

CROP REPORT



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The 2024 Grain Season – Warm dry conditions persist in the West

The sporadic bursts of rain from storms last week and around ANZAC Day have germinated dry sown crops in the south of the state, some areas in the central regions and strips of country in the north-east of the state, although the northern and central western cropping regions largely missed out. The rainfall that did occur was driven by thunderstorms rather than cold fronts and consequently was brilliant for some and simply a nuisance for others. Growers that did receive rainfall in the lighter end of the rain gauge and who have little subsoil moisture underneath, now face the risk of a “false break” unless there is follow up rain soon. Where there were heavier falls, particularly where the moisture was able to meet up with subsoil moisture, crops will be ok for the time being.

The persistent warm conditions are a concern and, whilst still fairly early in the season and with plenty of time for rains to come, the current conditions have growers increasingly nervous about the upcoming grain growing season. A warm winter can produce a record crop as was the case in 2022, although in that year there was good early moisture in the profile to start the season off, together with a long, soft finish. Soil moisture profiles are historically very dry this year and the light falls of rain are either being sucked up like a sponge or are evaporating before it soaks in.

Most regions have planted more than 50 per cent of the intended area and are continuing to plant dry. Without rain in the next two weeks, the northern and eastern regions will pull back on intended plantings and drop paddocks out to fallow. This could reduce the planted area in the state by several hundred thousand hectares, and the estimated planted area in this report reflects that outcome. However, the planted area estimate could swing the other way by a similar margin if there are decent rains in the next two weeks.

Canola area is going to be down from 2023 as growers held back sowing paddocks due to the dry conditions, and it is now close to being too late for these to go in. The lupin area is unlikely to be up from 2023 also due to the dry conditions. The oat area will be up from 2023 particularly in the lower rainfall regions where there was early rain. The wheat and barley swap in area could still vary depending on what happens with rainfall in the next three weeks.

2024 Season GIWA May Western Australia Crop Areas Estimates (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Pulses	State total
Kwinana	2,750,000	580,000	770,000	120,000	160,000	10,000	4,390,000
Albany	510,000	550,000	470,000	110,000	50,000	10,000	1,700,000
Esperance	540,000	250,000	340,000	9,000	20,000	24,000	1,183,000
Geraldton	900,000	90,000	120,000	4,000	80,000	1,000	1,195,000
Totals	4,700,000	1,470,000	1,700,000	243,000	310,000	45,000	8,468,000

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Geraldton Zone

It is still very dry in the Geraldton port zone and although there is crop up in places as a result of recent thunderstorms, the area is small and concentrated to the eastern portions of the zone. Most of the recent rainfall occurred further south with the northern grain regions mostly missing out. The coastal areas have had nothing at all yet.

Growers have been dry seeding for several weeks and will continue to do so until they have about 80 per cent of their planned programs in the ground. There is about half the intended wheat planting sown to date, mostly on the canola and lupin stubbles and the well managed fallow country. As growers push onto the lower potential yielding paddocks, the brakes will come on until it rains.

The area of canola in the region has been wound back due to the dry conditions to around 30-40 per cent of the intended hectares. This area could pick up if there is rain in the next two weeks. There has been a dramatic “hold” in lupin plantings with very few paddocks sown. Most growers will wait until around the 25th May to decide if they abandon lupins altogether this year, and a week later for wheat.

The well-known phenomenon of the albatross turning up to make its nest this week has growers excited about the prospect of rain, although time is running out as once the 20th May arrives, it is cutoff time for canola, and the end of May is the date most will abandon wheat.

The main profit driver in the northern regions is emergence date of wheat, and there has been a subtle shift in chasing moisture deep with current wheat varieties based on the findings of work conducted with long coleoptile wheats in recent years. Growers have been following the moisture down deeper than previously and obtaining reasonable establishment on very little rainfall. This practice change has been driven by the need to get a crop up before the end of May. The risk, of course, is how long these crops can hang on with very little moisture under them.

Kwinana Zone

Kwinana North Midlands

It has been storm lotto for growers in the region and if you happen to have been under one of the falls of rain, the crops are up and in good shape. Although, due to the hit and miss nature of the rain, establishment across paddocks has been patchy.

The region goes from sopping wet around Wongan Hills to completely dry at Miling just a few kilometres down the road. The lighter falls of rain in the last two weeks have either germinated crops sown dry, which could be problematic particularly where there is a dry profile under them, or alternatively the moisture has dried out too quickly to have allowed crops to germinate.

The canola and lupin areas are set now, as is most of the barley area. Growers are now ticking along with dry sowing wheat at a steady pace rather than being in any hurry. Where the rain has been enough to germinate weeds, knockdowns are going on and in some cases the seeder bars have stopped to wait for germination. Most growers are well on track as far as timing goes for getting their programs in and have the luxury of taking their foot off the gas a little now and looking to the clouds for inspiration.

Some canola paddocks that fell out of planned programs are going to barley and a lesser extent to wheat, so the canola area will be down a little from 2023. On top of the pulling back in canola area that occurred in 2023, canola area is now likely to be down about 20 per cent from the record planting in 2022.

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Oats will probably be up marginally as a few growers have swung back into it driven by the good prices, although the area change is in the hundreds of hectares rather than the thousands of hectares.

Water for livestock is starting to be a problem for those that rely on dams, and this is causing some anxiety for those growers that have held onto livestock.

Kwinana South

The western areas of the region are still dry with no subsoil moisture, and most areas received less than 10mm of rain in the last two weeks. Growers in these areas have not stopped seeding and will continue to “stick to the plan” as it is early days in these more reliable rainfall areas. Further east there was more rain, although it was very patchy. Growers are continuing to dry sow cereals where they know they will not get a split germination.

The canola area was wound back prior to the recent rainfall event and those that received 20mm or more have swapped back to canola for a few paddocks. The end result will be a reduction of around 10 per cent from planned canola programs.

For most growers it's the back end of barley programs and onto the wheat for the next few weeks. The intended barley area is sitting on about the halfway point and will change over to wheat in the next week. The planned barley area has increased slightly from 2023, particularly in the eastern areas where a paddock or two of canola has been dropped out, with most opting for the quicker maturing barley varieties.

The lupin area change from 2023 will be small, with a few of the dedicated lupin growers on the soils suited to lupins increasing area slightly.

There was some talk around last year's harvest that the oat area would go up due to the price, although that does not seem to have happened to any great extent. Area is up where growers received good recent falls of rain in March, but the risk of having light weight grain at harvest if the season is dry or cuts out early has deterred many growers from planting oats.

Kwinana North East

The low rainfall areas of the central grain growing regions that received the good autumn rains got lucky again with useful falls of between 10-20mm south of the Great Eastern Highway. North of the highway, growers mostly missed out on the rain.

There are very few crops up and looking the goods anywhere in the zone. Those that are up are stressed and desperately need a drink, and those that have germinated recently will need follow-up rain soon. There are isolated exceptions, although most need the daytime temperatures to drop and a decent fall of rain.

The whole zone is sitting on greater soil moisture reserves than any other region of the state and could still grow profitable crops if there is rain in the next three weeks.

Albany Zone

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Albany West

The region has gone from grim to good in the space of a week following the rain last weekend. The western regions received up to 30mm of rain, tapering down to 15mm in the eastern regions. The slow steady nature of the rain followed by some cool cloudy days has seen even the lower rainfall totals soak in to depth in the furrows of the dry sown paddocks.

Most growers are well into their seeding programs with canola finished. The majority of the barley will be in by the end of this week and then, with just the wheat to go, it will be an early finish to seeding for most. Until this week, all the crop has gone in without a knockdown, with the boom sprays cranking up this week.

The canola area will be up a little from 2023 and now comprises around 40 per cent of the rotation for many growers. The barley area will be similar to 2023, with slightly more area sown to barley than wheat in these high rainfall regions of the south-west.

The oat area will be up a little with increases in both oats for grain and hay.

Albany South

The majority of canola and cereal crops sown to date have not required a knockdown spray for weeds, which is a reflection of how dry it has been. This will put the pressure on post-emergent weed control once it rains. Growers are also expecting a flush of insect activity now there has been some rain.

The majority of the canola is sown in the region and is now up in the areas that received the recent rain. The rain was patchy and so is the germination, particularly on the soils where rainfall totals were lower.

The barley that was sown prior to the rain is in the same boat. Soil temperatures in the south have been extremely warm and the light rainfall events have not been enough to get crops away as they would normally.

Growers will now continue with planting the remainder of their cereals dry over the next few weeks with no substantial changes to crop area mix from what was planned.

The stockfeed situation has not improved and as we move into the back end of May, every extra week without rain will require another three weeks of handfeeding. Those pasture paddocks and crop stubbles that were destined for crop that are currently holding stock, will probably not go in now and this may decrease the final crop area.

Albany East (Lakes Region)

Most of the Lakes region received reasonable falls of rain recently and combined with subsoil moisture from the summer storms, are set up well for this time of the year. The rainfall was patchy ranging from 5-30mm so not all growers are set, although most are confident enough to continue with planned programs now. Some paddocks are wet to depth and others are wet just on the surface, with more follow-up rain needed.

The majority of the dry sown canola is up and is being monitored closely for bugs.

Growers are continuing to sow the remainder of their barley programs and will be swapping over to wheat in the next week or so. It's early days and the frosty areas are being steered clear of for the time being.

The western portions of the zone closer to Narrogin jagged some very good falls of rain, and even without any summer rain to speak of, this will be enough to get canola and oats up and a mean a fair chunk of the barley programs will be sown into moisture.

Esperance Zone

The Esperance Zone mostly received the tail of the storms that moved through further north in the last week. With rainfall in the 5-10mm range, these light falls will be enough to keeps crops that had germinated near the end of April going for the time being.

A lot of the crop that has been sown is up in the region, except some very dry pockets in the eastern portions of the zone. Even though there are crops up, they are generally patchy. There was a lot of soil wetter used and angle sowing this year, which has helped, although the whole area needs a good steady rain to even the crops up.

Some growers still have up to two thirds of their seeding programs to go in, whilst others are two thirds done, which is a reflection of the patchy start.

Overall, it looks like the canola area will be down on 2023, as will the pulse crop area, replaced instead by barley and wheat. A lot of the canola was sown without pre-emergent herbicides and with most dry sown canola now poking through, there will be a flurry of activity with the boom sprays for both weeds and bugs.

The livestock situation is tough, as it is over most of the state, and growers in the Esperance region are now starting to run out of water as well as feed.

Following the rain, baiting for snails, slaters and earwigs will begin. The lack of a green bridge over summer has reduced the chances of green peach aphid and diamond back moth hitting the emerging canola crops, but the various mites are expected to hatch now and need controlling.



Season Outlook, May 2024

Ian Foster, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Climate summary

Rainfall

April was dry for cropping areas and the south-west of WA, continuing the pattern occurring since spring 2023. Early May has brought welcome rain, mostly to southern parts, see Figure 1. Soil moisture storage remains low in western parts of the northern cropping area.

Forecast

The El Nino event in the Pacific Ocean has ended, and conditions are expected to remain neutral until at least July. Indian Ocean Dipole conditions in the tropical Indian Ocean have been positive for the past few weeks, driven by very warm ocean temperatures off east Africa.

Models are predicting continued development of this event into winter 2024, which would be historically early. However, predictions of these events from autumn have lower accuracy, so should be treated with caution at this stage.

The Bureau of Meteorology’s seasonal outlook indicates an improvement in rainfall chances from June, see Figure 2. Many of the international climate models have a neutral outlook for June to August. This comes from a weakening of the previously dominant high-pressure systems south of Australia.

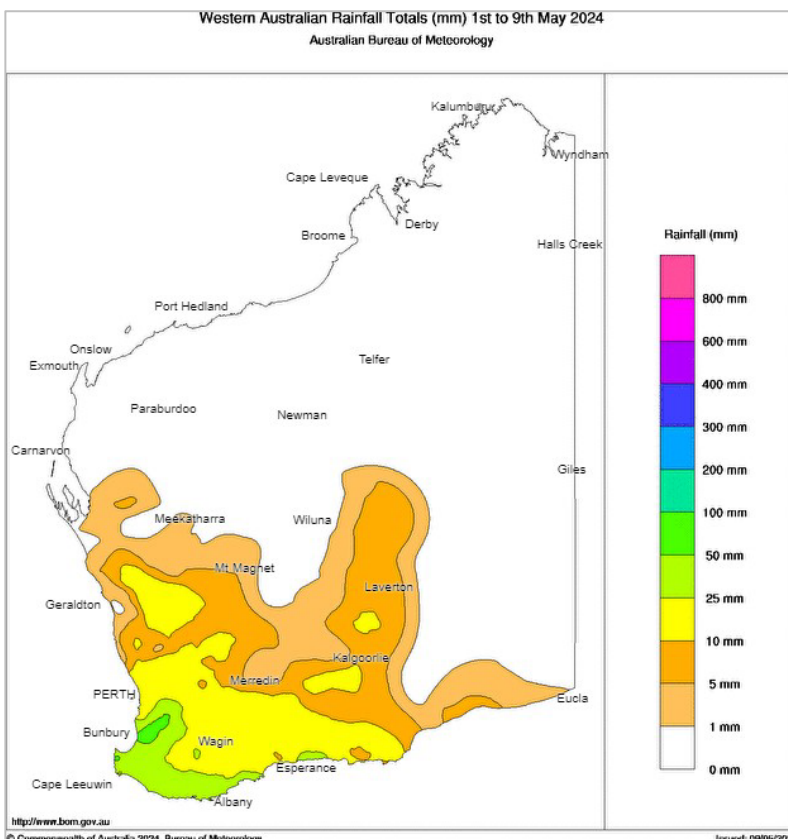


Figure 1: Rainfall totals for early May 2024. Source: Bureau of Meteorology (2024)

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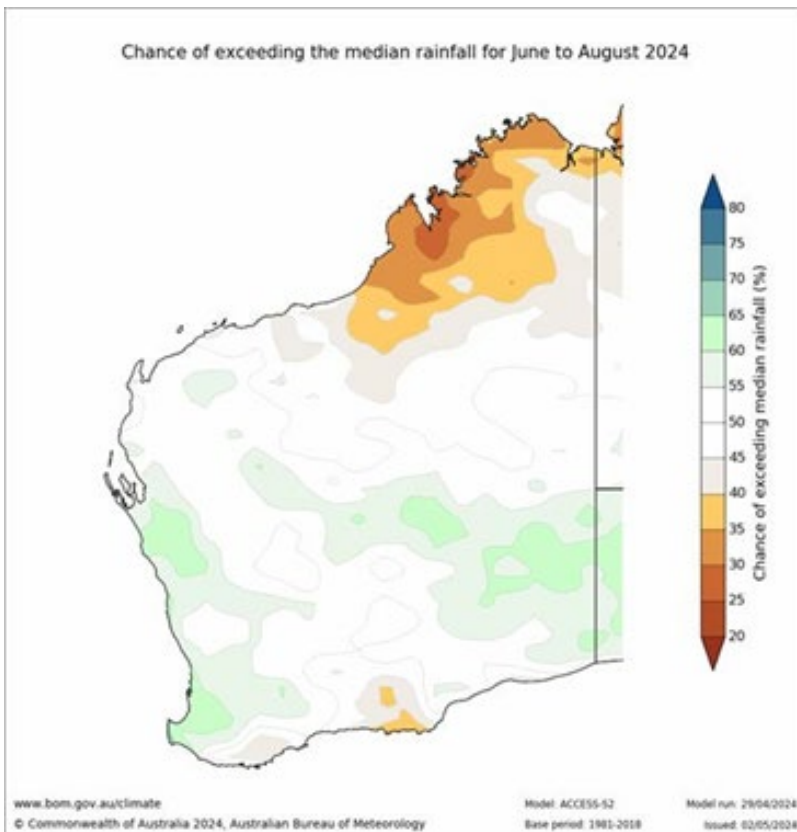


Figure 2: Rainfall outlook for June to August 2024. Source: Bureau of Meteorology (2024)

Temperature

Seasonal temperatures over summer and into autumn have been very much above normal. Soil temperatures remain very warm.

Predictions of above normal temperatures continue through autumn and into winter. Chances of unusually high maximum temperatures are about 3 times as likely for most of southern WA.

Minimum temperatures are also expected to be much warmer than normal.

Additional information is available from:

[DPIRD: Weather stations](#)

[DPIRD: Soil Water Tool](#)

[DPIRD soil moisture probes](#)

[BoM: Decile rainfall for October 2023 to April 2024](#)

[BoM: Rainfall outlook for the next week](#)

[BoM: Seasonal Rainfall Outlook](#)

[BoM: Australian Water Outlook](#)

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