



RISK MANAGEMENT 2025/26

CUMULUS

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Summary

Dry over central parts, more rain in the east

We are now in a part of the summer season when the location and intensity of tropical systems such as lows, depressions, storms and cyclones can have a major influence on the weather pattern across the summer rainfall region. During the next few days, the location and intensity of a tropical low/depression east of South Africa will have a major impact on weather conditions, and it also introduces a lot of uncertainty into the forecast, due to the difficulty of forecasting the track of such systems accurately a few days ahead of time.

It will be warm to hot and dry over most of the central to western interior according to current forecasts. The tropical system towards the east will result in heavy rain further east (Mozambique Channel, Mozambique), but forecast models are uncertain as to how far inland the system may cause rainfall. The best chances for significant rainfall associated with the system in South Africa, according to the latest forecasts, are along the KZN coast and parts of the Lowveld. The pattern currently expected is typical of a mid-summer drought situation over the central parts, with more uncertainty regarding conditions in the east, associated with uncertainty regarding the movement of the tropical low.

While tropical systems remain located east of South Africa and hot, dry conditions dominate over the central interior, the pattern may be reminiscent of a mid-summer drought situation, dependent on the duration of the hot, dry conditions over much of the interior. This pattern is quite typical of early January, and it should break towards the last 10 days of the month if the pattern follows a typical evolution. However, there is large uncertainty regarding the movement of the tropical low, and if the track should become more westward, this could result in widespread heavy rain in the east. Current forecasts, however, lean more strongly towards dry conditions over most of the country, while heavy rain should be confined to the far eastern and northeastern areas, possibly including the KZN coast.

Looking further ahead, forecast model output remains indicative of further tropical systems being active mostly to the north and east of South Africa. Convection along the equator is expected to increase over the central to eastern parts of the tropical Indian Ocean, which is also not a positive sign for widespread rainfall over South Africa during the next two weeks. It therefore seems likely that it will remain dry for this time of the year over much of the interior until the last week of the month. However, if the current tropical system to the east should behave differently than expected according to current forecasts and move into the Limpopo River Valley, the pattern may change completely and become wet over most parts. Given the current forecasts, the time of the season, and the expected large-scale global patterns, the drier outcome seems more likely, especially over the central interior, including the central to western parts of the summer-grain production region.

Given the weak La Niña event, which is expected to weaken further during the remainder of the summer, seasonal forecasts do not provide much guidance, and the rainfall signal for South Africa remains weak.



The following is a summary of weather conditions during the next few days (until middle next week):

- Temperatures will be above normal over most areas, but near normal in the far east.
- It will be warm to hot over most parts.
- Rainfall will be below normal over the central to western parts, but normal to above-normal over the eastern or far-eastern parts, depending on the exact movement of the tropical system to the east.
- It will be hot over the western interior and winter rainfall region until Tuesday.
- Isolated thundershowers are possible over the central to eastern parts on most days.
- It will be dry over the western interior where no rain is expected.
- Dry westerly winds will be present over the western to central parts on most days.
- Rain and thundershowers are possible over the southern Lowveld and northern KZN if the tropical system moves somewhat further west during the weekend and early next week. If the track is further inland, heavy falls of rain are also possible along the eastern escarpment and entire Lowveld. No forecasts currently indicate significant rain west of the escarpment, but these should be watched during the weekend in case the expected track of the tropical system changes.
- Light showers are expected over the winter rainfall region on Monday and more likely on Wednesday/Thursday next week.
- Over most of the summer-grain production region, conditions will be favorable for in-field activities. However, where wind is a factor, conditions may not be favorable, given moderate to fresh westerly winds at times in the western to central parts while the tropical system towards the east may result in moderate easterly to south-easterly winds at times in the east.
- **The summer-grain production region** will be hot and relatively dry over the western to central parts. The eastern areas will also be warm to hot, but possibly somewhat cooler later with showers possible, depending on the movement of the tropical system towards the east.
- The winter rainfall region will be hot, but cold fronts will bring temporary relief on Monday when light showers may occur and again by Wednesday/Thursday next week when somewhat more significant showers are possible, with a more significant drop in temperatures. The southern parts will be slightly cooler, with strong south-easterly winds in the southwest until Sunday and possibly again later next week.

Overview of expected conditions over the main agricultural production areas

The tropical system developing towards the east over the Mozambique Channel and Mozambique will play an important role in the rainfall potential over the far eastern to north-eastern parts of the country. The latest forecasts are split regarding the exact movement of the system, with some forecasts keeping it in the east, resulting in rainfall mostly along the KZN coast and parts of the Lowveld. Some models, however, bring the system deeper into the country, with heavy falls possible over the Lowveld and eastern escarpment. However, all models keep the central interior dry, while outcomes remain uncertain for the east. While all the activity will be located in the east, the central interior may see mostly hot and relatively dry weather.



Maize production region:

- It will be a warm to hot period over the summer-grain production region. It will also be dry for this time of the year, with accumulated rainfall expected to remain below 20 mm over the central to western parts. The eastern areas may receive somewhat more rain, but totals should remain below 50 mm during the period. These totals may change depending on the eventual movement of the tropical system towards the east. Should the tropical system move further inland than currently expected, heavy falls can occur over the eastern parts of the region later this weekend and next week.
- Maximum temperatures over the eastern grain-production areas will range between 28°C and 33°C. Minimum temperatures will range between 12°C and 16°C.
- Maximum temperatures over the western grain-production areas will range between 31°C and 37°C. Minimum temperatures will be in the order of 17°C to 22°C.
- **Friday (9th):** Partly cloudy and warm with scattered thundershowers over the western parts, and isolated over the central parts. It will be hot and dry with moderate to fresh westerly winds in the west.
- **Saturday (10th):** Partly cloudy and warm, but hot in the west. Isolated thundershowers are possible. It will be mild in the east with moderate easterly winds.
- **Sunday to Tuesday (11th – 13th):** Current forecasts indicate hot conditions over the central to western parts where it will also be relatively dry, with only isolated thundershowers possible. The east should be somewhat cooler with easterly to south-easterly winds. Depending on the movement of the tropical low to the east, showers may occur over the region, especially over the higher-lying areas further to the east, but totals are expected to be relatively low according to current forecasts.
- **Wednesday to Thursday (14th – 15th):** Thundershowers over the western to central parts may become more scattered as conditions for thundershowers improve somewhat. It will remain hot though. The eastern parts could still see further showers and warm to mild days with easterly winds, associated with the tropical system of which the movement is not certain yet.

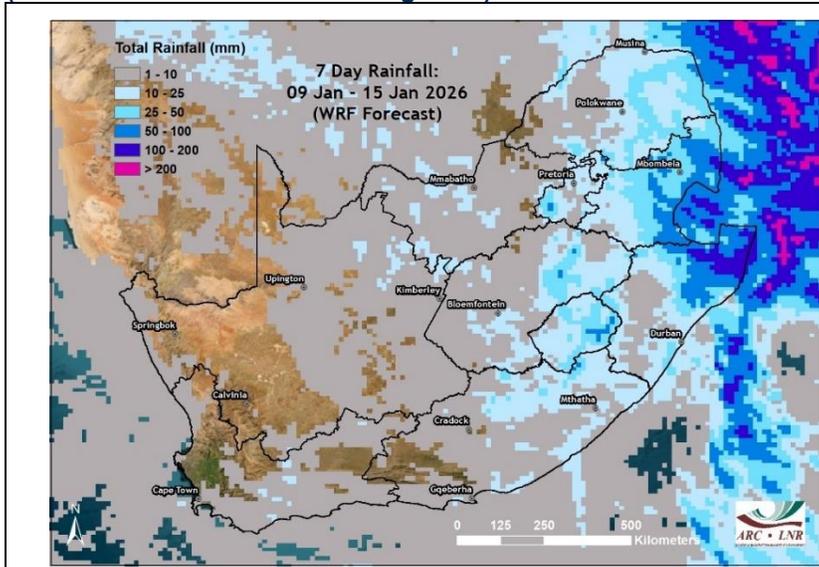
Cape Wine Lands and Rûens:

Summer-like conditions will dominate, with hot weather over the interior of the region, while strong south-easterly winds will be present in the southwest. It may be somewhat cooler on Monday, when a weak frontal system may result in light showers in the west. A more significant system by Wednesday/Thursday may bring showers to the entire region. Strong south-easterly winds may resume on Thursday next week in the southwest.



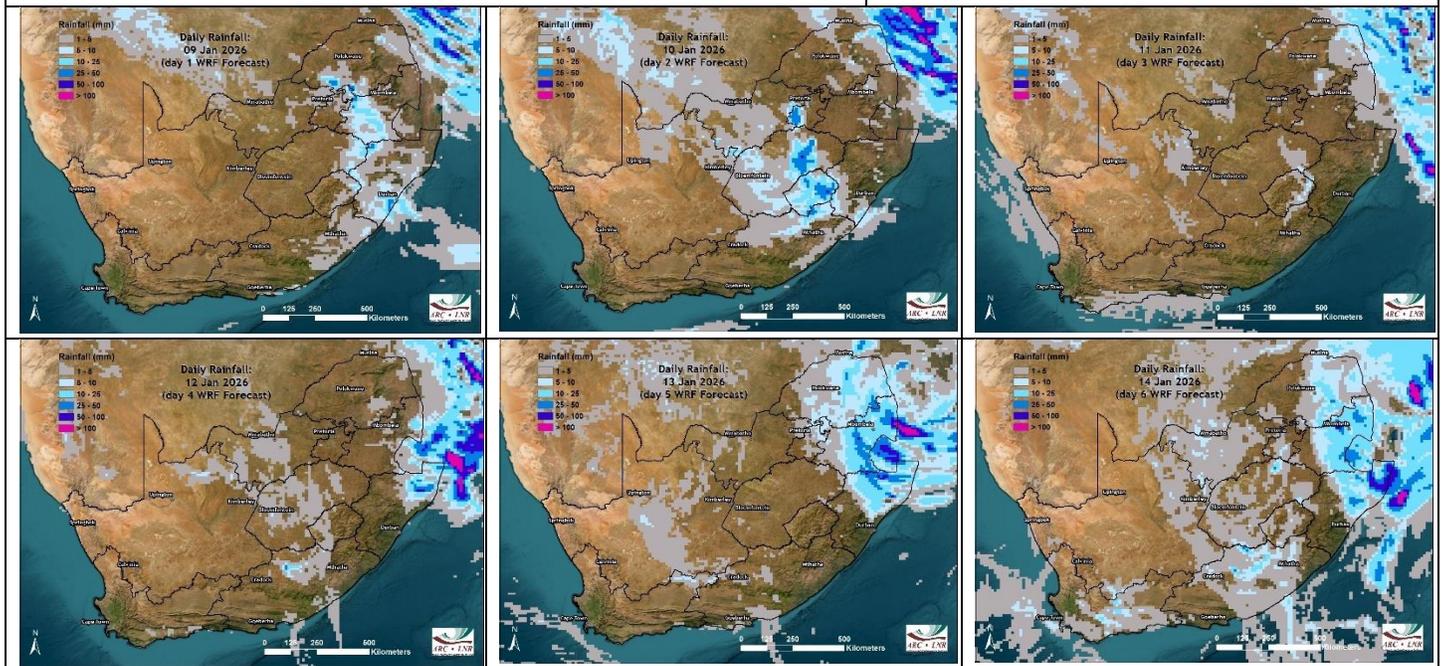
Daily summary of expected conditions (9 - 15 Jan)

(GFS forecast downscaled using WRF)



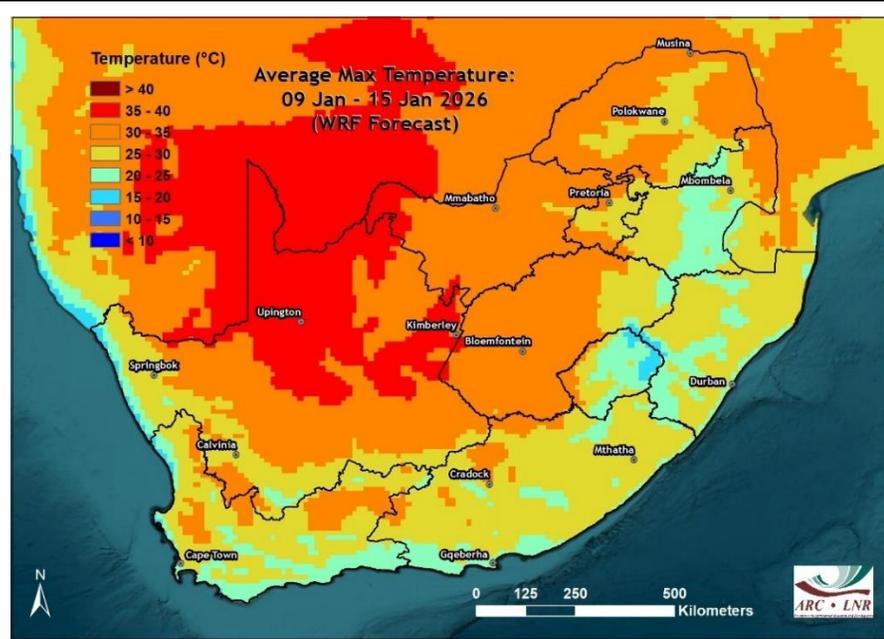
Rainfall

- Most of the country will receive rain, including the winter rainfall region.
- It will be dry over the far western to southern interior.



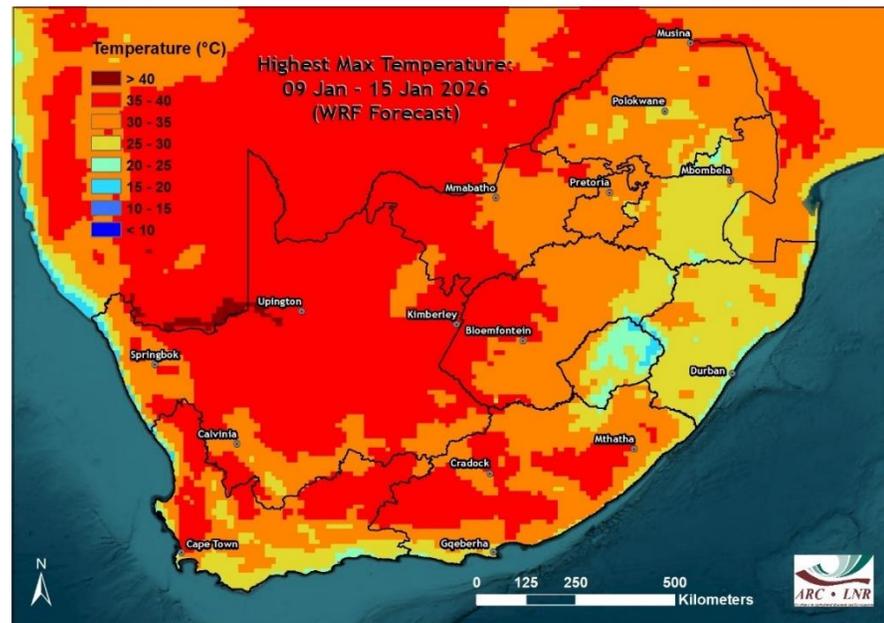
- Isolated thundershowers are expected daily over the central parts, but totals will be low, keeping the region quite dry given high temperatures.
- Depending on the movement of the tropical system towards the east, somewhat more widespread showers and thundershowers are possible over the far-eastern areas from Saturday until Wednesday.
- Light showers are possible over the winter rainfall region, mostly by Wednesday/Thursday next week.





Average maximum temperatures

- Average maximum temperatures will range between 30 and 40°C over the central interior.
- The Eastern Highveld will see average maximum temperatures between 20 and 30°.
- On average, it will be warm relative to the norm for this time of the year.



Highest maximum temperatures

- **Highest temperatures, exceeding 35°C, are expected:**
- Most of the central to southern and western interior as well as the Limpopo River Valley.
- Highest maximum temperatures will exceed 35°C over the western parts of the summer-grain production region.

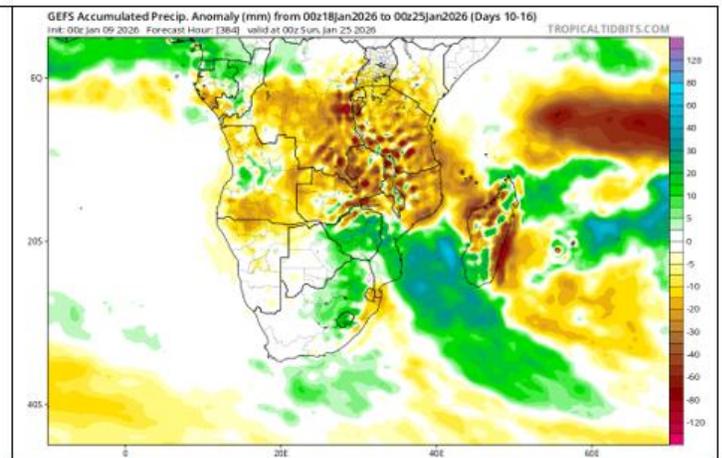
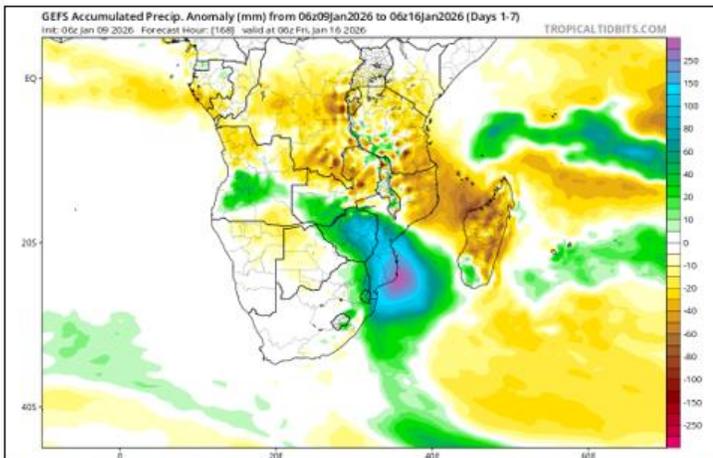
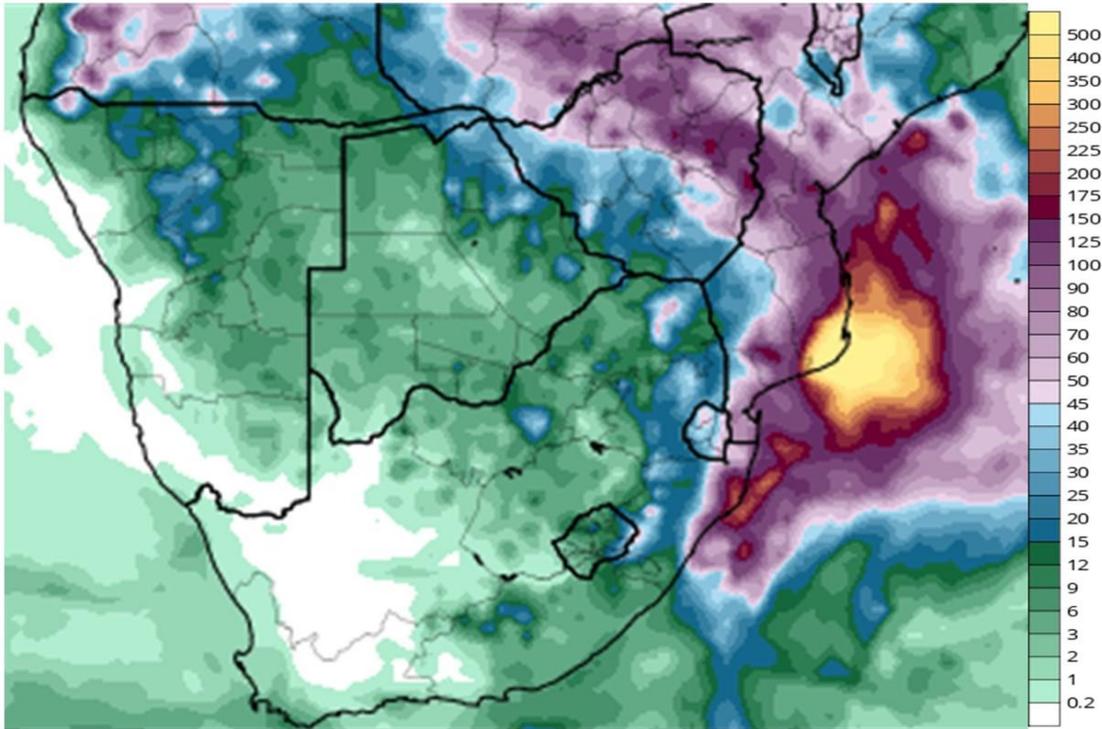


Medium term rainfall summary

GFS Total Accumulated Precipitation (mm) from 06z09Jan2026 to 12z15Jan2026

Init: 06z Jan 09 2026 Forecast Hour: [150] valid at 12z Thu, Jan 15 2026

TROPICALTIDBITS.COM



Cumulative rainfall totals through the middle of next week (top) are expected to be low over most of the interior, but the far-eastern parts may see some significant rainfall. This is very much dependent on the movement of the tropical system currently to the east of South Africa, which may result in heavy falls along the KZN coast and southern Lowveld according to this particular forecast. The western interior should be dry, but the winter rainfall region may again see some light showers yielding low totals. According to the GFS ensemble, the summer rainfall region should see normal to below normal rainfall while most of the rain should be associated with the tropical system towards the east, mostly in the ocean (bottom left). The pattern is expected to remain similar deeper into the month, towards the 3rd week (bottom right).

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Possible extreme conditions - relevant to agriculture

The South African Weather Service issues warnings for any severe weather that may develop, based on much more information (and in near-real time) than the output of only 2 weather models (GFS and the ECMWF model) considered here in the beginning of a week-long period (9 – 15 January). It is therefore advised to keep track of warnings that may be issued by the SAWS (www.weathersa.co.za) as the week progresses.

According to current model projections (GFS / ECMWF models) of weather conditions during the coming week, the following may negatively affect agricultural activities and production:

Cool, wet conditions may be conducive to fungal diseases:

- Extreme eastern parts, depending on the movement of the tropical system: **Saturday to Wednesday (10th – 14th).**

Significant rainfall totals, exceeding 50 mm in 24 hours, may occur, dependent entirely on the movement of the tropical system towards the east:

- More likely, these will be concentrated over the northern KZN coast (possibly moving further south later along the coast) and adjacent interior, together with the southern Lowveld: **Saturday to Wednesday (10th – 14th).**
- If the system tracks further west than currently expected, areas affected could be the entire Lowveld and eastern escarpment of Mpumalanga and Limpopo: **Saturday to Wednesday (10th – 14th).**

It will be hot, with maximum temperatures exceeding 35°C:

- Western to southern and south-eastern interior, including the Swartland and northern parts of the winter rainfall region, including the Karoo: **Saturday to Wednesday (9th – 14th).**
- The western to central interior, including the western parts of the summer-grain production region: **Friday to Thursday (9th – 15th).**

Some thundershowers may become severe, producing strong, gusty winds and hail:

- While isolated in nature, thundershowers over the central to eastern interior during the period may have an enhanced tendency to become severe, given the hot and dry environment in which they develop: **Friday to Thursday (9th – 15th).**

Hot, dry and at times windy conditions may be conducive to the development and spread of wildfires:

- Winter rainfall region: **Saturday to Tuesday (10th – 13th).**

Strong to gale-force south-easterly winds are possible:

- South-western parts of the Western Cape: **Friday to Sunday (9th – 11th) and Thursday (15th).**



Seasonal forecast

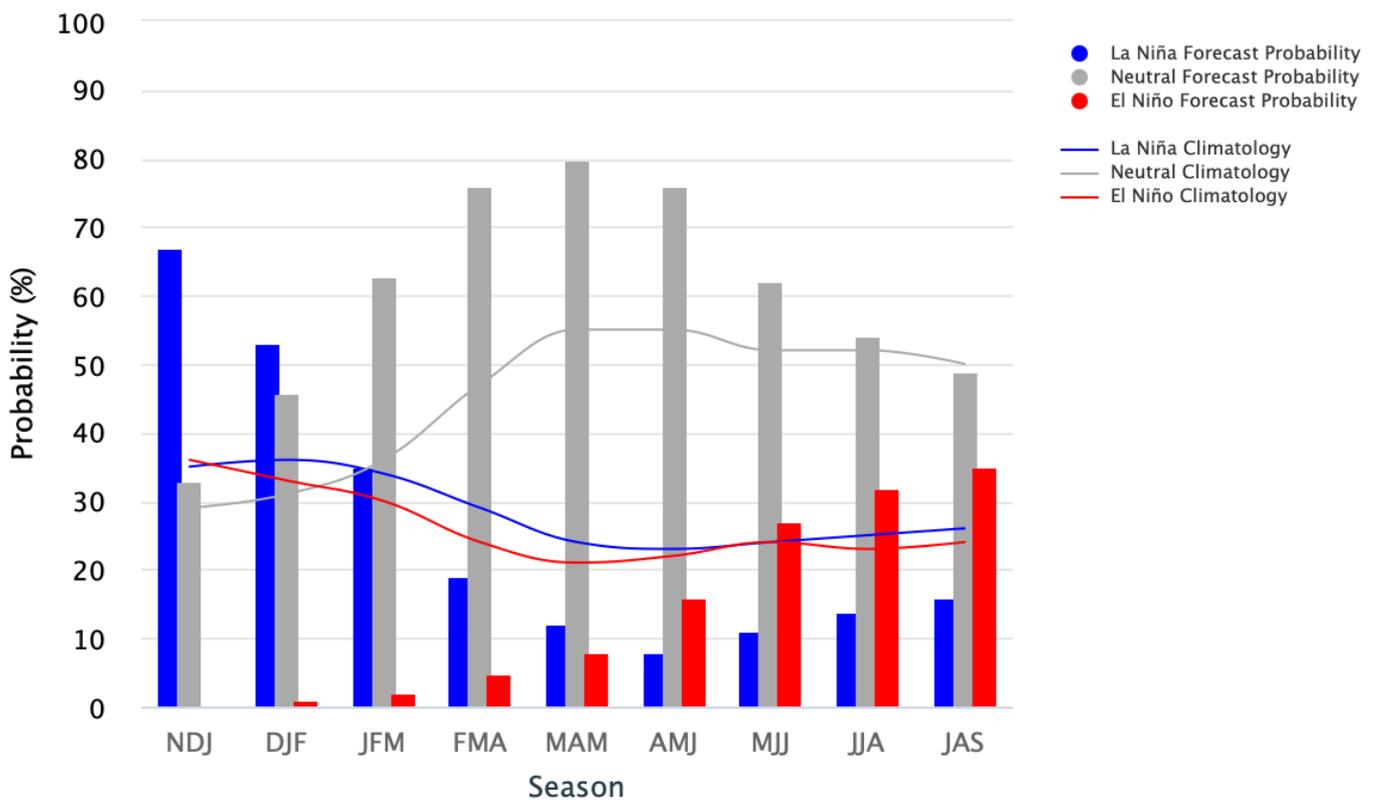
Current ENSO conditions:

Most institutions recognize the existence of weak La Niña conditions currently both in the tropical Pacific Ocean and atmosphere. These are expected to weaken during the remainder of summer and become neutral by autumn. Seasonal forecasts are less strongly positive for above-normal rainfall over southern Africa going forward, with a very weak rainfall signal present.

The graph below shows the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) ENSO forecast, with La Niña conditions expected to reach a peak in mid-summer.

Mid-November 2025 IRI Model-Based Probabilistic ENSO Forecasts

ENSO state based on NINO3.4 SST Anomaly Neutral ENSO: -0.5 °C to 0.5 °C



International Research Institute for Climate and Society- <http://iri.columbia.edu/>



In their most recent update (issued 19 December), the IRI states that” As of mid-December 2025, the equatorial Pacific is in a La Niña state, with sea surface temperatures in the Niño 3.4 region having crossed the La Niña threshold. The CCSR/IRI ENSO plume forecast places the probability of La Niña at 56% for Dec-Feb 2026. From Jan–Mar 2026 onward, conditions the forecasts begin shifting toward ENSO-neutral, which is forecast to become the dominant category. Neutral probabilities rise to 64% at the start of the year and remain the leading state through the forecast period ending in Aug–Oct 2026. El Niño probabilities stay very low, below 10% through Mar–May 2026, but gradually increase thereafter, reaching 14% in Apr–Jun, 26% in May–Jul, 35% in Jun–Aug, and 38% by Jul–Sep 2026.”

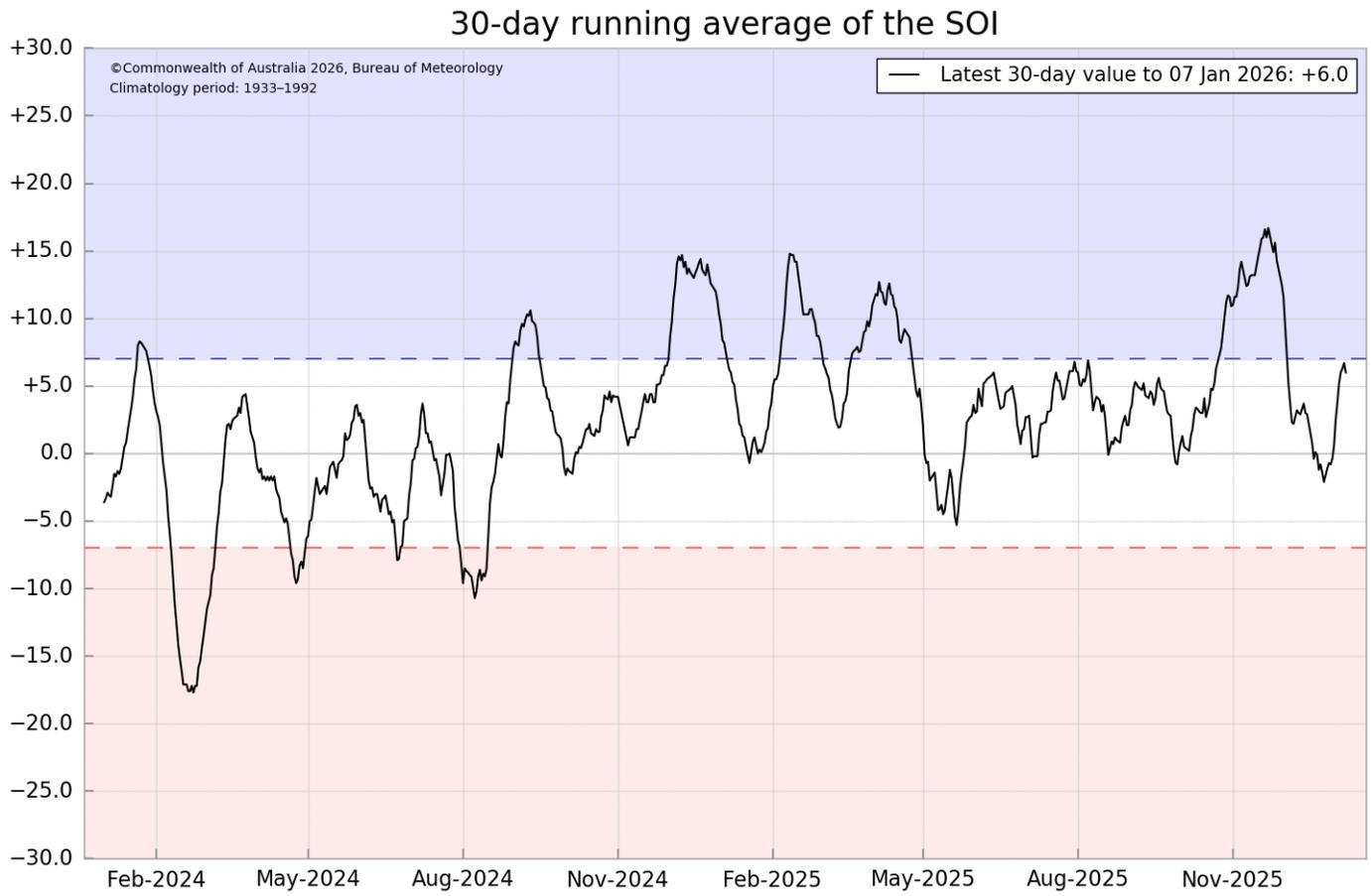
In their most recent update (9 January), the **Australian Bureau of Meteorology** states that Sea Surface Temperatures over the Tropical Pacific may remain at La Niña levels during the next few weeks:

- La Niña continues in the tropical Pacific. The latest relative Niño3.4 SST index value for the week ending 4 January 2026 is -0.95 °C. Sustained values below -0.80 °C are consistent with a La Niña pattern. Weekly values of the relative Niño3.4 index have been fluctuating around the La Niña threshold since mid-to-late September.
- Atmospheric indicators, such as trade winds, pressure and cloud patterns over the equatorial central Pacific, have shown consistent, though relatively weak, signs of La Niña since mid-to-late September. As of 4 January 2026, the 30-day Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) is $+6.0$, having risen over the past week after remaining neutral for most of December. Short-lived tropical systems can affect the SOI during the summer months and are not necessarily a reflection of the large-scale state of the climate system. The 60-day and 90-day SOI index values are $+5.0$ and $+7.7$ respectively, both near the La Niña threshold.
- The Bureau's model currently predicts that tropical Pacific Ocean temperatures are likely to remain at La Niña levels until around late summer before returning to neutral, broadly consistent with most international models, but earlier than the typical ENSO event decay.
- The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is neutral. The Bureau's model predicts the IOD is likely to remain neutral until at least the end of autumn 2026. This is consistent with all international models assessed. The IOD is typically inactive from December to April.
- The Southern Annular Mode (SAM) index is neutral as at 3 January 2026. It is forecast to remain mostly neutral over the coming week or two. After this, there is a range of possible outcomes, meaning less clarity in the likely SAM phase...” <http://www.bom.gov.au>

The Southern Annular Mode (SAM) is in neutral territory, increasing and expected to become strongly positive by mid-January. Positive values in the SAM are associated with enhanced chances for above-normal rainfall over the eastern parts of southern Africa.



The 30-day Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) have decreased to +6 and represents atmospheric pressure patterns in the Australia – Pacific region indicative of neutral to border-line La Niña conditions. Such atmospheric conditions are neither strongly positively nor negatively correlated with above-normal rainfall over the summer rainfall region of South Africa.



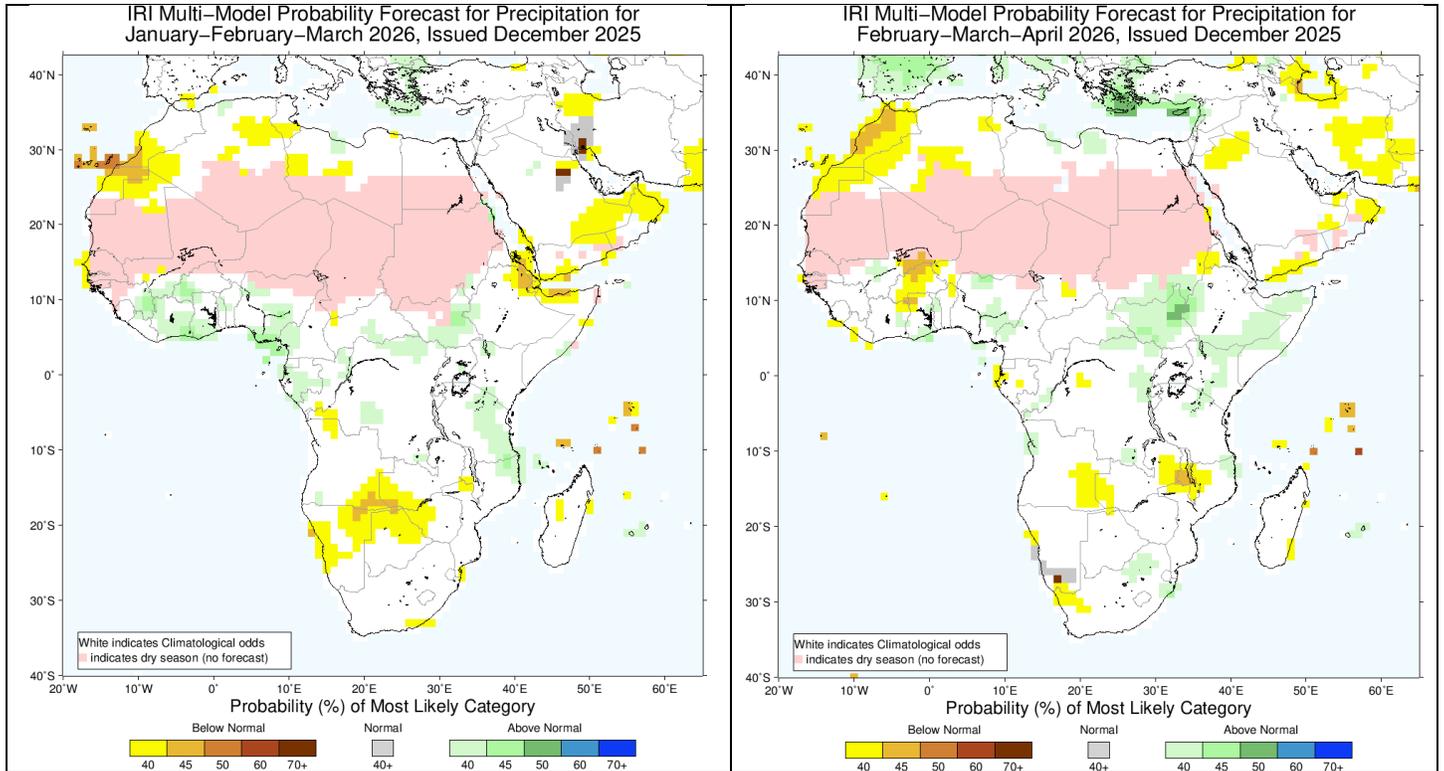
Australian Bureau of Meteorology - <http://www.bom.gov.au>



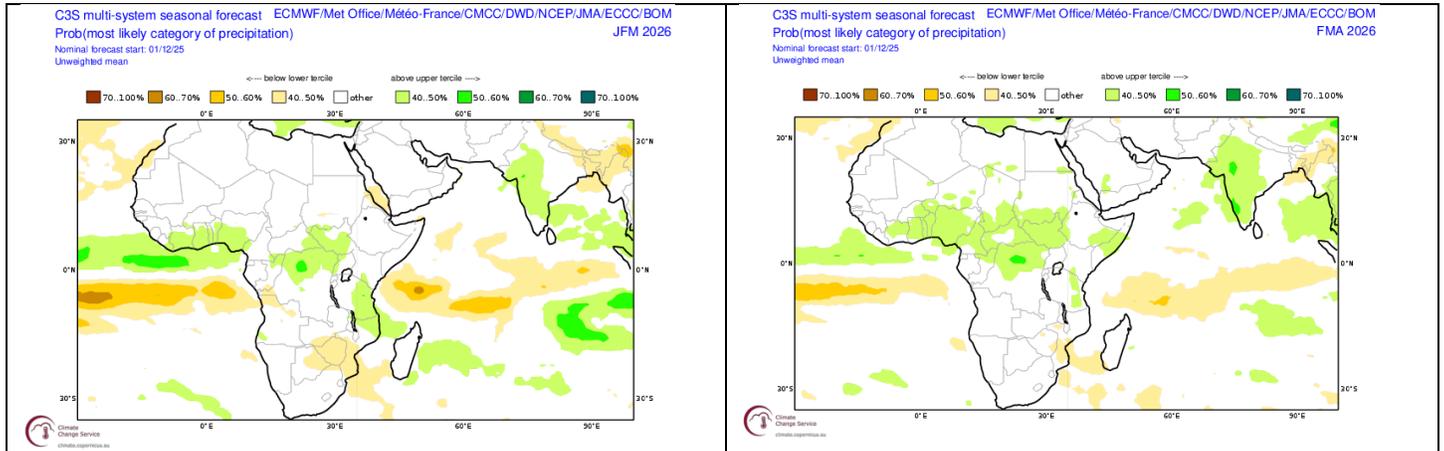
Seasonal forecasts issued by various international institutions

Seasonal forecasts (updated in December 2025) continue to indicate a weak signal for rainfall over southern Africa. This outlook is linked to the current weak La Niña in the Pacific Ocean, expected to come to an end in early 2026.

The projected wet signal for mid- and late summer has weakened considerably compared to the September forecast update. As a result, the interior may receive near normal during this period according to the forecast considered here.



Probabilistic forecasts by the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) for rainfall for summer (January to March 2026, left – Forecast issued in 2025-12) and autumn (February to April 2026, right – Forecast issued in 2025-12).



Probabilistic multi-model forecasts by the multi-system COPERNICUS Programme for summer (January to March 2026, left – Forecast issued in 2025-12) and autumn (February to April 2026, right – Forecast issued in 2025-12).



CUMULUS seasonal outlook

This outlook is based on the typical observed rainfall patterns over the north-eastern half of the country (including most of the summer grain-production region), which are associated with the cyclic variability of the global climate system. Summers similar to 2025/26 usually experience near-normal rainfall totals over the north-eastern parts of the country. There is a tendency for above-normal rainfall during January, while relatively dry conditions are usually observed during February and early March.

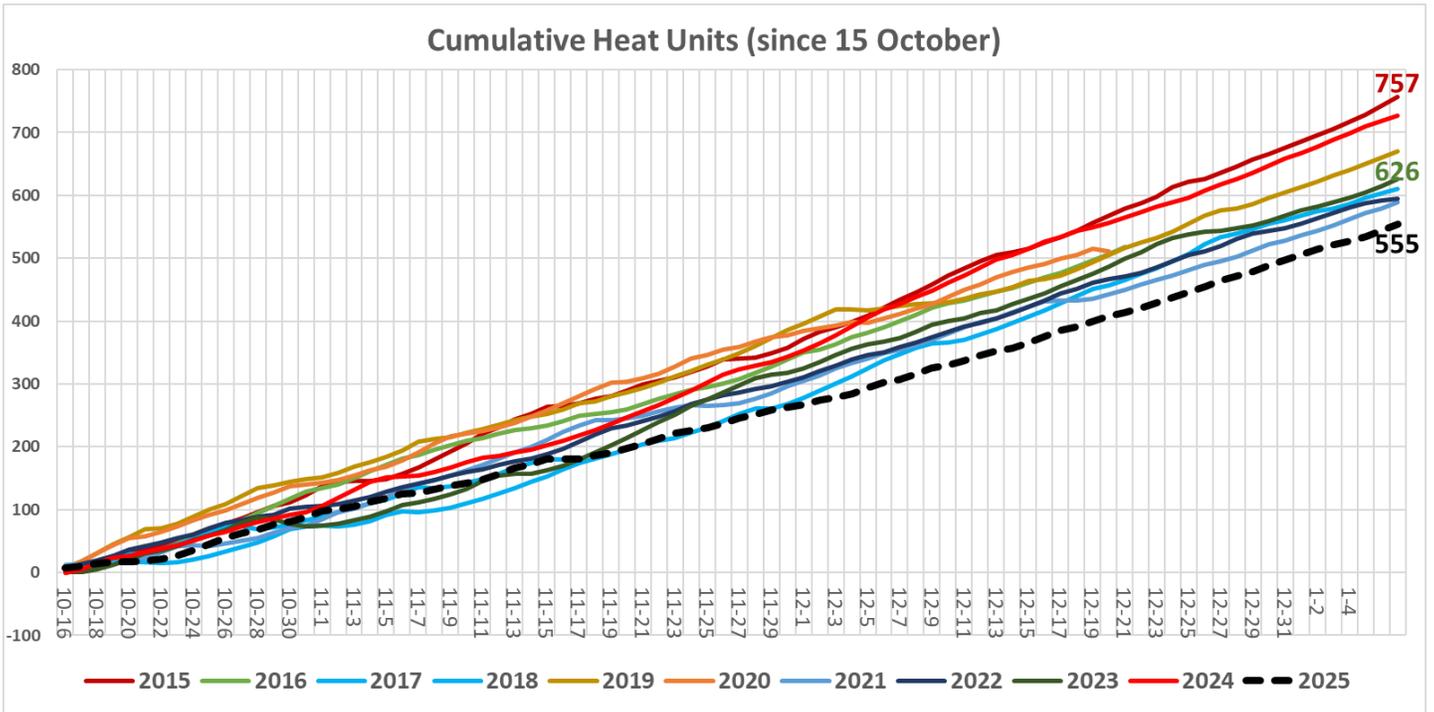
Typical patterns during similar summers, over the north-eastern half of the summer rainfall region, are:

- **October:** Near-normal to above-normal rainfall over the north-eastern half of the summer rainfall region
- **November:** Near-normal to below-normal rainfall over the north-eastern half of the summer rainfall region
- **December:** Somewhat wetter earlier in the month but usually trending drier into early January over the north-eastern half of the summer rainfall region
- **January:** Relatively dry early in the month, but above-normal rainfall is possible during the second half over the north-eastern half of the summer rainfall region
- **February-early March:** Near-normal to below-normal rainfall over the north-eastern half of the summer rainfall region
- **Mid- to late March:** Above-normal rainfall over the north-eastern half of the summer rainfall region



Observed conditions

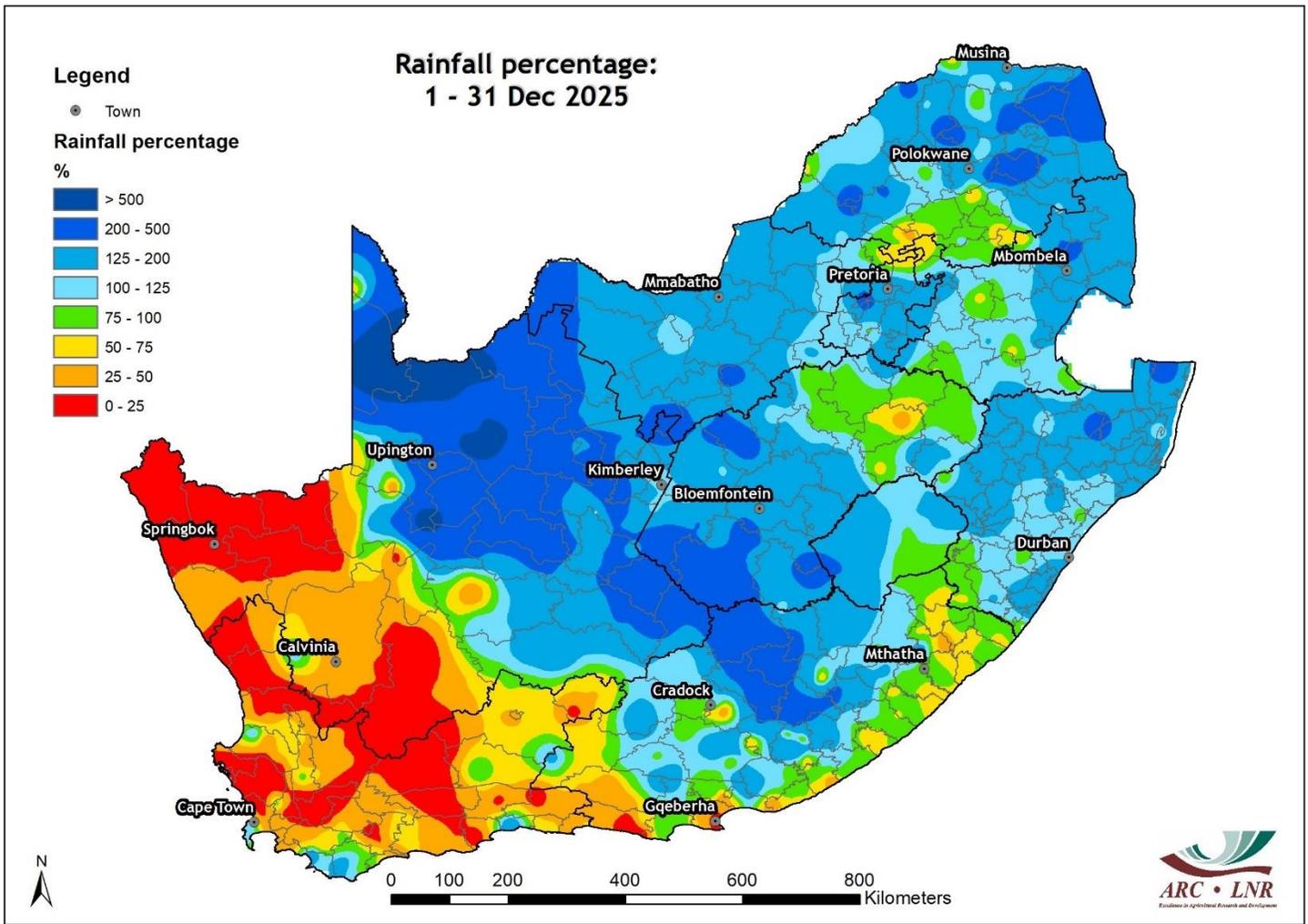
Cumulative heat units since 15 October



Accumulated heat units in the Ermelo region, for the period 15 October until 7 January, for the years as indicated. The current summer (broken black line) has seen the lowest accumulation of heat units relative to the other summers since 2015. At 555 compared to the average value in the order of 626, this summer lags about 12% behind. Warm conditions ahead will result in further gains relative to the other years.



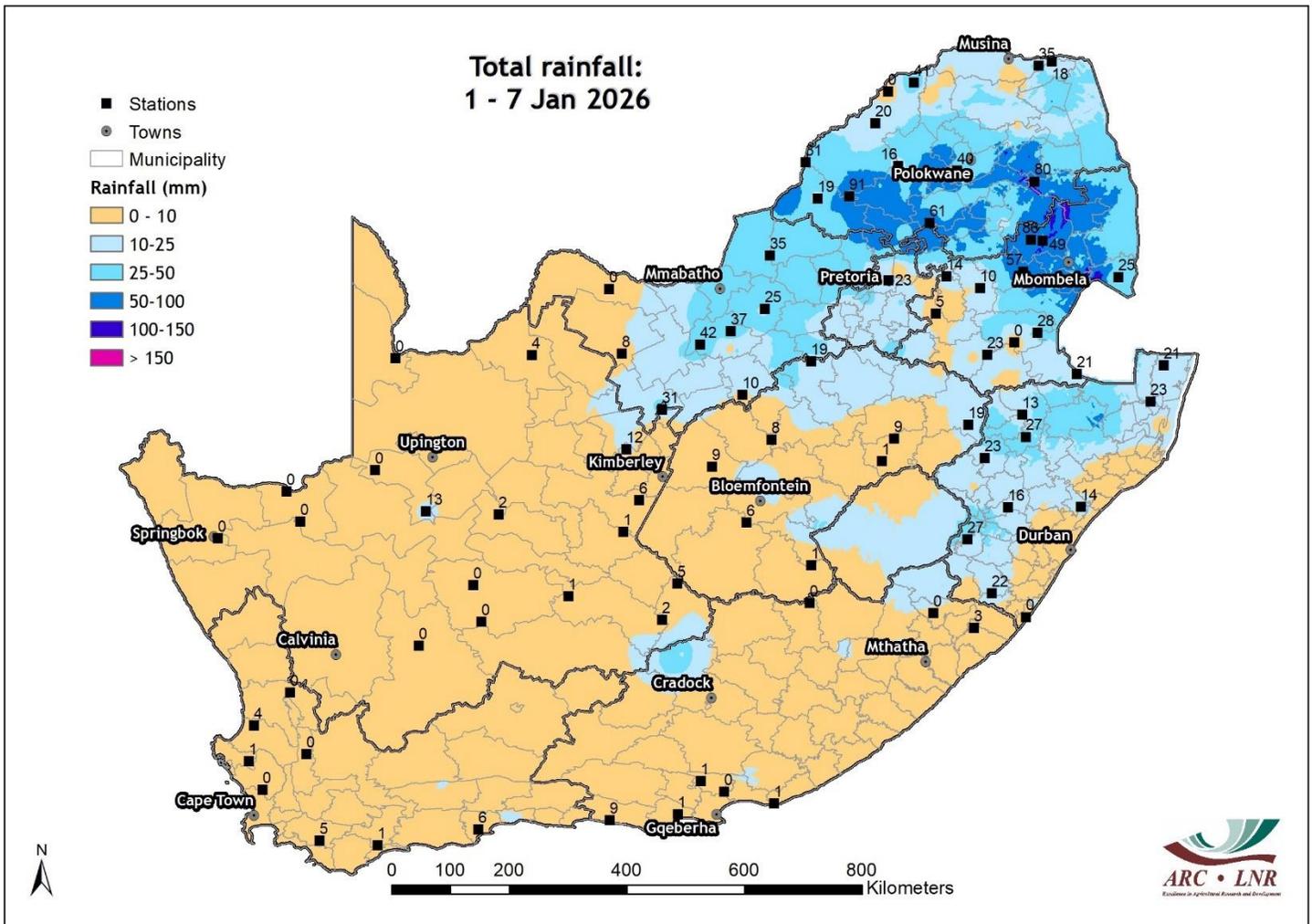
Rainfall (% of long-term mean): December 2025



Above-average rainfall has occurred over most of the summer rainfall region during December. The southern parts, including the winter rainfall region, received below average rainfall.



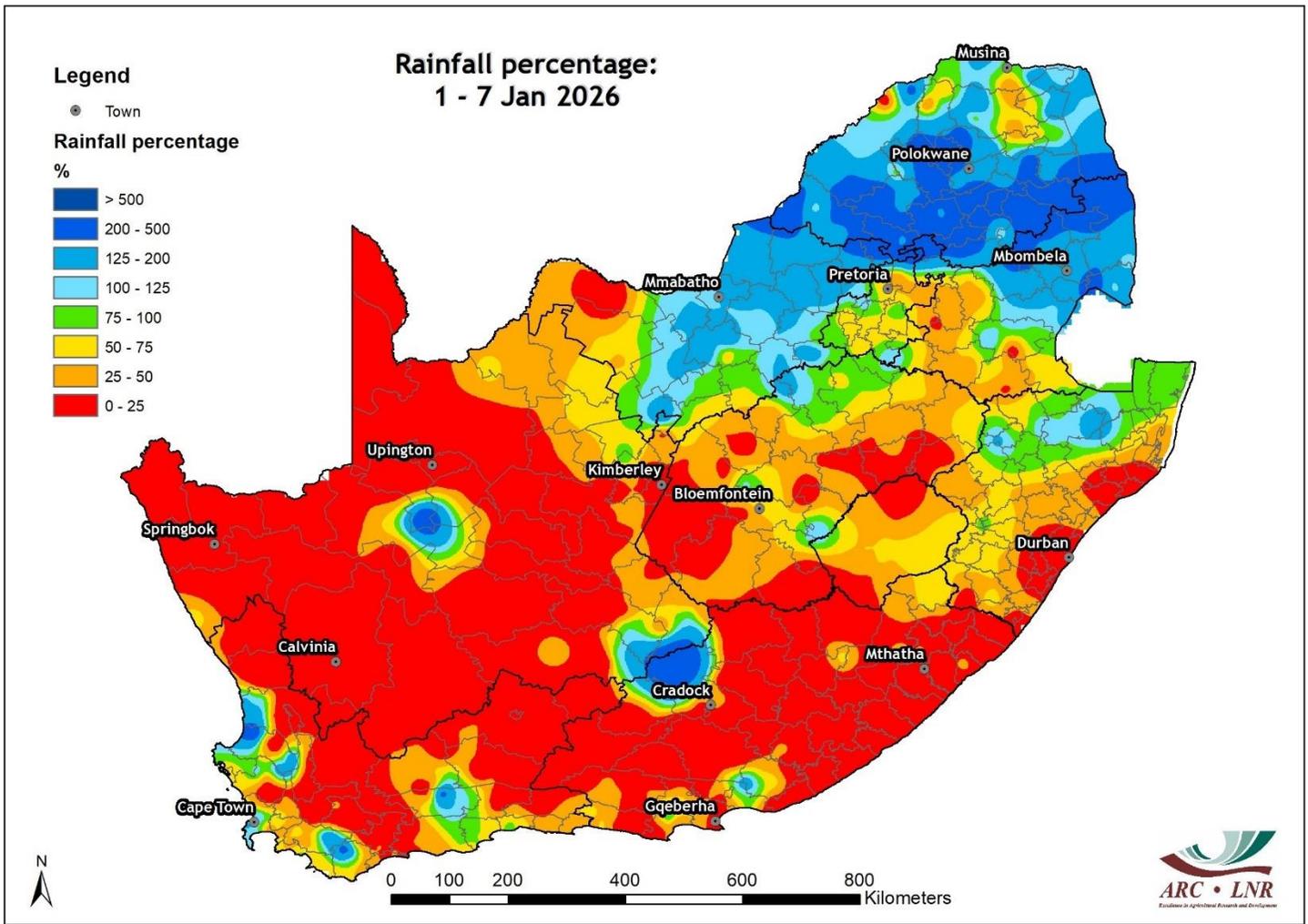
Rainfall (mm): 1 – 7 January 2026



Most of the central to western parts were dry during January, but rain and thundershowers at times, especially around the 4th, resulted in totals exceeding 25 mm over large parts of the north-east, and exceeding 50 mm over the eastern parts of Mpumalanga and southern Limpopo.



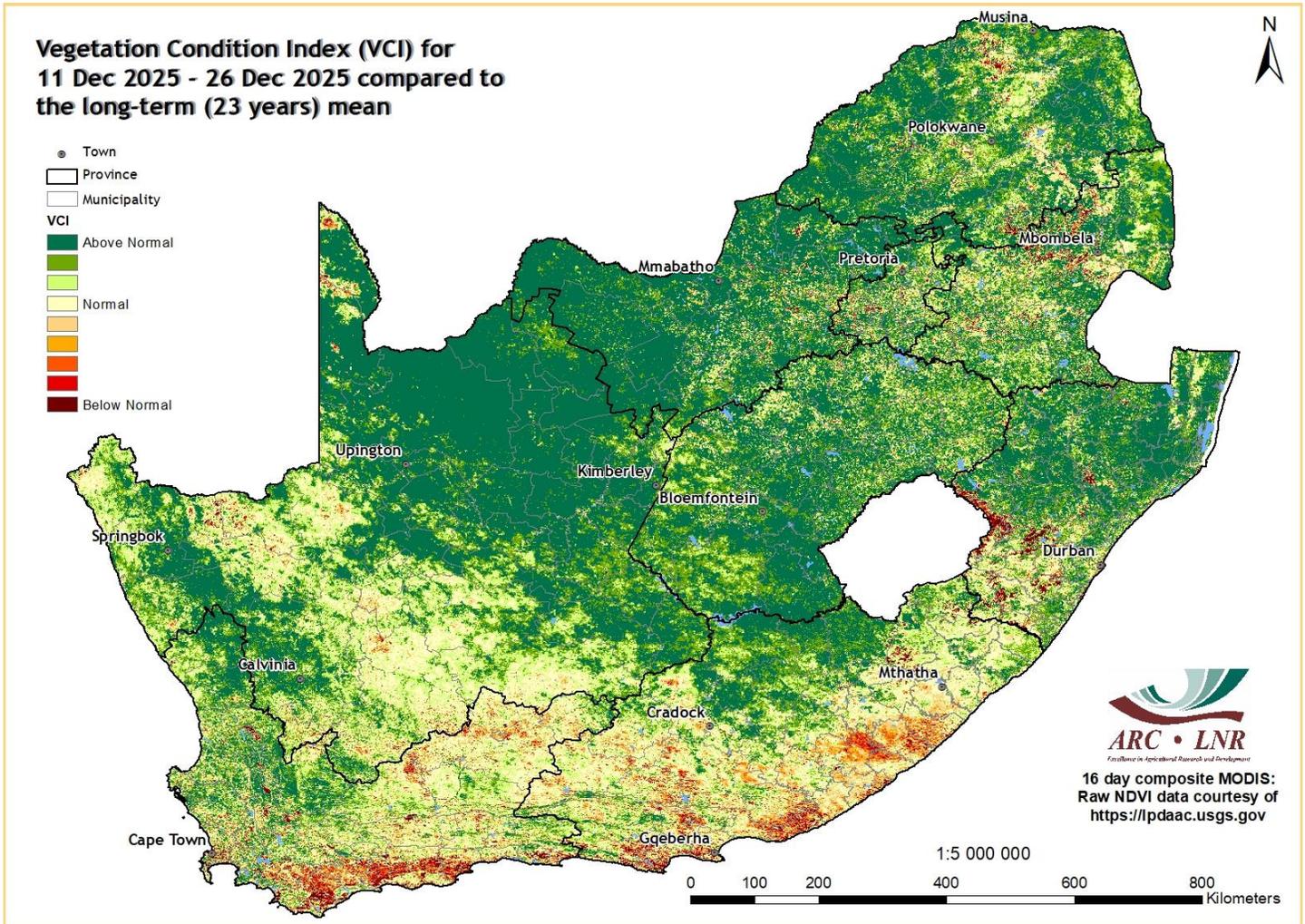
Rainfall (% of long-term mean): 1 – 7 January 2026



The first few days of January saw below-average rainfall over most of the country except the northeast.



Vegetation Condition Index: December 2025



Vegetation activity in December was above normal over most areas, following above-normal rainfall until April and again from August–November over large parts of the interior. Over the winter rainfall region, especially in the eastern parts and further east along the Garden Route, significantly below-normal rainfall is having a negative impact on vegetation activity.



Sources of information

Seasonal forecasts: Published by the COPERNICUS Programme (<https://climate.copernicus.eu/seasonal-forecasts>)

Rainfall, temperature and wind maps over South Africa for the past week:

Agricultural Research Council - Institute for Soil, Climate and Water (ISCW) – Climate Data Bank. Data recorded by the automatic weather station network of the ARC-ISCW.

Vegetation condition maps: Copernicus Global Land service, distributed by VITO.

Information related to: ENSO, IOD and SOI:

Australian Bureau of Meteorology - <http://www.bom.gov.au>

Climate Prediction Center - <http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov>

International Research Institute for Climate and Society- <http://iri.columbia.edu/>

Information related to the SAM:

The Annular Mode Website - <http://www.atmos.colostate.edu/ao/index.html>

SST map:

NOAA Climate Prediction Center - <http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov>

Daily conditions over South Africa:

WRF model downscaling of GFS forecasts.

Fires:

MODIS data, distributed by the Land Processes Distributed Active Data Center (LP DAAC), located at the US Geological Survey's EROS Data Center

Soil moisture:

<https://nasagrace.unl.edu/>

Precipitation and temperature outlooks for the coming week:

<https://www.tropicaltidbits.com/>

