



# Protecting the Catchment and Protecting the Catch

Corner Inlet and Norramunga includes a complex network of intertidal mangroves, saltmarsh, mud banks, seagrass beds, islands and deeper channels. Multiple rivers flow through a highly productive catchment to converge at the inlet which is home to many rare species of plants and animals and supports healthy economies.

A small fleet of commercial fishermen operate in the inlet, they are passionate about the local environment and ensuring the area has a prosperous future. They understand the delicate ecosystem that supports the fishery and value the natural habitat of the inlet. Their catch is sought after from top restaurants who recognise that Corner Inlet is a sustainably managed fishery.

The fishermen are an important segment of the Corner Inlet Partner Group. Coordinated by the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA), the group works together to ensure the inlet has a healthy future.

Max Laub, a fisherman from Port Albert explained ‘Sustainability of the fishery is really important to all those who fish in the inlet, a voluntary code of practice has been in place for around 20 years, restrictions come into place through the way fish are caught and the times we fish.’

Integral to the health of the fishery is the health of the catchment. Sediment and nutrients can enter rivers and make their way into the Inlet, causing a decline in the extent and health of seagrass. The seagrass is a food source and a shelter area for marine species and a nursery area for juvenile fish. “Without seagrasses in Corner Inlet the whole system, all the birds and aquatic life, they wouldn’t be here and that would then flow on to the recreation fishers and commercial fishers, they wouldn’t have anything for their pursuits,” says Michael Hobson, a fifth generation fisherman and restaurateur from Port Albert.



Parks Victoria have been a key player in the Corner Inlet Partner Group for many years, monitoring and mapping the seagrass with volunteer groups over many years to understand the extent, seasonal changes and stability of the meadows. More recently, researchers from the University of Melbourne have worked with the fishermen to further understand the changing dynamics of the seagrass beds.

The saltmarshes that surround Corner inlet are an important breeding ground for birds, fish and other marine and estuarine species - they protect against erosion and provide filtration for run-off from the land. Through the Partner Group, local Landcare Groups have focused their efforts to encourage the fencing off of vital coastline habitat. This ensures stock are excluded from wetlands and saltmarshes, weeds are controlled and native vegetation is restored. Over the past decade, The Yarram Yarram Landcare Network has overseen the restoration of more than 700 hectares of saltmarsh between McLoughlin's Beach and Port Albert.

For the inlet to continue to prosper, the way land is used within the catchment is important. Around 10% of the land is used for dairy farming. Farmers are aware of their impact on the catchment and GippsDairy is another partner in the efforts to protect the inlet. The dairy industry



has developed 'Fert\$mart' – a soil and fertiliser program that allows farmers to review their practices and minimise sediment and nutrient runoff into nearby waterways.

'So many positive benefits flow from the Corner Inlet Partner Group approach' commented Tracey Jones of the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority. 'We all understand and respect the needs of different groups working on the land and in the waters, we all want the area to prosper. The efforts carried out on the land help contribute to a healthy waterbody and in turn protect the sustainable catch of the fishermen who work in the inlet's waters.'

*Pictured top: fishermen Max Laub and Mick Hobson, by Drift media, and above: cows at Corner Inlet, by Graeme Nicoll.*



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