



The benefits of recovering additional water for the Yarra River (Birrarung)

The Yarra River and its key values

The Yarra River is home to a range of beautiful indigenous plants, animals, birds and fish, and is vital to our social and economic wellbeing. It is the source of 70 per cent of Melbourne’s drinking water, supports productive agriculture, and provides recreational opportunities like rowing, fishing, bird watching, picnicking and walking.

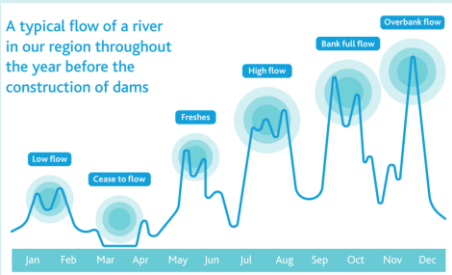
To the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, the river is known as the Birrarung, meaning ‘river of mists and shadows’. It is the sacred lifeblood of Country for both Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples, providing food, water and meeting places, as well as being a central element in their cultural, economic and spiritual life.



What is environmental water and why does the Yarra River need it?

Environmental water is water managed to improve or maintain the health of rivers and wetlands – including the plants and animals that depend on them. This includes ensuring that water is released at the right location, volume, timing, frequency, duration and quality.

There are a range of types of flows present in a natural flow regime which we try to replicate through the use of environmental water. However, due to historical and ongoing impacts, there are many important flow components missing. As a result, the Yarra River does not receive enough water and key environmental values are at risk of decline.



How much water does the Yarra River need now and into the future?

The Yarra River is currently entitled to 17 gigalitres of water to protect, maintain and enhance environmental values. However, scientific studies have shown that the current entitlement needs to be almost quadrupled to protect environmental values against climate change at 2028.

The Victorian Government’s target by 2032 is to recover an additional 11 gigalitres of water every year. This will be in a step in the right direction towards ensuring that the health of the Yarra River and its social, cultural and economic values are protected to support and enhance liveability for future generations to come.

What are the environmental benefits of additional water for the Yarra River?

The following table shows what will happen to key environmental values of the Yarra River in the future. With no additional water, most values will only be protected from the worst of climate change. However, with an additional 11 gigalitres, platypus and waterbugs can be improved beyond their current condition.

What will happen to these values in the future with...		No additional water for the Yarra River	Additional 11 gigalitres for the Yarra River
Fish		Protected from the worst of climate change	Maintained in its current condition
Platypus		Protected from the worst of climate change	Improved beyond its current condition
Plants		Not protected from climate change	Not protected from climate change
Waterbugs		Protected from the worst of climate change	Improved beyond its current condition

Recovery of smaller volumes of water also benefits the Yarra River. For example, just 1 gigalitre can deliver enough flow to prevent drying of refuge habitat for platypus, and 3 gigalitres can provide high flows to trigger fish breeding and migration. However, more than 11 gigalitres of water is needed now and into the future to improve all values.

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