McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan (WAP) Forum Q&A

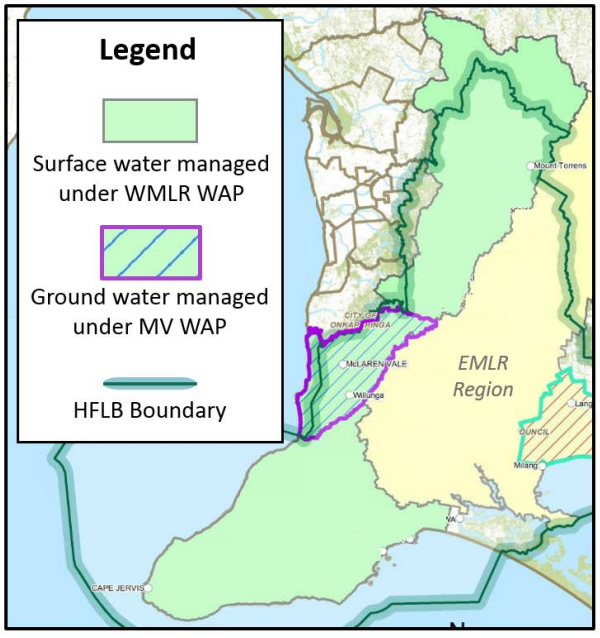
The purpose of this document is to provide additional detail to some of the core questions raised at the McLaren Vale WAP Forum on 4 August 2022.

Q1. What does the integration of groundwater and surface water management mean for the McLaren Vale water planning arrangements?

The proposal for integrated management effectively seeks to have the rules for groundwater and surface water located in the one water allocation plan (WAP). Currently the rules relevant to the McLaren Vale region are divided across the McLaren Vale Prescribed Wells Area (MVPWA) WAP (contains only groundwater rules) and the Western Mount Lofty Ranges (WMLR) WAP (contains both groundwater and surface water rules for all areas in the Western MLR except for MV groundwater). The most efficient way to have the McLaren Vale region rules in one place is to place the MV PWA rules into the WMLR WAP.

The alternative option, which was raised at the Forum and was also raised by the WAP Advisory Commitee, was to include both groundwater and surface water rules in a McLaren Vale WAP. This option has been explored by the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board (HFLB) and the Department for Environment and Water. The Board and Department consider that the regulatory process required to make this happen is prohibitive. This option would require amending the regulation that prescribes the Western Mt Lofty Ranges Prescribed Water Resource. This will take a substantial administrative effort, thereby re-directing efforts from time critical resource management issues like salinity hotspots and climate ready water policy development. This large administrative process will not result in better on-ground management of the water resources.

To explain further, the difference between these two options is that under Section 52(4) of the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019,* it is possible for one WAP to manage more than one prescribed resource. However, it is not possible for one prescribed resource to be managed under two different WAPs. The creation of new regulations would be required to alter the current WMLR surface water boundary (shown in green, below) so that a new surface water prescribed area could be created for the MV region and included in the MV Prescribed Wells Area (in purple) WAP.



Option 1 :
WMLR WAP to manage both green and purple areas.

Option 2 :
'Cut' green area where it overlies purple area (alter prescription, make new regulations). Create new MV surface water area and include in MV WAP.

Option 1 is the preferred mechanism to have surface water and groundwater managed together. The benefits and risks of this approach are outlined below.

Q2. What are the benefits and risks of incorporating the MV PWA into the WMLR WAP?

Benefits:

- Groundwater and surface water are interconnected resources. The interactions of the two resources can be more readily considered, managed, monitored and discussed if incorporated under the same policy document, and this approach is consistent with 'best practice' water planning standards.
- Discussions with community will be made easier by having the ability to talk about surface water and groundwater resources at the same time. Discussions of topics like 'Water Dependent Ecosystems' and groundwater rescharge that relate to both groundwater and surface water will be more able to consider the 'whole picture'.
- Alignment with First Nations (Kaurna) preference for integrated management approach.
- It is more efficient from the perspective of the HFLB and Department for Environment and Water (DEW) teams to manage surface and ground water under one plan rather than administering two plans. Efficiency gains will mean that the HFLB and DEW are better able to tackle the 'big issues', including addressing salinity hotspots, proactive transition to climate ready policies, investigation of adaptive management approaches (rather than 'set and forget' policies reviewed once every 10 years).
- Opportunity for strengthened connections and communication throughout the whole of WMLR region, with potential for better knowledge sharing to occur between the Willunga Basin and community and industry groups across the whole of the WMLR region.

Risks:

- Concern that having policies for MV groundwater resources incorporated into WMLR WAP could result in a lower level of community ownership/ autonomy in how water resources are managed in the McLaren Vale region, and that engagement opportunities will be reduced. This point is addressed in more detail under the following sub-heading, but briefly, there are well-established avenues by which a given region or community can continue to be recognised and heard within a broader water management context. The Board is committed to continuing to engagement with the Willunga Basin community about the management of the water resources in this region.
- The McLaren Vale water allocation plan is presently favoured for its simplicity and ease of use, and there are concerns that this simplicity will be lost by having McLaren Vale policies incorporated into the bigger WMLR WAP. Many of the current policies in the MVPWA WAP have been found to require amendment so that they can more effectively manage groundwater resources in a changing climate. The process of updating these policies in line with current best-practice and best available science will likely see a greater level of detail and complexity introduced, so that in the event that the MV PWA is maintained (and not incorporated into the WMLR WAP), the WAP will not retain the current level of simplicity.
- The possibility of diminished policy strength, through stakeholders in the other parts of the WMLR region having less of a focus on sustainability, was raised as another potential outcome of McLaren Vale groundwater resources being incorporated into the WMLR WAP. HFLB can assure the McLaren Vale region community members that sustainable management of water resources and the ongoing protection of ecosystems which rely on these resources is a key focus regardless of which WAP document the regions policies may reside in. Policies specific to the McLaren Vale can be included in the WMLR WAP if integration of the plans occurs.

The Willunga Basin region has a strong community identity and sense of ownership. How will this community continue to be recognised and engaged with in future?

One concern raised during the Forum discussion was the potential for the voice of the Willunga Basin region to be diluted within the context of a larger region, if the MV PWA policies were to be incorporated into the WMLR WAP. The Willunga Basin region has a cohesive community that has a strong history of advocating for effective water planning and management.

As described above, the Board is committed to continuing to engage specifically with the Willunga Basin community so that it can continue to have a strong voice in the management of water resources in the area.

One other important example of the strength of this region in mobilising action on issues that are important to them is the work which is underway in developing a McLaren Vale Water Security Strategy. The strategy is far more holistic in its scope than what is possible for water allocation plans (these are statutory tools with specific functions) and aims to consider all current and future water supply options alongside current + future demand, and taking into account future climate scenarios. The McLaren Vale Water Security Strategy was initiated by grower representatives and members of the community, and is currently being facilitated by the DEW Water Security team. This work is made possible through the concerted efforts of community members and local industry representatives and will continue to be an important avenue for broad ranging community voices to be heard.

At the Forum, we heard from James Stacey who is an irrigator in the Angas Bremer (Langhorne Creek) region and presiding member of the Angas Bremer Water Management Committee. This committee has been operating for around 40 years and offers a strong example for how a specific region can continue to be recognised and heard whilst being incorporated into a broader water allocation plan (the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges WAP, in their case). The Angas Bremer Water Management Committee meets regularly and continues to raise water planning and management with the Board. The Board will work with the community in the Langhorne Creek area as part of the Eastern Mt Lofty Ranges WAP review to consider surface water and groundwater management. More information about the Angas Bremer Water Management Committee can be found on their website, here: http://www.angasbremerwater.org.au/

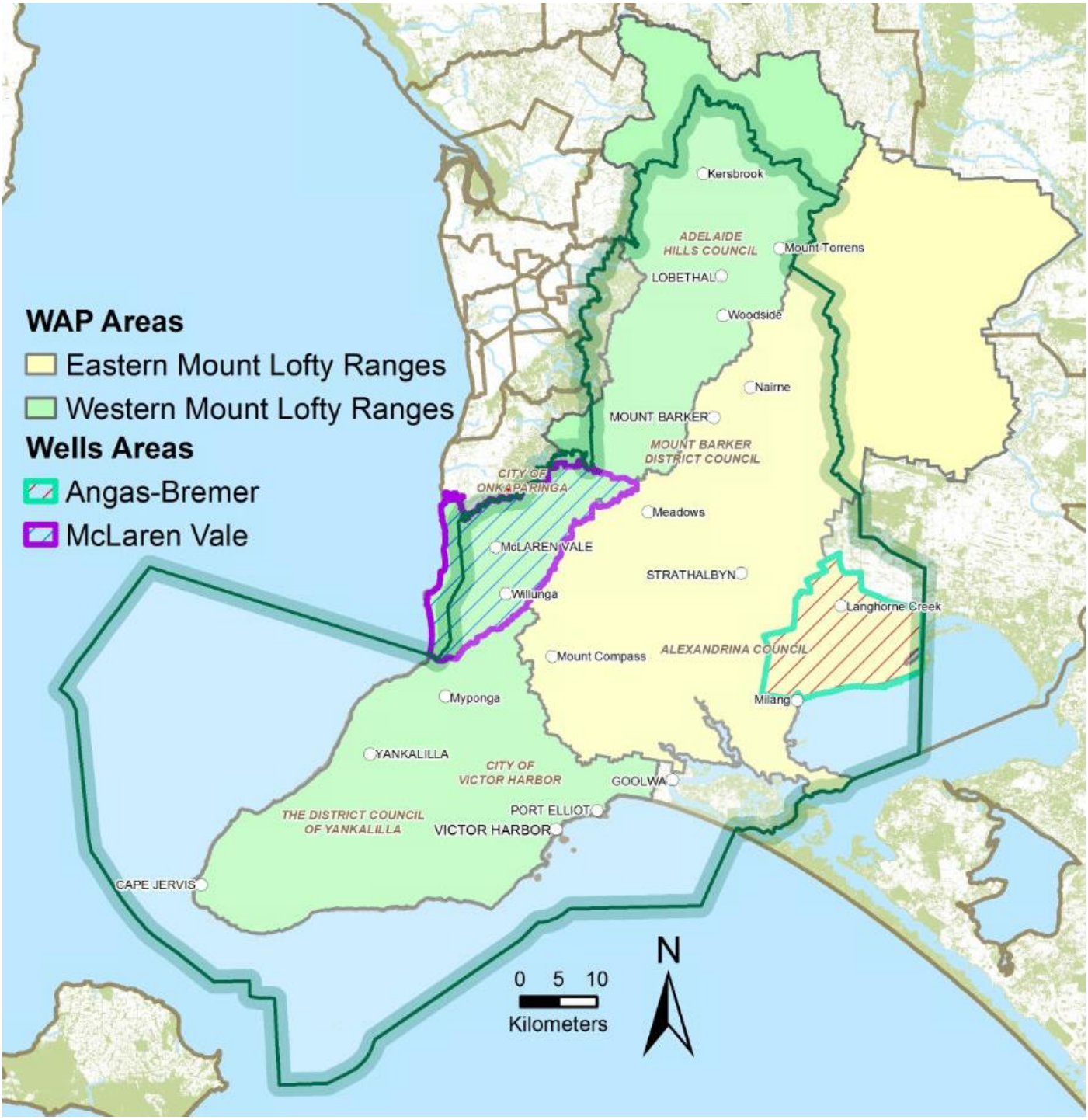
Where can I find further information?

The HFLB's website contains some useful information on the Water Allocation Plans within its region along with helpful fact sheets and resources on common water allocation or water management matters. We encourage you to view this information via the links below:

- For information on the main HFLB webpage: https://www.landscape.sa.gov.au/hf
- For information about the McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan: https://www.landscape.sa.gov.au/hf/our-priorities/water/water-planning/water-allocation-planning/mclaren-vale
- For information about the Western Mount Lofty Ranges Water Allocation Plan: https://www.landscape.sa.gov.au/hf/our-priorities/water/water-planning/water-allocation-planning/western-mount-lofty-ranges

Attachments

ATTACHMENT A: Map of the Prescribed water resource areas within the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board region.


WAP Areas
Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges
Western Mount Lofty Ranges
Wells Areas
Angas-Bremer
McLaren Vale
Kersbrook
ADELAIDE HILLS COUNCIL
Mount Torrens
LOBETHAL
Woodside
Nairne
MOUNT BARKER
MOUNT BARKER DISTRICT COUNCIL
CITY OF ONKAPARINGA
Meadows
McLAREN VALE
STRATHALBYN
Willunga
Langhorne Creek
Mount Compass
ALEXANDRINA COUNCIL
Myponga
Milang
YANKALILLA
CITY OF VICTOR HARBOR
GOOLWA
PORT ELLIOT
THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF YANKALILLA
VICTOR HARBOR
CAPE JERVIS
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Kilometers