

NEW SLUICER

INTERIM WATER RESTRICTIONS REQUIRED

I recall I started my last newsletter six weeks ago with “What a turnaround in the month!” and it is the same comment again this time although, regrettably, this time it is with a much less favourable outcome. After seeing such a positive turnaround in the storage in January, February has provided much less inflow and higher demand than I had anticipated. So now, as we hit the last phase of the irrigation season and a period where we need to sustain the river above the meagre minimums we had last year, we are again looking at a scenario that does not see us through April unless we take some measures now.

We have approval to reduce the river flows back from the prescribed March and April flows but we are also looking for some reductions in irrigation use with a 25% restriction. We are going to operate this again on a volumetric basis over the remaining three weeks of March with rolling fortnightly reviews.

I realise this is at odds with the advice that I gave at the beginning of February when it did look like there was sufficient storage. The inflows dropped dramatically around the whole catchment at the end of February and into March so that we are now releasing significantly more than anticipated to maintain flows and irrigation supplies. The catchment inflows are now less than for the same period last year. Nearly all above dam irrigators have been on various levels of restrictions over the last fortnight.

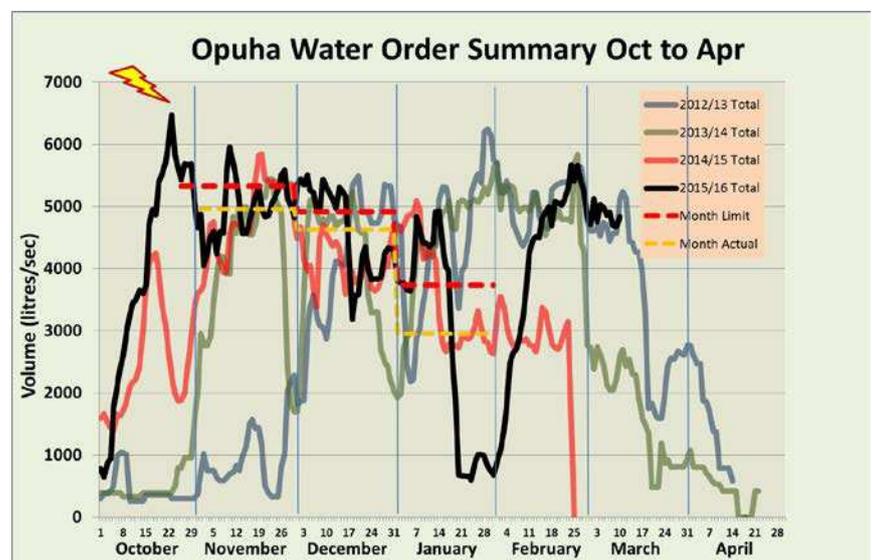
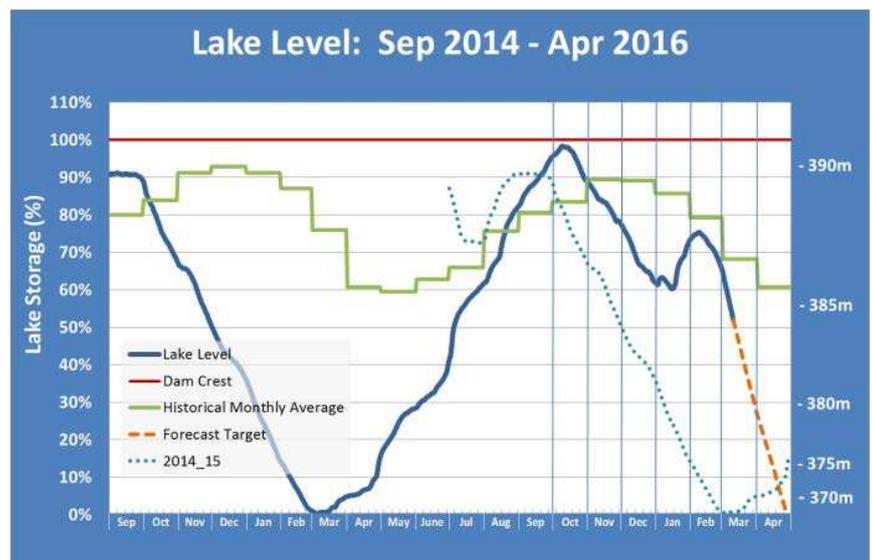
All irrigators are to please plan their water use to limit their takes to a 75% allocation for the three weeks to the end of March.

WATER STORAGE SITUATION

After the rain events through January there has only been one significant rain event in mid-February. The temperatures have been well above average which has been great growing and harvesting weather but the catchment river flows have all dropped away significantly since that time. The irrigation demand has risen steadily through the month and many irrigators have said that they have only just been able to maintain soil moistures with their irrigation under the hot dry conditions.

March and April are two months when our prescribed river flows are relatively high and so from the start of March our releases stepped up to increase the flow. These flows are required to maintain an open river mouth for fish migration into the catchment, to assist with the eel migration out and establish a navigable river. Fish & Game have reported that fish are coming in from the sea now under these favourable conditions but have agreed at the OEFrag forum that the river flow could be reduced from the ORRP flow of 7.5 cumecs. They have also indicated that they expect that the minimum river flows for April should be able to be reduced from the Plan flow of 8 cumecs. Even with both these reductions included, there is a likelihood that the lake could still empty before the end of April.

While we’re not shying away from using the storage over its maximum range, we do want to avoid a completely empty lake which gives us no options or ability to maintain any reasonable flows or irrigation.



RESTRICTIONS

The river flows have been reduced as from Friday 11th and we are requiring all irrigators to plan to limit their water use to a 75% allocation regime for the remainder of the month.

I am hoping this regime should enable most irrigators to maintain soil and pasture conditions as the days shorten through March and we would expect temperatures to drop from their February highs. March has traditionally been a month of two halves with irrigation demand normally dropping off significantly in the second part of the month and this regime will enable a higher level to be maintained for the next week or so if required - on the expectations that climatic conditions should improve later in the month.

We realise it is an important period for establishing new crops and for ensuring pasture is in the best shape going into the cooler autumn conditions.

If we do get some decent (overdue!) rain in the month then this will obviously help on the paddocks and may also enable us to review the supply conditions which we will be monitoring regularly.

WATER ORDERING

In these 'tighter' supply conditions it is all the more important to keep us informed of your water requirements.

The best way to do this is still to be keeping up your water orders but we realise that sometimes the lead time restrictions within the water order system (12/24/48 hours) can seem to be a constraint. While these are there for good reason, if you do need to change your water use unexpectedly, please ensure you let the office know of your intentions.

UPDATES

Staff

Aimee Bennett is currently on extended leave and we welcome **Tracey Hodgett** who has joined us at Opuha House as Financial Manager as cover for Aimee. Tracey has quickly got her sleeves rolled up and underway over her first two weeks. Tracey is based with her family in Timaru and has a experience in both small businesses and accounting firms in NZ and the UK (she hasn't lost the accent and still backs her local English football team!)



Julia is now a very proud Mum. Young Cushla Crossman arrived safely on January 12th and we have seen and/or heard Cushla on frequent occasions as Julia continues to keep in touch with us and help us out on important environmental matters.

Lucy Millar is continuing to work with farmers on our Farm Environment Plan roll out and is working at the moment with our Kakahu irrigators. She is also overseeing the FEP pre-audit programme where we have engaged **Dave Hewson** from Opus Consultants to assist with farm visits to those shareholders who have had their FEPs in place for two years now. The pre-audit visits are to check on progress with the planned on-farm improvement actions and to ensure that everyone is ready for the formal audits we will be facilitating in the next 12 months.

Downstream Weir Upgrade

We have been making very good progress on the Downstream Weir Upgrade project and we are currently evaluating tenders for the upgrade work this year.

The upgrade will involve cutting off the top section of the existing concrete spillway and installing a set of steel 'flap gates' on the modified spillway. The new gates are similar in concept but larger than the gates we have on the top of the main dam spillway. The gates will normally be in the raised position so that the working range in the Regulating Pond will be the same as it is now. In the event of a flood, the gates will be lowered to enable a flow of up to 250 cumecs to pass through the weir before the fusible embankment section operates.

Work is expected to start on the upgrade next month and will be completed by September. The gates are being imported from the USA – they are the same manufacture as our existing dam spillway gates.

WATERING THE ROADS!

PLEASE – for all the obvious reasons including the credibility and reputation of all our irrigators and our company – ensure YOU DO NOT IRRIGATE THE ROADS! We are still seeing this on an all-to-frequent basis and it is wasteful, dangerous, illegal and embarrassing. We find it hard to justify to the members of the public that ring the office! Name and shame in the newsletters from now on.

The Thing We Must All Do!



Don't forget to have your say! It's a once in a life time opportunity.

Regards



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