

# Advisory Statement

## 20 March 2020



## River Murray Water Availability Early Advice

**The purpose of this statement is to provide early advice on the conditions leading into the 2020-21 water year. Information on South Australia's projected opening minimum water allocation will be provided on 15 April 2020.**

### Information for the 2020-21 water use year

In preparation for the 2020-21 water use year, regular updates with information provided as early as possible will continue to be available ahead of the projected opening minimum allocation announcement on 15 April 2020.

In response to the Department of Health's recommended limits on organised gatherings, the Department for Environment and Water is not proposing to conduct public information sessions on this year's allocation announcement and processes. However, the Department understands the importance of communicating with water users on these matters and is considering other options to provide information and engage in discussion. Please keep an eye on the Department's website <https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/river-murray> for the latest information.

### Key Facts

- As stated in the 17 February 2020 advice, South Australia has secured its Critical Human Water Needs for 2020-2021.
- Catchments have received some rainfall in recent weeks but inflows continue to remain low.
- River Murray System inflows for the 2019-20 water year to date are at very low levels.
- It is prudent to continue planning for very low water availability for the beginning of the 2020-21 water year.
- Recent inflows into the northern Murray-Darling Basin are welcome as it helps to break the drought in some areas, however the expected inflows into Menindee Lakes will not reach the trigger level of 640 gigalitres (GL) and is therefore not available to supplement water in the River Murray System.
- While the seasonal climate outlook is neutral, water users are reminded to continue to make early plans for a potentially challenging year ahead. For further information on the outlooks visit <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/ahead/outlooks/>

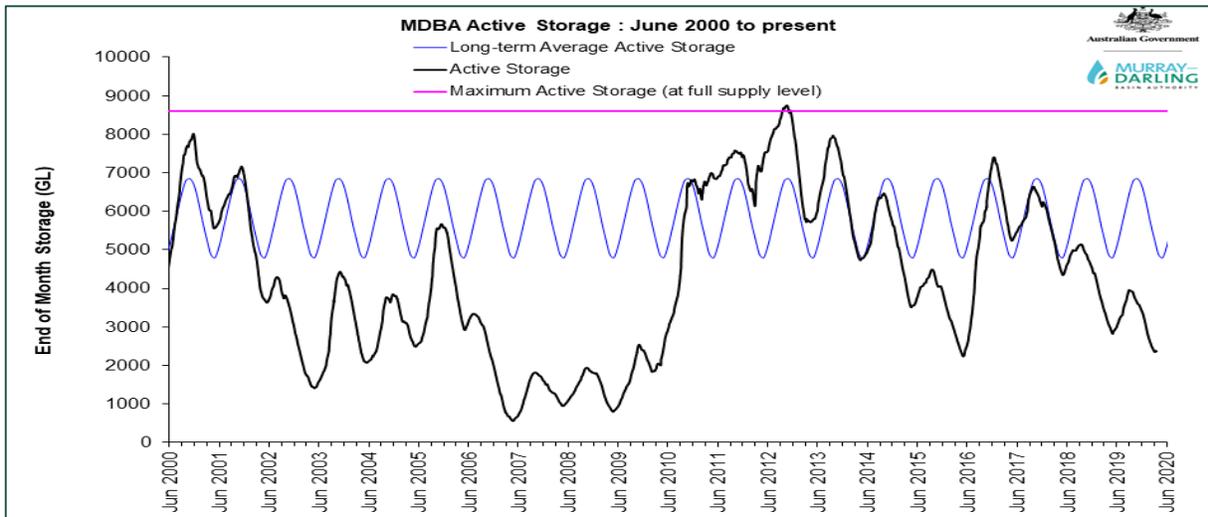
### River Murray System Storages

The River Murray Storages under the control of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) currently are Hume and Dartmouth Reservoirs and Lake Victoria. Menindee Lakes are not under the control of the MDBA as trigger levels have not been reached and therefore this water cannot be used to supply South Australia.

At 19 March 2020, the active storage volume in MDBA controlled storages was 2,540 GL; 45% lower than the long-term end of March average of 4,610 GL (excluding Menindee Lakes) and 25% lower than the same time last year (3,394 GL) (**Figure 1**).

The storages are currently at 33% capacity, which is a small increase since the last update. The rainfall events in March 2020 have provided a slight improvement to the volume of water in storage through a combination of inflows and reduced transmission and storage evaporation losses.

The end of year storage volumes will be determined by future rainfall, inflows, water use for diversions and the environment and meeting conveyance requirements from 2019-20 into the 2020-21 water year. Due to the high degree of uncertainty with a number of these variables, it is not currently possible to confidently predict irrigation allocations in South Australia for 2020-21. A possible outcome is that storage volumes under a dry scenario (low rainfall and inflows) may potentially result in end-of-year storage volumes declining to less than 2,000 GL. This has implications for the State's water availability at the start of the 2020-21 water year and as a result, water users should have contingency plans in place for very low water availability.

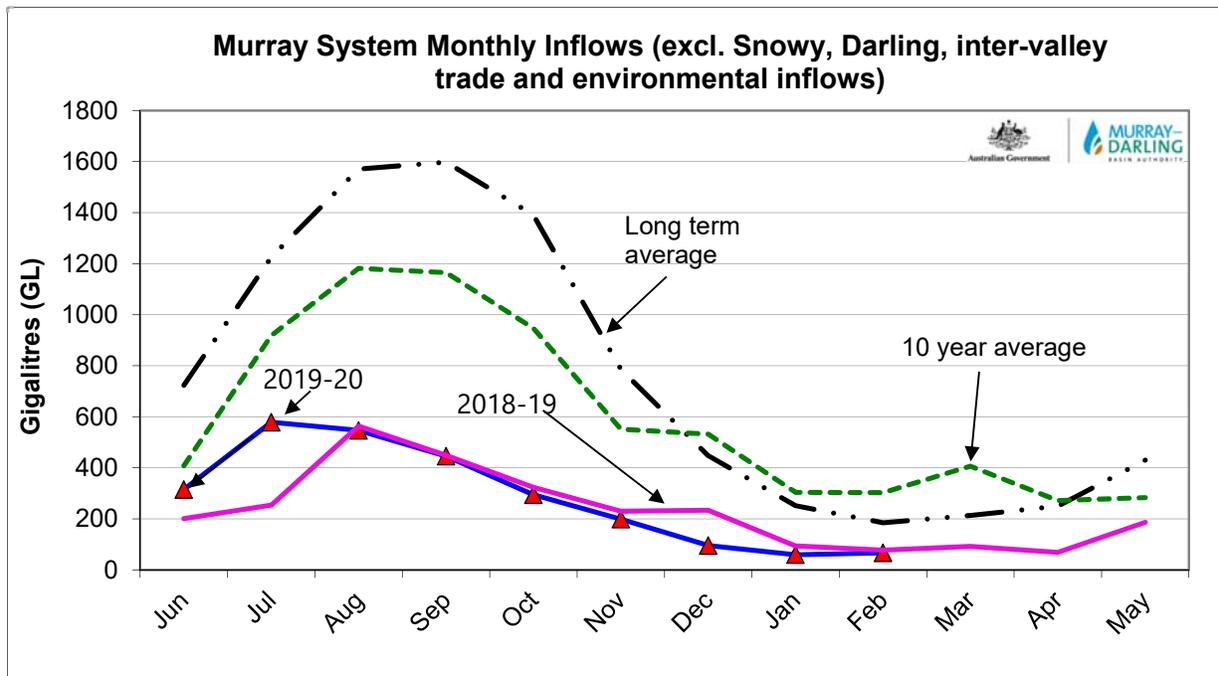


**Figure 1 Active Storage Volume (Source: MDBA)**

### River Murray System Inflows

River Murray System inflows in 2019-20 (June to end February) were approximately 2,600 GL compared to the long-term average of 8,100 GL (ie 32% of the long-term average for the same period). The inflows over the past three months continued to decline in response to both low rainfall and above average temperatures and were at a level expected to be exceeded 95 years in 100. In February 2020, the inflow was approximately 70 GL and close to the record low inflow of 50 GL in February 2007 during the Millennium Drought. The long-term average inflow for February is 185 GL.

**Figure 2** shows the River Murray System monthly inflows. The graph indicates that inflows are currently extremely low and unless there is a substantial change to rainfall and inflow conditions, then the trend of low inflows is likely to continue impacting on storage volumes and water availability for 2020-21.



**Figure 2: River Murray System Inflows (Source: MDBA)**

To view the MDBA storage volumes and system inflows visit <https://riverdata.mdba.gov.au/system-view>

## Recent Rainfall Impacts

Rainfall in Queensland and Northern New South Wales over recent weeks has helped to improve inflows in some northern Basin valleys alleviating some of the impacts of the prolonged drought in those areas. While this is extremely welcome news for regional communities in the northern Basin, it is not expected to increase water availability in the River Murray System.

In early March 2020, the River Murray System experienced some quite heavy rainfall. Rainfall was in excess of 200 mm at some locations. Generally, the inflow response was low, which highlights how dry catchments are. A sustained period of above average rainfall will be required to 're-wet catchments' and produce higher inflows. An additional benefit of the rainfall was the reduced volume of water required to meet both transmission and storage evaporation losses.

## Climate Outlook

In March 2020, the Bureau of Meteorology updated its rainfall and temperature outlooks for the period April to June and May to July 2020. The rainfall outlook indicates there are improved chances of exceeding median rainfall across the southern Murray-Darling Basin. The temperature outlook is showing a 20-30% chance of exceeding median maximum temperatures across the southern Murray-Darling Basin. The outlook for warmer temperatures is more apparent in the northern Basin.

## Climate Influences

Major climate drivers like the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) are neutral and forecast to remain neutral through autumn and early winter. When these major climate drivers are neutral, widespread above or below average seasonal rainfall is less likely.

For further information on the climate outlook visit <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/ahead/?ref=fr>

## Next Steps

Information on South Australia's projected opening minimum water allocations will be provided on 15 April 2020. The projected opening minimum water allocations will be a conservative forecast, which is subject to change in response to conditions experienced during the remainder of 2019-20 and into 2020-21.

## Quarterly meter reporting reminder

All River Murray water users are reminded of their requirement to ensure that they have not used more water than is available on their account by the end of each quarter. This is to help ensure that water can be reliably delivered to all River Murray water users in South Australia. The end of Quarter 3 of the 2019-20 water use year is 31 March 2020. A penalty will be applied in all instances where the volume of water taken for Quarter 3 is in excess of the available allocation on a water account after **5:00 pm on 31 March 2020**.

For more information, please see the DEW website or contact via telephone: (08) 8595 2053 or via email: [DEWwaterlicensingberri@sa.gov.au](mailto:DEWwaterlicensingberri@sa.gov.au).