



IMAGINE
THE YARRA

DRAFT YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Submission Number:	215088
Name (Individual/Organisation):	Wildlife Carers for Protection of Habitat
Attachments:	Attachment 1 – Written submission

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

RE: Yarra Strategic Plan

Background:

Wildlife Carers for Protection of Habitat is a new non-government organisation that aims to protect habitat in both urban and rural areas for the benefit of native wildlife. Since European colonisation, habitat from forests to grasslands have been repurposed for human use. The YSP gives an opportunity to protect and enhance habitat for the benefit of wildlife.

Wildlife Carers for Protection of Habitat Response to Yarra River Strategic Plan

It is positive that there will be an advisory council to advocate for the river so that the various councils and government agencies who contribute to actions on the Yarra River corridor do so in a coordinated manner.

The main priorities of the YSP that WCfPH endorse are protection of the environment and to restore the health of the river corridor.

Unfortunately, the wording of the Performance Objectives of the YSP has a high level of generality and vagueness. These objectives need to be rewritten as SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely). Preferably there will be baseline data for these to be measured against. The objectives also need to clearly and adequately address the impact of climate change. To achieve best practice, the results of the actions performed to attain the objectives need to be regularly monitored so that there is continuous improvement.

The key principle in the Yarra/Birrarung Act of a net gain for the environment is not contained in the draft YSP.

We commend the draft YSP for the performance objective of a healthy river and lands. This includes restoring billabongs and wetlands. These also need to be protected from future road development. Although the route of the proposed North-East Link has not been delineated precisely it appears that it will impact the Bolin Bolin Billabong in Manningham. Much work has been applied to improving the Bolin Bolin Billabong in recent years and it would not be a good outcome to have it disturbed by the creation of the North-East Link. Additionally, the Bolin Bolin Billabong is of great importance to the Wurundjeri people so it should be respected and protected.

Water quality can also be improved by replacing septic tanks with sewage, especially in the rural urban fringe. When not in good condition these septic tanks can leak and pollute the water. Runoff has been found to contain traces of human pharmaceuticals which have negative impacts on the aquatic life including platypus. Pollutants from runoff prevents many macroinvertebrates from surviving in the waterways. These invertebrates form a vital food supply for other organisms, and the loss of these aquatic invertebrates will lead to local extinction of organisms that feed upon them.

In rural areas livestock needs to be prohibited from grazing in the riparian zones, and these areas should be replanted with indigenous vegetation to both protect the river and tributaries and provide wildlife corridors.

In urban areas all new developments should incorporate Water Sensitive Urban Design, keeping impervious surfaces to a minimum, and collecting runoff from these developments for reuse rather than adding to the already excessive stormwater that enters and pollutes the waterways.

The water quality of the Yarra/Birrarung can be improved by the protection of the channel banks by weed removal and replanting the indigenous vegetation in a wide wildlife corridor of fifty metres or wider. This will aid in prevention of erosion to stop further siltation of the river. Feral animals especially deer and other large feral herbivores need to be removed due to the damage they do both to vegetation and stream banks.

Another performance objective is a culturally diverse river corridor. This objective lends itself to protection of both First Nations and European cultural stories and promoting these with interpretive signs. This would include such cultural history as the Heidelberg Artists as well as areas of importance to the Wurundjeri nations. This will involve protection of areas such as the Bolin Bolin Billabong and any large old trees of cultural significance.

The combination of protecting the existing native vegetation, replanting in the areas where native vegetation is lacking and monitoring and maintaining this vegetation should assist in providing the greatest natural biodiversity.

The performance objective of quality parklands for a growing population, recognises the importance to human mental and physical health of being in nature. However, this park infrastructure needs to be developed in a way that it is friendly and not disruptive to native flora and fauna. Also access points to the waterways disturb and fragment the natural environment and biodiversity, so need to be developed in a way which minimises disturbance. The fourth performance objective involves protecting the natural beauty of the Yarra River corridor. This relates to built infrastructure. These should all have mandatory setbacks from the river channels, as well as maximum height restrictions so infrastructure does not cast shadows on the waterways. These restrictions should not be able to be over turned by VCAT or the planning minister.

Sufficient funding needs to be made available for all the projects to be completed and monitored.

To integrate the YSP with the Healthy Waterways Strategy it is necessary to include the health of the tributaries, including their riparian vegetation in the YSP, and not only the land for one kilometre on either side of the main Yarra channel. This is important as the health of the main Yarra channel is only as good as the health of its tributaries. The Minister is able to amend the YSP to include the complete catchment areas of the river's tributaries in the YSP rather than just a narrow channel.

To increase the flow and water quality of the river and its tributaries, and to enhance the riparian habitat there needs to be education provided to farmers for regenerative agriculture. This should create connected wildlife corridors.

Grazing licences on river and stream frontages need to be terminated to protect the water from raised e-coli values and the stream banks revegetated with indigenous vegetation.

Revegetation of the riparian areas from Launching Place through Yarra Junction to Millgrove has been restricted to ten metres as a fire safety measure. Riparian vegetation by its nature

is a wet forest and is less likely to be a fire hazard than grass. Limiting the riparian vegetation to a width of ten metres is contrary to the execution of the YSP. Therefore, the ten-metre rule should be re-examined, and the riparian vegetation should be able to be increased to a width of fifty metres or greater.

The proposed Warburton Mountain Bike trail should have its tracks on the sensitive wet forest on the south side of Mount Donna Buang realigned to the north side of the mountain where it will not be as damaging to the Yarra River.

The Yarra River/Birrarung is considered a living entity, however the YSP does not include its headwaters above the Upper Yarra Weir, or the tail in Docklands. As already stated, the health of the tributaries is related to the health of the main river channel. The closed catchment forests in the Yarra Ranges National Park protects the water quality and quantity of the main Yarra channel, but the main area of its tributaries is found in State Forests. These forests are subject to timber harvesting until 2030. The process of timber harvesting is destructive to the environment which is contrary to the objectives of the YSP. (It is assumed that logging will cease in 2030 in line with the termination of the Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996, after which time the Maryvale Paper Mill is supposed to reduce its dependence on pulp from native forests and obtain it from plantations. However, due to wild-fires and unsustainable logging there will be insufficient timber to meet this obligation for supply of pulp logs until 2030. Therefore, WCfPH recommends that in line with the objectives of the YSP to protect the environment of the Yarra River, that the government terminates the Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996 immediately, rather than in three years-time when the native timber supply is depleted. Timber workers can be assisted in transitioning to other work, possibly regenerating these native forests, and the Maryvale Paper Mill can be supplied with wood pulp from plantations that is currently exported).

Finally, the YSP should include the U.N. Sustainable Development Goal number fifteen “life on land”. All nations involved in the Sustainable Development Goals are supposed to meet these targets by 2030. Goal fifteen covers biodiversity and forest ecosystems. The aim of this goal is “to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”. Forests are needed to mitigate climate change and protect watersheds. This is particularly important as with climate change the rainfall entering the Yarra River has halved since 2012. This will be of concern as the population of Melbourne is increasing and will require more water for domestic use and agriculture.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments on the Yarra Strategic Plan. We will look forward to an improved and protected environment for the Yarra Catchment.

Sincerely



Wildlife Carers for Protection of Habitat