

Tuesday, 30 October 2007

### **BLEAK OUTLOOK FOR IRRIGATION ALLOCATIONS**

South Australian River Murray irrigation allocations for 2007-08 will remain at 16 percent as below-average rainfall continues to result in extremely low inflows into the Murray-Darling Basin.

Minister for the River Murray Karlene Maywald says she is extremely concerned about the ongoing impact of such low water allocations on our River Murray communities.

“In light of the dire outlook, I urge all irrigators to not delay making decisions on how to best manage this situation for their own properties. Help is available through the SA Department of Primary Industries and Resources (PIRSA), the Drought Hotline and industry associations,” she said.

“Winter and spring is usually when the majority of inflows are received into the Murray-Darling Basin system. Unfortunately this year this is not the case, as we are tracking at near record low inflows again.

“River Murray inflows during September 2007 were the fifth lowest on record at 210 gigalitres, just 14 percent of the long-term median of 1 460 gigalitres. At this stage, October inflows are likely to be just as low.

“The volume of water held in storage within the four major Murray-Darling Basin reservoirs is currently 22 percent, compared with the average of 75 percent for this time of year.

“As a result of these low inflows, the volume of water available to South Australia does not allow for any increase to allocations at this stage, under the current water sharing rules agreed to by State Premiers and the Prime Minister earlier this year.

“When the total volume of water available for diversion across the basin reaches 1 500 gigalitres, then further allocations can be made. However, we are still around 130 gigalitres below this target, based on the latest assessment from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission.”

**Minister Maywald says further increases to allocations during summer are unlikely because of continued extreme drought conditions across the catchment.**

“Unfortunately 16 per cent of allocation may be as high as we can expect in 2007-08 because we are continuing to receive inflows into the River Murray system that are among the lowest on record and the forecast for summer is for drier and hotter conditions than normal.

“According to the Bureau of Meteorology, this is the first time in records dating back to 1900 that an El Nino drought in the Murray-Darling Basin, as experienced in 2006, has not been followed by at least one three-month period of above-average rainfall by the following winter.”

Minister Maywald says South Australia’s normal daily entitlement flow during October is 5 500 megalitres per day. Currently, we are receiving 2 600 megalitres per day.

Water levels below Lock 1 continue to decline. Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert levels are currently around 0.12 metres AHD (Australian Height Datum, metres above sea level) compared with around 0.73m AHD at the same time last year.

“The Bureau of Meteorology is forecasting that there is only a 50:50 chance of receiving above-average rain over the next three months and a 65-70 percent chance of experiencing above-average maximum temperatures.

“Salinity levels along the length of the river and in the Lower Lakes continue to increase with the level at Morgan increasing from 300 EC in early March to 760 EC earlier this month.

“The salinity level in Lake Alexandrina is currently around 2 340 EC compared to 1 415 EC at the same time in March 2007.

“Peaks in salinity will be managed using dilution flows allocated to South Australia to assist with maintaining water quality over summer – South Australia is not permitted to use dilution flows for diversion.”

For further information about conditions in the River Murray and wider Murray-Darling Basin, contact the Drought Link hotline on 180 20 20 or visit [www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au](http://www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au)