

15 May 2017

## NSW Murray and Lower Darling

### Water availability outlook for 2017-18 - update

This is the last update in this water year on water availability outlook for 2017-18. There has been little change in the forecasts provided a month earlier.

The outlooks for next year are intended to assist water users with their late season decisions about cropping, trading and carryover. The forecasts are not a guarantee of actual 1 July 2017 allocations.

Interstate trade (to and from South Australia and Victoria) closed 30 April 2017, and trade within and between valleys in the southern connected basin (Murrumbidgee, NSW Murray and Lower Darling) closes 31 May 2017. For more detail water users should contact WaterNSW.

### Key information

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- This updated outlook for the likely 1 July 2017 water allocation is based on very dry (90<sup>th</sup> percentile) inflow conditions for the remainder of the current (2016-17) water year.
- The River Murray system has experienced very wet conditions this (2016-17) water year, with higher flows experienced in only 11 out of 100 years (11<sup>th</sup> percentile inflows). This was due primarily to flooding in spring, as recent months have continued to be much drier.
- It allowed full allocations for to be announced in November 2016 and contributed to Hume and Dartmouth Dams holding combined 2,590,000 megalitres (ML) more than this time last year.
- The estimate of end-of-year carryover is uncertain as it is dependent on weather conditions over coming weeks and individual decisions by water users.
- Conditions this year continue to indicate potentially much higher carryover volumes in the NSW Murray than in recent years. Indications are that private carryover could average up to 43 per cent of entitlement or some 720,000 ML. Maximum carryover in the valley is 50 per cent.
- According to the Bureau of Meteorology, the valley is likely to be drier than average in the three months from May to July, with above average daytime temperatures.

The tropical Pacific is currently El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) neutral. Despite the likelihood for El Niño easing in some models, an event in 2017 cannot be ruled out. The Bureau's ENSO Outlook remains at El Niño WATCH, meaning there is around a 50% chance that El Niño may develop in the coming months. It should be noted that models have lower accuracy forecasting El Niño through the autumn months.

El Niño is often, but not always, associated with a drier than average winter-spring over eastern Australia. Of the 27 El Niño events since 1900, 18 have resulted in at least some areas of significantly dry conditions for Australia.

While the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) remains neutral, the majority of climate models suggest a positive IOD is likely to develop during winter. When a positive IOD coincides with El Niño, the typical dry conditions experienced across Australia during El Niño may be enhanced.

- Once the commencing allocations are announced on 1 July 2017, regular assessments will be undertaken and allocation announcements made fortnightly on the 1st and 15th of each month, or next working day following, as required for the remainder of the water year.

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- This is the final update for this 2016-17 water year. The next water allocation statement for the NSW Murray and Lower Darling will be on **Monday 3 July 2017**.

### **Indicative allocations on 1 July 2017 – Lower Darling**

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- With the Menindee Lakes System (MLS) currently holding about 780,000 ML (45 per cent capacity), there is sufficient resource to assure full allocation for all Lower Darling licence categories for the 2017-18 water year from 1 July 2017.
- This means water security for towns, domestic and stock users, and permanent plantings.
- It also means full access to water for irrigation under high security and general security entitlements, as well as access to carryover water.
- Lower Darling inter and intra valley trade will remain open while the system remains above 480,000 ML (subject to season closing dates). Also above this threshold the system will continue to be managed as a shared resource in accordance with the Murray Darling Basin Agreement.

### **Indicative allocations on 1 July 2017 - NSW Murray**

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- Security of water for towns, as well as domestic and stock access licences, is assured.
- Full allocations will be made for supplementary access licence holders. However, use of this entitlement is only available subject to announced periods of supplementary flow.
- Full access to carryover water in private accounts will be available on 1 July 2017. As noted, carryover is estimated to be much higher than in previous years.
- Latest estimates indicate that 64 per cent of water users<sup>1</sup> may have at least 45 per cent carryover, with 73 per cent of water users having at least 25 per cent of carryover.
- Water will be set aside for environmental requirements in accordance with the rules of the NSW Murray and Lower Darling regulated rivers water sharing plan.
- NSW Murray high security access licences will receive an allocation of 97 per cent of entitlement in accordance with the water sharing plan.
- General security allocation is expected to commence with at least 4 per cent of entitlement under both 'dry' and 'very dry' conditions for the remainder of this 2016-17 water year. This means that, when added to carryover, water availability for general security users could be on average close to 47 per cent of entitlement.
- Sufficient water will be available to make opening allocations for conveyance water, commensurate with the expected opening allocations above.
- Under the water sharing plan, the NSW share of the Barmah-Millewa Forest environmental water allowance may be borrowed for allocations when general security is less than 30 per cent. This assessment and outlook is therefore based on a full borrowing of the Barmah-Millewa account balance at the start of the 2017-18 water year. Pay-back uses the next improvement in water availability once general security allocations reach 30 per cent of entitlement.
- In the NSW Murray only general security access licence entitlements can carryover water, up to a maximum of 50 per cent of entitlement. The account limit (allocation plus carryover) is 110 per cent of entitlement.
- NSW Murray inter and intra valley trade will be in accordance with existing procedures and protocols, including 'no net' trade downstream of the Barmah choke.

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<sup>1</sup> These statistics exclude zero share water access licences.

## Chances of improvement

The chances of improved general security allocation in the NSW Murray regulated system, based on different inflow conditions from 1 July 2017, remain unchanged from earlier predictions and are provided in the table below.

### Forecast general security allocation (per cent)<sup>#</sup>

Potential Inflow Conditions	1 Sept 2017	1 Nov 2017
99 chances in 100 (extreme) (99%)	4	4
9 chances in 10 (very dry) (90%)	11	25
3 chances in 4 (dry) (75%)	19	31**
1 chance in 2 (mean) (50%)	27	53**
1 chance in 4 (wet) (25%) <sup>^</sup>	30*	100**

<sup>^</sup> The 2016-17 water year-to-date has experienced very wet conditions (11<sup>th</sup> percentile) due largely to spring floods.

<sup>#</sup> Assumes average general security carryover of 43% (720 GL).

\* Commence pay-back of borrow from B-M Allowance.

\*\* Borrow from B-M account is fully repaid.