

# Coorong District Council

## South Australia



### Summary

The Coorong District Council was one of the first councils in Australia to incorporate the environment into their Strategic and Development Plans as well as developing and implementing a Local Action Plan (LAP) to address the areas natural resource management issues, including dryland salinity, native vegetation decline, wind erosion and water resources.

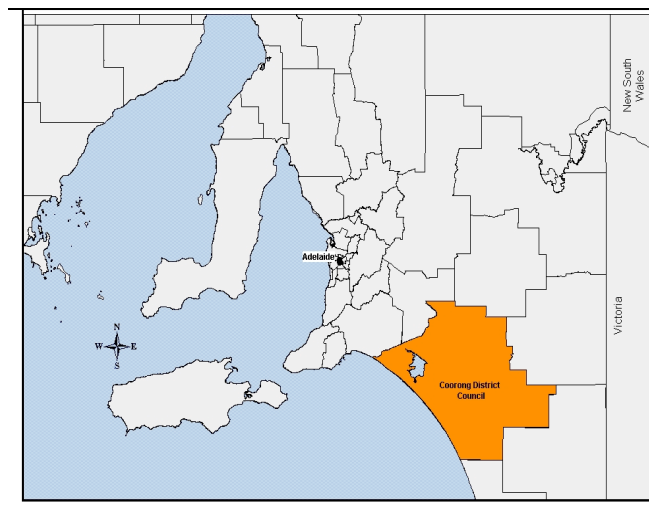
The Council considers natural resource management as core business, as Council's rate base and assets are directly threatened by land degradation.

The LAP committee has carried out over 120,000 hectares of on-ground works since 1997, with the assistance of NHT and NAP funding. The community has embraced the plan, with more than two thirds of landholders actively participating in the program.

The Council has been a pioneer in the development of inland aquaculture using saline groundwater, demonstrating the potential of a viable aquaculture industry as well as delivering environmental benefits through alleviate rising water tables, a major cause of dryland salinity.

### Coorong District Council area statistics

- Area = 8,836 sq km (State's largest council)
- Population = 6,000
- Number of farms = 553
- Length of road and railway reserves = 2,718 kms
- Shoreline = 894 kms (Ocean, Coorong & Lower Lakes)
- Rainfall = 350 to 500 mm
- Area of permanent wetlands = 71,880 ha including Ramsar listed Coorong and Lower Murray Lakes.
- Area of native vegetation remaining = 19% = 170,000 ha
- Dryland Salinity
  - >50,000 ha affected
  - >70,000 ha at risk
- Area of irrigation = 12,000 ha
- Agriculture includes cropping, sheep, dairy & beef cattle



### NRM issued in the Coorong District Council area

- Dryland salinity, urban salinity, salinity impacts on native vegetation and wetlands, salinity impacts on public and farm Infrastructure.
- Native vegetation and wetland decline, habitat loss and endangered species.
- Low River Murray Flows, Murray Mouth closure, river water quality, high salinity levels, water restrictions.
- Groundwater quantity and quality and poorly maintained infrastructure.
- Wind erosion and lakeshore erosion.
- Roadside woody weeds.
- Unsustainable agricultural practices

### Why the Coorong District Council is involved in Natural Resource Management

- Natural Resource Management is seen as core Council business.
- Council's rate base is dependant on land values.
- Land degradation leads to a loss of rate revenue.
- Land degradation leads to economic and population decline.
- Council's assets and infrastructure are directly threatened.
- Local government planning laws are integral to sustainable natural resource management.
- South Australian Local Government Act (1999) has environmental management requirements.

## **Advantages for the Council in supporting NRM programs**

- Protection of Council's rate base via land values.
- Protection of Council's assets.
- Helps to maintain the areas economy and population.
- LAP Officers provide Council with technical expertise, eg. reviewing development applications.
- Positive publicity for Council.
- The ability to attract large amounts of funds.
- Better linkage with the new NRM Act, NRM Boards etc.
- Funding assistance for projects that Council would normally have to meet the full cost, eg. stormwater.
- Funding assistance for projects that Council would not normally do, eg. revegetation and wetland projects.

## **Planning**

Planning for natural resource management has been a priority for council and has been addressed at three levels.

### Council's Strategic Plan

Environmental management is considered to be a core function of Council and this is reflected in Council's Strategic Plan, which was adopted in December 1999 and updated in 2002.

### Councils Development Plan

The Coorong District Council has been one of the first councils in Australia to fully incorporate the environment into their Development Plan, and is seen as a benchmark for other councils to follow. Conservation and the environment feature predominately in the council-wide objectives within the Development Plan. Issues such as biodiversity, dryland salinity, water use, natural systems, wetlands and native vegetation are all catered for within Councils planning and development policy.

The Coorong and Lower Lakes is a Ramsar listed wetland of international significance, and the Development Plan ensures the area will be managed in accordance with the aims and objectives contained in the Ramsar Management Plan for the area.

### Local Action Plan

The aim of Council's LAP Committee is to develop and implement a plan that addresses the district's natural resource management issues. The LAP was released in 1997 and an updated in February 2000. Implementation of the LAP began in 1997, with the assistance of Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funding. On-ground works addressing dryland salinity and other issues such as erosion, ground water quality, loss of biodiversity, sustainable agriculture etc, are being carried out on a scale that is likely to be successful and 120,000 ha of works have be completed in the first 9 years of the project.

The community has embraced the plan, with seventy percent of all landholders actively participating in the on-ground works program. The strong involvement of Local Government, has been a leading factor in the success of the Local Action Plan, and is seen as the ideal partnership for other LAP's/catchment groups to pursue. The LAP is administered by a committee of local landholders and senior Council Staff.

## **On-Ground works and Incentives.**

### Local Action Plan Devolved Grants

- 120,000 ha of on-ground works completed with the assistance with funding from the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality funding.
- Program now in 9th year.
- 70% of landholders access grants.
- >300 projects approved to date this year (2005) totaling \$650,000.
- 87% of funding received is spent directly on-ground.
- LAP Project Officers offer technical assistance for all projects.

For details of the incentives offered visit the Coorong District Council Website:

[www.coorong.sa.gov.au](http://www.coorong.sa.gov.au) → Council services → environmental management → Local Action Plan → December Newsletter

### On-ground works projects with a high public benefit

LAP incentives cover a high proportion of the cost. These projects have high biodiversity value.

Projects include native revegetation, protection of remnant native vegetation and wetlands, threatened species, lakeshore erosion and land retirement.

### On-ground works projects with a high private benefit

LAP incentives cover a low proportion of the cost, usually less than 20%. Projects are aimed primarily at reducing groundwater recharge, ie dryland salinity. Projects include;

Revegetation, perennial pastures, fodder shrubs, farm forestry, saltland pastures, wind erosion stabilization, soil improvement and sustainable agriculture.

### Technical Support

The LAP Project Officers give technical support for all on-ground works projects, and produce a range of fact sheets and information packages to aid successful completion of projects.

### Funding Guidelines

All projects are subject to strict guidelines and conditions.

- Agreement/contracts must be signed for all projects. These include maintenance periods.
- No upfront payments. Payments are results based following an inspection of completed works.

### Targeted on-ground-works include:

The Local Action Plan also offers a range of targeted on-ground works in priority areas. These include;

- Large scale revegetation.
- Wetland rehabilitation.
- Roadside woody weed control.
- Endangered species.
- Severe long term wind erosion.
- Roadside revegetation.
- Remnant native vegetation.
- Environmental weed control.
- Habitat restoration.

### Area of on-ground works completed

To date, more than 120,000 ha of on-ground works have been completed. The area of works completed in 2004 is listed below. A similar area is being undertaken in 2005.

- 700 ha of native vegetation planted.
- 5,400 ha of remnant native veg protected.
- 1,000 ha of eroded land rehabilitated.
- 9,700 ha of perennial pastures.
- 280 kms of fencing erected.

## **Capacity building and education**

Council via the Local Action Plan Committee, run a number of capacity building and educational programs in the area to maximise the participation rate and effect of the on-ground works programs. These include;

### Workshops and fields days held recently include;

Farm forestry, revegetation and seed collecting, perennial pasture establishment and wetland monitoring.

### Irrigation Water Use Efficiency

Irrigation scheduling, soils, pump and bore maintenance, systems check and rivercare courses.

### Schools projects include;

Waterwatch, revegetation and wetland projects.

### New groups established

Council has facilitated the formation of three new groups to help coordinate local activities. These include the Coorong and Mallee Farm Forestry Network, the Upper South East Irrigators Association and the Meningie Narrung Lakes Irrigators Association.

### Publicity

- The LAP Committee publishes newsletters every three months. These are sent to all landholders and other relevant stakeholders and can also be accessed on Councils web site.
- Regular newsletters are also produced for the Farm Forestry Network and the two Irrigator Groups.
- The LAP Committee produces regular media releases to local papers and radio stations.

### Community Support.

The LAP Project Officers have filled the role of Landcare Officers since 1998. They offer support to community groups, Landcare groups, Schools and individuals on natural resource management issues in the area, including the transition into the new NRM delivery arrangements in South Australia.

### **Awards**

- The 2000 National Landcare Catchment Award.
- The 1997, 2001 and 2003 State Landcare Local Government Awards.
- 2001 National Local Government Innovation Award.
- The 2003 River Murray Catchment Local Government Award.
- The 2003 State Landcare Research Award
- The 2003 Australian Water Industries Award
- The 2004 National Local Government Landcare Award

### **Contacts**

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