

McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan: Review Summary and Proposal to Integrate Groundwater and Surface Water Management

Community forum report

Thursday 4 August 2022, 5:30 pm - 7:00pm, McLaren Vale Visitor Centre

Attendees: 23 community members

Background

The Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board (HFLB) held this community forum to provide a summary of the outcomes of the [Review of the Water Allocation Plan for the McLaren Vale Prescribed Wells Area](#), and to seek the community's views on a proposal to integrate the management of groundwater and surface water in the McLaren Vale (MV) area by amalgamating the MV and Western Mount Lofty Ranges (WMLR) water allocation plans (WAPs).

Summary of views

Nearly all participants were supportive of integrating the management of groundwater and surface water.

Most participants also expressed support for amalgamating the WAP instruments. However, a number of participants wanted to know more about what amalgamating the MV and WMLR WAPs would look like and how it would actually change management/ engagement in future. There was a feeling that while the case for integrating groundwater and surface water was strong, the benefits of amalgamating the MV and WMLR WAPs had not been clearly presented, although they were not necessarily opposed to it.



Community forum 4 August 2022, 4 August 2022

The group felt that it was very important to maintain a sense of community ownership in the management of water resources with some participants expressing concern that their voice would be diluted in a larger plan. There was a request for formal reassurance that the same level of opportunity for community influence would be maintained. In discussion HFLB reiterated its strong commitment to engaging with the community on water management issues.

A small number of participants supported maintaining the current arrangements. There were also a number of participants that expressed the view that this was a minor issue and that HFLB should implement the proposal and 'just get on with' addressing the more important resource management issues.

Noting that it is a small sample size, of the eight feedback forms received from the group, in relation to Question 6 that asked participants to rate their level of agreement with the proposal to integrate the McLaren Vale and Western Mount Lofty Water Allocation Plans, 75% indicated that they 'agree' and 25% indicated that they 'disagree'.

Forum Outline

The forum had the following parts:

- Presentation providing an outline of Review of the Water Allocation Plan for the McLaren Vale Prescribed Wells Area,
- Presentation on the proposal to integrate the management of groundwater and surface water in the MV area by amalgamating the MV and WMLR WAPs.
- Activity and discussion to check in with what people had understood from the presentations
- Talk from James Stacey, Chair Angas Bremer Water Management Committee.
- A discussion and sorting activity to identify messages to take back to the HFLB
- Feedback forms

Presentations

REVIEW OF THE WATER ALLOCATION PLAN FOR THE MCLAREN VALE PRESCRIBED WELLS AREA

- The main inputs to the review were:
 - o McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan Advisory Committee (WAPAC)
 - o First Nations workshops
 - o Community survey
 - o Technical review of objectives
- The review determined that the the MV WAP should be amended
- The main issues identified by the review were:
 1. SALINITY HOTSPOTS - Localised risk to groundwater resources of rising salinity in some areas
 2. KAURNA INTERESTS - Plan does not recognise Kaurna interests in the water resources
 3. GROUNDWATER LEVELS AND CLIMATE CHANGE - May be risks associated with declines in groundwater levels –difficult to assess relative risk from extraction and climate change (rainfall declines)
 4. GROUNDWATER DEPENDENT ECOSYSTEMS – We need more data about location and condition of groundwater dependent ecosystems and need for buffer rules around groundwater-dependent ecosystems
 5. OBJECTIVES - Lack of clear objectives in the plan
 6. ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT - Need to be able to manage adaptively for climate change – resource condition and the ability to manage at aquifer and management zone scales.
 7. MANAGEMENT OF SURFACE & GROUNDWATER - Integrate planning and management of surface and groundwater
- HFLB will be initiating work to address salinity hotspots in the coming months, starting by meeting with affected licensees.
- Issues 2) to 6) require additional work, including scientific assessment and will be addressed through the process amending the WAP.

- The HFLB is keen to understand the community's views on the proposal to integrate planning and management of surface and groundwater – and is the focus of tonight's discussion.

PROPOSAL TO INTEGRATE PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF SURFACE AND GROUNDWATER

- The MV WAP is a groundwater only plan
- Groundwater and surface water are interconnected in complex ways
- All McLaren Vale watercourse and wetland ecosystems rely on both groundwater and surface water
- Integrating groundwater and surface will enable a water better planning process
- Rainfall and surface water flows recharge groundwater systems.
- Discharge (base flow) from groundwater is crucial in supporting the persistence of water dependent ecosystems.
- Groundwater and surface water extraction both impact on watercourse and wetland ecosystems.
- Important to be able to discuss groundwater and surface water together
- In the past we have managed resources separately but as our knowledge has increased, our understanding of the connections between groundwater and surface water has increased. It now makes sense to manage them together.
- Integration would occur by amalgamating MV and WMLR WAPs.
- For issues that are the same across the whole region (e.g. well construction rules), the same rules would apply
- Where there are local factors (e.g. salinity hotspots) separate rules can apply to specific aquifers or management zones.
- The McLaren Vale community has always been good at getting involved in water resource issues
- HFLB committed to ongoing engagement

'What have you heard?' check-in activity

Participants were asked to discuss in pairs what they heard from the two presentations.

- *A number of people commented that 'it makes sense to integrate' from what they heard.*
- *I want to see urgent action on salinity and see this as the top priority, I didn't think it is an issue what plan was used so long as urgent issues are acted on.*
- *The group also discussed how waiting for the 10 year review point is not allowing for 'nimble' action. Issues like salinity or groundwater levels should be addressed more regularly than at 10 year review point (this point is perhaps supporting an adaptive management approach)*
- *Are Local Council (elected members) aware of the proposal and what is Council's role in this space?*
- *One grower heard that salinity is the really big issue from review.*
- *Another grower heard that integrating SW and GW makes sense, but unclear on what it means for geography/ boundaries*
- *A WAPAC participant stated there was confusion in the WAPAC as to what the specific instruments are in MV – i.e. applicability / boundaries of WMLR WAP vs. MV WAP*
- *The difference in impact of climate change or extraction on GW levels is a critical point.*

GROUP 1

- Will combining these plans free (staff) resources for efficiency?
- What is the merit of one or two plans?
- Does combining plans improve the board's management of salinity?
- Does combining plans allow better solutions for groundwater management?

GROUP 2

- Explain process and help community to form questions.
- High quality relevant and accessible community information.
- Better strategic management is a benefit of integration (provided regional autonomy).

GROUP 3

- Will the revised WAP protect creeks and ecosystems by reinstating gaining sections in creeks?
- Riparian system habitat health.
- Groundwater and surface water model – forecasting – reinstatement condition.

GROUP 4

- Vertical integration (surface water and groundwater) has benefits – supported.
- Agree to integrate groundwater and surface water, BUT why integrate McLaren Vale with the Western Mount Lofty Ranges? Investigate benefits and potential losses.
- Surface and groundwater combined.

GROUP 5

- Can we please have legislative protection to not go backwards?

GROUP 6

- Horizontal integration no clear benefit – please explain. Onkaparinga catchment benefit?

Broader group discussion continued

- *A WAPAC participant highlighted that there was a third option not yet spoken about - merging the SW from WMLR into the MV WAP so that MV maintains its plan, but is still SW/ GW integrated.*
- *HFLB staff explained that this is not viewed as a viable option because of cost and time it would take to re-prescribe the McLaren Vale surface water and take it out of the WMLR PWRA. It is unlikely that the government would support this given the work involved and the fact that, compared to amalgamating MV and WMLR WAPs, it wouldn't result in any on-ground differences in policy and management of water resources. It could take around two years to implement and the HFLB's preference is to focus effort on addressing resource management problems.*
- *"Two years is optimistic – it took ten years to amalgamate the Central Adelaide and Northern Adelaide Plains groundwater areas. I agree the important thing is to get on with fixing the groundwater problems."*
- *"So essentially this is a 'go or no go' decision on amalgamating the MV and WMLR WAPs?"*
- *The terms 'horizontal' vs 'vertical' integration were raised as a way of distinguishing between integrating groundwater and surface water.*
- *"The board needs to be clearer on the 'why' behind integrating" – some felt that this was really the only thing they needed to know.*
- *Want to see stronger environmental restoration commitment from the Department*
- *Concerned about potential loss in community ownership and voice, wants assurance that this will be maintained in an integrated plan.*
- *Questioning of trust in the board and the process, specifically on lack of clarity for the options available. This concern was addressed directly by the facilitator and the broader group to ensure*

people understood what the choices were, and why the other option was not workable. Many of the participants chimed in and agreed this to be a genuine process and broadly understood how they could influence the decision/ outcome.

- *Developing a surface water/groundwater model is critical.*

Feedback forms

At the end of the forum participants were invited to fill in a feedback form asking about how the meeting was conducted and giving participants an opportunity to provide a written response to the integration proposal. The feedback form was also emailed to everyone who had responded to the invitation.

Eight feedback forms were received and the results are tabulated. In relation to Question 6:

Please rate your level of agreement with the proposal to integrate the McLaren Vale and Western Mount Lofty Water Allocation Plans?

- 6 people (75%) indicated that they 'agree',
- 2 indicated (25%) indicated that they 'disagree', and
- there were zero responses for 'strongly agree', 'don't care either way' or 'strongly disagree'.

The comments on the proposal mainly supported integrating the management of groundwater and surface water. Several of the comments asked for more information about the implications of the MV WAP being amalgamated with the WMLR WAP and emphasised the importance of continuing strong local influence on policy.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Copy of MV Forum Presentation slides

McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan review – community forum



LANDSCAPE
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
HILLS AND FLEURIEU

McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan

- Sustainable management of groundwater resource
- Set limits for water take
- Trade rules
- Water affecting activity rules
– e.g. rules around new bores
- Monitoring plan



Review and amendment of McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan

2021-22

2022-23

2023-24

McLaren Vale
WAP REVIEW

MV WAP AMENDMENT PHASE

Is the McLaren Vale WAP effective? Does it need amending?

2021-22 McLaren Vale WAP Review

MV WAP Advisory Committee

- 9 community and industry representatives, with board and DEW staff
- 8 meetings - papers and presentations about First Nations interests, hydrogeology, ecology and climate change
- Risk assessment undertaken

First Nations

- Two workshops held with representatives from the Kaurna Nation

Community survey

- Online survey of community views of the effectiveness of the WAP (41 responses)

Technical review of objectives

- Review of objectives and rules, and monitoring and evaluation plan

Review of McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan

Does the McLaren Vale WAP need amending?



YES, plan needs amending

1. SALINITY HOTSPOTS	Localised risk to groundwater resources of rising salinity in some areas
2. KAURNA INTERESTS	Plan does not recognise Kaurna interests in the water resources

Key issues found by MV WAP Review

3. GROUNDWATER LEVELS AND CLIMATE CHANGE	May be risks associated with declines in groundwater levels – difficult to assess relative risk from extraction and climate change (rainfall declines)
4. GROUNDWATER DEPENDENT ECOSYSTEMS	Need more data about location and condition of GDEs and need for buffer rules around groundwater-dependent ecosystems
5. OBJECTIVES	Lack of clear objectives in the plan
6. ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT	Need to be able to manage adaptively for climate change – triggers and specific management zones of aquifers
7. MANAGEMENT OF SURFACE & GROUNDWATER	Integrate planning and management of surface and groundwater

Review of McLaren Vale Water Allocation Plan



YES, plan needs amending

1. SALINITY HOTSPOTS	Localised risk to groundwater resources of rising salinity in some areas	Meet with affected licensees and address in coming months and through amendment
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Key issues found by MV WAP Review

2. KAURNA INTERESTS	Plan does not recognise Kaurna interests in the water resources
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Address through amendment – requires additional work and science

Key issues found by MV WAP Review

7. MANAGEMENT OF SURFACE & GROUNDWATER

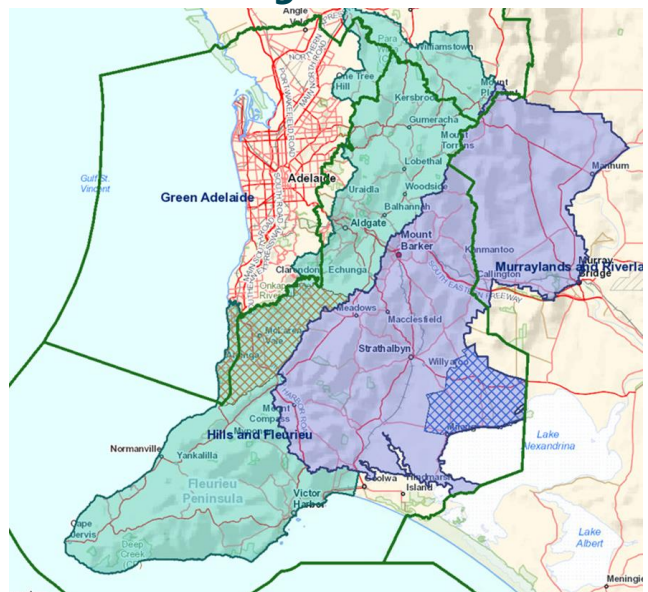
Integrate planning and management of surface and groundwater

Keen to understand the community's views – focus of discussion tonight

Integrating Groundwater and Surface Water Management

Brief background

- Water Allocation Plans:
 - Protect the resource (availability)
 - Protect water dependent ecosystems
 - Protect users from negative impacts from other users
- In McLaren Vale, groundwater and surface water currently managed under different water allocation plans



Integrating Groundwater and Surface Water Management

- The McLaren Vale WAP is groundwater only plan
- As part of the review we looked at the question of integrating groundwater and surface water
- The board wants to understand community views
- Will cover:
 - Why
 - How
- After discussion – grower experience in Angas Bremer – James Stacey



Integrating Groundwater and Surface Water Management

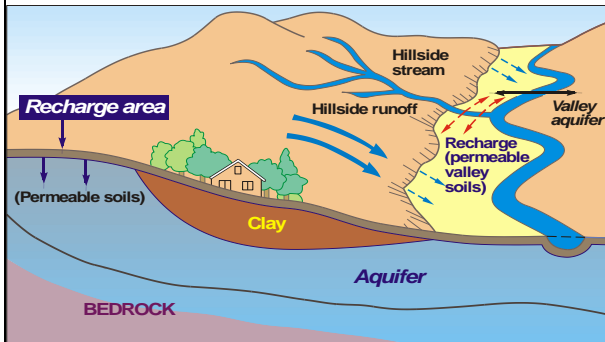
Why?

- Groundwater and surface water are interconnected
- Watercourse and wetland ecosystems rely on both groundwater and surface water
- A better planning process



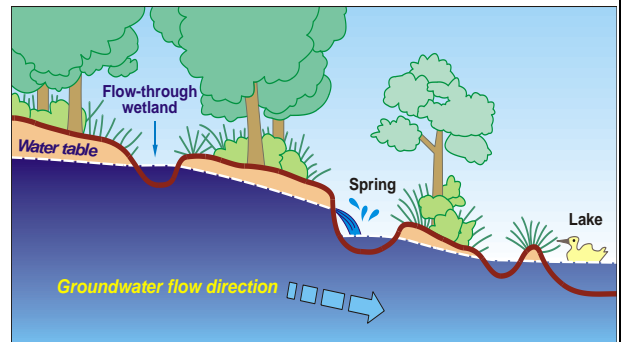
Integrating Groundwater and Surface Water Management

Groundwater / surface water connection



Recharge

Base flow (discharge)



Integrating Groundwater and Surface Water Management

Watercourse and wetland ecosystems

- Wetlands and watercourses rely on both surface water and groundwater
 - base flow from groundwater and
 - surface flow from rainfall
- Both groundwater and surface water extraction impact on watercourse and wetland ecosystems
- Important to be able to discuss together



Integrating Groundwater and Surface Water Management

A better planning process

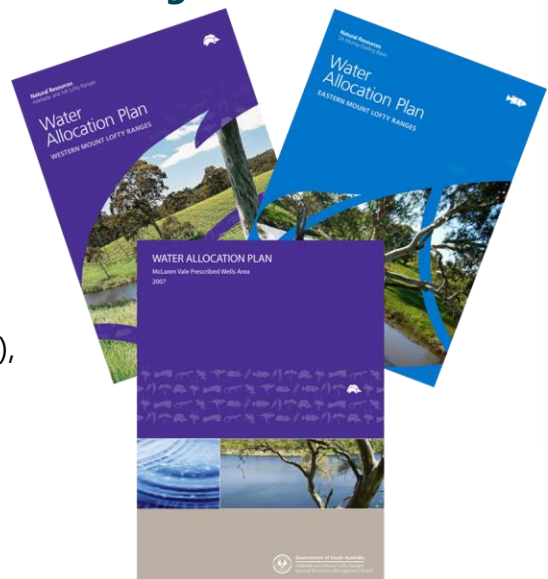
- In the past we have managed resources separately but as our knowledge has increased, our understanding of the connections between groundwater and surface water has increased.
- One set of meetings / community engagement
- Does it now make sense to have a plan that covers both groundwater and surface water?



Integrating Groundwater and Surface Water Management

How?

- Integrate McLaren Vale and Western Mount Lofty Ranges Water Allocation Plans
- For issues that are the same across the whole region (e.g. well construction rules), the same rules would apply
- Where there are local factors (e.g. salinity hotspots) different rules can apply to different areas



Integrating Groundwater and Surface Water Management

Community ownership

- Raised in earlier discussions
- The McLaren Vale community has always been good at getting involved in water resource issues
- Not only water allocation plans
- Board committed to ongoing engagement



WAVI LANDSCAPE
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
HILLS AND FLEURIEU

