

# BURNDAP BIRRARUNG BURNDAP UMARKOO

## YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024–25

Reporting on implementation from  
**1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025**



No. 6 Proposition Plan prepared for NGV's  
Reimagining Birrarung: Design Concepts for 2070  
**Credit:** Aspect Studios







# Acknowledgment of Country

**We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong Peoples as the Traditional Owners of the land through which Birrarung flows.**

We pay our respects to their Elders both past and present, and we acknowledge that they have never ceded their sovereign rights to their lands and waters. We recognise their deep and enduring connection to Birrarung, we celebrate their knowledge, culture and history, and we honour their rights as caretakers for the River and its lands.

We demonstrate our ongoing commitment to Birrarung as a living entity through strong working relationships and partnerships with Traditional Owners as we work together to care for land and water now and into the future, while valuing and respecting cultural and spiritual connections.

Our appreciation for Country has been enriched by the generosity of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong Elders who have shared their knowledge and stories with us.

*On World Rivers Day, the closing of 2024 Birrarung Riverfest commenced on the banks of Birrarung with a Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony with the Djirri Djirri Dancers highlighting Wurundjeri's enduring custodianship of the river.*







## Birrarung 50 Year Community 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 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, recreation, 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 natural living entity and everyone takes responsibility for its care. Its health and integrity are paramount and uncompromised.

**Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo – what is good for Birrarung is good for all.**



Acronym	Definition
<b>BBBU</b>	Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo
<b>Bunurong Corporation</b>	Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
<b>BVW</b>	Birrarung Valley Walk
<b>DEECA</b>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
<b>DMF</b>	Decision-making framework
<b>DTP</b>	Department of Transport and Planning
<b>HWS</b>	Healthy Waterways Strategy
<b>IWM</b>	Integrated water management
<b>MW</b>	Melbourne Water
<b>PV</b>	Parks Victoria
<b>RPE</b>	Responsible public entity
<b>WSUD</b>	Water sensitive urban design
<b>Wurundjeri Corporation</b>	Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
<b>YCC</b>	Yarra Collaboration Committee
<b>YRKA</b>	Yarra Riverkeeper Association

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# YCC Chair Foreword

On behalf of the Yarra Collaboration Committee (YCC), I am pleased to present the 2024–25 Annual Report for *Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo* — Yarra Strategic Plan.

Three and a half years into implementation, it is timely to reflect on how far we've come since the Plan's launch in February 2022.

Across the pages that follow, you'll see evidence of meaningful progress — the result of purposeful collaboration between state and local governments, Traditional Owners, water authorities, universities, community organisations and others. There is much to be proud of. And yet, there is still much to do.

A major milestone this year was the gazettal of the Birrarung Planning Scheme Amendment in April — a long-anticipated and welcome development. This amendment strengthens protections against inappropriate development and reinforces Birrarung's status as a living entity. Importantly, it embeds whole-of-catchment thinking into planning decisions, recognising Birrarung's health is shaped not only by what happens along her banks, but across her entire landscape.

The projects and case studies in this report show that collaborative care for Birrarung is increasing. Agencies with formal land management responsibilities are working together — and, importantly, in partnership with community. This spirit of cooperation, co-investment and shared purpose is essential to realising the Plan's vision.

We are also seeing encouraging steps forward in how Traditional Owners — the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong — are being engaged as delivery partners and decision-makers on their Country. Their knowledge, values and leadership are central to the Plan and to caring for Birrarung as a living entity. Ensuring Traditional Owner organisations are resourced to lead this work remains a priority for the year ahead.

This year also saw the success of Birrarung Riverfest 2024, curated by the Yarra Riverkeeper Association, which provided a vibrant platform to celebrate and promote care for Birrarung and her lands.

Finally, I want to acknowledge and congratulate the Birrarung Council for the Reimagining Birrarung exhibition at the NGV. Held across late 2024 and early 2025, the exhibition sparked new conversations and new understandings about Birrarung's past, present and future. It invited us all to imagine what's possible — and reminded us why this work matters.

**Together, we are shaping a healthier, more connected future for Birrarung.**



**Jane Doolan**

Yarra Collaboration Committee Chair



# SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS



## Yarra Strategic Plan – Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo 2022-2032 (BBBU) puts the interests of the river and its lands at the heart of future land use planning and decision-making.

It sets out an ambitious and transformative shift for collaborative governance between government agencies and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong Peoples as the Traditional Owners of Birrarung lands. This transformation is focussed on ensuring Birrarung and its lands are protected and cared for as one living and integrated natural entity.

This report has been prepared by Melbourne Water as lead agency for implementation, with input from the Yarra Collaboration Committee (YCC). This is the fourth annual report on implementation and covers the period from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025. The report is an obligation under the Yarra River Protection (*Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn*) Act 2017 (the Act).

The Yarra Collaboration Committee is comprised of representatives from Wurundjeri Corporation and Bunurong Corporation:



And the following 14 responsible public entities (RPEs):







# Birrarung Council Report 2024

The Birrarung Council's third annual report on implementation of Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo for 2023-24 was tabled in parliament on 27 November 2024.

The report acknowledged the ongoing efforts of RPEs and the lead agency in progressing the actions in the Plan, noting that these actions vary in ambition, complexity and impact. The limited progress in advancing the land use framework outlined in Part 2 of the Plan was called out as concern, with the Council noting that the delay had undermined the effectiveness of the Plan in changing the way planning decisions are made.

The Council commended RPEs' continued strong commitment to the YCC and representatives' work to support their organisation to understand their obligations under the Act. The Council also acknowledged improvements in the level of collaborative efforts in support of the river, and strengthening of engagement with Traditional Owners.

The Council identified five strategic priorities to improve implementation:

1. Enhance and strengthen organisational understanding of Birrarung as a living entity
2. Prioritise embedding the BBBU in state and local planning policies to give effect to Part 2 (the land use framework)
3. Strengthen organisational commitment to the protection principles of the Act, including net gain, within daily practices and decision-making
4. Enable Traditional Owners to increasingly act as decision-makers and partners in caring for Birrarung
5. Progress the implementation of the Birrarung Parklands transformative project.



# Response to Birrarung Council's strategic priorities

## Strengthen organisational understanding of Birrarung as a living entity

For the first meeting of 2025, the YCC came together in person in February for an all-day session in the grounds of Heide Museum of Modern Art. The day commenced with a cultural walk and talk with Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Dave Wandin at Yaluk Langa. This was followed by a facilitated workshop exploring what it means to have a "healthy reciprocal relationship with Birrarung" and how organisations can support and champion this relationship.

Uncle Dave Wandin, Zena Cumpston and Jackson Chatfield of the Birrarung Council all contributed to the session. The workshop built on previous YCC sessions where guiding principles / hallmarks for caring for Birrarung parklands as one living and integrated natural entity were developed and discussed.

For this year's Yarning Circles, the Birrarung Council asked each RPE to prepare a statement articulating their organisation's relationship with Birrarung. At the April and June YCC meetings, several YCC members shared how their respective organisations were approaching the development of their statement. While approaches varied – from dedicated on Country sessions, to leadership briefings and workshops, to staff surveys and drafting working groups – the consistent theme that emerged was that the Council's ask had triggered new and important conversations and reflections within organisations.

In its 2024 Annual Report, the Birrarung Council included a short section on the importance of language when discussing our relationship with Birrarung. The report noted *'the use of the word "management" in relation to any aspect of Country reveals an unhealthy relationship that sees living entities as property and resources to be "controlled."* When discussing the annual report at its December 2024

meeting, YCC members noted the usefulness of this guidance to support conversations and promotion of BBBU within their organisations. Likewise, YCC members have shared and promoted the Council member relationship statements included at Appendix 5 of the Council's Annual Report to help support and inform internal discussions.

RPEs also report that by working and spending time on Country with Traditional Owners, learning more about cultural values and Traditional Owner aspirations and priorities for Birrarung, they are deepening their understanding of Birrarung as a living entity. A common thread in conversations between the lead agency and RPEs is that organisational understanding is increasing but progress tends to be patchy and we still have a way to go.

## Embedding the BBBU in state planning policy to give effect to Part 2

Since January 2025, Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) has appointed a dedicated Senior Strategic Planner - Birrarung to advance Birrarung-related planning reforms and resources, through a funding partnership with Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA).

On 14 April 2025, planning scheme amendment VC281 was gazetted. This much-anticipated amendment supports the enhancement of the natural beauty, biodiversity, environmental health, cultural values and recreational opportunities of the Birrarung corridor and delivers on the first stage to implement the land use framework at Part 2 of BBBU.

Ministerial Direction 11 – Strategic Assessment of Amendments – was also updated in April, requiring planning authorities to specifically address how a proposed planning scheme amendment has considered the Yarra protection principles.

On 6 May 2025 the Municipal Association of Victoria hosted an online information session with the DTP on how the implementation of planning controls is strengthening protections for Birrarung as a living entity. The session included a welcome and introduction from Wurundjeri Elder and Birrarung Council member Uncle Andrew Gardiner, as well as contributions from Melbourne Water as lead agency and DEECA. More than 180 registrations were received for the session, signalling strong interest from the planning sector.

Further to gazettal of VC281, a key priority for DTP is the development of guidance to help planning practitioners understand and relate to Birrarung as a living entity. At its June 2025 meeting, the YCC agreed to support establishment of a Birrarung Land Use Planning Reference Group to assist DTP with developing the guidance material. DTP aims to complete the drafting by the end of 2025.



Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Dave Wandin at Yaluk Langa with YCC members



## What does VC281 do:

VC281 amends clause 12.03-1R (Yarra River protection) in the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP) and the Banyule, Boroondara, Darebin, Hobsons Bay, Hume, Manningham, Maribyrnong, Maroondah, Melbourne, Merri-bek, Monash, Moonee Valley, Nillumbik, Port of Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington, Whitehorse, Whittlesea, Yarra and Yarra Ranges planning schemes by:

- Renaming the clause title to Birrarung (Yarra River)
- Updating strategies to:
  - strengthen the natural environment, and overall health of the Birrarung (Yarra River) Corridor and tributaries
  - avoid detrimental cumulative impacts from land use and development on the natural and cultural values and the overall health of the Birrarung (Yarra River) Corridor and its tributaries and parklands
  - facilitate new and improved walking and cycling connections between precincts
  - facilitate community use and enjoyment of Birrarung (Yarra River) parklands and tributaries
  - ensure the siting and design of new buildings and infrastructure complements the Birrarung (Yarra River) Corridor's natural landscape setting and key viewing locations
  - protect and maintain key views from and to the Birrarung (Yarra River) Corridor and its landscape setting at key viewing locations.

The amendment inserts clause 12.03-1R (Birrarung (Yarra River)) into the following planning schemes:

- Glen Eira, to ensure the policy is applied to the catchment of Gardiners Creek / Kooyongkoot
- Mitchell, to ensure the policy is applied to the catchment, upper reaches and tributaries of Merri Creek and to the catchment and tributaries of Plenty River
- Macedon Ranges, to ensure the policy is applied to the catchment and tributaries of the Maribyrnong River.

The amendment introduces clause 51.06 (Birrarung (Yarra River) protection) into the Banyule, Boroondara, Manningham, Melbourne, Nillumbik, Stonnington, Yarra and Yarra Ranges planning schemes to ensure responsible public entities have regard to the principles specified in the Birrarung for decision making under those planning schemes.

The amendment changes clauses 11.03-6R (Birrarung-Bolin Framework Plan), 17.03-3R (Regionally significant industrial land – Metropolitan Melbourne – Inner Metro Region) and 19.02-6R (Open space – Metropolitan Melbourne) in the VPP and relevant planning schemes by updating references to the Yarra River to Birrarung (Yarra River).





## Organisational commitment to the protection principles within daily practices and decision-making

Through increased visibility of BBBU and the Act in internal and external communications, organisational awareness of and commitment to the protection principles is growing among RPEs. Annual reports, corporate business plans, and strategies for biodiversity, climate change and open space are increasingly including references to BBBU and their organisation's role as an RPE under the Act. Both Manningham and Banyule's recently endorsed Council Plans for 2025-2029 reference their commitment to BBBU.

The approval of planning scheme amendment VC281 has also helped bring both the Plan and the protection principles into focus for local councils as planning authorities and the planning sector more broadly. Since the gazettal of the amendment, a number of RPEs have reported requests from within their organisation for further information and guidance on the Plan and protection principles. Likewise, as noted above, the Birrarung Council's request for RPE relationship statements has led to new conversations and new consideration of the Act and the Plan.

RPEs are also looking at how to strengthen their internal governance practices to embed the protection principles within decision-making. At the April 2025 YCC meeting, Manningham Council shared that their initial approach had been to raise the profile of BBBU and share information and learnings via a working group of officers. In August 2024, Manningham's executive leadership team supported the establishment of a formalised BBBU Implementation Committee, chaired by a Director and comprising officers from across the organisation. The committee enables collective understanding and line of sight of projects that impact Birrarung, looking at both current and future planned projects. The committee checks alignment with BBBU including collaboration with Wurundjeri and other RPEs.

Following Manningham's presentation at the April 2025 YCC meeting, there was discussion both at that meeting and the June meeting regarding the need for clear and concise resources to promote whole-of-organisation understanding of BBBU, the protection principles and how to apply the decision-making framework. There was general agreement that fact sheets or summaries targeting different decision-makers, such as land use planners and capital project managers, would be helpful. The lead agency will develop these in consultation with the YCC over the next year.

DTP's Planning website has been updated to include an interactive map to assist stakeholders in identifying Yarra River Land, as well as whether land is within the BBBU area or the Birrarung catchment.

## Supporting Traditional Owner rights as decision-makers and partners in caring for Birrarung

Ensuring Traditional Owners are supported to act as decision-makers and partners for implementation of BBBU remains a priority. Both Wurundjeri Corporation and RPEs report that resource constraints within the Corporation continues to be a challenge. There is a strong sense among RPEs that their relationships with Traditional Owners are improving but that neither RPE nor Traditional Owner aspirations are fully met, in part because of the limited capacity and increasing demands being made of Registered Aboriginal Parties.

Since August 2023, funding has been provided to Wurundjeri Corporation to engage a BBBU lead in their Water Program to facilitate engagement with Wurundjeri on BBBU-related matters. This role has supported improved engagement levels and outcomes, including advocating strongly for Wurundjeri's role as decision makers and delivery agents on their Country. However, Wurundjeri Corporation's resourcing is still far below that required to fulfil their rights as decision makers and partners in caring for Birrarung.

In the second half of 2024, with DEECA funding support, the Wurundjeri Corporation engaged consultants to assess Wurundjeri resourcing requirements to fully participate in BBBU implementation. The project report was finalised in April 2025. Wurundjeri are considering next steps for engagement with RPEs to discuss resourcing needs.

For the development of its pricing submission to the Essential Services Commission for the 2026-2031 funding period, Melbourne Water engaged extensively with Wurundjeri and Bunurong Traditional Owners, as well as other Traditional Owners, to ensure their aspirations and expectations informed Melbourne Water's funding bid. Securing funding through the pricing submission process will support Melbourne Water's continued efforts to build stronger partnerships with Traditional Owners including by providing resources for self-determined Traditional Owner priorities.

The cultural values mapping component of the Birrarung Parklands transformative project, led by Wurundjeri Corporation Research Unit, will support collection and documentation of Wurundjeri stories and knowledge of Birrarung. This will enable improved Wurundjeri community access to information and engagement in decision-making. More detail is provided about this project in the Transformative Projects section below.

The relationship between Banyule City Council and the Narrap Unit continues to grow toward increasing opportunities for shared decision-making in ecological and cultural management of Country. This year, work on Country doubled and seven sites in Banyule Flats are co-managed with Narrap and Council's bush crew over two days each month. Similarly, collaboration between Yarra Ranges Council and the Narrap Unit is increasing; a highlight being Narrap's ongoing involvement in the Yering Billabongs Project, which included a cultural values assessment and monitoring to assess health of Country. Narrap's continued involvement in the project is being supported by Green Links funding from DEECA including development of a cultural land management plan through the Birrarung Rangers Program.



During 2024-2025, Melbourne City Council and Wurundjeri Corporation continued to collaborate on the Greenline project, including the completion of the Cultural Values Assessment for the central city section of Birrarung. A Cultural Curatorial Framework driven by Wurundjeri priorities is planned to identify key place-based aspirations for story-telling, language, physical representation of culture and places for cultural practice. Setting out a long-term vision for the north bank of the river, the Curatorial Framework is the next step in defining and achieving shared and integrated outcomes along this stretch of Birrarung.

Stonnington City Council and Wurundjeri Corporation have been working together to support embedding of Wurundjeri values, science and culture in Stonnington's Environment Strategy Suite. This work started a full year prior to commencing development of the strategy to provide time to develop relationships and work through ground-level input. Wurundjeri input to KooyongKoot Masterplan projects has resulted in a change of approach by Stonnington for delivery of two major water sensitive urban design projects. Council will be seeking a peer review of designs and will be engaging with Wurundjeri through the process to ensure Wurundjeri priorities are realised.

In March 2025, Melbourne Water as lead agency supported the YCC to attend cultural awareness training with Bunurong and Palawa Traditional Owners Jillian West and Alexandra Prouse. Birrarung Council member and Bunurong Elder Uncle Shane Clarke welcomed attendees on Country, and then Jillian and Alexandra explored a range of topics including understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, caring for Country, and colonial dispossession. Following the training, Bunurong Elder Uncle Mark Brown guided the YCC on a walk through Westgate Park alongside Westgate Biodiversity's President Lyn Allison.

Melbourne Water as lead agency supports the YCC and affiliated working groups to attend cultural awareness training as an important step to fostering cultural capability

and cultural safety. By walking alongside Traditional Owners we gain a deeper understanding of the cultural landscape and land on which we live and work. In-depth insights, storytelling and the sharing of knowledge and cultural practice, enable us to advocate for continued caring of Country and protection of Birrarung as one living and integrated natural entity.

## Birrarung Parklands transformative project

An update on the Birrarung Parklands project is provided in the Transformative Projects section below.





# TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECTS

A photograph of two cyclists riding away from the viewer on a dirt path that curves through a dense forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a dappled light effect on the path and surrounding vegetation. The cyclists are wearing helmets and dark clothing. The path is made of dirt and is flanked by tall grass and trees.

The 40 actions and five priority projects set out within BBBU are part of our shared journey to meet the ambitious 10-year performance objectives of the Plan. The coming together of RPEs, Traditional Owners and other partners is about far more than a list of actions. It's a commitment to transform our approach to caring for Birrarung, to position Traditional Owners as decision makers on their Country, and to ensure Birrarung is cherished, respected and protected as one living and integrated natural entity.

Transformative projects are designed to embed whole-of-river thinking and action, bringing RPEs and Traditional Owners together to design, deliver and promote collaborative projects in service of Birrarung.

There are four transformative projects:

- Greening the Birrarung
- Birrarung Parklands
- Birrarung Valley Walk
- Collaboration Platform



# Greening the Birrarung

**Each year RPEs invest significantly in vegetation and habitat improvement for Birrarung. The Greening the Birrarung project seeks to support and align RPE investment and activities for greater collective impact.**

The project seeks to demonstrate the power of a collaborative approach to caring for Birrarung as one living and integrated natural entity. The project also delivers on BBBU actions that relate to biodiversity, revegetation, and management of invasive plants and animals.

A Project Officer employed by Manningham City Council is leading the project. Working closely with the lead agency team, the Officer has established a highly engaged project working group to steer the project. The working group has representatives from all RPEs as well as Wurundjeri Corporation and Bunurong Corporation and from Trust for Nature and Yarra Riverkeeper Association.

In the first half of 2025, the working group had two on Country workshops – at Pound Bend in February and at Collingwood Children’s Farm in May – and three online meetings.

Through these discussions, the working group set themselves the challenge of three key deliverables to be completed by the end of 2025:

## Birrarung biodiversity mapping

A mapping product identifying age structure of canopy trees focusing on tree height and canopy extent will be used to identify gaps in habitat corridors. A trial of the mapping method using available LiDAR data has been undertaken by the GIS team at Manningham City Council, with outputs presented to the working group at their second in-person workshop in May.

## Greening Birrarung Guide

The Greening Birrarung Guide is being developed to support consistent revegetation and habitat restoration work along the Birrarung corridor. The guide will promote Birrarung’s status as a living entity, include shared principles for habitat restoration and a planting guide to support and attract culturally significant species. A sub-committee has been established to steer and contribute to the drafting of the guide.

## Habitat restoration event series

To showcase some of the great habitat restoration work happening along the Birrarung corridor, RPEs are organising a series of events to take place during Birrarung Riverfest 2025 in September. Messaging for the event series will be aligned to promote the river’s status as one living and integrated natural entity, to increase understanding of the importance of habitat enhancement works and provide the community with information on how they can support habitat restoration.

Possibly the greatest benefit of the project to date has been the fostering of new and revitalised relationships between the various organisations represented on the working group. Already, as a result of connections made through working group meetings, RPEs are coming together

outside of the project to explore and plan coordinated greening activities. One example is a commitment by Manningham City Council, Narrap Rangers and Parks Victoria to coordinate and increase revegetation and weed control at Witton’s Reserve, a site of significant cultural heritage. Further examples relate to agreements between councils to ensure their revegetation works are complementary on either side of the river, supporting habitat connectivity .

Thinking about future opportunities for collaboration, the working group are exploring sites where there are barriers to habitat restoration, such as unknown land tenure. The group are considering priority locations for building habitat connectivity – as well as other shared challenges and opportunities they can work together to address.

*Greening the Birrarung workshop at Pound Bend with Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Tony Garvey.*



**“Now that I know what other land managers have in mind for revegetation of the riverbanks – it has prompted me to plan works for adjacent parcels of land which would have otherwise not been priorities.”**

*– Nillumbik Shire Council Senior Environment Project Officer*



# Birrarung Parklands

The Birrarung Parklands project is exploring how to care for the river and its parklands as one living and integrated natural entity. The project is made up of three key components:

## Mapping of Birrarung's cultural values

The Birrarung Cultural Mapping Project is a pivotal self-determined two-year project being delivered by Wurundjeri Corporation's Research Unit. Commencing in March 2025, Wurundjeri Corporation is working with their community to document cultural values along the length of Birrarung. This will provide Wurundjeri with a foundational resource to inform future planning and decision making on their Country.

Progress so far includes:

- Scope developed and presented by Wurundjeri Corporation to YCC
- Contract executed between Melbourne Water (as lead agency) and Wurundjeri Corporation
- Establishment of the Project Advisory Group with Elder membership
- Desktop ethnohistorical research review underway
- Investigation of options for procurement of software to digitally protect and share cultural knowledge
- Site visits to assess accessibility for on Country Elder interviews.

## Creating a shared cultural story and visual identity

This project component seeks to create a consistent conservation, cultural and visitation brand identity that recognises and promotes Birrarung and its parklands as one living and integrated natural entity.

Maddison Miller, a Darug woman and research fellow at the University of Melbourne, has been engaged to work with Traditional Owners on the collaborative development of a cultural narrative that fosters a deeper, more connected relationship with Birrarung and its parklands. Preliminary meetings with Wurundjeri Corporation and Bunurong Corporation were held in May 2025 to discuss the project and possible next steps.

Once appropriate permissions are in place, it is envisaged the cultural narrative will inform the brand identity.

## Birrarung Parklands stocktake

Planning and preliminary activities have commenced for a parkland stocktake, led by Parks Victoria. The stocktake will provide context for considering how best to deliver activities to transform partnerships with Traditional Owners, strengthen the community's relationship with the river and its lands, and inform future management of our world class network of parks, reserves and open spaces along the river.

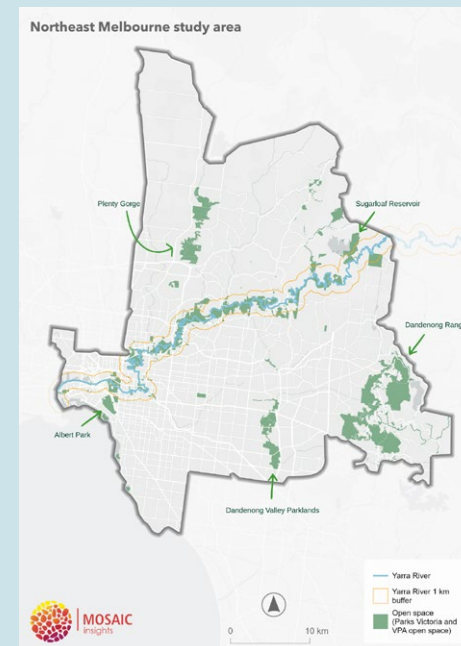
The stocktake will be informed by the soon-to-be-completed North East Melbourne Recreational Analysis which included Birrarung parklands within its scope.

## North East Melbourne Recreational Analysis

The North East Melbourne Recreational Analysis seeks to understand use of parklands by analysing existing recreational data and undertaking monitoring and surveys to assess seasonal activity. The project is being delivered by Parks Victoria, with funding support from DEECA.

Key insights from the analysis so far include:

- Most residents have adequate access to parks within 800m and 1600m of home. However, there are significant gaps in terms of walkability.
- Across open space and recreation use there is an increase in walking, dog walking, birdwatching, passive nature enjoyment, wellness activities, and female participation in structured recreation.
- There is greater demand for walkable, multi-use parks that address safety concerns and barriers experienced by women, older adults, and low-income communities.
- There is high citizen science activity recorded along major parklands and corridors, including Birrarung, reflecting both species richness and community engagement.





# Birrarung Valley Walk

**This exciting collaborative project, led by Birrarung Valley Walk Inc. will create a new destination walking trail for Victoria along the length of Birrarung. Supported by the RPEs, the Birrarung Valley Walk will link existing tracks and paths from Williamstown to the Upper Yarra Reservoir, creating a 215km+ multi-day walk.**

The project will curate a significant recreational asset, showcasing environmental, cultural and community values, while creating stimulus for visitation, outdoor activity, health and wellbeing and local economic development.

Critically, the project will also seed collective care and stewardship of Birrarung in partnership with, and under the guidance of, Traditional Custodians.

Progress over the last 12 months includes:

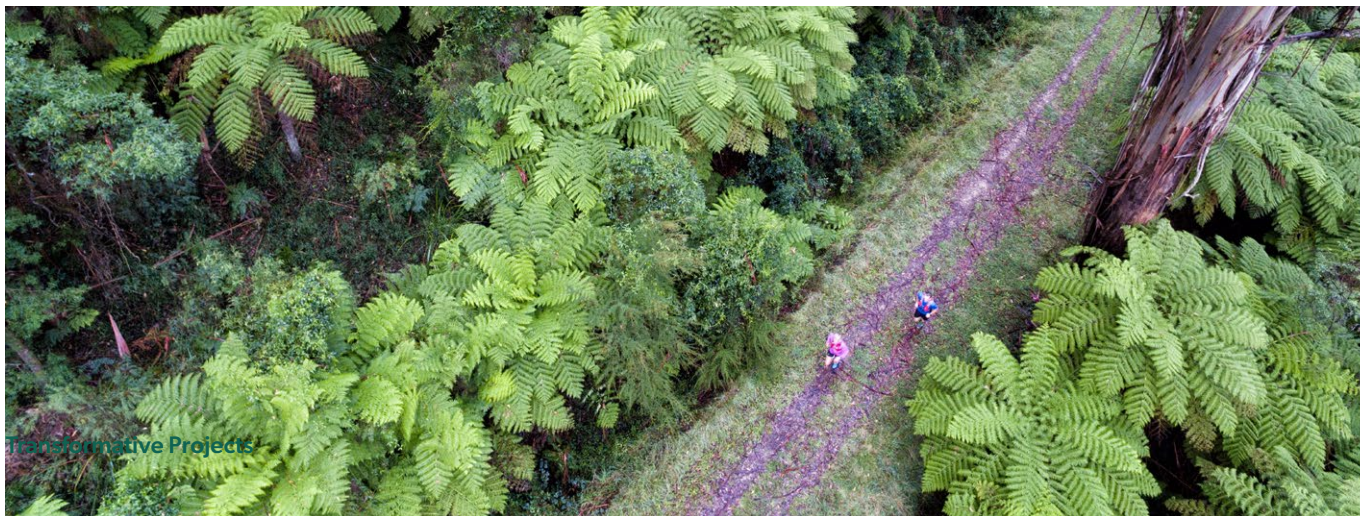
- Finalised a Memorandum of Understanding with Wurundjeri Corporation and each of the relevant land managers along Birrarung, including eight local councils, DEECA, Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria.
- Expanded the BVW Inc board to include three Wurundjeri Elders: Aunty Julieanne Axford, Aunty Alice Kolasa and Aunty Doreen Garvey-Wandin.
- Established and held several meetings with the BVW Wurundjeri Corporation Elder Consultation Committee, with representation from the three families, Water Unit, Education Unit and Special Projects team.
- Established and held two meetings with the BVW Steering Committee comprising representatives of all relevant land managers as well as Wurundjeri Corporation. The steering committee is chaired by Professor John Thwaites AM.
- Began initial engagement with the local councils and Traditional Custodians at the estuary of the river.
- Completed initial desktop digital mapping of the conceptual end-to-end route as well as an on-ground alignment audit.
- Progressed discussions and workshops with relevant land managers to work through audited alignment and address missing links in the preferred walking route.
- Recognition as a Registered Environmental Organisation by the ATO, securing deductible gift recipient status.

## Collaboration Platform

The Collaboration Platform is being delivered via dedicated pages on Melbourne Water “Let’s Talk” website. Both publicly accessible and password-protected pages are used to share updates and enable the YCC to access meeting notes, presentations and other relevant resources.

In the last 12 months, upgrades have been made to the interactive map of projects and activities along the corridor to improve functionality and better enable RPEs to have visibility of what others are doing. A new page has also been added to support the Greening the Birrarung project working group to connect, share resources and discuss the project outside of meetings.

Strengthening and expanding the reach and utility of the collaboration platform will be further considered by the lead agency and the YCC as we advance the transformative projects. The cultural narrative and visual identity components of the Birrarung Parklands project will be especially relevant to this work.





# PRIORITY PROJECTS



Part 1 of the Plan includes five priority projects to support achievement of the Plan's 10-year performance objectives. Attracting investment in 2024-25 from State and Federal governments, these projects continue to be exemplars for a shift to collaborative care for Birrarung, partnering with Traditional Owners, testing and evaluating new methods, and delivering significant change for the river and its lands.

The five priority projects are:

- Birrarung Ranger Program
- Yering Billabongs Project
- Yarra Flats Revitalisation Program
- Birrarung Floating Wetlands
- Polystyrene Pollution Project



# Birrarung Ranger Program

## LEAD ORGANISATION

Wurundjeri Corporation

## ACHIEVED TO DATE

- Project plan and governance
- Selection of Narrap Rangers to participate in program
- Selection of two pilot sites to develop and test assessment methods

## UPCOMING MILESTONE

- Waterway health assessments for priority places

The Birrarung Ranger program, now in its second year, focuses on empowering Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners and Narrap Rangers to make informed and culturally appropriate decisions regarding water management. The program is providing a training pathway for rangers to undertake and report on self-determined Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung healthy water assessments.

Birrarung Rangers operate alongside the Water Program vision to centre Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as leaders, decision makers and delivery agents on Country. The program supports the established Narrap Unit Ranger program to expand capacity and skillset (capability) in waterway monitoring, planning, management and decision making.

The Birrarung Ranger team has completed a series of field investigations at their two pilot sites at Yering Billabong and Biik Wurrdha, undertaking bird and vegetation surveys to understand ecological values, and collating information around cultural values. Work is also continuing on developing a waterway assessment methodology.



Priority projects





# Yering Billabongs Project



## LEAD ORGANISATION

Yarra Ranges Shire Council

## ACHIEVED TO DATE

- Design and construction of flood gates and regulator for diverting high flows
- Planning application and diversion application
- Cultural values assessment
- Flora and fauna survey
- Firestick project
- Vegetation planting
- Concept design for boardwalks, trails and viewing platforms

## UPCOMING MILESTONE

- Large-scale revegetation works along Olinda Creek
- Partnership agreement with Narrap Rangers
- Community engagement activities

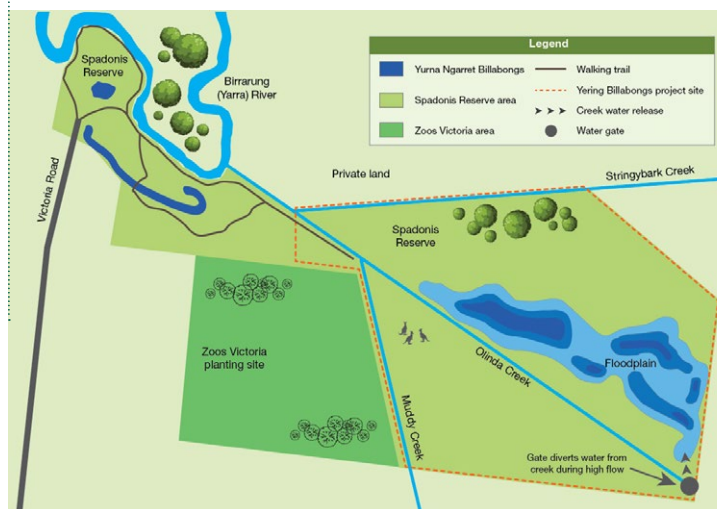
The Yering Billabongs project is transforming former grazing land into a thriving floodplain and billabong ecosystem, helping to improve water quality and support local biodiversity. Much of the ecological functioning of Birrarung floodplains has been lost since settlement, and this project is providing knowledge on what can be restored.

Led by Yarra Ranges Shire Council and with funding from DEECA, this collaborative initiative brings together the Wurundjeri Corporation, Melbourne Water, and Zoos Victoria. Together, they've completed key infrastructure works, including installation of a regulator and flood gate to enhance natural winter flooding of the floodplain.

Traditional Owner involvement is central to the project. A second cultural burn was carried out in established areas of the reserve, and Green Links funding has been secured enabling two more years of work with the Narrap Rangers.

Community involvement has also been a highlight this year, with five local primary schools taking part in planting days to help revegetate the area. Melbourne Water has also undertaken large-scale restoration along Olinda Creek, including exploring ways to add woody debris to create habitat and encourage natural water flow patterns.

To celebrate the progress, partners and stakeholders gathered for a special event and guided tour on 17 June. Three short videos about the project—*Introduction*, *Planting the Seed: School Plantings*, and *Cultural Values Assessment*—are available on the Yarra Ranges Council website.



## Planting the Seed

Eco Warriors Australia and Ecology and Restoration Australia received a grant for the Planting the Seed program from Yarra Ranges Council as part of DEECA's Green Links program.

Five local primary schools came together to plant 3000 plants along Olinda Creek to stabilise the bank and create habitat for the future restored floodplain site.

**"Planting the Seed is such a great way to get kids involved in protecting their local patch, and we hope it helps highlight the importance of all kinds of habitat to the kids, from floodplain to forest, and the way it is all connected. Ultimately, we hope it inspires them to become stewards for the environment."**

– Yarra Ranges Council biodiversity grant program facilitator Isabel Ebsworth



# Yarra Flats Revitalisation Program

## LEAD ORGANISATION

Melbourne Water

## ACHIEVED TO DATE

- Successful trial watering of billabongs
- Detailed designs finalised for Banksia Street constructed wetlands and Annulus Billabong channel
- Establishment of a long-term watering regime for Annulus and Banksia Street Billabongs that maximises ecological, cultural and liveability outcomes in consideration of current values, recovery potential and historical values

## UPCOMING MILESTONE

- Planning permits and approvals
- Earthworks to create an open channel from Birrarung to Annulus Billabong – early 2026, pending permits and approvals
- Works for the constructed wetlands – mid-2026, pending permits and approvals
- Ecological and cultural monitoring



The Yarra Flats landscape is an important part of the Birrarung floodplain. After many years of degradation associated with land clearing and urban development, the area now contains natural bushland, abundant wildlife, and billabongs that offer an oasis from the surrounding urban area. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have connections to and hold ancient knowledge of the land and water here and are supportive of restoration that considers cultural values.

Due to lower river flows from river regulation and water extractions from Birrarung, along with changes in the wider catchment, the billabongs don't get the water they need to thrive. In addition, much of the Yarra Flats area has been subject to land use change and development, including modifications to natural flow paths, which has impacted their wetting and drying cycles.

Melbourne Water is leading the delivery of the program of works, in partnership with Wurundjeri Corporation, Banyule City Council, Parks Victoria, Victorian Environmental Water Holder, DEECA, Federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, The University of Melbourne, and Friends of Yarra Flats Park.

The Yarra Flats Revitalisation Program will restore the health and functions of Annulus and Banksia Street Billabongs by delivering a long-term environmental watering regime. Informed by rigorous investigations conducted over many years, a watering regime has been established that maximises ecological, cultural and liveability outcomes for the billabongs in consideration of their historical and current values, as well as their recovery potential.

New constructed wetlands will improve the quality of water that's discharged from the Banksia Street Main Drain into Birrarung. It will also integrate the delivery of this water to supplement flows to the Banksia Street Billabong in times of low flow. The program also includes increasing native plants and reducing weeds to improve habitat for native wildlife.

The Yarra Flats Revitalisation Program of works are expected to be delivered over a three-year period, from early 2026 to late 2028. Detailed designs for the Annulus Billabong open channel works and Banksia Street constructed wetlands have been finalised. Preparations for planning permit applications and other approvals are in progress, and draft cultural heritage management plans have been prepared.

This phase of the Yarra Flats Revitalisation Program is jointly funded by the Australian Government's Urban Rivers and Catchments Program, Melbourne Water and DEECA.





# Birrarung Floating Wetlands

## LEAD ORGANISATION

Melbourne City Council

## ACHIEVED TO DATE

- Floating wetlands installed
- Wildlife monitoring and community engagement established

## UPCOMING MILESTONE

- Continuing maintenance, monitoring and public education
- Evaluation and reporting
- Preparation for post-trial phase

More than two years after their installation in December 2022, the Birrarung Floating Wetlands continue to support urban biodiversity and engage and intrigue the local community and general public.

The three wetland sites at Turning Basin (near Enterprize Park), Victoria Harbour Promenade and Yarra's Edge, Docklands feature hundreds of native aquatic plants and elements such as perching posts, drying banisters and basking areas to support breeding birds, ducks and other wildlife.

Enabled with funding from DEECA, this project is an initiative of the City's Yarra River Birrarung Strategy. The wetlands trial is informing the Greenline Project's broader ecological strategy for Melbourne's riverfront, and is part of Melbourne City Council's initiatives to deliver on its responsibilities to Birrarung under the Yarra River Protection (*Wilip-gin Birrarung murrnong*) Act.



The University of Melbourne was engaged to undertake monitoring of wildlife for a 24-month period to May 2025 and are currently working to finalise the evaluation reporting.

To also gain an understanding of what is happening below the wetlands, Melbourne City commissioned underwater photography. This footage shows substantial root growth of plants below the wetlands and presence of fish and other marine creatures and plants.

Since the beginning of the trial, the community have been encouraged to record observations of wildlife using the wetlands via iNaturalist. To date, the public have recorded 291 observations accounting for 20 different species, predominantly birds.

Opportunities for the public to learn about the project have been facilitated through walking tours, signage, the Greenline Project Engagement Hub, industry forums, collaborations with Open House Melbourne and Birrarung Riverfest.

An online survey has been used to find out how these unique landscapes may be influencing the public's experience of the city and their connection with nature. To date, respondents have expressed overwhelmingly positive sentiments about the wetlands and their role in improving the quality of the river environment and increasing their sense of connection to nature.

The trial period will continue until mid-2026, with evaluation commencing in August 2025, informing recommendations and planning for the post trial period.



# Polystyrene Pollution Project

## LEAD ORGANISATION

Yarra Riverkeeper Association

## ACHIEVED TO DATE

- Building evidence base, mapping of source pathways, and roundtable deliberation
- Final report published on YRKA website
- Launch of mini documentary on polystyrene pollution in waterways
- Final webinar to discuss project outcomes and recommendations (July 2025)

The Polystyrene Pollution Project, delivered in three phases and finalised in June 2025, explored expanded polystyrene (EPS) as a major pollutant in Melbourne's waterways and provided insights and actions to help reduce pollution. The project, which was led by the Yarra Riverkeeper Association with funding support from DEECA, included a working group with representatives from government agencies, councils, community groups and industry representatives.

The project found an estimated 380 million EPS pieces travel down Birrarung each year, with construction sites contributing the highest amount of EPS pollution.

The third and final phase of the project identified the need for coordinated action across the EPS lifecycle with a number of recommendations provided as starting points. These include clarifying regulatory enforcement approaches by the EPA and local councils, improving construction site hygiene, and advocating for the use of alternative materials. Ultimately, the report recommends investigating the phasing out of EPS as a building material due to its pervasiveness in the environment.

The Yarra Collaboration Committee reviewed and discussed outputs from the project and have agreed to explore in the coming year how their organisations can contribute to efforts to prevent EPS pollution entering waterways.





# PROGRESS ON ACTION IMPLEMENTATION

An aerial photograph of a river flowing through a lush, green landscape. A paved path with a metal railing runs along the left bank of the river. Several people are walking on the path, and a person is pushing a stroller. The river is surrounded by dense trees and vegetation. The sky is not visible.

Part 1 of the Plan sets out 40 actions that support achievement of the four 10-year performance objectives.



# Collaborative actions

Actions in the plan are categorised as short, medium and long term actions. Short term actions with a 1-3 year timeframe have been the focus for implementation to date. Medium and long term actions are the focus for the middle to later phase of this 10-year plan.

This year we have progressed four more short term actions, which means we now have all short term actions 'in progress' or 'delivered'. Table 1 provides status across short, medium and long term actions and Table 2 provides a summary of the status of actions across the four performance objectives.

At the June 2025 meeting, the YCC discussed the importance of not closing off or reporting as 'delivered' short term actions that require continued effort and investment. The YCC was of the view that while it may be possible to point to a range of projects and initiatives that would support classification of an action as 'delivered', issues such as stormwater awareness and litter reduction (Action 2), urban greening (Action 11), and climate change adaptation (Actions 22 and 23) require ongoing prioritisation.

The YCC feedback has been reflected in the lead agency decision to report on a number of short term actions as 'in progress' instead of 'delivered'. Noting the risk that this suggests inadequate progress is being made when there is actually significant investment occurring, the lead agency will consult with the Birrarung Council and the YCC ahead of the next reporting period about whether a further category, such as 'ongoing', is needed.

Table 1: Status of actions across short, medium and long term periods

Timeframe	Number of actions	Delivered	In progress	Planning
Short term actions	22	10	12	0
Medium term actions	13	2	9	2
Long term actions	5	0	3	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>

Table 2: Status of actions across performance objectives

Performance Objective	Number of actions	Delivered	In progress	Planning
1: Healthy river and lands	23	8	14	1
2: Culturally diverse	5	1	2	2
3: Quality parklands	10	3	7	0
4: Protecting landscapes	2	0	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>



## Performance Objective 1: A healthy river and lands

RPEs have continued to support progress in delivery of actions across the four performance objectives, with significant effort focused on Performance Objective 1: A healthy river and lands (supported by Actions 1 – 23).

A scan of education programs aimed at improving stormwater management (Action 2 – in progress) and reducing contaminants in rural runoff (Action 3 – delivered) identified a significant level of investment by RPEs. Flagship events such as Birrarung Riverfest have provided a vehicle to raise awareness of Birrarung and promote behaviours that support improved water quality and care for Birrarung. The work of DEECA's Onsite Wastewater Steering Committee completed its integrated program in December 2024 (Action 5 – delivered), and local councils together with Yarra Valley Water and EPA will continue to manage the risk of discharge from unsewered properties.

Continued investment in environmental watering, habitat restoration, revegetation and maintenance programs (Actions 6, 10, 11, 13 and 17) aligns with the Healthy Waterways Strategy, Regional Catchment Strategy and Council biodiversity plans. Highlights include Melbourne Water's Yarra Capital Improvement Program, Yarra City Council Bring Nature Back program, Yarra Ranges' Yering Billabong floodplain restoration, and continued efforts through Yarra4Life program in Upper Yarra reach. For 2024-25 estimates are this collectively amounted to over \$17 million in works funded by RPEs.

Wurundjeri Corporation's involvement in actions has added significant value to outcomes. The Narrap Rangers have continued their involvement in research, monitoring and management planning for billabongs and revegetation projects (Actions 6, 7, 9, 10, 15 and 16). Their involvement with the University of Melbourne in research for management of deer (Action 21 – in progress) has been a highlight, as has their participation in investigation of River Blackfish and short-finned eels (Action 19 – in progress).

## Performance Objective 2: A culturally diverse corridor

The status of Actions 24 and 25 have moved to 'in progress' as it is expected that the Birrarung cultural mapping and cultural narrative projects being progressed through the Birrarung Parklands transformative project will provide content to develop or enhance interpretive and educational programs. Current location-based projects of note include the Birrarung restoration project at Collingwood Children's Farm, which includes signage and educational activities to raise community awareness of cultural land management and production of plants for fibre, food and medicine. The cultural narrative will also inform Birrarung Valley Walk collateral.

DTP's funding of a cultural values studies program (Action 26) has been delivered. The last project under the program was a study for Brushy Creek, which is expected to be released in late 2025 by Wurundjeri Corporation. RPEs are continuing to provide funding for cultural values studies, for example Melbourne City is supporting a cultural curatorial framework for Birrarung.

It's expected that the medium term actions (Actions 27 and 28) under Performance Objective 2 will be discussed in late 2026 as an outcome of the cultural mapping and cultural narrative projects.



Progress on action implementation



## Performance Objective 3: Quality parklands for a growing population

All actions under performance Objective 3 are either 'in progress' or 'delivered'. Much of the progress is a result of activities being undertaken for the Birrarung Parklands transformative project.

The North East Recreational Analysis, funded by DEECA and led by Parks Victoria is seen as foundation analysis for management of Birrarung's parklands (Action 29 – in progress) and investigating improved access (Action 32). The parklands stocktake being led by Parks Victoria, commencing second half of 2025, will also contribute to Actions 29 and 32, and Actions 34 and 35 associated with review of parklands infrastructure.

Partnership agreements with Wurundjeri and Bunurong Corporations for management of parklands (Action 31) is progressing at two levels – organisation wide and site by site. Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria have commenced preliminary partnership discussions with Wurundjeri Corporation and are planning similar with Bunurong Corporation. For specific sites, consideration is being given to using Healthy Country Plans as the basis for works agreements for selected parks and reserves. Other RPEs also have in place multi-year contracts with Wurundjeri's Narrap Unit to undertake vegetation works on parklands and bush reserves.

The three actions associated with river activation (Actions 36, 37 and 38) have been reported as delivered. However, as indicated for other actions, RPEs will need to collaborate in the continued management and planning for commercial and recreational use of the river in the lower reach. This includes reviewing and implementing plans and programs for vessel berthing, navigation, maintenance dredging, waterway safety, emergency response management and approving commercial use and activation of the river.

## Performance Objective 4: Protecting the natural beauty of the Yarra River corridor

Action 39, protecting Birrarung's landscapes and views through improved planning and incorporating the land use framework into local and state planning policy, has had significant progress with approval of planning scheme amendment VC281 in April 2025. As a next step, DTP will work to develop guidance for considering Birrarung protection principles in planning matters. Action 40, which is still to be scoped, will form a key part of the evaluation of the Plan and the land use framework.

More details on the progress and outcomes of actions is provided in the Actions Tracker.






# Actions Tracker

The Actions Tracker indicates the status of actions, timeframe for delivery, nominated coordinating organisation, and provides commentary on progress since the launch of the Plan.

## Legend



 planning

 in progress

 delivered

**Coordinating agency abbreviations:** Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), Melbourne Water (MW), Parks Victoria (PV), Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC).




**Other abbreviations:** Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo (BBBU), Environment Protection Authority (EPA), Integrated Water Management (IWM), Healthy Waterways Strategy (HWS), Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS), Responsible Public Entity (RPE), Trust for Nature (TfN), Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA), Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP), Yarra Collaboration Committee (YCC), Yarra Valley Water (YVW).

Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment	
Performance objective 1: A healthy river and lands					
Water quality					
1	Develop a place-based pilot project (in an area where stormwater is threatening Yarra health and amenity) to explore innovative re-use of stormwater <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>use stormwater for urban greening, protecting and enhancing the environment</li><li>identify opportunities where potable water is being used for watering purposes, and can be substituted with suitably treated stormwater.</li></ul>		medium term (4-7 years)	MW	MW and Yarra Ranges Council are investigating construction of an ephemeral stormwater treatment wetland at Yarra Glen Recreation Reserve adjacent to Birrarung. The proposal is to divert stormwater from an urban drain, harvest 5 ML/y for irrigation, infiltrate 10ML/y and create habitat (1ha) for wetland birds. The proposal includes a 5-year scientific monitoring program, as part of proof-of-concept requirements to inform state of knowledge for water sensitive urban design (WSUD).
2	Implement a Yarra-specific stormwater awareness and behaviour change campaign targeted at reducing litter and contamination entering the Yarra River.		short term (1-3 years)	MW	As part of MW (as RPE) sponsorship of Riverfest 2025, stormwater will feature in key messaging and events. This builds on a June 2025 litter prevention toolkit commissioned by MW to support councils and litter advocacy groups, as well as education programs and knowledge sharing initiatives delivered by RPEs. In addition YRKA have completed and published their Polystyrene Pollution in the Yarra River report, providing targeted insights and actionable steps to reduce polystyrene pollution from the construction sector.





Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<b>3</b> Increase education, awareness and regulatory compliance to reduce pesticides and chemicals entering the river (including the impacts of agricultural runoff on water quality in the upper and lower reaches).	✓	short term (1-3 years)	MW	RPEs support sustainable land management, including reducing the risk of chemicals entering waterways, through online information, fact sheets, seminars and advice from extension officers. Councils, DEECA and MW also support Landcare and Friends groups across the catchment. Incentives for improving rural land management are provided through MW's Liveable Communities Liveable Waterways program. MW is also facilitating a Climate-Smart Agriculture Program over the next three years to support farmers to adopt sustainable agriculture practices including in the Yarra Valley. While this action is being reported as delivered, education and compliance related to pesticides and chemicals entering our waterways will remain an ongoing focus area for RPEs.
<b>4</b> Develop the integrated water management plan (including bicultural approaches) for the Yarra Catchment to optimise water cycle planning and reduce stormwater pollution into the river.	✓	short term (1-3 years)	DEECA	RPEs are implementing integrated water management (IWM) plans and investing in WSUD that align with the Yarra catchment IWM plan with benefits to Birrarung.
<b>5</b> Develop an integrated program to improve management of domestic wastewater in non-sewered areas (includes places serviced by septic tanks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>investigate the extent and location of wastewater pollution in the Yarra River and its tributaries to guide future projects and actions</li> <li>develop and implement programs (education, compliance and infrastructure improvements) to target areas where domestic wastewater has the greatest impact on water quality.</li> </ul>	✓	medium term (4-7 years)	DEECA	Integrated program was developed and implemented through DEECA's Onsite Wastewater Steering Committee activities and programs with local councils, YVW, DEECA and EPA. Outcomes include new regulations and guidelines in 2024, reviewed management plans and recording systems, and continued delivery of YVW Community Sewerage Program (Lower Plenty connected in 2024). The committee wound up in Dec 2024 but onsite wastewater management remains an ongoing focus area for councils.





Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<b>Billabongs and wetlands</b>				
6 Investigate options to restore billabongs and wetlands on private and public land by using water for the environment to mimic natural water cycles and undertaking complementary land and water management works.		short term (1-3 years)	MW	Comprehensive program of investigations, works and environmental watering are supporting restoration objectives for wetlands and billabongs, predominantly on public land. Highlights include investment in lower Yarra billabongs collaborative projects with Narrap Rangers, councils, PV, MW, researchers and community groups (includes Bolin Bolin, Phillips Fox, Bailey's, Montpelier, Banksia and Annulus billabongs). Important restoration of floodplains and billabongs also occurring for middle Yarra at Yering and Coldstream.
7 Work with partners, primarily Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, the Victorian Environmental Water Holder and Parks Victoria, to implement a landscape scale approach to improving the condition of wetlands and billabongs for the Lower Yarra billabongs. This must include the prioritisation of wetlands for water regime management and delivery of environmental water and cultural flows.		short term (1-3 years)	MW	Methodology developed by MW with partners and being delivered to influence restoration works, environment watering and monitoring of billabongs throughout lower and middle Yarra. The methodology has influenced many of the activities listed in Action 6 above.
8 Support the aspirations of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to pursue water justice for their people and Country <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deliver water justice through water rights, participation in water management, and broader water and policy reform (as per the definition of water justice identified in the National Cultural Flows Research Project 2020)</li> <li>• deliver options to support water rights for the Birrarung such as the possibility of the reallocation of the former Amcor entitlement.</li> </ul>		short term (1-3 years)	WWCHAC	Initial steps have been taken in the journey towards water justice. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Water Program Elders, staff and Narrap Rangers continue to be involved in water resource management and environmental flow planning through advice, projects and research. Transfer of former paper mill's 1.4 gigalitre licence in Birrarung to Wurundjeri Corporation for cultural use was a tangible step celebrated by Wurundjeri community at an event with Minister for Water and Birrarung Council in Oct 2024. However, significant work remains to remove barriers to Wurundjeri being able to access the water in the ways they want to. Further water justice requires an increase in decision-making opportunity, reform of water management and entitlement frameworks and redistribution of power and resources between the state and Traditional Owners. These changes are being pursued through state initiatives such as Water is Life framework and Central and Gippsland Sustainable Water Strategy.







Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<p><b>9</b> Work with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung to enhance knowledge, monitor and understand ecological change in prioritised Lower Yarra billabongs which have received environmental water.</p> <p>Includes working with partners, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, North East Link and Transport for Victoria to protect the water levels in the Bolin Bolin billabongs from the impacts of potential groundwater drawdown. The North East Link Project, in accordance with its environmental performance requirements, is required to design the project to mitigate the changes to groundwater levels in the billabongs including undertaking pre-construction, construction and post construction groundwater monitoring.</p>		short term (1-3 years)	MW	At seven billabongs (Annulus, Banyule, Bolin Bolin, Burke Road, Horseshoe, Montpellier and Willsmere), understorey vegetation, tree condition and fauna responses to flooding have been monitored jointly by Narrap Rangers and The University of Melbourne researchers twice annually for the past six years. Annual on Country meetings continue to be held to further co-develop Narrap Rangers' role in billabong management.
<b>Habitat connectivity</b>				
<p><b>10</b> Undertake vegetation works to strengthen terrestrial and aquatic habitat corridors to improve biodiversity. Revegetation should include species identified as culturally important to the Traditional Owners and where feasible works should be delivered by Traditional Owners groups. Priority areas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yarra Junction to Healesville billabongs and wetlands</li> <li>• Healesville to Yering billabongs and wetlands</li> <li>• Yering to Warrandyte landscape protection</li> <li>• Kinglake to Yarra biodiversity corridor.</li> </ul>		medium term (4-7 years)	MW	Continued investment in revegetation and maintenance programs; aligns with HWS and RCS priorities and Council biodiversity plans. Highlights include MW's Yarra Capital Improvement Program, Yarra Ranges' Yering Billabong floodplain restoration, and continued efforts through Yarra4Life program in Upper Yarra reach. Much of these works have been enhanced through involvement of Narrap Rangers. DEECA Green Links funding has supported additional vegetation works.






Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<p><b>11</b> Increase and enhance the extent and quality of urban greening in the inner city reach on public and private land downstream of Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) to combat air and noise pollution, create habitat for local wildlife and reinvigorate local communities appreciation of nature and the environment.</p>		short term (1-3 years)	MW	Efforts to redress loss of nature in the inner city reach are progressing. Councils are continuing to implement their urban forest strategies and are encouraging larger urban developments to incorporate additional greening. The Greening the Birrarung project is developing guidance and strengthening collaborative approaches for urban greening, with emphasis on cultural connections. Urban greening highlights include Melbourne City's floating wetlands, opening of Seafarers Rest Park, and investigation of locations to naturalise banks in lower estuary with MW. Stonnington is supporting community group, Rewilding Stonnington's restoration of MW and VicTrack land adjacent to river at Heyington Station in Toorak. Relevant RPEs report that while there has been progress, more can be done to increase and enhance urban greening if and when funds become available.
<p><b>12</b> Follow the goals and principles as set out in Protecting Victoria's Environmental Biodiversity 2037 for habitat and species conservation planning. This includes using associated decision support tools, Nature Print and Strategic Management Prospects as an addendum to the plan's decision-making framework, and incorporating environmental net gain when planning for whole of river biodiversity outcomes.</p> <p>DEECA and Wurundjeri Water Unit will work together to develop a biocultural approach to assessing net gain on their Country, considering cultural values and practices. They will explore ways to integrate this approach to support the Birrarung as a single living entity. Resourcing to be provided for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung participation.</p>		ongoing	MW	<p>Biodiversity strategies and plans produced by councils align with Biodiversity 2037. Additionally, in 2024, MW completed its Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan 2024-2028; spatial layers for ecosystem units have been created, allowing prioritisation and selection of biodiversity management methods for land managers.</p> <p>DEECA and Wurundjeri Corporation have been discussing a pathway for developing an approach to assessing net gain, including environmental and cultural values. These discussions draw on the earlier work of Birrarung Council.</p>





Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<b>13</b> Explore and support the use of incentive mechanisms to build skills, knowledge and capacity in restoring landscape function, protecting biodiversity, increasing nutrient and water cycling and building soil carbon for resilient enterprises that can mitigate climate-related pressures.		medium term (4-7 years)	MW	In 2024/25, MW Liveable Communities Liveable Waterways incentives program provided 57 grants for projects in the Birrarung corridor at cumulative cost of \$447,722. This included 25 grants (\$171,391) to establish 51.3 hectares of native vegetation. One of the 25 grants was to Yarra Ranges Council for \$88,000 to fund their Ribbons of Green Project, which helped establish 38 hectares of native vegetation. There were 32 grants for other projects, which included support for activities such as fencing, landscaping, pest and weed management, and community events. Incentives are also provided through DEECA funding of Landcare, Yarra4Life and local government programs.
<b>14</b> Promote the use of conservation covenants to protect priority conservation values on private land as well as enhancing habitat connectivity and, where possible, incorporating Traditional Owner aspirations and involvement.		medium term (4-7 years)	DEECA	In early 2025 Trust for Nature made significant progress on the DEECA-funded Birrarung Parcels project, identifying and prioritising privately owned land along the length of Birrarung suitable for conservation covenants. This project involves significant community and landholder engagement, with support from councils, MW, DEECA and PV. Both Wurundjeri Corporation and Bunurong Corporation are being consulted on the project.
<b>15</b> Plan and undertake terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna assessments to ascertain where opportunities exist to reintroduce and restore native plants and animals, including species that are important to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung as totems, seasonal indicators and resources required for ceremony and other uses. Selection of plants and planting methods will also consider impacts of climate change and opportunity to increase resilience.		medium term (4-7 years)	MW	Flora and fauna assessments are routinely undertaken at billabongs for MW to assess benefits of environmental watering and revegetation works. As part of Greening the Birrarung project, preliminary discussions held with Wurundjeri to consider culturally significant species (as identified by Narrap Rangers) in Greening Birrarung guide.
<b>16</b> Develop and pilot Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung flora and fauna assessments as critical planning tools for future management of the catchment. This will require external agencies providing access to relevant data.		short term (1-3 years)	WWCHAC	Flora and fauna assessments developed and tested by Narrap Rangers on Lower Yarra billabongs, with further testing, development and application through Birrarung Rangers project.



Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<b>Native Fish</b>				
<b>17</b> Invest in habitat restoration and environmental watering to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increase native fish in the Yarra River, its tributaries and billabongs</li> <li>support a healthy ecosystem</li> <li>improve opportunities for recreational fishing and cultural practices.</li> </ul>		short term (1-3 years)	MW	Monitoring for HWS (2024) indicates environmental flows, fishways and vegetation works are improving connectivity for migratory species. Construction of a further three fishways in the Upper Yarra catchment is planned for 2026. River Blackfish showed successful recruitment during last breeding season. Watsons Creek investigation (2025) highlights importance of reducing rural runoff, erosion of banks and maintenance of large woody debris for native fish.
<b>18</b> Work in partnership with angling groups to develop and implement a community education program on protection of native fish (especially for Macquarie perch and other threatened species). This will include promoting bag limits and areas where the taking of native fish is prohibited and increasing participation in monitoring and assessment programs.		long term (8-10 years)	DEECA	Scope to be developed with VFA and industry groups.
<b>19</b> Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to lead and explore the feasibility of research projects identifying current extents, habitat needs, and best practice recovery programs for culturally valued freshwater aquatic species, which are in decline in the greater Melbourne region. This includes species such as river blackfish, freshwater crayfish, and short-finned eel.		long term (8-10 years)	WWCHAC	Narrap Rangers were involved in 2023-2025 investigation of River Blackfish in Watsons Creek by Jacobs for MW. Rangers supported ecologists with electrofishing and macroinvertebrate surveys. At the end of project on-Country day, 18 June 2025, Rangers indicated desire to be involved in similar work (e.g. aquatic habitat, fish and macroinvertebrate surveys) and management actions to improve Blackfish populations. The Narrap Unit and MW are currently exploring opportunities for Rangers to be involved in August 2025 blackfish monitoring in upper Birrarung. Additional opportunities for Rangers to support MW monitoring projects are discussed at regular 6-weekly meetings between MW Environmental Water Delivery Team and Narrap Unit Water Program. Narrap Unit Water Program is investigating future project work for short-finned eels and freshwater mussels.






Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<b>Pest plants and animals</b>				
<p><b>20</b> Adopt a multi-agency collaboration and investment approach to management of invasive animals and plants in the Yarra corridor including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>quantify and measure numbers and impact of invasive animals and plants</li> <li>evaluate the effectiveness of existing control programs</li> <li>coordinate the delivery of new programs and projects to control and eradicate where possible invasive animals and plants in the Yarra corridor</li> <li>set targets for control programs over the next 10 years and monitor progress towards their achievement.</li> </ul>		medium term (4-7 years)	DEECA	RPEs are continuing collaborative pest animal and plant control programs as set out in their strategies and plans. Nillumbik's River to Ranges project funded through DEECA's Peri-urban Weed Management Partnerships has run from 2021-2025, covers 39,081ha and is delivering weed control across four interconnected habitat corridors connecting middle-Yarra and Plenty Rivers to Kinglake Ranges. Outcomes from Peri-urban Deer Control Plan were presented at DEECA deer management symposium in March 2025; included sharing knowledge from local councils and agency deer control programs, including those undertaken by MW and PV. The Greening the Birrarung project is also exploring pest animal and plant management approaches.
<p><b>21</b> Build capacity of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Narrap ('Country') team to manage and eradicate deer in the Yarra catchment.</p> <p>This action was rescoped with Wurundjeri Narrap team in 2024 to focus on increasing capacity to advise on impact of pest species on Country, as opposed to active involvement in deer eradication.</p>		short term (1-3 years)	WWCHAC	Narrap Rangers are partnering with The University of Melbourne on deer research, which will enable their informed input (through cultural lens) into design and implementation of deer control programs. Research has included surveys to measure deer activity and impact at culturally significant billabongs; collection of genetic material from faecal pellets to determine genetic connectedness to nearby populations and movement pathways; and collection of dingo scats to assess prevalence of deer in diet and potential role of this apex predator in moderating deer behaviour. Wurundjeri Narrap Rangers are ready to assist in developing MW's next 5-year deer management program.





Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<b>Climate change</b>				
<b>22</b> Deliver an interactive education program along the river corridor to enhance awareness and understanding around climate change and adaptive capacity of the river.		short term (1-3 years)	MW	RPEs are developing and delivering a range of resources and education programs on climate change impacts and resilience. While not specifically / solely focused on Birrarung corridor, content is relevant to the corridor. Examples include Yarra City Council funding school incursions and excursions focused on local environment and waterways; Manningham's sustainability and environment education days for primary schools; Banyule's youth climate action grants of up to \$3000 to transform ideas into action; and PV released a podcast about climate change in September 2024. MW highlighted risk of drying climate on waterways as part of HWS mid-term review. RPEs are committed to updating and delivering climate action plans to increase awareness and broader community engagement on climate change impacts and resilience.
<b>23</b> Map key risks to the Yarra for climate change and develop a climate change adaptation and resilience action plan. The plan will inform responses to extreme weather events including, heat waves, drought, flood and fire, and promote land management approaches such as cultural burning to mitigate risks and assist recovery.		short term (1-3 years)	DEECA	RPEs have a reasonable understanding of climate change risks and mitigations for flooding, heatwaves, storms and drought; and have in place climate change adaptation and resilience action plans. In July 2024, Yarra Council adopted its second Climate Emergency Plan 2024-2030 with seven transformations; one being to make landscapes and waterways healthier, greener and more biodiverse, and communities to feel at one with nature. Stonnington, as part of their Chapel Street Transformation project, have trialled a climate vulnerability assessment incorporating exposure, susceptibility and adaptive capacity of people, infrastructure and natural ecosystems, which will inform targeted investment for increased resilience. MW is supporting research into vegetation vulnerabilities to climate stressors and risks to water quality and associated impacts to macroinvertebrates and ecological processes; which will inform environmental watering and drought response plans for billabongs and wetlands. MW continues to roll out new flood modelling, including for Birrarung.





Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<b>Performance objective 2: A culturally diverse river corridor</b>				
<b>Cultural heritage</b>				
<b>24</b> Develop or, where existing, enhance interpretive and educational programs for sites that have Aboriginal cultural heritage values and historic heritage values. Potential sites are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collingwood Children's Farm</li> <li>• Dights Falls and Merri Creek confluence</li> <li>• Bolin Bolin Billabong</li> <li>• Brushy Creek confluence.</li> </ul>		medium term (4-7 years)	MW	The Birrarung cultural mapping and cultural narrative projects are expected to inform new or enhanced interpretive and educational programs at key Birrarung sites. Recent activity of note is Birrarung bank restoration project at Collingwood Children's Farm, which Wurundjeri's Narrap team are working on with staff from the farm and with support from MW and Yarra City Council. The project includes signage and educational activities to raise community awareness of cultural land management and production of plants for fibre, food and medicine. Birrarung Riverfest 2024 also featured events aimed at raising awareness of the cultural value of sites along Birrarung - Bolin Bolin, Annulus billabong, Banyule Flats and Spadonis Reserve.
<b>25</b> Deliver interactive educational programs (e.g. signage, and smart device applications) that include storytelling about the rich culture and heritage of the Yarra River. Indigenous cultural intellectual property agreements must be in place for use of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung intellectual property and programs.		medium term (4-7 years)	MW	The cultural narrative component of the Birrarung Parklands transformative project will inform and guide development of a brand strategy to achieve a common look and feel for signage and communication in the Birrarung parkland network. Respectful consultation, participation and consent with Traditional Owner knowledge holders is a critical component of the project. The project will raise awareness and understanding of what it means to care for the river and its parklands as a single living and integrated natural entity. We anticipate the cultural narrative will also inform Birrarung Valley Walk collateral.
<b>26</b> Support a program of cultural value studies by the Traditional Owners for the Yarra, Birrarung and its lands.		short term (1-3 years)	WWCHAC	Cultural values studies have been undertaken at Bulleen-Banyule Flats (2020), Healesville (2021), Brushy Creek (2023) and Yering Billabongs (2024). Melbourne City is supporting a cultural curatorial project with Wurundjeri as part of the Greenline project. Wurundjeri have also commenced a two-year cultural mapping project to establish a foundational resource for Wurundjeri decision-making, as part of the Birrarung Parklands transformative project.






Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
27 Explore with the Traditional Owners, the possibility of registering the Yarra as a cultural landscape.		medium term (4-7 years)	WWCHAC	Potential for registering Birrarung as a cultural landscape will be informed by Birrarung cultural mapping project.
28 Develop a holistic heritage assessment to understand historic heritage values using the Yarra River (Birrarung) Cultural Heritage Scoping Study thematic framework.		medium term (4-7 years)	DTP	Implementation of this action will be scoped with or by DTP as part of the next tranche of work for the land use framework. We anticipate it will draw on outcomes of the Birrarung cultural mapping project, in addition to other sources.

### Performance objective 3: Quality parklands for a growing population





#### Park management

29 Plan, design, and manage the river parklands as one living and integrated natural entity, ensuring that all parklands are managed to a consistently high standard and celebrate the relationship between the river and its parklands.		short term (1-3 years)	PV	Management of Birrarung parklands as one living and integrated natural entity is progressing through the Birrarung Parklands transformative project. Within the last 12 months PV has undertaken a recreational analysis for North East Melbourne which covers Birrarung parklands. They will commence a Birrarung Parklands stocktake the second half of 2025.
30 Develop, with Traditional Owners, a consistent conservation, cultural and visitation brand identity for the Yarra and its parklands to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• embed in the community, recognition of the parklands and river as one living and integrated natural entity</li> <li>• celebrate the nurturing relationship between the Yarra's parklands and the community</li> <li>• encourage proactive behaviour to protect and nourish the Yarra and its parklands</li> <li>• support national and international recognition of, and investment in, the Yarra's parklands.</li> </ul>		short term (1-3 years)	PV	Brand identity and narrative for Birrarung parklands is progressing through Birrarung Parklands transformative project. Wurundjeri have commenced cultural mapping project; and engagement has commenced with Wurundjeri and Bunurong for the development of a cultural narrative that will inform brand strategy and visual identity.






Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<b>31</b> Establish formalised partnership agreements (including resourcing) with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and Traditional Owners to manage the parklands		short term (1-3 years)	PV	MW and PV have commenced preliminary partnership discussions with Wurundjeri at organisational level. Consideration is also being given to using Healthy Country Plans as basis for agreements for managing selected parks and reserves.
<b>32</b> Investigate locations and options for improved access to the Yarra and its parklands that enable outstanding nature and culture based experiences while conserving the high biodiversity, cultural and landscape values that the community wish to protect. This includes identifying and mapping locations and options for improved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>on-water experience for kayak/canoe and boating access points at key locations (giving consideration to health and safety and being fit-for-purpose)</li> <li>signage and information for on-water journeys</li> <li>bicycle and pedestrian trail experiences</li> <li>experience and connection to nature for recreational and leisure pursuits.</li> </ul> <p>Assist Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to undertake cultural heritage assessments on any Crown land river frontages with grazing licences that are identified for camping. The Land (Regulated Watercourse Land) Regulations 2021 only allow camping in designated sites on licensed crown river frontages following assessments by DEECA and recognised Traditional Owners.</p>		medium term (4-7 years)	PV	Options for improved access is being looked at as part of the Birrarung Parklands transformative project. As an initial step PV have undertaken a recreational analysis for North East Melbourne which included Birrarung parklands. A review of access will be featured in Parklands stocktake commencing the second half of 2025.
<b>33</b> Over the next 10 years, the state government to investigate opportunities to improve and extend the area of parklands and deliver on priorities for acquisition.		long term (8-10 years)	DEECA	DEECA is investigating potential acquisitions in suburban reach that align with current Public Acquisition Overlay, together with investigations of other options for extending the network.



Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<b>Park infrastructure</b>				
<b>34</b> Conduct a strategic assessment of infrastructure and services in the Yarra's parklands to ensure they are contemporary, inclusive and provide multiple benefits, while respecting and protecting the conservation and cultural values of the parklands and the river.		short term (1-3 years)	PV	Strategic assessment of infrastructure is progressing through Birrarung Parklands project; available data has been collated as part of the Recreational Analysis and preliminary work by PV for their North East Metropolitan strategic planning project.
<b>35</b> Consider green infrastructure investment and solutions at the local and landscape scale within parklands. Examples include constructed wetlands for stormwater treatment and creating habitat, placement of trees to improve visual aesthetics and amenity, permeable surfaces to increase groundwater recharge, and rain gardens to manage run-off from hard surfaces.		short term (1-3 years)	PV	Review of green infrastructure and solutions for parklands is progressing through Birrarung Parklands project; initially with stocktake being led by PV. Boroondara's 2024 master plan for St James Park includes additional tree planting for shade and consideration of harvesting water from Hawthorn Main Drain for irrigation. The new pavilion at Willsmere Park, which looks out on to Birrarung, has a natural look and feel, uses sustainable building materials to tie in with the surroundings, is shaped around the existing trees to minimise impact, and allows free flow of flood waters to avoid causing any significant rise in flood level. Melbourne City Council's phase one of the Greenline Project includes urban greening at Birrarung Marr.
<b>River activation</b>				
<b>36</b> Develop a 10-year berthing strategy for the lower Yarra River.		short term (1-3 years)	PV	Berthing strategy for lower Yarra, developed in 2022 has been implemented by PV.
<b>37</b> Ensure access and egress for vessels to priority berthing sites along the inner city reach of the Yarra River through investment in a comprehensive dredging operation and ongoing maintenance dredging of the river to ensure boats and vessels can move safely along the river to maintain its status as a tourism precinct.		medium term (4-7 years)	PV	PV's 2022-24 Yarra dredging program, which was completed in 2024 included sites at Herring Island landings, Victorian Rowing Association landing and Southbank. Maintenance dredging is an ongoing need requiring a budget of around \$1.2M/yr. PV have submitted a funding bid for the next 2-year program.



Action	Status at June 2025	Timeframe	Coord agency	Status comment
<b>38</b> Establish a Lower Yarra River management committee to guide commercial berthing, events and activation, and river infrastructure development and improvement. The committee's main objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drive the development of a 10-year berthing strategy for the lower Yarra River (from Dights Falls to the Port of Melbourne) including options for commercial berthing, events and activation, and infrastructure investment</li> <li>• ensure activities and safe waterway usage is reflected in Yarra River waterway rules</li> <li>• drive the alignment of Parks Victoria and Melbourne City Council annual works programs</li> <li>• oversee the implementation of the outcomes of the Yarra Strategic Plan for the lower Yarra River.</li> </ul>		short term (1-3 years)	PV	Lower Yarra Management Committee was established in 2022. PV continues to lead discussions on challenges and opportunities for the lower river. Projects this year included an emergency management plan to guide water pollution response responsibilities, and a review of waterway rules.
<b>Performance objective 4: Protecting the natural beauty of the Yarra River corridor</b>				
<b>Landscapes and views</b>				
<b>39</b> Protect the river's landscapes and views through improved planning and management of the river corridor and incorporation of the Yarra Strategic Plan land use framework into local and state planning policy.		short term (1-3 years)	DTP	Approval of planning scheme amendment VC281 in April 2025 recognised BBBU in VPP. Through the YCC, DTP is establishing a working group of planners to develop guidance for considering Birrarung protection principles in planning matters. Birrarung Council will be consulted on guidance material.
<b>40</b> Set land use planning goals and monitor changes in land use using satellite imagery, geospatial and remote sensing techniques and cultural practices and knowledge.		long term (8-10 years)	DTP	Project yet to be scoped.



# Birrarung corridor activities summary

As part of the annual reporting process, the lead agency works with RPEs to update a list of activities being undertaken or planned by RPEs, all of which contribute to the Plan’s four performance objectives.

The collated list, referred to as the Activities Schedule, includes routine business, local projects and transformative projects; including the five priority projects committed to in the Plan. Initially developed in 2022, the schedule is updated annually, with new activities added, and those delivered in the previous year removed. As at 30 June 2025, the schedule lists 189 activities.

As shown in Table 3, there were 25 activities listed as in progress last year that have been delivered in 2024/25. There are 124 (66%) activities currently ‘in progress’; 28 activities planned; 7 on hold; and 5 listed as ideas that

require further scoping if they are to proceed. Those activities listed as ‘on hold’ have been scoped but are dependent on budget allocation or completion of other projects before they can proceed.

Similar to last year, the lower rural reach has the lowest number of projects listed (19), contrasting with the suburban reach which has the most (60), and the inner city next (56). There is a strong correlation between the number of projects and the level of urban development.

Alignment of activities against the Plan’s performance objectives shows that 131 (69%) of activities contribute to performance objective one, a healthy river and lands, and 42 (22%) contribute to performance objective three, quality parklands (Figure 1). This is similar to what we saw last year. However, there has been an increase of 5 in the number of activities (12) contributing to performance objective two, a culturally diverse corridor.

The spread of activities is similar to last year with 63% associated with on-ground works, compared with 64% last year and 65% the previous year (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Graph showing alignment of activities against the four performance objectives

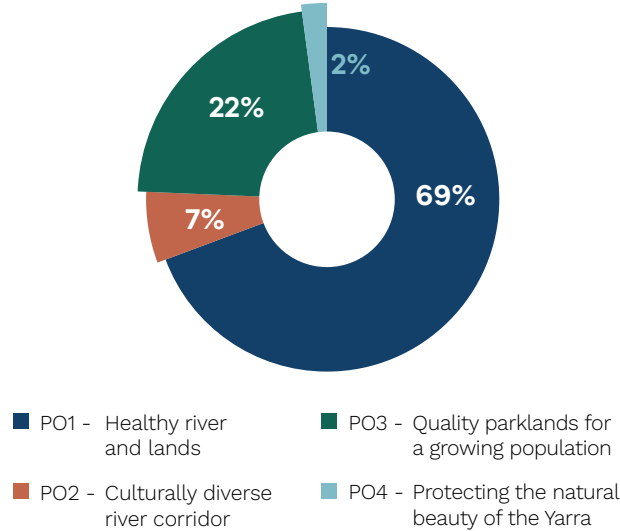


Figure 2: Graph showing categories of activities

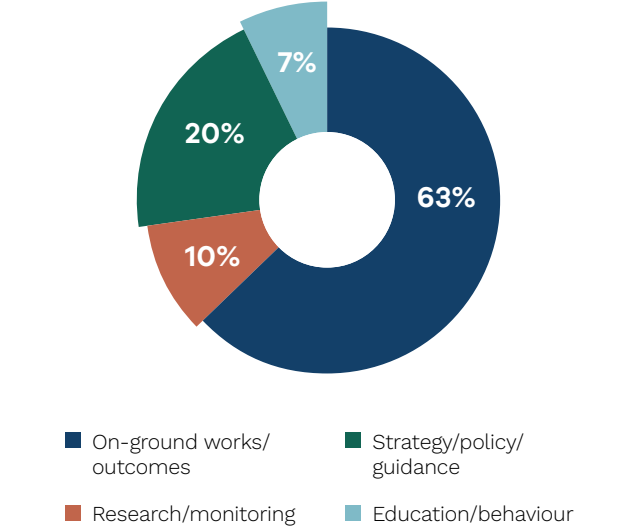


Table 3: Summary of activity status across reaches

Reach	Number of activities	Delivered	In progress	Planned	On hold	Idea
Upper rural	27	2	21	3		1
Lower rural	19	3	12	4	-	-
Suburban	60	4	45	9	-	2
Inner city	56	8	30	9	7	2
Whole of river	27	8	16	3	-	-
Totals	189	25	124	28	7	5



# THE YEAR AHEAD

The next 12 months will see continued focus on delivering the actions and priority projects set out in the Plan.

The lead agency will continue to coordinate delivery of the Birrarung Parklands and Greening the Birrarung transformative projects and provide support to the Birrarung Valley Walk transformative project led by BVW Inc. Further improvements to the Collaboration Platform will also be explored.

Traditional Owner resourcing will be a key priority. As outlined above, we anticipate conversations to progress RPE resourcing and support for Wurundjeri Corporation will occur in the near future. Likewise, the results of Melbourne Water's submission to the Essential Services Commission for the 2026-2031 pricing period will be confirmed in the first half of 2026, providing clarity regarding Melbourne Water's level of funding support for Traditional Owner self-determined priorities.

Following the gazettal of planning scheme amendment VC281 earlier this year, working with DTP on Action 40 (monitoring of land use change) will be a particular priority to ensure the efficacy of the scheme amendment and of the Plan and Act more broadly.

In addition, the lead agency has a number of other priorities to progress in consultation with the YCC including:

- Development of the next 3-year (2026-2028) implementation plan
- Review of the BBBU Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) framework
- Review of the decision-making framework to support RPEs to embed it within their organisations
- Development of resources to support RPE internal and external engagement on BBBU, the protection principles and building understanding of the Birrarung as one living and natural integrated entity
- Improved integration of BBBU with the Healthy Waterways Strategy, Port Phillip and Western Port Regional Catchment Strategy and regional collaborations such as Yarra4Life to ensure alignment, reduce duplication and support more effective engagement and communication
- Strengthen engagement with community.



# CASE STUDIES

An aerial photograph of two rowing teams on a body of water. The top team consists of three people in a white boat with red benches. The bottom team consists of four people in a similar white boat with red benches. The water is dark blue with visible ripples from the oars.

At the heart of Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo is a commitment to care for Birrarung as one living and integrated natural entity, collaborating across organisational boundaries, and centring Traditional Owners as delivery partners and decision makers on their Country. The following case studies showcase this commitment in action.



# BIRRARUNG RIVERFEST 2024

In September 2024, the Yarra Riverkeeper Association (YRKA) held the second Birrarung Riverfest – a vibrant, grassroots celebration of Birrarung.

Under YRKA's leadership, the festival brought together state government, councils, small businesses, artists and community groups, to deliver a three-week program of 46 events spanning the length of the river. These events invited people to engage with Birrarung in new and meaningful ways, deepening understanding of Birrarung's cultural and ecological significance, and our shared responsibility to care for Birrarung's lands and waters.

More than 2000 people took part in guided nature walks, land and water litter clean-ups, river cruises, bird watching, art installations, music and dance performances, documentary screenings, story-telling sessions and panel discussions.

Recognising the remarkable reach of the festival in 2024, BBBU and Melbourne Water (as RPE) are proud to again be major partners of Birrarung Riverfest in 2025 where the river's status as one living and integrated natural entity will be promoted and celebrated.





# BIRRARUNG RIVERFEST 2024





## Up the Creek's Birrarung Clean Up

Led by Derek Cook of social enterprise Up the Creek, this unique paddling event offered a firsthand exploration of Birrarung, collecting litter and inviting people to reflect on their responsibility to take care of the river.

- 95% of participants noted they see the river differently now
- 97% said this experience has enhanced their connection to nature

## Stonnington Council's Breathe with Birrarung

This guided meditation event at Como Park focused on weaving meaning and connection to Country and community through Birrarung.

Throughout the session, participants were encouraged to reflect and appreciate the role Birrarung has always played and will continue to play in our environment.

**"I had thought I'd spend a calm mindfulness session beside Birrarung but what happened was surprising, and so very, very special."**

## Warburton's Birrarung Bathers at Platypus Bend

Warburton hosted a number of activities as part of the Birrarung Riverfest pulled together by community powerhouse Nicole Fisher. One highlight was the Birrarung Bathers and Wim Hoff inspired breathwork, combining breathing and cold therapy from Birrarung itself.



**"Swimming in 8-degree water in Birrarung is sublime. The cold stings, then soothes and clears the mind. But it's the presence of others that makes it so special. To plunge together, laugh through chattering teeth, and emerge renewed—it's a kind of wild kinship. It's a stark reminder that we are part of Birrarung and she is a part of us."**

*– Carolyn Tate, river swimmer and Birrarung Riverfest Producer*





## Billabongs and wetlands in the Birrarung catchment

There are over 21,000 wetlands and billabongs in the Yarra catchment. Many have significant ecological and cultural values with deep histories going back many thousands of years. Today, they are also highly valued for recreational values as places to walk, cycle and connect with nature.

Wetlands are areas of permanent or temporary inundation supporting plants and animals that require wet conditions to complete their life cycle. A billabong is a waterbody left behind following a change in river course; it is a type of wetland usually still connected to the river and periodically flooded. Once there were more than 70 billabongs in the Chandler Basin of the Yarra catchment. Today, only a small number persist.

The connection that a billabong has with the river is important because it not only provides the billabong with water, but allows the exchange of living organisms, animal and plant material and nutrients between the river and billabong.

The ecological health of billabongs is dependent on their wetting and drying periods. Urban development, stormwater, drainage and vegetation clearing, as well as the construction of levees and harvesting of water, have meant that river-fed billabongs and wetlands are not inundated as frequently as they once were naturally, and are not able to act as nursery and breeding areas for the many plants and animals that rely on them.

Wurundjeri Corporation, Parks Victoria, Victorian Environmental Water Holder, Melbourne Water, councils and friends of groups are working together to investigate how they can improve the health of billabongs.

## Billabong wetting and drying research project

Over the last five years Melbourne Water, The University of Melbourne and Wurundjeri Corporation Narrap Unit have been undertaking research to:

- assess vegetation and fauna responses to natural and managed flooding at billabongs to inform their adaptive management; and
- increase the role of Wurundjeri's Narrap Unit in caring for Birrarung billabongs.

At seven billabongs (Annulus, Banyule, Bolin Bolin, Burke Road, Horseshoe, Montpellier and Willsmere), understorey vegetation, tree condition and fauna responses to flooding have been monitored jointly by Melbourne University researchers and Narrap Rangers twice per year.

Key findings include:

- Flooding durations between 4-8 months promote native wetland plant cover and reduce terrestrial weed cover.
- Regular flooding (at least 2 in 3 years) promotes the condition and flowering of the beautiful old River Red Gums that line these billabongs. In contrast, in the absence of flooding, the condition and reproductive output of these trees is reduced, and the cover of weeds is often high.
- Identification of 17 fish, 6 frogs, 35 birds, 20 mammals and one reptile species through eDNA sampling, with a greater number of species generally detected at billabongs more connected to the river (i.e. that flood more frequently).
- The strength of the collaboration is underpinned by respectful relationships highlighted by robust discussion during annual on Country knowledge sharing days.



# BIRRARUNG BILLABONGS

## Deer along the Lower Birrarung research project

Deer are an increasing threat to native vegetation, habitat and water quality. Momentum is building to tackle this pest in a coordinated way.

This collaborative study by The University of Melbourne, Melbourne Water, La Trobe University, and Wurundjeri Corporation's Narrap Unit explored deer activity, impact and movement along the lower Birrarung (Yarra River).

Researchers and Narrap Rangers surveyed eight billabongs, finding the highest levels of deer activity and deer impacts at Bolin Bolin and Montpellier. Annulus and Banyule billabongs were also found to experience substantial deer activity and impact.

Results from initial genetic testing of deer faecal pellets indicated a resident and breeding sambar deer population in Yarra Flats Park, and suggested immigration from upstream areas.

The final report for the project, completed in May 2025, provides several recommendations, including that Park Victoria's recently developed Deer Control Plan for the Yarra Valley Parklands be implemented and the surveys conducted for this project be repeated to monitor changes in deer activity and impact over time.





# IMPROVING BIRRARUNG'S BIODIVERSITY

## Birrarung Bank Restoration Project

The Birrarung Bank Restoration project is a long-term collaboration between Collingwood Children's Farm, Wurundjeri Narrap Unit and Melbourne Water.

The project is enabling holistic land care practices to decrease weed load and increase biodiversity and habitat, moving away from "set and forget" revegetation practices. Significant components of the work have been self-determined by Narrap.

In addition to on-ground works, this project has facilitated significant two-way knowledge exchange between Narrap and the farm's horticulture team, building the capacity of both teams.

Project outcomes to date include:

- increased biodiversity and habitat in the riparian corridor
- seed collection for propagation of plant stock
- improved erosion control of the river bank
- community planting and engagement days
- representation of indigenous agriculture for education and awareness
- increased quality public open space for more resilient and healthier communities.

The next phase of the project includes developing a farm plan to:

- reduce agricultural runoff
- minimise potable water use
- support the farm's long-term viability through regenerative farming.

## Birrarung Priority Parcels Project

This vital initiative, led by Trust for Nature, is working to protect and enhance the health of Birrarung by engaging private landholders to contribute to long-term environmental stewardship and the protection of native habitat.

Funded through DEECA's Iconic Urban Waterways Program and supported by Melbourne Water, Traditional Owners and the YCC, the project mapped habitat on private land that can be managed for conservation or permanently protected with conservation covenants. These voluntary legal agreements safeguard land with natural, cultural or scientific values, restricting damaging activities even after sale.

Over four months in the first half of 2025, Trust for Nature engaged 50 landholders and assessed 20 properties for conservation opportunities to promote permanent protection of habitat.

This project not only delivers on Action 14 of the Plan and contributes to the 50-year Community Vision, it also supports Victoria's Biodiversity 2037 targets.

By protecting habitat, landholders help improve water quality, support native species like the platypus, and preserve culturally significant landscapes.





# IMPROVING BIRRARUNG'S BIODIVERSITY

## Yarra City Council Bringing Nature Back

Yarra City Council Bringing Nature Back program assists in mitigating the impacts of climate change and healing Country by reducing bushland fragmentation and improving habitat connectivity.

The creation of accessible, healthy, resilient, and diverse ecosystems in urban areas is part of Yarra's commitment to custodianship of Birrarung, its parkland and tributaries as one living and integrated natural entity.

A total of 81,110 local native tube stock of over 70 different species have been planted by community, staff and ecological contractors, expanding areas of open space managed for biodiversity by 2.1 hectares.

Yarra City Council further supported Birrarung with a staff planting day to celebrate World Environment Day 2025. At Quarries Park in Clifton Hill, 150 staff gathered to put 6,430 local native plants of 35 different species into the ground.

The planting will improve habitat values for a variety of fauna along the escarpment as well as connect hilltop indigenous vegetation to the Merri Creek and Birrarung.



Case studies





## Yarra4Life

Established in 2006, Yarra4Life brings together agencies and communities to protect biodiversity and rehabilitate the unique natural values of the Yarra Valley, engage communities in caring for the region, and work with Traditional Owners to heal Country.

Melbourne Water coordinates Yarra4Life on behalf of 15 partner organisations:

- Cardinia Shire Council
- Yarra Ranges Shire Council
- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
- Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater
- Friends of Leadbeater's Possum
- Nangana Landcare Network
- Yarra Ranges Landcare Network
- Parks Victoria
- Trust for Nature
- Victorian National Parks Association
- Wurundjeri Corporation
- Yarra Riverkeeper Association
- Yarra Valley Water
- Zoos Victoria



In 2024-25, Yarra4Life secured over \$1.2 million in funding for projects across the Yarra Valley supporting sustainable agriculture, biodiversity on farms, habitat restoration and species resilience, including for the recovery of the critically endangered Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeater's Possum.

Eight land management agreements were completed, resulting in 38 hectares of weed control, 11 hectares of revegetation, and 752 metres of fencing to protect native vegetation. Targeted pest animal control covered 12,110 hectares, and twelve committee, partner, and community meetings were held to advance habitat restoration, threat abatement, and citizen science efforts.



Case studies



### Climate resilient habitat for Leadbeater's Possum

Melbourne Water is leading a pioneering conservation effort to protect habitat for the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum, with fewer than 40 lowland individuals remaining.

Using climate modelling technology, the project identifies tree species that can both support possums and thrive in future hotter, drier conditions.

With support from the Federal Government, a seedbank of 7000 seeds has been collected from regions with climates similar to what the Yarra Valley may face in coming decades.

The seeds are currently being stored by the volunteer-run Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater nursery, which has specialist knowledge in indigenous plants.

With additional funding recently secured through Melbourne Water's Internal Biodiversity Fund, Melbourne Water will begin trial climate plots in the Yarra Valley over the next two years.

Delivered through the Yarra4Life Partnership, the project is a collaboration between Melbourne Water, Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, Yarra Valley Water, Wurundjeri Corporation, Greening Australia, and Zoos Victoria.

### New wetlands for endangered species

Yarra Valley Water has commenced earthworks on a landmark 35-hectare habitat restoration project in Launching Place, designed to protect two of Victoria's critically endangered species—the lowland Leadbeater's Possum and the Helmeted Honeyeater.

Using recycled water from the adjacent Upper Yarra Sewage Treatment Plant, the project will create climate-resilient wetlands that mirror the species' natural environment.

The initiative is a collaboration with Greening Australia, Melbourne Water, Zoos Victoria, Wurundjeri Corporation, DEECA, Jacobs, North East Link, Jaydo Construction and Yarra4Life.

The restored site is expected to support around 50 lowland Leadbeater's Possums and 100 Helmeted Honeyeaters, with bushfire-resilient design features including firebreaks and low-flammability vegetation.

Earthworks will continue through 2025, followed by extensive native planting in 2026.

This project marks a significant step in biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use, showcasing how recycled water can support ecological restoration and species recovery.





# KEEPING BIRRARUNG BEAUTIFUL



## Litter Prevention Toolkit

The 'Bin it or bring it home' litter prevention toolkit, launched by Melbourne Water on World Environment Day 2025, empowers local councils, community groups and litter advocacy organisations to tackle litter in their local area.

Developed in collaboration with Shannon Behaviour Change and BehaviourWorks Australia, the toolkit addresses a key gap in public understanding: the link between urban littering and its impact on our waterways.

The toolkit includes a suite of ready-to-use resources to help promote litter prevention behaviours using clear universal messaging. The assets are tailored to support both industry professionals and community to drive positive behaviour change.

Nillumbik Shire Council is an early adopter of the toolkit, rolling out bin and floor decals across four locations. By pairing solar bin infrastructure with behaviour change messaging in strategic locations, the council is primed to reduce litter and support healthy waterways.



## Yarra Riverkeeper Association Litter Clean-up

Veneziano Coffee Roasters, headquartered in a repurposed factory on River Street, Richmond, sits just a stone's throw from the Birrarung. An old floor drain still visible on site is a reminder of a time when industrial effluent flowed directly into the river. Today, Veneziano is a certified B Corporation, committed to making a positive impact on the local environment.

In partnership with the Yarra Riverkeeper Association, Veneziano hosted a litter clean up in September 2024 of the surrounding streets and nearby riverbanks, helping prevent rubbish from entering the waterway.

The event provided an opportunity for Veneziano staff, local residents and community members to reflect on the importance of Birrarung and the threats it faces from litter, stormwater pollution, and broader urban impacts.



## Reduce, reuse, recycle

Parks Victoria's waterways team remove around 300 cubic metres of litter and waste per year from the inner reaches of Birrarung. Some of the large items removed include shopping trolleys, scooters, motor bikes, traffic barriers, sporting equipment and even park seat benches.

The Waterways team have come up with an innovative and community focused way to stop some of this waste going to landfill. As part of the litter trapping program, the team were able to present near-new balls of all descriptions, recovered from Birrarung to the Richmond West Primary School.



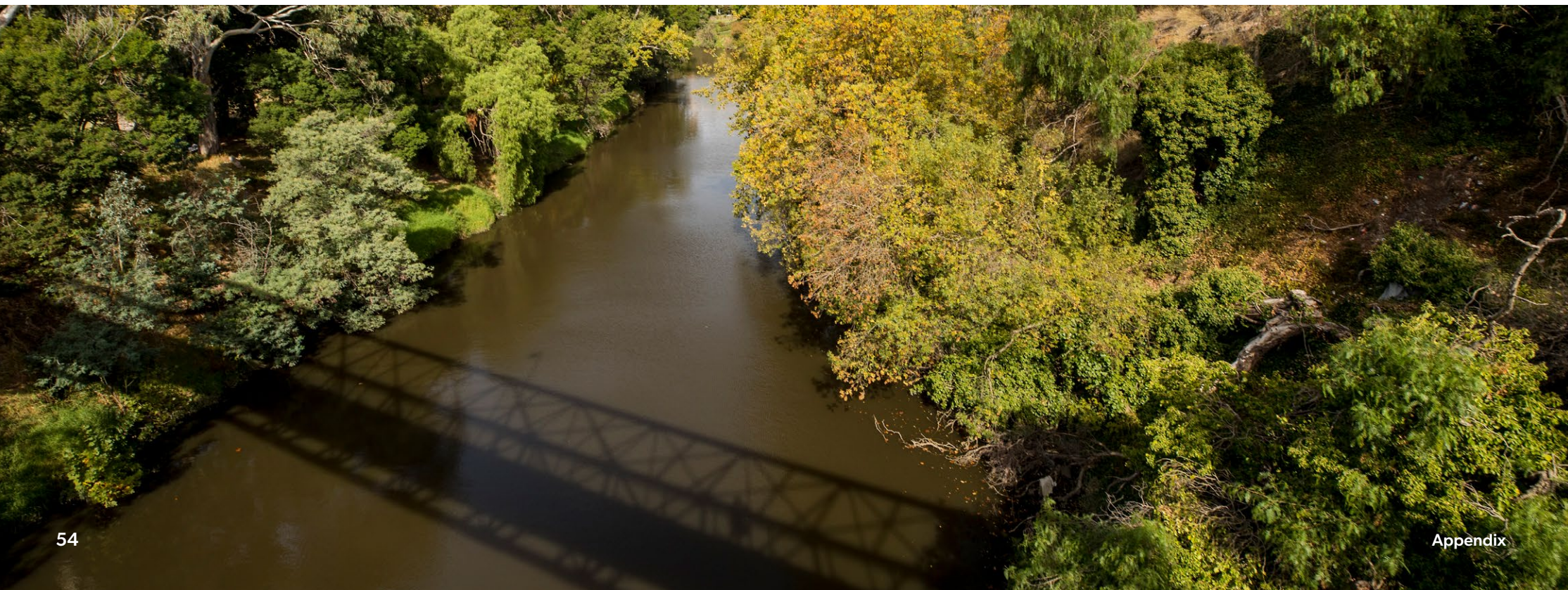
# APPENDIX

## YCC meetings and events

DATE & FORMAT	AGENDA
<b>Online meeting</b> <b>19 August 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lead agency and Transformative Project updates.</li><li>• Wurundjeri presentation on the Birrarung Rangers program.</li><li>• Yarra Ranges presentation on Yering Billabong project.</li><li>• Collaborative platform data exercise to assist with evaluation by lead agency.</li></ul>
<b>Online meeting</b> <b>14 October 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lead agency and Transformative Project updates.</li><li>• Debrief on 2024 Birrarung Riverfest with YRKA.</li><li>• MW case study for embedding DMF.</li><li>• PV presentation on North East Melbourne Recreational Analysis.</li><li>• MW briefing on the HWS mid-term review.</li><li>• Trust for Nature presentation on conservation covenants.</li></ul>
<b>Online meeting</b> <b>9 December 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lead agency and Transformative Project updates.</li><li>• Overview and discussion regarding Birrarung Council Annual Report.</li><li>• Endorsement of sponsorship for 2025 Birrarung Riverfest and sharing of 2024 Birrarung Riverfest film.</li><li>• Discussion regarding collaborative funding models.</li></ul>
<b>Cultural Walk and Workshop</b> <b>25 February 2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cultural walk and talk at Yaluk Langa with Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Dave Wandin.</li><li>• Facilitated exploration of what it means to have a “healthy reciprocal relationship with the Birrarung” and how RPEs can champion and support this relationship.</li></ul>
<b>Bunurong Cultural Awareness Training</b> <b>17 March 2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Led by Bunurong and Palawa Traditional Owners Jillian West and Alexandra Prouse at Port of Melbourne Education Centre.</li></ul>



DATE & FORMAT	AGENDA
<b>Online meeting</b> <b>7 April 2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead Agency and Transformative Project updates.</li> <li>• Discussed Birrarung Council Yarning Circle guidance and RPE Birrarung relationship statements.</li> <li>• DTP presentation on Birrarung planning controls – current settings and next steps.</li> <li>• Manningham Council case study re embedding BBBU and the DMF.</li> </ul>
<b>Online meeting</b> <b>16 June 2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead Agency and Transformative Project updates.</li> <li>• Reflections from 7 May Yarning Circle and discussion re RPE Birrarung relationship statements.</li> <li>• Decision to support establishment of a Birrarung Land Use Planning Reference Group to help DTP develop guidance for planning practitioners.</li> <li>• Lead agency overview of annual reporting process and discussion regarding status of short-term actions.</li> <li>• MW presentation on new litter prevention toolkit.</li> </ul>





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2	Spadonis Reserve	Melbourne Water
5	Dights Falls	Melbourne Water
7	Male Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis)	Mark Hunter
8	Yaluk Langa, Heide Museum	Kirsten Hickey
9	Abbotsford	Melbourne Water
11	Westgate Park	Parks Victoria
12	Templestowe	Melbourne Water
13	Pound Bend	Kirsten Hickey
14	Northeast Melbourne study area	Mosaic Insights
15	Salomon Warburton Trail Fest	Chris Ord
16	Laughing Waters	Rob Molloy
17	Biik Wurrdha	Wurundjeri Corporation
17	Yering Billabong	Wurundjeri Corporation
18	Yering Billabong	Yarra Ranges Shire Council
18	Spadonis Reserve Billabong map	Yarra Ranges Shire Council
18	Coldstream Primary School planting	Yarra Ranges Shire Council
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48	Collingwood Childrens Farm	Collingwood Childrens Farm
49	Quarries Park planting	Yarra City Council
50	Helmeted honeyeater	Kacie Melfi
50	Upper Yarra catchment	Claire Dunn
51	Leadbeaters Possum	Joanne Antrobus
52	Solar bin	Melbourne Water
52	Veneziano hosted litter clean up, Richmond	Yarra Riverkeeper Association
52	Burnley Depot	Parks Victoria
53	Yarra Flats	Melbourne Water
54	Collingwood	Melbourne Water





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# **YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN**