

Water for the environment in West Gippsland - why it matters



West Gippsland
Catchment Management Authority

What are the benefits?

Water for the environment helps restore more natural flows to help rivers and wetlands.

Water for the environment – also called environmental flows – is used to:



Help native fish to breed, feed and move, and increase their numbers



Increase the range and numbers of platypus and rakali (water rat)



Help riverbank and aquatic vegetation



Improve the stability of riverbanks and riverbed



Enhance conditions for waterbird breeding, foraging and sheltering



Avoid poor water quality conditions (like high salinity or blue green algae)

Water for the environment benefits everyone:

- Flows also provide improved conditions for fishing, camping and canoeing.
- Cleaner water has economic benefits for town drinking water supplies, irrigators and stock.
- Restoring natural flows can enhance cultural values of waterways.

Why do we need it?

Our rivers are the lifeblood of our towns and communities, carrying water for people, farms and the environment. Healthy and connected rivers are essential for healthy people, healthy communities and healthy local economies.

But our rivers and wetlands have changed. The construction of dams to provide a more reliable water supply for people has disrupted the natural flow cycles needed for healthy waterways. Some of our rivers give up more than a third – and sometimes half – of their water. When it rains, river systems no longer get their natural seasonal flushes. Since European settlement, we've lost a third of freshwater wetlands.

Gippsland rivers were once some of the most productive fisheries in Victoria. But, as many native fish rely on seasonal flows to signal that it's time to migrate or spawn, the disrupted flow patterns have affected fish populations.

Water for the environment helps to keep the environment going between big drinks. It's one of the tools we use to help support rivers systems and wetlands to survive and thrive, for the benefit of all.



Platypus. Photo: Doug Gimesy

Where does it go?

Water for the environment is a share of water allocated for the environment, usually held in dams and storages. It's used to target specific outcomes for fish, animals and plants by releasing the right amount of water from the storages, at the right time, to help them feed, breed and grow.

Water for the environment is managed very carefully using the best available science, community information and other expert knowledge to get the most efficient use of our limited water. It supports waterways in times of stress, making sure that local species are protected.

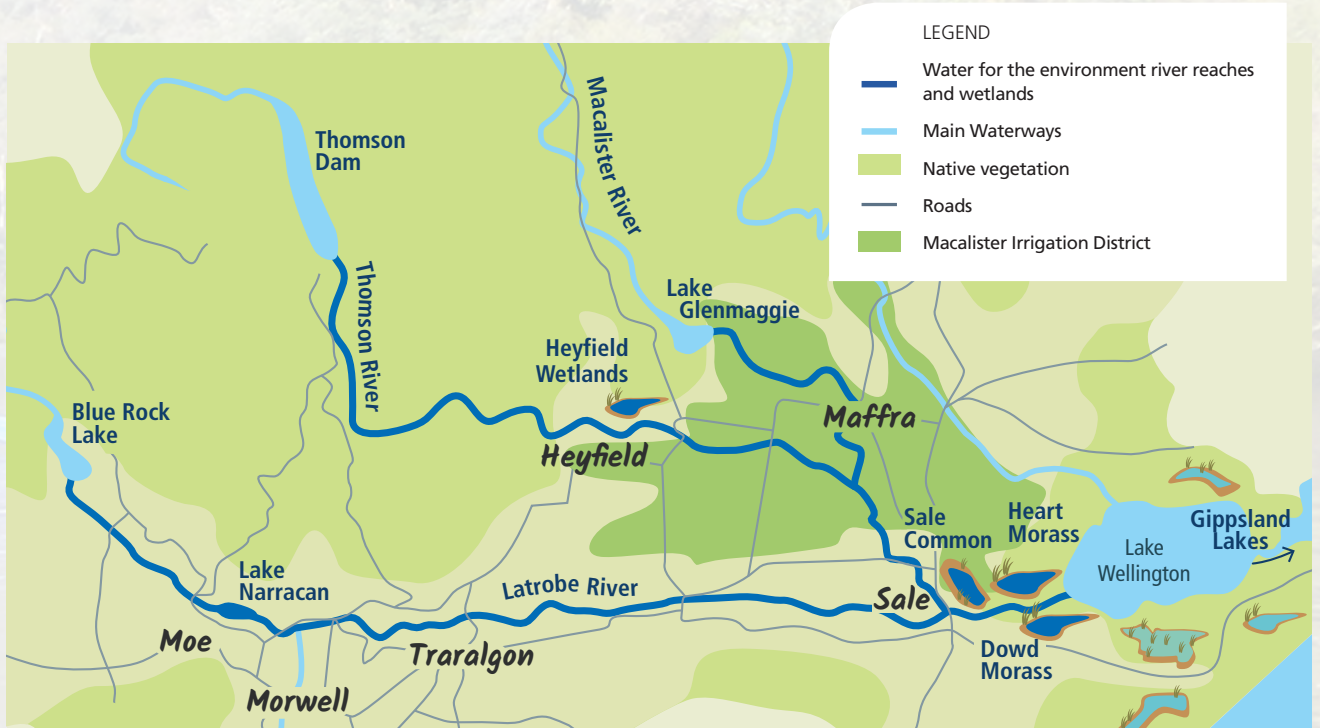
Environmental flows are actively delivered in the Latrobe, Thomson and Macalister Rivers and to wetlands including the Lower Latrobe Wetlands:



Australian grayling, a threatened native fish. Photo: Tarmo A. Raadik

What about rivers without dams?

For rivers that don't have dams (unregulated systems), **water for the environment** is important too. In these systems, it refers to the environment's share of water, that isn't allowed to be taken out for other uses.



Want to find out more?

For more information on what we're achieving with water for the environment

Visit: www.wgcma.vic.gov.au/our-region/waterways/current-environmental-water-releases

Contact: Water for the Environment Team on telephone 1300 094 262 or email eflows@wgcma.vic.gov.au

The WGCMA recognises the Traditional Owners of this region: the Gunaikurnai, the Bunurong / Boon Wurrung and the Wurundjeri.

Heart Morass. Photo: WGCMA



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