

Barossa water security threat

By PAULA THOMPSON

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Eden Valley farmer Jane Evans says challenging season highlights the need for an amended water allocation plan for the Barossa Valley region. Picture by Paula Thompson

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LOWER rainfall across the Barossa Valley has put water supply under serious threat, leading to the creation of an amended water allocation plan for the region.

Water users across the Barossa are being advised to prepare for the possibility of reduced water allocations in the next water use year, as new surface and groundwater data show the supply is in a precarious situation.

Preliminary results of recent modelling indicate a reduction in resource capacity of at least 25 per cent.

Eden Valley grapegrower and Barossa WAP advisory group chairperson Leon Deans said declining rainfall was testing supplies.

"Reduced water allocation is not what we want," he said.

"But we can't keep taking water when we have had decades of declining rainfall affecting the long-term sustainability of our supplies.

"This plan will provide industry with a quicker response to environmental conditions, so the resource recovers quickly and re-

mains sustainable for the future - both economically and environmentally."

Eden Valley farmer Jane Evans has been concerned about water sustainability in the region for many years.

She and husband Michael run a prime lamb, wool and Angus cattle operation.

"I first became involved (with planning for the amended WAP) because I was concerned about water resources in the Barossa Valley and Eden Valley in particular," she said.

"Eden Valley is one of the few regions that doesn't have access to external water resources. We're reliant on groundwater supply through bore extractions, any surface water run off, and our capacity for water storage with dams and tanks.

"I held a community water forum in 2019, with the help of industry and local government, and had local, state and federal government representatives attending. There were 150 people that came along to discuss community resilience and strategic water use moving forward."

From that meeting,

community feedback was received on how to better manage water resources.

Since then conditions have become even tougher, with last year the driest on record.

"It's meant less recharge of aquifers and less surface water run-off," Mrs Evans said.

For the couple, the dry conditions brought the need to destock early and they are down to less than half their normal livestock numbers.

Mrs Evans, who is also a technical facilitator with the Barossa Improved Grazing Group, said challenges were continuing even after improved rainfall this season.

"Our dams are still only about a third of capacity at the moment," she said.

Mrs Evans said the challenging seasonal conditions highlighted the need for an amended WAP for the region.

"The principle of the WAP is to protect water availability for everyone," she said.

Water monitoring data collected across the Barossa will continue to be collated and assessed between December and February each year. Based on the assessment, a

management response will be recommended to the SA Environment Minister in March next year.

"The WAP comes with flexibility and adaptability to the current environmental conditions, and responds to the climatic influences on a year-by-year basis," Mrs Evans said.

Northern and Yorke Landscape Board general manager Tony Fox said there was a real need to act soon on water resources in the region.

"Water available for use in both surface and groundwater systems is declining," he said.

"If this trend continues, the volume of water available for licence holders will need to be reduced to avoid irreversible damage to the resource and the environment.

"The updated WAP will provide a new flexible management approach, enabling more responsive reviews and adjustments to allocations when trigger thresholds are reached."

Barossa residents and water users can have their say on the amended Plan.

Details: bit.ly/BarossaWAP