

# Vasse Taskforce

*August 2022 | Meeting 25*

The twenty-fifth Vasse Taskforce meeting was held in Busselton on 19 August 2022. The meeting was preceded by a tour of drainage infrastructure of the Lower Vasse River and Vasse Surge Gates.

## 1. Tour of drainage infrastructure

The Vasse Taskforce took an in-depth look at Geographe waterways and the local drainage network in Busselton recently on a bus tour hosted by local catchment group GeoCatch. Taskforce Chair Jackie Jarvis MLC said the bus trip was important for Taskforce members to familiarise themselves with the catchment, understand some of the challenges of improving water quality and discuss projects.

Geographe catchment waterways have been diverted and modified since the late 1920's to mitigate flood risk and to allow development in the region. At times this has contributed to poor water quality.

Members reviewed the newly upgraded Vasse Diversion Drain culverts and two new penstock that were installed in 2021 to increase flows to the Lower Vasse River, doubling the flow rate without increasing flood risk. This was followed by the sediment removal project on the Lower Vasse River and future dredging and management plans. Water Corporation staff explained the flood protection mechanisms that are in place on the surge barrier, and how the gates on the surge barrier are used to allow seawater inflow in summer to reduce fish kill risk upstream.

The tour highlighted the complexity of the water quality and flood management issues in the Geographe catchment.

## 2. Vasse Wonnerup Wetlands - Summer Operations 22/23

- 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. The use of seawater in this way has occurred since the 1988.
- 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

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lower than required under regulatory approval. Salinity levels up to 4 parts per thousand (ppt) 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.
- The partnership has meet to determine the operation of the surge barriers and other infrastructure to manage water levels and quality for the many competing values of the wetland and surrounds.
- After successful use of a hydrological barrier in early 2022 the partnership will again install a temporary barrier in the Lower Vasse River prior to summer 2022-23. An improved design will be used to hydrologically separate the river from the Vasse estuary.

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

- Environmental and cultural heritage approvals and management plans have been completed.
- Tenders were advertised in early 2022 but unfortunately no tenders were received so planned works in winter 2022 did not proceed.
- Revised tender documents are planned for release in 2022 by Department of Water and Environmental Regulation.
- Dredging is now planned for the winter of 2023.

### **4. Rural fertiliser management**

- DWER, as part of the Revitalising Geographe Waterways program, hosted a fertiliser workshop in Busselton to provide the fertiliser and grazing industry with recent findings on nutrient loss off grazing land and water quality problems.
- The workshop was attended representatives from the fertiliser industry, Dairy Australia, Western Dairy and farmers.
- Interstate scientist provided global fertiliser management issues and international policy approaches to reduce excess nutrients off agriculture.
- The Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development provides an update on the South west WA soil testing program and uPtake project results and DWER outlined the results of the Geographe catchment soil testing program evaluation.
- Participants also looked at the future of fertiliser management programs in southwest WA including how to accelerate and increase the adoption of nutrient management best management practices by farmers and the fertiliser industry.
- The findings from the workshop will be used to determine the next phase of the nutrient management program and what is the role of the Fertiliser Industry.

### **5. Nutrient Best Management Practice**

- Water Minister Dave Kelly announced the release of new best practice guidelines for nutrient management to assist grazing farmers in Western Australia's South-West [Nutrient best management practices guideline](http://www.wa.gov.au) ([www.wa.gov.au](http://www.wa.gov.au)).

- The guidelines provide valuable information to help grazing farmers maximise stock productivity, while minimising environmental impacts in local waterways, and have been developed over the past two years with input from farmers, scientists, catchment groups and fertiliser industry representatives.
- The best practice guidelines focus on the optimal use of fertiliser and increasing productivity, and reducing environmental impacts on our precious South-West waterways.
- The guidelines reflect the internationally recognised 4Rs of best practice nutrient stewardship that optimise the efficiency of fertiliser use: Right source, Right rate, Right time and Right place.
- Revitalising Geographe Waterways staff will be using this new online resource to help farmers keep nutrients on farm and maximise productivity. They will also tailor advice to ensure it is relevant to the climatic and soil conditions of the high rainfall, coastal zones of Geographe catchment.
- The best practice guidelines are available on the Healthy Estuaries WA website (<https://estuaries.dwer.wa.gov.au/>) or from local catchment groups.
- Vasse Taskforce Chair Jackie Jarvis said that we value the collaborative efforts of the many farmers we work with who are continuously innovating and working hard to improve their farming practices as well as supporting the protection of our waterways. The guidelines will prove to be an important resource for both tackling waterways health as well as assisting grazing farmers to maximise stock productivity.

## 6. Upcoming engagement activities

Month	Scheduled Engagement Activity	Organiser	Topic
August	Taskforce and GeoCatch Board bus tour	GeoCatch/DWER	Tour of drainage infrastructure for Vasse Taskforce
August	Grazing Matcher Group	GeoCatch	
August	Future of Fertiliser	DWER	Industry workshop
September	Garden Guardians	GeoCatch	Garden Guardians at Origins
September	State NRM Conference	City of Mandurah	DWER will present on the RGW program/projects
6 October	Community Update	GeoCatch	- Whole of program update - LVR Sediment Removal Update - Farmer case study
October	Wildflower Show	DWER	Workshop on low nutrient gardening
November	NRM Knowledge Conference	SWCC	Dairy farm site visit (DWER) TBC
November	Bay OK Day	SWCC, GeoCatch, Dunsborough Primary	Looking after the bay with Dunsborough Primary students

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.