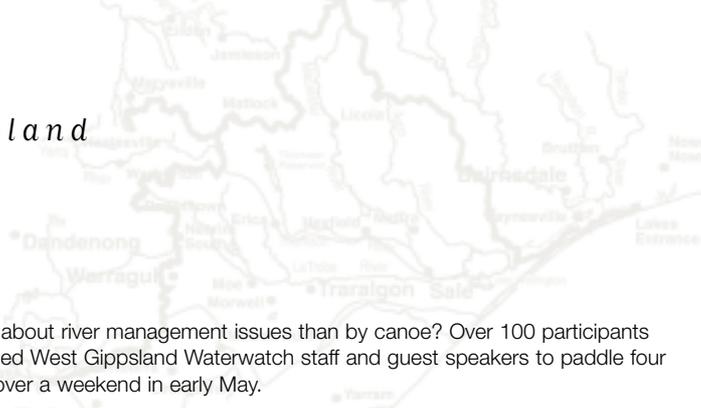




West Gippsland



Mini-buses were provided to shuttle participants to the start point of each section. Everyone was happy despite the conditions outside — note the fogged up windows!!



What better way to learn about river management issues than by canoe? Over 100 participants braved wind and rain and joined West Gippsland Waterwatch staff and guest speakers to paddle four stages of the La Trobe River over a weekend in early May.

Canoeing is a popular recreational pursuit enjoyed by the young and the young-at-heart. The West Gippsland Waterwatch canoe tour attracted participants from ages 10 to 70 and aimed to allow the community to experience the river from a different perspective and to learn about factors affecting its health.

Each stage varied in length, difficulty and the environmental issues represented. Guest speakers along the way included local landholders, a historian, West Gippsland CMA staff, and Landcare, Water Authority, DPI, Cultural Heritage, EPA and local business representatives. Short presentations covered topics such as environmental flows, irrigation issues, aquatic life and water quality, floodplain management, willows and other pest species. Landcare works, industry use of the river, carp management, bird research and local history.

Up a river with a paddle

Tanya Cowell, South Gippsland Waterwatch facilitator, believes that, 'Paddling down a river helps to bring the many and varied influences on the river into perspective. The canoe tour allows participants to appreciate the beauty (or lack of it) and the natural assets of stretches of water that exist in their own local area'.

Despite the challenging weather conditions, fun was had by all and all participants indicated that they had learned something new about the La Trobe River.

Two participants, Grant and Fiona Soosalu, provided the following feedback after the event - 'Thankyou again for organising a great event and weekend. Waterwatch, yourself and all the staff involved are to be congratulated on a great initiative and a job well done! It was a fantastic experience and we learned a lot about our beautiful river and environment and what the local organisations are doing. It was a great chance to meet the people involved and to realise we have the opportunity to also get involved and make a difference'.



The success of this canoe tour prompted the West Gippsland Waterwatch program to organise a second event along the Tarwin River in South Gippsland in November. Their success is a positive example of how outdoor pursuits and environmental education can be combined to create a positive learning experience for all.

We valued so much the opportunity to see one of our rivers from a viewpoint that would not normally be available to us. The speakers were informative and knowledgeable, the Waterwatch staff were friendly and welcoming, and the canoe company were efficient and competent. Thankyou all once again.
Colin & Margaret Armitage, Canoe tour participants.

Canoeers stopping to listen to guest speakers along the way. Some guest speakers also paddled the section while others met the canoes at various vantage points along the way.