



NSW Government

Department of Water & Energy

Critical water planning for the Murrumbidgee Valley

Issue 25 | 15 July 2009

CURRENT WATER AVAILABILITY

There has been some rain over the catchment in the last month, Thredbo Village received 190 millimetres (mm) of rain; 120 per cent of average July rainfall, Gundagai received 52.2 mm; 80 per cent of average July rainfall, Griffith 30.4 mm; 90 per cent of average July rainfall and Hay 29.7 mm; 95 per cent of average July rainfall respectively.

While this rain has been good for dry land agricultural areas, it has generated little runoff into the storages and upland tributaries. The outlook for the coming months is for average or just below average rainfall, but there is potential for an El Nino developing.

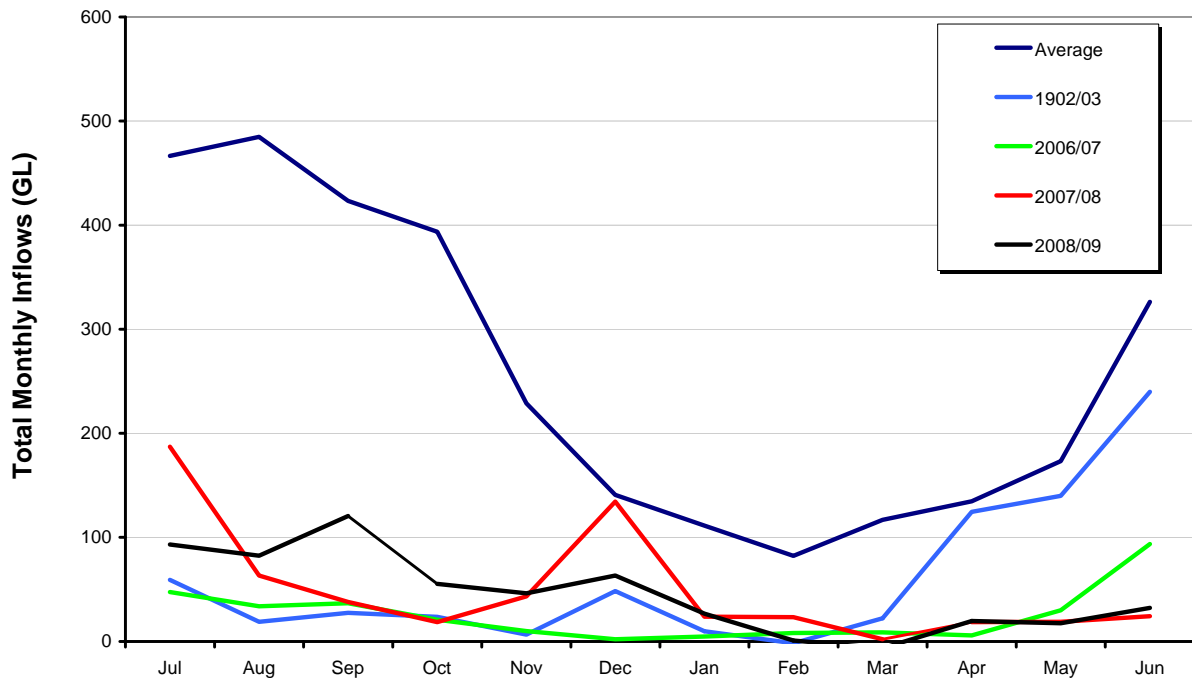
The following table shows Murrumbidgee Valley storage levels as at 13 July 2009.

Storage @ 13 July 2009	Volume (GL)	Percent of capacity	Change in Volume June 11 to 13 July 2009 (GL)	Volume at this time last year
Burrinjuck Dam	392	38	+11	433
Blowering Dam	590	35	+75	640
Total	982			1073

Much of the water held in both dams is private carryover (that is water held-over by licensed users from 2008/09 to use in 2009/10) and advance releases for Snowy Hydro Limited. There is a very small proportion of new water in either storage.

INFLOW GRAPH

Total Murrumbidgee Valley System Natural Inflows (excluding Snowy)
Selected Drought Years-v-Long term average



WHAT THIS MEANS

Minor increases in water availability across the Murrumbidgee Valley and some releases from the Snowy system means that there is sufficient water available to increase carryover from 80 to 90 per cent.

Water availability in the Valley remains critically low and the volumes required to provide for conveyance throughout 2009/10 is still not guaranteed.

There is insufficient water to provide any water to high or general security users. Allocations of zero per cent of entitlement remain. Town water and local water utilities have been advanced water for 'critical human needs' and have been requested to apply Level 4 water restrictions.

The balance of this carryover water is being use to guarantee water to meet critical human needs, which includes town water and domestic supply. Effectively water has been reallocated from business and industry to supply towns.

TRADE

An interim moratorium on the temporary trade of water from the Murrumbidgee Valley to the Murray Valley, including interstate trades, was announced on 30 June 2009. This moratorium was announced because of potentially excessively high transmission losses that would occur if the volumes of trades into the Murray Valley via the Murrumbidgee were to continue throughout the year. The Department is currently developing strategies to relax the moratorium if possible.

Water users are reminded that while the Water Sharing Plan remains switched off, the normal trade rules are also suspended. This means that high security trades may continue after 1 September 2009.

TOWN WATER SUPPLY

Councils and town water supply authorities have been requested to introduce level 4 water restrictions from 1 July 2009. This request is consistent with the Murray and Murrumbidgee town water restrictions policy and applies to all town water supply authorities that draw water from the regulated Murrumbidgee River or from its alluvial aquifers

The policy's trigger levels for easing water restrictions are based on high security allocations and allow town water supply authorities the ability to purchase water to ease water restrictions if they desire.

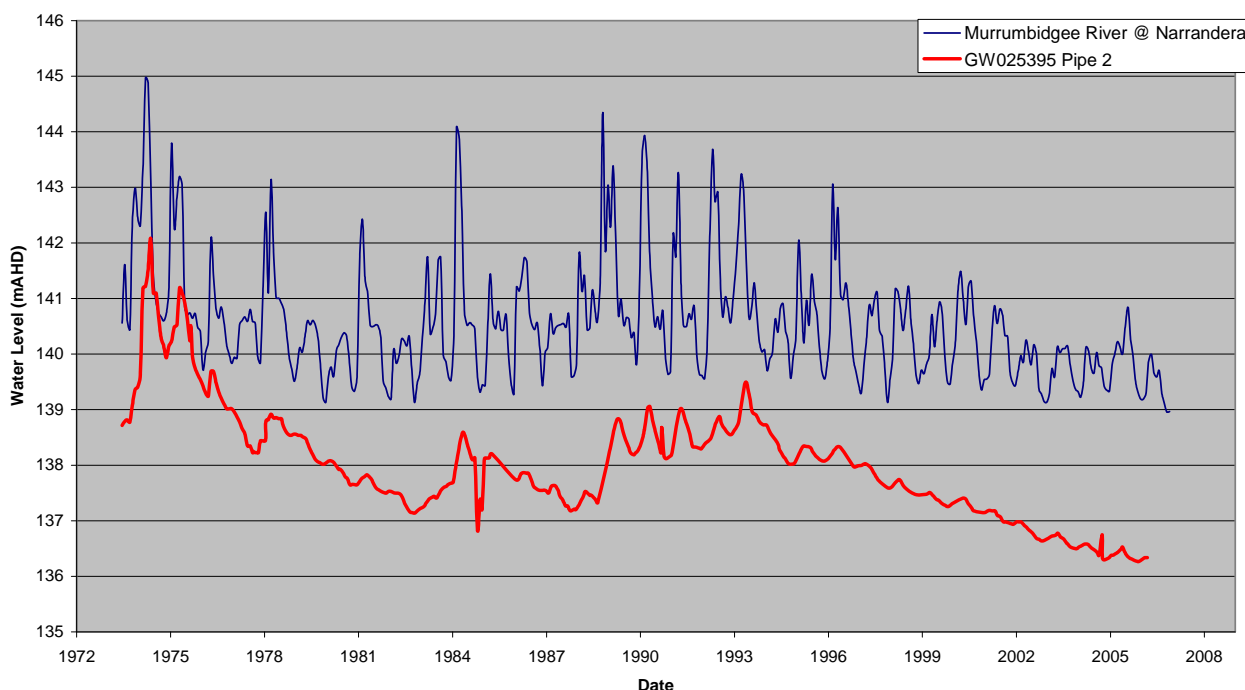
The probability of high security allocations passing 20 per cent by September 2009 is extremely high, meaning that level 3a (maximum of four hours of outside watering) may be applied when the weather warms up.

GROUNDWATER RESOURCES

As the drought continues it is important to be as conservative as possible with all water use. This includes groundwater. Data collected by the Departmental is indicating a decline in groundwater levels as a result of the on-going drought.

Groundwater is recharged from rivers as well as through direct rainfall infiltration. In situations where river levels are higher than the surrounding watertable, the river is known as "losing" and water flows from the river into the watertable. When river levels are reduced, less water flows into the underlying groundwater system and groundwater levels begin to decline. The following graph shows river levels in the Murrumbidgee River at Narrandera and the groundwater levels in adjacent areas.

Murrumbidgee River @ Narrandera and GW025395

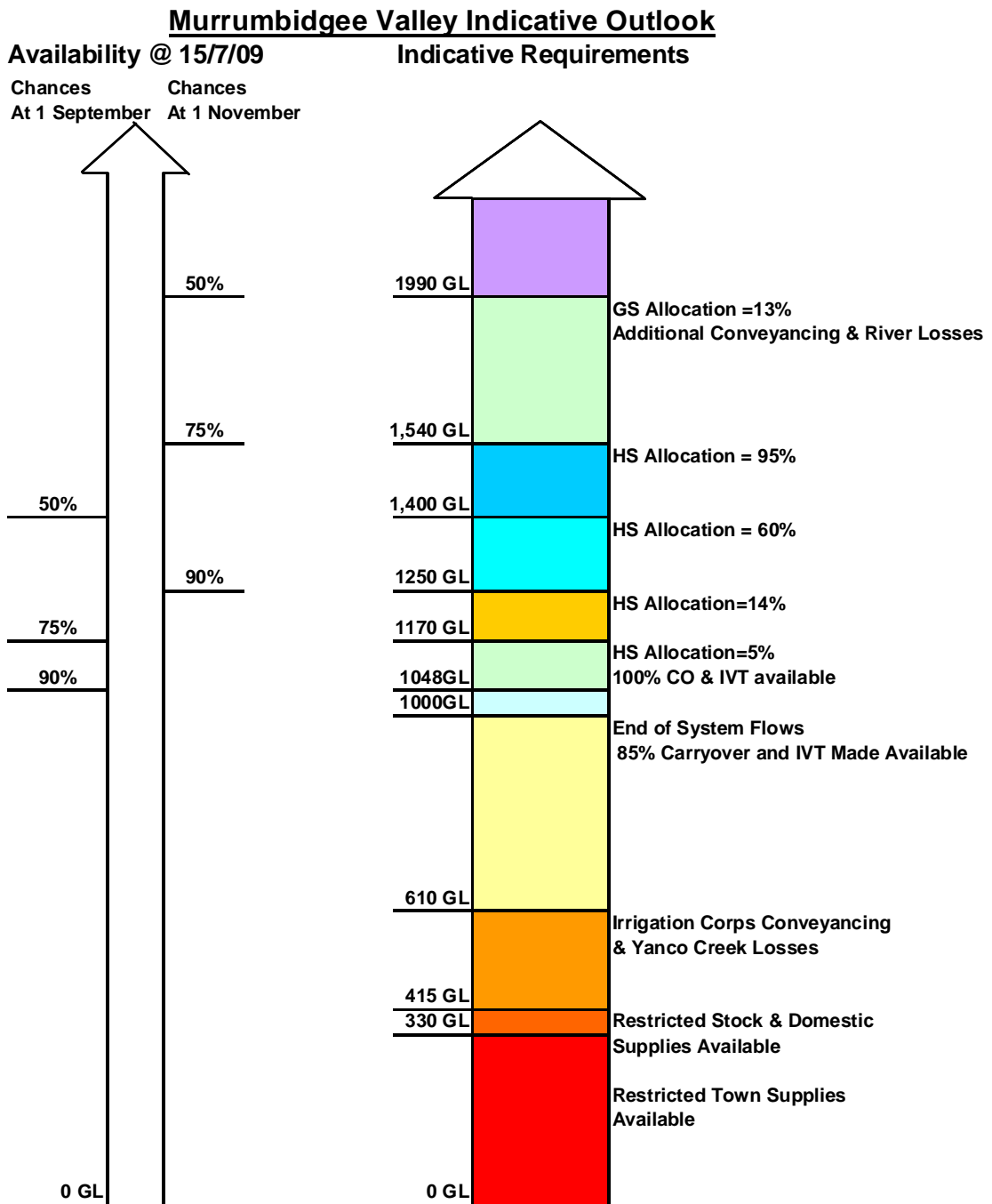


COMPLIANCE

The Department of Water and Energy’s Drought Contingency Planning Program will only work if everyone adheres to the restrictions and is careful with **all** water use. To ensure that the system is run fairly, the community should report any suspected breaches to the Department’s Compliance Unit via phone 1800 633 362 or by email to watercompliance@dwe.nsw.gov.au. All reports are confidential.

WATER AVAILABILITY OUTLOOK

The figures that have been used to calculate this diagram are based on dry tercile and are very conservative. They refer to water availability in **2009/10**. The volumes on the “rocket” are indicative only and may change, dependant on the priority of access following stakeholder feedback.



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