



IMAGINE
THE YARRA

DRAFT YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Submission Number:	215046
Name (Individual/Organisation):	Yarra Riverkeeper Association
Attachments:	Attachment 1 – Written submission

Draft Yarra Strategic Plan Submission

As Chairman of the Board of the Yarra Riverkeepers Association, my submission totally supports our Association's formal submission, sent under separate cover.

I have, for the purposes of clarity, included some of the key points of that submission below:

- This opportunity to alter the trajectory of the health of the Yarra River will not come again, at least not in our lifetimes. The report by the Victorian Commissioner of Environmental Sustainability shows that 17 out of the 25 environmental indicators are deteriorating. The trajectory is sharply downwards. This is what the Yarra Strategic Plan must address.
- I strongly support the aspirations of the Yarra Strategic Plan. The plan defends the river against the twin pressures of climate change and urbanisation, 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 Yarra Strategic Plan promotes the use of modern governance – collaboration and coordination – to help address issues on the Yarra. That is the way to go. But does the Yarra Strategic Plan include mechanisms of sufficient strength to ensure collaboration and coordination? It seems not. The plan, clearly, is too high level and aspirational in its wording; it needs more detail and more specific outcomes.
- We need to make the Performance Objectives SMART goals that reference the environmental indicators in 'State of the Yarra and its Parklands' report as a baseline to measure the improvement of the action instituted over the next 10 years. These Performance Objectives and Actions need to be time-bound and cumulative. They also need to clearly and adequately address the impact of climate change and urbanisation, that includes the effect of the rapid expansion of

hard surfaces such as roads and roofs on our waterways and the consequent stormwater pollution. This pollution kills that macroinvertebrates that are the base of the food chain.

- It is critical that the plan recognizes the conflict between disturbance and habitat fragmentation on the one hand and access to the river on the other. Suitable planning tools need to be included in the plan to clearly define what is to be protected and where activity nodes are appropriate.
- The Yarra Strategic Plan has been prepared by the Yarra Collaboration Committee (p 4 & p 10 of the Draft Yarra Strategic Plan) and not, as required under the legislation, by the lead agency, Melbourne Water. This committee has an inherent conflict of interest, and the plan reflects what is currently being done, rather than what is intended to be delivered under the Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act.

More personally, my perception is that the Yarra Strategic Plan has been hijacked by the Yarra Collaboration Committee, from Melbourne Water. With respect, the members of the Yarra Collaboration Committee are mainly lower-level people at councils, without the authority to make decisions. The Yarra Collaboration Committee is, simply, too large and unwieldy to function with integrity and purpose; they have ignored the need to collaborate with their communities, as required under the Act. Due to the unwieldy and fragmented nature of the Yarra Collaboration Committee, the Yarra Strategic Plan has been delayed, time and again.

Given this once-in-a-lifetime (well, ours anyway) opportunity, the Yarra Strategic Plan needs to encompass bold thinking; Melbourne Water, as the lead agency under the Act is best placed to provide such leadership, with the Birrarung Council, as the 'Voice of the River' reviewing their work and providing feedback as required.

Warwick Leeson OAM.