

# Vasse Taskforce

*November 2021 | Meeting 23*

The twenty-third Vasse Taskforce meeting was held in Busselton on 26 November 2021. Incoming Taskforce Chair Ms Jackie Jarvis, acknowledged the work of the Taskforce, stakeholders and community since 2014 and advised as Chair she would raise water and environmental matters with Minister Kelly and Minister Sanderson (now Minister Whitby) respectively to progress the business of the Vasse Taskforce.

## **1. New Chairperson**

The Vasse Taskforce welcomed incoming Chair, the Hon. Ms Jackie Jarvis (MLC South West). Ms Jarvis is based in Margaret River and has a background in agriculture. Her appointment reinforces the McGowan Government's commitment to the waterways of the Geographe Catchment. Ms Jarvis expressed her appreciation to the Hon. Dr Sally Talbot for leading the Vasse Taskforce for the past four years.

## **2. Vasse Wonnerup Wetlands - Summer Operations 21/22**

The Vasse Wonnerup Wetland Partnership (the partnership) reviewed operation of the Vasse Surge gates and seawater inflows for summer 2021/22 with the latest scientific information from the members of the Science Advisory Group and community feedback. The operation of the Vasse Surge Barriers in summer considers the many values of the wetland, with the objective to address water quality and fish kill risks, whilst managing use of the wetland by migratory bird species and minimising the likelihood of saltwater ingress into the Lower Vasse River. Regulatory approvals are now being sought for the improved management for operation of the Vasse surge gates during summer 2021/22.

The Taskforce acknowledged that numerous natural factors beyond the control of the Partnership could potentially result in changes to water levels/water quality, for example summer rainfall events and inflows to the Lower Vasse River through the culverts upstream.

## **3. Estuary View Drive sediment removal**

The Taskforce noted progress on the Vasse Estuary sediment removal project. The project aims to improve smell and liveability for residents by removing 'black ooze' sediment exposed over summer a section of the Vasse estuary channel foreshore adjacent to Estuary View

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Drive. Sediment removal will involve 'dredging to geotextile bags' using an unmanned dredge or micro dredge that sucks up and pumps sediment into geotextile bags that are left to de-water on the shore. Removal of sediment is expected to occur in July 2022, when water levels are high and bird numbers low). The project will be staged over approximately five months. The works will commence after community consultation and environmental impact assessments are completed, and all approvals received.

#### **4. Lower Vasse River**

The Lower Vasse River Management Advisory Group has been meeting approximately monthly, and providing input into the sediment removal project, Living Streams project, operating guidelines for managing the Lower Vasse River culvert, salinity incursion and management of Vasse surge barrier and potential human health impacts of cyanobacteria.

The Taskforce acknowledged that the City has had difficulty finding a suitable company to progress the peer review for the Living Stream concept and a further procurement process will be required before that can occur. The key focus in the next few months is implementation of the first stage of sediment removal, in the section of river between the Old Butter Factory and Causeway Road Bridge. It is envisaged that work will commence in March or April 2022.

#### **5. Soil testing program**

The Taskforce noted that significant progress has been made on the soil testing program and there had been a strong uptake by farmers with 37 farmers approved to date. Farms will be sampled by GeoCatch or Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development during the summer of 2021/22. Nearly half of the landholders selected Do-It-Yourself sampling. This is the first time this approach has been used and DPIRD and GeoCatch provided training for the DIY farmers in November. Evaluation of the 20/21 soil testing program is underway looking at pre survey results, soil and tissue test results, agronomic advice, fertiliser applications to understand how farmers make their fertiliser decisions.

#### **6. Dairy effluent**

The Taskforce noted that the Environmental Protection Act is under review and this includes waste reform with implications for dairy effluent management.

A revised Code of Practice for Dairy Farm Effluent Management WA was released in 2021 providing clear standards for farmers that reflect and support current commercial and environmental objectives, and meet the expectations of the community, consumers, government and the dairy industry in Western Australia. Ten effluent upgrades were completed between 2017-2020 in the Geographe Catchment through Revitalising Geographe Waterways. Healthy Estuaries WA will continue to support Western Dairy by providing technical advice to farmers, benchmarking against the Code of Practice, communication activities to support best practice and the development of a business case for effluent management. The ten recipient of upgrades completed in the Geographe Catchment through Revitalising Geographe Waterways are being interviewed at the time of their system review to specifically evaluate dairy effluent management.

#### **7. Award winning projects**

The Taskforce congratulated three partner agencies on their recent Australian Water Association awards (WA Division). Both projects benefited the Geographe waterways and are now vying for the national water awards to be announced in 2022.

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development and CSBP received the *R&D Excellence Award* for the uPtake project. uPtake is a partnership project between government, industry, universities, farmers, and catchment groups. Undertaking robust and innovative science to improve water quality in southwest WA waterways and estuaries by reducing phosphorus loss of grazing properties by improving confidence in the science supporting fertiliser recommendations.

The Water Corporation received the *Infrastructure Project Innovation Award (Regional)* for the Vasse Diversion Drain Upgrade Project. The Vasse Diversion Drain Upgrade project demonstrates excellence in engineering and planning to provide a sustainable solution to flooding in the Busselton region. It simultaneously offers innovative solutions in environmental management to help protect one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. The Water Corporation and Department of Water and Environmental Regulation co-designed the flow rates down the Lower Vasse River to improve flushing of the system and new monitoring stations will provide improved accuracy.

## 8. Upcoming engagement activities

Month	Scheduled Engagement Activity	Organiser	Topic
December	Farmer sundowner	GeoCatch	Celebration of farmers participating in nutrient management projects
December	Community fish tagging	Murdoch University, OzFish, GeoCatch	Community participating in Murdoch's fish tagging at the Vasse surge barrier
December	Estuary View Drive consultation	DWER	Community consultation meeting for proposed sediment removal in Vasse Estuary
December	Lower Vasse River Summer Communications Plan	DWER, City of Busselton, GeoCatch	Joint communication plan for 2021-22 summer

More information [www.rgw.dwer.wa.gov.au](http://www.rgw.dwer.wa.gov.au)

For more information [www.geocatch.asn.au](http://www.geocatch.asn.au)

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