

Southern Critical Water Advisory Panel (CWAP)

The Southern CWAP (Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys) held a meeting on 28 July 2020.

A summary of the meeting outcomes is provided below.

Further information on the function and membership of critical water advisory panels can be found at: www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/critical-water-advisory-panels

Information on the drought status of major river systems across the state can be found at: www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/critical-valleys-in-drought

Please note: All reasonable efforts have been made to provide accurate and current information in this communique. This information is accurate as at 28 July 2020. However, changes in circumstances such as weather variability, water management decisions or any other events after the time of publication may impact on the accuracy of the material. Water Allocation Statements published by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment - Water (DPIE-Water) provide the most accurate information on available water and allocations and are available at: www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements

Water availability update and forecast

CWAP members were provided with an update on southern river system conditions as at 28 July. Further inflows have occurred since this update due to additional rainfall. More up-to-date information can be accessed on the WaterNSW website. WaterNSW publishes weekly water availability update reports at: www.watarnsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/availability

The WaterNSW Water Insights Portal is also a useful resource for stakeholders wanting information on storage levels, allocations and any restrictions across the state in each valley. The portal brings together a range of water management data into one platform: www.watarnsw.com.au/waterinsights/water-insights

28 July update

The headwater storages in the Lachlan, Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys are operating to minimum releases. Due to wetter conditions over the last few weeks, tributary flows have been keeping the rivers running downstream of storages.

Lachlan

Some supplementary access has been allowed in the Belubula River due to recent rainfall. Water levels in Lake Cargelligo are currently being held down due to works being carried out by WaterNSW and supplies in the lower reaches are being met from Lake Brewster. Rainfall is forecast to continue this week which will increase Wyangala Dam storage.

Murrumbidgee

The tributaries are providing most of the water in the Murrumbidgee River. Most inflows to the dams are being kept in storage, except for translucent releases as required under the water sharing plan. There have been several supplementary events announced as a result of recent

rainfall. Some minor releases were made from Blowering and Burrinjuck dams to meet environmental needs, but these have now ceased as flows in the tributaries have increased.

Murray

The tributaries downstream of Hume Dam are currently providing all of the water required in the Murray River and into South Australia. Flows into Lake Victoria are being managed by the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) in accordance with the Lake Victoria Operating Strategy. The Strategy aims to stabilise the lake foreshore and protect cultural heritage sites by minimising the likelihood of wave erosion from high storage levels.

Some supplementary events were announced in the Murray due to recent flows, but these have now ceased. Most of the flows coming in were from the Victorian tributaries.

Lower Darling

Total storage levels in Menindee Lakes are below the 640GL trigger for interstate sharing. All water in the Lakes is currently reserved for Lower Darling needs only.

1 July allocations for 2020-21 water year

The 1 July allocations are largely reflective of the major storage conditions across the state. Rainfall from February – April improved in-stream conditions and soil moisture across most regions but did not result in large improvements to storage levels.

Small system improvements have provided good security for high priority access but there have not been large allocations to general security licence holders. All general security licence holders received zero allocations except for the Border Rivers A class (7.3%), Murrumbidgee (10%) and Lower Darling (30%) on 1 July.

High priority needs are relatively secure for the next 12-18 months. On 1 July, all regulated systems received full town, domestic and stock and high security allocations, except for the Namoi (90% high security), Lachlan (70% high security) and Peel (70% town water supply and 50% high security).

In the southern Basin, the Murrumbidgee started on 10% general security allocation and the Murray on 0% on 1 July. There was a 4% increase in the Murrumbidgee general security allocation and 2% increase in the Murray made on 15 July (NB further small allocations were announced on 3 August). The Lower Darling general security allocation remains at 30%.

All groundwater sources received full allocations, except for three sources where long-term extraction limits have been exceeded:

- Great Artesian Eastern Recharge Water Source
- Lower Murrumbidgee Deep Water Source
- Upper Namoi Zone 3 Water Sources.

Allocations have also been reduced in alluvial groundwater sources connected to surface water sources with reduced or zero allocations.

All unregulated systems received full allocations on 1 July, except for three Macquarie Unregulated River zones upstream of Bathurst. Licence holders in these zones have been restricted to 20% of normal access to protect Bathurst's water supply.

The outlook is for wetter conditions over winter and spring based on Bureau of Meteorology forecasting.

Water allocation statements can be found on the DPIE-Water website:

www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements.

A summary of current allocations and a valley-by-valley comparison of dam storage levels and opening allocations for 1 July 2019 and 2020 can be found at:

www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/summary

Southern valleys drought webinar

A drought information webinar for the southern valleys was held on 25 May. Forty-eight stakeholders participated in the live session.

Issues raised by stakeholders during the webinar included:

- The Northern Basin First Flush Event and management of the restrictions
- Allocations and drought reserves and interactions with the Snowy Hydro Scheme
- How Government delivers environmental water to achieve outcomes
- Supplementary access
- Future drought planning
- Improving engagement with valley-based groups and providing more valley-specific information.

The webinar recording, presentation slides and a 'What We Heard' summary are now available on the DPIE-Water website: www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/information-sessions.

Update – Regional Water Strategies

DPIE-Water is preparing 12 regional water strategies covering the whole state. These long-term strategies look at requirements over the next few decades based on detailed climate modelling and paleo-data.

Work has focused on delivering the three strategies identified as priorities in the State Infrastructure Strategy – the Lachlan, Gwydir and Macquarie. The drafts will be placed on public exhibition for six weeks and there will be multiple avenues for stakeholders to have their say. There will also be ongoing conversations throughout the development of the strategies post-exhibition. Depending on the timing of the public exhibition release, DPIE-Water is aiming to finalise all regional water strategies by the end of this year or the start of next year.

DPIE-Water has also started work on the other nine strategies, including for the Murray and Murrumbidgee. Meetings are being set up in the regions, including with local council representatives.

Data is being gathered and drafting has commenced for the Western Regional Water Strategy, which covers the Barwon Darling and Lower Darling river systems. The department has undertaken the first round of local council engagement through the Joint Organisations. Councils have provided feedback on potential risks and challenges in the region. Other NSW Government agencies are also providing input.

Unfortunately, this year's planned consultation with Aboriginal communities and stakeholders on the regional water strategies has been postponed due to COVID-19. A peak advisory group with representatives from NBAN, MLDRIN, NSW Aboriginal Land Council and NTS Corp has been established to provide the Department with advice on how to proceed with this engagement.

Lachlan Town Water Supply Steering Committee

A Lachlan Town Water Supply Steering Committee has been established by the Regional Town Water Supply Coordinator, James McTavish, to support local councils in the Lachlan Valley to progress works to access alternative water supplies during the current drought. The first meeting of the Committee was held on 19 June 2020. Committee members include representatives from DPIE-Water, WaterNSW, the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) and local councils/water utilities including Cowra Council, Forbes Shire Council, Lachlan Shire Council, Parkes Shire Council, Central Tablelands Water and the Central Joint Organisation of Councils.

On 20 July, the Minister for Water, Property and Housing, the Hon. Melinda Pavey MP, announced funding for three town water supply projects in Orange, Bathurst and Condobolin. The media release can be found here: www.nswnationals.org.au/major-water-investment-for-the-central-west/

Agencies present

- NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
 - Water Division (DPIE-Water)
 - Environment, Energy and Science Division (DPIE-EES)
 - Regional NSW
- WaterNSW
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
 - DPI Agriculture
 - DPI Fisheries
- Lachlan Shire Council
- Forbes Shire Council
- Cowra Council
- Central Joint Organisation of Councils
- Parkes Shire Council
- Murray River Council