

Formal submission regarding EnergyAustralia Yallourn Draft Declared Mine Rehabilitation Plan.

The Gippsland Lakes Recreational Fishing Alliance (community organisation) and Robert Caune (individual) are pleased to present their joint formal submission to EnergyAustralia Yallourn, in response to their Draft Declared Mine Rehabilitation Plan, on this day the 18th of August 2025.

Submission synopsis

Energy Australia Yallourn should offer a counter proposal to the Victorian government on how to rehabilitate the Yallourn mine site.

The current Victorian government proposal provides for an unrealistic and extremely long-time frame to fill the mine void with bulk entitlement surface water.

The twenty-five-year fill time frame will burden the project's budget with high on going annual site maintenance costs during this phase.

The current proposed rehabilitation plan offers no positive economic, social, or ecological outcomes for the Victorian community.

Counteroffer proposal

The Morwell River should be allowed to resume its previous course through the Yallourn mine site and create a run of river freshwater lake and wetland. Flood events, that have typically affected the Yallourn mine site throughout its operating history, would provide most of the water required. The envisaged project outcome would be to create a Morwell River freshwater Lakes and wetland that has the Morwell River acting as its natural headwater.

This 'new' waterway would be managed to provide habitat for the exclusive use of the catchments native fish and wildlife. The project would be planned to contribute a valuable and unique tourism and local amenity asset to the region.

The money saved by allowing floodwaters and the Morwell River to fill the mine complex would be repurposed to fund the 'Morwell River Lakes and wetlands' project.

Discussion

The Ramsar freshwater wetlands of the Gippsland Lakes are threatened by the increased salinity profile of the Gippsland Lakes. Over 40% of the freshwater inflows into the Lakes are currently harvested. The ocean entrance to the Lakes has been increased in size since 2009. Ocean levels are forecast to continue to rise in the foreseeable future, with some forecasts speculating that the outer barrier of the Gippsland Lakes will be breached by a storm event by 2027. The envisaged Morwell River Lakes and wetlands project could provide new freshwater habitat that is currently being threatened in the Gippsland Lakes.

Water quality, water volumes, and noxious species such as Carp have severely depleted freshwater native fish stocks in the Latrobe River. These depleted fish resources no longer offer any local amenity and are insufficient to attract any recreational angling tourism for the local economy.

It would be envisaged that the 'Morwell River Lakes and Wetlands' project would have an annual operating budget to maintain Carp at or below 10% of total fish biomass in the Morwell River and the lake project area. We believe that Carp control and the native fish recovery initiative could provide a unique opportunity for first nations organisations to manage and oversee a natural resource management recovery project.

Conclusion

Having the Morwell River as the natural headwater of the 'Morwell River Lakes and Wetlands' project provides the project with several potential benefits.

1. A natural headwater provides the necessary water chemistry to create and sustain the food web of this proposed waterway.
2. The Morwell River has the potential to provide much higher water quality to the project than Latrobe River water.
3. By including the Morwell River, the project area has habitat diversity, which allows a greater number of native fish and animals to be restored and protected.

The current proposal, to fill the Yallourn coal mine void with bulk entitlement water over an extended period will contribute to the ecological decline of the Latrobe River and Gippsland Lakes. It will provide no economic benefit or public amenity to the local community for the foreseeable future. It is also likely to facilitate the further growth of the Carp biomass in the river system.

The bulk entitlement, slow fill, will compound the existing challenges that currently face the Gippsland Lakes and its river catchment. The Victorian community deserves better planning than planning that is designed to create loss.

We believe that the recreational fishing community would strongly support a counter proposal such as the "Morwell River Lakes and Wetlands" project. The project, in our view, provides clear economic, environmental, and social benefits.