

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 the Lake Pamamaroo outlet is continuing, although volumes have been reduced to preserve the water resource in the upper lakes. Releases from Lake Menindee have also been reduced to assist in the flow of water from Lake Pamamaroo past Menindee town.

Are dissolved oxygen levels improving?

Yes. Monitoring is showing that the adjusted releases are still maintaining DO above critical levels in the Darling River at Menindee.

Monitoring undertaken in Menindee Lakes on 22 and 23 May highlights that the water being released from lakes Pamamaroo and Menindee is oxygenated and above the safe threshold for fish health. Releases from both Lake Pamamaroo and Lake Menindee continue to be managed to minimise the risk of further hypoxia-related fish deaths, while balancing the need to conserve water.

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 increased competition for depleting food 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 cold water temperatures. There are still large numbers of Bony Herring in the reach of Darling River downstream of Lake Pamamaroo.

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

Is the EPA testing water samples?

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) has undertaken testing on a number of water samples from the Darling-Barka River in response to the major fish deaths at Menindee in mid-

March 2023. Further details on the test result are available on the EPA's website:

www.epa.nsw.gov.au/working-together/community-engagement/updates-on-issues/menindee-fish-kill

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:

<https://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 red alert warnings for recreational use in Talyawalka Creek at the Menindee-Pooncarie Road and Darling River at Tolarno, 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
- 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.

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

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