

# Lower Yarra River Corridor Study



RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT  
NOVEMBER 2016



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2016



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# Acknowledgements

## Traditional Owners

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victoria’s Aboriginal community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

This study acknowledges that the Birrarung (Yarra River) flows through the traditional land of the Wurundjeri people with the waterway, its natural landscape and key features having social, cultural and spiritual significance.

## Project Participants

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning would like to thank all who have provided their input throughout this, and past local and regional studies. This appreciation is extended to the many heritage, cultural, community, planning, environmental, landcare groups and friends of the Yarra River who have contributed their information, knowledge, views and time over the life of this, and past studies.

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# 1. Introduction

# 1.1 Purpose of the Study

Waterways make a significant contribution to Melbourne’s landscape and liveability. Melbourne’s two main rivers are the Yarra and the Maribyrnong. The Victorian Government is committed to protecting both the Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers from inappropriate development and safeguarding public access.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) commissioned this study of the Lower Yarra River corridor to better understand and assess the need for new or amended planning controls and design guidelines for land in proximity to the Yarra River between Punt Road and Bulleen.

The objective of this study is to achieve consistent development outcomes along the Lower Yarra River to ensure that further development does not encroach on the river’s landscape, environmental, aesthetic, cultural and recreational values. Importantly, the study focusses on management of the interface between public and private land along the corridor.

The Lower Yarra River Corridor Study is being prepared in partnership with the City of Yarra, City of Stonnington, City of Boroondara and Melbourne Water.

## Project Partners

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

City of Yarra

City of Stonnington

City of Boroondara

Melbourne Water

# 1.2 Study Products

## This Report

This report is one of four key outputs for the Lower Yarra River Corridor Study. The full suite of documents is depicted in the diagram opposite.

This report outlines a brief history of planning for the Yarra River, documents the values of the Lower Yarra River corridor, and defines a series of river interface character types and important views within the study area.

It also includes detailed analysis of the Lower Yarra River corridor which underpins the proposed guidelines and controls.

The report concludes with the proposed implementation of the study, including planning scheme changes. This section outlines the objectives, controls and guidelines proposed to protect the river environs and guide development into the future.

The report is accompanied by a Municipal Toolkit for each Council area. The Toolkits will assist Councils to implement the study and contain detailed planning scheme recommendations by municipality.

### Lower Yarra River Corridor Study Recommendations Report

1 x Volume

- Introduction
- Values of the Lower Yarra River Corridor
- River Interface Character Types Analysis
- Views Analysis
- Managing Development
- Recommendations
- Appendices
  - Existing Planning Policy & Controls
  - Planning Scheme Maps

### Lower Yarra River Corridor Study Municipal Toolkits

3 x Toolkits

- New Directions for the Yarra River
- Project Background
- The Lower Yarra River Corridor in Yarra / Stonnington / Boroondara
- Existing Planning Scheme Provisions
- Planning Scheme Implementation Recommendations
- Appendices
  - Existing Planning Scheme Provisions
  - Planning Scheme Maps
  - Strategic Projects
  - Building Heights & Setbacks Analysis
  - (+ Other Appendices as required)
- NB. one per Municipality

# 1.3 Study Area

## Broad Context

The study area, known as the 'Lower Yarra River corridor', is located between Punt Road, Richmond and Bulleen. It includes parts of three municipalities: Yarra, Stonnington and Boroondara, and contains substantial areas of public open space managed by Parks Victoria.

The study area:

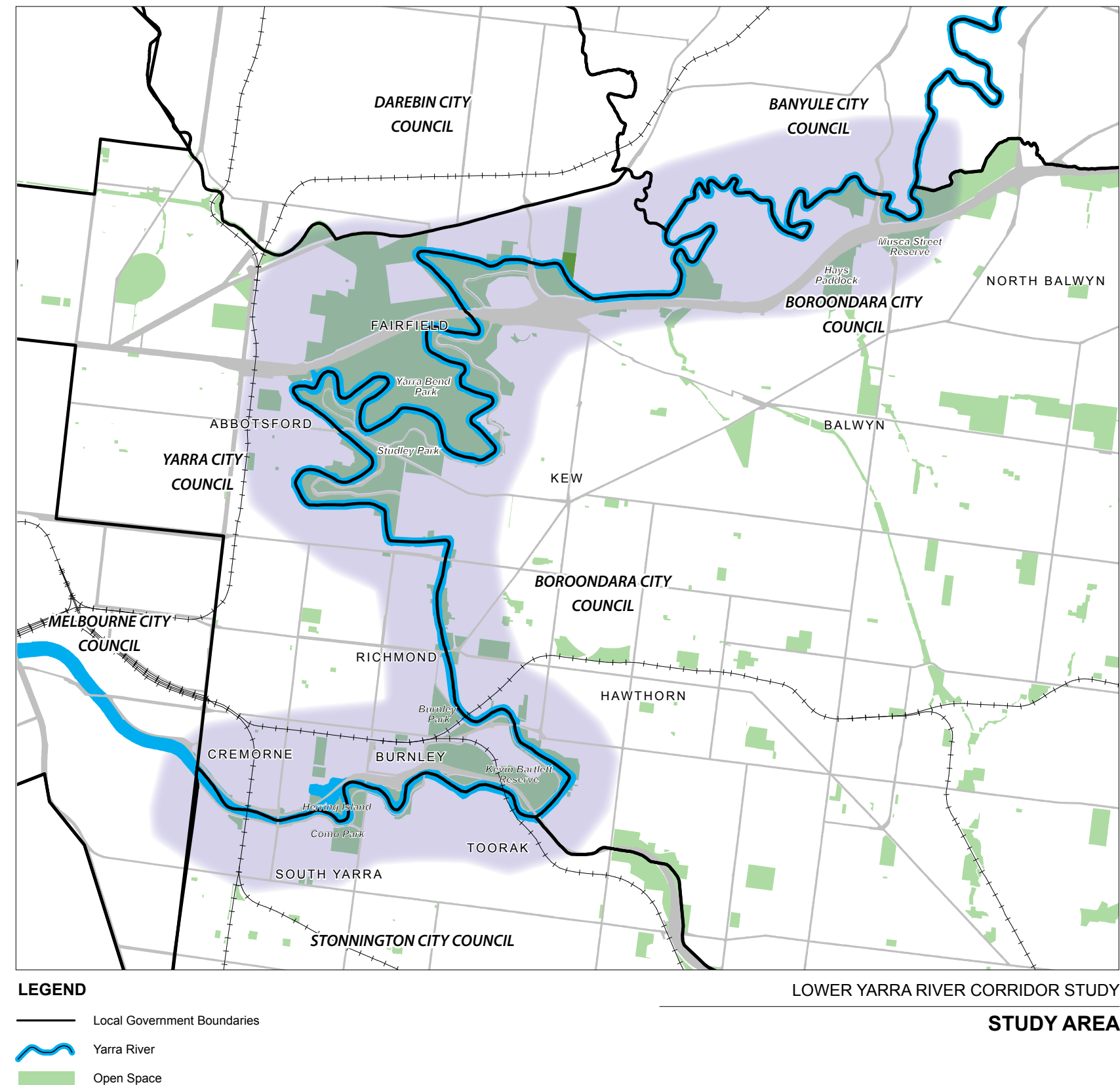
- Extends eastward from the municipal boundaries of Yarra and Stonnington at Punt Road (on the northern side and southern sides of the river respectively) - through to the eastern municipal boundary of the City of Yarra (on the northern bank) and the eastern-most part of the river within the City of Boroondara (on the southern bank).
- Includes the open space corridor that surrounds the river, and its urban and suburban interface.
- Includes all land adjacent to the Lower Yarra River open space corridor, including both public and private land.

## Primary Focus

The extent of the study area has been further informed by:

- the topographical character of the surrounding landscape, including consideration of land up to the 'crest' of the surrounding hill slopes;
- the visibility of land and development from publicly accessible locations including the Main Yarra Trail, other walking trails, bridges, areas of open space, main road corridors, and the river itself;
- identified important views and viewsheds; and,
- the location and extent of existing zones and overlays in the relevant planning schemes.

These defining elements are illustrated on the study area map opposite.





# 1.4 Study Process & Approach

## Study Process

Preparation of this report has involved a review of background documents, together with the relevant planning schemes, VCAT decisions and Planning Panel reports. Analysis of GIS information and photography (including aerial photography) has also informed the contents of this report, together with a detailed field survey, undertaken over the course of several days, by car, foot, bicycle and boat.

The process consisted of an assessment of the river corridor's:

- landscape character
- key views
- values
- threats and pressures
- existing policy and controls.

The study process was undertaken as four key stages. A summary of each stage is outlined as follows:

### Stage 1: Project Inception

The preparation of the detailed program to complete the study was undertaken in this stage. This included meetings with the Project Reference Group comprising representatives from each Council and Melbourne Water.

### Stage 2: Background Review & Analysis

Background research and investigation work was undertaken in this stage to define issues and opportunities for the study area. This included a detailed site survey and a review of all relevant concept plans, background documents and current planning scheme policies and controls.

### Stage 3: Implementation Recommendations

Final recommendations, design guidelines and draft of proposed planning controls for each Council was completed in this stage. This report outlines the key findings of the study.

### Next Stage: Planning Scheme Amendment & Consultation

The findings and recommendations of this study will be publicly exhibited through the Planning Scheme Amendment process, which will provide opportunities for all stakeholders and community to input into the form and content of final planning scheme controls.

## Design Principles

Siting, massing and design of development needs to take account of the particular characteristics of the Yarra River corridor as a sub-area. While the method for this study focussed on visual assessment of the landscape, it used a holistic approach to consider all the area's values, including aesthetic values (both visual and non-visual), historic, environmental, scientific, social and other values.

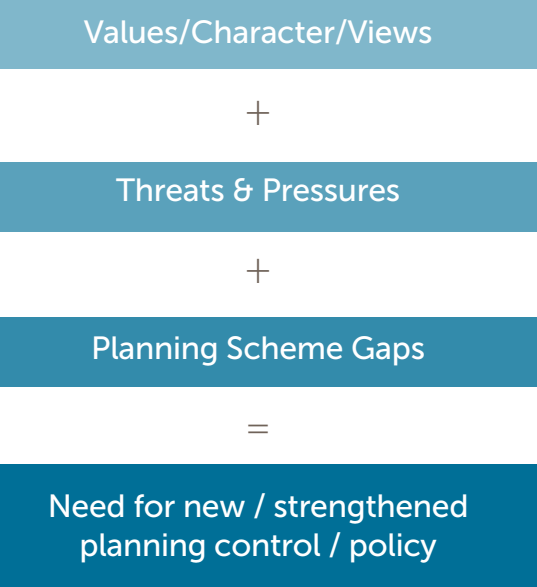
The following design principles, which have been applied in previous studies for the Yarra River and successfully tested in appeals tribunal and Planning Panel hearings, have underpinned the approach to this study:

- The Yarra River is valued and appreciated as much for the vegetation and parkland that dominate its corridor as for the presence of the waterbody itself
- The topographical character of the Yarra River is easily diminished by larger scale development sited too close to its banks
- There are a number of distinct river interface character types, i.e. areas of varying topographical, landscape and built form character, through which the Yarra River passes, each of which warrants a tailored policy approach
- Strong built form controls are likely to be necessary for sections of the river corridor, in order to maintain and enhance its valued qualities. Analysis of existing built form controls shows where these may need to be strengthened in some locations.

## Approach

The approach adopted by this study to determine whether new or strengthened policy and controls are required for this section of the Yarra River can be summarised simply as:

- Understanding the values, character and views of the river
- Identifying the threats and pressures to these
- Examining the current approach to managing development and protecting vegetation in the study area, principally through the planning scheme, in order to determine the gaps in statutory controls
- Recommending ways in which these controls could be strengthened to protect the identified values, character and views.



# 1.5 Key Relevant Studies for the Yarra River Corridor

Several key studies have been undertaken in relation to development along the Yarra River corridor in general, and provide the background to this project.

## Plan Melbourne: Metropolitan Planning Strategy (2013)

On 9 October 2013, the Premier, Minister for Planning and Minister for Transport launched Plan Melbourne, a 50 year planning strategy for metropolitan Melbourne.

Melbourne has some 7000 kilometres of waterways within its metropolitan boundaries which form an essential component of the city's open space network. They provide a sense of place and important habitat for maintaining biodiversity. The rivers and creeks of Port Phillip Bay and Western Port are popular recreational destinations for residents and tourists, with around 90 million visits each year.

The Plan recognises the need to continue to protect Melbourne's open space waterway corridors from inappropriate development to ensure that these significant values provided to Melbourne and its residents are maintained and enhanced over time. (Initiatives 4.2.4, 5.2.2 and 5.6.2).

The Plan will use the model approach to preparation of planning controls implemented by the Middle Yarra Study and the recent work for the Lower Yarra River and the Maribyrnong River. This will implement planning controls to protect Melbourne's metropolitan waterway corridors and be undertaken in partnership with local governments and key stakeholders.

The Plan identifies the need for this initiative to be completed in the short term (next four years) and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning has been tasked with leading this important initiative.

For further information about Plan Melbourne visit [www.planmelbourne.vic.gov.au](http://www.planmelbourne.vic.gov.au).

## Review of Policies & Controls for the Yarra River Corridor: Punt Road to Burke Road (2005)

The State Government Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) commissioned Planisphere to review the policies and controls for development within the lower Yarra River in 2005.

The study applied the principles of landscape protection to the lower Yarra River by assessing the river's values, distinguishing river interface types and identifying planning objectives that are relevant to this section of the river. Recommendations to protect and enhance the valued qualities of the corridor were made. This included non-statutory recommendations such as public land management and improved access, as well as a range of overlay controls in specific locations, including the Design and Development Overlay, Environmental Significance Overlay and the Significant Landscape Overlay.

The Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) undertook a follow-up project to implement the 2005 DSE report in 2010. This included consultation with Councils and development of draft planning scheme changes for the four municipalities, including overlays. The Lower and Middle Yarra Review projects are a continuation of the work done in 2005.

## The Lower Yarra Concept Plans & Design Guidelines

A number of concept plans and design guidelines have been prepared for the Lower Yarra corridor over the last thirty years. These plans have informed the implementation of current planning scheme controls and the management of public land, including the creation of new public access to the river and the design of parklands. Some of the studies are listed as Reference Documents in the Planning Scheme, and include:

- *Lower Yarra River Concept Plan (Punt Road to Dights Falls)* (1986), MMBW
- *Lower Yarra River Landscape Guidelines (Punt Road to Dights Falls)* (1986), MMBW
- *Lower Yarra River Urban Design Guidelines* (1992), Kinhill
- *Lower Yarra River Future Directions Plan* (2001), Parks Victoria
- *Stonnington DDO3 Review* (2012 & 2014 update), Planisphere
- *Yarra Built Form Review* (2003), Planisphere
- *Yarra River Corridor Strategy* (2015), Planisphere

## Waterway Management Reports

A number of reports have been completed to address issues of waterway management along the river corridor generally. These studies include:

- *Healthy Waterways Strategy* (2013) by Melbourne Water. This has specific reference to the Yarra River and provides a range of management actions.
- *A Cleaner Yarra River and Port Phillip Bay – A Plan of Action* (2012) by the Office of Living. This report specifically focuses on the Yarra River and provides a framework for State Government action.
- *Port Phillip and Westernport Regional River Health Strategy* (2005) by Melbourne Water includes directions for the Yarra River catchment.
- *Guidelines for Development in Floodprone Areas* (2005) by Melbourne Water provides guidelines for building siting and landscaping.
- *Yarra Catchment Action Plan* (1999) by Yarra Care, DNRE.



Plan Melbourne: Metropolitan Planning Strategy (2013)



Review of Policies & Controls for the Yarra River Corridor: Punt Road to Burke Road (2005)



# 1.6 Evolution of Controls relating to the Yarra River Corridor

Recognition of the environmental, recreational, landscape and aesthetic values of the Yarra River corridor have been evolving over the last 30 years.

Over the course of its history, the Yarra River corridor has faced various development pressures and threats to its landscape and environment. Formerly this was due to the location of industry or agriculture along the river's edge. From the second half of the twentieth century, the river's attractiveness for residential and commercial use also began to cause concern.

Earlier planning studies for the Yarra focussed primarily on environmental and recreational values – similar to other river corridors that were the subject of studies by the then Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW).

Creation of continuous corridors of open space and trail networks was a particular priority, and the MMBW began the process of reserving open space along the Yarra in the 1950s. This was the first step in addressing decades of environmental degradation along the river. The fact that government and agencies have continued to implement these past recommendations to the present day attests to the continuing relevance of these studies.

Public interest in environmental issues emerged strongly in the 1970s through organisations such as the Save the Yarra League, that campaigned for the preservation of the Yarra Valley. A Statement of Planning Policy issued in 1971 which set out conservation and recreation as planning objectives, was a landmark in the process of preserving the Yarra.

In 1980 the Age newspaper launched a public campaign to 'Give the Yarra a Go'. This led to the preparation of the first comprehensive plan for a major section of the river - Planning Opportunities along the Lower Yarra River from Punt Road to Dights Falls (1983).

Others plans for the Yarra River corridor soon followed: Concept Plan Lower Yarra River (Punt Road to Dights Falls) (1986), Lower Yarra River Landscape Guidelines (1988), Lower Yarra River Urban Design Guidelines (1992) and the Middle Yarra Concept Plan - Dights Falls to Burke Road (1990) and Burke Road to Watsons Creek (1993).

Recognition of the landscape significance of the Yarra River was more implicit than explicit in the original planning studies. Policies to protect the landscape values of the river have been evolving since the 1980s, reflecting the gradual emergence of accepted techniques for evaluating and protecting landscapes generally over the last 10-20 years in Victoria. Through consideration of landscape values, the later studies offer a more holistic view of the river corridor.

Significant milestones in the evolution of landscape protection in Victoria since the 1980s have included National Trust recognition of significant landscapes, the introduction by Councils of special zones to protect areas of landscape significance (e.g. Blackburn Lake area) and the inclusion in the Victoria Planning Provisions in the late 1990s of the Significant Landscape Overlay and Environmental Significance Overlay.

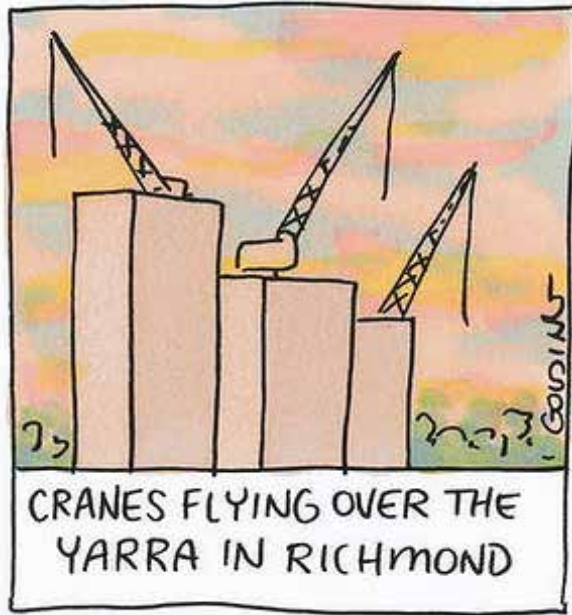
Since the early 2000s, assessment of landscape values at a regional scale has been progressed by the State Government's studies for coastal and rural areas of Victoria. These studies represent a further advance in the methodology for evaluation of landscapes and a wider appreciation of the importance of their protection and management among the community, planning profession and government.

This review provides an opportunity to examine the range of issues relating to the protection and management of the river corridor and its wider setting.

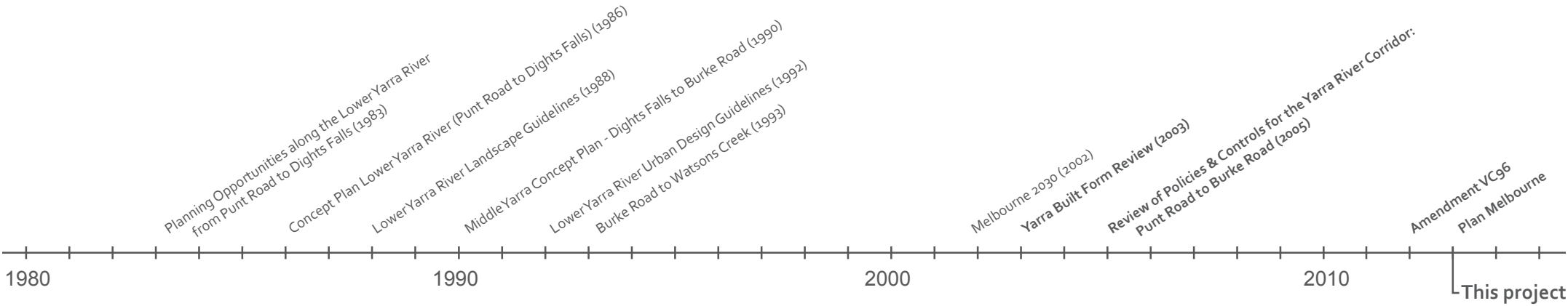


Yarra Falls, Collingwood, 1918

Source: [www.aboriginalhistoryofyarra.com.au](http://www.aboriginalhistoryofyarra.com.au)



Matt Golding, The Age Newspaper October 2012



A timeline showing the various policies developed for the Yarra River corridor since the 1980s

# 1.7 New Directions for the Yarra River

The Victorian Government has established a program of activity aimed at protecting the long term interests of the Yarra River. Commencement of the program was announced in August 2015 by the Minister for Planning.

The program is focused on establishing a dedicated Yarra River Trust and managing development impacts in the short term through implementing stronger planning policy and planning controls for areas along the Yarra River under immediate pressure from development.

## Establishing the Yarra River Trust

The Victorian Government has committed to protecting Melbourne's iconic Yarra River from inappropriate development and promoting its amenity and significance by establishing legislation and a dedicated trust.

A Ministerial Advisory Committee was announced on 15 December 2015. The Committee is focused on providing advice to government on the role and responsibility of a future dedicated Trust and the form of legislative instruments required for it to be established.

The Committee commenced work in 2016 with a discussion paper to determine the river's long term needs, with advice to Government in late 2016 and a potential Trust established in 2017.

## Implementing Stronger Policy and Planning Controls

The Victorian Government recognises that development pressures will continue in the short to medium term until a Trust is formed. To support effective decision making along the Yarra River while the above investigations progress, the Minister for Planning has approved a program that focuses on strengthening existing planning policy as it relates to the Yarra River. This includes finalising a range of studies (including this study) and implementing their recommendations via a suite of consistent planning controls within the Yarra River corridor between Richmond and Warrandyte – an area under the greatest pressure from urban development.

## Strengthening State Planning Policy

On 12 August 2015, the Minister for Planning hosted a roundtable forum with council mayors and heads of Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and the Port Phillip Catchment Management Authority, to outline the proposed actions the Victorian Government is taking to strengthen existing planning policy and controls for the Yarra River.

Councils and authorities were invited to collaborate with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning in developing more effective and consistent planning controls for the Yarra between Richmond and Warrandyte.

On 17 September 2015, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning hosted a workshop of senior planning practitioners from all councils, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and the Port Phillip Catchment Management Authority to discuss the components of a strengthened state planning policy, and to discuss the potential form and content of model planning controls. The feedback received through this workshop has been used to inform the development of strengthened State planning policy and input into the preparation of model planning controls for discussion and application within the Yarra River corridor, between Richmond and Warrandyte.

On 21 December 2015, Amendment VC121 was gazetted giving effect to a strengthened 'River corridor' and a new 'Yarra River Protection' sub-policy within the State Planning Policy Framework. The new 'Yarra River Protection' policy provides a strengthened basis and rationale for the protection of the whole of the Yarra River corridor to inform decision making.

## Preparing Consistent Planning Controls: Richmond to Warrandyte

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is progressing a program to finalise a number of studies and implement new and/or reformed planning controls for the Yarra River corridor between Richmond and Warrandyte. The program includes steps to:

- Finalise the Middle Yarra River Study recommendations and complete associated municipal toolkits for Banyule, Manningham and Nillumbik councils;
- Review planning controls implemented in the City of Boroondara under VC96 and strengthened those controls with appropriate setback distances;
- Implement the strategic findings of the City of Yarra's 'Yarra River Strategy'; and
- Prepare planning controls for areas adjacent to the Yarra River within the City of Stonnington.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is working in partnership with all councils to finalise the above work and progress a planning scheme amendment to implement agreed controls.