

Question on notice no. 161

Portfolio question number: 161

Additional estimates

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee, Agriculture, Water and Environment Portfolio

Senator Malcolm Roberts: asked the Murray-Darling Basin Authority on 6 March 2020—

Mr Glyde: Your question is: do we need to redesign the boundaries of the Murray-Darling Basin catchment? Senator ROBERTS: Return them to the way they were, because the south-east drains used to flow into the lower Coorong, not into the ocean. Sorry, the south-east water used to flow into the lower Coorong. Mr Glyde: Yes, and I guess the project that's underway there is to try and help out the environment of the Coorong, particularly that part of it, by having some fresh water come through. I'm not quite sure-various proposals have been put forward as to changing the boundaries of the Murray-Darling Basin catchment and I'm not quite sure that that project would be indicating that you need to change the boundaries. But I'd have to take that one on notice. ... Mr Glyde: We'd be happy to provide the maps and the history. It's certainly better than my knowledge as well.

Answer —

Answer attached

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

Answers to questions on notice

Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio

Question No: 161
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Division/Agency: Murray–Darling Basin Authority
Topic: Boundaries of the Murray–Darling Basin catchment
Hansard Page: 54
Question Date: 06 March 2020
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Roberts asked:

Mr Glyde: Your question is: do we need to redesign the boundaries of the Murray-Darling Basin catchment?

Senator ROBERTS: Return them to the way they were, because the south-east drains used to flow into the lower Coorong, not into the ocean. Sorry, the south-east water used to flow into the lower Coorong.

Mr Glyde: Yes, and I guess the project that's underway there is to try and help out the environment of the Coorong, particularly that part of it, by having some fresh water come through. I'm not quite sure—various proposals have been put forward as to changing the boundaries of the Murray-Darling Basin catchment and I'm not quite sure that that project would be indicating that you need to change the boundaries. But I'd have to take that one on notice.

...

Mr Glyde: We'd be happy to provide the maps and the history. It's certainly better than my knowledge as well.

Answer:

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) does not consider that the current catchment boundary for the Murray-Darling Basin (Basin) needs to be changed. While not within the defined catchment boundary, the Upper South East Drainage is already accommodated under certain provisions of the *Basin Plan 2012* on the basis that it is hydrologically connected to the Coorong.

The upper south east drainage system is being modified and improved to divert water currently draining to the ocean back to the Coorong South Lagoon.

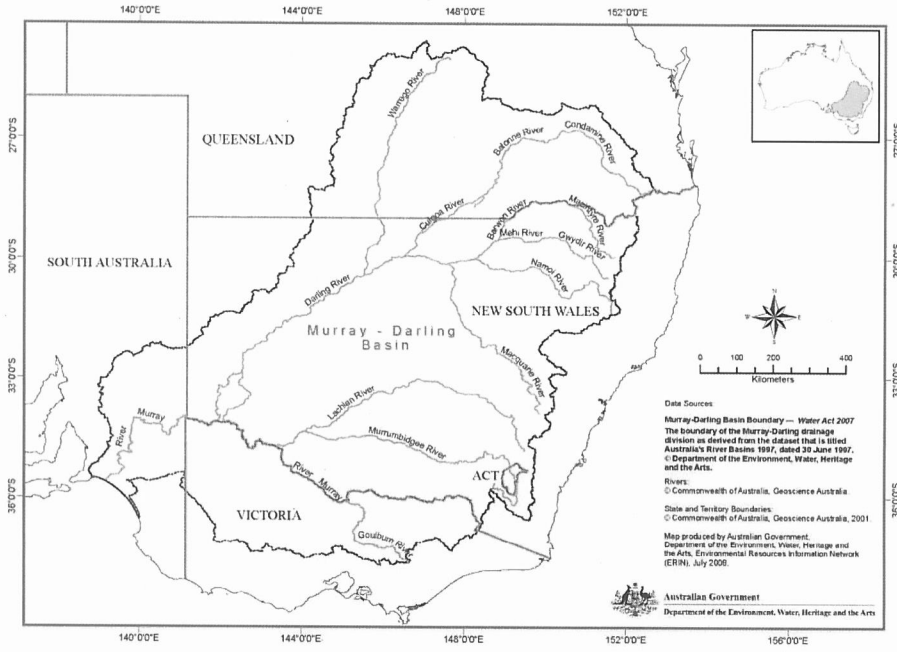
- The *Water Act 2007* (Cth) (Water Act), established the MDBA, incorporated the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement (MDB Agreement) with a map of the Basin catchment (Attachment A) derived from the dataset named *Australia's River Basins 1997*, which shows drainage basin boundaries as defined by the Australian Water Resources Management Committee.
- *Australia's River Basins 1997* (Attachment B) shows the Millicent Coast river region, including the areas of the South East Drainage Scheme and Upper South East Drainage and Flood Mitigation Scheme, as part of the South East Coast (Victoria) drainage division rather than the Basin.
- The watershed currently defined by the Upper South East Drainage (USED) Network is not a Basin water resource as per s4 of the Water Act, as it does not fall within the Basin. On this basis, the volumes of drainage water in the USED Network and its discharge to South Lagoon and the ocean were not included in the available water, Baseline Diversion Limits (BDL) and Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) volumes under the Basin Plan as first passed into law in 2012.

- However, the USED Network is considered under certain provisions of the Basin Plan 2012 on the basis that it is hydrologically connected to the Coorong - a Basin water resource, including in the development of South Australia's Water Resource Plans and the associated long term environmental watering plans.
- The hydrological modelling undertaken by the MDBA that informed the Basin Plan took into account the best available information regarding inflows from the South East of South Australia. Thus, the impact of the catchment area of the Coorong was considered when identifying environmental flow needs for the Southern Lagoon of the Coorong.
- The South East Flows Restoration project (SEFRP) is jointly funded by the Australian Government and South Australia under the Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program. The SEFRP will use new and widened drains within the upper south east drainage system to divert water currently draining to the ocean to the Coorong South Lagoon and en route wetlands. The SEFRP alignment can be found at Attachment C.
- The diverted relatively fresh water will reduce salinity in the Coorong South Lagoon and enhance ecosystem resilience, as well as enhance the quality of en route wetlands of the upper south east.
- The SEFRP is well progressed and is expected to be commissioned within the next 18 months.
- The project will contribute to meeting the ecological targets in the Coorong, thus allowing a greater SDL adjustment (i.e. less water to be recovered from consumptive users). The volume of offset from the project has been determined by the MDBA as part of the SDL adjustment process.

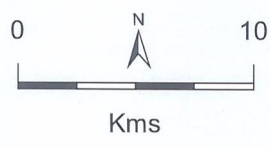
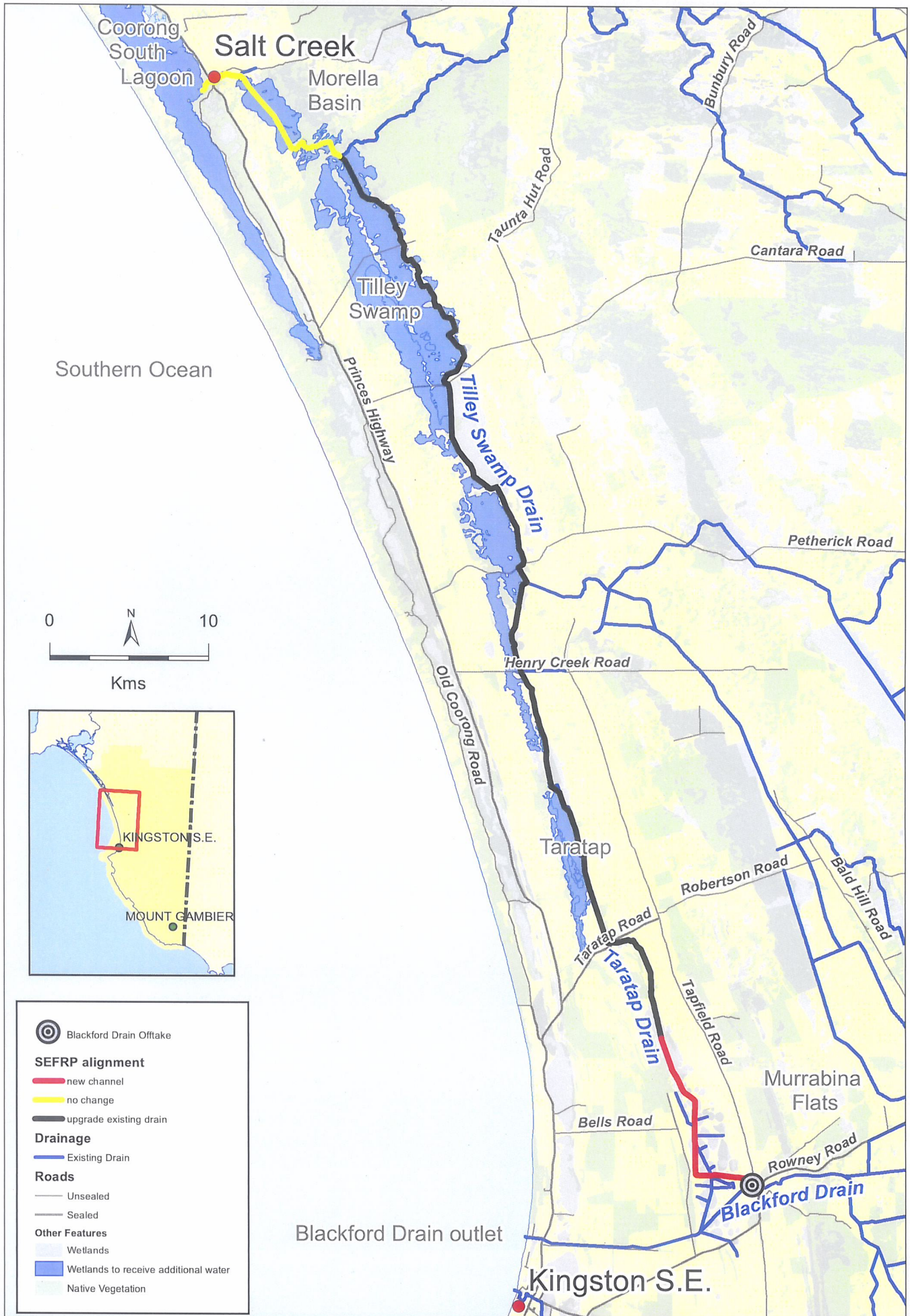
Schedule 1A—The Murray-Darling Basin

Note: See section 18A.

The map set out in this Schedule delineates the boundaries of the Murray-Darling Basin but does not show all of the water resources within the Murray-Darling Basin that are covered by this Act.



South East Flows Restoration Project Alignment



- Blackford Drain Offtake
- SEFRP alignment**
- new channel
- no change
- upgrade existing drain
- Drainage**
- Existing Drain
- Roads**
- Unsealed
- Sealed
- Other Features**
- Wetlands
- Wetlands to receive additional water
- Native Vegetation