

STATEMENT OF PLANNING POLICY

No 4. RIVER YARRA 1971

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Introduction

Report

Statement of

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INTRODUCTION

Town and country planning in Victoria has a three-tiered organisational structure involving State Government authorities, regional planning authorities and municipalities. At the Government level the Town and Country Planning Board is the principal planning agency, and, in conjunction with the State Planning Council, is responsible for formulating and implementing statements of planning policy.

First provided for by legislation in 1968, statements of planning policy enable the Government of Victoria to declare its broad policies for the future planning and development of individual areas within the State. In this way it is possible, at Government level, to:

- (a) co-ordinate planning throughout Victoria as well as between individual portions of it;
- (b) provide guidelines to regional planning authorities and municipalities for the preparation of planning schemes; and
- (c) safeguard the interests of the State as a whole in the conservation and development of localised resources.

There are many tangible advantages in establishing broad or strategic planning policies for specific areas. For example, the long range reservation and acquisition of land for public undertakings such as water supply, power supply, waste disposal, transport and institutions is facilitated. Urban fringe areas can be protected in advance of urban settlement for activities such as extractive industries, nature conservation and recreation. By providing an authoritative concept of the broad location of future urban settlement, statements of planning policy act as a guide to private undertakings in the planning of their future operations.

The Town and Country Planning Board has the initial responsibility to carry out such surveys as may be necessary and to prepare the statements of planning policy. In its investigations for and preparation of statements, the Board is required to pay particular attention to:

- (a) demographic, social and economic factors and influences;
- (b) conservation of natural resources for social, economic, environmental, ecological and scientific purposes;
- (c) characteristics of land;
- (d) characteristics and disposition of land use;
- (e) amenity and environment;
- (f) communications; and
- (g) development requirements of public authorities.

During the preparation of all statements of planning policy the State Planning Council, which is a body comprised of the heads of major Government authorities, acts as consultant and adviser to the Board. A draft of each proposed statement is then referred to any regional planning authority likely to be affected for consideration and comment.

Both the statements and any comments made by the State Planning Council or regional planning authorities are forwarded to the Minister for Local Government. On acceptance by the Minister and Cabinet the statements reach their final form and are approved by the Governor in Council.

In the preparation of planning schemes or amendments to them, due regard must be had to the provisions of any approved statements of planning policy relating to that area. However, although binding on regional and municipal planning authorities, these statements deal primarily with broad planning strategies rather than with the detailed planning of an area.

The task of detailed planning remains with the responsible authorities, with every safeguard for public participation in the planning process.

In this way regional and municipal planning are given a wider perspective while at the same time the Government can ensure that planning schemes provide for a balanced and appropriate development of Victoria's resources.

Statement of Planning Policy No. 4 (River Yarra) is a directive that the River Yarra and its immediate environs shall be planned primarily as an open space system for nature conservation and recreation with provision, where appropriate, for primary production and forestry. It applies to the River Yarra and its immediate environs and to the whole of its catchment east of Warrandyte.



River Yarra at Warrandyte

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(By courtesy of the Forests Commission, Victoria)

RIVER YARRA

The Explanatory Report accompanying Statement of Planning Policy No. 2 (Mornington Peninsula) stressed the necessity of preserving the countryside in the vicinity of the metropolis and noted that this was now receiving wider recognition by the community. It quoted a passage from a letter from the then Minister for Local Government on the future growth of Melbourne which strongly emphasized the need for planning to take full account of the countryside as a vital part of the metropolitan environment. The Explanatory Report then went on to show that Melbourne was well endowed in its physical surroundings but that these would be subjected to considerable pressures in the future due to the expected increase in population and in the demand for recreation outlets providing for a wide range of leisure pursuits. In the United States it has been estimated that a sixfold increase in recreation outlets will be needed by 1985 and a tenfold increase by 2000.

Although the River Yarra is now only partly in the countryside, much of what has been stated in the previous paragraph applies to it. It provides with its immediate environs a most valuable outlet for recreation.

The Yarra, originally Yarra Yarra, was named by John Helder Wedge, a companion of John Batman, when the latter founded the new community on its river site. Batman could not have realised what a major part the river was to play in the growth of his community during the ensuing 130 years. By now, like so many other important cities and their rivers the name Yarra has become synonymous with Melbourne.

However, although the river has played its part admirably it has long been taken for granted and has suffered accordingly. Yet while the evidence of neglect is ample there is much to be thankful for in what has been done to preserve the environs of the river.

As regards the future, the need to conserve the Yarra and its environs has been expressed by the then Minister for Local Government, who in March, 1970, in an address stated:—

“We are determined to preserve this (Yarra Valley) and to ensure that it is kept open along with other similar areas of open space and parkland, as a place where urban populations of the future can find recreation, peace and restoration of the spirit.”

Statement of Planning Policy No. 4 (River Yarra) applies to the River Yarra and its immediate environs and, east of Warrandyte to the whole of the river catchment outside the Dandenongs.

Great rivers usually derive their fame from the cities they sustain but although prominent as visual features in the urban environment their influence goes much deeper. The Thames, the Clyde, the Rhine, the Nile have all had a profound influence on city growth in such diverse services as ports, river transport, recreation, water supply and drainage. The River Yarra for its part has sustained Melbourne's growth in many ways and is probably the City's richest asset. It is the principal source of water supply and also the foundation of port activity and associated commerce and industry. Its banks have become a notable landscape feature and a setting for the City itself. In the suburbs the extensive slopes of the river valley are valued residential areas which benefit greatly from the extensive reservations along the river banks. Long before it winds away into the rural hinterland the Yarra and its banks, fortunately too flood prone to be built on, provide an almost rural landscape for a number of outer suburbs. When it reaches the country it provides rich farming areas and landscape of the highest quality.

RESOURCES AND THEIR USE

The area traversed by the River Yarra has a wide variety in environment and ease of accessibility which makes it suitable for recreation use and nature conservation. The range of opportunities it offers is already popular and will become increasingly precious as the metropolitan complex expands.

The variety in environment arises from the basic geology of the area, the land forms and the interaction of local climate. The resultant difference in natural vegetation and land use further diversify the scene and contribute to the numerous enclosed landscapes and open vistas that are such an outstanding feature of the area as a whole.

The main environmental components of the River Yarra are as follows.

- (a) The steep sided, round topped mountains at the headwaters and upper reaches of the river. The forested slopes with occasional long unspoilt vistas and few man-made structures generate a feeling of isolation, which is quite remarkable within such a short distance from the metropolis. Here too is the major source of Melbourne's water supply.



Warburton from Mt. Victoria

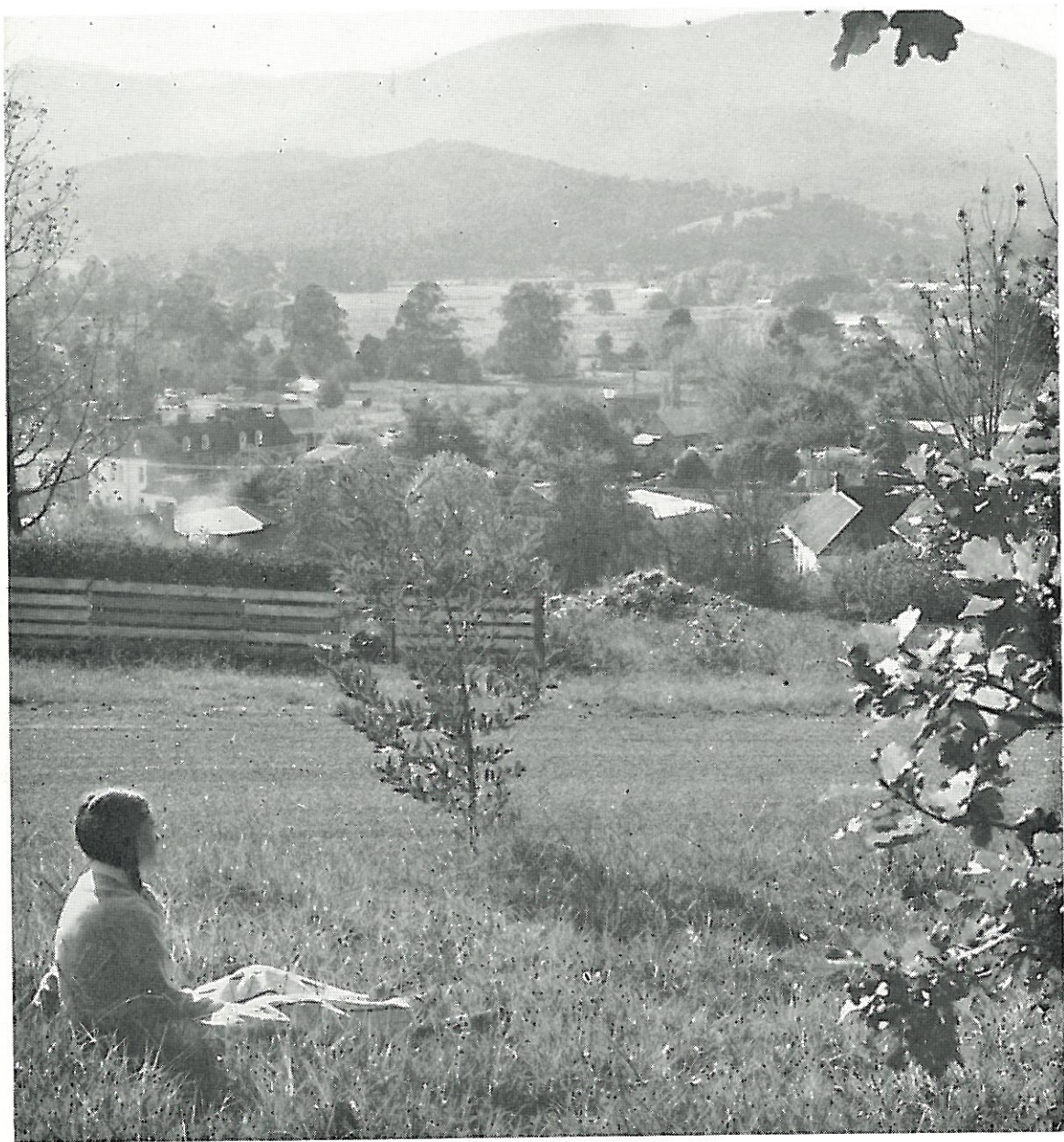


Healesville Sanctuary

- (b) The undulating hills between Lilydale and Healesville cleared of native vegetation. These afford sweeping views to encircling hills and mountains—the first truly rural panoramas to be seen outside the metropolis—and emphasise the character of the area.
- (c) The rolling hills around Steels Creek. The land uses make the scenery dramatic in its variety while intimate landscapes and wide vistas to the mountains offer rich contrasts in dimension and depth.
- (d) The alluvial flats of the Yarra. These are pastoral in character, the flat land sharply contrasting with the steep mountains and hills. As the tree lined river winds through this land unit, the view is enhanced and the landscape value increased.
- (e) The long river valleys of pasture land and forested valley sides around Gladysdale and Steels Creek. Here again there are pleasing contrasts in colour, pattern and texture in both winter and summer.
- (f) The narrow wedge of alluvial flats and slopes in the lower reaches. This is valuable because of the contrast of its almost rural character with the bustling and built-up metropolis. In the port areas at the mouth, the open banks disappear behind wharves and docks and the activities associated with the vigorous shipping terminal.

Climate is a major determinant of the natural environment. To the west in the river system rainfall is low, the summers hot and the winters cool. In the eastern mountainous region the rainfall is high, the summers cool and the winters cold with occasional snow. In general, where the high rainfall and cool weather is common the soils are stable and well structured, losing their quality towards the hotter and drier climates. Concurrent with the differences in climate, soils and terrain, the vegetation changes from lush mountain forests in the eastern highlands to dry box eucalypt forests in the middle regions.

These differences are also reflected in the changes in wild life habitats resulting in great diversity. In the east the mountain species such as the black wallaby, common wombat, and the lyrebird thrive. Further west the species of the drier country such as the grey kangaroo, echidna and magpie predominate. The River Yarra itself accommodates the platypus and white faced heron. A significant feature is the destruction of natural habitats with the probability of the local extinction of many species, such as the grey kangaroo.



Healesville

The upper reaches of the River Yarra provide the metropolis with most of its water for domestic and industrial purposes. Melbourne enjoys a soft water supply renowned for its purity. So important is the need for large quantities of high quality water that large areas of catchment are managed for water collection on a single-use basis.

The high costs of transporting timber and the limited area available for commercial forestry gives the existing use of parts of these upper areas as State Forests an economic importance of great significance. These areas are managed on multiple-use principles, providing timber, water, recreation areas, extractive materials and protection forest, thus returning an optimum benefit to the community.

Dairying, beef and sheep grazing are chief rural uses particularly in the middle reaches. Intensive cultivation of potatoes, cabbages and fruit including strawberries, occurs over smaller areas.

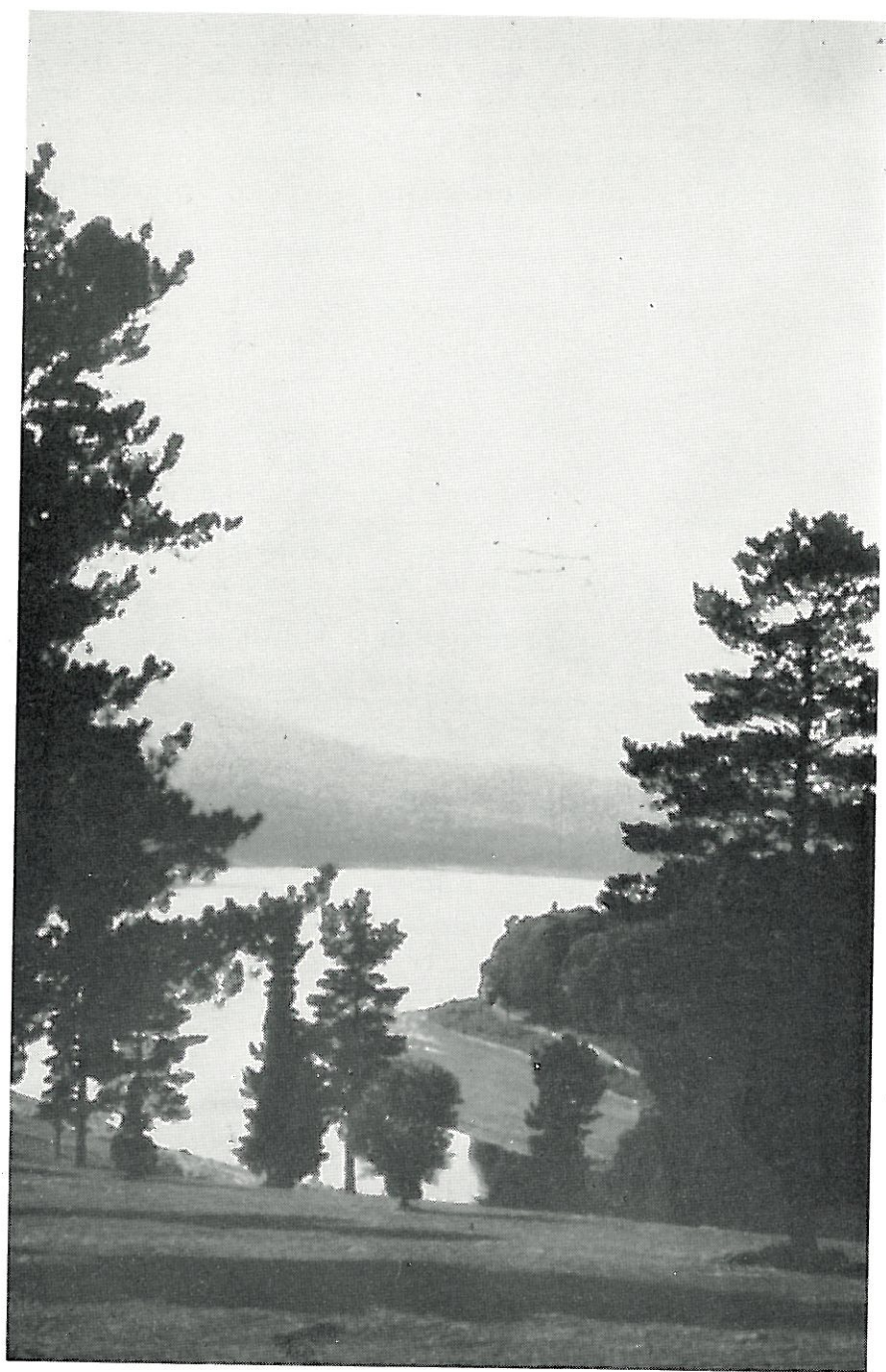
Further west the Yarra winds through a wedge of open space which drives deep from the north east into the urban mass. The water and vegetation provided by this wedge supports a relatively wide range of wildlife, and lends the area a quality of rustic charm.

In its lower reaches, the river flows through Melbourne's central business area. There the river and associated parklands are used by thousands of residents and visitors.

Below Spencer Street Bridge the river becomes the Port of Melbourne. Constant dredging enables ships with drafts of up to 31 feet to enter the Port. The amount of dredging required depends of course on activities occurring throughout the catchment but especially along the river banks.

The recreational use of the Yarra Valley covers a wide range and is increasing. As an indication average Sunday traffic above Warrandyte is generally double the average annual daily traffic, while peak traffic loads on a public holiday in summer can be over ten times the winter weekday low.

The scenic attractiveness of the river environment and its value for recreation make it equally sought after as a residential area. The eastern section of the metropolis, stretching from Heidelberg and Kew in the west to Healesville in the east, had the highest rate of population increase in the Melbourne Statistical Division in the three years from 1966 to 1969, and accommodated an estimated additional 52,700 people. Of this increase, the population change in districts close to the river was particularly large. The Doncaster-Templestowe area increased by over 10,000—a change of 27 per cent. The Diamond Valley and Lilydale areas increased by nearly 10,000—a change of 20 per cent over the period.



MaroonDAH Reservoir

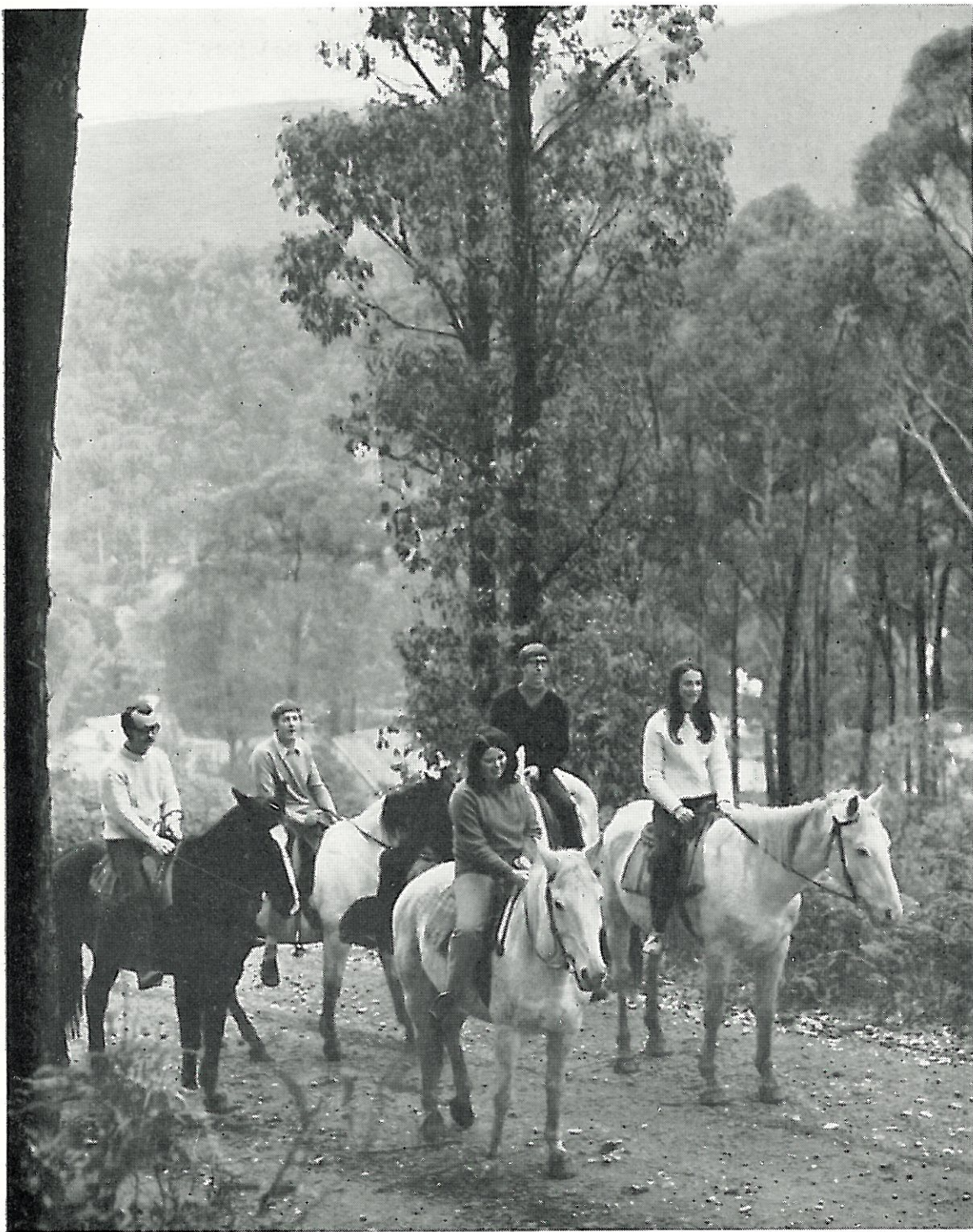
PRESSURES AND PROBLEMS OF DEVELOPMENT

While the River Yarra provides Melbourne with a vital breathing space the openness of its immediate environs, in an otherwise built-up area, makes it vulnerable as a relatively cheap outlet for public utility mains and installations and service facilities such as rubbish dumps which show little regard for landscape quality. If the Yarra environment is to be preserved as an open wedge, the use of its banks and adjoining areas must be in keeping with its character.

As regards future water supply, conservation in the Yarra system is of course fundamental to the continued development of the metropolis. Protection must be assured by managing areas required for extension of the water catchments on rational principles based on an adequate understanding of the nature of the whole river system. For example, the maintenance of forest cover on the catchments enables rain water to enter the soil instead of immediately running into the streams. The soil acts as a retarding basin, regulating the flow of water into the streams. The sustained yield of water allows economical collection by use of relatively small dams. Therefore, soil protection policies are of vital importance to this principle. The low capital headworks of the existing River Yarra water collection system are dependent upon the success of the land management employed. With poor management capital headworks would be much larger and treatment costs much greater.

Because of increasing demands for such facilities as roads, power lines, water supply, and forests, public authorities find their land requirements growing. This is particularly so in the field of water supply, where it could be expected that the area of the Yarra Valley required primarily for water catchment purposes will increase from roughly one quarter to one third of the total area studied, within the next two or three decades. If the policy of single-use management is pursued, large areas of land could become unavailable to public use and further pressures will be placed on those remaining. Nevertheless, while the policy of single-use management may not be the only way of collecting water in such an area, any alternative must ensure that the catchment is protected so that the water supply is not endangered in quantity or quality.

Provided it is suitably located and well-managed the use of land for primary production is compatible with the principle of establishing a green wedge along the Yarra. However, primary production on the urban fringe has special economic and management problems. For example, the inflated price of land often makes rural activities unprofitable, while the proximity of urban activities usually necessitates the introduction of safeguards to avoid damage to equipment, stock and crops.



Horse-riding on the mountain tracks



Winter at Mt. Donna Buang

*(By courtesy of the Forests
Commission, Victoria)*

Inappropriate land uses are also more likely to occur in such a situation. For example, the clearing of some forest areas can lead to soil erosion, especially when the areas are subsequently grazed. Further deterioration may follow when a farmer decides that his economic situation can be relieved (as an interim measure) if he subdivides some of his property, a process that ultimately intensifies the problem and creates many others. The retention of flexibility in the use of land by keeping land in large land units and holdings, especially in flatter areas with better soils, would be more desirable.

In this connection, a serious problem arising throughout the State and particularly on the rural-urban fringe is the unwarranted clearing of forest land for agricultural purposes, and of land which is perhaps in reality unsuitable for development as pastures. The rate of tree felling on private land is estimated to be 7 per cent per annum in the Upper Yarra areas. Forested land in the general vicinity of urban areas holds the potentiality for such uses as recreation, nature conservation, urban expansion, forestry or agriculture. The clearing of trees restricts the future choices available, so reducing the versatility of the land and some controls are clearly essential. To be effective, long range planning should retain flexibility. Future needs cannot be estimated with accuracy and any plan should permit the maximum freedom by keeping open as many choices as possible.

In cleared areas such as the attractive undulating hills between Healesville and Lilydale, speculation on the direction of future urban growth is an added problem and has caused inflation of land prices and rates beyond economic levels for primary production. Premature subdivision has even caused land to be taken out of production, to become a fire hazard, and visually unattractive. Subdivision down to uneconomic farming units brings similar difficulties.

In other areas excessive subdivision for holiday homes has led to servicing, public safety, and landscape problems. For example, in the Upper Yarra Shire, approximately 1,400 lots have been created in the last ten years. During the same period less than 150 building permits have been issued for these sites. The standard of housing on these sites is sometimes so poor as to be unsightly and dangerous from a fire protection viewpoint.

Flood prone land has also been subdivided. Other subdivisions are badly located. For example, some in the Armstrongs Creek locality lie in the midst of valuable water catchments and prime Mountain Ash forest areas. Others on Mt. Toole-Be-Wong have no alternative access and could be regarded as fire traps.



Devastation

*(By courtesy of the Fo
Commission, Victoria*



The Yarra River has a long history of flooding. Whatever controlling effect the Upper Yarra Dam has on flooding, this will be lessened when the waters of the Thompson River are diverted into the Yarra system. Continued and inadequately controlled urban development in the Yarra system could adversely affect the efficient use of the water resources and increase the incidence and severity of flooding in a number of ways.

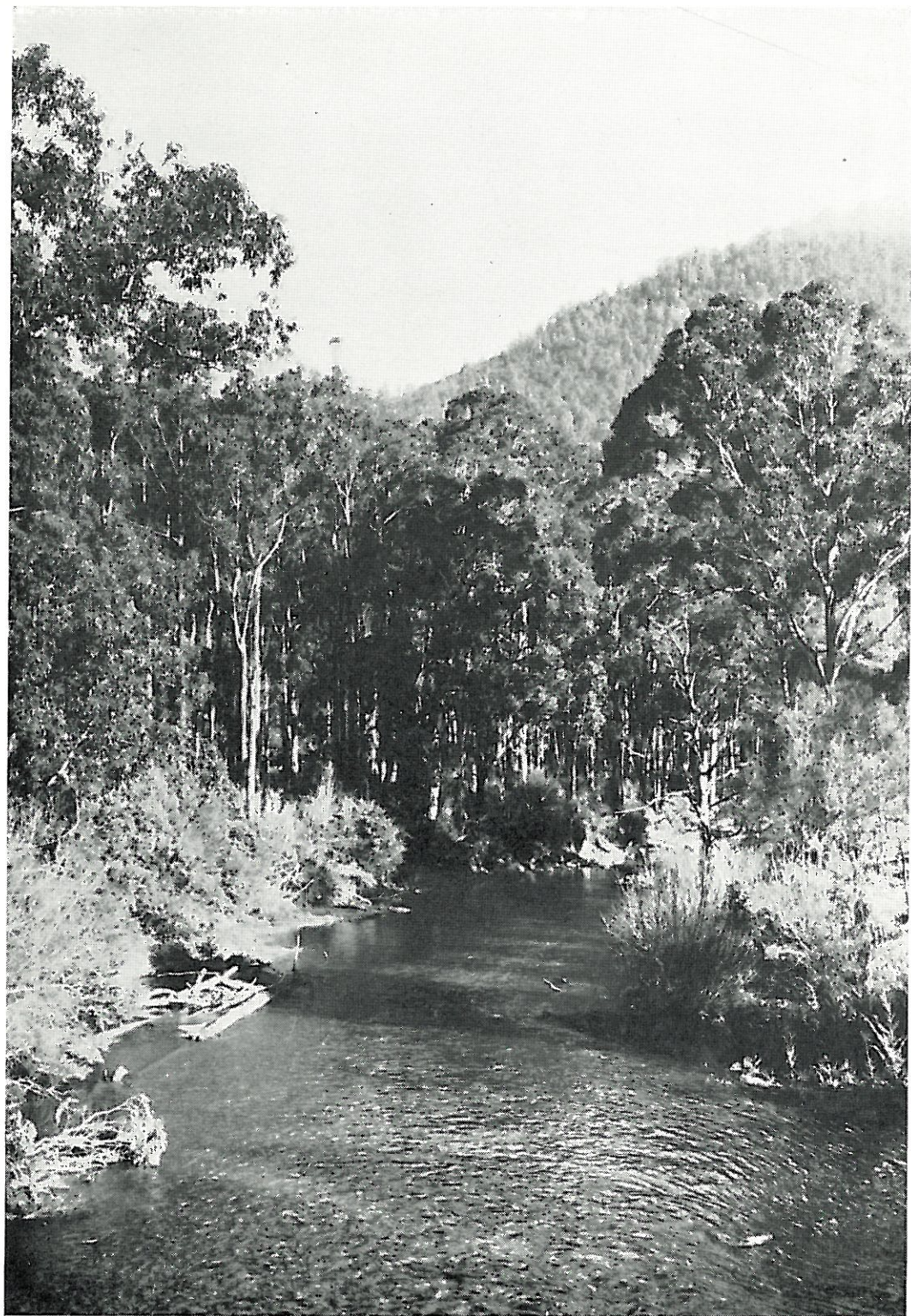
- (a) Development on flood plains could result in property damage.
- (b) Increased run-off from large "paved" residential areas would increase the risk of flash flooding downstream.
- (c) Pollution from septic tanks in flooded areas would cause health problems.
- (d) Filling of flood plains upstream would reduce the flood basin capacity and could cause severe flooding downstream.
- (e) Demands to use areas liable to flooding for residential purposes should continue to be resisted. One important reason for this is that it permits greater storage of water and therefore more efficient use of water resources.

Pollution of water resources both in the upper and lower catchment areas is a potential hazard which needs to be emphasised. The most likely sources of pollution in this instance are:—

- (a) Stormwater run-off from concentrated urban development;
- (b) Raw or partially treated trade and domestic waste water;
- (c) Soil erosion due to careless or unsuitable land use;
- (d) Increased concentration of agricultural chemical pollutants.

These potential sources of pollution could, in the absence of appropriate planning controls, seriously diminish the value of the Valley as a source of domestic water.

There is a strong prospect that further dams will ultimately be constructed above Warrandyte to collect water for a variety of uses—including possible domestic use. If residential development encroaches further into what would be the catchment area of these dams, the pollution problems could become extremely costly to control. Extra costs related to liquid and solid waste disposal, and the damage to aesthetic and recreational values all reinforce the arguments for a rural catchment.



(By courtesy of the Forests
Commission, Victoria)

PROBLEMS OF MANAGEMENT

The natural resources surrounding Melbourne are extensive but not limitless. Careful control of their use is essential. The River Yarra system can only be maintained as a renewable resource as long as adequate planning is recognised as necessary, and to the extent that the exploitation of the resources is managed on rational principles.

The need for better management is emphasised by the misuse of land generally. This is quite apparent in some recreation areas where intensive use is causing erosion, and in others where reserves are being used as rubbish dumps.

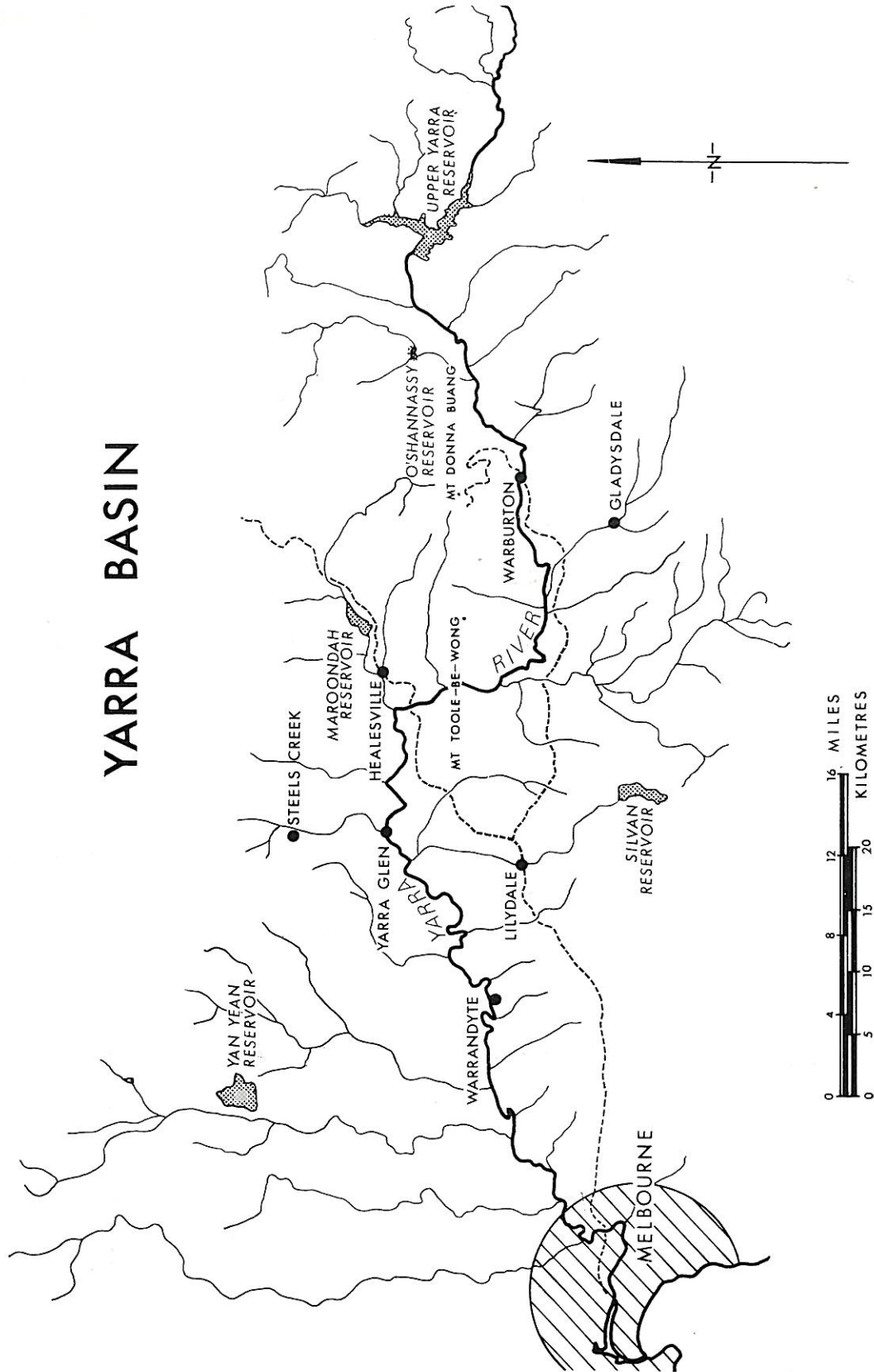
In order to be able to maintain a sustained yield of water, forest products, recreation facilities, high quality landscapes and wildlife, the nature of the area must be understood. The natural resources of terrain, water, climate, vegetation and wildlife, associated with the river are present in the form of interlocking functioning systems—an ecosystem—the pathways of which need constant maintenance to ensure a continual functioning with exploitation. Therefore the control and management of the River Yarra and its catchment must be all embracing and properly co-ordinated: the valley must be considered as one unit. The interaction of the various parts of the system must be understood, carefully controlled and managed. If control is divided without co-ordination then inappropriate activities in one part of the system will adversely affect activities in other parts.

IMPLICATIONS

Its outstanding attributes and the reputation it enjoys as a place of recreation, means that careful and bold planning of the area is necessary at all levels of government to ensure that the adequate alternative outlets for urban expansion, which are known to exist, are made available.

From the point of view of the State, the multi-purpose "rural" use of the Yarra system, the diversity in its natural environment and wildlife, the easy access to it from the living areas, and above all its susceptibility to detrimental change, make it worthy of special consideration. In the circumstances it has been decided that the Government's determination of the future of the Yarra Valley in the form of a Statement of Planning Policy is essential.

YARRA BASIN



STATEMENT OF PLANNING POLICY

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1961.

*At the Executive Council Chamber, Melbourne, the
seventh day of September, 1971.*

PRESENT

His Excellency the Governor of Victoria.

Mr. Rafferty.
Mr. Balfour.
Mr. Hunt.

STATEMENT OF PLANNING POLICY No. 4 (RIVER YARRA).

WHEREAS the Town and Country Planning Board on the 7th day of May 1971, adopted a Statement of Planning Policy a copy of which is annexed hereto;

AND WHEREAS in the preparation of the said Statement the said Board conferred with the State Planning Council;

AND WHEREAS a draft of the proposed Statement was submitted to the said Council and to the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works for consideration and comment;

AND WHEREAS comments were received from the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works and were forwarded to the Minister with the adopted Statement,

NOW THEREFORE, His Excellency the Governor of the State of Victoria, by and with the advice of the Executive Council thereof doth by this Order approve the said Statement with modifications so that the Statement as modified shall be as set out hereunder, that is to say:

STATEMENT OF PLANNING POLICY No. 4 (RIVER YARRA).

1. This is a Statement of Planning Policy under Part I. of the *Town and Country Planning Act 1961*. It refers to the River Yarra and its immediate environs and to the whole of its catchment east of Warrandyte.

2. The planning policy is:—

2.1 The River Yarra and its environs shall be identified through appropriate planning measures as one of the most significant physical features in the Melbourne metropolis.

2.2 The River Yarra and its immediate environs shall be planned primarily as an open space system for nature conservation and recreation, with provision, where appropriate, for primary production and forestry.

2.3 The planning of areas within the catchment of the River Yarra east of Warrandyte shall take account of the potential of the area for water catchment purposes.

3. The major factors influencing this planning policy are:—
 - 3.1 The natural resources of the River Yarra because of their great value and diversity are a social and economic asset of State significance.
 - 3.2 The intensification and expansion of urban development in the metropolitan area are likely, without adequate safeguards, to cause further deterioration in conditions which have resulted from ill-considered, adverse or excessive exploitation of the River and its environs.
 - 3.3 The River and its catchment immediately east of Warrandyte has a potential for further large scale use for water supply purposes provided levels of river pollution are kept to a minimum.
 - 3.4 The area in the immediate environs of the River is vulnerable to alienation for purposes which are out of character with the high quality landscape.
 - 3.5 The Yarra Valley from the City eastwards is a landscape feature which is capable of providing a tourist attraction of State significance.
4. Implementation of the planning policy for the River Yarra requires that special attention be given to the following:—
 - 4.1 An efficient system of management designed to ensure co-ordination of land use planning and all forms of development on private and public land.
 - 4.2 Assessment of the future demand for outdoor recreation opportunities.
 - 4.3 Location and planning of recreation centres together with the associated services.
 - 4.4 Preservation of the plant community and native fauna by reservation or regulation of the use of land.
 - 4.5 Preservation and enhancement of landscape by reservation or regulation of the use of land; selection of landscape areas and vantage points of high quality for special treatment.
 - 4.6 Location and regulation of the use of land and associated works for extractive industry.
 - 4.7 Formulation of standards for the siting and layout of buildings in recreation areas and areas of special landscape value.
 - 4.8 The most careful location, design and construction of any essential thoroughfares having regard to the special characteristics of the area and its potential; the regulation of land use adjoining road frontages with particular emphasis on visual harmony.

4.9 Regulation of the use of land to minimize pollution generally and particularly of the creeks which feed the River Yarra system and to control the incidence and extent of flooding.

4.10 Minimization of fire hazards.

4.11 The most careful location and control of any urban development.

AND the Honorable Alan John Hunt, Her Majesty's Minister for Local Government for the State of Victoria, shall give the necessary directions herein accordingly.

J. ROSSITER,
Clerk of the Executive Council.

STATEMENT OF PLANNING POLICY

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