

# Gippsland Lakes

Annual Report 2022/2023



GIPPSLAND LAKES



[www.loveourlakes.net.au](http://www.loveourlakes.net.au)

# The Gippsland Lakes Annual Report

The Victorian Government has provided \$7.5 million over 3 years as part of a wider \$248 million investment which is designed to encourage Government agencies, groups and individual landowners to get involved in activities to help improve the health of the Gippsland Lakes. This report presents the range of projects undertaken across the Gippsland Lakes and catchment during the 2022/23 financial year, including the government investment above, other government complimentary programs, and the volunteer efforts of many people.

The map in this report describes the combined actions completed across seven priority areas, four in and around the lakes themselves, and another three across the catchments surrounding the lakes system.

Across these areas, the report describes the activities completed, the partners participating in these activities, and the total level of investment for each area.

We would like to commend all the people involved in this outstanding effort.

Working together has turned the Gippsland Lakes direct investment this year of \$2.5 million into a combined total investment of \$14.82 million, plus many hours of volunteer efforts over a vast landscape involving 40 formal partners. New jobs have been created for Traditional Owners and community groups, and new partnerships have been developed around the management of the lakes.

More detailed information on all projects can be found on the 'Love our Lakes' website ([www.loveourlakes.net.au](http://www.loveourlakes.net.au)).



**Glenys Watts**  
Chair of the Gippsland Lakes Coordinating Committee

## Implementing Management for the Lakes Together

The Gippsland Lakes have a clear direction for management set out in the 2015 Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site Management Plan. An updated Plan is currently being developed for implementation in early 2024. It is supported by the Gippsland Lakes Priorities Plan which identifies the highest priority management actions for delivery across the Gippsland Lakes and its catchment.

The Gippsland Lakes Delivery Managers, a group of operational decision-makers from across the catchment, are leading regional partners in the coordination of projects

focussed on priority areas across the lakes. The coordination groups continue to guide the delivery of projects on the ground.

The successful delivery of priority projects is being achieved by fostering cooperation between Traditional Owners, land and waterway managers, community groups, individual landowners and other regional partners. The involvement of this wide range of people; guided by clear priorities, helps to maximise the benefits to the lakes.

## The Gippsland Lakes

The Gippsland Lakes are a series of coastal lagoons and fringing wetlands that cover approximately 60,000 hectares; fed by five major rivers spread across a catchment of over 20,000 square kilometres connected to the ocean at Lakes Entrance. The Gippsland Lakes are part of the Traditional Lands and Waters of the Gunaikurnai People, who have cared for Country for tens of thousands of years.

The lakes and catchments support a diversity of landscapes with high conservation value. The Lakes themselves are listed as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. The lakes are central to tourism for the region, supporting recreational fisheries, boating, camping and visitation with important Aboriginal and European cultural values.

### Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Gunaikurnai people, Traditional Owners of the land and waters of the Gippsland Lakes and pay our respects to their Elders, past and present. In particular, we pay tribute to the Brayakaulung, Brabralung and Tatungalung clans, whose intrinsic connection and custodianship of Country continue to be a vital element of the heritage, knowledge and future management of the Gippsland Lakes. Learn more about Gunaikurnai Country at [www.gunaikurnai.org/our-country](http://www.gunaikurnai.org/our-country).





### Protecting the Traditional Owner Country of the Gippsland Lakes Outer Barrier

**Partners** GLaWAC, EGCMA, Birdlife Australia, Gippsland Ports, Trust for Nature, Parks Victoria

**Investment** \$0.32 million

**Activities**

- 1 Control of priority pest plant and animal species to improve coastal habitats and protect migratory waterbird populations.
- 2 Understanding and protecting cultural values from the impacts of shoreline erosion through mapping of high priority areas.
- 3 Improving infrastructure and facilities for recreational users to prevent impact in high conservation areas.
- 4 Assessment and monitoring of important and threatened bird population including Little and Fairy Terns, Hooded Plovers, Latham's Snipe and Australian Pelicans.



### Improving the Condition and Connectivity of Lake Wellington and its Wetlands

**Partners** WGCMA, Trust for Nature, Gippsland Water, Wellington Shire, Southern Rural Water, Greening Australia, Birdlife Australia, GLaWAC, DEECA, DAFF, Parks Victoria, EGCMA, EPA, Monash Uni

**Investment** \$3.21 million

**Activities**

- 1 Investment in Lower Latrobe wetland infrastructure to protect and enhance fringing wetlands contributing to long-term management objectives.
- 2 Reducing nutrients and sediment loads to Lake Wellington through on ground works such as fencing, revegetation, weed control, stock exclusion, and off stream watering.
- 3 Coordinated control of pest plants and animals to protect priority habitats and the threatened species that inhabit them.
- 4 Managing environmental water to maintain habitat connectivity and reduce sediments enhancing the lower Latrobe Wetlands and estuarine river reach systems.
- 5 Working with landholders and industry partners to improve production and provide environmental benefits by managing water and nutrients.



### Protecting and Enhancing Alpine Ecosystems

**Partners** Parks Victoria, WGCMA, EGCMA, DEECA

**Investment** \$0.77 million

**Activities**

- 1 Monitoring and controlling priority pest plants and animals to protect and support the recovery of alpine environments post-fire.
- 2 Protection of important alpine peatland ecosystems, through fencing, weed and pest animal control, access management, and restoration work.
- 3 Maintenance of tracks, vehicle access and visitor facilities in alpine parks and reserves.



### Improving the Wetlands of Jones Bay

**Partners** EGCMA, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Parks Victoria, East Gippsland Water, Birdlife Australia, GLaWAC, DEECA, EGSC, EGLN, VFA, Gippsland Ports

**Investment** \$0.52 million

**Activities**

- 1 Increasing the number of large wood structures in Jones Bay to provide habitat and connectivity for fish species.
- 2 Restoration and protection of wetlands to provide suitable habitat for Green and Golden Bell Frog populations in Macleod Morass and Cobblers Creek.
- 3 Release of native fish species into the Macleod Morass to support current fish populations.
- 4 Monitoring wetland vegetation composition and water quality within Macleod Morass.
- 5 Pest plant and animal control, revegetation, and erosion control to protect important habitats around Jones Bay.



### Improving the Condition of the East Gippsland Catchments

**Partners** EGCMA, Parks Victoria, East Gippsland Landcare Network, Trust for Nature, East Gippsland Shire Council, DAFF, Far East Victorian Landcare, DEECA, GLaWAC, Greening Australia, Birdlife Australia

**Investment** \$3.90 million

**Activities**

- 1 On ground works to maintain and improve the condition and connectivity of riparian and wetland habitats and reduce sediments through stock exclusion, bank stabilisation, revegetation and weed control.
- 2 Controlling pest plants and animals to limit impacts on agricultural and environmental values, particularly post-fire.
- 3 Establishment of new conservation covenants to secure permanent protection over significant biodiversity sites.
- 4 Working with landholders to improve topsoil management practices for production and environmental benefits.
- 5 Understanding and protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage across the catchment.



### Understanding and Improving Aquatic Habitats and Ecosystems

**Partners** Gippsland Ports, EGCMA, WGCMA, GLaWAC, Birdlife Australia, Marine Mammal Foundation, Greening Australia, EGSC, EGW, Southern Rural Water, DEECA, EPA, The Nature Conservancy, RMIT, Monash University

**Investment** \$1.92 million

**Activities**

- 1 Improving boating infrastructure to protect seagrass, water quality and aquatic life.
- 2 Monitoring of water quality and pollution risks in the Gippsland Lakes.
- 3 Seagrass monitoring and research into options for restoration of meadows in the lakes.
- 4 Ongoing population monitoring and health assessments of priority waterbirds, Burrunan Dolphins and threatened frog species in the Gippsland Lakes catchment.
- 5 Restore nesting habitat for Little Terns on islands within the lakes through sand renourishment.
- 6 Delivery of citizen science activities to increase community participation, knowledge, and awareness.



### Improving the Condition of the West Gippsland Catchments

**Partners** WGCMA, Greening Australia, GLaWAC, Parks Victoria, Wellington Shire, Gippsland Water, Southern Rural Water, Trust for Nature, Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network, Maffra & District Landcare Network, DEECA, EGCMA, Field and Game Australia, Fed Uni

**Investment** \$ 4.18 million

**Activities**

- 1 Control of pest plants and animals across the catchment to protect important species and vegetation communities.
- 2 On ground works to maintain and improve the condition and connectivity of riparian and wetland habitats through stock exclusion, revegetation and weed control.
- 3 Rehabilitation of priority Red Gum Woodlands sites, including broadscale revegetation, fencing, weed control and rubbish removal.
- 4 Improving and maintaining infrastructure and facilities for recreational users.
- 5 Understanding and protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage across the catchment.
- 6 Monitoring wetland vegetation and water quality in freshwater wetlands.
- 7 Investment into the design of a fishway at Maffra Weir to allow native fish to travel upstream on the Macalister River.





# Case Studies

## 1 | Protecting Seagrass in the Gippsland Lakes



The Gippsland Lakes supports a diversity of important ecosystems including seagrass beds which provide essential habitat, food and shelter for aquatic life as well as improving water quality and reducing the impacts of erosion. Seagrass beds are widely distributed throughout the Gippsland Lakes and are recognised as a critical component of the ecological character of the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site for the many key functions they provide.

Human led activities including traditional boat mooring and anchoring has been identified as one of the key threats to seagrass beds globally due to its ability to reduce seagrass cover and extent following chain disturbance along the bed surface as the boat moves in the water. The Gippsland Lakes has been identified as a priority site for management, especially in summer months when recreational boat use is at its highest for the region.

To address this challenge, environmental managers worked in partnership with key agencies to install over 30 seagrass friendly swing moorings at high use sites across the Gippsland Lakes between 2019–2022. Seagrass friendly swing moorings work to reduce impact on the seabed due to the use of buoyant materials that keep all moving parts of the mooring off the lake bottom. This reduces the impact on seagrass beds located close to the mooring sites whilst also continuing to support recreational activities within the Lakes.

A protocol has been developed to monitor the effectiveness of the newly established seagrass friendly swing moorings in minimising impacts on seagrass beds. Monitoring of seagrass density and cover at seagrass friendly mooring sites and reference sites commenced in 2022 across sample sites within the Gippsland Lakes. Results from the monitoring will be used to inform future management priorities for seagrass protection and restoration in the Gippsland Lakes. By understanding the effectiveness of our management actions we can improve how we protect and help rejuvenate seagrass populations now and into the future.

## 2 | Collaborative effort in restoring Flannagan Island



Flannagan Island is one of several small islands located in the Gippsland Lakes south of Nyerimilang. The small freehold island, measuring 75 hectares in size, provides important refuge and habitat for ground nesting birds. It is also recognised for the important estuarine wetlands and saltmarsh mosaics distributed across the island.

Historically, Flannagan Island was cleared for cattle grazing purposes with goats introduced as part of the management regime of vegetation on the island. The millennium drought caused prolonged dry periods on the island contributing further to the reduced cover and condition of native vegetation. Between 2017–2019, due to a change in management, Flannagan Island underwent a goat removal program and became protected under a conservation covenant with Trust for Nature.

As part of the conservation covenant agreement, Trust for Nature developed and implemented the Flannagan Island Restoration Plan and Revegetation Strategy in 2022. This plan was implemented in partnership with landholders, Birdlife Australia and the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) to deliver key onground activities including weed control, revegetation, and bird surveys. Additionally, the GLaWAC NRM Crew were involved in training days led by Trust for Nature helping to facilitate knowledge sharing between partners.

Collaboration between regional project partners, Traditional Owners and environmental agencies to implement onground works that protect and restore the Gippsland Lakes are an integral part of the Gippsland Lakes Program. This project demonstrates the value of their combined expert and local knowledge being to deliver environmental works that will improve and protect habitat within the Gippsland Lakes into the future.

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