

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications**  
**Legislation Committee**  
Answers to questions on notice  
**Environment portfolio**

**Question No:** 101  
**Hearing:** Budget Estimates  
**Outcome:** Outcome 4  
**Programme:** Water Efficiency Division  
**Topic:** MENINDEE LAKES  
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**Question Type:** Spoken

**Senator Xenophon asked:**

Senator Birmingham: In the budget presented recently, which we are talking about here, the funding changes that have been made, including the change made to Menindee, are still premised on the fact that we will meet the full task of bridging the gap to the new sustainable diversion limits under the Basin Plan. We will do that within the 1,500 gigalitre cap and with the priority given to infrastructure measures. If we could achieve a greater saving from Menindee, I would love us to; but equally we should not underplay the fact that if we can achieve a 70 gigalitre saving from the infrastructure works at Menindee, or something in that order, that is a very significant part of the remaining challenge. It will be a major contribution.

Senator XENOPHON: It was meant to be about 300 gigalitres, wasn't it?

Senator Birmingham: Two hundred was the figure that has been floated since at least the 2007 election. I am sure that if possible that Mr McLachlan, in his answer to your earlier question, could perhaps provide information on how and why that is a smaller figure today.....

Senator XENOPHON: So I can get that on notice.

**Answer:**

The NSW Government is currently undertaking detailed project planning, design work, technical assessments and stakeholder engagement on an agreed scope of infrastructure works and operational changes that are estimated to reduce average annual evaporation at the Lakes by 80 gigalitres (GL) per year. This level of estimated evaporation savings is expected to minimise the impacts on downstream water users from changes to the Lakes' operations. To achieve higher evaporative savings, higher levels of change would be required to the Lakes' operations, with greater consequential impact on the local community, the environment and downstream water users. No final decisions have been made on any infrastructure or operational changes; these decisions will be subject to the work being undertaken under the current funding agreement.

Technical reports on options for infrastructure and management changes to Menindee Lakes are available on the Department of the Environment website (the *Darling River Water Saving Project Part A and B* and the CSIRO *Darling Water Savings: Options for Environmental Filling No Impacts, Version 2*), <http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/water/rural-water/sustainable-rural-water-use-and-infrastructure/menindee-lakes>.