



Lake Albert given a chance ... AT LAST

By MALCOLM SUTTON

THE days of the Narrung Causeway could be numbered after more than 50 years of operation.

It was built in the 1960s to reduce travel distance for the local ferry, but it has altered water flow in the region ever since.

Now it will be subject to scrutiny as part of 12-month State and Federal government study into the management of Lake Albert, which registered extreme levels of salinity during the last drought and has remained unpotable since – despite renewed flow throughout the Murray Darling Basin.

“When I visited Lake Albert earlier last year, local farmers and representatives from the Ngarrindjeri explained their thoughts on the future management of Lake Albert,” Federal Water Minister Tony Burke said.

“This study will consider the impact of varying lake levels and complementary works required in the Narrung Narrows and elsewhere to improve water exchange between Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina.”

The interconnection between the two lakes through the causeway has improved recently as a result of the final pieces of the Narrung bund being removed by the State Government in October, which was originally built to separate the lakes during drought.

But it is just one aspect a five-point plan submitted to the Murray Darling Basin Authority by the Meningie Narrung Lakes Irrigators Association last year, which included a proposal to remove the causeway, dredge the whole of the narrows, perform a feasibility study into connecting the southern end of Lake Albert to

the Coorong and diverting more freshwater from South East drains into the Coorong.

The five-point plan would be evaluated as part of the scoping study.

Liberal Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick said it had been obvious for two years what needed to be done in the narrows.

“Quite frankly, the causeway that went in during the 1960s needs to be pulled out,” he said.

“They need to get rid of the silt, and they need to extend the ferry cables.

“The locals have been telling State Water Minister Paul Caica what needs to be done for years. It’s time for action, rather than talk.”

Mr Pederick supported the plan on the proviso that a full environmental impact statement was made in regards to connecting the southern end of the lake with the Coorong.

“There needs to be far more than a scoping study on that because it is a significant change”

MNLIA president Bill Henshall welcomed the news as being the first step in what was likely to be

a lengthy process of evaluation, number crunching, and cost-benefit statements before any real work can start.

“It’s the first part of what we’ve been asking for for three or four years, but there’s never been anything positive about it until now,” he said.

“At last, they’ve come to the realisation that something needs to be done about sorting out the mess in Lake Albert, so let’s have a look at everything, and not just the five-point plan.”

Mr Henshall will be part of the Lake Albert Scoping Study Community Reference Group, a sub-committee of the Coorong,

Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth Community Advisory Panel.

It also includes Coorong Mayor Roger Strother and a Ngarrindjeri representative.

“We’ll finish up with a whole range of things we can do, that will be engineering and science-based, and then the bean counters will get in there and do a cost-benefit statement, and that’s what you’ve got to keep your eye on,” Mr Henshall said.

“The environmental impacts and financial parts of it depend entirely on who they get to write the report.”

The study is being 90 per cent funded by the Federal Government and 10pc by the SA government.

Mr Caica said it was impossible to know how much it would cost to undertake necessary works identified by the study, but a “business case” would be discussed with the Commonwealth.

“It wasn’t until the removal of the Narrung Bund was completed in October that we were able to finalise the Commonwealth funding arrangements for the scoping study,” he said.

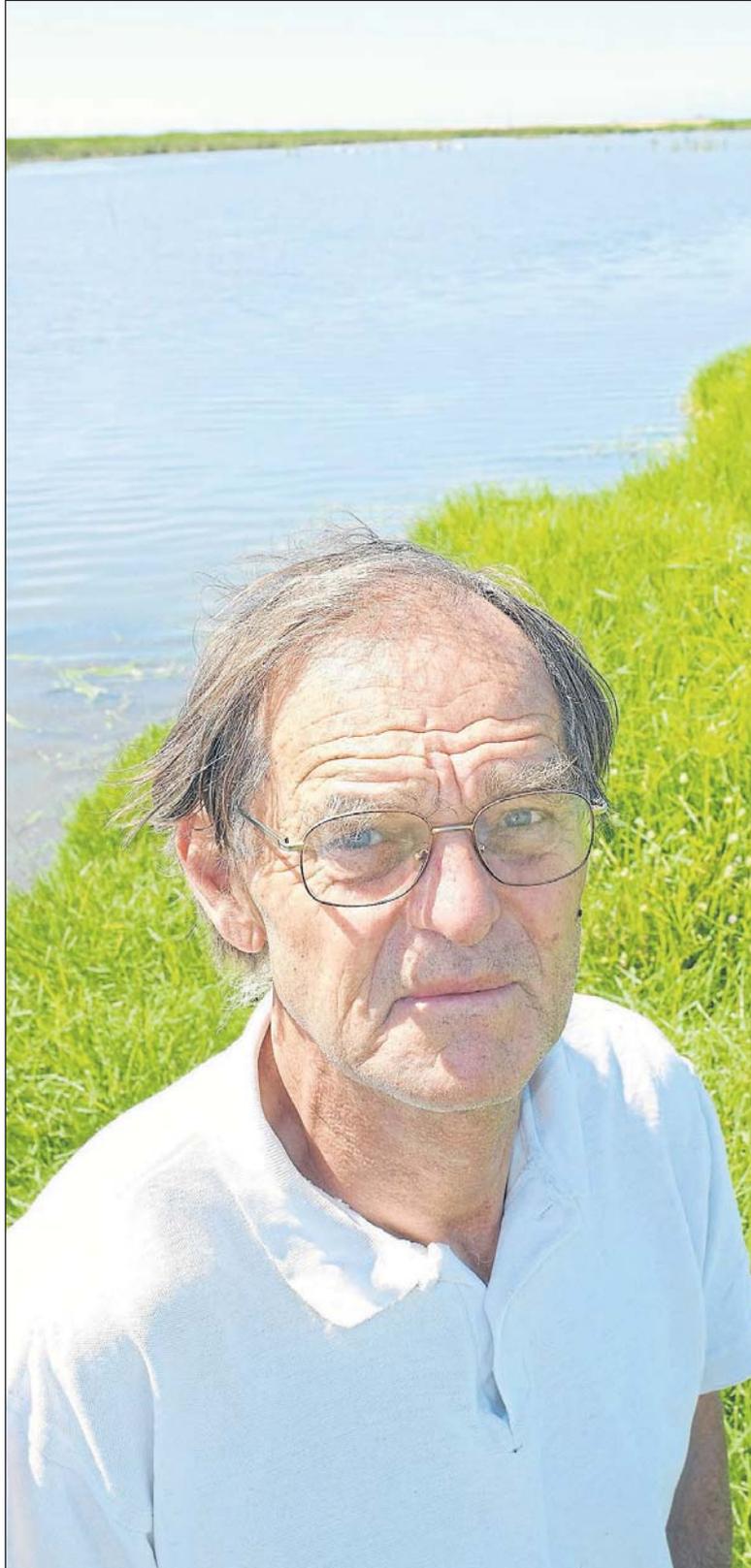


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– ADRIAN PEDERICK

KeyPoints

- Scoping study for Lower Lakes
- Narrung Narrows Causeway an issue
- Salinity remains high



GOOD INITIATIVE: MNLIA president Bill Henshall has welcomed the new initiative as being the first step in what is likely to be a lengthy process of evaluation.