



At the End of the River

The Coorong and Lower Lakes

THE MILLENNIUM DROUGHT BROUGHT TO THE FORE THE OVER-allocation of River Murray water over the twentieth century, illustrated by large changes at the lower end of the River. Water levels in Lakes Albert and Alexandrina have fallen dramatically, and without dredging, the Murray Mouth would be closed. Salinities in the North and South Lagoons of the Coorong have risen sharply over just four years, with the extinction or sharp decline in key components of the system. These wetlands are recoverable, but their recovery is reliant on fundamental changes being made to the way Australians manage the River Murray and allocate its water. Environmental requirements need to be considered up front rather than as an after-thought.

“Beautifully presented and written by one of the Coorong’s most knowledgeable ecologists, ‘At the end of the River’ is an essential read for those responsible for making the decisions that will determine its future.”

Professor Mike Young,
Director, Environment Institute,
University of Adelaide

“David Paton skillfully evokes the Coorong’s beauty and describes its importance as a wetland of international significance, emphasising the need for appropriate environmental flows to ensure the protection of our precious Coorong”.

Dr Barbara Hardy AO

From his unique perspective, ecologist David Paton AM examines the changes that have occurred in the Coorong and Lower Lakes since European settlement. He summarises research collected over thirty years on the different ecosystems that comprise these wetlands at the end of the River. The book is enriched with personal accounts from twenty contributing authors who share a passion for this part of South Australia through their connection with the environment for recreation, scientific pursuit or livelihood.

Over 200 magnificent images depict the Coorong and Lakes in their many guises – from the life beneath the waters to the pelicans soaring high, from the wild ocean beach to the sheltered waters and rocky islands of the lagoons. More than a guide to the region, this book will give you an understanding of the causes of the current crisis and possible solutions.



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Contents

Vignettes v

Figures vi

Tables vii

Foreword ix

CHAPTER 1	An Ecologist's Perspective	1
CHAPTER 2	The Coorong Ocean Beach: A high energy coastline	13
CHAPTER 3	Younghusband Peninsula: From discovery and exploitation to reservation	31
CHAPTER 4	The Ecology of Younghusband Peninsula	51
CHAPTER 5	The Coorong Lagoons: Dynamic but hydrologically challenged	79
CHAPTER 6	The Coorong Lagoons: Early natural history and use of natural resources	109
CHAPTER 7	The Coorong Lagoons: Biotic responses to a changed hydrology	127
CHAPTER 8	The Coorong Lagoons: A critical refuge for waterbirds	147
CHAPTER 9	The Lower Lakes: Wetlands that complement the Coorong	185
CHAPTER 10	The Future of the Coorong and Lower Lakes	213

Appendix Common and scientific names 232

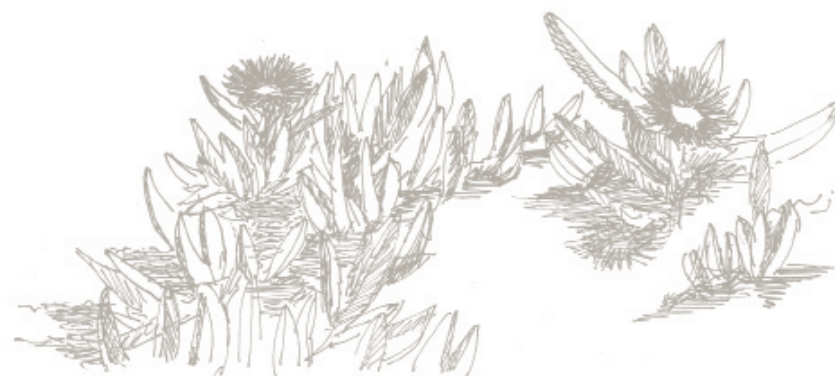
Abbreviations 234

Acknowledgements 235

About the Author 238

Cover Photographer 239

Index 240





Banded Stilt flock

PAUL WAINWRIGHT

Vignettes

Colin Thiele and the legacy of Mr Percival	FIONA PATON	2
Mulloway	GREG FERGUSON	14
Fishing the Coorong beach	ALASTAIR WOOD	15
Goolwa Cockles	COBY MATHEWS	17
Chinamans Well	PENNY PATON	40
Cantara Homestead	DAVID PATON	42
The unique Malleefowl	FIONA PATON	45
A tale of orchids, rabbits and RHD	PETER BIRD, GREG MUTZE & DAVID PEACOCK	66
Coorong wombats	GREG MUTZE	67
The song of Rufous Bristlebirds	DANIEL ROGERS	73
What are Ramsar wetlands?	PENNY PATON	80
Pelicans in the Coorong	PENNY PATON	114
The breeding biology of pelicans	PENNY PATON	119
Polychaete worms in the Coorong	ALEC ROLSTON	128
Chironomids in the southern Coorong	MIKE KOKKINN	134
Brine Shrimp in the Coorong	MIKE GEDDES	144
East Asian–Australasian Flyway	DAVID ANDREW, DEWHA	159
Recollections of living at Yalkuri	RICHARD HARVEY	189
Water quality in the Lower Lakes	KANE ALDRIDGE & JUSTIN BROOKES	191
Freshwater mussels in the Lower Lakes	KEITH WALKER	193
Threatened fishes on the brink of local extinction	SCOTTE WEDDERBURN	194
Musk Ducks	KEVIN MCCrackEN	196
What are acid-sulfate soils?	RUSSELL SEAMAN	200
The tubeworm of the Lower Lakes	ALEC ROLSTON	202
Managing acid sulfate soils in the Lower Lakes	RUSSELL SEAMAN	209
Going against the flow	KEITH WALKER	226
The Coorong and sea level rise	ANDREW SHORT	227



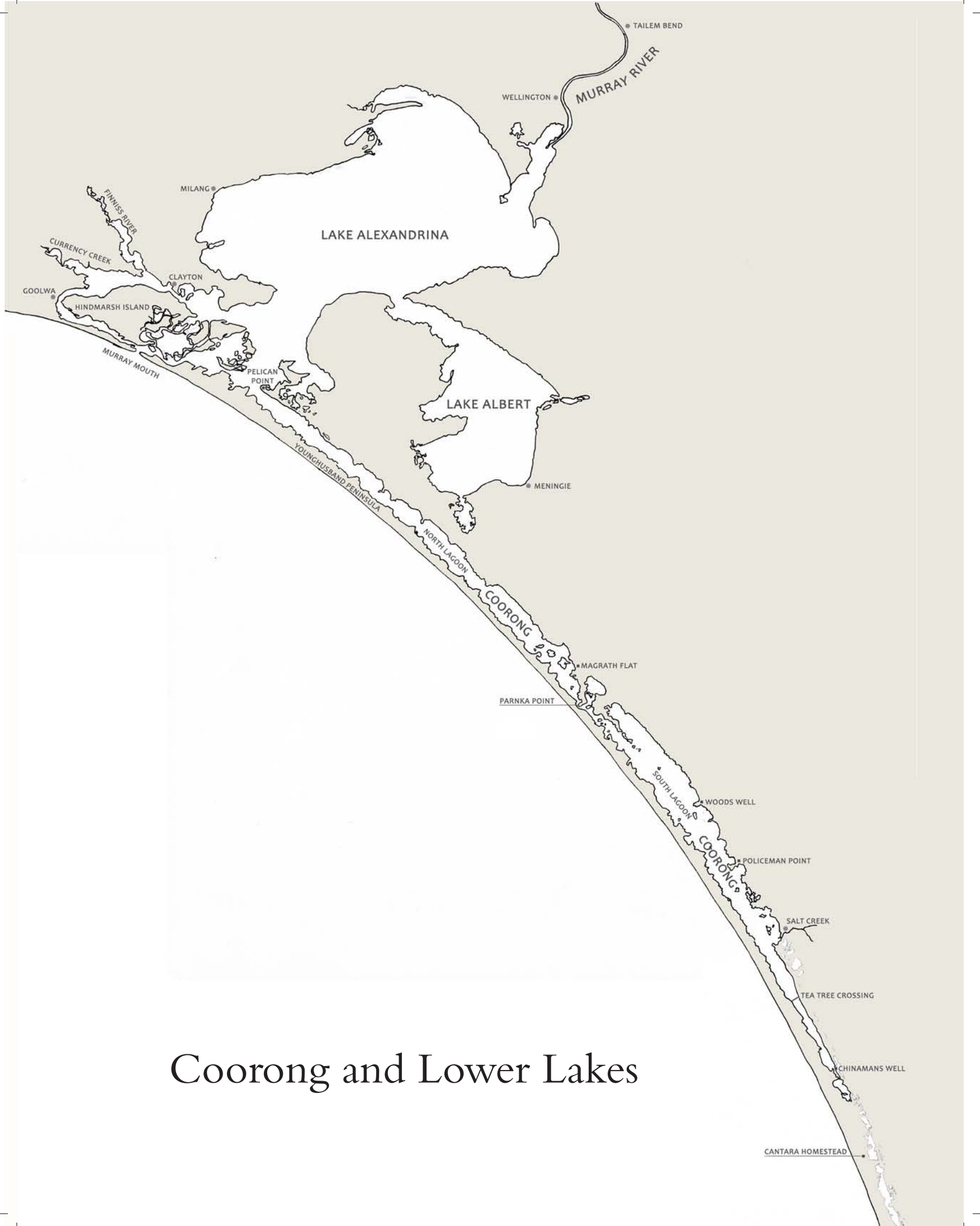
Figures

CHAPTER 1	1.1 The Murray-Darling Basin	1
CHAPTER 2	2.1 Vehicle tracks across the ocean beach	20
CHAPTER 4	4.1 Silveryeye movements, south-eastern South Australia	62
	4.2 Sonogram of the call of a pair of Rufous Bristlebirds	72
CHAPTER 5	5.1 Map of the Coorong and Lower Lakes	82
	5.2 Map of the Lower Lakes	83
	5.3 Seasonal changes in salinity along the Coorong from Dec 1999 - Sep 2000	86
	5.4 Predicted River flows reaching the Murray Mouth since 1901	90
	5.5 Map of the Barrages	91
	5.6 Predicted River flows reaching the Murray Mouth over the last 20 years	92
	5.7 Changes in salinity along the Coorong for January from 2001 to 2009	93
	5.8 Seasonal pattern of River flows reaching the Murray Mouth	95
CHAPTER 7	7.1 Salinity tolerances of selected aquatic organisms in the Coorong	130
	7.2 Number of macro-invertebrate taxa found along the Coorong	132
	7.3 Changes in the number of fish species along the Coorong	133
	7.4 Loss of <i>Ruppia tuberosa</i> from the South Lagoon	138
	7.5 Winter salinities in the southern Coorong	139
	7.6 Changes in abundances of seeds and turions for <i>Ruppia tuberosa</i> in the South Lagoon	140
	7.7 Changes in the abundances of chironomids in the South Lagoon	142
	7.8 Changes in the abundances of hardyhead fish in the South Lagoon	142
CHAPTER 8	8.1a Foraging depths of small waders in the Coorong	149
	8.1b Foraging depths of large waders in the Coorong	150
	8.2 Seasonal changes to the abundances of different groups of birds in the South Lagoon during 1984-85	158
	8.3 Map showing seven Coorong regions	164
	8.4 Distribution of waterbird species in the seven Coorong regions	165
	8.5 Numbers of waterbirds counted along the Coorong in January 2000-2009	166

	8.6 Distribution of birds along the Coorong in January 2000–2009	
	a Fish-eating species	168
	b Cormorants	169
	c Waterfowl	169
	d Resident waders	170
	e Migratory waders	171
	8.7 Changes in abundances of birds in the South Lagoon for Jan 1985 and Jan 2000–2009	
	a Fish-eating birds	172
	b Waterfowl	174
	c Small waders	174
	d Large waders	176
	8.8 Changes in abundances of small waders using different regions of the Coorong in 1987 and over 2000–2009	179
CHAPTER 9	9.1 Map of the Lower Lakes	199
CHAPTER 10	10.1 Elevated salinities in the South Lagoon since 2007 now exclude key biota	219
	10.2 Predicted changes in salinity following different management actions	222

Tables

CHAPTER 4	4.1 Prominent plants of Youngusband Peninsula	56
	4.2 Abundance of terrestrial birds and foraging niches in the Coorong	57
	4.3 Seeds found in scats of frugivorous birds and in seed traps	58
	4.4 Frost damage to fleshy-fruited plants	69
CHAPTER 8	8.1 Waterbird species of the Coorong	148
	8.2 Prominent shorebirds recorded in the Coorong in the 1980s	156
	8.3 Seasonal abundances of bird species in the South Lagoon for 1984–85	157
	8.4 Changes in abundances of selected waterbirds between 2000–2006 and 2007–2009	178
	8.5 Bird species with more than 1% of their flyway population using the Coorong	180
	8.6 Numbers of waterbirds in the Coorong during 2000–2006 and 2007–2009	181
CHAPTER 9	9.1 Waterbirds counted in the Lower Lakes, summer 2009	204



Coorong and Lower Lakes

Foreword



EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT HAS BROUGHT many benefits to Australia but few for the Coorong. During the first half of last century, the South East was drained and the Barrages were built. With the Barrages in place, irrigation communities and cities like Adelaide, Whyalla, Port Augusta and Port Pirie could expand and they did.

Late in October 2002, this era of expansion came to a screeching halt. Dredges were brought in to keep the Mouth of the River Murray open. Seven years later, these dredges are still there. The Coorong that served Australia for millennia is changing – changing rapidly. Australia’s mightiest river system has run out of water. When a river stops flowing, it is clear that it is over-allocated and over-used. All Australians need to know that the end of the River Murray was in strife before this current long dry emerged.

For millennia water has flowed into the Coorong from the great Southern Ocean, the South East and the River Murray. Collectively, these three sources have kept her landscape vibrant. The Coorong is one of Australia’s special places. To remain special, she needs water.

More than anything else, the Coorong needs a secure water entitlement—one that is as secure as that given to irrigators throughout the Murray-Darling system. Is this too much to ask? I don’t think it is. David Paton is of the same view.

How large an entitlement does the Coorong need? To answer this question, one needs first to understand how the Coorong functions and how much water is needed to raise the level of the Lower Lakes to a height that is above sea level. When the level of water in the Lower Lakes is below the sea, the Coorong cannot function—at



Coorong landscape

GREG BOURNE

least not function in the way that we have come to know and love. The Coorong, more than ever before, needs a drink.

In the process of gaining this knowledge and planning her future, one also needs to understand the beauty of the Coorong as a place to be nurtured.

Beautifully illustrated and written by one of the Coorong’s most knowledgeable ecologists, ‘At the End of the River’ is a must read for any person interested in the future of the Coorong. It is an essential read for those responsible for making the decisions that will determine her future.

PROFESSOR MIKE YOUNG

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