



WEST GIPPSLAND CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Our Achievements

2025



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 another busy, fulfilling year delivering work to improve and protect the region's wonderful natural assets, with Environmental Contribution Levy Tranche Six (EC6) programs and Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) projects well underway.

We focused efforts on delivering initiatives supported by the Victorian and Australian Governments such as a continuing focus on Corner Inlet and the Gippsland Lakes and Kugerungmome/Powlett Catchment with considerable progress in protecting and restoring these iconic assets.

We delivered 95% of actions in our annual Action Plan and continued to implement our new Strategic Plan 2024-2029 in partnership with management and Board.

With our partners, we achieved 1,194 hectares of weed control, 204 hectares of revegetation, 31,084 hectares of pest animal control and celebrated 25-years of the Sustainable Irrigation Program in the Macalister Irrigation District. We processed 938 planning permit referrals and requests for flood advice.

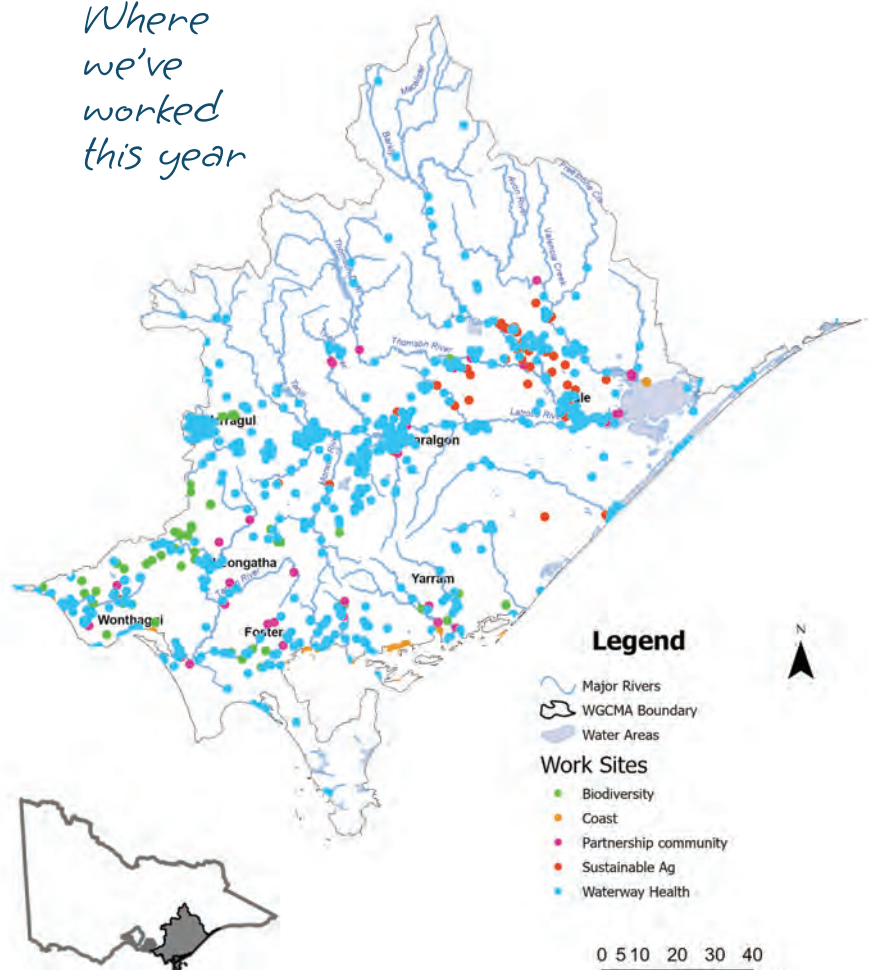
As we approach 30 years of operation, we are focussed on our updated strategic objectives, delivering the Regional Catchment Strategy mid-term review and Regional Waterway Strategy renewal.

With our ongoing and united effort, we will build resilience into the region's natural environment to meet the impacts of climate variability and regional change.

We're extremely proud of this snapshot of our achievements that reflect the diversity of programs, initiatives and results. Follow our story at www.wgcma.vic.gov.au

Mikaela Power
Board Chair

*Where
we've
worked
this year*

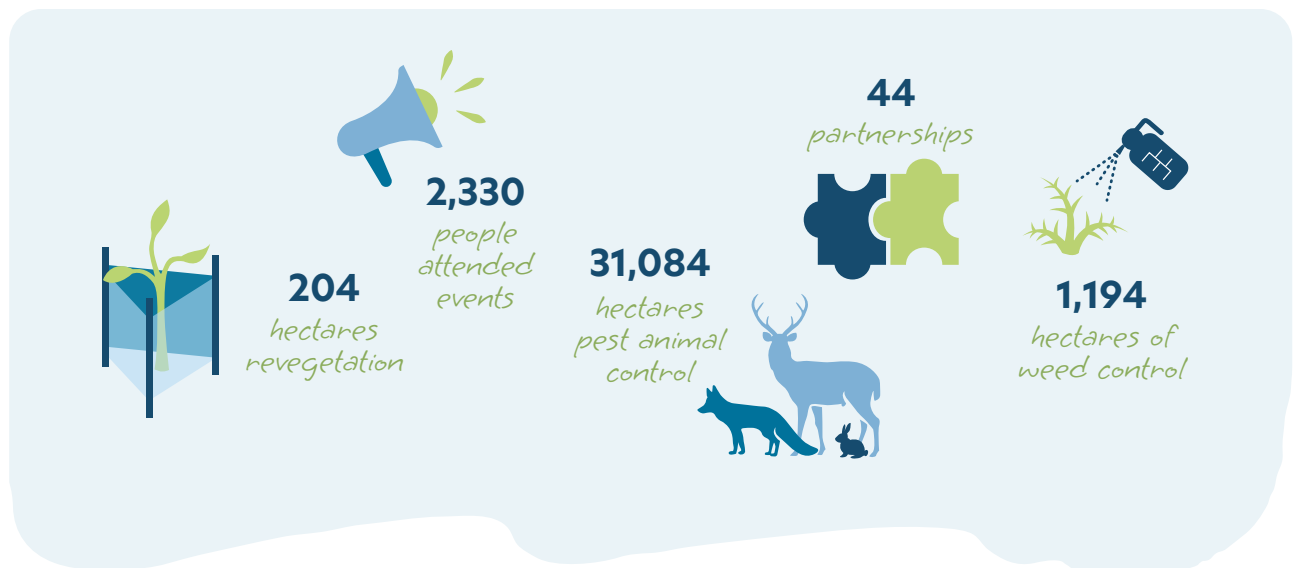


Cover: Wirn wirndook Yeerung
(Macalister River), Gunaikurnai
Country.

2025 *A year of catchment health*

Together with Traditional Owners, partners, volunteers and community we are working towards our shared vision of healthy and resilient catchments, valued and cared for by the community, that underpin the environmental, social, cultural and economic wealth of the region.

Major achievements



Delivering Water for Victoria priorities

We are extremely proud of our work to deliver on the priorities in Water for Victoria. We have made significant progress again this year:



Protecting waterways

We are river lovers

Working with private and public land managers to protect waterways is our key role. By fencing, controlling weeds and restoring native vegetation we can reduce sediment and nutrients in waterways and increase resilience to the impacts of climate change – all contributing to our goal of 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.
- Water for the environment plays an important role in improving river and wetland health.

Just over 41,000 megalitres were released into Carran Carran (Thomson) and Wirn wirndook Yeerung (Macalister) rivers.

Due to favourable conditions no water was required to be delivered into Durt'Yowan (Lalor River).

Project partners

Australian Government, Department of Energy, Environment, and Climate Action (DEECA), 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 6 (EC6)

Waterway achievements

Works focussed on building resilience, controlling weeds, improving water quality and creating wildlife habitat.

Corner Inlet project



Thomson/Rainbow Creek Flagship



WATER CASE STUDY

Taking action for the Thomson

It takes action to heal West Gippsland's rivers, building on each success, day by day, year by year. For over eight years, the mid-Thomson River Flagship project has been improving the health and flow of over 85 kilometres of the Thomson River (Carran Carran) and Rainbow Creek.

The Thomson and Rainbow Management Plan was developed along with community and partners to achieve our shared hopes for the river's future - to manage the balance of its flow and reduce the risk of 'avulsions' developing (where a waterway creates a new path in times of flood).

"We are in the 'taking action' phase of this long term project and are excited to be building on the success of the past eight years to improve the river's health " said David Stork, Waterways Project Officer for the CMA.

Across 2024-25, the team took action to restore the river by delivering targeted habitat restoration and weed control along both the Thomson and Rainbow. A highlight was collaborating with three neighbouring landholders to restore a continuous stretch of river running through the adjoining properties.

Dense willows were cleared across 6.67 hectares of river, ensuring both sides of the river were treated along the entire length. Stock-proof fencing was installed along 2.19 kilometres on one property with planned fencing to be completed and all sites planted with native revegetation in 2025-26.

"This coordinated effort highlights the project's strategic approach to getting the job done and we are delighted and thankful to the landholders for this cross-property collaboration," David said.

Works contribute to creating a continuous corridor of native vegetation along the waterways and improving conditions for priority native fish such as the endangered Australian Grayling to migrate and breed.

Since the program began in 2016, 66 hectares of woody weeds (mostly willows) have been removed, 76,000 local native trees have been planted, 22 kilometres of fencing has been created to protect the river on 16 properties and two high risk avulsion sites have been treated.



"This work brings us one step closer to our shared vision so the environment, agriculture, the community and Gippsland Lakes can thrive," said David.

Our partners and community

Working together

Respectfully working together is at the heart of everything we do. We take our lead from Traditional Owners to support self-determination and partner with community, Landcare, landholders, other organisations and government. This is integral to the success of our projects and vital to achieve our united vision for healthy and resilient catchments.

West Gippsland 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 and tackling future challenges.

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

"When you bring everyone together it creates a groundswell of possibility and the large task of taking action becomes bite size and manageable – supported by each other. That's how integrated catchment management works."

Partnership achievements

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

Worked with

*194 farm businesses,
39 Agency/Research Organisations,
58 Community Groups,
10 Industry/Corporate Organisations,
4 Traditional Owner Groups*



Delivered the

*Our Catchments
Our Communities
Kugerungmome/Powlett
River Partnerships
Project*



21 successful Landcare Grant

*recipients received
\$337,250 for
21 projects and
22 support grants*

Community Engagement Network

*had 16 members
and met 3 different times on
field trips and learning about
the CMA's role in flood advice
and recovery*



Irrigation Reference Group

*had 15 members and met 5
times including a field trip*

Environmental Water Advisory Groups

*helped
inform Seasonal Watering
and Management Plans*



COMMUNITY CASE STUDY

Kugerungmome, a river with heart

Working together to tackle the challenge of healing rivers is at the heart of the Our Catchments Our Communities program and the Kugerungmome/Powlett River Partnerships Project.

Flowing across Bunurong Country, Kugerungmome enters Bass Strait at Kilcunda. It is a much loved river alive with biodiversity, stories and cultural heritage. Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation are the Traditional Owners of the river and keepers and cultural authority of its story.

As it snakes along its course it passes farms, small townships – even schools. It faces many challenges and supports plants, small pockets of rainforest, productive farmland and endangered species from the Giant Gippsland Earthworm to Hooded Plovers.

West Gippsland CMA sees everyone along the way as part of the river's future with opportunities for them to act as stewards to play a small or large role in caring for it.

"When you bring everyone together it creates a groundswell of possibility and the large

task of taking action becomes bite size and manageable – supported by each other. That's how integrated catchment management works," explained Deb Archer, Manager Catchment and Communities at West Gippsland CMA.

The project began in 2022, stemming from the passion and collective efforts driven by Landcare for over 30 years. After a successful three years in motion, no one wanted the momentum they'd built to fade – they wanted it to grow.

In 2024-25, the project continued and a series of facilitated workshops brought everyone into one room to put their piece of the puzzle on the table, share learnings and build on success.

Together, they created a matrix of works to prioritise the projects and activities to be delivered in the coming four years.

Projects led by Bunurong Land Council, Bass Coast Landcare Network, Trust for Nature, Parks Victoria, and BirdLife Australia will bring landholders and community together to expand the reach and possibilities of works.



Partnerships with Traditional Land-owning groups

First Peoples self determination

Our journey to cultural competency continued. It aims to build a culturally safe environment in readiness to partner with the Traditional Owners in our region to support self-determination. We continued to work under the guidance of our MOUs.

Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC)

- Encourage involvement from the beginning of all projects.
- Supporting self-determined priorities and increasing amount of on-Country work for the Strong Country Team including:
 - Supporting the BLCAC led development of a three-year program in the Kugerungmome/ Powlett Catchment to protect Cultural Values. On Country activities will be led by BLCAC.
 - Enabling the Strong Country team to build capacity to complete Hooded Plover (barriytbarriyt) monitoring on their Country.
 - Co-hosting a partnership session at the Land Council's property in Rhyll during National Reconciliation Week.

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC)

- Co-hosting an on-Country event at Heart Morass to share knowledge between our agencies.
- Regular partnership meetings focused on co-designing future projects and identifying opportunities to align with GLaWAC priorities.
- Co-design of a Yarns on Farms project with the Cultural Hub Team to bring together farmers, landholders, land managers, Gunaikurnai Elders and our team to share stories about land use and management across the Gunaikurnai Landscape.
- Codesign of a program to support GLaWAC Katung (water) rangers to learn about river health and catchment management from a CMA perspective.



TRADITIONAL OWNER SELF DETERMINATION CASE STUDY

Balirt Biik Rangers protecting barriytbarriyt - Eastern Hooded Plovers

Over the 2024-25 breeding season, Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation's Balirt Biik Rangers monitored and cared for barriytbarriyt, the Boonwurrung name for Hooded Plovers, at nine key coastal sites between Kugerungmome/Powlett River and Inverloch on Bunurong Country.

The experience has cemented the team's passion and commitment to species protection on Bunurong Country.

"At the beginning of the season, many team members had never encountered a Hooded Plover and were unfamiliar with its life cycle," said Luke Phillips, Balirt Biik Eastern Team Leader with Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

This was soon to change as the rangers attended training sessions led by BirdLife Australia. The sessions built both technical confidence and ecological awareness, and the team is enthusiastic about continuing this learning into the next breeding season.

"They are particularly keen to deepen their skills in nest protection strategies, threat identification, and habitat management to ensure they are delivering the best outcomes for the species."

Over the months, the rangers developed a strong understanding of the plovers, affectionately known as Hoodies and their behaviour, such as how they feed, shelter, nest and use displays such as broken-wing to distract threats.

Each fortnight, between two to four rangers undertook monitoring across sites. They recorded bird numbers, behaviours, nesting activity, chick presence, signs of fledging and predator activity and entered data into the 'My Beach Bird Portal.'

The team also protected the plovers by fencing off active nests from public disturbance, talking to beachgoers, and working with local volunteers.

"A major part of the program's success has been the learning journey of the rangers themselves. One of the proudest moments this season was witnessing the full life cycle of the barriytbarriyt from parent birds preparing a site for mating to a tiny chick becoming a fully-fledged bird. Seeing these birds grow and survive in such challenging conditions, especially with the pressures of a long, hot summer and busy tourist beaches, has been humbling and deeply rewarding," said Luke.



"This combination of cultural stewardship and environmental care reflects the core values of the Bunurong Land Council and the Balirt Biik Rangers program."

Caring for coasts

Working for healthy and resilient catchments

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 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.

Project partners

GLaWAC, BLCAC

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

Funding

Corner Inlet Connections is funded by the Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust and delivered by West Gippsland CMA, a member of the Commonwealth Regional Delivery Partners panel.

Victorian Government – Victorian Water Program Investment Framework EC6

Victorian Landcare Grants

Coastal achievements

Corner Inlet Connections

In the second of the five-year Corner Inlet Connections project, on-ground works focussed on protecting Ramsar values including treating spartina, controlling foxes, improving water quality, and protecting saltmarsh.

696,704 hectares

pest animal control



68,703 hectares

weeds treated

Estuary management

We worked with Traditional Owners, partners and stakeholders to:

*Review and update
management protocols
for Bourne and Wreck
Creek estuaries*



*Identify a Powlett Estuary
Alternative Land Management
opportunity, including the potential
to expand Yallock-Bulluk Marine
and Coastal Park*



*Further long-term
management of the
Merriman Creek
estuary in Seaspray*

COASTAL CASE STUDY

Protecting precious coastlines

Capturing an elusive fox on Dream Island, tackling weed infestations and keeping watch over threatened beach nesting birds are just some events in the compelling story of the past year in Corner Inlet.

"It's been another successful year of dedicated work in the Corner Inlet Ramsar site where, for nearly two decades, we've been working with partners and community to protect the inlet's significant natural values," said Tanya Cowell, Waterways Officer for West Gippsland CMA.

This year the focus was on protecting Ramsar values including treating the weed spartina, controlling foxes, improving water quality and protecting saltmarsh with Parks Victoria, Trust for Nature, Birdlife Australia and specialist contractors.

A huge effort was treating 68,703 hectares of Spartina infestations across the entire site in summer and autumn by ground and air. The coordinated approach saw remote and previously inaccessible areas that flow into the Marine Park treated. Long term monitoring shows this consistent annual effort is significantly reducing this threat – a major win for the environment and wildlife.

Protecting an additional 20 hectares of habitat was another achievement with Trust for Nature leading a program to protect saltmarsh through weed control and fencing from stock on private properties.

Foxes are the number one predator for the Inlet's beach nesting birds including Hooded Plovers and Small Terns. Partners at BirdLife Australia monitored for foxes on the Inlet's four barrier islands. An elusive resident fox on Dream Island was caught by a determined contractor, increasing the likelihood of breeding success for endangered birds. Remote sensing cameras will continue to detect for foxes.

Summer and winter monitoring of beach nesting birds by BirdLife Australia and a team of highly skilled and dedicated volunteers showed generally low success in chicks fledging despite the birds putting in their best efforts. These failures are largely due to predators, high tides and people.



"Every effort is an important step towards our shared goal of a healthy and resilient inlet that we can all enjoy – whether you are a fisher, farmer, birdwatcher, walker or boater. We all love the inlet in our own special way and want it cared for."

Enhancing biodiversity

Working for healthy and resilient catchments

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 faces a range of biodiversity challenges including breaking up areas of remnant vegetation, threats from invasive plants and animals and urban development.

Toward Zero Extinctions

The five-year, targeted effort to protect Eastern Hooded Plover breeding sites along the Bunurong and South Gippsland coastline entered its second year.

Landcare Grants making an impact

The 2024 Victorian Landcare Grants support projects to protect and restore the region's environment such as safeguarding remnant forests, restoring swampy woodland to protect threatened species, developing a community nursery, inspiring the next generation of Landcarers and more.

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

Project partners

GLaWAC, BLCAC

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

Landholders and community

Funding

Corner Inlet Connections and Towards Zero Extinctions are 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 EC6

Victorian Landcare Grants

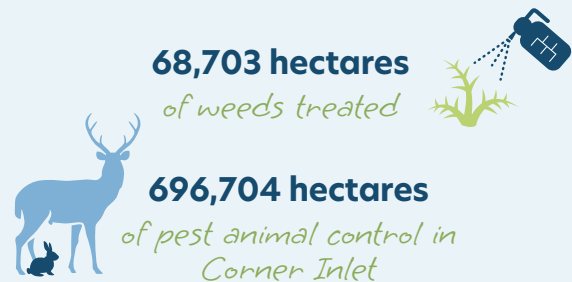
Biodiversity achievements

Projects tackled key threats with Traditional Owners, partners, landholders and community to protect the region's precious biodiversity through targeted, united action.

Towards Zero Extinctions



Corner Inlet Connections



34 Farm Fencing Grants

will allow recipients to fence and
protect over 80 hectares
of remnant vegetation.



BIODIVERSITY CASE STUDY

Partnership to save plovers from extinction

Eastern Hooded Plovers are tiny shorebirds that nest along the Victorian coastline. The adults, their eggs and chicks are highly vulnerable to disturbance by humans, coastal weeds, rough weather, off-lead dogs and their number one predator – foxes.

West Gippsland CMA is excited to be delivering the new Toward Zero Extinctions: Protect the Eastern Hooded Plover project aimed at saving one of our region's much-loved native birds from extinction.

Working with partners, it involves protecting nests during breeding season, controlling foxes and other introduced pests, and engaging the community about the plight of the plover – and how they can help its survival.

“There are only around 3,000 Hoodies remaining in south-eastern Australian and less than 2.5% of Hooded Plover eggs make it to adult stage,” said Martin Fuller, CEO of West Gippsland CMA.

During breeding season, Hoodies face many threats to survival, from people accidentally trampling their nests to off-lead dogs scaring the birds and eating their eggs. Even if the eggs successfully hatch, Hoodie chicks can't fly for the first five weeks of their life, making them highly vulnerable to predators, particularly foxes. To reduce this threat, the CMA and partners will undertake a coordinated approach to fox control across public and private land, conducted in partnership with landholders and Parks Victoria.

“By reducing fox numbers, we can help increase the chance of survival for eggs and fledglings and help boost the population of Hoodies overall.”

Enclosing vulnerable breeding sites to protect nests and chicks and signage at beaches are also key activities of the program, supported by BirdLife Australia's monitoring program and population counts.

In 2024-25 the project delivered the following activities: over 30,388 hectares of fox control works, over 40 Hooded Plover breeding sites protected; and over 50 volunteers engaged.



Supporting sustainable agriculture

Working for healthy and resilient catchments

Working with and supporting farmers is fundamental for productive and sustainable farming systems, achieving healthy waterways, increasing and connecting native vegetation, protecting the region's soils and protecting important cultural values.

Sustainable Irrigation

This year we focussed on setting up the first of the four-year EC6 Sustainable Irrigation Program to support the irrigation farming community to deliver priority actions from the Lake Wellington Land and Water Management Plan 2019.

Sustainable Agriculture

We started a five-year Climate Smart Agriculture Project to support farmers to utilise on-farm nutrients from dairy effluent and protect and improve native habitat while improving livestock production and management. This project complements workshops and field days delivered through our Climate-Smart Capacity Building project and the Carbon Farming Outreach Program.

Project partners

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

Funding

State Government Victorian Water Programs Investment Framework – Sustainable Irrigation Program.

This program a part of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's Sustainable Irrigation Program (SIP), implemented in Gippsland by Agriculture Victoria and West Gippsland CMA.

Projects supported by the Natural Heritage Trust under the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program.

Achievements in agriculture

Sustainable, climate smart farming practice and innovations mean healthier waterways:



15 landholders

engaged to participate in the nutrient management program

Farm fencing grants were provided to

34 recipients

for projects that will deliver over

80 hectares

of remnant vegetation protected



Sustainable Irrigation Program delivered

14 irrigation efficiency projects

covering

375 hectares

with water savings of over

730 megalitres

and reducing phosphorous load by

190 kilograms

per year.

LAND CASE STUDY

Celebrating a 25-year pivot towards sustainable farming future

This year, West Gippsland CMA is celebrating the 25th anniversary of its sustainable irrigation program and the long-term partnerships that have been central to its success.

The joint initiative between the CMA, Agriculture Victoria and local farmers has resulted in a remarkable transformation of irrigated land and water use across central Gippsland.

The successful program has delivered over 1,200 irrigation improvement projects in the Macalister Irrigation District (MID) and across the Lake Wellington Catchment - home to important river systems like Durt'Yowan (Latrobe), Wirn wirndook Yeerung (Macalister) and Avon rivers.

"Thanks to the sustained, collective efforts of farmers, agencies and local irrigation communities, we're now seeing a total of 47 gigalitres of water worth \$85 million dollars being saved every year. That's a huge financial benefit for irrigators and a boost to water security for the region's agricultural industry."

Encouraging irrigators to embrace sustainable irrigation practices has been key to the program's success and over the years attitudes have shifted.

"Twenty-five years ago, environmental outcomes weren't necessarily a priority on the farm, explained Anthony Goode, the CMA's Sustainable Irrigation Program Coordinator who's worked on the program for 14 years.

"It's a huge credit to those farmers who put their hands up in the early days to get involved and trial new irrigation methods and systems for the benefit of the wider irrigation community."

"It's not an exaggeration to say we've now partnered with nearly all landholders in the MID, achieving 94% coverage of the district with farm irrigation plans. Combined with the 179 spray conversions, 299 reuses systems and 70 best practice surface irrigation projects it adds up to a remarkable, long-term transformation of irrigated farmland."

And the results speak for themselves, with over 46 gigalitres of nutrient rich water carrying an estimated 23 tonnes of phosphorus being retained on farm every year for the benefit of soil health and pasture productivity. This reduces the need to buy-in synthetic fertilisers all while protecting surrounding waterways such as the Gippsland Lakes from run-off.

During 2024-25, 14 irrigation projects covering an area of 375 hectares were delivered, providing estimated water savings of over 730 megalitres and reducing phosphorous load by approximately 190 kilograms per year.



"Our vision is to reach a point where we can proudly say that the irrigation community is having zero impact on waterways and is actually benefiting waterways and catchment health."



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Australian Government



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*Sustainable irrigation takes
collaboration, Gunaikurnai Country*