

Summary of meetings in 2018

The Northern Inland NSW Regulated Rivers Critical Water Advisory Panel held four meetings in 2018: 12 July—on 17 September, 21 November and 10 December 2018.

The panel was established in response to extended dry conditions in the northern inland river valleys of NSW. Read the critical water advisory panels fact sheet (visit www.industry.nsw.gov.au and search for 'fact sheet critical water advisory panels' for information on the function and membership of these panels.

This communique provides a summary of the meeting outcomes for 2018.

Drought status (2018)

Macquarie

- Inflows since August 2017 to the end of 2018 remained the driest on record.
- At the start of the 2018–19 water year, general security irrigation accounts held around 200 gegalitres, and environmental accounts held another 200 gegalitres.
- The annual volume required to keep the river running was around 160 gegalitres per year.
- Burrendong Dam at 1 July 2018 held 446 gegalitres (36% of full storage) and Windamere Dam held 151 gegalitres (41% of full storage).
- With no inflows, not all the general security account water could be delivered.
- It was predicted that Burrendong Dam, with no inflow and no restrictions, could be empty by January 2019.

Namoi

- This is the most critical valley in northern NSW, with storage inflows lower than predicted and very high transmission losses.
- The valley started the water year in July 2018 with very low storage levels—only 11% in Keepit Dam and 14% in Split Rock Dam, totalling 104 gegalitres.
- The water in accounts was: 36 gegalitres irrigation, 6 gegalitres Commonwealth environmental water, 5 gegalitres commercial and 4 gegalitres high security.
- Shortfall at start of the year was 70 gegalitres, primarily because of high losses.
- Keepit Dam was predicted to be empty by December 2018.

Gwydir

- Storage in Copeton Dam at 1 July 2018 was 360 gegalitres (27% of active capacity).
- General security account water totalled 50 gegalitres for irrigation and 140 gegalitres of environmental water.
- The delivery shortfall of account water was estimated at 15–20 gegalitres—a small shortfall relative to storage.

Border Rivers

- Although no new general security (B-class) allocations could be made, the Border Rivers started the water year with reasonable supply volumes.
- Glenlyon Dam was at 49% and Pindari Dam was at 59%, with a total storage volume of 308 gegalitres.

Operational and management options

Macquarie

The panel discussed the following options for managing supplies in the Macquarie:

- restricting access to a portion of general security account water. This restriction was applied on 4 September 2018, freezing access to 30% of 1 July account balance for general security licence holders (100 gegalitres)
- block releases for irrigation orders in Macquarie valley to conserve water
- stock and domestic replenishments in winter, with future deliveries dependent on inflows and tributary flows
- timing of environmental releases to assist with base flows for other deliveries, if possible
- stock and domestic requirements in the lower Macquarie met by environmental releases for the Marshes
- bulk water transfer from Windamere to Burrendong Dam, which occurred in January 2019.

Namoi

The panel discussed the following options for managing supplies in the Namoi:

- restricting access to a portion of general security account water. This occurred on 13 November 2018. Lower Namoi general security users were limited to 85% of the water ordered by 5 November and the Upper Namoi to 85% of remaining account water. This restriction was lifted on 28 November following local rainfall
- replenishment flows deferred. Pian Creek replenishment flow was completed in June 2018 and no further releases were able to be made
- Lower Namoi orders delivered via block releases. This occurred in October and with a final release in late December
- bulk water transfers from Split Rock to Keepit Dam. This occurred in November and December 2018
- Reducing the distance of releases—it is unlikely that end of system flows can be provided.

Gwydir

The panel discussed the following options for managing supplies in the Gwydir:

- timing of environmental releases to assist with base flows for other deliveries, if possible
- environmental water to Gingham Creek, Lower Gwydir and Mallowa Creek delivered in block releases. Mallowa Creek water supply scheme shortfall was addressed by the timing of environmental releases
- block releases to creek systems—applied to Carole Creek and other systems
- no further winter deliveries to effluent streams.

Use of final water in Keepit Dam

Following the transfer of water from Split Rock Dam at the start of December 2018, Keepit Dam was at just 3% of active capacity. As the remaining water deliveries were being finalised, and despite some local rainfall and a Commonwealth environmental release, flows were not extending along the full length of the river.

The panel agreed that some additional volume should be released from the dam to enable the water to reach Walgett. This also allowed a final supply of water for critical needs along the river and for the delivery of remaining general security account water.

Leaving the water in storage would not provide significant benefit as there was insufficient volume to reserve for 2019–20 needs. Also, under continuing dry conditions, most of the water would be lost to evaporation.

Extreme events policy

The NSW Extreme Events Policy was publicly released on 30 October 2018 on the Department of Industry website (industry.nsw.gov.au/water/what-we-do/legislation-policies/eep).

By December 2018, the Gwydir was in Stage 2 (Emerging Drought) and the Macquarie and Upper and Lower Namoi in stage 3 (Severe Drought).

Future meetings

Panel members agreed that community drought meetings should be held in early 2019 to provide input on local concerns to the critical water advisory panels.