

East Gippsland

REGIONAL CONTEXT



Agriculture: 17% of catchment is private land, mostly used for grazing, and some irrigated horticulture and dairy.

Natural features: Snowy River National Park, Errinundra National Park, Croajingolong National Park, Cooperacambra National Park, Cape Howe Marine National Park.

Major waterways: Gippsland Lakes (Ramsar listed), Snowy River, Mitchell River, Tambo River, Bemm River and Sydenham Inlet.

Indigenous heritage: Native Title for much of the Gippsland Region is held by the Gunaikurnai people. Traditional Owners include the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation.

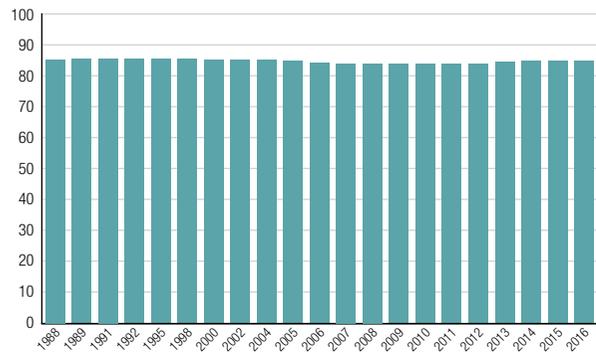
Source: EGCM, 2013



Benedore River Estuary. Photo: EGCM

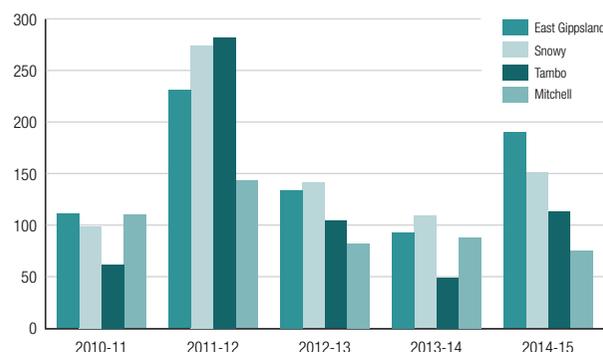
REPORT CARD

BIODIVERSITY Tree cover



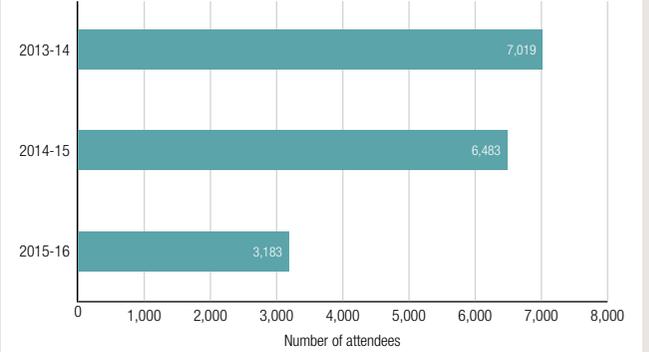
Average annual percentage (%) tree cover for the East Gippsland region 1988-2016. Source: Van Dijk and Summers, 2016

WATER Streamflow



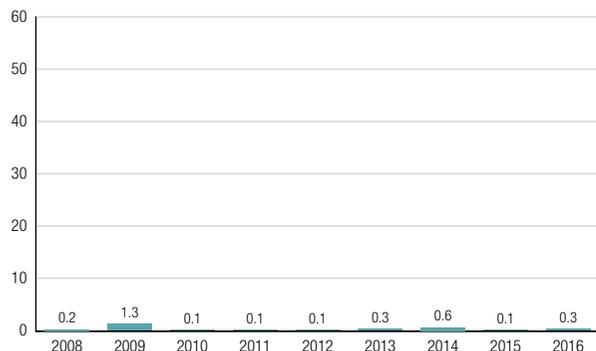
Basin streamflow (%) compared to long-term average. Source: Victorian Water Accounts

COMMUNITY Participation



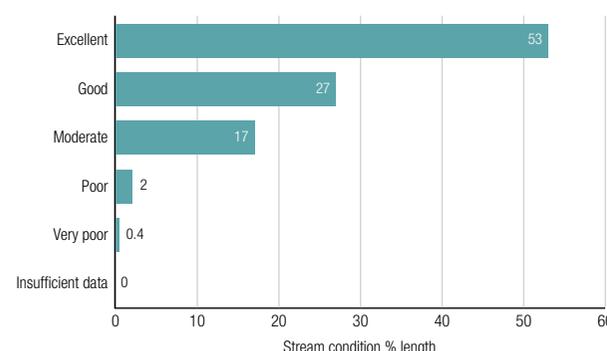
Community participation in CMA engagement events. Source: Victorian Catchment Management Authorities, 2014, 2015, 2017

LAND Exposed soil



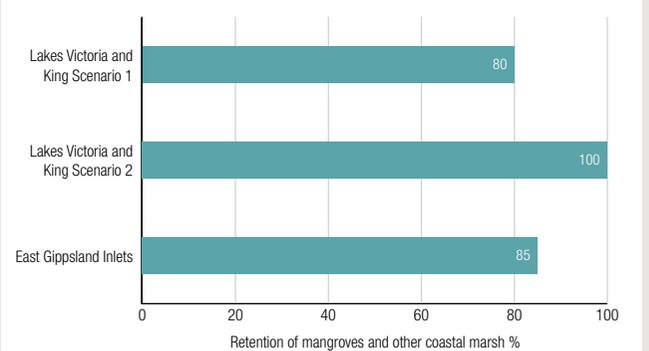
Percentage (%) Dryland area with 30-100% bare soils (higher risk of erosion) in March, 2008-16. Sources: DEDJTR, 2017a; EnSym; Guerschman et al., 2015

WATERWAYS Stream condition



Index of Stream Condition 2013 summary for the East Gippsland region. Source: DEPI, 2013b, p. 72

COASTS Vegetation retention



Estimated total retention (%) of Mangroves and Other Coastal Marsh from pre-1750 to ~2008. Source: Sinclair and Boon, 2012

ASSESSMENT OF CATCHMENT CONDITION

LAND

- ▶ The East Gippsland region has almost negligible risk of erosion from bare soils in dryland production areas over the last nine years. This is largely due to relatively high average annual rainfall, varying from 600 mm to 1,000 mm across public land in the catchment. The East Gippsland CMA reports that there is no significant evidence of poor condition for its soils (EGCMA, 2016).

WATER

- ▶ According to the last index of stream condition benchmark conducted in 2010 (DEPI, 2013b), almost three quarters (70%) of stream reaches assessed are in excellent or good condition. A very small proportion (2.4%) of river reaches, on the Snowy and Mitchell basins, are in poor or very poor condition, mostly due to limited vegetation width. Basin streamflow was high in 2011-12 and 2014-15.
- ▶ The East Gippsland CMA reports improved condition of riparian sites, based on their application of the works monitoring method (EGCMA, 2016).

BIODIVERSITY

- ▶ The East Gippsland region has widespread tree cover (85%), as approximately 83% of the region is public land held in state forests and national parks. The East Gippsland CMA assessed biodiversity in the region as remaining stable through 2015-16, with small gains in habitat enhancement (EGCMA, 2016).

COASTS

- ▶ The extent of saltmarsh in Lakes Victoria and King have all been influenced by the artificial opening of these systems to the Southern Ocean. Increases in salinity may have increased saltmarsh extent over and above naturally-occurring saltmarsh. Thus two scenarios were assessed, with Scenario 1 based on extensive pre-European distribution, and Scenario 2 on more limited pre-European distribution (Sinclair and Boon, 2012).
- ▶ The East Gippsland coast is protected by an extensive network of national parks, coastal parks, marine national parks, and a marine sanctuary (EGCMA, 2016). The CMA reports that the coast is in a stable condition.

COMMUNITY

- ▶ Community participation has slightly declined over three years. However, the reduction in community participation is due to the CMA undertaking a more targeted approach to community engagement and having more one on one discussions with community members (EGCMA, 2016).
- ▶ The top three community concerns about environmental health relate to feral animals (92% of respondents), invasive weeds (77%), and declining numbers of native fish (57%); all considered a problem by respondents (Schirmer et al., 2016).

CASE STUDY

Enhancing soil health through better management: the Topsoils project



Photo: EGCMA

“This project combines biophysical science about soil characteristics with social science about farmer attitudes and practices to enable more targeted management practices. The project aims to provide further training and have 10,000 hectares of land under improved management practices by 2018.”

LOCATION: East Gippsland

PARTICIPANTS: East Gippsland CMA, Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, East Gippsland Landcare Network, Far East Victoria Landcare, Greening Australia, Southern Farming Systems, and Snowy River Interstate Landcare Committee. Funded by the National Landcare Programme.

OBJECTIVES: To support farmers in managing soils by identifying soil health factors that limit production, and to work in partnership with farmers to improve soil management practices.

Soil health is a key regional management priority in the East Gippsland region. The East Gippsland CMA has adopted a regional strategic approach towards maintaining soil health, with a long-term objective of “[Maintaining]...the productive values and stability of agricultural land and soils” (EGCMA, 2013, p. 31), and short-term objective of supporting best practice management and assessing the viability of agricultural land.

With this in mind, the CMAs Topsoils project is a multi-partner regional project to benchmark current soil condition, soil fertility and farming practices.

The project has sampled soil and plant data over nearly 100,000 hectares of farming land in East Gippsland, or approximately 25% of total farmland in the region. This includes information on soil type, pH, chemical elements, salinity and organic matter. Over 200 farmers were involved in soil sampling.

Farmers were also asked about their soil management attitudes and practices as part of the project. The results from the questionnaire, as well as soil and plant data, were used to develop three demonstration sites and a training program for farmers. The demonstration sites were opened to the public in 2016, in combination with workshops on assessing soil condition, and how this is affected by farm management practices.

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The CMA also hopes that there will be long-term, sustainable change in soil management by farmers in the region. The training program and demonstration site field days have generated a good understanding of the differences in soils across the region. It is not yet clear whether these extension activities have led to changes in soil management practices.