

## Southern Critical Water Advisory Panel (CWAP)

*The Southern CWAP (Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys) held a meeting on 14 October 2020.*

A summary of the meeting outcomes is provided below.

Further information on the function and membership of critical water advisory panels can be found here: [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/critical-water-advisory-panels](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/critical-water-advisory-panels)

Information on the drought status of major river systems across the state can be found here: [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/critical-valleys-in-drought](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/critical-valleys-in-drought)

**Please note:** All reasonable efforts have been made to provide accurate and current information in this communique. This information is accurate as at 14 October 2020. However, changes in circumstances such as weather variability, water management decisions or any other events after the time of publication may impact on the accuracy of the material. Water allocation statements published by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment - Water (DPIE-Water) provide the most accurate information on available water and allocations and are available at: [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements)

### Water availability update and forecast

CWAP members were provided with an update on southern river system conditions as at 14 October 2020. More up-to-date information can be accessed on the WaterNSW website. WaterNSW publishes weekly water availability update reports here: [www.waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/availability](http://www.waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/availability)

The WaterNSW Water Insights Portal is also a useful resource for further information on storage levels, allocations and any restrictions across the state in each valley. The portal brings together a range of water management data into one platform: [www.waternsw.com.au/waterinsights/water-insights](http://www.waternsw.com.au/waterinsights/water-insights)

### 14 October update

Rainfall along the southern and central west slopes and ranges over recent months has maintained stream flows and in-flows to the dams in the Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and Murray.

The outlook to January 2021 indicates a wetter than average period for NSW. With this positive forecast, WaterNSW is assessing the likelihood of storages spilling, particularly Burrinjuck Dam. Any floods and floodplain flows that occur in the coming months may also trigger poor water quality and particularly low dissolved oxygen for fish.

### Lachlan

The Lachlan Valley is now in Stage 1 – Normal operations. A recent 4% increase takes the general security allocation to 32%. Wyangala Dam is at 61.6% capacity and rising and is releasing 30 megalitres (ML)/day. Translucent releases from Lake Brewster have now completed and the flows are now licenced environmental water releases. There is approximately a 10% chance of Wyangala Dam spilling by January 2021.

## Murrumbidgee

The Murrumbidgee is in Stage 1 – Normal operations. A recent 2% increase takes general security allocations to 48%. Burrinjuck Dam is at 79.4% capacity and falling and releasing approximately 4950 ML/day to meet system demands for irrigation and environmental orders. Blowering Dam is at 81.8% and releasing 2000 ML/day to meet system demands.

## Murray

The Murray is in Stage 1 – Normal operations. A 2% increase takes the total general security allocation to 17%. Hume Dam is at 72.3% and making a minimum release of 600 ML/day. This release will increase once the downstream tributary flows recede to meet subsequent environmental demands.

## Lower Darling

The Lower Darling is in Stage 2 – Recovering from drought. General security allocations remain at 30%. Total storage levels in Menindee Lakes systems are at approximately 467 GL of total volume. The system is releasing 420 ML/day.

## Hypoxic Blackwater events

With the return of wetter conditions after the prolonged dry period, hypoxic (low oxygen) blackwater is an increasing risk in the southern valleys.

Hypoxic blackwater is a natural event, but is occurring more frequently than in the past. There are only limited options available to manage such events. The key tool is to ensure that landholders are aware of the increasing risks and events when they occur.

The Commonwealth and NSW Government are working together to improve preparedness for hypoxic blackwater events. This includes informing stakeholders and the community about the risks and limited response actions available through media and public communications. It also involves establishing governance arrangements for a coordinated response to hypoxic blackwater events.

Valley based incident response groups will convene if a hypoxic blackwater event is emerging. These groups have representation from the Department – water and environment, DPI Fisheries, Water NSW, the Commonwealth Government and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. They will oversee functions including water quality monitoring, providing water quality updates and advice on the management of specific events. These committees will aim to ensure that consistent messaging at a valley-based level is provided to the community. Local Land Services and Councils will also support with the distribution of information to stakeholders and the community before and during hypoxic blackwater events.

The Department now has a hypoxic blackwater page on the DPIE website. The page provides weekly updates on dissolved oxygen levels for the southern valleys. This can be found at: [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/managing-drought-recovery/blackwater](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/managing-drought-recovery/blackwater)

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority has established a water quality alerts page on their website. The page indicates the likelihood of various water quality threats, including hypoxic blackwater. This can be found at: [www.mdba.gov.au/water-management/mdbas-river-operations/water-quality](http://www.mdba.gov.au/water-management/mdbas-river-operations/water-quality)

## Reliability of general security allocations

A question was raised regarding whether general security allocations are less reliable than in the past. DPIE-Water explained that there has been no change to the method used to allocate water in the valley and how all available water is accounted for is outlined in the respective water allocation statements. There are a greater number of licences now held by environmental water users, due to licence buy-backs by state and Commonwealth agencies. However, these are mostly general security licences and the total entitlement of general security and high security licences has not changed. The reason for the increased number of years with no or low general security allocations in recent times has been the occurrence of two major droughts in the last 15 years.

## Water for recreational lakes

A comment was made about whether water could be provided to fill Gum Bend Lake, near Condobolin, on the Lachlan River prior to summer. Lachlan Shire Council advised that the cost of buying water to fill the Lake is prohibitive.

All available water is allocated and to provide water to fill recreational lakes out of the resources available would come at the expense of other licensed water users. Water can be re-allocated from Council's water holdings, purchased or donated from other water users and with improving general security allocations these may be options for Council.

## Agencies present

- NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
  - Water Division (DPIE-Water)
  - Environment, Energy and Science Division (DPIE-EES)
  - Regional NSW
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
  - DPI Agriculture
  - DPI Fisheries
- NSW Health
- Local Land Services
- Lachlan Shire Council
- Central Joint Organisation of Councils
- Canberra Region Joint Organisation of Councils