



# Wimmera Southern Mallee Value of Recreational and Environmental Water: Trends 2016-17 to 2023-24



June 2024



# THIS PROJECT IS AN INITIATIVE OF



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### E1 Background

This project has been a joint initiative of Wimmera Development Association, GMMWater, the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, and Local Councils. The project has been conducted over an extended period from 2016-17 to 2023-24, assessing economic and social contribution made by the local lakes, and weir pools. This document presents a summary of trends and insights across the eight years, noting that there were only partial assessments conducted in 2021-22 and 2023-24.

### E2 Findings from Eight-Year Trends

The eight-year Wimmera Southern Mallee recreational and environmental water assessment has concluded:

- ❖ The lakes and weir pools are well understood and well utilised as recreational assets by Wimmera Southern Mallee residents. These waterbodies are fundamental to community wellbeing, irrespective of the size of the communities in the residential ‘catchment areas’ of the waterbodies. Many smaller towns consider their recreational waterbody among their town’s greatest assets.
- ❖ As tourism assets, the lakes and weir pools have shifted substantially from being rated as “underdeveloped” for the first 3-4 years of the longitudinal assessments to becoming integral to the region’s tourism product range by 2023-24. Relatively sound water security has:
  - Brought confidence to visitors in making holiday and mini-break bookings.
  - Stimulated a large-scale fish stocking program, implemented by the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) and this has attracted new recreational fishers and fishing groups to the region.
  - Provided a base for more on-water and adjacent to water events.
  - Supporting emerging tourism attractions such as the Silo Art Trail and historic attractions (Stick Shed, Wood’s Farming and Heritage Museum, Wheatlands Museum, Wimmera Mallee Pioneer Museum, etc) by ‘surprising visitors’ with such attractive and either serene or vibrant water assets.

Increased water security has been complemented by large investment in infrastructure and accommodation facilities across many of the waterbodies.

- ❖ The growing tourism reputation of the Wimmera Mallee Tourism region has had a clear flow-on impact to the lakes and weirs but strategic planning to maximise the impact has only just begun. Even in the Grampians, the lakes and weirs could be more integrated with other tourism attractions.
- ❖ Economic contribution peaked at \$33.68 million (in 2018-19) during the assessment<sup>1</sup> years and dropped to \$24.89 million in the depth of the COVID pandemic, rebounding to \$29.73 million in 2022-23.

<sup>1</sup> These economic contributions include all waterbodies assessed during the relevant year, and there were some variations from year to year.

- ❖ Health benefits have consistently been valued at around \$1.5 to \$2 million per annum for WSM resident participants at the waterbodies and between \$2.5 and \$4.2 million per annum for all residents of regional Victoria. These measurable physical and mental health benefits (including reduced risk of breast cancer, coronary heart disease, diabetes, bowel cancer, stroke, anxiety and depression) are only part of the complete picture of social benefits. Community satisfaction, pride, reduced social isolation and volunteering were all reported to be enhanced by having functional lakes and weirs.
- ❖ People touring the region to view the silo art trail and other nature and heritage attractions were frequently found staying and recreating at the waterbodies. This has also led to off-season participation (winter and early spring) becoming more significant as the years progressed.
- ❖ Passive participation (choosing to exercise and take advantage of the amenity, views and environment near the waterbodies) has been significant and very important to the recognition of the waterbodies. Passive participation increased in the early onset of the COVID 19 restrictions when higher numbers of local residents took the opportunity to walk, cycle and/or jog along waterways as a critical part of their exercise 'escape' during pandemic lockdown.
- ❖ There were some variations to a direct correlation between participation and economic contribution due to:
  - Shorter and longer average lengths of stay by overnight participants.
  - Changes in expenditure per person, both for day visitors and overnight trips, in response to prevailing economic conditions.
  - Availability (and opening hours) of local businesses.
  - Reasons for visiting and the nature of participation.
  - Expenditure by suppliers to the lakes steadily increasing until the COVID pandemic and then remaining at a high level, creating a lead-and-lag effect on the level of recreational participation.
- ❖ In the first year of the longitudinal assessment there was great enthusiasm among Wimmera Southern Mallee residents at the return of water to many of the lakes and weir pools which had been dry or too low for recreational activities. Over subsequent years, increased confidence in secure water had a considerable impact on both local residents and visitors making plans in advance to spend holidays and weekends at the waterbodies.

### **E3 Future Directions**

- ❖ Reorienting urban development in Victorian cities and towns along the bays, rivers or lakes on which they are located, only commenced in the 1990s but has since accelerated with the implementation of new river boulevards, marinas and commercial developments along their river and lake fronts. In the Wimmera Mallee, use of terms 'river town', 'lake town' and 'wetlands area' have been added to town signage and promotional materials, but the potential is much greater.
- ❖ Infrastructure like trails, tracks, cabins, new camping sites, amenities blocks, waste disposal, water and power have all received noticeable new investment over the eight-year recreational water assessment period and there is scope for further improvement if the lakes and weir pools are to maximise their potential for recreational visitors.

It is understood that this direction may not be appropriate for all the waterbodies: Any proposed improvement should be subject to minimal environmental, cultural or heritage impacts and to the requirements of traditional owners, local communities and other stakeholders. Some lakes are clearly closely guarded “best kept secrets” and are frequented mostly by local residents, and the ambiance and attributes of these assets could be perceived to be reduced, rather than enhanced, with further investment in infrastructure or facilities.

- ❖ Attributes of the waterbodies are well known to a majority of local residents, and to regular visitors from other regions and interstate who know one, or perhaps a few, of the Wimmera Southern Mallee waterbodies to which they return on a regular or occasional basis. Touring visitors who are exploring the region for the first time are often surprised by the opportunities for caravans and recreational vehicles to stay by attractive lakes and weir pools and to take advantage of their recreational opportunities. These responses, and the clear linkages across the WSM waterbodies network, suggest that developing and formalising links, creating themes and cross-promoting has potential to increase participation and socio-economic contribution, and to use the waterbodies as an important part of the Wimmera Mallee’s growing reputation as a tourism destination.
- ❖ Events are a definite ‘value add’ to all lakes and weir pools where they are held. Hosting major events opens participation to people who are not regular visitors, and they provide very significant economic contributions to the local areas. Apart from a few fishing/angling clubs holding competitions for members at different lakes and weir pools across the region, there are no linked events at the recreational waterbodies in the Wimmera Southern Mallee. There is potential to coordinate series of events across the region for staged competitions or social activities (eg in open water swimming, bi and triathlons, fishing, rowing/kayaking, fun runs, festivals, etc).
- ❖ Initial suggestions for future activation are made for each waterbody on potential improvements within (up to) five category areas, namely:
  - Infrastructure
  - Facilities
  - Recreational water trails
  - Cross promotions
  - Potential events.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This longitudinal project was undertaken during 2016-17 to 2023-24 by Street Ryan under direction from a Steering Group comprising:

- Mark Fletcher, Project Manager, Wimmera Southern Mallee Development
- Tony Baker, Statutory and Strategy Manager, Wimmera CMA
- Bernie Dunn, Co-ordinator Water Resources and Recreation Strategy, GWMWater
- James Goldsmith, Wimmera Mallee Lakes Alliance
- Jeff Woodward, Wimmera Mallee Tourism.

This group provided advice, direction and support in collection of data from Wimmera Southern Mallee businesses, recreational water facility committees of management, and recreational water users. Their input and contribution is gratefully acknowledged.

Street Ryan was supported by Sport Business Partners/Solucio in the estimation of health benefits for the recreational water facilities, Insight Communications assisted with interviews in the early years, and Wimmera Southern Mallee Development assisted with interviews at selected events throughout the assessment years.

### 1.2 SCOPE

The project has been a joint initiative of Wimmera Southern Mallee Development (formerly Wimmera Development Association), Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, GWMWater and Local Councils. Since reporting of the socio-economic contributions commenced, after the first year, the project has supported development of facilities, government grant applications and funding support, as well as planning for future water allocations. It has also demonstrated the value of environmental and recreational water to the community and government for use by event managers, media organisations and a range of agencies.

Economic contributions are measured in the 'recreational water supply chain' at three levels:

- Level 1: Service providers (supplying products and services to the lakes/weirs) including water, camping/caravanning, maintenance, construction, management, research and catering.
- Level 2: Users of the Recreational Water Lakes/Weir Pools including residents, community groups and visitors.
- Level 3: Local businesses (servicing the users of the lakes/weirs) including accommodation, food services, health, sport and recreation, transport, retail and personal services.

Interviews with recreational water participants and businesses (levels 1 and 2 in the supply chain) were conducted in Summer and Autumn months each year except year one (2016-17) when interviews were confined to Autumn. In addition, the Spring month of November was added to the interviewing schedule from 2018-19. Restrictions imposed for the COVID 19 pandemic of 2020 not only made it impossible to interview recreational water users from mid-March 2020, it also shut down the waterbodies until the end of the 'first wave' of the pandemic. The assessment in 2021-22 was confined to three major events (two fishing competitions and a barefoot skiing event), and in 2023-24 only four waterbodies were covered: Wimmera River sites in Horsham, Dimboola and Jeparit, and Rocklands Reservoir.

Busy school holiday periods, public holidays and major events, were explicitly included each year in the interview processes, and the types of visitation during other seasons is likely to be somewhat different. Bias associated with a restricted interview period was addressed in discussions with service providers at the recreational water facilities and with committees of management. Some interviews with supplier organisations (level 3 in the supply chain) were conducted in tandem with the recreational water participants and town businesses, and many were undertaken in the final months of each year to enable confirmation discussions on the full year's participation numbers.

Over the eight-year period, 33 recreational waterbodies were included in the assessment across 8 Local Government Areas. These were:

- Buloke Shire
  - Tchum Lake
  - Lake Watchem
  - Wooroonook Lake
  - Donald Caravan Park Lake (Folletti Lake)
  - Green Lake, Sea Lake
- Horsham Rural City
  - Wimmera River at Horsham
  - Taylors Lake
  - Green Lake
  - Lake Toolondo
  - Natimuk Lake
- Hindmarsh Shire
  - Wimmera River at Dimboola
  - Wimmera River at Jeparit
  - Nhill Lake
  - Lake Hindmarsh
  - Rainbow Lake
- Southern Grampians Shire
  - Rocklands Reservoir
- Northern Grampians Shire
  - Walkers Lake
  - Lake Fyans
  - Lake Bellfield
  - Lake Wartook
  - Lake Lonsdale.
- West Wimmera Shire
  - Lake Charlegrark
  - Lake Wallace
  - Lake Ratzcastle
  - Lake Bringalbert
  - Harrow Weir Pool
- Yarriambiack Shire
  - Beulah weir pool
  - Brim weir pool
  - Warracknabeal weir pool
  - Lake Lascelles
  - Lake Marma
  - Turkey Bottom Lake
- Rural City of Mildura
  - Lake Ouyen.



Twenty-two waterbodies were included in all six full assessment years, and eleven were added for shorter periods:

- Green Lake at Sea Lake was included from 2018-19 following rehabilitation work allowing the lake to be filled from the Murray River system.
- Lake Toolondo was included in from 2017-18.
- Natimuk Lake was included in 2017-18 but the lake remained dry throughout seven of the eight years and there was negligible recreational use as a result.
- Lake Hindmarsh was included in 2016-17 and 2022-23 but the lake remained dry throughout the intervening years.
- Rocklands Reservoir, and a host of sites around this very large lake, were included only in 2018-19 and 2023-24.
- Harrow weir pool was included only in 2016-17.
- Lake Ratzcastle was included from 2017-18.
- Lake Bringalbert was included from 2018-19.
- Lake Ouyen was included from 2019-20 following reconstruction work allowing the lake to be filled from the Murray River system.
- Rainbow Lake and Turkey Bottom Lake were included in 2022-23.



## 2. PARTICIPATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS

### 2.1 VISITATION AND RECREATION MARKET SEGMENTS

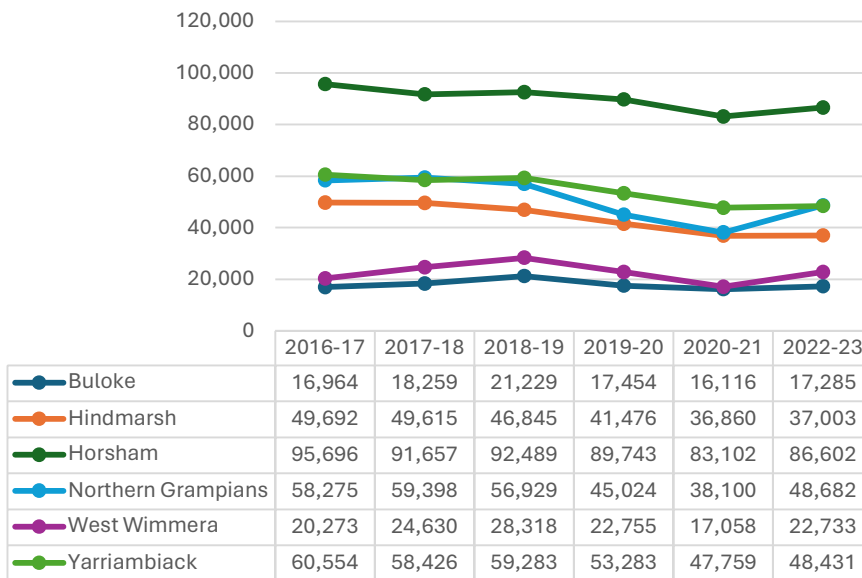
Total recreational water participation (in those lakes and weir pools covered throughout the assessment years) increased gradually from 2016-17 to reach a peak in 2018-19. In 2019-20 and 2020-21 reduced water levels in some lakes, poor water quality, reduced travel during the height of Victorian bushfires, and the COVID pandemic combined to reduce total participation by 21.7% as shown in Figure 2.1. Flooding and inaccessibility to several waterbodies in 2022-23 resulted in only partial recovery from the COVID affected years and total participation remained 14.5% below the 2018-19 peak.

Within the region, at Local Government Area level, the fluctuations in total participation are more pronounced and the differences were due to one or more of the following reasons in any one year:

- Travel restrictions (primarily due to COVID).
- High or low water levels.
- Good or poor water quality (including blue-green algae warnings).
- Flooding events and flood warnings.
- Early or late agricultural harvest timetables.
- Activities and events at the lakes.
- Strong and weak fishing and yabbying seasons.
- New amenities and infrastructure (amenities blocks, cabins, platforms/jetties, etc).
- Increased activity at nearby events and tourist attractions.

Horsham Rural City consistently had the highest total participation predominantly due to high day visitors at the Wimmera River in Horsham. Lakes in West Wimmera suffered the greatest drops in participation as a direct result of COVID pandemic travel restrictions (especially impacting visits from nearby South Australian communities) and **dwindling water levels in their naturally filled catchments**. Buloke, Yarriambiack and Hindmarsh Shires all benefited from new, pipeline supported, lakes being added to their recreational waterbody portfolio: Green Lake at Sea Lake, Turkey Bottom at Yaapeet, and Lake Rainbow, respectively.

**Figure 2.1 Total Recreational Water Participants**



Lakes where low water levels were too low to support recreational activities (and in some cases were completely dry) during the years 2019-20 to 2021-22 were:

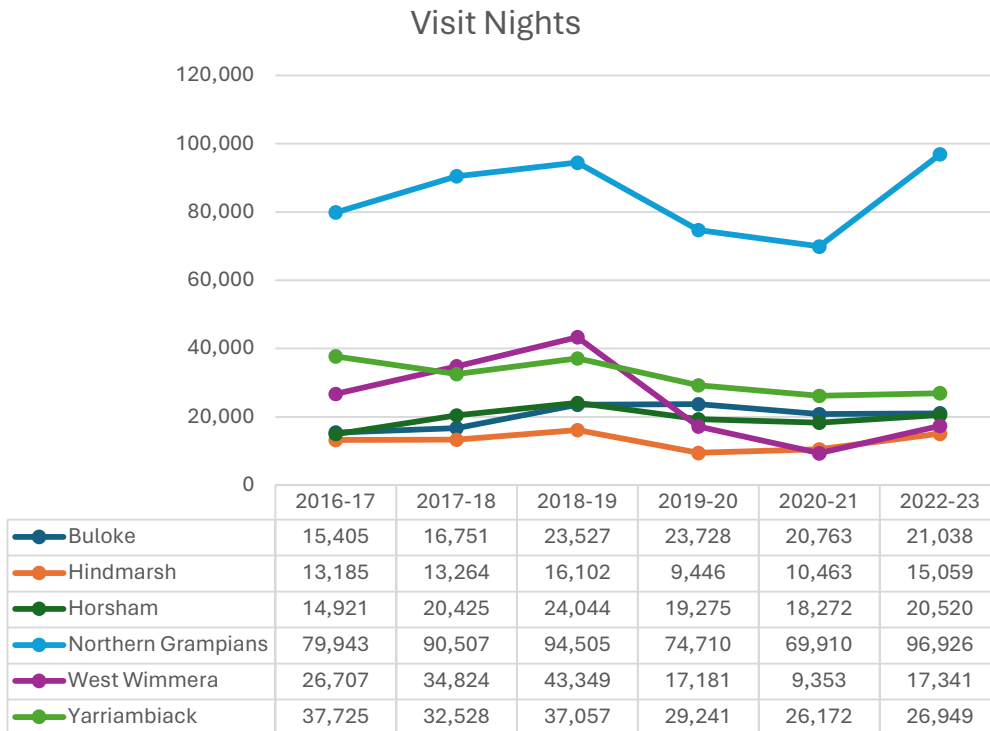
- Lake Bringalbert
- Lake Ratzcastle
- Toolondo Reservoir
- Lake Lonsdale
- Nhill Lake.

Lakes where water quality was poor (including blue-green algae blooms, odours, and weed impacting on recreation) for extended periods of time were:

- Green Lake, Horsham.
- Walkers Lake.
- Lake Marma.
- Lake Lonsdale.
- Lake Wallace.
- Taylors Lake.
- Lake Toolondo.
- Wooroonook Lake.

Trends in overnight visitation were similar to those for total visitation but Northern Grampians Shire was dominant as the overnight vacation destination in the region.

**Figure 2.2 Visit Nights at Wimmera Southern Mallee Waterbodies**



Families constitute the largest proportion of recreational participants. One of the previous “value of recreational water” reports noted that *“retirees and older travellers are prominent at some waterbodies and there is good potential to increase visitation and participation by older cohorts with:*

- *More accommodation options*
- *Improved marketing of the waterbodies as a complement to the region’s trails*
- *Greater food service offers/responses in the towns servicing the waterbodies”.*

Local Councils, State agencies and other stakeholders have acknowledged this potential and considerable investment has been made in recent years to capitalise. For example, new multiple self-contained cabins have been funded and constructed, or are under development, at:

- Donald Park Lake
- Wimmera River, Dimboola
- Wimmera River, Horsham
- Yarriambiack Creek, Warracknabeal
- Wooroonook Lake
- Lake Watchem
- Tchum Lake
- Green Lake at Sea Lake
- Wimmera River, Jeparit
- Lake Charlegrark.

Marketing initiatives in directional and interpretive signage have been implemented, and several of the towns which service the waterbodies have scaled-up their range, quality and trading hours in food service to meet the needs of recreational water participants (most notably in Horsham, Warracknabeal and Dimboola).

Figure 2.3 shows the relative population age distribution of recreational water users has been quite consistent over the 2016-17 to 2023-24 period. Consistent levels of participation throughout the age cohorts also show that the recreational lakes offer activities for a lifetime.

The ‘shape’ of the age distribution graphs was similar each year, with a general tendency towards a balanced structure (strong representation across age-groups). Factors influencing the small changes in age structure over the period were:

- Interviews with recreational participants extended over more months each year<sup>2</sup> and encompassed Spring to Autumn, when families and younger visitors are able to make use of the waterbodies (public holidays, school holidays, annual recreation leave and warmer weather). Non-interview months have a larger proportion of older visitors to the waterways, but these are times when participation is very low.
- The number of significant events (fishing, rowing, sailing, running/walking, and cultural) at the waterbodies increased over the eight years (despite some event cancellations in 2020 and 2021) and these tended to attract younger entrants and participants.
- The silo art trail had an impact in increasing the proportion of older visitors to the waterbodies, but this was only significant in the Wimmera Mallee Shires and insufficient to outweigh the age structure profile across the region.

<sup>2</sup> Interview schedules covered October to May, with shorter timeframes within this range in some years.

**Figure 2.3 Age Structure of Recreational Water Participants**

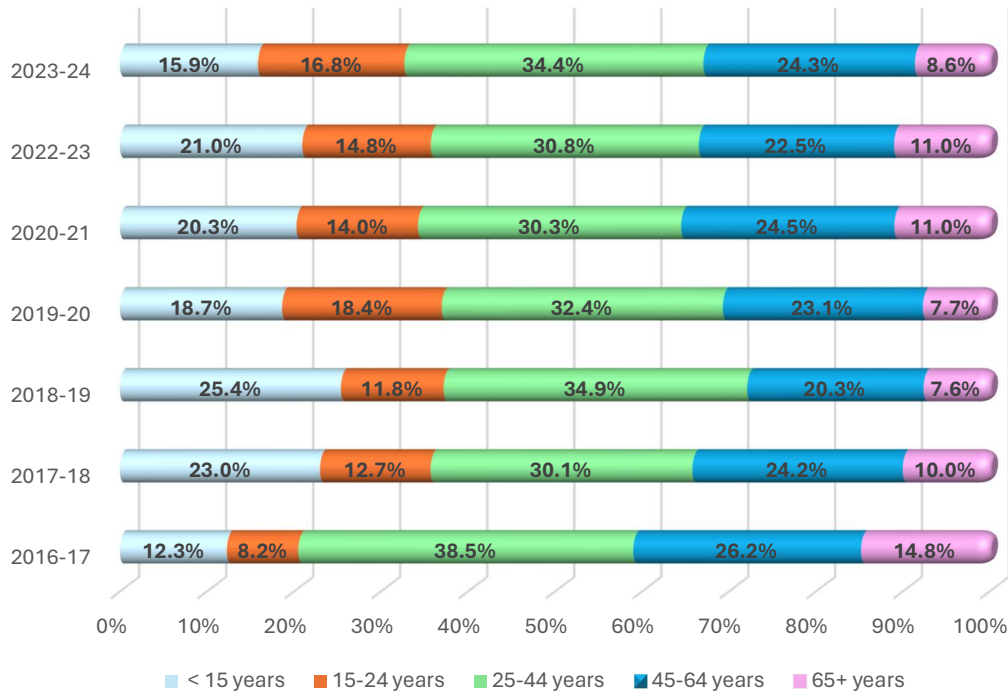
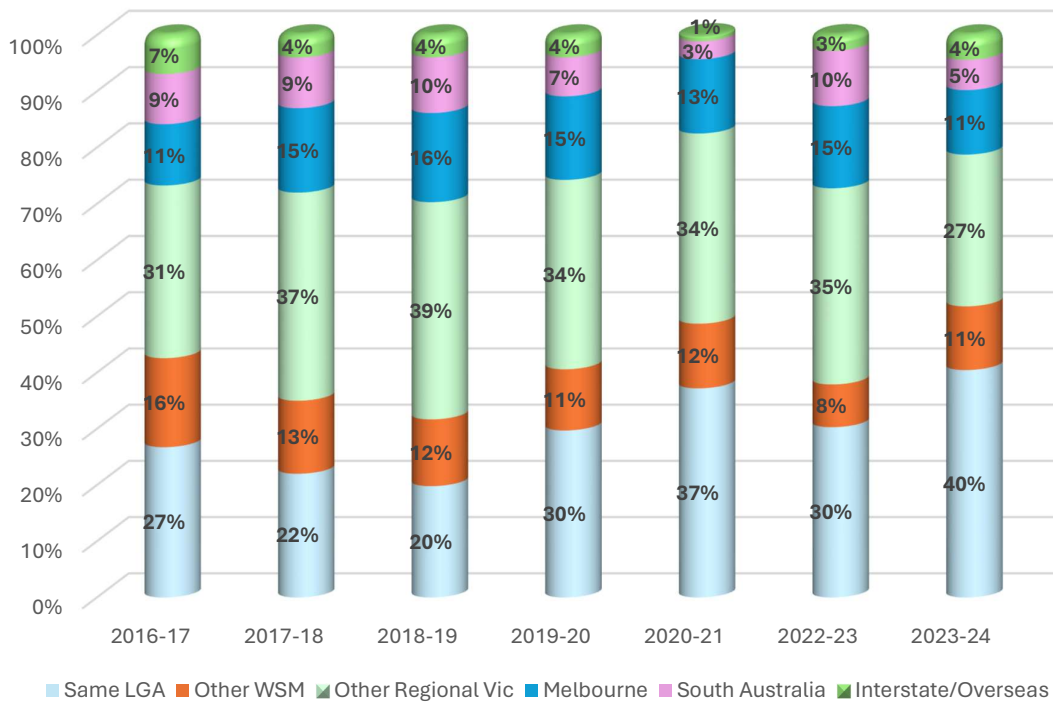


Figure 2.4 reveals the percentages of recreational water visitors are dominated by people from regional Victoria. Over the eight years, regional Victorian visitors peaked at 83% in 2020-21 (the most COVID affected year), but even at its lowest (in 2018-19) visitation was 71% of all visitors.

‘Locals’ from the same municipality or the broader Wimmera Southern Mallee was also quite stable, varying between a maximum of 51% in 2023-24 (when interviews were confined to Wimmera River sites) and 32% in 2018-19 when visitors from further afield were at their highest. Notably the percentage of local participants declined gradually over the three years 2016-17 to 2018-19 as the ‘novelty’ of water security dwindled and people chose recreation and vacations in other locations. Local participation rebounded in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 COVID years and beyond. Passive participation by locals showed a definite increase in during and since the COVID lockdown periods.



**Figure 2.4: Residential Locations of Interviewed Recreational Water Participants 2016-17 to 2023-24**



**2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION TRENDS**

While generally true that there is a positive correlation between participation and economic contribution, there were notable variations in the relationship between the two over the assessment years due to:

- Shorter and longer average lengths of stay by overnight participants. Generally, the average length of stay by overnight visitors has increased over the assessment years.
- Changes in expenditure per person, both for day visitors and overnight trips, in response to prevailing economic conditions during the relevant year.
- Availability (and opening hours) of local businesses where money could be spent.
- Reasons for visiting and the nature of participation, with events, reunions and functions tending to have highest average expenditures, followed by larger touring groups, and young singles and older couples tending to have the lowest average expenditures.
- Expenditure by suppliers to the waterbodies steadily increased up to 2020-21 and then fell somewhat. This expenditure is somewhat independent of the level of recreational participants, or perhaps has a ‘lead and lag’ effect on participation (through maintenance and management commitments, research and operational initiatives, fish stocking and water supply).

Table 2.1 indicates that direct economic contribution from water users/participants is related to participant numbers, especially overnight visitors and active day participants which dominate the direct economic contribution at this level in the recreational water supply chain. The table also confirms that direct contribution by suppliers is not directly correlated to participation at the lakes, but arguably has a lag effect (ie supplier investment stimulates participation in subsequent years rather than the same year).

Even though suppliers include committees of management, caravan parks, camping grounds, other accommodation providers and event managers (whose direct expenditure is strongly linked to participation) the largest part of direct expenditures in the ‘supplier category’ is made by statutory agencies<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 2.1 Participation and Economic Contribution Summary**

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2022-23
<b>Participation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>
Overnight Visitors	56,887	62,730	76,680	46,869	38,355	44,317
Visit Nights	196,088	208,300	296,655	175,367	157,684	198,311
Av. Nights	3.45	3.32	3.87	3.74	4.11	4.47
Active day participation	78,156	77,022	84,886	63,038	54,948	74,445
Passive day participation	163,189	162,937	166,622	172,240	158,391	163,380
Total participation	298,232	302,689	328,187	282,148	251,399	282,142
Number of people	85,135	77,011	93,225	67,051	66,009	76,385
Av. Frequency	3.50	3.93	3.52	4.21	3.81	3.69
<b>Economic Contribution</b>	<b>\$ million</b>	<b>\$ million</b>	<b>\$ million</b>	<b>\$ million</b>	<b>\$ million</b>	<b>\$ million</b>
Suppliers	\$6.77	\$9.23	\$11.15	\$11.83	\$9.35	\$10.50
Recreational Participants	\$8.78	\$9.21	\$10.64	\$6.96	\$6.72	\$8.37
Business and Multiplier	\$11.99	\$11.73	\$11.89	\$9.70	\$8.83	\$10.86
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$27.54</b>	<b>\$30.18</b>	<b>\$33.68</b>	<b>\$28.49</b>	<b>\$24.89</b>	<b>\$29.73</b>

At the start of the assessment years (in 2016-17) there was great enthusiasm among Wimmera Southern Mallee residents at the return of water to many of the lakes which had been dry or too low for recreational activities. Increased confidence in secure water had a considerable impact on both local residents and visitors making plans in advance to spend holidays and weekends at WSM lakes and weir pools.

After eight years of relatively secure water levels in a majority of the waterbodies, it is clear:

- Wimmera Southern Mallee region and other country Victorian residents continue to be the predominant recreational water users. The network of waterbodies around the region make an important economic and social contribution.
- Participation has been solid during buoyant economic conditions. Good broadacre farming seasons combined with good commodity prices have been regular during at least the last five assessment years. This has assisted recreational water participation but has also encouraged many regional farming families to take holiday breaks elsewhere.
- The growing tourism reputation of the Wimmera Southern Mallee has had a flow-on impact to the recreational waterbodies. People touring the region to view the silo art trail and other nature and heritage attractions were frequently found staying and enjoying the water.

<sup>3</sup> Note: This table includes all lakes and weir pools assessed in the relevant year, and there were some variations in the number of facilities covered each year.

### **3 INSIGHTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

#### **3.1 INCREASING RECOGNITION OF WATERWAYS IN VICTORIA**

Aboriginal Australia places great importance on waterways and waterbodies as central features of culture, livelihoods and lifestyle. Yet, since the beginning of European settlement in Victoria until the very end of the twentieth century, towns and cities were built around a focus on industry and transport, and this was not complemented by development which took advantage of the recreational and social benefits of water assets.

Even in the major coastal cities of Melbourne and Geelong developments which maximise access and outlook to waterbodies (Port Phillip Bay, the Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers and Southbank and Docklands areas in Melbourne, and Corio Bay and Barwon River in Geelong) only commenced in the 1990s. Activation of these water assets has since progressed at pace so that river and bay precincts are now the heartbeat of these cities. In inland Victoria, Mildura, Echuca, Koondrook, and Yarrawonga, for example, have begun to implement new enhanced river boulevards, marinas and commercial developments along their river and lake fronts in recent years.

In the Wimmera Mallee, residents of some Wimmera towns acknowledge their waterbody as the town's greatest asset. Hopetoun, Edenhope, Murtoa and Jeparit are prime examples. In some cases, terms like 'river town', 'lake town' and 'wetlands area' have been added to town signage and promotional materials. The potential is much greater.

Horsham has made great strides in activating sections of the Wimmera River in the 2020s to date, with construction of a second pedestrian bridge, improved walkways, a nature and water play park, new picnic and barbecue areas, river viewing and fishing platforms, and an 'activation area' for food vans, live music and gatherings. Capital works at Lake Fyans over the same period have also secured its immediate future as the region's pre-eminent recreational waterbody.

#### **3.2 ACTIVATING THE WATERBODIES**

Over the eight years of recreational water assessments, there has been increased confidence in making bookings, planning holidays and even short-breaks among WSM residents and other regional Victorian recreational water users. This confidence has been greatest in those lakes where GWMWater has given water security from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline, but it was also evident at some of the ground-fed and runoff lakes such as Lakes Wallace and Charlegrark. The increased confidence extended beyond individuals, families and small user groups to larger groups organising functions (family reunions, celebrations, and other special occasions), fishing and other sporting clubs, and community group organised events, all of which have shown indications of becoming secure fixtures in the annual calendar.

Prevailing economic, climatic and emergency conditions have quite measurably affected the level of participation and the expenditure by participants at the waterbodies, as the following examples demonstrate:

- Bushfires and the threat of bushfires over the summer of 2019-20 had an overall negative impact on the number of people visiting the Wimmera Southern Mallee region from Melbourne, regional Victoria and interstate due to severe fire climatic conditions, fire outbreaks in New South Wales and Victoria over the December-January period, and a reluctance to travel to areas with a recent history of bushfires (such as the Grampians).

This was a significant contributing factor in the drop in recreational water participants from regional Victoria, Melbourne, interstate and overseas; from 68.0% in 2018-19 to 58.5% in 2019-20.

- Relatively favourable grain growing seasons throughout the assessment period encouraged local residents in the Wimmera Southern Mallee to make use of their recreational waterbodies for at least a few days during year. This tendency peaked in the first year (2016-17) when the confluence of a good season coincided with high water levels and generally good water quality for the first time in many years. By 2019-20, there was some ‘drop-off’ in this tendency to holiday at a local waterbody, with many people advising that a proportion of local farming families had experienced consecutive good seasons and had opted to take a more extended holiday at a destination outside the region (on the coast, interstate or overseas).
- A tightening national economy in 2018-19 and 2019-20 resulted in interregional and interstate visitors staying longer in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region but spending less per day during their visit.
- The COVID pandemic’s greatest impact on participation and participant expenditure occurred in 2020-21: Participation decreased by 22% on the 2018-19 peak and participant expenditure decreased by 37%.
- Adverse climatic events disrupted recreational water participation again in 2022-23 and 2023-24 through flooding and threats of flooding in 2022-23 and fires in the Grampians in 2023-24. The most significant impacts on waterbodies were at:
  - Lake Wooroonook where flood water covered powered caravan park sites and caused extended power outages to the camping area and amenities block.
  - Walkers Lake where flooding also covered camping sites and the boat ramp.
  - Rapid water flows carrying debris along weir pools along the Wimmera River and Yarriambiack Creek, closing these waterbodies for some weeks.

Participation numbers and economic contributions increased most notably at those WSM waterbodies where the community implemented ‘activation’ strategies. The strategies were varied and often innovative. Examples over the assessment years included:

- Bidding for, and hosting, significant annual regional, state or national events on the waterbodies. In 2018-19, Horsham (in collaboration with the Dimboola Dragonboat Club) was successful in attracting a statewide regatta in November 2018, with around 280 participant and officials in teams, who stayed 1-2 nights in commercial accommodation for the event.

Dimboola hosts an annual Rowing Victoria regatta in November each year. The popularity of this event reached a 15-20 year peak in 2019 with around 350 participants and more than 600 attendees for the weekend. There are also annual barefoot water skiing and fishing classic events at the Wimmera River in Dimboola.

- Fishing competitions have become more prominent in the eight years. Long-term fishing competitions at the Wimmera River in Horsham (March long-weekends) and Jeparit (Easter weekends) continued throughout the assessment years and remained popular and well attended. There was one cancellation during the pandemic and A Lake Wallace Fishing competition was one of the town’s premier events in 2017 and 2018, but participant numbers declined in 2019 partly due to poor weather and water quality. The event has not been reinstated since the COVID years. Beulah introduced a fishing competition as part of its Wide-Open Spaces weekend from 2023, and there was a fishing competition in November 2019 at the Lake Fyans angling club.

All these fishing events attract local and overnight visitors from around Victoria, South Australia and some from New South Wales.

- Lake Fyans has an extensive program of regular events. A fishing competition was inaugurated at this Lake in 2019, on the same weekend as the Lake Wallace competition. It was quite successful, although the overwhelming majority of participants were local, or other WSM region, residents. Lake Fyans hosts many smaller fishing events throughout the year as well as sailing regattas. The Stawell Sailing Club and Angling Club both have clubhouse facilities on the lake.
- Conducting and establishing events that take advantage of the environment and ambience of the waterbodies without directly conducting activities on the water. Parkruns are among the most prominent of these. Wimmera River Parkrun in Horsham (commenced in August 2018) attracts a recent average of 110 participants per week plus 7-10 volunteers, and Nhill Lake Park Run in Nhill (commenced in February 2018) attracts 20-25 participants per week including volunteers. Parkrun is part of an international program involving free, weekly, timed, walking, jogging, running, and volunteering events. A new Parkrun was established at Lake Wallace in December 2022, and attracts around 50 participants and volunteers each week. Around 5-10% of weekly Parkrun participants make overnight stays in the host town.

The individual summaries for each lake and weir pool, in Chapter 4 of this document, conclude with short lists of suggested improvements which might help to activate additional recreational participation and economic contribution. These cover improvement in some or all of the categories:

- Infrastructure and facilities
- Recreational water trails
- Cross-promotions
- Events.

### 3.3 INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES

Infrastructure like trails, tracks, cabins, new camping sites, amenities blocks, waste disposal, water and power have all received noticeable new investment over the eight-year recreational water assessment period and there is scope for further improvements if the lakes and weir pools are to maximise their potential for recreational visitors. Any proposed improvement should be subject to minimal environmental, cultural or heritage impacts and to the wishes of the local communities and other stakeholders. Some of the lakes are clearly closely guarded “best kept secrets” and are frequented mostly by local residents, and the ambience and attributes of these assets could be perceived to be reduced, rather than enhanced, with any further investment in infrastructure or facilities.

It is understood that critical supplier organisations have made use of the WSM Recreational Water longitudinal research and reporting as part of the evidence needed to support annual investment commitments. Each year GWMWater allocates Wimmera Mallee Pipeline water for eleven of the WSM waterbodies plus Wimmera Catchment Management Authority (CMA) has a comprehensive program of research and practical projects, many of which are directly related to recreational use of the WSM waterbodies. The Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) has a fish stocking program which in the eight assessment years has involved about 5 million fingerlings and advanced fish stock in 25 of the Wimmera Southern Mallee waterways.

It is estimated that WSM recreational and environmental water longitudinal research and reporting has been used to leverage more than \$15 million in funding support, to date, for improved infrastructure and amenities at the region’s waterbodies. Some examples of funding support, the majority of which has drawn on the longitudinal research as evidence of benefits and demand in securing funds include:

- 2023 and 2024:
  - o Swimming and viewing platform and staircase at Jeparit’s ‘swimming hole’ on the Wimmera River.
  - o ‘Cabins across the Wimmera Mallee: Strengthening the Visitor Economy’ project with self-contained cabins at lakes in Hindmarsh, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack Shires.
  - o Self-contained cabins across lakes in Buloke Shire (Regional Infrastructure project).
  - o Nature and Water-Play park, viewing platforms, and activation areas at the Wimmera River in Horsham.
  - o Self-contained cabins at Yarriambiack Creek, Warracknabeal
  - o Construction of a new boat ramp, repair of the existing ramp near the Lake Fyans Holiday Park, new staircases, handrails, landings, new grass and an upgrade to the walking track. Embankment works were also completed to protect the lake against future storms and reduce flood risks.
- 2022:
  - o Completion and opening of a new pipeline filled lake: Lake Rainbow.
  - o Development of waterway rules and navigational equipment at Lake Lascelles.
- 2020
  - o Completion and opening of a new pipeline filled lake: Turkey Bottom Lake
  - o An all-abilities amenities block at Lake Lascelles.
  - o Amenities block at Yarriambiack Creek, Warracknabeal.
  - o Trading off the Wimmera Mallee Tourist Trails project, including the potential for lakes and weir pool increased visitation, integrated with other tourist attractions in the region.



- 2019
  - o Fishing platform at the Dimboola weir pool.
  - o Self-contained cabins at Lake Marma.
  - o Installation of pontoons, boat and kayak launching facilities, shelters, seating picnic tables, a rowing access platform, and other visitor facilities on the Wimmera River at Horsham and Dimboola.
- 2017 and 2018
  - o Lake Charlegrark new amenities block
  - o New amenities blocks at Lakes Wooroonook, Watchem and Tchum.
  - o Self-contained cabins at the Beulah weir pool.
  - o Walking and cycling track around Lake Fyans.
  - o Toilets at Taylors Lake.

Funds for restoration and construction works at Sea Lake’s Green Lake and Lake Ouyen had been committed prior to the WSM Recreational Water Socio-Economic assessments.

### **3.4 DEVELOPING RECREATIONAL WATER TRAILS, THEMES AND CROSS-PROMOTIONS**

The attributes of the waterbodies are well known to a majority of local residents, but even the regular visitors from other regions and interstate tend to know one, or perhaps a few, of the Wimmera Southern Mallee waterbodies to which they return on a regular or occasional basis. Touring visitors who are exploring the region for the first time are often surprised by the opportunities for caravans and recreational vehicles to stay by attractive lakes and weir pools and to take advantage of their recreational opportunities. Touring couples, families and groups interviewed at any of the waterbodies over the past eight years frequently made one of the following comments:

- “This is an unexpected gem, with great facilities”.
- “We are travelling around, not on a fixed timetable, where can you recommend that we go next to find another lake like this?”
- “We were not expecting a setting like this. Had we known, we would have come better prepared, with fishing rods, yabby nets, kayaks, paddleboards, etc.
- “Is the water safe to swim?”
- “What fish can you catch here?”

Even more regular visitors often asked:

- “We have always visited Lake X but recently discovered Lake Y, what others can you suggest?”
- “It’s too busy here this year. Is there a quieter lake setting we could choose?”
- “It’s too hot/water level/water quality is not good here this year. Where else can you suggest?”

These responses, and the clear linkages across the WSM lakes and weir pools network, suggest that developing and formalising links, creating themes and cross-promoting has potential to increase participation and socio-economic contribution, and to use the waterbodies as an important part of the Wimmera Mallee’s growing reputation as a tourism destination.

Advice from VFA field staff indicates that a major outcome of the extensive fish-stocking program in recent years, coupled with reliable water levels in the waterways, has been the attention that the Wimmera Southern Mallee lakes are receiving from competitive fishing clubs around Victoria and from serious recreational anglers looking for new places to search for trophy fish. This has been most notable at Rocklands Reservoir, and the trails concept could help to articulate the interest in Rocklands to other waterbodies in the region.

Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1 summarise a selection of possible themes and links, and indicative travel routes for the lakes and weirs as a starting point for further planning and discussion among the stakeholders.

Wimmera Southern Mallee Development and Wimmera Mallee Tourism have, to date, unsuccessfully sought funding to develop waterway trails in a structured and coordinated format, but these efforts should continue. It is also understood that Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism is interested in developing a tourism product around the ‘Great Lakes of the Grampians’ which would undoubtedly Lakes Fyans, Bellfield, Wartook and Lonsdale, and possibly Rocklands Reservoir, but could be extended to link with one or more of the themed trails suggested in this document.

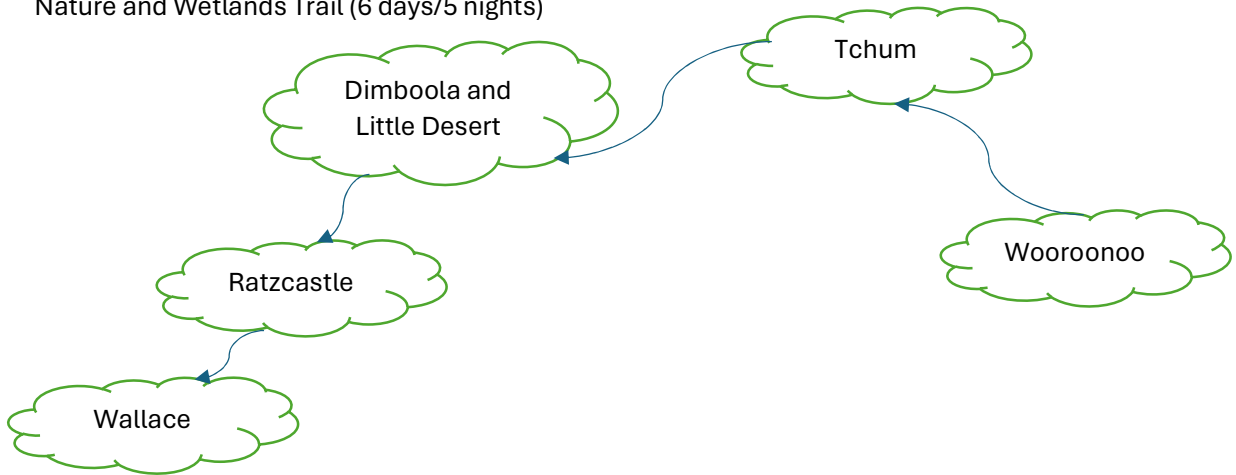


**Table 3.1 Themes for Linking WSM Recreational Waterbodies**

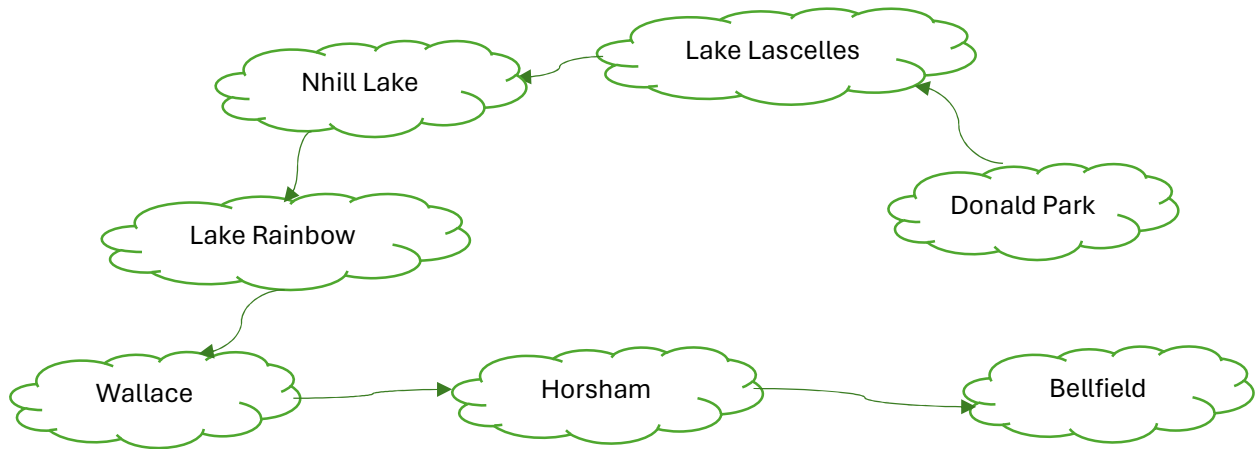
Theme	Possible Lakes (examples only)	Market Segments	Other Tourism Links
<b>Resort and Tourist Lakes</b>	Fyans	Families, young couples, clubs, special interest groups	Grampians National Park/ Gariwerd
	Bellfield		
	Lascelles		
<b>Peaceful Retreats</b>	Walkers	Older couples and groups	Promote as ‘escapes from the madding crowd’
	Ratzcastle		
	Turkey Bottom		
	Jeparit		
<b>Grey Nomad Bliss</b>	Marma	Grey nomads.	Silo art, history and heritage attractions.
	Beulah		
	Brim		
	Lascelles		
<b>Events Centres</b>	Dimboola	Special interest groups, and individuals, couples and families of all ages	Links to varied events (fishing, rowing, skiing, music, sporting competitions) with an aim to get extended stays.
	Charlegrark		
	Horsham		
	Donald Park		
	Wallace		
<b>‘Club Central’</b>	Fyans	Visiting clubs and club members	Supporting clubs at or near the lakes to conduct inter-regional meets or competitions
	Rocklands		
	Warracknabeal		
	Horsham		
	Green Lake		
	Dimboola		
<b>Water Playgrounds</b>	Tchum	Families and younger groups	Promote as cost-efficient holiday options with a range of water sports and places to meet up with family and friends.
	Wooroonook		
	Fyans		
	Watchem		
	Green Lake (Sea Lake)		
	Taylor's		
	Charlegrark		
	Bringalbert		
	Lascelles		
<b>Waterways with accommodation options</b>	Bellfield and Fyans	Less budget conscious couples and families, clubs (possibly corporates) and special interest groups	Promote as a more stylish way to take a fishing or kayaking holiday with the accommodation and food service options in selected WSM towns
	Warracknabeal		
	Horsham		
	Dimboola		
<b>Silo Art and Night Skies</b>	See Figure 3.1	Retirees/Older travellers, Intra and Interstate Tourers	See Victoria’s inland outdoor gallery by day, sunsets on the water and night skies.
<b>Nature and Wetlands</b>	See Figure 3.1	Retirees/Older travellers, Special interest groups	Environment and national/ wilderness parks
<b>Travellers Rests</b>	See Figure 3.1	Retirees/Older travellers, Intra and Interstate Tourers	Silo art, heritage and nature attractions
<b>Trophy Fishing</b>	See Figure 3.1	Serious recreational fishers of all ages	Fishing competitions/ events
<b>Grampians Great Lakes</b>	See Figure 3.1	Intra and Interstate Tourers Recreational Anglers	Grampians National Park/ Gariwerd

**Figure 3.1 Potential Recreational Water Tourism Trails: Indicative Concepts**

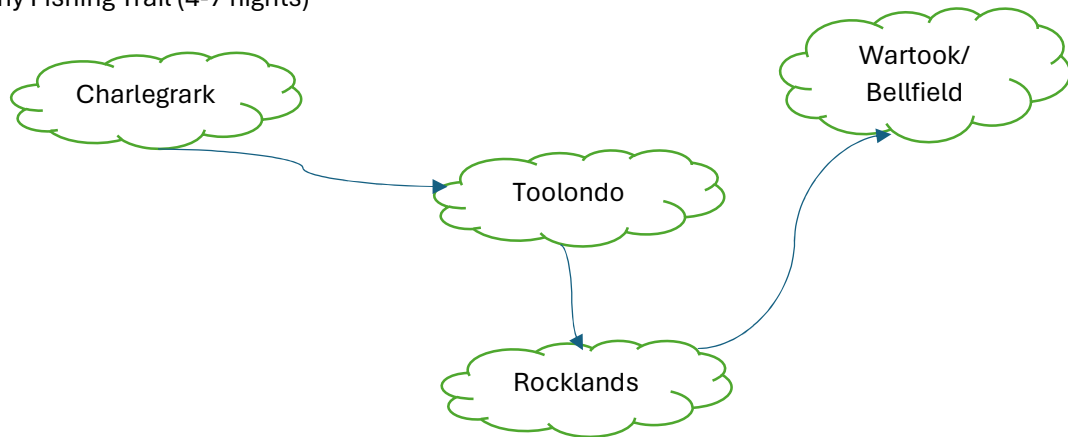
Nature and Wetlands Trail (6 days/5 nights)



Travellers Rests Tour (town services with a water experience – 7 nights)

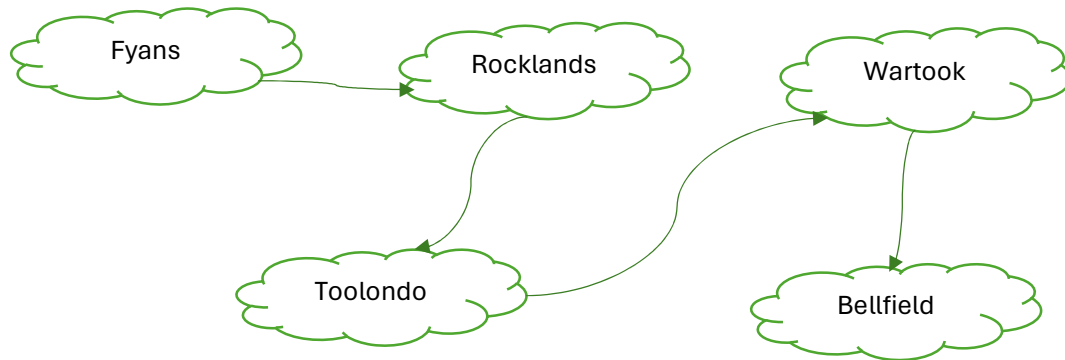


Trophy Fishing Trail (4-7 nights)

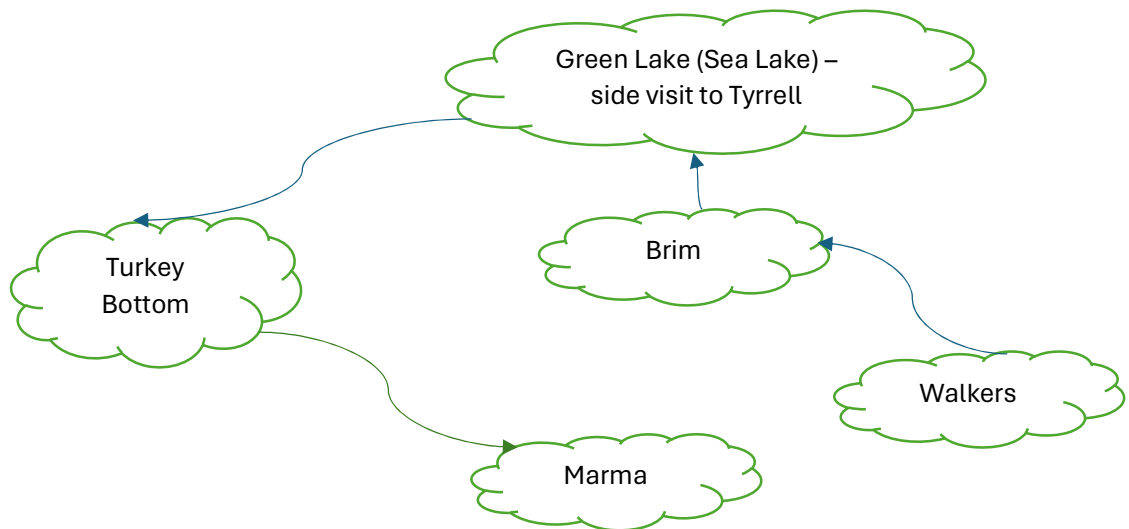


**Figure 3.1 (continued) Potential Recreational Water Tourism Trails: Indicative Concepts**

Grampians Great Lakes Fishing Trail (4-8 nights)



Silo Art and Night Skies (5 nights)



### 3.5 EVENTS AT THE RECREATIONAL WATERBODIES

Events are a definite ‘value add’ to all lakes and weir pools where they are held. In the main, events do not drive other participation at the waterways: Event participants who live locally tend to use the lake/weir pool throughout the year anyway, and most visitors attend only for the event. However, hosting major events opens participation to people who have never visited the area and they do provide very significant economic contributions to the local areas. In some cases, events at lakes and weir pools are the major activities in the community calendar for their respective towns or district (eg Charlegrark Music Festival, Jeparit Fishing Competition, Murtoa’s Big Weekend, Beulah’s Wide-Open Spaces). There are no linked events at the recreational waterbodies in the Wimmera Southern Mallee with the exceptions of:

- A few fishing/angling clubs holding competitions for members at different lakes and weir pools.
- Parkrun regulars from around Australia (and even some from overseas) targeting all three WSM parkruns at Wimmera River, Nhill Lake and Lake Wallace, either as a once-off or regular achievement.

These modest examples demonstrate that there is potential for more organised coordination of series of events across the region for staged competitions or social activities (eg in open water swimming, bi and triathlons, fishing, rowing/kayaking, paddleboarding, sailing, fun runs, festivals, etc).

Regular events have been consolidated over the assessment years, but a few have also been lost and/or are showing signs of being somewhat ‘past their peak’ due to volunteer fatigue rather than reduced visitor/participant interest. Communities must be aware of the workload and volunteer input associated with creating and continuing to host annual, or more frequent, events even with financial support from a Council, other government agency or private sector sponsors.

It is important for town businesses to support events at the waterbodies to provide good visitor experiences and to generate maximum local economic benefits. This support does not necessarily mean sponsoring the event (although that could be helpful) but having opening hours to complement the needs of the events, possibly offering products or services to suit the event participants, and ensuring there is a service-oriented approach by owners and staff. Key business sectors that fit this category include accommodation providers, cafés, hotels and restaurants, sport and recreation retailers, vehicle and fuel services, allied health and personal services and arts and recreation services.



## 4. SUMMARIES FOR EACH WATERBODY

This chapter provides an overview of participation and direct economic contribution from participants at each of the waterbodies during 2016-17 to 2022-23, and 2023-24 if relevant, and summarises potential initiatives and enhancements to further develop the recreational participation and regional impacts from the waterbodies. The summaries note where the improvements have already been implemented or partially implemented during the assessment years.

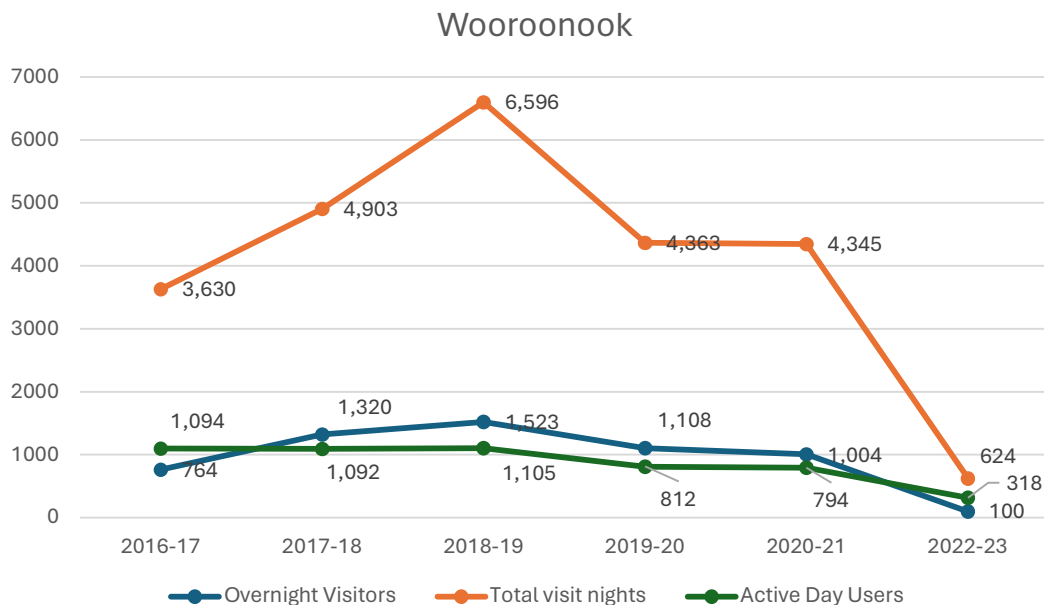
### 4.1 BULOKE SHIRE

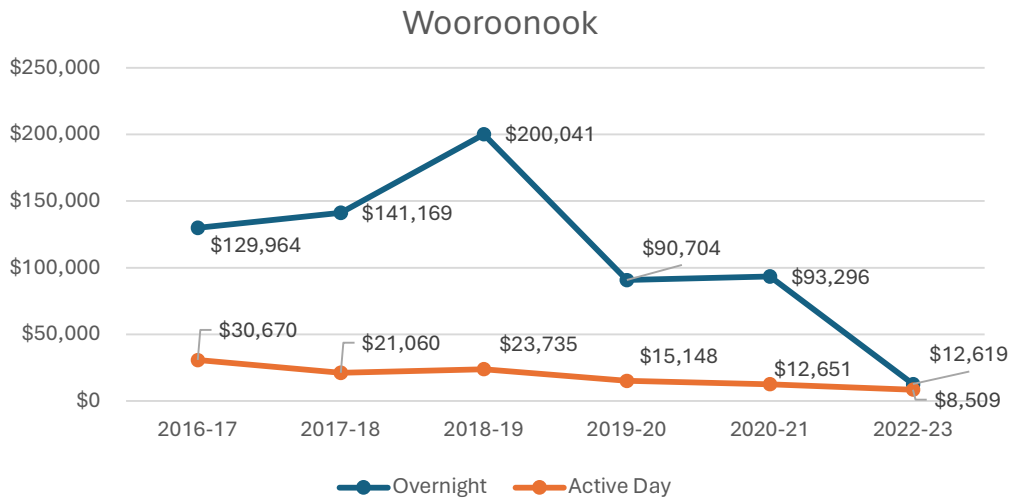
Five Buloke Shire lakes were included in the Recreational Water assessments. Lakes Tchum, Watchem, Wooroonook and Donald Park were included every year, and Green Lake (near Sea Lake) from the third year.

#### 4.1.1 Lake Wooroonook

Wooroonook attracts retired couples and small groups seeking a quiet and relatively isolated location for camping and caravanning. On weekends during warmer months, the lake is popular as a fishing destination.

Over the 2016-17 to 2018-19 period, participation increased. The overnight visitation in 2016-17 was abnormally low when blue-green algae outbreaks during spring and summer had an impact. A new amenities block was built in 2017-18. In 2019-20 and 2021-22, visitation to the lake declined on previous years largely a result of people choosing other holiday destinations after a good farming season and then the COVID 19 pandemic. In 2022-23 the lake was flooded to the point where the powered caravan sites were under-water and the electrical system for the lake and amenities block were disrupted for the whole summer period and the caravan park was effectively closed. When the park was reopened in autumn, a blue-green algae outbreak occurred. Day visitation was not decimated to the same extent as overnight visitation, since day fishing trips continued.





#### Summary of potential improvements:

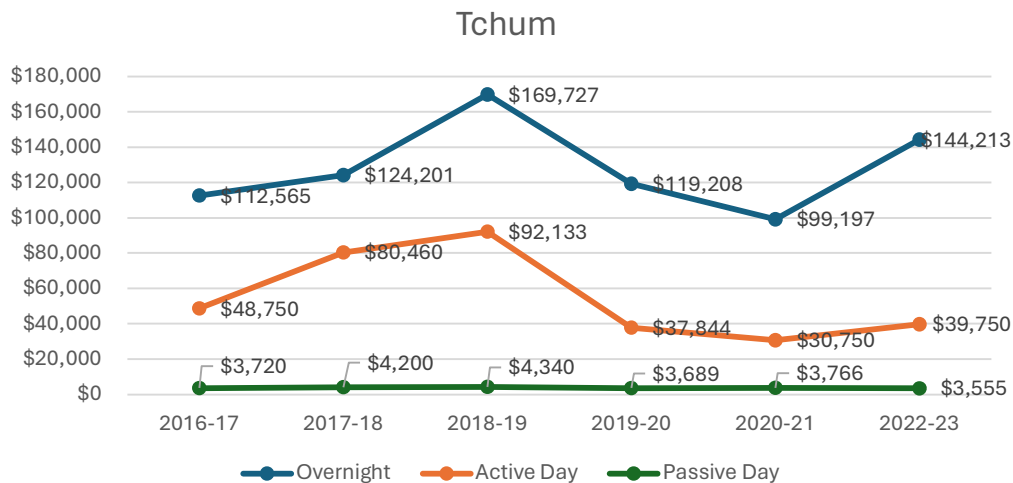
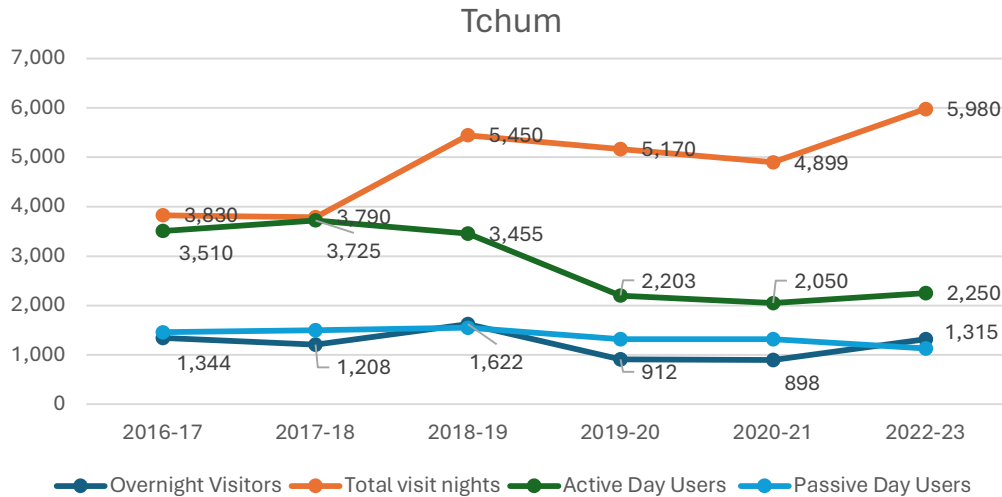
- Infrastructure – additional directional signage (*expected to be addressed through a Silo Art Trail project on signage*)
- Facilities – cabins or glamping installations (*funded and under development*)
- Recreational water trails
  - o Water playgrounds
  - o Nature and wetlands
- Cross promotions – Silo art trail, part of Charlton and Wycheproof town promotions.
- Potential events
  - o ‘Wooroonook Lakes Discovery’ (for wildlife and environmental enthusiasts)
  - o Fishing, kayaking, skiing, sailing and/or open water swimming challenges.

#### 4.1.2 Tchum Lake

Tchum Lake is a popular holiday spot for campers and water skiers. Lake users also participate in fishing and swimming. The lake is very busy at Easter and other summer holiday periods and tends to be relatively quiet at other times of the year. As a holiday-period recreational lake facility, Tchum attracts larger family groups rather than the retired and ‘grey nomad’ caravanning group that are frequent users of other Wimmera Southern Mallee water facilities.

Over the 2016-17 to 2018-19 period, participation steadily increased although overnight visitor numbers were slightly down in 2017-18 due to some discontinuity when a new amenities block was installed. In 2019-20 and 2020-21, visitation to the lake had declined on previous years even prior to the COVID 19 pandemic. Reasons for the decline were reported to be good harvests for the farming community (and those providing services to the farm sector) which meant people were either too busy to visit the lake or, after the season’s workload was over, decided to take a holiday outside the region. Cancellation of local events was also a factor.

Overnight visitation returned to an upward trend in 2022-23, while day visitation remained steady. A dedicated walking and cycling path for a distance of 8 kilometres alongside the Birchip-Wycheproof Road between Birchip township and the lake encourages ‘passive’ visitation, coupled with a children’s playground on the lake foreshore.



Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o Additional signage (*expected to be addressed through a Silo Art Trail project on signage*)
  - o Improved landscaping and grassed areas
  - o More formal markings and links of the track from Birchip to Lake Tchum, as a cycling, walking/running track.
- Facilities – cabins or glamping installations (*funded and under development*)
- Recreational water trails
  - o Water playgrounds
  - o Nature and wetlands
- Cross promotions – Silo art trail, part of Birchip town promotions.
- Potential events
  - o ‘Tchum Lakes Discovery’ (for indigenous plant, wildlife and environmental enthusiasts)
  - o Fishing, kayaking, sailing, skiing and/or open water swimming challenges.

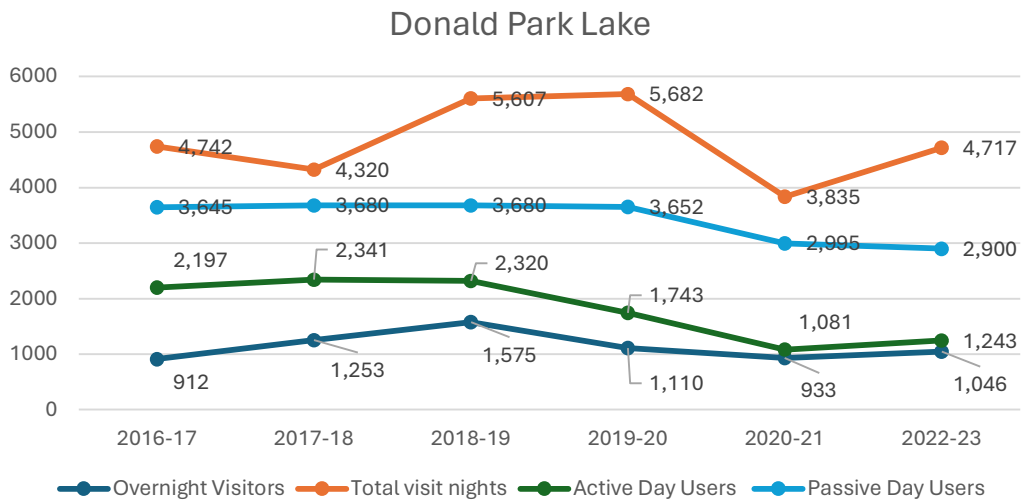
### 4.1.3 Donald Park Lake

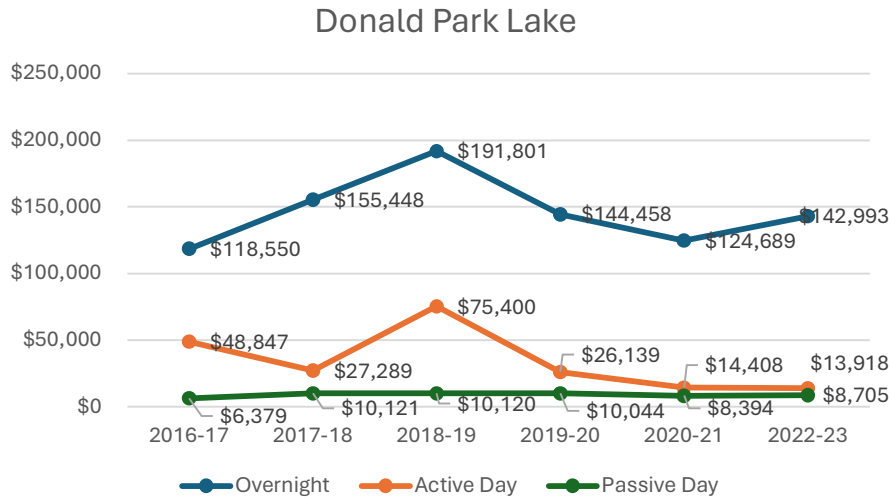
Folletti Caravan Park Lake is a small recreational facility in the heart of the Donald urban area. It is mostly used for fishing and environmental amenity (walks, picnics and camping on the foreshore).

As a centrally located, urban lake, many visitors stay to access facilities in Donald township, as a base to visit friends and relatives or as a base for short-term work assignments. Since 2017-18 the local football club has had responsibility for many of the management functions at the lake, on behalf of Council (which had previously employed a non-resident part time manager). This led to increases in visitors during both 2017-18 and 2018-19, while visit numbers were down in 2019-20 and so was average expenditure but length of stay increased. Passive day users also remained relatively stable in 2019-20 as local residents used the lake area as part of daily walks during the pandemic restrictions.

Participation at Donald Park Lake decreased between 2016-17 and 2017-18 when the management arrangements were shifted to the local football club and several longer-term visitors and workers were moved on. In the last three years, participation increased, albeit with some lost usage during the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions. Reduced active usage was somewhat offset by people staying at the lake during events (eg tennis tournament, Esoteric festival). Economic contribution was reduced in 2019-20.

Water levels were also lower in 2019-20 and 2020-21 than in the two preceding years, but overnight visitation rebounded in 2022-23 when the lake was fishing well and an extended grain harvest period (due to wet weather) saw more seasonal and contract workers staying longer at the lake.





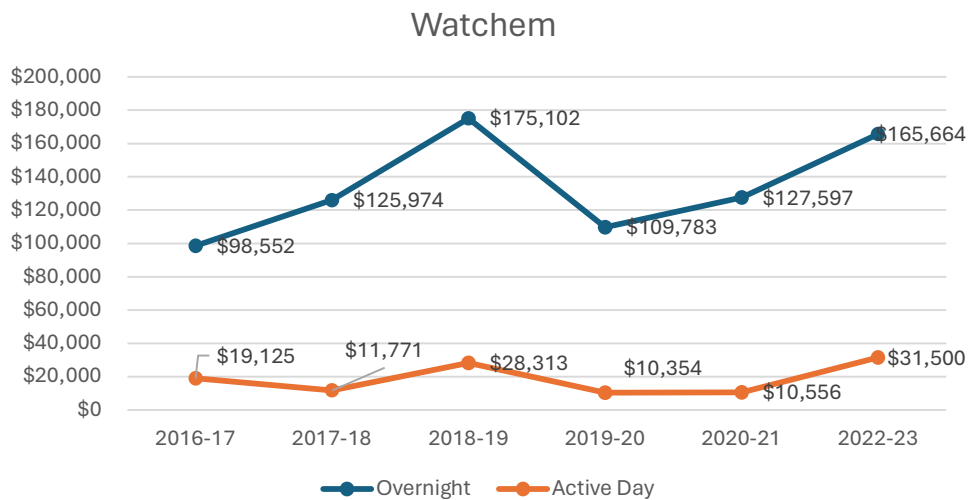
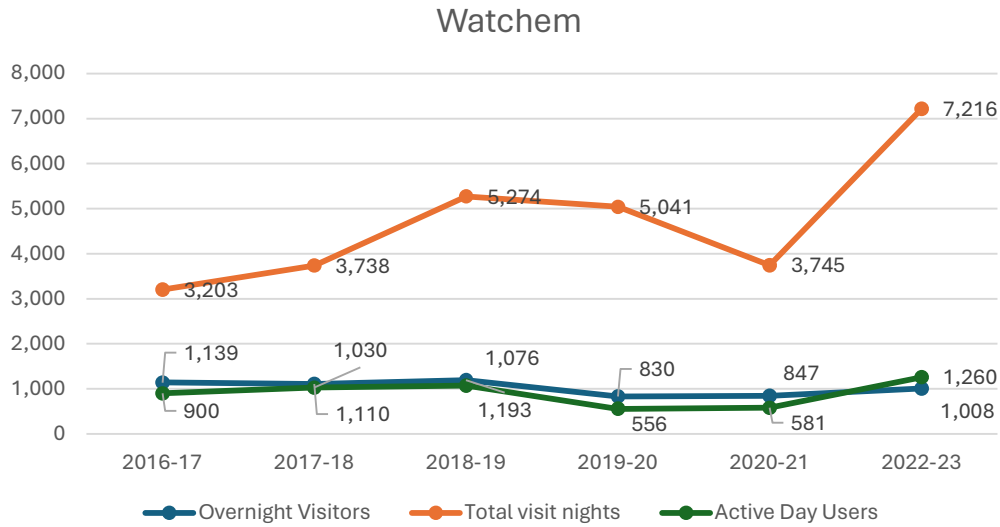
**Summary of further potential improvements and promotions:**

- Infrastructure
  - o Additional signage (*expected to be addressed through a Silo Art Trail project on signage*)
  - o Walking and cycling path alongside the lake, connected to town and the ‘pride of place’ track.
- Facilities - Funding has been secured for new self-contained cabins at Donald Park Lake (*construction has not yet commenced*).
- Recreational water trails
  - o Waterways with accommodation options
  - o Events centre.
- Cross promotions – part of Donald’s town promotions.
- Potential events
  - o “Stay at Donald Park Lake for your Donald event, function, or reunion”.
  - o Paddleboard challenge.

**4.1.4 Lake Watchem**

Lake Watchem is a focal point for the town, which now has a very limited commercial centre (consisting of a general store, hotel, aquatic centre/pool, and other sports facilities). The lake is popular for water skiing, swimming, fishing, picnics and camping/caravanning. Lake Watchem users peak during the Christmas holiday period and Easter. At other times, the lake is frequented by grey nomad type caravaners and local residents.

Participation at Lake Watchem increased considerably during 2016-17 to 2018-19; a result of water security from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline and improved facilities and infrastructure at the lake. The reduction in usage in 2020-21 was substantial, but the 2022-23 recorded the highest level of usage recorded (and the economic contribution was close to the 2018-19 peak). It was a year in which fishing and yabbing were good, and there were group and family holidays over an extended summer-autumn season.



Summary of potential improvements:

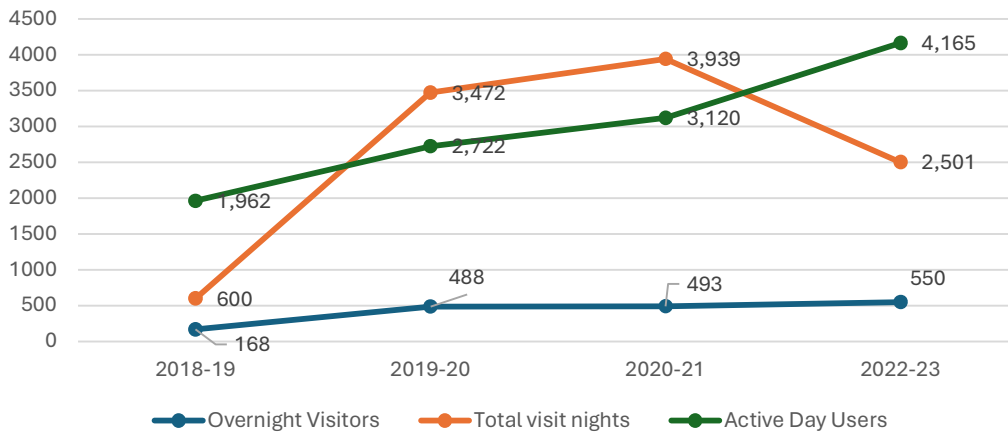
- Infrastructure
  - o Additional signage (*expected to be addressed through a Silo Art Trail project on signage*)
  - o Sealing of internal roads
  - o Walking/cycling track to, and around, Watchem.
- Facilities – cabins or glamping installations (*funded and under development*).
- Recreational water trails
  - o Water playgrounds
  - o Peaceful retreats
- Cross promotions – Silo art trail.
- Potential events
  - o Fishing, kayaking, skiing and/or sailing challenges.

### 4.1.5 Green Lake (near Sea Lake)

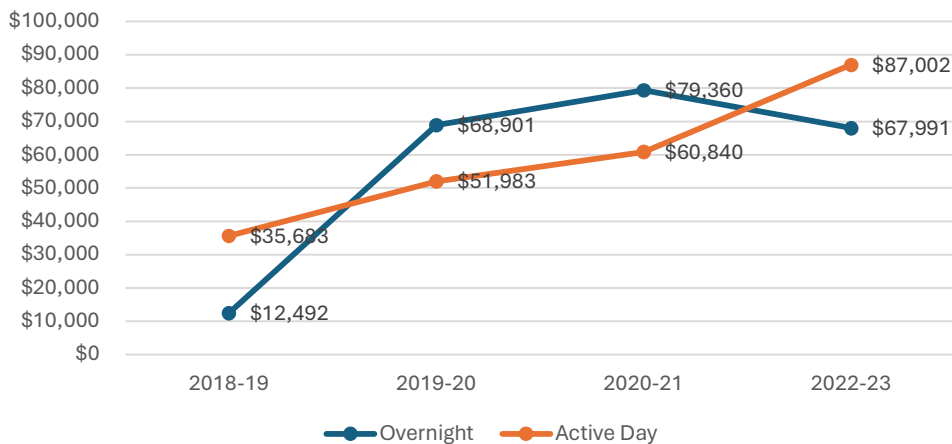
Green Lake near Sea Lake was empty during the millennium drought of the early 2000s. It filled from natural inflows and pipeline supply in 2011-12, seepage was too great to supplement the natural inflows with pipeline water. The Victorian Government funded a project in 2018 to reduce the seepage losses in the lake and the GMMWater Pipeline supply from the Murray River commenced in September 2018.

Green Lake became a popular recreational destination for Sea Lake locals immediately after pipeline water started to fill the lake in mid-2018-19 with active day participants almost reaching 2,000 in that first operating year. In 2020-21 the lake reached around 3,100 day participants and almost 4,000 visit nights from both local residents and (mostly) intrastate people during that COVID affected year. In 2022-23 day users, and expenditure by day users, exceeded overnight visitors/visit nights.

Green Lake Sea Lake



Green Lake, Sea Lake



Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o Additional signage and directional signage (*expected to be addressed through a Silo Art Trail project on signage*)
- Facilities – self-contained cabins
- Recreational water trails
  - o Water playgrounds
  - o Peaceful retreats
- Cross promotions – Silo art trail. Packages which include the lake with a visit to Lake Tyrrell and night skies interpretation.
- Potential events
  - o Fishing, kayaking, skiing and/or sailing challenges.

## 4.2 HINDMARSH SHIRE

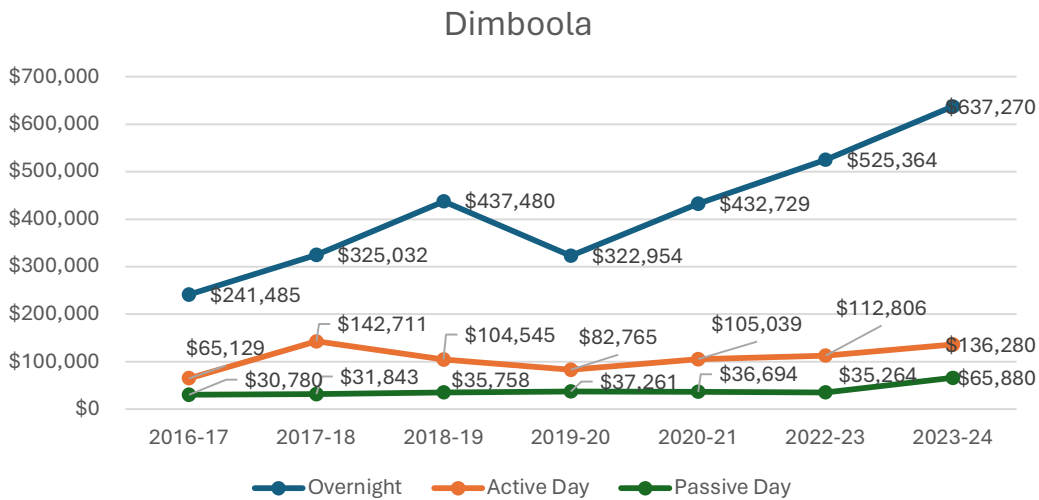
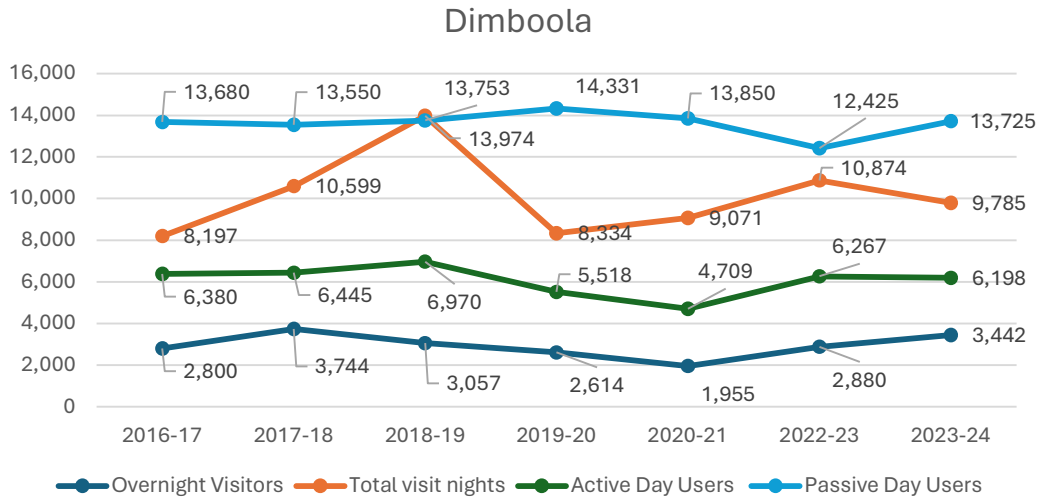
Four Hindmarsh Shire weir pools and lakes were included in the Recreational Water assessments. The Dimboola Weir Pool and Jeparit Weir Pool (both on the Wimmera River) and Lake Nhill were assessed each year and Lake Hindmarsh (which was effectively dry throughout five of the eight year period) was assessed in the first and seventh years only. The recently established Lake Rainbow was included in 2022-23.

### 4.2.1 Dimboola Weir Pool

The Dimboola weir on the Wimmera River is located close to the town, and on the edge of the Little Desert. Recreational water has become relatively secure in recent years through the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline. Environmental flows have substantially reduced the periods when the river has been too low for water to flow regularly, although flows can cease in droughts.

This waterbody has the largest number of significant annual events of all WSM lakes and weir pools. Over the eight year assessment period there have been a range of events, some only run sporadically, including the Dimboola Fishing Classic (promoted as the Wimmera's only “bank and boat” community-based fishing event), a State Rowing Regatta, the biennial Peter Taylor barefoot skiing event and the Wimmera River Challenge. As a water course which runs through the Dimboola township, the Wimmera River has a relatively higher number of passive day users than many other Wimmera Southern Mallee recreational water facilities. The *Wimmera River Discovery Trail* walking and cycling trail is being constructed in stages, adding another tourism attraction intrinsically related to the Wimmera River and is expected to increase the active and passive visitation.

The weir pool had increasing overnight visitation during 2016-17 to 2018-19 which fell away somewhat in 2019-20 (although the economic contribution decline was less significant than the reduced participation, partly due to increased food service and accommodation options in town), while active and passive day usage remained quite high. By 2023-24 the participation levels returned to pre-pandemic levels. With completion of substantially more cabin accommodation and a growing reputation for Dimboola as a visitor destination (with more retail and food service options in town for visitor expenditure) the expenditure by recreational water participants has rapidly increased.



**Summary of potential improvements:**

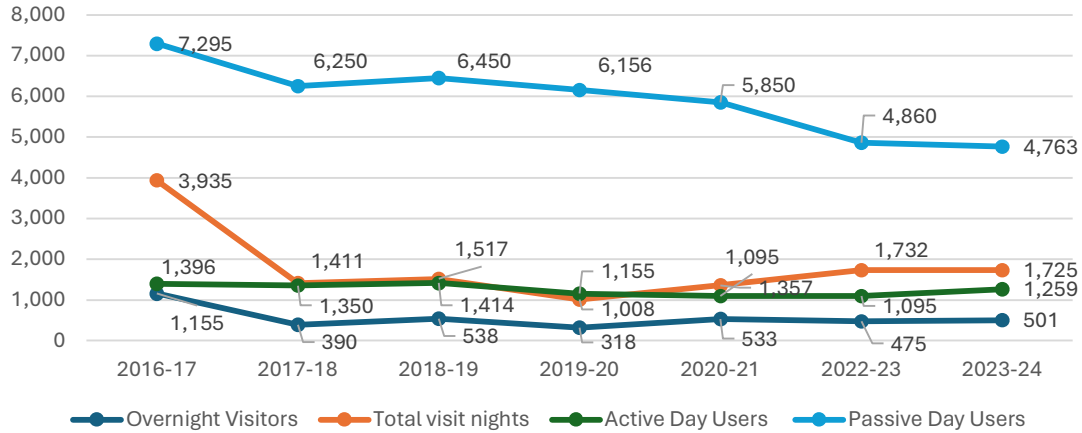
- Facilities – a café or other food service outlet on the river or with views of the river
- Recreational water trails
  - o Events centres
  - o Club central
  - o Waterways with accommodation options
  - o Nature and wetlands
- Cross promotions – parks and deserts, silo art trail, part of Dimboola town promotions.
- Potential events
  - o Already has an extensive events program in the town and on the river.
  - o Potentially could reactivate dragon boating.

**4.2.2 Jeparit Weir Pool**

The Wimmera River flows through Jeparit, south of Rainbow, as its final town, prior to draining into Lake Hindmarsh. It flows alongside the Jeparit township. Lake Hindmarsh was not included in the 2017-18 or 2019-20 assessments since it has little or no water for recreational activities. It was included in 2016-17 and the results were added to those for Jeparit weir pool.

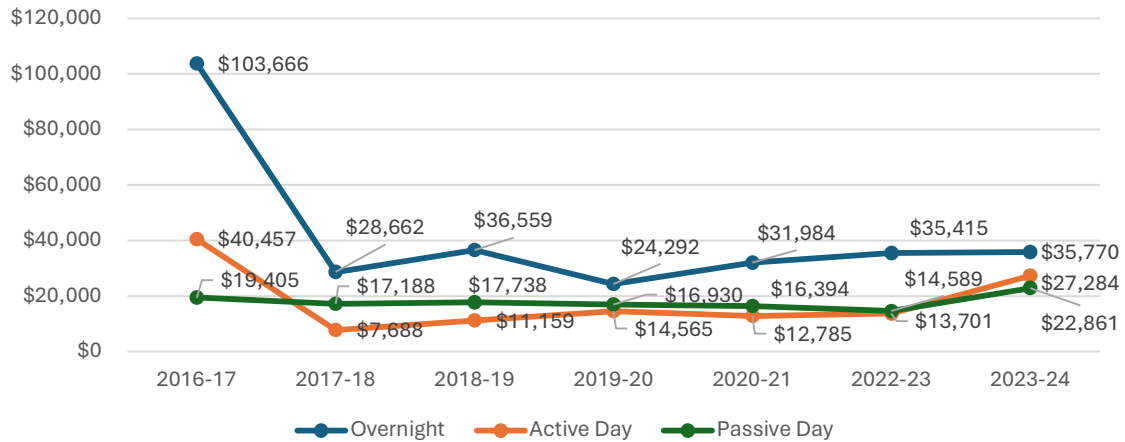
Unlike most other WSM waterbodies, the Jeparit weir pool had its peak overnight stay recreational usage and greatest economic contribution in the first year, 2016-17, and this was aided by the extra visitation counted for Lake Hindmarsh. Active and passive day participation has been relatively stable throughout the period. The major annual event at the weir pool, Jeparit’s fishing competition, was cancelled in 2019-20. Problems with high rainfall and weir-gates in 2022-23 reduced participation in that year, and the numbers did not recover in 2023-24, although the completion of a new swimming platform at the ‘swimming hole’ section of the river encouraged new participation in 2023-24.

### Jeparit



\* includes Lake Hindmarsh in 2016-17

### Jeparit



\* includes Lake Hindmarsh in 2016-17

#### Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o Directional signage (*expected to be addressed through a Silo Art Trail project on signage*)
  - o Landscaping and ‘clean-ups’ along some river access points (particularly on the Jeparit – Nhill Road)
  - o Cycling/hiking track along the river and Lake Hindmarsh.
- Recreational water trails
  - o Peaceful retreats

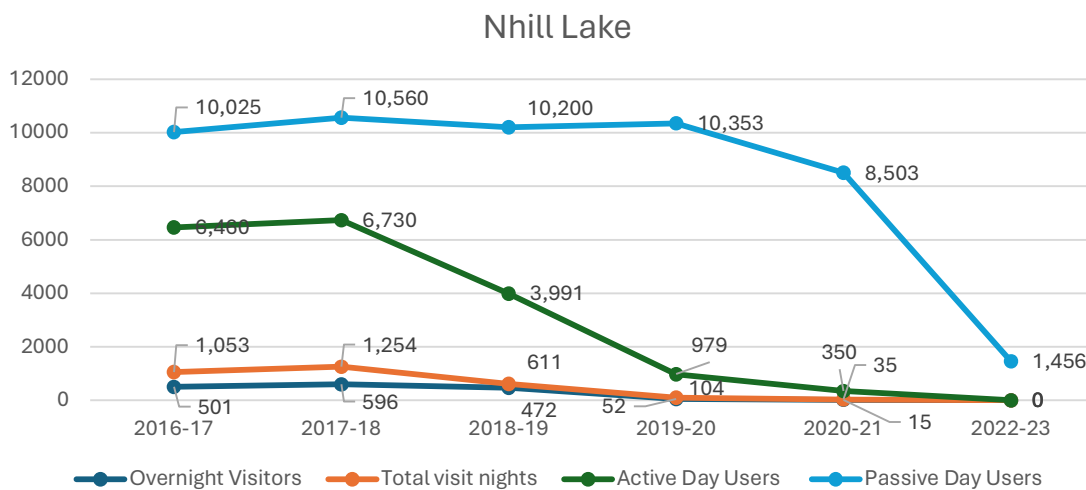
- Cross promotions
  - o Re-position Jeparit as a ‘river town’ in tourism promotions (replacing the former branding around Lake Hindmarsh) with a master plan linking the central activities area to the river.
  - o Redevelopment/upgrade of the Edward John Eyre Heritage River Walk
  - o History and heritage, part of Jeparit and Rainbow town promotions.
- Potential events
  - o Kayaking, canoeing or paddleboarding.

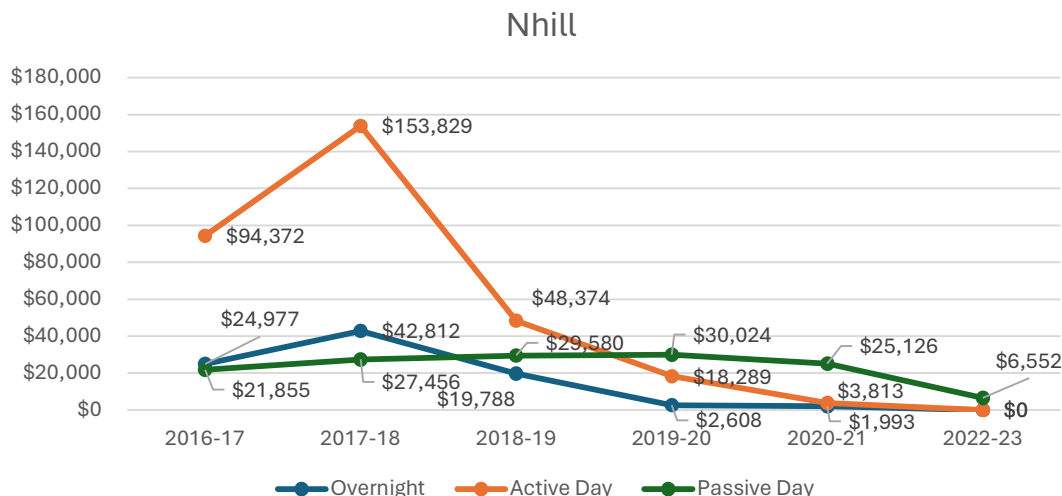
### 4.2.3 Nhill Lake

Nhill Lake is very much a lake built for local users, with shaded areas, a playground, and provision for swimming, fishing, boating and barbecues. A track around the lake provides 1 kilometre of flat surface which is suited to walking, cycling and running activities, including the weekly parkrun event, and this has resulted in passive users being the largest participation group. The lawn area is used to host community events including the annual February Fiesta held on each Friday throughout the month of February.

Nhill Lake attracts very few overnight visitors, and the small number measured during 2016-17 to 2022-23 tend to be family and friends of residents who are visiting (and staying with) these connections. Prior to 2016-17 there had been a bridge/walkway link connecting the lake and the Nhill Caravan Park, but this is no longer a thoroughfare.

When full and clear there is boating, fishing, a boardwalk and plenty of bird life. Over the eight-year period, this lake was at its best in 2017-18, when water quality was good and redfin fish catches were prolific. Unfortunately, there was a downward trend in participation and economic contribution at this lake over the assessment years. There was poor water quality in 2018-19 further compounded by problems with the bore pumping system in 2019-20 and 2020-21. By 2022-23 the lake was emptied and redeveloped. In mid-2023-24 the lake is again full, water quality is good and, assuming this is maintained (with a new pumping system and other maintenance) participation numbers should increase dramatically in the next few years, and it will return to its oft quoted claim as Nhill’s ‘hidden gem’.





Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o Use of additional bore pumping equipment (and closer bore) *(completed)*
  - o Connect the boardwalk to Jaypex Park, the Park Run course, vehicle access from Nelson Street, and foreshore access.
  - o Clean/revegetate the island in the lake *(completed)*.
- Facilities
  - o Re-connect the caravan park and the lake with a walkway
  - o Jetty or launching platform
- Recreational water trails
  - o Silo art and night skies
- Cross promotions – Silo art trail, desert parks and environment, and part of Nhill town promotions.
- Potential events
  - o Mini-biathlon or triathlon (involving swimming, running and cycling around the lake and Nhill pathways).

### 4.3 RURAL CITY OF HORSHAM

Five Horsham Rural City weir pools and lakes were included in the Recreational Water assessments. The Horsham Weir Pool on the Wimmera River and Taylors and Green Lakes were regularly assessed each year. Toolondo Reservoir was included from year two, and Lake Natimuk (although dry) was included briefly in year two.

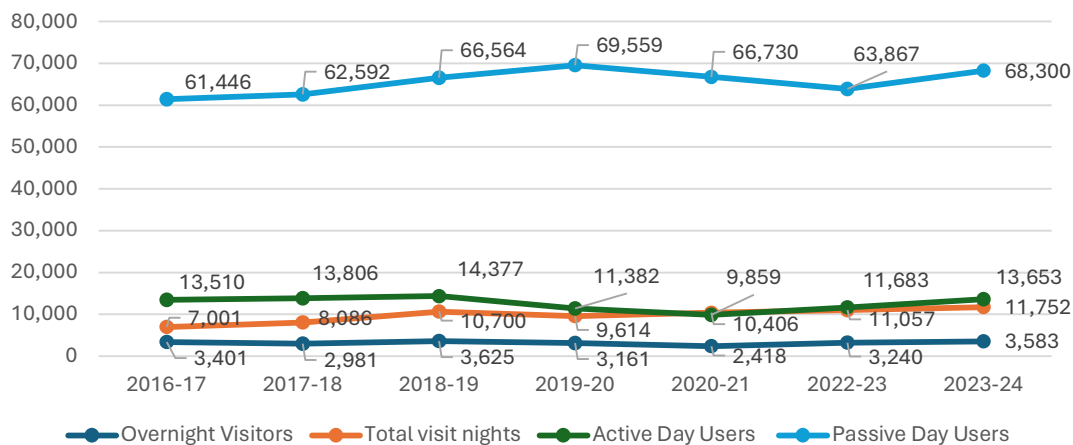
#### 4.3.1 Horsham Weir Pool

The Wimmera River, with water levels secured by the weir and pipeline supply, weaves through Horsham and is popular for kayaking, canoeing and fishing. A large number of Horsham residents and visitors use the riverside pathways for exercise routines; walking, jogging, or cycling. Designated walking trails encourage people to experience the river.

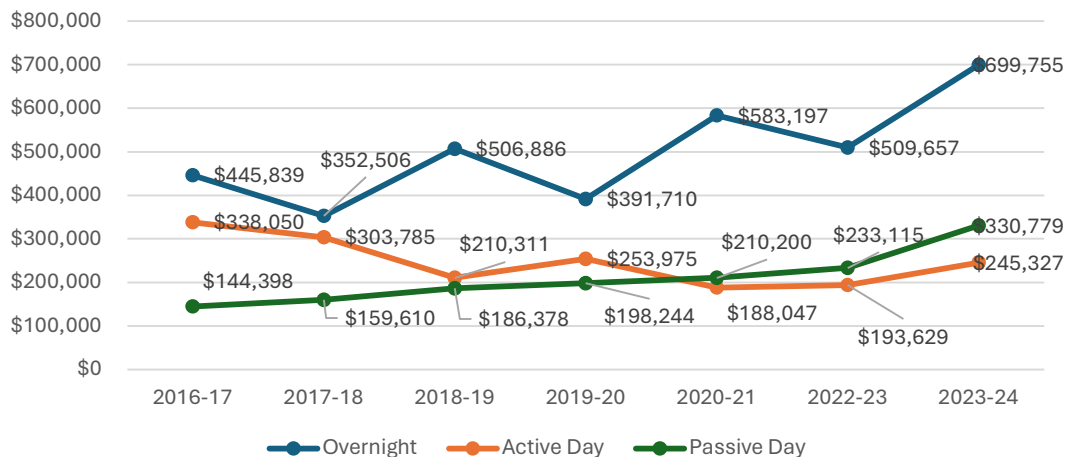
The number of day users at the Wimmera River at Horsham is the greatest of all recreational water facilities in the Wimmera Southern Mallee and this is increasing over time as housing development expands along the river. Fishing is the most popular Wimmera River activity, with walking, running and exercising along the river were the activities in which people participated most frequently (ie the passive day user group). These passive activities increased during the COVID 19 pandemic restricted period.

Active and passive day participation remained relatively steady throughout the 2016-17 to 2023-24 period, with an obvious dip in both participant numbers and economic contribution from overnight visitors in the COVID 19 pandemic, and a substantial increase in 2023-24 following the completion of both a second pedestrian bridge across the river and a 'nature and water play park' (with river activation area) near the riverside caravan park.

### Wimmera River, Horsham



### Wimmera River Horsham



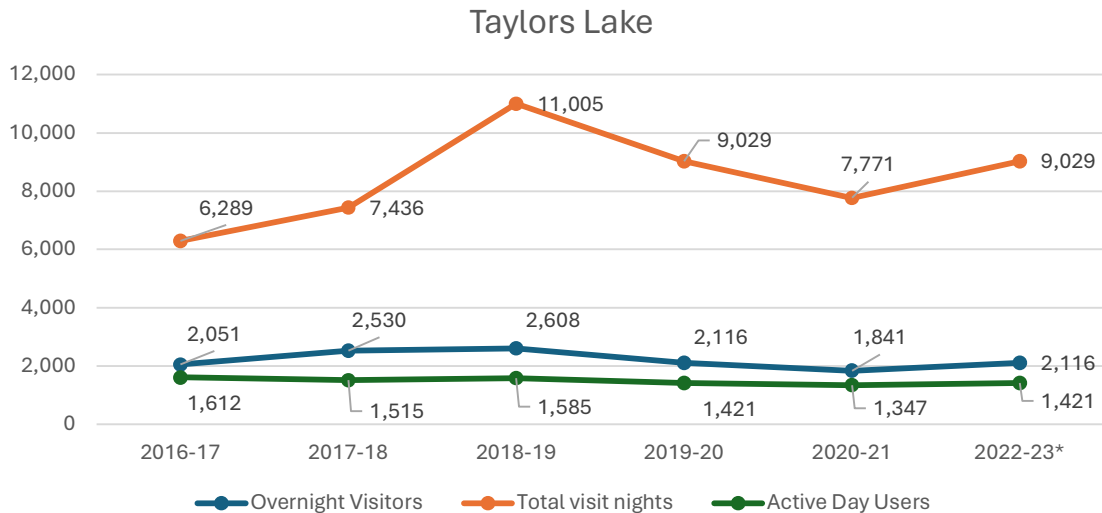
Summary of potential improvements:

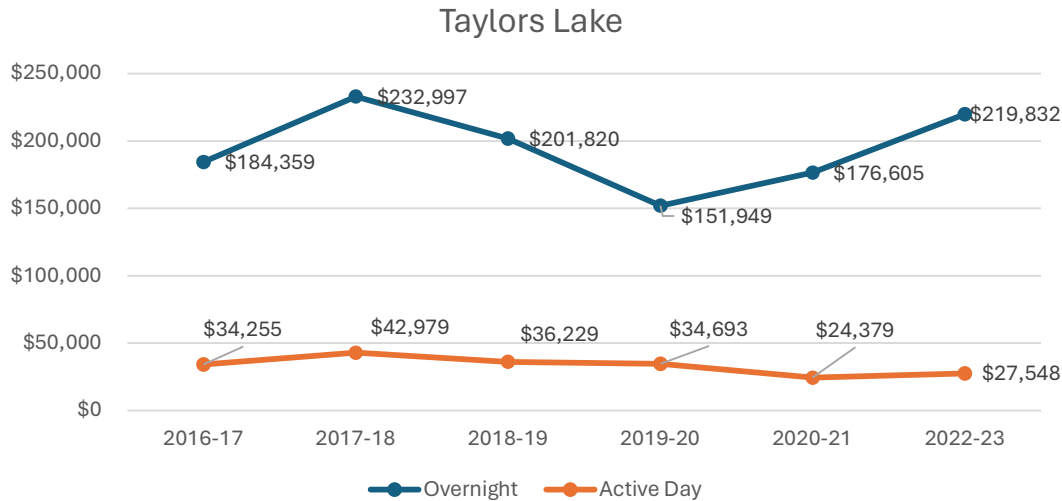
- Infrastructure
  - o Complete and implement proposed Wimmera River Precinct Masterplan (*in progress*)
  - o Additional pedestrian bridge (*completed*)
- Facilities – one or more cafés or other food service outlets along the riverfront.
- Recreational water trails
  - o Events centres
  - o Club central
  - o Waterways with accommodation options
  - o Travellers rests tour.
- Cross promotions
  - o Part of most Horsham Rural City promotions
- Potential events
  - o Kayaking, canoeing or dragon boating.

**4.3.2 Taylors Lake**

Taylors Lake is only 20 kilometres to the east of Horsham and it has an important role in supplying environmental water to the Wimmera River and it is also a backup reservoir for the WMP supply.

It is popular with Horsham and Stawell locals for recreation, especially fishing and water skiing. When other lakes have low water or are dry, Taylors Lake will often still have water to enjoy. The lake does not have a formal caravan park/camping ground but the opportunity for free camping and campfires, permitted in designated areas, is attractive to many visitors. Permanent toilet facilities have been installed on both the east and west sides of the lake in the past few years. The improved facilities, good water levels, and reportedly good fishing (especially prized Murray Cod) from years of stocking, have encouraged increased overnight visitation (curtailed by COVID in 2019-20 and 2020-21).





Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o Install waste disposal solution
  - o Clarify restrictions on camping at water's edge
- Recreational water trails
  - o Water playgrounds.

#### 4.3.3 Green Lake

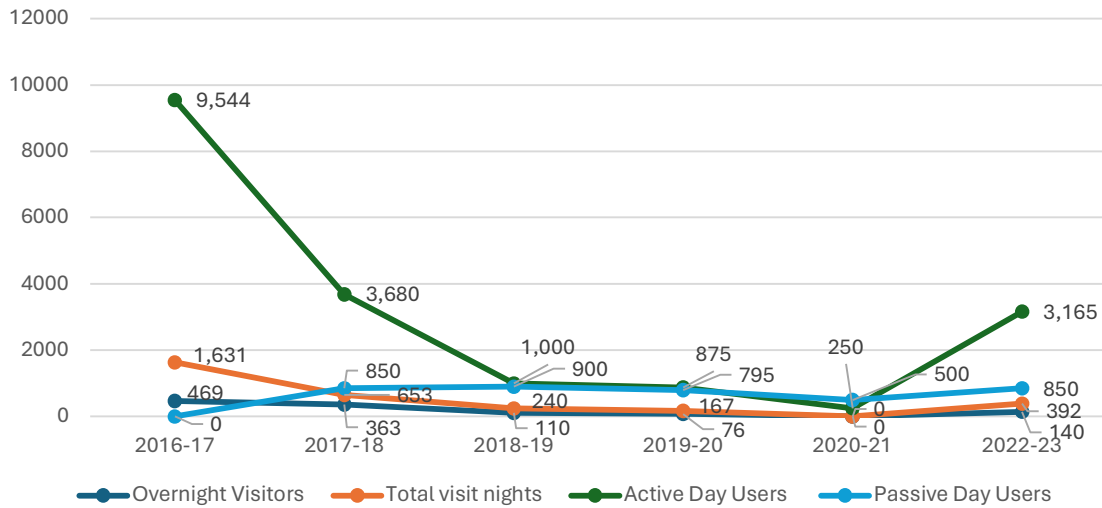
Green Lake is Horsham's closest recreational lake and has a long sandy beach, boat ramp, jetty and picnic facilities. The Horsham Yacht Clubhouse is located at Green Lake and runs regattas and events when water levels are suitable. There are no camping facilities at this lake, so most overnight visitors are people visiting friends and relatives or staying in Horsham for an event.

Green Lake is popular for fishing, swimming, boating and windsurfing. In early 2017 a large number of visitors were fishing for yabbies, and this year was the peak for participation and economic contribution throughout the eight-year period. In subsequent years the lake was plagued with blue-green algae infestations on varying and often prolonged occasions. There were windows of improvement in 2019-20 and 2022-23, fortunately over the Christmas and January holiday periods in both cases, enabling skiing enthusiasts to get out on the lake, but these were short-lived with blue-green algae returning.

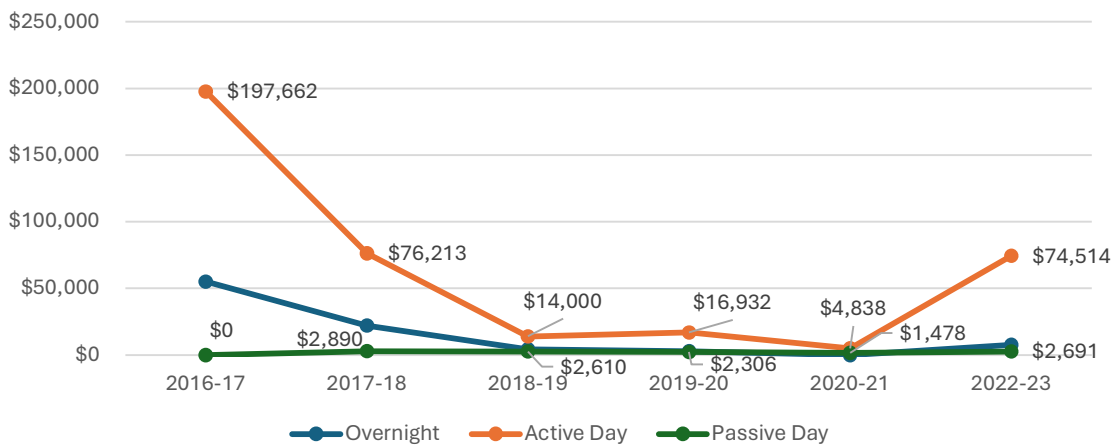
2016-17 was the only year when Green Lake did not encounter significant periods of blue-green algae warnings. The visitor expenditure effects of blue-green algae at this lake is estimated to have been \$60,000 to \$120,000 per annum in years between 2017 and 2021, when recreational activity was restricted.

In 2022, Horsham business networking group, West Vic Business, led a 'Green Lake Recreational Precinct Vision' project, which recommended the development and extension of existing facilities to include a mixed-use clubhouse, café, wrap-around deck area, sealed car park area and upgraded boat ramp facilities.

### Green Lake



### Green Lake



**Summary of potential improvements:**

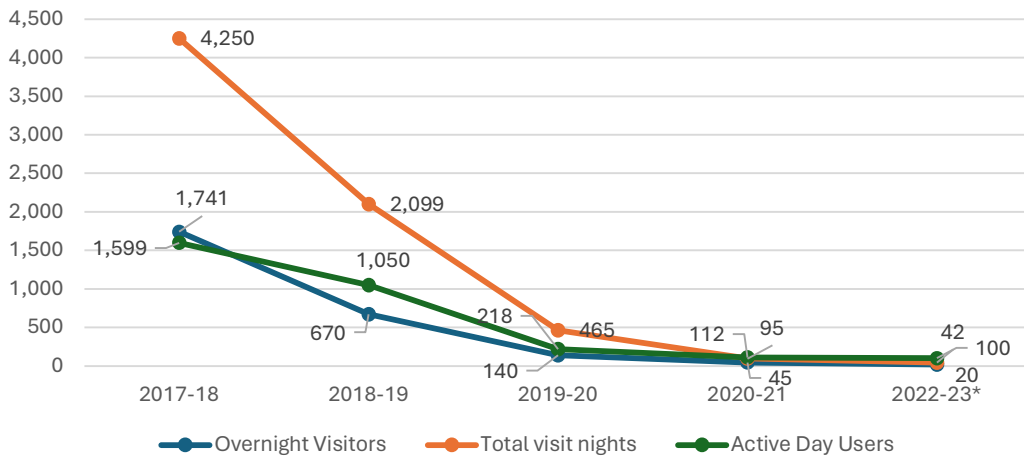
- Facilities – use of sailing club building as a food service outlet or restaurant. *(Being pursued by West Vic Business as part of a masterplan vision).*
- Recreational water trails
  - o Club central
- Cross promotions
  - o Part of some Horsham Rural City promotions
- Potential events
  - o Sailing, open water swimming.

#### 4.3.4 Toolondo Reservoir

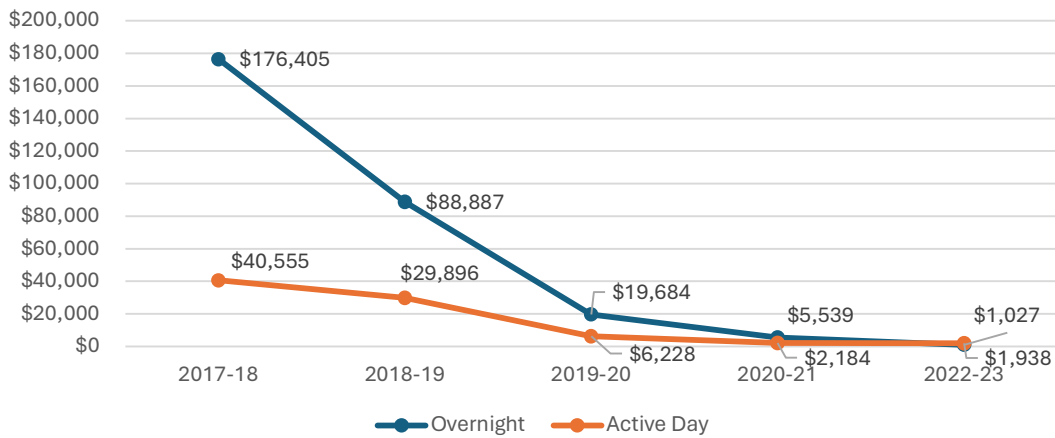
Toolondo Reservoir is well known for ‘trophy trout’ fishing. Northern, southern and eastern ends of Lake Toolondo all have boat ramps, however, these ramps become unusable during periods of drought due to the onset of low water levels. Lake Toolondo is also used by water skiers (when water levels permit) and swimmers.

The assessment of Toolondo began in 2017-18 and this was the peak year. Fishing activity steadily declined from 2017-18 through 2021-22. In particular, there was an absence of “trophy trout” for the enthusiastic sports anglers in all years, but there were good returns for those fishing for redbfin during the summer and spring months of 2017-18. Beyond that year, water levels declined and there were some periods of blue-green algae blooms. By 2019-20 the low water levels had decimated the recreational use of Lake Toolondo. It was almost empty in 2022-23, with the positive that large carp infestations were reduced. Fish stocking (exclusively rainbow and brown trout) of the reservoir stopped in October 2019 and did not resume until May 2023. Between May and June 2023, 25,000 advanced trout were released in Toolondo. The outlook for 2024-25 is quite positive for Toolondo’s status as a trout fishery to return.

Toolondo



Toolondo



Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o Additional signage
  - o Improved landscaping at access points and boat ramps
- Facilities – new camping ground with amenities
- Recreational water trails
  - o Trophy fishing trail
- Cross promotions – Recreational fishing promotions.

## 4.4 NORTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

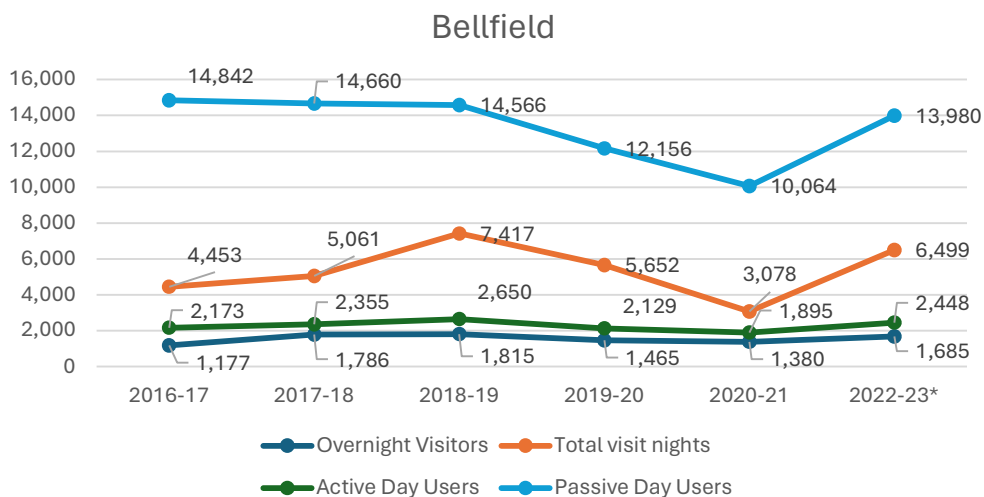
Five Northern Grampians Shire lakes were included in the Recreational Water assessments: Lakes Bellfield, Fyans, Lonsdale, Wartook and Walkers.

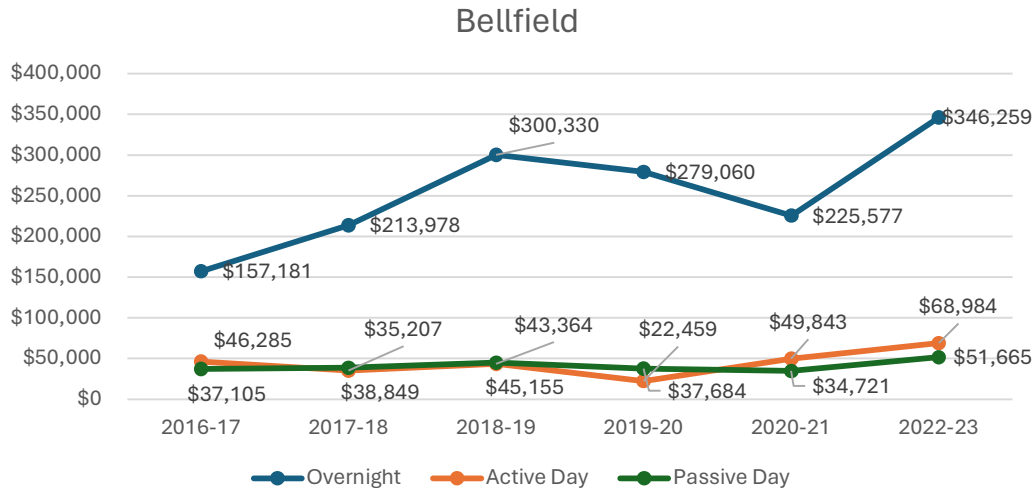
### 4.4.1 Lake Bellfield

Lake Bellfield is the main supply source for the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.

Lake Bellfield, on the edge of the Halls Gap township, is used for low-impact recreational activities such as kayaking, paddleboarding, some boating (not with combustion motors), swimming, fishing and picnicking. Trout fishing is popular among serious anglers in the cooler months. A wide range of accommodation and food service choices are available at premises throughout Halls Gap, and participants at this lake tend to have the highest average expenditure in the region, with many staying at motels and apartments/holiday houses rather than caravan and camping options.

While weather conditions and water quality have an impact on participation at Lake Bellfield, the broader tourist attractions of the Grampians mean visitation is less variable than other waterbodies in the region, unless overall regional tourism visitation is impacted, as it was in 2019-20 and 2020-21.





Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o More structured walking track from Halls Gap to the weir wall and the lake’s picnic area (*partially implemented*)
  - o Floating pontoon.
- Facilities – Pop-up food service van(s)
- Recreational water trails
  - o Resort and tourist lakes
  - o Waterways with accommodation options
  - o Trophy fishing
  - o Travellers rests tour
- Cross promotions – Part of Grampians tourism precinct promotions.
- Potential events
  - o Bellfield Lake picnic day (with a range of on water options such as paddle boats, paddleboards, kayaks, sailing dinghies)

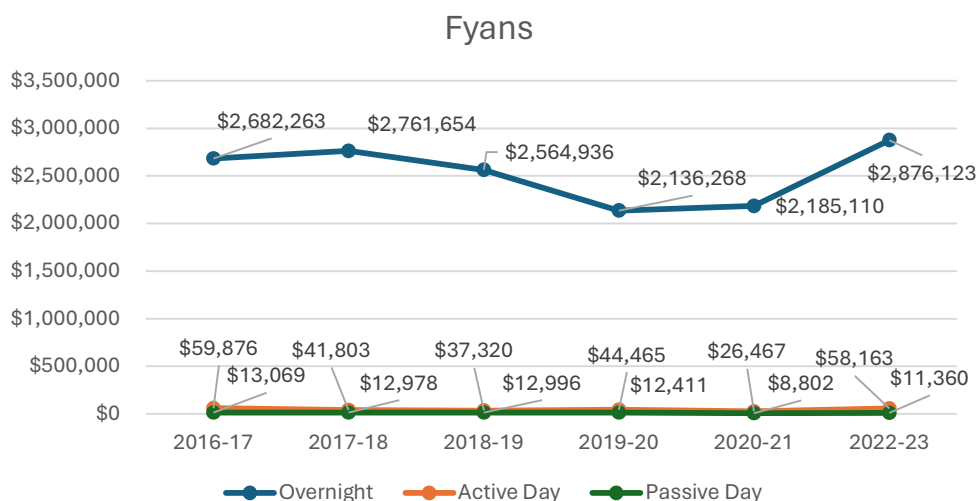
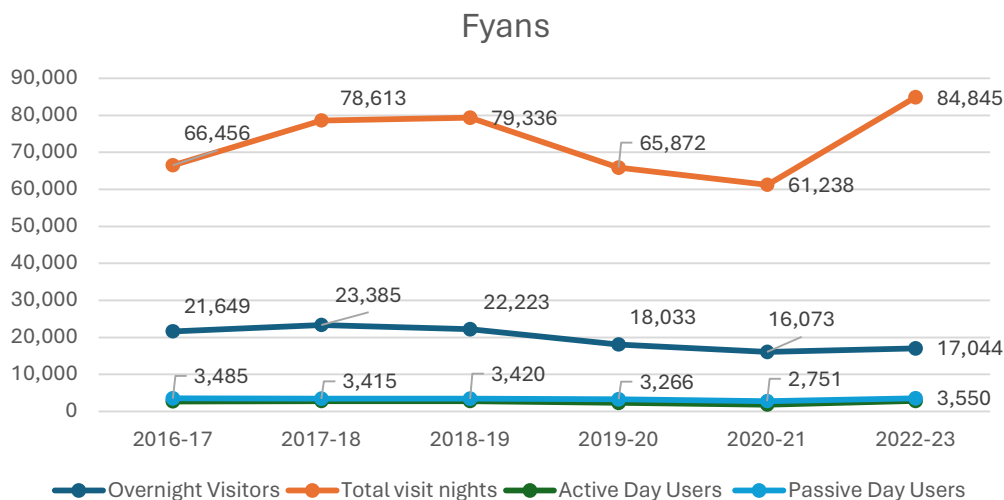
#### 4.4.2 Lake Fyans

The lake is one of the most important recreational lakes in the region. It has the greatest number of overnight visitors and makes the greatest economic contribution in the region. It hosts a number of clubs and regular activities including sailing, jet skiing, fishing, canoeing, hiking and scouting. Caravanning. A 9.6 kilometres walking track at Lake Fyans was opened in 2017-18 around the southern perimeter of Lake Fyans, with fencing, shade shelters, upgraded and new toilets, signage, nature trails and bird trails.

Extensive upgrade works were completed in 2023 to meet needs of recreational users and to ensure dam safety regulations continue to be met. The works encompassed construction of a new boat ramp, repair of the existing ramp near the Lake Fyans Holiday Park, new staircases, handrails, landings, new grass and an upgrade to the walking track. Embankment works were also completed to protect the lake against future storms and reduce flood risks.

The Lake Fyans Holiday Park is the largest accommodation facility dedicated to servicing any recreational water facilities in the Wimmera Southern Mallee.

There is a robust pattern of participation at Lake Fyans and even in the COVID 19 pandemic affected 2019-20 and 2020-21 years when numbers were at a low point but remained high by comparison with other regional waterbodies. Participation and economic contribution in 2022-23 reached a peak for the assessment years.



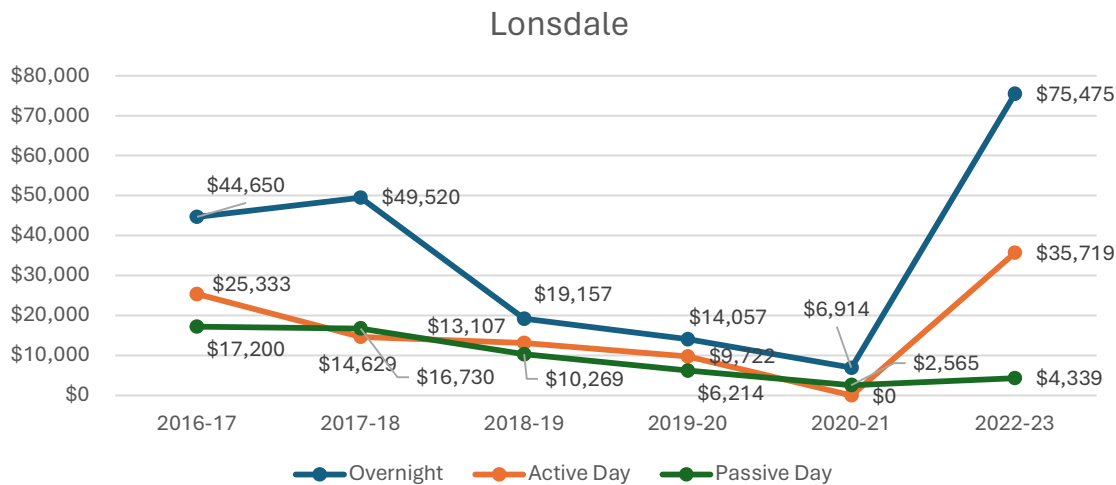
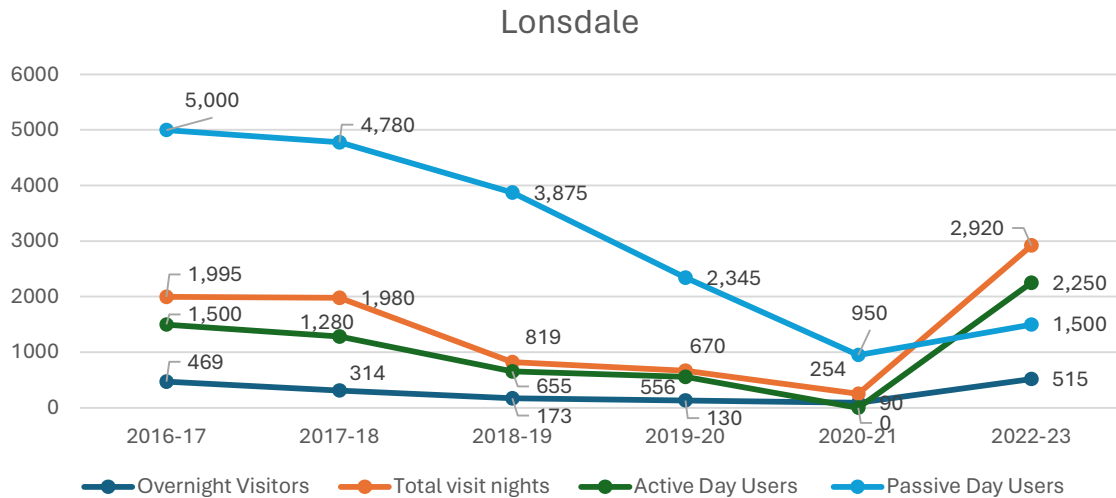
**Summary of potential improvements:**

- Infrastructure
  - o Greater integration of the 9.6 kilometres walking track around the southern part of the lake with the Grampians tourism precinct and the Lake Fyans Holiday Park.
- Recreational water trails
  - o Resort and tourist lakes
  - o Club central
  - o Water playgrounds
  - o Waterways with all the frills
- Cross promotions – Part of Grampians tourism precinct promotions.
- Potential events
  - o Better coordination and scheduling of events and collaboration among lake user groups.

### 4.4.3 Lake Lonsdale

Lake Lonsdale is one of the region’s lakes highly prized and mainly used by local residents. It is considered a somewhat dedicated resource to Stawell and other surrounding communities. It can offer fishing, yabbying, boating, swimming, camping and water skiing and the surrounding land provides opportunity for trekking, hiking and wildlife watching.

The lake was almost at a peak level in 2016-17 and attracted holiday makers throughout the summer and spring. Water levels and water quality were poor from 2018-19 through to 2020-21 (and experienced algal blooms at times). The lake returned to a near peak in 2022-23 and the redfin fishing was outstanding in the autumn of that year, attracting many anglers from around the region, and the highest number of estimated visit nights of the years assessed.



Summary of potential improvements:

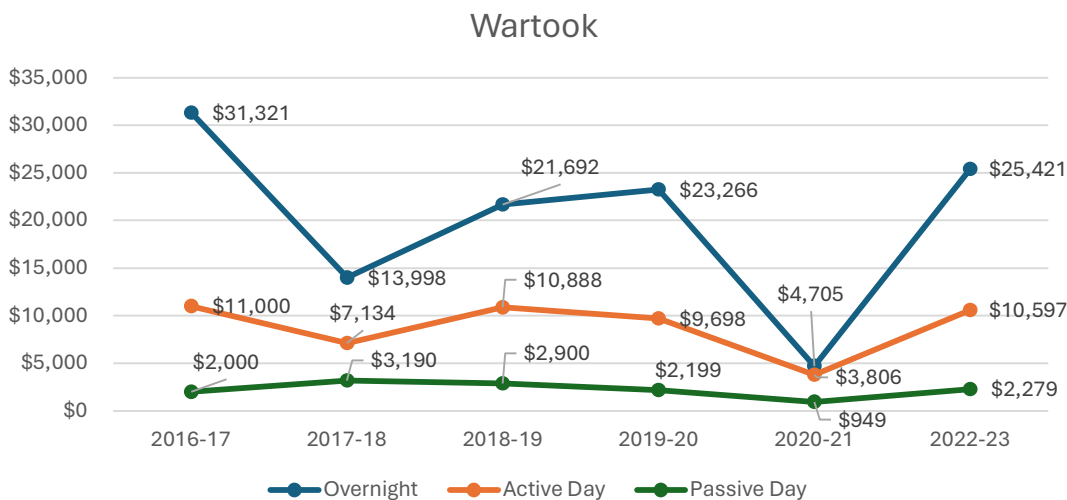
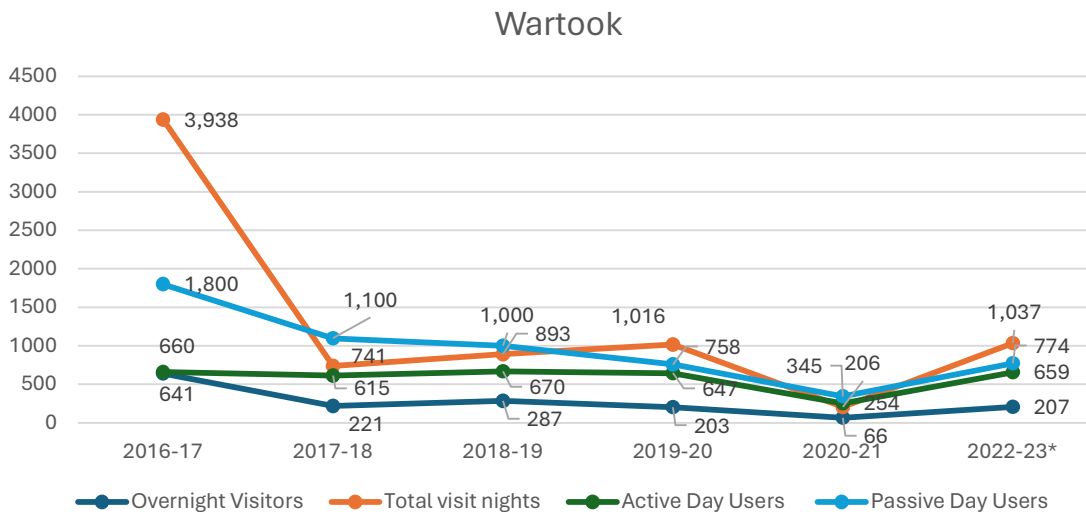
- Infrastructure
  - o Improved signage
  - o Toilet block upgrade
- Facilities – toilet block upgrade.

### 4.4.4 Lake Wartook

Located on the MacKenzie River in the central Grampians, Lake Wartook is popular with locals, particularly for fishing with trout as the target species. Around 15,000 rainbow and brown trout are stocked in the lake each year. This number increased to 25,000 in 2023.

Horsham Angling Club has a lodge located on the foreshore of Lake Wartook, and this is the main accommodation facility. The club has 300 to 400 fishing members, not all of whom are active. Many members join specifically to access the club’s lodge facilities at Wartook and Rocklands Reservoir.

Participation levels at Wartook are modest and regular bookings have dwindled somewhat in recent years, but the active participation continues to be largely dedicated anglers.



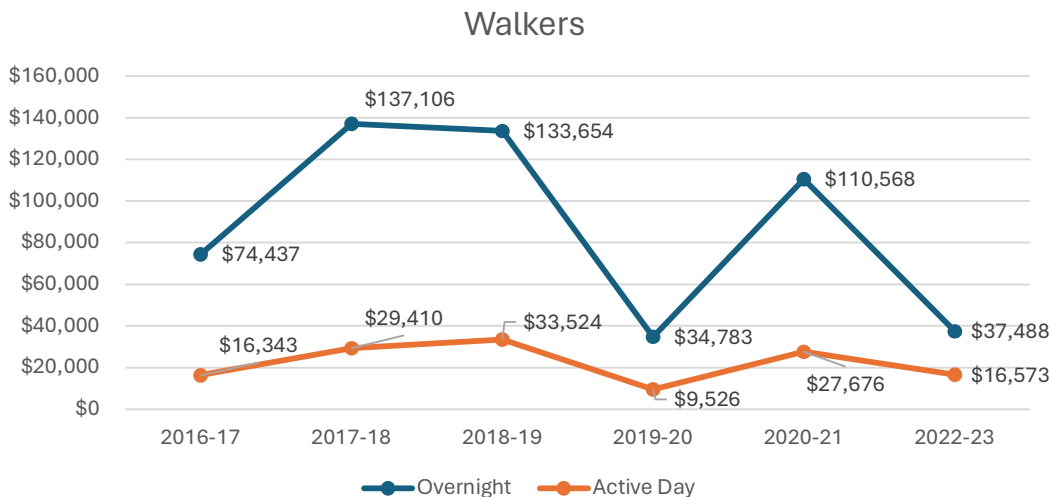
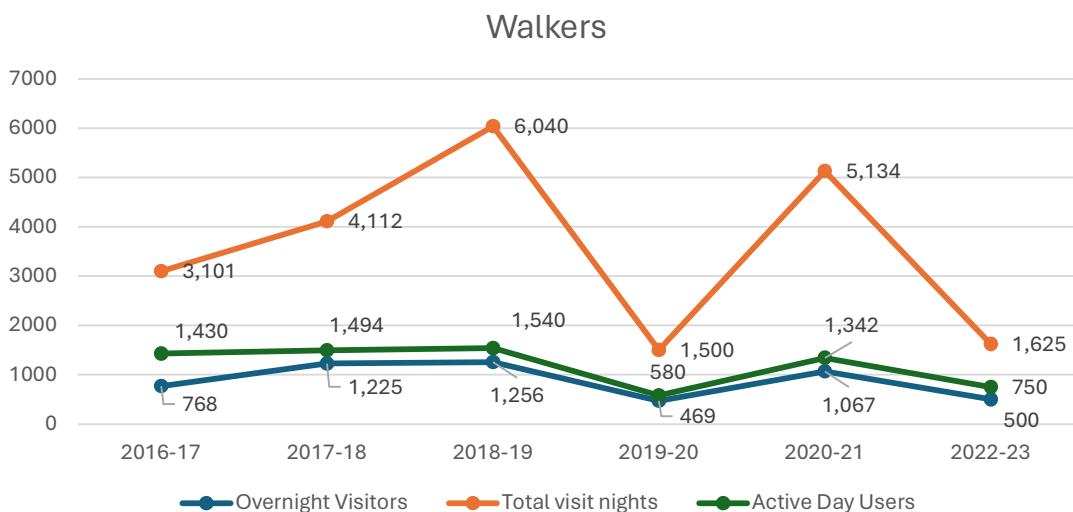
Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o Improved directional signage
- Recreational water trails
  - o Trophy fishing trail
- Cross promotions – Recreational fishing promotions

### 4.4.4 Walkers Lake

There are no specific clubs or organisations making regular use of facilities at Walkers Lake, but a few host events at the lake from time to time, for example the St Arnaud Anglers Club. The lake is a relatively un-promoted gem for people looking for a great fishing, kayaking and boating spot in a secluded location.

It is very popular with locals. In 2017-18 and 2018-19 the lake was busy with fishing and skiing participants. This was one of several lakes in the region where visit nights increased (ie average length of stay was greater) in 2018-19 but the average expenditure was reduced. However, participation in 2019-20 was decimated due to blue-green algae and there were massive fish mortalities during this period, estimated to have had an economic impact of around \$75,000. Participation recovered in 2020-21 despite the ongoing COVID pandemic restrictions, but flooding left the lake largely inaccessible in a large part of the 2022-23 year.



Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o Improved directional signage (*expected to be addressed through a Silo Art Trail project on signage*)
- Recreational water trails
  - o Peaceful retreats
  - o Silo art and night skies

#### **4.5 WEST WIMMERA SHIRE**

Five West Wimmera Shire lakes and weir pools were included in the Recreational Water assessments. Lakes Wallace and Charlegrark were included each year. Lake Ratzcastle was included from year two, Lake Bringalbert in from year three and the Harrow Weir Pool on the Glenelg River in year one.

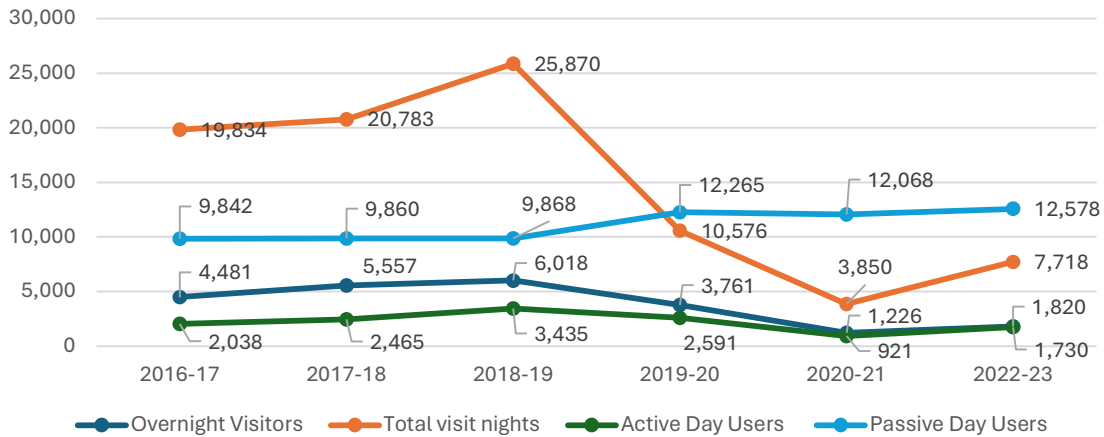
##### **4.5.1 Lake Wallace**

Lake Wallace is a key asset of the town of Edenhope. The lake was largely empty from 2001 until 2016 greatly affecting town morale. Since 2016, water in the lake has been a constant although water levels, water quality and problematic weed infestations have varied considerably and have impacted on recreational uses.

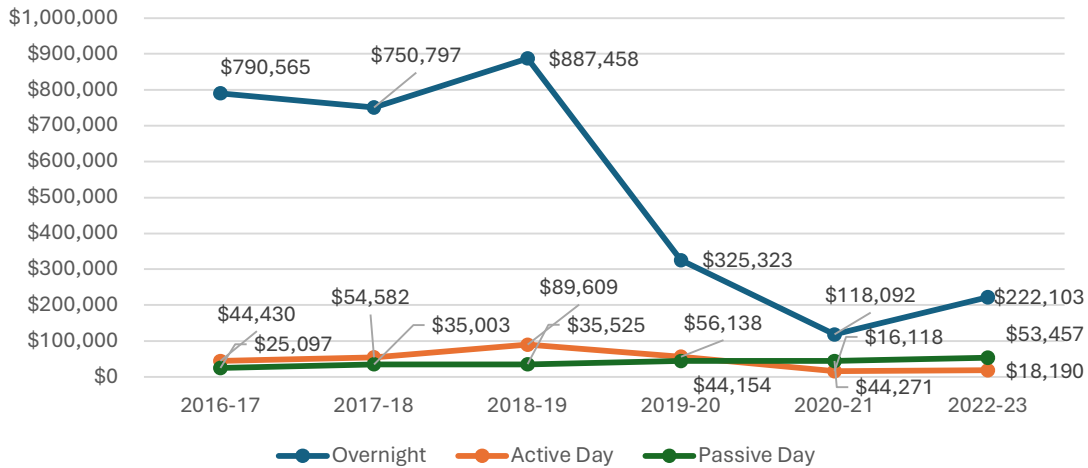
Many residents regularly visit, walk, run and picnic around the lake's 5.5km perimeter foreshore and the lake is popular for boating (shore and boat), fishing and swimming. The lake contains redfin and is stocked with brown and rainbow trout. Annual events include Henley on Lake Wallace and the Edenhope Fishing Competition. When water filled the lake in 2016 it immediately began to attract participants, and this steadily increased in the following two years before a combination of setbacks in 2019-20 and 2020-21 which included reduced water and water quality, fewer entries in key events, reduced fishing and boating participation, cancellation of activities due the COVID pandemic, and restrictions on interstate visitation from South Australia. Since 2021, participation levels have steadily resumed, bolstered by excellent fishing in the second half of 2022-23, but is not yet approaching pre-COVID pandemic levels.

There were, however, increased passive participants in 2020 and 2021 with people taking their daily exercise around the lake in larger numbers during pandemic restrictions. This was expanded in December 2022 with commencement of the Lake Wallace Parkrun, a weekly five kilometre run/walk around the perimeter of the lake. The Parkrun attracts an average of 50-55 participants each week (including volunteers) of which 5-10% tend to be visitors to the town.

### Lake Wallace



### Lake Wallace



Summary of potential improvements:

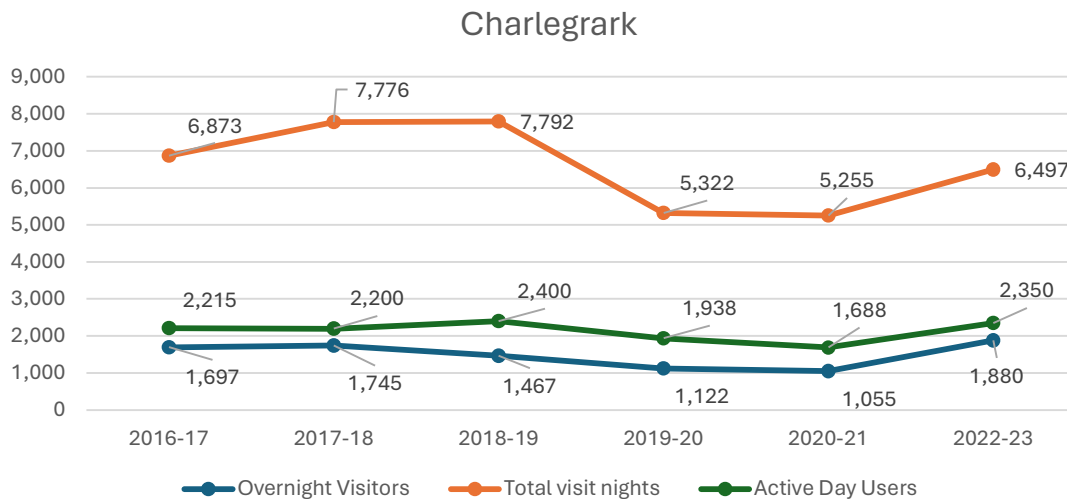
- Infrastructure
  - o Development of an area of the lake to provide water security in drier times.
- Facilities
  - o A permanent/semi-permanent café or food service outlet on/near the foreshore.
- Recreational water trails
  - o Events centres
  - o Nature and wetlands
  - o Travellers rests tour
- Cross promotions – Environment, nature and wildlife promotions, part of Edenhope town promotions.
- Potential events
  - o Continuation of existing events program (which may require additional volunteer input).

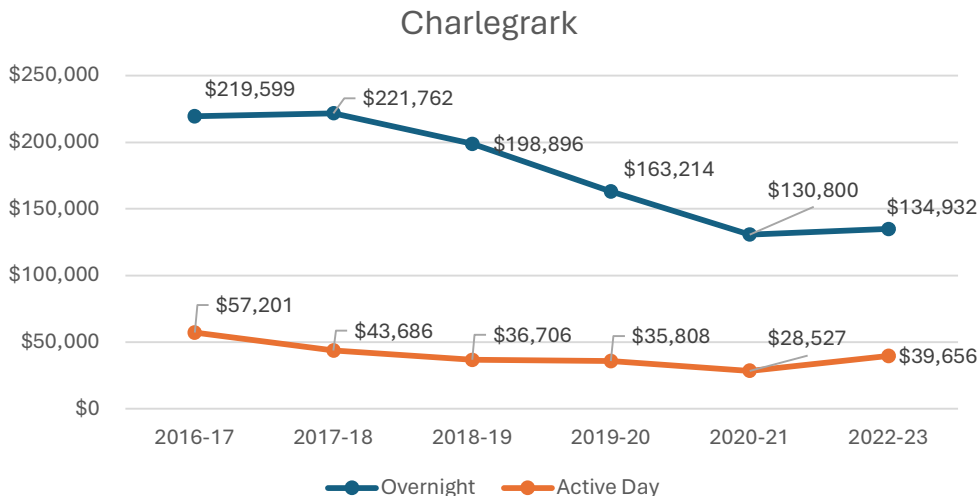
### 4.5.2 Lake Charlegrark

Lake Charlegrark is a natural lake located between Kaniva and Edenhope. This lake is popular for water skiing and fishing during holiday periods over warmer months. The lake is one of the region’s target destinations for Murray cod (which were first stocked in the 1950s). Families are attracted to the camping ground and there are also self-contained cottages, a house available for bookings and a private boutique style accommodation on the eastern side of the lake (opposite the main camping and caravan park) and a lodge (Langley Lodge) about 3 kilometres from the lake.

Regular maintenance works and small capital improvements are made by the Foreshore Committee. In the 2016-17 year this included installation of 2 new electric barbecues in Crabtree Hall (the functions facility) within the reserve, upgrading of navigational aids on the lake, a solar panel for Crabtree Hall, and new water pumps. In 2017-18 there was an upgrade to three phase power and construction of an all-abilities amenities block, together with upgrades to barbecue and seating areas.

There were some blue-green algae outbreaks in 2017-18 and 2018-19 and also power outages, which impacted during the eight-year period. These factors seemed to have a greater effect on economic contribution rather than overall participation numbers. In 2019-20, the annual Country Music Festival was staged prior to the COVID 19 restrictions and was unaffected. However, the normally very busy Easter, ANZAC Day long weekends and the 2021 Music Festival were abandoned.





Summary of potential improvements:

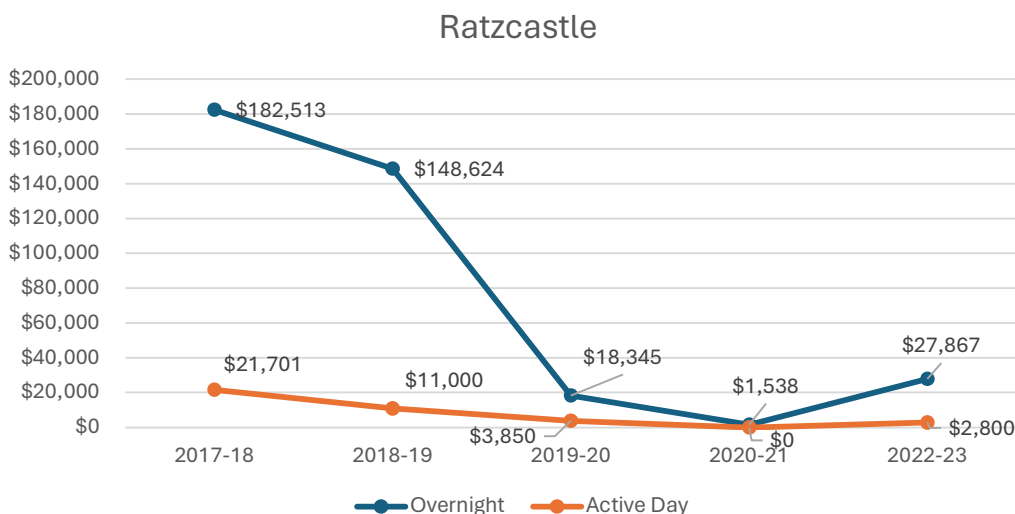
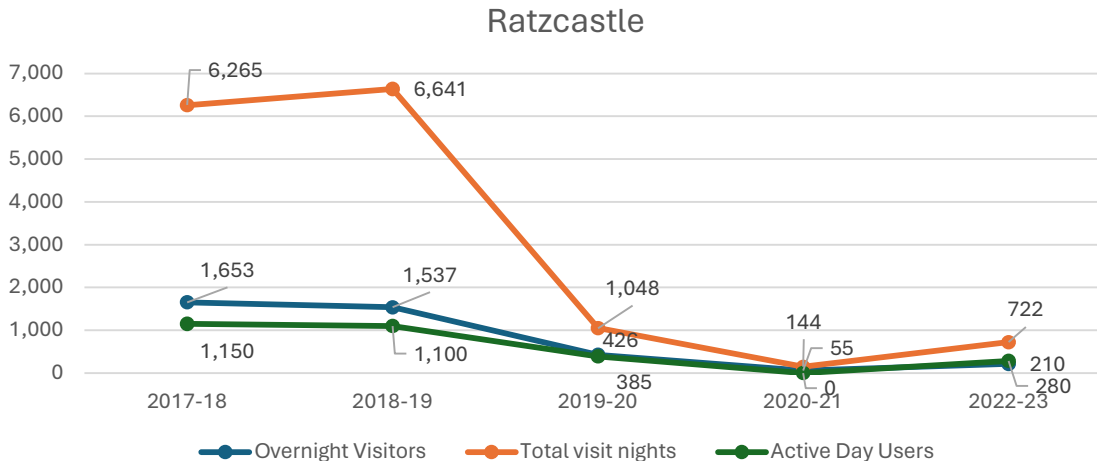
- Recreational water trails
  - o Trophy fishing trail
  - o Water playgrounds
- Cross promotions – Environment, nature and wildlife promotions. Recreational fishing promotions.

**4.5.3 Lake Ratzcastle**

Lake Ratzcastle is another of the relatively ‘hidden gem’ waterbodies in the WSM region, south of Groke. The lake only fills on a seasonal basis but is an iconic wetland and its environs have significant Aboriginal cultural heritage values. The lake foreshore is well maintained by the Groke Lions Club.

Camping is permitted at Lake Ratzcastle, at a good selection of unpowered sites, but there are no booking arrangements or camping fees (donations can be made, and many people are so impressed with the facilities and location that they do make a donation).

The lake was included in the recreational water assessment from 2017-18 and the water levels (and fishing) were good in both that year and 2018-19. In 2019-20 through to 2021-22 the lake became completely dry, and those people who did visit were attracted by the serenity of the camping sites and the flora and fauna of the area. Larger numbers of campers looking for a quiet spot returned from the spring of 2022-23, when the water levels rapidly increased (in November-December). There were no fish during this time, but yabbies were caught in the lake in the autumn of 2023.



**Summary of potential improvements:**

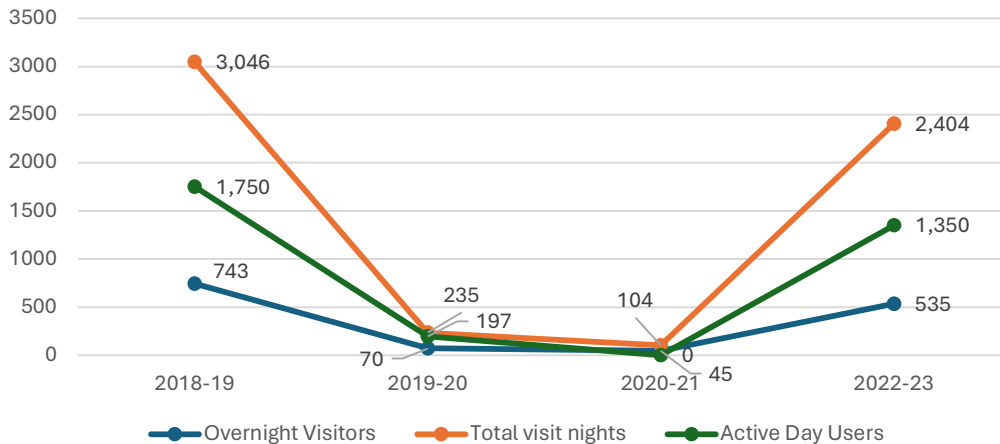
- Infrastructure
  - o Improved signage (*expected to be addressed through a Silo Art Trail project on signage*)
  - o Access road upgrade.
- Recreational water trails
  - o Peaceful retreats
  - o Nature and wetlands
- Cross promotions – Environment, nature and wildlife promotions, part of Goroke town promotions.

**4.5.4 Lake Bringalbert**

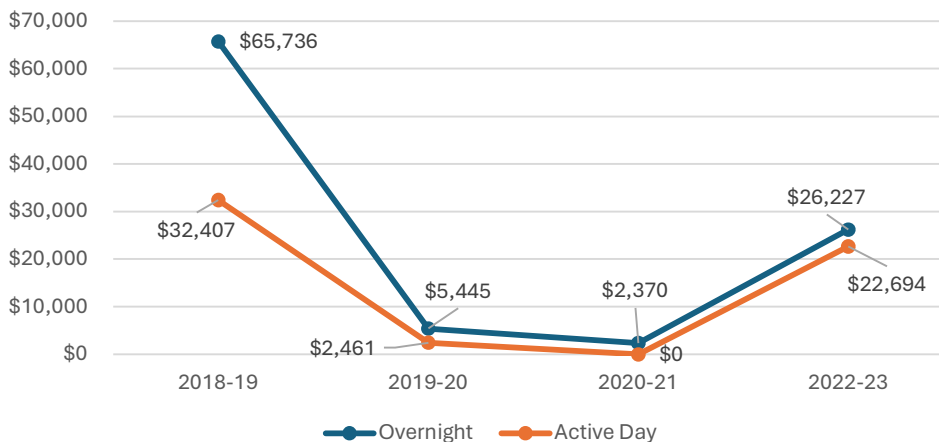
Lake Bringalbert was included in the lakes and weirs assessment for the first time in 2018-19. The lake is most popular with visitors from country South Australia (just 18 minutes drive to the west) who make almost 85% of recreational users. The lake is dependent on seasonal inflows and when full offers swimming, boating and fishing. In 2018-19 the lake was busy and recreational activities were possible but by 2019-20 the water level was very low and unusable for recreation. Some people stayed next to the lake in 2019-20 through to 2021-22 but travelled to Charlegrark or Wallace for water-based recreation.

In 2022-23 water levels returned to enable on-water recreation (including water skiing, jetboating, kayaking and swimming). The wide plain adjacent to the lake offers space for campers to occupy large sites. This lake is probably better known, and accessed, by visitors from South Australia’s south-east than from many in the Wimmera Southern Mallee.

### Bringalbert



### Bringalbert



Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o Improved signage
  - o Upgrade road around lake

#### 4.6 YARRIAMBIACK SHIRE

Six Yarriambiack Shire lakes and weir pools were included in the Recreational Water assessments. Lakes Lascelles and Marma, and the Yarriambiack Creek weir pools at Brim, Beulah and Warracknabeal were included each year and the newly pipeline-filled Turkey Bottom Lake at Yaapeet was included in 2022-23.

### 4.6.1 Lake Lascelles

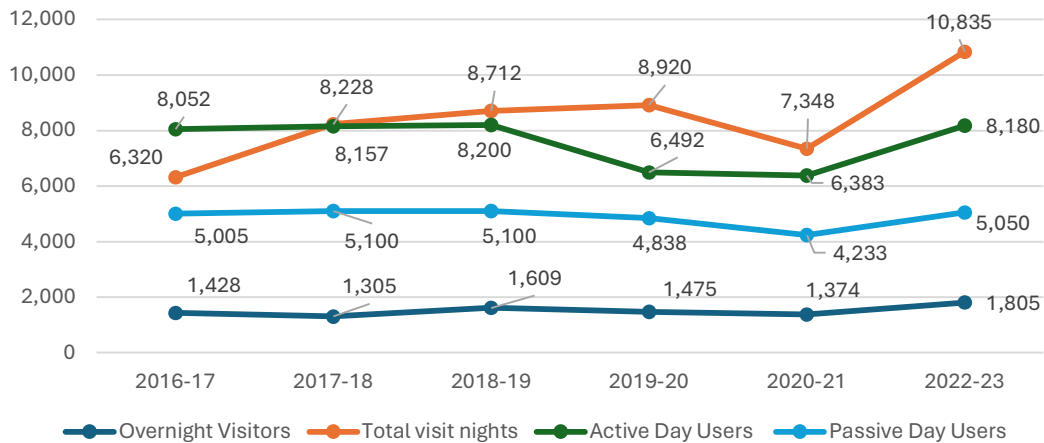
Lake Lascelles, within the Hopetoun town area, is a very popular holiday and day visit destination. It is ideal for walking, swimming, boating, skiing, kayaking, fishing and bird watching. A dedicated fishing ‘precinct’ adjacent to the lake was completed in 2019.

Lake Lascelles has a variety of accommodation options including free unpowered sites, paid powered sites (with amenities) and an eclectic collection of cabins/units at the Mallee Bush Retreat, made to replicate structures from the district’s pioneering heritage (such as silos, cow sheds, stables and machinery sheds). The Committee of Management was successful in securing grant funds in 2020 for a new all abilities amenities block at the Bush Retreat, which has been completed and adds to the appeal of the lake to a wide range of potential users.

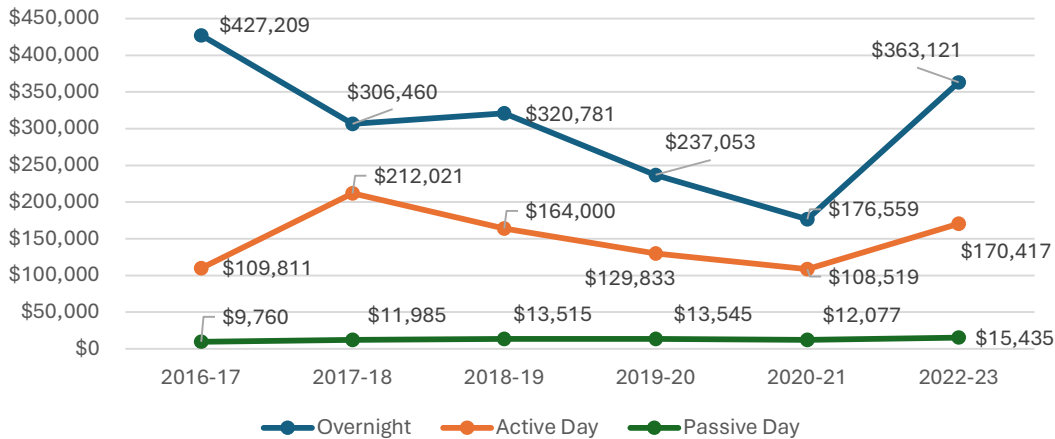
Lake Lascelles is one of the Wimmera Southern Mallee recreational water facilities utilised year-round, although at lower occupancy in the winter months. Even during the COVID 19 pandemic 7-9 couples were permitted to remain caravanning at the lake in the intense lockdown period. Visitation and local usage of the lake has continued to flourish in the post-pandemic years. Consistently good water levels and water quality and the mix of private, Council owned, free caravan and camping facilities and the proximity to Hopetoun’s central activities area give the lake very broad appeal.

Lascelles is the best ‘model’ of a tourist lake in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region, excluding the two lakes in the heart of the Grampians tourism region (Fyans and Bellfield). It is a tourist attraction in its own right, Hopetoun’s key physical asset, and a focal point for not only the local community but also the surrounding districts. Its economic contribution is sizable and one that could be emulated, as a target, by some of the other lakes in the region now that pipeline water offers reasonable security and investment in infrastructure and accommodation has improved.

Lake Lascelles



### Lake Lascelles



**Summary of potential improvements:**

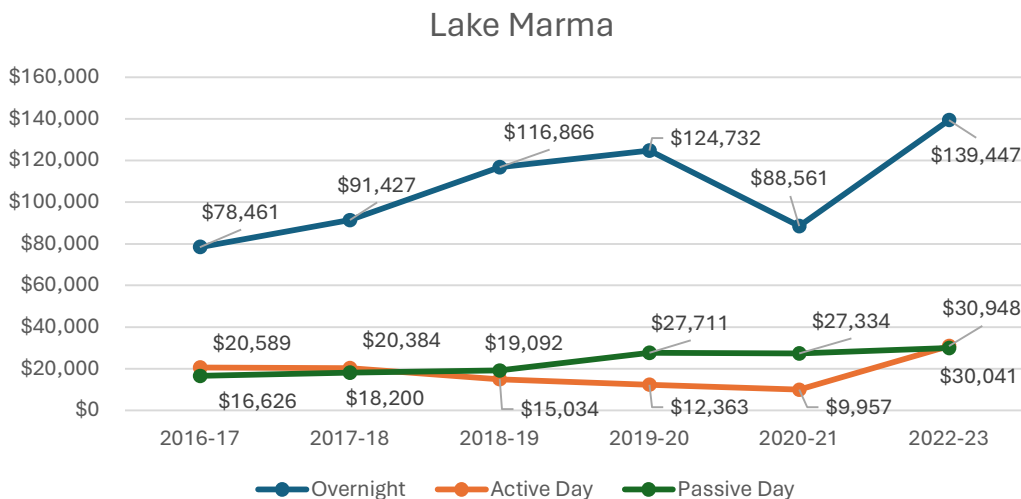
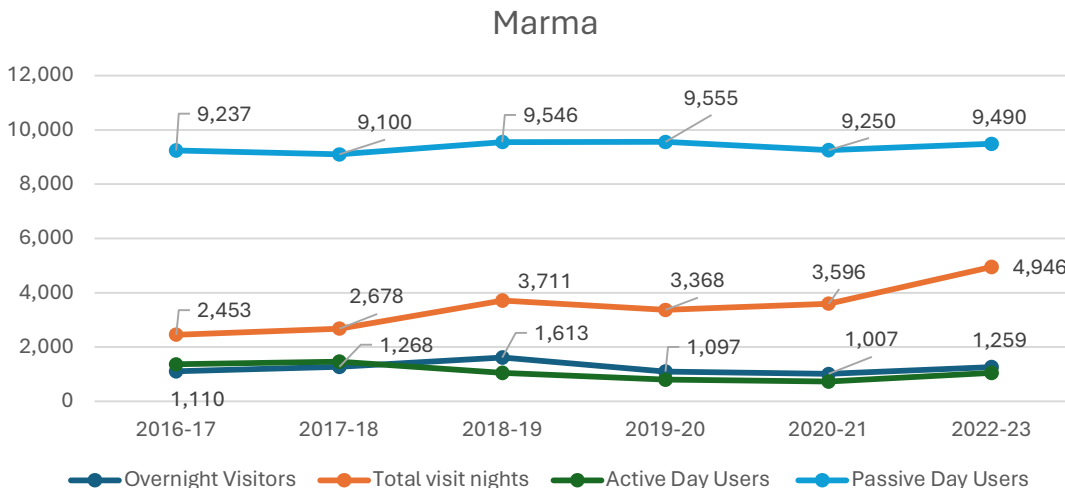
- Facilities
  - o New amenities block at Mallee Bush Retreat
  - o Pop-up or semi-permanent café or food service outlet next to the foreshore
- Recreational water trails
  - o Grey nomad bliss
  - o Water playgrounds
  - o Travellers rests tour
- Cross promotions – Silo art, heritage and environment, part of Hopetoun town promotions.

**4.6.2 Lake Marma Brim Weir Pool**

Lake Marma, in the heart of Murtoa’s urban area, has a selection of walking trails which encompass natural and historic areas of interest. The lake is a tranquil oasis with abundant birdlife and treed surrounds, making the small caravan park an accommodation option ‘of choice’ for grey nomads taking a leisurely tour of the silo art trail; often intending to stay one night at Marma and extending to 2 or 3. Three new cabins have recently been completed at Lake Marma, complementing the caravan park sites.

The lake consistently had amounts of ribbon weed throughout the eight-year assessment period, and the Committee of Management has been trying to control the extent of weed to reduce impact on recreational activities (fishing, swimming and kayaking), with some apparent success by mid-2020.

Participation/visitation levels at Lake Marma were among the most consistent of all lakes during 2016-17 to 2019-20 and even in the first COVID 19 pandemic year the visitation and economic contribution continued to increase (which actually masks quite a significant increase in 2019-20, since 3 months were effectively lost to the pandemic restrictions). This trend continued through to 2022-23 and visit nights increased substantially in 2023-24, largely through longer average lengths of stay.



**Summary of potential improvements:**

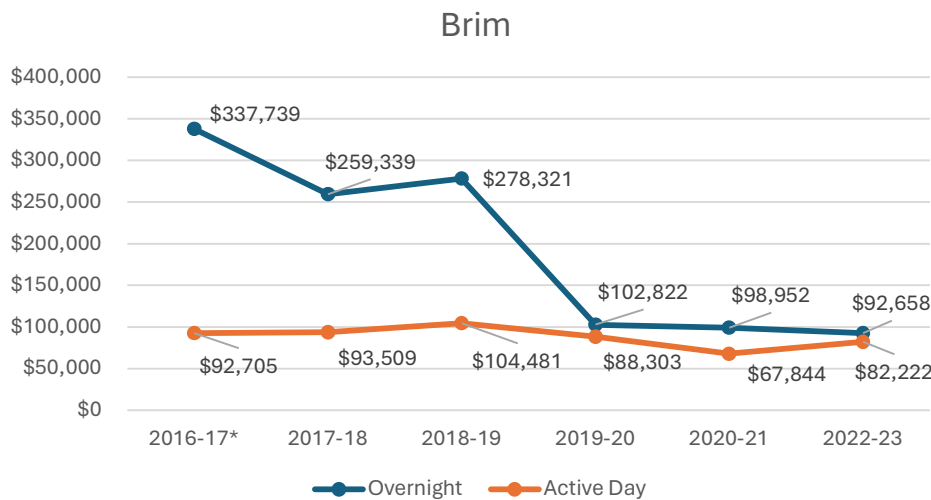
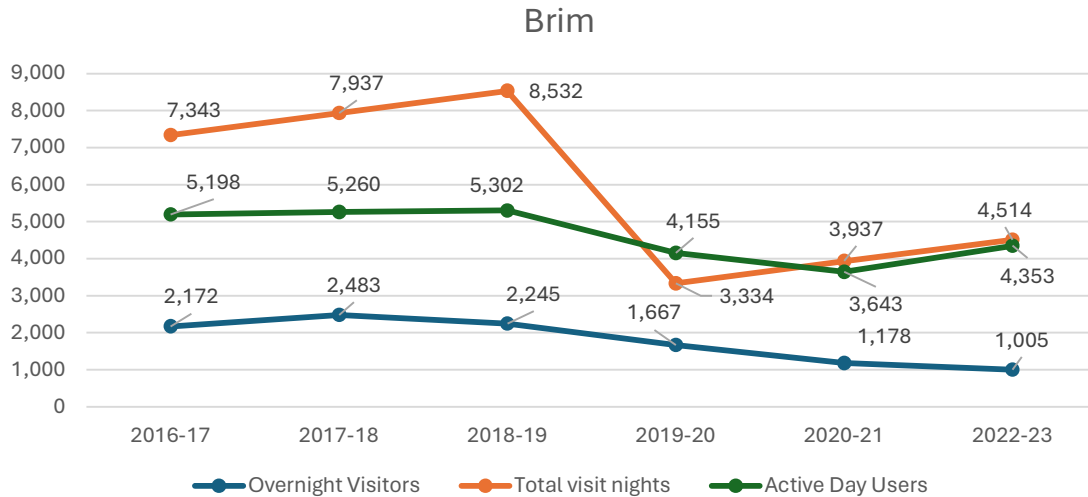
- Recreational water trails
  - o Grey nomad bliss
  - o Silo art and night skies
- Cross promotions – Silo art and heritage, part of Murtoa town promotions.
- Potential events
  - o Continuation of existing events program (which may require additional volunteer input).

**4.6.3 Brim Weir Pool**

Brim weir pool is one of the smallest recreational water facilities in the region. It offers a bushland setting, amenities, walking tracks, powered and non-powered sites and BBQ facilities.

The Yarriambiack Silo Art Trail was pioneered with the artwork on silos at Brim and visitation for the weir (including those people camping or caravanning on-site) is substantially bolstered by people taking a silo art trail tour. After healthy increase in visitation to 2018-19 the numbers were well down in 2019-20 even prior to the COVID 19 restrictions. There has been a loss of services

in the Brim township in recent years, with the closure of the town’s hotel in 2018-19 being a deterrent to some potential visitors, impacting on the poor COVID recovery in economic contribution recorded in 2022-23.



\* Brim and Beulah figures were combined in 2016-17

Summary of potential improvements:

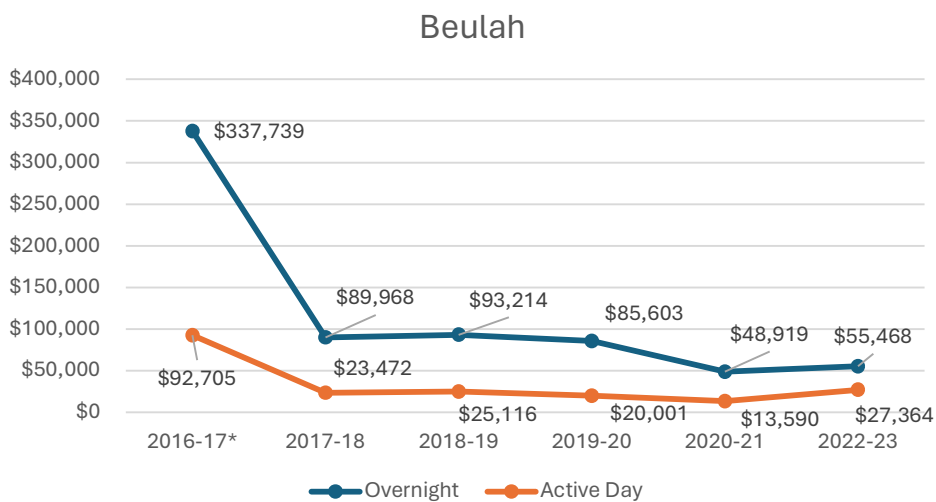
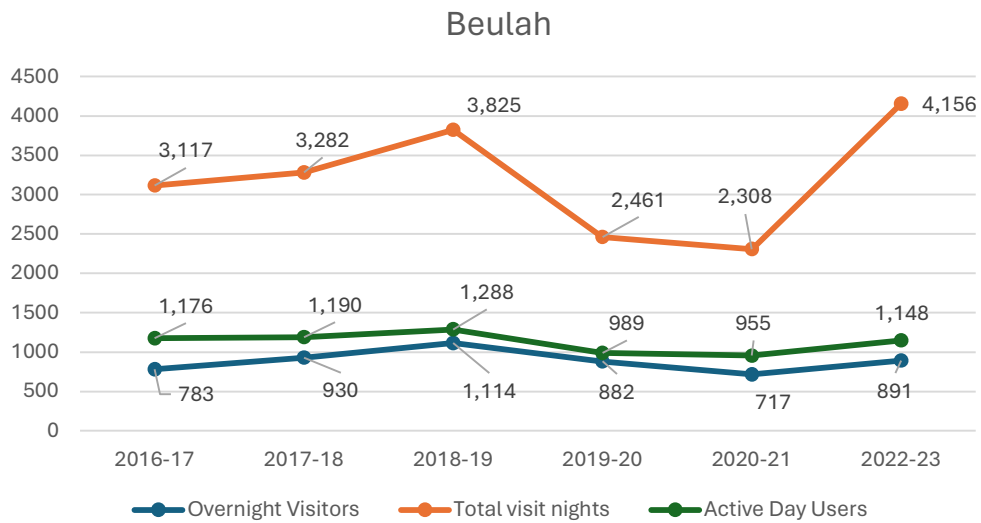
- Facilities
  - o Self-contained cabins.
- Recreational water trails
  - o Grey nomad bliss
  - o Silo art and night skies
- Cross promotions – Silo art.
- 

**4.6.4 Beulah Weir Pool**

Like Brim, the Beulah weir is constructed across Yarriambiack Creek, and has a camping and caravanning area with powered and unpowered camping sites, a playground, barbecue facilities. This facility is encompassed by Beulah’s recreation grounds (sports oval, tennis courts and a swimming pool) which can add to the activities for visitors.

Boating and water skiing is permitted on the Beulah Weir Pool and fishing, bird watching and walking is popular. Two new cabins, overlooking the weir pool, were constructed at the Beulah Reserve in 2019. Visitation and participation patterns at Beulah were similar to those at Brim during 2016-17 to 2019-20 although the overall numbers of participants were continually lower than at the neighbouring town. Beulah’s central business area supports a few more businesses than Brim. However, the town’s supermarket burned down in 2018-19 and has been (temporarily) replaced by a community run facility. The town’s hotel ceased operations in 2021.

Creation of a new Beulah event at the weir pool, “Wide Open Spaces” (staged in March since 2023) has stimulated participation. The full weekend event includes a half day fishing competition.



\* Brim and Beulah figures were combined in 2016-17

Summary of potential improvements:

- Infrastructure
  - o Improved signage (*expected to be addressed through a Silo Art Trail project on signage*).
- Recreational water trails
  - o Grey nomad bliss
- Cross promotions – Silo art and heritage.

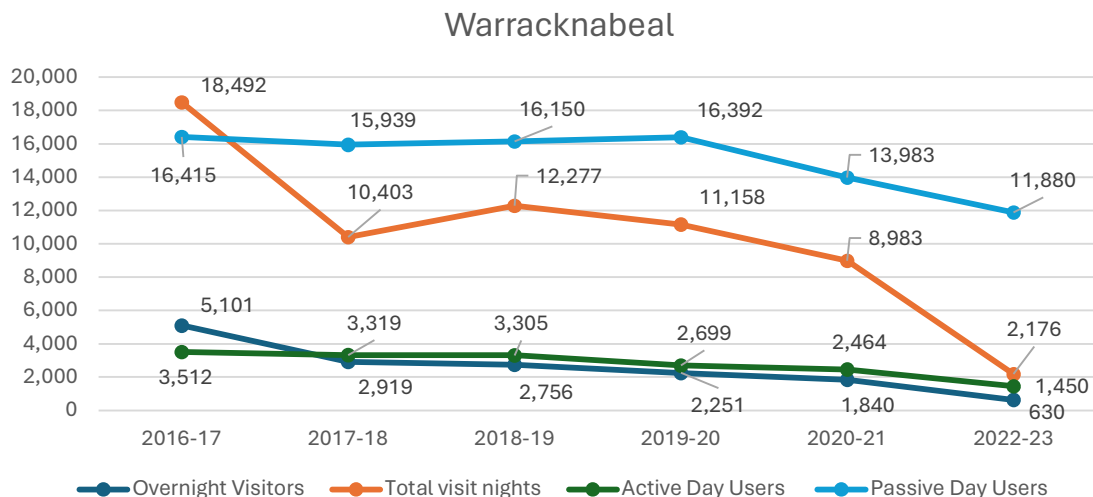
**4.6.5 Warracknabeal Weir Pool**

In Warracknabeal, the weir pool and the creek meandering through town are part of the recreational water facilities. Warracknabeal Caravan Park is located near the banks of the weir pool section of the creek, providing powered and unpowered sites, bathroom amenities, barbecues and laundry facilities.

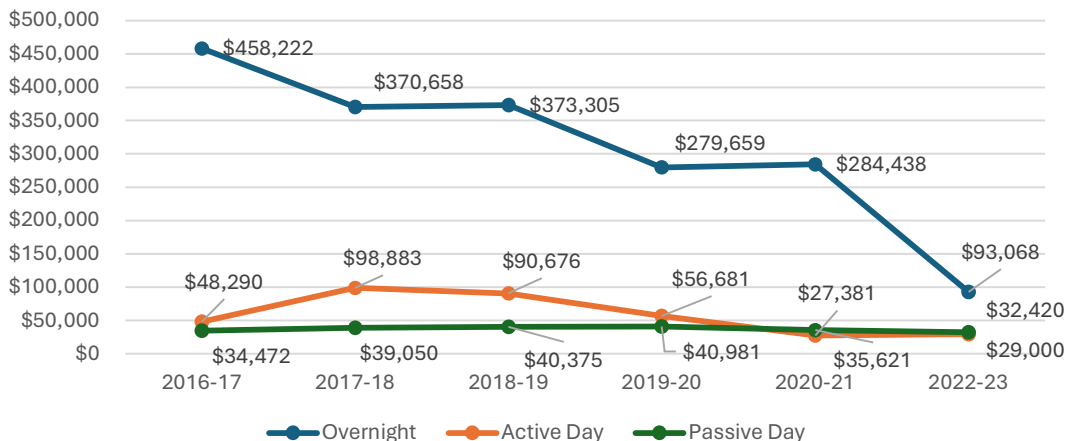
An angling club and ski club both operate at the weir pool. Swimming and fishing are popular in the area from the town’s fauna park up to the weir wall. Warracknabeal Weir Pool is used widely by local residents and community groups for walking and other forms of regular exercise: A use which became more important to residents during the restrictions imposed by the 2020 COVID 19 pandemic. The creek banks also offer many sites for tranquil picnics, fishing and relaxation.

Membership of both the angling club and ski club have declined slightly in the past three years, and the number of people using ski boats (largely on weekends) declined as well. Warracknabeal’s annual Easter festival, the Y-Fest, focuses strongly on activities along the Creek. It was cancelled due to COVID 19 restrictions in 2020. As a result, participation numbers decreased in 2019-20 and 2020-21 and the economic contribution experienced a considerable reduction.

The caravan park next to Yarriambiack Creek was closed for a large proportion of 2022-23, up to and including the Christmas period, while cabins and other infrastructure were installed.



### Warracknabeal



Summary of potential improvements:

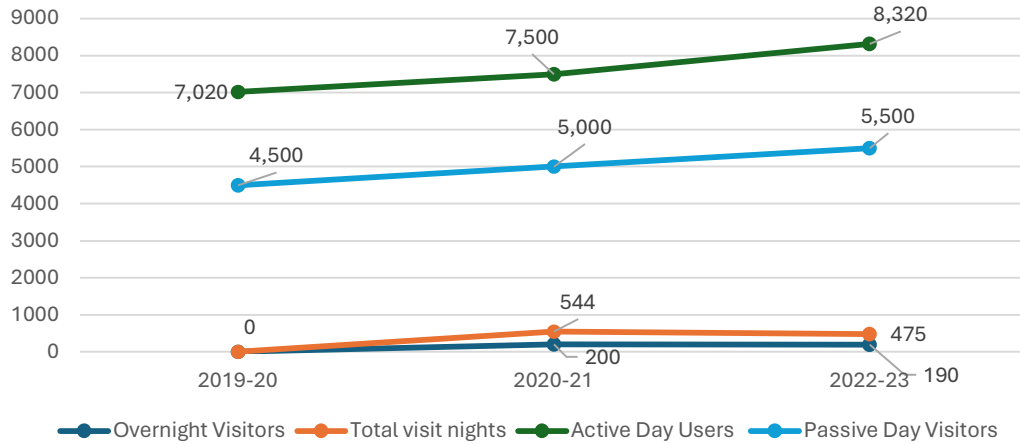
- Infrastructure
  - o Increased water levels and amenity in the ‘back-end’ of the weir pool, at least to the bridge beyond the Warracknabeal Caravan Park.
- Recreational water trails
  - o Club central
  - o Waterways with all the frills
  - o Travellers rests tours
- Cross promotions – Silo art, heritage, part of Warracknabeal town promotions.
- Potential events
  - o Fun runs and possibly a formal Parkrun (*An annual Run the Beal event has been implemented, in 2023*).

#### 4.7 MILDURA RURAL CITY: Lake Ouyen

Ouyen Lake was completed in the 2018-19 year and by 2019-20 was fully operational as a recreational waterway. Support infrastructure around the lake such as landscaping, a toilet block and outdoor furniture is still being developed but the lake is full and open to the public. There are strict rules in place, and at this stage overnight camping is not permitted. Water is delivered to Ouyen Lake by GWMWater through the Northern Mallee Pipeline. It has a basin volume of 450 megalitres. Fishing platforms, boat ramp and a designated swimming area have all been installed throughout 2021 to 2023.

Many of the stocked fish reached legal sizes by 2022-23 and attracted anglers. Participation at Ouyen Lake will continue to build over future years as the infrastructure around the lake is further enhanced and the landscaped vegetation matures.

### Lake Ouyen



### Lake Ouyen

