



# YARRA RIVER ACTION PLAN

*Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn*



# Acknowledgement

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich culture, and pays respect to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely.

We recognise the intrinsic connection of Traditional Owners to Country and value their contribution to managing the land, water, natural and built landscapes. We acknowledge the ongoing contribution this makes to the Yarra River (Birrarung) catchment.

We support the need for genuine and lasting partnerships with Traditional Owners to understand their culture and connections to Country in the way we plan for and manage the Yarra River corridor and its environment.

We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards equity for Traditional Owners.

# Joint Ministers' foreword

**“We have rowed on it, drunk it, dammed it, washed in it, ignored it, sewerred into it, gazed at it, drowned in it, swum it, built factories and cities because of it.”**

**Kristin Otto, Yarra**

Melbourne’s major river has been called many names.

To the Wurundjeri it is Birrarung. To the colonials it was everything from Freshwater to Batman’s to the Yarrow Yarrow to the Yarra Yarra. Today, we just call it the Yarra.

Whatever name you give our river, this much is certain: we need it.

The Yarra is fundamental to Melbourne’s sustainability, liveability and prosperity.

It gives our city life. It provides 70 per cent of our drinking water. It is home to the Port of Melbourne – the largest container and general port in Australia. And – with 2,450 hectares of parklands and green open spaces in Melbourne – it is a place we use for everything from the arts to entertainment to festivals to cycling to running to picnicking to rowing to walking the dog.

That is why we need to take action now to protect the Yarra.

One of the lessons of the Millennium Drought is that Melbourne must adapt to the challenges of climate change and population growth – and we must ensure our city is sustainable and liveable in 2050.

That means becoming more connected to our environment, protecting the health of our waterways and parklands, and understanding that creating a greener, healthier city is not just good for our community but good for our economy.

In short, Melbourne’s future prosperity and sustainability depends on the Yarra. That’s why the Victorian Government is releasing this Action Plan – a blueprint designed to keep the Yarra alive. This Plan also delivers on an election commitment that the Government guard the river corridor from inappropriate development and promote the river’s health and amenity. A central part of this will be the introduction of a Yarra River Protection Bill this year to enshrine our protections and commitments in legislation.

The thinking behind this document is simple: there’s more to the Yarra than just water.

Much more.

The Yarra is about the parklands and green open spaces that line its banks. The Yarra is about the communities that live along its path. The Yarra is about the sporting and recreational clubs that use its waters and lands. The Yarra is about the history of the generations of Aboriginal Victorians who are the original owners of the land. The Yarra is about the history of the migrants who followed. The Yarra is about the flora and fauna to which it gives life. The Yarra is about the port that drives our state’s economy.

The Yarra is about all of us; who we are, where we come from, where we are going.

If we want a vibrant city we need a living river.



*Richard Wynne*  
**Hon Richard Wynne MP**  
Minister for Planning



*Lisa Neville*  
**Hon Lisa Neville MP**  
Minister for Water



*Lily D'Ambrosio*  
**Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP**  
Minister for Energy, Environment  
and Climate Change  
Minister for Suburban Development

# Wurundjeri Council foreword



**Alice Kolasa**  
Wurundjeri Elder



**Ron Jones**  
Wurundjeri Elder



**Allan Wandin**  
Wurundjeri Elder

Our traditional homelands, Melbourne and the greater Melbourne region, are experiencing a population boom, with one-third of the state, approximately 2 million people, living in our Yarra catchment alone.

As the local Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri people, we were invited to consider, along with other recognised experts, what must be done to ensure the health of our Birrarung (the Yarra).

The invitation to participate in the Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory Committee was highly significant and we hope that this moment marks a genuine paradigm shift. It was the first time that our people were able to contribute in a meaningful way to high-level deliberations about 'possible futures' for our Birrarung (or for that matter, any sovereign Wurundjeri asset).

Unusually, we were sitting upstream, at the table where decisions are made, not learning about processes that had occurred, and decisions made, 12 months or more previously. We hope that this Ministerial Advisory Committee marks the beginning of something quite different to decision making on Country; co-designing decisions, policies, and managing our sovereign assets (land, water and sky) as Traditional Owners in partnership with the state.

So how do we ensure the long-term health of our iconic river, ensuring that the city remains liveable, sustainable and prosperous? The answer is in our Dreaming. Our Dreaming tells us that Bunjil, our Creator spirit made kulin (men) from the earth and that Bunjil's brother, Balliyang, the Bat, created bagarook (women) from the water. The requirement to touch the land and waterways lightly, respecting that which provides life, is implicit here. Since our beginning it has been understood that a harm to any aspect of biik, to Country, is a harm to all things and ourselves.

The answer to the challenges posed by this particular MAC is this: *Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn* (Keep the Birrarung alive) together, in partnership, guided by ancient wisdom and contemporary values.

Enshrine this in both law and policy.

We believe that the Government has committed to a framework that, if implemented in full, will secure the health of the Birrarung for all generations to come.



# Introduction



# Introduction

“The Yarra was the artery of early Melbourne. It provided transport from the Bay to the town. It gave fresh water until the first reservoir was opened at Yan Yean. It was the gutter for abattoirs and boiling-down works built on its lower banks, and the storm water drain for Melbourne’s streets. Further upstream, on the river flats, sat the market gardens and dairies and orchards which fed the town ... Even further upstream, in 1851, gold diggers rushed a tributary creek at Warrandyte. And along the same valley in the 1880s the young nationalist painters of the Heidelberg School saw Australian skies, hills and valleys with wide eyes.”

**Geoffrey Blainey**, *A History of Victoria*

The story of the Yarra River is the story of Melbourne.

If you want to understand prehistoric Melbourne, go to Dights Falls. There you’ll see the folded and eroded strata of sandstone and mudstone that once – 400 million years ago – were a seabed. Elsewhere, the Yarra and tributaries such as the Maribyrnong River and the Moonee Ponds, Merri and Darebin creeks cut through ancient volcanic fields. At various times – due to climate changes – the sea came as far inland as South Yarra or retreated so far that Port Phillip Bay was dry land.

Many of those pre-European events were outlined in the stories the Wurundjeri told.

Those stories of connection – relayed to the first European settlers by Traditional Owner leaders such as Barak – were not heeded

by Melbourne’s founding generation. The fledgling city’s waterways became a dumping ground for the settlement. In fact, the chronicler of early Melbourne, Garryowen, condemned the first Europeans for, in just 15 years, turning the ‘bright and sparkling’ waters of the Yarra into a ‘foetid, festering sewer’.

The first turning point in the health of the Yarra came at the end of the Marvellous Melbourne era. In the 1890s, big investments in Melbourne’s water infrastructure – with the construction of a sewerage system and a treatment plant at Werribee – rescued the river and saved countless lives.

In 1929, the Metropolitan Town Planning Commission released a report that – for the first time since European settlement – saw Melbourne’s waterways and bay as vital public spaces. Unfortunately, the plan was delivered at the beginning of

what became the Great Depression and its vision was never fully realised.

Still, the river became a backdrop to Melbourne life. For instance, the Yarra Bank (near what is now Melbourne Park) was a hotbed of political debating and religious proselytising – former Prime Minister John Curtin called it the ‘university of the working class’ – up until the 1950s. The Yarra also played a key role in the development of a truly Australian art, with the paintings of the Heidelberg School immortalising the Yarra Valley in the 1890s and Australian modernism born on the banks of the Yarra at Heide in the 1940s.

By the 1960s, though, Melbourne had largely turned its back on its waterways and the bay – an attitude exemplified by the decision, in 1962, to take parkland to build the Monash Freeway along the Yarra from Richmond to Toorak. Publicly,



a turning point came in 1970 when Prince Charles visited Melbourne and likened a dip at Elwood beach to ‘swimming in diluted sewage’.

From the 1970s onwards, the second turning point in the health of the Yarra began as environmental and planning controls were introduced and run-off from septic tanks was reduced.

Now, the time has come for a third turning point in the health of the Yarra, its tributaries and the Bay. A turning point that will, finally, realise the vision of the 1929 Metropolitan Town Planning Commission

plan and create a network of parklands, green spaces and water spaces that connect the people of Melbourne to their rivers, creeks and bay – and ensure the city grows greener and more liveable.

After all, the Yarra River is central to Melbourne’s character and identity.

It flows 242 kilometres from its near-pristine forested headwaters, through the Yarra Valley and Melbourne’s suburbs, to the heart of Melbourne’s central business district and the Port of Melbourne before emptying into Port Phillip Bay.

Its catchment is home to more than two million people. It has 2,450 hectares of urban parklands and green open spaces within Melbourne. And it provides 70 per cent of Melbourne’s drinking water.

Given the Yarra’s social, environmental and economic importance, the Victorian Government is committed to delivering reforms that secure the future of the river as Melbourne deals with challenges such as climate change and population growth.

This Action Plan is a watershed moment in the creation of a more liveable, sustainable and prosperous Melbourne.

Melbourne central business district from the Yarra River







# Executive summary



## Executive summary

**“The Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory Committee recognises that the Yarra River and its parklands are a magnificent natural asset that is highly valued by the community. We should not take for granted the effort that has been required to create this asset or the effort needed to ensure it remains healthy and continues to serve a growing population.”**

**Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory Committee Final Report, 2016**

Melbourne has experienced three great waves of population growth.

The first wave came during the Gold Rush, when the city’s population tripled in three years – causing social upheaval, the birth of Australian democracy and the creation of the wealthiest colony in the British Empire. During this Marvellous Melbourne period, the city relied heavily on the Yarra, with 8,000 migrant families camping on the riverbanks at what is now Southbank.

The second wave came during the post-War boom. Between 1947 and 1966, Melbourne’s population increased by 83 per cent – jumping from 1.2 million to 2.2 million people. That growth gave Victoria the critical mass of people it needed to become the industrial heartland of Australia – and laid the foundation of Melbourne’s rise as the cultural capital of Australia.

The third wave is happening right now. Melbourne’s population has been booming since the turn of the century, and is forecast to keep growing through to 2050. Proportionally, this third wave of growth is comparable to the post-War boom, and will give Victoria the critical mass of people it needs to care for its ageing population and make the transition to a zero carbon economy.

The challenge the state faces is to ensure that – as Victoria grows – every citizen has a fair chance to live the life they deserve and reach their full potential.

Of equal importance is the need to ensure that – as the city’s population grows – the city becomes greener and more liveable, with neighbourhoods that are walkable, jobs that are accessible, and an environment that is sustainable.

That is why the Government is committing to projects like the Metro Tunnel. That is why the Government has refreshed Plan Melbourne. That is why the Government is releasing the Yarra River Action Plan (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn).

This Action Plan comes at a critical time in the development of the city and state.

Population growth will continue to put pressure on the health of the Yarra River, increasing the importance of its parklands and public open spaces. Unless managed properly, urban development will also increase stormwater run-off into the Yarra – impacting the health of the river and the bay.

Climate change is also a threat to the Yarra, with projections of declining rainfall, higher temperatures, longer droughts and more frequent storms and bushfires.

**“The requirement to touch the land and waterways lightly, respecting that which provides life, is implicit ... *Wilip-gin Birrarung murron* (Keep the Birrarung alive).”**

**Wurundjeri Council**

With that in mind, the Government released the Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory Committee (Yarra MAC) Discussion Paper, *Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung)* on 1 July 2016.

That Discussion Paper was available for public comment until 8 August 2016.

Four stakeholder workshops, three community workshops, a youth workshop, three community insights workshops and three listening posts were held along the Yarra River corridor. Ultimately, the Discussion Paper generated more than 270 face-to-face conversations and 195 submissions from a range of stakeholder organisations, government, community groups and individuals.

In July 2016 the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation and Cultural Heritage Council (Wurundjeri Council) were invited to join the Yarra MAC for its deliberations.

The Yarra MAC submitted its report to the Government in late 2016, together with 30 recommendations to ensure the river’s long-term protection.

This document outlines Government’s response to the Yarra MAC’s report.

All 30 Yarra MAC recommendations are supported by the Government:

- 28 recommendations are adopted in full.
- The two remaining recommendations have been accepted in part, with minor changes to strengthen the role and independence of the Birrarung Council, ensure the longevity of the Yarra Protection Bill and to clarify lead agencies' responsibilities, with further work required to bring them to fruition.

Main Yarra Trail, Cremorne



The Yarra River Action Plan is guided by five objectives.

Objective	Through which we aim to...
<b>1. A healthy river</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong (keep the Birrarung alive)</li> <li>• protect and improve the health of the river and its riparian ecology</li> <li>• increase the resilience of the river to the impacts of climate change and population growth</li> <li>• protect the health of Port Phillip Bay</li> </ul>
<b>2. The Great Yarra Parklands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognise the network of parklands along the Yarra as part of the one integrated living whole natural asset</li> <li>• improve community access to, movement along and on the river</li> <li>• increase opportunities to enjoy the river parklands for people of all ages and abilities</li> <li>• create more destinations and improve visitor experiences</li> </ul>
<b>3. A culturally diverse riverscape</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in partnership with Traditional Owners, recognise, protect and promote both intangible and tangible cultural values</li> <li>• recognise, protect and promote heritage values</li> <li>• quality public places for recreation, celebration and coming together</li> </ul>
<b>4. Securing the Yarra footprint</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protect iconic and naturalistic river landscapes from inappropriate development</li> <li>• connect communities and places along the river with trails and cycling corridors</li> <li>• recognise the importance of the river to the economic prosperity and vitality of Melbourne and the Yarra Valley</li> </ul>
<b>5. Modern governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide visionary leadership and a long-term commitment to delivering the vision and its goals</li> <li>• partner with the Traditional Owners in the management of natural resources</li> <li>• align the activities and decisions of responsible agencies and councils</li> <li>• prioritise collaborative community processes</li> </ul>

The Government will take 30 actions to achieve those objectives, which will be empowered by a new Yarra Protection Bill.

The Government's key actions will be to:

- establish a new Ministerial Advisory Council, the Birrarung Council, that is independent of the responsible public entities, with a membership that includes experts, stakeholder group representatives and at least two Wurundjeri Council representatives
- establish Melbourne Water as the lead agency for developing and coordinating implementation of a Yarra Strategic Plan
- coordinate funding to ensure the Yarra Strategic Plan is properly resourced
- require independent auditing and reporting on the implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan
- establish regular reporting on the environmental condition of the Yarra River and its parklands
- translate the names of geographical sites along the Yarra into the Traditional Owner language.

Given the changes Melbourne is facing, there is an urgent need to develop and implement an overarching vision for the Yarra River corridor.

That is why the development of a Yarra Strategic Plan is crucial.

The Yarra Strategic Plan will give effect to the community vision for the Yarra and its landscape, providing an overarching spatial and management context for localised planning along the river corridor.

Broader application of the approach adopted to protect the Yarra and its parklands is also being considered. A taskforce is being established to bring focus to protecting and enhancing the natural open spaces that are important to the liveability of Melbourne as it grows rapidly (including the bay, rivers and creeks and their riverscapes, parklands and other open spaces).

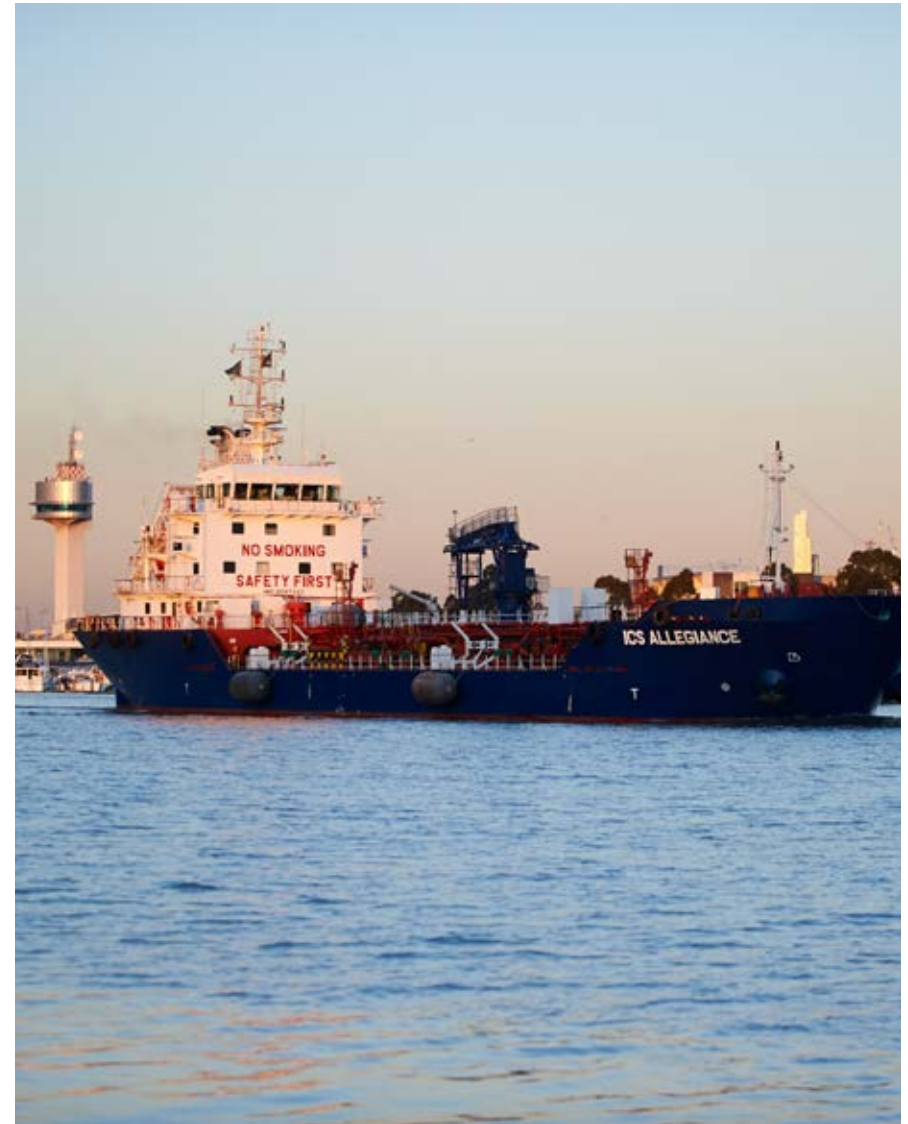
By taking a strategic approach to the management of the four reaches of the Yarra:

- communities along the length of the Yarra would be informed and engaged
- issues and challenges would be addressed
- demand for services would be better understood and managed
- river uses would be able to be valued and prioritised
- community understanding about the health and wellbeing of the river would be promoted.

The community also has a right to know about the health of their waterways.

That is why the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability will provide regular evaluation of the environmental conditions of the river and its parklands. These evaluations will be incorporated into the regular State of the Environment reporting.

It is in the social, environmental and economic interests of all Victorians to implement this new vision that connects the community to the Yarra, from its headwaters in the Great Dividing Range to its mouth at Port Phillip Bay.



Port of Melbourne from Stony Creek Park, Yarraville





# Actions



# Actions to protect the Yarra River

## A VOICE FOR THE YARRA

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1. A lead agency for the Yarra
2. Birrarung Council
3. State policy recognition
4. Traditional Owner inclusion
5. Yarra River (Birrarung) Protection Bill
6. Annual independent implementation audit
7. State of the Yarra and its parklands reporting
8. Coordinated funding
9. Support for council leadership
10. Stronger planning controls
11. Align public land reservations
12. Gifted assets policy

## A NEW COORDINATED PLANNING FRAMEWORK

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13. Community vision
14. Yarra Strategic Plan
15. Protect and promote cultural and heritage values
16. Local community reference forums
17. Long-term targets
18. Monitor implementation
19. Extend coverage of stormwater standards

## EARLY ACTION PROJECTS

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20. Abbotsford river structure plan
21. Cultural precinct structure plan
22. Bolin Bolin Billabong and environs
23. Construct missing Abbotsford link (Yarra Main trail)

## RIVER AND COASTAL PARKLANDS TASKFORCE

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24. Melbourne's natural infrastructure taskforce
25. An integrated urban natural infrastructure vision and strategy
26. Traditional Owner tangible and intangible cultural values mapping
27. Protect the Maribyrnong River
28. Protect other urban rivers and parklands
29. River corridor footprints
30. Melbourne Metropolitan Parks Charge review

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Indicative timeframes for completing actions are:

**Short Term:** By the end of 2018 (0-2 years)

**Medium Term:** By the end of 2021 (2-5 years)

**Long Term:** Beyond 2021 (more than 5 years)





# A voice for the Yarra

There is a need to adopt a coherent, whole-of-river approach to the protection and improvement of community amenity and open spaces along the Yarra River. The river and its public land are to be considered as the one living and integrated entity.

Given the importance of the Yarra River and its parklands, the range of stakeholders involved and the complexity of management activities, new governance arrangements are required.

Those arrangements will be set out in a new Yarra River (Birrarung) Protection Bill.

## One living and integrated entity

The Yarra River is a dynamic, natural and cultural system, which includes the main river, its tributaries and the broad landscape which it traverses. It is significantly influenced by humans who are, in turn, significantly influenced by it.

This concept asserts that the Yarra River and its landscape must be acknowledged, respected and cared for as one living and integrated entity and not as separate components. Such a holistic approach blends the wisdom of Traditional Owners 'Caring for Country' with contemporary Australian values of the river and its parklands for its contribution to the wellbeing of the community and the prosperity of the city.

Looking towards the Yarra  
River, Woori Yallock

# Actions

## Action 1

Timing: Short term

### A LEAD AGENCY FOR THE YARRA

Designate Melbourne Water Corporation as the lead agency to develop the initial Yarra Strategic Plan and coordinate its delivery. Melbourne Water Corporation is to work in partnership with Traditional Owners and public entities with delivery responsibilities along the Yarra.

- the biodiversity corridor along the river in urban areas in environmental management
- ecological health, cultural, social and amenity values in catchment and waterway management
- recognise the Greater Yarra (urban) Parklands that stretch from Warrandyte to Port Phillip Bay, as a state-significant natural infrastructure in state policy.

## Action 2

Timing: Short term

### BIRRARUNG COUNCIL

Establish a ministerial advisory committee that is independent of the responsible public entities and is to be known as the Birrarung Council to act as the voice of the Yarra River and provide ongoing independent advice on the protection and improvement of the Yarra River, its parklands, its cultural and heritage values and its interface with adjacent land uses and landscape setting. Initially established under interim administration arrangements, the Birrarung Council will become a statutory body enshrined in legislation for longevity. The membership of the Council will include an independent chair, representatives of the Traditional Owners (at least two from the Wurundjeri Council), representatives of environmental and agricultural peak bodies, as well as one community member and at least two skills-based members.

## Action 4

Timing: Short term

### TRADITIONAL OWNER INCLUSION

Support the Wurundjeri Council to play an active and ongoing role in protecting and improving the Yarra River and its parklands.

## Action 3

Timing: Short term

### STATE POLICY RECOGNITION

Recognise the importance of the Yarra River and its parklands to the economic attractiveness, vitality and liveability of Melbourne (and the Yarra Valley) in relevant state policies including:

- the landscape setting in which the river sits not only for the enjoyment of the community but also for the attractiveness of Melbourne to businesses, tourists and events in land use planning
- the waterway and adjacent Crown land known as part of the one integrated living whole natural asset that is the Yarra River in public land management

## Action 5

Timing: Short term

### YARRA RIVER (BIRRARUNG) PROTECTION BILL

Prepare a Yarra River (Birrarung) Protection Bill to establish an overarching planning framework for the Yarra River that coordinates waterway, public land and infrastructure management, cultural and heritage and statutory land use planning, with a clear role for amenity planning. The Bill will:

- create a requirement for the development of a Yarra Strategic Plan (community vision and river corridor framework plan) that includes objectives and targets for long-term outcomes to guide planning and decision making
- require alignment of the activities and decision making of public agencies and councils with delivery of the Yarra Strategic Plan and progressing towards achieving the long-term outcomes
- require Traditional Owner inclusion and community participation in planning processes
- set out monitoring, reporting and independent audit requirements for both implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan and the environmental condition of the river and its parklands
- establish the Birrarung Council as a ministerial advisory committee that is independent of the responsible public entities to provide assurance on protection and improvement of the Yarra River land and its parklands.

**Action 6**

Timing: Short term

**ANNUAL INDEPENDENT IMPLEMENTATION AUDIT**

Create an independent statutory function for an annual audit of the implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan and tabling of the report in Parliament. This will be overseen by the new Birrarung Council.

**Action 7**

Timing: Short term

**STATE OF THE YARRA AND ITS PARKLANDS REPORTING**

The Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability is to report on the environmental condition and benefits of the Yarra River and its parklands as part of the regular *State of the Environment* reporting, commencing with a baseline in the 2018 report.

**Action 8**

Timing: Short term

**COORDINATED FUNDING**

A review of current and potential public funding streams to identify options for a secure and regular investment to implement the Yarra Strategic Plan.

**Action 9**

Timing: Short term

**SUPPORT FOR COUNCIL LEADERSHIP**

Support local governments along the Yarra River to contribute to the development of the Yarra Strategic Plan and lead its implementation in their local district.

**Action 10**

Timing: Short term

**STRONGER PLANNING CONTROLS**

Expand the landscape assessment approach that is being taken to establish the stronger planning controls along the suburban Yarra River to other urban areas along the river.

**Action 11**

Timing: Medium term

**ALIGN PUBLIC LAND RESERVATIONS**

There is to be a moratorium on the reduction of Public Acquisition Overlays (PAOs) or sale of public land along the Yarra River corridor until the Yarra Strategic Plan is finalised. The new Birrarung Council is to provide the Minister with advice on specific exceptional cases until the Yarra Strategic Plan is in place.

- a. Review all Crown land reservations, public acquisition overlays and land acquisition opportunities along the river for alignment with the Yarra Strategic Plan.
- b. Align the public land reservations and PAOs with the Yarra Strategic Plan.

**Action 12**

Timing: Short term

**GIFTED ASSET POLICY**

Develop a policy to accept, hold and maintain gifted land, funding or other assets for the Yarra River.



The Yarra River beside  
Birrarung Marr, Melbourne

## A new coordinated planning framework

A new planning framework will be established that is centred on development of an overarching river corridor plan that recognises and sets the direction for four key elements:

- environmental health of the waterway, and riparian lands (including the biodiversity corridor)
- community use, access and amenity of the river and its parklands
- the landscape setting and interface of the river corridor with adjacent land uses
- cultural and heritage values in the riverscape.

This Yarra Strategic Plan – which Melbourne Water will prepare in partnership with the Wurundjeri, relevant agencies and councils over the next two years – will not replace other policies and plans made under statutes such as the *Planning and Environment Act*, the *Environment Protection Act* and the *Water Act*. Instead, it will coordinate and harmonise the many existing plans, regulations and investment programs. It will identify priority actions and provide an overarching (strategic) whole-of-river-corridor context for localised planning of places along the river.

Consistent with the Government's updated Plan Melbourne and Water for Victoria, water and land use planning will be better aligned and integrated – helping achieve cooler, greener, accessible public places and healthier waterways, with better management and re-use of stormwater to bolster water resources and project waterways from degradation.

# Actions

## Action 13

Timing: Short term

### COMMUNITY VISION

Develop a community vision that clearly outlines community requirements, values, expectations and preferences for the entire length of the river over the long term.

## Action 14

Timing: Short term

### YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

Develop and maintain an overarching river corridor strategic framework plan, to be known as the Yarra Strategic Plan, that gives effect to the community vision (and key directions for each reach of the river) and is developed in collaboration with the community and in accordance with departmental guidelines. It is to:

- provide direction to, and harmonise activities and decision-making in the development of public open space along the river, statutory planning and the management of public land and infrastructure and waterway management
- recognise, protect and promote Traditional Owner cultural values and heritage values
- provide future direction to land use and development in the corridor
- have a 50-year outlook.

## Action 15

Timing: Short - long term

### PROTECT AND PROMOTE CULTURAL AND HERITAGE VALUES

Work with the Traditional Owners to recognise, protect and promote intangible and tangible cultural values in the riverscape in the Yarra Strategic Plan along with other heritage values.

## Action 16

Timing: Short - long term

### COMMUNITY REFERENCE FORUMS

Establish local community reference forums in each reach of the Yarra to provide local communities with opportunities to participate in deliberative co-design processes during development of the community vision, Yarra Strategic Plan, river precinct structure planning and master planning for the Yarra River land.

## Action 17

Timing: Short term

### LONG-TERM TARGETS

Establish long-term targets for each of the four key elements (environmental health; community access and amenity of the river and its parklands; landscape setting and interface with adjacent land uses; cultural and heritage values) in the Yarra Strategic Plan to provide direction to the management of the river and its landscape.

## Action 18

Timing: Short - long term

### MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION

All relevant public bodies with delivery responsibilities in the Yarra Strategic Plan will report regularly on their progress.

## Action 19

Timing: Short term

### EXTEND COVERAGE OF STORMWATER STANDARDS

Extend the coverage of the best practice stormwater management standards for residential subdivisions (under Clause 56 of the Victoria Planning Provisions) to apply to all subdivisions. This will assist in maintaining the water quality in the Yarra River at the current levels.

## Early action projects

During the Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory Committee's investigations and stakeholder consultations, several opportunities for immediate action were identified.

For instance, the suburban river reach between Victoria Street and Dights Falls in Abbotsford, as well as the corridor between Bolin Bolin Billabong and the Yarra Valley Country Club, were identified as areas that would benefit from early master planning during the development of the Yarra Strategic Plan.

Several infrastructure projects were also identified. Early planning and investment is needed to guide, and make use of, the opportunities that redevelopment provides to create better outcomes for the community.

Bolin Bolin Billabong, Bulleen

### Bolin Bolin Billabong rehabilitation

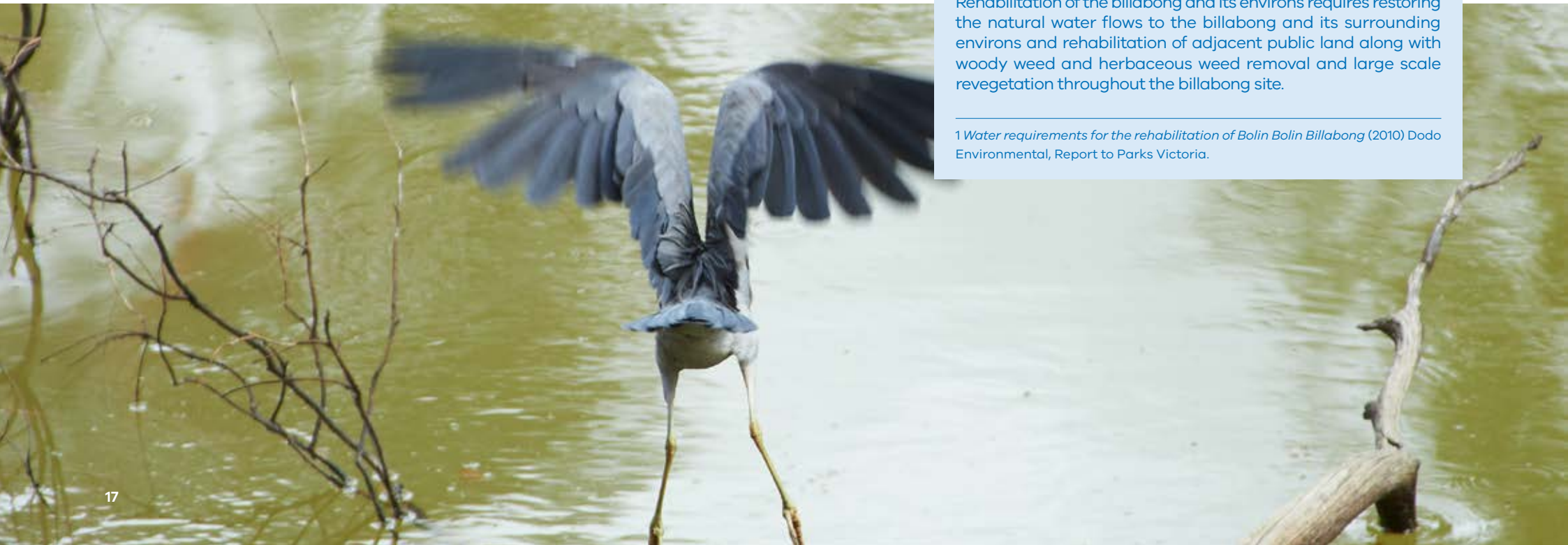
The Bolin Bolin Billabong is next to the Yarra River, adjacent to Bulleen Park, and is one of the few remaining billabongs situated within Melbourne's urban environment. It has high ecological and cultural significance.<sup>1</sup>

The billabong is an important ceremonial meeting place for the Traditional Owners and neighbouring tribes at iuk (eel) harvest time. The iuk harvest brought people together for negotiations, trade and marriage with gatherings of more than 1000 people.

The billabong's biodiversity has suffered from significant land-use changes in its catchment and marked changes to its wetting and drying cycles. The Victorian Government recognises the cultural heritage of the area and is committed to rehabilitating the Bolin Bolin Billabong and its environs as far as is possible to reflect its ecological condition before European colonisation.

Rehabilitation of the billabong and its environs requires restoring the natural water flows to the billabong and its surrounding environs and rehabilitation of adjacent public land along with woody weed and herbaceous weed removal and large scale revegetation throughout the billabong site.

<sup>1</sup> *Water requirements for the rehabilitation of Bolin Bolin Billabong (2010)* Dodo Environmental, Report to Parks Victoria.



# Actions

## Action 20

Timing: Short term

### **ABBOTSFORD RIVER STRUCTURE PLAN**

Develop a precinct structure plan centred on the Yarra River for the Abbotsford reach between Dights Falls and Victoria Street, with a particular focus recognising and promoting Traditional Owner cultural values and heritage values, continuity of the Main Yarra Trail, opportunities to provide safe access to a wider range of users ('all abilities') and to provide connections where there are gaps in the trail and/or trail quality. The development of the Abbotsford riverside between Flockhart and Gipps Streets has the potential to become an important link in Melbourne's public open space and trail network and would open the stretch of riverside to the public which is currently inaccessible.

## Action 21

Timing: Short term

### **CULTURAL RIVER PRECINCT STRUCTURE PLAN**

Develop a precinct structure plan to provide direction to the future land use changes for the Yarra corridor between Bulleen Park and Banyule Flats. This precinct has the opportunity to become an internationally-significant cultural precinct, centred on the relationship between the arts, nature and Traditional Owner heritage. The precinct has a number of public acquisition overlays and land use opportunities that should be reviewed as a whole to provide certainty to land owners and developers.

## Action 22

Timing: Short term

### **BOLIN BOLIN BILLABONG**

Restore natural water inflow regimes and rehabilitate the surrounding environs of the Bolin Bolin Billabong.

## Action 23

### **MISSING ABBOTSFORD LINK**

Timing: Medium term

Secure the footprint, provide all-abilities access, and connect the Yarra Main Trail between Victoria Street and Dights Falls including a low-level river crossing.

Abbotsford Convent





Royal Botanic Gardens,  
Melbourne

## River and coastal parklands

Planning for the projected population growth of Melbourne requires a major focus on both the amount and quality of open spaces and parklands across the city – including waterways, coasts and bays.

One of the lessons of the Millennium Drought is that there's more to water management than the user-pays model. The ways in which water resources – such

as the Yarra corridor – is managed has a direct impact on the sustainability and liveability of the city.

In other words, the Yarra is not just a (water) service that consumers pay for – the river is a living entity that will shape the ways in which Melbourne residents live as the population grows.

That is why there is a need for a more integrated approach to decision making that includes the waterways, riverscapes, parklands and public places, as well as adjacent land uses and infrastructure, tributaries and associated open spaces.



# Actions

## Action 24

Timing: Short term

### MELBOURNE'S NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE TASKFORCE

Establish a Taskforce that brings together the skills of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) with the Traditional Owners, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, VicRoads, Environment Protection Authority, and local governments to:

- Investigate the benefits of combining waterway management, open space, bay and coastal parkland management for greater Melbourne.
- Establish ongoing collaborative governance arrangements between DELWP, Traditional Owners, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and local government to:
  - deliver an integrated vision and strategy for Melbourne's natural infrastructure that increases the amount and quality of publicly accessible open spaces (including the bays, waterways and parklands)
  - realise the synergies from coordinated delivery of related projects from the updated Plan Melbourne, *Water for Victoria*, *Port Phillip Bay Environmental Management Plan* (EMP) and *Yarra River Action Plan*
  - establish long-term funding arrangements for developing and maintaining urban natural infrastructure
- Report to the Victorian Government on an improved integrated institutional model for delivery of major natural infrastructure in Melbourne.

## Action 25

Timing: Short term

### URBAN NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

Develop an integrated vision and strategy for Melbourne's open spaces, including its waterway corridors and coastal parklands to improve the liveability and ecological health of the growing city.

## Action 26

Timing: Short - long term

### MAP TRADITIONAL OWNER CULTURAL VALUES

Work with the Traditional Owners to map tangible and intangible cultural values along the Yarra River, over a number of years, starting with the highest priority reach.

## Action 27

Timing: Medium term

### PROTECT THE MARIBYRNONG RIVER

Use the landscape assessment methods applied along the Yarra to establish stronger planning controls to protect the Maribyrnong River and its environs.

## Action 28

Timing: Medium term

### PROTECT OTHER URBAN RIVERS AND THEIR PARKLANDS

Review the reforms to protect the Yarra River and consider protection of other major Melbourne rivers and their open spaces (such as the Maribyrnong and Werribee rivers).

## Action 29

Timing: Short - medium term

### RIVER CORRIDOR FOOTPRINTS

Identify the preferred open space footprint of Melbourne's key waterway corridors and in particular those under sustained growth pressure (e.g. Maribyrnong and Werribee rivers) and develop a plan to secure this.

## Action 30

Timing: Short term

### PARKS CHARGE REVIEW

Undertake a broad based review of the Melbourne Metropolitan Parks Charge to define the strategic goals/services it delivers and identify the funding available for supporting priority projects identified in the Yarra Strategic Plan.





# Implementation



# Implementation

Government is committed to implementing this Action Plan. For further information on delivery of this Action Plan refer to the website at **[www.planning.vic.gov.au](http://www.planning.vic.gov.au)**.

All projects and actions requiring funding will be carefully assessed against the criteria and budget capacity of potential funding sources. Decisions will be made in line with normal Government policy and budget processes.

The Environmental Contribution is one potential funding source for initiatives that promote sustainable management of water or address adverse water-related environmental impacts. In 2015-16 the third tranche of Environmental Contribution funding invested \$1 million towards the Yarra River Protection Program.



# Action\*

		TIMING	LEAD
<b>A VOICE FOR THE YARRA</b>			
1.	A lead agency for the Yarra	Short term	DELWP
2.	Birrarung Council	Short term	DELWP
3.	State policy recognition	Short term	DELWP
4.	Traditional Owners inclusion	Short term	DELWP
5.	Yarra River (Birrarung) Protection Bill	Short term	DELWP
6.	Annual independent implementation audit	Short term	Birrarung Council
7.	State of the Yarra and its parklands reporting	Short term	Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability
8.	Coordinated funding	Short term	DELWP
9.	Support for council leadership	Short term	DELWP
10.	Stronger planning controls	Short term	DELWP
11.	Align public land reservations	Medium term	DELWP
12.	Gifted asset policy	Short term	DELWP
<b>A NEW COORDINATIVE PLANNING FRAMEWORK</b>			
13.	Community vision	Short term	Melbourne Water
14.	Yarra Strategic Plan	Short term	Melbourne Water
15.	Protect and promote cultural and heritage values	Short-long term	Melbourne Water
16.	Community reference forums	Short-long term	Melbourne Water
17.	Long-term targets	Short term	Melbourne Water
18.	Monitor and implementation	Short-long term	Melbourne Water
19.	Extend coverage of stormwater standards	Short term	DELWP

		TIMING	LEAD
<b>STRATEGIC YARRA PROJECTS</b>			
20.	Abbotsford river structure plan	Short term	DELWP
21.	Cultural river precinct structure plan	Short term	DELWP
22.	Bolin Bolin Billabong	Short term	Parks Victoria
23.	Missing Abbotsford link	Medium term	Parks Victoria
<b>MELBOURNE'S RIVER AND COASTAL PARKLANDS</b>			
24.	Melbourne's natural infrastructure taskforce	Short term	DELWP
25.	Urban natural infrastructure strategy	Short term	Taskforce
26.	Map Traditional Owner cultural values	Short-long term	DELWP
27.	Protect the Maribyrnong River	Medium term	DELWP
28.	Protect other urban rivers and their parklands	Medium term	Taskforce
29.	River corridor footprints	Short-medium term	Taskforce
30.	Parks charge review	Short term	DELWP

\* Subject to funding

Short term: By end of 2018 (0-2 years)

Medium term: By end of 2021 (2-5 years)

Long term: Beyond 2021 (more than 5 years)





# Appendices

# Appendix 1: Response to each recommendation

(subject to funding)

## YARRA RIVER MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSE

### Governance reforms

Policy	New Overarching Planning Framework	Reformed Institutional Arrangements
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 1</b></p> <p>Adopt five objectives to guide the development of legislation and reforms of institutional arrangements to protect the Yarra River.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. A healthy river.</li> <li>ii. The Great Yarra Parklands.</li> <li>iii. A culturally diverse riverscape.</li> <li>iv. Securing the Yarra footprint.</li> <li>v. Modern governance.</li> </ul> <p><b>RESPONSE: Adopt in full</b></p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 3</b></p> <p>Establish a statutory requirement to develop a community vision that clearly outlines community requirements and expectations for the entire length of river over the long term.</p> <p><b>RESPONSE: Adopt in full</b></p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 6</b></p> <p>Assign Melbourne Water the planning function for developing the Yarra Strategic Plan and coordinating its delivery. This will establish Melbourne Water as 'caretaker of river amenity' in addition to its existing role as 'caretaker of river health'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Melbourne Water's objective in undertaking the new role: Protect and improve the Yarra River and adjacent public lands as the one living whole natural asset</li> <li>ii. New accountabilities to be assigned to Melbourne Water to support the objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop the Yarra Strategic Plan</li> <li>b. Coordinate delivery of the Yarra Strategic Plan including reflection in planning schemes.</li> <li>c. Monitor and report on implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan.</li> <li>d. Provide advice to the Minister for Planning on proposed planning scheme amendments and development proposals with a major impact on the amenity of the Yarra River.</li> <li>e. Become a recommending referral authority for protection of amenity values along waterways in land use planning permits.</li> <li>f. Be able to accept, hold and maintain gifted land, funding or other assets</li> </ul> </li> <li>iii. Melbourne Water is to undertake these functions in partnership with the Traditional Owners and with strong community participation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>RECOMENDATION 2</b></p> <p>Recognise the importance of the Yarra River and its parklands to the economic prosperity, vitality and liveability of Melbourne (and Yarra Valley) in relevant State policies including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. ecological health, cultural, social and amenity values in catchment and waterway management</li> <li>ii. the landscape setting in which the river sits not only for the enjoyment of the community but also for the attractiveness of Melbourne to businesses, tourists and events in land use planning</li> <li>iii. the biodiversity corridor along the river in urban areas in environmental management</li> <li>iv. adjacent Crown lands as part of the one integrated living whole natural asset that is the Yarra River in public land management.</li> </ul> <p><b>RESPONSE: Adopt in full</b></p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 4</b></p> <p>Establish a statutory requirement to develop and maintain an overarching Yarra Strategic plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. gives effect to the community vision</li> <li>ii. provides direction to and harmonises activities and decision making in waterway management, management of public land and infrastructure, cultural and heritage values and statutory planning</li> <li>iii. includes planning for whole-of-river amenity</li> <li>iv. provides future direction to land use and development</li> <li>v. is reviewed every 10 years.</li> </ul> <p><b>RESPONSE: Adopt in full</b></p>	
	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 5</b></p> <p>Establish a statutory requirement for public participation processes in the development of the Yarra Strategic Plan.</p> <p><b>RESPONSE: Adopt in full</b></p>	



**RESPONSE: Adopt in part**

Whilst Melbourne Water will be asked to prepare the initial Yarra Strategic Plan, flexibility will be provided in the legislation for the coordinating Ministers (Planning; Water; Energy, Environment and Climate Change) to decide which public entity will prepare the Yarra Strategic Plan and subsequent reviews.

Other points within recommendation 6 require further work to operationalise and align with other government policies (such as the *Marine and Coastal Act* amendments, stronger planning controls project, gifted Crown land associated with native vegetation and Smart Planning Project).

**RECOMMENDATION 7**

Require Melbourne Water to establish a Birrarung Rivers Council to provide oversight and advice to the Melbourne Water Board on its 'caretaker' functions and development and implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan

- i. Birrarung Rivers Council Functions
  - a. Advice, guidance and strategic oversight of the development and implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan
  - b. Act as a champion for the Yarra River
- ii. Members (mix of representatives and skills based)
  - a. Independent chair
  - b. Representatives from the Wurundjeri Council (at least two), DELWP, EPA Vic, Parks Victoria, two Councils, environmental advocacy group, the Victorian Farmers Federation and a community representative.
  - c. Skills based independent members as required (waterway health, urban design/landscape architect, urban parks and recreation, statutory planning, environmental planning, public participation processes, community health)

**RESPONSE: Adopt in part**

- A statutory ministerial advisory committee that is independent of the responsible public entities known as the Birrarung Council will be established to act as a voice for the Yarra River, and to provide the community and Ministers with greater transparency and assurance of the merits of the Yarra Strategic Plan developed, and on its implementation.
- Agencies and councils will be required to provide regular briefings to the Birrarung Council but are not members.

**RECOMMENDATION 8**

Require Melbourne Water to establish a community reference forum for each reach of the Yarra to provide local inputs to the Yarra Strategic Plan as part of the public consultation activities.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 9**

Create an independent statutory function to audit the implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan every second year.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 10**

Assign the auditing function to the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (or an existing auditing entity).

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full (assigned to Birrarung Council)**

**RECOMMENDATION 11**

Require the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability to provide reports on the "State of the Yarra River" as part of the State of the Environment reporting.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**New Legislation**

**RECOMMENDATION 12**

Prepare a Yarra (Birrarung) Protection Bill to establish an overarching planning framework for the Yarra River corridor that coordinates waterway, public land and infrastructure management, cultural and heritage and statutory land use planning, with a clear role for amenity planning. The Bill will:

- a. create a requirement for the development of a Yarra Strategic Plan (community vision and corridor plan) that includes objectives and targets for long-term outcomes to guide planning and decision making
- b. ensure the activities and decision making of agencies and councils are aligned with delivery of the Yarra Strategic Plan and progressing towards achieving the long-term outcomes
- c. require Traditional Owner inclusion and community participation
- d. set out monitoring, reporting and independent audit requirements.
- e. includes a Traditional Owner language title: Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn - "keep the Birrarung alive"

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 13**

The Department (DELWP) should establish appropriate consultative processes during the preparation of the Bill.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**Funding Arrangements**

**RECOMMENDATION 14**

Authorise Melbourne Water to use Waterways and Drainage Charge funds for undertaking its new functions as described in Recommendation 6.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 15**

Review the Melbourne Metropolitan Parks Charge to define the strategic goals/services it delivers and identify the funding available for supporting priority projects identified in the Yarra Strategic Plan.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 16**

DELWP, as the responsible department, is to champion funding bids through government budgeting processes for priority projects identified in the Yarra Strategic Plan.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

## Expanding the model across Melbourne

**RECOMMENDATION 17**

Expand the Yarra model to protect other major Melbourne rivers and their open spaces such as the Maribyrnong and Werribee rivers.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 18**

In recognition of the importance of green open spaces, waterways, coasts and bays to the liveability and ecological health of Melbourne, establish a joint Taskforce reporting to the DELWP Secretary that brings together the skills of DELWP, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and local government:

- i. Investigate the potential benefits of combining waterway management, open space, bay and coastal management for greater Melbourne.
- ii. Develop an integrated vision and strategy for Melbourne’s waterways, open spaces, coasts and bays to improve Melbourne’s liveability and ecological health.

iii. Establish ongoing collaborative governance arrangements between DELWP, Traditional Owners, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and local government to:

- a. deliver the integrated vision and strategy
- b. synergise delivery of related projects from the Water Plan, Plan Melbourne, Port Phillip Bay Environmental Management Plan (EMP) and Yarra MAC recommendations
- c. establish long-term funding arrangements
- d. identify the preferred open space footprint of Melbourne’s key waterways and in particular those under sustained growth pressure (e.g. Werribee River) and plan to secure this.

iv. Report to the Victorian Government on an improved integrated institutional model by December 2017.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

## Supporting Projects

**RECOMMENDATION 19**

Map the Traditional Owner tangible and intangible cultural values along the full length of the Yarra River.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 20**

Support the Wurundjeri Council to play an active and ongoing role in protecting and improving the Yarra River and its parklands.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 21**

Introduce the stronger planning controls along the Yarra River that are currently under development as quickly as possible, and expand this work as part of the Yarra Strategic Plan to other areas along the Yarra River.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 22**

Establish a moratorium on the reduction of Public Acquisition Overlays (PAOs) or sale of public land along the Yarra River corridor until the Yarra Strategic Plan is finalised.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 23**

DELWP to review all PAOs and land acquisition opportunities along the river to enable alignment with the Yarra Strategic Plan.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 24**

DELWP to review and update Crown land reservations along the river to enable alignment with the Yarra Strategic Plan.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 25:**

Extend Clause 56 of the Victoria Planning Provisions best practice stormwater management standards for residential subdivisions to apply to commercial and industrial subdivisions to assist in maintaining the water quality in the Yarra River at the current levels. Note that to make a marked difference in the water quality in the lower Yarra River will require further significant policy and regulatory changes.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 26**

Use the community consultation process for the development of the community vision and Yarra Strategic Plan to also meet the requirements for the development of water quality standards for the Yarra under the State Environment Protection Policy (Waters for Victoria).

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

Yarra River banks by Princes Bridge, Melbourne

**RECOMMENDATION 27**

Support councils along the Yarra River to contribute to the development of the Yarra Strategic Plan and implementation in their local government area.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 28**

Melbourne Water to commence development of the Yarra Strategic Plan and community vision as quickly as possible.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

## Early start projects

**RECOMMENDATION 29**

Provide Melbourne Water (or another appropriate entity) with immediate funding to lead the development and implementation of solutions to two areas where there has been long standing community issues, numerous plans undertaken and for which there are currently significant development proposals. These are:

- i. Secure the footprint, provide all abilities access, and connect the Yarra Main Trail between Victoria Street to Dights Falls.
- ii. Develop an integrated precinct plan to provide direction to the future land use changes for the Yarra corridor between Bolin Bolin Billabong and the Yarra Valley Country Club that recognises the internationally significant arts and culture precinct, Traditional Owner cultural values, environmental values of the wetlands and provides certainty to land owners and developers.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**

**RECOMMENDATION 30**

Implement the stronger planning controls already under development for the Maribyrnong River.

**RESPONSE: Adopt in full**





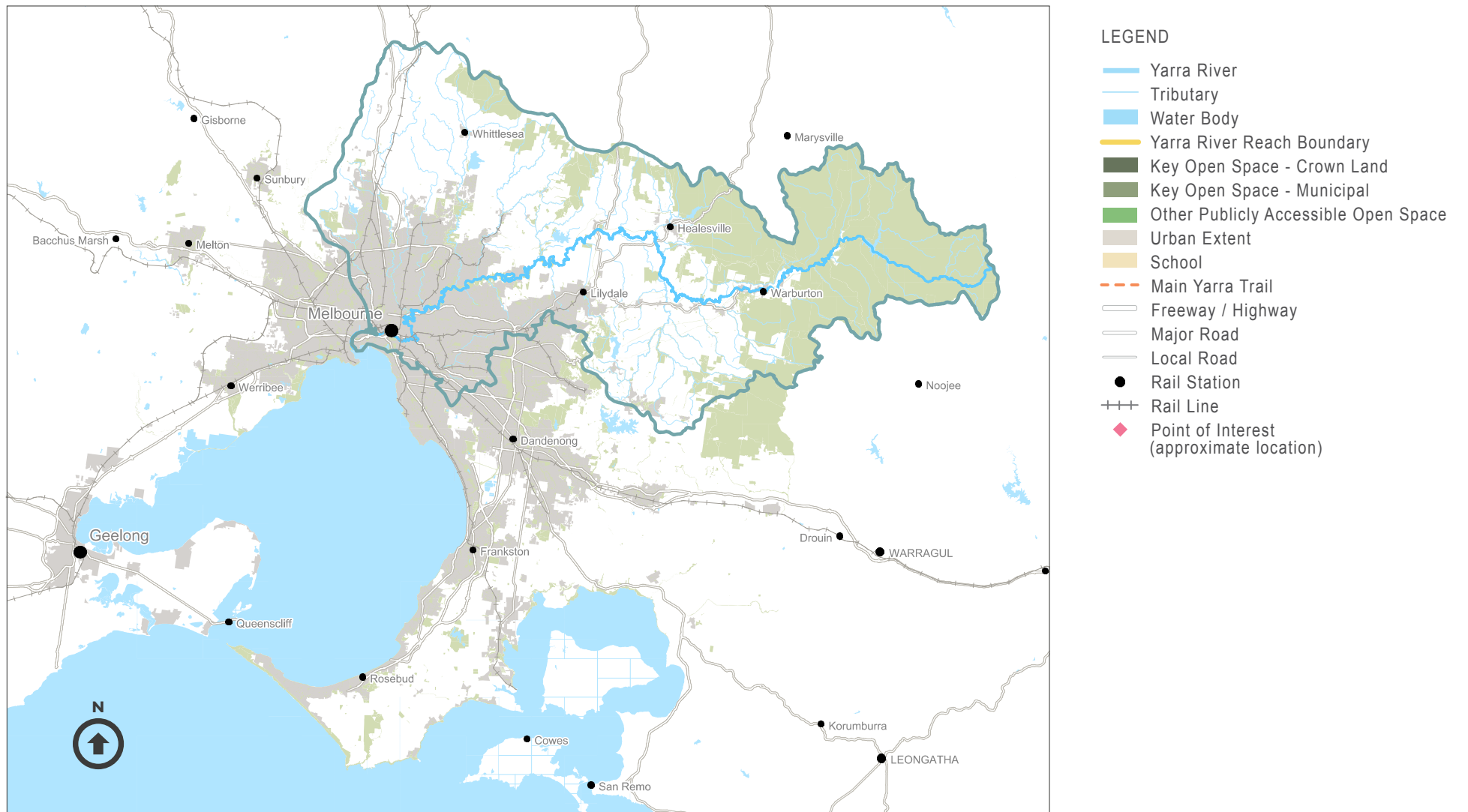
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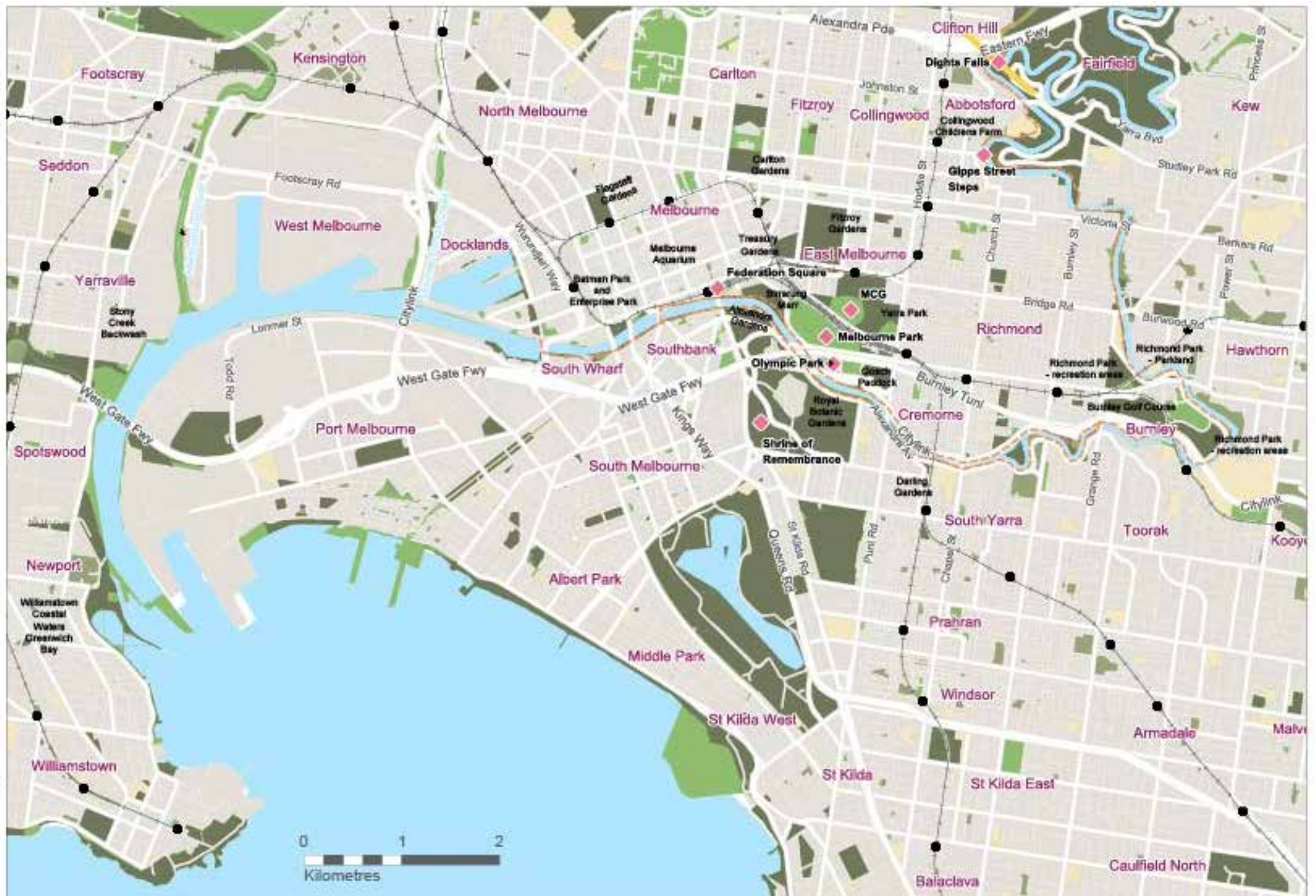
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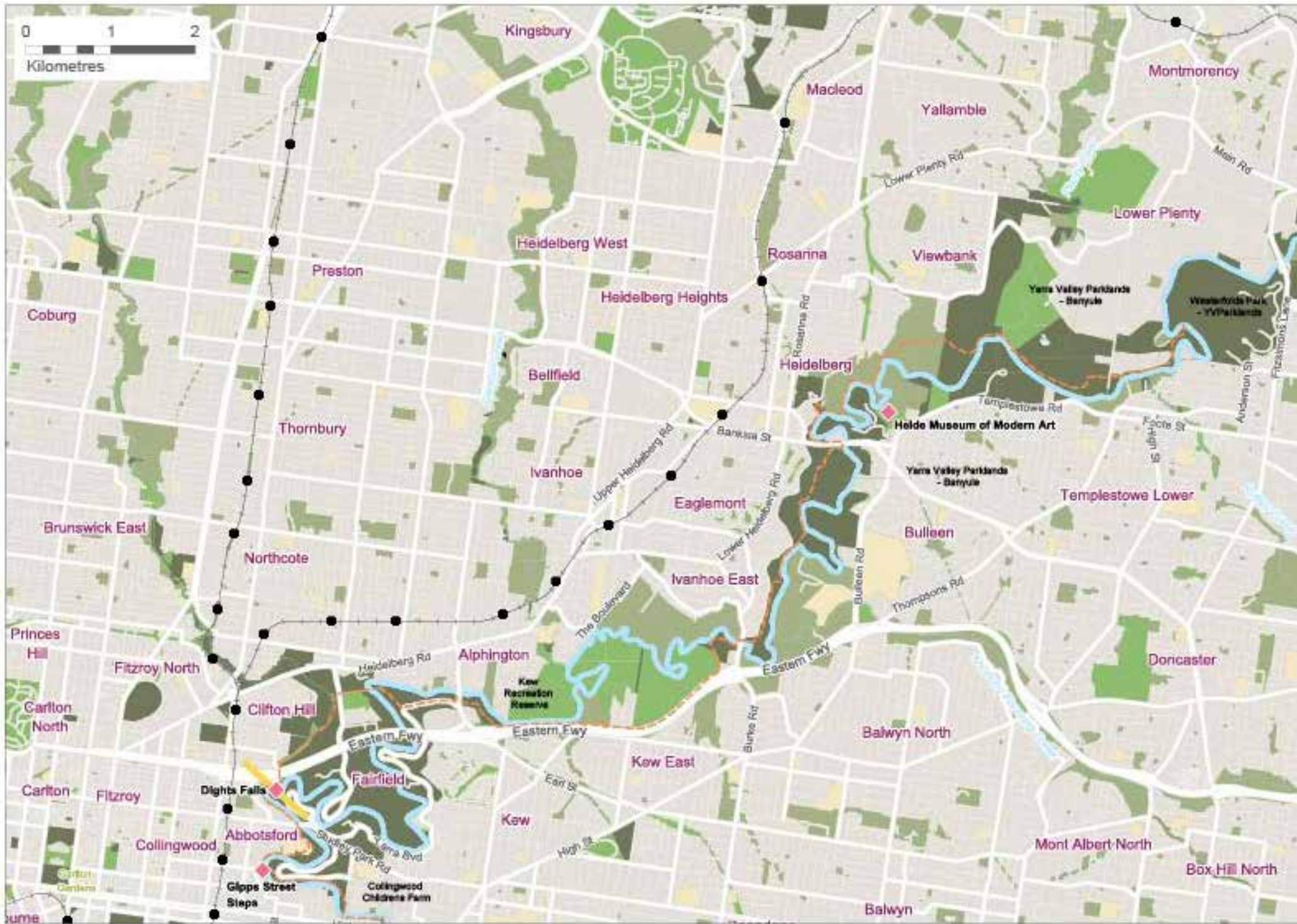


# Maps

**Figure 3: The Yarra River and its catchment**



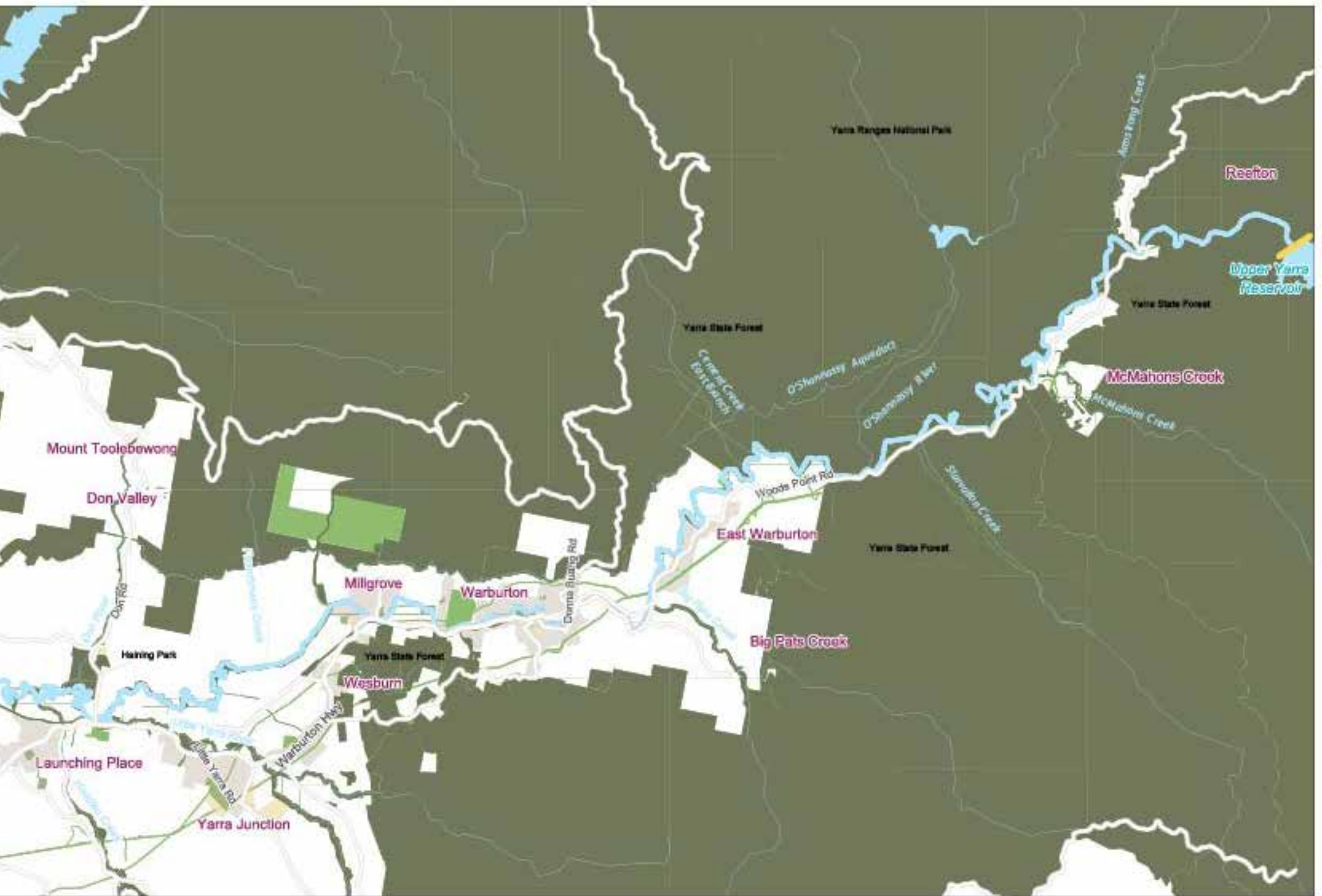


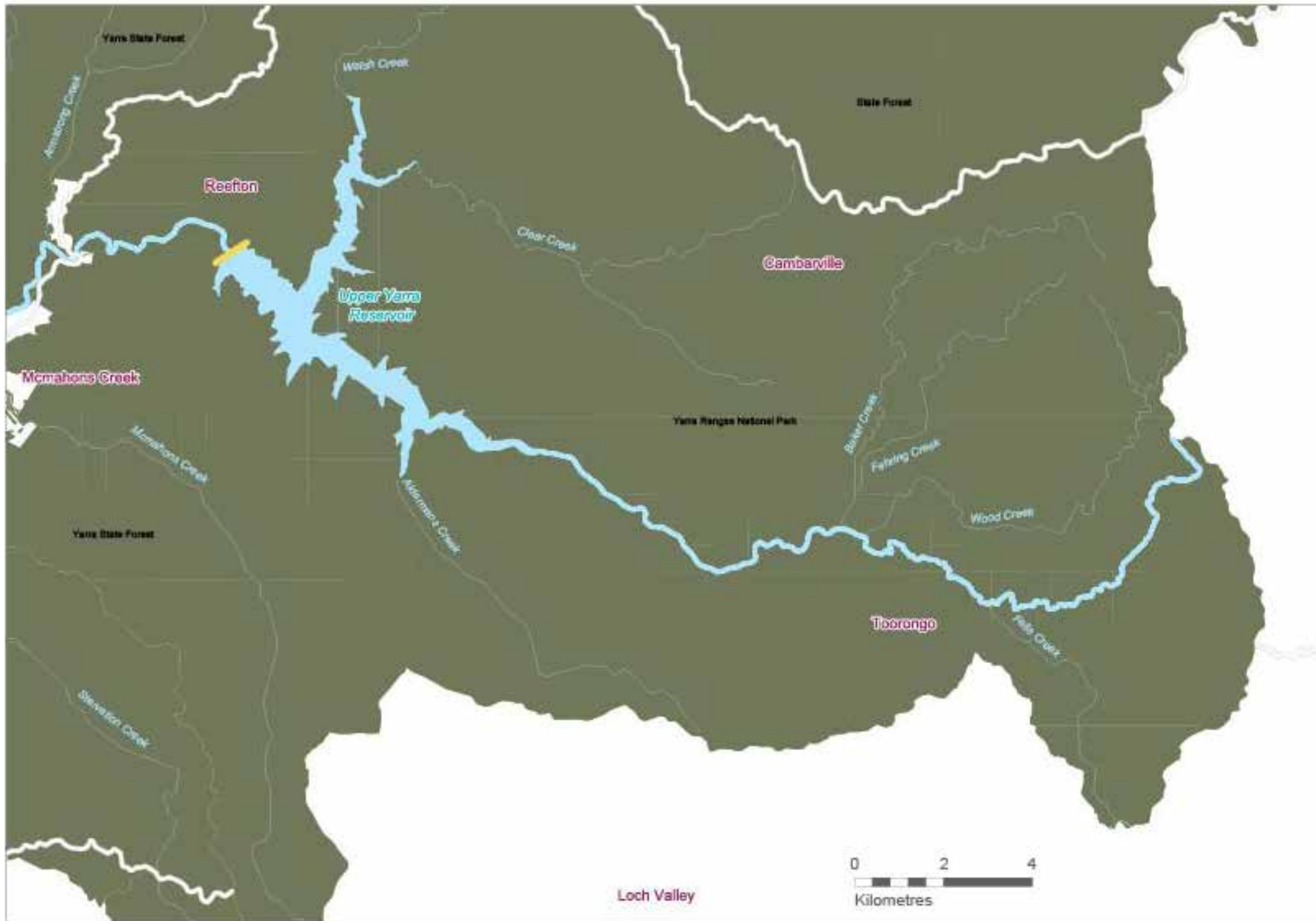












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