

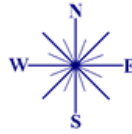
CENTRAL DARLING SHIRE COUNCIL

CONSTITUTED 1 MAY 1959
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SUBMISSION

Independent Review into the February/March 2023 Fish Deaths Menindee

Central Darling Shire Council is grateful for the help and support of numerous government and other agencies during the most recent Menindee Fish deaths event which is under review.

The scale of the fish kill event began to emerge on Friday on social media and reports from ABC Broken Hill.

It was obvious that the incident was going to be beyond Council's ability to manage and that on ground enquires by the Administrator Bob Stewart revealed a high-risk event in terms of water quality and public health particularly if the Menindee town water supply was compromised.

At this time efforts were made to reach out to the State River Managers to determine what the likely response would be. The response was that Council would have to deal with it and coordinate the clean-up.

This approach was rejected, and efforts immediately on the Friday night initiated to have the incident managed and coordinated under the State Emergency Management Arrangements. This was considered necessary given:

- The remoteness of the event In Far Western NSW and the fact that a high level of management and coordination was going to be required.
- That the event would require a multiagency approach.
- That the event would attract a high level of media and community interest given the history of Fish kill events and river Management Issues of the lower Darling River. Added to this It occurred during the State Election cycle and due to the nature of the disaster it was always going to be a high-profile issue.
- The limited resources of Central Darling Shire to cope with the response required.

The establishment of the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) on Saturday March 18, 2023, under the direction of Assistant Commissioner Greentree was a significant step.

The fact that the EOC was established on the Saturday made all the difference to the coordination and management of the situation. All the various agencies that had a responsibility, or role to play in the fish deaths, were able to come together and quickly start planning/activating the response relating to

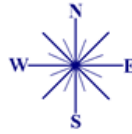
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water quality issues for people in Menindee and properties surrounding the Main Weir pool, as well as managing the clean-up of dead fish.

The effort which went into the response was essential to the outcome with many emergency management meetings held online and involving high level authorities coming together for decision making.

Understandably the incident caused stress and anxiety within the Menindee community. The Community Meetings provided information to residents about water quality and updated people about what was being done and allowed for.

Regular updates distributed via Police Media and the Department of Planning and Environment were also an important part of keeping people informed. The council also provided regular updates via avenues including the electronic sign at Menindee, printed material distributed locally, Council website, email, and Facebook.

With Police Media being the central communications point for media inquiries this had many benefits including avoiding the risk of mixed messages and therefore increased confusion within the community. The teamwork between government agencies and Police Media was exemplary and the system worked efficiently with collaboration being outstanding.

Regarding how things were handled there are lessons to be learnt from the EOC and Police Media (communications centre) that could be used as a benchmark for future emergency management incidents if this sort of situation was to occur again either in Menindee or elsewhere.

In learning from this event Council would like to see the following:

- More discussion around blackwater, following flooding, because not all residents accepted the explanations around blackwater.
- A regular water sampling and monitoring program to be undertaken say from Wilcannia, across the Lakes and downstream that provides real-time information to river residents.
- That Fish Kill events be recognized in the State Emergency Management Plan and that agencies develop response plans and that these be exercised as part of LEMC planning processes.
- A fish ladder over the Main Weir is needed as an intervention to mitigate or avoid this situation occurring in future.

ENDS