



IMAGINE
THE YARRA

DRAFT YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Submission Number:	YSP23
Name (Individual/Organisation):	Individual
Attachments:	Attachment 1 – Written submission

DRAFT YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN SUBMISSION DURING PUBLIC CONSULTATION, 29 MARCH 2020

We support the aspirations of the Yarra Strategic Plan (YSP) which represents a first phase implementation of the visionary legislation of the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong) Act 2017.

We note that it tries to establish a framework for the responsibility assigned to Melbourne Water as lead agency for implementation of the Act. However, in undertaking this duty, the statutory authority has a challenge to both service the needs of water users across the metropolitan area and have significant responsibility for long-term environmental care for the river and its communities.

We understand that the plan tries to defend the river against the twin pressures of climate change and urbanization, using the planning scheme mechanisms and other tools to re-think how we manage the river not only over the 10 years of the plan but also over the next 50 years. The YSP promotes the use of modern governance – collaboration and coordination – to help address issues on the Yarra. But it does not go far enough in ensuring that key decision-makers, in local government, in the community sector and commercial organisations are going to be able to back the plans and make determinations in their own areas of accountability that can deliver upon the Act's strategic requirements. It also does not make clear the important role that the Birrarung Council, as a consultative body, should play in endorsing and providing feedback on any planning decisions.

Too much of the strategy plan is vague both in wording, and in application to specific challenges facing the river. For instance, in the area that we know best – the inner city lower reaches of the Yarra – the increased demand for access is particularly highlighted during this current COVID crisis as more and more individuals use it for recreation and exercise. Thousands a day are entering the river landscape, and this number will only grow as apartment living expands, and brings with it a higher density of people and animals. This is of course a positive thing, however, the range of activities that include walking, cycling, dog-walking, running, outdoor training, mountain and trail bikes, children playing and pop-up parties, motor bikes and speeding cars, canoes and motor boats, homeless campsites, are at times in competition with one another for their enjoyment of the river. Most of these users appreciate its natural beauties, however, many of them also contribute significantly to increasing degradation of the river banks, increased rubbish, broken trees, soil erosion and the like.

In terms of river management, one of the key aims of the Act was to ensure a more coordinated approach between the various councils, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and other agencies who manage the river environs, to ensure that they are better connected and working in concert to achieve shared aims. It is evident that the Strategic Plan should be willing to determine a hierarchy of responsibilities at a particularly fine-grained level. Take for instance, the evidence of weeds and non-native species along various sections of the river, at

the moment it appears that no one authority has determined how that should be managed, and consequently decisions that need to be made urgently about the river environment to protect native species, flora and fauna, are not being made or are made by an individual council or by Melbourne Water with too little concerted efforts at maintenance. The same could be said for the increasing risk of fire hazards as climate change advances. Likewise, by way of example, a decision that might be made about trail bikes will not be effective if it is only about banning them – perhaps an area should be designated for trail bikes and appropriate facilities established for this group of users.

The YSP also seems to have failed to indicate in what ways it works across government, for instance, with VicRoads to perhaps change road alignments or ensure different kinds of road design that prevent waste discharge, and better integrate with the natural environment. If the plan is to 'have teeth', it will need to be able to make determinations over such competing pressures and competing decision-makers, and have the lines of authority required to ensure implementation over time with specified goals and targets attached.

There are also critical needs in the YSP to consider revenue strategies for the short and long-term. To achieve a net gain in the river environment, we need a percentage allocated within the Planning Scheme that will see all development contribute to its protection and long-term viability. An additional consideration may include expectations that high user areas collect fees, for instance through car-parking. We also endorse the payment of a tax for the Wurundjeri Tribal Land Council, and their involvement as rangers, with training and employment, along the course of the river.

In terms of priority projects, there need to be effective measures against which to determine success in terms of governance, community response, indigenous custodianship, and environmental impact. The Yarra Riverkeepers is recommending a baseline be used to measure improvement over ten years. Without this it is sadly likely that we will see great deterioration in river quality and a degradation of the river environment from which it is difficult to recover.

The Performance Objectives and Actions therefore need to be time-bound and cumulative with the YSP revised accordingly. As a member of the Yarra Riverkeepers Association, we therefore endorse suggestions made in the Yarra Riverkeeper Association/Environmental Justice Australia submission.

