



MEDIA RELEASE

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Murray-Darling Basin drought is getting worse

The drought in the Murray-Darling Basin is getting worse with June inflows the lowest on record and autumn inflows only just above the record lows of 2007.

That's the grim news in the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's (MDBC) latest Drought Update released today.

Chief Executive Dr Wendy Craik AM said inflows in June were 95 GL, lower than the previous record low of 106 GL June 2006. In June 2007 inflows were 220 GL. The long term average is 680 GL.

Inflows during autumn this year were 200 GL, just above the lowest on record of 195 GL in autumn 2007. The long term average is 806 GL.

"This is very disappointing and the likelihood of upper Murray inflows being above average for the remainder of winter and spring is very low," Dr Craik said. "And until there is significant rain and run-off, the prospects for irrigation and the environment in 2008-09 remain grim.

"2008-09 is shaping up to be a very tough year for water availability and there is likely to be continuing pressure on the riverine environment. The new water year is also likely to pose operational challenges with low river flows and varying weir pool levels.

"The most recent seasonal climate outlook issued by the Bureau of Meteorology shows a shift in the odds towards drier than average conditions in across the Murray-Darling Basin from July to September, including the high yielding catchments of the upper Murray and its tributaries."

For the year ending June 2008, total inflows to the Murray River System - excluding Darling inflows and Snowy Scheme releases - was 2,220 GL which was the 6th lowest in 117 years of records and only 25 % of the long term average of 8,900 GL.

"Critical water for human needs (including stock and domestic) for 2008-09 is reasonably assured for those who draw their water from the main stem of the Murray. However, we need inflows that are higher than the minimum used for planning to assure water is available to those who take water from anabranches or major channel systems."

Dr Craik said headwater storage levels were slightly higher than the record low levels of this time last year (due to higher levels of carryover) but were still well below average.

"The water level in the Lower Lakes has temporarily stabilised, but unless there is a significant improvement in water availability for South Australia, the outlook for the next 12 months is extremely poor.

"Pumping water from Lake Alexandrina which began in early May, is maintaining Lake Albert at its current level and preventing further exposure of sulphidic sediments. However, we are also looking at further management options for the Lower Lakes for the 2008-09 season and beyond," Dr Craik said.

Dr Craik said the MDBC's river operations would continue to maximise water availability by reducing evaporation and transmission losses along the river system.

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

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