

The sixth meeting of the Vasse Taskforce was held in Busselton on 17 June 2016. Ms Libby Mettam (MLA Vasse) Vasse Taskforce chair, said with the new funds from the \$7.15 million Royalties for Region *Revitalising Geographie Waterways* have enabled Taskforce partners to commence a range of new projects. Ms Mettam said that she is pleased with the progress and in her role of chair she will work to ensure project partners are delivering on time, working together and that the community's voice is heard.

Reconnecting Rivers update

The *Reconnecting Rivers* project has sparked people's interest and the final update for Stage 1 of the project was hosted by GeoCatch on 25 May 2016 with nearly 50 people attending. Four hydrological models will be developed over the life of the Vasse Geographie Strategy and will be used to test a range of management scenarios to improve water quality. The Department of Water presented an update of modelled scenarios for the Toby Inlet and Lower Vasse River considering flood risk, availability of flow and flushing potential. Six scenarios for the Lower Vasse River and Vasse Estuary (Vasse Wonnerup wetlands) and four from Toby Inlet were presented. All of these scenarios remain open for consideration. The next stage of this work is for the City of Busselton to work with the community to determine the management objectives for each water asset and then consider if the modelled scenarios support those objectives. The Department of Water will be developing a Q&A fact sheet on the scenarios presented and will be providing a report to the City of Busselton and Vasse Taskforce on the outcomes and recommendations from the project.

Vasse oxygenation trial success

A trial to assess the effectiveness of an oxygenation plant in the Vasse estuary to reduce the risk of fish kills has been a success. The aim of the trial was to determine if the oxygenation plant could artificially maintain dissolved oxygen above critical levels upstream of the Vasse surge barrier (4.0mg/L). The two units upstream of the surge barrier treated approximately 250-300 m stretch of river. The plant operated for 68 days over the trial period of 100 days mostly between the hours of 11 pm-11 am. Additional trials to assess the impact of the oxygenation plant on turbidity and to determine the extent of oxygenation will occur in the future and the cost/benefit of the oxygenation plant as a long-term option for reducing fish kills in the estuary will be assessed. During 15/16 the plant has been a great success and a welcomed management tool to reduce the likelihood of a fish kill event.

Winter monitoring

Early rains in April and May saw some initial flows in the rivers and drains allowing the winter monitoring program to commence. Busselton experienced high rainfall between 15-18 July resulting in high river flows in the Vasse, Abba, Sabina and Ludlow rivers.

Fortnightly monitoring will be undertaken at 21 sites across the catchment and on the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands. Information will be used in the development of an estuary model for the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands and for report cards for the Geographe Catchment over the life of the Vasse Geographe Strategy. A Science and Monitoring plan for the Geographe Catchment is being developed by the Department of Water with support from the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands Science Advisory Group. The plan will be presented to the Vasse Taskforce in September.

Regional Estuaries Initiative update

The *Regional Estuaries Initiative* was announced by the Hon Mia Davies Minister for Water in April 2016 and is a four year \$20 million Royalties for Regions funded state government program to improve the health of our regional estuaries. This is the biggest single investment the State Government has ever made in managing Western Australia's regional estuaries. This is in addition to the \$15 million (including \$7.15 million Royalties for Regions funding) going towards the Vasse Geographe Strategy and work of the Vasse Taskforce. The Initiative will fund new science and modelling, regional capacity, employment, training and a range of on-ground works, spanning soil and water testing, farm effluent management upgrades, fencing and revegetation and drainage siteworks. There are five strategies to the Regional Estuaries Initiative: Regional capacity and partnerships; Sustainable agriculture; Water in the landscape; Innovative remediation; Science for management. More information www.water.wa.gov.au

DairyCare partnership

DairyCare is a \$2.5 million project that brings together projects from the Regional Estuaries Initiative and Revitalising Geographe Waterways aimed at tackling fertiliser use and effluent management in the catchment. It is whole of industry partnership between Western Dairy, State agencies, Natural Resource Management groups (including GeoCatch) and dairy farmers that will tackle the flow of nutrients from dairy farms to rivers and estuaries. It is estimated that at least 30 priority dairy effluent systems will be upgraded and soil testing and nutrient plans undertaken on at least 80 farms, with the result being a substantial reduction of nutrients entering waterways. An industry

reference group will develop a strong self-regulatory approach and ensure farmers are motivated to be involved.

Communications and badging

The Vasse Taskforce is working to ensure that the projects delivered under the Vasse Geographe Strategy, Revitalising Geographe Waterways and Vasse Taskforce banners are communicated consistently. We anticipate that this will improve community engagement on the work taking place under the Vasse Geographe Strategy and on how funding is being applied. We will also be improving how we communicate so that we can reach a wider audience.

Community involvement

The Vasse Taskforce is encouraging community members interested in the health and future of Geographe waterways to have their say during community consultation opportunities. The City of Busselton will be leading community consultation on the development of management objectives for the Lower Vasse River and Toby Inlet and the Department of Parks and Wildlife for the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands. Community input into how we want our waterways to look and function in the future will be critical to determining the best management actions needed to meet community goals.

Funding opportunities for farmers

Funding has been provided to GeoCatch to work with landholders to reduce nutrients entering the catchment. Funding incentives and technical advice is available to farmers for fencing rivers, soil testing and upgrading dairy effluent systems in priority areas. GeoCatch will also be hosting seminars and workshops for home gardeners to have great gardens with minimal nutrient loss. For more information contact geocatch@water.wa.gov.au.

More information

Keep up to date on news from the Vasse Taskforce and progress on work at GeoCatch website < www.geocatch.asn.au > or on [Facebook/GeoCatch](https://www.facebook.com/GeoCatch)