

Tuesday, July 24, 2007

RIVER MURRAY ALLOCATIONS LIFTED TO 13 PERCENT

South Australian River Murray irrigation allocations will be increased from 4 percent to 13 percent from August 2 and carryover water will be allocated in full, following recent rainfall across the Murray-Darling Basin.

Minister for the River Murray Karlene Maywald says rain in June and early July in north-eastern Victoria has improved Murray inflows, and marginally lifted storage levels in Hume and Dartmouth Reservoirs and Lake Victoria.

“A total of 260 gigalitres flowed into the River Murray system during the first two weeks of July. This is double the inflows for the whole of July last year.

“These inflows are good news for the river system and for irrigators and show that hopefully we are beginning the long road to recovery from this extremely severe drought.”

However Minister Maywald says salinity levels are steadily increasing along the River Murray in South Australia because of significantly reduced flows across the border.

“South Australia usually receives about 3500 million litres a day across the border in July, but this year we have been restricted to only about 1100 million litres a day,” she said.

“Managing the River Murray under these low flows has serious implications for salinity levels and the environment and will present challenges for water users in the coming months.”

Minister Maywald warned irrigators that allocation increases in South Australia will now plateau over the next few months until the total water available increases to 1500 gigalitres, or approximately double what has been available to date.

“The drought has meant that water-sharing between South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria has had to be re-negotiated,” she said.

“State Premiers have agreed to temporary arrangements where each state receives an equal share of inflows early in the season, as well as allowing some water for the river’s recovery, to keep it flowing.

“South Australia successfully negotiated access to its share of water earlier in the season enabling a modest allocation to be given to irrigators to begin their water year but this means future increases in allocations will be limited until total inflows to the system reach 1500 gigalitres.”

Minister Maywald says the River Murray Advisory Committee, which provides feedback to the Minister on allocations, recommended incremental increases in access to allocations, rather than the announced 13pc.

“The RMAC recommended a lower percentage because they believed irrigators would not require all of the available water during August and then allocations could be stepped up as water was required.

“Upon further advice, the State Government has decided to allocate the available water upfront to allow irrigators to make their own decisions on water use relative to their specific business needs.”

The total storage volume for the Murray-Darling Basin at the end of June 2007 was nearly 1300 gigalitres, compared to about 3800GL at the end of June last year. The long-term average storage for the end of June is 6220GL.

Water levels within Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert remain low, and modelling indicates that water levels will continue to decline without increased flows across the border.

For further information about water restrictions or conditions in the Murray-Darling Basin, visit the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation website at www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au or contact the Drought Link Hotline on 180 20 20.