

## Lower Darling meeting No. 3 - 27 March 2020

*A subset of the Barwon Darling/Lower Darling CWAP convened on 27 March 2020 to discuss the recommencement of flows to the Lower Darling.*

A summary of the meeting outcomes is provided below.

Further information on the function and membership of critical water advisory panels can be found in this [fact sheet](#).

The Lower Darling is currently in drought Stage 3 – Severe Drought according to the NSW Extreme Events Policy. This valley has recently been de-escalated from Stage 4 – Critical Drought because of the inflows into Menindee Lakes which has enabled flows to be re-commenced in the Lower Darling.

**Please note:** All reasonable efforts have been made to provide accurate and current information in this communique. This information is accurate as at 27 March 2020. However, changes in circumstances such as weather variability, water management decisions or any other events after the time of publication may impact on the accuracy of the material. Water Allocation Statements published by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment - Water (DPIE-Water) provide the most accurate information on available water and allocations and are available at - [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements).

## Forecast flows to Menindee Lakes and block bank removal

Regular flow forecast updates are being published by WaterNSW on their operations updates webpage - [www.waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates](http://www.waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates)

Total flows into Menindee Lakes have reached 190 gigalitres (GL).

It is estimated (as at 25 March 2020) that 290-360GL will reach Menindee Lakes as a result of the current flow event. With further rainfall in the upstream northern tributaries, this forecast will increase.

Court Nareen block bank removal was completed on 25 March. Works have commenced at the Jamesville block bank, ahead of schedule. Contractors will move to the Ashvale block bank once work at Jamesville is completed.

Further rainfall is expected in the upper northern Basin valleys for the next few weeks.

## Managing releases to the Lower Darling

WaterNSW has been transferring the poorer quality water into Lake Pamamaroo to improve water quality in Lake Wetherell in preparation for releases to the Lower Darling. 10,000-12,000ML has been transferred to Lake Pamamaroo to date.

First flush releases commenced from the Lake Wetherell outlet on 26 March following confirmation that the Court Nareen block bank had been removed.

Target flow rates are as follows:

- 500ML/day on 26 March
- 1000ML/day on 27 March

- 2000ML/day on 28 March
- 3000ML/day on 29 March

Once flows reach 3000ML/day, they will be held at this level for seven days and then ramped down over 10-12 days to 300ML/day. The first flush volume will total approximately 30GL.

The quality of the flows leaving the lakes is good. The flexibility available in moving water between storages in the Menindee Lakes system has helped to minimise water quality risks. However, the subsequent quality of the released water depends on the quality of the water that is picked up as the flow moves down the system and dilution by the water moving behind it.

Potential measures to minimise water quality impacts in the Wentworth Weir Pool, when flows arrive, are being considered in consultation with the Murray Darling Basin Authority.

It is estimated that the first flush will take between 16 and 20 days to reach Wentworth.

Temporary water restrictions on account water will be lifted on 30 March, freeing up general security and high security water already in accounts. It is expected that DPIE-Water will also announce on 1 April 2020 full allocations for high priority (town, domestic and stock) and high security users for the remainder of this water year.

DPIE-Water is working to ensure longevity of flows in the Lower Darling and the security of water in storage. Current volumes are not sufficient for a new general security allocation. DPIE-Water will continue to monitor inflows and reassess the situation if conditions improve.

## Update on response to fish kills

No fish kills have occurred since the first flows entered Lake Wetherell. The volume and depth of the first flush should assist in minimising impacts on fish.

There is still a risk of fish kills in the first few hours when the flows enter previously isolated pools and turn over the water column. This risk lessens as more flows arrive.

Water quality will be monitored as the first flush makes its way down the Lower Darling. DPI-Fisheries/MDBA will keep the remaining aerators in place until flows arrive to minimise any impacts on fish populations. Wentworth Council offered to assist with water quality monitoring around Pooncarie.

## Communications

Updates on the progress of flows and water quality monitoring will be published by DPIE-Water each week. These can be found at - [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/drought-recovery/menindee-lakes-lower-darling-river](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/drought-recovery/menindee-lakes-lower-darling-river)

DPIE-Water's water allocation statements provide information on current allocations and resource outlooks and for the Murray/Lower Darling Valley are published fortnightly. These can be found at - [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/statements)

WaterNSW is also publishing flow forecasts and operational updates at - [www.watnsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates](http://www.watnsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/operations-updates)

## Agencies present

- NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
  - Water Division (DPIE-Water)

- Environment, Energy and Science Division (DPIE-EES)
- Communications and Engagement
- Office of Drought Response
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
  - DPI Agriculture
  - DPI Fisheries
- WaterNSW
- NSW Environment Protection Authority
- NSW Health
- Wentworth Shire Council

## Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 3 April.