

Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth

Environmental Water Management Plan



Schedule - Communications and Engagement Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

The Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth is one of six Living Murray Icon Sites. This Strategy has been prepared to guide communications and community engagement in relation to the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth Living Murray Icon Site planning and management.

BACKGROUND

The Living Murray (TLM) is one of Australia's most significant river restoration programs. Established in 2002, TLM is a partnership of the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian, Australian Capital Territory and the Commonwealth governments, coordinated by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA). The long-term goal of this program is to achieve a healthy working Murray River system for the benefit of all Australians.

The Living Murray aims to improve the environmental health of six icon sites that were chosen for their significant ecological, cultural, recreational, heritage and economic values.

Through its First Step water recovery initiative, TLM has acquired a water portfolio consisting of environmental water entitlements. This portfolio is used to achieve environmental objectives at the icon sites. Regulating structures, water delivery channels and fishways, known as works and measures, will deliver and manage the environmental water at the icon sites.

The Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth Icon Site is located at the terminus of the River Murray system in South Australia. The icon site is bounded by the Mount Lofty Ranges to the west, the Murraylands to the north, the Upper South-east to the East and the Southern Ocean to the south.

The principal towns are Goolwa at the western end of the icon site, Meningie on the shore of Lake Albert and Milang on the shore of Lake Alexandrina. The Icon Site is recognised as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention and its significant ecological, cultural, recreational, heritage and economic values are widely recognised locally, nationally and internationally.

The Lower Lakes and Coorong region is of high cultural, economic, spiritual and social value to the Ngarrindjeri people. The Ngarrindjeri people are the traditional owners of the region and maintain a continuous, strong relationship with their land and waters (Ruwe).

The Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth are popular areas for recreational activities such as sightseeing, bird watching, camping, walking, fishing, boating, swimming, canoeing, sailing, water-skiing, picnicking and four-wheel driving. The icon site area supports a range of economic industries including irrigated and dryland agriculture; commercial fishing; boat building and maintenance; tourism and recreation activity; and manufacturing industries centred on wine, machinery and equipment. All rely on the ecological health of the Icon Site for their wealth. A healthy Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth ecosystem ensures the existence of large and viable fish populations for commercial and recreational fishing, good quality water for irrigation, healthy bird numbers for ornithologists, and an aesthetically attractive and pleasing environment for people to enjoy.

The diverse community and the significant cultural and environmental values of the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth means that there is widespread concern and interest at a local, regional, statewide, national and even international level about the environmental management of the area.

The management of the area as a TLM icon site includes development and implementation of an Environmental Water Management Plan, undertaking environmental watering events, comprehensive projects to monitor the ecological condition of the site over time and to monitor the outcomes of environmental watering and water management activities.

There are a range of other significant programs and projects occurring within the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth region including the significant Murray Futures program run by the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources to develop a Long-term plan for the Coorong, Lakes and Murray Mouth (CLLMM).

All of this presents particular communications and engagement challenges. Wherever it is possible and appropriate, engagement around the TLM program is undertaken in close collaboration with other relevant programs and organisations, including those responsible for the Long-term plan for the CLLMM and the development of the Long-term Environmental Watering Plan for the South Australian River Murray required under the recently endorsed Basin Plan.

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

- Promote LLCMM icon site management and the benefits of environmental watering actions, associated works and monitoring, and engage with the community to maximise informed discussion and support.
- Ensure open and free access to information about the management of the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth as a TLM Icon Site.
- Ensure genuine engagement and feedback processes for key stakeholders.

INTEGRATION WITH EXISTING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

This Strategy guides communications and engagement around TLM Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth icon site management. It should be implemented with regard to wider communications objectives and messages in the TLM Business Plan and Icon Site Environmental Water Management Plans.

Communications and engagement around the TLM program is undertaken in close collaboration with other relevant programs and organisations, including those for the Long-term plan for the CLLMM and the development of the Long-term Environmental Watering Plan for the South Australian River Murray required under the recently endorsed Basin Plan.

TARGET AUDIENCES AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS

A variety of stakeholder and community organisations will be involved in the development and implementation of the LLCMM Icon Site Environmental Water Management Plan. A comprehensive and current list of possible stakeholder and community organisations has been prepared and forms the basis of stakeholder communication and engagement across the program.

Table 1: List of primary target audiences, the impacts and level of engagement and communication methods

Primary target audience <i>People or groups who are directly affected by or require the greatest exposure to our message</i>	Impact	Level of engagement and Communication and Engagement methods
LLCMM Community Advisory Panel	Includes representation from wide stakeholder groups and the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority. Kept well informed – provides strong link to community networks and member organisations.	Information, Consultation & Collaboration. Regular meetings and email updates; provide with expert presentations and up-to-date access to project progress and reporting; site tours and workshops.
LLCMM Scientific Advisory Group	Multi-disciplinary, peak scientific input and advice regarding icon site planning, management and monitoring projects. Includes representation by scientists from SARDI Aquatic Sciences, Adelaide and Flinders Universities and state government agency managers.	Consultation and Collaboration - Regular meetings, email exchanges, data sharing workshops.
Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority	Peak body for Ngarrindjeri – Traditional Owner input and advice regarding icon site planning, management and monitoring projects and regarding Aboriginal heritage management.	Information, Consultation & Collaboration. Attendance and involvement in Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement (KNYA) Taskforce meetings and associated working groups; presentations given at KNYA Taskforce meetings and other forums (including Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (NRA) meetings) as advised / requested. Site inspections / tours. Indigenous Facilitation through the TLM Indigenous Partnerships Program.
Environmental Water Holders	Includes the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (TLM water holdings) and Department of Environment (Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder).	Require up-to-date information on e-water related projects and delivery. Require sign-off on any media releases about e-watering. Will be consulted through regular teleconferences, workshops, emails and reports.

Primary target audience <i>People or groups who are directly affected by or require the greatest exposure to our message</i>	Impact	Level of engagement and Communication and Engagement methods
Local community groups – includes Local Action Planning associations; Catchment, Landcare and Wetland Management groups; Community associations; Community Centres; Information Hubs; etc.	Strong involvement in environmental and natural resource management programs across the icon site area. Provide excellent links through communities.	Some represented on Community Advisory Panel. Email updates. Presentations and displays at targeted events and CARE Team meetings. Community workshops, information sessions and site tours. Media and newsletter articles. Factsheets. DEWNR website.
Local Government Alexandrina Council; Coorong District Council; Rural City of Murray Bridge.	Strong concern with health and management of icon site – link to wider community and industry.	Some represented on Community Advisory Panel; Email updates; Presentations to meetings; Community workshops and information sessions. Factsheets. Website links.
Local industry - includes regional development boards; Fisherman's association; irrigators and dryland farmers; wineries; tourism; boating and marinas; ferry operators.	Industries dependent on and with great interest in health and management of icon site; strong networks.	Some represented on Community Advisory Panel. Email updates. Presentations and displays at targeted events. Community workshops and information sessions. Media and newsletter articles. Factsheets.
Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources	Lead water management agency including a particular focus on Murray-Darling Basin. Strong concern with health and management of the site. Responsible for environmental water delivery actions. Undertakes icon site management function and manages engagement with MDBA and other water holders. Close collaboration with regional staff, the Murray Futures CLLMM Program and Ramsar management.	Internal communications via intranet; email updates; presentations; briefings, CE News, Inside News. Strong cross-agency collaboration via various management committees; working groups; and projects. DEWNR website.
SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Board, associated NRM Groups, and regional programs	Strong concern with health and management of site; partners in monitoring and environmental water delivery actions; link to wider community and industry.	Strong interagency collaboration via management committees; working groups; and projects. Regular email updates. DEWNR website.

Primary target audience <i>People or groups who are directly affected by or require the greatest exposure to our message</i>	Impact	Level of engagement and Communication and Engagement methods
SA Water Environmental Protection Authority SA Tourism Department for Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (ferries) Primary Industries and Regions South Australia	Strong interest and involvement in various aspects of management of Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth across a range of government departments. Ongoing communications, meetings and discussions.	Information exchange via committees, email and projects. DEWNR website
Secondary target audience	Impact	Communication and engagement methods
SA environmental NGOs and Friends groups Business and other relevant associations; Industry boards (eg citrus/wine/grape); recreational Fishing organisations; houseboat organisations	Range of groups who also benefit from hearing the messages, particularly as a means of supporting or influencing the primary target audience.	Online – DEWNR Email updates Presentations and displays at targeted events. Community workshops and information sessions. Media and newsletter articles. Factsheets.
Wider community / general public.	General information, recognition of TLM program.	Media and newsletter articles. Websites. Factsheets.

KEY MESSAGES

For overarching key messages regarding TLM see The Living Murray 2011-12 Communication and Consultation Strategy.

- The Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth (LLCMM) is a site of enormous environmental, cultural, social and economic value of local, regional, national and international significance.
- As such, it has been recognised as one of six 'icon sites' under The Living Murray (TLM) program of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.
- The South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) is responsible for the management of the LLCMM Icon Site program.
- The LLCMM EWMP aims to achieve a series of ecological objectives, relating to maintaining an open Murray Mouth, enhancing estuarine fish and wading bird populations and reducing salinities.
- The ecological objectives and flow targets of the TLM LLCMM EWMP were developed in a separate process to those of the Basin Plan, and for different purposes and time scales. As a result, there are some minor differences between indicators in these Plans; however they are broadly consistent.
- LLCMM EWMP indicators aim to identify the flow targets and other water requirements to ensure the site functions in a 'healthy' ecosystem state. They are aspirational in nature and not achievable with TLM water only. They are also focussed on water required for real-time management of the site. Basin Plan indicators were developed as long

term statistics for modelling purposes.

- Allocations of environmental water from the TLM and other sources including the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder are sought to achieve significant environmental outcomes for the Lower Lakes (including fringing wetlands), the Coorong and the Murray Mouth.
- While large volumes of water are required to maintain the health of the LLCMM Icon Site, the timing of the delivery of this water is also critical for achieving positive ecological outcomes. As previously stated, these flow/water delivery targets are aspirational in nature and it is recognised that the volume delivered will depend upon water availability, and the requirements of upstream TLM Icon Sites. The TLM water portfolio is not expected to meet all of the water requirements of the LLCMM EWMP.
- To ensure recovery of the LLCMM, the Icon Site Environmental Water Management Plan identifies the optimum water regime required to maintain salinity in the Lower Lakes and the Coorong below threshold levels and to ensure the export of salt from the Murray-Darling Basin.
- Adaptive decisions are made in conjunction with environmental water holders to plan for a range of possible scenarios – from very dry to very wet – to achieve the best environmental outcomes. The annual water planning process is responsive to changes in water resource conditions, opportunities and environmental priorities throughout the season.
- Comprehensive monitoring is undertaken to track the health of the

LLCMM Icon Site, to determine priorities for future environmental water delivery and to assess the benefits of environmental water delivery.

- LLCMM Icon Site planning and management occurs in close collaboration with the Ngarrindjeri Traditional Owners, the community, the DEWNR CLLMM Long-term plan team and the SA Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board and region.
- All media releases around TLM-related projects must include the following statement; The Living Murray is a joint initiative funded by the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian, Australian Capital Territory and the Commonwealth Governments and is coordinated by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority.

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT TOOLS AND METHODS

Online presence – DEWNR Water for Good; WaterConnect; sa.gov.au; Links from connected/related websites.

E-news communiqués - DEWNR news; Other Government agency e-news communiqués; NRM Board and Local Action Planning newsletters.

Briefings and presentations - Food for Thought seminars; Executive and Ministerial Briefings; Government agency briefings; Stakeholder briefings; Conferences.

Events - Community events i.e. field days; displays at relevant events.

Public consultation - Information sessions / Public meetings; Stakeholder letters / emails.

Publications - Fact sheets; Newsletters; Posters/flyers; Display materials; Other agencies' publications.

Media - Media releases; Interviews; Special briefings.

ACTION PLAN

Table 2: Action Plan

Date(s)	Action	Responsible
Quarterly	Community Advisory Panel (CAP) meetings – include detailed briefings; presentations and seeking feedback and input to planning and management.	TLM Icon Site staff, in collaboration with Murray Futures CLLMM Program staff
Quarterly	Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) meetings - include detailed briefings; presentations and seeking feedback and input to planning and management.	TLM Icon Site staff, in collaboration with Murray Futures CLLMM Program staff
Monthly	Email updates to Community Advisory Panel and Scientific Advisory Group	TLM Icon Site staff
6 monthly	Email update to stakeholder list.	TLM Icon Site staff
Monthly	Engagement with Ngarrindjeri via involvement in KNYA Taskforce meetings – includes provision of presentations re Icon Site planning and management. Involvement on Ngarrindjeri CLLMM Research and Monitoring Working group includes collaboration on project development and implementation with Ngarrindjeri Research and Monitoring Unit.	TLM Icon Site staff, in collaboration with Murray Futures CLLMM Program staff
Ongoing	Website updates. Ensure links to other relevant sites.	TLM Icon Site staff
Annual	Community information workshop Monitoring data sharing workshop	TLM Icon Site staff
Annual	Input re TLM to SA annual Environmental Watering report	TLM Icon Site staff
December 2011	Factsheet re LLCMM Icon Site; e-water delivery and monitoring programs.	TLM Icon Site staff
Ongoing as opportunities arise	Presentations &/or displays at relevant meetings (eg. Council, NRM, CARE Team meetings) or events.	TLM Icon Site staff
Ongoing	Media releases to highlight key issues; milestones; environmental watering; notable outcomes from monitoring; engagement events.	DEWNR Communications Team with TLM Icon Site staff

STRATEGY MANAGEMENT

The communications and engagement activities in this strategy will be managed by the LLCMM Icon Site management team in the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources.

EVALUATION

Qualitative measures: ad hoc feedback, questions asked at information sessions, qualitative comments in surveys etc.

Quantitative measures: number of key target people/audiences attending information sessions, number of enquiries about the program/project, number of 'hits' on online information etc.

Evaluation will include media and content analysis to measure inclusion of strategic messages and whether the coverage has been positive or negative.

Evaluation will also consider if the key principles of effective engagement were followed throughout the process such as:

- Provision of accurate, timely, unbiased information on both content and process.
- Use of a range of techniques to inform and involve stakeholders and the community.
- Allowing adequate time and resources?
- Strategy implemented with integrity, treating all stakeholders respectfully.
- Ensuring decision-making processes were transparent and accountable.
- Learning from engagement undertaken and endeavouring to continuously improve engagement.