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Nine-year wonder as state's big dry shrinks

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THE rain dances must have worked, with NSW suffering less drought than at any time in the past nine years - this month, just 7.3 per cent of the state is declared.

The Primary Industries Minister, Steve Whan, said he hoped the figures marked a turning point for the drought, after some parts of the north-east and southern areas received up to 200 millimetres of rain last month.

"Not since the drought began nine years ago has the situation been this good across the state," Mr Whan said.

"It is a very welcome boost from January when 81 per cent of the state was in drought."

But as good as the statewide picture appears, some farmers still are wondering when their big dry will end.

"It feels like we haven't been out of drought at all," a sheep and crop farmer, Graham Hosegood, said. "What's tending to happen is we get larger dumps of rain and then nothing and it's back to where we were.

"Last year was terrible and things are as grim here as they have been in the past 10 years."

Mr Hosegood and his wife, Laila, manage a farm near Bingara, on the Gwydir River.

"It's really tough at the moment, it just seems to be relentless," he said. "I suspect we farmers must have very short memories because as soon as it does rain we get all geed up, and then it goes back to drought."

Many farmers have seen improvements yet more than half of the state is still declared marginal, Mr Whan said.

"Without continued good rains these areas could slip back into drought," he said.

In the Bureau of Meteorology's forecast to June for a large part of western NSW, the prospects are for average or below-average rainfall.

Areas to have moved out of drought include Wanaaring, Cootamundra, Wagga Wagga, Lake Cargelligo, West Wyalong, Hay, Griffith, Braidwood, Menindee and Dareton.

Areas that have moved from marginal to satisfactory include Deepwater, Murrumbateman, Bathurst, Broken Hill, Wilcannia and Tibooburra.

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