



# Gippsland Environmental Agencies



## Annual Report 2025 – 2026

Committed to working together to improve the management of land, water and biodiversity resources across Gippsland.

Gippsland Environmental Agencies (GEA) is a forum for the Managing Directors/Regional Director/CEO of fourteen environmental agencies in Gippsland to work together to share knowledge, develop and deliver partnership projects, create business and operational efficiencies and work collaboratively on policy development.

The GEA partnership brings together key organisations across environment, water, Traditional Owner, parks, catchment management, regulation and conservation roles. Its value lies in reducing duplication, strengthening coordination, clarifying responsibilities and enabling shared responses to complex regional challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, water quality, bushfire recovery, land-use change and community resilience.

The GEA Strategic Plan developed in 2023 identified five key areas of common focus.

### PEOPLE

Foster innovation and empower people.

### PARTNERS

Work together for innovative solutions to issues challenging communities. people.

### TRADITIONAL OWNERS

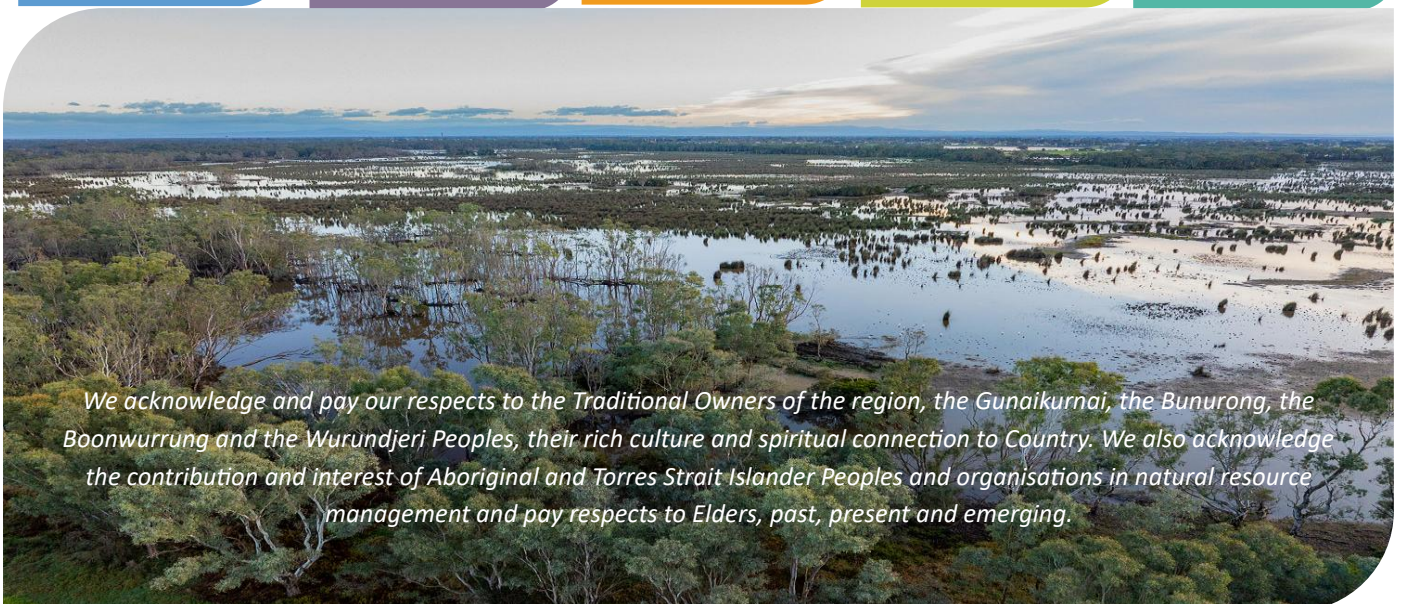
Empower Traditional Owners on their journey towards self-determination.

### ENVIRONMENT

Protect, enhance and restore the Gippsland region.

### LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Maintain high standard of partner and community engagement whilst meeting legislative responsibilities.



*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 contribution and interest of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and organisations in natural resource management and pay respects to Elders, past, present and emerging.*

# Economic value of Gippsland Environmental Agencies

Gippsland Environmental Agencies create economic value well beyond environmental protection. Through coordinated natural resource management, waterway and catchment health, biodiversity restoration, floodplain and water regulation, cultural land management, community partnerships and climate resilience work, these agencies help protect the natural assets that underpin agriculture, tourism, recreation, water security, liveability and regional investment. The value comes in a number of different areas.

Collectively GEA employs close to 1200 people working across Gippsland to manage and protect our natural assets. Agencies deliver programs through professional staff, field crews, contractors, Traditional Owner organisations, nurseries, fencing contractors, pest control providers, consultants, researchers, community groups and local suppliers.

Environmental programs create direct and indirect regional employment. They support skilled jobs in planning, science, project management, engagement, field operations and cultural land management, while circulating project expenditure through local businesses and contractor.

Healthy natural assets are foundational economic infrastructure. They support food and fibre production, tourism, water supply, recreation, biodiversity, public health, amenity and regional liveability. Without active management, the degradation of land, waterways and biodiversity creates direct costs for farmers, councils, water authorities, tourism operators and communities.

As Gippsland transitions economically, environmental resilience becomes a competitive advantage. Healthy catchments, reliable water, resilient farms, protected coasts and liveable towns support future investment, workforce attraction, insurance affordability, business continuity and community wellbeing.

## People

### Foster innovation and empower people



**In 2025- 26, GEA has focused on people, our people and communities we support.**

#### *IDAHOBIT Day*

We hosted agency wide, all staff briefing for IDAHOBIT day with over 100 staff in attendance. Brilliant presentation by Max Evans, Minus 18. GEA stands in solidarity with LGBTQIA+ communities around the world, raising awareness and taking a stand against discrimination, stigma, and inequality. This day reminds us of the importance of acceptance, respect, and support for everyone, regardless of who they are or who they love. Together, we can create safer, more inclusive communities where everyone is valued.

#### *Respectful Gippsland – GWH partnership*

GEA continued its relationship with Gippsland Women's Health and joined the Respectful Gippsland Partnership. The Respectful Gippsland Partnership was founded to provide leadership, strategic direction and build on networks for those working to address gender inequity and prevent gendered violence in Gippsland.



### *GEA Women in Leadership Team*

Women in GEA had the opportunity to be involved in a range of activities over the program, stepping in and out as they are available. The program focuses on building skills to help support relationship building.

Events in 2026 have included:

- How to build relationships with Leah Methers.
- Cultural Awareness session at Den of Nargun.
- “Let’s get going” and “Let’s get better” modules with Gippsland Women’s Health: continuing our journey or awareness, understanding and action in gender equity.
- Range of networking sessions across the region.
- The workshops will continue in 26/27 with another cultural awareness session and training with Tanya Heaney -Voogt in August.

### *Gender Equity*

GEA hosted Dr Niki Vincent, Commissioner for Gender Equality in Public Sector in Feb 2026. A session with the GEA members on leadership in the Gender Equality space and how agencies can embrace GE as an everyday concept and not just one we think about when hiring. This was followed by an online presentation for all GEA staff on Gender Equality and what does it mean for us all. This also was the launch of the GEA WLT Leadership Program for 2026.



GEA WLT team with Dr Niki Vincent

### *IPAA 50 top Women Award*

Kerri Villiers, Regional Director- Gippsland Region, Parks Victoria and valued GEA member has been recognised as one of the IPAA Victoria Top 50 Women Awards.

## Partners

Work together for innovative solutions to issues challenging communities.



GEA supported the establishment of the Gippsland Engagement Community of Practice (COP) Led by EPA, the COP brings attention to engagement happening across the Gippsland Region and to support engagement practitioners in their engagement delivery. The group meets quarterly and membership is from across state government organisations.



Following the release of the Silver Review into the Victorian Government, the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority was closed and its functions moved in the DEECA. The closure of the MLRA meant that GEA lost a valuable member of the team, Dr Jennifer Brereton. The MLRA team is to be highly commended. The team has taken a highly technical subject and introduced it in a way that the community can understand and embrace. The work undertaken around community engagement and their willingness to share the results has been so valuable to all the agencies as part of GEA. GEA continued to work closely with the Gippsland Executive Group, with GEG members being invited to join the Dr Niki Vincent presentation and a presentation by Sara Rhodes- Ward to GEA on emerging issues and Gippsland Regional Plan update.

## Traditional Owners

Empower traditional owners on their journey towards self-determination.



### *Cultural awareness event hosted by GEA WLT. Visit to Den of Nargun, Bairnsdale.*

What an amazing place to visit with a group of inspirational women from multiple agencies across Gippsland. Thank you to GLaWAC for leading such a wonderful day and sharing a special and culturally significant place for Gunaikurnai women. We heard and shared stories, walked together, and learnt the art of basket weaving. It was an opportunity to reflect on us, our work, our families and connecting with Gunaikurnai Country with strong Gunaikurnai women.

This was all made possible with the connections of the Gippsland Environmental Agency (GEA) group, with 50 women from 10 different agencies sharing knowledge, ideas and supporting one another.

### *Recognition and Settlement Agreement*

Presentation in May 2026, from First People's State Relations, Department of Premier, updated all agencies on the progress of Recognition and Settlement Agreement with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC). The briefing will be followed up with individual meetings with agencies.

There is a long-standing relationship and commitment from all GEA members to continue to work closely with GLaWAC to support self-determination.







## Environment

Protect, enhance and restore the Gippsland region.

2025-26 GEA members

A key area for GEA is keeping up to date with regional strategies / emerging issues and supporting agencies in the development, implementation and renewal of strategies and plans. This happens via regular meetings and briefings, such as regular updates on preparedness for Avian Influenza.

Weather consequences briefing for the third year in a row, GEA has been briefed on the weather data leading into the upcoming fire season. These briefings are invaluable to help agencies understand and prepare for the season ahead.

Capability Statement: GEA has a live capability statement, outlining the resources and their availability in times of need e.g.: bushfire, floods.

Gippsland Environmental Agencies has coordinated the update of the *Who does what in Water in Gippsland* brochure, as part of their role in supporting agencies and communities across Gippsland.

Walking Tour of Yallourn North hosted by Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority. The site visit in December, allowed GEA to understand first-hand the challenges facing mine rehabilitation as well as the optimism that we can make a difference.



## Legislative Responsibilities

Maintain high standard of partner and community engagement whilst meeting legislative responsibilities.



Key aspect of GEA operations is the importance for collaboration, sharing, insights, understanding, support and knowledge sharing. How do we work together that will provide a better outcome than if we did it alone?

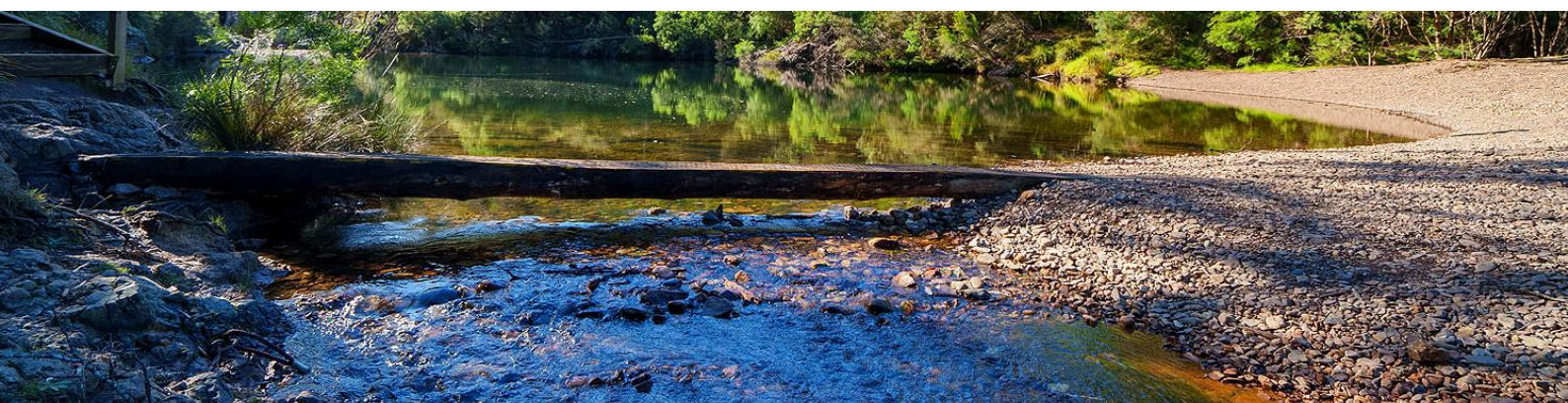
In September 2025, GEA held its 50th meeting, originally established in 2014, it is still going strong.

### Strategic review and update of GEA operations

Following a review of GEA operations involving 1:1 interview with all members.

Key take homes

- The commitment to GEA and its future is unwavering, there is consensus that the meeting structure, separate briefing and all staff briefings are working well. It is an excellent role model for practical collaboration.
- GEA is a supportive and trusted environment: about what you bring to the table and value to others.
- Collectively supporting staff in leadership space, fostering our new leaders, awareness of values of partnerships and can the collegiate approach make something even better



# Gippsland Environmental Agencies 2025-26 members

## 2025-26 GEA members

Agriculture Victoria  
Bruce Weston / Dr Jessie Horton,  
Regional Director

Department of Environment, Energy and  
Climate Action  
Darrin McKenzie, Regional Director

East Gippsland CMA  
Bec Hemming, CEO

East Gippsland Water  
Michael Wandmaker, Managing Director

Environment Protection Authority  
Jessica Bandiera, Regional Manager  
Gippsland

Gippsland Water Corporation  
Sarah Cumming, Managing Director

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal  
Corporation  
Charee Smith/ Nick Ashburner, CEO

Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners Land  
Management Board  
Craig Parker, EO

Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority Dr  
Jennifer Brereton, CEO (member to  
March 2026)

Parks Victoria, Eastern  
Kerri Villiers, Regional Director Eastern

South Gippsland Water  
Robert Murphy, Managing Director

Southern Rural Water  
Cameron FitzGerald / Scott Cornish,  
Managing Director

Trust for Nature, Gippsland  
Catherine Crowden, Area Manager  
Gippsland

West Gippsland CMA  
Martin Fuller, CEO

GEA Executive Officer  
Belinda Brennan

