

## Summary - 2017 Seasonal Outlook

Following good rains in most districts at the end of January and early February, confidence was high and there was hope of a repeat of the early sowing opportunities of 2016. Apart from some small areas of canola that went in on moisture, most areas are now dry on the surface and growers are faced with dry sowing. Dry sowing poses fewer risks this year with the good levels of sub-soil moisture. For most regions rainfall events of 15-20mm will ensure the soil moisture joins up and crops will survive through to the winter.

Most cropping regions throughout the state have at least 40-50mm of plant available soil water. Exceptions to this are close to the coast north and south of Geraldton, the north-eastern areas of Mount Marshall, Koorda, Dalwallinu and Perenjori shires, and the western areas of the great southern.

Most of the Esperance port zone, the south coast east of Albany and the western Kwinana port zone are very wet with plant available soil water of 60mm or more. The lack of rain on the horizon is concerning but it's early days yet and having stored moisture in the profile gives growers confidence to plant dry with less reliance on finishing rains in the spring.

Due to the higher price compared to wheat, barley and oats, canola plantings are projected to be as high as 20% more than 2016 in some regions, but this may decrease if it continues to be dry. For most areas wheat is projected to remain about the same as last year or fall a few percentage points. Barley area will drop in most districts by about 0.3% and oat plantings will drop, particularly in the great southern. Pasture area will increase slightly, limited by the high cost of re-stocking.

The warnings of the implications of a green bridge and the benefits of conserving soil moisture following the extensive summer rains has resulted in most paddocks going into crop being sprayed out and now bare. There are still risks from air borne foliar disease and aphid build up on volunteer plants in paddocks left out to pasture, and on roadsides and paddocks that were sprayed out soon after the rains.

Preliminary estimated changes to crop areas from 2016 are shown below.

### 2017 WA Crop Area Estimates (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Field pea	State total
Kwinana	2,371,200	476,500	458,100	149,600	124,300	9,500	3,589,200
Albany	714,000	450,200	315,000	96,800	38,750	6,000	1,620,750
Esperance	490,000	288,000	278,100	6,000	9,000	14,500	1,085,600
Geraldton	873,000	53,300	160,500	7,900	185,200	800	1,280,700
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,448,200</b>	<b>1,268,000</b>	<b>1,211,700</b>	<b>260,300</b>	<b>357,250</b>	<b>30,800</b>	<b>7,576,250</b>
<b>% change</b>	<b>-0.4%</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>-2.5%</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>-0.6%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>

## **Geraldton Zone**

### **Northern Geraldton Zone**

Subsoil moisture in the Geraldton area is variable. Some eastern areas that received up to 200mm from the rains earlier in the year have nearly a full soil moisture profile. Western areas that received less than 100mm have less than 30mm of plant available moisture stored in the profile.

Some canola has already been sown into moisture on the lighter soils around Coorow and Carnamah, and where there has been enough moisture to get a germination. Other areas have started dry sowing canola but growers are in no rush at this stage with no rain forecast in the short term. Most growers are holding off until after Easter before getting underway with dry sowing.

Canola areas will be up 10-15% in the region from 2016 and if good rains fall in April it could go as high as 30% more than last year. Canola seed shortages of Roundup Ready varieties will mean the area of those varieties will drop, and be taken up by mostly open pollinated varieties.

The lupin belt will continue the trend of the last couple of years with an increase in lupin plantings of between 5-10%. The low wheat prices coupled with the lower cost of growing a lupin crop on those soils that suit lupins in the medium to high rainfall areas, will see lupins getting close to 50% of the crop area.

In eastern areas which received good rainfall in January and subsequent adequate sub-soil moisture, some of the fallow phase of the wheat/fallow rotations will go into wheat or feed barley.

### **Southern Geraldton Zone and North West Kwinana Zone (The Midlands)**

A small area of canola has been sown but in most of the region the moisture is too deep to get a germination. Some growers got underway with dry sowing canola on 10 April but most were holding off until after Easter. The canola area is projected to go up by 5-10% in the region at the expense of lupins and barley, with canola now comprising around 25-30% of the break crop area. The lack of Roundup Ready seed and poor quality hybrid Triazine Tolerant seed has resulted in the majority of intended canola plantings being of a similar blackleg resistant group which is a concern for future years.

The wheat area is likely to be similar or slightly less than last year with a small increase in pasture areas due to growers hanging onto aged ewes and wethers because of good prices for meat and wool. Dry sowing of cereals will get underway near the end of April with a good rain of 15-20mm at the end of April / early May needed to get the crop up or to sow on to moisture.

Significant quantities of oaten hay are still on farm from 2016, but the hay area will remain static as it has for the last five years due to it becoming part of the rotation in the region. This is unlike some other parts of the state where the area swings from one year to the next due to price.

There have been a lot of stubbles burnt this year mainly due to the high load from 2016, and to a lesser extent for frost mitigation.

## **Kwinana Zone**

### **Kwinana East**

The summer rain in areas that received good falls has given growers confidence that with an April or early May planting, grain yields could be above long term averages. Dry sowing will get underway after Easter with a projected increase of up to 20% for canola in the region. Wheat and barley areas will probably remain around the same as 2016, with some fallow dropped and put into crop where there is sub-soil moisture. There may be a slight increase in the lupin area and some growers are giving chickpeas a go this year after many years of not growing them. The poor results with field peas again in 2016 will see the area drop further.

Most stubbles have been sprayed to conserve moisture and there is little risk of a green bridge in the region.

There may be a slight swing into pasture this year due to good livestock prices but this will be limited due to low numbers and the high prices if re-stocking.

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## **Kwinana West**

There have been small areas of canola sown into moisture with around 30% needing to be re-sown due to insufficient plant numbers established. The rain was a bit early for big areas to go in as most paddocks had parts that were too dry for a germination by the end of March and early April.

The canola area will be up 5-10% in the region, it is limited in the western areas by the already high percentage of grower programs in canola. There is some potential for this to be higher in the medium rainfall areas, but if it stays dry in April, canola will be swapped for cereals where they are dry sowing. Most paddocks are bare, however the unsprayed or partially green paddocks could potentially cause problems with a green bridge for pests and diseases.

Oat area will be down in the higher rainfall areas of the region but as you go east there may not be much change as profit, particularly on the acid soils, was good in 2016 even though prices were low.

The excellent germination of clover is starting to die off and will need rain in the next week or two to hang on through to winter.

After Easter, most growers will start dry sowing those paddocks dry enough not to get a split germination, with confidence high in the more reliable rainfall zones of the region.

## **Albany Zone**

### **Albany South Coast**

There have been small areas of canola going in around less than 5% at this stage. The canola area will increase by 10% in the region in 2017, limited only by the high percentage of canola sown in the past and the tightness of the rotation limiting the increase.

The small area of lupins in the region are being sown into dry soil to get them out of the way for when most of the seeding will start up after Easter. As there is no rain forecast in the short term, most growers are holding off and will start dry sowing when they know they won't get a split germination.

The barley area will be down as it is forecast to be the lowest profit crop this year. The reduced area of barley will result in increases in canola and pasture. The wheat area will be similar to 2016 and even with the current low price, the oat area will most likely not change much either, as oats have a fit in the waterlogged prone and frost prone areas.

The nearly full soil moisture profile could pose the greatest risk in the region if there is a normal winter rainfall pattern. Paddocks could get too wet and make crop protection and fertilising difficult. With growers mindful of this, some paddocks have been left unsprayed to help them dry out but this green bridge will cause problems with root diseases in those areas not sprayed out and contribute to leaf disease in neighbouring crops. The green volunteers on road verges will also contribute to foliar disease and pest build up in this years' crop.

### **West Albany**

The western areas of the great southern have received less summer rain than most areas on the east, therefore the risk of waterlogging in winter and risks associated with a green bridge are reduced for the region. The soil profile is less saturated than it was this time last year which is a relief for growers. The surface is dry now with 15-20mm of rain needed to join up with sub-soil moisture.

There is a lot of burning going on in the district due to the heavy stubbles from 2016. Most cereal volunteers have been controlled by the burn and/or knockdown sprays following the rain in the summer.

The canola area will be up 10% with dry sowing starting after Easter.

The wheat and pasture areas will be up at the expense of barley and oats. There will be a significant reduction in the area of oats for grain and hay due to the low prices for both and the high stocks.

There may be some oats grown for fodder but nothing for sale.

The pasture area will probably go up at the expense of cropping in general due to the profitability of sheep over cropping. For the region, sheep are still more profitable than most cropping options.

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## Lakes Region (East Albany)

Sub-soil moisture is very good in most of the region with some paddocks requiring a couple of sprays to control the weeds. There is a risk of cereal disease carry over with volunteers in pasture paddocks but most paddocks going into crop this year have weeds well controlled.

Some small areas of dry sowing of canola started before Easter but most seeding will start after Easter for barley and wheat following canola.

There will not be major changes to crop area percentages in the region from last year with canola only increasing by a few percent, wheat down a few percent and barley and lupins about the same. There has been some renewed interest in noodle wheat with the area planted to be slightly higher than in 2016. The barley area will be 80% feed and 20% malt varieties. There will be a slight swing to pasture of up to 5%. Oats for hay will drop by 5% and field peas look to be dropped completely by growers from the rotation. There is some interest in chick peas but the area will be small.

## Esperance Zone

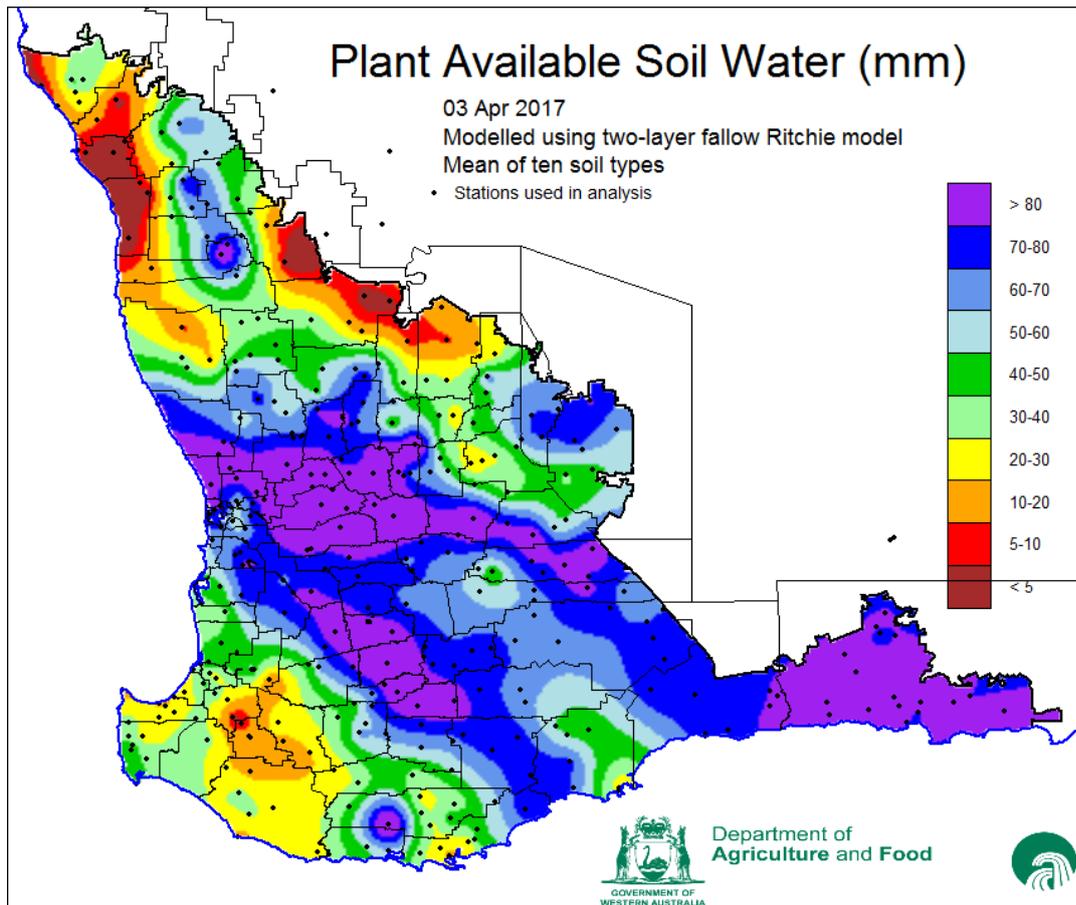
Most of the Esperance port zone has a very wet, full soil moisture profile. Some of the sandplain country has dried out on the surface but for the majority of the region when canola planting gets underway after Easter, the crop will be going in on moisture. In some cases growers are holding off with sowing canola as the shortfall in seed was made up of the shorter season varieties.

The canola area is expected to increase by 10-15% mainly at the expense of barley. The wheat area may increase slightly up 5% also at the expense of barley due to the perceived potential greater upside in price and how it fits into the rotation. The barley area is projected to be down up to 10% for the region. The wheat area increase will be mostly Scepter if the moisture holds up until early May. Pasture area will be similar or slightly more. Generally paddocks have been sprayed out following the summer rains but wheat and barley stubbles going to pasture have volunteers which may contribute to leaf disease in this years' crops. There are green peach aphid and diamondback moth larvae on volunteer canola which will be a risk for germinating canola crops in 2017.

## Season Outlook

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Rainfall over summer 2016/17 has been well above average over most of WA, especially in January and February. Resulting soil water stores are high over central and southern agricultural areas (see Figure 1). Northern regions are much more variable, with some parts indicating low water storage. This pattern is consistent with the Bureau of Meteorology's landscape soil water balance model (see link below).



**Figure 1. Plant available soil water at 3 April 2017 estimated using a simple two-layer model and assuming fallow conditions. The model uses daily rain from BoM and DAFWA stations since November 2016.**

The seasonal rainfall outlook for April to June 2017 is unusual because of the high level of agreement among models so early in the year for developments in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, as well as for rainfall outlooks. Please see the overview as follows:

- Most climate models indicate an El Niño event is likely to develop in the Pacific Ocean, as well as an Indian Ocean Dipole-positive event in the tropical Indian Ocean in 2017.
- Historical records indicate that below average rainfall during winter and spring is likely over southern WA if these two events occur together.
- Current conditions in the Pacific and Indian Oceans are neutral.
- Seasonal climate outlooks for rainfall over WA from Australian and international climate models, as well as DAFWA's seasonal rainfall outlook, are also indicating below average seasonal rainfall for WA being likely from April onwards.

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- Such strong agreement among climate outlook models is unusual, especially so early in the year.
- Assuming the outlook for below average seasonal rainfall unfolds as indicated, crop and pasture performance is likely to be determined by timing of key rainfall events and access to stored soil water.

### **Bureau of Meteorology: Seasonal three month rainfall outlook, April to June 2017**

#### **Summary**

- April to June rainfall is likely to be below average over the southern two-thirds of mainland Australia excluding the east coast, and above average for the far north.
- April is likely to be drier than average across the south and southwest of Australia, but wetter for eastern NSW, southeast Queensland and far northern Australia.
- Daytime temperatures for April to June are likely to be above average for most of Australia.
- Night-time temperatures for April to June suggest a warmer three months for many parts of Australia, except northern WA and the top end of the NT, where cooler than average nights are more likely. Southern WA shows roughly equal chances of cooler or warmer April to June nights.
- Outlooks are influenced by warming in tropical Pacific sea surface temperatures and a cooler eastern Indian Ocean.

#### **Additional information can be sourced from:**

- **[DAFWA: Seasonal Climate Information](#)**
- **[DAFWA: Soil Water Tool](#)**
- **[BoM: WA Seasonal Rainfall Outlook, next 3 months](#)**
- **[BoM: Decile rainfall for January to March 2017](#)**
- **[BoM: Landscape soil water balance](#)**