

Gippsland Lakes

Annual Report 2023/2024



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 2023/24 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 \$15.45 million, plus many hours of volunteer efforts over a vast landscape involving over 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).



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 Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site Management Plan. 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 is a vital part of the heritage, knowledge and future management of the Gippsland Lakes. Learn more about Gunaikurnai Country at www.gunaikurnai.org/our-country.

Case Studies

1 | Frog Habitat Restoration



A constructed frog bog, providing additional habitat for threatened species. Inset: A green and golden bell frog utilising the constructed habitat.

The wetlands of the Gippsland Lakes are diverse and provide many important ecosystem services including habitat for threatened species. The Green and Golden Bell Frog and Growling Grass Frog are a key threatened species occurring in the Gippsland Lakes who rely on the availability of freshwater wetlands. Maintaining population numbers and the breeding success of both species is recognised as a critical component of the ecological character of the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site.

Freshwater wetlands in the Gippsland Lakes are subject to key environmental challenges including periods of low rainfall which can result in increased salinity levels and reduced habitat availability for threatened species. Delivering activities to ensure the maintenance and protection of freshwater wetlands across the Gippsland Lakes is therefore a high priority for management.

To address this challenge, Greening Australia have successfully completed the construction of 10 'frog bog' wetlands in priority identified areas across the Gippsland Lakes catchment. Located on private land, these areas were identified as key refuge area for both the Growling Grass Frog and Green and Golden Bell Frog through recent and historic population monitoring surveys conducted across the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site.

This project has involved collaboration between key regional environmental organisations and private landholders to create critical habitat for threatened species, resulting in increased habitat availability and connectivity in the fringing wetlands of the Gippsland Lakes. This project compliments previous restoration works undertaken over the past 10 years within the Gippsland Lakes to restore and protect crucial habitat now and into the future.

2 | Saltmarsh Condition Monitoring



Saltmarsh communities in the Gippsland Lakes. Inset: Credit Dylan Osler

The Gippsland Lakes supports a large diversity of important ecosystems including saltmarsh which is recognised as a critical component of the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site. Saltmarsh communities are widely distributed across the Gippsland Lakes and are made up of nine distinct community types, as well as aggregations and transition zones of mixed saltmarsh species.

Saltmarsh in the Gippsland Lakes is subject to disturbance from several threatening processes including competition from invasive weeds, grazing and trampling impacts from pest animals, climate change and recreational activities such as vehicles driving across areas of saltmarsh. Although processes for monitoring the spatial extent of saltmarsh communities are currently in place, there has been no established benchmark for monitoring changes in the ecological condition of saltmarsh that is specific to the Gippsland Lakes.

To address this issue, the EGCMA worked with an engaged consultant to develop a monitoring methodology to determine the current condition of saltmarsh in the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site. The project looked at current vegetation assessment methods including the Index of Wetland Condition Assessment (IWC) and key threatening processes specific to the Gippsland Lakes. The resulting method has been used to create a baseline dataset of the current condition of saltmarsh within the Gippsland Lakes.

Results from the most recent assessments conducted in 2024 indicate that existing saltmarsh communities in the Gippsland Lakes are currently in 'good to excellent condition'. Through the collection of consistent monitoring data, we are able to detect and understand key drivers of change to implement suitable management actions to protect key ecosystems within the Gippsland Lakes now and into the future.

GIPPSLAND LAKES



East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

T 03 5152 1184 | E reception@egcma.com.au
Main Office 574 Main Street Bairnsdale VIC 3875
PO Box 1012, Bairnsdale VIC 3875

www.loveourlakes.net.au





Protecting the Traditional Owner Country of the Gippsland Lakes Outer Barrier

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

Investment \$0.45 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, VEWH, VR Fish, Field and Game Australia

Investment \$3.42 million

- Activities**
- 1 Investment in Lower Latrobe wetland infrastructure to protect and enhance fringing wetlands contributing to long-term management objectives of the Ramsar site.
 - 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 Managing environmental water to maintain habitat connectivity and reduce sediments enhancing the lower Latrobe Wetlands and estuarine river reach systems.
 - 4 Ongoing coordinated control of pest plants and animals to protect priority habitats and the threatened species that inhabit them.
 - 5 Working with landholders and regional partners to improve production and provide environmental benefits by managing water and nutrients.



Protecting and Enhancing Alpine Ecosystems

Partners Parks Victoria, WGCMA, EGCMA, DEECA, MHRMB

Investment \$0.33 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 \$1.06 million

- Activities**
- 1 Additional release of threatened native fish species into the Macleod Morass to support current fish populations.
 - 2 Restoration and protection of wetlands to provide suitable habitat for Green and Golden Bell Frog populations in Macleod Morass and Cobblers Creek.
 - 3 Monitoring wetland vegetation composition and water quality within Macleod Morass.
 - 4 Pest plant and animal control, revegetation, and erosion control to protect important habitats around Jones Bay.
 - 5 Increasing the number of large wood structures in Jones Bay to provide habitat and connectivity for fish species.
 - 6 Improving understanding of current regional water management practices and facilities to improve water quality and nutrient levels.

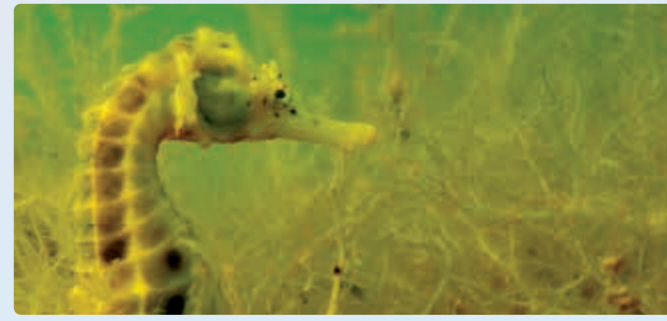


Improving the Condition of the East Gippsland Catchments

Partners EGCMA, Parks Victoria, East Gippsland Landcare Network, Trust for Nature, East Gippsland Shire Council, DAFF, FEVL, East Gippsland CMN, DEECA, GLaWAC, EPA Greening Australia, Birdlife Australia, Snowy River Interstate Landcare Committee, Agriculture Victoria, Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust

Investment \$5.20 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, particularly post-fire.
 - 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 Broad-scale revegetation of areas of whitebox grassy woodlands, contributing to a reduction of sediment entering the Gippsland Lakes.
 - 5 Understanding and protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage across the catchment.
 - 6 Implementing works to reduce land degradation and investigative studies to focus on soils and nutrient levels.



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, Better Boating Victoria, VEWH, Landcare, VRFish, Native Fish Australia, Parks Victoria

Investment \$2.57 million

- Activities**
- 1 Improving boating infrastructure to protect seagrass, water quality and aquatic life.
 - 2 Monitoring of water quality including understanding sedimentation processes and pollution risks in the Gippsland Lakes.
 - 3 Implementation of seagrass monitoring including restoration trials to inform future management and protection options.
 - 4 Ongoing population monitoring and health assessments of priority waterbirds, Burrunan Dolphins and threatened frog species in the Gippsland Lakes catchment.
 - 5 Delivery of citizen science activities to increase community participation, knowledge, and awareness.
 - 6 Investment into the design of a fishway at Maffra Weir to allow native fish to travel upstream on the Macalister River.



Improving the Condition of the West Gippsland Catchments

Partners WGCMA, Agriculture Victoria, Greening Australia, GLaWAC, Parks Victoria, Wellington Shire, Baw Baw Shire Council, Gippsland Water, Southern Rural Water, Trust for Nature, Environment Protection Authority, Latrobe Catchment Landcare, Maffra & District Landcare, Bass Coast Landcare, DEECA, DEDJTR, EGCMA, Gippsland Plains Rail Trail Committee, Fed Uni, Field and Game Australia

Investment \$2.42 million

- Activities**
- 1 On ground works to maintain and improve the condition and connectivity of riparian and wetland habitats through stock exclusion, revegetation and weed control.
 - 2 Control of pest plants and animals across the catchment to protect important species and vegetation communities.
 - 3 Rehabilitation of priority Red Gum Woodlands sites, including broadscale revegetation and habitat enhancement works.
 - 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 Delivery of environmental community-based projects supported by local Landcare networks.

