

GIPPSLAND LAKES

Annual Report

2025–2026

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



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The Gippsland Lakes Annual Report

The Victorian Government has provided \$6 million over four 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 2025/26 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 and projects completed by partners and community throughout the Gippsland Lakes and its catchment. The report describes the activities completed, the partners participating in these activities, and the total level of funding 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 into a combined total investment of \$18.63 million, plus many hours of volunteer efforts over a vast landscape involving over 40 partner agencies and community groups. 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).



Eric Sjerp
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 <https://gunaikurnai.org/our-country/>.

Case studies

1 | Protecting the Outer Barrier through integrated pest plant and animal control



Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) continue to lead work on Country to improve the health of *Talikatoor* – the Gippsland Lakes. Through pest plant and animal control, GLaWAC are working across the Gippsland Lakes Outer Barrier to target invasive species impacting native flora and fauna in this important area.

Landscape scale fox control has continued across Joint Managed Parks including the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park and the Lakes National Park, with baits deployed and monitored by GLaWAC crews. Foxes are extremely effective predators that target threatened shorebirds and other wildlife that inhabit these environments, including the important cultural breeding site of Borun - pelicans.

Along with pest animal management, invasive plant species such as boneseed, sea spurge, dolichos pea, boxthorn, prickly pear, bridal creeper, asparagus fern and mother of millions are also targeted to reduce the impacts of invasive species and allow for the natural recruitment of native vegetation. GLaWAC has been supported by other organisations, including Parks Victoria, East Gippsland CMA and Trust for Nature resulting in multi-agency working bees to tackle invasive species, extending to sharing knowledge, strengthening environmental outcomes and enhancing collaborative working relationships.

Through a partnership with the CSIRO, GLaWAC are also undertaking trials of a biological control agent to target sea spurge throughout areas of the 90-mile beach. This project commenced during previous Gippsland Lakes funded projects and will continue to be trialled through the project currently underway.

Protecting the Outer Barrier through integrated pest plant and animal control allows GLaWAC to continue to heal Country and protect important cultural heritage and significant species.

2 | Supporting native fish through habitat restoration



The Gippsland Lakes and its estuarine reaches provide critical habitat for several species of native fish which are vital to the health of the Gippsland Lakes. Historical management of the lower parts of our rivers and the Gippsland Lakes saw vast quantities of wood removed to increase channel capacity and drainage, and to provide safer passage of boats throughout these systems.

Over the last 20 years, a significant number of large wood structures have been reintroduced to the Gippsland Lakes and its estuarine reaches in collaboration with local angling clubs and interest groups. These works have improved the availability, density and connectivity of habitat for species such as Australian Bass, Estuary Perch, Black Bream, as well as threatened species such as the Australian Grayling. Over 230 species of fish that have been recorded within the Gippsland Lakes and many of these rely on structural habitat to shelter and feed. This type of habitat also provides benefits to invertebrates and other aquatic species that support fish communities.

In the lower parts of rivers, structures are created using a single timber pile driven into the toe of the bank with additional logs also secured to this. Within the Gippsland Lakes, root balls are placed around shoreline areas, creating complex structures which assist in replenishing the habitat lacking in these areas.

In recent years, assessments of existing structures have been undertaken to determine the condition and ongoing benefit of this habitat. Environmental conditions, the type of timber used and impacts from marine borers, all play a role in the deterioration of these structures over time. Regular inspections of these structures inform future locations for replenishment of fish habitat within the Gippsland Lakes and its adjoining rivers.

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Protecting the Traditional Owner Country of the Gippsland Lakes Outer Barrier

Partners GLaWAC, EGCMA, Gippsland Ports, Parks Victoria, Wellington Shire Council, East Gippsland Shire Council, DEECA

Investment \$0.26 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 Installation of CCTV camera to monitor facility overstay, littering and pollution.



Improving the Condition of the West Gippsland Catchments

Partners WGCMA, Agriculture Victoria, GLaWAC, Parks Victoria, Wellington Shire, Gippsland Water, Southern Rural Water, Trust for Nature, Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network, DEECA, EGCMA, Energy Australia, Baw Shire Council, East Gippsland Shire Council, South Gippsland Shire Council, Gippsland Coastal Board, South Gippsland Water, Melbourne Water, HVP, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, University of New England, Maffra and District Landcare Network

Investment \$2.78 million

Activities

- 1 Fencing, revegetation and weed control to maintain and improve the condition and connectivity of riparian and wetland habitats.
- 2 Controlling pest plants and animals across the catchment to protect important species and vegetation communities.
- 3 Understanding and protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage across the catchment.
- 4 Monitoring water quality across the catchment.
- 5 Securing new and managing existing conservation covenants on private land.
- 6 Delivery of environmental community-based projects supported by local Landcare networks.
- 7 Working with landholders and regional partners to improve production and provide environmental benefits by managing water and nutrients.
- 8 Work on constructing the fishway at Maffra Weir to reconnect 34km of high-quality fish habitat to migratory 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, GLaWAC, DEECA, Parks Victoria, EGCMA, EPA, Monash Uni, VEWH, VR Fish, Field and Game Australia, Agriculture Victoria, Melbourne Uni, Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network, Energy Australia

Investment \$3.64 million

Activities

- 1 Installation of Lower Latrobe wetland infrastructure to protect and enhance fringing wetlands.
- 2 Reducing nutrients and sediment loads to Lake Wellington through on ground works such as fencing, revegetation, weed control, 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 across fringing wetlands of Gippsland Lakes.
- 5 Enhancement and protection of wetland sites across public and private land increasing freshwater refuge and habitat areas.



Protecting and Enhancing Alpine Ecosystems

Partners Parks Victoria, EGCMA, DEECA, MHRMB, NECMA, Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network, GLaWAC

Investment \$0.79 million

Activities

- 1 Protecting alpine peatland ecosystems, through weed and pest animal control and restoration work.
- 2 Installation of bollards and fences to protect alpine peatlands from vehicles and heavy hooved animals.
- 3 Landscape scale pest animal surveillance to inform targeted pest animal control.
- 4 Undertaking Alpine Peatland ecological health and biocultural surveys.



Improving the Wetlands of Jones Bay

Partners EGCMA, Parks Victoria, East Gippsland Water, GLaWAC, DEECA, EGSC

Investment \$2.72 million

Activities

- 1 Restoration and protection of wetlands and riparian vegetation to increase connectivity, increase freshwater habitat and reduce sediments entering the Gippsland Lakes.
- 2 Monitoring wetland vegetation and water quality within Macleod Morass.
- 3 Water recycling plant upgrades to improve water quality recharge to Macleod Morass.
- 4 Monitoring of water quality parameters across priority sites, assessment of data and trends to inform future management strategies.
- 5 Coordinating and preparing for the impacts of H5N1 Avian Influenza.



Understanding and Improving Aquatic Habitats and Ecosystems

Partners Gippsland Ports, EGCMA, WGCMA, GLaWAC, Birdlife Australia, Greening Australia, EGSC, Southern Rural Water, EPA, Monash University, Parks Victoria, DTP, EGLN, DEECA, VFA, MMF

Investment \$1.72 million

Activities

- 1 Monitoring of water quality including understanding sedimentation processes and pollution risks in the Gippsland Lakes.
- 2 Implementation of seagrass and native fish monitoring and assessment to inform future management and protection options.
- 3 Ongoing population monitoring and health assessments of priority waterbirds and threatened frog species in the Gippsland Lakes catchment.
- 4 Restoration of critical habitat for shore nesting seabirds across multiple sand islands in the Gippsland Lakes.
- 5 Investigative studies and modelling to better understand nutrient loads, movement into waterways and potential removal pathways.
- 6 Structural works to ensure asset protection and ocean access between Bass Strait and the Gippsland Lakes.
- 7 Waterway pollution prevention and response.
- 8 Installation of large wood structures throughout the Gippsland Lakes estuarine systems to improve availability, density and connectivity of habitat that support fish communities.



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, Greening Australia, Agriculture Victoria, East Gippsland Water, GagG, SFS, SAF, FEVL

Investment \$6.72 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, habitat installation, revegetation and weed control.
- 2 Controlling pest plants and animals to reduce impacts on agricultural and environmental values.
- 3 Establishment of new conservation covenants to secure permanent protection over significant biodiversity sites.
- 4 Broadscale revegetation of areas of Whitebox Grassy Woodlands, Damp Sands Woodland and Red Gum Grassy Woodland contributing to a reduction of sediment entering the Gippsland Lakes.
- 5 Understanding and protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage across the catchment.
- 6 Establishment of demonstration sites to display vegetation growth in variable climates, controlling invasive species after extreme events and increase awareness of soil health for seasonal preparedness.
- 7 Management and upgrades to stormwater infrastructure to reduce potential erosion and sediment transfer into waterways.
- 8 Fauna surveys to determine species distribution data and habitat refuge.
- 9 Information and engagement on sustainable agriculture to facilitate partnerships and support project delivery within the region.



This map is a visual representation of the Gippsland Lakes catchment. Scale and details are not accurate and should not be relied upon for directions.

