



IMAGINE
THE YARRA

DRAFT YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Submission Number:	215093
Name (Individual/Organisation):	Port Places
Attachments:	Attachment 1 – Written submission

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the draft Yarra Strategic Plan.

About Port Places

Port Places is a project committed to observing and documenting the changing places of the lower Yarra in Melbourne - including Port Melbourne, Fishermans Bend and Docklands - at www.porplaces.com. The project commenced in 2013.

Port Places is vitally concerned with all the inter-connecting dimensions of healthy and liveable cities including healthy waterways, biodiversity, walkability and rideability, history and heritage.

Port Places is also engaged with the historic, ongoing and future relationship of these places with the Port of Melbourne.

Submission Basis

The long awaited and anticipated draft Yarra Strategic Plan (YSP) is a blow to the places with which Port Places is most concerned – Port Melbourne and Fishermans Bend - as they are excluded from the scope of the plan.

There is a contradiction at the heart of the legislation and the plan. It claims to be an Act and a Plan for the whole River, but it's not. The significant exclusion of the area managed by the Port completely undermines the intent and purpose of the Act which is to treat the River as one living entity from source to mouth.

We acknowledge that this exclusion is embedded in the legislation itself, the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong) Act 2017, an exclusion which then flows through into the draft YSP.

The 50 year community vision embraces the whole River, in the spirit if not the letter of the Act.

The YSP enumerates the great pressures the River is facing: from a hotter climate, reduced rainfall and increased population pressure. We submit that the actions in the plan are not strong enough to respond to those pressures and achieve the performance objectives within 10 years.

The Performance Objectives

1. A healthy river and lands

- The vastly improved management of urban stormwater is fundamental to any prospect of the plan achieving its objectives.
- The plan should enact the recommendations of the MAC on stormwater as a priority.
- All local governments should be encouraged to elevate the importance of integrated water management in their projects and programmes to ensure that rain falling in their catchment is either captured, re-used or enters the River in a cleansed condition.
- The nexus between rain and stormwater pollution needs to be broken through pursuing the circular economy, the introduction of CDL and ceasing the use of polystyrene.

- Increasing the biodiversity values of the riparian zone along the length of the River, as well as in its inner urban is essential for healthy river lands.

Recommendation

- Implement the actions of the MAC on stormwater as a priority
- Rather than treating litter as an 'end of pipe' problem embrace the circular economy

2. A culturally diverse river corridor

- We fully support and acknowledge the grounding of this plan and its co-development with the Wurrundjeri Woi Wurrung, and acknowledge with respect the primacy of the River's health to their wellbeing.
- The plan acknowledges the significance of the confluence of the Yarra and the Maribyrnong to the Wurrundjeri Woi Wurrung and yet there is no further reference to it in the plan.
- While the plan acknowledges the reality that the River was fundamental to the foundation of Melbourne, it is completely silent on actions and initiatives relating to post-settlement history.
- Changing the course of the Yarra River following Sir John Coode's recommendations in the 1880s was one of the most significant post settlement historical interventions on the River - along with the removal of the Falls. This audacious act of engineering warrants acknowledgement and interpretation for its implications for the Wurrundjeri Woi Wurrung as well as for the colony. While Coode's Canal protected the colony from flooding and enabled improved navigation, it destroyed the rich wetlands of the Wurrundjeri Woi Wurrung and Yaluket Weelam of the Boonwurrung..
- Stories from the history of the River can inform, educate and inspire. The history of the River is continuous and ongoing like the River itself, rather than just a matter to shine a light on from time to time.
- The fact that people swam in the River both before and after settlement reminds us that it was once possible to swim in the Yarra and can be possible again. The litany of stories of the ill treatment of the River followed by changing attitudes and practices from the 1980s onwards are instructive, part of the narrative on our evolving relationship with the River.
- The social history of the River is rich and warrants much more attention.

Recommendation

- Introduce a section in the final plan on valuing, recording and interpreting the post settlement shared history of the River.

3. Quality parklands for a growing population

- The concept of the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands is strongly supported.
- The Plan acknowledges that there will be significant pressure on the Yarra Parklands in future.
- Port Melbourne people who grew up in the 1950s had a very close relationship with the River which is now obscured and denied by the expansion of Webb Dock.
- Opportunities **must** be taken to expand the scope of the GYUP for the benefit of the future residential communities of Fishermans Bend.
- Opportunities should be taken to facilitate continuous River access for pedestrians and cyclists. The Jim Stynes Bridge is a brilliant example of turning a blight and a difficulty into a wonderful piece of urban design.
- We strongly support continuous pedestrian and bicycling links along the River corridor but it is also important that each local government adjoining the River examine the access ways to the River.



Fig 1: pedestrian access from the Montague precinct, Fishermans Bend to the Yarra River at South Wharf

- The only public access to the River south of the Bolte Bridge is Westgate Park with its rich biodiverse hinterland.
- Westgate Park and Stony Creek were originally envisaged in the 1980s as connected parklands on either side of the River, in recognition of the fact that there was less public open space available than upstream.
- If the Act is to give effect to 'source to mouth' the Yarra River estuary warrants attention in the plan.

Recommendation

- Westgate Park be added to the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands.
- Stony Creek be added to the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands
- Consider not only the access along the Yarra River but encouraging local governments to facilitate access **to** the River as a design response

4. Protecting the natural beauty of the Yarra River corridor

- in spite of controls being in place in the City of Melbourne planning scheme to protect the Yarra River from overshadowing in the central city, these controls have repeatedly been breached in the interests of other objectives such as affordable housing. The consequence is a heavily shadowed River which reduces amenity and river health.

Other points

- It is disappointing that at least the conceptual basis of the Decision Making Framework is not available for review. The framework needs to strongly align with the Commissioner for Sustainability's reporting requirements to facilitate meaningful reporting at the ten year mark. The Commissioner's *State of the Yarra and its Parklands* (2018) identified poor quality data as an impediment to meaningful reporting. This has to be a priority in the final plan.

- While the continuation of the coordination committee is welcome, an integrated approach to the management of the River is a basic and legitimate community expectation. It should be a given rather than an achievement of modern governance. It is how the YSP drives local government and agency strategic plans and budgets that will determine the success or failure of the plan.
- The role attributed to the Birrarung Council seems unduly passive.

Conclusion

We acknowledge the energy and drive that led to the adoption of the legislation, the development of the community vision and the preparation of the draft YSP. It has been three massive years of work.

That energy needs to be sustained into the implementation phase by having a strong lead driver for the plan.

Some means **has** to be found of including the estuary and parklands downstream of the Bolte Bridge within the scope of the Plan while respecting the Port's right to operate. Westgate Park needs to be incorporated within the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands.

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29 March 2020

