



MEDIA RELEASE

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Record low inflows keep Basin in serious drought

The outlook for the Murray system remains grim with winter inflows of 670 GL the equal 5th lowest in 117 years of records.

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

Chief Executive Dr Wendy Craik AM said August rainfall was below average and inflow during the month of 275 GL was less than a fifth of the long term average of 1,550 GL.

“In the two years ending August, Murray system inflows were 3,540 GL – a new record low.

“Storage levels are extremely low. Active storage in the Murray system is only 1,690 GL or 20 % of capacity. This is well below the August long term average of 5,600 GL or 62 % capacity. (Active storage is water which can be released using only gravity).

“Persistent low rainfall during the past seven years, particularly in the alpine areas, has been the main cause for the record low inflows to the Murray system, with above average temperatures exacerbating the situation.”

Dr Craik said a flow of 900 ML a day into the Lower Lakes, along with local rainfall had reduced evaporative losses during winter and caused the water level in Lake Alexandrina to gradually rise to its current level of -0.26 m, or 1.0 m below full supply level.

“This has provided some short term relief and has delayed the potential for acidification. However, with the arrival of warmer weather in spring, evaporative losses will start to increase, and the water level is expected to start falling again.

“This will be closely monitored while short and longer term management strategies are developed to maintain the lakes above acidification thresholds.”

Dr Craik said prospects for the coming season would depend on rainfall and run-off. But even with above average rainfall in the coming months, inflows would likely remain well below average.

The Bureau of Meteorology's prediction for spring rainfall is neutral for much of south-eastern Australia.

“So the outlook for the Murray system remains very serious. Critical human needs can now be met through to next winter but water availability for irrigation remains very low,” Dr Craik said. “Recovery of the system is likely to take several years of above average rainfall.”

Dr Craik said the northern part of the Basin was still benefiting from last summer's good rainfall and flooding, though water levels at the Narran lakes were dropping and most wetlands and lakes along the Warrego and Paroo Rivers were also drying up.

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

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