



GWYDIR REFUGE POOL FLOW - Update #1 12 November 2019

Water for the environment is flowing through parts of the Gwydir valley to maintain critical river pool habitat for native fish. Very hot and dry conditions and limited water holdings will see water for the environment prioritised to keep large refuge pools in good condition. These low flows will target parts of the Gwydir and Mehi Rivers and the upper Carole Creek.

Gwydir system water for the environment – Key Refuge Pool Maintenance Flow



Maintain and provide access to refuge habitat, increase connectivity, and improve water quality in pools.



Increase the chance of native fish survival.

Extremely dry and warm conditions in the Gwydir valley combined with a lack of inflows, has meant river pools across the system are drying out. Prior to the flow, the Mehi River at Moree had not flowed for more than 100 days.



Gwydir River between Boolooroo and Yarraman – left 27 October and right 2 November 2019 (Photo: CEWO)

Helping native fish survive during the dry is the key purpose for this watering action. Water has started to top up and maintain good water quality in the deeper refuge pools in the Mehi, Gwydir and Carole systems around Moree. Up to 5,000 ML of water for the environment will be released from Copeton Dam from NSW and Commonwealth accounts.

Unfortunately a fish death event has occurred in the Mehi River system which is currently being investigated by NSW DPIE Fisheries. Approximately 200-300 dead fish were observed in the Mehi River downstream of Moree on 5 November, with a number of species and size ranges affected. These fish were mostly Bony Herring which is a particularly fragile species. There has also been deaths of a small number of Murray Cod, Golden Perch and Carp. Further fish deaths are possible if conditions stay hot and dry, but we expect that many more fish will have improved survival chances across summer as a result of this flow.

Local communities working together with government

Planning for the water delivery involved local stakeholders, including landholder, irrigation and Aboriginal community representatives, through the NSW Gwydir Environmental Water Advisory Group. Deliveries have been informed by past experiences in maintaining our local fish communities during long dry times.



The recent Northern Fish Flow along the Mehi and into the Barwon-Darling undertaken jointly by NSW and Commonwealth agencies is a good example of what can be achieved with water for the environment.

Water flows

Releases from Copeton Dam for the current event started in early October and will continue from Tareelaro Weir until mid to late November. Water for the environment started flowing into Carole Creek and the Gwydir River downstream of Boolooroo on the 30th October. In the Mehi River flows reached Moree on 31 October and arrived at Combadello Weir on 3rd November. As we progress through November, flows will continue to reach refuge pools downstream of Moree. In the Gwydir River, flows commenced filling the Tyreel weir pool on 2 November.

The flow release is being managed by WaterNSW to ensure efficient management of the resource under drought contingency measures. Water for the environment is part of this flow, which also includes water for operations and water orders for permanent plantings.



Before and after images of river refuge pools along the Gwydir River up and downstream of Newell Highway at Boolooroo Crossing. Dark lines represent water. Top image – 17 October, bottom image – 1 November 2019. Images supplied by Sentinel.

It is anticipated that a mix of water for the environment and flows for stock and domestic supplies will continue downstream in the Mehi River from Combadello down to the Gundare Weir. In the lower Gwydir River and Carole Creek, stock and domestic flows will also follow water for the environment enabling flows to travel further downstream.

Monitoring refuge pools

Regular monitoring of refuge pools is being undertaken and will continue over the coming months. This work is being done together by WaterNSW, the NSW Department of Planning, Industries and Environment and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office. Results of water quality monitoring will be provided



in the next update. Many thanks to landholders who have allowed access across their properties for monitoring and flow checking.

Community input and flow updates

Feedback and information from our local community, including landholders and managers is always appreciated and welcomed.

If you would like to receive email updates on this and any other flow of water for the environment, please email Jane.Humphries@environment.gov.au.



Gwydir River - Boolooroo pool on 22 October 2019, looking upstream (Photo: University of New England)

More information:

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