

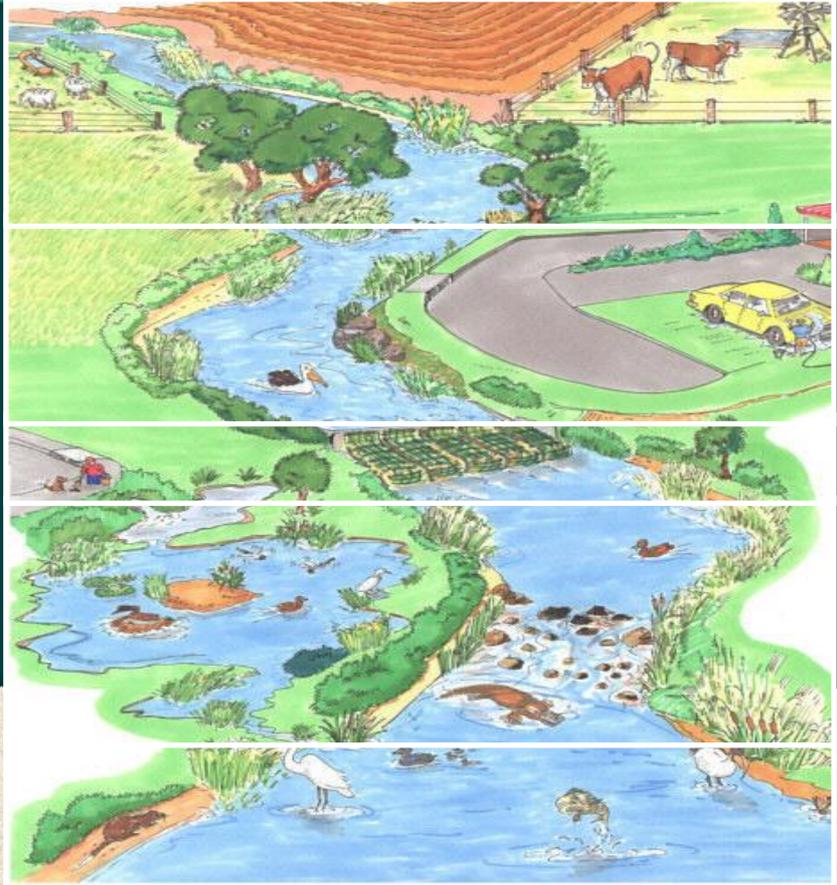
*A catchment is the area of land from which rainfall flows to form a creek or river. Catchments range in size, from small urban catchments to large catchments spanning three states, such as the Murray Darling Basin.*

### How a catchment works

Bordered by natural features such as hills and mountains, rainfall runs off the land into gullies, creeks, rivers, lakes and wetlands. Some water remains underground, slowly recharging waterways even when there is no rainfall. Not all catchments feed rivers that flow to the sea; some are the source of rivers which flow inland, ending in a dry lake or wetland. It is similar to what happens to the rain that falls on the roof of your house. The roof surface collects the rain, channels it to the gutters, and into the downpipe. A catchment is an area of land that collects rainwater, flowing to the lowest point in the landscape.

### Values of catchments

The soil, plants, animals and water all function together in a catchment – anything that affects one of these will also have an impact on the others. The health of catchments is vital for human existence because they are where all food is grown. The water you drink comes from a catchment near you. The oxygen you breathe comes ultimately from a growing green plant or algae. Catchments are part of our life support systems and sustain the lives of all plants and animals.



**Threats to catchments:** Over the last 200 years, catchments that maintained equilibrium for thousands of years have been significantly altered. Farming, mining and urban development has led to a loss of biodiversity, an increase in sedimentation and pollution, and the spread of invasive pest plants and animals.

### Managing catchments

Each catchment has its own unique qualities and traits, and so each one needs to be understood and managed according to the natural features, such as soil type, vegetation, rainfall, and climate, along with the threats caused by land use and human habitation. Growing populations need good agricultural land, space for people to live, resources such as timber, minerals and water and areas for nature and ecosystem services.