

Goulburn Broken Regional Waterway Strategy

Community Discussion Paper



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The document has been prepared by the Goulburn Broken Catchment Authority, with the support of OneBasin CRC and the University of Melbourne. It is a document for community consultation and discussion and does not yet represent policy.

This document should be referenced as: Goulburn Broken Regional Waterway Strategy Community Discussion Paper– February 2026.

We thank the Goulburn Broken Regional Waterway Strategy Community Reference Group for their time and input into this document.

1. Background

The Regional Waterway Strategy (RWS) is a ten-year regional plan for looking after our waterways. It guides how we manage, protect and improve waterways across the Goulburn Broken catchment.

The current RWS (2014-2022) helped to deliver important investment into our waterways through the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (GB CMA) in partnership with community groups, Traditional Owners and other agencies.

This work has protected and improved the health of many of the region's rivers, creeks and wetlands.

The GB CMA is now renewing the Goulburn Broken Regional Waterway Strategy which will set the direction for waterway health, actions and outcomes for the next decade (2027-2037).

We're working with our partners and local communities to decide:

- **What actions we need to take to keep our waterways healthy**
- **Where to focus our efforts and how we invest in maintaining and improving our rivers, creeks, and wetlands for the benefit of local communities**

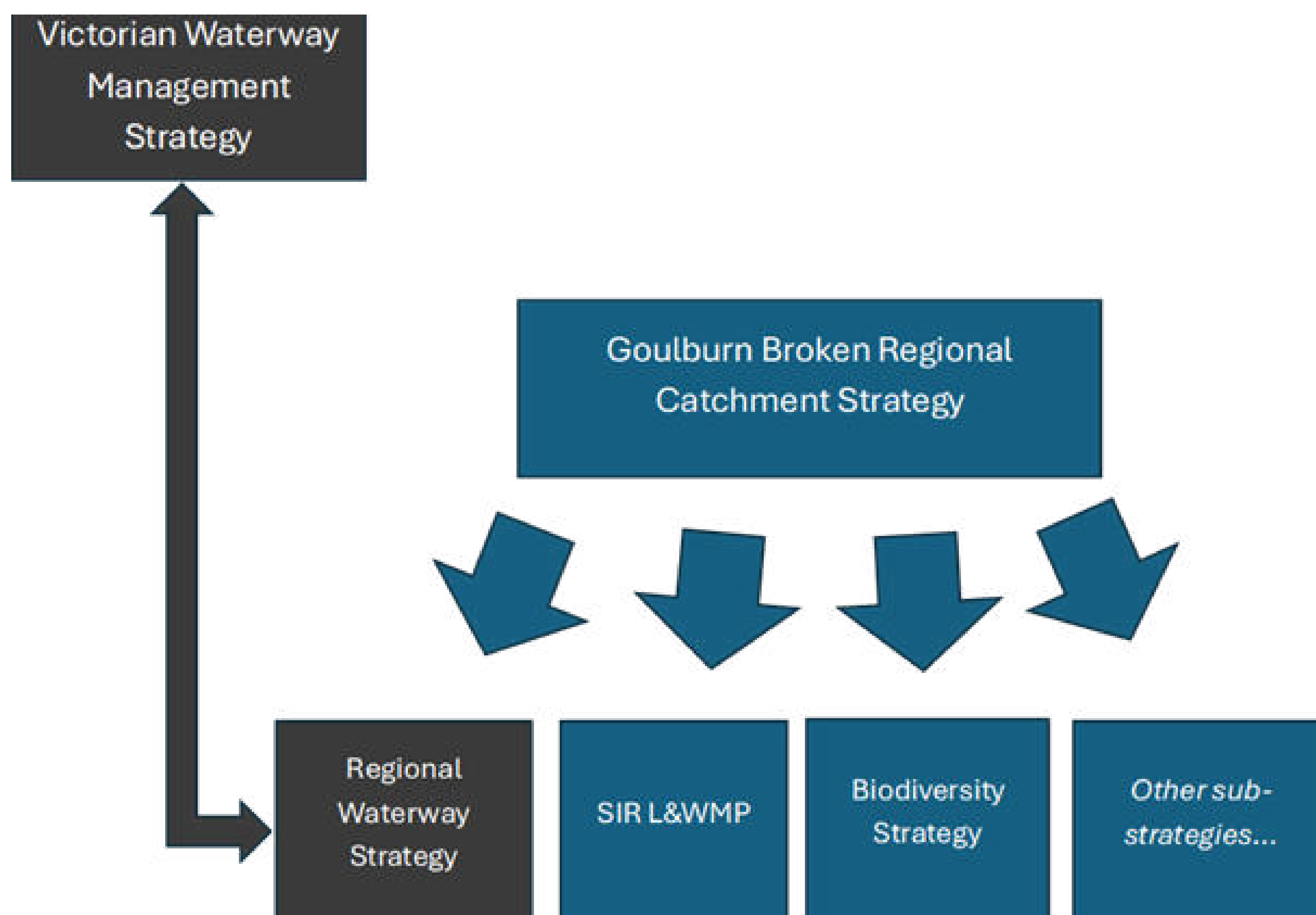


Fig 1. The Goulburn Broken Regional Waterway Strategy is one of a number of regional strategies that support the health of our catchment and communities.

How the strategy is being developed

Over the past nine months, the GB CMA has been listening to community perspectives through community surveys, workshops and presentations, learning from local knowledge, and exploring how people in the region want waterways to be managed into the future. Based on this feedback, the strategy will focus on building strong relationships, recognising connections between waterways and land, and ensuring reciprocity – in other words, caring for our waterways to benefit both the environment and our communities.

What is the role of this document?

This document brings together the many perspectives we heard from the community and our partners into one summary that will help inform the vision, values, principles, and key themes of the strategy. We want your feedback on the proposed values, issues, and themes that are likely to shape the renewed Regional Waterway Strategy.

We want to check that we've correctly understood your ideas and captured what you have told us. [We want your feedback on the proposed values, issues, and themes](#) click the link or scan the QR code below. Throughout this document is a series of questions for you to reflect on – Please send us your thoughts!



GB RWS Discussion paper Feedback
or
[Click here](#)

Waterways in our region include rivers, wetlands, floodplains, bogs and other water-dependent environments, all connected across the landscape. Some parts of our waterways are internationally recognised (such as the Barmah–Millewa Forest, listed under the Ramsar Convention for its outstanding and unique ecological significance), while others hold deep local importance as places where people walk, fish, swim, camp, and meet.



Man-made features such as irrigation channels and drainage networks also connect to waterways and can be important in supporting biodiversity and provide habitat for native plants and animals. All aspects of our waterways matter, whether globally significant or quietly cherished by local communities.

People have lived with and shaped the Goulburn Broken catchment for tens of thousands of years, and human activity has long played a role in how our waterways function. Over the past 230 years, the landscape has changed dramatically through farming, towns, irrigation systems, and major storages, all of which continue to influence how water moves across the region.

We acknowledge this long and complex history, and our goal is not to return waterways to a fixed “natural” state. Instead, we seek to manage them in ways that support healthy, resilient processes so that the system can continue to sustain people, culture, and nature into the future.

2. What we heard

The GB CMA has undertaken extensive engagement to capture community perspectives on waterways, and record community concerns and values surrounding waterways. Engagement activities have included:

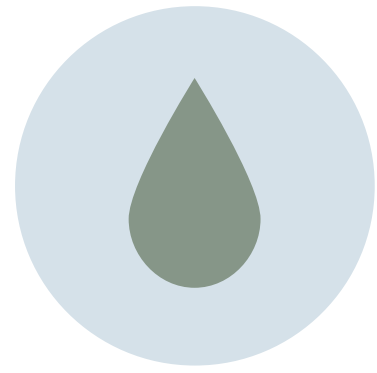
- **Community Survey:** 238 people responded to a survey asking community members to share their priorities, values and hopes for the future of waterways.
- **Community Workshops:** Four workshops were held in Shepparton, Yea, Benalla and Euroa, with a total of 34 participants. These sessions were semi-structured to allow participants to share diverse perspectives. Workshops enabled discussion of priorities, trade-offs between competing values, and complex management challenges.
- **Community Reference Group:** A Community Reference Group representing different perspectives participated in four workshops to develop a values framework for waterway management. The workshops progressed from reviewing community perspectives, and exploring values frameworks, to testing strategic directions against community priorities, and consolidating actionable management principles.



Key concerns

Four key waterway concerns emerged from community engagement in the Goulburn Broken catchment. Working with the Community Reference Group, these concerns informed the strategy's focus and core values

Future water availability



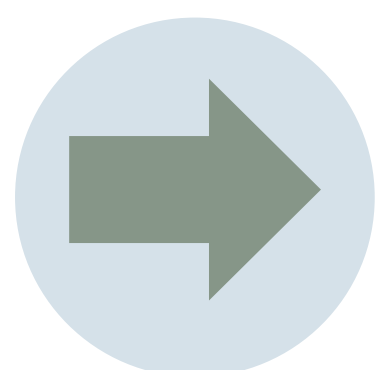
- Climate change will increase variability in flows, droughts, and floods. May require adaptive use of environmental water.
- Boom-bust cycles may pressure the GB CMA to deliver flows that sustain environmental resilience and maintain community expectations.
- Drying streams, reduced snowpack and reliance on groundwater will increase the need for allocation monitoring.
- Flow regulation from storages like Lake Eildon will remain central to balancing ecological health with competing uses.

Community attitudes



- Population growth, peri-urban expansion, and absentee landholders will challenge stewardship and waterway care.
- Balancing recreation, conservation, and consumptive use may require GB CMA-led community engagement in trade-offs.
- Cultural shifts and new residents unfamiliar with Australian water norms will increase the need for education campaigns.
- Smaller farms and declining volunteer capacity will require new engagement models and partnerships to sustain stewardship.

Policy directions



- Basin Plan reviews and policy shifts will require the GB CMA to balance trade-offs in local water allocations.
- Understanding the future role of environmental water.
- Urban planning changes may require GB CMA input into runoff management, stormwater treatment and flood protection.
- Compliance and enforcement capacity will shape the GB CMA's ability to prevent pollution, illegal diversions and habitat loss.

Environmental decline



- Invasive species such as carp, deer, feral pigs, willows, and blackberries will require ongoing control to protect waterways.
- Soil degradation, erosion, and sediment build-up in creeks may demand more riverside restoration and vegetation management.
- Agricultural runoff, algae blooms, and urban pollutants will require stronger riparian protection and education efforts.
- Habitat pressures will increase the need for clear fish passages.

3. Why we care about our waterways

Our proposed strategy framework

The **Vision** sets the destination
Values explain why it matters
Principles guide how we act
Themes show where we focus
Actions outline what we do
Indicators show whether it's working

People think about waterways in many different ways, and words like “vision” and “values” can mean very different things depending on personal experience, culture, or connection to place.

A values framework helps to ensure that all waterway decisions – big or small – are guided by a shared understanding of what matters most.

In renewing the Regional Waterway Strategy, we looked closely at how values had been represented in past strategies and found that they did not always readily connect with our community.

In our proposed framework, we are using a simple structure to translate community perspectives into a set of directions.

Fig 2. Proposed framework for the Goulburn Broken Regional Waterway Strategy (developed with input from the Community Reference Group).

Vision

Describes the long-term future we want for the catchment and its waterways

Values

Express what matters most to communities, Traditional Owners, and the CMA

Principles

Translate the values into guiding rules for decision-making and behaviour

Themes

Organise the strategy into the major areas where effort must be directed

Actions

Specific activities, projects, or initiatives undertaken under each theme

Indicators

Provide evidence that actions are working and progress is being made

Our Proposed Strategy Vision

People and waterways thriving together

A vibrant Goulburn Broken where healthy waterways continue a long legacy of sustaining people, communities, and Country. Together, we look after the waterways that shape our region, ensuring they remain resilient, valued, and thriving for generations to come.

The thinking around how we care for our waterways is changing. Moving from fixing problems in isolation to caring for the critical, living connections that make our waterways thrive.

Instead of only focusing on specific targets or individual issues, we want to support the relationships between water, land, plants, animals, and people.

When these waterway connections are healthy, everything and everyone benefits together. The vision we are proposing below aims to represent this shift in thinking.



Question for you:

Does the proposed framework and vision make sense to you?

Do you have a different perspective on what waterways mean to you?

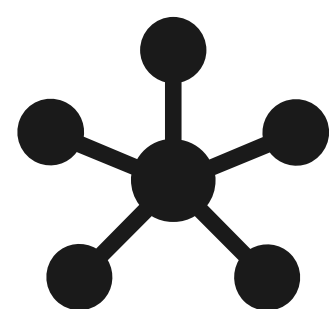


[Click here](#)

Our values

The values outlined below describe the fundamental beliefs and ways of relating that guide how we think about and care for waterways. They sit above the principles, shaping the overall approach of the strategy by expressing what matters most, rather than prescribing specific actions or outcomes

Connectivity



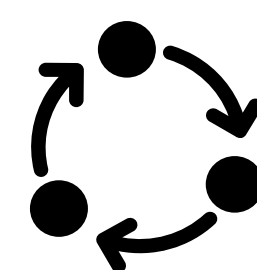
We value the deep interconnections between water, land, people, culture, and ecosystems. Nothing exists in isolation; health emerges from relationships.

Reciprocity



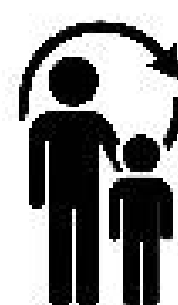
We value mutual care, between people and Country, upstream and downstream, present and future generations.

Resilience and Adaptability



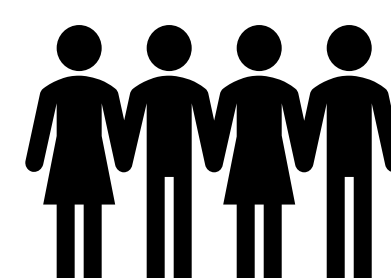
We value systems that can grow, evolve, and adapt to changing conditions, shocks, and uncertainties.

Intergenerational continuity



We value long-term thinking and deep-time connections, honouring ancestors, protecting future generations, and supporting enduring relationships with Country.

Community stewardship



We value the commitment and knowledge held by communities who already care for the catchment. Collective stewardship strengthens the wellbeing of the whole system.



Question for you:

Do you think the proposed values (Connectivity, Reciprocity, Community Stewardship, Intergenerational Continuity, Resilience and Adaptability) represents how you care about waterways in the catchment?



[Click here](#)

Our principles

These proposed principles translate our shared values into clear expectations for how we make decisions and act. Management principles act like a compass: they guide and provide standards for how waterway management is approached, helping to ensure decisions and actions are aligned with shared values and long-term goals.

Strengthen community stewardship and shared responsibility

The catchment is already actively cared for. Management actions should prioritise strengthening, empowering, and partnering with communities and Traditional Owners as co-stewards of the river and wetland systems.

Work with, learn from and respect waterways as a living system

Recognise the natural cycles, needs, and processes of waterways. Support ecological health as the foundation for all other benefits that waterways provide.

Consider the catchment's waterways as one connected system

Make sure decisions account for how water, land, people, and ecosystems are linked across different scales, recognising both the local values held by communities and the wider role of our catchment's waterways within the Murray–Darling Basin. Actions in one place may influence the whole system, from headwaters to downstream rivers.

Strengthen existing programs, institutions, and partnerships

Build on the strengths of current programs, organisations, and the distinct regional identities across the catchment, aligning roles and working collaboratively rather than independently.



Build long-term resilience and adaptability in waterways to support a productive region

Plan and act with future generations in mind, building resilience and supporting systems (e.g. our communities, our economy, our environment) to adapt to shocks and shifting conditions to cope with and thrive in the face of change over time.



Ensure Traditional Owner communities, cultures and knowledges have a meaningful role in decision-making

Work in genuine partnership with Traditional Owners, recognising their unique role in speaking for and caring for Country and waterways. Recognise their knowledges and support self-determination, rights and obligations to care for Country.



Use evidence-based decision-making

Ensure that the best available knowledge (drawing from science, Traditional Owner knowledge, local expertise, and community experience) underpins decision-making, policy, and waterway management programs.

4. Key themes proposed for our Regional Waterway Strategy

The strategy includes five themes that describe the major areas of work needed to care for our waterways as the region changes. These themes turn our guiding principles into practical focus areas and respond to concerns raised by the community. While we've separated these themes to make planning and investment needs clearer, they're designed to work together because in practice waterway management is interconnected. Many activities will naturally span multiple themes, providing a structured yet flexible way to prioritise actions that build a resilient, thriving waterway system.

Theme 1: Supporting connections between people and our waterways

Our waterways are part of everyday life in the Goulburn Broken catchment — places where people walk, fish, swim, learn, relax, and gather. Our region is home to a diverse community including farming families, town and rural residents, businesses, multicultural communities, as well as strong networks of Landcare groups, anglers, volunteers, and Traditional Owners who have cared for Country for generations. Many great initiatives already exist, from citizen science programs to RiverConnect program activities and community-led habitat restoration projects.

"As part of nature, we care for our water and environment for the health of country and people. We are all part of a connected and thriving ecosystem."

Community Member

This theme builds on that strong foundation by ensuring everyone can enjoy, understand, and care for our rivers, wetlands, creeks, and floodplains. When people feel connected to waterways, they're more likely to value them, speak up for them, and help look after them, continuing the long tradition of reciprocal care between communities and waterways

What we propose to do

The strategy will focus on improving sensible and safe access to waterways, balancing people's needs with environmental protection. This means improving access where it benefits both people and the environment, educating the community about harmful activities, and protecting sensitive areas. We'll strengthen existing partnership programs like Landcare networks, RiverConnect, fishing organisations, and community stewardship groups, while creating more opportunities for volunteering, citizen science, Traditional Owner cultural practices, and hands-on restoration work. By deepening connections, building knowledge, and supporting meaningful involvement, we aim to grow a strong sense of pride, care, and shared responsibility for healthy waterways.

"Restore ties between people and place, people as custodians of place, reciprocal relationship between non-human & human."

Community Member

Theme 2: Supporting healthy and connected waterways by supporting natural processes

*"Our waterways and wetlands are the lungs and kidneys of our land.
Restore wetlands and rivers to their health"*

Community Member

Healthy rivers, wetlands, and floodplains depend on being connected, to each other, to the surrounding landscape, and to the natural rhythms of flow that shape them. Supporting connectivity means keeping these links strong so that water, plants, animals, sediments, and nutrients can move through the system as they need to. It involves giving waterways space to follow their natural paths, allowing rivers to spread onto floodplains in the right seasons, and ensuring upstream and downstream areas remain linked. When these natural processes are supported, waterways are better able to sustain wildlife, recover from droughts and floods, and remain resilient into the future.



The Goulburn River plays a vital role in the wider Murray–Darling Basin, contributing water to downstream communities, wetlands, and ecosystems across Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia. While supporting downstream river health is important, it must be balanced with protecting the Goulburn River itself, particularly managing high summer flows that can erode banks, disrupt habitat, and affect water quality. The Broken River system too provides important habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species; however, regulation, extraction and the construction of weirs impact its natural flow patterns and the movement of species like native fish.

The strategy will guide how we balance these competing needs, so the Goulburn and Broken Rivers continue to contribute to Basin-wide responsibilities while protecting the values, landscapes, and communities that depend on them locally.

What we propose to do

Much of this work already happens through our environmental water program, which uses carefully planned water releases to support the health of rivers, wetlands, and floodplains. Building on this foundation, the Strategy will focus on areas where existing programs can be improved to overcome key challenges. These include improving and expanding the delivery of water to floodplains and wetlands that are hard to reach due to riverbank constraints or flow barriers; supporting the role of unregulated rivers; enhancing regional biodiversity, reducing the impacts of cold-water releases from large storages; and strengthening fish passage, native fish populations and habitat connectivity. These are practical ways of ensuring ecological health through strong connections and healthy natural processes.

Theme 3: Creating opportunities through effective policy, systems, and processes

Good policy and clear systems make it easier for people to care for waterways. When rules are easy to understand, responsibilities are clear, and decision-making is transparent, everyone can act sooner and with confidence. This includes community members, landholders, councils, water corporations, and Traditional Owners. This theme focuses on improving how water policy, planning, and on-ground delivery work fit together, ensuring the right people have the right tools, information, and authority to make good decisions. It reflects different agencies, short-term or uncertain funding, slow or confusing approval processes, and systems that favour technical or compliance views over local, farmer, community, and Traditional Owner knowledge. These barriers can leave people feeling unsure about who does what, how to get things done, or how to influence decisions that affect their local waterways.

What we propose to do

Through this theme the Strategy aims to tackle those barriers to make caring for waterways simpler, more connected, and more responsive to the people and places involved. It also means recognising and amplifying the great work already happening in the region. Rather than duplicating community programs or creating unnecessary new processes, we'll connect and strengthen what is already working well.

What do we mean by resilience?

The Goulburn Broken CMA defines resilience as the capacity of the catchment to sustain its natural resources, support community wellbeing, and remain productive over the long term, even as pressures grow. A resilient system is not about keeping things the same – it is about working with change, planning for variability, and strengthening the connections between people, land, water, and nature so the whole region can continue to prosper into the future.

When we look specifically at our waterways, resilience means that rivers, wetlands, creeks, and floodplains can absorb shocks, recover, and adjust to new conditions while remaining healthy and functioning. Resilient waterways maintain the ecological processes they depend on, even under stress. They protect critical refuges that help plants and animals survive droughts, floods, and heatwaves. And they continue to support farming, recreation, cultural values, and community wellbeing. A resilient waterway system is flexible, interconnected, and able to evolve and adapt over time, helping both ecosystems and communities thrive in a future with more change and uncertainty.

Theme 4: Managing for change and extremes

The Goulburn Broken region is already experiencing major changes, and the future will bring more uncertainty. Our climate is becoming hotter and drier overall, with more frequent heatwaves, longer dry spells, and higher evaporation. At the same time, intense rainfall events are becoming more common. The floods in 2022 and early 2023, show how powerful these events can be; damaging homes and farms, eroding banks, and changing the shape of floodplains and wetlands. Likewise, the recent fires in January 2026 can result in devastating, widespread and long lasting impacts to headwater landscapes, such as the Strathbogie Ranges, that support numerous wetlands and creeks. Past patterns are no longer a reliable prediction of the future, so we need to plan for a wider range of conditions and ensure our waterways and communities can cope with and manage for events such as droughts, fires and floods.

"I think the single biggest threat to our waterways long-term health is the threat of climate-change conditions requiring different management techniques"

Community Member

These environmental changes are happening alongside social and economic shifts across the region. Growing towns, changing land use, and increasing demand for recreation put new pressures on our waterways. Farmers are adapting to different water realities, changing markets, and new opportunities such as floodplain-compatible agriculture, carbon and biodiversity markets, and nature-based tourism.

"A changing climate that is unpredictable for farmers and will make region more fragile and less self-reliant placing more pressure to secure needed water from a decreasing water pool."

Community Member

Our region's economy and quality of life still critically rely on healthy rivers, wetlands, and landscapes. When waterway health declines, communities feel the impact through reduced water quality, damaged infrastructure, reduced tourism and challenges for local businesses.

"Urban sprawl as it encroaches on to natural floodplains, wetlands and recharge areas of the waterways."

Community Member

What we propose to do

This theme means preparing our rivers, wetlands, and communities for a future with more frequent shocks and long-term pressures. It involves working with the natural variability of the system, recognising that waterways are living, dynamic places, and supporting them to recover, adapt, and remain healthy. This includes practical steps to manage floods, fires and droughts, protect water quality, strengthen important habitat and refuge areas, and plan for sudden events such as blackwater incidents or heat stress in rivers. It also means building and sharing knowledge and experience that can be carried across generations, drawing on Traditional Owner knowledge, local insights, science, and community monitoring.

Theme 5: Supporting regional prosperity through healthy waterways

In the Goulburn Broken catchment, the environment and the economy depend on each other. Healthy rivers, wetlands, and floodplains are the foundation for many of the jobs, businesses, and industries that keep our region strong. When waterways are cared for, they support productive farms, reliable water for towns, thriving tourism and recreation, and the natural beauty and liveability that attract people and businesses to the region. They also reduce risks such as erosion, salinity, and damaging floods. A strong regional economy grows from a healthy natural system, not at its expense.

"Our catchments waterways underpin the viability of our irrigation area and underpin our local economy and community."

Community Member

What we propose to do

This theme means working with the many initiatives already underway to build a sustainable future for the catchment; from sustainable floodplain agriculture and regenerative farming to habitat restoration, cultural land management, carbon and biodiversity markets, and nature-based tourism. Waterways play a central role in all these opportunities. By improving waterway health and reducing environmental risks, the strategy aims to create conditions that help local businesses innovate, adapt, and thrive. While we can't control broader market forces, we can strengthen the region's resilience by making waterways healthier, landscapes more stable, and communities more confident in the future.

The strategy can build on strong regional programs while tapping into growing national investment in climate resilience, nature repair, and sustainable regional development. Federal funding for drought resilience initiatives, biodiversity and nature repair markets, carbon farming opportunities, urban waterway restoration programs, and climate-ready agriculture grants align closely with waterway health and floodplain function. For our region, this means focusing on actions that restore riparian corridors, reconnect wetlands and floodplains, improve fish passage and habitat, improve native fish populations and water quality, support sustainable floodplain agriculture, protects groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and enhances liveability and recreation in towns. These directions will improve ecological outcomes while opening pathways for local businesses, farmers, anglers and community groups to access new funding and provides economic opportunities tied to healthy landscapes.



Question for you:

Do the themes capture your concerns about waterways in the catchment?

Are there particular issues or places you would like to see captured under a theme?

Are you aware of any existing projects or groups that should be thought about under each of these themes?



[Click here](#)

5. Shaping the future of our waterways together

Where to next and how you can be involved

The Goulburn Broken Regional Waterway Strategy belongs to everyone who cares about the health of waterways in our catchment. We're committed to developing this strategy in partnership with the community, and there are several ways you can contribute your knowledge, experience, and ideas.

Next steps

This project will conduct a '**Collaborative Dialogue**' – a structured way of gathering input from community members, experts and stakeholders. It works by asking participants to suggest and comment on actions that fit under the themes described to understand different ideas, areas of agreement and areas of concern, rather than aiming for full consensus.

Beyond the **Collaborative Dialogue**, there will be opportunities for the wider community to provide feedback on the draft strategy over the coming 12 months. We will share information about public comment opportunities, community information sessions, and other ways to have your say as the strategy develops.

How you can keep up to date

To receive updates on the strategy development process and upcoming engagement opportunities, please visit:

[Waterways - GB CMA - Goulburn Broken CMA](#)

Your input matters. Whether you're a landholder, community member, Traditional Owner, angler, industry representative, or simply someone who values healthy waterways, your perspective will help create a strategy that reflects our shared vision for the Goulburn Broken catchment.

Register interest for the Collaborative Dialogue here:

<https://www.loomio.com/gbcma-collaborative-dialogue/>

February - March 2026



[Click here](#)

How well do you know your waterways?

To celebrate the diversity of our waterways, we have included a list of places across the catchment for you to explore, remember, or discover for the first time. How many of these waterways have you visited? Which ones hold special meaning for you, and which are still waiting on your list? Whether you've spent summers swimming in the Goulburn, walked the tracks of the Broken River, or admired the quiet beauty of a local wetland, this activity is an invitation to reconnect with the places that make our region unique — and to see how your own experiences link to the broader waterway system we all share.



Barmah–Millewa Forest (Ramsar Site)

Australia's largest river red gum forest — internationally recognised for its cultural significance, wildlife, floodplain wetlands, and the magical feeling of walking beneath centuries-old trees that breathe with the river.



Black Swamp (near Waaia)

A seasonal floodplain swamp that transforms dramatically after rain, filling with waterbirds, frogs, and life — a reminder of how vibrant our dry landscapes can become when water returns.



Dhungala (Murray River – lower Goulburn confluence)

The powerful meeting place of two great rivers, rich in cultural meaning and history; a place to feel the scale of water shaping Country and community.



Steavenson Falls (Marysville)

Located near Marysville, Steavenson Falls is one of Victoria's tallest waterfalls plummeting 84 metres. Enjoy a short and scenic walk to the base of the falls. The hydroelectric turbine uses the power of the falls to generate electricity for floodlighting the falls and walking track at night.

How well do you know your waterways?



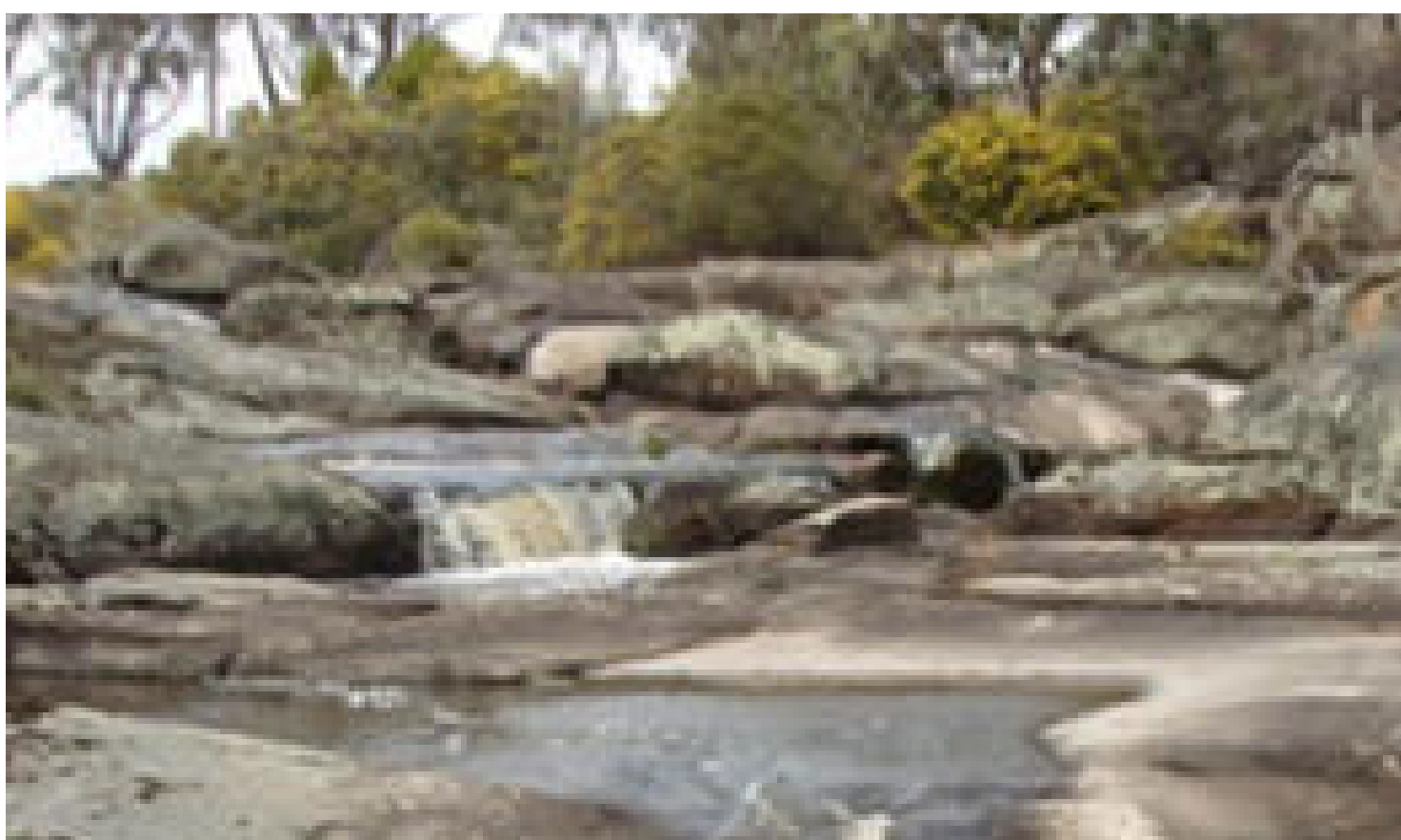
Seven Creeks (Euroa region)

Shady red gums, deep pools, and quiet bends make this a perfect place for walking, fishing, and spotting platypus — a cool refuge in hot summers and dry years.



Rubicon River

A pristine mountain stream with crystal-clear water tumbling over stones, loved for trout fishing, bushwalking, and its historic hydroelectricity infrastructure tucked into the forest.



Polly McQuinns (Strathbogie Ranges)

A favourite local swimming and picnic spot where a granite-lined creek feeds a historic weir, offering cool water, shady bushland, and a peaceful escape into the hills.



Kinnairds Wetland (Numurkah)

A community-built wetland with boardwalks, bird hides, and thriving native wildlife — perfect for family visits and sunrise birdwatching.



Goulburn River at Seymour

An iconic stretch of the river where town life meets flowing water: ideal for walking, paddling, fishing, and enjoying the river red gum landscape up close.