Shorebird and Wetland Habitat program

Fact sheet

Improving the hydrology of Lake George



Lake George is a 5,900-hectare coastal lagoon near Beachport on South Australia's Limestone Coast. It is culturally significant to the Boandik/Bun-gan¬ditj people (First Nations of the South East) and is highly valued by the local community for recreation, tourism and nature-based activities, including camping, fishing, windsurfing and birdwatching.

Located approximately 120 kilometres from the Coorong South Lagoon, Lake George plays an important role in supporting shorebirds across the region, providing critical habitat for resident and migratory shorebirds and waterbirds, particularly during periods of drought when other wetlands may be under stress.

Each year, migratory shorebirds travel thousands of kilometres from locations such as Arctic Siberia along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway to feed in Lake George's mudflats and saltmarsh habitats. These areas provide abundant food sources, including invertebrates such as snails, crustaceans and worms, helping the birds build the energy reserves they need for their return migration and breeding season.

What is happening

The Shorebird and Wetland Habitat program is delivering works to improve the hydrology of Lake George and support the long-term health of this important wetland ecosystem.

Investigations have identified surplus water within the Reedy Creek Mount Hope Drain system that can be redirected to Lake George, rather than flowing out to sea though Lake Frome at Southend. This will improve the ability to supplement declining water levels and maintain valuable wetland habitat.

The project has been split into two stages, with Stage 1 currently funded and works commencing to address Lake George's deteriorating ecosystem, while future funding is sought.

Stage 1

Stage 1 works ($2.85 million) will help maintain water levels at Lake George by reconnecting the Old Reedy Creek M Drain to the Reedy Creek Mount Hope Drain with an inlet regulator that can accommodate up to 100 megalitres of water per day during periods of high flow.

Stage 1 works include:

- refurbishment the Old Reedy Creek M Drain, with minor vegetation removal, crossing replacements and channel reshaping
- construction of a new connection between the Old Reedy Creek M Drain and the Reedy Creek Mount Hope Drain at Furner
- installation of a new regulator at the southern end of the Old Reedy Creek M Drain.

The new regulator is a critical part of the project and will enable better management of flows to Lake George, while ensuring environmental flows continue to support downstream systems, including Mullins Swamp and Lake Frome Conservation Parks. The new infrastructure will enable up to 100 ML/day to be diverted to Lake George during periods of high flow, helping maintain water levels and improve wetland health.

Following completion, the South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board will take over management of the infrastructure for ongoing seasonal operations.

Works are scheduled to start in late 2026 and are expected to take approximately three to six months, subject to weather and site conditions.

Stage 2

Stage 2 involves the construction of an additional regulator on the Reedy Creek Mount Hope Drain. This will provide the ability to divert up to 250 ML/day of flows to Lake George and enable the amount of water diverted to be managed independent of high flows.

Stage 2 works have the potential to increase habitat by up to 143 ha, with a considerable portion of this having a depth of between 0 cm and 10 cm, which is suitable for shorebird feeding and wading behaviour.

Funding for Stage 2 is still being investigated.



Red-necked stints foraging on the shores of Lake George

Why the project is important

Lake George has experienced a steady decline in water levels since the Millennium Drought due to reduced rainfall and changes to the region's hydrology. The lake now loses more water through evaporation than it receives from rainfall and seasonal inflows.

Previously, freshwater inflows from Drain M helped sustain water levels, but these flows have reduced over time. As a result, Lake George has experienced declining water quality, fish deaths, algal blooms, habitat loss, reduced waterbird numbers, suspension of recreational fishing and impacts on tourism and community use.

Without intervention, these environmental pressures are expected to increase, threatening the ecological health of the lake and the benefits it provides to wildlife, visitors and the local community.

The project will:

- improve water levels and water quality
- increase habitat for shorebirds and waterbirds
- support healthy wetland ecosystems and food chains
- help protect recreational and tourism values
- reduce the volume of freshwater discharged to the sea
- contribute to the long-term resilience of one of the Limestone Coast's most significant wetlands.

By keeping more water in the landscape, the project will help preserve the environmental, social and cultural values of Lake George for future generations.

Cultural value

The lands and waters surrounding Lake George are traditional Country for the Boandik (Bunganditj) Nation, who have managed and sustained this region for thousands of generations.

Lake George is a place of cultural significance for them, providing important places for totems and cultural practices.

The wetland forms part of a broader cultural landscape that has supported First Nations communities for thousands of years through its rich natural resources, biodiversity and connection to Country. Protecting and restoring the health of Lake George will preserve these important cultural values while supporting opportunities for ongoing cultural connection, knowledge sharing and care for Country.

The project is being delivered by the Department for Environment and Water and the South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board in partnership with Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation, recognising the importance of Aboriginal knowledge and involvement in caring for this significant wetland.



Lake Frome and Mullins Swamp

The environmental water requirements of Lake Frome and Mullins Swamp remain a priority, and any water diverted to Lake George will be balanced with the water needs of these two sites.

Operational guidelines for the regulators will help ensure the best use of available water in the Reedy Creek Mount Hope drainage system, while reducing discharge of water to sea at the southern end of the system.

More information

If you have any questions or require more information, please contact the Shorebird and Wetland Habitat team.

Email: DEW.ShorebirdsAndWetlands@sa.gov.au

Web: www.environment.sa.gov.au/SaWH

For information on H5 bird flu in South Australia, visit birdflu.sa.gov.au

This project is part of the Shorebird and Wetland Habitat program, funded by the Australian Government and delivered by the Government of South Australia, to enhance the quality and availability of shorebird habitat and wetland ecosystems across the Coorong, Lower Lakes, Murray Mouth and South East regions of South Australia. The Department for Environment and Water is working collaboratively with the South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board and Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation to deliver the project.