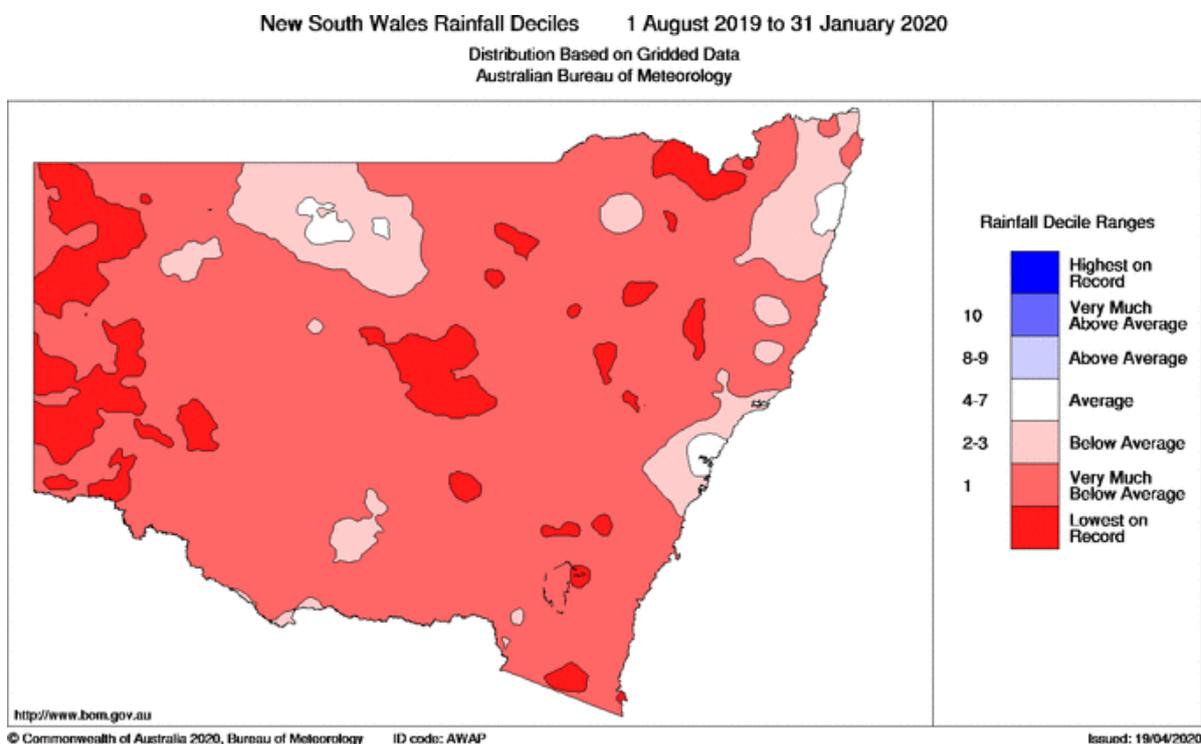


19 May 2020

NSW Groundwater allocation statement

Water allocation update

The extreme dry conditions experienced for the last two to three years across NSW continued into the beginning of 2020. The rainfall map below shows that, for the six months from August 2019 to the end of January 2020, most of NSW had very much below average rainfall. Some areas recorded the lowest rainfall on record for this time of year. With very little surface water available, there was a heavy reliance on groundwater across all areas of the state.

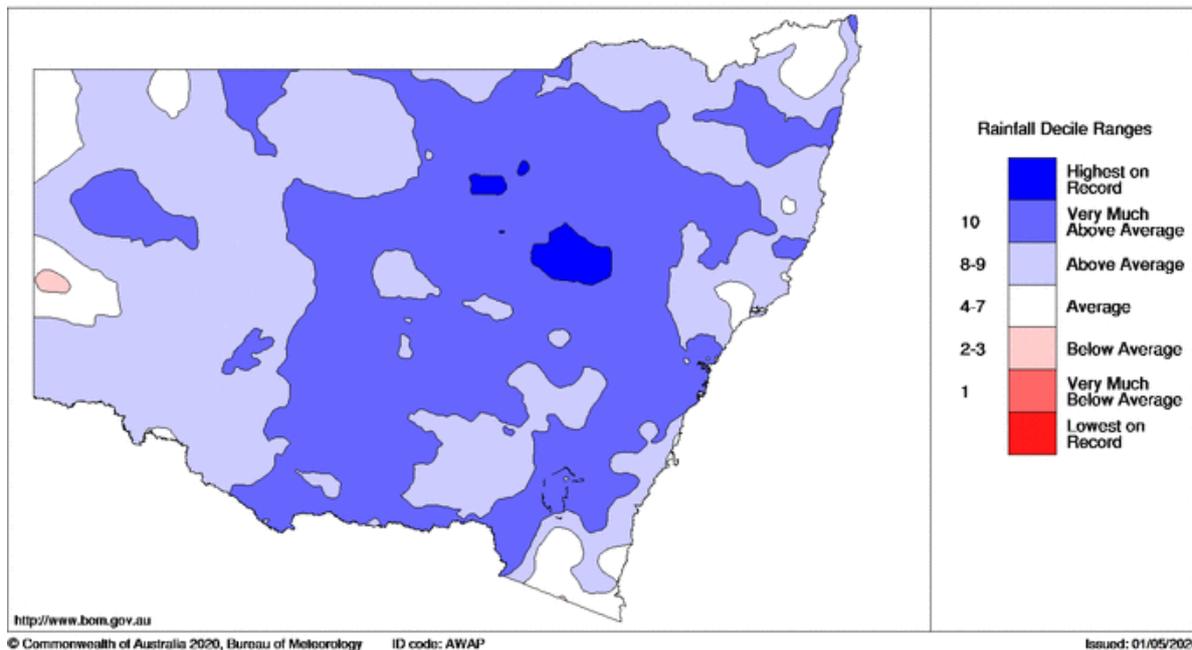


However, since February 2020 there has been some good rainfall across much of the state. The second map below shows large areas of the state having received much higher than average rainfall for the three months to the end of April. This rainfall has alleviated the pumping pressure on groundwater to finish the irrigation season.

Although soil moisture deficits have been reducing with passing storms and catchments are beginning to generate an improved runoff response, large inland storages are still very low, with most less than 20 per cent full. Coastal valleys have fared much better. Overall, the seasonal rainfall outlooks are providing some optimism for NSW surface water users.

New South Wales Rainfall Deciles 1 February to 30 April 2020

Distribution Based on Gridded Data
Australian Bureau of Meteorology



Water sharing plans allow groundwater to be temporarily pumped for some years at higher volumes than the annual limit. This provides some operational flexibility to respond to variations in climate conditions, including droughts. However, the plans also set limits on the period that this higher level of extraction can continue. To prevent unacceptable resource depletion, once this compliance trigger is reached, groundwater allocations are reduced until the extraction is back within the plan's annual limit.

It's anticipated that the new groundwater sharing plans for the Murray-Darling Basin area of NSW will start on 1 July 2020, once approved by the Minister for Water with the concurrence of the Minister for the Environment. For several groundwater sources these new plans change the period that extraction can exceed the plan's annual limit. The water allocation outlook provided here is based on the changed compliance triggers in the new plans. These new compliance rules will be adopted for 2020-2021.

Water allocation outlook

Under water sharing plan rules, allocations must be reduced in a groundwater source when the average annual extraction exceeds the plan's compliance trigger. Reduced allocations are intended to return groundwater extraction to within long term average sustainable limits.

The calculations for compliance with extraction limits, and therefore the need to reduce allocation, are based on the volumes pumped in the current and previous years to determine the average annual extraction over the five-year compliance period. The plans have varying exceedance levels, typically 5 per cent or 10 per cent above the extraction limit. Those groundwater sources that have higher exceedance levels over which the average extraction is calculated could require longer periods of reduced allocation to return the water source to sustainable levels of extraction once exceedance is triggered.

The 1 July water allocations are currently being calculated. For two groundwater sources, their plan's compliance trigger has already been reached and allocations for 2020-2021 will be reduced.

Reduced allocations for Aquifer Access entitlements may also be expected in some other groundwater sources (Table1).

WaterNSW is prioritising the processing of metering data for groundwater systems that have extraction levels approaching their plan's compliance trigger. This will ensure we have the best available information on which to base the water allocation determinations.

Groundwater entitlements in highly connected alluvial systems can also expect a reduced allocation on 1 July if the linked surface water allocation is reduced.

Table 1: Groundwater sources that could expect reduced allocations on 1 July 2020.

Compliance	Groundwater source
Compliance trigger exceeded. Can expect reduced allocations on 1 July.	Great Artesian Basin Eastern Recharge Lower Murrumbidgee Deep
Close to exceedance of compliance trigger, reduction in allocations dependent on final metering data	Upper Namoi Zone 3, Mooki Valley (Breeza to Gunnedah)
Potential compliance trigger exceedance and reduced allocation. May not eventuate depending on final metering data.	Lower Namoi Upper Macquarie Alluvial Upper Namoi Zone 2, Cox's Creek (Mullaley to Boggabri) Upper Namoi Zone 8 Mooki Valley (Quirindi - Pine Ridge Road to Breeza)

Not all groundwater meter readings can be finalised prior to the 1 July 2020 announcement, therefore some projections of annual water usage to 30 June will be necessary.

Projections will be checked using actual data as it comes to hand. Where a reduction has been imposed, but subsequent metering data shows an increase in the allocation is permissible, then a further allocation will be made in early October 2020.

All other groundwater sources can expect the usual allocation for entitlements held on 1 July for the water year 2020-21.

Further information

Information on available water determinations and water sharing plans is available on the Department of Industry website - www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water

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