WE ARE WHERE YOU ARE

AgriSeker fa( ) EST. 2015

RISK MANAGEMENT 2025/26

CUMULUS

by J Malherbe, R Kuschke

Contents

Summary

Dry at first, thundershowers next week

It will be warm to hot and dry over the interior initially, including the central to western parts of the summer-grain production region, until early next week. Conditions will gradually improve, with a return of thundershowers to large parts of the interior by early next week. Isolated thundershowers are possible from early next week over the central to eastern parts, becoming scattered in the east. Thundershowers may extend further west later next week.

Cumulative rainfall during the period will, however, most likely be below normal over most of the interior, except for the Eastern Highveld and the Drakensberg, where totals may be near normal for this time of year.

Large-scale patterns are becoming more favourable for a return of moisture to the interior. The mid-summer drought conditions over the interior will, however, linger until at least early next week, as hot and sunny weather is expected to dominate until then. Through next week, rainfall will return in the form of isolated to scattered thundershowers, bringing some relief in places. The distribution of rainfall will, however, be uneven, as can be expected with thundershowers.

Looking further ahead, forecast model output indicates a continuation of somewhat more favourable conditions into early February. At this stage, there is no indication of a redevelopment of tropical systems in the Mozambique Channel, which can at times result in drier conditions over the interior at this time of year. There is, however, also no indication yet of widespread above-normal rainfall over the interior, but forecasts will be monitored. Large-scale convection along the equator, globally, will not be particularly favourable for widespread above-normal rainfall over southern Africa into February.

While the weak La Niña event at present is expected to weaken further, seasonal forecast models lean towards near-normal to above-normal rainfall over the interior during late summer and autumn.

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

- Temperatures will be above normal over most of the interior, but near normal in the east and northeast.
- It will, on average, be warmer than the previous week in most places.
- It will be hot at times over the central to western and southern interior, including until early next week the central to western parts of the summer-grain production region, with dry, westerly winds.
- Maximum temperatures are expected to moderate over the central parts next week, associated in part with increased cloud cover.
- It will remain hot at times over the western to southern interior and winter rainfall region next week.
- Rainfall will be below normal over the central to western parts, but near normal over the Eastern Highveld, Drakensberg and surrounding areas.
- Little to no rain is expected over the interior until Sunday, with only isolated thundershowers possible over the northern Highveld and interior of KZN.

- Isolated thundershowers will spread into the central interior by Monday, while thundershowers will become scattered over the eastern interior.
- The western interior and winter rainfall region are expected to remain dry during the period.
- Isolated thundershowers may spread into the western to south-western interior later next week.
- Isolated thundershowers are possible over the central to eastern parts on most days.
- Light showers are expected by Tuesday/Wednesday along the Garden Route.
- **The summer-grain production region** will be hot and relatively dry, with only isolated thundershowers possible over the northern to eastern parts initially, spreading over the entire region next week. Conditions will be conducive for in-field activities, but high afternoon temperatures and fresh to strong westerly to north-westerly winds over the central to western parts of the region until early next week will not be conducive for certain activities.
- The winter rainfall region will be warm to hot at times, with hot conditions on several days over the Swartland and northern parts of the region. It will be windy in the afternoons. Little to no rain is expected, but frontal activity may possibly cause a few light showers in the southwest on Tuesday.

Overview of expected conditions over the main agricultural production areas

Conditions will initially be unfavourable for rainfall over the interior, given an anticyclonic atmospheric circulation pattern over South Africa. It will be warm to hot, with little to no rain, until Sunday. With upper-air perturbations developing over the interior and some tropical moisture moving in from the north, thundershowers will return to the interior next week.

Maize production region:

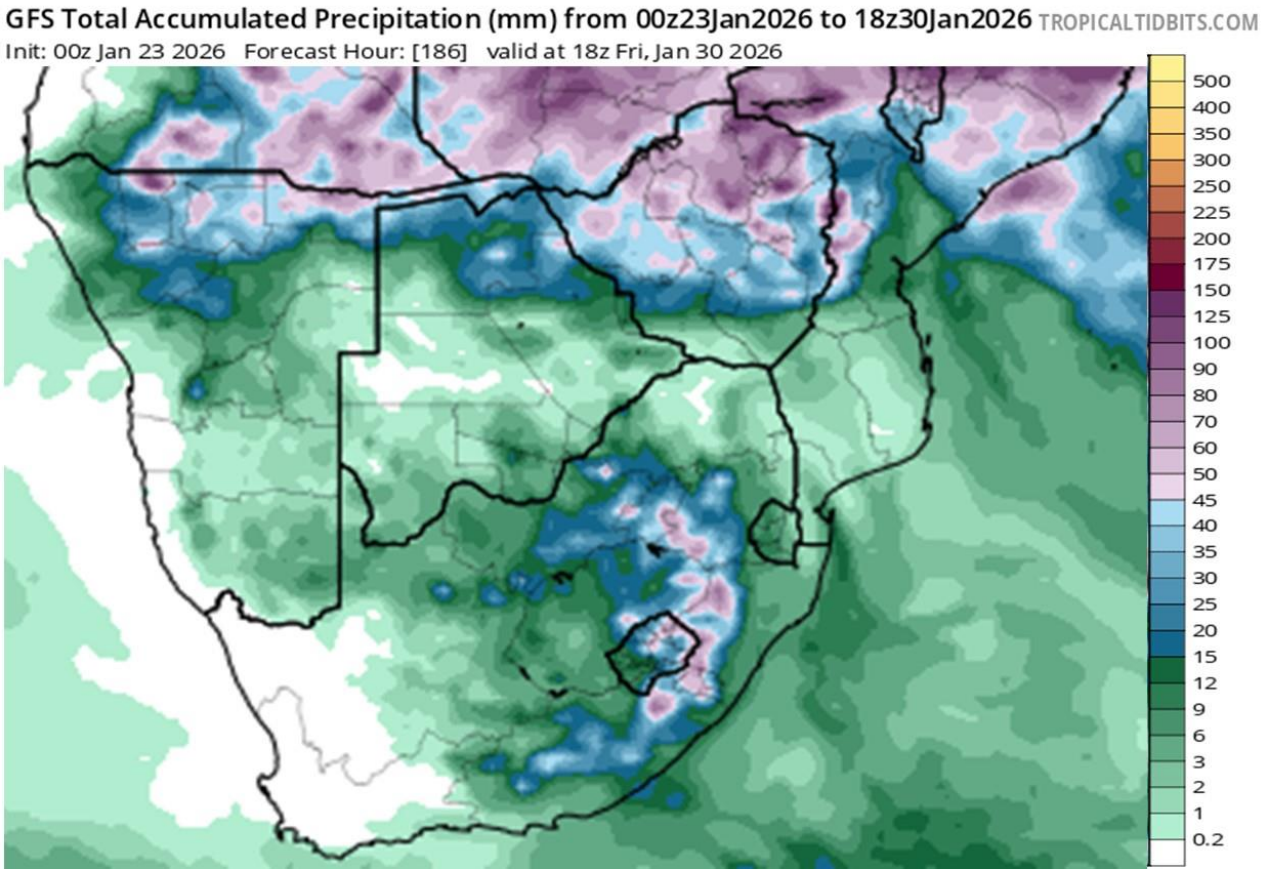
- The region will experience high maximum temperatures, with warmer conditions expected compared to previous weeks. It will be hot over the western to central parts, with windy conditions in the afternoon, especially until early next week. While only isolated thundershowers may occur during the first few days, and mostly confined to the northern to eastern parts, chances for thundershowers will improve next week over the entire region. It will however remain hot over the western parts, and current forecasts indicate more widespread thundershowers over the central to eastern parts as opposed to the western parts where falls may be more isolated.
- Maximum temperatures over the eastern grain-production areas will range between 29°C and 35°C. Minimum temperatures will range between 14°C and 17°C.
- Maximum temperatures over the western grain-production areas will range between 32°C and 38°C, with the highest temperatures towards the west. Minimum temperatures will be in the order of 16°C to 20°C.
- **Friday and Saturday (23rd – 24th):** Sunny and hot over the western to central parts with moderate to fresh westerly winds. It will be partly cloudy in the east and north where it will be warm. There is a very slight chance of afternoon thundershowers over the northern to eastern areas.

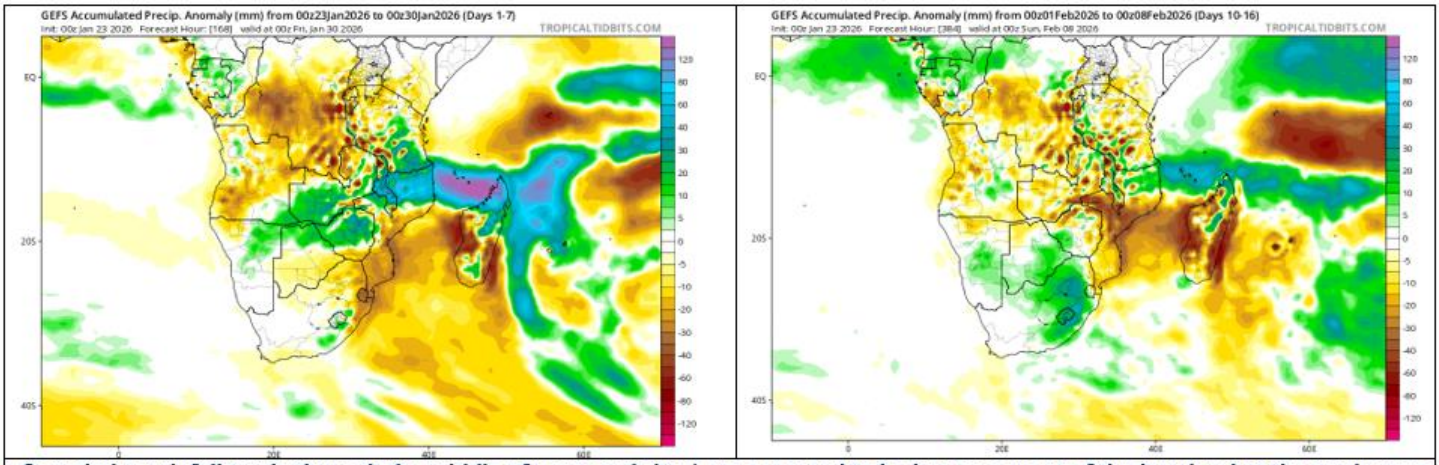
- **Sunday (25th):** Sunny and hot over the western to central parts with moderate to fresh westerly winds. It will be partly cloudy and warm over the northern to eastern parts with isolated thundershowers.
- **Monday to Thursday (26th – 29th):** Conditions are expected to improve for rainfall over the region. The region will remain warm, with hot conditions in the west. Isolated thundershowers are expected according to current forecasts, with scattered falls possible over the northern to eastern parts.

Cape Wine Lands and Rûens:

The interior of the region, especially the northern to western parts, will be hot on several days. It will generally be warm and sunny most of the time. A cold front may bring temporarily cooler conditions on Tuesday, together with light showers possibly in the southwest and south. Strong south-easterly winds may return to the south-western parts of the region later on Tuesday, continuing until Thursday, according to current forecasts.

Medium term rainfall summary





Cumulative rainfall totals through the middle of next week (top) are expected to be low over most of the interior, but the totals may exceed 25 mm or even 50 mm in places over the eastern to northern half of the summer-grain production region. According to the GFS ensemble, following relatively dry conditions until the end of January (bottom left), above-average rainfall is more likely in early February (bottom right).

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 (23 - 29 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:

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

- Central to western parts of the summer-grain production region, including southern North West, northern, central, western and southern Free State: **Friday to Tuesday (23rd – 27th).**
- Interior of the Northern Cape: **Friday to Thursday (23rd – 29th).**
- Western to south-western interior, including the Swartland and northern parts of the winter rainfall region: **Saturday to Monday (24th – 26th) and Wednesday to Thursday (28th – 29th).**
- Karoo: **Saturday to Thursday (24th – 29th).**
- Interior of the Eastern Cape: **Sunday to Monday (25th – 26th) and Thursday (30th).**

While only 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:

- Along the Drakensberg and adjacent parts of the northern part of the Eastern Cape, western parts of KZN, eastern parts of the Free State, southern Mpumalanga: **Monday to Thursday (26th – 29th).**

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

- Winter rainfall region: **Saturday to Monday (24th – 26th) and Wednesday to Thursday (28th – 29th).**
- Interior of the Northern Cape: **Saturday to Wednesday (24th – 28th).**
- Southern to southeastern parts of the country: **Sunday to Monday (25th – 26th).**

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

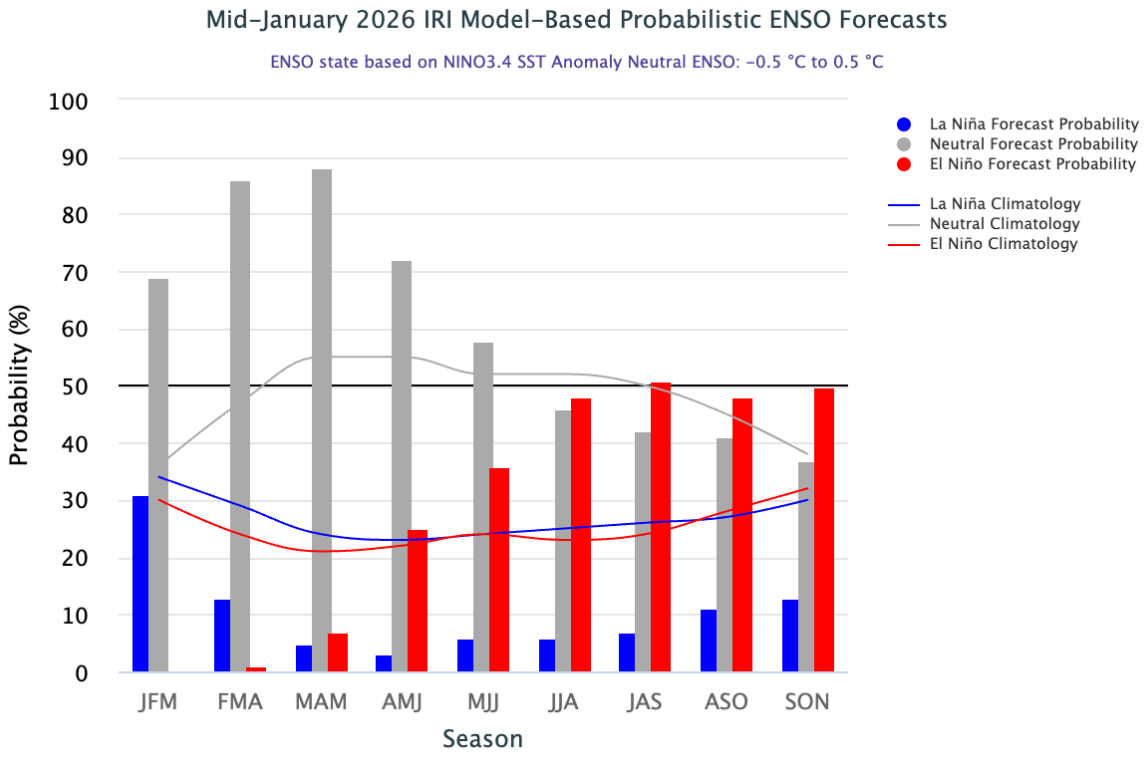
- South-western parts of the Western Cape: **Wednesday to Thursday (28th – 29th).**

Seasonal forecast

Current ENSO conditions:

Weak La Niña conditions are expected to come to an end during late summer. International institutions forecast relatively wet conditions during late summer and autumn over the summer-rainfall region.

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.



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

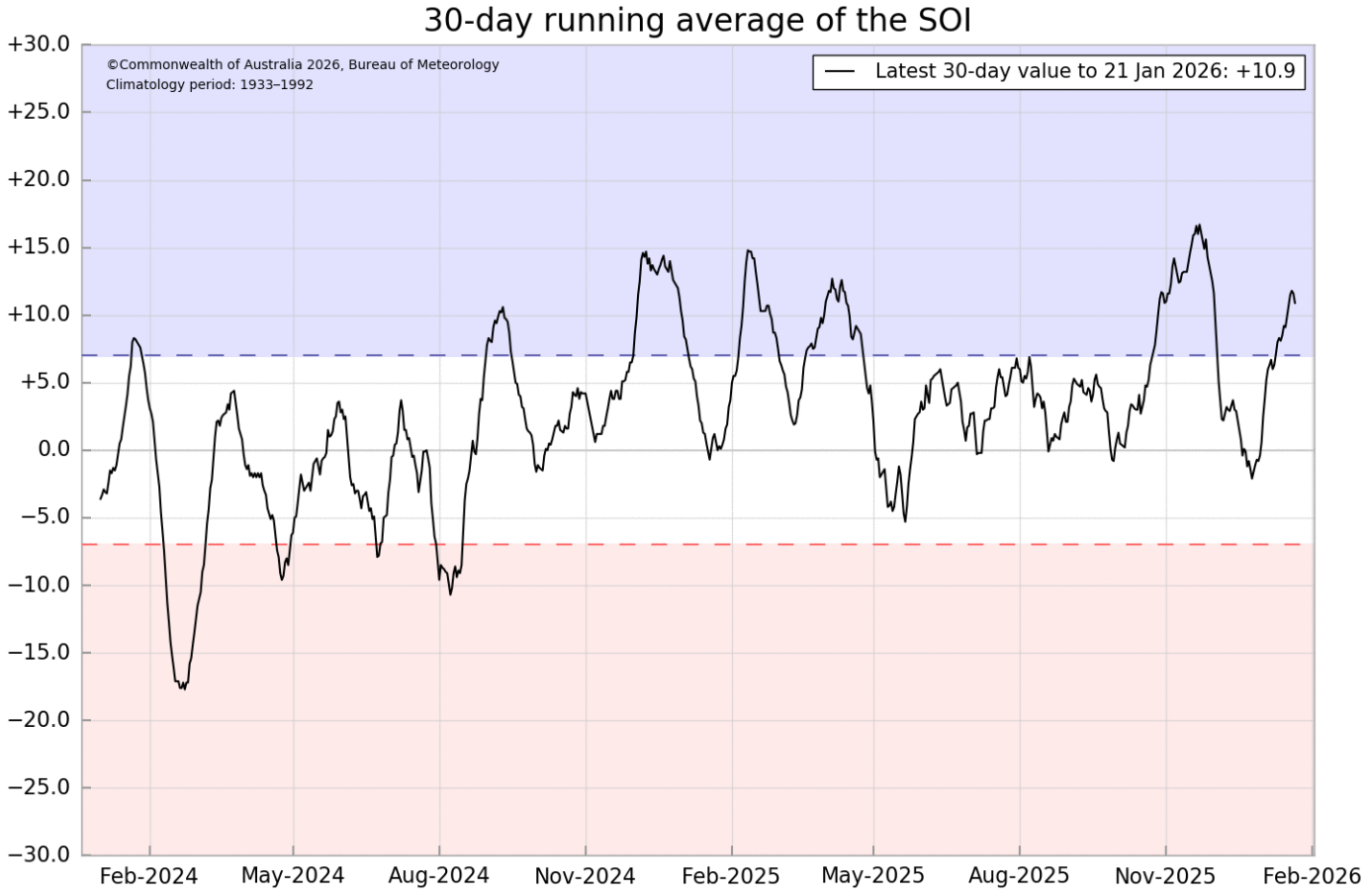
In their most recent update (issued 20 January), the IRI states that " By mid-January 2026, weak La Niña conditions have been present in both the atmosphere and ocean. In December 2025, the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) was +0.1, while the equatorial SOI was +0.9, indicating a mismatch between the two indices during the month. However, the most recent 30-day (ending on 18 January 2026) SOI value is firmly within La Niña territory. Low-level winds (850 hPa) were blowing close to average across the east-central and eastern Pacific. Enhanced convection and increased rainfall were evident over parts of Indonesia, marked by below-average OLR, while suppressed convection and reduced precipitation dominated around the Date Line with above-average OLR. Subsurface temperature anomalies weakened during November and December 2025 but still remained negative in the far eastern Pacific (roughly 100°W–80°W). Meanwhile, above-average subsurface temperatures strengthened in the western half of the Pacific and expanded further eastward; however, the warming remained confined to depth and was relatively weak in magnitude.
As of mid-January 2026, the equatorial Pacific remains in a La Niña state. The CCSR/IRI ENSO plume forecast places the probability of La Niña at 31% for Jan–Mar 2026 and shifts the odds in favor of ENSO-neutral conditions (about 69%) for the same period. ENSO-neutral remains the dominant category through May-Jul 2026. Beyond that, El Niño probabilities become higher than ENSO-neutral, although they remain in the range of 48% to 51%, with ENSO-neutral still the second most likely outcome."

In their most recent update (20 January), the **Australian Bureau of Meteorology** states that the La Niña event may come to an end by late summer:

- La Niña continues in the tropical Pacific. The latest relative Niño3.4 SST index value for the week ending 18 January 2026 is −0.91 °C, consistent with La Niña (below −0.8 °C). However, recent warming in the sub-surface may indicate the early stages of La Niña's decline.
- Atmospheric indicators, such as trade winds, pressure and cloud patterns in the central tropical Pacific, continue to show consistent, though relatively weak, signs of La Niña. As of 18 January 2026, the 30-day Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) has risen to +11.5. The 60-day and 90-day SOI index values are +5.9 and +8.8 respectively, close to La Niña thresholds (greater than +7).
- Trade winds across the equatorial Pacific have been close to, or slightly stronger than average in recent weeks. Forecasts of the Madden–Julian Oscillation suggest the trade winds may weaken in the coming fortnight, which could contribute to the breakdown of the La Niña pattern.
- The Bureau's model indicates that SSTs in the tropical Pacific are likely to return to a neutral El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) state in late summer, consistent with most international models. Neutral conditions are favoured through to at least late autumn. Some models suggest the possibility of El Niño development from June. However, data from past ENSO events shows predictability beyond autumn is low at this time of year." ***http://www.bom.gov.au***

The Southern Annular Mode (SAM) is in neutral to positive territory. Positive values in the SAM are associated with enhanced chances for above-normal rainfall over the eastern parts of southern Africa.

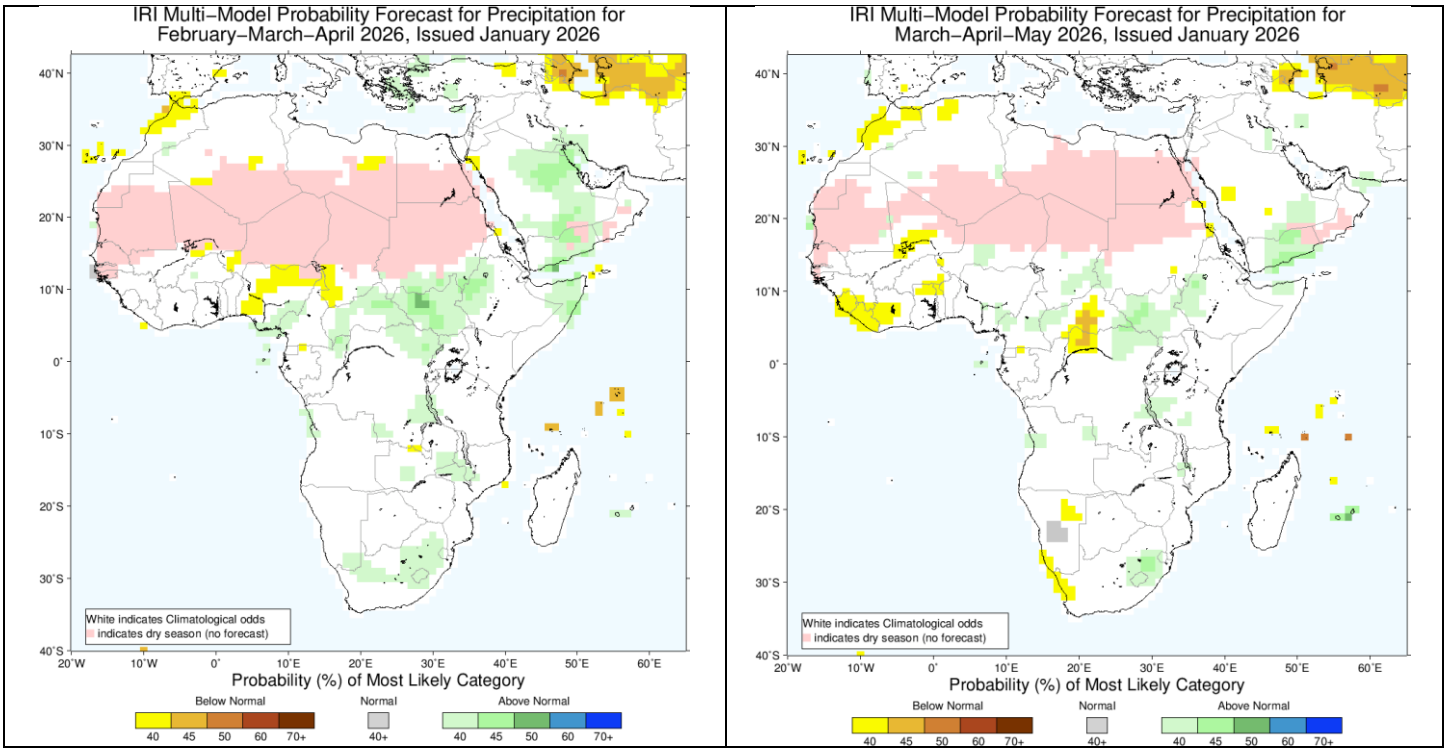
The 30-day Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) have decreased to +10.9 and represents atmospheric pressure patterns in the Australia – Pacific region indicative of La Niña conditions. Such atmospheric conditions are neither strongly positively nor negatively correlated with above-normal rainfall over the summer rainfall region of South Africa.



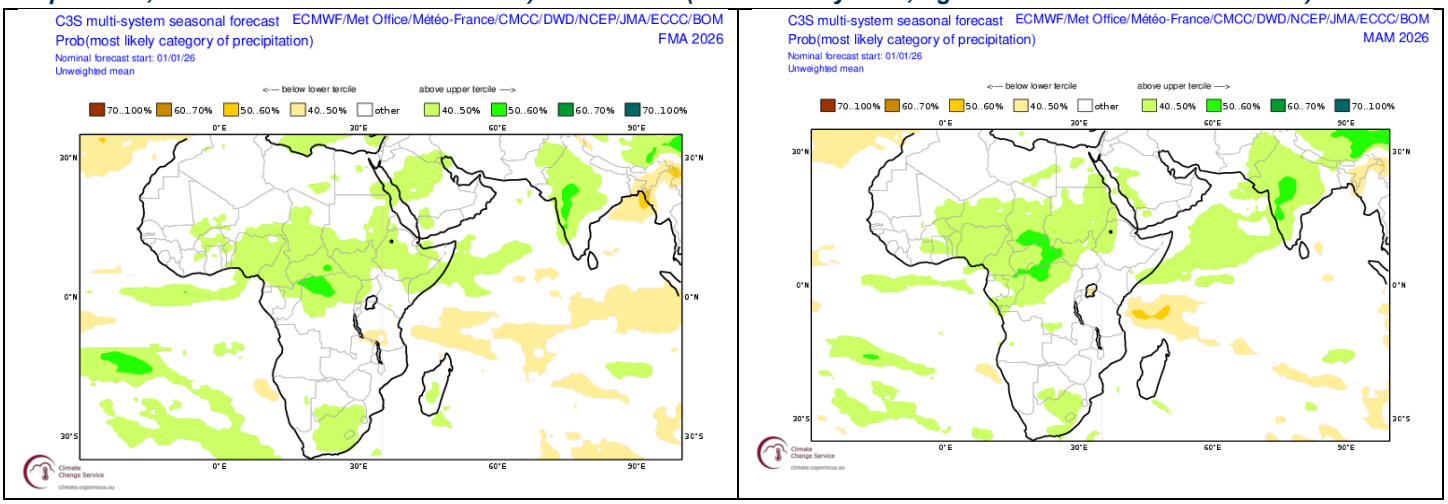
Australian Bureau of Meteorology **- http://www.bom.gov.au**

Seasonal forecasts issued by various international institutions

Seasonal forecasts (updated in January 2025) continue to indicate a weak rainfall signal over southern Africa, given the weak La Niña event currently present, but lean towards normal to above-normal rainfall over the summer-rainfall region during late summer and autumn.



Probabilistic forecasts by the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) for rainfall for late summer (February to April 2026, left – Forecast issued in 2026-01) and autumn (March to May 2026, right – Forecast issued in 2026-01).



Probabilistic multi-model forecasts by the multi-system COPERNICUS Programme for late summer (February to April 2026, left – Forecast issued in 2026-01) and autumn (March to May 2026, right – Forecast issued in 2026-01).

CUMULUS seasonal outlook

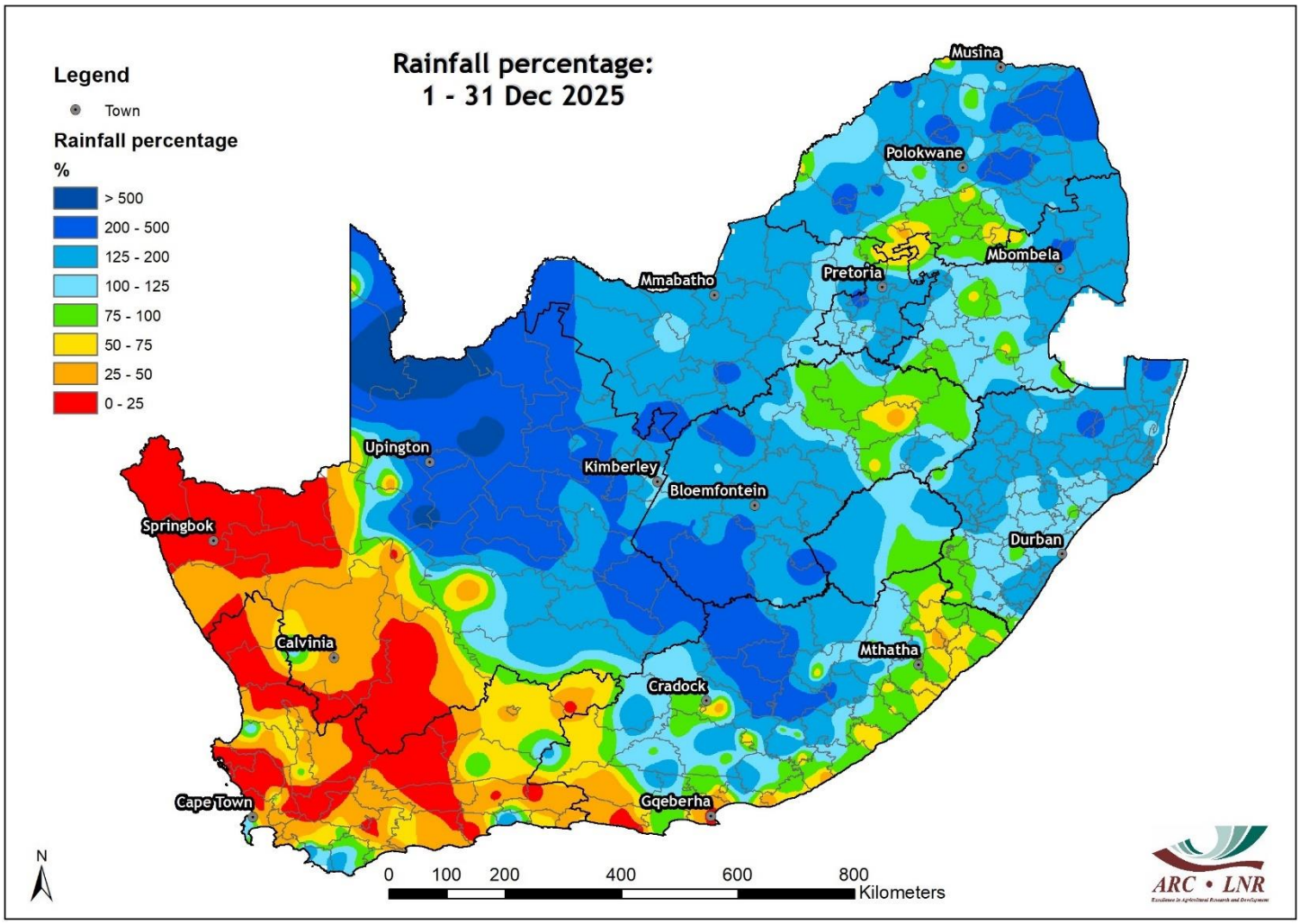
This outlook is based on the typical observed rainfall patterns over the north-eastern half of the country (including most of the summer grain-production region), which are associated with the cyclic variability of the global climate system. Summers like 2025/26 usually experience near-normal rainfall 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

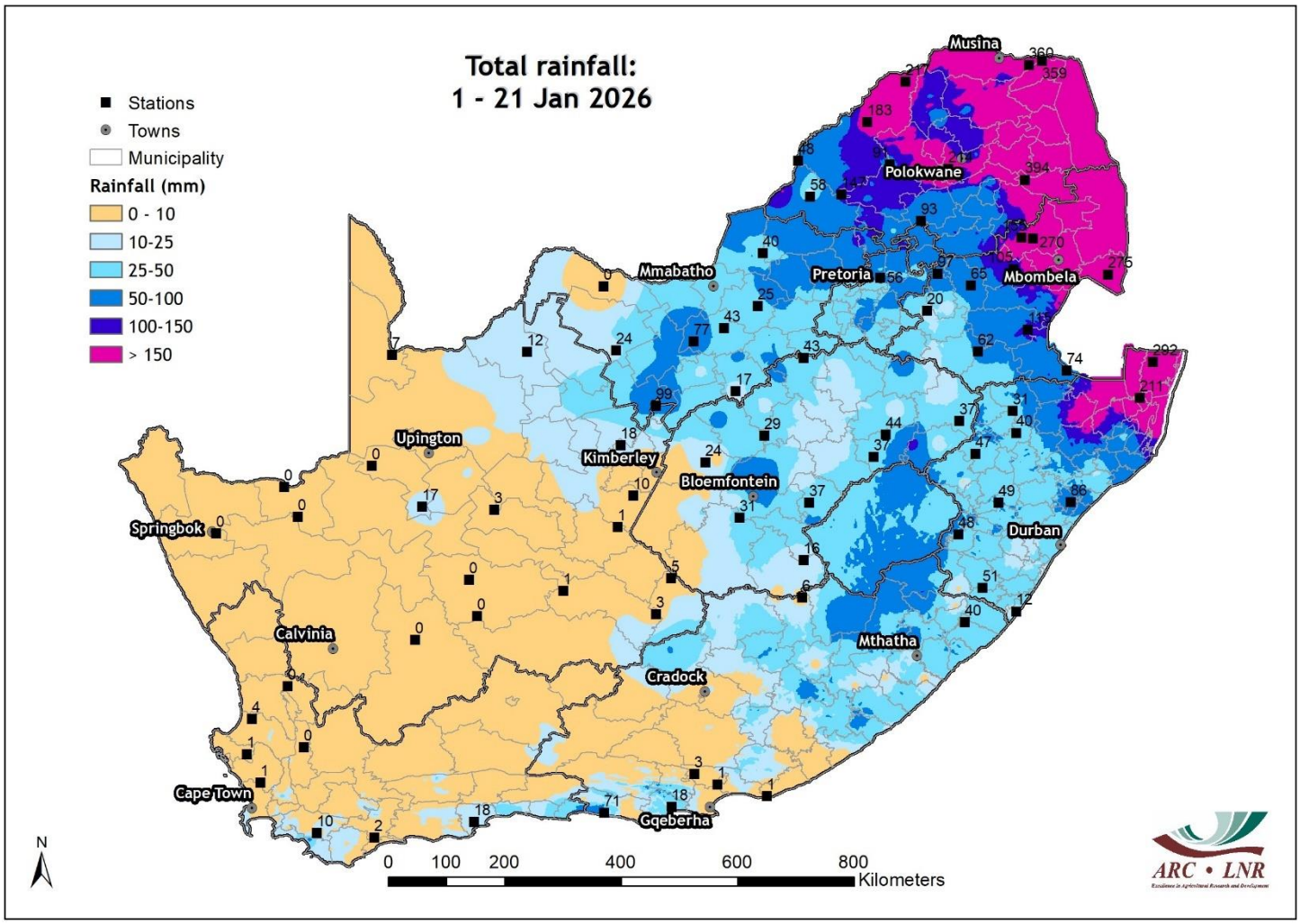
Observed conditions

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



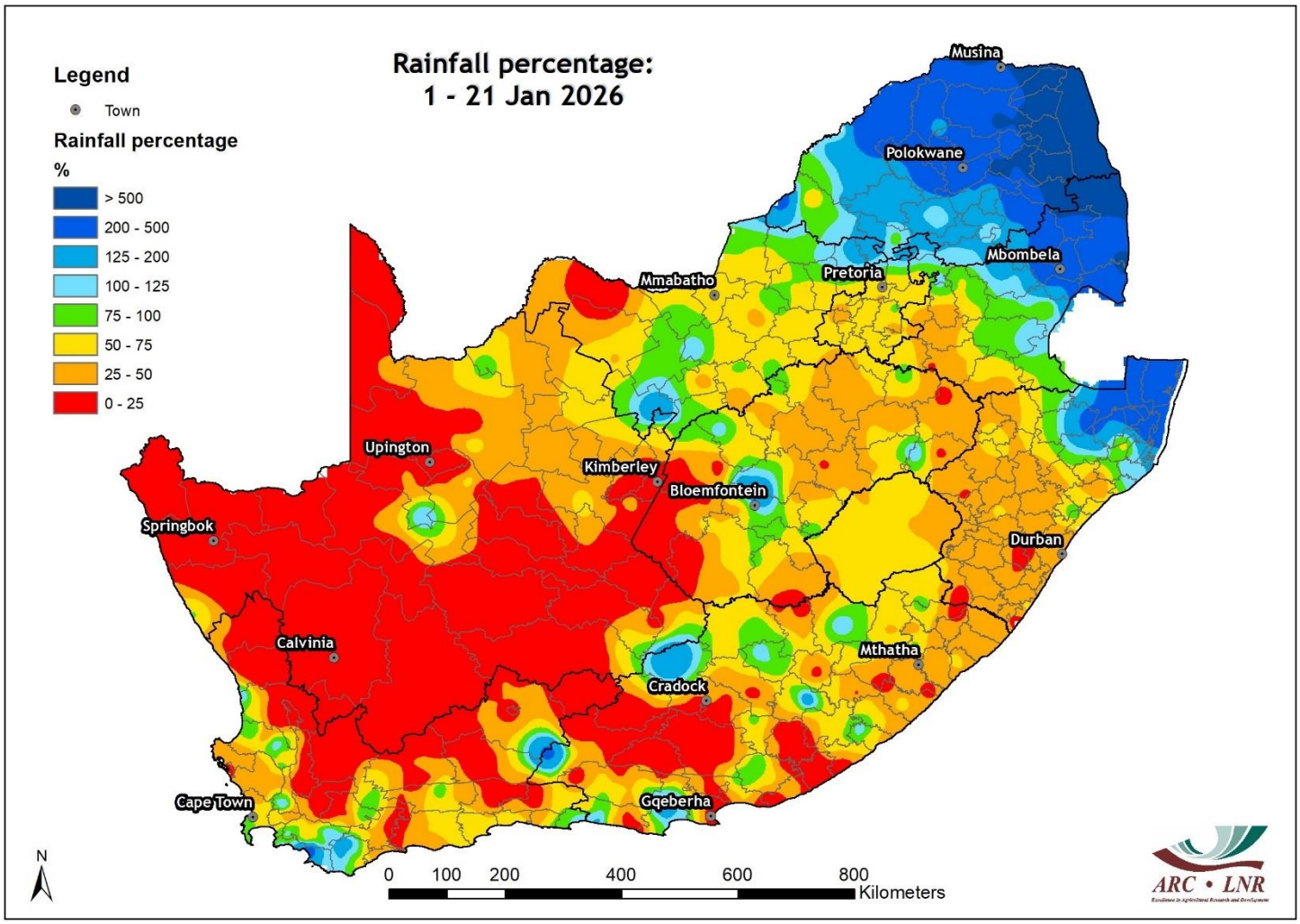
Above-average rainfall has occurred over most of the summer rainfall region during December. The southern parts, including the winter rainfall region, received below-average rainfall.

Rainfall (mm): 1 – 21 January 2026



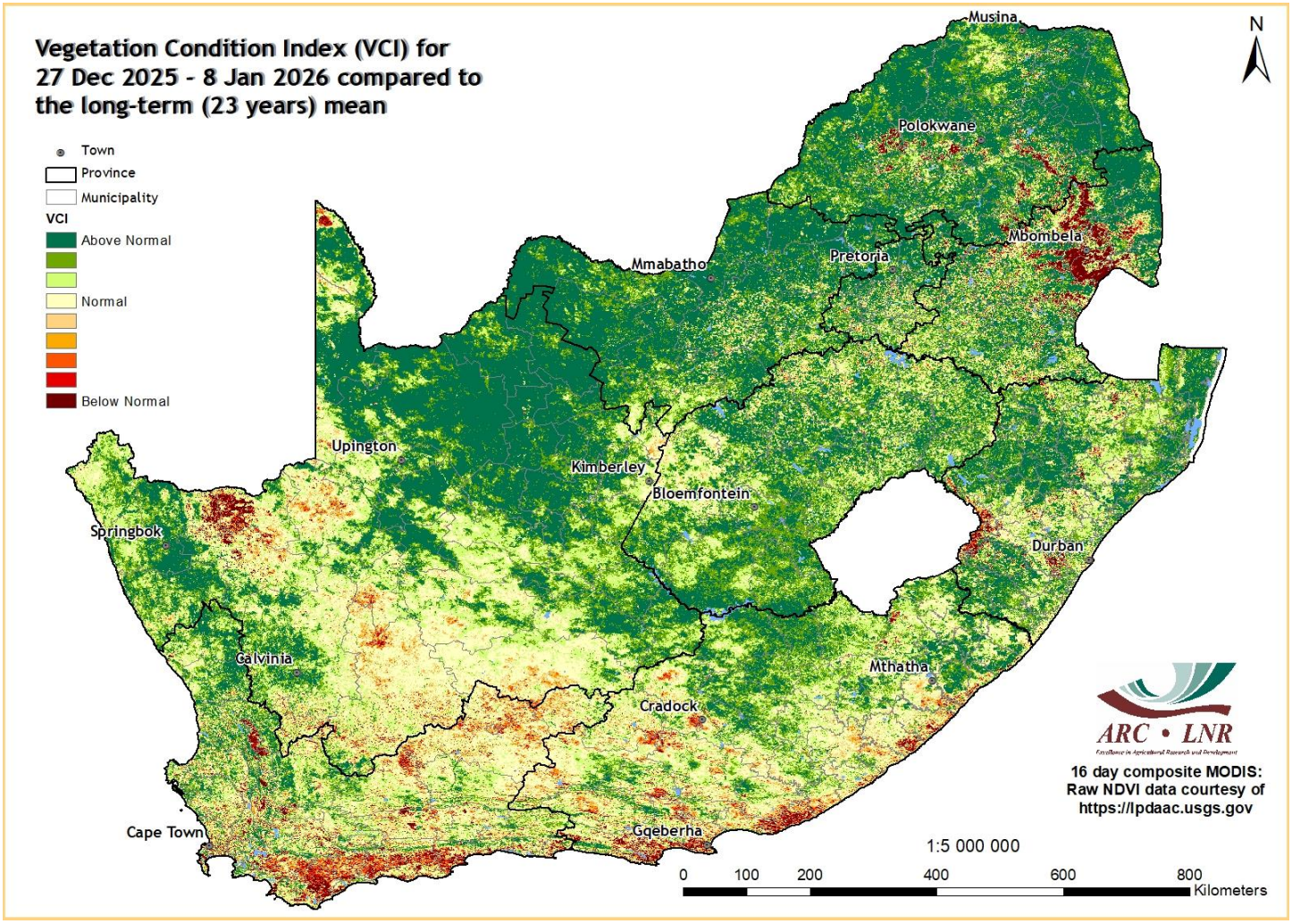
Most of the central to western parts were dry during January, with totals ranging from 0 to 40 mm. The north-eastern parts received more than 50 mm in total, but totals were much higher over the escarpment and Lowveld in the north-east, where large areas received more than 500 mm.

Rainfall (% of long-term mean): 1 – 21 January 2026



The first half of January saw below-average rainfall over most of the country, but above-average rainfall occurred in the northeast.

Vegetation Condition Index: January 2026



Vegetation activity in early January was above normal over most areas, following above-normal rainfall until April and again from August–December 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 has a negative impact on vegetation activity. Negative anomalies over the escarpment of Mpumalanga are artifacts caused by abundant cloud cover interfering with data quality.

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/