

Community Information Communiqué

Management of Menindee Lakes 2011-2012 Issue 7 – 5 April 2012

Introduction

The flood peak in the Darling River is now approaching Wilcannia. Upstream at Tilpa the river level is falling and no further rises are anticipated in this event. Downstream at Menindee, high inflows to the lakes system are expected throughout April and into May, however, maximum outflows will be limited to current levels. The NSW Office of Water and State Water Corporation are continuing to manage operations at Menindee Lakes in anticipation of the forecast inflows.

This information paper updates current flow conditions and operations, as well as provides information on what can be expected through April and May as the flood waters pass through the Darling River system.

In short, residents along the Darling River, from downstream of Tilpa to Burtundy, can expect an extended period of high flow and widespread rural inundation, similar to events of 1971, 1990 and 1998.

Residents and authorities are reminded to check with the NSW Office of Water in Buronga, approvals that might be necessary before undertaking any earthworks to protect infrastructure or crops.

Current flows

Current water levels and flows as at 5 April 2012

Location	Height (m)	Flow (ML/d)	Comment
Bourke	7.05	18,917	Falling (Peak 240,000 on 05/03/12)
Louth	10.81	47,512	Falling
Tilpa	12.43	70,213	Falling
Wilcannia (Main Channel)	10.52	38,957	Rising near peak
Talyawalka Ck (Barrier Hwy)	4.56	50,525	Rising
Menindee Town	9.50	-	Steady
Weir 32	7.00	34,598	Steady
Pooncarie	7.28	17,673	Rising
Burtundy	7.18	18,694	Rising



Lake Wetherell - Courtesy Barry Philp, SWC

River Operations

Darling River Flows and Menindee Storage Volume

The flow in the Darling River main channel at Wilcannia is currently at 39,000 megalitres per day and the flow in the Talyawalka Creek is over 50,000 megalitres per day. This combined flow is expected to approach a maximum of about 100,000 megalitres per day over the next few days causing major flooding. This is slightly lower than the early forecasts but comfortably within the range of planning expectations.

Downstream at Menindee, releases from the lakes system have been made in preparation of the anticipated significant inflows. The lakes are currently 82 percent full and can hold a further 600,000 megalitres under surcharge conditions. A large proportion of this available airspace will be used to manage forecast inflows of between 60,000 and 70,000 megalitres per day during April.

The main weir gate has been re-positioned in the water to limit outflows (measured at Weir 32) to a maximum of 35,000 megalitres per day, making town flooding and conditions immediately downstream of Menindee no more severe than what is currently being experienced. This will also cause lake levels to rise throughout April and May.

The NSW Office of Water will aim to begin reducing outflows from the lakes as soon as possible to allow water levels to fall and alleviate flooding in the Menindee town area and downstream. However this is not expected until May. Minimising outflows will also ensure that the lakes are full at the end of this flood event to provide maximum resource availability into the future.

Lower Darling River Flows

Downstream flooding could be similar to that experienced during the 1998 flood which had a comparable peak flow at Bourke of 230,000 megalitres per day (13.78m gauge height). Menindee releases to the Lower Darling in that event reached 46,500 ML per day through Weir 32 (7.45m gauge height or 10.0m at the Menindee Town gauge).

The targeted peak flow for this 2012 event is 35,000 megalitres per day through Weir 32 and with flows from the Talyawalka, combined flows in the Lower Darling immediately downstream of the Menindee Lakes will be as high as 50,000 megalitres per day. Historically, flows of this size, generally flow evenly to the Lower Darling and the Great Anabranch.

As far as possible the NSW Office of Water will reduce lake outflows at the time of peak Talyawalka inflows below Weir 32 to minimise the influence of the Talyawalka on the Lower Darling. If that can be achieved then a flow pulse

of 22,000 - 24,000 megalitres per day in the Lower Darling will not be experienced but rather steady flow conditions of around 18,000 to 20,000 megalitres per day produced by the Menindee outflows for the past few weeks, will be seen.

Water levels in the Lower Darling River at Pooncarie and Burtundy are both rising very slowly. The NSW Office of Water will aim to keep peak flow in the Lower Darling below that of the 1998 event, and no more than about 24,000 ML per day (7.7m gauge height) at Pooncarie and 22,000 ML per day (7.7m gauge height) at Burtundy.

Great Darling Anabranch Flows

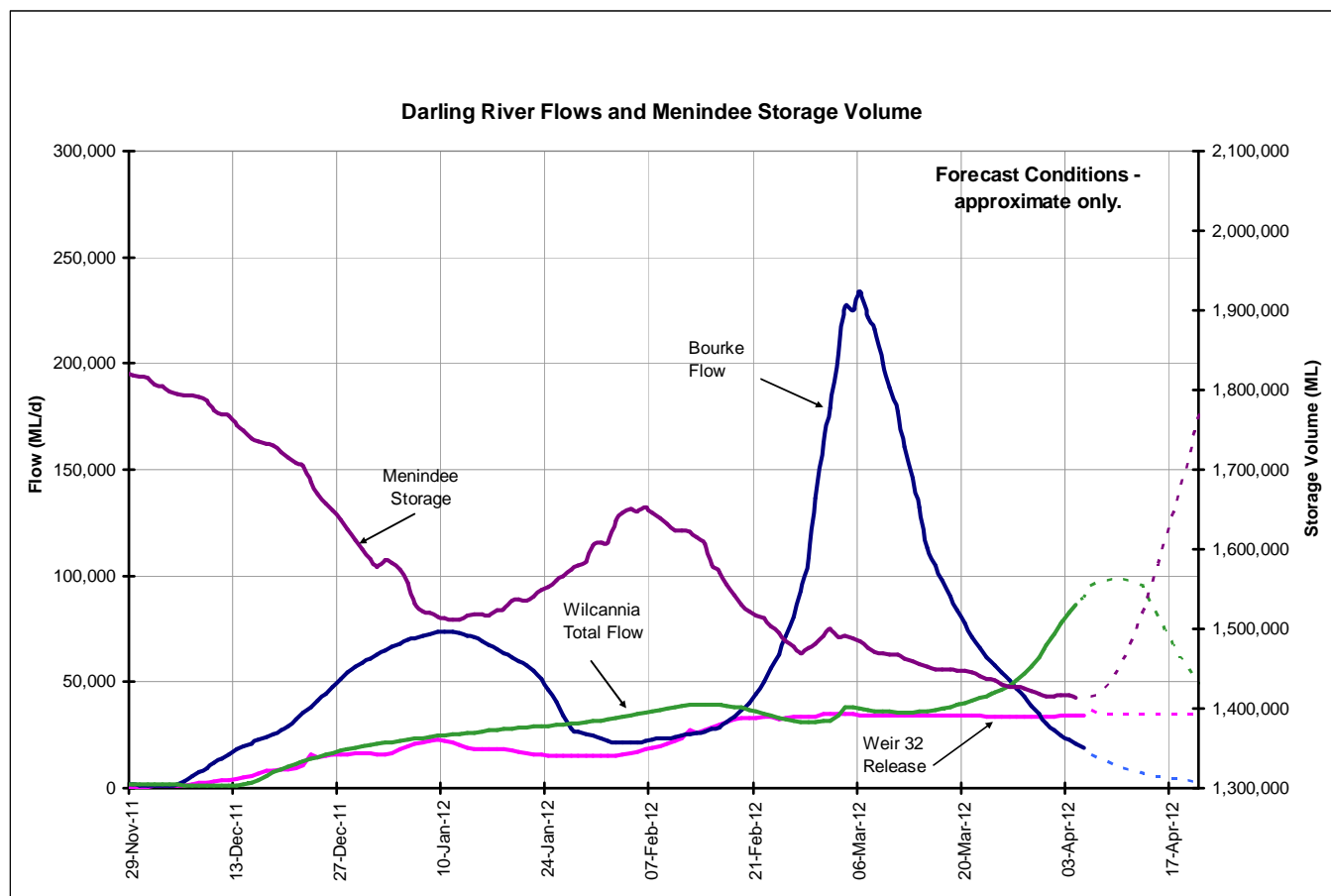
Flow in the Lower Darling at the Great Anabranch effluent has been relatively steady throughout March at around 18,000 megalitres per day, commensurate with the steady flows through Weir 32. In the Anabranch at Wycot the flow gradually rose through March to reach 13,000 megalitres per day and some 4.2 metres. At the peak of flow, expected in late April/May, levels are not expected to exceed 5.2 metres. A few thousand megalitres per day is now flowing in the lower reaches of the Anabranch and joining the Murray River. It is anticipated that this full connectivity through the Anabranch system will last at least through May, with significant flow volumes expected to reach the Murray River.

Combined Murray and Murrumbidgee River Flows

The flood peak in the Murrumbidgee River is current downstream of Hay where the river is now falling from 12.9 metres. Peak flow of around 40,000 megalitres per day is expected at Balranald next week. This water will then enter the Murray River and produce flows at Euston Weir of up to 60,000 megalitres per day from mid April.

It is expected that the Murray peak flow will pass Wentworth in mid to late April with the Darling River contributing steadily flows of around 18,000 to 22,000 megalitres per day during this period. Flows from the Great Darling Anabranch will be much longer in arriving at the Murray and have minimal impact on peak flows.

It is expected that high flows to South Australia will persist from mid-late April to early-mid May but at somewhat below the February 2011 event which peaked around 90,000 megalitres per day.



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)
1971	13.73	7,700	11.0	5,800	7.6
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
2012	13.8	5,000**	10.9*	4,000**	-

* Value predicted by the Bureau of Meteorology

** Values predicted by the NSW Office of Water

Releases from the Menindee Lakes at 5 April 2012

Location	ML/d
Main weir	36,600
Lake Wetherell outlet	300
Lake Pamamaroo outlet	0
Lake Menindee outlet	0
Lake Cawndilla outlet	1,200
Total	38,100

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.

Where do I go for additional information?

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

State Emergency Service Far West Region Head Quarters T 02 6879 7100 or visit website www.ses.nsw.gov.au

State Water: Menindee Officer on Duty: T 0429 784334