

LOWER VASSE RIVER MANAGEMENT ADVISORY GROUP COMMUNIQUE (POST MEETING OF 6 DECEMBER 2021)

1.0 Introduction

The City's Lower Vasse River Management Advisory Group (LVRMAG) met on Monday 6 December 2021. A range of matters of interest to the community were addressed at the meeting, including:

- updates on the planned commencement of sediment removal works next autumn;
- a presentation from OzFish on their organisation and on proposals for goldfish control in the River;
- an overview of the planned approach to health warnings over the summer;
- an update on planned additional groundwater monitoring;
- management of the Vasse Estuary surge barrier, and potential impacts on the Lower Vasse River; and
- a thank you to our departing community representative, and future call for new community representative.

Brief summaries of key points related to each of these matters are provided below.

2.0 Sediment removal

The stage 1 sediment removal contract has now been awarded to Apex Envirocare, and it is expected that works will commence in March or April 2022. The stage 1 area is from the Butter Factory to the Causeway Bridge. There are a number of reasons why sediment removal is planned to be undertaken in stages, including the fact that the availability of suitable contractors is limited – and even if sufficient funds had been available and all environmental approvals secured, it would not have been possible to do a larger sediment removal project this financial year.

The City continues to progress environmental approvals for sediment removal in the section of the River from the Butter Factory all the way to the Busselton Bypass, including the stage 1 area. The Federal Government has, however, determined that sediment removal will constitute a 'controlled action' under the Federal Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999. It is envisaged that Federal environmental approval will be granted in January or February 2022. The key environmental issues of interest to the Federal Government are potential impacts on Carter's Freshwater Mussels and potential downstream impacts on the Vasse-Wonnerup Wetlands.

3.0 OzFish Unlimited presentation on goldfish control

OzFish Unlimited is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to helping recreational fishers support the health of their rivers, lakes and estuaries and shore up the future of the sport. OzFish Unlimited partners with fishers and the broader community to invest time and money into the protection and restoration of our waterways, counteracting decades of degradation.

Steve Pursell from OzFish provided the Group with an overview of the organisation and plans to undertake a community-led goldfish control project. Goldfish are present in the River in large numbers, growing to very large sizes, outcompeting native species and stirring up sediments, which exacerbates water quality issues. OzFish have also submitted a project for funding through the City's

'YouChoose' community grant funding programme – and over the next month or so, community members will have an opportunity to vote on which of the approximately 30 projects submitted does get funded. As part of the OzFish initiative, community members may also be able to help removing the gold fish.

4.0 Health warnings over summer

The Group was provided with a briefing on health warnings strategies for the current summer, when algal blooms develop, most likely prior to Christmas. As in previous summers, temporary warning signage will be placed in publicly accessible areas close to the River, supplementing the permanent signage already in place. There was also a discussion around and a commitment to provide signage in languages other than English, and to publish newspaper and social media notices warning of the health risks associated with the River. Note that placement of notices in the newspaper may be difficult, due to advertising deadlines over the Christmas/New Year period.

5.0 Groundwater monitoring

The Group was provided with an update on ongoing groundwater monitoring near the River and the construction of two additional groundwater monitoring bores to occur prior to Christmas. The two additional shallow bores will assist with better understanding the local hydrology of the River, in particular the interactions between water levels in the River and underground and potential impacts of nutrients and other pollutants from the groundwater on water quality.

6.0 Management of Vasse Estuary surge barrier

The approach to management of the Vasse Estuary surge barrier was discussed, with some members expressing a view that more saltwater inflow should be allowed into the Vasse Estuary. It was explained that the management of the surge barriers is a matter for the Vasse Wonnerup Wetlands Partnership, which is currently seeking approval from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions for the planned approach to surge barrier management this summer. The Vasse Wonnerup Wetlands Partnership is led by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, and other members are the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Water Corporation, and the City of Busselton.

Whilst final decisions have not been made, it was explained that water levels and saltwater inflow through the surge barrier are both likely to be lower this summer than last, due to concerns about the impact of higher water levels last summer on birdlife in the Estuary and saltwater inflow into the Lower Vasse River causing the death of Carter's Freshwater Mussels. It was also explained that higher water levels would create risks for the sediment removal project, as the polymers used to assist with dewatering of the sediment before it is treated and transported for disposal or re-use do not work effectively with salt water.

7.0 Thank you to our departing community representative, and call for new community representative

Because of a need to relocate to the east coast for family reasons, Henk Van der Wiele has had to resign from the Group. The Group and the City thanked Henk for his contributions over the last 18 months and wished him all the best for the future. To ensure continued adequate community representation, the City will be inviting expressions-of-interest from potential new community representatives in the New Year.

Group members and members of the public can also find information relating to the River and its management on the City and Revitalising Geographe Waterways websites, via the following links –

- Wetlands and Waterways » City of Busselton
- Lower Vasse River - RGW (dwer.wa.gov.au)

These links may also be useful -

- Sediment removal FAQs available at [lower-vasse-river-sediment-removal-faqs \(busselton.wa.gov.au\)](http://lower-vasse-river-sediment-removal-faqs(busselton.wa.gov.au))
- Living Streams [FAQs | Waterway Management | Your Say Busselton](#)
- LVR FAQs available at [FAQs-Lower Vasses River-RGW \(dwer.wa.gov.au\)](http://FAQs-Lower Vasses River-RGW (dwer.wa.gov.au))

Members of the community can also contact the City if they have questions about the management of the River.