

Environmental Best Practice Guidelines 8.

Guiding Community Involvement in Works on Waterways and Wetlands

Tasmania has a long history of community involvement in works on the State's waterways and wetlands. Traditionally, the community has been involved in irrigation and drainage schemes, 'river improvement' schemes, and farm dam construction. In recent years, Landcare, Rivercare and Waterwatch groups have protected, monitored, managed and rehabilitated waterways and wetlands around the State.

The Rivercare Program was established to ensure progress towards the sustainable management, rehabilitation and conservation of rivers. Many Rivercare projects in Tasmania are carried out by community groups so the State Government has developed a framework to help groups plan and implement their projects. Rivercare Plans are a key component of that framework, which are designed to

- achieve sustainable outcomes for works in and along rivers by ensuring that the works are appropriate, effective, and in accordance with other activities in the catchment
- foster community spirit and cohesion in managing rivers
- ensure appropriate work practices are adopted
- encourage groups to continue maintaining and improving rivers after their projects have finished.

Community groups are advised to seek advice and support from their local council before starting their project. When notified of a proposed project, council staff should find out if the group has a plan. If not, they should suggest that one be developed as part of the assessment process. The nature of the plan will depend on the scale of the project. All projects funded by government, including National Heritage Trust and local community grants, and most self-funded projects will need a Rivercare Plan. Smaller self-funded works may only need a works plan.

1. Developing a Rivercare Plan

Guidelines for Planning Rivercare Projects in Tasmania has been produced by the Tasmanian Rivercare Technical Assessment Panel (TRTAP) and the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (DPIWE) (2000) to help community groups plan their Rivercare projects. Community groups should be encouraged to use the Guidelines when developing their project. The Guidelines can be downloaded from the DPIWE website at www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au.

The steps involved in developing a Rivercare Plan are

1. Vision for the river
2. Assess river condition
3. Management issues and objectives
4. Technical assessment and advice
5. Schedule of works
6. Links with other plans and processes
7. Monitoring the project
8. Provision for maintenance
9. Display and endorsement of the plan
10. Submit Rivercare Plan or works plan to council for assessment

Groups should be encouraged to see their Rivercare Plan as a 'living document' that states their community's long-term vision for the river and outlines the works they want to do, both in the immediate future and over the next 5-10 years.

1. Vision for the river

Groups should define their vision for the river and its catchment. The vision statement can be as short or as long as the group wants, provided it adequately describes their collective vision for the river. It may describe the river's look and 'feel', quality, riverine environment, riparian vegetation, birds and animals, agricultural production, recreational use and so on.

Public consultations should be held so the wider community and local government can contribute to the vision. Consulting the community will also allow groups to determine their community's awareness of the river and its condition, and discuss ways the vision might be achieved.

2. Assess river condition

Groups should survey their river to assess its condition and identify sites that are relatively healthy or degraded. Surveying the river will make it easier to determine what works need to be done and their priority, as well as the resources needed to do the works. The data collected will usually include information about remnant native vegetation, threatened species, weeds, stream conditions, erosion, bed and bank stability, stock management and fencing.

Guidelines for Planning Rivercare Projects in Tasmania (TRTAP & DPIWE, 2000) discusses the issues likely to be faced when surveying the river and outlines the data that should be collected. It also contains proformas that can be used to record the survey data.

3. Management issues and objectives

Groups should decide on the problems they will tackle and the objectives for resolving them. These decisions will be based on the analysis of the survey data. Each objective should show how the problem will be managed in order to achieve the group's vision for the river.

Relevant landowners and river users should be consulted to ensure no problems are missed and to make sure there is consensus on how the problems will be managed.

4. Technical assessment and advice

Groups should seek appropriate advice when developing their Rivercare Plans. The advice should cover a range of specialties, depending on the needs of the project. It may include

- An engineering survey to determine the suitability of the site and make sure the design of any structures, such as riffles and rip-rap, is appropriate before works begin.
- A geomorphic assessment to show how the river functions from a physical and hydraulic perspective (at a catchment, sub-catchment and reach scale), and how it will respond to the proposed works.
- Threatened Species Unit of DPIWE to find out if the works could affect any critical habitats and endangered species.

Possible sources of advice include State Government employees, extension staff and consultants. In addition, non-government organisations such as Birds Tasmania and the Tasmanian Field Naturalists can often provide useful information on bird and animal behaviour, and habitat needs and preferences.

Groups should be encouraged to seek advice in the early stages of developing their plans, although sometimes it will be needed in the latter stages as well. The advice should always be in writing, after a site visit. Any advice should be included in the plan as an attachment that can be referred to later.

Groups should also seek advice on public liability and any other insurance issues and liabilities that could arise during and after the project.

5. Schedule of works

The schedule of works should include

- A list of the planned works, along with their intended timelines and costings.
- A detailed description of the methods to be used for each of the works.
- A series of maps and aerial photographs that show the location and extent of all planned works. The maps are best done in 1.5-2.0 kilometre sections so they are clear and unambiguous.
- Detailed plans of all major river works, such as riffles and other structures.

General statements about the methods to be used can be given in the body of the plan. However, detailed descriptions of the proposed works should be included in the works schedule on a section-by-section basis. This is especially important if the works involve vegetation clearance (eg willows), in-stream works (eg riffles), stream bank works (eg rip-rap), or the use of machinery. Each of the descriptions should be linked to a map. An example of a works schedule can be found in Guidelines for Planning Rivercare Projects in Tasmania (TRTAP & DPIWE, 2000).

6. Links with other plans and processes

It is essential that groups obtain the support and agreement of the majority of landowners along the river when developing their Rivercare Plans. Council staff can advise community groups about the other interest groups and individuals that should be consulted. These people should be consulted to determine the likely effects of the plan on them and to obtain their consent.

It is also important to consider land use in the catchment and to link the plan to other management plans in the area. Such plans may include Rivercare Plans for other parts of the river, catchment management plans, whole farm plans, weed management strategies, and endangered species management plans.

Council planning schemes and management plans for national parks, state reserves and other Crown lands in the catchment should be considered to ensure the plan is co-ordinated with other planning processes.

If Rivercare Plans have or are being developed for other sections of the river they should be linked and integrated with each other. Groups should work out how they can co-ordinate their works with those of nearby groups. Groups working along the same river or in the same region should be encouraged to share resources and integrate their plans. The local DPIWE Water Management Officer and council planning officers may be able to facilitate this process if necessary.

7. Monitoring the project

Monitoring the river before, during and after the project will give an indication of the success of the project and the maintenance needed. However, groups do not have to do all the monitoring themselves. Members of the local community, schools and the local council may be able to help.

Several techniques can be used to monitor the success of a Rivercare Plan and its associated works. Groups can assess the condition of the river using the river survey proforma found in Guidelines for Planning Rivercare Projects in Tasmania (TRTAP & DPIWE, 2000). The proforma encourages groups to examine all components of the river, including the riparian vegetation, in-stream logs, erosion and sediments. Photo-points (photographs taken from fixed locations) can also be used to show the before and after condition of the river, and to monitor long-term changes after the project has been completed.

8. Provision for maintenance

The aim of the Rivercare program is to improve the long-term health of our rivers. Therefore, all groups must show how they will maintain the improvements they make to the river after the project has finished. Maintaining the improvements is particularly important in Tasmania where rivers can degrade quickly and the money spent improving them can be wasted if there are no follow-up works.

Long-term maintenance of the river can be funded by arrangements that share the costs equitably between the beneficiaries. The preferred arrangement is a riverworks district, which provides a framework for collecting the funds and administering and managing the maintenance. Generally, it is recommended that local councils establish riverworks districts and set up special council committees to administer them. However, incorporated trusts and Landcare groups can also establish and administer them. The local council or the DPIWE Rivercare Team can advise groups on the procedures for establishing such arrangements.

9. Display and endorsement of plan

The Rivercare Plan and its accompanying maps and aerial photographs should be displayed and made available to the public so all interested parties have the opportunity to comment on the planned works. Groups should seek endorsement from their general community, and individuals and groups likely to be affected by the plan. The local council may be able to use its normal planning processes to help groups seek public comment and endorsement.

10. Submit Rivercare Plan or works plan to council for assessment

The completed Rivercare Plan should be assessed by the local council before any works start. The level of assessment needed will depend on the scale of the works. The Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment can be approached if the local council does not have the necessary technical and scientific expertise.

2. References

Tasmanian Rivercare Technical Assessment Panel & Department of Primary Industries, Water & Environment. 2000. *Guidelines for Planning Rivercare Projects in Tasmania*. DPIWE, Hobart. <http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au>

These guidelines should be used in conjunction with the appropriate technical advice and literature.

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