

Attachment 4

Comments from Peel-Harvey Catchment Council on the REI program

(Emailed to Debbi Holtham, Anya Lam and Paula Pownall, 21/8/19, prior to REI Review Meeting held in Busselton 21/8/19)

REI Fertilising the Farm (FtF) (soil testing support to farmers):

- 1) The intent and overall objective of the Fertilising the Farm project is sound and supported. (i.e. support farmers to regularly conduct soil testing to support Whole Farm Nutrient Mapping to inform soil fertiliser and augmentation applications).
- 2) There is a momentum behind soil testing in the Peel-Harvey coastal plain (momentum built up over numerous years (10 years + and a number of programs). But even with these, most coastal plain farmers will probably not continue these soil testing practices if the FtF program (and its financial and technical support) stopped or was substantially cut.
- 3) The PHCC highly values our involvement in delivery of FtF and the current partnership with DWER/DPIRD and industry to support the FtF program.
- 4) To maintain momentum, and farmer confidence, FtF should continue without a break between REI and REI2 (i.e. 2020 and onwards).
- 5) The PHCC would strongly suggest that a new model for FtF in the Peel-Harvey be designed and trialled for rollout in 2020.
- 6) Considerations for the redesign for Peel-Harvey are:
 - a. Farmers should play a greater role in gathering soil samples, as indicated by farmers themselves. About 80% of farmers at the February 2019 Pinjarra workshop said they would be happy to take soil samples if this meant continued access to the soil testing program. The benefits of this are greater farmer ownership, reduced costs to government per farm, and therefore opportunities to support a greater number of farmers each year.
 - b. Government continues to provide significant support for the chemical analysis of soil samples, Whole Farm Nutrient Mapping, and support for local catchment group extension support.
 - c. Review of farm and farmer eligibility criteria. Consider farms smaller than 40 ha? Consider farmers returning each year to have support over consecutive years
 - d. Review the role of the PHCC in supporting the program (How does our role change to support a redesigned program? What are the key elements of the program, that we are best placed to deliver?).
 - e. PHCC would like to see more funds put aside for evaluating the program. More measures of effectiveness of behaviour and also on the resource base, which is the soil in this case- how have the soil tests been trending? PHCC has a strong role in the provision of the basic information through surveys and would like to see more use of the evaluation of this information. Also, PHCC would like to see more monitoring of the water quality at a small scale to measure the effectiveness of management interventions. A number of options could be explored in partnership with DWER to set up monitoring.
 - f. More funding is required to expand plant tissue testing. One approach is for funding and training to be provided to the catchment officers to publicise and to take tissue samples in an effort to increase the uptake of tissue sampling as well as extra support for agronomists to support an increase in tissue sampling reporting.
- 7) The aims of the redesign are to increase the number of participating farmers and to normalise soil testing practices that lead to changes in fertiliser/soil augmentation practices.

REI Dairy Effluent Upgrades Program

- 1) The program is highly valued and should continue, especially in the absence of tighter regulation of dairy effluent discharges to the environment
- 2) Dairy effluent systems can fall into disrepair and the PHCC would like some mechanism or some assurance that effluent management systems are being assessed and maintained with perhaps greater oversight from DWER regulators. While the total number of dairies in the Peel-Harvey is limited, PHCC would like to see that the participants in receipt of effluent disposal systems agree to ongoing evaluation of their systems. Also, staff

from the PHCC could work in conjunction with Western Dairy to evaluate the state of existing dairy effluent systems and maintenance of dairy effluent disposal systems.

- 3) PHCC would like to see some evaluation of paddock areas where dairy effluent is being applied through soil testing the superficial (0-1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 cm depth) soil layers. PHCC could be involved in this soil sampling if required and training was supplied- perhaps a joint project with DPIRD.
- 4) A number of dairy farmers in the Peel-Harvey Catchment have taken the opportunity provided by the program, and success stories should be shared and promoted in REI2
- 5) Funds to made available to participating farmers in REI2 should be reviewed with Western Dairy to ensure they continue to provide an adequate incentive for farmers to co-invest in upgrades.

Riparian fencing and revegetation

- 1) The Peel-Harvey did not have a Riparian program in REI (other SW catchments did) , because of the focus on drainage intervention in the Peel-Harvey (e.g. Peel Main Drain).
- 2) Without taking any funds away from future drainage intervention projects in REI2, I would recommend that Peel-Harvey Catchment would benefit from a substantive riparian fencing and reveg program.
- 3) A Peel-Harvey riparian program could learn from other catchment's experiences in REI, and prioritise on-ground works against agreed criteria, including subcatchment implementation plans.

Communications, media and events

- 1) In terms of Fertilising the Farm, PHCC appreciated the Comms and media support provided by DWER throughout REI.
- 2) REI2 should have, at least a similar sized comms/media budget as REI.

Partnership

- 1) In terms of Fertilising the Farm, the partnership between DWER/DPIRD and catchment groups works well through the Project Reference Group (PRG). The partnership must continue to support both a bottom-up and top-down approach.
- 2) With the uPtake project (Smartfarms) implementation overlapping with REI/REI2, and the creation of groups (Technical and Community engagement) under the PRG, there is some risk the partnership may become less focused, and more disjointed.
- 3) To address this, the PHCC sees value in a review of the roles and responsibilities of DWER, DPIRD and PHCC, especially if the FtF program is redesigned in the Peel-Harvey (as outlined above). It also suggests even more importance of timely communications flows between all the players to the catchment groups.
- 4) The PHCC value a longer-term partnership agreement to deliver REI2 (over at least 4 years) to support appropriate staffing and resourcing, and provide certainty to farmers engaged in the program.

Attachment 5:

Talkin Soil Health Conference - March 2020

WA's seven NRM regions will once again be hosting the Talkin' Soil Health Conference in 2020 (March). This was agreed by all regional NRM Agriculture Program Managers on 19/7/19. Conference occurs every 2 years, and is bank-rolled by a small \$ kitty that has been accumulated through previous conferences (Estm, \$ 27,000).

PHCC (Land Cons Team) will provide in-kind support to the conference organisation group, and has option of providing direct sponsorship. Conference will be held in York, and date in March will be confirmed shortly. **Conference theme: Regen Ag: Nutrient building or Nutrient mining?**

Implications for PHCC, all in 2019/20:

1. Officer time to contribute to conference organisation and run process of identifying a Peel-Harvey Region Soil Champion (Land Cons Program Manager and RALF) (July 2019 – April 2020). Possibly also H-W Team input.
2. Select a Regional Soil Champion – for outstanding and/or innovative soil management practice. Each regional NRM will have to run a process of selecting a regional soil champion (competitions have been used in past to get nominations).
3. PHCC funds the regional champ's prize: free registration + costs to attend the conference.
4. In past, regions have also made short videos of their regional champs soil work. See, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhvFqJYjzGw>
5. May consider additional \$ contribution (no commitment made).