



# NRM WA

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES  
LINKING LANDSCAPES

## Environment volunteering is alive and well

Volunteers are what make natural resource management in Western Australia, tick.

Far from being in decline, environmental volunteers are passionate and they are on the increase, and a part of the heart of natural resource management (NRM) organisations such as the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council (NACC).

From planting trees, to revegetation and even picking up rubbish, the scope of volunteering for our environment is vast and it's local stewards like David O'Meara in the NACC NRM region, that help make NRM what it is today.

"Like most of us, I just can't walk past litter without picking it up. Especially if it's plastic after seeing a David Suzuki documentary about 20 years ago on its devastating impact on marine life," David said.

"So when we first moved to Geraldton I continued the morning ritual of walking our dog on the beach. This would usually involve picking up some rubbish but that became a whole other story on the south facing beaches between Back Beach and Point Moore.

"My first morning walk became just a clean-up exercise stooping every few paces to pick up another piece of rubbish until I was fully loaded. I thought 'no worries', I'll have a clean beach to walk on the next morning, uninterrupted. Boy was I wrong!

"There was just as much as the first morning and each morning afterwards," he said.

Over the next few months, David met other locals doing good along the coast, and decided to look further into what could be done about the larger issue, marine debris. He came across 'Tangaroa Blue', an organisation dedicated to reducing the impacts of waste on the marine environment, and put his hand up to conduct a year-long citizen-science study to monitor waste, collect data and send it in for analysis and recycling.

"This identified the majority of the debris in Geraldton waters was fishing-related; lots of rope, floats, bait baskets and bait bags. The remainder was mostly single use plastics like plastic shopping bags, bottles and food containers," David said.

"That year's effort was very rewarding. We removed thousands of plastic items from the marine environment, but more importantly provided data for organisations to help reduce the source of the debris.

"It's also been exciting to see NACC develop the very popular Annual Beach Clean Up each October, raising awareness and continuing to add data," he said.

A report analysing social networks in natural resource management has found that many community groups, such as Rotary and Youth groups are taking on environmental volunteering.

In recent times, there have been more than 16, 000 first time participants in NRM, learning and delivering projects as part of the National Landcare Program, according to the Atlas of Living Australia's MERIT system report.

NRM WA Chair Jim Sullivan said the diversity of our natural environment has allowed for many collaborative volunteering opportunities.

"There is a broad range of volunteer groups involved in WA and the structure and arrangements for working with these groups differ both because of the nature of the groups, and the regional differences, across the seven NRM Regions in WA," Jim said.

"I hope this groundswell of effort for the environment is continued in the future, and we can build on current achievements.

"To sustain this activity we need continued government investment and greater coordination both across government, and with the independent regional NRM organisations," he said.

The Western Australian Government has also made a commitment to Landcare through the application of Royalties for Regions funds to community projects and capacity development.

END RELEASE

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\* 'MERIT system' Atlas of Living Australia <https://fieldcapture.ala.org.au/merit>

\*\*NLP 2014-2018 <http://www.nrm.gov.au/regional>

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