

Coorong Partnership

Communique No. 21

2 February 2023



The 21st meeting of the [Coorong Partnership](#) was held on 2 February 2023 at Coorong District Council, Tailem Bend.

The Department for Environment and Water (DEW) provided an update on the [Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin](#) (HCHB) Program and informed the Partnership of a number of new staff joining the Program in 2023. The Partnership welcomed incoming HCHB staff, including new HCHB Program Leader Dr Nadine Kelly and new Manager, Program Coordination and Development Lisa Stribley, who were present at the meeting as observers.

The Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) is currently undertaking a due diligence assessment of DEW's Business Case for Phase 2 of HCHB, and DCCEEW has almost completed its due diligence assessment of DEW's proposal for a project at Lake Hawdon North near Robe.

It was noted that the Goyder Institute for Water Research was awarded the R&D Excellence Award for the HCHB Research Plan in the South Australia Division at the [Australian Water Association \(AWA\) Water Awards](#). DEW was a finalist for an award for the HCHB First Nations Partnerships Project.

The Partnership provided feedback on aspects of the draft Coorong Restoration Roadmap, including some of the shortlisted options slated for further investigation under the [Coorong Infrastructure Investigations Project](#). This document is scheduled to be open for public consultation in the coming weeks.

DEW provided a summary of the 2022/23 River Murray [flood event](#), including on-ground observations from the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth (CLLMM) region. [Barrage flows](#) from the river remain unregulated and this is playing an important role in helping flush salt from the Coorong and Lower Lakes out of the Murray Mouth. The depth of the Murray Mouth was currently recorded at approximately 11m. Flood waters are having a beneficial impact on wetland vegetation communities such as Lignum and Samphire, and various species of frogs, fish and waterbird species, including pelicans and swans, are thriving.

Water levels in the Coorong North and South lagoons are currently very high and there has been a large reduction in salinity. Ecological observations indicate positive signs for the Coorong food web, such as increased numbers of macroinvertebrates in sediments and the increased presence of *Ruppia*. Conversely, some species of shorebirds, such as Fairy Terns are having to find alternative sites to nest due to high-water levels. The Partnership expressed interest in continuing to be informed about the impact of the flood on the Coorong, particularly the impacts to nutrient levels in the South Lagoon.

It was noted that the flood event provides a unique and exciting opportunity to learn more about the ecological state of the region in its current condition. DEW is seeking funding for research specific to the ecological impacts from the flood on the Riverland and CLLMM regions. DEW continues to closely monitor water levels and [flows](#).

Landscape SA Limestone Coast provided an update on the [Our Coorong, Our Coast project](#), with the project expected to be completed in mid-2023.

HCHB provided an update on the progress of the [On-Ground Works](#) (OGW) projects. It was noted that the flood and high lake levels have resulted in temporary access issues at both Tolderol and Teringie. Procurement for works at Teringie are now underway following approval of a revised budget. Survey works are currently being planned for Tolderol Game Reserve. The OGW team is hopeful that works can begin at Teringie and Tolderol in the second half of 2023, conditions permitting. Planned works for Waltowa wetland remain on hold while discussions with stakeholders continue.

Partnership members noted that there have been very positive signs for tourism in the region with operators such as the Spirit of the Coorong recording record numbers of visitors in January 2023. The Partnership noted that it was encouraging to see that tourists are eager to visit the region.

Further Information

The next meeting of the Partnership is scheduled for 6 April 2023 at Coorong District Council, Tailem Bend.

For further information or to receive regular updates about [Project Coorong](#) please email projectcoorong@sa.gov.au.