

Thursday, 2 November 2006

DROUGHT FURTHER RESTRICTS IRRIGATORS

Water allocations for South Australian irrigators will be reduced from 70 per cent to 60 per cent as widespread drought continues in the Murray-Darling Basin.

SA Water's allocation for Adelaide's fresh water supplies is also now at about 60 per cent of its available allocation.

Deputy Premier Kevin Foley says the reduction to these allocations is due to record low inflows to the Murray-Darling Basin water catchment since records have been kept.

“Last month, the basin recorded its lowest October inflows on record at just **74 gegalitres**. This compares to the average October inflow of **1100 gegalitres**.

“The previous low was 139 gegalitres in 1914.

“The impact of the drought is becoming worse,” Mr Foley says.

“If drought conditions do not improve by the new year, we will have to consider raising the level of domestic water restrictions, including a ban on domestic sprinklers.

“We are receiving regular updates on the situation and have formed a group of national water experts to help us keep a close eye on the situation.

“We are acutely aware of the economic impact on communities that rely heavily on the River Murray and the environmental impacts that need to be managed in relation to salinity and potential long-term damage to wildlife and vegetation.

“The expert group, the Water Security Advisory Group, chaired by me, comprises:

- Mr Dennis Flett – former Murray Darling Commissioner for Victoria
- Mr Don Blackmore – former Chief Executive of the Murray Darling Basin Commission
- Mr John Scanlon – current South Australian Commissioner on the MDC
- Mr Dennis Hussey – water economist
- Mr Jim Hallion - engineer and CE of Transport and Energy Infrastructure

“It will meet tomorrow for the first time to analyse data and options developed by a special taskforce of Chief Executives from the Departments of Water and Biodiversity Conservation, Primary Industries and Resources SA, Environment and Heritage, Treasury and Finance and SA Water. It will be chaired by Mr Paul Case.

Minister for the River Murray, Karlene Maywald says we are rewriting the history books for minimum inflows to the Murray.

“It is a situation beyond anybody’s previous experience and any records we have, which date back 116 years,” Ms Maywald says.

“Murray-Darling Basin storages continue to decline with only 2600GL available at present, compared with 5800GL at the same time last year. South Australia is likely to receive 1570GL of its 1850GL entitlement flow from interstate this year.

“The State Government is managing flows along the river to maximise the volume of water in the main channel to divert for irrigation and domestic use.

“We will be adjusting the pattern of flows to South Australia to ensure minimum impact on water levels from November to February. The environment is also affected by the low inflows with a number of wetlands already closed off to conserve water.

“The Murray-Darling Basin catchment is so dry that we need months of extremely wet conditions for the situation to be turned around.

“For irrigators, the outlook for the 2007-08 water year depends heavily on getting at least median rainfall throughout the catchment to boost inflows and storages, which are being quickly depleted.

“It is imperative irrigators have access to as much information to help them make the best decisions for their businesses,” Ms Maywald said. “A series of forums will be held in regional South Australia during November and details will be available shortly.”

Since the water year started on July 1, MDB inflows have reached record lows:

	2006 (GL)	Previous low (GL, year)	Average inflows (GL)
July	130	154, in 1967	920
August	120	125, in 1902-03	1360
September	112	178, in 1902	1558
October	74	139, in 1914	1100