Areas of responsibility

LDCs are based on districts that may include more than one regional council/shires and/or part regional council/shires.

Membership

The membership of any LDC comprises representatives from DAF and industry organisation representatives from the various primary industries in that area, for example AgForce, Canegrowers, Queensland Dairyfarmers Organisation, Queensland Farmers’ Federation and Australian Beef Association. Producers, or those from related industries with specialist expertise who are not affiliated with any industry organisation, may also become members, with the approval of the LDC. The extent of representation from DAF and industry organisations relates to the geographic nature of the various industries in each particular area.

For liability reasons, the chair of each LDC will be the Climate Risk Coordinator responsible for the area the LDC represents or a DAF officer with the delegated responsibilities.

Expert members will consist of DAF officers with expertise relevant to that particular area, such as beef cattle, sheep, horticulture, dairy and agronomy. Other than the Chair, DAF officers do not have voting rights.

- Industry members will be nominated at their respective Industry Association Annual General Meeting. A proxy should also be appointed to act in the absence of the nominated member. Members may also be sourced from areas other than industry annual general meetings based on recommendations from other LDC members.
- Industry members should report back to their associations on **non-confidential** information.
- Advisory personnel from the government or the community can be present at meetings to provide input into the meetings. They are not to be involved in voting on recommendations or motions that may arise during the meeting and must adhere to confidentiality requirements. Voting rights are given to the DAF Chair and each primary producer member to maintain a balanced approach towards committees being non-biased and non-political with full use of local knowledge to inform decisions.
- LDCs meet at least once a year, at a mutually agreed time, to discuss prevailing seasonal conditions and assess IDP declarations or revocations. However, each LDC must have met by the end of April each year, being at the end of the expected summer rainfall period. The type of meeting is to be determined by the LDC coordinator and may take the form of a face-to-face meeting, telephone conference or email correspondence.
- No meeting shall be recognised unless fifty per cent of the expert and industry representatives or their proxies are present.
- Any member of the LDC can request that a meeting be held.
- A senior government officer can be invited to the meeting to discuss rainfall recordings in the area, as opposed to historical data.
- After viewing properties and/or areas and discussing individual criteria that has taken place, members should vote for or against the recommendation.
- If there is no consensus, the outcome of the meeting should be referred to the State Climate Risk Coordinator for a decision.
- Minutes, in the form of the template provided, will be prepared and circulated to members and in the first instance forwarded to the State Climate Risk Coordinator within seven days for verification that the LDC has followed due process, that the Minutes reflect the view of the LDC members and that the LDC has satisfactorily considered the criteria. Once this verification has taken

place, the State Climate Risk Coordinator will then forward the documents to the Director, Land Management Unit, Brisbane.

- The LDC Co-ordinator should telephone the State Climate Risk Coordinator and Director, Land Management immediately following the meeting if a change in drought status has been recommended.
- The Minute of Outcome should, where possible, be signed at the meeting by all members of the committee.
- In the case of a telephone meeting, minutes are required but there is no requirement to obtain individual signatures of LDC members on the Minute of Outcome, providing no change is being recommended. The outcome of the meeting should be stated on the form and if the meeting was held by telephone or email correspondence, this should also be shown.
- Where the LDC is not recommending a change, local media can be informed through the DAF regional media contact person.
- **The LDC can only recommend a course of action. A decision to declare or revoke a regional council/shire or part regional council/shire sits with the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and the matter must remain confidential until the Minister has issued a press release. The Minister does not declare or revoke regional council/shires or areas without the prior approval/recommendation of the responsible LDC.**

The members of LDCs are volunteers and are not paid any expenses. The membership of LDCs is such that each LDC is non-biased and non-political and will not be influenced by matters outside of the prescribed charter of LDCs as detailed in this manual.

Processes and procedures

All LDC members should be actively involved in the LDC, be conversant with the conditions and procedures for declaring and revoking individually droughted properties and areas, and be able to provide advice to the chair on seasonal conditions in the area.

All LDC members must be able to mediate on and provide recommendations regarding applications that require LDC consideration and/or approvals.

Should any vote result in an equal number for and against, the matter will then be referred to the State Climate Risk Coordinator for a decision.

Minutes

Minutes Memorandum and Minute of Outcome

Minutes are prepared and circulated to members. The Minutes and the Minute of Outcome are then forwarded to the State Climate Risk Coordinator in the first instance for verification that the LDC has followed due process, and that the

minutes reflect the view of the LDC members and the LDC has satisfactorily considered the criteria. Once verified, this documentation is then forwarded to the Director, Land Management Unit, Brisbane. The Minute of Outcome is then forwarded to the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries for his decision.

The Minutes Memorandum template is shown in Attachment 1.

The Minutes of Outcome template is shown in Attachment 2.

Confidentiality

All discussions of the committee are to be treated as confidential. In line with this policy, decisions/ outcomes from a committee meeting are to be treated as a whole-of-committee action.

All LDC members are asked to sign a confidentiality deed. Any breach of this deed will be reported to the relevant industry organisation which that member represents. Breaches of confidentiality may necessitate the removal of the offending member from the committee. In these situations, the relevant industry organisation would be asked to nominate a replacement representative.

Industry members are permitted to report back to their respective associations on **non-confidential** information.

The LDC Confidentiality Deed is shown in Attachment 3.

Memorandum

To

Cc

From

Subject LDC MEETING

Date

Telephone

RECOMMENDATION:

A meeting of the Local Drought Committee was held on

It is recommended that:

- There is no change to the status of the regional council/shire/s of
- The regional council/shire/s ofbe drought declared, effective.....(insert date)..... as the LDC is satisfied that the threshold requirements for drought declaration have been met.
- The regional council/shires ofbe revoked from drought declared status, effective(insert date)..... as the LDC is satisfied that the threshold requirements for drought revocation have been met.
- The regional council/shire/s of remain drought declared at the present time and the LDC will meet on.....(date of meeting).....to further assess the situation.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

APOLOGIES:

OUTSIDE INFORMATION SOURCES: (if any)

SITUATION:

- 1. Rainfall**

- 2. Pasture response**

- 3. Water supplies (stock, underground, surface, irrigation)**

- 4. Extent of drought feeding**

- 5. Stock Condition**

- 6. Stock Movements**

- 7. Cropping (condition of crops, soil moisture, yields)**

- 8. Prevailing weather conditions**

- 9. Other factors/comments**

NEXT MEETING:

LDC CO-ORDINATOR

(Signature block)

Attachment 2

MINUTE OF OUTCOME

RECOMMENDATION:

A meeting of theLocal Drought Committee was held
at.....

.....on.....

The LDC resolved to recommend that:

- There is no change in the status of the regional council/shire/s of (insert regional council/shire/s name)
- the regional council/shire/s of (insert regional council/shire/s name) be drought declared effective (insert date) as the LDC is satisfied that the threshold requirements for drought declaration have been met.
- the regional council/shire/s of (insert regional council/shire/s name) be revoked from drought declared status, effective (insert date) as the LDC is satisfied that the threshold requirements for drought revocation have been met.
- the regional council/shire/s of (insert regional council/shire/s name) remain drought declared as the LDC is satisfied that the threshold requirements for drought declaration remain.
- the regional council/shire/s of (insert regional council/shire/s name) remain drought declared at the present time and the LDC will meet (date of meeting) to further assess the situation.

Signatures of all members of the LDC:

(Please note: original signed copy to be forwarded to the Director, Land Management, Level 6, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, GPO Box 46, Brisbane 4001 within seven days of the meeting. If there is a recommendation for declaration or revocation, it

would be appreciated if the signed copy could be forwarded to the Land Management Unit, to enable timely submission to the Minister for decision)

(Name) (Signature)
.....
LDC Coordinator

(Name) (Signature)
.....

(Name) (Signature)
.....

(Name) (Signature)
.....

(Name) (Signature)
.....

While non confidential matters can be discussed with industry organisations, confidential and non-confidential matters may not otherwise to be disclosed without the permission of the Director-General of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Deed of Confidentiality and Privacy

This Deed is made this _____ day of _____ 20__.

BETWEEN: _____

(print your name and address) (“YOU”)

AND: THE STATE OF QUEENSLAND through its Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) of 80 Ann Street, Brisbane QLD 4000, Queensland (the “Department”).

Background

1. The Local Drought Committee (LDC) process is an important part of the State Government’s response to drought. It is therefore extremely important that all protocols are followed and that any outcomes arising from LDC meetings have been made in accordance with the appropriate criteria.
2. The information that arises out of LDC meetings is often of an extremely sensitive and private nature and therefore the parties are required to enter into this Deed to ensure that the confidential and private nature of the information discussed at LDC meetings is protected from unauthorised use or disclosure.
3. The Department is committed to protecting the privacy of personal information. “Personal Information” means information or an opinion (including information or an opinion forming part of a database) whether true or not and whether recorded in a material form or not, about an individual whose identify is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information or opinion.

It is agreed that:

Confidential information

1. YOU will keep the following information confidential at all times:
 - (i) all recommendations and declarations of Local Drought Committees until the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries has assessed them and an official announcement has been made;

- (ii) all Minutes arising out of the deliberations of Local Drought Committees; and
- (iii) all information you are advised by the Department from time to time to keep confidential.

Privacy obligations

- 2. YOU will ensure that you take all necessary and reasonable precautions to protect all personal information that you obtain or have access to in the course of you performing your duty as an LDC Member from unauthorised use or disclosure. This means that you will not:
 - (i) use any personal information for any other purpose other than to fulfil your duty as an LDC Member; and
 - (ii) disclose any personal information without the prior written agreement of the Department.
- 3. YOU must immediately notify the Department if you become aware that personal information has been used or disclosed in a manner other than as set out in clause 2 above.

Miscellaneous

- 4. If you fail to comply with this Deed, the Department will immediately terminate your appointment as an LDC member and you will no longer be permitted to participate in LDC meetings.
- 5. This Deed is to be read as an agreement made in Queensland, and subject to the laws of the State of Queensland.
- 6. This Deed may not be varied except in writing signed by all of the parties

Executed as a Deed

EXECUTED for and on behalf of THE STATE OF QUEENSLAND acting through The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

by _____
(print name)

this _____ day of _____ 20____
in the presence of:

(signature of witness)

(print name of witness)

YOU:
SIGNED SEALED AND DELIVERED

by _____
(print your name)

this _____ day of _____ 20____
in the presence of:

(signature of witness)

(print name of witness)

} _____
(signature)

} _____
(your signature)