

CROP REPORT

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The 2022 Grain Season – Off to a good start

The Western Australian grain-belt is off to a very good start with most regions having reserves of sub-soil moisture from autumn rains, and now with widespread rain over the last 24 hours or so, a top-up that could not have been timed better. The timing of the “break” has been perfect, settling the dust and halting the run of hot days. Crops will bounce out of the ground and those to be sown will go into moisture.

The early rains provided an opportunity for large areas of canola to be sown with canola plantings increasing again over the record area sown in 2021. More than half of the total canola plantings for Australia will be in WA again this year. The recent rain will alleviate the moisture stress those early plantings were suffering from, even up patchy emergence, and allow those paddocks that were sown dry to now germinate.

Following last year’s record total area for all crops of 9.2 million hectares in WA and record harvest tonnage, it was likely the crop area would drop back to more recent historical levels. This will not be the case now as the early start and strong prices for canola and cereals mean total crop area will be up around that 9 million hectare mark again this year.

Up to 70 per cent of the states’ crop was in the ground before the recent rain and with falls of 20mm plus for all areas except the low rainfall eastern regions and parts of the Esperance zone, the remainder of the crop will be in the ground and up by the end of May or early June.

Strengthening grain prices timed with this recent rainfall is likely to see even more crop planted than is estimated in this report.

Apart from the noticeable increase in canola area, wheat and barley area is likely to remain unchanged from 2021. Lupin and pulse area is going to be down slightly, and oats also down slightly being replaced by canola.

2022 Season GIWA May WA Crop Area Estimates (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Pulses	State total
Kwinana	2,750,000	550,000	780,000	160,000	100,000	8,000	4,348,000
Albany	400,000	600,000	380,000	130,000	30,000	8,000	1,548,000
Esperance	500,000	320,000	330,000	10,000	30,000	20,000	1,210,000
Geraldton	1,300,000	150,000	260,000	10,000	80,000	2,000	1,802,000
Totals	4,950,000	1,620,000	1,750,000	310,000	240,000	38,000	8,908,000

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, DAS and contributions from independent agricultural consultants and agronomists in the production of this report.

Geraldton Zone

Much of the north is dry and dusty, with growers eager for the rain. Despite drying soils, 70 to 80 per cent of all crops had been sown in the northern region by the middle of May. The seasons looks to host a large canola program, with growers squeezing in an extra paddock or two to create a reasonable area increase from last year. Canola that is up ranges from cotyledons to early flowering. Strong barley prices have also seen extra paddocks go in fairly early, with 5 to 6 leaf plants around. An issue has been trying to hold farmers back on their wheat programs, depending on variety, to better manage frost, though plenty of Valiant and Illabo wheat has been sown.

Area's north of Geraldton are looking very dry, with poor emergence and little greenery around. This area will benefit more than others from the good falls of rain in the last two days. Where rain fell earlier, both winter weeds and summer weeds have emerged. Patchy rain out east has seen some pockets receive massive falls with wheat up and at 4 to 5 leaf. Growers have been going hard, with seeding looking to be wrapped up soon following a net increase in canola and barley areas. Some growers have missed out on the rain receiving only 30mm for the year to date, while some have pocketed 180mm. Low sub-soil moisture has led to dry sowing, and newly emerged plants look to be 'keen for a drink' following 30 plus degree days. North of Moora looks promising, with west coast areas such as Badgingarra, Dandaragan and Mingenew picking up big storms and having robust looking crops. The eastern strips in the central east look to have large fallow programs with 50 per cent of area allocated, though depending on how much of the recent rainfall these growers received, there will likely be less areas left out than planned. Early rainfall saw plenty of paddocks renovated throughout the region.

Kwinana Zone

Kwinana North Midlands

The region is experiencing an even better start to the growing season than last year, if that is possible. Sub-soil moisture reserves, the timing of the rains, an opportunity to get several knockdown applications on and good grain prices are again a rare combination that seldom come together at the one time.

Canola is in and mostly up, lupins are in, barley is 50 to 60 per cent in and wheat will be in by the end of May with growers managing variety choices to suit the time of emergence.

There are no major changes in crop area mix other than a slightly reduced lupin area, and a slightly increased area of canola. The recent rally in wheat and barley prices has seen the areas of those crops remain about the same as planned over summer. Pasture growth has been exceptional and where growers had planned to keep a few more paddocks out to pasture, this is now not necessary, and most will go back into crop.

Kwinana South

The Kwinana South regions had been one of the dry spots in the state up until the recent rain, with most areas west of the Meckering line still under 100mm for the year including the rain in the last day or two. A lot of the zone had little if any germination and most crops were being sown dry. Rainfall in the region was again a bit light-on in the northern areas of the region although the light, steady falls meant most will soak in with little run-off.

The region has good stores of sub-soil moisture carried over from 2021 and dry-sown crops that will now emerge should be able to access this.

Kwinana Northeast

The zone received very good falls of rain in March and many growers took advantage of this to sow canola. This region will contribute the majority of the increase in total canola area for 2022. Whilst it was too early for some growers, even knowing that it is risky getting canola established at this time of the year, many growers considered the early sowing opportunity was too good to miss out on considering the current price of canola.

There was a large area of wheat planted in the region in 2021 due to the excellent start and many growers were planning to pull back on area in 2022 due to significant increases in all input costs. Whilst there is likely to be some reduction in area planted this year, the recent rain will probably turn that around in areas where growers have received 15mm or more of rain in the last day or so.

The timing of the rain has been perfect as this region usually finishes quickly and getting a crop up in May reduces the impact of heat stress in spring. The recent rainfall dropped off to between 10 to 15mm in the east and north of the zone, although total rainfall to date for the year has been 100mm plus for most areas, giving a buffer of sub-soil moisture.

Albany Zone

Albany West

All canola has gone in, with a third of plants approaching 4 leaf, another third looking patchy, and the rest on the way up. A third of barley is in, though the region has been drying out, leading to some hesitation. West of Williams across to Darkan has had the most rain, but overall, there has been more moisture east of Kojonup than to the west. While barley area was thought to be down, some programs have gone back up in area due to good prices, though most are top heavy with canola. Most growers in the region have around 50 per cent of their programs allocated to canola, and whilst they would probably like to sow more, they are limited by rotation.

The area of lupins and faba beans will be down in the region this year due to the early break providing plenty of pasture seeds for livestock.

Albany South

Following one of the best starts to remember, early sown canola is up at 6 to 8 leaf with the bulk of crops at 2 to 4 leaf. Nearly all canola was in the ground by mid-May in the region. A fair chunk of barley (60 to 70 per cent) has been put in the ground, most growers are likely to be putting their seeders back in the shed by mid-May.

The soil surface has been drying out, leading to clover pastures fading in some areas. Looking back to 2021, total crop areas look similar. Lupins and faba beans have fallen away and been replaced with canola, and a swing back into barley rather than wheat has occurred. Sub-soil moisture is plentiful and will look to produce some good crops, particularly winter wheats which are already looking fantastic. There is a similar amount for winter canola sown early that looks brilliant as well. There are not many problems at the moment for canola growers, with predators thought to have been hiding out and keeping aphid populations down. Mice are thick with 60 to 70 per cent of the area having already been baited and most expected to be baited.

Albany East (Lakes Region)

The district has had another very good start to the cropping season following on from the record yields and tonnage produced in 2021. Autumn rains have provided useful amounts of sub-soil moisture. There were good winter weed germinations following the autumn rains and most paddocks have had at least one knockdown applied prior to seeding.

There has been an increase in the canola area planted from 2021 by about 10 to 15 per cent due to the ability to get crops up early from rain near the end of March, and the high prices.

Some cereals have been planted into moisture although most in the last week to 10 days have been sown dry. The rain this week will germinate those sown dry and will enable growers to finish off their programs over the next few weeks, with most planning to spread out sowing of the remainder of paddocks to mitigate the risk of frost damage.

The barley / wheat split has not changed a great deal from last year due to the new season price of both increasing in recent weeks.

Esperance Zone

The Esperance port zone has had an amazing start with most regions having at least 60 to 100mm, with areas close to the coast receiving in excess of 200mm for the year. There are some dry areas on the east of town and this area largely missed out on the rain over the last few days, though most have had a good germination, particularly of winter weeds.

Some areas have required re-sowing following the heavy rainfall event in April. Canola is anywhere from cotyledon to 5 to 6 leaf. Barley and pulse areas are down as is pasture, with the switch being to canola. Growers have been moving to dedicated canola / wheat rotations in recent years and this has continued in 2022.

Most growers are not far away from finishing seeding, though there have been some late starters. The bulk of the total crop area will be in by the end of May and the recent rain will see the remainder go into moisture.

Some growers have baited the whole farm for mice, and some are baiting twice. Although the general comment from around the state is that the higher-active mouse baits have been very effective. Vegetable weevils, red legs and downy mildew have been kicking around in early canola. Snail control looks to have been quite effective, although there are reports of more slaters and earwigs than in previous years.

Where there has been good early germinations of canola, nitrogen has been going on, and in those areas that may get too wet, growers are racing to get it on ahead of further rain.

Around 60 to 70 per cent of the intended crop area is in. Canola area is similar or slightly increased over 2021, barley is down a little, and lupins and pulses are both down in area. There has been very good pasture growth for livestock which is helping to keep the crop area up.

Season Outlook, May 2022

Ian Foster, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Climate summary

Autumn rain has offered early seeding opportunities across much of the WA grain-belt. However, fine and warm conditions since late April have resulted in declining shallow soil water storage.

The agricultural area and southwest saw a significant rain event over 11 and 12 May, where tropical moisture was expected to link with a cold front crossing southern WA. Total falls of 25mm or more were predicted across most of the region. While some following light rain is likely, the second half of May is forecast to be relatively dry. This event was therefore important in providing water for crops already sown, and to enable cropping programs to continue.

Climate conditions in the Pacific Ocean show the La Niña event is still having an influence on climate, especially for eastern Australia. As well, most models are predicting the development of a negative Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) event in winter. While this promotes rainfall over inland and eastern Australia it has a weak impact on southern WA. Oceans are warmer than normal around Australia, which can increase rain rates if weather systems can access it.

Most climate models have neutral rainfall outlooks for June to August 2022 for the agricultural area of WA, see Figure 1 for the BoM outlook. Daytime temperatures are expected to remain above average.

Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook summary, issued 5 May 2022:

- Winter (June to August) rainfall is likely to be above median for most of Australia, except south-western Australia, the south-east coast, and southern Tasmania which have roughly equal chances of being above or below median.
- June to August maximum temperatures are likely to be above median for northern, south-western, and south-eastern parts of Australia, but below median for broad areas of inland southern and central Australia.
- Minimum temperatures for June to August are very likely to be warmer than median across almost all of Australia.
- The weakening La Niña, the chance of a negative Indian Ocean Dipole, 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 February to April 2022](#)

[BoM: Seasonal Outlook video](#)

[BoM: Australian Water Outlook](#)

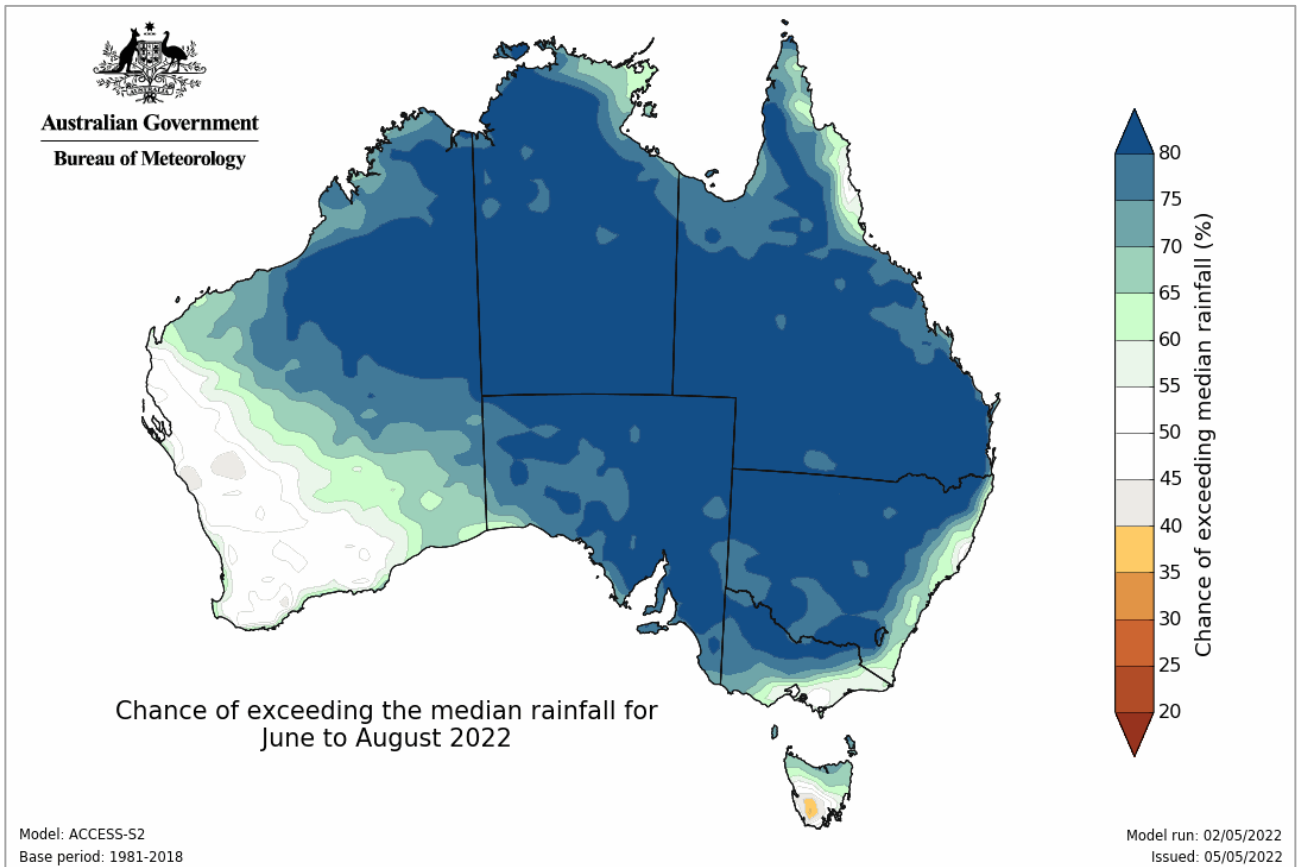


Figure 1. Chances of rainfall exceeding median for June to August 2022. From BoM.

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