

# Farmers' spirits rise as rivers hit full-flow

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ON Wednesday night, Stewart Sutherland had to pull a pump out of the Murray River as the waters rose. "It was lapping at the sump."

It had been "years and years and years (since) we have had this much water, this early, coming down the river", he said.

Mr Sutherland farms on the river flats of the Murray at Corryong, up above Hume Dam.

Good falls of rain this week through the Alps led the Bureau of Meteorology to issue minor flood warnings for the Murray upstream of Lake Hume, and the Ovens, King and Kiewa rivers.

"They called it a minor flood level up on the Swampy Plains," Mr Sutherland said. "On the Murray where we are it was just running a full bank. It didn't quite flood, it was perfect for us."

Hopes are rising that the long dry is ending.

Southeast Australia has just had its first autumn with above-average rainfall since 2000. A La Nina event, which typically brings above-average rainfall to the eastern seaboard, looks imminent.

Mr Sutherland said the soil was now full of moisture.

"It means we will get runoff very easily and they are talking more rain in the weekend.

"If that happens it heads downstream. It is all good."

Rain on the Upper Murray benefits many more people than Mr Sutherland and his neighbours. The headwaters comprise less than 2 per cent of the area of the Murray-Darling Basin, but they contribute nearly 40 per cent of the inflow to the system.

Ian Prosser, from the CSIRO's Water for a Healthy Country, said what South Australia needed was a flood along the Murray. "That is where we need the rain."

Mr Sutherland said that 2010 had been a good year so far,



Stewart Sutherland, at Corryong yesterday, says flood waters pouring down the Murray are 'perfect for us'

SIMON DALLINGER

"compared to the last few years where it has been dry, dry, dry, all the time".

"But you know what farmers are like, you get some rain and everyone is happy."

This time last year, Hume Dam was at just 13 per cent capacity. Yesterday it was at 31 per cent and rising.

Mr Sutherland was philosophical about the dry decade. "What

has been good, the 10 years has taught us all how to farm with a lot less moisture."

A little further downstream, near Tallangatta on Lake Hume, cattle farmer Michael McCormack

was also enjoying the results of the week's rain.

"Traditionally this is when we get our rains, through the winter," he said.

Tallangatta lies on an arm of

Lake Hume that has been dry for years. "It was a tourist town . . . they (tourists) haven't been there for 10 years because there is no water," he said. But Mr McCormack is now optimistic.