



Department of  
Primary Industries and  
Regional Development



Soil and Land Conservation Council

## Western Australian

### Soil Health Strategy – Draft 2020

Webinar

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Participant Question and Answer Session

Andrew Huffer, Independent facilitator and Stakeholder Engagement Consultant

Our first one here, thanks, Glenice, and good to have you here, is how does the WA strategy fit into the national one?

Tim Overheu, Principal Research Scientist, DPIRD

The national soil strategy is running independently. But look, we've done our best to endeavor to ensure that there are key links between the two, the state soil health strategy actually stand out, is developed before the national soil strategy was a blip on anyone's brain. And as you probably be very aware that the national soil strategy is running at an exceedingly tight timeline. To provide the link, I sit on the National Soil Strategy Steering Committee for the development of the strategy. So there's quite a lot of synergies that are occurring between that. I'm also a member of the National Soil Monitoring Program Design Reference Group, which really hits goal number three.

From a state perspective, not only are we collecting data to understand our resource information on the ground for our land users, and grower groups, but people may also be unaware that the state has an obligation to be able to report at a national level, as far as state of the environment types of reporting as well. So what we've got in goal number three, will certainly assist some of them outcomes that we're proposing to deliver with the national strategy. Of relevance, also, as the national sales strategy has a number of programs that are developing in the background where they're preparing substantial funding for that. There will be a budget announcement in May of this year, that will outline some of the investments that will be going towards things like on ground data collection, increasing monitoring points across the landscape, carbon is another feature, all of that, through our strategy will be accessible.

The other thing too is very few of the other states and territories around Australia have a strategy. And this is something now that the national group encouraging other states to follow suit, to follow Western Australian. I hope that kind of answers the question that was raised there. I think the links are pretty good, actually.

Andrew Huffer

Thanks, Tim. And next question is from from Kent. He's asking when was the last time anyone was prosecuted, and how many since the Act was proclaimed?

Cec McConnell, Commissioner of Soil and Land Conservation

We certainly prosecuted last year, on the Soil and Land Conservation Act. And sadly, I need to say that I have actually had a number of soil conservation notices go out just in the last three months since I've been on board. But we are trying to be using the act as we need to, not as the first point of call, but certainly at the last point of call. I would rather have a conversation, and try to negotiate an appropriate outcome without having to utilize the act, but it's there for that purpose, and we'll certainly use it if we need to.

Andrew Huffer:

Glenice, you've asked, "Do we have the benchmarking of soils already in place to ensure we have consistent monitoring, and tracking of the key threats, or will that come from the agreed best practice from goal one?"

Tim Overheu

Back in 2013, the department put out a publication called the WA Soil Report, WA report card. It was a good piece of work that actually has accessed a lot of legacy data, and put much of that together. Subsequent to 2013, the proposal was to put out another report card. And as you would

be aware, there was a report card that was put out in 2017-2018, for the pastoral area in Western Australia as well. We admit that we don't have the activity that we've had in the past in collecting base resource information.

But to part A of the question - yes, we do actually have some very good information, something like about over 150,000 data points on the ground that government manages, or government has investigated, that provide us with that benchmarking. What we do going into the future for another report card will be different, it probably won't look quite like the past report card, but what we'll be doing is working cooperatively across private industry, grower groups, and others, and working on some key programs to be able to put together new data. Part A of the question, yes, we do have some very good benchmarking data. Part B of the question is, where do we go from here is collaboration and cooperation - preparing, collecting the information.

Andrew Huffer

Thanks, Tim. Cec, do you want to add anything to that?

Cec McConnell

Yes and I know that Steve, put in a question there about collaboration. I think that is definitely where we will be going in the future. We know that there's some great monitoring that's been happening in private industry, and through growers. Part of our challenge is to bring that data together in an appropriate way that gives us a repeatable, or a set of confidence in the data, and then therefore, we can actually make some good conclusions from that data. But definitely, we'll both as an agency. But also as a soil strategy, we'll be looking to try to continue the work that's been there, whether it's in the same format, or not still to be determined, but collaboration is probably going to be a key part of that for us moving forward.

Andrew Huffer

And just for people's reference, Steve has asked, "How do we plan to access publicly held soil data?" Anything that people would like to add to that?

Cec McConnell

Only that we would certainly be looking... I guess that's the collaboration. But we've got to work our way through that.

Andrew Huffer

Great, thank you. And thanks for that, Steve. Glenice wants to know, where does the statutory area fit if not with the soil commissioner, and DPIRD, or DWER (Department of Water and Environmental Regulation)?

Cec McConnell

I think it definitely fits, the statutory part fits with the Soil and Land Conservation Act being a primary act that we've looked at. But we are also very conscious that there are multiple acts out there, the Environmental Protection Act, the Land Administration Act, that have a role in terms of land condition. But yes, they sit within the current existing legislative frameworks.

Andrew Huffer

Fantastic. Thank you. And for people's interest, we've got people from right across the state on the webinar. So far with our questions have come from across the Wheatbelt, and now we're heading into the Peel-Harvey. Jane asks, "The actions are not quantifiable or defined responsibilities, how will actions be tracked for implementation, and public reporting?"

Kevin Goss, Chair, Soil and Land Conservation Council

I made the point very briefly, and I just need to emphasize the point that this is a 10 year strategy. And by its nature, it needs to have a life of 10 years. And so it's fairly high level. And what's expected is good action planning to deliberate, and DPIRD is already working on that. And a good strategy will invite others to do the same. So the fact that it doesn't have a large suite of actions is not a surprise, but we have put in key actions to illustrate and make the point about what you'd expect to see. On this question of quantified, and being tracked. The council will be doing that, in the back end of the strategy, you will see that there will be a monitoring, and reporting, and tracking regime, annual reporting, and then periodic reviewing. And so that is very much part of the ongoing nature of this 10 year strategy.

Andrew Huffer

Great. Thanks, Kevin. Does anybody want to make comment on the second part of the question about goal one? "Has there been consideration of bringing in a product labeling process similar to what the Marine Stewardship Council does, which clearly defines to consumers a choice of products for those that are managing soil health?"

Kevin Goss

It hasn't come up specifically, but the point I would make with something as specific and possibly prescriptive as this, is that it doesn't have to be included in a strategy of this nature. The Soil and Land Conservation Council, as I said earlier, advises the government, through them to the minister and also with the commissioner on land conservation. So when specific matters, or ideas, or issues come up, the council can be open to considering those things, and dealing with them on their own terms. And I think this is probably a case in point. The sort of thing that an active counsel would be on the lookout for, and would go through an informed process before taking it forward.

Andrew Huffer

Our next question is from Doug Hall. Thanks, Doug for joining us from the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia. Doug mentions importance of monitoring in science, and good management. The key part of Doug's question really asks what consideration has been made of the need to be lean as a council, and draft strategy, given the vastness of our state? All aspects of the strategies surely need to be lean and driven by a modern risk management approach to ensure limited private, and public resources are prioritized. Can you give some sense or context about this?

Kevin Goss

On the one hand, we've had pretty good feedback that things are too lean in the sense that there aren't the resources that there used to be. And so we're starting this strategy from a position where there will be the need to do new and different things. And in the doing of that, then the role of new technology, the role of more efficient technologies, these sorts of things come to the fore. While we haven't stayed in the strategy, this is a principle I think you could take as a starting point, from the government side, at least, we're starting with a budget that is probably not quite up to the job. But at least it means that the question of leanness will be front of mind. And I think we'll see that in the rangeland monitoring area.

Cec McConnell

I will pick up on the risk management comment that you've made there, Doug, because certainly, from a pastoral estate point of view we're very much focused on our risk management approach.

We've not got the resources to put as many people on the ground as we would like in order to do condition monitoring that's at the level we require. So we really do need to take a risk management approach to say, where are the highest risks going to be? And let's have an understanding of the landscapes in those areas. I think leanness is going to be driven by necessity, but it's also going to drive collaboration, which keeps coming. We've mentioned a number of times in order to achieve those outcomes, which should be mutual outcomes. And that will be the benefit of our collaboration is that we're hopefully getting outcomes of both parties requiring.

Andrew Huffer:

Fantastic, thank you. Back into the Peel-Harvey, great to see you Kim. Kim is asking what role is there within the strategy for our Land Conservation District Committees, LCDCs?

Cec McConnell:

Well, I think Land Conservation District Committees have just as much role as anyone else from a land management point of view, those committees are made up of land managers. So the opportunity is for, as has been, is for a committee to look at particular issues that are in their area, look at practices, the common development of an issue and an understanding of how to approach that issue that comes through that land conservation committee structure is something that works very nicely with soil health and the Soil Conservation Act. I think there's definitely a role within this strategy for them.

Tim Overheu

Can I just add, Cec, that I'm certainly under goal four which talks about governance, and policy from the strategy. Some of the key actions there are about, first of all, undertaking a review of the current Soil and Land Conservation Act, as well as considering policy position statements, and various bodies and groups through the council, and through your role as Commissioner. So I think LCDCs they still have a prominent role in soil activities on ground at the coalface and is engaged as other groups in this area. Another question coming through on LCDCs is "Can they be reformed?"

Cec McConnell

The mechanism under the act still exists. There's no reason why an LCD can't be reformed.

Andrew Huffer:

Thank you. I've got another question here from Kent, who's saying that there's been no mention made of historical over-clearing. What place does re-vegetation have in the future to slow down, or stop significant wind events?

Cec McConnell

Major, major place. We're very conscious of that, and if you have a look within the last objective of goal one, "land managers and supportive strategies that profitably maintain ground cover to prevent wind and water erosion". So yes, as a strategy, we're very conscious of the need to promote, and encouraged ground cover in a range of forms, but to prevent wind, and water erosion.

Tim Overheu

I'll just quickly add to that as well. And this brings a quite prominent link to the national strategy, and bodies that are involved in this monitoring process of ground cover. There are standardized methodologies that are in place, Geoscience Australia has invested a lot of energy and research into pixel resolution, and your satellite bases, and the like. There's also carbon programs that are undergoing a review of the measurement models for emissions reduction fund methodology and the like. So I think re-vegetation will feature prominently in maintaining that ground cover to prevent landscape erosion by wind or water.

Andrew Huffer

Glenice has asked if there's maybe something missing in there that we need to be looking beyond just grower groups, and that there's still quite a few landholders out there not involved with peak bodies. So we need to be able to reach some of those general audiences with the strategy.

Kevin Goss

I guess there's nothing in the strategy about broader promotion, and education, which is something that we might think about. But clearly, in the strategy, we've tried to be very open to the diversity and range of how farmers get information, and advice, and access to new technologies and practices. And so it can be grower groups, NRM organizations, we've had a little discussion about Land Conservation District Committees, there's a diversity of groups. And this strategy needs to be open to all of those. But also, there are farmers who get their opportunities, their information, their advice from commercial services. And we've tried to be really open to that as well. That in goal number one in particular, and in the goal of outsource data, we've tried to be open to that. I think the strength of the strategy is that openness, and collaboration in the many, and diverse ways that landholders receive information and advice.

Andrew Huffer

And Glenice has a follow up question, "How would individuals and organizations input emerging issues or innovative practices? Will landholders be able to impact future research opportunities? And will that be through the Soil CRC, given this diverse mix of research effort, will the Council and the strategy be able to capture that for WA?"

Cec McConnell

That's our first goal. I don't know the nuts and bolts at this point, Glenice, but certainly that first goal is partnership with government, and industry and for the collaborative research for new and reassessed practices. So the second objective under that goal is very much looking for input around those new practices, or practices that might be modified now. And we're seeing how those impacting our soil health? We're certainly looking for that input, we don't have the... as we work through the implementation plan, the mechanisms for getting that input into that will be developed. But that's certainly the area that we'd be looking for input from any individual or organization.

Andrew Huffer

A question here from Doug, asking about the relationship between the Council, the Soil Commissioner, and the Pastoral Lands Board, and noting the involvement of the PJ in the Pastoral Lands Reform process, and being a member of the industry reference group. And noting here that the process of they're aware of that the PLB, and the DPIRD are developing a pastoral monitoring and compliance framework in partnership with industry. Part of Doug's question is how will Council Commissioner and strategy interact with that development process?

Cec McConnell

From the point of view of the Soil Commission Council, obviously, I sit on council as a member of council. In terms of the pastoral lands board, I don't sit on the Lands Board, but I certainly interact with the Lands Board on a pretty regular basis. The framework that's been developed and DPIRD, it's obviously very involved with that framework, has been brought to Council for Council's consideration, as well as having been taken to the PLB for input from PLB's point of view. In part it's trying to make sure that the communication between the two bodies and the commissioner occur on a regular basis. But in both instances, both Council and the PLB have had ability to have input to the soil strategy, but also to the pastoral land or the pastoral framework that's under development at the moment. Kevin, you might like to add.

Kevin Goss

Thanks, Cec. Just like Cec has said, we're in a communication relationship with, or communication phase, with the Pastoral Lands Board. We've met with the chair, and the executive. And we've agreed that we need to communicate closely. That's being done. The Soil and Land Conservation Council has informed itself on the land reform process and package. And so we're keeping that front of mind. And we've been briefed on the emerging work from DPIRD on the new range land monitoring process. At this stage, it's communication information, and where that leads, I guess it's something for council to decide, but we need to see through good communication and make sure that we're well informed before we take any further steps.

Andrew Huffer

Glenice has a final question about how will the Soil and Land Conservation Council, or DPIRD support, the reformation, and reinvigoration of LCDCs?

Cec McConnell

Good question, Glenice. Certainly from my point of view, just taking the commissioners point of view, the LCDCs are a part of the Conservation Act. And do you have a key role? We don't specifically have a resourcing role for that from the department's point of view. But we know the value that groups on ground have for both investigating, for promoting, and also understanding different practices. Whilst I don't have an answer specifically for reinvigoration, I do know that whether it's an LCDC, whether it's a grower group, whether it's a local group of guys that just that haven't got a formal name, but it came together to look at different practices, that on ground input to learning is really important and really critical to making change on ground.