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Basin Agreement rules applied as Authority assumes control of Menindee Lakes water

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority assumed control of the water in the Menindee Lakes over the weekend.

The Lakes have been under New South Wales Government control since March 2002. They reverted to MDBA control when their volume reached 640 GL (or 37% capacity).

Chief Executive Rob Freeman said the Authority will apply the water sharing arrangements set out in the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement.

He said that under the terms of the Agreement the water held in Menindee Lakes would be shared between New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

Mr Freeman said the lakes are slowly rising however the bulk of the water from the recent flooding in Queensland was still a long way upstream.

“In general terms, each state will be entitled to a one-third share after we allow for storage and transmission losses, however, supply of this water must occur within the terms of the Agreement,” Mr Freeman said. “Initial estimates are that the inflows should be about 1,000 GL - possibly by the end of May.

“This water will be held in the Menindee Lakes and will ensure that we start the coming water year in July in a moderately better position than we have experienced over the past few years.

“It’s not a drought-breaker for the Murray-Darling but it will certainly improve the outlook for the 2010-11 water year,” Mr Freeman said.

In the River Murray System irrigation allocations for 2010-11 are still highly dependent on future rainfall and system inflows.

“Only if the volume of water reaching Menindee Lakes exceeds their storage capacity, will the excess water be passed downstream to the Murray and then either be captured in Lake Victoria or flow directly through to the Lower Lakes in South Australia.

“At this time, it is too early to predict the precise volume that will reach Menindee Lakes. The floodwaters that originated in Queensland in early March are slowly moving across a huge area of floodplain in northern NSW.

“Much of the floodwater soaks into the floodplain or evaporates and some is harvested for local use. The floodwater will take up to three months to find its way to Menindee Lakes as the Darling River falls at only 7 cms per kilometre,” Mr Freeman said.

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