

Latrobe water fact sheet 3: Water for Traditional Owners

This fact sheet is number three in a series that illustrate how water is utilised in the Latrobe basin



Water for Country— understanding water use for Traditional Owners

For Traditional Owners, water is part of the fabric that is Country—without water there is no life. Water supports plants and animals, the people, is a place for gathering, and is a place for spiritual and cultural connection.

The Victorian Government through its Water for Victoria policy committed to include Traditional Owners in the decision making that guide Victoria's water resources. In 2019, legislation was passed requiring Traditional Owner water values and uses to be integrated into water planning and management across Victoria. This recognised that Traditional Owners had typically been excluded from water policy and committed to including their voices moving forward.

The Gunaikurnai, Traditional Owners of the Latrobe Valley and beyond

The Gunaikurnai people have occupied, used and managed land, water and coastal environments for many thousands of years and are the recognised Traditional Owners of about 1.33 million hectares in Gippsland. This

area spans from Warragul in the west, to the Snowy River in the east, and from the Great Divide in the north, to the coast in the south, and includes 200 metres of offshore sea territory. This area includes all of the Latrobe Valley, and beyond.

The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) is the official voice of the Gunaikurnai people, for the purposes of the Native Title Act 1993 (Commonwealth) and is a Registered Aboriginal Party for the purposes of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Victoria). Victoria has also entered into Recognition and Settlement

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Agreement with the Gunaikurnai people, executed under the Traditional

Owner Settlement Act 2010. This affords Gunaikurnai people rights relating to the use of public land within this area. Initial steps have been taken to recognise Aboriginal values and ecological knowledge in waterway management strategies, sustainable water strategies and state environmental protection policies. Because of this, Gunaikurnai and Parks Victoria jointly manage ten national parks and reserves across Gippsland.

For the Gunaikurnai as traditional custodians, there are immense challenges to heal, protect and manage Country. The Gunaikurnai name for the Latrobe River is Durt-Yowan (meaning forefinger).

Water in the Valley—the Gunaikurnai perspective

For Gippsland's Traditional Owners, all of Gunaikurnai Country is connected with no separation between landscapes, waterways, coasts and oceans, and natural and cultural resources. From the Gunaikurnai perspective, water for the Latrobe Valley requires considering the upper catchments, the Latrobe River system,

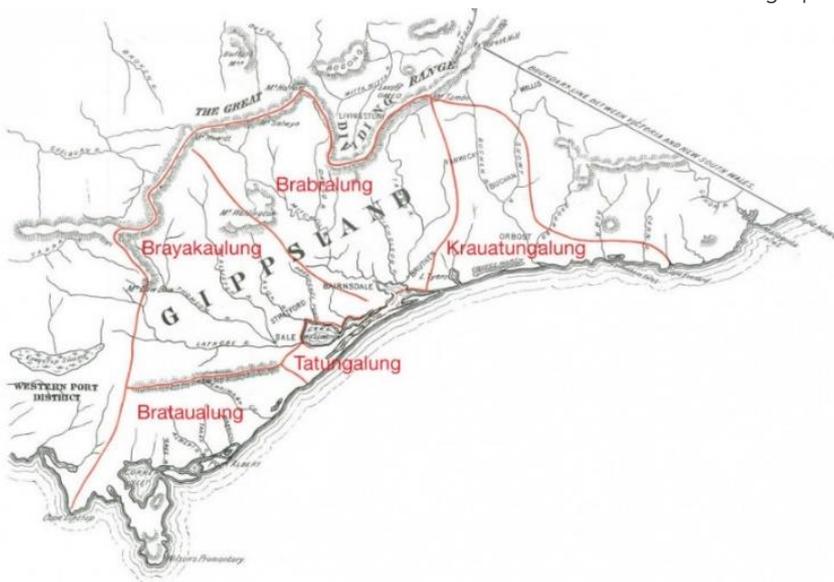
the Lower Latrobe wetlands, and ultimately, through to the Gippsland Lakes.

“We see our land (Wurruk, waters (Yarnda), air (Watpootjan) and every living thing as one. All things come from Wurruk, Yarnda and Watpootjan and they are the spiritual life-giving resource, providing us with resources and forming the basis of our cultural practices. We have a cultural responsibility to ensure that all of it is looked after.”

Gunaikurnai Whole-Of-Country Plan, 2015

Protecting and managing water is a custodial and intergenerational responsibility for the Gunaikurnai people. Cultural and spiritual values for water includes providing for the plants and animals important to Traditional Owners, drinking water, meeting places, language, song lines, stories, sacred places, customary use and recreational use. Water is also important for commercial activities traditionally through travel and trade, and to provide for economic development.

Top image: Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation's On Country crew member at Point Fullarton.
Photographer: Craig Moodie.



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