

Mossman/Tableland

The 2014 crush may not be over until 2015, and even then it may not be 100% completed. At a recent meeting with Mackay Sugar's Mossman Mill management, growers were informed that there is a chance that up to 10% of the 2014 crop could remain as stand over.

If Mill reliability can improve and weather conditions are favourable there is a chance that most of this year crop could be harvested by the 22nd of December. Plan B is to then shut down for Christmas and Boxing Day and then restart until the 5th of January, when the Mill will need to stop to allow adequate time to repair the Mill for the 2015 season. At time of writing, the Mill has lost 16 days over their original budgeted lost time. The boilers are still the major contributor to this year's lost time, with 49 hours lost in September and 71 hours lost in October. Mossman Mill suppliers are very concerned about the late finish and the impact that it will have on next year's crop, but they are not surprised as most farmers had predicted the situation that we now face.

At the end of week 28, the Mill passed the 950 000t crushed mark and this is the most cane that the Mossman Mill has crushed in one year for close to 12 years. To the end of week 27, 917 000 t of cane had been crushed with the average CCS YTD close to 13. The Tablelands MSF Mill completed its reduced 2014 season in mid-October.

As I mentioned in my last report, delays to the start of the 2014 crush have now put the Mossman Mill in a precarious position in regards to the Mossman and Tableland region. On the coast the crop is in need of some rain to help the plant cane and also the ratooning crop grow on for the 2015 season. But if we receive too much rain we will be in a position where we may not be able to harvest our entire crop and may also suffer severe damage by cutting blocks in the wet. This will then cause major problems with ratoonability of fields and reduce any chance of the Mossman region being able to harvest a reasonable crop in 2015. The Tablelands are in a similar position where they can receive storms in November that can hold up the harvest for days and also increase their chance of standover.

All in all we are not in an ideal situation for next year's crop. We are relying on weather conditions being favourable as well as Mill reliability being improved, in order for the Mossman Mill to have a chance of a decent crop through the rollers in 2015. Also, with the extended crush for 2014 and a strong chance of having to start the 2015 crush early next year, we can only hope for the best and a fair bit of luck.

The only advantage with the Mossman Mill Supply area having a long 2014 crush with some favourable weather conditions, is that most farmers are now up to date with their fertiliser programs and are over half way through their spraying programs (even though with the dry year, weeds haven't been a major issue).

The Mulgrave Mill completed the 2014 season at 2.22am on Sunday 16/11/2014.

Mulgrave's end of season data had not been finalised at the time of writing my report and it was estimated that 1,032,251 tonnes was crushed with a seasonal CCS at around 12.72.

Weather conditions are very dry, however ratoons look quite good and plant and re-plant blocks in the drier parts of the mill area are starting to show the effects of the dry weather. There is some yellowing of fields and this may be the first sign of YCS, however this has not been confirmed.

Mulgrave Mill's overall factory performance was quite satisfactory with the crushing rate limited by fibre levels and bagasse.

Finally on behalf of my family and myself, we would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a happy and safe New Year.

Gerard Puglisi - Northern Director