

Northern Territory Pastoral Feed Outlook - October to December 2020

The purpose of this quarterly outlook is to summarise information relevant to the pastoral industry such as current feed supplies, seasonal conditions, the development of drought conditions and relative fire risk. You can subscribe to receive the Outlook [here](#).

You can see the entire document and all districts by continuing to scroll through this file. If you are interested in selected sections, you can click on the links below.

[Summary of current situation & trends - all districts](#)

[Northern Territory Seasonal Outlook – as at October 2020](#)

Individual District Summaries:

[Darwin District](#)

[Katherine District](#)

[Victoria River District](#)

[Sturt Plateau District](#)

[Roper District](#)

[Gulf District](#)

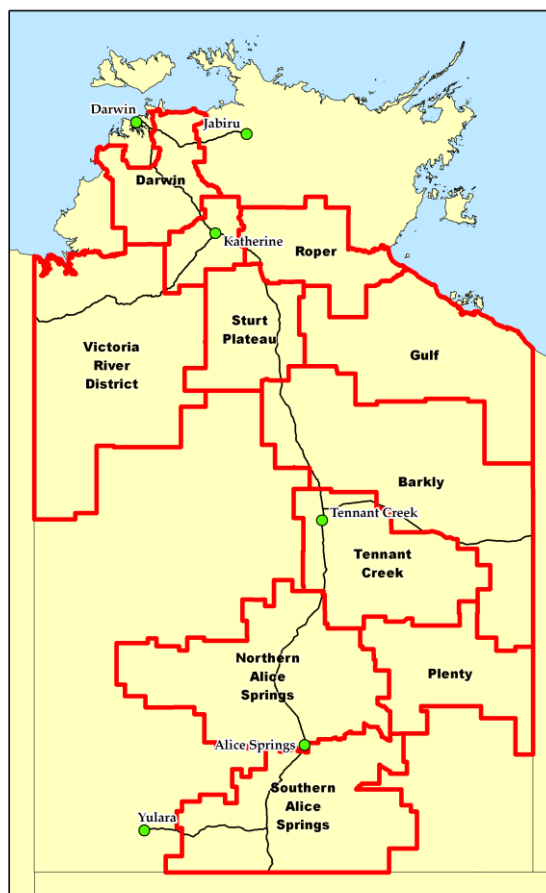
[Barkly District](#)

[Tennant Creek District](#)

[Northern Alice Springs District](#)

[Plenty District](#)

[Southern Alice Springs District](#)



For further information about this Outlook, please contact Chris Materne on 08 8951 8135 or Dionne Walsh on 08 8999 2178

Summary of current situation and trends – all districts – October 2020

With the exception of the Darwin and Katherine districts, the majority of the NT has experienced its second consecutive year of below-average rainfall. Consequently, as at 1 October 2020, most districts have experienced below-average to extremely low pasture growth for the 2019/20 growing season. Of concern is the lack of response from perennial grasses across large areas of the Alice Springs and Barkly regions where summer rainfall was sufficient to stimulate pasture growth. We have observed widespread death of perennial grass tussocks in these areas as a result of the recent prolonged dry period, which will take at least two years of better seasonal conditions to recover.

Large parts of the NT currently have very low levels (200-500 kg/ha) of pasture biomass. These include areas in the Victoria River, Sturt Plateau, Roper and Gulf districts. Critically low pasture levels (less than 200 kg/ha) are widespread in the Barkly, Tennant Creek, Northern Alice Springs, Plenty and Southern Alice Springs districts. Large areas of the Tennant Creek, Northern and Southern Alice Springs districts currently have less than 100 kg/ha of pasture biomass.

BoM forecasts suggest the 2020-21 wet season is expected to be strongly influenced by promising **La Niña** and **negative IOD**-like conditions. These typically deliver an early start to the wet season and above-average rainfall totals between October and April. Useful early October 2020 rain has been recorded across the Northern Alice Springs, Plenty and Southern Alice Springs districts (20-80mm). Although totals varied widely, pasture growth is likely to occur. Follow-up rainfall is needed to sustain the response.

KEY	Green = low risk	Orange = watch	Red = high risk
KEY	↑ = increasing trend	↓ = decreasing trend	↔ = steady

Indicator	Northern Territory Pastoral Districts											Comments
	Darwin	Katherine	VRD	Sturt Plateau	Roper	Gulf	Barkly	Tennant Creek	Northern Alice Springs	Plenty	Southern Alice Springs	
2019/2020 total pasture growth	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	Arrows indicate trend compared to the long-term median (for this time of year)
Current estimated standing biomass	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↔	Arrows indicate trend since previous quarter
Current fire risk	↔	↔	↔	↔	↑	↔	↓	↓	↔	↔	↓	Arrows indicate the trend since previous quarter
Current seasonal outlook	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	Arrows indicate the trend since previous quarter and taking into account the forecasted model predictions

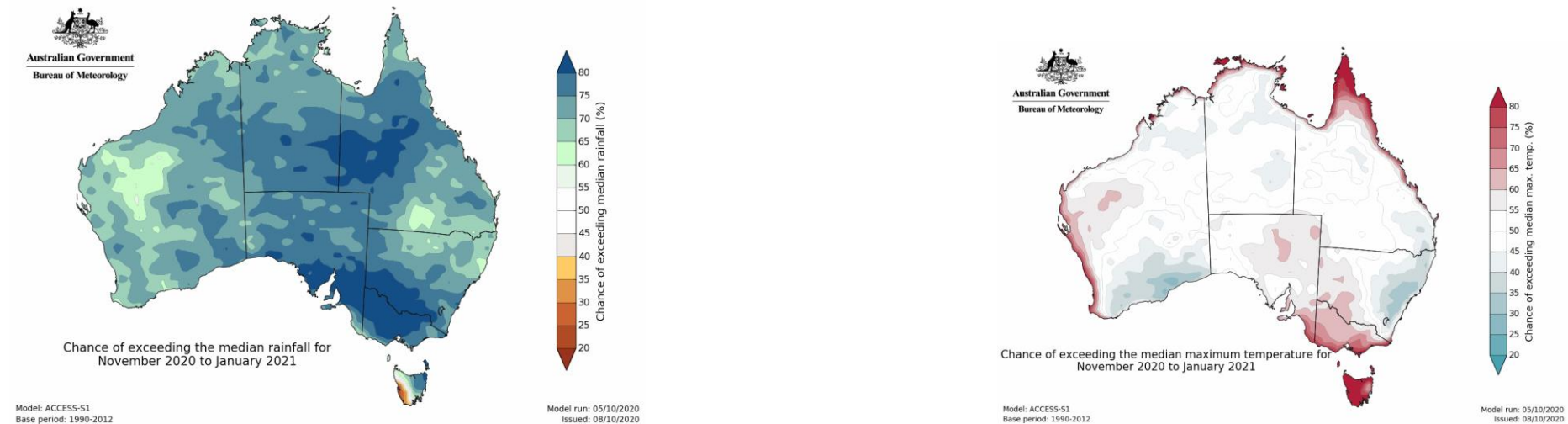
Northern Territory Seasonal Outlook as at October 2020*

Sourced from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BoM)

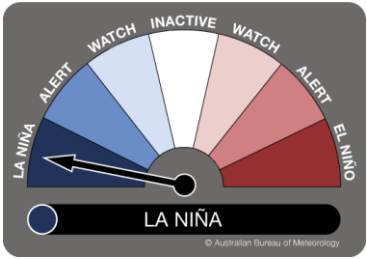
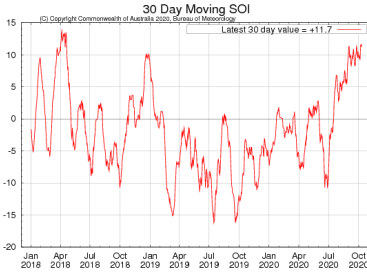
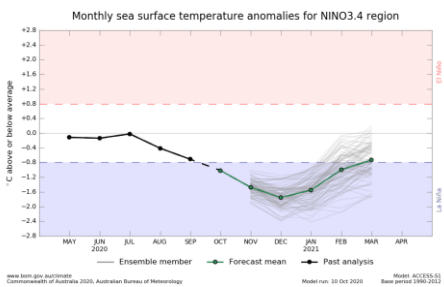
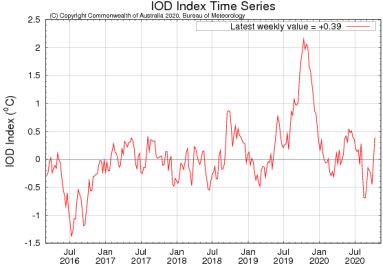
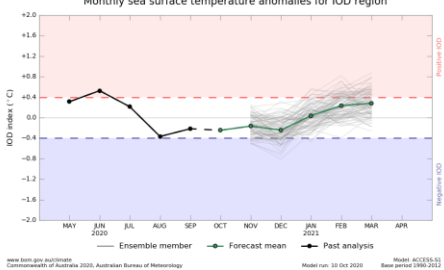
*This seasonal outlook was correct at the time of publication. For the most up-to-date seasonal outlook, please go to the “[climate outlook](#)” section of the BoM website.

The outlook for November 2020 to January 2021 indicates that:

- **Wetter** than average conditions are predicted across the majority of the NT.
- **Cooler** to **average** days are likely across the majority of the NT except for coastal areas which are likely to experience **warmer** than average days.
- **Warmer** than average nights are very likely over the entire NT.



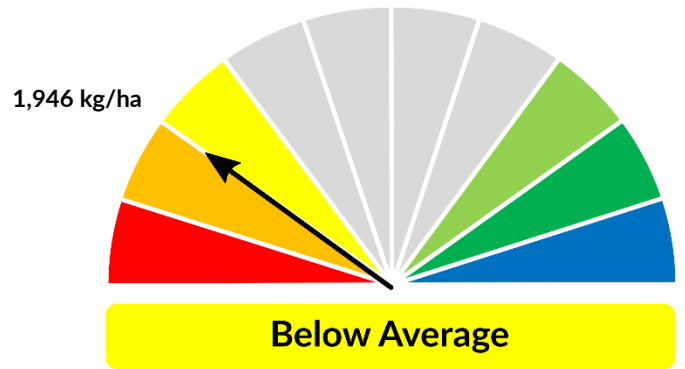
A **La Niña** is underway in the tropical Pacific Ocean and while the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) remains neutral, most models suggest it will return to negative IOD values during October. The Southern Annular Mode (SAM) is expected to be positive over the remainder of October. **La Niña** tends to favour positive SAM during the spring to summer months, which typically enhances the wet signal of **La Niña** in parts of eastern Australia.

<p>Seasonal Indicator</p>	<p>Comments (sourced from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology)</p>
<p>El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) ENSO status: La Niña</p>  <p>Pacific Ocean Update</p>	<p>La Niña is underway in the tropical Pacific Ocean.</p> <p>Both atmospheric and oceanic indicators are at levels consistent with a mature La Niña event.</p> <p>All eight surveyed international climate models, including the Bureau's model, anticipate La Niña conditions are likely to persist until at least the end of January 2021.</p> <p>La Niña and the negative IOD are both typically associated with above-average rainfall totals across northern Australia during the full wet season period (October to April).</p> <p>To see larger versions of these images, go to the Outlook and SOI tabs at Pacific Ocean Update</p>  
<p>Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) Current outlook: Neutral</p> <p>Indian Ocean Update</p>	<p>The IOD index has returned to neutral after exceeding the negative threshold last week. Most models suggest it will return to negative IOD values during October, with several maintaining these values into November. It is unclear at this stage whether these forecast negative values will be sustained long enough to be considered a negative IOD event.</p> <p>To see larger versions of these images, go to the Outlook tab and IOD Time Series</p>  
<p>Southern Annular Mode (SAM) Current outlook: Positive</p> <p>Southern Ocean Update</p>	<p>The SAM is expected to be positive over the remainder of October. La Niña tends to favour positive SAM during the spring to summer months, which typically enhances the wet signal of La Niña in parts of eastern Australia. A positive SAM during spring is typically associated with wetter and cooler than average conditions in parts of eastern Australia.</p>
<p>Wet Season Onset Current outlook: Early</p> <p>Northern Rainfall Onset Forecast</p> <p>Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) Current influence: Weak</p> <p>Tropics Update</p>	<p>Early rainfall onset likely for most of northern Australia.</p> <p>The chance of the first rains arriving early in 2020-21 is higher than average over most of northern Australia. The highest likelihood is across the southern Northern Territory and Barkly regions. La Niña and a negative IOD usually result in an earlier-than-normal monsoon onset date. This forecast is updated regularly until the end of August and can be sourced from Northern Rainfall Onset Forecast. The northern rainfall onset date occurs when the rainfall total reaches 50 mm since the 1st of September. This is considered to be approximately the amount of rainfall required to stimulate plant growth.</p> <p>At the time of this outlook, the MJO was weak or indiscernible and is currently in Phase 5. Forecasts suggest it may increase in strength as it moves from the Maritime Continent into the Western Pacific Ocean (Phases 6 and 7) during October. Higher than normal rainfall is expected across much of the NT with a strong MJO in Phases 6 and 7. In the southern NT a strong MJO in Phases 4 and 5 may also bring higher than average rainfall.</p>

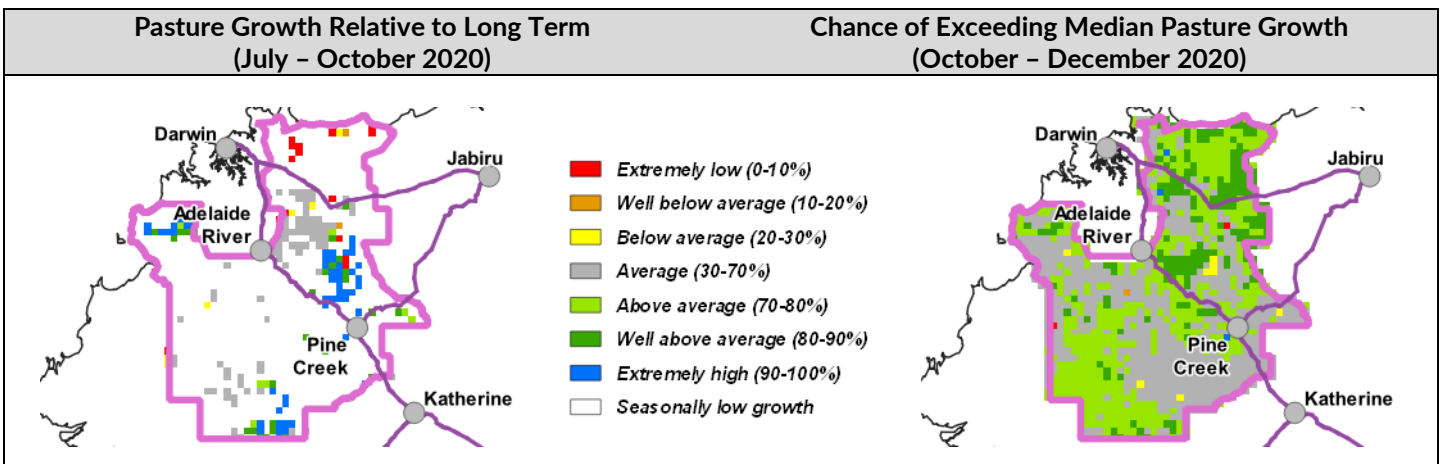
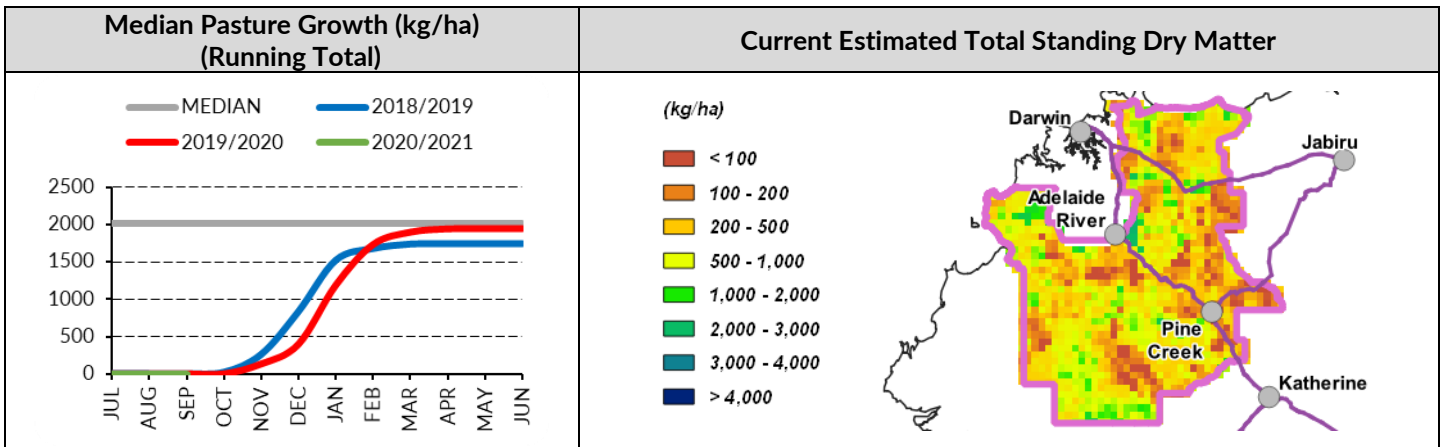
Darwin District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth for the district was below-average compared to long-term records, however this growth was only 3% lower than the long-term median.
- A late start and patchy rain resulted in wide variation in pasture growth depending on location last season.
- In a typical wet season, pasture growth in the Darwin region tends to be limited by available soil nitrogen rather than soil moisture. This means that the annual variation in growth on upland country is quite low.
- 21% of the district has burnt since 1 July 2020.
- Over the next three months much of the district is likely to receive above average to well above-average pasture growth.

2019/20 Pasture Growth



As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<1,000kg/ha	1,000 - 2,000kg/ha	2,000 - 3,000kg/ha	>3,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	79%	18%	3%	0%



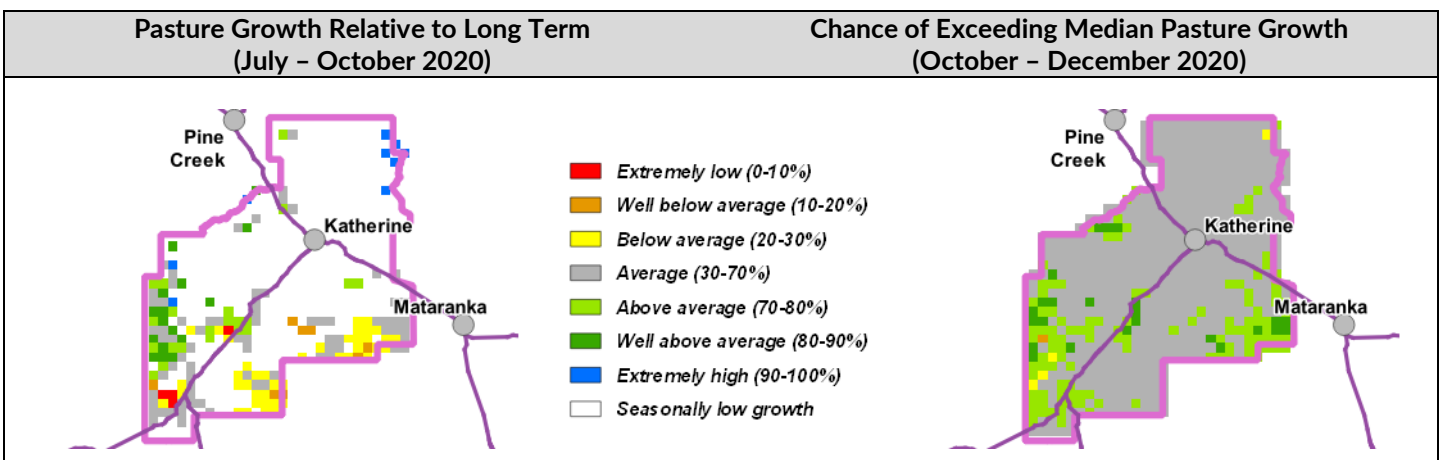
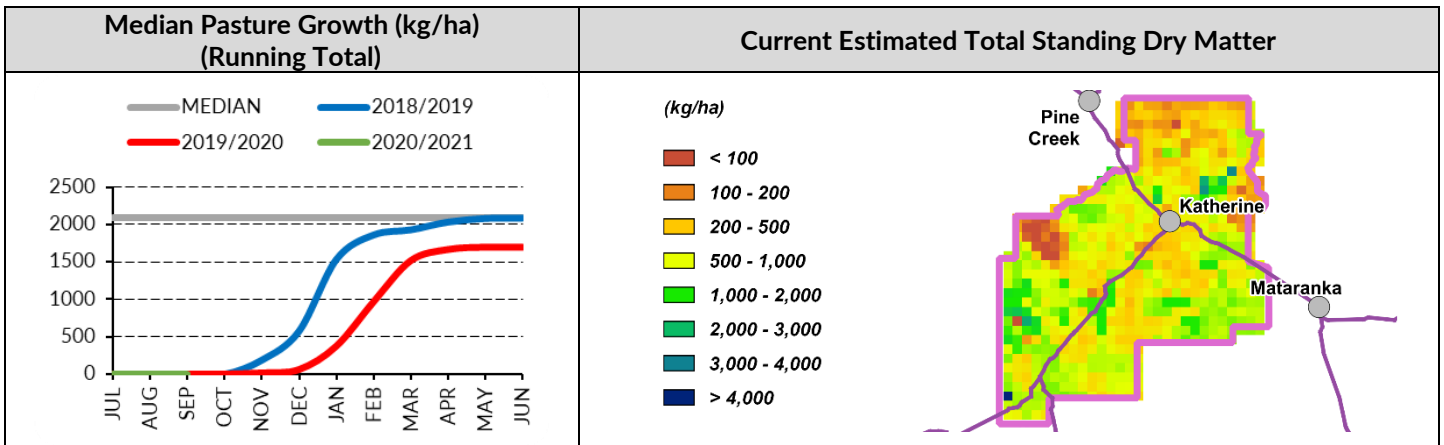
Katherine District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth for the district was patchy and extremely low (a 1 in 20 year event).
- That said, the district's pasture growth was only 20% lower than the long-term median which highlights that pasture growth tends to be limited by available soil nitrogen rather than soil moisture in this region.
- 9% of the district has burnt since 1 July 2020.
- Over the next three months most of the district is likely to receive average pasture growth, with some locations expected to receive above-average pasture growth.

2019/20 Pasture Growth



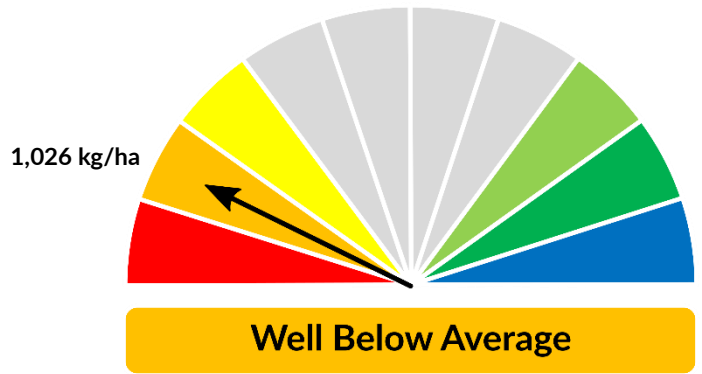
As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<1,000kg/ha	1,000 - 2,000kg/ha	2,000 - 3,000kg/ha	>3,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	56%	39%	4%	1%



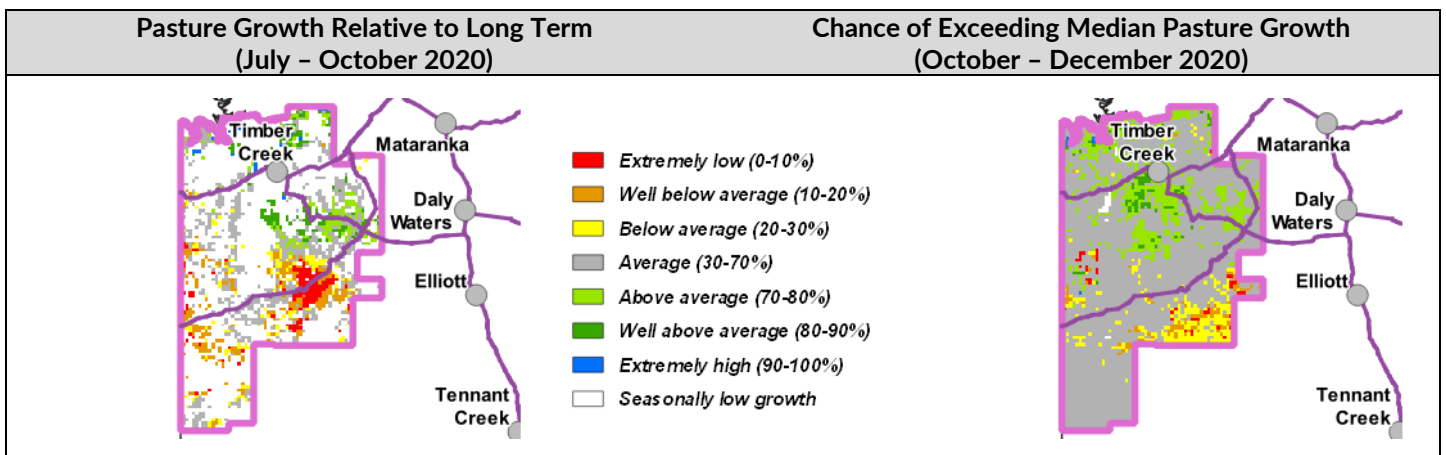
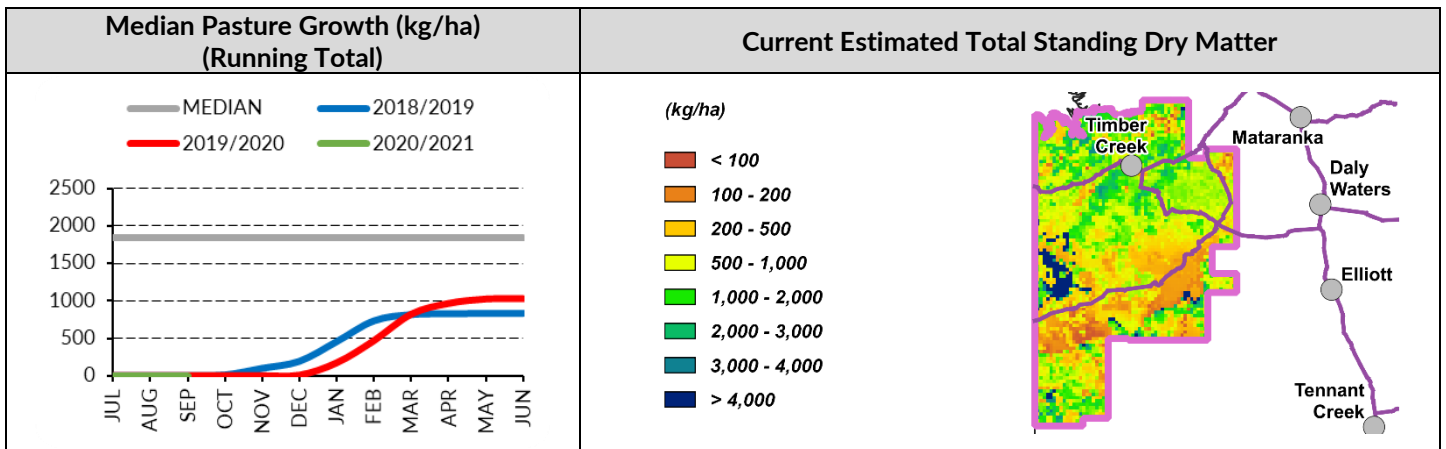
Victoria River District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth was patchy and well below-average (a 1 in 10 to 1 in 5 year event). District pasture growth was 56% lower than the long-term median. The late start and shorter growing season contributed to low pasture growth.
- Pasture growth was also extremely low in 2018/19 (in the lowest 6% of years on record).
- Areas in the southern half of the district have low levels of pasture biomass (<500 kg/ha), some are now at critical levels (<200 kg/ha).
- 4% of the district has burnt since 1 July 2020.
- Over the next three months the northern half of the district is likely to receive average to above-average pasture growth, while the southern half is likely to receive average to below-average growth.

2019/20 Pasture Growth



As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<1,000kg/ha	1,000 - 2,000kg/ha	2,000 - 3,000kg/ha	>3,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	44%	41%	10%	5%



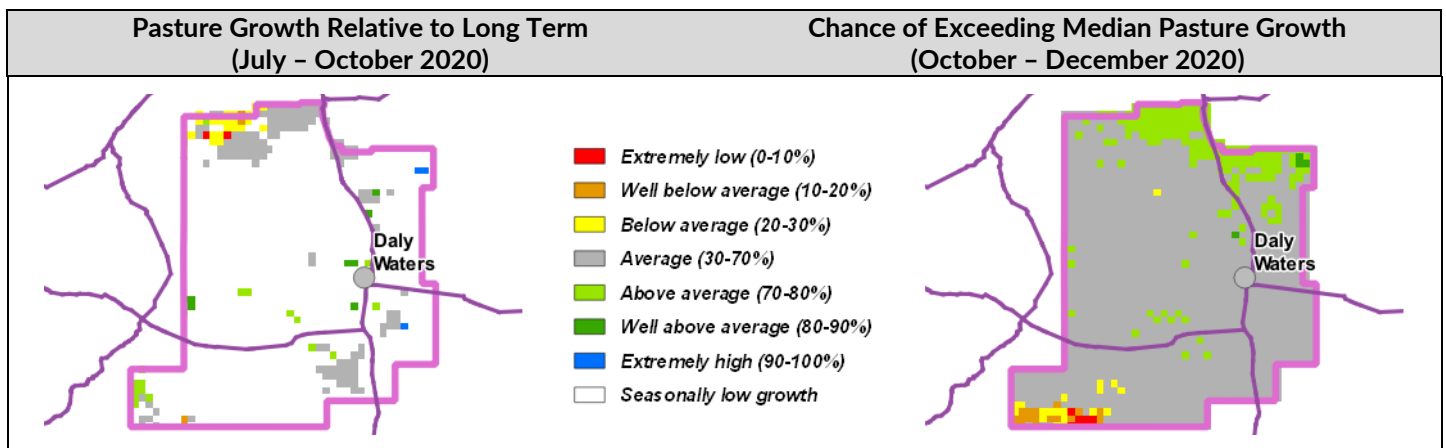
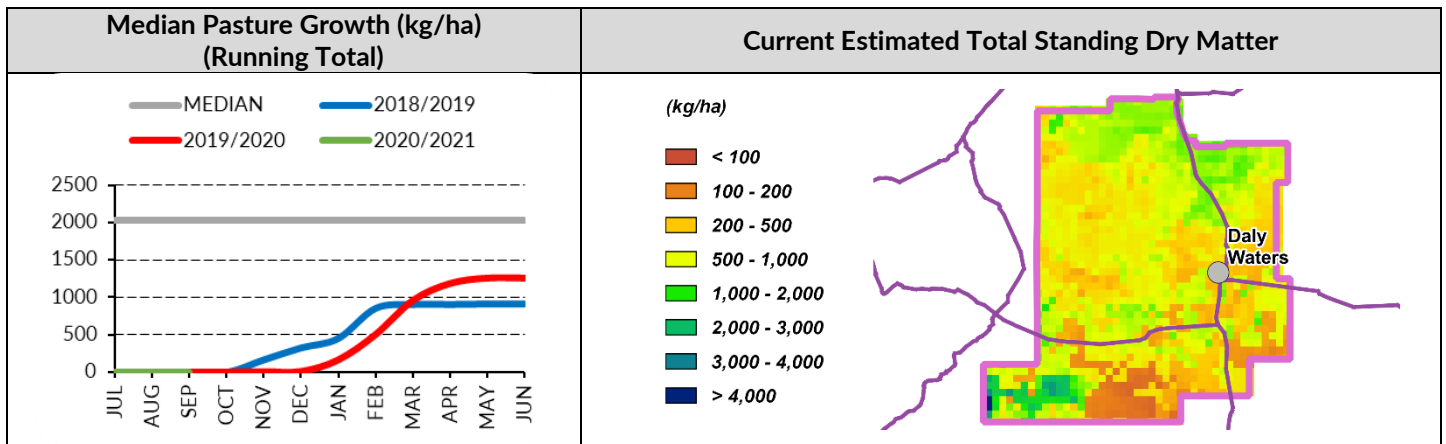
Sturt Plateau District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth was extremely low (a 1 in 10 year event). The district pasture growth was 48% lower than the long-term median. The late start and shorter growing season contributed to low pasture growth.
- The 2018/19 wet season pasture growth was also extremely low (lowest 3% of years on record).
- Large areas across the district have low levels of pasture biomass (<500 kg/ha), with some areas in the south now experiencing critically low levels (<200 kg/ha).
- Over the next three months the majority of the district is likely to receive average pasture growth. Some above-average growth is expected in the north of the district.

2019/20 Pasture Growth



As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<1,000kg/ha	1,000 - 2,000kg/ha	2,000 - 3,000kg/ha	>3,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	61%	36%	2%	1%



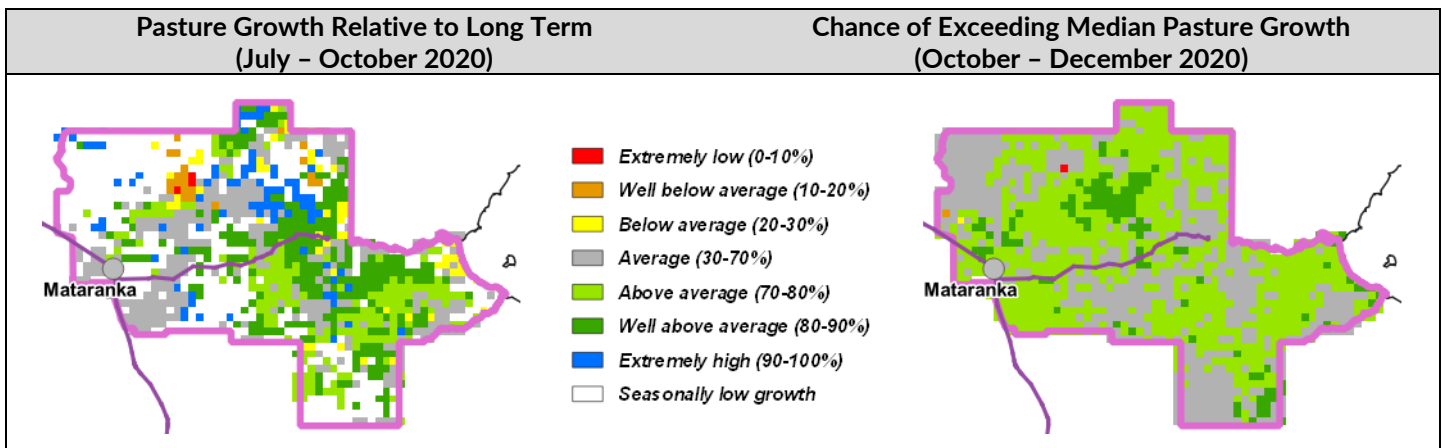
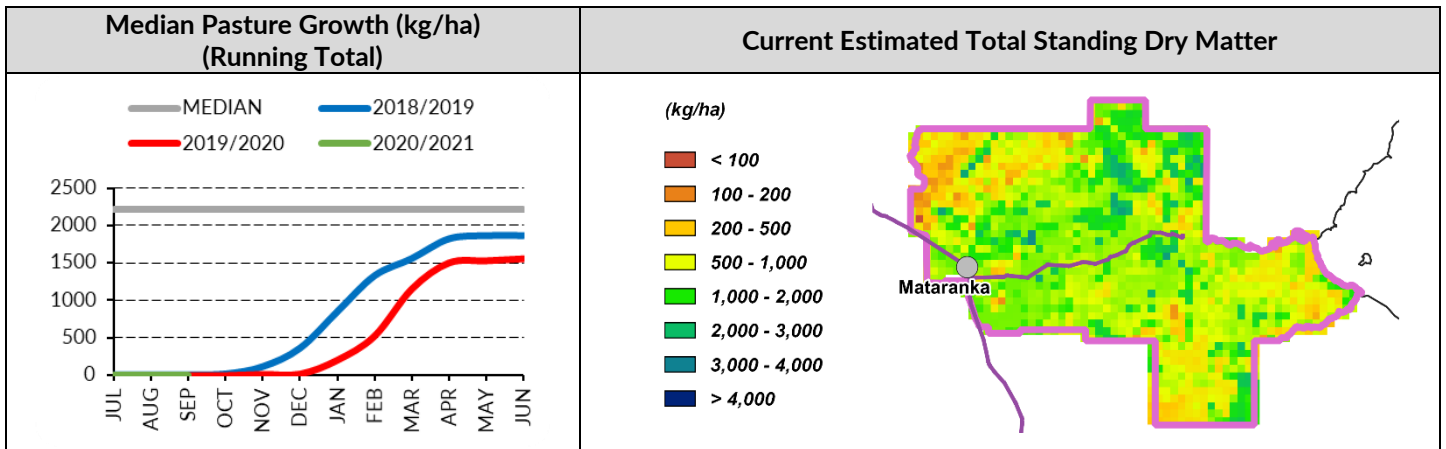
Roper District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth was extremely low (a 1 in 20 year event). The district pasture growth was 30% lower than the long-term median. The late start and shorter growing season contributed to low pasture growth.
- The 2018/19 pasture growth for the district was also below-average (lowest 21% of years on record). However, growth was very variable across the district that year.
- Large areas of low pasture biomass (<500 kg/ha) are now present throughout the district.
- 8% of the district has burnt since 1 July 2020.
- Over the next three months the entire district is likely to receive average to well above-average pasture growth.

2019/20 Pasture Growth



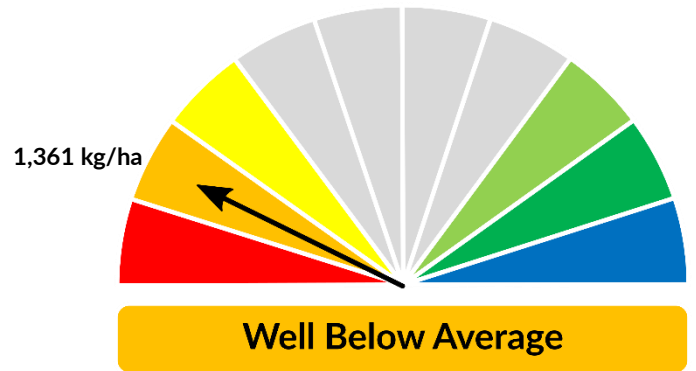
As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<1,000kg/ha	1,000 - 2,000kg/ha	2,000 - 3,000kg/ha	>3,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	29%	56%	13%	2%



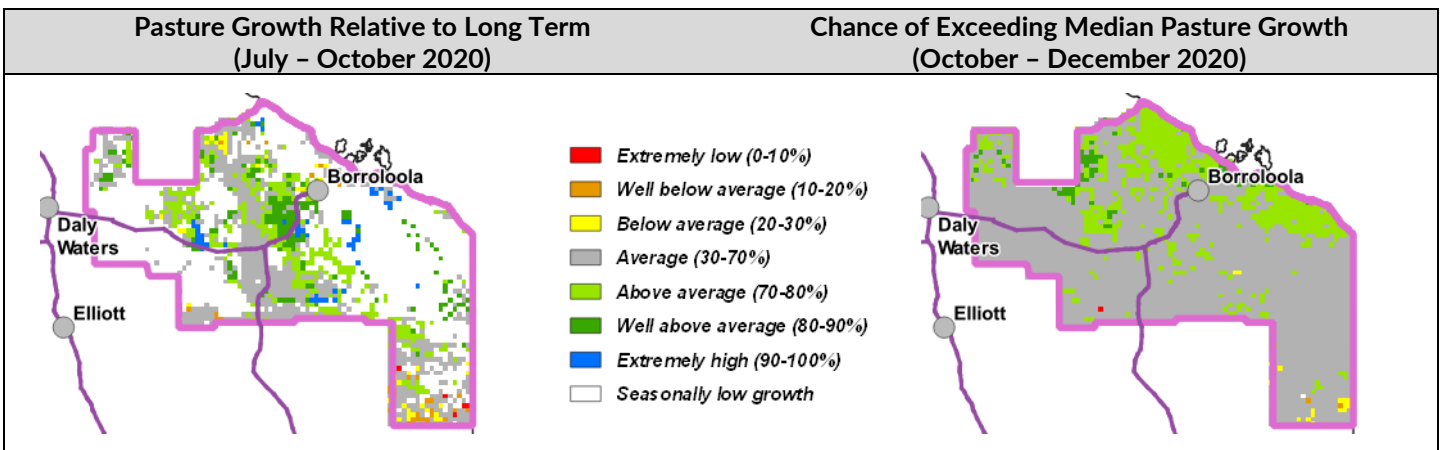
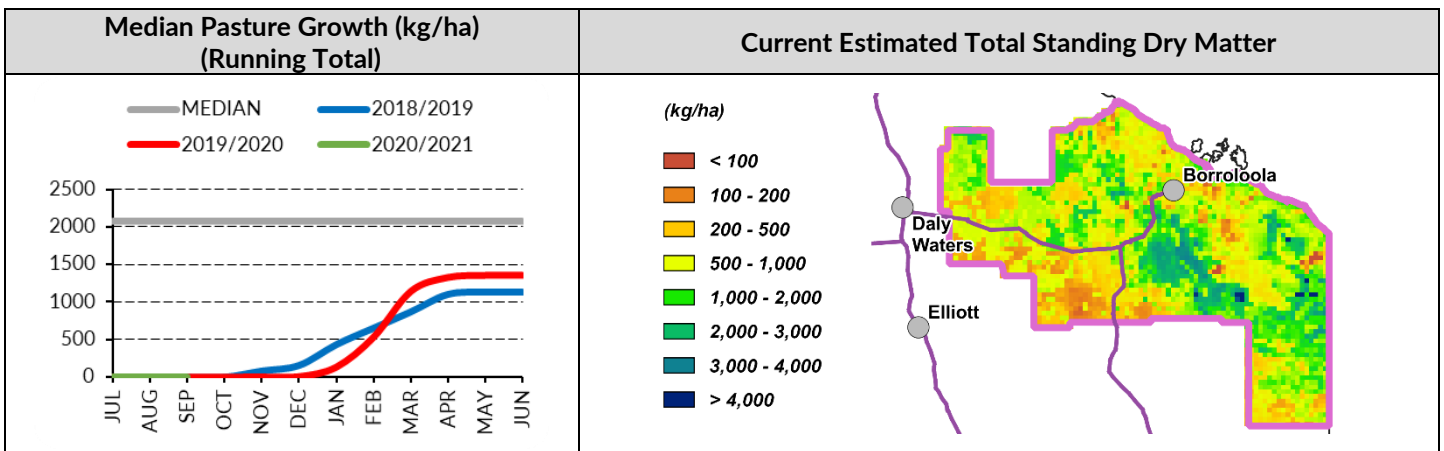
Gulf District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth was well below-average (a 1 in 10 to 1 in 5 year event). The district pasture growth was 35% lower than the long-term median. The late start and shorter growing season contributed to low pasture growth last season.
- The 2018/19 pasture growth was also extremely low (lowest 6% of years on record). A narrow strip along the coast was the exception, with average growth in 2018/19.
- Large areas of the district are showing low levels of pasture biomass (<500 kg/ha).
- 2% of the district has burnt since 1 July 2020.
- Over the next three months much of the district is likely to receive average to above-average pasture growth.

2019/20 Pasture Growth



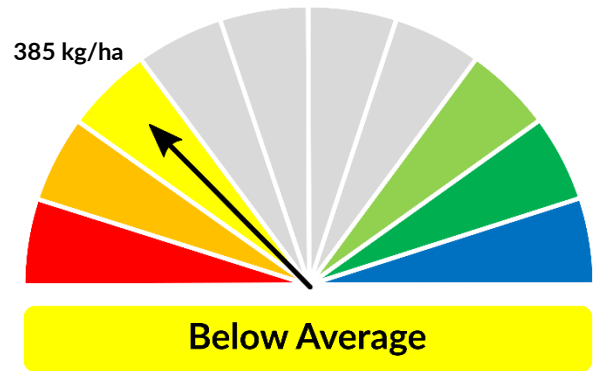
As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<1,000kg/ha	1,000 - 2,000kg/ha	2,000 - 3,000kg/ha	>3,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	41%	41%	13%	5%



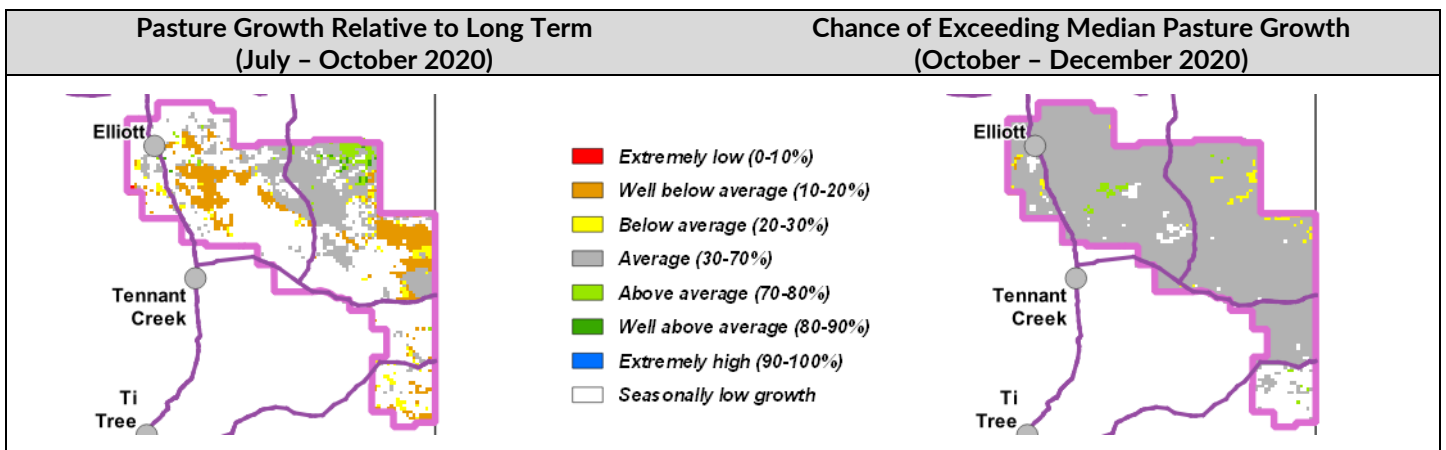
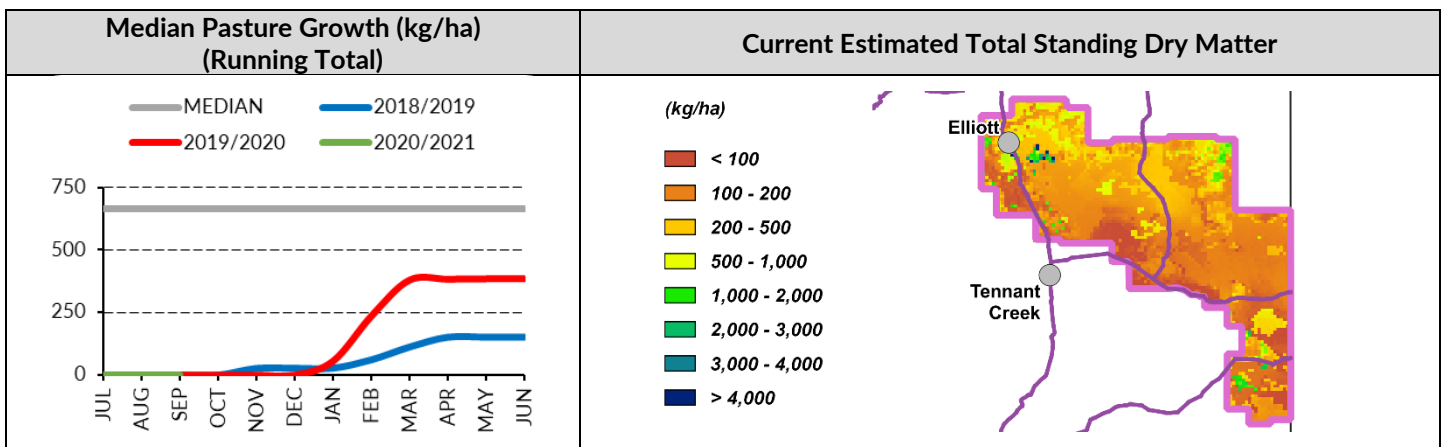
Barkly District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth for the district was below-average (58% lower than the long-term median), with parts of the west and NE experiencing extremely low growth. Parts of the west and SE experienced average growth. The late start and shorter growing season contributed to low pasture growth last season.
- The 2018/19 pasture growth for the district as a whole was also extremely low (lowest 3% of years on record).
- The majority of the district has low levels of pasture biomass (<500 kg/ha) with large areas experiencing critically low levels (<200 kg/ha).
- Over the next three months the majority of the district is likely to receive average pasture growth.

2019/20 Pasture Growth

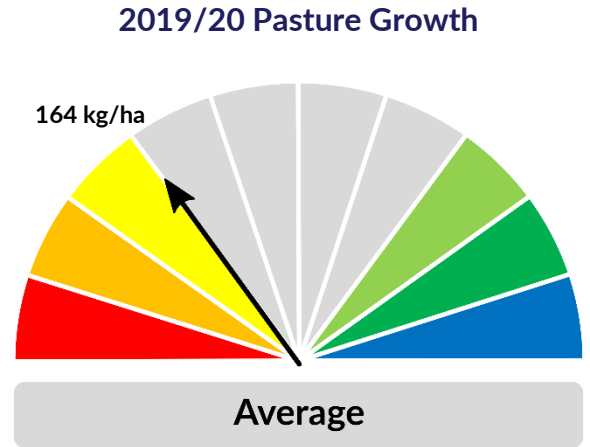


As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<250kg/ha	250 - 500kg/ha	500 - 1,000kg/ha	>1,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	47%	32%	15%	6%

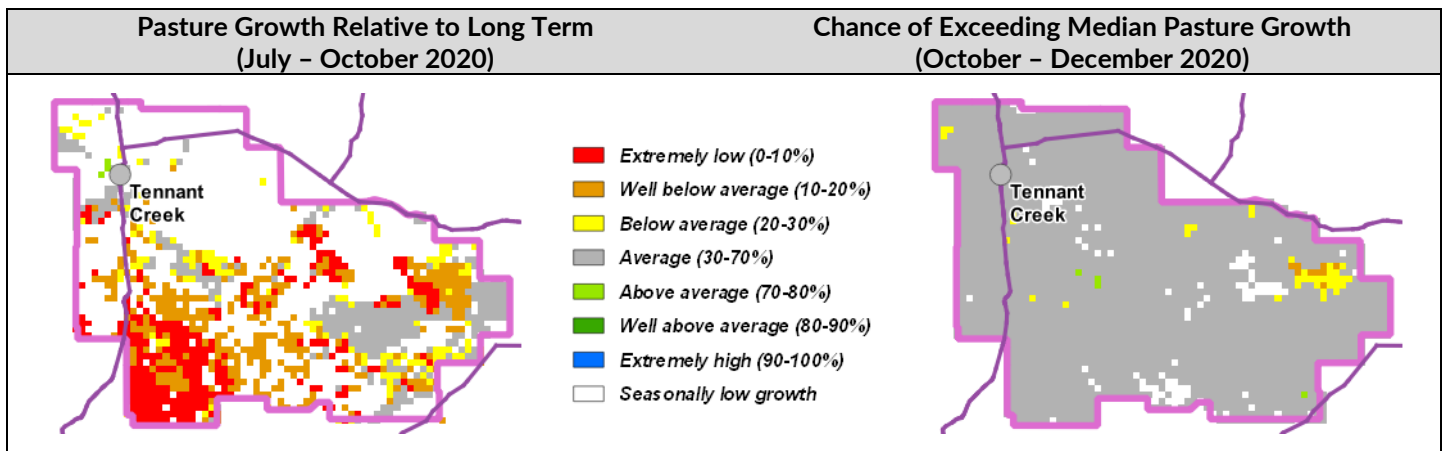
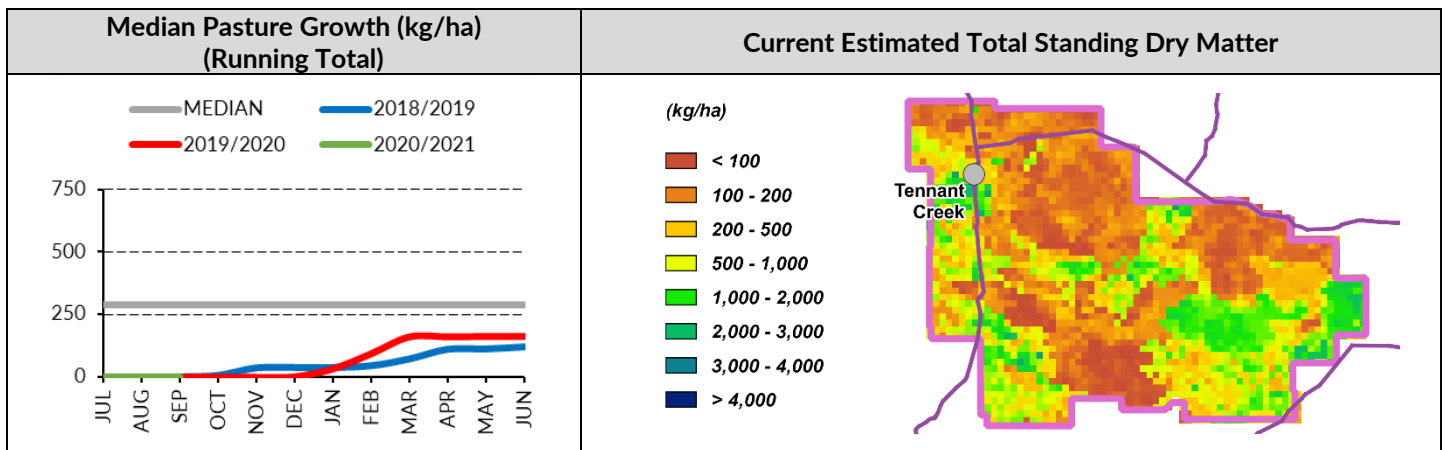


Tennant Creek District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth for the district as a whole was average to below-average. Some parts of the north and NE finished with well below-average to extremely low pasture growth.
- The district pasture growth was 56% lower than the long-term median.
- Large areas of the district have low levels of pasture biomass (<200 kg/ha), with some experiencing critically low levels (<100 kg/ha).
- Over the next three months the majority of the district is likely to receive average pasture growth.



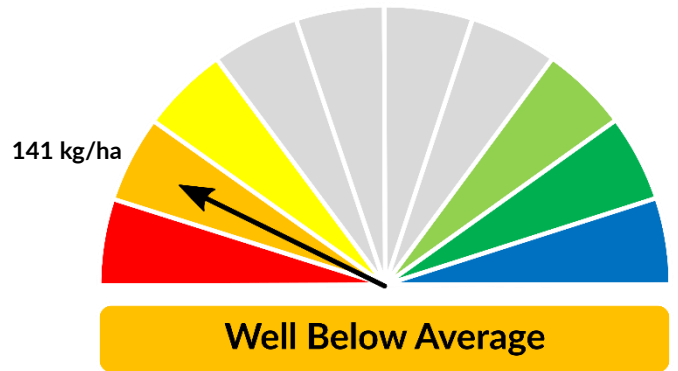
As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<250kg/ha	250 - 500kg/ha	500 - 1,000kg/ha	>1,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	35%	20%	17%	28%



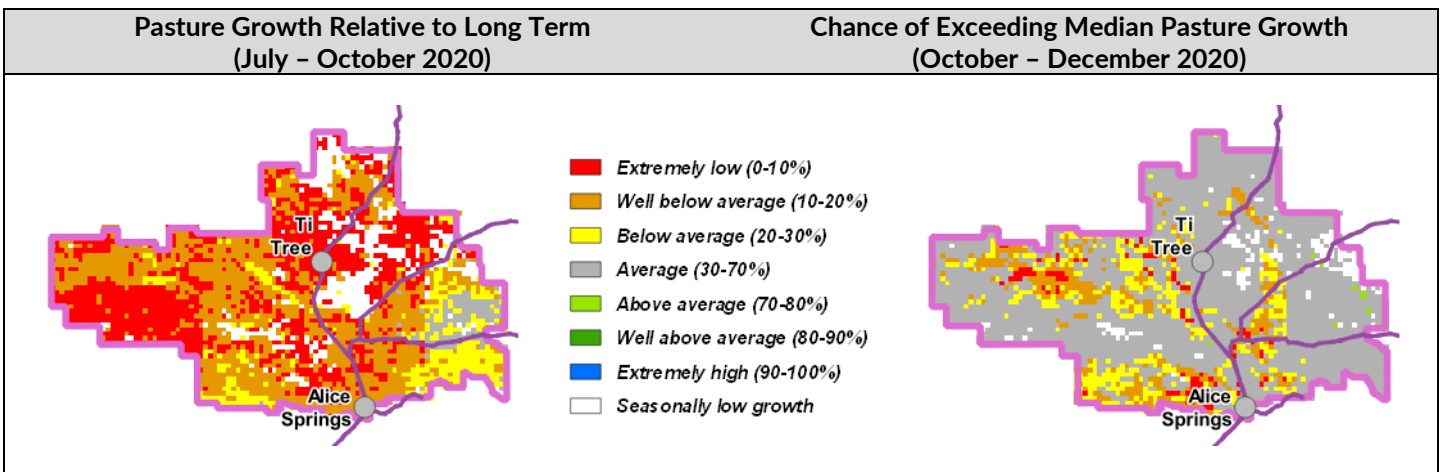
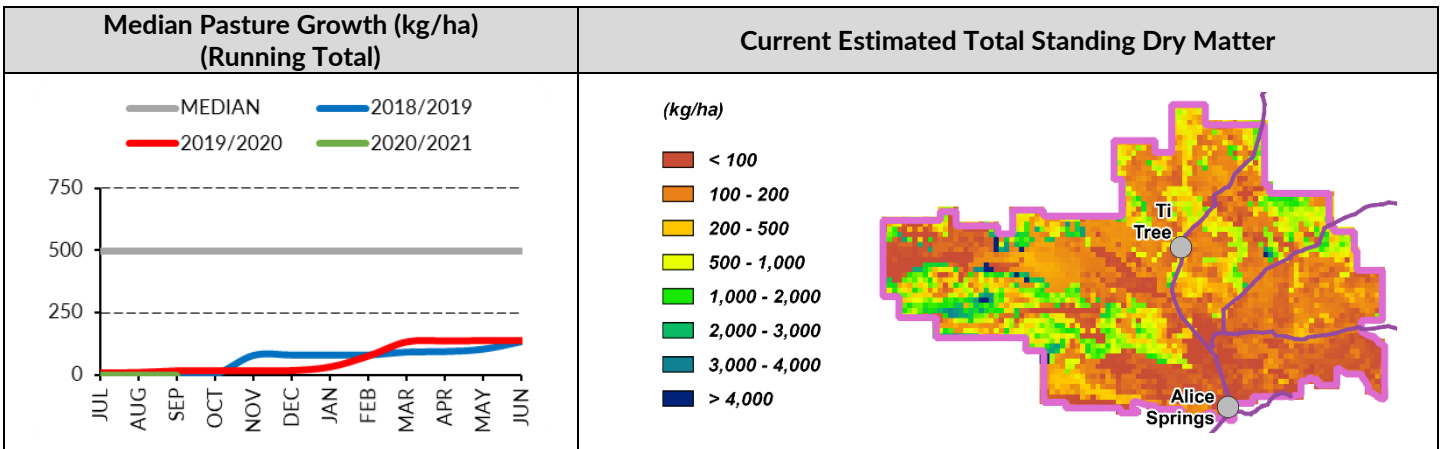
Northern Alice Springs District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth for the district was well below-average but varied considerably from extremely low growth in the west (a 1 in 20 year event) to average in the east. The district pasture growth as a whole was 72% lower than the long-term median.
- The 2018/19 pasture growth for the district was also extremely low (in the lowest 6% of years on record).
- Most of the district has low levels of pasture biomass (<200 kg/ha), with large areas experiencing critically low levels (<100 kg/ha).
- Over the next three months the entire district is likely to receive average to below-average pasture growth.

2019/20 Pasture Growth

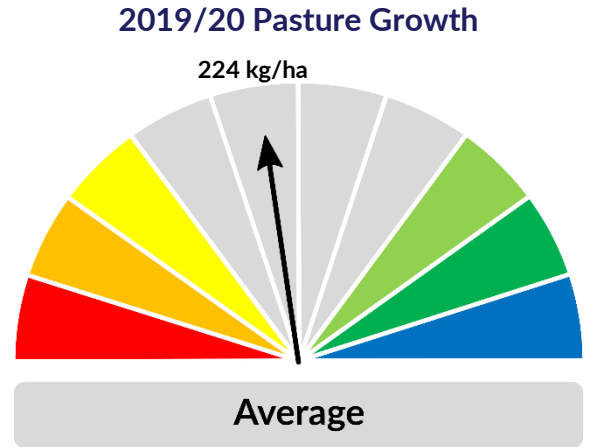


As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<250kg/ha	250 - 500kg/ha	500 - 1,000kg/ha	>1,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	53%	16%	13%	18%

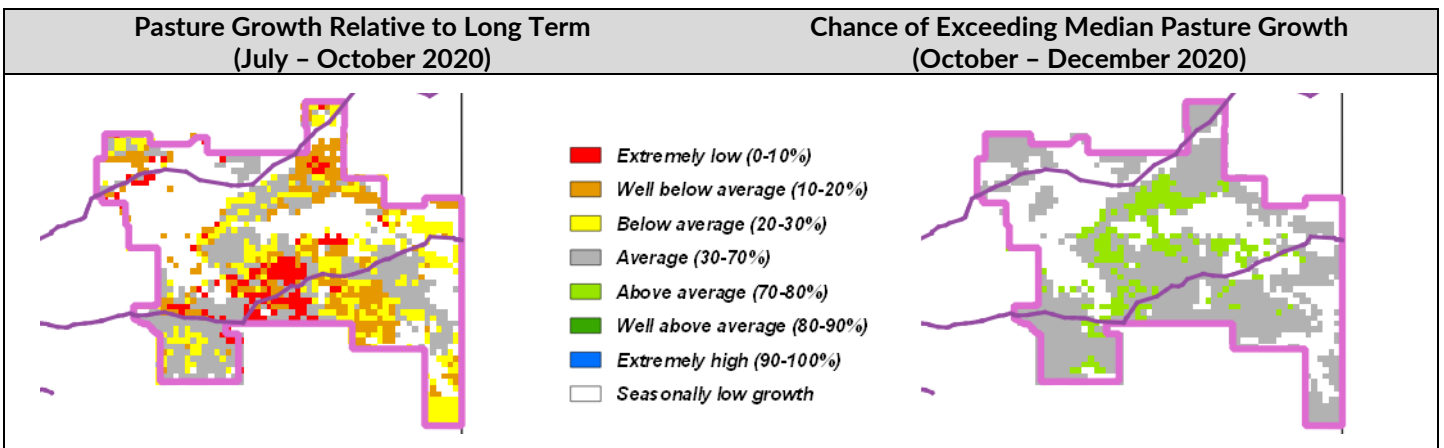
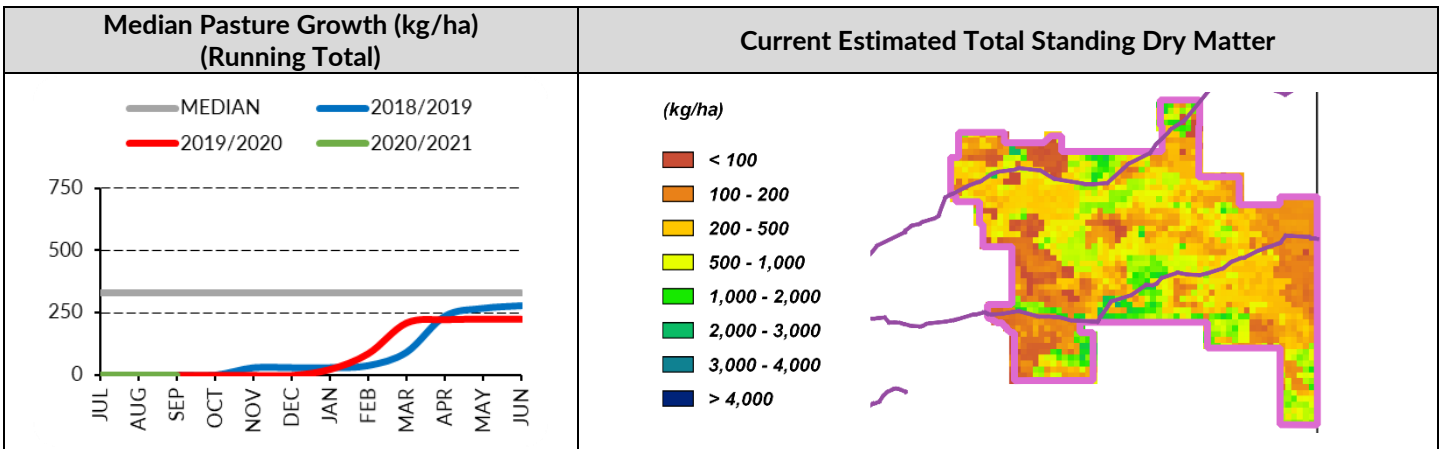


Plenty District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth for the district was average, however this pasture growth was still 31% lower than the long-term median. A small area in the centre of the district experienced above-average pasture growth.
- The 2018/19 pasture growth for the district was also average. This was largely due to rain received from ex-cyclone Trevor in southern and eastern parts.
- Although the district as a whole received average growth in 2019/20, areas in the western and far eastern parts of the district now have low levels of pasture biomass (<200 kg/ha).
- Over the next three months pasture growth is likely to be average to above-average across the district.



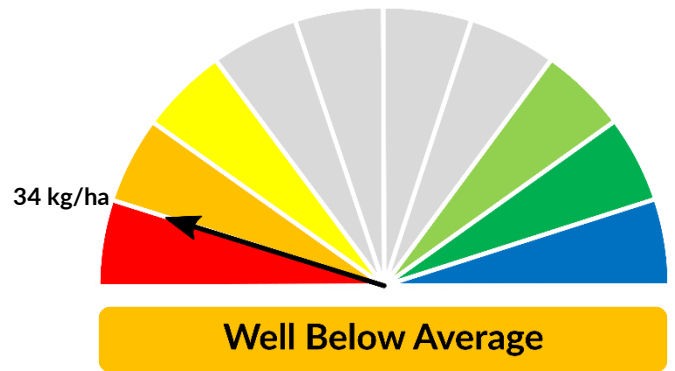
As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<250kg/ha	250 - 500kg/ha	500 - 1,000kg/ha	>1,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	21%	27%	29%	23%



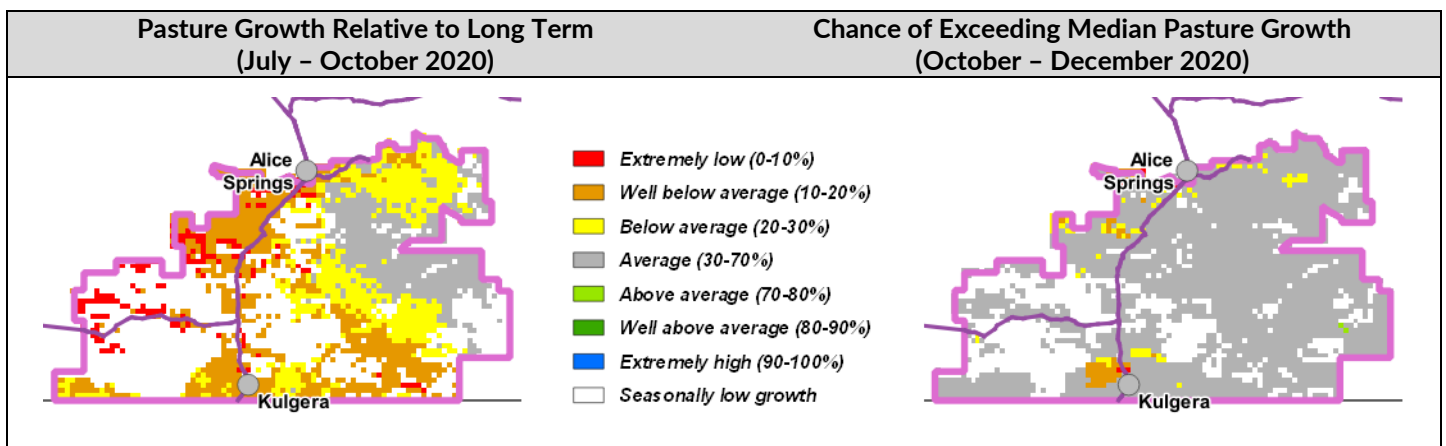
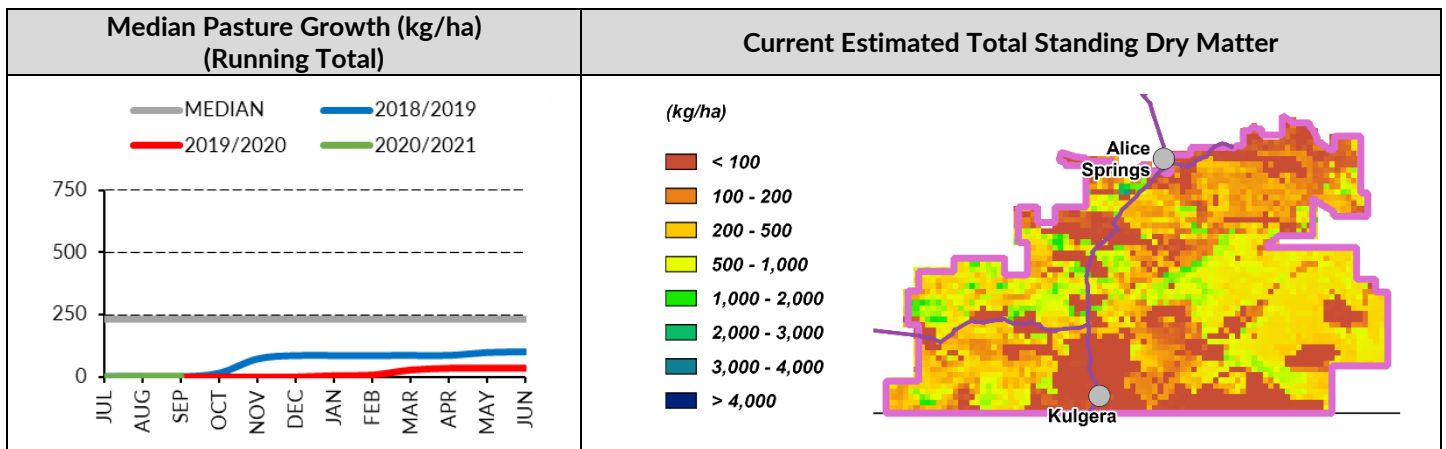
Southern Alice Springs District

- The 2019/20 pasture growth for the district was well below-average (a 1 in 10 year event), with growth 86% lower than the long-term median. The western two-thirds of the district has experienced extremely low growth (a 1 in 20 year event).
- The 2018/19 district pasture growth was also below-average. However, growth was patchy with much of the western half of the district experiencing average pasture growth, whilst the SW experienced above-average growth.
- Large areas of the district are now experiencing low levels of pasture biomass (<200 kg/ha), with some at critically low levels (<100 kg/ha).
- Over the next three months the majority of the district is likely to receive average to below-average pasture growth.

2019/20 Pasture Growth



As at 1 October 2020				
(% of district)	<250kg/ha	250 - 500kg/ha	500 - 1,000kg/ha	>1,000kg/ha
2020/21 Pasture Growth	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total Standing Dry Matter	37%	17%	33%	13%



Pasture information

The pasture and fire information in this document is derived from AussieGRASS. AussieGRASS is a model that simulates pasture growth and standing biomass using climate data, vegetation mapping, fire history and regional estimates of grazing pressure. The model can be used to track simulated pasture growth and total standing pasture biomass at the landscape scale.

Note that the model does not use stocking rate data for individual properties. Where stock numbers are significantly higher or lower than typical for a district, model estimates of total standing dry matter may be erroneous.

Disclaimer

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