

Thursday, 1 April 2010

FLOODWATERS ON THEIR WAY TO SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Minister for the River Murray Paul Caica said today South Australia has been officially assigned the first 257 billion litres of floodwaters from Queensland and New South Wales, which are now on their way to the Medindee Lakes.

South Australia is set to get a minimum of 500 billion litres of water from the Queensland floods, with this first tranche arriving within weeks.

Mr Caica says the Murray Darling Basin Authority's latest water resource assessment shows a total of 290 billion litres are heading to South Australia.

The latest assessment includes:

- South Australia's share of 33 billion litres from improved water availability in the River Murray catchment
- The first instalment of 257 billion litres from South Australia's minimum 500 billion litre share of the Queensland floodwaters.

"This water will be held in reserve, and decisions about where it is allocated will be made as South Australia's total water resource picture becomes clearer," Mr Caica says.

"We will now have available at the beginning of the 2010-11 water year a much greater amount of water than was available at the same time in 2009-10," Mr Caica says.

"In total, South Australia is receiving 700 billion litres of extra water from both the December/January NSW and Queensland floods alone.

"This puts South Australia in a much better position to manage our water resources despite the prolonged drought, which has previously reduced inflows to a trickle.

"There will now be a lot more water available to South Australia to direct to the environment and the Lower Lakes while securing our State's water supplies for communities along the River Murray.

"Today's allocation is on top of the 238 billion litres secured from the NSW floods that will go to the Lower Lakes, and South Australia's 170 billion litres Lower Lakes environmental reserve.

"This extra water will help prevent the devastating effects of acidification and salinity and is sustaining the lakes until the return of bigger freshwater flows from upstream.

“With an extra 408 billion litres set to reach the Lower Lakes this year, there is now a good chance that the decision to construct the temporary weir to protect Adelaide’s water supply can be deferred indefinitely.

Mr Caica says the Rann Government also remains committed to again securing a 170 billion litre Environmental Reserve to improve the chances of delivering a freshwater solution to the challenges facing the Lower Lakes..

“South Australia has also already secured water for our critical human needs in 2010-11 and raised River Murray irrigator allocations to their highest level in four years,” Mr Caica says.

“Irrigation allocations will remain at 62%. However it looks like there will be a good opening allocation this year, and the prospect of a much better season.”

Despite the inflows into the Basin from floods in New South Wales and Queensland, River Murray storage volumes remain low.

The current volume in Hume, Dartmouth, Menindee Lakes and Lake Victoria is 2,798 billion litres (30% capacity).

While this is double the 1,370 billion litres in storage at this time last year, it is still well below the long-term average storage for this time of year of 5,042 billion litres, or 54% of total capacity.

For more information about conditions in the River Murray or wider Murray-Darling Basin visit www.mdba.gov.au/