

Radio Adelaide Interview

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Topic: Progress on new fishways for the Lower Murray Barrages

1. What is the location we are concerned with today?

Last century - between 1935 and 1940, five barrages were constructed at the mouth of the River Murray, on the ancestral lands of the Ngarrindjeri people. The series of barrages are named (from west to east, which is left to right when you are looking at a map) respectively: **Goolwa, Mundoo, Boundary Creek, Ewe Island and Tauwitchere.**

Their function, both at that time and today, is the prevention of salt water entering the lower reaches of the River Murray system. The barrages are designed to withstand tidal pressure, but not to obstruct flood waters. They also have a highly significant function in delivering life-giving environmental water to sustain the lagoons of the Coorong, and maintain an estuary in the vicinity of the Murray Mouth.

Barrages can be a problem for fish, as fish are such highly mobile animals, and each species migrates to some degree. Fishways are a solution. Migrations include movements from fresh to saltwater, or *vice versa*. Among the many purposes for fish to migrate are feeding, spawning, dispersal and avoiding unfavourable conditions. The allowance for fish movements (which biologists term ***fish passage***) was not part of the original design criteria for the Lower Murray Barrages. Stretching as they do from the southwest corner of Hindmarsh Island to Pelican Point, which is just to the west of Meningie, these barrages represent an almost continuous linear barrier to fish passage, and have a total length that is in excess of 7 kilometres. These limitations to fish passage have significantly hindered fish populations in this region.

2. I understand that there were fishways already built, so why new ones?

Yes _____, that's right. There are four fishways already in place; two on each of the Tauwitchere and Goolwa barrages. These fishways perform effectively. However - they are located far apart (really, at either end of the span) and they do not suit all fish species. With the variety of fish types present, no individual fishway is capable of doing so. We need a suite of passage options to get the best outcomes.

In creating a series of fishways, this new barrage fishways project is contributing to a State goal of maintaining the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth as a healthy and resilient wetland of international importance.

3. What investment is being made for this project?

The Australian Government is providing 2.6 million dollars, together with almost 300,000 dollars from our government here in South Australia.

4. What are the fish, and the benefits, that this project is most concerned with?

Studies of fish at these barrages indicate that more than 30 species of native fish are likely to pass through them, so there is great potential to create healthy waters - where fish move freely between the Coorong and Lower Lakes. Direct benefits like greater access to habitat and increased breeding are expected. And indirect benefits too, through increased food supplies for our predatory fish.

I am not just talking about those fish with high ecological significance, unusual lifestyles, or those on lists of vulnerable or threatened species. Fish of interest to recreational fishers, like Golden Perch and Bream will benefit. Likewise we expect to see increased sustainability for populations of species significant for the important commercial fishery in the region, which include Mulloway, Coorong Mullet and Greenback Flounder.

_____, I see these outcomes as contributing to the vision of Henry Jones. Henry was a Murray River crusader and fourth generation fisher. A passionate advocate for the health and sustainability of the Murray, and particularly the Lower Lakes region, the legacies of the late Mr Jones in fishing and conservation are being continued by members of his family.

5. Has construction of these fishways commenced?

Things really gathered momentum late last year, and we have a busy twelve months ahead. At present, the Boundary Creek fishway is being finished off, and I have brought in some photos that show the initial processes of construction activity (these being the installation of a coffer dam, and the de-watering by pump-out of its interior) at the Ewe Island barrage. These two, plus one further fishway are anticipated to be in place by Christmas. And by this time next year, a further three to four fishways will see the completion of this project.