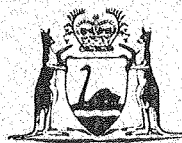
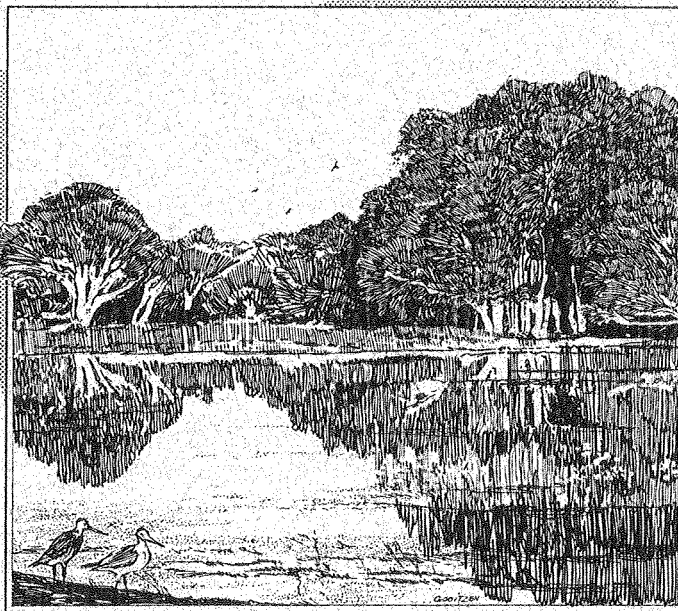


Draft
Wetland Conservation Policy
for Western Australia



December 1992



WETLAND CONSERVATION

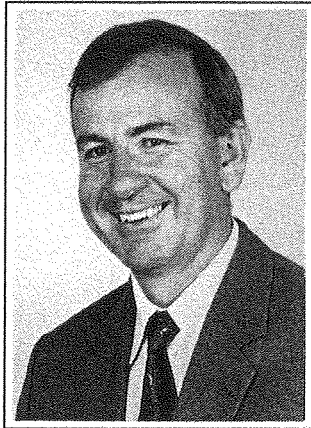
This policy was prepared through the Integrated Catchment Management Coordinating Group by the Department of Conservation and Land Management in consultation with the following agencies:

- ❖ Office of Catchment Management
- ❖ Environmental Protection Authority
- ❖ Department of Planning and Urban Development
- ❖ Department of Agriculture
- ❖ Department of Minerals and Energy
- ❖ Department of Local Government
- ❖ Waterways Commission
- ❖ Water Authority of Western Australia
- ❖ Wetland groups affiliated with the Conservation Council of Western Australia



WETLAND CONSERVATION

PREFACE



I am very pleased to release for public comment a draft Wetland Conservation Policy for Western Australia.

It is intended that this policy should have three components: a Statement of Policy, a Strategy for Implementation and a Program for Action.

Components one and two are elaborated in the following pages.

It is proposed that the third component - the Program for Action - be developed by each of the agencies involved in implementation, following finalisation of the policy and the strategy.

The five primary objectives are deliberately expressed in pure form, in the belief that this policy should aim high in its long term pursuit of the protection of wetlands. It is recognised that these aims will not be achieved immediately. The strategies herein provide a process towards the achievement of the primary objectives.

Comments on this draft should be forwarded by 26 March 1993 to the:

Minister for the Environment
12th floor Dumas House
Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Jim McGinty MLA
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



DRAFT WETLAND DEFINITION

DEFINITION

The following definition is adopted for the purposes of this policy.

“Wetlands are areas of permanent, or periodic inundation; whether natural or otherwise; fresh, brackish or saline; static or flowing. Typically they include lakes, swamps, marshes and dams; estuaries, rivers, streams and springs, and intertidal sand flats, mud flats and mangroves.

Exclusions are marine areas (other than intertidal flats and mangroves), and areas which typically do not support water-dependent plant or animal life (e.g. flooded playing fields or paved areas)”.

This definition above is based on the physical, chemical and biological properties of wetlands. It will enable the identification of wetlands for the purposes of inventory, evaluation and management. The definition is consistent with, or complementary to, other current definitions of wetlands, such as that used in the Swan Coastal Plain Lakes Environment Protection Policy.

COMMENT

There is no single, indisputable, ecologically sound definition for wetlands, primarily because of the diversity of wetlands and because the demarcation between wet and dry environments lies along a continuum. Because reasons or needs for defining wetlands also vary, a great proliferation of definitions has arisen. The definition proposed here is similar in scope to that adopted by the (Ramsar) “Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitat”. However, unlike the Ramsar Convention, the proposed definition does not include “areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres”. In Western Australia, conservation needs in such areas will be addressed through marine (rather than wetland) programs and legislation.



DRAFT STATE WETLAND CONSERVATION POLICY

The Government of Western Australia, recognising that wetlands,

- ❖ are essential habitats for a multitude of water-dependent plant and animal species, many of which have high public appeal (e.g. waterbirds);
- ❖ play a key role in supporting the diversity and abundance of species within surrounding terrestrial ecosystems;
- ❖ add considerable landscape diversity and aesthetic appeal to a mainly arid land;
- ❖ provide many opportunities for enjoyment for the people of Western Australia;
- ❖ may be of international significance, particularly as habitats for migratory bird species;
- ❖ have other significant values, including flood mitigation, water resource, soil conservation, fish nurseries, aboriginal and historical significance, recreation and tourism;
- ❖ form one of the habitats that will be most affected by climate change;
- ❖ have, in many instances, been unnecessarily lost or diminished in value through inappropriate use or management;
- ❖ may be conserved and enhanced through proper planning and management,

is committed to identifying, maintaining and managing the State's wetland resource, including the full range of wetland values, for the long term benefit of the people of Western Australia.

In making this commitment the Government establishes the following principal objectives with respect to conservation of the resource.

- ❖ To prevent the further loss of wetland area or degradation of valuable wetlands and wetland types, and promote wetland creation and restoration.
- ❖ To include viable representatives of major wetland types and key wildlife habitats within a Statewide network of appropriately located and managed conservation reserves which ensure the continued survival of species, ecosystems and ecological functions.
- ❖ To maintain the species and genetic diversity in viable wild populations of wetland-dependent flora and fauna.
- ❖ To maintain the abundance of waterbird populations, particularly migratory species.
- ❖ To greatly increase community awareness and appreciation of the many values of wetlands, and the importance of sound catchment management in the maintenance of those values.

This commitment is made in accordance with the conservation objectives of the State Conservation Strategy for Western Australia (1987) and contributes towards its implementation.



DRAFT STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The following Draft Strategy outlines the way in which the State Government will endeavour to achieve the objectives of the State Wetland Conservation Policy.

It is evident that these objectives will not be achieved without strong support from the community.

The Government is not able, nor committed, to provide all the resources necessary for achievement of the objectives.

A cooperative approach, involving State, Commonwealth and Local Governments, landholders, the private sector, conservation organizations, and other interest groups will be essential.

The Government will encourage community participation by promoting wetland conservation, and by facilitating voluntary efforts to conserve, restore and enhance wetlands, principally through the development and provision of sound advice concerning wetland values and the management of wetlands and their catchments.

The implementation of this policy will be coordinated by a Wetlands Advisory Committee.

Although Western Australia's river systems are within the scope of this policy, their specific conservation needs will be addressed separately under other programs, due to their special attributes and values.

It is the intention of this policy to encourage the conservation and proper management of wetlands, however, where implementation of this policy conflicts with other proposals, that conflict will be resolved through the normal processes of State Government.



In order to achieve the first primary objective of the State Wetland Conservation Policy, namely "to prevent the further loss of wetland area, or degradation of valuable wetlands and wetland types, and promote wetland creation and restoration",

the Government will, in addition to the actions listed under other objectives,

- 1.1 ensure coordination and cooperation between its agencies in order to achieve the policy's objectives;
- 1.2 encourage cooperation and coordination between Commonwealth, State and Local Government and private sector organizations for the conservation of wetlands;



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- 1.3 ensure land and water-use planning procedures promote the conservation of wetlands on a catchment or regional basis;
- 1.4 ensure that any projects likely to have significant adverse effects on wetlands are assessed by the EPA;
- 1.5 develop guide-lines based on ecological grounds for provision of "buffers" between proposed developments and wetlands;
- 1.6 develop and promote the use of a single classification system, including vegetation classification, for the wetlands of Western Australia;
- 1.7 on a catchment or regional basis, prepare inventories of the wetlands of W.A., in particular their distribution, attributes, functions and uses;
- 1.8. periodically review the state (quantity and quality) of the wetlands of W.A. through comparative inventories and monitoring, on a catchment or regional basis to identify, and suggest remedies for, any failures in achieving the aims of this policy;
- 1.9 develop a wetland evaluation process, including identification of "beneficial uses" and management objectives, with Statewide applicability, that will assist in ensuring that planning and management decisions concerning wetlands and their catchments are based upon as complete a knowledge as possible of current and foreseen wetland conservation values;
- 1.10 evaluate wetlands on a continuing basis as knowledge becomes available and circumstances change;
- 1.11 undertake and facilitate research needed to ensure that wetland conservation and catchment management measures are soundly-based and cost-effective;
- 1.12 establish an advisory unit to provide wetland management advice to planners, managers, advisers and private landowners, including landowner groups (e.g. Land Conservation Districts) and to oversee the implementation of this policy;
- 1.13 develop informative, technical products (pamphlets, manuals, videos etc.) concerning wetland conservation, creation, restoration and enhancement, for use by planners, managers, advisers, and private landowners;
- 1.14 encourage and assist private landowners to conserve, create, restore and enhance privately owned wetlands on a voluntary basis;



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- 1.15 encourage Local Authorities to prepare and implement, with public involvement, management plans for wetlands under their control;
- 1.16 develop and encourage the creation of innovative designs for improving the wildlife habitat value of artificial water supply, storage and drainage systems;

The Environmental Protection Authority and the Department of Conservation and Land Management have primary responsibility for achievement of this first objective in collaboration with other relevant agencies. Appropriate agencies will take responsibility for actions listed.



In order to achieve the second primary objective of the State Wetland Conservation Policy, namely "to include viable representatives of major wetland types and key wildlife habitats within a Statewide network of appropriately located and managed conservation reserves which ensures the continued survival of the species, ecosystems and ecological functions";

the Government will, in addition to actions listed under other objectives,

- 2.1 through wetland classification, inventory and biological survey, identify major wetland types and key wildlife habitats;
- 2.2 assess the extent to which major wetland types and key wildlife habitats are represented in the State's conservation reserve system;
- 2.3 where appropriate, reserve additional representative wetlands and key habitats;
- 2.4 give adequate emphasis to wetlands, wetland buffers and wetland catchments in the purchase of conservation lands;
- 2.5 develop management goals, management criteria and monitoring programs for wetland conservation reserves;
- 2.6 with provision for community input, prepare and implement management plans for wetland conservation reserves;
- 2.7 provide for the management of wetland conservation reserves;
- 2.8 develop and provide training programs for wetland researchers, planners, managers and advisers employed by State and Local Government and the private sector;



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- 2.9 fulfil its responsibilities under international agreements relating to the conservation of migratory waterbirds and wetlands;
- 2.10 under the provisions of international agreements relating to wetlands and migratory waterbirds, seek Commonwealth assistance for wetland purchase, management and research, training of relevant staff, and monitoring;
- 2.11 undertake the support studies needed to identify wetlands of international significance, especially as habitats for migratory waterbirds;
- 2.12 investigate the importance of aesthetics in the public's perception of wetland values, particularly in relation to establishment and consolidation of wetland conservation reserves, and the provision of adequate buffers;
- 2.13 further develop environmentally-sensitive methods of dealing with public issues such as nuisance midge and mosquito problems;
- 2.14 establish a Wetlands Conservation Trust to raise funds from wetland users, owners and managers, including the private sector, for wetland purchase, management and related research.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management has primary responsibility for achievement of this second objective in collaboration with other relevant agencies. Appropriate agencies will take responsibility for actions listed.



In order to achieve the third primary objective of the Wetland Policy, namely "to maintain the species and genetic diversity in viable wild populations of wetland-dependent flora and fauna",

the Government will, in addition to actions listed under other objectives,

- 3.1 review the state of knowledge of the taxonomy (classification into genus, species etc.) and geographic distribution of the flora and fauna of wetlands;
- 3.2 undertake and support research needed to clarify the taxonomy and distribution of poorly known groups, particularly those considered to be ecologically important (e.g. rushes and sedges, crustaceans, aquatic insect larvae, diatoms, rotifers);



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- 3.3 undertake and support research needed to clarify ecological roles and requirements of species judged to be important in the maintenance of wetland values (e.g. melaleucas, casuarinas, eucalypts, rushes and sedges, ostracods, chironomids, waterbirds);
- 3.4 undertake and support research needed to clarify the influence of water chemistry (e.g. salinity, pH, nutrient loads), hydrology (e.g. seasonal variation in water depth) and microbiology (e.g. decomposition and nutrient cycling) on ecosystem functioning and the maintenance of species diversity;
- 3.5 through endangered species programs, seek to prevent the extinction of endangered species of indigenous, wetland flora and fauna (e.g. western swamp tortoise);
- 3.6 manage utilization, where permitted, of species of wetland flora and fauna so as to ensure that harvests are not to the long term detriment of the populations of those species or their habitats;
- 3.7 ensure that tangible, long term benefits for the conservation of harvested species and their habitats result from utilization of wetland flora and fauna, where permitted;
- 3.8 endeavour to manage the wetland resource so as to maximise species diversity;
- 3.9 review the implications of possible climate and sea level change for the maintenance of wetland flora and fauna species diversity and wetland ecosystems;
- 3.10 seek opportunities for mitigating adverse effects of possible climate and sea level change on wetland species diversity and wetland ecosystems;

The Department of Conservation and Land Management has primary responsibility for achievement of this third objective, in collaboration with other relevant agencies. Appropriate agencies will take responsibility for actions listed.



To achieve the fourth primary objective of the Wetland Conservation Policy, namely "to maintain the abundance of waterbird populations, particularly migratory species",

the Government will, in addition to actions listed under other objectives,

- 4.1 further develop existing programs for monitoring the abundance, distribution and seasonal movements of waterbird populations;



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- 4.2 establish population abundance goals for waterbirds, on a State or regional basis, commencing with black swan (*Cygnus atratus*), ducks (Anatidae) and migratory and resident waders (Charadrii);
- 4.3 through appropriate research, identify habitat requirements for achievement of waterbird population goals;
- 4.4 maintain and enhance, through management and the provision of management advice, wetland habitats required for achievement of waterbird population goals;
- 4.5 through appropriate research, identify other factors (besides habitat) which limit the abundance of waterbird populations (e.g. excessive predation of nesting birds and young);
- 4.6 endeavour through management, and the provision of management advice, to increase waterbird productivity and decrease mortality on appropriate wetlands and wetland types, as necessary to achieve population goals;
- 4.7 through appropriate channels (e.g. Commonwealth Government), encourage the maintenance of populations and habitats of migratory waterbird species in countries which share those populations with Western Australia, i.e. eastern Asia and the USSR;
- 4.8 facilitate the efforts of volunteer groups wishing to rehabilitate sick and injured waterfowl;
- 4.9 investigate the causes of major waterbird mortalities (due to botulism, algal poisoning etc.) and, where practicable, take or encourage actions necessary to minimise recurrences;
- 4.10 review the implications of possible climate and sea level change for the maintenance of waterbird abundance;
- 4.11 seek opportunities for mitigating adverse effects of possible climate and sea level change on waterbird abundance;

The Department of Conservation and Land Management will have primary responsibility for achievement of this fourth objective, in conjunction with other relevant agencies.



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In order to achieve the fifth primary objective of the Conservation Policy, namely “to greatly increase community awareness and appreciation of the many values of wetlands, and the importance of sound catchment management in the maintenance of those values”,

the Government will, in addition to actions listed under other objectives,

- 5.1 further involve the community in cooperative research, monitoring and management projects relating to wetlands, wetland biota, and wetland catchments;
- 5.2 establish a wetland education unit in CALM to liaise with the Education Department and to prepare, and facilitate preparation, of a wide range of educational material and activities programs for schools, tertiary institutes, State and Local Government authorities and advisory services target audiences and interested groups and individuals;
- 5.3 develop training programs in wetland education for regionally-based, government education and extension officers;
- 5.4 encourage and support the establishment and operation of a small number of strategically-located wetland centres, e.g. the proposed Wetlands Visitor Centre on the Vasse Estuary at Busselton;
- 5.5 investigate opportunities for increasing tourist use and enjoyment of wetlands through increased publicity and the provision of improved, guided access to appropriate wetlands, particularly those of international, national or regional significance;
- 5.6 obtain and provide resources needed to ensure that improved tourist access, where provided, does not detract from, and where possible, enhances, other wetland values;

The Department of Conservation and Land Management has primary responsibility for achievement of this fifth objective, in collaboration with other relevant agencies. Appropriate agencies will take responsibility for actions listed.