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# Opening Water Allocations 2023/24 – NSW Unregulated River Water Sources

## Water availability and allocation update

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment today announced opening water allocations for unregulated river water users for the 2023/24 water year. There are no surprises, with all unregulated river license categories receiving their full allocation for the 2023/24 water year.

- Major utility access licence holders covered by all unregulated river water sharing plans have received an allocation of 100% of entitlement or 1 megalitre per unit share.
- Local water utility access licence holders covered by all unregulated river water sharing plans have received an allocation of 100% of entitlement or 1 megalitre per unit share.
- Domestic and stock water access licence holders covered by unregulated river water sharing plans have received an allocation of 100% of entitlement or 1 megalitre per unit share.
- Unregulated River and Unregulated River (special additional high-flow) water access licence holders covered by all unregulated river water sharing plans have received an allocation of 100% of entitlement or 1 megalitre per unit share.
- Floodplain harvesting water access licence holders covered by unregulated river water sharing plans have received an allocation of 100% of entitlement or 1 megalitre per unit share.

Last water year (2022/23) was characterised by more flood-making rainfall. Soil moisture continued to be high. However, with the La Nina system being declared over in the first quarter of 2023 by the Bureau of Meteorology, and the ENSO status now at El Niño ALERT, we could start to see some drier conditions. The opening months of the new water year are forecast to deliver below average rainfall for most of inland NSW, particularly in southern NSW, with no clear indication of either wetter or drier than average conditions along coastal NSW.

In unregulated river systems, the taking of water is opportunistic, based on natural flow conditions. Day-to-day access to water is prioritised through license conditions - the highest priority purposes being allowed to continue to take water down to lower river flows, and cease-to-pump limits protect the lowest river flows. Unregulated river water users can only divert water when flow thresholds in the river are met, regardless of their account balance.

Therefore, the water allocation or account balance is not designed to control daily access to water in unregulated systems because the forward flow regime for the year is not known. Rather, the allocation (account balance) is only available for use once there is sufficient river, that is, once licence access triggers have been met.

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