

Tuesday, 5 February 2008

RIVER MURRAY ALLOCATIONS TO STAY AT 32PC

Minister for the River Murray Karlene Maywald says irrigation allocations will stay at 32 per cent until imbalances in the way water has been shared between Murray-Darling Basin states are settled.

“An allocation of only 32pc for the entire water year is just more than half of what irrigators received in 2006-07 and will have a huge impact on our rural communities,” Minister Maywald said.

“Under the 2007-08 special water sharing rules introduced last year, South Australia had agreed to share its access to initial water resources so that New South Wales and Victoria could meet their critical human needs.

“In return, South Australia would receive better access to resources as the season progressed and water availability improved.

“The season was expected to improve enough to enable transition back to the normal Murray-Darling Basin Agreement water sharing rules by the end of 2007-08. Unfortunately, this is now unlikely.

“Under the special water sharing rules, SA was 150GL better off at November 30 than we would have been if the normal sharing rules had applied. This equates to about 27 percent of irrigator allocations.

“If those rules continued to apply then this imbalance would continue to grow and SA would be required to pay it back in full before any water could be allocated to irrigators for 2008-09.

“This was clearly unacceptable so the rules have been renegotiated.”

The Prime Minister and Premiers of South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria today signed off on the new sharing arrangements to apply from November 30.

The negotiated changes mean that from 1 July 2008, SA will be able to:

- Meet annual critical human needs of 201 gegalitres to supply Adelaide, country towns and private stock and domestic.
- Allow irrigators to carry-over water for use in 2008-09 that they may have either bought in or not used during 2007-08.
- Provide the greatest opportunity for water for allocation to irrigators from the start of the season, depending on inflows over the coming six months.
- Guarantee delivery of 696 gegalitres of dilution flow in 2008-09.

“Under these new rules and recent improvements in water availability during December and early January, South Australia’s imbalance is back to 100GL.

“The 201GL critical human needs reserve will be accumulated before July through a combination of improvements to inflows in the River Murray and Mount Lofty Ranges’ catchments and management of dilution flows,” she said.

“If conditions improve and South Australia receives more water to allocate to irrigation over and above the imbalance, we will need to determine whether it is best to allocate it for 2007-08 or store it to ensure there is a starting allocation for 2008-09. Further advice will be sought from the River Murray Advisory Committee on this matter.”

More information about the new sharing arrangements can be found in a frequently asked questions document available at: www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au/murray/drought/index.html. Information about carry-over arrangements will be available shortly.