

## Mapping Large Emergent Plant Communities in Lakes Alexandrina and Albert - Data Summary and Recommendations



**Jason Nicol, Susan Gehrig and Arron Strawbridge**

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SARDI Aquatics Sciences  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is no information regarding the landscape scale distribution and abundance of large emergent macrophytes (*Schoenoplectus validus*, *Typha domingensis*, *Phragmites australis*, *Duma florulenta* and *Salix babylonica*) in lakes Alexandrina and Albert. This information is required when planning future planting of *Schoenoplectus validus* to control erosion and provide sheltered areas for aquatic species to recruit and persist around the shorelines of the Lower Lakes. Furthermore, this information is required to identify areas where *Schoenoplectus validus* is abundant and could be used as sources of plants for future plantings.

The distribution and abundance of large emergent macrophytes in lakes Alexandrina and Albert and Goolwa Channel was mapped by boat. Stretches of shoreline with distinct emergent plant communities were identified, each end marked using a handheld GPS and the percentage cover of *Schoenoplectus validus*, *Typha domingensis*, *Phragmites australis*, *Duma florulenta*, *Salix babylonica*, modified shoreline and area of shoreline without large emergent macrophytes was visually estimated. Clustering and indicator species analysis were used to compare the large plant communities and identify different communities, which were mapped. In addition, the distribution and abundance of *Schoenoplectus validus* and areas where large emergent species were absent were also mapped.

*Phragmites australis* was the most common large emergent species in the Lower Lakes, with this species often forming dense monospecific stands. *Typha domingensis* also tended to form dense monospecific stands; however, this species was less common than *Phragmites australis*. *Schoenoplectus validus* was widespread throughout the Lower Lakes but locally abundant in Goolwa Channel and the western shorelines of lakes Alexandrina and Albert. Shorelines where large emergent species were absent or uncommon were also widespread but more abundant on the northern and eastern shorelines of lakes Alexandrina and Albert.

The dominance of *Phragmites australis* and, to a lesser extent, *Typha domingensis* were probably due to the relatively stable water levels in the Lower Lakes. The elevated stable water levels probably also contributed to erosion particularly on lee shorelines, where large emergent species were often absent or uncommon. Future planting of *Schoenoplectus validus* should concentrate on the northern and eastern shorelines of Lake Alexandrina and the eastern shoreline of Lake Albert. Potential sources for *Schoenoplectus validus* for future planting are in

Goolwa Channel (especially areas around private jetties and boat ramps, where it may be seen as a pest) and the western shoreline of Lake Albert.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

*Schoenoplectus validus* is a large, native, perennial, rhizomatous sedge that grows 2–3 m in height (up to 5 m in favourable conditions) in water up to 1.5 m deep (Cunningham *et al.* 1992; Sainty and Jacobs 2003). Ecosystem services provided by *Schoenoplectus validus* include erosion control, waterbird habitat, fish habitat, sediment and water column aeration and water quality improvement (Sainty and Jacobs 2003). It is a common emergent species around the edges of lakes Alexandrina and Albert, but unlike the other two large emergent species present in the Lower Lakes, *Phragmites australis* and *Typha domingensis*, it tends not to form dense monospecific stands (Frahm *et al.* 2014; Nicol *et al.* 2014). *Schoenoplectus validus* usually grows in deeper water than *Typha domingensis* and *Phragmites australis* (Sainty and Jacobs 2003) and is often associated with submergent taxa such as *Myriophyllum* spp., *Potamogeton* spp., *Ceratophyllum demersum* and *Vallisneria australis* in the Lower Lakes (Gehrig *et al.* 2011; 2012; Frahm *et al.* 2013; Nicol *et al.* 2013; 2014).

The ability of *Schoenoplectus validus* to tolerate wave action has resulted in it being planted extensively around the edges of lakes Alexandrina and Albert in water depths up to 1 m, primarily to control shoreline erosion (Goolwa to Wellington Local Action Planning Board *et al.* no date). Furthermore, there was evidence that plantings benefited the aquatic plant community by providing a sheltered area where submergent and less robust emergent species could establish (Nicol *et al.* 2013; 2014).

The program monitoring stand performance of planted *Schoenoplectus validus* and the benefits of the planted stands for the aquatic plant community have provided information regarding the survivorship, stem density, stand width, stem height and compared the plant community between planted and control sites (Nicol *et al.* 2013; 2014). However, there is no current information regarding the distribution and abundance of *Schoenoplectus validus* or other large emergent macrophytes in the Lower Lakes at the landscape scale with the only recent available information collected as part of the *Schoenoplectus validus* monitoring programs undertaken in autumn 2013 and 2014 (Frahm *et al.* 2014; Nicol *et al.* 2014). Information collected as part of these programs was designed to detect changes in the plant community through time and in response to management actions; hence, it was collected at a small spatial scale with replication to provide sufficient statistical power to detect change. Information regarding the

distribution and abundance of large emergent macrophytes at the landscape scale is required to plan future planting programs and inform where planting *Schoenoplectus validus* in lakes Alexandrina and Albert will have the greatest benefit and identify potential sources of plants for future planting.

## **1.2. Objectives**

The main objective of this project was to map the distribution of large emergent (*Schoenoplectus validus*, *Typha domingensis*, *Phragmites australis*, *Duma florulenta* and *Salix babylonica*) plant communities in lakes Alexandrina and Albert. In addition, areas where there was sparse or absent cover of large emergent species were also recorded. This information will be used to inform which areas will benefit most from future planting, where plants can be sourced for future planting programs and provide baseline information regarding the distribution of emergent plants around the shorelines of lakes Alexandrina and Albert.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1. Vegetation Mapping Protocol

Emergent vegetation stands around the edges of lakes Alexandrina and Albert and Goolwa Channel were mapped by boat using a hand held GPS. The ends of a section of shoreline, which had a distinct emergent plant community, were marked and the percentage cover of *Schoenoplectus validus*, *Phragmites australis*, *Typha domingensis*, *Duma florulenta*, *Salix babylonica*, modified shoreline (e.g. jetties, wharves, boat ramps) and bare soil (areas not occupied by the aforementioned species) were visually estimated. Additional characteristics of each site, such as whether there was evidence of erosion or whether planted *Schoenoplectus validus* was present were also recorded.

### 2.2. Data Analysis

The emergent plant community at each site was compared using Group Average Clustering (McCune *et al.* 2002), with Bray-Curtis (1957) similarities used to construct the similarity matrix. At a similarity of 25%, five groups from the dendrogram were identified and Indicator Species Analysis (Dufrene and Legendre 1997) was used to determine the species that characterised each group. All multivariate statistical analyses were undertaken using the package PCOrd version 5.12 (McCune and Mefford 2006). The spatial distribution of each group identified by the dendrogram was mapped using Google Earth. In addition, the percentage cover of *Schoenoplectus validus* and bare soil at each site was classified into six categories (0%, 1–5%, 6–25%, 26–50%, 51–75% and >75%) and the spatial distribution of each of the categories was mapped using Google Earth.

### 3. RESULTS

Cluster analysis comparing the emergent plant community between sites detected five different groups at a similarity of 25% (Figure 1). Indicator Species Analysis detected one significant indicator for each group, which was used to name each group (Figure 1). The largest number of sites was dominated by *Phragmites australis*, followed by sites where large emergent macrophytes were absent or uncommon (Figure 1). Sites dominated by *Schoenoplectus validus* were numerically the lowest (Figure 1); however, this species was often associated with other emergent species.

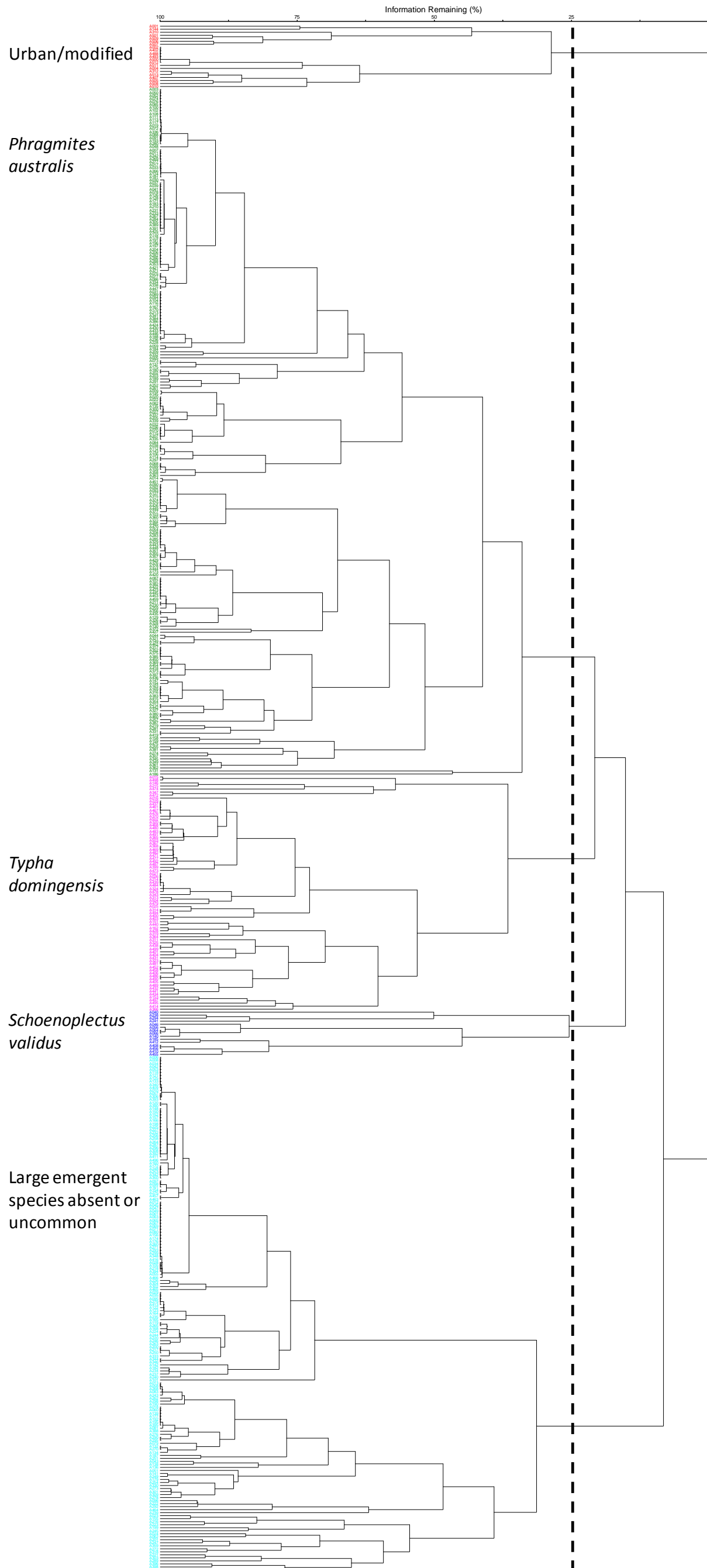


Figure 1: Cluster dendrogram comparing the large emergent plant community on the shorelines of lakes Alexandrina and Albert.

Sites classified in the group “large emergent species absent or uncommon” were generally widespread in lakes Alexandrina and Albert; however, they were more common in areas exposed to wave action (especially the northern and eastern shorelines of both lakes) (Figure 2). Sites classified in the “*Phragmites australis*” group were widespread throughout the lakes and Goolwa Channel, except the northern shorelines of lakes Alexandrina and Albert (Figure 2). Sites classified in the “*Typha domingensis*” group were dominant throughout Goolwa Channel but also present in lakes Alexandrina and Albert, generally in sheltered areas (Figure 2). Sites classified in the “urban/modified” group were dominant around the two main population centres of Goolwa and Meningie (Figure 2).

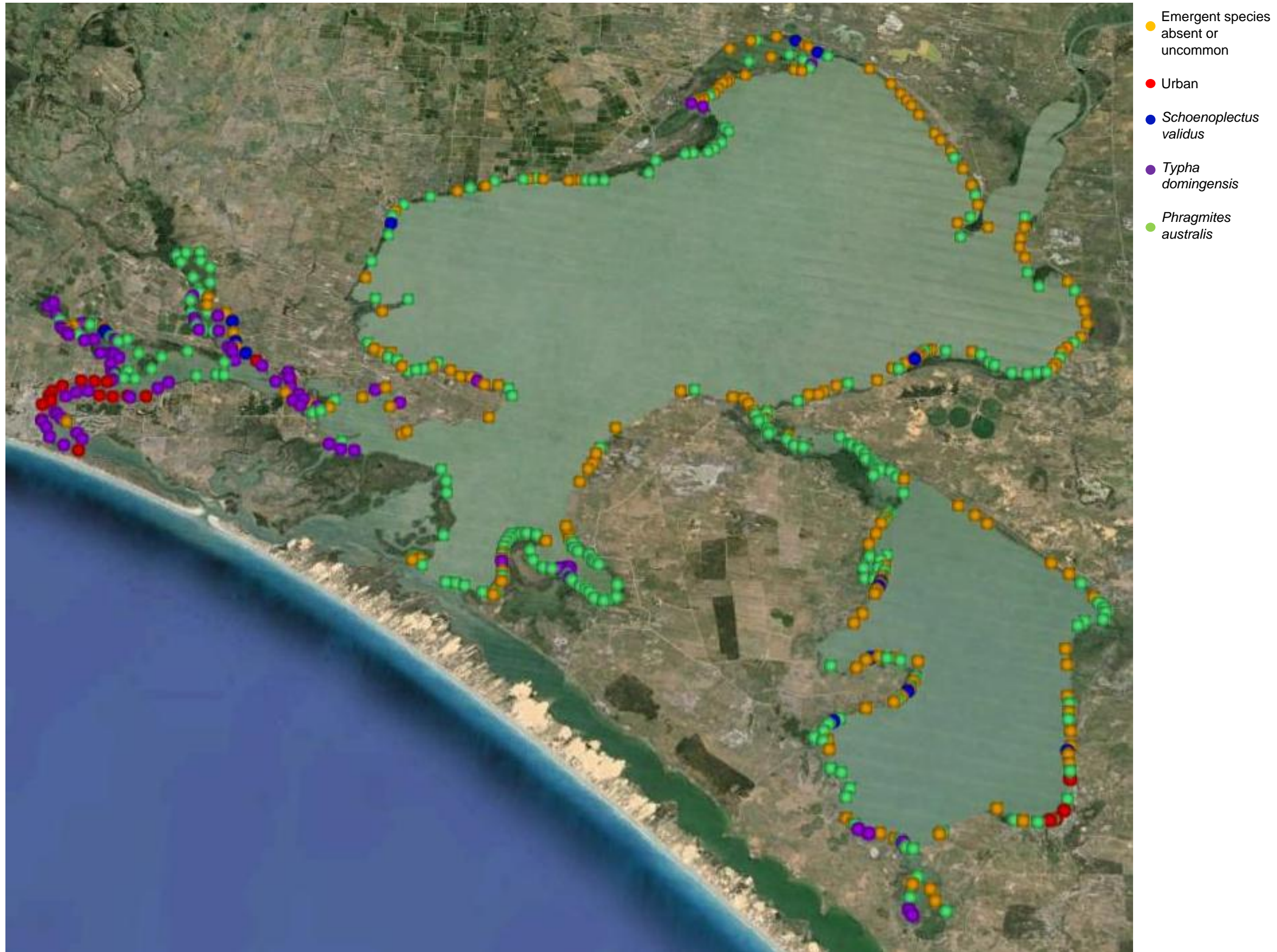


Figure 2: Aerial photo of lakes Alexandrina and Albert showing the spatial distribution of the different dendrogram groups (Figure 1, Appendix 1).

Only 15 sites were classified into the “*Schoenoplectus validus*” group, which were scattered throughout both lakes and Goolwa Channel (Figure 2). Sites classified in this group tended to have a high percentage cover of *Schoenoplectus validus* and no other species present. However, a total of 71 sites of the 513 sites surveyed contained *Schoenoplectus validus* with a cover score of greater than 25% and a further 94 sites with a cover score between 6% and 25% (Appendix 1). These sites were widespread throughout the Lower Lakes and Goolwa Channel, except on the northern shorelines of lakes Alexandrina and Albert (Figure 3).



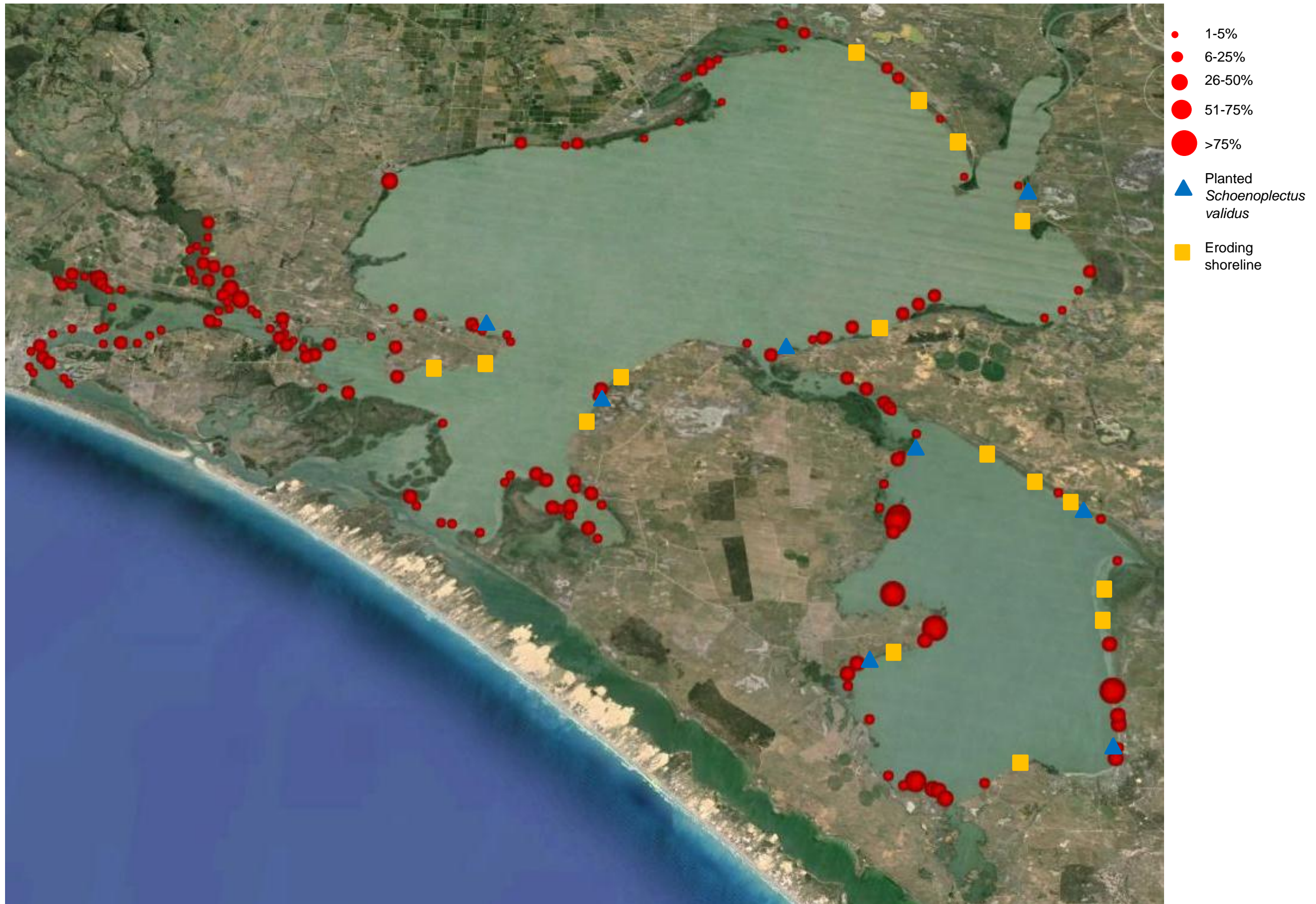


Figure 3: Aerial photo of lakes Alexandrina and Albert showing the distribution and abundance of *Schoenoplectus validus*, areas planted with *Schoenoplectus validus* and eroding shorelines (Appendix 1).

A total of 171 sites were classified in the “large emergent species absent or uncommon” group (Figure 1) and at 179 sites the percentage cover where large emergent species were absent was greater than 25% (Appendix 1). Furthermore, at 95 sites the percentage cover where large emergent species were absent was greater than 75% (Appendix 1). These sites were widespread but were more common on the northern shorelines of lakes Alexandrina and Albert (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Map of lakes Alexandrina and Albert showing the distribution of areas without large emergent species (Appendix 1).

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results showed that a large proportion of the shorelines of lakes Alexandrina and Albert were densely vegetated with emergent species, particularly *Phragmites australis* that often formed dense monospecific stands. *Typha domingensis* also formed dense monospecific stands; however, this species was less prevalent than *Phragmites australis*. This is probably a legacy of historic water level management because these species are adapted to stable water levels (Walker *et al.* 1994; Blanch *et al.* 1999; 2000).

*Schoenoplectus validus* was widespread throughout the Lower Lakes and Goolwa Channel, especially on the western shorelines of lakes Alexandrina and Albert and in Goolwa Channel. Using cluster analysis combined with Indicator Species Analysis to identify sites where species are common can lead to underestimating the distribution and abundance of a species such as *Schoenoplectus validus*. A total of 15 sites were classified in the group where *Schoenoplectus validus* was a significant indicator; however, there were a much larger number of sites where this species was abundant (Appendix 1). This was due to *Schoenoplectus validus* generally not forming monospecific stands and often co-occurring with other species in the Lower Lakes (Nicol *et al.* 2013; 2014; Frahn *et al.* 2014). There were several sites on the western shoreline of Lake Albert where *Schoenoplectus validus* was abundant that have potential to be source sites for future planting. In addition, sites in Goolwa Channel that are adjacent to private boat ramps and wharves may be potential donor sites because *Schoenoplectus validus* may be considered a nuisance and block access.

Sites where large emergent species were absent or uncommon were widespread throughout the Lower Lakes, but in contrast to sites where *Schoenoplectus validus* was present, clustering and Indicator Species Analysis generally identified these sites. There were large stretches of shoreline where large emergent species were scarce or absent on the northern and eastern shorelines of lakes Alexandrina and Albert. There was evidence of erosion on these shorelines and it is recommended that planting *Schoenoplectus validus* be undertaken along these shorelines. *Schoenoplectus validus* has been planted along some of the northern shoreline of Lake Albert and has established; however, in autumn 2014 this particular site had the lowest stem density and stand width of all planted sites (Nicol *et al.* 2014). Furthermore, this site showed the lowest increase in stand density and stand width between autumn 2013 and autumn 2014 of all planted sites (Nicol *et al.* 2014). This was probably due to the shoreline being

exposed to winds from the southerly quarter which, are exposed to south westerly winds during the passage of fronts and sea breezes and south easterly winds that are prevalent during late summer and autumn (Bureau of Meteorology 2014). If *Schoenoplectus validus* was to be planted along the northern shoreline of Lake Alexandrina it is expected that expansion of the stand would be at a similar rate or slower (due to the large size of Lake Alexandrina and potential for larger waves) to the rate measured along the northern shoreline of Lake Albert. This may be overcome by higher initial planting densities, which could be trialed at several locations during future planting seasons. In addition, different planting patterns could be trialed and monitored in areas with varying degrees of wave energy to determine the best planting strategies for different locations.

Planting *Schoenoplectus validus* along shorelines where there are problems with erosion is recommended; however, shorelines where emergent and submergent species are sparse or absent may play important roles in the landscape. Such areas may be habitats for pelagic fish or foraging areas for water birds and excessive planting of *Schoenoplectus validus* may reduce the abundance of these habitats. However, with the current rate of planting being undertaken and with planting concentrated on shorelines with erosion problems, it is highly unlikely this would occur and planting *Schoenoplectus validus* is likely to improve habitat diversity in the Lower Lakes at the landscape scale in the short to medium-term.

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Site Name	Start Coordinates		Finish Coordinates		Cluster Dendrogram Group	% cover of <i>Schoenoplectus validus</i>	% cover without large emergent species	Comments
	Easting	Northing	Easting	Northing				
A459	300907	6081527	300661	6081522	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	0%	0%	
A460	300661	6081522	300213	6081512	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	6 to 25%	0%	
A461	300213	6081512	300002	6081507	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A462	300002	6081507	299808	6081503	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	26 to 50%	0%	
A463	299808	6081503	299619	6081499	Bare	0%	>75%	
A464	299619	6081499	299546	6081497	Bare	0%	26 to 50%	
A465	299546	6081497	299478	6081496	Bare	6 to 25%	>75%	
A466	299478	6081496	298629	6081477	Bare	0%	>75%	
A467	298629	6081477	298354	6081470	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A468	298354	6081470	298833	6081481	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	1 to 5%	1 to 5%	
A469	298833	6081481	299059	6081486	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A470	299059	6081486	299170	6081489	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	1 to 5%	0%	
A471	299170	6081489	299277	6081491	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	1 to 5%	0%	
A472	299277	6081491	299503	6081496	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	6 to 25%	26 to 50%	
A473	299503	6081496	299626	6081499	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A474	299626	6081499	300128	6081510	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	26 to 50%	26 to 50%	
A475	300128	6081510	300477	6081518	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	6 to 25%	26 to 50%	
A476	300477	6081518	300984	6081529	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A477	300984	6081529	301403	6081538	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A478	301403	6081538	301924	6081550	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A479	301924	6081550	302101	6081554	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	1 to 5%	1 to 5%	
A480	302101	6081554	302380	6081560	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	1 to 5%	0%	
A481	302380	6081560	301986	6081551	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	6 to 25%	0%	
A482	301986	6081551	302094	6081554	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A483	302094	6081554	302190	6081556	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	1 to 5%	0%	
A484	302190	6081556	302304	6081558	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A485	302304	6081558	302191	6081556	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	1 to 5%	0%	
A486	302191	6081556	302038	6081552	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	6 to 25%	0%	
A487	302038	6081552	298853	6081482	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A488	298853	6081482	298862	6081482	Urban/modified	0%	0%	
A489	298862	6081482	299125	6081488	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	6 to 25%	0%	
A490	299125	6081488	299365	6081493	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	6 to 25%	0%	
A491	299365	6081493	300139	6081510	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	1 to 5%	0%	
A492	300139	6081510	300910	6081527	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	0%	
A493	300910	6081527	301019	6081530	Urban/modified	0%	0%	
A494	301019	6081530	300711	6081523	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	6 to 25%	0%	
A495	300711	6081523	300117	6081510	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	6 to 25%	6 to 25%	
A496	300117	6081510	299828	6081503	Bare	0%	>75%	
A497	299828	6081503	299596	6081498	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	26 to 50%	6 to 25%	
A498	299596	6081498	299459	6081495	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	0%	51 to 75%	
A499	299459	6081495	299160	6081488	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	26 to 50%	0%	
A500	299160	6081488	299167	6081489	Urban/modified	0%	0%	
A501	299167	6081489	299903	6081505	Urban/modified	26 to 50%	0%	
A502	299903	6081505	300423	6081517	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	1 to 5%	0%	
A503	300423	6081517	301029	6081530	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	1 to 5%	0%	
A504	301029	6081530	301628	6081543	<i>Typha domingensis</i>	1 to 5%	0%	
A505	301628	6081543	302309	6081558	Urban/modified	1 to 5%	0%	
A506	302309	6081558	303051	6081575	Urban/modified	6 to 25%	0%	
A507	301909	6081550	301274	6081536	Urban/modified	6 to 25%	0%	
A508	301274	6081536	300584	6081520	Urban/modified	0%	0%	
A509	300584	6081520	299668	6081500	Urban/modified	6 to 25%	0%	
A510	299668	6081500	299185	6081489	Urban/modified	6 to 25%	0%	
A511	299185	6081489	299039	6081486	Urban/modified	1 to 5%	0%	
A512	299039	6081486	298770	6081480	Urban/modified	0%	0%	
A513	298770	6081480	299828	6081503	Urban/modified	6 to 25%	0%	