



WATERWAYS



*Protection
and enhancement
of Western
Australia's
waterways*

Western Australia has some 208 major waterways with a combined length of more than 25 000 km. Many of these waterways are becoming degraded as a result of human activity within them and within their catchments. Water quality is generally declining across the State, with many waterways carrying high loads of nutrients, sediment, and organic matter, and in some cases toxic chemicals. A large number of rivers are also becoming increasingly saline. There is growing community concern about the deteriorating condition of our waterways.

Western Australia's waterways are an integral part of our heritage, and a significant State asset with important social and economic values. Many waterbodies were, and are, important water and food sources for Aboriginal peoples, and places of spiritual significance for which they still have

custodial responsibilities within their traditional country. Early explorers and settlers relied on good water supplies, and settlements were generally located close to rivers. Waterways

still supply water for agricultural and pastoral uses, and are a source of fish for commercial and amateur fisheries. They are a focus for recreation in our predominantly dry landscape; popular riverine activities include swimming, boating, picnicking and bushwalking.

Waterways also have important ecological functions. They form ecosystems made up of a wide range of plants, animals and micro organisms, many of them unique to a particular region.

The river channel with its surrounding fringing vegetation provides habitat for in-stream and land-based wildlife.

It is an important refuge for fauna during prolonged dry seasons, and is often the only ecological corridor between remnant bush habitats.

Healthy waterways have stable and efficient stream channels secured by a good cover of fringing vegetation that slows the flow of water, reduces erosion and protects the floodplain. The vegetation also acts to filter chemicals washed from surrounding land.

The Waterways WA Program will work with the community towards sustainable management of Western Australia's waterways over the next twenty years. The Program has two immediate key objectives: developing a State Policy and State Strategy to provide a framework for Statewide management of waterways; and supporting on-ground action that conserves and restores waterways. The outcome of the program will be improved water quality and ecosystem health, and reduced environmental problems associated in inland waters, estuaries and coastal areas.

This pamphlet outlines the approach for developing the framework for waterways management in Western Australia.

What is a waterway?

For the purposes of a Waterways WA Program, a waterway consists of a stream system, connected wetlands and the receiving lake, estuary or inlet at the base of the system. Waterway wetlands include flood plains, lakes systems that overflow into rivers, and lakes and swamps that are predominantly stream-fed, rather than expressions of shallow ground water.



Managing Waterways in Western Australia

The Water and Rivers Commission was established in January 1996. One of its responsibilities is to conserve and manage the State's waterways but Commission staff cannot achieve this task on their own. Rather, the Commission aims to develop partnerships with the community, local government, and relevant State and Federal agencies to achieve the sustainable management of waterways across the State.

The Waterways WA Program

Waterways WA is Western Australia's first comprehensive, Statewide waterways management program. Its vision is the sustainable management of waterways across the State. Some of the anticipated outcomes for this twenty year program are:

- Protection and where possible restoration of natural biodiversity
- Improved knowledge of the condition of the State's waterways
- Restoration to natural levels of salinity where possible
- Improved water quality
- Reduced waterway pollution
- Enhanced recreation and tourism opportunities
- Increased community awareness and participation

State Programs

The Western Australian Government has six priority programs for natural resource and environmental management in Western Australia. These are:

- Waterways WA
- State Salinity Action Plan
- Biodiversity Conservation
- Rangelands Management
- World Heritage
- Coasts and Clean Seas

All these programs depend on partnerships between the community, landholders and local government to plan and implement on-the-ground action, coordinated where appropriate through cooperatively developed regional and catchment strategies. The Waterways WA Program will coordinate and support those activities that relate directly to the management of waterways and develop appropriate links with other programs and agencies throughout the State.

National Programs

The Commonwealth Government supports waterways management in Western Australia. The table below outlines some major National initiatives that complement the Waterways WA Program.

PROGRAM	FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LEAD AGENCY	SCOPE	FURTHER INFORMATION
National Rivercare Program (NRP)	Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia as part of the Natural Heritage Trust	Investment towards sustainable management, rehabilitation and conservation of rivers	http://www.dpie.gov.au/dpie/nht/nrp-summary.html
National Land and Water Resource Audit (NLWRA)	Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia and the Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation as part of the Natural Heritage Trust	Provides a comprehensive national appraisal of Australia's natural resource base	http://www.nlwra.gov.au/
River Restoration and Management Research and Development Program	Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation	Investing in research to provide knowledge and processes to support those undertaking river and riparian lands restoration activities	http://www.rivers.gov.au/
National Eutrophication Management Program (NEMP)	Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation and Murray-Darling Basin Commission	The program provides the scientific research necessary for effectively managing algal blooms	http://www.nemp.aus.net/
National River Health Program (NRHP)	Initiated by Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation and led by Environment Australia	The program has developed Australia's first nationally consistent and standardised method of assessing river health	http://www.lwrrdc.gov.au/commissi.htm

Framework for management

The Water and Rivers Commission will initiate development of a State Policy and Strategy which will provide a framework for how the State's rivers will be managed over the next 20 years. The Policy and Strategy will contain recommendations on the following issues:

Partnerships

An effective Waterways WA program requires the cooperation of all sectors of the community and government. Cooperation can be fostered through partnerships between governments, industry, non-government organisations, individual land managers and the community. In particular, regional strategy groups will have an important role for ensuring sustainable waterways management.

Prioritisation of rivers needing action

The community can help to determine the priority for management of rivers in their area. Prioritisation must be done on a regional and a Statewide basis due to the diversity of waterway systems. The Commission is developing a process that will involve the community in the prioritisation of their waterways.

Action planning

The action planning process identifies desirable on-ground activities to be undertaken by stakeholders, and the costs and timeframe for each activity. This enables an integrated and coordinated approach to the management, rehabilitation and conservation of waterways by all sections of the community including government. The Waterways WA Program will provide technical support for river action planning; details of that support will be covered in a future pamphlet or can be obtained by contacting team members listed at the end of this pamphlet.

Restoration techniques and training

The Waterways WA Program and community groups are developing river restoration techniques suitable for Western

Australian conditions. Different techniques will be required for different parts of the State. Demonstration sites and workshops will train community groups in the application of these techniques.

Identifying environmental water requirements

One of the key issues for waterways management is achieving a balance between water use and maintaining a healthy functioning river system. Developing processes for determining how much water a river needs to function is a key part of managing waterways.

Floodplain management

The State's floodplains continue to be under pressure for more intensive uses despite the significant flood risk. When flooding does occur, the resulting damage to property can be quite considerable. Floodplains need to be managed for the benefit of the whole community so that the risk and damages are minimised and environmental values are protected.

Monitoring and database on river condition

Monitoring waterways health is necessary to determine the condition of our catchments and rivers and set priorities for management. The Commission monitors some catchments and rivers, and undertakes assessment of river condition to determine targets and indicators for management. Through the Waterwatch WA Ribbons of Blue Program community groups can be involved in water quality monitoring and awareness programs.

For waterways management, data on the condition of the rivers must be kept in a coordinated database and made available for decision making on management priorities. Local communities and landholders will be involved in developing the coordinated database.

Planning and management

The Commission supports sustainable waterways management by developing and giving advice on water sensitive urban design, waterways and catchment planning, and planning for the use of water resources.

DEVELOPING THE POLICY AND STRATEGY

As the lead agency for Waterways WA, the Water and Rivers Commission has developed the broad approach for the development of State waterways management.

The approach is to build on what is already being done by community groups, landholders, local government and State agencies. A considerable part of the Water and Rivers Commission's business already contributes to sustainable waterways management.

Two documents will be produced. The first, the State Policy on waterways management will set a broad direction for waterways management for the next 20 years. The second document, the State Strategy on waterways management, will define the actions needed to implement the Policy.

The Policy will be developed quickly for release by early 2000, and the Strategy document will be released 18 months later.

The draft Policy will enable community groups to demonstrate that they are broadly meeting State objectives for waterways management when seeking Commonwealth funds, rather than having to wait 18 months to be able to demonstrate alignment.

The policy will build on the 1997 Wetlands Conservation Policy for Western Australia, setting broad directions and approaches for waterways management in the State. The Strategy will be developed through detailed negotiations with stakeholders about the content, direction and priorities for waterways management. It will build on existing work and strategies already developed by regional and catchment management groups. The scope of both documents is outlined below.

	POLICY	STRATEGY
Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets broad direction and outcomes for waterways management for next 20 years • Partnership approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify strategies, processes and actions to implement Policy direction including but not limited to investigations, planning, management, restoration • Framework divided into 5 volumes: general overview and one for each drainage basin (Timor Sea, Western Plateau, Indian Ocean and South West Divisions)
Linkages	Links to State Programs	Links to regional strategies; State Programs
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection and restoration • Waterways managed for a range of uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed framework for managing waterways • Priorities for waterways management across the State
Outputs	Draft Policy released for public comment early 2000 for 6 month comment period. Final Policy released after review period for Strategy.	Documents released in a staged basis starting December 2000 for 3-6 month comment period.
Involvement	Key groups involved in development: Regional Chairs Coordinating Group; Agency Senior Officers Group; WRC Stakeholder Council	Developed in partnership with key stakeholders (including Agency Senior Officers Group; Natural Resource Management Regional Chairs Coordinating Group; regional strategy groups; Salinity Council; Rivers and Estuary Council; local government; Greening WA; Aboriginal Affairs Association; individual land managers; Western Australian Farmers Federation; Conservation Council; State Wetlands Steering Committee; Environmental Protection Authority; Western Australian Municipal Association; Ministry for Planning /Western Australian Planning Commission).

HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED

The development of the State Policy and Strategy depends on community input to help set the future direction of waterways management. The Commission is proposing that there will be a working team to develop the draft Policy before releasing it for general comment. It is not possible to involve all the interested stakeholders at the same level. The community will be able to contribute to the development of the Strategy and to the draft document prepared with the key partnership groups.

There will be a range of involvement options including:

- Having direct involvement in the formulation and writing of the Strategy;
- Providing comments and ideas on managing waterways for the Strategy;
- Providing comment on the draft Strategy;
- Being informed of the progress of the Strategy and final outcome.

You can contact the Waterways WA team if you are interested in participating, using the contact details at the back of this pamphlet.

WATERWAYS WA TEAM

There are nine staff directly employed on the Waterways WA Program. They are funded by NHT (Rivercare) and the Water and Rivers Commission for a three-year period ending in 2001.

Other Water and Rivers Commission staff also undertake work that relates to and supports the Waterways WA Program. Their work includes provision of engineering and restoration advice, Ribbons of Blue, floodplain management, determining environmental water requirements, community support and development of River Action Plans.

The Waterways WA staff and their areas are:

PERTH BASED

Program Manager

Verity Klemm

Senior Environmental Officer

Kerry Trayler
Swan Goldfields Agricultural and South Coast

Lisa Chalmers
Midwest/Gascoyne and South West

REGIONALLY BASED

Rivercare Officers

Kerry Wray (Part time)
Mid West Gascoyne

Catherine Walker
Swan Goldfields Agricultural

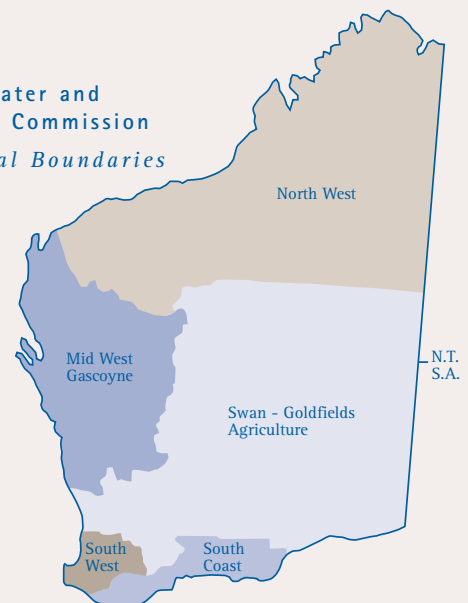
Kim Richardson (Part time)
Swan Goldfields Agricultural

Catherine Derrington (Part time)
South West

Kathryn Hardcastle (Part time)
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Jodie Oates
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Water and Rivers Commission Regional Boundaries





*If you would like more
information on the
Waterways WA program,
please contact:*



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