

STATE SALINITY COUNCIL

Newsletter of the Western Australian State Council

June 1999

Public responds to updated plan

The public comment period for the Salinity Action Plan update has closed, with 150 further submissions received raising a wide range of issues.

State Salinity Council chairman Alex Campbell said drainage and land clearing were emerging as important issues for people.

"From early analysis, submissions strongly support the general thrust of the Action Plan, but have highlighted key areas of interest to people which will help us refine and better target issues in the revised plan," Mr Campbell said.

"Other matters raised included promotion and development of perennial plants, communication, research, revegetation, funding, social factors and surface water management."

Each of the submissions is being categorised and will be allocated to one or more of the four government agencies to review and discuss with staff and community representatives so that appropriate action can be reflected in the Action Plan.

Mr Campbell said there was a clear desire from the community to home in on how various strategies for tackling salinity could be implemented on the ground.

He said the consultation process had included a media information campaign that had heightened general awareness of the Salinity Action Plan and its aims.

There had also been direct contact with groups such as the State Salinity Council Reference Group, the WA Farmers Federation, the WA Salinity Forum, WA No Till Farmers Association, Oil Mallee Association and some Members of Parliament.

"Through all these channels of consultation, we now have a big challenge to reshape the Salinity Action Plan for the next phase of its life," Mr Campbell said.

Mr Campbell thanked all those who had made submissions and said he expected the new Action Plan would be released in the second half of 1999.

New recovery catchment

The Lake Bryde wetland complex south east of Lake Grace has been nominated as a recovery catchment for natural diversity under the Salinity Action Plan.

The nomination was proposed by CALM and has been endorsed by the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority and the Salinity Council.

There are now four recovery catchments for natural diversity under the Salinity Action Plan. The others are the Lake Warden complex near Esperance, Toolibin Lake east of Narrogin and the Muir-Unicup complex between Manjimup and Mt Barker.

The Lake Bryde complex consists of a chain of freshwater and naturally saline lakes in the headwaters of the Lochard catchment that is a subcatchment of the Swan-Avon basin. The catchment is approximately 110,770 hectares of which 30 per cent is in reserves.

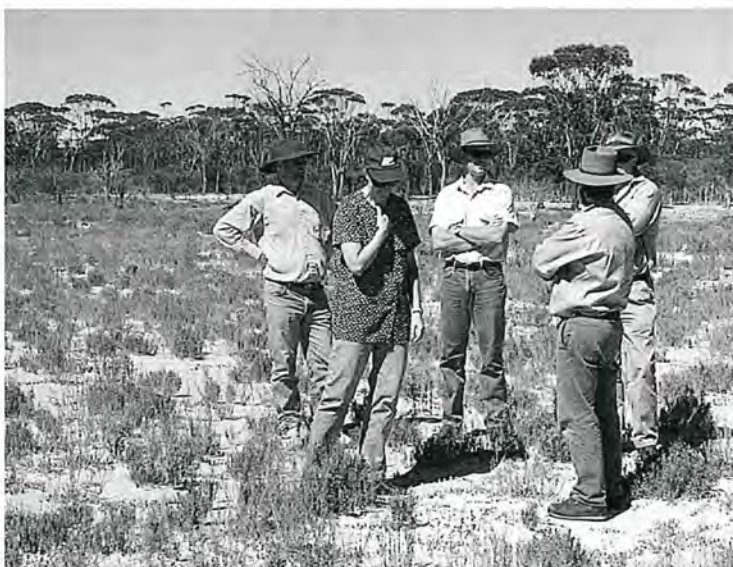
Lake Bryde and East Lake Bryde are habitat for a threatened ecological community of unwooded freshwater swamps of the southern Wheatbelt dominated by lignum and samphire species.

The lakes contain more than 80 species of aquatic invertebrates, a relatively high level of diversity. Monitoring by CALM also has revealed up to 69 species of birds including the threatened malleefowl and 19 species of waterbirds, 10 reptiles, three frogs and four species of native mammals.

There is strong local community support for the area to be a recovery catchment, with most landholders aware of the issues and keen to be actively involved.

National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority chairman, Tom Day, said the nomination of Lake Bryde and surrounding lakes as a recovery catchment would not only have major conservation benefits, it would also help the local community restore the area for recreational use.

"The viability of agricultural production also will be improved," Mr Day said.



CALM staff inspect East Lake Bryde with local farmer Anne Rick.

Groups to share funding

Thirty-nine community-based groups will share almost \$1.3 million for on-the-ground conservation projects in WA as a result of the latest round of funding through the Natural Heritage Trust Bushcare program.

The latest allocations bring the total funding granted to \$7.3 million for a range of Bushcare projects throughout the State in 1998-99. Bushcare is the biggest new program in the Commonwealth Government's Natural Heritage Trust with \$350 million allocated over five years.

The program's main objective is to reverse the long-term decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation by conservation of vegetation and biological diversity and restoring environmental values and productive capacity of degraded land and watercourses.

Bushcare funding is an integral part of the State Salinity Action Plan which is a long-term vision to stem land and water degradation as a result of salinity.

The program funds six Bushcare facilitators attached to CALM districts throughout the south-west and 11 Bushcare support officers with Greening WA, to help community groups and local government undertake a range of projects that will help conserve native vegetation and ameliorate the impacts of salinity.

Some of the latest grants include:

- Coorow Land Conservation District - \$123,006 towards conserving native vegetation, controlling groundwater recharge, establishing agroforestry demonstrations, creating wildlife corridors and raising local awareness of the importance of nature conservation on farms in the Marchagee catchment;
- Fitzgerald River Catchment Group - \$111,495 for work aimed at conserving a corridor between the Fitzgerald River National Park and Lake Magenta Nature Reserve; and

- Wallatin Wildlife and Landcare Catchment - \$93,267 towards integrating nature conservation initiatives into the catchment management plan for the Wallatin catchment near Doodlakine.

Agroforestry Expo '99 is a new series of national events to be held later this year, starting in WA.

The Expo will showcase the range of tree crop options available to landholders and cover a wide range of topics from farm planning and site preparation through to harvesting and processing the timber.

The WA Expo will be held at Flax Mill, Boyup Brook, on Saturday 14 August. It will be followed by a series of District Field Days over four weeks, ending with the Arbor Fest in Esperance on 11 September.

The organising committee in WA is a mix of farmers who represent the Master TreeGrowers Program and officers from CALM, Agriculture Western Australia, the Water and Rivers Commission, Timber 2002, Trees South West, and Greening Australia (WA).

Agroforestry Expo '99 will provide vital information on this developing industry. It will also be a family day, with plenty of activities for youngsters to enable both parents to take advantage of the site visits, talks, workshops, demonstrations and exhibits.

For more information, contact Monica Durcan, WA Expo Co-ordinator, on phone/fax (08) 9291 8249.



Boost for south-west landcare

Four million seedlings will be planted by 2001 in the Hotham Williams Catchment, south east of Perth, following a Natural Heritage Trust grant of \$1.68 million to the Hotham Williams Western Power Greening Challenge.

More than 720,000 seedlings have been planted by volunteers since 1996 as part of the challenge, which is expected to reach the one million mark later this year.

The Natural Heritage Trust grant will extend the original Challenge and form a partnership between Western Power, the State Government and local communities in the Hotham Williams Catchment.

Agriculture Western Australia's Chief Executive Officer Graeme Robertson said the Hotham Williams Catchment covered the Shires of Wandering, Boddington, Cuballing and parts of the Shires of Williams, Narrogin and Pingelly.

"Agriculture Western Australia and the Natural Heritage Trust are committed to developing sustainable agriculture and natural resource management, as well as protecting Western Australia's unique biodiversity," he said.



Greening Challenge volunteers pitch in with enthusiasm to plant seedlings grown in local nurseries in the Hotham Catchment.

Lucerne battles 'bad press'

A project to establish lucerne as a water management tool to combat salinity is gaining momentum in south-west.

The Water and Rivers Commission with support from Agriculture Western Australia (AGWEST) is providing farmers in three water resource recovery catchments with an opportunity to develop their skills in establishing lucerne.

Water and Rivers Commission salinity program manager Viv Read said lucerne was something of a victim of 'bad press', after some poor experiences some farmers had growing the crop in the 1950s and 60s.

"AGWEST's research has led to improved varieties which, coupled with better growing techniques, could provide farm productivity gains while tackling salinity problems," Mr Read said.

"AGWEST research and grower observations have shown

substantial reduction in groundwater levels where lucerne has been grown so if farmers can grow the crop efficiently, there are potentially major benefits for salinity management."

The Commission has dedicated about \$90,000 to cover up to 75 per cent of establishment costs, to help farmers overcome some of the barriers to taking on lucerne.

Uses for lucerne include cutting for hay, fattening lambs, supplementary feed and rotational grazing.

The one-year demonstrations are on the properties of five growers in the Collie catchment, nine in the Upper Warren and 10 growers in the Kent catchment, growing a total of 400 hectares.

"Farmers are being strongly supported by the WA Lucerne Growers Association through advice and experience, tips for growing and site assessment," Mr Read said.

Monitoring and Evaluation Committee

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has laid the foundations for a long-term monitoring and evaluation framework for the Salinity Action Plan.

In accordance with the 1998 draft update of the Salinity Action Plan, monitoring will provide information to landholders, the community and Government on the progress made towards achieving agreed agricultural, water resource and natural diversity objectives.

Monitoring will also look at longer-term biophysical trends, the likely impact of changes in land use and the way stakeholders are meeting their responsibilities.

To commence the process a draft six-month work plan has been developed to encourage agreement between stakeholder agencies on an appropriate framework, and to trial proposed indicators and protocols through various case studies.

The importance of maintaining independence when evaluating program performance will be an important consideration for the Salinity Council's monitoring and evaluation committee when implementing the framework.

It is anticipated that the work plan will be completed by mid-September 1999.

Mobrup...salinity risk assessment

Groundwater investigations in the Warren recovery catchment are paving the way for effective catchment planning.

Mobrup, near Kojonup, is one of six catchments in the Warren recovery catchment and the State's second oldest LCDC, established in the early 1980s.

Mobrup is the first sub-catchment in the area to develop a catchment plan and the first step is making a salinity risk assessment.

The Water and Rivers Commission's Groundwater Investigations Branch has recently completed drilling 20 bores in the Mobrup Catchment

Commission hydrogeologist Natti Hundi said that the preliminary results showed a 'text book' case of dryland salinity occurring in the Mobrup upper catchment.

The drilling carried out in the lower parts of the catchment also revealed the availability of good quality water in sediments suitable for horticulture.

Mr Hundi will discuss the drilling results with the Warren Salinity Catchments Recovery Team and may engage a company to supplement the drilling with airborne geophysics.



Mobrup catchment salinity investigation.

Recognition for WA landcarers

Western Australia's commitment to landcare will be showcased at this year's State Landcare Awards which recognise major environmental achievements across business, nature conservation, research, education and media categories.

Groups or individuals who have contributed to reversing land or water degradation over the past year are encouraged to enter the competition by 15 June.

In 1998, Western Australia's Katanning Creek Catchment Group was successful in taking out the prestigious BP Landcare Catchment award at the national level.

The State Landcare Awards presentation will be held at the gala dinner of the State Landcare Conference on 9 September in Esperance.

Community members interested in making a presentation at the conference are invited to submit their ideas and abstracts for papers.

Entry forms for the Landcare Awards are available from Belinda Wood, Agriculture Western Australia on (08) 9881 0222 or e-mail: bwood@agric.wa.gov.au

For more details about the State Landcare Conference call AGWEST's Esperance District Office on (08) 9083 1111.

Greenhouse pilot study

CALM and British Petroleum (BP) have begun the first pilot study in Australia to examine the potential of planting tree crops to offset greenhouse gas emissions.

The crops will be planted in partnership with farmers, on farmland at risk from rising water tables and salinity.

Trees extract carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as they grow—every tonne of wood sequesters, or locks up, the carbon from 3.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

The strict limits on greenhouse gas emissions from each country under the Kyoto Protocol have led to significant international interest in the establishment of tree crops to create carbon sinks to offset emissions.

"As well as the beneficial effect of reducing the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, tree planting to sequester carbon will make a major contribution toward reversing land degradation," Environment Minister Cheryl Edwardes said.

BP Kwinana Refinery Executive Director, Peter West, said the two-year pilot study with CALM was the basis for a project proposal developed for the refinery, involving the planting of maritime pine and landcare species.

BP has already funded the establishment of nearly half a million trees on south-west farms.

Australian Landcare Council appointment

Agriculture Western Australia Chief Executive Officer, Graeme Robertson, has been appointed to serve on the Australian Landcare Council for a three-year term.

The Australian Landcare Council is the Government's key advisory body on landcare matters. It brings together people involved in landcare at the grass roots level, in national organisations and in Federal and State Government agencies.

Australian Landcare Council Chairman, Bruce Lloyd, was in WA recently to attend a meeting of the Soil and Land Conservation Council.

During his visit, Mr Lloyd said that salinity was a major threat for Australia and he commented that WA was well advanced in working on solutions.



From left: Graeme Robertson (AGWEST CEO), Bruce Lloyd (Chairman of the Australian Landcare Council), David Hartley (AGWEST Executive Director of Sustainable Rural Development) and Rex Edmondson (Chairman, Soil and Land Conservation Council).

Focus catchment groups a success

Over the past 12 months, catchment support staff from Agriculture Western Australia have been working closely with the first three focus catchment groups chosen in the Blackwood region, to develop long-term, strategic action plans for the groups.

The focus catchment groups are: Fence Road (Dumbleyung/Wickepin/Kulin Shires), Lower Balgarup (Kojonup Shire) and Byenup Hill (Kojonup/Broomehill Shires).

Draft action plans for the focus catchment groups are being completed and will be presented to each group when the plans are finalised.

A full cost/benefit analysis will be calculated on recommendations made by AGWEST, to help landholders make more-informed decisions about their land-use planning and farming options.

Other catchment groups within the Blackwood are invited to nominate for selection as a focus catchment group. For more details, contact Belinda O'Brien, Landcare Development Officer, at AGWEST Katanning on: 9821 3315 or email: bobrien@agric.wa.gov.au

Salinity Council Newsletter — Contributing to WA's Salinity Action Plan

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