



Protecting the Yarra River - BIRRARUNG

Submission by:

Yarra Ranges Tourism

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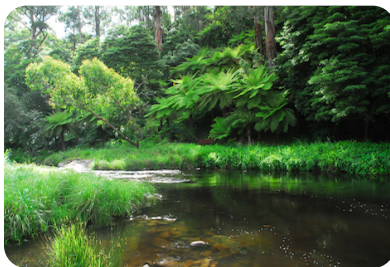
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August 2016

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Yarra Ranges Tourism provides the following response as a general submission to the Discussion paper for consideration by the Yarra MAC:

Yarra Ranges Tourism is the Official Regional Tourism Organisation for the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges, with committed support from Visit Victoria and Yarra Ranges Council. We work together with local tourism industry operators to promote the region to visitors with the aim of growing local business and employment. Within an easy hour drive of Melbourne the key to achieving this is to increase length of visitor stay and spend in our region.

The Yarra River is just one of many natural assets in the region that could be further embellished as a product to support new reasons for visitor growth, facilitated by appropriate management programs, access and cultural interpretation in place.

The Yarra River provides beneficial uses to our visitor economy, particularly in reference to agribusiness (including over 120 wineries and over 30 U-Pick orchards), nature based and leisure tourism. The tributaries of the Yarra River also provide a significant feature of the natural environment of the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. Of significant recognition is the relationship the River has with the indigenous culture of the region and the stories of this association, which could support strong cultural tourism products into the future, preserving Aboriginal culture and their practices in managing the land.

Passive and Active Recreation use of the River for Tourism

River experiences are enjoyed outdoors where visitors 'get back to nature', which can take the form of active or passive participation. Both uses need to be balanced to keep waterway accessible to all.

The opportunity the Yarra provides for picnic areas and social gatherings remains an institution of Melburnians and this should be encouraged with new migrant communities allowing them to start their own traditions that are connected to the River.

Tourism uses such as recreational fishing, swimming or canoeing are activities with appeal for visitors. Suitable infrastructure along the river at public access points should be a consideration for future planning to support this activity in the best way to minimise the impact to the river. Similarly, programs that promote native fish species in the river and control of exotic species would be attractive to the visitor.

Lineal walking and cycling trails have become a major feature of the River's identity. Groups such as Yarra4Life have previously proposed connections to the main Yarra Trail from the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. While private ownership may prevent this type of vision ever being achieved there are other significant trails that are shovel ready that could feature the river. These include the Yarra Valley Trail and the Warburton Mountain Bike Hub, being led by Yarra Ranges Council.

There is an ongoing opportunity to work with all land management agencies such as local government, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, Committees of Management and even private landowners to facilitate greater access to the river in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges, whether it be for private tour groups or the public.

Yarra Ranges Tourism supports the principles to ensure that continuous parkland and trails are maintained and appropriately managed along the Yarra River corridor.

Birrarung Indigenous Tourism Opportunities

The history, cultural significance and importance to Melbourne and surrounds, the Yarra River needs an effective way to engage Aboriginal culture in the management and promotion of this natural asset.

The ways of respecting Country and the deep connections the Wurundjeri People have to this land provide a positive exemplar for tourists to connect with the Yarra. As custodians of knowledge of the territory that includes the wider Yarra catchment through song lines, trade routes, ceremony and seasonal cycles. Cultural preservation of these stories and historical land and water practices could provide significant interest from international visitors, with the right support and nurturing of suitable cultural tourism operators.

Tourism Development

The access to the waterfront in many cases is hidden and not necessarily a feature for tourists to our region. Many areas that may be of strong interest to visitors are only accessible through private land, with the exception of some public areas around Warburton, Coldstream, Yarra Glen and Warrandyte. This opens the question as to whether there is an opportunity to facilitate greater nature based accommodation such as Yering Gorge Cottages by The Eastern Golf Club. Similarly completion of the major waterfront development in the Edgewater Yarra Valley Resort & Spa (Warburton) would be one of the most significant tourism projects for the Yarra River outside of the Melbourne CBD. Projects like these would not only showcase the natural beauty of the Yarra River but also allow the growth of ancillary tourism experiences associated with the river.

Environmental Stewardship for the benefit of Tourism

Ongoing River stewardship and maintenance are key issues for all public land. It is critical that the role of the Yarra MAC make the necessary recommendations to Government to ensure adequate levels of funding support for appropriate river management. Protection of the Yarra River waterway should be a priority to ensure it can provide the myriad of benefits that high water

quality can offer for tourism and recreational use. This includes enhancing the aquatic life and surrounding habitats abutting the River.

Opportunities may lie in the restoration of floodplain wetlands or suitable interventions such as water sensitive design into the agricultural landscape that could lead the way in sustainability practice. An example of this is the Little Stringybark Creek Project has seen the creation of some 39-rain gardens to better manage storm water runoff. Through working with private land owners potential agricultural interventions could be incentivised and form part of the region's sustainability narrative promoted to visitors of the region.

The restoration of other wetlands along the Yarra would bring back habitats for significant fauna species such as migratory birds. Likewise, the important role of the Rivers environmental corridor in supporting habitat for the state faunal emblems of the Helmeted Honeyeater and lowland population of the Leadbeaters Possum. As exemplified by the work done to repatriate the Yarra Flats Billabong at Yarra Glen, with its boardwalk and walking circuit that has enhanced the wildlife habitat values of the reserve and highlights the Aboriginal and European settlement heritage of the site.

Supporting Infrastructure

Tourism is an industry that requires specific levels of infrastructure whether it be roads, trails, mobile coverage or connectivity to high speed internet. The Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges is not currently well serviced by sewage mains, this impacts the ability of the local industry to grow but also leads to impacts on the Yarra and its tributaries. The key aspect of this is the age of septic systems (particularly across the Dandenong Ranges) and the regulation around their management and replacement. The outcome currently is that many of the systems that are no longer functioning properly are now contributing to the pollution of waterways in the region. The region needs a way of dealing with these that also allows for expansion of commercial properties that can appropriately cater for growing visitor demand.

Marketing

Equally important is the role of marketing the River assets to residents and tourists if it is to become more significant attraction of Melbourne and surrounds. With further support of government the role Regional Tourism bodies like Yarra Ranges Tourism would be better placed to develop effective interpretation, promotion and marketing. The Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges has been a place to 'get back to nature' for Melburnians for over 100 years, there is now an important role to help first generation migrant communities also build their association and connection to the region and the Yarra River.

River Management Model

Navigating public land ownership and relevant jurisdiction can be very difficult given the regular changes in department names and overlaps of responsibility within the River corridor. There is some merit in identifying a centralised point of contact for issues of River management, as happens in places like the Great Ocean Road. However, there may be also be several ways this could be better facilitated within existing structures of management without forming a new agency.

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