

Media Release

Environment Protection Authority



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Rivers and creeks assessed in the South East region

A total of 71 sites in the South East were assessed by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) as part of the new Aquatic Ecosystem Condition Reports.

The reports released recently on the condition of South Australia's rivers and creeks represent a significant breakthrough in the way water quality is measured and reported in this state, according to EPA Acting Chief Executive Tony Circelli.

EPA scientists investigating the 71 sites found 2 sites that were good, 24 that were fair, 40 poor and 5 very poor. The sites were assessed on the condition of waterways as ecosystems, including the water quality and the plants and animals that depend on it and a summary of information was provided on each location; presenting the scientific findings as well as the key pressures and management responses.

"These new Aquatic Ecosystem Condition Reports capture a more comprehensive picture of what is happening to the animal and plant life at those sites than we have had in the past, and they present the findings in a new, on-line format that is easier to access.

"Importantly, they provide information which will help us benchmark progress in avoiding further degradation and improving the condition of our precious water resources.

"Given the degree of land clearance and development in the South East region and the combined effects of the prolonged drought in a largely drained agricultural region, we were not surprised that there were no Excellent or Very Good ratings," said Mr Circelli.

The reports using a new 6 level grading system assessed the Piccaninnie Blue Lake Outlet, Piccaninnie Ponds Conservation Park as Good, Naracoorte Creek, Naracoorte as Fair, Tatiara Creek, north eastern Bordertown as Fair, Drain 31, Millicent as Poor and Henry Creek, south from the Tilley Swamp Conservation Park as Fair.

In some cases this assessment has considered constructed drainage systems. These drains were designed to remove surface water and drain saline groundwater to improve agricultural productivity in the South East region. They are not expected to rate very highly as aquatic ecosystems, although they do provide important habitat for many plants and animals.

According to Mr Circelli, the reports confirm what was expected in terms of overall trends and the ongoing impacts from the replacement of native vegetation with more intensive agricultural land uses.

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“These are long-term legacies from more than 170 years of European settlement and it is important to remember there are no quick fixes. It has taken a long time for them to get into this condition, and rectifying the situation is going to involve a concerted effort by government, industry and the community over the long-term too,” he said.

The Aquatic Ecosystem Condition reports will complement a series of reports produced by each of the NRM Boards which provide information on the state of the region and NRM Board’s progress in achieving targets set in the region’s NRM Plan.

This is the first stage in the release of the new style reports. Future reports are planned for release every year for different regions around the state and these will be based on monitoring data collected the previous year. For example, reports will be released during 2012 that are based on 2011 monitoring data.

The reports are available online via the EPA website. You can access them the ‘what’s new’ panel on the home page at www.epa.sa.gov.au. Further information is also available by phoning the EPA on (08) 8204 2004 or freecall (country) 1800 623 445.