

# Community Information Communiqué

## Management of Menindee Lakes 2011-2012 Issue 4 – 24 February 2012

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### Introduction

Major flood flows were generated from northern NSW and southern Queensland catchments during January and are making their way into the Darling River. The NSW Office of Water and State Water Corporation are continuing to manage flood operations at Menindee Lakes in anticipation of the impending substantial inflows.

Two significant flood peaks are approaching Bourke; from the east (Barwon River) and from the north (Culgoa/Bokhara River systems). They are forecast to merge during the first week of March, with the Barwon River flows expected to arrive slightly earlier than those from the Queensland Rivers.

The scale of this event at Bourke and downstream is expected to be at least the peak level of 13.8 meters experienced in 1998. However, with the Menindee Lakes near-full due to high inflows earlier this summer, total releases from the lakes could be the largest volume since the record Barwon-Darling floods of 1976.

Subsequent updates of this communiqué will provide more detail on the inflows, storage levels, operations and management of the Menindee Lakes, particularly as the scale of the flood becomes clearer.

Residents along the Darling River, from Bourke to Burtundy, are advised to make preparations for an extended period of flooding, similar to events of 1971, 1990 and 1998, and to check with the NSW Office of Water as to what approvals might be necessary before undertaking any earthworks to protect infrastructure or crops.

### Current flows

#### Current water levels and flows as at 24 February 2012

Location	Height (m)	Flow (ML/d)	Comment
Collarenebri (total)	4.89	24,987	Falling (Peak 226,000 on 11/02/2012)
Walgett	12.11	83,066	Falling (Peak 284,000 on 13/02/2012)
Brewarrina (total)	9.94	198,620	Peaking
Bourke	11.84	62,799	Rising
Louth	9.38	33,363	Rising
Tilpa	9.77	31,554	Rising
Wilcannia	9.64	29,578	Falling slowly (Peak 31,200 on 16/02/2012)
Menindee Town	9.49	-	Steady
Weir 32	7.00	34,500	Steady
Pooncarie	6.67	13,394	Rising
Burtundy	6.34	14,696	Rising (Potential max height from 7.7m to 8.5m)



**Flooding in the Gwydir Valley**



**NSW Office of Water staff monitoring flood flows in the Mehi River near Moree**

## **River operations**

### **Darling River Flows and Menindee Storage Volume**

Inflows to Menindee Lakes are now approximately 31,000 megalitres per day (ML/d) generated by floods in the Gwydir and Border Rivers valleys in November 2011.

The second flood peak, currently approaching Bourke, will cause significant flows along the Darling River and through the Talyawalka Creek system, replenishing the many floodplains and lakes, particularly in the Teryawynia area. They were last inundated just 12 months ago.

High flows were observed in the Warrego catchment in Queensland where flooding was experienced at Charleville and Cunnamulla. Most of this water has been flowing along the Cuttaburra Channels into the upper Paroo catchment where it soaks into the flat, permeable, outback terrain. This water is not expected to influence flood flows in the Darling River.

Pre-releases for the larger event now approaching Bourke began in early February. By Friday 17 February they had reached the target rate of 35,000 ML/d. About 5 per cent of these high releases are leaving the main channel and entering Three Mile Creek, by-passing the gauge at Weir 32.

These high release flows are now inundating low-lying dwellings and access roads downstream of the Lakes, including restricting access to the Pooncarie East Road. It is important, however, to create airspace in the system to manage the flood peak. So far, with the level in Menindee Lakes storage falling from 95 per cent to 87 per cent of capacity, about 500 gigalitres (GL) of airspace has been created.

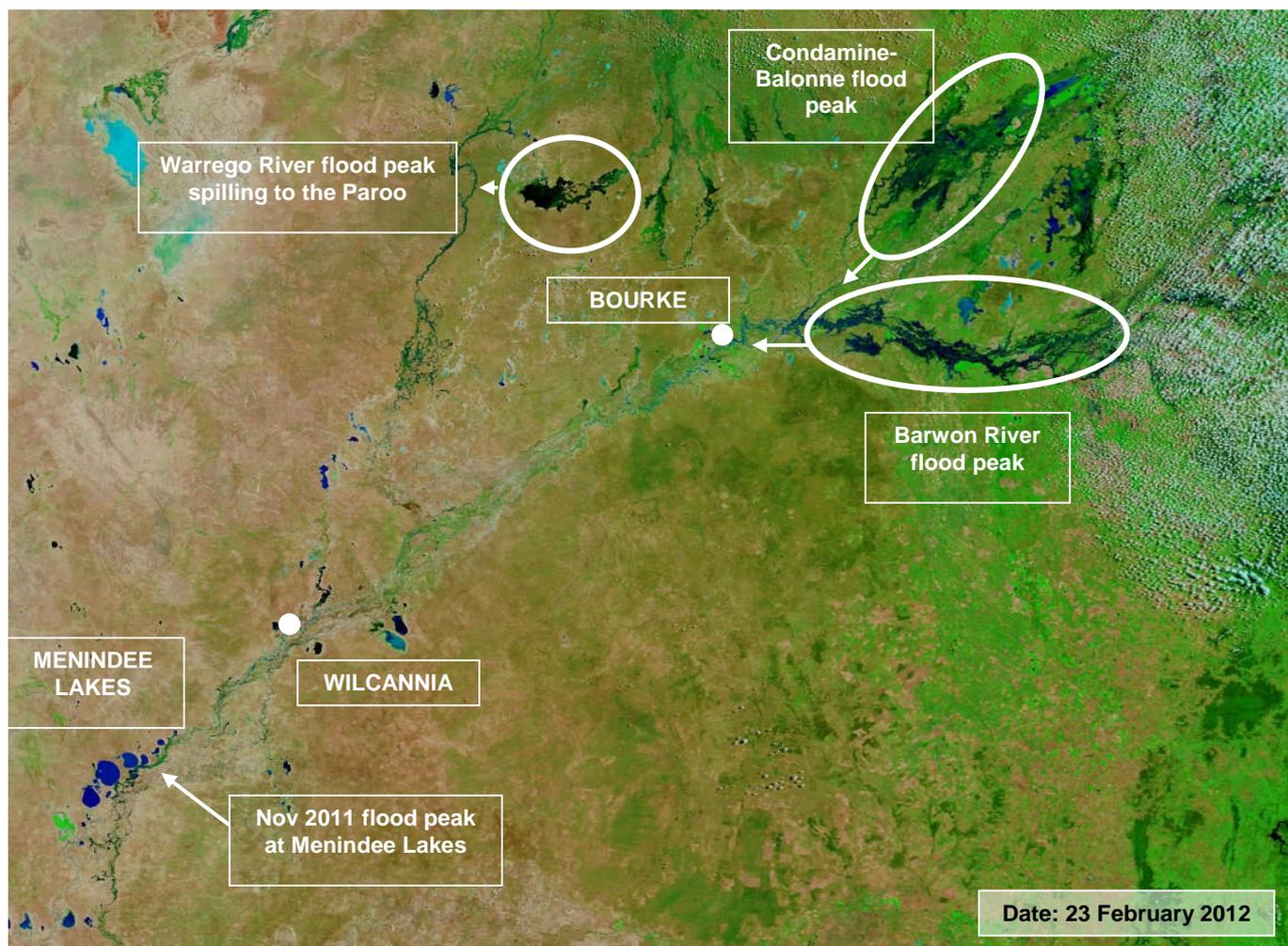
As the river rises downstream of the main weir at Menindee and river levels approach those of the lakes, it becomes more difficult to release water from the lakes and create airspace. In fact, lake outlets need to be closed to prevent ingress to the lakes from the high river.

Water levels in Lake Wetherell are continuing to slowly fall and it is expected that the gates on the main weir may soon be fully removed from the water. This will allow free passage of flood flow and fish passage along the Darling River channel. The gates will then be returned to refill the lakes system to capacity and reduce the size and impact of the flood peak.

### Satellite image of the Barwon-Darling catchment

Image: MODIS Australia6 Subset - Terra 250m Bands 7-2-1 Image for 2012/054 (23 February 2012)

Source: NASA/GSFC, MODIS Rapid Response 2012.



At this stage, it is estimated that the flooding is likely to reach at least the levels that occurred during the 1998 floods, where the peak flow at Bourke reached 230,000 ML per day (13.78m gauge height) and releases from Menindee Lakes to the Lower Darling reached 46,500 ML per day through Weir 32 (7.45m gauge height). This is approximately 10 metres at the Menindee town gauge and this level can be expected by around early to mid April.

Water levels in the Lower Darling River at Pooncarie and Burtundy are both now rising due to increased releases from Menindee Lakes. Until the flood passes Bourke there remains some uncertainty about what volumes will pass Wilcannia and/or pass into the Talyawalka Creek system, as well as in the Lower Darling and the Great Anabranche. Updated forecasts will be provided throughout March as the flood progresses downstream. Once the peak begins to arrive at the Lakes in early April, releases may need to be increased above the current 35,000 ML/d. If releases

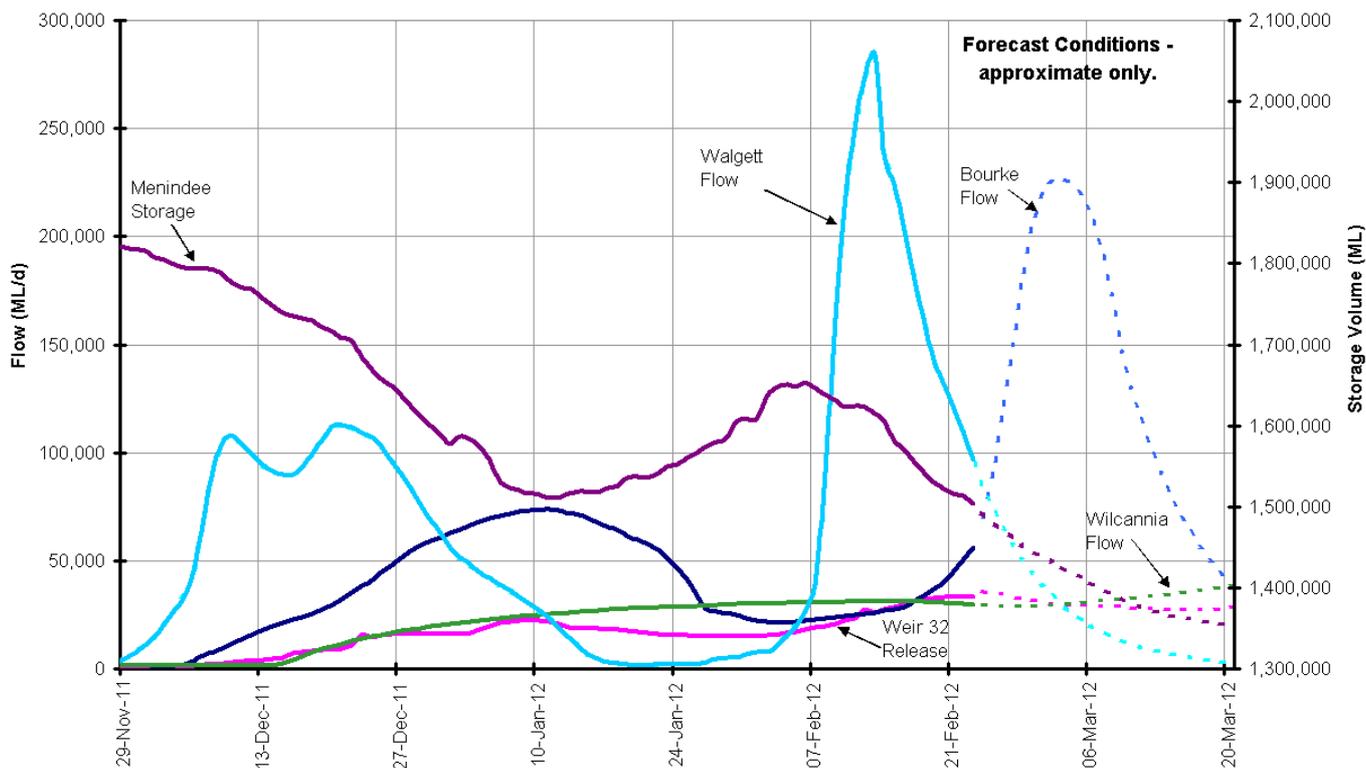
reach a similar level to the 1998 floods as expected, this would result in flows of at least 24,000 ML/d (7.7m gauge height) at Pooncarie and 22,000 ML/d (7.7m gauge height) at Burtundy.

The volume of flow expected to pass into the Great Darling Anabranch from the Lower Darling River will also be significant. During these high flows the Anabranch will receive approximately 50 per cent of flows through Weir 32 and boost ecosystems, particularly the native habitat, riparian vegetation and fish passage. Cawndilla outlet is releasing 1,500 ML/d and, combined with Tandou Creek flows, could contribute up to 2,000 ML/d to the Anabranch through Packers Crossing. It is anticipated that full connectivity throughout the Anabranch system will last for at least another two months, with significant flows expected to reach the Murray River.



**Paddle steamers in the Darling River again – Courtesy Rachel Strachan, Tulney Point Station**

**Darling River Flows and Menindee Storage Volume**



## How this flood compares to previous events

The table below shows a comparison of the current flood events with previous floods.

Year	Max height at Bourke (m)	Total Volume at Bourke (GL)	Max height at Wilcannia (m)	Total flow at Wilcannia (incl. Talyawalka Ck) (GL)	Max height Weir 32 (m)
1974	14.09	8,200	11.07	6,450	7.63
1976	14.17	14,000	11.59	10,500	8.07
1983	13.27	7,200	10.65	5,500	7.06
1990	12.99	9,000	11.0	8,150	7.37
1998	13.78	9,700	10.83	6,700	7.45
2010	10.78	2,370	9.43	2,400	5.44
2011	12.56	5,800	10.5	5,000	7.10
<b>2012</b>	<b>13.8*</b>	<b>4,500*</b>	<b>10.8*</b>	<b>4,000*</b>	<b>7.2**</b>

\* Predicted values

\*\* Likely to increase

## Releases from the Menindee Lakes at 24 February 2012

Location	ML/d
Main weir	35,550
Lake Wetherell outlet	950
Lake Pamamaroo outlet	0
Lake Menindee outlet	500
Lake Cawndilla outlet	1,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>38,500</b>

All landholders in the effected area are advised to check with the NSW Office of Water licensing staff before undertaking any work on a flood plain or on or near a water course.

## Communication and additional information

As conditions over summer can change relatively quickly, the NSW Office of Water and State Water will continue to monitor the situation carefully and provide regular information to the community.

**Central Darling Shire:** (Road and Asset information) Reece Wilson T 0429 915 992

**NSW Office of Water:** Bunty Driver T 0407 403234 or visit the website [www.water.nsw.gov.au](http://www.water.nsw.gov.au)

**State Emergency Service:** Far West Region Head Quarters T 02 6879 7100 or visit website [www.ses.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ses.nsw.gov.au)

**State Water:** Menindee Officer on Duty: T 0429 784334