

Lower Barwon Wetlands



The Lower Barwon Wetlands

The Lower Barwon Wetlands form part of the internationally significant Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Site. They are also a game reserve managed by Parks Victoria and the site of a licenced eel fishery.

The Lower Barwon Wetlands consist of a diverse range of aquatic vegetation communities that provide important feeding and breeding habitat for native fish and wetland-dependent bird species. The wetlands are home to several species of rare and endangered flora and fauna, including the Australasian bittern and the Orange-bellied Parrot.

The Wadawurrung Traditional Owners have a strong connection and long history with the area and place high cultural value on the wetlands.

What is 'Environmental Watering'?

'Environmental Watering' is a regime of watering, which may include providing water to or removing water from a wetland to maximise ecological outcomes. The Barwon River Environmental Entitlement 2011 allows water to be taken in and out of the Barwon River above the Lower Breakwater, in order to manage water levels in Reedy Lake and Hospital Swamps.

The entitlement is delivered by the Corangamite CMA on behalf of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH). The water levels in these wetlands are managed in a way that supports biodiversity and the ecological health of the whole system.

Watering actions take the form of wetting events and partial draw-downs to support a variety of species and habitats. These water fluctuations are synchronised with the natural rhythms of the Barwon River as much as possible.

Why do the Lower Barwon Wetlands (Reedy Lake & Hospital Swamps) need a managed water regime?

The Barwon River and wetlands have been substantially modified since European settlement. Breakwaters have been installed on the main river, and the depth of channels to and from Reedy Lake and Hospital Swamps have been changed and regulating gates installed.

Prior to this, Reedy Lake and Hospital Swamps intermittently filled up and dried out in rhythm with natural flows in the Barwon River. The ecology of these wetlands still requires a cycle of wetting and partial drying to maintain the diversity of habitats and species present.



Lake Connewarre, Lower Barwon Wetlands
Photo: Corangamite CMA

Ecological objectives of environmental watering actions in the Lower Barwon Wetlands

Refill to maintain a full wetland

e.g. to trigger waterbird breeding events and provide habitat, and to support fish breeding, movement and recruitment.

Drawdown to gradually reduce water levels, either through natural evaporation or by assisted drawdown (if required)

e.g. to start nutrient cycling, maintain terrestrial and mudflat plants, and provide muddy margins for migratory shorebirds to feed.

Adjustments to maintain a lake level

e.g. using the Barwon River, or tidal inflow to prevent complete dry out in summer

Maximise connectivity where ever possible

e.g. in spring to flush wetlands, increase habitat area and trigger fish spawning.

Water Planning

Each year the Corangamite CMA develop proposed watering actions in the Lower Barwon Wetlands, in consultation with community and partners, for submission to the Victorian Environmental Water Holder.

These watering actions are based on scientific advice (FLOWS studies, expert panel review) and are delivered according to water availability in the Barwon River, with timing informed by monitoring of water levels and breeding bird activity.

The current year's Seasonal Watering Proposal can be found on the Corangamite CMA website at ccma.vic.gov.au. There are also interactive maps on the website that can be explored to see current water levels, completed and planned watering actions and other water quality parameters in the Lower Barwon Wetlands and other river systems in the region.

Community engagement

Engagement is primarily conducted through the Lower Barwon Community Advisory Committee (LBCAC). Members include: Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Geelong Field Naturalists, Geelong Field and Game, Geelong Environment Council, Geelong Gun and Rod, individual landholders, commercial eel fishers, Victorian Fisheries Authority, Environment Victoria, EstuaryWatch volunteers, Parks Victoria, Southern Rural Water, City of Greater Geelong, RMIT, Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning, and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder.

Further information

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