

CROP REPORT

PO Box 1081, BENTLEY DC, WA 6983

P +61 8 6262 2128

E info@giwa.org.au

@GrainIndustryWA

www.giwa.org.au



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The 2020 Season – Winds and Patchy Rainfall Start the WA Grain Growing Season

Crops are up and growing in the majority of the Western Australian grainbelt. The start to the growing season has been patchy across the state and rainfall to date has been light or intermittent in the central, northern and south coastal regions. The grain yield potential at the moment in these areas is below average due to the lack of sub-soil moisture, the late timing of the break and the below average rainfall for the last three months.

Some of the eastern regions, the Lakes district, western areas of the Esperance zone and the western areas and central western regions of the Albany zone, have received enough rainfall for reasonable crop establishment, and grain yield potential at this stage of the season is at least average.

The majority of the grainbelt has not received a good soaking rain and the seasonal climatic outlook for winter has backed off from above average rainfall to neutral rainfall outlook at best, due to the strength and proximity of high pressure systems blocking the rain bearing frontal activity that usually occurs in winter.

The sown crop area across Western Australia is up from 2019 due to summer rain in some regions and a positive seasonal outlook in March / April giving growers confidence to plant more area. Due to attractive sheep meat prices, pressure on available water and pasture for stock, the recent reduction in livestock numbers has seen a slight substitution of pasture to crop across large areas of the grainbelt.

With the impact of the China barley tariffs, due to new season price projections the reduction in barley plantings has been substantial, particularly in the traditional malt growing regions. The reduction in planned percentage of barley plantings in the central regions has been around 20 per cent. As an agronomic response to the later break in the north of the state, growers have also reduced barley plantings with most substituted for wheat. The reduction in barley plantings in the southern regions of the state is less, closer to 5 per cent, substituted for wheat and oats as gross margins for feed barley are still a good option at current prices.

Compared with 2019, the oat area is up significantly, in part due to the dedicated hay growers continuing to plant more area for export fodder, and in part due to the substitution of food oats from barley that occurred in the last couple of weeks in May.

The actual canola area in the ground has reduced slightly from a month ago due to some wind damaged paddocks being re-sown to cereal following the strong wind events. The lupin area has been reduced to a much greater extent as many traditional lupin growers in the north of the state were holding off planting hoping for a decent rain in May rather than sowing dry. In the end, many paddocks intended for lupins did not get planted.

GIWA June 2020 Crop Area Estimates (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Pulses	State total
Kwinana	2,600,000	550,000	480,000	300,000	120,000	10,000	4,060,000
Albany	480,000	710,000	270,000	210,000	40,000	10,000	1,720,000
Esperance	490,000	340,000	210,000	10,000	10,000	45,000	1,105,000
Geraldton	1,320,000	30,000	140,000	10,000	100,000	4,000	1,604,000
Totals	4,890,000	1,630,000	1,100,000	530,000	270,000	69,000	8,489,000
% change to May 2020	5.4%	-12.4%	-1.98%	29%	-15.6%	2.9%	0.9%

Note: the grain totals reported are for whole farm production. This includes on-farm seed and feed requirements as well as trade outside of the CBH network.

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Geraldton Zone

The destructive extreme winds prior to the frontal rain system that went through two weeks ago on 25th May caused widespread furrow fill which has required many crops to be re-sown. The first round of seeding finished two weeks ago and the second round is winding up now, some growers are also moving in to their third round. The worst affected country was on the ameliorated sandplain. The intensity, duration and primarily north/south direction of the winds was unusual, and even where country was not ameliorated and had retained standing stubble, there was still damage to paddocks along tram lines and the ends of seeder runs.

Decisions around re-sowing crops are very difficult and many younger growers had not experienced a weather event like this before. Even though there are extra costs and a time cost with re-sowing, those that have are commenting that crops are coming through beautifully from being planted into a moist warm seedbed. Substantial labour and associated costs have also been required to repair roads, fences, sheds, gutters, stock water facilities, with growers naturally prioritising the welfare of stock.

Prior to the wind event and the opening rains following it, growers had backed off with lupin and canola plantings due to the lack of sub-soil moisture and the risk it poses with a late break. Many of the intended lupin plantings in the traditional “lupin belt” on the good sandplain in the western areas of the Geraldton zone did not go in and were substituted to wheat. The lupin area in the region is estimated to be down by up to 40 per cent in some areas. Some canola paddocks were re-sown to wheat although as most had not germinated and were not cut off by sandblast, most paddocks have come through with enough plants to make a reasonable crop. The barley area is well down on previous years, more of a planned move by growers as the break to the season became later rather than a market response.

The eastern areas of the zone are looking good as there was less wind blow and the crops have a bit of sub-soil moisture under them.

Kwinana Zone

Kwinana North Midlands

Seeding has finished in the region except for some of the late sown soil ameliorated paddocks that were done after the opening rains. Rainfall in the region has been variable, ranging from 15-35mm received from opening rains two weeks ago. Crops that received around 15mm are patchy and have variable emergence whilst areas that received more rain look fair to good. The coastal and central areas of the zone are behind crops in the eastern areas of the zone where there were some good earlier falls of rain.

Some areas in paddocks have needed re-sowing from the end May wind event, although nowhere near to the extent of further north. Crops have been slow to come through due to furrow fill and lack of rain. Some of the earlier sown crops in the east are up to five leaf and tillering although the majority are less than three leaf. In some places the canola is still coming though and will benefit from the rain we are currently having.

Barley area is down substantially in the region. The region is a large producer of malt barley and this is where the biggest reductions in plantings have occurred. The barley area in the region is estimated to be down by 20 to 30 per cent, largely replaced by wheat and to a lesser extent to oats.

Even though crops have grown very quickly in the last week from the unseasonably warm temperatures, making up ground in growth stages from the later break, most growers in the region are planning for a below average season and are adjusting fertiliser decisions based on a lower production year. Soil nitrogen levels are generally higher than normal and with the revised climate outlook pointing to a lower rainfall year, most growers will hold back on pushing crops along too much unless there is some very good rainfall in the next couple of weeks.

Kwinana South

The region is a tale of two halves with the central and western portions of the zone being later to get a start, and the eastern areas already looking green. The majority of the zone received opening rains two weeks ago and the ground has soaked up the rain like a sponge from being so dry. Crops were initially slow to get up although they have rocketed along from the recent warm temperatures, making up ground to be at growth stages that could result in average yields at the end of the season if the rain keeps coming.

Canola in particular has taken a long time to come through as have some cereal paddocks that received significant furrow fill from the wind event. Most growers in the zone are factoring an average year at best at the moment, whilst those that had crops up earlier in the east are quietly hopeful of an above average year.

There was a 10 to 15 per cent drop of intended barley plantings in the region with more being dropped in the western areas where there is a higher percentage of barley in the rotation and a greater percentage grown for malt. The remainder of the region did not pull back as much on barley plantings as the crop is grown as much for weed control and/or frost mitigation, and generally out-yields wheat by 0.5T to 1T/ha. Some of the substitution out of barley has gone to oats, as it has in other regions of the state, resulting in a significant tick up in oat plantings this year compared with the last few years.

The canola and lupin areas are similar to last year with a slight increase in canola plantings as you move into the eastern areas of the zone due to the earlier break.

Kwinana North East

Crops in the North Eastern Kwinana zone are generally ahead of where they were this time last year. They are further advanced in growth stage and much of the zone has some reserves of sub-soil moisture. In saying this, there are still some growers in the lower rainfall areas of the zone without a break to date.

For some growers there is enough sub-soil moisture to return above average grain yields from an average winter rainfall year.

Albany Zone

Albany West

The West Albany zone is in good shape with most of the crop sown prior to the end of May. Establishment has been good to fair and even though crops have started to “tongue” for water following the warm days in the last week, most are holding up okay.

There were no major changes in crop area from last month’s GIWA May 2020 Crop Report and no major changes to planned programs from earlier in the year.

The soil moisture profile in the region continues to be low and the region is well down on average rainfall for this time of year. Most growers are not worried at this stage of the growing season because the timing of the start they received means the region has plenty of time to produce above average tonnages.

Crops have gone in noticeably earlier this year than previously and whilst crops were a “bit stressed” on the low water holding capacity forest gravels, the rain has arrived just in time. These are the crops that will be more able to handle the waterlogging that invariably occurs in the winter in the region.

Albany South

Crops west of the Albany Highway look good although moving east through the zone, crops become patchier and some are just emerging from the light rainfall two weeks ago.

Canola crops now have below average grain yield potential due to the late start; cereals have slightly below average potential. Due to market developments there was a small “double swing” out of barley that was originally planned to go into canola, which was adjusted due to the late start and ended up being planted to wheat.

The surface water situation for much of the zone is still critical and growers are still turning off stock in big numbers.

Albany East (Lakes Region)

Crops in the region have “got away” well, with the amount and timing of rainfall just enough to keep them moving along. Some of the earlier crops are patchy and there has been some re-sowing of canola, due more to germination issues and running out of moisture rather than furrow fill as has been the case further north. In the main, the early barley and oat crops look very good.

Growers in the region have had a tough few years with below average rainfall and severe frost. While there is still a long way to go, this region has had its best start for last three or four years.

The crop area mix has changed little from last year with a slight increase in canola area from the better start, and a slight drop in barley area being substituted to wheat. The majority of barley was sown in the region when the new season price correction occurred; barley suits the region more than other cereals so the adjustment in planted area was never going to be significant.

Esperance Zone

The bulk of the region has received only patchy rain to date. The crops in the western parts of the zone are in better shape at this stage of the season than they have been for several years. Areas in the far east and right near the coast are looking good. Areas around Salmon Gums look average, and the central areas of the zone look below average.

Crop growth stages vary a lot due to the timing of rainfall events and the amount of rain. There are some very advanced crops and some just coming through, many have staggered emergence. Recent rainfall whilst only light has evened out the crops, with more crop up in the unevenly germinated paddocks to a state where “they will do”.

The lack of surface water for livestock has not changed with the light rainfall events and livestock are still “streaming” out of the region resulting in a slight increase in crop area. Some areas around Cascades in the central western areas are extremely dry.

In the end there was a slight pulling back in barley area from wheat/barley rotation paddocks to wheat/wheat rotation paddocks. The bean area is noticeably up from last year, peas about the same as 2019 and lentil area down from last year.

At this stage, the Esperance zone overall is only looking at an average year at best, although the good start in the western areas of the zone could significantly push the zones’ tonnage up if the season ends up with average rainfall and no significant frost events.



Season Outlook, June 2020

Ian Foster, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

DPIRD climate summary

Autumn rain was generally below average for the cropping regions. The main rain events in May occurred early and late in the month, and totals were patchy away from the South West. These also brought strong winds and soil erosion. South Coastal areas are entering their third winter with low levels of surface and soil water availability.

Modelled soil water storage at the end of the first week of June is highly variable across many cropping areas, with low storage for the far northern region and the South Coast. This reflects patchy rain to date. See Figure 1. Recent conditions have also seen significant soil erosion over paddocks with low surface coverage. Short-term rain outlooks indicated a rain event over 11 and 12 June but overall the month is predicted to be drier than normal for southern WA.

Seasonal rainfall outlooks from the Bureau of Meteorology and other models have a spread of rainfall probabilities for southern WA for July to September. The Bureau's model has a neutral outlook.

Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook summary, issued 4 June 2020

- Winter (June to August) is likely to be wetter than average for northeast SA, western NSW, and scattered parts of southern Queensland. However, coastal southeast SA, southwest Victoria and most of Tasmania are likely to be drier than average.
- The month of June is likely to be drier than average for scattered areas of the south.
- Winter days are very likely to be warmer than average across most of Australia, except southern SA, southwest NSW and western Victoria, which have roughly equal chances of warmer or cooler winter days.
- Winter nights are very likely to be warmer than average almost nationwide.
- To Australia's east, the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean is likely to cool over the winter months, establishing a La Niña-like pattern, while warmer than average waters are likely in the eastern Indian Ocean. In the shorter-term, higher pressure is likely to dominate southern Australia during the first half of June.

Additional information is available from:

[DPIRD: Seasonal Climate Information](#)

[DPIRD: Soil Water Tool](#)

[BoM: Seasonal Rainfall Outlook - weeks, months and seasons.](#)

[BoM: Decile rainfall for February to April 2020](#)

[BoM: Seasonal Outlook video](#)

[BoM: Landscape soil water balance](#)

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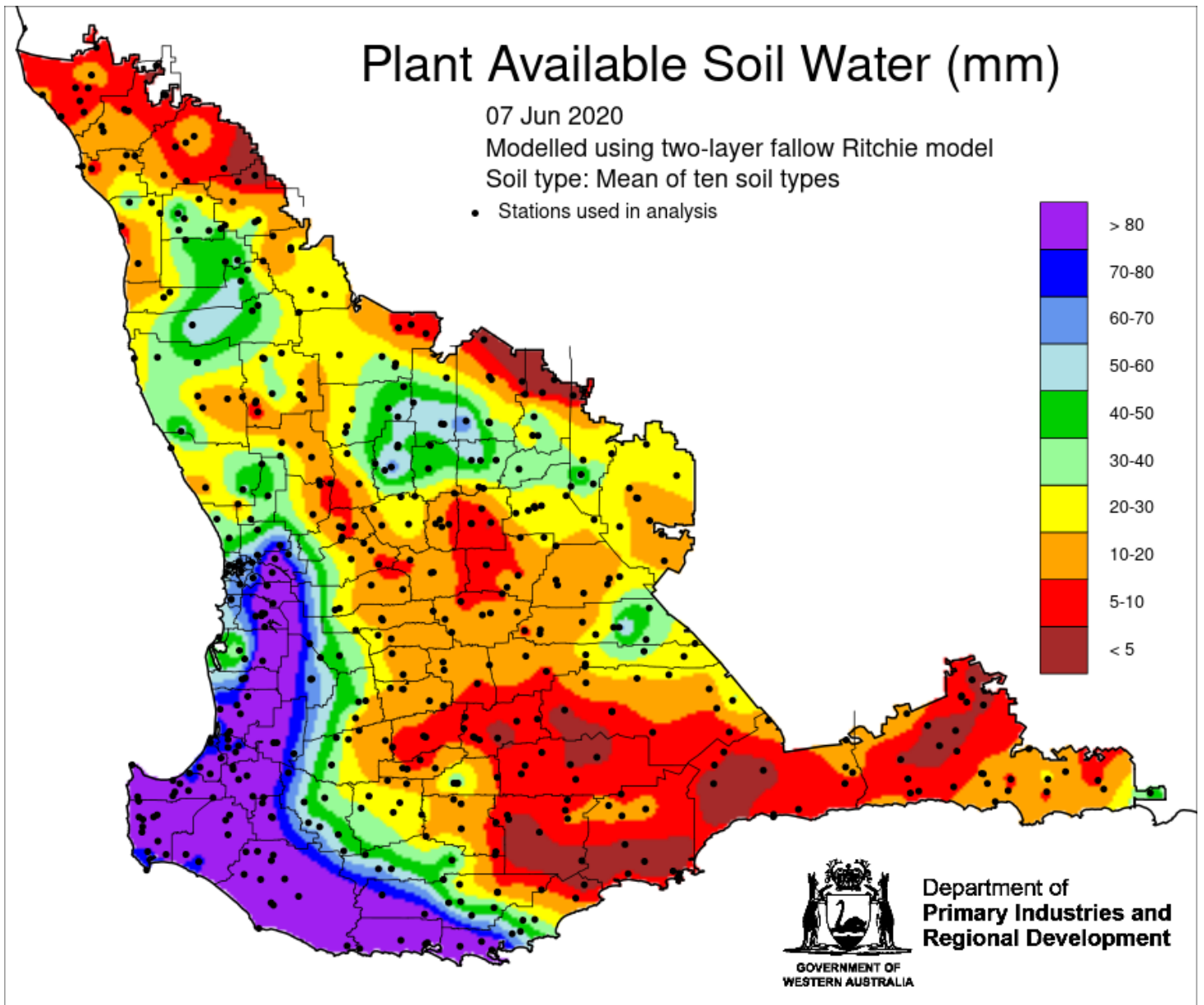


Figure 1. Estimated soil water storage at 7 June 2020 using a fallow water balance model. From Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

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