

Values and Pressures of Rushy Creek

The Rushy Creek supports a high species richness of fish and crayfish compared to other rivers in south-west Western Australia.

This encompasses three native freshwater crayfish and eight native fish species including the threatened mud minnow. Ten of these species are found only in south-west Western Australia. Evidence suggests the creek supports key spawning and nursery habitats for several species. Two exotic species were found in low abundance across two sites: mosquitofish and yabby.

The aquatic macroinvertebrate community includes one caddisfly larvae thought to be endangered. Evidence suggests that some species expected to occur naturally in reach 3 were absent, possibly due to predation by a large number of fish present at the time of sampling; further work is needed to determine if this is typical of the community in the Brook.

The movement of biota may be influenced by in-stream barriers including eight minor dams and a number of road crossing points. The influence of these structures needs to be confirmed. The large in-stream dam on reach 4 has a fishway; studies show three native species have successfully negotiated the fishway.

Water quality was within guidelines across all sites with one exception: turbidity was elevated at the site on reach 3; further work is needed to determine the cause.

Fringing vegetation covered 65% of the length of reach 1 and 2 with an average width of 20 m. By comparison, fringing vegetation covered only 25% of the length of reach 3 and 4, with an average width of 10 m. Exotic vegetation species dominated the ground cover particularly at sites on reach 1 and 4.

Correlating with loss of vegetation, sites on reaches 2 and 4 displayed a high extent of bank erosion. Further erosion may occur if vegetation cover on the banks is not improved.

There is limited flow data available for Rushy Creek, however at nearby Chapman Brook a 40% decline in mean annual flow has been measured (2001 to 2012 compared to 1975 to 2012), most likely due to climate change (reduced rainfall), and human use including storage in dams. Farm dams in the Rushy Creek catchment, including the large in-stream dam on reach 4, can hold approximately 15% of mean annual flow for the Creek (compared to 10% mean in the Chapman Brook).

The seasonal flow regime of Rushy Creek is unknown, however observations indicate the creek is likely to dry in places in summer months. The large in-stream dam in the lower catchment of Rushy Creek (reach 4) may provide a permanent water refuge for biota during summer, however this is not a natural feature and may present risks to the ecology such as increased predation (e.g. by cormorants).



Smooth Marron



Western Pygmy Perch



Freshwater Cobbler



Gilgie



Western Minnow



Western Hardyhead



Mud Minnow



Nightfish



Swan River Goby



South-West Goby



Restricted Gilgie

This snapshot is a joint initiative of the South West Catchments Council & the Department of Water through funding from the Australian Government and the Government of Western Australia.

More Information

A number of studies have been conducted that examine the condition and values of the Rushy Creek. These are available through the South West Catchments Council.

Most information in this snapshot came from a collaborative study by South West Catchments Council and the Department of Water. For further details of the study please contact South West Catchments Council.

Rushy Creek Blackwood Basin

A snapshot of the condition of the Rushy Creek



Lower catchment of the Rushy Creek

This snapshot provides a baseline summary of waterway condition for the Rushy Creek, based on assessments conducted in 2012 to 2013. A number of key values and threats to the system are highlighted.

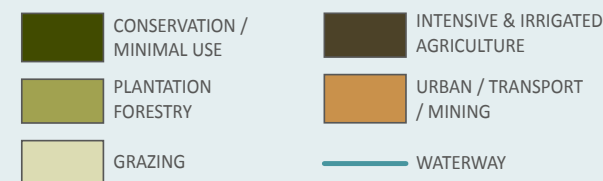




Rushy Creek Blackwood River Basin Lower Blackwood Catchment



LAND USE 2007 (DoW 2012)



Catchment Description

The Rushy Creek, in the lower catchment of the Blackwood River, extends 8 km from the top of catchment to the confluence with the McLeod Creek, 1 km upstream from the confluence with the Blackwood River. The catchment area is 22.4 km².

Land use in the catchment includes;

- 51% grazing and cropping
- 25% conservation including significant areas of remnant vegetation
- 14% intensive agriculture and urban/transport
- 8% plantation.

Restoring the Lower Blackwood Together

The South West Catchments Council (SWCC) works with the community to care for our south west environment.

One area SWCC works in is the Lower Blackwood High Ecological Value Aquatic Ecosystem (HEVAE), a nationally recognised aquatic ecosystem. The HEVAE incorporates the lower reaches of the Blackwood River and tributaries including the Upper Chapman and Chapman Brooks, McLeod and Rushy Creeks.

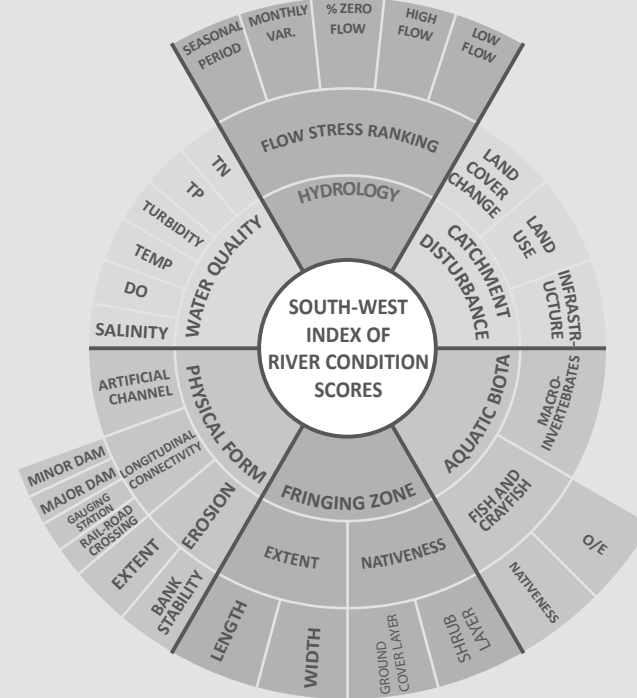
A biological hotspot, the HEVAE is recognised for its unique aquatic ecosystems (swamplands, permanent freshwater rivers and streams) which support a diverse number of plant and animal species. Many of the species are threatened

including the white bellied frog, the orange bellied frog, Balston's pygmy perch and a *Reedia* sedge community.

SWCC have partnered with landholders along the tributaries to restore and protect riparian areas on private land. This has involved removing aggressive weeds- predominantly blackberry, fencing off riparian areas and revegetating with local species.

SWCC will continue to support local landholders with riparian restoration. For advice or to find out about funding opportunities please contact SWCC on email: swcc@swccnrm.org.au or phone: (08) 9780 6193.

Methods for Assessing River Condition



Ecological Themes

Hydrological Change is assessed using the Flow Stress Ranking, which assesses the current hydrological pattern (e.g., seasonal flows, magnitude of high flows, and period of no flows) against expectations of flow without the influence of vegetation clearing and damming.

Catchment Disturbance is the primary pressure indicator of the SWIRC. Catchment Disturbance assesses the amount of human derived disturbance in a catchment, considering land uses, infrastructure types and loss of vegetation. Impacts of different land uses and infrastructure types are weighted according to their varying influences on river condition. Additional stress due to loss of vegetation is factored.

Aquatic Biota is the primary response indicator of the SWIRC. For this study, aquatic biota was assessed based on comparison of observed communities of fish and macroinvertebrates (richness, abundance and the presence of exotic species) against expectations for a healthy ecosystem.

Fringing Zone assesses the buffering protection provided by streamside vegetation to inputs from adjacent land use, and provides an indication of bank stability, shade and the organic material provided for habitat and food to support the aquatic food-web.

The quality of the fringing zone is assessed based on the extent (width and longitudinal continuity) at a reach scale and proportion of exotic species present at a site.

Physical Form indicators examine aspects of aquatic habitat at three scales:

1. erosion (extent and bank stability) assesses potential impacts to microhabitat;
2. artificial channel evaluates impacts to macrohabitats; and
3. longitudinal connectivity assesses the availability of the whole system as habitat to aquatic biota and the potential for natural flushing. This considers the presence of dams and road and rail crossings and other in-stream structures.

Water Quality is both an indicator responding to catchment disturbance and a stressor for aquatic biota.

Water quality is assessed through field measured and modelled data for nutrients, turbidity, temperature, dissolved oxygen and salinity. Data is compared against available guidelines and literature based on tolerance of aquatic biota.

Additional contaminant data are collected where required. This is reported separately; not included in the standard scoring suite.

A Snapshot of the Condition of Rushy Creek 2012/2013

Method

Assessments were made using the South West Index of River Condition (SWIRC), which provides a suite of standardised methods for collecting field and desktop data, as well as protocols for analysing the data. It includes a scoring system to measure departure from natural conditions and to allow comparison between river systems. Scores are categorised on a scale between 'largely unmodified' and 'severely modified'.

The SWIRC uses a series of indicators to examine six broad ecological themes that underpin ecological condition of waterways. Assessments are completed at a reach scale, with some data gathered at sampling site(s) which are representative of the reach.

Summary

Based on the 2012/2013 assessment, the Rushy Creek was generally in good condition, with over half of the broad ecological theme scores (inner ring of the SWIRC scoring diagram) being categorised as 'largely unmodified' or 'slightly modified'. The indicators contributing to theme scores (the middle and outer rings) showed greater variability in condition, with all reaches (reaches 1-4), showing 'substantial' to 'severe modification' in some indicators; these are summarised overleaf.

