

Community update for Menindee and Lower Darling-Baaka

Dissolved oxygen levels in the Menindee weir pool and water releases

Water quality monitoring is showing water temperatures are decreasing and dissolved oxygen levels in the Darling River at Menindee have increased and are remaining above the critical thresholds for fish health.

In response to the improved dissolved oxygen results, the volumes of water being released from Lake Pamamaroo is 300 ML/day, while Lake Menindee is 100 ML/day to maintain a total of 400 ML/day at Weir 32. 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.

Current blue-green algae alerts issued by WaterNSW

WaterNSW has issued a Red Alert advisory for high levels of potentially toxic blue-green algae in the Lower Darling River from Lake Wetherell to the Darling River confluence with the Murray at Wentworth.

The red alert warning for blue-green algae that was in place for Lake Pamamaroo outlet at Menindee lakes has been lifted. The Lake Pamamaroo outlet is now on amber alert for blue-green algae. This advice should not be confused with the red alert issued for the storage of Lake Pamamaroo, which remains in place.

Responding to algae blooms in the Lower Darling River

The joint government water quality working group meets regularly to manage water quality issues in the Lower Darling River. The option of increasing flows down the river from the upper lakes to 'flush' the river has been considered to be ineffective in reducing algae in the lower reaches of the river given the lakes themselves are on red alerts for blue green algae.

Lowering of the Wentworth Weir (Lock 10) to draw the poor quality water through to the Murray was also considered by the MDBA, however while the flow in the Murray is so much higher than the flow in the Darling this is unlikely to be successful at this point in time. This option continues to be examined, and if the relative flow in the two systems reaches a point where it would be effective the option will be reconsidered. Dissolved Oxygen levels remain adequate for fish health but humans should avoid consuming untreated water.

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 provide treated water to the township of Menindee and Wentworth Shire Council provide treated water to Wentworth, Dareton, Buronga, Gol Gol and Pooncarie communities.

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.

Community members should 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.

Inflows

Recent heavy rainfall in south-west Queensland is resulting in stream flows in northern NSW, with Menindee Lakes forecast to receive a further 70–100 gigalitres (GL) of inflow by the end of May.

Inflows from tributaries will continue over this week following rainfall in the Moonie and Culgoa catchments in Queensland as well as the Macintyre in the Border Rivers and Gil Gil River in the Gwydir catchment.

The increased flows have now reached Caloola on the Barwon River.

Rainfall in parts of the northern Murray-Darling Basin over the past six months has resulted in continued inflows to Menindee Lakes. Since the start of 2024 approximately 186 GL of water has entered Menindee Lakes to date. Menindee Lakes are currently at 53%.

Fish forum in Menindee 29 April – 3 May

NSW DPI Fisheries is hosting a Menindee Fish Forum from Monday 29 April – 3 May 2024 with events locally in Menindee and Pooncarie, with funding from the MDBA towards the Lower Darling-Baaka Recovery Reach program.

Fisheries and other government representatives will be in town to discuss a range of fish related topics for the Lower Darling-Baaka including:

- Update on the Lower Darling-Baaka Recovery Reach project
- Fish and flows: water for the environment and monitoring native fish outcomes
- Fish and flows – Golden Perch and Murray Cod and how they are tracking
- Various informal sessions in the evenings at the local pub to chat about threatened species,
- An electro-fishing demo at the Railway Bridge
- Drop-in sessions at the CWA Hall.

Additional information

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