

Community update on response to fish deaths in the Lower Darling

As residents of the Wentworth Shire Council, you may be aware of the mass fish death event that has been occurring further up-river around Menindee. As the river travels south, it brings some of the low-quality water with it and you may have observed some fish deaths.

Why did a mass fish death happen?

The fish deaths are caused by 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, having had two years of ideal breeding conditions, in the system as floodwaters recede.

Is the drinking water safe?

Yes. Wentworth Shire Council ensures it continues to meet the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines through effective management of the water treatment plant. The water quality has not been impacted by this event and is therefore safe for customers to drink.

Some of the community use treated bore water for drinking. This is also not impacted by this event.

Are there health guidelines to provide advice for people using water from rivers?

Yes. NSW Health advise 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, toilet-flushing, but we recommend 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. Water quality may be affected during drought as flow and the amount of water is reduced.

Further information can be found on the NSW Health website.

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.

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.

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 flows from Lake Menindee will also continue. We are monitoring water quality and managing the flows daily to support fish health. The monitoring of the Wentworth EOC will enable swift coordinated action in the event fish kills rise rapidly.

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.

Will there be further fish deaths?

We anticipate this is possible should current water quality 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.

Are fish dying in the Wentworth weir pool or floating down from upstream?

Some dead fish may appear in the upper reaches of the Wentworth weir pool over the coming days as some mortalities, involving smaller numbers of fish, have been recorded downstream of Pooncarie.

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

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-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. Information is treated in strict confidence. The public is reminded not to report information via NSW Police social media pages.