

Summary

After the record breaking 2013 season, and a near perfect break of season in 2014, grower optimism is at an all-time high in almost all WA cropping districts. Comments like “best start I have ever seen” are not uncommon. Widespread rains in the two weeks from the 24th April to 8th May have set up a perfect opportunity for crop establishment.

Seeding is well underway across the State, with most of the canola and lupin crops already planted and some growers have started planting wheat and barley. Most growers used the opening rains to enable a knockdown spray of weeds. In some cases growers managed two knockdown sprays.

Forecast grain prices remain relatively strong. On the positive side, because summer rain has been limited to small isolated events, growers have been able to prepare for the coming season without the time and expense normally needed to control summer weeds. However, the wet start to the season will also mean close attention will need to be given to post emergent weed control of winter weeds.

Soil moisture levels at the start of the season ranged from dry to low across the grainbelt. This situation means that the timing of follow up rains will be critical to crop establishment on the lighter soils.

Additionally, the quantity of mineralised nitrogen in the soil profile is very low, which in many cases has required additional nitrogen applications at seeding to establish and maintain cereal and canola crops. This contrasts with recent seasons where, after extensive summer rain, there have been very high levels of soil nitrogen available for plants at sowing.

Relatively high prices forecast for wheat is leading to a slight increase of the area predicted to be sown compared to 2013. Canola area is also forecast to increase slightly due to the good opening rains thus reaching the full potential of area being planted. This increased cropping area is mainly taking place in “flexible” paddocks which would have either been left fallow for weed control and a decrease in the area sown to barley in some districts.

Lupin prices also remains relatively high and this may cause a small increase in the area sown to lupins in suitable areas.

The area sown to milling grade oats is expected to fall after exceptional yields oversupplied the market last year. Grower returns in the Albany Port zone for wheat and barley in the last few years have tended to be better than that for oats.

Planted Area in 2014

The first preliminary estimates of the likely area to be planted for each commodity are shown below compared to the final areas estimated to have been grown in 2013.

WA planting area estimates- May 2014 (hectares)

| Port zone | Wheat | Barley | Canola | Oats | Lupins | Field pea | State total |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| Kwinana | 2,400,000 | 440,000 | 415,000 | 110,000 | 70,000 | 10,000 | |
| Albany | 666,000 | 365,000 | 366,000 | 63,000 | 13,000 | 5,000 | |
| Esperance | 398,000 | 243,000 | 255,000 | 2,000 | 9,000 | 15,000 | |
| Geraldton | 957,000 | 33,000 | 189,000 | 4,500 | 160,000 | 1,000 | |
| Totals 2014 | 4,421,000 | 1,081,000 | 1,225,000 | 179,500 | 252,000 | 31,000 | 7,189,500 |
| Totals 2013 | 4,375,000 | 1,136,000 | 1,177,000 | 187,000 | 245,000 | 38,000 | 7,158,000 |

Outlook for 2014 Plantings by Zone

Geraldton Zone

Across the Zone it is arguably the best start to the season in 15 years. For example out East at Pindar there has been 120mm of rain in two weeks compared to 92mm for the whole 2013 season.

Canola and lupin programs have just about been completed. Around 10% more Canola has been planted, mainly into paddocks that would otherwise have been left fallow.

Wheat has started to be planted further east between Morawa and Latham. Closer to the coast wheat planting has been held off waiting for the knockdown of weeds after the recent rains. The wheat varieties Mace and Wyalkatchem will continue to be dominant wheat plantings, with Calingiri for noodle grades.

Lupins, particularly Albus lupin plantings are expected to increase slightly, due to buoyant market prices and lower input establishment costs compared to canola.

The barley area may drop slightly and will be principally planted to Hindmarsh with some Scope barley in southern districts.

Kwinana zone

West Kwinana

Again, one of the best starts to the season ever with most areas having 20-50mm rain in the week ended 1 May and the same again in the week ended 8 May. However, there was virtually no summer rain and so soil moisture levels are low. Soil tests have shown low levels of available nitrogen and this has required increased fertiliser inputs at seeding.

Canola is almost all planted.

There is expected to be a slight increase in the area planted to wheat at the expense of canola and barley in this area due to current price relativities. In the western districts, which suffered high incidence of sclerotinia in 2013, the area sown to canola may reduce slightly.

Wheat is showing stronger profit potential, while the incidence of head losses and lodging in barley last year was significant for growers. There will be a rise in the area sown to the Mace wheat variety with Wyalkatchem, Calingiri, Westonia and Magenta all still being significant varieties.

The area sown to Baudin barley was reduced in 2013 and will fall again this year. Deliveries in the Moora district of Baudin in 2011 constituted 75% of deliveries, but this was down to 25% in 2013. There will be more Bass barley, but less Hindmarsh with head retention problems the main reason for the switch in varieties planted.

East Kwinana

95% of growers have had a good start. Rainfall has been between 40 and 80mm for the two weeks ended 8 May. Canola and lupins have just about all been planted. Canola plantings are estimated to be up by 5-10% in the central grainbelt, mainly sown into paddocks that would have otherwise been left fallow for weed control. Good knockdown of weeds has been achieved largely using paraquat rather than glyphosate.

Wheat plantings will increase at the expense of barley plantings due to improved relative profitability. Given the good start to the season there will be a predominance of long season wheat planted with Mace and Wyalkatchem the main varieties, whilst south of the Narambeen to York line there will be more Yitpi put in than was expected, followed by Mace and Wyalkatchem.

The area sown to lupins will rise slightly in the central grainbelt, though only 5 to 10%, as a result of the current relatively high price for lupins.

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GIWA gratefully acknowledges the support of DAFWA, contributions from AEGIC and independent agricultural consultants and agronomists in the production of this report

There will be a larger nitrogen input on cereal and canola crops at seeding as a consequence of no summer rains and therefore low nitrogen mineralisation over the summer. This is expected to add an extra \$10 to \$15 per hectare to seeding costs but this has been offset by the reduced cost of controlling weeds over summer.

Albany Zone

Growers are very optimistic about the coming season after a record 2013 cropping season. 2014 will be business as usual as far as the timing of cropping programs are concerned. Growers in this Zone don't rely on summer rain or stored water, as rainfall during the growing season is more reliable.

Most farms in the Lakes area received between 20-90mm of rainfall in the week ended 1 May, with a further 15 to 35mm on the week ended 8 May. Lupins and canola crops are largely planted, with a slight increase in the area of canola planted expected to be at the expense of the area planted to barley last year, but also at the expense of pasture paddocks as confidence is building for sufficient pasture production from less area set aside for pasture. Seeding of long season barley and wheat has commenced but most growers are waiting for knockdown of weeds before planting of wheat and barley starts in earnest.

There have already been some difficulties getting on to heavy paddocks. Conversely on the lighter land, with limited soil moisture built up over last summer there is concern that canola crops planted may dry off quickly if there are not good follow up rains.

Whilst the Lakes district had good opening rains, a lot less rain fell in the western districts in the Zone with falls in the week ended 2 May in Katanning of 12mm, Wagin (14mm) and Wickiepin (18mm). West of Kukerin growers are waiting for the germination of weeds to apply knockdown chemicals ahead of planting.

Across the Zone the area planted to wheat is expected to grow in area sown at the expense of barley. The last three years have shown better returns to wheat than barley, resulting in about a 10% swing in the relative plantings. The wheat variety mix should be stable with Yitpi and Mace, followed by Calingiri and Wyalkatchem the dominant varieties. There are concerns about the expected high percentage of the Mace variety in wheat sowings, mainly from a frost risk point of view, as it is very similar to Wyalkatchem which suffers badly in frosts.

For barley, there will be more Hindmarsh sown for feed grade compared to other varieties. Of the malt barley varieties there will be more Bass barley, replacing Baudin in all districts in the Albany Zone.

There will be less oats sown in 2014 after the milling oats market was oversupplied by exceptional yields in 2013. Feed barley delivered better returns than oats in 2013 and it is probable that the area planted to oats will decline.

Esperance Zone

Most of the Zone has had 30-60 mm rainfall over the last fortnight, with some areas west of Ravensthorpe received up to 80mm. Seeding is now under full steam and the season is off to a great start.

Most of the canola is in and up. Barley is going in and some wheat. By mid next week wheat will be underway in earnest.

More wheat is expected to be planted in the Zone at the expense of barley (5% less barley). Hindmarsh and Bass barley varieties have disappointed growers with poor head retention in 2013. Wheat has been more consistent. As a consequence there will be less barley and more wheat grown in the Zone this year. The Mace variety will continue to grow as a proportion of the wheat crop.

The area sown to field peas is expected to decline by up to 25% due to disease concerns, with these paddocks most likely planted with canola.

With the opening rains has come a massive flush of clover and medics, as well as ryegrass and self sown cereals. Most areas have received at least one knockdown spray of paraquat before planting and now glyphosate is being used. Post emergent weed control will be important this year as it didn't get the chance for double or triple knockdown.

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Weather Outlook



Weather ahead – Dr David Stephens, AEGIC

Recent heavy rains across southern Australia has provided good surface soil moisture in most areas and an ideal early start to seeding programs.

The AEGIC El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) forecasting system is suggesting that there is a 60-70% chance of a weak to moderate El Nino developing in 2014. This means that there is still a risk of a very dry growing season in eastern Australia.

In Western Australia, there is less of a chance of a drought in the southwest with more variation found in El Nino years. Warm ocean temperatures to the northwest of Western Australia is providing a favourable scenario for moist air to feed into low pressure systems over the south west.

In the next three months, the BoM model is suggesting there is a higher chance of median rainfall being exceeded in WA and less of a chance in eastern Australia.

BoM weather outlook May to July 30 2014

- A wetter than normal season is more likely for southern WA
- Climate influences include a warming tropical Pacific, and a warm Indian Ocean

Additional information can be sourced from:

- [AEGIC: Yield and seasonal forecasting](#)
- [DAFWA Statistical seasonal forecast](#)
- [BoM -Western Australian rainfall outlook May to July 2014](#)
- [BoM month to date rainfall for WA](#)
- [16 day rainfall outlook \(WX maps\)](#)

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