195 formal written submissions received

21 submissions from community groups

117 submissions from individuals and local residents

270 face-to-face conversations were had

32 submissions from industry/business/organisation

more than

Top 4 areas of comment

1 Healthy waterways and biodiversity corridors

2 Protection from adjacent inappropriate development

3 Improved management and governance arrangements

4 Increased recreation and accessibility opportunities
Introduction

This document outlines the feedback from the community on the Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory Committee’s discussion paper Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung).

The discussion paper outlined the Yarra River’s history, and detailed its current values and water quality as identified by the key responsible public entities (nine councils along the Yarra River, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, EPA Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning). Within the paper the Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory Committee (Yarra MAC) proposed a new strategic framework for better management of the Yarra River comprising:

- a community vision that clearly outlines community requirements and expectations for the entire length of river over the long term
- an integrated, overarching strategic plan for the river that would give effect to the community vision
- improved management arrangements to ensure the Yarra Strategic Plan will be implemented efficiently and effectively with clear accountabilities for all aspects of management
- legislation to provide statutory backing and longevity to the new arrangements and give real confidence that the river will be protected over the long term
- clear funding and infrastructure delivery arrangements.

Project outline

The Yarra River is an iconic feature of Melbourne’s landscape and integral to its identity. The river is a major source of Melbourne’s drinking water and its surrounding green spaces provide a haven for many plant and animal species. The river and its environs make a large contribution to the city’s liveability, providing opportunities for recreation, travel and diverse economic activities. The Yarra River is much loved by Victorians and holds particular cultural and spiritual significance for Traditional Owners.

The Victorian Government is committed to protecting the Yarra River by introducing legislation, stronger planning controls and a Trust or similar entity. Before preparing new legislation to protect the Yarra River, the Victorian Government established the Yarra MAC to provide advice on the effectiveness of current governance arrangements.

Figure 1: Yarra MAC timelines

- Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory Committee appointed (December 2015)
- Examined critical issues and opportunities (January – March 2016)
- Investigations of specific lines of enquiry (March – July 2016)
- Discussion paper released for public comment (1 July 2016)
- Public and targeted consultation (1 July – 8 August 2016)
- Ministerial Advisory Committee deliberations (August – September 2016)
- Ministerial Advisory Committee submitted its report to the Victorian Government (Late 2016)
Public consultation

On 1 July 2016 the Victorian Government released the Yarra MAC’s discussion paper, *Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung)* to seek the community’s views on the key issues and opportunities for the river and proposed management arrangements to protect the Yarra.

The discussion paper’s five chapters described the stewardship of the river over time, the condition of the river today, why a new management model is required, and proposed management mechanisms. The paper also included 10 questions to guide feedback in response to opportunities and proposed new management approaches.

A range of engagement activities were undertaken throughout the consultation period to raise awareness and understanding of the discussion paper, and to encourage people and organisations to voice their views.

Feedback on the discussion paper was invited until the consultation period concluded on 8 August 2016.

**Promotion**

The discussion paper, consultation process, submission activities and locations were promoted on a variety of platforms. This included the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) website ([www.delwp.vic.gov.au](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au)) and DELWP’s social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn). DELWP also provided material to the nine councils along the Yarra for promotion on their websites and in their newsletters. Relevant peak bodies and community groups were also provided with information to promote the consultation opportunities to their own networks and communities.

**Having a say**

The discussion paper and information on how to make a submission or take part in a face-to-face discussion were available via an online engagement hub established on the DELWP website. Visitors to this site could post an idea or pose a question about the project.

Written submissions could be made by completing an online survey or by uploading a document to the website. Submissions were also accepted by email or post.

Community and stakeholder feedback on the discussion paper was actively sought through online and face-to-face interaction through workshops, community insights forums and listening posts.

**Public participation**

The Yarra River is 242 kilometres in length and traverses a varied landscape from busy urban environments to near pristine forests. To ensure a wide range of views and perspectives were captured, the engagement activities took place in each reach of the Yarra River from Port Philip Bay to the Upper Yarra Reservoir.

Public activities did not take place in the Upper Yarra reach as it is mostly national park and the water catchment areas are closed to the public. Stakeholders who have an interest in this reach of the river were engaged through a stakeholder workshop.

**Workshops**

Workshops were held to provide information about the project and seek feedback.

- Four stakeholder workshops were held with representatives from local government, state government departments and agencies as well as industry and peak bodies.
- Three community workshops were held with representatives of community groups as well as interested members of the public.
- Three community insight workshops were held with community members who were recruited through Stable Research. The participants varied in age and gender and lived in areas along the Inner-city, Suburban and Rural reaches of the river.

A standard format was used for the 10 stakeholder and community workshops. Slight variations were made in the questions posed in order to reflect the prior knowledge and interests of the participants. Each session included a presentation about the Yarra River Protection Program followed by small-group discussions around the questions posed in the discussion paper. After each group discussion, there was a report back to the larger group so each participant heard about the different discussions happening within the workshop.
Listening Posts

A series of listening posts were held in each of the three reaches in locations that have high levels of foot traffic. The purpose was to engage with community members who may not be aware of the project or represent an interest in the river. A short intercept survey was used to seek feedback from the community on their views about the river.

During the engagement period

- 4,400 people visited the website
- 1,914 downloaded a document or viewed the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- 99 engaged with the site (completing an online submission, or asking a question)
- The site received 9,000 views
- Resulting in 195 written submissions, including 95 online submissions
Feedback

Key messages

There is strong stakeholder and community support for a new approach to protecting and improving the Yarra River and its environs.

Feedback emphasised the importance of:

- Traditional Owner inclusion and community participation in the new management model, for the legitimacy, longevity and implementation of a new vision and plan for the river
- an integrated approach to coordinating delivery and implementation of a strategic river corridor plan for the Yarra
- an enduring management model that clarifies accountabilities and avoids duplication of roles among the public organisations responsible for the management of the Yarra River and its environs.

Other themes with widespread agreement included:

- The environmental and social community benefits of the river and its surrounds should be protected and improved for the benefit of all Victorians.
- The river is a public asset, and private interests shouldn’t impinge on this.
- Responsible delivery agencies need adequate legislative powers and statutory clout.
- A vision for the Yarra is required, should be far sighted, holistic (cover the whole Yarra River catchment, including its tributaries), comprehensive (incorporate the breadth of social, environmental and economic aspects of the Yarra River), inclusive (i.e. a Yarra River that is accessible for all people) and aspirational (a vision that is ambitious and highlights what the river ‘can’ be for Victorians and visitors).
Table 1 – Prominent issues within each reach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reach</th>
<th>Inner-City</th>
<th>Suburban Yarra</th>
<th>Rural Yarra</th>
<th>Upper Yarra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Port Phillip Bay to Dights Falls</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dights Falls to Warrandyte</td>
<td>Warrandyte to Upper Yarra Reservoir</td>
<td>Headwaters above the Upper Yarra Reservoir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Level of modification**

- **HIGH**
- **LOW**

**Comments**

- **Inner-City**
  - Need measures to improve water quality, including reducing litter and improving stormwater management.
  - Improve riparian vegetation and open space amenity and continuity.
  - Protect from inappropriate development. Development should be low rise, well setback and visual view lines should be preserved.

- **Suburban Yarra**
  - Improve infrastructure access to and facilities within recreational areas.
  - Need measures to improve water quality, including reducing litter and improving stormwater management.
  - Improve riparian vegetation and open space amenity and continuity.

- **Rural Yarra**
  - Concerns regarding land management and community consultation for any changes in future arrangements.
  - Need measures to improve water quality and biodiversity.
  - Protect riparian vegetation while also managing bushfire risk.
  - Promote sustainable agricultural practices and agritourism.

- **Upper Yarra**
  - Protect water supply and water quality.
  - Manage the bushfire risk.
  - Preserve landscape and vegetation.
### Face-to-face conversations

There is strong support for a new approach to managing the river that sets out a vision and a plan for the whole corridor with coordination by a single entity.

The stakeholder and public engagement conversations reveal that there are many shared views held between stakeholders and the community about protecting the future of the Yarra River.

### Table 2: Shared views in stakeholder and community discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Develop partnerships with Traditional Owners to protect and manage the river corridor | The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage significance of the Yarra River should be more strongly acknowledged and protected.  
The storytelling and connection to the waterway remains an important part of Melbourne’s identity. Traditional Owners should be recognised as the original stewards of the Yarra River in governance arrangements. |
| Strengthen community pride and management of the Yarra River         | The Yarra River is an iconic feature of Melbourne’s landscape and contributes positively to Melbourne’s liveability as an open space corridor. Community and stakeholder participants believe the river deserves greater recognition for its health and condition.  
It was suggested there should be greater community education about its important role, including the native flora and fauna habitats it supports. Community and stakeholders believe the community has an important role in developing the strategic plan for the Yarra River and there are greater opportunities for community involvement in its management. |
| Protect native flora and fauna habitats by balancing uses            | The community and stakeholders acknowledged the Yarra River as an important open space corridor that provides Melburnians a place to relax or participate in recreational activities. However, the community and stakeholders recognise these recreational uses need to be managed so they are not in conflict with native flora and fauna habitats in order to protect the natural environment in the river corridor.  
Agriculture was recognised by stakeholders and the community as a significant contribution to Melbourne’s economy, however they also highlighted the importance of managing agricultural uses and practices to ensure they do not impact the river corridor health. |
| Protect the Yarra River’s natural character                          | Developing planning policies and controls to ensure new developments are appropriately located and do not impact the character of the river was important to both community and stakeholders. They believe that a new strategic plan should provide guidance and principles to support planning decisions as well as guide local policy development. |
| A whole-of-corridor approach                                         | Creating a guiding vision and plan for the river corridor is supported by the community and stakeholders. They believe an integrated management system will create better outcomes for the river in the future, particularly water quality. Improved access and amenity through the creation of continuous walking and cycling links is also important to the community and stakeholders. |
| Create new governance arrangements                                  | Stakeholders and the community agree that a new governance arrangement is needed to oversee the development and delivery of the strategic vision and plan. It was suggested that the new arrangement could be established through the creation of a new entity within an existing organisation. The new entity would need clear roles and responsibilities in managing the river corridor and be accountable for delivery of the strategic plan. It was also suggested that the new entity should have new legislation to support its functions as well as reporting lines to government or parliament. |
## Stakeholder conversations

Table 3: Key themes from stakeholder discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Protect and improve the Yarra River and its environs | • Celebrate and strengthen community pride for the Yarra River  
• Create continuous access along the river corridor  
• Protect and enhance the natural character of the Yarra River corridor through planning controls  
• Create a balance between recreational uses and protecting flora and fauna habitats  
• Protect the existing high-quality drinking water sourced from the upper Yarra River  
• Support compatible agricultural uses in the rural Yarra reach |
| Strategic Plan and Vision | • Develop in partnership with Traditional Owners  
• Involve community in its development and delivery  
• Recognise the Yarra River’s contribution to Melbourne’s liveability  
• Include initiatives to enhance the existing ecological conditions of the river  
• Develop a whole-of-river connectivity plan  
• Include a supporting implementation plan to deliver the vision |
| Future Governance arrangements | • A range of different perspectives on the best design of the new governance model  
• Develop new legislation to support the new institutional arrangements |
## Community conversations

### Table 4: Key themes of community discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Protect and improve the Yarra River and its environs** | • Create a continuous cycling connection along the river corridor  
• Improve the water quality and reduce pollution—better management of stormwater was seen as a priority  
• Protect the natural habitat of the river and its environs  
• Identify conservation areas along the river corridor to support wildlife species and habitats  
• Facilitate nature based recreation at appropriate locations  
• Protect against inappropriate development impacting the river  
• Acknowledge and celebrate Aboriginal cultural heritage significance |
| **Strategic Plan and Vision** | • Develop a community vision and strategic plan to give effect to the vision  
• A coordinated approach with a strong focus on community education and involvement  
• Recognise and promote Aboriginal cultural heritage  
• Balance the protection of biodiversity, vegetation, habitats and native fauna with urban development and management of stormwater run-off  
• Need to balance the needs of different land uses  
• Support, manage and protect agricultural uses in the rural Yarra reach  
• Strong support for better management of competing uses such as commuter cyclists and pedestrians  
• Improve public safety and access |
| **Future Governance arrangements** | • Support for a whole-of-river approach  
• Future governance should be separate from political processes  
• Clear planning directions and rules to stop poor development along the river  
• Fund the delivery of the strategic plan |
Submissions

The discussion paper invited feedback on 10 questions:

1. What aspect of the Yarra River and its environs would you most like to see protected?
2. What aspect of the Yarra River and its environs would you most like to see improved?
3. Is there any information or issues we have missed?
4. What would you like to see included in a vision for the Yarra River?
5. What elements would you like to see covered in the Yarra strategic plan?
6. What would you like to see included in legislation to protect the Yarra River?
7. What do you think are the key criteria for the evaluation of options for management arrangements of the Yarra River and its riverscape?
8. What are your thoughts on the options for a new management model for the Yarra River and its environs?
9. What are your thoughts about establishing a new organisation to oversee development and monitor delivery of the Yarra strategic plan?
10. Are there any other management models/options we should consider?

The following analysis has grouped responses to the 10 questions against key themes:

- Key values for protection
- A community vision and strategic plan
- Legislation
- New management arrangements

A total of 195 written submissions were received. Most of the submissions (117 of 195) were made by individuals. The rest were from groups or organisations including councils, community groups, peak bodies and sporting organisations. (Figure 1). Submissions are available for viewing on the DELWP website (www.planning.vic.gov.au).

Figure 1 – ‘Who made a submission?’ count by group

- Agencies - 9
- Community Group - 21
- Council - 12
- Individual - 117
- Industry/Organisation - 32

Total number of submissions: 195
More than half the 109 submitters who disclosed their age group were aged between 49-68 years old (Figure 2).

Submissions were received from individuals and local community groups along three of the four river reaches. For a visual representation of the river reaches, refer to the maps from page 35.

A third of all submissions were received from people who reside in the suburban reach (between Dights Falls and Warrandyte). For purposes of analysis, submitters with interests in all geographic areas of the Yarra River, such as industry groups or government agencies, were designated as ‘All Reaches Coverage’ (Figure 3).
What were the key themes raised?

The most frequently discussed themes in submissions were:

- Governance
- Waterway health
- Environmental health
- Land development

Many submissions addressed more than one theme, demonstrating the multiple benefits provided by the river and its parklands.

The majority of submissions supported the directions outlined in the discussion paper. However, a number of submitters felt they didn’t have sufficient detail or knowledge to respond to all questions, particularly regarding legislation.

Figure 4 – Number of comments by theme

![Bar chart showing the number of comments by theme ranging from Governance to Economic Activity](chart.png)
Key values for protection

Waterway health and environmental health were primary concerns of submitters (Figure 5). Inappropriate development was another theme that was frequently raised. Recreation and parklands as well as infrastructure and access were frequently nominated as needing improvement.

Detailed commentary on themes and key recurring points relating to river values is provided in the following outline.

Figure 5 – Values for protection and/or improvement

Q1: What aspect of the Yarra River and its environs would you most like to see protected?

Q2: What aspect of the Yarra River and its environs would you most like to see improved?
Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung) Community Views

Water quality is paramount. It needs to be protected and improved

Water quality was the most common themed raised in submissions with 156 submissions referring to water quality and the need to protect it. Submissions asserted that the quality of water within the Yarra River has significant bearing on the River’s natural environmental functions as well as our ability to enjoy its qualitative values. Both urban and agricultural run-off are of concern.

**Stormwater:** Stormwater, and its negative impact on water quality, is an issue that needs to be addressed and better managed.

**Litter:** Litter is a problem that needs to be addressed. Reducing litter at the source, through upstream management, is generally the preferred approach. However, effort needs to be made to reduce litter that is already in the River. Monitoring and enforcement of the illegal dumping of rubbish is also a concern.

**Pollution:** There needs to be a greater concerted effort to reduce sewerage discharge particularly those from septic and large wastewater systems. There was also a need to control rural and industrial point source pollution from industrial discharges, fertiliser and pesticide pollution. Suggested solutions include reducing discharges from sewage treatment plants into the river and adequately identifying and penalising illegal sewerage cross connections.

“By working to return swimming to the city reaches of the Yarra we can commence a serious discussion about water quality and meaningfully tackle the issue of diffuse source pollution and stormwater management. By being able to provide people with a meaningful and tangible benefit from the outcomes of investment in improvements to the Yarra we can drive positive change.”

Yarra Pools

“Yarra Ranges also has over 22,000 septic systems, of which around 7,500 are highly likely to be non-functional due to age and historic planning requirements which allowed the discharge of greywater into stormwater systems. The resultant pollution of waterways including the Yarra and its tributaries from septic systems places our unique aquatic ecosystems under threat, and poses a public health risk.”

Yarra Ranges Shire Council
Natural flora and fauna needs to be protected and enhanced

The Yarra River and its environs provides distinctive natural habitat for a diverse range of native flora and fauna. The need to protect and enhance natural habitats was raised in 141 submissions.

Aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna within the Yarra River, particularly native and endangered species, need to be protected and enhanced. This includes enriching habitats and wildlife populations along the Yarra River and its major tributaries. Particular reference was made about preserving native trees and greenery along the river, as well as sustained efforts at weed removal. Revegetation and replanting work was also needed, especially in the city and suburban reaches, where development has had a greater impact.

**Pristine forests:** The pristine upper reaches of the Yarra River should be protected from logging and different approaches to reduction burns should be explored. One possible avenue to recognise the significance of the upper reaches and the surrounding catchment forests could be to recognise it as a national park.

**Managing bushfire risks:** Conservation of native flora and fauna should be balanced against the need to safeguard the community and the river from bushfire risks. Vegetation levels need to be carefully monitored and effort needs to be directed towards management of introduced pests such as blackberries, rabbits and foxes.

**Biodiversity:** Maintaining adequate wildlife and vegetation corridors are also important to foster biodiversity. The platypus was often raised as an important species that requires conservation and suitable conditions to burrow.

**Environmental flows:** Environmental flows need to be maintained and monitored for waterway health and to improve climate change resilience. There needs to be a better understanding of the natural variation in flows and sediment load from the river, particularly as a result of storm events. The use of recycled water was raised as a possible method to supplement flows if necessary.

“Biodiversity in the inner city is under pressure. Space is required for remnant vegetation and animals along the River. Continuous vegetated corridors along waterways are crucial to biodiversity. They require protection through coordinated planning, planning scheme controls and land acquisition to secure space for vegetation and access. It is also vital to ensure embankments are properly reinstated when any development occurs along the river corridor.”

Yarra City Council
The river is an important recreation corridor with positive social benefits

More than half of submissions (110) noted the importance of the Yarra River as a recreation corridor. The Yarra River is an important recreation space that accommodates a diverse range of users. The river and its surrounding parkland provides a vital recreation space and ‘refuge’ from city living for the community.

Green space: Access to and the quality of this green space needs to be protected and improved, particularly considering Melbourne’s growing population. Green spaces, such as those provided by the river and its parklands, also have positive health and social benefits. A continuous parkland corridor along the length of the Yarra River should be seriously considered.

“There is now a growing body of evidence to support the assertion that time in a natural place lifts mood, reduces stress and improves focus and attention. Given the busyness of life in a city of three million people where anxiety, depression, sleep and attentional difficulties challenge many, a natural resource like the Yarra River provides a place of restoration and recovery.”

Doctors for the Environment Australia
Inappropriate development adjacent the river must be curtailed

Inappropriate development near the river was raised as an issue in 78 submissions. Submitters felt that the Yarra River needs to be protected from inappropriate development. Development should be low rise, well set back and impact on views and vistas should be minimised. Encroachment, overshadowing and light pollution should be prevented. Colours and materials should also be controlled to reduce visual intrusion.

Planning Controls: To deal with development pressures and land-use conflict, stronger and more consistent planning controls need to be applied that will hold up at VCAT proceedings. Furthermore, there needs to be a sustainable approach to development. Best-practice environmentally sensitive design principles should be applied to new developments to ensure that new developments ‘give something back’ to the river and the surrounding community by way of direct investment or approved public realm improvements. Planning controls and policy also need to encourage investment in appropriate areas. More compatible land uses need to be encouraged in a manner that produces high quality outcomes for the public realm and its users.

Land and river management: While planning zones and overlays control land use and development, better land and river management practices need to be encouraged in uses that are permitted and promoted in the planning scheme to achieve better river health outcomes. This includes uses such as agriculture and golf courses in the rural reach.

A public asset: The Yarra River is a public asset and private interests should not impinge on this. Developers leverage off the qualitative values of the river to contribute to development value. In these instances, there needs to be a value capture mechanism in place to ensure that new developments ‘give something back’ to the river and the surrounding community by way of direct investment or approved public realm improvements. Planning controls and policy also need to encourage investment in appropriate areas. More compatible land uses need to be encouraged in a manner that produces high quality outcomes for the public realm and its users.

"With Melbourne’s rapidly increasing population and increased storm activity due to climate change, there is an increased need to address issues on a broader basis. These challenges can be best controlled by having planning controls regulating development along the river corridor and across the river catchment."

City of Boroondara

"Balance must be found between commercial and public opportunities, between economic uses and environmental protection."

City of Melbourne

"The appeal of the Yarra River as a location for housing has allowed vastly excessive building development immediately beside the river."

Local resident
The river should be accessible

Fifty-one submissions addressed the issue of access to the river. The river and its accompanying green spaces need to be easily accessible for users. There should be continuous recreational pathways and parks along the Yarra for walking and cycling. All-abilities access to walking trails is also an integral consideration. Increased access points for canoes was also raised.

Cycling and walking trails: Existing cycling and walking trail infrastructure needs attention and improvement. Accompanying public space facilities such as the availability of toilets, rubbish bins and picnic facilities also need to be provided. The Gipps Street steps were often cited as an example of a site that requires infrastructure improvement. Another example was a trail to the Heidi Museum of Modern Art, between the CBD and Templestowe and Templestowe to Warrandyte.

Needs of different users: While access and trail infrastructure is important, the needs of different user groups should be balanced and ultimately met. Shared trails need to be designed in a manner that reduces tension between pedestrians and faster-moving cyclists. Similarly, open spaces need to be designed to balance the competing needs of passive and active recreation users as well as riverbank and on-river users.

Swimming: There should be an aspirational goal for water quality in the Yarra River to be good enough for recreational swimming and in other water activities. Tangible recreational benefits should be used as a means of justifying investment in water quality improvement. Examples of swimming in urban rivers in European cities were cited, such as Oslo, Berlin and Copenhagen. Conversely, there are inherent restrictions on access in the inner-city reach, due to safety and security concerns around Port of Melbourne activity.

Emergency access: Emergency access to the riverside land is also an important consideration. Access, particularly in the rural reach, needs to be maintained for firefighters, given the prominent history of bushfires in areas surrounding the Yarra River.

“The river itself has limited access for paddlers or anyone who wants to get right down to water level.”

Canoeing Victoria

“Walking-friendly neighbourhoods and urban spaces are essential to encourage and enable people to walk. Walking is associated with positive health outcomes, improved fitness and better physical, social and mental health.”

Victoria Walks

“Tourism uses such as recreational fishing, swimming or canoeing are activities with appeal for visitors. Suitable infrastructure along the river at public access points should be a consideration for future planning to support this activity in the best way to minimise the impact to the river.”

Yarra Ranges Tourism
Place of Traditional Owner cultural and heritage value

The Traditional Owners have a spiritual connection to the Yarra’s surrounding land and to the waterway. Twenty-eight submissions stressed that the Traditional Owner values and history of the river needs to be preserved and enhanced. The community needs to recognise, respect and reflect Traditional Owner areas of cultural significance.

“The cultural story of the Yarra and how it connects places and people should be reclaimed, elevated and celebrated in public consciousness, through media campaigns and education. Indigenous cultural history is the basis of this story and should inform future management and interpretation of the Yarra.”

Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

The river is a tourist destination with further room for growth

Twenty-seven submissions indicated that the Yarra’s tourism potential could be further enhanced to attract higher visitor numbers. This would help grow local businesses and employment. There is an opportunity to facilitate greater nature-based tourism activities along the River. These activities should aim to showcase the natural beauty of the Yarra River and also foster the growth of ancillary tourism experiences.

To grow, tourism ultimately needs investment and the appropriate supporting infrastructure, such as roads, trails and mobile phone coverage. The Yarra River helicopter flight path should also be preserved to provide multi-modal access and to service tourism destinations and opportunities.

There is potential to improve on-water tourism activities along the river by improving accompanying infrastructure including jetties for canoes.

The river’s strong relationship with Traditional Owner culture and history in the region could also support strong cultural tourism initiatives, thereby promoting Traditional Owner culture and practices in managing land.

“The Yarra River is just one of many natural assets in the region that could be further embellished as a product to support new reasons for visitor growth, facilitated by appropriate management programs, access and cultural interpretation in place.”

Yarra Ranges Tourism
Stewardship through education and environmental literacy

The broader community needs to be better informed about the qualities of the Yarra River and the important contribution it makes to social, economic and environmental processes, according to 20 submissions. It is important that the community develops a better appreciation of how the river relates to its wider catchment, the environmental, development and planning issues that affect it, and the cultural and social contribution it makes to the lives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Melburnians. This could be done through awareness-raising activities, environmental and cultural signage, environmental education and heritage/cultural tours.

Informing the community: An informed community is more likely to better care for the river and its surrounding environment. We can increase community awareness through education and cultivate a sense of environmental stewardship. This can act to reduce adverse impacts of recreational users (such as litter) as well as other users and land owners.

“Develop future citizens who will understand the need to continue to protect the Yarra and indeed other river systems and environments.”

Geography Teachers’ Association

“The workshops and community consultations highlighted the importance of the community increasing its understanding of river catchments and associated environmental, development and planning issues so that everyone can have an informed opinion to ensure sustainability in management.”

Geography Teachers’ Association

“Public education is essential to reduce adverse recreational, developmental and farming impacts on our waterways.”

Healesville Environment Watch Inc.

The river and its surrounding land make a significant economic contribution

Six submissions noted the need to recognise and foster the Yarra River’s significant contribution to Victoria’s agricultural and agritourism industries, particularly the rural reach.

Agriculture: Agriculture in the region includes wine making, gourmet food production, and cattle and sheep grazing. These industries rely on the river for supply of water for irrigation, stock and domestic use, and also its qualitative values for the attraction of visitors and tourists. There needs to be continued support for food production in the region by ensuring good water quality.

While the protection and enhancement of agricultural uses is important, a balance needs to be achieved to ensure these uses don’t have a detrimental effect on the river and its health. Agricultural run-off, including waste from animals and chemicals used in farming practices need to be managed. There was also concern about the diversion and extraction of water especially in the upper river reaches. Additionally, the upper reach needs to be protected from logging and a sustainable forestry plan needs to be devised.

“Farmers and landholders on the Yarra and its tributaries both reap from and give back to the river and its environment. Farmers rely on the Yarra and its tributaries for water for irrigation and stock and domestic purposes and at the same time manage the river’s riparian environment through pest, weed and fire management in addition to voluntary revegetation and fencing.”

Victorian Farmers Federation

“The output of agribusiness in the Yarra Valley is $824 million.”

Victorian Farmers Federation
A community vision and strategic plan that focuses on environmental health and waterway health is important to submitters (Figure 6). Governance was also a strong theme, particularly relating to the Yarra Strategic Plan and the designation of management responsibilities.

“We have been lucky enough to be the beneficiaries of far sighted and civic minded thinking, which led to the creation and management of our parks and waterways and protection of catchment areas for our water supply, as critically important to a city’s development. The opportunity to include this as fundamental to future development now lies with us.”

Friends of Banyule

Figure 6 – Themes mentioned for inclusion in a community vision and strategic plan

Q4: What would you like to see included in a vision for the Yarra River?

Q5: What elements would you like to see covered in the Yarra strategic plan?
Provide strategic direction and actions

Respondents asserted that a Yarra strategic plan should provide strategic direction and identify priority actions across a range of themes and issues. It should be used as the mechanism to capture the diversity of issues along the river, integrate the disparate management decisions affecting the river corridor, and coordinate implementation and delivery of actions. It should be outcome focused and should guide implementation. The scope of the plan should extend to the whole of the Yarra catchment to ensure issues can be targeted at their source. According to the submissions and workshops, the plan should cover these areas:

Amenity: The important role the river plays in enhancing liveability, particularly in the metropolitan setting, needs to be identified and further developed. Mechanisms to determine how best to assess ‘amenity’ need to be investigated and detailed, while opportunities to improve the amenity and lifestyle aspects of the river and its surrounding land need to be identified, prioritised and assigned to a delivery agency. This includes a strategic and coordinated approach to riparian infrastructure, including planning for recreation facilities, open space and general river access (trails and paths). When assessing amenity, the plan should recognise the different strengths and characteristics of the various river reaches. There were some suggestions for a ‘nested’ approach to planning for the river corridor. Reflecting the vision and based on the overarching strategic plan, separate plans could be prepared for each reach and for specific precincts within each reach.

Waterway and environmental health: Detail measures to improve waterway health including stormwater management (controlling inflows). Environmental health aspects, such as biodiversity and vegetation need to be protected and restored. Monitoring and reporting procedures on waterway health need to be established. Importantly, the plan and its justification for potential measures needs to be based on strong scientific and research evidence.

Economic activity: The plan needs to promote appropriate sustainable uses that foster economic activity and employment growth. Agricultural uses and agritourism are particularly prominent in the river’s rural reach. A value capture mechanism outlining ways new developments can contribute to the public realm, should also be investigated.

Traditional Owner recognition and cultural history: The plan should celebrate Traditional Owner history and the ongoing connection Traditional Owners have with the Yarra River and its surrounding land.

Heritage: Sites of heritage and cultural value should be identified and safeguarded. A cultural heritage awareness program could also operate in tandem with the plan. Examples of state-significant heritage sites identified in the submissions include Flinders Street Station, Dights Mill Site in Abbotsford and Chateau Yering.

Missing land links: Identify a mechanism for assessing gaps in the parkland network along the Yarra River and devise a method to acquire the strategically important land links. A review of Public Acquisition Overlays (PAOs) could be included in this assessment.

Developed with the community: Involve the general public and allow them to take ownership. Detail how the community can work with authorities to help with management and enhance the river’s values. Recognise the work done by owners in looking after land along the river.
Set priorities and implementation responsibilities

Submitters stated that after identifying actions and improvement measures, the plan needs to set priorities for their implementation. Actions for the period of the plan should be allocated to a responsible agency and given a timeframe for completion. The commitments and responsibilities of government agencies and councils should be articulated, including the standards their services aim to achieve.

While the legislation can play a role in long-term target setting, the plan should set shorter-term goals that support progress towards those longer-term targets in areas such as water quality and river health.

The plan should cover a 5-10 year period, and its vision should be more far sighted and aspirational in nature. The plan needs to be updated regularly.

The plan needs to be integrative and incorporated into other government strategies and policies, such as Melbourne Water’s Healthy Waterways Strategy. An integrative approach means that whole-of-government targets and goals can be set for the river, and allows for cohesive policy to address landscape-scale issues such as ecological health and recreation connectivity.

The plan needs to have longevity and gravitas. Implementation of the plan could be delivered through integration into the planning scheme (State Planning Policy Framework) although there were differing views as to what those mechanisms might be, for example, as an ‘Incorporated Document’ or as a ‘Reference Document’. However, it was also suggested that inclusion into the planning scheme makes the document inflexible because a planning scheme amendment would be required each time the plan was reviewed.

Respondents also proposed that the preparation of the plan should be required by legislation to ensure an ongoing commitment to improve the Yarra River and its environs.
Legislation

“...The challenge of the legislation is to build robustness and longevity into the arrangements. Part of that robustness will be that it delivers efficiencies of management rather than unnecessary duplication and that it distills community commitment to its river.”

**Yarra Riverkeeper Association**

**Accountability and role allocation**

Submitters expressed that legislation needs to clearly articulate functions and responsibilities of agencies within a new management model. This would ensure that delivery agencies have a clear role in implementation activities. Similarly, appropriate legal and enforcement powers need to be designated to ensure key objectives and projects are implemented and followed through. Enforcement powers are also required to take action against unauthorised works that present risks to the health of the river, such as the clearing of vegetation, retaining walls, decking, and rockwork on the riverbank.

Legislation should set long-term river targets, particularly relating to river health, including water quality, healthy ecosystems and biological diversity.

The legislation should also detail the frequency at which a Yarra strategic plan should be prepared, perhaps every 5-10 years.

The strategic position of the Yarra Plan needs to be supported by legislation. The legislation should ensure that the management agencies align their priorities, policies and implementation activities with the strategic plan, thereby improving coordination and integration.

**Monitoring and reporting**

Many submitters contended that the process for monitoring the plan and its effectiveness needs to be embedded in legislation. Monitoring of the river and implementation of the plan has to be conducted by an independent body, separate from the service delivery entity. The monitoring would ensure that the plan is being delivered in an effective manner and that statutory entities are fulfilling their requirements highlighted in the legislation.

It was suggested that reporting on the plan is tabled regularly in Parliament. The Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria was often cited as an appropriate independent oversight and monitoring agency.

At its core, strong monitoring and reporting pathways foster accountability and transparency, both important characteristics of good governance.

**Enduring and informed by the community**

Importantly, both workshop participants and submitters agreed that the legislation needs to give longevity to the new management model, to ensure it can have a lasting legacy. Longevity and implementation into legislation is important to ensure that long-term objectives can be realised and that measures to protect the Yarra River are not susceptible to changing government agendas or political cycles.

The process of developing the new legislation should be transparent to the public to ensure support and in order to address its impact on various stakeholders.
There was strong support for a new management model with:

- an integrated approach - coordination and alignment of the existing agencies and players along the river
- Traditional Owner inclusion and community participation
- be enduring
- have adequate enforcement powers
- have a focus on implementation and be outcome focused

Many submitters also warned against creating a model that would instigate further complications and lead to the duplication of roles.

Q8: What are your thoughts on the options for a new management model for the Yarra River and its environs?

Q9: What are your thoughts about establishing a new organisation to oversee development and monitor delivery of the Yarra Strategic Plan?

Q10: Are there any other management models/options we should consider?
Focus on implementation

A new management model needs to ensure that the responsible agency/agencies are results driven and focused on implementing the plan and its overriding vision. The new management model needs to give effect to the vision and strategic plan as well as coordinate all the various agencies and stakeholders involved in managing the river corridor. This sentiment was strongly supported in all the workshops and in the submissions.

A new management model needs to provide clarity of responsibilities as well as alignment between all agencies and bodies operating in the Yarra River catchment. It is important that the new management model has the breadth to cover the whole Yarra River catchment rather than just the river corridor. Broader coverage ensures that measures, particularly relating to storm-water management, can be treated at their source. Submitters believe that the entity should be tasked with an oversight role and should have the ability to coordinate the various functions and activities affecting the river.

Adequate funding

Workshop participants and submitters highlighted that one of the main limitations in achieving real and long-term improvements will be funding. In order to be effective, a management entity needs to be supported by adequate resourcing and funding. The entity needs secured and ongoing funding to enable it to undertake and complete long-term projects. There was some discussion, but no consensus, on the most appropriate source for this funding from the submissions. The Melbourne Metropolitan Parks Charge (raised through Parks Victoria) and the Waterways and Drainage Charge (raised through Melbourne Water) were suggested as potential funding avenues. There was also mention of funding from council rates and the Environmental Protection Fund. New innovative sources of finance should also be explored.

The new management model needs to have adequate legal authority and clout to be able to enforce policies. This includes responding to and dealing with non-compliance in policy.

In line with funding, a new entity needs to be properly resourced with professional staff from a range of disciplines. The expertise and experience of organisations currently operating and managing the river and its environs should be harnessed. Ultimately, resourcing needs to match the ambition to deliver on sustainable and long-term outcomes.
Traditional Owner and community representation

There was strong support for involving Traditional Owners as partners in any new management model. Traditional Owners’ history and intrinsic knowledge of the river and its values needs to be respected and drawn upon to work towards appropriate cultural and environmental outcomes for the river.

The new management model also needs to build in community representation and involvement. Community representation would ensure a new management model is in a position to:

• include local communities in developing site-specific or river reach appropriate solutions
• draw on the knowledge and practical experience of community groups and the public in regards to management activities
• ensure the community is involved/represented in strategic decision making.

Composition of a new management model

While there was strong support for a new management approach, respondents were more evenly divided in regards to the composition of the new management model: a new body, a new body established within an existing agency, or a new coordinating committee and an existing body.

Those in favour of a coordinating committee or sub-entity within an existing organisation argued that creating a new entity would bring risk of duplication, complexity and inefficiency by adding another layer of bureaucracy. Respondents asserted that organisations such as Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and DELWP already performed many of the functions that a new management model would have to undertake. Furthermore, the technical and delivery expertise that a new management model would require already resides in these organisations, and would have to be redeployed in a new management model in any case.

Those in favour of a new entity supported it on the grounds that existing organisations were not able to resolve the challenges of fragmented management, even though they are aware of them. They also believed that a management model needs to focus on the Yarra River and its issues and not be distracted by other potentially competing priorities. Some respondents felt that an independent entity accountable to Parliament would have the authority and ability to deliver successful coordination.

It should be noted that there was a significant number of respondents who were ambivalent or did not adequately address the question of a new management model and entity. Similarly submitters often did not differentiate between the entity who should prepare the Yarra Strategic Plan and who should take the lead in service delivery.

There was strong support for an independent monitoring and audit agency to assess the service delivery of the plan.

Transferable

The new management model should be transferable to Melbourne’s other major urban waterways, such as the Maribyrnong River and Werribee River. While these rivers have distinctly different features, characteristics, and challenges to the Yarra River, the management model should be able to be applied to these waterways. This point was particularly strong in the workshop with the Maribyrnong River councils, where there was also a call for the implementation of stronger planning controls along the Maribyrnong River.
Acknowledgement of participants

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning would like to thank all submitters and workshop participants for their important contribution towards the protecting the Yarra River program. Community and stakeholder perspective was paramount to forming of the Yarra MAC’s recommendations and advice, and also an important resource in Government’s consideration and uptake of these recommendations.

Table 6: Stakeholder and public participation program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>No of people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Yarra Corridor Local Government</td>
<td>Thursday 28 July, 2016 (9am–11am)</td>
<td>Cliftons Melbourne, 440 Collins St</td>
<td>Officers from: Banyule City Council, City of Boroondara, City of Melbourne, City of Yarra, Hobsons Bay City Council, Nillumbik Shire Council and Stonnington City Council</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Maribyrnong Corridor Local Government</td>
<td>Thursday 28 July, 2016 (1pm-3pm)</td>
<td>Cliftons Melbourne, 440 Collins St</td>
<td>Officers from Brimbank City Council, City of Moonee Valley, Hume City Council and Maribyrnong City Council</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Government agency workshop</td>
<td>Friday 29 July, 2016 (9:30am–11:30am)</td>
<td>Donkey Wheel House, 673 Bourke St</td>
<td>Officers from: Aboriginal Affairs Victoria; Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; Environment Protection Authority; Heritage Victoria; Melbourne Water; Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group; Parks Victoria; Places Victoria; Sustainability Victoria; VicRoads and Yarra Valley Water</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Industry and peak body workshop</td>
<td>Friday 29 July, 2016 (12:30pm–2:00pm)</td>
<td>Donkey Wheel House, 673 Bourke St</td>
<td>Representatives from: Australian Institute for Landscape Architects, Australian Water Association, Bicycle Network Victoria, CRC for Water Sensitive Cities, Geography Teachers Association of Victoria, Housing Industry Association, Marsden Jacob, Municipal Association of Victoria, Planning Institute of Australia, River Basin Management Society, South East Water, Stormwater Victoria, The Public Land Consultancy, Victorian Farmers Federation, Victoria Walks and Yarra River Keepers Association</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Listening post 1 (rural reach)</td>
<td>Saturday 30 July, 2016 (10am–1pm)</td>
<td>Next to The Vic, Warburton Main Street</td>
<td>Members of the public</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Participants</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Sunday 31 July, 2016 (10am–1pm)</td>
<td>Hall Reserve, The Esplanade, Clifton Hill</td>
<td>Members of the public</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Monday 1 August, 2016 (6pm–8pm)</td>
<td>Reading Room, Fitzroy Town Hall Napier St, Fitzroy</td>
<td>Members of the public</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tuesday 2 August (6pm–8pm)</td>
<td>The Centre Ivanhoe, 275 Upper Heidelberg Rd, Ivanhoe</td>
<td>ACCA Landcare, Waterwatch, Friends of the Plenty River and Diamond Creek, Collingwood Abbotsford Residents Association (CARA), Collingwood Abbotsford Residents Association (CARA), Friends of Banyule, Warringal Conservation Society, Riverlands Conservation Society, Friends of Wilson Reserve, Friends of Banyule, Canoeing Victoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Thursday 4 August, 2016 (6pm–8pm)</td>
<td>The Memo, 235 Maroondah Hwy Healesville</td>
<td>Chum Creek Landcare, Mt Toolebewong and District Landcare, Yarra Waterways and Yarra River Keepers Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Monday 8 August, 2016 (10am–1pm)</td>
<td>Birrarung Marr, Lower terrace</td>
<td>Members of the public</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tuesday 9 August, 2016 (6pm–8pm)</td>
<td>Collingwood Senior Citizens Hall, Eddy Court, Abbotsford</td>
<td>Recruited by Stable Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Wednesday 10 August, 2016 (11am–12.15pm)</td>
<td>Canterbury Girls School, 16 Mangarra Rd, Canterbury</td>
<td>Year 9 Geography Students</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Wednesday 10 August, 2016 (6pm–8pm)</td>
<td>Yarra Glen Memorial Hall, 4S Bell St, Yarra Glen</td>
<td>Recruited by Stable Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Thursday 11 August, 2016 (6pm–8pm)</td>
<td>St Margaret’s Anglican Church, 81 Pitt St, Eltham</td>
<td>Recruited by Stable Research</td>
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Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung) Community Views
Figure 3: The Yarra River and its catchment
Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung) Community Views

Rural Yarra reach