



MEDIA RELEASE

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Murray drought continues with no improvement in water availability in sight

There are no signs of improvement in water availability in the Murray system over the next few months according to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's latest Drought Update released today.

Chief Executive Dr Wendy Craik AM said rainfall during March and April had been below average and system inflows were very low.

"This is disappointing as historical records show that after a dry autumn, inflows into the upper Murray are not likely to be high," she said.

"While storages are slightly higher than this time last year, they are still well below long term averages and the prospects for irrigation over the coming year will have to depend entirely on rainfall over winter and spring."

Dr Craik said lower water availability would impact on all users and the environment. Critical urban, stock and domestic water needs for 2008-09 were reasonably assured.

"Opening allocations for Murray irrigators are again expected to be very low or zero, though carryover water is reasonably assured," Dr Craik said.

"The condition of the Coorong and Lower Lakes in South Australia is grave and deteriorating. There has been no flow through the barrages since 2006 and last week we started pumping water into Lake Albert to prevent any further exposure of sulfidic sediments.

"We are formulating medium to long term options for the Lower Lakes which we will present to the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council."

Dr Craik said other environmental concerns included the future of wetlands along the Murray which were disconnected to cut evaporative losses.

"We might have to partially re-fill some wetlands to prevent serious and possibly irreversible degradation, as we are doing at Banrock Station Wetland later this month," Dr Craik said.

Dr Craik said the MDBC would continue to run the system to maximise water availability. This will include continuing reduced minimum flows from Hume Reservoir and minimum flows downstream of Yarrowonga to the South Australian border.

"For the longer term, we are concerned at new evidence showing climate change is linked to the lower autumn rainfall in south eastern Australia. However, we will continue to work with all relevant State and Commonwealth governments on effective contingency plans," Dr Craik said

A copy of the latest Murray System Drought Update is available at www.mdbc.gov.au

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