

Media Release

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New Giant Gippsland Earthworm Colony

Recently the Lance Creek Water Connection project team discovered evidence of Giant Gippsland Earthworms near Korumburra in an area that hadn't previously been identified as a likely habitat.

Prior to the commencement of the pipeline project, South Gippsland Water, developed plans to minimise impact on Gippsland Giant Earthworm habitat, including the utilisation of horizontal drilling methods in order to avoid known colony areas.

Mark Lynch, Acting Managing Director for South Gippsland Water said, "The earthworm is listed as Threatened under the Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and Vulnerable under the EPBC Act (*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*), and in response to the new discovery work at the site was halted."

"The project team immediately enacted its environmental contingency plan and experts from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and the South Gippsland Shire Council were consulted."

Key to the process was the involvement of biologist Beverley Van Praagh who provided advice to the team on how to progress without damaging habitat or earthworms. Dr Van Praagh, who has been studying the Giant Gippsland Earthworm for the past 25 years, was delighted to be notified of the find and eager to be involved with the crew managing the site.

"Giant Gippsland Earthworms are very cryptic animals and can be very difficult to survey," explained Dr Van Praagh. "While we are very good at identifying suitable habitat and locating most colonies, some colonies are very small and easily missed while other times they surprise us where they turn up."

"It is quite amazing how these colonies manage to survive in tiny areas of habitat that have the key ingredients to allow them to persist. This colony was quite small and limited to an area of less than 6m x 4m. It supported the typical blue-grey clays these worms are found in and was kept moist by a soak."

Following Dr Van Praagh's site inspection, and her assistance with the careful relocation of the colony to an equally suitable site close by, works resumed in accordance with all necessary environmental requirements. The project team will continue to work closely with Dr Van Praagh, DELWP and SGSC as the project progresses.

To find out more about the Lance Creek Water Connection and to receive regular updates, visit the Project page at www.sgwater.com.au. Also follow us on Facebook and Twitter @SthGippsWater

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Giant Gippsland Earthworms visit <http://www.giantearthworm.org.au/index.htm>

Photo



Giant Gippsland Earthworms (*Megascolides australis*) reach an average length of 100cm and diameter of 2cm (photo courtesy of Dr Beverley Van Praagh).



Giant Gippsland Earthworm (*Megascolides australis*) exposed in burrow (photo courtesy of Dr Beverley Van Praagh).