

Vasse Taskforce

April 2021 | Meeting 22

The twenty-second Vasse Taskforce meeting was held in Busselton on 23 April 2021. Taskforce Chair Dr Sally Talbot, acknowledged the significance of an additional four years funding through Healthy Estuaries WA. Dr Talbot congratulated Taskforce members for finding collaborative solutions to issues, including sharing of resources, knowledge and co-designing projects.

1. Vasse Wonnerup Wetland Partnership

The Taskforce endorsed continuation of the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) as Chair of Vasse Wonnerup wetlands Partnership until the end of 2024 or until vesting of the wetlands comes under Conservation Estate, whichever occurs first. DWER will work closely with Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and other agencies in the Partnership to implement key actions of the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands Operational Plan: guidance for managers 2019 including re-establishing collaboration groups with the community.

It was noted that with native title settlement now finalised the transfer of vesting from unallocated crown land to Conservation estate can be progressed.

2. Vasse Wonnerup Wetlands Summer Operations 20/21

The Vasse Surge barriers were opened during 20/21 in line with the Operating Protocol by the interagency Vasse Wonnerup wetlands partnership and was consistent with previous years. High water levels from late Spring rains required the gates to be opened to let water out in November and December. The gates were again opened in response to complaints about odours in the vicinity of Estuary View Drive. This occurred in February and March to let water in, covering decaying algal mats, improving water quality conditions for fish, and improving odour issues for neighbours.

The Taskforce noted that the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) was investigating salinity levels in the Vasse Estuary and Lower Vasse

River and the discovery of an unknown number of dead Carter's Freshwater Mussels. It is thought a series of unusual weather events together with the normal opening of the Vasse Surge Gates have combined to connect the two systems, and further analysis was to be undertaken.

DWER scientists have recorded salinity in the lower depths of the Lower Vasse River about 1.8 km upstream from the Old Butter Factory museum.

Carter's Freshwater Mussel are highly intolerant to salinity so even low levels of salinity may have impacted on the mussels which are listed as vulnerable under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC).

DWER scientists advised that higher than normal water levels in the Vasse estuary may have been due to a combination of seawater inflows through the Vasse surge barrier and summer rainfall in February, March and April.

Water levels in the Lower Vasse River were also higher than normal due to the summer rainfall associated with TC Seroja causing additional water flows from the Vasse Diversion Drain.

The Taskforce was disappointed with the death of any fauna in our rivers and estuaries and supported the work of the Vasse Wonnerup Wetland Partnership to better understand the situation and to make any necessary changes to how the system is managed if these type of weather events occur.

3. Innovation and remediation funding

Innovation and remediation funding through Healthy Estuaries WA will be used to progress actions in the Lower Vasse River Water Management Plan, the Vasse Wonnerup, Vasse Wonnerup wetlands Operational Plan and Vasse Wonnerup wetlands Geographe Bay Water Quality Improvement Plan (in preparation).

4. Lower Vasse River Future Directions

The Taskforce congratulated the City of Busselton on implementation of the Lower Vasse River Waterway Management Plan, particularly the completion of the Living Stream concept design and amendment to the remainder of the project scope; and progressing environmental approvals for sediment removal in the Lower Vasse River.

The water management plan recommended further development of a "Living Stream" approach to future management of the Lower Vasse River. The primary objective of the Living Streams approach is to reduce the extent/severity/duration of algal blooms while enhancing existing ecological values and improving public amenity of the river.

Funds provided through the State funded Revitalising Geographe Waterway program has enabled the City to develop remediation actions in the Lower Vasse River and Toby Inlet, including the development of detailed designs for a Living Streams approach for an 800m section of the Lower Vasse River in the centre of Busselton, from the Butter Factory Museum to the Southern Drive boat ramp. Seeking community and stakeholders input has been an essential part of the project and the project also attracted significant interest on social media from sections of the community.

The Living Stream Concept design encompasses four stages: sediment removal; construction of an off-stream wetland with a re-circulation system; construction of in-stream structures; and enhancement of existing wetland(s) with a re-circulation system (optional).

5. Upcoming events

Month	Scheduled Engagement Activity	Organiser	Topic
April	Workshop	GeoCatch	Container planting (Garden Guardians)
May	Community Science Update	GeoCatch hosted	Seagrass and the marine environment
May	Dairy Innovation Day	Western Dairy/DWER/GeoCatch	Launch of dairy code

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

For more information www.geocatch.asn.au

Fish kills should be reported to the [FishWatch](#) 24-hour hotline on 1800 815 507.