

Vasse Taskforce

April 2019 | Meeting 16

The sixteenth Vasse Taskforce meeting was held in Busselton on 5 April 2019. Dr Sally Talbot (MLC South West Region) acknowledged that 2019 would be a challenging year as many projects are finalised and future investment plans completed.

1 Revitalising Geographe Waterways achievements

The Taskforce recognised that the majority of projects under Revitalising Geographe Waterways are due for completion in June 2019 but already many achievements and milestones have already been delivered supporting the need for investment post June 2019. Key achievements include:

- A significant reduction in nutrients (phosphorous and/or nitrogen) in 75% of Geographe waterways has been identified since 2015 resulting in a reduction of nearly 2000 kg/year of phosphorous entering the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands and Geographe Bay.
- Over 70 farmers have been involved in the program since 2016 contributing to improved farming practices by undertaking waterway fencing and revegetation projects, participating in soil testing programs to improve fertiliser management and undertaking major system upgrades to improve dairy effluent management.
- Water quality in the Vasse and Toby Inlet estuaries has improved through innovative management actions, scientific investigations and development of hydrodynamic models. This has substantially reduced harmful phytoplankton concentrations and the risk of fish kills.
- A survey of neighbours and community members showed that over 90% of participants supported new management practices in the Vasse estuary and were confident that initiatives would lead to long-term improvements in water quality.
- Improved drainage functionality of the Busselton Drainage District network directly improving water quality and visual amenity through changed management practices of key drainage infrastructure.
- Substantial improvement in relationships and collaboration across government agencies, NRM and industry groups and the community to actively work together to improve water quality in the Geographe Catchment.
- The program has also actively communicated with the broader community over the last three years to increase awareness of the challenges and successes of the program.

Revitalising Geographe
Waterways

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2 Investment post June 2019

- Modelling indicates a reduction of 5.8 tonnes of phosphorus and 43 tonnes of nitrogen per year (around 60%) is required to substantially reduce algal blooms in the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands, not including future developments.
- The Vasse Taskforce is preparing investment plans and seeking funding to implement actions to meet these ambitious targets as well as supporting thriving agricultural and tourism industries in the catchment.

3 Drainage plan

The Taskforce endorsed a drainage management plan for the Geographe catchment. The plan provides guidance and clarity to the agencies responsible for managing rural drainage infrastructure in the Geographe catchment in relation to water quality and makes a number of recommendations to optimise water quality in the drainage network without impeding on the drainage and flood prevention function of the drainage system. The draft plan has been developed in consultation with the Water Corporation and the City of Busselton drawing on local, national and international work.

4 Management plans – public consultation

The Taskforce was updated on the outcomes of public advertising of water and operational plans for the Lower Vasse River, Toby Inlet and the Vasse Wonnerup. There was general support for the plans which are expected to be finalised by June 2019.

3 Evaluation reporting

Revitalising Geographe Waterways will be evaluated by an independent assessor. The evaluation will showcase the success of the project and highlight any adjustments that may be required to future programs.

4 Vasse diversion drain sandbar opening

The Taskforce through the Drainage Management Plan endorsed the opening of the Vasse Diversion Drain in December each year. A trial opening in February 2019 and positive community feedback supported this action reporting the water is clearer and area more pleasant to visit. While the sandbar did reform at the entrance mouth after opening the water exchange was still greater than before. Opening the sandbar earlier in the season is expected to maintain the water exchange for long over summer.

5 Community update – ecological health and monitoring

A capacity audience heard about the health of the seagrass of Geographe Bay and the ecological value of the Lower Vasse River.

Results showed that the Lower Vasse River maintained high ecological values despite poorer water quality and one site covered with water lilies. High quantities of native species were recorded across all three sites with comparatively low numbers of exotic fish.

Edith Cowan University in collaboration with Taskforce partners – Water Corporation, GeoCatch and Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions reported on the health of the seagrass in Geographe Bay. This was the eighth year of monitoring by the university and once again results showed the seagrasses were healthy and did not exceed any of the monitoring triggers.

6 Governance

Taskforce members endorsed continuation of the Vasse Taskforce and are working to progress their commitment and roles and responsibilities to Revitalise Geographe Waterways after June 2019.

7 Upcoming events

April/May	Release Ecological monitoring results for Vasse Wonnerup
April/May	Quindalup infill sewerage works
8 May	Oz Water Conference – Australian Water Awards presentations
May/June	Vasse Diversion Drain upgrade completion
May	Community bus trip visiting project sites
May/June	Release fact sheets Vasse Wonnerup Sediment Report, Lower Vasse River Treatment Trials and Seawater Inflow Report
June	Community Update Vasse Wonnerup fish science
June	Plan release Vasse Wonnerup, Toby Inlet and Lower Vasse River
June	Community Update 'Where to Next' Future governance arrangements

More information www.rgw.dwer.wa.gov.au

For more information www.geocatch.asn.au