

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

Current conditions

Following the Water Quality Working Groups meeting on 15 December, releases remain unchanged. Lake Menindee outlet continues to be maximised, releasing ~3,440 ML/day. A further 750 ML/day is being released from Lake Weatherall to maintain water quality within the Menindee weir pool. The combined total release measured at Weir 32 is 4,1922 ML/day. As the flow rate continues to fall from the Menindee outlet, the flow and water level will continue to reduce slightly over coming weeks.

Water quality within the Menindee weir pool remains ok with the department continuing to closely monitor any changes and ready to alter the release strategy if required, particularly given the very hot weather we are currently experiencing. 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 1,103 GL (64% of the total capacity). There are no significant inflows forecast with 15-25 GL expected to enter the Lakes to the end of January. As at 19 December, flows at Wilcannia are 497 ML/day and at Bourke are 564 ML/day.

An **amber** algae alert remains in place at Lake Menindee, Weir 32 and downstream at Tolarno Station. For further information regarding algae please see below.

Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator

WaterNSW is advising customers and the wider community that Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator (PIR) will be operated today (Friday 19th December) to commence balancing Lakes Wetherell and Pamamaroo.

The transfer of water from Wetherell to Lake Pamamaroo will take approximately two weeks, in order to allow greater time for bank/floodplain areas to dry out and lessen the risk to stock bogging for landholders.

Scenario testing by WaterNSW has identified that a water saving of up to 6000 ML can be made through this operation. As the fish baffles remain in place, it is likely that fish passage will occur between Lake Pamamaroo and Wetherell. The action will allow the drawdown of water off the Wetherell floodplain to maintain water quality within the lake. It will also ensure we maximise the

water available in Lake Pamamaroo, so we have good quality water to manage water quality in the weir pool, given the algal blooms developing upstream.

Barwon Darling- algae conditions

Community has raised concerns regarding algae conditions above Menindee, particularly at Louth. As of yesterday, the WaterNSW algae alert map is now showing **amber** alert for both Louth and Bourke. The sampling at Louth was conducted on December 11, however conditions appear to have deteriorated quite significantly in recent days. Community is advised to avoid water where signs of blue-green algae are present. Further updates will be available at [WaterNSW algal alert map](#).

Blue green algae presence has grown rapidly over the last few days because of the combination of very high water temperatures and the still conditions created as flows drop to low levels.

Local residents and visitors should avoid any water that appears bright green, where obvious green scums are present on the water surface, or the water has a distinctive odour. Blue-green algae are usually very obvious, appearing as bright green clumps or specs in the water and are often associated with a strong musty or earthy odour.

Furthermore, a **red** alert warning was issued for the Namoi River at Walgett this week. The Barwon-Darling system is flowing but as flows have reduced in recent weeks there may not be sufficient discharge to flush an established algal bloom through the system. The department is continuing to monitor the situation closely however without further inflows there is limited actions that can be taken.

Algae level definitions

At **amber** level, the algae are multiplying, and the water often has a green tinge. While the water remains suitable for recreational use, it is considered unsuitable for potable use and raw water should be treated prior to domestic use. The water may also be unsuitable for stock watering. Water users should use caution and avoid water where signs of blue-green algae are present.

Red alert levels represent 'bloom' conditions. The water may appear green and may have strong, musty or organically polluted odours. Blue-green algae may be visible as clumps or as scums. The 'blooms' should be considered to be toxic to humans and animals, and the water should not be used for drinking (without prior treatment), stock watering, or for recreation.

EPA summer preparedness – mass fish death event response

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is now the combat agency for a Mass Fish Death Event at Menindee. This means that they are responsible for leading and coordinating a response should a mass fish death event occur.

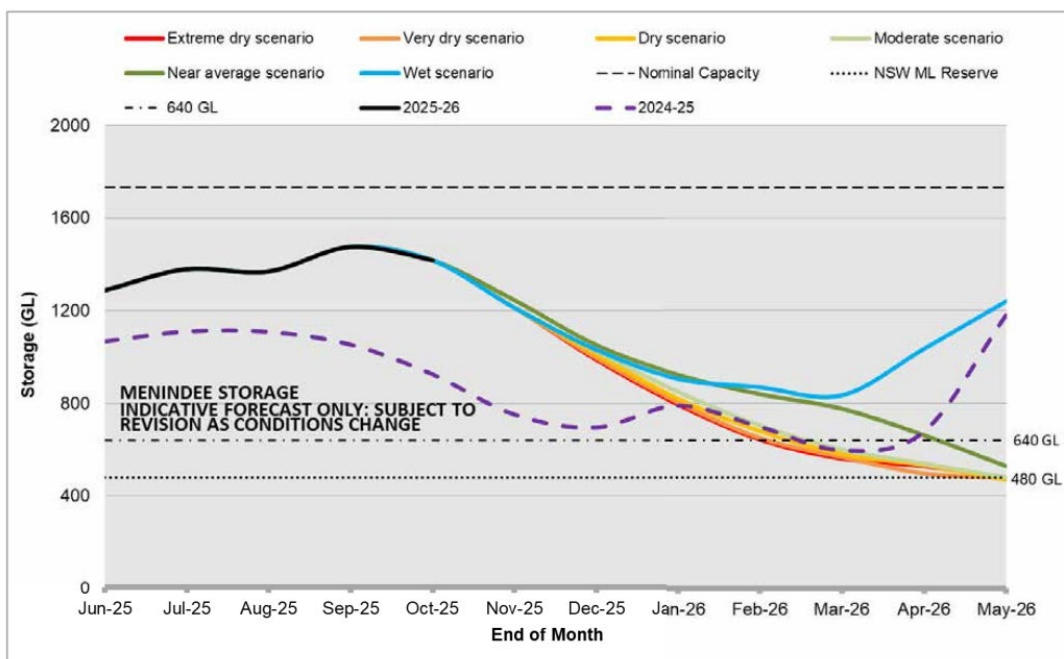
In preparation for the upcoming high-risk period for mass fish deaths, the EPA have been preparing operational response documents that details processes for removal of fish carcasses, where they will go, and burial sites. The EPA have also developed water and fish sampling plans, civil works plan, water carting plan, and traffic management plans.

The EPA have clean-up contractors on standby so we can commence a clean-up response within 12 hours if needed. These contractors will be on standby from early December until the start of April. The EPA have been talking with other agencies, so they are prepared and ready to respond and they have been practicing their response. The community will continue to updated by the EPA, especially if an event occurs.

MDBA – Annual Operating Manual

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has released their updated [annual operating manual](#). Various scenarios looking at different forecasts from extremely dry to wet, are predicting the Menindee Lakes to fall below 480 GL (into NSW control) in April or May 2026.

Figure 1. Menindee Lakes storage outlook from November 2025 to May 2026



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>