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The Watchman

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NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENGINEERING
Soil, Climate and Water

CONTENTS:

agriculture, land reform & rural development
Department: Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

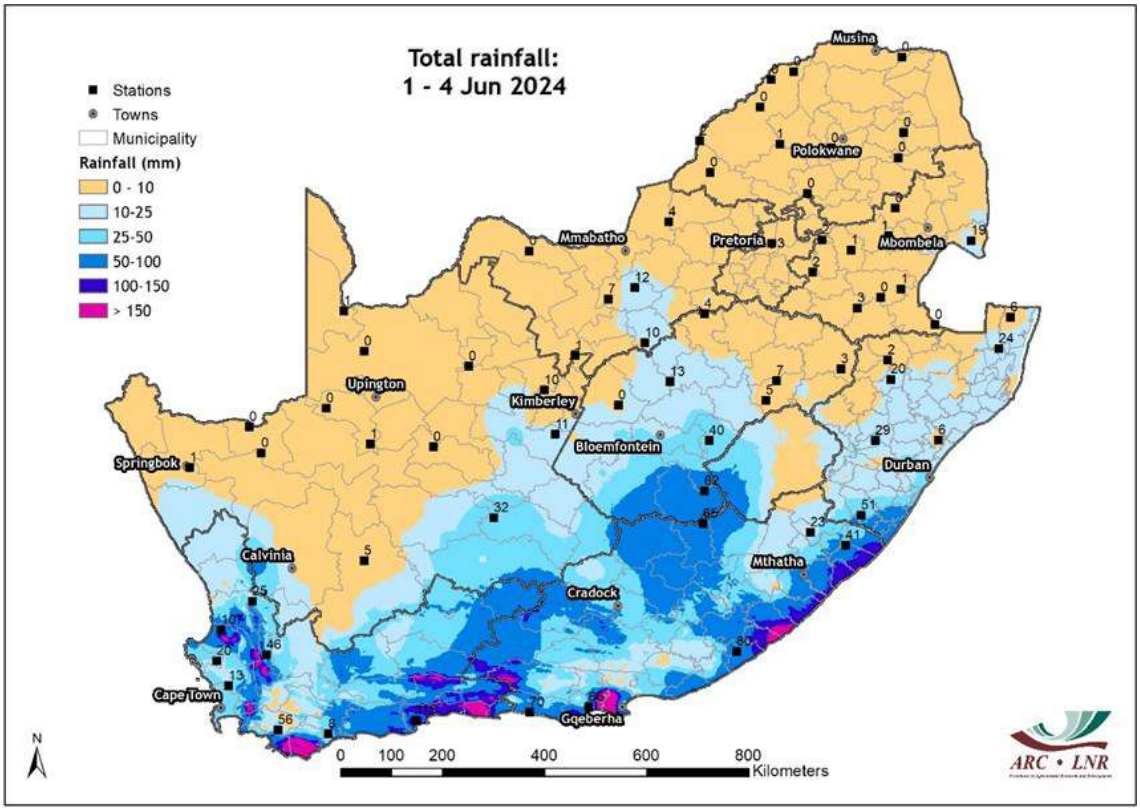
South African Weather Service

240th Edition

Image of the Month

Stormy start to June and first widespread cold conditions

In early June 2024, an intense cut-off low pressure system resulted in widespread precipitation across most of the country and the first widespread frost over the interior. As the system developed in the southwest, heavy rain occurred over the southeastern to southern coastal areas and adjacent interior associated with easterly to southeasterly winds in these areas. Along parts of the Garden Route, rainfall totals associated with the system exceeded 300 mm. Widespread rain also occurred in association with the surface cold front and low over the winter rainfall region, but totals were somewhat lower over the western to northern parts of the region compared to the south. As the low pressure system moved across the country, a band of thundershowers developed ahead of it and moved over the central to eastern parts. Some of these thundershowers became severe such as in the case of the tornado in the Tongaat area of eastern KwaZulu-Natal. Cold air underneath the system resulted in snow over parts of the southern to western high-lying parts of the interior, as far north as the central parts of the Free State. The cold air associated with the system also resulted in very low minimum temperatures over the northeastern parts of the country with widespread frost. This was the first significant frost over the interior following above-normal temperatures during May. Vegetation across this region will now be more susceptible to fires through the remainder of winter and early spring.



The Agricultural Research Council - Natural Resources and Engineering (ARC-NRE) Soil, Climate and Water campus collected the data, generated the products and compiled the information contained in this newsletter, as part of the Coarse Resolution Imagery Database (CRID) project that was funded by the Department of Agriculture and Department of Science and Technology at its inception and is currently funded by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD).

1. Rainfall

Overview:

In May 2024, a clear decrease in total rainfall was evident across the country following above-normal rainfall experienced during April. Dry conditions persisted across much of the summer rainfall region, with rainfall amounts ranging from 0 to 5 mm. However, isolated stations in the North West, Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces reported near-normal rainfall, receiving 50-100% of the typical rainfall for this time of year. Along the KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape coasts, rainfall totals ranged from 5 to 25 mm, with Mbazwana in KwaZulu-Natal and East London in the Eastern Cape each recording up to 100 mm. A similar pattern was observed in the adjacent all-year and winter rainfall regions, although the amounts received remained below normal compared to the long-term average. These dry conditions are expected to persist in the summer rainfall region, while in the winter rainfall region, rainfall is anticipated to increase in the coming months.

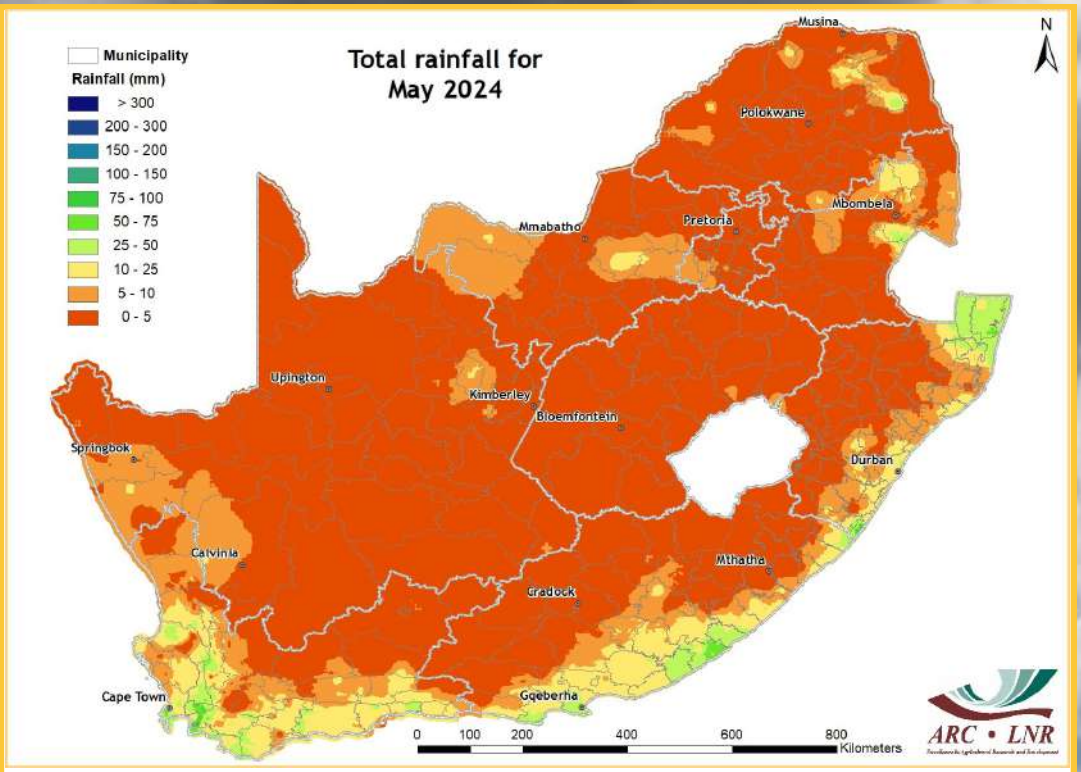


Figure 1

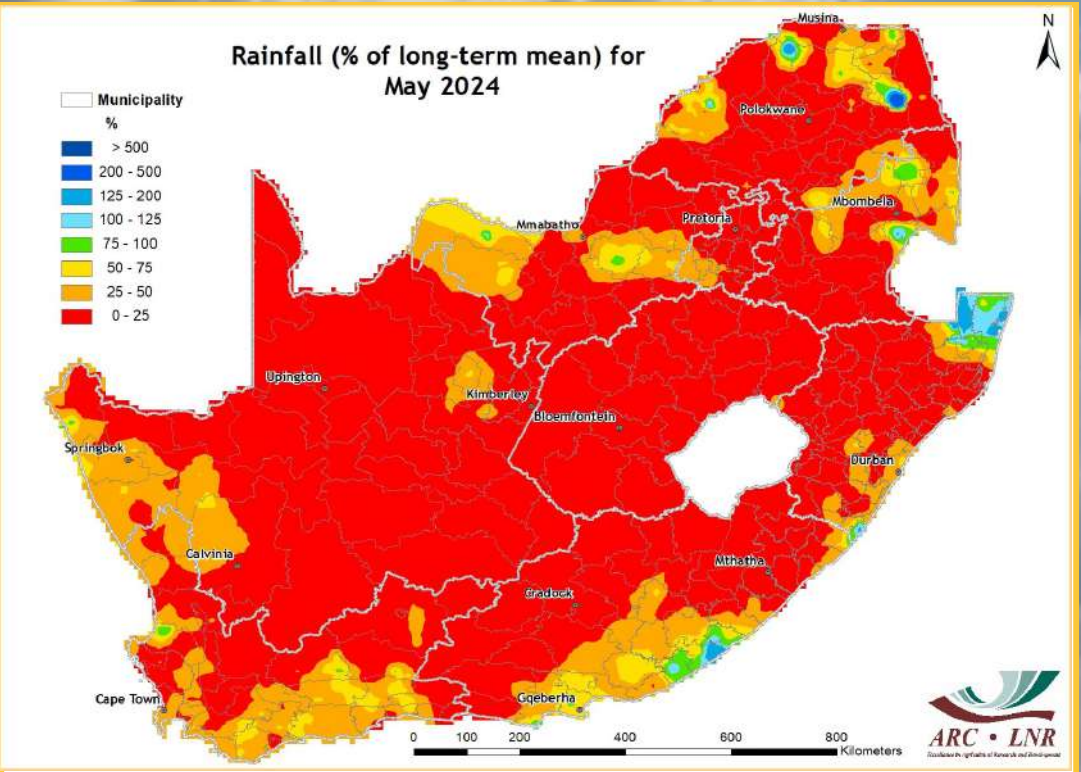


Figure 2

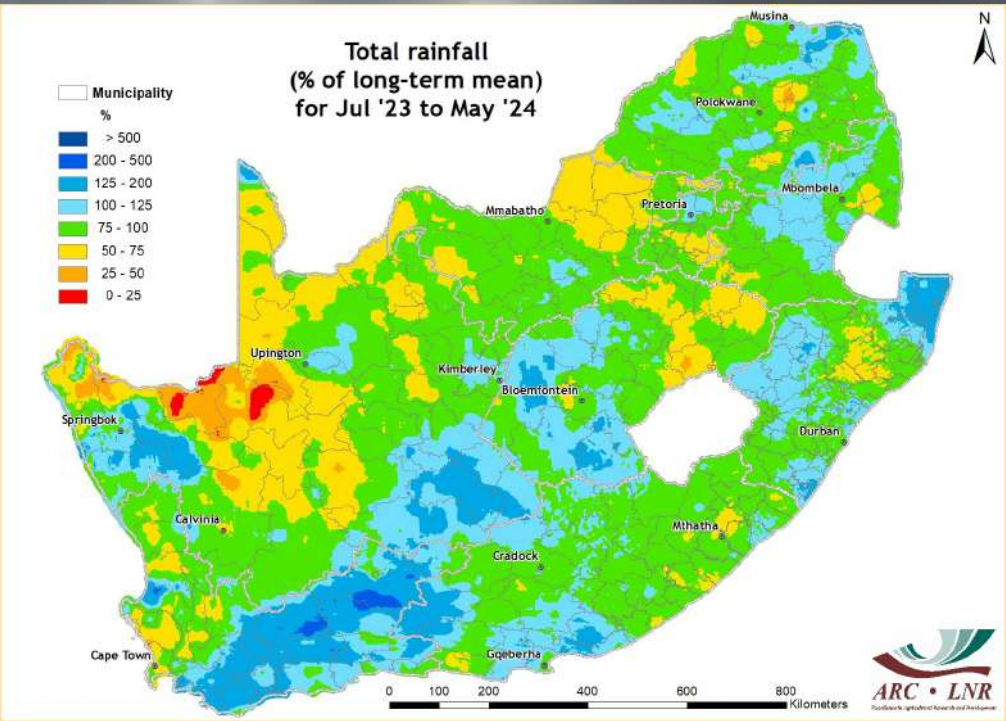


Figure 3

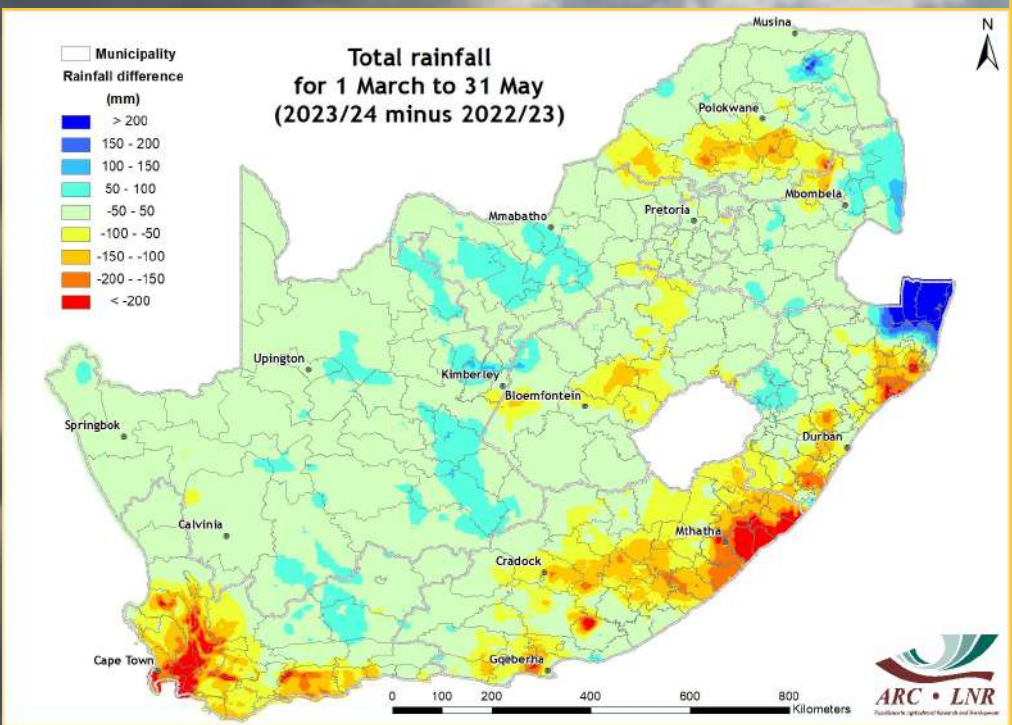


Figure 4

Figure 1:
May 2024 was predominantly dry, with stations in the Western Cape and isolated parts of the summer rainfall region recording less than 25 mm of rainfall. However, a few places in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape received up to 100 mm.

Figure 2:
Widespread below-normal rainfall conditions occurred across the country during May.

Figure 3:
Rainfall totals for the period between July 2023 and May 2024 indicate near- to above-normal rainfall over the country, with below-normal conditions observed in parts of the Northern Cape.

Figure 4:
During March-May 2024 the south-western parts of the Western Cape, moving towards the eastern coast, parts of the Free State and Limpopo received significantly less rain compared to the same 3-month period last year. The rest of the country received relatively the same amounts of rainfall, with isolated positive values noted in the Northen Cape, Mpumalanga and northern KZN.

Questions/Comments:
MasuphaE@arc.agric.za
Johan@arc.agric.za

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 May 2024 are shown in Figures 5-8. The short-term SPI map indicates near-normal conditions over the country, with moderate drought notable over isolated parts of the summer rainfall region and parts of the Western Cape and adjacent Northern Cape. In contrast, adjacent areas in the Overberg, Cape Winelands and central Karoo experienced mildly to severely wet conditions. The medium-term SPI map displays moderately to extremely wet conditions over the Western Cape, isolated parts of the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape. Moderate to severe drought can be observed over greater parts of the Highveld. The long-term SPI maps indicate predominantly wet conditions over greater parts of the country.

Questions/Comments:
MasuphaE@arc.agric.za
Johan@arc.agric.za

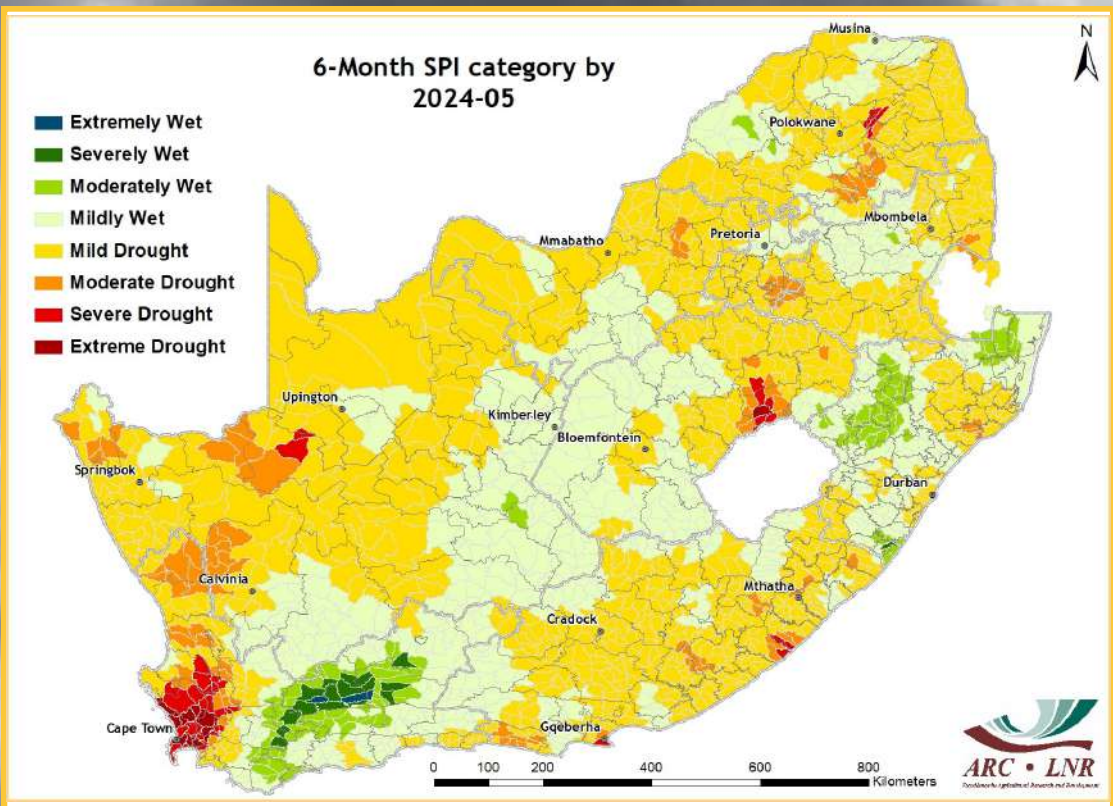


Figure 5

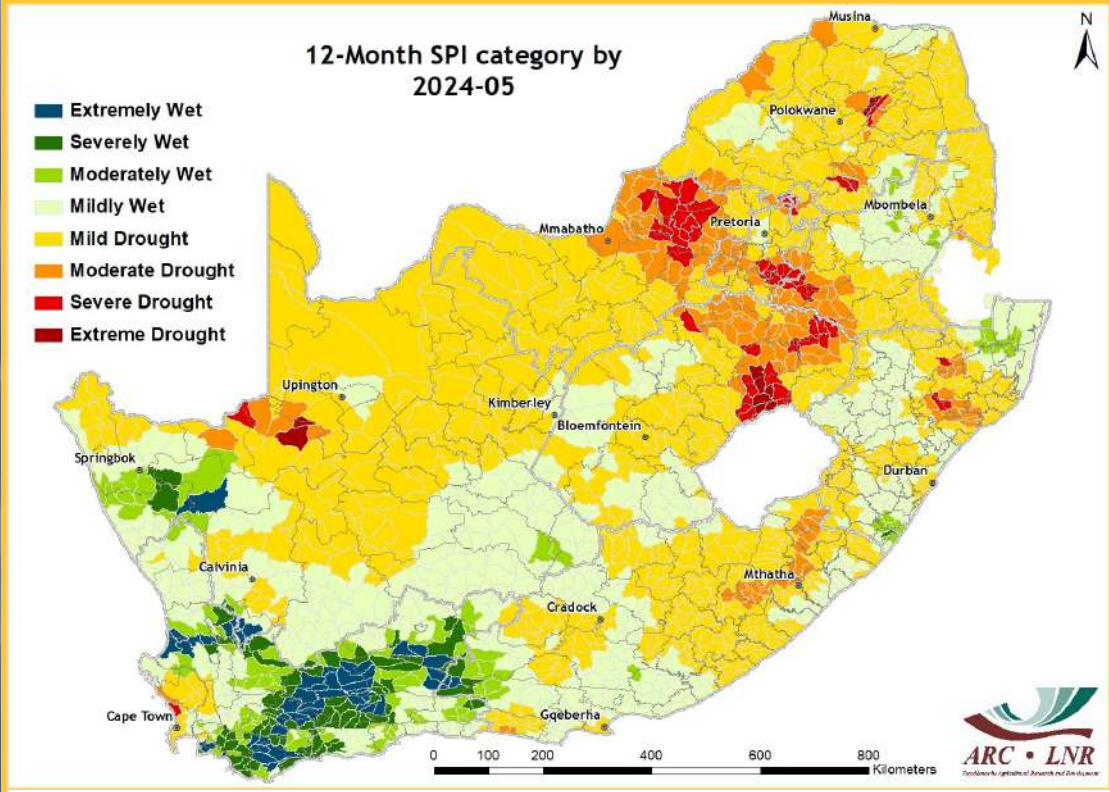


Figure 6

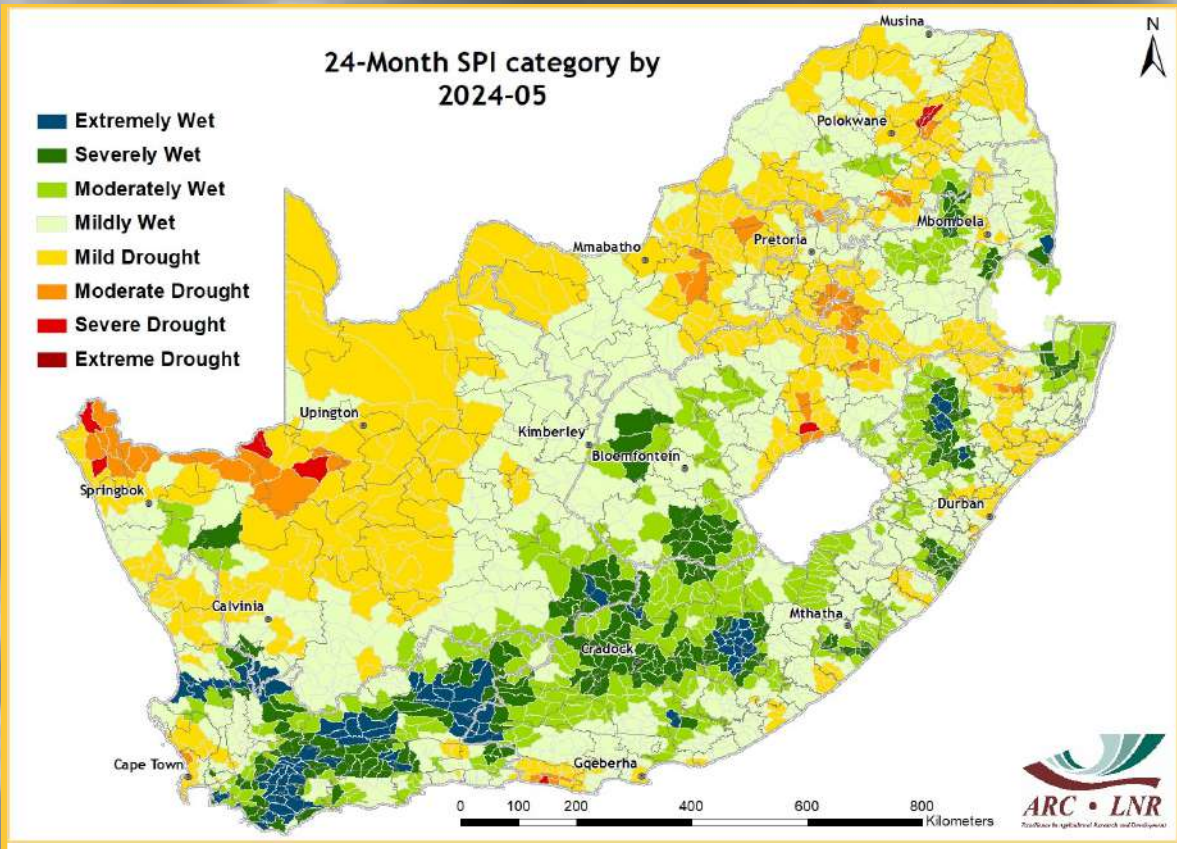


Figure 7

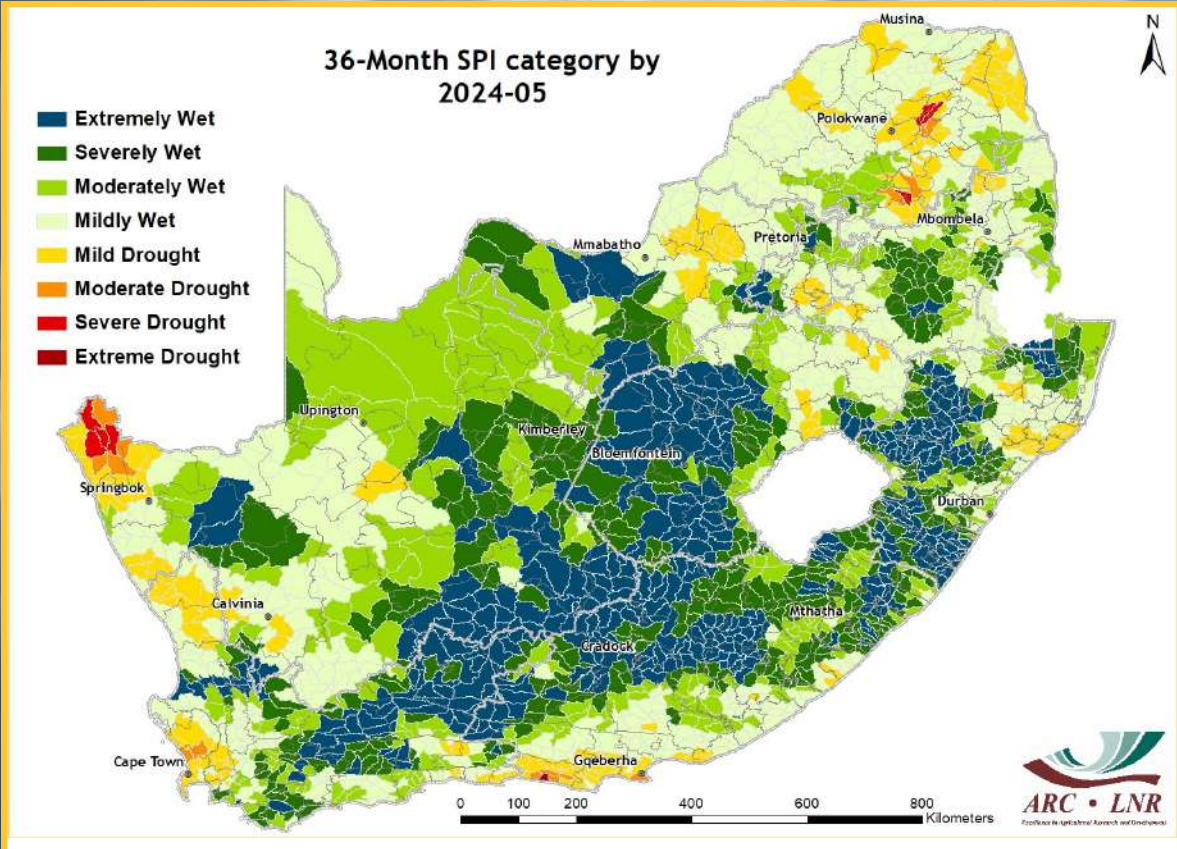


Figure 8

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.

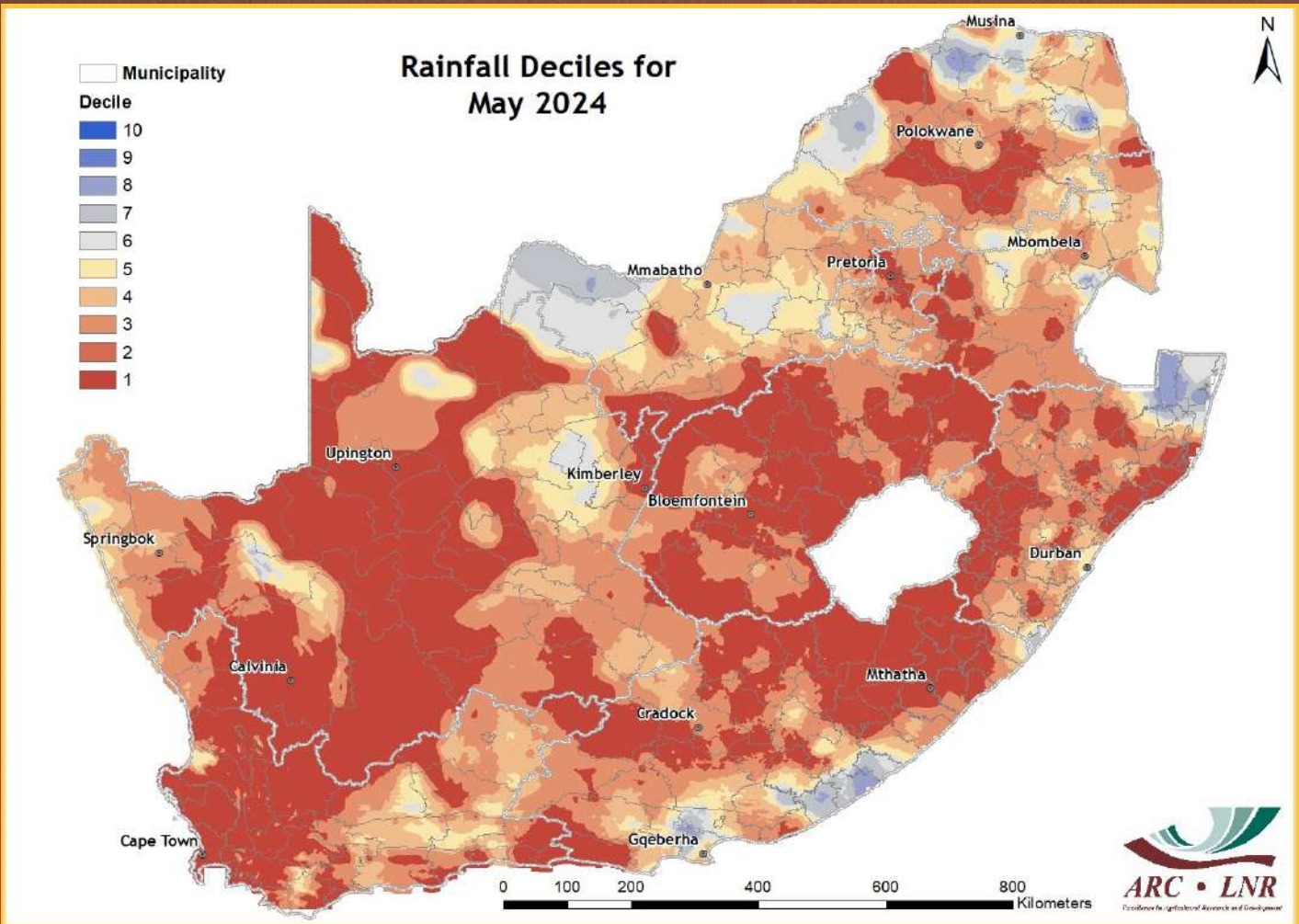


Figure 9

Figure 9:
In May 2024, isolated parts of the Eastern Cape, North West, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo received rainfall totals that compare well with historically wetter May months. The rest of the country remained dry.

Questions/Comments:
MasuphaE@arc.agric.za
Johan@arc.agric.za

4. Vegetation Conditions

Vegetation Mapping

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

NDVI=(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.

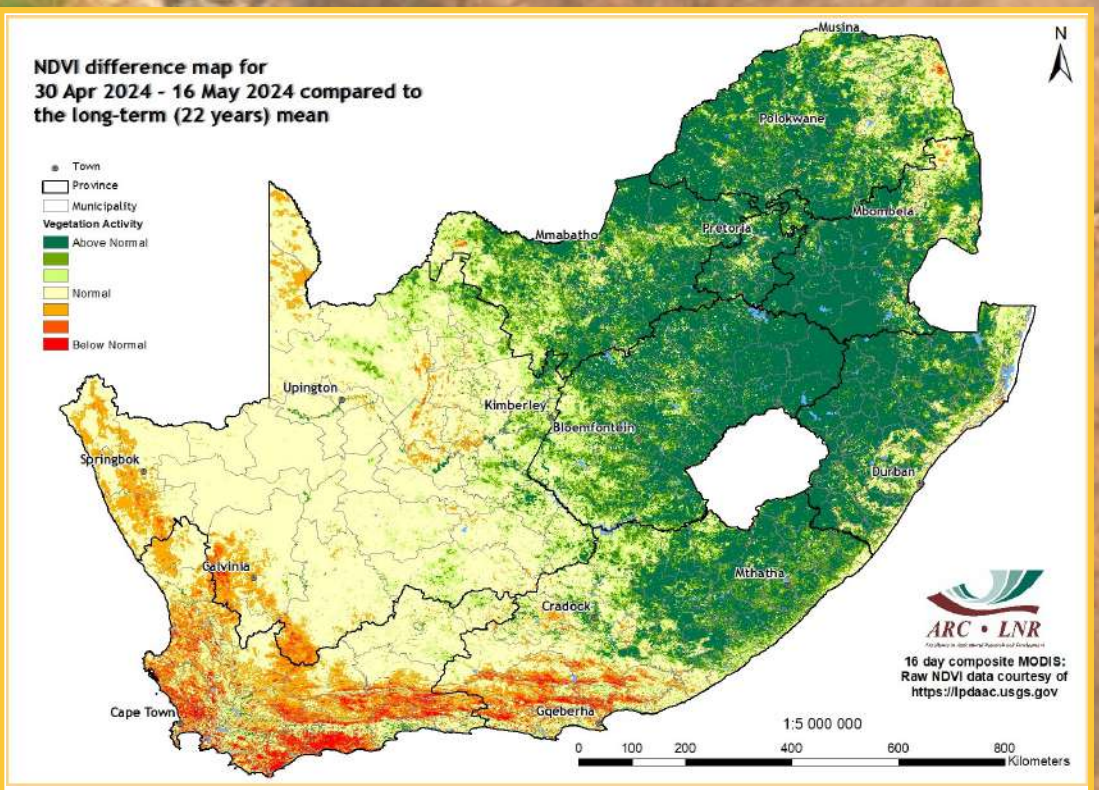


Figure 10

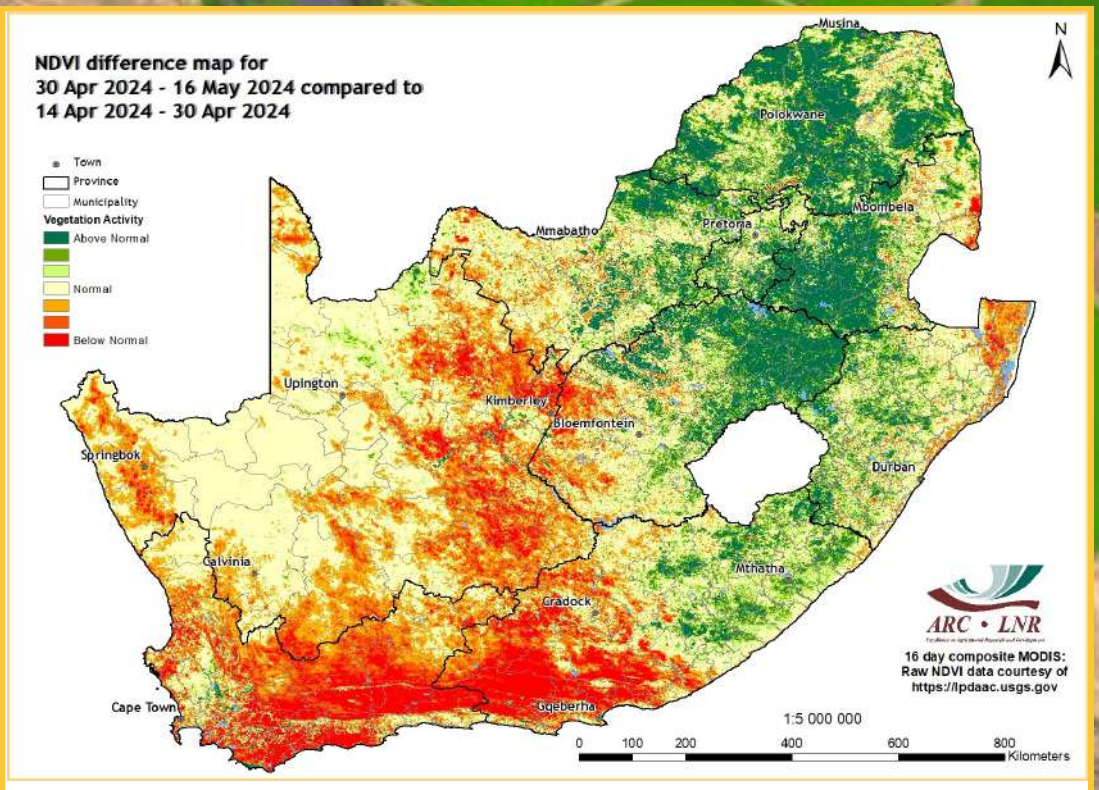


Figure 11

Figure 10:
Compared to the historical averaged vegetation conditions, the 16-day NDVI map for May 2024 shows that the eastern half of the country experienced above-normal vegetation activity while the western half experienced below-normal conditions.

Figure 11:
The 16-day NDVI difference map for May 2024 compared to the preceding 16-day period shows that the western half of the country experience below-normal vegetation activity while the eastern half experienced above-normal conditions.

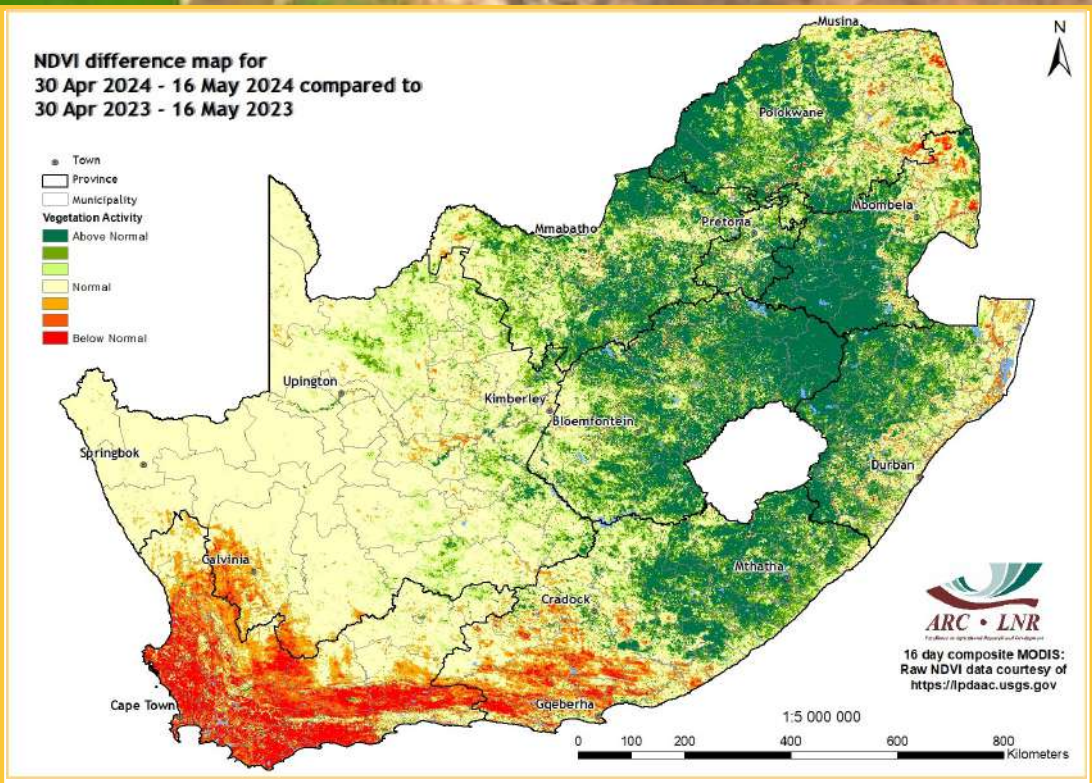


Figure 12

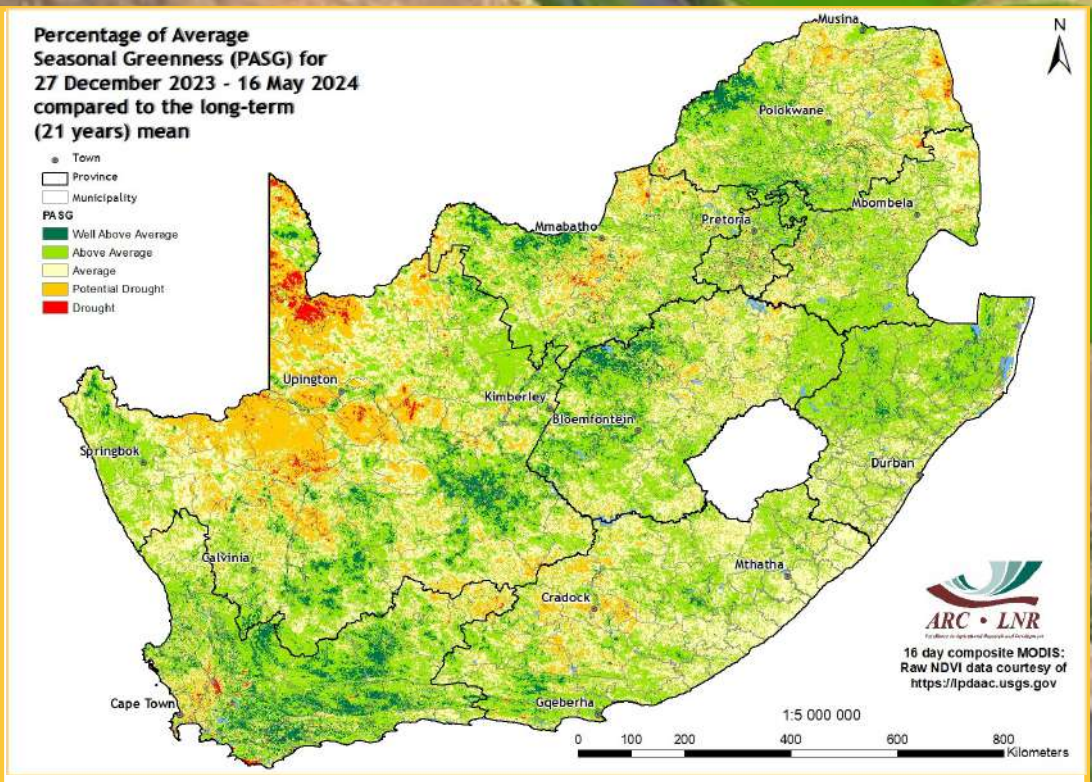


Figure 13

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
Summary: July to June

Figure 12:
The 16-day NDVI difference map for May 2024 compared to the same period last year shows that a larger part of the eastern half of the country experienced above-normal vegetation activity, while the western half experienced normal to below-normal conditions.

Figure 13:
The Percentage of Average Seasonal Greenness (PASG) map for the past 4 months, compared to the long-term mean, shows that the country continued to experience a mixture of vegetation conditions with patches of both above-normal seasonal vegetation greenness and potential drought.

Questions/Comments:
MaakeR@arc.agric.za

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.

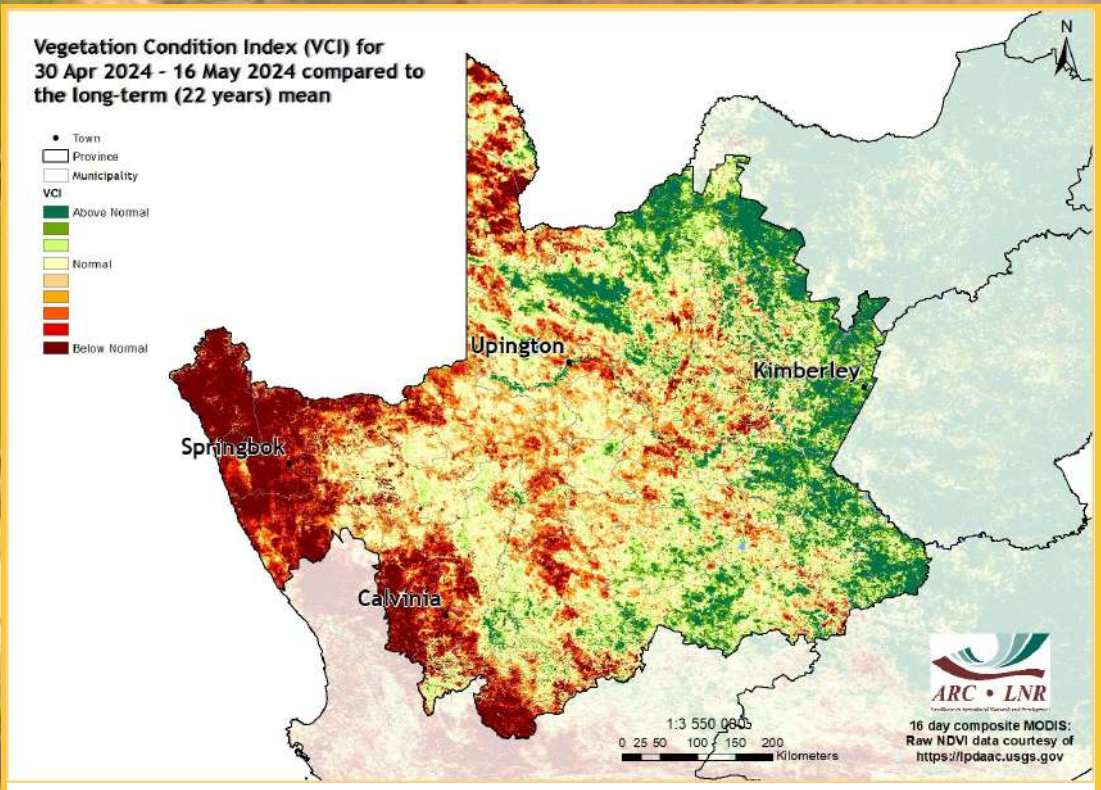


Figure 14

Figure 14:
The 16-day VCI map for May 2024 indicates that most parts of the Northern Cape experienced below-normal vegetation conditions, with patches of above-normal activity in the far east of the province.

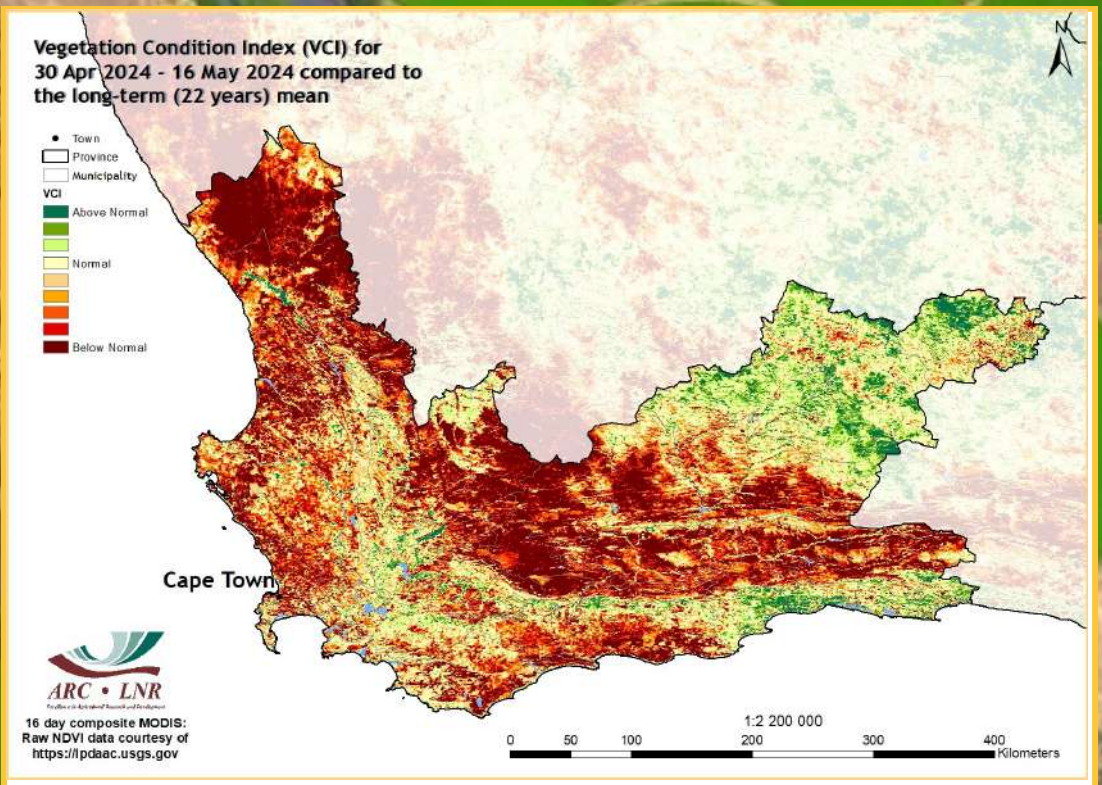


Figure 15

Figure 15:
The 16-day VCI map for May 2024 indicates that the majority of the Western Cape experienced poor vegetation conditions, with the exception of the central Karoo which experienced above-normal activity.

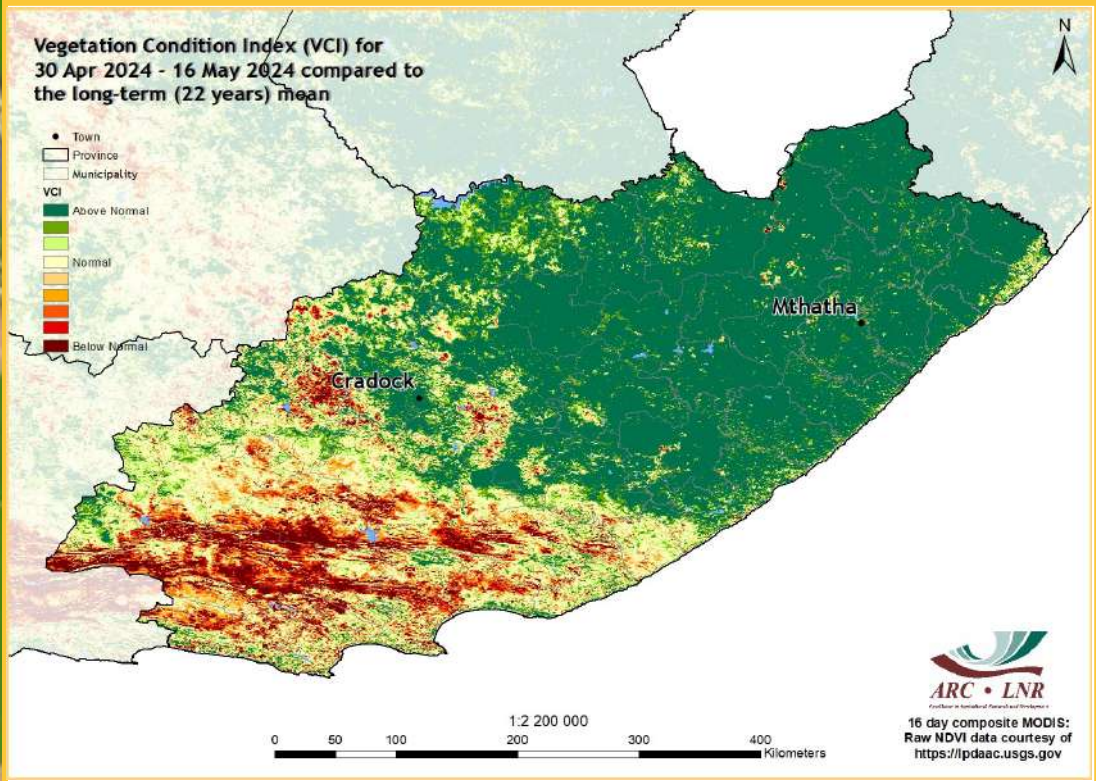


Figure 16

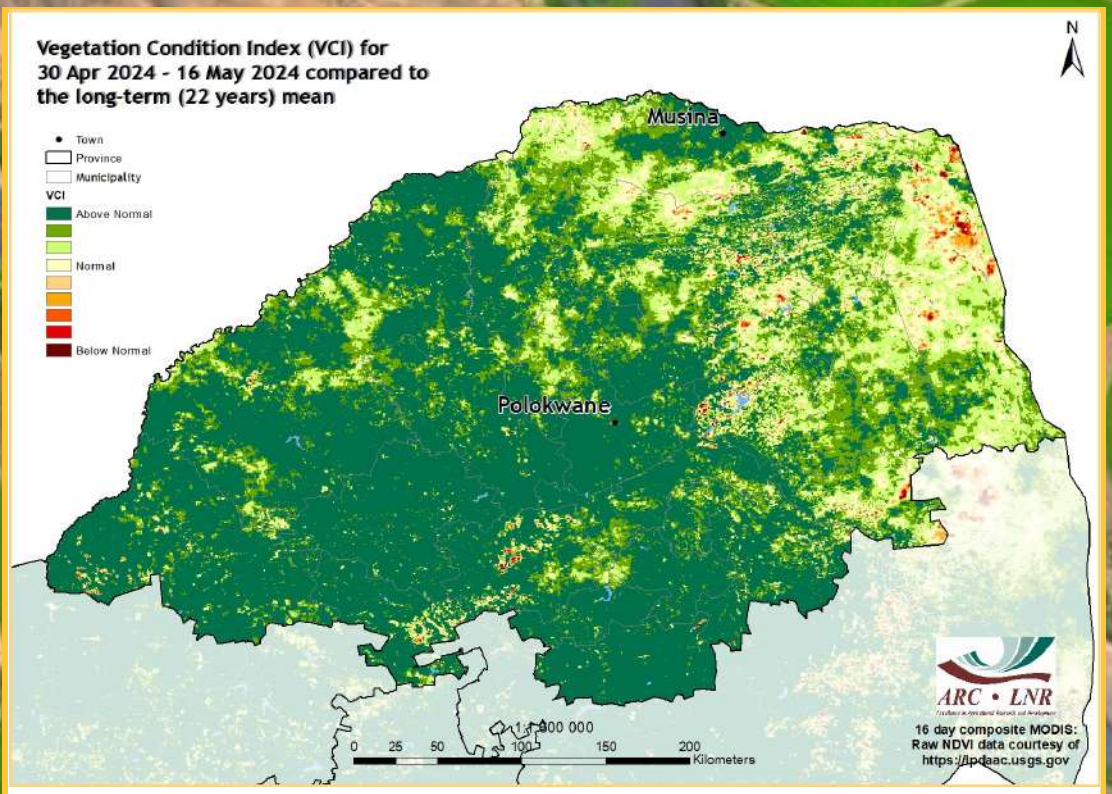


Figure 17

Figure 16:
The 16-day VCI map for May 2024 indicates that the eastern half of the Eastern Cape experienced above-normal vegetation conditions while the western half experienced mainly below-normal activity.

Figure 17:
The 16-day VCI map for May 2024 indicates that most parts of Limpopo experienced above -normal vegetation conditions.

Questions/Comments:
MaakeR@arc.agric.za

6. Vegetation Conditions & Rainfall

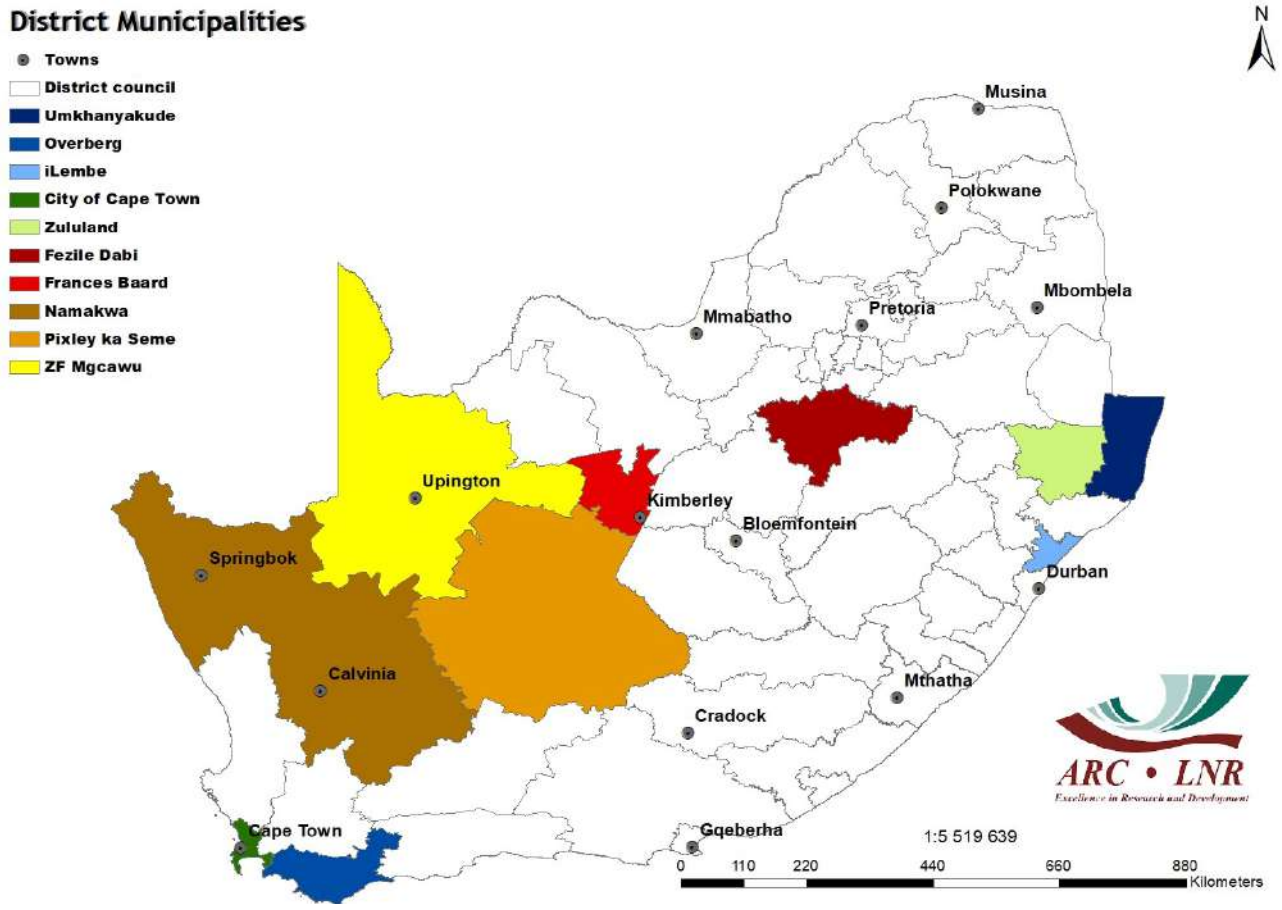


Figure 18

Rainfall and NDVI Graphs

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

Questions/Comments:
MaakeR@arc.agric.za

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.

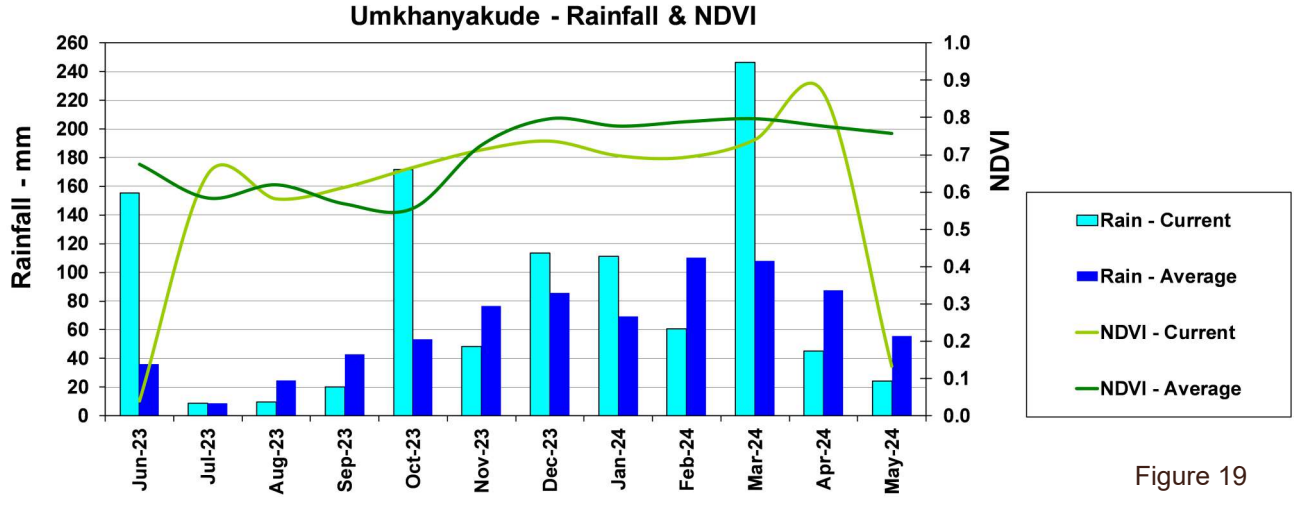
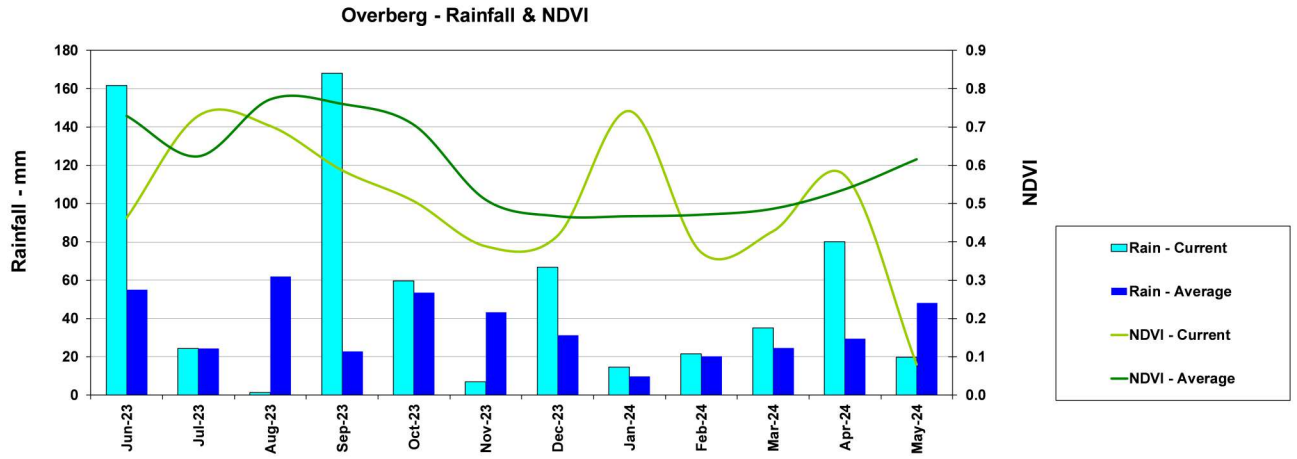


Figure 19



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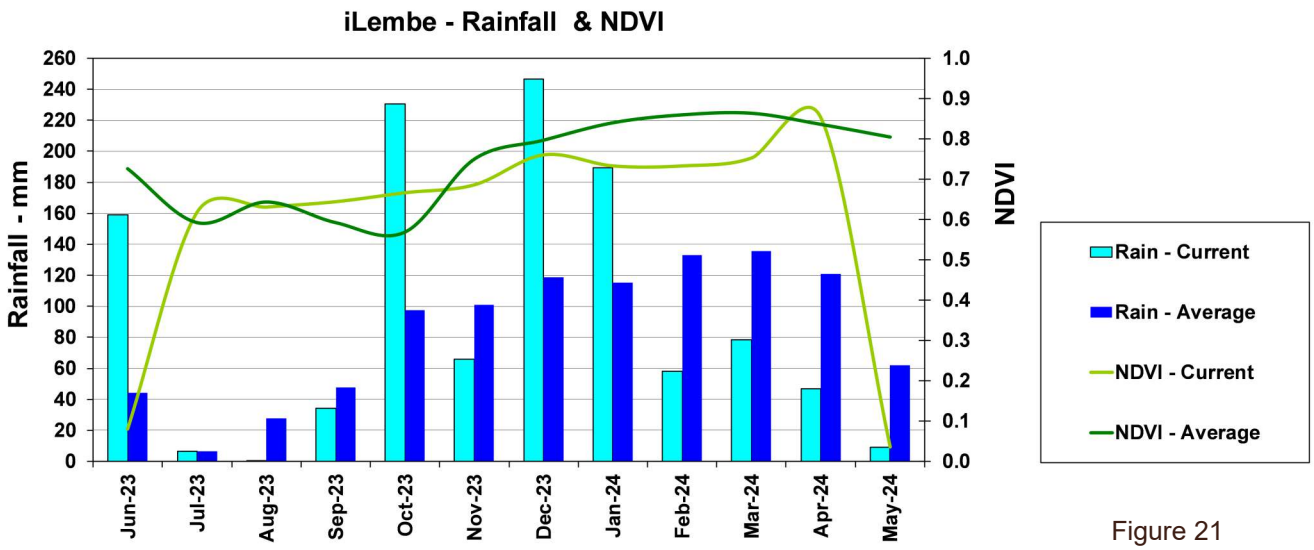

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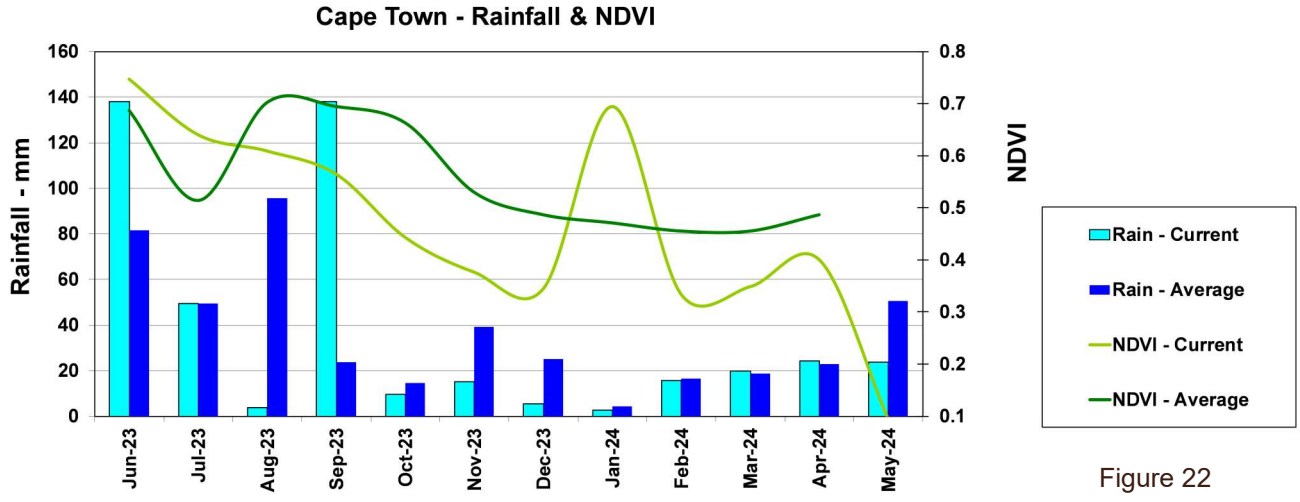

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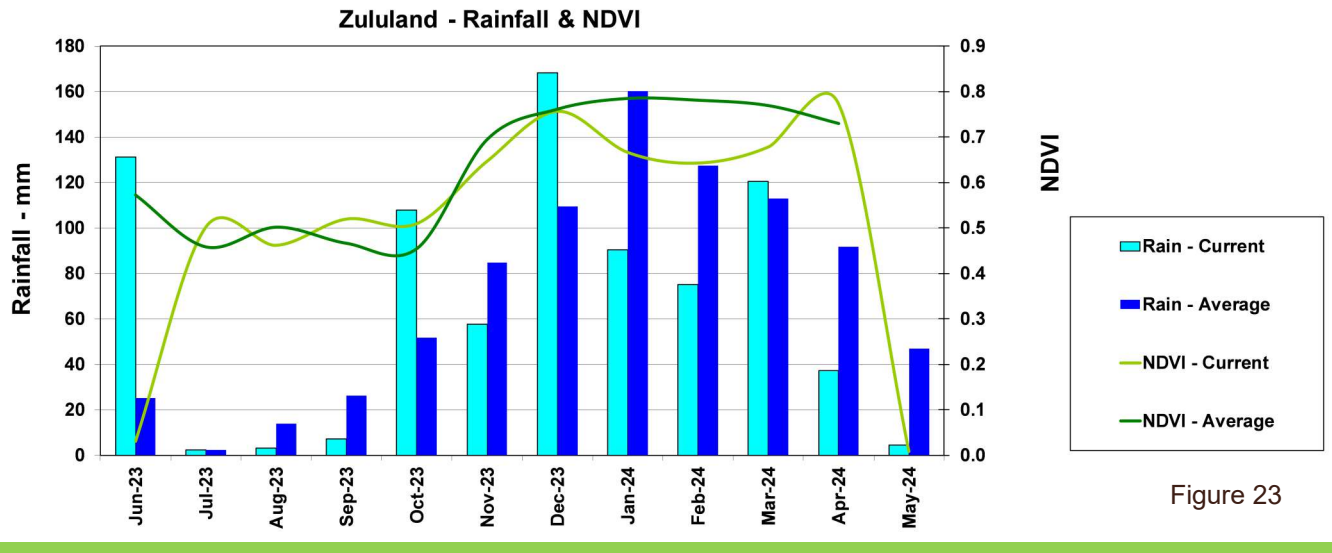

Figure 23

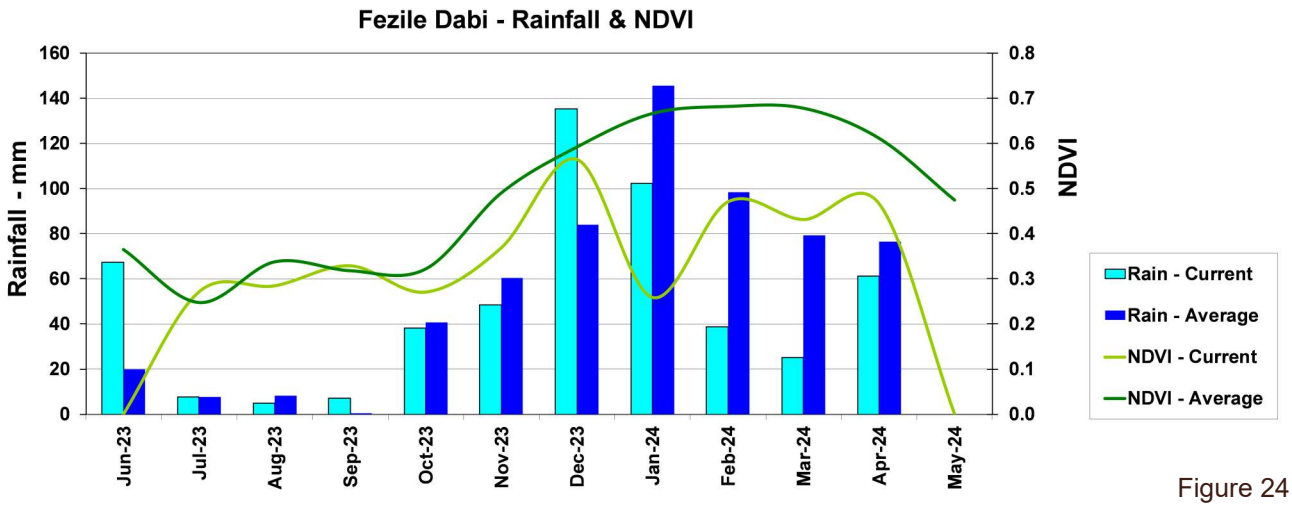

Figure 24

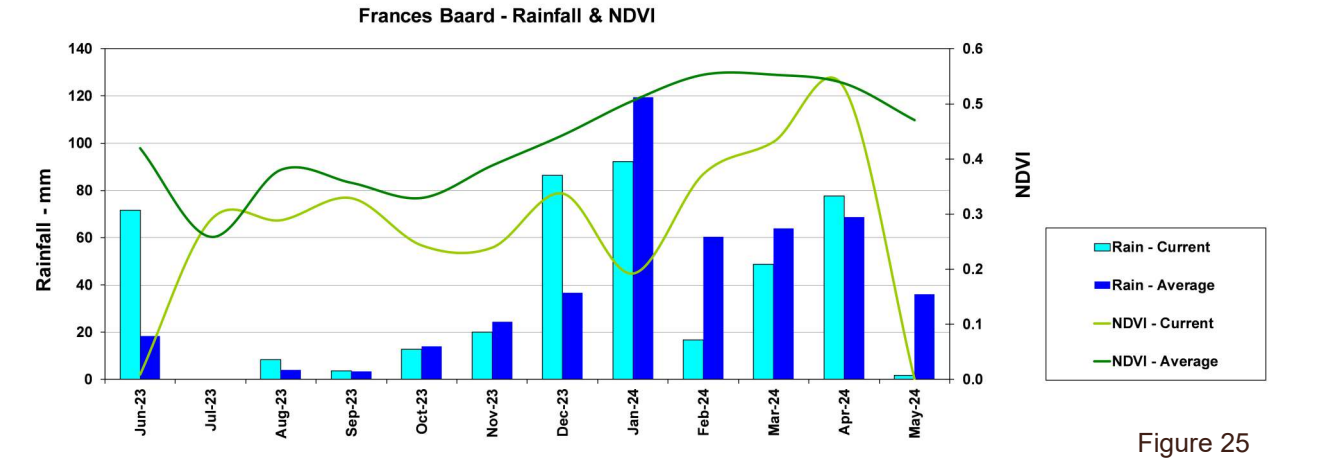

Figure 25

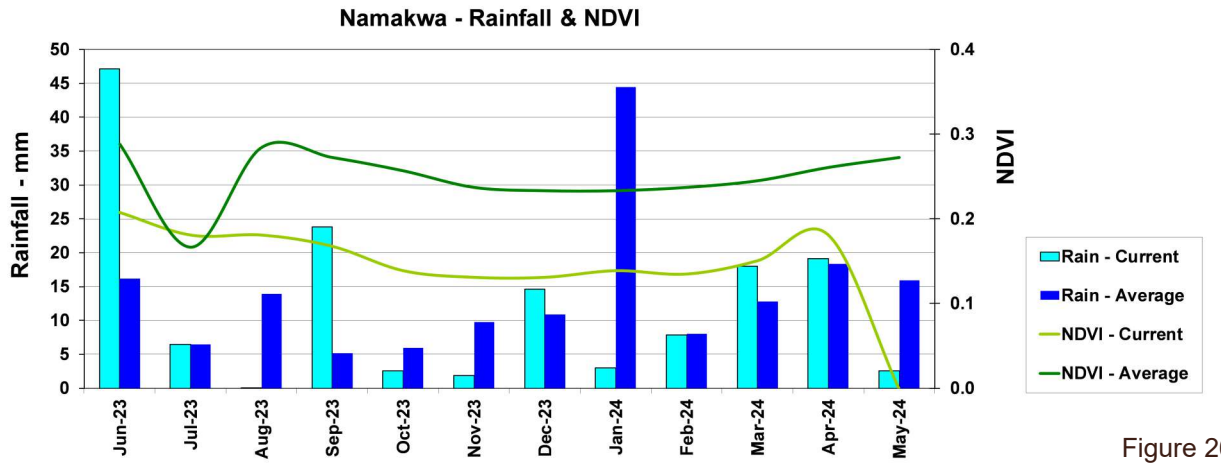

Figure 26

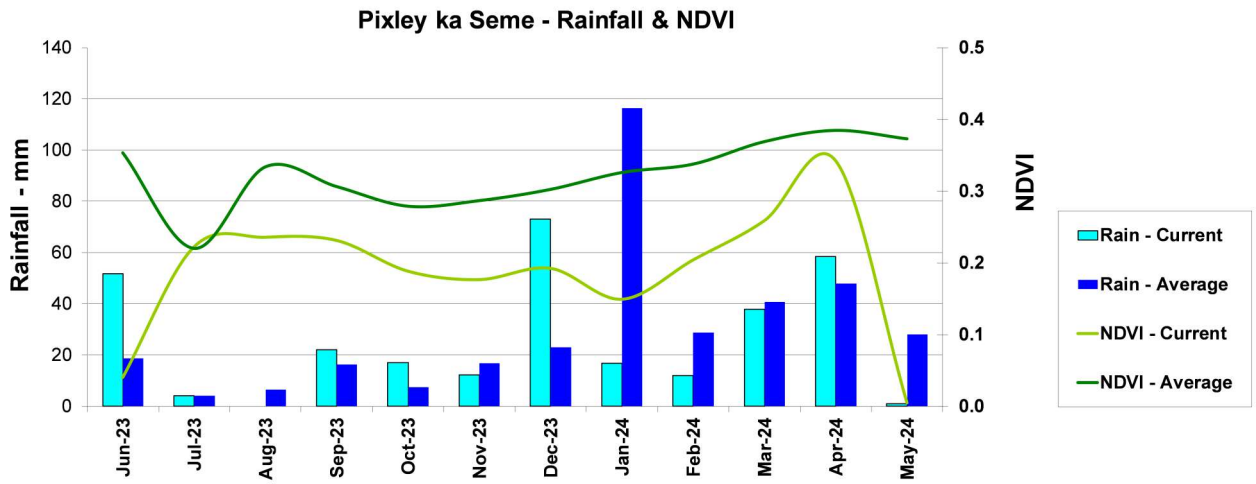

Figure 27

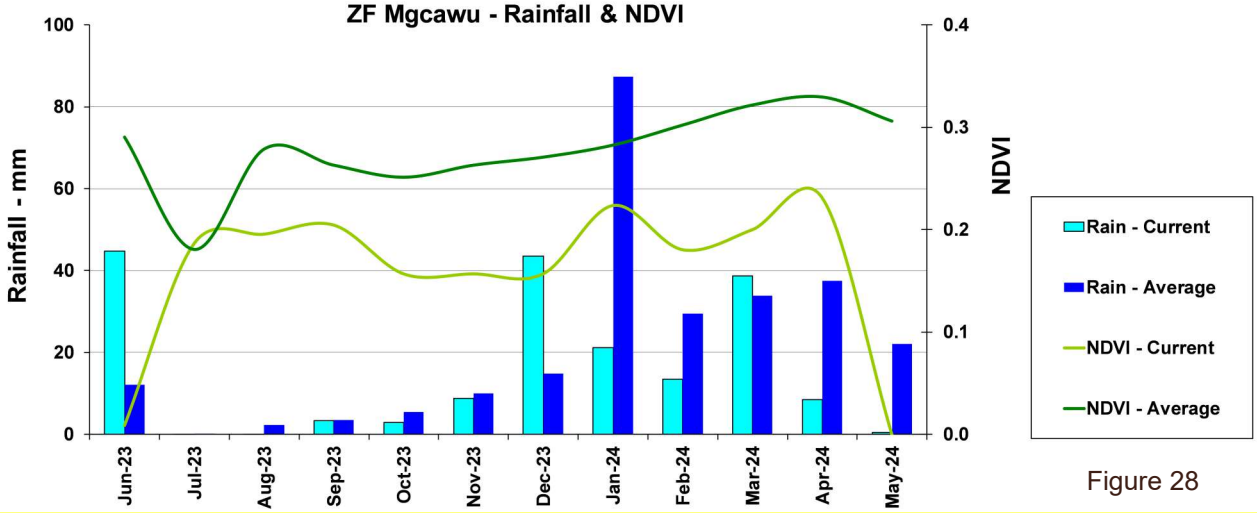

Figure 28

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 30 April to 1 June 2024 per province. Fire activity was higher in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo compared to the long-term average.

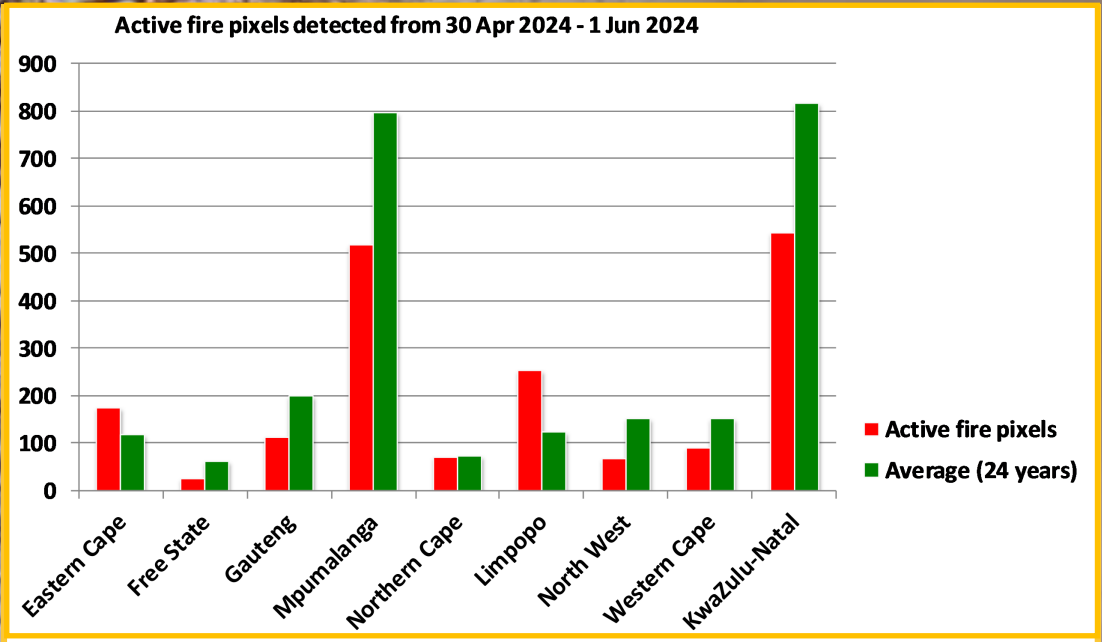

Figure 29

Figure 30:
The map shows the location of active fires detected between 30 April and 1 June 2024.

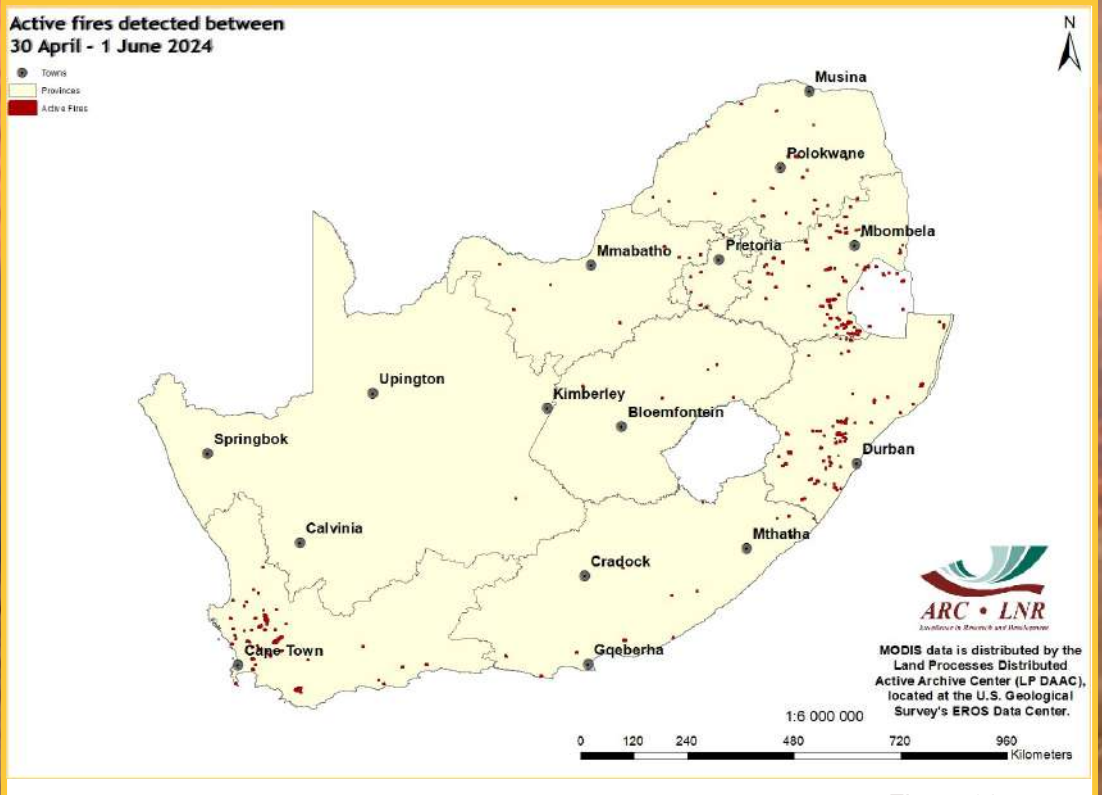

Figure 30

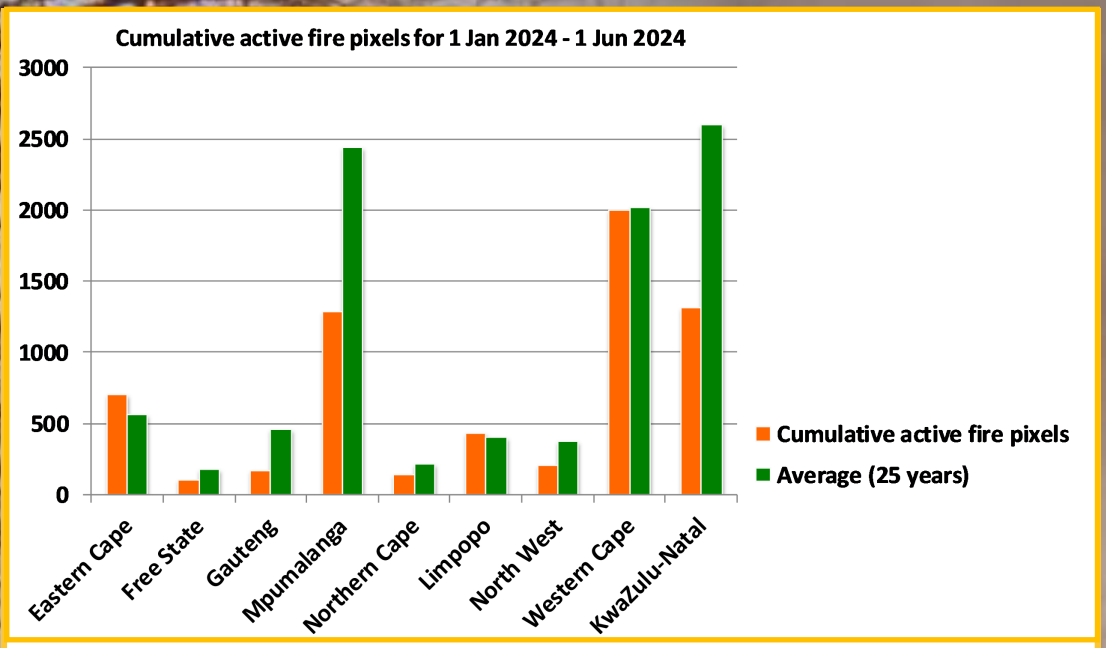

Figure 31:
The graph shows the total number of active fires detected from 1 January to 1 June 2024 per province. Fire activity was higher in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo compared to the long-term average.

Figure 31

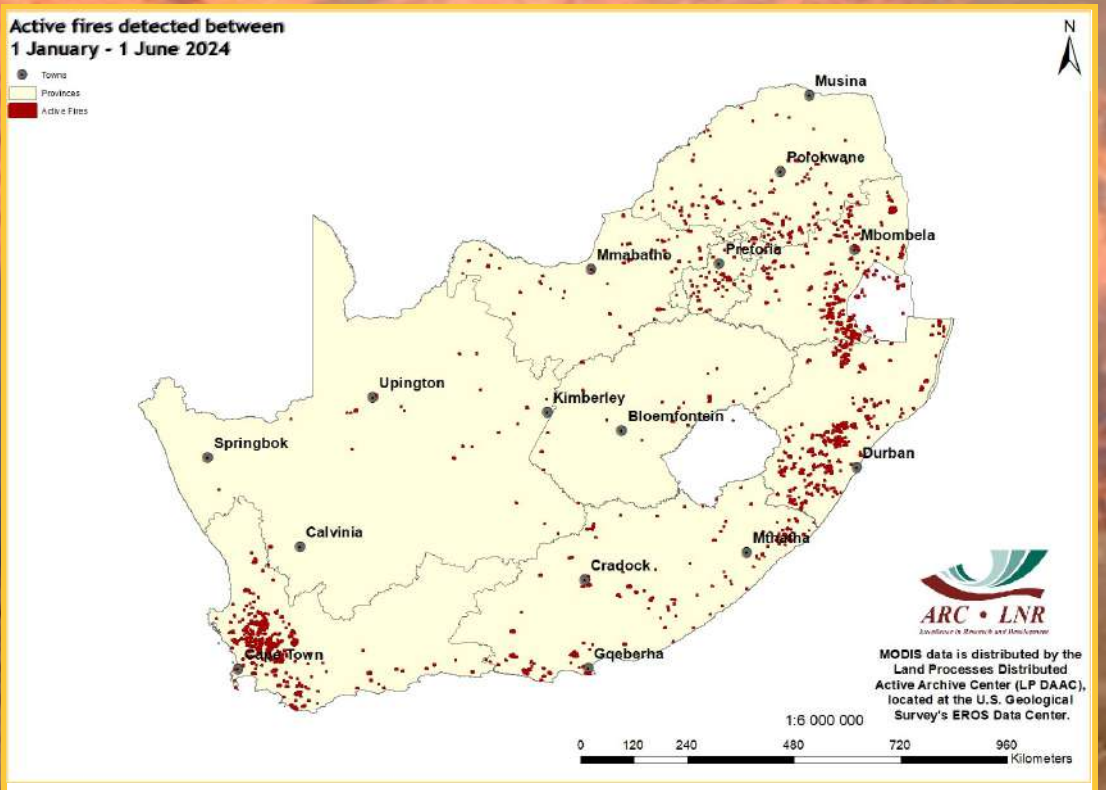

Figure 32:
The map shows the location of active fires detected between 1 January and 1 June 2024.

Questions/Comments:
MaakeR@arc.agric.za

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 8 years. This 8-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 May 2024 shows a similar water distribution pattern to the previous month, with the majority of catchments showing difference levels of 60% or more, indicative of better rainfall conditions this year,compared to previous years. However, a number of catchments across the country have dropped from April's 80-100% levels to 60-80%, indicating that, whilst better than in previous years, the situation in May is not as good as it was in April 2024.

The comparison between May 2024 and May 2023 exhibits a near identical situation to that recorded last month. This continues to indicate an improvement in water conditions in 2024 compared to last year, especially in several Karoo and east coast catchments (150-200% plus levels). The remainder of the country shows little change from the previous year (50-150% levels).

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

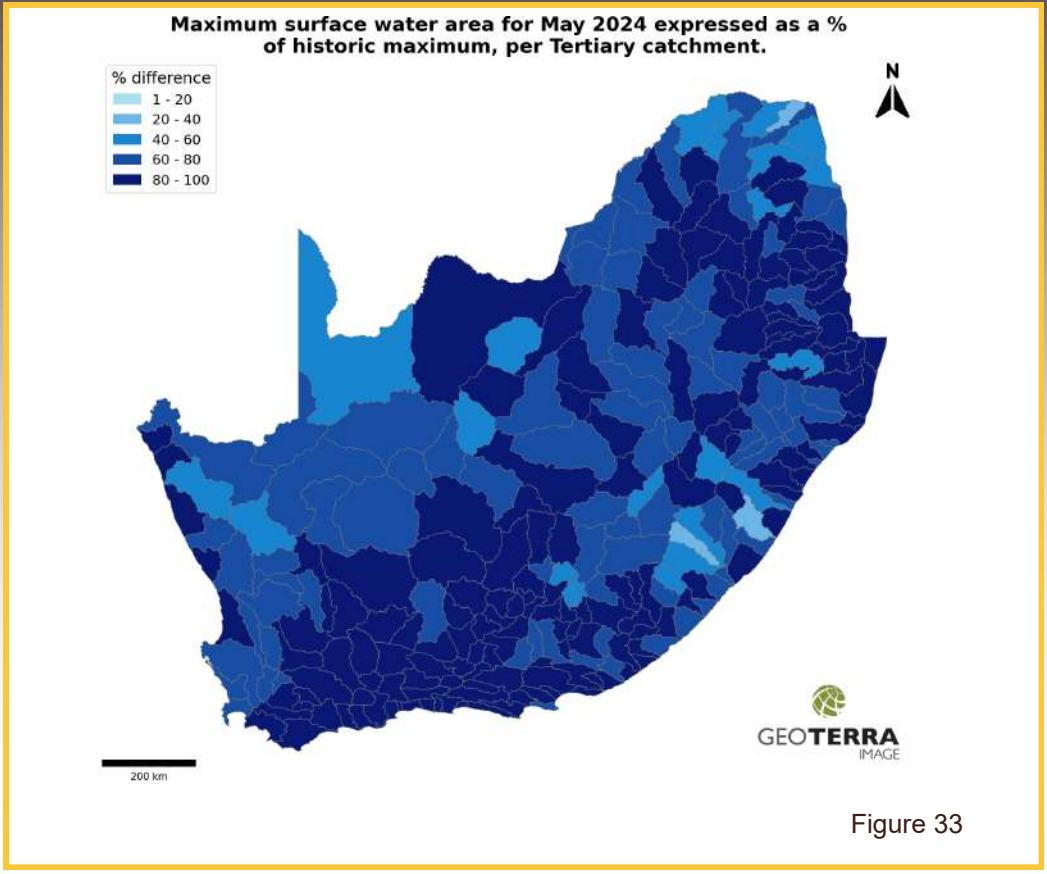

Figure 33

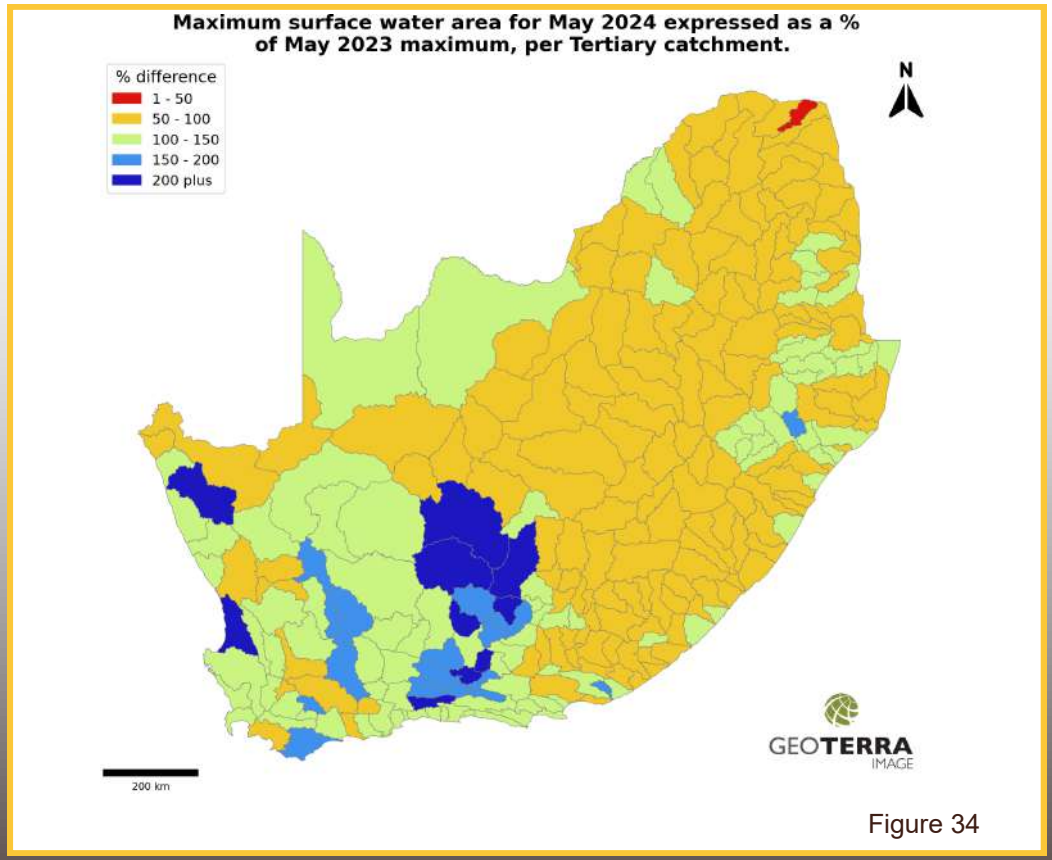

Figure 34

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ARC - NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENGINEERING

SOIL, CLIMATE AND WATER

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

Contact Person: *Dr Mokhele Moeletsi*
Tel: 012 310 2537 • E-mail: moeletsim@arc.agric.za

ARC-Natural Resources and Engineering
Soil, Climate and Water Campus
600 Belvedere Street, Arcadia, 0083
Private Bag X79, Pretoria 0001
Tel: 012 310 2500 • Fax: 012 323 1157
Website: www.arc.agric.za

For more information contact:
Adri Laas - Public Relations Officer
E-mail: adril@arc.agric.za

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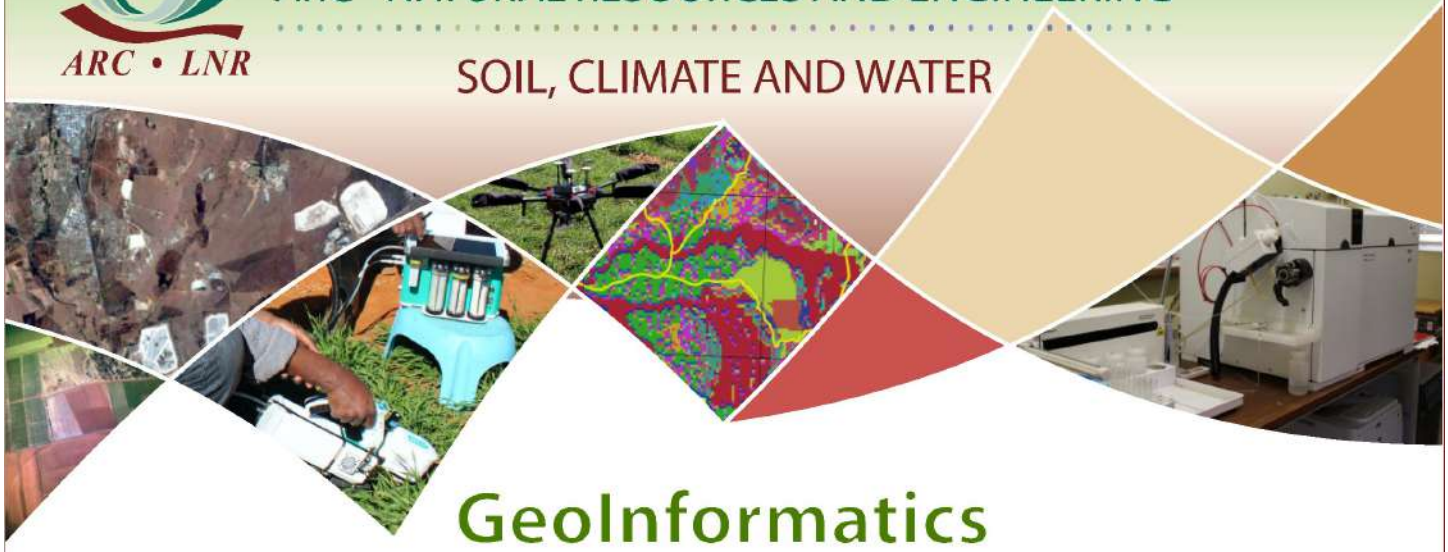

GeoInformatics

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

Contact Person: *Dr George Chirima*
Tel: 012 310 2672 • E-mail: chirimaj@arc.agric.za

ARC-Natural Resources and Engineering
Soil, Climate and Water Campus
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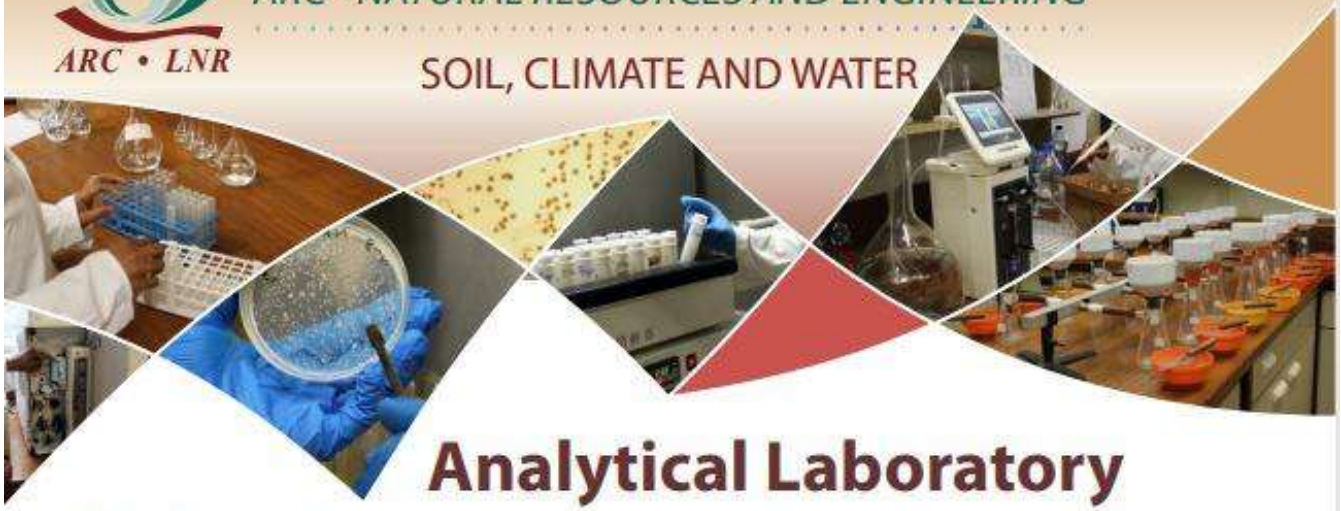

Analytical Laboratory

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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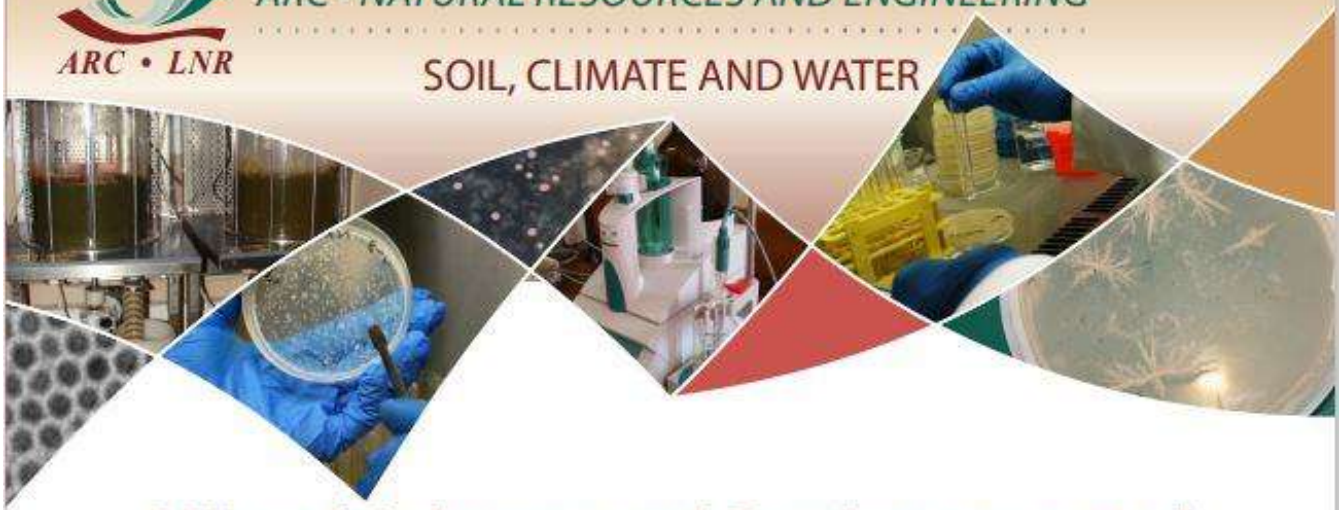

Microbiology and Environmental Biotechnology Laboratory

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
Dr Ashira Roopnarain
Tel: 012 310 2650 • E-mail: RoopnarainA@arc.agric.za

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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 m^2 to 1 km^2) 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

VGT4AFRICA 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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Private Bag X79, Pretoria 0001,
South Africa
600 Belvedere Street, Arcadia, Pretoria, South Africa

Reneilwe Maake
Project Leader: Coarse Resolution Imagery Database (CRID)
Tel: 012 310 2533
E-mail: MaakeR@arc.agric.za

The operational Coarse Resolution Imagery Database (CRID) project of ARC-NRE is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD). Development of the monitoring system was made possible at its inception through LEAD funding from the Department of Science and Technology.

For further information please contact:
Reneilwe Maake – 012 310 2533, MaakeR@arc.agric.za
Adri Laas – 012 310 2518, AdriL@arc.agric.za

To subscribe to the newsletter, please submit a request to:
MaakeR@arc.agric.za

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