

4.6 Correspondence sent to the Water Corporation in relation to the Shire of Denmark's and WIMAG's objection to a bar opening below the preferred level (1.1m AHD) was followed by a meeting between Water Corporation, the Shire of Denmark and Department of Water personnel on the 27th September. Further details of this meeting are provided in item 5.

5. EPA DECISION IN RELATION TO PROPOSED BAR OPENING

The Water Corporation's proposal to breach the Wilson Inlet sand bar on 8 October 2007 at approximately 0.8 metres Australian Height Datum (AHD) was referred to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) by the Denmark Environment Centre for consideration. Consequently, the EPA determined that the likely environmental impacts of an opening at that level were sufficient enough to warrant formal assessment under the provisions of the *Environmental Protection Act*. This decision means that before any breaching of the bar at less than 1.05m AHD the Water Corporation must formally explain their proposal to the EPA. The EPA will then assess the environmental impacts and how they are to be managed.

The EPA's decision was largely based on consequences of the opening in October 2006 at similarly low water levels, whereby there was insufficient scouring of the opening channel and bar closure within 2 months, although the opening was only really effective for 2 to 3 weeks. This resulted in record low water levels in the inlet during the summer and autumn of 2007 leading to, amongst other things, the drying out of extensive seagrass habitat and the loss of shallow water feeding grounds for water birds, including migratory waders.

The expected outcomes of this decision are that the inlet water level will not be significantly lowered over the 2008 summer, except for some minor level reduction due to evaporation. Then, with the first winter rains next year the inlet level should rise to the preferred opening height of 1.1m AHD by late June to early July. Historically, under these circumstances the inlet should stay open for at least 6 months enabling good water exchange between the inlet and the ocean and marine/estuary fish recruitment.

As expected there are drainage (flooding) issues associated with the EPA's decision, therefore it is important that all stakeholders, including the Water Corporation, the Department of Water, the Shire of Denmark and the community work closely together to not only resolve these issues for this year but to try to develop an appropriate management system for future openings. Ultimately, it is highly likely this situation will change the way in which South Coast estuaries generally are managed to deal with lower rainfall and decreased river flows in a continuing drying climate.

Danny Burkett requested input from the group to assist in the Water Corporation's attempts to satisfy the EPA requirements, in particular, the issue/question of the inlet's environmental values and the impact of a low level opening on these values. Existing knowledge is limited however the current Environmental Water Requirements (EWR) study will hopefully provide some answers in this regard. Danny explained that Water Corporation's attempts to mitigate flooding by pumping water over the Eden Road floodgates was costed at approximately \$11000/week and has had very little impact on water levels. He also informed the group that the Water Corporation intends to appeal the EPA decision.

Also, Zak was directed to Paul Close at CENRM following his query about what environmental values the EWR study was likely to consider, and more specifically whether or not it will include impacts on shellfish.

Relevant personnel from the Department of Water and the Water Corporation will meet on 26 October with the aim of deciding on an appropriate course of action to resolve the issue of future bar management.

6. WILSON INLET ENVIRONMENTAL WATER REQUIREMENTS PROJECT

The Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management (CENRM), in collaboration with the Department of Water, has prepared a report reviewing current knowledge of Wilson Inlet. The purpose of this document is primarily to establish and critically evaluate the existing knowledge base for Wilson Inlet, particularly flow dependent ecological values, and will form the basis for the environmental water requirements project for the Inlet. A copy of the report is available from Dave Rushton.

7. FISHERIES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Ben Chuwen is currently seeking funding support for a 5 year project titled ‘ Ecologically, economically and socially sustainable fisheries – developing skills for the future’. The project will enable Ben to develop skills that will facilitate the sustainability of fisheries in WA estuaries, and particularly for estuaries along the south coast.

Ben tabled a copy of his funding application and requested WIMAG endorsement which the group agreed to provide.

Recommendation: Chris Gunby to write a letter of support on behalf of the Dept of Water and Dave Rushton to arrange for a letter of support on behalf of WIMAG.

8. MEMBERSHIP

Brad Kneebone’s and Zak Launay’s membership expires at the end of 2007. Therefore, the Shire of Denmark and the Dept of Water will arrange to undertake the recruitment process in the coming weeks to fill 2 community positions. Members briefly discussed the need to have the Denmark tourism industry represented on the group. George suggested approaching the Denmark Visitors Centre in the hope that a suitable representative of the centre might consider applying for membership.

9. WILSON INLET NUTRIENT REDUCTION ACTION PLAN

Craig Carter tabled a WINRAP implementation progress update report primarily focusing on initiatives throughout the Wilson Inlet catchment area during August, September & October 2007. Copies of the report are available from Craig at craigc@southcoastnrm.com.au or the project website at www.scric.org/winrap

10. MEMBERS REPORTS

Melinda Lyons – Nil

Danny Burkett – Nil

John Xanthis – Nil

Brad Kneebone – questioned how best to progress/resolve the Hay River boat launching situation. Brad will possibly prepare a draft letter to the City of Albany for the next meeting in collaboration with Geoff Findlay at the DPI.

Craig Carter – Nil

Ben Chuwen - Nil

Zak Launay – seeks clarification regarding the proposal to utilise the Denmark River for town water supply over the coming summer. Danny advised that this was necessary because the Quickup Dam was currently only 36% capacity.

Dave Rushton – Nil

Stephen Bondini – requested that group members be better informed of all issues relating to the inlet, particularly the bar opening.

George Ebbett – Shire engineer has been approached regarding concerns over access to the new jetty at the Denmark river mouth. Suggestions on how to resolve this issue were invited.

11. NEXT MEETING – to be advised.