



GREENLINE PROJECT

Submission from the Yarra Riverkeeper Association

OVERVIEW

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association (YRKA) believes that the Yarra, Birrarung – our beautiful, spiritually significant, and resilient river – brings life, joy, and balance along its 242 kilometres journey from source to sea. The river we know, and love, is not just water, but lands, terrain, ecosystems, people, community, and culture – together as one living and integrated natural entity from source to sea.

The Greenline project presents a unique opportunity to support the Yarra, Birrarung river and all her inhabitants as she passes through the city. But it is not without its challenges. Existing built infrastructure that overpowers the river's 'parklands', pollution from industry, commerce and people, a growing urban population, and the impacts of climate change threaten the life and liveability of the river.

Meeting these challenges requires the ability to rethink our relationship with the river and nature more generally, and how we can live in better balance with the lifeforce of the city.

YRKA believes that this is possible by staying true to the broad principles of net gain – particularly for the environment and Melbourne's Traditional Owner culture. This requires some difficult choices to be made about how Greenline is designed and implemented. But, with the right leadership Greenline can be an example for Australia and the world.

WHO WE ARE

Founded in 2005, YRKA is a values-driven community-based organisation that works with communities, Traditional Owners, governments (local, state, and federal), statutory authorities, and businesses to advocate for the health of the whole river. We are a not-for-profit organisation with a paid staff and volunteer Board. We are independent of the government and transparent in our decision-making.

Our vision is a healthy, protected and loved Yarra, Birrarung River. We seek to understand and partner with Traditional Owners to re-energise the river ecologically and culturally, bringing back biodiversity and health. Every day we work to make this possible, through vibrant advocacy, education, community engagement, on-the-ground litter and regeneration programs, and fundraising.

Our policy achievements include the initial advocacy for the Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act, as well as for the Yarra River Planning controls. We seek to influence policy and policy decisions from an informed position.

As Melbourne's population grows and the climate crisis worsens, the Yarra, Birrarung is coming under increasing environmental pressure, pollution, and habitat fragmentation affecting biodiversity and health. Riverkeepers are vital to keeping the Yarra, Birrarung healthy.



SUBMISSION

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association exists so that the Yarra, Birrarung River and all her tributaries can be healthy, protected and loved. Greenline's existence should support this goal wholeheartedly along its four-kilometre length from Birrarung Marr to Bolte Bridge.

Fundamental to Greenline is its ability to actualise the Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act (2017) and the Yarra Strategic Plan (Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo) (2022-2032).

The Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act required the development of a community vision for the river. That vision, recommended to be read in full, concludes with these two sentences:

"Its (The River's) health and integrity are paramount and uncompromised. What is good for the Yarra is good for all."

The community vision is what we should be working towards with the design and implementation of Greenline.

Protection of waterway assets must be prioritised over intrusive recreational uses which may impact their health. Reversing damage can only ever be done imperfectly even when it is supported and resourced, which is rare.

Melbourne Water's Healthy Waterways Strategy recognises that it will be a monumental challenge to prevent further decline in our waterways as pressure on them mounts from climate change and urban pressures. A business-as-usual approach will certainly lead to further decline in our waterways,

YRKA commends the Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act and how it flows into the Yarra Strategic Plan, as well as the Healthy Waterways Strategy and the Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy. All are important guiding documents for Greenline.

We make our comments the Greenline project taking guidance from enacted Government legislation, adopted policies and strategies.

Greenline's opportunity statement

While the statement acknowledges the importance of the Yarra, Birrarung River, the river does not appear to be an equal partner in the project, with Melbourne's population being the priority beneficiaries. We would like to see the river, her parklands and all her inhabitants to be considered more prominently, and the concept of 'net gain' for the environment front and centre in explaining the purpose and outcomes of Greenline. We would also like to recommend that Greenline's connection to the river be emphasised (for what happens on land affects the water).

Net gain

Imagine an eel trap/net that catches all the elements that support the river as a living integrated entity, where there is ecological and cultural regeneration, and where society benefits from increased understanding and connectedness. This is the concept of net gain – where people and nature benefit equally.



Environmental net gain

YRKA believes that Greenline should result in net gain for the environment, it is entirety, as well as within different precincts. This includes habitat health and connectivity, biodiversity and resilience planning. There should be:

- net gains to river health overall, with improvements in water quality, biodiversity and terrestrial and aquatic habitat
- no physical impact on the river herself in the form of encroachment of paths (for example, any land used to create a continuous pathway should not be at the expense of the river herself)
- maximisation of green space and Indigenous species wherever possible, and not just where it is easy to do so, or because it provides amenity for humans
- significant effort put into ensuring that Greenline increases the city's climate resilience through the use of nature-based solutions (for example, mangroves and green edges)
- reduction in noise pollution from land and water-based transport (for example, further set-backs or removal of trains and cars from the river corridor)
- the use of permeable surfaces wherever new paths are constructed with sufficient opportunity for stormwater to be 'cleaned' before entry into the river (for example, rain gardens)
- opportunities for light and shade to occur along the river, but in amounts that are beneficial to the river (current shading of the river by large high-rise buildings is problematic)

Cultural net gain

YRKA believes that Greenline should result in cultural net gain, it is entirety, as well as within different precincts. This includes access to Country, cultural way-points, and First Nations natural resource management. There should be:

- acknowledgement of Country throughout Greenline, including access to Country by Traditional Owners to conduct cultural activities, and through signage, way-points/interpretation, and understanding place. There should be no doubt to visitors to this area that they are on Wurundjeri Country.
- special recognition of First Nation culture and connection to Country throughout the Yarro Yarro Precinct. The current state of this place is disrespectful to Traditional Owners and many improvements could be made.

Social and recreational net gain

YRKA believes that Greenline should result in social and recreational net gain, but only when environmental and cultural net gain can be equally achieved. This includes improved connection to Country, cross-cultural visibility and acknowledgement, improved recreational access and quality amenity. There should be:

- opportunity of access for those with disabilities (for example, ramps to access river spaces, signage in Braille)
- improved access to the river for non-powered boat craft (canoes, kayaks, SUPs)



- signage and interpretation that details First Nations, as well as other cultures (as relevant)
- recreational infrastructure that is environmentally-friendly and resilient, that reflects the river's character.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Greenline Project. We believe that it can be a transformative project and brings people and nature together, if designed and implemented well.

On behalf of the Yarra Riverkeeper Association.

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