



Highlights from CEWO's 2019-20 engagement with communities in the Northern Basin

- The Gwydir case study: planning with and learning from Aboriginal communities about how to work more effectively on Country.
- Presentations on rivers and wetlands to Collarenebri Central School and Moree Secondary College.
- Sharing information at Agquip.
- Visiting wetlands with various bird groups.
- Providing information and activities at fishing competitions at Collarenebri and Mungindi.
- Providing radio interviews on 2WEB Outback Radio.
- Presenting at the NSW Mayors conference in Sydney, the Murray-Darling Association conference in Toowoomba and to the Goondiwindi Regional Council.
- Assisting the Toomelah-Boggabilla community with Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations Aboriginal Waterways Assessment.
- Meeting with community members and visiting catchments.
- Sharing information through email, including flow updates and the latest monitoring stories.

Useful links

Current water availability: <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/about/water-holdings>

Water Management Plan 2020-21: <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/publications/water-management-plan-2020-21>

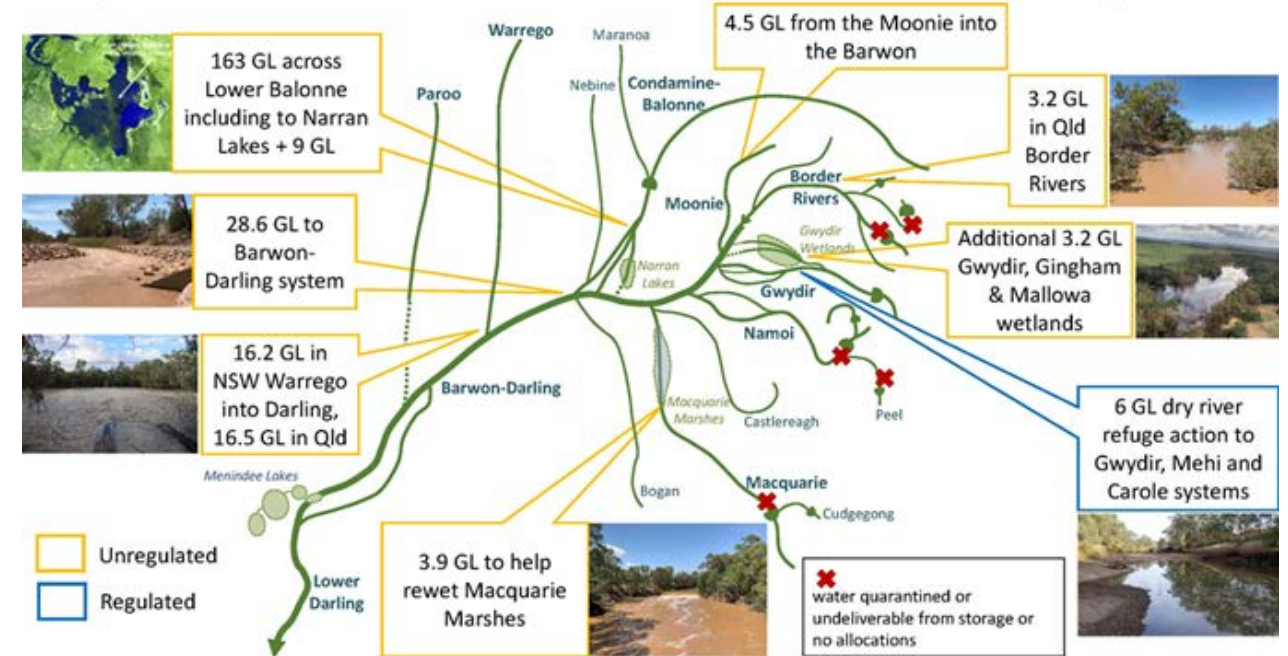
Catchment summaries for 2020-21: <https://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/publications/overview-water-mgt-planning-2020-21>

Lower Balonne flow 2020: <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/lower-balonne-updates>

Gwydir valley river refuge pool flow: <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/gwydir-valley-river-refuge-pool-flow>

Gwydir recovery flows: <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/gwydir-recovery-flows>

A snapshot of Commonwealth water for the environment in the Northern Basin during 2019-20



On the back of three record-breaking drought years, where water for the environment (both Commonwealth and NSW) was used in 2018 and 2019 to reconnect major northern basin rivers, water availability in 2019-20 began extremely low.

Thankfully, widespread rain in early 2020 resulted in some long-awaited unregulated flows and along with it, the opportunity for CEWO to maximise environmental and community benefits of rivers reconnecting. The portion of inflows from the Moonie River, Border Rivers, Warrego River, and the Culgoa River accounted against Commonwealth licences made up around 5-10% of the flow into the Menindee Lakes during Summer and Autumn 2020. While the drought had not fully broken by the end of June 2020, the early signs of recovery looked promising.

Local Engagement Officers

The CEWO has two Local Engagement Officers based regionally in the northern Murray-Darling Basin, who can be contacted for further information:

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Environment Minister Sussan Ley and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder Jody Swirepik with the Mayor of Moree Katrina Humphries at her fish and chip shop in 2019

The CEWO acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Murray-Darling Basin and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them, to their cultures and to their elders both past and present.

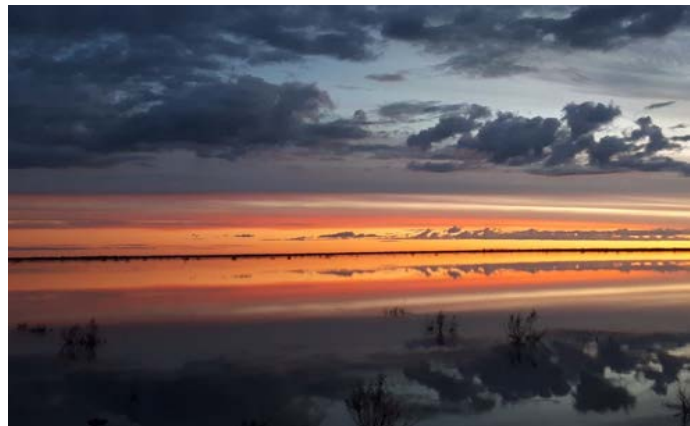


Left: Downstream of Bora Well, Macquarie Marshes in March 2020. Photo: Paul Keyte, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Right: Back Lake (within the Narran Lakes System) in April 2020. Photo: Joanne Ocock, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Condamine-Balonne

The Lower Balonne recorded the Commonwealth's largest single watering event in the northern basin, when 163 gigalitres (GL) of Commonwealth water for the environment was used in early 2020. This water helped reconnect rivers and floodplains along the Culgoa and Bokhara systems and to reconnect important waterholes that provided refuges for native fish. After seven years of dry, around 90 GL of water flowed into the internationally significant Narran Lakes (Dharriwaa). Up to half of this water was either our licenced water, or water made available through a Commonwealth grant (9 GL).



Sunset over Clear Lake (within the Narran Lakes System) in April 2020. Photo: Joanne Ocock, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service



Narran pelicans. Photo: Neal Foster, CEWO

Barwon-Darling

CEW licences in the Barwon-Darling river left 28.6 GL instream, which provided greater connectivity, improved food sources and movement opportunities for fish, and improved water quality.

Gwydir

In the Summer of 2019-20 the CEWO and NSW each provided 6 GL of replenishment flows to key refuges in the Gwydir system. The Gwydir Recovery Flow also provided 3.1 GL of Commonwealth environmental water to rivers and wetlands across the Lower Gwydir, Gingham and Mallowa systems. Later, unregulated flows helped further in greening up the riverine landscape.



Juvenile Murray cod (an endangered species) in the Gwydir. Photo: NSW DPI Fisheries

Macquarie

Several unregulated flow events below Burrendong Dam helped restore the condition of some wetland areas within the internationally significant Macquarie Marshes. The CEWO worked with NSW delivery partners to deliver 3.9 GL of Commonwealth and 0.7 GL of NSW supplementary water to the Marshes. Flows provided under water sharing plan rules also contributed additional volumes.



The Macquarie downstream of Warren, February 2020. Photo: Jason Wilson, CEWO

Border Rivers

Unregulated entitlements contributed 3.2 GL of CEW to help replenish permanent waterholes with high value refuge and fish habitat to support local movement and habitat access for native fish.



The Dumaresq River. Photo: Neal Foster, CEWO

Other northern rivers

CEW was triggered in the Warrego River in both Queensland and NSW in 2019-20. The CEW in Queensland flowed down the Warrego, and much headed west into the Paroo River and topped up important wetlands there. The 16.2 GL of CEW in the NSW Warrego added important flows to the Darling. CEW in the Moonie River contributed 4.5 GL to the Barwon. There was also 1.9 GL of CEW accounted in Nebine Creek. There was no CEW available for delivery in the Namoi or Peel catchments in 2019-20.



Black swan taking off on the Warrego. Photo: 2rog

Highlights from monitoring in the Northern Basin during 2019-20

- Native fish larvae were observed in the Warrego and Darling rivers.
- Drought refuge waterholes were replenished, including in the Gwydir system.
- Juvenile eel-tailed catfish detected in the Gwydir.
- Lignum, a shrub that many waterbirds nest on, flowered and improved in health at Narran Lakes and on the western floodplain at Toorale.
- A radio-tagged straw-necked ibis (Laurie) flew from Victoria to Narran Lakes and across to the Yantabulla Swamp in the Paroo system.
- Over 30 waterbird species were observed at Narran Lakes and over 35 were observed in the Gwydir wetlands.
- Nankeen night heron, pelicans, grey teal, black-fronted dotterel, yellow-billed spoonbills, royal spoonbills and brolgas were all seen in the Warrego during 2019-20.
- Fish larvae (including yellowbelly) were detected in monitoring in the Warrego River.



Flowering lignum plant on the Narran River in early 2020. Photo: University of New England

Further detail on current activities can be found in the Water Management Plan and flow updates (links provided on the back page of this fact sheet).