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Media Statement

Gnangara Mound acidity study begins

The Department of Environment and Conservation has begun a study to determine the extent of soil and groundwater acidity within Perth's largest water source.

The Gnangara Mound groundwater system provides 60 per cent of Perth's scheme water but is under threat from declining rainfall and increasing demands of a growing population.

DEC Contaminated Sites Branch manager Kerry Laszig said the department's study would provide a better understanding of the chemical processes affecting this vital water supply.

"The water table has dropped significantly in some areas of the mound, particularly due to reduced rainfall, and there is evidence of widespread acidification of the soil and groundwater," Ms Laszig said.

"Acidic groundwater may cause some metals that are naturally present in the soil to dissolve.

"While testing has shown the deeper aquifer used for public water supply is safe, there is evidence of acidification at shallow depths that has prompted the need for further study."

Ms Laszig said DEC would drill eight bores on the Gnangara Mound to five metres below the water table as part of the first phase of its investigation.

"We will drill at various locations between the wetlands in the west and the dunes in the east," she said.

"These bores will be used to test the acidity of the water and will be supplemented by intensive soil sampling in the second week of January.

"The data collected will help understand the mechanisms affecting groundwater quality and predict the consequences of different land uses - including pine plantations, banksia woodlands and various horticultural activities - on water quality.

"This information will be used to optimise management of these activities and better define future land use options for the area."

Ms Laszig said the study was being completed as part of the Gnangara Sustainability Strategy, a cross government initiative designed to ensure a sustainable water supply for drinking and commercial use and to protect the environment.

The Strategy is a collaborative project involving DEC, the Department of Water, the Department of Agriculture and Food, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, Water Corporation, Forest Products Commission and CSIRO.

Further information on other projects to be undertaken as part of the Gnangara Sustainability Strategy is available from the website www.gnangara.water.wa.gov.au.

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