Our living rivers of the Barwon

A discussion paper for the future

Prepared by the Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee
Yulluk
Aboriginal people call the Barwon River Barre Warre Yulluk, meaning the great river (yulluk) that ran from the mountains (barre) to the ocean (warre). The name Barwon is derived from parwan meaning 'magpie' or 'great wide'.

Wadawurrung Traditional Owners
The Wadawurrung retain a strong connection to the Barwon/Moorabool system. They see Barre Warre as a connected system, between rivers and the sea. Protecting Lal Lal to Connewarre is a Wadawurrung story.

The rivers of the Barwon at a glance

- 13% urbanised
- 17% natural vegetation
- 70% agricultural

300 species of birds
The rivers of the Barwon and its corridors support over 300 species of birds including the Secretive Nankeen Night Heron, the endangered Orange-bellied Parrot and the Great Egret.

17 reptile species
The rivers of the Barwon support over 17 reptile species, including skinks, snakes and turtles.

Yulluk
Aboriginal people call the Barwon River Barre Warre Yulluk, meaning the great river (yulluk) that ran from the mountains (barre) to the ocean (warre). The name Barwon is derived from parwan meaning 'magpie' or 'great wide'.

50 mammal species
The rivers of the Barwon support over 50 mammal species including the Platypus and Swamp Wallabies.

Over $50 million
The Corangamite CMA, Barwon Water, Central Highlands Water and local government have collectively spent over $50 million on waterway health improvements over the last ten years.

22 fish species
The rivers of the Barwon support over 22 native and recreational fish species, including Estuary Perch and Australian Grayling.
Discussion paper summary

Drinking water
The upper Barwon, Leigh and Moorabool rivers provide the majority of the drinking water for Geelong and Ballarat.

Connewarre wetland
The rivers of the Barwon pass through the internationally significant Connewarre wetland complex, which forms part of the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Site.

Local government
The rivers of the Barwon and their tributaries traverse six local government areas: City of Ballarat, City of Greater Geelong, Colac Otway Shire, Golden Plains Shire, Moorabool Shire and Surf Coast Shire.

Over 50 events
The Barwon River through Geelong supports over 50 events each year on its waters and along its river bank, including paddle sports and rowing regattas.

Over a million visitors
Each year over 1 million people use the Barwon River Parklands through Geelong and the Yarrowee corridor through Ballarat for cycling, walking and other recreational opportunities.

5,380 km²
The catchment area of the rivers of the Barwon (including 94 tributaries).

6,500 million litres
Over 6,500 million litres of water have been secured for the environment since the release of the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy in 2006.

795 km
The length of rivers of the Barwon from major headwaters in the Otway Ranges and Central Highlands to the estuary at Barwon Heads.
Our living rivers of the Barwon (Barre Warre Yulluk)
1 Introduction

The Victorian Government has established a Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee to ensure a community-led approach to the future management and protection of the Barwon River and its tributaries.¹

The intent of the discussion paper is to capture the community vision for the rivers of the Barwon, collate current and emerging issues and identify opportunities to shape the way the catchment is managed into the future.

The rivers of the Barwon catchment include the Barwon, Moorabool, Yarrowee and Leigh rivers and their tributaries.

¹ Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee – Terms of Reference
2 The challenge ahead

The rivers of the Barwon are diverse and complex and hold special cultural significance for the region’s Traditional Owners, the Wadawurrung people. They are also valued by other Aboriginal Victorians. The river system supports a range of natural values, from the headwaters in the Otway Ranges and Central Highlands to the estuary at Barwon Heads, including the Ramsar listed Connewarre wetland complex.

The Barwon catchment also supplies the majority of water to Victoria’s largest regional cities, Geelong and Ballarat, and sustains a highly productive agricultural sector supported by a range of fertile soils (including rich volcanic soils) and a temperate climate.

The catchment’s riverine corridors provide important areas of public open space and increasingly support recreational activities such as enjoyment of nature, walking, cycling, swimming, fishing, game hunting, rowing and paddle sports, as well as the community’s broader liveability aspirations for the region.

While significant inroads have been achieved over recent decades in protecting the health of the catchment, the region faces increasing pressure from significant population growth and a changing climate.

Forecast population growth will place increasing stress on the rivers of the Barwon through:

• Increased use of open spaces along waterways
• Higher demand for use of scarce water resources
• Intensification of land use close to waterway corridors
• More hard surfaces, which will increase stormwater run-off and localised flooding.

The Barwon catchment already has some of the state’s most stressed waterways, and climate change predictions for the region anticipate a warmer climate with less rainfall, further reducing water availability. More extreme weather events are also predicted under a changing climate, which can affect water run-off patterns and the riverine environment.

These pressures are expected to place increasing stress on the health of the catchment’s waterways and its natural landscapes, requiring a long-term strategic response to meet these challenges.
The Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee

The Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee (‘the MAC’) was established under Section 151 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to ensure a community-led approach to protecting and managing the rivers of the Barwon for generations to come.

The Minister for Planning and Minister for Water have established the MAC to make recommendations to inform an Action Plan for future management and protection of the rivers of the Barwon catchment and their tributaries. Recommendations may include improvements to institutional, legislative and regulatory arrangements, land use planning controls, land and water management and better ways to involve the community.

The MAC will work in partnership with the catchment’s Traditional Owners and local communities to understand the threats to the river, how to better manage these threats and how to enhance and protect the river system. Building on existing information and recent community engagement in the region, the MAC will look for opportunities to improve arrangements for management and protection of the region’s waterways, and to address any gaps or emerging issues.
3 Have your say

The issues and opportunities outlined in the discussion paper have been developed in consultation with local community members who attended nine local discussions held across the Barwon catchment in June 2019. The feedback identified community perceptions of where management and planning of waterways and water need to be improved to meet future challenges. After these sessions, three ‘pressure-point’ workshops brought together agency staff and community members to discuss potential solutions or improvements. These sessions included organisations that have responsibilities for decision-making and management of the rivers of the Barwon, along with environmental advocacy groups. There was also an opportunity to provide feedback online via the Engage Victoria website and a Social Pinpoint interactive map.

The MAC highly values all contributions made towards the discussion paper and encourages the community to become familiar with its content. We would like to hear what the public thinks about the proposed future directions presented in the discussion paper under the following six discussion themes:

1. A living cultural landscape
2. Water management for a secure future
3. Targeted and integrated management for a healthy catchment
4. Enhanced waterway corridors for community connection, access and use
5. Planning for sustainable growth and liveability
6. An effective governance model for the catchment.

The MAC welcomes any other ideas the public has about protecting and enhancing the rivers of the Barwon.

Please make your submission by Thursday 3 November 2019.

We would like to hear your views on the themes and future directions proposed in the discussion paper and any other ideas you may have about improving the management and protection of the rivers of the Barwon. In particular, your feedback would be appreciated on the following questions:

1. **What is most important to you in each of the themes?**
2. **How much do you support each direction within the themes?**
3. **Are there any directions that should be changed or removed?**
4. **What do you think are the barriers/obstacles that might hinder these directions?**
Online
At https://engage.vic.gov.au/protecting-rivers-barwon-barre-warre-yulluk you can view and download the discussion paper, background studies and other information, and also provide feedback through an online ideas-sharing tool. You can also make a written submission by completing the submission form on the website.

In person
You can attend one of the community sessions being held in the region at Geelong, Ballarat and Colac during October 14, 15 and 16, 2019 to join the discussion. Details and timings of events are available at https://engage.vic.gov.au/protecting-rivers-barwon-barre-warre-yulluk

Written submission
You can make a written submission on the discussion paper by:

• Completing an online submission form at https://engage.vic.gov.au/protecting-rivers-barwon-barre-warre-yulluk

• Emailing a written submission to barwon.river.inbox@delwp.vic.gov.au

• Posting a written submission to PO Box 500, Melbourne, Victoria 8002 (addressed to the Rivers of the Barwon Action Plan program)

Submissions will be made public unless you ask for yours to be confidential.

The MAC will consider all feedback and provide recommendations to the Victorian Government. A number of investigations have also been commissioned to inform the MAC’s deliberations. The MAC will provide their advice on reforms to manage and protect the Barwon River system to the Minister for Planning, The Hon. Richard Wynne MP, and the Minister for Water, The Hon. Lisa Neville MP, by 31 December 2019. The Victorian Government will develop a Rivers of the Barwon Action Plan as a response to the MAC recommendations.
4 What we have heard

Nine local discussions were held at locations across the Barwon catchment, including Armstrong Creek, Bannockburn, Barwon Heads, Birregurra, Forrest, Geelong, Meredith, Mt Clear and Winchelsea. These community discussions provided an opportunity for people to think about aspects of the rivers of the Barwon including what was important to them, what needed improving and what was getting better.

Three ‘pressure-point’ workshops were also held with agency staff and community members to discuss key issues facing the catchment and where better management could make a difference.

These community sessions and pressure-point workshops were accompanied by an online survey and a Social Pinpoint website (an interactive mapping platform) to collect community feedback on specific sites within the catchment.

The following pages provide a sample of the feedback received through this process.

Through the nine discussion sessions, the community was also asked to present their long-term vision for the rivers of the Barwon. The following 50-year vision statements are a reflection of this feedback. The first statement was provided directly by the region’s Traditional Owners, the Wadawurrung.

“I want to see a flowing river and healthy tributaries, with wide riparian zones of native vegetation, weed free, alive with fish, birds, platypus and insects.”
What we’ve heard

**Mt Clear – Ballarat**

“The Yarrowee cycle and walking path! What a joy this is and a hidden gem in Ballarat’s crown. Appreciated by young and old, dogs, wildlife. Continue funding and maintaining this asset and take it out even further!”

“This area is important to me because of becoming involved with the local landcare group, and helping and watching the regeneration of this area has been both fascinating and satisfying (and hard work!), but proud to be part of it.”

**Bannockburn and Inverleigh**

“My vision for the Barwon River is to maintain a healthy flow of water supporting viable aquatic life, and the river is supporting farming properties that border onto it.”

“The Barwon is messy where I live, the riparian zone in most places impenetrable, it is difficult and expensive to manage and to maintain fences after flooding ... but it is what it should be like ... natural and with such a diverse ecosystem.”

**Birregurra**

“The Barwon River is a beautiful ecosystem full of many different species ranging from large to small, it’s also full of amazing plants to create homes for animals. More plants and trees should be planted here and they should clean up the sides of the river to make sure the river has lots of clean water flow and to make sure nothing is harming the river.”

**Winchelsea**

“I want to see a flowing river and healthy tributaries, with wide riparian zones of native vegetation, weed free, alive with fish, birds, platypus and insects.”

“We want a river that is in the best possible condition to respond to a changing climate.”
Meredith

“Fauna surveys have found Brush Tailed Phascogales to occur within this area near the Moorabool River. The protection of native vegetation along the Moorabool River is important (especially of any large old trees) as these are important for habitat.”

(Regarding the Moorabool) “This section of the river is important for both recreational and environmental values. The river is used for paddling activities as well as environmental education projects. Powerful Owls, Phascogales, Sugar Gliders among others have been observed here along with numerous suspected platypus sightings.”

Geelong

“I love going down to the Barwon River because it’s close to my house. I go down to the Barwon River twice a week to row. I’ve got a lot of friends down at the Barwon River, and I make friends when I’m rowing.”

“The Barwon River is a great place to ride my bike, walk my dogs and it’s a really peaceful place to go on runs.”

“I love the freeness of the bike trail along the Barwon River. I have ridden it lots of times and love it.”

“This place is such a great place to take your dog for a walk. It is also a great place to ride your bike or even go for a run. This place is filled with nice tall trees and a great walking track. I would really recommend going and visiting this great place.”

Barwon Heads

“The estuary is a unique and diverse range of ecosystem services for both human enjoyment and biodiversity values. The species that are residents here rely on the system for part of their life cycle – which should be embraced and understood by all.”

“The Barwon River is clean, it’s running well and it has been maintained well with only a few sites of rubbish. It’s also a nice place to launch and drive a boat.”

“The riverbank in Barwon Heads is a great, nice and quiet place...for now. The growing population is a concern but at this point of time I can say that this place is a calm area to do your exercise, like riding bikes and walking. The river is a great place to go fishing although pollution is increasing a lot with a growing population.”
Traditional Owners retain a strong connection to the Barwon/Moorabool system

- We see Barre Warre as a connected system, water is a living entity in our stories, our creations are held by the life of these rivers, our intangible connections received from our past live and protect our culture for our present and future
- The connection between rivers and sea is our lore
- Protecting Lal Lal to Connewarre is a Wadawurrung story
- We work to ensure a balanced ecological water system, this includes all living things. It is our duty to care for, nurture and replace Barre Warre with all it needs for a healthy life
- We will continue to share our culture through the blood of our mother earth. May we educate others to see Barre Warre through our Wadawurrung lens.

Provided by Melinda Kennedy, Wadawurrung Traditional Owner

Our catchment’s waterways are healthy

- The condition of our catchment’s creeks and rivers (and their floodplains and wetlands) are improving
- We see flow in our rivers all year to support their health and function, and wide areas of land adjoining riverbanks are fenced, have native vegetation and are free of weeds
- Our rivers are alive with fish, birds, platypus and insects, and migratory birds return each year to their breeding grounds in the internationally significant wetlands of the Bellarine
- From Ballarat to Geelong and from the Otways to the estuary at Barwon Heads, our waterways are connected, and in our cities and towns are providing healthy green corridors for habitat, recreational use and transport.

Our precious water resources are used wisely

- Our water resources are sustainably managed to fit changing climatic conditions
- We value water as a precious resource and understand its availability, use and management
- We use water efficiently in our cities and for agriculture, and make better use of new technologies
- We maximise use of alternative water sources (such as recycled water and stormwater), and take advantage of our links to the Victorian water grid
- We learn rapidly from innovations in other catchments and integrated water management is central to planning for new development.

Our community understands, enjoys and cares for waterways

- Stewardship of our waterways draws on Traditional Owners’ understanding of rivers as living entities for which the whole community has responsibility
- As a community we understand water and where it comes from, we appreciate our rivers, their condition, and what is being done to keep them healthy
- We enjoy our rivers and catchment while limiting our footprint. In rural areas our landholders control weeds and limit stock access, while in our cities and towns streams are open, visible, valued and actively used
- We value the rivers of the Barwon and our advocacy for a healthy catchment remains strong.

Our management is integrated and focused on the future

- Our agencies and community are aligned around the long-term goals for the health of the catchment
- Our planning for water and river management is integrated and considers both whole-of-catchment and local place-based needs
- Our planning for the growth of our cities and towns considers the long-term health of our waterways and the liveability of our growing community
- Adaptation to a changing climate is central to our future planning for the catchment, its rivers and communities.

1 This statement is for the use of the Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee discussion paper, the author is to be notified for copies or prints

A new 50-year vision

Our community understands, enjoys and cares for waterways

Our precious water resources are used wisely

Our catchment’s waterways are healthy

Traditional Owners retain a strong connection to the Barwon/Moorabool system

Our management is integrated and focused on the future

Our living rivers of the Barwon (Barre Warre Yulluk)
5 Future directions

The MAC is proposing a new direction is needed to secure the long-term health of the rivers of the Barwon. This has been informed by an examination of the current management and planning frameworks, a review of the current state of the rivers, what has been heard from the region’s communities, the work underway by the region’s agencies, and what is planned in the near future.

The following six themes provide the focus for this future direction:

• A living cultural landscape
• Water management for a secure future
• Targeted and integrated management for a healthy catchment
• Enhanced waterway corridors for community connection, access and use
• Planning for sustainable growth and liveability
• An effective governance model for the catchment.

Under each of the themes, key emerging issues and directions have been identified for the purpose of more targeted discussion. Given the complexity of the system there is much overlap between these themes and directions, and as such they should be considered collectively.

Future consultation on the issues and directions presented in the discussion paper will enable the MAC to consider what is important and what should be prioritised in the subsequent Rivers of the Barwon Action Plan.
1 A living cultural landscape

“We see Barre Warre as a connected system, water is a living entity in our stories, our creations are held by the life of these rivers, our intangible connections received from our past live and protect our culture for our present and future. The connection between rivers and sea is our lore. Protecting Lal Lal to Connewarre is a Wadawurrung story.”

Melinda Kennedy – Wadawurrung Traditional Owner

Directions

To enhance the involvement of Traditional Owners in the management and stewardship of the rivers of the Barwon the following directions are being considered:

1. Traditional Owners have the capacity and resources to contribute effectively to the management of water for cultural purposes.

2. ‘Country’ plans are developed for the key rivers of the Barwon to ensure consideration of cultural values in future planning.

3. Cultural indicators are identified to measure the cultural health of the rivers.

2 Water management for a secure future

The Barwon catchment’s traditional water sources and the health of its rivers are facing a number of challenges from a growing population and the impacts of climate change.

Directions

To meet the challenges of managing water in the region for a secure future, the following directions are being considered:


2. Prioritise essential waterway restoration works to minimise flow constraints and maximise the benefits from environmental water entitlements.

3. Maximise the region’s links to the Victorian water grid to realise regional economic and environmental outcomes from the use of scarce water resources.

4. Investigate the introduction of a more natural flow regime for the Yarrowee/Leigh River.

5. Maximise the use of alternative water supplies.

6. Make the water resource planning process more visible to the public.

7. Increase the focus by all agencies on regional climate adaptation planning and adoption.
3 Targeted and integrated management for a healthy catchment

Many land use decisions and practices since European settlement such as gold mining and widespread land clearing have damaged the region’s natural resources. In some cases, the impact has been so great that critical natural resources such as soil and water have been compromised, and native species have become extinct or threatened.

Directions

To promote more effective and lasting integrated catchment management outcomes for the health of the rivers of the Barwon, the following directions are being considered:

1. Undertake ‘place-based’ scale planning and management to maximise engagement and impact, but within a catchment context and narrative.

2. Focus management and investment on upper catchments to maximise benefits.

3. Strengthen the planning and measurement of waterway health outcomes, including greater opportunities for community-based citizen science monitoring.

4. Prioritise the Barwon as the next targeted large-scale waterway project – as a new ‘Living Barwon’ flagship waterway.

4 Enhanced waterway corridors for community connection, access and use

Community feedback revealed the residents and communities of the Barwon catchment love their parklands and open spaces.

Directions

To ensure community access to the river corridors for use and enjoyment by people of all ages and abilities, the following directions are being considered:

1. Enhance the Barwon River Parklands.

2. Adopt a parklands concept for the Yarrowee corridor through Ballarat.

3. Explore opportunities to enhance broader access and connectivity to the rivers of the Barwon.

4. Consider a regional paths and trails strategy for the catchment’s river corridors.
5 Planning for sustainable growth and liveability

Consultation found that the residents of Geelong and Ballarat and the broader Barwon catchment value sound planning for waterways in urban areas and would like to see better controls in place to manage the impact of new developments along waterways.

Directions

To promote connected communities and protect riverine landscapes from increasing urban and non-urban land use and development growth pressures, the following directions are being considered:

1. Identify the rivers of the Barwon as significant rivers in Clause 12.03–1S (River Corridors, Waterways, Lakes and Wetlands) of the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP).
2. Introduce a regional-level planning policy for the rivers of the Barwon.
3. Develop master plans to outline the vision and strategic directions to guide future land use and development along and adjoining the river corridor.
4. Strengthen methods for better implementation of integrated water management principles through planning systems for new growth areas (including through precinct structure planning).
5. Use development contribution plans and value capture options to fund integrated water management infrastructure for new growth areas.
6. Create interim and consistent overlay controls for the rivers of the Barwon.

6 An effective governance model for the catchment

A number of organisations are responsible for the planning and management of the Barwon catchment across a range of regulatory functions.

Directions

To provide leadership and a long-term commitment to delivering the MAC vision and its goals, the following directions are being considered:

1. Develop a set of key principles to provide improved governance for the Barwon catchment that includes integration of water management and land use planning and a framework of shared accountability.
2. Establish an interim taskforce to facilitate the implementation of the MAC’s recommendations and drive delivery of the planned Rivers of the Barwon Action Plan in line with the agreed principles.
3. Review funding arrangements to ensure ongoing improvements to the rivers of the Barwon.
4. Strengthen existing partnership forums and governance arrangements to support the role of the interim taskforce.
5. Make management decisions and the roles and responsibilities of government agencies more visible to the public.
My Country tells a story of our waterways and our rivers; the rivers that have many resources for Aboriginal people.

Billy-Jay O'Toole is a proud Wadawurrung boy, residing on Country in Torquay. Billy-Jay works for the Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation, in the field of cultural heritage. He has a passion for art and says his biggest achievement was designing Geelong’s AFL Indigenous jumper in 2014–2015.

Stephanie Skinner is a Wadawurrung digital artist and illustrator. For the Wadawurrung people, the rivers of the Barwon and their tributaries are places of special cultural and spiritual significance.