



Powlett River Estuary Management Plan – Summary

The Powlett River estuary is located approximately 130km south east of Melbourne. It is listed as a Nationally Important Wetland due to its extensive saltmarsh and wetland communities and cultural heritage. It also provides habitat for the critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot.

The Powlett River estuary is an intermittently closed estuary with a history of management challenges associated with this.

A recent review of the management of the Powlett River estuary recommended that an Estuary Management Plan (EMP) be developed.

Scope

The focus of the EMP is the protection of the values within the Powlett River estuary. These include environmental, social, economic and cultural values. The EMP identifies the values of, and includes actions for, both public and private land.

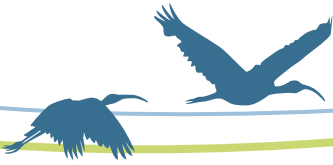
A series of overarching goals, identified through engagement with government stakeholders, community groups, interest groups and individuals, guide the priorities for the plan.

The EMP incorporates the whole of the Powlett catchment, including the nearby coastline. The plan focuses on maintaining or improving estuary condition and values, collecting information to inform estuary entrance management and prioritising activities including those needed to mitigate the need for artificial openings.

The review of estuary management in the Powlett catchment, field investigations, aerial photography interpretation and state environmental databases have provided the information required to develop the EMP.



*Left: Saltmarsh downstream of the Mouth of Powlett Road Bridge.
Right: Mouth of the Powlett River estuary.*



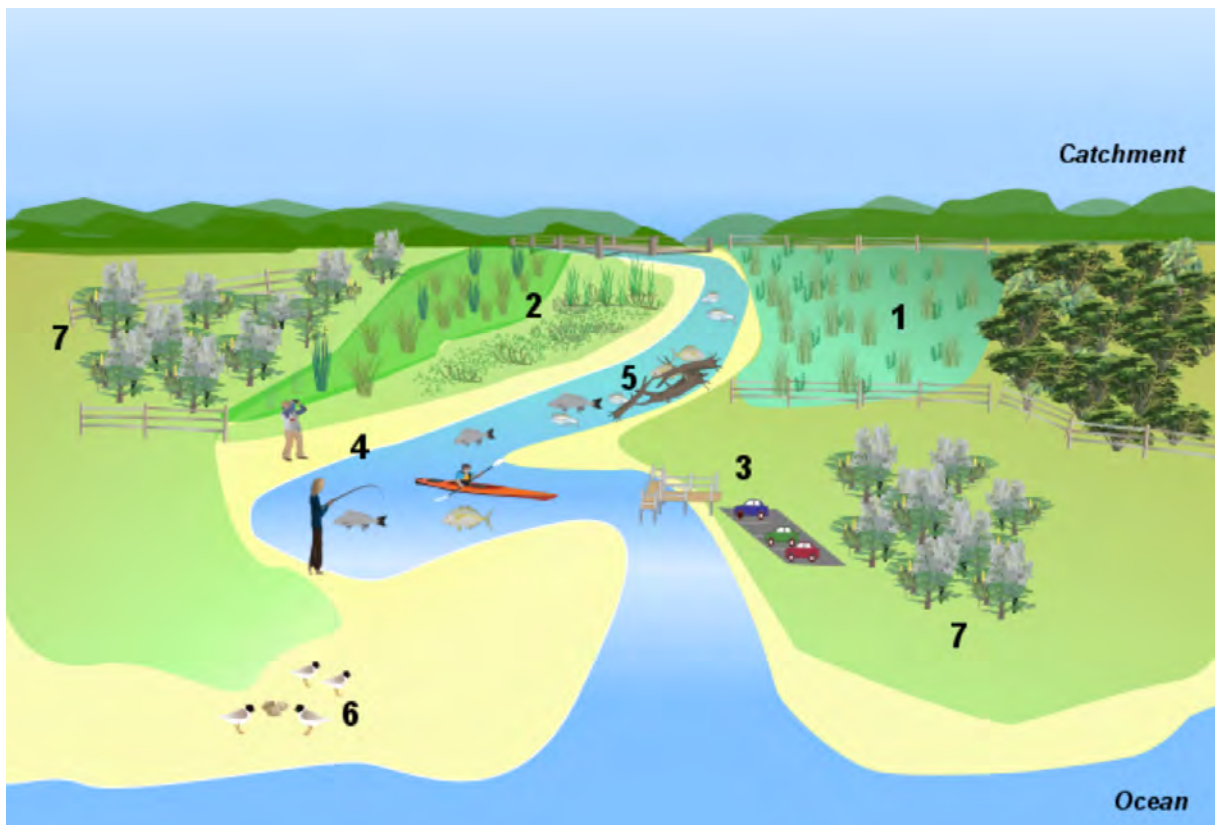
Goals

Using the information gathered through the community and stakeholder input, seven goals have been identified to guide the priorities and actions in the Powlett River EMP. These goals relate to the identified values of the estuary. Through the implementation of the Powlett River EMP the following condition outcomes will be achieved:

1. Swamp Scrub, Swampy Riparian Woodland and Estuarine Wetland vegetation communities are enhanced and significantly increase in area.
2. Orange-bellied Parrot continue to use the Powlett estuary as a feeding site, as the Coastal Saltmarsh vegetation communities have been protected and enhanced.
3. All abilities access points are provided for recreational fishing and enjoyment of the estuary.
4. Continued availability of multiple recreational opportunities exists and environmental impacts are minimised.
5. Recreationally targeted and native estuarine fish communities are enhanced through a network of resilient habitat areas.
6. Hooded Plover continue to successfully breed at the mouth of the Powlett River, and significant waterbirds continue to visit the floodplain and wetlands of the Powlett estuary.
7. The Coast Banksia Woodland vegetation community is protected.

It should be noted there may be significant time lag in achieving the goals, and it is expected that this will occur in a period greater than the 8 year timeframe of the Plan.

Powlett River Estuary – Goals



Conceptualisation of the goals of the Powlett River Estuary Management Plan.

Actions

An 8-year works program has been developed to achieve the goals of the EMP. The works plan has four key action areas and 80 individual actions. The four key action areas are presented below with some examples of actions provided.

1. Focus on maintaining or improving estuarine condition and values

- Fence remnant Coastal Saltmarsh and Estuarine Wetland to protect vegetation from the impacts of grazing.
- Improve signage regarding responsible dog ownership in public places to protect critically endangered Hooded Plovers.
- Install large woody habitat at four sites within the estuary, to increase habitat for Black Bream and other recreationally targeted species.
- Install fishing platforms near the confluence with Bridge Creek to assist with water quality monitoring activities.

2. Actions to mitigate the need for artificial estuary mouth openings

- Investigate the raising of Mouth of Powlett Road to mitigate the need to open the river mouth to avoid inundation of this road. Investigate alternative options for access when the road is inundated.
- Investigate further opportunities for land buyback within the inundation area of the estuary.

3. Collecting information to inform estuary management

- Undertake annual bird surveys throughout the estuary, specifically targeting significant species such as Orange-bellied Parrot.
- Undertake a detailed risk assessment, including onground mapping to identify potential and active acid sulphate soils with the Powlett estuarine floodplain.

4. Actions within the catchment to reduce upstream threats to the estuary

- Install riparian fencing to protect vegetation buffers and reduce nutrient entering the waterway in runoff.
- Implement a best practice program to support dairy farmers better manage and retain nutrients on farm.
- Improve fish passage past significant instream barriers.

To assist the West Gippsland CMA and other stakeholders to allocate funding to the actions and to seek appropriate external funding, the actions have been prioritised. Implementation of the actions is contingent on the availability of funding.



Left and centre: Swamp Scrub vegetation north of Daly Bridge.
Right: Orange-bellied Parrot. Photo by Birdlife Australia.



Looking north from Powlett River Estuary Mouth.

Consultation Process

The Powlett River EMP has been developed with a high level of community and stakeholder involvement. The West Gippsland CMA has managed the development of the EMP through a steering group made up of representatives from West Gippsland CMA, Parks Victoria, Bass Coast Landcare Network and the Bass Coast Shire Council. A reference group consisting of representatives from various community groups and agencies provided input to the development of the Plan through meetings, input of technical advice and review of a draft Plan.

Three key opportunities have/will be provided for broader community input, namely:

1. Community Consultative Group meeting

A community workshop was held to allow participants to review the information collated from the review of existing information and field work, identify goals for the future management of the creek and to identify management issues and threats (held on 29 January 2015).

2. Draft for public comment

The draft Powlett River EMP was open for public comment from 18 May to 5 June 2015.

3. Public open house

Agency staff and project team members were available to discuss the draft Plan, the public submission process, and the Powlett River estuary more generally on the 31 May 2015 at Kilcunda.

Following the closing of submissions on the draft Plan, community and stakeholder comments were considered and the Plan amended accordingly.