

PART 1 – WORKING TOGETHER TO DELIVER THE COMMUNITY VISION



Credit: Melbourne Water,
Row boats, Studley Park

Over the next 10 years, transformative and collaborative action will be vital to protect the Yarra and its parklands against future decline triggered by climate change and population growth.

To help guide this step-change in management, the community assembly distilled the 50 year Yarra Community Vision into four performance objectives. These objectives address the environmental, social, recreational, cultural and management protection principles of the Act.

In turn, the state and local government authorities identified in the Act, together with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, have identified whole-of-river and transformative actions to progress the performance objectives.

These objectives and actions set the foundation for achieving the community vision and alignment with the Birrarung Water Policy, and make up Part 1 of the Yarra Strategic Plan.

Collaborative management of the Yarra

State and publically owned lands along the Yarra corridor have been declared 'Yarra River land' to enable their coordinated management and ensure the continued health of the river. Collaborative management of the river will rightly see Traditional Owners and authorities working together to manage Yarra River land.

Each of the organisations involved in the Yarra's management traditionally deliver work within their remit making the most effective use of funds available to them.

The Yarra, however, flows through and beyond all geographic boundaries and requires a more holistic approach to its management. For this reason, the Act calls for modern governance and for state and local authorities to work together to manage the river as one living and integrated natural entity (see **Appendix D**). This is achieved through the Yarra Collaboration Committee, which currently:

- includes representatives of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and responsible public entities with responsibilities for managing the river
- is a long-term governance arrangement, which aims to evolve in its sophistication and approach over the coming years
- will oversee the delivery of the plan and ensure works on Yarra River land are aligned through the application of the decision-making framework (see **Appendix E**).

In order to implement the plan, the Yarra Collaboration Committee recognises that long-term change needs to be embedded in the way organisations work together, and proposes four changes to implement over the next 10 years:

- The Yarra Collaboration Committee will oversee implementation and ensure whole-of-government decision-making for Yarra River land.
- Member organisations will coordinate investment decisions on Yarra River land through use of the plan's decision-making framework.
- All stakeholders, including communities, will be involved in taking care of the river, evolving over time to include more direct community input.
- Traditional Owners and government agencies are supported in their transition to deliver the 50 Year Community Vision, Yarra Strategic Plan and Birrarung Water Policy.

Managing the Yarra River corridor

The plan has been prepared by Melbourne Water in collaboration with these members of the Yarra Collaboration Committee:

Yarra City Council: local government responsible for riverside suburbs including Burnley, Richmond and Abbotsford.

Over 20 km of the Yarra River runs through Yarra City with approximately 275 ha of Yarra River land in the council area.

Banyule City Council: local government responsible for riverside suburbs including Ivanhoe, Heidelberg and Lower Plenty.

Over 20 km of the Yarra River runs through Banyule, with approximately 281 ha of Yarra River land in the council area.

Nillumbik Shire Council: local government responsible for riverside suburbs including Eltham and Bend of Islands.

Over 45 km of the Yarra River runs through Nillumbik, with over 1000 ha of Yarra River land in the council area.

INNER CITY REACH

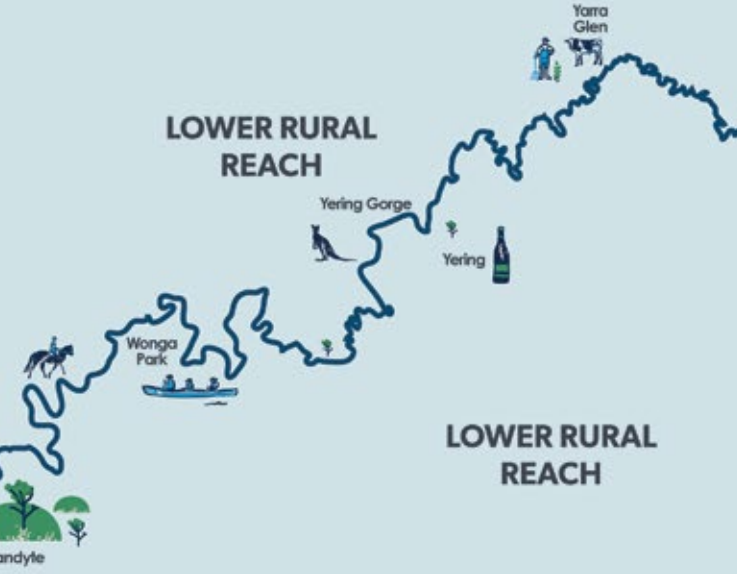


SUBURBAN REACH



SUBURBAN REACH

LOWER RURAL REACH



LOWER RURAL REACH

Manningham City Council: local government responsible for riverside suburbs including Bulleen, Templestowe and Warrandyte.

Over 50 km of the Yarra River runs through Manningham, with over 1000 ha of Yarra River land in the council area.

Boroondara City Council: local government responsible for riverside suburbs including Hawthorn, Kew and North Balwyn.

Over 23 km of the Yarra River runs through Boroondara, with approximately 164 ha of Yarra River land in the council area.

Stonnington City Council: local government responsible for riverside suburbs including South Yarra and Toorak.

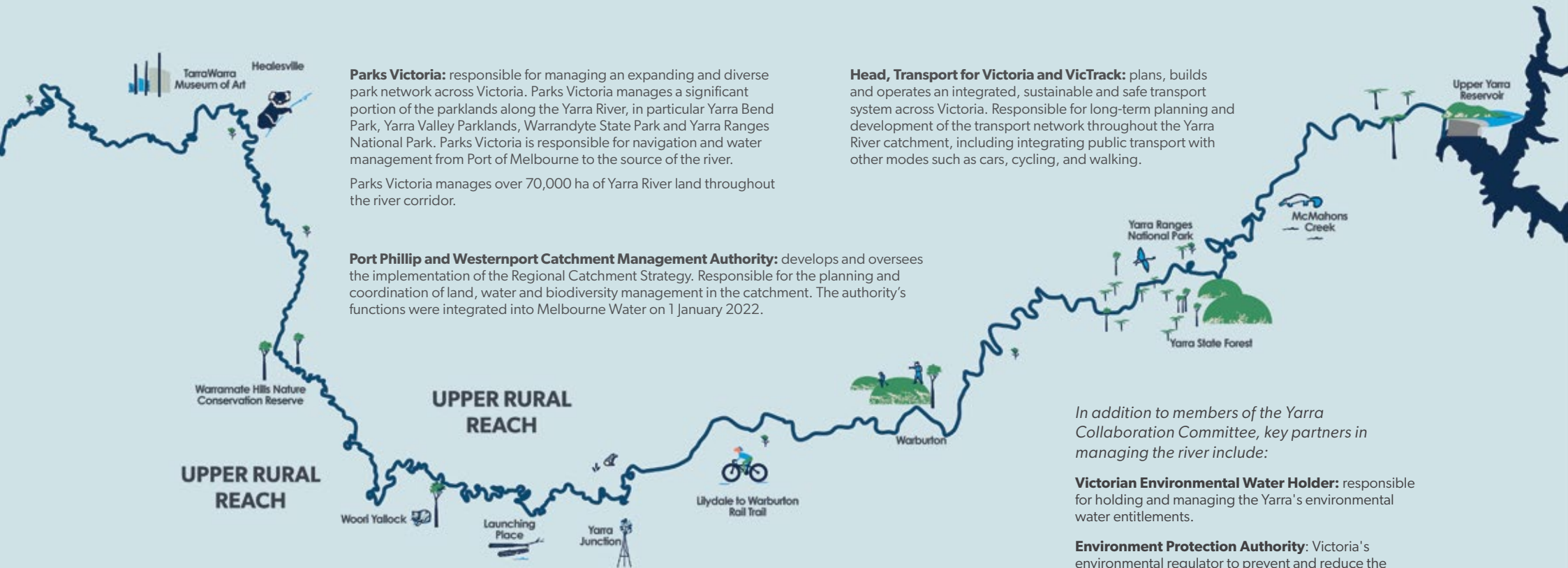
Approximately 4 km of the Yarra River runs through Stonnington, with 16 ha of Yarra River land in the council area.

Melbourne City Council: local government responsible for the municipality of Melbourne, within the inner city reach of the Yarra River.

Over 10km of the Yarra River runs through Melbourne City.

Yarra Ranges Council: local government responsible for the largest area of the Yarra River. Its area stretches from the lower rural to the upper rural reach.

Over 130 km of the Yarra River runs through the Yarra Ranges, with more than 100,000 ha of Yarra River land within the council area.



Parks Victoria: responsible for managing an expanding and diverse park network across Victoria. Parks Victoria manages a significant portion of the parklands along the Yarra River, in particular Yarra Bend Park, Yarra Valley Parklands, Warrandyte State Park and Yarra Ranges National Park. Parks Victoria is responsible for navigation and water management from Port of Melbourne to the source of the river.

Parks Victoria manages over 70,000 ha of Yarra River land throughout the river corridor.

Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority: develops and oversees the implementation of the Regional Catchment Strategy. Responsible for the planning and coordination of land, water and biodiversity management in the catchment. The authority's functions were integrated into Melbourne Water on 1 January 2022.

Head, Transport for Victoria and VicTrack: plans, builds and operates an integrated, sustainable and safe transport system across Victoria. Responsible for long-term planning and development of the transport network throughout the Yarra River catchment, including integrating public transport with other modes such as cars, cycling, and walking.

In addition to members of the Yarra Collaboration Committee, key partners in managing the river include:

Victorian Environmental Water Holder: responsible for holding and managing the Yarra's environmental water entitlements.

Environment Protection Authority: Victoria's environmental regulator to prevent and reduce the effects of pollution and waste.

Victorian Fisheries Authority: managing healthy and sustainable fisheries for all Victorians.

Yarra Valley Water: the primary water and sanitation service provider in the Yarra River catchment. Greater Western Water and South East Water provide similar services in separate areas in the inner city.

Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation: registered Aboriginal party for Country downstream of the city. Bunurong Country covers the lower parts of the Yarra estuary out to Narm (Port Phillip Bay).

Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions: focuses on building thriving places and regions and supporting inclusive communities. Leads the planning, designing and curating of Fishermans Bend Business Precinct and is responsible for Docklands as a business precinct.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation: registered Aboriginal party covering Country through which the Birrarung flows. They bring their unique knowledge, connections and understandings of the river. Their interdependent relationship with the environment provides a blueprint for holistic management of the river and its lands.

Victorian Planning Authority: works with councils and local communities, government agencies, landowners and developers to plan for strategically important precincts in the inner and middle rings of Melbourne.

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP): creates liveable, inclusive and sustainable communities with thriving natural environments. DELWP brings together Victoria's climate change, energy, environment, water, forests, planning and emergency management functions into a single department.

DELWP oversees more than 47,000 ha of Yarra River land throughout the river corridor.

Melbourne Water: responsible for the environmental management of all waterways (including the bed and banks of the Yarra River) and major drainage systems in relation to water quality, flood protection and floodplain management affecting the river.



Legislative requirements for responsible public entities

The primary legislation for all responsible public entities was amended to ensure alignment with the *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017*. The various acts now set out the following obligations of responsible public entities in relation to Yarra River land:⁹

- Responsible public entities must not act inconsistently with any part of the Yarra Strategic Plan that is expressed to be binding on the entity when performing a function or duty or exercising a power under specified legislation in relation to Yarra River land.
- Responsible public entities must have regard to the Yarra protection principles, and those parts of the Yarra Strategic Plan not expressed to be binding on the entity, when performing a function or duty or exercising a power under specified legislation in relation to the Yarra Strategic Plan area that may affect Yarra River land.
- The obligations above do not apply where the responsible public entity's function, duty or power relates to a declared project within the meaning of the *Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009* (e.g. section 64JA of the *Transport Integration Act 2010*).

The *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017* requires responsible public entities to prepare a report on their implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan. These reports will highlight activities and projects that contribute towards the plan's performance objectives, and will inform the annual report prepared by the lead agency for the Birrarung Council.

The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Part 3AAA) sets out the following requirement for planning authorities in relation to Yarra River land:

- A responsible public entity which is a planning authority must not prepare an amendment to a planning scheme that relates to Yarra River land that is inconsistent with anything in the Yarra Strategic Plan expressed to be binding on the responsible public entity.
- Any planning scheme amendment to zoning controls that allows for Greater Yarra Urban Parklands land to be used in a way that is inconsistent with the Yarra Strategic Plan be ratified by both houses of Parliament (in accordance with section 46AAB and 46AAC of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*).





Credit: Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Possum skin cloak created as part of the Birrarung Stories Project

Custodianship of the Birrarung

The Yarra Strategic Plan is, proudly, the first plan for the Yarra River, Birrarung, developed in partnership with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

The following dedicated chapter authored by the Corporation (Water Unit) and its Elders, 'Custodianship of the Birrarung' is a powerful inclusion for the plan, outlining the history, aspirations and opportunities for Caring for Country and water justice for the Birrarung.

We, the Woi-wurrung, the First People, and the Birrarung, belong to this Country. This Country, and the Birrarung are part of us.

The Birrarung is alive, has a heart, a spirit and is part of our Dreaming. We have lived with and known the Birrarung since the beginning. We will always know the Birrarung.

Bunjil, the great Eagle, the creator spirit, made the land, the sky, the sea, the rivers, flora and fauna, the lore. He made Kulin from the earth. Bunjil gave Waa, the crow, the responsibility of Protector. Bunjil's brother, Palliyang, the Bat, created Bagarook, women, from the water.

Since our beginning it has been known that we have an obligation to keep the Birrarung alive and healthy—for all generations to come.

Preamble of the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong Act 2017

Introduction

We, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have a deep cultural obligation and a birthright to look after the Birrarung (Yarra River) – to make sure the river and its lands are healthy and continues to support all life now and for generations to come. As Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people we do not separate the Birrarung from Port Phillip Bay (Narm) or regard the Birrarung as segmented according to reaches, nor disassociate the corridor from the rest of the rivers' catchment. The landscape, through which the Birrarung flows, from its source to the sea, is one integrated, living, cultural landscape. As such, we want to be self-determining and active partners in the ongoing management of the Birrarung and its lands with all responsible public entities who contribute to the management of the Birrarung as one living entity.

This chapter provides an overview of our aspirations for co-management of the Birrarung and emphasises key areas of focus for us in the Yarra Strategic Plan and its implementation – including water justice, significant places and the decision-making framework for transformational projects.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Peoples connection to the Birrarung

As the Traditional Owners of the Birrarung we are the first and only Aboriginal people with the cultural, legislated and moral authority to speak for this Country – our Country. We have an unbroken relationship with our Country which extends north to the Great Dividing Range, west to the mouth of the Werribee River, south to the mouth of Mordialloc Creek and east to Mount Baw Baw.

For thousands of years prior to European contact, the Birrarung was central to the civic, commercial (trade), cultural and ceremonial lives of our people. The wealth of our Country was immediately evident to Settlers. From 1835 onwards, Melbourne grew out from the banks of

the Birrarung which allowed it to become the vibrant city it is today. However, this has come at great expense to the Birrarung and our people. Only one of the Woi-wurrung clans survived European settlement, the Wurundjeri Willam balluk clan of the Birrarung.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation

We are represented by a peak body established over 35 years ago – the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (the Corporation). Predominantly employing Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and other Aboriginal people, the Corporation is a self-funded charity which provides opportunity for engagement with our people and culture.

The Corporation operates in a complex federal, state and local government legislative and policy ecosystem including planning and environmental statutes. The Australian Government has also ratified UN declarations that have a bearing on how the State should work with Traditional Owners.

Two significant Victorian legislative frameworks that the Corporation operates within include the Victorian *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act (2006)* (the Corporation was appointed as a Registered Aboriginal Party in 2008 and 2021 over a portion of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country), and the *Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn Act (2017)* which identifies and acknowledges us as Traditional Owners of the Birrarung.

Alongside Victorian state departments, local government authorities are priority partners for the Corporation given the large number of them are on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung traditional homelands.

A core focus of the Corporation's work is the protection, preservation and revitalisation of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture and cultural practices and expression of culture in a contemporary way.

The Corporation, is also active in the governance of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, including working with the state and its other agencies and partners to achieve this. To this end, the Corporation offers several key services including: Cultural Practices for events (Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremonies as well as yidaki performances), Cultural Heritage services, Cultural Consultations, Language and Naming, Cultural Education (including tourism) experiences, Natural Resource Management, Research, and more recently Water centred collaborations with selected responsible public entities.



Credit: DELWP,
First reading of the bill, June 2017

*'The Birrarung is part of
our identity.'*

– Aunty Margaret Gardiner

Corporation's response to the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong Act 2017 and Community Vision - Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung (Ancient Spirit and Lore of the Yarra)

Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong Act 2017 (the Act)

The Act is the first piece of Victorian legislation with a bilingual title and preamble in Woi-wurrung language and it acknowledges the privileged position of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as Traditional Owners of the Birrarung. This recognition and empowerment of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung language, values, and Elders was a profoundly important moment not only for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, but also Indigenous Australians and First Nations peoples globally.

The bill itself was introduced to Parliament by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders, who delivered an address on the significance of the proposed legislation.

In response to the Act and Community Vision, the Corporation facilitated a community driven process whereby the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community gathered to determine their aspirations for the Birrarung and a framework for their involvement in the development of the Yarra Strategic Plan. The deliberative process also shaped the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung vision for the Birrarung – complementing and strengthening the broader Community Vision.

Together, the Community Vision and *Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung* underpin the Yarra Strategic Plan and set the aspiration and expectations for what needs to be achieved in management of the Birrarung as one living entity.

Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung

Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung is an important document that outlines expectations about the nature of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung involvement in the development of the Yarra Strategic Plan. This plan outlines Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung contributions to the objectives of the Yarra Strategic Plan, the decision-making framework and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung performance objectives and targets.

Further, *Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung* unambiguously sets out the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung priorities for the Birrarung. The policy provides clear guidance to government, stakeholders and all responsible parties on engagement with the Corporation with respect to planning, policy and decision-making. The policy highlights the Corporation's intention for collaboration and partnerships alongside its expectation for these to be culturally respectful and appropriately and adequately resourced – through human and financial resources.

Securing and protecting the footprint of the Birrarung is essential for the health of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Country, the wellbeing of the diverse river communities and indeed the city of Melbourne.

Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung is not intended as a static response to the Act or Community Vision. Like other key policy documents that inform the strategic direction of the Corporation, *Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung* will be responsive to policy shifts and pressures on Country, including threats from large infrastructure projects, both the sale of and/or inappropriate access of Crown land, changes in land use and rapid urban expansion and agricultural intensification. The performance objectives and targets in both *Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung* and other key internal policy documents underscore the need for a whole of system approach, including the need to establish cultural and environmental corridors that connect areas beyond the Yarra River lands.

The following projects were identified by the Corporation as immediate priorities in response to the context within which the Act was introduced, and are reflected in the priority actions of the Yarra Strategic Plan:

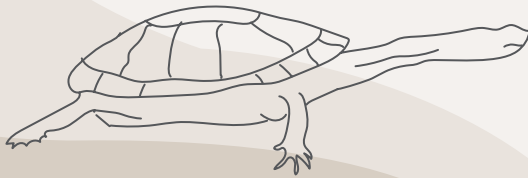
- Cultural practice, knowledge and cultural mapping
- Direct meaningful engagement with Abbotsford River Structure Plan
- Direct meaningful engagement with Bulleen-Banyule Cultural River Precinct Structure Plan
- Bolin Bolin Billabong complex rewatering, research and practice.



Credit: Melbourne Water,
Launch of the community vision and *Nhanbu
narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung*, May 2018

'Having our name in the Act finally gives us a legal mechanism to have a say about the Birrarung. We want to protect our homelands'

– Allan Wandin



Bringing the intention of the Act to life for the benefit of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people

The responsible public entities who will deliver and implement the 40 actions of the Yarra Strategic Plan have a significant responsibility to deliver the social, cultural, economic, environmental and heritage outcomes that the Act anticipates for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. This will sit alongside delivery of broader educational outcomes,

to which the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people aspire, as outlined in *Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung*.

Serendipitously, although the Act reflects a planning land use framework, the Minister for Water has ultimate responsibility for the Yarra Strategic Plan and deliverables through its implementation. This ideally positions the plan as the vehicle responsible for executing the directives of the Act to support both the land and water justice aspirations of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

Caring for Country is an important land and water justice aspiration for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people which we believe can actively be achieved through Part 2 – land use framework.

The opportunity for achieving water justice and water rights for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung through the actions of the Yarra Strategic Plan is particularly evident and inclusion of Action 8: *Support the aspiration of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to pursue justice for their people and Country via delivering water justice through water rights, participation in water management and broader water reform*.

To understand and contextualise this opportunity it is critically important to understand that historically, Aboriginal peoples' rights to water have largely been excluded from water planning and management policies and programs.

In Victoria it is estimated that Aboriginal People own less than 0.1% of all water rights. Without water rights, Traditional Owners are unable to exercise self-determination and can't decide where or how water can be used to support cultural, spiritual, environmental or economic outcomes. This exclusion denies Traditional Owners the right to care for Country, which is the essence of Aboriginal social, spiritual, economic and physical wellbeing, and the basis of cultural lore.

The time line at the end of this chapter represents a specific set of experiences to assist the reader appreciate the current context – it is not intended as an exhaustive history.

Water Justice: Yarra Strategic Plan as a mechanism for change

A recurring challenge for Traditional Owners is that legislation and associated policy is often silent on First Peoples matters, or underpinned by Settler/Colonial understandings of colonialism and culture. This also includes the perception that the cultures and interests of First Peoples are static and time locked to the environments, practises, and of societies, the First Peoples governed at the time of European settlement. It is evident in Acts written to support Traditional Owners such as the *Native Title Act 1993*, the *Victorian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2006* and *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, however is beyond the scope of this chapter.

In 2017, 182 years post contact, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people gained a legislative mechanism within which to formally engage with and influence the governance of the Birrarung and its lands, which is central to Woi-wurrung people's Dreaming and wellbeing.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung participation has only been possible because the Act employed a placed-based approach, pairing right Country with the right people – the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. Now with strategic planning and governance reform the Yarra Strategic Plan will support the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people achieve water justice outcomes.

Comprising three pillars, water justice is characterised by:

1. water rights
2. participation in water management
3. broader water and policy reform resulting in treaties and political agreements.

This definition of water justice is not a Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung concept. It has been adapted specifically for this chapter from the National Cultural Flows Research Project, which is currently considered the gold standard for water justice in Australia. This is a national initiative that aims to secure a future where Indigenous water allocations are embedded within Australia's water planning and management regimes.

Water justice for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people

'It's a living lifeline, the main highway for our resources and our spirituality.'

– Aunty Margaret Gardiner

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Water Ownership/Rights

Foundation of water justice for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. Control and decision making over ground and surface water. The Yarra Strategic Plan and responsible public entities have the ability to support and realise this essential aspiration for the Birrarung.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung participation in Water Management

The Yarra Strategic Plan provides an opportunity to ensure Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people's co-management of water, one of three key areas for water justice for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

Transform Foundation to empower Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people

Reform of wider policy and governance structures on Country, including treaties and political agreements, cultural rights, better recognition of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung lore and custom with benchmarking against International Agreements. The Yarra Strategic Plan and responsible public entities have the ability to support and realise this essential aspiration for the Birrarung.



Credit: Melbourne Water, Interpretive signage trail at Pound Bend Reserve, Warrandyte State Park

FIGURE 2. Water justice for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people

The inclusion of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people in the *Wilip gin Birrarung murron Act 2017* has allowed the Corporation participation in water management and decision-making for the Birrarung (**Figure 2**).

Actions 8 (see page 44) and 31 (see page 58) support Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people in their aspiration to progress additional rights, in particular water rights and agreement making with key agencies who manage aspects of Country. Current Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung water and land justice priorities include:

- The return of an appropriate parcel of land within the Bulleen Banyule precinct to the Corporation to establish a permanent cultural centre and base of operations. It was the first place our Ancestors requested as a Reserve from the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate in 1840.
- Appropriate development and zoning of lands within the Bulleen Banyule precinct that secures the Birrarung's footprint for the benefit of the river. The Birrarung needs its lands to enable natural systems including flooding. Planned sporting facilities and other forms of development are to be directed away from the Birrarung to more appropriate locations that are significantly set back from cultural places.
- Prioritise the hydrological functions of the Bolin Bolin and networked billabongs at current or improved levels in the face of development and infrastructure upgrades (NELP). A priority example is an in-perpetuity watering solution for Bolin Bolin billabong and networked billabongs so that they never dry out.
- Immediate moratorium on the implementation of the *Parks and Crown Land Legislation Amendment Act 2020* (commenced 1 September 2021) on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung homelands, including the Birrarung and its tributaries, until the Corporation is appropriately resourced to undertake a systematic program of cultural mapping. Consultation with Traditional Owners after legislation has been developed and enacted in law is inconsistent with the States commitment to Treaty, the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework, and DELWP's self-determination policy framework.
- The immediate drafting of a new piece of place-based legislation, informed by learnings gained from the *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murron) Act (2017)*, that protects and enhances the Maribyrrong and Werribee

rivers (including in stream water quality and flows), their catchments, and enshrines Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Wadawurrung Traditional Owner rights in law.

- Secure funds to develop a bicultural understanding of net gain imbued with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung values. Once 'bicultural net gain' is established, work with responsible public entities to implement the definition as part of the Yarra Strategic Plan.
- The development of a cohesive strategy to ensure that legislation and policy pertaining to land, water and heritage works together effectively to protect Country.
- Naming all unnamed waterways to ensure cultural heritage sensitivity overlay is more broadly applied to ensure cultural protections.
- The requirement that any planning amendments or ground works that impact upon and occur within the declared lands (1 km either side of the river) leads to a voluntary Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) process and engagement with the Water Unit.
- Securing 'cultural flows' by identifying the cultural water (volume and timing) required to sustain the natural, cultural, and spiritual values for the length of the Birrarung and its tributaries, and secure a water entitlement (unincumbered by fees and ongoing costs) required to meet those values.
- Systematic and sustained rewatering of wetlands and billabongs.
- Establishing Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Birrarung Rangers (land and water).
- Immediate cessation of sale of Crown lands where Native Title has not been extinguished and the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* can be applied.
- Protect, re-wild, rewater and/or rehabilitate significant sites.
- Water for commercial activities (cultivate native bush foods and aquaculture).
- Restoring/reintroduction of important species and ecological communities.
- Recognition and implementation of Climate Change Strategies which will reduce damage to cultural landscapes, cultural places, and cultural values.

A number of these priorities are being addressed through the actions in the Yarra Strategic Plan.

Significant sites and areas for protection

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people are often called on to outline or describe where there are sites of significance or cultural value. When referring to 'place' within Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, it is as much based upon emotion, knowledge, stories and intangible value as it is on artefacts and tangible heritage.

Place boundaries are mutable and movable, shifting location even between individuals. These are concepts that do not always align with the modern legal process of property boundaries, values, and ownership which restrict access and defined land use.

- All of Country is important to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, being a continuous and interconnected landscape.
- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung values do not end at property boundaries and do not just occur on Crown land.
- Some places will have values that are not public knowledge.
- There are places across Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country that contemporary Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people are yet to reconnect with as access to cultural landscapes has been disrupted for many generations.
- Place and space are conceptually different and a Place may be linked by many points through song lines, stories, view lines, and some links may be astrological.

There are also areas that are unknown, such as ancient billabongs and waterways. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung acknowledge that the Birrarung landscape is dynamic, having changed its course over millennia. These changes are recorded within stories that form part of our oral tradition. The evidence of a changing watercourse is seen in the numerous billabongs of the Birrarung. These ancient places, filled with sediment over time, still have potential for evidence of ancestral occupation despite urbanisation. The filled billabongs are often connected hydrologically to the Birrarung and visible from aerial imagery.

Table 1 describes some areas which have known values to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and are still semi-accessible to people today. These are identified in Part 2 – land use framework. Table 2 lists sites as areas for immediate protection, which are also identified in Part 2.

TABLE 1. Publicly known Places of Significance

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people consider the following places along the Birrarung (Yarra) to be sites of significance:	
Federation Square	Traditional meeting place for cultural business and ceremonial life for the Kulin Nation.
MCG	Significant ceremonial ground that was utilised until the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people were displaced from current day City of Melbourne. A site of inter-clan cultural business.
Dights Falls	Birrarung crossing place for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung. This area is also associated with Billibellary's (Ngurungaeta) resting place.
Yarra Bend	Site of the first Aboriginal School in Victoria. Also known as an important Kulin meeting place and one of headquarters of the Native Police.
Yarra Flats	Area of significant cultural resources: food, fibre, and medicine. It was also living area for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung.
Confluence of the Maribyrnong and Yarra	High-resource area in the swampy salt flats. Higher ground on the western side for meeting and trade with other Kulin groups.
Bend of Islands	Environmental Living Zone where landowners are required to maintain and manage the environmental and cultural values of the land. Adjacent to the Birrarung (nil invasive species).
Coranderrk	Established in 1863, Coranderrk was located on the lands of the Wurundjeri-balluk clan of the Woi-wurrung. The station was established for the Wurundjeri people and members from other Kulin (Victorian) tribes who were forcefully displaced from their traditional lands some 30 years previously. The reserve, which originally comprised 2300 acres of land, was later extended to 4850 acres, and was situated on the Yarra Flats bordered by the Birrarung, Badger Creek, Watts River and the slopes of Mount Riddell (currently the Shire of Yarra Ranges).
Confluence of the Plenty River and the Birrarung	A recognised ceremonial place.
Birrarung (the Yarra) Falls	Natural crossing point for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, located south of current-day Queen Street. This waterfall was the natural rock barrier that separated the salty tidal water from the fresh water that flowed from the Birrarung. The Yarra Falls were blasted away with explosives in the 1880s to make way for Queens Bridge and shipping purposes.

TABLE 2. Known Key Places requiring Protection

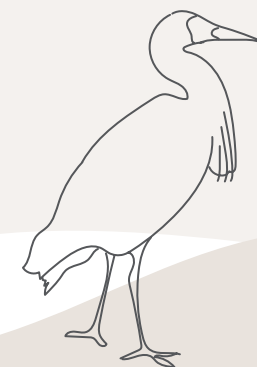
The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have identified the following sites as areas for immediate protection:	
Bolin Bolin Billabong and connected billabongs (Banskia St wetlands and Annulus Billabong)	Traditional eel fishing ground and living area that was highly significant to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. It was the subject of a Cultural Values Study lead by the Corporation. It was the first place that our Ancestors requested as a reserve from the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate in 1840. Multiple Creation stories are associated with this cultural landscape.
Merri Creek Confluence	Initiation place for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and associated with Ngurungaeta (leader) Billibillary's resting place.
Brushy Creek Confluence	Ngurungaeta (leader), William Barak's birthing place is located on the banks of Brushy Creek.
Laughing Waters (Garambi Baan)	Traditional aquacultural site, containing historic eel traps, which are actively maintained by the Corporation in association with Parks Victoria. The site of a contemporary ceremonial ground with scarred trees (dendroglyphs).
Bulleen-Banyule Flats	Important living area rich in resources. Bulleen is a place where important Settler and Indigenous relations played out within the political context of the Aboriginal Protectorate. It is currently subject to development considerations (NELP).
Yering	The 'Battle of Yering' occurred on the former Yering Station property, 13 January 1840. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung warriors fought troopers of the Border Police to secure the release of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ngurungaeta (leader) Jaga Jaga.

'Water Rangers would allow us to practice our culture without asking government permission to do so. In real terms, we could actually be custodians of the river.'

– Aunty Gail Smith

'The river was the main source of our culture and economy. Our relationship is both physical and spiritual. Cultural Flows are a modern way of interpreting this relationship.'

– Uncle Bill Nicholson



Decision-making framework – Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation engagement protocols for responsible public entities named in the Act

The Corporation has a unique organisational structure and operates from a model of consensus and representative decision-making. Engagement with the Corporation occurs across three interlinked tiers:

1. Legislation and Policy – Direct engagement in legislation and policy development with the State of Victoria regarding the interests of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Country.
2. Partnership – Self determined agreements with other parties (i.e., relevant government agencies, non-government organisations, research institution etc.) that deliver valued outcomes in an ongoing and meaningful manner.
3. Contracted services – Of particular note in the context of the Yarra Strategic Plan is the opportunity to Care for Country via an on-ground Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Natural Resource Management presence that can focus on restoration, rehabilitation, protection, education, knowledge gathering and sharing (research).

The decision-making framework (**Appendix E**) and the below overview of protocols will support our aspirations with respect to achieving co-management of the Birrarung and its lands as one living integrated entity, and help us deliver components of *Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung* and other key strategic documents of the Corporation.

Protocols are in place to ensure Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people's sovereign rights are respected and Country is protected. There is to be an ongoing cycle of involvement between responsible public entities and the Corporation. These protocols with respect to the Yarra Strategic Plan will:

1. Support responsible public entities in developing their understanding of the rights and responsibilities of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to Country (land, water, planning).
2. Demonstrate to responsible public entities and the broader community the value of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung inclusion and participation.
3. Support the Corporation to further engage with the community it represents including providing culturally relevant employment opportunities.
4. Further develop and consolidate cultural, environmental, social, political and economic relationships with water.

As with *Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung* these protocols will evolve over time. More detailed protocols for engaging services will be available upon the implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan.

Due to cultural considerations the Corporation has expanded expectations of broader engagement by responsible public entities than identified in the current decision-making framework. Considering cultural sensitivities, we believe it essential in delivering on the Yarra Strategic Plan priority actions and transformational projects that responsible public entities named in the Act understand and adhere to a number of protocols. Further details of the engagement protocols associated with decision-making will be included in the implementation plan for the Yarra Strategic Plan.

This chapter is dedicated to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders and community who supported and informed the development of this work.

Special thanks to the following Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation staff members: Jordan Smith and Karmen Jobling (Water Unit) and Fiona McConachie (NRM Policy Officer) who contributed to an earlier draft.

'The Yarra is one of the major transport routes. We didn't have a train system in those days, we had a water system.'

- Ron Jones

Traditional Owners journey for water rights

Pre 1788

A continent of many Nations

Prior to European settlement, First Peoples throughout Australia, used land and water without holding any formal title. The rights exercised by Australia's First Peoples over land and resources either prior to, or post settlement, should be considered property whether or not they are recognised by the State.

1835

Woi-wurrung Country (Melbourne and surrounding territories) Victoria

Europeans arrive on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country with devastating consequences for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung including successive disposessions. One of the clans survives settlement, the Wurundjeri Willam balluk clan.



1788

Terra Australis/ Australia

The British Crown declares the continent terra nullius. The experience of colonisation and legal implications of terra nullius set in train an enduring and catastrophic loss of land and water rights for A&TSI communities.

1989

Victoria

The Water Act 1989 is silent on Aboriginal/Indigenous people in either the purpose or body of the Act. Amongst its purposes are the orderly and equitable use of water resources.

1993

Australia

The Native Title Act 1993 includes water rights as a part of native title rights, but only rights to use water for domestic and personal purposes have been recognised by the courts. The Act does not provide for a right to negotiate over other water uses, cultural/environmental/commercial. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung do not have a Native Title agreement.

1998

The traditional homelands of 24 Nations (parts of southern NSW, VIC, SA, ACT).

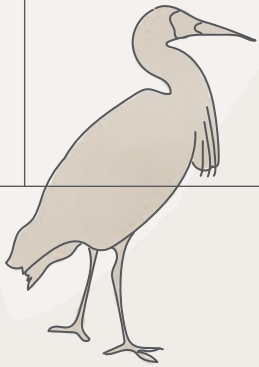
Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) formed during the Yorta Yorta Native Title Case.

MLDRIN is an independent, representative confederation of Sovereign First Nations from the Southern Murray Darling Basin which advocates for the progression and recognition of Aboriginal water rights.

2004

Australia

The *National Water Initiative (NWI)* establishes a framework for a water market (i.e. the commodification of water) and the unbundling of land and water, which has had significant implications for the rights of Australia's First People. The NWI recognises in national water policy for the first time Indigenous rights to water. All States/Territories agree that substantial progress towards implementation will be achieved by 2010. This includes indigenous representation in water planning, for water plans to incorporate indigenous social, spiritual and customary objectives and strategies for achieving these objectives. The *Victorian Water Act 1989* was amended to allow for the separation of land and water. This has significant implications for Victorian Traditional Owners, leading to what commentators such as Katie O'Bryan call a 'double dispossession' of water rights.



2007

Australia

The *Water Act 2007* created the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and committed to large scale water recovery for the environment under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan

The Echuca Declaration developed by MLDRIN asserts First Nations' Sovereignty, water rights, values and responsibilities, and contests ownership and management of water. It defines "Cultural Flows" as water entitlements that are legally and beneficially owned by the Nations of a sufficient and adequate quantity and quality to improve the spiritual, cultural, natural, environmental, social and economic conditions of those Nations.

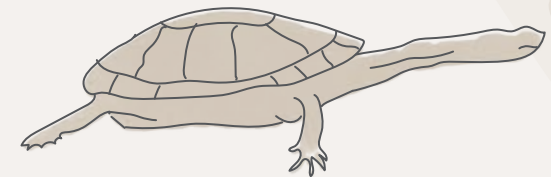
2006

Victoria

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, through their experience as Traditional Owners and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation as a statutory authority, has formed the view that the *Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act* allows recognised Traditional Owners limited decision making on Country, specifically in regards to Cultural Heritage places defined by the Act. The Act allows for the registration of culturally significant sites, including expanses of water. The Act does not provide water rights or access to water for Traditional Owners.

The Act recognises the land immediately adjacent to named waterways as likely to have a higher potential for cultural heritage. This is presented spatially by a statewide heritage layer called Cultural Heritage Sensitivity. It is managed and updated by Aboriginal Victoria and accessible via ACHRIS, VicPlan and other government websites. It does not include registered intangible heritage or unknown or unregistered locations.

Unless on Crown land or covered by an area that has a known registered site, unnamed waterways are without a CHMP trigger and the process for naming is complex. Currently there is no single statutory authority or legislation that deals with the naming of waterways within Victoria.



2009

International/ Australia

Australia endorses *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP, 2007) with Articles 32 and 25 making direct reference to water. Specifically, the States need to consult in good faith in order to obtain free and informed prior consent prior to any project affecting territories, including the utilization/ exploitation of water and Indigenous people’s rights to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their lands (including waters) to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

2012

Australia

Basin Plan (Act, 2012). Chapter 10, Part 14 – “Indigenous values and uses”. 10.52; *Water resource plans must identify objectives of Indigenous people with respect to managing water resources, outcomes for water management are desired by Indigenous people, regard to be had to social, spiritual and cultural values of Indigenous people as they relate to water resources of the water resource plan area.* 10.53: Consultation and preparation of water resource plan.

2016

Western Australia

Fitzroy River Declaration

Historic statement by native title holders pledging to work together to protect and manage the Martuwarra Fitzroy River. The declaration resulted in the Government of Western Australia committing to a catchment management plan for the Fitzroy River and a national park over parts of the Fitzroy and Margaret Rivers.

2010

Victoria

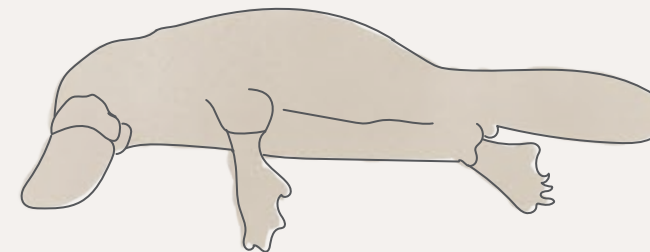
The *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* allows use of water for traditional purposes under some circumstances. This does not extend to commercial purposes, but is instead similar to the rights of non-Indigenous landholders under section 8 of the *Water Act 1989*, which provides that any person has the right to take water, free of charge, for that person’s domestic stock and use from a waterway or bore to which that person has access.

The *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* allows management agreements known as “Indigenous Land Use Agreements” with relevant authorities. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people currently do not have a settlement with the State.

Traditional Owners can only negotiate over Crown lands where Native Title has not been extinguished. The State can elect to sell Crown lands. Built forms and freehold title extinguish Native Title. Much like the rest of Victoria, the majority of land tenure on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung homelands is freehold. Crown land available for Native Title is highly limited.

The traditional homelands of NBAN membership (southern corner of Qld & northern NSW).

Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) was formed in 2010 as a confederation of Sovereign First Nations in the Northern Murray Darling Basin.



2016-2017

Victoria

The State introduces its first Aboriginal Water Policy as part of *Water for Victoria*. It acknowledged cultural values for water and the need for economic development, it doesn't formally commit to returning water entitlements to redress the imbalance.

The Corporation works with DELWP Planning and the Minister for Planning who facilitates the appointment of the Corporation to provide cultural guidance to the Yarra Ministerial Advisory Committee. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders table Bill which becomes the *Wilip gin Birrarung murron Act*.

2019

Victoria

The *Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2019* recognises Aboriginal values and knowledge in water resource and water planning, and enables Aboriginal participation in water/waterway planning and management, including reporting requirements for water and catchment authorities. Water planning must consider how to provide shared benefits for Aboriginal cultural values.

Recognised Traditional Owner groups given active role in development of the Central and Gippsland Sustainable Water Strategy.

2020

Victoria

The *Crown Land Legislation Amendment Act* (commenced September 2021). Prior to enactment neither DELWP or Victorian Fishing Authority consulted with any Victorian Traditional Owners despite some groups having either Native Title or Traditional Owner Settlements. This is inconsistent with the State's commitment to progress Treaty, the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework, and DELWP's Self Determination policy framework.

DELWP released *Pupungarli Marnmarnepu: Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy 2020-2025*, which commits to reconciliation, partnership, and self-determination for Traditional Owners in Victoria

Federal

New Closing the Gap outcome areas include Inland Waters. Specifically, "The inland waters target will measure progress towards securing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests in water bodies inland from the coastal zone under state and territory water rights regimes. This will include data development to identify a nationally consistent measure for inland waters encompassing, for example, water licenses, water rights and water allocation plans). National Agreement on Closing the Gap (July 2020).

2017

Victoria

Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murron) Act 2017 acknowledges Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the sole Traditional Owners of the Birrarung. A "place based" piece of legislation, the Act embodies a "Right People for Country" approach.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is produced at the National Constitutional Convention by 250 First Nations representatives from homelands across Australia and the Torres Strait.

2018

Victoria

The Corporation develops a policy response to the Act and Community Vision, *Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung (Ancient Spirit and Lore of the Yarra)*.

Birrarung Council established with dedicated seats reserved for the Corporation as per the requirements of the Act.

The Corporation commences participation on the Yarra Strategic Plan and associated subcommittees.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners appointed to Waterways of the West Ministerial Advisory Committee to discuss policy and legislative options to protect the health and amenity of Maribyrnong and Werribee rivers and their catchments. At the time of publication, the position of both Traditional Owner corporations is that the best path forward is the immediate drafting of new placed-based legislation, that protects and enhances the Maribyrnong and Werribee Rivers (including in stream water quality

and flows), their catchments and enshrines Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Wadawurrung Traditional Owner rights in law.

Victoria's new Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023 is released, which commits to self-determination, and among other things, the transfer of power and resources to communities.

Advancing the Treaty Process with *Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018* which is Australia's first piece of legislation pertaining to Treaty with the First People.

Federal

Changes to Federal Acts have resulted in changes to the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) purview. It is now able to fund water and sea programs including purchase of water entitlements, management tools for sea and water Country, and the development of Sea Country Planning.

To reflect these changes, the organisation is now known as the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC).



Credit: David Hannah,
Yering billabongs

Priority projects

The plan sets out a series of priority projects and foundational actions to achieve the 10-year performance objectives. These projects recognise Aboriginal cultural values of the Birrarung and deliver stormwater and environmental water benefits for the river, including its billabongs. They are innovative, represent a shift toward collaborative management between authorities and partnership with the Traditional Owners, and will deliver significant change across the river corridor.

The Birrarung Rangers

The Birrarung Rangers project is an initiative of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation. It will ensure the ongoing involvement of the Traditional Owners in the day-to-day management of the Yarra River, Birrarung, and use of cultural land practices to care for their Country.

Led by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, the project will build on the existing work of their natural resource management team, establishing a pathway for building capacity and capability for Birrarung rangers. Once established, the rangers will provide important cultural and natural heritage management services into the future. The project will be implemented in three stages: co-design, piloting and evaluation.

Yering Billabongs

The Yering Billabongs project will see 100 hectares of the Yarra River floodplain restored to functional billabongs. Led by Yarra Ranges Shire Council, the project aims to safely reconnect the floodplain by creating ephemeral and semi-permanent water bodies to mimic natural habitats and provide water quality treatment, while also extending Spadoni's Reserve.

The first priority of the project is to reconnect remnant billabongs, improve floodplain conditions and water quality, establish riparian corridors, and enhance the existing values in adjoining reserves (Spadoni's and Murrup Brann). Project works will be staged to lay the foundation for future partnerships.

The convergence of three waterways in this location – Olinda Creek, Stringybark Creek and Muddy Creek – is an area of Aboriginal cultural heritage and working with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation will ensure these values can be protected.

By securing and enhancing these significant billabongs, this project will create opportunities for engagement, recreation, volunteering and appreciation of the river, setting the foundation for a strong relationship between the Yarra River and its communities for decades to come.

Yarra Flats

The Yarra Flats billabong complex, located between Bulleen and Heidelberg, is a historically significant area that continues to be important for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and features in their Dreamtime stories. As an area of high cultural, environmental and liveability value, the Yarra Flats billabongs have potential to deliver significant outcomes for the community and environment. This was reflected in the concept plan developed in 2013 by Parks Victoria in consultation with Banyule City Council, Melbourne Water and the community.

Melbourne Water has been provided funding to undertake a trial watering of the billabongs and design of a long-term solution for an onsite stormwater treatment wetland to supply water to these billabongs. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation are working with Melbourne Water on ecological and cultural aspects of this project.

In the longer term, the plan is to improve water quality and recreation, while providing opportunities to connect the community to the river and local environment of Yarra Flats.

Floatlands

Led by Melbourne City Council, this innovative project will trial floating wetlands on the Yarra River, within the heart of Melbourne.

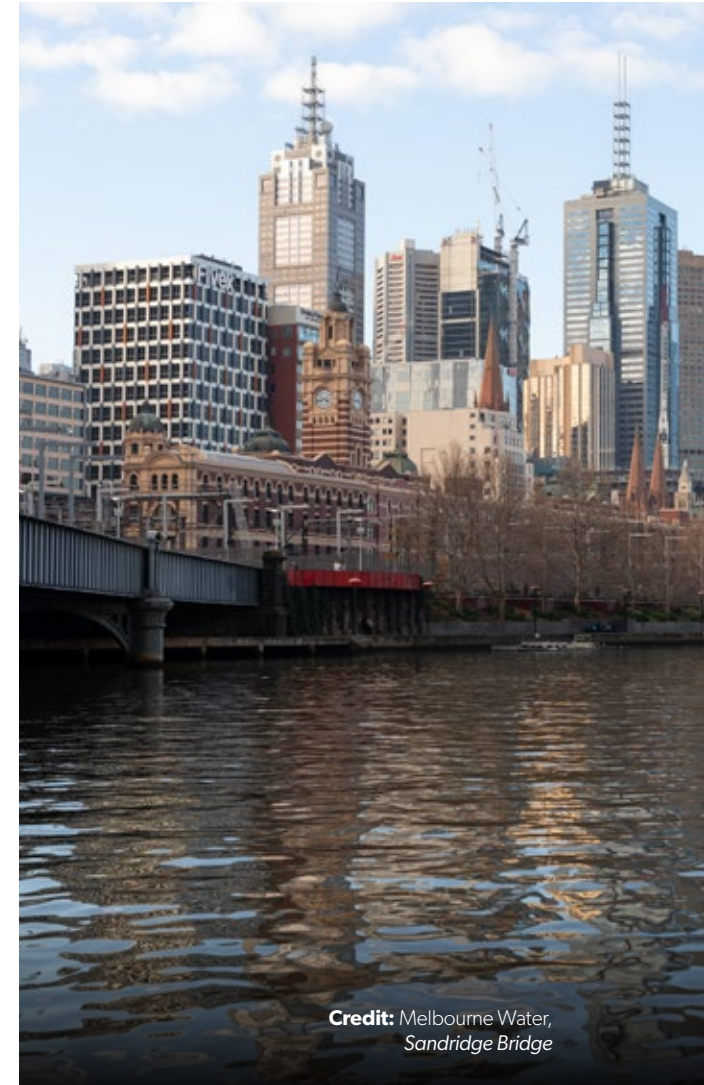
The project will support the community's connection to the river and the environment by providing a place of refuge and learning in the bustling centre of the city. While ensuring the continued safety in navigation on the river for commercial and recreational users, the wetlands will help improve water quality and provide habitat in areas of the river with concrete banks and limited biodiversity. Through collaboration between Melbourne City Council, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, DELWP and recognised Traditional Owners, the project will highlight the iconic character of the river and provide an opportunity to incorporate native vegetation into areas of the river that have been urbanised.

The project will contribute towards an Aboriginal cultural narrative for the river, which will be developed in collaboration with the Traditional Owners. This will provide an insight into the character of a pre-colonisation river wetland.

The results of the trial will be used to determine whether floating wetlands should be installed in other parts of the river and in more permanent forms.

Polystyrene in the Yarra River

Led by the Yarra Riverkeeper, this project looks at the relative contribution of industries to polystyrene in the river. The project includes building a stronger evidence-based understanding of litter sources, creating educational material for community and business on the extent and impact of polystyrene pollution, improving engagement with communities, and building an open-source interactive polystyrene pollution layer into the Yarra Atlas (<https://www.yarraatlas.org.au/>).

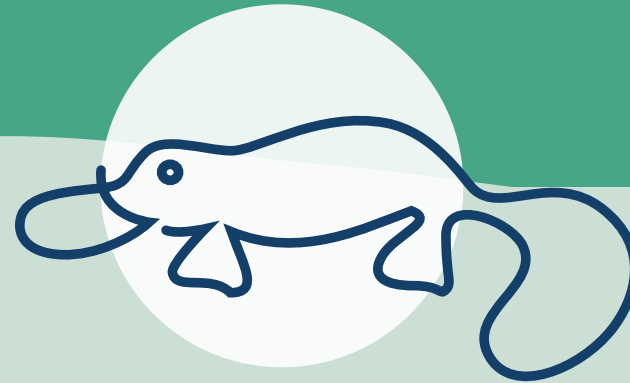


Credit: Melbourne Water, Sandridge Bridge



Credit: Melbourne Water,
Platypus, Yarra River

10-year performance objectives and collaborative actions



Performance Objective 1: **A healthy river and lands**

Improving the water quality of the Yarra River and protecting its land, floodplains and billabongs to achieve greater biodiversity.

THIS PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IF:

- Terrestrial and aquatic habitats are improved, connected and maintained resulting in improved biodiversity, increased resilience and net gain in their overall extent and condition.
- Waterway condition/water quality is improved in accordance with targets set in the *Healthy Waterways Strategy*.
- Populations of native fish including threatened species are improved.
- Participation in land management activities by land owners, recognised Traditional Owners, managers and wider community increases, resulting in improved native vegetation, water quality and biodiversity.

With population growth, rising temperatures and decreasing rainfall, the health of the Yarra is under significant pressure. Building its resilience is crucial to delivering the Yarra River 50 Year Community Vision, which calls for the Yarra's health and integrity to be 'paramount and uncompromised'.

Water quality in the river must be improved and the surrounding land, floodplains and billabongs protected and enhanced to achieve greater biodiversity. The river is an important habitat for native fish, including the nationally significant Australian grayling, and the endangered Macquarie perch and Murray cod. More than 150 species of birds flourish along the Yarra, including the Australasian bittern, kookaburras, superb fairy-wrens, powerful owls (Australia's largest owl, listed as threatened in Victoria), and the critically endangered helmeted honeyeater (Victoria's state bird emblem).

The Yarra is also home to a myriad of Australian mammals, including platypus, koalas, echidnas, possums, sugar gliders, and a spectacular array of bats. There are over 15 species of frogs and many species of snakes.

Native vegetation along the river provides critical habitat in addition to protecting the river's water quality by filtering nutrients, reducing the inflow of sediment and stabilising its banks. Important and unique plants that live along the river include the rare Yarra gum, endangered Upper Yarra swamp gum, kangaroo grass and sweet bursaria.

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung have called for a change in how all Victorians think about and actively respect the Birrarung – not as a resource to be exploited but rather to recognise the complex, living system that is sensitive to its surrounds and a uniquely Victorian treasure. There is opportunity to work together to restore and improve the condition of the river and its lands for the future use and enjoyment of all.

Strategies and mechanisms for a healthy catchment

The Yarra Strategic Plan complements many of the existing government strategies and mechanisms, including the *State Environment Protection Policy (Waters)*, *Biodiversity Strategy 2037*, *Healthy Waterways Strategy 2018*, the *Regional Catchment Strategy*, the Yarra Integrated Water Management forum and the *Sustainable Water Strategy*. The plan does not take the place of other policies, plans and strategies; rather, it provides an overarching strategy to integrate and harmonise the many plans, regulations and investment programs of the various agencies and organisations to assist in the management of the river corridor.

While the plan focuses on achieving greater biodiversity in the river corridor, the *Healthy Waterways Strategy* sets out performance objectives to achieve targets for environmental values and conditions for waterways across the entire Yarra catchment. The strategy's Yarra Catchment Program was developed with the Yarra River 50 Year Community Vision at its heart, recognising that a healthy river requires a healthy catchment. The Yarra Strategic Plan aligns with the *Healthy Waterways Strategy*.

All the actions included were prioritised through extensive community consultation and collaboration with the Yarra Collaboration Committee. The actions will deliver on the plan's four performance objectives as well as the community vision.



Credit: Peter Robertson,
Growling Grass Frog

Water quality

Water quality is an important indicator of river health and is critical for the survival of aquatic habitat and ecosystems.

With increasing development to provide for Melbourne's growing population, there will be more hard surfaces such as concrete and asphalt. Rainwater that would previously have been absorbed by the landscape instead rushes into our rivers and creeks as stormwater, carrying with it litter and other pollutants. Stormwater can lead to poor water quality and changes to flow regimes, reducing aquatic diversity and threatening ecosystems.

Tributaries that feed into the Yarra River in the inner city reach include Gardiners and Moonee Ponds creeks. Each of these drain large urbanised catchments. There are also major drains in the inner-city reach that carry stormwater, litter and other pollutants into the river; in particular, the Elizabeth Street Main Drain that drains most of the Melbourne CBD and the Prahran Main Drain that drains much of South Yarra and Prahran.

The suburban reach has more drains and waterways that carry stormwater, litter and other pollutants into the Yarra River. These include Jumping, Andersons, Mullum Mullum, Diamond, Ruffey, Banyule, Salt, Koonung, Glass, Darebin and Merri creeks and Plenty River. These waterways run through catchments with a mix of existing urban and new greenfield development that contribute contaminants, litter and sediments to the Yarra. A prominent major drain that is known to contribute large quantities of rubbish is the Banksia Street Main Drain which services most of the shopping centre and hospital in Heidelberg.

Within the upper and lower rural reaches, rural and urban runoff enters the river via tributaries including Woori Yallock, Stringybark, Olinda and Brushy creeks. Runoff from agricultural lands may contain sediment, nutrients and pesticides, which can impact water quality in the river.

Traditional custodians of the Yarra, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, have expressed deep concern about water quality and litter in the river.

'Rubbish, sediment and pollutants have built up and are choking the river, stopping the Birrarung from breathing clearly. The health of the Birrarung underpins the health of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, and the damage that has been done over the past two centuries is felt by all Wurundjeri people. We, along with many other Victorians, are worried that without a process of restoration and healing the pressures on the wellbeing of the river will become insurmountable.'

**– Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn
Birrarung, 2018**

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have called for a whole of system approach to the removal of refuse and pollution. This will require the collaboration of all stakeholders and engagement with partners like DELWP, Melbourne Water, councils, Yarra Valley Water, South East Water, EPA, and non-government environmental organisations.

There are a number of programs that aim to reduce litter in the Yarra including public awareness campaigns, litter traps and clean-up days. Government agencies are working with stakeholders and community organisations to develop a consistent and coordinated approach to managing litter, including for example, funding the Yarra Riverkeeper to investigate polystyrene litter and prevention at the source. Greater education and awareness is required to ensure the community understands the impacts and sources of litter and other pollutants carried by stormwater.

Planning reforms and policy directions to improve stormwater management

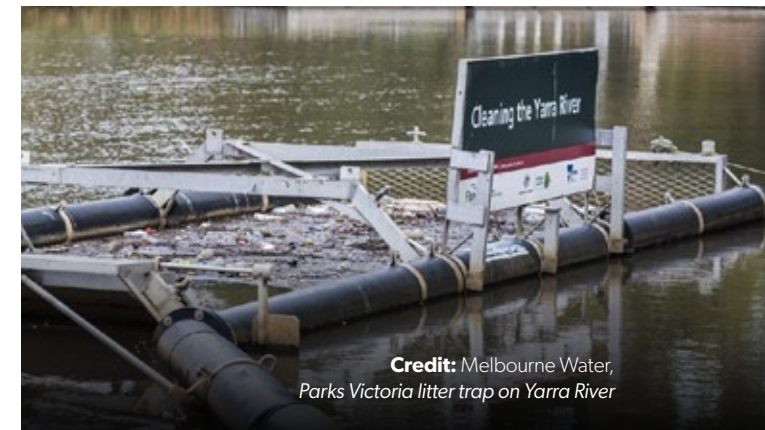
The Improving Stormwater Management Advisory Committee was established in 2018 to provide independent advice to the ministers for water and planning. The committee recommended short-term planning reforms and longer-term policy directions, with a focus on changing the planning system to improve stormwater management and encouraging integrated water management. This included new planning provisions that came into effect in October 2018 expanding the existing stormwater management requirements to commercial, industrial and residential multi-dwelling developments as well as public use developments. These stormwater management requirements previously only applied to new residential developments.

In line with the committee's recommendations, the EPA is also developing new guidance to improve capability and understanding for the design and assessment of urban stormwater treatments that will increase the removal efficiency for nutrients and pollutants.

The Healthy Waterways Strategy 2018 considers individual threats from stormwater, as well as cumulative threats such as the combination of warmer temperatures and changing intensity of stormwater flows. It also promotes reuse of stormwater for environmental, cultural, economic and social purposes.

Actions

1. Develop a place-based pilot project (in an area where stormwater is threatening the Yarra's health and amenity) to explore innovative re-use of stormwater:
 - use stormwater for urban greening, protecting and enhancing the environment
 - identify opportunities where potable water is being used for watering purposes, and can be substituted with suitably treated stormwater.
2. Implement a Yarra-specific stormwater awareness and behaviour change campaign targeted at reducing litter and contamination entering the river.
3. Increase education, awareness and regulatory compliance to reduce pesticides and chemicals entering the river (including the impacts of agricultural runoff on water quality in the upper and lower rural reaches).



Credit: Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria litter trap on Yarra River

Integrated water management (IWM)

As Melbourne's population continues to grow, it is estimated that by 2041 there will be around 140,000 additional dwellings in the Yarra River corridor – 90 per cent of these will be located in the inner city reach. Without better guidance and controls, development will increase stormwater runoff, impacting the health of the Yarra and compromising the river's landscapes and economic activities. Higher density living will increase demand for public open space as well as placing pressure on existing parklands.

Integrated water management (IWM) provides an opportunity for urban water management to address the impacts of climate change and urbanisation while delivering broader benefits to the community and the environment. Throughout the state, agencies are working together in IWM forums to identify projects and programs that manage water sustainably and enhance the resilience and liveability of our communities.



Credit: Melbourne Water,
Water sensitive urban design, inner city reach

Yarra Integrated Water Management (IWM) forum

The Yarra IWM forum, which was established in December 2017 recognises the importance of the Yarra River 50 Year Community Vision. The forum has pledged to work collaboratively to improve water system practices and deliver bold 21st century solutions for stormwater management, water sensitive blue and green infrastructure and sustainable land use planning that will ensure communities across the Yarra catchment remain healthy, prosperous and among the world's most liveable. The forum is developing their *Integrated Water Management Plan for the Yarra Catchment*, which will support investment in a range of projects, such as installing recycled water systems, stormwater harvesting schemes for urban irrigation and constructed wetlands to treat stormwater runoff and improve environmental conditions.

Actions

4. Develop the integrated water management plan (including bicultural approaches) for the Yarra catchment to optimise water cycle planning and reduce stormwater pollution into the river.

Septic tanks

Domestic wastewater is derived from bathrooms, kitchens, laundries and toilets. It includes human waste (containing pathogens), paper, soap, detergent residues and food scraps. Effective treatment and management of this wastewater is necessary to protect public health and the environment. It is managed either through discharge to a reticulated sewerage system or to an onsite wastewater treatment system – most commonly a septic tank.

Currently, across the whole of the Yarra catchment it is estimated that there are more than 30,000 septic tanks in various states of operation.

Septic systems can fail due to their age, neglect and lack of maintenance, resulting in risks to surface and ground water quality. Old systems that discharge untreated and partially treated wastewater to waterways continue to be a source of pollution. Septic tank effluent contains a wide variety of pollutants including pathogens, faecal bacteria, phosphorus, nitrogen, organic matter, suspended solids, pharmaceutical compounds and household detergents. All of these pose risks to the river.

Yarra Valley Water is the primary water and sanitation service provider in the Yarra catchment and has a critical role in improving wastewater management. Their Community Sewerage Program is targeted at properties that are not capable of onsite containment of sewage under the current council-led management framework. This includes properties with septic tanks in areas such as Eltham South, Woori Yallock, Launching Place and Warburton.

The Victorian Auditor-General's Office report Managing the Environmental Impacts of Domestic Wastewater

In 2018, an audit conducted by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) found that, despite significant efforts, responsible agencies had not made enough progress to protect the environment and public health from poorly managed septic tanks. In general, property owners have a low understanding of their role in maintaining septic tanks, how to prevent their failure and best practice septic management. At the time Yarra Valley Water had 10,900 high-risk unsewered properties on its Community Sewerage Program, 7482 of which were in the Yarra Ranges Council.

The audit put forward a number of recommendations including the development of a standard risk assessment framework for septic systems. This included monitoring to track progress and to confirm that servicing options reduce environmental and public health risks.

To meet and exceed the recommendations of the VAGO audit, Yarra Ranges Shire Council has developed a *Draft Wastewater Management Plan 2020–2025* to assist in the critical assessment of sites that generate wastewater without the availability of reticulated sewer for disposal. Nillumbik Shire Council also revised its *Domestic Wastewater Management Plan* in 2019 to address recommendations in the VAGO audit.

In response to the audit, DELWP has established an Onsite Wastewater Steering Committee with Yarra Valley Water and the councils to action the recommendations.

Actions

5. Develop an integrated program to improve management of domestic wastewater in non-sewered areas (places serviced by septic tanks)
 - investigate the extent and location of wastewater pollution in the Yarra River and its tributaries to guide future projects and actions
 - develop and implement programs (education, compliance and infrastructure improvements) to target areas where domestic wastewater has the greatest impact on water quality.

Billabongs and wetlands

A 'billabong' is a waterbody left behind following a change in river course; it is a type of wetland usually still connected to the river and periodically flooded. 'Wetlands' are areas of permanent or temporary inundation supporting plants and animals that require wet conditions to complete their life cycle. Urban wetlands do not always need to be inundated by river flooding but can receive water from tributaries, local rainfall runoff and groundwater.

Billabongs and wetlands each have their own set of values, issues and threats, which need to be considered in establishing watering regimes.

The connection that a billabong has with the river is important because it not only provides the billabong with water, but allows the exchange of living organisms, animal and plant material and nutrients between the river and the billabong. Billabong flooding induces ecological responses including cues for plant recruitment. Yarra billabongs tend to be wet for 3–4 months of the year, followed by a drying period, which is just as important for their ecological health.

Urban development, stormwater, drainage and vegetation clearing, as well as the construction of levees and harvesting of water, means that river-fed billabongs and wetlands are not inundated as frequently and are not able to act as nursery and breeding areas for the many plants and animals previously dependent on them.

The Dreaming of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people links the billabongs, wetlands and swamps in the upstream forests, across the floodplains and out to the bay. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have called for reestablishment of the billabong systems that are important cultural, spiritual and environmental features of the Yarra currently and historically.

There are over 21,000 wetlands and billabongs in the Yarra catchment. Many of these wetlands and billabongs have significant ecological and cultural values with deep histories going back many thousands of years. Today they are also highly valued for their recreational value as places to walk, cycle or connect with nature.

Water for the environment

Melbourne Water prepares and submits a seasonal watering proposal to the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH). The Seasonal Watering Plan is issued by VEWH in July each year and guides environmental watering decisions in the Yarra. Melbourne Water, as a delivery partner, implements the seasonal watering plan.

Environmental water can be released from the Upper Yarra, Maroondah and O'Shannassy reservoirs to support ecological processes and environmental outcomes in downstream river reaches and wetlands. Environmental water delivery focuses on maintaining habitat for aquatic life and supporting the migration and breeding requirements of native fish and vegetation. The extent to which additional water (releases from reservoirs) is required to meet flow requirements varies between dry, average and wet years.

There are numerous billabongs throughout the Yarra that are drier than natural, due to river regulation and modifications to natural flow paths. Melbourne Water is implementing a landscape-scale approach to watering floodplain billabongs that will consider the ecosystem services provided by different billabongs, and indicate a watering program. The approach considers the ecological, cultural and liveability values of the billabongs.

Watering at Yering Backswamp and Annulus Billabong was considered a high priority in 2020–21. In previous seasons water has been made available for Banyule, Bolin Bolin, Burke Road and Willsmere billabongs.

The *Healthy Waterways Strategy* includes an objective to increase the environmental water reserve for the Yarra River by 10 GL by 2028 to meet ecological watering objectives and cover projected shortfalls in available water due to climate change. Plans for achieving the additional reserve will be considered as part of the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy*, which is in preparation.

Actions

6. Investigate options to restore billabongs and wetlands on private and public land by using water for the environment to mimic natural water cycles and undertaking complementary land and water management works.
7. Work with partners, primarily Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, the Victorian Environmental Water Holder and Parks Victoria, to implement a landscape scale approach to improving the condition of wetlands and billabongs for the Lower Yarra billabongs. This must include the prioritisation of wetlands for water regime management and delivery of environmental water and cultural flows.
8. Support the aspirations of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to pursue water justice for their people and Country
 - deliver water justice through water rights, participation in water management, and broader water and policy reform (as per the definition of water justice identified in the *National Cultural Flows Research Project 2020*)
 - deliver options to support water rights for the Birrarung such as the possibility of the reallocation of the former Amcor entitlement.
9. Work with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung to enhance knowledge, monitor and understand ecological change in prioritised Lower Yarra billabongs which have received environmental water.

Includes working with partners, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, North East Link and Transport for Victoria to protect the water levels in the Bolin Bolin billabongs from the impacts of potential groundwater drawdown. The North East Link Project, in accordance with its environmental performance requirements, is required to design the project to mitigate the changes to groundwater levels in the billabongs including undertaking pre-construction, construction and post construction groundwater monitoring.



Credit: Merrilyn Serong, Helmeted Honeyeater, Yellingbo Nature Conservation Area

Habitat connectivity

One-third of Victoria's animal species are found in the Yarra catchment, including a diverse range of fish, frogs, birds, macroinvertebrates and plants.¹⁰ A number of threatened species also call the Yarra home; this includes the helmeted honeyeater considered critically endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. There are only three small populations of the helmeted honeyeaters in the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Area. The Leadbeater's possum is also critically endangered and is found in the upper rural reach.

The loss and fragmentation of habitat threatens the conservation of biological diversity. Habitat links and corridors, both terrestrial and aquatic, can support increased biodiversity. These links provide habitat, can be used as pathways by animals and can allow species to move into isolated habitats to recolonise; for example, areas affected by bushfires. Habitat links also contribute to ecological processes such as seed dispersal and provide important social benefits for people as places for recreation.

While there are areas of high biodiversity, in many locations the Yarra's ecological value has been depleted by land clearing, farming and grazing and later through urban development.

In the suburban reach, the Yarra has been highly modified; however, it flows through a near-continuous network of parklands that provide critical habitat and a connection to nature.

In the inner city reach the land along the river has been highly modified, with much of the native vegetation removed. With the expected population growth and development in this reach over the next 10 years, it is vital that parklands are extended and maintained to protect native species, strengthen urban biodiversity and improve liveability (see Performance Objective 3 for actions to improve parklands).

Rehabilitating native vegetation along the river can enhance habitat connectivity for native flora and fauna and improve human health and wellbeing.

Education and awareness raising campaigns can be used to encourage landholders, river users and visitors to protect, maintain and enhance native vegetation along the river. There is also the option of using land use planning controls and directions and incentive programs to increase the width and quality of vegetation to improve connectivity between habitats on both public and private land.

Plans to restore habitat corridors and improve our natural environment

To address the trend of deterioration in riparian vegetation, the Yarra River has been allocated a 10-year priority vegetation plan in the *Healthy Waterways Strategy 2018* to restore habitat corridors by increasing vegetation extent and quality along waterways. This includes revegetation of a continuous riparian buffer at least 20 metres wide on each side of the river and its tributaries. Habitat suitability models for instream values (aquatic macroinvertebrates, fish, and platypus) were also used in combination with spatial conservation prioritisation software (Zonation) to inform planning of other works, such as stormwater management, for protection and improvement of aquatic biodiversity in the Yarra and its tributaries.

In 2017, the state government released *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*, a plan to stop the decline of native plants and animals by improving the natural environment. DELWP have developed tools and systems, regulations and standards, and collaborative planning processes to support implementation, which are relevant to implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan.

Actions

10. Undertake vegetation works to strengthen terrestrial and aquatic habitat corridors to improve biodiversity. Revegetation should include species identified as culturally important to the Traditional Owners and where feasible works should be delivered by Traditional Owners groups. Priority areas include:
 - Yarra Junction to Healesville billabongs and wetlands
 - Healesville to Yering billabongs and wetlands
 - Yering to Warrandyte landscape protection
 - Kinglake to Yarra biodiversity corridor.(Note: this action is supported through establishing areas for protection, which are documented in the land use framework [see Part 2, page 71].)
11. Increase and enhance the extent and quality of urban greening in the inner city reach on public and private land downstream of Gardiners Creek to combat air and noise pollution, create habitat for local wildlife and reinvigorate local communities appreciation of nature and the environment.
12. Follow the goals and principles as set out in *Protecting Victoria's Environmental Biodiversity 2037* for habitat and species conservation planning. This includes using associated decision support tools, *Nature Print* and *Strategic Management Prospects* as an addendum to the plan's decision-making framework, and incorporating environmental net gain when planning for whole of river biodiversity outcomes.
DELWP and Wurundjeri Water Unit will work together to develop a bicultural approach to assessing net gain on their Country, considering cultural values and practices. They will explore ways to integrate this approach to support the Birrarung as a single living entity. Resourcing to be provided for Wurundjeri Woiwurrung participation.
13. Explore and support the use of incentive mechanisms to build skills, knowledge and capacity in restoring landscape function, protecting biodiversity, increasing nutrient and water cycling and building soil carbon for resilient enterprises that can mitigate climate-related pressures.

14. Promote the use of conservation covenants to protect priority conservation values on private land as well as enhancing habitat connectivity and, where possible, incorporating Traditional Owner aspirations and involvement.
15. Plan and undertake terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna assessments to ascertain where opportunities exist to reintroduce and restore native plants and animals, including species that are important to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung as totems, seasonal indicators and resources required for ceremony and other uses. Selection of plants and planting methods will also consider impacts of climate change and opportunity to increase resilience.
16. Provide resourcing to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to develop and pilot flora and fauna assessments as critical planning tools for future management of the catchment. This will require external agencies providing access to relevant data.

'A time-lapsed, Bunjil-eyed view of the river over tens, hundreds, thousands of years would show a living thing expanding (flood) and contracting (drought), changing beds, looping cutoffs and billabongs, running faster or slower, in different unpredictable patterns.'

– **Kristen Otto** author of *Yarra, a Diverting History of Melbourne's Murky River*¹¹

Native fish

The Yarra River, including its estuary and wetlands, supports relatively healthy populations of native fish with value scores of moderate to very high shown in the *Healthy Waterways Strategy 2018*. There are 16 native fish species, including threatened species Australian mudfish and Australian grayling. Freshwater species such as Macquarie perch, Murray cod and river blackfish, and estuarine species mulloway, bream and estuary perch are highly valued by the fishing community.

To maintain healthy populations, fish rely on variations in natural water flows, including floods or 'freshes', to trigger breeding, spawning and migration. A large number of species, such as Australian grayling and the short-finned eel, need to be able to move between the ocean and freshwater habitats to complete critical stages of their life cycle, such as breeding. The structure of waterways is also vital to fish because they need deep pools for resting, undercut banks and logs under which to hide, and streamside vegetation as an important food source.

As outlined in the *Healthy Waterways Strategy 2018*, improvements to environmental conditions, particularly riparian vegetation, water quality, environmental flows, stormwater management and ensuring the Dights Falls fishway is effective, will ensure a score of very high for native fish in the long term.

Plans to protect native fish and restore recreational fisheries

The *Freshwater Fisheries Management Plan 2018*, provides a state-wide approach to build better recreational fisheries by bringing together fish, water and land management activities.

Ongoing education and awareness campaigns will improve understanding of the river environment, regulations, fish stocks and other fisheries-related matters.

A key measure of the success of the plan will be the extent to which its priorities are supported and implemented by the Victorian Fisheries Authority, recreational fishers, Traditional Owners and other government agencies.

Actions

17. Invest in habitat restoration and environmental watering to:
 - increase native fish in the Yarra River, its tributaries and billabongs
 - support a healthy ecosystem
 - improve opportunities for recreational fishing and cultural practices.
18. Work in partnership with angling groups to develop and implement a community education program on protection of native fish (especially for Macquarie perch and other threatened species). This will include promoting bag limits and areas where the taking of native fish is prohibited and increasing participation in monitoring and assessment programs.
19. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to lead and explore the feasibility of research projects identifying current extents, habitat needs, and best practice recovery programs for culturally valued freshwater aquatic species, which are in decline in the greater Melbourne region. This includes species such as river blackfish, freshwater crayfish and short-finned eel.

Pest plants and animals

Invasive plants and animals cause environmental, economic and social impacts on both private and public land. Pest plants can severely decrease the productive capacity of land, alter water flow, lead to erosion and provide harbour for pest animals. They can also out-compete and displace native plants and lead to loss of biodiversity. Pest animals impact vegetation through grazing, trampling and other disturbance factors. Predators such as foxes, cats and dogs threaten the survival of native animals such as lyrebirds and platypus.

Pest plants, including declared noxious weeds and native plants classified as environmental weeds, are plants growing outside of their normal range that lack natural environmental controls. This allows them to quickly establish and take over areas of native vegetation such as bushland and forests, along waterways or native grasslands.

There are 47 prohibited, 51 controlled and 31 restricted plants (declared noxious weeds) listed under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* for the Port Phillip and Westernport region, which land owners, both public and private, have a legal responsibility to control. There are no formal regulations for control of native plants defined as environmental weeds.

Weeds of a high priority for control and eradication along the Yarra include blackberry, St John's wort, willow, English ivy, spear thistle, pittosporum, African boxthorn, serrated tussock and honeysuckle.

There are a number of local strategies and programs implemented by Melbourne Water, councils and other agencies for weed management. These generally aim to reduce the spread of established weeds on roadsides, council land, other public land and private land; avoid new weed species establishing; and reduce noxious and environmental weed infestations.

Community education is another focus of local councils for managing weeds. This includes providing information to identify common garden and agricultural plants that are environmental weeds as well as methods to eradicate them, and to suggest alternative native species for gardeners to use.

Pest animals that are a high priority in the Yarra catchment include rabbits, foxes, feral goats, wild dogs, cats and deer. Currently, sambar, fallow and red deer are of particular concern in the upper and lower rural reach of the river.

Deer trample vegetation, snap shrubs and young saplings, ring-bark trees by 'antler rubbing', and make large wallows in wet areas. They also have negative impacts on agriculture, including fouling of pasture, crops and water, spread of weed and soil borne diseases, and damage to infrastructure including fences and nets. Deer are also potential vectors of livestock disease such as foot-and-mouth, and parasites that can contaminate drinking water reservoirs, e.g. *Cryptosporidium*.

Carp, an introduced fish, is a major factor in the decline of native fish. They are present in high numbers in the Yarra and are a declared noxious aquatic species.

Although authorities involved in managing the river have pest control programs, there is room for better coordination between them and with the Traditional Owners and private landowners.

This plan aligns with the government's invasive plants and animals policy framework, which adopts a risk-management approach to reduce the impact of invasive species. The aim is to prevent the entry of new high-risk invasive species, eradicate those high-risk species that are at an early stage of establishment, contain where possible species that are beyond eradication and protect key assets from the impact of widespread species.



Credit: Reg Gordon, wild deer.

Investigations and initiatives focusing on the management of deer

The *Victorian Deer Management Strategy* was released in October 2020. It sets out a long-term coordinated plan to control wild deer numbers and reduce the threat they pose to the environment, farming, public safety and Aboriginal cultural heritage.

As part of the strategy, an outer suburban management plan will be developed in partnership with local councils, Parks Victoria and Traditional Owners to identify effective measures to reduce the impacts of wild deer and make the roads safer.

The strategy is being delivered under the *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037* and is also a commitment under the *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan*, complementing the government's expansion of the areas that deer can be recreationally hunted, and complementing the legislative changes allowing hunters to have wild deer butchered for personal use.

The strategy recognises that effective deer management requires a partnership approach between all levels of government, Traditional Owners, conservation groups, catchment managers, the hunters, the commercial deer harvest industry and the community.

Actions

20. Adopt a multi-agency collaboration and investment approach to management of invasive animals and plants in the Yarra corridor:
 - quantify and measure numbers and impact of invasive animals and plants
 - evaluate the effectiveness of existing control programs
 - coordinate the delivery of new programs and projects to control and eradicate where possible invasive animals and plants in the Yarra corridor
 - set targets for control programs over the next 10 years and monitor progress towards their achievement.
21. Build capacity of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Narrap ('Country') team to manage and eradicate deer in the Yarra catchment.



Credit: Dan Harley,
Critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum

Climate change

Victoria's climate has been undergoing rapid changes in recent decades and climate change has become a critical issue for Victoria and the world. The effects of climate change will continue well into the future impacting on temperature, rainfall, frost, sea level rise and extreme weather events including fire and flood.

Regional climate model projections, under a high emissions scenario, indicate that Victoria's average annual temperature may increase up to 2.4 degrees Celsius by mid-century compared to 1986-2005. Under a medium emission scenario, average temperatures may increase by up to 1.8°C.¹²

With conditions progressively becoming hotter and drier, during summer more people are likely to seek refuge from the heat near the river and in its parklands. There will be more stress on waterways with higher risks of algal blooms and reduced dissolved oxygen levels. Warmer and drier conditions will also affect the distribution of plants and animals and their habitats as they adjust to the changes.

Regional climate modelling also shows that, over time, annual rainfall totals are likely to decline, more so under high emissions scenarios, with the greatest decreases in the cooler seasons. Greater Melbourne's rainfall is naturally highly variable, and this natural variability will continue to dominate the rainfall over the next decade. Under a high emissions scenario, by mid-century median annual rainfalls are projected to decrease by 8 per cent, and 6 per cent under medium emissions.

With the ongoing change in Victoria's climate, the risk of bushfires is increasing. Higher temperatures and drier conditions will increase the frequency of days of extreme fire danger. The Yarra runs through landscapes that are at extreme risk for bushfires, especially in the upper reaches of the river. These bushfires not only threaten communities and their livelihoods but also Melbourne's water supply.

Flood events are predicted to become more common due to climate change, and the area of land inundated is expected to increase due to higher intensity rainfall and rising sea levels. The increasing frequency of flood events in the Yarra catchment may pose hazards to people, infrastructure and the delivery of essential services. Flood inundation and extreme storm events can cause substantial damage to property and infrastructure as well as place the health and safety of people at risk.

The Victorian Government is taking ambitious yet achievable action on climate change to safeguard our natural environment and living cultural heritage. Government action is driven by the *Climate Change Act 2017* and its long-term emissions reduction target of net zero by 2050. Victoria's *Climate Change Strategy* sets the pathway for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building resilience of natural and built systems. This includes actions and priorities to reduce Victoria's risk and harness the opportunities posed by climate change.

Increased education, awareness and science-informed planning will help in understanding climate change risks and the adaptive capacity of the river. Planning should include practical actions to manage risks, involve communities and strengthen the resilience of the river and its surrounds.

Strategies and initiatives to manage the effects of climate change

The Victorian Government provided funding for the local development of six regional climate change adaptation strategies across Victoria including development of a *Regional Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for Greater Melbourne*. These strategies provide an opportunity to identify and prioritise actions over the next five years. The government is also developing seven state-wide sector adaptation action plans in parallel to the regional strategies. These plans will help deliver the five-year adaptation priorities outlined in Victoria's *Climate Change Strategy*.

Local councils and statutory authorities have also prepared climate strategies and are implementing initiatives to better manage the effects of climate change and adaptation to changing climatic conditions. For Melbourne Water, priorities include reducing greenhouse gas emissions and investing in research to understand the impacts on stream flows and the species and processes that depend on them. This research is informing environmental watering programs that are helping, for example, to protect drought refuges for native fish and other aquatic species.

Actions

22. Deliver an interactive education program along the river corridor to enhance awareness and understanding around climate change and the adaptive capacity of the river.
23. Map key risks to the Yarra for climate change and develop a climate change adaptation and resilience action plan. The plan will inform responses to extreme weather events including, heat waves, drought, flood and fire, and promote land management approaches such as cultural burning to mitigate risks and assist recovery.



Credit: State Library of Victoria,
Aboriginal Australians camped near the Yarra River



Performance Objective 2:
A culturally diverse corridor

Acknowledging, protecting and commemorating the rich heritage of the Birrarung and its stories.

THIS PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IF:

- Sites and areas of cultural and historical significance, as well as historical river and land based practices, are increasingly protected, recognised and celebrated.

The Yarra River has been central to the lives of Traditional Owners for many thousands of years and, more recently, those who settled in Melbourne after colonisation in 1835. Because of this intertwined history, the river holds heritage values that are both tangible (embodied in physical places) and intangible (such as cultural practices, knowledge and oral traditions). To preserve the cultural and historical significance of the river, agencies and private landowners must protect, conserve and manage the river's cultural heritage values.

The Yarra's history is deeply connected to the history of its Traditional Owners. Evidence of human settlement and land management along the Yarra can be found in stone artefact scatters, scarred trees, hearths, middens and fish traps. Numerous places along the river hold great cultural and spiritual significance for the Traditional Owners.

The Yarra also has had a rich and varied history since colonisation, with remnants of the early colony including the port and other relics of maritime trade and industry found along the river. It is vital we identify and record the cultural heritage values to ensure they are protected for future generations.

Aboriginal cultural heritage

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung lived in the Yarra Valley for tens of thousands of years before British colonisation. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people call the Yarra River 'Birrarung', meaning place of mists and shadows, and the river marks the centre of Wurundjeri Country.

During this time, the geomorphology of the Yarra River and Port Phillip Bay changed dramatically. An early colonist, William Hull, recorded the following from 'the Yarra and Coast tribes': 'the river (Yarra) once went out at the Heads, but that the sea broke in, and that Hobson's Bay, which was once a hunting ground, became what it is'.¹³

At the point of British assertion of sovereignty, Bunurong-speaking groups articulated identity in terms of coastal water systems such as bays, estuaries and coastal streams. This can be distinguished from Woiwurrung-speaking groups, who articulated identity in relation to inland water systems such as the Yarra River system.

There are many known Aboriginal cultural heritage sites along the river. One such site for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung is Bolin Bolin billabongs in Bulleen. During eel breeding season the billabongs acted as a gathering site for members of the Kulin Nation. The billabongs are still highly valued for their ecological, cultural and recreational attributes.

The original loop in the river (west of today's Docklands), which was removed in 1886, is also a known Aboriginal cultural heritage site due to its extensive low-lying wetland that provided a source of food, fibre and medicine. The confluence of the Maribyrnong and Yarra rivers is also recognised as a meeting place for Kulin groups.

The river's history and heritage are documented in numerous sources. However, no single heritage assessment exists for the Yarra River, Birrarung, and information contained in council studies is inconsistent. Pressure for new urban development may threaten the protection of these important places.

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation has commenced stage one of a mapping project to identify culturally significant landscapes along the river. Some information from this work will be shared publicly, while some sites will remain part of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people's cultural knowledge. Further mapping is dependent on the availability of funding.

To deliver a culturally diverse corridor and share the stories of the river, Aboriginal heritage assessments and interpretive and educational programs are needed that involve all Traditional Owners connected to the river.

All Aboriginal cultural heritage is protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. The Act provides mechanisms for protecting and managing Aboriginal cultural heritage during land use and development activities. This includes cultural heritage management plans, which are required for high impact activities proposed in areas of cultural heritage sensitivity.

Actions

24. Develop or, where existing, enhance interpretive and educational programs for sites that have Aboriginal cultural heritage values and historic heritage values. Potential sites are:
 - Collingwood Children's Farm
 - Dights Falls and Merri Creek confluence
 - Bolin Bolin Billabong
 - Brushy Creek confluence.
25. Deliver interactive educational programs (e.g. signage, and smart device applications) that include storytelling about the rich culture and heritage of the Yarra. Indigenous cultural intellectual property agreements must be put in place for use of Traditional Owner intellectual property and programs.
26. Support a program of cultural value studies by the Traditional Owners for the Yarra, Birrarung, and its lands.
27. Explore with the Traditional Owners the possibility of registering the Yarra as a cultural landscape.

Historic heritage

Prior to colonisation, the Yarra River was radically different from what it is today. The river was originally tidal up to a basalt ledge known as 'the falls' (where Queens Bridge now stands). These falls acted as a barrier to the saline tidal flows, meaning a permanent source of fresh water could be found upstream of the rocks.

In the early 1830s, colonists arrived and began to use the river for agriculture as well as shipping and trade. Enterprize Park, on the north bank of the river, is where the first Europeans landed to start the development of Melbourne. The first bridge across the river was Princes Bridge, built in 1844 and later replaced with the current bridge in 1888. The 1850s saw the beginning of the Victorian gold rush with significant changes to Melbourne. At Warrandyte, where gold was first discovered in 1851, the river was extensively mined, creating the Pound Bend Tunnel and the Big and Little Peninsula Tunnels above Warburton.

Driven by industrialisation and the importance of shipping, major infrastructure works took place on the lower part of the river in the late 1800s. The Coode Canal was constructed in 1886 to improve access for large ships to Melbourne's main docks. This included the creation of Victoria Harbour, which was dug out from swampy land in what we now call Docklands.

There are many visible reminders of the Yarra's rich maritime history including the goods sheds, cranes, dry docks, warehouses wharves and vaults dotted along the lower part of the river. The Polly Woodside tall ship and museum in South Wharf provides insights into the importance of shipping to the growth of Melbourne. This includes the Duke and Orr's Dry Dock, built in 1875 and largely reconstructed in 1901. This large timber-lined dock currently houses the Polly Woodside and is one of the few surviving relics of a once-extensive ship building and repair industry that stretched along the south bank of the river.



Credit: Heritage Council Victoria,
Polly Woodside tall ship and museum, South Wharf

Other significant sites linked to the Yarra's maritime history include the turning basin and the heritage-listed Mission of Seafarers building. The turning basin just downstream of the rocky outcrop forming the Yarra Falls and roughly in line with William Street was the furthest point that ships could navigate up the Yarra River. In 1857, the Victorian Seaman's Mission was founded to support seafarers working far from their homes. This building continues to serve seafarers coming to Melbourne today.

Trade by sea was, and is still, crucial to Melbourne's economic prosperity. Today, the mouth of the river is used for container shipping by the Port of Melbourne. The inner city reach, which is inaccessible to larger watercraft, has seen increased use for both transport and recreational boating (including kayaking, canoeing and rowing).

The Yarra's maritime history has been acknowledged and captured in policies and actions in the City of Melbourne's *Yarra River Birrarung Strategy*, which aims to deliver a culturally diverse corridor and share the stories of the river. Similarly the Yarra Strategic Plan supports working together to bring this history to life through heritage assessments and interpretive signage and storytelling in the inner city reach.

Historical records associated with the Yarra provide important expressions of Victoria's identity and experience. They help tell a story, a celebration of past and ongoing human endeavour and activity, provide a sense of community identity, and reflect a diversity of values and experiences. Loss of these places, and the loss of knowledge about them, diminishes communities.

Actions

- 28.** Develop a holistic heritage assessment to understand historic heritage values using the Yarra River (Birrarung) Cultural Heritage Scoping Study thematic framework.



Credit: Melbourne Water,
Smoking ceremony at launch of the 50 Year Community Vision



Credit: Melbourne Water,
Kayaking in the Yarra River



Performance Objective 3: **Quality parklands for a growing population**

Improving the river's parklands to support community wellbeing and strengthen the relationship between the Yarra River, its community and visitors.



THIS PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IF:

- Opportunities for access to the river, community connection, recreation and cultural awareness are increased and enhanced whilst improving and protecting biodiversity.
- Areas of parklands are increased to improve habitat connectivity and reduce fragmentation.
- Traditional Owners are increasingly involved in decision-making and management of parklands on their Country.

Birrarung is central to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people's identity; it forms part of their Dreaming. A life source, the relationships between the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Birrarung are layered – spiritual, ancestral, social, cultural and economic. The river has shaped Country and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung world view. The Yarra has also shaped Melbourne, while the city and its surroundings have transformed the river.

The corridor of parks, reserves and open spaces along the Birrarung are a world-class natural and cultural landscape treasured by Victorians. The river weaves through the heart of the parklands, connecting communities, histories, activities, culture, art and landscape into one living and integrated natural entity.

These parklands contain a complex mix of ecosystems, including wetlands, billabongs, floodplains, creeks, tributaries, tree gorges, woodlands, rainforests, coastal marshes and an estuary.

As well as wilderness areas, the parklands include landscaped areas, playgrounds, sporting facilities, gardens, rail trails, national and state parks, and many places of environmental and cultural significance.

The parklands help secure Melbourne's world-class liveability, providing a strong connection between the health of the natural environment and human wellbeing. People obtain many benefits from being in the outdoors, including physical, psychological, cultural and social health and wellbeing. The parklands provide places for exercise, relaxation, play, learning and discovery. They provide respite from the pressures of urban living, and are often the first and most frequent contact that children have with nature.

Vision for the Yarra's 'Birrarung parklands'

Representatives of the Yarra Collaboration Committee developed the following vision for the Yarra's 'Birrarung parklands' drawing on community consultation and stakeholder input.

In 2070...The globally renowned Birrarung parklands are a sacred, living and internationally important ecological asset for Melbourne.

They are celebrated for weaving stories of Melbourne's history and people along a historic waterway through cultural heritage landscapes. Visitors to the river connect to its spirit and to each other.

The parklands are visited for refuge, recreation, learning, volunteering and livelihood. Contemporary and universally designed visitor infrastructure enable outstanding experiences that connect people to, and along, the Yarra.

These experiences make a significant contribution to the health and wellbeing of everyone in the community – regardless of age, gender, cultural background or socio-economic status.

The parklands are a place where people work together to protect natural and cultural values. Traditional Owner knowledge and practice is central to the management of cultural heritage, ecological health and biodiversity.

The rich heritage of the parklands is acknowledged, protected and commemorated. Visitor access is carefully managed to ensure protection of key sites, and education and interpretation deepens the connection of the community to a sacred living Birrarung.

Declaration of the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands

Under section 59(1) of the Act the declaration of the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands enables parklands in the vicinity of the Yarra River to be given a common identity and to be treated as one living and integrated natural asset of state significance. Declarations are intended to ensure the holistic management and protection of the river and its associated public lands, focusing on Crown and freehold government land parcels that are ecologically and strategically significant to the waterway. These declared parklands are protected from planning scheme amendments that change the zoning of that land so that the land may be used in a way that is inconsistent with the Yarra Strategic Plan, by requiring such amendments to be ratified by Parliament.

In February 2018, declarations were made for parklands between Punt Road, South Yarra, and the urban growth boundary in Warrandyte (see land use maps in Part 2). Criteria for declaration of these land parcels are that they are publicly accessible, of environmental significance and have frontage or direct relationship to the river. Additional land may be added or removed from the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands subject to provisions in the Act.

Living parklands

Parklands are critical for maintaining biodiversity in urban areas. The indigenous vegetation in these parklands provides critical habitat for native animals, supports fragile plant species, and helps protect water quality and flow in waterways.

The parklands are home to the iconic platypus and other mammals including koalas, echidnas, possums, sugar gliders, bats, bandicoots, kangaroos and wallabies. There are many species of frogs, lizards and snakes. Over 190 species of birds inhabit the parklands, with insectivores, honeyeaters, birds of prey, seedeaters, songbirds and waterbirds using the parklands for feeding, nesting and breeding.

The parklands provide critical links for biodiversity, with corridors that run along the many tributaries that flow into the Yarra. These biodiversity corridors allow species to travel between areas to find resources such as food and water and for breeding. Fragmentation of these corridors is a key risk for the survival of many species of plants and animals.

Recreation and wellbeing

The Yarra's extensive open spaces and parklands make a significant contribution to the physical, emotional and social health and wellbeing of Victorians. The proximity of the river's parklands to the city and suburbs means that these urban and peri-urban parks represent, for many people, their first and most regular contact with nature and the outdoors.

The parklands provide equitable access to natural open space and connection to the environment. Studies have confirmed that Traditional Owners' perception of their own or their community's health is closely intertwined with the health of their Country. There is central importance of land to their identity, spirituality, community and culture; in short, 'healthy Country promotes healthy people'.¹⁴

The parklands are a destination for international and local tourists and visitors, offering a diverse array of passive and active recreational activities, including sightseeing, walking, running, cycling, events, picnicking, BBQs, climbing, horse riding, bird watching, swimming, rowing, kayaking, canoeing, boating, fishing, golf, photography, nature appreciation, art and culture appreciation, camping and socialising. The parklands also support new and emerging recreational activities including electric bikes and skateboards, and flying of drones.

The Main Yarra Trail is part of an extensive network of regional shared trails that accommodate multiple user groups (particularly pedestrians and cyclists), are mostly off-road, have a relatively long and continuous length and have a regional scale, purpose and impact. The Main Yarra Trail begins in Abbotsford and follows the Yarra through Fairfield, Rosanna, Templestowe and Eltham with a proposed future extension to Warrandyte.

The *Eastern Regional Trails Strategy* (2018) recommends that councils and other land management authorities work together towards an interconnected and well-used trail network. The strategy outlines opportunities to improve condition, usability, safety and connectivity. This includes upgrades and extensions to the Main Yarra Trail, the new rail trail from Lilydale through to Yarra Glen and Healesville, and development of a Yarra River paddle trail between Yarra Glen and Abbotsford.

Major parkland attractions near the city include Southbank Promenade, Royal Botanic Gardens, National Gallery of Victoria, Federation Square, Birrarung Marr, Yarra River cruising, Abbotsford Convent, Collingwood Children's Farm, and the Studley Park and Fairfield boathouses.

Yarra Park, which includes the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), Melbourne and Olympic Parks and other stadiums, epitomises the sporting focus of many of the Yarra's parklands. Further upstream, the parklands provide a mosaic of sports ovals and playing fields for both

community and school-based sports. The wider sections of the river downstream of Dights Falls are also used for rowing, with school and club rowing sheds scattered along the banks from Hawthorn through to Southbank.

Yarra Park is culturally important for Traditional Owners. It is a gathering place and retains tangible culture in the form of a remnant scar tree. There are numerous other trees in the parklands providing cultural importance. Examples include the Corroboree Tree in Burnley Park, Richmond, and Yingabeal in the grounds of Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen.

There are many places in the parklands that offer space for family enjoyment and individual reflection, such as the sculpture park at Heide Museum of Modern Art and the AIDS Memorial Garden behind the former Fairfield Hospital in Yarra Bend Park.

There are a significant number of commercial businesses providing recreational, entertainment and wellbeing services for visitors across the parklands. This includes over 100 tourist operators licensed by Parks Victoria providing river cruises, sight-seeing, horse trail riding, mountain biking, rock climbing and outdoor education activities. The Yarra also represents an idyllic location for nature appreciation activities including photography, painting and bird watching.

A large number of people participate in environmental stewardship activities and citizen science projects that contribute to their wellbeing and community connection. Friends groups and volunteers are strong park advocates and make significant contributions to the parklands. They undertake important conservation work including revegetation, weeding, trail maintenance and environmental monitoring.

Caring for Country and co-governance of parklands with Traditional Owners

Traditional Owners have cared for Country throughout time. Through embedding Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation in the shared governance of the river and its parklands, their continued role as custodians of their Country is recognised.

The *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murron) Act 2017* calls for collaborative management of the Yarra River corridor. The Act implicitly speaks to the delivery of the social, cultural, economic, environmental, and heritage outcomes that the Act intended for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, as well as the educational outcomes, to which the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people aspire and which are outlined in *Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung* (Ancient Spirit and Lore of the Yarra).

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people consider the entirety of Country a cultural landscape, and have articulated a number of locations along the Birrarung as significant (as shown on maps in Part 2). This is not a full list of significant places – only what was agreed to be shared for the plan.

Traditional Owners have important cultural, economic and spiritual connections with the Birrarung and its parklands. Hence, the importance of their involvement in their management, ensuring that opportunities for use of these parklands for cultural, spiritual, social and economic practices and connection to Country can continue.

The parklands face many challenges. Victoria's population is growing and, with it, rapid urban development and suburbs are spreading into rural areas. Additionally, the climate is changing, becoming warmer and drier with more extreme weather events. Communities, the Traditional Owners and government authorities realise that to meet these challenges we need to work differently – collaboratively and together.

Actions

29. Plan, design, and manage the river parklands as one living and integrated natural entity, ensuring that all parklands are managed to a consistently high standard and celebrate the relationship between the river and its parklands.
30. Develop, with the Traditional Owners, a consistent conservation, cultural and visitation brand identity for the Yarra and its parklands to:
 - embed in the community, recognition of the parklands and river as one living and integrated natural entity
 - celebrate the nurturing relationship between the Yarra's parklands and the community
 - encourage proactive behaviour to protect and nourish the Yarra and its parklands
 - support national and international recognition of, and investment in, the Yarra's parklands.
31. Establish formalised partnership agreements (including resourcing) with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation to manage parklands on their Country, respectively.

Balancing access and conservation

The Yarra's parklands provide a broad range of community and individual opportunities to interact with nature. However, many forms of recreation in the natural environment inherently result in localised impacts to wildlife due to human disturbance, habitat fragmentation and the introduction of non-native species. These impacts can be exacerbated with increased numbers of visitors, especially where people congregate or enter the river.

Many people have expressed a need to balance increased access with the need for conservation of areas with high biodiversity value. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people believe strongly that parklands management should consider conservation over human desires and needs.

Careful design and management of activities and facilities, including location of trails and river access points, can minimise impacts while maximising the benefits of outdoor recreation. Trails in particular can help protect resources by redirecting use away from sensitive areas, fostering appreciation of the outdoors and ensuring that users minimise impacts by enjoying the trail experience in appropriate sites and locations.

Actions

32. Investigate locations and options for improved access to the Yarra and its parklands that enable outstanding nature and culture based experiences while conserving the high biodiversity, cultural and landscape values that the community wish to protect. This includes identifying and mapping locations and options for improved:
 - on-water experience for kayak/canoe and boating access points at key locations (giving consideration to health and safety and being fit-for-purpose)
 - signage and information for on-water journeys
 - bicycle and pedestrian trail experiences
 - experience and connection to nature for recreational and leisure pursuits.

Assist Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to undertake cultural heritage assessments on any Crown land river frontages with grazing licences that are identified for camping. The *Land (Regulated Watercourse Land) Regulations 2021* only allow camping in designated sites on licensed Crown land river frontages following assessments by DELWP and recognised Traditional Owners.

Extending the parkland network

The parklands network of interconnecting linear parks, wetlands and waterways support outstanding visitor experiences and high biodiversity. These parklands along the river are one of Melbourne's greatest open space assets, enhancing the city's economic prosperity, vitality and liveability.

The acquisition of land for parklands can support recreational, social and cultural uses, and increase biodiversity by reducing fragmentation and improving habitat connectivity.

Currently, a number of sites within the river corridor are being prioritised for acquisition by the state government so the parklands network can be expanded and enhanced.

Actions

33. Over the next 10 years, the state government to investigate opportunities to improve and extend the area of parklands and deliver on priorities for acquisition.

Infrastructure and services

Infrastructure and services have been developed to cater for passive and active recreation, which occurs on both land adjacent to the river and on the river itself. The environmental context within which these activities occur varies considerably from highly sensitive sites to significantly modified sites in urban areas.

Nearly all recreational activities within the Yarra's parklands require built infrastructure and services that enable access to sites and facilitate the needs of users. This includes infrastructure and services such as entrance roads, car parks, pavilions, amenities, lighting, boat ramps and jetties, sports grounds and courts, and constructed paths and trails.

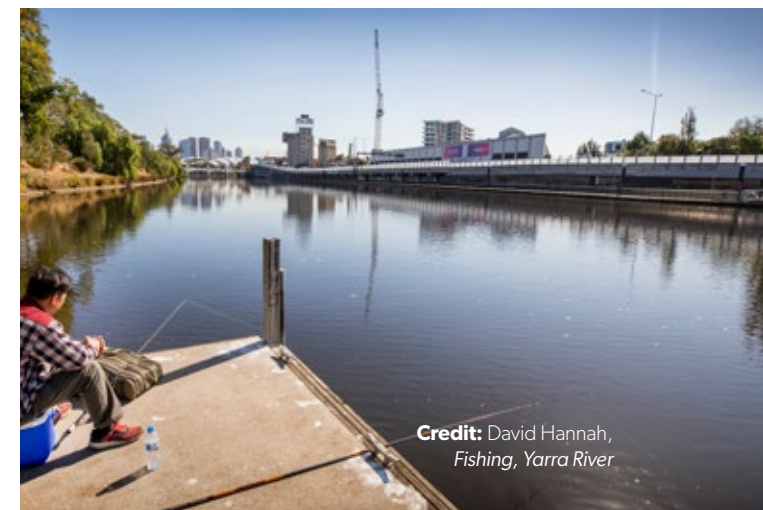
The community's expectation is that the infrastructure and services for the Yarra's parklands are assessed regularly, well maintained and updated on a consistent basis, and they should be updated and replaced in environmentally sensitive ways.

There is also an expectation that infrastructure and services are contemporary, inclusive and provide multiple benefits. There is a need to cater for a diversity of experiences that connect people with the parklands and surrounding areas, and provide for strong nature and culture-based tourism. Community infrastructure, such as education hubs, arts and entertainment spaces, are particularly important to create a broader identity for the parklands.

Actions

34. Conduct a strategic assessment of infrastructure and services in the Yarra's parklands to ensure they are contemporary, inclusive and provide multiple benefits, while respecting and protecting the conservation and cultural values of the parklands and the river.
35. Consider green infrastructure investment and solutions at the local and landscape scale within parklands. Examples include constructed wetlands for stormwater treatment and creating habitat, placement of trees to improve visual aesthetics and amenity, permeable surfaces to increase groundwater recharge, and rain gardens to manage run-off from hard surfaces.

36. Develop a 10-year berthing strategy for the lower Yarra River.
37. Ensure access and egress for vessels to priority berthing sites along the inner city reach of the Yarra River through investment in a comprehensive dredging operation and ongoing maintenance dredging of the river to ensure boats and vessels can move safely along the river to maintain its status as a tourism precinct.
38. Establish a Lower Yarra River management committee to guide commercial berthing, events and activation, and river infrastructure development and improvement. The committee's main objectives:
 - drive the development of a 10-year berthing strategy for the lower Yarra River (from Dights Falls to the Port of Melbourne) including options for commercial berthing, events and activation, and infrastructure investment
 - ensure activities and safe waterway usage is reflected in Yarra River waterway rules
 - drive the alignment of Parks Victoria and Melbourne City Council annual works programs
 - oversee the implementation of the outcomes of the Yarra Strategic Plan for the lower Yarra River.



Credit: David Hannah,
Fishing, Yarra River

Inner city reach

The inner city reach, extending from Dights Falls to the city, includes industrial areas on the river flats, well-established residential neighbourhoods, the central business district, sporting grounds, wide pedestrian promenades, and extensive areas of formal parks offering opportunities to walk, ride, picnic and relax. While each reach is highlighted here, Traditional Owners adopt a whole of river view, with all sites forming part of the cultural landscape.

Nature appreciation, walking, cycling, picnics and BBQs, rowing and dog walking are popular in this reach. Other activities include events such as White Night and Moomba, markets and celebrations in Birrarung Marr and Southbank Promenade, and tourist destinations including Abbotsford Convent, Collingwood Children's Farm and the Royal Botanic Gardens.

- 1 Melbourne is a significant traditional meeting place of the Kulin Nation with the annual Tanderrum ceremony held adjacent to the river.
- 2 Docklands, Federation Square, Birrarung Marr and other riverside locations host a range of events, including the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival and Moomba.
- 3 Threats to the Yarra parklands near the city include inappropriate development, building and construction along the river bank, and ineffective management of stormwater and litter pollution.
- 4 Melbourne and Olympic Parks and adjacent Yarra Park is integral to Melbourne's major events, tourism, sport and entertainment calendar, attracting nearly six million visitors



annually. Events include the Australian Open tennis championships, national and international football (soccer), rugby league and rugby union matches, cricket's Boxing Day Test and Australian Football League grand final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

- 5 Yarra Bend Park is an important Kulin meeting place, featuring the site of the first Aboriginal Police Corps. It contains significant bushland, a grey-headed flying fox colony and viewing platform.
- 6 Dights Falls is a meeting place for Kulin people and the location of the first post-contact Aboriginal School in the Melbourne region.
- 7 The Collingwood Children's Farm was established in 1979 so that children living in an urban environment, often without backyards, could learn to care for animals and nature. Nearby, Abbotsford Convent houses artists' studios, performing spaces, festivals, cafes and restaurants, and gardens.
- 8 The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people operate from two sites. The community has rented office space at the Abbotsford Convent since 2007.
- 9 The Burnley circus site, originally for travelling circuses and now a large space for cultural events, features large old river red gums and sugar gums. Nearby, McConchie Reserve features fishing and bird watching at Burnley Harbour, and beneath the freeway a rock climbing wall and wetlands.



- 10 There are some 85,000 members of rowing clubs, and the annual Head of the Yarra rowing event attracts over 10,000 people.
- 11 There are excellent recreational fishing areas close to the city. Surveys at 43 sites between Abbotsford and Millgrove recorded over 10,000 fish, comprising 22 species and two types of crayfish, with native Australian smelt, common galaxias and short-finned eel, roach, Macquarie perch, common carp, redfin and brown trout the most common.
- 12 Alexandra Gardens and Domain parklands, totalling 123 hectares abutting the river, cool the city, support biodiversity, profile cultural heritage, and are important for economic development. The area includes rowing boatsheds, a skate park, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, the Shrine of Remembrance and La Trobe's Cottage.
- 13 The Tan, a 3.8 km loop around the Royal Botanic Gardens is Melbourne's most popular running route. The gardens include the new Birrarung Gate – along the northern border where the Yarra once flowed through the gardens – celebrating Aboriginal values of place and the Indigenous landscape, plants, animals and people.
- 14 Herring Island, with its arts centre, Environmental Sculpture Park, and Summer Arts Festival, provides a sense of remoteness, with access only via water.

Suburban reach

The suburban reach, from Warrandyte to Dights Falls, is lined with a near-continuous network of parklands and conservation areas, transitioning from rural to suburban settings.

The main recreational activities in this reach are bike riding, canoeing and rowing, walking, organised sport, and visiting cafes and restaurants. Over a thousand people cycle to work every day in this reach, along a connection of trails. Other activities include cultural and sports events, festivals and markets.

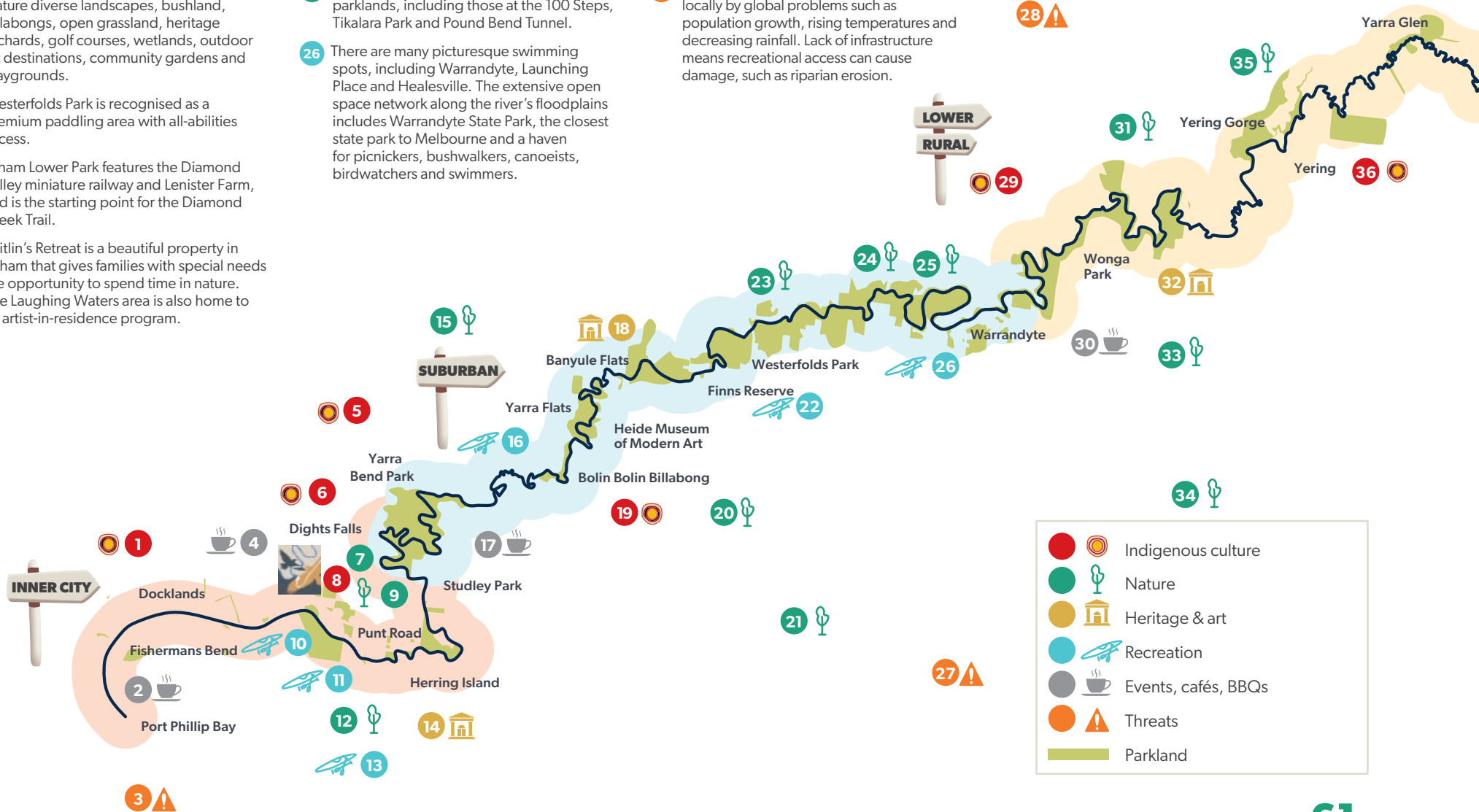
- 15 Commencing in 2011, Westgarth Kindergarten's Bush Kinder Program at the Darebin Parklands was a pioneer of the increasingly popular Bush Kinder movement in Victoria.
- 16 Many golf courses, such as Ivanhoe Public Golf Course, support recreational and environmental values of the river.
- 17 The popular Studley Park Boathouse, established in 1863 as the first boathouse on the Yarra, features a restaurant, café and boat hire. To the north is the Fairfield Park Boathouse, established in 1908.
- 18 Explore heritage and art at the Monsalvat heritage site and former artists' colony, the Heidelberg School Artists' Trail and the Heidi Museum of Modern Art.
- 19 The Bolin Bolin Billabong was a highly significant living area and gathering place for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung during iuk (eel) harvest time. Bolin Bolin remains one of many highly significant sites for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.
- 20 Wombat Bend, at Finns Reserve, is a multi-award-winning play space connecting families with nature. Melbourne's original all-abilities playground, Hay's Paddock in East Kew, opened in 1998 and quickly became one of Melbourne's most innovative and beloved playgrounds.

Experiencing the value of the Yarra Parklands

- 21 The numerous urban parks along the Yarra feature diverse landscapes, bushland, billabongs, open grassland, heritage orchards, golf courses, wetlands, outdoor art destinations, community gardens and playgrounds.
- 22 Westerfolds Park is recognised as a premium paddling area with all-abilities access.
- 23 Eltham Lower Park features the Diamond Valley miniature railway and Lenister Farm, and is the starting point for the Diamond Creek Trail.
- 24 Caitlin's Retreat is a beautiful property in Eltham that gives families with special needs the opportunity to spend time in nature. The Laughing Waters area is also home to an artist-in-residence program.
- 25 Viewing platforms overlook the Yarra and parklands, including those at the 100 Steps, Tikalara Park and Pound Bend Tunnel.
- 26 There are many picturesque swimming spots, including Warrandyte, Launching Place and Healesville. The extensive open space network along the river's floodplains includes Warrandyte State Park, the closest state park to Melbourne and a haven for picnickers, bushwalkers, canoeists, birdwatchers and swimmers.







27 Endangered species may be threatened locally by global problems such as population growth, rising temperatures and decreasing rainfall. Lack of infrastructure means recreational access can cause damage, such as riparian erosion.

28 ⚠️



	Indigenous culture
	Nature
	Heritage & art
	Recreation
	Events, cafés, BBQs
	Threats
	Parkland



-  Indigenous culture
-  Nature
-  Heritage & art
-  Recreation
-  Events, cafés, BBQs
-  Threats
- Parkland

Lower rural reach

The lower rural reach, from Healesville to Warrandyte, features open, expansive agricultural land with views across the Yarra Valley framed by surrounding mountain ranges.

The main recreational activities in this reach are visiting cafes and restaurants, picnics and walking. Other activities include visiting wineries and galleries, viewing nature, and enjoying tourism activities such as hot air ballooning.

Credit: Parks Victoria



- 28 Threats to Yarra parklands include pest plants and animals, inappropriate recreational usage, stock damage, litter, erosion, pollution, sewage, stormwater and agricultural runoff.
- 29 There are many sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity and significance in the lower rural reach. Garambi Baan, or Laughing Waters, was where Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung ancestors practiced sophisticated and sustainable aquaculture, and the site contains historic eel traps.
- 30 Markets abound along the Yarra, including the Warrandyte Riverside Market, Wonga Park Farmers Market and Healesville Organic Farmers Market.
- 31 There are isolated open spaces and other areas ideal for walking along the Yarra, such as Spadoni's Nature Reserve and Sugarloaf Reservoir Park.
- 32 Clifford Park in Wonga Park is a significant scouting site, having held two Jamborees (1948-49 and 1955-56) and World Rover Moot in 1961, it continues to be used as a campsite by the Scout Association.
- 33 The Yarra and its parklands are inhabited by a large variety of mammals, with 38 known species within 50 metres of the river.

- 34 There are more than 25 unique vegetation communities along the Yarra, its tributaries, and within billabongs, wetlands and swamps.
- 35 There are spectacular treed gorges in Yering Gorge Bushland Reserve, and nature reserves along both sides of the Yarra from Yering Gorge to Tarrawarra.
- 36 On 13 January 1840, on the former Yering Station property, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung warriors fought troopers of the Border Police and by tricking them into armed action secured the release of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung leader Jaga Jaga. This is known as the Battle of Yering.
- 37 Tarrawarra Museum of Art was established in the early 2000s as Australia's first significant, privately funded, public museum.
- 38 Vineyards comprise over 500 hectares of land in the Upper rural reach. Over 1 million people visited the Yarra Valley in 2018.
- 39 Galeena Beek cultural centre (Healesville) is one of two sites that the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people operate from. Part of the original Coranderrk Mission Station footprint, Galeena Beek was returned to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people in 2018.
- 40 People can walk, canoe and fish at Everard Park Streamside Reserve.

Upper rural reach

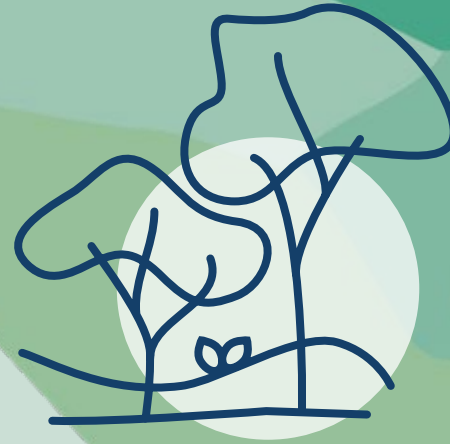
Much of the upper rural reach, extending from the Upper Yarra Reservoir to Healesville, is surrounded by the Yarra Ranges National Park. The river passes through a steep gorge enclosed by forests before flowing through flatter terrain surrounded by fertile agricultural land.

The main recreational activities in this reach are nature appreciation, picnics and bird watching. Other activities include cultural events, festivals, markets and sports events.

Credit: Parks Victoria



- 41 Coranderrk Aboriginal Cemetery and Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve are highly significant sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage. Coranderrk Station was established in 1863 for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Taungurong people and members from other Kulin tribes who had been forcefully displaced from their traditional lands.
- 42 Warramate Hills Nature Conservation Reserve provides bushland areas with a sense of remoteness.
- 43 Bushland parks, such as the Yarra Bridge Streamside Reserve, provide access to the river in rural areas.
- 44 There are many high-value environmental areas, such as Yellingbo Nature Conservation Area critical for protection of helmeted honeyeaters.
- 45 Farming and tourism, which rely on the river and its surrounding landscape, support employment and are major contributors to the local and regional economy.
- 46 Lilydale – Warburton Rail Trail. The Giro Della Donna cycling race is held at Mt Donna Buang.
- 47 The Yarra River between Warburton and Warrandyte is designated as a Heritage River.
- 48 Events and festivals along the Yarra include the Warburton Trail Fest.
- 49 Friends Groups and volunteers make a significant contribution to the condition of the parklands and to visitor experiences. Groups are active in many parts of the parklands in all reaches of the Yarra Valley Parklands, the Bend of Islands, Warrandyte State Park, Yarra Bend Park and Herring Island.
- 50 Yarra Ranges National Park around Warburton has kayaking access points, mountain bike trails and hiking tracks.
- 51 There are many spectacular views along the Yarra, such as the Upper Yarra Reservoir Park's lookouts, Mountain Ash forests and majestic rainforest scenery.
- 52 The Yarra River corridor is exposed to many threats and pressures, including habitat loss and fragmentation, and invasive pests that threaten endangered species. Bushfires pose a risk for flora, fauna and water quality. As Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people continue to work with other groups to protect and manage Country, including weed management, and working on areas for cultural burning.
- 53 Over 190 species of birds inhabit the Yarra river, using the river and its wetlands for feeding, nesting and breeding.



Performance Objective 4:
**Protecting the natural beauty of
the Yarra River corridor**

Respecting the significance of the Yarra River's landscapes. Where we build, we will protect and celebrate the river's natural beauty, landscapes and views.



THIS PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IF:

- Landscape character significance including landform features and views, is documented, measured and increasingly protected through planning policy.

The community has expressed that the river and its surrounding landscape and views are protected by planning for and managing the impacts of development and changes to land use.

The Yarra River provides natural beauty as it journeys from the mountains to the bay, it transitions through a rich variety of landscapes. In the upper rural reach, the forests create a sense of seclusion and offer a wilderness experience. Through the lower rural reach, the river's setting opens out to expansive and picturesque rural landscapes with billabongs and scattered woodlands. Within the suburban reach, the parklands and conservation areas have created a near-continuous corridor of native bushland along the river's edge, screening views of residential neighbourhoods that lie beyond. As the river flows through the inner city reach, activity and urban development are in close proximity and beauty is provided through landscaped gardens and parks.

Protect landscapes and views

The Yarra's landscapes are highly valued for their scenic qualities, environmental diversity, amenity and cultural values. There are numerous locations from which to view the river and its landscapes. This includes formal lookouts, the many bridges that provide vantage points, and recreational trails that run alongside the river and through the parklands.

Within the inner city and suburban reaches, the extensive parklands along the river's edge allow for direct access to the river and, in some places, provide an 'immersive' experience of the landscape. In the rural areas there are fewer parks and recreational trails, and opportunities to access and experience the river are more isolated.

As the city grows, there is a need to ensure land use and development along the Yarra is undertaken in a consistent way that aligns with Wurundjeri Woi wurrung people's and Bunurong people's aspirations for their Country and the community vision. The river's diverse landscapes must be protected and its vegetation corridor strengthened. Where appropriate, there is a need to create new opportunities to view, access and experience the river, while ensuring the river's continued protection.

The land use framework, in Part 2 of the plan, will be implemented into local and state planning policy to protect the Yarra's natural beauty throughout the corridor, on both private and public land.

Actions

- 39.** Protect the river's landscapes and views through improved planning and management of the river corridor and incorporation of the Yarra Strategic Plan land use framework into local and state planning policy.

Monitor changes in land use

The Yarra River encountered by early colonialists was vastly different to the river seen today. Its banks were lined with gums, wetlands and grasslands – with creeks joining the river, and falls frequently breaking the river’s flow. Since the arrival of colonialists, the Yarra’s course has been progressively disrupted and the river widened in places, while the surrounding land has been modified to accommodate agriculture, housing and industry.

Today, the river supports the social, cultural, economic and recreational needs of a diverse community. The vegetation that lines riverbanks forms a significant biodiversity corridor, supporting indigenous plants and animals, and providing Melburnians with a unique connection to nature.

Despite the Yarra’s cultural, social and environmental significance, the river is facing pressure from changing land use brought about by urban development and infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing population.

To help protect the river’s natural beauty the Yarra Collaboration Committee will work together to support land use planning goals and directions and gather accurate information on changes in land use and development. Technologies such as satellite imagery and geospatial and remote sensing can be used to monitor and analyse land use changes to inform better policy and planning decisions. There is also opportunity to incorporate cultural techniques and knowledge in the assessment of land use change and landscape values. As part of this process, environmental assets in the river corridor can be monitored to demonstrate the value of protecting the water, land, soil, forests, biodiversity and views.

Actions

40. Set land use planning goals and monitor changes in land use using satellite imagery, geospatial and remote sensing techniques and cultural practices and knowledge.

