

7 February 2020

Namoi Regulated River Water Source

Water allocation update

The Namoi Valley has received above average rainfall during January. Even though the upper catchment received about 100 to 200 mm of rainfall, total storage inflows were minimal, at around 2 gigalitres (GL), due to the prolonged extreme dry weather drying the catchments. The severity of the current drought still remains largely unchanged.

With extreme dry conditions experienced over the last 30 months more sustained rainfall and runoff is required to bring the system back to normal conditions. General security (GS) allocations remain unchanged at zero per cent for the 2019-2020 water year.

On Thursday (6 February), a low-pressure trough extending down from the north combined with a very moist onshore flow, has brought widespread heavy rain to much of the east coast. Some of this is forecast to extend towards north-west NSW and could bring up to 50-100 mm of rain in the next 3-4 days. The predictions are that this rain will be patchy.

A **temporary water restriction** was applied to a number of catchments including Namoi River and its tributaries from 17 January to 31 January. The restriction has been further extended to 17 February as the Bureau has been forecasting good rainfalls. The restriction is prohibiting pumping by the high security and unregulated river license holders on this valley. Having a temporary restriction order allows any moderate flows to be protected for critical needs. This recent restriction is in addition to the temporary water restriction on general security license holders that has been in place. The department will monitor flows closely and should critical needs be met, the order may be lifted. Information on current restrictions is listed here:

<https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/temporary-water-restrictions>

2019-20	High Security	General Security	Drought Stage
Upper Namoi Regulated River Water Source	75%	0%	 Stage 4
Lower Namoi Regulated River Water Source	75%	0%	 Stage 4

Keepit Dam is about 1.6 per cent full, holding 13,300 megalitres (ML). While Split Rock Dam is about 0.9 per cent full, holding about 6,700 ML.

These storages will need at least about 95,000 ML of combined inflow before normal regulated river operations can resume.

Key facts

- Storages received about 2 GL of inflows from the recent rain events.

- Higher priority users on the Upper Namoi including Manilla and Barraba township are receiving an intermittent (pulsed) regulated supply from Split Rock Dam over summer unless rainfall and inflows eventuate. The first pulse release ceased after 4 days following rainfall on 28 January.
- Storage inflows since the last general security allocation in August 2017 have been just 42,000 ML. This is well below the previous recorded minimums of 153,000 ML (August 2013 to January 2016).
- Upper and Lower Namoi high and general security water access license holders remain restricted from accessing any water in their accounts.
- Trade within water sources is still permitted; however, any purchased restricted water will be transferred to a drought sub-account and remain restricted.
- The restrictions will be eased or removed once the inflow situation improves sufficiently.

Drought stage

The NSW Extreme Events Policy introduced a staged approach from one to four to manage extreme circumstances. Both the Upper Namoi and Lower Namoi are now at drought criticality level Stage 4. The maximum stage is reflecting the critical water shortage conditions where access to water must be prioritised for critical human needs and town water supplies.

Further information on drought stages can be found at: www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/extreme-events

Seasonal climate outlook

The Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook for February to April indicates that the Namoi catchment is equally likely to get above or below average rainfall. Both daytime and night-time temperatures over this period are very likely to be above average.

The Bureau indicates that the two major climate drivers, El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), have returned to neutral. With major climate drivers neutral, local or short-term climate drivers, such as sea surface temperatures around Australia, and active or break periods of the monsoon, are likely to have a greater influence on Australian rainfall and temperature patterns.

Details can be found in: <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/ahead/outlooks/>

Further information

The next monthly water allocation statement for the Namoi Regulated River Water Source will be available in early March 2020.

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