

Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy

Discussion Paper



Our Water Our Future



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A comment from the Consultative Committee Chair

On behalf of the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy Consultative Committee, I look forward to working with people in the Gippsland Region to determine how to manage all components of the water cycle, including rivers, lakes, groundwater and estuaries, to protect the environment and achieve sustainable outcomes for our towns, farms and industry.

Through the Strategy, we will seek to ensure sustainable outcomes against a background that may include drought, climate change, population growth and other challenges to our water resources.

Sustainable water strategies are being undertaken at a regional level across the State.

This Discussion Paper marks the first step in the development of the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy. It outlines the region's current water resources, the emerging challenges to water availability and quality, and poses questions about what the water future in Gippsland may look like.

The release of the Discussion Paper provides the first of a number of opportunities for the wider community to have input into the development of the Strategy.

In developing the Strategy, we are seeking to build on the traditional values of Gippsland – its unique natural resources, agriculture, tourism and regional centres - by creating tools and policy to meet the water challenges of the 21st Century.

The Consultative Committee members bring to the table a diversity of perspectives and experiences. I am confident that we will represent the many communities that make Gippsland unique.

In addition, to be successful the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy must reflect the needs and values of Gippsland communities. The development of this Strategy will provide the community and the Government with an opportunity to work together to plan the best way forward to sustainably manage the region's water resources over the next 50 years.

I ask everyone with an interest in the Gippsland Region's water future to contribute to the issues and opportunities presented in this Discussion Paper and engage in the process of developing the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Vale'.

Llew Vale OAM
Chair, Gippsland Region
Sustainable Water Strategy
Consultative Committee

Planning for a Secure Water Future



What is a sustainable water strategy?

The Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy is a Victorian Government initiative to secure the region's water future. The Strategy aims to analyse all aspects of water management in the region to improve and secure water resources.

Regional sustainable water strategies complement the Government's water planning framework by analysing possible future impacts such as drought, climate change, land use and population growth on water supplies and demand at a regional level. Other key water resource planning tools are outlined in Appendix 1.

Sustainable water strategies consider all sources of water and examine the needs of towns, industry, agriculture and the environment. They are developed in consultation with water corporations, catchment management authorities, other State Government departments, local councils, industry representatives, interest groups, and the community.

The strategies also guide the region's water corporations and catchment management authorities in the development, integration and implementation of their water management plans.

Regional sustainable water strategies are a legislative requirement under the *Water Act 1989* and fulfil Victoria's commitment to the *National Water Initiative* to carry out open, statutory-based water planning.

Elements of a sustainable water strategy

The main steps in developing a sustainable water strategy are:

- *Determining the resource outlook*

Estimate how water needs and supplies will look over the next 50 years based on the best data available, including the potential impacts of climate change, land use change, population growth and events such as drought, floods and bushfires.

- *Identifying options to address the resource outlook*

During the development of the Strategy, options will be identified to secure water resources in a way that balances economic, social and environmental outcomes.

- *Establishing an implementation plan*

The Final Strategy will outline implementation actions and targets for the Government, community, water corporations and catchment management authorities.

- *Monitoring the resource outlook and adapting the implementation plan*

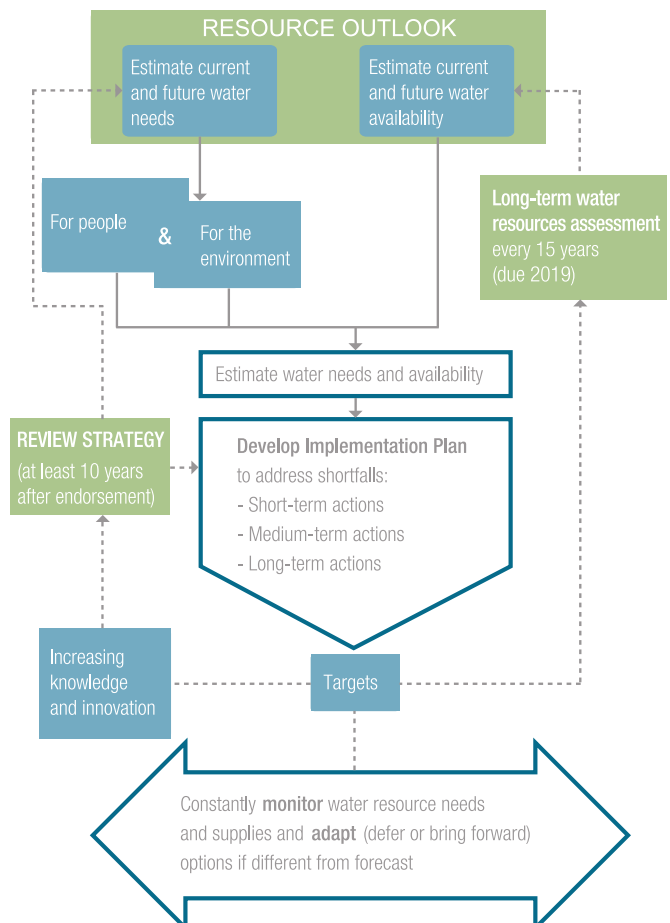
To ensure the Strategy adapts to changing needs and emerging trends in the region, it will be reviewed every seven to 10 years. Changes to the Strategy will be communicated to stakeholders and the broader community.

- *Ensuring we are prepared*

We will conduct specific studies as required to build on our knowledge and projections for the future.

This approach is summarised in Figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1 - Elements of a sustainable water strategy



Overview of the water planning framework

In 2004 the Victorian Government released *Our Water Our Future*, an action plan to secure water for Victoria's future. Sustainable water strategies were an initiative of *Our Water Our Future* to undertake water resource planning at a regional level with a long-term outlook.

In June 2007 the Government released *Our Water Our Future: the Next Stage of the Government's Water Plan* to provide a state-wide response to short to medium term water management.

Regional sustainable water strategies link with other management plans and strategies and are part of the broader planning context laid down by *Our Water Our Future* and the Government's Water Plan.

Regional sustainable water strategies

The Victorian Government introduced regional sustainable water strategies to secure each region's water supplies into the future. Regional sustainable water strategies are consistent with the *National Water Initiative's* approach of reflecting regional differences in water supply planning.

The Sustainable Water Strategy process is a vital element of the overall planning framework and brings together other water supply management tools. Its focus is on the region, rather than the localised issues dealt with in water corporations' water-supply demand strategies.

Sustainable water strategies inform the development, integration and implementation of management plans prepared by water managers within the region. The strategies set priorities and management actions for environmental and consumptive use requirements at the regional scale.

Water supply demand strategies

A key element of the resource planning framework is the commitment set out in *Our Water Our Future* requiring urban water corporations to prepare water supply demand strategies for their own supply systems.

The local strategies are prepared every five years with a 50 year outlook and identify measures to maintain a balance between demand for water and available supply over the medium to longer term. Additional commitments made in *Our Water Our Future* required urban water corporations to assess opportunities for the use of recycled water and other alternative supplies and establish water recycling targets and water conservation targets in the development of their water supply demand strategies.

A summary of each of Gippsland's urban water corporation's water supply demand strategies are available from: www.ourwater.vic.gov.au/programs/sws/gippsland or can be downloaded from each water corporation's website (see Chapter 5).

Regional river health strategies

Regional river health strategies establish objectives for river systems and set priorities to achieve these objectives for the next five years. They draw on concepts and requirements set down in the *Victorian River Health Strategy (2002)* and the Government's commitments in *Our Water Our Future*. They are then used to inform the Regional Catchment Strategy and Regional Investment Plan, which outline priority works for the coming years. The *Victorian River Health Strategy* is due to be revised by 2011, while local river health strategies are revised every five years.

A summary of the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority's river health strategies are located at: www.ourwater.vic.gov.au/programs/sws/gippsland or can be downloaded from each catchment management authorities website (see Chapter 5).

Long-term water resource assessments

The package of planning reforms rolled out in *Our Water Our Future* includes long-term assessments of the resource base and river health. These expert assessments of the State's water resources occur at 15 year intervals, with the first in 2019.

The principal objective of the assessments is to determine whether the resource base and environment has suffered a decline. The assessments will also consider if any decline has impacted disproportionately on one group or if there has been deterioration in waterway health related to flow.

If this has been identified, a review will be conducted to determine how to restore an acceptable balance. This may involve corrective action to restore a balance between water available for consumption and the environment. The *Water Act 1989* provides processes for making these adjustments.

Planning for a Secure Water Future

What is the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy

The Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy is one of four sustainable water strategies. The other strategies include the Central, Northern and Western sustainable water strategies.

The Gippsland Strategy will be developed in stages to enable comprehensive community consultation, including the release of a Discussion Paper, Draft Strategy and Final Strategy (see Figure 1.4).

Overview of the Gippsland Region

The Gippsland Region spans the area south of the Great Dividing Range in Victoria from the Latrobe River catchment and the Strzelecki Ranges to the New South Wales border in the East. It comprises seven major river basins; East Gippsland, Snowy, Tambo, Mitchell, Thomson, Latrobe and South Gippsland. The Latrobe, Thomson-Macalister, Tambo and Mitchell river basins flow into the Gippsland Lakes, while the South Gippsland, Snowy and East Gippsland river

basins flow to local estuaries or the sea. The East Gippsland and South Gippsland river basins do not form a single river system but instead contain many smaller waterways that flow to the sea.

The larger urban centres within the Region include Warragul, Traralgon, Wonthaggi, Sale and Bairnsdale (see Figure 1.3).

Gippsland Water, South Gippsland Water and East Gippsland Water manage the urban water supplies, while Southern Rural Water manages the rural water supplies. The caretakers of river health in the region are the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.

The current population of the Gippsland Region is approximately 224,000, which is projected to increase to approximately 313,000 by 2055. Population data used in this Discussion Paper is based on *Victoria in Future*¹ estimates. Significant agricultural, forestry, energy and tourism industries operate within the region.

FIGURE 1.3 - The Gippsland Region



FIGURE 1.4 - How will the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy be developed?

Discussion Paper Released July 2009	Draft Strategy Expected to be released late 2009	Final Strategy Expected to be released in first half of 2010
Provides a resource review and outlook. Demonstrates the need to develop a short, medium and long-term water resource plan that crosses geographical boundaries. This paper includes a range of potential water resource management opportunities and invites community submissions to help identify further options.	Outlines the Government's proposals for further community comment. This paper incorporates options provided in community submissions on the Discussion Paper and prioritises all options based on a sustainability assessment and a set of guiding principles.	Sets out Government and community actions required in an implementation plan to secure our water future together over the next 50 years.

Strategy objectives

The Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy provides an opportunity for the Government, community, environment, farming, industry and tourism and recreation groups to determine how water resources can be fairly and sustainably distributed.

The Strategy aims to:

- collate existing national, state and local water policies and projects within the region
- integrate information to form a regional perspective
- identify and understand threats to water availability and quality, including the implications of climate change
- provide for reliable, efficient and safe water supplies for towns and associated industries
- provide for economically viable and environmentally sustainable industries in the region
- provide for protection of rivers, estuaries and aquifers from the impacts of drought, climate change and other risks
- identify ways to improve and set priorities for improving the maintenance of the environmental water reserve in accordance with the environmental water reserve objective
- recognise and respect indigenous and other heritage values associated with the region's rivers and catchment areas.

Indigenous partnerships

Indigenous people in Victoria have for many hundreds of generations sustainably managed their environment. A special connection exists between indigenous people and their country. The health of waterways and the land remains central to Aboriginal cultures.

In preparing the Draft and Final Sustainable Water Strategies, the Department of Sustainability and Environment respects these connections and will consult closely with the region's Traditional Owners.

Purpose of the Discussion Paper

The Discussion Paper is the first publication of the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy. It provides a snapshot of the current water resources available in the Gippsland Region and how these resources are used and allocated. The Discussion Paper aims to increase understanding of water resources in the Gippsland Region and to help **communities and stakeholders give informed feedback on how these resources can be planned, managed and delivered for the future.**

All figures in this Discussion Paper, including estimates of future water availability, are indicative only.

Making a submission

See Chapter 5 for information on how to make a submission. All submissions must be received by Friday 18 September 2009.