



Media Release

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Concerned cotton growers call emergency meeting re: spray drift

The Walgett Cotton Growers' Association (CGA) has called an emergency meeting to discuss the impact of spray drift, and agronomic strategies to recover damaged cotton crops, in northern NSW.

Vice Chair of the Walgett Cotton Growers' Association, Bernie Bierhoff, says cotton crops on more than 10 farms showed signs of off-target spray drift damage around Christmas day. Affected farms were in a region bounded by Burren Junction, Rowena and Walgett.

"Spray drift damage is a terrible blow for the affected cotton growers, who are already struggling with limited access to water for irrigation this season," Mr Bierhoff says.

"While it is still early days, the information we have to date suggests more than 5000 hectares of cotton has been affected by off-target spray drift in the days leading up to December 25."

"Although the drift has caused varying degrees of severity, some growers believe they are facing complete crop loss, which would simply be devastating for them."

Cotton Australia's Regional Manager for Northern NSW, Paul Sloman, says the affected crop area may be higher once all growers in the district have had the chance to inspect their fields and tally up the damage.

"We are encouraging growers to inspect their fields and report any damage to the relevant regulatory authorities. In NSW, reports should be made to the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) hotline on 131 555," Mr Sloman says.

Cotton Australia, along with representatives from the NSW Department of Primary Industries and other industry organisations have inspected damaged cotton ahead of an emergency meeting called by the Walgett CGA to discuss the issue. The meeting will be held at 6pm on Thursday, 4/1/18, at the Walgett Sporting Club (corner of Fox St & Monkella Street, Walgett).

Mr Sloman said it was imperative that all agricultural industries worked together, and farmers individually with their neighbours, to combat off-target spray drift.

Cotton Australia urges all farmers, no matter what crop they are growing, to access tools to protect their crops from spray drift and apply pesticides responsibly to prevent damage to surrounding farms.

The vast majority of Australian cotton growers map their fields using online tools such as CottonMap to ensure all farmers in their area can check the location of nearby cotton farms and avoid unacceptable spray drift damage.

“Each season, we ask people to be mindful of weather conditions, particularly temperature inversions, and to check CottonMap to identify nearby cotton farms before applying weed control,” Mr Sloman says.

“We also remind cotton growers, farm managers, consultants, agronomists and contractors to input their cotton fields into CottonMap to help protect their crop.”

CottonMap is a collaboration between Cotton Australia, Nufarm Australia Limited, the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) and the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC).

Farmers should use this checklist when preparing to use Group I herbicides, particularly 2,4-D products:

- Read and follow label instructions – it is a legal requirement
- Monitor weather conditions before, during and after spray application
- Use a nozzle that produces coarse or larger droplets
- Check www.CottonMap.com.au for cotton fields that could be potentially impacted by your 2,4-D spray
- Notify your neighbours – even during reasonable conditions for spraying, some spray droplets could travel up to 20km or more if the spray equipment is not used correctly, and more than 70km in some instances of unfavourable conditions, such as during surface temperature inversions or night-time spraying
- Minimise boom height when spraying
- Ensure spray contractors are fully trained and accredited

Growers and spray contractors can also access a Summer Weed Control Best Practice Guide and a video explaining the risk of temperature inversions from the Cotton Australia website: www.cottonaustralia.com.au

More information on spray drift is available at the following sites:

- CottonMap website: www.cottonmap.com.au
- Spraywise Decisions website: www.spraywisedecisions.com.au
- Grains Research and Development Corporation website: www.grdc.com.au
- CropLife: www.croplife.org.au/resources/programs/myagchemuse

Cotton Australia is the peak representative body for Australia's cotton growing industry.

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