

Chowilla Floodplain

2025-26 proposed environmental water operations



Operation of the Chowilla Floodplain environmental regulator is planned between late July or August and December this year, although the final decision to proceed, the scale and timing of the operation, will depend on River Murray conditions, including flows received through winter and spring, environmental water availability and approvals.

Chowilla Floodplain responded well after a number of wetter years, showing an improvement in red gum and black box health, widespread understorey vegetation growth and large-scale recruitment of red gum and black box seedlings, particularly following the 2022-23 River Murray flood. However, with the recent and ongoing dry conditions, it is now important that these benefits are protected and consolidated with follow-up watering.

The operation of the Chowilla regulator will enable managed inundation of the floodplain including high value wetlands and areas of river red gum and black box trees. Targeted watering through pumping may also occur at some wetland sites.

This inundation will connect the waterways and wetlands, support the growth of aquatic vegetation, provide feeding and breeding habitat for birds and frogs, and enable the movement of carbon and nutrients from the floodplain to the river, to provide the resources that support food webs.

The operation will also improve soil moisture along creek banks and across wetlands and floodplains, improving tree and understorey condition and supporting further growth of the red gum and black box seedlings.



Watering operations help provide habitat and feeding resources for wetland birds.

Operation of the Chowilla Creek regulator

The final scale of the operation will vary from low through to a high level, depending on river conditions, particularly the level of River Murray flows into South Australia.

The operation will involve gradually increasing water levels in the floodplain creeks by between 1.8 metres and 3.5 metres above normal pool level, inundating between 2,000 ha and 6,000 ha of floodplain and wetlands.

If River Murray flows don't exceed and remain above 6 GL/day, the operation will only be able to achieve a 1.8 m raise. If higher flows occur, a larger level operation of the regulator may be possible.

As water levels are raised behind the Chowilla regulator, Lock 6 will also be progressively raised by between 20 cm and 60 cm above normal operating level, depending on the scale of the Chowilla regulator operation and river flows. This concurrent weir pool raising is important to enable the management of water quality and help to protect critical flowing habitat for native fish.



Aquatic vegetation provides important habitat and food resources for frogs and waterbirds.

Flows into the Chowilla creek system will be managed through the inlet weirs on Pipeclay and Slaney creeks, to ensure that flowing habitat in the creeks is maintained during the operation.

SA Water operates the river infrastructure, including the inlet weirs, to enable fishways to operate effectively in attracting and passing fish, and ensuring flowing water habitat in the Chowilla creeks is maintained as flow conditions change.

If River Murray flows remain lower than required, or decrease during the operation, the scale of the operation will be reviewed. If this occurs, pumping to some priority wetland sites may still be undertaken, to provide important refuge habitat for a range of plants and animals.

If River Murray flows increase to 50 GL/day or above during the operation, any managed operation of the Chowilla regulator and Lock 6 raising will cease.



Peron's tree frogs, one of eight frog species that benefit from environmental water delivery.



Black box seedlings that germinated after the 2022-23 River Murray flood.

Access to Chowilla Floodplain during environmental watering operations

Chowilla Game Reserve will remain open for the public to enjoy during environmental watering operations, where possible. However, there will be some campsite closures and restrictions to access tracks during higher level operations.

Boating

The regulator on Chowilla Creek will be closed to boat passage during operations. Boats travelling up Chowilla Creek from the main river will only be able to travel as far as the regulator.

When access tracks and campsites are open, boating access is possible upstream of the regulator, with a designated launch site available at Campsite 13. Small watercraft can also be launched at other campsites where it is safe to do so. The Customs Houseboat ramp, on the southern side of the River Murray, will be available as usual.

Watercraft such as kayaks and canoes can be carried around the regulator but users will need to be prepared to carry vessels for approximately 300 m. Portage for kayaks and canoes is also possible along existing tracks around the smaller weirs at Pipeclay and Slaney creeks.

Due to raised water levels during operations, vessels should navigate the area with caution, as elevated water levels may limit passage beneath bridges, increase the width of shallows and submerge hazards near the banks.

Important: for safety reasons, there is strictly no public access to walk on any regulator or weir structures under any circumstances.

Access Roads

Operation will result in the temporary closure of some public access tracks and roads on the Chowilla Floodplain. Further information will be available on the National Parks and Wildlife South Australia webpage at www.parks.sa.gov.au

Visitors to Chowilla Game Reserve are reminded to stay on public access tracks and proceed with caution on tracks they are unfamiliar with. It is essential to adhere to park signage and to not enter any flood waters. It is an offence to drive off-road or leave formed tracks in any park or reserve.

Campsites

A large number of campsites may be closed during the peak of the operation, therefore it is essential you **remember to book before you go**. To confirm the availability of campsites and purchase campsite permits, please visit National Parks and Wildlife South Australia at www.parks.sa.gov.au or call (08) 8595 2111.



Kayaking at Chowilla Game Reserve.

More information

For further information about Chowilla Floodplain, visit environment.sa.gov.au/chowilla-floodplain

If you would like to be added to future floodplain operation updates, please join our subscriber list at environment.sa.gov.au/ewater-subscribe and select the locations you are interested in. Alternatively, you can email your preferred details to DEW.ewater@sa.gov.au

Updates regarding water for the environment planning, including operations at Pike, Katarapko and Chowilla floodplains, weir pool manipulations and other activities are also provided in the weekly SA River Murray Flow Report (released each Friday). To view the Flow Report or subscribe to receive it directly to your email, please visit environment.sa.gov.au/flow-report

If you have further queries about the proposed floodplain operations, please contact the Department for Environment and Water's Environmental Water Team at dew.ewater@sa.gov.au