
FACT SHEET 2

ACCESS TO CHOWILLA GAME RESERVE DURING OPERATION OF THE REGULATOR IN 2016

BACKGROUND

Chowilla Game Reserve comprises floodplain and wetland environments. Chowilla features great stands of majestic river red gum and hardy black box gums, as well as Lignum and River Cooba. Large numbers of waterbirds and other native fauna can also be seen. Because of its unique ecological and cultural character the Chowilla floodplain is recognised as one of six icon sites in the Murray-Darling Basin and is listed as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

The Chowilla floodplain has experienced severe ecological decline due to lack of flooding over long periods. This decline accelerated during the extreme drought of 2006-10, resulting in the widespread loss of mature river red gums and black box trees.

What has been constructed at Chowilla?

A number of important environmental works have been constructed on the Chowilla floodplain to enable use of environmental water to improve the health of the floodplain.

The works include construction of an environmental regulator across Chowilla Creek downstream of Monoman Island designed to raise water levels to enable the inundation of large areas of the floodplain and wetlands. The regulator consists of a series of concrete piers and a deck. When the regulator is being operated, removable concrete stop logs (similar to those in existing River Murray weirs) are inserted between the piers to raise the water level in Chowilla Creek. During operation continuous flows are maintained over the regulator and downstream water levels will remain as normal. When the stop logs are removed, uninterrupted flow occur through the piers with no impact on water levels in Chowilla Creek.

A number of other smaller regulating structures have been built or upgraded to maximise the benefits to be gained during operation of the regulator, improve fishways, remove flow restrictions and improve access.

When will the 2016 operation of the regulator occur?

The intention is to make use of higher flows and availability of environmental water allocations during late winter and spring 2016. If River Murray conditions are right, operation of the Chowilla Creek regulator and ancillary structures will commence in mid August 2016 and be completed by mid-December. This duration depends on sufficient River Murray flows being maintained. .

What does the operation involve?

The operation will involve the progressive placing of stop logs between the concrete piers to raise water levels up to a maximum of 19.75 meters AHD, however the actual operating height achieved will depend on the availability of sufficient River Murray flows and environmental water allocations. At its maximum the operation will result in an increase in water levels behind the regulator of up to 3.45 meters. As water levels are raised behind the Chowilla regulator, Lock 6 will also be progressively raised potentially up to a maximum of 62 cm above normal pool level. This is done to ensure that flow velocities through the Chowilla anabranch can be maintained. The ancillary structures on Woolshed Creek and Chowilla Island Loop will also be operated.

Water levels in the Chowilla Creek will be gradually raised over approximately two to three weeks and eventually reach a level where water will spill into wetlands and then across floodplain areas. Water levels will be held at a peak level for up to approximately twelve weeks before gradually being lowered (through the progressive removal of stop logs) back to normal pool level by about mid December.

How much floodplain will be inundated?

If the water behind the Chowilla regulator is raised to the full target height for this event of 19.75m AHD, the modelling indicates that approximately 7,000 hectares of temporary wetlands and floodplain could be inundated (Map 1). Measurements will be taken during the event to confirm this modelling. The level to which the regulator will be operated will depend upon the level of flow in the River Murray. If flows only reach 15,000 to 20,000 megalitres per day (ML/day) then the regulator will only be operated up to about 19.4 m AHD and inundate a smaller area.

Map 1: Chowilla floodplain areas potentially inundated during operation of the environmental regulator and Lock 6.



Boat access through Chowilla Creek during operation of the Regulator

The regulator on Chowilla Creek will be closed to boat passage during the operation potentially to occur mid-August – mid-December 2016. Small boats moving up Chowilla Creek from the main river will only be able to move up as far as the regulator. Boating access upstream of the regulator is possible, a designated launch site has been developed upstream of the regulator at Campsite 13, however access to this site is not guaranteed if the higher level operation occurs. Small boats can also be launched at most campsites where it is safe to do so. The Customs House boat ramp, on the southern side of the River Murray is available as usual.

Water craft such as kayaks and canoes can be carried around the Chowilla Creek regulator but it is a significant structure so you need to be prepared to carry boats for approximately 300 metres. Portage for kayaks and canoes is also possible around the smaller weirs at Pipeclay and Slaney Creeks.

It is important to note that for safety reasons there is NO access (people or vehicles) on any of these structures under any circumstances. Due to raised water levels above the Chowilla regulator during the operation, vessels should navigate with caution when in the vicinity of, or travelling under bridges, and when navigating near the river banks, as elevated water levels may increase the width of shallows and submerge hazards near the banks in some places.

Vehicle access to the Chowilla Game Reserve during operation of the regulator

The Chowilla Game Reserve will remain open for the public to enjoy while the 2016 operation takes place, access to some areas will be restricted. The majority of public access tracks and roads on the Chowilla floodplain will become impassable due to the floodplain inundation and will be closed. Land based vehicle access will be restricted to roads that will not be effected by inundation. Boats and canoes will have access to the majority of the waterways.

To confirm track access and conditions during the event please call (08) 8580 1800.

While visiting the Game Reserve, visitors must stay on public access tracks. It is an offence to drive off-road or leave formed tracks in any park or reserve. Some access tracks may remain closed following completion of the operation until they have dried adequately to ensure safe access and to minimise track damage. Please adhere to signage on park.

Camp Sites

To confirm the availability of campsites during the event and to purchase campsite permits please call (08) 8580 1800.

The majority of campsites will be closed to ground based vehicles. A collection of campsites (9-13) where the Lock 6 Road meets Monoman Creek will be open as a campground allowing campsites for vehicle based visitors. Campers will be permitted to camp in any suitable spot they can reach by boat, canoe or by walking.

Campers are reminded that interfering with vegetation, including dead limbs and clearing is not permitted in National Parks. Campfires are allowed. No fires are allowed during the Fire Ban Season or on days of total fire ban. It is illegal to collect firewood in National Parks so make sure if you plan to have a fire to bring your wood along from a responsible source. If a fire ring is provided please use it.

Dogs on Park

Dogs are allowed onto the Game Reserve. They must remain on a leash at all times.

Fishing and Yabbying

Fishing regulations and bag limits are in place as normal. Further information is available at: www.pir.sa.gov.au

Who authorizes use of the regulator and who operates it?

Decisions about when the regulator will be used rest with the Minister for Water and the River Murray on advice from the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, working in conjunction with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and SA Water. An Operations Plan has been developed to guide all aspects of the regulator's operation including how to minimise risks. The regulator and the associated structures are operated and maintained by SA Water, on behalf of the Murray Darling Basin Authority.

Who is funding the project?

Funds for the construction of the Chowilla environmental regulator were provided through The Living Murray initiative of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, which was established in response to evidence showing the declining health of the River Murray system. The Living Murray is a joint initiative funded by the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian, Australian Capital Territory and the Commonwealth governments, coordinated by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources

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Further information is also available at these websites:

Department of Environment Water and Natural Resources (SA)

<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/chowilla-floodplain>

Chowilla Game Reserve;

<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/>

SA River Murray Flow Report (weekly updates)

<https://www.waterconnect.sa.gov.au/River-Murray/SitePages/2016/20Flow/20Reports.aspx>

The Living Murray;

<http://www.mdba.gov.au/>

Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder;

<http://www.environment.gov.au/ewater/>



The Chowilla Floodplain along with Lindsay and Wallpolla Islands in Victoria is one of six Living Murray Icon Sites along the River Murray. Works are being undertaken at all Icon Sites to maximise the environmental benefits from the cooperative use of environmental water provided through the Living Murray, and from other sources such as the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder.

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