3. Ord River Waterways Management Group

There are several authorities and agencies involved in managing waterways. To ensure consistent and best management practices along the Ord River, agencies with relevant statutory roles have formed a collaborative group, the Ord River Waterway Management Group (ORWMG). The group has developed a management framework to guide current and future activities to maintain the values of the river.

The ORWMG is involved in preparing policies, strategies and planning documents including the Lake Argyle Structure Plan, Review of Unallocated Crown Land, Assessment Process for Developments, and the Lake Kununurra Houseboat Policy.

Membership of this group includes:
- Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley
- Water Corporation
- Department of Conservation and Land Management
- Kimberley Land Council
- Department of Land Administration
- Department of Indigenous Affairs
- Department of Planning and Infrastructure
- Department of Fisheries
- Department of Environment, Water and Catchment Protection
- Ord Land and Water

Ord Land and Water represents the East Kimberley community in ensuring natural resources are managed and developed for the benefit of the whole community.

A larger reference group has also been established and encompasses representative community groups and other agencies depending on the issues.

For further information on the ORWMG please contact the Kununurra Water and Rivers Commission Office.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, WATER AND CATCHMENT PROTECTION

The Water and Rivers Commission is amalgamating with the Department of Environmental Protection and Keep Australia Beautiful Council to form the Department of Environment, Water and Catchment Protection (DEWCP).

DEWCP will have key roles in resource assessment and water allocation, environmental protection, and in ensuring sustainable use of resources and responsible development.

4. Where to find out more

For further information contact the Water and Rivers Commission Kununurra Office:

Lot 225 Bandicoot Drive
(PO Box 625)
KUNUNURRA 6743
Phone: (08) 9168 1082
Fax: (08) 9168 3174
ISSN: 1328-2034

Two cultures working together will provide better management outcomes for waterways

Boorlgoomirri (House Roof Hill)

Water Advice No.18
July 2002

Information and Advice for People Living Near or Using the Ord River
1. About the Ord River

The Ord River is the second largest river in Western Australia and has many features of value to the people, culture, ecology, economy and heritage of the East Kimberley region.

Social and cultural values

The Ord River is an integral part of Aboriginal life and culture. The river is an important source of food and water and many sites along its banks are significant to local culture of people. Changes to the river have resulted in changes to the lifestyles of Aboriginal people. Because of their close connection with this area, Traditional Owners are working with others to preserve and care for its resources so they can be enjoyed by everyone. (Information supplied by Mirima Dawang Wooriab-gerring Language and Culture Centre).

Recreational activities on the Ord River include fishing, swimming and boating. The river and its surrounding environs holds many aesthetic and landscape values for people living in and visiting the region.

The Ord River supplies water for hydro-generated electricity, including that used in Kununurra and Wyndham townships. The Kununurra town water supply borefield is also fed by the river.

Environmental and ecological values

The Ord River was dammed in 1963 (Kununurra Diversion Dam) and 1972 (Lake Argyle Dam) to provide a supply of permanent water flow and a whole new ecosystem has adapted from the previously highly seasonal river system.

This new ecosystem provides for a vast range of plants and animals, including assemblages of rare, vulnerable and endangered species. Both saltwater and freshwater crocodiles live on the Ord, as well as over 160 species of birds including significant breeding and migrant populations.

The Ord holds special value for maintaining the genetic and ecological diversity of a region, and as a result Lake Argyle, Lake Kununurra and the Lower Ord have all been declared Ramsar wetland sites of international importance.

Economic values

The Ord River currently provides a good quality water supply for irrigation of around 15,000 hectares of land in the Ord River Irrigation Area. The proposed Ord Stage 2 development would substantially increase the irrigated area, as well as the volume of water required for irrigation each year.

The East Kimberley region is increasing in popularity as a holiday destination for Australians and overseas visitors. Eco-tourism provides economic returns, as well as benefits through increasing knowledge and understanding of the Kimberley, while allowing tourists to enjoy the region’s natural features.

Several pastoral lease stations have Ord River frontages. Stock on these properties rely on good quality water from the river.

The Argyle and Bow River Diamond mines use water and power generated from the Ord River.

Recreational fishing, commercial fishing and emerging prospects of aquaculture are important to the East Kimberley economy and community. The economic health of these industries relies on the overall ecological health of the Ord being maintained.

2. Management advice for the Ord River

- Make sure that your use of the Ord River does not pollute or harm the waterway, for example by damaging foreshore vegetation or by pollution from litter, stormwater runoff, fertilisers, pesticides or herbicides.

- Advise the Water and Rivers Commission promptly if you notice any pollution of waterways or any destruction or erosion of river banks.

- Any new developments on the Ord foreshore or waterway will need approval from the relevant agencies. A Development Assessment Process is available from the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley.

- Much of the Ord foreshore is Unallocated Crown Land (UCL). If you have an interest or concern regarding UCL you need to contact the Department for Land Administration.

- Any activities need to respect Aboriginal heritage and culturally sensitive areas of the waterway and be in accordance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972.

- Stakeholders and Traditional Owners need to work together to determine the most appropriate and compatible type of land use and management for foreshore areas.

- Jetties, houseboats and all commercial craft must be licensed by the Department of Transport.