

The 2019 Season – Dust settles with general rain across the WA grainbelt

The dust has finally settled from a long dry summer and autumn. With general rains across the grainbelt of Western Australia over the last few days and more anticipated to fall in areas that have received the lighter totals, crops are finally up and away. The long awaited break to the season has arrived.

The recent rain was not predicted until the last few days in May and at that stage it was looking like a mid-June break at best. Whilst later than many would have liked, the rain over the last three days has still been a welcome change.

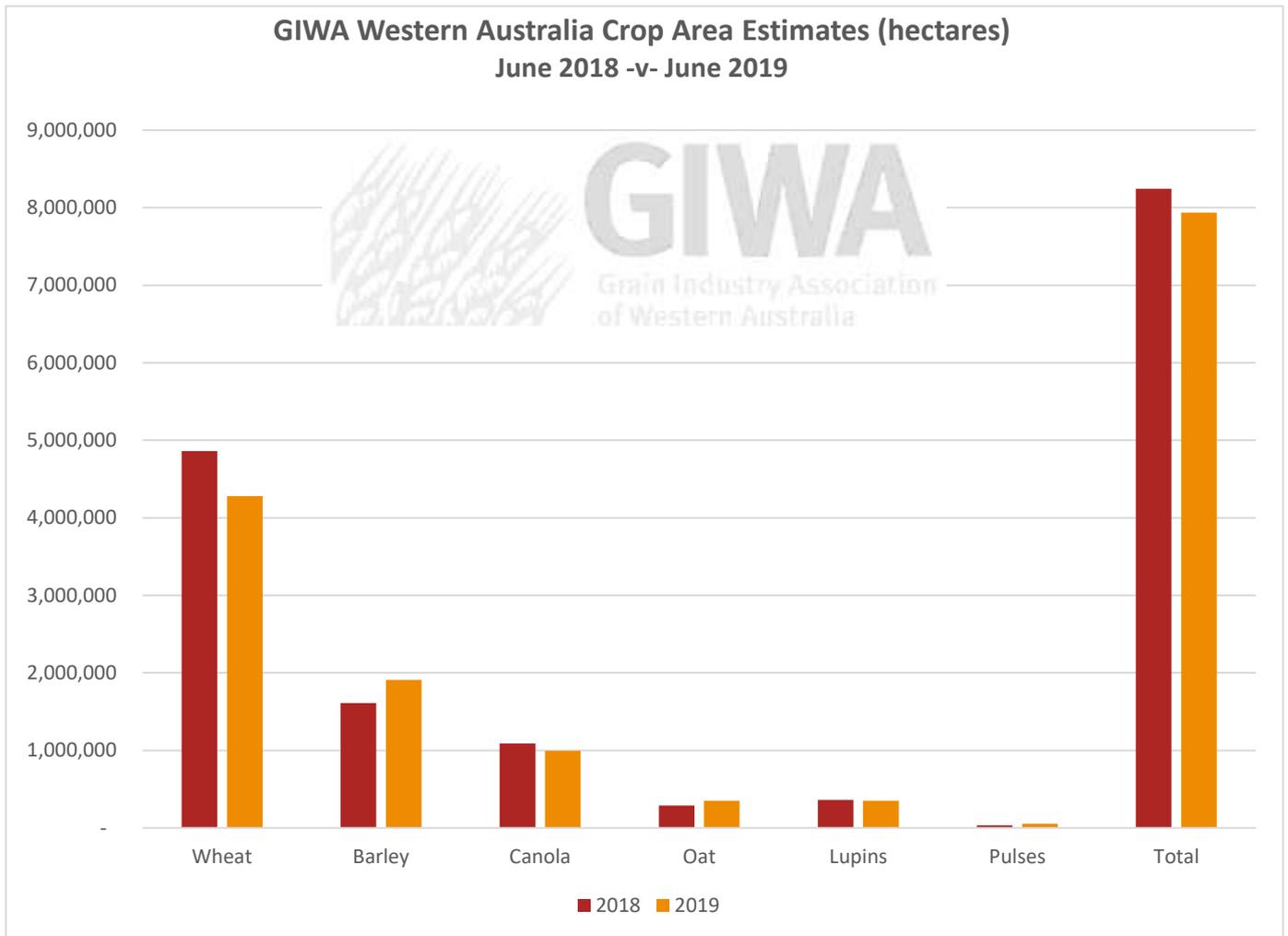
The chance for average grain yields across the medium and lower rainfall regions has diminished in the last month as opening rains have only been received by most growers in the last few days. The later than ideal start to the growing season for most and lack of sub-soil moisture means that winter and spring are going to need to be better than normal to return average grain yields.

Many crops in the southern half of the state had germinated from the light mid-May rainfall and were sitting just under the soil surface when the rain arrived on the weekend. These crops will have the jump on those germinating now although with some reduced vigour. Most crops in the north of the state have had no rain whatsoever until now and the transition zone between north and south has seen many crops that did germinate earlier fail, needing to be re-sown or left with low plant density.

The crop area mix has changed little in the last month. The trend to increasing barley has eventuated in most areas except the north, canola and lupin area is down, oats for hay are up in traditional hay areas and pasture/fallow area is up. The wheat area has continued to be substituted by barley and due to the late start, country has been left out that was initially to be sown to wheat. Wheat area is likely to be historically low at less than 52 per cent of the total crop area in 2019. This will also be the largest area of barley planted for the state on record. The subtle shift to pasture from the late break, and the increasing profitability of sheep has seen the total predicted area of crop drop to below 8m hectares for the first time in many years.

GIWA Western Australia Crop Area Estimates June 2019 (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oat	Lupins	Pulses	State total
Kwinana	2,300,000	770,000	400,000	170,000	120,000	6,000	3,766,000
Albany	520,000	640,000	210,000	160,000	40,000	8,000	1,578,000
Esperance	500,000	380,000	165,000	10,000	10,000	35,000	1,100,000
Geraldton	960,000	120,000	220,000	10,000	180,000	4,000	1,494,000
Totals	4,280,000	1,910,000	995,000	350,000	350,000	53,000	7,938,000



Geraldton Zone

The rain over the weekend was a welcome relief from the severe winds on Thursday 6th June. Any country that did not have stubble cover blew, resulting in furrow fill and topsoil shifting in the wind. Most growers had finished or were close to finishing seeding when the rain arrived. There may be some extra paddocks go in now, although as a percentage of the total area it will be small.

Seeding programs had not changed significantly from last month. Up until the recent rains, there had been no rain at all for most of the region and growers were dropping off the last few paddocks in their programs. In the eastern areas some were being left to fallow and to pasture for livestock in the western areas. The area dropped out to pasture or fallow has only been small with estimates around 5 per cent.

The barley area has been reduced in the region as previously reported due to uncertainty in the market and the ability of the crop to finish compared to wheat in a tight finish.

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Kwinana Zone

Kwinana North Midlands

Seeding was pretty well wrapped up for growers in the majority of the zone when the rain arrived and whilst there was a lot of changing around of crop types in paddocks from original plans, the area left out to pasture or fallow is unchanged significantly from last months' projections.

Due to the lack of any rain until now it has resulted in swings away from canola and lupins, more Imi barley sown for weed control and changing of rotations back to barley on barley or wheat on wheat as the risk of cereal volunteers is greater without rain prior to planting. This region is a major malt barley and noodle wheat growing region and the risk of downgrade from cross contamination can be too high.

There is quite a range in area fallowed in the eastern areas with some growers having 60 per cent of the area sown and others 80 to 90 per cent sown. The lack of subsoil moisture has caused major problems for growers in central and eastern areas of the zone down to the northern areas of the West Kwinana zone where the rainfall events of several weeks ago were enough to germinate crops, but not enough to keep them alive until the rain arrived this weekend. Big licks of country have been or may need to be re-sown depending on what will emerge in the next few days. It is not unusual for parts of paddocks to shoot then die when dry sown. Unfortunately this year the total lack of subsoil moisture combined with just enough rain to germinate crops, followed by a long stint of very warm weather, has been the worst possible scenario. The majority of the grainbelt south of these areas has not been affected to such an extent, because the rain that germinated crops several weeks ago was just enough to keep them alive under the soil until opening rains arrived last weekend.

There has been an increase in oaten hay planted by the traditional hay growers closer to the coast.

Kwinana West

Most growers had finished seeding or were close to finishing seeding when the rain arrived on the weekend. Crops sown dry on the light country were partly emerged or just sitting under the surface following rain in early and mid-May. The heavier country looked bare although most crops had sprouted and were sitting under the surface and will pop out of the ground very quickly following this rain. Whilst the opening rains this year are 10 days later than last year, crops will only be slightly behind in growth stage by the end of this week.

There are patches of the region where crops are more advanced than others from slightly more rain over the last six weeks although for the most part crops were not really growing until this rain arrived. Most of the zone has now had up to 30mm and crops will really take off until soil temperatures drop over the next few weeks.

There has been a 10 per cent increase in barley plantings in the Kwinana zones and most of this increase has been in the western areas of the region.

There has been a slight shift to pasture for growers that have livestock as the dry conditions continued with estimates of 5 to 10 per cent reduction in crop area for these growers.

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Kwinana North-East

The recent rainfall to date drops off as you go east and these regions will need substantially more rain to reach average potential yield with such a late start. Many crops had germinated and were sitting under the soil as was the case for most areas south of here. These regions had more rain earlier than further north and south resulting in less area left out to fallow or pasture than you would expect from a late break.

Growers had not significantly changed their programs from last month with most continuing to dry seed at a slower pace than normal with most finished or close to finishing when it rained. Much of the heavier pasture paddocks were just too tight to get into up until now and some of these paddocks may go into wheat now that it has rained.

The area of canola and lupins has dropped as much as 20 to 30 per cent in area from last year as previously reported due to the late break to the season.

Albany Zone

Albany West

The majority of growers had finished or were close to finishing seeding by the weekend with most crops either emerged or close to emerging. Canola is generally a bit patchy although most cereals have or will emerge evenly.

Some areas in the west of the zone have had little rain and as you move east the total amount of rain up until now was lower and more uneven across the district. As you move north and east in the district the rainfall has been less and there has been more of a substitution from canola to barley.

There has been a slight increase in barley plantings, less wheat, slightly less canola, and a small increase in grain legumes in the district. The oat hay area in the traditional hay growing regions in the west has increased. The milling oat area has not changed substantially from last year as the higher prices offered came too late for growers to change their programs.

The predicted lower than average rainfall and resulting lack of waterlogging for winter in the zone could again result in a lot of grain grown in the region.

Albany South

The majority of the region is in good shape with 90 per cent of the canola up and some of the earlier sown canola crops approaching budding. Most cereals are sown and either up or emerging. Most of the cereals are also in good shape with 95% sown to date and 80-90% of those emerged.

Previous rainfall events were less in the northern and eastern areas of the zone. These crops are behind, although the rain over the weekend will get these up and they should be able to put some growth on until it cools down over the next few weeks.

Some cereal paddocks have been dropped off to pasture as the break to the season pushed later.

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Albany East (Lakes Region)

Most of the zone had between 8 to 12mm of rain in mid-May and crops sown dry at that point emerged or sprouted and were sitting under the soil surface. Up to 20 per cent of intended crop paddocks on some farms were unsown prior to the weekend's rain as much of the heavy country was too tight to sow. Now it has rained, some of this country may go into cereal with the remainder left out to pasture for stock feed.

There has been a lot of handfeeding of livestock and for those growers with stock more paddocks are being left out to pasture than normal.

The recent rain dropped off quickly as you moved east as forecast and these areas will need more rain to soak the country and get crops away.

Large areas of the expanding oat hay area in the region have not been planted due to the lateness of the season. As previously reported, the canola area is down 40 to 50 per cent from last year.

Esperance Zone

To date the recent rainfall across the state has been lighter in the Esperance region. Weather fronts still to come through are predicted to drop more rain in these eastern areas in the next few days.

Rainfall events of between 5 to 30mm for most of the zone in the last few weeks have seen crops either germinate and sit under the surface, or emerge. The gradient of rainfall from the coast to the north was quite steep and most areas in the dryer northern areas have had no useful rainfall until the last few days.

The western areas of the zone have also missed out on the storms in May and more recent rainfall events, although around 50 per cent of crops have managed to emerge.

Due to the tough start, canola crops have been slow to emerge and have had some insect issues, although due to the very dry summer green peach aphid has not been as active as last year.

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Season Outlook, June 2019

Ian Foster, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

DPIRD climate summary

Most of WA grainbelt and eastern south coast has received below normal rainfall for the past six months. Rain for May was well below average for most of the agricultural area and South West. Accordingly, soil moisture storage at the start of June is very low over much of the grainbelt.

DPIRD's Statistical Seasonal Forecast for June to August (Figure 1) shows a below normal rainfall outlook for much of the South West, Great Southern, and central and eastern grainbelt regions. Over three quarters of available dynamical climate models also have a preference towards drier than normal conditions in this period, with the remainder having a neutral rainfall outlook. The Bureau of Meteorology's rainfall outlook (Figure 2) is mostly neutral for southern WA.

Overall, the season still appears to be more likely drier than normal rather than wetter. However, rainfall predicted over 6th to 11th June is likely to be a good start to the growing season in many areas and offers the opportunity to build soil water storage.

Looking further ahead, most climate models are indicating drier and warmer conditions are more likely for September and October. Normally projections at such a lead time would have lower predictive skill but this year most models are expecting a positive Indian Ocean Dipole event to develop. Coupled with predicted higher than normal sea level pressures over southern Australia, this tends to suppress seasonal rainfall over much of Australia.

Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook summary

- The winter climate outlook, issued 30 May 2019, suggests a drier than average winter is likely for much of eastern and parts of southern Australia.
- Daytime temperatures during winter are very likely to be warmer than average.
- With more cloud-free days and nights expected, there is an increased risk of frost in susceptible areas.
- Climate influences include the expected development of a positive Indian Ocean Dipole and a weakening of El Niño-like patterns in the tropical Pacific.

Additional information can be sourced from:

[DPIRD: Seasonal Climate Information](#)

[DPIRD: Soil Water Tool](#)

[BoM: Seasonal Rainfall Outlook, next 3 months](#)

[BoM: Decile rainfall for December 2018 to May 2019](#)

[BoM: Landscape soil water balance](#)

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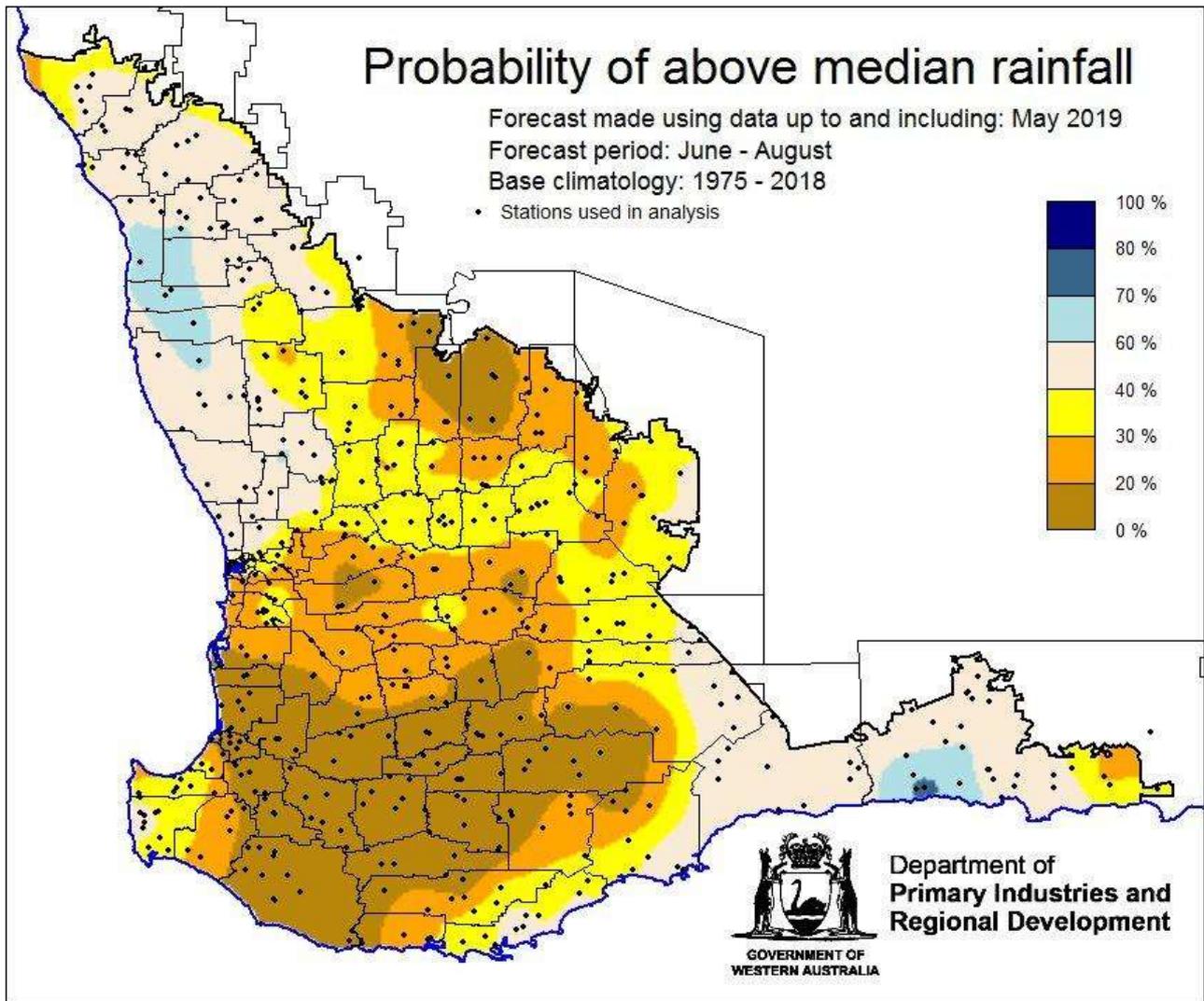


Figure 1. Seasonal probability of exceeding median rainfall for June to August 2019, based on global patterns of sea surface temperature and sea level pressure in May. Source: DPIRD.

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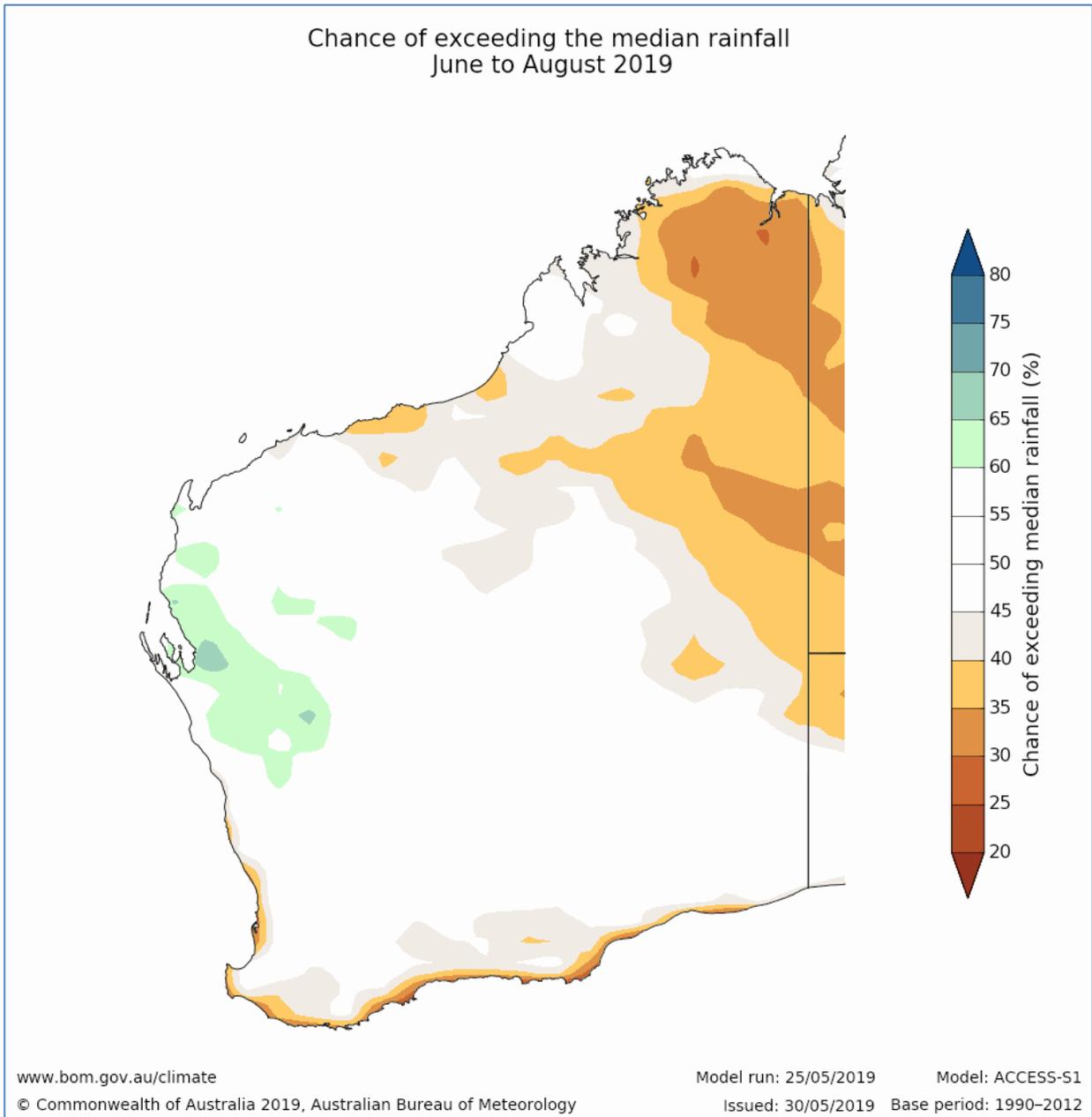


Figure 2. Seasonal rainfall outlook for June to August. Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

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