



Australian Government

Commonwealth Environmental Water Office

Lower Darling-Baaka and Great Darling Anabranh Flows 2021 - Update #1

1 October 2021

Great Darling Anabranh spring flow

In late September, water started being released from Lake Cawndilla to provide a flow down the Great Darling Anabranh — its first drink in almost five years. It is expected to take more than eight weeks for this water to flow down the Anabranh and into the Murray River.

The flow will help Golden Perch migrate down to the Murray River and is also expected to provide benefits for vegetation and create additional feeding grounds for waterbirds. It's also great for the local community.

'The people are smiling, the fish and other aquatic life are smiling, the birds and animals are smiling, and the scenery is magnificent. Congrats to all'.

Ross Leddra – President, Darling River Action Group



Releases commencing from Lake Cawndilla to the Great Darling Anabranh, September 2021. Credit: Michael Minns



Juvenile Golden Perch from Lake Cawndilla in August 2021. Credit DPI Fisheries

Lower Darling-Baaka spring flow

In late August, flows down the Lower Darling-Baaka were more than doubled, from a target flow of 500 megalitres per day to 1,200 megalitres per day at Weir 32.

With some of this water being released from Lake Wetherell, nutrients and plankton (fish food) from the Northern Basin are being passed directly downstream, setting up the river for spring.

The elevated and relatively stable flows are expected to support Murray Cod breeding, by inundating fish habitat (benches and snag) that is used by the fish to breed.

The flows will also provide more food for the juvenile fish when they hatch, along with shallow slack (slow-moving) water habitats where juvenile Murray Cod can hide from predators.

A key outcome for the community is the flow helping to break up an algal bloom that had formed in the stretch of river below the old Menindee Town Weir.



Juvenile Murray Cod (and Golden Perch) found in the Lower Darling-Baaka in March 2021. Credit: DPI Fisheries

Lakes full of water... and fish!

Following much needed rain and high flows in the Northern Basin, the Menindee Lakes are now full of water and overflowing. They are also full of fish!

Golden Perch (aka 'Yellowbelly' or 'Callop') spawned in the Northern Basin during high flows in early 2020 and again in early 2021. Many of these travelled down the Darling-Baaka River into the Menindee Lakes, which is a key nursery habitat for fish. Monitoring has confirmed that juvenile Golden Perch are currently feeding and growing in the Menindee Lakes 'fish nursery'. Some have already moved further downstream into the Lower Darling-Baaka River during various releases of water for the environment made over the last year.

Barkandji Rangers have been working with NSW DPI Fisheries on surveys at Lake Cawndilla to determine the number of fish likely to go down the Great Darling Anabranch during the flow. Results show there are a large number of fish in the Lake.

Both the Lower Darling Baaka and the Great Darling Anabranch flows will help juvenile Golden Perch in the Menindee Lakes to disperse through to the Darling-Baaka and on to the Murray. This is a critical part of their life cycle and is important to Golden Perch stocks across the Murray-Darling Basin, including the Southern Basin.

What's coming up?

Towards the end of spring, there is potential for a 'pulse' of water to be released from the Menindee Lakes using water for the environment and/or operational releases.

Golden Perch don't spawn every year and often need a faster flowing flow pulse to cue their spawning. It is likely to have been several years since Golden Perch have spawned successfully in the Lower Darling-Baaka.

Agency staff will continue to consult with stakeholders throughout spring around the potential to release a pulse to cue Golden Perch to spawn.

Working in partnership

Water managers from NSW, along with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office and the local community are working together to provide water down both the Great Darling Anabranch and the Lower Darling-Baaka. These flows will be a combination of operational releases and water for the environment.

How can I keep track of the flows?

More about these flows:

<https://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/lower-darling-baaka-spring-flow-2021>

More about the river:

- [NSW Real-time Water data](#)
- [River Murray Weekly Report](#) – river operations, inflows, river gauge heights, rainfall and salinity
- [Whose water is in the river](#)—monthly update of water for the environment and other water users.

Engagement Officer

Richard Mintern (Mildura, VIC)

☎ 0437 218 649

✉ richard.mintern@environment.gov.au

