

Burdekin region

With the Burdekin starting the 2016 season start on the 7th June, harvester crews and farmers are asked to ensure that they are up to date with safety inductions. Any crews wanting to update can complete the online induction course by contacting their field officer.

Some varieties have begun flowering and early ccs has proven to be patchy. The weather has continued to be hotter and more humid than we would expect for this time of year. The Burdekin crop estimate has been completed and looks to be higher than first anticipated, with early plant cane also looking promising.

There have been two rain events across the district since the commencement of the season, on Monday 13th June and then again over the following weekend. Invicta continued on one milling train after the first event, as the western district escaped most of the wet. Crushing resumed on Wednesday at the other district mills. The second rain event has ensured that harvesting has ceased for the coming week. District mills will be conducting maintenance in the meantime.

With cane trains moving around the Burdekin district, it is important for members of the public to stay safe and be alert. Cane train safety billboards are visible on the Bruce Highway in all regions and a television, radio and newspaper awareness campaign has been supported by Wilmar, Mackay Sugar and Tully Sugar.

“Please stay alert as you drive around cane-growing districts, approach all cane railway crossings with caution and always give way to cane trains. It is particularly important to be vigilant in rural areas in the opening weeks of the season, when encroaching cane can impede visibility at crossings”, urged John Pratt, Executive General Manager, Wilmar.

With the school holidays approaching, please talk to your children and grandchildren about the dangers of playing or riding bikes on or near cane railway tracks, especially on bridges, or playing between or riding on cane bins.

ARC UP co-ordinator, Debra Burden met with the Minister for Energy recently to ask if the government would put a temporary freeze on electricity prices and forego the proposed 10.3% increase for irrigators on July 1. After the Minister’s refusal, the Arc Up representatives met with Katter’s Australian Party state Member for Dalrymple, Shane Knuth who is sponsoring a Private Member’s Bill to get real reductions in electricity prices, including the proposed 33% costed and supported by the ARC UP group.

To put the Private Members Bill to the Parliament, Mr Knuth needs to prove he has consulted widely. To show your support, please provide a letter of support for the Private Members Bill. These support letters can be:

Emailed: debra_burden@canegrowers.com.au

Posted: ARC UP Campaign, Reply Paid 933, AYR, QLD 4807

Council elections have been conducted and seen a change from most of the incumbents but no relief in sight for farmers rates to be more equitably applied. Representations to the relevant Minister have also fallen on deaf ears.

Cane Supply Agreements – Burdekin District:

Despite efforts to finalise 2017 CSA negotiations with Wilmar staff, grower groups continue to face intransigence, with growers unable to confirm forward cane supply contracts and pricing. QSL negotiations with all mill owners are progressing but the Wilmar mills appear determined to delay the process and this is negatively affecting grower's ability to forward price beyond the 2016 season with any degree of choice, as allowed by current legislation.

QSL Grower Information sessions will be held in the Burdekin at 10:30am on 9th June. Please contact Carla or Cathy for more information.

Burdekin Productivity Board has advised that the 4 Invicta Seed cane plots are now closed for watering. Plots are expected to be re-opened within approximately 4 weeks.

“After the close of nominations to the Productivity Board, on 29th April, only three candidates had nominated to fill the three available Grower Director positions on the board. Therefore, at the Annual General Meeting, scheduled for 23rd August, 2016 these three nominees shall assume their position on the board for a three year term. Current grower directors, Chris Hesp & Bryce Davies shall continue in their role and will be joined by Mark Vass. Peter McDonnell has decided to stand down.”

“The management of BPS would like to thank all current directors and members for their support and look forward to working with the new board when the time comes.” Mark Rickards, Company Secretary, BPS Ltd.

Property Crime Update – Ayr Police:

Two instances of property theft have been reported to police over the past three weeks, both in the Brandon/Maidevale area. Please consider marking your tools and equipment with identifying markings, to deter thieves and make recovery more likely.

With the cane harvesting season upon us and much more movement around the rural areas, as well as machinery left unattended more often than usual, it is pertinent to remind crews and farmers to review your security and improve where necessary.

“If you have any information about the thefts or of suspicious activity in your area, I would urge you to contact your local police station or Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000”, urged Snr Sgt Steve Barton, OIC at Ayr Police.

Safety and Cane Warning System:

The sugar cane harvest will begin in the Burdekin mills, without a safety alert system again this year. Until recent years, locos had been fitted with EV alert transmitters to signal they were on the rail network nearby and many haulout vehicles and even private farm vehicles had been fitted with EV alert receivers to maximise safety of all industry participants. The system was designed to provide a warning and prevent collisions during the hectic harvest season and

appeared to be effective.

When the old analogue technology became outdated, Wilmar decided to remove it altogether, rather than replace it or leave it installed in some Wilmar areas and not others. From the first indications that the original equipment was to become obsolete, I have continued to research the options for replacement of this equipment as a critical safety issue for the industry and our communities alike.

A new safety system is urgently required. To date, the best available option appears to be for a linked alert system to be installed across the rail networks and across all milling areas, so that members of the public can also have warning systems installed in their own vehicles and for that system be effective across the state, or uniformly across the nation. I continue to urge all participants to work towards such an outcome.

Let's see a 2016 season that works towards building the framework of a solid industry for all participants and for the benefit of our communities. Wishing a safe and successful harvest for all.

Margaret Menzel
Burdekin Director