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## FACT SHEET 1

# Lakes and Coorong Commercial Fishery The Lakes and Coorong Region

## A Unique Region

The Coorong is a uniquely melodic word for a unique place. In the Aboriginal Dreamtime, 'the kyrangh' or 'long neck', which runs along the northern coast of the South East, was created by Ngurunderi, the hero of the Ngarrindjeri people. The original aboriginal residents of the Coorong region traditionally fished the rich marine, estuarine and freshwater resources of this highly productive ecosystem. They still live here, preserving the legends and sharing them with the visitor.

Less than 3km wide, the Coorong consists of shallow lagoons separating the Southern Ocean and Youngusband Peninsula with a total length of about 140 kilometres. Australia's largest river system, the Murray Darling, finishes its journey to the sea in broad and shallow freshwater lakes. Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert cover about 85,000 hectares and were originally semi-tidal estuaries. Barrages were built from 1935 to 1940 to keep the tides out and to raise the pool level for the steam navigation which the railways had killed a decade previously.

The habitats of the Lower Lakes and the Coorong include coastal and salt-influenced habitats, as well as unusual aquatic habitats in the Coorong and a unique set of ephemeral salt lakes. The Coorong supports extensive beds of aquatic plants, four of the eight species of wetland plants described as rare in South Australia, occur along the Coorong.

Reduced flows have resulted in long periods of time when no fresh water reaches the Coorong via the barrages. This causes a change in the salinity levels of the estuary, deprives it of nutrients and allows sand to accumulate inside the river mouth.



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*The view across the  
Coorong towards the  
Youngusband peninsula  
and the majestic  
sandhills.  
The ocean lies beyond.*

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In modern times, the Coorong and the adjoining Lower Murray Lakes have been declared a wetland of international importance. Virginal and vivid, the Coorong National Park stretches 145km from the mouth of the River Murray to just north of Kingston.

The 47,000 hectares are home to about 90 species of water birds and shore birds, 21 species of seabirds, 33 species of birds that migrate annually from Siberia, Japan and China and 14 protected species. It is home to Australia's largest, permanent breeding colony and it is actually a string of islands in the middle of the Coorong where pelicans breed.

The diversity of species mirrors the diversity of habitat available to the commercial fishery including the freshwater Lakes Alexandrina and Albert, the estuarine/marine/hyper saline Coorong, and coastal waters extending out to three nautical miles from Goolwa Beach Road to the Kingston jetty.

The dominant commercial species of the fishery currently are Yellow-eye mullet, Mulloway, Cockles, Callop (Golden Perch), Carp and to a lesser extent Flounder and Bony Bream.

A total of 24 fish species have been recorded in the River Murray mouth and the Coorong, including freshwater fish such as Congolli, Australian smelt, and Common galaxies.

The salinity levels of the Coorong vary between different areas and within different seasons. Coorong habitats range from seasonally fresh near the barrages when large quantities of water are being released, to brackish in the Murray Mouth area, grading to hypersaline in the Southern Lagoon. The salinity level of the Southern Lagoon is 140 parts per thousand (ppt), the Northern Lagoon is 80ppt – far greater than South Australia seawater which is only 35ppt.

The worry is that if the Coorong becomes closed off due to constriction at the Murray Mouth, evaporation would see salinity levels increase, dramatically affecting the substantial commercial fishery and the unique ecology of the internationally acclaimed Coorong.

