

## Lower Darling meeting 6 – 17 April 2020

*A subset of the Barwon Darling/Lower Darling CWAP convened on 17 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 17 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 and Lower Darling flows

Regular flow forecast updates are being published by WaterNSW on their operations updates webpage - [www.waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates](http://www.waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates)

Some rainfall has occurred in the Barwon Darling catchment area over the last week, with flows now increasing past Walgett (3000 megalitres (ML)/day and rising) and Brewarrina (5000ML/day and rising). These flows should make a small contribution to total inflows to Menindee Lakes.

Flows at Wilcannia are falling. A total of 445 gegalitres (GL) has been recorded past Wilcannia during this flow event, with an estimated 30GL still to arrive.

As at 14 April, it is estimated that a total of 400 to 440GL will reach Menindee Lakes as a result of the current flow event.

Lake Tandure and Lake Wetherell are currently holding 182GL, with 10GL of airspace to full supply level remaining in Lake Wetherell. Lake Pamamaroo is holding 107GL. Transfers to Lake Pamamaroo were reduced on 16 April to 2000ML/day to maximise levels in Lake Wetherell. There is a total of 292GL in Menindee Lakes as of 17 April.

The small bank that remains in place between Lake Pamamaroo and Copi Hollow has not yet been breached. This bank is providing stock and domestic access to water until flows are large enough to pass over. There is still a small difference in water levels between the two bodies of water.

Flows down the Lower Darling are almost at the point of recession. Releases from Weir 32 are currently at 450ML/day and are expected to drop to 300ML/day this weekend (18-19 April). Releases will be held at 300ML/day until the end of April.

Flows at Pooncarie are starting to recede and flows at Burtundy are at 2650 ML/day. Flows reached the top of the Wentworth weir pool on Easter Monday and the front of the flows is currently just upstream of Pomona.

## Lower Darling resource allocation

The latest water allocation statement for the NSW Murray and Lower Darling was released on Wednesday (15 April) and can be accessed here - [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements). There is currently not enough water in storage to make an allocation to general security entitlements.

The Lower Darling re-start flows patterns and volumes were as expected and Menindee Lakes storage is currently sitting at 17% capacity. Flows from upstream are dropping, but we are likely to see base flows continuing. DPIE-Water are continuing to monitor conditions closely.

## 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. The head of the flow made it past Burtundy on Saturday 11 April. Conductivity was sitting at almost 4000  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$  before the flows arrived and quickly dropped down to 400  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$  once the head of the flow had passed. Dissolved oxygen levels dropped down to 5mg/L when flows arrived but improved quickly to 8 mg/L, which is within safe levels for fish.

Water quality is stable all the way down the river from Weir 32 to Burtundy. Profile readings taken at Pooncarie weir pool during the week indicate that the water is well mixed and oxygenated.

While turbidity remains high, salinity and oxygen levels are remaining within safe levels. Landholders have reported that water quality is improving quickly as flows move through the Wentworth weir pool, with salinity (EC) dropping to 500  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$  within a few hours.

Salt levels in the Lower Darling flows are substantially better than in 2016 and the 'salt slug' at the head of the flow is moving through the system more quickly. This is mainly due to the better quality of water that was released from Lake Wetherell (less than 200  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ) and the greater flow volumes of water involved. Salt levels observed in the remnant river pools along the river prior to flows arriving were similar to that seen in 2016.

No further fish deaths have been reported since the small event near Carstairs last week. This small event was caused by localised rainfall before the head of the Lower Darling flows arrived. No fish kills have occurred as a result of restarting flows to the Lower Darling.

Fish should start moving upstream from Wentworth weir pool now that the flows have arrived.

## Communications

Updates on the progress of flows and water quality monitoring are being 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 at - [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statement](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statement)

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 Department of Primary Industries
  - DPI Agriculture
  - DPI Fisheries
- WaterNSW
- NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA)
- Wentworth Shire Council
- Far South West Joint Organisation of Councils

## Next meeting

The next and final meeting related to the management of the Lower Darling flows will be held on Friday 24 April.