

WATCHALUNGA NATURE RESERVE

Location: near Finniss, Fleurieu Peninsula

FACT SHEET

What is the background to Watchalunga Nature Reserve?

The property was identified as having high conservation value when it first came onto the market in 2011. In late 2012, an agreement was reached between Bob Lott, President of Nature Foundation SA, and the owner to subdivide and transfer the important swampland part of the property to Nature Foundation SA. The Foundation took ownership of the property after a lengthy process to obtain the necessary approvals to undertake this subdivision.



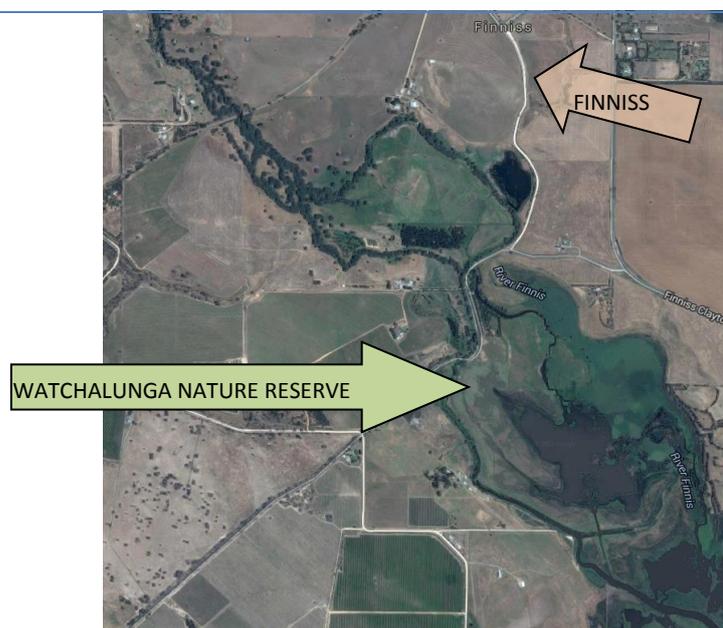
The Hon Ian Hunter MLC Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation officially launched Watchalunga Nature Reserve on 21 March 2015.

Nature Foundation SA purchased the property with funds from the Land Acquisition Fund with the support of Minister Hunter. Watchalunga Nature Reserve comprises approximately 92 ha of low lying Fleurieu Peninsula Swamp area on the Finniss River. It contains highly significant South Australian biodiversity and represents a significant proportion of the remaining area of good quality Fleurieu Peninsula swamps (500ha).

Where is Watchalunga Nature Reserve located?

Watchalunga Nature Reserve is located on Winery Road, approximately 60 minutes from Adelaide and about 2.5km South of the town of Finniss on the Fleurieu Peninsula.

Watchalunga is situated adjacent to properties owned by St Peter's College and Pembroke School.



What's significant about this property?

Watchalunga Nature Reserve protects an important area of Fleurieu Peninsula swamp, which is listed as a critically endangered ecological community under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*. Two nationally threatened fauna species, the Mount Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-wren (endangered) and the Southern Bell Frog (vulnerable) have been recorded on the reserve. The waters also contain a relatively diverse fish community with reasonably low numbers of non-native species, and may still be a refuge for the Yarra Pygmy Perch (vulnerable), and the Murray hardyhead (vulnerable). Previous flora (plant) surveys have identified 31 indigenous species with more species likely to occur with more thorough inspections.



Mt Lofty Southern Emu-wren (Photo: Marcus Pickett)

Nature Foundation SA is:

- Saving a significant area of critically endangered Fleurieu Peninsula swamp
- Protecting habitat from identified threats and working with individuals, local community groups, researchers and other stakeholders to achieve conservation gains
- Restoring critical habitat to create sanctuary for at-risk wildlife.

What are Nature Foundation SA's environmental plans?

Now that Nature Foundation SA owns the property, planning for long term conservation management has commenced. A Management Plan will be developed and will identify the conservation targets and objectives, the key threatening processes, actions required to achieve objectives and monitoring to validate outcomes. Some of the key management areas that will be addressed in the management plan include:

Biological surveys: Compilation of existing data, identification of knowledge gaps, small scale surveys (eg. Freshwater fish) to identify conservation assets and set up baselines for monitoring.

Vegetation recovery: Monitoring sites are being installed to measure changes in vegetation since removal of grazing. Revegetation to increase habitat for threatened species such as Emu-wrens.

Mt Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-wren: The Conservation Council of SA has had a long involvement with the property and led the Fleurieu Peninsula Swamp and Mount Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-wren Recovery Program. As part of the recovery effort, annual surveys are undertaken to assess the total population of Mount Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-wrens in the region and this surveying extends to cover the Watchalunga site. We have the opportunity to monitor improvements as a result of habitat protection and restoration on the site. Nature Foundation will continue to work closely with the key stakeholders, the Goolwa to Wellington Local Action Planning Group and Natural Resources SA Murray-Darling Basin and Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges in the protection and recovery of the Mount Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-wren.

Southern Bell Frog: Undertake monitoring to establish population information that can be used to determine the best management approach.

Weed control: A change in land use and removal of grazing may cause undesired weed response that could threaten the integrity of vegetation and Emu-wren habitat.

Fox control: Foxes predate birds that nest at ground level and their eggs. Fox baiting is expected to benefit nesting water birds, turtles and Emu-wrens through reduced predation pressure.

What is the recent history of the property?

The wetlands were owned by the Poyntz family for many years and used only for light grazing by cattle. The late Mr Ross Poyntz planted hundreds of trees on other parts of the property (to the east). The Poyntz family has always appreciated the natural beauty and wildlife value of the site and has had a keen interest in seeing the wetlands habitat preserved for the many birds that visit the site.

What about Indigenous connection to the land?

Watchalunga Nature Reserve is situated on Ngarrindjeri land. The Nature Foundation SA acknowledges and respects the traditional custodians of Watchalunga and the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of Aboriginal peoples to country. There might be artefacts or other evidence of Aboriginal occupation, such as canoe trees, in the Watchalunga area and these are protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act of South Australia (1988)* which provides protection for all Aboriginal sites and objects. Nature Foundation SA takes practical steps to work with Aboriginal people to manage Aboriginal heritage issues.

The Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority's Aboriginal Learning on Country team was involved in early restoration work at the property, undertaking weed control, fencing, and revegetation work.

Will there be opportunities to visit the property in the future?

Nature Foundation SA opens Watchalunga Nature Reserve during volunteer events that support conservation work on the property. Please contact Nature Foundation SA to find out more information/register your interest.

Acknowledgements

Nature Foundation SA thanks everyone who has supported us in the journey to purchase and manage Watchalunga, and particularly thanks key stakeholders the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority – Aboriginal Learning on Country Program (weed control, planting and fencing) and the Goolwa to Wellington LAP group (fencing, revegetation, weed and fox control and technical expertise). The Conservation Council of SA has coordinated important ongoing research at this property. We look forward to continuing the management of this area, with input from other key stakeholders, for conservation gains.

How do people get more information?

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Our Footprint

Founded in 1981, **Nature Foundation SA** is a not-for-profit nature charity which works to Save, Protect and Restore South Australia's natural biodiversity. The map below shows the locations of the six properties currently owned and managed for conservation, previously acquired properties, as well as Water For Nature sites (environmental watering) and Bushbank properties.

