



Our achievements

2020-21



Inspiring and achieving
catchment health

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of the region, the Gunaikurnai, the Bunurong, the Boonwurrung and the Wurundjeri Peoples, their rich culture and spiritual connection to Country. We also acknowledge

the contribution and interest of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples and organisations in natural resource management and pay respects to Elders, past, present and emerging.

Reflections from the Chair



2020-21 was a year that will definitely be remembered as a turning point in history with the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and significant damage from a major storm in June.

Despite this, the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority completed its 24th year as a stable, mature, and efficient organisation in one of Australia's most diverse natural resource regions. Together with our partners, we continue to achieve meaningful results for the environment. We are an efficient and adaptive organisation which allows us to quickly plan and implement programs that improve and protect the region's wonderful natural assets.

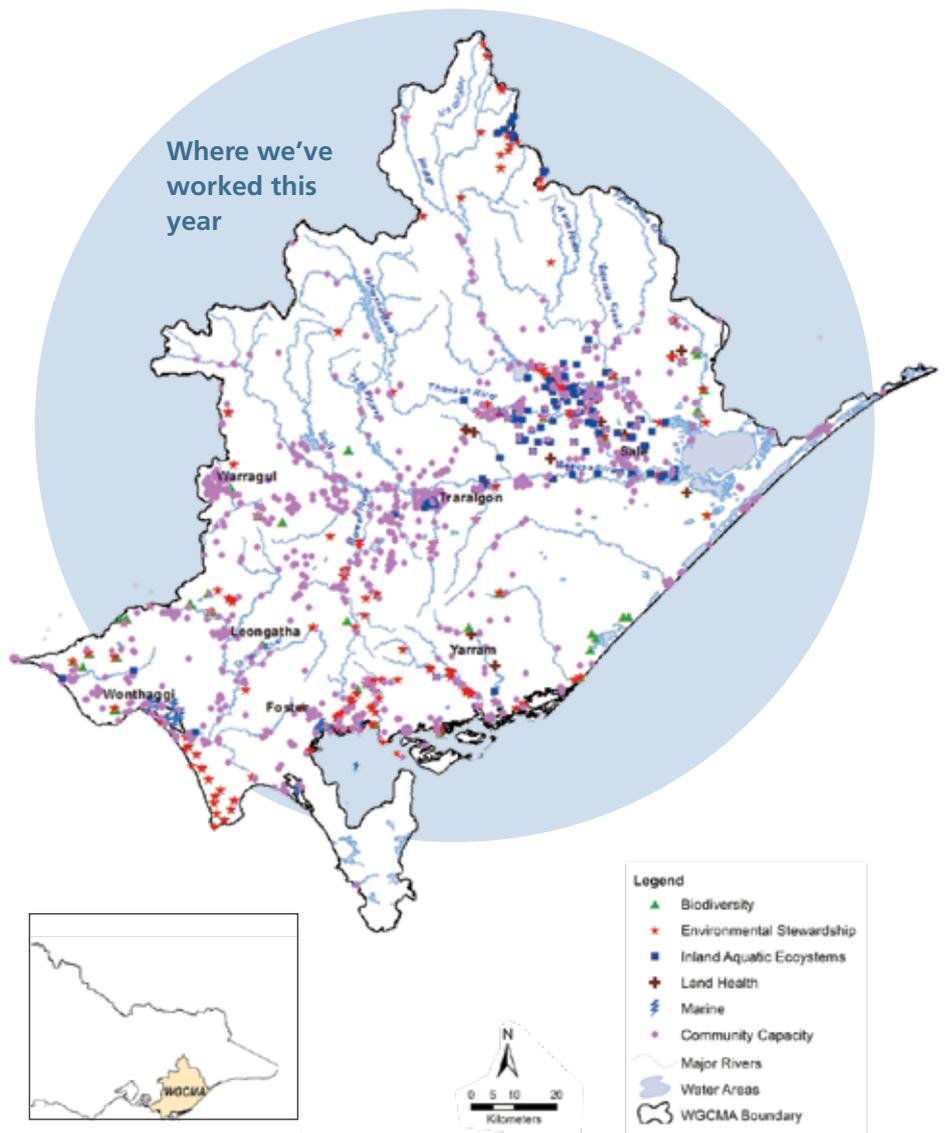
We maintained momentum and focussed on the strategic directions outlined in our annual action plan, delivering 92% of identified actions. This is a credit to our team whose conduct remained focused and professional despite the ongoing challenges.

I'm extremely proud of the high level of service delivery and results the organisation delivered including over 30,000 hectares of weed inspection and treatment, over 202 hectares of vegetation enhancement and protection and 3,986 hectares of land set to benefit from whole farm, irrigation, and soil erosion management plans.

Building resilience is a key strategy and we developed and adapted plans to intelligently manage catchment and broader environmental systems subject to change. Building connectivity into systems through measures such as fishways is beginning to pay dividends with Thomson Fishway at Horseshoe Bend now helping support results of environmental flow releases from the Thomson dam.

This brochure provides a snapshot of our commitment to delivering programs and initiatives funded by the Victorian and Australian governments. You can also follow our story at www.wgcma.vic.gov.au

Peter Jennings, OAM
Chair



Protecting waterways

Working with private and public land managers to protect waterways is our key 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 contributes to improving overall waterway health.

We continued to focus funds and efforts onto our highest priority waterways including the flagship Thomson River and our successful headwater willow control program continued in the far upper reaches of the Thomson, Macalister, Aberfeldy, Albert, Agnes rivers and Middle, Valencia and Freestone Creeks.

Water for the environment is important for improving Gippsland's river and wetland health and critical for native plants, fish and wildlife. Over 35,000 ML of water was released into the Thomson, Macalister and Latrobe rivers this year.

Fish surveys found higher numbers of migratory fish above the Thomson River Fishway than previously surveyed, which is an early indication of the success of this exciting project. Despite being impacted by the June flood event, works were undertaken to bring it back online in time for the spring environmental water releases.

Waterway achievements

Works focussed on creating valuable wildlife habitat and building waterway resilience.

- Fenced and excluded stock from more than 23 kilometres of priority waterways.
- Completed 103 hectares of revegetation.
- Removed 141 hectares of willows.
- Completed over 731 hectares of weed control.
- Stabilised riverbeds and banks at three significant sites.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Australian Government, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Gippsland Lakes Coordinating Committee (GLCC), landholders and Landcare networks, Parks Victoria, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC), GippsDairy, Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH), local Angling Clubs

FUNDING

Victorian Government – Victorian Water Program Investment Framework, Regional Riparian Action Plan, GLCC, Australian Government National Landcare Program.

"The best thing about my work is spending time out and about on Gippsland's stunning waterways. We are incredibly lucky to have so many river and wetland systems, and the biodiversity that can be found amongst productive farm country constantly surprises me. I love working with landholders to understand and protect these hidden gems."

Elsa Burnell, Project Coordinator





Somewhere over the rainbow

Rainbow Creek in central Gippsland has had a colourful history since forming as a 'break away' from the Thomson River in the 1950s after a series of floods.

In December 2018, WGCMA kicked off an important project to help change Rainbow Creek's future.

According to WGCMA Waterways Project Officer, David Stork, there have been many changes to the creek since it initially formed.

"Before starting this project, investigations told us that under extreme flood conditions, there is an increased risk of the Thomson River creating a new channel into Rainbow Creek," said David.

"When Rainbow Creek formed it resulted in major disruption to landholders – including loss of productive land and access issues to property.

"We wanted to create a management plan to address the risk of a new 'break away' forming as well as involving the community in planning the future directions for the creek and broader area."

A Waterway Management Plan was developed using an evidence based participatory method involving collaboration with the local community, technical experts and agency representatives. An interagency and community-based working group was formed and public meetings, one on one community interviews, flood modelling and benefit/cost analysis were undertaken.

The plan contains agreed options to address the risk of another avulsion as well as enhancing values the community loves about Rainbow Creek and Thomson River. The community's understanding of the largescale waterway processes impacting their land increased, and their contributions significantly shaped the final plan. The identified agreed actions are supported by the community and fully costed, making a strong business case with a 180% return on investment.

"By inviting the community to be part of the process and working with them, we've not only got a great waterway management plan with actions that address the risks of avulsion, we've also got a plan and actions for Thomson River and Rainbow Creek that are supported by the community that include:

- Five avulsion hotspots.
- 35 kilometres of riparian fencing.
- 30 off-stream water troughs.
- 52 hectares of willow removal.
- 52 hectares of native riparian revegetation.
- 135 hectares of maintenance.
- Amenity works at Rainbow Park (in Cowwarr).

Planning and involving

Under the *Catchment and Land Protection* and *Water* Acts, our key role is to provide strategic direction in how the region's natural resources are managed. Working with community and stakeholders, plans and strategies provide direct funding and future works and allow communities to have a voice and share in how their local waterways are managed.

Planning achievements

A highlight of the year was developing the Regional Catchment Strategy 4 (RCS) with our community and agency partners. We prepare this document on behalf of the region and it provides a framework to coordinate effort, identify strategic management directions and provide a set of regional outcomes. Close to 300 people were involved in shaping the Strategy through workshops, surveys, interviews and online meetings.

The RCS will guide the activities of government agencies and partner organisations from 2021–2027. The Strategy doesn't include fine details and implementation priorities – these are outlined in supporting documents, such as the Regional Waterway Strategy, West Gippsland Floodplain Management Plan, Ramsar Management Plans and Gunaikurnai Whole of Country Plan.

A highlight for this fourth RCS, is the involvement of Traditional Owners in its development from the outset. This RCS is underpinned by the aspirations of the region's Traditional Owners in the management of natural resources across West Gippsland. We recognise and respect their unique cultural heritage, beliefs and intrinsic connection to Country, and we look forward to working closely with them in the implementation of this strategy.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Australian Government, Victorian Government, local government, regional agencies – DELWP, DJPR, Parks Victoria, local communities, Landcare and community groups, landholders, GLaWAC, BLCAC, industry – Gipps Dairy, HVP, Trust for Nature

FUNDING

- Victorian Government – Victorian Water Programs Investment Framework
- Australian Government National Landcare Program



“Protection of the natural environment, respect for farming communities, and an acknowledgement of the effort of land holders put in to protect the waterways when their land has river frontage.”

Community comments from consultation process.

Catchment Health = Gippsland's Wealth

The fourth renewal of Gippsland's RCS builds on successes of previous strategies and promotes the vision of the people of Gippsland to protect and enhance the natural environment and build inspired, knowledgeable, capable and resilient communities to continue to underpin the environmental, social, cultural and economic wealth of the region.

The Strategy provides management direction of the region's land, water, biodiversity and magnificent coastal areas, responds to challenges and incorporates community and Traditional Owner priorities with those identified in government policies and legislation.

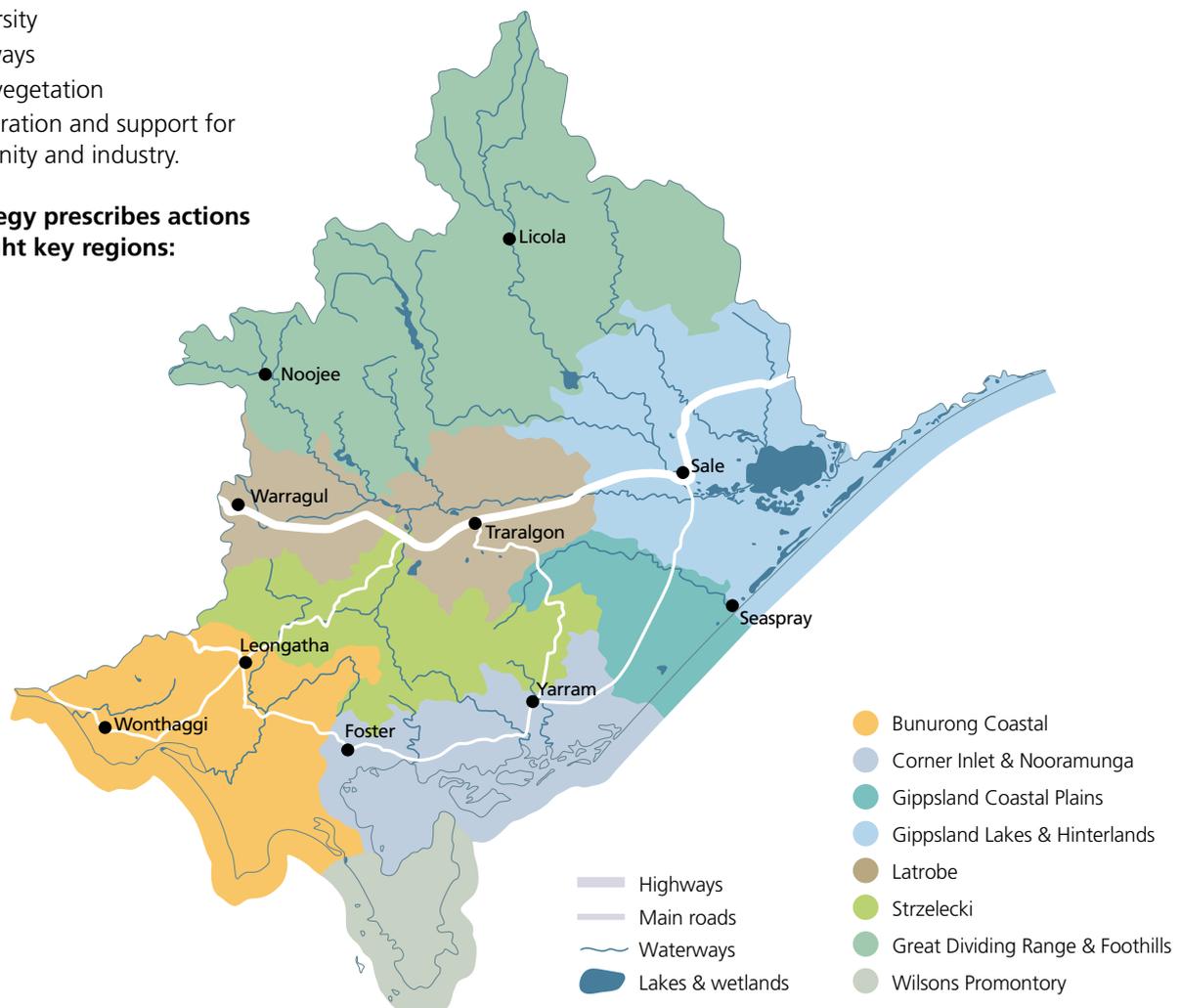
Community and stakeholder consultation identified previous successes as:

- Stabilisation in seagrass communities at Corner Inlet
- Reduction in Spartina from Coastal Salt Marsh Communities
- Extensive removal of willows from upstream catchments
- Recovery and delivery of water for the environment
- Removing barriers to fish movement (such as the Thomson Fishway)
- Protecting Alpine Peatlands
- Protecting remnants of the critically endangered Red Gum Grassy Woodlands on the Gippsland Plains.

Community and partner priorities included:

- Biodiversity
- Waterways
- Native vegetation
- Collaboration and support for community and industry.

The Strategy prescribes actions across eight key regions:



“One of the things our community identifies with is the natural environment, whether it be enjoying the beach, bushwalking in the Alpine areas, kayaking on a river, or enjoying the wonderful Gippsland Lakes. Also, farmers live and work on the land and Traditional Owners have a deep connection to country going back thousands of years.”

Shelley McGuinness, Chair
RCS Steering Committee and
WGCMA Board member

Caring for coasts

Where the rivers run into the sea, West Gippsland's marine and coastal environment extends from San Remo in the west to opposite Lakes Entrance in the east. The area features the precious Ramsar-listed wetlands of Corner Inlet, Nooramunga and the Gippsland Lakes, several marine protected areas including the newly established Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park and over 20 estuaries.

Much of the region's 623 kilometres of coastline is protected by coastal reserve, marine reserves and Wilsons Promontory National Park, however, however there are significant stretches where agriculture and urban development exist close to the coast and to important lakes and estuaries.

Coastal achievements

During the year, works focussed on increasing critical breeding habitat, improving biodiversity and protecting, enhancing and improving the management and understanding of estuaries.

- Fenced over four kilometres and revegetated 18 hectares to protect waterways.
- Protected and enhanced 468 hectares of precious saltmarsh habitat.
- Inspected 30,000 hectares resulting in 367 hectares of Spartina treatment.

Expanding Corner Inlet's seagrass meadows

A special partnership between farmers, fishers, Yarram Yarram Landcare Network and WGCMA created an additional 12 hectares of vital seagrass meadows in the internationally renowned Corner Inlet that supports migratory and wader bird populations and is home to many rare species of plants and marine life.

"It's well known that what we do on the land has an impact on our rivers and oceans," said Eleisha Keogh Manager Environmental Water and Waterways for WGCMA.

"In all our work, we take what we call an 'integrated catchment management approach'. That means, we implement projects on both land and water to help improve the overall health of an area.

"In this case, we're looking at the Corner Inlet catchment and the waterways that lead into the inlet to reduce the amount of nutrients and sediments leaving farms, entering these waterways, and ultimately ending up in the seagrass meadows of Corner Inlet.

"There is a long history of work in Corner Inlet and farmers and fishers working together to help protect this special place.

"The project includes seagrass restoration, fencing and revegetation along rivers.

"Through the Corner Inlet Water Quality Improvement Plan, we've identified the top priority areas and our experienced team will work with farmers to remove weeds, exclude stock from waterways and revegetate the rivers using locally grown seedlings," continued Eleisha.

"These farmers will enter into an agreement with us to ensure the 15-metre buffer on either side of the waterway is well maintained."

This project builds on existing work undertaken to protect seagrass by the Yarram Yarram Landcare Network and other partners as well as work by WGCMA under the Corner Inlet Connections project and is supported by WGCMA through funding from the Australian Government's Fisheries Habitat Restoration Program.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Australian Government, Victorian Government, Landcare networks, Parks Victoria, Local Government, GLaWAC, BLCAC, Trust for Nature, Birdlife Australia, local fishers and farmers

FUNDING

Australian Government National Landcare Program, Australian Government Fisheries Habitat Restoration Program, Victorian Landcare Grants

"Estuaries and coasts are dynamic systems, and this makes my job both challenging and super rewarding."

Callum Edwards, Coastal Waterways Officer



Enhancing biodiversity

West Gippsland is a wonderland of large and diverse areas of high biodiversity value featuring many national and marine national parks, Ramsar sites and endangered and threatened ecological communities. The region also faces a range of biodiversity challenges including fragmentation of remnant vegetation, reduced extent and condition of biodiversity, threats from invasive plants and animals and urban development.

Significant biodiversity projects this year included protecting the precious Alpine Peatlands community, Biodiversity Response Planning projects at Dutson Downs and Bunurong coast, and the Corner Inlet Connections project. We also supported Biodiversity 2037 and initiatives undertaken by partners including Landcare, local government, Parks Victoria and DELWP.

Biodiversity achievements

Key biodiversity projects tackled key threats and worked with partners and community to protect the region's significant value through improving water quality and improving habitat.

- Enhanced and protected over 202 hectares of vegetation to support biodiversity and river health outcomes.
- Removed willow and weeds across 150 hectares in Alpine areas including the threatened Alpine Peatlands.
- Reduced fox numbers on the Bunurong Coast.

Out foxed on the Bunurong Coast

A three-year collaboration between South Gippsland Landcare Network and WGCMA has reduced fox and rabbit numbers along the Bunurong coastline and given landholders incentives and skills to carry on future works.

The program, funded by the Victorian Government's Biodiversity Response Planning program, spans over 16,000 hectares of coastline and focuses on:

1. Engaging with and upskilling private landholders.
2. Targeted fox baiting.
3. Rabbit control.

Landholders along the Bunurong coast include Parks Victoria (which manages the Cape Liptrap Coastal Park), South Gippsland Shire Council (SGSC), large and small scale farmers, lifestyle and holiday homeowners and township

residents. South Gippsland Landcare Network leveraged existing partnerships with Tarwin Landcare Group, Trust for Nature, and Friends of Venus Bay Peninsula and engaged 30 private landholders with Parks Victoria and SGSC also participating.

Contractors utilised 1080-baiting and soft-jaw trapping and reported a decline in bait-takes and trapped foxes indicating a population decrease. There were also less signs of fox activity, increased lambing rates and fewer roadkill. The rabbit population was also targetted through calicivirus.

With a successful start, landholder commitment to ongoing control works will be the key to native flora and fauna recovering from the impacts of foxes and rabbits on the Bunurong Coast.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Victorian Government, Australian Government, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Landcare networks, Parks Victoria, DELWP, GLaWAC, BLCAC, Gippsland Water

FUNDING

Australian Government National Landcare Program, State Government – Biodiversity Response Plan (BRP), Victorian Landcare Grants

"Weed control sites are usually very scenic areas and popular for recreation so it is a great place to be able to work."

Matt Bowler, Manager Project Delivery



Supporting sustainable agriculture

Working with and supporting farmers is fundamental for productive and sustainable farming systems, achieving healthy waterways and increasing and connecting native vegetation cover. We continued to undertake activities to address threats to land health, with a focus on the Macalister Irrigation District (MID) and Corner Inlet. The four-year Sustainable Irrigation Program (SIP) for MID concluded this year with over 8,000 hectares of land reviewed.

We worked with partners to help develop soil management plans, demonstration sites, management programs, whole farm plans and on-ground activities designed to retain nutrients on farm and encourage water use efficiency.

These activities are complemented by the waterway health program, environmental stewardship, and community capacity to support natural resource management outcomes and tackle the effects of a changing climate together.

The construction of new irrigation infrastructure by Southern Rural Water (SRW) for its customers in the Newry area saw a partnership between SRW and WGCMA to deliver 30 Irrigation Farm Plans (IFP) to achieve significant water and time savings for the farm business and positive flow on effects for local waterways and the Gippsland Lakes.

Achievements in agriculture

- Developed and updated 41 new IFPs across 2,850 hectares of land in the MID.
- Completed 40 on farm irrigation efficiency projects (reuse systems, spray irrigation and best practice surface irrigation) across 1,135 hectares with estimated water savings of over 1,221 ML each year.
- Implemented the CORE 4 program in the MID to reduce nutrient loss to the Ramsar-listed Gippsland Lakes.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Australian Government, Landholders, Landcare networks, Southern Rural Water, DELWP, Agriculture Victoria, GippsDairy, Dairy Australia, Gipps Dairy

FUNDING

Australian Government National Landcare Program, State Government Victorian Water Programs Investment Framework – Sustainable Irrigation Program



“What’s really rewarding is feeling the pride within the Gippsland farming community when they talk about how far they have come over the decades. The collective work to make every drop of water count, prevent nutrients from getting into waterways, improve soils, revegetate riparian areas, etc. And knowing we have been able to help facilitate some of that change with the community.”

Anthony Goode, Lands Program Coordinator



Innovation pushes agricultural sector higher

Farm businesses in the MID are more efficient, productive, resilient and less polluting following the conclusion of a State Government program.

The Sustainable Irrigation Program managed by WGCMA saw \$2 million of funding allocated to a range of irrigation initiatives leading to a further \$7 million in investment by individual farm businesses.

“This is a prime example of the great outcomes that happen when government agencies and the farming sector get together with common goals,” said Shayne Haywood, Manager Land and Biodiversity for WGCMA.

“The program assisted landholders to complete more than 8,000 hectares of irrigation farm planning. This equates to around one fifth of the total area of the Macalister Irrigation District.

“The plans provide irrigators with a detailed roadmap for future innovation, investment, and productivity on their farms. Following the planning, the on-farm incentives program assisted irrigators to improve 3,500 hectares of irrigation infrastructure which generated an estimated 7,000 ML of water efficiency gains valued at around \$1.4 million annually.

“This reflects the demand by farmers to make the best possible use of every drop of irrigation water that comes onto their property,” added Shayne.

Better planning on farms and more efficient, modern irrigation systems also had a positive impact on the local environment with a notable reduction in nutrient laden irrigation water leaving farms, entering drains and creeks, and ending up in the Gippsland Lakes.

“Monitoring for nutrient from the MID shows that some measures we look for hit an all-time low over the last four years,” said WGCMA Lands Program Co-ordinator Mr Anthony Goode.

“It is a great reflection on the local farming community that the hard work and considerable investment over recent years has seen a significant reduction in farm run-off and nutrient being exported into local waterways,” added Anthony.

“We certainly found that the drought impacted on farmer expectations and how individual farm businesses approached issues like future planning and investment,” said Anthony.

Over the life of the program, we were involved in over 1,500 individual interactions with irrigators including almost 100 specifically related to the drought and immediate on farm demands and decisions. Arguably, this work with farm businesses going through a really tough time was probably one of the biggest, most important aspects of this project,” Anthony concluded.

Growing partnerships

Woven through everything we do is partnerships – with community, individuals, other organisations, and government. These are integral to the success of our projects and vital to the ongoing environmental health of the region.

Developing community capacity underpins the success of regional natural resource management and is a key component of projects in the West Gippsland region. The ability to achieve outcomes identified in the Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) depends on the quality of the social capital established through community capacity activities.

We worked to strengthen relationships and realise outcomes with Traditional Owners, committees of management and many individuals.

Partnership achievements

- Completed over ten Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System (ACHRIS) checks within the GLaWAC Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) area and two within the BLCAC RAP area.
- Adapted three projects to avoid possible Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- GLaWAC visited six project locations and registered new sites.
- Continued to develop our Landcare partnership and work closely with Landcare networks despite COVID-19 challenges.

Reconciliation takes action!

Traditional Owner corporations GLaWAC and BLCAC shared knowledge with WGCMA and Landcare members about Cultural Heritage and working together.

BLCAC representatives Uncle Mik Edwards, Eric Edwards, and Bradley Ward hosted a session at Powlett River. Uncle Mik spoke about the difference in cultures, and the fact that members of the oldest culture in the world are constantly operating within the parameters of European culture. He pointed out some of these and the trauma they have caused. Uncle Mik encouraged people to be aware and considerate of this. He said: “We all have the same colour blood” and should be “walking together”. Bradley also taught the group about protecting and recognising heritage sites.

GLaWAC staff Grattan Mullett Snr, Uncle Nicky Moffatt, Uncle Lloyd Hood, Bryce Baxter and Harley Wanganeen hosted two sessions at The Knob Reserve Stratford. Grattan Mullett, Cultural Hub Manager at GLaWAC, reflected that, to Traditional Owners, connection to Country is a priority

and it’s important we work together. He spoke about the importance of cultural sites to the Gunaikurnai, both tangible sites in the landscape and intangible sites, where important events both good and bad have occurred. He also highlighted the importance of young people re-establishing their connection to Country.

Elder and leader of the GLaWAC Cultural Water Team, Uncle Lloyd Hood, shared some of his life story with the group, which was quite confronting. Many people had not realised or heard directly the difficulties faced by Aboriginal people on the missions in Victoria. Uncle Nicky Moffatt, Cultural Heritage Officer and musician, talked about recognising heritage in the landscape and his moving story of reconnecting with family across the country.

“Landcarers have had an insight into people’s history, where they are at now and their aspirations for the future,” said Mandy Leggett, WGCMA Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Officer. “It has put them on the road to better understanding each other and working together.”

PROJECT PARTNERS

Australian Government, State Government, Landcare networks and other community groups, GLaWAC, BLCAC, Boonwurrung Foundation

FUNDING

Australian Government National Landcare Program, State Government Victorian Water Programs Investment Framework, Victorian Landcare Grants



“Ensuring Traditional Owners are leading our work together is the most important and rewarding part of my job. The cultural values of our catchment are amazing and it is a privilege to be able to work to recognise and protect them.”

Mandy Leggett, Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Officer

*"As a leader in
Natural Resource
Management
we will inspire
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