

Strategic **Direction**

The Yarra River, and its tributaries,
Healthy, Protected & Loved

Acknowledgment

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 respect to Traditional Owners, who have and continue to care for Country. We acknowledge that the river now called Yarra has always been known as the Birrarung by its custodians.

Thank you

We acknowledge and thank our members, partners and stakeholders that provided their reflections via a strategic planning survey or workshop to inform the development of this strategy. We value your insights and contribution, and look forward to collaborating in further advancing our shared vision for a Yarra, Birrarung that is healthy, protected and loved.

Our Story So Far

The Evolution of the Yarra Riverkeeper Association

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association was established in 2004 to be a community champion for the Yarra River. From advocating successfully for environmental flows during the Millenium drought, it went on to advocate for specific legislation to protect and enhance the Yarra River. We are now an influential and respected advocate, bringing the voice of the community into the protection of the Yarra, Birrarung.

The Yarra Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act became law in 2017. This legislation is supported by Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo, the Yarra Strategic Plan. We are proud to have played a role in bringing about this policy and legislative framework to protect and enhance the Yarra.

During these years, a number of other community groups and organisations have emerged along the Yarra, Birrarung. These organisations are strongly aligned with YRKA, focused on caring for the Yarra, its tributaries or broader ecosystem. Concern and care for the environment has also grown over this time, and we see increasing numbers of community members eager for opportunities to connect to the River and contribute to its health and regeneration. Over our 20 year history, we have achieved

important goals in the protection and awareness of the Birrarung. As we look to the future, our vision remains for a Yarra that is healthy, protected and loved. We see other people and organisations similarly invested in this mission, creating opportunities for concerted action towards what is now a shared vision.

We are looking to build on our achievements by working with others to advocate for action to improve the health of the River, deepen our understanding of the River as a living entity and inspire the community's love. Our strategic direction is to focus on partnership, collaboration and convening the many interested others to join us to achieve more for the Yarra, together.

We will expand the community of people involved in 'riverkeeping' in support of our Yarra, Birrarung. This means working together for shared advocacy goals, exchanging information, tools and resources for joined up action and providing opportunities for people and communities to connect with this River and ecosystem.

We invite you to join us.

The Yarra Birraring

The Yarra, Birrarung River, its tributaries and creeks span over 4,000 square kilometers 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. It is one of Victoria's significant and critical natural resources. The River provides 70% of Melbourne's drinking water and is home to hundreds of wildlife species, including platypus, rakali, blackfish, eels, owls, lyrebirds, turtles, wombats and kangaroos. The River has sustained 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 Traditional Owners and the environment.

The River is increasingly under threat. Poorly planned riverside development is encroaching on the River corridor. Biodiversity is declining with an increase in pest plants and animals such as deer. Development in the Yarra catchment is intensifying stormwater pollution in the River through an increase in impervious surfaces. Climate change scenarios anticipate less rain overall but more intense rain events, increasing stormwater degradation of the River and its banks. Stormwater carries pollution such as microplastics, faecal matter and run off from cars into our waterways. Water quality suffers to the detriment of the animals living in the River. Urban and industrial development has severely damaged the wetlands and floodplains along the River. We have to work even harder to maintain the status quo, let alone improve many of the key health indicators for the River.

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

Yarra River 50-year Community Vision

The Yarra River 50-year community vision is the first of its kind for an urban waterway in Australia. Thousands of Victorians came together to develop the community vision. It expresses the community's hopes for the river and provides the strategic framework to protect the waterway.



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.

Yarra River 50-year Community Vision
Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo -
Yarra Strategic Plan, 2022



Looking to the future

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association has a proud history as a leading advocate for the River. Our strategic direction builds on this foundation, focusing on convening and expanding the communities of people involved in riverkeeping along the Yarra.

This strategic direction supports the aspirations and goals outlined in existing regulatory and policy frameworks in Victoria, including:

- Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017
- Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo: Yarra Strategic Plan 2022 - 2032
- Healthy Waterways Strategy 2018-2028
- Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy 2022

Our work is focused on ensuring that the positive actions and outcomes outlined in these documents are delivered for the good of the River and community

The work of riverkeeping involves us all, to care for the river and tributaries, to learn from Traditional Owners and embrace caring for Country practices, to regenerate wetlands and care for wildlife, to work in partnership for better outcomes for our Yarra, Birrarung and our communities.

Our Purpose

For the Yarra River, and its tributaries, to be healthy, protected and loved.

Our Goals

- 1 Effective environmental governance of the Yarra, Birrarung
- 2 Greater knowledge and appreciation of the Yarra, Birrarung
- 3 An active and informed Birrarung community
- 4 Coordinated action for collective benefit

Our Roles

Advocate

A strong community voice for the Yarra, Birrarung

Convene

Nurture a network of Yarra champions to advance a shared agenda

Collaborate

Partner with others to do more, together

Strategic Direction

“ We will **expand the community of people involved in ‘riverkeeping’** in support of our Yarra, Birrarung. ”



Advocate

YRKA and community partner knowledge is used by decision-makers to inform River policy and practice

Regularly engage and participate in various forums and networks to promote protection and care for the Birrarung and broader ecosystem

Produce and disseminate knowledge and information about the Birrarung actions and goals outlined in existing policy frameworks in Victoria. Our work is focused on ensuring that the positive actions and outcomes outlined in these documents are delivered for the good of the River and community.



Convene

Grow the network of people and organisations that love and care for the Birrarung

Support and strengthen the capacity of community groups, sharing skills and resources to advance a shared mission as riverkeepers

Provide opportunities for diverse cohorts and communities to have experiences on and along the Birrarung



Collaborate

Partner with diverse stakeholder groups to increase knowledge and action to advance a healthy and protected Birrarung

Collaborate with others to increase knowledge of the River, in the context of Traditional Owner self-determination and caring for Country practices

Bring partners and communities together for riverkeeping and regeneration at exemplar sites

Stay connected to the broader Waterkeeper movement, while retaining a primary focus on local networks

Our Strategic Direction in Action



