



Healthy Rivers,
Healthy Communities



Objectives: Reconnect rivers in the Lower Balonne and further downstream.



Inundate Narran Lakes (Dharriwaa) Ramsar site to support water bird breeding.



Help native fish to move, breed and disperse.



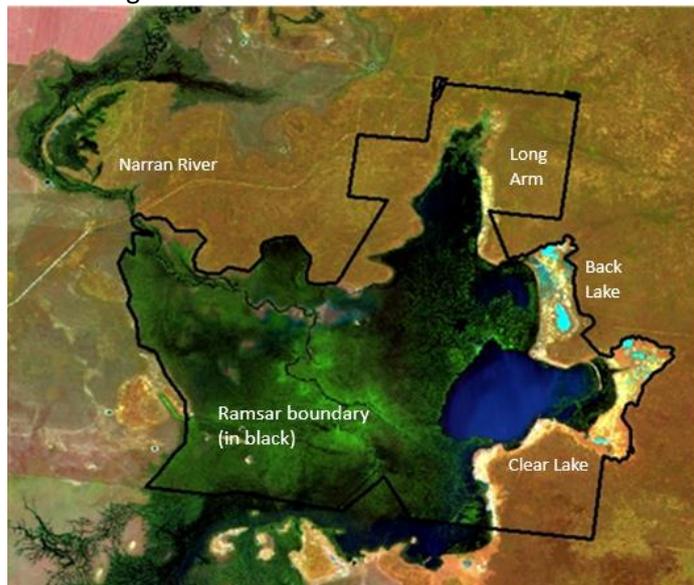
Target areas: Lower Balonne rivers, Dharriwaa, and the Darling (Baaka) River.

Good flows continue in the Lower Balonne, filling Dharriwaa during January

Since our first update in December, flows have been going gangbusters in the Lower Balonne. Around 1,819 gigalitres (GL) of water has flowed past St George since November, including 253 GL of Commonwealth environmental water. We saw significant rainfall across the Condamine-Balonne catchment early in the new year. Flows are now dropping past St George with flow harvesting ceasing on the 12 January 2022. Short-term rainfall is predicted to be average to wet for the rest of January and February so there may be further flows in the coming weeks.

Water continues to flow steadily into Dharriwaa, with flows filling all areas of the wetlands. Imagery (see below) shows this is the most water in Dharriwaa for 10 years. Flow targets for large-scale waterbird breeding were met on 10 January 2022 with over 170 GL having flowed past the Wilby Wilby gauge since November.

Over 220 GL of water has also flowed from the Culgoa into the Darling-Baaka River so far.



Satellite imagery of Ramsar area full of water with floodplain vegetation flushing area, the most water to enter Dharriwaa in ten years. Image MDBA.

What are the birds doing?

Word is out about good times at Dharriwaa and the birds are gathering! NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) surveys in late December saw more than 1,000 straw-necked ibis at core breeding areas between Back Lake and Clear Lake. Royal spoonbills were nesting and several threatened species including blue-billed duck and freckled duck were spotted. Whiskered terns were plentiful and excitingly the endangered bush-stone curlew was heard calling for the first time at Dharriwaa.



Straw-necked ibis gathering on lignum, (photo taken during scientific monitoring). Image Joanne Ocock NSW NPWS

While the birds are preparing to nest, we rely on remote information like remote cameras and helicopter flight observations to keep us informed from a safe distance. On the 13 January 2022, helicopter flight observations confirmed there are a few thousand straw-necked ibis gathering and they seem interested in nesting. Waterbirds are also being tracked using satellite transmitters, with the Straw-necked ibis 'Elf' heading up to Dharriwaa in January.



Map showing movements of Straw-necked ibis 'Elf' at Dharriwaa in January 2022. Image CSIRO Land and Water.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of partner agencies NSW Department of Planning and Environment – Environment, Energy and Science, and NPWS in monitoring bird colonies within Dharriwaa (Narran Lakes).

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What are we monitoring?

The CEWO and our partner State agencies collaborate to monitor the flows and responses to flows at Dharriwaa. Detailed waterbird monitoring is planned if the nesting becomes a large-scale event, but it is critical nesting areas remained undisturbed during this important breeding stage. Our trusty Local Engagement Officers Jane Humphries and Jason Wilson went beyond the call of duty on their first days back after a well-earned break to set up some remote cameras at Dharriwaa in early January!



Local Engagement Officer Jason Wilson at Dharriwaa in January 2022.

As with previous events, we are tracking the flows with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and partner agencies. The Narran Joint Management Committee (JMC) has been actively involved in vegetation monitoring at Narran and is hopefully going to take part in waterbird monitoring.



Blue-billed ducks at Dharriwaa, December 2021. Image Pat Johnston, volunteer, NSW NPWS (photo taken during scientific monitoring).

What's next?

The CEWO is preparing an event-based mechanism grant program to potentially access water from private on-farm storages, should it be required, to maintain water levels in Dharriwaa which in turn supports waterbird breeding. Grant guidelines for the event-based mechanism were released in mid-January and more information is available on the CEWO's website at www.awe.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/supporting-waterbirds-narran-lakes.

While we are being careful about arranging face-to-face events due to Covid-19 risks, we will also be engaging with communities and stakeholders about flows at Dharriwaa. Further updates will be released on the CEWO's website.

If you would like to be kept informed, please contact one of your Local Engagement Officers.

Local Engagement Officers

Contact the CEWO Local Engagement Officers for further information:

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The NSW NPWS and Narran JMC would like to remind people the Narran Lake Nature Reserve is not open to members of the public. To protect nesting birds access to the reserve is limited to scientific studies. For further enquiries please contact Narrabri NPWS office on 02 69727300 or npws.barwon@environment.nsw.gov.au.



Lignum swamp between Back Lake and Clear Lake showing the extent of the water on the 13 January 2022. Image Joanne Ocock, NSW NPWS.

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Office pays respect to the Traditional Owners of the Murray-Darling Basin. We acknowledge their enduring cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to the rivers, wetlands and floodplains of the Basin.