

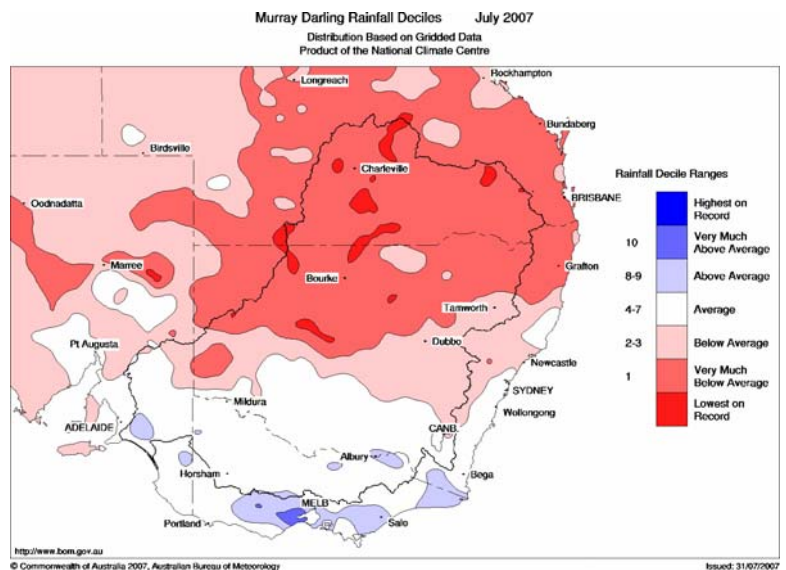
River Murray System Drought Update No. 9

August 2007

CURRENT SITUATION

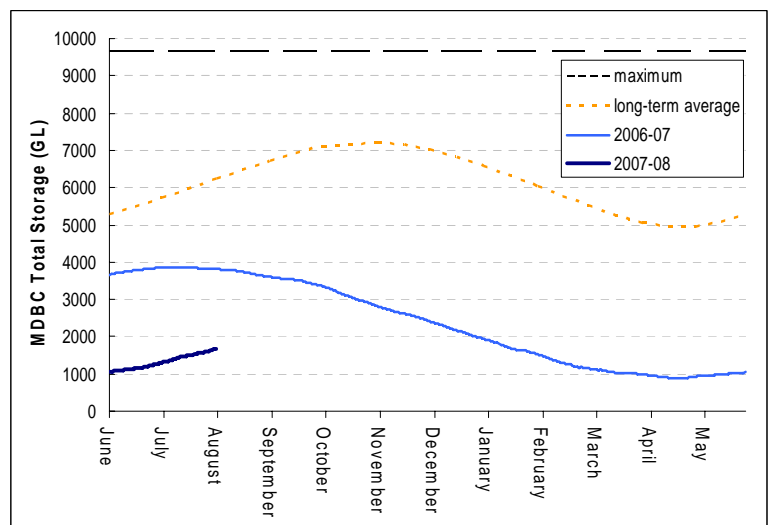
July saw average to above average rainfall on the main River Murray storage catchments in northern Victoria and across much of southern New South Wales and eastern South Australia. However, severe rainfall deficiencies persisted in the north of New South Wales and in southern Queensland (see Figure 1)

Figure 1. Rainfall Deciles - July
(Australian Bureau of Meteorology)



System inflows increased in response to the rain early in the month and total system inflow in July was 450 GL. Whilst this is significantly better than observed in July 2006 (130 GL) it is still well below the long-term average of 1190 GL. Lake Victoria has risen to 65% of capacity, and is expected to continue rising throughout August. Of the other major storages, Lake Hume is at 665 GL (22% of capacity) and Dartmouth 590 GL (15% capacity). Both storages are expected to rise slowly into early spring. Current MDBC storage is about 2000 GL less than at the same time last year (see Figure 2). The current low storage position provides a bleak outlook for 2007-08. To put this in perspective, current water availability is much worse than 2006-07, which delivered the lowest water availability for the River Murray System over the past 116 years (using modelled behaviour at current level of system development).

Figure 2. MDBC Total Storage - Recent seasons and long-term average



RIVER OPERATIONS

Current river operations are focused on maximising availability of water for consumptive use: keeping releases from Hume and Dartmouth low, minimising losses and capturing as much water as possible in Lake Victoria. Lake Mulwala is also being partially lowered to create “airspace” to capture and re-regulate any higher flows originating in the Ovens and Kiewa Rivers, lowering the likelihood of flooding the Barmah-Millewa Forest. Flow to South Australia is now being held near 1150 ML/day, representing a small increase from the target flow in June of 950 ML/day.

At 10 August, there was 900 GL of water (excluding transmission losses) available for sharing between States according to special sharing rules agreed by partner governments to manage extremely low resource availability. This volume more than meets critical human requirements in the three States. South Australia has announced a 13% allocation, with full delivery of carryover. Victoria has made all carryover water available and allocation is currently at 0%. NSW allocation is also 0% but is making allocations to individual licences to meet critical industry needs and to sustain permanent plantings. Physical *access* to carryover water and allocations in each State can not yet be guaranteed for all users. Further improvements are needed to move towards more normal River Murray system operations and provide for losses in State irrigation channel systems.

RAINFALL OUTLOOK

The Bureau of Meteorology’s rainfall outlook shows 40% to 50% chance of exceeding median rainfall across most of the Basin for the 3-month period August to October 2007 (see Figure 3).

The Bureau reports that dynamic computer models are indicating a moderate chance of a La Niña in 2007 but these models are “*not indicating this as emphatically as a few months ago*”. Typically, La Niña means average to above average rainfalls over eastern Australia.

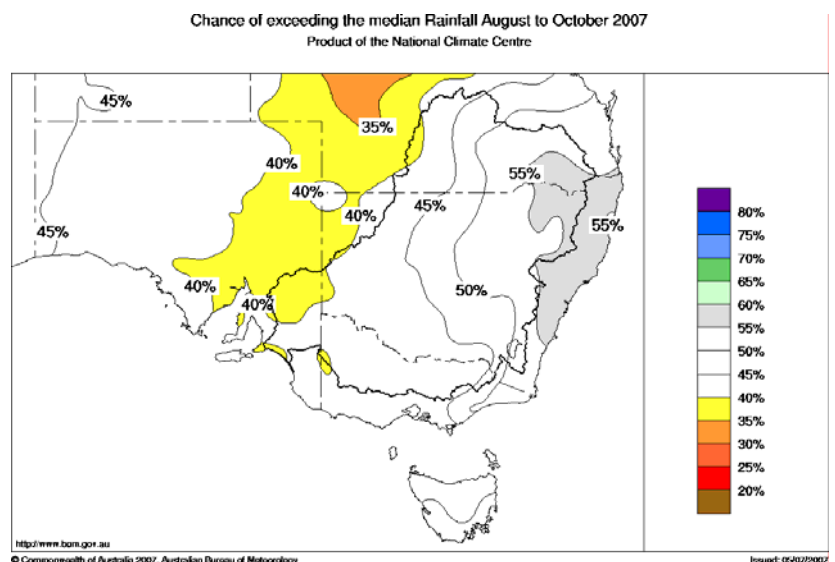


Figure 3. Chance of exceeding the median rainfall August to October 2007 (Australian Bureau of Meteorology)

SUMMARY

The situation is very serious. Although storages are rising slowly, we still have a long way to go to reach even the level of water availability at this time last year. Daily inflow rates have receded to levels observed in late May. Contingency measures are in place to save water, including the disconnection of some wetlands to reduce losses due to evaporation. The outlook for 2007/08 remains grim and is highly dependant on rainfall over the next three months. The months from November to May do not typically yield substantial inflows, as rainfall declines and evaporation losses increase.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

How do I get more information?

MDBC will provide further drought updates in coming months, and will release periodic operational outlooks as the season progresses. Additional information is available at www.mdbc.gov.au and from the relevant Australian and State Government Agencies.

**For media interviews with MDBC personnel, please contact:
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