

The 2026 Grain Season – Brutal cold fronts have reset crop potential with cold weather and little rain

The West Australian grain season grain production potential has fallen away over the last month due to the ongoing dry conditions over large areas of the southern Kwinana South port zone, the Great Southern and Lakes Districts. Promising cold fronts have ended up delivering only light falls of rain and cold weather in these southern districts.

It is still possible for the state's grain production to hit 20 million tonnes as most areas away from these very dry regions are very good, although the sudden change recently from still sunny days with very cold mornings to very cold windy days and cold mornings has put crops at immediate risk of lost potential due to frost. It is going to be a very nervous few weeks if the pattern of clear skies and lack of cloud cover after the cold fronts pass through continues.

Crops were already feeling the effects of one of the driest Julys on record and now the cold fronts have slowed down growth dramatically, particularly in the southern regions. The dry subsoil in most regions away from Geraldton, the Midlands, West Albany and Esperance is a greater concern than the potential impact from frost, because unless there is significantly more rain to come, crops in these drier areas will be more susceptible to heat shock by being less able to cope with the warming trend that will inevitably occur at the end of August and into September.

It will take a dramatic turnaround in increased rainfall over the next month to hit the high tonnage years in 2022 and 2025. The areas from Beverley to Bremer Bay that received the poorer start and were contracting following good rains June, have now started to go backwards and increase in area over the last few weeks from lack of rain. Many areas in this region have had less than 150 mm Year To Date (YTD), which is not enough to hit average grain yields. The expansion of this area of poorer crops is now going to have an impact on total grain tonnage for the state as the area impacted is large and is traditionally higher yielding country.

Whilst a decent rain is forecast in a few days, it is going to need to be a good old-fashioned dump of rain rather than the light sprinklings we have been having to reset crop yield potential where rainfall to date has been light on.

The better areas away from the low rainfall strips in the Great Southern part of the state are still very good, particularly in the central/eastern Midlands and most of the Geraldton port zone, the Kwinana North East port zone and the Esperance port zone. These areas are on track at the moment to be as good as those very high tonnage years. The low rainfall regions in the eastern and north eastern regions are particularly good with well above average grain yield likely no matter what happens from now on, and potentially exceptionally good with a couple of more rainfall events.

Barley and canola continue to be the standout crops across the state and together could represent 50 per cent of total grain production for the year, which has never happened in the past. Wheat tonnage estimated in this report could be the crop that swings the most. Wheat grain yields in the north and east of the state could still change quite a bit due to the impact of frost and whether or not they receive further finishing rains.

The fertiliser supply and price issues at the start of the season are starting to bite now in a lot of areas. Canola followed by barley crops were preferenced over wheat due to the potential profitability and earlier establishment, with most canola and barley looking to be okay and not yield limited from reduced fertiliser applications. It's the later sown crops which are mostly wheat that are now noticeably underdone, and many will be capped in potential yield due to a lack of fertiliser.

Crops in the low rainfall areas will not be as limited in yield from lack of nitrogen as those in the medium to high rainfall areas.

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

Oat crops in the northeastern regions away from Hyden and Newdegate mostly get harvested for grain and these crops look sensational, balancing the poorer oat crops in the more traditional oat grain producing areas around Narrogin. Lupin crops are quite varied from being very good in the north to not so good further south, with their growth slowed down by the recent cold conditions.

Pulse area is similar to last year although there has been a swing out of field peas to lentils, nearly a direct swap of 20,000 ha. Interestingly there are lentil plantings in 54 Local Government Authorities (LGA's) this year, up from 23 last year. Whilst many of these plantings are very small with just one or two paddocks per LGA, it points to the rapid expansion of lentils where there has been no significant movement in area planted of the other pulses for over 20 years.

Overall, the season is still very much in the balance with much of the grainbelt requiring regular rainfall going into spring as there is nothing in the bank at the moment.

2026 Season GIWA August 2026 Western Australia Crop Production Estimates (tonnes)

Port Zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Pulses	State Total
Kwinana	4,250,000	2,600,000	1,800,000	450,000	290,000	50,000	9,440,000
Albany	880,000	1,900,000	1,000,000	210,000	100,000	20,000	4,110,000
Esperance	1,350,000	1,430,000	960,000	28,000	40,000	49,000	3,857,000
Geraldton	2,550,000	180,000	580,000	4,000	290,000	1,000	3,605,000
Totals	9,030,000	6,110,000	4,340,000	692,000	720,000	120,000	21,012,000

Note:

- 1) 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.
- 2) Production estimates are based on crop status at the time each new Crop Report is released, and assume seasonal conditions are average for the remainder of the growing season.
- 3) Oat tonnage refers to estimated grain production whilst early area estimates are for total area planted and includes oats intended for hay.

Geraldton Zone

The Geraldton port zone is still in very good shape closing in on spring. Top-up rainfall has been more regular than further south in the last month and some areas around Mingenew and Three Springs became too wet and have only recently dried out enough to become trafficable.

The western areas of the zone on the border of the West Midlands where crops emerged later look washed out and lack decent growth for this time of the year and will struggle once the days warm up, although this is not representative of the majority of the region. The low rainfall eastern areas right through to the north of Geraldton are fantastic with good biomass and enough moisture under them to fill the potentially big crops. The maturity timings are early, which is perfect if there is an early cut out of rain.

It is hard to see things deteriorating substantially from here even if spring rainfall is below average.

Kwinana Zone

Kwinana North Midlands

The region had some very timely rainfall of 20 to 40 mm across most of the zone last week which helped to maintain the zone's yield trajectory. The zone is now sitting at 250 to 300 mm of growing season rainfall and is tracking considerably better than the Great Southern. The grain yield potential is there if a couple more well-timed rains arrive.

Growers are now scrambling to get nitrogen top-ups completed across canola, wheat and barley before the next rain system forecast for early next week arrives.

Canola nitrogen has been maintained reasonably well and is tracking okay. Nitrogen applications on the cereals, which up until recently had been lagging, is now mostly in line with rainfall totals and nitrogen should not be yield limiting.

There is some disease sneaking in on cereals which is being dealt with through fungicides. The blackleg in canola appears to be more aggressive than previous years, although an aggressive fungicide strategy for both blackleg and sclerotinia has kept both under check.

Russian wheat aphid has been found in pockets around Moora and Marchagee, and green peach aphid is doing localised damage in a few areas.

The frost impact in the region is thought to be fairly limited up until now as minimum temperatures have not been as low as further south and the crops are not in overly vulnerable growth stages.

Hail strips have caused significant damage to some lupin and canola paddocks with more than 50 per cent of yield potential lost in the worst-affected paddocks.

The lentil area has increased substantially in the central wheatbelt with an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 ha, up from small test plantings in previous years. Grower confidence is building in the crop and as this grows, so will the area planted in future years.

Potassium deficiency has started to show up on some of the lighter soils, and boron toxicity is apparent on some heavier soils. Both are exacerbated by the dry conditions, and in the case of potassium, draw down from recent high yielding crops and inadequate applications this year.

Kwinana South

The eastern part of the zone is still looking pretty good with most areas having received 180 to 220 mm YTD rainfall. In the western portions of the zone, crops went in earlier and have used up soil moisture reserves and have been living hand to mouth recently. As you move to the south western areas where rainfall has been very light, crops are really struggling. South of Quairading right down to the Albany port zone has been very dry, with some growers receiving only around 110 mm YTD rainfall.

Warm sunny conditions in July sped up wheat development, but this has slowed down a little lately which will limit the frost risk slightly. However, crops are still further ahead in development than normal for this time of year.

There is boron toxicity showing up in barley on the heavier soils and this is causing physiological leaf spotting and leaf discolouration. Actual leaf disease has been low until now with some spot form leaf blotch just getting going in barley crops, as is powdery mildew. Potassium deficiency is also showing up on the lighter soils in the region.

Due to the relatively dry conditions, nitrogen use has been lower than recent years and crops have been relying on mineralised organic nitrogen more this year, and this is now starting to run out. The uncertainty around the intensity of rainfall from the cold fronts has resulted in growers being cautious with expenditure on topping up with nitrogen. Consequently, crops are generally underdone which will limit top end grain yield potential if the rainfall totals increase from here on.

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Overall, the region is on track for average yield potential, apart from the very poor southern areas of the zone.

Kwinana North East

The season is still looking pretty good overall despite the conservative planting approach taken at the start of the year. Nitrogen deficiency is now evident across the zone, not from leaching or stubble tie-up necessarily, but more so because nitrogen application rates were reduced in response to forward forecasts of a dry year.

Canola crops were looked after better than the cereals due to their potential profitability and received preferential treatment with nitrogen applications.

The northern portions of the zone where early and continued rainfall has been better, the crops were fed more in line with their potential and in these areas the grain yields will not be limited by fertiliser.

Barley crops look fantastic, as do oat crops. The early sown wheat and some barley now have heads out and some of these early crops have already escaped the main frost-risk window, although the later ones will still be at risk for the next few weeks.

Hail strips have caused localised damage, but it is probably early enough for affected crops to be able to compensate to some degree.

Powdery mildew is showing up in wheat which is a rare occurrence and a function of the good rainfall year. There is also more yellow spot in wheat and the early onset of septoria nodorum.

A couple more rainfall events and dodging frost will put the zone in a very good position leading up to harvest.

Albany Zone

Albany West

There have been repeat frost events across the zone although it is hard to assess damage at this stage as crops were not at particularly vulnerable growth stages.

The Ongerup and Jerramungup areas sit in some of the driest parts of the state at the moment and late sown crops are now too late to improve enough to achieve decent grain yields.

Agronomists are managing client expectations around water use efficiency and yield potential and having discussions around nitrogen top-ups in areas where rainfall has been low and yield potential doesn't justify additional nitrogen. The run of good years has resulted in very good returns from applied nitrogen, although due to the lack of subsoil moisture and in season rain, this is unlikely to be the case in the region this year.

Barley crops are just maintaining tillers at the moment, although these will begin to drop off without significant rain within the next seven to ten days, and yield potential will be lost if this occurs.

There is a distinct north/south line around Cranbrook with anything west of this line having received 130 to 150 mm more rainfall for the season than further east.

The western and south-western areas around Franklin River, Boyup Brook and Kojonup have as good a potential as any year in recent memory if the season continues.

Canola in the western zone is at 30 to 50 per cent flowering and has a long way to go before the finish of podding.

Barley in the western high-rainfall area has some flag leaf emergence which is a little ahead of schedule but not dramatically out of its ideal window.

The waterlogging in the western zone which was showing up a few weeks ago has abated and crops should have time to recover to reach reasonable yields.

Albany South

The zone is sitting in one of the drier patches of the grainbelt this year. The dry triangle has extended further north from previous reports and is now impacting on large areas in the northern portions of the zone. Some growers are sitting on only 120 to 125 mm of rain YTD even after the most recent falls, with some areas north and west of Ongerup on only 70 to 80 mm of rain YTD.

Where reasonable canola establishment was achieved through to Borden and east of Broomhill, the biomass has sucked the available moisture out, and crops are losing the bottom 300 mm of leaf now. Blackleg is unusually prevalent in the area and this has helped to defoliate the lower leaves on drought-stressed plants.

There have been at least half a dozen frost events across the zone with early canola bottom pods (at watery-ripe stage at time of impact) effectively destroyed with no seed remaining in the bottom 150 to 200 mm of main stem. Frost has also removed flowers and immature pods at the top of the canopy and with the sub-zero mornings this week, canola crops may have also lost pods from the middle section as well.

Canola yield estimates are now tracking at 1.3 to 1.5 t/ha on a water use efficiency basis from available soil moisture, which is around 700 to 800 kg/ha below what appeared achievable earlier in the season in the drier areas. In the better areas, the canola yield outlook has been revised down to 2 to 2.5 t/ha from the 3 to 3.5 t/ha that looked achievable earlier in the season.

Barley crops still have the potential to yield very well with most crops showing sufficient tillers to achieve average or slightly above average yields where establishment was adequate, but the later sown crops are struggling. Some barley crops in the drier areas are showing an orangey tinge of moisture stress at the end of last week, a warning signal that they are running out of moisture.

Barley needs 20 to 25 mm from the coming rain event this weekend to maintain current yield potential, otherwise tillers will begin to drop off, reducing grain yield potential. The barley is very clean with very little to no disease.

The wheat crops in the region were later emerged and will slide in yield potential pretty quickly if significant rain does not arrive soon.

Albany East (Lakes Region)

Crops across the zone are now really starting to feel the effects of the very low rainfall year. With some oat and barley crops turning up their toes and turning a horrible red and yellow colour. The later start over large areas combined with low rainfall and now very cold conditions have severely restricted crop growth and yield potential for the region. There is still some good crops which have benefited from emerging early or have been lucky enough to jag more rain.

It is too late now for the crops to recover to any great extent even if the rain decides to crank up, and with the current weather patterns of light rain followed by large high-pressure systems resulting in clear skies, frost will be the next thing to contend with in the region.

Esperance Zone

Conditions in the zone are fairly positive overall with some relief that July was drier than June. The drier July allowed significant recovery in the badly waterlogged southern parts of the zone. The first week of August delivered good rainfall across the whole zone with the Salmon Gums area receiving approximately 25 mm and the coastal areas received 70 mm or more over three to four days with good coverage through Cascade, Beaumont, Grass Patch and Scaddan.

The sandplain coastal country may experience renewed waterlogging with this August rain, and if the rain continues, this will result in severe yield limitation in affected areas. Waterlogging also took significant bulk out of wheat through the sandplain, and the three plus weeks of wet conditions has had a lasting impact on those crops and has also amplified powdery mildew pressure.

Yield potential in the core areas of the zone is enormous with nitrogen responsiveness exceptional this season. The continued nitrogen applications will likely drive good returns as the need has matched the growth. Some of the lower rainfall mallee areas may not reach full potential due to nitrogen budget constraints at the tail end of the season.

Sclerotinia in canola is quite bad this season due to warmer than usual conditions favouring infection.

Scald in barley is not as bad as it was last year just yet, although this may be due to more proactive fungicide strategies as growers respond to last season when many let it get away too much and infections became firmly established.

Pulses are looking good overall with disease levels low.

Crops are now in the high-risk window with barley in head in some areas. The next three weeks represent the highest-risk frost window for the zone's most advanced crops. Recent cold mornings are making growers nervous with areas such as Lort River recording minus 2.9 degrees Celsius this week and Salmon Gums had minus 4 degrees several weeks ago. The warm early July sped crops up and the cold late July slowed things down, resulting in more evenness in maturity across the zone than might have been expected.

Frost has already caused some canola pod damage with pods not forming and stopping in their tracks in affected areas.



Season Outlook, August 2026

Meredith Guthrie, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Climate summary

Rainfall

Rainfall from 1 July to 10 August saw Rosa Brook record the highest rainfall total of 221 mm, while Wyalkatchem received just 10 mm (Figure 1). The rainfall since July has been below decile 3 for much of the South West Land Division (Figure 2). The FAO crop soil moisture map, averaged across 10 soil types for 9 August, indicates generally low soil moisture levels across the SWLD (Figure3) following a dry July. Another cold front is forecast from the 18 August.

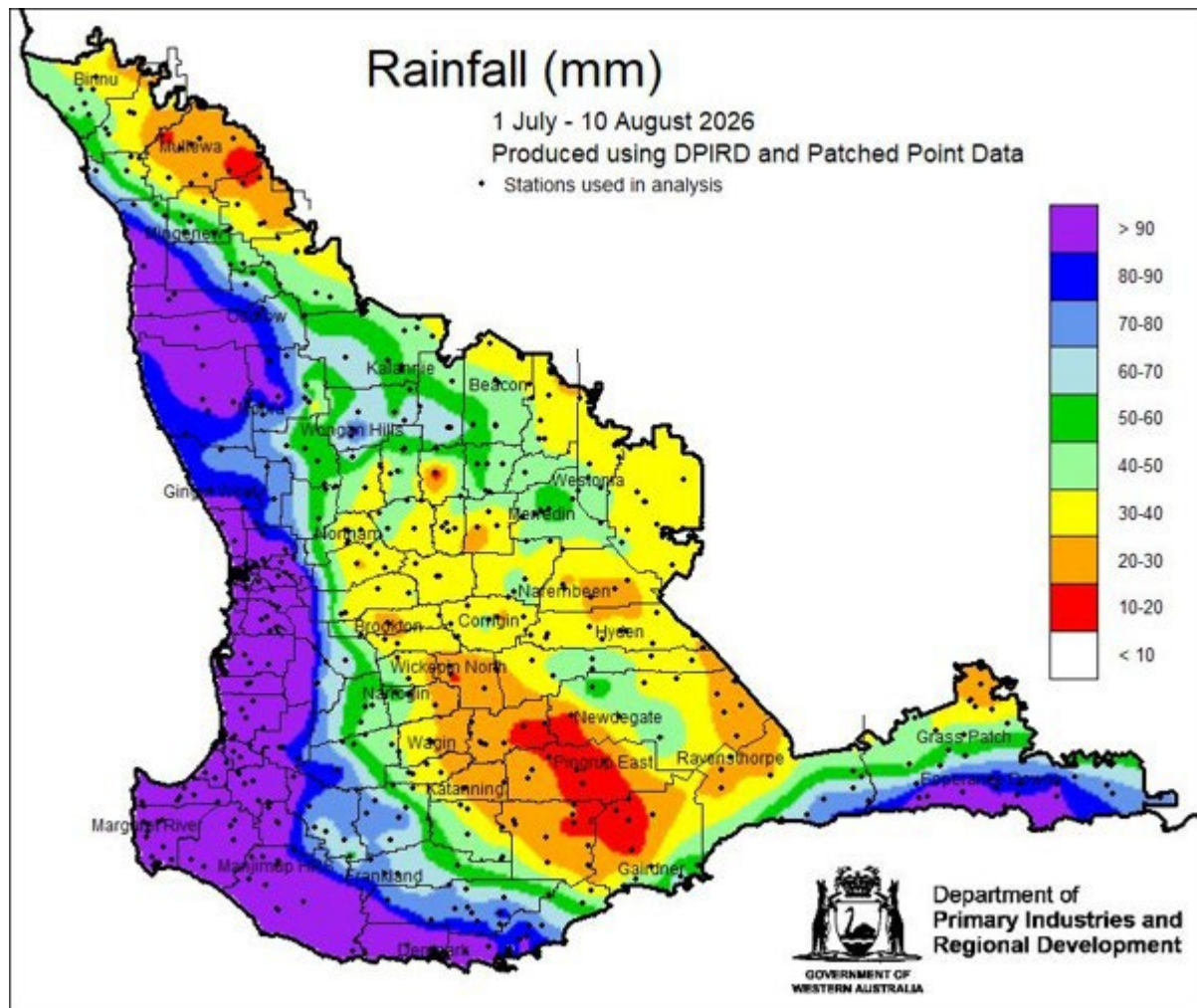


Figure 1 Rainfall from 1 July to 10 August 2026 for the South West Land Division (SWLD). Rosa Brook has the highest total of 221 mm and Wyalkatchem has the lowest total of 10 mm.

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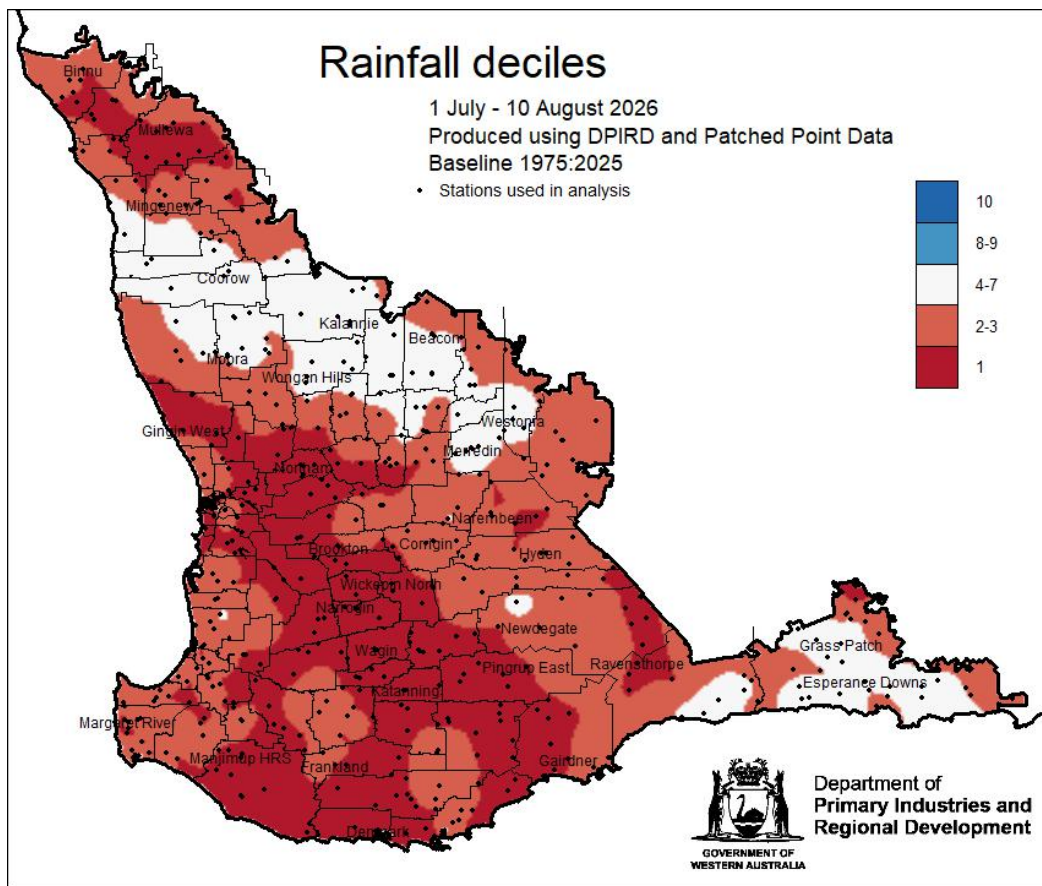


Figure 2 Rainfall deciles from 1 July to 10 August 2026 for the South West Land Division (SWLD). Indicating decile 3 or below for the majority.

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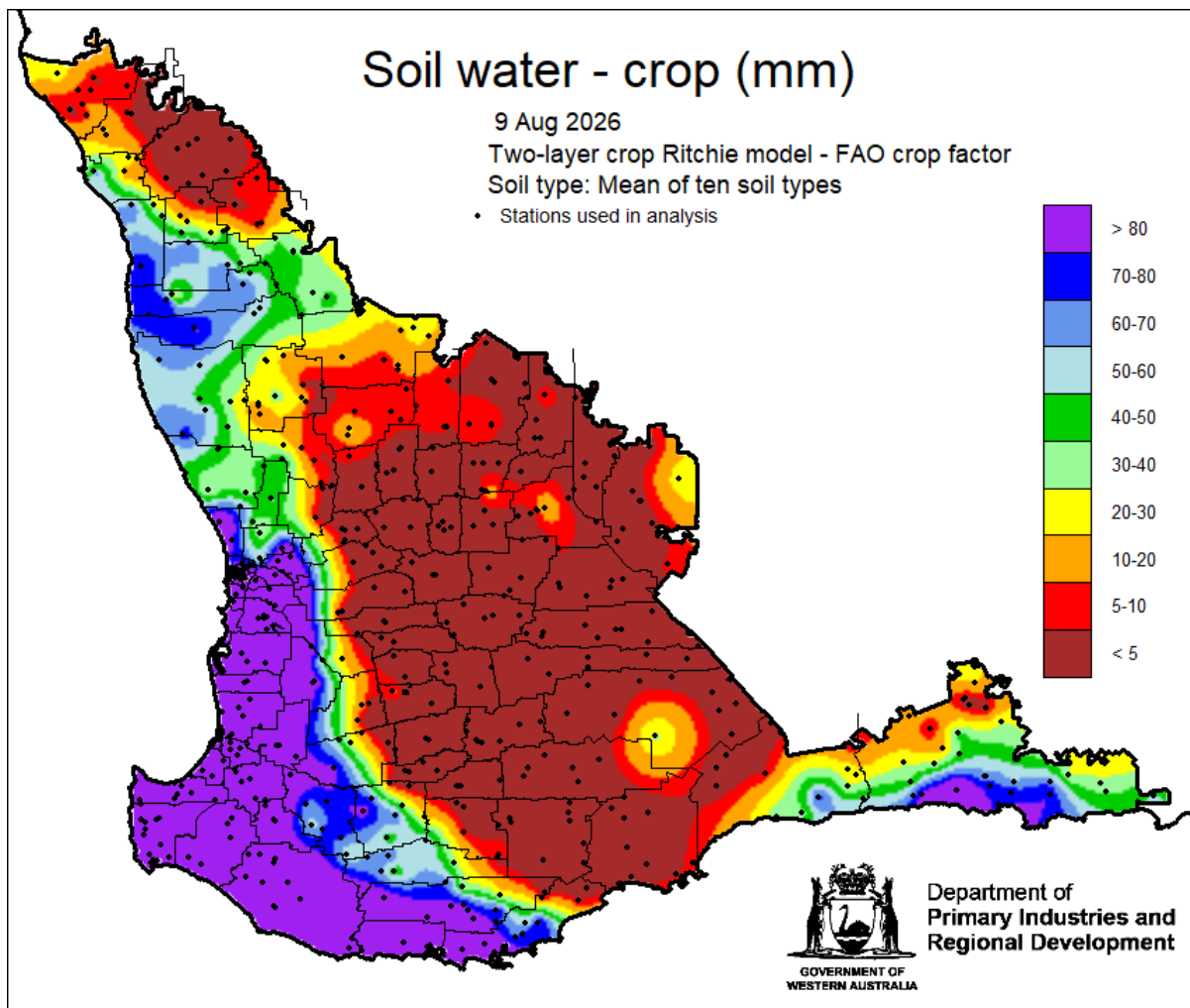


Figure 3 Plant available soil water map for the SWLD using rainfall up to 9 August 2026, uses the FAO crop factor method and represents the mean of ten soil types. The map indicates generally low levels of soil moisture.

Forecast

The August to October rainfall outlook from the Climate Copernicus website, which combines nine global climate models including the ACCESS model from the Bureau of Meteorology, indicates that below-median rainfall is most likely across the SWLD for the months of August to October (Figure 3). Long-term outlooks for spring are more favourable, with wetter conditions more likely, however it is expected that the spring rainfall will not make up for the dry July conditions particularly for the Great Southern.

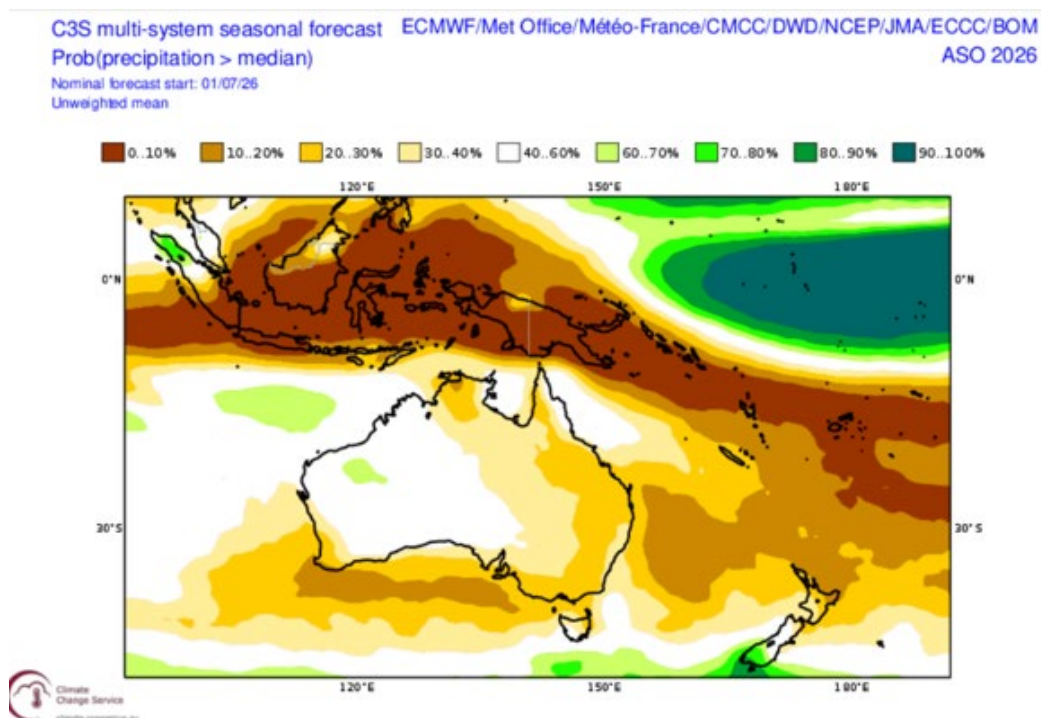


Figure 3. Probability of exceeding median rainfall for Australia in August to October 2026 from Climate Copernicus, which is a median of 9 climate models. Indicating below median rainfall is expected for the South West Land Division for August to October.

An El Niño has become established in the Pacific Ocean and is expected to persist until at least the end of the year. Most climate models indicate a positive Indian Ocean Dipole developing from September, along with an increased prevalence of high-pressure systems during winter and spring. For August and September, these climate drivers are likely to reduce rainfall and bring higher temperatures across the SWLD.

Temperature

In July, maximum temperatures were very much above average across the SWLD. Minimum temperatures were average across the SWLD, with below average temperatures in the central grainbelt. Lake King recorded 18 nights below 2°C, which is 10 more than the long-term average for July.

Outlooks for maximum and minimum temperatures indicate that conditions are likely to be warmer than normal for August to October. Despite the outlook for warmer-than-normal minimum temperatures, frost remains a risk in frost-prone areas. Reduced cloud cover associated with high-pressure systems can increase overnight heat loss, leading to colder surface temperatures and favourable conditions for frost formation.

Additional information is available from:

- [DPIRD: Weather stations](#)
- [DPIRD: Soil Water Tool](#)
- [DPIRD Rainfall to Date Tool](#)
- [DPIRD Seasonal Climate Outlook newsletter](#)
- [BoM: Rainfall totals for cool season 2025/26](#)
- [BoM: Rainfall outlook for the next week](#)
- [BoM: Seasonal Rainfall Outlook](#)
- [BoM: Australian Water Outlook](#)

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