

# CROP REPORT

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## The 2022 Grain Season – Here we go again

Autumn has brought smoky days and the rumble of tractors across paddocks as growers around the state have been getting into the annual hustle and bustle of deep ripping, ploughing, spreading lime and spraying. Those lucky enough to receive solid rainfall have been firing up seeders once again. The recent rainfall across large sections of the Western Australian grainbelt has instigated a flurry of activity and in some areas, particularly in the eastern regions, quite a few hectares of canola have already been sown.

While there have been headaches from supply chain issues, fertiliser costs, mice plagues, and snails in the south, the recent more positive outlook on prices has seen potential programs stretch to accommodate an increase in canola, wheat and barley area than was originally planned as growers and agronomists drew up their paddock plan over summer.

The end of March and beginning of April saw multiple rain events kick off some areas with a bang, driven by moisture dragged down from northeast systems and multiple low pressure systems. Patchy rainfall has seen some necks of the woods such as the northern, eastern and great southern regions receive over 100mm in the past few weeks. Whilst other areas in the west-central Kwinana, the central and southern Esperance and the west Albany port zones have had just a smattering of drops.

Those who haven't "pinned back their ears and gone for it" will likely get into seeding in the upcoming weeks. Not everyone is rushing into it however, as a hot dry summer for most areas has seen a wait and see approach taken by those who just don't have the subsoil moisture or canola seed reserves to cover a false break. Many of those in the medium and higher rainfall zones in the central and northern regions who can afford to wait, are comfortable in doing so, preferring to get a few knockdown sprays on to take the pressure off in-crop applications.

Dedicated canola growers in the higher rainfall south coastal regions are sowing canola now to utilise excess subsoil moisture carried over from last year. Those in the low rainfall eastern regions that received good rains are also sowing now to capitalise on the opportunity provided by current high canola prices and the effect it can have on overall farm profit. This is despite that previous years' have shown canola sown late-March to early-April rarely out-yields that sown in mid-April.

At this time of year, the models are not great at predicting weather events, but the rest of April looks likely to be dry with lingering La Niña effects causing some uncertainty. The uncertainty around future rainfall events and a less than positive medium-term outlook for rain has tipped the scales for those who had planned to sow canola in the low rainfall areas. Most growers in these areas who have enough subsoil moisture to ensure their canola can hang on through a dry April and May, already have, or will have within the next week, a big proportion of their canola in the ground.

Overall, the strong prices for canola, wheat and barley are not likely to have a huge impact for most growers on enterprise mix, other than the near certain equalling or increase in the record canola area from 2021. The early rain has ensured canola area will remain up, and there won't be a swing to more pasture, lupins and fallow as was expected to occur in the absence of early rains. A month ago, it was likely the total crop area would contract back to 8.6 to 8.7 million hectares from 9.2 million hectares in

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2021. The recent rain and good commodity prices have offset the increase in costs to some extent and accepting that it is still very early in the season, the total crop area for WA looks likely to be close to that for 2021.

## Geraldton Zone

It's quite a mixed bag of activity in the region with the recent good falls of rain providing an opportunity to sow canola, undertake soil amelioration operations and spray out the initial flush of weeds. The region is coming off the back of a record tonnage year and those that did have a very good year in 2021 are holding back a bit on sowing canola. These growers are preferring to take out weeds and wait on the next rain before starting the seeding operation. Some are saying they don't need to take a risk on sowing just yet as some hot weather is forecast in the next few days and that may compromise canola establishment. Others are going for it and making the most of the moisture.

The largely unexpected rain has come off the back of a very hot, dry summer and the cooler conditions accompanying the rain has germinated winter weeds which is a little unusual for this time of year for the northern grain growing regions. Weed control in 2021 was a bit ordinary for many regions of the grainbelt and getting rid of a germination now will take the pressure of pre-emergent herbicides in those paddocks that end up being sown dry.

## Kwinana Zone

### Kwinana North Midlands

It has been a dry, single digit rainfall summer, though some gauges showed up to 160mm in the early days of April with most in the 50 to 100mm bracket from March and early April rainfall. Canola seeding has kicked off and some fodder has gone into the ground. Green paddocks have had the sprayers cranking up, and plenty of burning has been occurring following trafficability issues, something that is looking to be a problem this year. Regions such as Kalannie and Dalwallinu have had close to 100mm, though less rainfall has fallen to the west. Therefore, some have steadily gotten stuck into seeding with a reasonable amount of seed going out while others are holding back waiting for more rain and to avoid the extra passes and inherent risks arising from early sowing.

Canola area is thought to be maxed out for the region in the western parts, and barley hectares look to be marginally up from last year. The ability to price wheat out further has seen greater stability and area increases. Having said that, most growers will have provisions for either cereal and will swing paddocks, with time and rainfall maybe bringing program changes throughout the month. Lupin and pasture area has also been seen to come back up, though numbers are not too dissimilar to 2021. Hay area, like much of the state, has been lost and is likely to be the lowest seen for over twenty years as a result of full hay sheds and a lack of positive signals from exporters.

### Kwinana South

The Kwinana port zones have seen lots of canola go in from early April, with the year looking to bring more fallow and less oats, with hay sheds still being full from previous years and uncertain export markets. Canola seed retained on-farm has been causing forecasting issues for seed production companies, who have voiced difficulty in matching demand when they are unsure of supply requirements when planning their breeding programs. To make the system smoother, growers need to offer long term commitments to seed companies to ensure supply will be met on-farm. Those going into canola this year, particularly on barley stubble, need to be watching out for mice who will be pouncing on any green stems coming up.

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### **Kwinana North East**

The zone has had very good falls of rain in the eastern parts and growers are flat out getting as much canola in the ground as they can. The crop mix and crop area were a big question mark in the region up until this rain. There is a complete lack of subsoil moisture together with very little fallow to work with due to so much of the area going into crop in 2021. This, along with the high input prices, will likely see a pulling back in area and a move to mostly wheat.

The recent rain and firming up of grain prices has turned around paddock plans more in this region than others. There will now be as much if not more canola sown in the region than in 2021, and it is likely there will be significantly more crop planted than was planned several months ago. This region accounted for the largest jump in crop area in 2021 and contributed a greater percentage increase in area planted than any other region in the state.

The Kwinana North East region suffered the greatest loss from frost and the lack of spring rain in 2021 and growers were not able to make the most of what was initially set up as a potentially very good season. The rain has now turned around sentiment and growers are noticeably more positive about what may be in store for 2022.

### **Albany Zone**

#### **Albany West**

West of the Albany Highway largely missed out on the recent rain and little has fallen since harvest, consequently, there is not the same level of activity as in other regions. The planned enterprise mix has not changed a lot from plans made over the summer. Most in the region are “maxed out with canola area” and the trend in recent years to a slight shift to wheat will continue.

Growers have had difficulty sourcing good quality hybrid canola seed this year as they have across the state. The region has very high canola grain yield potential and sowing the best available varieties for the region and time of sowing plays a big part in reaching this potential. The region is a regular buyer of hybrid seed and the lack of availability is a major concern.

#### **Albany South**

It is feeling like 2021 for growers on the south coast, who have had 70 to 130mm across summer. The lakes that have only just dried up have now filled again and soil moisture is abundant, as are snails.

Canola is forecast to be going in steadily by mid-April, as is Illabo wheat. Those who have spread clay may be having Easter off with surface moisture not going anywhere. Growers who maxed out canola area in 2021 are looking to swing back to more standard programs as barley prices come up. Receiving \$350 a tonne for feed barley makes the choice for planting too easy, especially after the sting of wheat falling numbers in 2021. While canola is on the top end, getting seed is proving to be a problem following on from supply chain issues.

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

Rainfall has been variable for the region, with a big band of rain distributing 30 to 40mm, hitting the north-east of Kojonup to Hyden and Lake King. Many growers have racked up 100mm in the last month and have been trying to get canola in, though some are nervous in doing so with a dry outlook. Canola is anticipated to make up around 8 per cent of the region's total cropped area in 2022, though diamondback moths and upper-canopy blackleg may be an issue this year. These pest and disease factors along with high fertiliser prices are likely to lead to some more cautious approaches. Growers may be looking to lean more toward pasture and fallow as a result, especially with March rainfall cranking up a fantastic start for pastures. A slight swing back into wheat or barley may potentially be seen.

The recent rain will see the need for knockdowns shortly, with most green things around at one leaf. Another germination opportunity later in April when canola and lupins are in the ground, may see an opportunity for more oats to squeeze into programs.

### **Esperance Zone**

The western side of the Esperance region received more rainfall from the last two rain events across the end of March and into April, than the eastern side. Some dry areas have only had one spray, which is considered unusual for the area at this time of year. Most growers started seeding at the end of March, with plenty of vetch and canola already in the ground.

The region was not spared from the dry summer, which has led to some worry around a lack of subsoil moisture which may further dissipate with a dry April. Seed supplies are still dribbling in with supply issues wreaking havoc, particularly with canola programs. This may see a reduction in canola areas if F1 seed isn't in sheds soon, with a decrease in barley also forecast for the area this year. Mice have unsurprisingly "gone berserk" in the Esperance region too following the stellar 2021 season.

## Season Outlook, April 2022

Ian Foster, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

### Seasonal Climate April 2022

After a dry summer, March has seen considerable tropical rainfall over northern, eastern and southern agricultural areas, as well as in the southern rangelands. The Gascoyne-Murchison region experienced heavy rain in early April, and the South Coast has had notable rain as well.

Soil water storage is well above average for time of year over much of the northern, eastern and southern agricultural areas, see Figure 1.

Climate conditions in the Pacific Ocean show the La Niña event is declining but still having an influence on climate, especially for eastern Australia. Oceans are warmer than normal around Australia.

Most climate models have neutral rainfall outlooks for April to June 2022 for the agricultural area of WA. Daytime temperatures are expected to remain above average.

### Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook summary, issued 31 March 2022:

- April to June rainfall is likely to be above median for northern and eastern Australia, with a small area of western Tasmania likely to be below median. Elsewhere, there are roughly equal chances of above or below median rainfall.
- April to June maximum temperatures are likely to be above median for western, northern and southern parts of Australia. Below median temperatures are likely for parts of the east coast.
- Minimum temperatures for April to June are likely to be warmer than median across virtually all of Australia.
- La Niña and other localised drivers are likely to be influencing this outlook.

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 March 2022](#)

[BoM: Seasonal Outlook video](#)

[BoM: Landscape soil water balance](#)

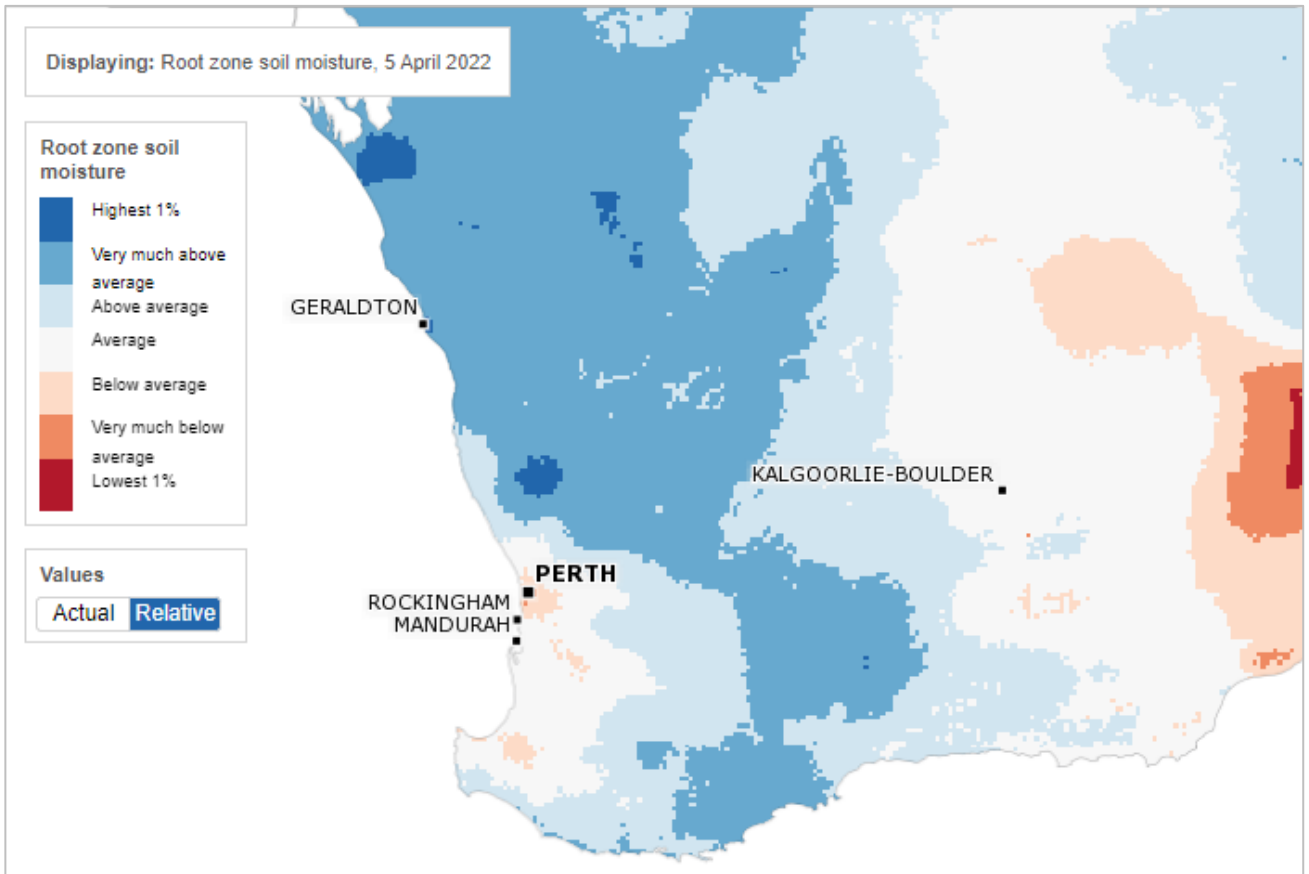


Figure 1. Estimated root zone soil water, relative ranking, at 5 Apr 2022. From BoM.

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