



**Government
of South Australia**

Department of Water,
Land and Biodiversity
Conservation

SAVE THE RIVER MURRAY FUND ANNUAL REPORT 2004-05

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For further information about the Save the River Murray Fund, or the achievements listed in this Annual Report, please contact The Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation) on (08) 8463 6800 or visit the website at www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au

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Prepared for the South Australian Parliament

By the Minister for the River Murray

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PROGRAM STATEMENT FOR
THE PERIOD ENDED
30 JUNE 2005

INTRODUCTION

The Save the River Murray Fund was established under the *Waterworks Act 1932* on 24 July 2003. The Fund is held by the Minister for the River Murray and administered by the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation on behalf of the Minister.

The Save the River Murray Levy was introduced on 1 October 2003 under the *Waterworks Save the River Murray Levy Amendment Bill 2003*. The levy is charged to all SA Water customers across South Australia, both residential and non-residential and is indexed annually.

"South Australia's Strategic Plan sets a target of 500 GL in additional environmental flows by 2008 as a first step towards improving sustainability in the Murray-Darling Basin, with a longer-term target to reach 1500 GL by 2018."

The Save the River Murray Levy contributes to a program of works and measures to address the declining health of the River Murray in South Australia and increasing community demands for a high security of good quality water for urban and irrigation purposes. The program, known as the River Murray Improvement Program, is integrated within a larger Murray-Darling Basin Initiative program of works and measures and the South Australian River Murray Salinity Strategy.

The program contributes to the delivery of three high level outcomes:

- Improved environmental health of the River Murray system in South Australia;
- High security of water of acceptable quality for irrigation in South Australia at an appropriate price; and
- High security of water quality for urban water supplies.

The program also contributes to a range of targets identified in South Australia's Strategic Plan including:

- Exceed Australia's average productivity growth within 10 years (T1.10);
- Treble the value of South Australia's export income to \$25 billion by 2013 (T1.12);
- Increase visitor expenditure in South Australia's tourism industry to \$5 billion by 2008 (T1.13);
- Increase investment in strategic areas of infrastructure to support and achieve the targets in South Australia's Strategic Plan (T1.16);
- Increase environmental flows by 500 GL in the River Murray by 2008, with a longer-term target to reach 1500 GL by 2018 (T3.1);
- Lose no species (T3.8);
- Reduce our ecological footprint to reduce the impact of human settlements and activities within 10 years (T3.10);
- Have based in South Australia either the headquarters or a major node of at least 40% of all Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs), Major National Research Facilities and Centres of Excellence within five years (T4.8); and
- Build and maintain infrastructure to develop and support sustainable communities in regions (T5.11).

In 2004-05 a total of \$17.6 million was received into the Fund and \$10.719 million was spent from the Fund on works and measures under the River Murray Improvement Program.

The balance is to fund commitments relating to water quality and South Australia's contribution of \$65 million over five years towards the \$500 million package to return 500 GL of water to the river system.

The annual report framework is presented to highlight achievements in the following five key outcome areas:

1. RETURNING WATER TO THE RIVER
2. SECURING WATER RIGHTS
3. PROTECTING THE RIVER
4. ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT
5. BUILDING CAPACITY

1. RETURNING WATER TO THE RIVER

South Australia's Strategic Plan sets a target of 500 GL in additional environmental flows by 2008 as a first step towards improving sustainability in the Murray-Darling Basin, with a longer-term target to reach 1500 GL by 2018.

Six priority sites, generally referred to as Significant Ecological Assets (SEA), including three that are wholly or in part in South Australia, have been selected as a focus for the first 500 GL and comprise the Chowilla (Lindsay-Wallpolla) Floodplain, The Murray Mouth, Coorong and Lower Lakes, Barmah-Millewa Forest, Gunbower and Koondrook-Perricoota Forests, Hattah Lakes and the River Murray Channel.

Draft asset management plans for each of the priority South Australian sites have been developed, to ensure that this additional water is used to achieve the best outcomes possible.

During 2004-05, funds provided through the *Save the River Murray Fund* have enabled the following achievements to be made in this area.

During 2004-05, 14 priority River Red Gum sites were watered on the Chowilla Floodplain.



“Security of water rights relates to both the quantity and quality of water available and is equally important for irrigation, other water based industries and the environment.”

Key Achievements in 2004-05

- Fourteen priority sites were watered on the Chowilla floodplain, based on their ecological significance, level of stress and the number of trees predicted to respond. Total area watered is around 350 hectares and include over 6 000 stressed trees.
- Positive responses were observed at all sites. For example, at Werta Wert 93% of trees were classed as stressed in August 2004, with 90% of those stressed trees developing new leaves and now classed as healthy.
- Water was provided for the watering projects through a partnership between the South Australian Government and the NSW Murray Wetlands Working Group.
- Other watering projects were undertaken at Paringa Island Wetland and Riversleigh Wetland, using water donated by local irrigators. In addition, an area at Piggy Creek near Katarapko was watered using a water donation from Timbercorp. Positive responses to the waterings have been observed at all sites.
- Extensive monitoring of the impacts of watering projects is ongoing. Monitoring data will be used to guide future decisions on the best way to use environmental flows.
- Stages 1 and 2 of the Chowilla hydrodynamic model have been completed, including preliminary model design and identification of data needs and the collection of new data on flow rates, bathymetry and creek cross-sections. It is expected that the model will be completed in September 2005.
- Public consultation on the draft environmental flows strategy for South Australia was completed and the final document will be considered by the South Australian Government in September 2005. The strategy sets directions and priorities for the recovery, delivery and management of flows in the River Murray in South Australia for the next five years.
- Draft Asset Environmental Management Plans have been developed for the Chowilla (including Lindsay-Wallpolla) and Lower Lakes/Coorong/ Murray Mouth Significant Ecological Assets. The plans will be considered by the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council in September 2005.
- The fishways at the Tauwitchere Barrage were opened during December 2004 to February 2005 to test the new fishways and to promote upstream and downstream fish migration. Over ten species of fish were captured in the first 24 hours, and researchers believe that this is one of Australia's most important fishways, critical to rehabilitating the fish communities of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Funding was directed to these activities through the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) state contribution and the Environmental Flows and Wetland Management projects.

2. SECURING WATER RIGHTS

Security of water rights relates to both the quantity and quality of water available and is equally important for irrigation, other water based industries and the environment. Security of water rights and recognising the environment as a legitimate user of water, are fundamental principles underpinning the National Water Initiative.

On 1 July 2002, the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse Water Allocation Plan (WAP) was adopted and became the guiding policy document for the allocation and transfer of water resources of the River Murray within South Australia, including environmental entitlements. The Plan also provided for the allocation of water to wetlands under certain criteria and the conversion of area based water allocations on the Lower Murray Reclaimed Irrigation Districts to volumetric allocations to ensure consistency with the Cap on allocations determined by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. Ongoing implementation of this plan has been a major focus during 2004/2005.

The Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, in partnership with the SA Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board, is establishing more rigorous water resource management arrangements for all environmental water entitlements to ensure these entitlements are formally allocated and managed sustainably.

These complimentary actions will ensure the long-term viability of the region's water resources and provide security for all water users, in accordance with the National Water Initiative.

The Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges (EMLR) catchment is part of the Murray-Darling Basin system in South Australia. The catchment provides freshwater flows to the River Murray and Lower Lakes and supports a range of important industries, communities and aquatic environments. Assessments undertaken by the Department and the (then) River Murray Catchment Water Management Board indicate that levels of farm dam development and surface and ground water extraction pose a significant risk to water resources and water dependent ecosystems in the region.

A Notice of Intent to Prescribe was issued on 13 October 2003, flagging the Government's intention to implement formal water management arrangements in the region. Concurrently, Notices of Prohibition were issued to temporarily prohibit the taking of ground water, surface water and watercourse water for new uses while existing water use and the capacity of the resource to support future needs is assessed.

A structured program of Land and Water Use Surveys to assess current levels of water use continued throughout 2004/2005, focussing primarily on larger water users and users in ecologically significant areas. Authorisations confirming rights to take water during the prohibition period were issued progressively, thereby providing security of access to water.

Detailed technical investigations to determine the capacity of the available water resources and environmental water needs were completed in key catchments. Assessments of the regulatory impact of the proposal to prescribe and of the regional economic impact of introducing stronger management controls for the water resources of the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges was undertaken in consultation with the community. These processes provided information essential to Government in the consideration of whether to prescribe the water resources.

During 2004-05, funds provided through the *Save the River Murray Fund* have enabled the following achievements.

Key achievements in 2004-05

- Issue of the first long-term Wetland Water Licenses in SA to managed wetlands on the River Murray from the 200 GL pool provided for in the WAP.
- Allocation of 9.3 GL for irrigation water use within the River Murray Irrigation Management Zone and associated with the Lower Murray Reclaimed Swamps Irrigation Areas.
- Development of operational policy, protocols and procedures to allow for implementation of the River Murray Salinity Zoning policy from 1 July 2005.
- Review of licensed water users within the Angas Bremer Irrigation Management Zone to review compliance with WAP conditions relating to non-irrigated vegetation.
- Continuation of the irrigation annual reporting processes to ensure that water use efficiency levels meet 85% and water users comply with monitoring

“There is significant effort to implement measures and to take actions that protect the River from harm.”

requirements within the WAP.

- Assessment of all water licence applications against the resource management principles provided for in the WAP.
- Detailed hydrological, hydro-geological and ecological studies in the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges (EMLR) to determine the capacity of the water resources, environmental water needs and support future actions. Technical investigations of surface and ground water resources were completed with the support of the (then) River Murray Catchment Water Management Board in key catchments including the Marne, Finniss, Tookayerta, Angas, Bremer and Currency Creeks.
- The Department completed an assessment of stakeholder feedback regarding the regulatory impact of the proposal to prescribe and of the regional economic impact of introducing stronger management controls for the water resources of the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges.
- A Land and Water Use Survey to assess current levels of water use and support the issuing of authorisations that recognise the current water use of landholders. At the commencement of the project 1,209 irrigation developments were identified for survey. At 30 June 2005, 653 irrigation developments (71%) had been surveyed.

Funding was directed to these activities through the Implementation of the River Murray Water Allocation Plan and Improved Management of the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges projects.

3. PROTECTING THE RIVER

There is significant effort to implement measures and to take actions that protect the River from harm.

The increased activity by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to enhance environmental flows, salinity management and integrated catchment management over the past three years has resulted in a substantial increase in the total budget commitment by the Commission. South Australia's share of the annual budget for the Commission has increased from about \$16 million in 2002-03 to \$20 million in 2004-05 of which the *Save the River Murray Fund* contributed \$3.46 million in 2004-05.

The Murray-Darling Basin Commission and the SA Government have identified a number of new salt interception schemes that will reduce the inflow of saline groundwater into the River and its floodplain. The first of the new schemes, at Bookpurnong, was brought to the stage of pre-commissioning trials during 2004-05. A detailed design for the Loxton scheme was completed while further assessments were undertaken regarding the location of schemes at two other locations.

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) plays a key role in ensuring that programs are implemented to identify and upgrade the quality of discharges to the River Murray. The EPA has specific involvement in the Restructuring and Rehabilitation of the Lower

Murray Reclaimed Irrigation Areas (LMRIA). This is an area where drainage to the river of excess irrigation water containing a significant pollutant load of nutrients and pathogens can occur. Programs have been developed to substantially reduce drainage and the discharge of such pollutants.

Progressed the implementation of the *River Murray Act 2003*. The aim of the Act is to ensure that all reasonable and practical measures are taken to protect, restore and enhance the River Murray in recognition of its critical importance to the South Australian community.

During 2004-05, funds provided through the *Save the River Murray Fund* have contributed to the following achievements in this area.

Key Achievements in 2004-05

- Final design and completion of pipeline supply contracts for the Loxton Salt Interception Scheme, and investigations for new salt interception schemes at Murtho, Chowilla and Pike River.
- Construction and pre-commissioning pumping for the Bookpurnong Salt Interception Scheme. It is anticipated that this scheme will reduce salt input to the River by 75 tonnes per day and will be commissioned by the end of 2005.
- Analysis of future saline water disposal requirements, including evaluations of the capacity and operation of existing basins and the sustainability of potential new basins.



River Red Gums at Lake Littra before (left) and after (right) watering trials.



“Economic production, tourism, the iconic scenery and a range of complex ecosystems all depend on the health of the River.”

- Design and construction of critical structures to improve environmental flows.
- Agreement with the Mid Murray Council on a joint disposal scheme for the treatment of waste from the Swan Reach Waste Disposal Station.
- Maintenance of the Register for salinity credits and debits for which the State is accountable. These arise from improved irrigation management (credits), irrigation district rehabilitation (credits), salt interception infrastructure (credits) and irrigation development (debits).
 - The credit and debit assessment for 2003-04 from South Australia was completed in preparation for review and formal transmission to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council.
 - A Salinity Zoning Policy will be implemented on 1 July 2005. The policy establishes high salinity impact zones, low salinity impact zones, and Salt Interception Zones. Explicit rules for allocating salinity credits to offset salinity impacts due to irrigation apply in each zone.
 - Developed and implemented Regulations under the *River Murray Act 2003* to establish River Murray Protection Areas.
 - Introducing the referral to the Minister for the River Murray, under the *Development Act 1993*, for assessment of certain activity applications that might impact on the River.
 - Assessed an increased number of statutory instruments and authorisations referred to the Minister for the River Murray, including:
 - eight statutory instruments
 - 167 non-mandatory statutory authorisations under the *Development Act 1993*
 - 707 mandatory statutory authorisations under the *Development Act 1993*
 - 10 mandatory statutory authorisations under the *Mining Act 1971*
 - one Statement of Environmental Objectives under the *Petroleum Act 2000*
 - two mandatory statutory authorisations under the *Harbours and Navigation Act 1993*
 - 15 applications were refused, with 4 applicants lodging appeals.
 - two actions to enforce the General Duty of Care were undertaken.
 - A *Notice of Exemption* pursuant to section 22(18) of the *River Murray Act 2003* was gazetted. The Notice exempts certain outbuildings and farm buildings from referral if they meet the conditions of the notice.
 - Work commenced on a Plan Amendment Report designed to improve consistency of the Development Plans of councils in the SA Murray-Darling Basin and to bring them in line with the objects and objectives of the *River Murray Act 2003*.
 - The Environment Protection Authority undertook a range of actions primarily on the lower Murray downstream of Mannum, aimed at achieving improved water quality in the River Murray:
 - assessed farm management practices that are a risk to water quality, on 100 flood irrigated farms in the Lower Murray Reclaimed Irrigation Areas
 - developed 70 farm Environmental Improvement Management Programmes as a condition of “exemption” for flood irrigators.
 - undertook 25 dairy milking shed effluent audits.

- completed the trial report, Mannum to Mypolonga, for the assessment of activities that are a risk to water quality on the River Murray.
- developed a draft drought water restriction policy, including preliminary communication and consultation on this policy framework.

Funding was directed to these activities through the following projects:

1. Investment in Salinity Accountability;
2. River Murray Act Implementation;
3. MDBC State Contribution;
4. Upgrade of Riverland Drainage Disposal System;
5. Water Quality Improvement.

4. ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT

Economic production, tourism, the iconic scenery and a range of complex ecosystems all depend on the health of the River.

Biodiversity values are much harder to restore or replace than they are to retain. The maintenance of functioning ecosystems is a critical component of integrated resource management in the region.

There are many ecosystems in the region that are important for biodiversity conservation and warrant attention, such as the Bookmark Biosphere complex and the Lower Lakes and Coorong. Wetlands feature highly as important habitats, many of which are recognised as being of national and international significance.

The Murray-Darling Basin Commission's plan to restore native fish passage along the River Murray between Lake Hume and the sea between 2003 and 2008 is well underway.

During 2004-05, funds provided through the *Save the River Murray Fund* have enabled the following achievements to be made in this area.

Key achievements in 2004-05

- Both fishways on the Tauwichee barrage completed.
- Dredging of the Murray Mouth has continued throughout 2004-05 to ensure that the river mouth remains open, thereby protecting the ecological health of the Coorong and associated fisheries
- Wetland management plans are being developed for thirteen wetlands. It is expected that these plans will be accredited and licences subsequently issued by December 2005.
- An assessment of performance against actions from the Coorong National Park Management Plan has been completed. A process has commenced to review the current Coorong National Park Management Plan to ensure park management activities meet Ramsar guidelines. A community reference group has been convened and the preparation of the draft plan will continue complementary to the review process for the Coorong, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Ramsar Management Plan.
- Undertaking a Coorong 'health check' and collating data for orange-bellied parrot monitoring, pelican and Caspian tern banding, hooded plover monitoring, Mallee fowl mound monitoring, mudflat habitat investigations and counts of migratory wading birds. A Coorong Health Check Annual Report has been prepared to analyse current conditions and recommend future monitoring and research directions.

- Continued implementation of water licences and water allocations specifically to provide water for River Murray wetlands within South Australia.
- The further development and scenario testing of a sophisticated morphological computer model to describe the sand deposition process at work at the Murray Mouth.
- Continued monitoring of salinity, birds, fish, aquatic plant growth, tide and lake levels, and bathymetric surveys will continue to ensure a robust baseline set of data is maintained.

Funding was directed to these activities through the Environmental Flows and Wetland Management project and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission State Contribution.

5. BUILDING CAPACITY

Capacity building will provide people with an increasing level of knowledge and control over their individual and collective social, economic and environmental futures.

South Australia's Strategic Plan (Objective 5) places a strong emphasis on building strong community networks and enhancing information transfer.

Adopting a strategic knowledge management approach will provide the framework for the long-term management of the River Murray, which will be enhanced by informed decision-making backed by the most up-to-date and relevant scientific and economic analyses. Information collection initiatives will continue to support natural resource assessments with an increasing emphasis on integrated ecosystem outcomes throughout the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin and upstream areas of strategic importance to the State.

Improved research networks and patronage will ensure that new knowledge is generated to inform related policy areas and strengthen the State's position in major Murray-Darling Basin initiatives within the MDBC and National Water Commission.

A new Resource Information Centre is planned for the River Murray to provide natural resource users and the community with local, up-to-date access to information to assist in River management and protection.

Innovative management systems and technologies in areas such as environmental flows, water trade and water use efficiency will continue to be pursued to enable irrigators and natural resource managers to respond to challenges presented by climate change, salinity and water allocation policy.

"Capacity building will provide people with an increasing level of knowledge and control over their individual and collective social, economic and environmental futures."

Key Achievements in 2004-05

- Coordinated the construction of a river-wetland-groundwater interaction tool within DWLBC to model and assess the salinity impacts of wetland management.
- Compiled all currently available bathymetric and elevation data sets within the South Australian River Murray and constructed a number of digital terrain models for use in hydrological and ecological assessments.
- Completed hydrological assessments of the salt loads arising from the Pike-Mundic and Murtho floodplain systems.
- Negotiated key research partnerships including a position as full partner in the eWater research initiative. The agreement will provide access to research outcomes, technical assessment tools and training, while also enabling South Australia to contribute to the shaping of a national-scale research agenda expected to play a significant role in informing Murray-Darling Basin management initiatives.
- Planning was finalised for the establishment of a Resource Information Centre for the SAMDB, which will be established in 2005-06.
- Production of digital, ortho-rectified satellite imagery continued. Final deliverables are expected by October 2005 which will enable irrigation baseline information to be updated and assist in ongoing monitoring of floodplain health.
- Tri-State Salinity Project investigations and reporting completed.
- Saline Horticulture Project Steering Group established and two staff appointed to investigate effect of salinity on reticulated horticulture. Work program developed and approved by Steering Group.
- Irrigation Recording and Evaluation System (IRES) prototype software version 1 successfully field tested.
- Engaged with Viticultural industry on R&D priorities relating to climate risk
- Engaged with key stakeholders and research providers working in NRM

management in the SA MDB

- Review of climate change activities relevant to SA-MDB region
- Engaged farmers in SA MDB in managing climate risk
- Commenced field testing of Irrigation and Recording Evaluation Systems (IRES) with 4 case study groups
- Investigation into Market Drivers for Water Use Efficiency (WUE) as a focus for irrigator training.

Funding was directed to these activities through Investing in River Murray Ecology, Improved Information Management and Irrigation Research, Technology Diffusion and Education projects.

Fishways at Tauwitcherie Barrage were opened during 2004-05 to promote fish migration.

Rock ramp fishway



Vertical slot fishway



DEPARTMENT OF WATER LAND AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

SAVE THE RIVER MURRAY FUND

PROGRAM STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2005

	Note	2005 \$'000	2004 \$'000
Funds held at 1 July		4,683	0
RECEIPTS			
Revenue from Government	1		
Recurrent Appropriation		17,641	12,773
Total Receipts		17,641	12,773
PAYMENTS			
1	Implementation of Water Allocation Plan	1,207	1,496
2	Investment in Salinity Accountability	176	152
3	Review of the costs Associated with Managing the River Murray in SA	22	122
4	River Murray Act	398	323
5	MDBC State Contribution	3,460	4,517
6	Environmental Flows & Wetland Management	815	604
7	Prescription of Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges	426	303
8	Investing in River Murray Ecology	150	150
9	Upgrade of Riverland Drainage Disposal System	89	12
10	Upgrade of River Murray Waste Disposal Stations	212	-
11	River Murray Select Committee - Drought Management & Other Recommendations	204	334
12	Improved Information Management	375	48
13	E-Flows and Wetland Management	1,762	-
14	Irrigation Research, Technology Diffusion and Education	1,250	-
15	Water Quality Improvement	2 150	-
16	Rebates - Administration Costs	3 23	29
Total Payments		10,719	8,090
Net Increase in Funds		6,922	4,683
Funds held at 30 June		11,605	4,683

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE PROGRAM STATEMENTS

1 Fund Purpose and Funding

The "Save the River Murray Fund" (The Fund) is established under Section 100 of the *Waterworks Act, 1932*. The major purpose of the Fund is to provide funds for programs and measures to improve and promote the environmental health of the River Murray or ensure the adequacy, security and quality of the State's water supply from the River Murray. The Fund contributes to the excess of the State's contribution to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and may be used to provide rebates (including administration costs) in particular cases. Revenue collected from the Save the River Murray levy is paid into the Fund through the provision of appropriation from the Consolidated Account. The fund is not interest bearing.

(a) Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Generally transactions through the fund are included under the grouping provisions of the GST Legislation. Under grouping provisions, the Department of Water Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC) is responsible for the collection of GST on sales and payment of GST on purchases. The DWLBC received and paid these monies to the Australian Tax Office.

2 Programs by Other Agencies

An acquittal of expenditure for \$100,000 by the Environment Protection Authority was not completed by 30 June 2005 and consequently funds were not transferred. This amount will be paid to the Authority in 2005-06.

3 Rebates - Administration Costs

The DWLBC engaged SA Water to administer the rebate scheme.

4 Save the River Murray Fund

A separate fund, Save the River Murray Contributions Fund, has been established to receive contributions where there is no obligation to pay the Save the River Murray Levy. The separate fund was created because the legislation that established the Save the River Murray Fund only provided for revenue to be received from the Save the River Murray Levy.

The funds received in the Save the River Murray Contributions Fund will be applied for the same purpose as the Save the River Murray Fund. Contributions received in 2004-05 were from the following sources: Donations of \$1,936 from individuals not obliged to pay the Save the River Murray Levy; and

Local Government contributions of \$1,350 under the Save the River Murray Levy honour system.

