

# WATCHALUNGA NATURE RESERVE

Location: near Finnis, Fleurieu Peninsula

## FACT SHEET

### *What is the background to Watchalunga Nature Reserve?*

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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 (NFSA). The Foundation took ownership of the property after a lengthy process to obtain the necessary approvals to undertake this subdivision.



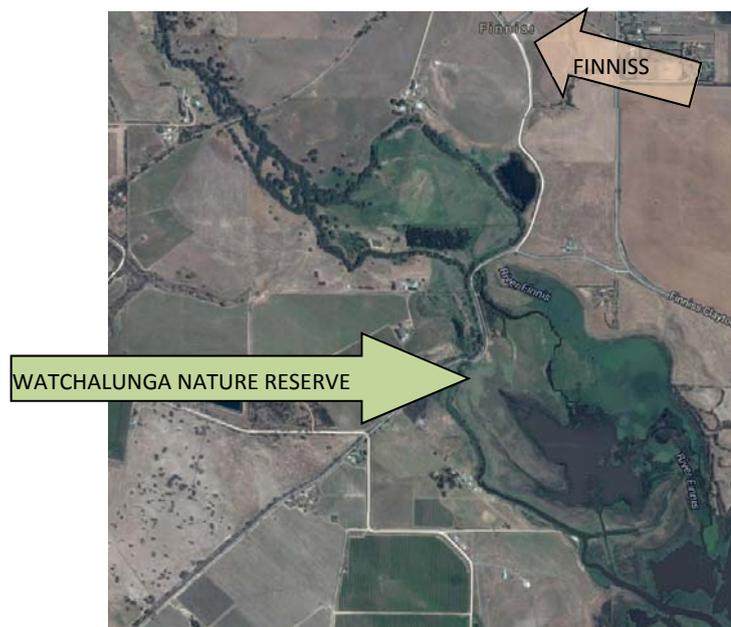
The Hon Ian Hunter MLC Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation officially launched Watchalunga Nature Reserve on 21 March 2015. NFSA purchased the property with funds from the Land Acquisition Fund with the support of Minister Hunter. Watchalunga Nature Reserve comprises approximately 92 ha of low lying Fleurieu Peninsula Swamp area on the Finnis 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?*

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Watchalunga Nature Reserve is located on Winery Road, approximately 60 minutes from Adelaide and about 2.5km from the town of Finnis 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?*

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Swamps of the Fleurieu Peninsula are listed as a critically endangered ecological community under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*. The property contains two confirmed EPBC listed species, the Mount Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-wren (endangered) and the Southern Bell Frog (vulnerable). The waters also contain high numbers of native fish (13 have been recorded) 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 Picket)

Nature Foundation SA is:

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

## *What are NFSA's environmental plans?*

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Now that NFSA owns the property, planning for long term conservation management will commence. Over the next twelve months the Foundation will develop a Conservation Action Plan that will identify the conservation targets and objectives, the key threatening processes, actions required to achieve objectives and monitoring to validate outcomes. There are a number of key management areas that will need addressing in the management plan:

**Biological surveys:** Compilation of existing data, identification of knowledge gaps, potential small scale surveys to identify conservation assets and set up baselines for monitoring.

**Vegetation recovery:** Monitoring sites are being installed to measure changes in vegetation as grazing is removed.

**Emu Wren;** The Conservation Council has a long standing involvement with the property and has been driving the Mount Lofty Ranges Southern Emu-wren and Fleurieu Peninsula Swamps Recovery Team. 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. So we have the opportunity to monitor improvements as a result of habitat protection and restoration on the site. The Foundation will continue to work closely with the recovery team, the Goolwa to Wellington Local Action Planning Group and Natural Resources SA Murray Darling Basin and Adelaide 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 will bring benefits to nesting water birds and potentially Emu-wrens through reduced predation pressure.

### *What is the recent history of the property?*

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The wetlands have been 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?*

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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 artifacts or other evidence of Aboriginal occupation in the Watchalunga area such as Canoe trees and these are protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act of South Australia (1988)* which provides protection for all Aboriginal sites and objects. The Nature Foundation SA will be taking practical steps to work with the Indigenous custodians to manage Aboriginal heritage issues.

The Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority's Aboriginal Learning on Country team has been involved in early restoration work at the property. Undertaking weed control, fencing, and revegetation work assisting in the recovery work taking place on the property.

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

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Nature Foundation SA plans to open the property up to volunteer events supporting conservation work on the property. Please contact Nature Foundation SA to find out more information/register your interest.

### *Acknowledgements*

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

### *How do people get more information?*

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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.

