



## OUR HERITAGE, CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES

# Conventions & treaties

Treaties and conventions are formal agreements made between two or more nations with public welfare in mind. These usually have no end dates and exist in perpetuity. There are several treaties and conventions relevant to the Gippsland region that regulates our use of the environment.

### Ramsar Convention

The Ramsar Convention was the first intergovernmental treaty between nations for the conservation of natural resources. At Ramsar, Iraq, in 1971, eighteen nations signed a convention based on the mission statement '*To conserve wetlands through the conservation and wise use of wetlands, by national action and international cooperation*', as a means to achieving sustainable development throughout the world.

There are now more than 135 contracting parties to the convention who have designated more than 1,200 wetland sites throughout the world to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Significance.

Signatories to the convention must show that their laws and planning regulations promote the conservation of wetlands; they will preserve the ecological character of their wetlands and educate the community on wetland conservation.

### CAMBA

The agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the People's Republic of China for the Protection of Migratory Birds and their Environment. (Canberra, 20 October 1986)

### JAMBA

The agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of Japan for the Protection of Migratory Birds in Danger of Extinction and their Environment. (Tokyo, 6 February 1974)

Both these agreements list species and threatening activities that may impact upon the survival of migratory birds.

## Resources

### Ramsar Database

[www.wetlands.org/RSDB/default.htm](http://www.wetlands.org/RSDB/default.htm)

### Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

[www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

### Birds Australia

[www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au)

## CASE STUDY

### Migratory birds on beaches

Many of the birds that inhabit Gippsland are listed under the Jamba and Camba agreements. They spend part of their lifecycle in Australia and part in the Northern Hemisphere. The Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons sinensis*) is one species whose ecology makes it susceptible to human interference. It is listed under Schedule 2 of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, and considered endangered.

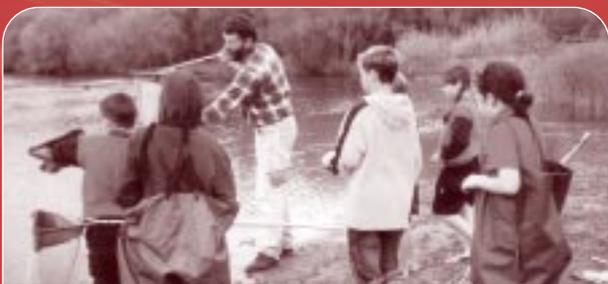
The Little Tern is believed to have only 200 breeding pairs in east Gippsland. These birds then leave for winter, presumably returning to the Northern Hemisphere.

The Little Tern makes its nest just above the high water mark on beaches. These can be easily trampled by beach goers, as they are difficult to recognise. The Little Tern is also easily disturbed while bringing up chicks and tries to distract intruders. This often leads to separation, and chicks may die of starvation.

Other factors that are believed to be responsible for its decline include predation by foxes and dogs, litter such as fishing line, and reduction in food sources by fishing and toxic algal blooms.

Over the breeding season Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers undertake 'Project Ternwatch' where they watch breeding sites and inform beach goers of the Little Tern's location. In other areas fox baiting to reduce predator numbers has been utilised.

Project Ternwatch has also helped out other species of shorebirds such as the Hooded Plover (*Charadrius rubricollis*), Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus longirostris*), Red-capped Plover (*Charadrius ruficapillus*) and the Fairy Tern (*Sterna nereis*).



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# Community Conservation Groups

Individuals can make a difference! In Gippsland there are community groups that focus on environmental monitoring and onground works. Community conservation groups are also fantastic sources of local environmental information.

## Waterwatch



The Focus of Waterwatch is 'Environmental Action Through Community Monitoring'.

In 1992 there were growing concerns about declining water quality. Visible signs such as rising salinity and blue-green algal blooms in our waterways were occurring more regularly. The Australian Government initiated Waterwatch in 1993.

Waterwatch is a national community water quality monitoring network. It encourages all Australians to become active partners in the protection and management of our waterways and catchments. National Waterwatch has nearly 3,000 groups in 200 catchments, monitoring approximately 5,000 sites nationally.

Your local Waterwatch network is made up of individuals, community groups and school groups who monitor waterway health with a variety of biological and habitat assessments, plus physical & chemical tests to determine of the health of our waterways and catchments. Monitoring our local waterways over time allows the community to determine if the health of the waterways and catchments is improving, declining or being maintained.

Gippsland Waterwatch strives to achieve a shared responsibility and collective action for natural resource management through partnerships between community, government and industry. If you are interested in joining a Gippsland Waterwatch group or perhaps starting up your own group, then contact the East or West Gippsland Catchment Management Authorities.

## Landcare



The Victorian government in the mid 1980's introduced a program where community groups were actively involved in planning and implementing natural resource management projects.

The approach was to deal with several land degradation issues rather than single issues. The groups were catchment based. In 1986 this program was registered in Victoria under the name of Landcare.

The first Landcare group was formed in 1986 in St Arnaud Victoria. Heather Mitchell, former president of the Victorian Farmers Federation and the Hon. Joan Kirner; Minister of Conservation, Forests and Lands were co-convenors of the Landcare program. The program became an immediate success. The decade of Landcare was declared in 1989.

Property owners engaged in Landcare join others in realising that natural resource management issues go beyond the boundary fence. Group members share resources, skills, information and friendships. The benefits of Landcare extend to building stronger communities.

In Gippsland there is an active Landcare community built by the community in the last 10 years. There are three networks in West Gippsland and over 180 groups. This involves 3,000 families united in finding better land management practices to sustain our environment.

In East Gippsland there are 33 Landcare Groups including an urban group in Bairnsdale. East Gippsland Landcare has formed a regional body called the South East Australia Landcare Forum to set strategic direction and coordinate cooperative funding applications. There are 4 networks across this environmentally diverse region. Landcare in East Gippsland is coordinated by the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.

[www.landcareaustralia.com.au](http://www.landcareaustralia.com.au)

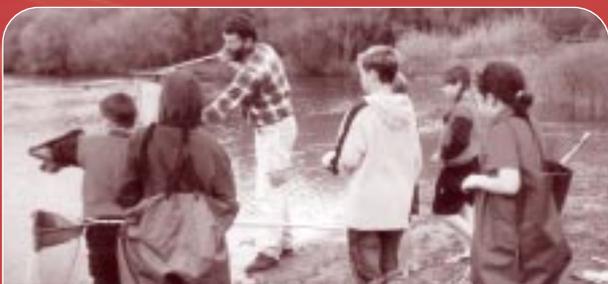
## Coast Action/Coastcare



Coastcare is about community volunteers caring for their coast. They identify local environmental problems and work together to achieve environmental solutions.

Coastcare volunteers deal with issues such as dune erosion, loss of biodiversity, storm water pollution, weeds and control of human access to sensitive areas. Practically they undertake projects such as revegetation, building boardwalks and access paths, removing weeds and fencing dunes, as well as educating visitors and locals alike.

The Coastcare program builds partnerships between governments, community, business and interest groups to become actively involved in on ground works to



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protect and manage our coastal and marine environments. Activities are funded via community grants such as the Australian Government Envirofund for their projects relating to coastal management, rehabilitation and protection. For example, East Gippsland Underwater Naturalists and local scuba divers John Ariens and Roger May launched have created a photographic display of the marine life of Beware Reef off Cape Conran in East Gippsland. This area is a marine sanctuary, and is used to educate the community. Coastcare funded this project.

Selected images can be seen at:

[www.gcb.vic.gov.au/gallery.htm](http://www.gcb.vic.gov.au/gallery.htm)

### Friends groups

Friends of Organ Pipes was established in 1972 as a committee of the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA). The VNPA later obtained support from the National Parks Service to form a number of friends groups for national parks. The concept has spread to cover a wide range of reserves, not only national parks.

'Friends' are people with a special interest in a particular conservation reserve or species of native flora or fauna. They operate in conjunction with the relevant management authority, such as Parks Victoria, a municipal Council, or Trust for Nature. Friends groups, and groups with other names but similar objectives, work in a great variety of natural situations – coastal sites, bush, grasslands, watercourses or wetlands.

Friends groups are independent and autonomous. Some groups operate informally, with no membership fee. Others have a formal constitution, membership fees and membership structure.

Each group has its own objectives depending on the focus. These broadly include:

- providing support for a reserve or species
- assisting with special projects selected by the Friends in consultation with the relevant management authority, such as revegetation, seed collection or monitoring
- bringing people together with a common interest in the reserve or species
- increasing public awareness of their chosen reserve or species
- supporting the effective management of native flora and fauna in Victoria

#### References

[home.vicnet.net.au/%7Efriends](http://home.vicnet.net.au/%7Efriends)

[www.vnpa.org.au/whatyoucando/friends.htm](http://www.vnpa.org.au/whatyoucando/friends.htm)

### CASE STUDY Watermark

Watermark is a local community based organisation, aiming to help conserve and enhance the catchments, and waters of the Gippsland Lakes.

'Watermark's main mission is to effect change in people's attitude towards the Lakes from indifference to caring, from ignorance to understanding, from a feeling of powerlessness to a sense of belonging to a great rehabilitative movement.'

(Chairman Peter Synan at Watermark AGM)

#### Its vision is:

'Individuals and community groups throughout the Gippsland Lakes catchment will work cooperatively towards improving the region's natural features. Trusts, Authorities and Government will support these activities, all of which, no matter where they may take place, will be recognised as contributing to the health of the Lakes. Land Managers throughout the catchment of the Gippsland Lakes – individuals, corporations and governments – will be guided in their daily activities by constant reference to the impact of their actions on the Lakes.'

Anyone can become a member of Watermark. There are many ways to be involved. Their current focus is education, both in a direct way through projects within the school system, and through promoting care of our environment and the Gippsland Lakes.

#### Reference

[www.watermark.asn.au](http://www.watermark.asn.au)

### Fishcare

The aim of the Fishcare Volunteer Program is 'to foster a concept of stewardship and personal responsibility by Victorian recreational fishers to fish resources and the aquatic environment'. The Victorian Fishcare Volunteer Program is developing positive relationships between recreational fishers and fisheries managers to achieve sustainable resource use.

With the support of regional facilitators, Fishcare volunteers provide information and educational material, offer assistance to recreational fishers, collect recreational fish catch data and visit schools and angling clubs.

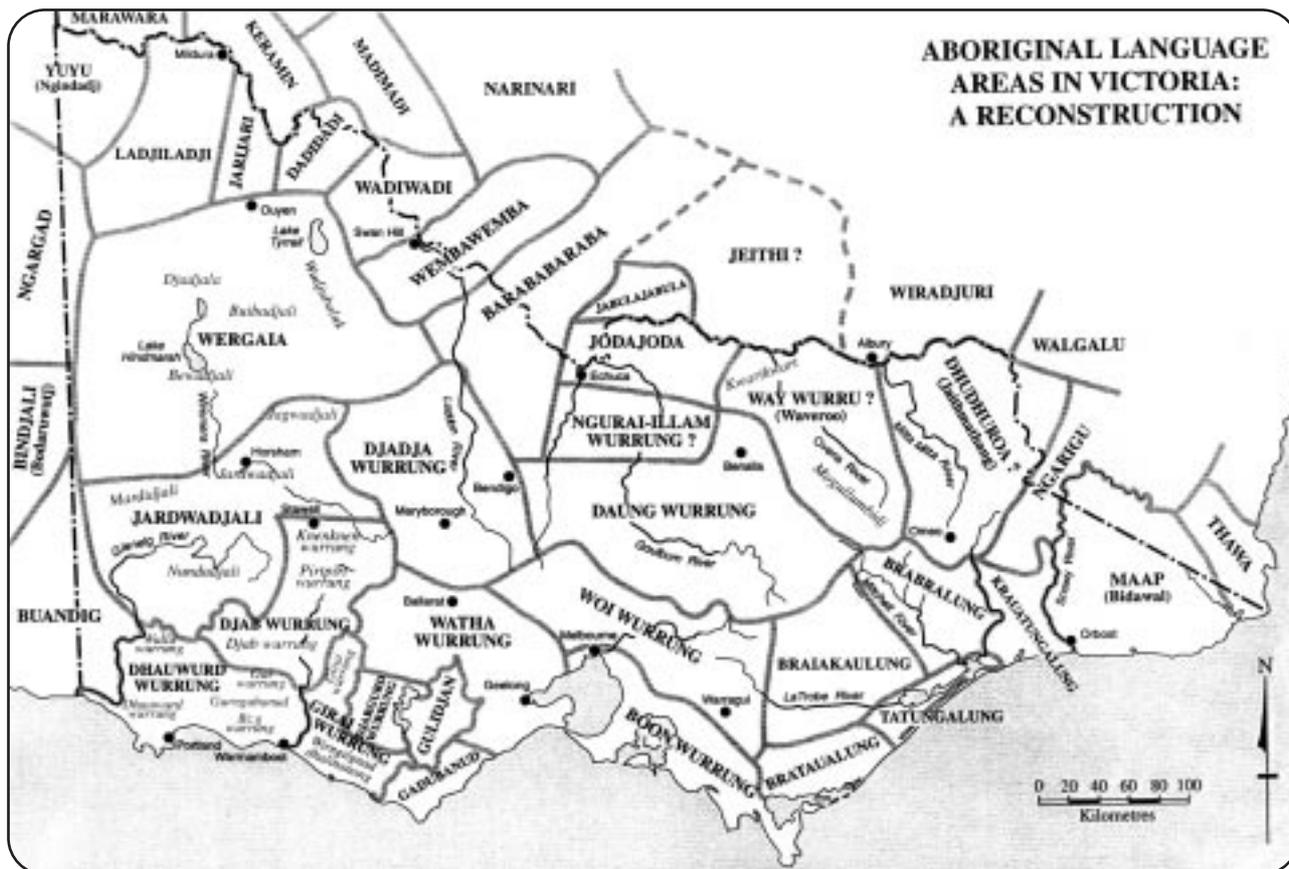
Fishcare Victoria was an initiative of the then Department of Natural Resources and Environment and was started in East Gippsland in 1995. Fishcare is now coastally statewide in six regions with plans to extend inland soon. Source: [www.fishcare.org.au](http://www.fishcare.org.au)



# Indigenous History

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It is told that Borun the pelican and Tuk the musk duck descended from the mountains to become the father and mother of all the Gunnai/Kurnai people. From a tribal existence to displacement, the Gunnai/Kurnai people are working together to recall and record their culture and history.



The local aboriginal population was estimated to be in excess of 10,000 (record from Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place, Bairnsdale). These people were part of the Gunnai/Kurnai Nation, and there were five clans.

- The Brataualung clan occupied the coast and the forest around the districts of Wilson's Promontory and Central Gippsland
- The Braiakaulung clan occupied the eastern strip of the Sale, Stratford and Bengworden district
- The Brabralung clan occupied the surrounding area of Bairnsdale, Bruthen and Buchan which is also the home of the Caves
- The Tatungalung clan occupied the coast along the Ninety Mile beach between Loch Sport and Lake Tyers
- The Krauatungalung and Bidawal clans shared the forest in Victoria's far east, and north beside the Snowy River and into New South Wales

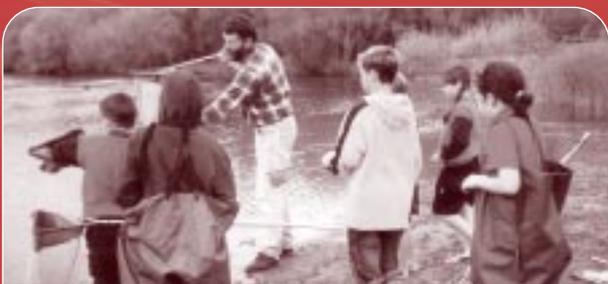
The clans could have been made up of kindred units, i.e. groups of people fairly closely related to each other, and linked by traditions to certain land.

### Early records

Scientific records from Fairy Cave in Buchan show that aboriginal people have been in Gippsland at least 18 thousand years. Aboriginal people believe that their people have lived in this region for between 40 and 50 thousand years.

### Current records

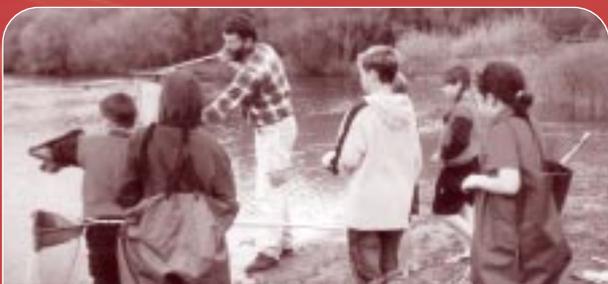
There are 3,098 aboriginal people living in Gippsland, and most of them are situated between Drouin and Lake Tyers districts (information from the Binjirru Regional Council Annual Report 2003). Based on national census information, there are 1,000 indigenous people living in the East Gippsland Shire district.



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### Historical timeline

- 15,000BC** Aboriginal people occupy Clogs cave at Buchan.
- 1798** The first European contact when George Bass sets ashore five convicts on The Ninety-Mile Beach. They disappeared in the land of the Gunnai/Kurnai people.
- 1839** Bayliss, Hutton, Mitchell and McMillan are the first Europeans to lead an expedition into Gunnai/Kurnai territory.
- 1840** The first report of a white woman held captive by the Gunnai/Kurnai people.
- 1840** McMillan's party camped at Nuntin and attacked and clashed with the Gunnai/Kurnai people to ensure the settlers safety.
- 1843** Ronald Macalister is murdered by the Gunnai/Kurnai people. This is believed to be related to the massacre of 60 – 100 Gunnai/Kurnai people at Warrigal Creek.
- 1844** Charles James Tyers, Crown's Commissioner of Gippsland arrives to oversee the detribalisation of the Gunnai/Kurnai people.
- 1860** Assistant Protector Thomas tours Gippsland and accounts for only 222 Gunnai/Kurnai people.
- 1863** Lake Tyers and Ramahyuck missions established.
- 1886** The amendment to the Protection of the Aborigines Act decrees that all part aboriginal people will be classified as white.
- 1907** Ramahyuck mission is closed and all Aborigines are transferred to Lake Tyers.
- 1935** Aboriginal teams win East Gippsland premiership in both football and cricket.
- 1970** Aboriginal lands Act established two land holding trusts; one for Lake Tyers Aboriginal residents and the other for Framlingham in the Western District of Victoria.
- 1975** Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act, enacted.
- 1978** The Aboriginal cooperative registered the name Gippsland/East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC).
- 1987** Amendment to the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islanders Commission Heritage Protection Act – recognises the rights of local aboriginal cultural sites, be protected.
- 1990** Gippsland East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative opened by the honourable Brian W. Mier MLC.
- 1991** Commonwealth Government introduces the council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act which is passed by agreement to all the parliamentary parties.
- 1992** The Australian High Court hands down its decision of recognising Native Title in Australia's common law, but does not define areas of land in which Native Title exist.
- 1992** New health & community centre opens on Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust.
- 1993** Native Title Act introduced by the Commonwealth Government to establish a process to determine which areas of land might still be subjected to Native title.
- 1994** Gippsland/East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative opens new cultural keeping place building, of Aboriginal art & crafts about the past and present.



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### Aboriginal uses of resources



#### Water

Use of resources by indigenous communities varied throughout Victoria and Australia due to the wide range of ecosystems, cultural and technological differences. Freshwater has always been important for indigenous people. The extensiveness of the water sources in a particular area would determine to a certain extent the population size of that area. For example large indigenous communities lived along the Gippsland Lakes, Lake Tyers & Mallacoota inlets.

#### Food

Riparian, floodplain, lake and coastal ecosystems are rich environments and generally represent areas with reliable food resources, this includes:

- Fish (when Europeans arrived, historic accounts tell us that Aboriginal men and women were frequently seen fishing along Gippsland's rivers and lakes)
- Water birds (swans, ducks)
- Shellfish (mussels, oysters, abalones)
- Crayfish
- Eels
- Water bird eggs
- A range of edible plants (bullrush, water ribbons and marsh club-rush were a rich source of carbohydrates)

As well as resources directly from water, adjacent ecosystems would also house other food resources.

- Mammals (kangaroo, possum)
- Moths
- Goanna
- Snakes
- Birds
- Plant foods

Various methods were devised to capture and use these resources. Fire was used to manage and increase food supplies.

### Technology

Ecosystem components provided raw material to make many useful objects in Aboriginal societies. Examples of materials used in housing, food gathering hunting and transport include:

#### Housing

- Caves
- Huts made from bark, sticks and leaves
- Animal fur for bedding (and clothes)
- String from plants and animal sinews

#### Food gathering and hunting

- Nets from plants for fishing
- Baskets
- Bowls (e.g. from Swordgrass and Mat-rush)
- Sap glues
- River stones for axe heads
- Wooden spears, clubs, shields, boomerangs

#### Transport

- Bark cradles for carrying babies
- Bark canoes

### Cultural & spiritual resources

Recorded in the landscape around them Aboriginal people see evidence of The Dreaming. Dreaming stories which talk about the Ancestors and Creation of the land give significance to all aspects of the landscape. The environment provided art and body paints for use during ceremonies and rituals.

### Resources

#### Regional Aboriginal Liaison Officer

East Gippsland CMA  
574 Main St Bairnsdale

#### Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative

The Keeping Place  
37-53 Delmahoy St Bairnsdale

#### Bataluk Cultural Trail

[www.ramahyuck.org/bataluk/bataluk.html](http://www.ramahyuck.org/bataluk/bataluk.html)

#### Hidden Histories

[www.museum.vic.gov.au/hidden\\_histories/](http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/hidden_histories/)

#### Department for Victorian Communities

– Aboriginal Affairs

[www.dvc.vic.gov.au/aav.htm](http://www.dvc.vic.gov.au/aav.htm)

Note: Spelling of indigenous names varies across the Gippsland District.