



Environmental excellence on a shoestring

THE SHIRE of Mount Marshall is located in the north-eastern wheatbelt of Western Australia. In this shire live 649 people, and they generate a rate revenue of \$840,000 per year. The shire covers 10,134 square kilometres and is responsible for the maintenance of 1725 kilometres of road.

Salinity, waterlogging and biodiversity conservation are major issues within the wheatbelt. In recognition of this, council has completely reassessed its role within the community and made natural resource management part of its core business.

The floods of 1999 sparked major salinity problems in the shire's town sites. Roads, railways and buildings were all affected. Council's standard engineering techniques were effecting farmland; large road catchment areas were draining through under-sized culverts.

One day, someone from the community sought clarification on the core business of local government. The knee-jerk response was 'roads'.

Why roads? 'Because this community needs roads to transport produce from the paddock to the port.'

What if there were no paddocks? If the paddocks become unusable, no one needs the roads.

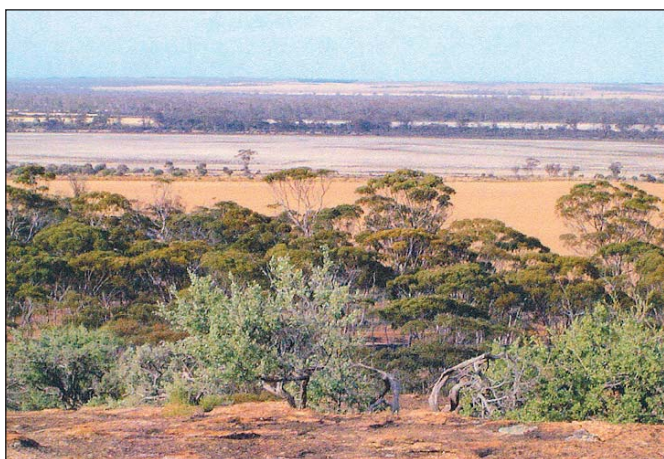
This led to a change in mindset. Council and the community became more involved in natural resource management.

The early days were difficult, as different people had different ideas, but a process of cultural change had begun.

A Natural Resource Management Committee was formed.

Ten degraded sites were identified by council to be improved over a ten-year period. Rehabilitating these sites would involve a combination of council machinery and community funds.

Then council decided to employ



ABOVE: The Gillett Road Gravel Pit: Kenneth Donohoe and Sam Atkinson participating in National Tree Day – July 2004.

RIGHT: Lake McDermott, managed reserve with significant biodiversity values.

its own landcare technical officer, Kevin Trustum. This was a major step towards assuming responsibility, in partnership with other agencies, for natural resource management within the region.

To fund the position and environmental activities associated with it, general rates were increased by

1.5%, general-purpose funds were also made available and a special reserve was created under the Local Government Act.

Council went on to create an environmental protection plan. This plan was created in partnership with the community and outlines the specific objectives to be achieved and the

actions to be undertaken over a five-year period.

In line with the Avon Catchment Council regional strategy, Mr Trustum then led a process of identifying water, biodiversity, infrastructure and land resources assets within the shire. These assets were allocated economic, social and environmental values at a local, state and national level.

Threats to assets were also identified and valued, and then prioritised depending on the level of threat, the overall value and the feasibility and capacity of the community to protect the asset.

The council then developed an environmental protection program through which the shire will pursue its natural resource management objectives.

The environmental protection program includes sub-programs covering:

- vermin control
- gravel pit rehabilitation
- community nursery
- biosecurity planning
- roadside revegetation
- farmer funding
- council policy, onground
- landcare works
- reserve management plans for Shire vested reserves
- project monitoring handbooks
- promotion of catchment groups
- partnerships
- community education
- production of technical documents.

For example, the gravel pit rehabilitation sub-program involves the rehabilitation of at least two exhausted gravel pits a year. The program includes a community tree-planting day, corresponding with National Tree Day. This involves the community and the two local schools. In 2004, 150 people attended and 1700 trees were planted.

Related activities by the landcare technical officer have included extensive community consultation and engagement of important stakeholders through the council committee.

By being actively involved in regional natural resource management processes, the council has developed extensive regional partnerships with the Centre for Water Research, Department of Environment, Greening Australia, World Wildlife Fund, Avon Catchment Council, Wheatbelt Development Commission and Rio Tinto.



Mt Marshall NRM Committee considering a deep drainage proposal and road crossing.



Plantings for National Tree Day.

With the leadership of the local council, the community is willing to be actively involved in natural resource management projects and programs. Council is becoming a better manager of its land, the community is becoming increasingly involved, and results are starting to be achieved.

Council receives continual input from the community regarding environmental matters and this process enables council to directly address the suggestions put forward and the problems faced.

Mt Marshall Shire Council has won numerous awards for its resourceful approach to natural resource management. In particular they have been recognised for best practice surface water management and for integrating biodiversity into planning. This latter award was sponsored by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust.

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Photographs by Kevin Trustum