Welcome

to the inaugural condition of the Gippsland Lakes Report Card 2011

On behalf of the Gippsland Lakes and Catchment Taskforce, I am pleased to present this first Report Card on the environmental condition of the Gippsland Lakes.

The Gippsland Lakes is a complex system. Many components make up the Lakes ecosystem, most of these being dependent on each other. Additionally, the Lakes are significantly affected by what happens in the catchment. The Report Card has been produced to show a more detailed picture of the ecological health of the various components that make up the Gippsland Lakes system.

The Report Card uses 6 key indicators to represent this complex ecosystem. These indicators include: Water Quality, Algal Blooms, Wetlands, Birds, Seagrass and Fish. We have used the same methods as the GINRF report card, but have provided a more detailed focus on the natural assets in the Lakes system. The information used in preparing this first Report Card will form the basis for future condition reporting of the Gippsland Lakes.

Overall the condition of the Lakes has been rated as ***Moderate***. The condition of Wetlands and Water Quality was highest rating - ***Good***. Birds, Algal Blooms and Seagrass were rated - ***Moderate***. Fish were rated - ***Poor***.

The Report Card is a very useful communication tool for presenting the general community with the issues that face the Lakes. It provides an overview of the good and bad aspects of the Lake ecosystem, and where and why management actions needs to be focused in the catchments and the Lakes to ensure the Lakes health is maintained.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere thanks to all who contributed data and information for this report, and also to Moroka Pty Ltd for their excellent work in producing the final Gippsland Lakes Report Card.

Professor Barry Hart
Independent Chair
Gippsland Lakes & Catchment Taskforce

The future

The information that has been collected as pert of this report card process has been a collation from all the existing research and monitoring programs that the Taskforce and other agencies currently undertake in and around the Gippsland Lakes. The following areas have been identified for improvements to this process:-

Water Quality

Update the guidelines values for water quality parameters and provide separate assessments for the major lakes. Provide water quality data on the internet.

Algal Blooms

Continue building on the exiting research to increase understanding about algal blooms and when these events will occur.

Wetlands

Expand the application of the Index of Wetland Condition to additional key wetlands in the Gippsland Lakes system.

Birds

Improve bird monitoring to specifically assess the lakes Ramsar values and incorporate data from existing programs on Sea Eagles and Little Terns

Seagrass

Establish a reference condition for density and extent of seagrass to improve reliability of ratings. Quantify the areal extent and physical structure of sea grass to facilitate direct comparison of seagrass condition now with that recorded in 1997, when extensive quantitative mapping was last conducted.

Fish

Improve fish assessment through multiple lines of evidence including - fishery independent surveys, recreational catches, other indirect measures to complement commercial catch data.

Information available:
The card and a full report is available on the Gippsland Lakes & Catchment Taskforce website: www.gippslandlakestaskforce.com.au
OR Hardcopies from the DSE Bairnsdale Office on 51520400.

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Gippsland Lakes & Catchment Taskforce

www.gippslandlakestaskforce.vic.gov.au

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2011

Gippsland Lakes Natural Assets Report Card

Gippsland Lakes & Catchment Taskforce

Health of the Gippsland Lakes

Condition Ratings for the indicators

*Using Algal Bloom rating scheme as an example**

A **Excellent**
Low risk of algal bloom

B **Good**
Risk of algal bloom but did not occur

C **Moderate**
Minor algal bloom, no economic impact

D **Poor**
Short duration algal bloom, minor economic impacts

E **Very poor**
Large persistent algal bloom with high economic impacts

* *more detailed information on indicators located in the technical report. www.gippslandlakestaskforce.vic.gov.au*

Water Quality B Good

60-80% of water quality parameters meet guidelines.
The water quality of the Gippsland Lakes is a critical determinant of other aspects of health including: seagrass, fish, wetlands, birds and algae. It is also vitally important for recreation, tourism and other commercial uses of the lakes and is a major factor in making.

Sixty two per cent of water quality guidelines were met across Lake Wellington, Victoria and King.

Wetlands B Good

Average Index of Wetland Condition score 7-8.
The wetlands of the Gippsland Lakes contain significant biodiversity values, and are recognised both nationally and internationally as important areas. These wetlands provide significant ecosystem services such as nutrient filtering, improved water quality, bird habitat and fish nurseries.

Birds C Moderate

Ramsar listing criteria met. Some decrease in abundance and richness.
The Gippsland Lakes is a wetland of international importance especially as water bird habitat and has been listed under the Ramsar convention since 1982.

Whilst Ramsar criteria continue to be met the total bird abundance seems to have declined and there has been substantial decline in some bird taxa.

Algal Blooms C Moderate

Minor bloom, little economic impact.
Algal blooms are an important aspects of the Lake's health. Potential impacts of blooms include: decreased image of the area as a destination; increased risk to human health and decreased commercial fish and seafood production.

In late Jan to Feb, the amount of algae in the water rose to a level that was considered a minor bloom in the Lakes mainly between the Mitchell River Silt Jetties and Raymond Island. Fortunately the temperatures and the prevailing wind conditions meant stratification of the Lakes was less strong and persistent than usual.

Seagrass C Moderate

No change in density or extent of seagrass cover.
The Lakes feature extensive seagrass meadows which are an ecologically significant marine habitat, serving as a nursery area for juvenile marine fauna as well as providing food and shelter.

Seagrass density and condition is fluctuating with no discernable trend over the period and has been rated as moderate.

Fish D Poor

Fish are commercially & ecologically important and provide recreational enjoyment for many.

There has been a general decline in the commercial fish catch since the early 1990s and evidence that recreational fishing has declined. Therefore this indicator has been rated as poor.