

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

SA MURRAY-DARLING BASIN ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS AND MEASURES FEASIBILITY PROGRAM (EWMFP) – STATE-LED COMMUNITY COMPONENT

Project Commencement Date: 15 September 2011

Project Completion Date: 29 March 2013

This final Project Report has been prepared in accordance with Section 19 of the Project Agreement for the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Environmental Works and Measures Feasibility Program Intergovernmental Agreement of Federal Financial Relations dated 15 September 2011.

STATED PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND OUTPUTS

The overall objectives of the Environmental Works and Measures Feasibility Program State-led Community Component (EWMFP SLLCC) was to deliver a State-led community engagement and communication process to identify and undertake pre-feasibility assessment of community based proposals for environmental works and measures.

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT AGAINST STATED OBJECTIVES

Identification and prioritisation of community ideas

The Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) entered into an agreement with the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Management Board (the Board) in December 2011 to manage the expression of interest process for community ideas, including the delivery of a prioritised list, communications and community engagement strategy. A Project Management Committee (PMC) was also formed in December 2011, consisting of DEWNR staff and representatives of the Board. The purpose of the PMC was to provide strategic direction on the Project's implementation and provide advice on planning, operational delivery and general project matters to the Service Provider.

DEWNR in conjunction with the Board developed the assessment and prioritisation criteria (see Attachment 9.1), proposal format and detail of project progress. A Community Engagement Strategy was finalised on 31 May 2012.

In February 2012 the Board invited expressions of interest from the community calling for "community ideas for localised solutions" to help achieve the environmental objectives of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and potentially save water or use water more efficiently. A comprehensive promotional campaign was carried out. An overwhelming response to the call resulted in 107 expressions of interest for community ideas being submitted by the community in March 2012.

All 107 expression of interest were reviewed internally by DEWNR against the requirements of the funding program. Some of the ideas were already funded through existing initiatives or grant programs, while some did not meet the objectives of this particular program.

DEWNR prioritised a total of 75 proposals in July 2012 that were in scope (Attachment 9.2). These proposals would require further refining to determine distinct packages in terms of geographic location or similar project deliverables / outcomes / benefits.



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Short-listing of the community identified sub-projects for pre-feasibility assessment including their potential for SDL offsets, in accordance with the project management plan for the State-led community engagement process.

The PMC reviewed the 75 proposals and endorsed 25 proposals to proceed to the next phase of community engagement. Expressions of Interest that were similar and/or had complementary activities were also grouped. Following this assessment process, the 25 ideas for projects that ranked most highly against these criteria were categorised as 'short-listed' (see Attachment 9.3). Ideas were grouped into two regions – 'Above Lock 1' and 'Below Lock 1' (A = Above Lock 1; B = Below Lock 1).

The Community were then updated on the progress of the expression of interest assessment process and invited to community workshops (see Attachment 9.4). In addition to the emails and letters sent to over 700 stakeholders, the Board advertised in Regional Newspapers and forwarded media releases which were published across the region (see Attachment 9.5).

A series of workshops were held in Berri, Mannum and Goolwa in June 2012, where the community reviewed the proposals and prioritised 11 proposals to proceed to pre-feasibility assessment (see Attachment 9.6). The 11 ideas were then further developed by the Community in a second workshop with assistance from DEWNR technical staff (see Attachment 9.7). Both workshops were well attended and achieved tangible outcomes.

Pre-feasibility assessment for sub-projects shortlisted through the community engagement process, and acceptance of final report

An Expert Panel was formed consisting of DEWNR staff and representatives of SA Water and EPA. A series of Expert Panel Workshops were held in August and September 2012 to further assess the technical veracity of each of the 11 ideas prioritised and developed by the community. Findings from the Expert Panel Workshops were considered by the PMC who decided to progress eight of the 11 ideas to pre-feasibility assessment (see Attachment 9.8).

Through the development of the pre-feasibility assessment, the following two proposals were not progressed due to potential funding opportunities through other programs:

- Lower Murray Irrigation Swamps
- Upgrade of Goolwa Barrages

The six ideas recommended as preferred projects for future investment priorities are detailed below:

Terowie, Waltowa and Tolderol Wetlands

These three wetlands are located within the Living Murray Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth (LLCMM) Icon Site and The Coorong and Lakes Alexandrina and Albert (CLAA) Ramsar site, which is also subject to international migratory bird agreements (i.e. Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA), China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA) and Republic of Korea-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (ROKAMBA)). While works and measures at the Terowie, Waltowa and Tolderol wetlands can enhance the outcomes from existing projects in South Australia, they will also contribute to achieving the management objectives and outcomes of the Basin Plan. Project proposal outcomes are also consistent with the objectives of the MDBA Native Fish Strategy, the Living Murray Lower Lakes Coorong and Murray Mouth (LLCMM) Icon Site Environmental Water Management Plan and CLAA Ramsar objectives.

In particular, these wetland restoration proposals aim to improve the diversity and abundance of native aquatic and fringing vegetation and assist in restoring and maintaining bird diversity and habitat for other species, including frogs, through improved hydrological connectivity.



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These wetlands all have a special significance to the traditional owners of the area, the Ngarrindjeri, who have indicated strong support for the proposals. The proposals have been shortlisted through rigorous community consultation, expert panel assessment and are strongly supported by local communities.

Hindmarsh Islands Wetlands

Hindmarsh Island is located within the Living Murray LLCMM Icon Site and the CLAA Ramsar site, which is also subject to international migratory bird agreements (i.e. JAMBA, CAMBA AND ROKAMBA). In a recent assessment undertaken by the University of Adelaide, Hindmarsh Island was rated the highest priority for on-ground works, based on the predicted improvements in ecological condition. In the LLCMM Icon Site Environmental Water Management Plan review, the Hindmarsh Island wetland and channel complex supported the highest range of aquatic habitats and the highest diversity of native fish.

Reconnecting wetlands on Hindmarsh Island has the potential to improve the quality and abundance of vegetation and to improve wader habitat and fish breeding habitat. The proposal is strongly supported by the Ngarrindjeri and local communities. While works and measures at the Hindmarsh Island wetlands can enhance the outcomes from existing projects in South Australia, they would also contribute to achieving the management objectives and outcomes of the Basin Plan. Project proposal outcomes are also consistent with the objectives of the MDBA Native Fish Strategy, Living Murray Icon Site Environmental Water Management Plan and CLAA Ramsar objectives.

Bookmark Creek

Bookmark Creek and wetland, located along the western side of Renmark, has been identified as one of the few sites in the Murray-Darling Basin that is able to provide a range of flowing habitats for a number of large bodied fish (Mallen-Cooper 2012^{*1}). Bookmark Creek and wetland has major potential for successful rehabilitation of aquatic habitats and recovery of native fish populations largely due to an upstream and downstream head difference of three metres, which can be used to create flowing water habitat.

The Bookmark Creek and wetland proposal would enhance regional ecological values by complementing projects at other sites such as the Chowilla and Pike floodplains. While works and measures at Bookmark Creek can enhance the outcomes from existing projects in South Australia, they would also contribute to achieving the management objectives and outcomes of the Basin Plan. The site is highly visible to the local community and visitors and is strongly supported by the local community.

Martin Bend

Martin Bend wetland was identified in the Wetlands Atlas of the South Australian Murray Valley (Jensen et. al. 1996^{*2}) as a wetland of 'high priority for management'. The Martin Bend wetland proposal would enhance the ecological aims of programs such as Riverine Recovery to improve wetland health and function. While works and measures at Martin Bend can enhance the outcomes from existing projects in South Australia, they would also contribute to achieving the management objectives and outcomes of the Basin Plan. Subject to feasibility assessment, the proposal has the potential to substitute some environmental water with stormwater.

Martin Bend is a very visible site of high visitation and has the potential to provide a demonstration site for wetland management involving multiple stakeholders. The proposal is strongly supported by the local community.

EVALUATION OF PROJECT

The EWMFP State-led Community Component Project has met all milestones in the Project Agreement. DEWNR gratefully acknowledges the valuable contributions from the South Australian River Murray Regional Community, including the many individuals and various local groups and organisations for their generous involvement and



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enthusiasm to enable the community ideas to be captured and prioritised and equally as important to share local knowledge in the development of proposals.

LESSONS LEARNT AND DIFFICULTIES/RISKS ENCOUNTERED

The project progressed well throughout all phases where thoughtful planning and collaboration between Government departments and many individuals and various local groups and organisations within the SA River Murray regional community resulted in the successful production of the SAMDB EWMFP SLLC Pre-feasibility Report.

Despite widespread 'consultation fatigue' within the SA Murray-Darling Basin, people participated in the process of prioritising community ideas with goodwill and optimism. There is a risk this community support could be lost through failure to communicate the outcomes of the next stages in this project, which may contribute to cynicism about management of the Basin. DEWNR has prepared a suite of communications products for the final phase of the project to be released once the final report is accepted, which will include:

- EWMFP State-led Community Component web page;
- Frequently asked questions information sheet;
- Final letter to stakeholders to be disseminated by email and post in April 2013; and
- Media release.

The MDB is a complex policy environment. There are many instances of multiple agencies and/or programs operating in the same geographic area with similar aims and objectives. However, during this project it was not evident that adequate systems are in place for sharing information about the status of projects or governance structures within Government departments. It was often challenging and time consuming to reconcile the different 'pieces of the puzzle' about a particular site or project idea across different agencies. Consideration is being given to ways to enable better sharing of information within and across Government agencies.

Attachments

- 9.1 Expression of Interest Assessment Criteria
- 9.2 75 Prioritised Proposals
- 9.3 Project Ideas Above and Below Lock 1
- 9.4 Invitations to Community Workshops
- 9.5 Communications and Media
- 9.6 Listing of 11 Community Identified Sub-projects
- 9.7 11 Ideas Prioritised and Developed by Community
- 9.8 Communication November 2012

References

1. Potential for Rehabilitation of Native Fish Populations in Bookmark Creek, Dr M Mallen-Cooper 2012.
2. Wetlands Atlas of the South Australian Murray Valley (Jensen et. al. 1996)

