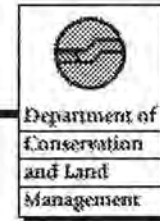


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News

R E L E A S E



Department of
Conservation
and Land
Management

2 August 1996

Turning back the tide of salinity

For the first time in more than 30 years, fresh water is flowing into Toolibin Lake, 45 kilometres east of Narrogin.

Toolibin Lake is the site of one of the Department of Conservation and Land Management's most important programs to conserve the local ecology.

Recognised under the Ramsar Convention as a wetland of international significance, the lake has been at risk of turning saline because of rising water tables and surface water run-off.

A special recovery plan was prepared for the lake in 1994, and local farmers, in conjunction with CALM and other agencies, began an extensive long-term revegetation program.

Short-term rescue measures were also put in place, and CALM Executive Director, Dr Syd Shea, said it was these that were now paying dividends for the Wheatbelt's last fresh water wetland.

"For the first time, heavy rains have generated enough run-off to see a diversion channel and gate structure installed in April 1995 swing into action," he said.

The 5.5km channel was designed to divert highly saline surface water from Toolibin Lake to a saline-affected nature reserve system downstream.

In the process, nearly 100,000 tonnes of earth were moved along the edge of the lake and through private property, and specially designed gates to control water flow were installed.

"Unfortunately there was not enough rain to test the engineering works last winter, but this year, water began to flow through the gates in the middle of July," Dr Shea said.

"At first, the salinity levels of this run-off were too high and the water was diverted downstream, but last week, tests by CALM revealed a reduction in

salt levels and the diversion gates were closed, allowing fresh water to flow into Toolibin Lake.”

“At current flow rates, CALM estimates it will take 15 to 20 days to fill the lake. And its water quality will be continually monitored.”

Dr Shea said this was a tremendous environmental achievement for the Wheatbelt, and many stakeholders should be congratulated.

“The recovery of Toolibin Lake relies on the continued support of surrounding private property owners, CALM, the Australian Nature Conservation Agency, the Water Corporation, Agriculture WA and numerous private and State Government contractors,” he said.

“A joint effort is vital to ensure a catchment-wide recovery and long term protection of this lake which has the richest diversity of resident waterbird species in the south-west.

“The surrounding community are to be applauded for the tree planting and other landcare measures they have adopted to improve the sustainability of agriculture on the catchment.

“Mass plantings of species like the deep rooting oil mallee, for example, hold the key to solving the lake’s salt problems in the long run.

“And if CALM’s trial plantings in the area prove commercially viable in terms of producing eucalyptus oil for the industrial solvent market, there will be a strong economic incentive for further large scale tree planting.”

Media contact: Dr Syd Shea (09) 442 0300.

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