GROWING CONNECTIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

# Building a Water Stewardship community in the Western Port Biosphere

WESTERN PORT BIOSPHERE

## What is Water Stewardship?

*"Good water management is good business."*

Water Stewardship is a form of catchment and water management which can be applied at a site or catchment scale, and can be externally accredited. It builds on existing works and planning that a site manager has already undertaken and is easily developed and implemented.

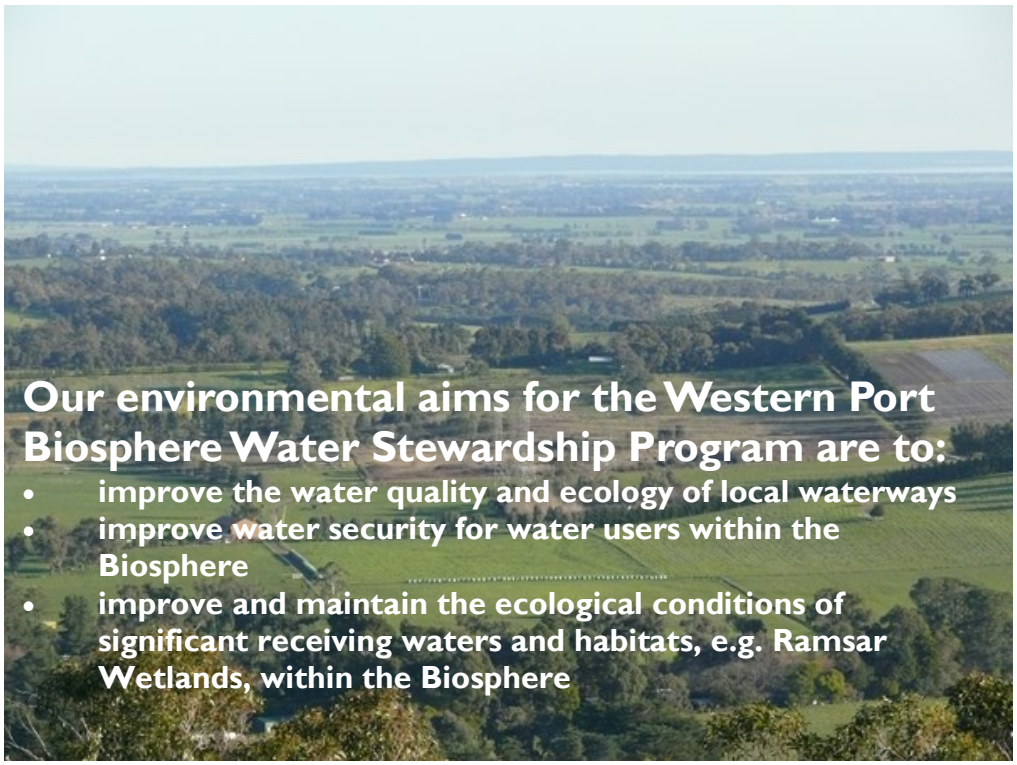
Water Stewardship Australia (WSA) has been developing a global water stewardship system since the Millennium Drought in 2006. The system is based on:

- an international water stewardship standard against which participating organisations can be assessed,
- a credible verification program for assessing participating companies and organisations, and
- a brand and recognition system that encourages and rewards participation in improved water management practices.

The Western Port Biosphere Water Stewardship Project (www.biosphere.org.au/biosphere-projects/water-stewardship) uses the AWS International Water Stewardship Standard as a tool for businesses and land managers that use water to address the shared and site-specific challenges of the catchment. Water stewardship is intended to achieve four outcomes:

- sustainable water balance (the quantity of water available)
- good water quality
- healthy ecosystems, and
- good water governance.

*"Restoring the health of our waterways is a shared responsibility. We can all play our part."*

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*"Doing better on our creeks and other waterways will be good for business. It will enhance the brand and reputation of our area and its businesses, it will foster innovation in how we manage water and it will lower our water risks."*

**Michael Spencer, Water Stewardship Australia**

# Western Port Biosphere

The Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve is located South East of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia. It includes all of the Mornington Peninsula, and all waterways of Western Port as well as French and Phillip Island. It has a combined area of 2,142 square kilometres and is made up of five local government areas and French Island. It contains a mix of landscapes: national and marine parks, rural agriculture and urban-growth areas. Dotted with beautiful swimming beaches, seaside townships and vineyards in picturesque settings, the biosphere is a tourist destination for millions of Australians and overseas visitors every year. A major drawcard of the biosphere reserve is the wonderful diversity of flora and fauna including breeding colonies of the Little Penguin, Koala, Australian Fur Seal, Hooded Plover and Short-tailed Shearwater.

It has numerous sites of geomorphological and historical significance and is a region of great biological diversity due to an unusually wide range of habitat types. Western Port Biosphere hosts many significant indigenous plant species and communities, including rare, threatened and vulnerable species such as the endangered Southern Brown Bandicoot. Western Port is listed under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as habitat for migratory species under the Ramsar Convention.

*"Importantly we will be working with the whole community of Western Port to make this a joint effort so we can celebrate the health of our waterways and recognise the businesses that have helped to make a difference."*

**Cecelia Witton, Western Port Biosphere**

## Building a Water Stewardship community in the Western Port Biosphere

The Western Port Biosphere Foundation works with the community to create a better future for the Western Port Biosphere Reserve — environmentally, socially and economically. In 2002, the United Nations designated the Western Port region a UNESCO biosphere reserve. Western Port was chosen because it has outstanding natural values, including a Ramsar wetland of international importance on the fringe of the expanding city of Melbourne. Biosphere reserves aim to keep places special by fostering conservation and sustainable development.

The Watson Creek Catchment was the initial focus for developing Site Water Stewardship Plans with landholders, organisations and businesses. The Water Stewardship Project is now expanding to all other catchments within the Biosphere. A Reference Group supporting the project includes representatives from the Western Port Biosphere Reserve, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, South East Water, Southern Rural Water, EPA Victoria, Inghams Enterprises, and Water Stewardship Australia.

UNESCO BIOSPHERE WESTERN PORT BIOSPHERE

Helen Macpherson Smith Trust

ALLIANCE FOR WATER STEWARDSHIP

Love'em INGHAM

MORNINGTON PENINSULA Shire

Port Phillip & Westernport CMA

Melbourne Water

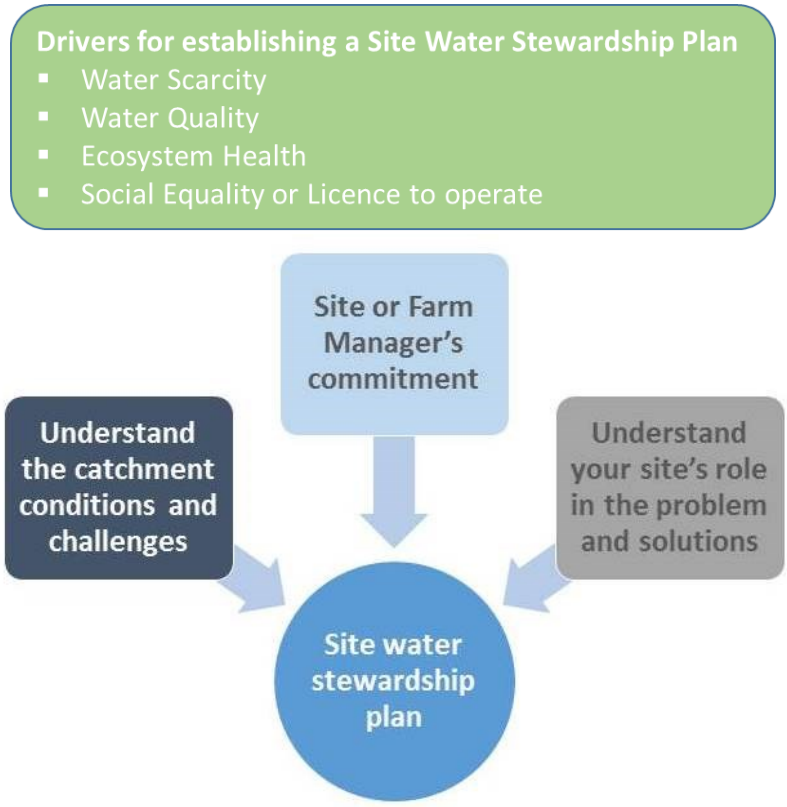
South East Water

Parks VICTORIA Healthy Parks Healthy People

Southern Rural Water Managing Water. Serving Communities.

EPA VICTORIA Environment Protection Authority Victoria

# Elements of a Site Water Stewardship Plan




***These are the main components for developing a Site Water Stewardship Plan. The Biosphere project team will help you with all of these components.***

# The benefits of being a Water Steward

The principles of Water Stewardship assist organisations to remain good corporate citizens by helping them to mitigate any potential direct risk to local waterways. The principles improve understanding of water risks and the social, environmental and economic benefits water provides the wider community.

**The benefits of being a Water Steward include:**

- **cost savings through more efficient water and fertilizer management**
- **a more secure water future**
- **recognition of good practice through a documented Water Stewardship Plan**
- **accreditation as a Water Steward, and**
- **the potential for funding for on-site works.**

Inghams Enterprises, based at Somerville, developed a Water Stewardship Plan for their site in 2014 and have seen these benefits on-site. Over time, and in parallel with other landholders, these benefits will accrue and result in improved environmental conditions in Watson Creek.

A site water stewardship plan will help you achieve other industry and environmental standards and add value to existing programs and whole farm plans by integrating water management into these plans. In the Watson Creek catchment we have been able to assist landholders, businesses and farmers in developing and implementing these plans.

The Biosphere project team will help water stewards develop and implement their sites plans, gain funding to undertake works and monitor improvements over time.

Watson Creek tributary in January 2015 – native seedlings starting to grow and re-vegetate the area.

## Case study: Inghams — an example of good Water Stewardship practice

*"At our site in Somerville, actions incorporated within our Water Stewardship plan allow us to reduce town water usage by over 65%, recover nearly 700,000 litres of rainwater per month and reduce our trade waste volumes to 33% of what they were in 2011.*

*We commend the water stewardship process to other landholders in the Watson Creek catchment."*

**Water Treatment Plant Manager, Inghams Enterprises.**

Key – Blue lines: Watson Creek and tributary. Red lines: stormwater pathways off site

In 2015, Inghams Enterprises Somerville plant was the first site in Australia and internationally to receive gold level Water Stewardship certification. As part of Inghams Enterprises commitment to Water Stewardship they worked with Water Stewardship Australia to make improvements on their site and in their section of Watson Creek catchment.

By identifying the water related issues onsite and how these may be impacting on the creek and catchment downstream of their site, they have been able to apply the International Water Stewardship Standard. This has resulted in recycling some 65% of the water used onsite, made their plant more water efficient and sustainable, reduced impacts from stormwater from their site and reduced the impacts of their farming operations on Watson Creek.

Inghams are working towards ambitious sustainability goals, reusing water on-site, eliminating the release of nutrients and attaining zero waste. They are also working towards protecting the waterways on, and adjacent to, their site, through revegetation and stock management in the riparian area. This will reduce erosion and encourage renewal of indigenous flora and fauna.

Improvements on their site (with funding assistance from Melbourne Water, Mornington Peninsula Shire, and others), along with other landholders within the catchment, will contribute to water quality improvement in the Watson Creek catchment, stabilisation of the tributary banks and reduce sediment inflow and ultimately, contribute to the protection of the internationally significant Ramsar wetlands and Yaringa Marine National Park in Western Port.

## How can you be involved in the Water Stewardship program?

Wherever you are, this is your opportunity to be at the forefront of this initiative and to develop and implement a Site Water Stewardship Plan. We will provide you with the necessary assistance and training. Specifically, we will provide you with:

- a site visit to assist you identify site conditions and actions required
- a template to build the plan
- information on catchment conditions
- field days to see how other water stewardship plans are being developed and benefiting landholders,
- information on how your other farm or site work (e.g. existing or planned works including whole farm plans or other site water management) will be built into, or integrated with, a site water stewardship plan, and
- specialist training from Water Stewardship Australia which will help you develop and implement your plan.

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