

PROJECT COORONG

Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin



Welcome to the March 2021 update for Project Coorong's Healthy Coorong Healthy Basin (HCHB) program. In this edition we are reporting on the Project Coorong World Wetlands Day Science Forum held on 2 February 2021 and take a look at what's been going on in the First Nations Partnerships project. There is also an update on the first Coorong Partnership meeting of 2021.

If you would like more information on the HCHB Program or have questions on anything contained in this update please contact the program team at projectcoorong@sa.gov.au

The Coorong, connected waters and surrounding lands have sustained many unique First Nations cultures and economies since time immemorial. The Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin program acknowledges the range of First Nations rights, interests and obligations for the Coorong and connected waterways and the cultural connections that exist between Ngarrindjeri and First Nations of the South East peoples across the region and seeks to support their equitable engagement.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that the following document may contain images and names of people who have died.

Project Coorong World Wetlands Day Science Forum 2021



As communities across the globe came together to celebrate World Wetlands Day on Tuesday 2 February 2021, around 170 people took part – in person and online – in the Project Coorong Science Forum.

World Wetlands Day aims to raise global awareness about the vital role of wetlands all over the world and celebrates the contribution of wetlands to the quantity and quality of freshwater on our planet.

The Forum, held at the South Lakes Golf Club in Goolwa, was an opportunity for the community to hear from First Nations, scientists and researchers on the theme **Science Informing Action**.

Ngarrindjeri provided a Welcome to Country and presented on how everything is connected. This theme of how everything is connected was reflected on throughout the day in each of the presenter's topics.

Presenters shared their previous understanding of the state of the Coorong, how the Coorong system is changing, new research findings, and how research is informing management of the Coorong to shift it to a healthier state. Topics included First Nations knowledge, Coorong water quality, aquatic plants, invertebrates, fish and waterbirds, Lower Lakes ecology, climate adaptation, and modelling and science integration. A livestream function allowed people as far away as Sydney and Canberra to get involved in the day by sending in their questions to be answered by the researchers in real time.

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, Jody Swirepik, welcomed attendees and shared her thoughts on the importance of the Ramsar status for the Coorong and Lakes Alexandrina and Albert wetland.

With the Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin infrastructure shortlisting recently announced, DEW also shared with the community the future directions of the Coorong Infrastructure Investigations Project.

The Forum aimed to help increase local community understanding of issues within the Coorong and how these projects are working together to fill key knowledge gaps in the area so was a really important way of building strong relationships and shared knowledge.

The video of the forum will soon be available on the Project Coorong website.



A livestream allowed people at home or in their office to be part of the Science Forum.

First Nations On-Country Monitoring

Cultural Rangers within the Coorong National Park have commenced working alongside [Goyder Institute for Water Research](#) researchers to undertake on-country monitoring along the Coorong, looking at birds, water and freshwater soaks.

The rangers will be looking at the chestnut teal, red-necked avocet, and sharp-tailed sandpiper. The numbers and movement of these birds are important for understanding how they move through the landscape, including connections between waterbirds in the Coorong and other wetlands in the broader landscape, and the habitats that are being utilised by the species.

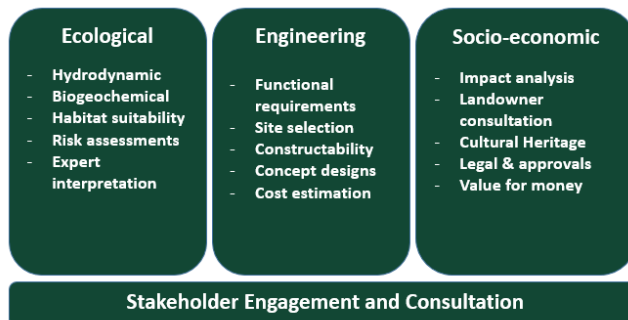


From left to right, the chestnut teal, red-necked avocet, and sharp-tailed sandpiper will be monitored as part of the on-country monitoring program. Photo supplied and taken by John Gitsham.

Coorong Infrastructure Investigations

In December 2020 the Minister for Environment and Water, the Hon David Speirs MP, announced that the following five infrastructure options had been shortlisted and will now undergo a detailed feasibility assessment:

- A connection between the Coorong South Lagoon and Southern Ocean
- Coorong Lagoon dredging to improve connectivity
- Lake Albert to Coorong Connector
- Further augmentation of South East Flows to the Coorong
- Additional automated barrage gates.



It's important to note this is just an investigation into feasibility at this stage, not a decision to proceed with any particular option.

Throughout 2021, DEW will objectively assess the technical feasibility and the environmental, social and cultural benefits and impacts of these concepts. As shown in the infographic above, stakeholder engagement will be conducted throughout the feasibility investigations.

These investigations will help us determine the options that are likely to have the best benefit for the Coorong. For those options deemed feasible and desirable, implementation business case(s) will be developed in late 2021 for Australian Government funding consideration. It is envisaged that phase two of HCHB will implement those long-term management options deemed feasible from 2022 – 2024, pending approval of funding from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

How can I get involved?

We are going to be involving First Nations, local communities and the broader South Australian community at each assessment phase of the project. Future opportunities will be listed on our Project Coorong [“Get Involved”](#) page, circulated via the Project Coorong email list, and updates will be available in future editions of this community newsletter.

The Coorong Partnership resumes for 2021

The eighth [Coorong Partnership](#) meeting was held on 4 February 2021 at Tailem Bend, hosted by [Coorong District Council](#).

The focus of the meeting was a presentation from the [National Parks and Wildlife Service](#) (NPWS) on nature-based tourism and economic development opportunities for the region. The Partnership welcomed the advice that NPWS is leading a new project to develop a Coorong Visitor Experience Master Plan in 2021 and looks forward to being involved in its development going forward. NPWS also provided an update on recent tourism trends, most notably the increase in demand for intrastate and domestic tourism opportunities. In December 2020, South Australia saw a 77 per cent rise in National Park entry numbers compared to December 2019, with the Coorong National Park experiencing a 46% increase in park-based camping. NPWS advised that there have been strong expressions of interest in the [Nature-Based Tourism Co-Investment Fund](#) from across South Australia, which will remain open until June 2022 (or until exhausted). The Partnership discussed the need to provide a more diverse range of accommodation options for a broader range of travellers to the Coorong. The Partnership were unanimous that further tourism and economic development of the Coorong needs to be balanced with protecting the natural environment and respecting and promoting First Nations culture.

The [Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin](#) Coorong Infrastructure Investigations Project presented some preliminary hydrodynamic modelling including a base “do nothing” case and three of the five infrastructure options that are being investigated to potentially improve the health of the Coorong South Lagoon, including a connection between the Coorong South Lagoon and Southern Ocean; Coorong Lagoon dredging to improve connectivity; and a Lake Albert to Coorong Connector. These models were summarised and will now be further refined. The Partnership noted that the preliminary hydrodynamic modelling was only the first step in an extensive and iterative feasibility process. The Partnership looks forward to ongoing input into the investigations progress through 2021.

The Limestone Coast Landscape Board provided an update on the Our Coorong | Our Coast program, which is improving the ecological character of the Coorong and enhancing habitat for threatened species along the Limestone Coast such as the hooded plover, orange-bellied parrot, eastern curlew, Malleefowl (right) and other migratory shorebirds. The Partnership noted the continuing efforts of the Limestone Coast Landscapes Board in tackling land-based threats to biodiversity.

The Partnership will next convene on 25 March 2021 at Alexandrina Council in Goolwa.



*Malleefowl - Photo by Lyn Pedler
supplied by the Murraylands and
Riverland Landscape Board.*

Water Resource Optimisation

The Coorong Water Quality Monitoring program has purchased four new instruments to continuously measure water quality, with installation planned for April 2021. These instruments will provide real-time, telemetered information on a number of different water quality parameters, including: salinity, temperature, turbidity, pH, and dissolved oxygen. They will be installed at four key Coorong locations; Snipe Point, Parnka Point, Long Point and Pelican Point.

The manual collection of water quality samples at 3-weekly intervals from 20 locations in the Coorong continued throughout 2020 and will remain in place until at least June 2022. These samples are analysed in a laboratory and will be used to validate and verify the Coorong's ecological models.

Development of the software management tool called the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth Management Action Database (or CLLMM MAD) continues through its early phases. The CLLMM MAD will enable resource managers to store the results of their management actions as well as the steps they took to implement them. Doing this allows resource managers to review previous management actions and their outcomes in order to improve future decisions. The ability for management decisions to be viewed by the community is planned for the CLLMM MAD and input to this functionality will be sought later in 2021.

Another software management tool, known as the Coorong Automated Forecasting System (or CAFS) will commence development in March 2021. This management tool will capture weather condition, water quality information – from the Coorong water quality monitoring network described above – and ecological modelling to forecast when and how much water should be released through the barrages for the best environmental benefit. Similar to the CLLMM MAD, the ability for this forecasting information to be publically available is planned and feedback from the community on the suitability of that information will also be sought later in 2021, once development has progressed sufficiently.

On-Ground Works

The HCHB On-Ground Works project has submitted a Regional Bird Refugia implementation proposal to the Australian Government for funding consideration. The proposal seeks to deliver wetland improvement projects at three sites around the Lower Lakes: Tolderol Game Reserve, Waltowa and Teringie. The project proposes to install new or renew old infrastructure, including culverts, regulators, and pipes, to improve water management for the provision of shorebird habitat. More information on this project will be provided in future updates.

If you have any questions on this update or anything else related to Project Coorong, please contact projectcoorong@sa.gov.au

The South Australian Government's Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin Program is jointly funded by the Australian and South Australian governments.