



# GIWA

Grain Industry Association  
of Western Australia

# Crop Report

17<sup>th</sup> April, 2015

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## Summary

The GIWA April Crop Report looks at the potential changes in the mix of grain commodities in planned cropping programs for the Western Australia grainbelt for 2015.

The 2015 season has commenced in the Geraldton, Kwinana east and Esperance port zones. Recent rainfall in these zones has been substantial and widespread. For some, this is on top of above average summer rainfall. Subsoil moisture status is very good in the northern and eastern portions of the Geraldton Port zone. Soil moisture status in the Kwinana zone is similar but less consistent with most of the summer rain falling in the eastern districts. Subsoil moisture is critical to the success of very early sown crops facing the risk of dry and very warm weather prior to the true break to the season.

### Wheat

The area sown to wheat across Western Australia may decline marginally in 2015, in the region of 2 to 3%. This is due to a range of factors including the relative profitability of lupins and oats, and the early sowing opportunity provided by the recent rainfall in April and late March in the northern and eastern regions. Canola and lupins are favoured more by early sowing opportunities because their growth pattern is less at risk of abnormal development than cereals.

Mace will continue to be the dominant wheat variety sown in all port zones. Calingiri is likely to be sown on a smaller area due to the widespread adaptability of Mace and the release of improved Noodle grade varieties. Given average yields, the quantity of Noodle quality wheat produced should be adequate for market demand.

### Barley

Barley production is expected to be similar to previous seasons. The mix of varieties sown continues to change. Plantings of Hindmarsh and Baudin will decline. Plantings of Bass and La Trobe varieties will increase, particularly in the Esperance and Mid-West regions. In the Albany zone, the relative area of barley to wheat is expected to increase, balancing any falls in area in the rest of the grainbelt.

### Canola

The area sown to Canola is expected to decline by around 10% in 2015. This decline can be seen as a 'correction' to a more sustainable area after the rapid rise in planted area over the last 6 years. Tight rotations of canola with cereals on the west coast and south coast have resulted in sclerotinia and Root Lesion Nematodes (RLN) becoming significant threats to yield. The profitability of canola has also declined as global prices have declined in the last 12 months. This decline will be off-set to some degree by the early sowing opportunity provided in the Kwinana east zone and south-eastern districts of the Geraldton zone where some paddocks planned for wheat may now go to canola.

The relative areas of Roundup Ready (RR) varieties and Triazine Tolerant (TT) varieties will continue to change. In the Geraldton zone the proportion of RR and Roundup/Triazine (RT) canola will rise, while in the other zones, the proportion of TT canola will rise. This is due to the rise of herbicide resistance in the north making RR canola more viable, and the reduced input costs using TT canola with equivalent yields in the other zones.

### **Lupins**

The profitability of lupin production has been gaining strength in the last 3 seasons. On the most favourable soil types along the west coast and Great southern, the area sown to lupin should rise by at least 10% in 2015, albeit from a small base. The relative profitability of lupins to wheat and canola is the major factor driving this expected increase in plantings, along with recent stable and competitive yields and lower input costs compared to canola. The rise of Root Lesion Nematodes under a tight canola rotation, which lupins will tolerate, is also a contributing factor.

The area planted to Albus lupin is also expected to rise significantly. Confidence in the yield from the new variety Amira and strong market support is expected to see the planted area double to around 10,000 hectares. All of this increase in planted area is likely to come from the Geraldton zone.

### **Oats**

The strong and growing market demand for oats over the last 6 months is expected to result in a rise in the area sown to oats in the southern Albany zone. This rise could be as high as 8 to 10% with most of the area substituted out of wheat production. Most of the interest is in the newer varieties Williams and Bannister for food grain production. While growers in other zones are weighing up oats as a viable and profitable alternative, it is unlikely there will be a significant change in the other crop zones.

### **Field pea**

There is not expected to be any change to the area sown to field peas in WA this season, with a small chance that the area may decline further. This is despite the strong market support seen since harvest last year. The inherent slowness of harvesting field pea and the risk of Blackspot disease are cited as the primary reasons for not increasing plantings.

### **Kwinana Zone**

In Kwinana West zone, rainfall for April was widespread in the Warradarge to Wubin districts with totals around 20 mm after 80 to 150 mm of summer rain. The districts east of Miling to Pithara received less than 80 mm of summer rain. All districts have good subsoil moisture and growers have conducted 2 to 3 summer weed sprays.

Winter weeds are now germinating.

Some crop sowing commenced last week (April 6), mainly for sheep feed and trials. Districts which received at least 40mm in the last 4 weeks have started planting canola and lupins. About 50% of growers in the central wheatbelt are planting canola and lupins, while 50% of growers are not planting now and are preparing paddocks and spraying winter weeds.

The forecast is for dry conditions for the rest of April. Most growers seem keen to establish a sizeable portion of their cropping program while soil moisture conditions are conducive to germination ahead of further rain.

### **Albany Zone**

Rainfall varies across the Lakes region with very patchy falls of 30mm to 120mm since January, and most of this falling in March. Districts west of Lake Grace (Kukerin to Tarin Rock) which received very heavy rain in November have good deep soil moisture levels. Winter weeds are now germinating enabling very good conditions for weed control prior to sowing.

Volunteer cereals, mainly barley, are showing up and the recent rain is enabling early weed control for paddocks rotating to wheat.

There is strong interest in oat grain production in the Williams to Narrogin, and Katanning to Kojonup districts with Williams and Bannister the favoured varieties.

In the southern districts of the Albany zone, the recent rainfall events means pastures are green, with lots of volunteer cereals (particularly barley) and canola that will need control prior to seeding.

Canola sowing will start on or around ANZAC day. Soil moisture is good to 10 to 15 cm. A dry band then exists down to deeper moisture from the rainfall events during harvest. Another good rainfall event is needed to join the two.

### **Esperance Zone**

Harvest rain was significant in the Esperance zone with 80 mm of rain in October and, 30mm in December. April rain has seen 20 mm at Ravensthorpe, 40 mm at Cascades, 60 mm at Grass Patch, 40 mm at Wittenoom Hills and 35 mm at Condingup. Most districts have good soil moisture enabling an early start to planting programs with vetch and beans being planted first. However, there is a big task in getting on top of weed control prior to seeding.

There is not expected to be any significant changes to the mix of crops in the Esperance zone after a number of above average yielding seasons. The majority of canola plantings will be to TT and less RR varieties. Benito, Stingray and Wahoo are the favoured varieties. For barley, the La Trobe variety is performing well and replacing Hindmarsh. The wheat area will be just about be all Mace.

### **Geraldton Zone**

Isolated storms over summer and rain in March from the remnants of Cyclone Olwyn have provided very good levels of soil moisture from Ajana in the north to Geraldton and east to Mullewa and south to Morawa.

In these districts, the recent seasons have been dry and yields have been disappointing. The current conditions are conducive to at least average yields in 2015. The early sowing opportunity means canola will be planted with 25% of the program already planted to date. It is likely that the majority of the cropping programs will be wheat and principally Mace.

There is likely to be less fallow planned with the optimism that the current conditions provide.

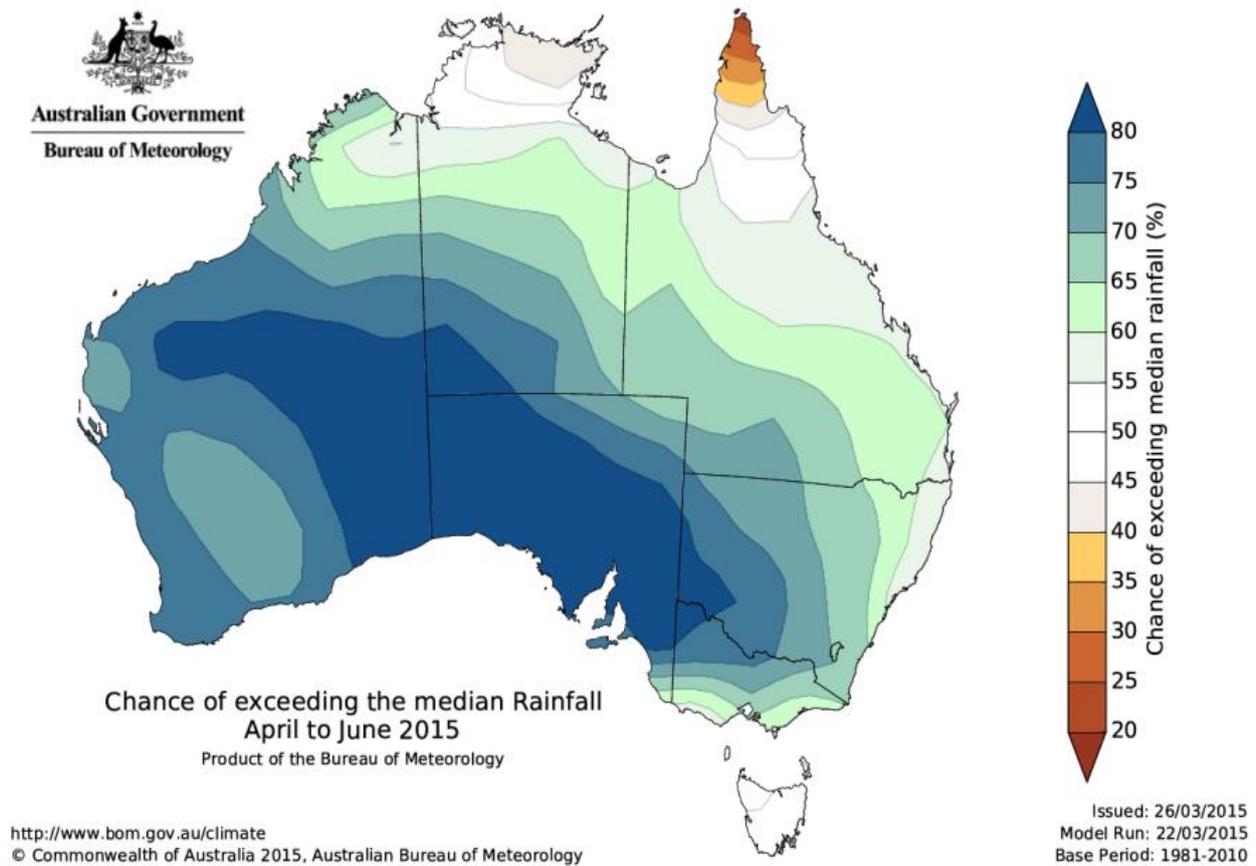
Rainfall during April has been lighter in the west coastal and southern parts of the zone with rainfall totals of 25 to 50 mm common. Some early sowing will occur with canola, lupins being planted.

The early April rain also provides a good opportunity to control weeds prior to sowing. Typically, 30% of crops in the Geraldton zone are dry sown with reliance on rotation and herbicides for weed control. Controlling weeds prior to sowing will provide a reduced production risk and input costs for the 2015 season.

The mix of crops planned to be sown shows a rise in the lupin area, including Albus lupin, a decline in canola (with a greater proportion of RR over TT), and a slightly higher area to wheat. The area sown to barley should be similar to 2014.

**Weather Ahead – Outlook February to April 2015, Courtesy BoM**

- February to April is more likely to be drier than normal over most of WA and across large parts of the eastern mainland States (to the west of the divide).
- For the month of February, most of Australia has a moderate to strong chance of a drier than normal month. This signal persists across much of the country in March.
- February to April shows an increased chance of warmer than normal days over WA, parts of SA, and much of Queensland and NSW.
- Night-time temperatures for the three months are more likely to be warmer than normal over most of WA, western SA, and areas of both Queensland and NSW. Cooler than normal nights are favoured in an area to the south of the Top End of the NT.
- Climate influences include some residual warmth in the tropical Pacific Ocean, and a warm central Indian Ocean



**Additional information can be sourced from:**

- [AEGIC: Yield and Seasonal Forecasting](#)
- [AEGIC: ENSO Summary March 2015](#)
- [DAFWA: Statistical Seasonal forecast](#)
- [BoM: WA Seasonal Rainfall Outlook, next 3 months](#)
- [BoM: Month to date rainfall for WA](#)
- [16 day rainfall outlook \(WX maps\)](#)
- [BoM: Decile rainfall for January to March 2015](#)