



## CORANGAMITE RCS TO 2027

# Summary for the Community

### WHAT IS THE REGIONAL CATCHMENT STRATEGY?

The Corangamite Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) is a blueprint for catchment health, providing a strategic, integrated framework for natural resource management. The RCS integrates the natural resource management aims of all catchment partners, across the whole region. The strategy facilitates appropriate, integrated land and water management within the region by identifying the roles and responsibilities of those involved, whilst also providing the basis for integrated place-based action.

This is a summary of the Corangamite RCS 2021-2027, the full strategy is presented in an online format that can be found at <https://corangamite.rcs.vic.gov.au/>

### THE STRATEGY IDENTIFIES:

- The nature, causes, extent and severity of land and water degradation of catchments;
- The region's land, water and biodiversity resources and how they are utilised;
- A long-term vision for the region;
- Regionally significant land, water and biodiversity assets and landscapes;
- Goals for maintaining and improving catchment condition; and
- A program of management measures for the life of the strategy.



### TRADITIONAL OWNER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Aboriginal peoples have lived in the area now known as the Corangamite region for thousands of generations. We acknowledge the Eastern Maar and the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners, their Ancestors and Elders, past, present and emerging.





# The Corangamite Region

The Corangamite region has rich and diverse landscapes, reflecting its' geological, climatic, and human history.

The region is bordered by 175km of spectacular coastline spanning from Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsular in the east, Cape Otway to the south, and extending to Peterborough in the South-West. The region includes a large portion of the vast Victorian Volcanic Plain through its centre, with the Central Highlands and the City of Ballarat to the north. The region boasts soaring old growth forests of the Otways, and many lakes and wetlands of national and international significance. The catchment area contains four major drainage basins; Moorabool, Barwon, Lake Corangamite and Otway Coast. Nine municipalities make up the region: All or part of the cities of Ballarat and Greater Geelong, the Borough of Queenscliffe, and the Shires of Colac Otway, Corangamite, Golden Plains, Moorabool, Moyne, and Surf Coast.

The natural resources of our region provide important habitat for flora and fauna, support valuable industries such as agriculture and nature-based tourism, and underpin the region's urban water supply needs. 78 percent of the land in the Corangamite region is privately owned, and the remaining 22 percent is publicly owned. Agriculture is the dominant land use within the Corangamite region. Meat and dairy products are the most valuable commodities produced in the region, contributing to 14 percent and 15 percent of Victoria's total value respectively.

## TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Corangamite Catchment Management Authority is committed to building and strengthening our partnership with Traditional Owners. We are committed to engaging and working with Traditional Owners to manage and improve the health of lands and waters and to embrace cultural ways of Caring for Country, and working together to support increased participation and engagement in Natural Resource Management.

The Corangamite CMA has worked with the Traditional Owner Groups to align the outcomes and priority directions in this Regional Catchment Strategy with the aspirations and priorities identified in their respective Country Plans.



# Current conditions and trends

## WATER

The waterways (rivers, estuaries, and wetlands) of the Corangamite region are diverse and complex ecosystems and the 'lifeblood' of many communities. They have unique environmental values, providing habitat for native fish, invertebrates, and water birds, while supporting extensive vegetation communities. They also have strong cultural and historic significance, and are a focal point for recreation and tourism. Their catchments provide our community with water for drinking, irrigation, and industry. The region's low stream flows and lack of topography suitable for dams has led to a high reliance on groundwater, which is shared by many users.

There are approximately 15,960 km of waterways in the Corangamite Region. The Otway National Park contains some of the most naturally intact waterways in Australia, featuring good water quality. In contrast, other waterways (such as the Moorabool and Woody Yaloak rivers) have experienced significant degradation and now exhibit poor water quality. Corangamite has more than 1,500 wetlands covering 63,000 ha (5% of the region), ranging from large open-water saline lakes to shallow, ephemeral, freshwater meadows – many of which are rich in native flora. Wetlands are one of the most threatened habitats globally. There are 40 estuaries in the Corangamite region, all of which are intermittently open/closed, except the Barwon River.

## BIODIVERSITY

Native vegetation in the Corangamite region has undergone a major change since European settlement, with less than 25 percent of the region's original vegetation remaining. Significant areas of remnant vegetation exist in protected reserves, but most of the estimated 66,000 hectares of remnants on private land are under some form of pressure. The Victorian Volcanic Plain, Warrnambool Plain and Otway Plain bioregions are amongst the most cleared in the State. The Central Victorian Uplands bioregion is moderately cleared, and the Otway Ranges bioregion is amongst the least cleared in Victoria. The region has over 300 species classified as threatened in Victoria, with 53 threatened on a national level. This generally relates to loss of habitat through clearing and fragmentation along with introduced pest species such as cats and foxes.

## LAND

Soil erosion by water and wind has impacted the region's waterways and environment, threatening a diverse range of assets from urban water quality to Ramsar-listed wetlands. Soils naturally acidify, erode and slip. Natural salinity existed before European settlement and farm development.

However, some agricultural practices aggravate these threats. Current sustainable agricultural practices in the region can be built upon, including pasture management, cultivation, crop stubble management, and fertiliser use. Trends in agriculture in the Corangamite region include fewer farmers by occupation, farmers converting to other enterprises, smaller property sizes, and an increasing average age of farmers, with half older than 61 years.

Aboriginal people have a deep connection with the land or Country, which is central to their spiritual identity.

This connection remains despite the many Aboriginal people who no longer live on their land.

## COAST AND MARINE

The Corangamite coastal environment is naturally dynamic and highly diverse. Marine habitats include intertidal, shallow, and deep rocky reefs, pelagic waters, sand beaches, subtidal sandy and muddy seabeds, and intertidal mudflats (Parks Victoria, 2003). Coastal habitats are dominated by a variety of Ecological Vegetation Classes, including: Coastal Dune Scrub, Coastal Headland Scrub, Coastal Tussock Grassland, and Coastal Saltmarsh. While there are management practices in place, the coasts and estuaries of the region face significant challenges posed by the threat of climate change, as well as population, land use and developmental pressures.

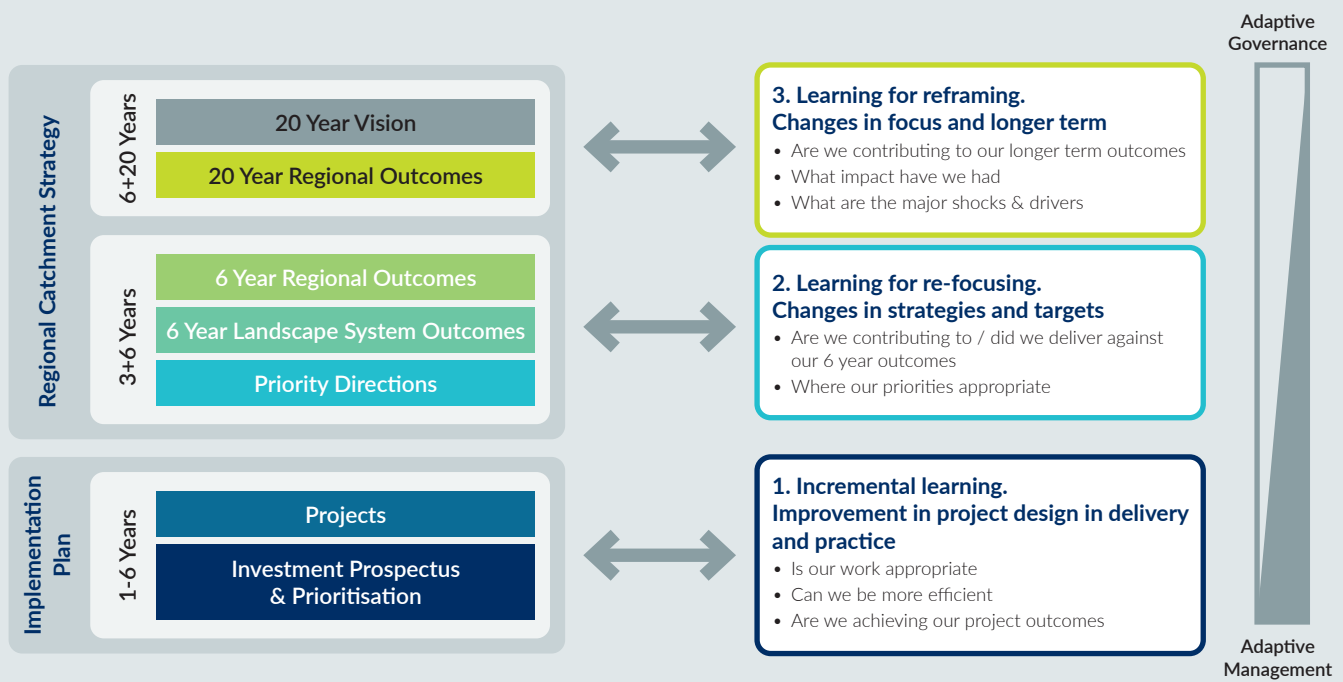
## COMMUNITY

The Corangamite region has a long-standing history of dedicated volunteers maintaining and conserving our natural resources. Our community groups are very active and contribute significantly to protecting natural resources on public and private land. Partnerships with a range of other stakeholders contributes to the successful delivery of on ground outcomes. Private landholders have made substantial investments in natural resource management on their land, sometimes supported by government, corporate or philanthropic sector investment.

## FUTURE CHALLENGES

Climate Change presents the greatest long-term challenge for the Corangamite Region. The future climate of the region is expected to be hotter and drier, with a higher frequency of extreme weather events such as bushfires and floods. As one of the fastest growing areas in Victoria, population growth is expected to further increase pressures through impacts from further urban development and increased demand for water.





# Process

The development of the Corangamite Regional Catchment Strategy followed an extensive review of the previous strategy, initial engagement with a range of stakeholders and partners to ascertain their aspirations for this strategy and involvement in the development of a state-wide approach.

The Victorian Catchment Management Council (VCMC) developed the guidelines that ensured that Regional Catchment Strategies (RCS) complied with the requirements of the *Catchment and Land Protection Act (1994)* for their development. Key requirements under the VCMC Guidelines are that the Corangamite Regional Catchment Strategy contributes to consistent integrated catchment management outcomes across Victoria.

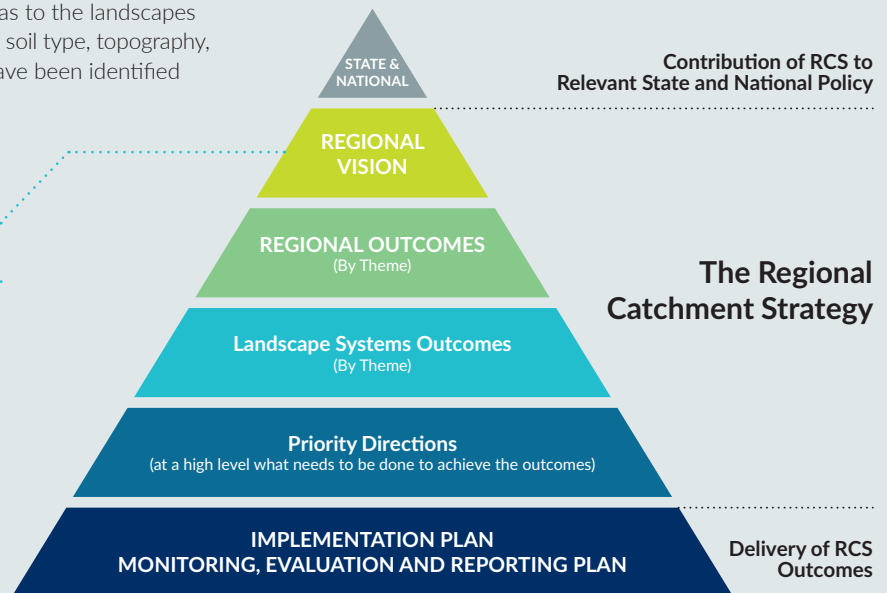
Key regional drivers for the development of this RCS were the need to better align local management areas to the landscapes of the region and how they function due to soil type, topography, climate, biodiversity and location. These have been identified within this strategy as landscape systems.

Key partners that were engaged with during the development of the Regional Catchment Strategy include traditional owners, all municipalities, all relevant agencies, industry groups, community groups such as Landcare and relevant community members. The Corangamite Catchment Partnership Agreement Forum played a key role in its development as did the Corangamite Community Engagement Network.

A comprehensive community and stakeholder engagement process was delivered, in collaboration with the Corangamite Catchment Partnership Group, to support the renewal of the RCS.

Figure: Relationship between the key elements of the RCS, Implementation and contribution to State and National Policy

Healthy and productive lands and waters cared for and enjoyed by thriving communities.



# Themes

A region-wide approach to improving natural resource management is needed to achieve the goal of the RCS. The approach in this RCS recognises that the community is the single most important agent of change in natural resource management. Even though funds are essential for achieving this change, it will not occur unless the community is motivated and engaged. Taking this into account, this RCS has identified four key elements that will provide the foundations for developing and implementing the detailed action plans required to achieve the natural resource management objectives identified in this strategy.

| Increased breadth and depth of participation  | Increased investment and develop joint priorities  | Improved integration and coordination   | Increased and widely shared knowledge  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p>Participation in the protection, enhancement and restoration of natural resources by landholders, community, industry and agencies has increased.</p> <p>Natural resource management partnerships have grown and existing partnerships are adequately supported.</p> | <p>The aggregate investment to protect, enhance and restore the region's natural resources has increased.</p> <p>Joint priorities for investment in the protection of natural resources are identified and pursued.</p> <p>Working in partnership with Traditional Owners groups on natural resource management projects that are a priority to their Country Plans.</p> | <p>Natural resource management partnerships have matured and the region's partners are working collaboratively to achieve effective integrated catchment management. Investment is targeted to the protection of high value natural resources with feasible and cost-effective solutions.</p> | <p>Knowledge of the region's natural resources and how to protect, restore and enhance them has increased, resulting in improved practices.</p> <p>The connection of Traditional Owners to land is respected and planning and activities are informed by their skills and knowledge.</p> <p>Improved knowledge of the impacts of climate change is used to review the objectives and actions to protect natural resources.</p> |

## 20 YEAR REGIONAL OUTCOMES

### WATER

By 2042, regional waterways (rivers, wetlands, lakes, estuaries and groundwater) are more resilient to the impacts of climate and land use change.

### BIODIVERSITY

By 2042, 90% of the region's ecosystems are biodiverse and resilient to the challenges of climate and land use change.

By 2042, a regional net improvement across all native species – with a priority on threatened species and ecological communities – is achieved (as measured by Change in Suitable Habitat).

By 2042, a regional net gain of the overall extent and condition of habitats across terrestrial, waterway and marine environments is achieved.

### LAND

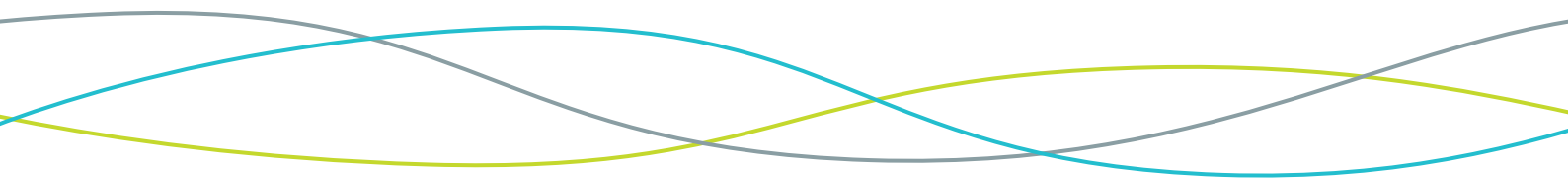
By 2042, the region's land is managed within its capacity as climate change impacts increase.

### COAST & MARINE

By 2042, an increase in the extent and condition of coastal habitats, together with improved water quality flowing into the marine environment, contributes to building a healthy, dynamic and biodiverse marine and coastal environment.

### COMMUNITIES

By 2042, communities are empowered to collaborate, connect and protect the region's natural assets.



## 6 YEAR REGIONAL OUTCOMES

### WATER

By 2027 there is an improvement in riparian extent and condition, hydrological regime and water quality compared to 2022 baselines in priority waterways defined in the Corangamite Waterway Strategy.

By 2027, the efficiency of consumptive water use from our priority waterways will be improved through use of cost effective alternative water sources and demand management strategies.

By 2027, waterway amenity will be improved for high priority urbanised waterways to enhance the user experience and connection to the natural landscape, compared to 2021 baseline.

By 2027, the condition of Ramsar listed wetlands and other priority wetlands identified in the Corangamite Waterway Strategy will be maintained and improved compared to 2021 baseline.

By 2027, the water quality of priority estuaries are maintained or improved, compared to index of estuary condition 2019 baseline.

By 2027, Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar Traditional Owner rights to access and manage water will be acknowledged and respected including a strong Traditional Owner voice on:

- all water planning activities which have the potential to provide water for Traditional Owner cultural or economic purposes;
- the timing and quantum of all environmental water releases;
- minimum environmental flows required for a healthy river;
- land management activities contributing to a healthy river system;
- knowledge and education on Traditional Owner values of water and connection to Country; and,
- development activities which may impact culturally significant water and riparian assets

By 2027, there is an increased understanding of floodplain management in relation to ecological and cultural values and mechanisms to mitigate the risk of flooding.

By 2027, the community's understanding and awareness of the environmental, social and economic values of water will be increased compared to 2022 baseline.

By 2027 there will have been an increase in the extent of in-stream habitat compared to 2021 baseline in priority waterways for resilience of threatened native fish and waterway dependent species.

### BIODIVERSITY

By 2027, there is a 10% increase in the regional community valuing biodiverse landscapes, planning for climate change adaptation and actively contributing to their protection, enhancement, and restoration.

By 2027, 90% of biodiversity planning, decision making, monitoring and data access is based on state-wide biodiversity decision tools and complemented by local specific information.

By 2027, there is an overall net gain of habitat for all flora and fauna species within the region.

By 2027, threats to biodiversity from pest species are recognised and appropriately controlled in priority locations across all land tenures.

By 2027, 120,000 hectares in priority locations are under sustained herbivore control.

By 2027, 20,000 hectares in priority locations are under sustained predator control.

By 2027, 20,000 hectares in priority locations are under sustained weed control.

By 2027, 4,500 hectares of revegetation in priority locations for habitat connectivity is established.

By 2027, 4,500 hectares of new permanently protected area on private land is established.

### LAND

By 2027, land manager capacity in effective management practices is increased to address the range of threats and market changes.

By 2027 there is a 20% increase (compared to 2022 levels) in private agricultural landholders engaging in sustainable land management practices.

### COAST & MARINE

By 2027, proactive management of coastal ecosystems by land managers and the community results in a net gain in the health and resilience of the region's highly valued marine and coastal environment.

### COMMUNITIES

By 2027, communities have the knowledge, skills and capacity to actively participate in and contribute to management of the region in a range of ways.

By 2027, communities (local, new and visitor) are encouraged, educated and enabled to further connect with and responsibly care for the natural environment.

By 2027, communities (local, new and visitor) have an increased awareness and understanding of the connection between human activities and impacts on the environment.

By 2027, the increased capacity of Traditional Owner Groups enables their increased involvement in decision making that affects their Country.

## PRIORITY DIRECTIONS

To deliver the outcomes outlined above, Priority Directions have been developed in consultation with partners and the community to provide the basis of action across the Corangamite landscape.

**Water-** there are 12 regional Priority Directions  
<https://corangamite.rcs.vic.gov.au/water-priority-directions/>

**Biodiversity-** there are 18 regional Priority Directions  
<https://corangamite.rcs.vic.gov.au/biodiversity-priority-directions/>

**Land-** there are 9 regional Priority Directions  
<https://corangamite.rcs.vic.gov.au/land-priority-directions/>

**Coast and Marine-** there are 9 regional Priority Directions  
<https://corangamite.rcs.vic.gov.au/coast-and-marine-priority-directions/>

**Community-** there are 11 regional Priority Directions  
<https://corangamite.rcs.vic.gov.au/coast-and-marine-priority-directions/>

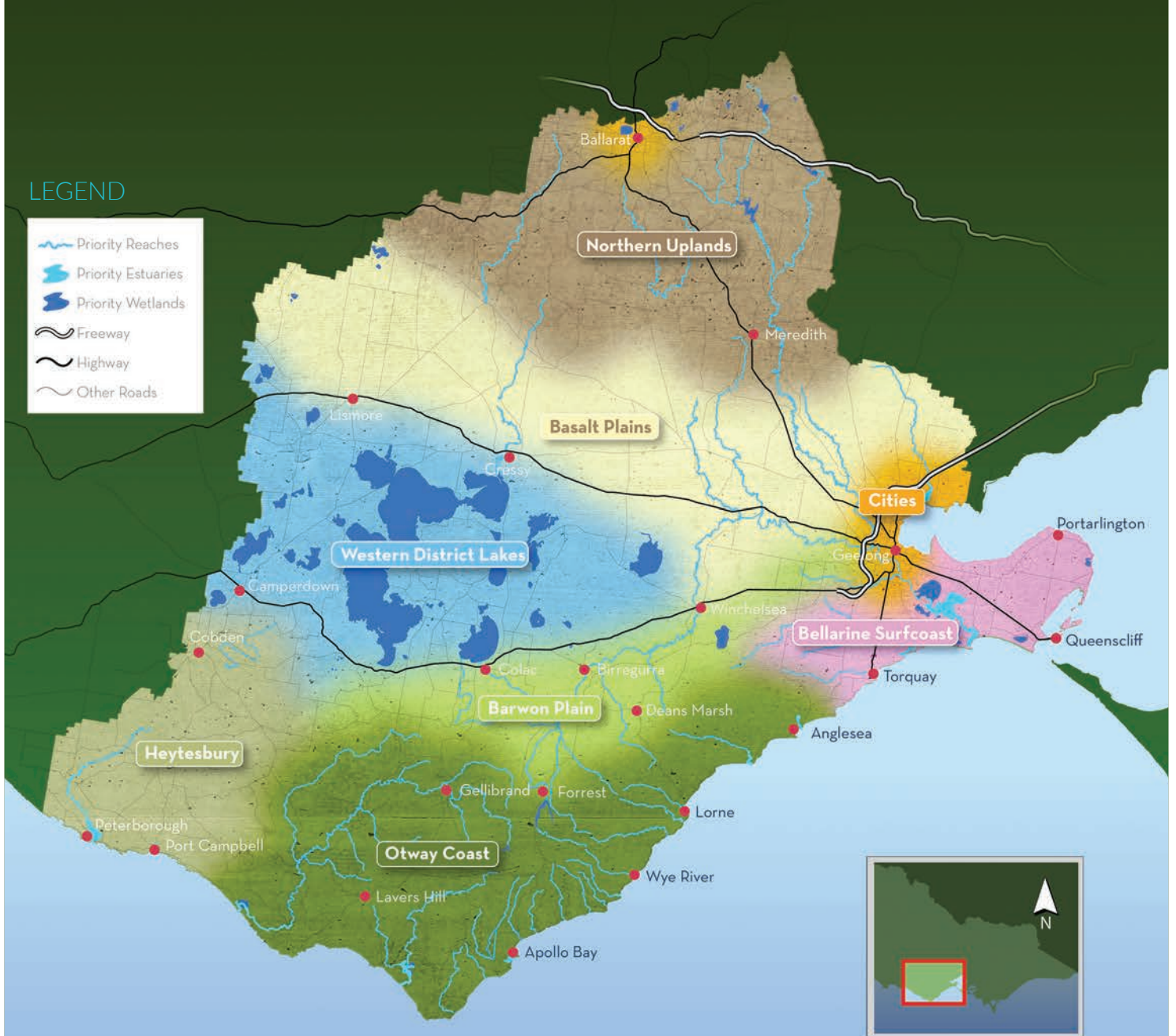
In addition priority directions have been identified for each local area, and can be found in the Landscape Systems Local Areas of the Corangamite Regional Catchment Strategy  
<https://corangamite.rcs.vic.gov.au/local-areas/>



# Landscape systems

## LEGEND

- Priority Reaches
- Priority Estuaries
- Priority Wetlands
- Freeway
- Highway
- Other Roads



# Delivery model

Successful implementation of the RCS will involve all collaborators working together to annually plan delivery and review performance against implementation.

## RCS IMPLEMENTATION



We acknowledge landholders, Landcare, farming bodies, volunteers, community groups and members of the Corangamite region for their significant contribution and investment in the development of this strategy.



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