

DROUGHT

Chances are you have heard about the current drought crisis in Australia and how badly it is affecting our farmers who are struggling to feed their animals and maintain their plant crops. Australia is no stranger to droughts but reports indicate that this drought is the worst our country has experienced since the 1902 Federation drought. It is important that we support our farmers through this crisis and many people and organisations have rallied to help raise funds for much needed support in the effected rural areas of Australia.



WHAT IS A DROUGHT?

Drought is a natural event caused by the absence of water for a long period of time, at a place where it is considered 'not normal' compared to its usual conditions. Some places have lots of fresh water such as rivers, lakes, lagoons, ponds etc. which are constantly filled by rainfall, runoffs and water from underground. Others places too are known to have very little water. Droughts become a big issue when they begin to affect water supply for irrigation, municipal, industrial, energy, and ecosystem function.

Drought is a period of time where as a result of dry weather, there is not enough water where there usually is to support human, animal and plant life.

WHAT CAUSES DROUGHT?

LACK OF RAINFALL

Droughts can occur when there is less rain or snow than would normally be expected for that area.

SURFACE WATER FLOW

Some regions are also well distributed with surface water such as streams and rivers but sometimes these surface waters may dry out.

HUMAN FACTORS

Forests (trees) play a key role in the water cycle, as they help reduce evaporation, store water and also contribute to atmospheric moisture in the form of transpiration. Cutting down trees is known to reduce a forest's watershed potential.

GLOBAL WARMING

Even though some people do not accept that the average temperature of the earth has risen, it is on record that human actions have contributed to more greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. As a result, there are warmer temperatures, often resulting in more dryness and bush fires. These conditions also tend to speed up drought conditions.



EXAMPLE EFFECTS OF DROUGHTS

Direct Effect. Low crop yield leaves farmers with very little produce to sell. This has a huge financial impact on the farmers and their families.



Water is involved in every part of human life and also for plants and animals.



Indirect Effect. With the farmers having been impacted financially, the sale of materials such as seed, tractors and other farm equipment is reduced. These business and the people who work for them are then financially effected.

Other Indirect Effects

- Diminished crop growth or yield productions and carrying capacity for livestock.
- Dust bowls, themselves a sign of erosion, which further erode the landscape.
- Dust storms, when drought hits an area, suffering from desertification and erosion.
- Famine due to lack of water for irrigation.
- Habitat damage, affecting both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.
- Hunger, drought provides too little water to support food crops.
- Malnutrition, dehydration and related diseases.
- Shortages of water for industrial users.
- Snake migration, which results in snakebites.
- Social unrest.
- Wildfires, such as Australian bushfires, are more common during times of drought.



Drought can also reduce water quality, because lower water flows reduce dilution of pollutants and increase contamination of remaining water sources.

