2026-27 Seasonal Watering Proposal

Lower Latrobe Wetlands

West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority



Royal Spoonbill at Sale Common, February 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) would like to acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Landowners and other Indigenous people within the catchment area: the Gunaikurnai people.

We also recognise the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in land and natural resource management.

Table of Contents

1 CONTEXT 4
2 SYSTEM OVERVIEW 4
3 ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES 6
4 TRADITIONAL OWNER CULTURAL VALUES AND USES 7
5 SOCIAL RECREATIONAL AND ECONOMIC (SRE) VALUES AND USES 8
6 SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL WATERING 8
7 SCENARIO PLANNING 13
Seasonal Review 13
Infrastructure 13
Triggers for action 13
Scenario planning 14
Dowd Morass 14
Heart Morass 15
Sale Common 15
8 ENGAGEMENT 18
Summary table 19
9 RISK MANAGEMENT 20
10 APPROVAL, ENDORSEMENT AND CONSENT 21
11 REFERENCES 22
12 APPENDICES 23
Appendix 1. Values icons used in the Seasonal Watering Plan 24

Document Control

STATUS	VERSION	AUTHOR	DATE	DESCRIPTION
Template	1.0	Kris Leckie	02/12/2025	Prepopulated content incorporated into template ready for issue to CMA.
Draft	1.0	Adrian Clements	04/03/2026	First draft proposal for VEWH review

1 CONTEXT

This seasonal watering proposal outlines the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority's (WGCMA) proposed use of environmental water in the Lower Latrobe Wetlands. This is as per the requirements under section 192A of the *Water Act 1989* and is a priority of the West Gippsland Waterway Strategy (WGCMA, 2014). This proposal covers the Lower Latrobe wetlands environmental entitlement managed on behalf of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH) by the WGCMA.

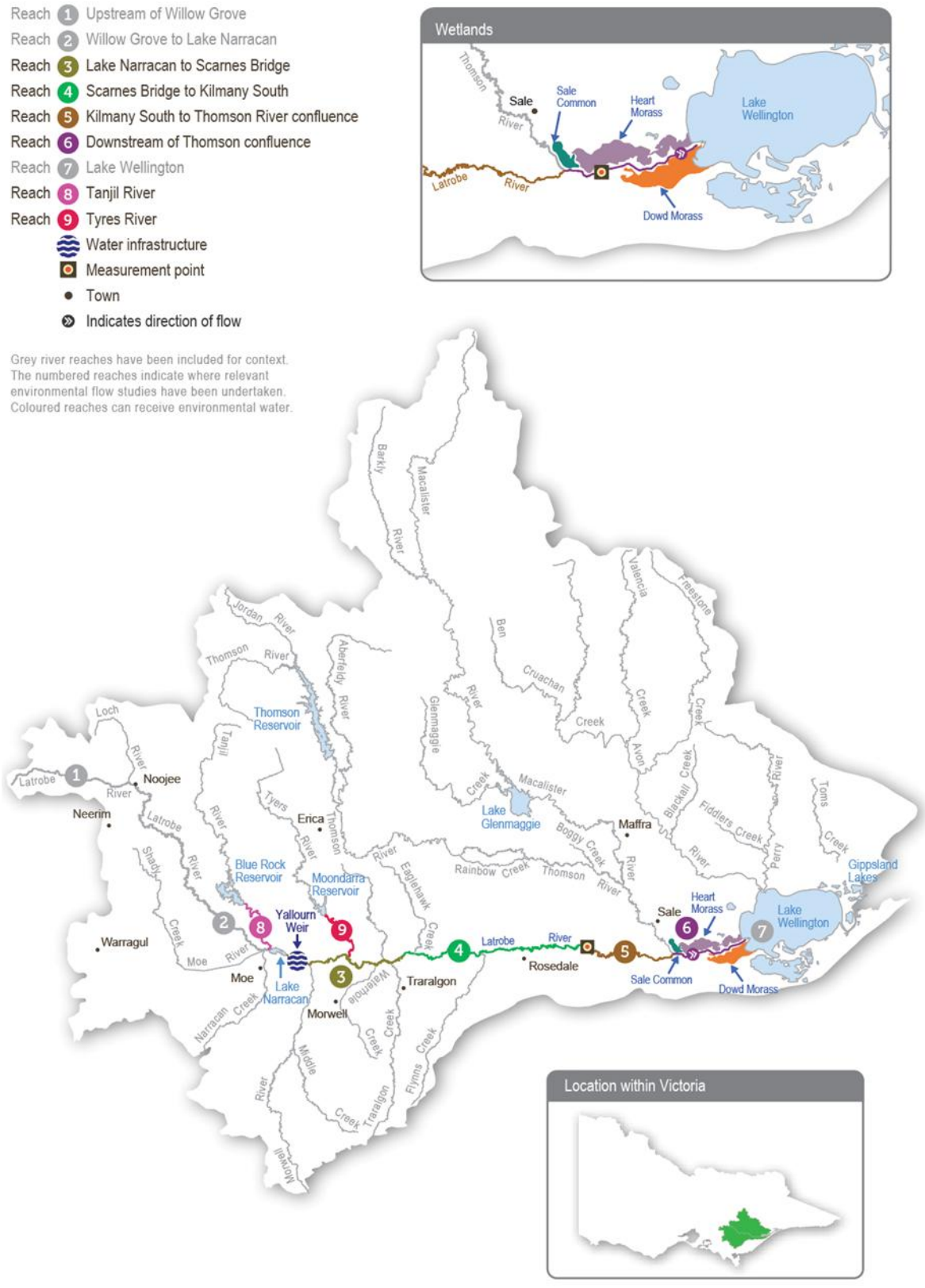
This proposal will be used by the VEWH to inform the development of the Seasonal Watering Plan 2026-27. The plan will outline the full scope of state-wide priorities for use of environmental water, including the West Gippsland catchment environmental entitlements. Environmental water in the Latrobe, Thomson and Macalister rivers will be used to protect and enhance the ecological health of their respective waterways. Where applicable, coordinated management of the three river entitlements will also be used to protect and enhance the lower Latrobe Wetlands and the Latrobe Estuary. The extent to which this is achieved will be governed by the amount of water available and the relevant climatic scenario.

Climatic conditions and system regulation strongly influence river flows, and thereby the opportunities and need to actively manage environmental water. Flexibility is built into this proposal to enable adaptive management.

2 SYSTEM OVERVIEW

The lower Latrobe wetlands (Dowd Morass, Heart Morass and Sale Common) are an important component of the internationally recognised Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site and provide habitat for waterbirds of state, national and international conservation significance. The wetlands are located on the floodplain of *Durt-Yowan* (Latrobe River) between its confluence with *Carran Carran* (Thomson River), and they form part of the Gippsland Lakes system (Figure 2.2.1).

River regulation and water extraction from the Latrobe, Thomson and Macalister rivers have reduced the frequency of small- and medium-sized floods that naturally wet the lower Latrobe wetlands. The construction of levees and drains and the filling of natural depressions have also altered water movement into and through the wetlands. The drainage and flooding regime in all three wetlands is now managed to some extent with regulators connected to the Latrobe River.


Reach 1 Upstream of Willow Grove
Reach 2 Willow Grove to Lake Narracan
Reach 3 Lake Narracan to Scarnes Bridge
Reach 4 Scarnes Bridge to Kilmany South
Reach 5 Kilmany South to Thomson River confluence
Reach 6 Downstream of Thomson confluence
Reach 7 Lake Wellington
Reach 8 Tanjil River
Reach 9 Tyres River
Water infrastructure
Measurement point
Town
Indicates direction of flow
Grey river reaches have been included for context.
The numbered reaches indicate where relevant environmental flow studies have been undertaken.
Coloured reaches can receive environmental water.
Wetlands
Thomson River
Sale
Sale Common
Heart Morass
Lake Wellington
Latrobe River
Dowd Morass
Barkly River
Macalister River
Jordan River
Thomson River
Aberfeldy River
Thomson Reservoir
Loch
Latrobe River
Noojee
Tanjil
Neerim
Tyers River
Erica
Glenmaggie
Lake Glenmaggie
Ben Cruachan Creek
Valencia Creek
Freestone Creek
Avon River
Blackall Creek
Fiddlers Creek
Perry River
Toms Creek
Gippsland Lakes
Maffra
Boggy Creek
Rainbow Creek
Eaglehawk Creek
Blue Rock Reservoir
Moondarra Reservoir
Yallourn Weir
Shady Creek
Warragul
Moe River
Moe
Lake Narracan
Morwell
Traralgon
Waterhole Creek
Narracan Creek
Middle Creek
Flynns Creek
Traralgon Creek
Morwell River
Rosedale
Location within Victoria

3 ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

Sale Common is one of only two remaining freshwater wetlands in the Gippsland Lakes system. It provides sheltered feeding, breeding and resting habitat for various waterbird species, including the Australasian bittern.

Dowd Morass is a large, brackish wetland that regularly supports rookeries of colonial nesting waterbirds, including Australian white ibis, straw-necked ibis, little black and little pied cormorants, royal spoonbills and great egrets.

Heart Morass is also a large brackish wetland, with open expanses providing shallow feeding habitat for waterbirds, including black swans, Eurasian coots and various duck species. The lower Latrobe wetlands function as a diverse and complementary environmental system. Colonial nesting waterbirds breed among swamp paperbark trees at Dowd Morass in spring. Migratory shorebirds feed on the exposed mudflats as the wetlands draw down and dry over the summer. Waterfowl and fish-eating birds use open-water habitat at the wetlands year-round. The wetlands also support threatened vegetation communities, including swamp scrub, brackish herbland and aquatic herbland.

Environmental objectives in the lower Latrobe wetlands	
A1	Maintain the abundance of frog populations
B1	Improve waterbird breeding, recruitment, foraging and sheltering opportunities
CN1	Enable carbon and nutrient cycling between the wetland and river through connectivity
MI1	Maintain the abundance of all waterbugs
T1	Maintain the abundance of freshwater turtle populations
V1	Maintain the diversity, condition and/or extent of native streamside vegetation fringing wetlands and the variety of self-sustaining submerged and emergent aquatic vegetation types
V2	Discourage the introduction and reduce the extent and density of undesirable/invasive plants (Sale Common)
WQ1	Provide suitable physicochemical conditions to support aquatic life
WQ2	Avoid catastrophic water quality conditions (i.e. avoid acid sulfate soil exposure [Heart Morass] or dilute salt concentrations [Dowd Morass])

4 TRADITIONAL OWNER CULTURAL VALUES AND USES

The lower Latrobe wetlands are a place of spiritual and cultural connection for the Gunaikurnai people. Over many thousands of years, customs and lore have been passed orally between generations about the Gunaikurnai cultural values and uses of the wetlands. Tangible cultural heritage in the lower Latrobe wetlands indicates the importance in the landscape as a food source and gathering place, and the connection to the Gunaikurnai creation story.

Maintaining the lower Latrobe wetlands as a Quarenook (meeting place) and a wetland system where animals and plants for hunting and gathering thrive requires maintaining them as freshwater ecosystems, and restoring natural water regimes, including wetting and drying cycles.

GLaWAC supports the West Gippsland CMA objective of providing freshwater to the Latrobe estuary and connected wetlands and seeks participation in monitoring to ensure culturally significant species are included as objectives in environmental water management. GLaWAC considers some drying may continue to occur in 2026-27 and that this provides an opportunity to minimise pest species, particularly in Sale Common. GLaWAC does seek maintaining some deepwater in wetlands to provide habitat including food sources for waterbird breeding.

GLaWAC seeks 2026-27 environmental watering of the lower Latrobe wetlands to support the following:

- Collaboration with GLaWAC regarding the timing of environmental water delivery to support a seasonal flow regime and wet and dry periods that embody healthy Country
- Monitoring, including of cultural indicators, to be seasonal and continuing to inform the impacts of changed water regimes from water storage dams, urban and mine supply and other uses.
- Freshwater supply to the Durt-Yowan estuary, Dowd Morass, Sale Common, Heart Morass and associated freshwater habitats
- With GLaWAC, read seasonal conditions and determine where environmental water can aid the growth of loombrak (water ribbon) and other aquatic water species to support Gidai breeding in late winter to early spring.
- Ensure the lower wetlands and billabongs receive freshwater flows to continue to provide food for waterbird breeding including fledglings.
- Aid control of pest species including through drying regime at Sale Common

5 SOCIAL RECREATIONAL AND ECONOMIC (SRE) VALUES AND USES

In planning the potential environmental watering actions in Table 2.2.3, the West Gippsland CMA considered how environmental flows could support values and uses, including:

- water-based recreation (such as canoeing and fishing)
- riverside recreation and amenity (such as birdwatching, bushwalking, camping and duck hunting)
- socioeconomic benefits (such as commercial eel and carp fishing and tourism).

6 SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL WATERING

Potential Watering Actions (PWAs), presented in **Error! Reference source not found.** are derived from the Latrobe Environmental Water Requirements Investigation (2020). This study established wetting and drying regime based on objectives and values determined by Traditional Owners, community groups, delivery partners and technical experts.

Potential Watering Actions in 2026-27

Potential environmental watering action	Expected watering effects	Environmental objectives
Dowd Morass		
Top-up (any time, following bird breeding event if required)	• Prolong wetting of reed beds to maintain habitat and food resources for waterbirds and protect chicks from predators, following an observed breeding event	B1
Fill to control salinity (anytime)	• Dilute salt concentrations within the wetland that may be caused by king tides from Lake Wellington (likely occurring between March to May) or other sources • This watering action is likely to be triggered if electrical conductivity rises and reaches 7,000 µS/cm	WQ2
Partial fill (with top-ups as required to maintain a water depth of 0.3 m AHD during July to December 2026 and April to June 2027)	• Provide seasonal variation in water depth throughout the wetland to support the growth and flowering of semi-aquatic plants • Wet vegetation and soils at middle elevations within the wetland to increase the abundance of waterbugs and other food resources for frogs, turtles and waterbirds • Provide connectivity between the river and wetlands and between wetlands, increasing available habitat for frogs and turtles • Support bird breeding (when delivered in spring/early summer following earlier fill) by maintaining wetted habitat around reed beds	T1 V1 B1 A1 MI1
Fill (with top-ups as required to maintain a water depth of 0.6 m AHD during August to November)	• Wet reed beds and deep water next to reedbeds to provide waterbird nesting habitat and stimulate bird breeding • Wet high-elevation banks and the streamside zone to support vegetation growth, creating nesting habitat for waterbirds • Wet vegetation and soils at higher elevations to stimulate ecosystem productivity and increase the abundance of waterbugs and other food resources for frogs, turtles and waterbirds • Provide connectivity between the river and wetlands and between wetlands, increasing available habitat and food resources for frogs and turtles • Reduce the impact of saltwater incursion from Lake Wellington	A1 T1 V1 B1 WQ1

Potential environmental watering action	Expected watering effects	Environmental objectives
Partial drawdown (during January to March)	• Oxygenate sediments to enable aquatic vegetation to germinate and recruit • Provide water level fluctuations for emergent vegetation reproduction and expansion (particularly swamp scrub and tall marsh) • Break down organic matter and promote nutrient cycling • Expose mudflats and create shallows to facilitate waterbird foraging	V1 B1 CN1
Heart Morass		
Top-up to permanently maintain water level above -0.3 m AHD (anytime)	• Minimise the risk of acid sulfate soils developing by keeping known high- risk areas wet • Respond to decreasing pH from the rewetting of exposed acid sulfate soils (most likely during high-wind events) • Dilute salt concentrations within the wetland that may be caused by king tides from Lake Wellington or other sources. This watering action is likely to be triggered if wetland overtopping appears likely; based on rising water levels at Lake Wellington (reaching or exceeding +0.5 m AHD)	WQ2
Top-up (anytime up to 0.5 m AHD, following bird breeding event if required)	• Prolong wetting of reed beds to maintain habitat and food resources for waterbirds and protect chicks from predators, following an observed breeding event	B1
Fill and partial flushing flow (during July to November)	• Wet high-elevation banks and streamside zone to support vegetation growth, create nesting and foraging habitat for waterbirds and provide food resources for terrestrial birds • Provide connectivity between the river and wetlands and between wetlands, increasing available habitat and providing food resources for frogs and turtles • Export accumulated salts and sulfates and transport nutrients, dissolved organic carbon and seeds between the Latrobe River and Heart Morass	A1 T1 V1 B1 WQ1 CN1

Potential environmental watering action	Expected watering effects	Environmental objectives
Partial fill (with top-ups as required to maintain a minimum water depth of 0.3 m AHD during August to December)	• Support the growth and flowering of semi-aquatic plants • Provide appropriate wetland fringing habitat for frogs and turtles • Provide conditions that support waterbug communities and food resources for frogs, turtles and waterbirds	 A1  T1  MI1  V1  B1
Partial drawdown (during January to March)	• Oxygenate sediments to enable aquatic vegetation to germinate and recruit • Provide water level fluctuations for emergent vegetation reproduction and expansion (particularly swamp scrub and tall marsh) • Break down organic matter and promote nutrient cycling • Expose mudflats and create shallows to facilitate waterbird foraging	 V1  B1  CN1
Sale Common		
Top-up (anytime, following bird breeding event if required)	• Prolong wetting of reed beds to maintain habitat and food resources for nesting waterbirds and protect chicks from predators	 B1
Partial fill with top ups as required to maintain a minimum water height of 0.3 AHD (July to December)	• Encourage the growth and flowering of semi-aquatic plants • Provide appropriate wetland habitat for frogs and turtles • Provide conditions that support waterbug communities and food resources for waterbirds	 A1  T1  V1  B1  MI1

Potential environmental watering action	Expected watering effects	Environmental objectives
Fill (with top-ups as required during August to November to maintain a water depth of 0.4 m AHD for at least two months)	• Wet the outer boundaries of the wetland to support the growth and flowering of streamside and fringing wetland plants, increasing foraging opportunities for waterbirds • Encourage bird and turtle breeding by providing nesting habitat • Provide connectivity between the river and wetlands and increase habitat and feeding opportunities for frogs and turtles	 A1  T1  V1  B1
Trigger-based fill or top- up to 0.5 m AHD (during warmer months, likely between December and January) Trigger: Observed broadscale germination of *Juncus ingens* in previously uncolonized areas	• Wet key habitats within the wetland for a sufficient duration to discourage invasive plants, particularly the excessive spread of *Juncus ingens* (Giant Rush)	 V2
Partial drawdown (during January to March)	• Oxygenate sediments to enable aquatic vegetation germination and recruitment • Provide water level fluctuations for emergent vegetation reproduction and expansion (particularly swamp scrub and tall marsh) • Break down organic matter and promote nutrient cycling • Expose mudflats and create shallows to facilitate waterbird foraging	 V1  B1  CN1

7 SCENARIO PLANNING

Seasonal Review

Drier conditions have prevailed across the Lake Wellington catchment over the past year, resulting in substantial drawdown across all three Lower Latrobe wetlands. Natural inflows have been less frequent than in recent years, and only minor top-ups occurred following isolated rainfall events in late summer. These conditions have reduced overall wetland water levels and increased the ecological importance of maintaining minimum water depths through managed inflows.

Freshwater vegetation communities that expanded during recent wetter years have persisted but show signs of stress as water levels have receded. Sensitive species at Heart Morass and Dowd Morass remain present but are vulnerable to extended drying periods and elevated salinity.

Monitoring results from WetMAP and partner agencies indicate that each wetland continues to support key ecological values, though habitat availability for frogs, turtles, and waterbirds has contracted with the drawdown.

Infrastructure

Several infrastructure developments will shape watering feasibility in the upcoming year:

Heart Morass – New inlet commissioning (expected May 2026)

This new structure will significantly improve the ability to deliver targeted inflows, maintain water levels above critical thresholds (particularly for acid sulfate soil avoidance), and enhance connectivity with the Latrobe River under suitable water quality conditions.

Sale Common – Planned upgrades to the inlet structure (May/June2026)

These upgrades will improve operational control, support more efficient top-ups, and help maintain minimum water levels during dry periods.

Dowd Morass – Inlet upgrade works planned for commencement at the end of the 2026 calendar year

This may temporarily constrain the delivery of larger-volume inflows late in the water year but is expected to offer longer-term improvements in water delivery efficiency and salinity management.

Triggers for action

A water management risk assessment performed for the lower Latrobe wetlands completed in 2019 identified triggers for action based on the comparative risk of saltwater inundation, extended dry periods or acids sulfate soil activation (Hale & Boon, 2019). The triggers for action are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Triggers for the implementation of the seasonal watering proposal for the lower Latrobe wetlands EC = Electrical Conductivity, a measure of salinity. Swing bridge is the location and name of the gauge used to monitor water level and quality in the lower Latrobe River.

Watering action	Wetland	Trigger
Partial fill (April - December)	Dowd Morass	Divert water if Latrobe River EC is substantially less than Lake Wellington, up to 15,000 µS/cm
Acid sulfate soils inundation (any time)	Heart Morass	Divert water in to maintain water levels above -0.3 m AHD, preferable EC < 1,500 µS/cm, however if critical < 10,000 µS/cm may be used
Fill and partial fills (any time)	All	Divert water if EC in the Latrobe River (Swing bridge) at the top of the water column is <1,500 µS/cm. If > 1,500 µS/cm,

		undertake spot readings at each regulator, open if EC is <1,500 µS/cm (<1,000 µS/cm for Sale Common), Continue to monitor
Fill and partial fills (any time)	Sale Common	Assuming the water quality conditions above are met, divert water in if the water level at Swing Bridge is: a) greater than 0.4 m AHD and will potentially remain above the threshold for more than 10 days (i.e. no strong wind or storm forecasts); and b) the water level in Sale Common is not higher than the Latrobe River

Scenario planning

The 2026–27 planning year is expected to be influenced by below-average rainfall and reduced natural inflows, following several years where wetter conditions naturally sustained inundation. With substantial drawdown already occurring across all three wetlands, environmental watering will focus on protecting priority ecological values and maintaining functional wetland habitat during extended dry periods.

The core set of watering actions remains the same as previous years; however, their relative priority increases under dry and drought scenarios. The emphasis in 2026–27 is on:

- **Protecting** critical ecological functions under dry conditions
  Reducing the risk of catastrophic events—such as acid sulfate soil exposure at Heart Morass—or salinity spikes at Dowd Morass remains essential. Partially filling wetlands during winter/spring helps maintain habitat for frogs, turtles, waterbirds, and aquatic vegetation during the peak ecological activity periods.
- **Maintaining** minimum water levels to prevent ecological decline
  With substantial drawdown already documented, partial fills in winter and top-ups triggered during key ecological events (e.g., waterbird breeding) will be crucial to sustaining biodiversity.
- **Supporting** vegetation communities during drought stress
  Watering actions are structured to retain fringing and emergent vegetation that underpins wetland food webs and habitat structure.
- **Leveraging** improved water delivery infrastructure
  The commissioning of the new Heart Morass inlet and upgrades to the Sale Common inlet provide improved opportunities for targeted water management, even under lower river flows—enhancing the reliability of achieving ecological objectives.

Dowd Morass

Given the substantial drawdown, the priority is to maintain water levels above 0.3 m AHD during July–December and April–June where possible. This supports vegetation condition and ensures habitat availability for waterbirds, frogs, and turtles.

Under drier conditions, the risk of salinity intrusion from Lake Wellington increases, reinforcing the priority of trigger-based fills to dilute salinity.

Inlet upgrade works later in the calendar year may temporarily reduce capacity for high-volume deliveries, so early-season management becomes more important.

Heart Morass

Maintaining water levels above –0.3 m AHD remains the highest priority due to the risk of acid sulfate soil activation.

The commissioning of the new inlet in April will improve the ability to respond promptly to salinity or acidity triggers and better support semi-aquatic vegetation and fauna.

Partial fills in winter and spring remain important for maintaining ecological resilience, while partial drawdown in summer will proceed naturally where conditions permit.

Sale Common

With substantial drawdown already underway, maintaining water levels above 0.3 m AHD through winter and spring remains essential.

The planned inlet upgrades will improve the ability to manage inflows and respond to invasive vegetation risks, particularly the need to drown out giant rush under the trigger-based fill action.

Natural drawdown in summer continues to be preferred unless monitoring indicates expanding invasive species that require intervention.

Table 2: Scenario Planning in 2026-27

Planning scenario	Drought	Dry	Average	Wet
Expected conditions	No natural inflow from the Latrobe River and wetlands are likely to dry completely	Minor natural inflow from the Latrobe River in winter/spring; expect moderate to substantial drying in summer.	Moderate winter/ spring flow in the Latrobe River is likely to fill or partially fill the wetlands; expect minor drying in summer	Major flow in the Latrobe River in winter/spring and possibly autumn/ winter is likely to fill all wetlands with very little drying in summer
Expected availability of water for the environment	Very low freshwater availability due to low river levels, saline conditions in the mid and lower estuary with extended periods of saline conditions in the upper estuary	Low freshwater availability due to low river levels, saline conditions in the mid and lower estuary with periods of saline conditions in the upper estuary	Moderate freshwater availability due to average river levels (fluctuating), 1-2 overbank flows, mostly freshwater conditions with periods of saline conditions in the mid and lower estuary	High freshwater availability due to extended periods of high river levels, two or more overbank flows, mostly freshwater conditions throughout estuary
Dowd Morass				
Potential environmental watering – tier 1 (high priorities)	• Top-up (any time following bird breeding) • Fill (any time to control salinity) • Partial fill (with top-ups as required in July to December and April to June) • Partial drawdown (during January to March)			
Potential environmental watering – tier 2 (additional priorities)	• Fill (with top-ups as required during August to November)			
Heart Morass				
Potential environmental watering – tier 1 (high priorities)	• Top-up (any time to permanently maintain water level above -0.3 m AHD) • Top-up (any time following bird breeding) • Partial fill (with top-ups as required during August to December) • Partial drawdown (during January to March)			
Potential environmental watering – tier 2 (additional priorities)	• Fill and partial flushing flow (during July to November)			
Sale Common				

Planning scenario	Drought	Dry	Average	Wet
Potential environmental watering – tier 1 (high priorities)	• Top-up (any time following bird breeding) • Partial fill (with top-ups as required, during July to December) • Trigger-based fill or top-up to 0.5 m AHD (during December to January, if required) • Partial drawdown through evaporation (during December to March)			
Potential environmental watering – tier 2 (additional priorities)	• Fill (with top-ups as required during August to November)			

8 ENGAGEMENT

The focus of engagement during the past year has been with partners. WGCMA hosted this year's Environmental Water Officer's regional tour, showcasing the Latrobe river and Lower Latrobe Wetlands. This was an opportunity to highlight the unique challenges facing this system with twenty environmental water professionals, with the aim of raising awareness and sharing knowledge. We also assisted both Arthur Rylah Institute and BirdLife Australia with fieldwork at lower Latrobe wetlands building relationships, sharing information and contributing to scientific data collection.

Field and Game continued to assist with water quality sampling as part of the Heart Morass WaterWatch program. The data is used to monitor salinity and acidity across the site. It also strengthens our relationship with an informed and eager group, who can contribute local knowledge and advocacy.

The broader community were engaged via the quarterly environmental water email and SMS notification system. This was used to share delivery updates, monitoring results and other information. Several articles were also included in VR Fish newsletters to reach our recreational fishing audience, highlighting the importance of environmental flows for fish spawning and recruitment.

A previous Project Advisory Group provided significant engagement for the Latrobe Environmental Water Requirements Investigation. As part of this project, participants were informed of the use of environmental objectives and wetting and drying regime recommendations were established. This group has now disbanded and there is no formal environmental water advisory group for the Lower Latrobe wetlands entitlement however WGCMA plan to establish one in 2026-27. Current input into the environmental water program is predominantly via direct engagement with partners and stakeholders.

Feedback received from Field and Game Australia and Parks Victoria following direct engagement, indicates strong support for the proposed 2026–27 watering actions, with general agreement that the 2025–26 watering actions were appropriate and effectively delivered. Parks Victoria has confirmed its willingness and capacity to contribute to the Carp Response Plan as required. Visitation data provided by Parks Victoria for Dowd Morass indicates a substantial increase in public use, with visits between May and December increasing by approximately 105 per cent from 2023 to 2024 and a further 58 per cent from 2024 to 2025, highlighting the growing social and recreational value of the site.

The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) have Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) status under the Aboriginal Heritage Act (2006) and their area of determination covers all West Gippsland rivers that receive environmental water. The WGCMA has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in place with GLaWAC since 2013. In this MoU the WGCMA agrees to involve the Aboriginal corporation in all WGCMA projects from the beginning as well as build capacity of GLaWAC to protect and conserve natural resources.

GLaWAC was engaged through one-on-one meetings with the new Aboriginal water officer. Efforts were made to arrange a field trip with the water officer, but due to unforeseen circumstances this was unable to proceed. WGCMA is also looking to contribute funds to GLaWAC's eDNA monitoring program in the region, to increase their capacity to participate in waterway management activities.

While a GLaWAC representative was invited to attend both EWAG meetings, they were unable to attend. Therefore, specific engagement will occur separately. WGCMA has worked closely with GLaWAC on our SWPs for several years and have amassed a wealth of cultural knowledge on the wetland system which will be reviewed along with the proposed flows.

Strategic engagement between the WGCMA and GLaWAC does occur regularly.

Summary table

Table 3: Summary of stakeholder engagement that informed this Seasonal Watering Proposal

Stakeholder Category	Stakeholder(s)	Engagement method	Engagement purpose
Community groups and environment groups	• Field & Game, Sale	• Stakeholder meeting to review proposal, • Direct engagement (one-on-one)	• Seek input to the development of the proposal. • Review previous environmental watering actions and seek feedback on any outcomes or observations. • Assist in increasing awareness and understanding of the purpose and objectives of the environmental watering program for the Latrobe system. • Identify opportunities to achieve shared benefits. • Increase collaboration and awareness of the Latrobe catchment.
Government agencies	• Parks Victoria • Victorian Environmental Water Holder		
Landholders/farmers	• Individual landholders	• Direct engagement (one-on-one, email distribution list)	• Increase collaboration and awareness of the Latrobe catchment. • Identify opportunities to achieve shared benefits.
Recreational Users	• Recreational Users		
Traditional Owners	• Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation	• Review of draft proposal • Direct engagement (one-on-one)	• Invitation to collaborate and share knowledge, • Inform on proposed watering actions, • Identify opportunities to achieve shared benefits.
Local businesses	N/A		

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

A risk management workshop hosted by the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH) was held in February 2026. The workshop participants included representatives from relevant water corporations MW, GW, land managers, WGCMA and VEWH. A representative from SRW was unable to attend. Participants identified the key potential risks that may occur in the 2026-27 water year, to prevent environmental objectives not being met. The risks were considered within the context of the likely watering actions proposed for 2026-27, and the current conditions of environmental assets across each system in light of the extensive natural and operational watering that had occurred in recent years across the region.

The risk assessment was undertaken using the likelihood, consequence and risk rating tables contained in the updated Victorian Environmental Watering Program Risk Management Framework (2026). The risk assessment process also had regard for dynamic risks that are more likely to vary from year to year, depending on seasonal conditions or the specific watering actions proposed.

Risks and mitigation strategies identified at this workshop are provided in the report on outcomes from the 2026 risk workshop supplied by the VEWH. Many of the risks were categorised as low risks, with the balance rating as medium risks with only one high risk. There were no extreme risks prior to mitigations.

The “high” risk, applicable to all systems, related to safety risk around rapid changes in river conditions due to flow releases. Post mitigation actions (i.e. enacting communications plan, notifications, appropriate ramp up and ramp down rates), the residual risk was identified as low.

The medium and high risks were assessed as having low residual risk levels for 2026-27 following the application of the identified mitigation actions.

10 APPROVAL, ENDORSEMENT AND CONSENT

WATERWAY MANAGER APPROVAL OF THE SEASONAL WATERING PROPOSAL

I, the authorised representative of the agency shown below approve the Seasonal Watering Proposal for the Lower Latrobe Wetlands system in 2026-27 and declare that:

- the information provided in this proposal is true and correct,
- all required approvals and endorsements from storage managers, land managers, Traditional Owners or other relevant party have been granted, and
- unless otherwise stated, any consent/s required to use or reproduce Traditional Owner language and knowledge has been obtained.

SIGNED FOR AND ON BEHALF OF WEST GIPPSLAND CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Signature of authorised representative:



Name of authorised representative: Martin Fuller

Position of authorised representative: CEO

Date: 27/04/2026

11 REFERENCES

12 APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Values icons used in the Seasonal Watering Plan

Environmental Values

Icon	Unique ID prefix	Value it represents
	A	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system relates to frogs.
	B	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system relates to waterbirds
	CN	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system aims to maintain, increase, or enable carbon and nutrient cycling and connectivity.
	F	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system relates to fish.
	G	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system aims to maintain or strengthen physical stream characteristics
	MI	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system relates to invertebrates.
	PR	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system relates to platypus or rakali.
	T	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system relates to turtles.
	TA	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system relates to terrestrial animals.
	V	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system relates to vegetation.
	WQ	Icon indicating an environmental objective in this system aims to maintain or increase water quality and/or conditions.

Traditional Owner

	Watering planned and/or delivered in partnership with Traditional Owners to support cultural values and uses

Social, recreational, and economic values and uses.

	Icon indicating that environmental watering will also support water sports activities (e.g. canoeing, kayaking, rowing, swimming, water skiing)
	Icon indicating that environmental watering will also support waterbird-related recreational activities (e.g., twitching, birdwatching)
	Icon indicating that environmental watering will also support angling activities
	Icon indicating that environmental watering will also support peaks in visitation (e.g., camping, or other public activities on long weekends or school holidays)