



# **Nathan Rees MP**

## **Minister for Emergency Services**

## **Minister for Water Utilities**

### **NEWS RELEASE**

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## **PRE-CHRISTMAS RAIN IMPROVES IRRIGATION SUPPLY IN THE MURRAY AND MURRUMBIDGEE VALLEYS**

*State Plan Priority E1: A secure and sustainable water supply for all users*

Pre-Christmas rain has delivered a welcome gift to battling Murray and Murrumbidgee valley licence holders, boosting water supplies for irrigation, Water Utilities Minister Nathan Rees announced today.

“Substantial rain before and during the Christmas period in the Southern part of the Murray-Darling Basin has increased flows and water storage levels in the drought-stricken Murray and Murrumbidgee river systems in Southern NSW,” Mr Rees said.

“This record-breaking drought has made life very tough for rural communities in NSW, but these valleys have been struck particularly hard.

“It’s a cruel irony that we are still facing a severe drought in the south of the State, while the North has been devastated by extensive flooding.

“While there’s enough water to make things a little easier for irrigators, water availability is still critical in both valleys.”

Mr Rees said there was now enough water available to:

- Re-pay a further 10 per cent of the water suspended in NSW Murray Valley licence holders’ 2006/07 accounts, taking the total amount of water now repaid to 65 per cent.
- Increase water allocation for Murrumbidgee Valley General Security licence holders by six per cent, so they can now access nine per cent of their licensed water entitlement.
- Lift Murray Valley town water supply restrictions from level 3a to level 3 to allow a maximum of eight hours of outside watering per week.
- Secure a further three per cent of the 75 gigalitres of water needed to meet critical human needs in 2008/09. This brings the total to 32 gigalitres.

Mr Rees said the rainfall across the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys in December was patchy and the occasional high falls were not enough to break the drought.

“Our main priorities are to continue to reduce the opportunity for water losses in the river systems by preventing evaporation and to conserve as much water as possible for the next water year,” Mr Rees said.

“However, we know people need more water now so we’re doing all we can to make as much water available as possible for irrigators and stock and domestic users.

“In the Murray Valley, 20,000 megalitres of water is currently being diverted into the Wakool and Niemur Rivers and the Yallakool, Merran and Colligen Creeks to provide stock and domestic water.

“The extremely hot weather combined with the problem of evaporation and extremely dry river beds has meant that this water has not gone as far as first expected. At this stage it will not replenish all creeks and water courses and flows will cease this week.

“While water for these systems remains a priority, no more can be committed until things improve significantly.”

In the Murray Valley town, water supply will remain at 50 per cent of entitlements and stock and domestic will remain at 75 per cent of entitlements.

High Security licence holders in the Murrumbidgee Valley currently have a water allocation of 90 per cent and access to five per cent of the water suspended in their 2006/07 accounts.

“To combat the effects of the extreme temperatures on public amenities and gardens, local water authorities are now advised that they may move to Level 3 water restrictions,” Mr Rees said.

“However we are still facing serious water shortages so all water users are reminded to continue to be very conservative with water and the ban on the watering of private lawns continues.

“Watering lawns is an extravagance when farmers and other landholders are battling to keep their stock alive and businesses ticking over.”

Mr Rees said that the flows from the flood in the Castlereagh River were now moving past Bourke and were heading for the Menindee Lakes system.

“This water combined with other inflows from the Darling Basin has secured Broken Hill’s water supply for at least 21 months, provided 100 per cent for High Security licences in the Lower Darling and allowed for the re-commencement of flows in the Darling River downstream of Menindee Lakes,” Mr Rees said.

More detailed information is available in the Department of Water and Energy’s critical water planning communiqués - available online at [www.dwe.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dwe.nsw.gov.au)

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