

# ENVIRONMENTAL WATER ALLOCATION

## LAKE HAWTHORN – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### Why water Lake Hawthorn?

Mallee CMA is coordinating a delivery of environmental water to Lake Hawthorn to achieve a partial fill of the wetland and protect the environmental values of the site.

This low-level watering will help retain a shallow, saline refuge for waterbirds and shorebirds. The watering will also stimulate the growth of water plants and provide an important food source for waterbirds.

### What is environmentally significant about Lake Hawthorn?

A recent survey at Lake Hawthorn counted more than 6,000 birds at this site, including migratory shorebirds and the nationally-protected Red-necked stint. Red-necked stints are a migratory species that travel from as far away as Siberia to find the conditions provided at Lake Hawthorn.

These birds need shallow and saline areas to wade and feed, which is different to the environment provided by the Murray River and freshwater wetlands.

There are few saline wetlands in the local area that can provide these conditions and feasibly receive environmental water.

This watering recognises the environmental value saline wetlands have in our semi-arid landscape.

### Why do we have to water Lake Hawthorn now?

Water levels in Lake Hawthorn have rapidly declined during the recent hot weather and dry conditions. If the lake dries completely, the aquatic plants eaten by the birds will die and will take time to re-establish. If this occurred, it is unclear what would happen to the large population of birds at Lake Hawthorn as there are very few saline wetlands in the local area that can provide similar conditions.

### How much water could be used at Lake Hawthorn?

Up to 1 GL of environmental water will be available to use between March and June 2016.

### Who is paying for this?

The watering is fully funded through the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. There is no cost to Lower Murray Water customers or Mildura Rural City Council ratepayers.

### Will this watering impact local irrigators?

No. The watering being delivered is allocated environmental water and does not impact other river users.

Water will be delivered via existing Lower Murray Water infrastructure and will not compete with irrigation demands (i.e. irrigation water will be delivered first, followed by environmental water).

### Will this watering fill the lake?

No. Water is not being delivered to fill Lake Hawthorn. Water is being delivered to protect the environmental values of the saline wetland.

### Will the watering stop the smell of Lake Hawthorn?

Water is not being delivered to “fix” the smell of Lake Hawthorn. The impact of this watering on the smell of Lake Hawthorn is unknown, but it is not expected to make the smell worse. A decrease in the smell could be a secondary benefit of the watering.

What will the lake look like during/after the watering?

This watering is not intended to turn Lake Hawthorn into a lush, green, freshwater wetland. It is a saline environment that has significant environmental value. This low-level watering will slightly increase the amount of water in the lake, in order to retain the shallow conditions favoured by bird species at the site.

What about blue-green algae?

Lower Murray Water is continuing to monitor water supplies for blue-green algae. If the blue-green algae affects this watering, the delivery will cease to minimise the risk of the water being delivered to Lake Hawthorn adversely impacting the health of birds/dogs etc.

What if it rains heavily in the coming weeks?

As the water is being delivered through existing infrastructure, there is the ability to cease the watering if stormwater inflows to the lake increase due to rainfall. These inflows, if received, would also help retain the environmental conditions needed for waterbirds at this site.

What does the community think?

Discussions with Cabarita residents to date indicate strong support for the watering, among the immediate community. There has been a lot of discussion with residents over many years about the potential of delivering environmental water to Lake Hawthorn. The local residents understand the lake has environmental value as a saline wetland and that no attempt is being made to either fill the lake or turn it into a freshwater wetland.

Why hasn't water been delivered in the past, particularly when the lake dried?

Land tenure is complex at Lake Hawthorn, with the lake and its immediate surrounds a mixture of freehold land and public land.

The primary use of Lake Hawthorn has been irrigation drainage and stormwater retention; however, as irrigation drainage water has significantly reduced with improved irrigation practices, the predominant water source has been stormwater.

Until the function of Lake Hawthorn and its management was made clearer, it was difficult to:

- A) Set environmental objectives for the site
- B) Determine the feasibility of any proposed watering action at the site.

Through the development of the Lake Hawthorn Management Plan, led by Mildura Rural City Council during 2015, the function and management of the lake has become clearer. This has enabled work to begin on setting environmental objectives for the site, which recognise the lake's value as a saline wetland, and determine how watering may be carried out at the site, if and when required. Work is continuing in this area through the development of an Environmental Watering Management Plan (EWMP).

Is there a strategy or policy in regard to watering Lake Hawthorn?

Mallee CMA is currently developing an Environmental Watering Management Plan (EWMP) for Lake Hawthorn, which sets environmental objectives for the site and suggests ways to achieve these.

The current environmental objectives for Lake Hawthorn are to:

- Provide refuge for waterbird guilds found at Lake Hawthorn;
- Feeding habitat for migratory shorebird species;
- Germination and growth of lake-bed herbland.

Undertaking this watering now provides an opportunity to complete the EWMP prior to Lake Hawthorn completely drying. Through this document, the Mallee CMA will work with partners and stakeholders to set long-term watering objectives for the site. This plan will complement the Lake Hawthorn Management Plan recently completed by Mildura Rural City Council.

Does this watering mean water will be delivered to Lake Hawthorn every year?

No. The long-term environmental watering objectives developed as part of the EWMP, together with assessment of water availability and other priorities, will determine future environmental water deliveries.