



## A helping hand for fish in the lower Darling/Baaka

<b>Objective</b>	To support the growth of young Murray cod and golden perch with increased food and habitat
<b>Timing</b>	1 May to 30 June 2021
<b>Target area</b>	Lower Darling/Baaka, from Menindee Lakes to Wentworth

### A release of water for the environment

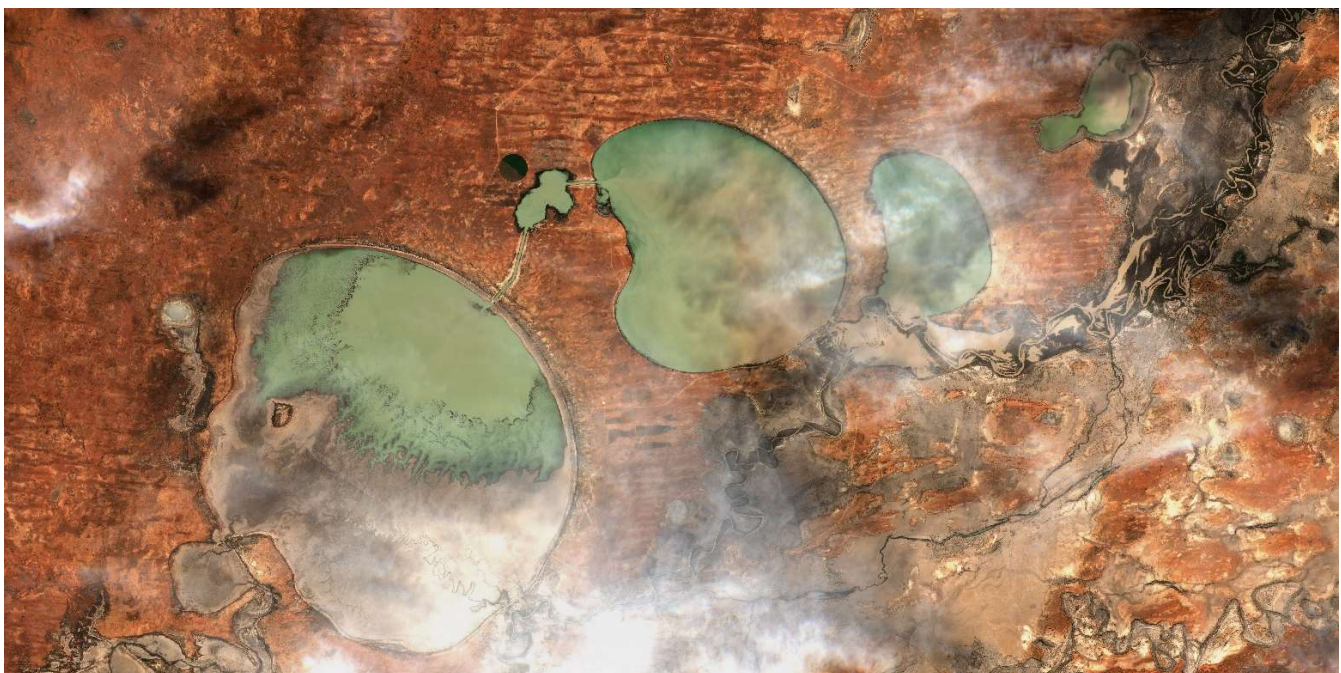
Water for the environment will be used to bring flows in the lower Darling/Baaka up to 500 megalitres a day during May and June.

The increased flow is expected to:

- inundate more of the river channel, providing increased food and habitat for growing young fish; and
- support the connection between the north and south of the Basin by ensuring some of the increased flows coming down the Barwon-Darling River make it all the way to the Murray River. This connectivity will contribute to system-scale outcomes described in the Basin-wide watering strategy.

### Water is flowing from the north

Water from recent rainfall in the northern basin is flowing down the Barwon-Darling system and into Menindee Lakes. Some of these flows will be released, either as operational or environmental flows, into the lower Darling/Baaka over the coming months. Flows will give a boost to the native fish population which is recovering after years of very dry conditions.



Water flowing into Menindee Lake (left) – 28 April 2021, Image source: © Sentinel Hub



*Baby Murray cod in the lower Darling/Baaka during the March 2021 fish survey. Image courtesy DPI Fisheries.*

## Building on spring/summer flows

This small release will build on the success of the recent environmental flow over spring and summer 2020–21. Approximately 25 gigalitres of water for the environment was released into the lower Darling/Baaka from September 2020 through to January 2021 which supported the breeding of Murray cod, golden perch and other native fish species.

Scientists monitored the river before, during and after the spring flow and found:

- a spawning response from Murray cod with strong numbers of larvae and juvenile fish recorded despite low numbers of adults in the river prior to the environmental flow; and
- dispersal of juvenile golden perch from the Menindee Lakes into the lower Darling/Baaka.

Scientists are analysing the survey data and results will be published on the CEWO website when available (after July 2021).

## Benefits for the Lake environment

Environmental water holders are mindful of balancing use of environmental water in the lower Darling/Baaka and keeping water in the lakes, including lakes Menindee and Cawndilla, over coming months to support ecological outcomes there as well. Waterbirds are

expected to benefit from lakebed inundation and resulting productivity ‘booms’. Inundated lakes also create abundant food and nursery habitat for many native fish like Golden perch juveniles currently in the lakes, larvae that may drift down from the north and other aquatic organisms.

## Improving fish passage

Modifications to the Pooncarie Weir during the last drought were impacting on the ability of fish to move up and down the lower Darling/Baaka.

These modifications were removed in February 2021, which has improved the ability of fish to pass through the weir. Planning is currently underway to further improve fish passage infrastructure in the lower Darling/Baaka, including at Pooncarie.

## Looking ahead

Environmental water holders are currently undertaking planning for 2021–22. This could include providing a spring environmental flow into the lower Darling/Baaka as well as a flow to the Great Darling Anabranch.

## Working together

This flow would not be possible without the support of our water delivery partners: NSW DPIE, NSW DPI Fisheries, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Arthur Rylah Institute, WaterNSW and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

Environmental water managers and fish scientists will continue to work with river operators, the local community and Traditional Owners to make sure flows are delivered in a way that supports native fish outcomes in the lower Darling/Baaka.

## Local Engagement Officer

For more information visit:

<https://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/baaka-spring-flow-2020>

Or contact our Local Engagement Officer:

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