

Storms in the Namoi 17 February – maintaining the embargo on pumping

The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has carefully considered the potential to lift current restrictions on take in the unregulated rivers of the Namoi Valley following the storms of 17 February.

At this stage the restrictions will remain in place for the following reasons:

- Town water supplies and domestic and stock needs in the tributaries, and along the Barwon-Darling and Lower Darling take priority.
- The mid and lower Namoi rivers provide significant flows to the Barwon-Darling river system.
- Recent sustained rainfall and flows in the northern Murray-Darling Basin, including from the Namoi and other northern tributaries, have seen flows reach the Barwon River at Brewarrina, providing critical relief to communities along the way.
- With the follow-up rain, WaterNSW is now forecasting that flows will reach Menindee Lakes. Our priority is to ensure this happens, and that if possible, a target volume of 60GL to 70GL gets to Lake Wetherell. This volume should allow us to send a connectivity flow all the way through the Lower Darling to Wentworth to meet critical needs, and to hold water in Lake Wetherell for local needs.
- As at 17 February, WaterNSW forecasts that somewhere between 15GL and 35GL will reach Lake Wetherell towards the second half of March.
- At this stage, every contribution to this flow counts, and that's why we have taken the unprecedented step of putting an embargo on pumping from the northern tributaries and floodplains.
- The river also needs to be restarted along its entire length, as recommended by various independent reports which were accepted by the NSW Government, following the fish deaths in early 2019.
- This is unusual – not business as usual. It is the 'first flush' after a record-breaking drought, and it is critical to restart the river system for regional communities that depend on it.
- Once the forecast indicates we will meet the target volume at Lake Wetherell, or it becomes clear that we won't, we will relax restrictions in the northern valleys and return to normal water sharing plan arrangements.
- We recognise the hardship this creates for northern irrigators.

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