

What are the risks of an artificial opening?

There are risks to the ecology of the estuary that require consideration before an opening is attempted.

A major concern is fish deaths. This can occur if the oxygenated upper level of water flows to sea during an opening and forces fish into the lower layers of water with lower levels of oxygen. This is why oxygen levels in the estuary are monitored and any consideration of an artificial opening takes this information into account.

There are also personal and property risks to the community. When water is flowing through the entrance, the difference in the level of water over a short distance can create high water velocities. Erosion also creates unstable sand cliffs along the channel margins that are prone to collapse.

Strong currents can exist in the estuary hundreds of metres from the entrance. The mooring lines on boats may need to be adjusted periodically as the water rapidly recedes after the entrance has been opened.



Artificial estuary opening at Marlo, April 2003.



Sydenham Inlet gauge.



Mallacoota Inlet gauge.



Snowy River gauge at Marlo.



Lake Tyers gauge.

Further information

Gauges have been installed at the major estuaries and these can be used as a guide to water levels in the estuaries. The locations of these gauges and **the minimum water levels that need to be reached on the gauge before an opening can be considered** are shown in the table. As explained earlier, the **water level is not the only factor that has to be taken into account** when an artificial opening is being considered.

Mallacoota Inlet	Boat ramp (public) jetty	1.5 metres
Sydenham Inlet	Boat ramp jetty	1.6 metres
Snowy River	Marlo jetty	0.75 metres
Lake Tyers	Boat ramp jetty ('Second boat ramp')	2.1 metres

Under no circumstances should residents attempt to artificially open the estuary entrance by using shovels to create a channel. Apart from the danger to persons directly involved in doing so, public safety may be an issue when water levels drop rapidly and adequate notice has not been given. Also important are environmental concerns such as fish deaths if an unauthorised opening is undertaken at the wrong time.

When an estuary is closed and getting near full levels, the Authority will publish the latest monitoring information on the website and also advise if an artificial opening is being considered.

Residents with concerns about estuary closures and artificial openings are encouraged to contact Ken Judd (Manager-Water Programs) on 5150 3569 to discuss these further.