

Conserving Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands in the South East of South Australia

Steve Clarke, Wetland Conservation Ecologist, South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources

Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands have recently been listed as a critically endangered ecological community under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

They are usually less than one hectare in size and between 30 to 50 centimetres deep. They are generally only wet over spring and early summer (hence 'seasonal') and characterised by sedges and grasses growing in the water along with a rich array of herb plant species (hence 'herbaceous'). These wetlands are only filled from rainfall and runoff from the local catchment, and have fresh water (salinity of around 1000 parts per million).

Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands were once abundant through Victoria and eastern parts of the Lower South East of South Australia, as well as extending into southern New South Wales. However, these wetlands occur on soils which are often used for crop, pastureland or plantation forest. This means hydrological and biological changes have often resulted in the loss of wetlands or change in their character. Nevertheless while many Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands have been lost, many have been lightly grazed or treated gently and still retain much of their former character.

The South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources is currently working in the south-east of South Australia to conserve this wetland community by first surveying, mapping, assessing its condition, entering the data into the South Australia Wetland Database and then implementing

conservation techniques. Since work started in November 2013, over 150 potential Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands have been surveyed and 98 have been determined to fit the listing advice. These wetlands have now been found to have an extent of occurrence in the south east of South Australia of 7500 square kilometres and are located on public and private land. Work has also started on raising community awareness of these unique wetlands.

The surveyed wetlands have been found to vary in condition from almost pristine to completely degraded and work has commenced on conservation based on condition rating and accessibility. This work includes fencing to exclude stock or to manage a grazing regime conducive to restoration, track closure, weed control and restoring hydrology. Over 30 Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands have undergone varying forms of conservation work since the start of 2014.

The Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands Project is funded by the Australian Government. For further information on the project, please contact Steve Clarke (steve.clarke@sa.gov.au).



Surveys of the recently listed threatened Seasonal Herbaceous Wetland ecological community are being done to establish their condition (© Copyright, South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources)



A seasonal Herbaceous Wetland near Tarpeena in the South East of South Australia (© Copyright, South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources)



*Bladderworts (*Utricularia* sp.) are often prolific in these types of wetlands* (© Copyright, South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources)