Cultural River Precinct Structure Plan

Project background and summary of previous engagement conducted as part of Yarra River protection
Acknowledgements
The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning would like to acknowledge the community engagement conducted by Melbourne Water to date, and thank Melbourne Water for their continuing collaboration as part of a whole-of-government program to deliver The Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung Murron) Act 2017 and the Yarra River Action Plan.

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Project background

Yarra River protection by the Victorian Government

Since 2016 the Victorian Government has been delivering a wide range of policy commitments to protect the Yarra River and its parklands for decades to come. In December 2015 the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water established the Yarra Ministerial Advisory Committee (Yarra MAC) to assess the effectiveness of current government arrangements.

The Yarra MAC was tasked to provide a recommended action plan for the improved management, promotion and protection of the Yarra River. Following extensive consultation with the community and the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Council, the Yarra MAC submitted 30 recommendations to the Government. All 30 recommendations were supported by Government with 28 recommendations adopted in full and the two remaining recommendations being accepted in part, with minor changes.


Aligning with the Yarra River Action Plan, in 2017, landmark legislation passed through the Victorian Parliament to protect the Yarra River for future generations. The Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung Murrron) Act 2017 (the Act) enables the identification of the Yarra River and the many hundreds of parcels of public land it flows through as one living, integrated natural entity for protection and improvement.

The new Act recognises the intrinsic connection of Traditional Owners to the Yarra River and provide for the declaration of the Yarra River and certain public land in its vicinity for the purpose of protecting it as one living and integrated natural entity. It also provides for the development and implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan, to establish the Birrarung Council and to provide for the declaration of the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands.

The Cultural River Precinct Structure Plan

During the Yarra MAC investigations, several opportunities for immediate action were identified, including in the corridor between Bulleen Park and Banyule Flats (Action 21 of the Yarra River Action Plan). This area was identified as an area that would benefit from early master planning during the development of the Yarra Strategic Plan to guide future land use changes along the corridor.

The Action Plan recognises that this precinct has the opportunity to become an internationally-significant cultural precinct, centred on the relationship between the arts, nature and Traditional Owner heritage. It is therefore referred to as the Cultural River Precinct within the Action Plan. The precinct has several public acquisition overlays and land use opportunities that should be reviewed as a whole to provide certainty to land owners and developers. This precinct falls into the Suburban Reach of the Yarra River, which spans from Dights Falls, Abbotsford to Warrandyte State Park.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) is tasked with preparing a structure plan for the Cultural River Precinct, with a 50-year vision. The figure on the following page shows the precinct boundaries for the structure plan.

A structure plan presents the preferred direction for future land use within a defined area, and how land use and development will be managed, in this case, to ensure the long-term protection of the Yarra River and its parklands.
Cultural River Precinct Structure Plan

Project background and summary of previous engagement conducted as part of Yarra River protection.
Engagement by the Victorian Government on the Yarra River

Victorian Government projects that have engaged directly or indirectly on the Yarra River are summarised in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Driver</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yarra MAC Engagement by DELWP (2016)</strong></td>
<td>To engage with community and stakeholders in each reach of the Yarra River to their views on the key issues and opportunities for the river and proposed management arrangements</td>
<td>MAC Terms of Reference prepared by Minister Wynne</td>
<td>Face-to-face engagement, online engagement, formal submission process</td>
<td>Yarra River Action Plan and Community Views Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imagine the Yarra River phase one by Melbourne Water (2017)</strong></td>
<td>To collect the river’s narrative through community storytelling, along with identification of the community’s values and priorities.</td>
<td>Prescribed in the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murron) Act 2017 and the Yarra River Action Plan (Action 13)</td>
<td>Face-to-face engagement, online engagement via Imagine the Yarra project page, and market research.</td>
<td>Identified the community’s narrative of the Yarra. Confirmed values and aspirations for the Yarra. Tested and confirmed the findings from the Yarra MAC engagement on priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yarra River Community Assembly by Melbourne Water (2017-2018)</strong></td>
<td>To co-design a 50-year community vision that ensures protection of the Yarra River’s unique character by providing guidance on future use and development.</td>
<td>Requirement prescribed in the Yarra River Protection Bill (Wilip-gin Birrarung murron) and the Yarra River Action Plan (Action 13)</td>
<td>24 randomly selected citizens brought together to create the community vision drawing on expert knowledge and the broader communities, stories, values and priorities.</td>
<td>A 50-year community vision for each of the four reaches of the Yarra and an overarching 50-year vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North East Link engagement by North East Link Authority (2017 to present)</strong></td>
<td>To seek feedback from the community on project objectives and principles and the four corridor options (2017). To seek feedback on the selected corridor option (2018 onwards).</td>
<td>Statutory requirement prescribed as part of the Environmental Effects Statement process</td>
<td>Online engagement and written submissions (2017). Face to face events, online engagement (2018).</td>
<td>North East Link Community Engagement Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community views on the Yarra River

Emerging themes from Yarra River Victorian Government engagement to date

Across the different Victorian Government community engagement processes since 2016 the following consistent themes were identified:

1. **Protect, enhance and restore environmental health of the Yarra and surrounds**
   The Yarra’s environment is recognised and valued by the community as a habitat for native flora and fauna, as an important biodiversity link, and as a connector between people and nature. Measures for protecting the environment should be focused on minimising the impacts of people and development on the river and its parklands, including rubbish and pollutants, stormwater management, loss of native vegetation, and a lack of community awareness.

2. **Maximise community use, facilities and improve access to the River and surrounds**
   The Yarra is highly valued for the recreation opportunities it provides but there are access limitations and the need for additional facilities that support community use including wayfinding, toilets, rubbish bins and improved safety. People’s significant place attachment to the Yarra is fostered by the recreational and social opportunities it provides from both a historical and present-day perspective.

3. **Protect the natural landscape and ensure a balance between land uses**
   Community identified a strong preference for the regeneration of the river’s landscapes with native vegetation, improved weed management and eradication, and increased habitats for native fauna. Balancing the different needs of river users and land uses was also a priority for improvement, while protecting the river from urban development through strengthened planning controls.

4. **Improve cultural and heritage values and understanding**
   There is a strong desire to improve the community’s knowledge and understanding of the Yarra River’s historical and culture significance, with particular emphasis placed on Traditional Owner values. This included understanding and protecting places that are culturally and historically significant. Priorities for improving the cultural values of the river were focused around strong partnerships with Traditional Owners and integrating Traditional Owner practices into land management.
Project-based Victorian Government engagement findings to date

Yarra MAC Engagement, DELWP (2016)

The Yarra MAC reported very strong stakeholder and community support for a new approach to protecting and improving the Yarra River and environs.

**Environmental health of the waterway and riparian lands**

A prominent issue in the Suburban Reach was the need for measures to improve water quality, including reducing litter and improving stormwater management. Other issues around improving the health of the Yarra River environment included pest management and controls on pollutants going into drains. When asked what aspects of the river and its surroundings they would most like to see protected, the Suburban Reach participants referenced the environment. Participants wanted the native species and wildlife reliant on the waterways, particularly platypuses, to be protected. They would also like the water quality of the river protected, including the removal of rubbish and contaminants. The need to consider climate change mitigation as part of future planning was also noted.

**Community use, access and amenity of the river and its parklands**

A prominent issue in the Suburban Reach was improving access to and facilities within recreational areas. Participants felt that there were many areas for improvement of community use, access and amenity of the river and its parklands. Specifically, participants would like to see improved: accessibility, community involvement in projects, walking paths (along with an increase in walking paths), removal of rubbish along paths and more rubbish bins, toilet facilities near recreation areas, access to rowing, canoeing and kayaking facilities, signage along the paths, and safety of public parks and paths at night.

**The river corridor’s landscape and its interface with surrounding land use**

Improving the riparian vegetation and open space amenity and continuity was a prominent issue for the Suburban Reach. Other areas for improvement were: more appropriate and attractive vegetation, weed management and eradication, more scenic places highlighted such as Dights Falls, the balance between recreational use and preserving native flora and fauna, restrictions of agriculture in ‘sensitive’ areas, and minimising industrial sites and development near the river. Participants wanted the quietness and bush feel of the river and surrounding lands to be protected. Participants also wanted the vegetation surrounding the Yarra to be protected by keeping paths away from the river’s edge. For future planning, participants highlighted the need to balance human needs with environmental needs, preserve the natural beauty of the river corridor and ensure protection from development by providing clear guidelines.

**Cultural and heritage values in the riverscape**

Suburban Reach participants called for more information on Indigenous heritage, increased planting of Indigenous vegetation and for there to be greater visibility of Aboriginal involvement in decision making. Many would like the Indigenous vegetation to be protected and for areas of historic and cultural significance to be protected.

**Community involvement**

The MAC also reported that many participants discussed the need for community participation in the future planning for the Yarra River including community engagement and education and capacity building.
Imagine the Yarra, Melbourne Water (2017)

The Imagine the Yarra engagement heard that a keen sense of place attachment is present through a history of people and their families enjoying recreation on or along the riverbank.

Visioning for the future of the Suburban Reach saw the Yarra as a vital green corridor connecting the outer suburbs to the city, the river also offers a place to reflect, relax and educate others on important ecologies, cultural stories and life skills, amidst a backdrop of precious and unique wildlife.

Environmental health of the waterway and riparian lands

The provision of habitats for various wildlife was a focus for participants in the Suburban Reach. Degradation of the river over time was also highlighted, this was particularly discussed in relation to the water quality and the fact the river used to be swimmable, and now it isn’t. The emphasis of protecting the environmental health of the Yarra River was primarily related to memories and recreational activities, for example, sightings of platypus were mentioned as being precious. Participants also expressed great appreciation of the billabongs and wetlands in the Suburban reach. Increased awareness of the Yarra River as a source of drinking water to promote greater respect, monitoring of environmental flows and biodiversity, was identified by participants as an opportunity for improvement.

Community use, access and amenity of the river and its parklands

Community use, access and amenity of the river and its parklands in the Suburban Reach was a prominent theme in participant contributions. There was a strong focus on the recreational and social opportunities the Yarra River provides, both formal and informal recreation. Diverse range of on land activities are enjoyed in the Suburban Reach, including: walking, cycling, running, team sports, horse-riding, animal and bird appreciation, relaxing and enjoying picnics, swimming, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, rafting, rowing and sailing small boats. For participants in the Suburban Reach, their place attachment to the river is fostered by old memories that are linked to specific places along the Yarra, including Warrandyte, Banyule Flats, Laughing Waters and Finns Reserve. Many people referenced enjoying their time spent with family and close friends. Opportunities for improvement focussed on the need for amenities that supported all ability community access and use of the Yarra River, including the need for community spaces.

The river corridor’s landscape and its interface with surrounding land use

Participants expressed concern around encroachment of urban development on recreational use of the Yarra River and its parklands. Specific concern included the North-East Link proposal crossing into valuable habitat areas and parklands, particularly at Banyule. Retaining an undisturbed large green corridor for continuous stretches of bike paths, parks and wildlife spotting was a priority. There were three key opportunities for improvement identified by participants: maintaining weed eradication from the river and its banks, preserving recreational areas and keeping spaces natural, and strengthening planning controls to preserve greenery.

Cultural and heritage values in the riverscape

Participants expressed support for Traditional Owners’ presence in the Yarra River’s future vision, including Aboriginal values, language and stories. The importance of protecting areas of cultural significance was also identified.

The living river

The importance of the river to Melbourne as a place to bring people to get in touch with nature and as being reflective of the diversity of Melbourne culture was identified by Suburban Reach participants. The Yarra River was identified as a place of experience, a place that inspires imagination and place for ritual.
North East Link Engagement, North East Link Authority (2017)

The North-East Link Authority engaged with the community and stakeholders on the project objectives and principles in 2017. The feedback received regarding the objectives and principles reveal priorities of the community that are relevant to the Banyule-Bulleen River Precinct Structure Plan. There was strong support for minimising impacts on communities and public open space, including: minimising impacts on communities by maintaining local character, minimising impacts on places communities value, and minimising the amount of public open space acquired.

The environment
Minimising impacts on the environment was considered to be very important by many participants. This includes minimising impacts on: waterways, wildlife and wildlife corridors, groundwater, places of environmental significance and native vegetation.

Cultural and historic value
Many participants felt that minimising the impacts on places with cultural and historic value was very important, including minimising: the visual impact of any new road infrastructure, impacts on places with Indigenous significance, and impacts on places with historical significance.

Transport and connectivity
There were several key priorities of community members and stakeholders that are relevant to the Cultural River Precinct regarding transport and connectivity. The priorities included: improve walking and cycling connections, ensure accessibility for all people, and have dedicated cycling paths for improved safety. There was a high level of support for making neighbourhoods safer and easier to travel around.

Yarra River Community Assembly, Melbourne Water (2018)

The Yarra River Community Assembly co-designed the 50-year overarching vision for the whole of the Yarra River along with individual visions for each of the four reaches, including the Suburban Reach.

Draft Yarra River 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 the 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, recreating, 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 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.

Draft Suburban Reach Vision

Our Yarra River, Birrarung provides a continuous network of protected parklands, providing inclusive access to all. A covenant of custodianship is adopted by private landowners along the reach, embedding a culture of respect and responsibility for river values. The river corridor provides a healthy natural environment, enabling swimming, relaxation and other recreational activities. Importantly, it also supports a flourishing natural ecosystem, including networks of billabongs and wetlands, for indigenous plants and animals to thrive. This is a valued place of connection to Wurundjeri culture and community, with a network of hubs of learning, play and celebration. It benefits from a united and integrated approach to governance and land management, guided by the wisdom and practices of Traditional Owners, keeping culture not just in the past but alive into the future.