Community update for Menindee and Lower Darling-Baaka

Inflows and water quality in the Barwon-Darling river

Rainfall in parts of the northern Murray-Darling Basin over the past month has resulted in noticeable flows in the tributary catchments of the Barwon-Darling Rivers. Inflow forecasting from the most recent rainfall across the Northern catchments indicate that the Menindee Lakes may receive additional inflows estimated at 300 – 400 GL by early February 2025.

We have been monitoring the levels of dissolved oxygen as the flows from the North begin to arrive at Menindee. Dissolved oxygen can impact on native fish species when levels drop below 2mg/L. The initial high flows in the upper reaches of the Barwon Darling, had dissolved oxygen levels at 0mg/L, and these were causing fish deaths at Walgett and Brewarrina. But as the flow has progressed downstream, we have been observing that dissolved oxygen levels are not dropping as low and are starting to recover.

The flow has peaked at Louth with dissolved oxygen stable at 3.3mg/L which is above critical levels for fish health. Dissolved oxygen has remained at a good level at 4.9mg/L at Wilcannia.

At 9am this morning (29 December), the fixed depth dissolved oxygen sensors at Nelia Gaari showed dissolved oxygen at 4.9mg/L. In addition, at the fixed level sensor that is located just downstream of Menindee main weir, levels are above 6.00mg/L and in the Menindee weir pool are around 5.0mg/L

WaterNSW – Operational update from 27 December

Peak inflow to the Menindee Lakes is expected early to mid-January 2025. Currently, sufficient airspace is available within the lakes to safely capture the expected inflows. Management of the inflows will be undertaken to ensure the upper lakes are filled to Full Supply Level at the completion of the inflow event. The forecasted volume surplus to this requirement will be passed into Lake Menindee.

The Lake Menindee inlet regulator was opened on 27 December and will pass an expected flow range of 3,000ML/d –12,000Ml/d over the coming weeks as required.

Please note that inflow forecasting is undertaken using the best available data at the time. There are several variables which may impact the final volume, with uncertainty of the final volume reducing as water flows toward the Lakes.

Blue-green algae

WaterNSW issued a Red Alert warning on 24 December for high levels of blue-green algae for Lake Wetherell site 2 near Menindee. You can check alerts online on the WaterNSW website.

The Red Alert warning applies only to untreated water at the identified location and will remain in place until monitoring and test results confirm that the risk is sufficiently diminished. People should avoid consuming untreated water from this waterbody and prevent pets and livestock from drinking this water. People should also avoid recreational activities such as swimming, water skiing, canoeing and any other activity that brings them into contact with this waterbody until the red alert warning is lifted.

Potentially toxic blue-green algae may cause gastroenteritis if consumed, while contact can cause skin and eye irritations. Consumption of water containing algal toxins may cause liver damage and other health problems. Boiling the water does not remove algal toxins.

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
- 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 Phoneline 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

- Real-time water quality data from DCCEEW-BCS monitoring buoys can be accessed from the Darling-Baaka River Health Project dashboard. https://sss.tago.run/dashboards/info/6574473bc8b74d0008344b05?anonymousToken=00000000-5ee2-f600-e0f3-6100270c936d
- WaterNSW buoy data can be found here https://waterinsights.waternsw.com.au/12104-lower-darling-regulated-river/river-data