



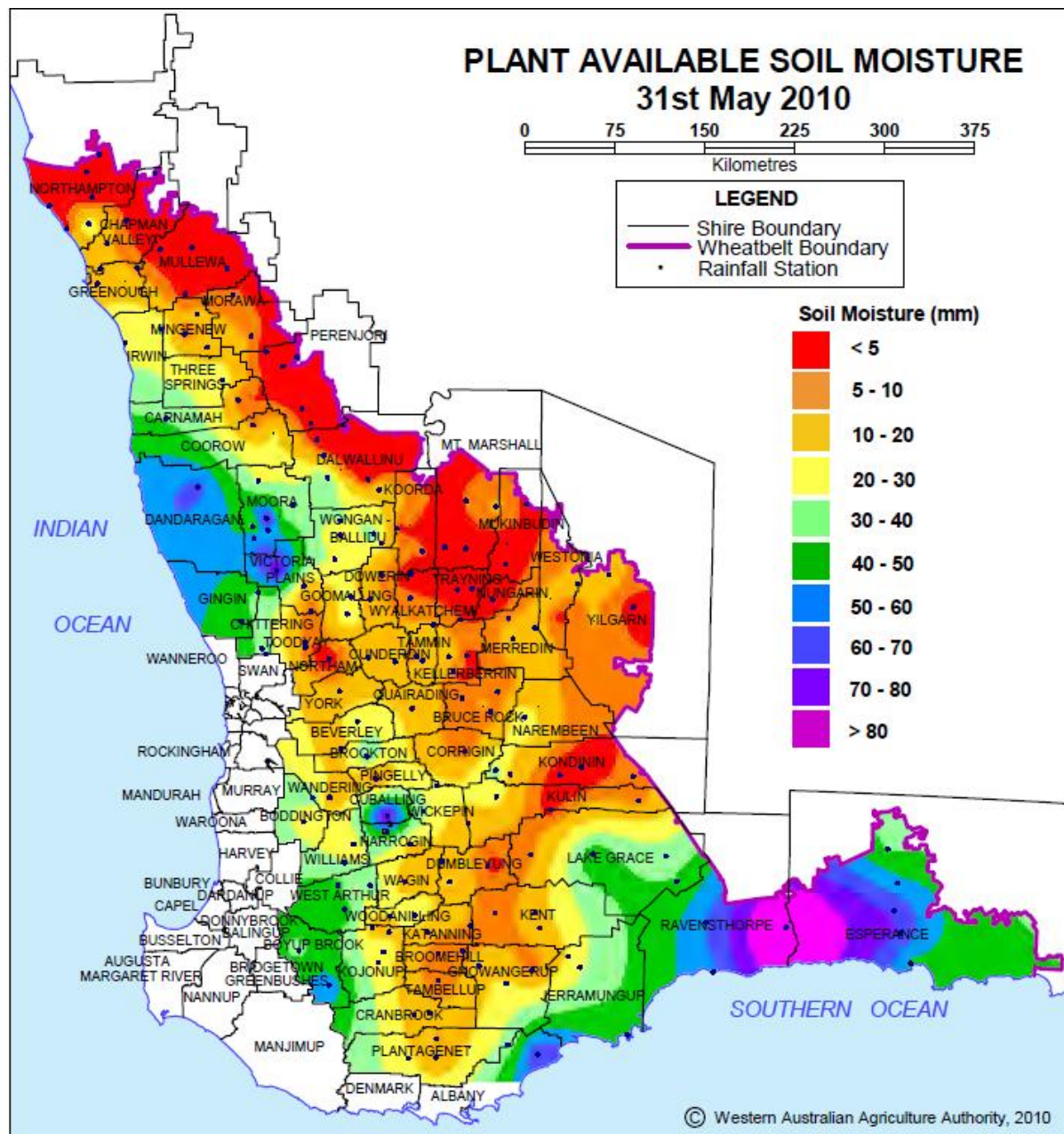
Soil moisture reserves throughout the Western Australian wheatbelt are currently extremely varied, jeopardising the chances of above average production for WA growers. The month of June produced below average rainfall, and recent forecast from the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA), indicate the months of July through to September have a high probability of producing the same outcome. With the majority of cereal crops across the state just emerging, grower's optimism is subdued, and production expectations for the 2010 season are being reduced.

Figure 1 (below) shows the DAFWA soil moisture map, indicating the variability of soil moisture reserves throughout the cropping regions. Areas in the south of the state, particularly in the Esperance zone, have had significant rainfall across the sowing period and have an excellent soil moisture profile. Locations west of Esperance around Munglinup have even experienced isolated cases of water logging in low lying areas. Further west in the Albany port zone conditions are perfect for crop emergence, with in excess of 30mm received for the month of June. Continued rainfall as is customary for this area of the state will see moisture profiles build over winter and provide a solid spring for this zone.

In contrast the central Kwinana and Geraldton zones are experiencing marginal moisture conditions. Sowing rainfall events have on average only produced falls of 10mm, well below 25mm which is considered the "Average" break. Improved sowing practices and mechanical and agronomic advancements mean rainfall events of this magnitude are sufficient to allow growers to plant crops. However, once the crops have been planted and begin to emerge, problems start to develop as a result of small amounts of sowing rainfall. Increased competition from weeds is common, as a result of poor kill rates from pre-emergent knock down herbicides and low plant available moisture restricts secondary root growth. As a result of these conditions, potential yield estimates for these regions are being revised downward, and significant rainfall is needed immediately to arrest the reductions

Importantly crops have not passed the point of no return. Solid germination rates and warm soil temperature have the crops looking better than expected. If we do receive some solid winter rainfall across all regions crops will recover and production forecasts will be raised, but after the dry spring conditions experienced last year, many growers feel the season is headed in the same direction. Let's hope a return to moderate La Nina conditions can affect the weather pattern and produce the rainfall events we so desperately need.

Figure 1: Plant Available Soil Moisture in mm as at the 31/5/2010



Source: Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia Seasonal Update June 2010

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