



*Healthy Rivers,  
Healthy Communities*

## A good start to the 2021-22 water year



**Objectives:** To boost river flows (if required) and help native fish move, feed and breed along the Barwon-Darling River system



**Target areas:** Barwon-Darling River system

Since the start of 2021 the Barwon-Darling (Baawan-Baaka) has been flowing consistently, with large flows in autumn and some winter follow up flows. This has resulted in some of the biggest flows into Menindee Lakes in almost a decade.



Sentinel image showing Baawan River flows downstream of Walgett on 31 July 2021. Source: [Sentinel Playground](#).

So far, ~44 gigalitres (GL) of Commonwealth water for the environment has been used this (2021-22) water year, building on 68 GL of Commonwealth contribution last year. Much of this water has come from licences in the Bourke to Louth river section, with around 2 GL from New South Wales (NSW) also contributing to flows. These volumes protected a portion of the natural flows and are helping ecosystems recover after the long dry. They are also assisting native fish to travel, giving them greater opportunities to breed and feed.

## Flows provide a helping hand to native fish

Rain and high flows from the northern Basin have meant Menindee Lakes are now full of water and fish. Flows are supporting continued recovery of native fish populations following the devastating fish deaths of 2018-19, and to connect the fish populations of the northern and southern basins.

Golden perch (yellow belly - or 'dhagaay' in Gamilaraay/ Kamilaroi language and 'gagalin' or 'bidyin' in Wiradjuri language) spawned in the northern Basin during high flows in early 2020 and again in early 2021.



Local kids chasing yellow belly in the Baawan River during summer (2021). Source: Jason Wilson, Commonwealth Environmental Water Office.

Many of the baby fish then travelled down the Darling (Baaka) River into the Menindee Lakes, which is a key fish nursery habitat. Monitoring confirmed that juvenile Golden perch are currently feeding and growing in the Menindee Lakes 'fish nursery'. Flows down the Lower Darling Baaka and the Great Darling Anabranch are helping juvenile Golden perch in Menindee Lakes make their way to the Murray. Check out the [Commonwealth Environmental Water Office website for further information](#).

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## New fish ladder on Walgett Weir

The new fish ladder on Walgett Weir was completed earlier this year. The team in charge of building the fish ladder worked closely with the Aboriginal community in Walgett regarding its development and installation.

Once commissioning is finalised, Walgett Weir Fishway will open fish passage from Bourke Weir to Calmundy Weir, a total of 576km of the Baawan-Baaka River. After the removal of Walgett town weir, an additional 300km of the Namoi River to Gunidgera Weir will also have fish passage.



Walgett Weir with the new fish ladder, 7 October 2021. Source: Jason Wilson, CEWO.

The Australian Government is working with the NSW and Queensland governments to implement [environmental works and measures](#) across the northern Basin to improve fish passage.

## What's planned next?

At the present time, rainfall is doing the job. Current forecasts from the Bureau of Meteorology indicate above average rainfall is likely in the coming months. Based on this, it is unlikely much more water for the environment would be needed before summer.

***The CEWO acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Murray-Darling Basin. We pay our respects to them and their elders past, present and emerging.***



The Baawan River at Dangar Bridge on 17 September 2021. Source: Jason Wilson, CEWO

## Working together

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Office and NSW Department of Planning Industry & Environment – Environment, Energy and Science manage held environmental water in the Baawan-Baaka collaboratively to maximise environmental outcomes. Commonwealth and NSW environmental water managers work in partnership with Traditional Owners, communities, scientists, and government agencies - these contributions help identify the best outcomes from environmental water and are gratefully acknowledged.

WaterNSW's [Water Insights Portal](#) provides key information on how water is being managed and shared within the Barwon Darling.

## Local Engagement Officers

Contact the CEWO Local Engagement Officers for further information:

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