

15 May 2017

Murrumbidgee Valley

Water availability outlook for 2017-18 – update

There has been little change in the forecasts already provided in the lead up to the 1 July 2017 water allocation announcements.

These forecasts are intended to assist water users with their late season decisions about cropping, trading and carryover. The forecasts are not a guarantee of actual 1 July 2017 allocations.

Interstate trade (to and from South Australia and Victoria) closed 30 April 2017 and trade within and between valleys in the southern connected basin (Murrumbidgee, NSW Murray and Lower Darling) closes 31 May 2017. For more detail water users should contact WaterNSW.

Key information

- This updated outlook for the likely 1 July 2017 water allocation conservatively assumes extremely dry inflow conditions (99th percentile) for the remainder of the current (2016-17) water year. It then looks at various inflow scenarios extending into 2017-18.
- The Murrumbidgee Valley experienced very wet conditions this water year, with higher flows experienced in only 18 out of 100 years (18th percentile inflows). However, since January conditions have been drier with inflows falling below monthly long-term averages.
- The estimate of end-of-year carryover is uncertain as it is dependent on weather conditions over coming weeks and individual decisions by water users. With the arrival of wet conditions last spring and full allocations, carryover is estimated to be close to the maximum allowable 30 per cent of entitlement, namely around 650,000 megalitres (ML).
- Access to inter-valley trade in 2017-18 is dependent on the balance of the IVT account. The 30 June balance will carry forward to 1 July and be made available for delivery to the Murray when most needed in 2017-18.
- According to the Bureau of Meteorology, the valley is likely to be drier than average in the three months from May to July, with above average daytime temperatures.

The tropical Pacific is currently El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) neutral. Despite the likelihood for El Niño easing in some models, an event in 2017 cannot be ruled out. The Bureau's ENSO Outlook remains at El Niño WATCH, meaning there is around a 50% chance that El Niño may develop in the coming months. It should be noted that models have lower accuracy forecasting El Niño through the autumn months.

El Niño is often, but not always, associated with a drier than average winter-spring over eastern Australia. Of the 27 El Niño events since 1900, 18 have resulted in at least some areas of significantly dry conditions for Australia.

While the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) remains neutral, the majority of climate models suggest a positive IOD is likely to develop during winter. When a positive IOD coincides with El Niño, the typical dry conditions experienced across Australia during El Niño may be enhanced.

- Once the commencing allocations are announced on 1 July 2017, regular assessments will be undertaken and allocation announcements made fortnightly on the 1st and 15th of each month, or next working day following, as required for the remainder of the water year.

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- This is the final update for this 2016-17 water year. The next water allocation statement for the Murrumbidgee Valley will be on **Monday 3 July 2017**.

Indicative allocations on 1 July 2017

- Full allocation can be expected for all towns, as well as domestic and stock access licences.
- Private carryover will be fully deliverable. It is estimated that the average carryover across the valley will be very high; close to the maximum 30 per cent of entitlement.
- Murrumbidgee High Security access licences will receive an initial allocation of 95 per cent of entitlement, consistent with the Murrumbidgee regulated river water sharing plan.
- Under 'extreme dry' inflow conditions (99th percentile) through to the end of this (2016-17) water year, there will be 9 per cent commencing general security allocation on 1 July.
- A 9 per cent allocation under 'extreme dry' conditions, together with 30 per cent carryover, means average general security water availability on 1 July will be 39 per cent of entitlement.
- Water will be allocated to conveyance licences, commensurate with the opening general security allocation.
- Supplementary access licence holders will receive a full allocation; however, as usual, diversion is only allowed during periods of announced supplementary access.
- Water in Environmental Water Allowances (EWA) accounts will be available in accordance with the rules of the water sharing plan.
- In the Murrumbidgee water source, general security and conveyance licences can carry over water up to a maximum of 30 per cent of entitlement. The account limit (allocation plus carryover) is 100 per cent of entitlement.
- Murrumbidgee inter and intra valley trade will operate in accordance with existing procedures and protocols, particularly in relation to the Inter-Valley Trade (IVT) account limits.
- Releases from headwater storages will be managed to maximise water availability and deliverability including equalising the risk of spill from storages.

Chances of improvement

The chances of improved general security allocation in the Murrumbidgee regulated system, based on different inflow conditions in 2017-18, remain similar to earlier predictions and are provided in the table below.

Forecast general security allocation (per cent)[#]

Potential Inflow Conditions	1 Sept 2017	1 Nov 2017
99 chances in 100 (extreme) (99%)	9	9
9 chances in 10 (very dry) (90%)	13	24
3 chances in 4 (dry) (75%)	20	34
1 chance in 2 (mean) (50%)	33	50*
1 chance in 4 (wet) (25%) [^]	48	52*

[^] The 2016-17 water year to date has experienced very wet conditions (18th percentile) due largely to spring floods.

[#] Assumes an average carryover of 30%.

* Under average and wetter conditions (and hence elevated allocations), peak demand deliverability become problematic. Water becomes 'trapped' in Blowering Dam due to Tumut channel capacity limitations so the water cannot yet be allocated. Monitoring for such conditions eventuating will be maintained to ensure that early advice can be provided.