

WATER MANAGEMENT

Swan 'needs own trust to run river'

■ Daniel Mercer and Kate Emery

The inaugural head of the Swan River Trust has savaged the Barnett Government's decision to scrap the agency, saying it is a retrograde step that will lead to worse environmental outcomes.

Bruce Hamilton, who was chief executive of the trust from its inception in 1989 to 1996, said axing the watchdog and rolling it into WA's main environment department smacked of recklessness.

It came after the trust's latest annual report showed nutrient levels and indicators of algal growth were above acceptable limits in many parts of the river system.

The report also noted the rivers suffered their worst ever algae bloom season last summer.

"This has reinforced the importance of the trust's role to manage and deliver strategic long term responses," it said.

On Thursday, Environment Minister Albert Jacob revealed the Department of Parks and Wildlife would "subsume" the trust to "streamline" the agencies' resources and avoid regula-

tory duplication. However, Dr Hamilton said the Swan and Canning river system demanded its own watchdog.

Abolishing the trust meant there would be less accountability for managing the rivers, while there was also a risk the DPAW would struggle to give them enough money and attention.

Such a result could heighten the dangers of toxic algal blooms and fish kills, both of which have been increasingly significant problems blighting the waterway.

"That loss of a focus is of real concern to me," he said. "If you look at the history ... of how we manage iconic things in WA the bodies that have been set up are ones that the community and the media and Parliament can clearly see have a role to manage that special place."

Rob Hammond, a former Water Department senior executive, said scrapping the trust amounted to "fiddling while Rome burns" and said fixing the rivers needed more money, not a different manager.

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