A year of achievements
2018-19
The landscape and waterways of West Gippsland are breathtaking and diverse. The challenge of protecting and managing our natural environment cannot be tackled by one organisation or group alone.

Over the past year, funding from the Victorian and Australian governments has enabled the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) to protect vulnerable ecosystems, empower farmers, encourage biodiversity and sustainable agriculture and highlight the importance of natural resource management and overcoming challenges together.

Without that government investment we would not have been able to complete the work needed to rehabilitate and protect our landscape and environment. Without trusted partnerships, particularly our close and productive relationship with Landcare, it would not have been possible to reach the ambitious goals set out in our projects.

I am proud of our achievements this year. There have been some incredible successes with new programs gaining momentum and inspiring outcomes based on real-life stories of local people who have embraced the challenge to make a difference to the world we live in.

In all the work we do, a constant feature of the WGCMA approach has been engaging energetic local people and organisations to act to help ensure future generations and the environment can prosper from our region’s natural resources. We are especially proud of the empowering programs and agreements made in working with Traditional Owners of the country we jointly care for.

This brochure presents a snapshot of just some of the projects we completed during the 2018-19 financial year to address priorities in the Regional Catchment Strategy. We’re proud of this work and are pleased to feature some of these projects within this brochure.

More information on our projects and the work we do is available at www.wgcma.vic.gov.au

Peter Jennings, OAM
Chair
Working with private and public landowners to protect waterways is a key part of our role. By fencing, revegetating and controlling weeds we can reduce sediment and nutrients in waterways, improve bed and bank stability and help prevent flood damage. In turn, this helps improve overall waterway health.

During 2018-2019, variable climatic conditions continued, yet there were no specific events or challenges to increase concern about the future of managing waterways. Monitoring is showing good fish migratory and recruitment numbers. An optimistic future with evidence that events during the year will have a positive impact in the long term.

Targeting willows at their source

More than 25,000 trees planted at a Toora North property to help stop erosion in its steep gullies are having a flow-on effect to improve seagrass and fish habitat in Ramsar-listed Corner Inlet.

According to West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority’s (WGCMA) Project Delivery Coordinator, Richard Allen, the project is one of the largest in the Corner Inlet catchment.

“There are three extremely steep gullies on the property which are difficult to farm,” said Richard.

“When we visited the property, you could see water streaming down the gullies, gathering dirt and delivering it straight into the Agnes River. This project is going to change that.”

The three gullies, covering ten hectares, have been fenced and a mixture of indigenous trees planted. These will have the combined effect of holding dirt and sediment in place while also creating new habitat for native wildlife.

“A 15-metre buffer along the bank of the river has also been fenced and planted out,” continued Richard. “This helps filter any sediment and nutrients out of the water before it reaches the river, improving water quality and stopping these sediments reaching Corner Inlet.”

“Before planting out the river there were some massive willows that needed to be removed and required heavy machinery. Willows contribute to erosion and choke up the river.”

“We’re very lucky that the new property owners have seen this work as a priority and are partnering with us to help protect the river and ultimately Corner Inlet.”

The property was originally a dairy farm and new owners Trevor and Elissa are keen to rehabilitate the steep slopes and turn it back to a more natural site.

“We’re excited, both for the contribution to our natural environment and lifestyle,” said Elissa.

“We look forward to watching the trees grow, provide habitat for our native animals and shelter from the elements for our stock and ourselves.”

Three gullies and one step closer to a new habitat for wildlife.

PROJECT PARTNERS

KEY OUTPUTS
- 215,483 ha of weed control.
- 345 ha of revegetation.
- 15,487 ha of land with whole farm, irrigation and soil erosion management plans.
- Over 200km of willow control in headwaters with 114 ha in total.
- 2,172 ML of on-farm, water-saving measures.
- Over 1,097 ha of Spartina control in Corner and Anderson Inlets.
- 36,134 GL of water released.
- Over 69 km of priority waterways fenced.

FUNDING
Enhancing biodiversity

West Gippsland is a diverse region, featuring many national and marine national parks, Ramsar sites and endangered and threatened ecological communities. The region faces a range of biodiversity challenges including fragmented remnant vegetation, reduced biodiversity, threats from invasive plants and animals and urban development.

This was the first year of a five-year National Landcare Program Regional Land Partnerships project to protect the nationally Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) listed Alpine Peatlands from high priority threats and the final of a five-year project to protecting high-quality remnant vegetation in the Cape Liptrap and Bunurong areas. We also commenced implementation of the Victorian Biodiversity 2037 Plan.

Outfoxed

Any foxes or rabbits contemplating a sea change might want to reconsider their options, due to a new program being introduced along the Bunurong Coast.

The South Gippsland Landcare Network (SGLN) signed a contract with the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) to deliver a three-year fox and rabbit control program worth almost $1 million. By June 2021, the program will have covered 16,000 Ha of coast from Venus Bay to Walkerville.

“This program should deliver a significant boost to the survival rate of native flora and fauna living along the coast,” said Martin Fuller, CEO of the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.

“Landcare will work with public and private landowners to roll out the program and it will build on existing pest animal programs on public and private land.”

The program is funded by the Victorian Government as part of its Biodiversity Strategy through their Biodiversity Response Planning program.

Farmers with existing pest control programs will be encouraged to continue these, with the assistance of the program.

“Community groups such as Friends of Venus Bay Peninsula, the Tarwin Lower Landcare Group and Walkerville Friends Group are just a few of the interested community people wanting to make a change,” said Mr Fuller.

“SGLN will deliver the project management and on-ground works through a number of avenues including volunteers, contractors, local experts and consultants.”

Glenn Brooks-MacMillan, Coordinator of the South Gippsland Landcare Network said acknowledged work to date and noted that detailed planning of the project is currently underway.

“We will be calling on the community in the area for their expert knowledge and skills to help deliver this important program.”

Fox control efforts will be invigorated with this recent injection of valuable resources giving hope to wildlife populations.
Supporting sustainable agriculture

Providing support for farmers in fundamental for productive and sustainable farming systems, and for the health of waterways and native vegetation.

This was a drier than average year, with parts of the West Gippsland CMA region being drought declared along with several fires throughout the region in more remote areas during summer. Achievements focussed Lake Wellington, the Macalister Irrigation Area and developing whole-farm nutrient management plans.

Wins for all under new land and water plan

Irrigators, local rivers and the Gippsland Lakes are all winners under a new plan in the heart of the Macalister Irrigation District,

The plan aims to improve farm productivity and profitability, while protecting the waterways and lakes in Gippsland’s premier irrigation region.

West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA), in partnership with Southern Rural Water (SRW) and Agriculture Victoria, developed the Lake Wellington Land and Water Management Plan with extensive input from the local irrigation community, industry and government.

Chief Executive Officer, Martin Fuller, said the document sets out a 10-year plan for how to manage irrigation farms.

“This is a real plan to improve the productivity and profitability of farms and care for the environment,” Mr Fuller said.

“It’s forward-looking and lays out the programs we want to run with and for farmers.”

The Lake Wellington Land and Water Management Plan replaces the existing Macalister Land and Water Management Plan.

“There have been a lot of changes in water use efficiency since the Macalister Plan was developed 10 years ago and irrigators have made a lot of positive changes in the way they manage farms,” said SRW Managing Director Cameron FitzGerald.

“Modernisation has provided the opportunity for farms to move to best practice irrigation, supported by our agencies working together.”

“This plan is appropriate for the current conditions,” agreed WGCMA’s Martin Fuller.

“It looks at how we can reduce the amount of nutrients entering our rivers, which will help prevent algal blooms and the associated environmental issues.

“It will help protect rivers, wetlands and the Gippsland Lakes and help manage the impacts of salinity and high-water table,” Mr Fuller continued.

“This, in turn, will protect the natural, cultural and social assets of the region for future generations.”

The Plan has also been expanded to cover the whole of the Lake Wellington catchment.

Working and walking together to improve farm productivity and protect precious waterways.
Providing Strategic Direction

Under the **Catchment and Land Protection** and Water Acts, a key role for the West Gippsland CMA is to provide strategic direction for how we manage the region’s natural resources. These documents help provide the direction for funding and future works and give communities a formal opportunity to have input into how their local waterways are managed.

During 2018-19, we

- Continued implementation of the West Gippsland Floodplain Management Strategy with three actions completed and another 18 of the 47 actions underway.
- In accordance with the Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) and other regional plans and strategies:
  - Regional waterway strategy approved by the Minister.
  - Biodiversity Response Planning: Bunurong Fox and Rabbit Control and Dutson Downs
  - Renewed our Strategic Plan (2019-24) to ensure both the Board and staff are fully aligned in our approach.

Perfect match for Corner Inlet

A 550-acre property at Manns Beach has been the focus of saltmarsh protection works for more than a decade. Owned by Yarram local, Esme Rash, the property has been in her family for more than 120 years. According to West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority Project Coordinator, Tanya Cowell, the 390-acre work site is important as part of the Corner Inlet Connections Project.

“Corner Inlet is an extremely important wetland site,” explained Tanya. “The salt marshes on Esme’s property form part of a transitional habitat between the ocean and the land. It’s fantastic to be able to work with Esme and our partners to protect this precious part of Corner Inlet.”

Saltmarsh filters pollutants, stabilises sediments, traps and processes nutrients and protects the shoreline from erosion.

“Saltmarsh in Corner Inlet provides habitat and food for many birds, juvenile fish and invertebrate species. They are a critical component of the Corner Inlet ecosystem,” continued Tanya.

One of the partners on the Corner Inlet Connections project is the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC). Funded through the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program, crews from GLaWAC work at different sites across Corner Inlet each month. This area is part of the traditional lands of the Gunaikurnai’s Brataualung clan.

Bronson Ritchie, GLaWAC’s Natural Resource Management Crew Leader, said the crews enjoyed the work on Corner Inlet.

“It’s good to see this country,” said Bronson. “We probably wouldn’t otherwise see it if we weren’t working here.”

“At this property, we’re treating Boxthorn and Briar Rose. The Boxthorn can get quite big and can sometimes have wombats or hog deer hiding under them.”

Corner Inlet possesses a rich Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal archaeological sites and artefacts can be found on farmland, in the bush and along waterways. These sites are important as they show how the Gunaikurnai used the land and the close and continuing connection the Gunaikurnai have to their country.

Some of these sites have been recorded, however many have not yet been found and protected. GLaWAC’s Registered Aboriginal Party Manager, Russell Mullett, encouraged landowners to let the work crews know if they think they have any Aboriginal archaeological sites on their property.

“Many landowners aren’t aware that they have Aboriginal artefacts such as scar trees, shell middens or even burial sites on their properties. By working with GLaWAC they can help us record, protect and manage our Aboriginal cultural heritage,” Mr Mullett said.

*This project is supported by West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program. For more on the Corner Inlet Connections Project go to wgcma.vic.gov.au.*
The area is a snapshot of what South Gippsland looked like before European settlement, but it was run down and in need of restoration. Local landholders and members of the Nerrena Landcare group agreed. They were keen to save the Strzelecki gums and the Swamp Paperbark and provide a habitat for native species including koalas and platypus and the Sword Grass Butterfly.

The small group of volunteers applied for funding to develop a plan for the future of the Wetland, incorporating the rail trail restoration and the proposed realignment of the South Gippsland Highway. The Plan took a twenty-year view to redeveloping the area. Improving water quality, weed control and restoring native vegetation and biodiversity were vital.

Nerrena Landcare group member, Kate Walsh, is excited to see the plan being embraced and endorsed by others.

"The group developed the plan and vision, which we’ve been able to share with others."

Matt said the CMA was happy to allocate money for weed control to help to get the project up and running because it also aligned with our priorities.

"Landcare has driven this project and now it’s great to see the Major Roads Project Authority commit to revegetating a significant part of the area as part of their $50 million highway realignment project."

Already the community is seeing the benefit of the united approach to this unique area.

"At the moment, there are swans nesting in the wetlands and we have platypus swimming down the river," said Kate. "When you walk along the rail trail you really appreciate the remnant vegetation."

Landcare volunteers are dedicated to protecting and sharing a precious piece of remnant habitat.

**Project Partners**

Arthur Rylah Institute, Australian Government, Boonwurrung Foundation, Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC), Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), Landcare networks and other community groups, Leongatha Angling Club, Parks Victoria, State Government

**Key Outputs**

- Coordinating Victorian Landcare Grants: 32 projects resulting in 18 km of fencing, planting 18,000 indigenous plants and 6.94 ha of weed control.
- Launching Community Engagement Network with 26 community members.
- Renewed MOU with GLaWAC and new MOU with BLCAC.
- Corner Inlet Connections: fox control, 150 ha of Spartina control and saltmarsh protection, 11 km of fencing and 36 ha of revegetation.
- Protecting our Ponds: fenced 10 km of waterways, over 800 ha of weed control and revegetated 38 ha.
- Controlled 1,097 hectares of Spartina treatment with Parks Victoria.

**Funding**


**Productive Partnership**

Over the years, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority’s relationship with Landcare has helped us work toward the goals we set to rehabilitate and protect our landscape and environment.

The extent of the Landcare partnership ranges from broad support for Landcare Networks, a program of community grants, and support for a range of field days, workshops and events, through to working together on on-ground projects like tree planting and weed control. For Project Delivery Team Leader Matt Bowler, that close connection with Landcare is vital.

“We share a vision for effectively managing natural resources and helping farmers be more productive, efficient and environmentally friendly,” explained Matt.

“It’s not always about developing major projects. Sometimes a small contribution from us can help Landcare get a project underway or it can complement other work we are doing.”

**Black Spur Wetland**

Matt says the Black Spur Wetland project is a good example of the multiple benefits of a strong connection with Landcare.

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