

1 December 2023

NSW Murray and Lower Darling

Interim update

The NSW Murray regulated valley reached full allocations for the 2023/24 water year on 17 July 2023, while the Lower Darling opened with full allocations on 1 July 2023. No further allocation increments should be expected for these valleys in the current water year (2023/24).

Water allocation statements have not been provided since 17 July 2023, as allocations are full. However, this interim update is to confirm current conditions and outlooks, and to provide a reminder that water allocation statements will recommence on Friday 15 March 2024.

Unless conditions change significantly beforehand, the next statement in March will provide water users with forecast 1 July 2024 opening allocations for the 2024/25 water year.

Rainfall conditions so far this year have been much drier than those for the same period last year. This has resulted in the Murray River returning to regulated conditions by the end of November. However, with full storages, individual rainfall events could reduce demand and increase river flows, resulting in unregulated flows. Timely notifications will be provided and water users should look to waterinsights.watersnsw.com.au for the latest supplementary access details.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) has declared that an El Nino event is underway. Models indicate that the event may persist beyond summer. A positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) also operates, but may dissipate by the end of summer. El Nino and positive IOD conditions generally mean a higher chance of drier than average rainfall. Despite this, BoM's climate outlook over December 2023 to February 2024 shows no clear indication of drier or wetter than average conditions.

Water users are reminded that the wet season for the southern valleys is winter and spring, and therefore, even if rainfall conditions are near average or even a bit wetter than average over summer, this does not necessarily translate into substantial inflows.

Resources have continued to accrue for the NSW Murray, beyond those already committed to meet the full allocations announced for the 2023/24. These additional resources will be first used to assure high priority and operational needs for the 2024/25 water year, with any further resource beyond this being used to underpin an opening general security allocation on 1 July 2024. Outlooks for the 2024/25 will be provided in the water allocation statements commencing on 15 March 2024.

Inflows into Menindee this water year have been much lower than those for the previous water year. They have mainly comprised flow recessions and baseflows as the Basin drains. Periodic showers and storms across the Basin have generally been extending Menindee system inflows. Despite this, the Menindee Lakes System has been slowly reducing in volume from around 1,430,000 megalitres (ML) in July to currently around 1,220,000 ML or about 70% full.

Demand in the NSW Murray regulated valley has been increasing with drier conditions and healthy water availability. As conditions dry and irrigation demand increases further into summer, it is expected that Hume Dam levels will fall as water is delivered against water orders. Releases from Menindee are also expected to be made to support River Murray demands, in accordance with the Murray Darling Basin Agreement.

Due to the higher water availability in the Murray compared to the Murrumbidgee, back trade from the Murray into the Murrumbidgee has significantly reduced the Murrumbidgee IVT balance. Currently, trade out of the Murrumbidgee into the Murray is open, but trade into the Murrumbidgee from the Murray is closed (as of 1 December 2023). Water users should monitor the WaterNSW website (www.waternsw.com.au) for daily information about the IVT account balance, the status of trade, and other information including seasonal trade closures.

Year to date allocations for 2023/24

2023/24	High Security	General Security	Average Carryover
Murray	100%	110% [#]	43% [*]
Lower Darling	100%	100% [#]	4% [*]

[#] Availability of allocation on individual licences is subject to account limits as per the rules in the water sharing plan.

^{*} Carryover in private accounts can be considered forfeited and replaced by allocation when full allocations are announced.

Murray storage levels (as at 1 December 2023)*

- Dartmouth Dam is 98% full – holding 3,795,000 ML
- Hume Dam is 89% full – holding 2,680,000 ML
- Lake Victoria is 87% full – holding 590,000 ML
- Menindee Lakes System is 70% full – holding 1,220,000 ML

* The NSW Murray share of this water is approximately 49%, 50%, 42% and 32% for these storages respectively, or 46% in total (averaged across all storages).

Next announcement

The next water allocation statement will be published on Friday 15 March 2024, unless there is a significant change in conditions that warrant another interim statement. From March, monthly statements will update the potential water availability on 1 July 2024 for the 2024-25 water year.

Note: NSW Murray statements are now available online about 2:30pm on the day of the publication.

Water allocation guide

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment – Water has produced a series of guides to describe the water allocation methods for most NSW regulated river systems. The guide for the NSW Murray regulated system is available at: water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/allocations-availability/allocations/how-water-is-allocated/resource-assessment-process

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