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Grass-roots climate change action begins on South Coast

Loss of biodiversity and declining water quality will be the two biggest future impacts of climate change within the South Coast region of Western Australia according to a wide-ranging report commissioned by South Coast NRM.

The report, titled *Climate Change: Whole of Landscape Analysis of the Impacts and Options for the South Coast Region*, was launched to an audience of 60 community representatives in Esperance on June 17.

Among its findings, the report revealed the impacts of climate change on the South Coast region were likely to be significant, particularly on water resources and biodiversity. It found climate change was likely to exacerbate stress on ecosystems which are already under pressure from habitat loss, fragmentation, invasive species and changed fire regimes.

Water resources on the South Coast are already limited for both human and environmental use with a 10-20% decline in rainfall since 1970 resulting in a 40-50% reduction in stream flow in the South West of WA. With further reductions predicted as a result of climate change, the report discovered groundwater and wetlands are likely to experience less recharge, water quality is likely to decline, rivers are likely to experience less flow and the salinity of estuaries may increase.

South Coast NRM chief executive Rob Edkins said the report findings and its recommendations were a wake-up call for the South Coast community, government agencies and regional stakeholders to develop actions and set priorities to minimise the impacts of climate change.

Mr Edkins said the report recommended South Coast NRM form a South Coast Climate Change Management Group of a similar model to the successful South Coast Management Group, to help guide government policies at all levels. It also recommended the organisation build climate change resilience and adaptation strategies into Southern Prospects, the South Coast Strategy for NRM.

“In spite of the politics surrounding climate change at present, we believe it is essential that the South Coast community prepare for the potential impacts of climate change and associated seasonal variability sooner rather than later,” he explained.

“To this end, we are pushing ahead with many of the report recommendations including the formation of a South Coast Climate Change Management Group and have already received support from local governments in the region. The group will comprise a mix of community and government representatives and together will provide leadership and coordination in the area of climate change.”

Mr Edkins revealed the organisation had seed funding to form the group but was looking for other regional stakeholders to contribute.

While the report highlighted many negative impacts from climate change including an increased risk of fire in the region, and expansions of invasive species such as dieback, weeds and feral animals, it also suggested South Coast NRM and its community partners could benefit from the emerging carbon economy through forestry, agroforestry and farming practices, while assisting to mitigate the impacts of climate change in the region.

For a full copy of the report prepared by environmental consultancy Coffey Environments, in association with Marsden Jacobs Associates and Gaia Resources, visit www.southcoastnrm.com.au

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South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc. is the leading regional group for natural resource management in the South Coast region of Western Australia. As an independent not-for-profit organisation, we work with the community to improve the environment by preserving and protecting unique plants and animals, managing land and waterways, and sharing knowledge and skills in natural resource management.