



# BLACKWOOD CATCHMENT

## Scoping for an Integrated Catchment Management Plan 2025



Lower Blackwood Catchment  
Land Conservation District Committee

# Funders and Partners

## Funders



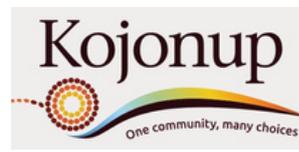
natural resource  
management program



## Partners



Lower Blackwood Catchment  
Land Conservation District Committee



## Authorship

This report was written by Ali Babington and the Lower Blackwood LCDC team with input from funders and partners

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# Introduction

The Blackwood Catchment is the largest catchment in the southwest of Western Australia, covering an area of 2.3 million hectares (Figure 1). The Catchment spans diverse landscapes from the low rainfall Mallee and Avon Wheatbelt in the east, to the Jarrah Forests and wetter coastal Warren regions of the southwest.

Within the broader Blackwood Basin, the lower Blackwood sub-catchment has the highest proportion of native vegetation under conservation, with nearly 70% of the area comprising State Forest or other conservation estate. In the middle catchment, ~40% remains covered in native vegetation, with ~26% protected within conservation reserves or State Forest. Outside of these formal conservation areas, remaining vegetation is largely fragmented and confined to remnant patches, riparian zones, and road reserves. In contrast, the upper catchment has experienced extensive land clearing for agricultural development, leaving 16% of native vegetation intact, with 3% of that within designated conservation areas or State Forest. This large-scale clearing has contributed significantly to dryland salinity, particularly in the upper and middle catchments.

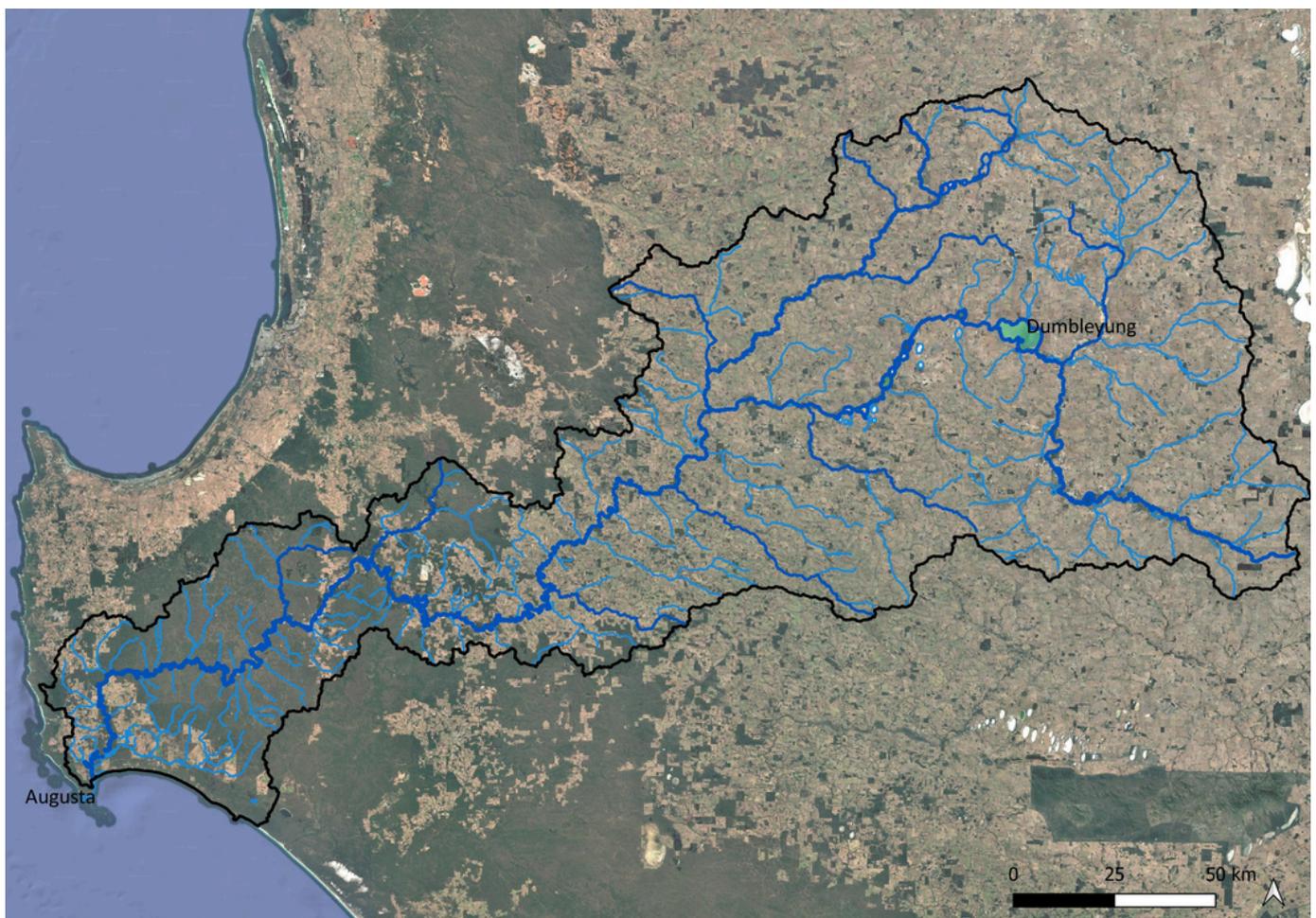
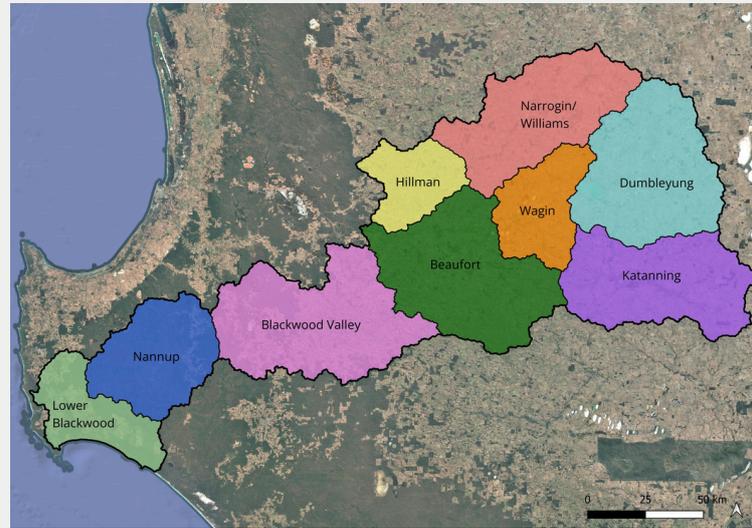


Figure 1. Blackwood Catchment (black outline) with major waterways

# Catchment Background

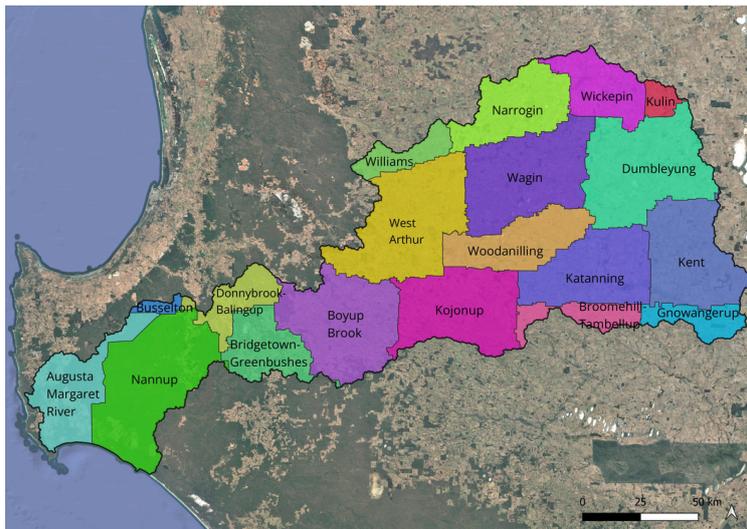
## ZONES

The Blackwood Catchment was divided into nine zones in the early 1990s according to vegetation types, active environmental groups and local government areas. This helped identify local issues to make sure on ground works are appropriate and relevant to each zone. A number of on-ground actions, research and education have occurred in the zones, however this has been unevenly spread across the Catchment, with more work in the lower catchment (Blackwood Basin Group 1998).



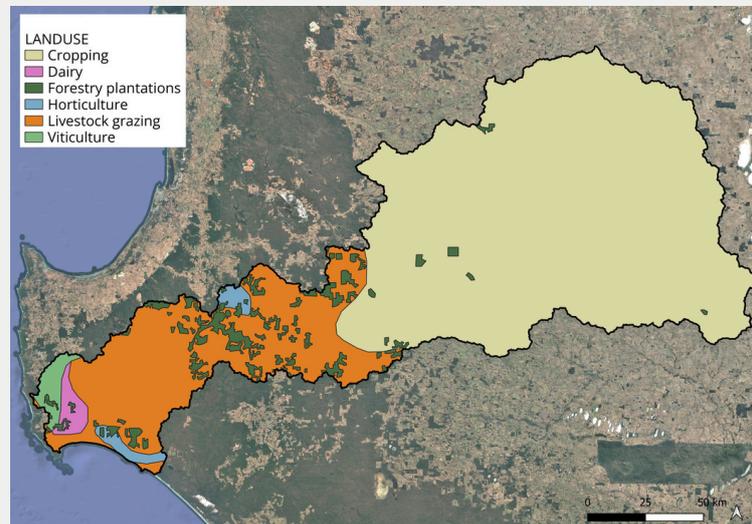
## POPULATIONS

There are 51 towns and 19 local government areas within the Catchment and rapid urbanisation, especially in the west, is a growing land use type in the Catchment. Population has increased 74% in the Shires of Augusta Margaret River, 31% in Nannup and 33% in Bridgetown-Greenbushes, yet has decreased 11% in Kojonup, 3% in Dumbleyung and 2% in Katanning over the last 20 years (Bureau of Statistics 2001-2021). A full list of stakeholders is given in Appendix A.



## LAND USE TYPES

The main land use type in the Catchment is agriculture, including cropping, livestock grazing (sheep and beef), dairying, horticulture, viticulture, and forestry. Agricultural activities have increased runoff and damaged riparian vegetation (Brearly 2013). Other major industries include tourism and mining, which are increasing in the Catchment.



# Landcare Groups

There are nine Landcare groups in the Blackwood Catchment (Table 1; Figure 2). To date, there has been no Integrated Catchment Management Plan (ICMP) for the Blackwood region despite interest in collaborative landcare for over 30 years. The State NRM and SouthWest NRM provided funding for active Landcare groups to get together to discuss scoping for a Blackwood Catchment ICMP.

Group	South West NRM member	Present at workshop
Lower Blackwood LCDC	Yes	Yes
Shire of Nannup	No	Yes
Blackwood Environment Society	Yes	Yes
Blackwood Basin Group	Yes	No
Shire of Kojonup	No	Yes
Wagin-Woodanilling Landcare Zone	Yes	No
Katanning LCDC	Yes	Yes
Dumbleyung LCDC	Yes	No
Shire of Kent	No	No

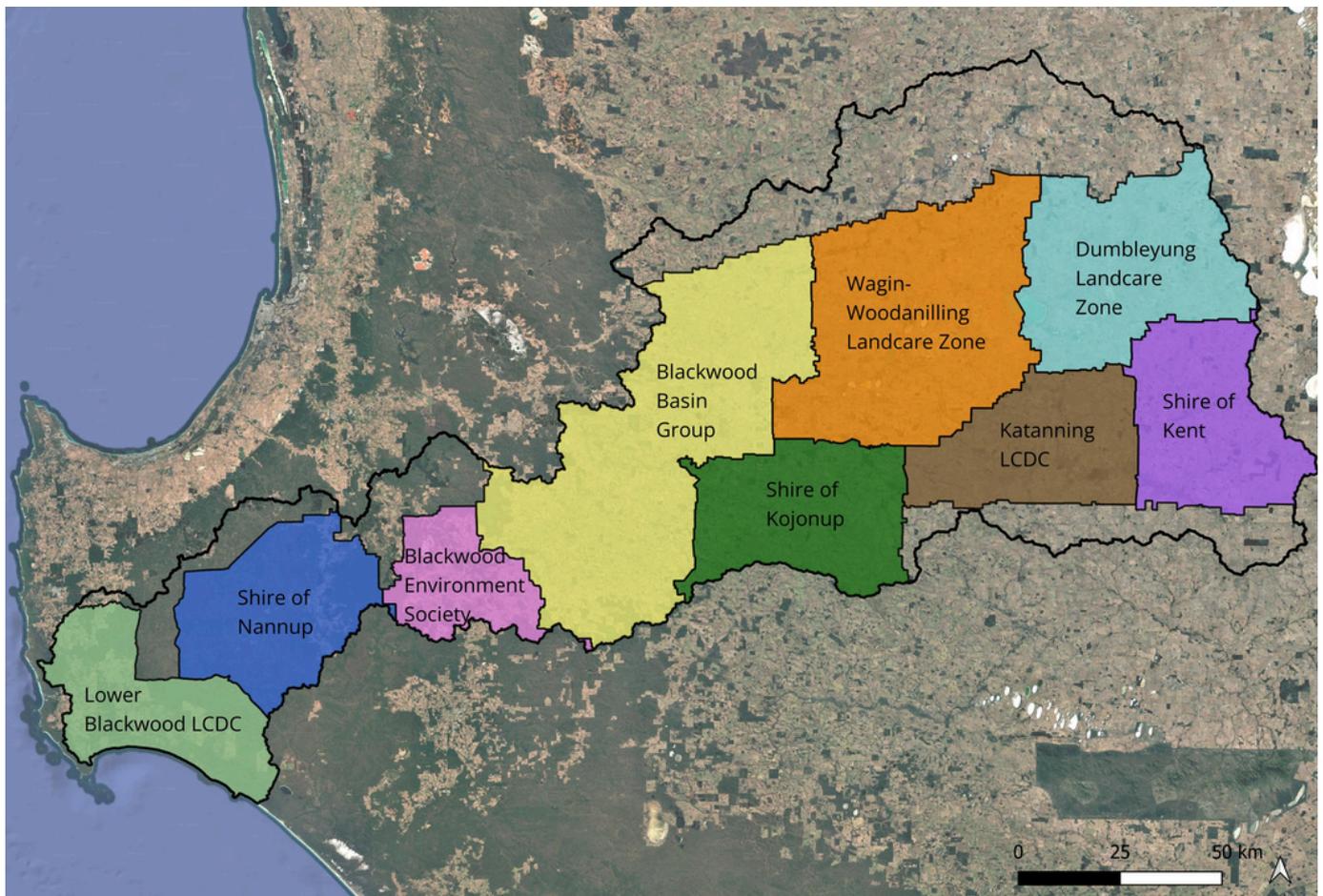


Figure 2. Blackwood Catchment Landcare groups and active Shires

# Integrated Catchment Management Plan

Integrated catchment management underpins sustainable management of land and water resources and ensures stakeholders can work collaboratively to achieve common goals. This is particularly relevant in the context of changing climate and reducing rainfall, where cooperation across groups and the Catchment is needed to improve resilience and adaptability. An integrated catchment management approach for the Blackwood Catchment would be effective in delivering more cohesive and collaborative land care.

There are strong Landcare groups within the Catchment delivering a number of research, education, demonstration and on-ground activities in partnership with community and local, state, and federal governments. However, these activities are conducted in isolation from other Landcare groups and local governments. A more collaborative approach is needed to tackle the large scale threats and challenges in the Catchment. An integrated catchment management plan would collate previous data and works in the Catchment to better understand what the Catchment was, the current state, and desired future directions.

Funding was provided by State NRM and South West NRM for develop a scope for an ICMP through interviews, an in person meeting and an online meeting. The key findings and outcomes are presented here.

Interviews were conducted by the Lower Blackwood LCDC in 2024 to understand key threats, challenges, priority areas and support of an ICMP. The Blackwood Basin Group, Wagin Woodanilling Landcare Zone, Dumbleyung Landcare, Katanning Landcare, Facey Group, and Blackwood Environment Society provided responses.

An in person workshop was held on in March 2025 in Bridgetown to further discuss developing an ICMP for the Blackwood Catchment. Funding was provided by South West NRM and State NRM. Fifteen attendees were at the workshop, representing the Blackwood Environment Society, Gondwana Link, Katanning Landcare, Shire of Kojonup, Shire of Nannup, the Lower Blackwood LCDC, and South West NRM.

An online follow up workshop was held in May 2025 to discuss the draft scope of the ICMP and priority steps going forward. Blackwood Basin Group, Katanning Landcare, Lower Blackwood LCDC and South West NRM attended.

# In Person Workshop

The in person workshop held in Bridgetown was facilitated externally. Topics covered included key threats/challenges, opportunities to work together, SOAR analysis (strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results) and priority actions, which were further refined through the online meeting. A vision statement was developed during the workshop by the Landcare groups to outline the long term goal for the Catchment, align stakeholders, provide strategic direction and to inspire and engage the community.



Images from the workshop. J Wells

Vision statement developed at the workshop:

From the Wheatbelt to the Sea,  
the Blackwood environment and  
its communities are thriving  
together

# Challenges/Threats

There were a number of key threats and challenges identified in pre-workshop interviews and during the workshop as common across all Landcare groups. These are large scale issues that require collaboration between groups to make meaningful impact in the region. Understanding threats at the catchment scale is important to inform collaborative management actions to mitigate these issues.

THREAT	DESCRIPTION	IMPACT
<p>Climate change and water security</p> 	<p>The southwest is getting warmer and drier. Rainfall in 2024 was 23% and 29% lower in Augusta and Dumbleyung respectively, compared to the 100+ year average (BOM 2025; Appendix B). Adapting to changing climate and building resilience is the biggest challenge the Catchment is facing and impacts all other works.</p>	<p>Significant reduction in water supply for rivers in the Catchment and increased water demand from industry. Water resources in the catchment are under stress and this impacts the environment, rural communities and the economy.</p>
<p>Loss of biodiversity</p> 	<p>Native vegetation has been cleared for agriculture, industry, and urban development in the Catchment to the extent only 26% remains. Native vegetation is also under threat from changing climate.</p>	<p>Decline in fauna and flora biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, reduces resilience of the Catchment. Vegetation clearing also leads to dryland salinity, especially in the east.</p>
<p>Reduced capacity for collaboration</p> 	<p>There used to be strong capacity of and collaboration between Landcare groups in the Catchment. This has declined in the last two decades due to changes in funding, government priorities, and loss of staff.</p>	<p>Whole of Catchment management is low. Sustainable and effective Catchment management relies on collaboration, cohesion, communication and trust between all Landcare groups.</p>
<p>Lack of long-term funding</p> 	<p>Grant based funding system for environmental groups developed in the 2000s make it difficult to secure long term funding.</p>	<p>Results in project-based approaches to landcare, without long term cohesion. This also makes it difficult to retain staff.</p>

# Working Together

A key finding from the workshop was the collective interest among all Landcare groups in strengthening relationships across the Catchment to improve resilience and adaptability to the threats the Catchment is facing. Participants emphasised the importance of in-person meetings to support more effective collaboration and knowledge sharing. There was broad consensus that online meetings alone are insufficient to foster the meaningful relationships necessary for sustained cooperation. Enhanced collaboration was identified as critical to enabling an integrated catchment management approach, thereby increasing the collective capacity to address the complex threats and challenges within the Catchment.

PLANNING	RESOURCES	INFORMATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish a collective identity as a Catchment to foster cohesion between groups and raise public awareness of the Catchment.</li><li>• Build understanding on planning, resources, and infrastructure for more sustainable functioning of Landcare groups.</li><li>• Understand landscape-wide issues in each zone and plan cohesively across the Catchment to maximise effectiveness of programs.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve sharing of knowledge and skills between Landcare groups.</li><li>• Explore alternative funding streams, such as from philanthropic organisations.</li><li>• Investigate how Landcare groups can apply for deductible gift recipient status (DGR) and/or registration with the Australian Charities &amp; Not-for-Profits Commission.</li><li>• Explore combined lobbying for funding and work on advocacy as a collective to support funding applications.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compile and consolidate relevant documents pertaining to the Catchment into a central, accessible repository or 'library'. At present, no shared database exists.</li><li>• Facilitate the exchange of information on both current and past projects among Landcare groups within the Catchment.</li><li>• Promote the sharing of operational insights, including day-to-day practices to enhance mutual learning across groups.</li></ul>

# Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results

## STRENGTHS

### What do we excel at?

- Establishing ideas
- On-ground works and connections
- Passion and enthusiasm
- Technical skills and knowledge
- Communication facilitator between public, government and landholders

### What makes us unique?

- Diversity in environment and communities across the Catchment
- Balancing supporting agriculture and achieving sustainable outcomes for the Catchment

## ASPIRATIONS

### What do we want to be known for?

- An identity that encompasses the entire Catchment
- Achieving tangible outcomes for the region
- Achieving cohesion and collaboration amongst community and organisations

### What matters most to us?

- Environmental and social health and resilience
- Connection and collaboration
- Finding and achieving balance in the Catchment between multiple stakeholder interests and values and health of the environment
- Continued meaningful and rewarding work in the Catchment

## OPPORTUNITIES

### What will our stakeholders need from us in the future?

- Support network
- Database for shared knowledge

### Where should we focus our efforts?

- A sustainable funding model for NRM in the Catchment
- Building human relationships between Landcare groups (opportunities to meet in person)
- Supporting new/reinstated Landcare groups
- Increase awareness of the Catchment and the values in each zone

## RESULTS

### How do we know we are succeeding?

- Impact considers both biophysical and social impacts
- Sharing positive stories and feedback between Landcare groups and with the public
- Achieving high value for money with clear return on investments
- Explore success metrics not related to specific projects but still indicate strong Landcare in the region (e.g., number of staff and volunteers)

### How do we support each other?

- Share information and knowledge to avoid duplication. Create a database for information exchange.
- Maintain and strengthen relationships between Landcare groups through in person meetings

# Priority Actions

Key priority actions were determined at the in person workshop and the follow-up online meeting. It was agreed that increased collaboration and building the relationship between Landcare groups and developing a library of past reports is needed before a more formal ICMP should be developed. These priority actions ultimately aim to improve the capacity of each Landcare group and the catchment as whole to mitigate key threats in Catchment.

PRIORITY	DESCRIPTION	ACTION
<p><b>Strengthen network through regular meetings</b></p> 	<p>The size of the Catchment and project-based system of funding make it difficult for Landcare groups to find the time and funding to meet in person. However, strengthening the collaboration and cohesion between Landcare groups in the Catchment was identified as important by all participants in the workshop. Enduring relationships that extend beyond current staff are needed for long term positive collaboration in the Catchment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research funding opportunities for annual in person meetings and quarterly online meetings</li> <li>• Develop and agree on key focus areas for the workshops</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strengthen the network of Blackwood Catchment Landcare groups</b></p> 	<p>A whole of catchment identity is important for effective integrated catchment management to promote cohesion and collaboration between Landcare groups and to raise public awareness. A webpage (accessible by the public too) with information on the Catchment, values, threats, and active Landcare groups will help build a collective identity and streamline future collaborative works.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential for a Blackwood Catchment webpage as the project develops</li> <li>• Quarterly online and annual in person meetings will develop collective identity</li> </ul>
<p><b>Up to date Landcare group information available</b></p> 	<p>The active Landcare groups in the Catchment have changed since previous reports and need updating. This includes mapping where each group is active and compiling contact details for each group. This information should be continually updated as staff and groups change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map active Landcare group areas</li> <li>• South West NRM to include Landcare group information (website, contact details, socials) on their website</li> </ul>

# Priority Actions

PRIORITY	DESCRIPTION	ACTION
Develop a database/library	<p><b>Collate existing information</b></p>  <p>There are a number of documents (both hard copy and digital) relevant to each zone and the whole Catchment that are currently kept at each Landcare office. It would be beneficial to have all these documents made available online and accessible by all Landcare groups to build on previous works and understand the Landcare history in the Catchment. This will allow easier transfer of information between and within Landcare groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landcare groups to collate existing digital copies of relevant documents</li> <li>• Research funding opportunities for Landcare officer time to catalogue and digitise paper documents and time to read them</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Make information easily accessible</b></p>  <p>Collating and digitising existing reports must be followed by making this information easily accessible to Landcare groups. This can be achieved by each group holding their own library, a central repository (for Landcare groups only) and a public repository</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create shared online folder for Landcare officers</li> <li>• Katanning LCDC to host main reports on upcoming website for public</li> </ul>
Develop plan for ICMP development	<p><b>Strengthen Landcare group network</b></p>  <p>Researching and writing an ICMP takes considerable time and collaboration between all Landcare groups and stakeholders in the Catchment. Reforming relationships between all Landcare groups is needed before an ICMP is developed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a stronger network of Landcare groups before developing an ICMP</li> <li>• Better understand past work in the Catchment</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Plan for future ICMP</b></p>  <p>Further work understanding the time commitment and resources needed to achieve this is needed before funding can be applied for. This includes understanding who will drive the project, timeframes, budgets, and where funding be sourced from. The terminology around an ICMP should also be analysed and potentially reframed around building capacity and resilience in the Catchment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree on terminology around ICMP</li> <li>• Develop a business case for plan development</li> <li>• Determine who will lead the plan development</li> <li>• Research funding opportunities</li> </ul>

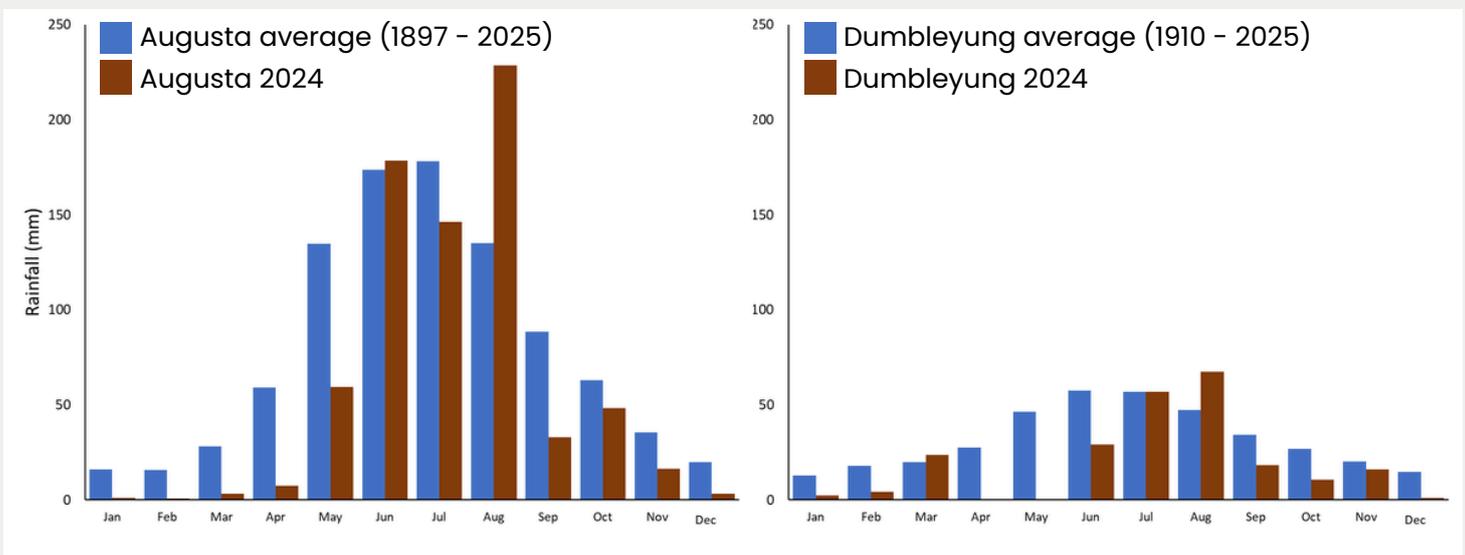
# Appendix

## Appendix A: Stakeholders

- Five active environmental groups: Lower Blackwood LCDC, Blackwood Environmental Society, Blackwood Basin Group, Facey Group, Katanning Landcare
- 19 local government areas, some of which have active NRM officers: Shire of Katanning, Shire of Narrogin, Shire of Augusta Margaret River, City of Busselton, Shire of Boyup Brook, Shire of Wickepin, Shire of Kojonup, Shire of West Arthur, Shire of Kent, Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes, Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup, Shire of Wagin, Shire of Dumbleyung, Shire of Broomehill-Tambellup, Shire of Williams, Shire of Woodanilling, Shire of Gnowangerup, Shire of Nannup, Shire of Kulin
- South West NRM and Western Australian State NRM
- Government agencies
- Indigenous groups
- Farmers and landholders
- Industry and their representatives, including the horticulture and nursery industries
- Recreation groups and users
- Interested community members

## Appendix B: Rainfall decline

Rainfall has declined 23% in Augusta and 29% in Dumbleyung (data from Bureau of Meteorology 2025), which presents a significant environmental, economic and social challenge for the Blackwood Catchment.



# Resources

Blackwood Catchment Co-ordinating Group (1998). *Securing the future: Community action on sustainable resource management*. Boyup Brook, Western Australia.

Brearley, A (2013). *Revisiting the Blackwood River and the Hardy Inlet: 40 years of change. An environmental review of the Blackwood River estuary, Western Australia 1974–2010*. Ernest Hodgkin Trust for Estuary Education and Research.

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Brockman, H., & Blackwood Rapid Catchment Appraisal Team (WA) (2003). *Blackwood Catchment: Beaufort zone (Zone 4): Catchment appraisal 2002 (Report 243)*. Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Western Australia, Perth.

Ecker, S., & Chadwick, D. (2000). *Zone action planning – Delivering integrated catchment management in the Blackwood River Basin, Western Australia*. In *Conference Proceedings Changing Landscapes – Shaping Futures, International Landcare Conference, 2–5 March, 2000, Melbourne, Australia*.

Ecker, S., Karafilis, A., & Taylor, R. (2001). *Challenges of the Blackwood Basin, Western Australia*. *Water Science and Technology*, 43(9), 37–44.

Maesepp, E. (2013). *A resilient Blackwood Basin in a changing climate: Concept plan*. Katanning, Western Australia.