

# MANAGEMENT OF OBLONG TURTLES (*CHELODINA OBLONGA*) DURING WEED AND SILT REMOVAL WORKS IN A CONSTRUCTED LAKE – CULL PARK, ALBANY

## BACKGROUND

Cull Park is located on the corner of Campbell Road and Bathurst Street in Albany. The park includes an artificial lake which, looking at aerial photographs, was constructed between 1988 and 1996. In 2015, the City undertook revegetation works around the lake to help improve water quality, provide fauna habitat, and improve the park's aesthetics.

Since it was constructed, the lake has gradually become choked up with weeds and silt which is now affecting the functionality and aesthetics of the lake (Figure 1). The buildup of weeds also poses a safety risk to the public as people could mistakenly think they could walk across to the island.



Figure 1 Weed, and soil build up in the Cull Park Lake

The lake is split into 2 sections (northern and southern) by a pedestrian bridge, with an island located in the middle of the southern portion. The southern portion of the lake is shallower than the northern portion which is likely the reason for the weed buildup mostly being in the southern section (see Figure 2).

Due to the condition of the lake, the City of Albany intends to carry out weed control and silt removal works in the southern portion of the lake in February 2026, when the water level in the lake will likely be at its lowest.

Oblong Turtles have been recorded in the area (2 records in both 2023 and 2024), with one nest being recorded (and protected) close to the lake during the 2024 nesting season (TurtleSAT). Therefore, hatchlings and adults may be present in the lake. It is predicted that the number of turtles will be low, as there haven't been a lot of sightings in any one year.

## WATER, WEED, AND SILT REMOVAL PROCESS

Water will be pumped out of the southern part of the lake, into a nearby stormwater drain. A small-sized (<5 mm) mesh will be placed over the intake pipe to the pump to prevent any turtle hatchlings, frogs, or feral fish (gambusia) going through the pump or downstream.

Some water will likely remain in the deepest pool of the lake.

A long-reach excavator will reach into the lake to remove weed and silt. This material will be carted away from the park and disposed of appropriately (dried and taken to landfill).

Once completed, the lake will be left to refill. Given this is a constructed lake, it is predicted that the lake is not ground fed and will refill via rainfall on the site and upstream (to the east).



**Figure 2.** Cull Park Lake. Red section is the area to be cleaned of weeds and silt. Blue section is the holding pond for turtles. Orange area is the island that will not be impacted. White circle is the stormwater drain that the water will be pumped into; this carries the water away from the park.

## TURTLE MANAGEMENT PLAN

### HOLDING POND

Given the high level of disturbance that the southern lake will endure during these works, the temporary relocation of the turtle population is required. It is proposed to use the northern pond as the holding pond for the duration of the site works. This pond is more than sufficient in size to provide the habitat required for this purpose.

Sandbags will be placed at the narrowest point (under the bridge) between the two portions of the lake to discourage the turtles from immediately moving back into the southern portion of the lake.

It is predicted that the noise from the machinery will discourage the turtles from returning to the southern portions of the lake during works, so no fence is proposed.

### TRAPPING – NIGHT BEFORE AND NIGHTS BETWEEN WORKDAYS

A combination of Cathedral (x2) and Fyke (x1) traps will be used to capture turtles the night before works commence. The traps will be baited with sardines. Traps will be checked on the morning before works commence, and turtles will be relocated to the holding pond.

Traps will be set early evening in the deepest pool of the southern portion of the lake.



Traps will be checked early morning - turtles health checked, photographed and released into holding pond.

Any turtles considered in need of further veterinary care will be transported by container to Mira Mar Veterinary Surgery, Cockburn Rd Mira Mar (400 m away) for further assessment & treatment.

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### LAKE WATER, WEED, AND SILT REMOVAL DAYS

The machine operator will be fully briefed by the fauna spotter before commencing work. Hand-held radios will be used by the fauna spotters to communicate with each other and the machine operator.

Ad hoc hand capture of turtles will be undertaken during the dewatering and weed/soil removal process. The fauna spotter will inspect the area to be cleared prior to commencing and for the duration of the clearing for any turtles that may be present. If turtles are located within the immediate work area, the clearing activity will be ceased until the turtle has escaped into adjacent habitat ahead of the clearing activity or is translocated into the adjacent holding pond.

Clearing will be carried out in a slow, progressive manner from one direction only to allow turtles to move into adjacent vegetation and the holding pond ahead of the clearing activity (see figure 3).



Figure 3 Direction of weed control works Fauna spotters will be on site throughout the duration of the weed and silt excavation works. One spotter will be located between the holding pond and work site to prevent turtles from moving back into the work area. Spotters will also monitor any movement of turtles towards the roads.

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## PERSONNEL

Primary Fauna Spotter: TBA

Assistant Fauna Spotters: Sandra Maciejewski and Sophie Madaffari.

Born Free Wildlife Carers: Atlanta Veld, with others on call.

Veterinary Hospitals: Mira Mar Hospital will be notified of works in progress.

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## REINTRODUCTION

Given the proximity of the holding lake (northern portion of same lake), turtle will be allowed to move back into the southern portion of the lake once the sandbags between the two lakes is removed at the completion of the works.

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## OTHER

A Section 28 Fauna relocation licence will be sought from DBCA for the fauna handling works.

Although the aim is to remove weeds, some native vegetation will be cleared for access and is mixed in with some sections of weed. The City will be referring the vegetation clearing to DWER.

Management of fish has been discussed with DPIRD and Stephen Beatty. Additionally, any detection of reportable aquatic pests will be reported the Aquatic Biosecurity team at DPIRD.

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## ADVICE RECEIVED FROM:

Atlanta Veld. Turtle Ecologist in Albany.

Deon Utber. Regional Leader of Nature Conservation. South Coast Region. DBCA.

Stephen Beatty. Centre of Sustainable Aquatic Ecosystems, Harry Butler Institute, Murdoch University.