

Community update for Barwon–Darling, Menindee Lakes and Lower Darling–Baaka river

Current conditions

As mentioned in the last community update (20 November) the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has reduced its call from 5,000 ML/day to 4,500 ML/day. The reduction, which was staged to monitor water quality conditions, was completed on Tuesday 25 November.

Releases are currently being maximised from the Lake Menindee outlet with approximately 800 ML/day being released from Lake Wetherell to maintain water quality within the town weir pool. As the Menindee Lake level is falling, the flow rate has begun to decrease from the outlet slightly. The MDBA will reduce its water order at Weir 32 to reflect the reduction in flows from Lake Menindee to negate the need for further releases from the upper lakes. The water level at Weir 32 for releases at 4,500 ML/day will remain around 2.27 metres, however this may reduce slightly in coming weeks.

Water quality within the Menindee weir pool is currently good with the department continuing to closely monitor any changes and ready to alter the release strategy if required. The department and WaterNSW continue to monitor the multi-depth monitoring pontoons in the Menindee area that measure key parameters such as temperature, dissolved oxygen and turbidity.

Menindee Lakes currently holds 1,194 GL (68.8% of the total capacity). The inlets between the lakes remained closed. All current inflows are remaining in Lake Wetherell but as flows continue to recede expect to see the lake levels reduce moving forward, unless there are more rain events in the northern Basin.

There are no significant inflows forecast and updated forecasting indicating that a further 20–40 GL is expected to enter the Menindee Lakes to the end of December. Since the start of August, around 700 GL has passed Wilcannia. As of 3 December, flows at Wilcannia have fallen to 815 ML/day and at Bourke flows have reduced to 610 ML/day.

Great Darling Anabranh- Cawndilla Releases

An environmental flow will be delivered down the Great Darling Anabranh from Lake Cawndilla, with releases of 700 ML/day starting in the coming days. Communities and water users in Menindee, the Lower Darling–Baaka and the Anabranh have advocated for this flow.

The flow will reconnect the Anabranh from Lake Cawndilla to the Murray, freshening refuge pools and providing opportunities for native fish to move downstream. It will also provide environmental outcomes for native vegetation, waterbirds and aquatic fauna such as yabbies, rakali and turtles. Environmental outcomes will be monitored via the [CEWH's FlowMER Program](#).

Water Quality Working Group

As we enter summer the Menindee, Lower Darling Water Quality Working Group (WQWG) will begin convening on at least a weekly basis. The WQWG is an advisory body that provides local and technical expert advice to inform decision-making bodies of management/response to water quality issues (particularly dissolved oxygen levels in the Weir 32 weir pool) and also advise on possible actions to mitigate against, or lessen the impact of, such issues. Members of the WQWG include representatives of local, state, and federal authorities as required and may include one or more technical specialists on a consultant basis.

For more information regarding the WQWG please email Kate: kate.mcbride@dcceew.nsw.gov.au

Menindee Community Update – Webinar

The department is organising an online webinar for the community to hear from agencies about operational plans to manage water quality and lake storage levels and reduce the risk of mass fish deaths for the summer months. It will also be an opportunity for community to ask questions regarding lake releases, future scenarios and work that is being done in the area. The webinar will be held on **Thursday 11 December at 4 pm** and further information and access details will be shared shortly.

Additional information

- To notify the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water of potential blackwater events email: water.enquiries@dcceew.nsw.gov.au
- To view community updates issued, visit water.nsw.gov.au/menindee-updates
- If you've got any questions regarding this update or other water matters **contact your local implementation officer, Kate McBride on 0458 945 149** or kate.mcbride@dcceew.nsw.gov.au
- To report dead fish, fish struggling or gasping at the water surface, or crayfish leaving the water please call the **NSW Department of Primary Industry Fisheries Phonenumber 1800 043 536** or fill in a fish kill protocol and report form at: 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 department's website at: water.nsw.gov.au/hypoxic-blackwater
- Additional information is also available on the Murray–Darling Basin Authority website at: www.mdba.gov.au/climate-and-river-health/water-quality/fish-deaths
www.mdba.gov.au/water-management/infrastructure/menindee-lakes
- WaterNSW operational updates are available in [WaterInsights](#)
- Water quality data collected after the fish deaths at Menindee is available on the Environment Protection Authority web page at: www.epa.nsw.gov.au/working-together/community-engagement/updates-on-issues/menindee-fish-kill
- Real-time water quality data from The department – Strategic Science & Engagement monitoring buoys can be accessed from the [Darling–Baaka River Health Project dashboard](#)
- Data from the WaterNSW gauging network can be found in WaterInsights at: <https://waterinsights.waternsw.com.au/12104-lower-darling-regulated-river/river-data>