

Growing season rainfall at Birchip - is there any pattern?

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The graph below (figure 1) shows the growing season rainfall totals recorded at Birchip in the last 97 years. For this exercise, we have chosen the April to October time period as the "normal" growing season in this area.

Many people say that this does not consider pre-sowing soil moisture, nor does it identify years with uneven rainfall distributions (eg., when waterlogging is followed by a dry finish). Climatologists will also point out that 97 years is a very short time span, and so cannot be used to indicate definite climate trends. All these claims have merit. In comparing these figures we simply want to see if any patterns emerge.

As a guide to the years which one might call "average", the graph has different coloured bars for the totals that were within 10% of the mean GSR (257.2mm). This is equal to all figures between 231mm and 283mm.

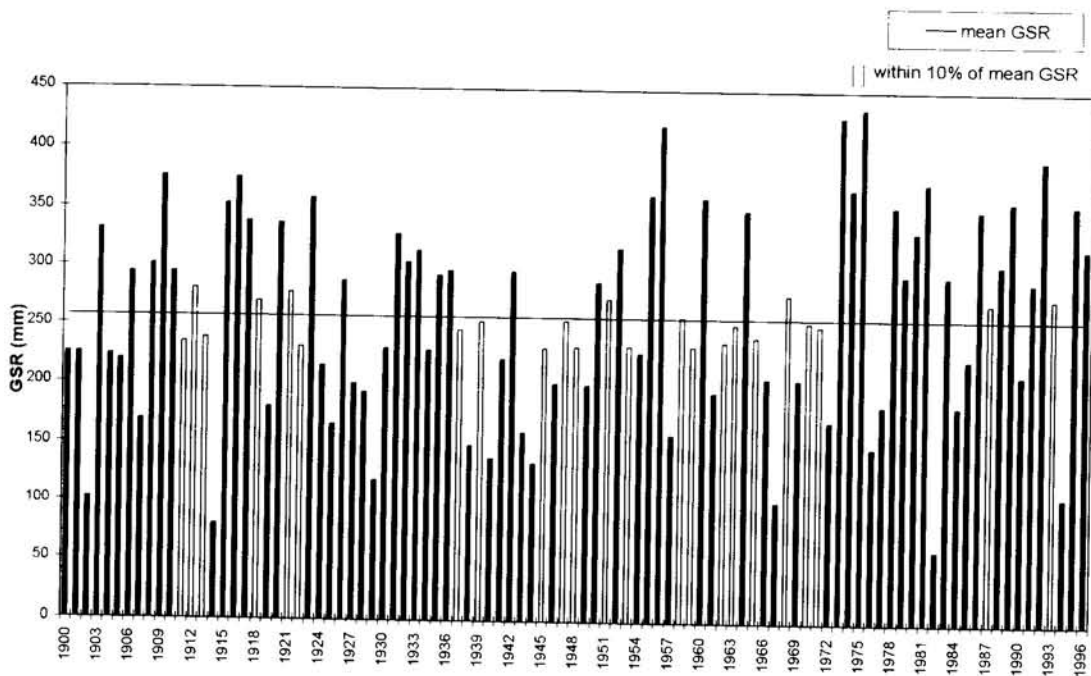


Figure 1. Growing Season Rainfall at Birchip (1900-96).

In the last 25 years (1972-96), only twice (1987 and 1993) has the GSR been within 10% of the mean. In the preceding quarter of a century (1947-71), 12 of the GSR totals were within this range. This represents a change from 48% to only 8%. So we have gone from 25 years of reasonably stable rainfall patterns (during the growing season) immediately after the war, to a relatively volatile period more recently.

Another interesting thing to note is that there have been three instances when the GSR has been abnormal for an extended period of time. These are the 11 years from 1900 to 1910, the 14 years between 1923 and 1936, and the 15 years from 1972 to 1986.

Remember: BCDS Field Day - 17th September