

# Mapping community values for the Murray River Reserves for use in planning for natural area management for conservation, recreation and tourism<sup>1</sup>

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This project aims to identify sites on the Victorian bank of the Murray River where community values indicate that either further conservation or development is undesirable. Communities value natural locations in different ways: from recreational, tourism, economic or natural resource perspectives. Through questionnaire surveys, residents, visitors and tour operators have shown places with a range of values e.g. biodiversity, scenic, economic, recreation, therapeutic, wilderness etc. Spatial analysis of the survey data using GIS reveals the locations of particular importance. In particular, values density mapping shows a considerable degree of congruence of several values indicative of conservation. Most significantly, the results indicate that Barmah State Park and Forest and Gunbower State Forest have high wilderness, biological diversity and aesthetic values at a level similar to that ascribed to National Parks. Sites acceptable for further tourism development were located around existing towns and minor reserves along the river, while those unacceptable for development were in National and State Parks. This research gathers and synthesises respondents' opinions about the region and its future, and provides strategic knowledge to the tourism industry by revealing places where further development is desirable and, through spatial analysis and mapping, indicates areas worthy of National Park status.

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