



Australian Government

Commonwealth Environmental Water Office

Lower Balonne flow 2020 - Update #3

17 March 2020

Lower Balonne flow objectives will be met

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 habitat.
Target areas	Lower Balonne rivers, the Darling River and Narran Lakes Ramsar Site.

Early monitoring results

On the ground monitoring at Narran Lakes is providing useful information about the health of vegetation that is vital for waterbird breeding.

Early observations have found that vegetation in some areas is responding well to recent rainfall and inundation. Preliminary results will be shared in the next update.

The fieldwork is also an opportunity for knowledge exchange between researchers, water managers, and Traditional Owners.



Members of the vegetation monitoring team, Traditional owners, NSW and Commonwealth reps (CEWO)

Joint Management Committee member, Rhonda Ashby commented that “cultural and scientific knowledge can be embedded through respectful relationships and partnerships. It’s vitally important for Narran Co Management and researchers positively working in collaboration and understanding each other roles for better outcomes for all.”

The Commonwealth’s Monitoring and Evaluation program, in collaboration with CSIRO, is tracking waterbird movement in response to water for the environment. One of the female birds being tracked is ‘Laurie’, an adult female straw necked ibis. At the end of February, Laurie left the southern Basin and began heading north. On 7 March she crossed the Barwon and reached Narran. You can continue to track Laurie’s movements on the Waterbirds Australia facebook page: [@ColonialWaterbirdScience](https://www.facebook.com/ColonialWaterbirdScience).



Heather McGinness about to release Laurie the straw necked ibis (CSIRO)

Laurie has continued west, to the Warrego and Paroo catchments. We will continue to monitor Laurie’s movements to see if she returns to Narran Lakes, particularly if waterbirds start breeding there.



Laurie’s travels from 7 March through to 10 March (CSIRO)



Narran Lakes is a renowned haven for birds, with over 100 bird species being recorded there at times. As Clear Lake fills, small wading birds have been seen foraging along its edge, along with herbivorous waterbirds, including swans. Clouds of budgies have also been observed. More waterbirds are expected to appear, in coming weeks.



Water gradually spreading through the wetland (CEWO)

Update on the flows

The Lower Balonne flow is made up of water from Queensland water plans, Commonwealth holdings, a grant and private water licence holders.

As of 17 March, approximately 1,423GL has passed the gauge in the Balonne River at St George. This is almost three times the volume of water in Sydney Harbour.

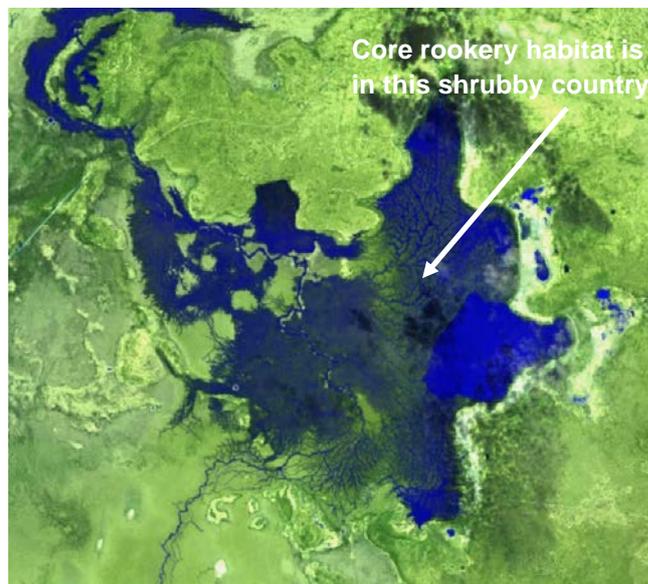
Commonwealth environmental water licences have contributed ~152GL to the flows across the Lower Balonne, comprising of ~84GL from overland flow licences and ~68GL from unsupplemented water allocations.

There have been good flows in the Culgoa River, on the way to the Barwon and in the Narran River, on the way to the Narran Lakes. Last week the front of the main flow passed the most downstream gauges on Birrie and Bokhara rivers.

The flow target of 50GL upstream of the Narran Lakes was met on 13 March. This will result in core rookery and important foraging habitat at Narran Lakes being inundated over coming weeks.

Local reactions to the flows

Over the coming weeks we will share people's reactions to the flows. First up is Dirranbandi local and Smartrivers President Frank Deshon who said: "After such a long dry spell this flow is a welcome relief and will provide great outcomes for the community and the environment."



Core rookery habitat at Narran Lakes Ramsar site filling on 16 March (Sentinel image)



Culgoa River flowing through the Culgoa National Park on 3 March (Melissa Hams NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service)

Want to know more?

- Web: <https://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/attachment/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
- CSIRO's fascinating work on the movement of waterbirds <https://research.csiro.au/ewkrwaterbirds/>

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.