

Rivers of the Barwon

(Barre Warre Yulluk)
Action Plan



Confluence of the Moorabool (*Murrabul*) River east and west branches, Morrisons

Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners and pays respect to their Elders past and present and emerging. We acknowledge their ongoing connection to land, water and natural and built landscapes, and acknowledge the ongoing contribution this makes to the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) region.

We support the need for genuine and lasting partnerships with Traditional Owners to support self-determination and the protection of Country. The Victorian Government is committed to working towards equity of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice for Traditional Owners.

We recognise the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) as a living and integrated natural entity: the rivers, creeks and wetlands and the landscapes through which they flow that form the Barwon (*Parwan*) and Moorabool (*Murrabul*) catchments. Their waters flow together from the uplands to the sea, supporting and bringing life to the region.

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MINISTERS' FOREWORD

The Rivers of the Barwon encompass all the major waterways within the Barwon catchment. This includes the Barwon, or *Parwan* as the Wadawurrung people named it, Moorabool (*Murrabul*), Yarrowee (*Yarowee*) and Leigh (*Waywatcurtan*) rivers and their tributaries.

This is an incredible region, rich in natural wonders and breathtaking sights. To protect this legacy, we will partner with the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to build a shared future for the waterways.

The Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung peoples have cared for this Country and its diverse waterways for millennia. Their relationship to the waterways inspires values that we hold today. This includes the knowledge that the Barwon River, *Parwan*, its tributaries and lakes, wetlands and estuaries are a connected and integrated system. This knowledge is represented by the Wadawurrung term *Barre Warre Yulluk*.

The Barwon (*Parwan*) and Moorabool (*Murrabul*) enrich the cities of Ballarat and Geelong through which they flow, making them great places to live. These waterways and their parklands help the community to connect with nature, and they support the region's world class liveability.

Many in the community understand the challenges we face to protect *Barre Warre Yulluk* from threats such as climate change and population growth. We need a long-term strategic response to meet these challenges and we need to act now. And this is why the Victorian Government has released a Rivers of the Barwon Action Plan.

This Action Plan was developed via extensive consultation with Traditional Owners, community and government agencies and takes steps to protect *Barre Warre Yulluk* and improve the liveability of the region. We acknowledge the efforts of so many community volunteers who have championed their treasured parts of *Barre Warre Yulluk*. Their contribution to this Action Plan through the work of the Barwon Rivers Ministerial Advisory Committee has been essential.

We are proud of this Action Plan, which lays out comprehensive steps to protect the catchment

and ensure it can be enjoyed as a community asset for future generations.

This Action Plan includes seven directions supported by 17 shorter-term actions which will be implemented in the next year, and a further 13 actions that will be delivered within five years. It will reinstate the Traditional Owners' values and knowledge in the management of waterways on Country. With our partners in the region, it will help deliver greener, healthier towns and cities.

We extend our thanks to all the Traditional Owners, community and government agencies, stakeholders and 500 community members who participated and contributed to the development of the Action Plan.

United in our vision for thriving waterways and communities and working together, we will see *Barre Warre Yulluk*, the living Rivers of the Barwon, protected and sustained for generations to come.



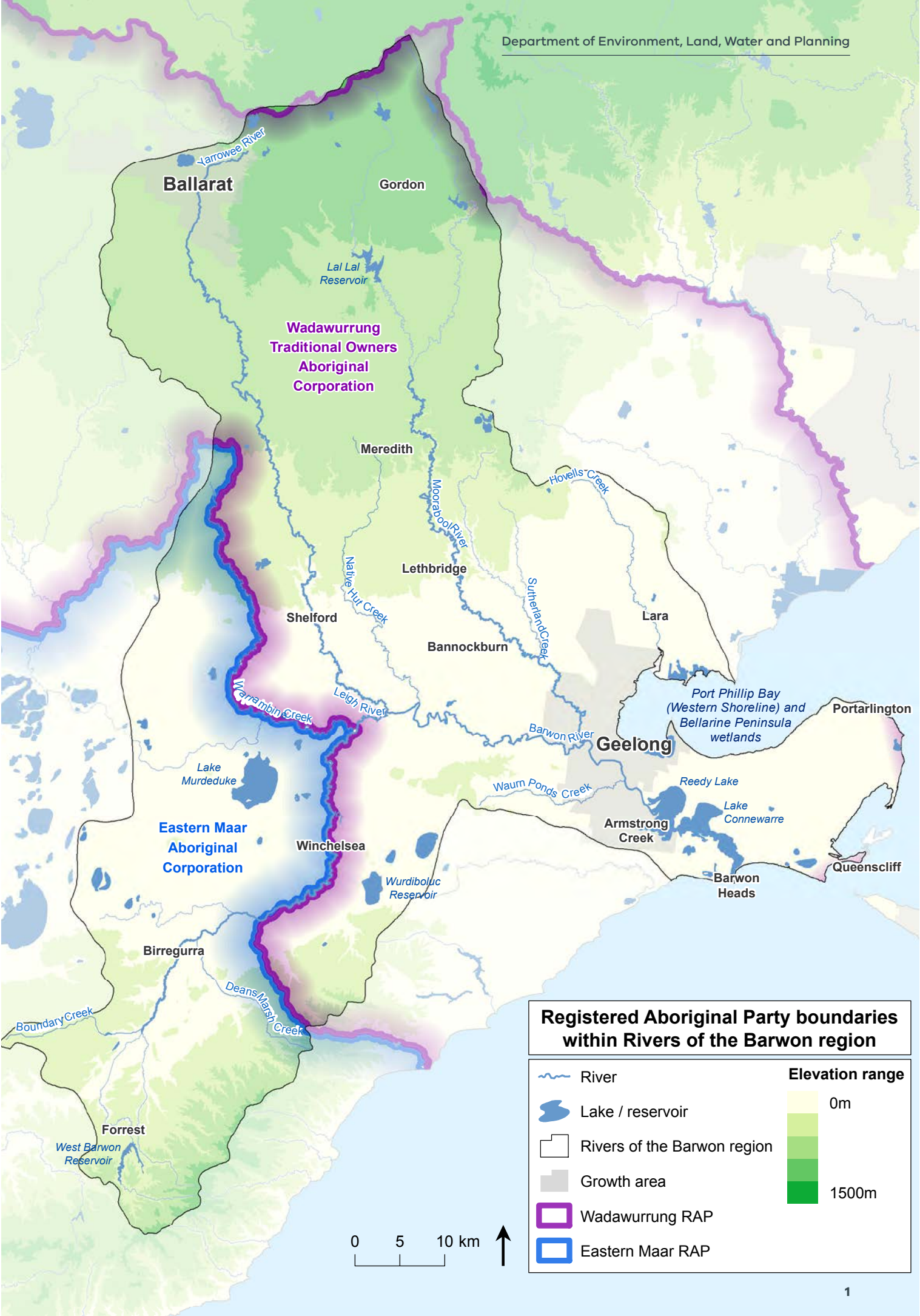
The Hon Lisa Neville MP
Minister for Water



The Hon Richard Wynne MP
Minister for Planning

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AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE RIVERS OF THE BARWON (*BARRE WARRE YULLUK*)

The *Rivers of the Barwon (Barre Warre Yulluk) Action Plan* is a five-year plan that includes shorter-term and longer-term actions to better protect the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) and to walk together with the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to heal Country.

The Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) are a living entity: a connected system of rivers, creeks and wetlands that form the Barwon (*Parwan*), Leigh (*Waywatcurtan*), Moorabool (*Murrabul*) and Yarrowee (*Yarowee*) rivers. The Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) region stretches from the eastern fringes of Ballarat to the northern slopes of the Otway Ranges and past Geelong to Barwon Heads on the Bellarine (*Bellawiyn*) Peninsula.

The Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners have had strong physical and spiritual links to the land and waters of the Barwon catchment for thousands of generations. In the Wadawurrung language, the Rivers of the Barwon can be known as *Barre Warre Yulluk*, which means 'the great river' (*Yulluk*) that runs from the 'mountains' (*Barre*) to the 'ocean' (*Warre*).

With this Action Plan, the Victorian Government will create a legacy of protection for the region's waterways and a new way of working. This new way of working will be guided by the traditional

knowledge and custodianship of the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners and the community's vision for the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*).

Their voices will be complemented by strongly supportive institutional arrangements that enable integrated and innovative waterway management.

The Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) is a connected system. The connection is more than physical. It's about the connection to community wellbeing, to culture and identity. To secure the future of the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*), the Victorian Government is committed to reforms that reinforce the link between river management and caring for Country. The Action Plan also protects water quality, manages impacts of development on waterway landscapes, and supports recreation and amenity across large sections of the rivers.

This Action Plan lays the foundations to address the challenges of population growth and climate change and to protect the social, cultural, environmental and economic values of the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*).

The Action Plan has three parts:

- seven directions and 30 actions that guide the Victorian Government's commitment to implementation over the next five years
- the 50-year community vision for the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*)
- the background for the actions, setting out the key issues for the waterways and the implementation context for the Action Plan.

The Action Plan includes **shorter-term actions** that will deliver results within the first year of implementation and **longer-term actions** to deliver within five years. Longer-term actions are to consider necessary changes to institutional arrangements, strengthen planning provisions for waterways and strengthen the role of the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners in planning and management. Completion of longer-term actions will be dependent on the availability of funding. Decisions about the implementation and timing of these actions will be made in line with government policy and budget processes.

Directions and actions

Confluence of the Barwon (*Parwan*) and Leigh (*Waywatcurtan*) rivers

Direction 1:

Recognise the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) as a living and integrated natural entity and the Traditional Owners as the 'voice of this living entity'

Shorter-term actions

- 1.1 The *Corangamite Regional Catchment Strategy* (RCS) will recognise the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) as a living and integrated natural entity and the Traditional Owners as the 'voice of this living entity'.
- 1.2 Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners will be funded to meaningfully participate in the planning and implementation of the RCS, to enable their reinstated role as a unique voice for the waterways.
- 1.3 Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners will be supported by the government to express what the 'voice of the living entities' is to them.

Longer-term actions

- 1.4 Engage with Traditional Owners across Victoria on possible legislation to enable all waterways and the landscapes through which they flow to be recognised as living and integrated natural entities and for Traditional Owners to be able to self-determine the application of these concepts on Country.

- 1.5 Investigate legislation to embed the recognition of the waterways and their lands as living and integrated natural entities and the Traditional Owners as the 'voice of these living entities' on their Country.

- 1.6 If legislation is introduced, it will contain a preamble that celebrates and supports Country and the preservation and promotion of Aboriginal cultures and languages and recognises past and ongoing Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners' stewardship of and connection to Country.

Direction 2:

Embed Traditional Owners' values in planning and decision-making for waterways

Shorter-term actions

- 2.1 The Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CMA) will invite the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to partner in the planning and implementation of the next RCS (due in 2021) to:
 - recognise Traditional Owners' right to self-determination
 - embed in the RCS the cultural connections of Traditional Owners to Country, as outlined in Country plans or through other means.

- 2.2 Corangamite CMA will partner directly with Traditional Owners to implement the 'voice of the living entity' on Country.

Longer-term actions

- 2.3 Investigate potential amendments to the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the planning policy framework to embed Traditional Owners and their values in decision-making. Develop tools to support agencies, Traditional Owner groups and planning practitioners to implement any amendments to the Act and the planning policy framework.
- 2.4 Corangamite CMA will include in its RCS reporting an assessment by the Traditional Owners of RCS activities that give effect to Traditional Owners' aspirations and Country plans.
- 2.5 Corangamite CMA will invite the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to partner in the planning and implementation of the next Regional Waterway Strategy, with a focus on their reinstated role as the 'voice of the living entity'.

Trail near the Leigh (Waywatcurtan) River, Inverleigh

Direction 3:

Strengthen planning policy and controls for waterways

Shorter-term actions

- 3.1 Protect waterways statewide through a strengthened planning policy framework, processes and supporting guidance.
- 3.2 Protect and elevate the significance of the Barwon (*Parwan*), Leigh (*Waywatcurtan*), Moorabool (*Murrabul*) and Yarrowee (*Yarowee*) rivers through stronger landscape and environmental planning controls and new regional policies.

Longer-term actions

- 3.3 Protect the Barwon (*Parwan*), Leigh (*Waywatcurtan*), Moorabool (*Murrabul*) and Yarrowee (*Yarowee*) rivers from inappropriate development with stronger built-form planning controls.
- 3.4 Prepare an integrated regional strategic land use plan that provides a forward-looking framework and vision to underpin land use and development planning for the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*).

- 3.5 Develop a Barwon Riverfront structure plan which provides a vision and integrated framework to better connect the Barwon (*Parwan*) River and its parklands with Geelong's city and to guide the longer-term renewal of industrial land uses near the river.
- 3.6 Review interim planning controls to ensure the ongoing protection of waterways.

Direction 4:

Improve waterway amenity to meet community expectations

Shorter-term actions

- 4.1 The *Corangamite RCS* will include the amenity values of the waterways and their lands across the region.
- 4.2 Corangamite CMA will commence a flagship waterway program for the Barwon (*Parwan*) River and continue to deliver a Moorabool (*Murrabul*) flagship waterway project.
- 4.3 Corangamite CMA will develop the *Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut* ('places of many stories') – Barwon Rivers Parklands Masterplan to strategically plan for a continuous, connected waterway parkland between the Brisbane Ranges and Barwon Heads.

- 4.4 Provide funding for priority actions in the *Yarrowee River and Tributaries: River Corridor Master Plan* to ensure the parklands can cater to the recreational needs of the growing community while balancing the protection of cultural and environmental values and restoring habitat.

Longer-term actions

- 4.5 Support priority projects in the *Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut* ('places of many stories') – Barwon Rivers Parklands Masterplan to ensure the parklands can cater to the recreational needs of the growing community while balancing the protection of cultural and environmental values and restoring habitat.
- 4.6 The *Victorian Waterway Management Strategy* to provide stronger guidance about planning for urban waterway values and threats including waterway amenity: naturalness, escape and safety.

Barwon (Parwan) River, Geelong

Direction 5:

Identify opportunities to meet environmental and cultural water needs

Shorter-term action

- 5.1 Provide funding to support Traditional Owners' cultural water assessments in accordance with Traditional Owners' priorities.

Longer-term action

- 5.2 In the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy*, address environmental water deficits and water for culture by investigating:
- options to meet flow-related objectives through investment in all sources of water including recycled water and stormwater and irrigation efficiency and modernisation, to reduce extraction from waterways
 - complementary works to improve waterway health.

Direction 6:

Strengthen stormwater management to build resilience

Shorter-term action

- 6.1 Support the City of Greater Geelong, Barwon Water and Corangamite CMA to formalise a framework for collaboration on stormwater drainage infrastructure planning, development and management, with clear roles and responsibilities for each organisation to enable better protection of the lower Barwon (Parwan) River and optimisation of stormwater as a water resource for the region.

Longer-term actions

- 6.2 Support the City of Greater Geelong to deliver a pilot stormwater offsets program.
- 6.3 Investigate opportunities to increase adoption of harvesting and reuse of urban stormwater in the Rivers of the Barwon (Barre Warre Yulluk) region through the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy*.

Direction 7:

Ensure accountability and transparency for Action Plan delivery

Shorter-term action

- 7.1 Publish an annual implementation report for the Action Plan on the Plan's website.

Longer-term action

- 7.2 Publish a final review of the implementation of the Action Plan.



RIVERS OF THE BARWON (*BARRE WARRE YULLUK*) COMMUNITY VISION

The Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee has developed a 50-year community vision. It reflects the feedback from communities across the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) region, and it was strongly supported by participants in a comprehensive public engagement process and by further input following the release of *Our living rivers of the Barwon: A discussion paper for the future*.

The Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) community vision will guide policymakers, waterway and land managers and the community as we walk together with the Traditional Owners of these lands over the next 50 years.

Wadawurrung aspirations for the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*)

- The Wadawurrung Traditional Owners see *Barre Warre Yulluk* as a connected system, water is a living entity in our stories; our creations are held by the life of these rivers; our intangible connections received from our past live and protect our culture for our present and future.
- The connection between rivers and sea is our lore.
- Protecting Lal Lal to Connewarre is a part of Wadawurrung culture.

- The Wadawurrung work to ensure a balanced ecological water system: this includes all living things. It is our duty to care for, nurture and replace *Barre Warre Yulluk* with all it needs for a healthy life.
- The Wadawurrung will continue to share our culture through the blood of our mother earth. May we educate others to see *Barre Warre Yulluk* through our cultural lens.

Eastern Maar aspirations for the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*)

- The Eastern Maar Traditional Owners are invited to self-determine their long-term vision for the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*).

Our catchment's waterways are healthy

- The condition of our catchment's creeks and rivers (and their floodplains and wetlands) are improving.
- The flow in our rivers supports their health and function; wide areas of land adjoining riverbanks are fenced, have native vegetation and are free of weeds.
- The Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) are alive with fish, birds, platypus and insects, and with migratory birds that return each year to the internationally important Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar site.
- From Ballarat to Geelong and from the Otways to the estuary at Barwon Heads, our waterways are connected, and in our cities and towns are providing healthy green corridors for habitat, recreational use and transport.
- Rural land and its natural resources and environment are protected, enhanced and regenerated by sustainable farming and land management practices.



Balyang Sanctuary, Barwon (*Parwan*) River, Geelong

Our precious water resources are used wisely

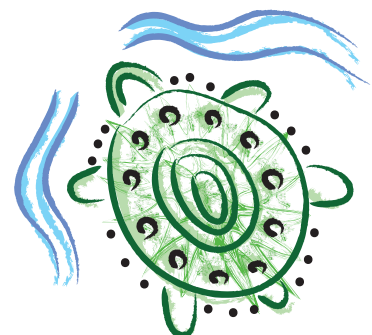
- Our water resources are sustainably managed to fit changing climatic conditions.
- The community values water as a precious resource and understands its availability, use and management.
- The community uses water efficiently in our cities and for agriculture, and it makes better use of new technologies.
- The use of alternative water sources (such as recycled water and stormwater) is maximised, and we take advantage of our links to the Victorian Water Grid.
- The government and community learn rapidly from innovations in other catchments, and integrated water management is central to planning for new development.

Our community understands, enjoys and cares for waterways

- Stewardship of our waterways draws on Traditional Owners' understanding of rivers as living entities for which the whole community has responsibility.
- As a community, we understand water and where it comes from, and we appreciate our rivers, their condition and what is being done to keep them healthy.
- The community enjoys our rivers and catchments while limiting our footprint. In rural areas, our landholders control weeds and limit stock access, while in our cities and towns streams are open, visible, valued and actively used.
- The Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) are valued and our advocacy for a healthy catchment remains strong.

Our management is integrated and focused on the future

- Agencies and community are aligned around the long-term goals for the health of the catchment.
- Planning for water and river management is integrated and considers both whole-of-catchment and local, place-based needs.
- Planning for the growth of our cities and towns considers the long-term health of our waterways and the liveability of our growing community.
- Adaptation to a changing climate is central to our future planning for the catchment, its rivers and communities.



CONTEXT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) rise in the Otways, the Wombat Forest and around Ballarat. They cross varied landforms, flowing through the historic bluestone-lined channels of the Yarrowee (*Yarrowee*) in regional Ballarat to the Moorabool (*Murrubul*) and Leigh (*Waywatcurtan*) gorges, the Barwon's (*Parwan's*) broad floodplains and the Barrabool Hills before joining together to flow through the parklands of Geelong and the Ramsar wetlands of the Connewarre system.

Why an Action Plan for the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) region?

The Barwon (*Parwan*) catchment already has some of the state's most flow-stressed waterways, and climate predictions indicate this will be exacerbated by a warmer climate with less rainfall and longer periods of low streamflows. This will put greater pressure on the ability of the Barwon (*Parwan*) system to meet the aspirations expressed in the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) community vision.

The Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners have cared for this Country for thousands of generations, and they have an ongoing and enduring connection to it. The communities of the region have also shown they are passionate about their waterways by their

advocacy and on-ground action through Landcare and other environmental projects.

Over a million people use the Barwon River Parklands through Geelong and the Yarrowee (*Yarrowee*) corridor through Ballarat for cycling, walking and other recreational activities. Significant population growth is forecast for both Geelong and Ballarat – the Geelong region alone is forecast to reach a population of 500,000 people in 25 years – and this growth is expected to increase pressures on the health of the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*). The growing community will rely on our river corridors for cool green spaces to connect with nature and for exercise and wellbeing. However, this growth also risks increasing the volume of polluted urban stormwater flowing into the waterways.

Now more than ever, we need to meet the changing and growing needs of the people of the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) by protecting natural spaces for their environmental, health and wellbeing values and by planning for new social, recreational and amenity opportunities.

Victoria already has comprehensive policies to protect and manage waterways, but step-change improvements are needed to meet the challenges the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) face. This Plan will embed the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners' voices – that in the past have not been heard – and support the liveability, agricultural production, environmental values and waterway amenity needs of our communities.



Lake Connewarre Wildlife Reserve, Barwon (Parwan) River

How was the Action Plan developed?

The *Rivers of the Barwon (Barre Warre Yulluk) Action Plan* resulted from strong community advocacy following similar initiatives for Victoria's other iconic urban waterways: the Yarra (*Birrarung*), Maribyrnong (*Mirrangbamurn*) and Werribee (*Wirribi Yaluk*) rivers. *Plan Melbourne* (2017) recognised the need to reconsider the planning and policy context for waterways significant for major urban centres, and *Water for Victoria* (2016) identified the Barwon system as a priority waterway.

In late 2018, the government established the Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) to make recommendations about how best to protect the health and amenity of the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yalluk*) and to promote their cultural significance, values and recreational benefits. This included advice about policy and planning mechanisms and a review of institutional, legislative and regulatory arrangements to enhance the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) and bring to life a community vision.

The members of the MAC were Christine Forster AM (Chair), Peter Grieg, Chris Harty, Melinda Kennedy (a Wadawurrung Traditional Owner) and Kirsten Kilpatrick.

The MAC engaged in extensive community consultation between June and November 2019 including community workshops and open houses across the region, interactive school sessions, surveys and opportunities for written submissions. The Barwon MAC submitted its recommendations to the government in March 2020. The MAC also prepared a summary of the community engagement outcomes.

The Action Plan is part of the government's Iconic Urban Waterways initiative, which has also developed the *Waterways of the West Action Plan* in parallel to this plan.

The invitation was made to the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to continue to engage in the development of this Action Plan. Much work is still to be done to better understand their aspirations, and the government will partner with the Traditional Owners so we can continue to walk together to heal Barwon Country.

The Rivers of the Barwon (Barre Warre Yulluk) Action Plan resulted from strong community advocacy following similar initiatives for Victoria's other iconic urban waterways.



**As a community,
we understand
water and where
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The directions explained

The Action Plan's seven directions commit to achieving broad reforms to secure the future of the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*). The critical drivers for the directions and integrated actions are explained below.

Lake Connewarre, Barwon (*Parwan*) River, Leopold

Direction 1:

Recognise the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) as a living and integrated natural entity and the Traditional Owners as the 'voice of this living entity'

The Action Plan recognises the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) as a 'living and integrated natural entity' and the Traditional Owners as the 'voice of this living entity'.

We have a collective and individual responsibility to keep these waterways alive. The Wadawurrung Traditional Owners have shared their knowledge of the living, interconnected essence of these natural places in the development of this plan. The Traditional Owners view Country as a living, connected entity, and they are uniquely placed to speak on behalf of the land and waterways on their Country. It will take time, however, for Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to give these concepts practical meaning through their self-determined involvement in land and waterway management.

It will also take time to grow a shared, new understanding based on synthesising contemporary scientific and traditional ecological knowledge. Our framework to plan for and manage these waterways will adapt to this new understanding.

While the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners express this unique voice, waterway and land managers will continue to work with and listen to the broader community. Walking together, we can better protect the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) as the lifeblood of the region: they are critical to the region's identity and the health of its communities.

In the longer-term, options will be explored to recognise the unique aspects of the Traditional Owners' Country and culture in strengthening their roles as the 'voice of the living entities' in legislation. Approaches to legislative change would look to embed the legacy of the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) collaboration, including incorporating Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung language in the title and preamble of any legislation introduced in response to this Action Plan.

Our *Dja* [Country] is interwoven with relationships no matter whether the shape of that relation is human, granite hills, *Waa* (crow) or *Larrap* (Manna gum). Country is filled with relations speaking language, sharing stories and following lore. These spirits they link us back through time in a continuing connection with our past, our cultural practices and our stories. These spirits connect us to our Country and each other which gives us ongoing respect for our obligation to care for our Country.

Paleert Tjaara Dja – Let's make Country good together 2020-2030 – Wadawurrung Country Plan (2020), p. 10



Bunjil's Lookout over the Moorabool River at Maude

Direction 2:

Embed Traditional Owners' values in planning and decision-making for waterways

The Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners have managed the Rivers of the Barwon (Barre Warre Yulluk) and the landscapes through which they flow for tens of thousands of years; and through their association and relationship with Country, they continue to maintain unique cultural and spiritual connections to the waterways and their lands. The government respectfully acknowledges the status of the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners who have Registered Aboriginal Party status in the region. Recognised Traditional Owners shall self-determine their level of involvement when an action affects Country.

Country plans assert the inherent rights of Traditional Owners for Country. They communicate Traditional Owners' vision and aspirations for Country, culture and people, educating and guiding all those who make decisions about Country. Country plans are living documents.

The government acknowledges the aspirations for Country identified in the *Paleert Tjaara Dja – Let's make Country good together 2020 – 2030 – Wadawurrung Country Plan*, and that work is underway to renew *Meerreengeeye Ngakeepoorryeeyt* (the Eastern Maar Country Plan) to further capture Eastern Maar aspirations around water. References to a Country plan are not substitutes for Traditional Owners having a seat and voice at the table for waterway and land planning and management.

Treaty negotiations are underway in Victoria, which may affect how the Action Plan is implemented. Until a treaty is achieved, the government is committed to enabling self-determination, creating partnerships and engaging with Traditional Owners in line with the *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023* and with DELWP's *Pupangarli Marmarnepu 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy 2020-2025*. Self-determination means Traditional Owners have the right to freely determine their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development, based on their values and way of life.¹

The Action Plan supports Traditional Owners to self-determine their involvement in planning and decision-making for waterways, so their aspirations for Country and culture are realised. The government is committed to building trusting relationships with Traditional Owners over time. These relationships should not be overburdened with administration, and they should allow time for strategic, longer-term goal-setting and for governance responsibilities to adapt to the self-determined priorities of the Traditional Owners.

Over thousands of years, our Ancestors developed a deep understanding of natural systems – knowledge that was passed down through the generations. It guided how we cared for Country and how we made sure that it could sustain us year after year. There is much that we can bring to contemporary land and water management, but our cultural knowledge is not yet embedded into the current approaches, based on modern science. Without proper application of our knowledge, there is a very real risk that thousands of years of traditional science will be lost.

Meerreengeeye Ngakeepoorryeeyt (Eastern Maar Country Plan, 2015), p 31

¹ Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



Moorabool (Murrabul) River towards Geelong

Direction 3:

Strengthen planning policy and controls for waterways

The Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) are of immense cultural significance to their Traditional Owners and are loved for their landscape vistas, ecology and recreational values. In Ballarat, Geelong and the region's many smaller settlements like Winchelsea and Inverleigh, river corridors provide cool, green places where people connect with nature and one another. In rural reaches, the rivers flow through bushland and form a green spine through rolling, agricultural landscapes. The corridors sustain abundant, biologically diverse plant and animal life, which is vulnerable to urban development and climate change impacts.

The government will strengthen state and regional planning policy to protect Victoria's precious waterways including by developing a new, regional policy for the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*). The stronger planning policies will be supported by new, built-form and environmental planning controls – overlays in planning schemes – that will be applied in stages across local government boundaries. These actions will ensure that decision-making affecting the health and vitality of the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) by agencies is consistent across local government boundaries.

To support the implementation of stronger planning controls, the government will prepare new guidance and tools for planners and decision-makers to drive a consistent approach to waterway protection.



Fishing at Barwon Heads, Barwon (Parwan) River estuary

Direction 4:

Improve waterway amenity to meet community expectations

‘Waterway amenity’ is people’s experience of the naturalness, escape from the busyness of urban life and perception of personal safety along waterways. It includes the character of the landscape and the vistas and views from and to the waterway, as well as the many benefits that public open space near waterways provides. Public open space includes public areas that provide for outdoor recreation, leisure, environmental and cultural benefits, visual appeal and off-road active transport. The cultural values of waterways and their recreational uses and facilities also contribute to amenity, as does the ability to access and safely enjoy spaces along the waterways.

Current arrangements for planning and managing waterway amenity are dispersed across several government agencies, and often depend on collaboration to deliver waterway amenity outcomes. The Action Plan includes shorter-term actions to facilitate coordinated planning and delivery of improved waterway amenity in Ballarat and Geelong, and to recognise waterway amenity across the region. These actions will complement existing waterway health actions.

The City of Ballarat has led the development of the *Yarrowee River and Tributaries River Corridor Masterplan*, which will guide waterway improvements in the next 20 years. Similarly, public land managers from Meredith to the Barwon (Parwan) River Estuary seek a collaborative vision of enhanced amenity and accessibility for the Moorabool (Murrabul) and Barwon (Parwan) rivers. The *Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut* (‘places of many stories’) – Barwon Rivers Parklands Masterplan will address fragmented land management and identify strategic priorities.

Implementation of the masterplan will begin immediately following its development, which Corangamite CMA is leading.

In the upcoming review of the *Victorian Waterway Management Strategy*, the government will further review the approach to planning for waterway amenity, particularly for regional Victoria.



Lal Lal Falls, Moorabool (Murrabul) River West Branch

Direction 5:

Identify opportunities to meet environmental and cultural water needs

The Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) have historically provided much of the drinking water for Geelong and Ballarat, along with water to support agriculture and industry. In recent years, environmental entitlements have been put in place in both the Moorabool (*Murrabul*) and Barwon (*Parwan*) systems to support some environmental objectives. Further water recovery for environmental purposes is needed to meet environmental water deficits and maintain the ecology of the system.

The 2020 *Long-Term Water Resource Assessment* determined that there has been a substantial decline in surface water availability in the Moorabool (*Murrabul*) and Barwon (*Parwan*) basins. There has also been a disproportionate impact on the environment as water availability has reduced over the last 15 years.

Secure water supplies for the region's increasing population have been maintained by connections to Melbourne's and northern Victoria's supply system. These connections, along with emerging interest in the use of all sources of water for urban and agricultural uses, provide an opportunity to consider how water from the Moorabool (*Murrabul*) and Barwon (*Parwan*) rivers may be better shared between the environment, Traditional Owners and existing water users.

Cultural water is a water entitlement that is owned and managed by Traditional Owners in accordance with their own laws and cultural practices. Each Traditional Owner group will determine how to use its own water entitlements, including caring for Country and cultural heritage, providing for healthy people and wellbeing, and fostering economic benefits and sustainable development.

The government will provide funding to support Traditional Owners' cultural water assessments, or other preferred methods, in accordance with Traditional Owners' priorities.

Public and stakeholder consultation on the discussion draft *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy* is occurring in 2021, and it proposes actions to respond to environmental water deficits and the need to make water available for Traditional Owners' purposes.

Our relationship with Country is always respectful; we know that if our lands and waters are managed the right way then we will always enjoy a bounty of resources. These resources belong to all our citizens and are shared within our community.

Meerreengeeye

Ngakeepoorryeeyt (Eastern Maar Country Plan, 2015), p 9

It is clear that a business as usual approach will not be sufficient. Unless the right management strategies are put in place it is likely that, by 2050, the region could have twice the current population and possibly half of the traditional sources of water for our towns, industries, farms and environment.

Christine Forster,
Chair Barwon River MAC



Johnstone Park, Geelong, site of integrated water management works

Direction 6:

Strengthen stormwater management to build resilience

The Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) region is the most populated area of Victoria, outside metropolitan Melbourne.

The Northern and Western Geelong Growth Areas is the largest urban growth project in regional Victoria, and it is expected to gain more than 110,000 new residents, more than the current population of Bendigo. Population growth in the region could by 2050 add another 5.5 GL of stormwater to the Yarrowee (*Yarowee*) River in Ballarat and another 10.5 GL of stormwater to the lower Barwon (*Parwan*) River in Geelong.

This increased stormwater runoff into our waterways carries pollutants and increases flooding risks. However, as the climate changes, excess stormwater can be a valuable resource for keeping our towns and cities green.

Innovative approaches to integrated water management and stormwater harvesting and reuse can help avoid adverse outcomes for waterways from urban development. One of the challenges is the complex, fragmented institutional arrangements for managing stormwater. Building on existing collaborations between agencies, better integration of land use and water planning can improve liveability and resilience outcomes and make funding for stormwater harvesting and reuse more certain.

By strengthening accountabilities and obligations for stormwater management in the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*), the precious water resources of the region can be managed more effectively.



Yarrowee (Yarrowee) River, Ballarat

Direction 7:

Ensure accountability and transparency for Action Plan delivery

This Action Plan aims to leave a legacy of enduring protection for the Rivers of the Barwon (*Barre Warre Yulluk*) and their lands. To do this, the Victorian Government will use an adaptive approach to deliver each direction and its actions. While the government is committed to delivery of the directions, the actions may be adapted to deliver on the intent of the direction as Traditional Owners identify their priorities, and new information and opportunities emerge. DELWP will publish an annual report card about the delivery of this Action Plan on its website.

The Corangamite CMA will report on waterway values and conditions through its Regional Waterway Strategy review process.

The Action Plan will be evaluated in 2026, to review and evaluate progress and to recommend further work or new approaches.

The table on the following page summarises the implementation of the Action Plan.



Implementation

Action	Lead	Timing
1.1 'Living entity' and 'voice' for Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS)	Corangamite CMA	Short term
1.2 Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung aspirations in RCS planning	Corangamite CMA	Short term
1.3 Support for Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung to express 'voice of the living entity'	DELWP	Short term
1.4 Wider engagement with Traditional Owners about 'living entity' and 'voice'	DELWP	Longer term
1.5 Investigate legislation for 'living entity' and 'voice' concepts	DELWP	Longer term
1.6 Traditional Owner preamble for possible legislation	DELWP	Longer term
2.1 Embed connections to Country in RCS	Corangamite CMA	Short term
2.2 Partnerships to implement 'voice' on Country	Corangamite CMA	Short term
2.3 Traditional Owner values and knowledge in land use planning	DELWP	Longer term
2.4 RCS reporting Traditional Owner aspirations	Corangamite CMA	Longer term
2.5 Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung regional waterway strategy partnership	Corangamite CMA	Longer term
3.1 Stronger planning policy and guidance	DELWP	Short term
3.2 Interim landscape and environmental controls for key waterways	DELWP	Short term
3.3 Interim built-form controls for key waterways	DELWP	Longer term
3.4 Integrated regional strategic land use plan for Rivers of the Barwon (<i>Barre Warre Yulluk</i>)	DELWP	Longer term
3.5 Structure plan to integrate Geelong's centre with Barwon River (<i>Parwan</i>)	DELWP	Longer term
3.6 Review of interim planning controls	DELWP	Longer term
4.1 Waterway amenity values in RCS	Corangamite CMA	Short term
4.2 Barwon and Moorabool flagship programs	Corangamite CMA	Short-longer term
4.3 Develop <i>Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut</i> – Barwon Rivers Parklands Masterplan	Corangamite CMA	Short-longer term
4.4 Funding for Yarrowee Masterplan parkland priority projects	DELWP	Short term
4.5 Support for <i>Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut</i> priority projects	Corangamite CMA	Longer term
4.6 Victorian Waterway Management Strategy – urban waterway values	DELWP	Longer term
5.1 Funding for Traditional Owner cultural water assessment priorities	DELWP	Short term
5.2 Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy (SWS) water options for environment and culture	DELWP	Longer term
6.1 Framework for stormwater infrastructure collaboration	City of Greater Geelong	Short term
6.2 Support for a pilot Geelong stormwater offsets program	DELWP	Short-longer term
6.3 Central and Gippsland Region SWS stormwater investigations	DELWP	Longer term
7.1 Annual implementation report	DELWP	Short term
7.2 Final review of implementation	DELWP	Longer term

Short term: Within 1 year

Longer term: Within 1-5 years subject to funding



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