

# Stories

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## Dairy farmers do the right thing to save wetlands

Dairy farmers living next door to the internationally significant wetland of Corner Inlet in Victoria have thrown their support behind a program to protect it from nutrient runoff and have found that this can also save them money in the process.

The picturesque Corner Inlet adjoins Wilsons Promontory National Park and is prized for its seagrass meadows, mangroves, intertidal mudflats and salt marshes that support large numbers of migratory birds, crustaceans and fish.

Dairy Australia teamed up with the local West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to deliver two key programs for farmers, with impressive results.

“Over the last few years we’ve rolled out Fert\$mart and one round of Core 4 in all catchments around Corner Inlet and engaged 90% of farmers, which is quite incredible,” says Dan Garlick from WGCMA.

“Fert\$mart is about enabling farmers to understand soil types and pasture responses

to fertiliser so it can be used more efficiently. In 2017–18 we had 32 farms participating, that’s a milking area of 5000ha and around 11,000 cows, and the maximum potential saving on farm was just under \$71,000.”

### PROGRAMS BOOST HEALTH OF CATCHMENT AND COMMUNITY

Small clusters of 10–12 dairy farmers with similar properties and soil types developed individual Fert\$mart plans with the help of qualified agronomists, and over six months shared their learnings at several collaborative workshops.

Core 4 supports actions like improved effluent management to retain nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) on farms. From 23 expressions of interest, 12 projects were funded and implementation resulted in 1.8 tonnes of P and 3 tonnes of N per year that were retained on farm and kept out of waterways.

Work will continue in supporting dairy farms in high priority catchments of Corner Inlet to better manage nutrients from leaving the farm.

Dan Garlick says dairy farmers are directly contributing to change that they can quantify, and at the same time improving local relationships with those who rely on the health of the inlet — the commercial fishing industry and recreational fishers.

“It’s only 40km from the top to the bottom of the catchment so everyone knows each other, but don’t underestimate being able to engage 90% of dairy farmers to work together. That’s quite incredible.”

**Dan Garlick, Catchment Planning & Delivery Manager, West Gippsland CMA**

“It’s difficult to measure the impact from these programs on the seagrass meadows where fish breed because it’s a dynamic system. But this is the dairy industry being proactive. There’s a real commitment to continue to work in partnership to support the health of the catchment as well as the viability of these industries,” says Dan.

West Gippsland CMA is proud of the commitment of dairy farmers and key agribusinesses in the Corner Inlet community to create a common goal and community understanding of plans to protect the inlet.

Funded by: A range of sources including Australian Government, State Government, Dairy Australia, philanthropic groups and direct investment from partners.

### LEARN MORE

- ➔ [www.wgcma.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/WGCMA-NLP-5year-2018-final-web-low-res.pdf](http://www.wgcma.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/WGCMA-NLP-5year-2018-final-web-low-res.pdf)
- ➔ [www.wgcma.vic.gov.au/our-region/projects/corner-inlet-connections](http://www.wgcma.vic.gov.au/our-region/projects/corner-inlet-connections)
- ➔ [wgcm.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Fertmart-Information-JAR-1.pdf](http://wgcm.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Fertmart-Information-JAR-1.pdf)

