

Submission on behalf of Yarra Council to the draft Yarra Strategic Plan Panel.

Introduction

1. This submission is made on behalf Yarra Council as one of the Responsible Public Entities (RPE) nominated in the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarong murrong) Act 2017 (the Act).
2. Council submitted a preliminary submission to the draft Yarra Strategic Plan (YSP) in April this year. Subsequently, Council at its meeting on 5 May 2020, endorsed this submission and by resolution provided some further comments it wishes to put to the Panel. The resolution of the Council is attached to this submission.
3. Council's submission regarding the Land Use Framework (LUF) is confined to the Suburban and Inner City reaches. The Suburban Reach extending west of Darebin Creek through to the Merri Creek confluence including Yarra Bend Park and the Inner City covering the remaining area westward to Punt Road in Richmond.

General

4. Council acknowledges the significant amount of work that has gone into developing the draft YSP. Council considers that whilst the draft YSP is a significant step towards meeting the requirements of the Act and generally sets the right directions there are aspects of the draft that need further consideration and improvement.
5. Council does not consider that the draft YSP is fully developed nor does it account sufficiently for the protection of the ecological values and significant biodiversity of the Yarra River and surrounds, or the impact that climate change will have on these values.
6. Further, Council considers that balancing the interaction between human activity and the ecological functions, including wildlife habitat of the Yarra River corridor, needs to be further refined.

7. Council supports an ambitious YSP that responds to the issues facing the corridor and achieves the expectations set out for an integrate whole-of –river and a new coordinated and modern management approach. This needs to come through more clearly in the draft YSP.
8. Equally, implementation should have more ambitious timeframes and targets that could include sequencing initial and intermediate steps and more simultaneous actions.
9. Council’s earlier submission provides comments regarding Part 1 of the YSP and the Performance Objectives. In addition to this, Council considers the draft YSP needs to develop and articulate the relationship between the natural beauty (in performance objective 4) and the landscape values and the ecology of the Yarra River corridor and the needs of inhabitant species. This is what is valued by the community and what makes the Yarra River corridor significant.
10. The YSP will need to work across multiple policy areas and a range of other legislation and strategies to achieve its vision, objectives and outcomes. It is important for the draft YSP to more clearly explain the relationship with other strategies and legislation, their inter-dependency and how they support the YSP in order to bring about a whole of government approach and a coordinated policy response.
11. Council notes that there remains an inherent conflict between the Theme 2 *Environmental principles – protecting biodiversity and ecological integrity is paramount and decisions should result in a net gain for the environment on Yarra River land* and the exemptions provided for projects declared under the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act. This is seen as undermining a core principle of both the Act and the role of the YSP to enact the community vision.

Land Use Framework

12. The content of the Land Use Framework Plan is set out in Section 21 of the Yarra River Protection Act 2017 and includes fifteen matters that must be included. Council submits that the draft YSP needs reviewing against Section 21 to ensure they are adequately covered in the strategy. Particular matters that could be improved are:
- Nominations of localised habitat corridors and ecological values for improvement.
 - Locations for community activities and events.
 - Identification of movement and access networks.
13. The draft LUF starts to provide a sense of the spatial settings and priorities along the whole of the Yarra River. It is however high level. Council suggests that there is merit in considering the future development of more localised plans that capture the finer details of the strategic land use, development, infrastructure and environmental outcomes. This could occur by individual local governments or by reaches. For example, a new master plan for Yarra Bend Park would provide a more integrated and holistic consideration of the proposals in the draft YSP as well as providing greater clarity to land managers.
14. In order for to make the Yarra River a central part of land use planning and decision making the YSP needs to be brought into effect using the policies and controls in planning schemes. Council supports the planning proposals specified in the ‘whole of river directions’ outlined in the draft YSP, including the YSP becoming a reference document in planning schemes. This is considered a key priority that needs to occur in a timely way.
15. Council is wanting to know more details about the proposals, such as what “updating” Clause 12.03-1R Yarra River Protection of the Planning Policy Framework will involve and what is intended by “refining” the existing interim controls. It appears the form and content of any amendment will occur after the final YSP is adopted and will have to be considered by Council at that time.

16. Council has always been an advocate for controls to protect the Yarra River corridor through design and development overlays including mandatory controls for setbacks and building heights. Permanent controls are supported, however, Council seeks to understand the process for reviewing the effectiveness of the current controls and the process for consulting with local governments.
17. Council notes that there are no broader planning reforms or changes proposed that might address wider metropolitan or catchment issues such as water quality or broader development outcomes.
18. Council considers the various overlays need reviewing to ensure they provide protection and guidance for areas of environmental significance and to ensure cultural heritage protection particularly for sites of significance to Traditional Owners.

Suburban Reach

19. This reach covers a significant part of the Yarra River within the municipality and represents areas with significant landscape, biodiversity, habitat values as well as areas of flood protection.
20. It includes a large part of the Yarra Bend Park with its mix of uses and environmental and cultural heritage values. The Park is important to the inner metropolitan area and will face increasing pressures as open space and recreation needs increase through the population growth occurring within the inner metropolitan area. Council considers a new master plan is needed for the Park to reconcile the various demands and priorities for the parklands. This will provide a more integrated approach and help guide the future project opportunities identified for the Park in the LUF.
21. This reach contains the confluences of the Merri and Darebin creeks which provide important riparian habitat links and offer opportunities for further revegetation and habitat enhancements. While the Merri Creek is recognised within the LUF, Council

submits the confluence with the Darebin Creek should also be identified for its environmental significance and potential for enhanced habitat links.

22. Council also considers that the river corridor between Yarra Bend Park heading eastward to Alphington Park and the Alphington Wetlands should be identified as a potential access links and also a significant vegetation and landscape corridor. This link will, in part, be achieved through the redevelopment of the former Amcor Paper Mill site where the river frontage will become available to the public as a requirement of the redevelopment of the site.

Inner City Reach

23. The Abbotsford Convent and the Children’s Farm is a renowned institution and an important point of connection to the Yarra River. Council considers the draft YSP needs to articulate what is meant by “opportunities for improvement” and that the focus on improving access to these places and to the river needs to be balanced more with actions to protect the ecological value of the river in this location.
24. While expanded and updated visitor facilities may provide a future opportunity, it needs to be considered within an overall understanding of the site’s values and having regard to other opportunities that might present. Council considers this is best done in collaboration with the Convent and Farm through a local plan which combines the Dights Falls and Merri Creek confluence areas.
25. Council recommends additional river connections within this reach including:
- A pedestrian/cyclist link between Cremorne, south to the South Yarra Station and a link to the Yarra River bank from Cremorne.
 - The Walmer Street bridge in Abbotsford
 - A potential new crossing at the northern end of Church Street, Richmond.
26. Council supports completing the missing link in the Main Yarra Trail between the Walmer Street and the Gipps Street bridges in Abbotsford. It supports the preparation of an Abbotsford Precinct Structure Plan as proposed with a focus “on

recognising and promoting Traditional Owner cultural heritage values, continuity of the Main Yarra Trail and opportunities to provide safe access to a wider range of users (all abilities access)". Council is keen to understand the full scope and timing for the project.

Conclusion

27. Council supports the draft YSP directions and puts forward these changes to help improve and strengthen the draft YSP. Council considers it important for the draft YSP to convey greater ambition and strengthened the protection of the ecological values and significant biodiversity of the Yarra River and surrounds and address the impacts of climate change.
28. Council is appreciative of having the opportunity to present this submission to the Panel.

Attachment 1 – Council resolution – Draft Yarra Strategic Plan 5 May 2020.

11.9 – COUNCIL RESOLUTION - 5 May 2020

Moved: Councillor Stone

Seconded: Councillor O'Brien

1. That Council:
 - (a) note the report of officers in relation to the draft Yarra Strategic Plan being prepared by Melbourne Water as the nominated lead agency in accordance with the requirements of the Yarra River Protection (*Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn*) Act 2017;
 - (b) note that the preliminary submission has been lodged with Melbourne Water as outlined in paragraph 33 of this report;
 - (c) endorse these key points for presentation to the Panel considering submissions in relation to the draft Yarra Strategic Plan,
 - (d) further note that whilst the draft YSP is a significant step towards meeting the requirements of the Act and generally sets the right directions, Council does not consider that it is fully developed nor does it account sufficiently for the protection of the ecological values and significant biodiversity of the Yarra River and surrounds, or the impact that climate change will have on these values. Council considers that balancing the interaction between human activity and the ecological functions, including wildlife habitat of the Yarra Corridor, needs to be further refined;
 - (e) further notes that the Directions for Future Land Use and Development at the Abbotsford Convent, Collingwood Children's Farm and Dights Fall needs to articulate what is meant by "opportunity for improvement" and that the focus on improving public access to these places and to the river needs to be balanced more with actions to protect the ecological value of the river in this location, in line with Yarra's draft Nature Strategy;
 - (f) also the relationship between the draft YSP and the Victorian Planning Scheme needs to be clearly articulated within the Plan;
 - (g) requests that the relationship between natural beauty (Performance Objective 4) and landscape values and the ecology of a major waterway and the needs of inhabitant species be developed and articulated in the Plan
 - (h) further notes that there remains inherent conflict between Theme 2 of the Yarra River Protection (*Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn*) Act (2017) *Environmental principles – Protecting biodiversity and ecological integrity is paramount and decisions should result in a net gain for the environment on Yarra River land* and exemptions provided for projects declared under the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act. This exemption undermines a core principle of both the Act and the role of a Yarra Strategic Plan to enact the community vision and this needs to be raised in the panel hearings; and
 - (i) officers continue to represent the Council at the various meetings regarding the preparations of the draft Yarra Strategic Plan, and the panel hearings, and provide further updates to the Council.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY