



**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RECREATIONAL FISHING ADVISORY COUNCIL INC**  
(First convened in 1975)

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11 November 2019

Committee Secretary  
Select Committee on Regional Australia  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Sir/Madam

**SUBMISSION ON THE REGIONAL AREA OF SOUTH EAST OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA  
RECFISH SA RECREATIONAL FISHING TRAIL  
KAKADU OF THE SOUTH**

RecFish SA is the nationally recognized, independent peak body for the 277,000 recreational fishers in South Australia and is a member of the national peak recreational fishing body, Australian Recreational Fisheries Foundation.

Recreational fishing in South Australia involved over 328,000 people and some 24% of the population participated in 2000/01 when the first National Recreational Fishing & Indigenous Survey (REF 1) was conducted, but this participation rate has declined due to various factors. According to the Primary Industry and Resources South Australia Recreational Fishing Survey 2013/14 (REF 2), the participation rate in South Australia has declined to 18%.

RecFish SA is grateful for the opportunity to provide this submission to the Select Committee. We believe that the South East Lakes provide enormous untapped potential to contribute to local economies and recreational activities through investment in modest infrastructure improvements and tourism initiatives.

All the Lakes, Rivers, Estuaries, Creeks, Swamps and Basins referred to in this submission are in the Federal Electorate of Barker, which is the seat of Mr Tony Pasin MP, who is the Chair of this Select Committee. Attachment 3 is a map of the Barker Electorate with the water bodies identified.

The South East of South Australia contains significant quantities of the surface freshwater in South Australia and provides numerous and extensive lakes and coastal lagoons and substantial estuaries, but almost no one fishes in them. The exception is Lake George where recreational netting is undertaken, with a minor participation level.

The South East Natural Resources Management Board (SE NRM), a South Australian government agency, completed the Drainage and Wetlands Strategy 2019 (REF 3) in November 2019. The Strategy noted that originally wetlands comprised 50% of the South East but is now down to 6%, and some of the remaining area is being challenged. The South East Water Conservation and Drainage Board (SEWCDB) has carriage of that Strategy, and has advised that:

*“The Goals of the Drainage and Wetlands Strategy 2019 are compatible with improved community use of lakes, wetlands and drains, such as fish stocking and recreational fishing.”*

The SE NRM also subtitled the Drainage and Wetlands Strategy 2019 with the “Kakadu of the South” appellation, to reflect the regions natural character and the title has resulted in immediate recognition by persons who have heard it.

The Coorong has received considerable input financially and physically to improve the south east hypersalinity of that waterbody, with the most recent a \$60M investment through the South East Flows Restoration Project (SERFP) to add a median volume of 26.5 Gl to the southern lagoon. The SERFP is a component of the \$123M Coorong Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth (CCLMM) project, which was funded by the Commonwealth Government and the South Australian Government.

Lake Bonney SE and Lake George were specifically identified in the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation report “Revitalising Australia’s Estuaries”, by Colin Creighton AM, in September 2013, as potentially transformational sites to improve. Comments on these waterbodies were provided by RecFish SA. (REF 4)

## **LAKE BONNEY SE**

The largest coastal lagoon/lake in South Australia is Lake Bonney SE which is 24 Kms long and 4 Kms wide, with an average depth of less than 2 metres. Lake Bonney SE is currently unrecognised as a recreational location and could provide substantial economic motivation for tourism, including recreational fishing, as the Lakes system of Western Victoria does for many SA tourists who pass through the South East on their way to the Victorian Freshwater Fisheries.

Natural exchange of fish from marine to freshwater, and vice versa, would be facilitated by the construction of a Fish Passage, potentially designed by Australia's premier fish passage designer, and adequate stocking of desirable species.

There is also a conservation issue in that recreationally attractive Estuary Perch, *Macquaria colonorum*, that are plentiful in the Glenelg River, south east of Lake Bonney SE and Lake George, may be able to progressively move towards the Murray Mouth, where Estuary Perch are regionally extinct, and repopulate.

Lake Bonney SE is less than 10 kms from the significant regional town, Millicent, with an airport, and existing bitumen road access, and thus meets **Item C, Promoting the development of ..regional centre and districts**. In the 1930s, the NE end of Lake Bonney SE was substantially used as a recreational location with sailing, fishing and camping, and so it could be today, with Caravan Parks and other facilities, including boat ramps, clubhouses etc. Lake Fyans, in Western Victoria, is an excellent example of a recreational fishing water body with private dwellings and a large caravan park, offering a range of accommodation types.

A very recent proposal in a remote area of Tasmania, Miena, where recreational fishing and World Heritage wilderness are major tourism attractors, has created an 8 year, private sector plan to invest over \$20M, with additional building jobs and ongoing work. In fact, the area is to host the Lakes component of the World Fly Fishing Championship in early December 2019, with international coverage and ongoing tourism visitation from Australians and International visitors.

Lake Bonney SE is adjacent to the Canunda National Park and could thus be serviced by new tourist developments at the northern end of Lake Bonney SE.

Lake Bonney SE was used under a State Government Indenture with a Paper Manufacturer as a pollution sink for over 50 years, with the paper manufacturer then contributing significantly to the recovery of Lake Bonney SE, with the assistance and cooperation of the SA Environmental Protection Authority.

By 2008, the waters were declared as suitable for human contact and RecFish SA applied for unpowered craft (kayaks and canoes) to access the waters, which was granted in 2013. The recovery from the pollution impact is a success story for environmental improvement, yet the Lake is still to return as an economic contributor to the region.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

**That a detailed assessment of the recreational benefits of Lake Bonney SE be undertaken, including:**

- **Fish Passage**
- **Stocking of recreationally attractive fish**
- **Boating Facilities**
- **Caravanning facilities**

## **LAKE GEORGE**

Lake George, beside Beachport, South Australia, is some 5,700 Ha and has a net based recreational fishery catching mainly yellow eye mullet. Three commercial netters were bought out by PIRSA Fisheries in the early 2000s because of poor returns. Over the last 30 years, high freshwater flows have killed Rivoli Bay seagrass, with resulting sand blockage in the Outlet, thus reducing the opportunity for marine fish to access the highly modified water environment.

There is the possibility of diverting some 16 Gl per annum of freshwater from the South End Outlet thru Lake George, as well as extending the current groins further out to sea to keep the Lake George Outlet open. There would be a need to remove the sand clogging the reverse delta inside the lake. Regrowth of the seagrass beds in Rivoli Bay would also be a positive.

Wattle Range Council has undertaken several engineering studies, but the blocked Outlet has significantly reduced the economic benefits resulting from up to 16 species of fish accessing the Lake.

Improving the Lake George Outlet will significantly **improve and promote the development of the regional centre and region, Item C.**

### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**That plans be developed to enable ongoing marine access through the Lake George Outlet and associated channels.**

Improving both Lakes would **meet Item D of promoting private investment in regional centres and regional infrastructure** by significant town centre development and lake-based infrastructure.

## **LAKE LEAKE, LAKE EDWARD, VALLEY LAKE, COCKATOO LAKE.**

There are a range of Lakes that hold water: Lake Leake, Lake Edward (both owned by Forestry SA) near Glencoe, Valley Lake in the centre of Mt Gambier, managed by the City of Mt Gambier, and Cockatoo Lake near Keppoch. These Lakes are a desirable part of the Trail and would bring even more positive visitors to the camping areas, with their kayaks and other suitable watercraft. The financial impact of tourists staying another day in a regional area is very positive for the local economy.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

**That the Lakes that hold water be assessed for maximizing their tourist contribution to the SE, as part of the Trail.**

## **LEG O MUTTON LAKE, BROWNES LAKE, GREENRISE LAKE**

There are a number of **lakes that have no water** currently, but some 30 years ago, were significant recreational centres of activity with power boating, water skiing, fishing sailing etc. These are Leg O Mutton Lake and Brownes Lake, near Mt Gambier, and Greenrise Lake near Penola.

Greenrise Lake, has an estimated capacity of some 240 Ml with an annual recharge possibly of 120 Ml but detailed assessments would be needed.

These could be due to underground water level table changes, water diversion or other reasons. Nevertheless, these social activity centres are not useable in their current configuration and require further analysis to meet the Regional Australia criteria, perhaps involving environmental water.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

**4.1 That the Lakes that do not hold water currently be assessed for maximizing their tourist contribution to the South East, as part of the Trail.**

**4.2 That the lakes water requirements be assessed and water allocation changes considered.**

**MORELLA BASIN AND TILLEY SWAMP**

The Morella Basin, near Salt Creek in the Washpool Conservation Park, is a relatively new tourism and recreational opportunity, generated through the SERFP (mentioned earlier) and is mentioned to ensure it is considered in an ongoing investigation, as is required of Tilley Swamp.

**SOUTH EAST ESTUARIES AND CREEKS**

There are creeks, such as Maria Creek and Naracoorte Creek, that may have beneficial recreational purposes after further detailed assessments. The significant estuaries containing several lakes, Battye, King and Nunan, such as those at Robe, require further examination. Eight Mile Creek and Mosquito Creek are also in this category.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

**That the Morella Basin, Tilley Swamp, South East Estuaries and Creeks be evaluated for their contribution to the RecFish SA proposal.**

Several creeks in the lower South East contain the very rare and endangered Glenelg Spiny Crayfish (*Euastacus bispinosus*), which may only have 500 specimens remaining in South Australia, according to a 2012 Scientific Assessment by Whiterod and Hammer.

The South East Lakes have a range of facilities, but are not currently treated as freshwater fisheries or as part of a Regional Recreational Activity, or as part of the RecFish SA Recreational Fishing Trail.

**RECFISH SA RECREATIONAL FISHING TRAIL**

The Trail stretches from Aroona Dam, near Leigh Creek, down through the Mid North reservoirs (Baroota, Beetaloo and Bundaleer), which were opened by the South Australian Labor Government in the period 2014-18, as well as Warren Reservoir, near Williamstown on the southern edge of the Barossa Valley.

The South Australian Liberal Government is planning to open many Metropolitan Reservoirs for many recreational activities, including recreational fishing, allocating \$5M in the period 2018-2022, as planned in Reference 4.

The Trail would then sweep toward the South East where most of the surface area of the SE Lakes, the subject of this proposal to the Regional Australia Select Committee, would exceed the surface area of the northwestern end of the Trail by many factors. Of course, the SA Trail would then link with Western Victoria fisheries, where facilities are excellent and the water bodies are extensively stocked and promoted.

A significant feature of this proposal is that the lakes, estuaries and creeks have no conflict with any commercial fishery, and thus is a relatively straightforward scheme to implement and on an ongoing basis.

### **COMPLEXITY OF ORGANISATIONAL INVOLVEMENTS**

As extensive consultation will be required during the planning and implementation phases of this proposal with the State Government Agencies, and the Local Government Councils, and input from the recreational organisations, including RecFish SA and local recreational fishing organisations, funding will be required. RecFish SA has the knowledge, background, local involvement and representation of this proposal, and is currently unfunded, so will require funding to participate in the South East Lakes structure.

Legal advice may be necessary to clarify which government agency is directly responsible for the "Unallocated Crown Land" that comprises the Lakes and associated waterbodies, for the effective implementation and ongoing management of the proposed scheme.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

**THAT A SOUTH EAST LAKES BODY BE SET UP AS A ONESTOP SHOP TO WORK WITH THE STATE, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS TO PLAN IMPLEMENT AND ADMINISTER THE SOUTH EAST LAKES TO MAXIMISE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION FROM RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING PRIMARILY RECREATIONAL FISHING.**

#### **CONSULTATION:**

These proposals have been developed in consultation with the

- Recreational Fishing Association (Lower South East) Inc
- Recreational Fishing Association (Upper South East) Inc
- Greenrise Lake Wetland and Recreation Area Committee
- Lake George Management Committee
- Broad discussions with the Wattle Range Council
- South East Water Conservation & Drainage Board

- RecFish SA.

#### **SUMMARY:**

##### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

**That a detailed assessment of the recreational benefits of Lake Bonney SE be undertaken, including:**

- **Fish Passage**
- **Stocking of recreationally attractive fish**
- **Boating Facilities**
- **Caravanning facilities**

##### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**That plans be developed to enable ongoing marine access through the Lake George Outlet and associated channels.**

##### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

**That the Lakes that hold water be assessed for maximizing their tourist contribution to the SE, as part of the Trail.**

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##### **RECOMMENDATION 5:**

**That the Morella Basin, Tilley Swamp, South East Estuaries and Creeks be evaluated for their contribution to the RecFish SA proposal.**

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Financial estimates have not been prepared at this stage, but will need to be developed for a shovel ready proposal.

RecFish SA and community representatives are available to present to the Committee, as needed.

Contact details are located in Attachment 2.

Signed 

Michael Wilson  
Chair  
RecFish SA

REFERENCES:

1. National Recreational Fishing and Indigenous Survey 2000/01 South Australian Regional Information, Paper No 46, July 2005 Page 20.
2. South Australian Recreational Fishing Survey 2013/14  
[https://pir.sa.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/267177/SA Rec Survey 2013 14.pdf](https://pir.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/267177/SA_Rec_Survey_2013_14.pdf)
3. Drainage & Wetlands Strategy 2019, available at  
<https://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au>
4. "Revitalising Australia's Estuaries", Colin Creighton AM, FRDC, September 2013, Chapter 6, South Australia, available at <https://www.frdc.com.au>
5. Reservoirs SA, 191107 Reservoirs SA, Attachment 1. .