Gippsland Lakes

Annual Report 2024–2025

A summary of projects undertaken in the Gippsland Lakes Catchment over the past year.

Love Our Lakes

VICTORIA State Government

The Gippsland Lakes Annual Report

The Victorian Government has provided $7.5 million over 3 years as part of a wider $248 million investment 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 information on the range of projects undertaken across the Gippsland Lakes and catchment during the 2024/25 financial year, including the government investment above, other complementary government 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 with 40 formal partners has turned this year's direct investment of $2.5 million in the Gippsland Lakes into a combined total investment of $14.81 million. This was further increased by the many hours of volunteer efforts over a vast landscape. 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 (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 of groups continues 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 https://gunaikurnai.org/our-country/.

Case Studies

1 | Sand Renourishment

The Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site provides critical shoreline habitat for many bird species including threatened Small Terns (Little and Fairy Terns). Shoreline habitat is under threat from rising sea levels and constant wave action resulting in coastal erosion and habitat loss over time. This is being tackled though a collaborative project led by Gippsland Ports, who have worked closely with Parks Victoria, Birdlife Australia and the East Gippsland CMA. Together they have implemented complex renourishment activities to restore degraded shoreline habitat at two islands within the Lakes and also protect nesting shorebirds from introduced predators.

Dredged sand material from nearby channels regularly maintained for vessel navigation in the Lakes, was used to renourish areas of bird habitat on the islands. Sand renourishment was undertaken at Crescent and Albifrons islands as well as Horries Spit and resulted in a total of six hectares of habitat being established for beach nesting birds. Birdlife Australia played a key role in this project, by providing important advice on shorebird habitat requirements and undertaking critical bird surveys at the sites. To support the protection of key bird species Parks Victoria delivered targeted predator control works in these areas.

Additionally, Gippsland Ports reviewed vessel operation zoning rules (VOZR) near the sites and identified and implemented an area of reduced boat speed for passing vessels that will assist in reducing future shoreline damage. Shortly after the renourishment works were completed, Small Terns were recorded across all sites.

2 | Dirty Rivers

The Gippsland Lakes comprises of a series of shallow coastal lagoons including Lake Wellington, Lake Victoria and Lake King and a number of smaller lagoons and wetlands. Freshwater from five rivers (Latrobe, Avon, Mitchell, Nicholson and Tambo) flows into the Lakes. Water quality and the overall health of the Lakes is strongly influenced by the amount of suspended sediments and nutrients flowing in from these river systems. High sediment and nutrient loads entering the Lakes have the potential to negatively impact on environmental values such as seagrass meadows, fish populations, fringing wetlands and can also influence the occurrence of algal blooms along with other ecological processes.

In 2017, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) engaged a consultant to undertake a study to identify priority waterway sites with the greatest potential for long-term reduction in sediment and nutrient loads into the Gippsland Lakes. West Gippsland CMA has since engaged with local landholders in these priority locations to seek their interest in undertaking on-ground waterway works, including weed control, fencing and revegetation on their property.

Through the GLCC Program, WGCMA worked with landholders to establish agreements on four properties on the Latrobe, Rintoul and Rainbow Creeks, to complete 7ha of priority weed control works and 9ha of native revegetation in 2024/25. At Rainbow Creek, approximately 10,000 seedlings were planted resulting in a significant riparian buffer of 100 metres. This project, which was leveraged with existing river health funding, contributed to the connection of over 18ha of riparian area along Rainbow Creek.

These continued rehabilitation efforts will importantly contribute to a reduction of sediments and nutrients impacting the Lakes into the future.

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East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

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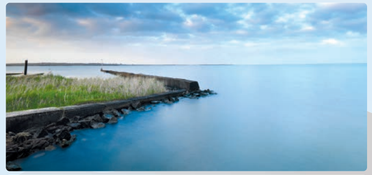
Protecting the Traditional Owner Country of the Gippsland Lakes Outer Barrier

Partners GLaWAC, EGCMA, Gippsland Ports, Trust for Nature, Parks Victoria, EGLN, Barrier Landing Coast Care Group

Investment $0.12 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 Revegetation and erosion control activities to support existing coastal vegetation.
5 Understanding and monitoring culturally significant species.



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, HVP, Parks Victoria, EGCMA, EPA, Monash Uni, VEWH, VR Fish, Field and Game Australia, Australian Flora Foundation, UNE, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Agriculture Victoria, Federation Uni

Investment $1.97 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.
6. Improving the instream habitat value in the lower Avon River through the installation of five fish habitat structures.
7. Rehabilitation of five high quality wetlands on the lower Thomson and Latrobe Rivers to improve the freshwater and brackish refuge areas for native flora and fauna.

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 Network, Maffra & District Landcare, Bass Coast Landcare, DEECA, DEDJTR, EGCMA, Gippsland Plains Rail Trail Committee, 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 Understanding and protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage across the catchment.
5 Monitoring wetland vegetation and water quality in freshwater wetlands.
6 Delivery of environmental community-based projects supported by local Landcare networks.

Protecting and Enhancing Alpine Ecosystems

Partners Parks Victoria, WGCMA, EGCMA, DEECA, MHRMB, NECMA

Investment $0.68 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

Investment $3.80 million

Activities

1 Urban wetland construction contributing to the reduction of nutrients and suspended solids entering Jones Bay.
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 and bird species within Macleod Morass and around Jones Bay.
5 Increasing the number of large wood structures in Jones Bay to provide habitat and connectivity for fish species.
6 Waste water recycling plant upgrades to improve the water quality released into Macleod Morass.

Understanding and Improving Aquatic Habitats and Ecosystems

Partners Gippsland Ports, EGCMA, WGCMA, GLaWAC, Birdlife Australia, Greening Australia, EGSC, EGW, Southern Rural Water, DEECA, EPA, RMIT, Monash University, Better Boating Victoria, VEWH, Landcare, Parks Victoria, DTP, FoGL, Deakin University, Marine Mammal Foundation

Investment $1.74 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 and threatened frog species in the Gippsland Lakes catchment.
5 Restoration of critical habitat for shore nesting seabirds across multiple sand islands in the Gippsland Lakes.
6 Installation of additional water quality monitoring stations across priority areas of the Gippsland Lakes.

Improving the Condition of the East Gippsland Catchments

Partners EGCMA, Parks Victoria, East Gippsland Landcare Network, Trust for Nature, East Gippsland Shire Council, East Gippsland CMN, DEECA, GLaWAC, EPA, Greening Australia, Agriculture Victoria, GAGG Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust, East Gippsland Water, Eastwood Landcare Group, Foundation for National Parks and wildlife, DTP, Bairnsdale Urban Landcare Group

Investment $4.08 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 Broadscale 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.

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