

'Pulse' to push the Darling

By Peter Lamb

WATER will begin flowing down the Lower Darling River from Menindee Lakes storage towards Wentworth weir pool from Monday.

The flow will make space in Lake Wetherell for flood waters now heading downstream from Bourke where the Darling has been running at 17,642 megalitres a day.

The flow downstream will allow an allocation of 100 per cent of entitlement for high security users in the Lower Darling River for 2007-08.

NSW Water Utilities Minister Nathan Rees said in addition, water availability for irrigators in the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valleys would be reviewed over the coming week and he expected "positive announcements" on January 15.

"There'll be good flows passing the length of the Barwon-Darling to the Menindee Lakes," he said.

Lower Darling irrigator Allan Whyte said there could be 30,000 to 50,000 megalitres of water let down from Menindee's Weir 32, towards Wentworth, probably in a "pulse" flow that could last up to four weeks at this stage.

Mr Whyte said the flow would be welcome and his citrus trees would "have to adapt" to the fresh water after several years on low quality

drought survival water.

"There's quite a lot coming down the Darling to Menindee Lakes, and there could be more," he said.

"The first of the water from previous rains reached Menindee on Christmas Day and, currently, there's good volumes coming down past Collarenebri, Walgett and Bourke.

"All the Darling tributaries are running, including the Border Rivers, although not as much."

'The flow will allow an allocation of 100 per cent for high security users'

The Darling has been flowing at 17,6432 megalitres a day at Bourke, at Louth 11,756 megalitres, Tilpa 10,115 and Wilcannia 4878 megalitres a day.

Above Bourke, the Barwon Darling downstream of the junction with the Culgoa River was flowing at 19,327 megalitres a day; and at Brewarrina, 16,654 megalitres.

The Namoi at Walgett is flowing at 4532 megalitres a day, and on the Barwon downstream of the junction with the Macquarie River, the flow yesterday was 32,174 megalitres a day.

Minor flooding continues to ease slowly in the Warrego River below

Cunnamulla in Queensland to the NSW border.

Also of interest in Queensland is news of flows in the Paroo River, the Bulloo, the Thomson and Barcoo, and Cooper Creek.

Mr Whyte said modelling was being done to try to determine how much water might come down the Darling to Menindee.

"There's a lot of water coming into the Darling from the tributaries and while the water from the heavy rains at Collarenebri hasn't hit the Darling yet, it will certainly add something."

The release into the Lower Darling will allow authorities to "change" the water in Lake Wetherell (the lake includes the Darling channel itself and is one of the four major lakes in the storage, along with lakes Pamamaroo, Menindee and Cawndilla).

The water was being held in Wetherell to give water security for Broken Hill and Menindee.

"I think they'll pulse the water (by varying the outflow) into the Lower Darling at roughly 2000 megalitres a day over three to four weeks," Mr Whyte said.

"A lot of the Lower Darling channel is dry.

"It will certainly freshen things up.

"I don't know whether we'll see enough water come down for a continuous flow this summer, but it certainly looks promising."