

What do West Gippslanders think of water for the environment?

Water for the environment stakeholder research

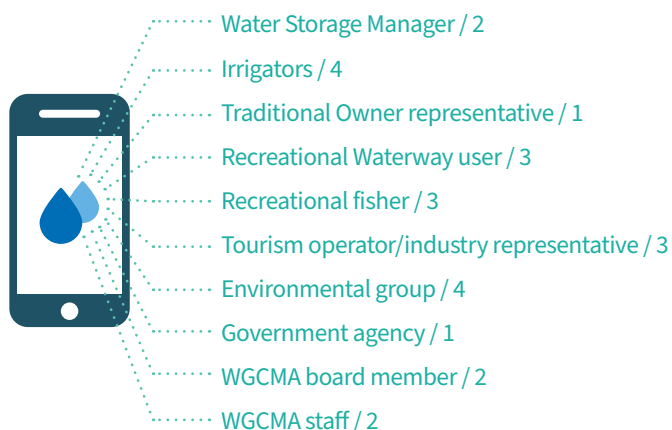
In 2023, we asked people in West Gippsland about their views on water for the environment. Through targeted interviews and an online survey, we asked how they value and use rivers and wetlands, their views and understanding about water for the environment, and how they want to work with West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (CMA). We compared the results with surveys completed in 2018. Here are the key findings.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of this Country, the Gunaikurnai, and to their rich culture and spiritual connection to Country.

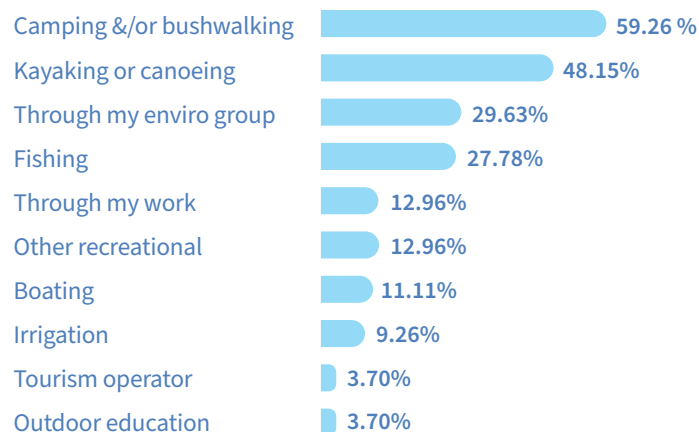
Who did we talk to in 2023?

Phone interviews with 25 people (representing similar interest groups to 2018)

Online survey with 57 respondents, mostly recreational users (similar numbers to 2018)



How do you use rivers in our region?



What did we hear?

There is an **increased level of trust** in the way that West Gippsland CMA manages water for the environment.

- ▶ **Level of trust 2023:**
86% of interviewees rated us 8 out of 10 or above
- ▶ **Level of trust 2018:**
53% of interviewees rated us 8 out of 10 or above

The **level of support** for water for the environment in West Gippsland has remained high.

- ▶ **2023 average:** 8.6/10
- ▶ **2018 average:** 9/10

'It is powerful when people are involved in making decisions about the flow.'

'Being on the EWAG (Environmental Water Advisory Group) I see what they do, they are very capable of managing water and including farmers.'

'We need to look after the health of our rivers.'

'Water for the environment is important for supporting the rivers ecological processes and the wildlife that live within these systems.'

'Water used for wetlands is important for the health of our environment. Wetlands are our heartlands, they're also one of the best carbon capture technologies.'



What do West Gippslanders think of water for the environment?



It was interesting to note that 24% of interviewees said that **farmers do not support** water for the environment,



yet all irrigation farmers interviewed were in **strong support** of the need for the allocation of water for the environment.

'There is still some opinion around that farmers don't care about the environment and take all the water, it is becoming a minority view now.'

'As a farmer I believe strongly in water for the environment. The environment and farming depend on each other, it's symbiotic, one benefits the other.'

Lots of positive benefits of water for the environment were identified. Most people also thought that these could be communicated better to a broader audience.

Benefits included:

- ▶ Environmental benefits
- ▶ Healthy rivers, wetlands, lakes
- ▶ Benefits for fish
- ▶ Water quality improvements
- ▶ Recreation
- ▶ Vegetation benefits
- ▶ Community awareness, health and wellbeing
- ▶ Things look better
- ▶ A positive for farmers (who help the river)

Cultural benefits for Traditional Owners were identified as positives, these were not mentioned in 2018.

These included:

- ▶ Looking after and healing Country
- ▶ Uplift for Traditional Owners
- ▶ Cultural water values

'A path for reconciliation, looking after Country.'

'An improvement in community knowledge and understanding of environment from a TO (Traditional Owner) perspective. The return of cultural flows has a psychological impact, it's a starting point for TO's to contribute to the environment.'

What will we do next?

Overall, the research highlighted areas where we're having success, as well as feedback on where we can improve. It gave us valuable insight into community interests and offered a range of new ideas. We'll use this feedback to keep improving the way we work with our partners and the community as well as how we communicate information about water for the environment.

Some of the ideas that we're taking on board:

- We'll focus on making information more accessible and relevant.
- We will work to change misconceptions by sharing case studies and scientific research.
- We'll keep working closely with our delivery partners, interested landholders, community members and interest groups to make sure that water for the environment is delivered in the best way to provide as many benefits as possible.
- We'll work with fishing, tourism and environmental groups who are keen to learn and distribute information and facts about water for the environment.
- We'll keep working in partnership with Traditional Owners to build their cultural aspirations into river management.

To find out more please visit:
wgma.vic.gov.au/explore-the-catchment/water-for-the-environment

If you would like a presentation about water for the environment or for more information to share with your group, please email eflows@wgma.vic.gov.au or call 1300 094 262.

