

4. The effect of salinity on the region's assets

4.1 The region's assets

The West Gippsland CMA region can be divided into three basins – Latrobe, Thomson and South Gippsland. The region covers an area of approximately 1.8 million hectares with a population of approximately 169,000 people. The major population centres are Traralgon, Moe, Morwell, Sale, Warragul, Wonthaggi, Churchill, Leongatha and Maffra.

The region is rich in environmental, social and economic assets supporting a prosperous agricultural sector dominated by the dairy industry, an industrial sector dominated by the coal and electricity industry and a strong tourism sector based around the Gippsland Lakes, wetlands and beaches. Significant environmental assets include the Gippsland Lakes and associated wetlands, the forested areas of the Great Dividing Range, Wilsons Promontory National Park, Tarra Bulga National Park, other parks and reserves, and the forests of the Strzelecki Ranges.

The West Gippsland Regional Catchment Strategy (2004) categorises the region's assets into the following asset classes:

- Water (surface water and groundwater; inland and coastal; permanent and temporary)
- Land (soil, geology, landform, minerals, coal, gas and petroleum)
- Biodiversity (terrestrial and aquatic, species and ecosystems)
- Atmosphere and Climate
- People and Communities (individual, community and institutional capacity)
- Infrastructure (land, water and air transport networks; energy generation and distribution; water supply and drainage; flood mitigation; waste treatment; industrial, commercial, domestic and civic premises and facilities)
- Production (timber and agricultural production systems, fisheries)

The West Gippsland Regional Catchment Strategy outlines the threats and management actions for each of the above asset classes. Salinity has the potential to directly impact all of these asset classes except for “atmosphere and climate”. However, the actions to address salinity have the potential to impact on the ‘atmosphere and climate’ asset class so it cannot be ignored all together (eg fossil fuel powered groundwater pumps leading to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions).