

CROP REPORT

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The 2020 Season – Scratchy start to the 2020 cropping season in Western Australia

With rainfall this week across parts of the Western Australia grainbelt, the anticipated early start to the 2020 cropping season has been “hit and miss”. Some growers in a line from north of Merredin down to Hyden and Jerramungup have been getting nice falls of rain this week, with others missing out completely. The areas receiving falls of rain have good subsoil moisture and growers will be able to put a reasonable area of cereals in over the next week or so. The areas closer to the west coast that received 6 to 12mm will be enough to get lupins, canola and oats that were sown dry out of the ground, although the cereal area that can be planted into moisture will be patchy reflecting the rainfall.

The north western Geraldton zone missed out on the rain and large sections of the grainbelt away from the eastern regions and further south also received very little rainfall. The central Midlands region from Coorow down to the Kwinana zone to Tammin mostly missed out on rain. The majority of the central and eastern areas of the Esperance port zone also missed out on rain, but unfortunately did not miss out on strong winds.

Around 40 to 50 per cent of the crop has been sown although this varies from region to region. In the north growers have held off somewhat with dry sowing this year, whilst the large wheat growing areas in the east are more than 50 per cent through programs. In the southern regions where there has been more rain, growers are 40 to 50 per cent through their programs and in some cases will be able to complete up to 70 to 100 per cent of the intended plantings into moisture from the recent rain. Large areas of wheat and barley remain to be sown although most will be in the ground in the next two to three weeks.

With only very light rain forecast for the next week to ten days, most growers who had paddocks earmarked for canola will now drop them for cereal. The lupin area is unlikely to increase much from now on as growers away from the coast in the north will switch intended lupin paddocks for wheat. Further south there may still be plantings of lupins although the area will be small.

The medium term forecast for the season is more positive than this time last year, with the chance of rain towards the end of May. If this eventuates, Western Australia could still be on track for at least an average production year.

GIWA May 2020 Crop Area Estimates (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Pulses	State total
Kwinana	2,500,000	700,000	470,000	200,000	120,000	10,000	4,000,000
Albany	460,000	740,000	280,000	190,000	40,000	8,000	1,718,000
Esperance	480,000	360,000	210,000	10,000	10,000	45,000	1,115,000
Geraldton	1,200,000	60,000	160,000	10,000	150,000	4,000	1,584,000
Totals	4,640,000	1,860,000	1,120,000	410,000	320,000	67,000	8,417,000

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.

GIWA gratefully acknowledges the support of DPIRD, CBH, CSIRO and contributions from independent agricultural consultants and agronomists in the production of this report.

Geraldton Zone

Little rain was received in the last week for most of the region except for a narrow strip in the far east and a few patchy storms in the central areas of the zone.

Across the Geraldton zone pockets of rain bands with enough moisture to sow wet are split across farms and paddocks. Growers will chase the wet areas and get as much in on the moisture as they can, then go back to dry sowing for the remainder of their programs.

In the region 40 to 50 per cent of the crop is dominated by wheat plantings. Around half the intended canola plantings have not been sown, this is also the case for the lupin area. The canola and lupin areas could be down as much as 25 per cent from 2019. Depending on rainfall events in the next two weeks, growers may choose to allow intended canola and lupin paddocks to go fallow.

Kwinana Zone

Kwinana North Midlands

Rain has been patchy across the region with the central areas from Moora to Pithara receiving virtually nothing. The western areas of the region also missed out on the recent rain. The majority of strips of rain were not enough to germinate crops and most were only strips of two to five kilometres wide.

There is a shift from barley to wheat across most of the zone as planned earlier in the year. In the West Midlands, barley will still go in for grazing although away from here plantings will be dominated by wheat. Around 50 per cent of the wheat area in the eastern portions of the zone are in the ground. There has been some backing away from dry sowing compared to recent years. This decision has been made to limit the time which country is exposed to winds once dry-sown, as well as limit the time pre-emergent herbicides are left in the ground before the crop germinates. In saying that, most growers only have about 10 days to two weeks of sowing to go before they finish.

There has been very little canola sown in the west of the zone with most growers waiting for rain to plant. Some of the intended canola plantings may be left out although most growers will still plant even if it is late for the rotational benefits. For the rest of the zone the canola area will not change from now on. The majority of lupin plantings are finished.

Kwinana South

Up until the recent rain around 50 per cent of the intended plantings were sown with small areas of canola up from storms a few weeks ago. Most of the canola, lupins and oats are in the ground. In the eastern areas where the percentage of barley in the rotation is less, most growers just have wheat remaining; in the western areas there is still a reasonable amount of barley to go in which will be followed by the wheat.

In the western regions of the zone the accumulated light rainfall events this week have been sufficient for most dry sown crops to emerge. With growers around halfway through programs and with no rain forecast for the next week to ten days, they will aim to get the majority of their programs in dry to make the most of the growing season when the rain arrives.

West of the Meckering line the crop area mix will be similar to last year. In the eastern areas where there was enough rain for the moisture to join up in the profile, some of the break crop area that was going to be dropped for wheat will now go in.

Kwinana North East

There were some very good falls of rain through the zone in the last week and whilst some areas missed out, many received enough to now sow into moisture. Most of the regions that received rain also had sub-soil moisture from summer rains and these growers are now well set up for a good year. The rain went through the centre of the zone with areas east and west missing out.

The drier eastern areas of the zone have more than 50 per cent of their intended crop planted and growers will continue to dry sow until finished. The majority of the crop is wheat with barley making up less than 10 per cent of the plantings. Moving west in the zone, the barley area increases and less wheat is sown.

Albany Zone

Albany West

The majority of the canola in the region was in the ground before the recent rain. Little had emerged prior to the rain although with most of the region west of the Albany Highway receiving good falls, what was in the ground will emerge. The rain will enable growers to continue on barley then move on to sowing wheat over the next two weeks, with intended plantings on track to finish before the end of May.

The timing and amount of rain has been perfect for the region. Growers are now sowing more of the crop dry and starting earlier than a few years ago. The region is set-up well for a good production year. When dry sowing, using soil wetters has helped to facilitate the move to more dry sowing on non-wetting gravelly soils, this has given growers the confidence to sow dry and get the crop up.

The timing of the rain has resulted in the intended slight increase in canola, lupins and barley plantings to occur.

Dam levels are still very low for livestock and a concern for most of the region.

Albany South

Rainfall in the region was mostly in the sub 10mm range and whilst enough to germinate dry sown crops, it will not be enough to sow in to moisture as the lighter soils in the region require more rain to wet down the profile. Sub-soil moisture is either not there or too deep to join up. The break crop area is mostly finished and growers were moving on to barley prior to the rain.

The season so far has an uncanny resemblance to 2018 where the south coast missed out on the rain and was battered by wind for most of the year. It is still early in the season and the region can catch up with a good finish, although the fragile nature of the country and lack of cover together with little stock water are causing challenges.

Albany East (Lakes Region)

Most of the region has had reasonable rain to germinate dry sown crops. Around 40 per cent of the crop was sown prior to the rain and for areas in the region that received 15mm or more, they will now be able to get the majority of their programs in on moisture. The exception is the spread in planting dates, required for frost mitigation which is a normal practice in the region. The good rain will allow growers to sow into some of the heavier country this year, country which for the past couple of years has been too dry to sow.

At this point the Lakes Region is in pretty good shape with early rain and sub-soil moisture. This is a welcome change for growers who have done it tough for the last three years.

The canola area that was planned to go in is mostly sown. The area is up slightly this year compared to where it would have been last year, as the intended sown area was dropped as the start to the 2019 season was pushed back. The result is an estimated 10 per cent increase in canola plantings for the region and a slight increase in lupin plantings as well.

The barley area will be up again this year with an increase from 2019 of between 5-to 10 per cent. The feed barley price has been good for several years now and whilst there is some risk of that coming off this year, the potential profit margin still makes it more attractive than wheat for the region.

Esperance Zone

The region received virtually no rain from the last series of weather fronts except for the more western regions of the zone from Lake King down to Ravensthorpe. Most of the region has moisture at depth although it is too deep to sow in to.

Most growers in the region are 50 to 60 per cent done with about 20 to 30 per cent of the early sown canola, lupins and beans already up from earlier rains.

Most growers are well into sowing cereals, starting with the longer season barley varieties and then moving on to wheat. Some over halfway depending on where in the zone. Growers will now mostly keep going and sow the remainder of their programs dry. Interestingly, there has not been an adjustment in programs by most growers from the severe frost events of 2019. There has also been a noticeable slight shift out of barley due to the uncertainty of new season prices. The region usually has a very stable rotation, although the income shock from the 2019 frosts to growers who have otherwise had a good run over the past few years, has meant that there has been more sensitivity and reaction to price signals than normal for the 2020 program.

The bean area looks to be up this year and there has been a slight increase in canola in the lower rainfall regions, which was substituted for cereal last year.

There are still water problems for growers for stock and spray programs, with little run-off across most of zone.



Season Outlook, May 2020

Ian Foster, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

DPIRD climate summary

Rain for January to April 2020 has been near average for most of the state, although April rain was well below average. Rainfall for the first week of May has been variable across cropping regions. While areas towards the south-west have received good falls, much of the northern region and Esperance area remain quite dry.

Modelled soil water storage at the end of the first week of May is highly variable across many cropping areas, with low storage for the far northern region and the eastern south coast. This reflects warm and dry conditions in April and patchy rain in May to date (See Figure 1). Recent conditions have also seen significant soil erosion over paddocks with low surface coverage. Short-term rain outlooks indicate only light rainfall until mid-May at least.

Seasonal rainfall outlooks from the Bureau of Meteorology and other models have mostly neutral or wetter rainfall probabilities for southern WA for June to August. This outlook is better than the same period in 2019.

Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook summary issued 7 May 2020

- Winter (June to August) is likely to be wetter than average for most of the continent. However, parts of the tropical north which are now into their dry season have roughly equal chances of being wetter or drier than average.
- Winter days are likely to be warmer than average across northern and eastern Australia and cooler than normal over much of southern WA. Winter nights are very likely to be warmer than average nationwide.
- A warmer than average eastern Indian Ocean is currently the main influence on Australia's climate, increasing the moisture available to weather systems as they sweep across the country.

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](#)

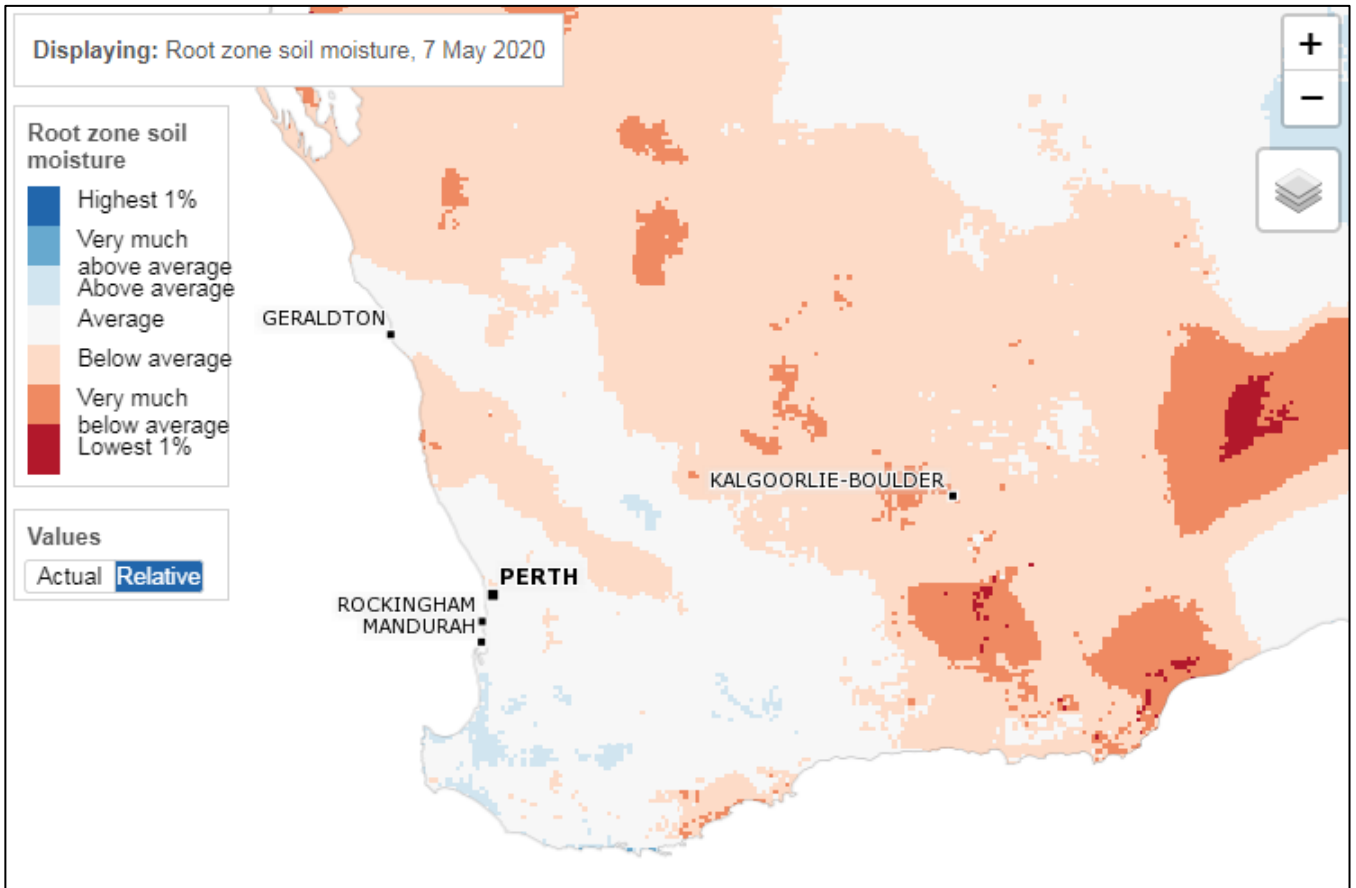


Figure 1. Root zone soil water deciles at 7 May 2020. From Bureau of Meteorology.

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