

May 2018 Season Outlook

The dry conditions across most of the grain growing regions of Western Australia continue with most of the state waiting for a general break to the season.

Isolated pockets of early sown canola, lupin and to a lesser extent cereals are up in the eastern, south coastal and Esperance regions with most paddocks patchy due to the lack of follow up rain.

There has been widespread wind damage to emerged crops and paddocks where stubble was not anchored in the southern regions from a severe wind event last week.

The area of canola will be down from last year due to the lack of rain with most of these paddocks being substituted for barley. As a result of this, the estimated barley area has increased.

The wheat area remains unchanged as there is still a large proportion of the wheat area to be planted. Most growers recognise it is still early days and are not rushing things currently.

The lupin and oat areas are lower than earlier forecasts with the final area sown expected to become more accurate by the end of May.

The area sown to legume pasture has increased significantly reflecting the improved profitability of sheep.

The seasonal rainfall outlook from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's (DPIRD) statistical model for May to July (refer Figure 1 at end of report) shows a clear preference towards drier than normal conditions. Temperatures in WA during May are very likely to be warmer than average and the rainfall outlook for the month is highly likely to be below average.

2018 May WA Crop Area Estimates (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Pulses	State total
Kwinana	2,650,000	550,000	500,000	140,000	130,000	10,000	3,980,000
Albany	770,000	560,000	330,000	130,000	40,000	3,000	1,833,000
Esperance	510,000	320,000	240,000	10,000	10,000	20,000	1,110,000
Geraldton	920,000	100,000	130,000	10,000	180,000	1,000	1,341,000
Totals	4,850,000	1,530,000	1,200,000	290,000	360,000	34,000	8,264,000
% change to April 2018	2.1%	6.2%	-15.2%	-9.4%	-10.0%	0%	-1.1%

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Geraldton Zone

There has been no rain in the zone for the last month. The majority of intended canola and lupin plantings are now in the ground dry, with growers backing off on area planted in the eastern areas of the zone for both crops due to the lack of rain. The intended area of canola and lupins in the western areas has still gone ahead although some have been planted without pre-emergent herbicides to give growers options for other crops if it does not rain during the remainder of May.

There has been a significant area of pasture legumes sown dry in the zone into paddocks coming out of crop.

Around two thirds of the total crop area has now been planted with the remaining third being held back to allow for changes in crop mix depending on the timing of the rain. Conditions over the next two weeks will determine if canola and lupins are substituted for cereal and fallow if there is a lack of rain.

There is likely to be an increase in barley malt varieties in the region as there has been over the last few years. The relative profitability of barley over the break crops canola and lupins has driven this change. The final wheat area will not be known for some time as this will be the last crop substituted for fallow as the start to the season becomes later.

Kwinana Zone

The Midlands

The majority of canola and lupins are now in the ground dry except small areas of early plantings on storms six weeks ago. The area of canola has dropped off in the eastern areas due to the lack of rain and this is being replaced with barley and wheat.

There has been a noticeable increase in pasture legume plantings this year in paddocks coming out of crop that would normally just be left to regenerate on their own.

Some areas of the zone have around 100mm of stored sub-soil moisture from summer storms although it is very deep and the majority of crops sown to date have been put in dry.

There has been no change to intended planting other than canola and a slight reduction in lupins in the eastern areas to date. The intended cereal plantings in the east will decrease and be replaced with fallow if there is no rain by the end of May or the chance of rain soon after.

There has been a slight shift in increased barley and noodle wheat plantings in response to the current relative high prices compared to milling grades of wheat.

Kwinana West

There are isolated paddocks of canola and a small area of cereals up out of the ground west of the line from Bolgart to Beverley from storms around ANZAC Day. The rain was heavier in a narrow strip from Goomalling through to South Dowerin, Tammin, north Quairading and Naremben with some growers receiving around 20mm. These growers have been planting into moisture for the last two weeks although

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the moisture is starting to become too deep to chase. Growers in the remainder of the zone have been sowing canola and lupins and more recently barley and wheat.

There has been no change in intended plantings for the zone at this stage with most growers working 'school hours' rather than going flat out.

Kwinana East

There are small areas in the north east of the zone and the far-east with canola out of the ground from the isolated storms six weeks ago. The severe storms around Merredin over ANZAC Day dropped enough rain for some growers to plant into moisture although the area is small.

Growers have backed off with intended canola and lupin plantings due to the lack of rain and in some cases intended legume pasture plantings have been replaced with cereals.

Growers in the region would normally be getting close to backing off on area to cereals due to the lack of rain although this is being pushed back to the third week or the end of May in areas where there is sub-soil moisture down deep from summer storms.

Albany Zone

Western Albany

Growers in the region are well into their canola plantings with most going in dry. The area of canola in the region has increased over the last five years and this year looks to be similar to last year. As is the case in many areas of the state, legume pasture sowing has increased this year. There is more upgrading of existing pasture area rather than an increase in area.

Most growers are intending to plant slightly more barley replacing the wheat and oat area. Oats are still being planted for grazing and grain harvested for sheep feed with the area similar to last year, whilst oats intended for milling grades again looks to be on the decrease.

It is still early days for the region and the lack of rain is not a major concern for most growers at this stage.

Southern Albany

The canola area in the zone is about 60 to 75 per cent sown. Paddocks have varying emergence from 0 to 90 per cent and everything in between depending on soil moisture. The recent severe winds caused substantial damage to individual paddocks on lighter soils and those that did not have stubble anchored or stubble removed or modified prior to planting. Some paddocks have lost 30 to 50 per cent of plants cut off by wind or buried too deep to recover. Most of the intended canola area will go in except for the dryer areas north of the coast where canola is now being substituted for barley.

Around 20 per cent of the intended barley plantings are in the ground, mostly sown deep into moisture. Areas away from the coast are drying out and the majority of these areas are being planted dry. It is estimated that 50 per cent of the barley will be planted in the zone in around seven days time. Growers wanting to substitute barley for canola or lupins are finding it difficult to access seed, reflecting the increased area of barley being planted and increase in stocks held by growers for stock feed in anticipation of several more months of feeding if the rain holds off until the end of May.

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There looks to be little change in the oat area for the region with most plantings being kept for stock feed or grazed in a legume pasture mix.

The wheat area in the region is anticipated to be similar to last year.

Eastern Albany (Lakes Region)

The majority of canola and lupin plantings are now wrapped up with only a small percentage emerged from recent light falls of rain. The canola area is estimated to be down 20 per cent on initial forecasts due to the very dry conditions to date.

Barley plantings are getting underway with most growers planning to sow a slightly increased area this year. Only about half of the paddocks being sown at the moment are requiring a knockdown herbicide.

Pasture legume area planted has been higher than normal reflecting the recent change in profitability in sheep enterprises. As is the case in most of the state, pasture area is not necessarily replacing crop area, it is more of an upgrade in pasture quality to increase stocking rate on existing areas.

Plague locusts are becoming a threat to emerged crops particularly in some of the areas around Kulin and Corrigin with some requiring spraying.

Esperance Zone

There are reasonable areas of canola emerged from earlier plantings with some at 5-6 leaf. Most canola paddocks sown into moisture have variable emergence ranging from 0 to 70 per cent. The severe winds recently caused damage to emerged and emerging canola crops through wind blast and burial from furrow fill. The damage was greater on the lighter soils and those paddocks without anchored stubble that were burnt, spaded, ploughed or speed tilled. Dry sowing of canola will finish up in the next week with close to the intended area being planted.

There is a greater percentage of the early sown crop emerged in the eastern areas of the zone from the storms in April with paddocks generally having a greater percentage of an even emergence than other areas of the zone.

There was a slight increase in pasture legume plantings in the region this year.

Dry sowing of barley is underway with the planned area slightly up on earlier forecasts. Only small areas of wheat have been sown to date and the intended area will remain similar to last year or down a little due to the increase in barley plantings.

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Season Outlook, May 2018

Ian Foster, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Current conditions are dry across much of the grainbelt. Despite having summer rainfall, there is little plant available soil water in most areas. Accordingly, modelled soil water shows low levels of storage across much of the northern, central and southern agricultural areas. In areas showing higher levels of storage, such as 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 May to July shows a clear preference towards drier than normal conditions, see Figure 1. Approximately half of Australian and international climate models are also indicating May to July rainfall is likely to be lower than the long term median. Beyond that period, the risk of below average seasonal rainfall remains during winter.

In the shorter term, May rainfall appears highly likely to be below average. Weather models indicate little or no rain for the next 10 days or more. Opportunities for early crop emergence may be limited except in areas where patchy rain in early May has provided soil moisture. Temperatures have been above average for the month so far.

Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook summary (May to July 2018)

- The May to July rainfall outlook, issued 26 April 2018, indicates below average rainfall is likely for parts of southwest Australia and western Victoria, but for much of the country there is little shift towards a wetter or drier than average period.
- May to July daytime temperatures are likely to be warmer than average for southern Australia and the northern Kimberley in WA.
- May days and nights are very likely to be warmer than average for much of the country.
- The El Niño - Southern Oscillation (ENSO) in the tropical Pacific Ocean is neutral (neither El Niño nor La Niña) and is expected to remain neutral through the coming season. The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is also neutral, with the possibility of a negative IOD event forming during winter. With mostly neutral climate drivers at present, there is no strong push towards broadscale wetter or drier conditions across the country.

Additional information can be sourced from:

[DAFWA: Seasonal Climate Information](#)

[DAFWA: Soil Water Tool](#)

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

[BoM: Decile rainfall for February to April 2018](#)

[BoM: Landscape soil water balance](#)

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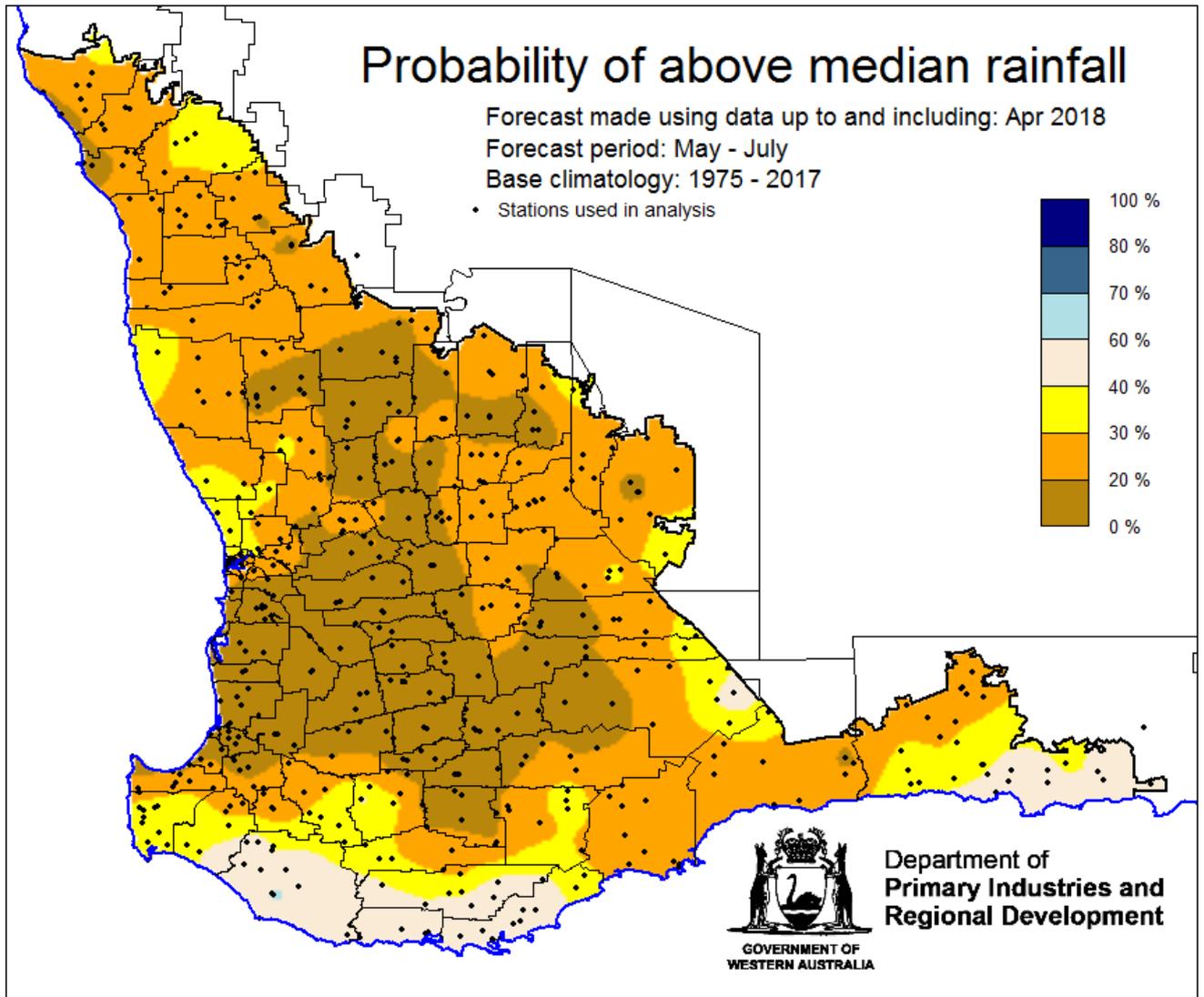


Figure 1. Chances of exceeding median rainfall for May to July from DPIRD's statistical seasonal forecast model. This outlook is based on global sea surface temperatures and atmospheric pressures in April 2018.

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