

# Reconnecting Flows across the Budj Bim Landscape

Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority

Project: Budj Bim Waterways Project

Project Sponsor: State Government Victoria under the Rivers 2040 program

## *Budj Bim landscape, ancient and valuable*

When Budj Bim (also known as Mount Eccles) erupted around 30,000 years ago it changed the landscape forever. The resulting Tyrendarra Lava Flow created a series of stony rises, rivers and wetlands between Budj Bim and the sea. This diverse landscape in the south west corner of Victoria encompasses Lake Condah, Darlots Creek and the Fitzroy River and Estuary.

Among the lava flows, local Gunditjmara people developed a large and ingenious aquaculture system designed to grow and harvest eels. The engineered channels, weirs and wetlands provided a year round supply of food. Dated at about 6,600 years old, it is one of the oldest known examples of freshwater aquaculture in the world, pre-dating the Pyramids in Egypt. This landscape is currently being considered for inclusion in Australia's World Heritage Tentative List—a list of places the Australian Government may decide to nominate for inclusion in the World Heritage List in the coming years.

## European arrival

European settlement of the area from 1830 and subsequent displacement of Aboriginal people caused a period of disconnect between traditional owners and this landscape. Gunditjmara people were excluded from practicing their cultural traditions and using and managing the resources that the Budj Bim landscape provided.

Settlement also resulted in the fragmentation of native vegetation through clearing, the introduction of livestock and planting of willows, gorse and buckthorn. Dams, drains and channels interrupted the flow of water across the landscape, severely reducing connectivity. Species such as Australasian bittern, growling grass frog, Yarra pygmy perch and Glenelg spiny crayfish, once abundant in this area, are now threatened due to habitat loss.



*Top: Lake Condah, when it flooded in 2011*  
(Glenelg Hopkins CMA)

*Bottom: The southern extent of the diverse Budj Bim landscape and Fitzroy River estuary complex*  
(Glenelg Hopkins CMA)

## Reconnecting to Country

Many Gunditjmara people have maintained their connection with the Budj Bim landscape and in 1987, the Lake Condah mission lands were returned to the Gunditjmara Traditional Owners.

Following the restoration of Lake Condah in 2010, the local community which now includes both traditional owners and other landholders, are focusing on protecting and restoring other waterways and associated wetlands across the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape.

## Target Setting

The Victorian State Government has provided Glenelg Hopkins CMA with funding under the Rivers 2040 program to assist the local community in achieving the following outcomes:

1. supporting Aboriginal connection to waterways through the integration of traditional knowledge into waterway management
2. well-connected riverbank vegetation
3. restoring flow regimes and hydrological connectivity.

Currently in the target setting phase, the project is investigating how to align environmental and cultural objectives, such as the possibility of reinstating hydrology through wetlands which will enable cultural 'fish traps' to be reinstated for traditional practices and tourism. Traditional Owners, local landholders, agencies and scientific community form the reference group undertaking the planning and implementation of works

## Taking Action

Gunditjmara people including the Budj Bim Rangers will assist with on-ground works whilst training and knowledge exchange will build capacity of land managers, agencies and the Gunditjmara community. Works will consist of pest plant control, removal of fish barriers, improvement of waterway connectivity, removal of drains, control of stock access to waterways and revegetation.

## Recovery and Growth to Achieve 2040 Targets

After an intensive implementation period of on-ground works, the project allows for a period of recovery and growth. Target outcomes will be measured against base line information gathered in the initial phase of the project.

Sources: Case Study 4 – Lake Condah, Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape, Heritage Council Victoria; Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape Brochure, Australian Government

This project is a partnership between:

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For more information on the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape: Australian Government National Heritage Places, visit [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/budj-bim](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/budj-bim)



*The fish channel system at Lake Condah is well visible when the landscape is dry (Glenelg Hopkins CMA)*