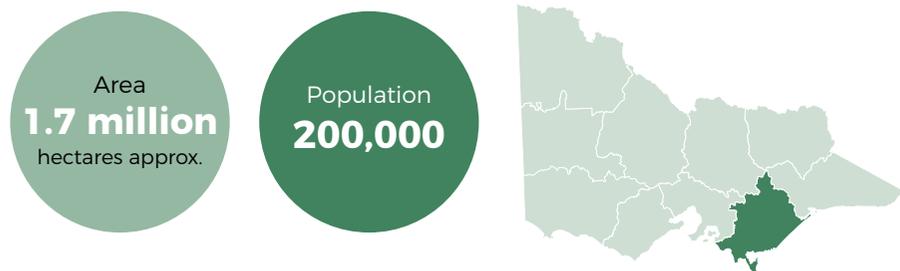


# West Gippsland

## REGIONAL CONTEXT



**AGRICULTURE:** 54% of catchment area is private land, much of which is used for agriculture. The main agricultural enterprises are dairy, grazing and meat production, forestry and vegetables.

**SIGNIFICANT NATURAL FEATURES:** Corner Inlet (Ramsar listed) Gippsland Lakes (Ramsar listed), Wilsons Promontory National Park, Tarra Bulga National Park, Victorian Alps.

**MAJOR WATERWAYS:** Thomson, Latrobe, Macalister, Avon, Perry, Powlett, Tarwin and Tarra Rivers.

**INDIGENOUS HERITAGE:** Gunaikurnai peoples (Brataualung, Brayakaulung, Tatungalung), Kulin peoples (Bunurong, Boon Wurrung, Wurundjeri).

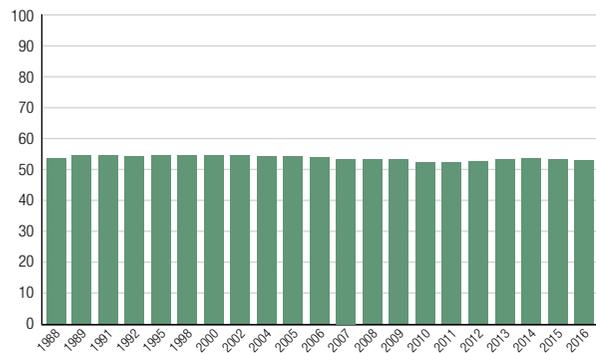
Source: WGCMA, 2012



Aerial view of Anderson Inlet. Photo: WGCMA

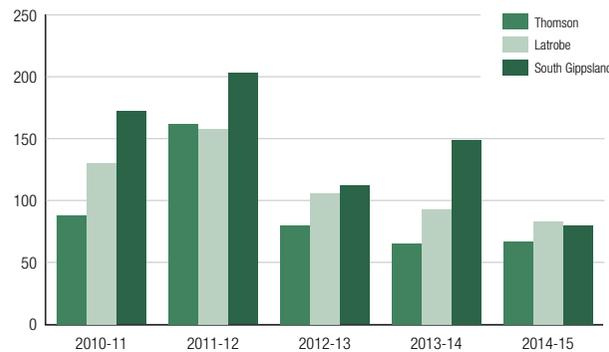
REPORT CARD

**BIODIVERSITY** Tree cover



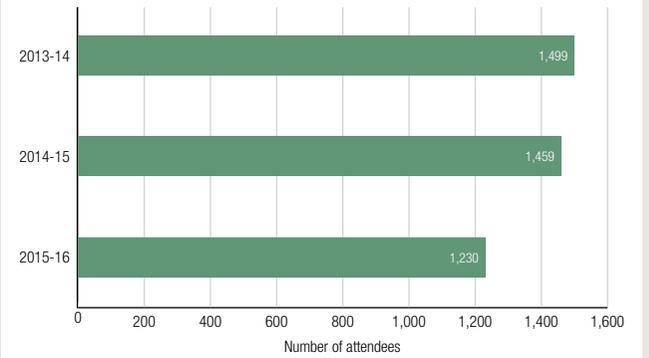
Average annual percentage (%) tree cover for the West Gippsland region 1988-2016. Source: Van Dijk and Summers, 2016

**WATER** Streamflow



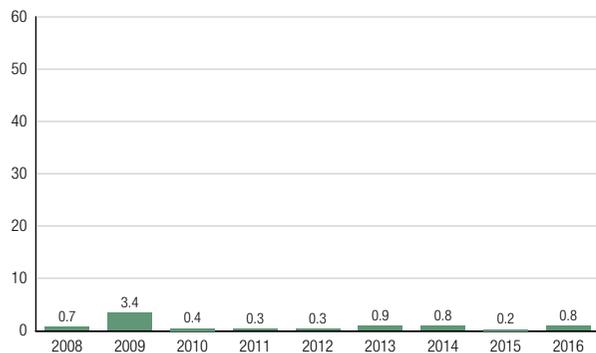
Basin streamflow (%) compared to long-term average. Source: Victorian Water Accounts

**COMMUNITY** Participation



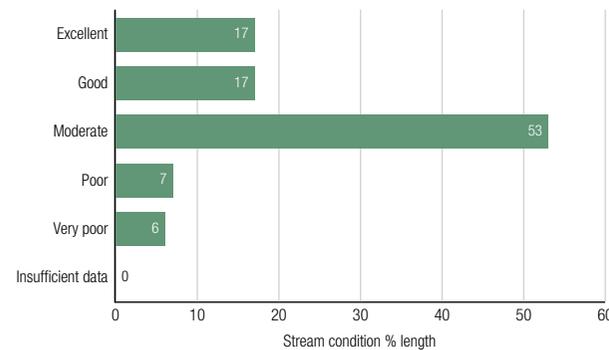
Community participation in CMA engagement events. Source: Victorian Catchment Management Authorities, 2014, 2015, 2017

**LAND** Exposed soil



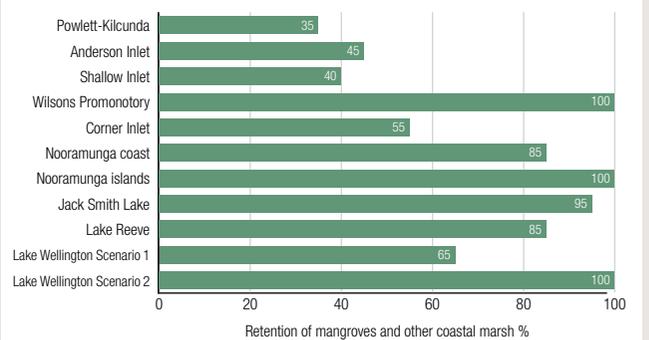
Percentage (%) Dryland area with 30-100% bare soils (higher risk of erosion) in March, 2008-16. Sources: DEDJTR, 2017a; EnSym; Guerschman et al., 2015

**WATERWAYS** Stream condition



Index of Stream Condition 2013 summary for the West Gippsland region. Source: DEPI, 2013b, p. 84

**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 West Gippsland region has had almost negligible risk of erosion from bare soils in dryland production areas over the last nine years. However, erosion risk is present in parts of the catchment with steep slopes and approximately 24% of private land was modelled as being at high or very high risk of gully and tunnel erosion (WGCMA, 2016).

### WATER

- ▶ According to the last Index of Stream Condition benchmark conducted in 2010 (DEPI, 2013b), 34% of stream reaches assessed were in 'excellent' or 'good' condition, mostly located in Thomson and Latrobe Basins. The majority of stream reaches assessed in the region were in 'moderate' condition (DEPI, 2013b). Basin streamflow was above the long-term average from 2010-11 to 2011-12, and close to or slightly below the long-term average from 2012-13 to 2014-15.

### BIODIVERSITY

- ▶ Tree cover in West Gippsland is relatively high (approximately 50% on average) and has remained stable over last 20 years. Areas of high tree cover are primarily located in northern part of the catchment, along the Great Dividing Range. The West Gippsland CMA reports that native vegetation extent is 'poor' to 'moderate' in the catchment's lower reaches, mainly as a result of fragmentation on private land.

### COASTS

- ▶ The West Gippsland coasts shows three sections with low retention of coastal marsh, primarily due to conversion to pasture (Sinclair and Boon, 2012), though the West Gippsland CMA reports that 7,632 ha of mangroves and saltmarsh were recently mapped in the Corner Inlet stretch, a figure that exceeds the estimated pre-1750 area (Sinclair and Boon, 2012; WGCMA, 2016).
- ▶ The region has several coastal national parks and coastal parks that provide higher levels of protection for the areas of coasts covered, reportedly more than 56,000 ha (WGCMA, 2016).

### COMMUNITY

- ▶ Community participation has remained stable over three years. West Gippsland CMA works with Landcare, private landholders and government agencies to deliver catchment management outcomes (WGCMA, 2016).
- ▶ The top three community concerns about environmental health relate to invasive weeds (81% of respondents), feral animals (70%), and declining numbers of native fish (62%); all considered a problem by respondents (Schirmer et al., 2016).



Photo: WGCMA

## CASE STUDY

## Improving catchment health through local connections: Corner Inlet Connections project



**Figure 51. Location of Corner Inlet in the West Gippsland region.**

**LOCATION:** West Gippsland

**PARTICIPANTS:** West Gippsland CMA, Parks Victoria, Birdlife Australia, DELWP, South Gippsland Water, local government, Environment Protection Authority, Agriculture Victoria, industry partners, research organisations, community groups, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, Australian Government.

**OBJECTIVES:** The Corner Inlet Connections project aims to protect catchment health through partnerships between government agencies, landowners and the local community.

Corner Inlet (Figure 51) is located about 200 km south-east of Melbourne in the West Gippsland region. It is the third largest coastal bay in Victoria and includes a complex network of intertidal mangroves, saltmarsh, mud banks, seagrass beds, rocky islands and deeper channels.

The area supports unique plant communities, provides a feeding, nesting and breeding area for thousands of waterbirds, and is one of the most important areas in Victoria for shorebirds. The site is listed under the Ramsar Convention as a wetland of international significance. It is culturally significant to the Gunaikurnai, Bunurong and Boon Wurrung peoples, and is an important farming and fishing area.

In recent years, local fishers, recreational users and communities have expressed concern about the health of land and water resources at the site. Land uses such as farming, forestry and urban development have contributed to sediment and nutrient

loads entering waterways from the surrounding catchment, and threatened environmentally significant areas. Pest plants and animals are also a problem.

Corner Inlet Connections is a partnership between government agencies, landowners, industry and the local community. The partnership aims to maintain and improve the environmental, agricultural and economic sustainability of the inlet and its surrounds. In particular, the project seeks to raise community awareness about the connection between catchment health and the health of the Ramsar site, through knowledge and skill sharing and practical on-farm improvements.

On-ground works to address water quality issues include the protection of saltmarsh vegetation and rivers through stock exclusion, and revegetation of rivers, creeks and drains. The CMA has carried out control programs for gully, hill slope and drainage erosion issues, whilst local farmers have substantially improved effluent and fertiliser management on their dairy farms. Parks Victoria, Yarram Yarram Landcare Network and local landholders have undertaken a range of pest plant and animal control works on both public and private land.

These on-ground works were complemented by a range of media articles, field visits and community days to increase community awareness of, and participation in, the need to protect catchment health. These community engagement activities have lifted the profile of Corner Inlet as a community asset, helping to safeguard catchment health into the future.