



IMAGINE
THE YARRA

DRAFT YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Submission Number:	215062
Name (Individual/Organisation):	Friends of the Diamond Creek (Eltham Lower Park)
Attachments:	Attachment 1 – Written submission

Submission to the Draft Yarra Strategic Plan 2020

From: **Friends of the Diamond Creek (Eltham Lower Park) Inc.**

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Who we are:

Our group has been undertaking revegetation work since 1991, along the Diamond Creek in Eltham Lower Park, where it forms a confluence with the Yarra River. Whilst our group might be small in number we are large in passion. Among our members are a number of environmental experts and many ordinary citizens, who are passionate about the environment of the area and who actually are prepared to regularly undertake the physical work.

Our local Government area is Nillumbik – ‘the Green Wedge shire’ and our work and education is overseen and advised by Nillumbik Council Environment staff.

The draft Yarra River Strategic Plan 2020 is an important document given its timeline in an era of climate change.

When we first started in 1991 we planted in both Spring and Autumn seasons. However about 10-12 years ago, we changed to only Winter planting, in response to the poor survival rates in Spring planting during the drier and hotter summers and the unstable rainfall affecting the viability of Autumn planting .

We agree with most of the Performance Objectives and Options and the document as a whole however we do have three main concerns.

Firstly,

The document as a whole, has a strong emphasis on the river and how humans should value it and feel connected to and have access to it for a variety of admirable reasons but, and there is often a but, there is a need for a far stronger emphasis throughout the document on preserving and enhancing the environment values of the Yarra River and its tributaries.

Talk of protecting natural landscapes and tree canopy is all well and good but are motherhood type statements without specific Performance Objectives ensuring the environmental health and wellbeing of the river. Enhancing and protecting the environmental future of the river should be paramount; the document appears to value the river for human pleasure and well-being. At this point in time human survival does not depend of the river. Too much use of and access to the river will destroy the very existence of the eco systems that the river supports.

There is an inherent conflict of interest between strengthening the environmental values of the Yarra River for future generations and ‘improving access and visual connection to the Yarra River’ as stated on P106 Lower Plenty-Eltham Parklands.

Also on p 106 ‘There is great potential to improve recreational trails and access*and offer new experiences*’.

Secondly,

The axiom 'be careful what you wish for' comes to mind in relation to Eltham Lower Park especially when *offering new experiences* .

The well-loved Diamond Valley Miniature Railway operates out of Eltham Lower Park in the area of the park that has sporting facilities and children's playgrounds. However Eltham Lower Park is a large park with two specific and separate zones.

One is intensely active and the other, called Lenister Farm, is over a ridge, parallel to the Yarra River. Here there is an oasis of calm and passive enjoyment of the environment and the natural world beside the Yarra River reached by a bitumen shared track leading to a viewing platform at the confluence of the Diamond Creek and Yarra River. In this area there is also a small wetland. This section of the Eltham Lower Park offers a range of passive experiences appreciated by the many people who enjoy the shared path along Yarra River and appreciate the natural world around them. A rare experience in busy suburbia.

However the Diamond Valley Railway is continuing to pursue their extensive expansion plans to double the size of their track layout and so destroy the passive area of the park. This proposal would involve regularly run rideable miniature trains within fenced in track sections alongside the Yarra River in this passive Lenister Farm area.

In order to actually reach this valued space, the fenced track will need to be installed through the area, alongside the Diamond Creek, that our group have lovingly looking after for nearly 30 years. Such a significant physical intrusion would severely impact the environmental values within this section of Eltham Lower Park and would decimate the results of all the hard work and commitment we have voluntarily contributed to improving our environment.

This local issue of concern to us has been raised in this submission because on:

P 106 of the Draft Yarra River Strategic Plan

Under the heading;

Opportunities for future projects and alignment:

Lower Plenty-Eltham Parklands the document states:

"There is great potential to improve recreational trails and access,.....and offer new experiences for community enjoyments of the Yarra River"

And ends however :

*"Implement initiatives in the Nillumbik Shire Council's **Eltham Lower Park Master plan Review**"*

Nillumbik Shire Council's Eltham Lower Park Master plan Review is **not** a publicly available or easily available document. The Master Plan was completed in 2008 following an extensive public and transparent process. A desktop review was apparently completed in 2014 but on asking, this week for a copy, the Manager Leisure Services was unable to find it on the Council's website and has asked Governance to find one.

A further desktop review was initiated in 2019 and our group had one meeting with a council officer and the Ward Councillor regarding any concerns/suggestions we have in the park but again since then no further communication on this process or documentation is publicly available.

Since the 2008 document was released, no opportunity has arisen for a full and transparent community consultation for the future of Eltham Lower Park.

What is the status of *Nillumbik Shire Council's Eltham Lower Park Master Plan Review* being referenced in the draft Yarra River document, as it has not been subject to a full and transparent public process?

And so, how can the final point of **Opportunities for future projects and alignment** be realised when no mention is made of which review is to be the basis of implementation – the review apparently completed in 2014 or the one initiated in 2019?

Finally

The Membership of the Yarra Collaboration Committee, with relevant Councils and Authorities is a composition of groups that could be considered to potentially have inherent conflicts of interest.

Nillumbik Council, along with other Councils, is on this committee. In referencing the implementation of the *Nillumbik Shire Council's Eltham Lower Park Master Plan Review*, in the draft Yarra River Strategic Plan 2020, when the community of Nillumbik is unaware of what the document contains, one could question what will be the outcome for our community.

The Friends of the Diamond Creek suggest that the last point listed in **Opportunities for future projects and alignment: *Implement initiatives in the Nillumbik Shire Council's Eltham Lower Park Master Plan Review***

Be deleted, as the State Government and Melbourne Water would be committing themselves to an unknown document with unknown outcomes for the community and the future of the Yarra River.

Even if the wording can be changed by the addition of the date of the Review document under question, that move would still not address the issue of the lack of wide and transparent community consultation and community knowledge and acceptance of either document.

An inherent conflict also appears in the emphasis in the document on human use of the river- could it be called exploitation - of a natural resource, when it should be firstly considering the environmental future of the Yarra River, with government and community acting as custodians committed to ensuring its survival. The emphasis on the human use of the river may well be in conflict with immediate and longer-term environmental needs.

Friends of the Diamond Creek (Eltham Lower Park) acknowledge and thank you for the opportunity to express our opinions.

27.03.20