

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

Golden Perch deaths within weir pool

NSW DPIRD- Fisheries is investigating ongoing fish deaths in the Menindee town weir pool that were reported by the local community in recent days. An estimated 200 dead fish have been observed so far, predominately Golden Perch, with additional observations of fish in stress.

The Barkandji River Rangers have completed initial site assessments along the weir pool to get a better understanding of the number of affected fish, the species and any other observations. DPIRD- Fisheries staff are working with the Rangers and department staff to collect samples for analysis. These will be analysed by the department's Environmental Forensics Lab in Sydney.

At this stage, the cause of the fish deaths remains unknown. Aspects of water quality such as dissolved oxygen remain within normal ranges for native fish. NSW Government agencies are exploring appropriate actions to manage the situation, noting options may be limited until the cause of death and any associated risks are known.

The department and DPIRD-Fisheries understand that fish death events are distressing to the local community, particularly on the Lower Darling-Baaka.

Community members are encouraged to report any fish deaths or struggling fish to the Fishers Watch phonenumber on 1800 043 536. For more information on fish kills please visit:

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/habitat/threats/fish-kills

Weir 32 Science Program

You may recall similar fish deaths that effected Golden Perch in February 2024. There are many similarities between this event and the 2024 event such as the species impacted, time of year and water quality conditions. The Weir 32 Science Program was established in June 2024 to investigate the cause of the Golden Perch deaths and to further understand the impacts of previous mass fish deaths on the water quality and sediments of the Menindee weir pool.

The findings suggest previous mass fish deaths in the Menindee weir pool did not play a significant role in the Golden Perch deaths of 2024. While no direct cause of the Golden Perch deaths was found within the sediment or water quality analyses, several parameters were outside the expected range or outside of the ideal range for Golden Perch. In particular, pH was above the preferred range for Golden Perch for a month before and during the perch deaths.

The fish impacted in 2024 also had severe infections of parasites, all of which impair gill function and two of which have previously been known to cause mortality when in high abundance. Further, all these parasites are related to poor water quality, specifically high nutrient concentrations and prefer slow-moving waters, making the Menindee weir pool an ideal habitat for these parasites.

While a definitive cause of the 2024 Golden Perch fish deaths could not be identified, it is likely to be a sequence of events. The Golden Perch were influenced by environmental stressors making them more susceptible to parasite infections, which made them ideal hosts for secondary infestations and external parasites. This likely weakened the Golden Perch, compromising their immune systems and making them more susceptible to pathogenic bacteria.

The findings of the Weir 32 science program suggest that the extreme parasite loads driven by poor water and sediment quality, an inability to escape the weir pool and the preference of Golden Perch to eat and forage in the benthic zone led to their deaths in February and March 2024.

Unlike the 2024 event, the temporary fishway or fishheart unit is in place to allow movement of fish from the weir pool into Lake Wetherell. DPIRD-Fisheries has reported Golden Perch movements have increased markedly in recent weeks, with some of the highest daily passage rates now occurring.

The reports, including a summary, are available on our website at: [Darling-Baaka water science projects](#)

Current Operations

- Releases from Lake Menindee Outlet are currently maximised, prioritising use of resource in Lakes Menindee and Cawndilla.
- As of today, ~560 ML/day is being released from Lake Menindee Outlet and 750 ML/day continues to be released from Lake Pamamaroo.
- The releases from Pamamaroo are being done to maintain water quality within the Menindee weir pool, but the department is conscious of conserving water in the upper lakes for critical needs.

- The combined storage of the upper lakes of Wetherell, Tandure, Pamamaroo and Copi Hollow is forecast to reach 250 GL active in the coming week. This volume may provide up to 12-months' supply to the Lower Darling for critical needs
- Flows of 700 ML/day continue to be released from Lake Cawndilla down the Great Darling Anabranh.

Inflows

- WaterNSW released an updated inflow forecast on 23 February.
- Flow from the Northern Basin has been relatively low over the past month.
- At this time, there are no significant inflows forecast. As such, updated forecasting indicates a further 15 - 20 GL is expected to enter the Menindee Lakes to the end of March. Please note that a portion of this inflow is protected environmental water.

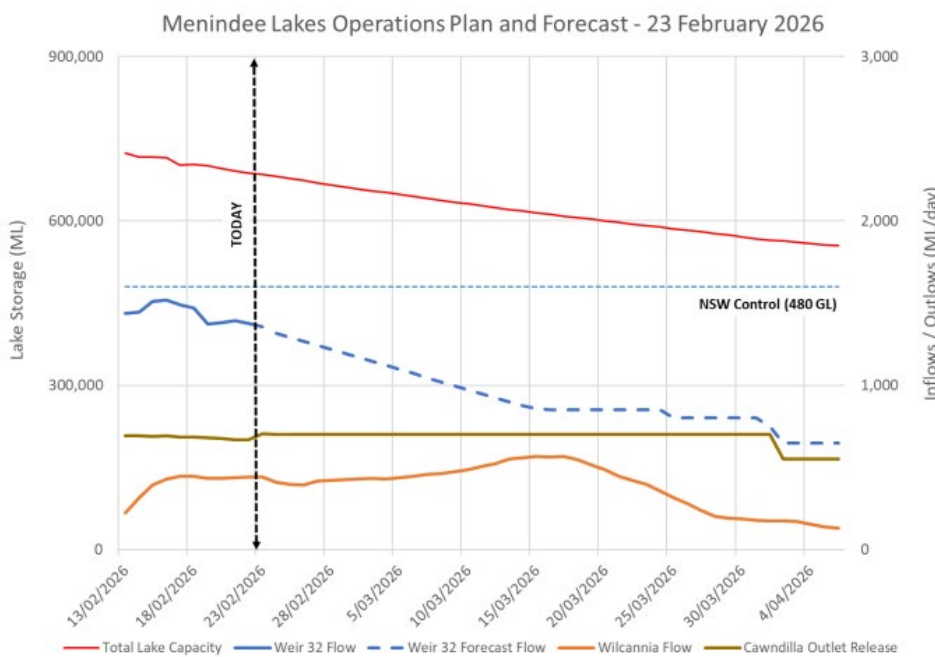


Figure 1. WaterNSW Menindee Lakes Operating Plan and Forecast (23 February)

Algae alerts

- Lake Menindee and Lake Menindee Outlet remain on **RED** alert.
- The Silver City Highway site along the Great Darling Anabranh has now been place on **RED** alert due to the high algae levels at the head of the flow. Additional sampling will be done in coming weeks once the front has passed and algae levels have decreased.

- Darling River at Weir 32, Copi Hollow, Lake Cawndilla Outlet, Lake Pamamaroo Outlet and multiple sites along Lake Wetherell have **AMBER** alerts in place.
- Darling River pump station (Menindee), Lake Tandure, Pamamaroo inlet and Lake Pamamaroo centre have **GREEN** alerts in place.
- Elsewhere around the region, Tolarno, Burtundy, Ellerslie and Tapio remain on **AMBER** with Pooncarie's status remains **GREEN**.
- Wilcannia, Louth and Bourke remain on **AMBER**.

For the latest algal alerts and information, go to [Algae Alerts NSW map - WaterNSW](#)

Connectivity

The department is holding public webinars on the Northern Basin Connectivity and Minimum Inflows projects on **Wednesday 11 March**.

We will provide updates on the Northern Basin Connectivity program and discuss the results of the assessments the department has done to understand the benefits and impacts of the recommendations made by the independent Connectivity Expert Panel.

The department will also provide an outline of the methodology developed to undertake the Minimum Inflows review, and the department's response to recommendations made in the Office of the Chief Scientist & Engineer's Minimum Inflows Method Review report.

The webinar session will include time for questions.

[Register here for Wednesday 11 March, 12.00 pm – 1.30 pm](#)

[Register here for Wednesday 11 March, 3.30 pm – 5.00 pm](#)

Webinars will be recorded and put on the departments webpage for those who can't attend.

Upcoming agency trips to the area

The table below outlines the dates and times that agencies will be visiting Menindee and the surrounding areas or holding events. As always, Menindee's local department contact Kate McBride will be around and is happy to discuss any water related matters in person or over the phone.



Temporary Tube Fishway Trial

End of Season 2 Community Day



Join us for a free BBQ with a fun and informative day out on Country!

- Fishheart demonstration:** Get a behind-the-scenes look in the control room
- Info stands & displays:** Learn more about the project and the health of the Baaka!
- Community art installation:** Help us paint the pipes!



When: Saturday 14 March 2026 | 10 AM – 3 PM

Where: Lake Wetherell Outlet Regulator (Main Weir Road)





Agency	When	Reason for visit / Activity	Location
NSW DPIRD Fisheries	Saturday 14 March, 10am-3pm	Community Open day – Temporary tube fishway trial (Fishheart)	Lake Wetherell Outlet Regulator
NSW DPIRD Fisheries	Week of 9-14 March	Engagement with local community on the Menindee & Lower Baaka Permanent Fish Passage Business Case	Menindee (various throughout the week).

More 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.watarnsw.com.au/12104-lower-darling-regulated-river/river-data>