



Getting Involved in Waterwatch

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In 1992 concerns regarding declining water quality were growing in Australia as visible signs such as rising salinity and blue-green algal blooms in our waterways were becoming more prevalent. In recognition of this growing concern for water quality by the Australian public the Commonwealth Government initiated Waterwatch in 1993.

Waterwatch is a national community water monitoring network that encourages all Australians to become involved and active in the protection and management of their waterways and catchments.

The network is made up of individuals, community 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 and catchment.

The First Step

If you are interested in improving the health of your local waterway and meeting or forming a group of likeminded individuals you should begin by contacting your relevant State or Territory Waterwatch Facilitator.

Waterwatch Facilitators have the resources necessary to help individuals and community groups become established, and they will provide you with the contact details of your regional Waterwatch coordinator.

Regional and local Waterwatch coordinators are responsible for setting up and supporting Waterwatch groups in their region. They'll help get you started and provide ongoing support in the form of resources, training and practical advice. Your coordinator will also give your group access to technical manuals, quality assurance and quality control protocols and data management tools.

The Waterwatch Website is located at www.waterwatch.org.au and features information on Waterwatch, resources, contact details and a library of relevant publications and fact sheets.

Community Involvement

Waterwatch aims to create awareness of water quality issues by involving all members of the community and by forming partnerships between the Waterwatch group and water authorities, local councils, businesses and industry.

Local schools or universities are usually good sources of support, as they will often get involved in the project and may offer scientific equipment, expertise and other resources. You might also approach other community, conservation, environmental, landcare and water activity/sporting groups. While many people may wish to become directly involved in monitoring, it is also important to find people who will participate by providing equipment, expertise, sponsorship, or promotional opportunities.

Where will you monitor?

Most new Waterwatch projects focus on a particular area of a waterway, usually a spot that members are interested in, or which is easily accessible. The advantage of this approach is that local people know their area, and can identify problems and implement solutions.

You may want to discuss any potential site with your regional Waterwatch coordinator, relevant government agencies or local conservation groups. You will need to check how safe your planned water monitoring site is (especially if children will be monitoring). If you need to cross private land to access a site, you will need permission from the landholders.





The Monitoring Process

Most groups initially form a technical advisory committee to provide advice on aims, methods, equipment, training and data interpretation. Gaining knowledge about the catchment and water quality management in the region is an important first step in establishing monitoring goals for your group. State facilitators and regional Waterwatch coordinators can assist you in developing your monitoring plan.

You may wish to determine:

- Who is responsible for water quality in your catchment
- If regular water monitoring occurs, and who conducts it
- What water quality issues are of most relevance to your community
- The impact of invasive weeds, bank erosion and pollution on your waterway
- What (if anything) is currently being done to improve water quality
- Location/s of remnant vegetation which could provide seed for replanting eroded banks

Once this information is determined, the group can begin developing monitoring aims. Potential monitoring aims might be:

- Check on regulatory compliance (does the waterway meet State standards for recreation or drinking?)
- Document long term or one off problems
- Track trends or changes in the waterway
- Establish benchmark monitoring
- Promote community awareness of the importance of waterways and the impact of water quality decline
- A combination of the above

Most groups begin by establishing the status of their catchment, and over time determine if water quality is improving or declining. From this base, groups can then expand to tackle more complex monitoring projects.

Waterwatch Activities

Depending on the size and inclination of your group, you might consider pursuing some or all of the following activities.

Learning about waterway habitat and water quality by:

- Learning about water monitoring techniques
- Observing daily and seasonal changes in a waterway
- Comparing water quality records with other groups or government agencies

Monitoring local waterways by:

- Preparing monitoring plans with your local Waterwatch Coordinator
- Examining water quality and waterway habitat
- Surveying wildlife to help determine water quality
- Gathering and recording scientific data

Getting involved in action by:

- Reporting results to participants, sponsors and the community
- Replanting native vegetation along waterways
- Removing weeds or litter from waterways
- Encouraging businesses, farmers, households or individuals to evaluate their activities and minimise waterway pollution

Promoting community awareness and appreciation of local waterways by:

- Organising information days
- Organising public meetings or displays on water quality issues
- Publishing newsletters, gaining media coverage and promoting healthy waterways

Making a Difference

Water quality information collected throughout a catchment provides a picture of the health of your waterways. Waterwatch groups are making real impacts, in the past few years alone, community collected data has been used to guide decision making and reform in a number of areas.

For more details contact your State / Territory Waterwatch Facilitator :

ACT Tel: (02) 6207 2246

SA Tel: (08) 8204 9117

NSW Tel: (02) 9228 6571

TAS Tel: (03) 6336 5254

NT Tel: (08) 8999 4456

VIC Tel: (03) 9412 4663

QLD Tel: (07) 3896 9737

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