

## Lower Darling meeting 5 – 9 April 2020

*A subset of the Barwon Darling/Lower Darling CWAP convened on 9 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 9 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](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements)*

## Forecast flows to Menindee Lakes

Regular flow forecast updates (currently every Monday, Wednesday and Friday) are being published by WaterNSW on their operations updates webpage - [www.watarnsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates](http://www.watarnsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates)

Flows in the Barwon-Darling are continuing to recede, with flows at the majority of gauges upstream of Bourke falling to below 1000 megalitres (ML)/day.

Flows are currently 150ML/day at Mungindi, 2200ML/day at Bourke, 4000ML/day at Louth, 5500ML/day at Tilpa and 10,000ML/day at Wilcannia.

A total of 480GL has passed Bourke as a result of this flow event, while Wilcannia has seen a total of 390GL. Another 50GL is expected to pass Wilcannia.

There has been some rainfall in the Bogan River system. This is only likely to contribute base flows to the Barwon-Darling.

Total flows into Menindee Lakes have reached 295GL, with 100GL still expected.

It is estimated (as at 6 April 2020) that 395 to 425GL will reach Menindee Lakes as a result of the current flow event.

Menindee Lakes is currently holding 250GL, including 167 GL in Lake Wetherell, 80GL in Lake Pamamaroo and 2GL in Copi Hollow. Water is still being transferred into Lake Pamamaroo at a rate of 4000ML/day. There is 25GL of air space in Lake Wetherell, which will be topped up as more flows arrive.

There is still a small bank left in the channel connecting Lake Pamamaroo to Copi Hollow. This is providing stock and domestic access to water until flows are large enough to pass over the bank. There is still a small difference in water levels between the two bodies of water.

## Lower Darling flows

2450ML/day is being released down the Lower Darling from Weir 32.

Flows arrived at Pooncarie on the morning of 7 April and water passed downstream of the Pooncarie Weir by that afternoon.

As of 9 April, flows are passing over Carstairs Weir. Flows are expected to reach Burtundy on 11 or 12 April and reach the top of the Wentworth Weir Pool on 13 or 14 April.

WaterNSW has been working closely with the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) to lower Wentworth weir pool and actively draw the flow out of the Darling arm of the weir pool when flows arrive. This is being done to manage the higher salinity levels of the flows entering the pool and assisting in allowing this poorer quality water to more quickly pass through the weir pool.

WaterNSW has issued an operations update providing more information on the planned drawdown on their website here - [www.waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates](http://www.waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates)

The MDBA's media release can be found here - [www.mdba.gov.au/media/mr/managing-water-quality-darling-meets-murray](http://www.mdba.gov.au/media/mr/managing-water-quality-darling-meets-murray)

River users have been advised to adjust their activities, pumps and moorings to accommodate the change in the weir pool level.

At this stage the Wentworth weir pool is expected to start dropping from about 10 April. It is forecast that the movement of poorer quality water may take in the order of 8 – 12 days to move through the Darling arm of the Wentworth Weir pool.

## Update on water quality and fish health

Regular updates on the progress of flows down the Lower Darling and water quality monitoring are being provided on the DPIE-water website here - [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/drought-recovery/menindee-lakes-lower-darling-river](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/drought-recovery/menindee-lakes-lower-darling-river)

Water quality remains good as flows move down the Lower Darling. Similar to last week, dissolved oxygen levels are currently above 5mg/L and salinity levels are down. Flows are moving quickly and water is mixing well.

Turbidity levels remain high as flows continue downstream.

Water quality is much better than that seen during the last flow event in 2016. There several factors that have contributed to this outcome. Flow volumes and rates are higher for this event compared to 2016. The water quality coming into Menindee Lakes from upstream has also been better than the previous event and salinity levels in the lakes were much lower when flows were restarted to the Lower Darling.

A red alert for algae is still in place for Burtundy, but algae should be washed away when flows arrive.

A small fish kill involving around 100 individuals has been reported near Carstairs, approximately 50km downstream of Pooncarie. However, this event was caused by localised rainfall and occurred before the head of the Lower Darling flows arrived. No fish kills have occurred as a result of restarting flows to the Lower Darling at this stage.

DPI-Fisheries have opened the fishway at Burtundy in anticipation of flows arriving this weekend.

## Communications

Updates on the progress of flows and water quality monitoring will be published by DPIE-Water each week. These can be found at - [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/drought-recovery/menindee-lakes-lower-darling-river](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/drought-recovery/menindee-lakes-lower-darling-river)

DPIE-Water's water allocation statements provide information on current allocations and resource outlooks and for the NSW Murray and Lower Darling are published fortnightly.

WaterNSW is also publishing flow forecasts and operational updates at - [www.waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates](http://www.waternsw.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 Office of Drought Response
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
  - DPI Agriculture
  - DPI Fisheries
- WaterNSW
- Wentworth Shire Council

## Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Friday 17 April.