

12 Bemm River

Bemm River is a small town located on Sydenham Inlet. The river itself bends north of the township, entering the Inlet to the east. The Inlet is surrounded to the west by east by Cape Conran Coastal Park and to the east by Croajingolong National Park.

The town hosts various holiday cottages and accommodation, a boat ramp, bait shop and boating facilities including jetties, wharfs and launching ramps. Fishing and boating are key attractions in Bemm River.

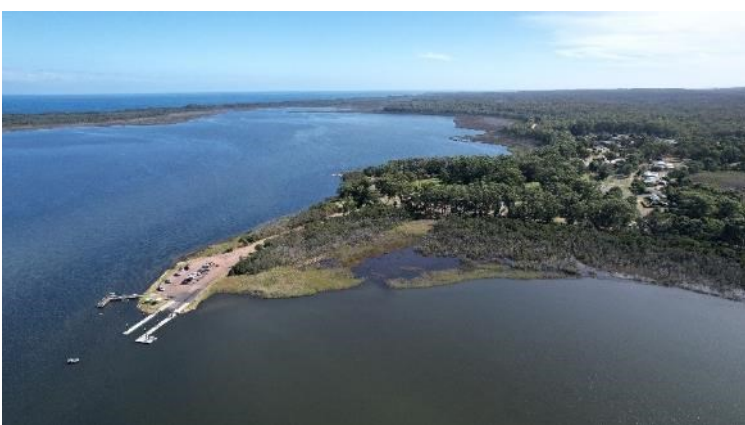


Figure 115. Bemm River locality.

12.1 Community and connection to coast

The Bemm River community is very small, with just over 70 residents, 60% of which are male. The older population has a median age of 67, with very few families and no residents younger than 20 years.

Only around a third of the population are in the labour force, with many retirees. Around half of properties are occupied, suggesting a high number of holiday homes.

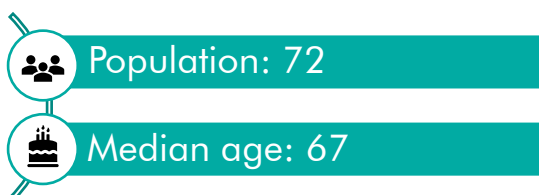


Figure 114. Key statistics for Bemm River (ABS, 2021). Note some other statistics have reduced reliability due to small population size.

While no formal designation currently exists for the area surrounding Bemm River these areas are important to a number of the region's Traditional Owner groups.

Traditional Owners were known to travel from the hills to the coast at different times of year to harvest different food sources such as abalone, mussels, shrimp and fish.





12.2 The coastal environment

The Bemm River hosts a multitude of waterways and inlets, encompassing the Sydenham Inlet, Swan Lake, and Bemm River itself. Sydenham Inlet is recognised as a high-value wetland.

Important ecological communities include:

- Coastal Saltmarsh
- Riparian Forest
- Coast Banksia Woodland
- Lowland Forest



These ecosystems provide habitat for a range of threatened species, including:

- Caspian, Little, Fairy, and Australian Gull-billed Terns
- Little Egret
- Lace Monitor
- Ground Parrot
- White-throated Needletail
- Musk Duck
- Yellow-bellied Glider
- White-bellied Sea-Eagle
- Hooded plovers

The Inlet is recognised as a high-value wetland in the Directory of Important Wetlands. The inlet, river and lakes are popular with visitors and residents for Bream fishing. They are also home to many other species like flathead, mullet, and salmon.

12.3 Coastal processes and hazards

The area is influenced by both riverine and coastal inundation. Surrounded by low-lying floodplain wetlands, inundation is an important natural process to support these ecosystems.

Some foreshore reserves and facilities are likely to be impacted by inundation, particularly in storm events. Impacted areas may include Pearl Point Road, Sydenham Parade, the boat ramp, jetties, piers and the coastal reserve itself. With sea level rise, inundation may become more frequently or permanent.

The inlet is subject to closure and rarely re-opens naturally. Flooding occurs on roads, wharves and boat ramps when the inlet is closed for extended periods.



Intermittently closed-open estuaries

The region hosts several estuaries that naturally open and close. This is influenced by river flows, rainfall, sea, and wind conditions. Some estuaries close for months or years. These naturally dynamic systems support varied ecological, cultural and social values. Artificial openings can impact on these values, with poor water quality and fish kills.



The EGCMA monitors estuary health – analysing water levels, water quality, and weather conditions for potential closures and re-openings. Protocols guide entrance management, with further information at: egcma.com.au/what-we-do/estuary-openings





12.4 Coastal uses, reserves, and facilities

The town's nickname is "The Bream Capital". It is a hot spot for recreational and competitive fishers. The Bemm River Angling Club hosts numerous fishing events and competitions for visitors and residents.

There is also a growing emphasis on embracing eco-tourism within the region, with many tourism websites advertising it as a birdwatcher's haven and walking trails destination.

The main public foreshore facilities include the Bemm River Coastal Reserve itself, the boat ramp, fishing platforms, jetties and wharfs and picnic areas.



12.5 Coastal and marine management

Council manage the coastal reserve across the township from near Banksia Street to the eastern edge of Sydenham Parade residences. Council also manage the recreation reserve. Parks Victoria manage surrounding coastal and national parks. Gippsland Ports and Park Victoria are the managers of Sydenham Inlet. The EGCMA manage river health and oversee opening of the inlet. DEECA manage the Bemm River State Forest and other Crown land.



The Bemm River Foreshore Management Plan (2014) guide management with management strategies focussed on maintaining, improving or upgrading:

- Recreational facilities, including boating facilities
- Car and trailer parking and roads
- Pedestrian linkages and access
- Natural values and vegetation

The plan also sought to clarify boundaries for on-ground management responsibility and better define Crown land boundaries.

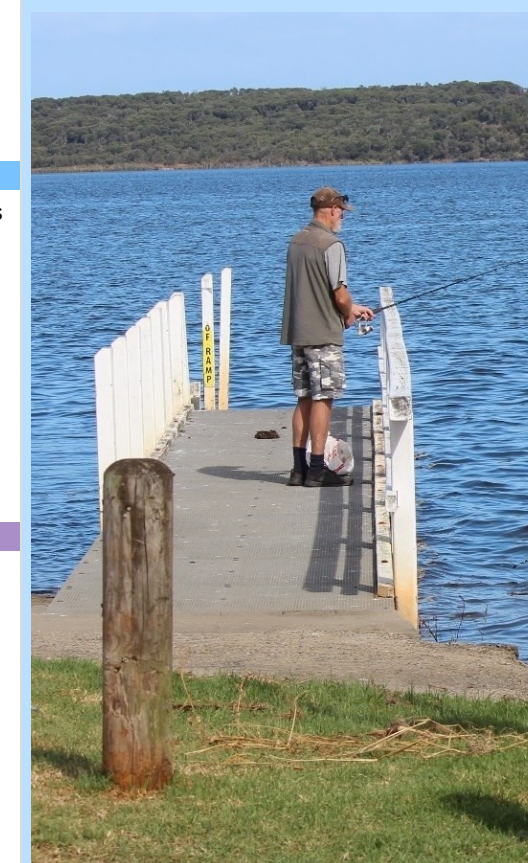
There are several recent or ongoing Council-led projects across Bemm River:

- Footpath development
- Road safety improvements

Table 20 summarises community values, challenges and opportunities across Bemm River, with focus areas for future management. Figure 116 to Figure 124 map key features, values, and management arrangements across the foreshore.

Table 24. Values, challenges and opportunities for Bemm River coastal and marine management, with focus areas for future management.

Bemm River				
	 Values	 Challenges	 Opportunities	 Focus for management
 Traditional Owners' rights, aspirations and knowledge	- Far East groups connection to Country - Significant Aboriginal Heritage places and sites (recorded and unrecorded)	- Unrecorded and unprotected sites and heritage - No Registered Aboriginal Party with unclear arrangements of who can speak for Country. - Recreational use impacts on cultural values.	- Identify unrecorded Aboriginal Heritage sites and continue planning overlays and controls to protect - Strengthen understanding of and relationships with Far East groups and desire/capacity for involvement in coastal and marine management	- Maintain existing facilities, small town character and surrounding environmental values, - Strategic vegetation management consistent with planning and overlay controls
 The marine and coastal environment	- Foreshore vegetation, natural setting and surrounding National and Coastal Parks - Important vegetation communities – coastal saltmarsh, seagrass, swamp and riparian scrub, riparian and lowland forest, and coastal banksia - Rare and threatened species - Ground Parrot, White-throated Needle-tail, Musk Duck, Yellow-bellied Glider, Australian Grayling, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, egrets, terns and plovers. - Sydenham Inlet - Directory of Important Wetlands - Diverse fish - Black Bream and Estuary Perch	- Stormwater quality and pollution from town and agricultural zones - Water quality impacts related to inlet opening and closure regime, including artificial opening - Balancing bushfire fuel management requirements with loss of native vegetation – e.g. vegetation removal controls and species selection	- Vegetation protection and enhancement, including weed, pest and access management - Continued estuary water quality and water level monitoring to inform opening requirements - Consider water-sensitive urban design options to improve stormwater quality - Holistic approach to vegetation management, including fire risk management	- Review upgraded walking paths, connectivity and improve all abilities access to water and fishing opportunities - Review safety and traffic flow arrangements - Update signage and consolidate engagement of community members to develop better understanding of community needs and values
 Natural processes and climate change	- Dynamic estuary and inlet features - Fire safety and bushfire preparedness/planning	- Flooding associated with prolonged estuary closure occurs on roads, wharves and boat ramps. - Active management of estuary required – rarely opens naturally - Changing estuary opening regimes associated with climate change and sea level rise - One road in and out for evacuation routes, with places of last resort, often on foreshores - Vegetation management in relation to fuel loads	- Strategic vegetation management and communication, incorporating bushfire management considerations - Monitoring of sediment movement around Luderick Point and any impacts on boat ramps - Investigate ecosystem responses to changing estuary conditions resulting from changes in climate and sea level. - Investigate estuary dynamics and expected changes with climate change and sea level rise.	- Improve communication of Council roles, responsibilities and activities - Work with Far East Groups to investigate and increase understanding of cultural heritage and ensure protection.
 Sustainable use and development	- Boating, fishing and water access facilities across Luderick Point – main boat ramp, jetty, small craft and kayak water access, fishing platforms. - High recreational fishing value and all abilities fishing access platforms - Recently upgraded facilities – playground, toilets, other foreshore facilities - Accommodation, camping and caravan parks to support tourism - Small village character and wilderness surrounds	- Lack of foreshore access pathways, connectivity between walking tracks and all abilities access - Poor stormwater management and occurrences of poor local water quality - Safety around Luderick Point including playground and toilet placement	- Water- and ecologically-sensitive facilities – boardwalks in areas of inundation - Walking path connectivity and all-abilities access - Apply best-practice water-sensitive urban design and stormwater controls from urban town areas - Safety, parking and traffic flow improvements	
 Stewardship, knowledge, engagement and collaboration	- Community groups - Far East Victoria Landcare, Bemm River Recreation Reserve Committee, Bemm River Progress and Improvement Association Inc. and Bemm River Community Centre - Recreational groups – Bemm River Angling Club	- Perceived lack of Council communication and opportunities to engage - Confusing signage around boat ramps	- Consolidate community input into key strategies, including CMMP - Improve communication of Council roles and activities - Upgrades to foreshore signage	



Bemm River mapping: Traditional Owners and cultural values



Traditional Owners and Cultural Values

Areas of Cultural Heritage Sensitivity

Other Features

Creeks and waterways

Inset map

Registered Aboriginal Parties

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

Other Registered Aboriginal Parties

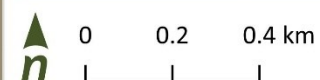


Figure 116. Registered Aboriginal Party areas, culturally sensitive areas, and Joint Management areas for Bemm River.

Bemm River mapping: Environmental values



Figure 117. Key coastal and marine environmental values, including protected areas, ecological vegetation classes (EVCs) and biotypes for Bemm River.

Bemm River mapping: Environmental overlays



Figure 118. Environmental and land management planning overlays for Bemm River.



Figure 119. Coastal hazard mapping of Statewide coastal hazard data as part of the Victorian Governments Future Coasts Project and Victorian Coastal Hazard Assessment for Bemm River.

Bemm River mapping: Coastal protection and drainage infrastructure



Figure 120. Coastal protection and drainage infrastructure for Bemm River.

Bemm River mapping: Recreation and transport



Figure 121. Recreation facilities and transport networks for Bemm River.

Bemm River mapping: Planning scheme zones



Figure 122. Planning scheme zones for Bemm River.

Bemm River mapping: Planning overlays



Figure 123. Other planning scheme overlays for Nungurner.

Bemm River mapping: Land management arrangements



Figure 124. Public land management arrangements for Bemm River.



12.6 Management actions

Table 25 details the CMMP management actions for Bemm River.

Figure 125 presents site-specific management actions and maps activity and recreation nodes.

Table 25. Bemm River management actions

Long-term objective	No.	Action	Timeframe	Council role	Partners
Objective 1: Acknowledge Traditional Owners' rights, aspirations and knowledge	BR1.1	Guided by Far East Traditional Owner Groups, support identification, management and protection of cultural heritage values across Bemm River coastal areas. In alignment with Shire Wide actions, this includes: - Supporting Far East Traditional Owner Groups to identify unrecorded cultural heritage sites. - Continuing to implement appropriate planning overlays and controls such as Cultural Heritage Management Plans to protect cultural heritage. - Collaborating with Far East Traditional Owner Groups to better understand cultural values and inform future protection, in alignment with Action BR1.2. - Incorporating culturally-sensitive design into all works across Council-managed coastal reserves.	Ongoing	Participate	Far East Traditional Owner Groups
	BR1.2	Continue to advance relationships with Far East Groups, including Bidwell, Yuin, and Ngarigo Monero peoples, and strengthen EGSC understanding of desire and capacity among Far East Groups for collaboration in coastal and marine management across Bemm River.	0-3 years, then ongoing	Lead	Far East Traditional Owner Groups
Objective 2: Protect and enhance the marine and coastal environment	BR2.1	Continue to support EGCMA and citizen science programs to monitor estuary water quality and levels to inform opening arrangements of Sydenham Inlet. Communicate management roles and responsibilities with reference to EGCMA entrance management protocols. Aligns with Shire wide Action EG5.2.	Ongoing	Participate	EGCMA, Parks Victoria, citizen science programs
Objective 3: Respect natural processes and strengthen resilience to climate change	BR3.1	Investigate options to manage emerging coastal hazard risks across the Bemm River foreshore, including measures to avoid risk and the use of nature-based solutions.	3-5 years	Lead	Parks Victoria, DEECA, EGCMA, research institutes
	BR3.2	Collaborate with land managers and EGCMA to investigate and plan for Sydenham Inlet estuary opening regime changes expected with climate change and sea level rise. Consider opportunities for accommodation and adaptation of surrounding built and natural environment, impacts of increased flooding associated with prolonged closures, and the reducing need for artificial estuary opening.	5+ years	Participate	EGCMA, land managers
	BR3.3	Continue to contribute to strategic bushfire recovery and management across coastal and marine areas through: - DEECA, Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) and CFA collaboration. - Strategic vegetation management, considering environmental values and fuel management loads. - Review of bushfire recovery projects, funding and outstanding actions. - Aligning and coordinating bushfire recovery efforts with CMMP objectives, principles and actions. - Strategic bushfire management activity communication (through Action BR5.1 and aligning with Action EG3.4).	0-3 years	Participate	DEECA, FFMVic



Long-term objective	No.	Action	Timeframe	Council role	Partners
Objective 4: Use and develop sustainably	BR4.1	In alignment with Action EG4.1, utilise activity and recreation nodes to clearly delineate distinct purposes and uses within foreshore zones, and ensure efficient development through co-location, partnership use, and consolidation of community assets. Includes delineation of: Bemm River (Luderick Point) Boat Ramp area as recreation node, supporting parking, boat access, fishing facilities, toilets, playground and other recreational facilities.	0-3 years	Lead	All other land managers
	BR4.2	In alignment with East Gippsland Housing and Settlement Strategy (2023), continue to foster Rural Town character and prioritisation of natural setting through: - Maintenance of existing foreshore facilities and investment in facilities, based on assessment of need. - Only small-scale housing development within existing residentially zoned areas. - Promoting adherence to township boundaries, planning overlays and land use planning.	Ongoing	Lead	
	BR4.3	Progress and complete Bemm River Footpath Development project. Review designs and planning to ensure proposed works and upgrades align with CMMP objectives, principles, actions and State policy. Review and monitor path upgrade to understand if further works are required to improve alignment with community values and needs, and/or incorporate ecosensitive design improvement opportunities.	5+ years	Lead	
	BR4.4	Undertake review of town drainage arrangements and maintenance regimes. Investigate potential for drainage upgrades, improved maintenance and implementation of best-practice water-sensitive urban design options to improve stormwater quality entering the Inlet.	5+ years	Lead	
	BR4.5	Improve user safety through review and upgrades to Luderick Point including: - Update to boat ramp road markings, parking demarcation and signage. - Review playground and toilet siting and implement strategies to improve safety (e.g. formalised pedestrian crossing, fencing, signage).	0-3 years	Lead	
Objective 5: Take a stewardship approach, build understanding and knowledge, engage and collaborate	BR5.1	Continue to support and collaborate with local volunteer community and environment groups e.g. Far East Victoria Landcare, Bemm River Recreation Reserve Committee, Bemm River Progress and Improvement Association Inc. and Bemm River Community Centre. Includes: - Promoting community group activities in the coastal and marine space. - Fostering open communication and engagement channels with community groups. - Leveraging existing engagement information and knowledge, established community networks and place managers to improve communication of and engagement with of Council activities. - Continuing to seek opportunities to increase community involvement, including through community grants and Council partnerships. - Promoting and increasing citizen science opportunities (including environmental monitoring - Action BM2.2).	Ongoing	Lead	All other management agencies, environmental and community groups and organisations



Long-term objective	No.	Action	Timeframe	Council role	Partners
Objective 5: Take a stewardship approach, build understanding and knowledge, engage and collaborate (cont.)	BR5.2	In alignment with Shire wide Action EG5.3, review, consolidate and update foreshore signage across Bemm River to: • Increase clarity of communication. • Promote activities around Bemm River. • Improve safety. • Celebrate unique environments, history and culture. • Support implementation of activity and recreation nodes (Action BR4.1). May include updated township mapping.	3-5 years	Lead	Other land managers, VFA, Far East Traditional Owner groups



Figure 125. Bemm River management actions and nodes