

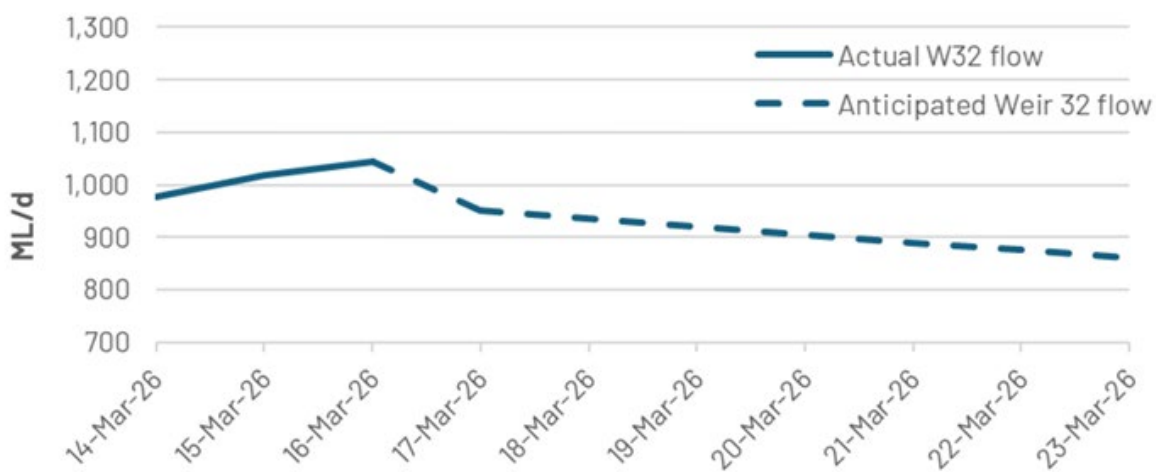
Community update for Barwon–Darling, Menindee Lakes and Lower Darling–Baaka River

Reduction of water releases from the upper lakes

The Menindee/Lower Darling Water Quality Working Group (WQWG) has met at least weekly over the summer months to monitor water quality in the Lakes and Lower Darling. Balancing an adequate level of dissolved oxygen in the weir pool and conserving water for drought reserve is the primary consideration of the WQWG when making recommendations on releases from the upper lakes.

Currently, the cooler weather and higher than minimum releases is keeping dissolved oxygen levels at good levels for fish health. As such, the WQWG has further recommended a reduction in releases from the upper lakes to 500 ML/day. In support of this reduction, the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has further reduced its call on water. Total releases are still higher than the minimum release of 350 ML/day (Weir 32) that is required at this time of year.

Figure 1. WaterNSW graph showing anticipated flow at Weir 32



The department continues to utilise a recently developed stratification/destratification model that predicts when the weir pool water column will destratify/mix. This model continues to be ground-truthed and is showing releases of 500 ML/day should be sufficient to prompt destratification/mixing of the water column on most days this week.

Menindee Operations

As of 16 March 2026, 1,049 ML/day is being discharged from Weir 32 however this will reduce to ~950 ML/day once Lake Pamamaroo releases reduce shortly. Lake Menindee releases will continue to be maximised and the MDBA will reduce its water order to reflect the reduction in flows from Lake Menindee. This will negate the need for further releases from the upper lakes unless required to address poor water quality in the weir pool.

Lake Pamamaroo inlet remains open and is discharging 1,000 ML/day from Wetherell into Pamamaroo which is assisting with moving water off the Wetherell floodplain. In the coming weeks the lake levels will equalise. This will also allow WaterNSW to complete required maintenance at Main Weir.

Environmental water flows of ~700 ML/day continue to be released from Lake Cawndilla down the Great Darling Anabranch. The flows will gradually reduce and cease over April and early May, with input from Anabranch landholders. The flows are providing benefits for vegetation, waterbirds, native fish and other aquatic animals like yabbies. During autumn, ecological monitoring will be undertaken by the department and the CEWH's [FlowMER2.0 program](#).

Storage	Percent full
Lake Wetherell	31%
Lake Pamamaroo	78%
Lake Menindee	7.4%
Lake Cawndilla	30%
Menindee total	37%

Inflows

WaterNSW is expected to provide an updated inflow forecast in the next few weeks. From their update on 23 February only a further 15–20 GL is expected to enter the Menindee Lakes to the end of March 2026. The combined active storage of the upper lakes of Wetherell, Tandure, Pamamaroo and Copi Hollow is forecast to reach 250 GL around the end of March 2026, which may provide up to 12 months supply to the Lower Darling for critical needs.

Following localised rainfall, there was a small inflow of turbid water from Bonley Creek into the Darling River halfway between Wilcannia and Lake Wetherell. The turbid water, that appears

somewhat orange in colour, extend for about 10 km and reached the Nelia Gaari gauging station last week. Dissolved oxygen dropped to ~2.5 mg/L at the site, but has begun to improve.

Figure 2. Picture of turbid water at Lake Wetherell site 1 (9 March 2026)



Golden Perch deaths within the weir pool

NSW agencies continue to investigate ongoing fish deaths in the Menindee town weir pool. Fish deaths remain in the low 100's and are predominantly Golden Perch with additional observations of fish in stress. Daily reports of fish deaths continue to be in the 10's but the daily death totals have not escalated since the event begun.

The Barkandji River Rangers continue to complete onsite assessments along the weir pool to monitor conditions and record numbers of affected fish. 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.

Water samples were sent on the 26 February 2026 to the departments Environmental Forensic lab in Sydney and analysed for nutrients, herbicides, pesticides, metals and major anions and cations. There were trace level detections of some common herbicides but all well below 95% species protection guideline values. There were exceedances of ANZECC (2000) guideline values for total nitrogen, phosphorus and phosphate at sites, however within the expected range for the Menindee weir pool. There were no increases in the parameters tested that would suggest a cause of the fish deaths.

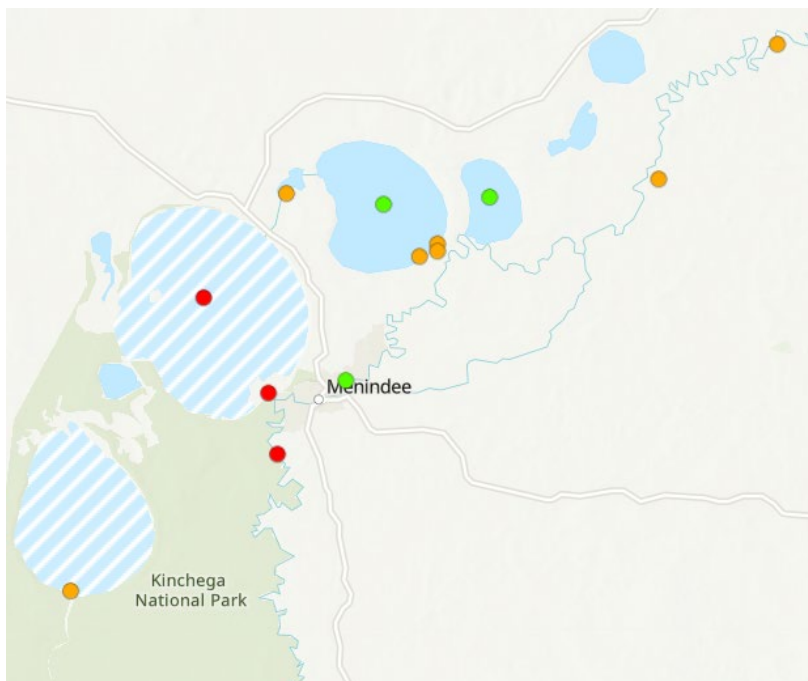
For more information regarding the results please contact Zacchary Larkin by email at zacchary.larkin@environment.nsw.gov.au

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

Algae alerts

- Lake Menindee, Lake Menindee Outlet, Lake Menindee at Sunset Strip, Darling River at Weir 32 and Silver City Hwy (Great Darling Anabranch) remain on **RED** alert. Weekly sampling at these sites is being conducted by WaterNSW.
- Copi Hollow, Pamamaroo Inlet, Pamamaroo Outlet and multiple sites along Lake Wetherell have **AMBER** alerts in place.
- Darling River pump station (Menindee), Lake Tandure and Lake Pamamaroo centre have **GREEN** alerts in place.
- Elsewhere around the region, Tolarno, Pooncarie, Burtundy, Ellerslie and Tapio remain on **AMBER**. Upstream at Wilcannia, Louth and Bourke remain on **AMBER**.
- For the latest algal alerts and algal alert definitions, go to [Algae Alerts NSW map - WaterNSW](#).

Figure 3. Screenshot of Menindee regions algal alerts. Further information available at waternsw.com.au/algae



Connectivity

The final scheduled webinar on the Northern Basin Connectivity and Minimum Inflows programs is on Monday 30 March, 12:00–1:30 pm. [Registrations are still open](#). Webinars held last week provided updates on the programs and discussed the benefits and impacts of the recommendations made by the independent connectivity expert panel.

Last week's webinars were recorded and will be put on the departments webpage for those who were unable to attend.

Find more information on our website at: [Northern Basin Connectivity Program](#)

Upcoming engagement/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.

Agency	When	Reason for visit/activity	Location
Water Group	Wednesday 18 March, 11:00 am–12:00 pm	Water Engagement Roundup – Restoring the Darling–Baaka	Online
MDBA	Monday 30 & Tuesday 31 March	Menindee Review and Basin Plan Review	Menindee
Water Group	Monday 30 March, 12:00–1:30 pm	Northern Basin Connectivity Program	Online

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