

Waterways of the West

Annual Report 2024



We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

DEECA is committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



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Context

The Victorian Government released the Waterways of the West Action Plan in late 2021 to ensure Melbourne's western waterways are healthy and thriving for future generations.

The Waterways of the West Action Plan is a 5-year plan that identifies 9 directions and 40 actions. This Waterways of the West Annual Report outlines some key highlights from 2024 implementation and the status of actions, and delivers on the Victorian Government's commitment to update the community annually on implementation of the Action Plan.

The Bunurong, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples have cared for this Country and its integrated waterways for millennia. The Action Plan recognises the waterways of the west as living and integrated natural entities, and Traditional Owners as having a unique role as a voice of the living entities on their Country.

A new community-led approach, the Action Plan is guided by the 50-year Waterways of the West Community Vision. The vision encourages agencies and community to walk together with the Traditional Owners of Melbourne's West.

By bringing everyone throughout the region together, we move closer to realising the Waterways of the West community vision and delivering the beneficial outcomes we are collectively seeking for the health of our waterways.

How the 5-year Action Plan builds on the vision for the Waterways of the West



Figure 1: Waterways of the West implementation framework

Overview of progress in 2024

Highlights of 2024 include:

- Funding supported a First Nations resource to work with the Chain of Ponds Collaboration, to enhance cultural heritage values and Traditional Owner aspirations along Moonee Moonee/Moonee Ponds Creek. *See Action 2.2 of the [Waterways of the West Action Plan](#).*
- The Victorian Government supported the recently established Maribyrnong River and Waterways Association to build on community and Traditional Owner connection with the Maribyrnong catchment. This included rolling out the Water Think Tank Series and a collaboration with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Corporation, via the Yiagilang Ngarrngatj Research Unit, to explore the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of waterways in the Maribyrnong catchment. *See Action 2.2.*
- The City of Wyndham, supported by a Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) Iconic Urban Waterways grant, completed a concept design for improved landscape outcomes and on-water access at Bungies Hole, which is located in a bend of the Wirribi Yaluk/Werribee River behind Chirnside Park. *See Action 4.2.*
- Commencement of the Adapt West – Shaping our Shores project, to deliver a Coastal Hazard Adaptation and Resilience Plan for the region, guided by the Port Phillip Bay Western Shoreline Regional and Strategic Partnership. *See Action 5.3.*
- Funding secured in the 2024-25 State Budget to progress pollution prevention initiatives. *See Action 7.2.*
- Targeted investment in community-driven collaborations and activities across the Waterways of the West, such as Melbourne Water's Growing Waterway Knowledge and Engagement in the West. This project resulted in 11 community engagement and capacity-building events between 2022 and 2024. Annual Grow West Community Planting Days attracted almost 300 volunteers and involved another 300 people in associated events and workshops, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and school groups. *See Actions 8.1 & 8.2.*

For more detailed information on delivery of actions in the Waterways of the West Action Plan, please see the [Action tracker](#) section of the report.

Table 1: Status of actions across Action Plan directions

Direction	Number of actions	Delivered	Ongoing	In progress	Planning
Direction 1: Recognise the Waterways of the West as living and integrated natural entities and the Traditional Owners as the 'voice of these living entities'	6	2	1	1	2
Direction 2: Embed Traditional Owners' values in planning and decision-making for waterways	7	2	2	1	2
Direction 3: Strengthen planning policy and controls for waterways	5	2	0	2	1
Direction 4: Improve waterway amenity to meet community expectations	5	2	0	3	0
Direction 5: Better protection of the region's wetland values	4	2	0	1	1
Direction 6: Identify opportunities to meet environmental and cultural water needs	2	1	0	1	0
Direction 7: Protect the Waterways of the West from pollution	3	1	0	2	0
Direction 8: Increase community connection, education and participation	5	4	0	1	0
Direction 9: Ensure accountability and transparency for Action Plan delivery	3	0	1	2	0
Total	40	16	4	14	6

Looking ahead

The Waterways of the West Action Plan enters the fourth year of its five-year implementation timeframe in 2025. Some actions for the year ahead include:

- Statewide engagement with Traditional Owners to develop and test legislative and policy approaches to recognise waterways as 'living entities' and their Traditional Owners as a unique 'voice' of those entities (Direction 1).
- Development of a new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy is underway in partnership with Traditional Owners, catchment management authorities and other key stakeholders, with input from the broader Victorian community (Direction 4).
- Adapt West projects are undertaking further engagement with the community and partners as it progresses towards developing a Coastal Hazard Adaptation and Resilience Plan (Direction 5).
- Launching new potential pollution prevention initiatives, guided by analysis of existing projects and research on pollution and litter in our waterways (Direction 7).
- Further investment in Victoria's urban waterway care and restoration through the \$10 million [Green Links Grants Program](#).

Action plan implementation case studies

Collaboration delivers amenity outcomes along the Lower Wirribi Yaluk/Werribee River

Direction 4: Improve waterway amenity to meet community expectations

The Lower Werribee Waterway Amenity Action Plan continues delivering amenity improvements along the Wirribi Yaluk/Werribee River.

Opened in 2024, a new multi-use platform for recreational water activities on the Lower Wirribi/Werribee is a joint initiative of Melbourne Water, Wyndham City Council, Parks Victoria, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). The platform, a stepped rock terrace, is designed to be used for launching kayaks and fishing on the west bank of the river in the Werribee River Park, creating an additional launch place upstream of the mouth of the river.

The project provides a new access point to the River Red Gums Nature Walk which runs through the adjacent woodland, and is complemented by revegetation works funded under the [Green Links program](#). These works improve visitor accessibility, experience and increase community connection and appreciation of the river and surrounds.

The project works recognise and celebrate the cultural values of the Lower Wirribi Yaluk/Werribee River for the Bunurong and Wadawurrung peoples. Work on an overarching experience framework and signage will also foster greater awareness of cultural knowledge and history.

Further upriver, Wyndham City Council will be undertaking a river access and crossing feasibility study at the Davis Creek Confluence. This work is funded by a grant from DEECA.

Traditional Owner engagement with community in the Maribyrnong and Werribee catchments

Action 8.1: Community engagement about Traditional Owner culture and values

Landcare, environmental groups, school students and community members from the Maribyrnong and Werribee catchments have had a unique opportunity to join Traditional Owners on-Country as part of a DEECA funded program of cultural awareness education.

Highlights of the program over the last 2 years have included:

- Cultural heritage tours on-Country with Wadawurrung of Little River, the You Yangs and local urban waterways.
- Bunurong cultural safety sessions held at the Hobson Bay Wetlands Centre.
- A Wurundjeri-led cultural education session in Melbourne.
- Cultural events held by Landcare groups including Brisbane Ranges Landcare Group, Werribee River Association, Eynesbury Landcare Group, Little River Community Landcare and a walk and talk at Little River Primary School.
- A bus tour on International Rural Women's Day visited Derrimut Grassland Reserve and Werribee Mansion to discuss indigenous management of Country and protecting small patches of remnant grasslands and wildflowers within an urban landscape.
- A tour of the Little River Catchment with Landcare leaders and Wadawurrung for scoping of future collaboration opportunities.

Feedback shows that participants grew their understanding of First Nations culture and their understanding of the experience of First Nations peoples since colonisation. The funding also supported Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to produce a video to highlight and share cultural knowledge of waterways, biodiversity, and land (dja) and sea (warre) Country, that is being used at the Western Treatment Plant as an educational tool. More material on Wadawurrung cultural values and heritage is being developed to create a resource for agencies and community groups on the importance of cultural heritage assessments as part of natural resource management projects.



Wadawurrung tour of You Yangs, November 2023 (source: Melbourne Water)

Action tracker

The Action Plan outlines 9 directions and 40 actions that aim to deliver results across a 5-year period. All short-term actions have been completed and reported on in the 2022 and 2023 annual reports, with the exception of part of Action 4.3. Long-term actions are planned for delivery by the end of 2026, dependent on the availability of funding.

The 2024 reporting below provides detail on the progress of actions in 2024, including ongoing actions that have no fixed delivery date and are continuing.

While each action below lists a responsible lead organisation, the delivery of the Action Plan is only achievable through extensive collaboration across agency/organisation boundaries. This is most apparent in working to deliver 'living entity' and 'voice' outcomes, where agencies and community walk together with Traditional Owners towards a shared future.

A detailed explanation of all deliverables and actions, including background, can be found in the [Waterways of the West Action Plan](#).

Action	Status at Dec 2024	Timeframe	Lead agency	Comment
Direction 1: Recognise the Waterways of the West as living and integrated natural entities and the Traditional Owners as the 'voice of these living entities'				
1.1 'Living entity' and 'voice' for Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS)	Delivered	Short-term	Melbourne Water	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
1.2 Bunurong, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri aspirations in RCS planning	Delivered	Short-term	Melbourne Water	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
1.3 Support for Bunurong, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri to express 'voice of living entities'	Ongoing	Short-term	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)	Continuing support of Bunurong, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Traditional Owners to express what being 'the voice of the living entities' is to them through policy and legislation. This includes work on living entity policy to support the new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy (VWMS), as well as engagement on Outcome 1 of Water is Life, Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap .
1.4 Wider engagement with Traditional Owners about 'living entity' and 'voice'	In progress	Long-term	DEECA	Preparation for broader statewide engagement with stakeholders as part of the delivery of Outcome 1 of Water is Life, Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap
1.5 Investigate legislation for 'living entity' and 'voice' concepts	Planned	Long-term	DEECA	Subject to engagement outcomes (see Action 1.4) and consistent with the commitments in Water is Life, Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap, consultation will be held on proposed legislative mechanisms.

1.6 Traditional Owner preamble for possible legislation	Planned	Long-term	DEECA	Subject to Actions 1.4 and 1.5
Direction 2: Embed Traditional Owners' values in planning and decision-making for waterways				
2.1 Embed connections to Country in RCS	Delivered	Short-term	Melbourne Water	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
2.2 Partnerships to implement 'voice' on Country	Ongoing	Short-term	Melbourne Water	<p>Melbourne Water is undertaking work relevant to this action through its implementation of Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo, the Yarra Strategic Plan. The outcomes from this are being monitored for application to the Waterways of the West. Melbourne Water is also supporting DEECA's statewide policy focus on waterways as living entities.</p> <p>DEECA also partnered with Maribyrnong River and Waterways Association to support the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to explore the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of waterways in the Maribyrnong catchment, and with the Chain of Ponds Collaboration to enhance cultural heritage values and Traditional Owner aspirations along Moonee Moonee/Moonee Ponds Creek.</p>
2.3 Support for Jacksons Creek Regional Parklands cultural values study	Delivered	Short-term	DEECA	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
2.4 Jacksons Creek Planning Partnership	Planned	Long-term	Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and DEECA	DEECA is working with partners, including Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, to progress initial actions to support the delivery of a pilot Jacksons Creek Planning Partnership. Delivery of the pilot is subject to longer-term funding. The project will embed cultural mapping values that inform broader planning in the Jacksons Creek biik wurrdha Regional Parklands.
2.5 Traditional Owner values and knowledge in land use planning	Ongoing	Long-term	DTP and DEECA	This action will be delivered beyond the Action Plan framework. DTP is reviewing the <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i> . Although the review is not focused on Traditional Owner-related amendments, it provides an opportunity to strengthen the recognition of Traditional Owner values. The Planning Controls for Waterways Program within DTP is also exploring how planning schemes can better reflect these values.
2.6 RCS reporting Traditional Owner aspirations	Planned	Long-term	Melbourne Water	Melbourne Water is undertaking a mid-term review of the Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS). The review includes an assessment of development of the RCS and to what extent self-determined Traditional Owner priorities are reflected. The review also includes an assessment of

				implementation of the RCS, including to what extent self-determined Traditional Owner priorities are included in sub-strategies under the RCS.
2.7 Bunurong, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri Healthy Waterway Strategy partnership	In progress	Long-term	Melbourne Water	<p>Melbourne Water are holding regular discussions and on-Country meetings with Bunurong, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Traditional Owners.</p> <p>The Healthy Waterways Strategy (HWS) mid-term review outlines a process for the assessment of the HWS progress towards cultural values objectives, which will be completed by Traditional Owners. This process aims to develop a path forward, supporting self-determination over the next four years of the Strategy and beyond. Resource and capacity support for Traditional Owners to partner on the HWS is being factored into Melbourne Water's Price Submission for 2026.</p>
Direction 3: Strengthen planning policy and controls for waterways				
3.1 Stronger planning policy and guidance	Delivered	Short-term	DTP	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
3.2 Interim landscape and environmental controls for key waterways	Delivered	Short-term	DTP	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
3.3 Interim built-form controls for key waterways	Planned	Long-term	DTP	DTP has conducted background studies to support stronger built-form planning controls for Mirrangbamurn/Maribyrnong River, Moonee Moonee/Moonee Ponds Creek and Wirribi Yaluk/Werribee River. Subject to funding, further work is required to review and consider their potential implementation.
3.4 Planning controls for additional waterways	In progress	Long-term	DTP	<p>DTP is implementing additional waterway planning controls for: Mirrangbamurn/Maribyrnong River, Moonee Moonee/Moonee Ponds Creek, and Wirribi Yaluk/Werribee River beyond the urban growth boundary, and Cherry Creek, Stony Creek, Emu Creek, Deep Creek, Skelton Creek, and Jacksons Creek.</p> <p>This now forms part of the Government's commitment to establish planning controls across 17 waterways in Melbourne through the Planning Controls for Waterways Program.</p>
3.5 Review of interim planning controls	In progress	Long-term	DTP	As part of the Planning Controls for Waterways program, a review of the performance of existing interim controls for the Mirrangbamurn/Maribyrnong

				River, Moonee Moonee/Moonee Ponds Creek and Wirribi Yaluk/Werribee River is underway to support the transition to permanent controls.
Direction 4: Improve waterway amenity to meet community expectations				
4.1 Waterway amenity values in RCS	Delivered	Short-term	Melbourne Water	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
4.2 Develop a Lower Werribee Waterway Amenity Action Plan	Delivered	Short-term	Melbourne Water	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022 The City of Wyndham also finalised a concept design for improved landscape outcomes and on-water access at Bungies Hole, located in a bend of the Wirribi Yaluk/Werribee River.
4.3 Waterway amenity advocacy	In progress	Short-term	Melbourne Water	The Urban Waterways Planning Guidelines project has commenced to complement DTP's planning for waterways work. Draft guidelines are planned for the end of 2025 with statutory implementation for government consideration in 2026. Other components of this action have been delivered - refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022 .
4.4 Melbourne Water statement of obligations to reflect amenity role	In progress	Long-term	DEECA	Melbourne Water is progressing the investigation of options for expanding its amenity advocacy role.
4.5 Victorian Waterway Management Strategy – urban waterway values	In progress	Long-term	DEECA	The new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy is due to be released in the next year. Work is underway on this, including updated policies about planning for urban waterway values and threats.
Direction 5: Better protection of the region's wetland values				
5.1 Wetland mapping data update	Delivered	Short-term	DEECA	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
5.2 RCS wetland mapping	Delivered	Short-term	Melbourne Water	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
5.3 Adaptation strategies for western shoreline wetlands of Port Phillip Bay	In progress	Long-term	DEECA	The Port Phillip Bay Western Shoreline Regional and Strategic Partnership has been established to respond to current and future coastal hazard impacts across the region. Exploration of coastal hazard adaption and community engagement occurred in 2024.
5.4 Western shoreline wetlands master plan	Planned	Long-term	DEECA	Master Plan dependent on Action 5.3.

Direction 6: Identify opportunities to meet environmental and cultural water needs				
6.1 Funding for Traditional Owner cultural water assessment priorities	Delivered	Short-term	DEECA	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
6.2 Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy water options for environment and culture	In progress	Long-term	DEECA	<p>Short-term environmental water commitments for Wirribi Yaluk/Werribee River have been progressed through water savings from the Bacchus Marsh Irrigation District project. Long-term commitments are dependent on the Werribee system reconfiguration. Feasibility studies, water resource modelling, and a preliminary business case concluded in 2024.</p> <p>Initial investigations are underway regarding use and/or trade of unused water in the Maribyrnong system for use as environmental water.</p> <p>Catchment-scale Integrated Water Management (IWM) Plans for the Werribee and Maribyrnong catchments to increase use of recycled water, treated stormwater and rainwater, and associated Action Plans were released in April 2024. All plans are available online at IWM forums.</p>
Direction 7: Protect the Waterways of the West from pollution				
7.1 Pollution prevention taskforce	Delivered	Short-term	DEECA and Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria	Delivered in 2023 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2023
7.2 Priority pollution prevention projects	In progress	Long-term	DEECA and EPA Victoria	Review and planning of the next stages is underway, guided by the recommendations of the Pollution Prevention Taskforce. DEECA is looking to better understand how to complement broader work on pollution and litter projects, including those undertaken in the Yarra Catchment and as part of the Healthy Waterways Strategy. Funding was secured in the 2024/25 budget to progress this work.
7.3 Implementation of place-based stormwater objectives	In progress	Long-term	Melbourne Water	As part of the Healthy Waterways Strategy mid-term review, a review of the stormwater performance objectives was undertaken. The review outlined several recommendations that will seek to support achievement of the stormwater objectives. Further information is available online at: https://healthywaterways.com.au/resources/mid-term-review

Direction 8: Increase community connection, education and participation				
8.1 Community engagement about Traditional Owner culture and values	Delivered	Short-term	Melbourne Water	Community engagement and cultural awareness programs for community groups with Bunurong, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Traditional Owners were held across 2024. The program included cultural heritage training and on-Country site visits with all Traditional Owners, as well as the production of a Wadawurrung specific cultural heritage and values film. See Traditional Owner engagement with community in the Maribyrnong and Werribee catchments case study
8.2 Community engagement strategy, including culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)	Delivered	Short-term	Melbourne Water	Delivered in 2023 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2023
8.3 CALD engagement toolkit	Delivered	Short-term	DEECA	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
8.4 Community Vision inclusion in RCS	Delivered	Short-term	Melbourne Water	Delivered in 2022 – refer to the Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report 2022
8.5 Community Vision inclusion in Healthy Waterway Strategy programs	In progress	Long-term	Melbourne Water	The mid-term review of the Healthy Waterways Strategy was completed in June 2024. Addendums for the Werribee and Maribyrnong catchment programs are being prepared and will include the Waterways of the West Community vision.
Direction 9: Ensure accountability and transparency for Action Plan delivery				
9.1 Annual implementation report	Ongoing	Short-term	DEECA	The first two annual reports were published in 2023 and 2024, respectively. This report is for the third year of implementation January – December 2024.
9.2 Final review of implementation	In progress	Long-term	DEECA	A Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Implementation framework is in place and interim reviews of the Action Plan progress has commenced.
9.3 Waterway condition reporting through Healthy Waterways Strategy	In progress	Long-term	Melbourne Water	In June 2024, Melbourne Water released its mid-term review of the Healthy Waterways Strategy (HWS). The review assessed how the Strategy is tracking and informed priorities for the remainder of the Strategy. The mid-term review findings and recommendations were shared with the Waterways of the West communities through online and in person events (June-Oct 2024). The mid-term review summary and reports can be found here: https://healthywaterways.com.au/resources/mid-term-review .

		In addition, Melbourne Water continues to report annually on progress towards the Performance Objectives of the HWS. Community participation is on track in both the Werribee and Maribyrnong catchments.
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