

MAY 2020

This newsletter is sent to General Managers and to Water and Sewer Managers in 89 regional Councils in NSW and also to 80 contacts in government departments and private industry across Australia.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S UPDATE

Welcome to the May 2020 edition of our newsletter. Issues we have been working through in the past month on behalf of our members include:

- COVID-19 response for local water utilities
- Drought updates
- Water industry training
- Reform of water industry frameworks and regulations
- Our communications strategy
- Digital water utilities strategy
- Reviews of our Odour Management and STP Buffer Zone guidelines.

CORONAVIRUS COVID-19

COVID continues to have sweeping impacts across our work and home lives. Many of the changes that we are making to the way we live and work are likely to be permanent – the 'new normal'.

This is why Water Directorate will be preparing two new strategies – a new **communications strategy** to improve the way we engage with our member utilities, and a **digital utilities strategy**.

We are staying in touch with DPIE, NSW Health and also the Energy and Utilities Functional Area (EUSFA) on the day-to-day movements related to COVID.

We are also grateful to receive international updates courtesy of [Isle Utilities](#). Relevant info has been summarised in our [COVID blog](#) on our website.

Safe Work Australia have provided updated guidance on physical distancing at work, available [here](#). The guidance includes workers travelling in vehicles together.

Water utility alliances including Central NSW and Orana have been meeting frequently to update their business continuity and mutual assistance arrangements. [Atom Consulting's planning checklist](#) has been of immense value to local water utilities.

Councils have also moved quickly to respond to financial hardship in their communities, including rates deferrals and cancelling price increases. Some are reviewing their developer charges as a form of local economic stimulus. It will be important to assess the financial impacts of these decisions to ensure financial sustainability of your LWU in the long run.

On the subject of economic stimulus, we have been making representations to the Commonwealth, in partnership with the Australian Water Association and the Water Services Association of Australia. More information in our blog: [COVID Recovery and Regional Stimulus](#)

An interesting discussion on Coronavirus as a national security issue can be found [here](#).

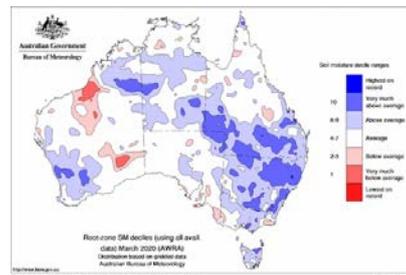
DROUGHT UPDATE

The number of towns with high risk of failure of water supply has reduced further in May to seven, as some more towns have received some good rainfall in April.



Photo: The Darling River has reached the Murray for the first time in 2 years

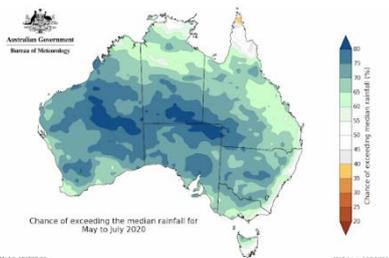
The Bureau of Meteorology reports that root zone soil moisture continues to improve, which is a good primer for runoff.



Root zone soil moisture deciles in March
Source: <http://www.bom.gov.au/>

While the rain so far has been welcome, it cannot be called drought breaking. Significant follow-up rainfall is still needed for several months to address our long-term water deficiency.

The prediction is for a negative Indian Ocean Dipole. This last occurred in 2016, which was our last wet year. The next three months are expected to experience wetter than average conditions in NSW. BOM's [Climate and Water Outlook for May to July 2020, issued 30 April 2020](#) is available [here](#).



Chance of exceeding the median rainfall for May to July 2020. Source: <http://www.bom.gov.au/>

DPIE WATER SECURITY INFORMATION SESSIONS

Due to COVID-19 all DPIE engagement meetings with stakeholder advisory panels are now being held online. The water security, climate and water allocation forecasts are being held as follows:

- 22 May: Barwon-Darling and Lower Darling
- 25 May: Southern Valleys – Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and Murray
- 28 May: Northern Valleys – Border Rivers, Gwydir, Namoi-Peel, and Macquarie
- 2 June: Hunter Valley



Stay up to date with upcoming consultation events [here](#).

SAFE AND SECURE WATER PROGRAM

In April, DPIE issued its risk prioritisation advice to NSW Local Water Utilities. DPIE have indicated that only projects with the highest risk ranking will be eligible for funding with the remaining \$260 million in the program.

DPIE have provided a [Questions and Answers](#) sheet for more information on the risk prioritisation process. We are liaising with DPIE in regards to a number of comments and questions raised by LWUs.

FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING INQUIRY EXTENDED

A parliamentary committee has been established to inquire into and report on the [Impact and implementation of the Water Management \(General\) Amendment \(Exemptions for Floodplain Harvesting\) Regulation 2020](#).

Submissions can be made via an [online questionnaire](#). In response to COVID-19 the inquiry timeline has been revised, with the questionnaire open until **31 May 2020**.

IN THE NEWS

- [Drenching rain welcome](#)
- [Woolworths takes the lead on the 3P's](#)
- [Inflows to Murray-Darling halved](#)
- [MDB cop's report released](#)
- [Expert study of rising drought intensity](#)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

A number of conferences have now been postponed or cancelled in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, mostly between now and the end of June. Some may be reconvened

as virtual events or rescheduled to later in the year. We will keep you informed.

- **Ozwater '20**, Adelaide, 5-7 May – cancelled. AWA are planning an 'Ozwater '20 online' series in June. Details to be confirmed soon.
- **LGNSW Water Management Conference 2020**, Narrabri, 15-17 July – under review.
- **AWA NSW State Conference**, Tamworth, 13-14 August – may proceed as planned. [Call for papers](#) is closing **15 May 2020**.
- **IPWEA NSW Annual Conference and Excellence Awards**, Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley, 4-6 November – may proceed as planned.

AWA VIRTUAL EVENTS PROGRAM

AWA have done a remarkable job responding to current challenges with a series of virtual events. There's no better time to commit to your continuing professional development:

- [Webinar: Climate Variability & Water Planning](#) 21 May, 6pm.
- [Webinar: Implications of COVID-19 for potable reuse](#) 26 May, 4pm.

Most interesting will be the opportunity to attend events from other state branches. Full list of virtual events [here](#).

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING DATES 2020

- Thursday 21 May (by Zoom)
- Thursday 9 July (by Zoom)
- Thursday 10 September
- Wednesday 11 and Thursday 12 November

Brendan Guiney
Executive Officer
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