

Basslink to the rescue as our lakes run low

SUE NEALES

LAKES and water storages supplying Tasmania's hydroelectric power stations are now officially more than two-thirds empty.

Hydro Tasmania energy manager Michael Connarty said storages were now just 29.9 per cent full on average, compared with 44 per cent at the same time last year.

The past year has seen the lowest rain runoff into the inland lakes which provide the Hydro's power generation supplies since the catastrophic drought year of 1967.

Dr Connarty said just 67 per cent of normal runoff had flowed into its lakes in 2006.

The Great Lake has been the hardest hit and was just 17 per cent full.

However, according to Hydro Tasmania, the situation is "challenging" but not critical.

Dr Connarty said the 2006 drought and the low water levels would have been much worse for Tasmanian electricity consumers without the ability to import energy from Victoria's coal-fired power stations using the Basslink cable.



HELPER: Basslink saving water, says Dr Connarty.

"Basslink is already proving its worth to Tasmania many times over," Dr Connarty said.

"The cable is enabling Tasmania to import power at a crucial time of below-average rainfall over a significant period."

Importing power from Victoria, as well as generating extra electricity from the gas-fired turbines at Bell Bay power station, has enabled Hydro Tasmania to preserve its low water storages.

In total, Tasmania has imported more than 800 gigawatt-hours of electricity in the last four months for local consumers, equivalent to Hydro Tasmania saving (rather than using) about 6 per cent of its total water storages.