

An aerial photograph of a waterfall cascading down a steep, forested hillside. The water is white and frothy as it falls over rocks, surrounded by dense green trees. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Yarra
Riverkeeper
Association
Annual Report
for the Year
2018-19**

Cover photo: The Upper Yarra Falls in the forests of Central Highlands of Victoria. These forests are the source of much of the water that flows down the Yarra River and they also supply a large part of Melbourne's drinking water. (Photo courtesy: John Gollings - motion picture capture.)

Back cover: The upper Yarra Catchment under snow. (Photo courtesy: John Gollings.)

Double page (pp. 18-19): The upper Yarra catchment (Photo courtesy: John Gollings)



Anthony is but one of the many fabulous volunteers that underpin the work that the Association does. (Photo courtesy: Andrew Kelly)

We are ...

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association Inc speaks for the Yarra (Birrarung), Melbourne's own beautiful, resilient, iconic river. The Association is the credible and authoritative voice for the river. It is an independent community of citizen-advocates that works solely in the interests of the river. The spokesperson of the Association is the Yarra Riverkeeper, and the Riverkeeper boat is permanently moored in the Yarra and patrols the river.

We educate about the river and advocate for the Yarra: for green spaces, for water quality, for biodiversity, for the birds, animals, insects and reptiles along the river, for good planning decisions, for the tributaries, for the parklands, for appropriate recreation; and for an understanding of our river and its role in the life of the city of Melbourne and the Yarra Valley. We promote research and an improved understanding of our river. We work to discover new ways of improving management of the river. We run on-ground weeding and planting programs and litter clean-up programs. We host seminars and run workshops. We advocate to governments and we educate the community. We tell the story of the river.

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association was incorporated in 2005 and is part of the Waterkeeper Alliance of more than 200 waterkeepers worldwide.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Association acknowledges the Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the lands and waterways of the Yarra Catchment.

Our vision
Our Yarra:
Healthy,
Protected
and
Loved

Our aim

To protect and restore the Yarra River and its tributaries, from source to mouth, for current and future generations.

Our objectives

- to be an effective, independent public advocate for the Yarra River and its tributaries
- to provide a unified voice, representative of the community, in relation to whole-of-river issues
- to identify, create and implement initiatives that will protect and restore the Yarra River and its tributaries
- to build and foster relationships with all stakeholders
- to ensure integrated management founded upon stewardship
- to build and make publicly accessible knowledge relating to the Yarra catchment
- to celebrate the ecological and social value of the Yarra River and its tributaries
- to establish a realistic funding base that can support projected activities.

President's message

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association has had another successful year: growing its membership, expanding its staff, increasing its advocacy on behalf of the river, and expanding the community events it arranges to look after the river.

At a board level, we have also had a productive year.

Governor becomes patron

I am delighted to report that Her Excellency the Hon. Linda Dessau AC, Governor of Victoria accepted the Association's invitation to become its patron. We are most grateful to Her Excellency and Mr Howard for their patronage.

New Executive Officer — freeing up the Riverkeeper

At our annual half-day strategy planning session in February, one of the topics we focussed on was the optimal staffing structure for the next stage of the Association's growth. It became clear that we needed to lighten the administrative and management load on the Riverkeeper, Andrew Kelly — the aim being to free him up. To do that, we decided that the Association needed an experienced Executive Officer to run the office, to support our staff, and perhaps to expand our activities and our reach.

A few months later, we appointed Ian Wong as the Association's Executive Officer. (Although Ian is on the board, he has taken leave from the board while he is in the role.) Ian is a former Partner within IBM's consulting business with vast experience in managing teams, and in developing and implementing change projects.

Ian is working — at Riverkeeper rates — for 10 hours a week and donating many hours more than that. He and Andrew have worked closely and successfully to determine the boundaries between each of their roles and to shape

the future growth and management of the Association.

This builds on the work Ian has led the board through in recent years: namely strategic planning, and understanding the “journey” people go on that results in them becoming a member of the Yarra Riverkeeper Association. Indeed, if you were at our 2018 Annual General Meeting, you heard Ian talk about that journey work.

Having Ian as Executive Officer is enabling both the Riverkeeper, and the Association, to achieve more. Also, the staff have the benefit of being managed and mentored by Ian.

Birrarung Council — 2 of our directors are members

Under the Yarra River Protection (Willipgin Birrarung Murrumbidgee) Act 2017, the state government established the Birrarung Council to develop and manage a Yarra Strategic Plan. We are delighted that the Andrew Kelly and our director Warwick Leeson are members of the Council. We look forward to the release of the draft Yarra Strategic Plan, which — after much consultation and deliberation — is due to be published soon.

Board committees — with members who aren't directors

Our board committee structure continues to work well. We have four committees that meet consecutively on the same day, so all board members can readily attend each meeting. Each committee has members who are not directors and who contribute enormously to the activities of the committee in between meetings. Our thanks to those committee members.

Our committees, and their chairs, are:

- Advocacy, Janet Bolitho;
- Membership and Community Engagement, Ian Wong;
- Resources, Gillian Jervis, Treasurer; and
- Governance, Christopher Balmford, President.

If you have relevant experience and would like to be considered for one of the Committees, please email Ian on ianw@yarrariver.org.au.

Board changes

During the year, the chair of our Governance Committee, Ian Thomas resigned from the committee and the board. Our thanks to Ian for his work with the board — in particular, his work on risk management and all things governance. His expertise and guidance is missed by us all.

The board welcomed Sally McPhee as a new director. Sally is a freelance collaborator on projects engaging people in culture, nature, art and place. In 2016, she graduated from RMIT's Urban and Regional Planning program, completing a thesis on historic representation of swimming in Melbourne's Yarra River. She is co-creator and co-host of 'This Is Public', a podcast about cities, people and place produced with Open House Melbourne. She currently works with the Engagement and Impact team at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria on placemaking and interpretation projects. Sally's planning expertise is already proving useful in our submissions and reports.

Thank you

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association is going from strength to strength. This is largely due to the energetic, informed and passionate efforts of our Riverkeeper, Andrew Kelly. Our congratulations and our ongoing thanks to Andrew.

The Association's burgeoning success is also due to our hard working and passionate staff. We thank them. Andrew writes about their work and thanks them more fulsomely in his report.

The good work of our team depends on the support of our members and volunteers. Our deep thanks to them — especially to those of them:

- who help to manage our events — for

example: by running the BBQ at a litter clean-up; and

- who turn up to volunteer for the purposes of the event — for example: walking, or paddling, along the river collecting litter; or sorting litter into categories and weighing it for our litter analysis.

And, of course, all our activities depend on funding and on in-kind support. So, to our members, donors and sponsors our extended and ongoing thanks — whether they contribute money to pay our staff, or (for example) lend us kayaks for litter collection volunteers to use. Our generous donors and sponsors are listed on pages 22 and 23.

Lastly, my personal thanks to the board members, Janet Bolitho, Warwick Leeson, Sally McPhee, Andrew Kelly, Gillian Jervis and Ian Wong (on leave from the board). Each board member gives substantial time, expertise and effort to the Association. Even so, Gillian, our Treasurer, deserves extra thanks. I know every other board member feels that too.

Over recent years, Gillian has led and implemented a range of finance-related projects. Some of them have been substantial, vital, and yet tedious. For example, we moved our accounts from a cash basis to an accrual basis. That change alone was a substantial task. But then — to enable our auditor to compare like-with-like between the 2 years — Gillian had to redo the previous year's accounts on an accrual basis. Thank you, Gillian, for your work, your patience and your cheerful persistence.

And thank you to you, for reading this Annual Report, which implies that you have an interest in the Association and — more importantly — an interest in the river. Please join us in fulfilling the Association's vision, namely Our Yarra; healthy, protected and loved.

Christopher Balmford
President
Yarra Riverkeeper Association Inc

Yarra Riverkeeper's Report

Due to the hard work of staff, the strategic foresight of the board and, not least, the support of all four of our committees, the Association is firmly positioned to continue to grow and to strengthen our voice for the Yarra. Much of what the Association has done over the past busy and successful year is presented elsewhere in this report: from our very successful Yarra River Blitzes, masterminded by our Education Manager, Dr Nicole Kowalczyk, to the work being done by Anton Tejada on our bold and innovative Yarra River Atlas, and the work that each committee does to drive the organization forward.

A vital part of this year has been the growth in our knowledge work around building a strong community understanding of the Yarra River and its catchment. This work is threefold

- research,
- reports,
- and seminars.

A crucial part of building our knowledge is being out on the river, in the boat or on foot. Our growing understanding of the river also happens in the day to day work of the Association as we work with agencies such as Melbourne Water and EPA. We thank them for sharing their expertise. With Melbourne Water, I am currently on the Customer Council and I am involved in the Healthy Waterways Strategy.

I am also on the EPA Community Reference Group. We also have grant-funded project-based formal research programs through the work of Dr Nicole Kowalczyk.

In this year, we published a major urban planning report, *Protecting the Yarra Corridor Through Better Planning: Punt Road to the Urban Growth Boundary*, which we commissioned from the highly regarded Ethos Urban. The publishing of reports has always been a strong strand in our work-flow, and we took a step up by, for the first time, commissioning a report from an outside consultancy. It was a bold step forward for a modest environment group. I thank Ethos Urban for their patience in adjusting their methodology to capture the needs of a place-based environmental group. This report consolidates our reputation for thoughtful, evidence-based advocacy for the Yarra based on expert research.

The year was also exciting as it included the launch of our seminar series with 'All About Plastics' in November. Through the year we ran three seminars. Our seminar series dovetails with our report publication work and our research. I am pleased to say all were well-attended and well-received.

At the start of October, we celebrated the appointment of the Birrarung Council, one of the key steps under the *Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung murrin) Act*. I was pleased to be appointed to the council along with fellow board member Warwick Leeson. The essential roles of the council are to be the voice of the river and, also importantly, to oversee the Yarra Strategic Plan.

The Yarra Strategic Plan is the heart of the *Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung murrin) Act* that we fought so hard for. The act has been described as an act for a plan. The process of developing the plan is an exercise in transformative modern governance. It requires councils and government agencies to cooperate in the development of a plan that obliges them

to comply with the parts of the act that are binding and to respect the parts that are not strictly binding. Each increment of the plan is for ten years. The plan delivers on the 50-year community vision. We have been actively involved in the plan over the past year and look forward to the forthcoming release soon. The plan needs to be transformative not only in terms of governance but in terms of what it delivers for the river. I urge you to make a submission when the draft plan is opened for consultation. We will be posting on social media and providing our thoughts as a guide.

The other item I would highlight is the work that the Melbourne Water Customer Council is doing in preparing for Melbourne Water's Pricing Submission to the Essential Services Commission (ESC) for expenditure, which is required every three years. A critical part of this is how our waterways charge is expended. In the Melbourne Metropolitan area. Each retail customer pays around \$25 a quarter to our water supplier who passes on the money to Melbourne Water. That is largely the funds we have as a community to spend on the ecological health of our waterways. The ESC requires MW to consult with the customers to justify the pricing. Thus the Pricing Submission is where the rubber really hits the road for the environment. If customer support is not demonstrated, if the submission is not approved, ideally with an increase on last year, and funding for our waterways is reduced, then our waterways, under the pressures of increased population, more roads and roofs, and a drying climate, will continue to deteriorate and begin to deteriorate sharply. I thank Melbourne Water for appointing me to the council. It has been a steep and satisfying learning trajectory. I also acknowledge the work of my fellow Riverkeeper John Forrester, from the Werribee, in chairing the council. I do urge everybody to follow this project when it becomes open to public consultation. Without proper funding our environment goes backwards. We will be keeping you informed of progress through our social media channels.

I do want to thank the not-for-profit law firm Environmental Justice Australia, and in particular their lawyers Bruce Lindsay and Virginia Trescothick, who represented us the North-East Link Planning Panel. We made quite a step up in the effectiveness of our presentation by having legal representation.

I endorse our President's thank you not only to all our board and committee members but especially to Gillian as treasurer, whose work is both detailed and time-consuming. All board members richly deserve my thanks and I would in particular like to thank Janet Bolitho for her energy and clear-sightedness as chair of the Advocacy Committee.

I am taking this opportunity to thank Ian Wong for stepping into the role of executive officer and working to transform our organizational base. Our growth has been rapid in the past few years, and that trajectory is continuing. Ian's work is critical in building solid foundations for our growth. The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation has funded us for the past three years to building organizational capacity under a Thrive grant, and Ian's work is one of the tangible outcomes of that grant.

As always I would like to thank our President Christopher Balmford, for his steady guidance and his skilful chairing of our organisation.

Andrew Kelly, Yarra Riverkeeper



Members of our Board of Management

Christopher Balmford, President

Christopher, a former lawyer with Baker & McKenzie and Phillips Fox (now DLA Piper), is the founder and managing director of Words and Beyond an Australian-based plain-language training, rewriting, and cultural-change consultancy launched in 1999. Christopher is also the founder, and former Managing Director, of online legal document provider Cleardocs, which launched in Australia in 2002. Christopher is also a Director of the Robyn Boyd Foundation, is on the steering committee of Birds of King Island 'BOKI' and has served on the Council of Wollangarra Outdoor Education Centre, for periods between 1988 to 2011.

Andrew Kelly, Vice-President and Yarra Riverkeeper

Andrew has been the Yarra Riverkeeper for the past four years from November 2014. Prior to that he had been on the committee of management of the association for three years. Andrew grew up along the Yarra and has a deep understanding of the river as a connected ecosystem that is the imaginative heart of the city of the Melbourne. He has degrees in archaeology, Australian history and geography. Andrew worked in the publishing industry for 35 years, and after a successful career in corporate publishing he established several award-winning independent imprints. He was vice-president of the Australian Publishers Association and a recipient of the George Roberston award. Andrew is a past president of the Society of Editors (now Editors Vic). He is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Gillian Jervis, Treasurer and Membership Secretary

Gillian joined the Yarra Riverkeeper Association Board as Treasurer in May 2014

and is now also the Membership Secretary. Her background is primarily audit, risk management and forensic accounting across a variety of organisations within the corporate and public sectors. Gillian has her own bookkeeping business, her client base largely focused on the not-for-profit sector and local small businesses. Gillian has been Treasurer of the Australian Plants Society South East Melbourne Region for several years and was recently elected Treasurer for the Korowa Anglican Girls' School Parent's Association and is currently collaborating with the school to give students opportunities to learn about the Yarra River and its future sustainability. Gillian has a Masters of Applied Finance from the University of Melbourne and is a member of CPA Australia and Institute of Community Directors Australia.

Warwick Leeson, Committee Member

Warwick Leeson OAM has been a resident of Kangaroo Ground for 20 years, and is a former councillor and mayor of Nillumbik. He is passionate about the natural world, especially that which has been protected by Green Wedges legislation. He has used that understanding to make significant contributions to the formulation of the Association's policies and strategies. Some of Warwick's community activities include: Secretary: Warrandyte Community Association Deputy Chair: WCA 'Be (Fire) Ready Warrandyte' Project Committee member: Bend of Islands Conservation Association Member: Christmas Hills Landcare Chairman: Andrew Ross Museum @ Kangaroo Ground Member: Kangaroo Ground Rural Fire Brigade Secretary: St Andrews Community Bushfire Recovery Association Committee Member: St Andrews Community Centre Member: St Andrews Landcare Committee member: Friends of Pantan Hill Bushland Reserves Member: Nillumbik Reconciliation Group Member: Rotary International (Diamond Creek branch) Member: Green Wedges Coalition Committee member: Friends of Nillumbik Committee member: Green Wedge

Protection Group Community Member: Victorian Local Governance Association White Ribbon Ambassador: and Committee member: Victorian White Ribbon Ambassadors Network

Janet Bolitho, Committee Member

Since settling in Port Melbourne in 1987, Janet Bolitho has been actively and deeply involved in the life of Port Melbourne. Witnessing and participating in planning debates on Port Melbourne's transition from industrial to residential development led to two terms representing Port Melbourne on the Council of the City of Port Phillip (2004 and 2012), Mayor in 2006 and 2007. Janet represented Port Phillip on the Association of Bayside Municipalities throughout her time on Council. As acting chair of the Victorian Coastal Council in 2011, she oversaw the revision of the Victorian Coastal Strategy (2008) and the studies that underpinned the 2014 Victorian Coastal Strategy which has a strong focus on the health of catchments, and catchment to coast management. She also chaired the Victorian Local Sustainable Accord between 2008 and 2012, which supported collaborative council projects and policies advancing sustainability. Since 2012, Janet has continued her involvement with community groups including the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society, 3207 Beach Patrol (a group that picks up litter borne by the Yarra to Port Melbourne's beaches) and Friends of Westgate Park. She observes and comments on the changing landscape of the Lower Yarra at Port Places. She is also a community representative on the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Fisherman's Bend.

Ian Wong, Committee Member

Ian, a former Partner within IBM's consulting business, at various times led IBM's digital strategy, experience and design practice, and retail industry practice in Australia and New Zealand. During this time, he worked across multiple industries to assist clients in transforming their organisations and

businesses to become more customer focused through the adoption of digital capabilities. He currently serves on the board of the Royal Botanic Gardens Foundation Victoria. Ian also has his own digital consulting business, helping small businesses take advantage of digital technologies to develop customer and stakeholder experiences to grow their business whilst staying true to their core values. He has lived in many places across the world including England, Mauritius, Canada, Singapore, the USA and has finally settled in Melbourne with his lovely wife and two young children who are growing up to become 'eco-heroes'

Sally McPhee

Sally McPhee is the Creative Producer, Placemaking and Interpretation at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria and has worked a freelance collaborator on projects engaging people in culture, nature, art and place. With a background in performing arts administration and participation, she worked in various roles at Arts Centre Melbourne between 2001 and 2013. In 2016 she graduated from RMIT's Urban and Regional Planning program, completing a thesis on historic representation of swimming in Melbourne's Yarra River. Since then she has developed a deep love for the Birrarung, Yarra River, writing commissioned pieces about its past and future, and co-curating the Waterfront program with Open House Melbourne for Melbourne Design Week 2019. She is co-creator and co-host of 'This Is Public', a podcast about cities, people and place produced with Open House Melbourne. In 2016 she graduated from RMIT's Urban and Regional Planning program, completing a thesis on historic representation of swimming in Melbourne's Yarra River. Since then she has developed a deep love for the Birrarung, Yarra River, writing commissioned pieces about its past and future, and co-curating the Waterfront program with Open House Melbourne for Melbourne Design Week 2019.

Projects, staff and volunteers report

Yarra Atlas Report

The Yarra Catchment Atlas is a Yarra River focused online database that houses information from community groups, government agencies, and government entities. This project will serve as a centralised database that will allow for better analysis and accountability of the stakeholders who engage with the Yarra on a daily basis.

This project came from the vision of the Riverkeeper to be able to account for events and disasters that he has witnessed himself during his river trawls or excursions. From this idea it grew into something far more powerful and exciting. From its inception in February 2017, it has developed and grown into a platform that will have the ability look out for the Yarra through detailed and recorded accountability. Furthermore, this Atlas will serve as an advocacy tool through which the organisation as well as other environmental groups will be able to voice their concerns and show the evidence needed to justify those.

The Yarra Catchment Atlas has been developed with the help of one of our major partners CeRDI who have captured everything that the Yarra Riverkeeper Association wanted for the website. The website will house information about the Atlas as well as its connection to the Yarra Riverkeeper Association. However, the centre point of the website will be the Atlas itself. Within the Atlas we have developed several layers which carry significance for us such as a Friends of Layer which spatially maps the position of said group as well as its best point of contact and its website. We have also featured a Historical layer which houses over 100 landmark locations around the Yarra River. Within each of these points is a past image of the location along with the author or owner of the photograph. Another layer, and one which we are most excited about is the cultural historical

layer which features images of areas of cultural and historical significance. This is a layer that we are working together with the Wurundjeri to verify and approve the layer.

All of these features that the Yarra Catchment Atlas houses were showcased during the Yarra Atlas Seminar which was held on the 26 June at the Park View Room in Boroondara. We had over 45 attendees ranging from Yarra Riverkeeper members to organisations such as City of Yarra and City of Boroondara. The seminar served as the first instance in which we presented our online database to the public. The response was positive and there was a general feeling that the capacity of the Atlas was quite powerful. There was also a general feeling of our attendees being surprised given the amount of data we were housing and the ability we had to display it visually so easily. The audience had many questions which queried different aspects of the capabilities of the Atlas, however, they were all able to be answered with a satisfactory and positive response. There is another Atlas Seminar proposed soon in the Upper Yarra - this will allow us to engage with a different area of the River. The Upper Yarra Catchment is also very active in their conservation and environmental efforts which is important for us to note to have a thorough Atlas. Other layers that will be displayed in the Atlas include Flora and Fauna, water quality, and drains among other layers. The data displayed in these layers comes from other environmental organisations, however, the Yarra Riverkeeper Association has developed some of these data sets through monthly micro-plastic trawls and litter audits.

The release of the Atlas will mean easy access to information and this means that we have to be extremely thorough and detailed with what we allow in the database. We have tasked ourselves with reviewing and formatting some of the data we receive. We have, as well, tasked ourselves with learning how to operate the Atlas website so we are able to modify data when necessary. This knowledge will be passed onto us via a

seminar in September. We will also contract the CeRDI team, after the ending our agreement, to support the Yarra Riverkeeper Association in maintaining the website and its contents live and updated.

The Yarra Catchment Atlas is envisioned as an advocacy tool but also an educational asset. We have seen multiple databases that have the component of teaching individuals about how to engage with the River, water quality about the river and its natural value in our landscape. We hope that the Yarra Catchment Atlas will be able to serve a similar purpose. Additionally, we envision the Yarra Atlas to serve as a point of reference for other environmental organisations to support arguments regarding planning, natural disasters and conservation.

The work that has been done for the Yarra Atlas has been a joint effort between the Yarra Riverkeeper Association and its supporters: The Port Phillip Bay Fund, CeRDI and DELWP. This joint effort has brought the Yarra Catchment Atlas close to being released. We hope that this tool will live to its full potential and facilitate better and more informed communication between organisations and a third party.

We are focused on releasing the Yarra Atlas as soon as possible and will endeavour to provide updates through our channels to keep our supporters briefed.

Litter and Flows Project

This is a research project run by the Association to identify the sources and composition of litter in the Yarra River and to understand how litter is carried down the river by flows. The project is managed by the Association's Education Manager Dr Nicole Kowalczyk. The project is supported by funding from the Victorian Government through the Port Phillip Bay Fund. The project involves on-ground and in-water clean-ups along the lower Yarra River. In 2018-19, the Association coordinated 40 school and community group presentations

in the Yarra catchment related to the health of the Yarra River, 22 community clean-ups, 12 microplastic trawls, 49 Bandalong litter trap audits. Over 1,725 volunteer hours and \$50,000 of in-kind support was generated through these initiatives. Furthermore, over 1000 kg of rubbish was removed from our riverbanks and the Yarra river itself.

Bandalong Litter Trap Audits

Another component of the Litter and Flows Project are the audits of the Bandalong litter traps in the Yarra. The traps are maintained by Parks Victoria, who empty the traps on rotation at regular intervals. In the suburban and inner-city Yarra reaches, 17 Bandalong litter traps are located along the river to capture litter. The Bandalong Litter Trap is a floating device installed at strategic locations along waterways to collect and retain floating litter and organic debris. The first series of traps were first installed in 1996 (3 x 9 meters) followed by the installation of larger traps (3 x 12 meters) in 2015. A crane with a bucket grab removes floating debris and is emptied into wire cages secured to the Pelican vessel. Parks Victoria keep a record of collected litter and organic debris, measured in cubic metres. The Yarra Riverkeeper vessel is used to analyse all 17 litter traps along the lower Yarra. Trap ID, fullness (%) and the relative proportion of dominant items (organic material, polystyrene, plastic bottles, metal items, balls, coffee cups, other) are recorded.

Trap fullness and composition varies both within and between traps. However, based on 49 trap audits organic material dominates trap material comprising on average 59.5% of trap contents. Polystyrene and plastic bottles feature heavily in traps comprising on average 18.2% and 13.2% of trap contents, respectively. Balls (predominantly tennis balls) comprise 3.6% of audited material and metal aerosol cans (predominantly spray paint cans) comprise 2% of trap contents. 'Other' items including plastic packaging, glass, and clothing and coffee cups make up the rest of trap material (3.5%).

Microplastic Trawls

Since 2015, the Yarra Riverkeeper and Port Phillip Baykeeper have collaborated on the Yarra and Maribyrnong microplastic study. The study highlights the pervasiveness of plastics in our urban water catchments and indicates an increasing trend in microplastics entering our waterways. A total of 14,564 litter items have been trawled from the surface waters of the Yarra and 6,950 items have been removed from the Maribyrnong River. Our research estimates that 1.4 billion litter items flow into Port Phillip Bay annually from the rivers' surface waters. 1.1 billion of these items are microplastics. In both rivers, most of the litter caught consisted of hard plastic remnants of broken up plastic items. Of the other researched litter items polystyrene, nurdles and plastic bottle caps were most problematic in the Yarra. Interestingly, we are seeing a significant decline in plastic straws in the Yarra over time, while in the Maribyrnong, plastic straws and soft plastics are more prevalent.

Yarra River Blitz Project

The Yarra River Blitz, a Port Phillip Bay Fund project, was designed to remove accumulated waste from reed beds in the lower Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers using a unique approach which incorporates a boat mounted vacuum system with traditional waterway cleaning techniques. Crew target litter seasonally over 8 days at strategic locations along the rivers to maximise litter removal, culminating in a community event on the final day of the Yarra River Blitz. Yarra Riverkeeper members and the community are invited to clean the river on a kayak/canoe or on land and give back to the river.

The vacuum was developed by the Cleanwater Group in conjunction with the Association and was trialled at a pilot event in April 2018. It uses a unique of high volume low pressure flows to target small pieces of light-weight litter.

The Yarra River is the largest contributor of litter into Port Phillip Bay. Our recent research

indicates that approximately 1.4 billion litter items reach the Bay each year from the surface waters. 1.1 billion (79%) of these items are microplastics, especially plastic fragments and polystyrene beads. Much of the litter (especially microplastics) entering the Bay is trapped in reed beds in the lower Yarra. These areas are extremely difficult to access by foot.

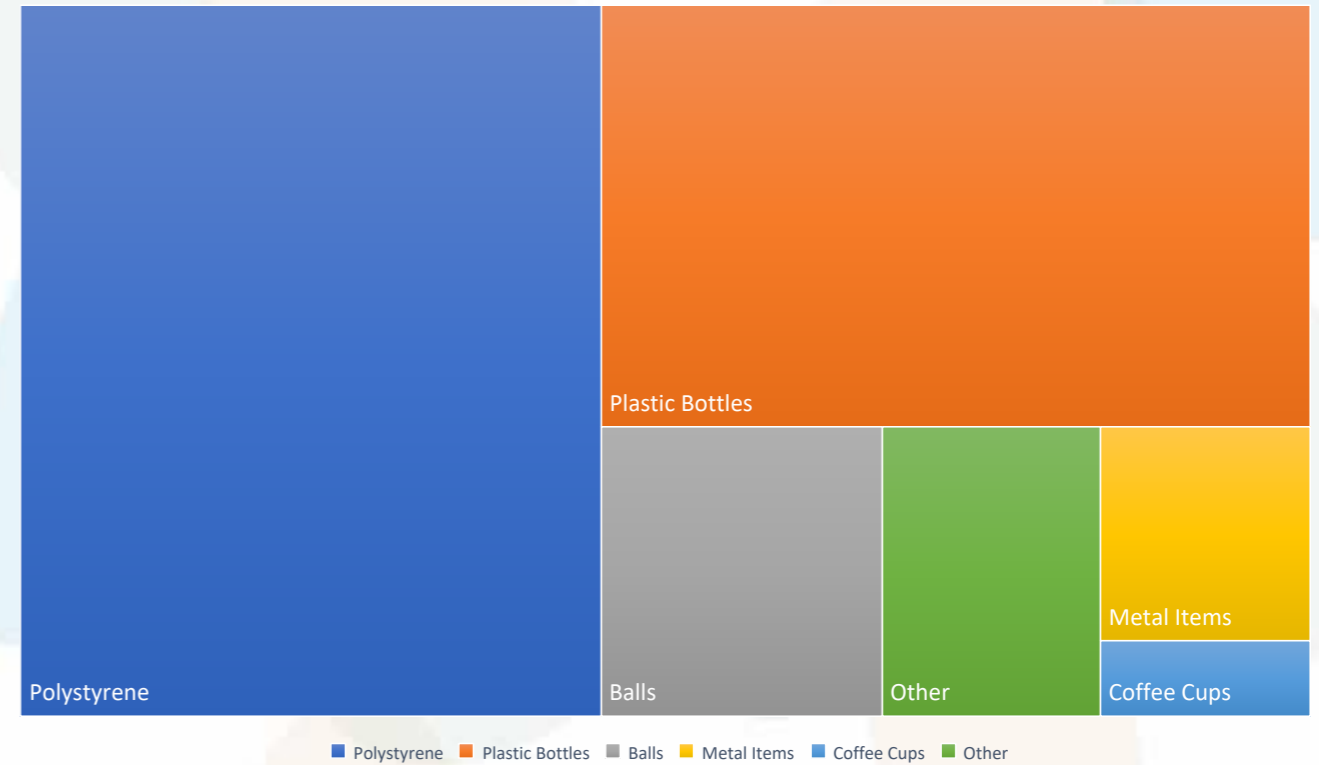
Between April 2018 and June 2019 the vacuum system removed 24,500 kg of litter from the Yarra and Maribyrnong. The dominant vacuumed litter item is expanded polystyrene. Furthermore, over 420 people have lent a helping hand at our Blitz community events, removing an additional 1,150 kg of rubbish from the Yarra and Maribyrnong, predominantly cigarette butts, plastic food packaging and plastic bottles. A total of 1,404 volunteer hours have contributed to the Blitz generating over \$42,000 in in-kind support. The Blitzes have greatly reduced the amount of litter and microplastics travelling along the Yarra and Maribyrnong and helped prevent millions of pieces of litter from escaping into the Bay annually. Furthermore, much of the plastic waste collected at Blitz events will be recycled to create 3 park benches to be positioned along the Yarra River.

Blitz events continue to draw media attention. In the last financial year the Blitz was featured over 20 times in printed, televised and radio platforms including the ABC's War on Waste (Season 2), Channel 7 and Channel 9 News. The Blitz has also boosted Yarra Riverkeeper membership numbers with members gaining privileged access to canoes and kayaks at Blitz community events.

Volunteers

Volunteer contributions of time, talent and resources are critical in fulfilling the Association's mission of protecting the Yarra and its tributaries from source to mouth. In particular, we would like to acknowledge our key event volunteers for assisting with the organisation and smooth operation of our community events. We thank Anthony

Average composition of a Bandalong litter trap in the Yarra River



Victoria University environmental science students audited the litter vacuumed from the reed beds during the Yarra River Blitz in the week beginning 23 May 2019. (Photo courtesy: Shayan Barmand)

Despotellis, Karin Traeger, Kate Arnold, Michel Honnegger, Ross and Ramona Headifen, Isabella Blick, Miriam Sheriden, Sebastian Pivet, Anna Ridgeway and Ian Wong for the invaluable assistance.

We would also like to extend our acknowledgements to students at Melbourne Girls College, Strathcona Girls School, Wesley College and Victoria University for their support at Blitz events.

REFUSE OR RECYCLE
plastic soy fish

Thousands of plastic soy fish litter the streets of Melbourne, with many of them entering the Yarra. From there they:

- Pollute other water bodies, like Port Phillip Bay
- Harm marine wildlife and ecosystems
- Stick around for centuries

REFUSE plastic soy fish. Use in-store bottles, or keep soy sauce at your home or workplace.
OR
RECYCLE plastic soy fish by putting them in the correct bin.

YARRA RIVERKEEPER
@YarraRiverkeeper
@yarrariverkeeper
@TheYarraRiver

Our Plastic Fish Soy Source Reduction project was launched in June 2019. The project targets the ubiquitous tiny fish-shaped soy sauce containers that inhabit city drains. The containers are representative of all unnecessary plastic pollution. We are creating a campaign to refuse or recycle with the support of the Melbourne Aquarium

Committee reports

Governance Committee

The board met 8 times during 2018/2019 and all directors attended the annual Strategic Planning Day. Two directors each missed one board meeting.

The board's 4 committees are functioning well and prepare papers for full board meetings. Each committee meets in the alternative month between board meetings. The committees meet consecutively on the same day so as directors can readily attend each committee meeting. The 4 committees are:

- Governance — chaired by our President and Company Secretary, Christopher Balmford;
- Resourcing — chaired by our Treasurer, Gillian Jervis;
- Advocacy — chaired by Janet Bolitho; and
- Membership and Community Engagement — chaired by Ian Wong.

The committees include board members, former board members, and a range of other people with relevant skills and experience. The Association's staff attend as appropriate.

During the 2018/2019 year, the board welcomed Sally McPhee as a director (see the President's Report) and said farewell to — and thanked — Ian Thomas who resigned as director, Company Secretary and Chair of the Governance Committee. On 6 May 2019, director Ian Wong took leave of absence from the board when he became the Association's Executive Officer. Ian continues to attend board and committee meetings as appropriate in his capacity as Executive Officer.

The Governance Committee continues to establish and develop sound governance practices and procedures for the board to implement — notably: gift, sponsorship, and purchasing etc. policies.

Christopher Balmford, chair and company secretary

Resourcing Committee

The Resourcing Committee had an active year that consolidated the financial foundations of the Association. Among the achievements of the committee was that all bookkeeping and accounting function were migrated to Reckon Accounts Hosted — as the Association became more active, the paper-based system had become burdensome.

The committee changed the Association's accounting process for recognising grant income from a cash basis to an accrual basis so that the Association's accounts more accurately report the financial position when we receive a grant in one financial year for activities to be carried out across more than one year.

The Association's first incremental budget was prepared, with a sub-budget for each of the grants for which the Association needs to acquit; Most recently, the payroll function was outsourced to ADP Payline to facilitate more effective management of this process with an expanding employee base.

The committee is continuing its work of consolidating the financial organisational base for the Association, so the Association is able to continue to grow and deliver more for the Yarra River.

Gillian Jervis, chair and treasurer

Advocacy Committee

The Riverkeeper gives voice to the Yarra River. There were many calls for that voice to be heard over the past year. The Association seeks to make credible, informed and considered contributions whenever an opportunity arises to speak for the river. We seek to position ourselves as a key stakeholder in the River. The many pressing issues affecting the River are kept in focus and prioritised through the Advocacy sub-committee.

Our October celebration of the passage of the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung

murrin) Act (the Act) on the banks of the Yarra at Studley Park was a great opportunity to share the Ethos Urban report *Protecting the Yarra Corridor Through Better Planning*. The intention of several projects with Ethos Urban is to make it easier for community members to participate in the planning system, and to make their contribution even more effective in the protection of urban waterways.

Both the state and federal elections were held in this period. At the state level, we prepared an election policy position paper supported by a social media campaign. Our sustained effort continues to be to see the Act implemented in a meaningful way and supported by budget.



Phil Ryan from the Cleanwater Group wields 'Mr Snuffalupagus' in one of Yarra's reed beds. (Photo courtesy: Andrew Kelly)

It is unfinished business to see the temporary planning controls that protect the Yarra River corridor from inappropriate development made permanent.

At the federal level, sustained advocacy by many organisations over time meant that urban rivers became an election issue with both major parties making strong commitments to urban waterways. The incoming Coalition government, through the member for Kooyong Josh Frydenburg made a substantial election promise the delivery of which is still being worked through.

The Association was dismayed by the findings of the Commissioner for Sustainable Environment's inaugural State of the Yarra and its Parklands report which found many of the key indicators for the Yarra were declining. This prompted engagement with the Commissioner, who was receptive to our concerns.

The Association submitted to the North East Link Independent Advisory Committee raising concerns about vegetation loss, impact on water quality and on groundwater.

It has been pleasing to often have the whole Board present at our Advocacy sub-committee bringing valuable perspectives and insights to the work of the committee.

We welcomed Scott Seymour and Sally McPhee to the Advocacy Committee this year.

Janet Bolitho, chair

The Community Engagement Committee

The Membership and Community Engagement Committee continued to develop the member and community experience in 2018/2019. During the year, we have continued to implement ways in which we can allow our members and the community to gain more value from their relationship with the Yarra

Riverkeeper Association. The key initiatives that we have delivered are: Knowledge Seminars, Membership as a Gift during Christmas, Enhanced Membership Experiences during our Yarra River Blitz, and Evolution of our Membership Management system. We look forward to continuing to evolve the membership and community experience in 2019/2020.

Knowledge Seminars

During 2018/2019, we have run a knowledge seminar, approximately once a quarter to inform and engaging our members and the community in key topics that are relevant to the Yarra River. In November 2018, we hosted our inaugural seminar: All About Plastic, at the Abbotsford Convent, where the topic of plastics was explored, and discussed. In February 2019, we hosted the Circular Economy seminar, at the Abbotsford Convent, to explore how transitioning to a Circular Economy could help in revitalising our Yarra River. In June 2019, we held a seminar on the Yarra Atlas, a soon to be launched digital platform which will hold information about our Yarra River and empower the community to understand and share information about our Yarra River. We look forward to running more quarterly seminars in the upcoming year.

Membership as a Gift

During Christmas 2018, we provided the ability for the community to purchase and gift a Yarra Riverkeeper Association membership to their loved ones. This proved to be a successful offering which increased our membership base and allowed our members to share their love of the river with their friends and families.

Enhanced Membership Experiences - Yarra River Blitz

During the Yarra River Blitz in March 2019, and May 2019, we implemented processes that allowed us to recognise members who attended this key event for us by utilising our digital constituent relationship management platform to check in all participants. We

provided our members with priority access to river kayaks and canoes by allowing them to reserve the canoes and kayaks before the event, and finally, we allowed the community to sign up to become Yarra Riverkeeper Association members at the event. The River Blitzes were run on both the Maribyrnong and Yarra River and were extremely successful in engaging the wider community in taking action for keeping our Yarra: Healthy, Protected and Loved.

Evolution of the Membership Management System

During 2018/2019, we implemented changes to our membership management solution that enabled easier membership renewal by providing auto renewal and renewal on anniversary capabilities. We hope that you have experienced these and find these beneficial.

In 2019/2020, we look forward to the continued evolution of our social media channels to engage our members and the community, and finally, we plan to review and implement changes to our digital platforms to provide an improved experience for our members and the community through these channels.

Ian Wong, chair

Executive Officer Ian Wong at a Yarra River Blitz — assisted by Alexander and Amelia. Alexander attended a presentation by Andrew and Nikki at Melbourne University's Early Learning Centre in Abbotsford. Ian then met Nikki at a Boroondara Skilled Volunteering event. He was familiar with the work of the Association as Alexander had come home and talked about meeting the Riverkeeper and the Penguin Lady (Nikki's PhD was about the penguins of Port Phillip) and spoke about how we need to keep the river clean. Ian first volunteered to work on the Association's strategy and then joined the board. (Photo courtesy: Andrew Kelly)





Financial Statements

Financial Summary for Annual Report 2018-19

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association is pleased to report a net surplus of \$37,850.36 for the financial year ended 30 June 2019 (compared to a net loss of \$24,051.57 in the previous year). The improved result was primarily due to:

- Significant growth in grant income supplemented by increased donations and membership fees. We were fortunate to receive some sizable grants from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), enabling the Association to expand on current river revitalisation, advocacy and education projects and embark on new initiatives including the polystyrene research project.
- Effective social media campaigns to engage, inform and educate our key stakeholders and the wider community.
- Well-attended community events and educational seminars that attracted new members.

The Association's current funding base is becoming increasingly diverse and there is a defined longer-term strategy to generate more untied funding through memberships, donations, educational workshops and corporate volunteer events as the Association continues to grow. These funding sources enable us to continue the vital advocacy work needed for a healthy and sustainable Yarra River. Current funding sources are represented in the pie chart below.

Summary of Current Funding Sources 2018/19

Other * - represents untied funding and includes Waterkeeper Alliance funding for Yarra Rewilding Report, education programs, corporate volunteering events, membership fees, donations and bank interest.

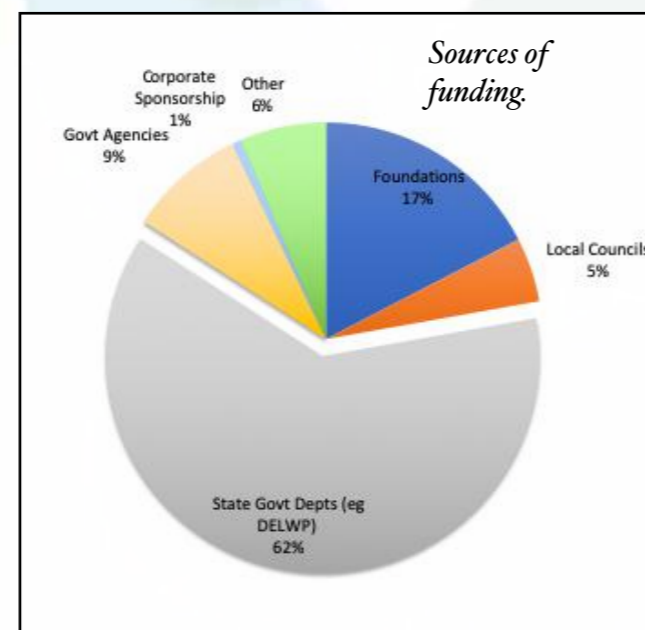
Grants comprise the largest portion of income received during the year, followed by donations

and membership fees. These vital funding sources enabled the Association to:

- Expand project management and operational capabilities through the recruitment of additional staff
- Embark on new projects such as polystyrene research and analysis
- Continue the successful Yarra River Clean-up Blitz events and other on-ground and in-water clean-up activities.
- Further develop the Yarra Catchment Atlas education and research tool
- Deliver school educational programs, workshops and community seminars

The Association continues to maintain a strong financial base with further consolidation likely as the Association continues to grow and has become a well-respected independent advocate for our iconic Yarra River.

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association would like to sincerely thank all grant providers, sponsors, donors and members for their generous support throughout the year. Without their support, the work of revitalising our river would not be possible, and enables us to continue the vital advocacy work needed to ensure our Yarra River is healthy, protected and loved for present and future generations.



Yarra Riverkeeper Association Incorporated ABN: 95 339 378 852 Statement of Financial Performance (Profit & Loss) for the year ended 30 June 2019

Revenue	FY2019	FY2018
	\$	\$
Grants	366,950	118,301
Donations	27,275	23,855
Membership Fees	4,896	2,645
Other Income	6,055	7,539
Total Revenue	405,176	152,340
Expenditure		
Employee Expenses	164,058	131,195
Operational Expenses	199,438	41,374
Depreciation	3,350	3,350
Audit Fees	480	473
Total Expenditure	367,326	176,392
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	37,850	(24,052)

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association is a charity registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), and operates in accordance with the legislation and regulations applied by the ACNC, including the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 (Cth). The Yarra Riverkeeper Association holds tax exempt charitable status and is endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR).

Yarra Riverkeeper Association Incorporated ABN: 95 339 378 852 Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet) as at 30 June 2019

Assets	FY2019	FY2018
	\$	\$
Current Assets		
Cash at Bank	263,871	214,568
Receivables	7,464	3,700
Total Current Assets	271,335	218,268
Non Current Assets		
Plant & Equipment (Boat)	11,320	14,670
Total Non Current Assets	11,320	14,670
Total Assets	282,655	232,938
Liabilities		
Current Liabilities		
Payables	7,002	9,994
Unspent Grant Income	0	88,250
Provision for Committed Expenditure	89,9000	
Employee Provisions	25,033	12,419
Prepaid Membership Fees	2,505	1,910
Total Liabilities	124,440	112,573
Net Assets	158,215	120,365
Equity		
Retained Surplus	120,365	144,417
Current Earnings 2018	37,850 (24,052)	
Total Equity	158,215	120,365

Patron

Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau
AC, Governor of Victoria

Yarra Riverkeeper Supporters

Major Funding

Melbourne Water Corporation

Stonnington City Council

Yarra City Council

Boroondara City Council

Sealife Trust

Lord Mayor Charitable Foundation

- Thrive: A Sustainable Association for a Sustainable Yarra
- Proactive: Protecting the Yarra River Corridor Through Better Planning

Victorian Government,

Port Phillip Bay Fund, Projects Funding:

- Litter and Flows
- The Yarra Atlas
- The Yarra River Blitz
- Styrofoam: Sources and Solutions

Community Skills Development Grants:

- Building Capacity in the Friends Network
- Building a Yarra River Community

Issacson-Davis Foundation

Shelmerdine Foundation

Myer Foundation

Waterkeeper Alliance

Sponsors

Morgan Wealth Management

City of Melbourne

Event Sponsors

Melbourne Water Corporation

Cleanaway

Studley Park Boathouse

Parks Victoria

Government Agency Collaborators

Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP)

Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)

Melbourne Water

Parks Victoria

Consultants

Ethos Urban (noting James Reid, April Valle, Bianka Covic, Phoebe Harrison)

180 Degrees (noting Deborah Placido, Kasin

Athulathmudali, Maggie Du, Maneesh

Selvarajah. Qun Dian Zhang, Shrey Mehtra,

Josh Azik)

Cressida Bradley

Business and Group Members

Alluvium Consulting

Aqua Deck Pty Ltd

Aquatica Environmental

Bend of Islands Conservation Association

Camberwell Senior Citizens Multi Cultural

Club

Collingwood & Abbotsford Residents'

Association (CARA)

Cool Australia Trust

Credo Financial Group

Dread Pirate Sound System

Eco Aspects Pty Ltd

Finbar Neighbourhood House Inc

Five Consulting Pty Ltd

Friends of Damper Creek Reserve Inc.

Friends of Merri Creek

Friends of Scotchmans Creek and Valley

Reserve Inc

Friends of the Yarra Valley Parks (FYVP)

G.L.A.D.E.

Gowrie Victoria Docklands

Healesville Environment Watch Inc

INCC Yarra Paddlers

Johns Hill Landcare Group Inc.

Jumping Creek Catchment Landcare Group

Kirinari Kayak Klub

Ludlow Bar & Dining Room

Manningham City Council

Melbourne Boat Hire

Melbourne Girls' College

Melbourne University Boat Club

Melbournwalks.com

Native Fish Australia (Vic) Inc.

Olmsted

Practical Ecology Pty Ltd

Riverland Conservation Society (RCS)

Ross Allen Consulting

Rotary Club of Richmond

Storm Consulting Pty Ltd

The Australian Environmental Films Association

Trinity Grammar School

Water Stewardship Australia

Yarra Climate Action Now

Yarra Dheran Advisory Committee

Yarra River Business Association

Capstone Project Partners

CeRDI, Federation University

Cleanwater Group

Port Phillip EcoCentre

Event Contributors

Abbotsford Riverbankers

Aquayak Kayaks

Arbory

Beach Patrol

Bunnings Warehouse

City of Melbourne

Clean up Australia

Dish and Spoon Cafe

Footscray City Rowing Club

Friends of Merri Creek

Genovese Coffee

Inflatable Regatta

Kanteen

Kayak Melbourne

Keep Victoria Beautiful

Lilly Bee Wraps

Love our Street

Melbourne City Marina

Melbourne Girls College

Melbourne University Boat Club

Merri Creek Management Committee

Monash University

Morgan Stanley

Newtech Poly

Paddle Victoria

The Plastic Runner

RMIT University

Port Places

Practical Ecology

Red Rock Venues

Richmond Rowing Club

Riverland Bars

RMIT

Sea Kayak Australia

Sealife Aquarium

Serco Waste Collection

Sound Warehouse

Stephen Curtain Wildlife Filmmaker

Strathcona Baptist Girls Grammar School

Strike Bowling

Tangaroa Blue

Jack Vanzet

Victoria University

Werribee Riverkeeper Association

Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung Tribal Land Council

Yarra Pools

Key Volunteers

Kate Arnold

Maryann Ballantyne

Anthony Despotellis

Ross Headifen

Ramona Headifen

Michel Honnegger

Sebastian Pivet

Will Shelmerdine

Anna Ridgeway

Karin Traeger

Work Experience Students/Interns

Isabella Blick – RMIT

Miriam Sheridan - RMIT

Poppy McCammon - Brunswick High School

