

# Community update for Menindee and Lower Darling-Baaka

## Decreasing flows from the Menindee Lakes

The current flow target of 1,550 ML/d at Weir 32 will decrease to a new target of 750 ML/d, commencing from Sunday 8 December 2024. This decrease is in response to the MDBA ceasing their call on water, for the time being, due to a spill risk at Lake Victoria. Flow will be reduced by steps of 250 ML/day.

Releases from Lake Menindee will cease as water from here has very high levels of algae, with all water to be sourced from the upper lakes. This is to ensure continued flow through the town weir pool to reduce the risk of stratification and poor water quality, that could lead to fish deaths. It will also reduce the volume of algae entering the lower Darling Baaka.

Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator will be opened on 6 December (today) to balance lakes Wetherell and Pamamaroo. This will act to further draw water off the Lake Wetherell floodplain to reduce the risk of algal growth and poor-quality water across the shallow floodplain regions. This will also assist expected inflows move downstream into Lake Wetherell and potentially improve Lake Wetherell water quality (WQ) conditions.

Please note, algal blooms are developing upstream of Lake Wetherell and the water quality is being monitored as the blooms move downstream, allowing us to assess if there are options, we can take to limit their impact. Releases may move from Lake Wetherell to Lake Pamamaroo. This would be undertaken to prevent water with high levels of algae being released into the Weir 32 weir pool, and noting that Lake Pamamaroo has high turbidity levels, which reduce the risk of algal blooms forming.

## Current water quality and fish health

Water quality monitoring is showing that overall, dissolved oxygen levels in the Darling River at Menindee are remaining above the critical thresholds for fish health.

Dissolved oxygen sensors located at Nelia Gaari, downstream of Lake Wetherell Main Weir, Menindee town and Weir 32 gauging stations show levels are above 4 mg/L through the Menindee weir pool. The Weir 32 sensor did show dissolved oxygen levels dropping toward 2 mg/L at various stages over the past week. The sensor was cleaned today (6 December) as fouling of the sensor by algae may have been the cause.

Releases from Lake Wetherell are not adversely impacting dissolved oxygen at the downstream Main Weir monitoring site. Water temperature is around 25°C.

A continuous dissolved oxygen sensor has been installed in the Lower Darling River at Pooncarie and the dissolved oxygen levels at Pooncarie and Burtundy are above the critical thresholds for fish health.

Real-time water quality data from DCCEEW-BCS monitoring buoys can be accessed from the [Darling-Baaka River Health Project dashboard](#). More information on the fixed depth sensors and buoy data can be found [here](#).

## Improving fish passage

DPIRD Fisheries is trialling tube fishway technology that can be easily and cost-effectively retrofitted to existing structures to enhance fish passage at the Lake Wetherell outlet regulator within the Menindee town weir pool on the Lower Darling-Baaka River.

Fishheart Ltd have recently been announced as the successful supplier. The Fishheart unit will be fitted to the Lake Wetherell outlet regulator during the 2024/25 summer to help connect the northern and southern Basin. The project will be run up to 3 years targeting the fish movement seasons (typically spring and summer months), helping move some fish out of the Menindee town weir pool to reduce biomass and help try and mitigate risks of further mass fish kills in the region. This is novel technology currently untested at this scale in Australia and on native inland freshwater fish. For more information please click [here](#).

## Management of the lakes

WaterNSW, in collaboration with the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), is closely monitoring Menindee Lakes as storage levels approach the 480 GL trigger. Currently, the lakes are at 42.9% capacity (742 GL) as of December 6.

The MDBA predicts storage could drop below 480 GL by late summer 2025, depending on water demand and in-flows. If this occurs, water will be reserved exclusively for NSW to meet critical needs such as water utilities, Stock and Domestic and Basic Landholder Rights supply in the Lower Darling. However, anticipated in-flows from recent rain events may extend the time that the MDBA manages the Lakes as a shared resource.

Efforts are underway to optimize storage in the more efficient upper lakes.

To read the full update, please see [WaterNSW's WaterInsights Portal](#)

## Thank you from the EPA

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) would like to thank the Menindee community for attending our BBQ at the CWA Hall in Menindee on Saturday 23 November. We appreciate the community meeting with us and sharing their experiences, views, and opinions.

We discussed the development of our Mass Fish Death Event Emergency Management Framework as a part of the NSW Government's response to the March 2023 mass fish deaths at Menindee. The EPA is considering the feedback received from community and Government agencies to inform the development of the Framework and help us be better prepared for the coming summer.

## Additional information

- To notify the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water of potential blackwater events email: [water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au](mailto:water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au)
- To view community updates issued, visit [Community updates and frequently asked questions | Water \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)
- To report dead fish, fish struggling or gasping at the water surface, or crayfish leaving the water please call the **NSW DPI Fisheries Phonenumber 1800 043 536** or fill in a fish kill protocol and report form at: <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/habitat/threats/fish-kills-2019-2020/info-sheet>
- Information on recent fish deaths is available at: [Fish kills in NSW](#). When reporting, please include the name of the river/waterbody, location and date of your observation and provide photographs. If possible, please also record what species are affected and an estimate of number of each species observed.
- Further information on blackwater events can be found at the DCCEEW Water website at: [Hypoxic blackwater | Water \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)
- Additional information is also available on the Murray-Darling Basin Authority website at: <https://www.mdba.gov.au/climate-and-river-health/water-quality/fish-deaths>  
<https://www.mdba.gov.au/water-management/infrastructure/menindee-lakes>
- Operational updates are available at: [WaterInsights - WaterNSW](#)
- Water quality data collected after the fish deaths at Menindee is available on the Environment Protection Authority web page at: <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/working-together/community-engagement/updates-on-issues/menindee-fish-kill>