West Gippsland
Catchment Management Authority

2026-27 SEASONAL WATERING PROPOSAL

Macalister River - *Wirn wirndook Yeerung*

West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority



Overlooking the Macalister River

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.

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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	V1.0	Steph Suter & Tash Marty-Cripps	4/03/2026	Draft proposals, reviewed template and updated content
Final	V1	Steph Suter & Tash-Marty-Cripps	29/04/2026	Final version ready for issue to VEWH

Acknowledgement of Country

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

1 CONTEXT

This seasonal watering proposal outlines the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority's (WGCMA) proposed watering actions and priorities for use of the *Macalister River environmental entitlement* and the *Thomson/Macalister Mitigation Water entitlement* for the 2026-2027 water year. The Macalister River environmental entitlement and the Mitigation Water entitlement are managed on behalf of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH), by the WGCMA. Development of this proposal is as per the requirements under section 192A of the *Water Act 1989* and is a priority of the West Gippsland Waterway Strategy.

This proposal will be used by the VEWH to inform the development of the state-wide Seasonal Watering Plan. 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 using an adaptive management approach. 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.

The VEWH revised their guidelines for the 2026-27 watering proposals, which has created additional guidance and a tool related to the division of tiers in the scenario planning table, and a change to illustrating shared benefits, with overall benefit represented instead of linkages to specific watering actions.

2 SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Wirn wirndook Yeerung (Macalister River) flows from Mt Howitt in the Alpine National Park and joins *Carran Carran* (Thomson River) south of Maffra (Figure 2.4.1). The river winds southeast through mostly forested, confined valleys and narrow floodplains above Lake Glenmaggie. The downstream reaches flow through wide alluvial floodplains cleared for agriculture. The Wellington River and Glenmaggie Creek are the main tributaries of the Macalister River.

Lake Glenmaggie is the major water harvesting storage regulating the Macalister River. Maffra Weir is a small diversion weir located further downstream in Maffra.

Before the construction of Lake Glenmaggie, the Macalister River would regularly receive high and medium flows in winter and spring. Although Lake Glenmaggie regularly spills, a high flow is less frequent than natural because the storage captures much of the water. A notable effect of irrigation and water harvesting is the reversed seasonality of the flow between Lake Glenmaggie and Maffra Weir. The summer flow through this reach is much greater than natural due to the delivery of irrigation water. Winter flow in this reach is lower than natural because a large proportion of the inflows are captured, and there are no irrigation demands over winter. Most irrigation water is diverted at Maffra Weir, and the flow downstream of the weir is lower than natural year-round. The changed hydrology restricts fish migration, limits the growth and recruitment of in-stream and streamside plants and reduces the quality of in-stream habitat.

Water for the environment is stored in Lake Glenmaggie and released to the Macalister River. The river is divided into two reaches for the purposes of managing environmental flows: Lake Glenmaggie to Maffra Weir (reach 1) and Maffra Weir to the Thomson River (reach 2) (Figure 1).

Maffra Weir is a major barrier to fish movement along the river, so environmental water delivery for migratory fish objectives mainly focuses on reach 2. All other objectives apply to reaches 1 and 2. Construction of a new fish ladder on Maffra Weir to improve fish passage is scheduled to commence in April 2026, with expected completion in November 2026. WGCMA has been advised that construction is not expected to affect deliveries of water for the environment in 2026-27.

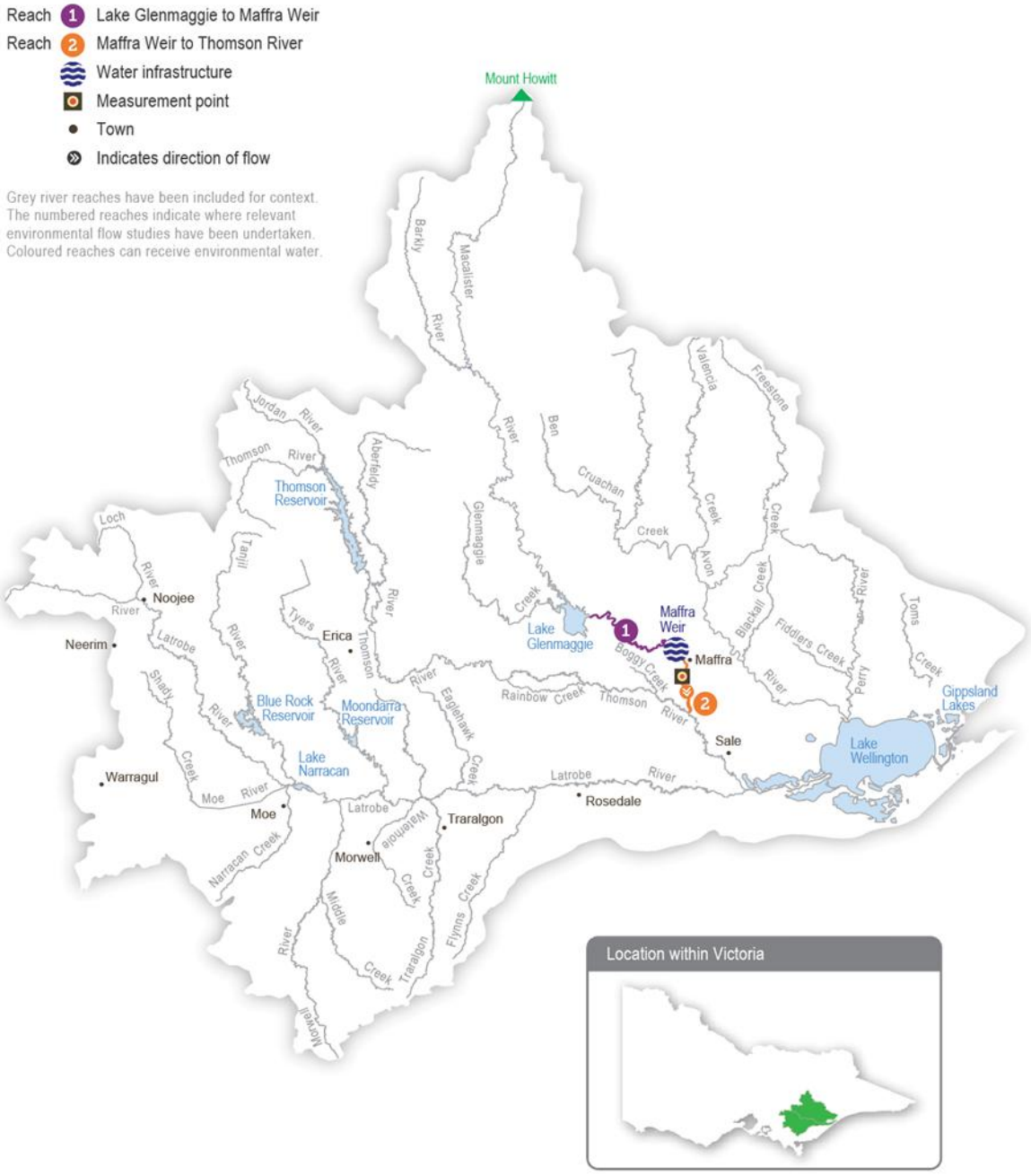


Figure 1 Macalister System Overview

3 ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

Seven migratory native fish species move between the Macalister River, the estuary, Gippsland Lakes and the sea to complete their life cycle. These species include the Australian grayling, short-finned eel, long-finned eel, tupong, Australian bass, shorthead lamprey and common galaxias. Yellow-eye mullet, an estuarine species, has also been recorded in the river. Platypus and rakali (water rats) are widely distributed through the Macalister River and its tributaries.

The streamside vegetation corridor along the regulated reaches of the Macalister River is fragmented. Immediately below Lake Glenmaggie, the vegetation is in good condition. It includes remnant river red gums and good-quality stands of shrubs, particularly in areas where revegetation has occurred in combination with stock exclusion. Further downstream, the vegetation is degraded. The cover of in-stream vegetation has declined, possibly due to increased water turbidity, erosion and a changed water regime that doesn't encourage plant growth. The cover of non-woody plants (such as reeds, sedges and rushes) along the river's fringes is patchy.

Environmental objectives in the Macalister system	
F1	Increase the distribution, recruitment and abundance of all native fish, and increase opportunities for the spawning and recruitment of native migratory fish (such as Australian grayling)
G1	Maintain the form of the riverbank and bed to provide physical habitat for aquatic animals and plants
PR1	Increase the abundance of platypus and rakali (water rats)
V1	Maintain emergent (non-woody) and fringing (woody) vegetation in the streamside zone
V2	Reinstate submerged aquatic vegetation
MI1	Increase the abundance and number of functional groups of waterbugs
WQ1	Improve water quality during periods of reduced or no passing flow from Lake Glenmaggie
WQ2	Improve water quality in the Thomson River estuary

4 TRADITIONAL OWNER CULTURAL VALUES AND USES

Wirn wirndook Yeerung (Macalister River) is an important river to the Gunaikurnai. The Gunaikurnai have moved through the landscape along the waterways for thousands of years, sourcing food and plants along the way, and *Wirn Wirndook Yeerung* is a pathway that connects the Snow Country to the heart of Gippsland, to ceremonial grounds and to a known special men's place to Elders. Its traditional name *Wirn wirndook Yeerung* translates to 'song of the male fairy-wren'. *Yeerung* is the men's totem.

The river has many cultural resources and extensive important sites along the whole system. Traditionally, the landscape of *Wirn wirndook Yeerung* and its branches and associated floodplains, has been a rich source of food, medicine and other resources for the Gunaikurnai people. There are many sites of cultural significance near the river and around Lake Glenmaggie.

Values mapping undertaken by GLaWAC has raised concerns about the impacts of changing water quality and a regulated water regime on plants and animals that depend on it.

GLaWAC seeks 2026-27 *Wirn wirndook Yeerung* environmental watering to support the following cultural values and uses:

- Provide *Wirn wirndook Yeerung* with more water for healthy Country, at the right time, including promoting deeper water pools
- Promote downstream fish migration and spawning
- Environmental water deliveries planned in partnership with GLaWAC to support a seasonal flow regime to support plants and animals of importance to the Gunaikurnai
- Monitoring including monitoring 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.
- Water quality to support the health of native plants and animals with cultural values and uses of significance to the Gunaikurnai.
- Improve water quality between Lake Glenmaggie and Lake Wellington.

5 SOCIAL RECREATIONAL AND ECONOMIC (SRE) VALUES AND USES

Part 1 – SRE values and uses:

In planning the potential environmental watering actions in Table 2, the West Gippsland CMA considered how environmental flows could also support other values and uses, including:

- water-based recreation (such as canoeing, kayaking and swimming)
- riverside recreation and amenity (such as fishing)
- socioeconomic benefits (such as preventing erosion and potentially losing private and public land).

Watering actions, particularly over summer, may improve the water quality in waterholes and improve swimming conditions. Freshes throughout the year also increase the longitudinal connectivity of the river, improving conditions for canoeing and kayaking.

Winter and spring freshes encourage the spawning and recruitment of fish species (such as Australian bass, a popular recreational fishing species).

The West Gippsland CMA notifies the public of planned large releases of water for the environment to alert river users about potential increases in the water's level and velocity. People can register on the West Gippsland CMA website to be notified of upcoming watering events.

Part 2 - how 2026-27 PWAs may support SRE values and uses

a)

While specific requests for alterations to environmental deliveries aren't common in the Macalister system, the WGCMA and SRW operate under some shared principles regarding planning of deliveries and management of the storage and Maffra Weir during and preceding the irrigation season. Instances where timing of deliveries may be modified are summarised below:

	Description	**Implications for environmental watering**
Maffra Weir Filling	SRW gradually fill Maffra Weir during July in preparation for the irrigation season	Winter freshes planned in July/Aug (if any) may be timed on either end of the Maffra Weir filling period, timing will be co-ordinated with SRW
Lake Glenmaggie spill period	Releases prior to storage spills are considered a sensitive issue for the irrigation district, as watering releases may reduce the probability of Lake Glenmaggie spilling. A spill bestows significant benefits to consumptive water users through the provision of spill entitlement.	To strike the balance between watering and meeting irrigation demands; the WGCMA and SRW will work together ahead of time (i.e. well in advance of when the watering action is due to be delivered), to determine if there are different scenarios that may provide for both environmental and economic outcomes (e.g. delaying a flow release by a week and shaping a spill instead).

b)

Table 1: Shared benefits likely to be supported by Potential Watering Actions in 2026-27

	Environmental watering will also support water sports activities (e.g., canoeing, kayaking, rowing, swimming, water skiing) by improving the water quality in waterholes and increasing longitudinal connectivity of the river, improving conditions for canoeing and kayaking.
	Environmental watering will also support angling activities by encouraging the spawning and recruitment of native fish species

6 SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL WATERING

The environmental objectives and related flow recommendations in this proposal are detailed in the Macalister Environmental Flows and Management Review (2015) and the Macalister River Environmental Water Management Plan (2023), and unless otherwise stated the watering actions evaluated and prioritised in this proposal are consistent with those documents. Each potential watering action, along with the expected watering effect and the environmental objectives supported are summarised in Table 2.

Potential watering actions for 2026-27 are focused on providing continued support to native fish communities, from baseflows to freshes allowing for continued migration, dispersal, and survival of previous years recruits.

Also of note, since the 2025-2026 water year, management of the Mitigation Water Entitlement is included in this proposal. The intention of this volume of water is to provide benefits to both the Thomson (reach 5 and 6) and reach 2 of the Macalister. At this stage the preferred delivery option is via the Macalister from Lake Glenmaggie, so meeting reach 2 of the Macalister and reach 6 of the Thomson (Thomson estuary). This volume has been considered in the pool of the available allocation, and as such will be incorporated into the rationale and planning along with the regular Macalister EE, with expected benefits to reach 6 of the Thomson provided where considered part of the prioritisation process. At the time of writing, an amendment was signed off by the Minister for Water, resulting in an additional 400 ML of water to the Mitigation Entitlement likely to be in effect from the 12th of March. The VEWH, WGCMA and SRW will need to update the Macalister Operating Arrangements to reflect this change.

Table 22: Potential Watering Actions in 2026-27		
Potential environmental watering action	**Expected watering effects**	**Environmental objectives**
Macalister River/Creek – reach 2 (compliance point)		
PWA 1 Continuous low flow (60-90 ML/day Year round)	• Maintain water depth in pools and hydraulic habitat for native fish • Maintain permanent wetted habitat in pools and riffles for waterbugs • Provide longitudinal connectivity for local movement of platypus and rakali (water rats), as well as protection from predation, access to food sources and maintenance of refuge habitats • If passing flows drop below 60ML/d for an extended period, it enables maintenance of a minimum depth in pools to allow for turnover of water and to slow degradation of water quality to support aquatic life • Note: At 90 ML per day, expected watering effects are met in reach 1 and 2. At 60 ML per day, expected watering effects are met in reach 2 only	 **F1, PR1, MI1, WQ1**
PWA 2 Winter-Spring low flow 300 ML/d for a minimum of 120 days (July – Dec 2025 to Nov – June 2026)	• Provide permanent wetted habitat for waterbugs and maintain water depth over riffles to enable fish passage between local habitats • Provide sustained wetting of low-level benches to limit the encroachment of terrestrial vegetation	 **F1, MI1, V1, V2**
PWA 3 Spring/summer fresh following spill 1500-1800 ML/d, for 3 days Sept - Dec	Shape the recession of a 1,500 ML/day or 1,800 ML/day storage spill to: • wet mid- and higher-level benches to water emergent and woody vegetation and move organic matter into the channel to transport food resources downstream • provide flow with sufficient shear stress to scour biofilms and flush fine sediment from pools and small gaps in the substrate to improve geomorphic habitat and food resources for waterbugs • cue the upstream migration of adult fish (e.g. short-headed lamprey) and the recruitment of juveniles (e.g. Australian grayling, tupong, common galaxias, Australian bass and short- and long-finned eels) from marine/ estuarine environments	 **V1, MI1, F1, G1**

PWA 4 Spring fresh 700 ML/d, 5-10 days (Sep – Nov)	• Cue the upstream migration of adult fish (e.g. short-headed lamprey) and the recruitment of juveniles (e.g. Australian grayling, tupong, common galaxias, Australian bass and short- and long-finned eels) from marine/estuarine environments • Wet mid-level benches to water woody vegetation, limit the encroachment of terrestrial vegetation and facilitate the dispersal of emergent and fringing vegetation seeds and propagules throughout the reach	 **F1, V1** 
PWA 5 3 x Summer/autumn fresh(es) 140 ML/d, 3 days (Dec – Mar)	• Increase water depth to allow fish to move throughout the reach • Flush pools to maintain water quality for aquatic animals • Flush substrates and improve the quality of existing waterbug habitat and food supply • Wet low benches to facilitate the dispersal of seeds and propagules from emergent vegetation throughout the reach • Provide flow with sufficient shear stress to flush fine sediment from small gaps to improve geomorphic habitat	 **G1, V1, V2, MI1, F1, WQ1** 
PWA 6 Summer/autumn fresh 350 ML/d, 7-10 days (Dec – Mar)	• Flush the upper Thomson River estuary (Thomson Reach 6) when combined with flows from the Thomson River, and contribute freshwater to the lower reaches of the Latrobe estuary and wetlands, particularly in the dry-drought scenarios • Increase water depth to allow localized fish movement • Flush pools to maintain water quality for aquatic animals • Flush substrates and improve the quality of existing waterbug habitat and food supply	 **G1, V1, V2, MI1, F1, WQ2** 
PWA 7 Autumn fresh 350 ML/d, 5-10 days (April – May)	• Cue the downstream migration of Australian grayling towards the estuary for spawning • Additional benefits for the Thomson River and the Latrobe system are expected when delivered for greater the minimum 5 days: • Fully flush the upper Thomson River estuary when delivered for more than three days and combined with freshes in the Thomson River, and contribute freshwater to the lower reaches of the Latrobe River and wetlands	 **F1, WQ2** 
PWA 8 Autumn/winter fresh 700 ML/d, 5-7 days (July – Aug 2026, or May – June 2027)	• Cue the downstream migration of Australian bass and tupong towards the estuary for spawning/breeding • Increase the wetted area and improve water quality by flushing pools, providing habitat and conditions for waterbugs • Wet low and mid-level benches to facilitate the dispersal of emergent and fringing vegetation seeds and propagules throughout the reach	 **F1, V1, WQ2** 

7 SCENARIO PLANNING

Seasonal Review (as at 3rd March 2026)

The 2025–26 water year commenced with 7 GL of carryover. Early-season watering focused on a winter low flow across July–August and a partial spring fresh, resulting in 4.8 GL delivered. A major storage spill in September exhausted the remaining carryover, with 5.4 GL spilled. Spill conditions persisted through October, and another spill in November overlapped with a planned spring fresh, which was partially delivered but ultimately cancelled due to spill release volumes exceeding that of the flow order. Spilling continued into early December.

Through January and February, inflows to Lake Glenmaggie were well below the 10-year average, and high irrigation demand maintained low operational flows in reaches 1 and 2 of the Macalister, removing the need for additional summer freshes (Figure 2).

As of early March, no Low Reliability Water Share (LRWS) announcement has been made. This has implications for delivering remaining PWAs. With 9,371 ML currently available, Tier 1 actions under a dry scenario can be fully met. If LRWS is announced, some Tier 2 actions, including an autumn–winter fresh, may become feasible. Expected carryover at year's end remains 1.9 GL, consistent with drought, dry and average planning scenarios.

Climate forecasts for March–May 2026 indicate drier-than-average conditions and low regional streamflows, with climate models pointing to neutral ENSO conditions by late summer. A significant rainfall event in late February generated high rainfall in the upper Macalister catchment and may influence the likelihood of an LRWS announcement.

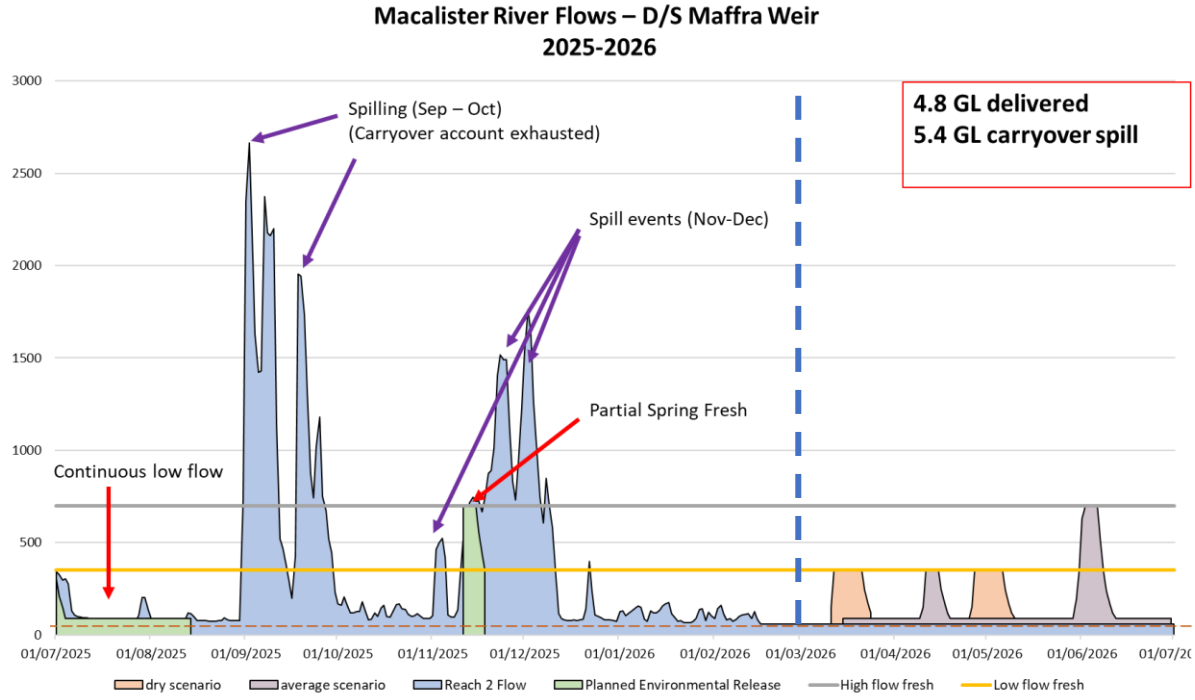


Figure 2 Macalister River 2025-26 Water Year Summary (broken blue line indicates 3rd March 2026)

Preliminary Native Fish Report Card monitoring results (February 2026) in the Macalister did not detect any Australian grayling in the Macalister, however three were detected from the annual

Thomson River population surveys that were carried out at a similar time. No young-of-year were detected on either system. Tupong were recorded in both systems, again with no evidence of young-of-year. Other species recorded included Australian bass, Estuary Perch, Sea Mullet, Australian Smelt, Common Galaxias, Flatheaded Gudgeon, Long-finned Eel, Short-finned Eel and Flinders Pygmy Perch (IUCN – listed as Vulnerable).

Also of note, European Carp were present at all 9 sites surveyed, with extremely high abundance at the lowest three (on the Thomson River), with >500 recorded at a single site.

Part 1 – expected conditions and prioritisation:

For any given year the level at which an objective can be met will vary depending on the extant weather and climate conditions. For this reason, the overarching goals for environmental water management varies over four climatic scenarios. These goals are as follows:

- Drought — **Protect** high priority environmental assets, key functions, and priority refuges to ensure chance of future recovery and avoid catastrophic events such as low dissolved oxygen or algal blooms
- Dry — **Maintain** high priority environmental assets, key functions, and priority refuges to ensure chance of future recovery and avoid catastrophic events such as low dissolved oxygen or algal blooms
- Average — **Recover** by improving ecological health and resilience and enhance recruitment opportunities for key flora and fauna
- Wet — **Enhance** by maximising recruitment opportunities for flora and fauna species.

Native fish in the Macalister system require baseflows for habitat connectivity and local movement, and freshes as triggers to promote spawning and recruitment in migratory species. Outside of very wet seasons, these flow events have a lower probability of being fully provided naturally, and as such represent the highest priority watering actions across all management scenarios for the Macalister River in 2026-27.

Table 3: Scenario Planning in 2026-27

Planning scenario	Drought	Dry	Average	Wet
Expected conditions	• No unregulated flows • Likely reduced passing flow volumes based on inflows: 35-60 ML/d or natural (as per the Bulk Entitlement Rules) • Low consumptive water delivery throughout the irrigation season (15 Aug – 15 May) – most of this water diverted downstream of Maffra Weir. Water availability a likely constraint on irrigation deliveries.	• Low likelihood of reservoir spill/s, volume dependent on rainfall; up to minor flood level – any spills most likely in winter/spring • Likely reduced passing flow volumes based on inflows: 35-60 ML/d or natural (as per the Bulk Entitlement Rules) • High consumptive water delivery from late spring (post-spill period) to end of irrigation season, predominantly during the warmer months – most of this water diverted downstream of Maffra Weir	• Reservoir spill/s in spring likely, volume dependent on rainfall; minor to moderate flood level • Passing flows 60 ML/d • Moderate to high consumptive water delivery from later spring (post-spill period) to end of the irrigation season, predominantly during the warmer months – most of this water diverted downstream of Maffra Weir	• Reservoir spill/s likely anytime during the spill period, volume dependent on rainfall; moderate to major flood level • Passing flows 60 ML/d • Low demand for consumptive water delivery from late spring (post-spill period) to end of irrigation season. Rainfall likely to reduce the need for irrigation deliveries.
Expected availability of water for the environment	85% HRWS 0% LRWS	100% HRWS 15% LRWS	100% HRWS 30% LRWS	100% HRWS 100% LRWS
Macalister EE	10.6 GL	13.4 GL	14.3 GL	18.7 GL
Thomson/Mac Mitigation EE	1.3 GL	1.7 GL	1.8 GL	2.2 GL
Carryover* *as at 21/04/2026	1.9 GL	1.9 GL	1.9 GL	1.9 GL

Macalister River - reach 2				
Potential environmental watering – tier 1 (high priorities)	• **PWA 1** Year-round low flow • **PWA 5** 3 x Summer-Autumn freshes, 140 ML/d 3 days • **PWA 6** 350 Summer-autumn fresh, 10 days • **PWA 7** Autumn fresh, 350 ML/d, 7 days	• **PWA 1** Year-round low flow • **PWA 4** Spring fresh, 700 ML/d, 5-7 days • **PWA 5** 3 x Summer-Autumn freshes, 140 ML/d 3 days • **PWA 6** 350 Summer-autumn fresh, 10 days • **PWA 7** Autumn fresh, 350 ML/d, 10 days	• **PWA 1** Year-round low flow • **PWA 4** Spring fresh, 700 ML/d, 5-7 days • **PWA 5** 3 x Summer-Autumn freshes, 140 ML/d 3 days • **PWA 7** Autumn fresh, 350 ML/d, 5-7 days • **PWA 8** Autumn-Winter fresh, 700 ML/d, 5 days	• **PWA 1** Year-round low flow • **PWA 4** Spring fresh, 700 ML/d, 7-10 days • **PWA 7** Autumn fresh, 350 ML/d, 7-10 days • **PWA 8** Autumn-Winter fresh, 700 ML/d, 7-10 days
Potential environmental watering – tier 2 (additional priorities)	• **PWA 4** Spring fresh, 700 ML/d, 5-7 days • **PWA 8** Autumn-Winter fresh, 700 ML/d, 5 days	• **PWA 8** Autumn-Winter fresh, 700 ML/d, 5 days	• **PWA 6 350** Summer-autumn fresh, 10 days	• **PWA 2** Winter/spring low flow 300 ML/d continuous 30 days May-June • **PWA 3** Spring/summer fresh Piggybacking a spill 1500 ML, 3 days
Possible volume of water for the environment required to achieve objectives	• 10.8 GL (Tier 1) • 11.1 GL (Tier 2)	• 14.3 GL (Tier 1) • 5.3 GL (Tier 2)	• 16.1 GL (Tier 1) • 3.4 GL (Tier 2)	• 21.9 GL (Tier 1) • 13.7 GL (Tier 2)
Priority carryover requirements for 2027-28	• 1.9 GL	• 1.9 GL	• 1.9 GL	• 0 GL

Part 2 - Scenario planning logic/rationale (descriptive narrative)

The Macalister system experienced much drier climatic conditions in 2025-26. While storage spills occurred over spring and irrigation demand has maintained low flow volumes in the River, the summer period has seen lower than average inflows to Lake Glenmaggie. Planned environmental watering actions in 2026-27 will continue to focus on supporting the migration, spawning and recruitment of native fish within the system. They are generally the same in all planning scenarios, but the duration and magnitude may vary depending on water availability throughout the year.

Providing a year-round low flow to maintain critical habitat, habitat connectivity and food for native fish and platypus in the Macalister River is the highest-priority potential watering action in all planning scenarios. Year-round operational passing flows of 60 ML per day will meet the minimum low-flow objectives for reach 2 in average and wet conditions. Increasing the flow to 90 ML per day will meet the minimum low-flow objectives for reaches 1 (which has a wider channel) and 2 and will provide more habitat and food to help grow waterbugs, fish and platypus populations and exclude terrestrial vegetation from the main channel. A higher-magnitude low flow is preferred and may be partly met by operational releases and natural inflows at certain times. In drought and dry conditions, the operational passing flows may be reduced to 35 ML per day. Water for the environment will be used where possible to deliver a higher-magnitude low flow but will be prioritised in November in all planning scenarios when operational and consumptive water deliveries are expected to be low. In the wet planning scenario, the low flow may be increased to 300 ML per day during winter and spring to wet the lower benches over a sustained period to discourage the encroachment of terrestrial vegetation.

Larger summer/autumn freshes of 350 ML per day may be timed to coincide with freshes from the Thomson River. These freshes are a high priority in drier planning scenarios, as they are unlikely to be met naturally, and help to improve water quality in Reach 6 of the Thomson River and in the Latrobe estuary where salt wedge upstream migration is likely to occur. Smaller 140 ML per day summer/autumn freshes to maintain the quality of pool habitats that will serve as important refuges for native fish and platypus will be delivered in all planning scenarios. They are especially important to deliver in the drier planning scenarios when poor water quality could be an issue. The West Gippsland CMA will monitor water quality during dry and drought scenarios and adapt the flow as necessary to limit stress on aquatic animals.

Delivering at least one fresh of 350 ML per day in autumn is a high priority in all planning scenarios to provide a migration trigger for native fish to move into or out of the system to complete their life cycles. A larger-magnitude spring fresh is a high priority in all planning scenarios except drought and in addition to providing a migration cue, will also inundate vegetation higher up the bank, improving the condition of flood-tolerant species. The autumn fresh will also contribute to improved water quality in the Thomson River and Latrobe estuary, which can deteriorate at the end of summer. These autumn and spring events are necessary yearly in the average and wet planning scenarios to ensure regular spawning and recruitment cues that align with environmental cues in the broader landscape. An additional 700 ML per day fresh may be delivered in late autumn or winter in the average and wet planning scenarios to increase fish migration and boost fish recruitment when climatic conditions are favourable. However, this event may be difficult to deliver in the drought and dry planning scenario, given the expected availability of water for the environment. Several other large freshes are recommended to slow the recession following spills from Lake Glenmaggie in the

wet planning scenario, but they are a lower priority and will likely be at least partly met by operational releases if the reservoir spills.

Natural inflows and operational releases to manage storage levels may partially achieve some tier 1 planned watering actions in the wetter planning scenarios, meaning lower-priority tier 2 actions that are proposed in these scenarios may also be achievable if enough water for the environment becomes available.

A minimum carryover target of 1,900 ML has been prioritised in the drought, dry and average planning scenarios to support early-season low-flow requirements in the Macalister River in 2027-28. In the wet planning scenario, opening allocations in 2027-28 are expected to be high enough to meet early-season low-flow requirements.

8 ENGAGEMENT

Narrative

Engagement during the past 12 months

This past year there has been strong efforts to engage with the region's landholders and irrigators, as the Macalister Irrigation District is a significant water user in in the Macalister River system. These stakeholders have been engaged through the Southern Rural Water Macalister Customer Consultative Committee, the Macalister EWAG and the WGCMA Irrigator Reference Group. Each of these forums offered an opportunity to present an introduction to environmental water, as well as opportunities for participants to ask questions and develop their ewater literacy. A field trip for the EWAGs in December also had an irrigation theme, with WGCMA staff and landholders presenting to the groups on the Sustainable Irrigation Program. This was an opportunity for us as a group to get more of an understanding of how irrigators manage their water, how they relate to the river, and how they are improving efficiency of water use on their properties. Southern Rural Water also share details about upcoming environmental water deliveries with irrigators via their weekly snapshot newsletter.

Recreation users and the broader community were also engaged to increase awareness, knowledge and advocacy for environmental water across the region. We have made efforts to strengthen relationships with kayaking groups via one-on-one communications and targeted social media, to ensure that they take advantage of the shared benefits of freshes, particularly around long-weekends such as Melbourne Cup Day. Several articles were included in VR Fish newsletters to reach our recreational fishing audience, highlighting the importance of environmental flows for fish spawning and recruitment.

The broader community were engaged via the quarterly environmental water email and SMS notification system. This was used to share information on planned flows, delivery updates, monitoring results and other news.

Input into the Environmental Water Program

Input that has informed planning and decision making for this proposal was via the Macalister EWAG. This group is composed of members from government agencies, community, Traditional Owners, and environmental groups, as well as landholders/irrigators, recreational users, and land managers.

Membership of this group originated from the Macalister flows study project advisory group, with subsequent membership coming from an expression of interest process designed to target a diverse range of communities of interest.

The EWAG was invited to two meetings during the year, a field day touring farming enterprises in the Macalister Irrigation District to learn about the role irrigation has on river flow and how these farmers are working to conserve water, and our annual planning workshop for watering proposals. These meetings included an outline of the delivered flows, planned flows, monitoring results as well as current climatic conditions. They also included opportunities for members to ask questions, present updates from their communities/groups, and provide feedback on the 2026/27 proposed watering actions. This group also receives emails throughout the year outlining upcoming flows,

observations, and any relevant monitoring results that they can share with their representative groups.

Notable feedback
During the February EWAG meeting feedback was sought on the remaining watering actions for 2025-26, and the proposed watering actions for 2026-27.

The proposed priority watering actions for 2026-27 for the differing management scenarios were supported by the group.

Engagement with Traditional Owners (TO)
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, which includes regular strategic engagement between the WGCMA and GLaWAC. 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.

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

WGCMA is working with GLaWAC to coordinate river based eDNA monitoring, looking for sites of shared interest and complementarity., to increase knowledge sharing and participation in waterway management activities.

Summary table

Table 4: Summary of stakeholder engagement that informed this Seasonal Watering Proposal

Stakeholder Category	Stakeholder(s)	Engagement method	Engagement purpose
Community groups and environment groups	• VR Fish • Native Fish Australia • EcoGipps • Friends of Bellbird Corner	• Formal advisory group (Macalister EWAG) • Direct engagement (one-on-one, email distribution list)	• 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 of objectives of the environmental watering program in the Macalister system. • Provide an opportunity for individuals, agencies and groups to contribute to the proposed watering actions and intended outcomes. • Identify opportunities to achieve shared benefits. • Increase collaboration and awareness of the Macalister catchment.
Government agencies	• Victorian Environmental Water Holder • Southern Rural Water • Gippsland Water • Arthur Rylah Institute • Agriculture Vic	• Review of draft watering actions • Formal advisory group (Macalister EWAG) • Direct engagement (one-on-one, email distribution list) • Sustainable Irrigation Group representation	
Landholders/farmers	• Macalister River Irrigators	• Visits to irrigator group meetings and field days/farm visits • Formal advisory group (Macalister EWAG) • MC	
Recreational Users	• Whitehorse Canoe Club	• Direct engagement (one-on-one, email distribution list)	• Increase collaboration and awareness of the Macalister catchment. • Identify opportunities to achieve shared benefits
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	N/A	N/A

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

A risk management workshop was held in February 2026, hosted by the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH). Workshop participants included representatives from relevant water corporations Melbourne Water, Gippsland Water, land managers, WGCMA and VEWH. A representative from Southern Rural Water was not available on the day. 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.

The risk assessment was undertaken using the likelihood, consequence and risk rating tables contained in the updated Victorian Environmental Watering Program Risk Management Framework (updated 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 have been summarised in the VEWH's 2026 Operational Risk Register for West Gippsland. 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 Macalister 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

Alluvium. (2015). Macalister River environmental flows review. A report prepared by Alluvium Consulting for the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority. Melbourne, Victoria.

DG Consulting. (2026). Victorian Environmental Water Holder 2025 Risk Workshops: West Gippsland region – Macalister, Latrobe and Thomson systems. A report prepared by DG Consulting for the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. Melbourne, Australia.

VEWH. (2026). Victorian Environmental Watering Program: Risk Management Framework. Melbourne, VIC.

WGCMA. (2023). Macalister River Environmental Water Management Plan. Traralgon, VIC.