Draft

YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

A 10 year plan for the Yarra River corridor - draft for public consultation
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The Yarra River, Birrarung, with its parklands is a living and integrated entity. It flows through and nourishes our forests, farmland, towns, suburbs and the city.

It is a place where we can rest, play and enjoy.

With the challenges presented by climate change and population growth, it is vitally important to have an overarching strategy to guide future urban development and planning both for the waterway and its surrounds.

In listening to the community and the Wurundjeri Woi wurrung people, the Traditional Owners of much of the Yarra, the 15 state and local government agencies with responsibility for the area have developed the Yarra Strategic Plan to address their aspirations and address the challenges.

The draft Yarra Strategic Plan is a regional strategy that guides local planning and decision making and outlines the first 10 years of work to deliver the 50-year community vision for the Yarra.

Wurundjeri Woi wurrung people have partnered in the development of the Plan, outlining their priorities and ambitions for the Birrarung, recognising Traditional Owners’ voices in the governance and protection of the Yarra River.

The landmark Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murron) Act 2017 enshrines in law the protection of the Yarra River and its management as a single living entity.

This Plan will help underpin the commitments we made in the creation of the Act.

Melbourne is the nation’s fastest growing city, which places pressure on the city’s waterways and environment, as well as creating challenges managing urban development along the river.

We want to ensure our city is sustainable and liveable for future generations, which is why we are acting to protect this wonderful resource.
We, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, are the Traditional Owners of a large area of Country that includes the lands through which the Birrarung flows, from its freshwater source through to the sea. The city of Melbourne grew out from the banks of the Birrarung, allowing it to become the vibrant city that it is today. However this has come at a great cost to both the Birrarung and Wurundjeri Woi wurrung people.

We take our responsibility for the overall management of the Birrarung, which forms a part of our Dreaming, very seriously. With our recognition in the Yarra River Protection (Willip gin Birrarung murron) Act (2017), the Yarra Collaboration Committee and relevant Ministers have significant opportunity to deliver the social, cultural, economic, environmental, and heritage outcomes that the Act (2017) intends and to which we aspire. These opportunities are outlined in our water place based policy entitled Nhanbu nurrung ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung (Ancient Spirit and Lore the Yarra).

Historically, Indigenous people’s rights to water have largely been excluded from Settler societies water planning and management policies and programs. Given this context, our inclusion in the Act (2017) was highly significant. One hundred and eighty two years Post Contact, our people gained a legislative mechanism within which to formally engage with and influence the governance of the Birrarung. Our participation has only been possible because the Act (2017) employs a placed-based approach, pairing right Country with the right People – our people.

With strategic planning and governance reform, the Yarra Strategic Plan and the Yarra Collaboration Committee can support Wurundjeri Woi wurrung people achieve natural justice, including water justice, which comprises three pillars; water rights, active participation in water management and broader water and active decision-making policy reform resulting in treaties/political agreements. Collectively, these pillars are also commonly referred to as “cultural flows”.

We look forward to sharing how the above priorities can be achieved when our aspirations are published next year. In the meantime we remain committed to working with the Yarra Collaboration Committee and all associated Ministers to further progress our vision for the Birrarung and our people.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

‘A special place for me is where the Yarra meets the sea, where my Aboriginal mother lived and my English father worked. I love to walk along the Yarra and remember stories my father told me about his grandfather Tom Roberts, the artist who painted the river as it is: a whole living entity.’
– Lisa Roberts, community member

As a 10 year strategy, the Yarra Strategic Plan sets the foundation to achieve the Yarra River 50 Year Community Vision and deliver on the aspirations contained in the Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation’s Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung (Ancient Spirit & Lore of the Yarra).

The Yarra Strategic Plan has been prepared by the Yarra Collaboration Committee, which is made up of representatives from Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation; Banyule City Council; Boroondara City Council; the Department of Environment; Land, Water and Planning; Department of Transport (including VicRoads) and VicTrack; Manningham Council; Melbourne City Council; Melbourne Water; Nillumbik Shire Council; Parks Victoria; Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority; Stonnington City Council; Victorian Planning Authority; Yarra City Council and Yarra Ranges Council.

The Birrarung: our lifeblood, our shared history, our river

Over tens of thousands of years the Yarra River, Birrarung, has shaped the lives of those around it.

The river is our lifeblood, providing water to drink, places to socialise, parks for play, nature to experience and landscapes to explore.

As our city grows and the climate warms there will be more demands placed on our iconic waterway and its parklands. For the Yarra to thrive under these pressures, our river needs more from us.

With changing practices, and the efforts of stakeholders and the community, the condition of the river has improved considerably over recent decades. However, in its lower reaches the Yarra remains a polluted river facing unprecedented population growth, climate change – and an uncertain future without significant intervention. We must act now to protect the river and ensure it continues to support our healthy city and environment.

To deliver this plan we will work with the Yarra’s Traditional Owners, whose interdependent relationship with the environment provides us with a blueprint for holistic management of the river and its lands.
The community is calling for us to work with the Traditional Owners to deliver on a shared goal: the Yarra River 50 Year Community Vision.

‘Under Wurundjeri Woi wurrung lore, it is the responsibility of everyone living on Country to protect the water and the land’
– Aunty Di Kerr, Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
Achieving the community’s vision for our river, together

The Yarra Strategic Plan is the first integrated corridor plan developed collaboratively by representatives from the Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, as well as all 15 state and local government agencies involved in managing the river. This unprecedented alliance demonstrates the serious and sustained commitment, by all levels of government, to protect the Yarra River corridor for future generations.

The community is calling for us to work with Traditional Owners to deliver on a shared goal: the Yarra River 50 Year Community Vision.

To achieve the Yarra River 50 Year Community Vision we must take collective action. This requires a significant shift in the way state and local government agencies view and manage the river. We need to work with Traditional Owners to ensure that, as the vision states, ‘Our Yarra River, Birrarung, is respected as a sacred natural living entity and everyone takes responsibility for its care’.

To achieve this change we must harness the great work that is already being done for the river: the 50,000 hours community members spend volunteering each year, the water available for environmental flows, the reestablishment of Traditional Owner cultural knowledge and practices, and the significant annual investment ($80 million in 2019/20) by state and local government agencies to improve the river corridor. We will work across organisational boundaries to leverage these existing efforts to get the greatest benefit for the river as a whole – to ensure it remains a central part of the lives of our children and grandchildren.

The Yarra Strategic Plan is the first of its kind and sets the foundation for incremental change to achieve the Yarra River 50 Year Community Vision. As a 10 year strategy, it identifies immediate actions for the river, enables long-term collaborative management between agencies and Traditional Owners, and guides local planning.

The 10 year performance objectives: celebrating the relationship between the river and the community

To help guide our activities in the Yarra River corridor, we have identified four 10 year performance objectives. These objectives represent the changes we are seeking for the river.
10 YEAR PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

A healthy river and lands
Improving the water quality of the Yarra River and protecting its land, floodplains and billabongs to achieve greater biodiversity.

A culturally diverse river corridor
Acknowledging, protecting and commemorating the rich heritage of the Birrarung and its stories.

Quality parklands for a growing population
Improving the river’s parklands to support community wellbeing and strengthen the relationship between the Yarra River, its community and visitors.

Protecting the natural beauty of the Yarra River corridor
Respecting the significance of the Yarra River’s landscapes. Where we build, we will protect and celebrate the river’s natural beauty, landscapes and views.
How the Yarra Strategic Plan works

The Yarra Strategic Plan is split into two interrelated parts:

Part 1 – Working together to achieve the community vision: this part of the plan showcases the immediate investment already planned for the river; acknowledges the history of Traditional Owners and recognises their intrinsic relationship to the Yarra River, Birrarung. It outlines a modern governance approach for our collaborative actions on Yarra River land (public land) in the next 10 years.

Achieving the performance objectives requires a shift in the way agencies and Traditional Owners work together to manage the river.

Part 2 – Land use framework: this part of the plan marks a step-change in how we manage development along the river, setting a new standard for decision-making and placing the river at the heart of land use planning.

As Melbourne grows, the Yarra River must be a central consideration in land use planning and development in the corridor. The land use framework will guide future land use and development to ensure that activities within the corridor deliver on the performance objectives over the next 10 years.

The framework will protect areas of high environmental, landscape and cultural value, and identifies opportunities to improve access to the river for community enjoyment. It ensures that the health and integrity of the Yarra are protected.

All members of the Yarra Collaboration Committee are committed to delivering the projects, objectives, and actions outlined in the Yarra Strategic Plan. We will work towards achieving the community’s vision for the river to ‘deepen the relationship between nature and people’ and manage the river as one living entity.

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This does not apply in relation to a declared project within the meaning of the Major Transport Project Facilitation Act 2009.

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YARRA RIVER 50 YEAR COMMUNITY VISION

Our Yarra River, Birrarung, is recognised around the world as an iconic example of a nurturing relationship between a river and its community.

Flowing from source to sea, it is the resilient lifeblood of past, present and future generations of Victorians. It connects and enriches our flourishing city, suburbs, regions and beyond.

Our Yarra River, Birrarung, its essential role in our lives and its rich history, are respected, understood and protected. It has cared for us for thousands of years and will for thousands to come.

The vital and continued role of Traditional Owners as custodians of the River, and its role in their culture, is recognised and celebrated.

Our Yarra River, Birrarung, and its diverse surrounding landscapes provide a place of refuge, recreation, learning and livelihood. It brings communities together and supports sustainable local economies.

Its clean waters and connected network of thriving green spaces nurture biodiversity, and deepen the relationship between people and nature.

Our Yarra River, Birrarung, is respected as a sacred natural living entity and everyone takes responsibility for its care. Its health and integrity are paramount and uncompromised.

What is good for the Yarra is good for all.