

1 July 2024

# Opening Water Allocations 2024/25 – NSW Unregulated River Water Sources

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## Water availability and allocation update

The NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water today announced full opening water allocations for unregulated river water users for the 2024/25 water year. Water users are reminded that access to unregulated river water is managed by access license conditions, typically river level triggers, rather than allocations, meaning that river flow conditions on water access licenses must be met before water can be taken.

- Major utility access licences 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 licences covered by all unregulated river water sharing plans have received an allocation of 100% of entitlement or 1 megalitre per unit share.
- Domestic and/or stock water access licences 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 licences 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 licences covered by unregulated river water sharing plans have received an allocation of 100% of entitlement or 1 megalitre per unit share.

Last year, similarly, all licenses for unregulated rivers received their maximum allocation on 1 July 2023. That year the state's northern region experienced less than the average rainfall, while the southern area was mostly above-average rainfall. The soil moisture content varied from below average to average across most of the state and cropping conditions were generally very good. The Barwon-Darling (Baawan-Baaka) River flowed continuously in 2023/24 reducing the drop in the Menindee Lakes System from about 80% full to around 60% full over the water year.

At present, the El Niño phenomenon is in a neutral state and the Bureau's ENSO Outlook has transitioned to a La Niña Watch. Looking ahead to the initial months of this water year, spanning July to September 2024, the Bureau forecasts the likelihood of median to above-median rainfall for the majority of inland New South Wales.

In unregulated river systems, the taking of water is opportunistic, based on natural flow conditions in response to rainfall and runoff. 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. Cease-to-pump limits on licenses protect the lowest river flows. That is, unregulated river water users can only divert water when flow thresholds in the river, prescribed on their water license, are met, regardless of their account balance.

Therefore, the announced water allocation or account balance is not designed to control daily access to water in unregulated systems. Clearly the forward flow regime for the year is not known. Rather, the allocation or account balance is only available for use once there is a safe river flow.

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