

# Community update on response to fish deaths in Menindee

The Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) will be stood-down from Friday 31 March 2023 as agencies expand their water monitoring to downstream of Menindee following fish kills in the lower Darling-Baaka River.

The EOC was established on Saturday 18 March 2023 at the direction of State Emergency Operations Controller, Deputy Commissioner Emergency Management Peter Thurtell, to ensure fresh and clean water supply was maintained to the Menindee township and properties surrounding the Main Weir pool, as well as to coordinate the removal and disposal of as many of the fish as possible.

NSW Police Force Regional Emergency Operations Controller, Assistant Commissioner Brett Greentree, said the EOC has delivered on its priorities in and around Menindee, but key agencies would remain vigilant with monitoring and actioning where new risks are identified.

Established contacts and processes for clean-up in the event it is required in the future are also in place.

The coordination of operations has now returned to the control of individual agencies. NSW and Commonwealth Government agencies are continuing to monitor conditions, take samples and test water, and take actions to try to improve conditions, including dissolved oxygen (DO) levels, in the Murray Darling Basin.

## Is the drinking water safe?

Yes. Essential Water has increased sampling and testing of drinking water to ensure it continues to meet the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

Essential Water use laboratories certified to Australian standards and NSW Health reviews the results. Results of recent testing confirm the quality had not been impacted by event and therefore safe for customers to drink.

There is no need for community concern as there are multiple viable solutions to maintain water supply to the Menindee township and surrounds, if alternatives are required. The frequency of water quality testing has been increased, which will ensure immediate action if a switchover for supply is required.

## What is the EPA advice on the water quality?

WaterNSW collected water samples for the NSW Environment Protection Authority on March 21 at six locations on the Darling River from downstream of the Pamamaroo outlet to downstream of Weir 32.

The EPA had these samples tested for pesticides, nutrients, metals, algal toxins and algae. The preliminary water results tested negative for pesticides and scanned for approximately 600 pesticides.

All six water samples contained potentially toxic algae and blue green algae. [Algae alerts](#) are published on the [WaterNSW website](#).

The testing is continuing with results of metal and nutrient testing likely to be available in the coming week. The EPA will provide a report to the community about the results of testing once all results are available. The EPA will also undertake another round of water testing this week which will include testing near Pooncarie.

### **How do I manage my livestock if blue-green algae blooms are present?**

We know graziers are well versed in managing water for their stock. Local Land Service provides water testing kits to support them in tracking the quality of the water for their stock. [Water NSW provides up to date information on algae alerts.](#)

Early identification of blue-green algae blooms in livestock water sources is important. Prompt removal of livestock from the water source and access to an alternative safe water supply for stock is important if water if algae levels are too high.

There have been no reports of issues in relation to livestock access to water. However, if livestock owners have concerns, they can request a water sampling kits from Local Land Services.

### **Is water carting continuing?**

Yes. Over 147,000 litres so far. Water carting remains available for eligible residents at this time under the flood recovery grants. Community will be advised as we transition to business as usual.

### **What has happened to clean up the dead fish?**

Over ten tones of dead fish have been removed from the river and buried as landfill. The clean-up operation is now being wound down.

### **Is the water low in oxygen further down the river at Pooncarie?**

The water oxygen levels further down the river have decreased. We have further increased monitoring and assessment of the water and fish deaths. Flows of oxygenated water from Lake Pamamaroo were increased this week and we are monitoring and managing the flows daily.

### **Will an EOC be established for Wentworth?**

Yes. The Wentworth Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) has stood up an EOC to assist the NSW and Commonwealth Government agencies who are continuing to monitor conditions, take samples and test water, and take actions to try to improve conditions, including dissolved oxygen (DO) levels, in the Murray Darling Basin.

The monitoring of the Wentworth EOC will enable swift coordinated action in the event fish kills rise rapidly.

At this time, while low DO water has moved down the river, the fish kills are in the 10s-100s. Flows of oxygenated water from Lake Pamamaroo were increased this week and we are monitoring and managing the flows daily to support fish health.

### **What water quality monitoring is being undertaken?**

Various agencies are monitoring dissolved oxygen and water temperature, with both remote monitors and field samples, with occasional field data on pH and electrical conductivity levels. Water quality monitoring is undertaken year round.

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## Will there be further fish deaths?

We anticipate this is possible should current water and weather conditions persist. To support native fish outcomes, targeted releases are being made to enhance downstream water quality. As the weather cools we would anticipate the risk of hypoxic blackwater events to decrease.

## 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)

Observations of changes to water, including 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: [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-infoexchange-service-seeker](http://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 [nsw.crimestoppers.com.au](http://nsw.crimestoppers.com.au). Information is treated in strict confidence. The public is reminded not to report information via NSW Police social media pages.