

# CROP REPORT

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## The 2021 Season – Brilliant start continues for the Western Australian growing season

The rare combination of early season rainfall, above average levels of subsoil moisture across most of the grainbelt and good prices for all grains, particularly canola, is providing the platform for a brilliant start to the growing season in Western Australia.

Total crop area will be up slightly from 2020 which was a record area of crop sown for Western Australia.

There will be a small reduction in barley area from 2020 mostly going to canola. Current barley feed grain prices are holding up well and when coupled with the grain yield premium over wheat in the southern regions, this is driving current plantings. The recent widening spread in price between wheat over barley will not have a significant influence on intended cereal plantings.

The overall canola area planted is a record for Western Australia. This area could still creep up a little as price nudges \$800 per tonne. It is still relatively early and with good subsoil moisture, canola grain yield potential is above average. At current prices, one tonne of canola is equal to 3 tonnes of barley and 2.5 tonnes of wheat.

There have been record sales of Roundup Ready (RR) and Hybrid TT canola in Western Australia. The switch to hybrids in the last two years has been significant and whilst seed supply has again been tight, the increase in plantings has been made possible with a run-down in old stock and OP TT farmer retained seed.

The increase in canola has come at the expense of lupins and pulses, and to a lesser extent, wheat and barley. The oat grain area is going to be up slightly, particularly in the eastern regions, whilst the oat hay area is more than 50 per cent down due to the ongoing uncertainty of demand. Much of the oat hay area has gone to canola.

Dams are filling and there is plenty of feed for livestock, so there is optimism all-round. Some paddocks in the south are already a bit wet to get across, which is a problem we have not had for a while.

### 2021 Season GIWA May WA Crop Area Estimates (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Pulses	State total
Kwinana	2,700,000	490,000	630,000	220,000	80,000	10,000	4,130,000
Albany	440,000	680,000	360,000	150,000	40,000	10,000	1,680,000
Esperance	485,000	320,000	282,000	10,000	35,000	25,000	1,157,000
Geraldton	1,290,000	40,000	220,000	10,000	80,000	3,000	1,643,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,915,000</b>	<b>1,530,000</b>	<b>1,492,000</b>	<b>390,000</b>	<b>235,000</b>	<b>48,000</b>	<b>8,610,000</b>

*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

Northern regions are experiencing their first wet seeding in a few years.

Despite much infrastructure damage from the cyclone, many went ahead with seeding even with missing sheds and power. The beginning of the season is looking promising, despite the cyclonic weather havoc as well as some hot days creating soil moisture losses. Most have had 120 to 180 mm of rain over several events during the summer.

It is expected that all crops will be in the ground in the next few weeks.

This is the largest canola season ever seen, up by 20 to 50 per cent. Forty per cent was in the ground by the end of April, with most of it now in, especially in the North Midlands. There has been a backing off with lupin plantings this year, as ryegrass resistance, other weed control issues and grain prices have pushed more area into canola. Barley area has also dropped back from 2020.

Most paddocks have had two knockdowns, and there are now plenty of winter weeds coming up. It is the first time in a few years that growers have been able to take these out with glyphosate rather than pre-emergent herbicides. Locusts could be an issue in the east, and later in season it will be interesting to see the effects from the high numbers that are currently in the area.

Canola has come up quickly, and the first nitrogen applications have gone on with crops in heavy soils being targeted first. Spraying herbicides as well as seeding has kept many busy, and local fertiliser companies have been commended following the implementation of longer opening hours that allow busy growers, many of whom have lost sheds, to regularly pick up by the truckful.

## Kwinana Zone

### Kwinana North Midlands

Growers in the region have seen soil moisture carry across summer rains and recent events, providing good conditions to get the season started. Between 120 to 170mm has fallen this year, though coverage has been somewhat patchy. Ex-cyclone Seroja went to the east of the region and delivered rainfall in strips, where lucky growers got between 40 and 50mm, and southern areas received around 10 to 25mm. Ideally, receiving an additional 20 to 25mm would allow for some good, wet sowing. The summer rains enabled some extensive soil amelioration programs which has been valuable for many growers, though in the first properly wet seeding in a decade, heavy air seeders are proving to be easily stuck. Locusts are out and about with “unbelievable flights” across the region being reported by some growers.

Early sown canola is around the 2 to 4 leaf stage, though some consecutive hot days has seen slow emergence due to cotyledon damage. Post-rain sown canola has come up better, though patchiness has been a result of crops planted more than three days after the cyclone. The majority of canola seeding has been completed in the region, with 10 to 20 per cent to go. Barley has started going in, though growers are waiting for rain to continue and for knockdown results to be seen before really getting stuck into it. Export hay area is down 60 to 70 per cent, with cereals picking up the bulk of re-allocated rotations.

Most paddocks going into crop have had a couple of passes with a boom spray, and good knockdowns of ryegrass, radish, wild oats, winter weed, brome grass and capeweed has resulted. This season will likely capitalise on weed control after five prior years of dry sowing.

### **Kwinana North East**

The north and east of the zone has had a terrific start to the growing season. Rain over the last few days has topped up the profile and most growers will now be getting stuck into planting wheat in a big way over the next few weeks. Unlike the last few years, most of the large areas of wheat in the zone will be planted into moisture rather than dry sown. The early start combined with good levels of subsoil moisture is a nice combination to have in these lower rainfall areas. The early start brings the growing season forward which is critical in the region to minimise heat stress during grain-fill in spring.

Locusts have been and will continue to hammer emerging crops closer to the pastoral fringes until it cools down. Large areas have been sprayed and most crops are having an insecticide in the knockdown mix to keep numbers down.

The recent rain tailed off in the far east and north as it normally does, although many areas that have had a dry run in recent years have good reserves of soil moisture to start this season. There has been little shift in crop enterprise mixture for the region in the east, although in the northern areas of the zone there has been more canola paddocks go in with those growers that usually have a percentage of their rotation to canola adding an extra paddock or two.

### **Kwinana South**

Due to the early season break and current rains, at least 10 per cent more canola has gone in than what was planned. With the rain we have just had, there could be even greater canola uptake for the region, largely at the expense of wheat. The very dry central areas of the zone pulled back on canola last year. With the good start this year across the whole region, there has been a big increase in canola plantings, including further east than in recent years. In the Western areas of the zone where the dominant rotation is canola/barley, growers have little scope to increase canola area in response to the current high canola prices.

Barley is still currently being seeded, and wheat will be gearing up to go in from early next week. Most growers will now back off the pace of seeding and aim to finish around the 25 May in order to prevent flowering in early August. Most are sowing country higher in the profile first to mitigate frost risk. This is still undoubtedly the best start in a long time, as there has not been an early break with such good subsoil moisture for a while.

Those in the Avon Valley are finding that extensive burning has been required to get the bar through after a big season last year. Root release in stubbles from summer rain is also causing problems with stubble “balling up” even if cut short at harvest.

March sown canola crops were hit with cabbage centre grub and weed web moth. Green peach aphids and diamond back moth are just starting to build up in numbers and could be a problem with emerging canola over the next few weeks if it warms up in May. There have also been some locusts in the north, though otherwise early disease and pest pressure has not been a huge concern.

## **Albany Zone**

### **Albany West**

The zone does not need any further rainfall at present, with trafficability issues already resulting from the cumulative 200 to 250 mm received to date. It is looking to be a good season, where the mid-late April rains delivered between 70 and 100mm. Livestock producers are also happy with dams topped up and good rainfall and warm day temperatures promoting pasture growth.

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With the early start, cereal seeding started in the first week of May, though many have been getting stuck in the wetter areas of paddocks as a result of the recent rains. Early sown canola is up, with growers moving on to barley and wheat. As expected, pulses and lupins are not very popular this season by comparison. All canola is in, with advanced crops now at the 4 leaf stage. There will be some RR canola due for nitrogen in the next week or so.

Many paddocks have had three knockdown sprays, resulting in good weed control. However, where summer weeds were slow to be knocked down, various pests such as vegetable weevils have emerged and have been an ongoing issue. Slugs and earwigs may also be a problem in the near future, though are not too bad and with the rapid crop growth seen, they will be controllable.

### **Albany South**

It is time for “masks and snorkels” after three previous dry seasons. Most growers have had to stop due to trafficability issues and are now reassessing.

This year, there is a bit more canola around with an extra 5 to 10 per cent going in. Most of it was sown prior to ANZAC Day and is now up, though waterlogging and inundation may be a significant risk going forward. For the earliest crops, frost risk may also be a problem down the track. Lots of barley has also gone in and a reasonably large area is now up and growing well (where not waterlogged). Generally, there has been great establishment and early vigour all round, although this will be challenged by any further rain.

Some pests are posing issues, such as weevil and early hatchings of red legged mites being the main contenders.

### **Albany East (Lakes Region)**

Compared to other regions, this area had not been quite as wet until the rain over this week. Growers have seen 100 to 125mm for the year, where 30mm of that was delivered by the cyclone system three weeks ago. Most of the region has had 30 to 50mm in the last week which is perfect timing.

Canola was mostly in before the cyclone, though some extra area was put in shortly after the rain. This season is seeing the largest amount of hybrid TT varieties ever seeded, and overall canola is up 20 per cent in rotations at the expense of lupins and barley.

In terms of pests, vegetable weevils and the occasional byrobia mites have been hammering canola.

Canola plant establishment is very good and hybrid canola growers are being more proactive in maintenance when looking at the ballpark \$800 per tonne prices. Earlier sown hybrids are around the 2 to 4 leaf stage and are coming up very well.

The opportunity for multiple knockdown sprays has been a welcome change from the run of dry starts recently.

Growers are really going for it putting cereals in the ground with the nice conditions. A potential looming problem will be frost later in the year if too much goes in too early. On top of this the quick early emergence and growth, it will mean everything will need spraying for weeds at once.

## Esperance Zone

Up until the rain this week, things were slightly dry in the region, with subsoil moisture reserves lower than the rest of the grainbelt. Some areas had enough summer rain to get a weed germination, with 15 to 20mm minimum everywhere and up to 25 to 30mm in wetter areas.

Most growers have not stopped seeding over the past few weeks, and lots of canola went in before the rain.

There have been good winter weed germinations from the rain a few weeks ago, especially in mallee soils. Quite a bit of Illabo wheat was put in before the rains and this has come up very well. Now in early May, over half of all cereals are in and some growers are nearly finished. There was also a lot of Planet barley that went in quite early. Up until the rain this week many growers had slowed down due to the drying soil profile, although seeding is now back in full swing across the region.

Nitrogen is already being put out on canola, which is at a 2 to 4 leaf stage for early sown crops. Overall, an extra 15 to 20 per cent of canola has been planted in the region this season. There has been a reduction in pulse and lupin crops in the area.

The exodus of sheep in the region continued over summer and in the autumn largely due to water issues.

Mice are around in high numbers, and grasshoppers have been a problem around Scaddan and further north. Weevils are an issue on the sandy gravels, as are slaters in warm wet soils.



Department of  
Primary Industries and  
Regional Development

## Season Outlook, May 2021

Ian Foster, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

### DPIRD climate summary

Seasonal rainfall for January to April 2021 has been well above average for western parts of Western Australia. This has mostly come from a series of tropical rain events in early February and March, as well as Tropical Cyclone Seroja in April. Another event over 4 to 5th May has brought significant rain to western WA (see Figure 1). This has provided soil water storage opportunities over much of the grainbelt, as well as runoff into farm dams. Concerns about soil waterlogging and trafficability have emerged, and are novel given recent drier years.

Major climate influences in the Pacific and Indian Oceans are neutral, with the Pacific expected to remain neutral this year. The Indian Ocean Dipole evolves over winter and spring, and current outlooks are neutral. Most climate models have near-neutral rainfall outlooks for the next three months for most of WA's cropping region. Local factors such as ocean temperatures may have greater influence on rain events in the short term.

### Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook summary, issued 29 April 2021

- May to July rainfall likely to be above average for the southern half of the mainland, but areas in the south-west and south-east have roughly equal chances of above or below average rainfall. Western Tasmania and northern tropics are likely to have a drier May to July.
- May is likely to be drier than average in northern Australia and western Tasmania, while a wetter than average May is likely for central and south-east WA, western SA, and south-east NSW.
- Maximum temperatures for May to July are likely to be above average for most parts of Australia.
- Similarly, minimum temperatures for May to July are likely to be above average Australia wide.
- The El Niño–Southern Oscillation is neutral, as are most other climate drivers.

Additional information is available from:

[DPIRD: Seasonal Climate Information](#)

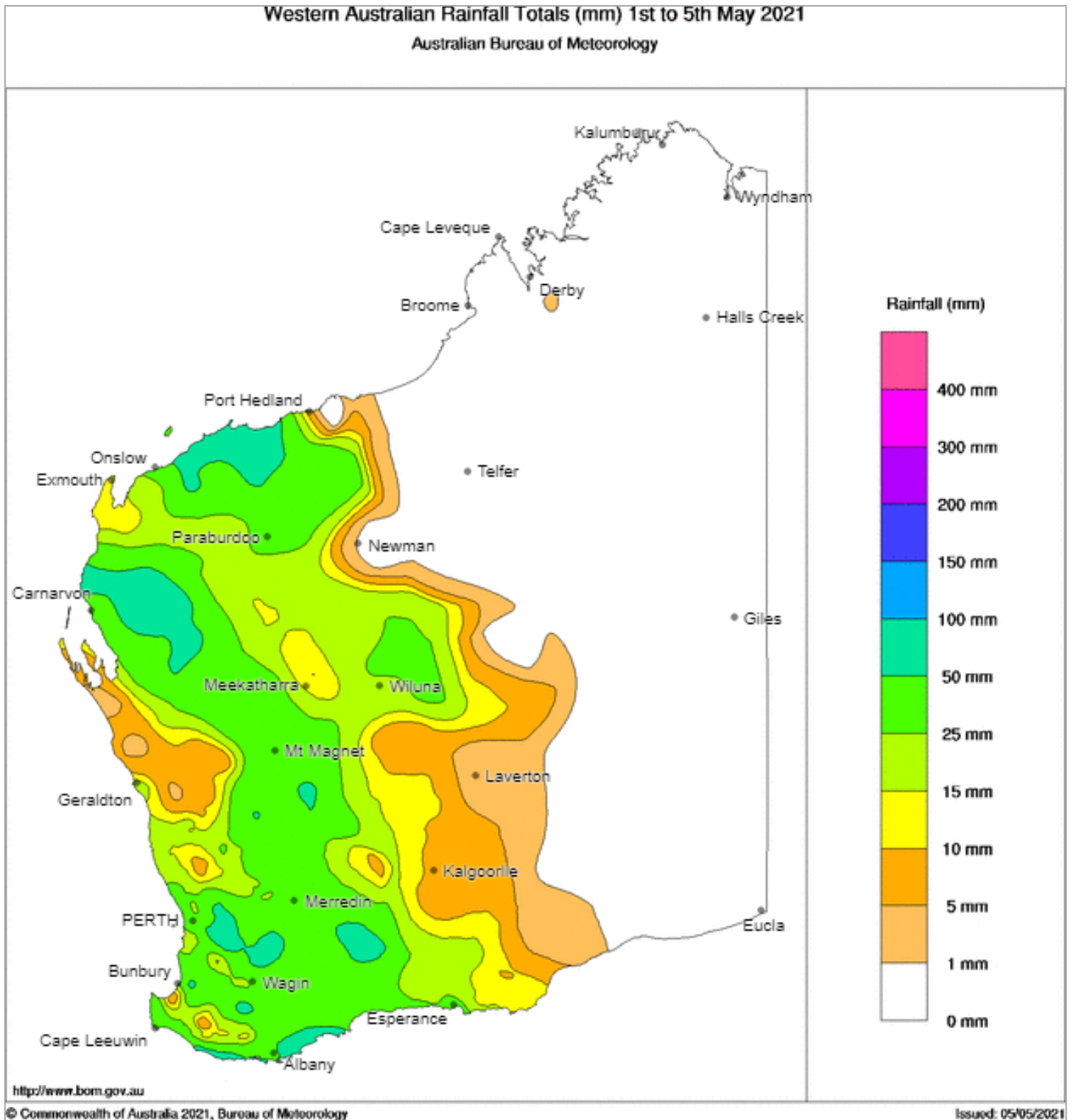
[DPIRD: Soil Water Tool](#)

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

[BoM: Decile rainfall for January to April 2021](#)

[BoM: Seasonal Outlook video](#)

[BoM: Landscape soil water balance](#)



**Figure 1. Rainfall totals for May 2021 to date. From Bureau of Meteorology.**

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