

News Release

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Hon Paul Caica
Minister for Environment &
Conservation
Minister for the River Murray
Minister for Water

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RIVER MURRAY ALLOCATIONS INCREASE TO 63 PERCENT

Minister for the River Murray Paul Caica today announced that irrigator allocations have been increased from 41 percent to 63 percent as a result of improved inflows in the River Murray system.

Mr Caica said South Australia would now receive a minimum of 1,860 GL during 2010-11 under a “worst case” scenario.

Mr Caica said 1,720 GL of the 1860 GL is entitlement flow, whereas 70 GL is interstate trade water and 70 GL has been allocated to South Australia as a correction for under-delivery in 2009-10 and are additional to our entitlement flow.

Mr Caica said the 22 per cent increase was good news for irrigators and this is significantly higher when compared to the same time last year when the allocation was 16 per cent. Irrigators continue to have access to 100 percent of carryover.

“Rainfall during the past three months has primed the River Murray catchment for spring inflows,” he said.

“Recent rainfall events have significantly improved inflows, the volumes of water in storage and the seasonal outlook.

“The forecast minimum Basin inflow for September 2010 has increased to 2,150 GL, which is not only well above the long-term average for September of about 1,600 GL, but is also forecast to increase further.”

Mr Caica said the Murray-Darling Basin Authority’s latest assessment includes 130 GL of improvement for South Australia plus 15 GL of previously unallocated water, which means that allocations can be increased by 22 percent.

“This improvement has been allocated entirely to general allocations following an interim review of the 2010-11 River Murray Drought Water Allocation Decision Framework,” he said.

“In addition, the MDBA has advised South Australia will receive a minimum unregulated flow of 190 GL before December.

“Further increases are also likely, however it is difficult to forecast the exact volume of water because it is still unknown how much will be consumed by the environment interstate.

Mr Caica said a more reliable estimate should be available in the next two to three weeks.

“South Australia will also receive an extra 183 GL of Additional Dilution Flow to mitigate salinity, taking the total volume of Additional Dilution Flow in 2010-11 to 459 GL,” he said.

Mr Caica said it is important to remember the amount of water that can be allocated to licensed water users in any one year is capped at 650 GL.

“This 650 GL limit includes any carryover water held from previous years,” he said.

“Given the significant volumes of carryover water available this year to irrigators, general allocations will not reach 100 percent during 2010-11. However the Allocations Framework has been amended to provide that all future improvement to South Australia’s entitlement flow for this year, as advised by the MDBA, will be allocated to irrigators until the 650 GL limit is reached.”

Mr Caica said due to the rapidly changing situation in the Murray-Darling Basin and the Mount Lofty Ranges, the State Government brought forward its comprehensive review of the 2010-11 River Murray Drought Water Allocation Decision Framework which was scheduled for November.

“Future carryover arrangements will be considered in this comprehensive review,” he said.

“Current carryover arrangements are a drought policy and we will need to consider what arrangements should be in place as water availability increases.”

During the recent years of low water levels downstream of Lock 1, many irrigators moved or modified their pumping infrastructure in order to continue pumping operations.

With increased inflows, those irrigators may now need to again move or modify their infrastructure to ensure that it does not become inundated by rising waters.

The current water level in Lake Alexandrina is about 50cm above sea level and is expected to increase to 75cm above sea level by early October 2010. The water level in Lake Albert is about 30cm below sea level, the highest levels since 2005.

Water levels in the River Murray channel upstream of Wellington are likely to be consistently 10 to 20cm above the level in Lake Alexandrina due to the higher flows at Lock 1.

Higher water levels will be sustained for some time and the water level should not drop below 30cm above sea level over summer 2010-11. This is within the normal operating range for the weir pool below Lock 1.

The current volume in Hume, Dartmouth, Menindee Lakes and Lake Victoria is 6,138 GL (66 percent capacity). This volume includes a large amount of water for private carry-over and critical human water needs for all southern Basin states.

Although this storage capacity is higher than at the same time last year (2,367 GL, 25 percent) it is below the end of September long-term average (7,460 GL, 79 per cent).

For more information about conditions in the River Murray or wider Murray-Darling Basin visit www.mdba.gov.au