

Week 7 – water crisis

30 August

In the middle of the rural water crisis and severe shortage in supply for towns, farms and businesses, the Victorian Government has proposed the release of 3000 megalitres in environmental flows down various river systems. This week, BCG asked three Wimmera and Mallee farmers the following question:

What is your current water situation? What are your thoughts on the proposed use of water for environmental flows?



Brian Allan – Wycheproof

Brian Allan farms with his father, Graeme, 16km northwest of Wycheproof. They have 3500ac of mixed clay loam and share-farm a further 2000ac. Brian grows wheat, barley and vetch on three-fifths of the land and runs sheep on the rest.

Water: “Our current situation is very good compared to most on or near this system. We are on the Waranga system and get 1/3 dam fill plus get to pump dead water out of the Waranga, giving us another dam or two after the channel stops flowing. We’re lucky the main channel runs through the main part of our farm block.

Environmental flows – I don’t know a lot about policy etc, but if there are severe water shortages and people aren’t receiving any water in house dams for household use, it seems a poor option.

If water levels ever get back to reasonable levels, environmental flows could become part of life, but commonsense should be used when and when not to run them.”



Peter Martin – Brim

Peter and Bronwyn Martin have a mixed property at Brim. They crop about 80 percent of the 1450ha of Mallee loam that they own, lease and share-farm, growing canola, wheat, barley and lentils.

Water: “I am against the current proposal to have environmental flows down the river system. In drought years, creeks and rivers dry out. The proposed flow is too small to have a significant effect on rivers.

In the current water crisis, human consumption should come first.

Dealing with the current situation we have started to de-stock, most likely reducing numbers by 50 percent. We were lucky to receive some water from the Waranga channel on one section of the farm. The plan is to buy some water to help supplement GWM deliveries for remaining livestock and crop spraying.

In recent years we have been installing more water tanks on the farm. Every roof now has a tank. In “normal years”, we will be able to catch enough rainfall for all crop spraying and domestic requirements.

I think there is a chance of summer rains early in the New Year that will create opportunities for livestock if we can carry them through until then.

Currently the house dam is 1/3 full. We are keeping busy in dry times building cattle yards.”



Norm Bales – Swanwater

Norm and Lauren Bales run a mixed property at Swanwater, midway between St Arnaud and Donald. They grow mainly cereals and about 40 percent legumes on their self-mulching clays and clay loams.

Water: “We should have sufficient dam water to last until the New Year. All the water is from channel-filled dams, which is mainly used for stock purposes and some for crop spraying. As most of the dams are dry, the little water we have is pumped to tanks and then stock troughs.

The region is facing a very serious crisis with water storages critically low. Both farming and wider community spirits are already strained and to use water for such a purpose when people’s livelihoods are so threatened is wrong. Animal production is already being wound back because of water shortages and in many cases will have to cease. This will have an enormous impact on the region.

If we are not careful there will be no people left to serve and the environment will get the lot!

We must get our priorities right.”