

# Media Release

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## Mapping seagrass meadows in SW Victoria manage their future

The seagrass meadows of Victoria southwest estuaries will be the focus a new \$350,000 research project being undertaken by Glenelg Hopkins CMA in conjunction with Deakin University.

The 'Assessing the distribution, health and potential for restoration of estuarine seagrass meadows in the Glenelg Hopkins Region' project will begin shortly after funding for the project was approved through the Victorian Government's Victoria's Resilient Coast Grants Program.

The Victorian Government has funded \$150,000 towards the project, with the balance of the funding coming through the CMA and Deakin University, in the form of a PhD student scholarship and technical and equipment support for the project.

"Seagrass meadows are vital to the health and function of estuarine ecosystems in the Glenelg Hopkins region, providing a variety of ecological and economic benefits," Glenelg Hopkins CMA Senior Estuary Officer, Jarred Obst, said.

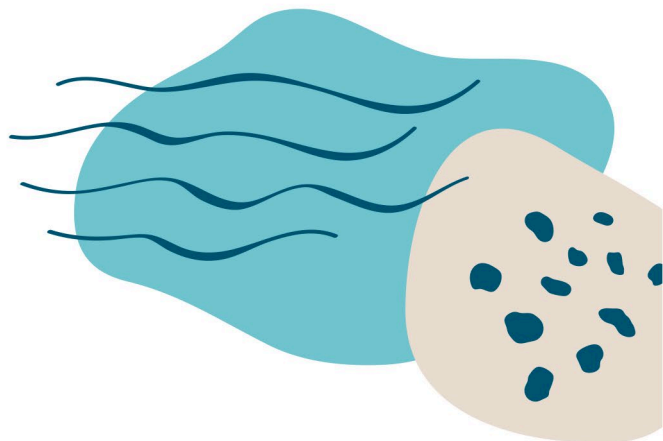
These include the habitat Estuarine seagrass meadows provide for a wide variety of marine animals such as fish, crustaceans, and molluscs; the fact Estuarine seagrass is an important carbon sink, meaning it absorbs and stores atmospheric carbon in its tissues and sequesters carbon into estuarine sediments; and, the variety of economic benefits Estuarine seagrass meadows provide by supporting commercial and recreational fishing and diving, improved water quality and protecting coastal communities from storms and erosion.

Mr Obst said the main objective of the project was to map the extent and distribution of estuarine seagrass meadows in the Glenelg Hopkins region, assess the health of current seagrass populations, identify trends and drivers of change, identify suitable sites for seagrass restoration, and initiate restoration trials.

"We expect that the knowledge gained from this project will provide a framework for informing the management and restoration of estuarine seagrass meadows at a state-wide scale," he said.

Despite their ecological and economic importance seagrass meadows are threatened globally by a variety of stressors, including coastal development, catchment erosion and sedimentation, pollution, and climate change.

"As a result, seagrass meadows are currently recognised among the most threatened habitats globally, with declines of up to 7 per cent per year," he said.



Although the Glenelg Hopkins region contains important estuarine seagrass habitat, habitats in some river systems have experienced significant declines in cover and condition over the last two decades, threatening the future health, resilience and functioning of these critically important ecosystem, Mr Obst said.

“Consequently, there is a growing urgency to characterise where these habitats are persisting, where they have been lost, and opportunities for rehabilitation and/or enhancement in the face of rapid climate change,” he said.

Additionally, Mr Obst said the three-year project will provide a collaborative research opportunity for Deakin University student, something the CMA and Deakin University have considered important to developing the skills of natural resource managers of the future.

“Being able to provide the opportunity to support a research student is key to ensuring the skills for this type of natural resource management in our region are developed locally, which is important to ensure the future of this type of work both in our region, and around Australia.”

**ENDS**



CAPTION: Seagrass meadows are often overlooked for the valuable role they play in estuary health.

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