



Australian Government

Commonwealth Environmental Water Office

Lower Balonne flow 2020 – Update #4

6 April 2020

Flows continue to improve the health of Narran Lakes

Objectives	Reconnect rivers in the Lower Balonne and further downstream. Ensure more water stays in Lower Balonne to reach Narran Lakes to rebuild critical habitat.
Target areas	Lower Balonne rivers, the Darling River and Narran Lakes Ramsar Site.

Update on flows from this event

Most of the flow has now passed from the Queensland reaches of the Lower Balonne into NSW. Good flows continue in the Intersecting Streams, particularly the Culgoa River, which has already provided more than 167 gigalitres (GL) to the Barwon-Darling River. The Birrie and Bokhara rivers are also still flowing in downstream reaches.

As of 6 April, 89 GL has passed the Wilby Wilby gauge on the Narran River with around 60 GL reaching Narran Lakes so far. Waterbird breeding habitat has received a good watering (as shown below from a helicopter inspection undertaken by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service).

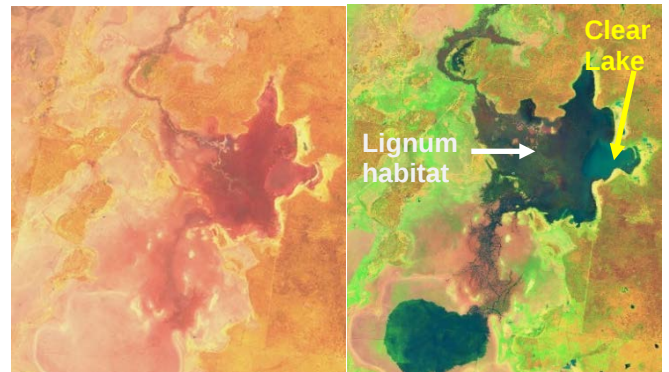


Inundation of waterbird breeding habitat to the west of Clear Lake – 2 April 2020 (Joanne Ocock, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service).

As of the end of March, over half of the Narran Lake Nature Reserve Ramsar Site had been inundated. After Narran Lakes fill, water will persist for months.

Monitoring

Flows continue to be monitored through the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's 'MDBSat' monitoring program using remote sensing. In particular, Sentinel-2 satellite imagery, in conjunction with flow gauge data.



A dry Narran Lakes before the flow (left) – 2 Feb 2020 and inundation following the current flow (right) – 23 Mar 2020 (Sentinel satellite images).

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service have been monitoring waterbirds from the ground and air during the event. The latest news is: "From the helicopter, we saw 18 waterbird species in total, including small numbers of pelicans, straw-necked ibis, glossy ibis, egrets, and black swans. Unfortunately, there was no sign of any colonial waterbird breeding. Earlier ground surveys had spotted a blue-billed duck, a threatened species in NSW."



Clear Lake – 20 March 2020 (Peter Berney, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service).

Laurie the ibis, who recently flew from the southern Basin and visited Narran Lakes as reported in the

[last update](#), remains to the west of Narran, at the Yantabulla Swamp, south-west of Cunnamulla. While it appears waterbird breeding is not likely to occur during this event, the vegetation is expected to be in much better health for their next breeding at Narran.

Local resident and former Basin Community Committee Chair, Rory Treweek observed there were not as many frogs as usual when there is flow, which may reflect the dry conditions during the recent drought. In contrast, the monitoring team from the University of New England found good numbers of frogs and other wildlife at Toorale National Park, which has had more regular watering in recent years.

Staff from CEWO and NSW, along with traditional owners, have been monitoring the wildlife and plant response since water reached the lakes. It may take more flows, such as this one, before Narran Lakes is able to bounce back to pre-drought health. However, this has been a great priming event, which is helping restore resilience of important habitat.



Rain on a corner of Back Lake – 2 April 2020 (CEWO).

Want to know more?

- Web: <https://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/rebuilding-waterbird-habitat-narran-lakes>
- Email: ewater@environment.gov.au
- Follow us on Twitter: @thecewh
- Contact our Local Engagement Officer Jason Wilson on Jason.Wilson@environment.gov.au or 0418 210 389.
- The Origin of the Narran Lake, Australian Legendary Tales, by K. Langloh Parker, [1897], at sacred-texts <https://www.sacred-texts.com/aus/alt/alt07.htm>

The origin of the Narran Lake

Dharriwaa has been an important site to Aboriginal groups for thousands of years – as a meeting place for people and animals alike. But how did Dharriwaa come to be?

Back in the creation time, Byamee went hunting with his two wives. His wives went one way, and he the other.

Byamee was supposed to meet his wives back at Coorigel spring. However, whilst bathing in the sweet and clear water Byamee's wives were seized and swallowed by two kurreahs (crocodile like creatures). The kurreahs then dived into an underground watercourse, which led to the Narran River – drying all watercourses along the way.

When Byamee reached the spring and realised what had happened he started in pursuit of the kurreahs. The track Byamee followed is still marked by the morilla ridges, which stretch down the Narran, pointing in towards the deep holes.

Finally Byamee came to the end of the Narran and the kurreahs who had eaten his wives. Byamee speared and killed the kurreahs to release his wives who promptly came back to life.

Byamee then said: "where there was dry land and stones in the past, in the future there will be water and water-fowl, from henceforth; when the Narran runs it will run into this hole, and by the spreading of its waters will a big lake be made."



Image of crocodile taken at Narran Lakes at an open day in 2018 (University of New England).

The Department acknowledges the traditional owners of Yuwaalaraay/Euahlayi First Nations people country and all country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to their elders both past and present.