



NSW Police Force

MEDIA RELEASE

Emergency Operations Centre activated in response to Western NSW fish kill

Issued at 6.10pm, Sunday 19 March 2023

An Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) has been activated at Menindee in the state's far west to coordinate multi-agency operations in response to fish kills in the lower Darling-Baaka River.

The deaths are believed to be attributed to hypoxic blackwater, a naturally occurring phenomenon which causes extremely low dissolved oxygen levels. The scale of this event has been exacerbated by recent hot weather and significantly increased numbers of fish in the system as floodwaters recede.

NSW Government agencies are continuing targeted releases of higher quality water where possible to boost dissolved oxygen levels in this area.

State Emergency Operations Controller, Deputy Commissioner Emergency Management Peter Thurtell, requested the establishment of the EOC to ensure fresh and clean water supply is maintained to the Menindee township and properties surrounding the Main Weir pool, as well as to coordinate the removal and disposal of fish in areas that may impact the water supply or other high-impact areas.

"There is no need for community concern as the initial assessment has determined multiple viable solutions to maintain water supply to the Menindee township and surrounds," Deputy Commissioner Thurtell said.

"Importantly, there is ongoing testing of the water quality, which will ensure immediate action if a switchover for supply is required."

Additional supply via water carting is available to residents in the Main Weir pool whose properties ordinarily rely on the river for water supply. Those residents can contact Central Darling Shire Council for advice and/or assistance.

The EOC is a Menindee-based central hub, where the lead agencies monitor the situation in real-time, coordinate operational activities and ensure critical information is disseminated to the public.



The EOC will be overseen by the NSW Police Force Regional Emergency Operations Controller, Assistant Commissioner Brett Greentree, and will support the emergency response by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Department of Primary Industries, WaterNSW and Central Darling Shire Council.

Assistant Commissioner Greentree said numerous agencies are already on the ground in the area with more on the way to conduct and support operational activities.

"The results of water quality testing will also be used by experts to determine further actions to improve dissolved oxygen levels and reduce further environmental impacts," Assistant Commissioner Greentree said.

"In addition, significant planning – including risk assessments – is already underway for clean-up efforts, which will include the removal of as many of the dead fish as possible, prioritising the immediate areas around Menindee, as well as other areas deemed high-risk in terms of water supply.

"While this will require specialised skills and equipment, experts in the EOC have already identified suitable contractors, and it is expected work will commence this week."

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A community town hall is being planned for Tuesday (21 March 2023) to provide Menindee residents with up-to-date information and the opportunity to speak with experts about the current situation.

NSW and Commonwealth agencies will continue to assess the risks to fish health in this area through on-going monitoring. 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.

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


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

For more information about fish kills, as well as recent reports of observations and causes, visit:
<https://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:

<https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/customer-support-service-infoexchange-service-seeker>

Information about suspected criminal activity or concerns in relation to community safety can be provided to Crime Stoppers: 1800 333 000 or <https://nsw.crimestoppers.com.au>. Information is treated in strict confidence. The public is reminded not to report information via NSW Police social media pages.

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