



YOUR YARRA, BIRRARUNG: HEALTHY, PROTECTED, AND LOVED


STRATEGIC PLAN 2022 – 2025

Yarra Riverkeeper Association



Acknowledgement of Country

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association acknowledges that the lands and waterways of the Yarra, Birrarung catchment, are the unceded territories of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples. We pay our respect to their Ancestors, who cared for Country since time began, and to all Traditional Owners who continue to speak and care for their Country. We acknowledge that the river now called the Yarra has always been known as the Birrarung by its custodians.



**“It is only by walking
Country together, by talking
Country together, that we can
heal Country together.”**

Uncle Dave Wandin, Wurundjeri
Woi-wurrung Elder



Your Yarra, Birrarung: Healthy, Protected, and Loved
YARRA RIVERKEEPER ASSOCIATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2025
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Cover: Sarah Sterrett. 'Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo' - what's good for the Yarra is good for all.

Photo (this page): Growling Grass Frog, Melbourne Water from Flickr
Photos page 5: A wombat peaks out from his burrow by the river, Corentin Massayeau
The Riverkeeper boat patrols the lower reach of the Yarra, Birrarung, Sarah Sterrett
Regeneration of the riverbank, Anthony Despotellis

ABOUT US

We believe that the Yarra, Birrarung – our beautiful, spiritually significant, and resilient river – brings life, joy, and balance along her 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.

Founded in 2004, the Yarra Riverkeeper Association 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.

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.

Healthy



**“Our vision is a healthy
protected and loved
Yarra, Birrarung River”**

Loved



Protected



THE YARRA, BIRRARUNG

The Yarra, Birrarung River, her tributaries and creeks span over 4,000 square kilometres, and encompass more than a third of Victoria's population.

The Yarra, Birrarung is a unique ecosystem that brings natural systems, culture, and people together and is one of Victoria's significant and critical natural resources. The river provides 70 percent of Melbourne's drinking water and is home to hundreds of wildlife species, including platypus, rakali, blackfish, eels, owls and lyrebirds, turtles, wombats and kangaroos. The River has been a major food source and meeting place for First Nations peoples for more than 40,000 years. Melbourne, Naarm would not exist without the river, but this has come at great cost to her Traditional Owners and the environment.

During COVID-19 the Yarra, Birrarung has provided a place to contemplate, revive our spirits, and enjoy, whether walking, canoeing, fishing, weeding, planting, or just sitting by it. The river has lived and breathed with us during difficult times as it has done in the past. She has cared for us.

Unfortunately, the river is under threat. Issues such as poorly planned riverside development, unhealthy flow regimes, declining biodiversity, climate change, plus contaminated stormwater and pollution put the river and its flora and fauna in danger of degradation. Pollution from litter and a cocktail of urban wastes and treated sewage effluent has resulted in water quality well below acceptable standards. Urban and industrial development has resulted in her wondrous wetlands, and floodplains being severely damaged.

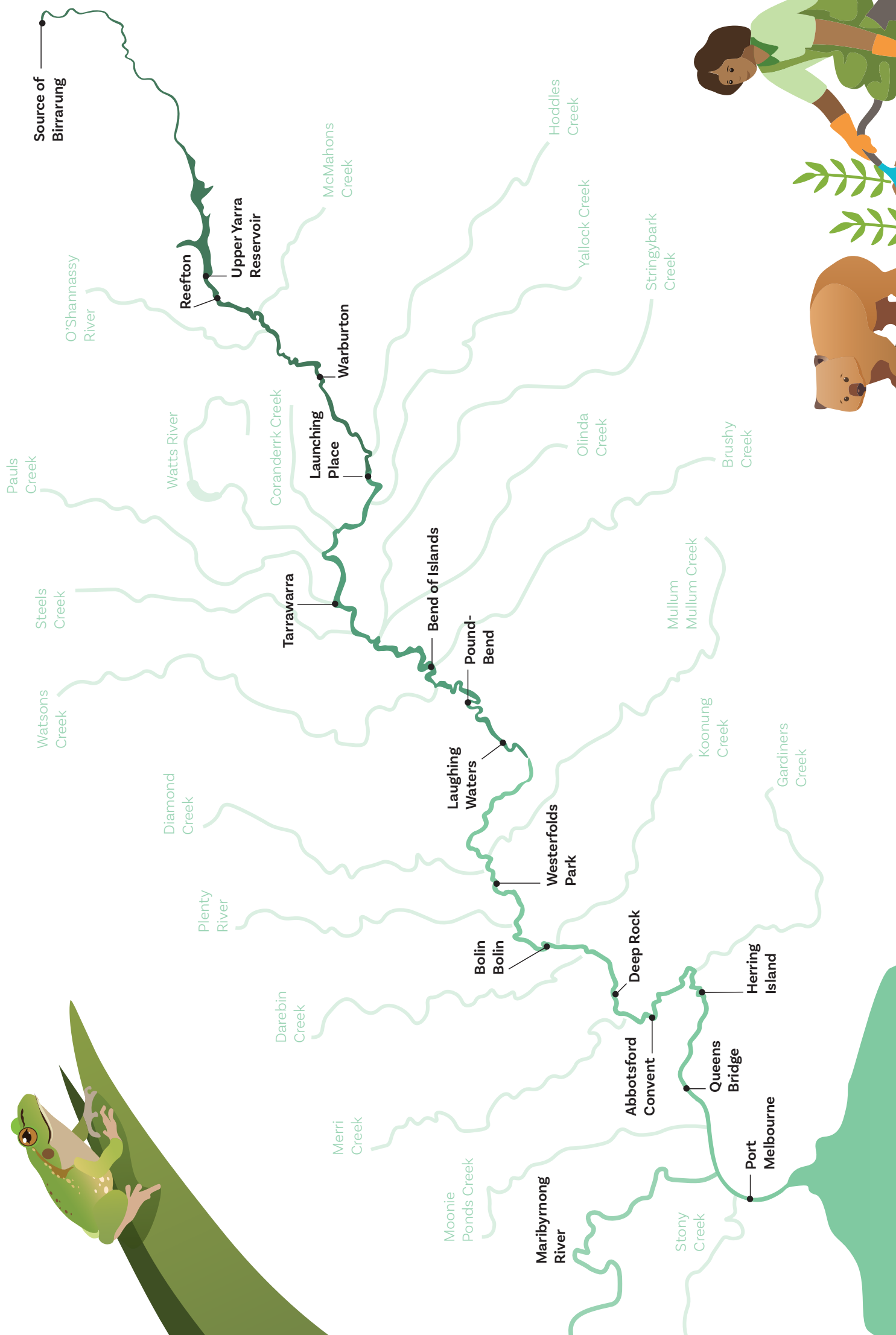
The future

The many pressures facing the Yarra, Birrarung and the catchment present not only problems but also opportunities for our work. The Yarra Riverkeeper Association has unique capabilities, insight, and connection to the river and its communities, and proud history as a leading advocate for the river.

This plan will build on what we've achieved during the past 18 years of operation and take our work forward in new and exciting ways – not only in what we do but in how we work as an organisation and with others.

We will build on our achievements and our culture of challenging the status quo, innovating, and leading with others to support the attainment of ecological and cultural health of the river.

We are an ally of Traditional Owners and all communities who fight for the river as a living, breathing entity with rights of her own.



Yarra River 50-Year Community Vision

Flowing from source to sea, it is the resilient lifeblood of past, present, and future generations of Victorians. It connects and enriches our flourishing city, suburbs, regions and beyond.

Our Yarra River, Birrarung, its essential role in our lives and its rich history, are respected, understood, and protected. It has cared for us for thousands of years and will for thousands to come.

The vital and continued role of Traditional Owners as custodians of the River, and its role in their culture, is recognised, and celebrated.

Our Yarra River, Birrarung, and its diverse surrounding landscapes provide a place of refuge, recreation, learning and livelihood. It brings communities together and supports sustainable local economies.

Its clean waters and connected network of thriving green spaces nurture biodiversity and deepen the relationship between people and nature.

Our Yarra River, Birrarung, is respected as a sacred natural living entity and everyone takes responsibility for its care. Its health and integrity are paramount and uncompromised.

What is good for the Yarra is good for all (Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo)."



Kankeen Night Heron
Photo: Geoff Whalan from Flickr

STRATEGIC FRAMING

Our 2022 – 2025 Strategic Plan seeks to build on our successes and strengthen our efforts by holding duty bearers to account and by collaborating with Traditional Owners and others to ensure a healthy, protected and loved Yarra, Birrarung.

Our strategic plan supports the aspirations and goals of a range of policy frameworks in Victoria:

- The Yarra River Planning Controls (2016)
- The Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017
- Healthy Waterways Strategy (Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn) 2018-28
- Nhanbu narrun ba ngargunin twarn Birrarung: Ancient Spirit and Lore of the Yarra (2018)
- The Yarra River 50-year Community Vision (2018), and
- The Yarra River Strategic Plan (Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo) (2022-2032).

More broadly, it aligns with various international frameworks and agreements:

- Universal Declaration on the Rights of Rivers
- The OECD Principles on Water Governance
- UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021 – 2030), and
- Sustainable Development Goals (2015 – 2030).

Our Values:



First Nations reconciliation:

We believe in action towards reconciliation with Traditional Owners. We do this by actively listening, learning, and partnering with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong people to support cultural learning and healing of Country.



Collaboration and learning:

We believe that everyone has a contribution to make to improve our relationship with the river. We do this by working with and partnering with others, including Traditional Owners, community groups, government, authorities, businesses, and individuals to increase our collective knowledge, skills, reach and experience.

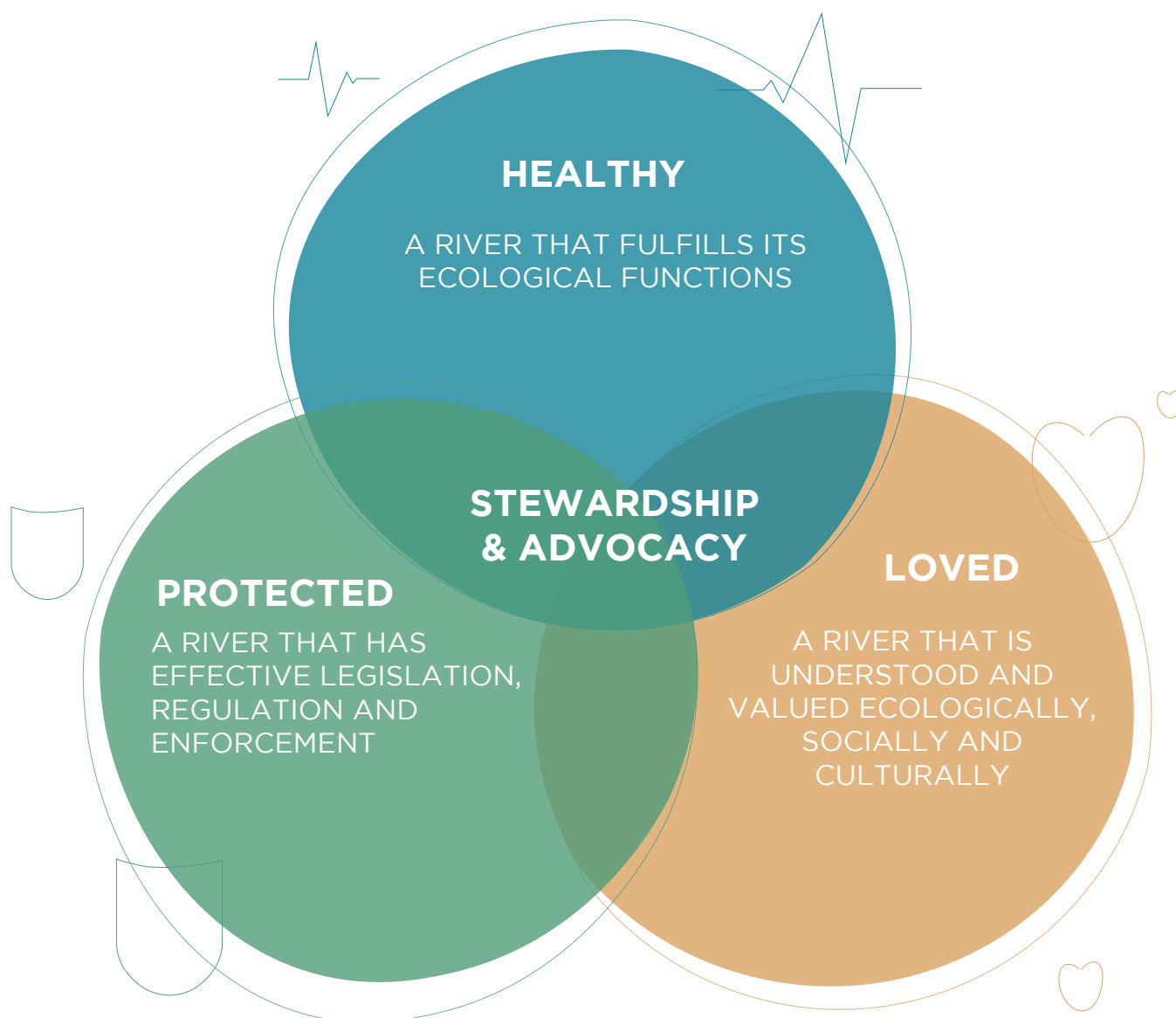


Transparency and accountability:

We believe in being open about the work we do and holding ourselves and others to account. We do this by being open about the work we do and publishing our work for everyone to see.

Positive impact through stewardship and advocacy

At the heart of our work are stewardship and advocacy. We believe that a healthy, protected and loved Yarra, Birrarung river is only possible by improving relationships between people and nature, and advocacy with decision-makers to bring about positive change and protective actions. As stewards, we seek to nurture relationships between people and the life force of rivers, waterways, and natural systems. As advocates, we use evidence from research, citizen science, and decades of on-the-ground experience to speak honestly and with confidence on behalf of the river and her ecosystems, and the communities who love and care for her.





WORK STREAM OUTCOMES

Good river health decisions and actions are achieved through the co-creation of knowledge, advocacy, government engagement, and partnerships with diverse stakeholders.

INFLUENCE

RIVER HEALTH

Improved ecological health, biodiversity, water quality, cultural healing, and climate resilience is realised through good practice regeneration approaches.


Litter and polystyrene pollution are reduced through research and multi-stakeholder engagement.

Diverse individuals, communities and businesses are able to increase their understanding of, and be involved in, river stewardship and advocacy through social and traditional media, participation in events, training and knowledge-sharing opportunities.

COMMUNITY

ORGANISATION

Strengthened efficacy, efficiency, and resilience of the Yarra Riverkeeper Association is fostered through good governance and practice, transparency, and accountability.

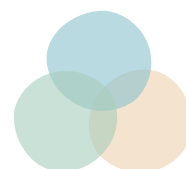


The Yarra, Birrarung has many stories to tell
along her 242km journey from source to sea.
Photo: Charlotte Sterrett



INFLUENCE

Impact area	Outcomes	Strategies	Targets
Knowledge	<p>IO1 Research and knowledge developed align with TO perspectives and priorities.</p> <p>IO2 YRKA and partner 'knowledge' is used by decision-makers to inform river policy and practice.</p>	<p>IS1 Liaise with Traditional Owners, governments, authorities, community groups and other stakeholders to identify and undertake research in mutual areas of interest.</p> <p>IS2 Use research and knowledge generated in public and private forums to influence decision-making.</p>	<p>IT1 At least two research/knowledge products are co-led by TOs over the life of the strategy.</p> <p>IT2a At least one YRKA and partner research/knowledge product, two submissions to inquiries, and at least one conference presentation annually.</p> <p>IT2b YRKA publications are referenced in multiple government policies and strategies over the life of the strategy.</p>
Government engagement	<p>IO3 Local, State, and Federal government representatives consider YRKA as a key stakeholder in government policies and legislation.</p>	<p>IS3a Build and strengthen relationships with key government representatives and influencers at Local, State and Federal levels.</p> <p>IS3b Be an active influencer of the Birrarung Council.</p> <p>IS3c Use election campaigns to influence political commitments on river issues.</p>	<p>IT3a At least ten meetings with Local, State and Federal representatives (boat trips, visits to regeneration sites) annually.</p> <p>IT3b At least one engagement with the Birrarung Council annually.</p> <p>IT3c 50% of election commitments are supported by at least one major party at Local, State and Federal levels.</p> <p>IT3a, b & c Evidence of YRKA policy positions in government policies and legislation.</p>

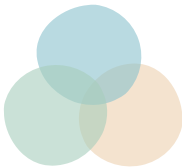


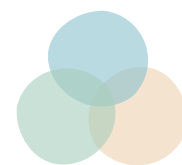
Partnerships	<p>IO4 Traditional Owners want to partner with YRKA to heal Country</p> <p>IO5 Melbourne Water, DEECA, EPA, Parks Victoria, local government and others engage with YRKA as a key river stakeholder.</p>	<p>IS4 Strengthen and nurture relationships with Traditional Owners through collaboration and co-learning in TO-led and supported projects.</p> <p>IS5a Strengthen existing relationships with Melbourne Water, DEECA, Parks Victoria and others through research, partnerships, and co-learning.</p> <p>IS5b Work with Melbourne Water to deliver on key aspects of the Yarra Strategic Plan and the Healthy Waterway Strategy.</p>	<p>IT4 At least two collaborations that are TO-led or supported projects over the life of the strategy.</p> <p>IT5a At least quarterly attendance at partner events annually.</p> <p>IT5b At least two funded partnership projects with key stakeholders (environmental flows, climate change, polystyrene) over the life of the strategy.</p>	<p>IT6a Two local advocacy initiatives annually.</p> <p>IT6b Engagements with one landowner annually on an issue of mutual interest.</p>
Stewardship	<p>IO6 Targeted communities and landowners are effective stewards of the land and waterways they manage/live on.</p>	<p>IO6a Strengthen the capacity of community groups to undertake targeted advocacy initiatives</p> <p>IO6b Strengthen relationships with targeted landowners so that they implement stewardship activities.</p>		

COMMUNITY

Impact Area	Outcomes	Strategies	Targets
Communication	CO1 YRKA is a trusted and credible environmental organisation by media, community groups, supporters, and key stakeholders.	<p>CS1a Reach more diverse audiences through targeted initiatives, including collaborations with the Arts.</p> <p>CS1b Foster relationships with media outlets and influencers to increase YRKA content uptake.</p> <p>CS1c Develop TO cultural and language standards for all communications.</p>	<p>CT1a1 100% increase in people receiving communications across various platforms compared to baseline.</p> <p>CT1a2 At least one annual event or engagement with LGBTQ+, refugee or other minority groups.</p> <p>CT1b At least eight media pieces annually.</p> <p>CS1c All communications adhere to TO cultural and language standards.</p>
Community and supporter engagement	<p>CO2 Opportunities are provided to enable diverse participation in river stewardship and advocacy activities.</p> <p>CO3 YRKA has an educated and engaged network of supporters.</p>	<p>CS2 Provide opportunities for people to participate in both stewardship and advocacy initiatives (regeneration, litter, cultural awareness, and specific campaigns related to river issues)</p> <p>CS3 Educate supporters with written guidance, training and knowledge sharing opportunities to increase skills in river issues.</p>	<p>CT2 20% annual growth in participation in YRKA activities from baseline.</p> <p>CT3 At least four webinars or training opportunities are provided annually.</p>

Business partner engagement	CO4 YRKA is a corporate partner of choice by B Corp, 1% for the planet organisations and local champion businesses.	CS4 Develop and implement a Business Partnerships Program that recognises the trends in corporate giving while aligning to YRKA values for sustainable funding.	CT4a One business partner event delivered annually. CT4b 200% increase in the value of business partners over the life of the strategy (from baseline).
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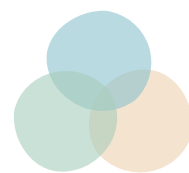
Impact Area	Outcomes	Strategies	Indicators
Regeneration	RO1 YRKA has a network of ecologically functioning regeneration sites in strategic locations along the river (as part of the Great Birrarung Parkland)	RS1 Liaise with key stakeholders to identify strategic locations along the river to undertaken regeneration activities.	RT1 Establishment/maintenance of regeneration sites in targeted locations along the river (5 lower, 2 middle, 3 upper).
	RO2 Regeneration sites are culturally sensitive and climate-resilient.	RS2a Combine traditional and scientific knowledge with climate-resilient practices to apply good practice regeneration approaches and techniques.	RT2a1 Develop a Regeneration Monitoring Plan (RMP) that includes key indicators, and report progress annually.
	RO3 Community groups view YRKA as a key ally of their regeneration efforts.	RS2b Partner with NARRAP and Traditional Owners to ensure YRKA and community sites support healing of Country. RS3 Work with friends groups (auspicing, written guidance, ground support, mentoring).	RT2a2 All sites are categorised as either adequate or above against indicators in the 2025 RMP report. RT2b All YRKA sites integrate culturally sensitive practices. RT3 At least two Friend groups are provided with support annually.
Litter	RO4 Polystyrene (EPS) is better regulated by governments.	RS4/5 Develop relationships and undertake targeted advocacy with governments and industry on EPS pollution and good practices.	RT4a Evidence of increased polystyrene legislation/regulation by governments.
	RO5 Construction, retail and food markets better manage, use, and dispose of EPS.	RS6 Undertake targeted research on the multiple benefits of EPS alternatives.	RT4b Dedicated funding for a polystyrene project as part of the Yarra Strategic Plan.
	RO6 Environmentally friendly alternatives to polystyrene are being used by industry.	RS7 Work with local communities to increase awareness and knowledge of EPS and alternatives.	RT5a Participation in industry events. RT5b Construction industry guidelines published. RT6 Research on EPS alternatives published.
	RO7 Communities are advocates for a reduction of EPS and the adoption of enviro friendly alternatives.		RT7 5 communities participating in a polystyrene pollution campaign and taking self-directed actions with governments and industry.



Rakali drinking from the riverside
Photo: Ed Dunens from Flickr

ORGANISATION

Impact area	Outcomes	Strategies	Targets
Waterkeeper movement building	<p>OO1 The Maribyrnong river & Waterways Association (MRWA) is a recognised community and waterkeeper organisation.</p> <p>OO2 The Waterkeeper movement is strengthened globally and in Oceania</p>	<p>OS1a YRKA supports the development of the MRKA strategic plan</p> <p>OS1b YRKA supports the development of funding proposals.</p> <p>OS2a YRKA provides mentoring support to help new WKA groups in Oceania</p> <p>OS2b YRKA is a member of the WKA Council selected working groups</p>	<p>OT1a MRWA has developed its own strategic plan by 30 June 2023.</p> <p>OT1b MRWA has sufficient resources to support its strategic priorities.</p> <p>OT2a Oceania has six new WKA groups by June 2025</p> <p>OT2b YRKA attends one global WKA conference and leads the Oceania regional conference.</p>
	<p>OO3 YRKA attracts, develops, and retains talented and passionate individuals (staff and volunteers).</p>	<p>OS3a Provide professional development opportunities for staff and volunteers.</p> <p>OS3b Increase staff remuneration and benefits in line with industry standards and cost of living.</p> <p>OS3c Establish and maintain effective systems and resources to support wellbeing, and empower our team to participate, learn and prosper.</p>	<p>OT3a1 All staff have benefited from at least one professional development opportunity over the life of the strategy.</p> <p>OT3a2 All staff have received training in basic skill sets (advocacy, communication, reconciliation, and stewardship).</p> <p>OT3b More than 70% retention rate of staff over the life of the strategy.</p> <p>OT3c Over 75% of staff and volunteer satisfaction with YRKA.</p>
First Nations Reconciliation	<p>OO4 YRKA has taken concrete and meaningful steps to reconcile with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples.</p>	<p>OS4 Listen and learn from TOs and develop and implement a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).</p>	<p>OT4 RAP developed by June 2024</p>



Organisational Resilience	<p>OO5 YRKA has effective policies and organisational governance practices.</p> <p>OO6 YRKA has a high performing Board and Executive Leadership team.</p>	<p>OS5 Review of organisational policies and procedures.</p> <p>OS6 Review of Board and Executive leadership roles and responsibilities. Development and implementation of a performance and skill evaluation framework for the board and executive leadership.</p>	<p>OT5 All policies and procedures reviewed and updated.</p> <p>OT6a YRKA Board or staff has at least one First Nations Representative and a dedicated fundraising member.</p> <p>OT6b Board and Committees meet regularly and are effective.</p> <p>OT6c Annual reports are published and include information on diversity, and staff remuneration, with independent audits.</p>
Financial sustainability	<p>OO7 YRKA has sufficient resources to implement the strategy fully.</p>	<p>OS7 Develop and implement a funding strategy (unrestricted and grant) that increases and diversifies funding sources (including philanthropy) and allocates resources effectively.</p>	<p>OT7a Funding strategy developed by 30 September 2022.</p> <p>OT7b Overall funding of at least \$650k in year 1, \$750k in year 2, and \$800k in year 3.</p> <p>OT7c Funding from any one source does not exceed 40% in any year of the strategy.</p>

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

To achieve our goal of a healthy, protected and loved Yarra, Birrarung River and tributaries, we work with others for collective impact.



Victorian and Federal governments

We work with governments, and responsible agencies & authorities to identify emerging issues and advocate for policy and practice change beneficial to the river.



Non-government organisations

We work with other like-minded environmental, climate change and advocacy organisations to advance river health, protection, and care.



Industry and business

We work with industry and businesses to improve their business policies and practices, and to increase support for our work and their environmental duty.



Universities, TAFE, and other research institutions

We partner with research institutions to increase the state of knowledge on river issues and ensure our decisions are based on the best available science and knowledge.



Local Government

We work with local governments that are part of the Yarra Collaboration Committee to implement Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo (Yarra Strategic Plan), and to identify and address local issues of concern.



Regulators

We work with and partner with regulators to support positive outcomes for the river and to identify risks to the river that can be addressed efficiently and effectively.



Communities

We listen to, work with and support communities so that they can be better stewards and advocates for the river.



Media

We partner with media organisations to increase awareness and knowledge of our work and the work of others engaged in river issues.

Planning, monitoring, and reporting

Each financial year, YRKA produces an annual plan that outlines our proposed actions for the year ahead which is aligned with the three-year strategy. We report on our plan each year in our Annual Report.

At the end of the strategic plan period, we will conduct a review of progress against our plan.

The plan will be updated based on changes to the internal and external environment, although the overall goal and objectives will remain the same.



Traditional Owners

We actively listen, learn and partner with Wurundjeri Woiwurrung and Bunurong people to ensure the strategy fosters cultural learning and healing of Country.



Many hands make light work at Murandaka.
Photo: Parks Victoria.



The sun sets on the Yarra, Birrarung.
Photo: Ben Lovell.



WATERKEEPER ALLIANCE

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association is a member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, a worldwide network of more than 350 inspiring, determined organisations in 49 countries dedicated to protecting the world's waterways. Founded in 1999, it brings together all waterkeeper organisations to strengthen and grow a global movement for healthy and clean water to be enjoyed by all.



YARRA
RIVERKEEPER