

WILSON INLET SANDBAR OPENING

There are three organisations that manage the Wilson Inlet sandbar opening; the Water Corporation, the Department of Water and the Shire of Denmark. These management authorities are supported by the Denmark Surf Lifesaving Club, which helps provide supervision of onlookers and ensures public safety during bar openings. The Wilson Inlet Management Advisory Group (WIMAG). WIMAG provides an agency and community forum for all matters in relation to Wilson Inlet, including the sandbar opening, with a focus on improving the health of the Inlet and its associated waterways.

The **Water Corporation** artificially opens the sandbar, to ensure flooding is controlled within the Lake Saide and Sleeman and Cuppup catchments. These catchments form part of the Albany drainage district, within which drainage is managed by the Water Corporation in accordance with their responsibilities under various legislation including the *Land Drainage Act*, the *Water Corporation Act* and the *Water Services Licensing Act*.

The Water Corporation has primary responsibility for the opening of the sandbar, and determines the timing of the opening and height of Wilson Inlet prior to any opening.

The **Department of Water** has responsibility, in partnership with the community and other agencies, in managing the State’s water resources, including Wilson Inlet. The Department of Water provides a recommendation on the location of the sand bar opening to the Water Corporation. In providing this advice the Department has regard for environmental factors, existing policy and advice from past and present community based organisations that have had or have responsibility for managing the Inlet, such as the Wilson Inlet Management Authority and WIMAG. Department of Water advice in relation to this matter must also reflect their interests under the *Waterways Conservation Act*.

The **Shire of Denmark** has planning, development and management responsibilities for areas within its jurisdiction and therefore takes a major role in managing public use of the sandbar. The Shire also has a responsibility in expressing community opinion in relation to the sand bar opening location.

A summary of the main responsibilities in relation to Wilson Inlet bar management is provided in the table below.

Water Corporation	Department of Water	Shire of Denmark
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determines timing and location of bar opening. • Determines Inlet levels prior to opening. • Manages bar opening until opening stabilises (normally 12-24 hours). • Notifies agencies and community on timing of opening. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides advice to Water Corporation on location of bar opening. • Undertakes research in relation to Wilson Inlet and coordinates work to improve condition of Inlet • Services WIMAG, which enables wider community and agency input into management of Wilson Inlet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages vehicle and pedestrian access onto sandbar. • Manages adjacent landuse and development compatible with Inlet levels. • Manages public use of bar and foreshore areas. • Represents local community opinion on sand bar openings.

Timing of Opening

The Water Corporation opens the sandbar by excavating a channel. The timing of this work is dependent on the water level in Wilson Inlet, which is determined by rainfall and discharge from rivers. Tide patterns and expected rainfall are also given consideration.

The Water Corporation monitors water level in the Denmark River at the Old Railway Bridge. Under normal circumstances, long-term weather patterns are monitored once the level at the bridge reaches 0.9 metres AHD (Australian Height Datum) and daily records are kept as the level reaches 1.0 metres AHD, which is considered the minimum level to allow an effective opening. The opening is then scheduled depending on weather conditions, tide patterns and other relevant factors.

The Water Corporation liaises with various groups and landowners in order to obtain a bar opening that balances the need to achieve an effective opening whilst protecting property from flooding.

Location of Opening

The Water Corporation decides the location of the bar opening based on advice from the Department of Water. This advice takes into account the environmental benefits of such locations on the health of the Inlet, however present scientific conclusions are that the location of the bar opening has negligible influence on the health of the Inlet.

In light of this the location of the bar opening is based on wider social factors. Although there is a wide divergence of views on the preferred location, community support is strongest for a western sand bar opening. This was demonstrated in 1996, when after initially supporting a trial for an eastern sandbar opening, WIMA was directed to change this advice following intervention by the Minister of Environment and the Shire of Denmark. Since this date a policy position has been adopted to continue western sandbar openings, and this policy is reflected in the Wilson Inlet Nutrient Reduction Action Plan. This preference is expected to continue until such time as there is a change in scientific advice or change in community support. The Shire of Denmark is best placed to provide information on the community desires for the bar opening's location.

A western opening is defined as an opening (channel) located within 100 metres from the western cliff face. Specific recommendations on bar opening locations also consider seasonal factors, such as tidal patterns and sand accumulation.

Bar Opening Procedure

3-6 weeks before opening

- Water Corporation notifies Department of Water when opening is expected.
- Department of Water advises Water Corporation on recommended location of opening in accordance with western opening policy.

1-2 weeks before opening

- Meeting arranged by Department of Water to discuss upcoming bar opening. Meeting is attended by relevant personnel from the Department of Water, the Water Corporation, the Shire of Denmark (Shire Ranger), the Denmark Surf Lifesaving Club and a community representative of WIMAG. The Water Corporation advise of likely bar opening date/time and also informs the Denmark Hospital.
- The Water Corporation issues notices to the Shire of Denmark, Denmark Environment Centre, the Denmark Visitors Centre and Tourist Bureau and the Denmark Bulletin. A media release is also issued by the Water Corporation just prior to opening when definite timing of opening is decided.
- Just prior to opening an on-site meeting occurs between the Water Corporation and Department of Water to confirm bar opening location.

Immediately prior to and during opening

- Department of Water to respond to general public enquires.
- Water Corporation to respond to specific enquires in relation to water levels and timing of opening
- Water Corporation manages bar opening and access into excavation area, through use of movable barrier and signs. These barriers to be gradually moved as the channel forms.
- Shire of Denmark to manage vehicle barriers at the Surf Club.
- Shire of Denmark to put up barrier tape to prevent pedestrian access to cliff face from the Ocean Beach lookout.
- The Denmark Surf Lifesaving Club to attend and monitor recreational use.
- Shire of Denmark (rangers) to attend and monitor public access.

RELEVANT CONTACTS

SUBJECT	CONTACT
Timing of opening. Excavation works. Height of Inlet prior to opening.	Willie McDougall, Operations Manager, Water Corporation. Tel: 98 424 211
Vehicle/pedestrian access to sandbar. Public amenity Issues.	Chris Hoare, Ranger, Shire of Denmark Tel: 98 480 300 Mob: 0429 482 244
Recreational use and public safety	Martin Norwood (President Ocean Beach Surf Lifesaving Club), Ph: 98481314 (H) or Mob: 0427 487 314. Warren Rudd, Ph:98481513 (H) or Mob: 0428 481 513
Location of bar opening. General enquiries.	Dave Rushton, Environmental Officer, Department of Water Tel: 98 410 123