

Recently, an opportunity arose where we could spend some long overdue quality time away with our boys (both being available at the same time) so we decided to head for the lower Fleurieu Peninsula, about an hour's drive from home, where the Murray River flows into the lower lakes and the Southern Ocean.

We decided to make Goolwa our base to tour the Lake Alexandrina waterways and the Coorong. Our youngest had just passed his boating test and was hot to trot to validate his new license and we considered the waterways, channels, buoys, lock negotiation and indeed the variety (sail, cruisers, commercial tourers, ski boats, PWCs and kayaks), a combination you would not encounter at our local ramp.

Goolwa holds some nostalgia with us for it was here that John and I ventured into boating together, buying a half cab fishing boat from South Coast Marine. This boat had aspirations for a

moon landing, power down and the bow pointed skyward. The hull was magic but the repowered engine selection proved an absolute mismatch, too heavy in the main and it was always a ... pest to start and maintain idle. But, we learned lots in it; how to fend off all things at the ramp, large trawlers in the harbour at Robe and how to grapple up a mooring when the motor stalled - again. It was a bit scary on occasions enlightening us to the fact that lots can go wrong on any boat at anytime.

Walking into South Coast Marine, a company with 35 years experience in the boat trade, was memory lane stuff as we met with Keith Parkes. This is the home of Goolwa Craft, fibreglass boat builders who currently produce three beautifully finished models; a 490 Cuddy Cab, a 530 Cuddy Cab and a 540 Runabout. They are also agents for the popular Allison Alloy Boats - the 4.94M Adventura Runabout being a



Well, it's come a long, long way . . . this is the actual Murray River passage to the Great Southern Ocean, after it's passed through Lake Alexandrina and created the Coorong estuary.

very practical design and the 5.45M Arifura Centre Cab, a serious, robust-looking fishing platform.

The lower lakes district has been under much stress over recent years basically with little to no water coming downstream from NSW and Vic. The lakes have suffered with rising acid sulphate levels and have been devoid of many fish species and subsequently birdlife. To see the mighty Murray River ending up as mere puddles before reaching the Mouth was an indictment on the authorities supposedly managing this substantial and important water resource. Whilst under license constraints, water has been available for stock and agriculture upstream, but the mere dribble at the end has been pitiful to see.

In an effort to retard the less than desirable salinity build-up during this last catastrophic drought, SA embarked on a major programme to save the lakes by keeping some water coverage

over the lake beds for as long as possible building a series of regulators (dam walls). With the drought over, and good flow coming downstream, the regulators at Currency Creek, Clayton and Narrung are being removed.

There is no denying the fact that the Murray River is still the major water supply for Adelaide, the Barossa Valley and Yorke Peninsula, Whyalla and the 'Iron Triangle'. On average the Murray supplies around 40% of Adelaide's requirements however this can increase to 90% in extreme dry conditions.

The lack of water flow from the NSW/Vic border had a serious impact on the SA. We have seen the lower lakes all but emptied, the Murray Mouth closed, salinity and acidity dry lake beds, marine plants and animals die and severe water use restriction across the state.

Meanwhile rice crops requiring bulk amounts of water are being produced upstream. I think I would be forgiven for not buying rice labelled 'Product of

Australia'.

Whilst we all felt the GFC impact, the lack of river flow to the lower river sector, the lakes and the Murray Mouth added further hardship - a double whammy! There was an urgent need to relocate many private and commercial river craft upstream, the alternative being leaving them beached indefinitely.

The moorings at Goolwa were all but vacant. With their boats elsewhere, people no longer had a purpose to come to their "shacks". Tourism waned dramatically, boating activities ground to a halt and local business and general social aspects of the community took a downturn.

This country of ours is surely one of extremes; whilst our east and northeast were inundated with water, not a trickle made it to the Murray mouth. It has taken some time for these flood waters to make their way via tributary rivers and many locks to eventually



Above: Map of the Lower Lakes & Coorong with Barrages; Goolwa itself is approx 80km from the centre of Adelaide. Below: The waterways off Lake Alexandrina are picture book stuff, meandering through small channels, the rest of the world could be a million miles away. You can even find a perfect 'nose fit' to moor along the shoreline . . .

