



CRC for  
Water Sensitive Cities

# Waterwise Council Program

Location:  
WA



Case Study — Prepared by Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities, September 2018



Australian Government  
Department of Industry,  
Innovation and Science

Business  
Cooperative Research  
Centres Programme

## Insight

A program to support and endorse local governments in Western Australia for their leadership in creating water sensitive communities



## Project description

The Waterwise Council Program established in 2009 is a partnership between the Water Corporation (WA water utility) and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation. It aims to build a cooperative working relationship with local governments, to improve water use efficiency and adopt water sensitive cities concepts in their operations and communities. The program also acknowledges councils that are demonstrating leadership in sustainable water management. It is an opt-in program for councils in Western Australia, providing education, training, materials and funding opportunities, to improve water efficiency and build water sensitive communities.

### Key figures:



**56**  
Councils involved  
in the program



**40%**  
participation in  
recognition scheme  
in first year



Over **80%**  
program participation rate among  
metropolitan councils, reaching over  
**1.6 million** residents



**20%**  
of councils nominated  
for platinum recognition  
in first year



City of Subiaco awarded Platinum Waterwise Council for its leadership in building water sensitive communities

### What does this case study demonstrate?

Each case study has been selected to demonstrate specific solutions, benefits or enabling structures that support the creation of water sensitive cities. This case study focuses on:

#### Governance and policy

## The drivers

*Climate change in Western Australia, as well as an increase in water demand due to population growth, presents significant challenges in how we sustainably manage and use our water resources. The Waterwise Council Program responds to these challenges through the following objectives:*

- **Collaboration** – Build and foster collaborative working relationships between local governments, Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, Water Corporation and the community.
- **Sustainable water management** – Sustainably manage water use within council facilities, public open space and within communities.
- **Liveable communities** – Support councils to implement water sensitive urban design principles into their urban planning to create more liveable and productive communities.
- **Leadership** – Empower councils to become leaders in sustainable water management and water sensitive implementation.
- **Education** – Support councils to improve water literacy in the community.

The Waterwise Council Program initially focused on water use efficiency, but leading local governments were striving to achieve greater benefits across the water cycle. To recognise and encourage these achievements, the program was revamped in 2017 to embed the seven goal areas of the Water Sensitive Cities Index in a new recognition scheme. This is a key pathway to promote and celebrate water sensitive practice by local government.



Caption: City of Cockburn awarded Gold Waterwise Council in recognition of a range of initiatives, including its Native Plant Subsidy Scheme for Schools and Community

## The innovations

**Waterwise Council Endorsement Program** – Under the program, local governments who successfully meet the criteria are endorsed as Waterwise. To become endorsed, participants must agree to and meet the following five criteria:

1. Sign a Memorandum of Understanding to demonstrate council commitment.
2. Create a five-year Waterwise Council Action Plan to determine opportunities and goals.
3. Ensure allocated team members complete free Waterwise training.
4. Adhere to their annual groundwater licence terms set by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, and scheme water usage terms set by the Water Corporation.
5. To retain their endorsement, councils are required to submit a program annual report, providing an update on each of their actions and initiatives.

### Waterwise Verge Incentive Scheme and Best Practice Guidelines

– Through the [Waterwise Verge Incentive Scheme](#), the program provides funding to councils who promote low water use verge gardens within their communities through either rebates or verge replacement programs. Verge guidelines were also developed to provide councils with a benchmark to assess how their own policies compare with best practice. Councils are encouraged to use the guidelines to develop new best practice verge policies or update existing ones.

**Benefits to endorsed Waterwise councils** – Councils who are endorsed receive a number of benefits, including:

- opportunity to participate in liveability projects and trials, as per the Waterwise Council webpage
- free waterwise training for staff
- waterwise materials and presentations to promote water conservation to the community
- funding opportunities to implement water sensitive practices
- access to services such as data logging.




**Award ranking and recognition scheme** – The Waterwise Council Program recognition scheme acknowledges councils that are demonstrating leadership in sustainable water management, with Gold status for top performing councils and a Platinum award for the council of the year. Recognition criteria aligns with the Water Sensitive Cities Index to celebrate the great work councils are doing across the water cycle. This Index allows participants to benchmark their performance against seven urban water goal areas that characterise a water sensitive city, to help councils set targets and identify strategic priorities.



[City of Perth was awarded Gold Waterwise Council for the great work they are doing building water sensitive communities. Read about their Sustainability Reporting Platform here](#)



## The outcomes

 <b>Cities providing ecosystem services</b>	 <b>Cities as water supply catchments</b>	 <b>Cities comprising of water sensitive communities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sustainable groundwater use</b> – The program protects groundwater and dependent ecosystems by ensuring that endorsed councils are not in breach of groundwater licence terms.</li> <li>• <b>Urban cooling</b> – Improved water efficiency and better designed public open space and streetscapes (which support functional green spaces) will in turn deliver urban cooling benefits. Councils have the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Water Corporation and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation to enhance the value of their stormwater drains and basins to the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reduced water use</b> – The program creates water efficiency outcomes for local government operations and the community.</li> <li>• <b>Diversified supplies</b> – The program offers increased recognition and support for alternative water supply schemes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Increased capability and knowledge</b> – The program involves training for local government staff, and education materials for the community.</li> <li>• <b>Demonstration of positive behaviours</b> – Waterwise Council endorsement requires councils to demonstrate a number of waterwise behaviours, empowering them to act as leaders in the community in promoting efficient and effective water use.</li> <li>• <b>Building water sensitive communities</b> – The Waterwise Council Program recognition scheme aims to award local governments that are demonstrating leadership and building water sensitive communities within their local government area.</li> </ul>



Town of Bassedean celebrates recent Gold Waterwise Council status

## Business case

Costs	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cost of benchmarking</b> - The Waterwise Council Program has been providing funding support for councils to undertake benchmarking using the Water Sensitive Cities Index.</li> </ul>	<p>Aligning the recognition scheme with the water sensitive cities framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises councils' efforts across the seven urban water goal areas that characterise a water sensitive city.</li> <li>• Links local governments with water sensitive cities funding, updates, projects and opportunities.</li> <li>• Enables councils to report on projects and identify opportunities to drive liveability outcomes across the water cycle.</li> <li>• Increases program focus and reach beyond water efficiency, accounting for water sensitive urban design and liveability benefits for communities.</li> <li>• Drives program engagement and provides a robust framework for councils to adopt the water sensitive cities framework in their operations.</li> <li>• Promotes Water Sensitive Cities Index benchmarking.</li> <li>• Is a key enabler in meeting Water Corporation's water sensitive cities targets.</li> </ul>



City of Swan awarded Gold Waterwise Council. One of its key water sensitive initiatives is the Thinking Green Education Program

## The lessons

- **Local waterwise champions are vital** – It's vital for each local government to have a waterwise champion, preferably two, to drive advocacy and behaviour change at different levels.
- **Some councils require more organisational change than others** – Some councils require a robust framework, change in policy, and cross-agency support to obtain executive endorsement for adoption/investment in implementing the water sensitive cities framework
- **The Waterwise Council Program provides an important link to community** – The program provides an opportunity to educate the community about water issues and strengthen people's connection to water.
- **Resourcing constraints are a barrier to councils implementing water sensitive cities aligned initiatives** – The program framework and supporting resources take into account the additional support councils require to deliver water sensitive cities initiatives.
- **Local expertise** – Each local government has its own specific challenges and motivations, so it's important program advice and support isn't one size fits all.



## Transferability

This program is highly transferrable to other locations to help drive water efficiency outcomes and create water sensitive communities. It is a great demonstration of a partnership between state and local agencies leading the way and demonstrating water sensitive city outcomes to the local community.

## Project collaborators

- Water Corporation
- WA Department of Water and Environmental Regulation
- Local governments across Western Australia
- Key industry stakeholders such as the CRC for Water Sensitive Cities and the WA Local Government Association

## Awards:

- Australian Water Association WA Water Award 2011 - Program Innovation Award


## Additional information

More information about the Waterwise Council Program can be found at:

- [Water Corporation Waterwise Council Program](#)
- [Waterwise Council Program Brochure](#)
- [Recognition Scheme](#)



## Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities

 Level 1, 8 Scenic Boulevard  
Monash University  
Clayton VIC 3800

 [info@crcwsc.org.au](mailto:info@crcwsc.org.au)

 [www.watersensitivecities.org.au](http://www.watersensitivecities.org.au)

  
CRC for  
Water Sensitive Cities

 Australian Government  
Department of Industry,  
Innovation and Science

**Business**  
Cooperative Research  
Centres Programme