



# 2023-24 SNAPSHOT



# Creating a web of green spaces across Melbourne's south-east

**Living Links is an urban nature program working to create a web of high quality, interconnected green spaces across Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs.**

By improving the connections between the many parks, reserves, open spaces, coasts, beaches, pathways, rivers, creeks and wetlands, we aim to make this area a world-class urban ecosystem. This will improve habitat for wildlife and make it easier for people to experience the many benefits of connecting with nature as part of their daily lives.

Living Links is a collaboration between 18 organisations (councils, government agencies, Holmesglen TAFE and community/interest groups) all working together towards our shared vision.

## Exceeding targets for Our Catchments Our Communities - Living Links Urban Forest Project

The focus this year was to complete the **Our Catchments Our Communities (OCOC) - Living Links Urban Forest Project** which ran from 2020 to 2024. The project, supported by the Victorian Government, established urban forests across the Dandenong catchment, contributing towards biodiversity protection and enhancement, climate change mitigation and research, urban cooling, and creating benefits for human health and well-being.

### Project delivery summary:

- Revegetation of 10.5 hectares of decommissioned landfill sites in the Kingston Municipality, contributing to the Kingston Chain of Parks - creating biodiversity and recreation opportunities for the local community.
- The establishment of a micro forest demonstration site in the Monash Municipality.
- Re-greening Frankston Council's streetscapes by planting 70 canopy trees and the completion of 321 pollinator surveys as part of Frankston's Gardens for Wildlife Program.
- Establishing a long-term Climate Future Research Plots partnership to measure the impact of climate change on climate adapted seed through planting five replicated research plots in the Cities of Greater Dandenong, Knox and Maroondah, in partnership with Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Melbourne Water, Melbourne University and Federation University.
- Parks Victoria planted 18 hectares of vegetation and removed 18 hectares of weeds at Churchill National Park and 33 hectares at Dandenong Police Paddocks.
- The City of Greater Dandenong planted 24 hectares of vegetation and removed 134 hectares of weeds along the Dandenong Creek.



**The overall total project outputs** are outlined in the table below, demonstrating that all project targets were exceeded. This is an outstanding effort for the delivery partners as there was a very slow start to most projects due to: Covid 19 lock down delays in years 1 and 2; several staff changes; and the merger of the Catchment Management Authority with Melbourne Water.

Our Catchments Our Communities EC 5 - Living Links Urban Forest Project - 2020/21 to 2023/24										
Overall Project Targets & Actual Outputs										
	Ecological Assessments	Videos Produced	Publications Written	Hectares Revegetated	Hectares of Weed Control	Environment Volunteer Numbers	Environment Volunteer Hours	Number of Workshop Participants	Numer of Field Day Attendance	Number of Meeting Participants
OVERALL TARGET	165	7	8	34	90	0	0	240	375	250
ACTUAL OUTPUTS	426	6	8	60	282	610	1906	331	2103	250

## \$2 Million additional funding for the Dandenong Creek Catchment.

In 2023-24, Living Links partners have leveraged over \$2 million of additional funding for environmental projects in the Dandenong Creek Catchment. Most of these projects will be implemented in the next one to four years and include:

- \$250,000 Melbourne Water Liveable Communities Liveable Waterways grant to expand the Climate Research Project Partnership with the City of Greater Dandenong, Knox Council, Maroondah Council, Bunurong, Melbourne Water, Melbourne University and Federation University.
- \$220,000 of Melbourne Water capital funding for Mordialloc estuary weed control and revegetation
- \$420,000 of Melbourne Water Urban Cooling capital funding for revegetation along waterways at two sites in the City of Greater Dandenong, & one site in the City of Kingston.
- \$180,000 of Melbourne Water capital funding to establish habitat for threatened species, Dwarf Galaxis, in the City of Frankston.
- \$600,000 of Melbourne Water capital funding for Dandenong Creek rehabilitation works in the City of Monash - \$505,000 secured from the Victorian Government 'Our Catchments Our Communities' Grant for the Middle Dandenong Creek catchment, to be delivered between 2025 and 2028.



# Climate Future Research Plots established

Following years of planning and preparation, five experimental Climate Future Research Plots were established across the municipalities of the City of Greater Dandenong, Knox and Maroondah, using seed from four different locations. This collaborative partnership will test how native plant species respond to future climate scenarios, offering valuable insights into creating resilient landscapes.

City of Greater Dandenong project managed the establishment of the plots with project partners Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC), Melbourne University, Federation University, Melbourne Water and Maroondah and Knox City Councils. The plots will be maintained over the next three years to ensure the plants establish successfully.

Federation University is leading the research and monitoring component, focusing on how native plant species will adapt to projected climate changes in urban settings.



Professor from Federation University, measuring each plant.



Bunurong Welcome to Country & Smoking Ceremony.



Dandenong Climate Future Research Plot.



Dandenong planting day team briefing with Project Manager.



Project Manager from City of Greater Dandenong.

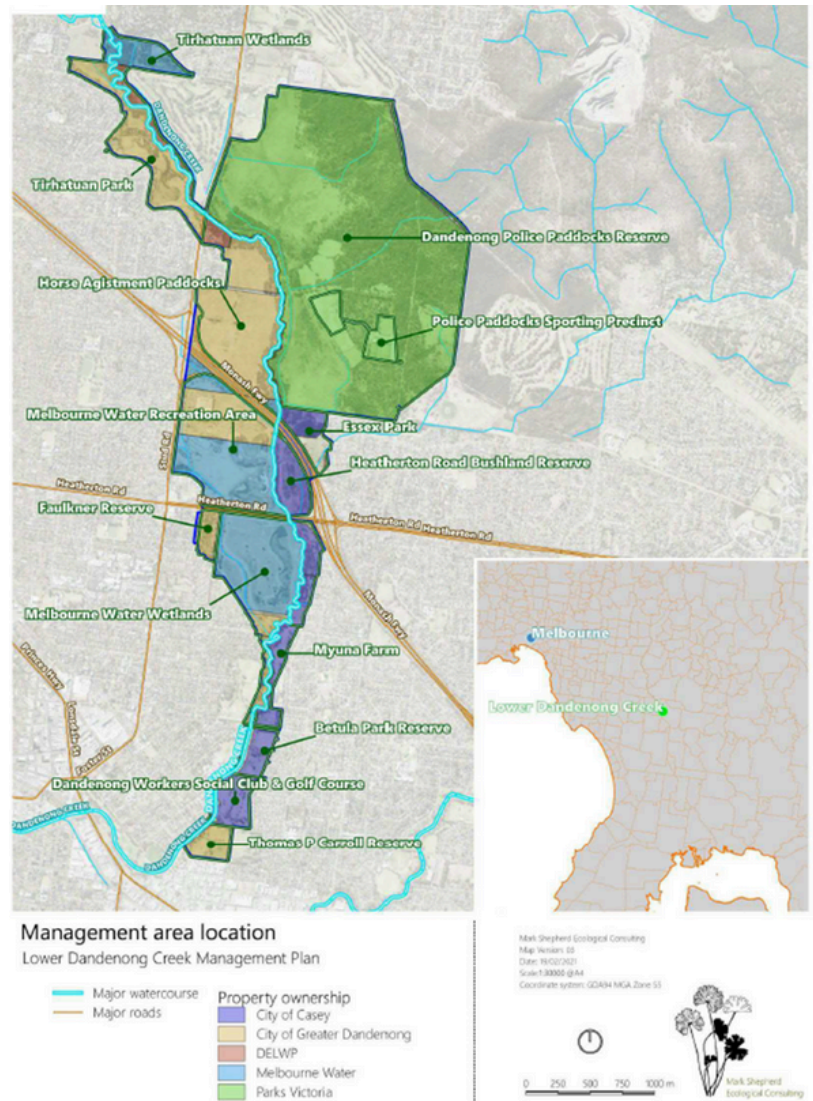


# Next round of funding approved for the Our Catchments Our Communities Vital Landscapes Project

The Our Catchments Our Communities 'Vital Landscapes Project' is supported by the Victorian Government and aims to restore native vegetation along the Dandenong Creek. The next round of funding of \$505,000 has been approved and will deliver five projects over the next four years (2024 to 2028). This is \$185,000 more than the previous OCOC funding for the project, formerly known as the Urban Forest Project.

This funding will be used to implement the Lower Dandenong Creek Management Plan in partnership with the municipalities of Knox, Monash and City of Greater Dandenong, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, DEECA and includes sites of cultural heritage significance to the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

The collaboration of works to be implemented includes; ecological surveys, environmental monitoring, weed control, revegetation, Cultural Heritage Assessments, stewardship and, community engagement including another Living Links Conference.



Project area map from the Lower Dandenong Creek Management Plan

## The budget allocation is outlined below:

\$77,000: Knox City Council for weed control, ecological monitoring and research at Police Paddocks.

\$140,000: Parks Victoria for weed control and revegetation at Dandenong Police Paddocks.

\$125,000: City of Greater Dandenong for weed control and revegetation along the Dandenong Creek.

\$20,000: Monash City Council for weed control and revegetation along the Dandenong Creek.

\$30,000: Melbourne Water to coordinate agency and community events and activities over 4 years.

\$113,446: Melbourne Water for 4 years of project establishment, coordination of project partners, collation and mapping of project data, and 6 monthly reporting to the Victorian Government

# The inaugural Living Links Conference

The Living Links Conference was a successful event with 70 people attending at Tatterson Pavillion in Keysborough on May 5th 2024. The conference program began with a Bunurong 'Welcome to Country' and followed by a variety of presentations and discussions showcasing the incredible work of the partnership over the last year.

Key presenters were:

- Anthony Bigelow – Convener of Victorian Environment Friends Network;
- Irene Kelly – Co founder of the Gardens for Wildlife Program;
- David De Angelis – Dandenong Creek Catchment health; and
- Kim Boswell from The Forever Agenda talking about volunteer group recruitment and retention of members.

These presentations were followed by group discussions covering the following topics:

- Goat grazing for vegetation management;
- Environmental partnerships across the region;
- Community advocacy at Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve;
- Building a network of citizen scientists;
- Gardens for Wildlife;
- Friends of Dandenong Valley Parklands projects;
- The power of demonstration gardens;
- Indigenous nurseries with Friends of Braeside Park; and,
- Attracting small birds back to the suburbs with urban ecologist Gio Fitzpatrick.

Lunch was then followed by a Tatterson Wetland tour led by City of Greater Dandenong staff. There was very positive feedback from participants about the conference with interest for more opportunities to bring volunteer community groups together and hopefully run another conference in the future.



Round table discussions



David De Angelis presenting on Dandenong Creek health and condition.



## Records broken at the Discover Dandenong Creek Festival

Congratulations to the City of Greater Dandenong for another amazing Discover Dandenong Creek Festival in April 2024. Attendance records were broken with approximately 1000 people attending on a beautiful sunny autumn day. The festival included a variety of engaging environmental and cultural activities for families to enjoy and improve their connection to their local Dandenong Creek. Bunurong conducted a powerful Welcome to Country, with a Smoking Ceremony and Cultural dancing. Well done to Living Links partners who had displays on the day including the City of Casey, the Greater Dandenong Environment Group, Climate Plot Research partners from Federation University and the Melbourne Water team who helped out at the Living Links tent.



Vinnie the MW platypus at the Living Links Tent



The Dandenong community enjoying the festival

## Ambassador School Program

Each year, Living Links will support one primary or secondary school located within the Dandenong Creek catchment to undertake a project relating to the Living Links program vision. The Living Links Ambassador school for 2023-24 was Lyndale Greens Primary School. This program awards one school annually. The school was awarded the Living Links Ambassador School status for their amazing 'Knowing the Walk Program', where the students spent a day exploring and learning about the Dandenong Creek between Booth Reserve and Tirhatuan Reserve. The students were engaged in many activities including: tree planting, water testing, bird watching & litter surveys. Their teacher said, "The students enjoyed the excursion so much they were still talking about it months later!"



Lyndale Greens Primary School students tree planting



Living Links Ambassador School Sign



## Holmesglen TAFE opportunities through Living Links Partnership

Long-term member of Living Links, Tony Collins, who previously worked for Kingston Council, is now a teacher at Holmesglen TAFE. Tony presented to the Committee on the highly regarded environment courses run at Holmesglen TAFE and suggested opportunities for students through collaboration with Living Links partners. Tony has rejoined the Living Links Committee in his new role to create collaborations to implement Living Links activities whilst providing students with practical natural resource management industry experience. Current courses available are the Certificate 4, and the Diploma of Conservation and Ecosystems management.



Holmesglen TAFE students tree planting along the Dandenong Creek in CGD.

## Ranger tour of Yulukit Willam Nature Reserve

Bayside Council organised a ranger guided tour for the Living Links Committee of the amazing transformation of the Elsternwick golf course into the Yulukit Willam Nature Reserve. The reserve provides valuable wetlands and habitat in the urban landscape which help improve the quality of water as it flows in Port Phillip Bay and provides a beautiful natural parkland for the local community to enjoy.



Living Links Committee on guided Ranger tour.

# Living Links 2023-24 Achievements



**345.7 hectares**

of native vegetation  
managed or established

**120,646+ native plants**

planted to improve habitat  
and strengthen corridors



**92.5 kilometres**

of riparian vegetation  
enhanced along waterways

**2.5 kilometres**

of recreational trails  
established or improved



**9045+ hours**

of volunteer time spent  
caring for the environment



# Looking forward – key focus areas for 2024-2025

- The Living Links Strategic Review will be conducted in 2025 to create the new 10 year Living Links Strategic Plan and a three year Action Plan. These documents will guide the future direction and priorities for the Living Links Partnerships Coordinator role and the Living Links Committee.
- Establishing project contracts, delivery and reporting for the first year of the OCOC Vital Landscapes Project.
- Working together with DEECA, Knox Council and the Eastern Region Pest Animal Network to hold a Peri Urban Deer Forum in March 2025.
- Federation University will continue to monitor the Climate Research Plots and, City of Greater Dandenong, Knox Council and Maroondah Council will continue maintenance of the plots to ensure the plants successfully establish over the next 3 years.
- Implementation of Melbourne Water riparian vegetation restoration projects in the City of Frankston, City of Monash, Mordialloc Estuary in Kingston and urban cooling projects in the City of Greater Dandenong and Kingston.
- Living Links Partners will continue to provide diverse work experience opportunities for students at Holmesglen TAFE. Due to popular demand there will be another Living Links Conference including environmental volunteers and community leaders in 2025-26.

## More information on Living Links:

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