# Adaptation of the South-Eastern drainage system under a changing climate

## Seawater intrusion risk modelling

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# Contents

# Figures

# Tables

# First Nations Respect and Reconciliation

The Goyder Institute for Water Research and Limestone Coast Landscape Board, acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters of the Limestone Coast and South East region, where this project took place. Together we pay our respects to their Elders—past, present, and emerging—and recognise Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Nations of South Australia, possessing and caring for these lands under their own laws and customs.

We respect the enduring cultural, spiritual, physical, and emotional connections that Aboriginal peoples maintain with their lands and waters. We recognise the diverse rights, interests, and obligations of First Nations and the deep cultural connections that exist between different First Nations communities. We seek to support their meaningful engagement and honour the continuation of their cultural heritage, economies, languages, and laws, which remain of ongoing importance.

We walk together with the First Nations of the South East and the Ngarrindjeri peoples through organisations such as Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation, Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation, the Ngarrindjeri Lands & Progress Aboriginal Corporation and South East Aboriginal Focus Group. For the work of generations past, and the benefit of generations future, we seek to be a voice for reconciliation in all that we do.

# Project Summary

The Limestone Coast of South Australia is a highly modified landscape with an extensive cross-catchment drainage system converting what was once a wetland dominated landscape into one dominated by agricultural production. The region now has a diverse agricultural sector and extensive forestry plantations which are highly dependent on reliable rainfall and easy access to the region's substantial groundwater resources. However, as climatic conditions become hotter and drier it's important to understand impacts on ground and surface water resources and consequent risks to primary production and the environment to build a water secure future.

Achieving water security in the Limestone Coast region under a changing climate requires a more integrated and holistic approach to water resource management. In particular, the interactions between surface water and groundwater must be better understood, quantified, and managed to balance the seasonal demands—removing excess water from productive lands during winter while safeguarding groundwater-dependent agriculture and ecosystems during summer.

The "Adaptation of the South Eastern Drainage Network under a changing climate" project aims to inform opportunities to improve water management in the region - including potential use of water in the drainage network - to address risks to primary industries and groundwater dependent ecosystems. Delivered through the Goyder Institute for Water Research, research teams from the CSIRO, Flinders University and the University of South Australia have completed five separate but inter-connected tasks:

1. Quantifying the value of consumptive and non-consumptive uses of water.
   This task assessed the value of additional water for key primary industries in the region, while also estimating the value of water for non-consumptive uses aimed at achieving ecological outcomes. Together, these valuations provide important context to the project's hydrological tasks, informing options to manage additional available water in the region.

2. Current and future water availability.
   A water balance model for the region has been developed using the Bureau of Meteorology's Australian Water Resources Assessment – Landscape (AWRA-L) model. It integrates national and regional datasets to capture surface runoff, recharge, and soil moisture, while accounting for seasonal dynamics and regional variability. The model enables analysis of climate change impacts on the full water balance, providing insight into future water availability, supporting both short- and long-term water management decisions.

3. Modelling groundwater and wetland interaction.
   Site-specific models representing three-dimensional aquifer-wetland interactions have been developed for two key groundwater dependent sites. The models test the feasibility of changing the water distribution in the local landscape to improve ecosystem health and mitigate impacts of groundwater extraction. Options included redirecting / holding water back in drains, altering surface water inflows and reducing the extent of the wetland basin with levees. The learnings from modelling these two disparate sites will assist decisions to manage additional available water in the region.

4. Sea water intrusion risk.
   The coastal area south of Mount Gambier is an area of high value irrigated agriculture and significant karst springs where the risk of seawater intrusion is of concern for both irrigators and environmental assets. This task set out to understand the extent and hydrodynamics of seawater intrusion in the region with an airborne electromagnetic survey of the south coast area, undertaken in October 2022, and construction of cross-sectional models to simulate seawater intrusion under different scenarios at different regional locations. This work provides the evidential basis to build on previous projects where reinstating wetlands by retaining water in drains appeared to effect some control over the seawater interface.

5. Groundwater, Ecology, Surface water and Wetland Assessment Tool (GESWAT)
   To enable opportunities to improve water management to be easily identified and investigated -

including the potential use of water in the drainage network –a dynamic GIS tool (GESWAT) was built. GESWAT brings together outputs from the other project tasks integrating them in a tool with a range of other critical data (e.g. surface water flows, groundwater levels, and rainfall data, annual water use and allocation data, ecological information and other standard datasets). GESWAT provides the LC Landscape Board and its partner agencies a single platform with which to view, compare and interrogate the diversity of hydrological and ecological information available to inform policy and management decisions.

This report details results from Task 4 of the project.

Further results from this project are presented in the following reports:

Task 1

Cooper, C., Crase, L., Kandulu, J., and Subroy, V. (2025) *Adaptation of the South-Eastern drainage system under a changing climate – Quantifying the value of different water uses and future demands*. Goyder Institute for Water Research Technical Report Series No. 25/2

Task 2

Gibbs, M.S., Montazeri, M., Wang, B., Crosbie, R., Yang, A. (2025) *Adaptation of the South-Eastern drainage system under a changing climate - Water Availability for South East Drainage Adaptation*. Goyder Institute for Water Research Technical Report Series No. 25/3

Task 3

Gholami, A., Werner, A.D., Maskooni, E.K., Fan, H., Jazayeri, A., and Solórzano-Rivas, C. (2025) *Adaptation of the South-Eastern drainage system under a changing climate - Groundwater and wetland modelling*. Goyder Institute for Water Research Technical Report Series No. 25/4

Task 4

Davis A, Munday TJ, and Ibrahimi T (2025) *Adaptation of the South-Eastern drainage system under a changing climate - Limestone Coast Airborne Electromagnetic Survey: Acquisition, Processing and Modelling*. Goyder Institute for Water Research Technical Report Series No. 25/5.1

Davis A, Munday TJ, and Ibrahimi T (2025) *Adaptation of the South-Eastern drainage system under a changing climate - Limestone Coast Airborne Electromagnetic Survey: Conductivity-Depth Sections*. Goyder Institute for Water Research Technical Report Series No. 25/5.2

Gholami, A., Werner, A.D., Solórzano-Rivas, C., Jazayeri, A., Maskooni, E.K., and Hongxiang, F. (2025) *Adaptation of the South-Eastern drainage system under a changing climate - Seawater intrusion risk*. Goyder Institute for Water Research Technical Report Series No. 25/5.3

Task 5

Gonzalez, D., Werner, A., Jazayeri, A., Pritchard, J., Hongxiang, F., Botting, S., Judd, R. (2025) *Adaptation of the South-Eastern drainage system under a changing climate - Groundwater, Ecology, Surface water and Wetland Assessment Tool (GESWAT) Spatial Data Dictionary*. Goyder Institute for Water Research Technical Report Series No. 25/6

# Executive Summary

This report describes the key findings and methodologies of seawater intrusion modelling undertaken as part of Task 4 (*Seawater intrusion risk*) of the Goyder project *Adaptation of the South-Eastern drainage system under a changing climat*e. The primary goals of this investigation are to: (a) apply numerical modelling to evaluate the extent of seawater in the coastal aquifers of the Limestone Coast, and (b) assess the threat of seawater intrusion under current and future groundwater stresses.

Five cross-sectional (2D) models of Limestone Coast aquifers were extracted from an existing regional-scale groundwater flow model (3D) of the Lower Limestone Coast Prescribed Wells Area that was developed in 2015 through a previous Goyder Institute collaborative project. Groundwater heads and flows from 2D models were compared with those of the *parent* 3D model. Reasonable matches were obtained, validating the method for 2D model extraction.

Modifications were needed to allow for the simulation of density-dependent groundwater flow and dispersive salt transport, which are key factors controlling the seawater extent in coastal aquifers. Mainly for this reason, the models described in this study are significantly more complex than “standard” groundwater models that are not required to distinguish waters of different densities. This includes the need to run models for considerable timescales to find stable (steady state) conditions.

The models were extended offshore because the aquifers of the Limestone Coast are known to occur within the continental shelf of the Great Australian Bight, and earlier studies have indicated that fresh groundwater may extend beneath the sea within the study area. Offshore extrapolation was achieved by incorporating data from petroleum wells to approximate offshore sediment distributions. Next, the 3-layer structure of the regional 3D model was subdivided into up to 23 layers (the number of layers varied between the cross sections) to allow for the simulation of vertical variations in flow and salinity in 2D models. Also, the horizontal dimension of cells was reduced to up to ~25% of their original size in areas likely to host the freshwater-seawater interface. This refinement was undertaken to improve the horizontal resolution of the seawater wedge, in particular the complex zone of mixing between freshwater and seawater. Subsequently, density-dependent solute transport parameters were added to the model, including porosity, solute dispersion parameters and the relationship between salt concentration and water density. After some model testing, 2D models were truncated in their horizontal extents to reduce the number of cells and to lower the time required to complete simulations. The landward truncation of 2D models ensured that the seawater wedge did not reach the landward boundary, and offshore freshwater did not reach the seaward limit of the model.

The first simulations of seawater intrusion adopted the conditions occurring around 1970 as input parameters. The models were then run for durations sufficient to reach steady-state conditions, which required some 30,000 years. The goal was to create initial conditions, in terms of the seawater distribution in the aquifer, for transient simulations. We refer to these models as "pre-development" scenarios, notwithstanding that the conditions in 1970 reflect a modified situation since European settlement. The results of pre-development simulations were treated as baseline conditions for the seawater extent, allowing us to quantify any landward movements of seawater (i.e., seawater intrusion) in Limestone Coast aquifers that occurred in transient simulations. Transient simulations adopted the period 1970-2013 (44 years; between January 1970 and December 2013), consistent with that of the regional 3D model. A third modelling scenario was also generated, whereby steady-state conditions were obtained that used average recharge and evapotranspiration for the 10-year period 2004-2013, while pumping was set as a constant value taken from the average of the last year (2013) of the transient model. This scenario was intended to evaluate the long-term seawater extent in Limestone Coast aquifers, at least under conditions that are similar to the latter stages of the 3D model simulation period. In this way, the model provided insight into the stability of the seawater wedge, specifically, whether to expect the wedge to continue to move inland or whether the seawater wedge has reached a stable condition (as of 2013), and to approximate the eventual landward position of the wedge for periods exceeding the 44-year timeframe of transient simulations. Moreover, three additional scenarios were conducted based on the third scenario: (a) a sea-level rise of 0.3 m; (b) an 18%

reduction in recharge to approximate the projected rainfall decline due to climate change by 2050; and (c) a 71% increase in pumping to represent full allocation levels anticipated by 2050.

The above methodology was undertaken at five cross-sectional locations that intersect the following geographical features: (a) MacDonnell Bay, (b) South of Lake Bonney, (c) Canunda National Park, (d) Cape Jaffa, and (e) Paranki Lagoon Conservation Park.

The results of cross section A (MacDonnell Bay) show the occurrence of seawater within the inland part of both the upper and lower aquifers, with a substantial occurrence of offshore fresh groundwater in the lower aquifer, in which the simulated interface tip extends approximately 12 km offshore. Freshwater discharge from the lower aquifer into the upper aquifer is also apparent, causing freshwater-seawater mixing in the offshore part of the upper aquifer. The results indicate minimal seawater intrusion (i.e., a landward movement of the freshwater-seawater interface toe of ~15 m) in the lower aquifer between 1970 and 2013. The stability of the seawater wedge in the deeper aquifer can be attributed to the low value of hydraulic conductivity in this layer (3 m/d). In contrast, the upper aquifer shows significant seawater intrusion during the same period, with the seawater toe advancing ~855 m further inland, reaching 4,036 m inland by 2013. This is the consequence of a head drop of approximately 1 m (at ~5 km inland) in the upper aquifer during the 44-year simulation period and the high hydraulic conductivity of this layer (115 m/d). A sea-level rise scenario that examined the new steady-state position of the seawater wedge at cross section A, with the sea level 300 mm higher, showed only moderate influence on the seawater extent in the upper aquifer, resulting in an inland toe shift of about 86 m. However, the lower aquifer appears more vulnerable to seawater intrusion under sea-level rise, with the seawater wedge toe predicted to advance some 535 m further inland, albeit this required considerable time (>100 years) for this movement to occur.

A 71% increase in pumping was assessed through an additional scenario, also run until steady-state conditions were obtained. The pumping increase caused seawater intrusion at cross-section A in the form of a 460 m landward shift in the toe in the upper aquifer, and a 1,312 m landward movement of the toe in the lower aquifer. A reduction of 18% in the recharge had the most pronounced effect (relative to sea-level rise and pumping impacts) on simulated seawater intrusion in both aquifers. It caused an inland toe shift of 752 m in the upper aquifer and a 3,591 m shift in the toe within the lower aquifer. Note that the time scales for these shifts to occur were not explored in detail because only steady-state-to-steady-state conditions were simulated. That is, the seawater intrusion described here may not eventuate within planning timeframes. Nevertheless, seawater intrusion obtained in these scenarios are an indication that seawater is likely moving landward and will shift significant distances further inland under plausible future scenarios, at least under the simulated stresses, even if the shifts in the toe described above may take centuries to achieve.

The results of cross section B (south of Lake Bonney) also indicate that fresh groundwater extends offshore within the lower aquifer, with its tip reaching over 24 km from the shoreline, thereby excluding seawater from crossing the shoreline in the lower aquifer. The seawater wedge occurs landward of the coast within the upper aquifer. Fresh groundwater leakage from the lower aquifer into the upper aquifer (through the intervening aquitard) was observed as patches of lower-salinity water, driven by complex density-dependent processes, within the offshore part of the upper aquifer. Seawater intrusion over the 44-year simulation occurred as a ~1 km advance in the toe of the wedge in the upper aquifer, whereas the seawater toe moved landward only 13 m in the lower aquifer. Sea-level rise seems to pose only a minor risk of seawater intrusion, with the toe expected to shift 164 m inland in the upper aquifer and 469 m landward in the lower aquifer (where it is predicted to be offshore at cross section B). A 71% increase in pumping caused greater seawater intrusion than that caused by sea-level rise, with the toe shifting inland by 472 m in the upper aquifer, and 911 m landward in the offshore, lower aquifer. Reduced recharge (by 18%) again seems to pose the greatest threat to freshwater in the nearshore aquifers of the Limestone Coast, with toe shifts of 1,096 m (inland) and 1,899 m (landward) in the upper and lower aquifers, respectively. Note that these toe movements are from one steady-state condition to another, and are likely to overestimate any seawater intrusion occurring over timeframes of <100 years.

Seawater penetrates onshore in both the upper and lower aquifers of cross section C (Canunda National Park). Fresh groundwater discharge seeps through the aquitard, from the lower aquifer to the upper aquifer, close to the shoreline. Minimal seawater intrusion (12 m toe shift) occurred in the lower aquifer between 1970 and 2013 due to relatively consistent hydraulic heads during the simulation period and the low value of the hydraulic conductivity of this layer (3 m/d). No offshore fresh groundwater is observed at this location in either aquifer as a result of lower heads in the vicinity of cross section C relative to the head imposed by the sea. The latter is particularly high because the aquifer is deep (enhancing seawater density effects); particularly the lower aquifer, which has a bottom elevation of ~-750 m AHD. Seawater intrusion in the upper aquifer occurred, with the toe advancing 333 m further inland during the transient simulation. Sea-level rise had little impact on the seawater extent in the lower aquifer, with the toe shifting inland by 52 m. The upper aquifer was affected more so, although to a relatively minor degree, with the toe advancing 124 m further inland. The 71% increase in pumping caused seawater intrusion (toe movements) of 74 m in the upper aquifer and 240 m in the lower aquifer. The 18% reduction in recharge caused greater inland toe shifts - 190 m in the upper aquifer and 371 m in the lower aquifer. Thus, the recharge reduction again had the greatest impact in terms of seawater intrusion.

As with cross section C, cross section D (Cape Jaffa) produced seawater wedges with onshore toes in both the upper and lower aquifers. The extent of seawater was larger in the lower aquifer. Again, no offshore fresh groundwater occurred in the model of this location, likely due to the relatively low hydraulic heads (at about 6 km inland from the coast, the head is ~4 m AHD in the lower aquifer in 2013), in contrast to cross sections A and B where the heads are higher near the coast. A comparison of pre-development and 2013 conditions reveals a stable seawater wedge in the lower aquifer, with negligible movement of the seawater toe during 1970-2013. Conversely, the toe location in the upper aquifer shifted 206 m further inland relative to its pre-development position during the 44-year transient simulation. Predictive scenarios indicate that sea-level rise is likely to cause seawater to move 391 m and 390 m inland in the upper and lower aquifers, respectively (again, this shift represents the difference between two steady-state conditions). The 71% increase in pumping produced seawater extents that were 122 m and 133 m further inland in the upper and lower aquifers, respectively. The 18% reduction in recharge produced inland movements in the toe of 362 m and 296 m in the upper and lower aquifers, respectively. Thus, at cross section D, sea-level rise is expected to cause the most extensive seawater intrusion.

Seawater penetrates only a small distance inland (124 m) from the coast in the upper aquifer of cross section E (Paranki Lagoon Conservation Park) under pre-development conditions, according to the model. Groundwater discharge to the sea pushes the freshwater-seawater interface ~7 km offshore in the lower aquifer. This arises from high groundwater heads in the vicinity of cross section E, with groundwater levels some 8 m AHD at 5 km from the coast. The seawater extent was stable during the 44-year transient simulation, with toe movements of 1 m and 11 m in the upper and lower aquifers, respectively. The corresponding toe movements due to sea-level rise of 300 mm were 5 m and 260 m (respectively), while a drop in recharge of 18% caused 4 m and 197 m (respectively) of seawater intrusion, and a change in pumping of 71% led to inland toe movements of 1 m and 16 m, respectively. Thus, cross section E appears to be under reduced threat of seawater intrusion relative to other sites.

A comparison of modelling results with recent interpretations of an airborne electromagnetic (AEM) survey, conducted by CSIRO as part of the Task 4 program, was performed for cross sections A and B, where AEM data are available. This comparison demonstrated a reasonable correlation between numerical modelling and AEM results in the upper aquifer, in terms of the occurrence of the seawater wedge. This is notwithstanding that the AEM may pick up high-conductivity features that are not related to the seawater wedge, and rather, reflect geological variability, non-marine saline groundwater, and artefacts associated with interference from surface infrastructure. Also, the penetration depth of the AEM survey restricts the interpretation of seawater occurrence in the lower aquifer.

# Acknowledgments

This report covers one of five tasks undertaken as part of the *Adaptation of the SE drainage system to a changing climate* project. The project has been jointly funded by the Australian Government through the National Water Grid Authority, the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, and the South Australian Government. The project was delivered by the Goyder Institute for Water Research partners: CSIRO, the University of South Australia, Flinders University and the University of Adelaide in collaboration with the Limestone Coast Landscape Board, South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board (SEWCD Board) and the Department for Environment and Water.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Given the limited surface water resources of the Limestone Coast of South Australia, groundwater is the dominant source of freshwater (Mustafa et al., 2012). The groundwater resources of the Limestone Coast are mostly of high quality and support a wide range of primary industries, including viticulture, livestock, forestry, horticulture and seed cultivation (Gibbs et al., 2012). Groundwater is also the primary water source for town water supply and rural domestic use in the Limestone Coast (Brookes, 2010; Gibbs et al., 2012).

Coastal aquifers in the Limestone Coast are at threat of seawater intrusion (SWI), which is the landward movement of seawater in coastal aquifers caused by the lowering of groundwater levels, sea-level rise or various other causes (Werner et al., 2013). Substantial groundwater extraction occurs within the region's coastal aquifers, which support sensitive freshwater ecosystems that may be impacted by salinity changes arising from SWI. Pumping occurs primarily from the upper aquifer, the Tertiary Limestone Aquifer (TLA). Leakage between the TLA and the underlying aquifer, the Tertiary Confined Sand Aquifer (TCSA), is known to occur in several locations within the study area (Morgan et al., 2015).

There is presently only limited understanding of the spatial extent of seawater within Limestone Coast aquifers, despite previous attempts to measure and model salinity variations within the coastal fringe of the Limestone Coast. Previous studies of SWI within the Limestone Coast include the geophysical investigation of King and Dodds (2002), who used transient electromagnetics (TEM) to try to characterize the seawater wedge along five 5 km-long transects perpendicular to the coastline. While the TEM results did not conclusively identify the freshwater-seawater boundary, they highlighted zones of high conductivity that may indicate saline groundwater. King and Dodds (2002) recommended drilling wells to validate the TEM findings, which would support further field surveys such as airborne electromagnetics (AEM) to comprehensively map the interface along the coast. Mustafa et al. (2012) developed a three-dimensional (3D) hydrostratigraphic model to assess the risk of SWI in the area. They also analysed the hydrochemistry of coastal groundwater, detecting the occurrence of seawater up to ~1.5 km inland. However, whether seawater intrusion was occurring was difficult to ascertain due to limited historical data. Nevertheless, they concluded that SWI had occurred at Eight Mile Creek, based on increasing groundwater salinity observed over time at two observation wells—one at a depth of 12 m and the other at 180 m—located 1 km inland from the coast. Consequently, they recommended ongoing monitoring to determine whether SWI would continue to occur in that location or in other areas where the presence of seawater was detected.

Recently, DEW (2023) constructed a 3D numerical groundwater flow model for the TLA within the Lower Limestone Coast Prescribed Wells Area. The study considered two modelling scenarios, assuming different extraction rates and climate conditions, with projections from 2022 to 2050. One scenario extended the conditions observed between 2012 and 2021, while the other assumed increased extraction and decreased recharge over the projected period in response to climate change. The model incorporated the influence of the freshwater-seawater interface using the simplified approach provided by the MODFLOW Seawater Intrusion Package, SWI2 (Bakker et al., 2013). SWI2 neglects vertical flow effects and assumes a sharp interface between freshwater and seawater by neglecting dispersion effects. For that reason, the authors (DEW, 2023) noted limitations in ascertaining both the SWI extent and interface location, recommending further validation with AEM results. Thus, the AEM survey of the current study (Davis et al., 2025a, 2025b) is a direct response to those recommendations. We anticipate that the simulation of SWI in the Limestone Coast incorporating dispersive transport, as undertaken in the current study, will overcome some of the limitations of the SWI2 approach used by DEW (2023), notwithstanding that the current study adopts 2D cross sections while DEW (2023) undertook a regional assessment.

Despite these earlier studies, several key management questions remain unanswered regarding the proximity of the seawater interface to critical water infrastructure and the potential for the interface to shift landward under existing groundwater levels. Additionally, the potential for SWI to occur under future conditions, including with sea-level rise and changes to recharge resulting from climate change, require further investigation.

## 1.2 Aims

The primary objective of the investigation described in this report is to develop an understanding of the risk that SWI poses to irrigated agriculture and coastal aquifers more generally in the Limestone Coast, at least at a selection of key locations. The project aims to achieve this by defining the spatial extent and movements in the seawater interface using numerical simulation. A key goal in the development of these modelling tools is the creation of a methodology for extracting SWI models from existing regional groundwater flow models, so that in the future, SWI can be assessed at a larger number of locations within the study area. For example, if the regional groundwater models are updated, the methodology developed in this study can be re-run to build a new set of cross-sectional models with far less effort than was expended in the current study.

The current modelling analysis is complementary to a concurrent airborne electromagnetic (AEM) survey, which will map the variability of the seawater extent within the south coast of the Limestone Coast. The comparison of modelling results with AEM interpretations is a significant step forward in seawater intrusion analysis in Australia that will allow the resulting models to assess the threat posed by future SWI with greater reliability. The AEM-numerical model comparison in the current study is largely qualitative and based on a snapshot in time, and as such, there are opportunities to draw further conclusions about seawater intrusion in the Limestone Coast from a more systematic comparison of the AEM results, likely requiring a wider array of numerical simulations.

Much of the advice created from this investigation is drawn from scenarios of SWI under modified hydrogeological conditions, which include relatively simplified cases of sea-level rise, pumping and recharge changes, including in response to climate change. Additional scenarios are possible to examine a wider range of situations and “what-if” questions of relevance to water management and ecosystem protection in the study area through a continuation of the current modelling investigation.

By addressing these objectives, the project aims to inform water management strategies that mitigate the risk of SWI, ensuring the long-term sustainability of coastal groundwater resources for both agricultural use and ecosystem support in the region.

# 2 Methods

## 2.1 Outline of modelling approach

This section outlines the strategy to construct and run numerical models of the seawater extent and SWI in the Limestone Coast. Table 1 describes the key steps.

**Table 1.** Overview of modelling methodology for building 2D cross-sectional SWI models.

| Step | Description |
|---|---|
| 1 | Obtain existing regional-scale groundwater flow models of the study area. Validate model input files by re-running relevant models and comparing results to those provided in accompanying reports. |
| 2 | Convert the regional-scale model input files into Python scripts (developed and executed using Python version 3.11.5). |
| 3 | Extract relevant 2D models (cross-sectional flow models) from the regional model using Python, apply an initial truncation to the landward extent to focus on the coastal zone, and extrapolate offshore. |
| 4 | Run 2D flow models in steady and transient states and compare results to the regional model. |
| 5 | Reduce the cells sizes of 2D flow models and compare results to the regional model. |
| 6 | Add solute transport and density effects using the basic transport, advection, dispersion, generalized conjugate gradient, source and sink mixing, and variable-density flow packages, and run steady-state SWI simulations. |
| 7 | Truncate models to capture onshore seawater and offshore freshwater extents, re-run models and compare to the models obtained in Step 6. |
| 8 | Run transient SWI simulations. |
| 9 | Check the results of 2D SWI models against AEM data for cross sections A and B, as well as available salinity data from coastal wells across all cross sections. |
| 10 | Run modified SWI models to assess causes of any differences between AEM results and 2D models. |
| 11 | Run SWI scenarios, including long-term steady-state, modified recharge and pumping, and sea-level rise. |
| 12 | Make interpretations, draw conclusions and complete reporting. |

## 2.2 Review of Lower Limestone Coast regional model

The current study adopts the regional-scale 3D groundwater flow model of the Lower Limestone Coast Prescribed Wells Area developed by Morgan et al. (2015), in creating 2D cross-sectional models. The model is discretized into 1 km x 1 km cells. It consists of three layers: the TLA (Tertiary Limestone Aquifer; layer 1), a Lower Tertiary Aquitard (layer 2), and the TCSA (Tertiary Confined Sand Aquifer; layer 3). Figure 1 depicts the study area and the location of modelling cross sections, while Figure 2 shows the regional model of Morgan et al. (2015). This model was imported into Python to facilitate execution using publicly available versions of MODFLOW 2005. It was then re-run to obtain model outputs relevant to the investigation of coastal aquifer hydrology in the study area. Outputs obtained from re-running the model were consistent with those shown in the accompanying report (Morgan et al., 2015).

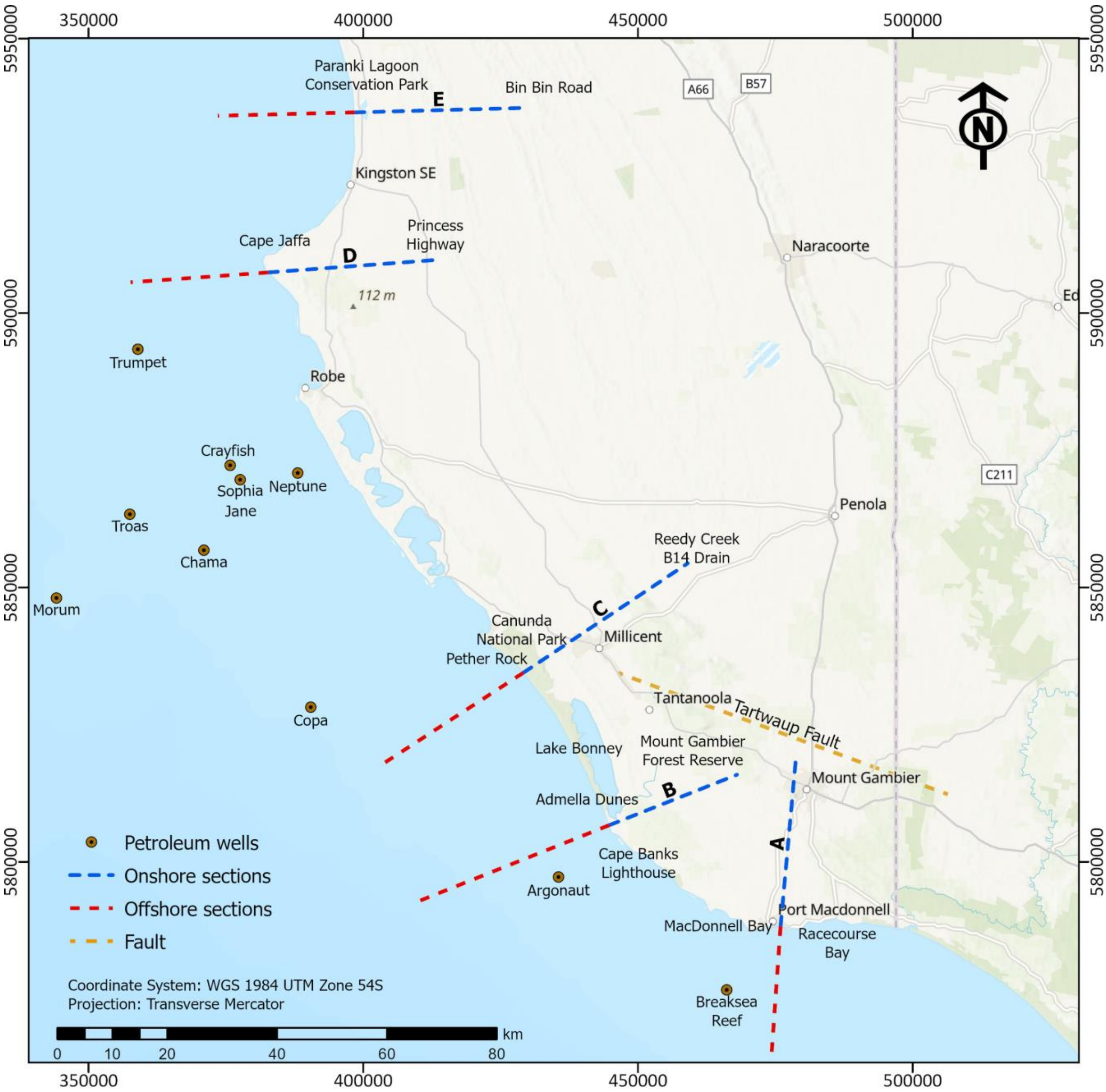


**Figure 1.** Study area showing the locations of the cross-sectional models.

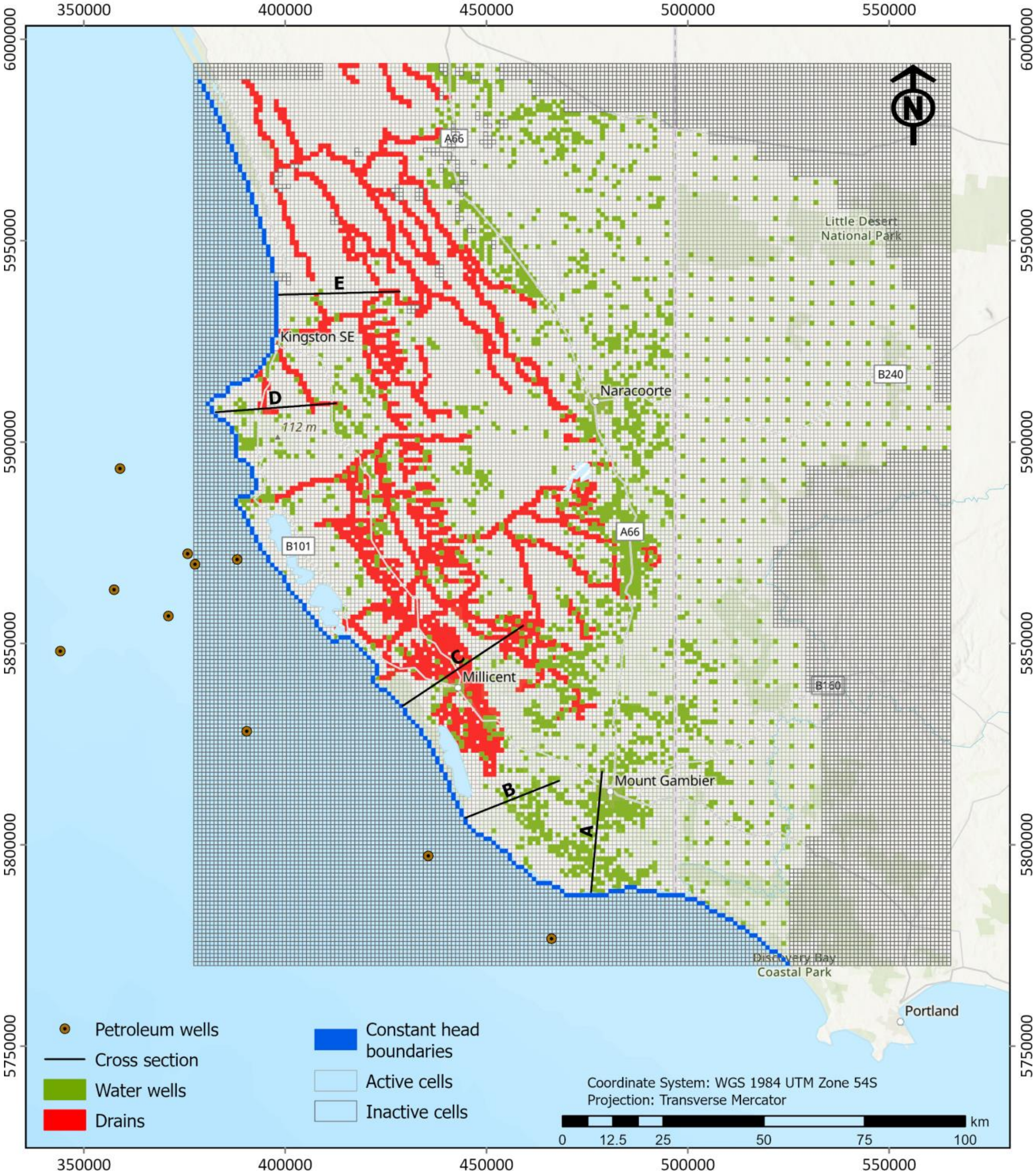


**Figure 2.** Regional model of the Lower Southeast of South Australia (Morgan et al., 2015), showing seawater intrusion model cross sections (the onshore parts that are based on the regional model are shown; offshore extensions are illustrated in Figure 1), drains, pumping wells and offshore oil exploration (petroleum) wells.

## 2.3 Extract cross sections from the regional-scale model

To assess the risks of SWI, five representative locations along the coastal fringe of the study area were selected. Cross-sectional models were extracted from the regional-scale model at these locations, initially as groundwater flow models and later converted to SWI models. The methodology for extracting the cross section from the 3D regional model is provided in Appendix A. Cross-sectional models were extended offshore using geological information from petroleum wells in the offshore areas, adopting a similar methodology to that described by Knight et al. (2019) and explained in more detail in Section 2.4. Figure 1 shows both the onshore and offshore extents of models, and labels the petroleum wells for reference within the text that follows, while Figure 2 shows the onshore locations of these models.

Cross section A (CSA) intercepts MacDonnell Bay between the Harbor of Port MacDonnell and Racecourse Bay, and extends landward near the city of Mount Gambier. CSA intercepts a high density of pumping wells, as shown in Figure 2. The regional model of Morgan et al. (2015) does not simulate drains in the vicinity of CSA (Figure 2), although there is nevertheless likely to be surface water-groundwater interactions in this region. The landward limit of CSA is the Tartwaup Fault, across which groundwater levels change abruptly. Initial attempts at cross-sectional models that pass through the fault demonstrated that it is very difficult to reproduce the hydrogeology of this fault in a cross-sectional model due to the strong lateral flows (parallel to the fault) that occur. CSA extends seaward close to the Breaksea Reef offshore petroleum well, and therefore, its offshore stratigraphy will reflect mostly that well, although the offshore stratigraphy was created based on all of the offshore wells plus the onshore stratigraphy from the regional model of Morgan et al. (2015). Therefore, the geological layering varies in the offshore domain (and in the cross sections) due to variations in all of the offshore wells. Interpolation of offshore layers used *Topo to Raster*; a GIS technique that is designed to produce smooth and continuous surfaces from scattered point data. This allowed for the generation of continuous spatial distributions of the layer geometry.

Cross section B (CSB) was included based on an AEM survey transect to allow for comparison between AEM and numerical modelling results. CSB passes south of Lake Bonney, between the Admella Dunes and the Cape Banks Lighthouse, extending northward to the Mount Gambier Forest Reserve. CSB also intercepts numerous pumping wells, especially close to its landward limit. Seaward, CSB approaches the Argonaut petroleum well, a key reference for extrapolating the offshore geology in CSB.

Cross section C (CSC) crosses Canunda National Park approximately 4 km southeast of Pether Rock. The landward boundary of CSC is marked by the Reedy Creek B14 Drain, while the seaward extension runs between the Copa and Argonaut offshore petroleum wells. This cross section intercepts several drain cells (Figure 2), which simulate the interactions between the aquifer and surface water features in this area.

Cross section D (CSD) intersects the coastline at Cape Jaffa, extending seaward to a point approximately 12 km north of the Trumpet petroleum well. Its inland boundary lies about 1 km east of Princess Highway.

Cross section E (CSE) is the northernmost cross section simulated in this study, oriented west to east. It crosses the Paranki Lagoon Conservation Park, extends approximately 25 km offshore, and terminates near Bin Bin Road in the landward direction.

The heads on the inland boundary of the cross sections shown in Figures 1 and 2 were extracted from the regional-scale model and set as either constant (in time) values for steady-state models or were time-varying specific heads in transient models. Heads in the regional-scale model were then compared with those of the cross-sectional models (initially without seawater being simulated) to evaluate consistency between the two.

## 2.4 Subsea extension and refinement of cross-sectional models

Cross-sectional models were extended to include the offshore sections of Limestone Coast aquifers (Step 3; Table 1). The offshore wells used for this purpose are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. Seafloor elevation data was used to establish the top of the model in offshore regions, sourced from the Australian bathymetry and topography grid (https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/australian-bathymetry-and-topography-grid-geoscience-australia). Bottom elevations for extending the top and intermediate model layers were inferred from lithology data from petroleum wells, as provided within the Water Connect database (https://www.waterconnect.sa.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx). The approximate offshore extent of the cross-sectional models was initially set to 25 km. Figure 3a presents an example of the offshore extension to the onshore part of a cross-sectional model, showing cross-sectional model D (CSD).

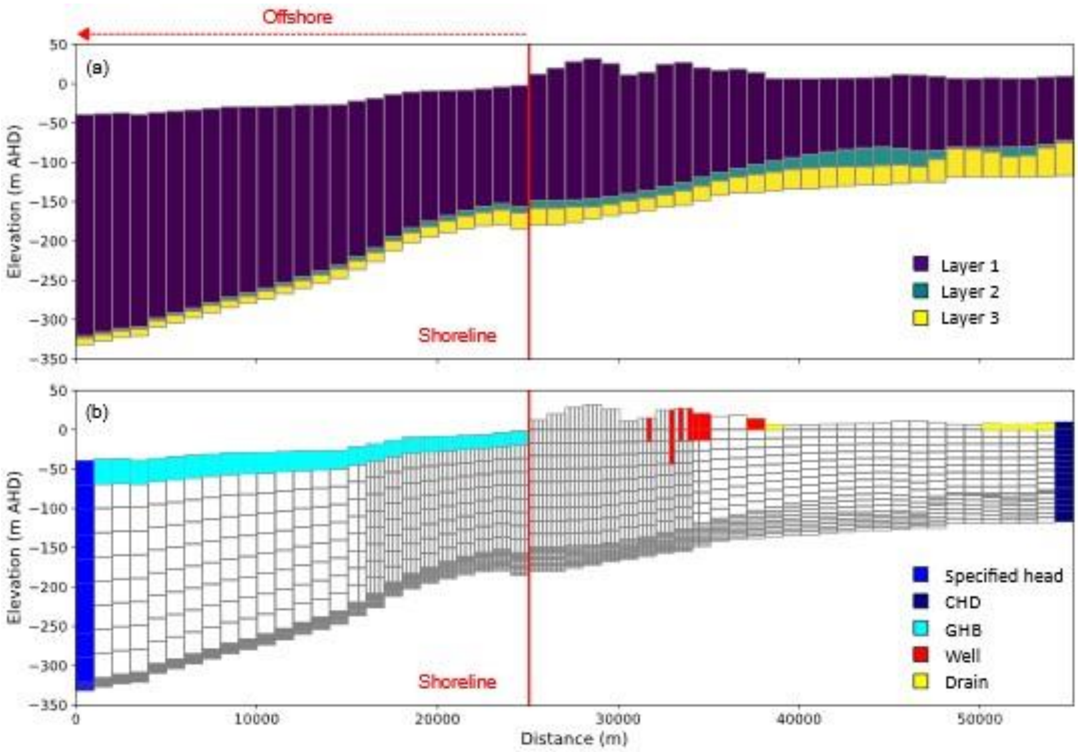


**Figure 3.** Example of model cell refinement for SWI simulations: (a) cross-section extracted from the regional-scale model (cross-sectional model D; see Figure 1 for its location), and (b) the same cross-section after vertical and horizontal refinement. The Time-Variant Specified-Head (CHD) and General Head Boundary (GHB) packages in MODFLOW were assigned to cells along the inland boundary and the seafloor, respectively.

Cross-sectional models were also refined to enable simulation of vertical variations in flow and salinity, along with enhanced horizontal resolution at the freshwater-seawater interface. For CSD, Layer 1 was divided into 10 layers, Layer 2 into 3 layers, and Layer 3 into 6 layers. The horizontal extent of cells was reduced in areas where the freshwater-seawater interface is likely to be found. For example, in CSD, cells near the shoreline were 250.7 m in the horizontal plane, reduced from 1002.8 m in the cross-sectional model that was extracted directly from the parent model. This refinement was necessary to produce a reasonable approximation of the complex zone of mixing between freshwater and seawater. The maximum ratio of each cells horizontal dimension to that of its adjacent cell was 1.6, which approximately reflects the criteria recommended by Anderson et al. (2015), who advised that the ratio of adjacent cell lengths should not exceed 1.5. Cell refinement represented a trade-off between model run times and the accuracy of model calculations, whereby smaller cells provide a higher resolution of calculations and salinity distributions, but require longer model run times. An example of the regional grid, the offshore extension, and the grid refinement is provided in Figure 3b for CSD.

A number of other adjustments were needed to create cross-sectional models from the regional model. For example, pumping cells in the regional model occupied the entire layer in which they occurred (because each stratigraphic layer was a single layer of cells in the regional model), whereas in cross-sectional models, we placed wells in the layers that contained the slotted sections of wells (red cells, Figure 3b). This was done because stratigraphic sequences were resolved into multiple model layers in the cross-sectional models. The proportion of pumping assigned to each layer was proportional to the respective screen length occurring in each layer, for a given pumping well. Similarly, drains (representing groundwater discharge to surface features) were located within the model layer that they occur in cross-sectional models, instead of occupying the entire stratigraphic unit. In doing so, pumping-induced vertical flows within stratigraphic units were captured in cross-sectional models that were neglected in the regional model of Morgan et al. (2015).

## 2.5 Steady-state and transient SWI models

Following the vertical and horizontal refinement of the grid, three scenario types were designed for SWI simulations, as: Scenario 1 – pre-development, steady-state conditions; Scenario 2 – transient conditions (1970-2013); Scenario 3 – projections of steady-state conditions under various contemporary (2013) and future conditions.

Scenario 1 represents steady-state *pre-development* conditions (i.e., prior to the expansion of irrigation across the study area) adopting the aquifer that the conditions in 1970 reflect a modified situation since European settlement. The results of pre-development simulations were treated as baseline conditions from which landward seawater movements were assessed, thereby serving as initial conditions in transient simulations. Steady-state results were obtained by running models for sufficient durations to reach stable conditions, requiring some 30,000 years of run time for models of SWI, starting from initially fresh conditions and allowing the seawater to penetrate the aquifers until an equilibrium state was obtained. Given that sea levels have varied substantially over the past 30,000 years (e.g., sea levels of 30,000 years ago were around 125 m lower than today), it is possible that the seawater extent in the aquifer is still responding to past paleo-sea level changes. However, we have neglected the paleo-history of both sea level variations and sediment deposition/erosion in our investigation, primarily because this would add considerable modelling analysis to the project that may or may not affect the modern seawater extent in the aquifer. It is likely that paleo-conditions are more relevant to the freshwater-seawater extent in the TCSA rather than the TLA, given the findings of previous investigations of offshore aquifers (e.g., Morgan et al., 2018).

The main solute transport parameters were taken from literature values, and considering simple relationships between solute transport parameters and other aquifer properties. For example, porosity was set to the specific yield ($S_y$) of the regional model. Longitudinal dispersivity ($\alpha_L$) was assigned a value of 12.5 m, determined after a wide range of values were tested within a trial-and-error approach, whereby numerical stability required a higher dispersivity but a lower dispersivity produced more realistic freshwater-seawater mixing zone widths, reflecting typical field conditions observed in aquifers with higher-density monitoring of the coastal salinity distribution (e.g., Cooper, 1964). This is notwithstanding the considerable variability in mixing zone widths observed within field studies of coastal aquifers, and the generally poor understanding of the local-scale processes affecting seawater intrusion in karst aquifer systems (Werner et al., 2013). It is worth noting that dispersivity acts as a surrogate for heterogeneity, making it challenging to determine the appropriate value for specific field sites (Lee et al., 2018). Early models adopting $\alpha_L$ values $\geq$ 50 m resulted in overly dispersed mixing zones and near-vertical freshwater-seawater interfaces, which is probably unrealistic based on the collective experience of the authors. Both transverse and vertical dispersivities ($\alpha_T$ and $\alpha_V$, respectively) were set at 0.075 m. The small $\alpha_T$ value aligns with the findings of the review undertaken by Zech et al. (2019), who observed that the most reliable investigations of dispersion parameters reported relatively low (< 1 m) $\alpha_T$ and $\alpha_V$ values in previous studies. The total variation diminishing (TVD) scheme was used to solve the advection-dispersion equation (Zheng and Bennett, 2002), because this approach is known to minimise artificial dispersion and numerical errors, while providing solutions within reasonable timeframes.

Some other adaptations were needed to create cross-sectional models of SWI. For example, the seaward boundary conditions at the vertical left-hand model boundary (offshore) adopted a constant seawater head of 0 m AHD, with any incoming flow occurring at the seawater concentration. The inland boundary was modelled using the Time-Variant Specified-Head (CHD) package in MODFLOW 2000, while the seafloor was represented by a head-dependent flux condition using the General Head Boundary (GHB) MODFLOW 2000 package. In this setup, the salinity of any incoming flux was also set to seawater concentration (Figure 3b), following a similar approach to that used by Solórzano-Rivas and Werner (2018).

The results of the steady-state pre-development simulations were used to evaluate inland and offshore positions for truncating 2D models, whereby the onshore seawater and offshore freshwater extents were captured within the model domain. The landward boundary was shifted inland so that any SWI within modelling scenarios was likely to be accommodated. An assessment was made as to whether seawater encroached on the inland boundary for all modelling scenarios, and where necessary, a landward shift occurred as needed.

Scenario 2 involved transient simulations, covering the period 1970-2013. The pre-development, steady-state models were used to generate initial conditions for transient simulations. In transient models, the stressors (e.g., recharge, pumping) were extracted from the regional model (Morgan et al., 2015), while the model grid, solute transport parameters and the numerical solver were the same as those used in the steady-state model. The salinity distribution at the end of the transient simulation was compared to the pre-development salinity distribution to evaluate SWI within Limestone Coast aquifers during the 44-year period of simulation.

Scenario 3 involved four simulations to assess future conditions, including:

- (3a) future steady-state conditions under the average climate stresses of 2004-2013 and the mean pumping (considering both the TLA (Layer 1) and TCSA (Layer 3)) of 2013,
- (3b) the same as (3a) except with the effects of sea-level rise,
- (3c) the same as (3a) except with reduced recharge due to climate change impacts (to approximate the scale of rainfall changes under climate change effects by the year 2050), and
- (3d) the same as (3a) except with modified pumping to estimate the increase in extraction to full allocation levels by the year 2050.

The reduction in recharge is consistent with the investigation by DEW (2023), which examined future climate impacts using projections from RCP 8.5 to 2050 (DEW, 2022), predicting an 18% recharge reduction in response to the 6% rainfall decline. DEW (2023) also adopted an increase in pumping of 71%, representing a rough estimate of the extraction that would occur under full allocation. Scenario 3a adopted average stresses (recharge, evapotranspiration, etc.) from the period 2004-2013, assuming that the pumping conditions of 2013 persist into the future. The purpose of Scenario 3a is to provide insights into the stability of the seawater wedge, specifically to determine whether the seawater wedge is likely to move inland in the future under "existing" (in 2013) conditions. Scenario 3a assesses the eventual inland distance the seawater wedge may reach, and whether the wedge reached a stable condition in 2013 (at the end of the transient simulation). In this way, Scenario 3a provides an approximation of the eventual landward extent of seawater for periods extending beyond the 44-year timeframe of the transient simulations, assuming "business (and climate) as usual".

Scenario 3b builds on the conditions of Scenario 3a by raising the sea level by 0.3 m, as an approximation of sea-level rise, which is expected to be between 0.13 m and 0.33 m by 2050, according to URPS (2015). The higher sea level was assigned for the entire simulation duration, rather than adopting a gradual increase, as occurs in reality. Here, the inland boundary conditions, the recharge and the pumping are identical to Scenario 3a – i.e., sea-level rise was applied to the cross-sectional model while using the inland boundary heads representing the situation without sea-level rise. This is a type of worst-case sea-level rise scenario, because the heads would be expected to rise at the inland boundary with sea-level rise, and by maintaining them at the conditions without sea-level rise, we are adopting the "head-controlled" condition of Werner and Simmons (2009), rather than "flux-controlled" conditions, where the former is known to cause worse SWI than the latter. A future simulation that imposes sea-level rise in the regional model, prior to extracting the stressors for the cross-sectional models, would allow for an assessment of SWI under less conservative conditions (i.e., where the inland boundary head is allowed to rise in response to sea-level rise, as occurs in flux-controlled conditions according to Werner and Simmons (2009)). We expect that the relatively large distances to the inland boundaries of models likely reduce the effect of the inland boundary condition on SWI.

Scenario 3c modifies the conditions of Scenario 3a by reducing recharge by 18% consistent with the analysis by DEW (2023), in which a scaling factor of 3 was adopted in reducing recharge in response to the 6% rainfall decline projected by climate change models (Green et al., 2012), leading to an 18% decline in recharge. This was firstly applied to the regional groundwater model of Morgan et al. (2015) prior to the extraction of cross-sectional model stressors from the regional model. In this way, the inland boundary in the cross-sectional models reflects the regional effects of the recharge decline, in addition to the local effects of recharge applied directly to cross-sectional models.

Scenario 3d adopts pumping rates that are higher by 71%, which is the increased pumping assumed by DEW (2023) reflecting extraction rates at full allocation by 2050. As with Scenario 3c, the pumping change is applied to the regional model prior to the construction of cross-sectional models, and therefore, the effects of pumping change on cross-sectional models are manifested in both the heads at the landward boundary and in the change to pumping rates within cross-sectional models. Table 2 summarizes the SWI scenarios used in the current study.

**Table 2.** Summary of model scenarios used for SWI simulation.

| Scenario | Aim | Simulation period (years) | Recharge | Evapotranspiration | Pumping | Inland boundary condition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Establish initial, steady-state seawater distribution | 30,000 | Constant value, taken from the regional-scale model (pre-1970) | Constant value, taken from the regional-scale model (pre-1970) | None | Constant head extracted from the regional-scale model |
| 2 | Simulate transient seawater movements during 1970-2013 | 44 (1970-2013) | Time-varying, taken from the regional-scale model (1970–2013) | Time-varying, taken from the regional-scale model (1970–2013) | Time-varying, historical pumping (1970–2013) | Time-varying head extracted from the regional-scale model |
| 3a | Predict long-term, steady-state SWI | 30,000 | Constant recharge – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model | Constant evapotranspiration – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model | Constant pumping - average of 2013 pumping | Constant inland head – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model |
| 3b | Predict long-term, steady-state SWI caused by sea-level rise of 0.3 m | 30,000 | Constant recharge – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model | Constant evapotranspiration – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model | Constant pumping – average of 2013 pumping | Constant inland head – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model |
| 3c | Predict long-term, steady-state SWI caused by an 18% decline in recharge | 30,000 | Constant recharge – 18% lower than the average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model | Constant evapotranspiration – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model | Constant pumping – average of 2013 pumping | Constant inland head – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model with an 18% recharge reduction |
| 3d | Predict long-term, steady state SWI caused by a 71% increase in pumping | 30,000 | Constant recharge – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model | Constant evapotranspiration – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model | Constant pumping – 71% higher than the average of 2013 pumping | Constant inland head – average of 2004–2013 in the regional-scale model with a 71% increased pumping |

# 3 Results

This section describes the results of five cross-sectional models; the locations of these are shown in Figure 1. The results of cross section E (CSE) are presented in the main body of the report, while the results of cross sections A to D (CSA to CSD) are provided in the Appendices. Figure 2 also outlines the boundary of the regional *parent* model of Morgan et al. (2015) that was used as the basis for cross-sectional model parameters, showing the locations of wells, drains and the position of offshore oil wells that allowed for coastal aquifer models to be extended into the continental shelf. Results are presented at various steps within the workflow to demonstrate the changes introduced with each step, such as the extraction of cross sections from the regional model, changes to the grid, extrapolation into the continental shelf, and the addition of density effects, to give the reader confidence that cross-sectional models reasonably reflect the parent model simulations of groundwater heads and flow.

## 3.1 Cross section E: Groundwater flow model construction

Here, the outcomes of Steps 1 to 3 in the modelling approach (see Table 1) are shown for cross section E (CSE). Figure 4 illustrates the grid for CSE extracted from the regional model, truncated to focus on the coastal zone, and extended offshore. Corresponding figures for cross sections A to D (CSA to CSD) are included in Appendix B.

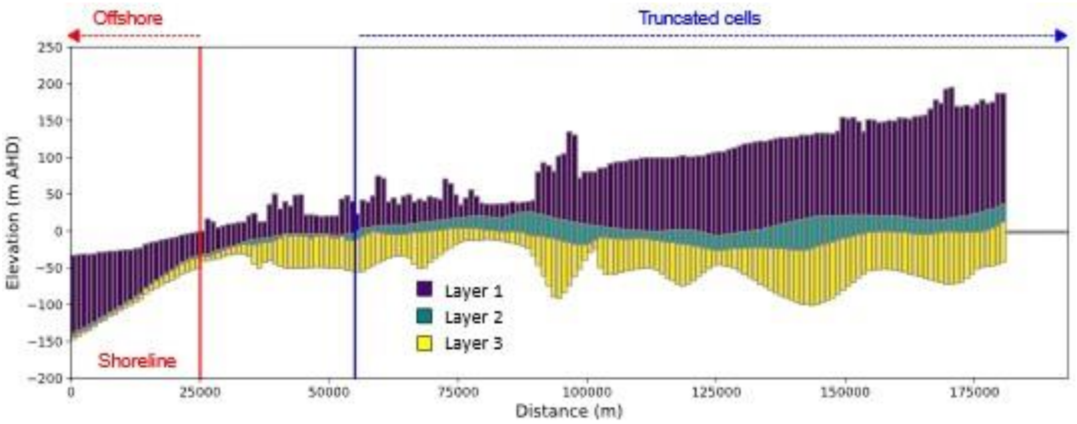


**Figure 4.** Grid extracted from the parent model of Morgan et al. (2015) for cross section E, showing the region where cells were removed (Truncated cells), and the extrapolation of the cross section into the continental shelf (Offshore), with the shoreline location shown as the red vertical line.

The heads in CSE were compared to the corresponding cells in the parent 3D model for steady-state, pre-development conditions (Step 4; Table 1). The results are shown in Figure 5 for the CSE model that adopts the same coastal boundary condition as that used by Morgan et al. (2015), and assigns steady-state heads from Morgan et al. (2015) as the inland fixed-head boundary condition. The largest negative and positive biases were -0.46 m and 1.02 m, respectively, shown as the darker blue and red cells in Figure 5. Here, a positive bias means that CSE produced higher heads than the parent model, whereas the heads were lower in CSE than in the parent model where the bias is negative. Although we consider the scale of these biases to be acceptable, further investigation is warranted to explore the cause of these given the many possible reasons that these may have arisen out of the CSE construction methodology. Note that the bias at the inland boundary of CSE is zero because heads from the parent model were assigned to the inland boundary through a specified-head condition, and therefore, CSE matches the head exactly at that location. This is also the case at the coastal boundary. The bias distributions of the four other 3-layer cross-sectional models are provided in Appendix C.

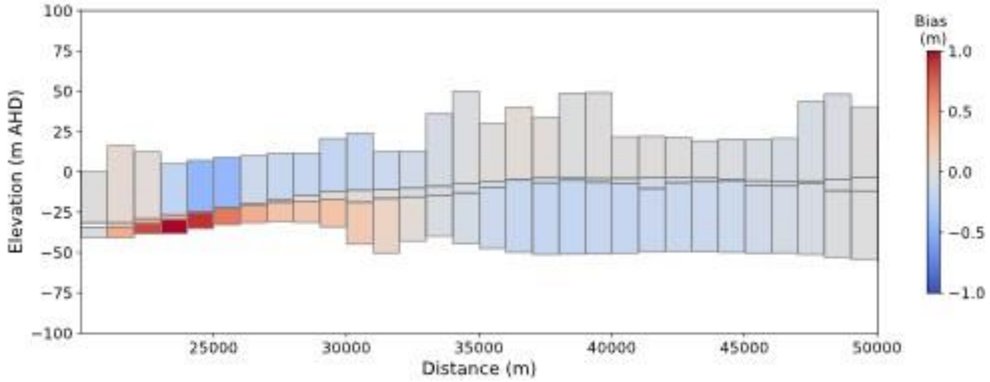


**Figure 5.** Comparison of heads between CSE (only freshwater is simulated) and the parent 3D model for steady-state, pre-development conditions, in terms of the bias, where a positive bias indicates that CSE heads are greater than the parent model. Heads from the parent model were transferred directly to specified-head conditions at the shoreline (left boundary) and the inland limit of the model (right boundary). Note here that the *x*-axis scale reflects distances in the regional model of Morgan et al. (2015) whereas the earlier *x*-axis (in Figure 4) is specific to the cross sections with extended offshore domains. The white cell located on the left boundary belongs to Layer 2 (aquitard) and represents an inactive cell at the shoreline in the regional model.

Next, the CSE model shown in Figure 5 was extended offshore (see Figure 4), and a check of the heads against those of the parent 3D model was repeated. The distribution of head bias is provided in Figure 6, while the corresponding plots for the other cross-sectional models are given in Appendix D. The results show that the bias increased at the coastal boundary once the specified heads of Morgan et al. (2015) were removed and replaced with a representation of the offshore aquifer. Note that the sea was simulated as equivalent freshwater heads (i.e., the heads on the seafloor boundary were assigned the pressure of the ocean at the sea floor, but treating the sea as having the density of freshwater), while the offshore aquifer was treated as containing freshwater (i.e., density effects are neglected in freshwater-only simulations). Thus, it appears that the explicit simulation of the sea provides alternative heads at the shoreline relative to those used by Morgan et al. (2015). Comparison to field measurements of groundwater heads near the coast is warranted to assess whether the more physically based simulation of the coast adopted in CSE has produced a more reliable prediction of near-shore groundwater heads than those adopted by Morgan et al. (2015). This would require the installation of near-coastal wells is various locations, given that there are few of these in the study area.

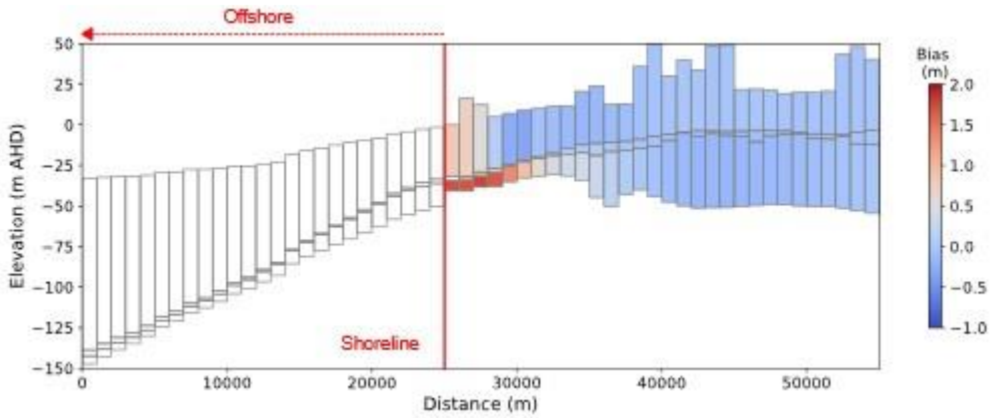


**Figure 6.** Comparison of heads between CSE (with offshore extension, only freshwater is simulated) and the parent 3D model for steady-state, pre-development conditions, in terms of the bias, where a positive bias indicates that CSE heads are greater than the parent model. Heads from the parent model were transferred directly to specified-head conditions at the inland limit of the model (right boundary), whereas the coastal boundary condition adopts the equivalent freshwater heads of the sea. Offshore cells are blank because these were not used in the parent model. The white cell located near the shoreline (onshore part), belongs to Layer 2 (aquitard), and represents an inactive cell at the shoreline in the regional model.

The next step in the model construction was to refine the grid (Step 5; Table 1). An example of this step leading to a refined grid within the vicinity of the freshwater-seawater interface is provided in Figure 3 for CSD. Figure 7 shows the refined grid for CSE, along with head values (shown as a colour flood), along with the corresponding heads in the parent model (interpolated to the location of CSE; Figure 7a), to show the match between this form of CSE and the original regional-scale model. Refinement of the grid in the horizontal direction was undertaken to ~15 km offshore and ~10 km onshore, resulting in a refined cell length of 25 m in these areas. This was intended to focus the numerical effort on parts of the modelling containing both seawater and freshwater, because freshwater-seawater mixing is a complex process that can only be properly simulated with sufficiently small cells (Werner, 2017a). The model's first layer was divided into ten sub-layers, the second into three, and the third into three – to allow for the vertical stratification of salinity (and associated water density) to be simulated. The ratio of cell lengths (in the horizontal direction) between adjacent cells was up to 1.6. The results for CSA to CSD are given in Appendix E.

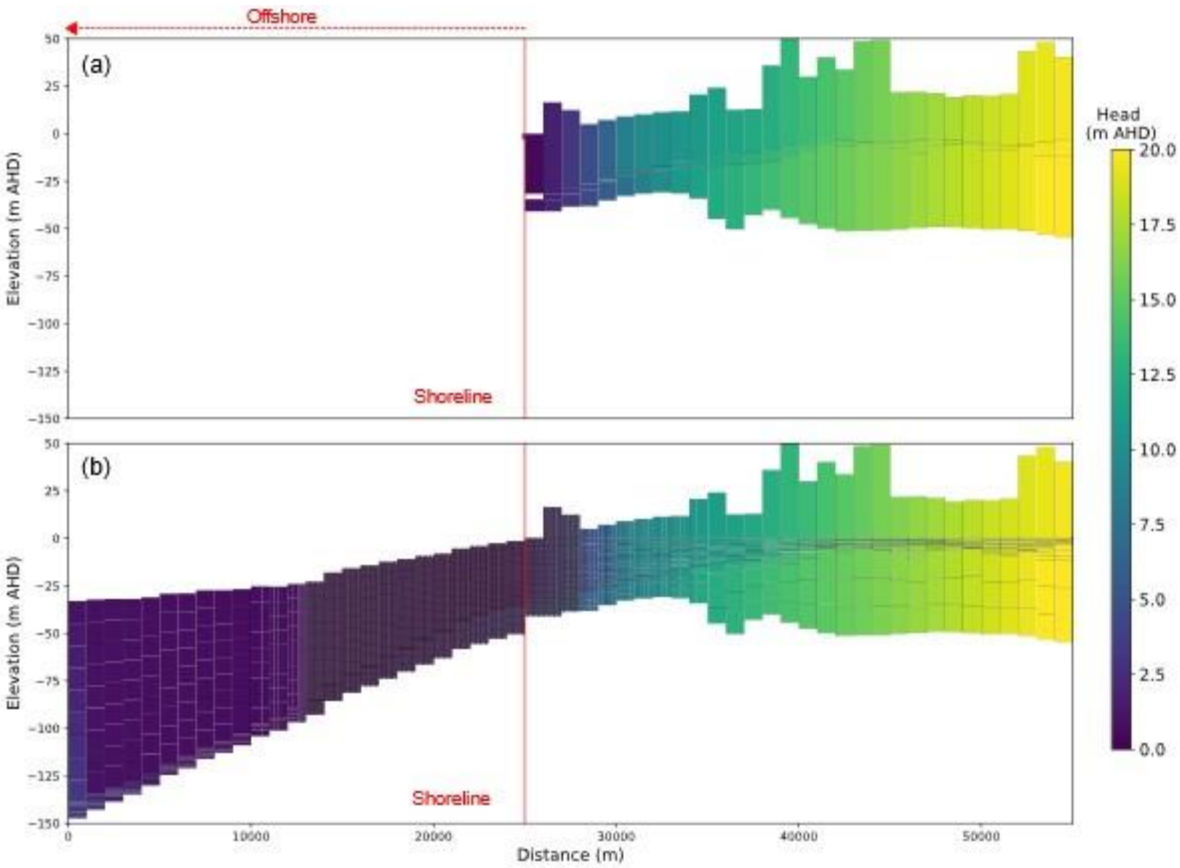


**Figure 7.** Comparison of heads between: (a) the parent 3D model at the location of cross section E (CSE), and (b) CSE with offshore extension and refined grid (only freshwater is simulated). This simulation represents steady-state, pre-development conditions. The white cell in (a), located near the shoreline, belongs to Layer 2 (aquitard), and represents an inactive cell at the shoreline in the regional model.

The results in Figure 7 demonstrate reasonable agreement between the extended, refined grid of this version of the CSE model and the parent model results extrapolated to the location of CSE. This result gives confidence that the methodology for extracting cross-sectional models from the regional model of Morgan et al. (2015) was effective in reproducing the parent model conditions.

Following completion of the pre-development, steady-state simulations (seawater is not considered, and we neglect density effects; this is referred to as "freshwater only" in the remainder, even though the terrestrial groundwater that is simulated in these cases is often not fresh in regions across the Limestone Coast), adopting the various model grid extents and resolutions shown in previous figures, the CSE model was assigned the transient stresses of the parent model to reflect the simulation period 1970-2013. For example, a time-varying specified-head condition was adopted at the inland boundary, with heads extracted from the parent model, while recharge and other hydrological stresses in CSE were also extracted from the regional model. As CSE is aligned with the principal axes of the rectilinear grid of Morgan et al. (2015), the stresses could be transferred directly from the parent model to CSE, without needing to average the stresses from multiple cells in the parent model. Other cross-sectional models that are not either north-south or east-west in their orientation required averaging procedures because each CSE cell corresponds with parts of multiple cells in the parent model. The methods for achieving this are described in Appendix A.

The CSE model grid initially adopted was the same as that shown in Figure 5, except the stresses are transient instead of steady state. Four groundwater level hydrographs from the parent model and at corresponding locations in the CSE are provided in Figure 8, while Figure 9 illustrates the bias at the end of the transient simulation. Corresponding plots for the other cross-sectional models are given in Appendix F (comparisons of hydrographs) and Appendix G (bias at the end of the transient simulation).

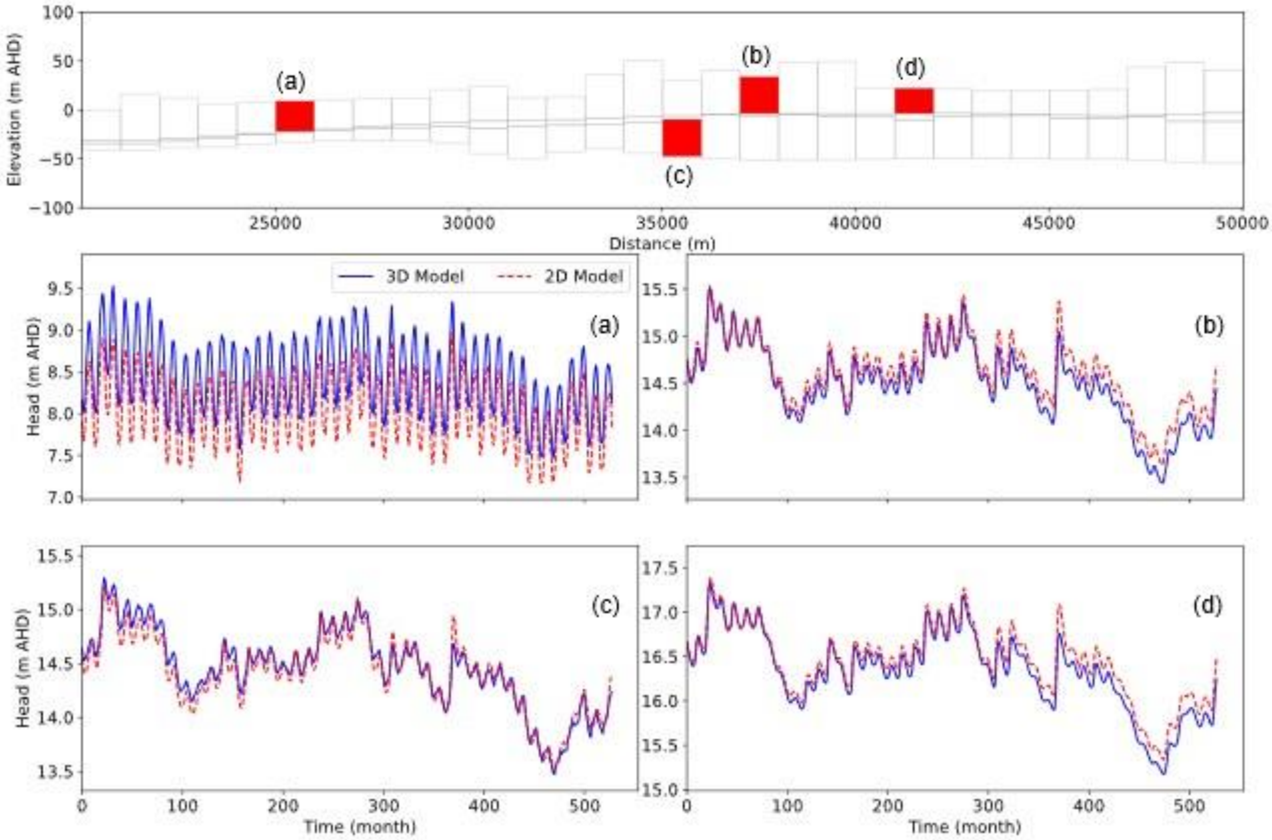


**Figure 8.** Four hydrographs comparing heads from the transient simulation (freshwater only) of cross section E with the parent 3D model. The top figure identifies the cells from which model hydrographs, (a) to (d), were extracted. The distribution of bias in the pre-development steady-state model (used as initial conditions for the transient model) is shown in Figure 5, while the bias at the end of the transient simulation is shown in Figure 9.

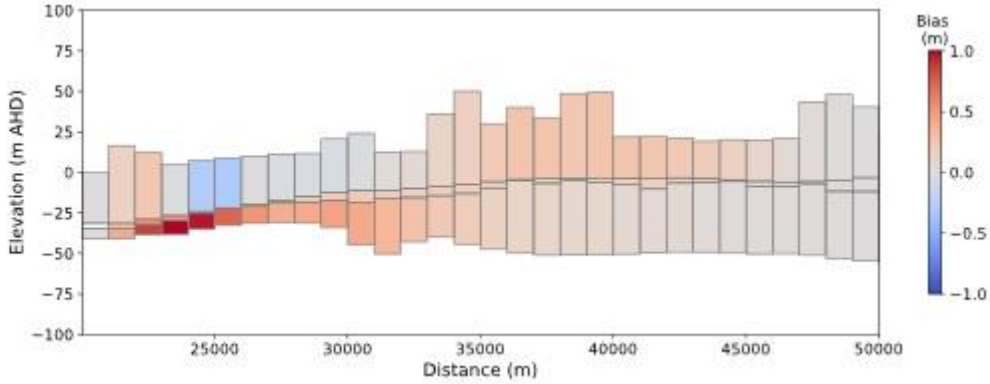


**Figure 9.** Comparison of heads from cross section E (CSE; transient simulation, freshwater only) and the parent model at the end of the transient simulation (1970-2013), where positive bias indicates that the heads of CSE exceed those of the parent model. The white cell located on the left boundary belongs to Layer 2 (aquitard) and represents an inactive cell at the shoreline in the regional model.

Figures 8 and 9 show that the regional model dynamics is reproduced reasonably well in CSE, given the closeness of hydrographs (Figure 8) and the adequately low bias (Figure 9). The bias at the beginning of the transient simulation (Figure 5) is somewhat similar to the bias at the end (Figure 9), although it appears that the CSE heads rose relative to the regional model during the transient simulation, as the bias tended to increase slightly (cell colours trend towards red, comparing Figures 5 and 9) over the course of the simulation. Note here that the bias in Figure 9 is consistent with the hydrographs presented in Figure 8. The main reason for this bias stems from inherent differences between 2D and 3D models, whereby extracting a cross section from a 3D model eliminates perpendicular flow components, leading to variations in head values. Other sources of bias have arisen from the methodology used to extract the cross sections.

## 3.2 Cross section E: Seawater intrusion model construction

### 3.2.1 Scenario 1: Pre-development, steady-state seawater extent

Once the truncated, offshore-extended, grid-refined cross-sectional models of groundwater flow were created (Steps 1 to 5; Table 1; Figure 7 shows the resulting grid for CSE), solute transport and density effects were added to the models to allow for the simulation of the seawater extent within the coastal aquifers. Figure 10 presents the freshwater-seawater distribution for pre-development, steady-state conditions in CSE, showing the truncated, offshore-extended and refined model grid. These results represent the salinity distribution, with aquifer stresses from 1970 imposed, after some 30,000 years. Figure 10 shows that seawater in the upper aquifer (TLA) penetrates only 124 m inland, while there is an extensive body of "freshwater" (or at least groundwater of terrestrial origin) in the lower aquifer (i.e., the freshwater head is sufficient to push the seawater offshore). The landward extent of seawater in the TLA is only observable in the close-up of the near-shore aquifer because the high density of cells in the larger-scale figure doesn't allow the salinities to be shown in fine detail. The limited penetration of seawater in the aquifer is the consequence of the high groundwater heads, being some 8 m above sea level at 5 km inland from the coast (see Figure 8). With this head gradient and the high hydraulic conductivity (*K*) of the coastal aquifer (e.g., the TLA aquifer *K* is around 115 m/d near the coastline), the offshore discharge of groundwater is expected to be considerable. The seawater distributions obtained from CSA to CSD are provided in Appendix H.

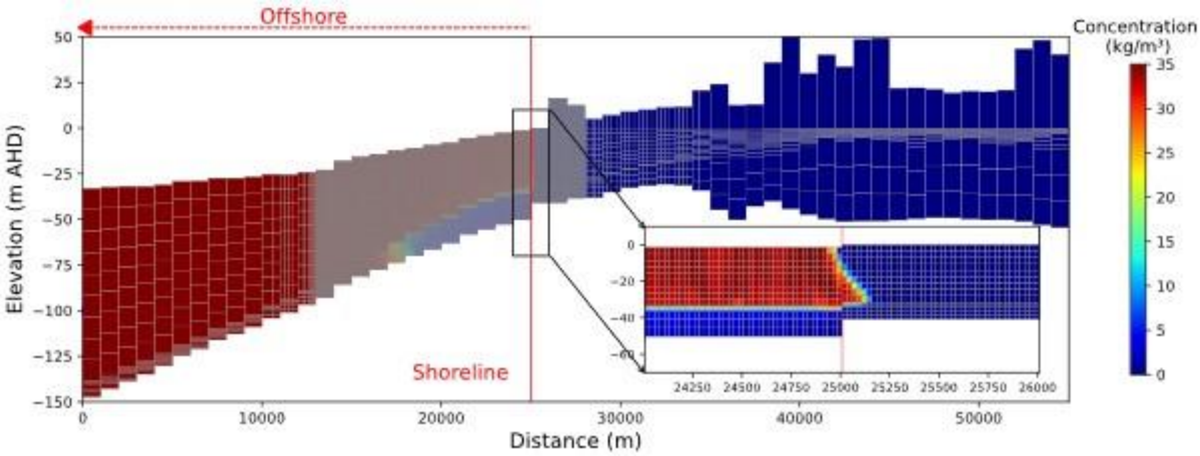


**Figure 10.** Salinity distribution of cross section E (CSE), representing pre-development, steady-state conditions. The grey shading near the shoreline in the main figure is due to the high concentration of grid cells. Grid refinement involved the subdivision of regional model cells into 40 smaller cells (in CSE) for simulation accuracy.

The close-up of the near-shore saltwater wedge in Figure 10 shows colour variations (i.e., light-dark shading of the red region shown in the inset close up of the saltwater region), indicating that mixing is occurring in the model between the freshwater in the TCSA (lower aquifer) and the overlying seawater in TLA. This produced complex patterns in the TLA, in the form of unstable fingering. This is characteristic of density-driven flow instabilities, where the freshwater and seawater mixing becomes irregular, resulting in complex patterns. These processes were investigated by Solórzano-Rivas et al. (2021), who showed the variability in buoyancy-driven freshwater plumes expected in subsea sediments under a range of conditions.

Figure 11 provides the head distribution from the density-dependent simulation of pre-development steady-state conditions at CSE (the corresponding salinity contours are shown in Figure 10). Note that the heads in the seawater zone are relative to the salinity of each cell, such that the equivalent freshwater head in a cell containing seawater is higher than the equivalent freshwater head in a cell containing freshwater but having the same reported head, due to the higher density of seawater. This influences the direction and rates of groundwater flow. For example, even where the groundwater levels of two cells are the same, groundwater will move from the cell with higher water density to the one with lower density. For this reason, the effects of salinity on the heads must be considered in comparing the heads of SWI models to freshwater-only models. Given that almost all of the onshore aquifer contains only freshwater, this is an issue in very few cells for CSE. The results in Figure 11 indicate that the head consistency obtained in the freshwater-only versions of CSE is adequately retained with density effects added to the model. We conclude from this that CSE, as a SWI simulator, is a reasonable reproduction of the regional model hydrogeology produced by Morgan et al. (2015). Appendix I shows this comparison for other cross sections (CSA to CSD).

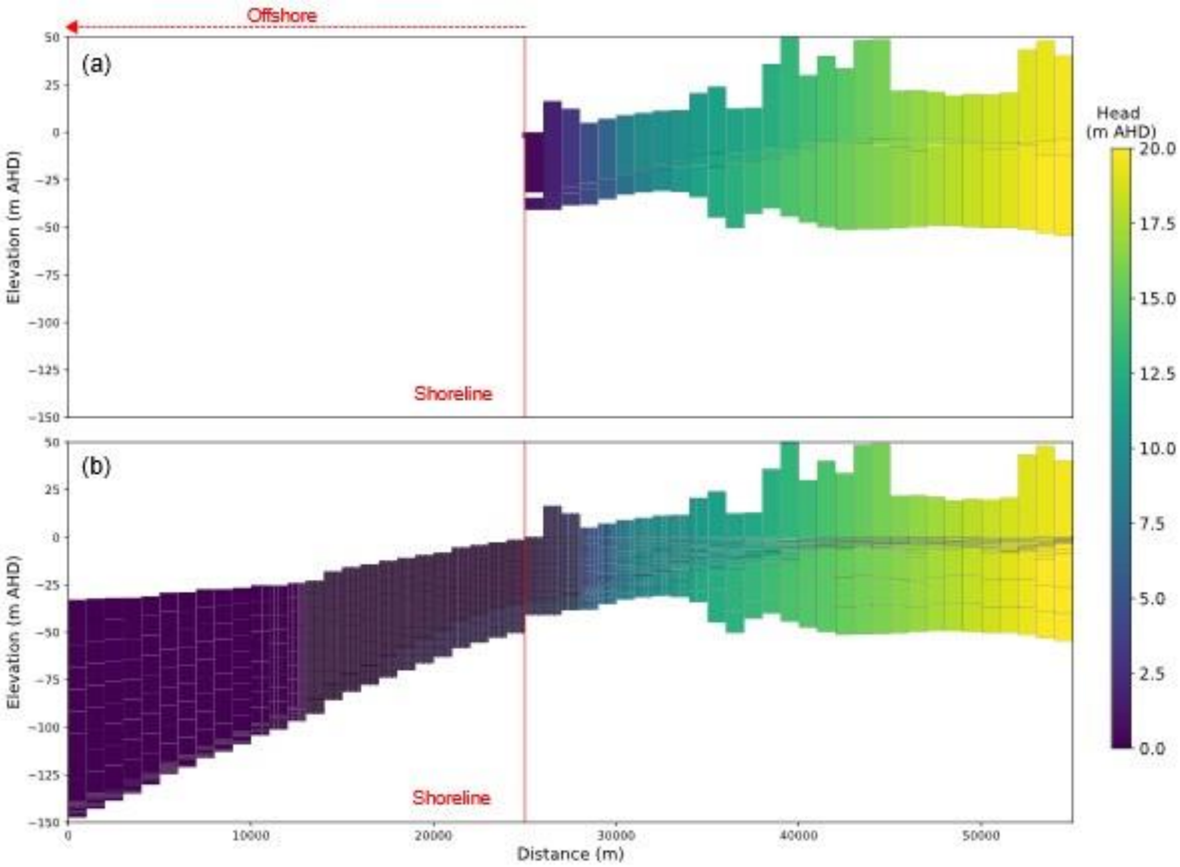


**Figure 11.** Comparison of heads between: (a) the parent model of Morgan et al. (2015), and (b) cross section E (density-dependent, steady-state, pre-development simulation of freshwater-seawater interactions). The white cell in (a), located near the shoreline, belongs to Layer 2 (aquitard), and represents an inactive cell at the shoreline in the regional model.

### 3.2.2 Scenario 2: Seawater intrusion, 1970-2013

Figure 12 presents the freshwater-seawater distribution at the end of the transient simulation using the truncated and grid-refined version of CSE. The results show negligible changes in the groundwater salinity of the upper and lower layers compared to the pre-development condition, suggesting that SWI is unlikely to have occurred during 1970-2013 in this location. To assess the reasons for this stability in the seawater extent, Figure 13 shows the difference in heads between the pre-development, steady-state condition and the end of the transient simulation. The results highlight the limited net changes in groundwater levels at this site during 1970-2013 – this is the primary reason for the stability in the seawater extent in CSE. Note that there is no pumping in CSE. The seawater distributions at the end of the transient simulation (1970-2013) from CSA to CSD are provided in Appendix J, which shows more extensive seawater movements under the stresses of 1970-2013.

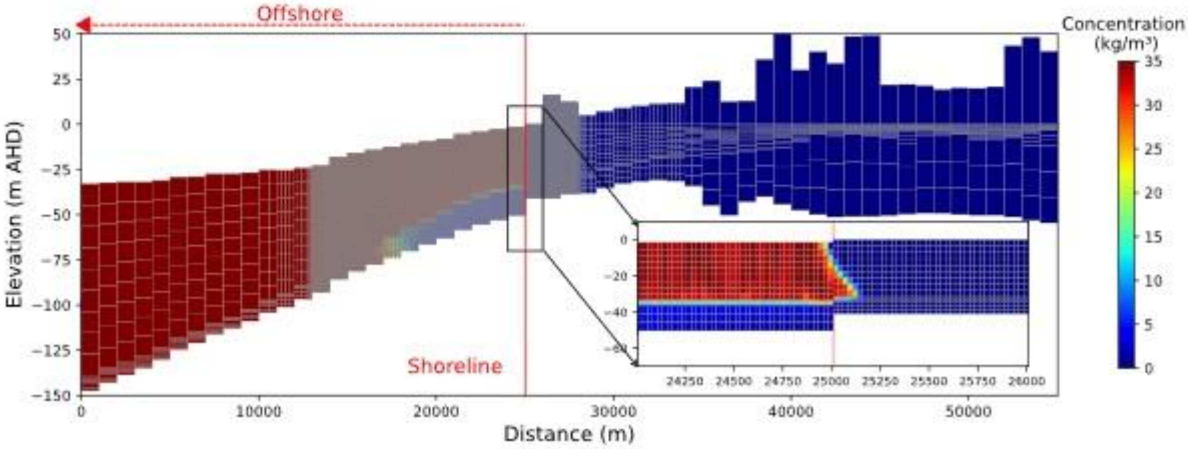


**Figure 12.** Spatial distribution of salinity at cross section E at the end of the transient simulation (1970-2013).

Figure 13 shows the groundwater head distributions corresponding to the SWI models shown in Figures 10 and 12. Comparing the two head distributions provides insight into head changes within CSE over the period 1970-2013. The results indicate negligible changes in the head distribution, consistent with the finding that the freshwater-seawater distribution changed minimally over the same timeframe, as evident from a comparison of Figures 10 and 12. The groundwater head distributions of the SWI models for CSA to CSD are included in Appendix K.

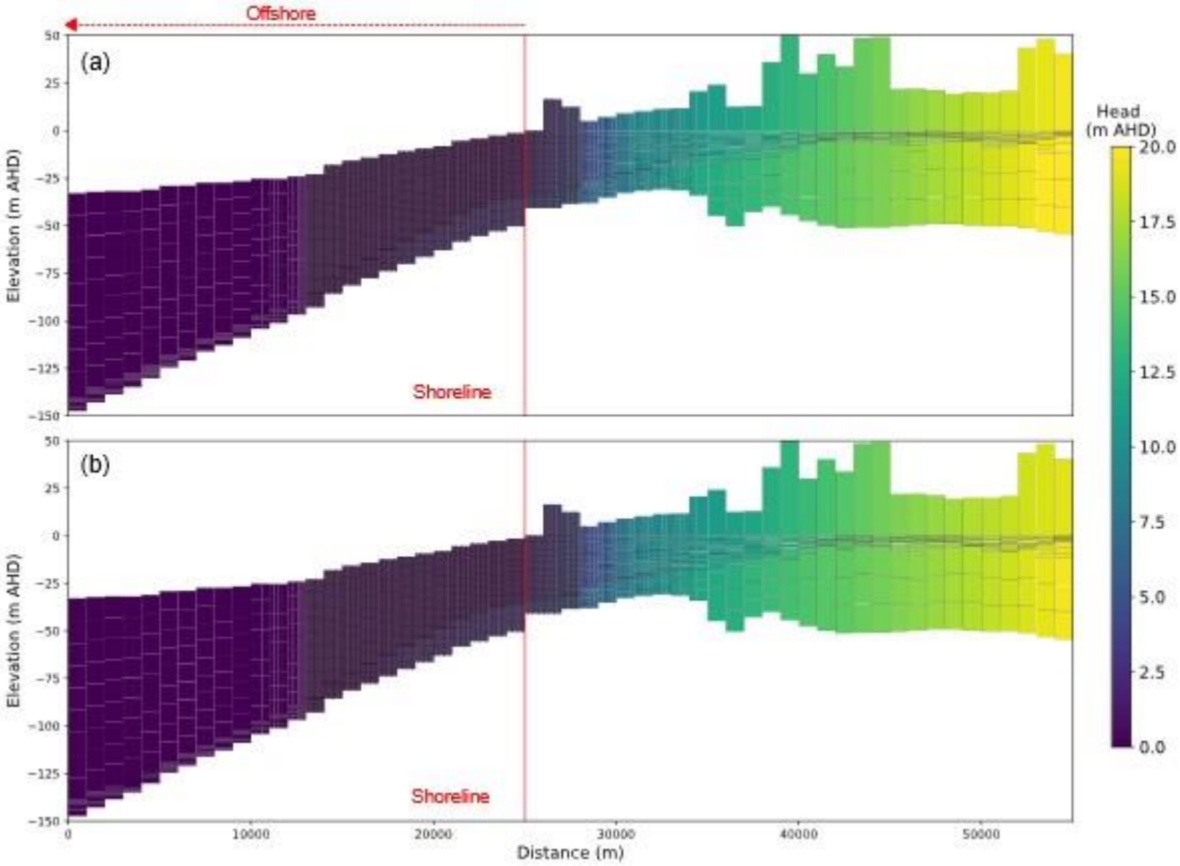


**Figure 13.** Head distributions during the transient simulation period (1970-2013) within cross section E (CSE), showing: (a) head distribution under pre-development conditions, and (b) head distribution at the end of the transient simulation (1970-2013).

### 3.2.3 Comparison to field salinities

The modelling results for CSE were assessed by comparing the salinity predictions to existing field measurements of groundwater salinity proximal to the axis of CSE. Figure 14 presents the distribution of wells near CSE that have electrical conductivity (EC) data. Only EC data for the TLA was available in this location, likely because most of the pumping wells in the Limestone Coast draw from the TLA. The simulated toe location (where the seawater wedge intercepts the bottom of the aquifer) from the pre-development, steady-state model is shown for the TLA (upper aquifer), while the tip (where the seawater wedge intercepts the top of the aquifer) is omitted because it occurs approximately at the shoreline in the unconfined TLA. Although the pre-development, steady-state numerical modelling results are used for comparison, the discussed results are applicable to all CSE scenarios tested in this study, as the changes in toe location for each CSE scenario are effectively imperceptible at the scale of Figure 14. The simulated toe and tip in the lower aquifer (TCSA) are offshore and are therefore not shown in Figure 14 (note that the extent of offshore freshwater in the TCSA is apparent in Figure 12, at the end of the transient simulation of CSE, and in other figures to follow for the results of scenarios). The distribution of wells near CSA to CSD that have electrical conductivity (EC) data are provided in Appendix L.

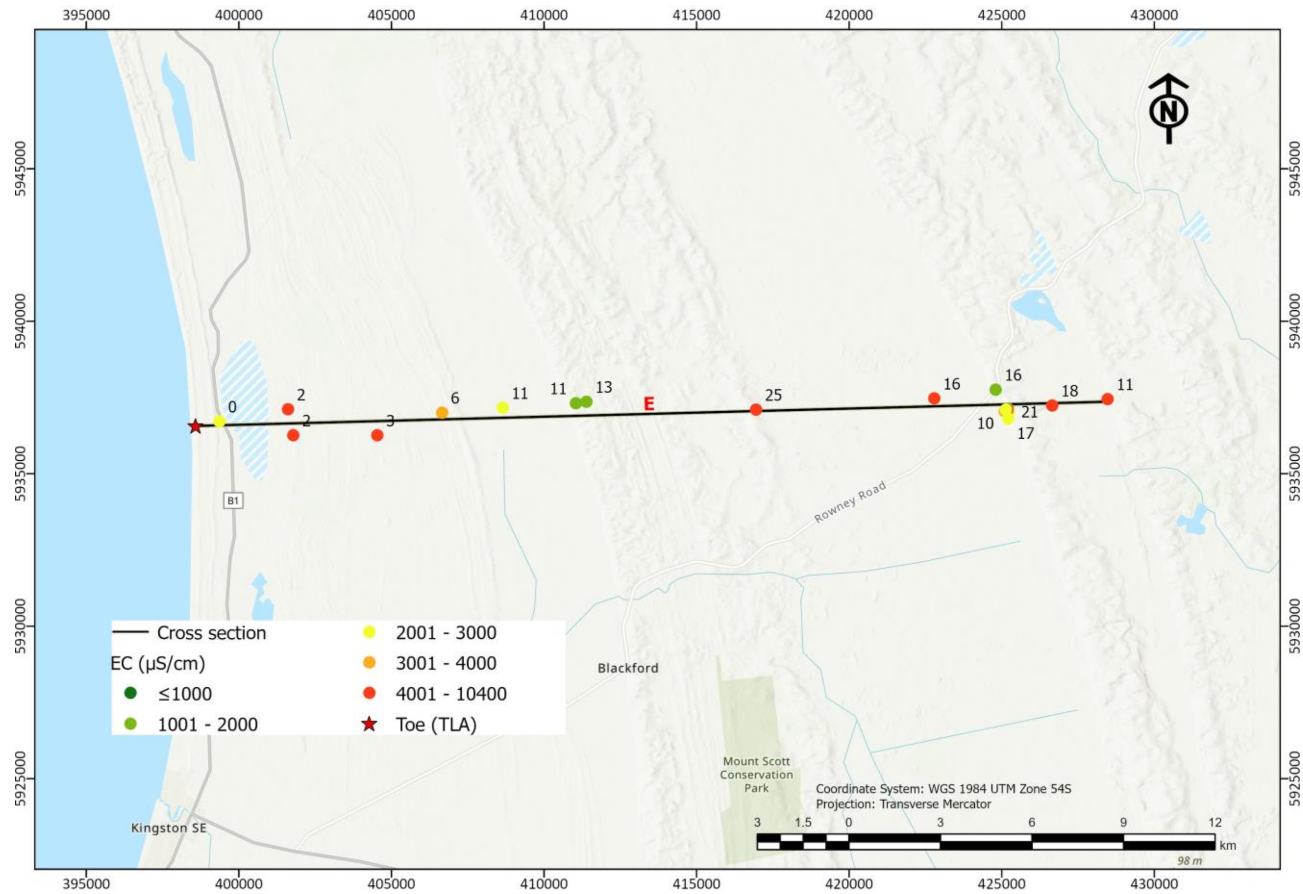


**Figure 14.** Location of wells with salinity data proximal to cross section E for the TLA (upper) aquifer. The numbers next to wells indicate the elevation of the bottom of the wells, rounded to the nearest integer, in m AHD, where 0 m AHD is sea level. The tip of the seawater wedge in the TLA is approximately at the shoreline. The toe location for the TLA is shown by the red star, while the TCSA toe is omitted because it is offshore. Toe locations were taken from pre-development conditions (see Figure 10).

Figure 14 indicates that there are significant areas of saline groundwater (EC >4,000 µS/cm) observed in wells installed in the TLA, occurring at locations of up to 31 km from the coast. The bottom of the wells shown in Figure 14 vary from 0 m AHD to 36 m AHD, and therefore, the salinity of only the shallow groundwater has been assessed. For a monitoring well to be used as a sentinel well for seawater intrusion, it must be installed below sea level, preferably below the mid-depth of the aquifer. Thus, the saline groundwater encountered in observation wells along the transect of CSE is not associated with modern seawater processes or seawater intrusion occurring in recent decades. This conclusion arises from: (a) the high groundwater levels of this area that are more likely to force the seawater wedge close to the shoreline, and (b) the occurrence of high salinity groundwater at elevations above mean sea level cannot be caused by modern seawater movements. A hydrochemical and environmental isotope analysis would be needed to ascertain the origins of the saline groundwater encountered in the observations wells proximal to CSE, but the evapoconcentration of rainfall is a likely contributing factor amongst other possibilities. Mustafa et al. (2012) investigated the water chemistry of the coastal aquifers of the Lower Limestone Coast, but their analysis didn't extend as far north as CSE. Their findings suggest that, in general, saltwater derives from multiple salinity sources in the Lower Limestone Coast.

The current study includes a comparison between cross-sectional models and recent AEM survey results for CSA and CSB, which coincide with AEM flight lines (Appendix Q).

### 3.2.4 Scenario 3: Steady-state scenarios to assess future seawater intrusion

Here, we present the results of steady-state simulations (obtained by long-term time-marching) that provide guidance on future SWI at the location of CSE. Four scenarios are presented, as described in Section 2.5.

***Scenario 3a:*** This scenario aims to assess the steady-state seawater extent that arises when stresses from the latter stages of the transient simulation (1970-2013) are applied for a prolonged period (~30,000 years). We consider this a business-as-usual case, and a baseline for testing the effects of sea-level rise (Scenario 3b), recharge change (due to climate change; Scenario 3c) and higher groundwater pumping (Scenario 3d). Figure 15 shows the results of Scenario 3a, including a zoomed-in depiction of the interface toe in the TLA aquifer.

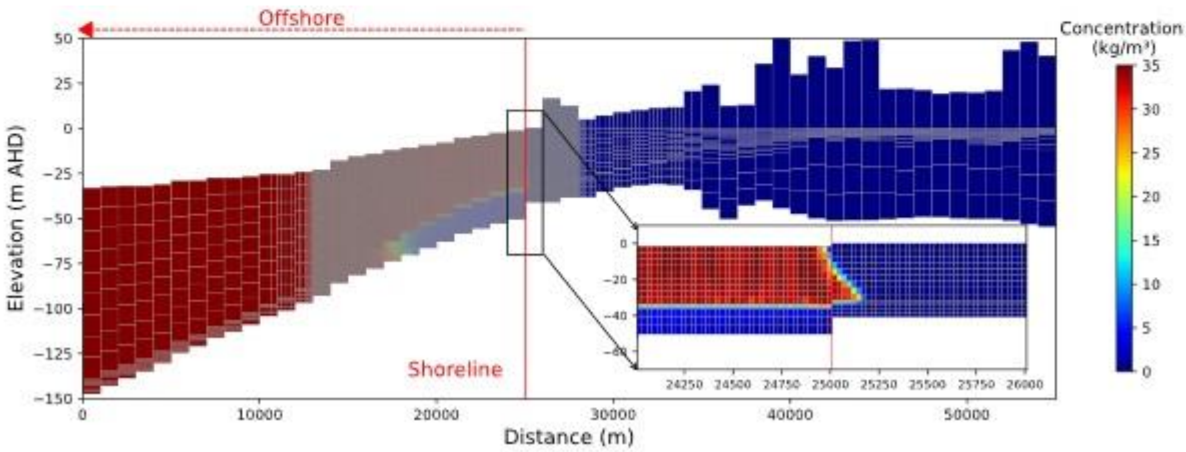


**Figure 15.** The salinity distribution arising from the steady-state simulation of future conditions at CSE, arising when pumping stresses in 2013 and the average recharge of 2004-2013 are applied for a prolonged (future) period of time.

Figure 15 shows that the interface is effectively unchanged after reaching a new steady-state condition under the pumping stresses of 2013. This result is expected, given that the heads in 2013 are similar to those of 1970, leading to similar salinity distributions under the pre-development steady-state condition (reflecting 1970 stresses) and Scenario 3a (reflecting 2013 stresses). In this scenario, the seawater toe shifts 129 m landward in the TCSA (relative to its position at the end of the transient simulation), compared to the 23 m landward movement of the seawater toe in the TLA. This difference is attributed primarily to the hydraulic conductivity values in the TLA and TCSA, whereby a higher hydraulic conductivity (~115 m/d) occurs near the coast in the TLA. In contrast, the TCSA, with a lower hydraulic conductivity of about 64 m/d near the coast, required longer to transition to a new steady state. Appendix M includes the results of Scenario 3a for the other cross sections.

***Scenario 3b:*** This scenario evaluates the effect of sea-level rise (the sea level is 0.3 m higher than the value of 0 m AHD used in Scenario 3a) on the steady-state distribution of groundwater salinities. Other stresses are adopted from Scenario 3a, including the inland boundary heads (and therefore, this reflects a head-controlled case of SWI arising from sea-level rise, using the classification of Werner and Simmons, 2009). Figure 16 shows the results of Scenario 3b. Appendix N includes the results of Scenario 3b for the other cross sections.

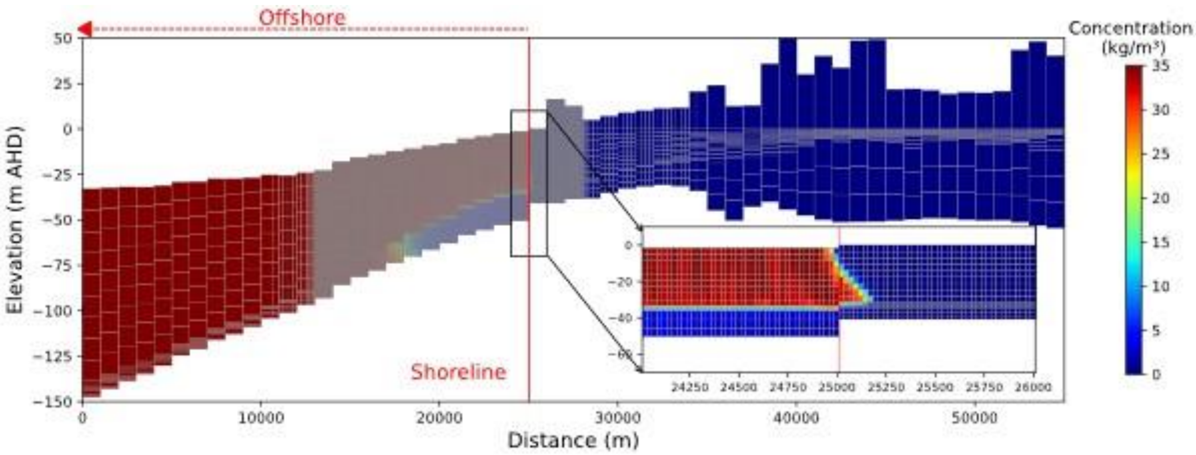


**Figure 16.** Steady-state distribution of salinity at CSE following sea-level rise of 300 mm occurring instantaneously in 2013.

The salinity distribution depicted in Figure 16 indicates that sea-level rise is unlikely to cause significant changes to the groundwater salinity in the coastal zone, although we have not assessed the potential for seawater to move further inland via surface pathways. That is, the shoreline is presumed to be unmoved due to sea-level rise. The result shown here that sea-level rise is largely inconsequent is due to the high groundwater heads at the inland boundary, such that a 0.3 m rise in sea level modifies the regional groundwater hydraulic gradient only slightly. The inland movement of the toe in the TLA due to sea-level rise is approximately 5 m, as determined by the 0.5 isochlor (50% relative salinity with respect to seawater salinity, which is assumed to be 35 kg/m$^3$). The model cells in the interface area are 25 m wide, and therefore, the toe location is found through linear interpolation.

***Scenario 3c:*** The impact of an 18% decline in recharge, caused by climate change, was assessed in this scenario. In this case, the inland boundary head fell relative to Scenario 3a because the recharge decline was applied to the regional model before extracting the stresses to apply to CSE for this scenario. Thus, the effects of the recharge drop are twofold; the inland head falls and the recharge over the cross section drops. Figure 17 shows the results of Scenario 3c. Appendix O includes the results of Scenario 3c for the other cross sections.

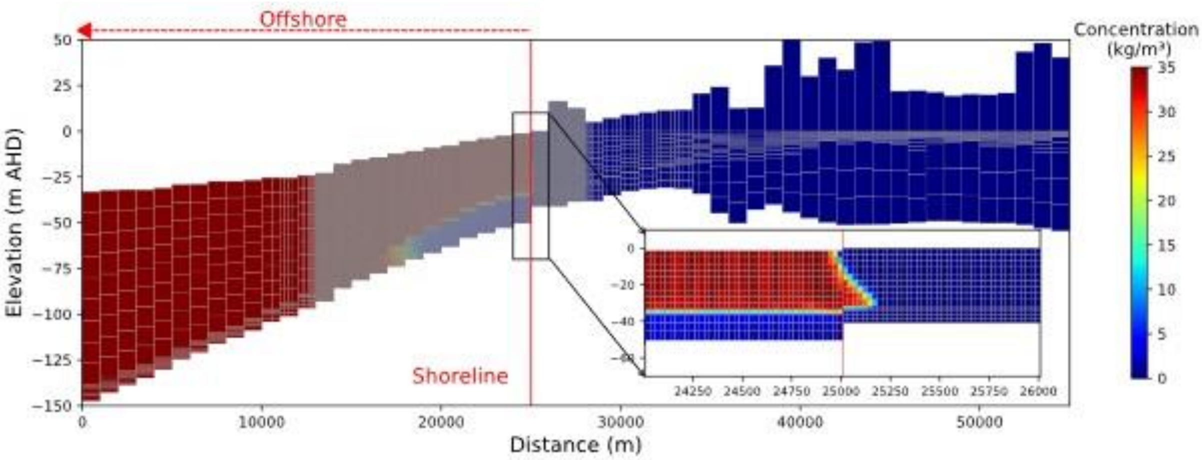


**Figure 17.** Steady-state distribution of salinity at CSE caused by a decline of 18% (relative to 2004-2013) in recharge.

Again, we see little impact (in Figure 17) on the salinity distribution from the imposed hydrologic changes to the groundwater system – in this case, an 18% drop in recharge. This is further evidenced by the slight relative inland movement of the toe in the TLA, approximately 4 m, compared to Scenario 3a.

***Scenario 3d:*** In this scenario, the pumping rate is increased by 71%, and the effect on the steady-state salinity distribution is assessed. Although there are no pumping wells that are intercepted by CSE (wells are located to the north and south of CSE, but not alongside it), the increased pumping will affect the regional heads, and therefore, the head at the inland boundary is expected to drop in this scenario. That is, the pumping increase was applied to all of the wells in the regional model prior to extracting the cross section. Figure 18 shows the results of Scenario 3d. Appendix P includes the results of Scenario 3d for the other cross sections.

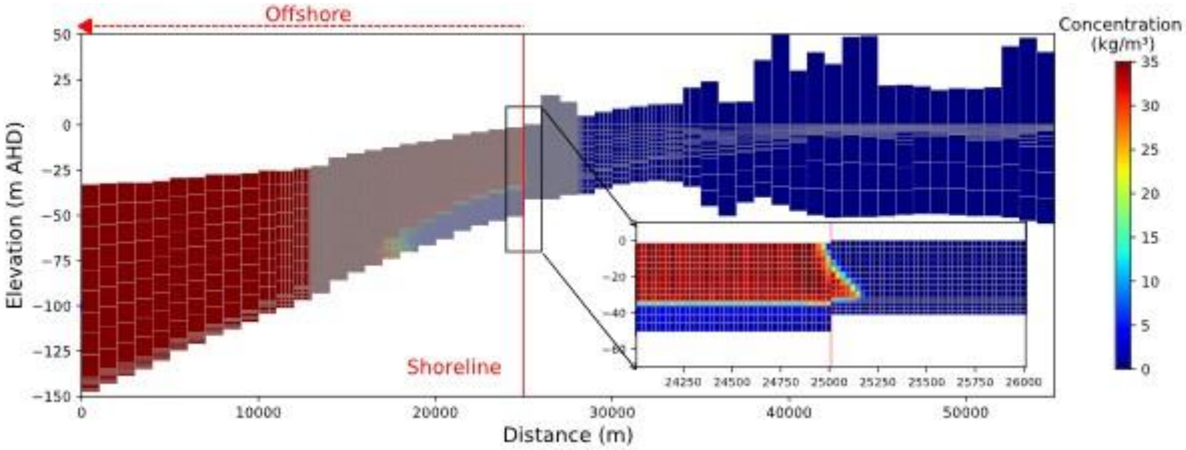


**Figure 18.** Steady-state distribution of salinity at CSE where the average pumping rate of 2013 was increased by 71%.

Consistent with the other two scenarios assessing seawater intrusion under future conditions, Figure 18 indicates minimal impact on the seawater extent when pumping is increased by 71%. A negligible toe movement of 1 m in the TLA caused by increased pumping is the least seawater intrusion that occurred within predictive scenarios, i.e., compared to the sea-level rise and reduced recharge simulations.

## 3.3 Summary of findings: Cross sections A to D

Tables 3 and 4 provide a summary of the results for Scenarios 1, 2, and 3, showing the distances of the interface (toe location) from the shoreline for CSA, CSB, CSC, CSD and CSE in the upper and lower aquifers. Table 3 presents the toe location distances for the upper aquifer, with negative values indicating onshore positions, whereas Table 4 shows the toe location distances for the lower aquifer, where positive values represent offshore positions.

**Table 3.** Toe location distances in the upper aquifer for CSA, CSB, CSC, CSD and CSE. Negative numbers indicate that the toe is onshore.

| | CSA | CSB | CSC | CSD | CSE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scenario 1 | -3,181 m | -3,176 m | -2,401 m | -3,965 m | -124 m |
| Scenario 2 | -4,036 m | -4,281 m | -2,734 m | -4,171 m | -123 m |
| Scenario 3a | -4,207 m | -5,242 m | -2,802 m | -4,607 m | -146 m |
| Scenario 3b | -4,293 m | -5,406 m | -2,926 m | -4,998 m | -151 m |
| Scenario 3c | -4,959 m | -6,338 m | -2,992 m | -4,969 m | -150 m |
| Scenario 3d | -4,667 m | -5,714 m | -2,876 m | -4,729 m | -147 m |

**Table 4.** Toe location distances in the lower aquifer (TCSA) for CSA, CSB, CSC, CSD and CSE (where negative numbers represent the distance inland from the shoreline to the seawater wedge toe, and positive numbers indicate that the toe is offshore in the TCSA).

| | CSA | CSB | CSC | CSD | CSE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scenario 1 | -9,344 m | 10,556 m | -5,129 m | -4,964 m | 7,018 m |
| Scenario 2 | -9,359 m | 10,543 m | -5,141 m | -4,965 m | 7,007 m |
| Scenario 3a | -14,250 m | 7,339 m | -5,473 m | -5,702 m | 6,878 m |
| Scenario 3b | -14,785 m | 6,870 m | -5,525 m | -6,092 m | 6,618 m |
| Scenario 3c | -17,841 m | 5,440 m | -5,844 m | -5,998 m | 6,681 m |
| Scenario 3d | -15,562 m | 6,428 m | -5,713 m | -5,835 m | 6,862 m |

**Cross Section A:** The modelling results for this cross section shows seawater in the landward part of the aquifer in both the upper and lower aquifers. This contrasts with CSE, in which the toe is around 7 km offshore. Recall that the toe is defined as the position of the 50% relative salinity contour (i.e., where the salinity is 50% of the seawater value, where seawater is assumed to be 35 kg/m$^3$) in the lowest model layer. Despite the onshore toe in the lower aquifer, there is considerable offshore freshwater in that aquifer, with the interface tip extending approximately 12 km offshore (see Figure H1). Freshwater discharge from the lower aquifer into the upper aquifer is also apparent (as unstable flow, as observed in the CSE results), causing freshwater-seawater mixing in the offshore part of the upper aquifer from upward leakage through the intervening aquitard.

The results of Scenario 2 indicate minimal seawater intrusion in the lower aquifer between 1970 and 2013 compared to pre-development conditions. This is reflected in a slight inland shift of the seawater toe by approximately 15 m (Scenario 1 versus Scenario 2; Table 4). This stability (in the seawater wedge) can be attributed to the low hydraulic conductivity of this layer (3 m/d). In contrast, the upper aquifer shows a noticeable increase in the seawater extent during the same 44-year period, with the seawater toe advancing approximately 855 m further inland (Scenario 1 versus Scenario 2; Table 3). This occurs because the modelled heads in the upper aquifer dropped by approximately 1 m at 5 km from the shoreline during 1970-2013, and the hydraulic conductivity of this layer has a high value (115 m/d).

Sea-level rise had only a small impact on the seawater extent in the upper aquifer, resulting in an inland toe shift of about 86 m (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3b; Table 4). However, the lower aquifer appears more vulnerable to seawater intrusion under sea-level rise, with the seawater toe advancing approximately 535 m further inland (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3b; Table 3). The reason for this difference is apparent in Figure B1 (Appendix B), showing the geometry of the CSA, whereby the lower aquifer is especially deep, and the base of the aquifer is mostly horizontal where the toe occurs, allowing it to more easily shift inland with the increased seawater head caused by sea-level rise. On the contrary, the upper aquifer has an upward sloping aquifer base near the coastline, acting as an impediment to seawater intrusion. Compared to the impacts observed under sea-level rise (Scenario 3b) and increased pumping (Scenario 3d), reduced recharge (Scenario 3c) had the most pronounced effect on seawater intrusion in both aquifers. It caused significant inland toe shifts of approximately 752 m in the upper aquifer (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3c; Table 3) and 3,591 m in the lower aquifer (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3c; Table 4).

Existing field measurements of groundwater salinity at wells near this location correspond to the TLA aquifer. The salinity distribution shows relatively fresh groundwater along this transect with EC values less than 2,000 µS/cm (Figure L1). These results are in agreement with the fresh groundwater that occurs at this location in the model, noting that a selection of the wells in this area are sufficiently deep (with the well bottom below mean sea level) to inform the extent of seawater in the aquifer, although none of the wells are installed to the base of the TLA, which would be necessary to observe shifts in the seawater toe.

A comparison between modelling results and the findings of a concurrent AEM survey is shown in Figure 19. The results indicate that a reasonable match between numerical model results and the AEM data was obtained in terms of the occurrence of the seawater wedge in the upper aquifer (TLA). Note that the AEM results can only be used to evaluate the occurrence of seawater in the upper aquifer (TLA) because the depth of the AEM survey for this cross section is shallower than the bottom of the TCSA.

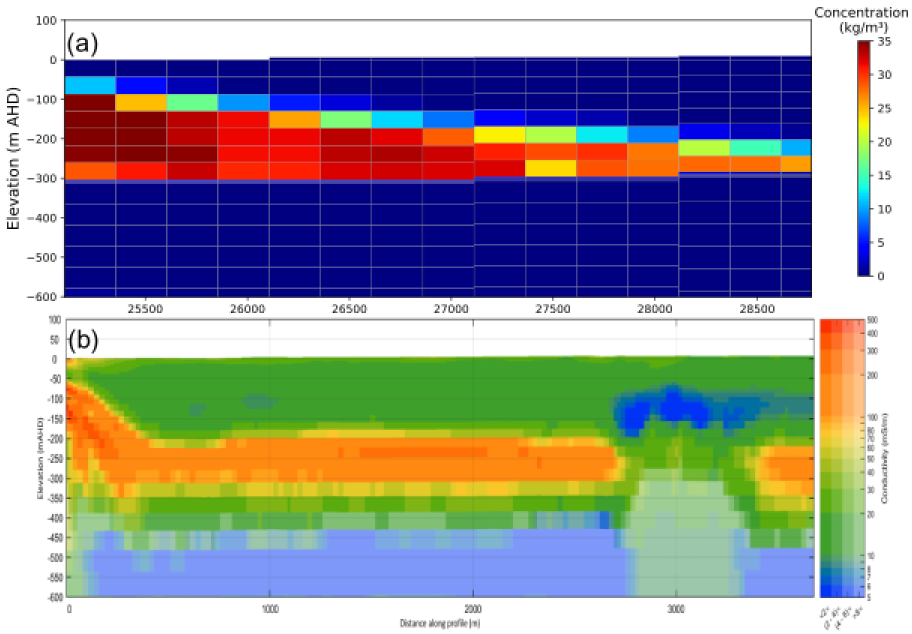


**Figure 19.** Comparison of numerical model and AEM (flight line 300121) results for cross section CSA. (a) Numerical model results derived from the salinity distribution at the end of the transient simulation (Figure J1); (b) interpretation of AEM survey derived from Davis et al. (2025a, 2025b). This figure is repeated in Appendix Q, in which the results for CSB are also shown.

**Cross Section B:** The model produced offshore fresh groundwater in the lower aquifer under pre-development conditions, with the seawater wedge tip occurring over 24 km from the shoreline (see Figure H2).24 In the model, the seawater wedge occurs at 3,176 m inland from the shoreline in the upper aquifer (TLA) under pre-development conditions. Evidence of fresh groundwater discharge from the lower aquifer into the upper aquifer is observed in the modelling results as patches of lower-salinity columns of water within the offshore zone of the upper aquifer that is otherwise filled with seawater.

The results of Scenario 2 indicate that significant seawater intrusion has occurred in the upper aquifer between 1970 and 2013, with the inland extent of the seawater wedge advancing by over 1 km (Scenario 1 versus Scenario 2; Table 3) since pre-development conditions. This occurs because the modelled heads in the upper aquifer dropped by approximately 1 m at 5 km from the shoreline during 1970-2013, and the hydraulic conductivity of this layer has a high value (115 m/d). In contrast, the simulation results of Scenario 2 exhibit limited seawater intrusion in the lower aquifer during the same 44-year period, with the seawater toe shifting landward by only 13 m (Scenario 1 versus Scenario 2; Table 4). The seawater wedge remained stable largely because the hydraulic conductivity of this layer has a low value (3 m/d).

Modelling results indicate that sea-level rise (Scenario 3b) presents the lowest risk of seawater intrusion compared with an 18% reduction in recharge (Scenario 3c) and a 71% increase in pumping (Scenario 3d). The toe shifts caused by sea-level rise (i.e., from one steady-state condition to another) were approximately 164 m inland in the upper aquifer (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3b; Table 3) and 469 m landward in the lower aquifer (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3b; Table 4). Simulation results indicate that reduced recharge (Scenario 3c) poses the highest risk (similar to CSA), leading to toe shift of approximately 1,096 m further inland in the upper aquifer, and a landward shift of 1,899 m in the lower aquifer.

Available groundwater salinity field measurements of the TLA near CSB indicate relatively fresh groundwater (including at depths below mean sea level), with most salinity values below 2,000 µS/cm (Figure L1). These field observations are consistent with the numerical modelling results, which produced relative concentration values close to zero near the above-mentioned well locations.

The comparison between the cross-sectional model outputs and the AEM survey data for CSB shows good alignment between the numerical model and AEM results in terms of the occurrence of the seawater wedge (Figure Q2). Similar to CSA, the AEM data is limited to assessing seawater occurrence in the upper aquifer (TLA), as the measurements do not extend below the base of the TCSA. Therefore, it is not possible to compare the AEM and numerical model predictions of the occurrence of seawater in the lower aquifer (TCSA).

**Cross Section C:** The modelling results from CSC indicate that seawater occurs at 2,401 m inland of the shoreline in the upper aquifer (TLA) and 5,129 m inland in the lower aquifer (TCSA) under pre-development conditions (see Figure H3), with some evidence of fresh groundwater discharge from the lower aquifer to the upper aquifer near the shoreline. The results of Scenario S1 (pre-development condition) indicate freshening of the offshore TCSA aquifer as a result of groundwater discharge, although significant mixing between waters of terrestrial and marine origins occurs causing mostly brackish water, rather than freshwater, in the offshore part of the lower aquifer. The interface tip is predicted to be approximately 3 km seaward in the TCSA.

The results indicate minimal seawater intrusion in the lower aquifer between 1970 and 2013, as reflected by a small inland toe shift of approximately 12 m (Scenario 1 versus Scenario 2; Table 4). The stability of the seawater wedge is due to the low hydraulic conductivity of the layer (3 m/d). No offshore fresh groundwater was predicted to occur at this location. In contrast, the seawater extent in the upper aquifer increased compared to pre-development conditions, with the toe advancing approximately 333 m further inland (Scenario 1 versus Scenario 2; Table 3). This occurs because the modelled heads in the upper aquifer dropped by approximately 0.5 m at 5 km from the shoreline during 1970-2013, and the hydraulic conductivity of this layer has a high value (115 m/d).

The simulation results indicate that sea-level rise had little impact on the seawater extent in the TCSA, with the toe shifting inland by approximately 52 m (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3b; Table 4). The toe moved further in the upper aquifer, advancing about 124 m inland (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3b; Table 3). Reduced recharge again caused the most seawater intrusion in both aquifers, resulting in inland toe shifts of approximately 190 m in the upper aquifer (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3c; Table 3) and 371 m in the lower aquifer (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3c; Table 4).

Shallow fresh groundwater (in the TLA) has been confirmed by salinity field measurements (in bores constructed below mean sea level) near CSC, with values below 2,000 µS/cm (Figure L2) but also, some wells showing elevated salinities that are more likely associated with terrestrial rather than marine sources of saltwater. These measurements align with the numerical model, which also predicts shallow fresh groundwater in CSC.

**Cross Section D:** Results for the pre-development simulation (Scenario 1) of CSD indicate the presence of an onshore seawater wedge in both the upper and lower aquifers, with the landward extent of seawater being larger in the lower aquifer (see Figure H4). Notably, no offshore fresh groundwater is observed in this location, likely due to the relatively low hydraulic heads - approximately 4 m AHD in the lower aquifer in 2013 at an inland distance of 6 km (Figures I4 and K4).

During the transient simulation (1970-2013), the seawater wedge was relative stable in the lower aquifer due to the low value of hydraulic conductivity (3 m/d). Conversely, the seawater toe in the upper aquifer (TLA) shifted approximately 206 m further inland during the 44-year simulation period (Scenario 1 versus Scenario 2; Table 3). This occurs because the modelled heads in the upper aquifer dropped by approximately 0.5 m at 5 km from the shoreline during 1970-2013, and the hydraulic conductivity of this layer has a high value (115 m/d).

Future seawater intrusion scenarios suggest that sea-level rise (Scenario 3b) is likely to have a greater impact on the extent of the seawater wedge in both aquifers (at CSD) compared to the other scenarios (i.e., recharge decline and increased pumping). The inland toe shifts were approximately 391 m in the upper aquifer and 390 m in the lower aquifer under sea-level rise scenarios (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3b; Tables 3 and 4). The simulation results show that compared to other scenarios (i.e., sea-level rise and recharge decline), a 71% increase in pumping (Scenario 3d) had the least impact in terms of the advancement of seawater in both the upper and lower aquifers (Scenario 3a versus Scenario 3d; Tables 3 and 4).

Figure L3 shows that field measurements of coastal groundwater in the TLA (near CSD) is relatively fresh, with salinity measurements mostly below 2,000 µS/cm. This is consistent with the predicted of the numerical model of CSD.

# 4 Discussion

This study has sought to improve the current understanding of the spatial extent of seawater within Limestone Coast aquifers. The analysis of five representative cross sections revealed significant variability of the extent and threat of seawater intrusion across the region. The main factors causing this variability are spatial differences in the hydraulic head and in predictions of head changes occurring over time (or between steady-state scenarios), and variability in aquifer hydraulic properties (e.g., hydraulic conductivity, aquifer thickness) between cross sections. The results indicate a somewhat consistent seawater penetration in the TLA, at least in CSA, CSB and CSD, with the inland toe wedge located ~4 km from the coast. In contrast, the toe location in the TLA at CSC is predicted to be about 2 km inland, while the most northern cross section, CSE, shows an inland seawater extent of just 123 m from the coast. These results build on the prior study of Mustafa et al. (2012), who identified the presence of seawater in Limestone Coast aquifers through water chemistry analysis. They encountered seawater up to 1.5 km from the coast in certain TLA units. Given the limited number of wells that penetrate to the base of the TLA, it is unlikely that Mustafa et al. (2012) had sufficient monitoring well coverage to discover the landward limit of seawater (as indicated by the toe position in our modelling results) in Limestone Coast aquifers. The current work also adds to the study by DEW (2023), which examined Limestone Coast coastal aquifers encompassing CSA and CSB in this study. Their results suggest a toe location of about 2 km inland in the vicinity of CSA and CSB, although they acknowledged that the simplified approach that was used to simulate the freshwater-seawater interface (with the SWI2 package) likely impacted their estimates of the seawater extent.

The comparison of groundwater heads between the cross-sectional model with offshore extension (where only freshwater is simulated) and the parent model shows a slightly difference. As there are few field measurements of heads near the coast to allow an assessment of which of the models (cross-sectional models or parent models) has produced a more accurate representation of the coastal boundary, it is presently unclear whether the more physically based coastal simulation undertaken in our study (relative to Morgan et al. (2015)) has provided a more reliable prediction of coastal groundwater heads than the parent model. Given the link between heads and salinities in coastal aquifer theory, the comparison between AEM-based estimates of the seawater extent (see Figures 19 to Q2) offers useful insight into the reliability of cross-sectional modelling outputs (as a direct comparison to salinity and an indirect assessment of heads), even if it is difficult to check the heads near the coast directly.

The modelling results support the potential occurrence of offshore fresh groundwater in the TCSA, particularly at CSA, CSB and CSE, as discussed by Lamontagne et al. (2015) and Morgan et al. (2015). This is consistent with the analysis of Knight et al. (2019), who found brackish groundwater up to 13.2 km offshore in the TCSA. Their analysis was based on a combination of offshore geophysical data and analytical modelling.

SWI in the TLA was assessed for the 44 year-period of simulation (1970 – 2013). Modelling results indicate inland shifts of the seawater wedge of about 1 km in CSA and CSB, and less severe SWI in the other cross sections, including almost no SWI at CSE. This difference in the SWI that occurred in the various cross sections arises because there is significantly more pumping and greater long-term drawdown in the southern part of the study area, where CSA and CSB are located. In contrast, the northern cross section (CSE) has little or no pumping, resulting in more stable groundwater levels and less SWI over time. These results add to the analysis of DEW (2023), who refrained from reporting on SWI modelling outcomes due to uncertainties associated with the SWI2 package. Furthermore, DEW (2023) did not assess the potential effects of future climate change or other scenarios on the seawater extent, highlighting a critical gap addressed in this study.

The karst nature of the Limestone Coast is undoubtedly an important control on seawater intrusion, and yet, the current study neglects karst conduits and fractures, and adopts the hydraulic properties of the regional model of Morgan et al. (2015). Where pumping occurs in the vicinity of conduits, we expect seawater to be drawn preferentially inland through those pathways. This process is not considered in the model, partly because it is unclear where karst conduits occur, but also, there are very few measurements in the coastal fringe that would assist in assessing the model's goodness of fit as a resolution that could capture karst features. The AEM survey may provide observations of salinity (and geological) structure in the coastal aquifer at a multitude of sites, which would allow for additional modelling scenarios that incorporate alternative parameter distributions to reflect potential karst feature locations. Further research effort is also warranted to compare the results of the dispersive modelling undertaken in this study with the analysis of DEW (2023), in which the seawater intrusion (SWI) package of MODFLOW was used to obtain an approximate, regional-scale evaluation of the seawater extent in the aquifer. The SWI2 package adopts a sharp interface, and therefore, probably over-estimates the seawater extent according to prior studies comparing dispersive and sharp-interface models (e.g., Pool and Carrera, 2011; Werner, 2017b).

The match between numerical model results and the interpretations of the AEM survey, applicable to the TLA in terms of the occurrence of the seawater wedge, was found to be reasonable for CSA and CSB, where cross-sectional models were constructed within the AEM survey area. Differences between the two, independent forms of seawater extent analysis are attributable to a host of possible causes that influence the accuracy of two methods in deciphering the occurrence of the seawater wedge. For example, the cross-sectional models rely on homogenised representations of the TLA, TCSA, and the intervening aquitard, and yet, heterogeneities may play an important role in modifying the seawater extent, as discussed above. The salinity distributions extracted from the AEM survey will reflect the effects of heterogeneities; however, the AEM readings are themselves influenced by heterogeneities because the sediment properties influence the electrical conductance and the magnetic response an electromagnetic disturbance (Ball et al., 2020). As such, geological features (e.g., karst conduits) may be indistinguishable from salinity variability, albeit salinity and geological variability affect the subsurface electromagnetic signals by different amounts. Environmental conditions, such as electromagnetic noise from infrastructure or temperature variations during the survey, can also affect data quality (Kang et al., 2021). The depth limitations of AEM further limit the comparison between AEM results and the numerical model.

# 5 Conclusions

This report aimed to evaluate the extent of seawater intrusion in the coastal aquifers of the Limestone Coast and assess the risks associated with current and future groundwater stresses by simulating five representative cross sections perpendicular to the coast (CSA to CSE). This work was conducted as part of Task 4 (Seawater Intrusion Risk) of the Goyder Project: Adaptation of the South-Eastern Drainage System under a Changing Climate. Additionally, a key objective of this study was to develop a methodology for extracting seawater intrusion (SWI) models from existing regional groundwater flow models. This methodology is intended to facilitate future assessments of SWI across a broader range of locations within the study area. The main findings of this project are summarised as:

1. Steady-state numerical simulations predict an inland seawater wedge in the Tertiary Limestone Aquifer (TLA) as reflected in the numerical simulations of cross-sections CSA to CSE, whereas a seawater wedge that is inland of the coast in the lower Tertiary Confined Sand Aquifer (TCSA) was only obtained at three cross-section locations: CSA, CSC and CSD.
2. Transient simulations for the period 1970-2013 predict that SWI in the TLA during that time was generally less in the north (e.g., CSE) than in the south (e.g., CSA). An exception is CSB, in which a large SWI movement during 1970-2013 is simulated, with an inland shift of the seawater wedge toe exceeding 1 km.
3. The results indicate that SWI in the TCSA during 1970-2013 has been less than SWI in the TLA, with the maximum inland shift in the seawater wedge toe of only 15 m in the TCSA, which occurred in the model of CSA.
4. Simulations under sea-level rise scenarios underscore the variability of the accompanying SWI in both the TLA and TCSA across the Limestone Coast. SWI in the TLA (from sea-level rise) was largest at CSD (391 m), while CSA, CSB, and CSC exhibit moderate landward advances in the TLA (86 m, 164 m, and 124 m, respectively), and CSE showed minimal SWI (~5 m) in the TLA due to sea-level rise. Sea-level rise is expected to cause greater SWI in the TCSA. Inland and landward movements of the wedge toe were generally larger in the south, from 535 m at CSA down to 52 m at CSC, with intermediate values at CSB (469 m), CSD (390 m), and CSE (260 m).
5. Recharge-reduction simulations caused larger SWI than that resulting from sea-level rise or the transient historical period (1970-2013). In the TLA, CSB experienced the greatest toe movement (1,096 m), followed by CSA (752 m), CSD (362 m) and CSC (190 m), while CSE underwent only minor toe displacement from a reduction in recharge. In the TCSA, a reduction in recharge caused SWI that was as much as an order of magnitude larger than the predicted SWI in the TLA. That is, the toe moved 3,591 m at CSA, 1,899 m at CSB, 371 m at CSC, 296 m at CSD, and 197 m at CSE in the TCSA due to the imposition of an 18% recharge reduction.
6. Pumping-increase simulations revealed SWI that was larger than the SWI that was predicted to have occurred during 1970-2013. The maximum toe shift in the TLA occurred at CSB (472 m) and CSA (460 m), with CSD (122 m) and CSC (74 m) showing smaller toe advances, and CSE again negligible. In the TCSA, increased pumping led to the toe of the wedge moving 1,312 m at CSA, 911 m at CSB, 240 m at CSC, 133 m at CSD, and moved minimally at CSE.
7. A reasonable match between numerical model results and AEM data for the TLA in cross sections CSA and CSB (see Figures 19 and Q2) indicates that the models appear to have simulated the occurrence of the seawater wedge with a reasonable level of reliability, albeit direct measurements of the freshwater-seawater interface are needed to confirm the modelling predictions of seawater extent. The depth limitations of AEM data prevent a comparison with numerical model estimates of the seawater wedge in the TCSA, for which there are also very few monitoring sites that can be used to aid in validating the numerical models.
8. The proposed methodology in this study for extracting cross-sectional models from the regional model was validated by inter-model comparisons, as evidenced by the closeness of hydrographs and the adequately low bias observed when comparing the results of both models.

# 6 Recommendations

There are several shortcomings in the existing dataset where opportunities exist to update the existing models so that more realistic depictions of seawater intrusion can be simulated. For example, heterogeneity within the stratigraphic units likely plays a key role in the movement of seawater in the coastal aquifer. Geological modelling is warranted to produce stochastic realisations of the geology of the Limestone Coast, similar to other efforts to do this where groundwater transport depends on strong contrasts in sediment hydraulic properties (e.g., Schiavo, 2023; Li et al., 2022). This approach will allow for the assessment of geological uncertainty and its effect on the extent of seawater intrusion, and will no doubt provide opportunities to better understand coastal wetland-aquifer-ocean interactions, amongst a host of other relevant groundwater-related knowledge gaps (e.g., the estimation of submarine groundwater discharge, nutrient transport, etc.).

Given that we have relied upon the model of Morgan et al. (2015) in developing SWI models (because it better represents the regional stratigraphy compared to more recent studies), there is a need to update that model with more recent pumping and recharge values. This is notwithstanding recommendations by Morgan et al. (2015) for a suite of other improvements to their regional model. Additionally, a thorough evaluation of groundwater quality data is necessary, including assessing where saline groundwater is associated with terrestrial processes or seawater intrusion, and considering saline groundwater from non-marine sources. Also, the current representation of the drainage network is quite rudimentary and would benefit from being updated, particularly in terms of where fresh or saline groundwater enters the drains. Moreover, it is necessary to better capture the variation in topography due to its significant influence on modelled groundwater evapotranspiration, and the substantial impact of evapotranspiration on the water balance. Finally, the model's representation of wetlands, especially those along the coast, is rather simple and should be improved to better capture links between wetland hydrology and coastal groundwater movements.

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