



GeoCatch



IN THE CATCHMENT

GeoCatch

Celebrating 20 years in the Geographe catchment



Over the past 20 years GeoCatch has worked with community and partners to improve and protect the natural resources of the Geographe catchment.

Officially formed in July 1997, The Geographe Catchment Council was created in response to the need for a coordinated, community-based approach to managing the natural resources of the Geographe Bay catchment.

GEOCATCH'S MISSION IS:

"To work with the community and management agencies to manage the catchment of Geographe Bay and its marine environment so that natural systems, people and their activities co-exist in a healthy, productive and sustainable way".

Twenty years on, in 2017 GeoCatch continues to have a vital role working with the community and partners to conserve the environment, and be the community's voice to enhance and protect Geographe Bay and the catchment.

This is a snapshot of the highlights and key projects led by GeoCatch over the past 20 years.



Water

Concerns from the community on the water quality of valued waterways like the Lower Vasse River and Geographe Bay were central to the formation of GeoCatch. Many early initiatives, including the Lower Vasse River Cleanup Program, focused on improving water quality in the Lower Vasse River. Activities including dredging, water treatment trials, bank stabilisation and revegetation were carried out in the early days of GeoCatch. Despite considerable efforts, GeoCatch realised that to see improvements in water quality, nutrients off the catchment would need to be dramatically reduced.

Reducing nutrient loss off farms

Over the last fifteen years GeoCatch has worked in partnership with farmers and Western Dairy to support local farmers to improve fertiliser use and dairy effluent management.

In this time GeoCatch has worked with over 80% of Geographe Dairy farmers to provide support and funding incentives to upgrade their effluent systems and coordinated the development of a 'Code of Practice for dairy Shed Effluent Western Australia'.

"I could not have undertaken a system upgrade if the incentive funds were not available. Participating in the project gave me the extra push to start improving our effluent management system."

- Rodney May. Geographe Dairy Farmer



GeoCatch has also worked closely with farmers to improve fertiliser use through soil testing and nutrient mapping projects. Nearly 50% of beef and dairy farms in the catchment have been involved in these projects supporting farmers making informed fertiliser decisions.

"The program was invaluable as it defined the fertiliser bank and acidity of different paddocks, allowing us to plan an economic and targeted fertiliser program"

- Syd Dunstall. Soil testing participant.



Reducing nutrient loss off urban areas

GeoCatch began working in the urban catchment in the mid-2000s focusing on the link between nutrient loss off urban areas and Geographe Bay. The Bay OK program to date has worked with 10 schools, 64 businesses and 22 gardeners to become recognised as being "Bay OK".

With nutrients from urban areas predicted to increase with new developments GeoCatch has developed resources and an online garden assessment tool to inspire gardeners to create beautiful, healthy gardens that minimise nutrient runoff, conserve water and support local biodiversity. Over 2,000 community members have attended more than 30 Bay OK community workshops and seminars to learn more about the catchment and how they can do their bit to keep Geographe Bay OK.



"The workshop was absolutely fantastic! Thank you - you have started me on a new life mission... this is how I will help effect change"

- Vicki Pretorius. Participant of the Bay OK Gardening for Healthy Soils workshop.



In 2013 GeoCatch was recognised by the Australian Water Association for its work to reduce nutrients entering urban waterways through improved stormwater management. In partnership with the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, Capel Shire and the City of Busselton, GeoCatch has upgraded twelve stormwater structures in Busselton, Dunsborough and Capel.



Biodiversity

The Geographe Catchment occurs within the Busselton-Augusta National Biodiversity Hotspot and South West WA International Biodiversity Hotspot and therefore protecting biodiversity has been a long term focus for GeoCatch. Over the last 20 years, GeoCatch has worked in partnership with landholders to protect and enhance Geographe waterways by supporting farmers to install over 300 kilometres of stock exclusion fencing. Restoring over 155 hectares of native vegetation has also enhanced the uptake and removal of nutrients from waterways, and provided habitat to aquatic wildlife.



The lines in red show the Geographe waterways that have been fenced in 20 years

“Where we have fenced earlier we have noticed natural vegetation returning and minimal to no erosion. With the creek lines now fenced, stock management has been a lot easier”

- Julie Walters. Geographe Farmer

“Good project, a win win for everybody. We have benefited through a farm management perspective and it will improve the value and aesthetics of the property. One of the better projects around”

- Doug Walters. Geographe Farmer



Sabina River revegetation project

10 YEARS ON



GeoCatch also developed River Action Plans for key waterways to assist landholders in protecting vegetation along their waterways. In 2006 the value of these plans was recognised when GeoCatch was awarded the national Murray-Darling Commission Rivercare award.

Peppies for Possums

“Peppies for Possums” is an iconic GeoCatch project helping protect a local threatened species, the western ringtail possum. Launched in 2005 at a time of rapid decline of western ringtail possum habitat, “Peppies for Possums” aims to enhance the protection of ringtails by increasing community awareness, monitoring possum numbers, and enhancing habitat through revegetation.

A large focus of “Peppies for Possums” is working with schools and the community. Over 1,000 school children have been involved in school and community habitat planting days, planting over 25,000 peppermint trees and native understory plants to restore over of 40 ha of western ringtail possum habitat.



Western Ringtail Possums – a threatened species in our backyard
Photo credit: Sally May Mills.



“We had lots of fun learning about possums and planting trees with our buddies”

- Jacob, Vasse Primary School



“Peppies for Possums” has been embraced by the Geographe community with over 1,300 participants enjoying possum spotting on one of GeoCatch’s guided possum nightwalks, and over 80 residents contributing to counting 1,300 ringtail possum sightings over 243 evenings in community ringtail surveys.



“We had fun looking for possums in our garden. They are a threatened species and we are lucky to have them in our backyard”.

- Gracie Hall

The Community’s Voice in the Catchment

Being the “Community’s Voice in the Catchment” is central to the essence of GeoCatch. Community board members are elected based on their knowledge and involvement in the catchment and bring wisdom and insight to GeoCatch’s activities.



GeoCatch board members in 2016 (L-R, Cr Brian Hearne, Mr Leon van Wyk, Mr Chris Adams, Mr Jeff Falconer, Ms Bev Thurlow, Mr Will Hosken, Ms Jo Hoyes, Mr David Kemp, Mr Nik Selheim. Absent: Mr Geoff Oddy, Ms Felicity Bradshaw, Ms Julie Howes, Mr Ben Lullfitz, Cr Coralie Tarbotton).

“GeoCatch members inspire me with their commitment and passion for looking after the Geographe catchment and making sure the community’s voice is heard. I have learnt a great deal from members over the years” - Dr Kath Lynch. Department of Water and Environmental Regulation.

The natural values of the Geographe catchment are important to many people in the community. Over the last 20 years GeoCatch has fostered partnerships with community members, local environmental groups, government agencies, schools, industry, and local businesses to work together to protect Geographe Bay and its catchment. The long-standing partnership with the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation has enabled GeoCatch to have a constant presence in actions to improve water quality and protect waterways, wetlands and Geographe Bay.



“Dedication, partnerships and being responsive to our community has brought about some great successes and achievements over the past twenty years. While reflecting on these we also need to continue to find new opportunities and grow GeoCatch’s role in preserving our unique environmental assets and providing a community voice”.

- Will Hosken. GeoCatch Chair

