

# The Creery Wetlands Debacle

## BEFORE DEVELOPMENT



*Birds flying over Creery Wetlands*



*Samphire across to Creery Island*



*Samphire in flower.  
Swamp oaks to give way to canals*

Late sixties-early seventies first residential canal estate started at Sth Yunderup opening into Peel Inlet at mouth of Murray river.

1979 First canal development proposed for Mandurah.

1982 Environmental Protection Authority, EPA, approved Waterside Canal Development Stage 1, north of proposed Mandurah bypass. Also approved, in principle, Creery Wetlands, south of bypass route for Waterside stage 2.

1984 After Environmentalists point out ecological value of swamps earmarked for destruction ratepayers of Mandurah vote in referendum against further canals.

1989 Peel Harvey Estuary nominated to become part of Peel Yalgorup Ramsar listed site. Creery Wetlands, however, excluded from this at insistence of State Government.

1990 Waterside canals site Stage 1 going ahead but rezoning of Creery Wetlands (from Rural use) not yet taken place. In response to a strong petition, organised by PPG (Peel Preservation Group) and spearheaded by Len Howard, Mandurah City Council unanimously voted against development on the Creery and asked help of State and Federal Governments to buy the land for conservation. Help was not forthcoming.

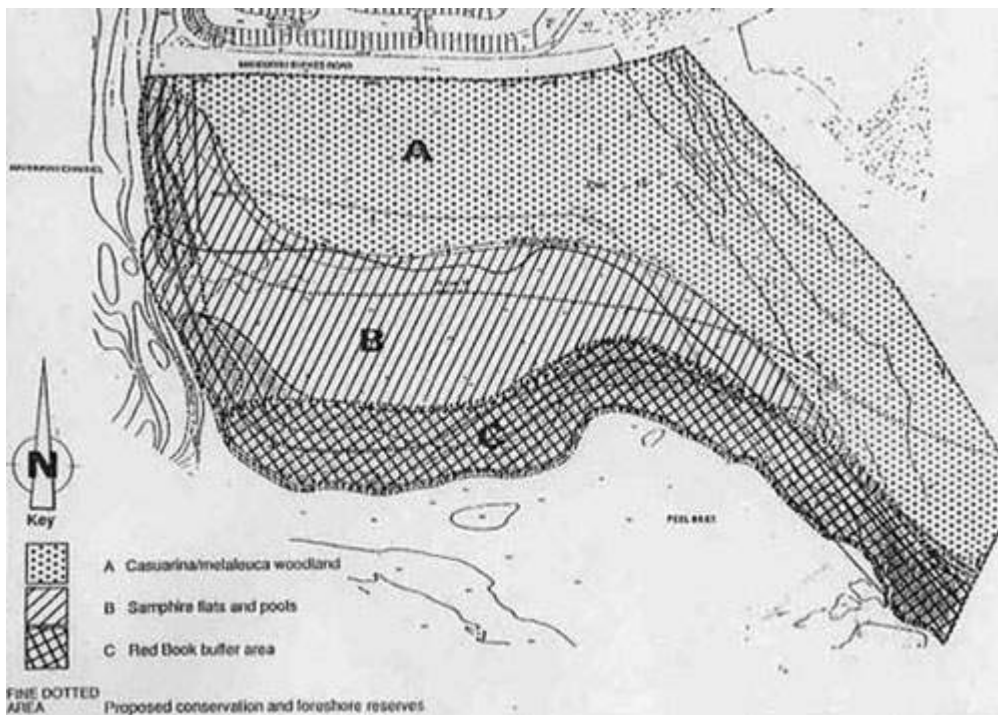
1991 Cedar Woods Pty Ltd bought Creery Wetlands for a reported \$1.2 million.

1992 The then Mandurah City Council started to look favourably upon Cedar Woods' proposed Harbour City canal development. A group of concerned environmentalists formed Creery Wetlands Support Group (CWSG) to try and save the wetland. In assessing the Harbour City Canal Estate proposal the EPA divided the 197 HA site into 3 areas each with different environmental values:

Area A - 96 HA - highest land with Tuart and Jarrah woodland plus Casuarina/Melaleuca lower down with some samphire. EPA said this dry land area could be developed.

Area B - 63 HA - central area of low-lying samphire with some open pools. Considered by EPA to be of some environmental significance which should be conserved but, surprisingly, announced it could be developed for canals if Government would not buy it for conservation.

Area C - 38 HA - area of foreshore, part of System 6, which EPA said should be conserved.



Over 1100 submissions made to EPA opposing the proposed development. 6,000 persons signed a petition to the government opposing the development.

1993 (January) Then Environment Minister, Jim McGinty, decided to refuse development of Areas B and C but lost office shortly after.

1993 (May) Cedar Woods lodged revised Harbour City Plan with EPA which Environment Minister, Kevin Minson, approved, ignoring all appeals, in December 1993. Minson approved a high density dry land development on Area A, canals on about half of Area B with the remainder of B plus C to be conserved. It was this line - the Minson Line - which was then used to justify allowing development on areas A and B of the Creery Wetlands.

1994 (September) In a referendum ratepayers rejected canal development by a majority of 2.1.

1995 Federal Government proposed a Memorandum of Understanding to declare areas B and C an A class reserve - this was never signed.

1996 At Ramsar Wetlands Convention in Brisbane PPG members endeavoured to have the Creery Wetlands added to the Peel Yalgorup Ramsar site, (See Peel Yalgorup page) but this was opposed by State and Federal Governments.

1997 PPG made a strong appeal to the Inner Peel Region Structure Plan committee to recommend that all 3 areas - A, B and C - should be zoned for conservation and added to the proposed Peel Regional Park.

1997 ( November) the committee, in the final IPRSP, recommended that the Minson Line should be ignored and the whole of Area B plus Area C should be preserved and added to the Peel Regional Park. No such recommendation, however, was made for Area A.

1998 Members of PPG concerned that developer's advertising in local papers and activity on the site seemed to suggest that development was being brought forward possibly to avoid environmental assessment due February 21st 1999. A member donated a large sum of money for counter advertising.

These advertisements brought forth even more supporters and protest banners, organised by two young members of the group at the corner of Leslie Street and the Bypass led to a protest meeting in the Leslie Street Reserve. This was attended by a large group of people and various guest speakers from the Senate, the Legislative Assembly, the Legislative Council, the City Council and PPG.

Meetings between members of PPG and Ministers for Planning and for Environment organised. Further signatures to petitions were hastily collected and the response was as strongly in favour of saving the wetlands as before.

The copies of the signatures were sent, along with further submissions, to the Ministers for Planning and for the Environment.

A set of image maps of the area were compiled and assessed by an expert, and given to PPG. These show quite clearly that, contrary to other reports, the samphire in the area had regenerated over the last five years and was in a very healthy state. This information, along with reports from the Wildflower Society of W A and the Conservation Council of W A, were all made available to the Ministers concerned but no satisfactory answers were received by PPG.

## AFTER FEBRUARY 1999

Prepared by Griselda Hitchcock and Beryl Francis with additions by Sue Grayling and edited for this website by Sybil Smith (Members of PPG Executive) Pictures digitised from video and photos taken by Vic Beacham, Len Howard and Anna Lanza.



*Tuart dying due to salt intrusion after de-watering March 2000*



*Samphire at Entrance Canal.  
Note new wall out into estuary*



*Work on Area A*

### **Arguments against development on Area A put forward by PPG**

#### **Selections from Fact Sheet on Creery Wetlands presented to Mandurah City councillors and other interested parties in 1998.**

1. Evidence is mounting world wide on the destructive nature of canal estates and last year the New South Wales Government directed their local Councils to enforce a new policy to ban any more canal estates on environmental grounds.
2. Figures on the costs to local Councils of maintaining canal estates are mounting every year. These costs include maintaining canal walling and water quality.
3. In a letter to the W A Minister for the Environment August 1993 the Australian Nature Conservation

Agency, ANCA, stated This agency believes that the recommendations of the EPA and the responses by the proponent are inadequate and fundamentally flawed in that they fail to address the environmental issues at stake. Also The only outcome will be the loss of valuable habitat for the many species which utilise the area, and the potential for further impact on the water quality for the Ramsar listed areas of the Peel-Harvey Estuary.

4. In the EPA bulletin 695 1993, on the Harbour Canal Estate for the Creery Wetlands, a time limit of 5 years for commencement of the project was recommended, after which a reassessment must be made. This time limit expires in August 1998.

5. The advice given in the EPA Bulletin 695, that the Harbour City Canal Development could go ahead under certain strict environmental conditions, was based upon an Environmental Review commissioned by the proponent This Environmental Review has been strongly criticised in peer review documents released last year under the Freedom of Information Act. These documents claim that, not only was the Environmental Review factually incorrect in some of its data but it also drew faulty conclusions from it. We suggest that, should the EPA reassess the development in the light of this criticism, and of mounting scientific evidence on the value of wetlands and remnant native vegetation, they would be most likely to recommend against the development.

6. In September 1994 a Mandurah referendum overwhelmingly rejected the proposed Harbour City canal estate on the Creery Wetlands. This led directly to Mandurah councillors rejecting a rezoning proposal for the Wetlands. There is no reason to believe that Mandurah residents have changed their minds.

### **Scientific data is accumulating steadily on the environmental value of Area A of the Creery Wetlands.**

7. City of Mandurah State of the Environment Report 1997 p34 states: There are a number of important wetlands in the City of Mandurah. The Creery Wetlands are a good example, having a high level of biodiversity with large trees, intact understory and samphire flats.

8. An opinion on the value of the Creery Wetlands expressed in 1995 to ANCA by Dr Semeniuk of WA, states: Preservation of the geomorphic values of a wetland requires that the boundary of said wetland be kept intact and that its context, in this case its relationship with surrounding hinterland and the estuarine water body, be retained.

9. Experts from the Wildflower Society of WA gave this opinion in Jan. 1998: A large portion of Area A is considered part of the wetland unit and should be preserved as such. These scientists are continuing their study of the Creery Wetlands using aerial photos supplied by PPG - more information from them is expected soon.

10. A member of the Dept. of Environmental Protection has stated that freshwater seepage into estuaries and inlets produced unique ecosystems and every effort should be made to conserve them. One such freshwater seepage (see Picture) occurs on Area A of the Creery Wetland.

11. PPG have identified 26 species of local native plants including large Jarrah and Tuart trees on Area A of the Creery Wetlands. Tuarts are under threat throughout the State due to heavy development along the coastal strip. The City of Mandurah's State of the Environment Report 1997 states on P34 In remnant Jarrah and Tuart forests, fauna is well represented by the Grey Kangaroo, Emu, Brush Wallaby, Short-nosed Bandicoot and diverse bird populations. This includes two rarely sighted bird species: the Peregrine Falcon and Red-eared Firetail Finch.

### **Conclusions**

In the light of mounting scientific evidence on the value of wetlands and remnant native vegetation, and on the environmentally destructive effect of Canal Estates, we suggest any proposal for Canals on Creery should be reassessed by the EPA. This would be in line with their sunset clause recommendation in Bulletin 695. (see Fact 4 above).

Until this has been done, rezoning of Area A of the Creery should not go ahead as it may be decided to add Area A to Conservation Zones B and C. These arguments (prepared for the PPG committee by Griselda Hitchcock, Beryl Francis and Sue Grayling) were presented to Mandurah City Councillors and similar presentations were made to the Ministers for Planning and also Environment.

There are 9 volumes of indexed material (thanks to the librarian who did this for us) as well as more recent correspondence etc. in our filing cabinet. Arrangements can be made for this material to be viewed and photocopied for study purposes.

As you will see from the photographs above work commenced on Area A in February 1999.

## Creery pictures taken at high tide

These show the areas which have become inundated

Early morning photos taken by Griselda Hitchcock, June 2001



*There is some suggestion...*



*that wading birds will benefit...*



*from having constant shallow water here..*



*but surely the samphire...*



*...will not be able to survive.*



*Separation canal flooding the wetland*

# More Creery pictures

Taken by Vic Beacham



*Group at Creery wetlands*



*View across to bird hide*



*Marion Timms at Creery Wetlands*