



Annual Report
2023/24



South
West
NRM



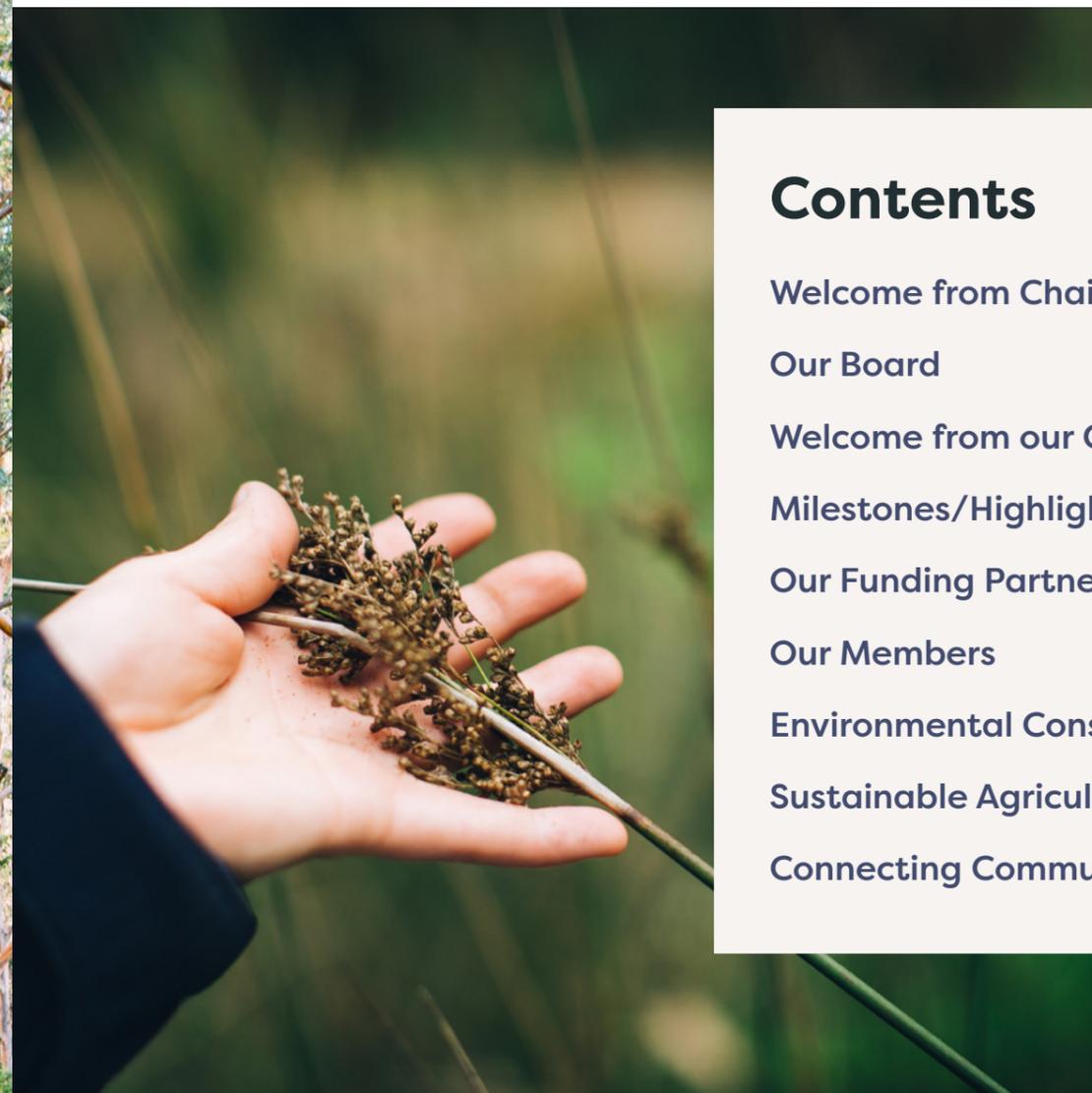
South West NRM works to address the triple threats of climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation in one of the most biologically rich, yet threatened environments on earth – Our South West.

With our partners, we operate at the intersection of science, technology and landcare, across natural and agricultural landscapes. We deliver evidence-based solutions for creating healthy ecosystems as well as improved productivity and sustainability for farmers.

Broadly, the projects and programs we deliver fall into two main focus areas of Environmental Conservation and Sustainable Agriculture.

Please read on to find out more about our achievements in 2023/24 across these focus areas.

Cover photography: Robert McLean



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Acknowledgement of Country

Ngala kaaditj Noongar moort keyen kaadak nitja boodja

South West NRM acknowledge the Noongar peoples as the traditional custodians of the land that we live and work on. We pay our respect to Elders past and present and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of First Nations peoples.

Noongar (Aboriginal peoples of the South West of Western Australia) typically use the term 'Aboriginal' or 'Noongar' and South West NRM (SWNRM) aims to respect this in our documentation and engagement. The spelling of the word Noongar is subject to variation as the language was passed down through generations orally. It may also be spelt Nyungar, Nyungah, Nyoongar and Nyoongah. SWNRM uses the spelling of Noongar, in line with the spelling advocated by the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC).

Welcome from Chair

After more than 20 years of operation, (including under our previous name of South West Catchments Council), the 2023/24 financial year has been characterised by a period of consolidation and preparation for springboarding into a new phase.

This followed the wrapping up last financial year of \$13.5 million in environmental, conservation and sustainable agriculture projects on behalf of the Australian Government and the launch of our new name and brand.

Our moves toward scaling up work with industry, government, community and landholders have been supported by the Board of Directors with a decision to invest in several significant new appointments to the team.

In September, 2023 we welcomed a Community Relations & Communications Manager in Kristy Hitchens and a Commercial & Finance Manager in Jason Cleasby. Additionally our CEO Sally Wilkinson pivoted to a newly-created and part-time Development Lead role following four years of leading our organisation with incredible professionalism.

Sally's combination of savvy business management expertise combined with a passion for the land resulted in a myriad of achievements during her tenure including overseeing delivery of projects between 2018 and 2023 as a preferred supplier of the Federal Government's National Landcare Program.

Following this change, Dr Manda Page was appointed earlier this year as our new CEO, after five years as the Director of Threatened Species Operations at Queensland's Department of Environment, Science and Innovation.

Prior to her Queensland stint, Manda held various environment-related, lead roles within WA Government and private conservation agencies over a 10-year period.

Following feedback from our Association Members expressing interest in a mechanism that would facilitate advice from Members to the Board of Directors on priorities for natural resource management, a Members Advisory Committee was formed. Still in its early stages, the committee has already provided feedback on membership criteria and will review the Memorandum of Understanding between Members and the Association.

As we seek to secure new sources of funding, this new committee will be key to defining how South West NRM can continue to work effectively with its members leading to better environmental outcomes for the South West region.



Karen Boyce

Our Board



Karen Boyce
Chair



Peter Rogers



Dr Campbell Thomson
Vice Chair



Ann'Elisha Stephen



Dr Pete Di Bona



Tanya Bartram
(To November, 2023)



Alexis Davy



Dr Tash Teakle
(From November, 2023)

Welcome from CEO

Having been appointed to this role early in 2024, it is a pleasure to be presenting my first Annual Report as South West NRM Chief Executive Officer.

It's been a real thrill to move back to Western Australia after a 5-year stint in Queensland and what a privilege it is to be working to create positive change for the environment and the community within an internationally-recognised global biodiversity hotspot.

Since commencement I have tried to hit the ground running and have spent a great deal of time in my first few months travelling to the vast corners of the South West NRM region and meeting with all of the amazing groups which form our Association. I have also been busy re-establishing contacts in the Western Australian government, with non-government organisations, First Nations groups and research institutions.

Having delivered a great deal of work at a research, policy and strategic level across two States, I am already enjoying the fresh opportunity this role affords of once again being closer to the ground level of action. I am also looking forward to the new opportunities this role presents in forming new and exciting partnerships to address the threats of climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation in South West Western Australia.

In May it was exciting to share the long-awaited news that we will once again be the supplier of Environmental Protection, Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management services to the region. It represents a continuation of our work on behalf of the Australian Government across more than two decades.

Under this tender, South West NRM was appointed to a panel of Regional Delivery Partners across Australia under a new five-year agreement. We'll work with the Australian Government through the departments of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to deliver a series of projects all designed to achieve environmental outcomes.

My team has been deeply invested in finalising co-design of our projects with the Government and as you can imagine, we are very much looking forward to getting some boots on ground and sharing more information with our community about the work that will be occurring.

In the meantime, please enjoy this overview of highlights achieved during the 2023/24 financial year.



Dr Manda Page

Our funding partners



Our Association Members



Our Highlights



2023

August

Member Advisory Committee to the SWNRM Board of Management established to ensure Member priorities are well understood.

September

Community Relations & Communications Manager commences.
Pasture Wise Field Day event.
Sponsored Regen Ag Conference.

October

Commercial & Finance Manager commences.
Sustainability Policy & Strategy introduced.

November

New Board Member Dr. Tash Teakle appointed.
Co-sponsored ESG Strategy Summit (Perth) with NRMWA.

December

Mainland Quokka Christmas Giving Campaign launched.



2024

February

Formation of the Reconciliation Action Plan working group.
First Community Resilience Network Workshop held with attendees from throughout the South West.
Pasture Challenge findings revealed at Valentine's Day event.

March

New Development Lead commences.

April

New CEO Dr Manda Page commences.
Community consultation commences on development of Emergency Preparedness & Response.



May

Appointed by the Australian Government as a Regional Delivery Partner under new five-year agreement.
2 x Saving Native Species grants awarded by the Australian Government.

June

Works completed for Agricultural Stewardship Program.
Works completed on revegetation projects under One Tree Planted grants.
Draft Emergency Preparedness & Response Plan submitted to the Australian Government.



Environmental Conservation

Saving Native Species

In May 2024, Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek announced \$24 million in funding for 61 Saving Native Species project grants to help reduce the risk of extinction, especially for many of the 110 priority plants and animals in the 10-year Threatened Species Action Plan.

South West NRM received two grants totalling \$726,000 for delivery of two important projects to benefit threatened species in Our South West.

In partnership with our Association Member Leschenault Catchment Council, \$478,786 is for protecting native species of the Wellington National Park under threat of extinction like mainland quokka, chuditch and western ringtail possum from introduced predators.

The Saving Native Species in Wellington National Park project seeks to engage landholders located on the park boundary for targeting of feral pigs, cats and foxes with the aim of reducing the number which enter the park and prey on wildlife.

And in partnership with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, a \$247,425-project will aim to restore populations of the critically-endangered white-bellied frog whose habitat has become too dry for successful breeding due to climate change.

Funding will enable development and testing of a soil rehydration method, allowing for reintroduction of the species to areas where it has previously become extinct.

Soil water potential monitoring probes will be installed at identified locations to measure hydration status over time. Irrigation systems, consisting of water tanks, solar powered pump, irrigation controller and sprinklers will be installed to systematically rehydrate the sites to create suitable habitats for breeding of the frogs which grow no bigger than an adult thumbnail.

South West NRM is located within one of 36 internationally-recognised, global biodiversity hotspots which means we have some of the rarest, yet most threatened species on earth within our stewardship.

Both projects will assist with addressing the triple threat of climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation.



Contributing to global reforestation by partnering with One Tree Planted

One Tree Planted is a US-based non-profit focused on restoring forests, creating habitat for biodiversity and making a positive social impact around the world. In 2023, through its reforestation program, One Tree Planted, funded the planting of 51.9 million trees in 72 countries. South West NRM was privileged to contribute to that effort with One Tree Planted grants enabling multiple tree planting projects across a range of locations within our NRM region.

Among the sites were eight farms in the Wheatbelt town of Dumbleyung with works coordinated by South West NRM Association Member Dumbleyung Landcare. The projects are predicted to deliver social and economic benefits.

The Dumbleyung area was extensively cleared for farming in the latter half of last century and as a result, large areas of productive land have been lost to rising water tables and secondary salinity. Revegetating the landscape is beneficial to farming businesses and the communities they support.

Introducing new plantings of salt tolerant species reduces the impact of salinity and helps stabilise the landscape which becomes additionally vulnerable to soil erosion from wind. And that's not to mention the added benefit of reducing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and capturing carbon.

“Planting trees in unproductive areas of the farm is both good for the environment and for our mental health because these areas of land that were getting eroded and looking worse each year will now start improving.”

Kalan Joyce (Farmer)

Key achievements

- 36,000 trees were planted across eight Dumbleyung sites;
- 2,000 trees and shrubs were planted across two sites in the Australind area;
- Good survival rates recorded following a record-breaking 2023/24 dry spell.

Considering nature during emergencies

The 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires in Eastern Australia was one of the worst wildlife disasters in modern history. Scientists estimated some three billion animals were killed or displaced.

With the aim of mitigating a similarly devastating outcome in the future, the Australian Government charged NRMs around the country with the responsibility of ensuring nature on public and privately owned land in our regions were given the best chance of survival during a natural disaster.

The task was to develop a Biodiversity and Agricultural Natural Capital Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (EPRP) with input from State Government agencies who lead activity in the Emergency Management space including the Departments of Fire & Emergency Services; Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; Planning & Regional Development along with local governments, Traditional Owners and landcare groups.

Our South West NRM Region is located within one of 36 internationally-recognised global diversity hotspots – and one of only two in Australia! That means we have a very high proportion of species found nowhere else on earth and also facing a high-level threat of extinction.

In one significant natural disaster, ongoing work to protect biodiversity here could be completely undone. South West NRM therefore approached the task with necessary and appropriate rigour. The draft EPRP for the South West NRM region has now been submitted to Government for review prior to public release.



Key achievements

- 160-page draft EPRP submitted to Australian Government;
- Catalogued region's natural capital assets (including Threatened Ecological Communities, threatened species and agricultural natural capital) plus susceptibility, preparedness, and response actions that could be undertaken against a range of identified emergency scenarios;
- Identified the roles and responsibilities of natural resource management organisations (NRM's), State government agencies, local landcare groups and Traditional Owners in emergency management;
- Made eight recommendations and identified knowledge gaps to help better inform future emergency management policy, plans and actions;
- Raised community awareness about the importance of considering nature within the context of emergency planning through a month-long campaign including launch of Nature Voice - a customised online community engagement platform.

Photography: Robert McLean

Sustainable Agriculture

National Agriculture Biodiversity Stewardship Program

In June 2024, South West NRM wrapped up our partnership with the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Australian National University (ANU) on a suite of programs tailored to the South West region under the Agriculture Biodiversity Stewardship Package.

South West NRM was one of only six regions across Australia chosen to design and deliver pilot projects which sought to reward and encourage landholders for investing in nature on their properties. Pilot projects were delivered under two categories - Carbon & Biodiversity and Enhanced Remnant Vegetation - each with its own approach to addressing the same issue.

Results of the pilots were then used to inform development the Nature Repair Market legislation which passed through the Australian Parliament in December 2023 and is now being used toward development of the regulatory framework for the emerging market, set for launch in 2025.

Key achievements

- Helped farmers in the region to be rewarded for their efforts as responsible stewards of the land.
- Developed a national protocol for high biodiversity environmental plantings in the South West region, for carbon farming and co-benefit valuation.
- Contributed towards the research base supporting the Australian Government's Nature Repair Market, driving investment in nature and diversification of farm income.

Jacqui

Dairy farmer



Project: Enhancing Remnant Vegetation

Jacqui planted 1,200 native seedlings on a 22ha section of her property with the aim of enhancing an existing area of eucalypt woodland. Funding Jacqui received through the program contributed to the project cost of plants, fencing, weed and pest control.

Jacqui says the project provided a great opportunity to invest in nature and farm productivity by locking up a piece of land that was no good for grazing but presented an opportunity to reconnect two pieces of remnant bushland by revegetating it. South West NRM's environmental scientists assisted Jacqui with project set-up and selection of plant species.

As part of her obligations under the project, Jacqui will continue reporting to the Department on the progress of her seedlings for the next 10 years.

Bronwyn

Hemp farmer



Project: Carbon + Biodiversity

Bronwyn and her husband Chris planted 7,000 seedlings at their Vasse Valley Hemp property between Busselton and Margaret River. Under the project, they received funding support and Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCU) from the Emissions Reduction Fund which can be traded like stocks and shares with the Government, private businesses looking to offset emissions or even retained as a step towards making their own business carbon neutral.

With a young family, Bronwyn and Chris said they were motivated to participate in the project both as an investment in the health of their land and in a sustainable future for generations to come. Their regular reporting back to the Department on the progress of their project will continue to inform development of the Nature Repair Market.



Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub

South West NRM has been continuing in its role as one of eight Regional Node Leads to help local producers and their communities adapt to drought and the changing climate.

The Regional Node Leads were selected by the South West WA Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub, hosted by Grower Group Alliance, as a key component of the Australian Government's \$5 billion Future Drought Fund. They are tasked with providing guidance on drought and climate resilience, and shaping transformational measures for farming systems, their industries and communities.

In its role as Regional Node Lead for Bunbury and the broader region (including north of Bunbury and Perth) South West NRM in partnership with Perth NRM, gathers and shares knowledge, coordinates local activities and supports Hub activities to increase the uptake of drought resilience practices and technologies.

Guidance was provided to the Hub by South West NRM on priority issues impacting the drought and climate resilience of farming systems, industries and communities as a member of the South West's Regional Advisory Committee.



Key achievement

Supported farmers through the recording breaking dry season of 2023/2024 by facilitating the sharing of knowledge. Seven case studies were developed and published to showcase how others were managing in a drying climate, including some of their learnings or strategies implemented. These were published on the South West NRM website, circulated via a dedicated Sustainable Agriculture E-newsletter and shared on social media channels.

The case studies covered a range of industries including livestock, perennial horticulture and viticulture.

The Pasture Challenge

A year-long farming project by South West NRM wrapped up in February and revealed clear benefits of a sustainable approach to growing pasture, highlighting that environmentally-friendly systems could also be a cost effective option when compared to traditional methods.

Underperforming agricultural soils cost Australian farmers billions of dollars in lost revenue each year and the Pasture Challenge was designed to help farmers understand problems with their soil and how to address them.

Under the Challenge, four groups of farmers were tasked with creating their own agricultural package – a combination of preferred pasture varieties, selected pesticides and fertilisers and then applying any chosen treatments like deep ripping.

Their selected approach should aim to address and overcome problems identified with soil at the Challenge's Busselton site which included acidity, compaction and clover root disease.

Agricultural packages created by each of the four farmer groups were then applied to three 50m x 3m strips of soil at the test site. One set of three strips also received no treatment at all for a baseline comparison.

Amazing event, fantastic speakers, great to network and learn from each other. Would love more events like this.

The Pasture Challenge Participant

Across 12 months, South West NRM in consultation with agronomist Graham Mussell conducted regular analysis of pasture growth and quality plus detailed soil testing to track results.

Pasture Challenge winners and details of research insights gained from the extensive range of scientific testing and analysis conducted were announced at a special event in Busselton, attended by more than 70 farmers and agriculture experts.

Two farmer groups were announced as joint winners of the South West NRM Pasture Challenge – The pH Group and The Rippers. The most surprising finding of the Challenge results and significant in the selection of winners was that pasture strips left uncultivated had more root disease.

Thanks for the Pasture Challenge final report. I have just finished reading and will read again to digest more info. Your managing the program with the various professionals, co-operators and farmers has been very informative and most commendable.

The Pasture Challenge Participant

Key achievement

93% of attendees at The Pasture Challenge final event agreed or strongly agreed they had more knowledge of soil testing.

Connecting Communities

Surviving the Dry & Community Resilience Network

We've been working to connect communities ahead of a predicted increase in drought events.

Drought months in the South West are expected to increase by up to 80 per cent in the next 50 years, according to the region's Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub, with less rainfall in winter and spring creating increased water demands.

Surviving the Dry is the collective name for a series of five projects all designed to reduce the potential for community harm during times of drought by first building social resilience. The projects kicked off in early 2024 with support from the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) and funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund.

South West NRM is delivering one project - the Community Resilience Network - as well as overseeing delivery of four additional projects by partner organisations.

Emerging Minds (2018) The Big Dry Report.

Drought is insidious and devastating for the communities it affects. It has a massive impact on families, businesses, the surrounding environment, and can affect even the most resilient of individuals and communities.



Community Resilience Network

Amidst growing awareness of the heavy socio-economic impact of drought on entire communities, a Community Resilience Network aims to improve capability and collaboration between organisations and groups to reduce harm.

To establish the network community leaders and volunteers from a broad range of sectors were sought in six South West shires to participate in local working groups that would champion resilience building and support services.

The aim of the groups - who would come together for a series of workshops between February and October, 2024 was to:

- Increase community access to suitable support services, especially early intervention tools that help to build individual and community resilience;
- Share resources and learnings to develop partnerships across the region;
- Develop plans to further build community resilience.



Key achievements

- Partnered with 5 Community Resource Centres throughout the region to assist with engaging communities;
- 4 of 6 online workshop series held at participating community resource centres with guest presenters;
- Online directory of Community Support Services developed and shared.



Contact us

For more information about our projects and programs or to discuss working with us, please contact us:

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