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Australia

Green–blue Asset Workshop

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Executive summary

As cities grow across Australia, a focus on sustainability is essential to improve social, economic and environmental wellbeing. Rainfall in Perth, Western Australia has reduced significantly over the past 40 years, impacting stream flows and groundwater supplies. Integrating green–blue assets (infrastructure) such as parklands, wetlands, green corridors, trees and waterways within urban areas provides multiple benefits such as reducing temperatures, filtering water and cleaning air, providing spaces for recreation, and managing water resources. Green-blue assets support both people and nature to thrive and become more resilient.

The Western Australia Green–Blue Asset project, led by Water Sensitive Cities Australia (WSCA), addresses this need through a focused initiative that aims to quantify and maximise the benefits of green–blue infrastructure in the Perth and Peel regions in a way that communicates effectively to decision-makers, communities and other influencers. The project held a comprehensive workshop to consolidate a strategic approach to sustain and advocate for vital green-blue assets such as parks, wetlands, urban forests, and waterways. The workshop identified priorities for ‘killer facts’ and cut through messaging for different audiences that supports the protection and restoration of existing green-blue assets in Perth and Peel.

The workshop included scene-setting presentations followed by interactive sessions where participants identified key benefits, challenges and opportunities associated with green–blue assets. Participants also identified the needs and priorities of different stakeholders, including communities, policymakers and business leaders.

Participants came from government agencies, private sector and non-government organisation: Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; Department of Water and Environmental Regulation; Department of Communities WA; Department of Health (WA Health); Department of Education Western Australia; Infrastructure WA; Water Corporation; Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS); WA Local Government Association (WALGA); University of Western Australia; Perth NRM; Murdoch University; Josh Byrne & Associates; and Urbaqua.



Confirmed benefits

Green–blue infrastructure plays a pivotal role in enhancing urban liveability by providing critical ecosystem services across asset classes including tree cover, parks, bushland, green corridors, waterways, lakes, wetlands and vegetated stormwater assets. These services include reducing urban heat, improving air and water quality, increasing biodiversity, health impacts and many more. The discussions highlighted several key points on benefits across the asset groups:

- **Urban cooling:** Urban forests, wetlands and waterways contribute significantly to cooling urban areas, mitigating the urban heat island and reducing energy consumption for cooling.
- **Health and wellness benefits:** Access to green spaces is linked to improved physical and mental health, offering recreational spaces that enhance community wellbeing.
- **Air and water quality improvement:** Vegetation and water bodies filter pollutants from the air and water respectively, improving overall environmental health.
- **Biodiversity enhancement:** Green–blue assets provide habitats, supporting urban biodiversity, ecological resilience and stabilising micro-climate.

These benefits can support local economic development by enhancing liveability, and providing opportunities in tourism, recreation, real estate and social cohesion. There are also potential cost of living benefits through reduced energy costs with improved cooling, reduced health costs following improved physical and mental health, and lower transportation costs from access to bike and walking paths in green corridors. Additional benefits that were identified include flood plains, avoided crime, cultural and spiritual values, lower emissions and education opportunities.

Stakeholders needs and priorities

Participants discussed the needs of different stakeholders and how green–blue assets can support priorities, as well as the information needed to protect and maintain assets.

The two main target audiences were communities and politicians, as they are best positioned to influence decisions on green–blue assets. Communities can influence decisions and policy direction through their voting, as well as self-organising to vocalise priorities. Politicians set policy positions and need to respond to voters in their constituencies. A third target audience included senior bureaucrats, industry (listed companies and small and medium enterprises (SMEs)), senior management of local government authorities and non-profit lobbyists of relevance (e.g., health/crime). These groups have the power to influence long-term, sustainable change management.

Within communities, there are different interest groups such as sports participants, young people, friends of groups, suburban neighbourhoods, vulnerable at risk (including elderly), and those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. For these diverse groups, priority issues revolve around access to recreational spaces, urban cooling, affordability and overall liveability. Targeted information to garner community support could include usability and accessibility of green–blue assets such as parks, contribution to health and overall wellbeing, cost savings from reduced energy and water use, local economic growth and how the assets support long-term sustainability within the area.

For politicians, the priority issues include cost of living, housing affordability, biodiversity, mental and physical health, and resilience to climate change. Green–blue infrastructure addresses these priorities by enhancing urban liveability, supporting biodiversity and providing sustainable urban cooling. Policymakers need compelling, data-driven evidence to integrate green–blue assets into local and regional planning policies, ensuring these natural elements are recognised as essential components of sustainable urban development. This could be information on reduced energy costs, water consumption and long-term development costs associated with green–blue assets. Other areas could be the contribution of green–blue assets to improved health outcomes, pollution reduction, urban cooling, groundwater recharge and improved liveability.

For other audiences, priorities include heat, climate, mental health and physical health across groups. And the information to support change needs to be decisive and impactful to guide long-term strategies and policy making. This includes killer facts and strategies for behaviour change.

Next steps

To maintain momentum and successfully implement green–blue infrastructure projects, the following next steps were outlined:

- **Killer facts development:** Compelling, easily digestible facts that highlight the importance of green–blue assets. These ‘killer facts’ will be tailored to resonate across a broad audience, including community members, policymakers and business leaders.
- **Expanding stakeholder communication and engagement:** Information dissemination approaches to target broader stakeholder groups, refining advocacy strategies and expanding network support.

The workshop emphasised continued advocacy, research and community engagement to promote integration of green–blue assets in the urban development. By recognising these natural elements as essential components of sustainable urban living, the workshop built on the direction and vision the participants had for a sustainable and liveable city.



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