

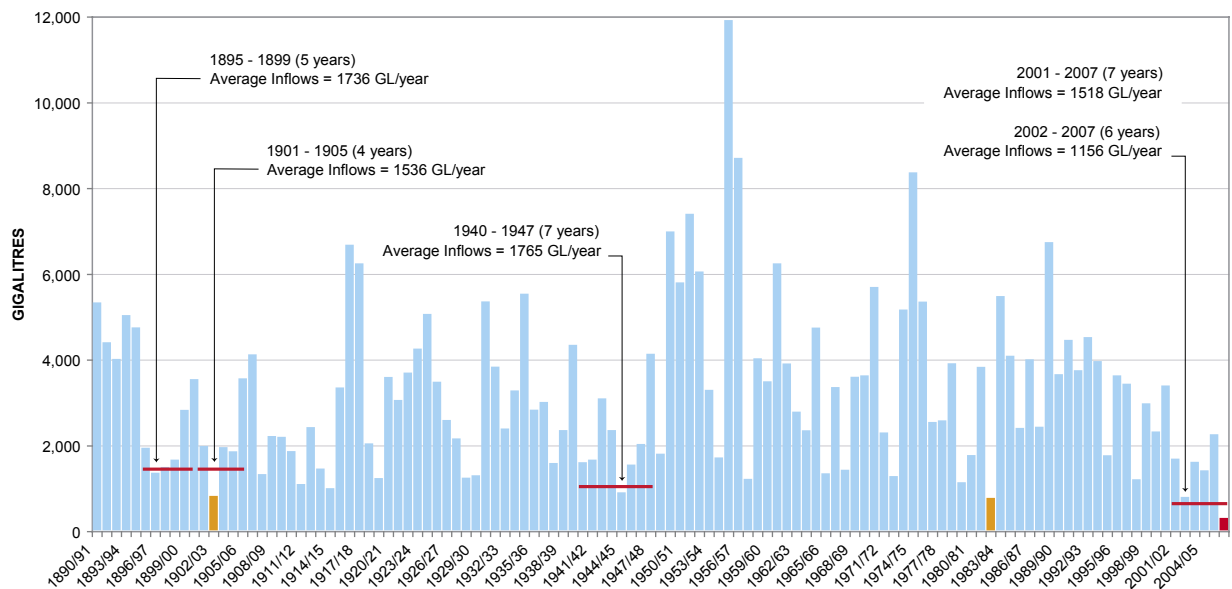


critical water planning for the Murrumbidgee Valley

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Rainfall and inflows to the Murrumbidgee River system remain at record low rates and water availability for 2007/08 will be extremely low unless there is very significant rain. Widespread above average rainfall from May to June is needed just to allow some water supply for irrigation at the start of the 2007/08 season. Murrumbidgee storage reserves remain at very low levels with Blowering Dam at 11 per cent and Burrinjuck Dam at 24 per cent.

HISTORICAL MURRUMBIDGEE VALLEY INFLOWS
(Excluding Snowy Scheme transfers, and assuming continued dry conditions for 2006/07)



HOW HAS THIS OCCURRED?

The low storage levels are the result of very low inflows in 2006/07, following on from the below average inflows during the last six years. In addition, the Murrumbidgee Valley has been experiencing record high losses which are due to the very dry catchment and declining groundwater levels in the mid river sections.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

If there is not a break in the drought and significant rainfall in the coming weeks, there is currently only sufficient supply to meet town water supply and some minimum industry needs.

Critical town water supply and domestic needs is assured in the Murrumbidgee River Valley for 2007/08, but any water for other purposes will depend on future inflows.

Some water supply from the Murrumbidgee environmental water allocation is also reserved to meet critical town water needs in the Murray Valley. This will become available in the Murrumbidgee Valley if conditions in the Murray Valley improve.

IF THE DROUGHT DOES NOT BREAK

There will need to be good inflows to provide water for high security users in the coming season. If not, allocations will remain critically low and contingency plans for allocating any water that does become available will be developed in the coming weeks.

The Department of Water and Energy will also need to consider how to secure critical town water and domestic needs for 2008/09.

IMPROVEMENTS IN CONDITIONS

If improvements in the resource occur, it is proposed that allocations are made as follows:

First priority

- Domestic component of town water supply, basic landholder rights and domestic and stock needs, and critical industry requirements.

Second priority

- Critical environmental needs.

Third priority

- High security entitlements.

Given these extraordinary circumstances, the Department of Water and Energy will be assessing water availability and allocating water on a month by month basis.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

An initial peak stakeholder meeting was held in Leeton on the 30th April to brief councils and industry groups. A regional advisory group will be formed to provide advice to the Minister on the critical water needs of industries and how to best share the limited water available. This group will include representatives from:

- Riverina Organisation of Councils
- Intensive livestock industries
- Forest products
- Murrumbidgee Irrigation
- Coleambally Irrigation
- NSW Irrigators Council

The NSW Government will work with this group to develop contingency measures to provide the best outcomes for the Valley, given the limited water supply.

The first meeting of this group will be held in Wagga Wagga on 18th May.

Further communiqués will be released on the 15th of each month and again at the beginning of each month leading into the 2007/08 season.

CONTACT

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