



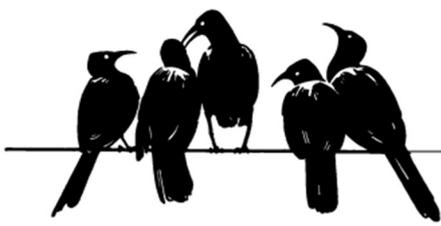
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THE YARRA

# DRAFT YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

## PUBLIC CONSULTATION

### SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

<b>Submission Number:</b>	YSP16
<b>Name (Individual/Organisation):</b>	Bend of Islands Conservation Association
<b>Attachments:</b>	Attachment 1 – Written submission



To Whom It May Concern,

The Bend of Islands Conservation Association (BICA), with a membership that includes approx 70% of property owners in the Bend of Islands, would like to make the following submission to the Draft Yarra Strategic Plan process in relation to the Lower Rural Reach - Healesville to Warrandyte section of the Yarra River.

BICA was founded over 40 years ago in response to a proposal to dam the Yarra River, with the result that the dam proposal was shelved and the Bend of Islands, due to its high conservation value and local biodiversity, was declared an Environmental Living Zone. The whole aim of the ELZ is to protect and enhance the high biodiversity of the local area. Many of those who founded BICA are still living in the Bend of Islands and all our members care deeply about the local environment and the Yarra River, which meanders for some km along our southern edge.

In addition to this submission, we would like to fully endorse the detailed submission made by the Yarra River Keeper Association/Environmental Justice Australia.

### **Support for the Aspirations of the YSP**

We applaud the development of the 50 Year Community Vision and all efforts to protect the Yarra River. In general we support the aspirations and vision of the YSP and the 10 Year Performance Objectives contained in it, however feel strongly that aspirations need to translate directly into SMART (specific, measureable, attributable, responsive and targeted) actions and outcomes and more needs to be done to identify these.

There is also a need to show how the 10 year plan has been designed to fit into an overall 50 year plan. Although it is difficult to anticipate all the unknowns, we need to have confidence that enough is being done within the first 10 years to build upon (hence the SMART criteria above).

Environmental protection **MUST** be placed at the forefront of any planning decisions at all levels of government and not watered down or compromised by successive governments, local authorities or planning schemes.

Given that local planning schemes can be regularly amended or overthrown, often to the detriment of the local environment, the YSP also needs to be a binding planning document, not simply a reference document that planning authorities need to "have regard to" in making decisions.

### **A Healthy River as a Priority**

Whilst much has been done in recent decades in the suburban and inner city reaches to improve the health of the Yarra River, the lower rural reach, which often flows through open farmland, has been overlooked and overall river health is deteriorating - according to the 2018 report by the Commissioner of Environmental Sustainability which shows that 17/25 environmental indicators are deteriorating.

In parts of the Lower Rural Reach section, in particular from Yering Gorge to Healesville, the lack of streamside vegetation and the degraded state of the billabongs is evident, despite the efforts of the Melbourne Water Streamside Improvement Program. A detailed survey and assessment of the river corridor here is needed to ascertain the actual extent of the degradation. As the river passes through much privately owned land it will be necessary to gain the cooperation and participation of ALL landowners to remedy this, not just the ones who are currently making improvements. This is an unlikely scenario and stronger government initiatives are needed for this to occur.

If we are to achieve a "wide mature cloak of indigenous vegetation for the riverside zone including the billabongs" as part of the 50 year plan, then we must begin to revegetate now. Let's not leave it to the 9<sup>th</sup> year of the 10 year plan. Creating a Nature Reserve/Billabong Park along both sides of the Yarra from Yering Gorge to Tarrawarra would be an outstanding practical outcome. This would complement the existing community asset that is Warrandyte State Park/Mt Lofty Reserve and greatly enhance the state of the river.

In a farming area such as the lower rural reach, the problem of pesticides and chemicals entering the water needs to be addressed, using EPA testing methods and enforceable controls. Similarly in a largely unsewered



environment we need a documented control system to ensure septic systems are fully operational and properly maintained.

The draft YSP recognizes that as we move into a climate that is hotter and drier a healthy river will depend on adequate environmental flows. Once again more detail is needed on how to achieve and measure this. The whole population of Melbourne will need to be more water wise and local people will need to become more self sufficient in their water storage capacity, which could involve limits to secondary domestic pumping from the river.

#### **Habitat Corridors and Yarra Tributaries**

The draft plan does not appear to give much attention to enhancing the Yarra tributaries outside the urban area, which are fundamentally connected to the health of the Yarra. In the inner city and suburban reaches the Merri Creek and Darebin Creek are important tributaries and much has already been done to enhance them over the years.

In our local area the Watson's Creek tributary is an important habitat corridor, in effect linking the river to the wider Kinglake National Park area in the north and to the Warrandyte State Park in the south. Detailed wildlife records over many years show how wildlife uses this corridor to move between these areas. Enhancement of these adjoining areas of vegetation/habitat is important as well.

#### **Environmental Weeds and Feral Animals**

The draft YSP contains various measures for restoration of corridors, habitats, billabongs etc to achieve greater biodiversity, but more detail on how to achieve this is needed. Both the spread of environmental weeds and feral animals are a significant threat to the physical and biodiversity values of the river. Weeds, in particular blackberries, are a significant problem on private land bordering the river to the east of the Bend of Islands.

#### **Examples of Significant Local Projects to Improve the River Environs**

A fully funded 3 year project - Sugarloaf Link - involving BICA, Melbourne Water, Nillumbik Council, NARAP and Parks Victoria is currently underway. This is an excellent example of collaborative action to control environmental weeds and feral animals in parts of Nillumbik Shire, including Watson's Creek and Bend of Islands.

In 2019 BICA received funding to erect a deer control fence along a section of the Gongflers escarpment immediately above the Yarra in the Bend of Islands to protect significant vegetation, notably a stand of *Banksia marginata* (Silver Banksia) which represents the last significant population of this species within the Yarra River Catchment. Other species of significance include *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* (Yarra Gorge Form).

Over the last 5 years the deer activity in this area had increased exponentially, having a massive impact on the vegetation structure, species abundance and cover. The degradation was preventing the recruitment of species, such as the *Banksia marginata* and almost all the floristic values were being undermined.

Evidence of the success of the project can now be seen with vegetation cover increasing significantly.

On the south side of the river the Middle Yarra Landcare Network has received funding to conduct a deer monitoring project using drones to discover the pathways deer are taking to cross the river and BICA is in consultation with them about how this might work.

These are examples of collaborative action at a local community level to protect and restore the river environs.

#### **Community Access to the Yarra**

One of the 10 year performance objectives of the YSP is "protecting the natural beauty of the Yarra River corridor – where we build we will protect and celebrate the river's natural beauty, landscapes and views". In line with this, access to the river needs to be well planned and controlled to manage any conflict between habitat disturbance/degradation and social uses. Planning tools need to be incorporated into the YSP to clearly define what activities are appropriate and where. The river environs closer to the city are much more modified for social activity than those further upstream. We must be able to protect the outstanding natural beauty and "wildness" of our river landscapes from the demands of overpopulation.



Warrandyte State Park in particular may need to plan carefully given the increased pressure from Manningham Council for tourism in the area.

As an example of conflicting land use, the Neil Douglas Nature Reserve in the Bend of Islands is directly over the river from Whitten's Reserve, a popular canoe launch site, picnic area and local swimming hole, where dogs are permitted off lead. In summer river water levels are low enough to enable people to walk across and there have been instances of dogs crossing into the Bend of Islands (where domestic animals of any kind are largely prohibited), people crossing the river to have campfires and leaving their rubbish behind, and even sending stray golf balls across the river to land in the reserve.

**In Conclusion**

- Environmental protection **MUST** be placed at the forefront of any planning decisions at all levels of government and not watered down or compromised by successive governments and local authorities.
- Recognition of the Yarra River as a source of human and wildlife well being.
- In principle support of the YSP.
- Would like to see specific targets and strategies to achieve them.
- Extend awareness of the Yarra River from its source to the sea.

Thankyou.

Yours Sincerely

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