

The Gippsland Lakes Annual Report

The Victorian Government has provided \$7.5 million over 3 years as a priority in Water for Victoria – a plan for the future, 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 2021/22 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.

Implementing a Plan 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 that 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

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 \$11.4 million, plus many hours of volunteer efforts over a vast landscape involving 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

Case Studies

1 | Waterbird Monitoring in the Gippsland Lakes



The Gippsland Lakes supports a diverse population of over 20,000 waterbirds comprising of colonial nesting birds and important migratory species notably including threatened Little and Fairy Terns, Australasian Bittern and Bar-tailed Godwits. Waterbirds are indicators of wetland health across a variety of habitats within the Gippsland Lakes, so understanding abundance and diversity trends over time is crucial.

Data on waterbird diversity, actual number of birds, successful breeding of key species and maintenance of populations is collected to enable an assessment against the Limits of Acceptable Change in Ecological Character for the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site. Since 2018 BirdLife Australia have been undertaking regular surveys to record a range of data on waterbird population, diversity, and recruitment trends across the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site and adjoining areas. The project has ensured the continuation of waterbird, shorebird, and colonial nesting species surveying.

BirdLife Australia have implemented weekly surveys across 22 sites which have known breeding waterbird colonies within the Gippsland Lakes. Monitoring activities importantly contributes to our knowledge of key bird species and how to better manage the Gippsland Lakes for these species. Successful breeding of eight bird species within the Gippsland Lakes (every 5 years) are indicators used to assess the status of the Ecological Character of the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site.

The recording of an Intermediate Egret at Sale in early 2022 is the first known breeding record for the Gippsland Lakes. Individuals of this migratory species can be widespread being recorded in parts of Africa and Asia making the sighting of the species in the Gippsland Lakes significant. Above average rainfall across the region during 2021 has provided opportunities for waterbirds to expand their breeding season.

The data collected from the surveying will allow for short and long-term trends to be identified in bird populations assisting in the assessment of any condition change within the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site.

2 | Implementing Vegetation Monitoring in Macleod Morass



Macleod Morass is one of two freshwater wetlands located within the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site. Located on the west bank of the Mitchell River below the Bairnsdale township, Macleod Morass supports an abundance of threatened waterbirds, frogs, and aquatic plant species contributing to the overall Ecological Character of the Lakes.

The 520-hectare deep freshwater wetland receives an array of different freshwater inflows including local catchment runoff and regulated inflows of treated water which is currently managed by East Gippsland Water and Parks Victoria. As a wetland, the Morass experiences wet and dry phases. These seasonal changes refer to the water coming into or leaving the system and are important for native vegetation species in promoting abundance and diversity. Importantly, wetland vegetation supports habitat and food sources for nesting bird species as well as frogs and fish.

In 2020 an assessment of the existing water regime was completed including an investigation of the ecological water requirements for Macleod Morass. In response to updated management, a Monitoring and Evaluation Protocol was developed by the EGOMA in early 2022 to assess the ecological responses to the updated water regime.

The Protocol will be implemented over the next 2 years through onground vegetation monitoring which will record species cover and diversity of species occurring in the Morass. The data will be collected by a qualified consultant through field-based research techniques developed as part of the Protocol.

Understanding the diversity and condition of key native vegetation in the Morass, particularly that of paperbark and common reed species, will inform future management of the area so it remains a freshwater wetland.

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 over a catchment of over 20,000 square kilometres connected to the ocean at Lakes Entrance.

The lakes and catchments support a diversity of landscapes with high conservation value.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Gunaikurnai people, Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and waters of the Gippsland Lakes region, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. In particular, we pay tribute to the Brayakaulung, Brabralung and Tatungalung clans, whose custodianship is a vital part of the heritage, knowledge and future management of the Gippsland Lakes.

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.



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Improving the condition and connectivity of Lake Wellington and its wetlands

Partners WGCMA, Greening Australia, EGCMA, Gippsland Water, Southern Rural Water, Wellington Shire, Trust for Nature, DEECA, DTP, Parks Victoria, EPA

Investment \$1.21 million

- Activities**
- 1 Protecting and enhancing riparian habitats and connectivity through revegetation and fencing in the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment.
 - 2 Working with landholders and industry partners to improve production and provide environmental benefits by managing water and nutrients.
 - 3 Reducing nutrients and sediment loads to Lake Wellington through on ground works such as fencing, revegetation, weed control, stock exclusion, and off stream watering.
 - 4 Controlling pest plants and animals to protect important habitats and the threatened species that inhabit them.
 - 5 Managing environmental water to enhance the lower Latrobe Wetlands and estuarine river reaches.



Protecting the Traditional Owner country of the Gippsland Lakes Outer Barrier

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

Investment \$0.44 million

- Activities**
- 1 Assessment and monitoring of important and threatened bird population including Little and Fairy Terns, Hooded Plovers, Latham's Snipe and Australian Pelicans.
 - 2 Restore nesting habitat for Little Terns on islands within the lakes through sand renourishment.
 - 3 Understanding and protecting cultural values from the impacts of shoreline erosion.
 - 4 Improving infrastructure and facilities for recreational users to prevent impact in high conservation areas.
 - 5 Control of priority pest plant and animal species to improve coastal habitats and protect migratory waterbird populations.



Protecting and enhancing alpine ecosystems

Partners Parks Victoria, EGCMA, Gippsland Water, DEECA, DEDJTR, East Gippsland Water

Investment \$0.97 million

- Activities**
- 1 Monitoring and controlling 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, Parks Victoria, VFA, Angling Clubs, GLaWAC, DEECA, EGSC, EGLN, EGCMN, VFA,

Investment \$0.22 million

- Activities**
- 1 Increasing the number of large wood structures in Jones Bay to provide habitat for fish species.
 - 2 Monitoring wetland vegetation composition and water quality within Macleod Morass.
 - 3 Restoration and protection of wetlands to provide suitable habitat for Green and Golden Bell Frog populations in Macleod Morass and Cobblers Creek.
 - 4 Pest plant and animal control, revegetation, and erosion control to protect important habitats around Jones Bay.



Improving the condition of the East Gippsland catchments

Partners Trust for Nature, East Gippsland Shire Council, EGCMA, EGLN, Gippsland Water, EGCMN, FEVL, SCELG, Parks Victoria, DEECA, Southern Ark, GLaWAC, DTP, Greening Australia, Birdlife Australia

Investment \$3.96 million

- Activities**
- 1 Controlling pest plants and animals to limit impacts on agricultural and environmental values, particularly post-fire.
 - 2 Establishment of new conservation covenants to secure permanent protection over significant biodiversity sites.
 - 3 Assessment, protection, and restoration of important habitats through revegetation, weed control and fencing.
 - 4 Understanding and protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage across the catchment.
 - 5 Improving riparian and woodland habitats through revegetation, weed control and vegetation management.
 - 6 Working with landholders to improve management practices for production and environmental benefits.



Understanding and Improving Aquatic Habitats and Ecosystems

Partners Gippsland Ports, EPA, EGCMA, DEECA, GLaWAC, EGW, Birdlife Australia, Marine Mammal Foundation, East Gippsland Shire Council, RMIT, Southern Rural Water, Monash Uni

Investment \$1.35 million

- Activities**
- 1 Improving boating infrastructure to protect seagrass, water quality and aquatic life.
 - 2 Monitoring of water quality and pollution risks in the Gippsland Lakes.
 - 3 Installation of four new water quality monitoring stations within the lakes.
 - 4 Seagrass monitoring and research into options for restoration of meadows in the lakes.
 - 5 Environmental DNA assessment of species across the lakes and fringing wetlands.
 - 6 Burrunan Dolphin population monitoring and health assessments.
 - 7 Annual citizen science pelican count to establish population numbers across the lakes.



Improving the condition of the West Gippsland catchments

Partners GLaWAC, EGCMA, Parks Victoria, DEECA, Wellington Shire, Gippsland Water, Southern Rural Water, Greening Australia, LCLN, MDLN, BRV, DJPR, Field and Game Australia, Angling Clubs

Investment \$3.27 million

- Activities**
- 1 Control of pest plants and animals across the catchment to protect important species and vegetation communities.
 - 2 Understanding and protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage across the catchment.
 - 3 On ground works to maintain and improve the condition and connectivity of riparian and wetland habitats through stock exclusion, revegetation and weed control.
 - 4 Rehabilitation of priority Red Gum Woodlands sites, including revegetation, fencing, weed control and rubbish removal.
 - 5 Improving and maintaining infrastructure and facilities for recreational users.
 - 6 Monitoring wetland vegetation and water quality in freshwater wetlands.

