



IMAGINE  
THE YARRA

# DRAFT YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

## PUBLIC CONSULTATION

### SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

<b>Submission Number:</b>	214257
<b>Name (Individual/Organisation):</b>	Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network
<b>Attachments:</b>	Attachment 1 – Written submission

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## **Submission to the Melbourne Water Draft Yarra Strategy**

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Chair of the MMHN  
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Personal assessment

I commend the intent of Melbourne Water (MW) in producing this Strategy offering a long overdue geographical assessment of what must be considered or what changes are necessary in relation to the better management of the entire Yarra river corridor. This Strategy will, as I understand it, inform the Yarra/Birrarung Act in due course. Without doubt, the Yarra River is an invaluable public asset and an immensely important one to the citizens of Victoria.

However, the MW Draft Yarra Strategy requires revision in both its **scope** and its **content**.

As the primary responsible authority managing the Yarra waterways, MW has an obligation to see that the final version of the Yarra Strategy is comprehensive, properly represents the views of informed stakeholders and is historically accurate.

On close reading of the Draft reveals that MW has not yet succeeded in this task.

My submission refers primarily to the Inner City Reach section of the Draft, making reference also to the various **introductory statements** and describes essentially two **serious omissions**.

### **Scope**

I commend the MW approach which provides due recognition in the public realm to both Aboriginal presence and the natural environment throughout the length of the river corridor. A focus on these aspects is long overdue and I strongly support this.

While supporting this intent, quite rightly to focus on two important formative or contributory elements within the river corridor 'story', I note with dismay that another equally important contributory element of the 'story' is neglected, or actually omitted. No matter how worthy the focus. Balance not bias, is required in this Strategy. A regrettable and unnecessarily exclusive focus appears to underpin the entire Draft.

Given the plethora of evidence of the rivers' having a rich maritime heritage, it is a concern that the Draft fails to adequately cover this formative element of the river 'story'. This element is also entitled to attention and due recognition.

Recognition of the Aboriginal presence along the corridor is long overdue BUT this does not mean that historical accuracy within the 'story' should be ignored. MW is risking its own credibility if it persists in largely ignoring the formative role played by maritime heritage on the river corridor, including the estuary and related waterways.

It fails to incorporate relevant information on the rich maritime heritage along primarily the Inner City Reaches of the river corridor. Indeed where there is scant reference to maritime heritage in the Draft, these are for the most part, historically inaccurate.

### **Balance and Responsibilities**

In part this lack of balance may be a consequence of the limitations of legislative control existing for MW.

I recall when officers from MW first presented the Draft Strategy to a Councillor Forum at Town Hall. At that time, when I queried the absence of any reference to the Yarra Estuary, and Victoria Harbour, MW officers remarked that these waterways were outside their purview and that Parks Victoria (PV) was Responsible Authority for these waterways. It became clear to me that MW was well aware of difficulties arising from this bureaucratic tangle. e.g. the senseless legal demarcations, competing responsibilities. I specifically inquired what ameliorative action MW taking legislative terms found to address such practical impediments to MW work. The answer from MW was that there was no action. Such MW 'inertia' is professionally and politically, disappointing. It does not serve the people of the Yarra well. The public should expect, at the very least, advocacy by MW. It is, admittedly one authority of many, surely as the predominant responsible authority on waterway management is MW should proactively join with others concerned citizens in seeking such reform. Months later now that this Draft continues to 'acommodate' or function within an obviously flawed governance system.

### **Stakeholder Representation**

I was dismayed to note the limited stakeholder representation in the Yarra Collaboration Committee (p10). I presume MW selected this committee. Regrettably and inexplicably it failed to include key stakeholder representatives. Eg. Maritime heritage representation and maritime commercial industry representation. Yet the Yarra Collaboration Committee was charged with providing representation and presumably wide-ranging expertise. This lack of representation may account for the absence of due recognition for maritime heritage and due recognition for maritime commerce and related industries within Draft. Without genuinely comprehensive representation, any Draft Strategy it is inevitably flawed.

My experience over many years in public life is that when public in-put via submissions **post-draft**, the likelihood of new information being incorporated into the final document is slim. Whereas as information arising from consultations **pre-draft** is likely to remain without changes, no matter how valuable. I trust MW will prove me wrong.

In relation to Aboriginal presence and the environment (both of which are of course of critical importance), reference to the role of maritime heritage and the modern of maritime

sector as contributing to the 'story' of the waterways - Yarra, Estuary, Victoria Harbour, former billabongs, dredging and shallow lakes etc. - remains cursory at best.

Curiously (p.4) it falls to a member of the Aboriginal community to make the link to maritime heritage, an element that MW seems, in essence, to have failed to grasp. This is captured by Community Member Lisa Roberts who poignantly describes the estuary "*a special place for me is the Yarra meets the sea where my Aboriginal mother lived and my English Father worked.....*" and further on same page the sub-heading '*The Birrarung: our lifeblood: our shared history, our river (my underlining)*'. To respectfully and accurately reference maritime heritage along the river, does not to deny Aboriginal heritage at all.

## **Content**

I note with frustration (p.7) within the 10 year Performance Objective List "*A Culturally diverse river Corridor*" ... "*acknowledging and commemorating the rich heritage of the Birrarung and its 'stories'*". The Draft does not actually tell the 'stories'. MW avoids this stated objective when it fails to properly acknowledge the maritime heritage and the critical importance of the maritime sector today. Maritime activity on the river corridor has been, as still is, critical to the prosperity of Melbourne, regional Victoria and the nation. This fact is irrefutable.

I will cite further equally regrettable examples:

- "*The Yarra River and its lands have always been pivotal in the lives of traditional owners and have also shaped the European settlement*". (p. 11) Scant recognition indeed of the vital formative role played by maritime activity, specifically trade but not limited to trade on the lower reaches Yarra. The text continues with "It (i.e. the Yarra) *provided a reliable water supply*" and a "*focal point for the settlement, commerce, and industry*". Clearly that drafters are either simply unaware of the immense scale of maritime activity and trade on the Yarra – or have an particular focus which excludes historical accuracy.
- I note reference to litter, sewerage and pollution (p.14). See my earlier comment on MW apparent inertia around addressing the bureaucratic tangle, which impedes better management, the environmental challenges of the river. Parks Victoria (PV) are the responsible authority litter and do it badly. For example, PV continue to park floating rubbish collection eqpt each weekend in front of Melbourne's key tourist site (off Southbank, and Fed Square) totally without regard for the tourist operators on the river. Why do PV persist with this? Because they can? In order to effect change MW has an obligation within the Draft Strategy to advocate rationalising or streamlining bureaucratic demarcations. It is pointless for the MW Strategy to make reference litter, sewerage and pollution unless it is prepared to actually step-up and manage the problem namely litter AND the bureaucracy).
- The Draft (p.34) states "*it is essential to understand post-colonial History*" and yet this clearly has no intention of actually doing so. Indeed it is also essential that in "*understanding post-colonial History*" does not necessitate denial of the role of maritime activity on the Yarra. Indeed it is entirely necessary to understand and

acknowledge the post-colonial impact on the Aboriginal Communities. However, this should not preclude a comprehensive inclusive understanding of life, pre and post-colonial, all of the “stories” of the river.

- Reference to “*Federation Square, MCG, Yarra Flats and Confluence of the Maribyrnong*” (p.37). Indeed each area along the Yarra corridor cited has having Aboriginal significance, yet each area cited also has rich maritime heritage significance with a social and cultural value not recognized adequately in this Draft Strategy.
- Reference to the culturally diverse river corridor (p.52) ... “*improved trail networks and connections to the river*”. MW notes but does not follow the example of the City of Melbourne River Strategy which awards due recognition to the significance of maritime trade as well as the of remaining evidence of maritime heritage elements
- Reference to “*Quality Parklands for growing population. Improving the river parklands....*” (p. 54.) The Draft seriously underplays these elements of the river “story”.

Point 2. Omits to reference to the various ‘pocket parks’ along Northbank being developed by the CoM. eg. Enterprise Park, Rebecca’s Walk, Seafarers Rest Park.

Point 6. Refers to “*park infrastructure*” but fails to refer to heritage infrastructure - wharves, bridges, vaults, Duke & Orr Dry Dock, Electric Crane, Good Sheds etc

Points 10 & 11. Refer to “berthing” yet makes no reference to the heritage fleet nor to tourism, ferries, taxis etc. Nor is there reference to continuous dredging, in the past and today, which has continually alters the river. Nor is there reference to the ‘turning basin’ or to Victoria Harbour.

- Reference to Federation Square within the “*Inner City Reach*” (p.112) but no reference at all to maritime heritage infrastructure between the Square and the river.
- Reference to Docklands and Fisherman’s Bend and again no reference to maritime heritage infrastructure – Vaults, wharves, piers, bridge etc .Nor the 19<sup>th</sup> century engineering marvels the Coode Canal, dredging, turning circle, draining the swamps and Victoria Harbour.
- Reference to the river as the “*centrepiece of Melbourne’s CBD*” (p.115) without any reference to the maritime heritage infrastructure on the river corridor. e.g. vaults, wharves, trail, piers, artefacts etc
- Reference to CoM Greenline trail (p. 122) but ignores all references within the CoM River Strategy of maritime heritage infrastructure. The MW concern appears to be limited to landscaping and informational signage, and ignores the evidence of maritime heritage.
- Reference to the place on the river where salt water met “*fresh water*” (p.122) the stone ‘weir’ above which river waters became fresh, the fording place used by Aboriginal tribes, the site of the demolished waterfall, the point where navigation

upstream became impossible. Inexplicably the Draft does not actually name the park now close to this place. Nor is there reference to the plethora of river crossings before Princes Bridge was built, or the transport 'industry' which evolved around early river crossings, the ferries, punts, barges etc. All legitimate 'stories' of the river yet omitted from the Draft. Cultural sensitivities around colonial settlement probably account for such ambiguity but this is not acceptable at the expense of historical accuracy etc. Reference to the Yarra as a '*transport corridor*' yet no mention of the Yarra being a such a corridor for trade from the Bay to the city. Nor the importance of the bridges crossing the Yarra.

- Reference to "*improved use and navigation*" (p.122) yet no reference to the 19<sup>th</sup> century evidence all the along the river of maritime transport and trade. Nor reference to the extraordinary 19<sup>th</sup> century civil engineering work - canals, bridges, dredging the water courses and draining swamps.

### **Conclusion**

The MW Yarra Strategy is a document with admirable intent.

It has many strengths but it is obviously not acceptable in its current form for the reasons I have outlined. It requires revision – and a re-think about scope, focus and genuine stakeholder consultations to fill the obvious 'knowledge gaps' within it. Currently the 'story' is not comprehensive. Obviously the Strategy cannot adequately recognize aspects of the river corridor, which the Draft seems to deliberately deny.

Given that my submission, and others submitted in good faith by the community after considerable effort, I trust that the final version of the Strategy will indeed reflect views submitted and incorporate additional information provided.

The final Strategy must ensure that all of the "stories" of the Yarra, its formative elements, are understood, celebrated and sustained.

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