

Hon Ian Hunter MLC

Minister for Water and the River Murray

Thursday, 28 April 2016

Minimum allocations reflect very dry conditions and low inflows

Continued dry conditions and low inflows across the Murray Darling Basin mean South Australian River Murray water access entitlement holders will receive a minimum opening allocation of 36 per cent for the 2016-17 water year.

The minimum opening allocation is based on a conservative “very dry” inflow scenario – such that only five in 100 years have lower inflows.

Holders of irrigation entitlements will also be allowed to carry over their unused allocation volumes from 2015-16 into the 2016-17 water year – up to a maximum of 20 per cent of their entitlement volume. For carryover, water allocations traded from interstate will now also be factored into the determination of underuse against a licensee’s entitlement volume.

Today’s earlier than usual announcement of a minimum opening allocation of 36 per cent, as well as the availability of carryover in 2016-17, enables licence holders to better prepare for what is shaping as a dry year across the Basin.

The State Government will continually assess conditions to allow for allocations to increase in the event inflows improve.

Entitlement holders will find out their actual opening allocations by 1 July 2016.

Background

All River Murray water users across New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia have been affected by low inflows in 2015-16 due to below average rainfall. As a result, South Australia is likely to receive a restricted River Murray entitlement flow in 2016-17.

In line with the approach adopted by NSW and Victoria, advice has also been provided today on how allocations are projected to increase throughout the water year under particular water availability scenarios. These may be found on the [DEWNR website](#).

The minimum opening allocation and projected allocations reflect input provided by community stakeholders and the River Murray Advisory Committee during the SA Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board’s extensive consultation on the draft River Murray water allocation plan.

Future allocation announcements for 2016-17 will also be informed by the findings of the independent Adelaide Desalination Plant cost benefit study, which is due to be provided to the State Government in late May.

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More information is available on the [DEWNR website](#).

Quotes attributable to Water and the River Murray Minister Ian Hunter

Today's announcement comes just days after Murray-Darling Basin Ministers across Australia agreed a comprehensive package of Basin Plan implementation measures out to 2024, ensuring the total water return equivalent to 3,200 gigalitres remains on track.

The Ministers' agreement includes support for recovering the extra 450 GL secured by South Australia in 2012. This is yet another important step in our fight for a healthy River Murray.

The forecast of dry conditions for 2016-17 highlights the importance of ensuring that the commitments we secured for South Australia are delivered on time and in full.

With extremely dry catchments across the Upper River Murray system, well above average rainfall will be required to replenish soil moisture, create runoff and improve inflows.

While conditions remain dry and the outlook is still serious, management of the River Murray through the Murray-Darling Basin Plan should give the community confidence that we will not see a repeat of the extreme ecological damage experienced during the Millennium Drought.

Today's earlier than usual allocation announcement provides greater certainty, allowing irrigators and other water users the confidence they need to prepare for the dry year ahead.

The State Government will continue to review probability-based forecasts to determine whether additional allocations can be made, should conditions improve.