

Community update on response to fish deaths in Menindee

NSW and Commonwealth Government agencies are continuing to monitor conditions, collect samples, test water and take actions to try to improve conditions, including dissolved oxygen (DO) levels, in the Murray-Darling Basin. Established contacts and processes for clean-up in the event it is required in the future are also in place.

Are dissolved oxygen levels improving?

Yes, but it varies between different parts of the Darling-Baaka River. Water quality monitoring over the past week continues to show good levels of dissolved oxygen during the day in most parts of the Menindee reach. [Read the latest water quality update.](#)

It is estimated that there is still a significant number of Bony Herring which is causing a drop in dissolved oxygen downstream of Lake Pamamaroo due to the fish using the oxygen and also the decomposition of fish which also uses up oxygen. However, there are enough strong areas of dissolved oxygen in the river to provide refuges for fish.

To maintain an oxygenated flow in the Darling River through Menindee township, releases of water from the Lake Pamamaroo outlet are continuing, although volumes are being reduced. Releases from Lake Menindee are also being reduced to assist in the flow of good quality water from Lake Pamamaroo past Menindee town. With our responsibility to balance these water releases against the need to maximise water in the Lakes for ongoing storage, flows are being gradually reduced and adjusted, whilst keeping a close eye on dissolved Oxygen levels.

Where is the carp removal effort up to?

The carp removal program undertaken by DPI Fisheries from 24-28 April is now complete.

The priority area of the river that was targeted was from Lake Pamamaroo Outlet downstream to Weir 32, with key areas identified along the river to focus including Lake Pamamaroo outlet, Little Menindee Creek, and Old Town Weir/Railway Bridge.

11.4 tonnes of carp were removed from the area, equating to about 125,000 individual fish. These have mostly been juveniles. Most of the harvesting occurred within 600m of Lake Pamamaroo.

This will help improve conditions for native fish in the Lower Darling-Barka, by reducing competition for food, space and available oxygen for our native fish.

Is the drinking water safe?

Yes. Results of recent testing confirm the quality of the water treated and supplied by Essential Water is safe to drink.

Essential Water has increased sampling and testing of drinking water to ensure it continues to meet the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and to ensure immediate action if a switchover for supply is required. Essential Water use laboratories certified to Australian standards and NSW Health reviews the results.

Can I drink and bathe using water from rivers?

NSW Health advises that surface water from farm dams, rivers and creeks should not be used for drinking or cooking without appropriate treatment. This applies to any location in NSW.

Surface water may be acceptable for non-potable uses such as washing clothes, irrigation, gardening and toilet-flushing, but NSW Health recommends that water used for bathing is at least disinfected before use.

NSW Health warns that heavy rainfall and flooding increases the risk of contaminated water, which could contain disease-causing micro-organisms, chemicals or algal blooms, entering surface waters such as rivers and creeks. Blue-green algae may cause skin irritation.

Further information can be found on the NSW Health [website](#).

How do I avoid water quality problems if I am using a rainwater tank or surface water from farm dams, rivers and creeks?

NSW Health advises that surface water from farm dams, rivers and creeks should not be used for drinking or cooking without appropriate treatment. To avoid water quality problems, you should treat your water by:

- Disinfecting your water to kill disease-causing microorganisms and to protect the water should recontamination occur. Chlorine is the most common and cost-effective disinfectant used for drinking water. Drinking water can also be disinfected by bringing it to a rolling boil and then allowing it to cool. An electric kettle with an automatic shut off is sufficient for this purpose.
- Filtering your water. There are a number of different filtration methods available and the choice of filter depends on the contaminants that need to be removed. Special filters may be necessary to deal with blue-green algae and specific chemicals. [Information on filtration can be found on the NSW Health website](#).
- Make sure that surface water sources are fenced against livestock and protected from septic tank overflows and spills of domestic, agricultural or industrial chemicals.
- Check up-stream for contamination sources. Your local Council, Local Land Services or Catchment Management Authority may be able to provide information about nearby activities which may affect your local water quality.

If information on water quality is not readily available, households may wish to have the water tested for key health characteristics. Regular testing would be necessary to identify all contaminants, especially due to varying weather conditions.

Further information on water quality and treatment is available on the [NSW Health website](#), in NSW Health's Private Water Supply Guidelines, the Rainwater Tanks brochures and in the [NSW Health surface water treatment fact sheet](#).

Will there be further fish deaths?

Another significant fish death event remains possible, but most likely due to stress. This occurs when fish that are already in a stressed condition succumb to increased competition for depleting food resources and cooler temperatures.

This is particularly common at this time of year for Bony Herring, which boomed during the recent floods and are now in poor condition being more susceptible to environmental stresses like low oxygen levels and abrupt decreases in temperature.

There have been reports of small numbers of Bony Herring dying in the reach below Lake Wetherell toward the town of Menindee.

Our operational measures outlined above are assisting with dissolved oxygen levels downstream of Menindee Main Weir and Lake Pamamaroo outlet. With our responsibility to balance these releases against the need to maximise water in the Lakes for storage, flows are being gradually reduced and adjusted.

More information on water releases can be found on the [WaterNSW website](#).

Regular monitoring is ongoing to minimise the risk of water quality deteriorating in different parts of the river.

Is water carting continuing?

Yes. Water carting remains available for eligible residents at this time. Community will be advised as we transition to business as usual.

What if I need an alternative raw water supply?

For Menindee residents, not on the Main Weir Pool who require raw water, there is a standpipe available for access to raw water drawn from Stephens Creek. This raw water is as good or better quality than water from the Menindee weir pool prior to the fish kill.

This water is **NOT** for drinking.

The standpipe is located between Wilcannia west road and the railway crossing on the Broken Hill side of the turn-off. There is a circular drive through at the location with easy access. There is currently no lock on the standpipe and is available for use by the community to fill IBC's or other tanks.

Where else can I find information?



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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

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Community update 8 May 2023



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