

Summary - The 2016 season

The 2016 cropping season continues to show excellent prospects with significant moisture levels across much of the grainbelt of Western Australia. Having such widespread high soil moisture levels across the majority of the grainbelt at this early stage of the season is almost unprecedented.

Rainfall during April was widespread and was at least average to well above average in all regions. However, the timing of rainfall was not equal. The lower Geraldton, Kwinana and Albany port zones received rain in the first half of April while the Esperance zone received rainfall in late April. The northern Geraldton zone continues to be dry.

Early sown crops, canola, lupins and pastures have produced strong early growth. Additionally, repeated and effective pre-seeding weed control has been possible across most of the grainbelt, meaning cereal crops are facing less risk of weed competition during early growth.

All this points to an expectation that the 2016 crop will be, at worst, average for Western Australia. With timely winter rainfall and average spring rainfall, production will be well above average.

The intended mix of the different grains to be sown in WA has changed slightly in the last month as growers push to take advantage of the April rain that occurred in most districts. The general market outlook for cereals (wheat, oats and barley) has softened in the last month and this has also contributed to a small upward swing to canola plantings.

The estimated canola planted area has risen further from the April 2016 GIWA Crop Report while the estimated area to be planted to oats and barley has been reduced slightly to account for the increased canola area.

Apart from the lower Albany zone, canola and lupin sowings have largely been completed. Wheat sowing is now in full swing, particularly in medium to low rainfall districts. While Mace wheat will continue to have the largest share of the wheat area, a range of other long season varieties more suited to early sowing are being planted to minimise the risk of frost in spring. This is particularly so in the Kwinana east zone, and in the north eastern districts of the Albany zone.

Growers are also moving to start post emergent weed control programs in early sown crops. For very early sown canola, the first post emergent program has already been completed.

Pest issues to date have been localised and with minimal impact, almost exclusively in canola. Heavy cereal residues in the Esperance region has promoted some soil pests. Slugs in the west Midlands region have been controlled after causing some damage, and Desiantha weevils have been controlled in the Hyden district.

2016 WA Crop Area Estimates (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Field pea	State total
Kwinana	2,363,000	475,000	450,000	149,000	114,000	9,000	3,560,000
Albany	714,000	450,000	315,000	97,000	39,000	6,000	1,621,000
Esperance	490,000	288,000	278,000	6,000	9,000	15,000	1,086,000
Geraldton	885,000	39,000	127,000	8,000	179,000	1,000	1,239,000
Totals	4,452,000	1,252,000	1,170,000	260,000	341,000	31,000	7,506,000
Since April 2016	-0.3%	-1.6%	1.5%	-2.7%	0.6%	0.0%	-0.3%
*Since Aug 2015	-1.6%	0	2.4%	10.2%	8.3%	34.8%	0.2%;

*Comparison - percentage of figures compared to 2015 Final Estimate (Aug 2015)

Kwinana Zone

The Midlands

'Best start to the season in living memory' is the general sentiment in the Midlands region. Since January, rainfall has totalled 160 mm in coastal districts to 260 mm in Wubin, most of which fell in the last two months.

Consequently all paddocks have high soil moisture levels and have received a double knockdown regime ahead of seeding.

Canola sowing has finished this week, with 90 per cent germinated before the end of April. There has been some slug damage in western districts.

Lupin seeding is mostly complete with planted area up by around 10 per cent.

Seeding has proceeded at a steady pace with growers taking the opportunity to spread planting timing to spread risk and take a breather. This week will see barley sowing commence followed by wheat to complete the program.

Deep ripping of soils has increased more than was planned during March and April. These paddocks will be later sown to allow the soil to settle and enhance establishment.

Soils in north east districts, eg. Wubin and Dalwallinu, were very wet during April, but the dry weather forecast in early May will enable these to be sown with confidence shortly.

Kwinana east

Wheat sowing is currently in full swing across the eastern Kwinana zone. There are high soil moisture levels with good prospects for the season.

Pre sowing weed control has been very effective with double knock programs being used throughout the region.

Barley and oats have been sown with wheat sowing now the main focus. Canola sowing is complete with the area sown to canola up slightly due to the early start to the season.

Kwinana west

Soil moisture levels in the Kwinana west zone are now adequate after a drier start than occurred in the eastern districts.

Canola sowing is continuing and will be finished this week. In the medium rainfall districts, lupin sowing is complete and oats and some barley have been sown. Wheat sowing is now the focus.

The area sown to canola and lupin is similar in western districts but plantings of canola are higher in eastern districts with less experienced growers expanding their programs. From Kellerberrin east, the area of canola may expand by as much as 20 per cent. This increased area includes paddocks designated for fallow but being cropped instead. The lupin area is up as well, again perhaps by as much as 20 per cent, in southern districts, eg. Kellerberrin to Bruce Rock to Kondinin.

Pasture growth has been excellent with 80 per cent legume content and low levels of doublegee and radish. Pasture manipulation is proceeding, much earlier than usual. Up to 30 per cent of pasture paddocks are now being cropped, mainly to wheat. Some stubble paddocks are being used for feed but efficient harvesting means there is little value in many of them.

The barley and wheat areas will be similar.

Albany Zone

Conditions are still wet in many districts from Kulin to Hyden to Narembeen. East to Holt Rock, valley soils are still very wet but soils with high gravel content and low water holding capacity are now dry.

Canola and lupin sowing is complete across the Lakes region. Canola is at varying growth stages from emergence to 8 leaf, with weed control being conducted ahead of completing the wheat program. Weevils in canola has been an issue and has required control.

Early sown oats and barley are at the 2 to 3 leaf stage. Oats sown for hay are in top class condition.

Many growers will be finishing programs by May 15, with seeding in all districts finished before the end of May.

The range of wheat varieties being sown is more varied this year with the early rain. Yitpi, Trojan, Magenta and Calingiri varieties are being sown. However, Mace is still making up the majority of the area, with spring frost a large risk as a consequence. The overall area sown to wheat is similar to last year.

All paddocks have received a double knockdown regime, with some even three.

The area sown to lupins is up slightly but with some crops now going into less favourable soil types. The early sowing makes this less risky and yield potential is good.

A lot of paddocks are at risk of waterlogging after 230 to 270 mm of rain so far this year, with an average of 200 mm across the region. Pasture growth is excellent resulting in about 5 to 10 per cent of planned pasture paddocks now being cropped. Excellent pasture growth means stocking rates can be higher than normal and some extra cropping area is possible.

Weed control has been the highest priority for growers across the lower Albany zone. Generally, paddocks are very wet and have only been trafficable in the last two weeks of April.

Weed growth has been strong and fast, meaning herbicide rates for effective control have had to be much higher than usual.

The area sown to canola will be slightly higher, replacing barley and oats due to softening markets for these grains. Canola sowing will be finished by mid-week, oats have been sown and some barley is in. Wheat will be sown from mid-May.

Overall, the sowing dates are about a week earlier than planned, despite the opportunity to sow even earlier. The need for effective weed control and poor trafficability are the main reasons for not sowing even earlier.

Esperance Zone

April rainfall across the zone has been light resulting in crusty and dry top soil, slowing early sowing activity. However, there is plenty of subsoil moisture and the zone is on track for a good season.

In the last week, 10 to 20 mm of rain has enabled sowing to once again hit full speed. Rainfall seems to have been slightly higher in the Mallee districts and less along the coast, which is good for both areas - Mallee because of the lower soil moisture status prior to these rains, and for the coastal areas to reduce the risk of prolonged waterlogging.

Overall, crops in the Mallee districts are in excellent condition. West of Esperance soils are very wet and at risk of waterlogging, as seen in 2014. East of Esperance soils are now wet and in good condition after receiving low rainfall in March and April.

Canola planting is finished and growing well. There have been some issues with sowing into heavy stubble residues, especially barley stubbles, after exceptional yields in 2015. As a consequence, insects are causing damage to canola and require control.

Cereal sowing is now the main activity.

The early rains and opportunity for a double knockdown, with a delay to seeding, is showing up patches of possibly resistant ryegrass in increasing quantities.

Geraldton Zone

Cropping programs in the southern districts of the Geraldton zone are about 70 per cent complete, but by comparison northern growers have barely started.

Districts north of the Geraldton/Mullewa road remain very dry. Dry seeding is well underway but growers are cautious at this stage with no rain forecast for the first half of May.

Inland in the Eradu, Yuna and Mullewa districts, canola and lupins have been largely dropped from the seeding program. In western districts, Ogilvie and Northampton, sowing of canola and lupins has been completed. Wheat will be dry sown from here on.

Overall, there is no subsoil moisture and the majority of seeding programs will revert to a more normal wheat/fallow rotation leaving out canola and lupins.

The Carnamah/Three Springs/Latham/Wubin/Dalwallinu/Watheroo districts are completely different. They are generally very wet with Latham growers already having 270 mm of rain, compared to 200 mm for the whole of 2015. Pasture growth is excellent and some growers are looking for more stock. Late March to early April sown canola is growing strongly with flowering expected by the end of May in inland districts. Lupins are at the 10 leaf stage.

In the traditional lupin growing districts of Walkaway to Dongara, the lupin area is up due to higher expected yields and profitability, especially with the early start to the season. Lupin establishment in the Badgingarra to Dongara area on non-wetting sands is excellent. Warm soils and moisture have enabled much better establishment rates than if there had been a cooler start.

In the Carnamah to Latham and Dalwallinu districts there is a rise in canola area, perhaps 20 per cent, with the majority being TT canola.

Low rainfall growers will be finished seeding by mid-May, especially where the frost risk is negligible. Where the frost risk is high, growers are proceeding at a somewhat leisurely pace to spread their risk.

Season Outlook

Dr David Stephens



Australian Grains Export Innovation Centre

The seasonal outlook for the 6 months to October is for an average to above average season. AEGIC's ENSO Sequence System is predicting a high chance of a strong El Niño transitioning into neutral conditions for the rest of the year, though the odds of a La Niña have increased from a month ago. Historical data analysis shows that there is a high chance WA experiences a good season in a neutral year after an El Niño year.

Current conditions influencing our weather include:

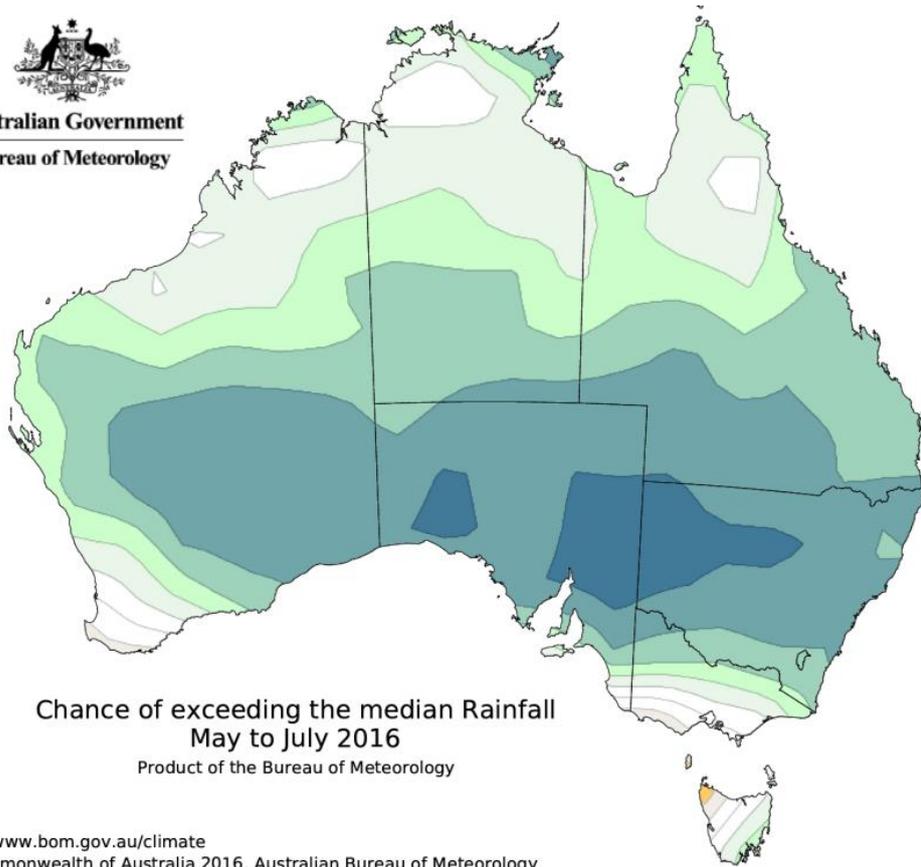
- Warm water in the central equatorial Indian Ocean and north of Australia which is producing moisture for the still-active upper level air stream.
- Strong high pressure systems to the south west of WA.
- Warm water in the Indian Ocean west of Perth (which works against a wet winter).
- The current pattern of high pressure systems around Antarctica, and principally to the south and south-west of Australia, will restrict the potential for a typical winter cold front to develop during the first half of May. As the El Niño continues to break down the see-saw in pressure between Australia and the Pacific should gradually tip over, so the transition from stronger to lower pressure is gradually occurring in the Australian region. Northerly rain systems look to offer the best prospects for rains in the short term. Rainfall is expected to improve further into winter/spring as the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) tips over from negative to neutral or positive values. Good rainfall prospects are likely in much of eastern Australia.

The soil moisture maps on the following pages shows very high levels of soil moisture across most of the WA grainbelt and one of the best starts to the season in the last decade. Waterlogging potential exists in the wetter south-west if a wet June develops, though early sowing will mitigate this problem.

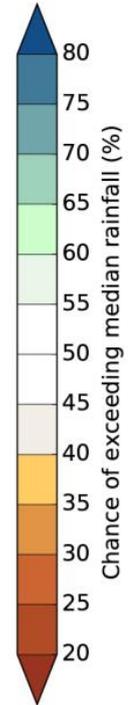
Bureau of Meteorology

Rainfall outlook

- May looks to have equal chances of above or below average rainfall across Australia.
- Good rainfall prospects are likely in much of the grain growing areas of Australia for May to July.
- The current outlook reflects a combination of a rapidly weakening El Niño, very warm Indian Ocean temperatures and warm sea surface temperatures around much of the Australian coast.
- Historical outlook accuracy for May to July is moderate over most of eastern Australia and WA, but is lower in patches across the central south, and the tropical north. See the map for more detail.



Chance of exceeding the median Rainfall
May to July 2016
Product of the Bureau of Meteorology



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Base Period: 1981-2010



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