

Lower Darling meeting 7 – 24 April 2020

A subset of the Barwon-Darling/Lower Darling Critical Water Advisory Panel (CWAP) convened on 24 April 2020 to discuss the recommencement of flows to the Lower Darling.

A summary of the meeting outcomes is provided below.

Further information on the function and membership of critical water advisory panels can be found in this [fact sheet](#).

The Lower Darling is currently in drought Stage 3 – Severe Drought according to the NSW Extreme Events Policy. This valley has recently been de-escalated from Stage 4 – Critical Drought because of the inflows into Menindee Lakes, which has enabled flows to be re-commenced in the Lower Darling and for high priority commitments to be met for the next 12 to 18 months.

Please note: *All reasonable efforts have been made to provide accurate and current information in this communique. This information is accurate as at 24 April 2020. However, changes in circumstances such as weather variability, water management decisions or any other events after the time of publication may impact on the accuracy of the material. Water Allocation Statements published by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment - Water (DPIE-Water) provide the most accurate information on available water and allocations and are available at - www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements.*

Forecast flows to Menindee Lakes and Lower Darling flows

Total inflows to Menindee Lakes are now expected to reach 450-490 gigalitres (GL) (as at 22 April 2020). The WaterNSW forecasts are available here - www.waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates

Forecast total flows at Wilcannia are now expected to reach 570-600GL.

This improved forecast is due to inflows to the Barwon-Darling from the Macquarie-Castlereagh and Bogan river systems, which both received good rainfall over Easter. An additional 50-100GL is now expected from the Macquarie-Castlereagh. Supplementary access has been granted in the Macquarie as a result of these inflows. Flows at Brewarrina are currently peaking at 12GL/day.

There is a total of 312GL combined storage in Menindee Lakes. Water is being transferred into Pamamaroo at a rate of 4000ML/day as Lake Wetherell is close to its full supply level.

The Lower Darling recommencement pulse has now finished. Releases of 300ML/day are now being targeted at Weir 32 until the end of April. Releases will then go back to 200ML/day for the rest of winter as per the water sharing plan rules. Flows downstream are now falling.

Wentworth weir pool was lowered when flows arrived to draw poorer quality water through the pool more quickly and is now rising again.

Lower Darling resource allocation

Conditions have improved with more inflows into the Barwon-Darling from the Bogan and Macquarie-Castlereagh systems. DPIE-Water is currently looking at expected inflows into

Menindee Lakes and assessing the potential for a general security allocation. Further advice will be provided in the next water allocation statement for the NSW Murray/ Lower Darling (1 May 2020).

Update on water quality and fish health

Water quality remains good along the Lower Darling. Salinity (EC) transects and water quality profiles have been taken over the last week in the Wentworth weir pool. The results show that the water is well-mixed from the surface to the bottom of the weir pool, with EC and dissolved oxygen (DO) levels constant throughout the profiles. There is no evidence of highly saline water at the bottom of the weir pool, as occurred during the 2016 flow event.

Dissolved oxygen levels are low at the head of the flows (approximately 2mg/L), where the water is highly turbid, however; low water temperatures are reducing the risk posed by lower oxygen levels. EC levels continue to be diluted as flows move down the Murray River. EC at Lock 10 on the Murray River is less than 110 μ S. Water turbidity is expected to remain high as flows move down the Murray, but will improve over time.

No fish deaths have been reported in the last week. Golden Perch spawned in the north of the Barwon-Darling system in January and February and moved downstream to the Menindee Lakes. It is expected that Golden and Silver Perch will have also spawned in the Lower Darling in response to the flows.

Communications

This week's flow and water quality reports will be the last of the regular reports published on the Lower Darling releases, given flows have reached the Murray and flows and water quality along the Lower Darling are stabilising. Previous updates are available on DPIE-Water's website here - www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/drought-recovery/menindee-lakes-lower-darling-river

Stakeholders should continue to refer to the DPIE-Water's water allocation statements for information on current allocations and resource outlooks for the NSW Murray/Lower Darling valleys - www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statement.

WaterNSW operational updates can be found at - www.watnsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates

Agencies present

- NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
 - Water Division (DPIE-Water)
 - Environment, Energy and Science Division (DPIE-EES)
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
 - DPI Agriculture
 - DPI Fisheries
- NSW Health
- WaterNSW
- Wentworth Shire Council

Next meeting

This was the last in a series of weekly meetings to monitor the Lower Darling recommencement flows. Meetings of the broader Barwon/Lower Darling Critical Water Advisory Panel will be held as required moving forward.