



2024-25 SNAPSHOT



Native Paper Daisy in Bateman Street Bushland Reserve, Wantirna.

www.livinglinks.com.au

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

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

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

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

Our Catchments Our Communities - Vital Landscapes Project

The Victorian Government's Our Catchments, Our Communities program has allocated \$505,000 to restore native vegetation within the Mid-Dandenong Creek catchment from 2024–2028.

The project is delivering five targeted initiatives in partnership with Knox, Monash, and Greater Dandenong councils, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), and the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

Activities include ecological surveys, weed control, revegetation, cultural heritage assessments, stewardship programs, and community engagement. These efforts support biodiversity, climate resilience, urban cooling, and community well-being.

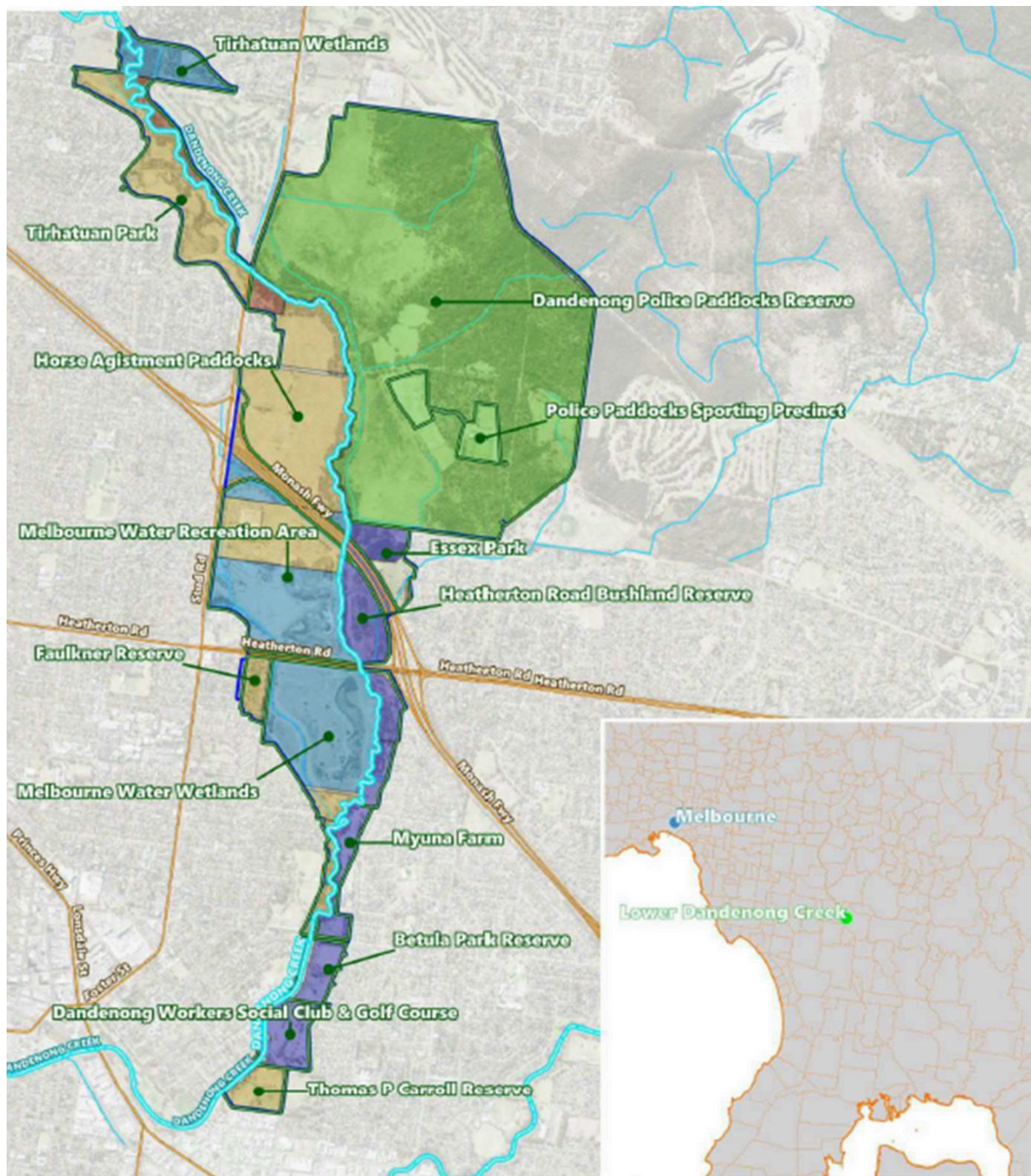
Funding breakdown:

- \$77,000 – Knox City Council: weed control, monitoring, research at Police Paddocks
- \$140,000 – Parks Victoria: weed control, revegetation at Police Paddocks
- \$125,000 – Greater Dandenong: weed control, revegetation along the creek
- \$20,000 – Monash City Council: weed control, revegetation
- \$30,000 – Melbourne Water: coordination of events and activities
- \$113,446 – Melbourne Water: project coordination, data collation, reporting

Expected outcomes:

- 267 ha weed control
- 31 ha revegetation
- 22 ecological surveys
- 135 volunteers engaged
- 2 management plans
- 1 Cultural Burn Assessment
- 4 education and engagement events





Mark Shepherd Ecological Consulting
Map Version: 05
Date: 19/02/2021
Scale: 1:30000 @A4
Coordinate system: GDA94 MGA Zone 55



Mark Shepherd
Ecological Consulting

Project area map from the Lower Dandenong Creek Management Plan highlighting project areas for Vital Landscapes project

Strategic Plan Review

The Living Links Strategic Review commenced in 2025 to develop a new 10-year Strategic Plan and a 3-year Action Plan, which will guide the future direction and priorities of the Living Links Partnership. Consultation began in March and included two facilitated workshops with partners and community representatives. The collaborative process involved:

- Reviewing strategically aligned documents
- Evaluating current measurable targets and indicators
- Conducting a survey of the Living Links Committee and community groups
- Assessing the status and recommendations of the Mapping the Gaps Report (2020)

A draft Strategic Plan is currently awaiting endorsement, with a comprehensive Action Plan in development to support its implementation.



Living Links Strategic Plan Workshop 2 at Tatterson Pavillion (Credit: Melbourne Water)

Living Links Committee Site Tours

Bateman Reserve:

In September 2024, the Living Links Committee joined Knox City Council for a 'Best of Spring' walk at Bateman Reserve, Heathmont. The tour highlighted one of metropolitan Melbourne's largest remaining Valley Heathy Forest areas, showcasing rare native flora and valuable urban habitat for birds, insects, and reptiles.



Living Links Committee site visit at Bateman Reserve, lead by Knox Council (credit: Melbourne Water)

Alex Wilkie Reserve:

In December 2024, the City of Greater Dandenong hosted the Living Links Committee meeting and a site tour of Alex Wilkie Reserve, a beautiful oasis in the suburbs.

Well done to Greater Dandenong who protect and enhance the environmental values of this reserve and provide many opportunities for the local community to engage with nature.



Living Links Committee site visit at Alex Wilkie Reserve in the City of Great Dandenong.(credit: Melbourne Water)

Holmesglen TAFE students on-ground contributions

Holmesglen TAFE's respected environmental programs continue to offer students valuable, hands-on experience through active collaboration with Living Links partners. The Living Links Committee helps foster these partnerships, enabling students to contribute to real-world conservation efforts while gaining practical skills in natural resource management.

Current courses include the Certificate IV and Diploma of Conservation and Ecosystem Management, both of which integrate field-based learning aligned with Living Links activities.

Student contributions for 2024/25 included:

- Supporting planting days in partnership with the Cities of Kingston, Greater Dandenong, Monash, and Frankston
- Removing over 200 tonnes of invasive weeds from key sites
- Conducting ecological surveys, including microbat monitoring in Frankston and bird surveys at Edithvale and Seaford in the City of Kingston.

These collaborations not only strengthen local biodiversity but also prepare students for future careers in environmental management and stewardship.



Holmesglen TAFE students monitoring biodiversity values. (credit: Holmesglen TAFE)

Living Links Volunteer Workshop

Kim Boswell from The Forever Agenda led an inspiring weekend workshop in November 2024, for The Living Links environmental volunteer community, bringing fresh energy and practical insights to the table.

The session focused on empowering volunteer groups to attract new, enthusiastic members and build strong succession plans to ensure long-term impact and sustainability. With a diverse mix of participants from across the Dandenong and Yarra Catchments, the workshop was well attended and received glowing feedback. Beyond the valuable learning, the event served as a vibrant networking opportunity, connecting passionate individuals and groups working to protect and enhance our local environment.



Volunteer group workshop participants (credit: Melbourne Water)

Climate Future Research Plots - the first year

In June 2024, five Climate Future Research Plots were established across the municipalities of Greater Dandenong, Knox, and Maroondah, using seed sourced from four different provenances that represent different climatic conditions. This collaborative initiative is designed to investigate how native plant species respond to projected climate conditions, providing valuable insights for building resilient urban landscapes.

Each council is actively maintaining the plots including weed control, while Federation University leads the research and monitoring efforts. Over the first year, the plots have progressed well, with some plant losses observed. These plants are being replaced in line with the project's planned protocol, ensuring consistency across all sites.



Greater Dandenong Climate Plot (credit: Federation University)

Peri-urban Deer Forum

In March 2025, Living Links proudly supported DEECA, the Eastern Region Pest Animal Network, and Knox Council in hosting the Peri-Urban Regional Deer Forum. The event brought together over 50 attendees to explore the latest research and practical approaches to managing deer populations in peri-urban environments.

Experts, volunteers and practitioners shared their progress made over the past five years in resourcing and developing effective management techniques. Despite this progress, the exponential breeding capacity of deer continues to drive their expansion across new areas. The ongoing classification of deer as a 'protected species' under the Victorian Wildlife Act 1975 was also noted.



Melbourne Water's Tom Wright presenting on the catchment deer control program. (credit: Melbourne Water)

Another successful Discover Dandenong Creek Festival

Congratulations to the City of Greater Dandenong for another amazing Discover Dandenong Creek Festival in April 2025. It was great to see the community support with approximately 1000 people attending on a beautiful sunny autumn day. The festival included a variety of engaging environmental and cultural activities for families to enjoy and improve their connection to Dandenong Creek. Bunurong led a powerful Welcome to Country, with a Smoking Ceremony and dancing. Well done to all those who had displays on the day including the Greater Dandenong Environment Group, Federation University and the Melbourne Water team who helped out at the Living Links tent.



The very busy Living Links Tent (credit: Melbourne Water)



Bunurong dancing with large audience (credit: Melbourne Water)

Upwey High - the 2024-25 Living Links Ambassador School

Each year, Living Links identifies one outstanding school within the Dandenong Creek catchment as its Ambassador School. Recognising innovative project ideas that bring the program's vision to life, Upwey High School earned the 2024-25 title for their inspiring creation of a native pond ecosystem right on school grounds.

Out of eight strong applicants, Upwey High stood out for their hands-on approach to environmental learning. Their pond project not only enhances biodiversity but also aligns with the Victorian Science Curriculum, offering students a dynamic space for inquiry-based learning for years to come. Plans are already underway to add a seating area, transforming the site into a vibrant hub for both education, relaxation and connection to nature.

The Living Links Committee worked hard to ensure that all eight schools received support from either direct funding or assistance provided by alternative local council or Melbourne Water programs, so that every project could be implemented.



Upwey High School pond installation (credit: Upwey High School)

Introducing Melbourne Water's new Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan

Melbourne Water has released its Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan 2024–28 (BCAP) to guide its role as Catchment Management Authority in protecting and enhancing biodiversity across the Port Phillip and Western Port region.

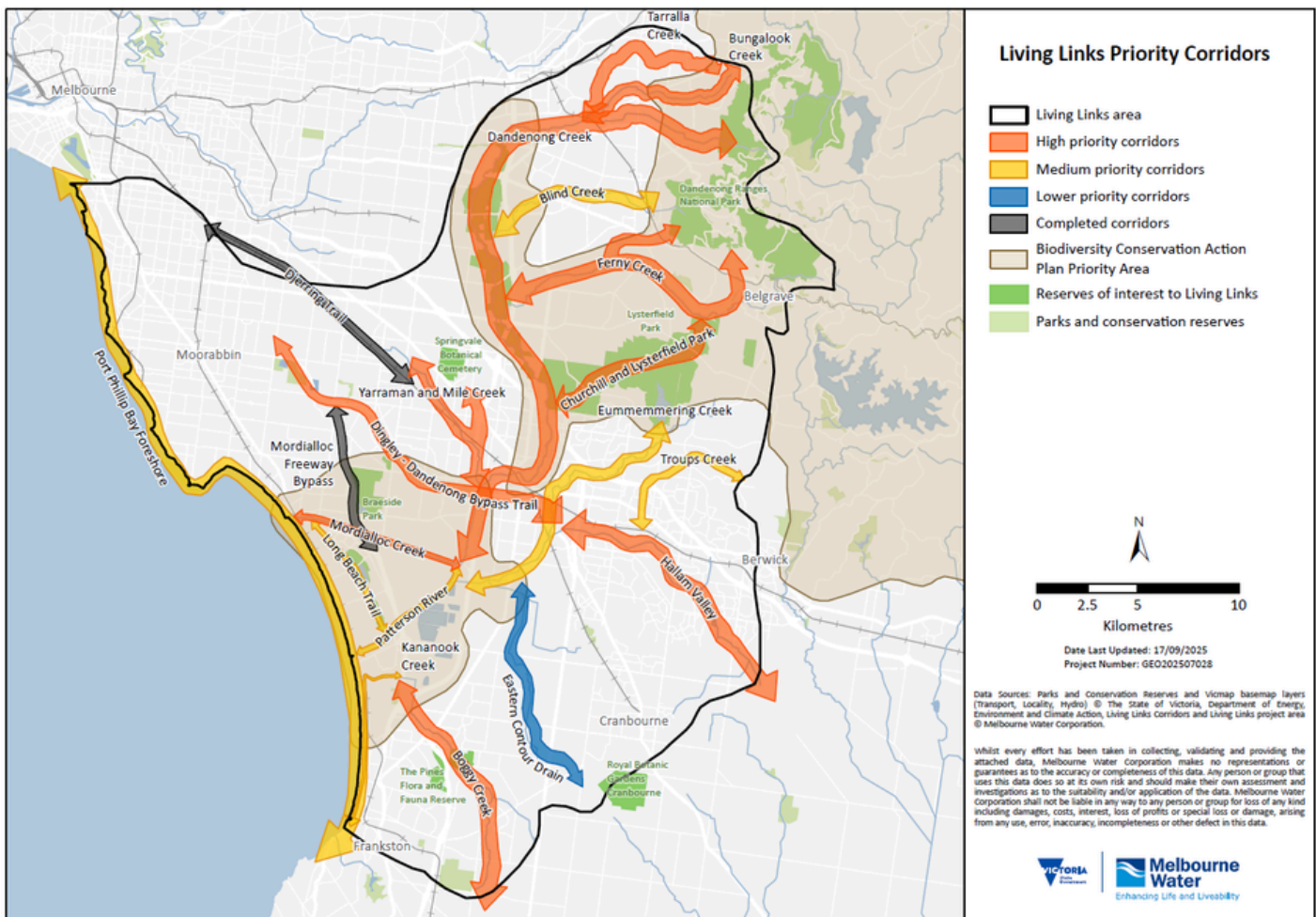
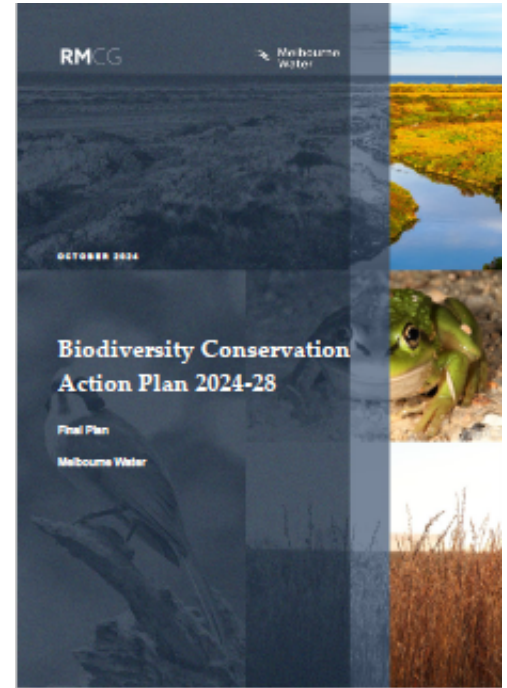
As both water resource and catchment manager, Melbourne Water is responsible for managing its own land and leading broader biodiversity efforts across the region.

The vision:

“Our region’s native biodiversity is protected and maintained for future generations to appreciate, and Melbourne Water is recognised as a leader among natural resource managers.”

The map below shows the Living Links area and BCAP regional priorities, highlighting the Dandenong Creek Catchment, including the entire Dandenong Creek Corridor.

The map is available on the Living Links website.



Living Links map illustrating the designated priority corridors alongside the BCAP priority areas (credit: Melbourne Water)

Living Links 2024-25 Achievements



7043 hectares

of native vegetation
managed or established

181,286 native plants

planted to improve habitat
and strengthen corridors



150 kilometres

of riparian vegetation
enhanced along waterways

10 kilometres

of recreational trails
established or improved



22,793 hours

of volunteer time spent
caring for the environment



Looking forward – key focus areas for 2025-2026

- **Strategic Direction:** The Living Links 10-year Strategic Plan will progress to implementation guiding the future priorities and activities of the Living Links Partnership.
- **Project Delivery:** The second year of Our Catchments Our Communities (OCOC) Vital Landscapes Project will see the rollout of five targeted initiatives, with contracts, delivery schedules, and reporting frameworks to be actively managed.
- **Climate Research Monitoring:** Federation University will lead ongoing monitoring of the Climate Future Research Plots, while the Cities of Greater Dandenong, Knox, and Maroondah will continue site maintenance to support successful plant establishment over the next two years.
- **Riparian and Urban Cooling Projects:** Melbourne Water will advance riparian vegetation restoration across key locations including Frankston and Monash municipalities, the Mordialloc Estuary (Kingston), and Bushy and Koomba parks. Urban cooling initiatives will also be delivered in Greater Dandenong and Kingston municipalities.
- **Education and Training:** Living Links partners will continue to provide diverse work experience opportunities for Holmesglen TAFE students, offering practical exposure to natural resource management and conservation practices.
- **Community Engagement:** Planning will commence for the next Living Links events in 2026, which will bring together environmental volunteers and community leaders to share insights, celebrate achievements, foster collaboration and network.

More information on Living Links:

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www.livinglinks.com.au

