

The inaugural meeting of the Vasse Taskforce, chaired by the Minister for Water, Hon. Mia Davies MLA was held on 28 November 2014 in Busselton.

With representatives from 12 organisations, the establishment of the Taskforce reflects the strong will across Local and State Government to address water quality problems in the Geographe catchment and improve the management of key water assets.

The Taskforce was provided with an overview of the water quality problems in the Geographe Catchment and the historical work done by many agencies and groups to address these issues.

Outcomes from the meeting

Taskforce agrees on roles and responsibilities

The Minister for Water, Hon. Mia Davies MLA, has agreed to Chair the Taskforce for the first 12 months.

There was overwhelming agreement between Taskforce members on the need for effective cooperation and coordination between agencies with all agreeing on the terms of reference and roles and responsibilities of Taskforce members.

The key role of the Taskforce will be to coordinate and oversee the delivery of a range of projects and actions across the Geographe Catchment to improve water quality and management of key water assets. The Taskforce will also report back to the community on progress and provide opportunities for community involvement.

Working group signs fish kill MOU

The Taskforce witnessed the signing of the Fish Kill Mitigation and Response Plan Memorandum of Understanding by members of the Vasse Estuary Technical Working Group and officially endorsed the plan as part of the overall program of work to improve the management of water assets in the Geographe catchment.

The Vasse Estuary Technical Working Group, a collaborative partnership between State and Local Government, water service providers and catchment groups, was first established in 1997 to reduce the frequency and severity of fish kills in the Vasse Estuary.

After a major fish death event in 2013, the Working Group developed a response plan that sets out the roles and responsibilities of relevant members in the prevention and incident response to fish death event. This plan was trialled successfully over the 2013-14 summer and has now been formally adopted under the MOU.

The plan includes a management response framework that escalates with declining water quality conditions. The Department of Water has installed two water quality loggers at the Vasse surge barriers that continually monitor dissolved oxygen levels. Actions identified in the response plan to mitigate the impacts of falling dissolved oxygen levels include opening the fish gate, increasing seawater inflow and temporary use of aeration pumps.

Action planning commences

Taskforce partners, led by the Department of Water, will now develop a detailed program of work for the next three to four years, under the banner of Vasse Geographe strategy. The strategy will focus the delivery of work and projects on key water assets in the Geographe catchment including the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands, Lower Vasse River, Toby Inlet, the greater Geographe catchment and rural drainage networks.

One of the areas of work will include a feasibility study of the Geographe catchment drainage network by the Department of Water to determine if river flow can be re-connected into waterways to improve water quality.

The Department of Water, City of Busselton and GeoCatch will develop an extensive business case to seek funding to support the projects and work under the Vasse Geographe strategy.

GeoCatch to lead community consultation

The Minister for Water and GeoCatch signed a \$200 000 partnership agreement that will allow GeoCatch to continue its work in community consultation and initiate a pilot program with the dairy industry to reduce nutrient loss off dairy farms.

GeoCatch will take on the important role of keeping the community informed as the Taskforce's work progresses. With 18 years' experience working in the Geographe Catchment and with local communities and industries, GeoCatch is ideally placed to lead community consultation and involvement.

The next Vasse Taskforce meeting is scheduled for 5 March 2015.

More information

Geocatch

More information about these projects and work is available on the GeoCatch website < www.geocatch.asn.au >

Vasse Taskforce

Keep up to date on news from the Vasse Taskforce and progress on work at GeoCatch website or on [Facebook/GeoCatch](#)

Community

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