

# CROP REPORT

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## The 2021 Season - Near perfect start to the season

The near perfect start to the Western Australian grain growing season has set most growers up for above average grain yields. Whilst still early days, there is potential for a record crop for the 2021 season. The good early rains have driven the total crop area up by nearly 5 per cent compared to 2020, which was previously a record area of crop sown in Western Australia.

The similarities to 2016 which produced a record total grain tonnage of just over 18M tonnes are striking.

In 2016, there were very good reserves of subsoil moisture in all regions except the top half of the Geraldton Port Zone, which is also the case this year. The 2016 growing season got off to an early start and early crop growth was excellent, again, the same conditions for the start of the 2021 growing season. On top of this, there is 16 per cent more crop in the ground in 2021 than 2016.

In 2016, there was 7.5M hectares of total crop. The 2021 total cropped area of almost 9M hectares has been boosted by extra canola plantings (up 26 per cent), barley (up 20 per cent) and wheat (up 14 per cent) from 2016.

This extra area of crop sown has the potential to push total grain production past 20M tonnes if there is an average season going forward. On the downside, waterlogging is starting to show up in the south, which also pulled crop grain yields back in 2016, and of course there is the risk of frost in the spring. In 2016, there were several severe frost events which shaved about 2M tonnes of grain from the total in 2016.

Growers are already actively planning for a large harvest with the knowledge that if the current staff shortages continue there will be added pressure on an already stretched supply chain.

There are still challenges ahead, and the grain is a long way from the bin, although it is difficult not to be quietly optimistic about how the 2021 growing season will pan out.

### GIWA June 2021 Crop Area Estimates (hectares)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Pulses	State total
Kwinana	2,920,000	510,000	670,000	210,000	90,000	10,000	4,410,000
Albany	440,000	660,000	380,000	150,000	40,000	10,000	1,680,000
Esperance	500,000	330,000	300,000	10,000	35,000	30,000	1,205,000
Geraldton	1,300,000	70,000	230,000	10,000	80,000	3,000	1,693,000
Totals	5,160,000	1,570,000	1,580,000	380,000	245,000	53,000	8,988,000

**Note: 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.**

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

Weed control has begun early, as have nitrogen applications. This could be a well above average year for the region, though growers are not quite there and are cautious with the expected conditions from early June onwards when rainfall is forecast to be lighter. With not much rainfall in the region since the cyclone event and average subsoil moisture reserves, good rain would really push the season to excellent potential. Areas north from Geraldton are the driest, even though current crops are not reflecting it and are looking great.

Extra paddocks have been allocated to what is the biggest canola crop ever seen up further north. With 20 per cent of canola flowering, those in on good soils are going “gangbusters” and “shooting along.” Clean crops are also well up and not struggling at present. While sown lupin area is small, what is planted has had excellent establishment. Some extra barley has gone in as predicted. Many are finding it is hard to get hands on nitrogen which has been going out more rapidly than what suppliers and trucks can keep up with.

Overall, around 10 per cent more crop area has been put in this year in the zone, mainly on the heavier soils in the low rainfall regions to the east.

## Kwinana Zone

### Kwinana North Midlands

The few drier areas of the zone where crops had not germinated a few weeks ago, are now either up or emerging. For the majority of the region, the crops are in excellent shape for this time of the year. Cereals are anything from 5 leaf to just emerging with all very clean from weeds. Canola is good to very good with some crops just starting to flower. The small lupin area looks very good with excellent establishment.

The several pre-sowing rainfall events gave growers the opportunity for effective weed control from their knockdown sprays. This has taken the pressure off pre-emergent herbicides and the regular rainfall during seeding has resulted in the pre-emergent herbicides working very well.

The big changes to crop area in the region from last year have been the increase in canola area and the decrease in the oat area for hay as well as a slight decrease in the barley area. The lupin area in the region is down slightly as well. The area of Roundup Ready (RR) canola is up about 10 to 20 per cent which has mostly been taken up by the dedicated crop growers. The larger increase in canola area has been with OP Triazine Tolerant (TT) canola by the mixed crop / livestock growers.

There has been an increase in total crop area in the eastern areas of the zone where tactical fallow has been dropped in favour of wheat. In the low rainfall areas with 100 to 120mm plus of subsoil moisture to start the growing season, growers have opted to chase cash by putting crop rather than conserve moisture for 2022 using fallow. For some growers, the increase in crop area from 2020 is up by 20 per cent.

### **Kwinana North East**

The region has had a very good start and for growers in the eastern and north-eastern fringes of the zone, it has been the best start for many years. There has been a large increase in the area of wheat planted in the low rainfall areas north of Merredin and further north and east of the zone.

The area of tactical fallow is pretty well non-existent in the region as it is in the low rainfall corridor further north. The summer rain has been more widespread in the region than it was in 2020 and growers that have had a few tough years have been able to plant early into moisture. The strong grain prices combined with the early start has fuelled the jump in crop area state-wide and much of this increase is from this zone.

The crop area increase is not as large in the far east of the region as fallow is still necessary for the following years' crop.

### **Kwinana South**

Crop growth is good to excellent for most of the region except for a small area along the Great Eastern Highway that keeps missing out on the rain. All crops have above average grain yield potential for this stage of the season. Crops that were sown in April and early May have been pushed along by the warm growing conditions and are ahead of where they would normally be at this time of the year. Whilst this means more frost risk it also means less exposure to heat shock in the spring. This is going to be the case with much of the WA grain crop. Heat shock is an annual event and even though frost can have a devastating impact on grain fill, it is more of an intermittent event. The wide range in growth stages from a strung-out planting period into moisture, means less of the WA grain crop will be exposed to frost at any one point in time.

Canola area is up about 20 per cent overall with more of the increase in the medium to low rainfall regions. Most of the extra canola has taken area from barley and wheat, and to a lesser extent lupins. There is a slight increase in total area with an extra paddock or two of pasture being sown to barley or wheat at the end of the seeding program.

### **Albany Zone**

#### **Albany West**

The region is extremely wet in many areas. End result is that around 10 per cent of sown crops will see some re-sowing following waterlogging. Consensus is that the forecast is looking good, as a low-rainfall forecast is currently a good forecast with many areas now underwater and out of action. Duplexes and flatter, shallow soils have been the leading contributors.

Canola is up significantly by around 10 per cent with many more hectares being squeezed in where seed could be found. Lupins have been culled by half with many silos still full of seed intended for this year's planting. What lupins have been sown are experiencing waterlogging and root rot in some paddocks. In the last few weeks, there has been a lot of early seedling blackleg in canola, and some paddocks have lost around 40 to 50 per cent of plant numbers in both TT and RR varieties.

Nitrogen supply has been an issue for those that have not ordered early, with delays of up to three weeks to obtain. Nitrogen loss from leeching following some of the heavy rainfall events in the region is a concern for some farmers. Many paddocks are not trafficable as well, creating additional setbacks for growers.

Snail numbers are generally lower and have been dropping over the years as growers get on top of them. Outbreaks are becoming more widespread though, and other regions have noticed an increase in numbers.

### **Albany South**

Growers are a long way in front of where they usually are, though many have not finished seeding and a few intended crop paddocks will probably be left out now from becoming too wet to sow. The zone is undeniably wet, and it is too difficult to get into a lot of paddocks. This will mean that most unsown paddocks will be allocated to pasture, while wet paddocks that have been sprayed in preparation for cropping will be causing some head scratching.

Flowering in canola has begun already. Like most regions, canola is everywhere. Lupins have been discarded from most rotations and as it is hard to argue with the price of canola. Oats are also out driven largely by the loss of the China hay market, though in terms of cereal crops, the overall area has not significantly changed. The wheat that has been unable to go in, especially that allocated to be sown on wet canola stubble, could lead to a drop in proportion. However, from last year, the overall cropped area has not moved much. Trying to get Nitrogen has been difficult, and there are just not enough trucks to go around. The supply chain is a looming problem in this sense, and this season is really highlighting the issue largely caused by a change in growers' buying patterns.

Diamondback moth damage has not been found. Normally this would be seen around this time. Snails however, are certainly around.

### **Albany East (Lakes Region)**

All crops are looking good to very good in the Lakes Region. Rainfall has been a little variable across the zone with a few pockets of country receiving less rain than others. For now, crops are on track for above average grain yields.

Generally, plant establishment is excellent with the early canola starting to flower and lupins starting to bud. Cereals are everything from just emerging to well tillered in the case of some of the early planted oat crops.

The canola area is up at the expense of barley and lupins, with the percentage of canola in the rotation up significantly from the last couple of years. The total area of crop is also up; with the abundance of sheep feed a few extra pasture paddocks have gone into late cereals. Pasture paddocks will need chemical "pasture manipulation" for the first time in many years to control volunteer cereals and grasses.

Availability of urea has been tight as has been the case across the state. Having said this, grain yield potential has not been affected yet as mineralised nitrogen has provided an early buffer and a full moisture profile with moderate rainfall events has resulted in limited leaching and good nitrogen use efficiency to date.

## Esperance Zone

Growers in Esperance are not complaining, and it is hard to remember the last time a start this good took place in the region. Around 90 to 100 mm has been received so far for the winter on top of the summer rain for most areas of the zone. There are not too many wet spots that have been causing the trafficability issues seen in other southern zones.

Very early barley is up and close to first node, which is stressful for those managing it, especially considering fungicide is becoming difficult to order in. Nitrogen, which is now being poured onto canola, also has many scrambling to get their hands on as much as possible.

Blackleg is showing up in Bonito, and there is some waiting to see if a high disease load will show up later in the season. Snails are certainly out and about in the zone as well. Late canola has come up well, and pasture is looking better than usual though a significant area has been removed from rotations with many sheep being taken out of the zone.



## Season Outlook, June 2021

Ian Foster, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

### DPIRD climate summary

Seasonal rainfall for January to May 2021 has been well above average for western parts of WA. This has mostly come from tropical rain events in February and March, as well as Tropical Cyclone Seroja in April. May rain has also been well above average for eastern and southern parts of the agricultural area. Accordingly, soil water and dam storage is high over much of the grainbelt. Soil waterlogging and vehicle trafficability issues have emerged, and are a novel prospect given recent drier years.

Major climate influences in the Pacific and Indian oceans remain neutral, with the Pacific expected to remain neutral this year. The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is likely to remain neutral during the first part of winter; although three of five models suggest negative IOD conditions could develop over winter or spring. This is associated with wetter conditions over southern Australia, though there is a wide spread of outcomes for WA. Half the climate models have neutral rainfall outlooks for the next three months over southern WA; although four models (including BoM and DPIRD) indicate below-normal seasonal rain is more likely. Local factors, such as ocean temperatures, may have greater influence on rain events in the short term.

### Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook summary, issued 3 June 2021:

- Winter (June to August) rainfall very likely to be above average for much of northern, central, and eastern Australia extending into SA. Parts of west coastal WA are likely to have below average winter rainfall (see Figure 1).
- The short term outlook for June is the same as the general winter outlook in the map, less than 50 per cent chance of exceeding the average rainfall for June to August.
- Maximum temperatures for winter are likely to be above average for northern, south-western, and south-eastern Australia.
- Minimum temperatures for winter are very likely to be above average for most of Australia; parts of western WA show a more neutral outlook. The pattern is similar for the June minimum.
- The El Niño–Southern Oscillation is neutral. Large parts of the eastern Indian Ocean are warmer than average, which can favour above average rainfall for parts of Australia.

Additional information is available from:

[DPIRD: Seasonal Climate Information](#)

[DPIRD: Soil Water Tool](#)

[BoM: Seasonal Rainfall Outlook - weeks, months and seasons.](#)

[BoM: Decile rainfall for January to May 2021](#)

[BoM: Seasonal Outlook video](#)

[BoM: Landscape soil water balance](#)

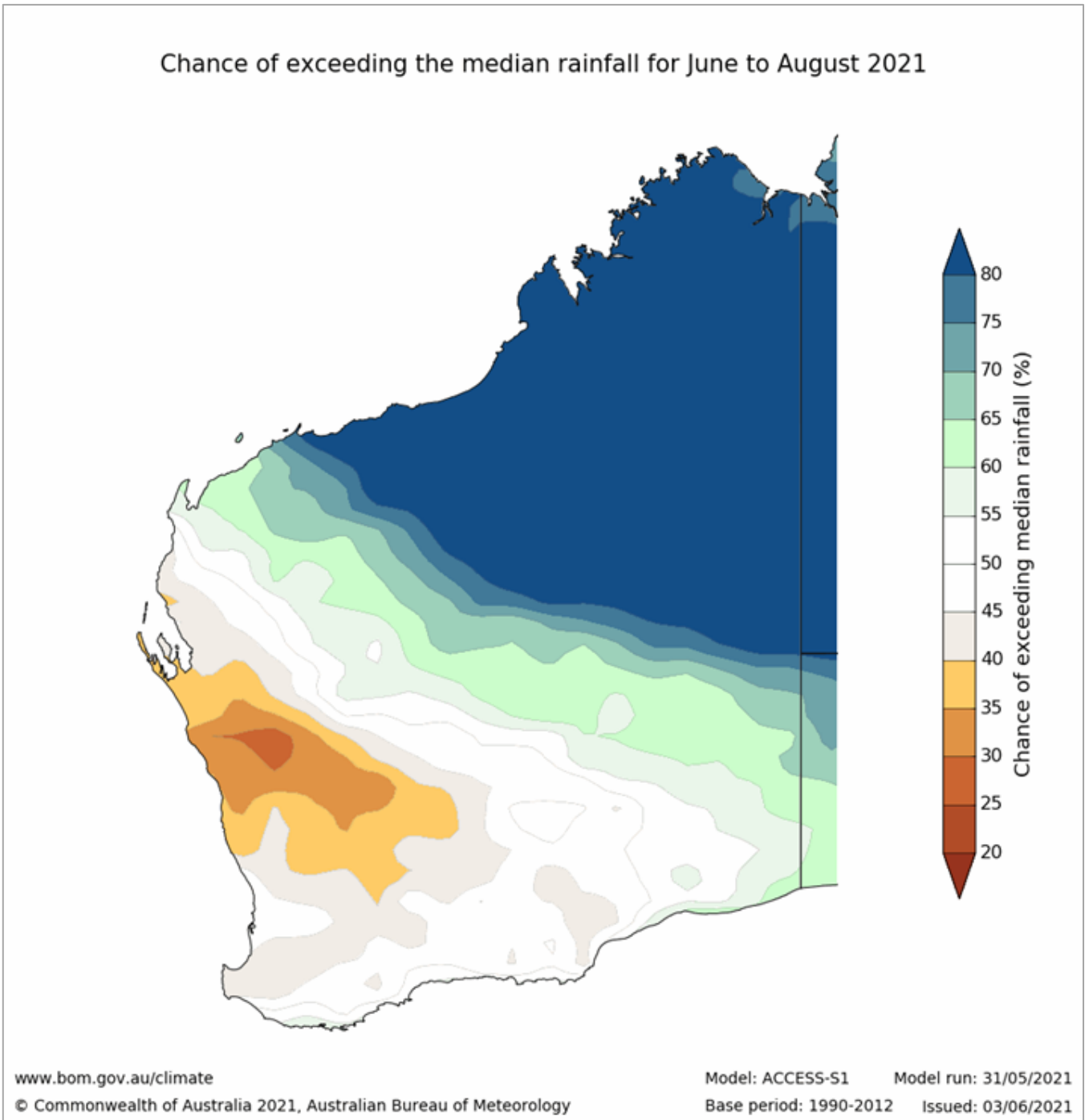


Figure 1. Rainfall outlook for June to August 2021. From Bureau of Meteorology.

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