



Providence Ponds & Perry River Catchment  
**Strategic Directions  
Statement 2017**

## Purpose

The strategic directions described in this document represent the long-term priorities for the significant natural assets as identified by the stakeholders of the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment.

Each strategic direction has been identified through a review of the issues in the catchment and the articulation of the long-term outcomes sought for land, water and the community.

The Strategic Directions Statement will identify the natural resource management issues of importance in the catchment and the agreed areas for strategic focus.

## Stakeholder Reference Group

The Strategic Directions Statement has been developed as a collaboration between a range of agencies and individuals with an interest in Integrated Catchment Management in the Providence Ponds and Perry River Catchment including, (in alphabetical order)

- Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
- Department of Environment, Land and Water Planning
- East Gippsland Landcare Network
- Greening Australia Victoria
- Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
- HVP Plantations
- Maffra and Districts Landcare Network
- Parks Victoria
- Southern Rural Water
- Trust for Nature
- Wellington Shire Council
- West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

Over 40 members of the community also provided input to the preparation of the final document through participation in a forum and workshop to discuss and identify priority issues and actions. The Stakeholder reference group is committed to continued engagement with the community as it looks to implement the priorities identified in this document.

## Implementing the priorities

The preparation of this Strategic Directions Statement is an important milestone for Integrated Catchment Management in the Providence Ponds and Perry River Catchment. The process of developing the Strategic Directions has resulted in a shared understanding of the concerns of agencies and members of the community. The Statement also represents a commitment to working together to seek support and additional funding to address the priority issues.

The initial focus for implementation will be voluntary programs to protect intact 'Chain of Ponds', rehabilitate recovering 'Chain of Ponds' and improve habitat connectivity. Funding from the Our Catchments Our Communities initiative for the period 2017-2020 has been made available for this purpose and a project plan will be finalised in July 2017.





## The Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment 'Chain of Ponds'

### A unique and significant waterway system

Providence Ponds, the Perry River and their tributaries are a type of waterway system known as 'Chain of Ponds'. The 'Chain of Ponds' are described as a waterway consisting of irregularly spaced, deep pools separated by a grassy depression or shallow undefined channel.

'Chain of Ponds' systems were once common across South-eastern Australia but are now very rare. No fully intact 'Chain of Ponds' systems are known to currently exist as post-European changes to aquatic habitats have resulted in a loss (or at least significant modification) of these environments. The Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment is unique in that the catchment still contains sections of intact ponds as well ponds that are recovering from erosion and incision processes.

The destruction of 'Chain of Ponds' has occurred as result of erosion and incision (i.e. gully and sheet erosion) caused by clearing of native vegetation, periods of drought and flood and exacerbated by rabbits, deepening to provide water sources and trampling by stock.

*Sources: Zavadil and Ivezich, 2011, King, 2004*

*Chain of Ponds (photo source: Wellington Shire Council)*

# Introduction

Located between the Great Dividing Range and the Gippsland Lakes, the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment is one of the only places in the Gippsland region where remnant habitat provides a link between these two iconic landscapes. A network of protected areas across private and public land provides the backbone of the link and extensive areas of remnant vegetation remain on private land.

The Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment has unique and significant assets, including the Chains of Ponds and associated Sandy Floor Scrub vegetation, Gippsland Red Gum Grassy Woodlands, and a diversity of wetlands. These habitats are not broadly appreciated but support a surprisingly rich array of plants and animals that are not found in other places in Victoria.

Providence Ponds and the Perry River rise near Fernbank and through a series of disconnected ponds flows from the forested slopes of the Great Dividing Range, joining with the Avon River south-east of Stratford, shortly before flowing into Lake Wellington, part of the Gippsland Lakes.

The catchment is significant as it is one of only a few in Victoria with a Chain of Ponds formation across large sections of the waterway. In the Providence Ponds and Perry Catchment, the Chains of Ponds formation supports a diversity of plants and animals including the endangered Sandy Flood Scrub Ecological Vegetation Class, Dwarf Galaxias and Pygmy Perch.

The Gunaikurnai people are the traditional owners of the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment and have a strong connection to their land and waterways. Gunaikurnai people have both historic and contemporary perspectives on land and water management.

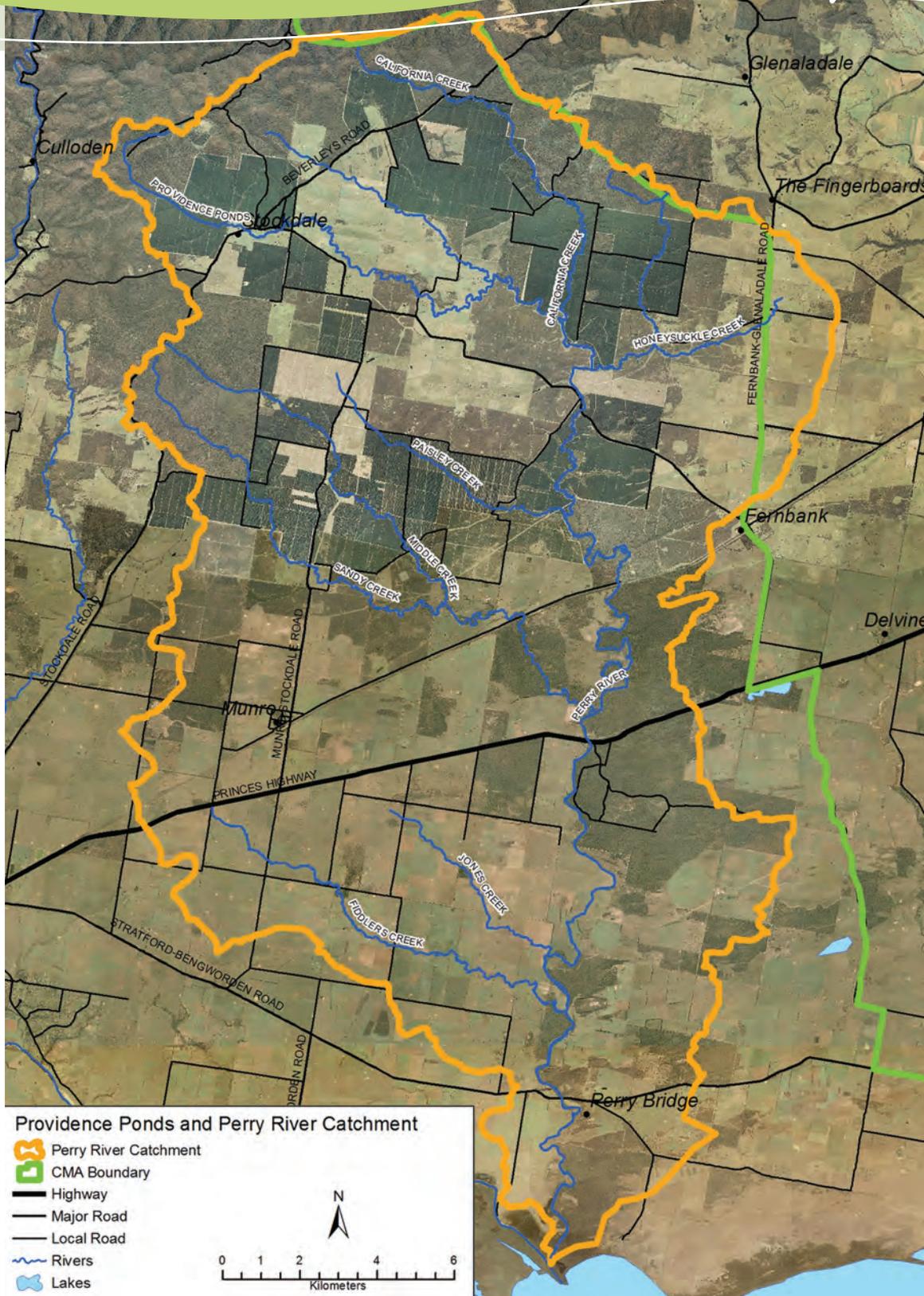
Across the catchment productive landuses including forestry and grazing contribute to the local economy and the social fabric of the local community. The communities of Munro and Perry Bridge have a dedicated band of volunteers and leaders involved in Landcare, CFA, Red Cross and production groups and provide an important service to the community.

There are a number of challenges impacting the health of the Providence Ponds and Perry Catchment, including:

- changing land use
- habitat fragmentation as a result of historical development and intensification
- protecting the Chain of Ponds and the wetlands
- reducing sediment loads to the Gippsland Lakes
- protecting threatened species and ecological communities in the catchment
- protecting high priority cultural sites
- pest plants and animals, including African Lovegrass

The history of the catchment, the pressures from a variable climate and the use of land and water resources have affected the health of the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment. There is however a great opportunity to take a more coordinated and proactive approach to catchment management. From an assessment of the important natural assets and a review of strategies, plans and investigations a Discussion Paper was developed. This Strategic Directions Statement was developed by a Stakeholder Reference Group, it documents the key concerns and areas of priority for catchment health.





Map of the Providence Ponds Perry River Catchment indicating the major waterways, catchment boundary and the extent of West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority region (source: WGCMA)

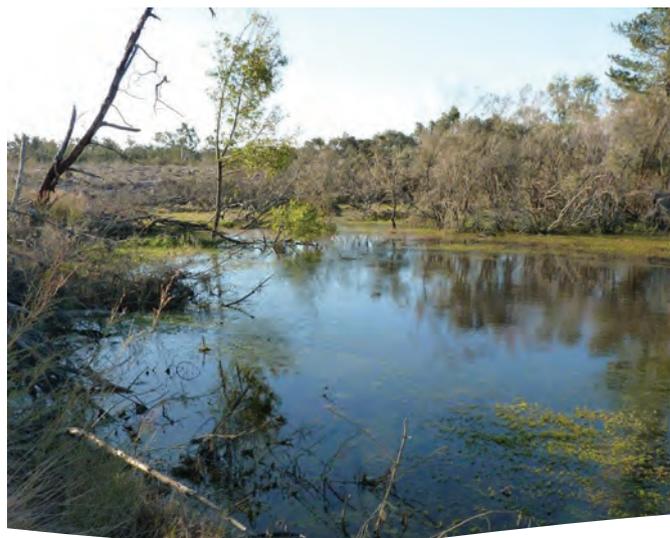
# Strategic Directions

A set of eight priority strategic directions have been identified by the Stakeholder Reference Group. The strategic directions set out the long-term priorities for Integrated Catchment Management in the Providence Ponds and Perry River Catchment. Each strategic direction has a list of priority focus areas, which are the activities that are recommended to make the greatest contribution to achieving long term outcomes in the Providence Ponds and Perry River Catchment.

## A. The 'Chain of Ponds' are protected and rehabilitated

### Priority focus areas:

- Protect intact 'Chain of Ponds' as a priority and rehabilitate recovering 'Chain of Ponds'.
- Establish vegetated buffers along the 'Chain of Ponds' system and fence to exclude/manage stock access where there is land manager support.
- Continue to work with timber plantation managers to establish and maintain riparian buffers to protect the 'Chains of Ponds'.
- Conduct an inventory of the 'Chain of Ponds' that incorporates their current condition and records their vegetation communities and native animal populations.
- Implement integrated pest plant and animal programs to control woody weeds, feral pines and manage the impact from deer<sup>1</sup> and rabbits across land tenure.



*Works to rehabilitate recovering ponds will ensure their condition improves over the long term (photo source: L. Crisp)*

<sup>1</sup> The impact of Sambar deer compared with Hog deer has not been explored in the project. It is noted that many members of the community value Hog deer as a game species whilst still having concerns about the impact of Sambar deer on the environment.



B. The significant native plants, animals and ecosystems of the catchment are protected.

**Priority focus areas:**

- Ensure integrated catchment management actions are designed and coordinated so that opportunities to protect significant plant and animal species and communities are implemented (See also Strategic Direction C).
- Implement and develop recovery plans for threatened species and vegetation communities of conservation significance in the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment.



*Trust for nature covenants and reserves contribute to habitat connectivity (photo sources: G. Park & WGCMA)*

# Strategic Directions



C. Habitat connectivity is provided through the protected area network across private and public land.

## Priority focus areas:

- Implement ecologically appropriate burning regimes informed by local knowledge and science.
- Improve the condition of core terrestrial, riparian and wetland habitats through weed control (e.g African love grass), supplementary planting and exclusion fencing across all land tenure.
- Extend the links between core habitat through targeted revegetation and remnant enhancement projects.
- Support and encourage efforts to increase the area of and actively manage the protected area network in the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment.
- Enforce regulations relating to collection of firewood and recreational use of parks and reserves.

D. The knowledge skills and values of Aboriginal people are incorporated in Integrated Catchment Management Programs.

## Priority focus areas:

- Undertake a survey and inventory of the plants, animals and places of cultural significance of traditional owners.
- Engage with Aboriginal communities through GLaWAC to improve understanding of their historic and contemporary cultural values and practices in the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment.
- Provide opportunities for traditional owners to participate in the planning and delivery of integrated catchment management projects.





## E. The sustainable use and management of land and water for production is supported.

### Priority focus areas:

- Support the voluntary adoption of practices that aim to improve production and the environment including grazing and cropping, soil health and nutrient management programs.
- Strategic land and water use planning supports the community's aspirations for social and economic outcomes whilst maintaining the unique ecology of the catchment.
- Agencies responsible for permitting the use and development of land and water resources are aware of and consider the special features of the catchment in their approvals processes.
- Increase the effectiveness of pest plant and animal control through partnership programs that cross land tenure.
- Support land and water managers to adapt to seasonal climate variability and long-term changes in climate through extension, capacity building and trials.



*Timber plantations and agriculture are important productive landuses in the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment (Photo source: E.Keogh)*

# Strategic Directions

F. Integrated Catchment Management is adaptive and is informed by monitoring, evaluation and investigations.

## Priority focus areas:

- A program of research and investigations addresses key knowledge gaps and informs adaptive planning in the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment.
- Initial priorities for research and investigations include:
  - Improve the understanding of the catchment hydrology and how changes to land use and climate have influenced the ecology and processes in the 'Chain of Ponds', wetlands and terrestrial habitats.
  - Complete mapping and condition assessments of Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands.
  - Continue to build knowledge about the ecology and condition of the 'Chain of Ponds' system (see also Strategic Direction A)
  - Capture the full extent of on-ground works and the current mix of land uses in the catchment through community mapping exercises.
  - Support research into iconic threatened species recorded in the catchment including New Holland Mouse, Dwarf Galaxias, Green and Golden Bell Frog, Gaping Leek-orchid and Prostrate Cone-bush.
- On-ground works programs consider the implications of a drier, warmer and more variable climate in their design and implementation.
- The success of on-ground works programs is reported back to the community and is informed by monitoring and evaluation activities.



*By working together government and community organisations can learn from each other and achieve shared outcomes  
(Photo source: E.Zavadil)*





## G. Collaborative partnerships between government, community, traditional owners and land managers are established and thriving.

### Priority focus areas:

- Provide opportunities for community members to come together with traditional owners and government agencies to share their knowledge and inform the delivery of projects.
- Continue to support a stakeholder reference group that collaborates, identifies and solves problems, and advocates for the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment.
- Support the existing community groups and networks who provide important essential services in the community.

## H. Increased awareness and stewardship of the natural assets of the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment.

### Priority focus areas:

- Work with existing 'care' and agricultural production groups as well as rural service providers and recreational users to build capacity and stewardship for the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment.
- Provide opportunities for landholders and the community to contribute their knowledge to planning and delivery of integrated catchment management projects and citizen science programs.
- Establish a coordinated communications program across agencies and organisations in order to:
  - Actively inform and involve the community about the special features of the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment and how they can make a difference.
  - Raise the profile of the Providence Ponds and Perry River catchment with funding bodies and corporate landowners.

[www.wgcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.wgcma.vic.gov.au)



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*(Photo source: P.Camenzuli)*