



# Nhanbu narrun ba ngurqunin twam Birrarung

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**Ancient Spirit & Lore of the Yarra**



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# Wurundjeri input into the Yarra Strategic Plan

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The Wurundjeri First Peoples have set out to inform the development of the Yarra Strategic Plan (YSP) in line with the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017 requirement of guiding the future use and development of the YSP area. This includes identification of areas for protection within the Yarra River Land and the expectations and composition of Wurundjeri membership and participation on the Birrarung Council, as specified under the Act. This is consistent with Wurundjeri Council's focus on the cultural, social, environmental, heritage and economic benefits of participation in the management of and care of Country (Land and Water).

As the Traditional Owners of the Birrarung and its surrounding country, the Wurundjeri will bring their unique knowledge, connections and understandings of the River and the wider Yarra catchment into the YSP to enhance the integrity of the Plan. At the same time the Wurundjeri recognises the role and contribution to the process that other partner stakeholders will bring to the development and strength of the plan.

To guide the process of developing Wurundjeri input to the YSP, we have been guided by the following Principles:

- Acknowledgement of the history of the relationship between Wurundjeri and the colonial and post-federation governments of Victoria
- The continued participation in the implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan by the Wurundjeri and a recognition by Government for the need to resource Wurundjeri participation and planning for the future management of the Yarra catchment
- Agreement on the Principles expressed in the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn Act that will underpin the ongoing role of the Wurundjeri in the management and sustaining of the Yarra catchment waters and environment
- The substance of the priorities and strategies that are agreed and adopted in the YSP must reflect the Cultural Principles identified within the Act
- The need for an agreed strategy for the resourcing of the ongoing participation and capacity building of the Wurundjeri First Nations people to fulfil their responsibilities under the Act. In particular, Wurundjeri participation in all future planning negotiations and processes as they relate to the Yarra catchment.
- In the context, these principles have sought to define a set of key tasks that provide a framework for Wurundjeri input to the development of the YSP:
- Define and articulate the Wurundjeri values and vision as they relate to the Yarra River catchment and within the context of the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn Act.
- Identify and explore opportunities presented through the Wurundjeri participation in the responsibilities enshrined by the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn Act (and other mechanisms), including the Birrarung Council.
- Describe in the YSP how the Wurundjeri expect to participate in the delivery of the opportunities that are identified and agreed within the YSP.
- Identify the strategies and actions within the YSP that will deliver the social, cultural, economic, environmental and heritage outcomes that the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn Act intended for the Wurundjeri and to which the Wurundjeri aspire.

## CONTRIBUTING TO THE OBJECTIVES OF THE YSP

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The Wurundjeri are supportive of the broad objectives identified for the YSP in the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong Act, in particular the objective of returning the Yarra to a healthy river, a key aspiration of the Wurundjeri and central to our vision of the future of the Yarra.

Whilst we recognise the objectives already included under the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong Act, the Wurundjeri are seeking to pursue an expansion of these objectives to address key gaps, especially around education and economic development.

The Wurundjeri recognise that various partner stakeholders have interests in the management of specific areas within the Yarra catchment area, but for the Wurundjeri there are no delineation lines of interests. The Wurundjeri see the Birrarung as one whole living cultural landscape and take our responsibility for its overall management seriously, while also understanding the challenges that those responsibilities present.

Wurundjeri interests lie across the catchment as a whole. We recognise that the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong Act focuses on a relatively narrow corridor set back from the river channel, but the Wurundjeri maintain that management needs to consider values, priorities and aspects that lie beyond the designated Yarra River Land and land to which the YSP will apply. The Wurundjeri are looking to further develop the opportunities presented through the passing by Parliament of the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong Act can be developed in such a way as to provide the necessary resources to enable the Wurundjeri to fully participate in the management of the Yarra catchment, and be engaged in the strategies of all stakeholders that are being developed for the future development and restoration of the Yarra. The Wurundjeri are seeking to be independent and active partners on an equal level and be contributors to the future of the Yarra catchment management, but clearly recognise that at this point of time the necessary resources and capacity building have not been identified to enable the Wurundjeri to play their role to the extent to which they aspire.

The Wurundjeri acknowledges and appreciates the stated intention of Melbourne Water and the government partners to recognise and incorporate Wurundjeri values, objectives and priorities into the YSP.

To enable the genuine collaboration that is foreshadowed by the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong Act, and ensure effective input from Wurundjeri into the planning process, Wurundjeri seek to be involved upfront and participate throughout the Plan's development. The Wurundjeri therefore requests a seat on the Yarra Collaborative Committee (YCC) and any sub-groups that are established, and for this participation to be appropriately resourced.

To effectively meet our cultural obligations and aspirations to participate in management of the Birrarung, we will need to expand our capability in planning, monitoring and on-ground management, and will identify the resources that will be required or Wurundjeri to fulfil these roles.



# Ganbu gulinj Narm, Wurundjeri Gulinj nuringianith biik baambuth

The First People of Melbourne, the Wurundjeri People, have been caring for Country since the beginning of time

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The Birrarung is a river of mists and shadows - the river and its environs are a living, breathing entity that follows Wurundjeri songlines and forms a central part of the Dreaming of the Wurundjeri. A Dreaming that links the billabongs, wetlands and swamps in the upstream forests, across the meandering plains and out to the salt water. We the Wurundjeri are connected to the Birrarung through spirit, culture and nature. The river follows the paths that our ancestors have travelled for thousands of years - providing for them as now it provides for all Victorians.

We honour the land and water of the Birrarung. Wurundjeri people have a deep cultural obligation and a birthright to look after the river - to make sure the Birrarung is healthy and continues to support the plants and animals, our community and all people, both those currently alive and the generations yet to come.

The Wurundjeri have lived with and known the Birrarung since the beginning. The Birrarung is now shared by many Victorians, who value the river and its surrounds for what they bring to the beauty of our city. In sharing in the benefits that the river provides, we must also share responsibility for preserving and restoring the wellbeing of the Birrarung.

The city of Melbourne grew out from the banks of the Birrarung – the river has allowed it to become the vibrant city it is today, but this has come at great expense to the Wurundjeri.

Our songlines have been sustained even though many of the creeks have dried up and billabongs been destroyed. 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 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.

The Wurundjeri believe that we need to change how all Victorians think about and actively respect the Birrarung. We believe we need to see not a resource to be exploited but rather to recognise the complex, living system that is sensitive to its surrounds and a uniquely Victorian treasure. By engaging with those partners with whom we now share the river we, together, are capable of turning around the damage of the past and acting to restore the river and its environment for the future use and enjoyment of all.

Wurundjeri invites all people to see the Birrarung through our eyes, to talk with us to understand our values, and to partner with us to re-energise the river as we fulfil our cultural duty in bringing the Birrarung back to environmental, cultural, ceremonial and spiritual health.

# WURUNDJERI PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORK

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The Wurundjeri have a traditional responsibility for the entire Yarra catchment and will seek to contribute to the four reaches that make up the whole, connected Birrarung system, as identified in the Melbourne Water's framework for the YSP. As outlined in the principles of the Wilip-gin Birrarung murrin Act, the Wurundjeri will seek to be involved in planning and decision making in all aspects of management of the Yarra catchment.

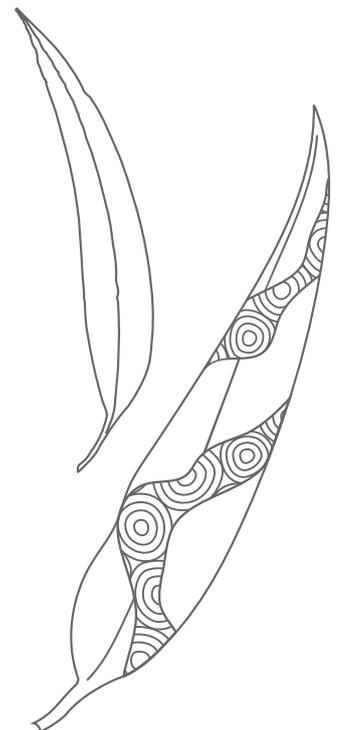
As such, the Wurundjeri will be seeking to ensure that their informed input is considered in all decision-making and planning processes in relation to the river management and that Wurundjeri will seek to be represented on all committees and planning processes involved in the future use and management of the river. This must include the right of Wurundjeri People to be informed of developments and projects in a timely manner, and to participate in assessment and approval processes.

The Wurundjeri seek to ensure those matters and procedures of greatest importance to Wurundjeri are managed appropriately, and, through the YSP, seek to create binding obligations on responsible public agencies to appropriately consult with Wurundjeri and reflect their objectives.

The Wurundjeri will require adequate resourcing to enable the preparation for and participate in the complexity of all decision-making processes, ensuring effective and informed contributions to all discussions on the future restoration and management of the Birrarung.

The Wurundjeri will seek the independent ability to access all areas of the Birrarung to allow for broad community participation in planning and decision-making processes that impact on community values, cultural responsibilities and matters of significance to the future of the Wurundjeri.

The Wurundjeri will work towards the development of a Wurundjeri River Management and Access Plan that will enable Wurundjeri to effectively expand capability in natural resource management, cultural heritage and other areas that will enable Wurundjeri People to fulfil cultural obligations and effectively participate in planning and implementation at all levels of river management.



# WURUNDJERI PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

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## A healthy, cleaner river

- Systematically clean out flood plains and recreate historical flood patterns – working with the Victorian Environmental Water Holder and others to release appropriate water for wetland restoration.
- Recreate the billabong systems which were pre historically, historically and remain contemporaneously an important feature along parts of the Yarra.
- Develop a whole of system approach to the removal of refuse and pollution points into the river that will require the collaboration of all stakeholders and the engagement with partners like DELWP, Melbourne Water, local government authorities, the Environment Protection Authority, Keep Australia Beautiful Network and other environmental NGOs
- Facilitate the establishment of a Healthy River Fund (Birrarrung Bank) to attract funding from philanthropies, environmental NGOs and other sources such as revenue from water trading, sales and development and other sources identified through Actions 8, 12 and 30 of the Yarra River Action Plan, for the long-term development of Birrarung restoration and enhancement projects
- Development of strategies to establish cultural and environmental corridors within the whole of catchment with a view to connecting to areas beyond the Yarra River Land that provide important connections to the river system
- Identify the cultural water (volumes and timing) required to sustain the natural, cultural and spiritual values along the length of the Birrarung and its tributaries, and secure the water resources required to meet those values.
- Plan and undertake comprehensive terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna assessments across the catchment to ascertain where opportunities may exist to reintroduce and restore native plants, birds and animals into the Yarra catchment, including species that are important to Wurundjeri as totems, seasonal indicators and resources required for ceremony / other uses.
- Utilise the Wurundjeri flora and fauna assessments as critical planning tools for future management of the catchment. Relevant external agencies to allow access to relevant data.
- Identify resources to allow for the employment of Wurundjeri people to participate in the design, implementation, management and MERI (monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement) of assessments and strategies for flora and fauna maintenance and restoration projects.
- Incorporate into the YSP strategies the reintroduction of traditional fire and river management practices (where applicable) in a contemporary rural, urban and semi-urban environment.
- To develop the mechanisms necessary for Wurundjeri Council to participate in the above mentioned activities Establish and embed partnership protocols with relevant agencies.
- Wurundjeri Council works with partner organisations to develop an independent framework of ongoing funding and accountability for its obligations as a responsible public entity.

# WURUNDJERI PRIORITIES IN CULTURAL & HERITAGE VALUES – MAPPING, KNOWLEDGE, CULTURAL PRACTICE AND CARE OF COUNTRY

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**Cultural mapping is a collective term used to describe a range of practices with regards to identifying values.**

- Development of a Cultural Knowledge and Mapping Program, overseen, guided and delivered by the Wurundjeri. This program will identify and document in an ongoing manner sites and areas of cultural and historical significance to the Wurundjeri people. These include existing and future burial and ceremonial places and water-dependent sites. A Wurundjeri Cultural and Traditional Practice Map will be a critical planning tool for all stakeholders in the Yarra catchment.

The Wurundjeri would propose a similar process of mapping the historical use of the river in the post-colonial period to provide planners and river management authorities with an understanding of the shared and bi-cultural nature of the responsibility that all Victorians have for the future of the Birrarung.

- The development of educational material for schools, tourists and visitors to the Birrarung to inform Victorians and visitors of the importance of the river across historical, cultural, economic and environmental perspectives – The Birrarung Story from the Dreaming to Modern Victoria.
- Strategies for incorporating Wurundjeri values into catchment planning and development processes in all reaches of the river, including influencing design and naming.
- The identification of areas within the catchment for the managed expansion of parklands, bicycle networks, regional trails, cultural corridors and general recreational areas for use by all Victorians, in a way that supports Wurundjeri values and cultural places.

- Incorporating interpretive and naming signage in Woi-wurrung and English languages throughout the catchment that reflects the Wurundjeri Traditional Ownership into the contemporary management of areas of recreation beyond the Yarra River Land that provide important connections to the river system.
- Establish protocols with stakeholders for incorporating naming and badging of future developments on or around the river.

Wurundjeri cultural practices are expressed in activities that connect Wurundjeri people to their family, Country, and identity (practices that are tied to Aboriginal tradition). Yet, Aboriginal tradition should not be viewed as static and unchanging from a distant ‘authentic’ past. At its essence, Aboriginal tradition is grounded in the handing down of beliefs and practices from one generation to the next and is therefore subject to change over time. Wurundjeri cultural practices include, but are not limited to activities such as smoking ceremonies and Welcomes to Country (Tanderrum), dance (corroboree) artwork, traditional music (yidiki), craft, tool production, and custodianship of Country.

# PRIORITY PROJECTS IDENTIFIED IN THE YARRA ACTION PLAN

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The Wurundjeri have identified and support the following projects cited in the Yarra River Action Plan (YRAP) as their immediate priorities from within the YRAP. Relevant agencies charged with delivering these projects must engage Wurundjeri to ensure that Wurundjeri cultural values are incorporated into the project planning and implementation.

There are a range of other projects and actions identified in the YRAP that are reflective of Wurundjeri priorities and would be supported by the Wurundjeri as they are developed, including the participation of Wurundjeri in management of the Yarra Lands and reviewing the collection and use of Parks charges.

## **Cultural practice, knowledge & cultural mapping**

As identified in Action 26 of the Yarra River Action Plan, a comprehensive program of cultural mapping is required to support the Wurundjeri to contribute to setting the direction for management of the Yarra catchment, and as a critical information basis for cultural knowledge enhancement for Wurundjeri People and participation in future planning processes. The cultural mapping program should include identification of cultural values, ceremonial places and burial places, development of a secure database that is managed by Wurundjeri, and needs to be appropriately resourced to include broad participation of Wurundjeri People, relevant equipment and ongoing information management capability.

## **Abbotsford River Structure Plan**

Wurundjeri values are central to the design of the Abbotsford reach. This area has significant pre historical, historical, post contact and modern values for the Wurundjeri. The highly modified environment also has high visitor use, recreational attraction and settler history. Specific focus needs to be placed on improving the local environmental conditions and water flows of Dights Falls and in particular extending restoration works up into the tributary of the Merri Creek through to the confluence.

## **A Whole of Landscape Approach to the Cultural Management of Lands**

While Banyule-Bulleen and the Bolin Bolin Billabong Complex are inextricably linked- the two areas are being considered in isolation from one another. Wurundjeri seek recognition of this broader cultural landscape and the need to manage the landscape as a whole.

## **Banyule - Bulleen Cultural River Precinct Structure Plan**

The significant role of Wurundjeri must be recognised in setting objectives and direction for the cultural landscape, and ensuring it is developed in a way that supports Wurundjeri values, principles and priorities, and respects Wurundjeri cultural protocols. Specific opportunities that can improve education, cultural and economic outcomes for Wurundjeri people through appropriate use of land and resources should be explored. In the immediate term, Wurundjeri require input into the planning processes from the beginning.

## **Bolin Bolin Billabong Complex**

As a first step in a broader programme of billabong rehabilitation throughout the Yarra catchment, Bolin Bolin and its associated cultural landscape should be established as a best-practice example for wetland rehabilitation. This will include establishing appropriate watering and cultural maintenance regimes into the future, and investigating options to create a more direct role for Wurundjeri in managing the Billabong complex.

## **Partnership Development**

The development and implementation of Partnerships will be essential for Wurundjeri to achieve many of the desired outcomes. Developing good working relationships with existing community groups, research institutions, large land owners and other interested parties which operate along the Yarra River can bring about important land management changes, innovative ideas on landscape use, increase internal capacity and improve Wurundjeri access to land and water resources.

# Additional Acknowledgements

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