

# MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until  
9.30 am, 7 April 2009



## Murray autumn outlook bleak as inflows hit record lows

Murray inflows between January and March were the lowest in 117 years and the outlook for the next three months is also looking bleak. That's the grim news in the latest Drought Update issued by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority today.

Chief Executive Mr Rob Freeman said storage levels were low and the rainfall outlook for the next three months over the southern Basin was for drier than average conditions.

"Total inflows for the first three months of this year were 140 GL, slightly lower than the previous historic minimum of 150 GL in January-March 2007," Mr Freeman said. "Inflows for the 2008-09 water year are currently tracking as the sixth driest on record.

"Despite good rainfall in the north of the Basin during February, the Menindee Lakes received only about 190 GL from the Darling River, increasing the storage level to about 15 per cent of capacity.

"Murray system inflows for the three years ending in March were 5,160 GL, or 46 per cent of the previous three year minimum of 11,300 GL in 1943 to 1946. The persistence and severity of this drought, particularly over the past three years, is unprecedented.

"All three States have set aside enough water to meet critical human water needs in 2009-10, but the prospects for irrigation will be highly dependent on future rainfall and system inflows," he said.

The MDBA's total active (useable water) storage is currently only 950 GL or 11 per cent of capacity, well below the March long term average of 4,400 GL. Total storage across the whole Basin remains low at about 18 per cent.

Mr Freeman said the combination of low storage levels, low river flows and high water temperatures, had contributed to outbreaks of blue-green algae in the Murray in recent weeks.

"Whether the growth dissipates or worsens will depend on a number of factors such as rainfall, water temperatures and wind direction."

Mr Freeman said flows to South Australia would continue below normal entitlement rates until there was a significant improvement in water availability. The water level in Lake Alexandrina was at record low levels and its salinity has risen. Salinity in Lake Albert was also on the rise, despite the water being pumped in from Lake Alexandrina.

"Wetland and floodplain ecosystems across the entire Murray system will continue to be severely impacted by the prolonged dry conditions," Mr Freeman said.

**Media contact: Sam Leone, phone (02) 6279 0141**