

## MINUTES of WATER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting No.3, Friday 12 March 2021

Berri Office Jack Seekamp Room

### Present:

**Members:** Rosalie Auricht, Anne Jensen, Greg McCarron, Joanne Pfeiffer, Clem Mason, Rick Hartman

**Staff:** Andrew Meddle, Amy Goodman, Mel White

**Guest:** Michelle Campbell (CEWO)

**Apologies:** Sheridan Alm, David Zadow, Di Davidson

### Site visit to Clark's Floodplain, Bookpurnong

Presentation and site tour by Anne Jensen and Steve Clark on environmental projects being undertaken to protect and restore the River environment over the past 20 years.

Clarks Floodplain is an excellent location to demonstrate cause and effect of the impacts of irrigation and river regulation on the health of floodplain vegetation.

Clarks Floodplain, located just downstream of Weir & Lock No 4 at Bookpurnong, consists of three large river meanders enclosing sandy peninsulas, back by higher clay floodplains. The sandy peninsulas support tall red gum forest (uncommon in the Lower Murray), while the clay floodplains support black box woodland and lignum shrubland. The peninsulas are dissected by a series of flood-runners which start to flow at 35,000 ML/d flow into SA, while the elevated floodplains require higher flows to be inundated. The entire site goes underwater at 100,000 ML/d.

Vegetation health has been in severe decline since the early 2000s. By 2004, with no overbank flows since 1996, hundreds of mature red gums had died. The cause was the combined effect of extremely saline water entering their root zones and lack of surface freshwater flood flows.

Saline groundwater was being mobilised under the floodplain and moving towards the river as a result of pressure from the water mound formed under irrigated crops on adjacent highland. At the same time, no freshwater flows occurred to provide a fresh layer over the saline groundwater.

The first environmental water was provided to the site in 2005 from the Living Murray program, to save red gums lining the main flood-runner. In spite of this emergency watering and with no overbank flows, trees on the site continued to show stress and decline. By 2007, stressed trees were measured as having 10 times less seed than healthy trees.

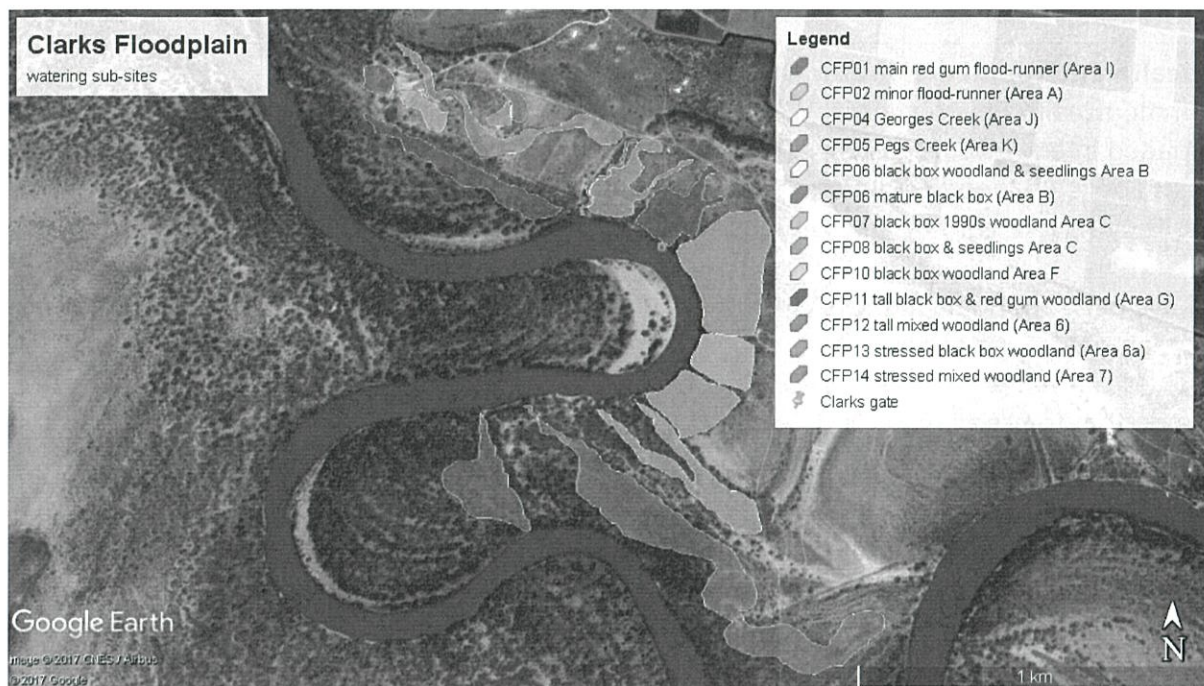
The floods in 2010-12 saved the site, with the peak of 94,000 ML/d reaching almost all locations and triggering a wave of black box germination on the intermediate level floodplains. Environmental watering to sustain those seedlings commenced in 2013 in a partnership with Nature Foundation. The rolling five-year watering plan for Clarks Floodplain has now identified 14 different sub-sites with varying habitat types and vegetation communities.

The Water Advisory Committee viewed the site from a high point to understand the issues and drivers with the help of historic air photos. They then visited the main flood-runner to view dead mature red gums, 2011 flood regeneration, 2013 regeneration triggered by environmental watering and the benefits of the recent 2020 watering. Other stops included a view of rare 1990s black box trees in an area with historic contouring which trapped water and seed. There was a stop to see the downstream block bank which is used to hold environmental water in the main flood-runner.

The tour then visited George's Creek, currently full of water to sustain surviving red gum saplings germinated in 2011, as well as lignum shrubland. The final stop was the Living Murray bore, which was operated in 2015-16 to draw down groundwater to create a space for fresh river water to be drawn back into the subsoil. This was being tested as a method to water black box communities. That location also allowed comparison of woodland which had been watered by sprinklers to sustain regeneration and mature tree health, contrasted with adjacent woodland which had not received environmental water.

The visit highlighted the physical challenges of lifting water onto the floodplain in the Lower Murray, with significant energy costs to lift water 3 m out of the river channel. This requires people, equipment, funds for fuel and voluntary assistance to deliver water as needed. The local irrigator group Bookpurnong Lock 4 Environmental Association has been very supportive and Steve Clark contributed the cost of installing electricity on the river bank to run pumps. Watering events are coordinated by Nature Foundation Program Manager Natalie Stalenberg and water is provided by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder.

The Committee noted that they were glad to see a positive project with landholder involvement bringing good results and saw the value of environmental watering on private wetlands and floodplains. It was also noted that watering is being delivered at priority sites in the Lower Murray by a variety of groups, including Nature Foundation, Renmark Irrigation Trust, Central irrigation Trust, Australian Landscape Trust, Mannum Aboriginal Community Association and the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority. These projects include many important partnerships with local councils and community groups, all supporting a network of watering projects which seek to sustain the benefit of any natural high flows and to maintain river and floodplain health as well as possible, given reduced water availability and reduced natural overbank flows.



## 1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed the committee and acknowledged the First People of the River Murray and Mallee as the traditional owners of the land we meet upon.

The Chair thanked Anne Jensen for arranging the tour of Clark's Floodplain.

## 2. Regional Water Resources update – Mel White, Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board

### 10 Year review of the Peake Roby Sherlock Water Allocation Plan

- The Board is required, under the Landscape SA Act, to review the Peake Roby Sherlock WAP as it has been in place for 10 years.
- This review has recently been completed and approved by the Board.
- The review found that the impacts on the aquifers have stabilised and the WAP policies are currently having the desired impact.
- A fact-sheet has been developed that will be made available to the Peake Roby Sherlock community.
- Are we considering the third party impacts that can arise from the unbundled water resource? The change in the Landscape SA Act that allows a partially unbundled arrangement will allow us to consider these impacts.

### Re-establishment of the Mallee Cost-Sharing Arrangement

- The Board has recently approved the re-establishment of the cost-sharing arrangement in the Mallee.
- The arrangement allows for stock and domestic users who are impacted by localised draw-downs to apply for financial support to alter their bore as required.
- The guidelines for the cost-sharing arrangement will be updated and made available to users as required.

### 3. Commonwealth Environmental Water Office – Michelle Campbell

- The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder is a large water entitlement holder and will be very engaged in any River Murray WAP policy development.
- CEWH has applied a "good neighbour" policy in the delivery of environmental throughout the basin to date. They have a current emphasis on focussing on the delivery constraints throughout the basin.
- CEWO have been arranging farmer exchanges as a way of building literacy around farming practices and environmental watering. These opportunities are really powerful in building a broader catchment-scale view of addressing constraints in the system and delivering environmental water.
- Expectation that transparency around water use will be a significant priority for the MDB Inspector General, and suggested it should be for the SA community and a focus for this Committee.

### 4. Minutes from previous meeting

Minutes were approved

### 5. Other Business

#### a. Water Efficiency Program

Members expressed concern about the abrupt end of the program and wondered what SA's response has been. The Committee believes that these types of programs were essential for SA and the recovery of the 450GL target. It is critical that the State Government make it clear to the community what the next steps are for the recovery of this water.

**Action: Arrange for Dan Jordan (DEW) to attend a future meeting to discuss SA's position about the further recovery of the 450GL target, and implications for SA on failure to complete 605 GL SDL offset projects.**

#### b. MDBA Delivery Capacity

Members reported on attendance at recent MDBA workshops held on delivery capacity and the range of view of participants. Critical that focus is on dealing with delivery constraints as a priority as opposed to restrictions on end users.

#### c. Member Items

Chair invited members to consider those water related issues that would like to this committee to focus on or which they require further information on at future meetings.

#### d. Feedback to Board

The Committee discussed how it should provide feedback to the Board. Andrew Meddle advised that the Board were considering process around this and further information would be provided to the Committee.

Close



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**Greg McCarron**  
Chair



No.	Action	Due Date	Status
1	Committee to provide feedback/ideas on shortfall management to Theresa Heneker and the Water Advisory Committee for discussion		Complete
2	Dan to attend a future meeting to discuss specific issues as identified by the Committee - complete		Complete
3	Simon Jacobs to come to a future meeting to provide an update/seek feedback on the plan – for April meeting	April meeting	In-hand
4	Committee to seek an additional member who is knowledgeable about Mallee water	ASAP	On-going
5	Lyz to investigate whether First Nations are willing to provide the Committee with a copy of their Water Plan		In-hand
6	Lyz to provide updates at future meetings as WAP progresses		This action will be ongoing and can be removed from the Action Sheet
7	Committee to speak to Chair regarding what they would like to hear from the MDBA or bring to their attention		Complete
8	Deana to provide information on what process is followed when certain catchments/states do not meet legislative requirements		
9	Deana to provide details of the upcoming MDBA engagement session to Committee		Complete
10	Speakers to be asked to clearly state if any part of their presentation is confidential, prior to presenting		Complete
11	Committee members to report any conflict of interest to the Chair		Complete
12	Samantha Wakelin and Amy Goodman to determine members' availability for monthly meetings		Complete
13	Committee members to provide suggestions for agenda items to the Chair		Complete