Community update for Menindee and Lower Darling-Baaka

Update on current environmental water flush

The NSW Government flush of 45-50 GL from the upper Menindee Lakes through the lower Darling-Baaka River commenced on 29 May to help clear the current infestation of blue-green algae impacting local communities.

Discharge at the Darling River at Weir 32 and Great Darling Anabranch offtake gauging stations is increasing. No increase in flow at Pooncarie as yet.

Satellite images

The latest Planet satellite imagery from 1 June has patchy cloud over Menindee, extending down past the Darling anabranch offtake, obscuring most of this area.

A comparison of satellite imagery (see below) at Tolarno station from 22 May before the flush (**Figure 1**) and 1 June after the flush commenced (**Figure 2**) shows the water has changed colour from green to a greenish/brown as the turbid flows increase.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Tracking the pulse flows down river

The graph below shows the arrival of the flows at key measurement points along the river. The pulse has passed Weir 32 at 3500ML per day and as of today (3 June) it is at 2000ML per day at the Anabranch offtake. It is expected to reach Pooncarie within the week.

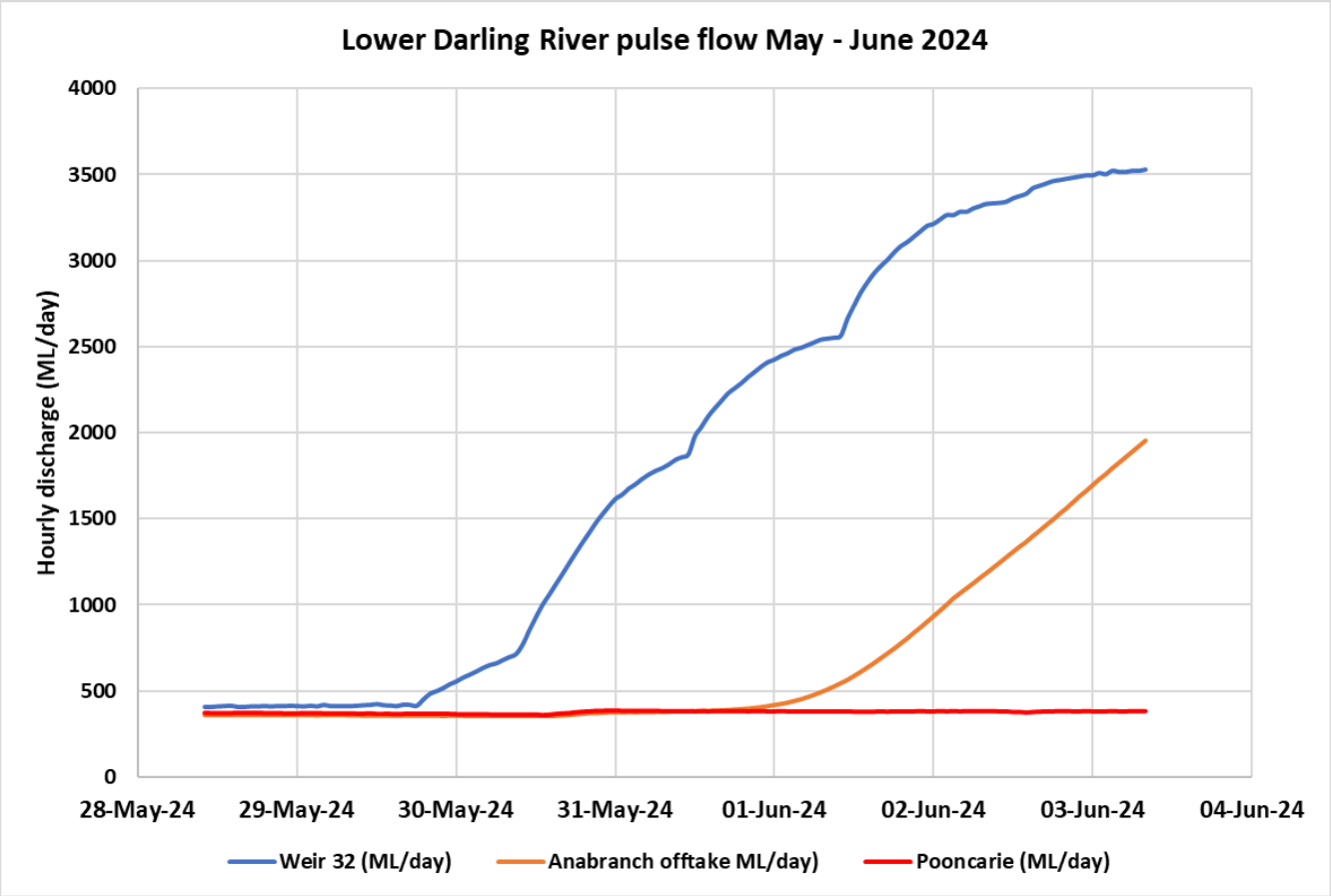

Photo taken 3 June at Karoola Reach showing freshwater passing through

Send us your 'before and after' photos of the river

In addition to staff regularly monitoring the river, we would appreciate photos you may have taken currently and then photos you capture in the coming days and weeks to help us track improvements in the water quality as the flush moves through. If you are happy to share your photos, please email them to water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au

Wentworth weir pool red alert remains as flush starts

The community is reminded that blue-green algae red alert warnings for the Lower Darling-Baaka remain in place until further notice, and the public should continue to exercise caution, especially water users drawing from the Wentworth weir pool.

The weir pool is covered by an algal red alert in place from the Menindee lakes to the Murray River. Concentrations of potentially toxic blue-green algal levels in the weir pool are among the highest in the region, and the community is advised that people, pets and livestock should not come into physical contact with the water or use it for domestic purposes while the red alert remains in place.

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.

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 Shire 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.

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 Phoneline 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