

[Lake Toolibin]

**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

**11/10/94**

Environment Minister Kevin Minson today released a \$4.5 million plan to save a wetland of international importance in Western Australia's South-West.

Mr Minson said the 10-year Toolibin Lake recovery plan would also provide a vital opportunity to work with farmers and other landowners to protect agricultural land from rising salinity levels.

Toolibin Lake, east of Narrogin and about 200 km south-east of Perth, is a breeding site for 24 species of waterbirds. Another 17 waterbirds have also been recorded feeding at the lake, which is managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

"This diversity of waterbirds is greater than at any other wetland in the South-West and is one of the reasons for Toolibin Lake's listing under the Ramsar Convention as a wetland of international significance," Mr Minson said.

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

"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 Toolibin Lake recovery plan has been prepared by a team including representatives from CALM, Toolibin catchment landowners, the Water Authority, the Department of Agriculture and the Australian Nature Conservation Agency. The plan lists a range of measures to save the lake from immediate groundwater pumping to long-term revegetation in the catchment. Other key elements include:

- + draining surface water on the Toolibin Flats to reduce waterlogging on neighbouring agricultural land and help protect them from salinisation;
- + action to improve natural flushing of the lake and protect it from saline run-off; and
- + forming a recovery team and a technical advisory group to implement the plan and monitor its progress.

Salinity problems occur when natural salts deep in the ground are brought closer to the surface by rising groundwater levels after land clearing.

"Such land degradation and saline waterways are massive problems for farmers and other landowners," Mr Minson said.

"In 1988 alone, the value of agricultural production lost because of salinity was estimated at more than \$44 million.

"It is now believed that another 15 per cent of productive land in the wheatbelt will be lost unless remedial action is taken.

"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.

"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 Lake and many other nature reserves cannot be saved if the surrounding catchments turn saline.

Less than 10 per cent of the original cover of native vegetation is left in the wheatbelt - we simply cannot afford the loss of biodiversity and the loss of wealth that salinity threatens.

"It would be easy for some landowners to despair of finding a solution to the salinity problems destroying their properties, but we must not give the situation up as hopeless.

"I am confident that the strategy proposed for the whole Tcolbin catchment will prove to be a case study for land managers around Australia."

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