

Community update on response to fish deaths in Menindee and Lower Darling-Baaka

Responding to ongoing fish deaths in the Darling-Baaka at Menindee

A fish death event has been impacting adult Golden Perch within the Menindee Weir 32 weir pool since 10 February 2024. It is estimated more than 1,000 fish have died during the event. Daily mortalities appear to have peaked during the current incident around 26 February, with numbers of dead and distressed fish steadily declining since. Water quality parameters that typically impact fish health have remained within or near normal range during this period. This includes dissolved oxygen, temperature, salinity and pH.

Dissolved oxygen levels in the Menindee weir pool remain at adequate levels

The dissolved oxygen levels in the Menindee weir pool remain at adequate levels for fish health. Our series of in-river buoys installed between Lake Pamamaroo and Weir 32 provide 'real-time' enhanced water quality data and show that the dissolved oxygen is within the healthy range. NSW Government and Commonwealth agencies are continuing to carefully monitor the situation and adjusting releases as required.

Continued water releases

From Thursday 21 March, water releases from Lake Pamamaroo will drop to 600ML/day, which is down from the current 750 ML/day. Lake Menindee releases of 50 ML/day will remain the same.

The decision to drop the flow rate has been taken given the water column has been destratifying each day, dissolved oxygen is adequate for fish health, to conserve water, and reduce volume of e-water currently being used.

Data from the weir pool buoys will continue to be monitored to determine if there is a deterioration of water quality conditions as a result of reduced flows and we can take immediate action.

River health monitoring program

The NSW government has established a river health monitoring program from Wilcannia to Wentworth. This involves monitoring both water quality and biological indicators of health on a monthly basis.

Routine monitoring of the river health is scheduled for next week. This will involve sampling both from boats and along the shoreline at various locations along the river. Water will be sampled for algae, nutrients, dissolved oxygen, organic matter, suspended solids, EC, pH, temperature.

Sediment sampling

NSW Government staff will also be sampling sediments from weir 32 for specialist laboratory analyses to try and identify the possible cause of Golden Perch deaths.

They will be sampling the sediments from a boat using a box corer to retrieve surface and deeper sediment. The focus will be on looking for pesticides, heavy metals, nutrients and acid sulphate that may be stored in the sediment and possibly affecting the food source of golden perch.

Samples are kept cool and then transported to the laboratory in Sydney.

Barkandji Rangers engaged to monitor for fish deaths

Barakandji Rangers have recently completed their boat licence training and are now being engaged to monitor on the water for fish deaths. The Rangers are working closely with NSW and Commonwealth Government departments.

Current blue-green algae alerts issued by WaterNSW

WaterNSW has [issued a Red Alert advisory](#) for high levels of blue-green algae for:

- Darling River BHWB Pumping Station at Menindee.
- Menindee Lakes at Pamamaroo outlet and at Lake Menindee Site 19
- Lake Wetherell Site 4
- Darling River at Weir 32 and at Pooncarie
- Tandure Lake

The Red Alert warning for blue-green algae that was issued for the Menindee Lakes at Copi Hollow has been lifted following two consecutive laboratory algal reports which indicates that the lake is no longer on Red Alert for blue-green algae.

See Map below

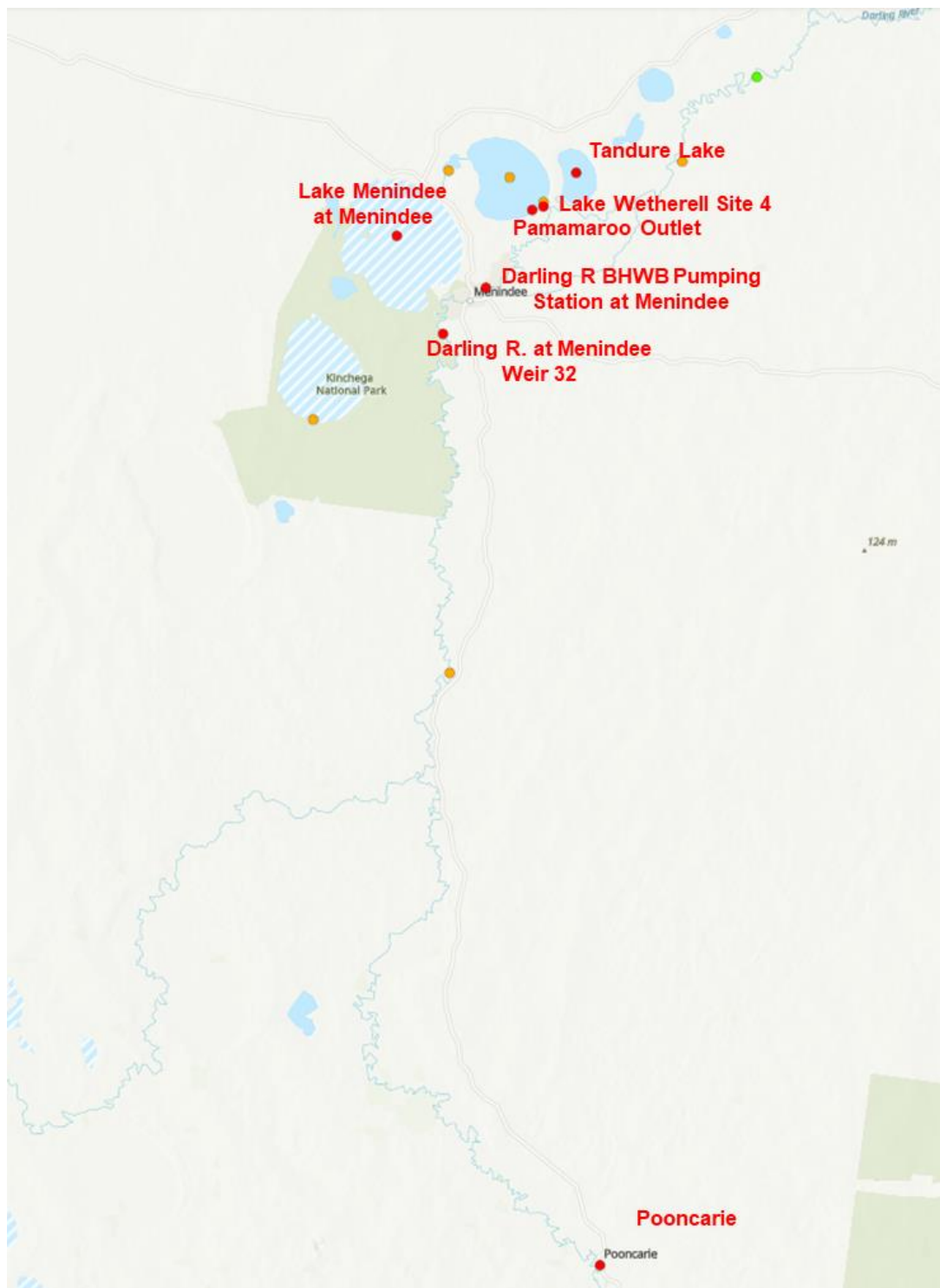


Figure 1. [Algae Alerts NSW map - WaterNSW](#)

What does a red alert for blue-green algae mean?

Red Alert warnings apply 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 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. People who suspect they have been affected by blue-green algae should seek medical advice.

People should not eat mussels or crayfish from red alert warning areas. A precautionary approach to eating fin fish from red alert warning areas is advised. Any fish caught should be cleaned and washed thoroughly in uncontaminated water; the internal organs should not be eaten. Avoiding fishing during a bloom is the best way to minimise risk.

Blue-green algae is naturally occurring and can reproduce quickly in still or slow-flowing water when there is abundant sunlight and sufficient nutrients.

Updates and information about blue-green algae blooms and red level warning areas can be obtained by 1300 662 077 or visiting www.waternsw.com.au/water-quality/algae

Is the drinking water safe?

Yes. Essential Water issued advice that the quality of drinking water for customers has not been impacted by the high levels of blue-green algae identified in the Darling River in the Far West of NSW.

WaterNSW has issued a Red Alert advisory for high levels of blue-green algae for the Darling River at Menindee Weir 32, warning people to avoid consuming untreated water. The warning applies only to untreated water at Menindee Weir 32. There has been no impact to the quality of drinking water coming from the Essential Water Treatment Plant.

Essential Water urges the community to continue to avoid untreated water taken directly from the river as it is not considered potable and encourages local residents to prevent pets and livestock from drinking the river water.

Essential Water conducts sampling and testing of drinking water to ensure it continues to meet the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. Essential Water use laboratories certified to Australian standards and NSW Health reviews the results. Essential water delivers a secure water supply for drinking.

Keeping up to date

Anyone wishing to receive this and other related updates from NSW Government can subscribe by emailing water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au and mention you would like Menindee updates.

Additional information

- To notify the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water of potential blackwater events email: waterqualitydata@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 Phonenumber 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 DCCEE 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>