

Review of South East Coastal Lakes - Engagement Summary

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We acknowledge the Kaurna People as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Executive Summary

The Department of Environment and Water (DEW) is undertaking a project to review future management options for a number of coastal Lakes located on Crown Land in the South East of South Australia. To support the review process, early engagement with stakeholders and the community has been undertaken to understand the valued features of the Lakes, how the Lakes are currently used and preferences for future management.

The South East Coastal Lakes (the Lakes) that are the subject of the review comprise:

- Lake Bonney SE
- Lake George
- Lake Eliza
- Lake St Clair
- Lake Hawdon North and
- Mullins Swamp.

Participation in the community engagement about the South East Coastal Lakes was self-nominated. Participation in the regional workshop and online survey were dominated by voices that represented interests in fishing and hunting and therefore the results of the community engagement cannot be assumed to be representative of broader community views. Stakeholder engagement included meetings with representatives of First Nations, local government and organisations with an interest in conservation, hunting, fishing and lake management.

The engagement illuminates key themes regarding issues and opportunities and provides insights regarding the views of those people who participated in the engagement and should be considered as one input to inform the decision-making process.

The engagement undertaken for this project clearly indicates that the South East Coastal Lakes are highly valued for the habitat, plants and animals they support. The Lakes are widely used for a range of recreational uses by both locals and tourists. Many locals are involved in the management of the Lakes, particularly for Lake George, and highly value this involvement.

Through the engagement a range of options for future management arrangements were heard from stakeholders at planned meetings, and the community through an online survey, online workshop and in person workshop.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they thought that some or all of the Lakes need a higher level of protection, for example as a Conservation Park or National Park. Feedback in relation to higher protection referred to the Lakes containing habitat for threatened and migratory species, having high ecological values, being adjacent to existing protected areas and parks having potential for greater resource allocation for management action.

Some stakeholders and many community members indicated they did not think the Lakes needed any higher level of protection and would like all the South East Coastal Lakes that are the focus of the review

to remain as Crown Land. The majority of feedback in relation to no higher protection referred to the desire to maintain hunting and fishing access that may be restricted if the Lakes are designated as Conservation or National Parks.

The opinion that the Lakes do not require a higher level of protection was strongly represented through feedback via the survey and workshops, where a high proportion of respondents participated in hunting and/or fishing. 73% of survey respondents indicated that they participated in hunting and/or fishing at Lake George or Lake Bonney SE and 79% and 74% of respondents indicated they did not think Lake George or Lake Bonney SE respectively require a higher level of protection. .

Several management opportunities within a Crown Land designation were suggested by participants to improve the condition and use of the Lakes, most commonly for Lake George. These suggestions included providing additional funding for lake management (including additional National Parks and Wildlife Service funds or the allocation of local netting/fishing licences back into local lake management), entering into management arrangements with local groups such as the Conservation Hunting Alliance of South Australia and the Lake George Management Committee, and improving water quality, quantity and flows using a landscape-scale, science-based approach.

1. Introduction and purpose of the engagement

The Department of Environment and Water (DEW) is undertaking a project to review future management options for a number of coastal Lakes located on Crown Land in the South East of South Australia. To support the review process, early engagement with stakeholders and the community has been undertaken to understand the valued features of the Lakes, how the Lakes are currently used and preferences for future management.

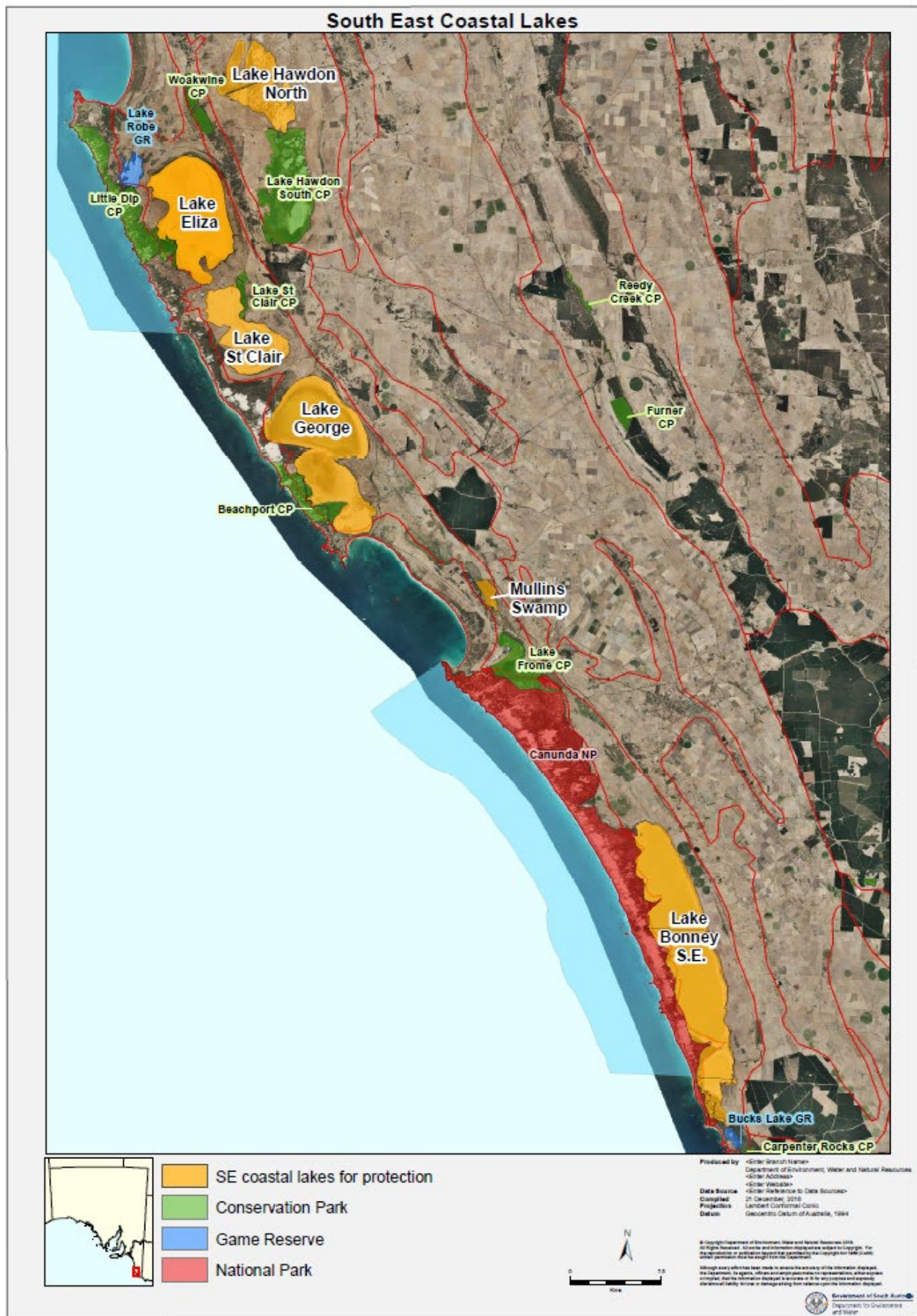
The South East Coastal Lakes (the Lakes) that are the focus of this project are shown in Figure 1 and include:

- Lake Bonney SE
- Lake George
- Lake Eliza
- Lake St Clair
- Lake Hawdon North and
- Mullins Swamp.

A range of investigations undertaken over the past 20 years have considered the Lakes' ecological and hydrological characteristics and cultural and social values. From these investigations it is understood that the Lakes:

- Are valued country for First Nations people and have sites of cultural significance and provide important places for cultural practices.
- Provide important habitat for a range of waterbirds including a number of migratory species listed on the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and species of national and state conservation significance.
- Provide important recreation opportunities including bird watching, hunting, walking, camping, windsurfing, boating and fishing.

These Lakes are important coastal landscapes that are poorly represented in the protected area network in South Australia.



1.1 Engagement activities

As part of the review of the South East Coastal Lakes a series of engagement activities have occurred early in the project to engage with targeted stakeholders and the community. It is intended that the engagement will be used to inform next phases of the review process.

This early engagement has focused on providing information about the context for the project, including why the review is being undertaken and what it is looking to achieve and gathering insights and information from stakeholders and the community regarding:

- How the Lakes are currently used
- What is valued about the Lakes
- Opportunities for the future management of the Lakes to ensure they can be used and enjoyed while maintaining and protecting their unique and iconic features.

Summaries of all individual engagement activities were prepared and have been used to inform the development of this report. Stakeholder meeting summaries were provided back to each stakeholder group for confirmation that the summary provided an accurate report of the discussions. All activity summaries have been collated and provided to DEW in a separate report.

1.1.1 Individual stakeholder meetings

Nine online and face to face meetings were held in March through to July 2022 with targeted stakeholders representing the following groups and sectors:

- Bird groups (Birds SA and Friends of Shorebirds SA)
- Local government (District Council of Robe, District Council of Grant, Limestone Coast LGA)
- Conservation Hunting Alliance of South Australia (CHASA)
- Lake George Management Committee (LGMC)
- South East Field & Game
- South East Aboriginal Focus Group (preliminary meeting - ongoing engagement required)
- RecFish SA
- Wetlands Environmental Taskforce
- Walking SA.

NOTE – The discussion with the South East Aboriginal Focus Group was preliminary in nature. Further conversations will be planned to talk about the South East Aboriginal Focus Group's preferred approach to the management of the Lakes and how they would like to be involved in the review project moving forward.

1.1.2 Online feedback form

An online feedback form was released from 2 May to 20 June 2022 to gather feedback from the community about how the Lakes are valued and used and opportunities for their future management. 361

responses to the online feedback form were received. Online feedback form respondents were mostly from the local area, with some from further afield in South Australia and Victoria.

1.1.3 Online regional workshop

An online regional workshop open to the community was held on 17 May 2022 via Zoom. In total, 65 people attended the online workshop. This workshop was originally intended to be held face to face but due to the impacts of COVID-19 was moved online. An in-person workshop was rescheduled for June (see below).

1.1.4 In-person regional workshop

A regional workshop open to the community was held on 16 June 2022 at the Millicent Civic and Arts Centre. 63 people attended the face to face workshop.

1.1.5 Site visits

A site visit was undertaken to Lake Robe, Big Dip Lake and Lake Eliza with the South East Aboriginal Focus Group on 17 May 2022.

A site visit was also held to Mullins Swamp with the landholder who manages the site for the South East Conservation and Drainage Board on 17 June 2022.

1.2 Interpretation of community engagement findings

Through this report the term 'stakeholders' has been used to refer to the stakeholders targeted for engagement (refer section 1.1.1). 'Community' has been used to refer to those present at the on-line workshop, in-person workshop and respondents to the online feedback. Some stakeholders also participated in the workshop/s and responded to the survey. Their inputs through those processes are therefore also included in the 'community' perspective.

Community participation in the engagement about the South East coastal Lakes was self-nominated and the feedback received should not be considered statistically representative of broader community views. Rather, the engagement illuminates key themes regarding issues and opportunities and provides insights regarding the views of those people who participated in the engagement and should be considered as one input to inform the decision-making process. It is also important to note that some people participated in the engagement via more than one engagement opportunity.

It should be noted that the hunting/fishing perspective dominated participation in the community engagement, particularly the online feedback form and online and face to face workshops. Of the 361 respondents to the online feedback form, 265 (73%) indicated they participated in hunting and/or fishing at Lake George or Lake Bonney SE. with 200 (55%) participating in hunting and 249 (69%) participating in fishing. Of the 63 people that attended the in-person workshop, 46 (73%) identified as using the lake/s for hunting and 45 (71%) as using the lake/s for fishing.

With the majority of participants in the community engagement activities identified they participated in hunting and/or fishing activities; the community engagement findings tend to be led by the perspectives of this group and may not reflect the overall values of the broader community.

It was observed over the course of the engagement process that a range of messaging was used by some stakeholders and representative groups to raise awareness of the engagement and promoted participation to ensure access to the Lakes for hunting and other associated activities such as fishing, camping etc would not be lost. This messaging appeared to skew the participation as many came to the engagement activities with an adversarial attitude that something was going to be taken away (ie access to the Lakes) and appeared to inhibit the ability for participants to consider alternative or new information and have an informed and robust conversation about the opportunities that different management arrangements could deliver.

2. Engagement findings overview

The following section provides a summary of the engagement outcomes regarding the South East Coastal Lakes identified through the engagement activities. Each lake is described in greater detail in the remainder of the report.

2.1 How are the South East Coastal Lakes currently used?

Access to the South East Coastal Lakes varies and has a strong influence on current use.

Engagement feedback aligned with anecdotal information that Lake George is the most commonly used of the Lakes, followed by Lake Bonney SE. Participants in the community engagement activities indicated community interest is highest in these two Lakes and particularly in Lake George. Participants identified a range of recreational uses of these Lakes including hunting, fishing, camping, four-wheel driving, walking, kayaking, nature appreciation, bird watching, environmental management/monitoring and cultural practices.

Although access to Lake Hawdon North is limited, participants identified it is accessed for hunting and bird watching. A grazing licence is held by an adjacent landholder who uses some of the lake to graze sheep for up to 8 months each year (summer months).

Lake Eliza and Lake St Clair are more difficult to access and hence experience a lower level of use. Stakeholders identified that these Lakes are currently not accessed for hunting however some environmental management and bird watching is undertaken.

Mullins Swamp is surrounded by private land and not currently accessible or used in any way by the public.

2.2 What is valued about the Lakes?

Key values identified by the engagement include:

Environmental values

All the South East Coastal Lakes are highly valued by the community and stakeholders for their natural environmental values. These values are associated with native plants and native animals including threatened species, migratory shorebird and waterbird habitat and the Lakes' hydrology and presence of open water.

The wild and remote natural beauty of the Lakes was also valued by many participants.

Recreational opportunities

Lake George and Lake Bonney SE are highly valued for the recreation opportunities that they provide for the local community and tourists. These two Lakes provide fishing, hunting, camping, windsurfing and four-wheel driving opportunities.

All of the Lakes (excluding Mullins Swamp) are valued for their provision of low impact recreation by the wider community, including walking, bird watching, kayaking, environmental monitoring/management and nature appreciation.

Opportunity for the local community to be involved in the management of the Lakes

Community and stakeholder participants identified they highly value their level of involvement in the management of the Lakes, particularly at Lake George through the work of the Lake George Management Committee. Bird counts are undertaken at several Lakes by bird watching groups and community members. Many community and stakeholder participants commonly expressed a desire for community involvement to be continued and enhanced going forward.

Cultural heritage values

Cultural heritage values associated with the Lakes were identified as important by survey respondents and a number of stakeholder groups. Many stakeholders referred to First Nations cultural values associated with the natural environment.

Economic values/tourism

Lakes George and Bonney SE were identified as popular destinations for locals and visitors from around the State and interstate. While tourists were acknowledged for their contribution to the local economy, it was also noted by some community members that some lake visitors may not be as respectful of lake values and cause impacts including environmental damage and littering.

2.3 What are the opportunities for future management of the South East coastal Lakes?

Through all engagement activities it was noted that there are opportunities to better manage the Lakes to maintain, protect and enhance their valued attributes. Physical management options were identified, as well as opportunities for tourism and promotion and governance arrangements.

Opportunities for the future management of the South East Coastal Lakes included the following:

- Protect and enhance local flora, fauna and habitats through control of pest plants and animals, revegetation, installation of artificial habitat and protection of native vegetation by limiting access to sensitive areas.
- Restore natural hydrological cycles and enhance Lakes' capacity to provide drought refuge, by managing flows from drains/the watertable and outflows to the sea for water quality management and fish passage, and continuing water quality management at Lake Bonney SE.
- Assess the threat of climate change to lake hydrology and associated impacts on flora and fauna, to identify management response.
- Maintain existing access and opportunities for current recreational activities including water sports, fishing, hunting and nature appreciation.
- Increase public access to Lake Bonney SE and maintain and enhance access to Lake George to enable more opportunities for recreation and management.
- Enhance visitor opportunities by creating additional trails for walking and/or cycling linked with existing National Parks and Conservation Parks.

- Investigate opportunities for First Nations involvement in on-ground management and tourism activities.
- Better manage recreation/tourism impacts on sensitive areas/features.
- Promote the accessible Lakes as a destination for nature-based tourism.
- Raise awareness and educate visitors about the Lakes' unique features and how they can support lake management through their behaviour.
- Maintain current local management and investigate opportunities to partner with local interest groups to help manage the lake
 - The Lake George Management Committee indicated they were keen to continue their involvement in the future management of Lake George.
 - CHASA and its partners expressed explicit interest in partnering with DEW for management of the Lakes (particularly Lake George and Lake Bonney SE) through leasing or land stewardship agreements.
- Provide coordinated, holistic management of all the Lakes together while still facilitating targeted and individual management of each lake.

2.4 Support for different management arrangements for the South East Coastal Lakes

Through the engagement a range of options for future management arrangements were heard from stakeholders and the community.

Some stakeholders and many of the participating community members indicated they did not think the Lakes needed any higher level of protection and would like all of the South East coastal Lakes that are the focus of the review to remain as Crown Land. The majority of feedback in relation to no higher protection referred to the desire to maintain hunting and fishing that may be restricted if the Lakes are designated as Conservation or National Parks.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they thought that some or all of the Lakes need a higher level of protection, for example as a Conservation Park or National Park. Feedback in relation to higher protection referred to the Lakes containing habitat for threatened and migratory species, having high ecological values, being adjacent to existing protected areas and parks having potential for greater resource allocation for management action.

The opinion that the Lakes do not require a higher level of protection was strongly represented through the community feedback via the survey and workshops where a high proportion of respondents participated in hunting and/or fishing. 73% of survey respondents indicated that they participated in hunting and/or fishing at Lake George or Lake Bonney SE and 79% and 74% of respondents indicated they did not think Lake George or Lake Bonney SE respectively require a higher level of protection.

At the in-person workshop, 46 of 63 attendees (73%) identified as using the lake/s for hunting and 45 (71%) as using the lake/s for fishing. Workshop participants were asked to indicate their support for

changing management arrangements and the activity undertaken suggested there was very little support for a change in management at Lake George and Lake Bonney SE, however there was more support for a change in management at the other Lakes, particularly Mullins Swamp and Lake Hawdon North.

3. Lake Bonney SE

3.1 How is Lake Bonney SE currently used?

Participants identified that Lake Bonney SE is commonly used for a wide range of activities. The following activities were identified by participants through all engagement activities:

- Camping
- Walking
- Nature appreciation
- Hunting
- Fishing
- Bird watching
- Canoeing/kayaking
- Environmental monitoring
- Environmental management
- Cultural practises
- Dog training/walking.

The importance of being able to undertake recreational activities such as hunting, camping and fishing with friends and family was emphasised by numerous community members. Several stakeholders and community members shared that they see the lake as “unusable for human activity” due to pollution and the presence of logs in the lake.

The community engagement outcomes indicated Lake Bonney SE is one of the more popular of the South East Coastal Lakes due to its accessibility, which is relatively easy, but it was noted that limited access tracks to help protect the area from large numbers of tourists.

3.2 What is valued about Lake Bonney SE?

Participants identified a wide range of values for Lake Bonney SE. The following list of values was raised by participants through all engagement activities:

- Environmental values, including native animals and native plants and habitat supporting migratory shorebirds and waders
- Opportunities for hunting and fishing
- Opportunities for overnight stays (camping)
- Opportunities for four wheel driving
- Cultural values
- Opportunities for low impact land based recreational opportunities (walking and bird-watching)

- Opportunities to be involved in the management of the lake and its environment including bird counts
- Opportunities for low impact aquatic recreational opportunities e.g. canoeing
- The sense of wildness and remoteness of the lake environment.

Community participants often emphasised the importance of undertaking activities such as hunting, fishing and camping with family and friends and that this is part of their “history, tradition and heritage” which they want “future generations to be able to enjoy”.

3.3 What are the opportunities for future management of Lake Bonney SE?

Participants identified a range of ideas for the future management of Lake Bonney SE. The following list of management opportunities is collated from participants through all engagement activities:

- Improving water quality and quantity through better management of water flows from drains, groundwater and the sea, and better pollution management
 - A possible partnership with Kimberly-Clarke was suggested to address pollution issues.
- Improving the environment through re-establishing and better protecting vegetation, installing artificial habitat, reintroducing rare and endangered fish species and managing weeds and pest animals
- Maintaining existing access and opportunities for recreational activities
 - Those who currently partake in recreational activities at Lake Bonney SE expressed a very strong desire for these activities to continue and not be prohibited. Some participants suggested enhancing hunting and fishing opportunities by breeding ducks, restocking the Lakes with fish and providing better recreational infrastructure.
- Improving public access
 - Contrasting feedback was provided regarding improving public access. While some would like better facilities and access tracks, many others would like it to remain difficult to access to maintain its ‘wild’ nature and prevent large numbers of tourists
 - Removing the logs in the Lakes to facilitate boating access was a widely supported management option
- Partnering with local interest groups to help manage the lake
 - Community and stakeholder participants indicated they would like management to remain local or at least have significant influence from local people who have intimate knowledge of the Lakes and local community. Establishing a locally run management committee similar to the Lake George Management Committee was a commonly identified option.
- Better managing tourism impacts including rubbish and impacts to vegetation and habitat
 - Suggestions included fees for access by interstate/non-local visitors, fines for misuse, cleaning up rubbish, and ensuring tourism is not pushed too hard that the numbers of visitors ruin what locals value about the Lakes
- Raising awareness and educate visitors about the lake’s unique features

- Managing access to sensitive areas
- Providing additional visitor opportunities
- Addressing the impact on climate change on species and water levels
- Prohibiting certain activities that impact unique environmental and cultural values
 - This management option received highly mixed levels of support by participants.

3.3.1 Land tenure

Through the engagement a range of options for future management arrangements for Lake Bonney SE were heard from stakeholders and the community.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they thought that Lake Bonney SE needs a higher level of protection, for example as a Conservation Park or National Park. Feedback in relation to higher protection referred to the lake containing valued ecological habitat, being adjacent to existing protected areas including Canunda NP and parks having potential for greater resource allocation for management action. Opportunities to work with Kimberly Clake were identified to improve water quality and habitat.

Some stakeholders and the majority of participating community members indicated they did not think Lake Bonney needed any higher level of protection and would like the lake to remain as Crown Land. The majority of feedback in relation to no higher protection referred to the desire to maintain hunting and fishing that may be restricted if the Lakes are designated as a Conservation or National Park. Some community members were also concerned that this would prevent local knowledge and expertise from helping to manage the Lakes.

4. Lake George (Narter)

4.1 How is Lake George currently used?

Community and stakeholder engagement participants identified that Lake George is commonly used for a wide range of activities including:

- Fishing (via boat and net)
- Camping
- Hunting (including ducks, rabbits, foxes and cats)
- Walking
- Nature appreciation
- Bird watching
- Motorised water sports (including water skiing)
- Windsurfing, sailing, kayaking and canoeing
- Environmental management and monitoring
- Cultural practises
- 4WDing and motorcycling
- Dog training and walking
- Picnics.

Participants identified that Lake George is the most accessible and most highly used of all the South East coastal Lakes. They recognised that people travel from around South Australia and from interstate to visit the lake and undertake activities. Many participants identified that this high level of use has led to some degradation of the lake including damage to vegetation and littering.

4.2 What is valued about Lake George?

Participants identified a wide range of values for Lake George. The following list of values was raised by participants through all engagement activities:

- Opportunities for fishing
- Native animals and plants and habitat supporting migratory shorebirds and waterbirds
- Opportunities for overnight stays (camping)
- Opportunities for hunting
- Opportunities to be involved in local management in the environment
- Nature appreciation
- Opportunities for low impact land-based recreational activities (e.g. walking, bird watching)

- Opportunities for four wheel driving
- Windsurfing
- Cultural heritage values
- Freshwater springs.

Community participants often emphasised the importance of undertaking these activities with “family and friends” and referred to the lake as “a backyard for the locals of the South East”.

4.3 What are the opportunities for future management of Lake George?

Participants identified a range of ideas for the future management of Lake George. The following list of management opportunities is collated from participants through all engagement activities:

- Maintaining existing access and opportunities for recreational activities
 - Community participants expressed a desire for the “continuation of the freedoms we have now”
- Improving public access
 - Including through better maintaining access tracks and providing more vehicle access to areas that are currently inaccessible
- Partnering with local interest groups to help manage the lake
 - One of the most commonly raised management opportunities emphasised the importance of maintaining and enhancing local management by the Lake George Management Committee and other local groups, and providing them with funding and authority to better manage the lake
 - The current community consider themselves as “custodians” of the lake
- Managing the impact of recreational use/tourism
 - While increasing tourism opportunities at Lake George was seen as an opportunity that would benefit the region, it was acknowledged that if not managed appropriately this may cause further degradation of the natural environment and that this would need to be managed appropriately
 - Common suggestions included installing information signs and bins for rubbish and other safe/considerate conduct, managing the impacts of 4WD’ing, introducing a fee for use, lowering speed limits of main access roads and managing damage to vegetation
- Improving water quality, quantity and flows, including through better flows from drains and groundwater and through opening the lake to the sea
 - One commonly identified suggestion was to redirect the water from Mount Hope Drain and Reedy Creek Drain into Lake George
- Raising awareness and educating visitors about the lake’s unique features
- Managing access to sensitive areas
- Providing additional visitor opportunities

- Including more camping areas, stocking the Lakes with fish, creating bird hides, establishing a duck breeding program and providing better public amenities
- Supporting local fauna including through re-establishing water levels and flows, managing the threat of feral animals such as cats and foxes and installing artificial nesting boxes
- Supporting local flora through managing invasive species, re-establishing native vegetation on the lake edges and better protecting vegetation
- Protecting cultural values
- Prohibiting certain activities that impact unique environmental and cultural values.

4.3.1 Land tenure

Through the engagement a range of options for future management arrangements for Lake George were heard from stakeholders and the community.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they thought that Lake George needs a higher level of protection, for example as a Conservation Park or National Park. Feedback in relation to higher protection referred to the ongoing protection of the lake, the ability to manage in a regionally consistent and integrated way and to protect valued ecological habitat.

Some stakeholders and the majority of participating community members indicated they did not think Lake George needed any higher level of protection and would like the lake to remain as Crown Land. The majority of feedback preferring no higher protection referred to the desire to maintain hunting and fishing that may be restricted if the Lakes are designated as a Conservation or National Park.

Some stakeholders and many community members expressed that they were concerned that a change from Crown Land would affect the participation of local groups in lake management activities, in particular the Lake George Management Committee (LGMC). Most community participants would prefer for the LGMC to remain involved with lake management and receive additional funding and support by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. It was suggested to allocate revenue from recreational netting licence fees for Lake George back into management of the lake. Other suggested options included making the LGMC an advisory body under the Crown Lands Management Act and establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with the LGMC.

5. Lake Hawdon North

5.1 How is Lake Hawdon North currently used?

Participants identified that Lake Hawdon North is used to a moderate degree by the community for a wide range of activities, including for the following uses:

- Bird watching
- Fishing
- Hunting
- Ecological monitoring
- Environmental management
- Walking
- Nature appreciation
- Grazing.

Stakeholder and community participants noted that the difficulty in accessing the lake and its ephemeral nature means that it is not as commonly used by the community as other Lakes.

5.2 What is valued about Lake Hawdon North?

Participants identified a wide range of values for Lake Hawdon North. The following list of values were raised by participants through all engagement activities:

- Native plants
- Habitat supporting migratory shorebirds
- Native animals
- Cultural values
- Role in draining the surrounding agricultural and forestry land.

Several participants noted that “filling” the lake would make Lake Hawdon North more special to them as it would increase its recreational and ecological value.

5.3 What are the opportunities for future management of Lake Hawdon North?

Participants identified a range of opportunities for the future management of Lake Hawdon North:

- Partnering with local interest groups to help manage the lake
 - Local management of the lake by local groups. CHASA expressed a particular interest to partner with DEW to restore the lake
- Providing public access and visitor opportunities

- Including allowing hunting (including for ducks, waterfowl and deer), increasing ease of public access, bird watching tourism and other tourism
- Restoring the natural hydrology of the lake to become a wetland and better support ecological and recreational values
- Restoring the natural ecology of the lake
 - Restoring water levels, undertaking revegetation and weed control, ensure use of fit for purpose fencing and better protecting the lake from the impact of adjacent grazing and mining
- Raising awareness and educating people about unique features
- Managing access to sensitive areas
- Maintain the role the lake plays in draining the surrounding agricultural land
- Prohibiting certain activities that impact unique environmental and cultural values
 - This management option received highly mixed levels of support by participants.

5.3.1 Land tenure

Through the engagement a range of options for future management arrangements for Lake Hawdon North were heard from stakeholders and the community.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they thought that Lake Hawdon North needs a higher level of protection, for example as a Conservation Park or National Park. A number of respondents also suggested it could become a Game Reserve or Regional Reserve. Feedback in relation to higher protection referred to the location adjacent to Lake Hawdon South Conservation Park and protection for shorebird habitat.

Some stakeholders and many community members indicated they did not think Lake Hawdon North needed any higher level of protection and would like the lake to remain as Crown Land. The majority of feedback in relation to no higher protection referred to the desire to maintain hunting and fishing that may be restricted if the Lakes are designated as a Conservation or National Park.

6. Lake Eliza

6.1 How is Lake Eliza currently used?

Stakeholder and community participants identified that Lake Eliza is used to a moderate degree by the community for a wide range of activities, including for the following uses:

- Walking
- Nature appreciation
- Bird watching
- Camping
- Fishing
- Canoeing
- Bird monitoring
- Environmental management.

Participants explained that the difficulty in accessing the lake means that it is not used as commonly by the community as other Lakes. Its salinity also makes it less suitable for hunting.

Some hunting stakeholders explained that they do not currently hunt at Lake Eliza and Lake St Clair due to access difficulties. While they “would love to hunt here”, they “are content not to”. They recognise that there “must be places set aside for refuge” and see that if these Lakes remain relatively inaccessible, they fill this role.

6.2 What is valued about Lake Eliza?

Participants identified a wide range of values for Lake Eliza through the engagement activities:

- Habitat supporting migratory shorebirds
- Native animals, including threatened animals
- Native plants
- Cultural values
- Hydrology as one of the few unaltered coastal Lakes, a groundwater dependent ecosystem and a freshwater springs location adjacent to the Lake.

6.3 What are the opportunities for future management of Lake Eliza?

Participants identified a range of opportunities for the future management of Lake Eliza:

- Partnering with local interest groups to help manage the lake
- Raising awareness and educating people about unique features
- Providing public access and visitor opportunities

- Including making the lake more accessible to the public, including for hunting, walking and bird watching
- Managing or limiting access to sensitive areas
- Environmental management
 - Including limiting human impacts, managing the hydrology of the lake, managing invasive weeds and managing grazing on the surrounding land to limit impacts.

6.3.1 Land tenure

Through the engagement a range of options for future management arrangements for Lake Eliza were heard from stakeholders and the community.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they thought that Lake Eliza needs a higher level of protection, for example as a Conservation Park or National Park. Feedback in relation to higher protection referred to the location adjacent to Little Dip Conservation Park.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they did not think Lake Eliza needed any higher level of protection and would like the lake to remain as Crown Land. Very limited feedback was provided by workshop attendees and survey respondents as to why Lake Eliza did not require further protection, with one comment in the survey of “no way”.

The online survey indicated that more respondents supported Lake Eliza having a greater level of protection than the other South East Coastal Lakes, with 20% of respondents answering “yes” and a further 15% responding ‘not sure’.

7. Lake St Clair

7.1 How is Lake St Clair currently used?

Stakeholder and community participants identified that Lake St Clair is used to a moderate degree by the community for a wide range of activities, including for the following uses:

- Bird monitoring
- Bird watching
- Environmental management
- Photography.

Participants explained that the difficulty in accessing the lake means that it is not used as commonly by the community as other Lakes. Its salinity also makes it less suitable for hunting.

Some hunting representatives explained that do not currently hunt at Lake Eliza and Lake St Clair due to access difficulties. While they “would love to hunt here”, they “are content not to”. They recognise that there “must be places set aside for refuge” and see that if these Lakes remain relatively inaccessible, they fill this role.

7.2 What is valued about Lake St Clair?

Participants identified a range of values for Lake St Clair through all engagement activities.

- Native animals
- Habitat supporting migratory shorebirds
- Native plants
- Cultural heritage values
- Hydrology, as one of the few unaltered coastal lake systems and an important groundwater dependent ecosystem
- Area for grazing stock.

7.3 What are the opportunities for future management of Lake St Clair?

Participants identified several opportunities for the future management of Lake St Clair:

- Partnering with local interest groups to help manage the lake
- Providing better public access
- Environmental management
 - Including weed control, managing grazing on the periphery, re-establishing native vegetation around the lake, protection of hydrology as a key groundwater dependent ecosystem and enhancing artificial nesting habitat

- Providing visitor opportunities
 - Including for hunting of ducks and waterfowl
- Managing access to sensitive areas
- Raising awareness and educating people about unique features.

7.3.1 Land tenure

Through the engagement a range of options for future management arrangements for Lake St Clair were heard from stakeholders and the community.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they thought that Lake St Clair needs a higher level of protection, for example as a Conservation Park or National Park. Feedback in relation to higher protection referred to the location adjacent to Lake St Clair Conservation Park, protecting ecological values and wetland habitat.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they did not think Lake St Clair needed any higher level of protection and would like the lake to remain as Crown Land. Very limited feedback was provided by workshop attendees and survey respondents as to why the Lake did not require further protection, with one comment in the survey suggesting to “just leave it alone”.

8. Mullins Swamp

8.1 How is Mullins Swamp currently used?

Participants identified that Mullins Swamp is not used by the general public as it is surrounded by private land with dense vegetation. The area is on land dedicated to the South East Conservation and Water Drainage Board and managed under agreement by the adjacent landholders who do bird counts and restoration works around the swamp.

8.2 What is valued about Mullins Swamp?

Stakeholder and community participants identified several values for Mullins Swamp:

- Native animals
- Native plants
- Habitat supporting migratory shorebirds, colony nesting waterbirds and an ibis rookery
- Cultural heritage values
- Role in wider hydrological system.

8.3 What are the opportunities for future management of Mullins Swamp?

Participants raised several ideas for the future management of Mullins Swamp.:

- Partnering with local interest groups to help manage the swamp
- Providing public access and raising awareness
- Providing visitor opportunities
 - Including better infrastructure for bird watching and allowing hunting for ducks, waterfowl and deer
- Educating people about unique features
- Managing access to sensitive areas
- Improving water flows to the lake
- Managing weeds.

8.3.1 Land tenure

Through the engagement a range of options for future management arrangements for Mullins Swamp were heard from stakeholders and the community.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they thought that Mullins Swamp needs a higher level of protection, for example as a Conservation Park. Feedback in relation to higher protection referred to a Conservation Park being a preferred management approach for a wetland with conservation values, limited use and access.

At the regional workshop, a higher number of participants supported a change in management arrangement for Mullins Swamp. 43% of workshop attendees that responded to the question, supported a change in management. However, this is strongly contrasted by the online feedback form results where only 5% of respondents supported providing the swamp a higher level of protection, the lowest proportion of any of the South East Lakes.

Some stakeholders and community members indicated they did not think Mullins Swamp needed any higher level of protection and would like the lake to remain as Crown Land. Very limited feedback was provided by workshop attendees and survey respondents as to why the Lake did not require further protection.

One participant expressed concern that making Mullins Swamp any type of park would result in an expectation by the public for public access.

One participant expressed concern that water management decision making will become cumbersome should the Department be involved and that the area needs to stay with the South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board to enable one point of decision making.

9. All South East Coastal Lakes

Some of the feedback received from stakeholder and community participants related to all of the South East Coastal Lakes as opposed to any particular lake. Any feedback provided generally about the Lakes that is not already covered within the individual lake summaries in the previous section is provided in the following section.

9.1 How are the Lakes currently used?

Uses of the South East Coastal Lakes not mentioned by participants in relation to a specific lake include:

- Paddleboarding
- Swimming
- Bike riding.

9.2 What is valued about the Lakes?

Two values of the South East Coastal Lakes raised by participants in relation to a specific lake are:

- Educational opportunities for water safety, environmental features and recreational skills
- The scenic views they provide.

9.3 What are the opportunities for future management of the Lakes?

Participants identified several general ideas for future management of the South East Coastal Lakes. The following list of management opportunities is provided in no particular order:

- Coordinated, holistic management of all the Lakes in the region together while still facilitating targeted and individual management of each lake
- Clear and concise management plans, individual to each lake, with actions that are updated by DEW on a regular basis
- Considering a partnership with CHASA and its member organisations (including South East Field & Game and the Wetlands Environmental Taskforce) including either leasing unalienated Crown Land to CHASA or establishing a land stewardship arrangement between DEW and CHASA
- Protecting/enhancing lake edge habitat
 - Including through increasing the distance of agriculture/forestry setbacks and providing more muddy shorebird habitat by adjusting hydrological regimes towards a semi-ephemeral state and clearing reeds around some lake edges
- Promoting light touch ecotourism
 - Attracting visitors that stay longer, spend more money and are more environmentally aware, whilst avoiding “over-commercialisation of the sites”
 - Building approaches for reducing visitor impact into management plans and governance models

- Advertising the South East Lakes together as a collective nature based tourism destination
- Conducting an economic assessment of the South East Lakes to investigate their economic potential and possible funding sources
- Reviewing the merits of Councils in taking on the role of maintaining Crown Land, as this improves the availability of officers to manage issues requiring quick response or local knowledge but also has operational and resource implications for Councils
- Considering allowing hunters to shoot priority pest animals such as foxes year-round if the Lakes were to be made into Game Reserves
- Creating and maintaining walking, cycling and/or fishing trails that link the South East Lakes together, along with associated supporting infrastructure such as carparks, toilets and seating
- Providing for cultural needs
 - Establishing a genuine role for the South East Aboriginal Focus group in the management and decision making for the Lakes
 - Providing for cultural needs, including employment opportunities through tourism and management, tours, cooking programs etc.
 - Considering using the traditional names for the Lakes, ideally to replace their current European names
 - The South East Aboriginal Focus Group identified that cultural heritage surveys must be done before the management of the lake is changed
 - Establishing an Aboriginal Interpretation Centre.

9.3.1 Land tenure

A stakeholder group explained that by bringing the South East Coastal Lakes into the National Parks system, existing and new walking trails would be popular and easier for people to find information as the parks' website is a great source of information. Another stakeholder group identified other benefits of the Lakes becoming parks including long term protection, succession planning and weed management.

