



✓ Latest release

Water Use on Australian Farms

Final estimates of agricultural water use, irrigation water sources and expenditure. Estimates are presented at Australia, state & territories levels

Reference period 2018-19

Released 28/05/2020

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Water used on Australian farms

Drought conditions meant reduced water availability for many Australian farming businesses in 2018-19.

During 2018-19:

- 8 million megalitres of water was used in agricultural production (down 24% from 2017-18)
- 7.2 million megalitres of water was applied to crops and pastures (down 26%)
- 2 million hectares of agricultural land was irrigated (down 15%)
- 21,900 farms applied water to their land (down 2%)

Irrigation of crops and pastures

The majority of water used on farms was applied to pastures and crops.

In 2018-19, 5 million megalitres were applied to Crops (70% of all water applied):

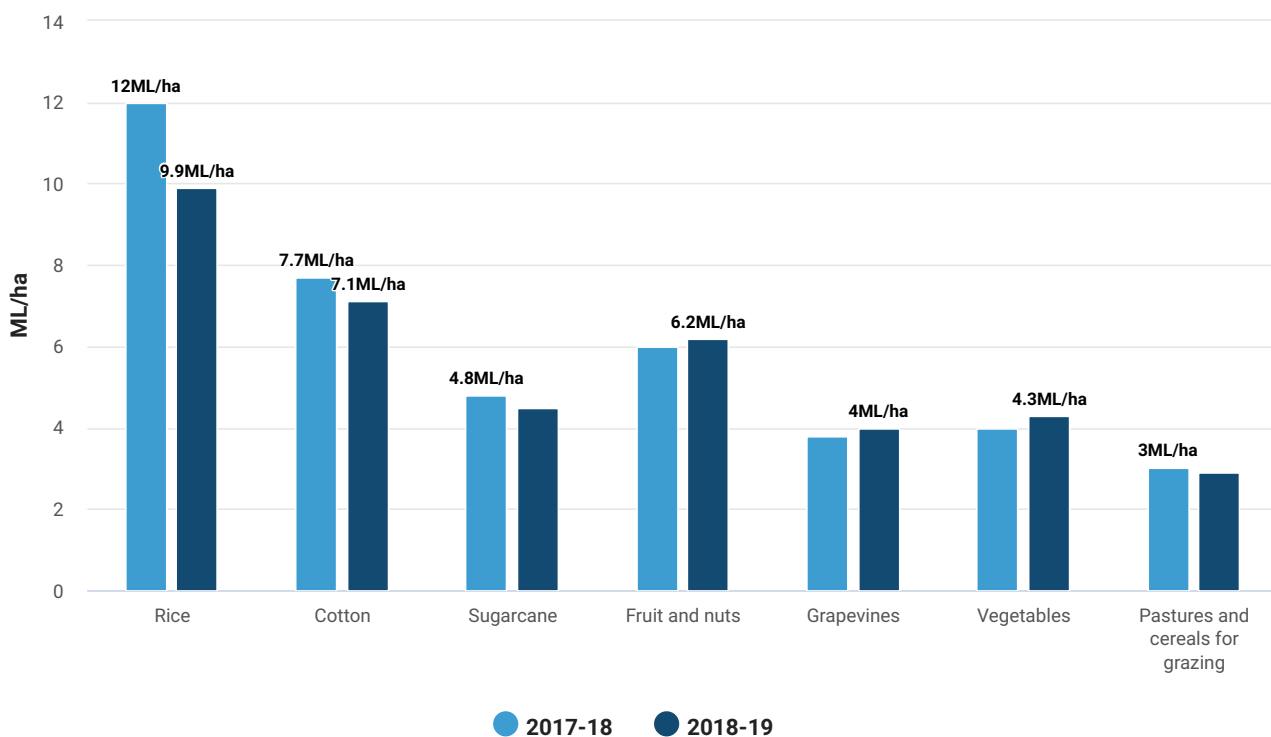
- 1.3 million megalitres for cotton (down 53%)

- 1 million megalitres for fruit and nuts (up 7%)
- 882,000 megalitres for sugar cane (down 13%)
- 75,600 megalitres for rice (down 90%)

Of the 2.2 million megalitres applied to Pastures (30% of all water applied):

- 1.5 million megalitres for pastures and cereals fed off (down 18%)
- 454,400 megalitres for pastures and cereals cut for hay (down 5%)
- 214,900 megalitres for pastures cut for silage (up 11%)

Water application rate for selected crops and pastures



Murray Darling Basin

Lower than average rainfall and resulting drought in many catchment areas resulted in decreased water available for irrigation.

Almost two thirds (62%) of Australia's total water use for irrigation was within the Murray Darling Basin

region where there was:

- 1.1 million hectares of agricultural land irrigated (down 26%)
- 4.4 million megalitres of water applied (down 35%)

Cotton, pastures for grazing and fruit and nut trees used 63% of the water applied in this region:

- 1.2 million megalitres for cotton (down 51%)
- 803,000 megalitres for pastures and cereals crops used for grazing (down 36%)
- 769,000 megalitres for fruit and nuts (up 13%)

Water expenditure and sources

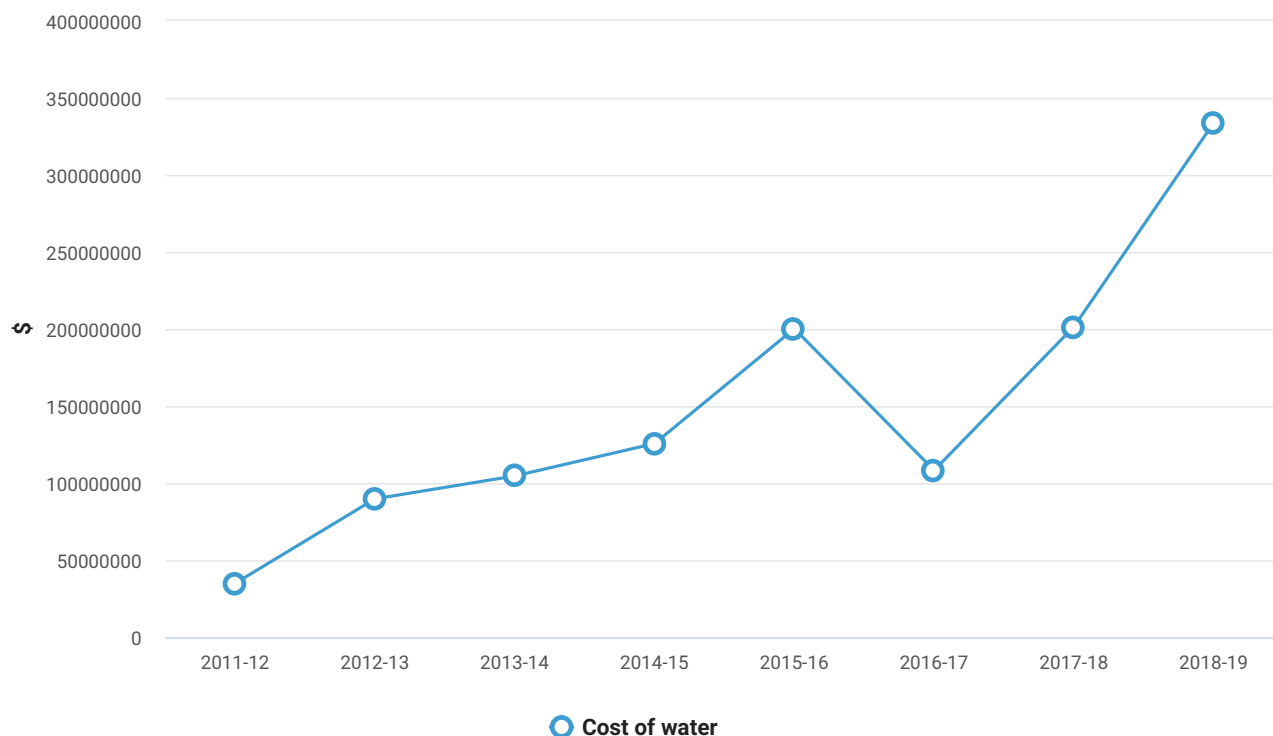
Irrigation expenditure

While expenditure on additional water purchased on a temporary basis reached a record high level in 2018-19, volumes purchased were down.

During 2018-19:

- \$334 million of extra water was purchased on a temporary basis (up 66% from 2017-18)
- \$104 million was purchased on a permanent basis (up 84%)
- \$266 million was the total cost of annual irrigation charges (up 9%)

Cost of water purchased on a temporary basis



Volumes of additional irrigation water purchased

Of the additional irrigation water purchased during 2018-19:

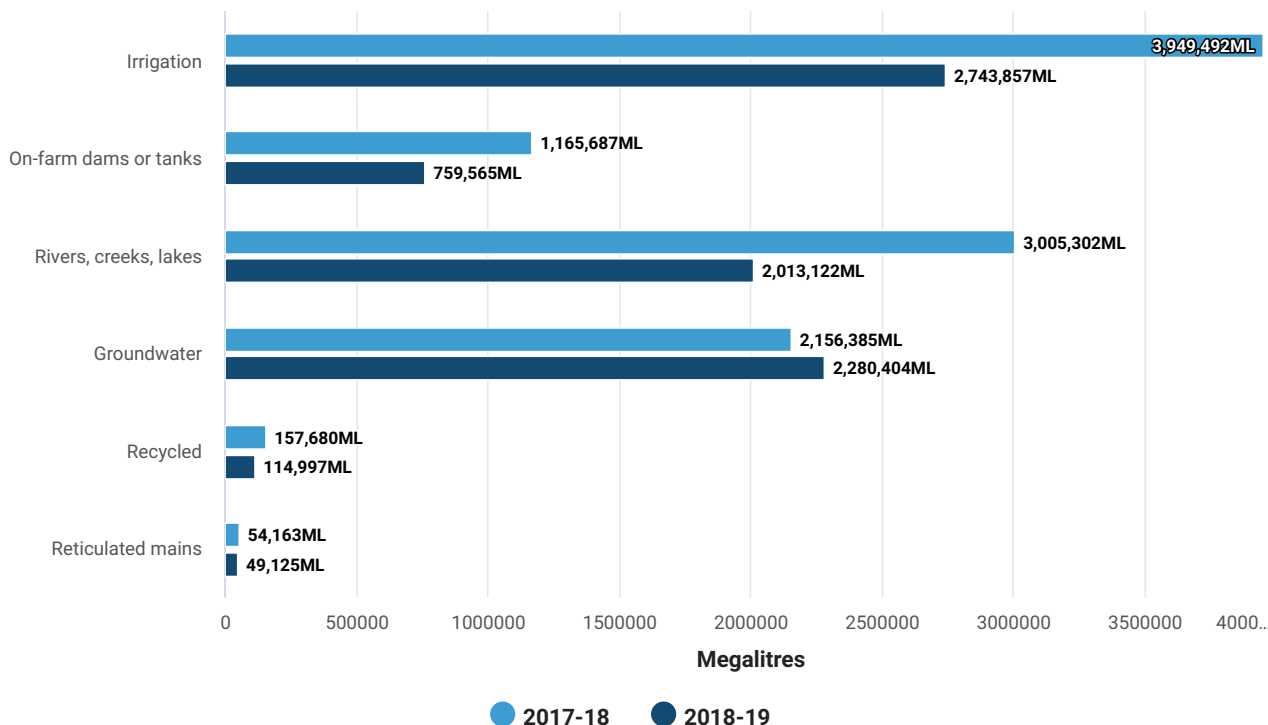
- 1.2 million megalitres of extra water was purchased on a temporary basis (down 30%)
- 114,000 megalitres of extra water was purchased on a permanent basis (down 7%)

Sources of water for agricultural production

Australian farms used a total of 8 million megalitres of water taken from various sources including:

- 2.7 million megalitres from irrigation channels or pipelines (down 31%)
- 2 million megalitres from rivers, creeks or lakes (down 33%)
- 2.3 million megalitres of groundwater (up 6%)
- 759,600 megalitres from on-farm dams or tanks (down 35%)
- 115,000 megalitres from recycled or reused water from off-farm sources (down 27%)
- 49,100 megalitres from town or reticulated mains supply (down 9%)

Sources of water used for agricultural production



Changes in this and forthcoming issues

Drought, bushfires and Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Impacts of drought are evident in agricultural activity estimates for the 2018-19 reference year across a number of the ABS' agricultural collections, including Water Use on Australian Farms. Many farming areas across Australia experienced drought throughout 2019, with New South Wales and Queensland particularly impacted.

There are no impacts in the 2018-19 estimates from more recent events including the COVID-19 pandemic, and from bushfire activity in New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory in late 2019 and early 2020. The ABS is continuing to monitor potential impacts from natural disasters and COVID-19 across its agricultural collections for the 2019-20 reference year and beyond. For more information on the expected economic impacts of the Bushfire and COVID-19, please see the ABS Chief Economist Series paper [Measuring natural disasters in the Australian economy](#).

Changes to collection outputs

Final estimates from the ABS' annual agricultural survey are available each year in this publication (Water Use on Australian Farms) as well as in a number of other ABS publications. For the 2018-19 reference period, there are two changes to collection outputs.

Final estimates of the gross value of agricultural commodities that are produced with the assistance of irrigation data will no longer be released in [Gross Value of Irrigated Agricultural Production](#) (cat. no. 4610.0.55.008). This data will instead be incorporated into [Water Account, Australia](#) (cat. no. 4610.0).

Final estimates for land management, similar to those previously published in [Land Management and Farming, Australia](#) (cat. no. 4627.0) will be available on request from the second half of 2020.

Data downloads

Water use on Australian farms, Australia, state/territory and NRM and MDB regions - 2018-19

↓ [Download XLS](#)
[539 KB]

Water use on Australian farms, Australia and state/territory and ASGS (Statistical Area 4) regions - 2018-19

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Water use on Australian farms, Australia, state/territory and NRM and MDB regions - 2018-19 (.csv file)

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Water use on Australian farms, Australia and state/territory and ASGS (Statistical Area 4) regions - 2018-19 (.csv file)

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Previous catalogue number

This release previously used catalogue number 4618.0

Methodology

[Water Use on Australian Farms methodology, 2018-19](#)

Articles

28 May 2020

Water used for irrigation falls 26% in 2018-19

[View story](#)

