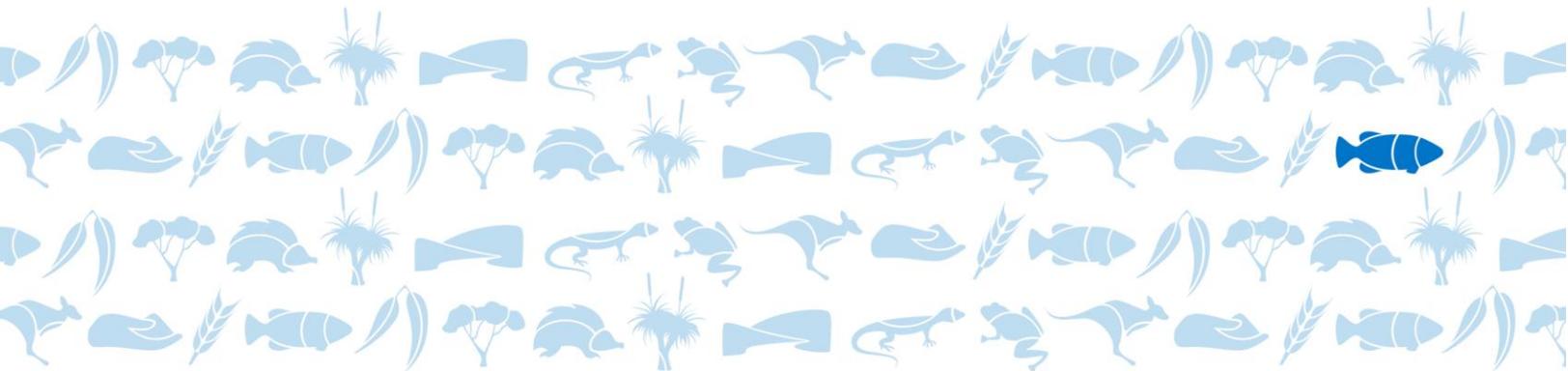


South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board

Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse

CONCEPT STATEMENT – AUGUST 2008



Government of South Australia

South Australian Murray-Darling Basin
Natural Resources Management Board

Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse - Concept Statement

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Concept Statement relates specifically to the Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse in South Australia.

1.1 Background

The *Natural Resources Management Act 2004* (the Act) requires the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board (the Board) to prepare a water allocation plan for each of the prescribed water resources in its area. A water allocation plan is a statutory instrument that will be used for various purposes in the administration of the Act; in particular, to guide the granting of licences to take and use water and to allow for licence transfers.

Before preparing a draft plan, the Board must prepare a Concept Statement. In accordance with section 78(2) of the Act the Concept Statement must set out:

- in general terms, the proposed content of the draft plan;
- matters to be investigated by the Board before preparation of the draft plan; and
- the proposals (if any) for consultation on the draft plan that are in addition to the requirements of the Act.

The intent of the Concept Statement is not to explore issues in detail or provide solutions as this will be done as part of the process of preparing the draft plan.

The current Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse was adopted on 1 July 2002 by the then Minister for Environment and Conservation, the Hon John Hill MP. There were some minor amendments made to this plan on 12 January 2004.

In accordance with the Act, the Board is required to review the current plan within five years. The Board undertook this review in 2007 and determined that a new draft plan needed to be developed. The review process involved a review of all existing policies in the current plan, as well as targeted consultation with River Murray licencees, various regional representative bodies, the Board and Board staff involved with implementing aspects of the current plan, the River Murray Advisory Committee, and representatives from the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation.

This Concept Statement is the beginning of the process to prepare a draft plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse.

1.2 Area covered by the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse

The current plan covers the region referred to as the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse. The River Murray Prescribed Watercourse includes the River Murray Watercourse and other associated watercourses, as defined by the Government Gazette notice dated 10 August 1978, and encompasses the River Murray channel from the Victorian border down to and including Lakes Alexandrina and Albert. The map at the end of this document shows the River Murray Prescribed Area.

2. PROPOSED CONTENT OF THE DRAFT PLAN

The following sections (section 2 – 7) broadly outline the intended content of the draft plan. This proposed content has been generated by:

- a review of the current plan undertaken in 2007;
- consultation with the River Murray Water Allocation Plan Community Advisory Committees, the River Murray Advisory Committee, the SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Groups and the Board; and
- consultation with staff of the NRM Board and the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (providing input on national and state legislation and other policy requirements).

The proposed content of the draft plan is presented in the following sections. Chapter and section headings are provided and the broad content of those sections is detailed in the bullet points.

2.1 Purpose

- A clear and concise statement about the purpose and role of the draft plan.

2.2 Description of the Prescribed Watercourse

- A general description of the prescribed region and its boundaries and management zoning, including a map.
- Potential impacts of past, present and future land use and land use change on water quality and quantity.
- Health and condition of system.

2.3 Water-dependent Ecosystems

- Identification of what are and where are the known water-dependent ecosystems.
- Assessment of the quality, quantity, frequency and timing of water required by the water-dependent ecosystems.
- Assessment of the environmental water requirements and environmental water provisions for water-dependent ecosystems.
- Assessment of environmental impacts of the use of the prescribed resource on the water-dependent ecosystems within the prescribed area.
- Assessment of the environmental impacts of the use of imported and effluent water on the water-dependent ecosystems within the prescribed area.
- Description of the knowledge base and the work required to improve that knowledge base.
- Identification of the environmental and other public benefit outcomes.
- Prioritisation process for providing environmental water to water-dependent ecosystems.

2.4 Assessment of effects on other water resources

- Assessment of the effect of taking and using water from the prescribed watercourse on the quality and quantity of other water resources (includes licensed and non-licensed use)
- If the taking or use of the prescribed resource may result in detrimental effects on other water resources:
 - Analyse the needs of users and water-dependent ecosystems of the other water resources.
 - Identify provisions designed to prevent or reduce the detrimental effects.

2.5 Assessment of capacity of the resource to meet demand

- Assessment of the quality and quantity of the resource.
- Assessment of the risks to the quality and quantity of the resource.
- Assessment of the capacity of the resource to meet the demands for water on a continuing basis, including an indication of the accuracy of the assessment.
- Assessment of the current and future cultural (includes Indigenous) water requirements.
- Identification of the current demands for licensed and non-licensed needs (including stock and domestic use and existing artificial waterbodies).
- Identification of future demands for licensed and non-licensed use (including stock and domestic use).
- Assessment of system demands, including evaporative losses, transmission water requirements and end of system flow requirements.
- Assessment of the water balance including the current and future volume of the available water resource against the current and future volume demand for the available water resource.
- Assessment of the land capacity within the prescribed area to meet current and future water use demands

2.6 Water Allocations/Water Access Entitlements/Consumptive Pools

- Specify the objectives for the policies around consumptive pools, water access entitlements and water allocations.
- Determine or provide a mechanism to determine the consumptive pool or pools.
- Determine or provide a mechanism to determine the number of shares of water access entitlements that will be issued for each consumptive pool.
- Set out reasons when the consumptive pool and the number of shares might be adjusted.
- Establish the rules for available water determinations from each consumptive pool.
- Determine the basis for the allocation methodology for each consumptive pool.
- Establish criteria for determining water allocations, water access entitlements and consumptive pools.
- Assessment of the rates, times and circumstances under which water may be taken from the resource.
- Determine the quantity of water that may be delivered to the area within the prescribed resource boundary.
- Provision for re-allocation of water that has been returned to a consumptive pool where it is within the Murray-Darling Basin CAP diversion volume.
- Provision for allocation of unregulated flows.
- Determine management zone boundaries and the associated management principles and rules.
- Pathway for review of water allocation processes, over allocations and overuse.

2.7 Site Use and Water Resource Works Approvals

- Specify the objectives for the policies around site use approvals and water resource works approvals (and delivery capacity entitlement where appropriate).
- Determine criteria for site use and water resource works approvals including:
 - Efficient taking, use and storage of water.
 - Managing negative effects of water use (i.e: salinity).
- Assessment of the rates, times and circumstances under which water may be taken from the resource.

- Determine management zone boundaries.
- Provisions for environmental water use, including real time and long-term salinity and other water quality impacts of environmental water use.
- Provision for stock and domestic uses.
- Provision for the variation of site use and water resource works approvals.

2.8 Transfers of Water Access Entitlements and Water Allocations

- Specify the objectives for the policies around the transfer of water access entitlements and water allocations.
- Determine the quantity of water that may be delivered to different management zone areas within the prescribed resource boundary.
 - Criteria for transfers both intrastate and interstate.
- Determine management zone boundaries.
- Provision for review of water transfer processes and policies.
- Provision for transfers between consumptive pools.

2.9 Permits

- Identification of water-affecting activities requiring a permit (may include dams, forestry, importation of water, use of effluent, mining, forestry, well construction and aquifer storage and recovery).
- Policies and criteria for granting permits.

2.10 Taking and use of other water resources

- Provisions relating to the taking and use of water from another resource, if this is likely to affect the management of the prescribed resource (for example importation of water from another catchment such as the Eastern Mt Lofty Ranges).

2.11 Monitoring

- Provisions for the regular monitoring, evaluation and publication of status reports on the condition of the water resource including the health of water-dependent ecosystems.
- Provisions for the regular monitoring of the prescribed resource to assess capacity to meet demands for water on a continuing basis.
- Appropriate monitoring and evaluation, including performance indicators, and reporting requirements at a regional and property scale.
- Identification of knowledge gaps and further research needs.
- Review of monitoring and evaluation outcomes from the current plan.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS TO THE RESOURCE

There are a number of potential risks to the resource that have been identified. Some of these risks can be managed through the water allocation plan and some cannot, but they must be acknowledged in developing the policies for the plan. The identified risks include (but are not limited to):

- Climate change.
- Decreased water availability in SA.

- Floods.
- Upstream taking and use of the resource (outside of South Australia).
- Declining water quality (particularly due to reduced flows).
- Increased demand upon the resource (due to urban growth etc).
- Increased interception activities.
- Current and future groundwater use impacting on the River Murray.
- Land Use Change in the region.
- Changing knowledge about system requirements and environmental requirements.

To address the impact of these potential risks the draft plan may set triggers for highlighting changes to the resource and identify responses once these triggers are activated (where appropriate).

4. ASSESSMENTS TO BE UNDERTAKEN

There have been a number of assessments undertaken since the release of the current plan in 2002. Further assessments to be undertaken during the development of the draft plan will cover a number of key areas as outlined below:

4.1 Climate change/capacity of resource to meet demands

- Risks to the resource due to climate change.
- Estimates of the current levels of water use.
- Assessment of the current and future water demands and the capacity of the resource to meet those demands.
- Determination of the sustainable extraction volumes.
- Determine hydrological characteristics of the prescribed area (ie: rainfall, evaporation).

4.2 Environmental Assessments

- Determine current health and needs of water-dependent ecosystems and other environmental assets, including those that provide Indigenous and other public benefits.

4.3 Broader Risk Assessments

- Assessment of the impact of various land uses and land use changes on the prescribed resource.
- Assessment of the interaction of the prescribed resource with other water resources (ie: the interaction between the River Murray and Eastern Mt Lofty Ranges prescribed resources).
- Assessment of the effects of water use from the prescribed resource on other water resources and within the prescribed area (both within and outside the Board's region).
- Assess the significance of potential risks from a range of water-affecting activities.

4.4 Socio-economic Assessments

- Determine areas of Indigenous cultural significance.
- Assessment of the impact of predicted demographic changes (i.e. expanding urban and rural areas and their reliance on the River Murray for water supply).
- Assessment of the social and economic impacts of changing water security.

4.5 Policy Assessments

- Determine appropriate management area boundaries.
- Evaluating the salinity zoning boundaries and associated policies, for both existing and future irrigation areas.

5. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT PLAN AMENDMENTS

To the extent that the regional natural resources management plan does not so provide, a water allocation plan can identify any polices in a Council Development Plan within the region, that in the opinion of the Board should be reviewed under the *Development Act 1993* in order to improve the relationship between the polices in the Development Plan and the polices in the water allocation plan.

Any changes proposed to Development Plans will be identified and defined in consultation with Local Government and Planning SA during the development of the draft plan. Any changes proposed to a Development Plan will not affect the completion of the draft plan.

6. LINKS TO OTHER LEGISLATION AND AGREEMENTS

The draft water allocation plan will have regard to the provisions of other relevant Acts and strategies including (but not limited to) South Australia's Strategic Plan, the State Natural Resources Management Plan 2006, the *Environment Protection Act 1993*, the *Development Act 1993* and the relevant

Development Plans, the *River Murray Act 2003* and the Murray Darling Basin Agreement 1992, the *Federal Water Act 2007*, the 2008 Intergovernmental Agreement on Murray-Darling Basin Reform, the *Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, the *Native Vegetation Act 1991*, the *Groundwater (Qualco Sunlands) Control Act 2000*, the *Irrigation Act 1994* and the *Native Title Amendment Act 1998*.

The draft plan will also have regard for the Intergovernmental Agreement on a National Water Initiative, particularly the requirements in relation to water access entitlements, cultural water requirements, environmental and other public benefit outcomes, water planning frameworks and the setting of sustainable levels of extraction.

Within the prescribed area there are sites of ecological significance that are listed under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (commonly referred to as Ramsar sites) that are also recognised as sites of national environmental significance under the *Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Appropriate links with the requirements of this Act and other relevant management plans for sites of ecological significance will be considered during the development of the draft plan.

Sites of Indigenous significance requiring water and areas with Native Title claims or Indigenous Land Use Agreements will also be acknowledged and addressed where appropriate in the policies of the draft plan.

There are a number of other strategies that will be considered during the development of the draft plan including the South Australian River Murray Salinity Strategy 2001 – 2015, the South Australian Environmental Flows Strategy, Living Murray Icon Sites Environmental Management Plans, the CSIRO Murray-Darling Basin Sustainable Yields Assessment and other relevant Land and Water Management Plans.

7. CONSULTATION STRATEGY

To develop a draft plan there are a number of statutory consultation requirements (detail provided below). The Board will be undertaking a significant amount of consultation in addition to the minimum requirements in the Act. To facilitate the development of the draft plan, consultation and community engagement strategies will be developed. The Board will be seeking input into these strategies from three Water Allocation Plan Community Advisory Committees based geographically along the length of the River Murray, the Natural Resources Management (NRM) Groups, the Board and the River Murray Advisory Committee. There will be a range of methods used to consult and communicate with the community including:

- advertising
- public events
- consultation workshops
- stakeholder briefings
- discussion/information papers
- media
- websites.

The Board will provide detailed information about consultation arrangements during the development of the draft plan and other opportunities to get involved, primarily through the Board's website and newsletter and the regional media.

The statutory consultation requirements are detailed below.

Concept Statement: There is a statutory requirement under section 78 (3) of the Act to consult on the development of the Concept Statement with NRM Groups who may have a direct interest. Once the Concept Statement has been prepared it must then be referred for comment under section 78 (4) to:

- Any Government Department or Agency with a direct interest.
- The Natural Resources Management Council.
- Local Government in the Board's region.
- The public.

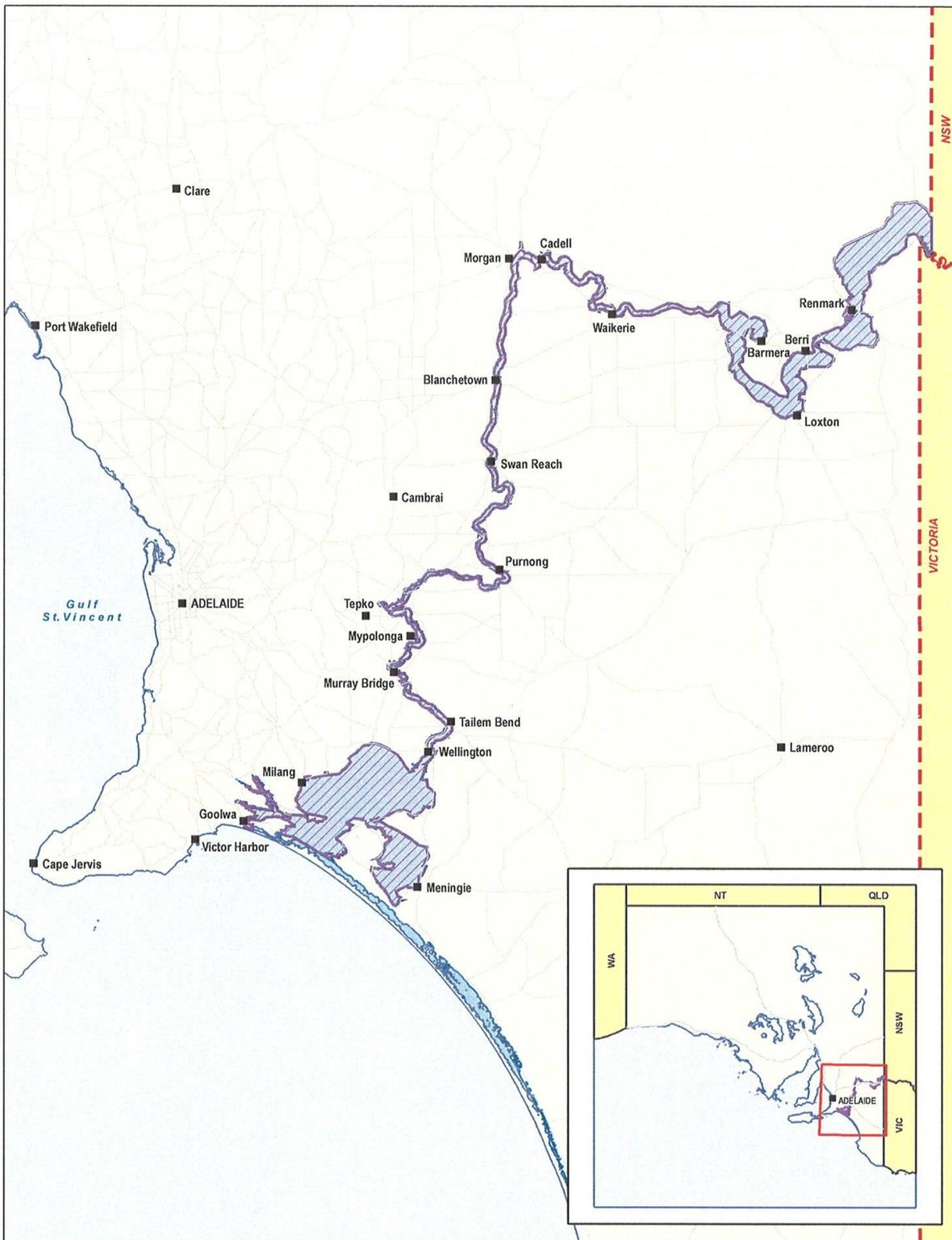
The minimum period for making comment on the Concept Statement is six weeks, after which time the Concept Statement may be amended to incorporate any relevant comments received during the consultation phase.

Draft plan: The Act specifies that the community must be consulted on the draft plan (under section 79 (6)(b)) and can make written submissions for a period of no less than two months following the draft plan's release. An invitation to attend a public meeting in relation to the draft plan must also be advertised in a newspaper circulating throughout the State, and a newspaper circulating in the Board's region.

Other relevant stakeholders, apart from the Minister for the River Murray, as detailed under section 79 (6)(a) have a period of four weeks to furnish a response. These stakeholders include but are not limited to:

- Government Departments or Agencies that have a direct interest.
- The Natural Resources Management Council.
- Peak Bodies.
- NRM Groups.
- Local Councils in the Board's region.
- SA Water.

RIVER MURRAY PRESCRIBED WATERCOURSE



- Towns
- Roads
- River Murray Prescribed Watercourse



0 25 50 km

Map Production: Resource Information Group
Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation

Map Projection: MGA 54
Map Datum: GDA94

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