

Action plans for Wheatbelt wetland ...

A RECOVERY plan of international conservation significance has been launched for the most important remaining freshwater lake system in Western Australia's Wheatbelt.

The plan, which focuses on Toolibin Lake east of Narrogin, is the first strategy for the conservation of an entire threatened community.

Department of Conservation and Land Management Executive Director Syd Shea said the 10-year plan, costing almost \$4.5 million, was the single most ambitious recovery initiative of the Department.

"Toolibin Lake is listed under the Ramsar Convention as a wetland of international importance," Dr Shea said.

"The recovery plan gives us a vital opportunity to work with farmers and other landowners to protect the lake and surrounding agricultural land from the impact of salinity."

In launching the plan, Environment Minister Kevin Minson said Toolibin Lake's diversity of waterbirds was greater than at any other wetland in the South West and was one of the reasons for the lake's listing under the Ramsar Convention.

"Toolibin also is the last wetland in the South West with extensive sheoak and melaleuca woodlands across the lake floor," Mr Minson said.

"However, the area is in danger of becoming highly saline and all these values could be lost unless we take urgent action."

Toolibin is the first in a series of nine lakes and the only major lake in the chain not yet badly affected by salinity.

The recovery plan has been pre-



Toolibin Catchment Group chairman Keith Parnell (left) and group member Lyn Chadwick explain their enthusiasm for the recovery plan to CALM Wheatbelt Region Manager Ken Wallace and CALM Executive Director Syd Shea.

pared by a team including representatives from CALM, Toolibin catchment landowners, the Water Authority, the Department of Agriculture and the Australian Nature Conservation Agency.

The team is chaired by CALM's Wheatbelt region manager, Ken Wallace. It is supported by a technical advisory group with representatives

from CALM, the Department of Agriculture and the Water Authority.

The plan lists a range of measures to save the lake. These measures include:

- immediate groundwater pumping;
- draining surface water on the Toolibin flats to reduce waterlogging on neighbouring farm land and help protect them

- from salination;
- action to improve natural flushing of the lake and protect it from saline run-off;
- revegetation in the catchment; and
- forming a recovery team and technical advisory group to implement the plan and monitor its progress.

Dr Shea said landowners in the catchment were aware they needed to

be involved in the solutions for their areas and more catchment groups were being formed.

"We now have an important opportunity to develop long-term solutions based on our inventiveness and ability to work hard together, as communities do when faced by a crisis," he said.

"Effective group action at Toolibin will not only protect an important wetland, it will also create options for increasing farm productivity and will provide a case study for action elsewhere in Australia."

Land degradation and saline waterways are massive problems for farmers and other landowners. In 1988 alone, the value of farm production lost because of salinity was estimated at more than \$44 million.

It now is believed a further 15 per cent of productive land in the Wheatbelt will be lost unless remedial action is taken.

Mr Minson said the cost to the State of losing any more land would be enormous but the cost to conservation values could be even higher.

"The Wheatbelt is an area of megadiversity, and unchecked salinity could result in the loss of species," he said.

"One of the goals of the Toolibin Lake recovery plan is to show that it is possible to stabilise and even reverse damaging water table trends.

"It is vital that we succeed in this because Toolibin and many other nature reserves cannot be saved if the surrounding catchments turn saline."

Copies of the Toolibin Lake Recovery Plan are available from CALM's Wheatbelt Region office in Narrogin. Phone (098) 811 444

... and fire protection

CALM has significantly boosted its fire management system in preparation for what promises to be another long, dry fire season.

The Department has allocated \$343 000 to recruit up to 60 additional fire fighters for both fire suppression and fuel hazard reduction for the fire season.

CALM also is continuing its program of establishing and upgrading water points in the forest and building access roads to provide improved protection for karri and jarrah regeneration and for plantations.

This work follows a \$250 000 boost to the annual program in the southern forests earlier this year.

As well, the Depart-

ment has extensively upgraded its fire spotting tower network which stretches from north of Perth to Walpole on the South Coast.

These towers, coupled with rapid-response Eagle spotter aircraft equipped with modern satellite navigation technology, will significantly lessen the time from when fires are detected and suppression crews are mobilised.

CALM fire crews, with assistance from volunteer brigades, fought several big fires in October, a reflection of the drier than normal conditions at this time of year.

Environment Minister Kevin Minson, who visited the southern forests last month, said the new fire fighters would boost

what was already an elite fire fighting force and help expand CALM's prescribed burning operations as recommended earlier this year by the Lewis inquiry.

That inquiry investigated CALM's prescribed burning policies and practices and found the fuel hazard reduction program in forest areas had been running behind desired levels in recent year.

"Reducing the fuel that accumulates on the forest floor is critical to minimising the risk of fires, improving safety for fire fighting crews and improving the ability to mount direct attacks on wildfires," Mr Minson said.

CALM Executive Director Syd Shea said towers were being re-

introduced into the Department's fire management system as they were more reliable and cost effective than having only aircraft continually circling the forest in the fire season.

The combination of towers and aircraft will provide the most reliable and cost-effective detection system for the fire-vulnerable areas of the south west.

The towers are dotted throughout CALM's three forest regions — Swan, Central and Southern.

In Swan Region, a tower in the Gnarung pine plantations has been replaced by a new tower in Walyunga National Park. This tower will be coupled with existing towers at Pinjar and Wabbling

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CALMFire — CALM's new fire protection unit — hosted delegates to the Australian Fire Authorities Council Conference earlier this month. The unit's senior operations officer Terry Maher (right) and Munding District fire protection officer Bruce Telfer (left) are seen briefing a South Australian visitor on CALM's fire management strategies. (See 'Council confers on fire' page 8.)

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to provide complete coverage of the pine plantations north of Wanneroo.

Another new tower, at Bickley, provides excellent surveillance of the jarrah forest between Mundaring and Jarrahdale.

"These towers give line-of-sight coverage from the pines near Yanchep to Jarrahdale," Dr Shea said. "They also provide a panorama over the Swan coastal plain."

An existing tower at Mt Solus also will be staffed to cover the jarrah forest between Jarrahdale and Dwellingup.

In the Central forest region, Stewart tower, near Kirup in the Blackwood Valley, Mowen, east of Margaret River and Mt William, north east of Harvey have been upgraded. Work also is planned for Mungalup tower, near Collie and Carlotta, east of Nannup.

Towers in the South-

ern region being upgraded are Diamond Tree near Manjimup, Mt Frankland near Walpole and Beard, east of Quininup.

A public viewing platform is planned to be built under the lookout cabin on Diamond Tree as part of CALM's strategy to promote tourism in the southern forest region. Bicentennial Tree in Warren National Park in Pemberton will be opened as a climbing tree for the public.

CALM also has reorganised its fire protection into a new unit known as CALMFire.

The unit, comprising dedicated, trained fire staff and crews, will ensure CALM provides reliable, cost-effective and environmentally sound fire management for the 19 million hectares of land the Department is responsible for, as well as providing security for the many community assets adjoining CALM land.





CALMFIRE



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SUBJECT
TECHNICAL DATA

