

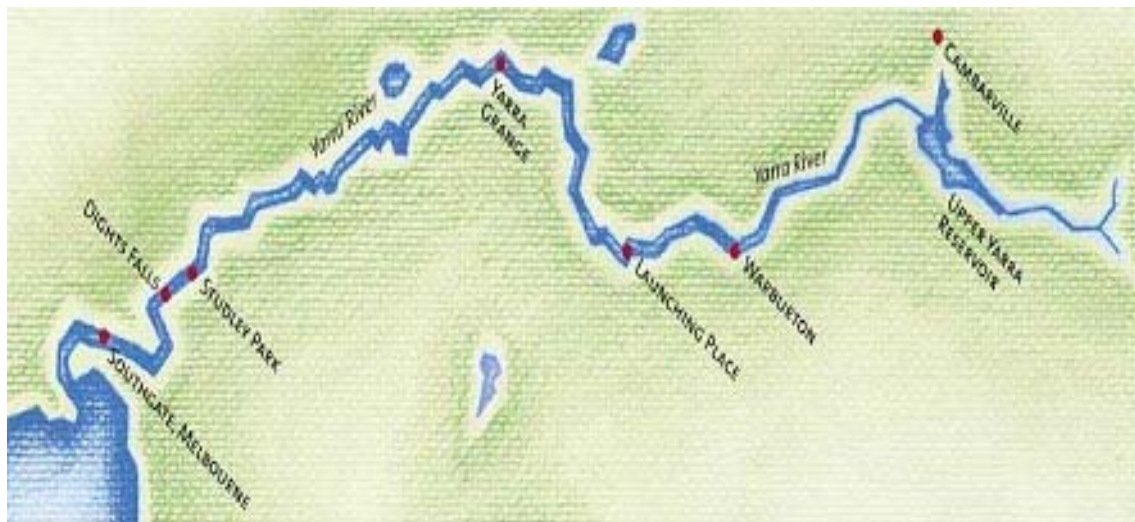
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Yarra River

Melbourne's Yarra River has a catchment that extends from Moonee Ponds Creek in the west, to the Kinglake Ranges in the north, and upstream of Upper Yarra Reservoir in the east. The river itself rises in mountainous terrain approximately 40 kilometres to the east of Warburton, and flows for 245 kilometres to Port Phillip Bay.

The Yarra Catchment

The total catchment area of the Yarra River and its tributaries is over 4000 square kilometres, and about two million people live within its boundaries.



Average annual rainfall in the catchment ranges from 615mm at Burnley near Melbourne, to 1080mm at Upper Yarra Reservoir near Warburton, contributing to higher flows during Winter and Spring. Although the Yarra River is not large by Australian standards, it is a very productive catchment, as it generates the fourth highest yield of water per hectare of catchment in Victoria.

The upper sections of the Yarra River and its major tributaries flow through forested, mountainous areas that have been reserved for water supply purposes for more than 100 years.

The upper section offers excellent habitat and good water quality, and is home to a wide range of aquatic species, including the Mt Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly, which is only found in the small area of alpine catchment around the source of the river.

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Over one third of Victoria's native plants and animal species occur in the catchment, and the Yarra River between Warburton and Warrandyte has been identified as a Victorian Heritage River

A number of water supply reservoirs are within the Yarra River catchment, such as the Upper Yarra, O'Shannassy, Maroondah and Silvan reservoirs. A study to determine the environmental flow requirements of the Yarra is being finalised and will be released soon.



River water quality

Historically, the Yarra River system has received highly contaminated discharges from industrial premises (such as tanneries, abattoirs, breweries, etc) unsewered areas, septic tanks, sewage treatment plants, landfills and sewer overflows. Over the past 30 years or so, there has been an improvement in the river's water quality. Water quality information on the Yarra River is available on Melbourne Water's website – melbournewater.com.au/ouryarra

As a result of urbanisation and changes in land use, river health deteriorates downstream towards Melbourne. However, water quality in the Yarra has greatly improved since the 1970s, resulting from the sewerage of catchments and the diversion of industrial discharges into the sewer system. The river now compares favourably with many metropolitan rivers overseas.

The river channel has been largely modified, particularly downstream of Dights Falls, to improve drainage during high flows and to protect nearby residential areas from flooding. Works have included straightening and realigning the channel, and deepening and widening the river to increase flood capacity.

The Victorian Government has released the Yarra River Action Plan, which outlines \$580 million of initiatives to improve the health of the Yarra River over the long-term.

This investment will build on the vast amount of work carried out by the community, organisations and individuals over many years to improve water quality.

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Everyone can contribute to a cleaner Yarra

When it rains, litter and other pollutants get washed from our roads and pavements down drains and into rivers and creeks.

You can help make the Yarra River a healthy place for native plants and animals to live and for everyone to enjoy by following these simple tips to reduce stormwater pollution:

1. Make sure litter is binned securely.
2. Clean up your dog's droppings to stop them washing into stormwater drains when it rains.
3. Collect grass clippings and leaves and clear them from street gutters and drains to stop excess nutrients entering rivers and creeks.
4. Don't allow paint, oil, fertiliser or pesticides to wash into drains.

A history of our great river

The Yarra River was a life-source to the aboriginals of the Wurundjeri tribe that occupied the lands around Port Phillip Bay for at least 30,000 years. It was seen to be etched into the landscape by the ancestral creator spirit Bunjil - the wedge tailed eagle. They called the river Birrarrung - "Place of Mists and Shadows" and it was the dreaming path they followed and camped beside for countless seasons.

The first documented sighting of "the great river" by explorers occurred in 1803 when NSW Surveyor-General Charles Grimes, sent south by Governor King to map the Port Phillip district, rowed upstream as far as Dights Falls. He named it "Freshwater River" and proclaimed the valley "the most eligible place for a settlement that I have seen".

When the first settlers set up camp beside the Yarra in 1835 they used the fresh water above a natural rock barrier for drinking, bathing, irrigation and fishing. An eight-kilogram snapper was once caught in the river and dolphins were regular visitors quite far upstream.



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Within a few years of Melbourne's establishment, however, the river was also being used as a drain and as a place to dispose of industrial and household rubbish. The water quickly became so noxious that three typhoid epidemics occurred in the early 1840s that claimed up to 20 lives each week. Residents were forced to buy safe drinking water from commercial water carters.

When industries such as wool washing works, abattoirs, tanneries and soap works were established alongside unsewered workingmen's houses on the mud flats of Collingwood and Richmond, the pollution pouring into the Yarra became so bad and the putrid smells so terrible that the Governor threatened to vacate Government House and the city turned its back on its river for almost a century.

Community standards and expectations have changed substantially in recent years, and the introduction of the *Environment Protection Act* in 1970 ensured substantial improvements in waterway quality through the diversion of industrial waste to the sewerage system, and the large-scale sewerage of Melbourne's outer suburbs and rural areas.

More recently, water quality initiatives have included additional sewerage system upgrades, better management of stormwater pollution and partnerships between farmers, community groups and water authorities in a range of Yarra River improvement programs.

Platypus are even returning to re-establish colonies in parts of the Yarra River system, and some have recently been spotted at Kew, just 10 km from the city centre.

Natural valley storage and flooding

With 24 tributaries and a catchment of over 4000 square kilometres, the Yarra was historically a river of unpredictable seasonal mood swings. Within the floodplain, buildings, fences, crops and farm animals were at risk of washing away in floods that occurred almost annually.

Unusually, the biggest floodplain is a long way from the river's mouth. The 40km floodplain, which stretches from Yarra Junction to Yering Gorge, endowed the world-famous Yarra Valley wine-growing region with its wonderfully productive soils.

Three major natural valley storage areas help to control flood levels along the Yarra. These are known as Chandler Storage, between Fairfield and Eltham, Homestead Road-Henley Road Storage, and Yering Storage on the Yering Flats.

Further information

If you would like further information, please contact us on 131 722 or visit our website at melbournewater.com.au