



NSW Government

Department of Water & Energy

Critical water planning for the Lower Darling

Issue 5 | 15 February 2008

Current water availability

The recent rainfall and flooding in Queensland is now making its way into the Darling River. On current estimates, this flow will provide approximately 150 gigalitres (GL) to the Menindee Lakes, and adds to the 350 GL that reached the Lakes following the recent floods in the Border Rivers before Christmas. This water will continue to flow into Menindee until March 2008.

Rainfall across the region from 15 December 2007 to 7 February 2008 saw falls of 347 millimetres (mm) at Charleville, 155 mm at Goondiwindi, 408 mm at Coonamble, 388 mm at Coonabarabran, and 77 mm at Bourke.

The following table shows storage volumes in Lower Darling storages as at 14 February 2008

Storage @ 14 February 2008	Volume ML	Full volume ML	% capacity
Lake Wetherell	170 500	262 000 (surcharge)	70
Lake Pamamaroo	182 700	278 000	63
Total Menindee Lakes Storage *	353 200		

What this means

The flooding and subsequent flows that have made their way into the Darling River and Menindee Lakes has provided enough water for a High Security allocation of 100 per cent and a General Security allocation of 50 per cent to be made for licence holders in the Lower Darling.

It is not expected that the flood from the Warrego River region will translate into large flows in the Darling River. This is because much of the flow will spread out across the floodplain and be taken up by seepage and evaporation. Substantial volumes will also flow into the Cuttaburra Channel system and to the Paroo River system, where they will terminate.

The Department does expect that the inflows will be sufficient to fill Lakes Wetherell and Pamamaroo but significantly larger inflows will be required before any flows will be directed into Lake Menindee.

Releases from the Menindee Lakes system into the Lower Darling River recommenced on the 7 January 2008. As at 7 February, the total amount released was approximately 108,000 megalitres (ML). These flows have provided benefits to both landholders and the environment and reached the Wentworth Weir pool in late January. The flows are now being reduced to the minimum required to maintain the river and meet irrigation demand.

Water availability

All water that was suspended in accounts in 2007 is now available for use.

All High Security licence holders now have access to 100 per cent of their licensed entitlement for use in the 2007/08 season. This includes licence holders who participated in the "Tandure water offer".

All General Security irrigators who were allocated survival water, have access to the announced 50 per cent allocation, plus any survival water that has been provided to their accounts until their water availability, including future allocation increases, is equal to 100 per cent of allocations.

Carry over and trade

All unused water in accounts will be carried over into 2008/09. Likewise all water in accounts is tradeable, except for town water supply and stock and domestic entitlements. All trades must be finalised by close of business on the 30 April 2008. Inter-state and inter-valley trades will not be permitted from the Lower Darling system until the Menindee Lakes storages pass back into Murray-Darling Basin Commission control and transfer of shared Murray-Darling Basin Commission resources to the Murray River commences.

The water supply situation for 2008/09 is not yet guaranteed and although every effort will be made to do so, any water carried over may not be available at the times it is required.

Where to from here

Currently there is enough water to secure Broken Hill's Water supply for 21 months.

The Department of Water and Energy and State Water are currently devising the best way to manage the Menindee Lakes system to maximise environmental outcomes and to conserve water for consumptive use.

At this stage water, availability for 2008/09 is not guaranteed, however it is expected that High Security allocations will be available in 2008/09 during the growing season. Unless further significant inflows occur, river management in 2008/09 will occur under a drought management strategy and there is a low risk that General Security allocations will not be available.

As the Lower Darling is now returning to a more normal pattern of flows and allocations, this will be the final critical water planning communiqué for 2007/08.

Compliance issues

Efficient river management can only work successfully if all users abide by the rules and only pump in accordance with their share, and the rules provided by either the Department of Water and Energy or State Water.

To ensure that the system is run fairly, the community should report any possible breaches to the Department of Water and Energy's Compliance Unit on 1800 633 362 or Email: watercompliance@dwe.nsw.gov.au. All reports will be treated confidentially.

Contact: Bunty Driver 03 5898 3900
