



Tara Moriarty

Minister for Agriculture
Minister for Regional New South Wales
Minister for Western New South Wales

Rose Jackson

Minister for Housing, Minister for Homelessness,
Minister for Water, Minister for Mental Health,
Minister for Youth and Minister for the North Coast

Media Release

Innovative technology installed in Menindee to restore native fish passages

Thursday, 6 March 2025

Images & diagrams available: <https://spaces.hightail.com/space/u0dWua0wX2>

The Minns Labor Government is trialling *Fishheart*; a state-of-the-art temporary fish passage technology in the Lower Darling-Baaka River near Menindee, western NSW.

The goal of this initiative is to test options to connect the Northern and Southern Basin and reduce the accumulation of fish, as part of the Government's response to the Office of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer (OCSE) independent review into the March 2023 mass fish kill.

The NSW Government continues to make good progress in addressing the recommendations identified in the OSCE report, with 10 of the 26 actions we've committed to now complete and the remaining 16 underway funded under the \$25 million Restoring the Darling-Baaka River Program.

One of the key actions the NSW Government has committed to is a \$6.52 million trial of new temporary fish passage technology at Menindee.

Australian native fish need to migrate to feed, breed and seek new habitat but due to the introduction of barriers to fish passage, like dams and weirs, fish migration pathways have been impacted.

Currently in the Lower Darling-Baaka, fish can only migrate upstream as far as Lake Wetherell and Menindee Main Weir. The *Fishheart* unit is a floating hydraulic fishway system designed to assist fish moving over existing barriers. Construction commenced to install the Fishheart unit to the Lake Wetherell outlet regulator in December 2024.

Work continued over the summer, with the technology being lowered into the Lower Darling-Baaka River in late January 2025. Calibration and testing of the Fishheart is currently underway.

The *Fishheart* unit works by attracting fish into the fishway and then using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to detect and collect fish in the chambers, counting fish, gathering data before moving fish up and over barriers like the Lake Wetherell outlet regulator.

This is the first time that this innovative technology will be trialled at this scale on Australian inland freshwater fish and builds on *Fishheart's* work in Europe and the USA that has shown plenty of promise.

The aim of the project is to test options to connect sections of the river, thereby helping move some fish out of the Menindee town weir pool to complete their life cycle and reducing the biomass and associated risks for water quality and fish kills.

Fisheries Scientists from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) Fisheries will conduct the monitoring program, using underwater sonar and video capture technology, plus trapping activities under appropriate permits.

For more information about the project: <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/dpi/fishing/fish-passage-nsw/fish-passage-projects/menindee-tube-fishway-trial>

To read the NSW Government's six-month Darling-Baaka progress report, visit: <https://water.nsw.gov.au/restoring-the-darling-baaka-program>

Minister for Agriculture and Regional NSW, Tara Moriarty said:

“This is the first time that this fishway technology will be trialled under Australian conditions at this scale and on native inland freshwater fish and it demonstrates the commitment of the Minns Labor Government to address environmental issues using innovative approaches, especially in western NSW.

“While there is no one size fits all solution to restore fish passage in the Lower Darling-Baaka River or the Menindee Lakes system, this project aims to use innovative science, data and infrastructure as we promised to do.

“Construction has been progressing through very hot days out at Menindee and we are grateful to all the personnel for their efforts in ensuring the fishway can get operational as soon as possible.

“The *Fishheart* will be trialled for three breeding seasons, to measure its effectiveness in Menindee. But overseas experiences provide strong indicators for success, for moving fish through the fishway safely and hopefully reduce the risks of future fish kills in the Lower Darling-Baaka.”

Minister for Water Rose Jackson said:

“It's fantastic to see the fish passage being trialled in Menindee which is one of the innovative infrastructure solutions proposed to prevent future fish deaths.

“We pledged to take decisive action on water quality in the Darling-Baaka to improve fish health and we are delivering on this promise, with a six-month progress report now available to show the community where we are up to.

“So far, we have developed new water quality triggers, overhauled our emergency response plans, continued to upgrade monitoring and added additional resources while also exploring state-of-the-art infrastructure solutions such as the tube fishway and microbubble technology.

“I'm encouraged by the progress in a short space of time, which the Chief Scientist himself has acknowledged publicly, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

“The reality is this is an incredibly complex river system with significant challenges that won't go away overnight, but we are in a much stronger position to respond to changing conditions than ever before, and we are undoubtedly moving in the right direction.”

MEDIA:

Alastair Walton | Minister Moriarty | 0418 251 229

Elodie Gooden | Minister Jackson | 0488 057 498