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RISK MANAGEMENT 2025/26

CUMULUS

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Summary

Dryness continues over central parts until next week

Even though thundershowers have spread into the central interior during the last few days, the distribution and total amounts associated with the thundershowers have not been sufficient to provide widespread relief from the drought conditions that have developed in places. 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. This will intensify drought conditions in some areas. Conditions will gradually improve, according to some current forecasts, by the middle of next week, but the rain expected then should still be in the form of thundershowers, with the distribution expected to be uneven. The eastern half of the summer rainfall region, including the eastern to central parts of the summer-grain production region, will experience more favourable conditions, with lower maximum temperatures than further west and a better distribution of, and more frequent, thundershowers.

Cumulative rainfall during the period until the middle of next week will still be low and also below average over the central to western interior and, coupled with high temperatures and dry westerly winds during the afternoons, atmospheric demand for water will exceed total accumulated rainfall over large parts, resulting in an intensification of drought conditions in places, including parts of the western summer-grain production region. Some forecasts, however, indicate potential for relief in the form of thundershowers by the middle of next week, given more favourable atmospheric circulation patterns expected. The high-pressure system that has been in place during the last few days and has resulted in hot and dry conditions most of the time over the central to western interior will retreat somewhat, with an upper-air trough expected in the southwest, which will support at least thundershower development over the central to western parts.

While the low-pressure system in the southwest may bring relief in terms of rainfall over the central to western interior next week, the large-scale global patterns are not expected to become favourable for more widespread rainfall over the southern Africa region, according to current outlooks. While forecast models indicate somewhat more widespread rainfall over a larger area next week, it is more likely that the rainfall will be in the form of thundershowers over the interior, not widespread above-normal rain associated with a more general rainfall situation. There is no indication yet of such a pattern developing deeper into February either.

While the weak La Niña event at present is expected to weaken further, recent atmospheric and oceanic indicators have trended away from La Niña conditions. 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 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 cooler than the previous week in most places.
- It will be hot and dry over the central to western and southern interior until early next week with dry, westerly winds. This will include the western parts of the summer-grain production region.
- Maximum temperatures are expected to moderate over the central parts by the middle of next week, associated in part with increased cloud cover.
- Rainfall will be below normal over the central to western interior, but near normal over the Eastern Highveld, Drakensberg and interior of KZN.
- Isolated to scattered thundershowers are possible over the central to eastern parts on most days.
- Thundershowers will be confined to the east-central to eastern interior until Monday, spreading into the central to western and southern parts by Tuesday.
- Scattered to widespread thundershowers are possible over the southern parts on Wednesday.
- Thundershowers may occur over the southern parts, including parts of the winter rainfall region and Garden Route, later next week.
- The Garden Route will become partly cloudy to cloudy and cooler from Monday onwards, with light showers and possibly thundershowers by Wednesday.
- **The summer-grain production region** will experience daily thundershowers, especially over the central to eastern and northern parts of the region. The western parts will be hot and dry until the middle of next week, and cumulative totals will be lower than 20 mm in most places in the west during the period, far below the atmospheric demand given hot and windy afternoons. Thundershowers may become more widespread over the entire region from the middle of next week according to current forecasts.
- **The winter rainfall region** will be sunny to partly cloudy and warm, while the interior may become hot at times. Showers or thundershowers may occur especially over the southern parts by the middle of next week, depending on the exact movement of the upper-air low expected in the region, when it will also be cooler in the south.

Overview of expected conditions over the main agricultural production areas

It will be warm, with isolated to scattered thundershowers over the eastern areas initially, when an upper-air high will dominate the interior. Current forecasts indicate an upper-air trough moving into the southwestern parts by Tuesday, which may result in more widespread thundershowers and a better chance of thundershowers also over the central parts, where it is currently dry. The upper-air low may also result in some showers or thundershowers over the southern parts of the winter rainfall region, the Garden Route, and adjacent parts of the southern interior.

Maize production region:

- It will remain hot and mostly dry over the western parts until Tuesday next week, when current forecasts indicate an improvement with somewhat lower maximum temperatures and scattered thundershowers possibly spreading into the western parts. Scattered thundershowers are expected throughout the period over the eastern to northern parts. On average, temperatures will be lower than the previous week, following a continuation of hot conditions in the west until early next week.
- Maximum temperatures over the eastern grain-production areas will range between 26°C and 32°C. Minimum temperatures will range between 11°C and 15°C.
- Maximum temperatures over the western grain-production areas will range between 29°C and 38°C, with the highest temperatures towards the west. Lower maximum temperatures are expected by the middle of next week. Minimum temperatures will be in the order of 16°C to 20°C.

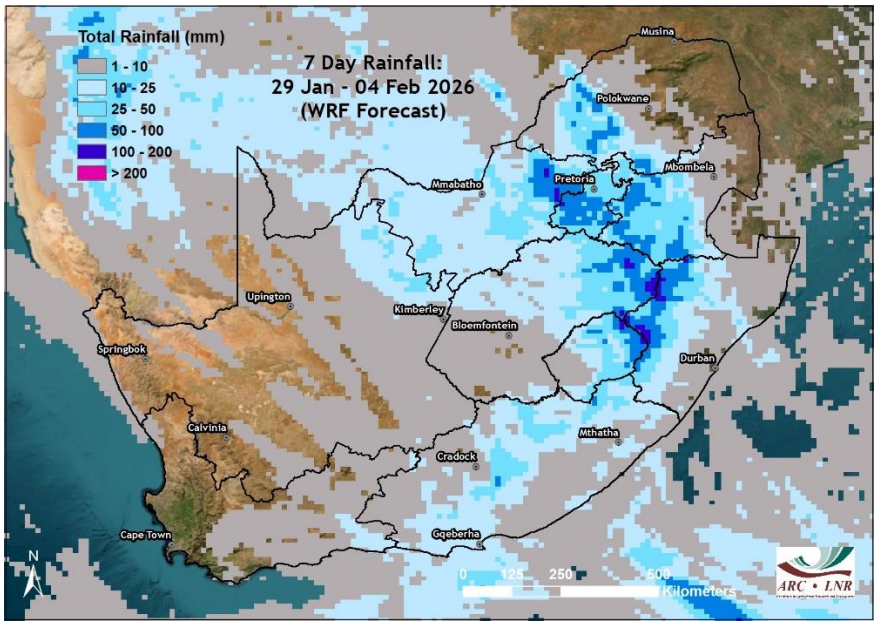
- **Friday (30th):** Partly cloudy and warm but hot in the west. Scattered thundershowers are expected, but isolated in the south.
- **Saturday and Sunday (31st, 1st):** Partly cloudy and warm in the east and north with scattered thundershowers. It will be sunny and hot over the western to central parts, with moderate westerly winds in the afternoon.
- **Monday (2nd):** Partly cloudy and warm with scattered thundershowers, but hot over the western to central parts with isolated thundershowers only and moderate westerly winds in the afternoon.
- **Tuesday to Thursday (3rd – 5th):** Conditions are expected to improve for rainfall over the region. Maximum temperatures are expected to moderate over the western parts, especially from Wednesday onwards. The entire region should see partly cloudy and warm conditions with isolated to scattered thundershowers during this period, according to current forecasts.

Cape Wine Lands and Rûens:

Sunny and warm conditions will dominate until Monday, followed by partly cloudy and warm conditions with isolated to scattered showers and thundershowers. Current forecasts indicate more widespread showers and thundershowers over the southern parts, including the Garden Route, where it will be cooler, by Wednesday and Thursday. This is still far ahead in time, and this outlook may change.

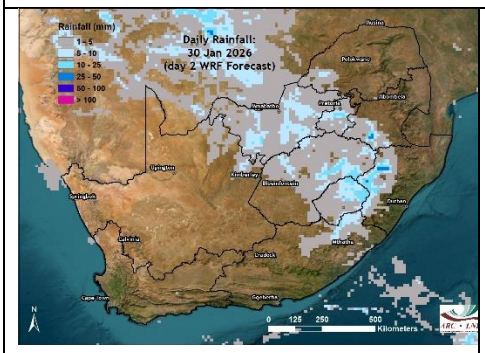
Daily summary of expected conditions (30 Jan – 4 Feb)

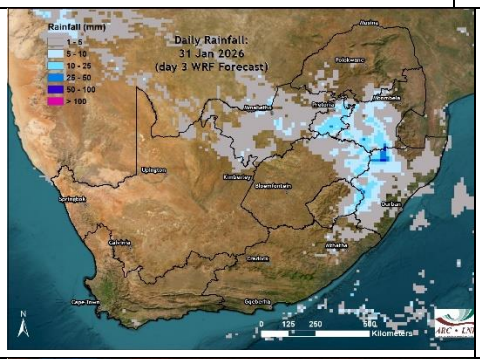
(GFS forecast downscaled using WRF)

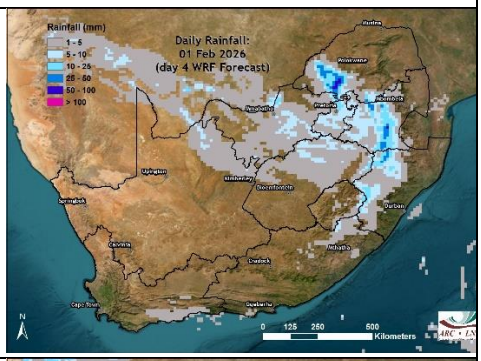


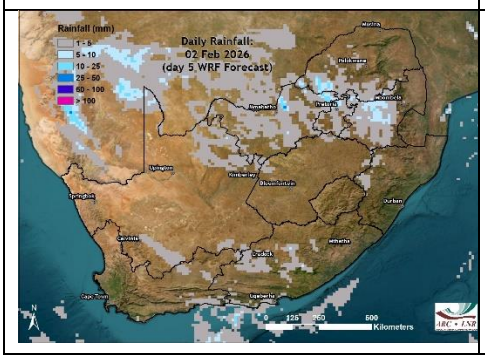
Rainfall

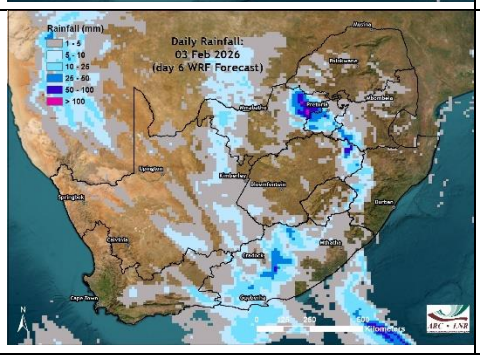
- Most of the country should receive some rain during the next six days, but totals will be light to negligible over the western interior, western parts of the winter rainfall region, and north-eastern low-lying areas, according to current forecasts.

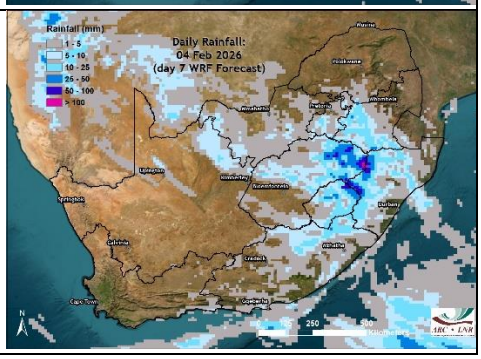




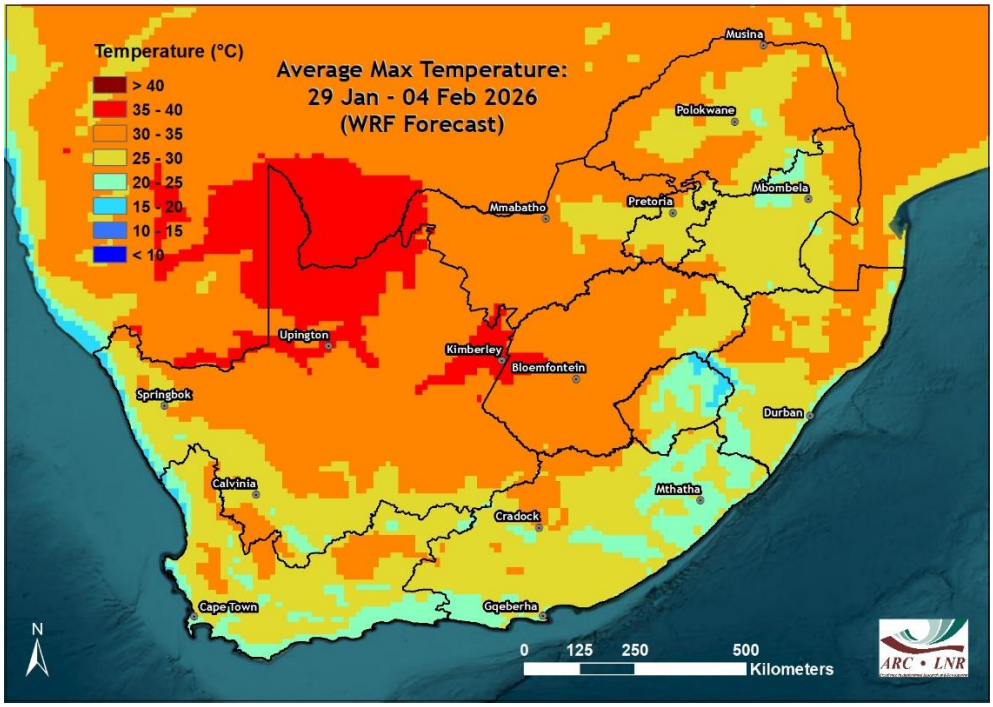






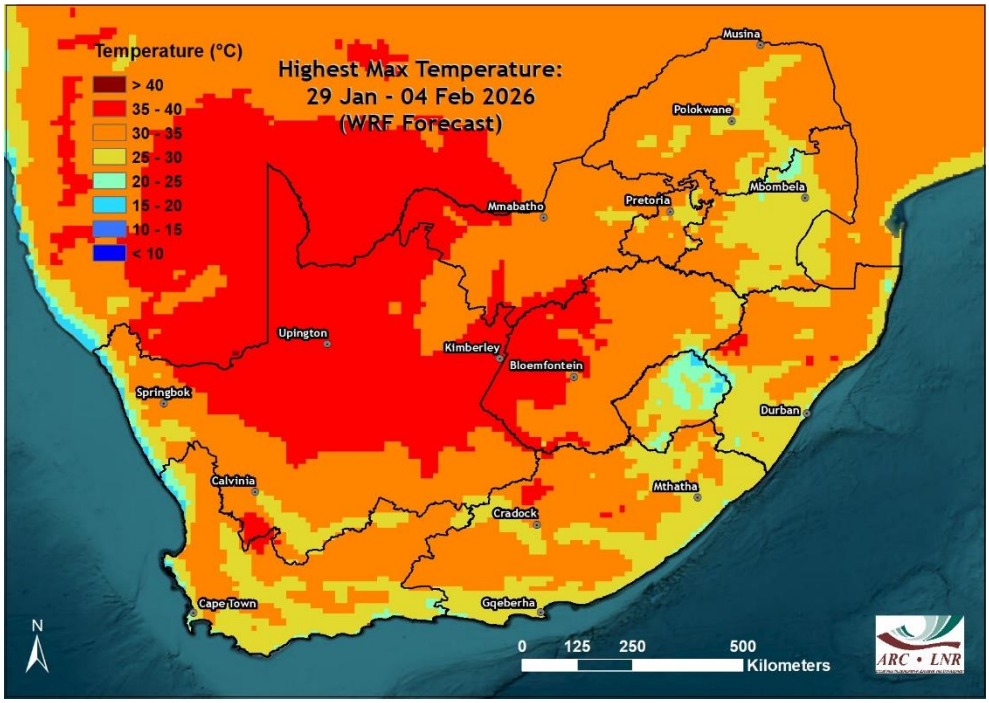


- Thundershowers over the eastern parts will spread into the central to western areas early next week and become somewhat more widespread.
- Light showers are expected along the Garden Route at times from Sunday onwards, with more significant showers possible in that region from Tuesday.
- Scattered thundershowers are expected over the southern parts by Wednesday.



Average maximum temperatures

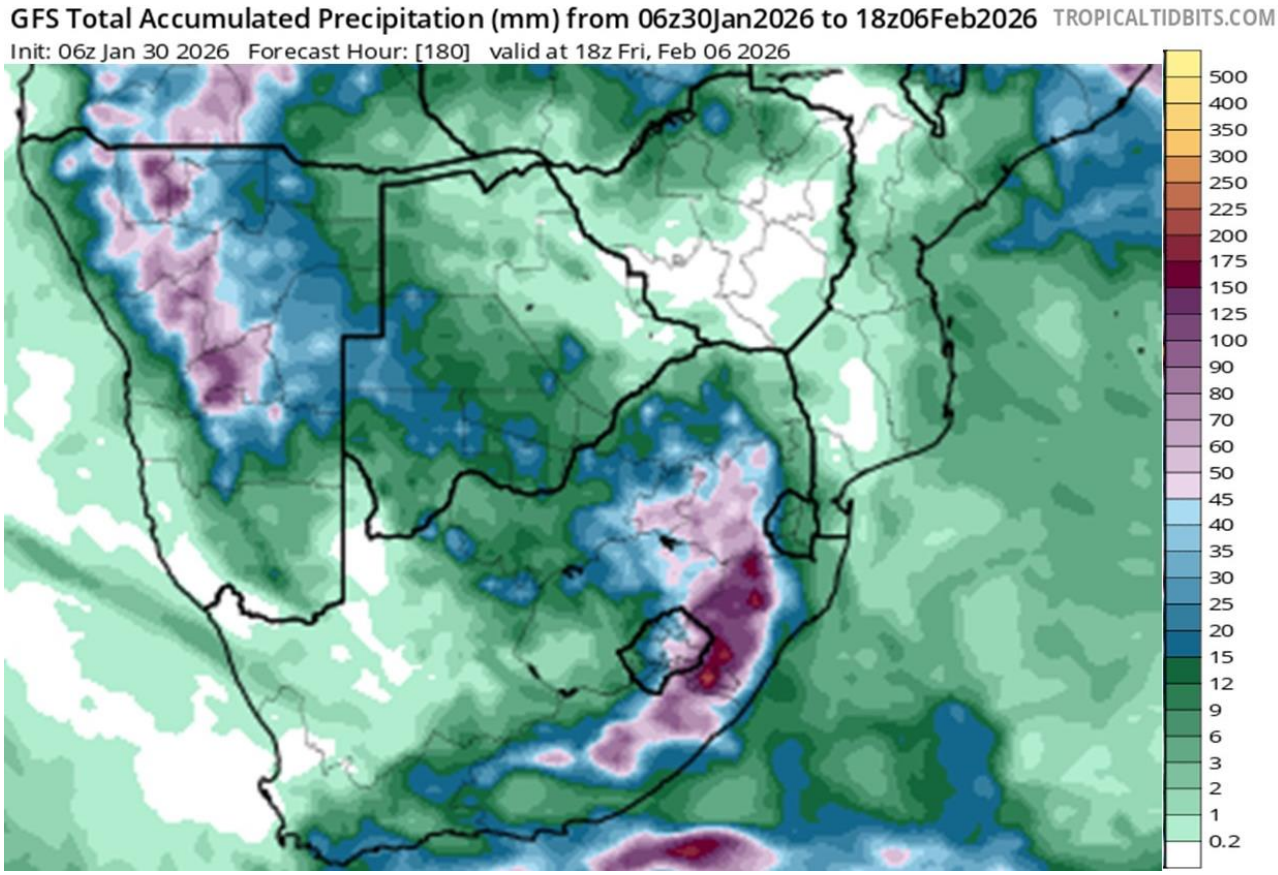
- Average maximum temperatures will range between 30 and 35°C over the central interior and parts of the interior of the winter rainfall region.
- The Eastern Highveld will see average maximum temperatures between 25 and 30°C.
- On average, it will be warm relative to the norm for this time of the year.

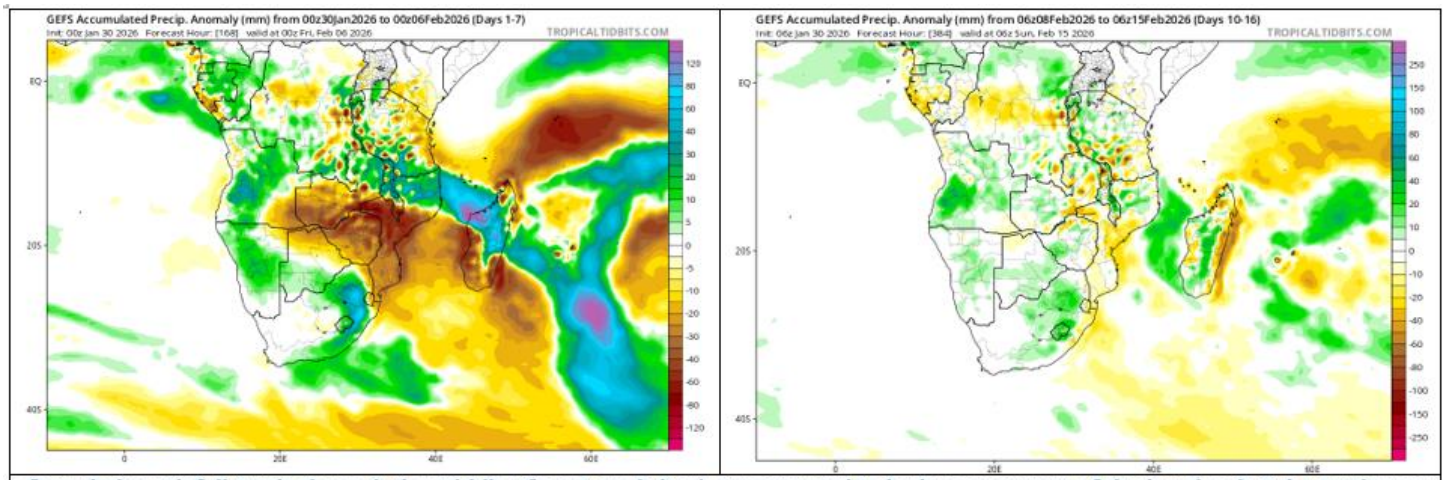


Highest maximum temperatures

- **Highest temperatures, exceeding 35°C, are expected:**
- Interior of the Northern Cape.
- Northern parts of the Western Cape.
- Western half of the Free State and North West provinces, northern part of the Eastern Cape, northern to western interior of KZN.

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, the first (bottom left) and second week (bottom right) of February may remain relatively wet, with normal to below normal rainfall towards the west.

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 (30 January – 5 February). 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 (30th – 3rd).**
- Interior of the Northern Cape: **Friday to Thursday (30th – 5th).**
- Western to south-western interior, including the Swartland and the rest of the interior of the Western Cape: **Friday to Sunday (30th – 1st) and Thursday (5th).**
- Karoo: **Friday to Monday (30th – 2nd).**
- Eastern parts of KZN: **Monday to Thursday (2nd – 5th).**
- Western Bushveld of Limpopo into the northern parts of North West: **Friday to Thursday (30th – 5th).**

Thundershowers over the central to eastern interior during the period may in isolated cases 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 to central parts of the Free State, southern Mpumalanga, southern North West and Gauteng: **Friday to Tuesday (30th – 3rd).**
- Interior of the Eastern Cape: **Monday to Wednesday (2nd – 4th).**
- Southern to eastern interior of the Western Cape: **Wednesday (4th).**

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

- Winter rainfall region: **Friday to Monday (30th – 2nd) and Thursday (5th).**
- Interior of the Northern Cape: **Friday to Thursday (30th – 5th).**

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

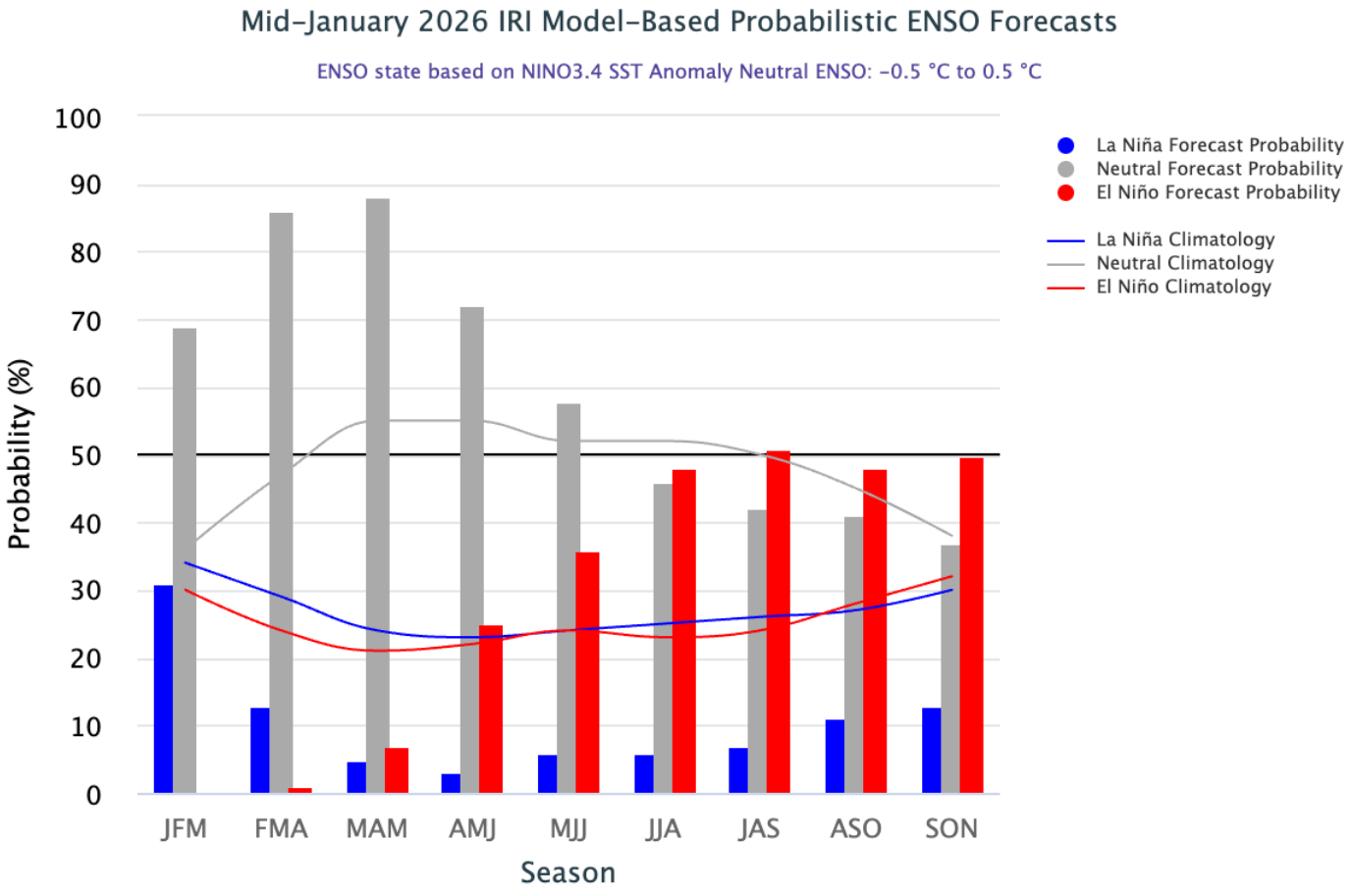
- South-western parts of the Western Cape: **Tuesday to Thursday (3rd- 5th).**

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/**

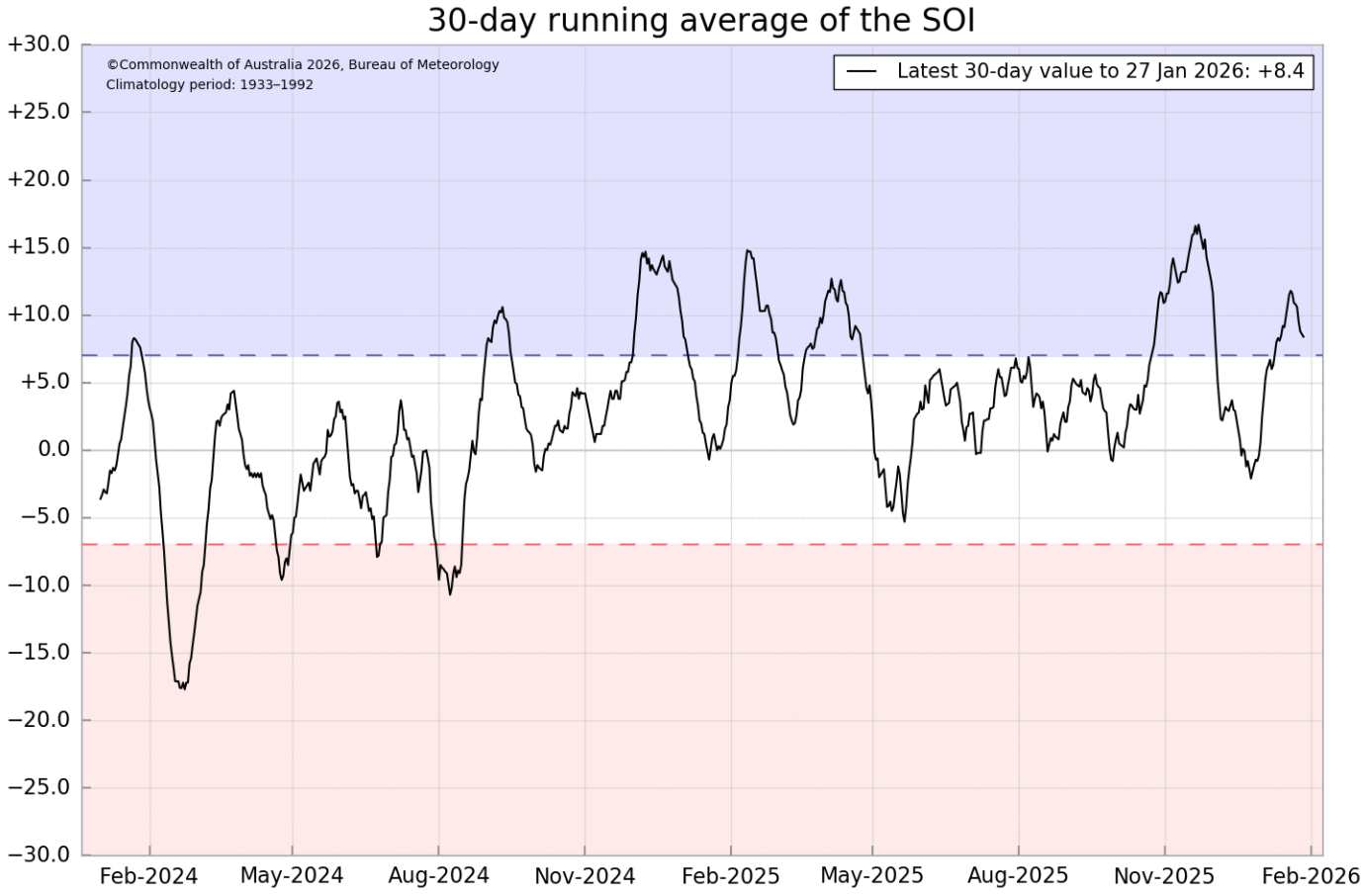
In their most recent update (issued 20 January), the IRI states that " By mid-January 2026, weak La Niña conditions have been present in both the atmosphere and ocean. In December 2025, the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) was +0.1, while the equatorial SOI was +0.9, indicating a mismatch between the 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.

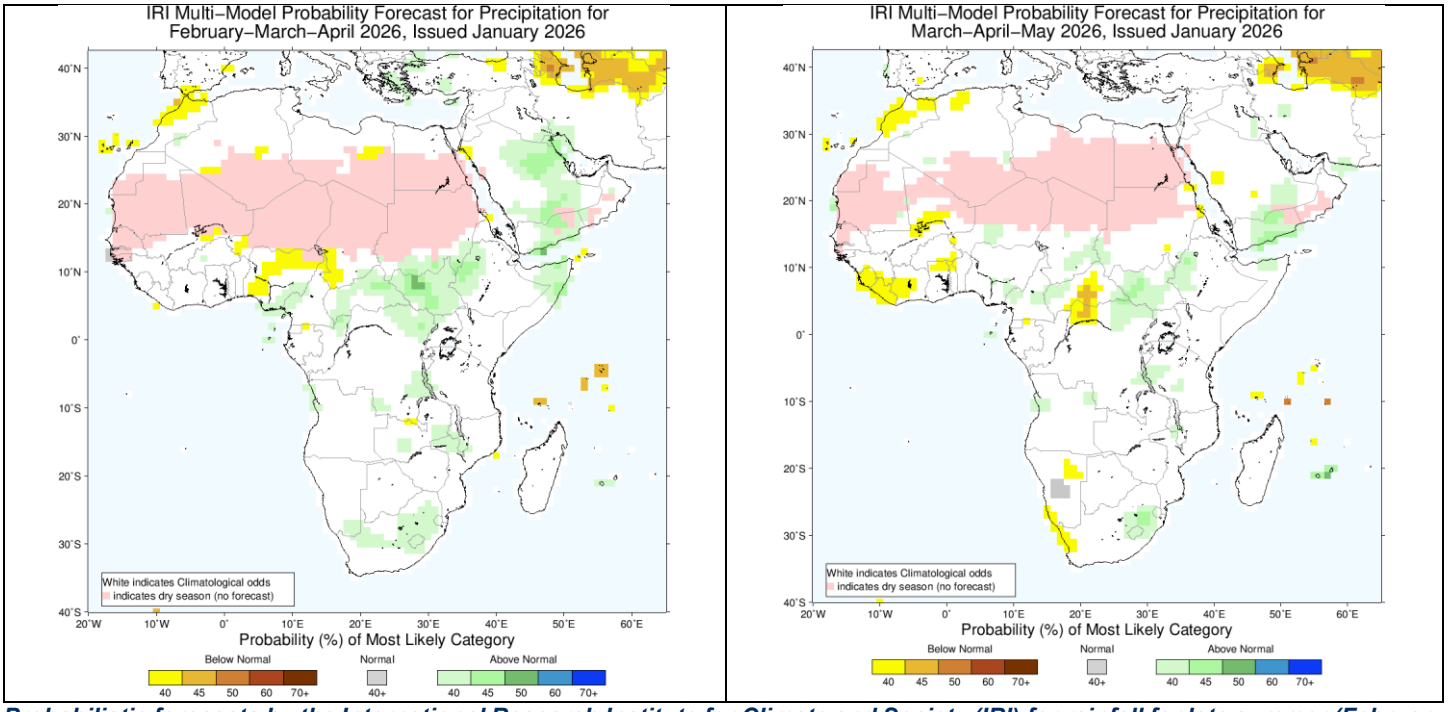
The 30-day Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) have decreased to +10.9 and represents atmospheric pressure patterns in the Australia – Pacific region indicative of La Niña conditions. Such atmospheric conditions are neither strongly positively nor negatively correlated with above-normal rainfall over the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



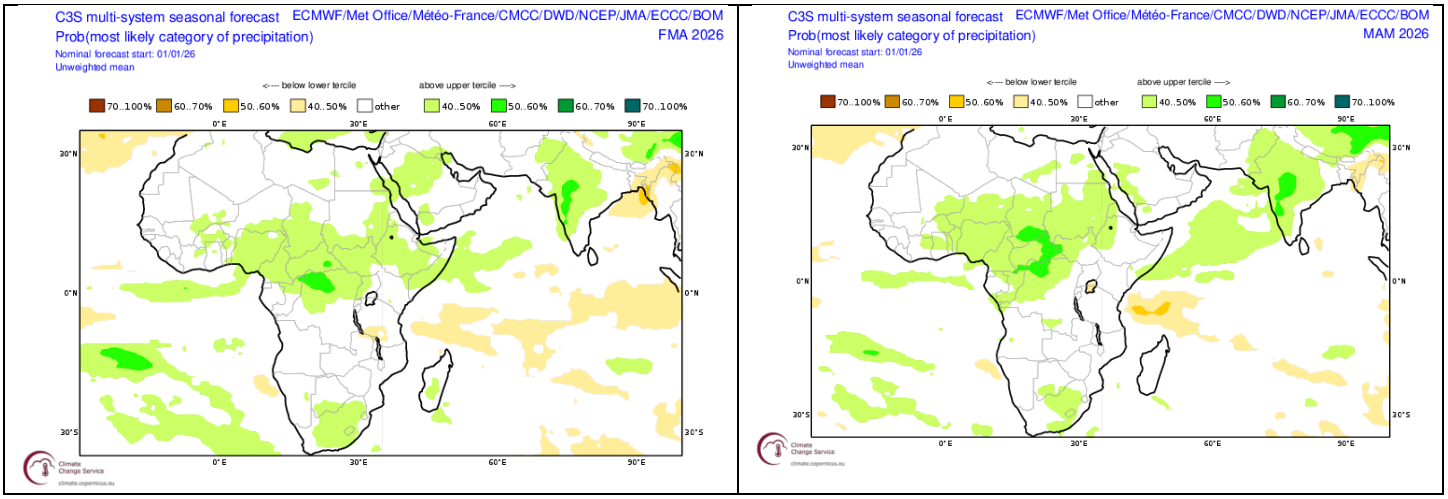
Australian Bureau of Meteorology **- http://www.bom.gov.au**

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

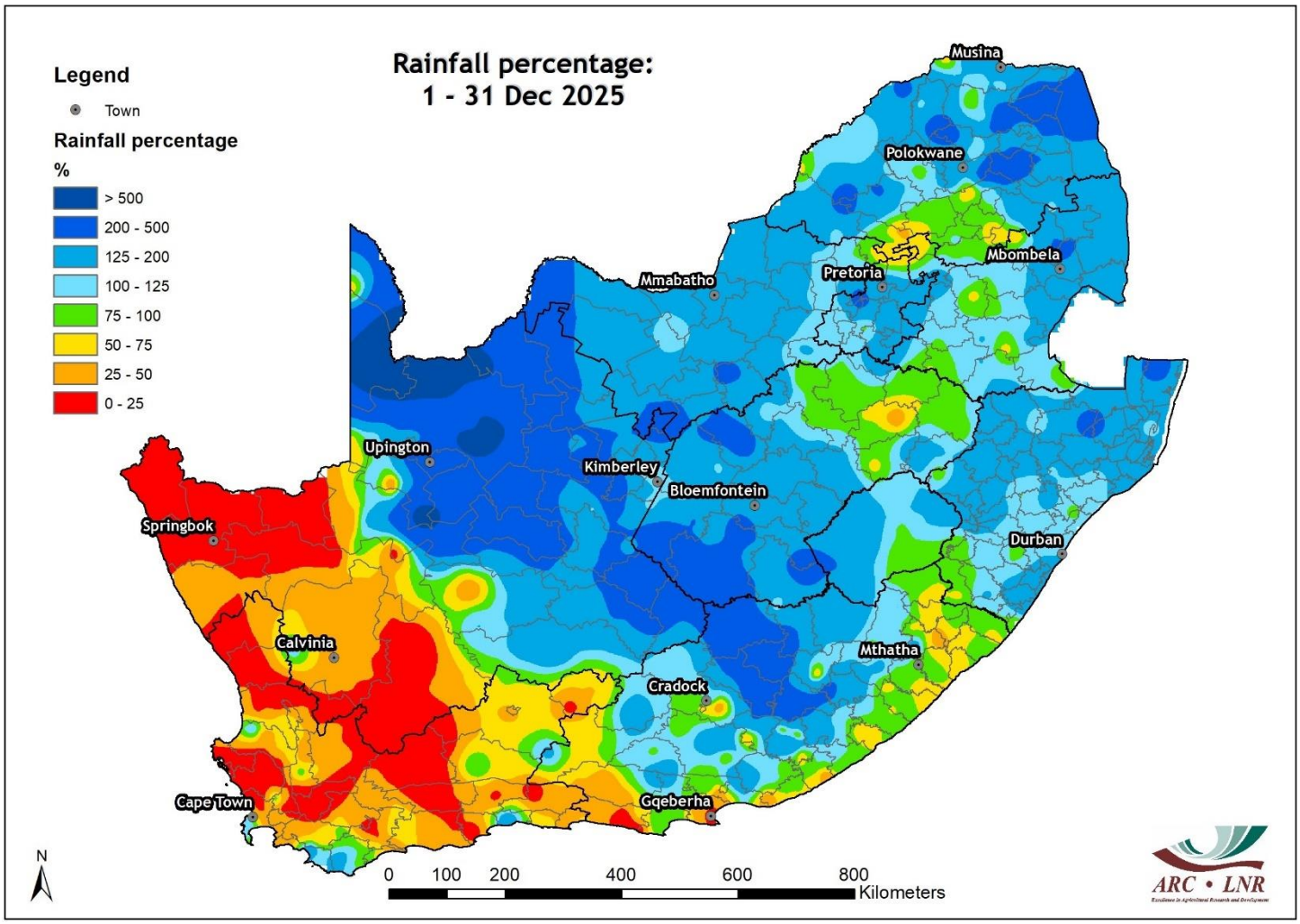
This outlook is based on the typical observed rainfall patterns over the north-eastern half of the country (including most of the summer grain-production region), which are associated with the cyclic variability of the global climate system. Summers like 2025/26 usually experience near-normal rainfall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

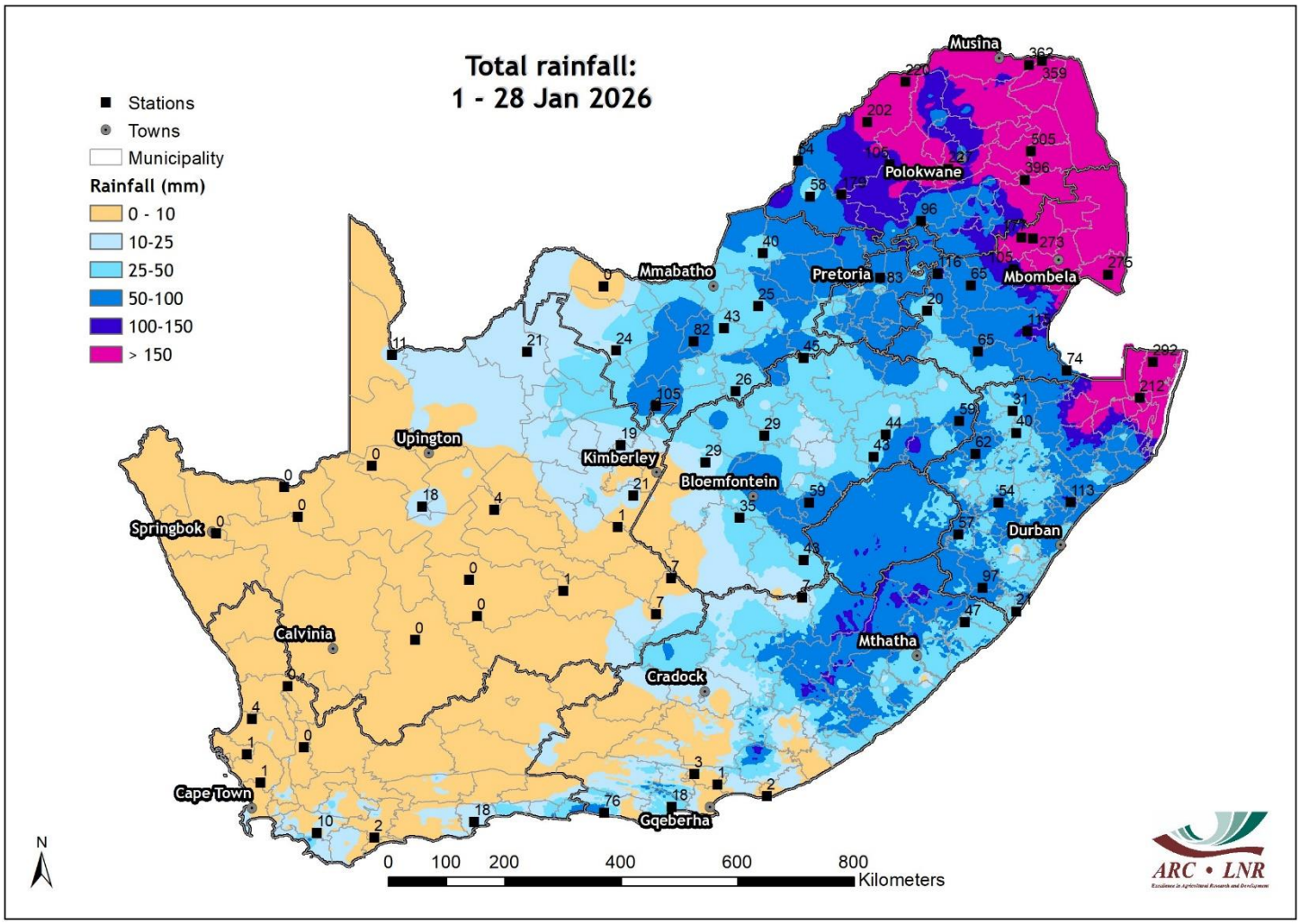
Observed conditions

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



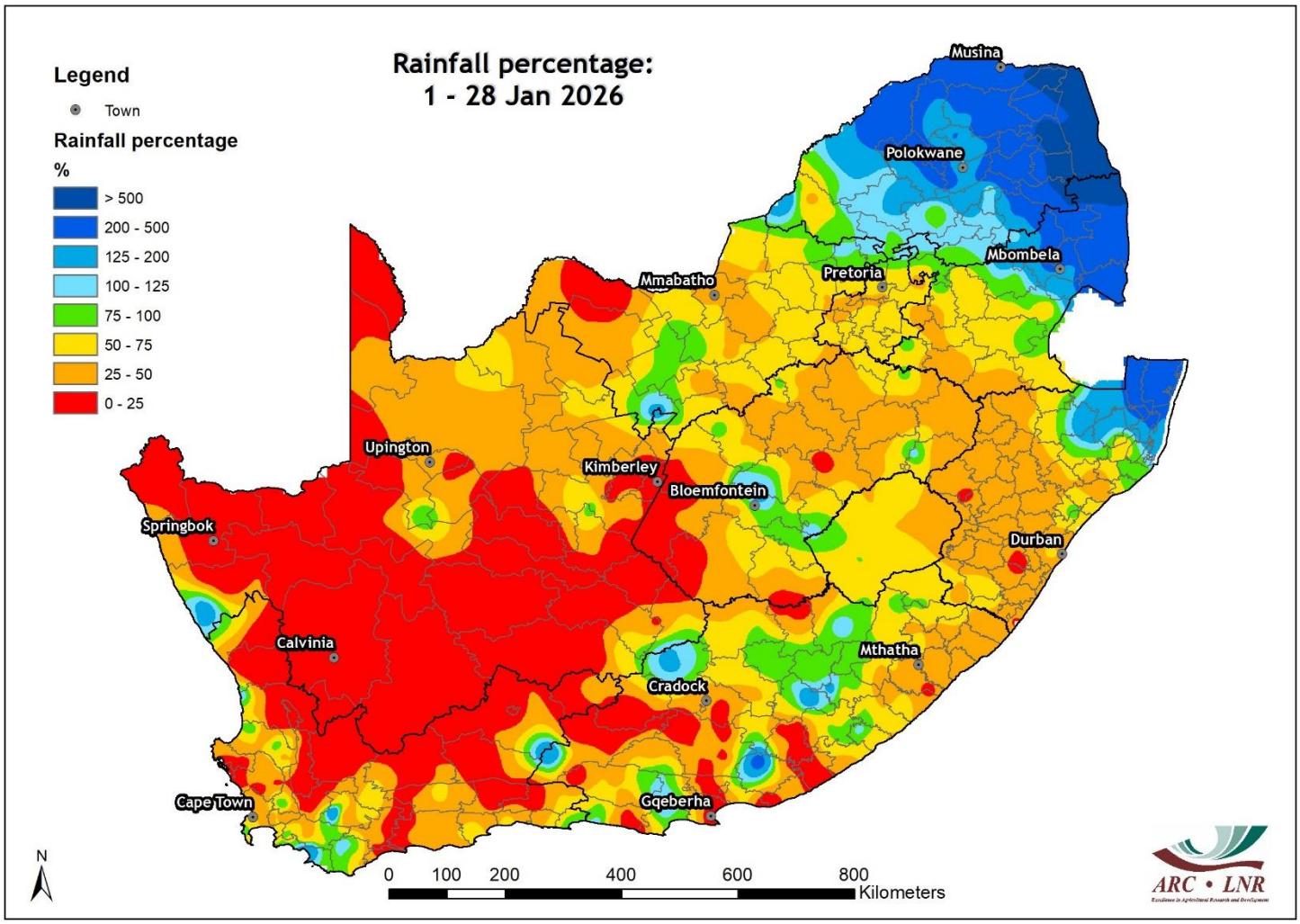
Above-average rainfall has occurred over most of the summer rainfall region during December. The southern parts, including the winter rainfall region, received below-average rainfall.

Rainfall (mm): 1 – 28 January 2026



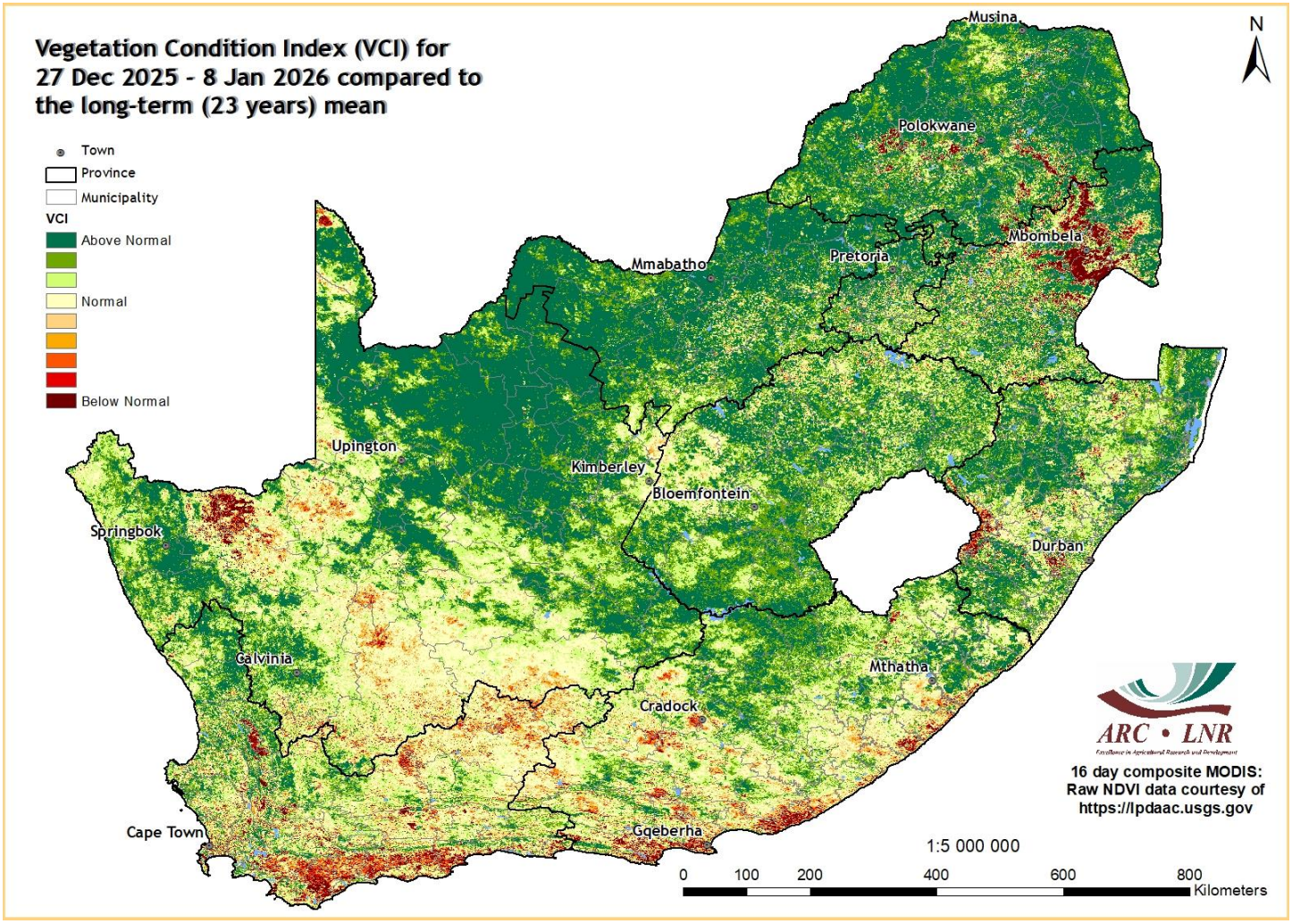
Most of the central to western parts were dry during January so far, with totals ranging from 0 to 40 mm. The north-eastern parts received more than 50 mm in total, but totals were much higher over the escarpment and Lowveld in the north-east, where large areas received more than 500 mm.

Rainfall (% of long-term mean): 1 – 28 January 2026



With the end of January approaching, the month 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/