

Vasse Taskforce

April 2022 | Meeting 24

The twenty-fourth Vasse Taskforce meeting was held in Busselton on 29 April 2022. Chair, the Hon. Ms Jackie Jarvis acknowledged that while COVID-19 restrictions had limited face to face community involvement all project managers had adapted quickly to working online.

1. Vasse Wonnerup Wetlands - Summer Operations 21/22

- The Vasse Wonnerup wetlands Partnership have been letting seawater into the Vasse estuary since 2015 to improve water quality and reduce the risk of fish kills.
- Summer operations in February 2022 saw easterly winds push water from the estuary into the Lower Vasse river, despite water levels in the estuary being lower than required under regulatory approval. Salinity levels up to 4 parts per thousand (ppt), fatal to Carter's Mussels, were recorded up to Strelly Street. This was the area that mussel deaths occurred in 2021.
- In response the City of Busselton undertook earthworks mid February along Ford Road, hydrologically separating the Vasse estuary and Lower Vasse River. This allowed re-opening of gates on the Vasse surge barrier to increase water levels to improve water quality and respond to community requests to raise water levels to improve smells.
- Experience over the last seven years has shown that the competing objectives (Ramsar values, liveability, smell, water quality, and reduction in fish kills) of the wetlands cannot be managed through surge barrier manipulation alone.
- Over the next 12 months the Vasse Wonnerup wetlands Partnership will work with the community and stakeholders to prioritise the management objectives in the Vasse Wonnerup Wetland Operational Plan.
- The Partnership will also explore the options to install a temporary or permanent barrier in the Lower Vasse River prior to summer 2022-23 to hydrologically separate the river from the Vasse estuary.

2. Estuary View Drive sediment removal

- Environmental and cultural heritage approvals are progressing and management plans are being prepared for the project. Tender documents are planned for release in mid-May by Department of Water and Environmental Regulation.
- Dredging is planned for the winter of 2021.
- Indigenous monitoring will be undertaken during dredging in recognition of mythological importance to the traditional owners.

3. Lower Vasse River – sediment removal

- The Taskforce congratulated the City on its work to remove nutrient rich organic sediments from the section of the Lower Vasse River between the Butter Factory Museum and the Causeway Road bridge.
- Environmental and cultural heritage approvals are in place and sediment removal will be guided by a Carter's Freshwater Mussel Management Plan, an Acid Sulfate Soil and Dewatering Management Plan and a Dredging and Disposal Management Plan.
- The City now seek funding from the State to progress further stages of the sedimental removal initiatives.

4. Rural fertiliser management

- The Taskforce welcomed the opportunity to review the evaluation results of the Geographe soil testing program 2009-2019.
- With over 70% of total phosphorus entering Geographe Bay coming from dairy and beef enterprises the Taskforce acknowledged the importance of this program and the concerted efforts of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and GeoCatch in delivering the program.
- Over the ten-year period 178 farmers were involved in the program with soil testing undertaken on 40,700 Ha of land. Evaluation of farmer soil testing results and fertiliser surveys showed a 32% reduction in the amount of phosphorus applied and a modelled reduction of 4.8 tonne/year of phosphorus entering Geographe Bay, if participating farmers continued to follow best management practices.

5. Upcoming engagement activities

Month	Scheduled Engagement Activity	Organiser	Topic
April	Grazing Matcher Group Meeting 1	GeoCatch with MLA and Western Beef	Grazing Matcher Group – first meeting for the new 2022 group
TBC	Taskforce bus tour	GeoCatch/DWER	Tour of drainage infrastructure for Vasse Taskforce (Program TBC)
June/July	Community Update	GeoCatch	Provide a program update to the community including soil testing program and dairy effluent management.
September	State NRM Conference	City of Mandurah	DWER will present on the RGW program/projects (TBC)
November	NRM Knowledge Conference	SWCC	Dairy farm site visit (DWER) TBC

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.