Lake Buffalo Recreational Area Management Plan

August 2025



Goulburn-Murray WATER

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Cover Image Credit: Gab Connole

Acknowledgement to Country

Goulburn-Murray Water recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia and the proud representatives of the world's oldest, living culture.

We respectfully acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters and the rich cultural connections First Peoples have across our region.

We commit to building meaningful partnerships that create value for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities through genuine engagement and collaboration.

We recognise the Taungurung Land and Waters Council as the Registered Aboriginal Party within the Lake Buffalo region and acknowledge their rights as the Traditional Owners of land and waters, as outlined in their Agreements with the State of Victoria.

About Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW)

GMW is Australia's largest rural water provider, managing the storage, delivery and drainage systems for 70 per cent of Victoria's stored water resources, 50 per cent of Victoria's underground water supplies and 35 per cent of Victoria's unregulated water resources.

GMW services a region of 68,000 square kilometres, bordered by the Great Dividing Range to the south, the River Murray to the north and stretching from Corryong in the east to Nyah in the west.

Recreational areas managed by GMW are popular destinations for local communities and Victorian and interstate visitors to connect with water and the natural environment, to undertake a variety of recreational activities. Since 2021, an average of almost 2.5 million people visit determined recreational areas managed by GMW each year.

GMW plays a crucial role in managing recreational areas at Lake Buffalo. The development of the Lake Buffalo Recreational Area Management Plan (the plan) aims to balance the needs of GMW customers, the environment and recreational opportunities.

Introduction

The purpose of the Lake Buffalo Recreational Area Management Plan (the plan) is to provide clear operational guidelines for managing recreational activities at Lake Buffalo while minimising impacts on water quality, the environment, cultural heritage values, and GMW assets and operations.

The plan provides a comprehensive and practical framework for GMW to manage recreational activities at Lake Buffalo in a way that aims to protect the natural environment, maintain water quality, provide opportunity for Cultural Practices for Traditional Owners, and support the safe enjoyment by visitors.

Key values referenced in the development of the plan include:

- Environmental protection
- Recreational opportunities
- Cultural heritage
- Economic benefits, and
- Community engagement.

The plan details permitted recreational activities, management objectives, designated set-aside areas to balance use and conservation, and highlights the variety of stakeholders involved in the management of Lake Buffalo. It references the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's (DEECA) guidance materials to ensure sustainable use and the protection of water resources.

Recreational Area Management Plans

The *Water (Recreational Area) Regulations* 2023 (the regulations) apply to approximately 40 water storages across Victoria. These storages have been determined as recreational areas by the Minister for Water in accordance with section 122ZA of the *Water Act* 1989.

The regulations provide for the control, management and use of recreational areas and provide for infringement offences and penalties. These infringement penalties were not available in the superseded Recreational Area Model By-law 2012. The regulations came into operation in August 2023, replacing GMW's Recreational Area By-law. A key feature of the regulations is the requirement for water corporations to develop management plans for recreational areas under their jurisdiction.

The plan explains how Lake Buffalo's public recreation areas are operationally managed under the *Water (Recreational Area) Regulations* 2023. While it is not strategic planning document, GMW supports and partners with agencies, councils, Traditional Owners, and

community groups on projects that support health, wellbeing and liveability, boost tourism and contribute to regional economic growth through improved recreational opportunities.

Water corporations are legally obligated to uphold commitments outlined under the Traditional *Owner Settlement Act* 2010 and the *Native Title Act* 1993. These obligations include actively working in partnership with the relevant Traditional Owner groups to ensure culturally appropriate and equitable outcomes.

This plan acknowledges and values the principals of self-determination and the cultural and decision-making protocols of the Taungurung Land and Waters Council, and recognise that these lie outside Western governance frameworks.

For further information on the *Water (Recreational Area) Regulations* 2023 visit:

www.water.vic.gov.au/our-programs/recreational-values-of-victorias-water/recreational-area-regulations

In addition to the regulations, GMW manages the recreational use of this storage in accordance with:

- *Water Act* 1989
- *Marine Safety Act* 2010
- *Safe Drinking Water Act* 2003.

The plan serves as a guiding operational document for GMW, local communities, and stakeholders in managing recreational activities at Lake Buffalo. It provides clear operational guidelines and actions to enable the sustainable use of Lake Buffalo recreational areas while protecting its natural and cultural values.

It is intended to be a living document, to be reviewed and updated when appropriate based on the monitoring of recreational activities and in consultation with key stakeholders.

Monitoring and evaluation

The plan will be reviewed every 10 years, or sooner as needed, to assess its effectiveness and make necessary adjustments. This review process will involve:

- Traditional Owner engagement and an open feedback process based on the principles of self-determination
- Monitoring and evaluation: regularly monitoring the impact of recreational activities on the environment and water quality
- Regulatory compliance: ensuring compliance with DEECA's guidelines and other relevant regulations
- Community feedback: gathering input from local residents, recreational users, local government authorities, special interest groups and other key stakeholders.

About Lake Buffalo

Lake Buffalo is situated on the lands of the Taungurung people, on the picturesque Buffalo River. It is at the foot of the western slopes of Mount Buffalo National Park in northeast Victoria and is 20 km south of the town of Myrtleford.

Construction of the storage was completed in 1965 and has a capacity of 23,504 ML. This involved the creation of a 31 m high and 634 m long embankment, gated spillway, and outlets within the dam wall.

Lake Buffalo is used to supplement flows in the Ovens River for agricultural irrigation. It is also used for providing water for stock and domestic uses.

The lake and its surroundings offer a range of recreational activities including sailing, paddle boarding, boating, water skiing, cycling, hiking and picnicking. Boats can be launched from near the dam wall year-round. Fishing is also a popular activity at Lake Buffalo, as fish varieties include Redfin, Macquarie and Golden Perch, Brown and Rainbow Trout, Murray Cod and River Blackfish.

A diverse range of visitors are attracted to Lake Buffalo, including touring cars and motorcycles, road riders, and gravel riders, with one of the seven routes in the Ride High Country Gravel Network located at the lake (Lake Buffalo to Whitfield).

GMW manage two recreational areas that provide facilities for day visitors including toilets, boat ramps and picnic and barbecue facilities. These are:

- Main Recreation Area
- Marshalls Ridge Recreation Area.

Objectives of the plan

The objectives of this management plan for recreational areas at Lake Buffalo are to:

- Protect the land, services and facilities in the area
- Protect and maintain water quality in waterways in the area
- Conserve and preserve flora, fauna and habitat in the area, including the biodiversity of that flora, fauna and habitat
- Protect the health and safety of visitors to the area
- Promote the enjoyment and recreation of visitors to the area
- Continue the ongoing enjoyment of Lake Buffalo by ensuring leases and licences for caravan parks, marinas, clubs and other appropriate organisations delivering recreational facilities to the community are maintained and reviewed regularly
- Protect and promote Aboriginal cultural heritage and Aboriginal intangible heritage in the area
- Protect and promote any other heritage features in the area
- Facilitate the participation of Traditional Owner groups in the management of that area, including in accordance with any agreements under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* 2010 that apply to the area
- Ensure that the area is managed and used in a way that respects and upholds the rights and aspirations of Traditional Owner groups who have a connection to the area.

Consultation

The Lake Buffalo Recreational Area Management Plan has been developed to align with the guidance provided by DEECA in accordance with the regulations. A formalised consultation and engagement framework was imbedded in the development of the plan.

The following consultation activities were undertaken in 2024/25 to support the development of the plan:

- Consultation opportunities were promoted widely, including via GMW social media posts, media releases, the GMW website and targeted mailing lists to notify stakeholders and encourage participation and feedback on the draft Lake Buffalo plan
- Interviews with partner agencies including Alpine Shire, North East Catchment Management Authority (CMA), Victorian Fisheries Authority, and Better Boating Victoria
- Traditional Owner consultation that was determined in partnership with representatives from the Taungurung Land and Waters Council as the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP)
- Feedback was encouraged via GMW's dedicated online engagement portal yoursay@gmw. Opportunities to provide input to the draft plans included a values-based questionnaire and the ability to download and comment on the draft plans
- A summary of the feedback received was published on GMW's yoursay@gmw portal, highlighting the key themes and how this feedback has been incorporated into the plans.

What we heard

GMW engaged through face-to-face gatherings, one-on-one discussions and an online survey to understand people's connections to the land and water, personal experiences, and what they valued most about accessing Lake Buffalo for recreational purposes.

We have been working closely with the Taungurung Land and Waters Council on the Corop Wetlands Cultural Waterscape Project. This project has established open dialogue and knowledge exchange opportunities which have supported the inclusion of Traditional Owner values, priorities and aspirations in the management of the Lake Buffalo recreational areas.

The consultation highlighted that Lake Buffalo is hugely important to the local community and provides a wide range of cultural, lifestyle, health, environmental and economic benefits and contributes to the community's sense of place.

It provides an opportunity to connect to Country and draws visitors year-round. It was acknowledged that at times this results in surges in population especially on weekends. It contributes to the regional economy and serves as a multi-generational recreation destination.

Key value themes include:

- Strengthening Social Bonds: Spending time with family and friends (and in many cases with dogs), sharing experiences across generations, and celebrating family events fosters strong social connections. These activities help build a sense of community, reduce feelings of isolation, and create a supportive network.
- Promoting Lifelong Learning: Learning new skills and teaching the next generation encourages personal growth and development. This benefits individuals and enriches the community by fostering a culture of knowledge sharing and continuous improvement.
- Enhancing Mental Health: Quality time spent relaxing and escaping day-to-day pressures helps reduce stress and anxiety. Recreational activities provide a much-needed break from routine, contributing to improved mental health and overall wellbeing.
- Preserving Cultural Heritage: Participating in Cultural traditions and celebrating heritage strengthens Cultural identity and pride. It can support diversity and understanding within the community, fostering a more inclusive environment.
- Encouraging Physical Activity: Engaging in outdoor activities like walking, cycling, and water sports promotes physical health. Regular physical activity contributes to maintaining a healthy lifestyle and preventing chronic diseases.
- Fostering a Connection to Nature: Getting back to nature and basics helps individuals appreciate and protect the environment. This connection can lead to more sustainable practices and a greater sense of environmental awareness in the community.
- Creating Lasting Memories: Making memories through shared experiences enhances the quality of life. These memories contribute to a sense of belonging and continuity, enriching the community's collective history.
- Supporting Local Economy: Recreational activities attract visitors and boost local businesses, contributing to the local economy.

Key themes from engagement with Taungurung include:

Lake Buffalo holds high importance to Taungurung Land and Waters Council. The Taungurung Buk Dadbagi (Country Plan) has been referenced in the development of the plan. It identifies the following values, priorities and aspirations:

- *Biik-nganjin dadbagi* – Caring for Country
- *Daanboor mon* – Health and wellbeing
- *Ngerren, ngarrnga ning ning guding* – Identity, recognition and rights
- *Ngi-agat munga* – Economic development and employment
- *Taungurung yulendj* – Taungurung traditional knowledge
- Yulendj – Cultural heritage.

Location

Lake Buffalo is situated on the traditional lands of the Taungurung people, on the Buffalo River. It lies at the foot of the western slopes of Mount Buffalo National Park. The town of Myrtleford is 20 km to the north.



Figure 1 Lake Buffalo location map

Facilities available

The following facilities are available at Lake Buffalo, with locations shown in Figure 3.



Figure 2 Facilities

For more information on recreational activities and facilities, please observe all signs and directions at GMW's storages and visit the GMW website at:

www.gmwater.com.au/water-operations/storages/ovens/lakebuffalo

For information on all ability facilities, please refer to the GMW website at:

www.gmwater.com.au/recreation/all-ability-facilities

Recreational activities

Public recreational areas managed by GMW are popular places for visitors to connect with water and the natural environment, and to undertake a variety of recreational activities. GMW places the highest priority on safety at the storages we manage.

The below table summarises the activities permitted at Lake Buffalo, any conditions that apply and links for further information.

Table 1 GMW Recreational Area Activities

Activity	Permitted ✓ or Prohibited X	Notes
Fishing	✓	Permits, bag limits and seasonal restrictions apply. For more information visit www.vfa.vic.gov.au
Boating	✓	Speed and safety restrictions, and zones must be adhered to. Other restrictions may apply. Visit Rules And Exclusion Zones | Safe Transport Victoria for more information.
Water skiing	✓	For licence and registration requirements see Marine licence : VicRoads Vehicles are permitted to access low level boat ramps below the full supply level via existing formed tracks, with vehicle and trailer parking permitted around the boat ramp.
Houseboats	X	Houseboats are not permitted on Lake Buffalo.
Canoeing/ kayaking	✓	Safety requirements, including capacity limits must be adhered to.
Camping/ caravaning	X	Camping/caravaning is not permitted at Lake Buffalo. Camping/caravaning is prohibited in GMW public recreation areas, foreshore or lakebed areas.
Campfires	X	Campfires are not permitted in GMW public recreation areas, foreshore or lakebed areas. No wood collection is permitted within GMW public recreation areas, foreshore or lakebed areas.
Picnic & barbequing	✓*	*No wood fire barbeques are to be lit. On declared days of Total Fire Ban all solid fuel barbeques, portable gas appliances and kerosene lanterns are prohibited. Electric barbeques are available at some locations.
Dogs	✓	Dogs must be on a lead and under effective control at all times. Please clean up after your pets. Handlers are to be aware of Blue-green Algae and the risk to skin/health - water access should be managed accordingly. GMW will review localised access if issues arise. Dogs and cats aren't permitted in Alpine National Park (www.parks.vic.gov.au)
Drone flights	X*	*Conditional - permits can be obtained, please contact GMW for more information. Drone safety rules must be adhered to. For more information visit www.casa.gov.au
Bathing/ washing	X	Cleaning agents such as soap, shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste or detergent are not to be used in or near the lake.

Activity	Permitted ✓ or Prohibited X	Notes
4WD and trailbikes	X	Vehicles and trail bikes are only allowed on public roads above full supply level within the recreation areas and are not permitted on the exposed areas of the shores or the lakebed. All vehicles must be roadworthy, registered and users must be licensed. Road rules must be obeyed at all times.
Hunting	✓*	Appropriate permits and licences are required and MUST be carried – for more information visit **www.gma.vic.gov.au** Full retrieval and removal of carcasses is required. Dogs are permitted for use when hunting in accordance with the *Wildlife Act* 1975. *Seasonal restrictions (including locations) apply
Prospecting, fossicking or digging	X*	*The removal of rocks, material or vegetation is prohibited within GMW public recreation areas. Permits may be obtained under certain circumstances, please contact GMW for more information.
Events	✓*	*An events permit may be required. For more information, please see the 'Events and Permits' section or visit **www.gmwater.com.au/recreation/event-permits**

Caring for the Lake Buffalo environment

Lake Buffalo is a beautiful natural resource. To help care for the environment so that it can be enjoyed now and into the future, visitors are requested to follow a few simple steps:

- Take out your rubbish. The dumping of rubbish is prohibited and penalties apply, please take all your rubbish with you when you leave. Please consider the environment when disposing of litter. For nearby transfer stations refer to:

  www.alpineshire.vic.gov.au/residents-ratepayers/waste-recycling/transfer-stations
- Don't interfere with animals or their habitats, and don't feed them
- Keep to 5 knots within 60 m of shore as boat wash can cause erosion (even in higher speed zones)
- Keep the waterway healthy by not using cleaning agents such as soap, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner or detergent in or near the lake. They break the surface tension of the water, which reduces the oxygen levels in the water, causing harm to fish and other forms of aquatic life.
- Protect the biodiversity at Lake Buffalo. The removal of flora or fauna from GMW's public recreation areas is prohibited. Don't remove or bring in any vegetation (including harvesting of wood).

Water safety

GMW places the highest priority on safety at the storages we manage. Ensuring personal safety and adhering to posted guidance can help prevent accidents and ensure a safer experience for everyone.

Water safety messages are communicated via GMW's Water Smarts campaign and are distributed via social media, in print at the recreational areas we manage and on the GMW website.

Key themes are aimed at educating recreational users and reducing risk taking behaviours and include:

- Speed
- Lifejackets
- Boating alone
- Checking conditions
- Hazard awareness
- Consumption of alcohol, and
- Diving.

Swimming

GMW storages are not patrolled by lifeguards nor contain rescue equipment, therefore swimming is not recommended due to safety concerns.

However, it is recognised that some visitors may still engage in this activity. Visitors are encouraged to wear life jackets, not swim alone and should make themselves aware of the local dangers and risks, such as submerged objects, varying water depths and water temperature, before entering the water.

Boating safety

GMW is the Waterway Manager for Lake Buffalo under the *Marine Safety Act* 2010. When using the waterway, boaters need to be aware of the vessel operating and zoning rules, including supportive signage and buoyage in place. While in many instances there are state-wide rules in place, at many of GMW's storages there are also localised zoning rules that can vary depending on the type of watercraft being used or seasonal conditions such as water levels.

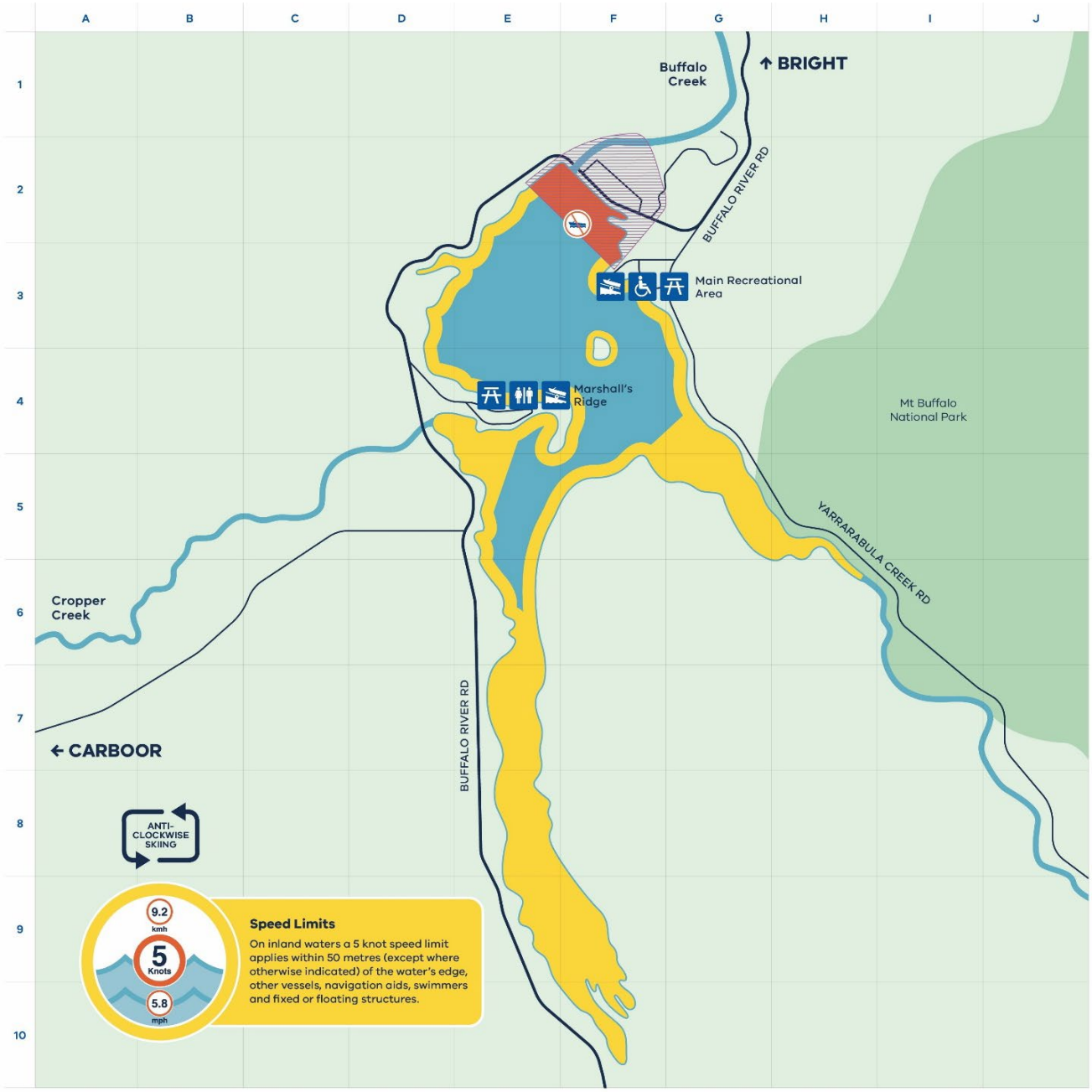
As Waterway Manager, while GMW is not required through the Marine Safety Act to undertake compliance activities associated with the Act, GMW is committed to providing a safe space for recreational users and will collect any relevant information and report any issues to Safe Transport Victoria for management through their compliance team. GMW also works closely with local police and other agencies to address any immediate concerns where appropriate.

For more information on the state-wide vessel operating and zoning rules, signage and buoyage types visit:

www.safetransport.vic.gov.au/on-the-water/using-waterways/rules-and-exclusion-zones/

For localised zoning information look for Boating Safety Information Signs located at public boat ramps or visit:

www.gmwater.com.au/water-operations/storages/ovens/lakebuffalo



Legend

- No boats
- 5 knots speed restriction
- Unrestricted speed
- Water hazard
- Fishing prohibited
- Mt Buffalo National Park
- Public launching area
- Camping
- Public toilet
- Accessible facilities
- Picnic facilities
- Road

No camping or fires are permitted on the GMW foreshore land, including lakebed areas.

Campfires are only permitted in locations where designated infrastructure is provided and in line with Country Fire Authority (CFA) guidelines.

Boating Safety

1. Local requirements are posted on all public boat ramps.
2. Boat ramps are for the launching and retrieval of vessels only.
3. To avoid congestion, complete any preparation prior to launching, or when returning from the water, away from the ramp.
4. Ensure all safety equipment is on the vessel and operational, and that lifejackets are worn when required.
5. Always keep a lookout for waterway hazards and operate your vessel in line with weather and waterway conditions.
6. Vehicles can access low-level boat ramps via existing formed tracks.
7. Vehicle and trailer parking is only allowed in designated areas or immediately adjacent low water level boat ramps.
8. Ensure no person is in or on the vessel when moving to and from the ramp.
9. Shade structures aren't allowed within 50 metres of either side of boat ramps.
10. Stay clear of dam infrastructure.

N

0 200 METRES

Current water level

Disclaimer

The content of this map is provided as a visual reference only. No claim is made as to the accuracy. Visitors to the recreational areas managed by GMW are reminded to always check weather, water and local area conditions prior to visiting.

For more detailed information on the Vessel Operating and Zoning Rule visit:
www.safetransport.vic.gov.au/on-the-water

To check local conditions visit:
www.emergency.vic.gov.au/prepare

Hunting is prohibited on GMW owned and managed land. For seasonal duck hunting the Game Management Authority sets the associated guidelines and rules to ensure hunting is undertaken in a safe and sustainable way. See www.gma.vic.gov.au for specific regulations.

Figure 3 Lake Buffalo Recreational Area map

Managing Lake Buffalo
Recreational Area



Image credit: Gab Connole

Set aside areas

To accommodate the diverse range of recreational activities that occur at Lake Buffalo, GMW may use 'set aside areas' to enable flexible or tailored management of the area under the regulations while ensuring the health, safety and enjoyment of visitors.

The regulations outline that a set aside area may:

- Apply to the whole of the recreational area or a specified area
- Apply on specified days, times or periods
- Apply to a class of person, vehicle, vessel or aircraft
- Specify any conditions which must be carried out for certain activities.

Set aside areas enable the safe operation of the water storage, ensuring that water quality is maintained, on-water recreation can occur safely, and that conflicting or complementary recreational activities are well managed. Set aside areas for Lake Buffalo are summarised in Table 2.

Occupation agreements for lease holders such as caravan parks, club sites or grazing licences may also have restrictions or conditions for public access subject to the terms of that agreement.

Publishing a determination of a set aside area

A determination of a set aside area will be published on the GMW website and there will also be signs and notices placed on-site.

It is an offence not to comply with the conditions of determinations in set aside areas. If GMW revokes or amends a set aside area, any previous sign or notice that has been displayed under the regulations must be removed or amended to reflect the revocation or amendment.

Signage for set aside areas

Signs or notices will:

- Be displayed in a manner that is likely to be seen by any person affected by the determination
- Indicate the area that is temporarily closed or set aside by the determination
- Where applicable, state the activities that are prohibited, restricted or permitted by the determination and any conditions specified in the determination.

Register of set aside areas

A record of the set aside areas at Lake Buffalo is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 Set aside areas

Regulation		Basis	Purpose of set aside area	Set aside area	Times or periods
14 (1)(b)	Prohibited or restricted access	(r.30(1))	Prohibited access for public safety (operational area)	• Spillway structure • Embankment, secondary spillway and perimeter lands north of the embankment • Within 200m of the spillway downstream on the Buffalo River.	Always
14 (1)(b)	Prohibited or restricted access	(r.30(1))	Prohibited access for public safety	Vessel prohibited areas: • Within 200 m south of the embankment at the northern end of the storage • Immediately offshore and west of the Main Recreation Area (within the sign posted vessels prohibited zone) • Immediately offshore and east of the Marshalls Ridge boat ramp (within the sign posted vessels prohibited zone).	Always
14 (2)(h)	Areas where dogs are permitted	(r. 56 (2))	Specify the area where dogs are allowed to enhance the enjoyment of the visitors to the recreational area	All areas excluding prohibited/restricted access areas	Always
14 (2)(d)	Areas for operating BBQs or fireplaces	(r. 43(3))	Specify an area where BBQs are permitted	Public BBQ areas	Always
14 (2)(d)	Areas for operating BBQs or fireplaces	(r. 43(3))	Specify an area where fireplaces are permitted	None	Always

Regulation		Basis	Purpose of set aside area	Set aside area	Times or periods
14 (2)(e)	Areas where campfires are permitted	(r.44(2))	Specify an area where campfires are permitted	None	Always
14 (2) (j)	Areas where livestock is permitted	(r. 62(2))	Specify areas where livestock is permitted	Livestock is permitted in areas where a grazing licence is held.	Always
14 (2) (k)	Areas where fishing is prohibited	(r.72(2))	Specify area where fishing is prohibited	Within 200 m downstream of the spillway and in the following prohibited areas: • Within 200 m south of the embankment at the northern end of the storage • Immediately offshore, west of the Main Recreation Area • Immediately offshore and east of the Marshalls Ridge boat ramp.	Always
14 (2) (l)	Areas where swimming is prohibited	(r.73(3))	Specify an area where swimming is prohibited	The following areas: • Within 200 m south of the embankment at the northern end of the storage • Within 200 m downstream of the spillway.	Always
14 (2) (m)	Areas where camping is permitted	(r.74(3))	Specify where camping is permitted	None	Always
14 (2) (p)	Areas where vehicles, vessels and aircraft are permitted	(r. 79(3))	Specify an area where vessels are permitted	All areas except prohibited areas (within 200 m south of the embankment, immediately offshore, west of the Main Recreation Area (within the sign posted vessels prohibited zone), and immediately offshore and east of the Marshalls Ridge boat ramp (within the sign posted vessels prohibited zone)).	Always
14 (2) (p)	Areas where vehicles, vessels and aircraft are permitted	(r. 79(3))	Specify an area where vehicles are permitted	Designated parking areas and public roadways only. Vehicles are not permitted on exposed areas, foreshores or lakebed.	Always

Regulation		Basis	Purpose of set aside area	Set aside area	Times or periods
14 (2) (s)	Areas where vessels, or classes of vessels may be used	(r.86(2))	Specify area where vessels may be used	All areas except prohibited areas (within 200 m south of the embankment, immediately offshore, west of the Main Recreation Area, immediately offshore and east of the Marshalls Ridge boat ramp).	Always
14 (3) (b)	Prohibited or restricted access *(Access by arrangement only)*	N/A	Continue the ongoing enjoyment of the recreational area by ensuring leases and licences delivering recreational facilities to the community are maintained	All leased and licenced areas for boating clubes, marinas, sailing clubs, caravan parks and other appropriate organisations.	Always

Prohibited areas

Access to the following areas is prohibited at all times to protect the water supply infrastructure and to minimise risks to public safety:

- Spillway structure
- Embankment
- Secondary spillway
- Within 200m of the spillway downstream on the Buffalo River
- Perimeter lands north of the embankment.

Vessel access to the following areas is prohibited at all times to protect the water supply infrastructure and to minimise risks to public safety:

- Within 200m south of the embankment at the northern end of the storage
- Immediately offshore and west of the Main Recreation Area
- Immediately offshore and east of the Marshalls Ridge boat ramp.

Temporary closures

Temporary closures of GMW recreational areas may occur on occasion as outlined in the regulations.

A temporary closure will primarily occur to:

- Support the safe management of events such as floods and fires
- Allow for operational maintenance works to take place
- Allow for Cultural Heritage investigations to take place if required
- Manage amenities and access during periods of low water levels
- Manage safety during periods of high-water levels
- Rationalise maintenance requirements during times of low visitation
- Manage safety during water quality events such as algal blooms.

In the event of an immediate temporary closure, GMW will:

- Publish the determination of a temporary closure on the GMW website and promote it through social media
- Where possible, display signs or notices on-site providing details of the temporary closure determination
- Publish a notification on the GMW website.

All other temporary closures will be communicated with impacted parties a minimum of two weeks prior to the closure.

Events and permits

GMW storages and waterways are a great place to host personal, community or commercial events. An application for an event permit must be submitted to GMW no more than 12 months prior to the proposed event date.

The timeframe for approving an event permit can vary, but we recommend applying for your permit at least 90 days before the event. This will ensure that all appropriate arrangements have been considered prior to your event such as details of communications, relevant permits, and risk management. Incomplete information will delay this process.

An event permit application form must be submitted to GMW for any event including but not limited to:

- An organised entertainment, sporting or recreation event or show
- A rally
- An organised boating event or regatta
- A festival, tour, fete or public meeting
- A demonstration, training class or similar event
- A wedding or similar ceremony
- A private function of 30 or more people.

GMW's Event Permits Policy and Procedure recognises the differing requirements and responsibilities associated with standard and commercial events to allow for better decision making, outcomes and pricing which is reflective of the proposed event. A Commercial Pricing Strategy will be developed in 2026-27.

For more information and to apply for an event permit, visit:

www.gmwater.com.au/recreation/event-permits

Land and development opportunities

GMW regularly reviews opportunities to maximise its landholdings. This is generally by way of leasing, licensing or transfer where the land is deemed surplus to operational needs.

From time-to-time GMW will release an Expression of Interest (EOI) for targeted parcels or proposed commercial activities on land and/or on water. Anyone wishing to register for upcoming opportunities can do so by submitting their interest via our dedicated procurement website at **https://app.eprocure.com.au/gmwater/home/public**

Select "Classification" then "Property and Realty Services".

For further assistance please contact Property Services on 1300 013 357 or e-mail **eoi@gmwater.com.au**

Occupation Licences

In areas around some of the GMW storages, GMW may allow structures and activities that require an Occupational Licence to be obtained from GMW.

Adjoining landowners may apply for an Occupation Licence to construct and/or keep privately owned structures for recreational purposes on foreshore land owned or managed by GMW. In some areas there may also be an opportunity to apply for an Occupation Licence to graze livestock or seek formal access over GMW-owned or managed land.

For more information and to apply for an Occupational Licence, visit the Occupation Licences page on GMW's website at **www.gmwater.com.au**

Compliance and enforcement

The *Water (Recreational Area) Regulations* 2023 introduced the ability for GMW to issue Penalty Infringement Notices (PINs) for offences under the regulations.

Water corporations can issue infringement penalties to users undertaking activities that are in breach of the regulations. These include activities that may risk land and water services, water quality, the environment, or the health, safety and enjoyment of other users within a recreational area.

Hunting

The plan acknowledges hunting as a lawful activity at Lake Buffalo and aligns with Victorian State Government policy, which allows regulated hunting in designated public lands and water bodies.

To appropriately manage the safety of visitors and GMW staff, all illegal or inappropriate behaviour will be reported to Victoria Police.

Operations and maintenance

Water supply operations and infrastructure

GMW harvests and stores water entitlements for its customers in accordance with the requirements set out in the *Water Act* 1989.

Lake Buffalo is used to supplement flows in the Ovens River for agricultural irrigation. It is also used for providing water for stock and domestic uses in nearby towns.

GMW also delivers water for the Victorian and Commonwealth Environmental Water Holders who make decisions about watering sites with the aim of maintaining healthy environments.

Further information on the operations of Lake Buffalo can be found on the website:

https://www.g-mwater.com.au/water-operations/storages/ovens/lakebuffalo

Maintenance of water supply and hydro-electric infrastructure (where applicable) at GMW-operated storages is primarily undertaken by GMW storage operations staff. Maintenance activities include:

- Regular inspection of all water supply infrastructure
- Periodic operation of key outlet works and lubrication of ropes and bearings
- Testing and servicing of ancillary equipment
- Weed control
- Access track and fence repair works.

Recreational facilities and assets

Recreational facilities and assets include but are not limited to toilet amenities, boat ramps, public access tracks, barbeques, and picnic furniture.

GMW has developed internal Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Manuals for recreation and land assets at each water storage. The O&M manuals include a description of each recreation and land asset, the associated standard operating and maintenance procedures and a maintenance schedule for storage staff to follow.

GMW storage staff undertake regular patrols and maintenance programs of GMW's public recreation areas as part of their O&M processes. The manuals and patrols support the management and reliability of GMW's recreational assets, ensuring they are reliable, operational, and safe for public use, and enable monitoring for environmental impacts such as rubbish dumping.

Vegetation management is undertaken through local maintenance programs by both GMW staff and trained arborists as necessary. If visitors have any concerns they are encouraged to contact GMW to report an issue.

A comprehensive internal review of these manuals is completed at least every five years to ensure their accuracy. The review enables our staff to safely and effectively perform maintenance activities, train new staff and continuously improve our recreation and land asset standards for the public.

Land that is occupied under licence or lease arrangements is required to be maintained in accordance with maintenance obligations detailed in lease/licence agreements.

Areas of public access may be restricted under an occupation agreement, subject to the conditions of that agreement.

Environment

GMW does not have a direct role in the management of invasive flora and fauna but actively supports and partners with the North East CMA, the Victorian Fisheries Authority and Taungurung Land and Waters Council to deliver programs aimed at managing invasive species.

Water quality management

Water Quality Monitoring Program

The Major Storages Water Quality Monitoring Program involves the monitoring of water quality in 14 of GMW's major water storages including Lake Buffalo.

Specific objectives for the program are to:

- Provide an overview of the current and historic water quality in GMW's storages
- Examine water quality and assess compliance with guideline values recommended in current state and national guidance
- Identify water quality status and trends so that future management practices have the potential to improve water quality within the storages
- Examine blue-green algae events (particularly the number of warnings issued) and identify trends so that future management practices have the potential to limit the risk of blue-green algae.

Further details of water quality management at GMW storages can be viewed here:

www.gmwater.com.au/water-operations/water-quality

Blue green algae

GMW is responsible for the management of blue-green algal blooms within our storages, irrigation channels and drains. GMW regularly monitors and inspects water bodies within our area of operation for blue-green algae. Find out more about our blue green algae warnings here:

www.gmwater.com.au/water-operations/bga

Wastewater management

Wastewater includes all septic tank effluent and sullage water. Untreated wastewater can transmit pathogens and viruses as well as nutrients, salts and heavy metals to Lake Buffalo if not managed properly.

GMW operates and maintains its effluent lagoons in accordance with regulatory guidance.

Any leased sites must comply with lease agreement obligations and Environmental Protection Authority guidelines in Victoria. This requires all effluent/sullage from ablution blocks on leased land to be connected to an approved wastewater system in accordance with current standards and guidance.

Implementation plan

Table 3 provides a summary of the measures to be implemented to meet the objectives of this management plan.

Table 3 Implementation Plan

Objective	Actions to meet objectives	Implementation timeframe	Responsibility
Protect the land, services and facilities in the area	Maintenance of facilities in accordance with O&M Manuals	Ongoing	GMW
	Development of Recreational Area Future Service Approach (inc service standards)	2025–2026	
Protect and maintain water quality in waterways in the area	Water Quality Monitoring Program	Ongoing	GMW
	Blue green algae monitoring and reporting of warnings	Ongoing	
	Signage and public education on practices to minimise impact to water quality	Ongoing	
Conserve and preserve flora, fauna and habitat in the area, including the biodiversity of that flora, fauna and habitat	Facilitate delivery of water for the environment to support Victorian and Commonwealth Environmental Water Holders who make decisions about watering sites with the aim of maintaining healthy environments	Ongoing	GMW
	Signage and education to ensure visitors are aware of making their responsibilities to protect environment when using storages, including respecting GMW bylaws and taking their rubbish with them	Ongoing	
	Water Quality Monitoring Program	Ongoing	
	Flora and fauna - Investigate opportunities to collaborate with Traditional Owners and relevant agencies to protect and re-establish native flora and fauna habitats, including native fish species and bird life. This could include management of erosion, developing lists of culturally significant plant species, organising community planting days, establishment of or exclusion and revegetation zones. This could also be achieved through education and signage.	Short to medium team priority (2025-2030) transitioning to business as usual operations (BAU)	GMW in collaboration with the Taungurung Land and Waters Council, North East CMA, and other agencies
Protect the health and safety of visitors to the area	Implementation of set aside areas	Ongoing	GMW
	Water safety program	Ongoing	
	Public information and signage	Ongoing	
Promote the enjoyment and recreation of visitors to the area	Public information and signage	Ongoing	GMW
	Maintenance of facilities in accordance with O&M Manuals	Ongoing	
	Commercial Pricing Strategy	2026-2027	
	Accessibility – Investigate opportunities to establish areas with all abilities access that allow all community members, particularly elders, people with reduced mobility using mobility aids including wheelchairs and walkers, and parents with prams, to access and experience the waters edge.	Ongoing in line with GMW's recreational investment prioritisation framework	GMW
Protect and promote Aboriginal cultural heritage and Aboriginal intangible heritage in the area	**Signage** – Co-design and develop culturally relevant signage for recreational areas that share information about Traditional Owner people, history, stories and cultural significance.	Short to medium team priority (2025-2030) transitioning to business as usual operations (BAU)	GMW in collaboration with the Taungurung Land and Waters Council
	Language – Collaborate with Traditional Owners to understand traditional names and translations. Display naming on signage and other public communications.	Short to medium team priority (2025-2030)	
	Education/preventing misuse - Investigate ways to improve signage or install barriers to ensure use of designated parking areas and to minimise off road driving and pollution, to preserve and protect the natural environment and remaining cultural heritage.	Medium term priority (2025-2030) transitioning to business as usual operations (BAU)	
	Website/social media - Develop communications to share knowledge/stories or remind visitors to respect Country. Ensure all information on GMW website is reviewed and kept up to date with general information about Traditional Owner groups.	Short term priority (2025-2026) transitioning to business as usual operations (BAU)	

Objective	Actions to meet objectives	Implementation timeframe	Responsibility
Facilitate the participation of Traditional Owner groups in the management of that area, including in accordance with any agreements under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* 2010 that apply to the area	To be investigated through future discussions with the Taungurung Land and Waters Council.		GMW/Taungurung Land and Waters Council
Ensure that the area is managed and used in a way that respects and upholds the rights and aspirations of Traditional Owner groups who have a connection to the area			
Protect and promote any other heritage features in the area	GMW recognise and respect the importance of protecting and promoting existing post-contact heritage places within our recreation areas. Ongoing management of such sites will be undertaken in line with the relevant historic heritage legislation and data sets including: • World Heritage List • National Heritage List • Commonwealth Heritage List • Register of the National Estate (non-statutory) • National Trust • Victorian Heritage Register • Victorian Heritage List • Local Planning Scheme Heritage Overlays	Ongoing	GMW