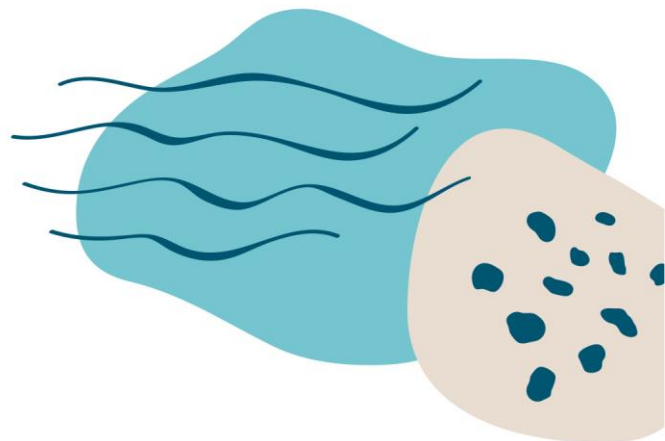


Media Release



Friday, 10 February, 2023

Surry River mouth opened after high swells raise beach berm

High swells building an unusually large sand beach berm has led to the CMA and Parks Victoria taking proactive action to support the Surry River at Narrawong with an authorised artificial river mouth opening (ARMO) on Friday, 10 February.

The decision comes following an extremely large and unseasonal 8m swell hitting the coastline last week, depositing large volumes of sand at the estuary mouth and high volumes of seawater entering the estuary.

Glenelg Hopkins CMA Executive Manager Waterways, Chris Solum, said past monitoring and research by the CMA has indicated that such seawater intrusions, which typically occur during autumn and early winter, can result in dissolved oxygen depletion in the estuary, leading to vegetation dieback and risk of fish death events.

“Artificial openings are not the preferred management approach, with the management authority preferring to let the mouth of the river open and close naturally,” Mr Solum said.

Opening an estuary can only be completed by authorities when they are safe and appropriate. Opening an estuary mouth without authority can lead to heavy fines and prosecution.

Mr Solum said that due to significant rainfall and streamflow during spring and early summer 2022, the estuary was highly oxygenated, which allowed for a safe and appropriate artificial opening.

“The beach berm covering the mouth is also higher than has been seen in a number of years at this stage of summer,” he said.

“The beach berm covering the mouth is also higher than has been seen in a number of years, meaning it will take significant natural events to move the sand load.

“The opening was therefore undertaken to reduce the foreseeable negative impacts on the system, which include prolonged inundation of adjacent public and private land, native vegetation dieback and fish death risk, often encountered during late autumn and early spring,” Mr Solum said.

The opening aimed to lower the estuary water level, reduce seawater loads within the estuary and lower the height of the sandbar at the estuary mouth.

The opening will not be permanent, and the system is expected to close naturally without rainfall, Mr Solum said.

“The decision to attempt an ARMO was made in the best interests of the long-term health of the estuary.

“We would reiterate to people that the artificial opening of a river mouth can only be undertaken after careful consideration and monitoring and should never be attempted by community members ,” he said.

Friday’s opening of the river mouth used heavy machinery to create a channel through the sand berm and allow water from the estuary to escape. Parks Victoria and Glenelg Hopkins CMA staff and contractors undertook the work.

Information on how estuaries open and close can be found here: www.ghcma.vic.gov.au/what-we-do/estuary-management/

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