

Gippsland Lakes

# Program Report

2021–2024



A large, collaborative program of works aimed at maintaining and improving the health of the Gippsland Lakes.

# The Gippsland Lakes Program Report

The Gippsland Lakes Program is coordinated by the Gippsland Lakes Coordinating Committee (GLCC) and involves the participation of a range of stakeholders to deliver on a large program of activities aimed at maintaining and improving the health of the Gippsland Lakes.

The Victorian Government provided \$7.5 million over 3 years to the GLCC for the Gippsland Lakes Program and this report details the combined outputs achieved between 2021-2024 investment period.

The program has been delivered in a collaborative effort with 22 partners and community groups delivering 48 projects across the Gippsland Lakes catchment. The combined

outputs of the on-ground activities are displayed across the map to outline the achievements throughout the area. We would like to commend all the people involved in this outstanding achievement.

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 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 through a partnership between Gunaikurnai 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 program has included: 13 Community Grant projects, 1 Citizen Science project, 17 Ramsar projects and 34 Regional Delivery Partner led projects.

## 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 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 <https://gunaikurnai.org/our-country/>.



# Partner Collaboration



Management of the Gippsland Lakes is complex, involving multiple management plans and strategies, with agencies working together to achieve positive outcomes for the environment, community and business. A key objective of the GLCC is to 'foster cooperation and coordination between agencies and organisations with an interest in the health of the Gippsland Lakes'. Collaboration between agencies, organisations and community groups has played an integral role in the development, right through to the delivery of on-ground works across the area.

Over the duration of the 3-year program, 22 regional delivery partners worked together to plan and deliver 34 projects across the Gippsland Lakes catchment area. Involvement of multiple regional partners resulted in opportunities to align investment and further contribute to shared positive outcomes for the Gippsland Lakes. Projects were delivered by multiple partners who worked collaboratively to contribute towards priority actions and outcomes.

Joint Management partners, GLaWAC and Parks Victoria worked together to deliver a pest plant and animal control program across the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park. This jointly managed area is impacted by invasive plants and animals which adversely impacts significant cultural and environmental values. Through this program, partners combined efforts to achieve 1,400 hectares of weed control

and 10,000 hectares of introduced herbivore and predator control. These control activities resulted in multiple benefits including reduced predation of threatened shorebirds, reduced browsing and trampling, improved habitat condition and reduced risk to cultural values.

Similarly, Parks Victoria, Gippsland Ports, EGCMA and Birdlife Australia worked together to complete 6 hectares of sand renourishment across Horries Spit, Crescent and Albifrons Islands in the Gippsland Lakes. This activity resulted in increased shoreline habitat to support breeding activities of several threatened bird species including Little and Fairy Terns. Shoreline habitat is impacted by rising sea levels, coastal erosion and human activity. Birdlife Australia provided important habitat requirement information and assisted with bird surveys throughout the project. Parks Victoria delivered additional predator control works in this location prior to the arrival of the birds. Additionally, Gippsland Ports reviewed vessel operation zoning rules (VOZR) near the site and identified an area where reduced boat speed could occur for passing vessels, contributing to reducing future shoreline damage.

We'd like to acknowledge and thank all of the partner organisations, agencies and community groups involved in the development and completion of the program.

## Our Valued Partners

- Agriculture Victoria
- Barrier Landing Coastcare Group
- Bass Coast Landcare
- Baw Baw Shire Council
- Better Regulation Victoria
- Birdlife Australia
- Birdlife East Gippsland
- DEECA
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- Department of Jobs, Precincts, and Regions
- East Gippsland CMA
- East Gippsland Conservation Management Network
- East Gippsland Landcare Network
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- East Gippsland Water
- Environment Protection Authority
- Federation University
- Field and Game Australia
- Friends of the Gippsland Lakes
- Gippsland Plains Rail Trail Committee
- Gippsland Ports
- Gippsland Water
- Greening Australia
- Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
- Heyfield Wetlands Committee of Management Incorporated
- Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust
- Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network
- Local Angling Clubs
- Maffra District Landcare Network
- Marine Mammal Foundation
- Monash University
- Mount Hotham Resort Management Board
- Nicholson River Landcare Group
- Parks Victoria
- Raymond Island Landcare Group
- RMIT
- Romawi Landcare Group
- Southern Ark
- Southern Rural Water
- The Nature Conservancy
- Trust for Nature
- Victorian Environmental Water Holder
- Victorian Fishers Authority
- VR Fish
- Wellington Shire Council
- West Gippsland CMA



226

### Bird Surveys

White-bellied Sea-eagle surveys which recorded 45 active nests.

30

### Threatened Species

30 Threatened Dwarf Kerrawang transplanted into Blond Bay.

27,700Ha

### Pest Animal Control

Pest animal control to reduce impact on native flora and fauna.

36km

### Fencing / Bollards

Fencing and bollards to protect rivers, wetlands and other important habitat.

7km

### Protective Fencing

Installed to protect 62ha of vegetation from stock access.

2,250Ha

### Weed Control

Weed control targeting highly invasive plant species.

3,300

### Event Attendees

Individuals attending meetings, presentations, training days, workshops, community boat trips, social media posts and media releases.

130Ha

### Revegetation

Revegetation to connect and restore habitat and improve waterway health.

128

### Partnerships Established

Partnerships established to deliver various projects.

13

### Community Grants Projects

Projects delivered by nine community groups.

### Erosion Control

Natural erosion control trial on fringing wetland vegetation.

6Ha

### Sand Renourishment

Sand renourishment to improve habitat and support bird breeding.

50+

### Flora and Fauna Assessments

10

### Seagrass Friendly Moorings

10 seagrass friendly moorings at priority locations.

3

### Seagrass Trials

Three seagrass restoration trial sites established in the Gippsland Lakes.

5

### Fish Habitats

Habitats installed on Lower Avon River.

17

### Ramsar Monitoring Activities

Ramsar monitoring including Frog, Bird, Seagrass, Saltmarsh and Water Quality monitoring.

## Protecting Country with Gunaikurnai

Gunaikurnai people are the Traditional Owners of the Gippsland Lakes. In October 2010, this was formally recognised by the Federal Government through the Native Title Act. The Gunaikurnai Land and Aboriginal Water Corporation (GLaWAC) was established in 2006 as the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for a significant area of Gippsland. Joint management of this land is a partnership between Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners and the State, allowing both to bring their knowledge and skills to the management of these areas. The joint management is overseen by the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Board (GKTOLMB).

A key objective of the GLCC and Gippsland Lakes Program is "To empower Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners through Joint Management and self-determination, supporting capacity building and involvement in management of the Gippsland Lakes". As part of the Gippsland Lakes Program, GLaWAC identified and addressed threats to priority cultural and environmental values within the Gippsland Lakes.

As part of a broader program of investigation in coastal environments across Gunaikurnai Country, GLaWAC undertook geomorphological assessments of the Outer Barrier between Ocean Grange and Lakes Entrance. The surveys looked at dune stability and age, covering an area of over 1500 hectares. Climate change and human impact modelling data contributed to identifying priority sites of cultural significance. The GLCC program has contributed to the broader program led by GLaWAC that has identified areas of significant cultural heritage in need of protection from shoreline erosion.

Fauna biodiversity across the Gippsland Lakes waterways is important to understand to identify the presence and monitor change in species distribution over time. Baseline data of culturally significant species within the rivers and fringing wetlands of the Gippsland Lakes was gathered through eDNA assessments. GLaWAC attended a training day to upskill staff before heading into the field to collect water samples at sites of cultural significance, which were sent off for lab analysis. This information has identified the presence of culturally significant species which will help to inform future management priorities.

The lower Tambo River is important to Gunaikurnai People and is subject to threats of erosion and pest plant infestation. GLaWAC delivered targeted weed control and revegetation which complemented the recent bank stabilisation works, contributing to the protection of the culturally significant and environmental values at the site. This was accompanied by mapping highly invasive plant species around the site for future targeted control.

Pest plant and animal control activities were also delivered by GLaWAC across the Outer Barrier, totalling an area of over 9000Ha. Specific activities included fox baiting programs and targeted control of invasive plant species.

Additional to these outcomes, GLaWAC provided support to partners across 14 projects being delivered throughout the program.



1,500Ha

### Cultural Assessments

More than 1,500Ha of cultural assessments completed by GLaWAC.

4

### Involvement Projects

Projects led and delivered by Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners.

15

### Frog Refuge Ponds

15 'frog bog' wetlands installed to improve habitat connectivity for threatened frog species.

3

### Pelican Counts

Counts involved over 240 volunteers.