

The Southern Inland Critical Water Advisory Panel (Southern Panel) held a meeting on 8 November 2019 to discuss options for managing the emerging drought conditions affecting the Lachlan Valley.

Critical Water Advisory Panels are established under the NSW Extreme Events Policy to provide valley-specific advice on the most appropriate management actions to be adopted during an extreme event.

Lachlan Valley

Drought situation update

The recent winter-spring period in the Lachlan Valley has almost passed with no significant inflows. Typically, this is a period when the main inflows into the Lachlan Valley occur. In the unlikely event of no further system inflows, then water savings are necessary to provide for towns and critical human needs in 2020–21.

The Southern Panel recommended considering measures that could be implemented this water year to conserve river supplies for towns until the next winter-spring inflow period.

Contingency measures

The Southern Panel discussed a range of possible drought contingency measures as a means of extending water supplies until late September 2020 under a zero inflow scenario. This would allow more time for towns to secure or connect to groundwater supplies.

The Southern Panel considered measures including:

- improving the operational efficiency of the Lachlan regulated river by ceasing end-of-system flows, or
- limiting the delivery of flows to certain creeks, or
- not topping up Lake Cargelligo.

Other measures considered included:

- further restricting access to general security carryover
- limiting the use of the water quality allowance in the *Water Sharing Plan for the Lachlan Regulated River Water Source 2016*, or
- placing restrictions on domestic water use by rural landholders in line with town water restrictions.

In evaluating these measures, the Southern Panel considered the potential social, economic and environmental risks associated with each option, against the comparative water savings that could be provided were the measures to be implemented.

The Southern Panel supported measures that would improve the operational efficiency of the regulated river. This included reducing or pulsing releases to downstream creeks where necessary, as well as ceasing flows to Lake Cargelligo. The preference was to cease flows to Lake Cargelligo only after 1 March 2020, to minimise the potential effects on local tourism over the summer holiday period.

The Southern Panel's preference is to consider further restrictions to general security carryover, or the suspension of the water quality allowance, only if absolutely necessary.

We will advise water users of the implementation of these measures through local consultation by WaterNSW and the regular water allocation statements released by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. These measures will be closely monitored to minimise the effects on water users and water quality.

Agencies present

- NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
 - Water Division
 - Environment, Energy and Science Division
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
 - Fisheries
 - Agriculture
- NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet
- WaterNSW
- NSW Health
- Forbes Shire Council
- Lachlan Shire Council
- Parkes Shire Council
- Cowra Shire Council
- Central NSW Joint Organisation