

Critical water planning for the Lachlan Valley

Issue 4 | 1 October 2009

Current water availability

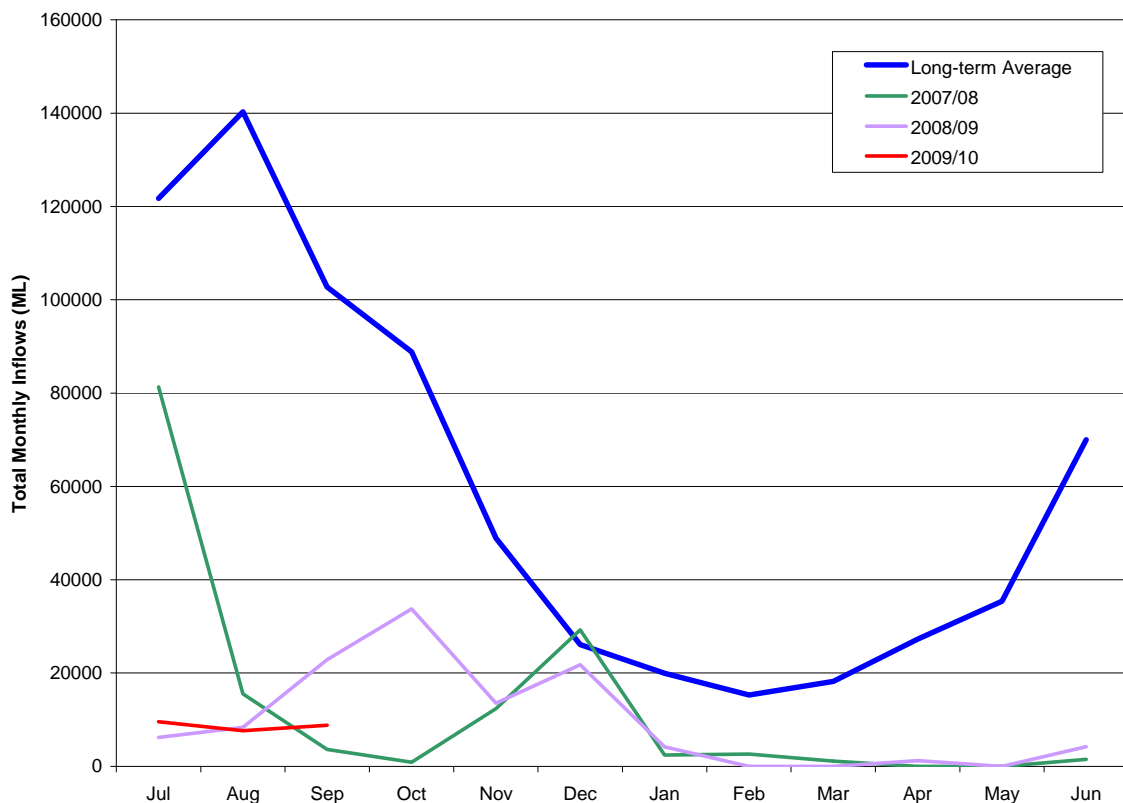
Rainfall across the Lachlan valley during August and September has been patchy with some good falls recorded in the catchment during the latter parts of the month. Unfortunately this has done little to improve the storage levels with only 26 gigalitres of inflow being recorded into Wyangala Dam since 1 July 2009.

While Wyangala is currently at 6.3 percent of capacity, it has been as low as 2.8 percent, in March 1983.

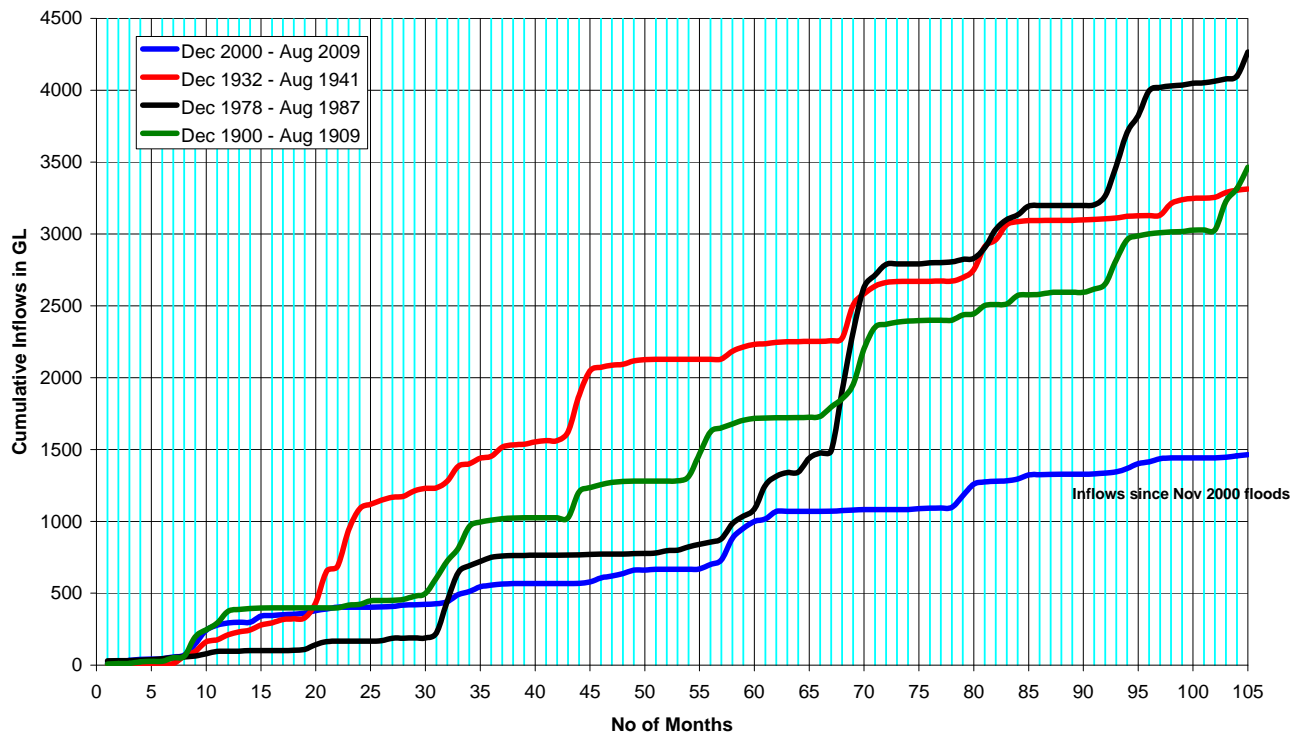
The following table shows storage levels in gigalitres (GL) as at 30 September 2009.

	Volume (GL)	Percentage of Capacity	Change in volume (GL) since 1 July
Wyangala Dam	76	6.3%	0.1%

Inflow graph



Wyangala Drought Inflows for 105 Months Starting in December



This graph compares this drought, with previous droughts

What this means

The ongoing drought in the Lachlan Valley has seen dam levels drop to such low levels that without urgent action, Wyangala Dam may empty and the whole river run dry by mid summer. Critical water planning is now well underway to preserve the available water for as long as possible.

Rainfall over the past month has generated little inflow, and as a consequence the proposed dam and weir pool management actions will now be implemented. This will ensure that as much water as possible can be reserved and diverted to meet critical human needs and stock and domestic requirements. This will also ensure that the Wyangala Dam storage level is maintained above 2 per cent of capacity during coming summer.

Currently there is enough water available to allow for a 50 per cent allocation to town water supply, 15 per cent allocation to be made to stock and domestic licence holders and a 10 per cent allocation to high security licence holders.

There is no water available for general security licence holders' and water remaining in accounts as carryover cannot be accessed.

Lachlan River management during 2009/10

Releases from Wyangala Dam will reduce on 31 October to a rate that will only maintain flows in the river to Condobolin. This means that flows in the Lachlan River will continue past Condobolin until mid November until the flow becomes so low that the river ceases to flow.

Similarly, flows in the Lachlan River down stream of the Lake Brewster weir will also continue into November as flows recede down river.

Releases from Wyangala Dam are currently occurring at 500 megalitres per day to raise the Lake Brewster Weir and Jemalong Weir pools. This will enable licensed stock and domestic and high security diversions to occur and re supply fish habitat.

Water orders for licensed high security and stock and domestic must be placed with State Water Corporation as soon as possible.

Landholders who access water under basic landholder rights may also extract water at this time to replenish farm dams. The NSW Office of Water may issue directions to cease extraction if water is wasted through inefficient access and storage.

Restrictions will be imposed for the full length of the Lachlan River in late October by the NSW Office of Water. These restrictions will apply to all classes of water use including basic landholder rights access.

Further details of these restrictions will be available in the next communiqué and via the NSW Office of Water's website.

These restrictions will limit the amount of water that can be taken by licenced pumpers and as basic landholder right. The action will extend the valley's reserves for as long as possible. Periodic pulse flows will be delivered downstream of Condobolin to refill the Lake Cargelligo Weir pool to maintain water supplies to the village of Lake Cargelligo.

This will also mean flows into the mid Lachlan effluent creek systems of Wallamundry, Wallaroi and Nerathong are expected to cease sometime in mid November.

The action to restrict flows in the Lachlan River is unprecedented in the period since the original Wyangala Dam was constructed in 1935. These measures will be under constant review to ensure the available water resources are used in the most efficient manner.

An additional 30,000 megalitres of inflow is required between 1 October and 31 March 2010 to allow for restricted access under critical water planning. A minimum of 60,000 megalitres is required to between 1 October and 31 March to allow for the Lachlan River to be run for its full length. This inflow will also ensure that Wyangala Dam storage level is maintained above 2 per cent capacity with these increased flows.

The probability of achieving this by end of March 2010 is about 70 per cent.

Every effort to reduce the likelihood of impacts upon threatened species and endangered ecological communities will be considered when reducing and introducing the river flows.

Town water supply

The town water supply to the village of Lake Cargelligo is secure and flows will be periodically pulsed through the season to replenish the Lake Cargelligo weir pool. The Lachlan Shire Council has installed emergency works to supply the village from the Lachlan River without filling the lake system.

The township of Hillston is supplied from groundwater. The communities of Booligal and Oxley will be supplied by water carting from Hay Shire Council if necessary. The NSW Office of Water will work closely with local councils to ensure that all households receive potable drinking water.

Water trading in 2009/10

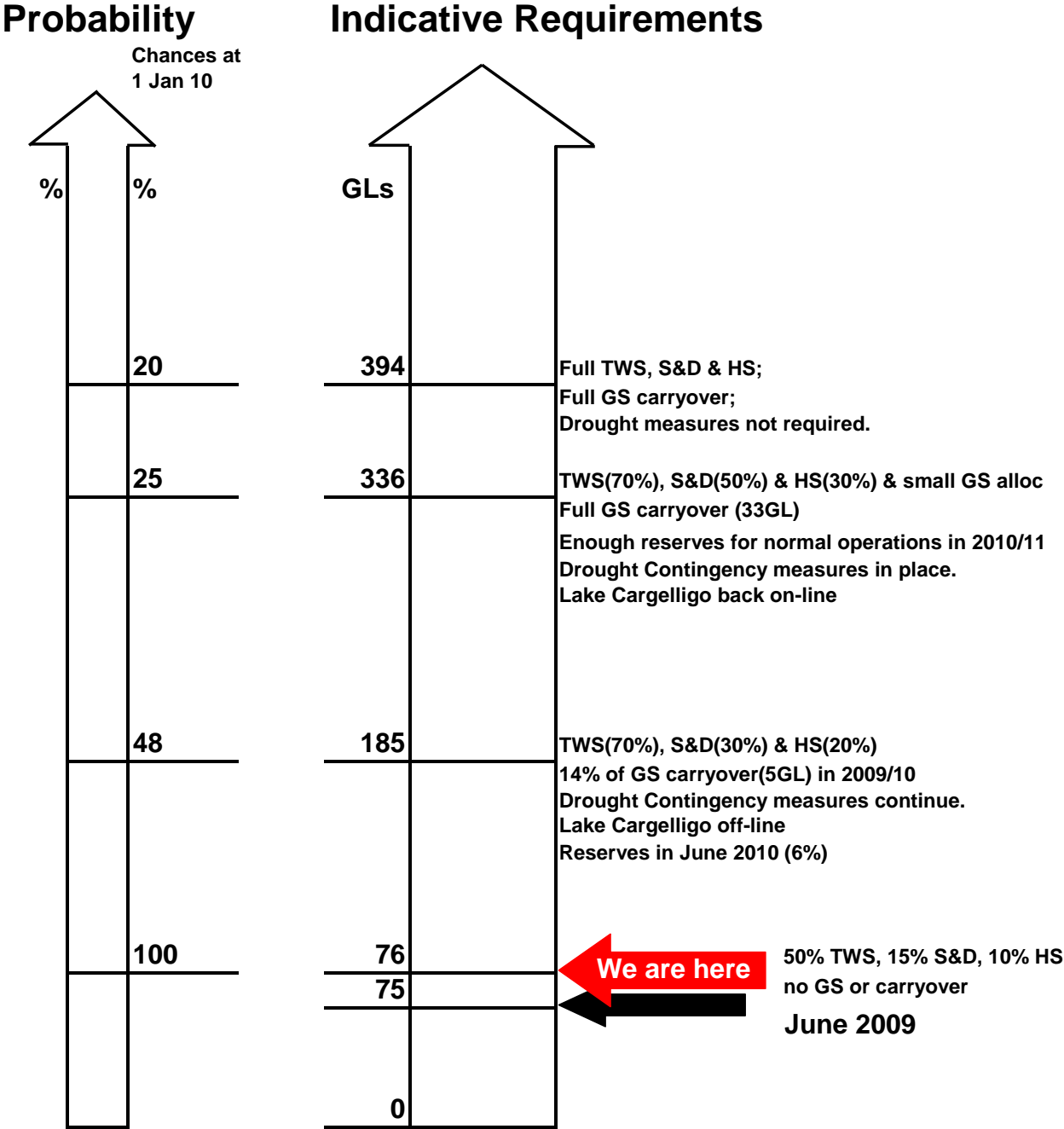
Domestic and Stock licenses cannot be traded, however the NSW Office of Water are currently considering proposals to introduce trade of this class of water.

Compliance

The NSW Office of Water’s Drought Contingency Planning Program will only work if everyone adheres to the restrictions and is careful with all water use. To ensure that the system is run fairly, the community should report any suspected breaches to the Office’s Compliance Unit on 1800 633 362 or by email to watercompliance@dwe.nsw.gov.au. All reports are confidential.

Water availability outlook

Lachlan Valley Indicative Outlook



Contact: Bunty Driver 03 5898 3910 mobile 0407 403 234