

The Vasse Taskforce, chaired by the Minister for Water Hon. Mia Davies MLA met for the second time on 5 March 2015 in Busselton. Minister Davies announced that Ms Libby Mettam MLA, Member for Vasse has accepted the role of the Deputy Chair of the Taskforce.

The Taskforce is gearing up to oversee the delivery of a range of projects under the new Vasse Geographe strategy. The projects will address water quality problems and improve the management of key water assets in the Geographe catchment area.

### *Outcomes from the meeting*

#### **Water asset managers appointed for Vasse Geographe strategy**

The Taskforce has appointed lead management agencies for the five key water assets including Geographe catchment, Vasse Wonnerup wetlands, Lower Vasse River, Toby Inlet and rural drainage networks. The interim asset managers, in partnership with the Department of Water, will take on the responsibility for leading projects and initiatives under the Vasse Geographe strategy. The interim water asset managers are:

- Geographe catchment – GeoCatch
- Vasse Wonnerup wetlands – Vasse Estuary Technical Working Group
- Lower Vasse River – City of Busselton
- Toby Inlet – City of Busselton
- Rural drainage network – Water Corporation

Determining and implementing long term governance options for each asset will be part of the work undertaken by the Taskforce and will result in the appointment of permanent asset managers.

#### **Collaborative action plan**

The Taskforce is finalising an overall action plan under the Vasse Geographe strategy that targets work across the five key water assets and results in:

- Appointment of a lead agency or body to manage each water asset
- Improvements in water quality now, and into the future through investigations and on-ground works
- Contemporary waterways management framework with clear objectives for water assets
- Long term business investment framework sustaining initiatives into the future
- Community and industry participation and involvement.

The range of projects under the strategy is extensive and includes innovative trials to improve water quality, investigating options for reconnecting rivers and increasing flows, development of management plans for key water assets and on-ground works in the catchment. The Department of Water, GeoCatch and the City of Busselton are jointly seeking additional funding from Royalties for Regions to support some of these projects.

## **Working with the dairy industry**

A new partnership program supported by State Government funding was signed between the Minister for Water Mia Davies, Department of Water, Western Dairy, WA Farmers and GeoCatch on 5 March 2015. The first stage of the project will pilot the national Fert\$mart program in Western Australia on at least six dairy farms in the Geographe catchment to reduce nutrient losses from dairy farms.

A second partnership agreement was signed in March 2015 where GeoCatch and Western Dairy will review dairy effluent management systems across the Geographe Catchment to see how dairies are performing against the Code of Practice. The review will help guide future investment in dairy effluent upgrades and give farmers high level technical advice on effluent management.

## **Responding to fish health**

Late spring/early summer is a critical time for fish health with seasonal decline in water quality in Busselton's estuaries and wetlands. After signing a MOU and response plan in late 2014 the Vasse Estuary Technical Working Group partners have responded a number of times over this summer to periods of critical water quality conditions.

Measures taken include opening the Wonnerup Inlet sandbar, releasing seawater into the Vasse Estuary, aerating the water with pumps and removing macroalgae from the Vasse surge-gates. To date, the summer has progressed without a fish kill incident. There still remains a high risk of a fish kill incident, and the Working Group will continue to undertake water monitoring and management actions where possible.

The Working Group has commenced a pilot trial to see if allowing seawater back into the Vasse Estuary improves water quality. It is monitoring and assessing impacts of the trial to water quality, water levels and phytoplankton in the Vasse Estuary. The Working Group is a partnership between the Departments of Water, Fisheries, Parks and Wildlife, the Water Corporation, the City of Busselton, Busselton Water, West Australian Fishing Industry Council, Recfish WA and GeoCatch.

## **Building a new catchment water balance model**

Water and landscape modelling work by the Department of Water has progressed rapidly and is on track to help us understand where and how water moves through the Geographe Catchment. This information will be used to evaluate a number of drainage, flood and nutrient export scenarios including whether it is feasible to reconnect rivers and waterways to improve water quality.

## **More information**

### **Geocatch**

More information about these projects and work is available on the GeoCatch website < [www.geocatch.asn.au](http://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**

Keep up to date on news from the Vasse Taskforce and progress on work at GeoCatch website.