



Environmental Action through Community Monitoring

SUPPORTED BY THE NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST

Waterwatch is a national community water monitoring network supported by the Commonwealth Government's Natural Heritage Trust. Waterwatch enables Australians to become involved in the monitoring and management of waterways in their catchment. Waterwatch aims to build community understanding of water quality issues, and to encourage monitoring groups to undertake constructive actions to rectify water quality problems.

The Waterwatch network has over 50,000 volunteers involved in the monitoring of waterways. The high level of community involvement has been attributed to the considerable education and awareness components of the program.

The network is made up of individuals, community groups and school groups who undertake a variety of biological and habitat assessments as well as physical and chemical tests to build up a picture of the health of their waterways.

Waterwatch groups have initiated many positive, community based conservation activities such as fencing areas of riverbanks, removing litter from waterways, eradicating weeds and invasive species, and reducing the use of pesticides and other pollutants.

Background

Waterwatch Australia was established in 1993 by the Commonwealth Government, and it is administered by a team based in the Sustainable Water Section of Environment Australia. Waterwatch Australia is an 'umbrella' scheme, that coordinates the activities of all State and Territory Waterwatch programs.

Waterwatch began in response to growing concerns over declining water quality, and as a means for the Commonwealth Government to work with State and Territory governments to encourage community based solutions to environmental problems.

Waterwatch contributes significantly to meeting the community involvement aspects of the National Water Quality Management Strategy and associated Action Plans.

Objectives of Waterwatch

Waterwatch is an important element in the conservation of waterways. Our water systems are threatened by unsustainable levels of water extraction, the destruction of aquatic and riverbank habitat, weed growth, algal blooms and rising levels of salinity, silt and pollutants.

Waterwatch is successfully addressing these issues by efficiently pursuing its objectives and expanding the network. Waterwatch is now recognised as one of Australia's most successful grassroots environmental initiatives. From relatively small beginnings, the network has made great leaps in the protection of waterways.

The vision for Waterwatch Australia is healthy waterways. The goal for Waterwatch Australia is to have community groups and individuals active in the protection and management of waterways.

The objectives of Waterwatch are:

- An increased awareness and understanding of the importance of healthy waterways and the relationship to land uses within the catchment.
- Communities monitoring their local waterways
- Community involvement in planning and action to address waterway and catchment issues
- Effective partnerships between all sectors of the community working towards healthy waterways.
- Financial and institutional support for the Waterwatch Australia network





Major Achievements

- Since Waterwatch began in 1993, the number of monitoring groups has grown from 200 operating in 16 catchments, to over 3000 groups in 200 catchments. Estimates indicate that over 50,000 Australians are participating in water monitoring and regular monitoring occurs at over 5,000 sites nationally.
- Waterwatch Australia, established in all States and Territories, is expanding catchment by catchment under strategic direction of State/Territory-based steering committees.
- Across Australia data is collected by monitoring groups using nationally adopted protocols for nine parameters (macroinvertebrates, dissolved oxygen, temperature, pH, conductivity, turbidity, reactive phosphorus, nitrogen and riparian habitat assessment) and recorded using nationally agreed units and national site code systems.
- Waterwatch generates an extremely high level of support from the private sector, State/Territory governments, community groups, local and regional management agencies. On average, \$1 from the Natural Heritage Trust is met by \$4 contributed from other sources.
- Over 130 regional coordinators are supported to varying degrees by Waterwatch Australia. The coordinators train others to get involved in water monitoring.
- Waterwatch operates in every major metropolitan centre as well as in the bush. It has created partnerships and mutual understanding between urban and rural dwellers leading to greater cooperation in catchment management.
- State Waterwatch programs have established an annual "snapshot" of the health of our waterways as a regular part of National Water Week. Over 80,000 people now participate in National Water Week each year.

- Waterwatch Australia has developed a National Database Program that allows community data to be pooled, analysed and interpreted at the catchment level and beyond. The system can also produce reports for use by water management authorities. All Waterwatch groups use a standard database so results can be easily exchanged, and merged at either State or National levels.
- All state and territory Waterwatch programs have developed internet pages that are linked together. This helps groups communicate and to exchange advice and data with other groups – in Australia and overseas.
- Waterwatch Australia has developed national community monitoring procedures and data confidence guidelines to ensure that community data is being collected in a consistent and credible way.

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A program of the Natural Heritage Trust



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