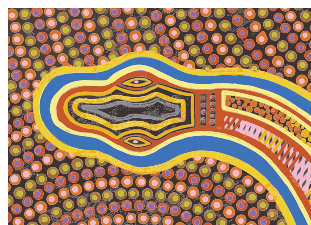




Powlett River / Kugerungmome Catchment  
**Strategic Directions  
Statement**



**POWLETT RIVER /  
KUGERUNGMO  
PARTNERSHIPS**





# Bunurong Traditional Owners

The Traditional Owners of the Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment are the Bunurong people of the Kulin nation who have occupied the area for in excess of 35,000 years. The Bunurong have a deep connection with all aspects of the natural environment including earth, sea, rivers, and sky. The Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation is the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for the area.

The following statement accompanied the Bass Coast Distinctive Area Landscape declaration and provides insight to the significance of the Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment to the Bunurong Traditional Owners (DELWP, 2020).

*We the Bunurong People are the Traditional Custodians of this Country, it's alive with our stories. These sands of the Bass Coast contain the footprints left behind by our ancestors in every cultural way. The responsibility for the Caring of our Country belongs to us as its Custodians. She is our Mother and Bunjil our Father. Our Country has always given us our physical means to flourish and survive, food, water, and air. We are saltwater people, and the rivers that run into the sea are our Country, and where these rivers meet the sea have always been important places to our people.*

*Our Country will continue to preserve us and our values into the future, as we will continue to preserve Our Country and protect our past and persist within these modern spaces. We have been here since the beginning and will be here until the end. These Places hold our Stories, Culture and our Ancestors physically as well as spiritually and it is by the Lore of Bunjil we protect, love, and look after her.*

Kugerungmome is the Bunurong people's Traditional name for the Powlett River catchment. The Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC) have given their permission to use a dual name for this project. We respectfully use the dual name Powlett River / Kugerungmome.

## Purpose

The strategic directions described in this document represent the long-term priorities for the significant natural assets as identified by the stakeholders in the Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment.

Each strategic direction has been identified through a review of the issues in the catchment, consideration of the natural assets and their values and the articulation of the long-term objectives sought for land, water, biodiversity, Traditional Owners and the community.

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



## Artwork 'Kugerungmome'

### The Artist – John Thomas Winch

John was born in Melbourne and taken back to Balranald NSW shortly after his birth. John is descendent from the Mutthi Mutthi, Yorta Yorta and Bunurong tribes from south east Australia.

John is currently a director and senior culture and heritage officer with the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC). He draws his inspiration to paint from the land and waters associated with his home land south east Australia.

**Artwork design and use has been approved by BLCAC.**

### Traditional Owner Acknowledgement

*We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of this country, the Yallock – Bulluk Clan of the Bunurong People, and to their rich culture and spiritual connection to Country. We also acknowledge the contribution and interest of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in natural resource management and pay respects to Elders, past, present and emerging.*





## The Powlett River / Kugerungmome Catchment

The Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment, including the waterways and the associated land, biodiversity, and coastal and marine assets, is of major cultural significance to the Traditional Owners the Bunurong people, represented by Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

The Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment extends from Korumburra to Wonthaggi from the hills to the coastal plain (Figure 1). The Powlett River originates on the southern slopes of the Strzelecki Ranges flowing in a southwest direction and discharging to Bass Strait via an intermittently closed estuary system. The surrounding catchment has a mild climate, with high annual rainfall.

The catchment incorporates parts of Bass Coast and South Gippsland Shire Councils. Urban and built-up areas make up 1.7% of the catchment area, and include the townships of Wonthaggi, Korumburra and smaller localities of Jumbunna, Kongwak, Outtrim, Wattlebank and Dalyston (Figure 2).

Water is an important resource in the catchment supporting agriculture, domestic and urban consumption, and the environment. Soil and land assets are highly valued for supporting agricultural production. Whilst the soil is susceptible to acidity, it is largely intact and meets desired land use requirements under appropriate management. Upper reaches of the catchment can be subject to erosion.

The catchment was once heavily forested and was almost entirely cleared for farming in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Some areas of fragmented native vegetation remain, mostly along the waterways, coast, estuary and around Wonthaggi.

Coastal and inland reserves including the new Yallock Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park support an array of diverse native flora and fauna, including threatened species such as Eastern Spider-orchid, Swamp Antechinus and Hooded Plover. A further 46 ha is permanently protected on private land through Trust for Nature covenants. There are also areas of Crown water frontage along parts of the Powlett River and its tributaries and an extensive network of road reserves.

The Powlett River estuary is listed on the Directory of Important Wetlands Australia due to its diverse range of birds, plants, and fish communities, including many listed threatened and endangered species, as well as its extensive saltmarsh and wetland communities and cultural heritage values.

Community interest in land, water and biodiversity management in the catchment is high with a strong history of collaboration on waterway, biodiversity, and coastal projects. The Powlett Project was established in 1996 as part of the Bass Coast Landcare Network and covers the five landcare groups in the Powlett catchment. In that time the project has put 1,630,000 plants in the ground. Other active groups in the area include the South Gippsland Conservation Society, the friends of Wonthaggi Heathland & Coastal Reserve, Wonthaggi Seedbank and Nursery and Bass Coast BirdLife.

## Catchment Collaboration

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 Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment including (in alphabetical order).

- Agriculture Victoria
- Bass Coast Landcare Network
- Bass Coast Shire Council
- Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Community representatives
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)
- GippsDairy
- Parks Victoria
- South Gippsland Shire Council
- South Gippsland Water
- Trust for Nature
- West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

The process of developing the Powlett River / Kugerungmome Catchment Strategic Directions Statement collaboratively with a Stakeholder Reference Group has resulted in a shared understanding of the concerns of Traditional Owners, agencies and community members.

## Implementing the priorities

The initial focus for implementation has been identified through a project prioritisation process. Funding from the Our Catchments, Our Communities initiative for the period 2021-2024 has been made available for this purpose and a project plan was finalised in December 2021.

The Strategic Directions Statement represents a commitment by key stakeholders to work together to seek support and additional funding to address the priority issues.

*Pictured: Aerial view of revegetation in the Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment (source: WGCMA)*



## Catchment Snapshot

- ▶ The Powlett River is approximately 63km in length has six main tributaries, Woolshed, Bridge, Archie's, West, Lance, and Foster Creeks.
- ▶ The catchment was almost entirely cleared for farming in the late 19th and early 20th Century. Native vegetation accounts for only 3.2% of the catchment area. Much of this is highly fragmented and in moderate to poor condition.
- ▶ The catchment supports a range of threatened and iconic fauna species such as the Strzelecki Koala, Giant Gippsland Earthworm, Platypus, Swamp Antechinus and Hooded Plover.
- ▶ There are 17 ecological vegetation communities in the catchment and a number of species and communities listed as threatened under legislation.
- ▶ The main vegetation types include damp forest and wet forest, lowland forest, and swamp scrub whilst on the coast there are mosaics of woodlands, grasslands and heathlands.
- ▶ Grazing is the major landuse in the catchment making up 90% of the catchment area, a further 2.9% is used for irrigated horticulture.
- ▶ The major agricultural commodities include dairy, beef, and vegetables.
- ▶ The major centres of Wonthaggi (population 10,090) and Korumburra (population 4,788) are on a growth trajectory.
- ▶ Lance Creek Reservoir services the townships of Wonthaggi, Inverloch, Cape Paterson, Korumburra, Poowong, Loch and Nyora and is the single largest water storage managed by South Gippsland Water (SGW).
- ▶ The Powlett River estuary is listed on the Directory of Important Wetlands Australia and is recognised for its outstanding environmental, social and cultural values.
- ▶ Approximately 1791 ha of the catchment is permanently protected in a park or reserve<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> This includes the State Coal Mine Reserve and Wonthaggi Rail Reserves which are not classified as protected areas under IUCN categorization. Crown water frontages and council parks and reserves are not included in this figure.

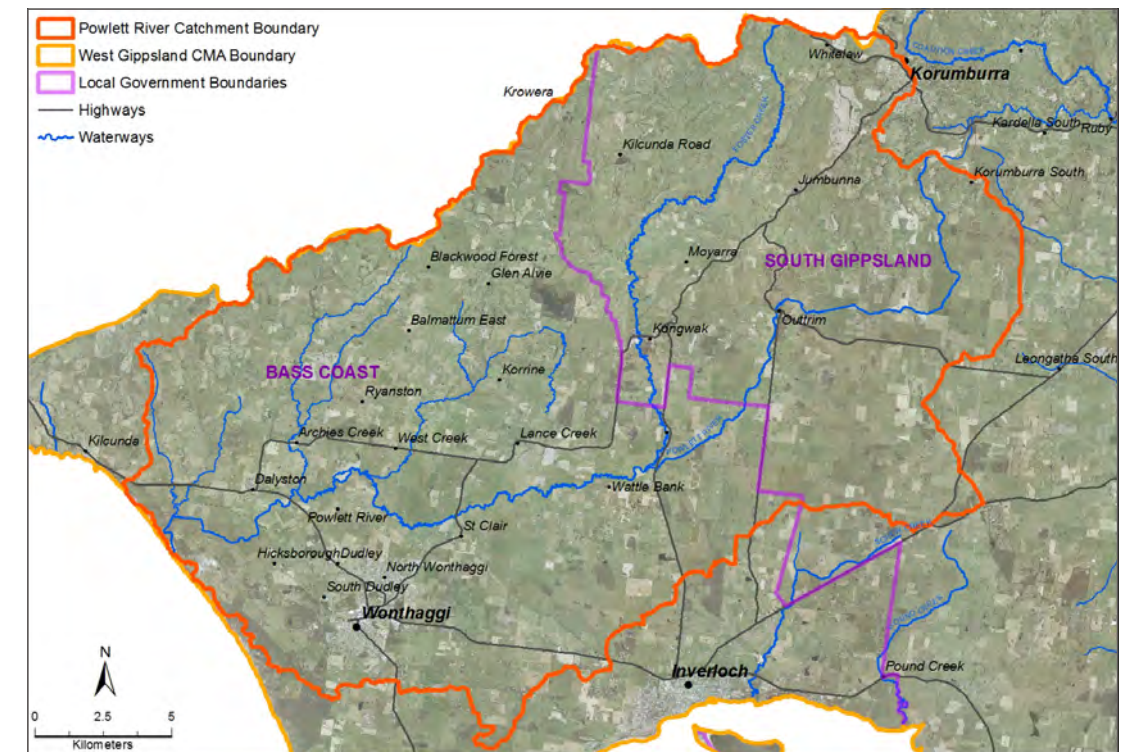


Figure 1. Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment with local government and Catchment Management Authority boundaries

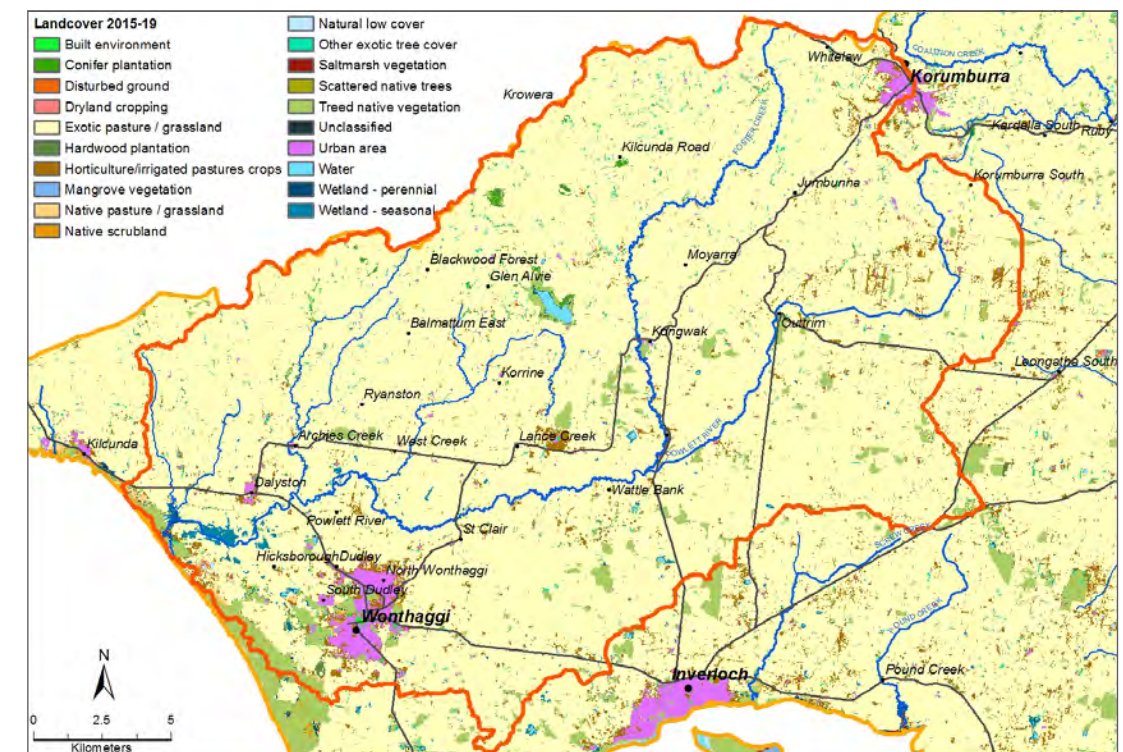


Figure 2. Landcover land use for the Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment 2015-19





## Vision and Strategic Directions

### Vision for the Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment:

*Bunurong Traditional Owners work side by side with agencies, landholders and the community to protect and restore their Country. Across the landscape native vegetation extends along waterways and the estuary, connecting with the coastal woodlands and forest remnants. The diverse ecosystems are functioning well and continue to support their iconic natural, cultural and social values. The catchment is productive and sustainable; with agriculture, a reliable supply of water and tourism supporting the local economy. Urban growth is well planned and respectful of the landscape context and climate change impacts are understood and managed. Catchment stewardship ensures our natural resources are left in a better condition for future generations.*

A set of eleven priority strategic directions have been identified by the Stakeholder Reference Group.

The strategic directions set out the long-term objectives for Integrated Catchment Management in the Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment. Each strategic direction has a list of priority focus areas, which are the activities that are recommended to make the most significant and enduring contribution to long-term outcomes in catchment. Accompanying the Strategic Directions Statement will be a prospectus of priority and costed projects that have been identified as the best candidates for future investment.

#### 1. Protect and rehabilitate the riparian areas of the Powlett River and its tributaries

##### Priority actions:

- Establish riparian native vegetation buffers along the Powlett River and tributaries and fence to exclude / manage stock access.
- Maintain past waterway health works and work with landholders to ensure they meet their obligations.
- Undertake works to improve fish passage in the Powlett River.

#### 2. Protect and enhance the environmental, social and cultural values and associated ecosystem processes in the Powlett River estuary

##### Priority actions:

- Implement the priority actions outlined in the Powlett Estuary Management Plan to maintain and improve estuarine condition and values.
- Investigate the sources and implement actions to reduce threats from poor water quality in the catchment.
- Investigate opportunities to modify releases under the annual watering plan for the Wonthaggi-Inverloch Bulk Entitlement.
- Continue to work with landholders and the government to pursue options to alleviate the need for artificial estuary openings.

#### 3. Protect and enhance habitat for threatened fauna and flora species to maximise conservation outcomes

##### Priority actions

- Protect Giant Gippsland Earthworm habitat including through buffering and measures to address soil compaction and physical disturbance.
- Protect and revegetate coastal, wetland and riparian vegetation including through permanent protection on private land.
- Undertake integrated European Fox and feral cat control programs, with a focus on estuary and coastal habitats.
- Control and manage the impact of transformer weeds<sup>2</sup> and invasive native shrubs (e.g., Coast tea-tree in the Wonthaggi heathlands), including use of appropriate ecological burning.
- Manage the impacts of recreation and disturbance on sensitive species and habitats from human activity through compliance, infrastructure and signage.
- Raise awareness of threatened species and the actions that members of the community can take to protect and enhance them.

#### 4. Protect and enhance remnant vegetation on public and private land including hollow bearing trees

##### Priority actions:

- Improve the condition of remaining fragmented habitats through control of 'transformer' weeds and invasive native vegetation, supplementary planting and exclusion fencing where appropriate.
- Encourage the retention of large hollow-bearing trees as significant habitat features for native fauna.

#### 5. Improve habitat connectivity between key areas of native vegetation (including riparian) on private and public land

##### Priority actions:

- Establish strategic buffers and biolinks that connect fragmented habitat through targeted revegetation and remnant enhancement projects.

<sup>2</sup> A 'transformer weed' is an invasive plant species that has the capacity to change the character, condition, form or nature of one or more ecosystems over substantial areas relative to the extent of that ecosystem.





## 6. Support the sustainable use of land and water resources for agricultural production

### Priority actions:

- Support farmers to adopt management practices that maintain sufficient ground cover (>70%), manage acidity and minimise off-farm nutrient and sediment losses.
- Provide extension and planning support for farmers to be more profitable through improved soil and nutrient management.
- Support farmers with information and tools to enable them to prepare for and respond to extreme events and climate change.

## 7. Reduce the impacts of urban and peri-urban development on environmental, social and cultural values

### Priority actions:

- Support implementation of planning measures as outlined in the Bass Coast Distinctive Area Landscapes.
- Implement priority Integrated Water Management projects that improve water quality and provide additional community benefits (e.g., recreation and amenity).
- Support community led projects that improve amenity and recreation opportunities whilst protecting environmental values in and around township areas.

## 8. Ensure Lance Creek Reservoir provides sufficient quantity and quality of water for human consumption

### Priority actions:

- Protect and enhance riparian areas upstream of Lance Creek Reservoir to minimise nutrient and sediment inputs.
- Investigate and implement options to augment water supply and improve water security through the Urban Water Supply Strategy.
- Investigate and implement the most cost-effective solutions to reduce the risk of blue green algal blooms in Lance Creek Reservoir (e.g. catchment works and/or technical solutions).

## 9. Empower Bunurong Traditional Owners to manage land and sea Country according to their aspirations, principles and priorities

### Priority actions:

- Support Bunurong Traditional Owners to assess Cultural health of their Country at a local and landscape scale and identify priorities for action.
- Support Bunurong Traditional Owners to identify and implement their priorities for Country, including development of Whole of Country Plan.

## 10. Take a collaborative approach to the planning, delivery and evaluation of ICM projects

### Priority actions:

- Provide opportunities for community members to come together with Traditional Owners and government agencies to share their knowledge and inform the delivery and adaptive management of projects.
- Continue to support a stakeholder reference group that collaborates, identifies and solves problems, and advocates for the Powlett River / Kugerungmome catchment.
- Work together to attract and secure funding for the implementation of agreed priorities.
- Support the existing community groups and networks in the catchment to deliver on-ground works and citizen science activities.

## 11. Incorporate climate change adaptation and mitigation into the planning and delivery of ICM projects

### Priority actions:

- Support land and water managers to adapt to seasonal climate variability and long-term changes in climate through extension, capacity building and trials.
- Identify opportunities to establish strategic biodiversity plantings that optimise carbon sequestration outcomes.
- Utilise latest climate change modelling, data and research to inform project design and delivery.
- Include analysis of whether natural assets or ecosystems have the capacity to persist, transition or transform entirely in response to climate change in project design, planning and delivery.





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