



Position Statement No 11

Water management and the assessment of proposals affecting lands vested in the Conservation and Parks Commission of Western Australia

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| Current from | October 2022 | For Review | September 2025 |
| Version | 3.0 | Replaces | <i>The protection of surface and groundwater biodiversity values of lands vested in the Conservation and Parks Commission of Western Australia Dec 2014 version 1.0</i> <i>Drainage Policy- 2011</i> |
| Officers responsible | Director, Conservation and Parks Commission | File / Document No. | |

The Commission's Position

The Commission has the statutory role to provide advice to the Minister for Environment on matters relating to land vested in it or under its care, control and management. This may include advice on current and future impacts and trends of hydrology and its impact on lands vested under the Commission's control and associated state-wide biodiversity.

The Conservation and Parks Commission (the Commission) acknowledges that surface and groundwater management extends across different land tenures, often requiring a multi-stakeholder approach. Measures to protect water-dependent biodiversity and cultural values of lands vested in the Commission, where relating to landscape-scale or cross-tenure impacts, is a shared responsibility between all land managers.

In considering proposals to take water from or alter the way volume and quality of water, including drainage under the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act land), the Commission will consider the following.

- The consistency of the proposal against the park or reserve purpose.
- The consistency of the proposal against the relevant management plan, if one is available; the Commission will examine how proposals will affect the values and delivery of management objectives prescribed in management plans prepared under the CALM Act. For lands managed under the Forest Management Plan, the Commission will consider proposals in the context of ecologically sustainable forest management principles.
- In the absence of a management plan, whether the proposal is a necessary or compatible operation under the CALM Act.
- The impacts of the proposal on other values of CALM Act land, with regard to the primacy of management objectives under the Act.
- The net impacts and/or benefits of the proposal for the public and the nature and level of those impacts and/or benefits.
- Noting the interconnected implications of water-related changes for different land tenures, the Commission will consider the impacts of water-related proposals on a landscape scale.
- The Commission will obtain guidance from environmental impact assessment processes, including expert advice from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER), Traditional Owners, advisors and stakeholders as required.

The Commission advocates for avoidance of impacts on environmental, cultural, heritage and social values of CALM Act land from proposals, and where this is not possible, mitigation and management measures to minimise and manage impacts.

Proposals will be considered on their merit if they can clearly demonstrate that the impacts on CALM Act land values are not unacceptable, and that they are in the public interest or where they complement or have a net benefit on CALM Act land values and/or management operations under the CALM Act.

In respect to drainage proposals, the Commission will encourage the adoption of agricultural methods which increase *in situ* use of water and so minimise downstream loss of nutrients, silt, salt and water. The Commission supports catchment-wide solutions to drainage problems.

Context and Background

Water (hydrology) includes surface water (e.g. lakes, wetlands, rivers and rainfall-runoff) and groundwater (e.g. high and low porosity-permeability aquifers) and all the processes that affect the movement, distribution, persistence and the quality of these waters. Rates of water movement and water quality can vary over short distances and timeframes. These processes can be directly modified by human activities such as clearing, drainage, pumping and interception. Changes also can occur because of natural events such as extended drought or excessive periods of inundation.

If hydrological processes are altered from their natural state, by humans or naturally, large-scale catastrophic consequence can occur to ecosystems and associated biota; drastically reducing local and regional biodiversity.

Hydrology that is modified for an extended period results in either a deficit or excess of water (inundation or drought, and hydroperiod). The effect of altered hydrology over time is usually a change in vegetation structure and composition, resulting in a reduction to the natural biodiversity of the lands affected. The causal factors are often flooding, increased erosion, too frequent inundation, groundwater rise and changes to water quality (salinity) and chemistry (pH). Drought or reduced hydroperiod occurs when there is no or reduced water available for recharge. Species that depend on specific water requirements would be especially vulnerable to low water levels. In many places, because of a drying climate, water derived from modified landscapes plays an important role in keeping stream assemblages intact.

Historic and projected groundwater levels in the Agricultural Zone of the South-West of Western Australia are attributed to the interaction of three factors: clearing of native vegetation, changing long-term average rainfall, and time to the onset of a hydrological equilibrium. Dryland salinity is a significant threat particularly on valley floor conservation reserves in this zone.

The management of an adequate, representative and comprehensive conservation reserve system in Western Australia, and associated other values such as Aboriginal culture and heritage, is dependent on the sustained health and diversity of ecosystems. Water and how it is managed directly contributes to this. Water of the right quality and right volume is important to maintaining healthy natural systems. It is also an essential commodity for people, communities and various industries.