



Vasse Taskforce

September 2017 | Meeting 10

The tenth Vasse Taskforce meeting was held in Busselton on 8 September 2017 and was chaired by Dr Sally Talbot (MLC South West Region).

1 Community survey results

Results from community survey commissioned by the Taskforce indicate the high value respondents have for the waterways of the Geographe Catchment, particularly Geographe Bay. Respondents demonstrated a high level of concern (88%) for our waterways and correspondingly a high level of participation in activities to improve water quality and waterway health (33%). The most valued waterway is Geographe Bay which was nominated by over 52% of participants. Examining these results the Taskforce acknowledged how important work to improve water quality in our rivers and wetlands is to maintain the health of the bay and community values.

The survey was also used to test whether the Vasse Taskforce and the Revitalising Geographe Waterways program are meeting community expectations. Results showed that over one third of respondents are aware of the Vasse Taskforce and the program with that nearly 90% of participants indicating that the Revitalising Geographe Waterways program is valuable to the catchment. These results reinforce that the community is supportive of the Vasse Taskforce model and work to date. The Taskforce will continue to use the results to guide and implement actions in the catchment.

The community can find a summary of the key findings of the survey on the GeoCatch website www.geocatch.asn.au or attend the next Revitalising Geographe Waterways community update schedule for 24 November 2017.

2 Soil amendments

Soil amendments are products that raise the phosphorus retention of soils thus reducing phosphorus losses from farms and retaining it for plant growth. Modelling and analysis has shown up to 50% reduction in phosphorus losses when combined with fertiliser management. A number of trials have been conducted in the state but the key challenges to using soil amendments more widely are: gaining regulatory approvals; demonstrating the effectiveness in agriculture and product supply and consistency. The Taskforce is contributing through on-site trials in drains and public open space turf and is keen to develop more trials across a diversity of agricultural uses and different application rates such as turf farms and fodder crops.

Revitalising Geographe
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3 Sustainable agriculture

Nutrient run-off from agricultural land is a significant source of nutrients entering waterways in the Geographe catchment. Working with farmers and industry to reduce nutrient loss of agricultural land is a major focus of *Revitalising Geographe Waterways*.

Two key projects are being delivered under *Revitalising Geographe Waterways* to reduce the loss of nutrients of agricultural land to improve fertiliser management and dairy effluent management.

Improving fertiliser management is an important project benefiting both the farmer's productivity and the water quality of Geographe waterways. In this project farmers are supported to make better fertiliser decisions through subsidised whole farm soil testing and nutrient maps and access to Fertcare accredited agronomic advice. This project builds upon similar soil testing programs that have been delivered in the Geographe catchment since 2009. Fourteen farmers were involved in the soil testing program in 2016 and another 30 have submitted an expression of interest to participate in the 2017 program. GeoCatch in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development are delivering this project with farmers making sure profits and nutrients stay on farm.

The dairy effluent project, DairyCare aims to improve the management of dairy effluent across at least ten high risk dairy farms to reduce the amount of nutrients and organic matter entering Geographe waterways. The Geographe Catchment supports close to a quarter of the dairy farms in the state and is an important industry on a local and state scale.

GeoCatch have teamed up with Western Dairy to deliver the DairyCare project that involves developing tailored dairy effluent plans for farmers and providing funding incentives to implement the plans to meet the industry Code of Practice. Seven farmers identified as being high risk to waterways due to their herd size and position in the catchment have been accepted in the project. Another twelve farmers have submitted an expressions of interest, which will be assessed against a risk criteria. Five dairy effluent plans are in the final stages of completion and upgrades will start early 2018. GeoCatch in partnership with Western Dairy are delivering this project to support farmers and dairy industry achieve best practice effluent management.

Due to the importance of the sustainable agriculture projects to *Revitalising Geographe Waterways* a project reference group with representatives from government agencies, catchment groups, industry and farmers has been established to oversee the fertiliser and dairy effluent projects. The group has been established to progress the sustainable agriculture programs and to ensure that industry and farmers are involved in developing projects to maximize adoption and long-term behavioral change. The Vasse Taskforce is encouraged by the progress that has been made in the last 18 months. The Taskforce will continue to strive to work with the Sustainable Agriculture Project Reference Group and the farming community to reduce nutrient loss off agricultural areas.

4 Upcoming events for the community

- 15 September - closing date for entries for Bay OK Garden Competition and selection of winner
- 14 October - Bay OK community workshop - sustainable garden installation event
- October Toby Inlet Coastwise community fish sampling project involving local schools, community and Murdoch University. The project is a partnership with GeoCatch and City of Busselton.
- 24 November - Revitalising Geographe Waterways community update (including report to community on survey results)
- 11 November Bay OK community workshop – waterwise verge installation

For specific dates and more information <https://geocatch.asn.au/events/>

More information www.dwer.wa.gov.au

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