



Images of the Month

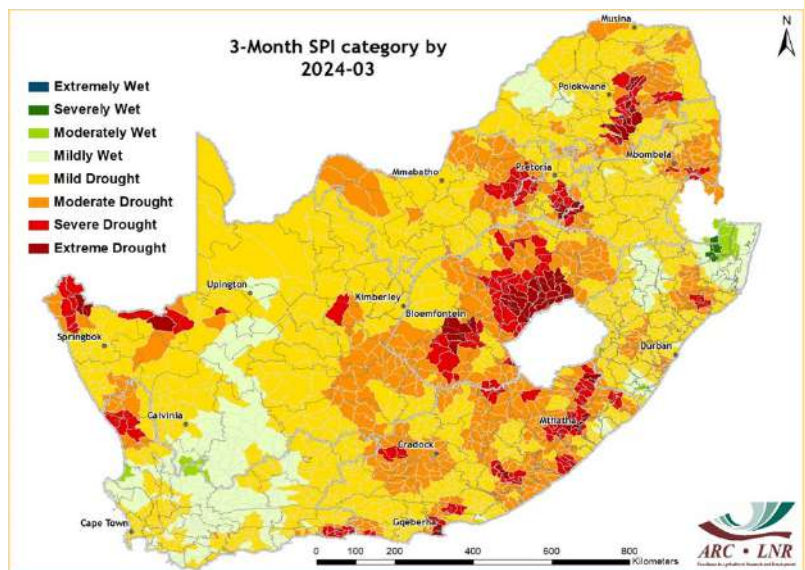
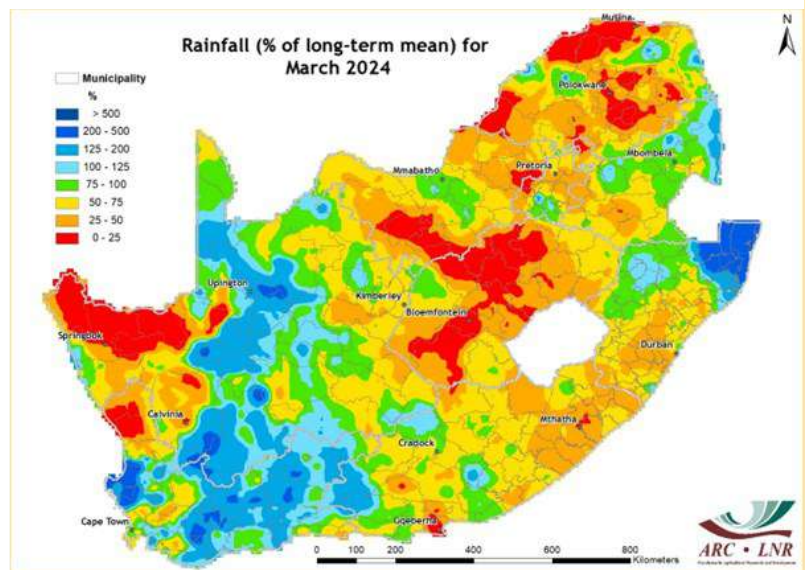
NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENGINEERING
Soil, Climate and Water

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Dry conditions persist as the summer rainfall season nears its end

The summer of 2023/24 witnessed fluctuating rainfall patterns across South Africa's summer rainfall region amidst an El Niño state. This phenomenon typically results in higher temperatures and below-normal rainfall. The weak onset of rains in October, followed by a dry November, aligned with this, but December and January brought a significant turnaround, with the highest summer rainfall totals recorded during these months. This was followed by the return of dry conditions in February and March (see rainfall map). This intra-seasonal variability, characterized by fluctuations in rainfall intensity and distribution, poses significant challenges to the agricultural sector and raises concerns about water availability (see SPI map) and crop production. It further reflects the dynamic nature of weather systems and atmospheric conditions during the summer rainfall season in South Africa. Therefore, the agricultural community is advised to prioritize mitigation measures and contingency planning. Additionally, farmers should assess their local conditions and consult with agricultural extension services to navigate these challenges effectively.



Overview:

As is typical during early autumn, rainfall is expected to occur across much of the country, including both the summer and winter rainfall regions. In March 2024, there was a notable improvement in rainfall across various parts of South Africa compared to the preceding month. Following a reduction in total rainfall over most regions in February, this rain brought a welcome shift, particularly in the western to southern interior and north-eastern areas of Limpopo, resulting in above-normal rainfall conditions. Similarly, northern KwaZulu-Natal observed above-normal conditions, attributed to the impact of tropical storm Filipo, which brought heavy rains accompanied by strong winds, resulting in significant damage to infrastructure such as low-lying bridges and roads. Stations near the Makhathini research centre and Charters Creek recorded close to 100 mm of rainfall during the 13th and 14th. Conversely, parts of the Free State, North West, Limpopo and Eastern Cape experienced low to no rainfall. Meanwhile, the winter rainfall region did indeed receive rain, primarily concentrated along the Overberg and Cape Winelands.

1. Rainfall

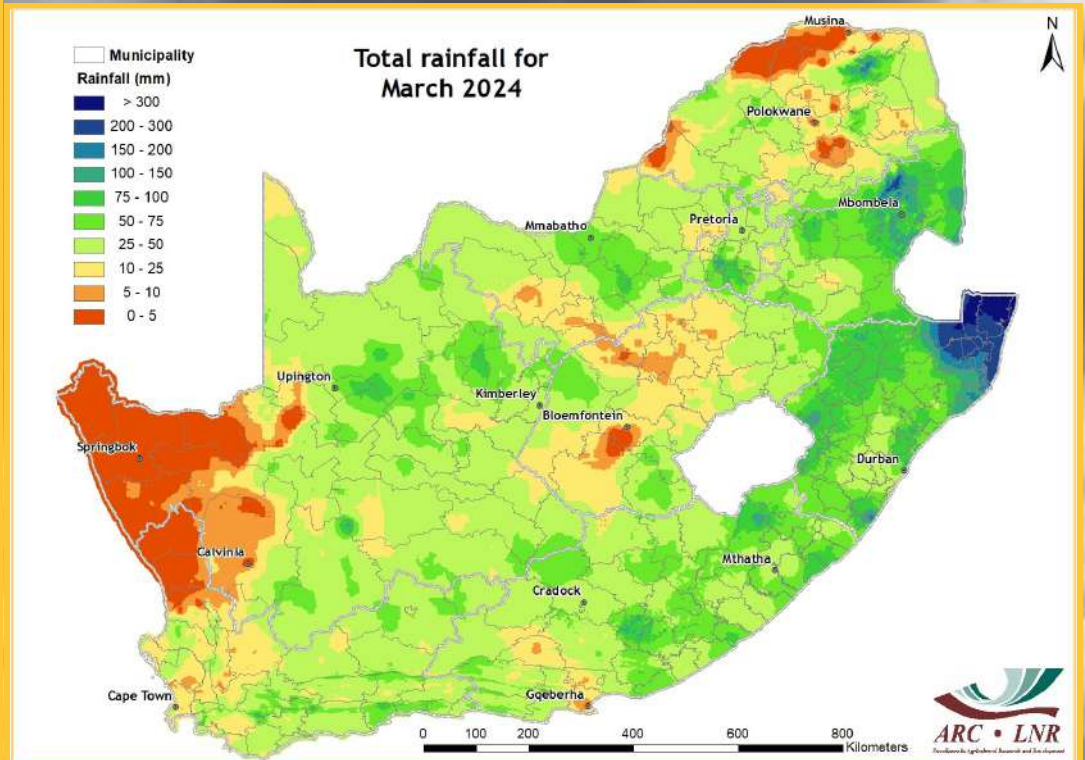


Figure 1

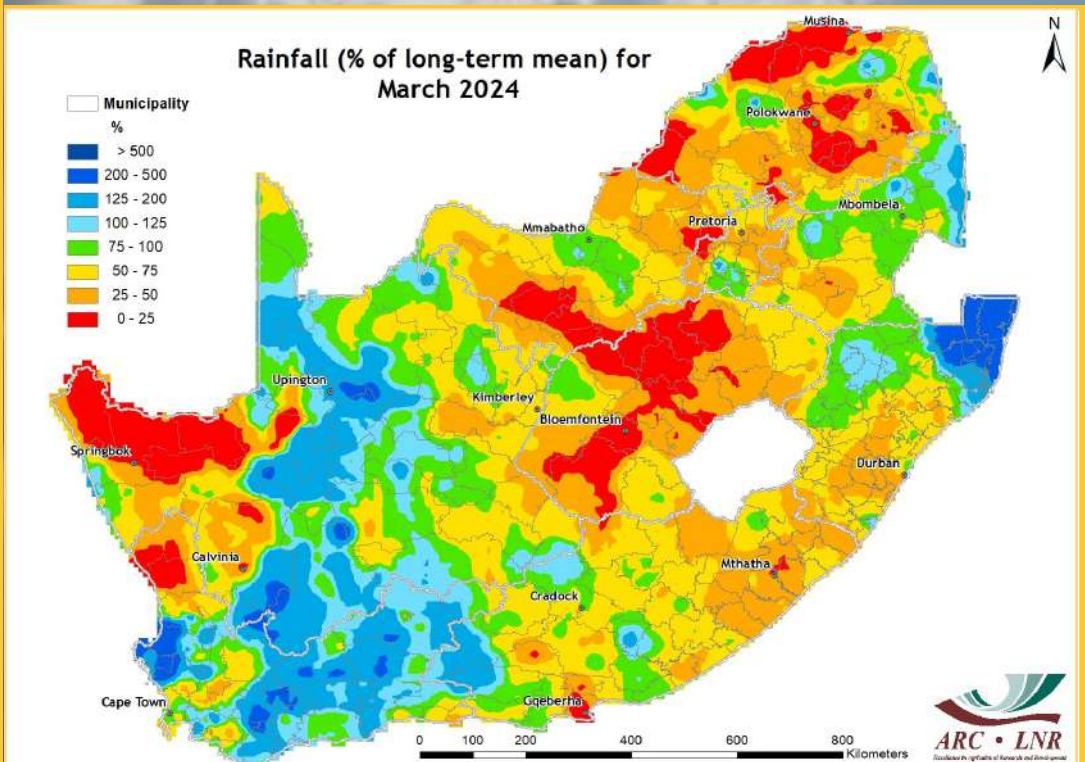


Figure 2

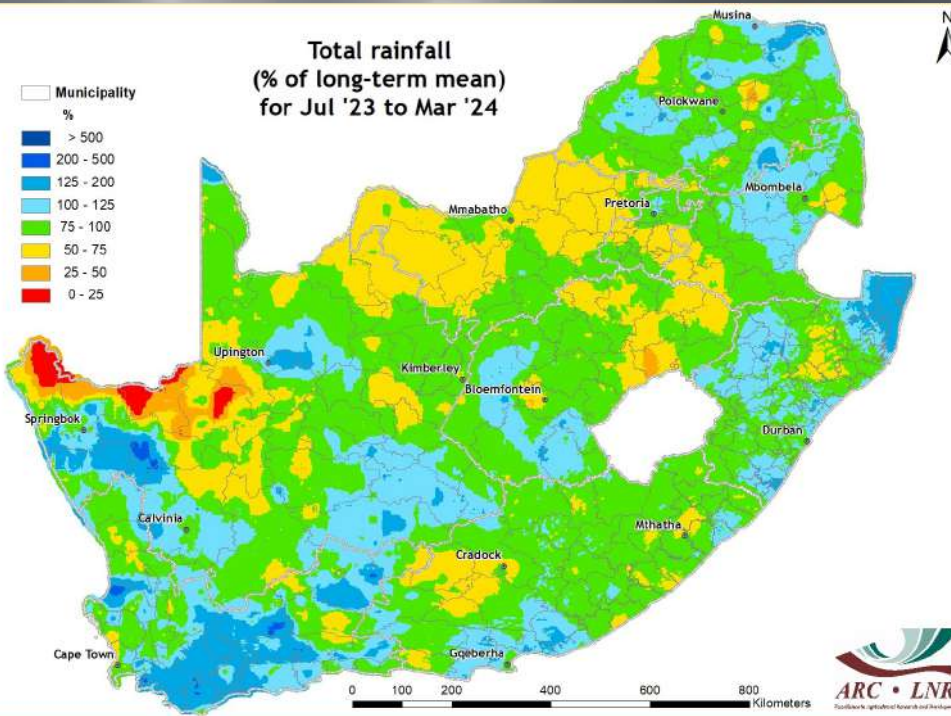


Figure 3

Figure 1:

Rainfall was confined to the western interior and eastern parts of the country during March 2024. The highest totals were recorded in certain areas of Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal, in excess of 100 mm in places. The driest areas were largely confined to the central interior, parts of Limpopo and the northern parts of the winter rainfall region.

Figure 2:

Most parts of the summer rainfall region experienced near- to below-normal rainfall conditions in March. Above-normal rainfall was observed in the Northern Cape, Western Cape, and northern KZN.

Figure 3:

The period between July 2023 and March 2024 was characterized by near- to above-normal rainfall over most of the country. Below-normal conditions can be observed in parts of the Northern Cape, North West and Free State.

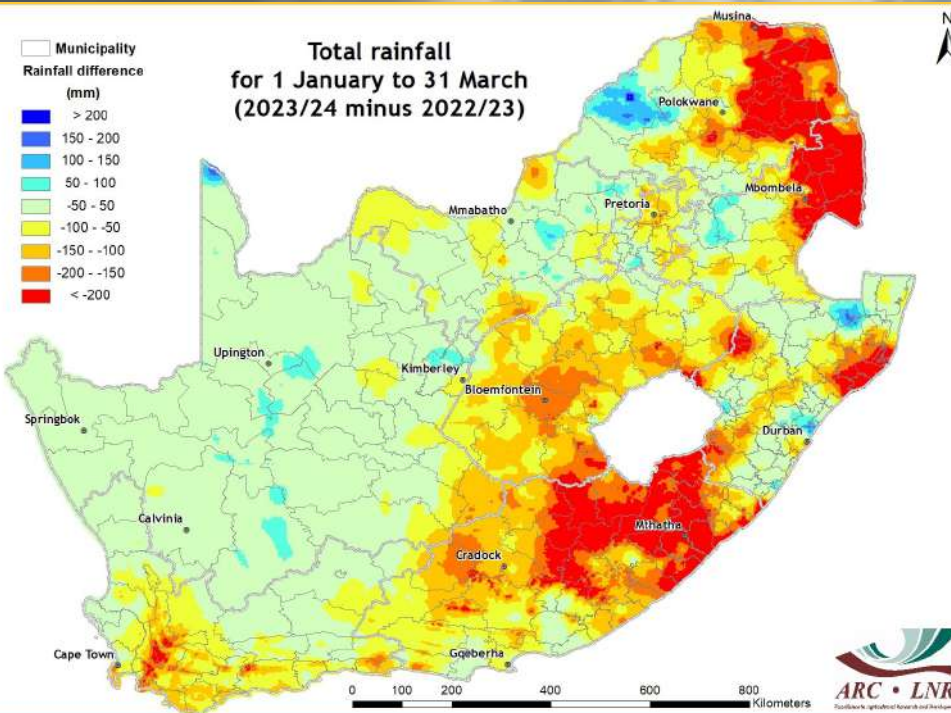


Figure 4

Figure 4:

Greater parts of the summer rainfall region and the southwestern parts of the Western Cape received significantly less rain compared to January-March of the 2022/23 summer season. The rest of the country received relatively the same amounts of rainfall, with isolated positive values noted in the Limpopo Lowveld.

Questions/Comments:

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2. Standardized Precipitation Index

Standardized Precipitation Index

The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI - McKee *et al.*, 1993) was developed to monitor the occurrence of droughts from rainfall data. The index quantifies precipitation deficits on different time scales and therefore also drought severity. It provides an indication of rainfall conditions per quaternary catchment (in this case) based on the historical distribution of rainfall.

REFERENCE:

McKee TB, Doesken NJ and Kliest J (1993) The relationship of drought frequency and duration to time scales. In: Proceedings of the 8th Conference on Applied Climatology, 17-22 January, Anaheim, CA. American Meteorological Society: Boston, MA; 179-184.

The SPI maps revealing short-term (6-month), medium-term (12-month) and long-term (24- and 36-month) drought conditions ending in March 2024 are shown in Figures 5-8. The short-term SPI map indicates near-normal conditions over the country, with moderate to severe drought notable in North West, Gauteng and the eastern Free State. These conditions, extending towards the Northern and Eastern Cape, are further depicted on the medium-term SPI map, while moderate to extremely wet conditions can be noted over the Western Cape, isolated parts of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. The long-term SPI maps indicate predominantly wet conditions over greater parts of the country.

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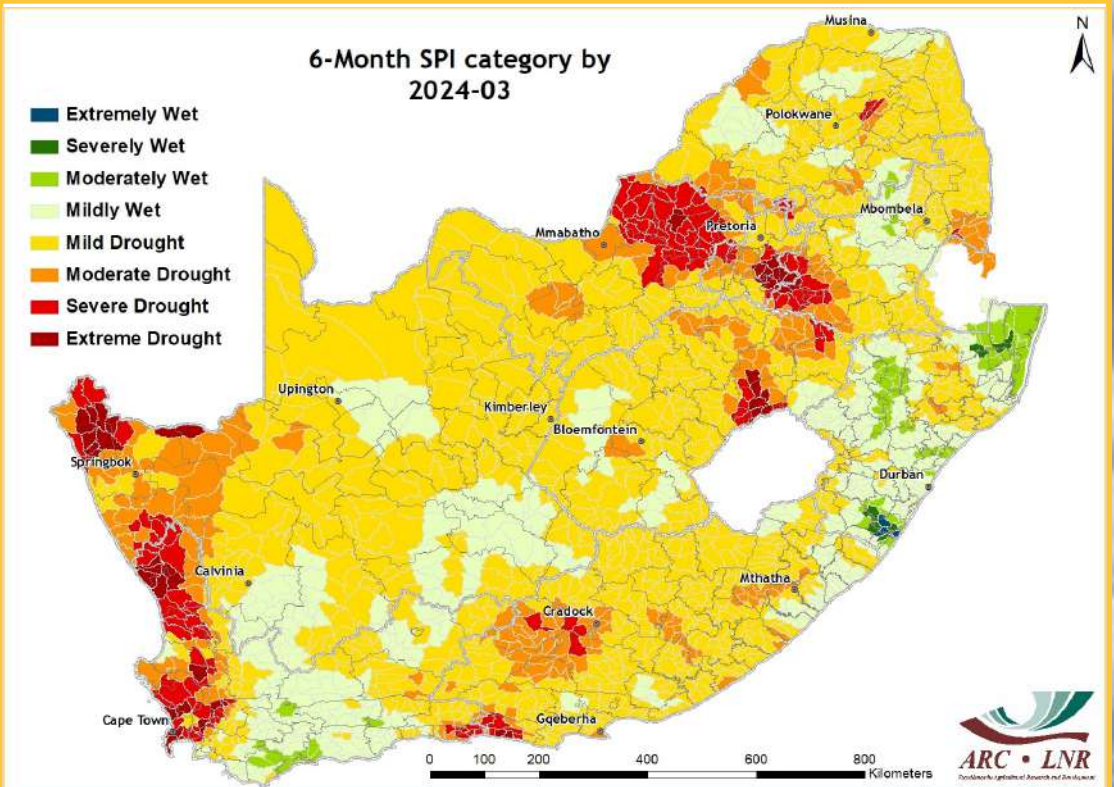


Figure 5

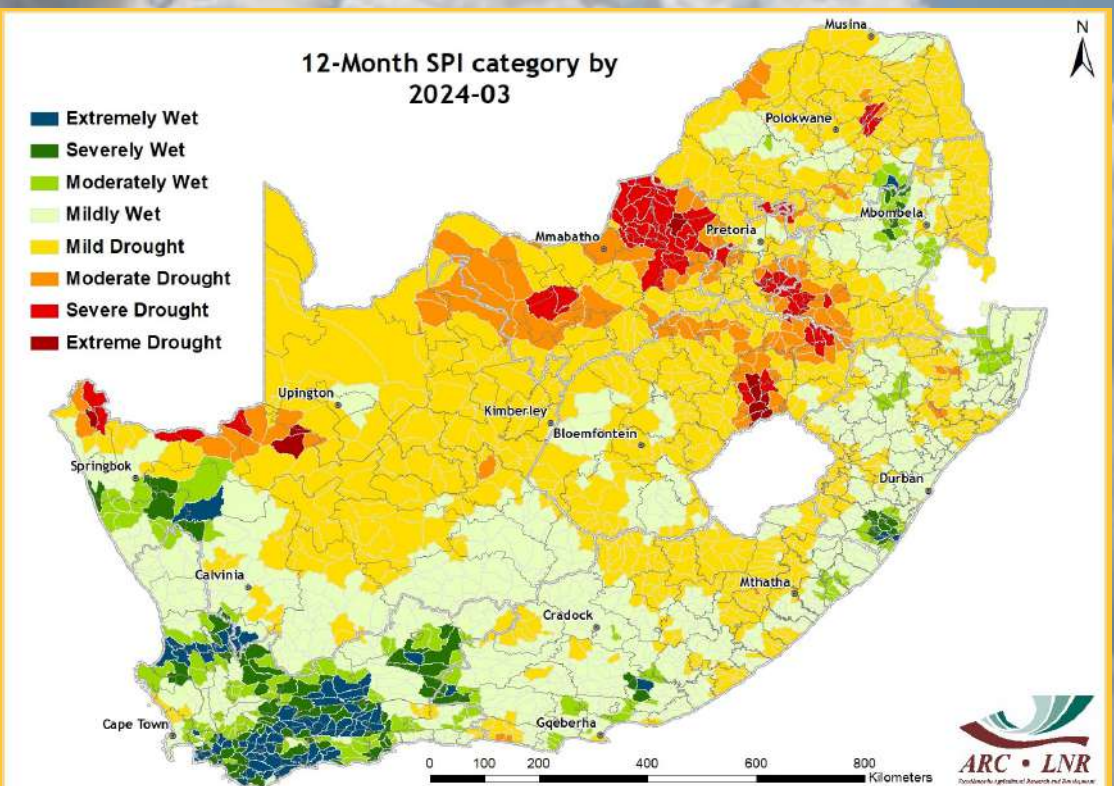


Figure 6

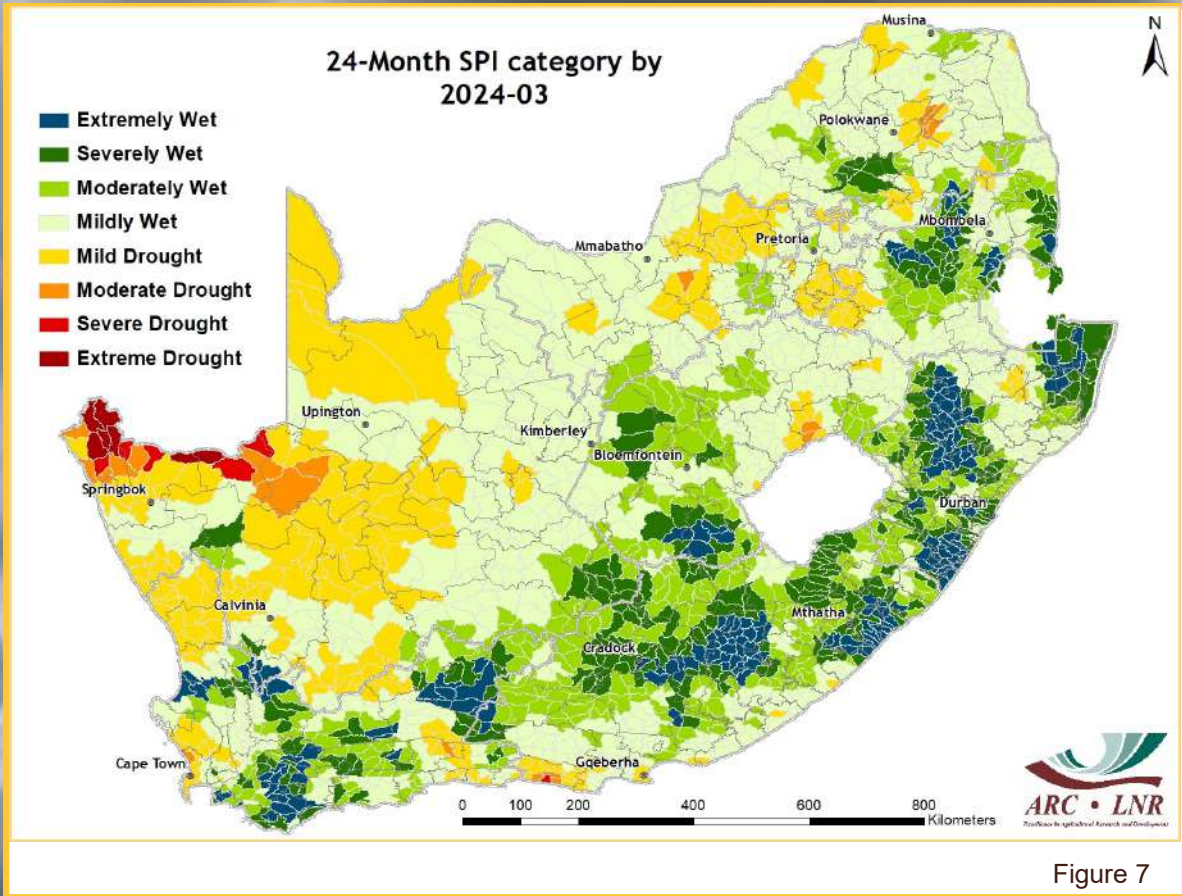


Figure 7

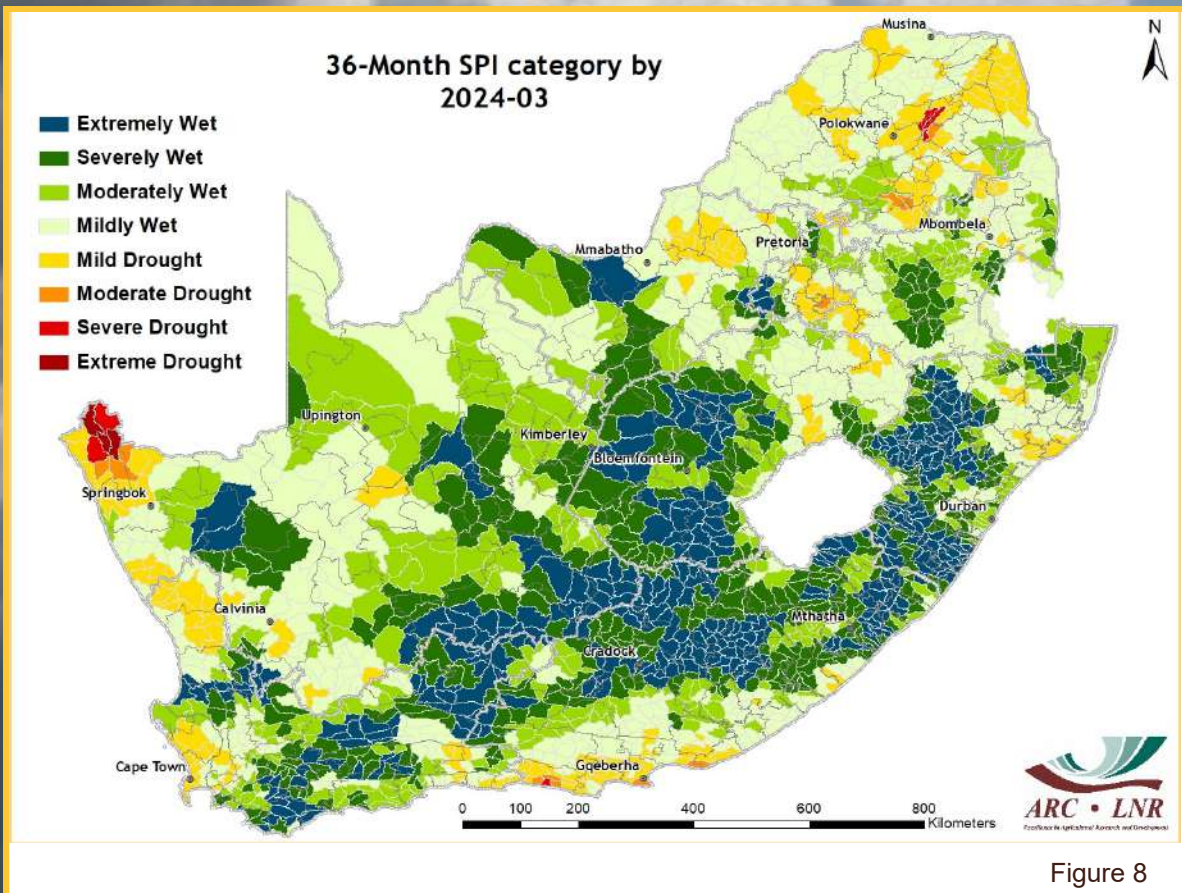


Figure 8

3. Rainfall Deciles

Deciles are used to express the ranking of rainfall for a specific period in terms of the historical time series. In the map, a value of 5 represents the median value for the time series. A value of 1 refers to the rainfall being as low or lower than experienced in the driest 10% of a particular month historically (even possibly the lowest on record for some areas), while a value of 10 represents rainfall as high as the value recorded only in the wettest 10% of the same period in the past (or even the highest on record). It therefore adds a measure of significance to the rainfall deviation.

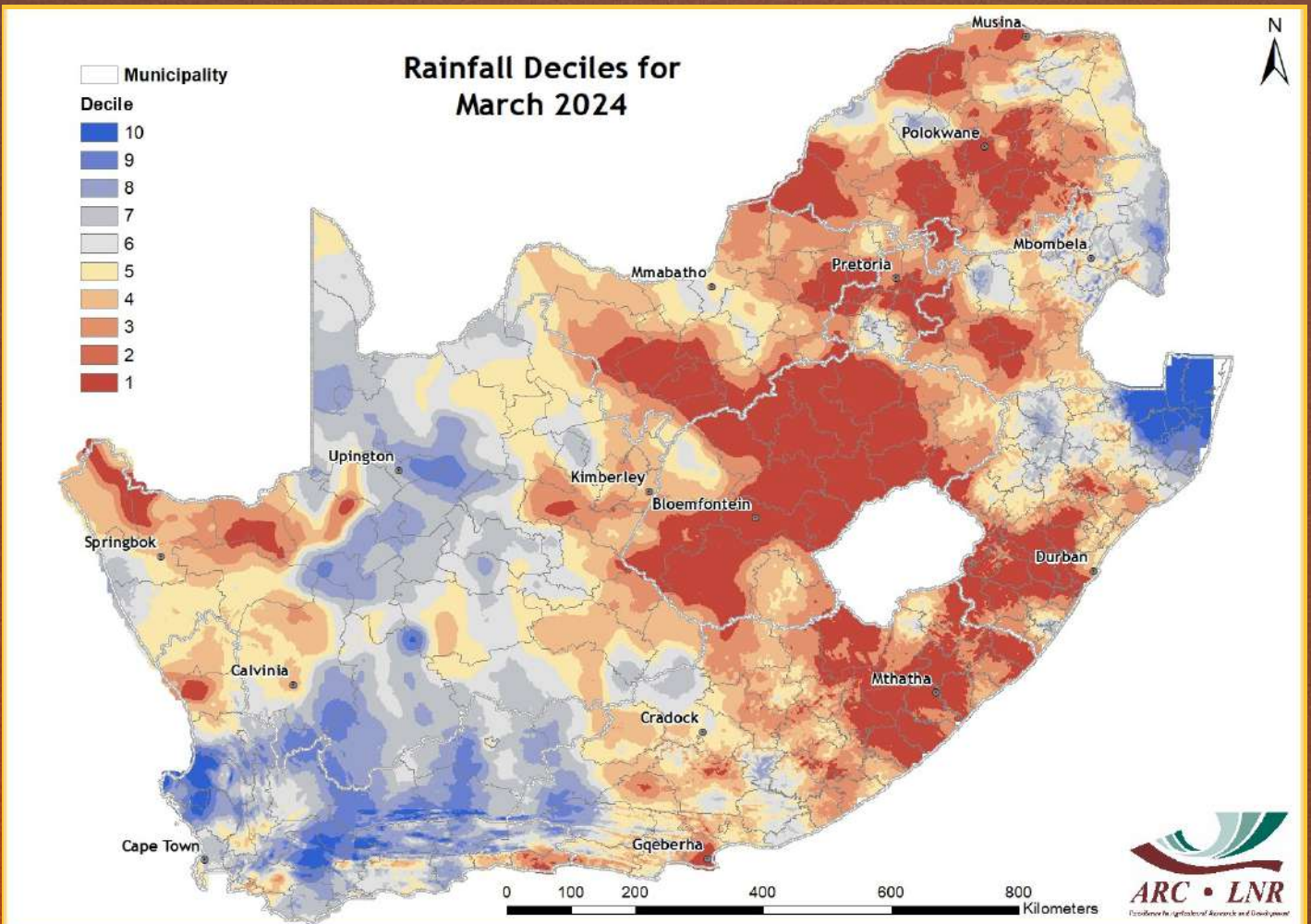


Figure 9

Figure 9:

In March 2024 the western half of the country, parts of Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal experienced rainfall totals that compare well with historically wetter March months. The rest of the country remained dry.

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Vegetation Mapping

The Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is computed from the equation:

$$NDVI = \frac{(IR - R)}{(IR + R)}$$

where:

IR = Infrared reflectance &
R = Red band

NDVI images describe the vegetation activity. A decadal NDVI image shows the highest possible "greenness" values that have been measured during a 10-day period.

Vegetated areas will generally yield high values because of their relatively high near infrared reflectance and low visible reflectance. For better interpretation and understanding of the NDVI images, a temporal image difference approach for change detection is used.

The Standardized Difference Vegetation Index (SDVI) is the standardized anomaly (according to the specific time of the year) of the NDVI.

4. Vegetation Conditions

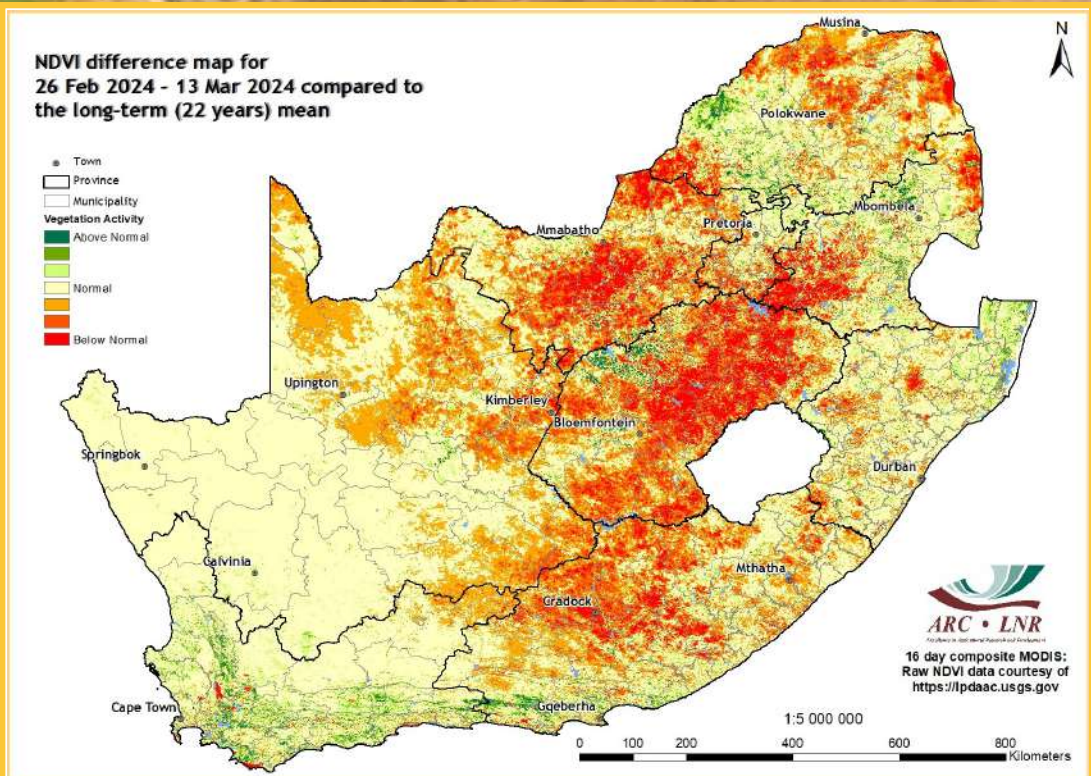


Figure 10

Figure 10:

Compared to the historical averaged vegetation conditions, the 16-day NDVI map for March 2024 shows that the central interior and the far northern parts of the country continued to experience below-normal vegetation conditions, while the western parts of the country experienced normal activity with isolated patches of above-normal vegetation conditions.

Figure 11:

The 16-day NDVI difference map for March 2024 compared to the preceding 16-day period shows that the western half of the country continued to experience normal vegetation activity, while the eastern half experienced below-normal conditions.

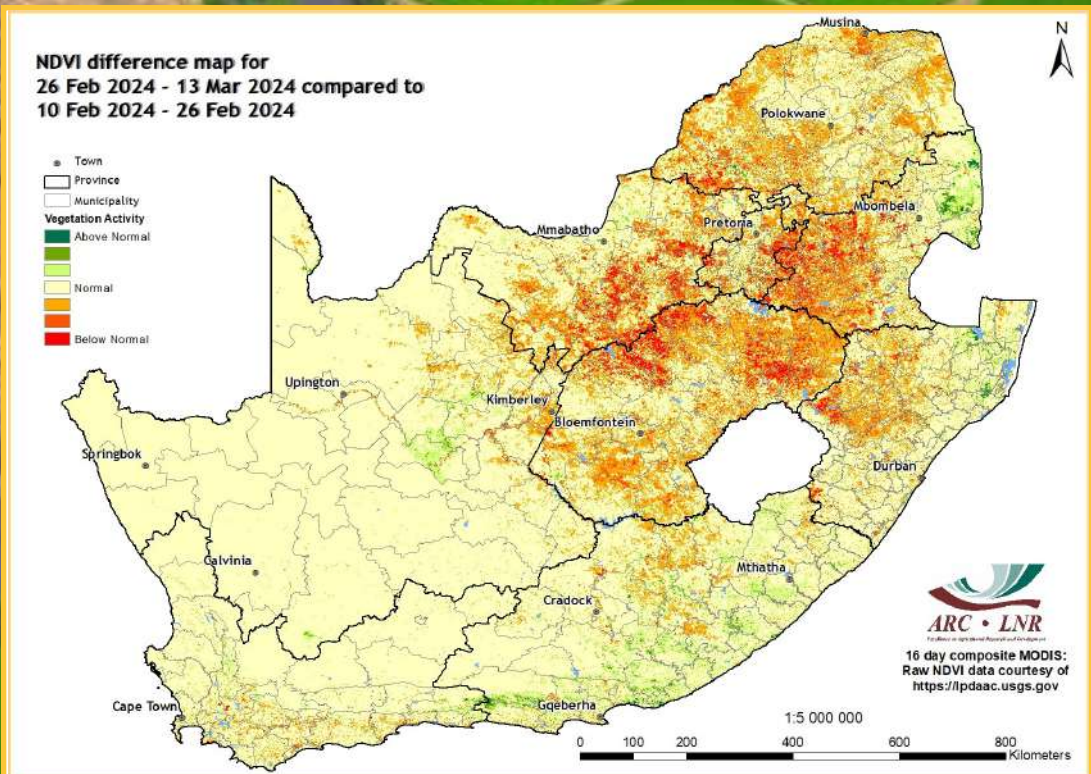


Figure 11

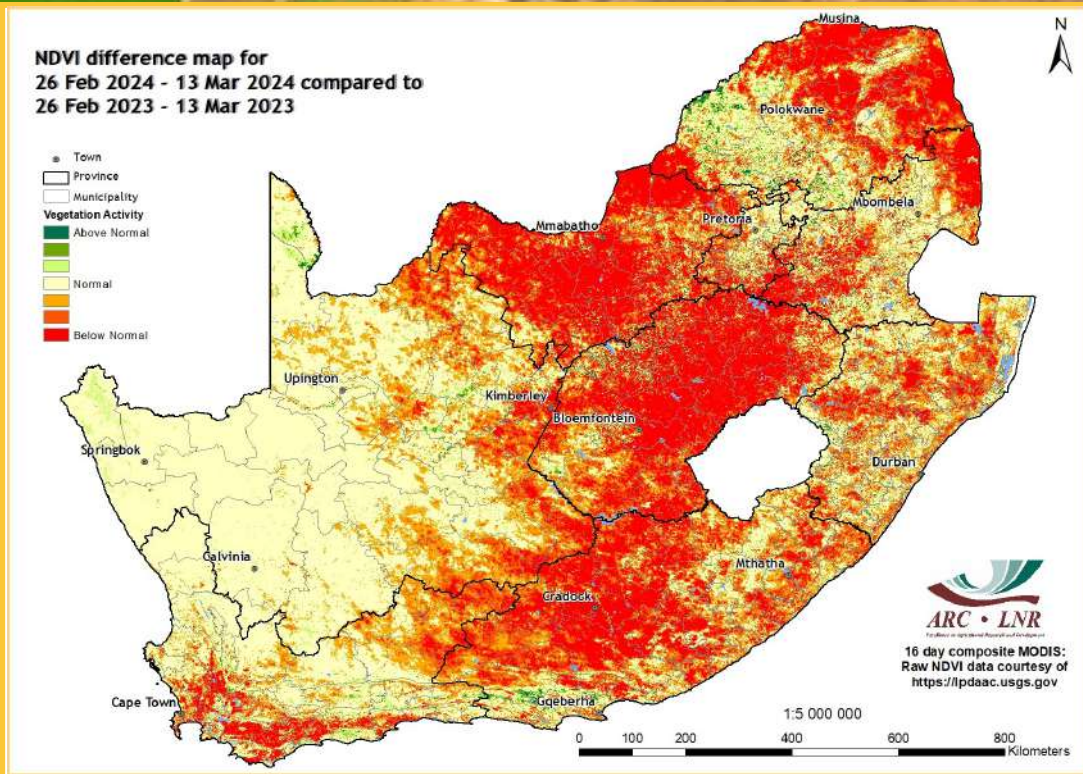


Figure 12

Vegetation Mapping
(continued from p. 7)

Interpretation of map legend

NDVI-based values range between 0 and 1. These values are incorporated in the legend of the difference maps, ranging from -1 (lower vegetation activity) to 1 (higher vegetation activity) with 0 indicating normal/the same vegetation activity or no significant difference between the images.

Cumulative NDVI maps:

Two cumulative NDVI datasets have been created for drought monitoring purposes:

- Winter:** January to December
- Summer:** July to June

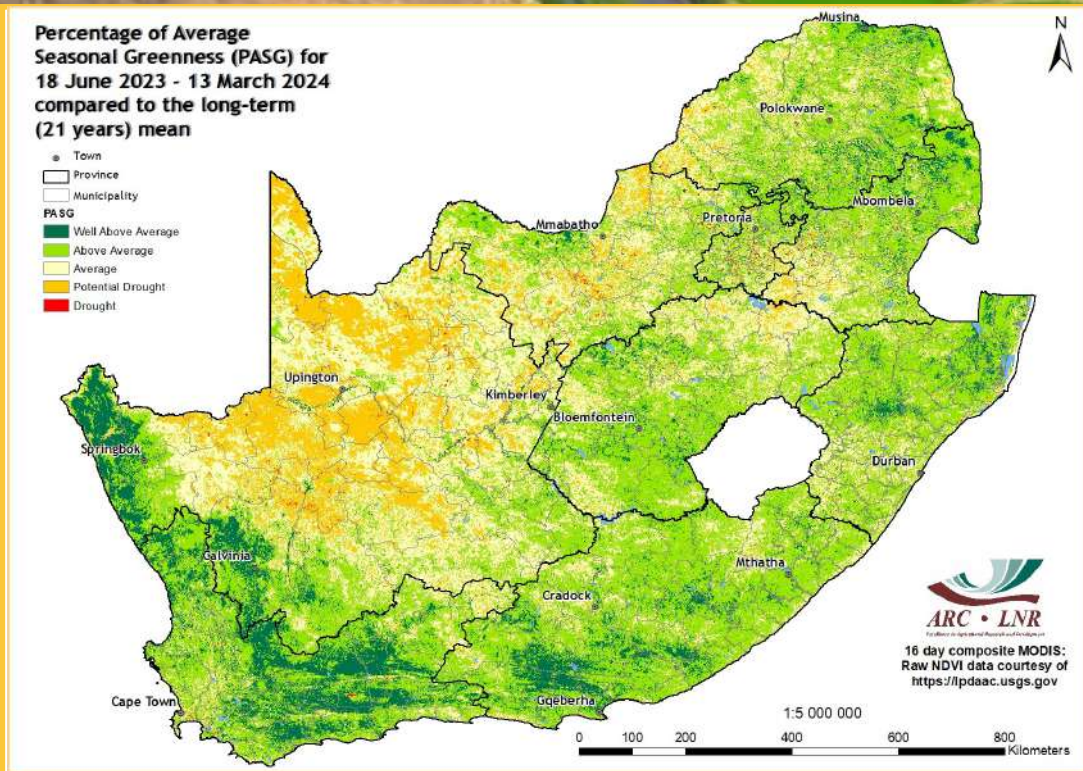


Figure 13

Figure 12:

The 16-day NDVI difference map for March 2024 compared to the same period last year shows that the central and the northern parts of the country continued to experience poor vegetation conditions, while the western half experienced normal vegetation activity.

Figure 13:

The Percentage of Average Seasonal Greenness (PASG) map for the past 9 months, compared to the long-term mean, shows that above-normal seasonal vegetation greenness prevails in most parts of the country, with the exception of the northwestern region and some isolated areas in the north which experienced potential drought.

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5. Vegetation Condition Index

Vegetation Condition Index (VCI)

The VCI is an indicator of the vigour of the vegetation cover as a function of the NDVI minimum and maximum encountered for a specific pixel and for a specific period, calculated over many years.

The VCI normalizes the NDVI according to its changeability over many years and results in a consistent index for various land cover types. It is an effort to split the short-term weather-related signal from the long-term climatological signal as reflected by the vegetation. The VCI is a better indicator of water stress than the NDVI.

Vegetation Condition Index (VCI) for 26 Feb 2024 - 13 Mar 2024 compared to the long-term (22 years) mean

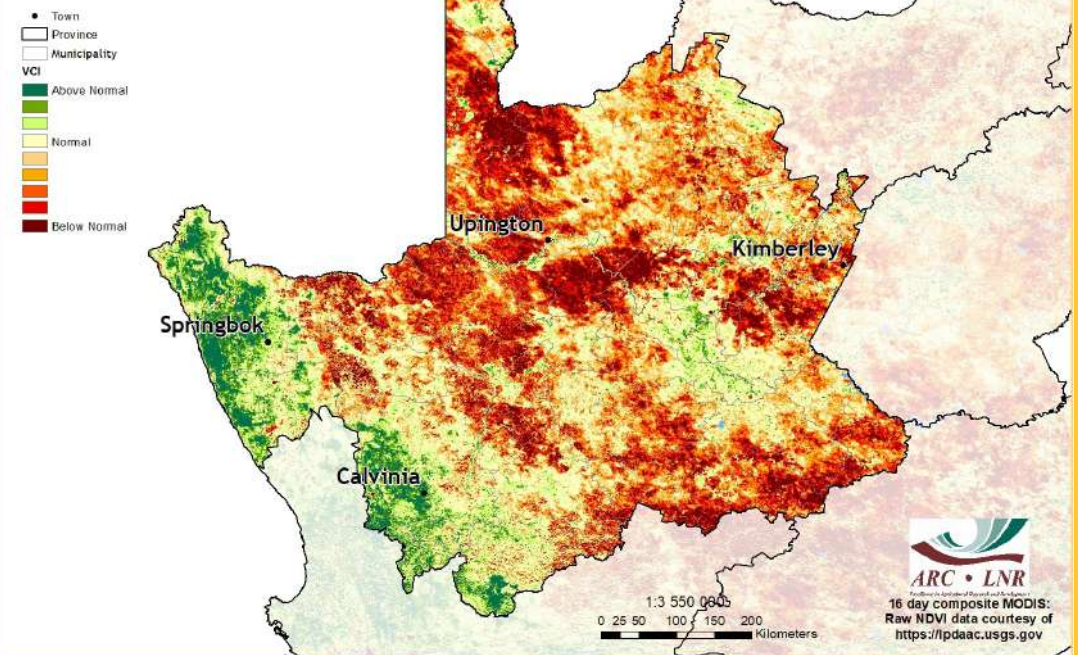


Figure 14

Figure 14:

The 16-day VCI map for March 2024 indicates that many parts of the Northern Cape continue to experience below-normal vegetation conditions, with isolated areas of above-normal activity, mainly in the southwest of the province.

Figure 15:

The 16-day VCI map for March 2024 indicates that the Eastern Cape experienced mainly below-normal vegetation conditions, with patches of above-normal activity in the far eastern and southern parts.

Vegetation Condition Index (VCI) for 26 Feb 2024 - 13 Mar 2024 compared to the long-term (22 years) mean

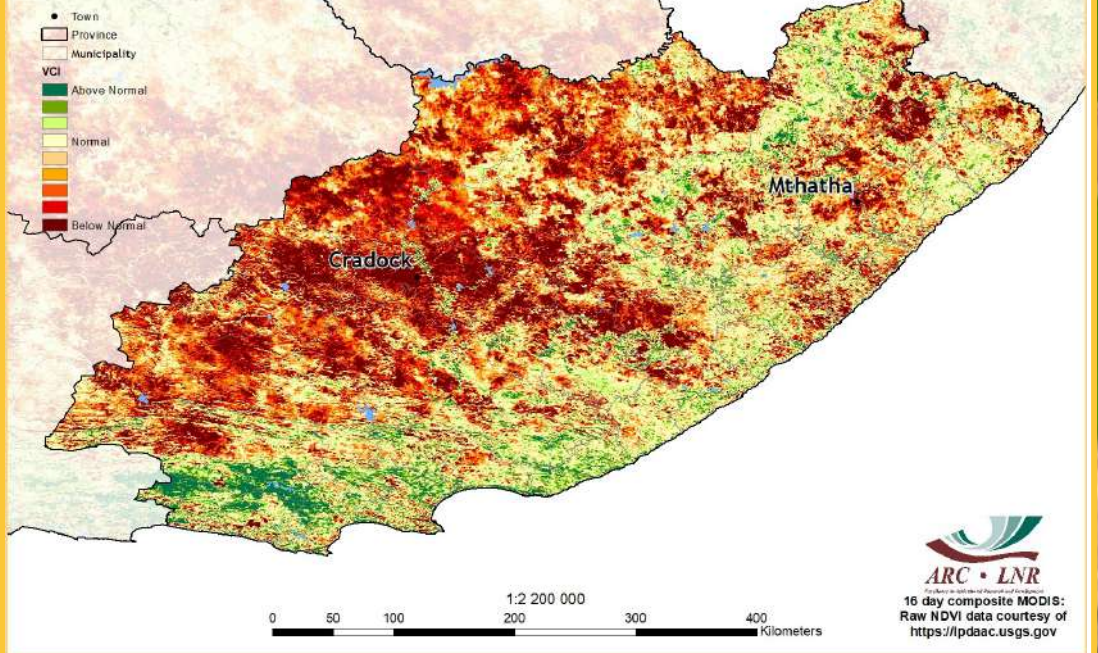


Figure 15

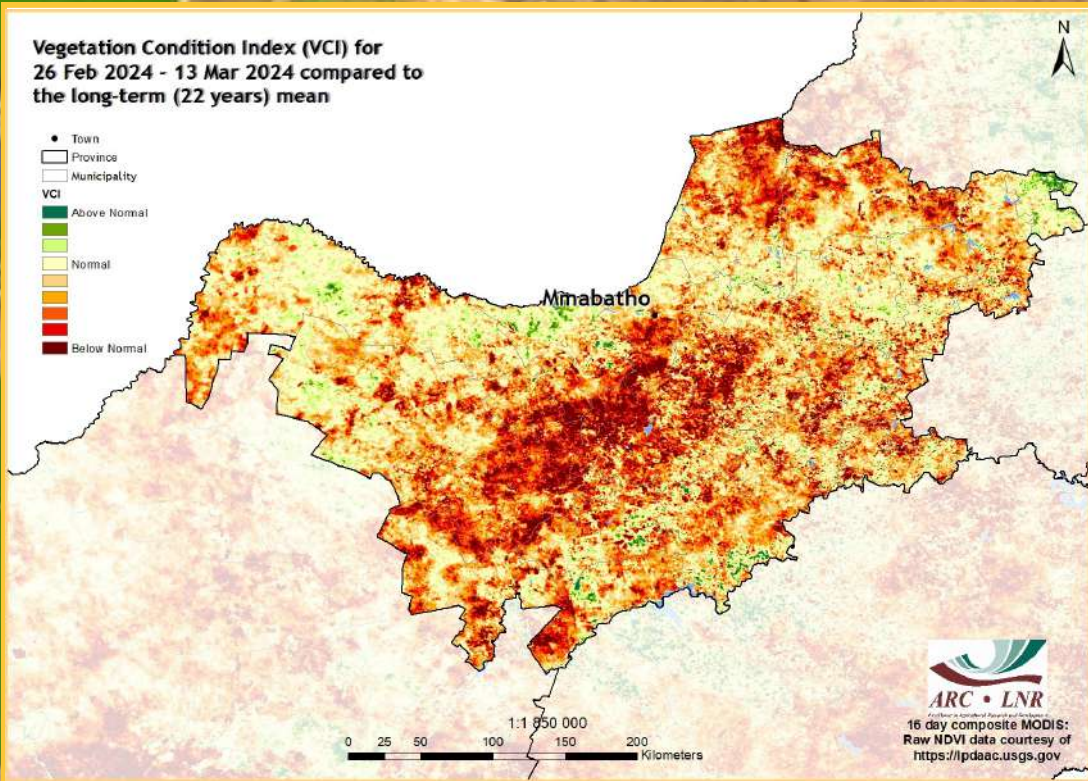


Figure 16

Figure 16: The 16-day VCI map for March 2024 indicates that most parts of North West experienced below-normal vegetation conditions.

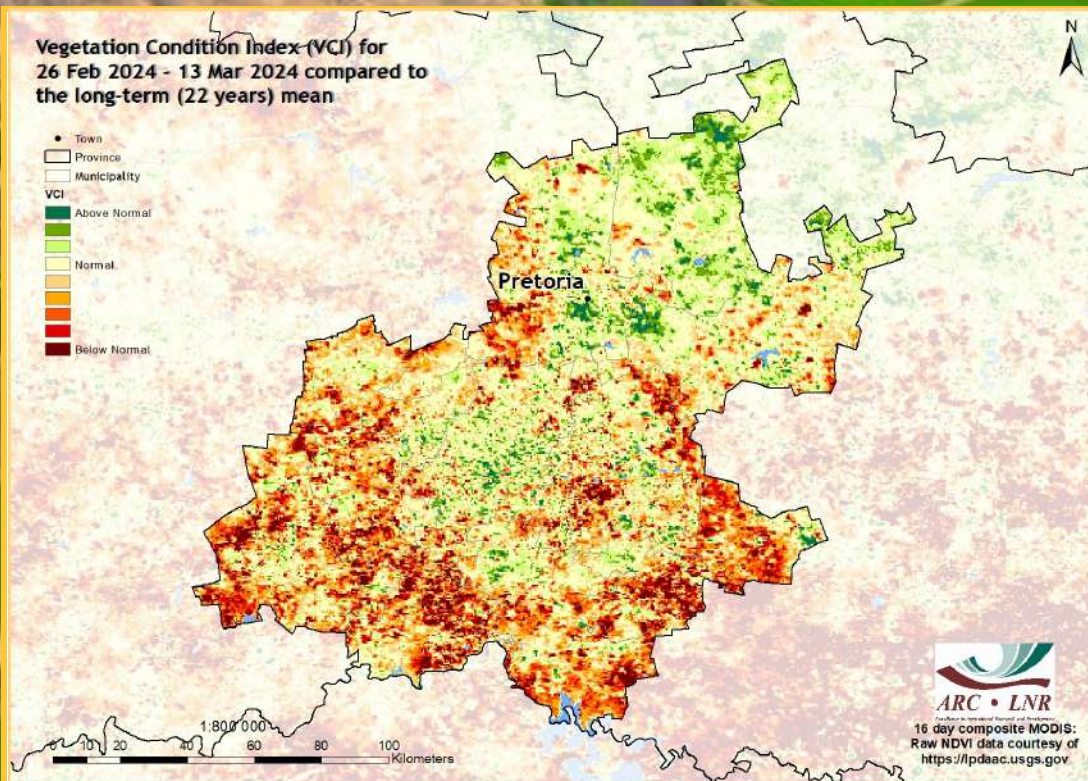


Figure 17

Figure 17: The 16-day VCI map for March 2024 indicates that many parts of Gauteng continue to experience below-normal vegetation conditions, with patches of above-normal activity in the northern and central parts of the province.

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6. Vegetation Conditions & Rainfall

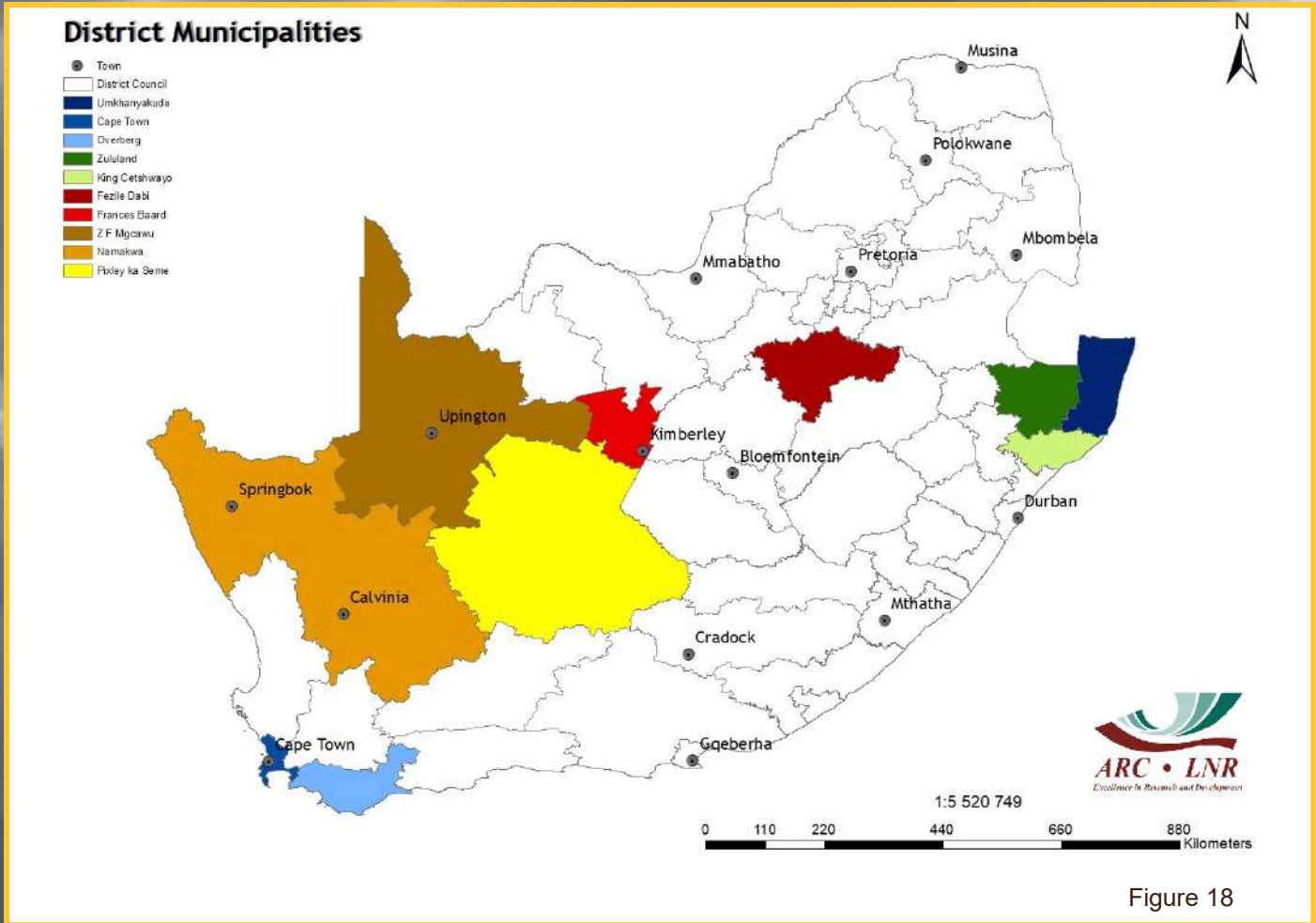


Figure 18

Rainfall and NDVI Graphs

Figure 18: Orientation map showing the areas of interest for March 2024. The district colour matches the border of the corresponding graph.

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Figures 19-23: Indicate areas with higher cumulative vegetation activity for the last year.

Figures 24-28: Indicate areas with lower cumulative vegetation activity for the last year.

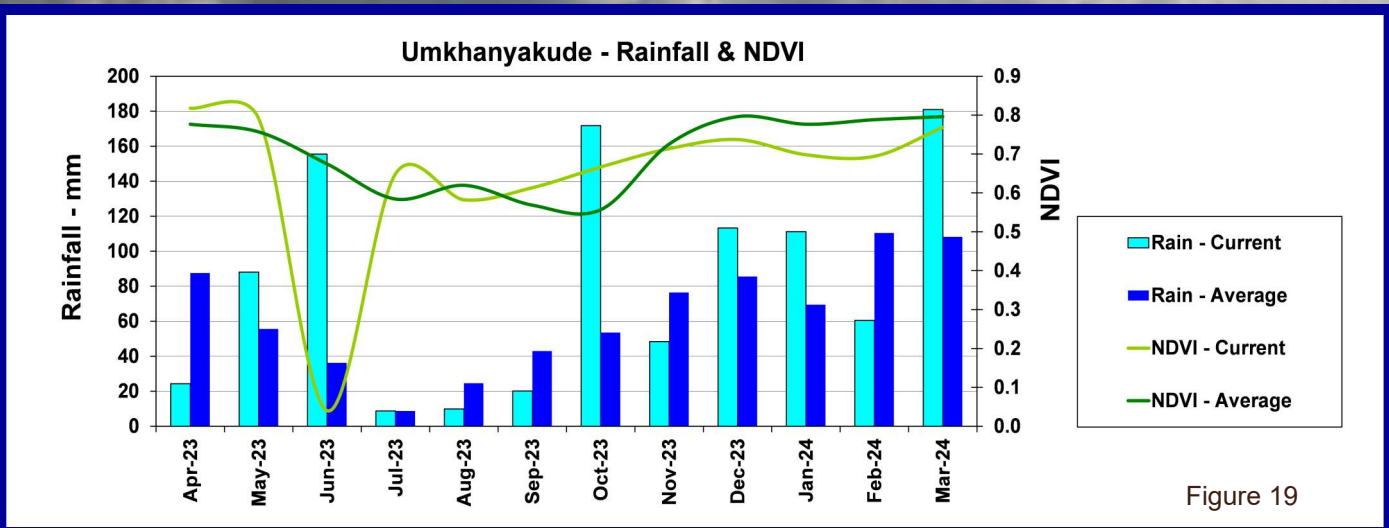
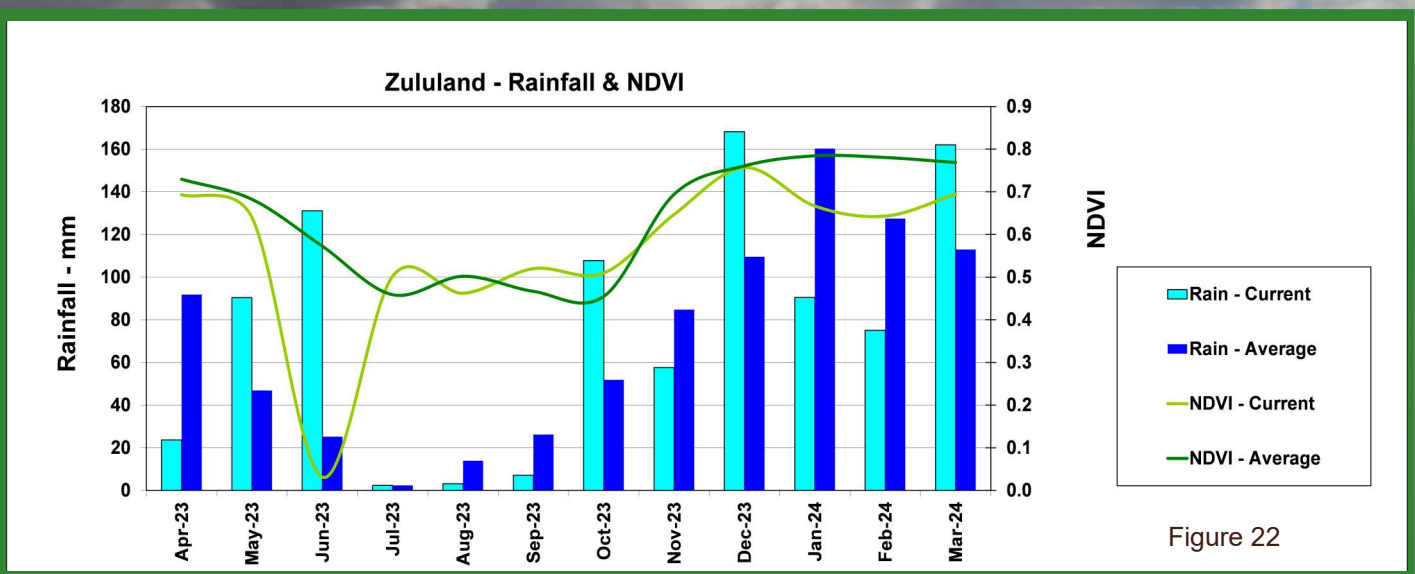
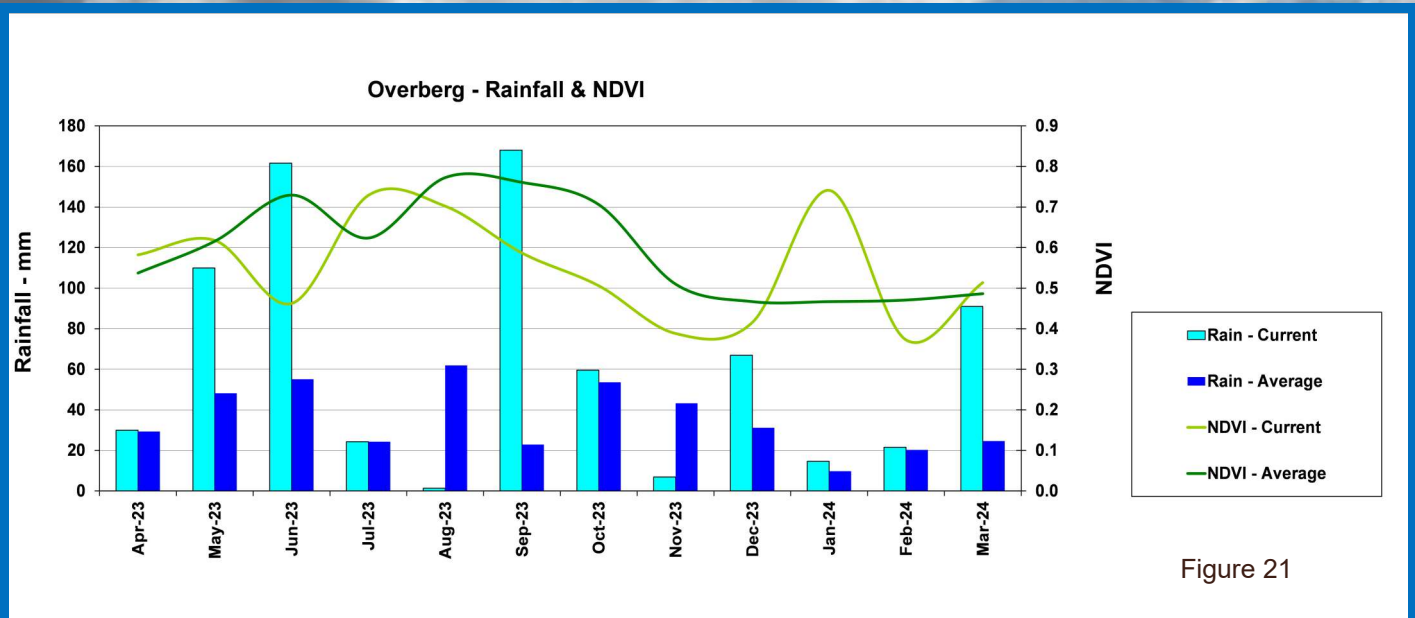
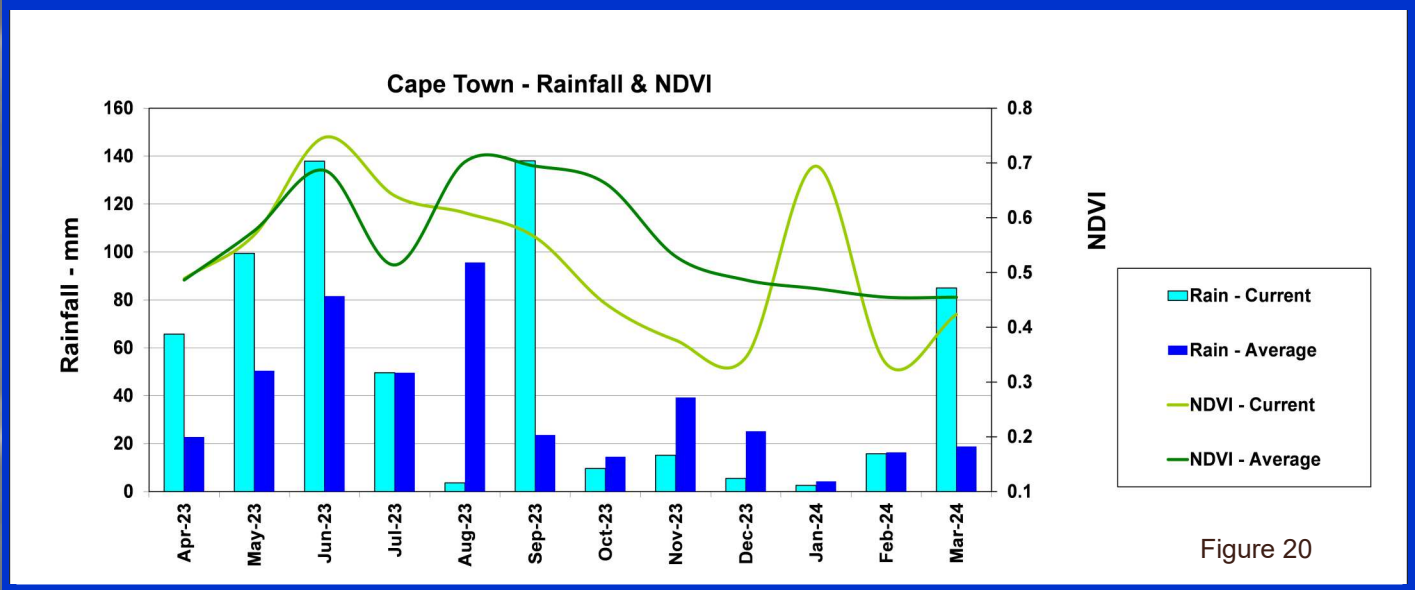


Figure 19



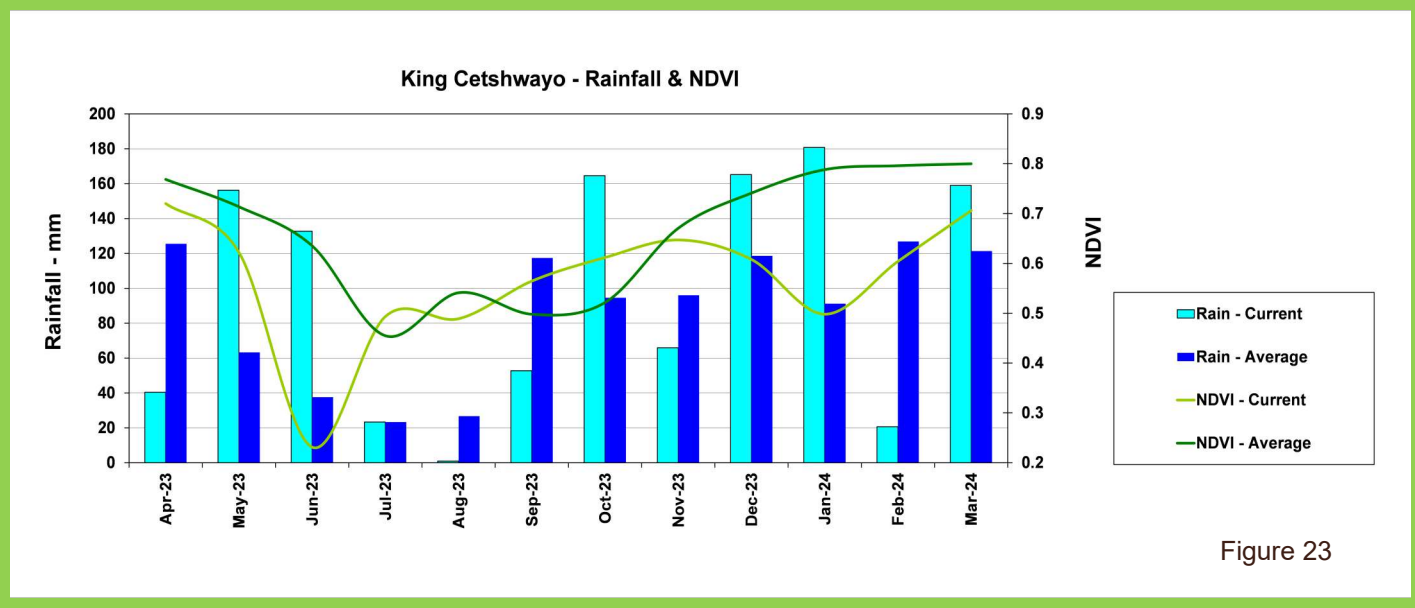


Figure 23

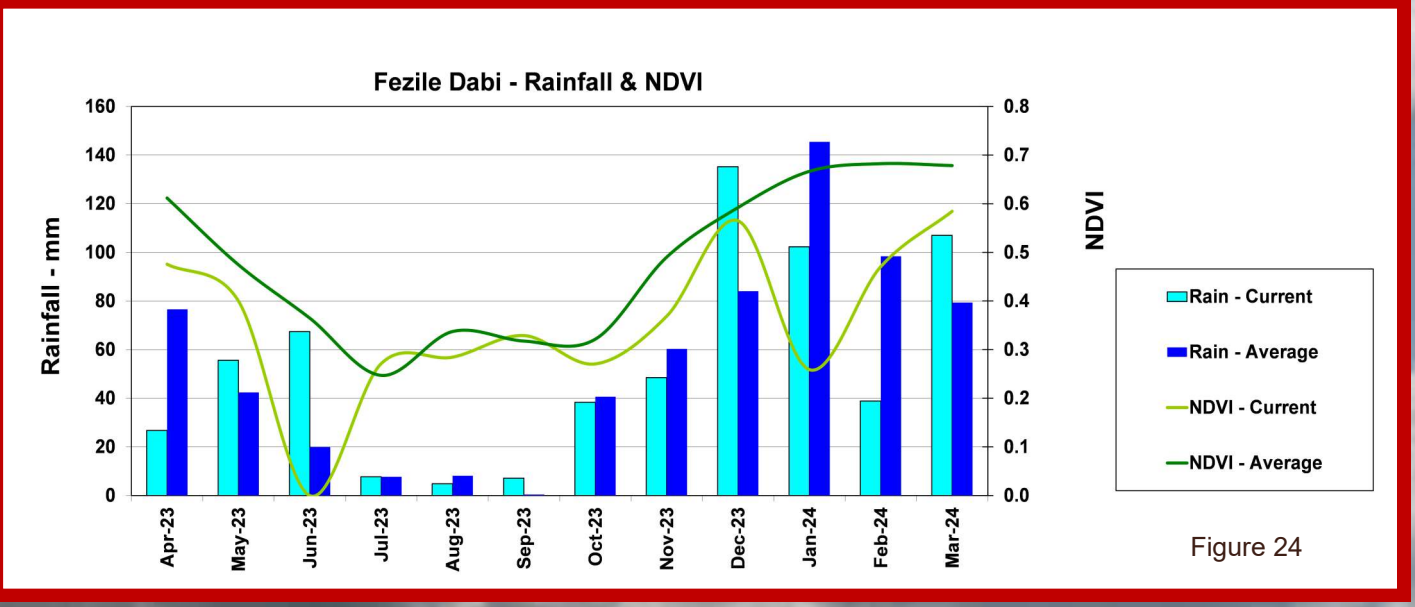


Figure 24

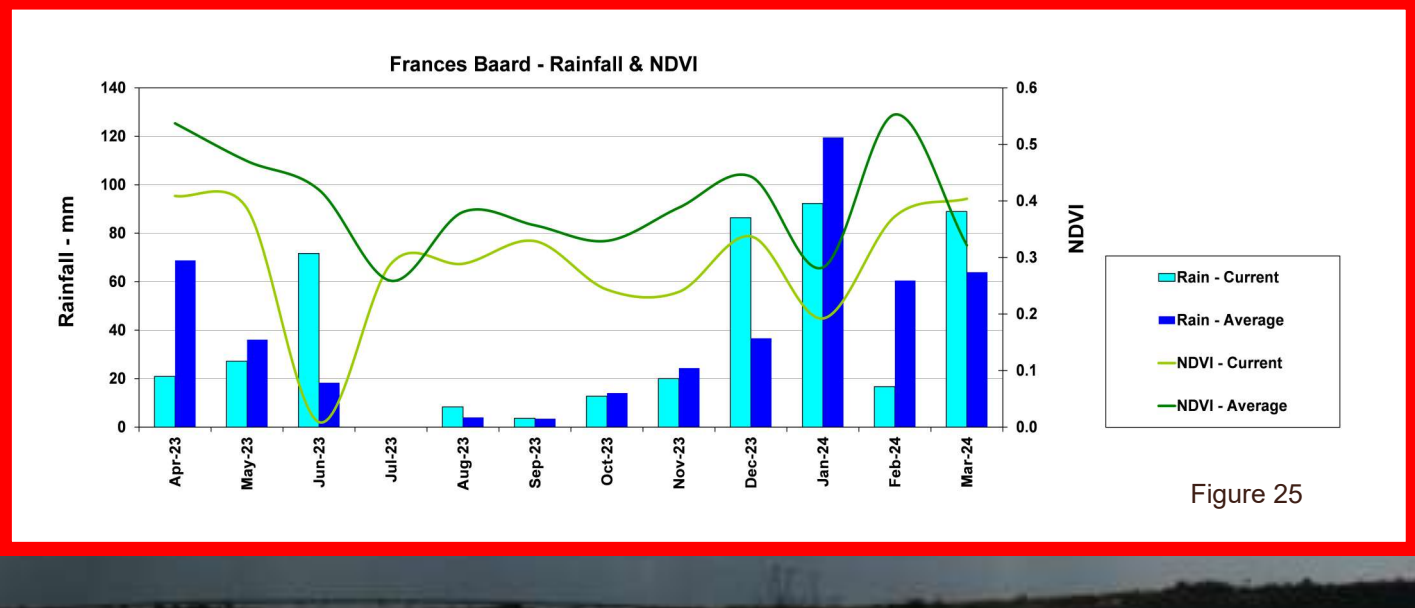


Figure 25

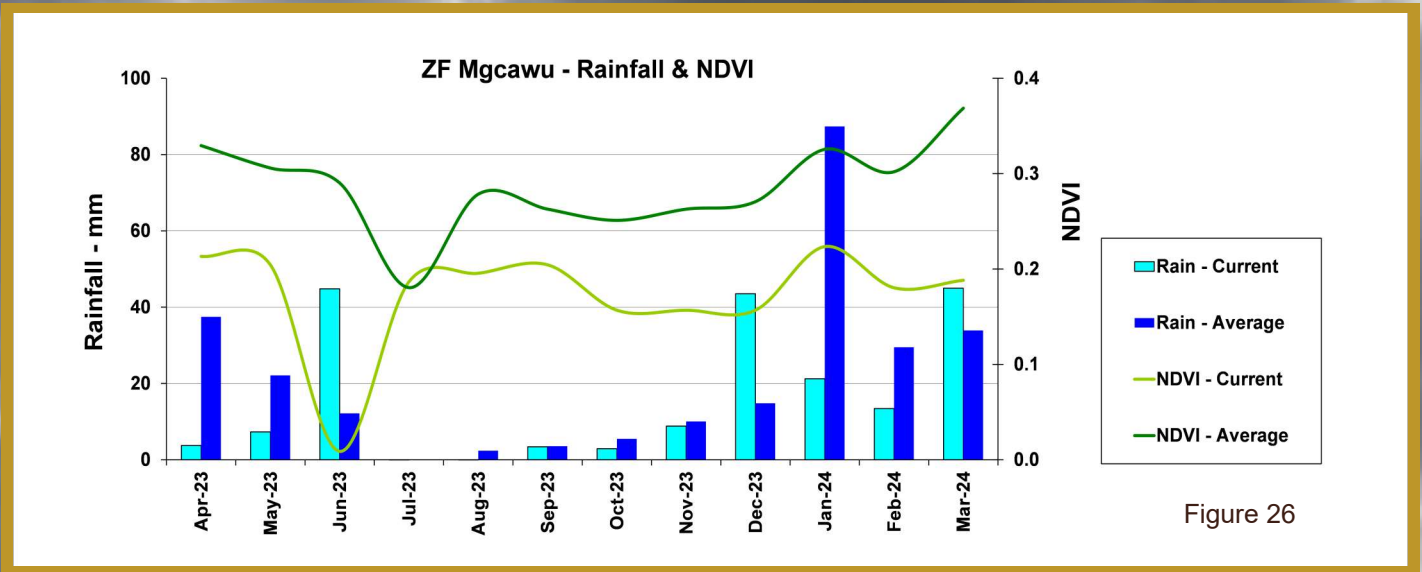


Figure 26

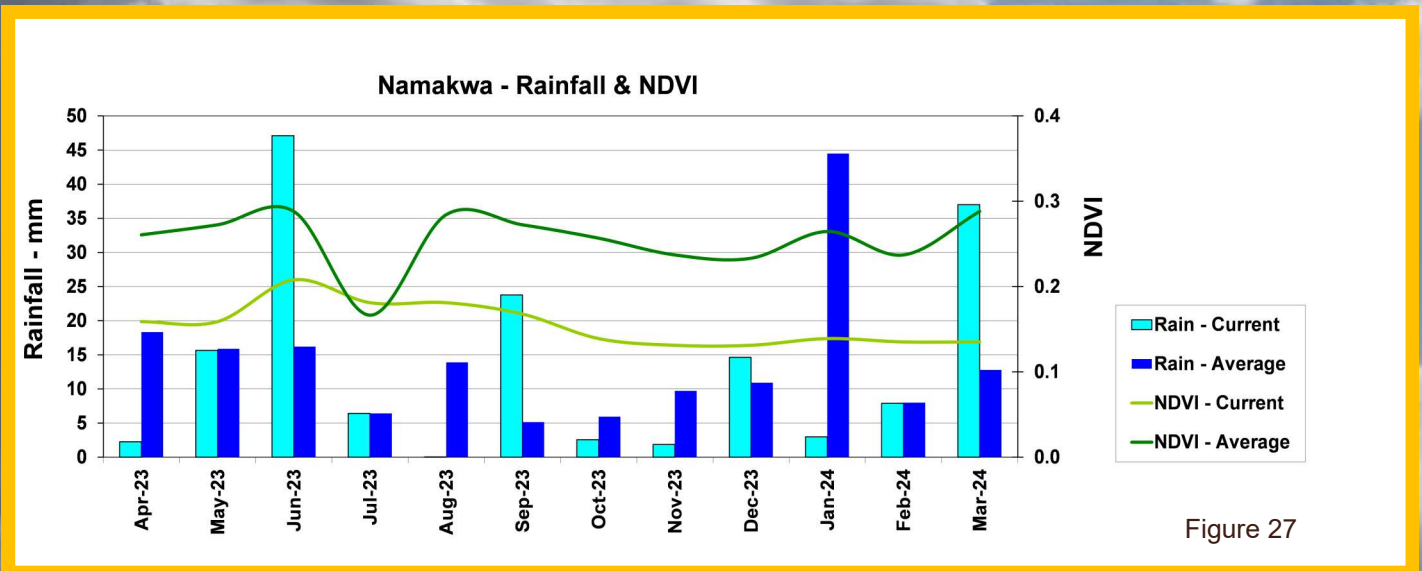


Figure 27

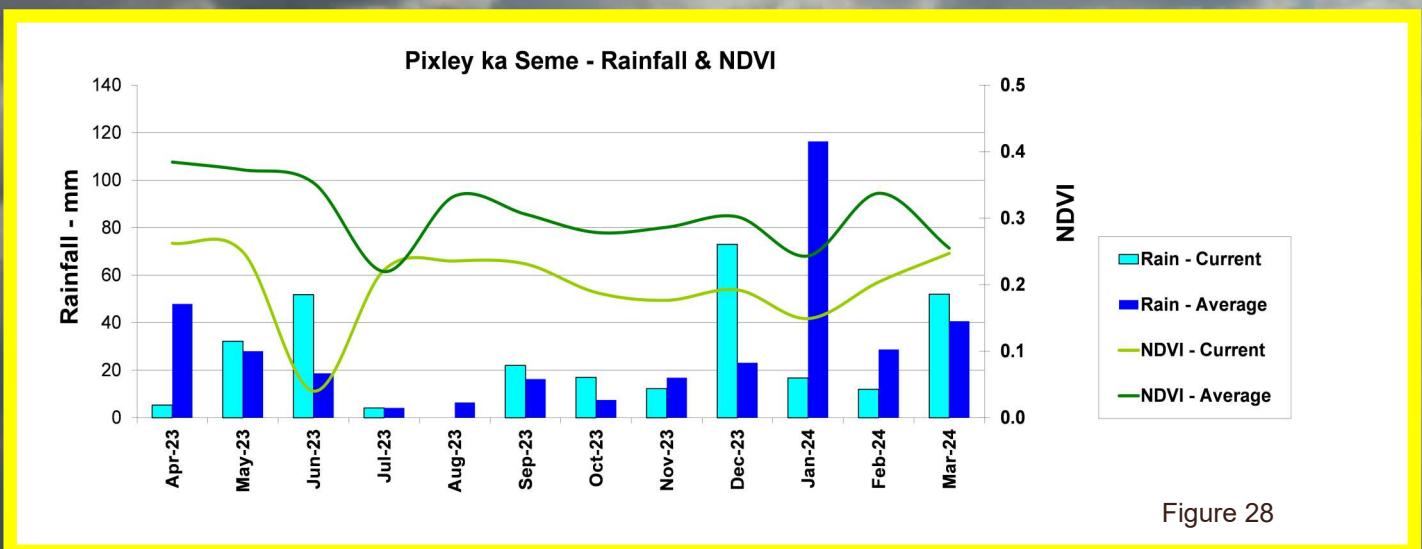


Figure 28

7. Fire Watch

Active Fires (Provided when data is available)

Forest and vegetation fires have temperatures in the range of 500 K (Kelvin) to 1000 K. According to Wien's Displacement Law, the peak emission of radiance for blackbody surfaces of such temperatures is at around 4 μm . For an ambient temperature of 290 K, the peak of radiance emission is located at approximately 11 μm . Active fire detection algorithms from remote sensing use this behaviour to detect "hot spot" fires.

Figure 29:

The graph shows the total number of active fires detected from 26 February to 29 March 2024 per province. Fire activity was higher in the Eastern Cape, Free State, Limpopo and North West compared to the long-term average.

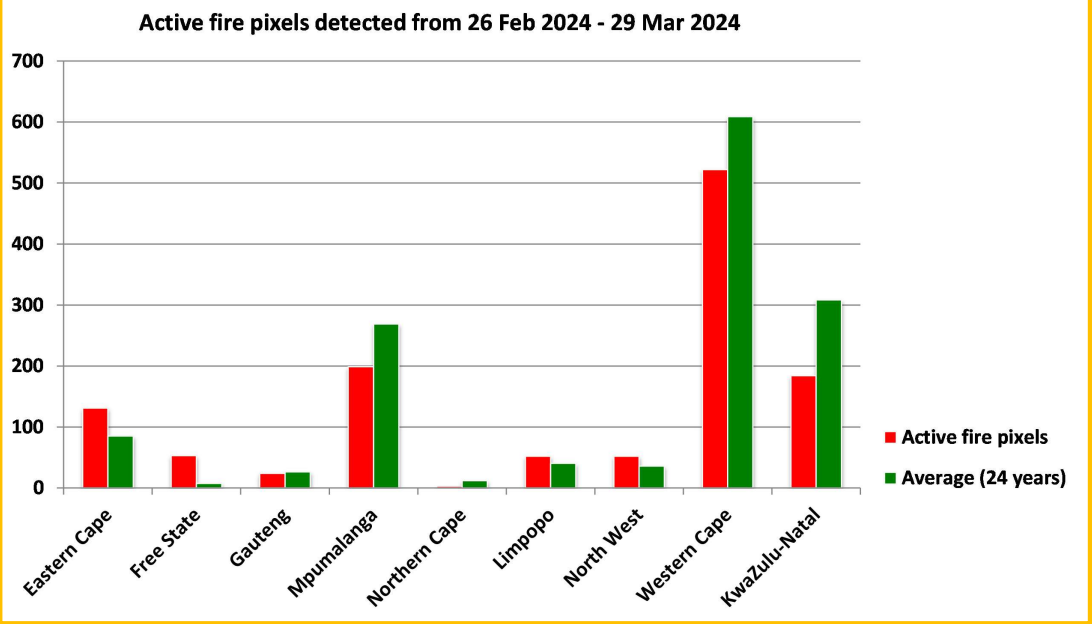


Figure 29

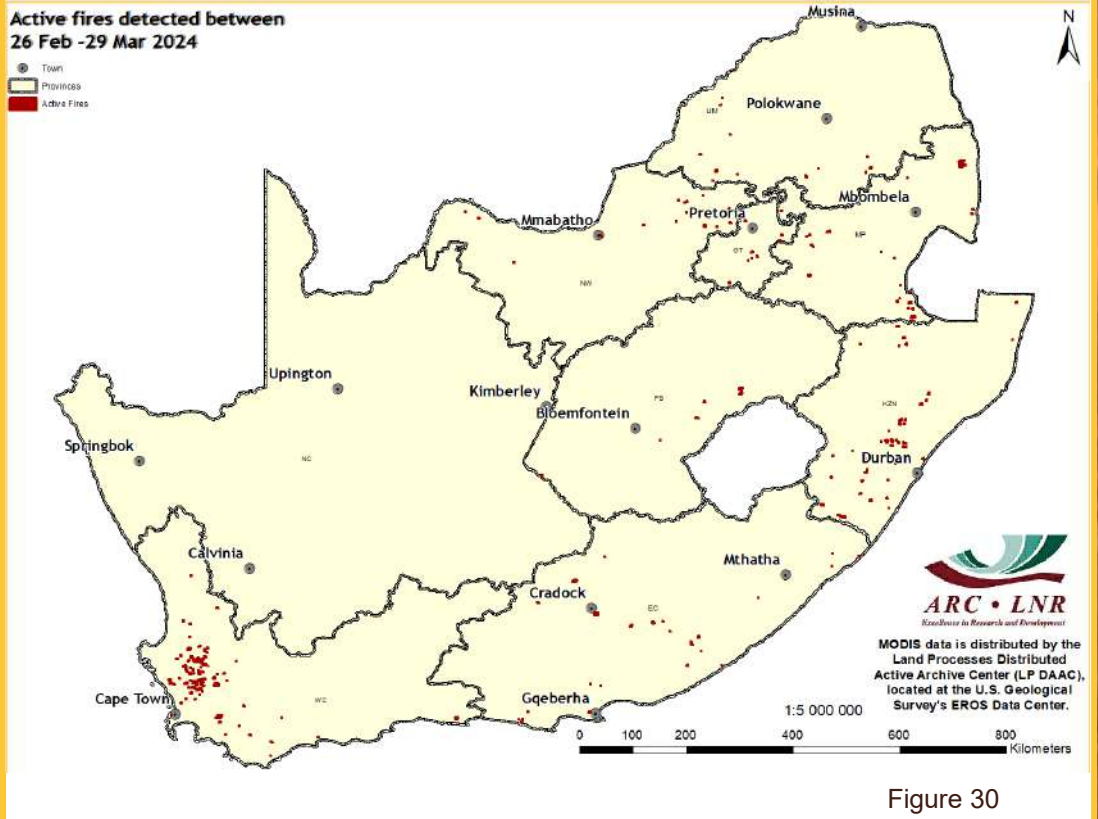


Figure 30

Figure 30:

The map shows the location of active fires detected between 26 February and 29 March 2024.

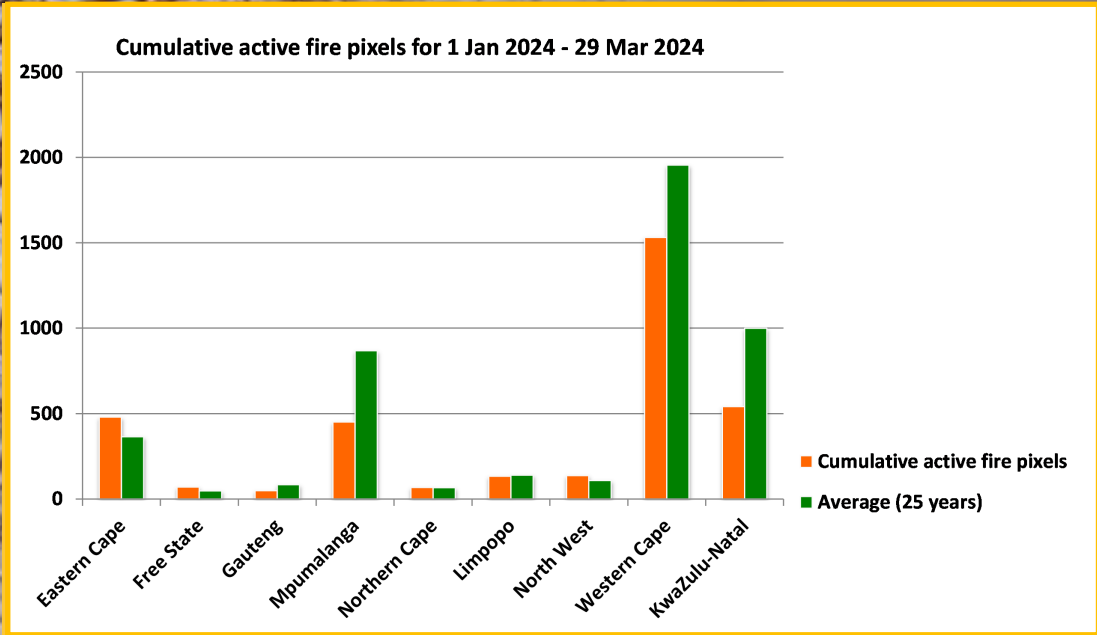


Figure 31: The graph shows the total number of active fires detected from 1 January to 29 March 2024 per province. Fire activity was higher in the Eastern Cape, Free State and North West compared to the long-term average.

Figure 31

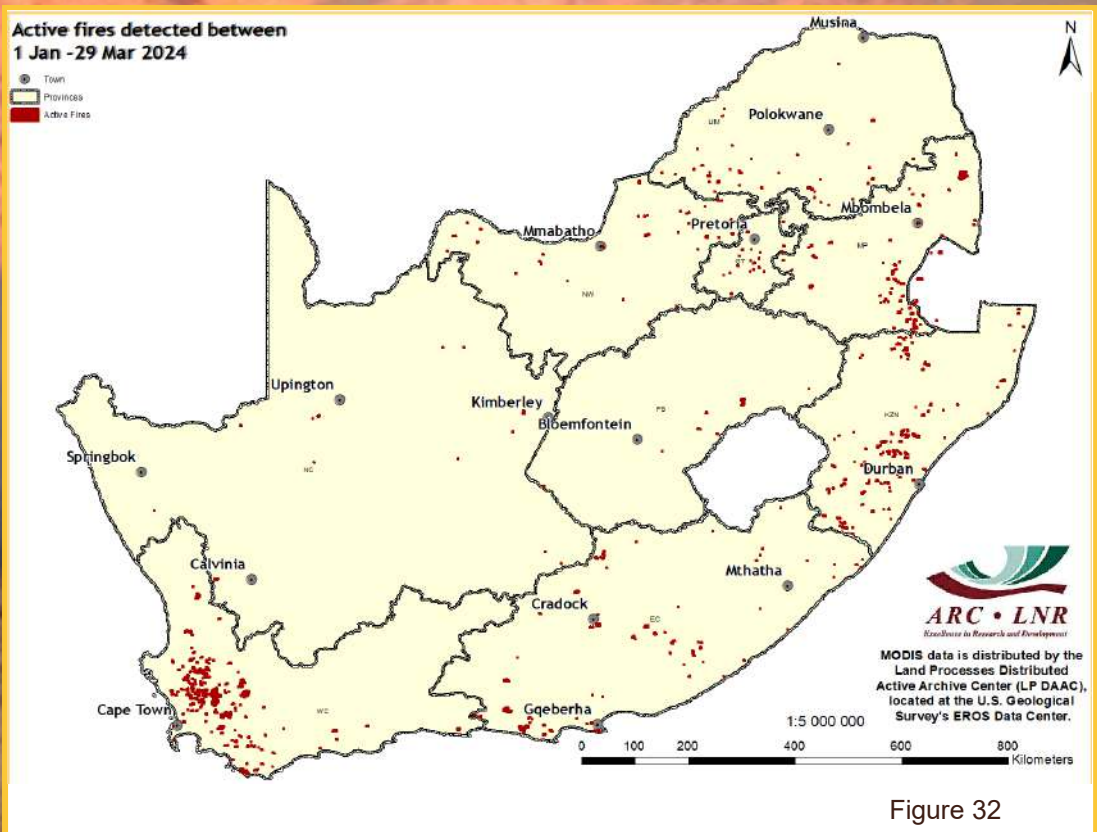


Figure 32: The map shows the location of active fires detected between 1 January and 29 March 2024.

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Figure 32

8. Surface Water Resources

Countrywide surface water areas (SWAs) are mapped on a monthly basis by GeoTerraImage using Sentinel-2 satellite imagery from the start of its availability at the end of 2015.

Figure 33 represents a comparison between the area of water available now and the maximum area of surface water recorded in the last 7 years. This 7-year historical window represents the operational period of the satellite from which the water information has been generated. In this map, any value less than 100 represents water catchments within which the current month's total surface water is less than the maximum extent recorded for the same area since the end of 2015.

Figure 34 represents a comparison between the area of surface water now and for the same month last year. In this map, any value less than 100 represents water catchments within which the current month's total surface water is less than that recorded in the same water catchment, in the same month, last year.

The long-term map for March 2024 shows very similar, water conditions countrywide to those of the previous month, but with a slight expansion in the central region of catchments now showing water levels equivalent to 60-100% of the 7-year, long-term maximum water levels.

The comparison between March 2024 and March 2023 continues to show very similar water conditions to those evident in both the January and February year-on-year comparisons. However, there is a slight increase in the number of water-stressed catchments representing the 1-50% category. Most catchments countrywide are still classified in the 50-100% difference category.

The SWA maps are derived from the monthly data generated and available through GeoTerraImage's 'Msanzi Amanzi' web information service: <https://www.water-southafrica.co.za>

Questions/Comments:
mark.thompson@geoterraimage.com

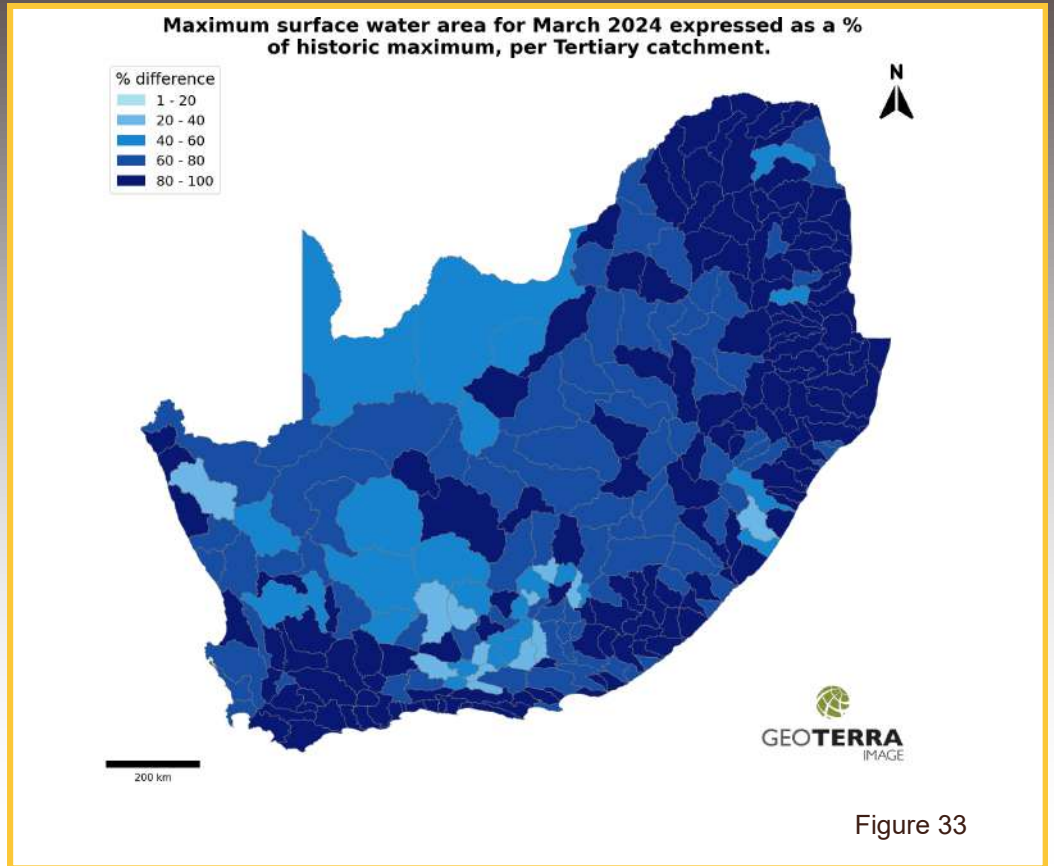


Figure 33

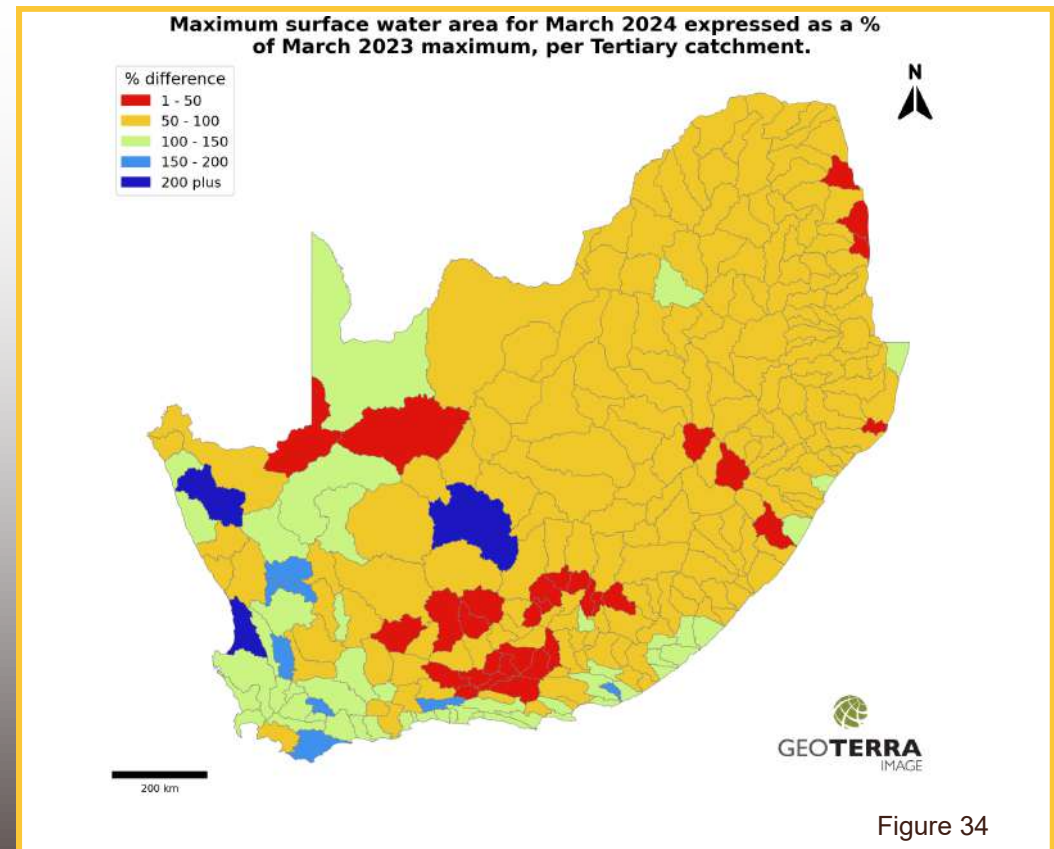


Figure 34





Agrometeorology

The programme uses weather and climate information for agricultural planning and the enhancement of crop and livestock production systems. The impact of climate variability and change in the agricultural sector is investigated. Due to the increasing pressure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions globally, climate change mitigation is also an important facet of our activities. The Weather Station Network and Climate Database are maintained as a national asset for the benefit of the agriculture sector.

Activities

Agrometeorology and Crop Modelling

- Assessing climate risk for an area in relation to a particular crop
- Agroclimatological analysis of the suitability for crop production at a particular location
- Development of early warning systems for climate hazards (e.g. drought, floods)
- Agrometeorological forecasting and advisory services
- Crop modelling to assess the impact of weather conditions and climate on agriculture
- Conducting crop yield forecasting exercises, hydrological modelling, hydrometeorology and biometereology studies

Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

- Conducting research on possible impact of projected climate change on agricultural activities, potential, greenhouse gas emissions from various land use, climate change, mitigation and adaptation strategies for agriculture
- Developing greenhouse gas inventories at farm and national levels
- Conducting research on climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies for agriculture
- Promoting low-carbon technologies

Climate Monitoring, Products and Services

- Developing and maintaining a network of over 500 weather stations distributed all over the country
- Archiving historical and current weather data of good quality with some datasets dating back to 1900
- Developing weather/climate products and services together with stakeholders and clients to meet their specific requirements
- Disseminating weather/climate data, products and services via multiple platforms

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SOIL, CLIMATE AND WATER



GeoInformatics

The programme focuses on applied Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and provides leadership in GIS products, solutions and decision support systems for agriculture and natural resources management. The Coarse Resolution Satellite Image Archive and Information Database is maintained as a national asset.

Activities

Digital/Smart Agriculture/Drone Platform - Applications

- Yield & production estimation
- Insurance index
- Mapping crop types
- Monitoring growth stages
- Weed/invasive sp. mapping
- Water requirement
- Smart & digital agriculture
- Disease/pests



Applications in Natural Resources/National Assets

- Early warnings
- National & Provincial advisories
- Crop suitability changes
- Crop statistics
- Crop stress
- Spatially explicit information dissemination systems, e.g. Umlindi newsletter



Applications in Rangelands, Livestock and Wildlife

- Early warnings
- National & Provincial advisories
- Rangeland suitability
- Rangeland dynamics
- Rangeland stresses
- Spatially explicit information dissemination systems, e.g. Umlindi newsletter



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SOIL, CLIMATE AND WATER



Analytical Laboratory

The unit focuses on the various procedures to analyze and determine the properties of soil, water and associated materials, mainly for agricultural purposes. The laboratory operates a range of equipment and participates in various quality control schemes, both local and international. The water analysis for anions is SANAS-accredited and other accreditations are underway.

Analyses and Services

Soil Physical Analysis

- Texture (sand, silt and clay content)
- Water-holding capacity
- Soil moisture content
- Bulk density
- Shrink-swell capacity

Soil Chemical Analysis

- pH
- Exchangeable and extractable cations
- Acidity
- Soil Organic Carbon
- Nitrogen content and C/N ratio
- Phosphorus
- Micronutrients

Soil Fertility

- Analysis package for farmers & gardeners
- Fertilizer recommendations for specific crops

Water Analysis

- pH, EC, anions, cations
- Water quality

ICP Scan

- Semi-quantitative scan for a range of elements (Li, Be, Ti, V, Cr, Mn, Co, Ni, Cu, Zn, As, Se, Rb, Sr, Mo, Cd, Sn, Sb, Te, Cs, Ba, La, W, Pt, Hg, Tl, Pb, Bi, U), can be done on soil, water and plant

Plant Material Analysis

For example: leaves, roots, growth media, etc. – drying, milling, pH, EC, C, N, nutrients and toxic elements

Special Sample Analysis

- For example: sludges, compost, fertilizers – composition and other properties
- Elemental analysis of animal tissue (e.g. hair, bones, liver, muscle, milk)

For more information or to obtain prices or quotation, contact the Laboratory Manager: Ms. Zanele Hlam
Tel: 012 310 2531 • E-mail: HlamZ@arc.agric.za

In order to assist clients who wish to send samples to ARC, the courier costs can be borne by ARC for analysis packages of R10 000 or more.

Contact the Laboratory Manager for details.

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Microbiology and Environmental Biotechnology Laboratory

The Microbiology and Environmental Biotechnology Research Group forms part of the Soil Science Programme at ARC-SCW. The research group utilizes both fundamental as well as applied microbiology and biotechnology approaches to address soil, climate and water related problems in a sustainable and eco-friendly manner.

Analyses and Services

Renewable energy generation

- Gas Chromatography analysis of biogas - methane and carbon dioxide content measurements

Nanotechnology

- UV-Visible spectrophotometer analysis for colloidal nanoparticle synthesis

Phytochemical extraction

- Hotplate extraction of phytochemicals
- Soxhlet extraction of phytochemicals
- Microwave-assisted extraction of phytochemicals

Community-Level Physiological Profiling (CLPP)

- Microbial functional analysis using Biolog 31C plates

For information on microbiological analyses contact

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In order to assist clients who wish to send samples to ARC, the courier costs can be borne by ARC for analysis packages of R10 000 or more.

Contact the Laboratory Manager for details.

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The Coarse Resolution Imagery Database (CRID)

NOAA AVHRR

ARC-NRE has an archive of daily NOAA AVHRR data dating from 1985 to 2004. This database includes all 5 bands as well as the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI), Active Fire and Land Surface Temperature (LST) images. The NOAA data are used, for example, for crop production and grazing capacity estimation.

MODIS

MODIS data is distributed by the Land Processes Distributed Active Archive Center (LP DAAC), located at the U.S. Geological Survey's EROS Data Center. The MODIS sensor is more advanced than NOAA with regard to its high spatial (250 m² to 1 km²) and spectral resolution. ARC-NRE has an archive of MODIS (version 4 and 5) data.

- MODIS v4 from 2000 to 2006
- MODIS v5 from 2000 to present

Datasets include:

- MOD09 (Surface Reflectance)
- MOD11 (Land Surface Temperature)
- MOD13 (Vegetation Products)
- MOD14 (Active Fire)
- MOD15 (Leaf Area Index & Fraction of Photosynthetically Active Radiation)
- MOD17 (Gross Primary Productivity)
- MCD43 (Albedo & Nadir Reflectance)
- MCD45 (Burn Scar)

Coverage for version 5 includes South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

More information:

<http://modis.gsfc.nasa.gov>

VG4AFRICA and GEOSUCCESS

SPOT NDVI data is provided courtesy of the VEGETATION Programme and the VGT4AFRICA project. The European Commission jointly developed the VEGETATION Programme. The VGT4AFRICA project disseminates VEGETATION products in Africa through GEONETCast.

ARC-NRE has an archive of VEGETATION data dating from 1998 to the present. Other products distributed through VGT4AFRICA and GEOSUCCESS include Net Primary Productivity, Normalized Difference Wetness Index and Dry Matter Productivity data.

Meteosat Second Generation (MSG)

ARC-NRE has an operational MSG receiving station. Data from April 2005 to the present have been archived. MSG produces data with a 15-minute temporal resolution for the entire African continent. Over South Africa the spatial resolution of the data is in the order of 3 km. ARC-NRE investigated the potential for the development of products for application in agriculture. NDVI, LST and cloud cover products were some of the initial products derived from the MSG SEVIRI data. Other products derived from MSG used weather station data, including air temperature, humidity and solar radiation.

Rainfall maps

- Combined inputs from 450 automatic weather stations from the ARC-NRE Soil, Climate and Water weather station network, 270 automatic rainfall recording stations from the South African Weather Service (SAWS), satellite rainfall estimates from the Famine Early Warning System Network: <http://earlywarning.usgs.gov> and long-term average climate surfaces developed at the ARC-NRE.

Solar Radiation and Evapotranspiration maps

- Combined inputs from 450 automatic weather stations from the ARC-NRE Soil, Climate and Water weather station network.
- Data from the METEOSAT Second Generation (MSG) 3 satellite via GEONETCAST: <http://www.eumetsat.int/website/home/Data/DataDelivery/EUMETCast/GEONETCast/index.html>.



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What does Umlindi mean?
UMLINDI is the Zulu word for “the watchman”.

DISCLAIMER:

The ARC-NRE and its collaborators have obtained data from sources believed to be reliable and have made every reasonable effort to ensure accuracy of the data. The ARC-NRE and its collaborators cannot assume responsibility for errors and omissions in the data nor in the documentation accompanying them. The ARC-NRE and its collaborators will not be held responsible for any consequence from the use or misuse of the data by any organization or individual.