



Government
of South Australia



Australian Government

MURRAY FUTURE

Lower Lakes & Coorong Recovery

FACT SHEET

Protecting the Lower Lakes and Coorong for native plants and animals

At a glance

- The Lower Lakes and Coorong are home to many endangered or unique native plants and animals.
- Low water levels have put the ecosystem at risk.
- The main problems for plants and animals are salinity, acidity, poor water quality, and separation of wetlands.
- Work to protect habitats and captive breeding projects is underway to secure the future of these plants and animals.
- You can help protect plants and animals and improve local habitats.

A unique habitat

The Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth region is a designated 'Ramsar Wetland of International Importance' because of its unique habitats and wildlife.

The range of native plants, fish, birds, and other animals in the region also make it one of the most important ecological areas in southern Australia.

Biodiversity snapshot

- Around a third of all wading birds that fly to Australia, from as faraway as Siberia, spend summer in the region.
- More than 70 bird species - mostly water birds - have regularly been found in numbers of around 20 000.



The region is home to a range of unique plants and animals, including the sharp-tailed sandpiper (Paul Wainright)

- Almost 50 types of fish, including five that are threatened nationally and 20 that are protected or of conservation concern within South Australia, are native to the region.
- There are several types of frogs in the Lower Lakes area, including the endangered southern bell frog.
- Reptiles include the eastern tiger snake; eastern brown snake; and eastern long-necked, Murray short-necked, and broad-shelled tortoises.
- The site is home to at least seven endangered or vulnerable types of plants, and critically endangered swamp habitats.

An ecosystem at risk

The combined impacts of low freshwater flows and reduced water quality can affect the range of plants and animals that can live in the area.

Rising salinity has reduced numbers of invertebrates such as worms and insects. They are important sources of food for a range of water birds, frogs, and other animals that could all be impacted by their loss.

It has also allowed marine animals to colonise normally fresh water environments. Tubeworms are now common in the Goolwa Channel and parts of Lake Alexandrina. They can encrust any hard surface, including jetties, boats and even tortoise shells. The weight of tubeworms can cause tortoises to drown.

Many types of fish are sensitive to water quality. Changes in salinity or the amount of acid in the water can kill native fish. This then reduces the amount of food available for many native and migratory birds.

Working to protect native plants and animals

Work is being carried out to protect the plants and wildlife at risk in the region.

Water specifically allocated to the environment has been delivered to critical wetland habitats to ensure their survival until regular fresh water flows return to the region.

Many local schools and community groups are involved in rehabilitating tortoises suffering from tubeworms and releasing them into safe environments.

Volunteers are also helping restore and create habitat through growing and planting vegetation and removing weeds.

Captive breeding programs are underway for native fish facing local extinction, such as the Yarra pygmy perch and southern purple-spotted gudgeon.

Plans to reintroduce more natural patterns of freshwater flow and water levels in the region will help keep habitats connected and help secure a healthy future for the region.

How you can help

You can help improve local habitats for native plants and animals by volunteering to grow and plant vegetation as part of the region wide Vegetation Project.

If you find a tortoise suffering from tubeworms, contact the Lakes Hub to find out the nearest rehabilitation site.

There may also be opportunities to get involved in monitoring birds, animals, native vegetation, weeds, soils, and water.

Contact the Lakes Hub to find out more.

Further information

The Lakes Hub

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