



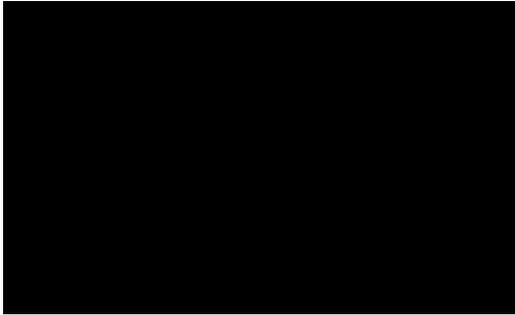
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THE YARRA

DRAFT YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Submission Number:	YSP21
Name (Individual/Organisation):	Yarra Riverkeeper Association member
Attachments:	Attachment 1 – Written submission



29 March 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to provide feedback on the draft Yarra Strategic Plan.

I. Background

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a New Zealand-born photographer and writer based in Melbourne. I am also a member of the Yarra Riverkeeper Association.

I emigrated to Melbourne in February 2013, following the Canterbury and Christchurch earthquakes (2010 and 2011 respectively). Although it took time to fully grasp the reasoning behind this decision, I was removing myself from the fractured place Christchurch had become to heal and to pursue my career as an artist.

When I arrived, I found myself taking long walks, often with my camera, next to the Birrarung. These walks helped with my sense of orientation in Melbourne and enabled me to comprehend the significance of my experience of the earthquakes; particularly their influence on my approach to photography, my understanding of belonging and community, and the myriad relationships people have to place.

Currently, I am undertaking my Master of Fine Art by Research at RMIT. My project is centered on the Birrarung, and aims to recognise the river as a sentient being. As I am of Anglo-settler descent, with complicity in colonisation, the Yarra Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act offers me an important framework to do this without appropriating First Nations cultures.

II. Specific opportunities for artists

I would like to see more opportunities for artists detailed in the Yarra Strategic Plan (YSP). At the time of writing, this seems especially pertinent. Many of my colleagues and friends are experiencing financial hardship due to the loss of work and the lack of work available caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The draft YSP articulates the significance of the Birrarung to our communities. Yet it doesn't definitively offer Victorian artists the chance to engage with and respond sensitively to the river within this context, which they are uniquely placed to do. Indeed, it acknowledges the importance of the Birrarung for artistic communities post-invasion:

The suburban reach also features important postcolonial cultural heritage sites. The Heidelberg School of Australian Impressionism began with painting the landscapes of the Yarra Flats and the Melbourne Modernists movement emerged from what is now Heide Museum of Modern Art. (p. 53)

The YSP has an opportunity to develop a creative program and in doing so align with 10 Year Performance Objectives 2 and 3. Among many other projects, artists could be commissioned to:

- create temporary or permanent public art installations that respond to the river
- deliver community-based projects, and
- document the implementation of and/or the community and environmental response to the YSP.

As an example, the [Metro Tunnel Creative Program](#) 'features activities and events designed and led by a team of designers, curators, and place managers dedicated to enhancing city life alongside the construction of the Metro Tunnel.' Artists are commissioned, either through an expression of interest or invitation, to contribute to this program.

Further, there are several instances in the draft YSP that demonstrate intentions to engage artists but no meaningful steps about how this might happen, or how the artists and communities involved might benefit. These instances include:

Showcase the river as a place for sustainable and **creative events**, with a focus on **culture**, sport, ecology and education. (p. 59)

Works to upgrade Southbank Promenade as a key cultural and arts destination: new and expanded public spaces, extension of urban forest planting, management of commuter cycle traffic, **new public art** and protection of heritage elements. (p. 63)

Express the Yarra River's rich history and many stories through interpretive information, public realm design, **art** and planting. Work with Traditional Owners to protect significant places and

increase the visual presence of their cultural heritage within the Yarra River's environment. (p. 64)

(Please note these page numbers refer to the Word document version of the draft plan, which I downloaded from the [Engage Victoria website](#). Emphasis is my own.)

It's worth mentioning that the examples from the draft YSP above relate only to the lower reaches of the river. If appropriate, I would encourage the consideration of artist engagement along the river in its entirety. This could potentially be managed by Melbourne Water or in addition to the existing arts grants programs run by each of the local councils in the Yarra Collaboration Committee.

III. Other feedback

More generally, the lack of detail in terms of achieving and measuring the goals stated in the draft plan is problematic. I also have concerns around the Birrarung not being treated as 'one living and integrated natural entity', as legislated in the Yarra Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong) Act. The draft plan only considers the river from the Upper Yarra Reservoir to the Westgate Bridge and there is little mention of tributaries, though they are acknowledged as 'provid[ing] vital biodiversity links into the catchment' (p. 53).

In my capacity as a member of the Yarra Riverkeeper Association, I would also like to endorse the Yarra Riverkeeper Association/Environmental Justice Australia submission.

Thank you for taking my submission into consideration. I'm very happy to discuss anything raised in this letter further via the contact details provided.

Yours sincerely,

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