GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Department of **Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions**

SWAN RIVER TRUST

CORPORATE POLICY STATEMENT NO. 47

PLANNING FOR DREDGING AFFECTING THE SWAN CANNING DEVELOPMENT CONTROL AREA

June 2026

1. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this policy is to ensure that dredging within or affecting the Swan Canning development control area (DCA):

- does not unacceptably impact the ecological health, community benefits and amenity of the DCA; and
- is undertaken in accordance with best practice management.

2. SCOPE

The Swan Canning river system has high ecological, social, cultural and economic values and is sensitive to contamination associated with land use and development. This policy addresses potential contamination and altered hydrology associated with dredging. It applies to dredging proposals within and abutting the DCA, as well as proposals that may not immediately adjoin the DCA but may affect waters in the DCA. Proposals that may affect waters in the DCA include, but are not limited to, those that might mobilise sediment, nutrients and other contaminants to the DCA, or that might alter the hydrology of the waterways and wetlands in the DCA. This includes proposals for new dredging and maintenance dredging.

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 involving dredging and providing advice to other statutory decision-makers, land managers and proponents in relation to dredging proposals 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).

All policy and guidance documents identified in this policy should be taken to refer to the most current published version.

3. CONTEXT

Dredging involves the removal of sediment from the bed of a waterway, generally to deepen it for a defined purpose. Dredging can be an element of proposals for new facilities or extensions to existing facilities. It may also be proposed to maintain waterway system function, re-establish ecological features, such as river pools, remove contaminants or maintain existing navigation channels.

The dredging process and resulting altered bathymetric conditions can have adverse ecological impacts, including:

- degradation of water quality by introducing sediment and porewater bound contaminants to the water column, increasing turbidity, decreasing dissolved oxygen levels and altering pH;
- mobilisation or exposure of contaminants, nutrients or algal cysts from disturbed sediments;
- direct and indirect damage to fauna and habitats, particularly benthic communities; and
- changes to shorelines, water movement, sediment type and sedimentation processes.

Increased sediment in the water column can affect aquatic fauna by physical abrasion or clogging of respiratory systems and can reduce light penetration to and smother aquatic flora. Exposure of underlying sediments to the water column can release nutrients and other contaminants, making them biologically available and able to have a range of negative impacts. Several harmful algal species produce resting cysts that can survive in benthic sediments for many decades. These can germinate and potentially result in harmful algal blooms if re-exposed to the water column during favourable conditions. Dredging is to be planned and managed to minimise potential impacts and ensure that those impacts do not persist beyond the short-term. The creation of visible sediment plumes and alteration of riverine processes and water circulation resulting from dredging can adversely impact amenity, which affects the community's use and enjoyment of the DCA.

Dredge spoil (excavated material) might be contaminated and require treatment and/or off-site disposal. However, clean dredge spoil may be used for beach renourishment, erosion control structure backfilling, or habitat creation.

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 and Swan River Trust's other Corporate Policies and Guidelines for the Swan Canning river system.

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 following policy statements.

5.1 Apply a general presumption against dredging. Dredging may be supported for ecological purposes, such as the re-establishment of river pools, and to maintain existing navigation channels, subject to approval. In all instances, dredging is to be minimised and managed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the ecological health, community benefits, and amenity of the DCA.

Justification for dredging

5.2 Require applications to demonstrate the necessity for the dredging and provide details regarding:

- past and expected future sedimentation rates;
- the proposed use(s) of the dredged area; and
- considered alternatives to dredging.

Potential impacts

5.3 Require dredging applications to demonstrate they are minimising and managing effects on water movement and the ecological health of the DCA, including flora, fauna and their habitats. Proponents will likely be required to provide site specific details regarding:

- the extent and distribution of benthic habitats and identification of present species;
- baseline water quality data;
- sediment quality and composition (including contaminants);
- potential risk of mobilising harmful algal species (i.e. analyse cyst occurrence in sediments);
- waterway hydrodynamics (i.e. impact on water movement – flow direction, velocity, etc.);
- predicted direct and indirect impacts of dredging, including extent, severity and duration;
- consideration of spoil disposal options; and
- need for, amount and frequency of any ongoing maintenance dredging.

5.4 Require dredging applications to demonstrate they are minimising and managing effects on landscape character, amenity, and community use. Consider potential secondary impacts, such as altered erosion and deposition patterns and affects to the shoreline. In some instances, turbidity and hydrodynamic modelling will be required.

5.5 Advise proponents to address Aboriginal heritage and historic heritage requirements in accordance with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* and *Heritage Act 2018*, respectively.

Dredge spoil

5.6 Require dredging applications to demonstrate that the feasibility of a range of dredge spoil management and disposal options has been considered and justify the selected method and site, with particular regard for spoil quality and characteristics. Contaminated dredge spoil is to be removed from the DCA and disposed offsite in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation. Temporary storage or disposal of dredge spoil in-water will not be supported unless there are clear ecological health and community benefits. The use of clean dredge spoil in the DCA may be approved, for example, for beach re-nourishment. Proponents are directed to the sediment quality guidance provided in the Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality (ANZG 2018), including default guideline values for toxicants. Evidence of the physical nature of the spoil and toxicity must be submitted to the department.

Management and monitoring

5.7 Require dredging applications to include a methodology, management and monitoring plan that addresses how the dredging is to be undertaken to ensure best possible protection of the ecological health, community benefits, amenity, and heritage values of the DCA. This includes optimising dredging and management technology with the aim of minimising disturbance, the physical effects of the spoil, any contamination (including algal cysts), effects on water quality, and addressing noise and air quality (dust and odour). Proponents are directed to the methodology outlined in the Technical Guidance – Environmental Impact Assessment of Marine Dredging Proposals (EPA WA) and the environmental controls identified in the Dredge Guideline (EPA SA).

5.8 Require a sediment ecotoxicology survey to support dredging applications, where necessary, considering the size of the disturbance area and volume of sediment to be removed.

5.9 Require water quality monitoring to be undertaken in accordance with ANZG 2018. The department considers the waterways within the DCA to be a slightly to moderately disturbed system and typically expects trigger levels for 95 per cent species protection to be applied. Trigger values based on local conditions may be considered where it can be demonstrated that adequate background data has been collected. Phytoplankton monitoring will likely be required to provide early warning against the potential for a toxic or noxious bloom.

Maintenance dredging

5.10 Require maintenance dredging applications to be in accordance with the original development plans and current best practice dredging methodology, management, and monitoring. The application is to provide information addressing the provisions of this policy proportionate to the level of risk associated with the proposal. Wherever possible, ongoing maintenance dredging should be minimised.

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 approved 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 Seek appropriate advice when assessing proposals. Advice may be sought from planning authorities, referral agencies, 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 prior to seeking advice from external parties.

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

6.8 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, development control area, dredging, dredge spoil, maintenance dredging, bathymetry, benthic, water quality.

10. REVIEW

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

11. APPROVAL

Approved by

Stuart Smith
DIRECTOR GENERAL /
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Date: 16 June 2026

David McFerran
CHAIR
SWAN RIVER TRUST

Date: 4 June 2026

Effective date: 16 June 2026