

Section 3 Regional Assets

3.1 Introduction

This section of the document describes in detail the seven categories of regional assets. The seven categories are:

- Land
- Water
- Biodiversity
- Coastal and marine
- Air
- Cultural heritage
- Regional capacity

Within those seven categories, a common structure is used to describe them. Each category is defined in terms of the resource description, resource condition, issues and pressures, current response and Strategy response.

At the beginning of each category a Nyoongar extract from the *Carers of Everything* dreaming story is used to provide an introductory indigenous perspective to the asset category and is indicated in italics. This is followed by a definition of the Aspirational Target developed for each category to reflect local, regional and institutional priorities. An Aspirational Target can be defined as statements about the desired condition of natural resources in the longer term (50+years).

The Region has a vast array of natural resource assets. Assets are all the various uses of natural resources that are valued by the wider regional community. An asset-based approach to NRM implies that management activities are focused on the protection and enhancement of assets. For the purpose of this Strategy the definition of an asset is something that is useful or valuable.

The value of an asset is directly related to its beneficial use. For example, the value of water is its use by the environment and consumptive use as drinking and irrigation water. This also brings in the 'triple bottom line' principle in that assets have beneficial uses that have an economic, social and environmental value. The decision to protect assets that have values across this full spectrum, equates to having economic, social and environmental outcomes.

The Council has adopted an asset-based approach to guide the development of this Strategy. Basing NRM decision-making around asset protection, enables justification of investment based on the value of an asset being protected. By using an asset-based approach to NRM this Strategy will ensure that management activities are focused on the protection of high value natural resources. The intended outcome of this approach is that funding will be prioritised towards assets of greatest importance. This approach is a three-step process. It involves the identification of regional assets, placing a value upon those assets, and identifying known threats to them.

Recognition of the inter-connection, inter-relatedness and inter-dependency of environmental, social and economic assets is paramount to the successful management of natural resources in the Region. This Strategy identifies seven major asset categories in the Region. The first five are biophysical in nature and are seen as the core primary natural resource asset categories:

- **Land** - including geological formations, soil and productivity
- **Water** - including waterways, wetlands and groundwater
- **Biodiversity** - terrestrial and aquatic
- **Coastal and Marine** - biodiversity and water quality
- **Air** - for sustaining life support systems and protection of biodiversity

The other two core asset categories have been identified to incorporate the inter-connectedness of social and economic aspects within NRM. These have been categorised as cultural heritage and regional capacity.

Most natural resource assets have a collection of associated values. For the purpose of this Strategy values are considered to be the worth, desirability, utility, or qualities on which these depend.

The focus of this approach are the 'qualities' on which the worth, desirability, or utility of the natural resource asset values in the Region depend. In accordance with the principles of sustainability asset values have been grouped into broad categories of environmental, economic and social.

The term environmental value is defined as:

Particular values or uses of the environment that are important for a healthy ecosystem or for public benefit, welfare, safety or health and which require protection from the effects of pollution, waste discharges and deposits and activities which cause 'environmental harm' (Environmental Protection Authority, 2003).

The primary environmental values of natural resource assets that have been identified in the Region are:

- **Natural Diversity:** Genes, species, communities and life-supporting ecosystem services
- **Ecological function:** Ecological processes vital for the provision of ecosystem services and the survival and the continued evolution of living organisms
- **Physical structure and habitat:** a combination of plants, animals and landforms.

Throughout the Region the wider regional community derives a multitude of economic benefits from natural resource assets. These benefits are evident at all levels of industry. Within primary industry the main economic benefits are gained through agriculture and mining. Manufacturing, processing and value-adding are typical of secondary industry benefits. Services such as tourism are the major source of economic benefit at the tertiary industry level.

Healthy ecosystems result in a range of economic values. For example, relatively intact vegetation in the hills catchment ensures the cost of clean water is less than it would be if the land was degraded or disturbed.

The natural resources of the Region not only have economic value, but also provide the wider regional community with many social values. For example, recreational activities, spirituality and culture and they can provide "a sense of place".

For the purpose of this Strategy an inventory of natural resource assets and their associated values has been developed. The inventory was developed through comprehensive consultation and engagement with stakeholders and the wider regional community (Appendix 7). Other reference sources include the draft Region NRM Strategy 2000, technical reports, catchment management plans, action plans, State Government agency data sets and other information sources.