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Environmental outcomes at 2070 for the Gippsland Lakes.

The Gippsland Lakes are the largest inland network of waterways in Australia and are the traditional lands and waters of the Gunnaikurnai people, who I honour and pay respect to today.

Gippsland Environment Group's vision is that by 2070 the Lakes system is once again healthy for all. By that time perhaps the past can meet the future.

Gippsland Environment Group believes the Gippsland lakes' ecology can be rehabilitated with relatively little effort and cost.

To achieve this, three things must happen without delay:

- **An independent audit** of the ecological function of the Gippsland Lakes system.
- **Reduce the depth of the Entrance** to reduce salinity in the Lakes system.
- **Restore water for the environment** - all the waters have an intrinsic right.

Independent audit:

A tremendous amount of change has happened to the Gippsland lakes ecology since the last audit, which CSIRO did in 1998. Requests for a follow up audit have been refused by both State and Federal governments.

Reduce the depth of the Entrance:

[Gippsland Ports'](#) Dredging Permit must no longer allow the extra 2 metres on top of the navigable depth of 3.5 metres. The current allowance is to dredge 5.5 metres which is unnecessary and to the great cost of the environment. Going back to dredging to 3.5 metres will reduce ocean water intrusion and reduce the lakes' salinity.

As a direct result of increased dredging depth, the tidal speed through the entrance has sped up from three knots to 7.4 knots.

The Tidal Prism, the amount of ocean water entering the Lakes each tide, has massively increased, to the extent that surface water is now classified as 'highly saline' (as in, it can kill fresh-water plants).

Before European colonisation the Lakes were a barrier estuary system that was closed to the sea on most occasions, therefore a mix a fresh and brackish waters. The EPA has now listed the lakes as Marine.

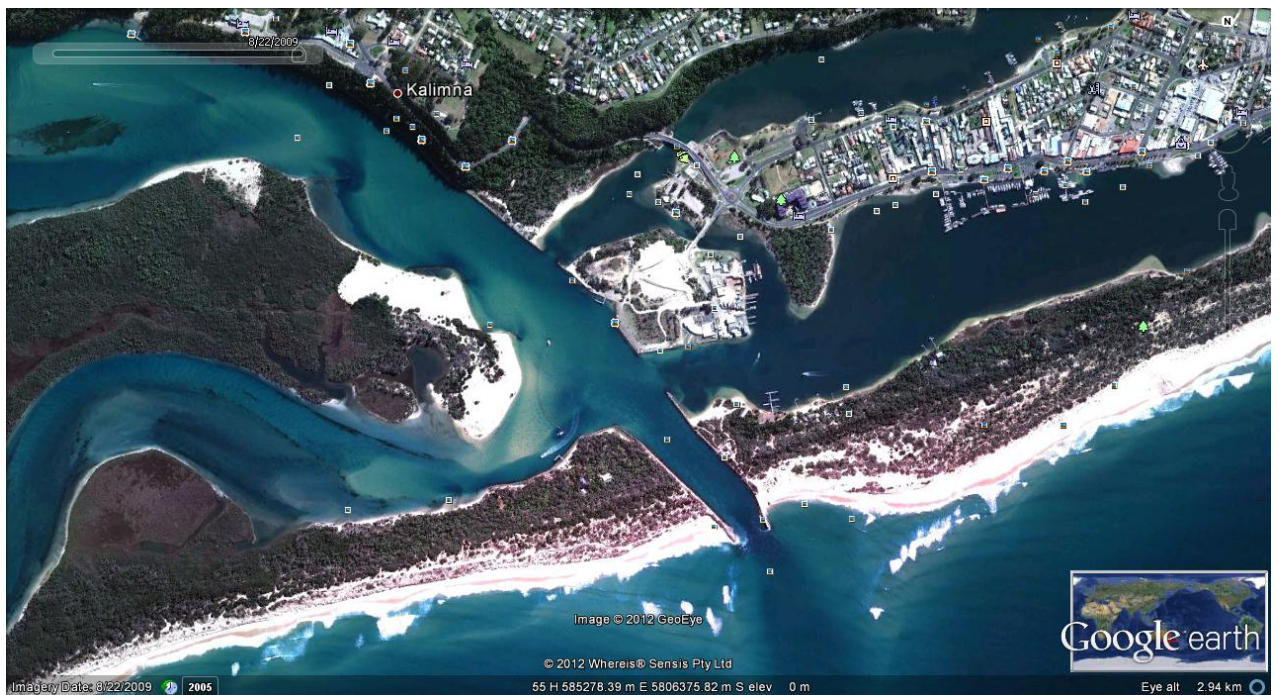
The ecological impacts of this hugely increased salinity on the Lakes system is bad:

- Marine species invasion
- Loss of shoreline vegetation, erosion.
- Loss of bird habitat and disrupting food chain.
- The salt-water wedge has intruded up the lake chain as far as the Port of Sale (over 100 km), endangering the Heart, Dowd and Clydebank Morass.

A condition of Gippsland Ports' permit for dredging the Entrance is that the Ports authority must protect the nesting sites of the Little Tern, the Fairy Tern and the Hooded Plover on adjacent islands. The increased tidal speed and scour has washed away these protected birds' nesting sand, putting the Ports authority in breach of their permit.



*The Entrance **before** August 2008 deepening.
It shows the numerous sand bars which slowed the ingress of salt water.*



Lakes Entrance 2012

Restore water for the environment. All the waters have an intrinsic right!

There is not sufficient water to service irrigation, mine rehabilitation, Melbourne Water's demands and cultural flows to the Gippsland Lakes.

Fresh water flows from the Lakes' catchment, intended for the Lakes environment, are currently being harvested and sold by Southern Rural Water, and more irrigation is now being proposed.

Following the EPA listing the Lakes as Marine, vested interests can now make the claim that any freshwater discharging to this marine environment is going to waste.

Water quality is also not being monitored or tested properly in Gippsland Lakes' feeder streams. The Gippsland Lakes have become a settling basin for Gippsland wastes. Pollution including heavy metals and pesticides and toxic algal blooms are serious problems for everyone and everything trying to survive and thrive around the Lakes system.

Cultural flows are vital to sustain ecosystems. GEG contends that Flow monitoring is also not currently being managed. As in, not being done.

Governance Outcomes. Who will be responsible for managing the Lakes? How will they manage it?

Management of the Gippsland Lakes is currently fragmented and uncoordinated. There are over 30 authorities involved in the Lakes' management.

For the Gippsland Lakes and river systems to recover, a transparent management structure must be formed. Any oversight structure of the Lakes system must be led by and in genuine partnership with local First Nations Traditional Owners and Custodians. GEG's vision is for an independent oversight body. A good model is the Snowy Independent Statutory Authority that government could not control.

Australia is now in breach of its Ramsar Agreement in relation to the Lakes, and strong treaties are needed with Japan, China and South Korea to protect the habitat of migratory wading birds.

GEG agrees with the proposal for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands, consistent with the 1982 World Charter for Nature.



Freckled Ducks. They breed in the lower Murray Darling basin, but come here in drought time. A classic case of a species that relies on the Gippsland Lakes for its survival as a species and the importance of the Lakes system as a drought refuge.



Green and Gold bell frogs once very common in the fringing wetlands of the Gippsland Lakes now are only found in small areas near Clydebank Morass (the Avon River entrance into Lake Wellington).