

THE YARRA RIVERKEEPER ASSOCIATION

Annual Report 2025

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 Woiwurrung 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 her custodians have always known the Yarra as the Birrarung.

We align our work with the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung Whole of Country Plan 2025 - 2035.

About Us

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association is an independent community-based organisation that advocates for the health and protection of the Yarra, Birrarung River and all its tributaries.

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Cover photo: David Redfearn
Design: Anthony Despotellis

From the President

Janet Bolitho

Reflections on the year

Yarra Riverkeeper Association thrives on engaging with our community. We create opportunities for people to connect with the Yarra Birrarung - to raise a concern, to act for the River.

This year, YRKA has benefitted greatly from the goodwill people have towards the Yarra and the Association.

In April, David Stevens ran the length of the River to raise funds for YRKA. He wanted to give back to the River along which he runs and leave a legacy for his grandchildren.

Judith Buckrich dedicated her wonderful book *Yarra Birrarung: Artists, Writers and the River* to YRKA in support of our work for the River.

YRKA grew Birrarung Riverfest from small beginnings in 2023 to 46 events in 2024. Riverfest brings together individuals and communities connecting to the River. Riverfest's unifying theme, *Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo* What's good for the River is good for all was widely shared. The living river is present in all our work.

YRKA has been pleased to support the work of the Narrap Rangers at Bolin Bolin Billabong through contributing to updated signage, and hosting a popular walk and talk event for Riverfest. We also partnered with Uncle Dave Wandin to expand the revegetation program along the Birrarung at Coranderrk.

The Swimmable Birrarung movement gained momentum. YRKA is galvanised to act on the stormwater pollution that makes the river unswimmable.

Puggle, YRKA's electric boat, has been out on the River this year under the skilful stewardship of volunteer skippers Kelvin Gedye and Palz Vaughan, hosting stakeholder meetings and monitoring the life of the river.

Anthony Despotellis concluded YRKA's funded work on polystyrene pollution in the Yarra River, highlighting construction sites as a major source requiring attention. A gifted educator and designer, Anthony has made a huge contribution to the Association over many years.

Emma Barnett brings a creative, thoughtful, approach to her community engagement work in the upper Yarra. Through playful activities, she builds understanding of river health and stormwater pollution amongst children and families.

YRKA's revegetation work, led by Andrew Wood, increases biodiversity and stabilises river banks. Phillips Fox Billabong, where YRKA works with Friends of Yarra Valley Flats, has become a demonstration site enriched with mid and ground story flora. Deer have become a significant threat to the viability of revegetation along the River and YRKA has urged the government to control the growing deer population.

YRKA has worked with colleagues in the Urban Waterways Alliance to raise a collective voice for urban waterways since their health and the health of the River is inseparable.

YRKA is proud to be part of the Concerned Waterways Alliance, a network of waterway groups which has become a respected and informed contributor to the issues facing waterways from Gippsland to the Barwon.

The Association has strengthened its financial position and consolidated its organisation under the steady hand of Operations Manager, Carina Watson.

In YRKA's 20th year, the need for a community voice for the River remains as important as ever.

Thank you to the Board for your input, advice and contribution. I acknowledge, in particular, Lara Werbeloff for leading our strategic work and Candice Charles for her rigour in her time as Treasurer and Andrew Lees for his deep commitment to the Yarra Flats parklands.

YRKA gratefully acknowledges the support of Melbourne Water in funding our 3 year partnership which has enabled us to further our shared goals for a healthy river. We are also grateful for the rich collaboration we enjoy in working with the Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo team who lead the implementation of the Yarra Strategic Plan.



Our Activities

Growing the community of river supporters

	1 Riverfest
	46 events
	2000+ attendees
	121 members (21% increase)
	14 business partners
	43,000 reach on Meta socials
	9 newsletters
	36.4% email newsletter open rate
	1804 subscribers (47% increase)

Bringing river supporters together to increase knowledge and stimulate action for the Yarra, Birrarung is key to the Association's strategy.

YRKA invested in Birrarung Riverfest 2024 to become the association's flagship event. In only its second year it doubled its program and tripled participation earning enthusiastic support from sponsors, hosts and attendees. A strong Riverfest brand was developed and backed by a communication and marketing strategy resulting in high exposure for YRKA as a community voice for the river and increased awareness of the river as a living entity. Riverfest featured in 31 media stories with a reach of 17m+

"Thank you so much for the opportunity of being included in the 2024 Birrarung riverfest, it was a total privilege to be a part of such a wonderful community grass roots event."

YRKA hosted three events during Riverfest, a walk and talk at Bolin Billabong, *Letters to the Birrarung* River Cruise and the finale event, *Our Birrarung Past, Present and Future*, on World Rivers Day.

YRKA developed its social media presence throughout the year increasing Facebook reach by 34%, interactions by 8.3% and content by 117%. Awareness and education campaigns highlighted threats such as litter, stormwater and deer and provided pointers on how to take action.

YRKA collaborated for a second year with RMIT University Communication Design for Social Change students in a joint project on stormwater education.

14 business members supported the work of the Association with a number also participating in Riverfest.

YRKA supporter David Stevens ran the length of the Yarra to raise money for YRKA in April. His "Let the Rivers Run" campaign raised \$3450 for YRKA and led to a new collaboration with his employer Swinburne University.

Sharing stories and learning about the Yarra, Birrarung

	4 Talks delivered
	280 Attendees at talks
	48 river cleanups
	828 participants in cleanups

Our corporate volunteering cleanup sessions saw 828 people join in 48 cleanup events (20 walking and 28 paddling). These sessions diverted many kilograms of litter from the river. Each session involves river education raising awareness for people who may have had little exposure to the river. Sessions were delivered with the support of the **Port Phillip EcoCentre** and **Up the Creek**.

Our community engagement officer Emma Barnett returned from parental leave in April and recommenced education sessions focussing in the upper catchment area.

YRKA hosted a popular revegetation workshop at Yarra Flats in May bringing together bush regeneration practitioners to share knowledge about restoring habitat in Birrarung's riparian zone.

Dr Judith Buchrich published *Yarra Birrarung: Artists, Writers and the River* in 2024 dedicating the book to YRKA. YRKA President Janet Bolitho was honoured to speak at the book launch at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria to an enthusiastic audience of 100 people.



Restoring the banks and billabongs

 **2400** plants planted

 **3** sites

 **2** ha

Andrew Wood, YRKA's valued revegetation lead, continued restoring sites through the middle Yarra. Working with the Friends of Yarra Flats and Yarra Valley Parklands, planting occurred at Phillips Fox Billabong in Ivanhoe, Banyule Billabong in Viewbank and at Montpelier Reserve in Lower Plenty. Andrew's meticulous maintenance of the sites resulted in more than 80% survival rate. However deer predation and damage has become a significant problem upstream of Banksia St with stronger guards required at an increased cost.

Influence and action for the Birrarung

 **1** Reports published

 **3** Advocacy forum collaborations

YRKA published *Microplastic Traps in the Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers* in July 2024, the culmination of two years of work investigating microplastic pollution and trapping solutions. We continued our work highlighting polystyrene pollution in the Yarra, bringing key stakeholders together to chart a way forward on managing this problematic pollutant.

The Swimmable Birrarung movement gained momentum with gatherings and swims at Deep Rock, the podcast series *Ten Steps*

Towards a Swimmable Birrarung, and with the City of Yarra signing the Swimmable Cities Charter. YRKA's role in the network is to advocate for stronger action on stormwater pollution.

YRKA strengthened relationships with other groups through the Urban Waterways Alliance*. UWA met with then Water Minister Harriet Shing both to highlight the issues facing urban waterways and the value these groups contribute to the health of our waterways and their communities.

Participation in the Gardiners Creek Collaboration was rewarding as they work towards transforming that waterway. The health of the Birrarung depends on the health of its tributaries.

As part of the Concerned Waterways Alliance, YRKA supported the report, *What is a waterway?* written by Dr Bruce Lindsay. This report examines the critical question of how waterways are defined in legislation and policy—and why this matters for the long-term health of our rivers, creeks, and wetlands.

We met with Planning Minister Sonya Kilkenny to urge the extension of planning controls for the river corridor from Warrandyte to Warburton and for the release of Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umakoo Land Use Framework Plan.

YRKA also supported community members in taking action on issues affecting their part of the River.

*Merri Creek Management Committee, Darebin Creek Management Committee, Maribyrnong River and Waterways Association, Werribee River Association, KooyongKoot Alliance



Financial Report

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association (YRKA) demonstrated strong financial stewardship in FY2025, improving its position for the second consecutive year despite a challenging funding environment. Whilst revenue for the year was \$426,616 compared to close to \$600,000* in the previous year, expenses were down to \$349,521 compared to just over \$514,000. The net result for YRKA was the organisation achieved a surplus of \$77,095, increasing net equity to a healthy \$97,444 at year's end.

Less than a third of the expenditure was on running the association leaving over two thirds being spent directly on delivery. This is remarkable in itself but when that delivery is amplified through the contribution of our volunteers, our knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm the results become extraordinary for the investment. It reflects a lean organisation with a laser focus on effective and efficient delivery very much to the benefit of the river.

While the ambitious goal of securing \$100,000 in new philanthropic donations was not met, income from corporate volunteering, business sponsorships, general donations, and fundraising exceeded the budget by \$40,000. Careful cost management delivered an additional \$13,000 in savings, resulting in more than double the forecast surplus.

* Pertinent to the step down reduction in revenue and expenditure was the successful launch of the Maribyrnong Rivers and Waterways Association (MRWA) as an independent organisation on June 30 2024. From this date MRWA runs its own finances previously reported in those of YRKA.

We are two-thirds through a three-year partnership agreement with Melbourne Water, which funds vital work on stormwater education, community engagement and riparian regeneration. Discussions have commenced on the next 3-year bid.

Four grant-funded projects, some of which had been delayed, were completed and acquitted this year.

This year's strong operating performance consolidates the gains from last year's turnaround and provides a sustainable foundation for YRKA's continued operations and Growth. I thank the previous Treasurer, Candice Charles and EO, Carina Watson for delivering the organisation in a tidy condition.

The Board remains committed to diversifying income streams, strengthening reserves, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organisation's vital work for the Birrarung.

Bruce Easton
Treasurer



Financial Performance Profit and Loss

	2024	2025
Income		
Consulting	3,986	460
Donations	23,664	37,024
Fundraising		
Individuals	5,545	3,168
Philanthropic Foundations	31,000	5,545
Corporate	159,808	150,703
Government Grants	289,971	218,510
Philanthropic Grants	78,399	-
Interest	3,873	4,625
Membership	3,439	4,806
Sundry Income	38	1,775
Total Income	599,723	426,616
Expenses		
Audit Fees	1,750	2,200
Bank Charges	1,010	396
Boat Expenses	2,573	647
Contractors	39,112	4,983
Depreciation	7,627	7,772
Employment Costs		
Wages	251,860	104,662
Superannuation	25,801	10,839
Workcover	4,564	1,862
Annual Leave Provision	(13,556)	(5,245)
Long Service Leave Provision	(1,122)	(5,062)
Personal Leave Provision	(2,453)	(9,440)
Fringe Benefits Tax	5,641	-
Employee Training	1,164	-
Fundraising Expenses	37,790	47,384
Grant Expense	123,012	166,830
Insurance	1,522	5,316
Office Expenses	433	218
Operational Expenses	19,033	10,668
Professional Services	-	4,795
Rent	6,111	-
Subscriptions & Donations	482	644
Sundry Expenses	-	52
Travel	1,825	-
Total Expenses	514,178	349,521
Net Operating Income/(Loss)	85,545	77,095

Financial Position

Balance Sheet

	2024	2025
Assets		
Current Assets		
Cash at Bank (Note A)	339,416	310,248
Aust Tax Office - Receivable	6,771	-
Accounts Receivable	1,408	9,240
Total Current Assets	347,595	319,488
Fixed Assets		
Plant & Equipment - at cost	30,262	30,262
Office Equipment	1,767	1,767
Website Development	32,650	33,477
Less Provision for Depreciation	(39,395)	(47,167)
Total Fixed Assets	25,284	18,339
NET ASSETS	372,879	337,827
Liabilities		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts Payable	34,286	4,024
PAYG Payable	4,360	2,860
GST Payable	-	14,495
Project Payments Received in Advance (Note B)	283,173	212,446
Superannuation Payable	2,283	4,727
Provision for Committed Expenditure	6,849	-
Provision for Annual Leave	6,297	1,052
Provision for Long Service Leave	5,062	-
Provision for Personal Leave	10,219	779
Total Liabilities	352,529	240,383
NET ASSETS	20,349	97,444
Represented by:		
Equity		
Retained Earnings - brought forward	(65,196)	20,349
Current Surplus - 2025	85,545	77,095
TOTAL EQUITY	20,349	97,444



Our Team

Board Members

Janet Bolitho, President

Margaret Gillespie, Deputy President
(elected November 2024)

Candice Charles, Treasurer
(resigned 30 June 2025)

Bruce Easton, (elected Treasurer
(July 2025)

Arte Kousis, Member
(Resigned as secretary January 2025)

David Redfearn, Member

Lara Werbeloff, Member
(resigned March 2025)

Andrew Lees, Member
(elected November 2024)

Meredith Lamb, appointed Secretary
June 2025

Staff

Carina Watson, Operations Manager

Anthony Despotellis, Litter Officer
completed contract August 2024

Emma Barnett, Yarra River Community
Engagement Officer returned from
Parental Leave April 2025

Andrea Olivera Garcia, Corporate
Volunteering Bookings Officer,

Thank You For Your Support

appointed April 2025

The work of the Yarra Riverkeeper Association is only made possible by the support of the many organisations, communities and people who love and care for the Yarra, Birrarung. We are deeply grateful for your ongoing dedication, commitment and support.

Patron:

Governor of Victoria, Her Excellency
Professor the Honourable Margaret
Gardner AC

Our work caring for the Yarra, Birrarung is only possible thanks to the generous support of our wonderful donors, philanthropic supporters and government and business partners.

Our major funding partner



Energy,
Environment
and Climate Action

And:

Anthony Cribbes
Australian Ecosystems
Australian Venue Co
Barry Dixon
City of Yarra
Daniel Rowe
David Stevens
Emily Wright
Factory X

Fairfield Primary School
Fed Square
Green Energy Markets
Grill'd Collingwood
Henry Blatman
Isaacson Davis Foundation
Jared Hoddinott
Jock Given
Kayak Melbourne
Kirsten Bauer
Loretta Bellato
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North East Community Fund
Regen Melbourne
Regen Projects
Richard Everingham
Royal Commonwealth Society of Victoria
Sarah Patterson
Septic Systems Australia
Theo Kitchener
Up the Creek
Visy CDS
Vitality Brands
Yarra River Business Association

YRKA is enriched by collaborating with:

Annie Bolitho & Associates
Carolyn Tate & Associates
City of Melbourne
Concerned Waterways Alliance
Friends of Yarra Flats
Friends of Yarra Valley Parklands
Gardiners Creek Regional Collaboration
KooyongKoot Alliance
Parks Victoria
Port Phillip EcoCentre
RMIT School of Design
Swimmable Birrarung advocates
University of Melbourne School of Design
Urban Waterways Alliance



