GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Department of **Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions**

SWAN RIVER TRUST

CORPORATE POLICY STATEMENT NO. 52

PLANNING FOR LOCALITIES ALONG THE SWAN CANNING DEVELOPMENT CONTROL AREA

April 2026

1. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this policy is to ensure that land use, development and other permitted works, acts and activities within or affecting the Swan Canning development control area (DCA):

- protect and enhance the ecological health, community benefits and amenity of the DCA; and
- achieve consistent and integrated planning, decision-making and management outcomes in relation to the Swan Canning river system.

2. SCOPE

This policy is developed and published pursuant to the *Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006* (SCRM Act). It will be applied by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (the department) and the Swan River Trust when assessing and determining applications and providing advice to other statutory decision-makers, land managers and proponents in relation to proposals for land use changes, development, works, acts and activities within, abutting or affecting the DCA.

Pursuant to section 6 of the SCRM Act, Schedule 5 authorities should perform their functions with due regard to the objectives and principles under section 5 of the SCRM Act. This policy has been developed to achieve the objectives and principles of the SCRM Act and therefore should be regarded by Schedule 5 authorities to functions including strategic planning, decision-making, and management.

In this policy, the Swan Canning river system means the catchment area of the Swan, Canning, Helena, Southern and Avon (to Moondyne Brook) rivers (map available). The DCA is defined in Schedule 3 of the SCRM Act (maps available).

3. CONTEXT

The Derbal Yirragan (Swan River) and Djarlgarro Beeliar (Canning River) are the centrepiece of the Perth metropolitan region. The waterways of the Swan Canning river system and their foreshores have significant ecological value and perform an important floodplain function. They are an important landscape feature of scenic quality, hold cultural and heritage significance to Whadjuk Noongar people and are a focus for recreation and tourism activities for residents and visitors to Perth. The DCA is within Whadjuk Country.

The river system is subject to increasing pressures from development on the waterways, within the DCA and in the catchment. There is a need to ensure development and

activities within and adjacent to the rivers aligns with the strong community desire to conserve and restore the riverine environment, protect its amenity, and maintain and improve public access for a range of recreation and nature-based activities.

It is acknowledged that the characteristics and identity of the river system change depending on the locality. To ensure planning, development and management considers and preserves these unique attributes, locality plans have been developed for sections along the DCA, as depicted in Figure 1 below.

This policy outlines the key principles and policy statements that are to be addressed in all localities. The locality plans are policies that set out locality-specific policy statements to be achieved within the respective parts of the river system.

This policy should be used in conjunction with the State Planning Policies adopted under the *Planning and Development Act 2005* (PD Act) as they relate to planning and development within, abutting or affecting the DCA, and assists with implementing the River Protection Strategy for Derbal Yirragan Djarlgarro (Swan Canning river system). This policy is to be applied with the department's other Corporate Policies and Guidelines for the Swan Canning river system.

Mapping of the DCA and environmentally sensitive areas, such as wetlands, can be accessed from the Landgate Locate website.

4. LEGISLATION

The SCRM Act establishes a governance, regulatory, and approvals framework for the Swan Canning river system. It promotes collaboration among State and local government organisations to achieve a unified and consistent approach to land use planning decision-making.

The SCRM Act places the care, control and management of the River reserve with the Swan River Trust. The SCRM Act also empowers the department and Swan River Trust to undertake statutory functions related to the river system and DCA.

The statutory responsibilities of the department and Swan River Trust in relation to the DCA under the SCRM Act, the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Regulations 2007, and proposals subject to control under the Metropolitan Region Scheme (MRS), PD Act, and other relevant State Government legislation are further detailed in the Determination Processes document.

5. POLICY

When undertaking its functions, the department, Swan River Trust and Schedule 5 authorities, as described in the SCRM Act, are to regard the key principles below in bold and further detail provided in the associated policy statements underneath each principle for all localities.

5.1 Protect and restore the river system

5.1.1 Respect the river system, its waters and floodplains, local vegetation, wetlands, and habitats as a dynamic natural system, by designing land use and development to protect ecological and landscape values and be responsive to natural processes and the environment.

5.1.2 Maintain and progressively restore ecological function, the landscape, habitat and water quality, and improve degraded areas of the river system, including waterways, floodplains, wetlands, and bushlands. This applies to both the aquatic and terrestrial environments.

5.1.3 Establish and maintain buffers between significant wetlands and other land uses.

5.1.4 Protect and restore habitats that support local fauna, including protecting seagrass habitats and considering habitat enhancements.

5.1.5 Incorporate local vegetation into foreshore reserves, parks and road reserves located within, adjacent to and affecting the DCA, to provide ecological corridors and improve biodiversity, local sense of place and visual amenity. Use a mixture of understorey, middle-storey and tree species.

5.1.6 Avoid planting deciduous trees within parks and reserves adjacent to waterways and wetlands, or within road reserves that contain stormwater systems that discharge untreated stormwater to the rivers, except when deciduous species are used for passive-solar purposes.

5.2 Protect and restore foreshore vegetation

5.2.1 Protect areas of local vegetation associated with waterways (including the floodplain) to ensure that the river landscape and its values are maintained. Vegetation that is within and fringes waterways serve an important environmental, stabilisation, biological, and amenity function, adding value to the river system landscape for water-dependent ecosystems, wildlife and community enjoyment. Foreshore vegetation should not be removed, unless there is a demonstrated problem, such as weed invasion. Foreshore vegetation should not be altered to facilitate development outside of the foreshore reserve, including for bushfire management purposes or to enhance private views.

5.2.2 Restore foreshore vegetation to enhance the values of the foreshore area. Prioritise weed removal and replace with local plant species. Consider viewsheds from select public vantage points and balance ecological health, community benefits, amenity, and bushfire risk management when planning restoration projects.

5.3 Establish and maintain foreshore reserves

5.3.1 Establish foreshore reserves for conservation and recreation. Foreshore reserves are fundamental to waterway function, management and access. Foreshore reserves protect landforms and plant and animal communities, which form an integral part of the estuarine and riverine ecosystems and landscapes. Foreshore reserves allow for natural flood processes, provide a physical buffer between private land and the waterway and provide a place for community connection and enjoyment.

5.3.2 Maintain and increase, where possible, the total area of foreshore reserves, and enhance the environmental quality of foreshore reserves.

5.3.3 Revegetate foreshore reserves by applying site responsive design that is consistent with the foreshore functions and local vegetation classification.

5.3.4 Secure uninterrupted foreshore reserves in public ownership along the waterways as opportunities arise.

5.4 Increase resilience to climate change

5.4.1 Adapt foreshore use, infrastructure and management to allow natural river foreshore flooding processes to occur. Sea/estuary level rise and other variables associated with climate change, such as extreme weather events and storm surges, will affect the river foreshore and associated infrastructure. Design development around the foreshore to accommodate inundation, unless located within urban nodes, such as Elizabeth Quay, which have been designed to minimise inundation risk.

5.4.2 Prioritise retention of existing urban forest. Incorporate and enhance vegetation within subdivision and development plans, particularly large trees 8 metres or greater in height and/or average canopy diameter of 6 metres or greater, to reduce temperatures within urban areas, and reduce soil erosion and flooding from intense rainfall events.

5.4.3 Retain and increase local aquatic and terrestrial vegetation in the intertidal zone and foreshore area of the waterway to reduce riverbank erosion and to sequester carbon.

5.4.4 Retain water in the landscape (e.g. infiltrating stormwater to increase soil moisture, and incorporating vegetated swales, living streams and wetlands), where appropriate, to reduce temperatures within urban areas.

5.5 Implement water sensitive design

5.5.1 Locate stormwater and groundwater control management systems within the development footprint and not within the foreshore area or within significant wetlands and their buffers. Overland flow of treated (where required) stormwater and controlled groundwater discharge towards waterways or wetlands is to occur via vegetated flow paths.

5.5.2 Incorporate water sensitive design to maintain or improve the water quality leaving the site, maintain the pre-development hydrology of the site, and protect or restore natural habitats within or adjacent to the site. Developments should, where applicable, include:

- improved catchment management practices (e.g. improved fertiliser, pesticide and chemical use, and retention/planting of local vegetation);
- on-site retention of sediment;
- management of construction works (including any dewatering) to prevent contaminants from entering the environment;
- installation of maintained stormwater quality treatment systems (e.g. biofilters, tree pits, vegetated swales, living streams, pervious paving, and litter and sediment traps);
- connection to reticulated sewerage; and
- protection and restoration of significant wetlands, river pools, streams, and local vegetation.

5.5 Minimise dredging and channel disturbance

5.5.1 Avoid dredging and disturbing the waterway channels for the purpose of development. Dredging for ecological purposes, such as the re-establishment of river pools, and to maintain existing navigational channels and public boating facilities may be acceptable where environmental impacts are minimised and managed. Site conditions and potential secondary impacts, such as altered erosion and deposition patterns, should be understood.

5.5.2 Avoid filling/reclamation of the waterway channels and floodways, including temporary filling.

5.6 Retain and conserve cultural significance and heritage values

5.6.1 Retain and conserve the Derbal Yirragan (Swan), Djarlgarro (Canning) and Mandoon (Helena) rivers, and other Aboriginal heritage sites, places and protected areas. All Aboriginal heritage sites, places and protected areas are protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*, including sites and places that are not registered. Registered Aboriginal sites are listed in the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register. The rivers have intrinsic value due to their natural attributes and spiritual and cultural significance. Features and landscapes that commonly contain Aboriginal heritage include springs, river pools, important trees, and middens. Whadjuk Noongar culture and knowledge of the river system should inform decision-making.

5.6.2 Retain and conserve places of historic heritage significance associated within the rivers, in accordance with the *Heritage Act 2018,* including places entered on the State Register of Heritage Places or under consideration for the Register. The 'Swan and Canning Rivers' itself is acknowledged as a significant Western Australian landmark that is under consideration for the Register.

5.6.3 Retain and conserve natural heritage places, including protected sites in the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Directory and places of natural heritage value in the National Heritage List established under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

5.7 Maintain the rivers and their foreshores as a community asset

5.7.1 Recognise the rivers and foreshores as a public asset that should be available to the whole community. Proposals should enhance the amenity of and consider the public's ongoing use and enjoyment of the rivers and foreshores. Development within the DCA is to enhance the river experience, be pertinent to the river, and demonstrate a benefit to the wider community.

5.7.2 Undertake strategic planning for land within and adjacent to the DCA to provide clear direction for future development and help achieve continuous improvements.

5.8 Maintain a sense of place

5.8.1 Maintain and enhance the natural landscape character and sense of place created by the varying landform features and local vegetation across the DCA. The distinctive river landscape and features may be detailed in the locality plans or Swan River System Landscape Description.

5.8.2 Retain and integrate each locality's distinctive characters into the development interface. Promote community connection to the rivers and their foreshores by continuing design and character themes into adjacent activity centres.

5.8.3 Protect and enhance views and view corridors to and from the rivers from select public vantage points to provide spaces to appreciate the river setting.

5.9 Secure public access to the rivers and their foreshores

5.9.1 Provide public access to the rivers and foreshores for recreation and to increase opportunities for people to connect with nature, subject to protecting ecological health and public amenity.

5.9.2 Establish continuous public access along or adjacent to the foreshore, whichever is appropriate to local conditions. Respond to the environmental values, terrain, cultural and heritage values, existing land uses, amenity of the site and opportunities to connect adjacent activity centres when locating and designing accessways. Consider passive and active transport and assess access in relation to safety and functional requirements.

5.10 Provide opportunities for water transport

5.10.1 Recognise and account for potential commuter water transport opportunities, including by private operators, where practical and appropriate.

5.10.2 Minimise potential wash and wake impacts, including to riverbank stability, built infrastructure, the ecology of the area, and the safety of other river users. Lower-carbon transport options are encouraged.

5.10.3 Jetty infrastructure is to be of an environmentally sensitive and high-quality design that complements the amenity of the location.

5.11 Establish linkages and ecological corridors

5.11.1 Provide linkages and ecological corridors through an integrated system of regional parks, conservation areas, recreation nodes and public open spaces throughout the river system. Waterways are a linear landscape feature with functional linkages (e.g. streams, creeks and drains) that connect back through the urban and rural landscape to headwaters, springs and wetlands, and to other landscape features, such as the coast, Darling Scarp, remnant bushland, and regional parks. Proposals should consider these important linkages in the following manner:

- Ecologically – providing important wildlife habitat and connections between habitats. Ecological corridors and linkages and the movement of wildlife are essential components of maintaining biological (plant and animal) and ecological processes and the biodiversity of the river system;
- Functionally – providing for recreational space and movement by people (e.g. pedestrians, cyclists and recreation nodes) and for natural water flows and drainage; and
- Conceptually – connecting known 'destinations' evokes the community's recognition or 'sense of place' of the river landscape.

5.11.2 Increase the provision of a continuous foreshore reserve along the waterways to improve public access and provide ecological connectivity along the foreshore. Continue to secure in public ownership land reserved as Regional Open Space under the Metropolitan Region Scheme.

5.12 Complement the river landscape through sensitive design and built form

5.12.1 Apply the Design Principles in State Planning Policy 7.0 Design of The Built Environment (Western Australian Planning Commission) to development within and adjacent to the DCA. Proposals are to consider the context of the river setting and the characteristics of the site, particularly in regard to building height, bulk, scale, form, orientation and location.

5.12.2 Maintain and enhance the quality of the river environment when designing development within the DCA. The built form should derive design inspiration from the river landscape and be consciously planned and constructed to improve the amenity of the rivers and their settings. The principles for design and built form are to be structured around the following:

- Bulk, form and scale – height, form, bulk, siting and setback are all critical aspects of building scale. The appropriate forms and scales of development vary, depending on the location within the river landscape. Massing and height of development should balance with, and be in proportion to, the surrounding setting and provide good amenity for people at the ground level.
- Materials and colours – an attractive and aesthetically pleasing landscape is generally attributed to the use of building and landscaping materials that harmonise with the broader setting in which they are located. Contrasting materials and elements can be introduced to emphasise design. The selection and use of external finishes and materials should generally be based on materials and hues naturally occurring or predominantly used in the locality. Unity in the river landscape is more attainable using materials found naturally or historically in the locality.
- Design – built form and urban design should be responsive to the surrounding setting. Design inspiration is to be drawn from the natural, cultural, physical, social and historical setting of the rivers. Integrate vegetation with development to minimise the contrast between the natural and built elements of the landscape. Development is to be designed to positively contribute to the quality and character of the setting and facilitate a sense of place for all users.

5.13 Activate the foreshores

5.13.1 Create within the foreshores a network of connected activity nodes and tranquil spaces, a diversity of active and passive uses and experiences, and opportunities to encourage visitation and tourism. Decisions relating to activation of the foreshores are to consider the following:

- Purpose – the establishment of activity nodes occurs in a coordinated strategic manner with the management and use of the foreshore between activity nodes prioritising environmental conservation, nature-based activities and passive recreation.
- Design for context – development responds and adapts to environmental values and processes, minimises foreshore impact and is undertaken in a

coordinated manner. Development within nodes should intrinsically relate to the river setting and role of the node.

- Scale – the cumulative impact of development within nodes is managed and might limit future intensification.

5.13.2 Provide opportunities to learn about river ecology, conservation, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history and heritage, including through art, interpretation, signage and nature-based play and nature-based tourism.

5.14 Implement Locality Plans

5.14.1 Apply the locality-specific policy statements contained within adopted locality plans to the respective part of the river system. The following locality plans are to be read in conjunction with this policy:

1. Jenalup (Blackwall Reach) Locality Plan (March 2026)
2. Dootanboro (Melville Water) Locality Plan (March 2026)
3. Perth Water *Buneenboro* Locality Plan (August 2021)
4. Windan-Guildford Locality Plan (March 2026)
5. Middle Derbal Yirragan (Swan) Locality Plan (March 2026)
6. Upper Derbal Yirragan (Swan) Locality Plan (March 2026)
7. Mandoon (Helena River) Locality Plan (March 2026)
8. Lower Djarlgarro (Canning) Locality Plan (March 2026)
9. Upper Djarlgarro (Canning) Locality Plan (March 2026)
10. Southern River Locality Plan (March 2026)

6. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

To implement this policy, the department will:

Swan River Trust

6.1 Consult with the Swan River Trust when assessing proposals under Part 5 of the SCRM Act and preparing strategic documents and corporate policies and guidelines.

6.2 Provide advice on behalf of the Swan River Trust in accordance with delegated powers.

6.3 Keep the Swan River Trust informed of development and permitted works, acts and activities within the River reserve.

Schedule 5 authorities

6.4 Provide advice to relevant Schedule 5 authorities when consulted on planning instruments, and the assessment of land use and development proposals and other works, acts and activities within or affecting the DCA.

Referral agencies

6.5 Ensure there is a clear understanding of the role of referral agencies, how their advice will be considered in assessing proposals and when clearing conditions of approval.

Assessment of proposals

6.6 Have regard to the contextual information provided in the Swan River System Landscape Description (Swan River Trust, 1997).

6.7 Seek appropriate advice when assessing proposals. Advice may be sought from planning authorities, referral agencies, service providers (e.g. Water Corporation), contractors, consultants, or other stakeholders and from the department's specialist branches and regional locations. Where expertise is available from within the department, it will be utilised before seeking advice from external parties.

6.8 Ensure relevant staff, contractors and consultants have the necessary qualifications, skills and expertise when assessing planning and development proposals.

6.9 Maintain records of discussions, advice and decisions when undertaking the department's and Swan River Trust's statutory roles in accordance with the *State Records Act 2000.*

7. CUSTODIAN

Executive Director Conservation and Ecosystem Management.

8. PUBLICATION

This policy will be made available on the department's website and intranet.

9. KEY WORDS

Swan, Canning, river, Blackwall Reach, Helena River, Lower Canning, Lower Swan, Melville Water, Middle Swan, Perth Water, Southern River, Upper Canning, Upper Swan, Derbal Yirragan, Djarlgarro, Jenalup, Dootanboro, Mandoon, development control area, conservation, development, foreshore, land use, localities, Metropolitan Region Scheme, planning policy, plans, precinct.

10. REVIEW

Further reviews will be at the discretion of the Director General, with a review of this policy and associated locality plans undertaken after five years from the date it is signed.

11. APPROVAL

Approved by

Stuart Smith
DIRECTOR GENERAL /
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Date: 29/4/26

David McFerran
CHAIR
SWAN RIVER TRUST

Date: 22 April 2026

Effective date: 29/4/26

FIGURE 1: SWAN CANNING RIVER SYSTEM LOCALITIES