Department of Environment
Government of Western Australia

South West Region

Media Statement

May 24, 2005

Lake Dumbleyung has record flows

Record flows and early rains have the State's eastern wheatbelt community guessing whether Lake Dumbleyung will fill with water this winter for the first time this century.

One of the largest salt lakes in the Blackwood River catchment, Lake Dumbleyung has only filled three times in the previous century and last overflowed in 1983.

The lake is recognised as an important wildlife area and is on the National Estate Register, but is better known as the site where Donald Campbell set the world water speed record on New Year's Eve 1964.

The Department of Environment's South West regional Manager Wayne Tingey said the department recorded the highest peak flow yesterday morning.

"Rain from last week's storms penetrated into the eastern wheatbelt which caused the peak flow of 55,217 litres per second, which is equal to filling a 100,000 litre water tank in 1.6 seconds," Mr Tingey said.

"Records from March 1 show the lake was essentially empty at the end of summer, but heavy rains in the Kojonup and Broom Hill area in April resulted in the first flow into the lake from the Coblinine River system.

"Flow peaked during the days between April 1 and 3 and then another peak was recorded on May 10, 2005 after another front crossed the coast at Mandurah and spread south east."

The Department of Environment has been recording flows into the lake since 1996 as part of its salinity program.

During the last two weeks the department has monitored various gauging stations, recording flows where no flow has been recorded before.

Mr Tingey said that while an accurate prediction was difficult, it was likely that the lake would fill before the end of August.

"A flow rate of this level at this time of the year is unusual and as long as normal winter rains continue there is a high probability the lake will fill up," he said.

Lake Dumbleyung has a capacity of 192 gigalitres, about the same as Wellington Dam.

During the last six weeks the lake had already received its average inflow of 30 and 40 GL annual inflow and was now at about 30 per cent of its capacity.

A series of lake systems from Dumbleyung to Katanning were also full and were feeding the system.

“The catchment is now wet and any additional rain is likely to result in continued inflow into the system,” Mr Tingey said.

“Salinity in the lake itself is also falling as a result of the inflow, however exact measurements will not be available until later in the season.”

The Department of Environment has been working with the Shire of Dumbleyung for the last four years reviewing salinity risks in the catchment and assessing options for arterial drainage.

The information collected would be used to further the understanding of how the salinity and water levels naturally change in the lake over time.

This analysis will help in assessing the risks and benefits of an arterial system on the lake.

Media Contact: Jean Stewart, 9278 0355.