

Painkalac and Flood Management Engagement Session

Notes and summary from Sunday June 26, 2022

Attendance

Community members - 62

Agency representatives are listed below

Organisation	Staff member/s
SES	Marisha Paton Melanie Gill
CCMA	Jayden Woolley Rhiannon Glover
GORCAPA	Scott Hives
Barwon Water	Jared Scott
SCS	Adam Lee Sharna Whitehand Nick Guyett Robyn Lucas
SCS Councillors	Mayor Libby Stapleton Cr. Bodsworth
Facilitator	Jen Lilburn

Note from the session - in chronological order

Introduction

- Acknowledgement of Country, introduction and welcome from Adam Lee
- Jen Lilburn set meeting protocol and asked for initial questions from the audience, what participants wanted to get out of the session;
 - Confidence that relevant agencies are managing appropriately
 - Understanding future planning and projections
 - Understand environmental management (what are agencies considering?)
 - Understand the range of issues, pros and cons.
 - Why are there more frequent openings lately?
 - What other solutions to resolve flooding/opening issues?
 - What is the warning process for openings?
 - Sharing information
 - Role of reservoir?
 - What is done to maintain minimum water levels in the Creek?
 - Understanding of management of riparian vegetation, and potential contribution to flooding
- Presentation by Sharna Whitehand
- Presentation by Rhiannon Glover

Word cloud

In 4 words or less, what do you think about when someone mentions the Painkalac Creek?



A comment from Jen on the Word Cloud;

I know there were a few concerns about the word cloud (being not representative of all views), the point of which was to get participants thinking about the broad range of values. The product is much less important than the exercise.

The full list of responses is below;

active management	fear when raining	kayaking	recreation
aesthetics	fishing	little kids	recreation
aesthetics	fishing Santa	my house	salt or fresh
eels	flooded infrastructure	my house	salt wedge
environment	flooding	my house	waterbirds
environment	height of berm	needs protecting	waterbirds
environment	indigenous borderlands	open or closed	waterbirds
Estuary watch	insurance	open or closed	waterbirds

Panel Q&A Session

Panel consisted of;

- Sharna Whitehand, SCS
- Scott Hives, GORCAPA
- Jared Scott, Barwon Water
- Jayden Woolley, CCMA
- Marisha Patton, VicSES

Questions are underlined.

- Answers are in the dot points.
 - Some questions received multiple answers from different panellists.
1. Re. management of riparian veg and it's contribution to flooding risk/mitigation.
 - Jayden – explanation of dynamic communities and how they support many species and high levels of diversity. When there is static water, there is only a few species that live there. Lots of variation and disturbance supports many species. “If we’re maintaining a dynamic system then we’re supporting the EVC”. In-stream vegetation is really important ecologically. In-stream veg can slow water down, but may not make huge amounts of difference in this situation.
 - Sharna – Council works to State guidelines re. drainage requirements.
 2. From Jen – why so many more openings?
 - Sharna – La Nina and higher rainfall. Coupled with increased development and hardscapes means more run off. Past 12 months the driver has been La Nina.
 3. Capacity of reservoir and capacity of estuary.
 - Jared. Reservoir capacity is 532ML.
 - Jayden. Estuary capacity is unknown. We look more at what flows are coming downstream and what impacts these flows might have. Focus is on doing what we can within limitations of our operating environment.
 4. Less permeable surfaces interact with atmosphere. About to be more development around River Res Rd, Bambra Rd. But drainage isn't going to be updated. Why can't we exceed the state guidelines around drainage? Already had raw sewerage flowing into Painkalac twice.
 - Sharna. Makes sense to say this is a high risk area, why can't we do more? Need to take this on notice.
 5. Would like to know the outcomes of the working group meetings. Would also like to know outcomes of EEMS reports when heights reach certain triggers, eg 1.9m-2m, and if the decision is made not to open due to adverse EEMS results, what triggers the next EEMS assessment.
 - Jayden. State policy states that height levels can't be used as a trigger. EEMS results can be shared via council updates, but EEMS isn't a trigger to say open or not, it's a way to mitigate for risks rather than a management systems.
 - Sharna. Will have to check with working group re. publicising outcomes. A newsletter may be better format rather than sending out minutes.
 - Audience member response. Would like more transparency. Wants the minutes rather than a marketing newsletter.
 6. What sort of timeframe does a risk assessment take? (eg 3am and water lapping at the doorstep). How many times have 'no risk assessment' openings have been conducted without a permit.
 - Sharna. Risk assessment, variable. Anywhere between 1-2hrs or ongoing monitoring over several days. Based on conditions, eg forecast of high levels of rain – we would

review and assess. If the forecast changes and downgrades the amount of rain then we reassess. January opening was a no risk assessment (emergency) opening.

7. Seems to be 2 groups, 1 worried about flooding, 1 worried about enviro. Sometimes ppl are in both camps. With 2 competing groups/priorities, there has to be a place of compromise. Shouldn't be an all or nothing situation. Can we have an opening that draws water down to a lower/safe level but protects the environment? Doesn't like the water getting as low as it does, and can there be a middle ground between flooding and empty?
 - Jayden. It's normal for estuaries to have low water levels after an opening, and important for some species. Can we close it after opening? It would mean more intervention. Maintaining a narrower band of water levels means less diversity and could lead to perverse environmental outcomes.
8. Response from audience – you're already intervening and having an impact. I don't accept your arguments.
 - Rhiannon – timing is extremely important. At some times of year, completely empty is the best/most natural state. At other times of year when a 'big' empty happens, this isn't a good outcome. Estuaries are made to be adaptable.
 - Jayden – we don't have a mechanism to control how much water drops. Putting a rate of control over a natural system isn't going to lead to better outcomes. The only place minimum levels could be maintained is where there is significant infrastructure at the mouth.
9. Are you pushing more towards emergency openings rather than managed opening?
 - Sharna – 90% of opening are managed, with EEMS.
 - Response from audience – Thanks, that gives me confidence.
10. Is there water transfer through the berm, is it permeable?
 - Jayden. Yes, believe that is the case. No specific info for Painkalac, but at the general level, yes this happens and works in both directions – water flows out to sea, and back into the estuary.
11. Is there scientific evidence that suggests there's a negative impact from opening the estuary? Audience members is not aware of any evidence, specifically for Painkalac.
 - Jayden. In general terms yes, artificial openings can have a negative impact eg. fish kills. No specific data for the Painkalac but studies on other estuaries say 'leave it alone'.
12. Audience member is now convinced that decision to open is not arbitrary, there's scientific basis to it. Hasn't yet heard of alternatives, eg levees, pumping, syphoning.
 - Sharna – working group is currently working towards investigating solutions. (Comment from audience "Encouraging"). The Regional Floodplain Management Strategy also directs that a flood study is required.
13. What is the warning process for openings?

- Sharna –We have a list of community members who have asked to be notified when we undertake an opening. If you'd like to add your name on the list we'll email you when we're about to undertake an opening. Council also posts on Facebook to inform community of an artificial opening.

14. Comment – ppl who are worried about flooding of their houses are also worried about the environment. We're not always opposed.

15. Latest opening, water level went very low. Became tidal right up the creek, something Tony had not seen before. Was there anything different about the latest opening?

- Sharna. Nothing remarkably different. Just happened that it was a slow release.
- Jen. Highlighted comment from Jayden earlier that there's no mechanism to control water levels.

16. Comment – natural opening location used to be near the cliff. Opening near the dune closes up quickly.

- Sharna. We open in middle so that we don't adversely impact either cliffs or dune. If we get more info then we'll change practices.

Butchers Paper/Sticky Wall exercise

6 'stations' were set up around the room, each with a different topic. Participants had the opportunity to walk around the room and share their ideas and ask questions anonymously by placing a post-it note on the Sticky Wall.

The topics and responses appear in the table attached. We have included every comment for the sake of accuracy. Some comments were questions, which we will seek answers for and update the community as answers become available.

Recap and Summary

Social perspective – Sharna.

- Wide variety of views. Lots of little factors contributing to recreational use of estuary.
- Not just about openings, but also about use and amenity of inlet.

Environment – Jayden

- Lot of different opinions on what we're doing and why, and can we do anything different.

Community Engagement options – Robyn.

- Large forums like this work well.
- Subject matter experts for next one, looking at solutions.
- Community reference group, not just agency.
- Online options next time.

- Quarterly newsletter/update?

Economic/public infrastructure – Marisha

- Comments around developments and building legislation.

Questions on Notice

- Can we upgrade the storm water drainage, especially in area with increasing development?