The Scott River Action Plan

SUMMARY BROCHURE - OCTOBER 2020

Lower Blackwood Catchment
Land Conservation District Committee

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Department of **Water and Environmental Regulation**
Department of **Primary Industries and Regional Development**

HEALTHY ESTUARIES WA

THE SCOTT RIVER ACTION PLAN

The Scott River Action Plan aims to protect and enhance the environmental health and community benefit of the Scott River Catchment whilst achieving sustainable agriculture outcomes.

This plan describes the **current status of the Catchment** with regard to water quality, health of waterways and riparian zone and provides a **set of clear recommendations** aimed at maintaining and improving **catchment health** while facilitating **current and future farm and agricultural production.**

The Scott River Action Plan, **funded by Department of Water and Environmental Regulation** through the **Regional Estuaries Initiative,** was prepared by the **Lower Blackwood LCDC** in collaboration with the **Scott River farming community, local industries, Traditional Owners and government agencies**. The purpose of this collaborative effort was to accomplish a meaningful integration of local knowledge and perspectives into the Plan (particularly in the development of management recommendations) in order to foster ownership and implementation.

An important part of this collaborative effort is the **recognition of the large amount of work** already carried out to improve water quality and sustainability in the Scott River catchment. This includes the detailed report Scott Coastal Plain a Strategy for a Sustainable Future, Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia (2001); and the Hardy Inlet Water Quality Improvement Plan Stage one -the Scott River Catchment, Department of Water (2012). The Scott River Action Plan is the beginning of a **long-term collaborative partnership** approach to achieve agreed water quality and sustainable agriculture outcomes.

Drawing on previous work, industry best practices and current needs and priorities of landholders and industry in the Catchment, this work seeks to:

1. Integrate previous data with those collected and analysed in the current study to provide a current snapshot of Scott River catchment condition
2. In collaboration with landholders and industry groups, identify methods and opportunities to improve Catchment health
3. Strengthen collaboration and ownership between those invested in the health of the Catchment. Specifically, Scott River landholders, government agencies, traditional owners, and NRM groups
4. Identify knowledge gaps
5. Provide a clear set of recommendations
6. Develop an Action Plan by which those recommendations can be met.

To achieve this, new research was commissioned to:

1. Establish a baseline foreshore condition assessment for Scott River tributaries within priority sub-catchments
2. Provide an update on water quality targets for the Catchment
3. Identify those areas where there is a paucity of knowledge on catchment health and impacting human activities
4. Investigate current nutrient management practices and opportunities for improvement with a focus on dairy effluent systems, drainage, fertiliser applications and waterway condition.
5. Identify landholders' values and priorities with regard to catchment health and water quality
6. Develop a comprehensive spatial dataset to be used in future planning

Preparation of the Plan

The Lower Blackwood LCDC is the primary facilitator of the Scott River Action Plan guided by the Project Reference Group.

The **Project Reference Group** consists of a number of Scott River producers, representatives from the Plantation industry, the dairy Industry and government agencies. The Plan was primarily prepared by the LCDC with some studies carried out externally.

The **three key ingredients** in the preparation of the Plan were:

- A thorough and on-going engagement with Scott River producers from each agricultural sector and with local indigenous groups;
- The involvement of specialist consultants with strong expertise and knowledge of the area;

and

- A strong collaborative approach with relevant government agencies.

Much work went into determining and mapping farmer interest in the river systems, identifying gaps in existing knowledge, establishing priority areas for survey and enhancing local support for this project.

Innovative methods were used to enable learning from local producers about their values, priorities and concerns. The purpose of this approach was to accomplish a meaningful integration of local knowledge and perspectives into the Plan (particularly in the development of management recommendations) in order to foster ownership and implementation.

Sensitive data and information collected through the process is treated with confidentiality by the LCDC and project partners and not included in the Plan.

What's in the Plan?

The Scott River Action Plan has a broader scope than a standard river action plan. It includes a number of studies which were identified as being crucial to providing a more holistic understanding of catchment condition and for the identification of management solutions. Figure 1 shows the different sections of the Plan and how they link to each other.

Introduction states the background, aims and notes of previous studies and the Methods Section outlines the methodology used for the preparation of the Plan.

Following is ***Methods*** which provides the methodology used for the formulation of action plan.

Catchment Overview describes both the socio-economic landscape of the Catchment as well as the environmental values/drivers, including water quality and most up to date information on river health.

The process of stakeholder engagement and its findings is outlined in ***Engagement and Consultation Process***. A component of the engagement process is the ***Knowledge Sharing and Value Mapping*** study which covers farmer and community views on the elements of water, vegetation, land use and climate. This is an important study, because through interviews and mapping the farming community shared their views, concerns and priorities. In turn this helps develop a broader understanding and assists implementation of agreed management measures.

Catchment Condition Assessment is the Section of the report that looks at the key aspects of water quality management: Dairy Effluent Management, Riparian Management, Drain Management, and Fertiliser Management & Soil Health. Last comes the final recommendation Tables in the actual Action Plan.

Appendix A contains the FCA map sheets, the management recommendation Tables and priority actions. ***Appendix B*** contains additional information about flora and fauna species found in the Catchment, recommended weed control methods and a riparian restoration local case study.

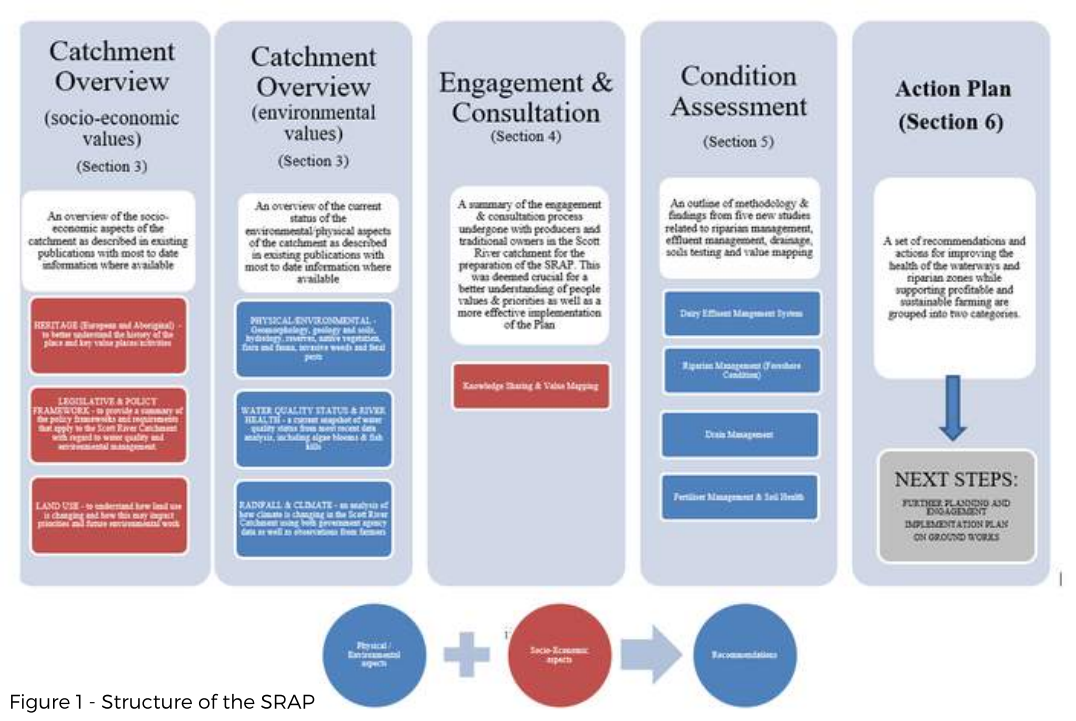

Figure 1 - Structure of the SRAP

Key Findings

A total of 12 recommendations with associated actions (divided into **recommendations for landholders** and **recommendations for supporting organisations**) were developed based on best practice riparian management, current understanding of waterway and riparian condition in the Scott River catchment, and input from Scott River growers and other relevant stakeholders.

Recommendations

For landholders:

1. Identify and adopt optimum fertiliser rates and applications that maintains productivity levels whilst minimising nutrient loss (for all land uses)
2. Identify and implement farm-specific best practice solutions for upgrading effluent systems (dairy)
3. Protect or Improve the condition of riparian land
4. Adopt sustainable surface water drainage design and management practice to reduce nutrient export, while maintaining essential drainage functions.

For supporting organisations:

5. Continue to investigate Catchment conditions and waterway health.
6. Support the identification and implementation of best practice fertiliser management.
7. Support the identification and implementation of farm-specific, best practice solutions for designing or upgrading effluent systems.
8. Support landholders to protect or improve the condition of riparian land.
9. Support a strategic and coordinate catchment scale approach to drainage management.
10. Support farm-scale best management practice for drainage.
11. Foster on-going and meaningful engagement and knowledge sharing opportunities with farmers, Aboriginal groups, industry and government.
12. Strengthen collaboration and project ownership among landholders, government agencies, land managers, traditional owners and NRM groups for further research and implementation of the SRAP recommendations.

A Strategic Approach

The Scott River Action Plan covers a lot of ground and makes a relatively large number of recommendations and actions which at first glance might seem unconnected and potentially complex. However, all parts of the report and the recommendations are connected and **add up to a strategic approach** that can begin to be implemented in the short term and continued in the medium to long term.

T**he key elements in this strategic approach include:**

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- The importance of a collaborative-based governance framework that brings farmers, industry and government together in a full partnership to achieve agreed joint objectives, with Lower Blackwood LCDC supported to play a leadership role.
- The need for a 'knowledge hub' to retain and make information about all aspects of management and land use accessible, along with collaborative processes to share and exchange information and ideas.
- A series of practical recommendations and practical learning tools, including for further work, for management of the main land uses to support farmers in cost effective ways, including the dairy and beef industries. This includes support for farmers to optimise their fertiliser programs and reduce nutrient loss, and more cost-effective ways to make use of valuable dairy effluent.
- A landscape approach across the Catchment that identifies the best way to manage the existing drainage system across farms and sub catchments.
- The identification of streams, drains, remnant vegetation and wetlands, which still have valuable vegetation that can be fenced and restored if necessary, to support the amenity, biodiversity and water quality of the Catchment.
- Clear identification of the scale of problems with feral animals, especially feral pigs, that can lead to more strategic approaches to dealing with these pests.
- Introduction of the idea of 'Whole Farm Mapping' as a service to farmers to bring together all of the elements of sustainable and productive farming in a sub-catchment and whole of landscape approach.

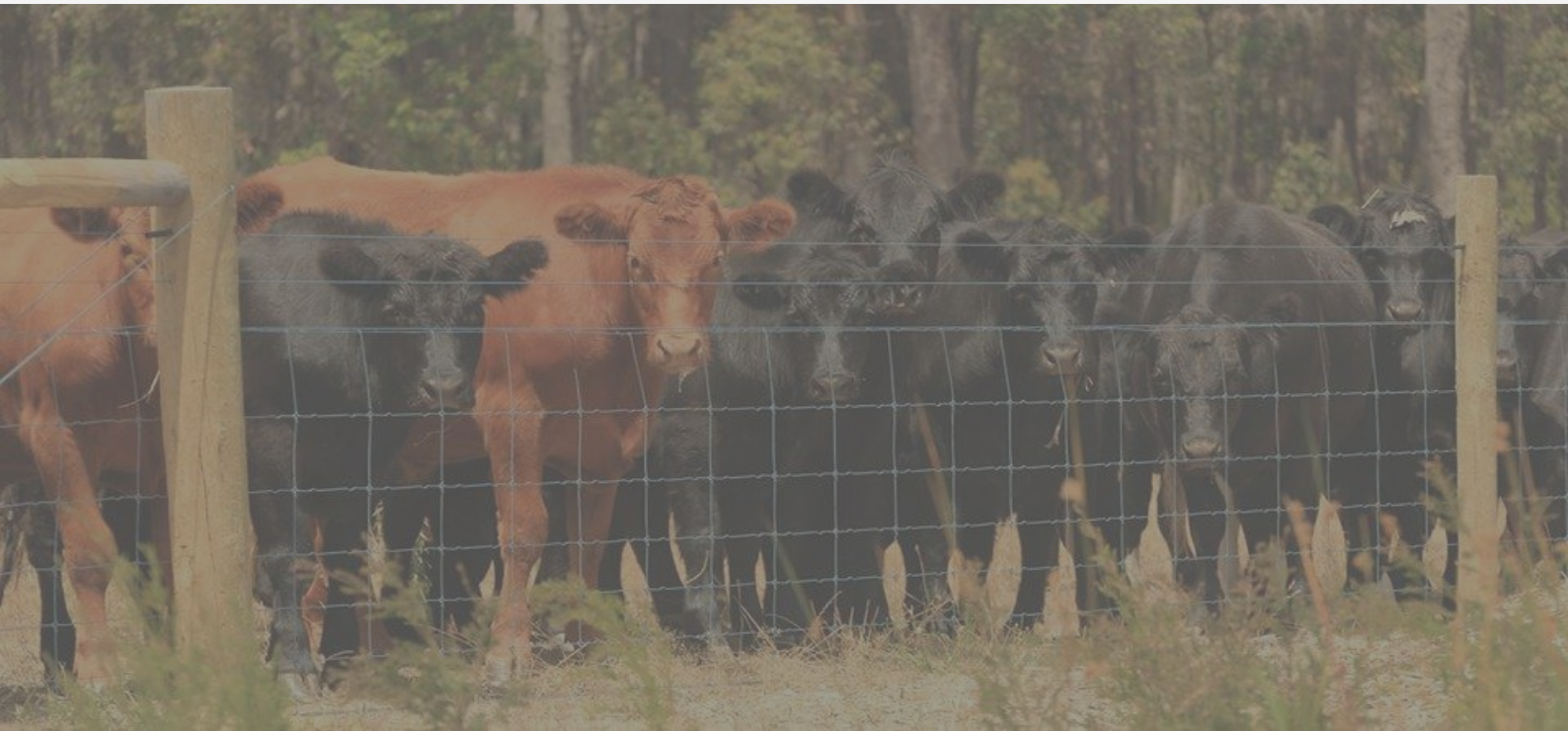
Next Steps

The next steps will involve finalising the Action Plan and **sourcing funding** for the preparation of an **Implementation Strategy** and the **implementation of some of the recommendations** in the Plan. Some recommendations will be able to be implemented in the near future, but others will need more work, underpinning the need for the **collaborative approach to continue.**

More info and links

The Scott River Action Plan can be downloaded from the LCDC website:

https://lowerblackwood.com.au/



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