



Annual report

2019 – 20

Department of Water and Environmental Regulation

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which we live and work, and pay our respects to their elders past and present. We recognise the practice of intergenerational care for country and its relevance to our work. We seek to listen, learn and build strong partnerships. We aim to provide genuine opportunities for Aboriginal people within our workforce and through our business.

Director General foreword

Thank you for reading the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's 2019–20 annual report. This document reflects our important work during the past financial year, the latter months of which saw the world face an unprecedented health crisis in the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of our staff and stakeholders during this time. Our combined efforts to ensure we maintained our service delivery during the response reflects our department's 'Better Together' value and enables us to play our part in Western Australia's (WA) COVID-19 recovery.

While this pandemic has undeniably impacted us all, we have worked together as a department to remain committed to our responsibilities. We continue to be responsible for environment and water regulation, serving as a one stop shop for industry and developers – with the aim of streamlining and simplifying regulation. We continued our flexible work practices, with working from home options one of a suite of measures rolled out during the pandemic.

The year saw us achieve a number of key milestones across our business areas. This is further testament to the commitment of our team, partners, stakeholders and the community, and demonstrates our efforts to help WA move towards economic recovery.

Across our statewide programs and initiatives, key milestones included:

- Consultation to amend the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (EP Act) began in October 2019, with the release of the *Modernising the Environmental Protection Act discussion paper*. The discussion paper presented background information on proposed reforms and was accompanied by the release of an Exposure Draft Bill. After considering the submissions and issues raised, the Environmental Protection Amendment Bill 2020 was introduced to State Parliament and passed through the Legislative Assembly on 28 May 2020. The amendments support a modern EP Act that will streamline and improve regulatory processes for the protection of the environment in WA.



Our department remains focused on delivery of the State Government's priorities and our services.

- Two consultation papers – *Closing the loop: Waste reforms for a circular economy* and *Review of the waste levy* – were released and invited Western Australians to have their say on potential reforms to guide the future of waste management in the state. The proposed reforms support implementation of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2030 and will help the State Government meet its commitment to have at least 75 per cent of waste generated in WA being reused or recycled by 2030.
- The State Government's Waterwise Perth Action Plan was launched in October 2019 – setting the direction for Perth to become a leading waterwise city by 2030. This action plan sets targets to respond to the major impacts of climate change on water resources

and liveability, to support the 3.5 million people anticipated to reside in Perth by 2050.

- Our regulatory team worked hard throughout the year to address backlogs, reduce our approvals timeframes and develop guidance. I am pleased we improved performance across our Industry Regulation directorate this financial year – determining more works approvals and licence applications in a shorter average timeframe than in 2018–19. At 30 June 2020, 1,075 licences and 316 works approvals were active across the state – something that could not have been achieved without the hard work and commitment of our team.
- Our water regulation services introduced a number of business

improvement initiatives this year, particularly in water licensing.

Implementation of our Water Licensing Backlog Action Plan has driven a significant reduction in the number of water licence applications open for a period of more than 65 days – recording a new low of 173 applications in 2019–20. This is well within our performance target of 350 applications or less.

The average time taken to process a water licence application has also been substantially reduced – now taking 46 days to process a low-risk application (target 65 days); 85 days for a medium-risk application (target 75 days); and 87 days for a high-risk application (target 95 days).

- At the end of April 2020, the State Government opened applications for the first round of funding under the [Clean Energy Future Fund](#). Administered by the department with support from Energy Policy WA, this \$9 million* fund is expected to support the development of innovative clean energy projects.
- Throughout the year, rural water planning remained a key focus for our department – with continued dry conditions across our state because of climate change significantly impacting our agricultural sector. The Cascade area in the Shire of Esperance became the 12th water deficiency declaration since May 2019, with the State Government commencing water carting to the area on 17 June 2020. With support from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the Water Corporation, we worked to manage water carting arrangements to all water deficiency declared areas – significantly reducing the distance farmers need to travel to source emergency livestock water.

* The State Government announced an additional \$10 million to the fund on 28 July 2020.

- A trial of an algal bloom-preventing clay in the Serpentine River was undertaken through our Regional Estuaries Initiative (REI) – the largest trial of its type in WA. With REI now finalising its four-year program to ensure the health of key regional estuaries across WA, work began during the financial year to implement the State Government-funded Healthy Estuaries WA, which was announced in June 2020.
- WA is set to launch its container deposit scheme, Containers for Change, on 1 October 2020 – paving the way for reduced litter, improved recycling rates, and the creation of new business and employment opportunities across the state.
- We continue to build our regulatory capability with work progressing on development of our Environment Online initiative – a customer-focused, digital one stop shop for environmental assessment, approvals and compliance for industry and developers in WA.

In May 2020, the State Government committed an additional \$12.4 million to complete this initiative, adding to the Australian Government's \$7.5 million in funding and the department's \$8.1 million – resulting in total funding of \$28 million.

We also pressed ahead with Streamline WA – a whole-of-government initiative making it easier to do business in WA by improving regulation and regulatory practice.

- In March 2020, we launched the Index of Marine Surveys for Assessment – an online portal to information about marine-based environmental surveys in WA. Developed by our department in collaboration with the Western Australian Marine Science Institution, it is the first platform of its kind to deliver systematic capture and sharing of marine data taken as part of an environmental impact assessment.

As always, I am proud to lead an organisation that is committed to meaningful engagement with Aboriginal people and Traditional Owners across WA.

This year, we furthered these commitments by working with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to negotiate a comprehensive water package that was included in the Yamatji Nation Indigenous Land Use Agreement – reaching a native title settlement in February 2020.

Worth \$442 million, this landmark settlement was based on a Land Use Agreement including land, housing, tourism opportunities, revenue streams and access to water. Of particular note (and unique to the agreement) is the recognition of the importance of water to Aboriginal people, not only in practising culture but also as an economic opportunity.

We also continued to work with the State Government and the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation to protect the rock art of Murujuga – supporting co-existence between the Indigenous culture and heritage values and industry on Murujuga. Building on the release of the [Murujuga Rock Art Strategy](#) in early 2019, registered Aboriginal business Puliypang was appointed to develop and implement a scientific and monitoring analysis program for the area – another milestone in protecting this valuable area while building the state’s economy.

While 2019–20 was not the year many of us expected, it has still been a time of momentum and achievement. Our department remains focused on delivery of the State Government’s priorities and our services.

We will continue to work together – both internally and externally – to meet the water and environmental needs of our unique state as we head into financial year 2020–21.

In closing, I express again my sincere thanks, appreciation and admiration for the exceptional people who work for the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, with a strong commitment to professionalism and public service.



Mike Rowe
Director General



2019-20 at a glance

4,058

gigalitres of water
licensed for use

30,000+

tonnes of recycled
C&D waste used in
our Roads to Reuse
pilot program

3,449

reports to
Pollution Watch
Hotline

994,532

tonnes of
controlled waste
reported to the
department

3,700+

submissions
received under
*Climate change
issues paper*

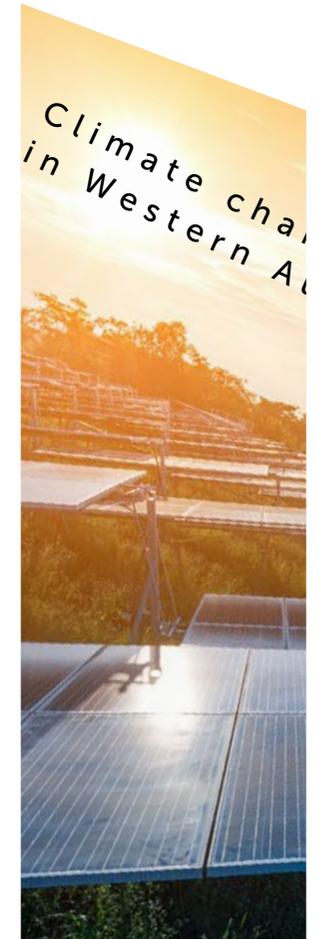


Why does the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation require me to have a licence or permit?

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation is responsible for the *Water and Irrigation Act (1914)* that gives licences and permits to take water and undertake activities. Information can be found at [water licensing](#).

Do I need a licence or permit?

Information on when you may require a licence and the licensing process can be found at the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for information on the activities that require a licence. [Submit my licence application](#)



325

illegal dumping and
littering complaints
investigated



5,925

requests for water
information via
WIR portal



4,182

sites classified
under the
*Contaminated Sites
Act 2003*



214

accredited
Waste Wise
Schools



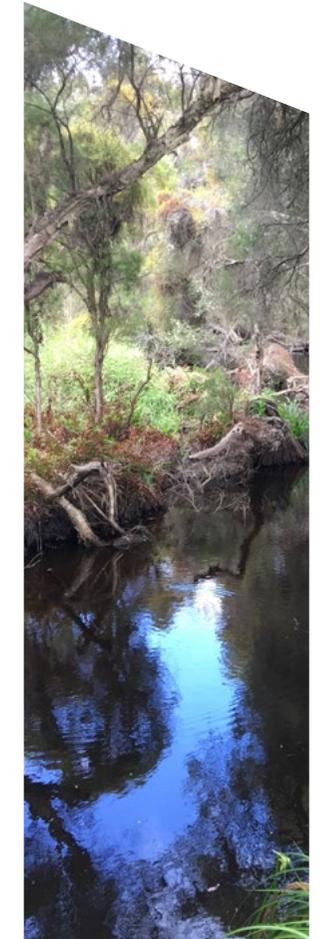
9,500

submissions
received under
*Let's not draw the
short straw reduce
single-use plastics
issues paper*



13,751

water licenses
and permits
administered
across WA



Statement of compliance

For the year ended 30 June 2020

Hon. Dave Kelly, MLA
Minister for Water

Hon. Stephen Dawson, MLC
Minister for Environment

In accordance with section 63 of the *Financial Management Act 2006*, I hereby submit for your information and presentation to Parliament the annual report for the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation for the financial year ended 30 June 2020.

The annual report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the *Financial Management Act 2006*.



Mike Rowe
Director General
24 September 2020

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Setting the direction for Perth to become a leading waterwise city by 2030

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Performance summary

Each year the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (the department) is required to meet several targets set by the Government of Western Australia (State Government). These targets relate to Government-desired outcomes, financial management, services to be delivered and performance targets to be achieved. The agreement is a transparent way for the State Government to monitor the operational performance of the department.

The department evaluates, measures and reports on the effectiveness of its services in achieving its desired agency-level outcomes through key performance indicators. Key performance indicators comprise both effectiveness and efficiency indicators.

Effectiveness indicators show the extent to which the department achieved its department-level outcomes, while efficiency indicators show the cost of services delivered by the department, as summarised in the following tables.

Actual results versus budget targets

► Financial targets

	2018-19 Actual (\$'000)	2019-20 Budget ¹ (\$'000)	2019-20 Actual (\$'000)	2019-20 Variance ² (\$'000)
Total cost of services (that is endorsed expense limit)	170,919	177,058	182,634	(5,576)
Net cost of services (details in the income statement)	53,617	49,010	65,721	(16,711)
Total equity (details in the statement of financial position)	479,468	479,145	490,592	(11,447)
Agreed salary expense level	80,961	85,832	93,496	(7,664)
Working cash limit	7,548	7,607	8,328	(720)

¹ As specified in budget papers.

² Further explanations are contained in the financial statements.

Summary of key performance indicators

For a more detailed explanation of the indicators and reasons for variances, please refer to the audited key performance indicators section of this report.

► Summary of key effectiveness indicators

Outcome	Key effectiveness indicator	2018-19	2019-20			
		Actual %	Target %	Actual %	Variance %	
1 Western Australia's growth and development is supported by the sustainable management of water resources for the long-term benefit of the state	Proportion of stakeholders who perceive the department to be effectively managing the state's water as a resource for sustainable, productive use ^(a)	52	60	55	(5)	↓
	Proportion of priority growth areas that have a water supply planning strategy	46	100	77	(23)	↓
2 Emissions, discharges and clearing of native vegetation are effectively regulated to avoid unacceptable risks to public health and the environment	Percentage of regulatory compliance activities completed as planned	98	100	96	(4)	↓
	Percentage of potential environmental risks identified during compliance monitoring program that are rectified within two months	40	80	43	(37)	↓
3 Development and implementation of strategic policy and legislation that promoted sustainable environmental outcomes	Percentage of advice and recommendations that met Ministerial approval, without the need for significant modification	92	95	86	(9)	↓
4 Waste avoided and the recovery of materials from landfill maximised	Percentage of municipal solid waste reported as diverted from landfill through recycling compared to waste strategy target in the Perth metropolitan region	37 ^(a)	50	34	(16)	↓
	Percentage of commercial and industrial waste reported as diverted from landfill through recycling compared to the statewide waste strategy target	47 ^(b)	55	51	(4)	↓
	Percentage of construction and demolition waste reported as diverted from landfill through recycling compared to the statewide waste strategy target	75	60	81	21	↑
5 Quality advice to Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and Minister for Environment on significant proposals and environmental issues	The EPA's satisfaction with the department's environmental impact assessment (EIA) service, during the year, in line with best practice principles of EIA	97	80	97	17	↑
	Percentage of project-specific conditions which did not require significant change following the appeal process	96	80	95	15	↑
	Percentage of assessments that met agreed timelines	93	75	94	19	↑
	The EPA's satisfaction with the department's provision of environmental management services during the year	93	80	95	15	↑
6 Compliance with Ministerial Statement implementation conditions are monitored effectively	The number of Ministerial Statements audited compared to targets	100	100	73	(27)	↓

(a) The 2018-19 audited figure was previously reported as 40 per cent. This has been restated as reported in *Recycling Activity in Western Australia 2018-19*.

(b) The 2018-19 audited figure was previously reported as 45 per cent. This has been restated as reported in *Recycling Activity in Western Australia 2018-19*.

► Summary of key efficiency indicators

Service	Key efficiency indicators	2018-19	2019-20			
		Actual	Target	Actual		Variance
 Service 1 Water information and advice	Proportion of statutory referrals from decision-making authorities where advice is provided within target timeframes	92%	95%	93%	(2%)	↓
	Average cost per statutory referral assessment	\$11,442	\$14,477	\$7,182	(7,295)	↑
	Average cost per water measurement site managed	\$7,118	\$7,467	\$9,437	1,970	↓
 Service 2 Water planning, allocation and optimisation	Average cost per plan, report or guidance document to support water planning, allocation and optimisation	\$431,338	\$342,767	\$348,488	5,721	↓
	Average cost per hour of scientific support for water planning, allocation and optimisation	\$145	\$222	\$161	(61)	↑
 Service 3 Water regulation, licensing and industry governance	Average cost of assessing a water licence application by risk assessment category:					
	• Low-risk	\$3,788	\$3,834	\$3,284	(550)	↑
	• Medium-risk	\$5,051	\$5,111	\$4,378	(733)	↑
	• High-risk	\$6,313	\$6,389	\$5,473	(916)	↑
	Average time taken (days) to assess a licence application by risk assessment category:					
	• Low-risk	57	65	46	(19)	↑
	• Medium-risk	133	75	85	10	↓
• High-risk	213	95	87	(8)	↑	
	Average cost of compliance monitoring and enforcement action	\$608	\$610	\$205	(405)	↑
 Service 4 Environmental regulation	Average cost per works approval and licence application	47,505 ^(a)	\$62,184	\$47,220	(14,964)	↑
	Average cost per native vegetation clearing permit application	\$29,865	\$40,192	\$17,644	(22,548)	↑
 Service 5 Environmental and water policy	Average cost per hour of policy advice and recommendations	\$84	\$76	\$118	42	↓
 Service 6 Waste strategies	Cost of landfill levy compliance as a percentage of landfill levy income collected	2.10%	1.97%	1.94%	(0%)	↑
 Service 7 Environmental impact assessment services to the EPA	Cost per standardised unit of assessment output	\$33,082	\$30,383	\$39,924	9,541	↓
 Service 8 Environmental management services to the EPA	Cost per standardised unit of environmental management services output	\$21,049	\$22,511	\$34,793	12,282	↓
 Service 9 Compliance monitoring services to the Minister for Environment	Average cost per environmental audit completed	\$31,719	\$21,267	\$65,666	44,399	↓

(a) The 2018-19 audited figure was previously reported as \$57,821. This has been restated to include applications decided as withdrawn or declined (previously excluded) to more accurately reflect the time and effort spent on assessment of applications. The restatement further allows realignment with the application assessment methodology for native vegetation clearing permit applications.



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