



Increased flows for the Lower Balonne

Objectives	To reconnect rivers in the Lower Balonne and further downstream. To ensure more water stays in the system and reaches Narran Lakes to rebuild critical waterbird habitat.
Start date	11 February 2020.
Target areas	Lower Balonne rivers, the Darling River and Narran Lakes Ramsar Site.

A collaborative effort between governments, local water licence holders and community representatives will see more water stay in our rivers on the back of recent rains in the area. The increased flows will reach the parched Lower Balonne system, including the internationally significant Narran Lakes, in early March.

Who is contributing to these flows?

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Office, Queensland government and private water licence holders are all contributing water.

Water under Queensland water planning arrangements is providing the foundation for this flow. Stock and domestic and pre-water harvesting releases commenced from Beardmore Dam on 11 February 2020.

Approximately 15 gigalitres of Commonwealth water for the environment has been left instream so far to enhance the flows through the rivers in the Lower Balonne system.

In addition, Cubbie Station is voluntarily contributing up to 10 gigalitres of water to the flow.

Combined, these contributions are ensuring more water stays in the rivers and reaches important habitat across the Lower Balonne, including the currently stressed Narran Lakes and possibly the Darling River downstream.

Where's the flow at?

Beardmore Dam started spilling on 15 February ahead of the peak of the flow, which is expected to reach St George by early next week. The flow rate at St George was 27,000 megalitres per day as of 21 February and continues to rise – more than 100 gigalitres has passed the gauge to date.

Water is now on its way to Narran Lakes

The severe drought has meant areas in the Lower Balonne have been suffering and under stress for some time.

Large areas of lignum, which provides crucial waterbird breeding and foraging habitat within the Narran Lakes Ramsar site, has not had a decent inflow since April 2013.

Upstream reaches of the Narran River are now full, with water flowing towards Narran Lakes. The flow is replenishing important waterholes enabling native fish to repopulate the river from waterholes upstream.

Narran Lakes is an internationally significant wetland and important waterbird habitat. The Narran Lakes (Dharriwaa) is also of immense cultural significance – it is a meeting place for the Yuwaalaraay/Euahlayi First Nations people.



Before the flow: Stressed waterbird breeding habitat in the Narran Lakes - January 2020 (CEWO)

Pilot project to enable more water to reach Narran Lakes

The CEWO is currently running a pilot project to assist more water to flow into a core part of the Narran Lakes. The pilot offers grants for water-licence holders to forgo pumping water, which they are legally entitled to take.

The pilot will mean more water will stay in the river and reach critical waterbird habitat in the internationally significant Narran Lakes, to prevent the loss of this important habitat.

Monitoring and collaboration

The CEWO is working with NSW and Queensland government agencies to develop a monitoring program. Representatives from the Narran Management Committee will participate in the monitoring program. The focus of monitoring will be flows and the response of native vegetation. There will be other observations, such as birds and frogs. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority will also be using satellite technology to keep an eye on the flows.

Monitoring will be undertaken before and following the flows into Narran Lakes Nature Reserves to ensure water reaches the intended locations, to track the environmental benefits of the project and to support reporting the results to the community.

What's next

Flows are expected to reach the Narran Lakes at the start of March. A further update on where flows have reached will be published in late February-early March, along with an update on the latest monitoring activities, early results and community reactions to the flows.

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.



Before the flow: upstream in the Narran River - 20 February 2019 (CEWO)



During the flow: upstream in the Narran River - 20 February 2020 (Scott Balsillie)

The Department acknowledges the traditional owners of Gomerioi 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.