

# Community update on response to fish deaths in Menindee and Lower Darling

As air and water temperatures decrease, dissolved oxygen in rivers and streams across the majority of New South Wales are at safe levels for fish health. The only remaining area of concern for fish deaths is the Darling River between the Lake Wetherell Main Weir and the junction of the Darling River at Menindee Creek, downstream of Menindee township.

To maintain an oxygenated flow in the Darling River through Menindee township, the release of water from lakes Pamamaroo and Menindee is continuing, although volumes were reduced at the end of June 2023 to preserve the water resource stored in the upper lakes.

## Are dissolved oxygen levels improving?

Yes. Monitoring is showing improved dissolved oxygen levels in the Darling River at Menindee over the past two weeks. In addition to the release of oxygenated water from lakes Pamamaroo and Menindee, the cooler water temperatures (as air temperatures fall) are providing an opportunity for dissolved oxygen levels to recover.

An additional temporary dissolved oxygen sensor has been installed in the Darling River downstream of Lake Wetherell Main Weir to assess if less-oxygenated water entering Lake Pamamaroo from Lake Wetherell is being drawn through the Lake Pamamaroo outlet and into the Darling River. Monitoring since the initial opening of the Pamamaroo inlet has shown dissolved oxygen levels in the Darling River have not been adversely impacted.

NSW and Commonwealth agencies will continue to work together and monitor dissolved oxygen levels between Lake Pamamaroo and Weir 32 and advise the best operational measures to mitigate risks to aquatic life as much as possible. This can involve adjusting the timing, size and location of releases from the lakes into the lower Darling River to maintain the quality of the water in the river.

For further information, read the latest [water quality update](#).

## Will there be further fish deaths?

There remains a risk of further fish deaths in the Darling River at Menindee as fish in an already stressed condition may succumb to any decrease in dissolved oxygen, increased competition for depleting foodweb resources and cooler temperatures.

This is particularly the case for Bony Herring, which boomed during the recent floods, and many may now be in poor condition and are more susceptible to environmental stresses like colder water temperatures. There are still large numbers of Bony Herring and Carp in the reach of Darling River downstream of Lake Pamamaroo.

In the past week to 3 July, there has been a report of fish deaths in the Darling River near the Lake Pamamaroo outlet, with tens to hundreds of dead Carp observed. These fish likely succumbed as a result of reduced health and condition from a lack of foodweb resources, and additional 'winter stress' from reduced temperatures.

# Fish deaths in Menindee

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Water quality modelling indicates that further reductions in releases may cause hypoxia. We are continuing to monitor and rerun the models with the latest information, so any further reductions will be carefully considered before commencing. As we move into Spring, it is also likely that the biological oxygen demand will increase, and releases may again need to increase. This will be considered and carefully balanced with the need to conserve water as we move into a potentially hot and dry Summer.

To report any further incidents of dead fish, fish struggling or starting to gasp at the water surface, or crayfish exiting the water, please call the NSW Department of Primary Industries Fisheries' Fishers Watch Phonenumber 1800 043 536 or fill in a fish kill protocol and report form at: [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/habitat/threats/fish-kills-2019-2020/info-sheet](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/habitat/threats/fish-kills-2019-2020/info-sheet)

## Where do I find information about the Independent Review of the fish deaths?

In April 2023, the Hon. Rose Jackson MLC, Minister for Water and the Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC, Minister for the Environment requested that the Office of the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer (OCSE) conduct an Independent Review into the February-March 2023 fish deaths in the Darling-Baaka River, Menindee.

To find out more visit the website: [www.chiefscientist.nsw.gov.au/independent-reports/menindee-fish-deaths](http://www.chiefscientist.nsw.gov.au/independent-reports/menindee-fish-deaths)

## Are there currently harmful levels of blue-green algae in the Menindee Lakes and Darling River?

The most recent results indicate a red alert warning for recreational use in Talyawalka Creek at the Menindee-Pooncarie Road, with algal numbers at most sites in the Menindee Lakes area remaining in the amber alert range for recreational use ([Algae Alerts NSW map - WaterNSW](#)).

When a red alert warning is in place, people should avoid recreational activities that brings them into contact with the water and drinking untreated water. At the amber alert warning level, blue-green algae may be multiplying in numbers but remains suitable for recreational use. The water may have a green tinge and musty or organic odour.

The water should be considered unsuitable for potable use and alternative supplies or prior treatment of raw water for domestic purposes should be considered. The water may also be unsuitable for stock watering. Water users should use caution and avoid water where signs of blue-green algae are present.

## Where else can I find information?

Information about the monitoring, management and maintenance of water quality, including detailed community updates from the Department of Planning and Environment, is available online: [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/managing-drought-recovery/blackwater](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/managing-drought-recovery/blackwater)

[water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/menindee/community-updates-and-frequently-asked-questions](http://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/menindee/community-updates-and-frequently-asked-questions)

Observations of changes to water, including struggling fish or deaths can be reported directly to DPI Fisheries on 1800 043 536.

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For more information about fish kills, as well as recent reports of observations and causes, visit:  
[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/habitat/threats/fish-kills](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/habitat/threats/fish-kills)

These types of events can be distressing to members of the community, and anyone who requires health, welfare or other support can contact local community support services.

A comprehensive list of services can be located online:

[www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/customer-support-service-infoxchange-service-seeker](http://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/customer-support-service-infoxchange-service-seeker)