



South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board

Management Plan 2025 to 2028

Prepared by

The South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage (SEWCD) Board

ABN: 37480438213

PO Box 531 Millicent SA 5280

2 Park Terrace Millicent SA 5280

T: (08) 8730 3555

E: dew.adminsewcdb@sa.gov.au

<https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/water/resources/south-east-drainage-network/south-eastern-water-conservation-drainage-board>

Acknowledgements

The authors of this management plan acknowledge the assistance of the SEWCD Board and DEW Drainage Operations staff, in the development of this document. All images in this document are taken by Drainage Operations staff at various locations and dates.



Government of South Australia

South Eastern Water Conservation
and Drainage Board

Welcome to the South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board Management Plan to 2028

The South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage (SEWCD) Board Management Plan outlines the priority management measures to be undertaken by the SEWCD Board on behalf of the South East community of South Australia over the next three years to meet the objectives of the *South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Act 1992* (the Act).

The high-level purpose for management of the drainage network as set out in the Act, is described as:

"An Act to provide for the conservation and management of water and the prevention of flooding of rural land in the South East of the State; and for related purposes."

The Act specifies a number of objects to be achieved in its administration, which include:

- The prevention or minimisation of damage to agricultural production and the natural environment caused by flooding within the South East
- The improvement of the soil quality and the productiveness of rural lands in the South East
- The enhancement or development of natural wetlands and the natural environment in the South East.

A number of other state and local government legislation, inter-jurisdiction agreements and policies also influence and govern the management of the South East drainage system, and these are identified, along with associated stakeholders.

The SEWCD Board is required under the Act to prepare a Management Plan outlining key activities that will be undertaken to meet the Act's objectives. This Management Plan fulfils that requirement.

Vision

To balance the needs between sustainable and productive agriculture and healthy water dependent ecosystems across the South East (Limestone Coast) of South Australia.

The SEWCD Board seeks to be adequately funded to implement this Management Plan and perform its duties under the Act into the long term.

Role of the SEWCD Board

To manage and conserve the quality and flow of water in the South East of South Australia by effectively managing flooding, redirecting water to areas of greatest need, and reducing salinity.



Contents

<i>Message from the Presiding Member</i>	4
<i>Regional overview</i>	5
<i>The Board and its responsibilities</i>	7
<i>The Legislative and Governance Arrangements</i>	8
<i>Principles for the Development of the Management Plan</i>	8
<i>Goals, Strategies and Actions</i>	9
Goal 1: Manage the South East Drainage Network to retain water and manage. flows to benefit agricultural production, connected groundwater systems and wetlands	9
Goal 2: Maintain infrastructure assets	10
Goal 3: Maintain land and drainage corridors	11
<i>Key Reporting Criteria</i>	12
 <i>Appendices</i>	
1. SEWCD Board stakeholders	13
2. Three-year revenue and expenditure forecast (from 2025/26 year)	14

Message from the Presiding Member

The South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board (Board) is pleased to publish the Management Plan (Plan) for the financial years 2025 to 2028. The Plan guides the Boards operations and administration of the Act for the forthcoming year(s).

The Board continues to manage water through the variable climate patterns experienced by the South East, which can be challenging at times and demonstrated by the wettest June on record in 2023, followed by one of the driest years on record in 2024. These challenges mean that water management continues to become ever more important for both regional productivity, and the ecological and conservational outcomes which in many ways help to drive this region.

The drainage network provides benefit to both regional and State productivity and conservation outcomes that helps to generate many billions of dollars of South East generated Gross Regional Product coupled with environmental benefits of over 80,000 hectares of wetlands and lakes connected to the drainage network.

To meet the goals and objectives in the Plan the Board must be adequately funded. The aging infrastructure (many assets are now beyond expected useful lives) provides constant challenges to the Board when prioritising infrastructure renewal activities and operations. The Board is working to increase awareness of the importance of the drainage network and is engaging stakeholders in seeking a sustainable funding base to safeguard the people, prosperity and ecology of the South East community by having a fully funded and functional network.

The Board strives to provide drainage services and flood mitigation when the climate demands and to make the best possible use of that water. Retaining water in the landscape is important for the aquifers and for conservation as wetland and ecological refuges. This is why the Board strongly supports the Lake Hawdon North weir project that provides feeding grounds for vulnerable migratory shorebirds. Likewise, the Board is developing (in partnership) a project to augment the water supply to Lake George through the drainage network. The project has multiple benefits and provides habitat food for migratory shorebirds and waterbirds, fish and other fauna and flora as well as multiple social and recreational uses. The project has many stakeholders including First Nations of the South East, Councils, landholders, Limestone Coast Landscape Board and multiple government agencies amongst others and is one the Board is passionate about.

The Board thanks you for taking the time to read the Plan, and encourages you think more deeply about regional drainage water management -its benefits to regional productivity and the environment and its contribution to South Australian prosperity before arriving at conclusions. A functioning network will only become more important in both the wet times and dry times as we look to direct water to wetlands, and to retain water in the landscape.

I encourage you to contact the Board (or staff) to discuss the Plan (or the drainage network generally) should you wish to clarify anything, or an interest has been sparked.

Yours sincerely,

Brett McLaren

Presiding Member

South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board



Regional Overview

The South East has a history of both high primary productivity and flooding. The need for extensive drainage and flood mitigation systems is a result of the unique physical characteristics of the region combined with the requirements for agricultural development.

Surface water in the region moves west slowly toward the coast until it is diverted northwards along the eastern side of each intervening range. As a consequence, the inter-dunal flats were often covered with watercourses, wetlands, swamps and lakes, all common features in the pre-European landscape.

The succession of coastal dunes acts as a natural barrier to surface water, resulting in few natural sea outlets.

Slow surface water movement, due to the lack of slope and high groundwater levels, often results in widespread flooding. It is estimated that up to 40 per cent of the lands of the South East were seasonally inundated wetlands prior to drainage.

Since the first South East Drainage Act was passed in Parliament in 1875, the SEWCD Board has developed an extensive and complex drainage system to mitigate flooding and improve agricultural production for the region. Since that time, management of water in the landscape has also evolved in line with changing community expectations and needs of the region.

Today the SEWCD Board manages over 2500 kilometres of drains as part of the South East network (Figure 1). Associated with the drains are significant infrastructure assets such as regulator weirs, span bridges, culvert bridges and associated roads.

Without these assets being maintained in good condition, transport of primary production goods and services to markets and manufacturing centres will be restricted and inhibited, as will local and tourist travel which will impact significantly on the regional and state economy.

The drains are designed to account for one in ten-year events, as a minimum.

There are eight discharge outfalls to the marine environment from Lake Bonney SE to the Victorian Border. Drain cleaning (removing silt and weeds/grasses) increases drain capacity significantly often solving inundation issues for adjacent landholders.

Priorities for flows from the drainage system are directed to wetlands, coastal lakes and to reduce salinity in the Upper South East.

Key flows are monitored by a sophisticated decision support system and telemetry system utilising adaptive management principles.



Figure 1: South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board area.



The Board and its Responsibilities

The SEWCD Board consists of four members that are appointed by the Minister for Climate, Environment and Water, one member appointed by local government and three members elected to the Upper, Central and Lower South East electoral zones. The Board is made up of community representatives with the necessary skills and experience.

The Act outlines the functions and obligations of the SEWCD Board and includes the following responsibilities:

- Provide an effective and efficient system for managing the surface water of the non-urban lands in the South East, by conserving, draining, altering the flow of, or utilising that water in any manner.
- Carry out works for the purpose of lowering the level of the water table of lands in the South East to manage dryland salinity.
- Undertake, assist, or promote research in the fields of water conservation, drainage, and management.
- The enhancement or development of natural wetlands and the environment in the South East.

The SEWCD Board recognises that by collaborating with the community, government agencies, industries, and organisations, the best outcomes for our natural resources, landscapes and community will be achieved.

Under guidance and direction of the SEWCD Board the functions are coordinated and delivered by staff from the Department for Environment and Water (DEW). These staff are based at Millicent in the South East and Adelaide.

Diagram 1 below describes the relationships between the SEWCD Board, the Minister, and the delivery of the functions by DEW.

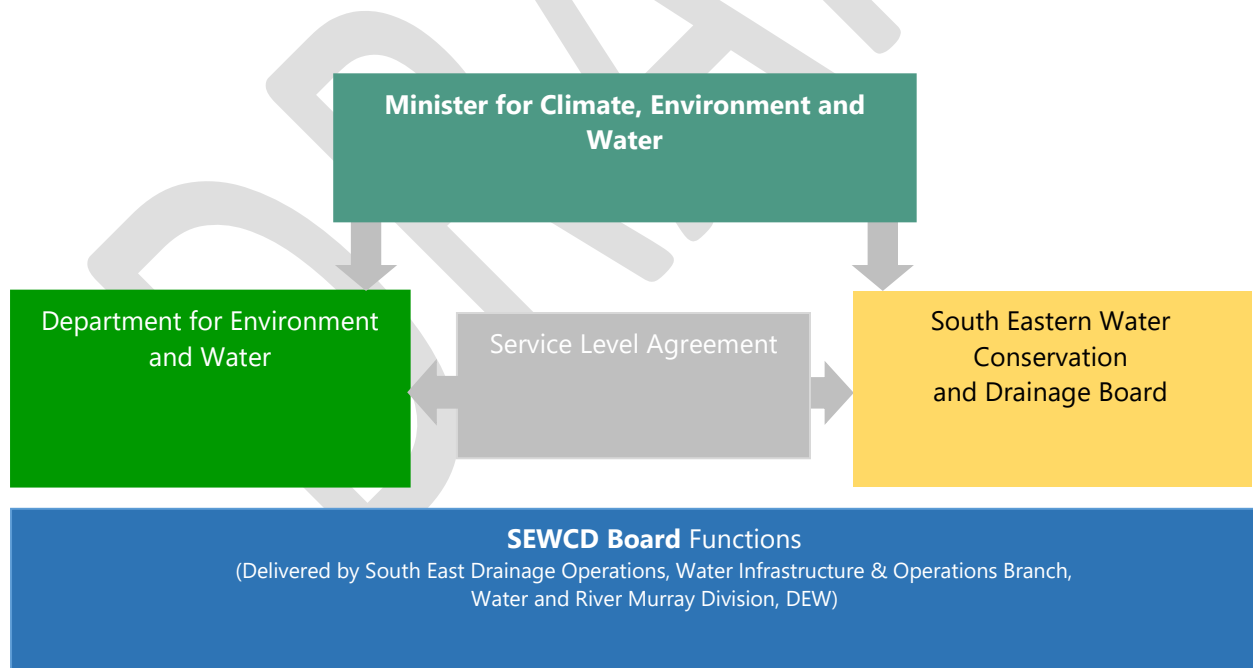


Diagram 1: The delivery of the SEWCD Board functions

Legislative and Governance Arrangements

Water management in the South East is directed by the following legislation:

- **South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Act 1992** (the Act) - to manage the South East Drainage Network.
- **Landscape South Australia Act 2019** - An Act to promote sustainable and integrated management of the State's landscapes, to make provision for the protection of the State's natural resources and includes water planning.

In addition to these pieces of legislation, there are national, state, and regional legislation, policies and strategies which the SEWCD Board and this Management Plan must consider.

Principles for the Management Plan Development

All actions and decisions of this Management Plan are in line with South Australia's economic priorities, the DEW Corporate Plan, the Limestone Coast Landscape Board Regional Landscape Plan, and other strategic documents.

To meet the goals of the Management Plan, the SEWCD Board will:

- Apply good governance, financial management and administration.
- Monitor membership of the SEWCD Board and the internal Governance, Finance and Audit Committee.
- Apply best practice financial management (a three-year revenue and expenditure forecast from the 2024/25 year is provided in Appendix 1).
- Monitor and revise Service Level Agreements with DEW.
- Maintain a complaint register and a stakeholder list for response to customer enquiries.
- Encourage community participation in decision making. Genuine engagement is undertaken with agencies, landowners, the community, and other stakeholders (see Appendix 2) to provide a better understanding of the risk and consequences of decisions that are likely to affect nearby landholders or the community.
- Undertake risk-based decision-making.
- Conduct twice yearly reviews or updates of the Operational Plan, to ensure that the South East Drainage Network is managed to achieve multiple benefits for agricultural, environmental, social, and economic advantage. Accordingly, all actions will be quantified and qualified based on investigation, monitoring and understanding community values.
- Report on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in accordance with, SEWCD Board, DEW, and annual reporting requirements.

Goals, Strategies and Actions

Goal 1: Manage the South East Drainage Network to minimise flooding to agricultural land and retain water to benefit primary production, connected groundwater systems and wetlands.

Priority Strategies

- 1.1 Develop a regional water balance by qualifying and monitoring the extent of flows entering and exiting the South East Drainage Network (i.e., coastal environment).
- 1.2 Operate the South East Drainage Network by applying adaptive management principles of using regulators and weirs to manage water flows.
- 1.3 Flooding, inundation and dryland salinity is mitigated through a well-designed, maintained and integrated drainage system, whilst planning for the effects of climate change.
- 1.4 Implement the South East Drainage and Wetlands Strategy priorities and objectives for the movement of surface water in the region in collaboration with the Limestone Coast Landscape Board projects.
- 1.5 Provide ongoing advice on managing the South East Drainage Networks to boost landscape productivity including agricultural productivity and healthy water dependent ecosystems.

Specific Actions

- Provide annual flow data to demonstrate water balance and flows to receiving environments.
- Develop a program utilising best available technology for regulating flows and automation of the South East Drainage Network and prepare for the effects of climate change (i.e., intense storm events and rising sea levels).
- Refine operating principles and procedures for effective control of regulator weir structures.
- Undertake cost effective ecological, hydrographical, and hydrological monitoring for seasonal flows and the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth.
- Update the Operational (capital and recurrent) Project Plan.
- Develop operating guidelines to assist with balancing Drain M flows between the Upper South East, Bakers Range and Lake George.
- Participate in the implementation of the *South East Drainage and Wetlands Strategy* with the Limestone Coast Landscape Board.
- Support the development and implementation of the Lake Hawdon North weir project delivered by Department for Environment and Water through the *Healthy Coorong Healthy Basin* program.
- Investigate the feasibility of implementation of water regulation for augmentation of water delivery to Lake George through Drain M.

Related Key Performance Indicators

- Provide annual flow data into receiving environments (i.e., Lake Bonney SE [Millicent Drainage Network], Lake Frome, Drain M, Drain L, Kingston SE, Blackford Drain and from Morella Basin).
- Management of SEWCD Board regulators to ensure both agricultural and environmental objectives are met wherever possible.
- Where possible, wetlands actively managed by the SEWCD Board have their environmental water needs met.



Goal 2: Maintain infrastructure assets.

Priority Strategies

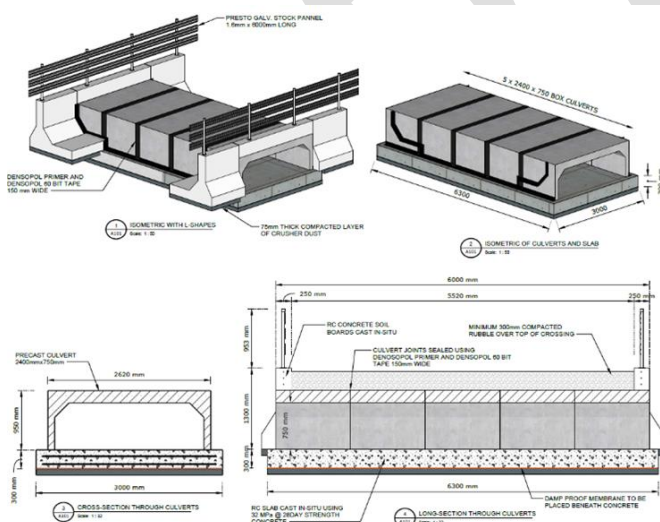
- 2.1 Develop and implement an Asset Management Plan for the South East Drainage Network applying risk management principles for infrastructure that includes regulators, weirs, bridges, culvert bridges, occupational bridges, and crossings.
- 2.2 Develop the annual Capital Works Program in accordance with the Asset Management Plan with prioritised works extending over three years for inclusion within the Operational (capital and recurrent) Plan.
- 2.3 Attempt to secure additional funding to invest in the upgrade of assets as defined in the Asset Management Plan.

Specific Actions

- Pursue funding opportunities for infrastructure from Australian and state governments with consideration of partnerships with other organisations e.g., Limestone Coast Local Government Association, Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast.
- Complete an Operational Plan that includes all actions within the approved Management Plan.

Related Key Performance Indicators

- Completion of Capital Works Program in accordance with annual Operational Project Plan.



*Goal 3: Maintain land and drainage corridors.***Priority Strategies**

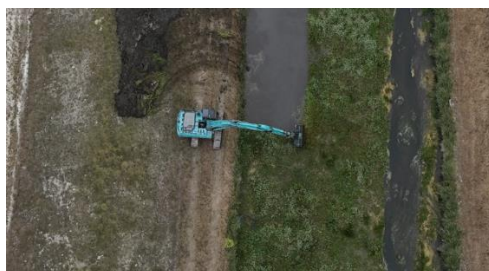
- 3.1 Complete annual drain maintenance - spraying, slashing, silt removal and fencing program and drain inspections (documentation of condition of landholdings, gates, tracks, and structures).
- 3.2 Undertake an audit of required drain reserves, equipment and structural assets.
- 3.3 Reduce costs of land and pest plant management for SEWCD Board owned (freehold) land through the ongoing review and implementation of grazing leases.
- 3.4 Maximise opportunities by engaging with volunteers to be involved in the management of the system, including revegetation works, drain clearing and/or monitoring.

Specific Actions

- Assign appropriate resources for the completion of the annual operations and maintenance program, including spraying, slashing, silt removal and fencing in accordance with the Operational Plan.
- Implement and maintain occupational licences for grazing, access, and recreational use.
- Undertake drain inspections to document condition of landholdings, gates, tracks, and assets.
- Develop a policy and procedure for the recreational use of Drainage Reserves.
- Maintain equipment inventory for major plants including a replacement program.

Related Key Performance Indicators

- Completion of Works Schedule into the annual Operational Project Plan.
- Kilometres of drain sprayed/ aerial spraying.
- Kilometres of silt cleaning.
- Kilometres of routine patrols.



Key Reporting Criteria

Related Key Performance Indicators are as follows:

- Management Plan updated in accordance with Section 18 of the Act.
- Annual Report in accordance with Section 24 of the Act.
- Financial Report approved by the Auditor General in accordance with Section 24 of the Act.



Lake Hawdon North weir Project 2024



South East Field Days



Appendix 1: SEWCD Board stakeholders

SEWCD Board Stakeholders	Role / responsibility
Department for Environment and Water (DEW)	DEW supports the delivery of the SEWCD Board functions through the provision of staff and resources. In particular, DEW provides strategic, financial, corporate, scientific, and operational services through a Service Level Agreement.
Limestone Coast Landscape Board	The Limestone Coast Landscape Board develops policies for management of water and the associated formal regulations and rules (e.g., Water Allocation Plans) have a significant influence on the SEWCD Board's approach to managing the drainage system. The Limestone Coast Landscape Board (formerly the South East Natural Resources Management Board) prepared the South East Drainage and Wetland Strategy (2019) in collaboration with the SEWCD Board. This strategy identifies the strategic requirements of the drainage system to meet the needs of the community and the environment.
Landholders	Contact with landholders is usually made as a consequence of operational issues associated with the drains, particularly with regard to leases and the current requirement on landholders to obtain SEWCD Board approval for any private drainage works in the region.
Private Environmental Land Managers	The board seeks to work with Private Environmental Land Managers to assist the Board in achieving the best possible environmental and conservational outcomes.
Local Government	There are seven local council areas within the Limestone Coast Local Government Association. Councils manage road access and stormwater within township areas. There is a common interest with regard to managing stormwater drainage together as well as road bridges and crossings.
Department for Infrastructure and Transport (DIT)	The SEWCD Board is responsible for a substantial number of bridges and uses the knowledge and expertise within DIT to assist with assessments and the asset management program.
Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast (RDALC)	RDALC seeks to build a prosperous future for the region. The RDALC assist the SEWCD Board in its attempts to source funding opportunities and connect with stakeholders and community.
First Nations Communities	The South East is the traditional home of the Meintangk, Potaruwutj, Bungaanditj, Tatiara / Ngarkat and Tanganekald First Nations' language groups. The SEWCD Board will work towards the use of existing agreements established between the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, the South East Aboriginal Focus Group (SEAFG), and the Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation, and will work with the Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation as the Prescribed Body Corporate of the Ngarrindjeri native title.
Tertiary Bodies	Ongoing research work will continue, particularly with the Goyder Institute of Water Research - a partnership between the South Australian Government, the CSIRO, Flinders University, the University of Adelaide, and the University of South Australia.
Other state government Agencies	Ongoing liaison with Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) to assist with broad acre cropping and livestock productivity, together with biosecurity and other emergency preparedness.



Appendix 2: *Three-year revenue and expenditure forecast (from 2025/26 year)*

Revenue			
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Recurrent	2,138,000	2,341,000	2,400,000
Capital	562,000	576,000	590,000
Total Appropriation	2,845,000	2,917,000	2,990,000
Other Revenue	40,000	45,000	50,000
Total Revenue	2,864,000	2,962,000	3,040,000
Expenditure- Recurrent			
Board Members Expenses			
Utilities - Phone Water Power			
Office expenses / reports / financial / audit			
Employee Training			
DEW Service Level Agreement			
	557,057	571,483	566,270
Other Services provided by Board			
Technical / Hydrographic / Environmental			
	314,639	322,505	330,568
Infrastructure Expenses / Asset Management			
Insurance (SAFA)			
Emergency Service Levy			
	416,970	427,394	438,079
Operational Maintenance Projects			
Chemical Drain Spraying activities			
Removal Silt & Obstructions			
General Maintenance on Reserves			
Control Water Flows			
Board Equipment & Depot Maintenance			
	1,002,140	1,027,193	1,052,873
Total Recurrent Expenditure	2,290,805	2,348,575	2,387,789
Expenditure - Capital			
Replacement of Plant & Equipment			
Bridge Replacement Program			
Flood Mitigation & Water Conservation			
Fencing			
Total Recurrent Capital	573,195	613,425	652,211
Total Expenditure	2,864,000	2,962,000	3,040,000
Surplus/(Deficit) before depreciation	0	0	0
Depreciation	4500000	4500000	4500000
Net surplus/(Deficit)	(4,500,000)	(4,500,000)	(4,500,000)