



Australian Government



MURRAY-DARLING
BASIN AUTHORITY

Drought in the Basin

The Murray–Darling Basin has been in drought for some time. Drought is a significant issue for the Basin and continues to impact on its environment, industries and communities.

Farmers and communities across many locations in the Basin are experiencing severe drought conditions.

The Basin cannot be ‘drought-proofed’. Drought is a natural part of Australia’s climate and climate change is predicted to increase drought frequency and severity in the Basin.

Every fortnight, the MDBA draws together information from a range of sources to publish a **Basin Drought Update**. This update outlines the status of the drought in the Basin, a weather pattern summary, updates on water quality, salinity and blue-green algae alerts.

Drought and the Basin Plan

The Basin Plan prepares for drought by ensuring water is managed for all users—the environment, farmers and communities.

It ensures that in times of drought, water is prioritised for critical human needs and will be provided to communities for drinking and household use before being allocated for any other purpose.

All water entitlement holders are treated equally and in times of drought, all allocations will be reduced regardless of whether the water is for farming or for the environment.

The MDBA operates the River Murray on behalf of Basin state governments. In drought conditions the MDBA considers water availability and climate predictions in its planning and management decisions.

Key facts

The Basin cannot be ‘drought-proofed’. Drought is a natural part of Australia’s climate and climate change.



Climate change is predicted to **increase drought frequency and severity** in the Basin.



When it’s dry, **the whole river system suffers** –including the animals, fish and birds that rely on the Basin for survival.



The Basin Plan ensures that in times of drought, water is **prioritised for critical human needs**.



In the northern Basin –the situation is serious. There are many farmers and communities that are struggling with difficult business decisions in responding to this drought.



In the southern Basin –the River Murray storages are not as severely affected and water is available for farming and communities; and South Australia will continue to receive its expected annual flow.

Fish deaths and drought

With river levels low or dry, and reduced water storage across the Basin, the drought is affecting communities, businesses, animals and the environment.

Low rainfall across the Basin can have a severe impact on water quality. Water managers can manage flows to help mitigate water quality issues, such as fluctuating water temperature and dissolved oxygen shortages. But when there are limited flows, water quality can be difficult to manage in this way. This means fish can suffer and die, due to reduced dissolved oxygen.

Dry conditions can provide conditions for blue-green algae to thrive. When previously high water temperatures drop quickly, algae dies and as it decomposes, oxygen levels fall below critical levels, causing fish to die.

Until the drought conditions break and there are sustained inflows again, the MDBA expects further fish death events are likely across the Basin.

In the meantime, Basin governments, the MDBA and environmental water holders are working together to mitigate the risk of further fish deaths.

Reporting fish deaths

If you witness a mass fish death, we encourage you to report it to the relevant local authority:

- **New South Wales**
Fishers Watch hotline
1800 043 536
- **Queensland**
Department of Environment and Science
1300 130 372
- **Victoria**
Environmental Protection Authority pollution hotline
1300 372 842
- **South Australia**
Fishwatch Hotline
1800 065 522
- **Australian Capital Territory**
Access Canberra
13 22 81

Support services for farmers and communities

For **financial services and to access government support**, contact the Rural Financial Counselling Service on 1800 686 175.

The **Australian Government** via the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (www.agriculture.gov.au) provides a number of assistance measures to support farm families, farm businesses and rural communities to prepare for, manage and recover from drought and other hardship.

The **Regional Investment Corporation** offers drought loans for farmers to help them prepare for, manage or recover from drought.

The states also have a range of assistance and support services:

- **Queensland** - www.daf.qld.gov.au
- **New South Wales** DroughtHub - www.dpi.nsw.gov.au
- **Victoria** - www.agriculture.vic.gov.au

For people in drought affected communities **concerned about mental health and wellbeing**, there are a number of organisations focused on supporting communities:

- **Lifeline** - 13 11 14
- **Reachout.com** - specifically for young people with a current focus on drought
- **Queensland Drought Wellbeing Service** - led by the Royal Flying Doctors Service, has teams of mental health clinicians working with communities
- **NSW Rural Resilience Program** - runs community workshops and a rural support network.



Connect with us.

The MDBA has offices in Adelaide, Albury-Wodonga, Canberra, Goondiwindi, Griffith, Mildura, Murray-Bridge, Toowoomba, and regional engagement officers around the Basin.

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