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Flushing flows aid in Snowy River recovery

NSW Water Commissioner, David Harriss, today said the recent spring 2012 flushing flows to the Snowy River was another successful step in aiding the river's recovery.

A total of 79.6 gigalitres of water was released into the river from Jindabyne Dam across 17 days from 13 September with a peak discharge of 10,000 megalitres per day.

"This year's spring release was the third controlled flood to the Snowy River in 12 months," said Mr Harriss.

"These types of small floods attempt to mimic some of the characteristics of the natural spring snowmelt floods that previously occurred every year prior to the construction of the Snowy Mountains scheme."

"The contraction of the natural river channel and the accumulation of sand, silt and mud on the river bed due to a lack of a flooding regime, is seen as a key factor limiting the environmental recovery of the river downstream of Jindabyne Dam."

"The main objective of the initial environmental releases including 2012 spring flood has been to scour accumulated silt and mud and rejuvenate the bed of the Snowy River."

"The improvement in habitat condition is required to allow other significant biological responses to occur. The condition of the habitat is a key factor in determining habitat availability to many aquatic biota."

"While the flushing flows are starting to improve the condition of the river's habitat, it is expected that the recovery process will continue for decades."

"However, preliminary findings from the spring 2011 flows demonstrate that the flushing flows have started the process for the Snowy River."

Mr Harriss said the 2011 studies included measuring the re-suspension of sediment into the water column, the scour of sediment and biofilms from riffles, water quality changes, community composition of aquatic plants and animals, and salinity dynamics in the estuary.

"These studies have allowed us to make the most of the available environmental water in order to improve the condition of the Snowy River."

"The most significant finding from these studies so far is that most of the physical scouring occurs in the first day of the peak of the release."

"This information will assist in determining whether the focus of the release should be placed on the duration of events or to have more events with shorter duration to improve riverbed scouring."

"One thing that is clear is that higher flows remain an important driver for the rehabilitation and maintenance of the Snowy River's in-stream physical habitat," Mr Harriss said.

Further information on the preliminary findings from the spring 2011 flushing flows to the Snowy River can be found on the NSW Office of Water website -

www.water.nsw.gov.au/Water-management/Water-recovery/Snowy-Initiative

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