

Critical water planning for the Murray Valley and Lower Darling

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Current water availability

Rainfall summary

There has been some good rainfall across New South Wales over the past month with significant falls in the north-west and coastal areas of the State.

Rainfall in the Murray Valley has been patchy with some areas receiving significant falls. Unfortunately most falls occurred down stream of the storages.

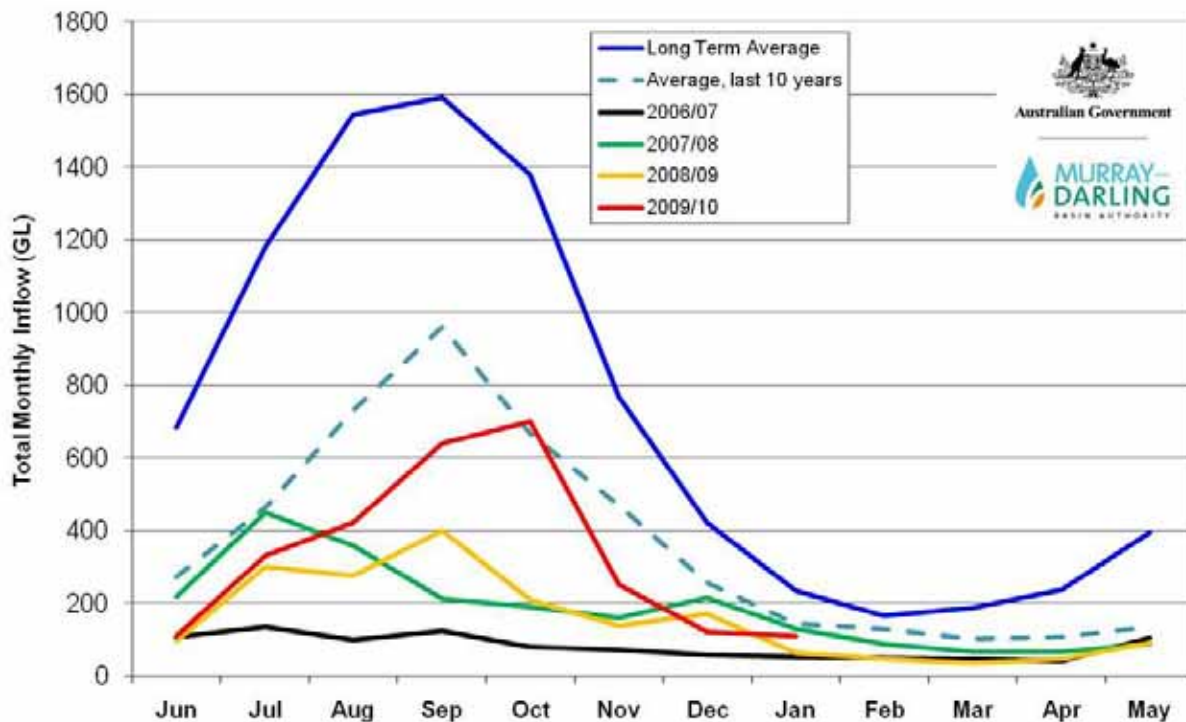
Location	From 13 Jan–1 Feb (mm)	From 1 Feb–10 Feb (mm)	Total (mm)	Long term Feb average (mm)	% of February average
Thredbo Village	21.4	26.6	48.0	83.1	58
Albury	3.4	66.4	69.8	38.4	182
Deniliquin	4.4	35.6	40.0	27.5	145
Mildura (airport)	2.6	7.4	12.0	19.6	61

The following table shows Murray Valley storage levels as at 13 February 2010

Storage @ 13 February 2010	Volume (GL)	Percent of capacity	Change (GL) in Volume since 11 January	Approximate volume at this time last year
Hume Dam	565	19	-141	390
Dartmouth Dam	1,189	30	-6	870
Menindee Lakes	470	27	+325	113
Lake Victoria	317	47	-30	182
Total volume	2,541			1,555

Inflow graph

Inflows this year are similar to the low drought inflows of the last three years, still well below the long term average. This excludes the inflows into the Menindee Lakes.



What this means

While there has been some good rainfall in NSW, little has fallen in the catchment areas to produce runoff until 11 February, particularly the upper catchments. This combined with the hot dry weather has meant that inflows into Hume and Dartmouth dams have been relatively small.

Similar circumstances have been experienced in the Snowy Mountains providing no improvement to the water availability from the Snowy scheme for the Murray Valley.

Water being released from the Menindee Lakes into the Murray River has increased water availability to the NSW Murray Valley and enabled general security allocations to be increased by 6 percent to 19 percent of entitlement.

A portion of this improvement has been reserved to meet critical human needs in 2010/11. Around 75 gigalitres has now been reserved for this purpose.

Similarly reserved have commenced to enable supply to the Wakool River system to be maintained.

It must be noted that there is still insufficient water reserved to guarantee the **delivery** of all critical human needs and carryover in 2010/11.

Consequently any further improvement in water resources will be shared between **increasing allocations** and **establishing reserves to ensure delivery** of critical human needs and carryover.

Should record drought conditions similar to 2006/07 return, water users should be aware that full carryover may not be available at the start of the season.

A State account adjustment of 20 gigalitres (GL) to South Australia has also been set aside. This is the result of an anomaly in the Murray Darling Basin Agreement.

Management of the Menindee lakes

It is likely that up to 900GL will reach the Menindee Lakes system from the Christmas – New Year floods in the north of the Basin. The flow peak has just reached Wilcannia where the flow is currently at a rate of 28GL/day. The flow is being managed to ensure that at the end of this event, the upper two lakes in the system, Wetherell and Pamamaroo, are full.

Water from this event not needed to fill these two lakes will flow to the Lower Darling and into the Murray River. The NSW and South Australian governments have agreed to 148GL from the Menindee Lakes system to be delivered to the environmentally sensitive Lower Lakes in South Australia.

At this stage the Menindee Lakes system will be temporarily surcharged, up to about 610GL while the flood event passes, before drawing back to full supply capacity of 480GL next month. Full details of the management of this water to South Australia is available in [Management of Menindee Lakes releases to South Australia](#) available at www.water.nsw.gov.au

At the time of this communiqué, the Bureau of Meteorology was forecasting more rain for north-west NSW. If this eventuates it will trigger a review of the current flow management strategy that will require releases into the Darling River to be increased. The larger of the two lakes in the Menindee Lakes system, Lake Menindee and Lake Cawndilla have remained dry for the last 5 years. At least a further 500GL, about the volume of Sydney Harbour, would be needed to warrant activating these storages given the enormous seepage and evaporation losses that would be incurred along with their natural dead storage.

Lower Darling flows

Releases from the Menindee Lakes to the Lower Darling will be retained at 12,000 megalitres (ML) per day for up to another week or so while the upstream flood peak passes Wilcannia and into the Menindee Lakes. This may be increased depending on the extent of further rainfall.

Assuming no further inflow events, releases into the Lower Darling will be carefully reduced to a base flow of about 250ML per day to avoid potential bank erosion and slumping.

Trade

Trade is currently permitted out of the Lower Darling and all other trades within the Murray Valley can occur under the same rules as for 2008/09. Trade continues to be allowed downstream across the Barmah Choke.

It is likely that Inter Valley Trading (IVT) will close this year as usual at the end of May 2010.

A third ballot has been announced to enable 60GL of water to be traded out of the Murrumbidgee Valley. The same rules and conditions will apply for this ballot, as in the previous water ballots.

The ballot is open from today with applications being taken for three weeks by State Water, Deniliquin. Applications must be lodged by close of business 8 March 2010.

Further information will be available on State Water's website early in the week or by contacting the Deniliquin office on 03 5898 3900.

Carryover

The water sharing plan for the Murray-Lower Darling River valley remains suspended and will be introduced at the commencement of a water year only when the water availability is sufficient to ensure critical human needs, including town water supply for at least that year and the subsequent year.

Until then, carryover rules in the Murray and Lower Darling River valleys will remain as they have for the past two years. That is, for 2010/11 licensed high and general security and conveyance entitlement holders will be allowed to carryover up any unused water from 2009/10, up to 100 percent of their entitlement. Water use in 2010/11, which includes allocation plus carryover and any water traded out, will be limited to 100 percent of entitlement unless additional water is purchased in during that year.

Compliance

Despite the good flows in the Darling River, water availability in the NSW Murray Valley remains extremely low.

The NSW Office of Water's Drought Contingency Planning Program will only work if everyone adheres to the restrictions and is careful with **all** water use. To ensure that the system is run fairly, the community should report any suspected breaches to the Office's Compliance Unit on 1800 633 362 or by email to watercompliance@dwe.nsw.gov.au. All reports are confidential.

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