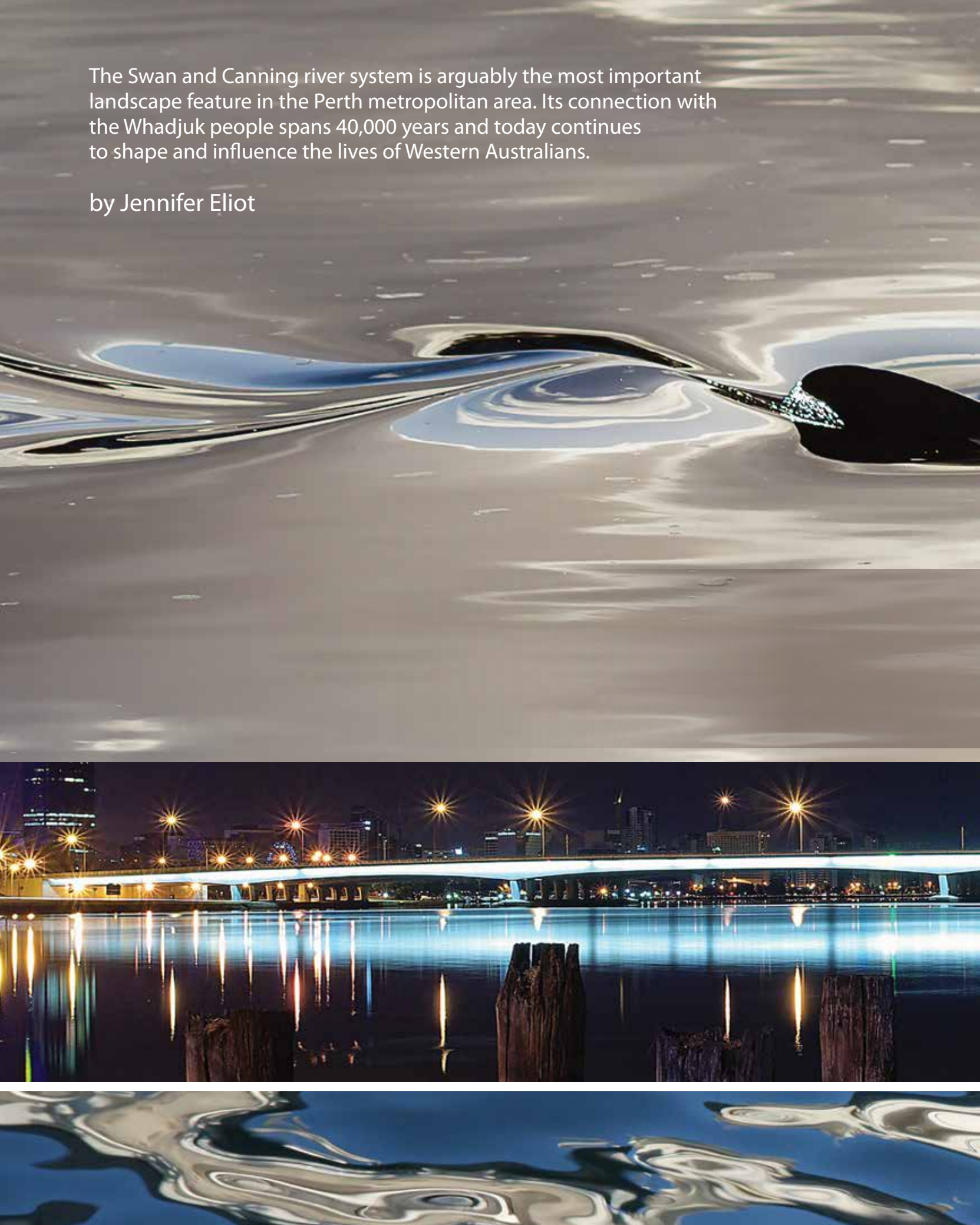


The Swan and Canning river system is arguably the most important landscape feature in the Perth metropolitan area. Its connection with the Whadjuk people spans 40,000 years and today continues to shape and influence the lives of Western Australians.

by Jennifer Eliot





a city
playground



The Swan Canning Riverpark and the iconic rivers at its heart are the centrepiece of Perth.

It's a resilient ecosystem, facing similar pressures as other urban waterways in Australia, a recreational playground and a source of vibrant commercial and tourism activity which takes in significant cultural sites, river reserves, national parks, conservations areas and busy recreation zones.

It starts with the Swan River, which begins as the Avon River at Wickepin in the Wheatbelt and twists its way 280km to the ocean at Fremantle, being joined along the way by its most significant tributary, the Canning River at Melville Water. These rivers and their tributaries drain a catchment of 2090km² and the combined Swan Canning Catchment and Avon Catchment are approximately 125,000km². Sitting within the Riverpark, is the Swan Estuary Marine Park, which provides special protection for three areas – Alfred Cove, Pelican Point and Milyu.

WHADJUK HISTORY

The Swan and Canning rivers and their tributaries are intrinsically linked to the fabric of Whadjuk people and culture. The rivers and waterways have continuing cultural importance related to past and contemporary Whadjuk culture. To Whadjuk people, *Derbal Yerrigan* (the Swan River) and *Djarlgarra* (Canning River) were created by the *Waugal*; a powerful dreaming serpent and the creator of all rivers, lakes, valleys and other landforms on its journey to the ocean. Whadjuk people consider *Derbal Yerrigan* and *Djarlgarra* sacred due to stories associated with the *Waugal* and its continued presence in the area.

Walyunga National Park, which is 72km from the mouth of the Swan, is also a significant site for the Whadjuk people. It is the place where the Avon River meets the Brockman River and becomes the Swan River. The park is one of the largest known Aboriginal camp sites in the vicinity of Perth, and today Walyunga continues to hold great cultural importance to Whadjuk people. The Aboriginal Heritage



Trail, an easy 1.2km return hike, provides an excellent insight into Whadjuk cultural heritage and values.

Today Whadjuk people continue to access the Swan Canning Riverpark for sustenance, knowledge, spiritual renewal and to practise distinct cultural activities.

RIVERPARK TRAILS

The Swan and Canning rivers have a combined shoreline of 358km and there is currently 170km of established tracks and paths suitable for cycling, running, walking and hiking in the Riverpark. During the week, Perth's commuters take full advantage of this shared network, swapping traffic for river views. These pathways also form the basis of a 50km circuit which can be used as a whole or in 12 separate sections. In its entirety, the ride takes in Perth Water, Matilda Bay Reserve, Point Resolution Reserve, Rocky Bay, Point Walter, Lucky Bay, Deep Water Point, the Shelley Rossmoyne Foreshore, the Canning River Regional Park, Tranby House and Garvey Park. Popular routes in this circuit include Canning Bridge to Mt Henry Bridge and return and Fremantle to Point Walter rides.

The Canning River trip is pleasant with much of the path shaded with native trees. From the Raffles Hotel, it continues to Deep Water Point, a popular waterskiing area, and the Esplanade which is a hive of activity with its swimming and waterskiing areas, jetty, playground and café. The Mt Henry Bridge has excellent views of the Canning River, with Kings



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Main One of the Indo-Pacific dolphins that call the Swan Canning Riverpark home.

Photo – Matt Kleczkowski

Inset top The Narrows Bridge links the north and south sides of the city.

Photo – Robert Davis

Inset bottom Reflections on the Riverpark.

Photo – Matt Kleczkowski

Top Fishing at dusk from the jetty at Taylor Reserve.

Photo – Reanne Archer

Above Ingrid Cumming at the Festival of the Black Swan.

Photo – Mark Thornley

Park and Perth city as a picturesque backdrop.

The Fremantle to Point Walter route offers equally spectacular views. There are plenty of points of interest along the way



Top left Calm shallow waters are a perfect playground for families.
Photo – Megan Lewis

Above Kent Street Weir.
Photo – Douglas Lim

Far left One of the many places to rest along the Riverpark.
Photo – Megan Lewis

Left Red-necked avocet are one of 100 bird species that visit the Riverpark.
Photo – Rob Drummond/Lochman Transparencies

Canoe Trail Project runs the length of the river, and the stage which passes through the park should take two to three hours one way, or a full day if you plan on returning to your start point. There are no rapids or adrenalin-pumping sections in this stretch. Instead, it is a relaxing float down the river with some spectacular views of natural vegetation and excellent birdwatching opportunities.

The park has both freshwater and estuarine areas and includes two tidal lagoons, a constructed wetland, parkland and remnant bush, providing habitat for more than 100 bird species. The birds are more active in the morning and keen birdwatchers in canoes or on designated tracks in the park can see waders, gulls, terns, reed warblers, swans, ducks, geese, grebes, cormorants, darters, herons, egrets, ibises, spoonbills, crakes and rails.

including the Bicentennial Falls, Leeuwin Army Barracks, the Swan River Yacht Club and the Aquarama Marina. A winding path from Blackwall Reach Parade, through natural bushland offers excellent views across the Swan River.

DESTINATIONS

There are 40 parks and reserves on the banks of the Swan and Canning rivers which are popular for Perth locals and visitors wanting to enjoy time with family and friends or engage in activities on the rivers. The sheltered waters and established barbecue areas at Point Walter Reserve make it an ideal place for people with small children, stand-up paddle boarders and people learning how to kitesurf. The 20ha reserve is most notable for the sandbar that extends more than 1km into the river and the sheer 10m cliffs

at Blackwall Reach to the south-west of the spit. The deep waters at Blackwall Reach and its proximity to the ocean make it a great fishing spot and anglers are known to catch black bream, mulloway, flathead, blue swimmer crabs and the occasional crayfish or large pink snapper. It is also a significant site for the Whadjuk people. This area is known as *Jennalup* to Whadjuk people, and is a place for women and children.

The Canning River Regional Park is the drawcard on the Canning River. The park extends 6km on either side of the river and includes large areas of parkland for public recreation and extensive wetlands. The best way to experience the park is by canoe and there are designated canoe launching facilities at Mason’s Landing, Kent Street Weir, Riverton Jetty Park and Woodloes Park. The Canning



“ Black bream are abundant in the Swan and Canning rivers and during the last two years the rivers have produced bumper blue swimmer crab seasons. This prawn season is one of the best in recent years. ”



Far left The Riverpark provides a wealth of opportunity for discovery.
Photo – Carol Siedel

Above Night prawning in the river is fun for all the family.
Photo – Stewart Allen

Left The Australia Day Skyworks is a well-known and much-loved event.
Photo – Jiri Lochman

EVENTS

The Riverpark plays host to many events and is a popular destination to celebrate and come together. The Swan River becomes the centre of Australia Day celebrations each year when the City of Perth presents Skyworks. It is the largest annual fireworks display in Western Australia and attracts more than 300,000 people. There are many great locations to watch Skyworks in the Riverpark and the majority of people gather at family-friendly events at Langley Park in the city and Sir James Mitchell Park on the South Perth foreshore. Matilda Bay, Garvey Park and Kings Park are also popular vantage points as well as two designated boat zones – one east of the Narrows and another west of Heirisson Island – where boat owners can anchor and watch the sky above the river explode with colour.

Perth is also one of the few capital cities in the world where people can see dolphins in the heart of the city.

Dolphin Watch Day celebrates the 40 Indo-Pacific dolphins living in and visiting the Riverpark. The event provides an opportunity to recognise *Dolphin Watch* volunteers monitoring dolphins in the Riverpark and to share the data collected as part of the citizen science program. The event concludes with a river cruise which is a popular option for Riverpark visitors to relax and enjoy the rivers while also providing the perfect opportunity to dolphin watch. Dolphin sightings are common in the Swan and Canning rivers and since the program began in 2009, *Dolphin Watch* volunteers, now numbering more than 890, have logged more than 13,000 sightings and observations. Scientists now know that dolphins travel as far up river as Guildford on the Swan River and up to the Kent Street Weir on the Canning River. The Fremantle Port, Perth Waters, Matilda Bay and the Applecross and Shelley foreshores are dolphin spotting hotspots.

VOLUNTEERING

Dolphin Watch volunteers are part of a growing number of community members volunteering their time to help protect the Riverpark. Community groups such as local landcare groups, dive clubs and fishing advocates often hold clean-up days, clinics, planting days and workshops in the Riverpark and catchment. A significant focus of the volunteering effort centres on recreation and conservation. The Swan River Trust and Alcoa Landcare Program (SALP) – a partnership between government, industry and community – has seen landcare volunteers invest 154,000 hours in 1210 sites in the Swan Canning Catchment since the project began in 1999. It's a conservation effort that has seen more than 2.2 million trees planted and 1800ha of degraded bushland revegetated through water quality improvement projects that also include dieback management, fencing, weed control, creating native animal habitat and feral pest management.



Above left Environmental officer Kim Sylvia carrying out water sampling.
Photo – Miranda Holker

Above Kitesurfing is growing in popularity.
Photo – Matt Kleczkowski

Left 'Biscuiting' on the Riverpark.
Photo – Chelsea Bates

and drains, and applying river intervention techniques such as oxygenation to improve water quality.

Oxygenation plants on the Swan and Canning rivers are positioned in the upper reaches where low oxygen conditions can persist throughout spring and summer once fresh water flows from the catchment diminish and the salt water wedge pushes upstream. The oxygenation plants are capable of providing relief to more than 10km of the Swan River and 4.5km of the Canning River.

Despite pressures facing the Riverpark, there is evidence suggesting fish communities have actually improved in the past five years. Black bream are abundant in the Swan and Canning rivers and during the past two years the rivers have produced bumper blue swimmer crab seasons. This prawn season is one of the best in recent years. There is also anecdotal evidence that cobbler are returning to the river system.

WATERSPORTS

The way Western Australians use the Swan and Canning rivers has changed dramatically over the years and today it has become an aquatic playground above and below the water. The Riverpark's location in the heart of WA's capital city makes it a popular place for Perth's residents to enjoy watersports.

There are 12 yacht clubs and marinas, 18 boat ramps and 43 jetties located around the Riverpark and this infrastructure supports a number of rowing, kayaking, dragon boat and canoeing clubs. The more traditional pursuits of sailing and rowing continue to be popular, however, in recent years a number of new sports have established on the rivers. It is now a common sight to see people stand-up paddle boarding, kitesurfing, waterskiing and jetskiing in the Riverpark. To manage potential conflicts, there is a dedicated jetski zone in Melville Water and five dedicated public waterskiing zones in Freshwater Bay, Point Walter and Point Heathcote on the Swan River. The largest zone on the Canning begins just south of the Canning Bridge, taking in Deep Water Point and stretching to Aquinas Bay. This access is balanced with a number of exclusion zones and jetskis are restricted at Alfred Cove, Pelican Point and Milyu in the Swan Estuary Marine Park.

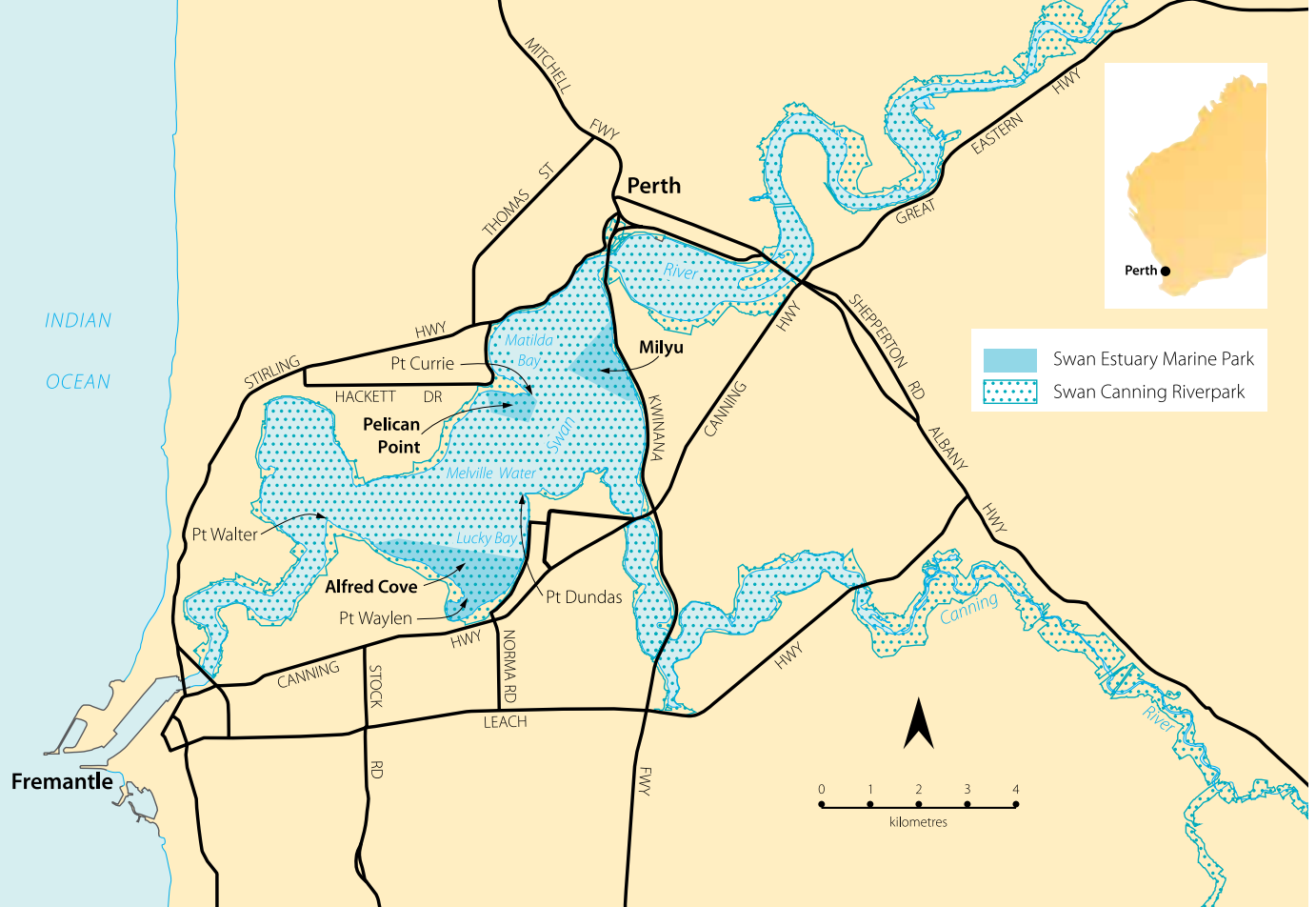
Bannister Creek is a classic example of works funded by SALP and undertaken by committed volunteers. The creek was once a beautiful tributary of the Canning River but time and development were not kind to the waterway and by the late 1990s it was reduced to a struggling weed-infested trickle. Families living nearby avoided it and the native animals had long since moved on. Today, it is a functional living stream. The turtles, birds, fish and native animals have returned and families are back using the area, their presence helping to secure Bannister Creek for future generations to enjoy a slice of nature in the heart of our bustling city while ensuring that the quality of water flowing into the Canning River will continue to be improved.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The Swan and Canning rivers are a resilient ecosystem but like all major urban waterways, these rivers are under

pressure from climate change, population growth, development pressures and land and water use practices. Historically, the system has been significantly changed with vast areas in the catchment cleared for development and agriculture and this combined with the river's industrial legacy – which saw many low-lying areas used as landfill sites and heavy industry established on Riverpark banks – has resulted in sediment, nutrients and other contaminants entering the waterway.

Ongoing challenges include reducing nutrient and organic inputs from the Swan Canning and Avon catchments and managing a drying climate. A reduction in rainfall has resulted in lower stream-flows and has increased the system's vulnerability to oxygenation depletion. To address this, the Swan and Canning rivers are managed with a 'catchment to coast' approach, which is focused on reducing contaminants from catchments, intercepting pollutants from tributaries



Above Kayaking and rowing are popular on the Riverpark.
Photo – Sophie Huisman

Right Yellow seahorse in North Fremantle seagrass beds.
Photo – Matt Kleczkowski

Another sport gaining in popularity in the Riverpark is scuba diving. There is an underwater explorers’ dive club based on the Swan River, with many people taking advantage of the underwater wonderland in the Swan Canning Estuary in night and day dives. The downstream reaches from Mosman Bay to the mouth have a number of excellent dives and in the right conditions fish, prawns and seahorses can be prolific on the drop-offs around Bicton Baths and Mosman Bay. In this zone, divers can see estuarine fish such as black bream, silver bream, cobbler, flathead, mulloway and marine and coastal species such as skipjack trevally, tailor, herring, whiting, butterfish, king wrasse, brown spotted wrasse, samson fish, pink snapper and the banded toadfish or blowie.

MANAGEMENT

The management of the Swan and Canning rivers will shift to the Department of Parks and Wildlife in July 2015 following the amalgamation of the Swan River Trust into the department. The move is part of a commitment to create a dedicated agency to help manage and enhance WA’s national parks and conservation estates. The new

joint workforce will bring together scientists, conservation and ecosystem management experts and planners as well as project managers with expertise in delivering significant capital works. The amalgamation of the Trust and Parks and Wildlife will increase and streamline conservation efforts in the Swan Canning Riverpark.



Jennifer Eliot is the Swan River Trust media manager. She can be contacted on (08) 9278 0916 or by email (jennifer.eliot@swanrivertrust.wa.gov.au).