



**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 and breed.



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

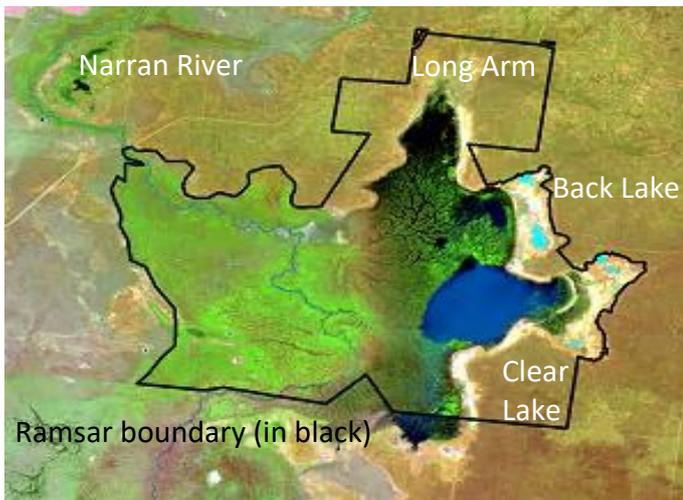
### Rain and flows return in the Lower Balonne

Patchy rain fell in the Maranoa and Condamine-Balonne Rivers in mid-February, including some at Dharriwaa (Narran Lakes).

Very heavy rainfall in late February caused severe flooding across much of Southeast Queensland, including in the upper parts of the Condamine River system. Water harvesting was announced on 28 February and will likely last for several days. A Queensland water management rule has also been triggered that reduces the amount of water that can be harvested to enhance flows into Narran Lakes.

Almost 1,855 gigalitres (GL) (32 GL in February) has passed St George since November, including almost 254 GL of Commonwealth water for the environment. While providing multiple benefits to the environment and communities, the CEWO appreciates that the recent flooding has also significantly impacted many communities.

Satellite imagery (see below) shows floodplain vegetation is still responding well to the flows.



Satellite image of Ramsar site area showing floodplain vegetation as of 16 February 2022 (Ramsar boundary shown in black). Image MDBA.

### What are the birds doing?

For the first time in 10 years, waterbird breeding is underway at the internationally significant Narran Lakes Ramsar site.

Monitoring undertaken by the University of New South Wales and NSW partner agencies in February identified at least 9,000 waterbird nests.

The nests were mainly from straw-necked ibis; however, Royal spoonbill nests were also seen. In all, 35 waterbird species were detected including the threatened Freckled duck and Black-necked stork. A total of 13 colonial nesting species are breeding at the wetlands

With flows making their way down the Condamine-Balonne, the critical water levels for successful waterbird breeding are expected to be maintained so birds don't abandon their nests or chicks. The baby birds need stable water levels until the end of March to fledge successfully.

Over 174 GL of water has passed the Wilby Wilby gauge since November and recent inflow of water into Dharriwaa has stabilised water levels which had been rapidly dropping.



South Arm straw-necked ibis' colony, (photo taken 14 February 2022 during scientific monitoring). Image Joanne Ocock NSW NPWS



Intermediate egret, Cormorant, and Royal spoonbill at Dharriwaa, 26 February 2022. Image Pat Johnston NSW NPWS.

## CEWO activated a grant process, but no water releases went ahead

To maintain water levels and optimum bird breeding conditions at Dharriwaa, the CEWO put grant arrangements in place in early 2022 to access water from private on-farm storages along the Narran River.

The CEWO planned to work with the grant recipient, relevant Queensland and NSW agencies, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, Inspector-General's Office, and the NSW Natural Resources Access Regulator to monitor the water release.



The acting CEWH, Mr Hilton Taylor and CEWO staff at Dharriwaa, 24 February 2022 (photo taken during scientific monitoring).

The release was due to begin on 24 February, however rainfall in late February changed our plans. Around 500 GL is now expected to flow past St George in Queensland in March. The CEWO has decided not to proceed with the release at this point. The ecological outcomes from current flows are being tracked through waterbird, fish, and vegetation monitoring projects in the Lower Balonne.



Waterbird monitoring at Dharriwaa, February 2022 (photo taken during scientific monitoring). Image Kate Brandis, UNSW.

## Want to know more?

Further updates will be provided on the CEWO website: [www.awe.gov.au/water/cewo](http://www.awe.gov.au/water/cewo)

To protect nesting birds, Narran Lake Nature Reserve is not open to the public. Please contact the [Narrabri NPWS office](mailto:Narrabri@npws.gov.au) (02 69727300) for further information.

The Narran Joint Management Committee and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) are holding an **Open Day at Narran Lakes on 9 April 2022**.

Registrations are essential. More information can be found on the NSW NPWS website: [www.nswparks.info/narranlakeopenday](http://www.nswparks.info/narranlakeopenday)

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Back Lake and Long Arm (photo taken during scientific monitoring 14 February 2022). Image Joanne Ocock, NSW NPWS

We gratefully 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).

**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.**