ABOVE: Property planning workshop run by Esperance Regional Forum in 2016

A guide to property planning for small landholders in the Shire of Esperance

This factsheet introduces small landholders and growers to property planning and its importance in managing and producing sustainable, economic outcomes on their property.

Introduction

Property management planning is a process supporting sustainable land management whilst at the same time considering the personal goals of landholders, environmental issues and economic returns.

Developing a property plan will assist landholders to:

- Help focus your goals
- Help you solve problems
- Allow you to plan your budget and time.

A property management plan is an internal planning tool. It is typically a document with maps and overlays, which provides a picture of the current features of the land, highlighting the issues and opportunities, as well as the vision and aspirations for your land.

A property plan importantly has an action plan which sets out the opportunities and how these will be implemented, monitored and evaluated.

Focus area

The focus area of this factsheet are landholders and growers within a 30-50km radius of the Esperance town site, primarily within the catchments of Lake Gore and Lake Warden.

Shire of Esperance land zoning of the focus area are classed as either 'Agriculture General' (broad scale enterprises) or 'Rural Small Holdings' (land size up to 8 hectares).

The focus area is commonly referred to as having 'lifestyle blocks' with production off the land varying from vegetable growers, forestry, aquaculture and grazing to name a few.

Concerns for Focus Area

Property management concerns identified by Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA), Esperance Regional Forum (ERF) and landholders for the study area include:

- How do I individualise a plan for my property?
- What resources/ information are available?

Key Messages

1. Planning is critical to the success of the enterprises on your property
2. Know your land capability
3. Assess your land and develop the plan according to your strengths and limitations

- What rules, regulations and development restrictions apply to my property?
- Is my property adequately set up to manage bushfires?
- What is biosecurity & how does it affect me?
- How do I manage water/ soil & land management on my property?

NOTE: The concerns identified above may or may not be relevant to your property, however the main thing to consider is what the concerns for your property are.

Property planning guide

There are a number of steps involved in developing a successful property plan.

Step 1: Identify your vision and goals

Having a clear vision is important if you want to achieve your aspirations for your property. Think about why you wanted to buy your parcel of land and what you want to do with it.

A useful tool is a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats). You will need to consider:

- The property and its natural resources
- Current infrastructure
- Financial and human resources
- Your family and lifestyle aspirations
- Business opportunities

Your goals should be SMART goals (specific, measureable, achievable, relevant and have a timeframe).

Step 2: Know your land capability

Land capability describes the ability of your land to accept a type and intensity of use (with minimal risk of damage to the soil, local and surrounding environment).

Understanding land capability is the core of responsible land use and management. Land capability is based on the physical attributes of the land and takes into account a range of limitations (potential for land degradation).

The limitations for the focus area are:

- Wind erosion – This occurs when groundcover is insufficient and soils are exposed to wind.
- Soil acidity – Strongly acidic soils is when is the soil pH levels are less than 5.0. Acidic soils can be detrimental to plant health and often lead to a lack of ground cover, increased weed growth and erosion.
- Waterlogging - Waterlogging refers to the saturation of soil with water. Soil may be regarded as waterlogged when the water table of the groundwater is too high to conveniently permit an anticipated activity, like agriculture.
- Water erosion – this occurs when soil is 'worn away' by the action of water, often when rain falls faster than it can soak away.
- Water repellence – Where water may not readily soak into the soil but tends to 'sit' on the top. Water repellent soils are caused by a build-up of waxy material on the soil particles.

Further information on these (and other) limitations and how to manage them can be found in the DAFWA 'Land is in your hands' document.

Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA) have classified the land capability for the focus area into land systems and further into land management units (LMU's).

The dominant land system for the focus area is included in Table 1. For further information on the LMU's relevant to you refer to the DAFWA Esperance Land Resource Survey.

LMU's are areas with similar soils and landforms, that should be managed similarly to maximise benefit to the small landholder and at the same time, minimise degradation.

NOTE: the surveys are typically at a broad scale and therefore there is an inherent need to get out onto the land and investigate. A walk around your property is a great way to identify LMU's. Look at the physical characteristics of your property and group similar areas into one LMU based on factors such as soil type, waterlogging, vegetation or slope.

TABLE 1: Land systems

Land System	Description	Capability
Tooregullup land system	A series of coastal dune formations	Very limited in its agricultural potential as it mainly consists of steep walled parabolic sand dunes and swales with many active blow-outs. Soils are alkaline, sandy, rapidly drained and very infertile. Extreme wind erosion hazard, steel side wall slopes which prevents use of machinery. Swales have some potential.
Gore land system	Discontinuous level to gently undulating coastal plain	Water logging is the main limitation to agricultural production on the poorly drained coastal plain with a moderate to high wind erosion hazard on the deep sandy soils.
Young land system	Well-developed river valley systems	The duplex soils of valley slopes of the river valleys are suitable for all land uses with some exception. Valley slopes are prone to water erosion and require management.
Esperance land system	Gently undulating sandplain *Covers the major part of the survey area	Waterlogging and wind erosion are the two main limitations of this system. Perched water tables are possible. Land uses not recommended are ones sensitive to waterlogged conditions. Potential for wind erosion on this land system with extreme hazard on sand dunes. Water erosion potential on >3% slopes.

Step 3: Assess your property

To ensure your property plan is meaningful, you will need to gather info about your property.

This information may 'influence' your decisions and your next steps. These could be 'inside influencers' or things ON your property or 'outside influencers' or OFF your property.

Things you may need to consider are:

'ON'

- Natural resources – rainfall, native vegetation, water quality, water quantity.
- Physical geography – slope, rocky areas, drainage lines.
- Limitations – waterlogging, weeds, erosion, acidity, poor soil cover, dieback (refer to land capability section)
- Financial/ human resources – what are the enterprise requirements and have you got the resources?

'OFF'

- State laws (land clearing/ drainage/ biosecurity laws) - have I applied for a clearing permit? If you are moving livestock on/ off your proper if I am clearing land? Do you have livestock identification tags?
- Local planning restrictions - have you applied for a building permit, are you within a groundwater protection area and have planning approval?
- Neighbours – will my ideas affect others or alternatively will my neighbour's activities affect me?

Step 4: Develop the property map

A great way of developing a property plan is by overlaying information on top of each other.

The recommended layers for a property plan are:

- **Base layer** - The base layer is typically an aerial photograph. An aerial photograph can be purchased from Land gate. These are usually high quality images and can be tailored to your property. Alternatively cut and paste your property from Google Maps!
- **Overlay 1** – The first overlay should be a map of the physical and permanent features on your property that cannot be easily changed and could impact on its management. These include saline sites, rocky areas, steep slopes, native vegetation, and water sources.
- **Overlay 2** – The second overlay should be a map of the LMU's for your property. Note: you may not need this overlay if you only have 1-2 LMU's on your property.
- **Overlay 3** – This overlay includes the existing layout of the property including houses, sheds, boundary and internal fences, watering sources, laneways and earthworks.
- **Overlay 4** – This is your final plan, recording what you want to do on your property. This should be based on 'best practice' land management principles. See table 3 on things to consider and where to go for assistance.

TABLE 2: Property plan considerations and help

Opportunity	Things to consider:	Where can I go for help?
Land management	Identify the limiting areas that require management. Identify the watercourses that require fencing, the windblown prone areas that require stabilisation, and the slopes that shed water which could be harvested/ provide additional stock water and prevent erosion.	South Coast Natural Resource Management (SCNRM), Esperance Regional Forum (ERF), Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA)
Soil health	Have you conducted a soil test and know the pH and nutrient deficiencies?	DAFWA, SC NRM/ ERF, Agronomists
Personal use	Where is the best location for my new shed/ my future dream house? Do I need a building permit or planning approval? Is it in a waterlogged paddock and require to be built up?	Esperance Shire, Planning consultants
Production	Identify the LMU's/ areas that will be used for specific productive land uses such as perennial crops/ pastures, plantation timber, floriculture, horticulture or orchards.	DAFWA
Grazing/ stock management considerations	Do you know the grazing capacity of your land? Have you allocated sufficient stock water sources? Have you considered drought proofing your property, yard/ shed placement, raceways and shelter belts? Fencing for rotational grazing.	DAFWA
Irrigation	Have you considered depth and quality of groundwater, are you in a proclaimed area and require a water licence?	Department of Water (DoW)
Biodiversity improvements	Have you considered bush-corridors, fencing of environmentally sensitive areas?	Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPAW), SC NRM/ ERF
Biosecurity	Is there a need to incorporate a wash-down area? Are you moving stock on/ off your property? Do you have stock registration/ brands/ livestock ID tags?	DAFWA
Fire management	Have you got a bushfire survival plan? Is there sufficient firebreaks to protect important areas?	Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES)
Dieback	Has dieback been identified on my property or close-by?	DPAW, SC NRM/ ERF
Weed management (agriculture & environmental)	What weeds are present and are there any declared plants? Have I incorporated a weed action plan?	Esperance Shire, DAFWA DPAW
Regulatory	Am I clearing/ draining land and require a permit? Am I creating/ managing effluent?	DAFWA/ Office of the Commissioner, Department of Environment Regulation (DER), Department of Health (DoH)

Step 4: Write a detailed action plan

The success of any property management plan will depend upon the amount of resources needed to implement the changes.

Most landholders will be limited by either time, money or knowledge, so a feasible action plan should be drawn up to ensure that the plan is successfully implemented.

Your action plan should inlcude SMART goals (specific, measureable, achievable, relevant and have a timeframe). Your action plan could look similar to Table 4 and could be completed on a large piece of paper or in a spreadsheet (up to you!) but the main challenge is going through the steps.

TABLE 4: Action Plan Template

Issue	Outcome	Considerations	Costs	Actions	Dates	Monitoring
Priority 1: Fence waterway	Protect river system	Determine whether engage fencing contractor or build myself. Are there any landcare grants available?	$1000/km	Ring ERF and ask if any grants available. Obtain quote from local fencing contractor. Start works	End of September	Daily updates by contractor. Seasonal checks of fence-line condition.
Priority 2						
Priority 3						

Step 5: Do it!

The most time consuming, challenging and fun part. Seek out assistance if and when needed. Talk to your neighbour, friends in the area and local experts. Keep going back to your maps and action plan when feeling lost.

Step 6: Monitoring and evaluation

As per your action plan, ensure you continually monitor and evaluate the success of your property plan. Often the property maps may need to be re-jigged and the action plan actions and timeframes need to be altered. An annual check-up of your action plan is recommended. And remember to celebrate your successes and share your successes and challenges.

Need help with your plan?

Department of Agriculture and Food WA
Melijinup Road Esperance
Phone: (08) 9083 1111
www.agric.wa.gov.au

Department of Parks and Wildlife
92 Dempster Street Esperance
Phone (08) 9083 2100
www.dpaw.wa.gov.au

Department of Water
5 Bevan Street Albany
Phone: (08) 9841 0100
www.water.wa.gov.au

South Coast Natural Resource Management
Dempster Street Esperance
Phone: (08) 9076 2200
www.southcoastnrm.com.au

Department of Environment and Regulation
120 Albany Highway
Ph: (08) 6467 5000
www.der.wa.gov.au

Department of Fire and Emergency Services
Dempster Street Esperance
Ph: (08) 9071 3393
www.dfes.wa.gov.au

Shire of Esperance
77 Windich St Esperance
Phone: (08) 9071 0666
www.esperance.wa.gov.au

Landgate
1 Midland Square Midland
Phone: (08) 9273 7373
www.landgate.wa.gov.au

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Other resources in this series:

The Esperance Growers' Markets; more than just fresh, local produce.

A guide to property planning for small landholders in the Shire of Esperance.

A guide to soil sampling for small landholders in the Shire of Esperance.

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