

## SECTION 3

**DISTRICT  
REPORTS**

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## &lt;46...WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**South Coast****Overview**

The 2007–08 season started very wet with a big January storm dumping between 100 to 200 mm over the entire region. So once again this rain brought on a big summer weed spraying program but it also provided soil moisture reserves which were extremely beneficial later in the season. The season opening occurred during mid April with good rains which continued well into May – most crops were well and truly sown by the end of May.

Crop establishment was excellent and there were very few agronomic problems, in fact the season was almost textbook. Rain continued to fall at the right times and the region was looking at a decile 8–9 year. But history does repeat itself at times. The spring was starting to be very reminiscent of 2006 with poor finishing rains, but fortunately 2007 did not have the hot north winds of the previous season. In the end, crops finished very well with no major frost problems. Most growers at least achieved average yields. Grain prices were very good, and coupled with good yields, resulted in most south coast growers having the best financial returns that they can recall.

**Wheat**

Yields ranged from 1.5 to 4 tonnes per hectare, which is in line with five year averages. The lower yields came from the lower rainfall zones or areas that experienced frost damage.

**Barley**

Yields ranged from 1.8 to 5.5 tonnes per hectare – again in line with five year averages.

**Canola**

Yields ranged from 0.7 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare. The best yields came from high rainfall areas to the east of Esperance which experienced a better spring than most areas.

**Pulses**

Lupin yields ranged from 1.0 to 2.8 tonnes per hectare; field peas 0.2 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare; and faba beans 1.8 to 2.8 tonnes per hectare.

**Cropping and property trends**

There is a trend to more crop area on the south coast. The area sown to canola will increase at the expense of pasture or livestock and to some degree other legume break crops such as peas and lupins.

Wheat area will also increase at the expense of barley with more wheat-on-wheat. Growers are unsure of forward barley pricing and are more confident with forward pricing of wheat.

Growers are starting to look more closely at variable rate fertiliser application with the record high fertiliser prices.

Property values are up once again – a property 65 km to the north east of Esperance in 450 mm rainfall country, recently sold for \$2700 per hectare. The property has average wheat yields of 3.2 tonnes per hectare and canola around 1.4 tonnes. Another property 90 km north of Esperance in 375 mm rainfall country sold for \$1500 per hectare with average wheat yields of 2.2 tonnes and field pea yields of around one tonne per hectare.

**Quenten Knight**  
**Precision Agronomics Australia**

**South Australia****Overview**

2007 was the warmest year for South Australia since statewide records began in 1910 and the 15th consecutive year of above average temperatures.

Winter-spring rainfall for 2007 was the lowest on record for the state and continued the below average rainfall seen over the past 10 years.

Crop yields were extremely variable even at the most local level, ranging from those paddocks struggling to return seed through to above average yields in some of the later areas on Kangaroo Island and the lower south east.

Severe frosts in the upper south east in early October had a significant impact on some crops, particularly canola, with estimates of up to 30 per cent yield loss in parts.

High prices and limited availability for commonly used nitrogen and phosphorus fertiliser blends have caused many farmers to review their fertiliser strategies and prompted increased interest in alternative fertilisers.

Farmers have been taking delivery of fertiliser requirements where possible to ensure availability when the 2008 winter season starts.

There are reports of canola seed shortages for some of the preferred varieties.

Total crop area in 2008 is likely to increase marginally, although the crop mix will vary depending on the timing and amount of the opening rains.

The increased crop area is expected to be mainly for wheat and to a limited extent canola, in response to the current high prices.

In the south east, harvesting of dryland lucerne was completed by late March with near average yields.

Total crop area in 2007 was 4.01 million hectares with crop production of an estimated 4.97 million tonnes.

**Western Eyre Peninsula**

Harvest was completed before the rains could affect grain quality.

**Eastern Eyre Peninsula**

Generally 90 per cent of the harvest was finished in eastern areas around Arno Bay through to Rudall by the start of December.

Yields varied from 0.5–1.0 tonnes per hectare for wheat and were similar for barley, although there were a lot of barley crops with boron toxicity problems given the extremely dry conditions in spring, with some of these areas being non harvestable.

Pea crops yielded poorly with some also not harvested and left for livestock grazing.

Around Mitchellville was very poor with reports of farmers not even being able to recover any seed and a similar situation around Buckleboo.

Because the 2007 season started reasonably early, there were significant areas of pulse crops (predominately peas with smaller amounts of lupins and beans) planted. Cash flow demands will make this less likely to occur in 2008 for all but the more reliable areas, as farmers seek to recover from the past two seasons.

Other than the wetter parts of the Cleve hills, not much

canola is expected to be planted in 2008. This is due to the extremely poor performance of canola over the past two years, current profitability of cereals, as well as the high cost of production.

### Lower Eyre Peninsula

The harvest was finished by the end of the first week of December.

### Yorke Peninsula

Yields were variable throughout but generally a bit below average, while grain quality was mostly satisfactory.

Early sown crops performed best, although many crops struggled on coastal country and stony soils but did better on some of the sandy soils.

High snail numbers were a problem at harvest, particularly on southern YP.

### Lower North

Yields were variable ranging from well below average to near average or better in some situations, while grain quality was mostly satisfactory.

Sowing time and soil type was critical in the 2007 season, with early sown crops on the better soils clearly outyielding those sown later or on poorer soils.

A combination of close to average yields and well above average prices provided good returns for some growers.

### Mid North

Harvest progressed quickly, with few hold-ups. Yields were mostly good for the season and better than expected.

Yields were very good (3.5–4 tonnes per hectare) in the

southern wetter areas, but there were patches of poor yield in northwest parts of the district.

Grain quality was also been mostly good and better than expected. Together with the excellent prices which have helped compensate for the poor season, most growers were happy with the outcome.

Some growers with various forms of forward contracts were hit with notional or real losses if they were unable to fully deliver grain against them. This is expected to lead to a greatly reduced interest in these marketing mechanisms in 2008.

Farmers are concerned about rising fertiliser and chemical prices in 2008. Cropping intentions are likely to favour the planting of wheat and canola in particular, due to their forecast high prices.

There is likely to be an increased focus on cropping due to the high prices currently for all grains. Most growers will maintain their current crop rotations and mixes.

### Upper North

Harvest was completed in most parts of the district in early December. Some wheat crops in the eastern part of the district, which had been frosted in October, reshot and remained green until the third week of December.

Heavy rains in the third week of December caused erosion on bare and worked paddocks, particularly in the Carrieton and Quorn areas.

There is major concern from growers regarding the rapid rise in the price of fertiliser and glyphosate.

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## &lt;49...SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**Kangaroo Island, Central Hills and  
Fleurieu Peninsula**

On Kangaroo Island, bushfires destroyed a significant unharvested crop area during December. But yields were above expectations on the mainland, where crop yields of 2–2.5 tonnes per hectare for wheat and barley and 1.2–1.5 tonnes for pulse crops were common.

Kangaroo Island had some of the best crops in the state with wheat yielding up to 4.5 tonnes and canola 3.0 tonnes per hectare.

**Northern Murray Mallee**

Wheat and barley crops were generally above expectations (although mainly still below average), particularly on the loamy sand soils with reasonable rooting depth.

Heavy clay soils, stony soils and deep sand soils yielded very poorly due to the dry season.

Grain quality was very good across the district, with generally low screenings and good protein levels.

**Southern Murray Mallee**

Harvest continued through December relatively uninterrupted due to the number of warm days early in the month. Wheat and triticale crops were mostly left to harvest during December and grain quality was good.

Protein levels in some hard wheat crops were a bit low to make H1 classification, but comfortably made H2 classification. Wheat yields were generally lower than expected, ranging from 0.4 up to 1.5 tonnes per hectare.

Triticale yields ranged from 0.4 up to 1.0 tonne per hectare. Some growers took the opportunity to bale straw where stubble was thicker.

**Lower Murray**

Crop yields varied significantly with time of sowing, sowing depth, frost and moisture all playing important roles in determining final results.

Overall grain quality was good considering the year, with most barley being malt and good quality wheat with low screenings.

Barley yields ranged from 0.8 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare, with wheat slightly lower.

Any later sown crops suffered yield reductions of 20 to 30 per cent.

Canola yields were down with many opting to cut canola for hay.

**Upper South East**

Yields were variable ranging from somewhat below average in northern parts of the district to near average in the southeast, depending on sowing time and soil type.

Yields ranges for wheat were 1.5 to 4.0 tonnes and beans/lupins 1.0 to 1.5 tonnes per hectare.

Lentil crops did well in some cases with above average yields of 1.5–2 tonnes.

Grain quality was mostly satisfactory.

The severe frosts in early October had a significant impact on some crops – particularly canola – with estimates of up to 30 per cent yield loss in some places.

Quite a lot of oaten hay was cut with reported yields around 6.0 to 7.0 tonnes in better areas.

Total crop area is likely to increase marginally in 2008, mainly in wheat and to a lesser extent canola.

**Lower South East**

Yields varied from near average to somewhat above average, with some very good yields recorded in southern areas. Barley and canola had yields up to 6.0 tonnes and 3.5 tonnes per hectare respectively.

Clover seed crops were harvested with near average yields.

Crop area may increase by up to 20 per cent in 2008 as farmers continue to reduce livestock numbers, especially in sheep breeding flocks, in favour of cropping.

There is also a trend away from small seed crops into cereals. The major increase will be in wheat as a relatively low risk crop, including feed wheat to supply the dairy/feedlot industry, although an increase in canola and beans is also anticipated.

There are reports of difficulties obtaining some varieties of canola seed.

Fertiliser prices have continued to increase as suppliers have reportedly resorted to allocating/rationing some products. Farmers have been purchasing fertiliser and storing it on farm as it becomes available.

**PIRSA Rural Solutions contributors****Victoria****Wimmera**

All started on track for 2007, with a generally wet start to the year and heaps of optimism from district growers. By June or July there was concern over what to do with all the grain to be harvested in the lead up to Christmas.

History shows there was no need to worry. Rainfall ceased in mid winter only to recommence in mid summer leaving crop yields once again in the doldrums. Most growers were able to 'get out' with costs covered thanks to buoyant grain prices – where early contracts had not been entered into.

Thousands of hectares of poor crops in the Wimmera and southern Mallee were cut for hay in the hope of cashing in on feed shortages in the dairy industry.

Further south, growers enjoyed average grain yields following a Melbourne Cup rain, and were able to cash in on the prices being offered.

Farmers are a resilient bunch and most will be back into cropping in 2008.

**SOUTH AUSTRALIA 2007–08 WINTER  
CROP PRODUCTION (tonnes) AND  
AREA (hectares) AGAINST THE  
5 YEAR AVERAGE**

		5 year average	2007–08
Wheat	Area	1,877,500	2,013,000
	Prod'n	2,586,100	2,305,000
Durum	Area	68,900	54,750
	Prod'n	129,900	95,400
Barley	Area	1,073,100	1,170,000
	Prod'n	1,810,200	1,772,000
Oats	Area	83,400	90,600
	Prod'n	100,200	88,900
Rye	Area	8600	9000
	Prod'n	5800	4800
Triticale	Area	89,200	106,100
	Prod'n	101,700	107,700
Peas	Area	121,600	133,800
	Prod'n	141,300	142,650
Lupins	Area	63,700	67,150
	Prod'n	69,400	67,000
Beans	Area	92,100	91,200
	Prod'n	136,300	130,600
Chickpeas	Area	3000	5800
	Prod'n	2500	5130
Lentils	Area	62,600	64,800
	Prod'n	65,000	67,200
Vetch	Area	22,200	24,900
	Prod'n	10,600	10,100
Canola	Area	171,000	177,500
	Prod'n	203,100	173,500
<b>Total SA crop</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>3,738,000</b>	<b>4,009,500</b>
<b>Total SA crop</b>	<b>Prod'n</b>	<b>5,362,700</b>	<b>4,970,900</b>