



Objectives:



Help maintain waterbird breeding conditions at Narran Lakes (Dharriwaa)



Reconnect rivers in the Lower Balonne



Help native fish to move and thrive

Flows are now arriving at Narran Lakes

From 8 to 26 February, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) facilitated the released of over 6 gigalitres of water from the on-farm storages of Eastern Australia Agriculture into the Narran River.

This water has been making its way to Narran Lakes with 350 megalitres per day passing the Dirranbandi-Hebel Road gauge since 10 February, and 300 megalitres a day past Angledool since 15 February. Some local rainfall upstream of Angledool on Saturday also provided flows with a quick boost.



Water released from the on-farm storages flowing over Angledool Weir on 15 February. Photo: Rory Treweeke.



Flows at Muttaban/Bangate Weir on 18 February downstream of Angledool. Photo: Brian Marshall.



Flows over the Narran Park Weir into the Narran Lake Nature Reserve on 2 March. Photo: Ian Bates NSW NPWS.

This water is now flowing into Narran Lakes at 200 megalitres a day. This water will help to ensure waterbird habitat stays in good condition and food remains plentiful so the birds can finish breeding and young chicks can fly. The flow is expected to continue into Narran Lakes until mid-March.



Ibis at Narran, January 2023. Photo: Dr Kate Brandis UNSW. Photo taken as part of surveys approved under scientific licence.

Replenishing waterhole habitat

On its 250km journey along the river to reach Narran Lakes, this water has reconnected and replenished 15 significant waterholes improving habitat and food sources for fish and birds.

The river is part of an important Aboriginal Dreaming Path extending from Dirranbandi in Queensland south to Narran Lake, a site of major mythological significance. The sequence of springs, waterholes and bends in the Narran River and the lake are part of the dreaming path of Baieme, the sky hero who was central to Aboriginal beliefs and laws in the area. The dreaming path still has considerable significance to local Aboriginal people, both in its traditional sense, and also as a reminder of traditional lifestyle and laws.



'SQ Landscapes NAIDOC Art Competition – 2022' – Lane Brookes.

Native fish populations that were severely impacted by the drought are continuing to recover after three wet years. Many native species, especially the iconic Golden perch (Yellowbelly or *dhagaay* to the Yuwaalaraay people), rely on long flowing rivers to thrive and breed. Recent monitoring shows the Lower Balonne can provide favourable conditions for Yellowbelly to thrive.



A healthy Yellowbelly population from the Condamine-Balonne. Photo: Dr. Peter Negus, Qld DES. Photo taken as part of surveys approved under scientific licence.

Above the water, birds are making the most of the flows along the Narran River. As local resident and former Basin Community Committee Chair, Rory Treweeke observed at Angledool Weir, "everyone on the Narran will enjoy a few extra weeks of flow. Likewise the birds, as I disturbed quite a few white and blue herons and shags fishing on the weir when I arrived. It's good to see the wide variety of bird species taking advantage of the opportunity to breed in the Narran Lakes following many, many dry years".

Upcoming monitoring

The CEWH will continue working with our partner agencies, monitoring providers and other local stakeholders to track the progress of these flows and their outcomes.

This week, our monitoring partners at the University of NSW undertook drone and on-ground surveys of the waterbird colonies at Narran Lakes. Information collected during these surveys will be critical for understanding how waterbirds are responding to the flows. Early survey results and a further update on the flows will be shared in our next update in late March.



Checking the Back Lake water level near the shoreline. Photo: Kate Brandis, UNSW. Photo taken as part of surveys approved under scientific licence.

Wetland plant monitoring at the Narran Lakes Nature Reserve is also planned for April, which will help to assess long-term plant response to flows.



Narran Lakes, January 2023. Photo: Harro on behalf of UNSW.

Contact the CEWO Local Engagement Officer if you would like to know more:

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The Commonwealth Environmental Water Office pays respect to the Traditional Owners of the Murray-Darling Basin. We acknowledge their enduring cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to the rivers, wetlands and floodplains of the Basin.