



Government of South Australia

Department of Water, Land and
Biodiversity Conservation

SAVE THE RIVER MURRAY FUND

ANNUAL REPORT 2006-07



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PREPARED FOR THE

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT

BY THE MINISTER FOR THE RIVER MURRAY

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For further information about the Save the River Murray Fund, or the achievements listed in this Annual Report, please contact the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation on (08) 8463 6800 or visit the website at www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au



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ENDED 30 JUNE 2007



INTRODUCTION

The Save the River Murray Fund (the Fund) was established under the Waterworks Act 1932 on 24 July 2003. The Fund is held by the Minister for the River Murray and administered by the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC) on behalf of the Minister.

The Save the River Murray Levy was introduced on 1 October 2003 under the Waterworks (Save the River Murray Levy) Amendment Bill 2003. The levy is charged to all SA Water customers across South Australia, both residential and non-residential and is indexed annually.

The Save the River Murray Levy contributes to a program of works and measures to address the declining health of the River Murray in South Australia and increasing community demands for a high security of water of acceptable quality for urban and irrigation purposes. The program, known as the River Murray Improvement Program (RMIP), is integrated within a larger Murray-Darling Basin program of works and measures, the South Australian River Murray Salinity Strategy and the South Australian Environmental Flows for the River Murray strategy.

The RMIP contributes to the delivery of three high level outcomes:

- improved environmental health of the River Murray system in South Australia;
- high security of water of acceptable quality for irrigation in South Australia at an appropriate price; and
- high security of water quality for urban water supplies.

It also contributes to a range of targets identified in South Australia's Strategic Plan including:

- Increase environmental flows by 500 GL in the River Murray by 2009 as the first step towards improving sustainability in the Murray-Darling Basin, with a longer-term target of 1500 GL by 2018 (T3.10);
- South Australia maintains a positive balance on the Murray-Darling Basin Commission salinity register (T3.11); and

- South Australia's water resources are managed within sustainable limits by 2018 (T3.9).

2006-07 was an extremely dry year for the River Murray. Record low inflows into the Murray-Darling Basin resulted in South Australia only receiving 1470 gigalitres (GL) across the border compared to the normal minimum entitlement flow of 1850 GL and the average flow of approximately 4000 GL. This led to a temporary change in management and the sharing of available water. The water sharing arrangements that exist under the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement were modified to accommodate the drought conditions.

The drought had a major impact on all water users of the Murray-Darling Basin. South Australian irrigators were restricted to 60% of their water entitlement, water restrictions were introduced for urban users and water allocated to the environment was significantly reduced.

In addition, water savings measures were introduced including the temporary disconnection of regulated wetlands from the main channel to reduce evaporative losses and protect water quality in the river.

The water in Lakes Alexandrina and Albert (the Lower Lakes) dropped to very low levels. At times during the tide cycle, water levels in the Lower Lakes were below the sea water level on the Coorong side of the barrages. This resulted in leakages through and around the barrages that in turn has led to elevated salinity levels upstream of the barrages, and an inability to open the barrages or operate the fishways between the Lower Lakes and the Coorong.

The drought in 2006-07 was widespread throughout the Murray-Darling Basin. Given the significance of the region in meeting human, irrigation, and stock and domestic water needs, numerous measures were taken to address the possibility of low inflows into both systems in the forthcoming years and the need to secure water for critical needs.

As extremely dry conditions continue into 2007-08, the health of the river continues to decline, underscoring the need to continue to fund projects focussed on improving the health of the river and the quality of water supplies.

The Fund contributes to a wide range of projects for the River Murray in South Australia and more broadly in the Murray-Darling Basin. The State contributed \$21.607 million to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) in 2006-07 and \$3.741 million of this total was sourced from the Save the River Murray Fund.

At the beginning of the 2006-07 year, there was \$7.2 million in the Fund representing commitments relating to the South Australian contribution towards the Living Murray First Step to return 500 gigalitres of water to the river system and water quality projects.

In 2006-07 a total of \$21.1 million was received into the Fund and \$15.8 million was expended from the Fund on works and measures under the River Murray Improvement Program.

The annual report framework is presented to highlight achievements in the following five key outcome areas:

RETUNING WATER TO THE RIVER

SECURING WATER RIGHTS

PROTECTING THE RIVER

ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT

BUILDING CAPACITY.

01

RETURNING WATER TO THE RIVER

Throughout 2006-07 a number of initiatives have been undertaken to return water to the River Murray with the aim of addressing environmental water needs, the effects of long-term drought and decline in River Murray health.

Living Murray water recovery within South Australia

The Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council established the Living Murray Initiative in 2002 in response to the evident ecological decline in the River Murray system. In November 2003, the Ministerial Council agreed on a First Step Decision to return an average of 500 gigalitres of water per annum to the River Murray by 2009. Under the Living Murray First Step, South Australia's target is to recover 35 GL of water from within South Australia by 2009. In May 2006, South Australian Premier, Hon Mike Rann MP, and Minister for the River Murray, Hon Karlene Maywald MP, formally announced a South Australian water recovery package.

During 2006-07 South Australia continued to implement the South Australian Water Recovery Package. There are three agreed water recovery measures, which are in various stages of implementation, including:

- securing government held water for the environment (13 GL);
- innovative market options (20 GL); and
- infrastructure measures (2 GL).

In 2006-07, South Australia recovered just over 40% (or around 14 GL) of its first step water recovery target. The water recovered so far has been secured on a South Australian water licence dedicated to the Living Murray and which is held by the Minister for the River Murray, in perpetuity. 13 GL of the recovered water was Government-owned water, purchased mainly from willing sellers. The 13 GL was placed on the Living

Murray Eligible Measures Register and has been put forward for investment by the Murray-Darling Basin partner governments. In the interim, the water (restricted to 60%) was made available for environmental use at Living Murray Icon Sites.

Feasibility assessments investigating water recovery through improvements in water use efficiency and market-based measures were completed. Water purchases from willing sellers commenced within South Australia, with SA Water acting as an agent for the Minister for the River Murray.

Living Murray water recovery interstate

In addition to the *South Australian Water Recovery Package*, work has continued on the assessment of interstate water recovery measures. Under the 2004 Living Murray Intergovernmental Agreement, South Australia has a financial expenditure target of \$65 million to help achieve the First Step of 500 GL of water by 2009. In order to meet respective water recovery and financial investment targets, jurisdictions are able to propose water recovery measures, in which all Murray-Darling Basin partner governments may choose to invest. In 2006-07, South Australia invested in the Victorian Goulburn-Murray Water Recovery Initiative. Technical assessments continued on other interstate proposals.

SA River Murray Environmental Manager

South Australia's *Environmental Flows for the River Murray* strategy released in 2005 established the function of the River Murray Environmental Manager (RMEM). In November 2005, the function

of the River Murray Environmental Manager (RMEM) was established and assigned to the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board (Board). During 2006-07, associated roles and responsibilities were formally transferred from DWLBC to the Board. The Board, through the RMEM, has the lead role to coordinate the delivery, allocation and management of River Murray environmental water and to develop policy in relation to environmental flows. The establishment of industry partnerships is progressing, including the development of a partnership with Waterfind Environmental Fund. Discussions are also being held with a number of other organisations.

The RMEM is also South Australia's Living Murray Icon Site Manager and has ongoing responsibility for Living Murray Icon Site management and project implementation (see section 4, Enhancing the Environment). This includes the management of environmental water recovered through the Living Murray for icon sites.

SA Independent Commissioner

South Australia's Independent Commissioner continued to represent the State on the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, pursuant to the *Murray-Darling Basin Act 1993*. The role of the Commissioner is to provide advice to the South Australian Minister for the River Murray, as the State's lead Minister on the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council, on all matters relating to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC).



Key Achievements 2006-07

- 13 GL of water recovered within SA was officially listed on the Living Murray Eligible Measures Register and was made available for investment by Murray-Darling Basin partner jurisdictions.
- SA made the first water available by any Murray-Darling Basin jurisdiction for use at Living Murray icon sites (13 GL (restricted to 60%)).
- Environmental water was used to water some River Red Gum sites on the Chowilla Floodplain and to operate the Barrage fishways.
- Contributed to the development of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's proposal for a 20 GL pilot market purchase.
- Recovery of water through purchase of water from willing sellers commenced.
- Completed a feasibility assessment to introduce innovative water products onto the water market.
- Completed a feasibility assessment to provide financial support to irrigators to upgrade inefficient irrigation systems in exchange for water savings.
- A partnership was established between PIRSA and DWLBC to develop a system to provide financial support to irrigators to improve water use efficiency on-farm.
- Wetlands that may provide 2 GL of evaporation savings by introducing a wetting and drying regime are being investigated.
- Development of the Annual Environmental Watering Plan, which was suspended due to ongoing drought conditions.
- Finalisation of the Floodplain and Wetland Prioritisation Projects, which prioritise floodplain and wetland assets based on specific ecological criteria.
- Ongoing development of a partnership with Waterfind Environmental Fund to establish a water donation framework.

CASE STUDY

USE OF ENVIRONMENTAL WATER

Fishways were a focus for the release of limited environmental water during 2006-07. They provided a mechanism for maintaining some aspects of ecological integrity, particularly in the Coorong, during periods of low freshwater inflows.

Specific monitoring at the fishways during flow release periods provided the following information.

- From September 2006 to March 2007 approximately 190,000 fish were sampled attempting to utilise, or immediately downstream of, the barrage fishways. The overall catch was dominated by the estuarine Small-mouthed Hardyhead, Sandy Sprat and Yellow-eyed Mullet, Diadromous Congolli and Common Galaxias, and freshwater Australian Smelt.
- Upon closure of the Tauwitchere rock-ramp fishway (when lake levels fell below 0.65 AHD) the abundance of freshwater and diadromous species captured fell substantially while estuarine species increased in abundance. This trend was also evident at the Tauwitchere and Goolwa vertical slot fishways when they were closed.

The preliminary data indicates that some modest, largely localised, ecological benefits have been achieved in relation to fish migration, as a result of provision of environmental water. These results reflect change at the fishways and may not fully represent the ecological picture across the entire icon site. In comparison, a substantial decrease in migratory wader bird abundance has been observed and there has been a general decrease in quality and quantity of migratory wader bird habitat, food and resources.



02

SECURING WATER RIGHTS

Securing the water rights of the River Murray and Murray-Darling Basin is important for licensed water users and the wider South Australian community in economic, social and cultural terms.

This security encompasses the quantity and quality of available water, and considers the needs of all water users; rural and urban, as well as the environment. The security and transfer of these rights are key principles of the National Water Initiative, and of Council of Australian Government commitments. The importance of this security has been further highlighted over the 2006-07 year, as the impacts of the drought on all River Murray water users remain ever present and significant.

The *Natural Resource Management Act 2004* (the NRM Act), the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse Water Allocation Plan and the *River Murray Act 2003* form the guiding legislation and policy for the management and protection of the River Murray within South Australia. These are further supported by and support the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement and its schedules in South Australia to protect and manage a significant water resource.

The implementation of the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse Water Allocation Plan remained a major focus during 2006-07, with this work accelerated due to the drought conditions. Significant work supporting amendments to the NRM Act to expand interstate trade and water management options was also completed.

Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment

Efforts continued to protect the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges (EMLR) catchment. The catchment provides freshwater flows to the River Murray and Lakes Alexandrina and Albert, and supports a range of important industries, communities and aquatic environments.

The water resources of the EMLR were prescribed in 2005 to allow for the establishment of a framework for sustainable water resource management and to provide more secure access to water for all water users, including the environment. A Notice of Prohibition is currently in place in the EMLR to temporarily prohibit the taking of groundwater, surface water and watercourse water for new uses while existing water use and the capacity of the resource to support future needs are assessed. Authorisations confirming rights to take water during the prohibition period have been issued progressively, thereby providing security of access to water.

The SA MDB NRM Board is preparing a water allocation plan (WAP) for the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges to ensure water resources in the area are managed and developed in a sustainable manner. The Board appointed two community advisory committees; the Southern Community Advisory Committee which has representatives from Currency Creek, Deep Creek, Tookayerta Creek, Finnis River and Sandergrrove Plains catchment and the Northern Community Advisory Committee which has representatives from Angas River, Angas Plains, Bremer River, Reedy Creek and Milendella catchments.



These committees play a key role in developing policy for the EMLR WAP. In consultation with the Community Advisory Committees, the SA MDB NRM Board developed and released, for consultation, four papers that will form the basis for policy within the WAP. The Board also commissioned numerous technical investigations to assist in the development of the plan.

Water trade

In June 2006, the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council approved a revised Schedule E to the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement. This expanded the area, for interstate trade of water entitlements and transfers, to the whole of the southern-connected Murray-Darling Basin. In parallel, a bilateral agreement was signed between Victoria and South Australia to permit water trade under an exchange rate methodology. An agreement with New South Wales, which permits water trade under a 'tagged' system, was signed in late 2006 and is operational. An equivalent agreement between South Australia and Victoria was finalised in early 2007. In 2007, due to the drought, late season temporary trade was halted on 30 April 2007 to ensure SA remained within its allocation.

Murray-Darling Basin Cap on Diversions

In 1993, amid growing concerns about changes to flow regimes in rivers within the Murray-Darling Basin, the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council initiated an audit of water use within the Basin. In response to the findings of the Audit, a limit or 'Cap' was imposed on the volume of water that could be diverted from the rivers for consumptive use. The Cap on Diversions became permanent in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia from 1 July 1997 and the Independent Audit Group of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission reviews compliance with the Cap each year. In 2006-07, the Independent Audit Group's review found that in 2005-06 South Australia was again under its Cap target, adding to the cumulative Cap credit that South Australia has already developed.

Key Achievements 2006-07

- The *Natural Resources Management (Water Resources and other matters) Amendment Act 2007* was finalised to enable South Australia to fully participate in tagged interstate water trading, and create a greater range of options for the management of water. The amendments also included provisions that enable salinity impacts to be accounted for without being a barrier to water trade.
- Facilitation of expanded interstate water trade as provided for by bilateral agreements and the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement.
- South Australia's water use was again under the MDBC Cap on Diversions.
- Allocation of 22.2 GL for environment land management in the Lower Murray Reclaimed Areas Irrigation Management Zone, as provided for in the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse Water Allocation Plan, and consistent with the MDBC Cap requirements.
- Development of regional meter implementation plans to support the implementation of the South Australian Licensed Water Use Metering Policy.
- Assessment of all River Murray water licence applications against the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse Water Allocation Plan.
- Administration of the Minister for the River Murray Living Murray water licence.
- Increased activity to address non-compliant water extraction and use, and damage to the watercourse, including implementation of repair orders and the implementation of expiation fees for legislative breaches.
- Concept Statements for the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges Water Allocation Plan were approved.
- Papers that will form the basis for policy within the EMLR Water Allocation Plan were developed and released for consultation, including *Management of farm dams*; *Managing new well*; *Aquifer Storage and Recovery*; and *Use of imported water and effluent*.
- Numerous technical investigations to assist in the development of the EMLR Water Allocation Plan were commissioned, including:
 - Aquifer recharge investigations to determine recharge rates across the EMLR;
 - Review of groundwater sustainability in the Angas Bremer catchment;
 - Modeling of gauged and ungauged catchments within the EMLR to determine the capacity of the surface water resource across the EMLR;
 - Development of models of the Angas and Bremer Rivers to determine their respective contribution to surface water flows;
 - Investigations into the environmental water requirements to determine the environments share of the resource;
 - Identification of areas where groundwater and surface water resources are connected to ensure double accounting is prevented;
 - Investigations to better understand the response of fractured rock aquifers to pumping; and
 - Assessment of current and future stock and domestic demands to ensure that total allocations remain within the capacity of the resource.
- Land and water use surveys for the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges were completed.

CASE STUDY

INTERSTATE

WATER TRADE

Interstate water trade takes place under Schedule E of the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement. In May 2006 this Schedule was adjusted to allow the trade of entitlement (permanent) and allocation (temporary) across all of the southern connected Murray-Darling Basin.

This extended area of trade means that irrigators can access water from above Nyah near Swan Hill, the former upper extent to the trading area. The expanded area includes all of the Goulburn River system and the River Murray above the Barmah Choke.

During 2006-07 over 15 gigalitres of entitlement and 51 gigalitres of allocation water was traded into South Australia. Both these figures far exceeded the volume of water traded out of South Australia in the same period. 2006-07 resulted in the highest net trade into South Australian figures on record. This is as a result of both the expanded water trade areas and the impact of the drought on water availability.

During 2006-07, bilateral agreements were entered into by the States to permit 'tagged trading' of entitlements, in addition to the existing exchange rate method of entitlement trade. Although no tagged trades occurred during the 2006-07 year, the ability for these trades to occur was in place. In May 2007, the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council again adjusted Schedule E to permit tagged trade as the method of entitlement trade across the southern connected Murray-Darling Basin. It is still possible to undertake exchange rate trade into the Goulburn River from South Australia.



03

PROTECTING THE RIVER

The Save the River Murray Fund contributes to numerous projects designed to protect the River Murray from processes that have a detrimental impact.

Salinity Management

Salinity is a threat to the quality of River Murray water. Increased salinity levels in the river result in costs for urban and industrial users, and adversely affect the environment and the health of irrigated horticultural crops. Following a review and update of South Australia's Strategic Plan, a new salinity target was developed in 2006-07 to reflect the significance of the issue for the State. The target (T3.11) is "South Australia maintains a positive balance on the Murray-Darling Basin Commission Salinity Register".

As part of our ongoing commitment under the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative, South Australia maintains a register of all actions that impact on the river's salinity. The credit and debit entries to the register are updated annually. The Salinity Register is currently in credit, confirming that South Australia is meeting its salinity management obligations. Updates to the Salinity Register use the best possible information as it becomes available, and among other things, a suite of accredited groundwater models for South Australia is currently being developed to continue this commitment. Salinity management measures have been undertaken in South Australia to control and reduce salinity levels, including improved irrigation efficiency, rehabilitation of irrigation infrastructure, salt interception and salinity zoning policy development. These measures assist in maintaining South Australia's net credit position on the register, which ensures irrigation development is not having a long-term effect on the river.

Under Schedule C of the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement, South Australia has a target to keep salinity levels below 800 EC at Morgan for 95% of

the time. Implementation of strategies to support this target will also ensure that South Australia maintains the salinity register in balance.

South Australia has continued to take a proactive and coordinated approach in meeting its obligations under the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement. In 2006-07, a review of the milestones of the *South Australian River Murray Salinity Strategy 2001-2015* was undertaken and the outcomes were considered as part of the mid-term review of the *Basin Salinity Management Strategy 2001-2015*. South Australia also prepared a discussion paper, *Managing salinity impacts of the Living Murray actions*, which was used to inform the mid-term review of the Basin Salinity Management Strategy and the co-ordination of implementation of the Living Murray and Basin Salinity Management Strategy.

Reducing the inflow of saline groundwater into the River Murray provides environmental benefits and underpins sustainable irrigation development. The Bookpurnong Salt Interception Scheme (SIS) was commissioned in September 2006. The project will intercept up to around 120 tonnes of salt per day, preventing it from returning to the river. Murtho SIS investigations were concluded and presented to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) for approval to proceed. The Commission granted conditional approval to progress the project to a "construction ready phase". Investigations have continued at Pike, Chowilla, Salt Creek, Woolpunda and Waikerie and construction of Loxton SIS continued with the completion of the disposal main pipeline and floodplain interception bores.

Implementation of the Salinity Zoning Policy continued. The aim of the policy is to encourage irrigation development to low salinity impact zones or salt interception zones. The Salinity Zoning Policy has been refined so that:

- All water transfers within the high salinity impact zone would be assumed to have the same salinity impact. An allocation transfer can therefore proceed on a one megalitre for one megalitre basis. This has simplified the salinity assessment process for the proponents.
- Water (taking) allocations can be transferred out of the high salinity impact zone and transferred back in at a later point. This requires that an offset be registered against the licence at the time of the transfer, either by the buyer or the seller. The offset is a right to bring a certain volume of water into the high salinity impact zone.

Risks to Shared Resources Program

The MDBC Risks to Shared Water Resources program is aimed at addressing the impacts of climate change, overuse of groundwater, bushfires, expansion of farm dams, reduced return irrigation flows and reforestation on the future water resources of the Murray-Darling Basin. Recent predictions by the CSIRO are that this impact will be high and could significantly reduce flows by the year 2023. If this prediction is correct and jurisdictions do not manage these risks, then water resource availability will be seriously negatively impacted for all water users in the Murray-Darling Basin.

In August 2006 the MDBC agreed to the outline of a framework for addressing activities and processes that pose a risk to the Basin's shared water resources. The Commission also agreed to develop a strategy, known as the 'Risks Strategy' (this can be likened to the Basin Salinity Management Strategy or the Algal Management Strategy) to advance the Risks Program. This agreement shifted the program from information gathering to action.

Coordinators for the Risks to Shared Resources Program have been appointed in each jurisdiction. The South Australian Coordinator was appointed and completed the first report *Risks to the Shared Water Resources of the Murray-Darling Basin – Implementation of regulatory approaches to manage farm dams, groundwater and afforestation in South Australia*.

River Murray Act

The *River Murray Act 2003* was introduced to ensure that new and existing activities that may affect the health of the river are undertaken in a way that protects, maintains and improves river health. Work undertaken in 2006-07 focused on implementing the Act through the development of policies, building relationships with local councils, responding to referrals and compliance matters. *The River Murray Act General and Overview Provisions* were approved for use and the *Neutral and Beneficial Effect Guidelines* were developed. The *Neutral and Beneficial Effect Guidelines* will be the subject of a pilot for 6-12 months prior to finalisation.

Upgrade of Riverland Drainage Disposal Systems and Waste Disposal Stations

There are 17 saline water disposal basins along the River Murray and these were upgraded during 2006-07. The basins have been important in keeping the EC level at Morgan below the 800 EC target. Consultation with stakeholder groups was undertaken to address issues associated with balancing the social amenity and environmental security of the basins.

There are 12 waste disposal stations sited along 650 km of the River Murray in South Australia to take sewage from river vessels free of charge. Until recently some of these 12 stations were discharging the effluent water into 'soakage trenches' located on the floodplain. Work commenced in 2006-07 to upgrade these stations with secondary treatment plants to eliminate the use of the 'soakage trenches'. The stations also require upgrading to cater for modern vessels, which are larger in size and for greater volumes of vessel traffic.

Key achievements 2006-07

- A new target was adopted in South Australia's Strategic Plan (T3.11 South Australia maintains a positive balance on the Murray-Darling Basin Commission Salinity Register). An implementation plan and fact sheet for the SA Strategic Plan salinity target were also prepared.
- A salinity credit and debit assessment was undertaken and the MDBC Salinity Register, currently in credit, confirmed South Australia is currently meeting its salinity management obligations.
- South Australia took a proactive role in the co-ordination of the implementation of the Living Murray and Basin Salinity Management Strategy, and the mid-term review of the Basin Salinity Management Strategy.
- The 2005-06 annual report on South Australia's implementation of the *Basin Salinity Management Strategy* was completed.
- A review of the *South Australian River Murray Salinity Strategy 2001-2015* milestones was completed.
- An evaluation of the legal and administrative arrangements for the Qualco-Sunlands Groundwater Control Trust was completed.
- A performance evaluation framework for the Salinity Zoning Policy was completed to determine if the policy objectives are appropriate and effective.
- The Bookpurnong SIS was commissioned in September 2006 and Murtho SIS investigations were concluded and presented to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC).
- The development and application of a river-wetland-groundwater interaction tool to model and assess the salinity impacts of wetland management in the River Murray system continued.
- The position of South Australian Jurisdictional Coordinator for the MDB Risks to Shared Water Resources Program was established and the Coordinator completed the report, 'Risks to the Shared Water Resources of the Murray-Darling Basin Implementation of regulatory approaches to manage farm dams, groundwater and afforestation in South Australia'.
- The River Murray Act Implementation Strategy was published and a number of referral assessment policies under the River Murray Act were progressed, including policies relating to wetlands and floodplains; minor structures; coast; heritage; dwellings; aquaculture; commercial buildings; and offsets.
- 607 mandatory and 72 non-mandatory referrals were assessed against the objects and objectives of the River Murray Act. 11 matters relating to activities that were likely to cause harm to the river resulted in requests for voluntary reparation work to be carried out.
- A management plan was developed for Saline Water Disposal Basins. The Morgan and Berri Waste Disposal Stations were upgraded to eliminate discharge on the flood plain.
- Modelling and technical advice was provided as required for use in the development of water security strategies and drought recovery strategies for the River Murray and for MDBC reporting purposes.



CASE STUDY

MORGAN & BERRI WASTE DISPOSAL STATIONS UPGRADE WATER TRADE

The River Vessel Waste Disposal Program, funded through the Save the River Murray Levy, is eliminating the practice of using soakage trenches and an effluent lagoon on the floodplain for the treatment and disposal of waste from river vessels. Waste disposal stations also require upgrading to cater for more modern vessels which are larger in size; to provide for the greater volumes of vessel traffic; and to allow pump-out of additional volumes that will result from the new Environment Protection Authority policy currently being implemented to eliminate the disposal of untreated greywater to the river.

There are 12 waste disposal stations sited along 650 km of the River Murray in South Australia with a 13th currently being constructed at Walker Flat. These stations provide an appropriate disposal point for sewage and hard rubbish from river vessels, free of charge, thus protecting the river from pollution.

Until recently the treatment facilities at the waste disposal stations at Swan Reach, Morgan, Lock 6, Lock 3 and

Lock 1 consisted of septic tanks at the site that then discharged the effluent to 'soakage trenches' located on the floodplain. Under agreements with the Mid Murray Council, secondary treatment plants were constructed off the floodplain at Swan Reach in 2005-06 and at Morgan in 2006-07 eliminating the use of the 'soakage trenches'.

At Berri the septic tank treatment facility discharged to the old Council effluent treatment lagoon for the township, also located on the floodplain. Under an agreement with the Berri Barmera Council, the upgrade of the treatment arrangements involved pumping the effluent to the Council's Septic Tank Effluent Disposal (STED) Scheme through a rising main of about 730 metres in length. Council relocated its town effluent lagoons from the floodplain to their current location nearly 20 years ago, however, the Berri waste disposal station continued pumping directly to those lagoons as they were remote from the Council STED Scheme connections. This final action is important to the Berri Barmera Council as it now means the old lagoons can be fully decommissioned.

In future years, similar upgrades to the treatment facilities at the stations at Lock 1, Lock 3 and Lock 6 will also be funded by the Save the River Murray Levy.

04

ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT

The River Murray in South Australia is important to all South Australians and for a range of reasons. Economically, the river supports vibrant and productive agriculture. It functions as a significant cultural and recreational resource and it is, in itself, a complex and rich ecosystem..

The maintenance of functioning ecosystems is a critical component of integrated natural resource management in the region. The region features a variety of wetland systems and types that perform various functions for the river and many of these are recognised as being of national and international significance.

While the drought has impacted substantially on environmental projects during 2006-07, programs and activities to maintain these environments have been progressed.

Living Murray Environmental Management Plans for the Chowilla Floodplain, the Lower Lakes/Coorong/Murray Mouth and River Murray Channel Icon Sites were completed and interim 'blueprints' have been developed to inform hydrologic modelling to assess the feasibility of addressing the collective water needs and infrastructure works at all sites and the extent to which the water and works will achieve the environmental objectives established by the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council.

The River Murray Environmental Manager (RMEM) finalised the Floodplain Prioritisation Project, which identifies River Murray floodplain units at a broad scale to assist in targeting investment in environmental flows in the future; and the Wetlands Prioritisation Project, which prioritises wetlands along the river based on a number of criteria. The SA MDB NRM Board continued important work to develop wetland management plans and environmental monitoring programs.

Drought contingency planning has been a critical component of the RMEM program during 2006-07, with the prioritisation of sites permanently connected to the River Murray channel for temporarily disconnection to achieve evaporative water savings and to protect water quality in the river itself.

Chowilla Floodplain

To meet the environmental objectives of the Chowilla Floodplain Icon Site, some infrastructure project proposals and investment plans have been developed and approved by the MDBC. These include the replacement of Bank E with a rock ramp fishway and an upgrade of both Pipeclay and Slaney Creek weirs. The replacement of Bank E with a rock ramp fishway will provide access for fish to over 100 km of anabranck creek system and will enable future weir manipulations at Lock 6 to create favourable conditions for a range of fish in the downstream creek and wetlands. Weir pool manipulation is a high priority, as it is one of the few means of inundating localised wetlands and varying water levels in the anabranck creeks. An investment plan is also being developed for construction of an environmental regulator at Chowilla Creek, to enable inundation of up to 50% of the Chowilla floodplain.

A total of 15 sites were originally prioritised to receive environmental water during 2006-07. Due to a lack of water, a rationalisation of the watering program occurred, resulting in a total of 11 sites being watered.

A total of 4.2 gigalitres was used on Chowilla during 2006-07. No watering occurred after November 2006.

Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth (LLC&MM) Icon Site

The LLC&MM Icon Site Environmental Management Plan contains 20 specific ecological targets to be addressed to meet the broader objectives of the icon site plan and the Living Murray Initiative. In 2006-07 work focused mainly around fish objectives and targets. Projects being progressed include additional fishways at Hunter's Creek and Boundary Creek, fish ecology and movement investigations, modifications to the Tauwitschere rock ramp fishway, construction of a low flow small bodied vertical slot at Goolwa and Tauwitschere barrages and two additional small rock ramp fishways at Tauwitschere. Investigations are also underway into the potential to divert SE drainage flows to the southern lagoon to improve the ecological outcomes.

The three existing fishways in the Lower Lakes barrages continued to provide an opportunity for fish to move between freshwater and estuarine environments for different stages of their life cycle. Small environmental releases were made through the barrages during 2006-07, with a total of 4.7 gigalitres of environmental water used to operate the barrage fishways. Monitoring at the fishways in November 2006 indicated that fish species such as common galaxias and congollis migrated upstream following spawning.

To ensure ongoing connectivity between the Coorong and the sea, dredging of the Murray Mouth continued for a fifth year. From July 2006, two dredges were undertaking the dredging but part way through the year the dredging effort was reduced, as one dredge was able to maintain the dredged channel.

Key Achievements 2006-07

- Further development and implementation of South Australian Living Murray Icon Site Environmental Management Plans.
- Blueprints to identify the environmental watering needs and works required at icon sites were developed.
- Approval for the upgrade of Pipeclay Creek and Slaney Creek weirs, Bank E development and a new bridge at Boat Creek near Chowilla.
- Approval was provided by the MDBC for a fish-friendly regulator at Hunters Creek.
- Water sampling for the Coorong and bird surveys for the South Lagoon continued and a mudflat survey for the South Lagoon was completed.
- Coordination of a comprehensive baseline survey of the Markaranka Floodplain as part of the partnership with Fosters Ltd to achieve long-term environmental improvement in floodplain health.
- Completion of consultation with Community Reference groups on key wetland management issues and commencement of consultation with the Ngarrindjeri community.
- Hydrological management plans for each regulated wetland site were completed.
- A National Water Quality Management Strategy agreement was reached between the SA MDB NRM Board and Environment Protection Authority.
- Final reports for the River Murray and Lower Lakes Catchment Risk Assessment were released.
- The final phase of the Lower Murray Rehabilitation Irrigation Area environmental monitoring project (2004-2006) was completed.
- Construction of the Lock 1 fishway at Blanchetown began in conjunction with the upgrade of the navigable pass and completion of the detailed design of Lock 3 fishway, which is to include an innovative fish lock for small fish passage.
- Establishment of an expert panel to study the effects of drought on the fish community.
- *Fish of the Murray-Darling Basin: an introductory guide* – the first book devoted exclusively to the fish of the Basin was released.

CASE STUDY

ENVIRONMENTAL WATERING AT LOWER LAKES, COORONG & MURRAY MOUTH

A total volume of 68 GL of water was released through the Lower Lakes barrages and fishways during the 2006/07. This was over 700 GL less than 2005/06 and 2700 GL less than the long-term median flow over the barrages. The majority of the 2006/07 flows were through the barrages (54 GL) with the remaining 14 GL through fishways (4.7 GL was environmental water allocated through the Living Murray Initiative [TLM]).

Targeted freshwater releases through Boundary Creek (5.2 GL) and Mundoo Channel (2.3 GL) barrages achieved localised estuarine conditions for the duration of the releases (Boundary Creek: 115 days; Mundoo Channel: 37 days). The conditions proved favourable for fish, vegetation, and macro-invertebrate communities (i.e. increased abundance and diversity).

Fish investigations at the barrage fishways between September 2006 and March 2007 captured a total of 191,449 fish from 30 different species (freshwater, diadromous and estuarine)

over the sampling period. Common galaxias, congolli, small-mouthed hardyhead and sandy sprat dominated the catch. Both common galaxias and congolli appear to have undergone substantial recruitment despite very low-levels of flow in 2006/07 with >95% of the migrating population consisting of young-of-year individuals for both species.

The provision of environmental water provided modest, largely localised, ecological benefits for fish migration. The early closure of the fishways in 2007 was necessary due to low lake levels and the increased risk of reverse flows i.e. sea water from the Coorong flowing into the freshwater lakes. It should be noted that while these results reflect change at specific points such as the fishways they may not fully represent the ecological picture across the entire icon site. For example, salinity levels increased, and water levels decreased to the lowest on record in the Coorong, South Lagoon. Migratory waders were in low abundance during the 2006/07 summer.

The ecological health and condition of the Coorong and Lower Lakes continued to decline in 2006/07 with the decline primarily due to the reduction of system-wide freshwater inflows.

CASE STUDY

ENVIRONMENTAL WATERING AT CHOWILLA

Between 2004 and 2006 environmental water was provided to 24 sites across the Chowilla floodplain. Nineteen of these sites have now been re-watered. The program has been successful in maintaining and improving the condition of Red Gum, Black Box and River Cooba (Gehrig 2005, Aldridge et. al 2006) as well a diverse range of flood-dependent understorey species. The condition of individual trees at these sites was recorded prior to watering and then again approximately 2-3 months after they were provided with

environmental water for the first time. For all tree species there is evidence of a strong canopy response, with the frequency of stressed trees declining, and a strong increase in the frequency of trees putting on new growth.

For all three species, at least 70% of all trees originally scored as extremely stressed (no leaves, bark intact) or higher showed an improvement in canopy condition following the application of environmental water, with 70% of Red Gums, and approximately 74% of Black Box and 80% Coobah improving. The frequency of canopy response to watering among trees originally scored as near dead (cracked bark, no leaves) was less than 10%. Sites that have not received water have continued to decline, probably beyond recovery in many cases.



05

BUILDING CAPACITY

South Australia's Strategic Plan places a strong emphasis on building strong community networks and enhancing information transfer. Capacity building generates knowledge and skills that will better equip South Australians to responsibly manage our natural resources. This knowledge will allow South Australians to actively participate in making decisions for their individual and collective social, economic and environmental futures.

Adopting a strategic knowledge management approach will provide the framework for the long-term management of the River Murray, which will be enhanced by informed decision-making backed up by the most up-to-date and relevant science. Integrating this scientific knowledge increases the ability to achieve positive ecosystem outcomes throughout the South Australia Murray-Darling Basin and in upstream areas of strategic importance to South Australia.

Significant capacity has been built by directly funding research and investigations through improving research networks. This generates new knowledge that is used to improve environmental management outcomes, inform water policy and strengthen the State's position in the Murray-Darling Initiative and the National Water Initiative.

Innovative management systems and technologies in areas such as environmental flows, water trade and water use efficiency continue to be pursued to enable irrigators, water and environmental managers to respond to challenges presented by climate change, salinity and water allocation policy.

eWater CRC

During 2006-07 the *Investing in the River Murray* project was progressed through investment in the eWater Cooperative Research Centre (eWater CRC). The eWater CRC was established in July

2005 through the merger of the Cooperative Research Centre for Catchment Hydrology and the Cooperative Research Centre for Freshwater Ecology. Established as a technology development initiative the eWater CRC is supported by the Australian water resource management industry and research organisations and the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres program. Total funding for the eWater CRC is \$141.2 million over seven years. The key products of the eWater CRC will build and deliver the next generation of water management decision tools to effectively manage fresh water resources and environments. These products range from models for forecasting and visualising scenarios and decision support software, to databases and data collection mechanisms, management guidelines and training courses for industry professionals and postgraduates.

Root zone salinity

The South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) developed a simple, inexpensive toolkit for growers to monitor root zone salinity of high-value horticultural crops. This toolkit is now marketed internationally as "SoluSAMPLER™" by Adelaide company SENTEK Sensor Technologies. About 1000 of the toolkits are already in use by Australian growers, consultants and researchers. By using the toolkit, among others, a Baramera grape grower used 3 megalitres per hectare last year compared to 10 megalitres per hectare five years ago. Despite the drought, the grower's

chardonnay yielded 16 tonnes per hectare. The grower said that the "SoluSAMPLER™" enabled him to keep the water and nutrients where he wanted them for the maximum benefit of the vines.

SARDI has been at the forefront of technology development and diffusion. More than 70 of Australia's leading scientists, researchers, growers and policy makers working in the area of irrigation and root zone salinity attended a two-day workshop, organised by SARDI in October 2006, to share new knowledge, tools and techniques developed by SARDI to tackle irrigation inefficiency and the risk of root zone salinity.

In July 2007 SARDI organised an international workshop in partnership with the CRC for Irrigation Futures. The focus was finding the right formula to apply precise amounts of water to leach excessive salts from the root zone of horticultural crops. Root zone salinity is an unfortunate consequence when horticultural industries become highly efficient in water use. Left unchecked the problem could cost the Lower Murray horticulture industry about \$100 million a year.

Irrigation and Recording Evaluation Systems (IRES)

IRES was developed after years of listening and working with growers on what information is required for them to manage irrigation operations. Suggestions and feedback from more than 100 growers have already been incorporated into IRES software since its inception in June 2005. Development work on IRES is continuing. IRES V3.0 is due for release in March 2008 and includes more water budgeting, crop production and water and soil salinity tracking benefits. IRES V3.5 will be a centre pivot irrigation version. IRES is currently being trialled with grower groups in the Murraylands, Southern Vales and southeast of South Australia. Over the past two years the Irrigated Crop Management Service (ICMS) team has delivered 12 IRES training workshops in the Lower Murray, Mallee and Riverland regions. The ICMS team has provided subsequent on-farm support to irrigators for installing IRES on farm computers, setting up properties in IRES software and general computer use.

Interactions between climate change and technology

Significant achievements in research at the interface between climate and viticulture include an original quantitative characterisation of climatic influences on the quality of Australian wines, and the development of novel methods to simulate warmer environments in the field. This research featured in three scientific papers in the Australian Journal of Grape and Wine Research, and five poster papers and one keynote address at the 13th Australian Wine Industry Technical Conference (Adelaide 2007). The work on experimental manipulation of temperature in vineyards received the best-paper award at the Australian Wine Industry Technical Conference 2007.

Northern Murray-Darling Basin

There has been growing awareness of the low level of knowledge of the Northern Murray-Darling Basin and agreement has been reached to develop a work program for the Northern Murray-Darling Basin to improve flows and floodplain health. Improved end of system flows and improved river and floodplain health are in South Australia's interests because on average the Darling contributes 17% of total Murray-Darling flow into this state, and Darling flows are important for ecologically important sites such as the Chowilla Floodplain wetlands.

Key Achievements 2006-07

- Investment in the eWater CRC delivered for:
 - Ecological Response Modelling Tool
 - Prototype Pressure Response Model Builder
 - Catchment Modelling Package and Ecological Response Models
 - Experimental models for analysing strategic options for an environmental trader to acquire water for key wetland sites in the Murray-Darling Basin and restore historical flow regimes
 - Framework for Setting Ecological Targets and an online delivery program.
- Development of a toolkit for growers to monitor the root zone salinity of high-value horticultural crops.
- Organisation of a national workshop on root zone salinity with 70 leading scientists.
- Development and testing of the Irrigation and Recording Evaluation Systems (IRES) software, and roll out of the software in the Riverland.
- Establishment of a partnership between the SA MDB NRM Board and the Yatco Landcare Group to develop a long-term management plan for the Yatco Lagoon that incorporates relocation of irrigation pumps to the river, to achieve water savings and improved ecology.
- Appointment of Indigenous Facilitators at the Chowilla Floodplain and Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth Icon Sites.
- Ongoing monitoring of water levels, water quality, salinity levels, bird and fish populations, vegetation, aquatic plant growth, tide and lake levels by government agencies, the SA MDB NRM Board, Living Murray Icon Site projects and community groups.
- Provision of modelling and technical advice regarding changing water levels and salinities for use in the development of water security strategies and drought recovery strategies for the River Murray in South Australia.
- Participation in the establishment of the Northern Murray-Darling Basin Initiative.



CASE STUDY

INDIGENOUS FACILITATORS AT SA LIVING MURRAY ICON SITES

This case study can sit between Themes 4 and 5 if there is a spare page)

The SA Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board's (NRM Board) River Murray Environmental Manager unit has employed two Indigenous Facilitators to help achieve Aboriginal input into the management of the Chowilla Floodplain and the Lower Lakes, Coorong & Murray Mouth Icon sites. These positions are funded through the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's Indigenous Partnerships Project to work with the Living Murray Icon Site Managers in developing and implementing the Environmental Management Plans for each site, and to be a local resource to guide and facilitate involvement of the Indigenous community.

Steven Walker, the Indigenous Facilitator for the Living Murray Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth Icon Site was appointed in July 2006 and has been working with Icon Site management staff to facilitate Indigenous input on a range of projects, and to provide information about the Living Murray and projects occurring at the Icon Site to the Ngarrindjeri

community. Steven is also working with his community, Local Action Planning groups and the NRM Board to enhance Indigenous engagement in a range of on-ground works happening around the Icon Site.

Gladys Sumner, the Indigenous Facilitator for the Living Murray Chowilla Floodplain Icon Site was appointed in early 2007. She has been involved in supporting cultural heritage survey work and planning for cultural site protection works on the Chowilla Floodplain. Gladys is developing information products that will highlight the Aboriginal significance of the Chowilla Floodplain, providing information about the Living Murray and projects on Chowilla Floodplain to the Aboriginal communities of the Riverland and seeking input from those communities to enhance Icon Site management.



CASE STUDY

GROWERS TOOLKIT

Significant areas of wine grape growing occur in the Lower Murray region, Langhorne Creek (6200 ha) and Currency Creek (1000 ha). These districts draw most of their irrigation water from Lake Alexandrina.

During recent years, rising salinity of irrigation water has become a serious threat to wine grape production in this region. In the peak growing season (from December till March) the flow of the Finnis River effectively ceases and consequently this results in very high water salinities (3800 to 6000 EC) near where the river discharges into Lake Alexandrina.

A simple tool, SoluSAMPLER™ developed by the SA Research & Development Institute (SARDI) is helping high value horticulture growers to manage salt in the roots of plants while achieving maximum use of water on the farm. By using this tool in conjunction with a simple salinity meter, irrigators can monitor salt accumulation and make timely irrigation management decisions by comparing the instant readings against benchmark values.

This new toolkit was launched in May 2007 to be marketed worldwide by Adelaide company SENTEK Sensor Technologies Pty Ltd. About 1000 of

these devices are already in use by growers, consultants and researchers in Australia, South Africa and USA.

The new tool is being used in a two year project jointly instigated by , SARDI and SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Board, which is aimed at monitoring & managing the salinity risks for a Currency Creek cabernet vineyard irrigated with Finnis River water. A key component of the project is to assess the most efficient method for leaching accumulated salt from the root zone after vintage with emphasis on using natural rainfall events to optimise salt leaching process.

The key learning from this project is that growers should no longer apply a leaching irrigation immediately after harvest as traditionally practised as at that time irrigation water tends to be more saline. It is recommended that the grower delays root zone leaching until mid-winter when the river water quality has improved, the soil profile has been wetted up by the interim rainfall, and evapo-transpiration levels are minimal. In this way significant volumes of valuable water are being saved.

This leaching strategy will potentially reduce amount of water diverted for irrigation from the River Murray because the leaching efficiency is far greater in winter compared to leaching immediately after harvest.

PROGRAM STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2007

	Note	2007 \$'000	2006 \$'000
Funds held at 1 July		7,201	11,605
RECEIPTS	1		
Recurrent Appropriation		21,113	21,711
Other Revenue		0	126
Total Receipts		21,113	21,837
1	Implementation of Water Allocation Plan	1,431	1,496
2	Investment in Salinity Accountability	212	173
4	River Murray Act	522	467
5	MDBC State Contribution	3,741	3,643
6A	Environmental Flows & Wetland Management	470	780
6B	Modelling Assessment	229	219
7	Prescription of Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges	885	627
8	Investing in River Murray Ecology	150	150
9	Upgrade of Riverland Drainage Disposal System	24	108
10	Upgrade of River Murray Waste Disposal Stations	550	188
11	River Murray Select Committee - Drought Management & Other Recommendations	167	170
12	Improved Information Management	225	276
13	Water Acquisition for Environmental Flows	2	5,522
15	Save the River Murray Levy Flyers	0	9
16	MDBC Independent Commissioner	42	28
19	E-Flows and Wetland Management	197	87
20	Irrigation Research, Technology Diffusion and Education	900	1,200
21	Water Quality Improvement	256	500
22	River Murray Environmental Manager	308	0
TOTAL PAYMENTS		15,831	26,241
Net Increase in Funds		5,282	-4,404
Funds held at 30 June			7,201

1 Fund Purpose and Funding

The "Save the River Murray Fund" (The Fund) is established under Section 100 of the Waterworks Act, 1932. The major purpose of The Fund is to provide funds for programs and measures to improve and promote the environmental health of the River Murray or ensure the adequacy, security and quality of the State's water supply from the River Murray. The Fund contributes to the excess of the State's contribution to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and may be used to provide rebates (including administration costs) in particular cases.

Revenue collected from the Save the River Murray levy is paid into the Fund through the provision of appropriation from the Consolidated Account. The fund is not interest bearing.

(a) Future Developments in Financial Reporting

Establishing the Save the River Murray Fund (STRMF) as a separate general-purpose reporting entity, where separate statements would be prepared and then consolidated with the Department (newly defined), recognising that the latter retains control. This is intended to improve the overall 'understandability', an essential qualitative characteristic of financial reporting. Recent transactions in respect of water license transfers have further emphasised the need for separation of reporting. This reporting relationship is not provided for in existing statutory arrangements.

(b) Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Generally transactions through the fund are included under the grouping provisions of the GST Legislation. Under grouping provisions, the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC) is responsible for the collection of GST on sales and payment of GST on purchases. The DWLBC received and paid these monies to the Australia Tax Office.

2 Water Acquisition

The purchase of water allocations from individual irrigators and subsequent transfer of 564,420 KL of water allocation to 'The Living Murray' occurred on 30 June 2006. This licence transfer resulted in a obligation on the part of DWLBC to make a payment of \$762,102 being the consideration payable in respect of the vendor's allocation at 30 June 2006. Consequently, an expense for the \$762,102 was accrued and shown in the financial statements of the DWLBC. Payment was made in 2006-2007 and has been reflected as expenditure in the Fund.

Save the River Murray Contributions Fund

A separate fund, Save the River Murray Contributions Fund, has been established to receive contributions where there is no obligation to pay the Save the River Murray Levy. The separate fund was created because the legislation that established the Save the River Murray Fund only provided for revenue to be received from the Save the River Murray Levy.

The funds received in the Save the River Murray Contributions Fund will be applied for the same purpose as the Save the River Murray Fund. The balance of funds held in the Save the River Murray Contributions Fund at 30 June 2007 was \$4,415.

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