

## The 2018 Season

Growers in some areas are commencing an earlier start to seeding for 2018 with an estimated total 8.4 million hectares crop area to be planted across Western Australia.

Although some have started, very little crop has been sown in the wheatbelt to date. Small areas of canola have gone in on moisture from recent thunderstorms in the eastern and southern regions with most canola sown dry so far.

Growers are now dry sowing or will start to dry sow in the next week with most planning to start by ANZAC Day.

The outlook for increased barley plantings looks likely to occur although this will be less in the regions of the state that had a reasonable season last year. The wheat area is continuing to decrease, being substituted for barley and to a lesser extent pasture. Resowing of pastures to legumes is an increasing trend across the whole state as is the sowing of cereals intended for grazing by stock.

Intended canola and lupin areas will remain about the same as last year, although rain over the next few weeks will determine the final areas sown.

The seasonal rainfall outlook is neutral to lower for winter and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's (DPIRD) statistical model for April to June shows a preference towards drier than normal conditions.

### 2018 WA Crop Area Estimates (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Pulses	State total
Kwinana	2,600,000	520,000	650,000	150,000	150,000	10,000	4,080,000
Albany	750,000	540,000	330,000	150,000	40,000	3,000	1,813,000
Esperance	500,000	300,000	255,000	10,000	10,000	20,000	1,095,000
Geraldton	900,000	80,000	180,000	10,000	200,000	1,000	1,371,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,750,000</b>	<b>1,440,000</b>	<b>1,415,000</b>	<b>320,000</b>	<b>400,000</b>	<b>34,000</b>	<b>8,359,000</b>

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

## Geraldton Zone

### Northern Geraldton

Growers are just getting underway dry sowing crops. Topsoil is very dry with moisture down deep in most areas away from the coast which will be of value later in the season. Crops are being sown without the need for insecticides or knockdown herbicides.

The area of barley is projected to be up at the expense of wheat area due to the current high price. There has been more noodle wheat varieties grown in the region in recent years and this is expected to continue, noodle varieties have been yielding close to yields of milling varieties. Canola and lupin plantings are projected to be up although this will depend on rain in the next few weeks.

Pasture area has been increasing for the region in recent years particularly on the heavier soils and will continue this year. Oats and barley are going in as fodder crops on pasture paddocks to provide early stock feed.

There have been reasonable areas of mechanical soil amelioration on the lighter soils following the summer rains. There is noticeably less burning of stubbles in the region in part due to the lower yielding crops from 2017 but also due to an increase in “chaff lining” at harvest time by growers.

### Southern Geraldton and Northwest Kwinana

Sowing to date has been confined to small areas of canola going in on moisture around the Wongan Hills and Latham areas and dry sowing pasture. There are strips of country with good stores of sub-soil moisture but the moisture is too far down to sow into. Dry sowing of canola will ramp up next week and then move on to the cereals in late April or early May.

There is likely to be an increase in the barley area in the region due to the current high prices. This region of the state has traditionally been a large producer of noodle wheat and noodle varieties have been a relatively high percentage of the wheat area for growers. The area of noodle wheat grown in this region may stay steady or decrease in response to projected increases in other regions of the state. Total wheat area will remain about the same as last year.

Canola area will be down slightly due to the lack of hybrid seed available for planting. Hybrid canola is favoured in these northern regions due to its ability to get away in tough conditions and finish in a drying profile. The Triazine Tolerant varieties are running out of weed control options and are increasingly relying on a late glyphosate spray to control seed set.

The lupin area will remain about the same as 2017.

There has been a slight shift in increasing pasture area with either aerial seeded legumes being sown or a fodder crop of either oats or barley going in for early feed.

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## Kwinana Zone

### Kwinana West

Some canola has been planted into moisture following the thunderstorms over the past two weeks and is up and looking promising. Most seeding so far has been dry sowing of pasture and cereals for sheep feed. Dry sowing of canola will get underway over the next two weeks with projections of slightly less canola planted this year unless there are good opening rains in April. The next three to four weeks will determine the mix of crop types for most growers.

There is likely to be an increase in lupin plantings of between 10-15 per cent due to the current price and newer varieties being more reliable in yield. There is an understanding by most growers that they need more legumes in the system but there still tends to be an “us and them” mentality when it comes to those that grow legumes and those that don't.

Barley plantings are likely to be up slightly due to historically high prices compared to wheat and the ability of barley to generally out-yield wheat. Wheat plantings are projected to be similar to last year with a slight shift to noodle wheat varieties due to some of the newer varieties such as Ninja yielding close to or equal to Scepter.

Oats will still be a minor crop with equal quantities grown for hay and grain. Pasture area may be up slightly as growers with sheep are steadily increasing numbers. Most growers in the western areas of the Kwinana zone had a reasonable year and those that did are investing in resowing pasture legumes to increase the carrying capacity of their pasture paddocks.

### Kwinana East

Summer rainfall in January and February was patchy and isolated in most areas of the zone. Rainfall was generally higher in the eastern areas and individual growers have up to 80mm of soil available moisture. Some wheat has been planted in the areas around Southern Cross, Bullfinch and Marvel Loch and small areas of canola have gone in around Mukinbudin, Nungarin, Burracoppin and south to Muntadgin. Those that have missed out on the recent storms are planning to start sowing dry in the next week and most will be going by ANZAC Day, starting with lupins then moving onto barley and wheat. The canola area will be down this year for the region if the opening rains don't come in April.

Wheat area is expected to be about the same as last year, barley will be up slightly and lupins equal to last year. Oat area will be unchanged for the lower rainfall regions with most used for grazing, hay or grain retained on farm. The pasture area will remain unchanged or slightly up as most growers are opting to spend on improving the legume component of the pasture paddocks rather than leave more country out for those that have sheep. The recent trend towards more serradella rather than sub-clover is likely to continue.

There are some experimental paddocks of chickpeas going in again but the area is small. Small areas of field peas will be planted with most brown manured rather than harvested.

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## Albany Zone

### Albany South Coast

Subsoil moisture is good for most of the region from summer rains and carryover from last year. The moisture is too deep to be sowing into for most areas except close to the coast where there have been small areas of canola sown.

Most of the activity has been dry sowing pastures and fodder crops for stock feed. There has been a slight shift to more pasture in the region in recent years and this year will be the same. Dry sowing of the major crops will start in the next week, starting with canola, lupins and oats.

The total crop area may be back 5-10 per cent this year, although most of the enterprise mix decisions will be made in the next month. There is likely to be a small increase in feed barley area this year with some growers having already forward sold a percentage of their intended barley crop at the current high prices.

Canola area is forecast to remain unchanged this year for the region and wheat a slight decrease in area.

The weed germination from the remnants of the cyclone that went through several weeks ago is still hanging on in some areas with most being grazed or sprayed out. The disease or insect pest risk from a green bridge in the region this year is very low.

### West and South Albany

The western areas of the great southern have received little summer rain and the soil moisture profiles are low. There is more moisture in the profile as you move east in the region and some areas around Ongerup, Jerramungup, and West River have reasonable levels to start the season. In most of these areas where there is sub-soil moisture, it is too deep to sow into now, although there are isolated paddocks of canola that have been sown and emerged. Due to the lack of rain over summer there is no green bridge to speak of.

The feed barley area will be up slightly in the region due to the relatively high price and potential grain yield advantage over wheat. Wheat area will continue to decline this year as it has over recent times and be substituted with pasture for livestock. Growers are dry sowing pasture legume species to improve the stocking rate of existing pasture paddocks and more area is going into oats and barley for early grazing. An increased area to normal of oat and barley will be retained on farm for grain at the end of the season due to the current low stock levels. The oat area will also be up slightly due to the relatively high price for milling grade oats.

Canola area will be similar to last year although this can change depending on rains in the next few weeks. Lupin area is likely to remain unchanged for the area this year.

PreDicta B tests are showing high levels of nematodes in the soil, possibly from the extended spring period over the last two seasons and the increase in cropping frequency. This may impact on enterprise decision in the region.

### Eastern Albany (Lakes Region)

Sub-soil moisture is less than this time last year, although most of the region has some stored moisture that will be useful later in the year. The summer rains of up to 70-80mm for most of the region came in several small amounts and evaporation from each of these events has reduced the effective stored soil moisture. Weed germinations from summer rains have required growers to have sprayed paddocks 2-3 times.

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A small area of canola has been sown into moisture from recent storms although most will go in dry over the next few weeks if it does not rain. Intended canola plantings will be similar to last year. The area of barley will be up 5-10 per cent mainly at the expense of wheat area. Lupin area will be similar to last year.

The pasture area may increase slightly as most growers are opting to resow legumes into run down pasture paddocks to increase stocking rates, rather than increase the area at the expense of crop area percentage. The break crop area, made up of canola, lupins and pasture will remain at about 35 per cent for most growers in the region.

There have been reports of locusts in the Kulin, Kondinin and south Kellerberrin areas that may impact on emerging crops.

### Esperance Zone

Most of the Esperance port zone has reasonable levels of moisture in the profile. There has been some canola go in on moisture although the area is small. Growers, active presently, are sowing pastures and canola dry.

Grain proteins were generally low in the Esperance port zone last year and growers are aware of the need to increase the area of legumes and to alter nitrogen application strategies. There is an increase in pasture legumes being sown in the region as there is for other areas of the state to improve the quality of pasture feed and provide nitrogen for following crops.

There is a lot of discussion in the region around grain quality and growers will likely implement more sophisticated nitrogen application strategies as well as pay more attention to trace element requirements. Leaf disease was a problem for many growers last year in barley and wheat and this will be also be a focus for growers this year.

The crop enterprise mix is unlikely to change significantly this year as most growers had a good 2017 and will stick to their rotations rather than chase prices. The uncertainty around pulse crop prices together with a lack of suitable cold tolerant varieties will limit the expansion of pulse area in the region. Canola will predominantly be Triazine Tolerant varieties in part due to the lack of availability of hybrid canola seed.

Growers are faced with big stubbles and there is more burning being carried out than normal.

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## Season Outlook, April 2018

Ian Foster, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD)

After a summer where rainfall was well above average, March rainfall has been below average across much of the agricultural area. Thunderstorms have been active in eastern parts but rainfall has been patchy. Accordingly, modelled soil water shows low levels of storage across much of the northern, central and southern agricultural areas (see Figure 1). In areas showing higher levels of storage, such as the Esperance region and western parts of the central agricultural area, water is likely to be at depth rather than near the surface.

The seasonal rainfall outlook from DPIRD's statistical model for April to June shows a preference towards drier than normal conditions. Most international climate models have a neutral outlook for this period, meaning no preference towards either wetter or drier than normal conditions. Beyond that period, the risk of below average seasonal rainfall increases during winter.

In the shorter term, April appears likely to have below average rainfall. Opportunities for early crop emergence may be limited except in areas where recent thunderstorms have provided soil moisture.

### Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook summary (April to June 2018)

- The April to June outlook, issued 29 March 2018, shows parts of the tropical north, eastern Victoria, Tasmania, and southeast NSW are likely to be wetter than average. Elsewhere, there are roughly equal chances of a wetter or drier than average three months.
- April is likely to be wetter than average over Cape York Peninsula, but drier in parts of WA and the central NT.
- Days are likely to be warmer than average for parts of southeast Australia and the northern Kimberley in WA, but cooler than average for much of the tropical north. The rest of the country has roughly equal chances of a warmer or cooler than average three months.
- The La Niña in the tropical Pacific Ocean has ended, and ENSO neutral conditions now prevail. The Indian Ocean is also likely to have neutral conditions for most of the next three months, so there is no strong push towards broad scale wetter or drier conditions for much of the country.

Additional information can be sourced from:

[DPIRD: Seasonal Climate Information](#)

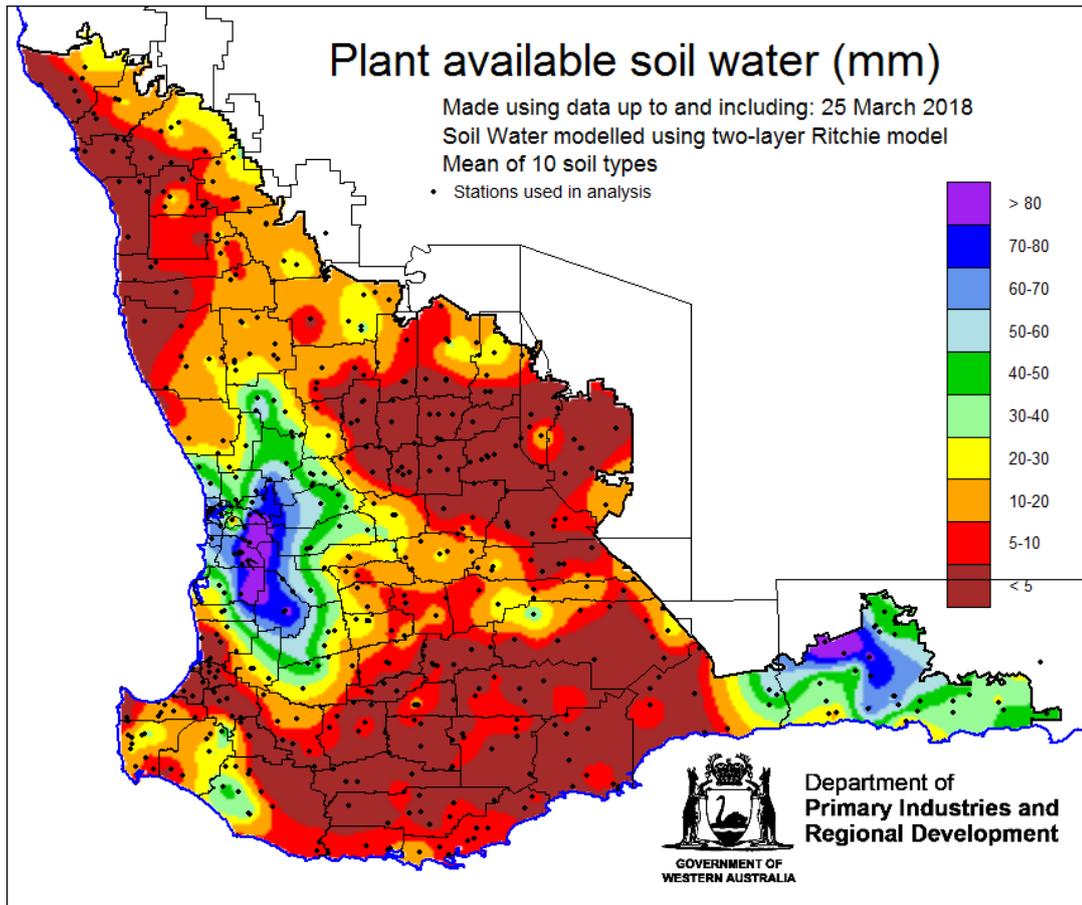
[DAFWA: Soil Water Tool](#)

[BoM: Seasonal Rainfall Outlook, next 3 months](#)

[BoM: Decile rainfall for January to March 2018](#)

[BoM: Landscape soil water balance](#)

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**Figure 1. Modelled plant available soil water from DPIRD’s fallow water balance model. This map uses rainfall to 25 March 2018, with no data available since then.**

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