



# *West Gippsland Regional Catchment Strategy*

## *Community Consultation*

*Summary Report*

*February 2021*

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### Version Control Table

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# 1. Introduction and context

The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) is leading the renewal of the Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS). The RCS is West Gippsland’s plan for managing land, water and biodiversity. It will reflect

- Traditional Owner aspirations
- Community Priorities
- Best available science and knowledge

The RCS will include information at the Local Area scale. Local Areas have been defined for eight geographic areas within the region (see Figure 1).

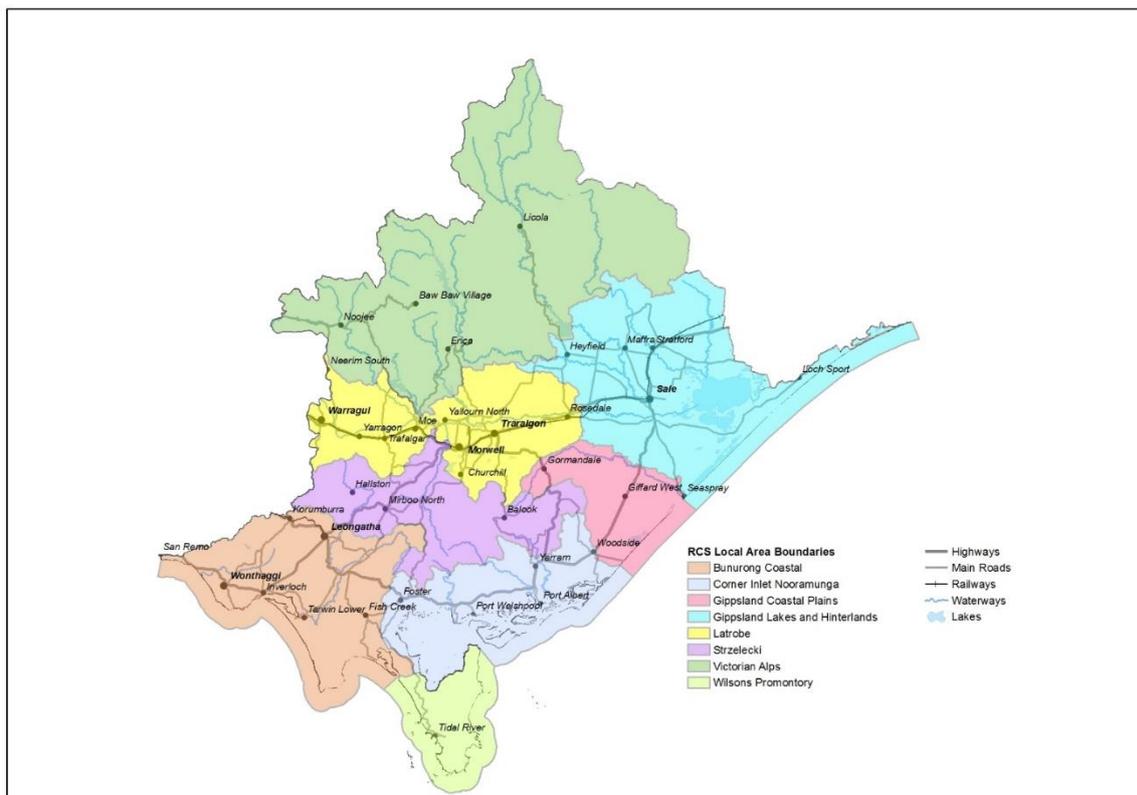


Figure 1. West Gippsland RCS Local Area boundaries<sup>1</sup>

As part of the renewal process, the WGCMA sought input from the community on views and aspirations for managing land, water and biodiversity at the Local Area scale. The purpose of the consultation was to understand what is important for each local area to local people, what local people want considered for future planning, to hear as many voices as possible and scope out the challenges and suggested actions before agency and partner input is invited.

<sup>1</sup> Note the Victorian Alps Local Area will be renamed the Great Dividing Range and Foothills Local Area in future reference to Local Areas. This change is based on feedback from the WGCMA board. For the purpose of this report the name Victorian Alps has been retained as it reflects the communication at the time of consultation.

The consultation process involved an online survey and a series of focus groups and interviews with participation by community members across each Local Area. This report presents a high-level summary of outcomes of that consultation process, the detailed results will be used to inform the preparation of Local Area content and inform regional priorities and strategic directions for land, water and biodiversity management.

*N.B Engagement with Traditional Owners on their aspirations and priorities for Local Areas is being coordinated through a partnership arrangement with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation through separate processes to this broader community consultation*

## 2. Consultation approach

### Survey

An online survey was designed to gather local knowledge and better understand the community and industry priorities for the West Gippsland region. The survey included a mix of closed and open questions related to aspirations, challenges, climate change and priorities for action as they relate to land, water and biodiversity management. The survey was based on an instrument developed by the North Central Catchment Management Authority and was tested for utility before being made available to the public. The survey was hosted on SurveyMonkey and accessed via the WGCMA webpage. Respondents were not required to provide personal information.

The survey was accessed 224 times during the period it was open in November and December. 172 valid responses were received<sup>2</sup>. The Bunurong Coastal Local Area received the most responses (52 responses), followed by Corner Inlet and Nooramunga and Strzelecki (32 and 33 responses respectively), Gippsland Coastal Plain and Wilsons Promontory received the least number of responses (5, 3). The overall number of survey responses exceeded expectations (the aim was for 100 responses), however, the response rate for some Local Areas was low and this is a limitation that must be taken into account when reading the outcomes of this consultation process. There was a mix of respondents (Figure 2) including lifestyle and other rural property residents (37%), farmers (28%) and town residents (25%), however, the majority of respondents indicated they were residents of the Local Area with only a small proportion of non-residents (9%) participating in the survey.

*Table 1. Distribution of survey responses*

Which Local Area do you live in or wish to comment on?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Bunurong Coastal	30%	52
Corner Inlet and Nooramunga	19%	32
Gippsland Coastal Plain	3%	5
Gippsland Lakes and Hinterland	10%	18
Latrobe	10%	18
Strzelecki	19%	33
Victorian Alps	6%	11
Wilsons Promontory	2%	3
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>172</b>

<sup>2</sup> Valid responses were those that included responses to the survey items in addition to the demographic and hurdle questions.

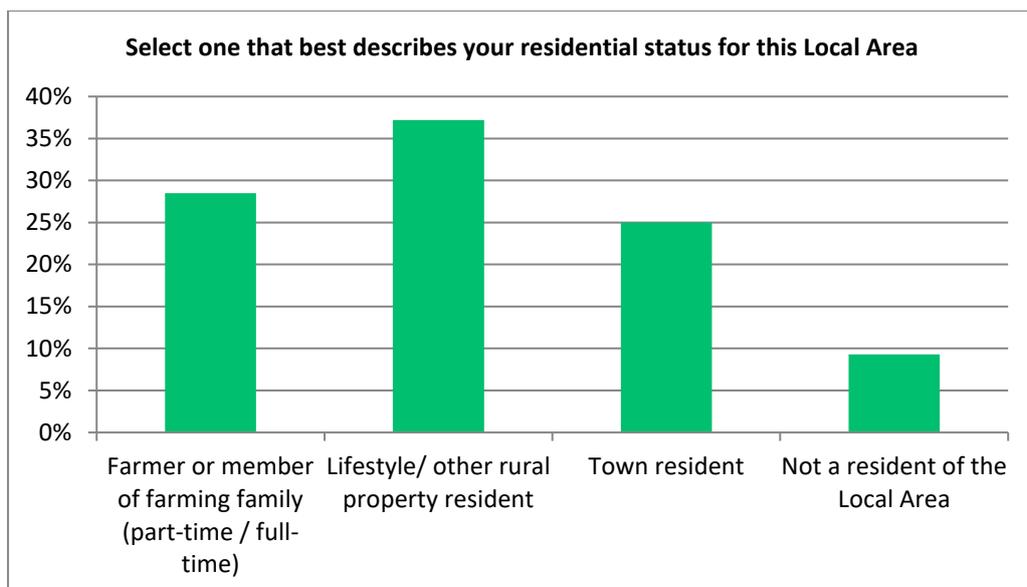


Figure 2. Residential status of survey respondents

## Focus groups and Interviews

Focus groups were designed to be run in each Local Area to seek more in-depth feedback than was possible through a survey. The purpose was; to understand the priority items for each area and what local people want for land, water and biodiversity management over the next 10 years.

Community members were targeted using utilised existing networks and contacts with known community groups in accordance with the WGCMA's *Regional Partnerships and Engagement Plan*. Nominations were also sought from WGCMA staff and WGCMA board members. Community members were invited to take part in a focus group discussion via an email invitation. Adequate numbers of participants registered for five out of the eight Local Areas to justify an online focus group discussion. For the remaining three Local Areas, telephone interviews were conducted with interested community members. These interviews used the same questions as the focus group discussions. Questions were designed to overlap and add value to those used in the survey.

Table 2 shows the number of community members involved in the focus groups and telephone interviews.

Table 2. Number of participants for focus groups and interviews

Local Area	Form of consultation	Number of participants
Bunurong Coastal	Focus Group discussion	11
Corner Inlet and Nooramunga	Phone interviews	3
Gippsland Coastal Plain	Phone interviews	3
Gippsland Lakes and Hinterland	Focus Group discussion	6
Latrobe	Focus Group discussion	4
Strzelecki	Focus Group discussion	5
Victorian Alps	Phone interviews	1
Wilsons Promontory*	Focus Group discussion	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>

\*Wilsons Promontory Advisory Group members

### 3. Summary and implications for the RCS

COMMUNITY VIEWS WERE SOUGHT ON THE PRIORITIES AND ASPIRATIONS FOR LAND, WATER AND BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN THE WEST GIPPSLAND REGION WITH A FOCUS ON THINKING ABOUT 'LOCAL AREAS'.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS OBTAINED FEEDBACK THROUGH 172 SURVEY RESPONSES AND 39 IN-DEPTH DISCUSSIONS.

A NUMBER OF KEY MESSAGES EMERGED FROM THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS:

#### Considerations when planning for Local Areas

Across the region **participants want the RCS to consider and address:**

- **BIODIVERSITY**
- **WATERWAYS**
- **NATIVE VEGETATION**
- **COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY**

Participants also identified the need to address:

- **Development concerns (landuse change, mining, renewable energy, tourism)**
- **Water security and availability**
- **Improved agricultural practices and valuing agriculture**
- **Invasive plants and animals**
- **Recreational facilities and managing human access to natural areas**

#### Land, water and biodiversity challenges

Across the region, participants indicated **the top challenges for land, water and biodiversity management (excluding climate change) are:**

- **INVASIVE PLANTS**
- **INVASIVE ANIMALS**
- **DECLINE IN BIODIVERSITY**

**Urban expansion and population growth** were also raised for Bunurong Coastal and Latrobe Local Areas.

**Unsustainable water use** was identified in the Gippsland Lakes and Hinterland and the Gippsland Coastal Plain Local Areas. Other responses included; **concerns about mining and wind turbine developments, recreational access, changing demographics/lack of awareness and climate change.**

Invasive animals and decline in biodiversity were also raised in the Focus Groups and Interviews. Community knowledge and awareness were raised as a challenge across six of the eight Local Areas through the in-depth discussion process.

## Climate change concerns

Across the region the top concerns about climate change are

- INCREASED FIRE RISK
- WARMER AND DRIER CLIMATE
- MORE FREQUENT OR INTENSE STORMS AND FLOODS

**Increased fire risk and warmer and drier climate** were one of the top responses across all Local Areas

There were some differences for individual Local Areas:

- **More frequent storms and floods** were a top response for the **Latrobe and Victorian Alps** Local Areas and just short of the top 3 for **Bunurong Coastal**.
- **Reduced stream/flows and water availability** were a top response for **Corner Inlet and Nooramunga, Strzelecki and Victorian Alps**<sup>3</sup>.
- **Coastal erosion and storm surge** was also a top response for **Bunurong Coastal**<sup>4</sup>.

The focus group and interviews allowed for greater discussion around the impacts of climate change and highlighted **concerns about impacts on biodiversity and the viability of agriculture**. The need for **more communication and engagement about climate change adaptation** was also noted.

## Preferred actions and initiatives

### *Strategic actions*

There was **strong support for typical NRM activities such as controlling invasive plants and animals and retaining and restoring native vegetation communities**. There were strong sentiments expressed through in-depth discussions about **the need to incorporate climate change adaptation into 'everyday operations'**. The in-depth discussions also emphasised **support for biolinks and controlling invasive animals (particularly deer) as well as protecting waterways**. There was also strong feedback through the focus groups and interviews about the need for **planning scheme changes and improved public land management**.

Survey participants indicated the following top ten priorities in terms of if they could see 'one action' implemented through the RCS

1. RETAIN AND RESTORE NATIVE VEGETATION COMMUNITIES
2. CONTROL INVASIVE PLANTS
3. FENCING OF WATERWAYS AND NATIVE VEGETATION
4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION
5. CONTROL INVASIVE ANIMALS
6. SUPPORT AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES THAT IMPROVE SOIL HEALTH, PRODUCTIVITY AND WATER USE EFFICIENCY.
7. IMPROVE OUR KNOWLEDGE OF LAND, WATER AND BIODIVERSITY AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR ACTIONS.
8. FUNDING AND MORE SUPPORT
9. PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT CONTROLS (MINING, WIND TURBINES, URBAN)
10. INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

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<sup>3</sup> And received more than 1 response for Gippsland Coastal Plain and Wilsons Promontory.

<sup>4</sup> And received more than 1 response for Wilsons Promontory.

Except for planning/development controls and initiatives to support climate change adaptation all of these themes were also identified through the focus groups/interviews for at least one Local Area. The in-depth discussion revealed additional priority actions including **using Traditional Owner knowledge** and **Community involvement/awareness/education/support**.

**To support community and industry to participate in land and water management, there needs to be:**

- **COLLABORATION BETWEEN AGENCIES AND COMMUNITY/INDUSTRY ON PROJECTS AT A LOCAL LEVEL**
- **GRANTS OR INCENTIVES TO UNDERTAKE PROJECTS**
- **INFORMATION /ADVICE TO IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE**

In terms of **actions to enable climate change adaptation**, there was strong support for actions to:

- **MAINTAIN A DIVERSITY OF HABITATS, ENVIRONMENTS AND SPECIES TO MAXIMISE THE CHANCE OF SURVIVAL**
- **INCREASE CARBON SEQUESTRATION THROUGH ACTIVITIES SUCH AS REVEGETATION AND SOIL IMPROVEMENT.**
- **IMPROVED AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES AND POSITIVE LANDUSE CHANGE TO ENSURE ENTERPRISES REMAIN VIABLE**

**There was a small number of respondents who were not concerned about climate change and believed there was no need to act.** There were strong sentiments expressed through the in-depth discussions about the need to take action on climate change at a local level through adaptation and climate mitigation projects. There was some tension between this desire to adapt and act on climate change with concerns about the potential localised environmental impacts associated with renewable energy developments.

## Implications

Throughout the consultation, there was **strong feedback around the need to continue to address core RCS theme areas of waterways, biodiversity and native vegetation, invasive plants and animals, improving agricultural practices and valuing agriculture in the landscape.**

The consultation processes also highlighted a range of emerging themes that the RCS has not traditionally addressed including;

- **population pressures and urbanisation**
- **concerns around renewable energy projects and extractive industries**
- **managing/improving recreation facilities and access**
- **valuing Traditional Owner input and incorporating traditional ecological knowledge into NRM programs**

An overarching theme across different survey and focus group topics was the **need to continue and strengthen collaboration between agencies and community and explore new partnerships for local projects.**

**Improved community engagement, participation and awareness programs** was also an overarching theme and participants expressed a strong desire for **more direct engagement with a broad section of the community** in all aspects of land, water and biodiversity management (from planning, on-ground activity and monitoring and research).

Participants across all forms of consultation expressed **concerns about the impacts of climate change on biodiversity, water resources, agricultural viability and regional communities.** There was a sense from participants that **it is time to get on with taking action to adapt to a changing climate** and that **community members want to be involved in further research, engagement activities, planning and on-ground action.**

A number of potential/existing initiatives and flagship projects were highlighted throughout the community consultation process and there is an opportunity to consider these when planning at the Local Area scale. Examples included:

- Prom Sanctuary
- Raising the profile of Anderson Inlet / Tarwin Catchment
- Improving the health of Corner Inlet
- Improving the health of the Gippsland Lakes including Lake Reeve
- Continuing work in the Powlett catchment and estuary
- Raising the profile and improving knowledge of Merriman Creek, Lake Reeve and Jack Smith Lake
- Bio-links in key areas such as Latrobe and Strzelecki
- Urban waterways in growing towns