

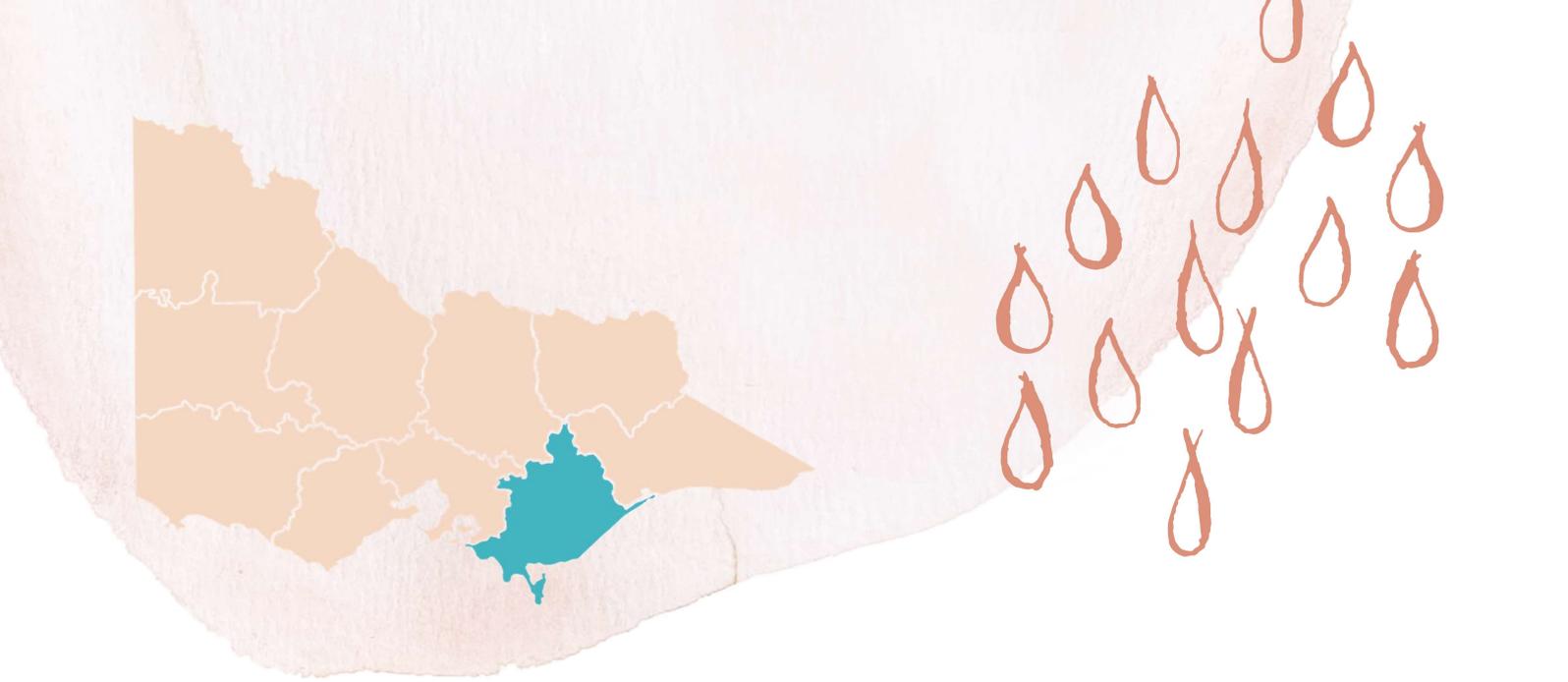


Waterwatch & EstuaryWatch
Citizen science in
Victoria's waterways
West Gippsland

Regional Report
2019-2020



Environment,
Land, Water
and Planning



Victoria sustains a vibrant history of community-based environmental monitoring and citizen science programs, including the Waterwatch and EstuaryWatch programs. These programs are instrumental in informing waterway management decisions while strengthening community engagement and fostering environmental stewardship and advocacy. Catchment management authorities, water authorities, local government and other delivery partners play a crucial role in facilitating the programs.

Through the EstuaryWatch and Waterwatch programs, citizen scientists are supported and encouraged to become actively involved in local waterway monitoring and on-ground activities. Citizen scientists involved in the 2019-2020 programs contributed a total of **232,580** hours to care for our waterways, equivalent to 31,011 volunteer days. This contribution provides an economic value of the 2019-2020 volunteer effort of **\$9,707,889**. For more information, see the Waterwatch & EstuaryWatch Citizen science in Victoria's waterways Annual Achievements Report 2019-2020.

Aboriginal Acknowledgement:

EstuaryWatch and Waterwatch proudly acknowledge Victoria's Aboriginal community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches us. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards the equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.

If you are interested in participating in citizen science in your region, please contact West Gippsland CMA on 1300 094 262 or visit <https://www.wgcm.vic.gov.au/>.

Regional Stats



73

Event Participants



5

Active Groups



30

Active Sites



30

Active Volunteers

Waterwatch at Heart Morass with Field & Game

The rehabilitation of Heart Morass from a dry dustbowl continues since the 1,300-hectare wetlands changed ownership in 2006.

Saltwater intrusion from Lake Wellington threatens the Heart Morass' freshwater and brackish wetlands. The site's acid sulphate soils also endanger the habitat of animals and up to 30,000 waterbirds that visit Heart Morass at any one time, including Latham's Snipe, a migratory snipe of the East Asian-Australasian flyway.

Since 2006, dedicated volunteers from the Sale branch of Field & Game Australia have planted over 60,000 trees and for the last two years have also monitored the water quality at Heart Morass. Initially proposing six sites across Heart Morass, Waterwatch volunteer, Gary Howard, and other Field & Game volunteers opted to monitor an incredible 12 sites! Taking around four hours to monitor all the sites each month, the volunteers enjoy a social day out; measuring the water's electrical conductivity (EC), pH, dissolved oxygen, turbidity and temperature. Importantly, the EC and pH levels indicate to the volunteers

how Lake Wellington's salty water is impacting the wetlands and how the acid sulphate soils are tracking.

As the wetland receives environmental water flows, water quality monitoring was a natural next step for Field & Game as wetland conservationists. Conserving the Morass is more than just for hunting, Gary emphasises, "There was a view that 'wetlands were wastelands', that they could be drained. We're there fighting to save, protect and enhance them."

By uploading the water monitoring results onto the Waterwatch data portal, this valuable information is shared with the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA), and other stakeholders, so better water delivery and management decisions can be made to help the Morass. WGCMA's Water for the Environment team member Dr Adrian Clements says, "It's great having the Field & Game crew out there collecting data regularly. It gives me a sense of what's going on across the wetland and informs my water planning. Gary also notes other significant happenings. Earlier this year the crew observed over 40 Glossy Ibis at one of the sites, a bird not often seen at the Morass."

"Field & Game certainly want to improve the site, but we want members of the public to come and enjoy it too. We're building new walking tracks, maintaining other tracks and encourage people to come for a walk or bike ride. We might be the key manager now, but it's a community asset we want people to enjoy,"

Gary Howard,
Waterwatch volunteer.



Field & Game volunteers ready to go Waterwatch monitoring. Credit: Gerard Callinan.

From Waterwatch Volunteer to Water Career

For Jem Stirling, landing a job at the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) two years ago was a dream come true. “I’ve always been passionate about the environment but ended up in a completely different field. Eventually the stars aligned, the opportunity came by and graciously, the WGCMA gave me a go,” said Jem

Since taking the job, Jem has been learning to manage Water for the Environment and delivering groundworks, but in 2020 a full-circle came to pass.

“When Matt Khoury, the Waterwatch and EstuaryWatch co-ordinator, announced he was leaving, I was pretty quick to put my hand up and say I’d like to give his role a go,” Jem said. The WGCMA agreed, and Jem now also manages WGCMA’s citizen science program, including coordinating and supporting volunteers.

A Waterwatch volunteer for seven years, Jem considers her new responsibilities as pretty special; “I monitored the Tarwin River at Mossvale Park and really enjoyed the opportunity. It was a great way to gain skills and get to know a waterway.”

Jem was also an EstuaryWatch volunteer, at times collecting data with the Powlett River EstuaryWatch group. Jem feels these opportunities were instrumental in turning her volunteering into a professional opportunity; “I really valued the people I met along the way, especially the other volunteers. It was great to meet people who shared similar passions and to broaden my environmental networks.”

So far, Jem is enjoying the new responsibilities of co-ordinating WGCMA’s Waterwatch and EstuaryWatch volunteers. “All the volunteers have been really lovely and accepting. I’m looking forward to getting to know them better and learning more about their stories. It’s also interesting to learn more of how it works from the ‘other side’; there’s great work out

there and people have gathered incredible datasets that will remain useful for years to come,” she said.

Jem would recommend anyone keen to pursue water management as a career to give Waterwatch or EstuaryWatch volunteering a go: “It’s an easy way to learn more about the industry, learn some new things and get to know your local waterways better.”

“From a CMA perspective, I appreciate being able to look at datasets other volunteers have gathered – they do come in handy!”

**Jem Stirling,
ex-Waterwatch volunteer.**

Jem Stirling, monitoring Thomson River in 2019 for the WGCMA. Credit Elsa Burnell.

