



# Queensland Government Drought Declaration Process

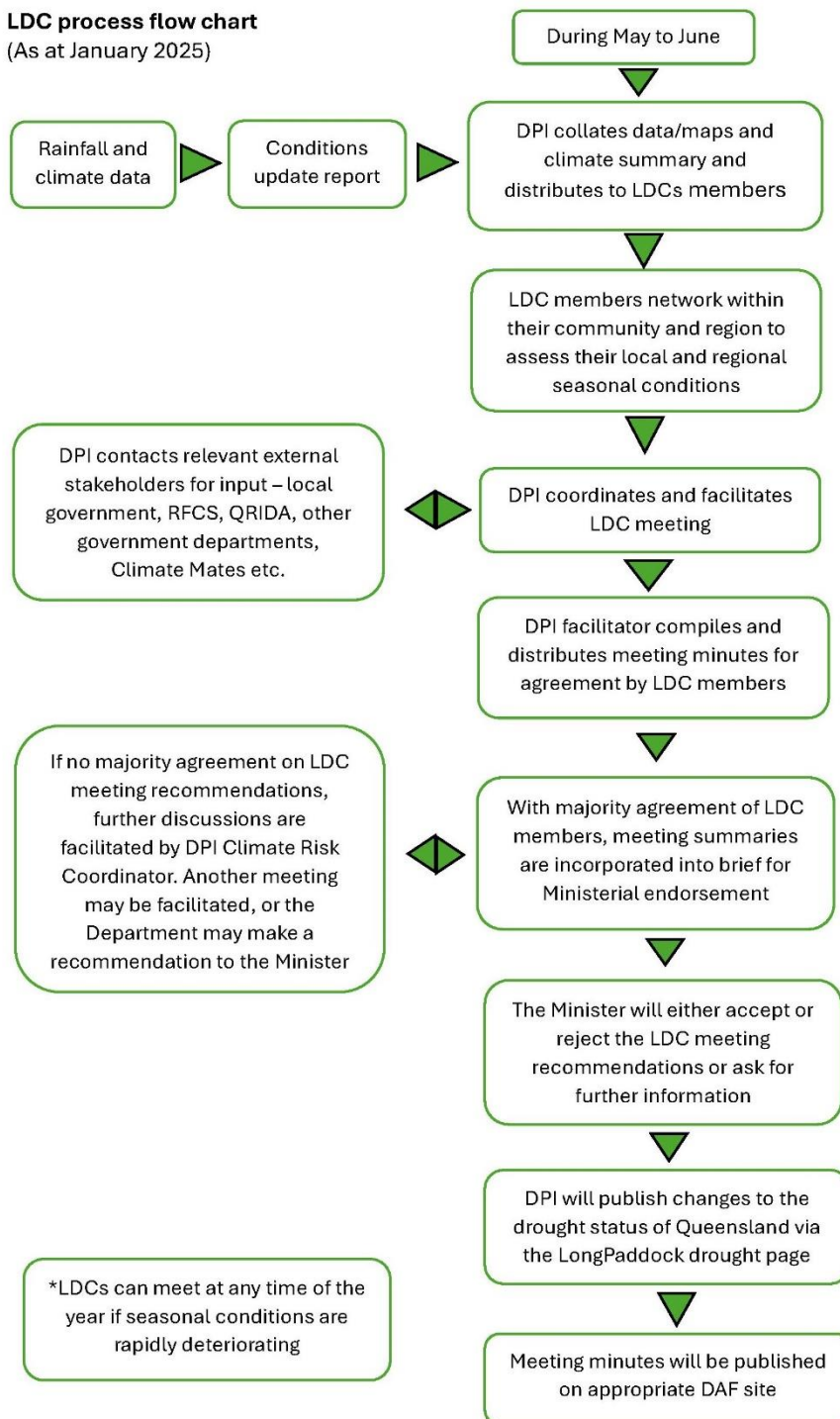
## Local Drought Committee Guidelines

Effective from January 2025

## Summary

The purpose of this document is to outline Local Drought Committee (LDC) guidelines which are the basis of the Queensland Government response to drought. The below flow chart identifies the core process.

**LDC process flow chart**  
(As at January 2025)



## *1. Background*

Local Drought Committees (LDCs) were established in 1982 to assist Stock Inspectors make recommendations to the Minister for Primary Industries on regional council/shire declarations and revocations. Since 2008, following departmental changes, the role of the Local Drought Committee (LDC) Coordinator has been transferred to regionally based Departmental Climate Risk Coordinators.

After industry requested reviews into LDC's and drought declaration and revocation process during 2018 and 2023, the LDC guidelines have been updated (2025) and will be used as the basis for future recognition of drought (and its impacts) by the Department of Primary Industries and Queensland State Government.

## *2. Definition of Drought*

Given the semi-arid and arid nature of much of Queensland's grazing rangelands, drought should not be considered as when an area has low rainfall. As defined by the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), drought is a prolonged, abnormally dry period when the amount of available water is not sufficient to meet normal use for that region.

A distinction therefore has to be made between the large rainfall and climatic variations Queensland can experience on a seasonal and annual basis and persistent severe rainfall deficiencies. Existing records indicate that there is a probability of a severe rainfall deficiency event occurring once in every ten to fifteen years.

For the purposes of these guidelines, **drought is considered to be when rainfall recorded during the previous 12 months (*at a minimum and including a full wet season – November to March*) is in the lowest (*or driest*) decile (*at or below the 10th percentile of historical rainfall*) when compared to the long term rainfall for that location.**

While this definition for identifying the onset of drought is well accepted, it can be more difficult to define when a drought ends. This is due to the socio-economic, ecological and financial impact of severe drought not only on agricultural enterprises but also on surrounding rural and regional communities.

Historically the 'revocation' of droughts has been more subjective than objective which has led to critical comment about the Department and LDC's. This is due to views on if the drought period has truly ended and agricultural production (and financial impacts) have returned to 'normal'.

Therefore, **for the purposes of these guidelines the base criteria for a period of drought to be considered ended or 'revoked' is when rainfall for the previous 12 months is at or above the 40th percentile.** While full restocking and/or production and/or financial recovery may not have occurred (and may not for a number of years), it acknowledges that local seasonal conditions have improved and that existing water and pasture reserves should last until the expected onset of the next wet season.

The definition of drought used in this process should remain limited to rainfall rather than production and/or industry profitability.

### *3. Role of LDC's*

The primary role of LDCs is to provide regional intelligence to the Department on current seasonal conditions including rainfall and primary production trends for their region. The knowledge local industry representatives have regarding their local environment and seasonal conditions (such as soil types; appropriate stocking rates; pasture availability; livestock conditions and movements; grain, forage and horticultural cropping conditions) is invaluable to the Department in supporting fair and equitable decisions regarding drought declarations or revocations.

The information and feedback provided by the LDCs to the Department is used in conjunction with rainfall and climatic data in determining if an area meets the base drought recognition or revocation criteria. LDC feedback and recommendations regarding seasonal conditions and other issues of concern (community health, biosecurity, market issues etc) in a region are passed onto the Minister for consideration.

It should be noted that **LDCs do not make drought declarations or revocations.** Under State Government processes that is the role of the Minister.

#### *4. LDC regions*

LDC's are regionally based. They can be based on a single Local Government Area (LGA), combination of whole or part LGAs or centred on an ecological region incorporating a similar soil, pasture, agricultural production region. The Department can modify the coverage area of LDCs based on changing operational needs or regional changes.

#### *5. LDC membership*

LDC membership comprises representatives from DPI and from the various primary production industries predominate in that region. This may include (but is not restricted to) members from the various primary industries organisations in that area such as AgForce, Queensland Farmers' Federation, Growcom, Cotton Australia, Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers, CANEGROWERS, eastAUSmilk etc.

Producers who are not affiliated with any industry organisation, or those from related industries with specialist expertise (including but not restricted to livestock agents, livestock transport industry representatives, Natural Resource Management (NRM) group representatives, agronomists, horticulturists etc.) may also be members of a LDC or be invited to share background information with an LDC. The variety of industry membership of an LDC relates to various primary production industries found in each region.

The chair of each LDC will be a DPI officer responsible for the area the LDC represents or with the delegated responsibilities. DPI officers who are LDC members will have expertise relevant to that area, such as climate science, cattle, sheep, horticulture, dairy and agronomy etc.

It is expected that LDC members reside in their LDC area, are knowledgeable about seasonal conditions and other factors impacting their communities, are prepared to contribute to discussions and information gathering and are expected to act in a professional and respectful manner in all LDC dealings. LDC members must also have suitable internet connectivity (or access to) and capability to join in on discussions and meetings remotely (using Microsoft Teams, Skype etc).

LDC membership numbers can vary based in industry diversity, industry intensity, land ownership demographics etc. At a minimum, there should be a minimum of 3 up to a maximum of 6 members per LDC. LDC membership is initially for a period of 5 years (with the option of renewal).

Following a review, any changes to membership will be made on a rolling basis. While it is accepted that representative organisations and individuals will make LDC nominations, it is at the Departments discretion as to whether to accept those nominations or find alternatives. The Department will undertake a standardised review process to ensure all nominations meet community expectations.

**LDC membership is voluntary with no remuneration made. LDC members will act in a non-biased and non-political manner and not be influenced by persons or matters outside of the remit of LDC process and guidelines. It is expected that all LDC members will respect each other's views and inputs. The Department and/or Minister may disband a LDC or effect the removal of an offending member from a committee if professional standards are not meet.**

#### *6. LDC processes*

LDCs should meet at least once a year during April/May to consider seasonal and production conditions across their region. Being at the end of Queensland's key summer rainfall, pasture and crop growing season, members will have a good grasp of seasonal and agricultural conditions (pasture response, soil moisture levels, water levels, crop growing conditions etc) and if there are enough reserves to last until the expected start of the next wet season.

Meetings will as a standard be run remotely (Skype, Teams) at a time suitable to the majority of members. If a member cannot join, they can provide input via email or verbally with the responsible DPI officer. The DPI officer will then provide that input during the meeting.

**LDC members can meet at any time of the year if seasonal conditions are rapidly deteriorating** or may choose not to meet formally if seasonal conditions are positive.

Regardless, the DPI officer responsible for each region will contact members for feedback on seasonal and agricultural conditions in their region.

The DPI officer responsible will as required:

- organise and facilitate the LDC meeting,
- disseminate background information to members prior to the meeting for their consideration,
- present on rainfall, climatic data, seasonal and production conditions to members,
- organise a relevant guest presenter (e.g. from BoM, other Government agencies, other project officers such as Climate Mates) if appropriate,
- compile meeting summaries/minutes and contribute to the development of a Ministerial Briefing Note and report to the Department.

LDC members will as required contribute their local and regional knowledge of:

- pasture response and reserves
- water availability (stock, underground, surface, irrigation)
- extent of drought feeding and drought related stock movements if any,
- cropping and horticultural (condition of crops, soil moisture, yields) conditions.

Contact with relevant local government officers to seek input or contributions regarding drought related issues for their communities may also be made by DPI and LDC members.

After discussing the current situation and reviewing the climatic data and information, LDC members in collaboration with the responsible DPI officer will provide feedback and recommendations regarding seasonal and drought conditions to the Minister for consideration.

If there is significant disagreement during the LDC meeting as to seasonal conditions and no consensus agreement regarding feedback and recommendations to provide to the Department and Minister, it shall be referred to the DPI State Climate Coordinator for consideration, noted in the meeting minutes and noted in the Ministerial Brief. The

DPI State Climate Coordinator will follow up with the LDC members for further input and a recommendation made by the Department to the Minister.

Disagreements of this nature are not common in the development of drought, rather in the revocation of a droughted area especially if it is associated with a reduction in financial assistance to producers and/or the relevant Local Government.

The impact of natural disasters (bushfires, floods, cyclones etc.), market disruptions (price crashes, exclusion from markets etc.), production issues (pasture dieback etc.), seasonal climate forecast or biosecurity incidents can be referred to in the feedback to the Department and Minister, however, should not form the basis of LDC considerations. These concerns though will be noted and forwarded onto the relevant contact.

A survey of LDC members should be undertaken every 3 years to ensure members wish to continue in their role, are confident in the process, have at least a basic (or better) understanding of the maps, data and climatic information provided and that the information provided represents conditions in their areas generally well.

## *7. Resources*

Sources of science based data and information to be provided to LDC members prior to and during meetings will include:

- The **Long Paddock** website [www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au) provides information on climate outlooks, rainfall and pasture outlooks, historical rainfall etc. and is the portal to a number of useful decision support tools including:

SILO [www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/silo/](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/silo/) contains Australian climate data from 1889 (current to yesterday), in a number of ready-to-use formats, suitable for research and climate applications. It provides point and gridded climate data in addition and in excess of what BoM can offer. It also provides the background data for a number of decision support tools for agriculture

FORAGE [www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/forage/about/](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/forage/about/) generates and distributes information relating to climate and pasture condition at user-specified locations. FORAGE reports are available for any location including



property/regional level scales in Queensland and include: Rainfall and Pasture reports, Rainfall and Pasture by Land Type reports, Ground Cover reports, Regional Comparison Ground Cover reports, Foliage Projective Cover reports, Rainfall and Pasture Growth Outlook reports, Regional Climate Projections report and importantly **Drought Assessment Reports**.

Seasonal conditions map (currently in development/prototype stage) which will allow producers to see a State view of seasonal conditions (drought, non-drought, drought developing, drought receding) which can then be downscaled to a locality and takes into account rainfall, soil moisture and plant growth. **It will be released in the first half of 2025.**

- **Australian CliMate** <https://climateapp.net.au/> uses Bureau of Meteorology data and the Queensland Government's SILO database to interrogate long-term climate records to ask questions relating to rainfall, temperature, radiation, and derived variables such as heat sum, soil water, drought, seasonal forecasts and time trend analyses. It is the primary tool used when identifying specific sites rainfall percentiles. It also offers an excellent drought analysis tool. Australian CliMate rainfall and drought assessments for key locations within a LDC region should be presented in all LDC meetings.
- **Bureau of Meteorology** [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au) data, maps and information including [rainfall decile maps](#), [drought statements](#) and [maps](#), [soil moisture maps](#) and reports, [streamflow and dam reports](#) and evaporative stress reports.
- The **Drought Monitor** at [www.nacp.org.au/drought\\_monitor](http://www.nacp.org.au/drought_monitor) hosts the Australian Combined Drought Indicator (CDI). The CDI uses a combination of rainfall, soil moisture, evapotranspiration and Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) from satellite to produce a drought indicator tailored for Australia.  
The 12-month Qld Drought Monitor drought map is a good place to start investigating drought conditions and shows Queensland council/shire boundaries.
- **Dam Levels** information as relevant to individual RAAC can be sought from:  
Sunwater [www.sunwater.com.au](http://www.sunwater.com.au) and seqwater [www.seqwater.com.au](http://www.seqwater.com.au)

Further information if required regarding regional communities' water supply levels is best sought from their local government. The [Queensland Local Government Directory](#) provides contact details and locality maps for Queensland's local governments.

#### *8. LDC meeting minutes*

Minutes are to be prepared and circulated to members for agreement as per the agreed LDC meeting minute template (Appendix 2). When LDC members have acknowledged their agreement to the meeting minutes, these are then used to form the basis of a Ministerial Brief. The purpose of the Ministerial Brief is to seek agreement from the Minister as to any recommended changes (or not) to Queensland's drought status as well as provide an uptake on seasonal conditions across the State.

LDC members may also take this opportunity to identify other issues of concern (community health, biosecurity, market issues etc) for their community to be included in the meeting minutes. The DPI facilitator may also refer these concerns to an appropriate contact and facilitate discussions if appropriate.

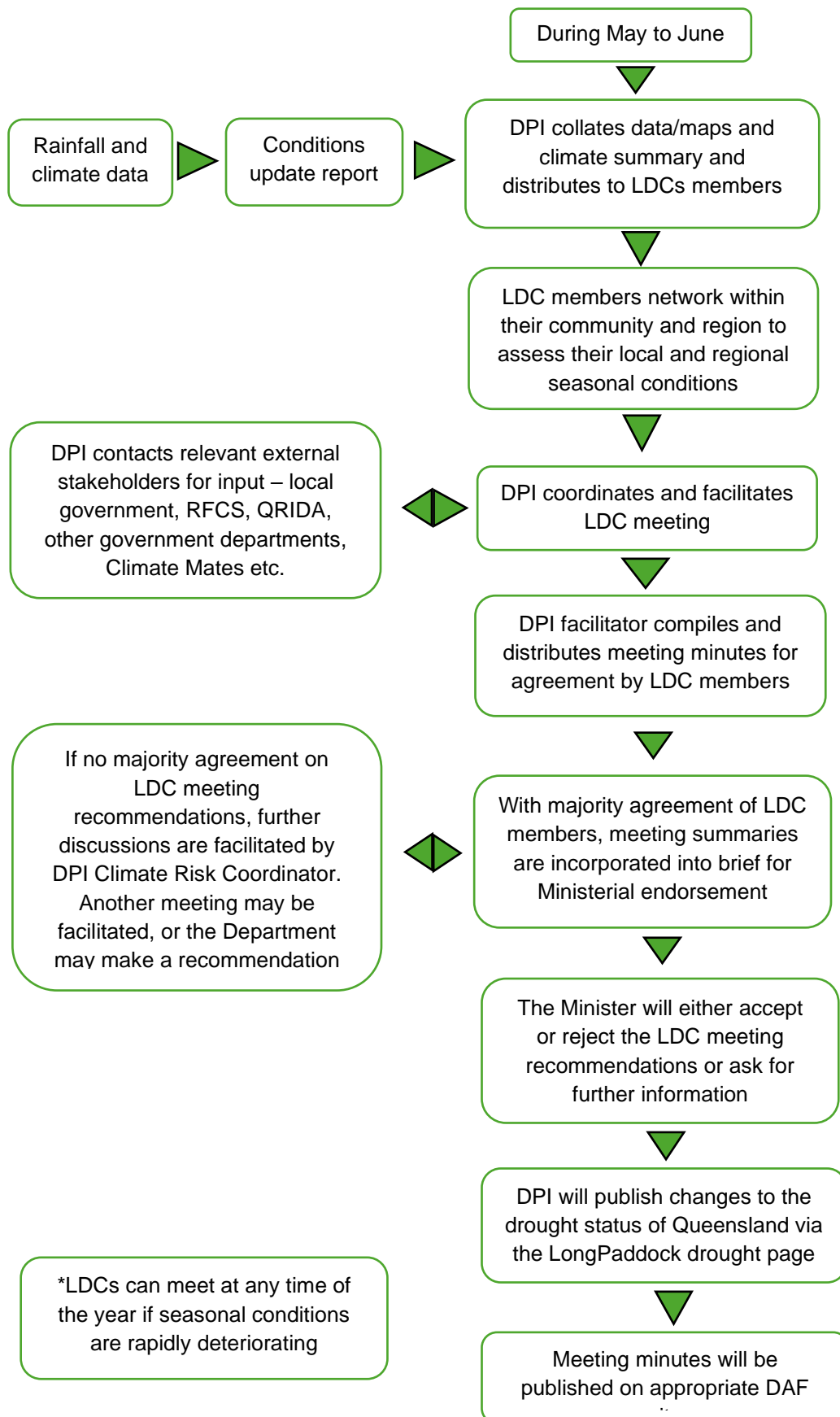
**When the Minister has agreed to the Brief, the meeting minutes will be published on an appropriate DPI website (from 2025 on).**

#### *9. Confidentiality*

Meeting minutes from 2025 on will be published on an DPI website. From 2026 onwards, membership of LDCs will no longer be confidential. Members details will be maintained by the Department and their names published on an appropriate Departmental site and included in LDC meeting minutes.

Industry members will continue to be permitted to report back to their respective associations on relevant discussions. Regardless, LDC members are not permitted to publicly disparage (via media, social media, public events, industry organisations etc.) other LDC members or their individual views. Breaches of LDC expected behaviour standards in this context will necessitate the removal of the offending member from the committee.

Appendix 1. LDC flow chart process (as of January 2025)



Appendix 2. LDC meeting minute template

LDC Meeting Minutes
LDC:
Date:
DPI Chair:
Attendees:
Apologies:
Situation:
Rainfall/CDI summary:
Pasture Response:
Water availability (stock, irrigation, surface):
Livestock condition (inc. level of drought feeding and drought related livestock movements):
Cropping conditions (inc. yields, failures, soil moisture):
Community issues (as raised by LDC members inc. market access, employment, biosecurity):

Other input: (as raised by external stakeholders inc. local government, drought commissioners)

**Summary statement** (inc. general climate conditions and LDC recommendation to Department and Minister):