WEST GIPPSLAND CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Our Achievements

2024

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of the region, the Gunaikurnai, the Bunurong, the Boonwurrung and the Wurundjeri peoples, their rich culture and spiritual connection to Country. We also acknowledge the responsibility of First Peoples to care for Country and pay respects to Elders, past, present and emerging.







Reflections from the Chair



This was a busy fulfilling year as we concluded works delivered under the fifth tranche of the Environmental Contribution Levy (EC5) and Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

We focused efforts on initiatives in Corner Inlet, on the flagship Agnes and Carran Carran (Thomson) rivers and delivering sustainable irrigation programs.

We provided catchment management advice around the considerable shift in the

region's energy industry. A key highlight was telling the story of Durt'Yowan (Latrobe River) through a short film. We also celebrated our partnership with Vic Catchments winning the Nature Positive category in the 35th National Banksia Sustainability Awards.

We delivered 96% of actions in our annual Action Plan and also developed our exciting new Strategic Plan 2024-2029 in partnership with the management team and Board.

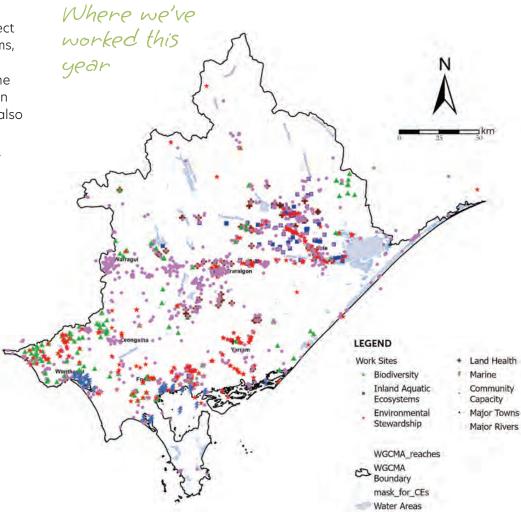
We proudly continued to deliver on West Gippsland's fourth Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) and the Regional Waterway Strategy.

Together with our partners, we achieved 127 hectares of weed control, 194 hectares of vegetation enhancement and 62 hectares set to benefit from whole farm, irrigation and soil erosion management plans and 490 megalitres of farm water saving measures.

We're extremely proud of this snapshot of achievements that reflect the diversity of programs, initiatives and results we deliver funded by the Victorian and Australian governments. You can also follow our story at www.wgcma.vic.gov.au

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Mikaela Power Board Chair



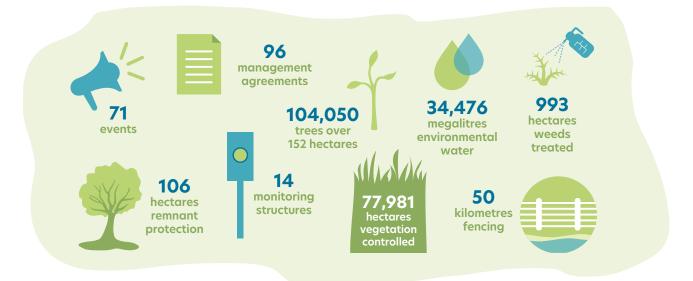
Cover image: Planting for flood recovery and resilience on Wirn Wirndook Yeerung (Macalister River).

2024 - a year of catchment health

Together with Traditional Owners, partners, volunteers and community we are working towards our shared vision of Catchment Health Gippsland's Wealth...

Major achievements

Notable outputs delivered throughout the year include:



Ongoing flood and storm recovery

In June 2021, there was widespread storm damage across Gippsland and flooding in a number of catchments. Over the last three years, we assessed damage and implemented repair works across the catchment via a comprehensive flood recovery program. This year we completed the program that achieved many outcomes:



Protecting waterways

Working with private and public land managers to protect waterways is our key role. By fencing, revegetating and controlling weeds we can reduce sediment and nutrients in waterways, increase resilience, improve bed and bank stability and help prevent flood damage. In turn, this contributes to improving overall catchment health.

West Gippsland has two Flagship Waterways – Corner Inlet (Agnes) and Carran Carran (Thomson)/Rainbow Creek between Cowwarr Weir and Wirn wirndook Yeerung (Macalister River) confluence. The Corner Inlet (Agnes River) project aims to fence off and revegetate 100% of the main stem. The Thomson/Rainbow Creek project aims to complete a natural riparian corridor from the Gippsland Lakes to the Alps and address future avulsion risks of Rainbow Creek.

Water for the environment is an important part of improving river and wetland health in Gippsland. This year, due to the higher-than-average rainfall and high flows, 34.5 gigalitres of water for the environment was released into the Carran Carran (Thomson), Wirn wirndook Yeerung (Macalister) and Durt'Yowan (Latrobe) Rivers. This water is critical for native plants, fish and other animals.

We are thrilled to continue connecting waterways in the region with the fishway at Maffra Weir under development and establishment of environmental watering infrastructure at the lower Latrobe Wetlands as well as seeing the iconic Thomson Fishway at Horseshoe Bend now fully functional.

Waterway achievements

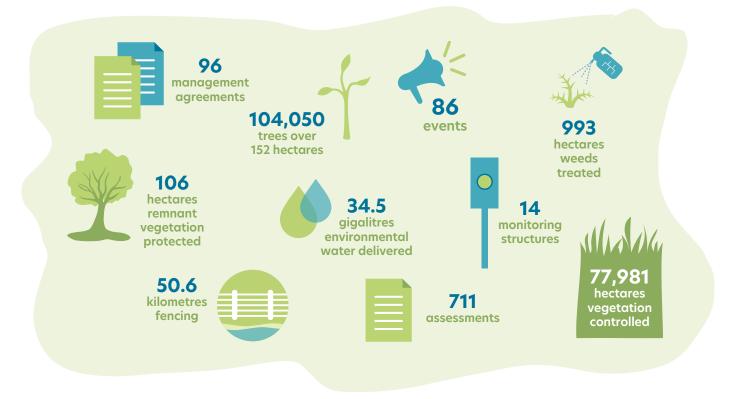
Works focussed on creating valuable wildlife habitat and building waterway resilience.

Project partners

Australian Government, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), Gippsland Lakes Coordinating Committee (GLCC), landholders and Landcare networks, Parks Victoria, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC), GippsDairy, Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH)

Funding

This project is funded primarily by the Victorian Government - Victorian Water Program Investment Framework (Environmental Contribution Levy Tranche 5) and the GLCC



"A major highlight was fencing a two kilometre stretch to provide a wide buffer for revegetation to restore this young waterway and give it a bright future for people, wildlife and the environment."

David Stork, Waterways Officer for the CMA

Future shines bright for Rainbow Creek

The Carran Carran (Thomson River) is a flagship waterway for West Gippsland CMA who are working on a long-term restoration project to improve habitat connectivity along the river from the Victorian Alps to the Gippsland Lakes.

Flowing off the Carran Carran is Rainbow Creek, a short but significant waterway with a long and rich history that presents unique challenges and opportunities.

"In the 1950s a flood caused the Carran Carran to 'jump' its course and carve a new channel through surrounding floodplains creating Rainbow Creek and cutting farming land in half," explains David Stork, Waterways Officer for the CMA.

In response, the weir at Cowwarr was constructed to keep the river flowing down its original course, manage flows to the Rainbow and provide irrigation for Macalister Irrigation District.

"Rainbow Creek runs from Cowwarr to Heyfield, and is really where the Carran Carran still wants to flow. In floods, there is risk of avulsion (where a waterway creates a new path) meaning it could jump course again and cut a new channel through farmland, disrupting agriculture and the local community, like it did the 1950s. This would have major environmental impacts due to large amounts of sediment and silts that would flow into waterways and ultimately the Gippsland Lakes."

"For the past four years, we've been delivering the Thomson and Rainbow Management Plan to manage this avulsion risk and improve waterway health. The community has been instrumental in this process with a panel helping to shape the original plan and supporting the delivery of recommended actions including treating hotspots where the river is most likely to form new channels through armouring the banks, removing willows, fencing, weed control and planting along the riverbanks to restore native habitat."

In 2023-24, we worked with landholders to plant 3,800 trees over two hectares and treat 10 hectares of weeds.

Like rivers carving their course, works on the Rainbow and Thomson are long term and the CMA team is looking forward to seeing results of works to date, and continuing the process to improve connectivity between the Victorian Alps and the Gippsland Lakes for the benefit of the community, environment and catchment.

Caring for coasts

Where the rivers run into the sea, West Gippsland's marine and coastal environment extends from San Remo in the west to opposite Lakes Entrance in the east. The area features the precious Ramsar-listed wetlands of Corner Inlet, Nooramunga and the Gippsland Lakes, several marine protected areas including the newly established Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park and over 20 estuaries.

Much of the region's 623 kilometres of coastline is protected by coastal reserve, marine reserves and Wilsons Promontory National Park, however, there are significant stretches with agriculture and urban development close to the coast, important lakes and estuaries.

Coastal achievements

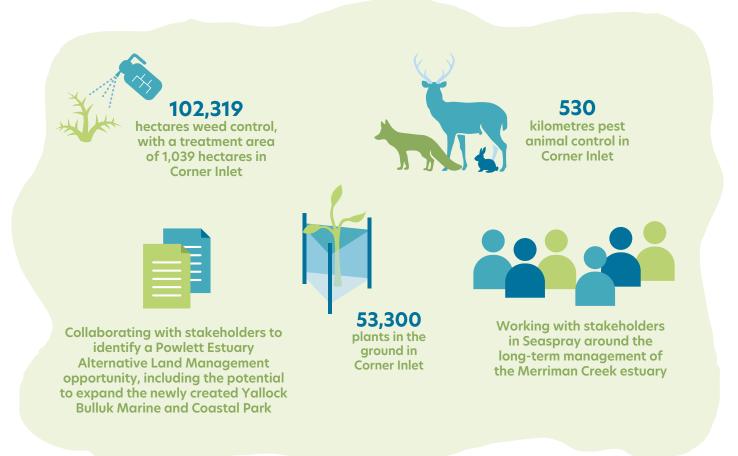
Works focussed on increasing critical breeding habitat, improving biodiversity and protecting, enhancing and improving the management and understanding of estuaries.

Project partners

Australian Government, Victorian Government, Landcare networks, Parks Victoria, Local Government, GLaWAC, BLCAC, Trust for Nature, BirdLife Australia, volunteers, local fishers and farmers

Funding

Victorian Government - Victorian Water Program Investment Framework (Environmental Contribution Levy Tranche 5), the GLCC, This project is funded by the Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust and delivered by West Gippsland CMA, a member of the Commonwealth Regional Delivery Partners panel (RDP), Victorian Landcare Grants



"Ongoing bird monitoring helps to raise community awareness of the birds' plight so we can work together as a community to protect these special species."

Tanya Cowell, Waterways Project Officer, West Gippsland CMA

Protecting precious coastlines

Working to enhance and protect world renowned Corner Inlet has been a team effort led by West Gippsland CMA that has so far spanned decades. We start in the upper reaches of the rivers that flow into the inlet and works follow their course to the coast.

The precious Ramsar wetland is a recognised haven for migratory and resident shorebirds made up of extensive saltmarsh, seagrass meadows, unique intertidal mudflats and white mangrove (Avicennia marina) - the world's most southerly distribution of this species.

"This consistent and sustained effort is definitely paying off," said Tanya Cowell, Waterways Project Officer for West Gippsland CMA.

"Everyone plays their part – like along the flagship Agnes River where we are extremely proud of the dedicated landholders and passionate Landcare volunteers who have largely driven the works."

In 2023-24, 11 landholder management agreements were signed to complete 45 hectares of weed control, put 53,300 plants in the ground across 91 hectares and fence 16 kilometres of the river in partnership with Corner Inlet Landcare Group and Greening Australia.

Down at the inlet, the first of a five-year Corner Inlet Connections project is being delivered in partnership with Parks Victoria, GLaWAC, Trust for Nature and BirdLife Australia. "In this first year, the focus has been to protect the area's Ramsar values including treating spartina, controlling foxes to protect shorebirds, improving water quality, and safeguarding 136 hectares of saltmarsh including a 25 hectare Trust for Nature covenant.

In total, weed control has covered over the entire Corner Inlet Ramsar Site of 67,000 hectares with 530 hectares of pest animal control. Water monitoring equipment will help us measure results of our efforts across the catchment."

Summer and winter shorebird counts provide crucial information to ensure the Ramsar values and levels of acceptable change for key species are maintained based on international Ramsar guidelines.

BirdLife Australia teams undertook shorebird counts and also monitored the breeding success and health of key species of beach nesting birds such as Hooded Plovers, Pied Oystercatchers and Crested, Caspian and Fairy terns.

This ongoing monitoring is crucial to understanding the bird populations and threats they face. This can then guide effective fox and weed control and assist in community education about the effects of off leash dogs and nest disturbance.

Enhancing biodiversity

West Gippsland is a wonderland of large and diverse areas of high biodiversity value featuring many national and marine national parks, Ramsar sites and endangered and threatened ecological communities. The region also faces a range of biodiversity challenges including fragmentation of remnant vegetation, reduced extent and condition of biodiversity, threats from invasive plants and animals and urban development.

This was the first of a five-year partnership funded by the Australian Government to implement actions to support the recovery of the Eastern Hooded Plover (Thinornis rubricollis rubricollis), as identified in the Threatened Species Action Plan, recovery plans and approved conservation advice. This project will improve the trajectory of Hooded Plover populations by implementing pest control activities, temporarily installing protective enclosures and signage at nesting sites at risk and conduct targeted community and volunteer engagement.

It also marked year one of the five-year Corner Inlet Connections project, funded by the Australian Government to build on over 15 years of achievements through this partnership approach.

Willow infestations in the upper reaches of the Wirn wirndook Yeerung (Macalister), Avon, Carran Carran (Thompson) and Corner Inlet catchments were targeted as part of a four-year program.

We once again delivered Victorian Landcare Grants for West Gippsland.

We also supported Biodiversity 2037 and initiatives undertaken by partners including Landcare, local government, Parks Victoria and DEECA.

Biodiversity achievements

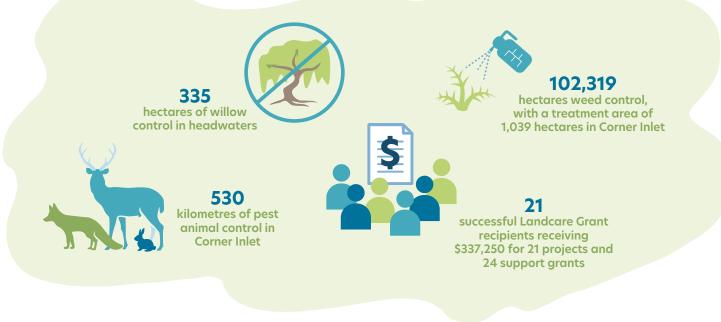
Key biodiversity projects tackled key threats and worked with partners and community to protect the region's significant value through improving water quality and improving habitat.

Project partners

Australian Government, Victorian Government, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Landcare networks, local government, Parks Victoria, DEECA, GLaWAC, BLCAC, BirdLife Australia

Funding

This project is funded by the Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust and delivered by West Gippsland CMA, a member of the Commonwealth RDP panel, Victorian Government -Victorian Water Program Investment Framework (Environmental Contribution Levy Tranche 5), Victorian Landcare Grants





"Over 95% of the weed has now been removed through the spraying program."

West Gippsland CMA Project Delivery Officer, Richard Allen

Biodiversity the winner in war on weeds

Corner Inlet wetland is a biodiversity hotspot. For many years, West Gippsland CMA and partners have been working together to target the pest animals and plants that threaten the rich biodiversity of this precious landscape.

A key threat is the weed Spartina. If uncontrolled, the invasive weed mats and spreads and threatens the integrity of the Ramsar Wetland.

Also known as Rice Grass or Cordgrass, Spartina was introduced in the 1920s and has since become aggressively invasive, competing with indigenous plants, degrading waterbird and fish habitats and restricting waterways.

"Spartina infestation is a major threat to coastal environments," said Martin Fuller, West Gippsland CMA's Chief Executive Officer.

"Tackling such a widespread infestation has required a consistent and sustained effort involving multiple partners - all dedicated to restoring and maintaining the inlet's natural values," explains Martin.

"Our strong partnership with Parks Victoria ensures land, estuary and coastal public lands are able to be treated for Spartina."

Aerial control involves a helicopter with a snorkel attachment targetting intertidal areas and ground control measures are also used.

"The Spartina control program complements the work we're doing with farmers and landowners in coastal areas to fence and revegetate, control erosion and protect saltmarsh," Martin said.

"It helps improve natural estuary habitat for important fish populations, allows vital plant species to re-establish and improves the feeding and breeding sites for local birds and internationally significant migratory species."

Along with reducing the weed, monitoring has continued to be an important tool to understand how the plant is responding to treatment and provides a real time and structured approach to gather data and plan future spraying and control operations.

In 2023-24 weed control covered the entire 67,000 hectares of Corner Inlet Ramsar Site, including air and ground treatments.

"This year we have had the best results to date - all from hitting it continuously," said West Gippsland CMA Project Delivery Officer, Richard Allen, who has been involved in the program for over a decade.

"We can start to say that we are getting on top of this weed," concluded Richard.

Supporting sustainable agriculture

Working with and supporting farmers is fundamental for productive and sustainable farming systems, achieving healthy waterways and increasing and connecting native vegetation cover. We continued to undertake activities to address threats to land health, with a focus on the Macalister Irrigation District (MID) and Corner Inlet.

Working with partners we helped to develop soil management plans, demonstration sites, management programs, whole farm plans and onground activities designed to retain nutrients on farm and encourage efficient water use.

These activities are complemented by the waterway health program, environmental stewardship, and community capacity to support natural resource management outcomes and tackle the effects of a changing climate together.

The renewal of the Lake Wellington Land and Water Management Plan was finalised in 2019-20 and provides a ten-year vision for sustainable irrigation and water management in the Lake Wellington catchment. This year the program contributed significant efficiencies and water savings and promoted innovation.

Achievements in agriculture

Sustainable farming practice and innovations mean healthier waterways:

Project partners

Landholders, Landcare networks, Southern Rural Water, DEECA, Agriculture Victoria, Dairy Australia, GippsDairy

Funding

State Government Victorian Water Programs Investment Framework – Sustainable Irrigation Program



The Sustainable Irrigation Program delivered 33 new or updated irrigation farm plans which will influence 2,806 hectares of land in the Macalister Irrigation District There were 22 on-farm irrigation efficiency projects completed covering an area of 767 hectares, providing estimated water savings of over 1,535 megalitres each year and 7 re-use systems – with savings of 523 megalitres "These farmers are paving the way for sustainable irrigation by trialling technology that will lead to better on-farm productivity, improved water quality in waterways and less greenhouse emissions from irrigated agriculture."

Land Programs Coordinator with West Gippsland CMA, Anthony Goode

Showcasing Gippsland's innovative irrigators

West Gippsland CMA, in partnership with Agriculture Victoria, supported four irrigators in central Gippsland to trial innovative irrigation and nutrient management practices that boost farm productivity while improving the environment.

"We partnered with irrigators to help tackle some of the region's greatest challenges like maximising water use efficiency and improving nutrient management." said Land Programs Coordinator with West Gippsland CMA, Anthony Goode.

The four trial projects include the use of variable rate irrigation (VRI) technology to optimise irrigation, expanding dairy effluent application through a pipe and riser system, installing a self-cleaning effluent pump to reduce blockages in pivot irrigators and smart sprinkler controls powered by solar energy.

James Clyne trialled variable rate irrigation (VRI) technology to optimise water use and increase pasture on a dairy farm with challenging terrain.

James' 300-hectare farm at Newry features low-lying pockets of land that are prone to waterlogging, rendering them unproductive for pasture and potentially hazardous for the herd. By installing VRI technology to an existing pivot irrigator, James has optimised irrigation to suit the varying terrain and soil profiles of his paddocks. This benefits his pasture and the health of the herd while also increasing water-use efficiency, reducing runoff and improving nutrient retention on the farm.

"We've noticed an increase in water use efficiency by 20%," said James. "I would recommend this technology to anyone with a pivot. There are always areas getting underwatered or overwatered and this technology just instantly helps with that."

All four demonstration trials were completed in mid-2024 and outcomes and learnings will be shared with the farming community through field days run in partnership with Agriculture Victoria, with the aim of increasing the adoption of these farming techniques.

Alexis Killoran, Senior Irrigation Extension Officer at Agriculture Victoria, said: "Together we can continue to reduce the environmental impacts of irrigation from the farm itself, all the way down to the Gippsland Lakes."

Our partners

Woven through everything we do is partnerships and engagement – with Traditional Owners, community, individuals, other organisations and government. These are integral to the success of our projects and vital to the delivery of the RCS and ongoing environmental health of the catchment.

The region has a long and proud history of a committed and motivated grassroots community that has delivered best practice natural resource management for over 30 years. Five Landcare networks support over 70 Landcare groups along with over 55 community groups such as 'friends of' or foreshore committees of management.

All these groups and networks drive projects that address local and landscape-scale issues through on ground works such as revegetation, pest plant and animal management, soil health and riparian management. They also build skills and social connections in the community through training and events. Their current important role is in enhancing the West Gippsland environment and its ability to adapt to meet emerging challenges.

Partnership achievements

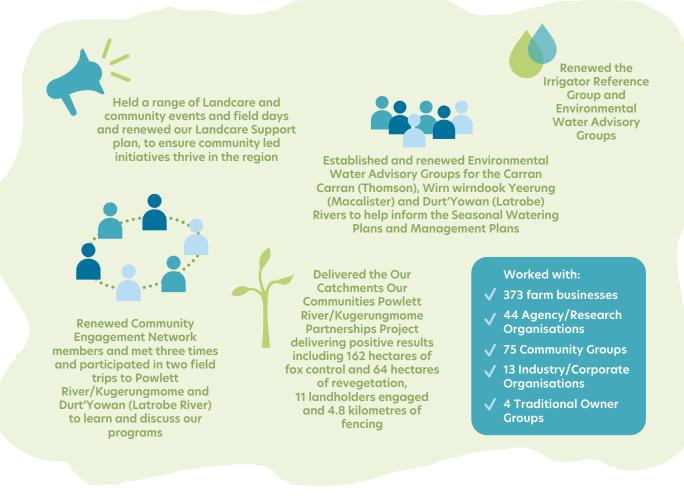
Together with our partners we achieved great outcomes for the catchment.

Project partners

Australian Government, State Government, Landcare networks and other community groups, GLaWAC, BLCAC

Funding

Australian Government - RDP, State Government Victorian Water Programs Investment Framework, Victorian Landcare Grants



It is amazing to be a part of an enthusiastic community group with a broad range of ages and expertise."

New CEN Member, Jessica Tong

Fresh faces for the Community Engagement Network

Community representatives from across West Gippsland recently met to kick off the next three-year term of West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority's (CMA) Community Engagement Network.

"The Community Engagement Network or CEN is where we let community members know what work we are doing and priorities we have and they, on behalf of the broader community, can provide valuable feedback on that work and other areas of community interest," said CEO of the West Gippsland CMA, Martin Fuller.

Sixteen new and returning members representing a broad range of age, location and experience make up the network for 2024-26. Marine science graduate Jessica Tong is one of them.

"I look forward to learning more about the West Gippsland CMA and contributing to the community voice for environmental preservation," said Jess.

Returning member Dave Sutton was pleased to see a mix of equal gender representation across members. "It is wonderful to see some fresh faces to bring new ideas and perspectives to the group," he said. The latest cohort officially began their term with an induction session at the CMA's Traralgon office to get to know one another and the CMA team. Cultural competence training led by Mandy Leggett, Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Officer for West Gippsland CMA, was also a feature of the day.

Additional member forums throughout the year will provide an opportunity for the group to deep dive on topics of interest such as sustainable agriculture, citizen science, Landcare in West Gippsland and works on waterways.

Executive Manager - Catchment Planning and Delivery for West Gippsland CMA, Dan Garlick, sees the CEN as an important two-way information exchange between local communities and the CMA.

"Over the years there has been incredible input from this group along with advocacy back to the community. As we move into the next round of project funding and delivery, we'll continue having these localised conversations with CEN members to make sure we get the best outcomes for the environment and the community," concluded Dan.

Partnerships with Traditional Land-owning groups

This year saw our commitment to the process of cultural competency continue to gain momentum in all levels of projects and programs. There has been an increase in GLaWAC and BLCAC work On Country, and in Traditional Ecological Knowledge, communication, and engagement.

We acknowledge and recognise Close the Gap Campaign, National Sorry Day/Day of Healing, National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week. We have worked on projects and sought advice and resources from many organisations, including the Close the Gap: Indigenous Health Campaign and the Human Rights Commission, Reconciliation Victoria and NAIDOC.

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC)

We continue to work under the guidance of our MoU with GLaWAC. Further opportunities for involvement have been encouraged from the beginning of all projects undertaken during this time.

Partnership meetings take place regularly, many of which have been conducted online and all communications occur through protocols put in place by the two organisations, which are reviewed regularly to ensure they are working well.

Highlights included:

- Co-hosting two on-Country events to share knowledge between agencies.
- Continued support for GLaWAC to Protect Cultural Heritage from the impacts of climate change in Corner Inlet.

Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC)

Partnership meetings are currently the main source of knowledge sharing between the two organisations.

We have partnered with BLCAC to deliver the Powlett River/Kugerungmome Cultural Heritage Management Project. The early stages of the project focused on bringing all the project partners together with the Land Council in a culturally safe environment to build the cultural competency of the partners to develop connections that would create additional opportunity to work together and co-deliver on-ground works.

Highlights included:

- Our partnership with the Land Council provided the opportunity to form the BLCAC-led Strong Country working group. This also supported the Land Council to establish a new Natural Resource Management team located in Gippsland.
- The team completed a three day On-Country field day with CMA staff, aquatic ecologists and the Land Council's water team to share knowledge.
- We hosted a partnership session at Powlett River/Kugerungmone during National Reconciliation Week.



Bunurong Land Council

Caring for Country

In May, the West Gippsland CMA team and community partners enjoyed an On Country Networking Day led by Bunurong Land Council at Kugerungmome (Powlett River).

On the day, held in National Reconciliation Week, our team, project partners and the Land Council Traditional Owners shared knowledge about projects happening to protect the river as it runs from Korumburra down to the estuary and out to sea at Kilcunda.

There were demonstrations of water testing, and the group heard about the estuary and how it is currently managed, including the story of our work together with BLCAC. We also shared ideas about possibilities for future work to understand, restore, and care for this precious cultural landscape.

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

During May, a GLaWAC Natural Resource Management (NRM) Partnership Field Day was held at Sand Banks Reserve. Twenty attendees including GLaWAC, NRM Managers and the Latrobe Valley NRM Team heard presentations on the work we do from West Gippsland CMA's Water Team, Works Team and Partnerships Team. The Water Team had a scientist on site who had set up several aquatic survey demonstrations, so everyone had the opportunity to get involved and learn about aquatic survey techniques.

This day facilitated a connection between our agencies and gave the NRM Crew the chance to hear and see what the CMA does.

"We all enjoyed the connection to Country and culture that was shared by GLAWAC, the relaxed atmosphere and shared learning then led to a good yarn about future opportunities for us to share knowledge and work together."

Mandy Leggett Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Officer with West Gippsland CMA



Healthy and resilient catchments, valued and cared for by the community, that underpin the environmental, social, cultural and economic wealth of the region.

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Connect with us





