Project benefits

The Menindee Lakes Water Saving Project is an opportunity to save a substantial amount of water otherwise lost to evaporation. It will contribute to improvements in river operations and the environment, consequently passing benefits on to the community.

Water savings

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority’s detailed hydrological modelling of the project suggests there will be average, long-term water savings of around 106 gigalitres per year, made up of around 93 gigalitres in evaporative savings, and 14 gigalitres in Lower Darling delivery losses due to the reduction of high security water demand in this river. The evaporative savings are in part owing to the Cawndilla Creek Regulator allowing the managed use of Lake Cawndilla for environmental outcomes and separate operations for the rest of the Menindee Lakes system.

These savings will make more water available to achieve environmental outcomes without the need to recover additional water from productive uses, avoiding socioeconomic drawbacks.

Environmental benefits

The project is expected to create environmental benefits through infrastructure works, which will allow the Menindee Lakes system to be operated in ways that support environmental outcomes. These include:

- The enlarged size of the Lake Menindee outlet regulator, the new Emu and Yartla Lakes offtake regulators, and the increased capacity of the Anabranch offtake regulator will increase the frequency and duration of small overbank flows to sustain and improve floodplain health.
- These works will also allow increased river flows into the Lower Darling, potentially contributing to increased flows in the Murray River and helping to deliver environmental benefits for a range of ecosystems.
- The construction of new fishways will allow upstream and downstream movement for native fish and other biota, giving them access to a wider range of habitat over a larger area and contributing to the distribution and abundance of the species.
- The proposed changes in operation strategies will reinstate the natural drying cycles of the Lake Wetherell floodplain and restore more natural conditions.

Flood protection

High-flow levee banks will be constructed to protect Menindee residences located close to the Darling River (note that a previous version of this fact sheet incorrectly stated that a levee bank would be constructed at Sunset Strip). The levee banks will reduce the need to evacuate during times of flooding and provide greater flexibility in managing flood events as they pass through the Menindee Lakes system, improving flood mitigation capacity.

Employment opportunities

The project will provide employment opportunities in the Menindee Lakes region during the delivery period, particularly during the detailed design and construction phases. In particular, the project will support the NSW policy of seeking greater participation by Aboriginal people in government construction projects.
Alternative water supply for Broken Hill

As part of a parallel project, the NSW Government will provide an alternative town water supply for Broken Hill. To provide long-term water security for Broken Hill, the Wentworth to Broken Hill Pipeline will be constructed, which will transfer water from the Murray River to Broken Hill via a route parallel to the Silvery City Highway. The pipeline is currently under construction.

More information about the Broken Hill pipeline can be found on the WaterNSW website at waternsw.com.au/projects/murray-to-broken-hill-pipeline