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MANAGING
AND PROTECTING
WESTERN
AUSTRALIA'S
MOST VITAL
RESOURCE



WATER AND RIVERS
COMMISSION

From the chief executive

If there is a single principle understood by natural resource managers it is that water is vital – to everything.

At a basic level, without water there is no industry, no agriculture, no viable environment.



Western Australia understands this principle well. Its community, industry, and agriculture compete for limited water resources.

The Water and Rivers Commission is a custodian for all the State's water and is responsible for managing these precious resources.

Our specific reason for being is to manage water resources for the benefit of present and future generations in partnership with the community.

To facilitate this we bring to a consultative process water resource stakeholders, credible data and considered policy. We ensure that Western Australia's water resources are equitably managed, protected and allocated between vying interests.

This is not an easy job, but it is approached and delivered with seriousness and professionalism.

As Australia's only specialist water resource management agency, I believe we have one of the best water allocation processes. It can be tailored to meet the specific needs of a diverse range of social, environmental and hydrological situations across Western Australia.

You will see in the case studies of the West Kimberley and Harvey Basin, the process is working and meets environmental needs and the expectations of today's society.

Our role, our mission, and our goals are outlined in this brochure. Our approach, work and planning, have us well placed to meet the water resource challenges of today and the future.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Payne'.

Roger Payne
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Who we are

Western Australia led the way in January 1996 when it restructured its water industry and established the Water and Rivers Commission – the country's first independent and comprehensive water resource manager.

It established a new system of assessment, allocation, regulation and protection, allowing a proactive, transparent approach to managing and protecting our most vital resource.

The system is based on the philosophy of good science supporting tough decisions made in partnership with the community.

The Commission operates under the *Water and Rivers Commission Act 1995* and is responsible to the Minister for Water Resources. The Act sets the ground rules for how water should be used and sustainably managed in WA, while guiding development of the State's water resource.



What we do

West Australian homes, industry, agriculture and the environment all rely on a steady stream of quality water.

To meet these challenges the Water and Rivers Commission's 300 staff act together to understand, balance and meet community and environmental needs for water.

We quantify the amount of surface and groundwater in a particular region, and assess water quality, then we identify how much water is needed to maintain and protect environmental features.

The allocation process determines the level of sustainable use for people including public scheme supplies and development projects such as mining and horticulture. We manage these through water allocation licences.

WATER AND RIVERS COMMISSION

To plan and manage our future water supplies the Water and Rivers Commission provides a range of advice and seeks input from key sectors of the community, including developers, local councils, planning and environment agencies, farmers and conservationists.

We help local communities manage their own water resources by establishing catchment and waterways management groups. These community-led groups bring together key players to guide and coordinate environmental management and water resources protection.

Through the State Salinity Action Plan the Commission is also taking action to improve the quality of our water supplies, waterways and agricultural land.

Public education is vital in protecting our water resources. The "Ribbons of Blue" schools and community program and general community awareness efforts make sure this and the next generation know about water issues.

Natural resource management – a negotiating organisation

Effective natural resource management is as fundamental to Western Australia's future as water is to life. Done properly, it is about understanding what nature has given us and working with it in a sustainable way.

To ensure better water resource management and partnerships with the community, the Commission has adopted negotiating organisation principles to underpin its business approach. We continually develop our business by using these principles to set and achieve our goals.

By setting clear goals we work toward achieving defined outcomes. To do this we are responsive, flexible and assertive, but we understand the importance of relationships.

As a facilitating organisation, our outcomes are achieved through proactive negotiation which balances and integrates stakeholder views.

We have established and developed links with a range of community groups, key user and industry bodies, and government at a local, state and national level to better understand and help resolve water usage issues.

Our role in Government enables us to participate in the State's planning and development processes. We are able to influence policy to ensure sustainable development and protection for water resources through negotiating with agencies such as the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Agriculture Western Australia, Department of Resources Development and the Ministry for Planning.

Through our proven negotiating approach, we are able to lead the difficult process of water resources management in Western Australia.



Water resource protection

Natural resource management must also involve a proactive effort to protect, enhance and conserve water resources.

We believe people should be able to live in a clean and safe environment and that the environment's productive capacity should be protected and natural ecosystems maintained.

Protecting water resources can be achieved in part through regulation. But this approach rarely provides the whole solution in environmental protection.

Good land use planning is essential and this can only be achieved if planners are aware of the issues and interactions in natural resource management. General community



awareness and involvement is also essential in this aspect of resource management.

To involve the community the Commission provides financial, technical and administrative support, often in partnership with other government agencies, to community-based catchment management and river care projects across the State.

In Western Australia, our heavy reliance on groundwater has led to highly developed systems to ensure groundwater reserves are protected from the potential impacts of urban development and industry.



Water quality evaluation and monitoring are key Commission activities. Monitoring ensures water resources including wetlands, waterways, water supplies and restored sites maintain their water quality, while providing a performance measure for land management initiatives.

To reduce threats to water resources quality, the Commission plays an integral role in guiding planning by working closely with State and local governments to achieve land use plans that recognise and incorporate water resource protection.

Environmental water provisions – a snapshot

To provide for water in the environment the Commission follows these steps for surface water – rivers, streams and wetlands – and for groundwater:



- identify the significant environmental values, particularly those most sensitive to change
- identify any social and environmental water needs, including recreational amenity
- work out the water regime needed to maintain those environmental and social values
- calculate how much water can be used for public, agricultural and industrial needs
- allow public review of the proposed "allocations"
- review public input
- set the rules for licensing water use in the particular river or groundwater area based on the above



Allocation planning

Successful water resource management requires careful long-term investigation and planning which responds to community needs and values.

Western Australia's water allocation process is being further refined in response to the Council of Australian Governments' water reform framework and the establishment of the *National Principles for the Provision of Water to Ecosystems*.

While some key areas of allocation are to be developed through legislative change, the Water and Rivers Commission is already working to ensure that future water needs can be met through environmentally sustainable development.

This approach has clear roles for the community, the Commission, the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and water service providers.

Under the allocation planning process, the Water and Rivers Commission sets the context in a strategic water allocation plan which is developed in consultation with the community.

A water service provider — such as the Water Corporation — identifies the need for additional water and prepares a strategy which manages demand and seeks access to specific sources.

The Water and Rivers Commission reviews the provider's strategy and sets out the requirements for access to new sources, in particular, setting the level for efficient water uses.

The Commission prepares detailed water allocation plans for water source areas to determine how much water can be allocated for supply while protecting the environment. This is also open to public review.



The EPA then assesses the allocation plan for the water resource's environmental acceptability. If the plan is approved, the Commission advises the water service provider which sources and how much water is available for development.

Once environmental approval has been given and the source is actually needed, the final stage is for the Water and Rivers Commission to issue a water allocation licence.



Case studies

Two examples show the practical application of the Commission's approach to strategic water management, highlighting our commitment to integrating community consultation with technical assessment.

Harvey Basin

Securing water supplies for Perth's future entails a continuing search and careful planning to ensure optimal development of accessible, affordable water sources.

Four water supply options, including a new Harvey dam, are being evaluated in a plan for sustainable use of the surface water resources of the Harvey Basin, about 150 kilometres south of Perth.

The Commission's plan sets out how much water should be set aside to protect the environment and other local uses, and how much can be allocated for consumption.

Although water resources in the Harvey Basin are already extensively used, an extra 34 million cubic metres of water per year from the Harvey River could be made available to meet future demands in Perth. The social and environmental impacts would have to be properly managed and existing irrigation entitlements maintained.

The "Proposed Harvey Basin Surface Water Allocation Plan" sets a limit on the size of any future reservoir and identifies the environmental, social and economic issues associated with the four water supply options.

Public input is as important as scientific, technical and environmental studies in developing the water allocation proposals.

The Commission encouraged public submissions on the proposed plan to involve the whole community in future water development decisions.

West Kimberley

The Water and Rivers Commission is playing a pivotal role in the State Government's consideration of a major irrigated agriculture proposal in the State's north.

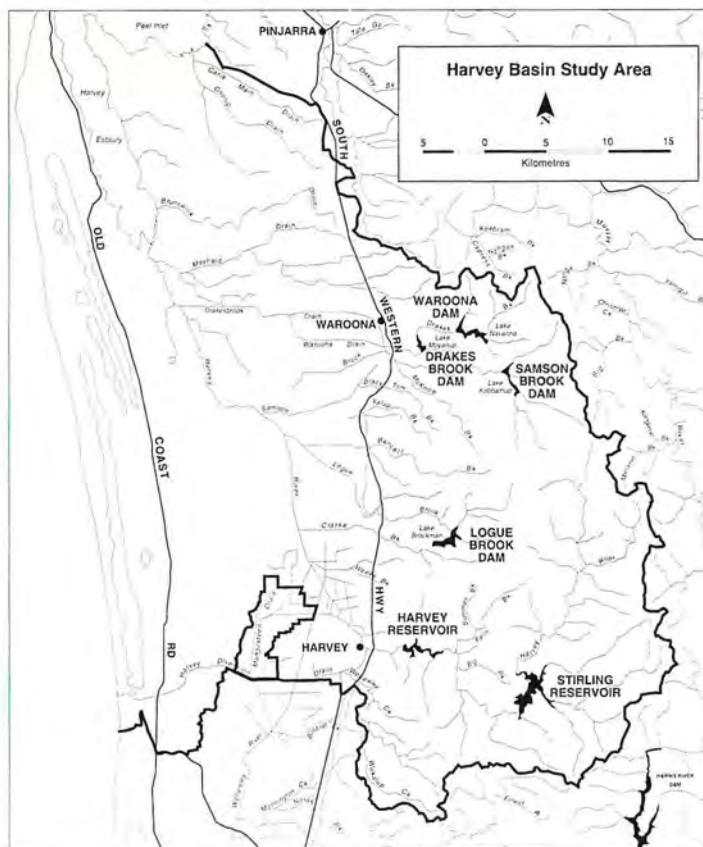
A private company is developing a proposal for the West Kimberley which could entail large scale development of groundwater and surface water resources in the Canning Basin and Fitzroy River.

While no guarantee of approval is given for the particular proposal, the Commission's assessment of water resources will be essential for any sound future judgment of water allocation for the West Kimberley.

The Commission will prepare a water allocation plan so that potential impacts of water development are assessed at the regional scale, taking into account social, cultural, environmental, heritage and economic water values.

The plan will assess the region on a water allocation and protection basis and be referred to the Environmental Protection Authority for confirmation or adjustment.

In the meantime, the Commission is also influencing the feasibility studies required for the irrigated agriculture project by issuing necessary groundwater exploration and abstraction licences and working with the proponent and other Government agencies to ensure water resource impacts are properly managed.



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