

2016 State Report Card

Is the condition of our estuaries improving?

The marine environment provides valuable resources for regional economies, supporting tourism, commercial and recreational fishing, aquaculture, shipping and mining. Most South Australians live near the coast and many coastal and marine systems are under pressure from human impacts.

An estuary is a partly enclosed coastal body of water formed where freshwater water from on or under the land mixes with seawater. Estuaries range in size from a few to hundreds of hectares and can form bays, lagoons, harbours, inlets and gulfs. Coastal environments are culturally important to Aboriginal people as places of occupation, spirituality and traditional resources. Today, estuaries are also valued for their scenic beauty and as places for recreation, tourism, fisheries, aquaculture and transport. Saltmarsh, mangrove and seagrass habitats are common in estuaries, and help to maintain coastal water quality by filtering sediments, nutrients and pollutants. Estuaries also soften the impact of floods and storms and provide food and shelter for marine animals, including commercial fish in their juvenile stages.

The condition of estuaries depends on activities in their catchments. Estuaries are affected by declines in water quantity and quality. Stormwater, industrial and sewage discharges, seepage and agricultural runoff can increase the amount of nutrients, pollutants and sediments going into the water. Estuaries are also affected by removal of riverbank vegetation, over-grazing by stock, coastal developments, construction of tidal barriers, soil erosion, water diversion and fishing.

The health of estuaries relies on management of water quality within catchments, coastal developments, grazing and fishing.



Regional trends in the condition of estuaries



State target

Improve condition of coastal and marine ecosystems

Trend	Unknown	Ongoing efforts will be needed to monitor and protect our estuaries
-------	---------	---

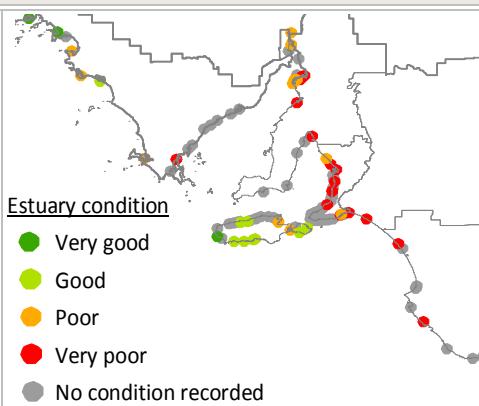
Estuaries are present in Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges, Eyre Peninsula, Kangaroo Island, Northern and Yorke, SA Arid Lands, SA Murray-Darling Basin, and South East NRM regions.

Changes in the condition of estuaries in all NRM regions since they were last assessed in 2001 are unknown (map above).

Where we are at (2001)	Poor	South Australia has some of the most extensively modified estuaries of all Australian states
------------------------	------	--

Of the 104 estuaries in South Australia, 38 estuaries were assessed for the National Land and Water Resources Audit in 2001. Based on these assessments, the condition of estuaries in South Australia was rated as 'poor', with a score of 36 out of 100 (where 100 represents undisturbed condition).

The [Murray Mouth estuary](#), in the SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM region is the largest in South Australia. It has been affected by prolonged drought, water extraction from the Murray-Darling Basin, construction of barrages, water diversion, clearance of shoreline vegetation and development. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan, which was adopted in November 2012, will support the delivery of water for consumption, industries and the environment. Environmental water flows will keep the Murray Mouth open, flush salt out of the system and provide water for wetlands and floodplains.



Reliability of information



Fair

Further information:

[Technical information for this report card](#), [OzCoasts \(Estuary search\)](#), [Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth Recovery Project](#)



This report is a work in progress. As resource monitoring improves, so too will our ability to describe trends in condition. Licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#). © Crown in right of the State of South Australia.



Government of
South Australia