

Geoff Looney Picture Submission

Geoff Looney is a Menindee local of some 30years. He is a wildlife photographer and an amateur ornithologist. He has published books about local photography and wildlife.

Geoff has documented by images the fish deaths in 2018 and 2023. These are chronologically arranged and the original images are available on request.

The images include photos of inlet and outlet regulator infrastructure that in 2023 was covered by water. He makes the point that these regulators are at the bottom of the lakes, indicating that when blackwater flowed, it was a “solid wall of bad water”.

His 2023 images of the deaths show the putrescence of the dead fish on the water, creating a slime layer. This contradicts local narrative that the slime was there before the incident.

Mr Looney also contends that in the lead up to the 2019 drought fish deaths incidents the lakes had been “needlessly drained” and not held in reserve as had previously been the case.

Captioning

The first number in the caption (e.g. 1318) is the photo reference number. Each photo is dated. The narrative is from Geoff Looney, provided at the Menindee community listening session on 26/6/2023 to Alan Gale, OCSE Communications Manager. Mr Looney wants this to be considered his formal submission. The notes to each photo contain his statements about the management of the Menindee Lakes system.



1318 17/11/17

Menindee inlet regulator (2 on map) – turtles trying to escape pool of water. Lakes were full in 2016 and drained by 2017. Why wasn't the water kept? Why was it drained? The water could and should have been left in the lake because there was not the demand downstream for water at that stage. In the past, the water was kept and looking at past reports from the NSW Govt, Broken Hill would have been guaranteed fresh good water for at least 18 months.

Mr Looney pointed out past management plans supported this.

This paper differs from the previous papers as its release coincides with good inflows passing into Lake Wetherell from rainfall that fell throughout northern NSW and southern Queensland in January.

The resulting flows from those rainfall events are expected to reach the Menindee Lakes in the coming weeks. The forecast inflows will provide sufficient water to secure Broken Hill and Menindee town water supply for a minimum of 18 months, allow restrictions on irrigation diversions to be relaxed and to enable releases to the Lower Darling River downstream of Menindee that will improve water supply and water quality.

“Managing the Menindee Lakes in 2003-4 February 2004”

Land and Water Conservation - NSW Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources



3851 13/1/18

Dead fish Lake Menindee inlet from Pamamaroo (No 2 on map). Note the natural colour of water, but by this stage there was no oxygenated water left in the small pools that remained at the low points of the lake. Note how different the water colour is in the later photos about the 2023 flooding event. There was clearly bad water that came down the river, not natural flood water which in the past “cleaned” the system. The 2023 water polluted the system and killed it.



8993 25/6/18

Menindee lookout, viewing lake Menindee inlet regulator figure 2 on map. Illustrative of infrastructure, as revealed in the drought conditions.



3380 18/12/18

Dead fish incident. Note colour of water – lots of algae. Bird and cod and a bony bream.



3382 18/12/18

Dead fish incident. Again note the colour of the water – how different from the 2023 incident. Heavy blue green algae.



3386 18/12/18 dead fish incident. Again note water.



4300 29/1/19

Fisheries NSW measuring oxygen and noting fish deaths.



4301 21/1/19 Darling at Menindee Rail bridge from the site of the old town weir. Showing colour of water and extent of fish deaths. Note difference between 2023 riverbank photos with no vegetation on the banks. At this time, during a drought, there is natural vegetation at the river edge. Mr Looney says the 12 month inundation by the flood has cleared the banks.



4234 10/6/19

Pamamaroo from the shoreline showing extent of dryness. Typical of the drought conditions.



5920 27/7/19

Darling River below weir 32. Illustrating extend of drought effects.



0574 7/11/19

Wetherell outlet regulator (7 on map) – note at bottom of lake. It shows that when the blackwater entered the system from the lakes, the blackwater was at bottom of the lake. “It was a solid wall of black water” According to Mr Looney the lakes were full in 2006, but had been “deliberately drained by 2017, so were already empty when the 2019 drought incident happened. He says that other lakes not on the regulated system (e.g. Lake Speculation and Lake Emu) had plenty of water. “Water NSW has lied about the evaporation rate. It was their drainage rate”



0580 7/11/19

Menindee outlet regulator (3 on map).



2630 5/1/20

Pamamaroo Outlet regulator. Showing effects of the “intentional draining”. Therefore no water to assist during the flood. At this time, all the fish were below weir 32 because there was no water about that point.



2634 5/1/20

Looking into Lake Wetherell from Pamamaroo, showing outlet from Wetherell into Pamamaroo.



2640 5/1/20

Inlet regulator into Pamamaroo from Wetherell



2662 5/1/20

Outlet from Wetherell into darling river, looking into Wetherell. Note depth of regulator - therefore blackwater released 2023 was at the bottom of the lake.

2023 photos



0003 20/1/23 Lake Pamamaroo inlet regulator (5 on map) showing darkness of water that came in (blackwater). This photo has been adjusted to make it lighter. My Looney says the water was “as black as pitch”



0030 23/1/23 Drone shot of Pamamaroo outlet regulator (6 on map) showing black water coming into river and not mixing.



0801 8/1/23

Fish jumping out of Pamamaroo to get air. Lake bubbling as carp jumped to get oxygen. Illustrating that water was already severely deoxygenated. This was happening across the lake and river system at Menindee.



0812 8/1/23 Pamamaroo – carp seeking oxygen.

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0815 8/1/23 Pamamaroo foreshore fish deaths.

OFFICIAL



1027 16/1/23

Main weir's last full flow before the feb/march fish deaths. At this time the fish were not biting – do not know why there was no response to fishing lures. What normally happens is that the peak is allowed to go into the lakes and this brings the blackwater into the shore and it cleans. This did not happen. They should have done the same as happened in 76 90s and 2011. Because the lakes were so low, the regime was changed and the blackwater was not cleaned.

“Previously the peak would come so high it was over the tops of the gates and it would be allowed to clean the lakes and it was allowed to do this. They don't do this now.”

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1831 6/2/23

Pamamaroo outlet regulator at flood level. Note darkness of water.



2380 18/2/23

Main weir Menindee fish deaths. Fish struggling and dying. Yabbies trying to escape. Fish trying to get upstream.

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2383 18/2/23

Main weir Menindee. Dead cod and yabby that tried to escape. Carp and bony bream.



2389 18/2/23

Main Weir Menindee. Dead native fish and yabbies trying to escape up the weir apron. Locals harvested buckets of yabbies.

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2770 27/2/23

One week later, showing dead fish at Menindee boat ramp. Fish were mainly bony bream.



2772 27/2/23

Menindee boat ramp close up of dead fish. One perch or cod and lots of bony bream. "I could not stay to take too many photos due to the stench. I was vomiting."

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2774 27/2/23

Menindee boat ramp close up of dead fish. One perch or cod and lots of bony bream. Could not stay to take too many photos due to the stench.



2784 27/2/23

Menindee boat ramp close up of dead fish. One perch or cod and lots of bony bream. Could not stay to take too many photos due to the stench.

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2815 28/2/23

Under Menindee rail bridge. Note water colour.



2821 28/2/23

Under Menindee rail bridge. Note water colour. Golden Perch.

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4218 16/3/23

Main Weir apron. Mostly bony bream. Note Ibis had arrived. They were the only ones to be taking fish. Could not understand why there were no more birds gorging on the fish ... had expected that the river would be covered in flocks of birds such as cormorants and pelicans eating all the dead fish. Do the birds know something we don't?



4222 16/3/23

Main Weir apron. Dead swan amongst the fish. Fish are mainly bony bream.

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DSCN4233.MP4

4233 16/3/23 Main Weir.

Video showing dead fish and carp trying to escape water to find oxygen. Note low water level post release.



4235 16/3/23 Main Weir. Dead cod and bony bream.

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4239 6/3/23 Main Weir - dead fish



4242 16/3/23 Main Weir - dead fish

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4248 6/3/23 Main Weir - dead fish



4261 17/3/23 Railway Bridge downstream. Fish being washed down river. Note no birds feeding. Not what was expected by people in the town

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4265 17/3/23 Railway Bridge downstream. Fish being washed down river. Note no birds feeding.



4268 17/3/23 Railway Bridge downstream. Fish being washed down river. Note no birds feeding.



DSCN4269.MP4

4269 17/3/23 Video Railway Bridge downstream showing extent of fish deaths. Again, no birds feeding or any animal activity.



4276 18/3/23 Wetherell outlet regulator (No 8 on map) Note stain still in water being released into the river. This is most likely leakage from the regulator and illustrates the extent of the blackwater in the lake.



4452 21/3/23 Pamamaroo regulator (No 6 on map) from Pamamaroo into the river. Note darkness of water.

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4475 21/3/23 Pamamaroo outlet. Note bird taking yabby. Note colour of water. Yabbies still trying to escape poor water.



4527 23/3/23 Darling River Menindee, near town. Note slime build up from putrefying fish. Stench almost impossible to bear.

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4543 23/3/23 Darling River Menindee, near town. Note slime build up from putrefying fish.



5525 12/4/23 Darling River below Menindee close to Menindee outlet regulator (Number 3 on map). Fish are still in the area, were not washed downstream, so are all on the bottom of the river.

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5535 13/4/23 Darling River below Menindee close to Menindee outlet regulator (Number 3 on map). Fish are still in the area, were not washed downstream, so are all on the bottom of the river.