Introduction
1.1 WHY THESE GUIDELINES ARE NEEDED

The Maribyrnong River is one of Melbourne’s most treasured and well-used rivers. Thousands of Melburnians spend time exercising and relaxing along it every day – from its source above the Organ Pipes National Park through Keilor, Essendon, Footscray and Yarraville to where it meets the Yarra River near the West Gate Bridge.

Coordinated planning is essential to protect and enhance the Maribyrnong River’s natural and built environment for current and future generations.

The Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines are intended as an overarching framework to achieve planning consistency along the river valley. The main purpose of the Guidelines is to protect open space and guide development along the river, as well as expand and link existing parkland, walking paths and cycling trails.

This report sets out a broad vision for the built form and landscape of the river valley and presents a range of priority actions for further work from the Organ Pipes National Park right through to the river mouth. This includes the Hume and Brimbank Green Wedges which are outside the current Urban Growth Boundary. Priority actions over the next five years include capital works, planning scheme amendments, enlarging the open space corridor, further detailed planning and community engagement.

In addition to these priority actions, this report includes a detailed set of design guidelines, which apply only to the river’s urban length from the Urban Growth Boundary to the river mouth. They do not cover the Hume and Brimbank Green Wedges, which are predominantly rural in character. These design guidelines are intended to influence the form of proposed buildings and works along the river and to inform prospective developers, land managers, landowners and the wider community.

The Guidelines will be introduced as a reference document into all relevant planning schemes and reflected in council Municipal Strategic Statements.

Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines is the result of extensive collaboration between all of the major agencies with planning responsibility for the river, including the Department of Planning and Community Development, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, the Port of Melbourne Corporation and the five local councils through which the river runs (Brimbank, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne and Moonee Valley).

Within its pages are design guidelines for river health, habitat protection, heritage, parks and recreation, tourism and planning. The overall aim is to provide greater certainty and clarity on development and a consistent approach to the protection of the Maribyrnong River.
1.2 POLICY CONTEXT

*Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines* is informed by three major areas of Victorian planning policy: *Melbourne 2030: Planning for Sustainable Growth*, the State Planning Policy Framework and five Municipal Strategic Statements.

**Melbourne 2030**

The Victorian Government’s long-term strategy for metropolitan Melbourne, *Melbourne 2030*, and the related planning update, *Melbourne @ 5 million*, are the overarching planning policies for all urban development in Melbourne.

These two planning documents outline how the Victorian Government will meet the housing needs of the city’s growing population – projected to increase by 1.8 million people between 2006 and 2036 to 5.5 million – while still maintaining high quality services and preserving Melbourne’s extensive and prized open space network.

One of *Melbourne 2030*’s major policies (5.7) is to “rectify gaps in the network of metropolitan open space by creating new parks and ensuring major open space corridors are protected and enhanced”.

A number of initiatives are set out under this policy including creating four continuous open space links and trails in Melbourne, one of these along the Maribyrnong River.

*Melbourne 2030* also proposes reviewing the adequacy of planning controls related to the Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers to ensure long-term protection of open space and conservation values. Among other initiatives, it specifies adding to the recreational and tourism potential of the Yarra and Maribyrnong river corridors by:

- identifying and completing high priority infrastructure, landscaping works and enhancement of pedestrian and bicycle trail links along the lower Maribyrnong River
- completing links between the Maribyrnong Trail and Bay Trail at Williamstown.
State Planning Policy Framework
Also informing the development of these guidelines is the State Planning Policy Framework, and in particular Clause 14.02-2.

This clause states that environmentally sensitive areas of Melbourne with significant recreational value such as the Maribyrnong River should “be protected from development which would diminish their environmental, conservation or recreation values”.

Municipal Strategic Statements
All relevant local councils with planning responsibility for the Maribyrnong River also recognise and acknowledge its importance in their Municipal Strategic Statements.

The range of issues covered in the existing Municipal Strategic Statements of Brimbank, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne and Moonee Valley councils include:
> protecting public access to parkland
> developing new parks and open space
> completing linear pathways
> protecting vegetation and natural features
> conserving water resources and managing stormwater
> facilitating specific uses in nominated locations
> managing development in the floodplain
> managing the scale, siting and bulk of new developments in the Maribyrnong River Valley to protect significant features
> preparing and updating park masterplans.

1.3 Overview of the River

Major physical features
The Maribyrnong River Valley was formed over millions of years, with water eroding through the basalt plains west of Melbourne to create a complex landscape of gorges and river flats. Its topography can be simplified into three basic areas:
> the flat basalt plain hinterland
> the valley escarpment
> the floodplain and valley flats.

The river has eroded gorges up to 55 metres deep in the basalt plain. Six thousand years ago sea levels were substantially higher than today and the whole of the present day river flats was covered by water.

Flooding
The Maribyrnong River is Melbourne’s second largest waterway. It has a catchment of some 1,400 square kilometres, stretching from the Macedon Ranges to Port Phillip Bay.

The Maribyrnong River has a history of flooding dating back to the 1880s, with the largest flood recorded in 1906. The depth, duration and flow characteristics of flooding vary greatly along the river in any particular flood event. Flooding from the river poses an ongoing safety and property damage hazard.

There are currently about 250 residential and about 55 industrial and commercial properties within the Maribyrnong River floodplain. It is essential to continue to manage development in the floodplain of the river.

Melbourne Water is the floodplain management authority for the Melbourne metropolitan region. All developments referred to Melbourne Water are assessed to ensure that new development does not increase the risk to public safety, or increase the risk of damage to property resulting from a flood.
Open space
The Maribyrnong River Valley offers a wide range of public open space and recreational opportunities to residents and visitors.

A number of important public parks are situated along the river including Brimbank Park and Horseshoe Bend Farm, situated approximately 15km north-west of Melbourne in Keilor East. These parklands offer ideal settings for picnics, walking, fishing, canoeing and bird watching.

Other important parks along the river include Canning Reserve, Fairbairn Park, Pipemakers Park, Footscray Park and Newells Paddock Wetlands. Formal open space areas and sporting grounds are found on the river flats at Aberfeldie Park and Maribyrnong Park.

A range of commercial vessels and water taxis operate on the river as well as private and club-based recreational vessels. Several rowing and canoe clubs have facilities along the river’s edge and the river is increasingly popular for angling. There are also a number of private jetties along the river providing exclusive access to the water.

Natural assets
The Maribyrnong River Valley supports a variety of remnant vegetation, flora and fauna.

The upper lengths of the river valley include remnant native grasslands, escarpment shrublands and riparian woodlands, which are home to threatened flora species such as the Slender Tick-trefoil (Desmodium varians) and the Tough Scurf-pea (Cullen tenax).

The river valley also supports a range of migratory and resident bird species including Egrets, Herons and many species of ducks. There are also records of Galaxias, Australian Grayling, Common Long-necked Tortoise and Platypus in the river. Brushtail Possums, Echidnas, Gould’s Wattle Bats, Growling Grass Frogs and Striped Legless Lizards are just some of the mammals, frogs and reptiles that live in the valley.
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Urban development
Historically, rivers were not desirable locations for residential development and much of the land along the Maribyrnong River was originally given over to industrial uses and quarrying.

Most notable were large areas of Commonwealth land associated with the munitions industry and industrial and abattoir uses in Footscray and Kensington. Much of this land has since been developed for residential use (Waterford Green, Edgewater Estate), or is expected to be developed in the near future (Defence Site Maribyrnong). In the more intensively developed parts of Footscray and Melbourne, industrial uses have given way to office and residential development.

There are a number of current proposals for new development or redevelopment within the river valley.

Heritage
The Maribyrnong River has played a major role in the occupation and development of western Victoria. The river is part of the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people and their ancestors have frequented its banks for at least 40,000 years.

Originally known by Europeans as Saltwater River, the first party of Europeans to explore the Maribyrnong was led by Charles Grimes, Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales, in February 1803. However, Europeans did not to start to settle along the river until after Melbourne was established in 1835.

During the second half of the 19th century much of Melbourne’s industry was located along the Maribyrnong River and the river became severely degraded. But with the closure of many industries since the 1960s and 1970s, large areas of river-front land were opened up to form parkland and residential estates.

There are also many important maritime, industrial and farming archaeological sites along the river. Some of these have been recognised and conserved but more work is needed particularly in the upper reaches of the river.
1.4 STUDY AREA

These Guidelines cover the entire urban section of the Maribyrnong River downstream of the Urban Growth Boundary. To help guide development, the river has been divided into seven river lengths, each with a basic character type. These are:

- **Brimbank length** – a natural river
- **Steele Creek length** – a secluded river
- **Maribyrnong length** – a suburban river
- **Racecourse length** – river flats
- **Footscray length** – an urban river
- **Footscray Wharf length** – an urban river
- **Port length** – a working river

These basic character types were developed following extensive community consultation. See Appendix B for more information about the consultation phase.

The basic character of each river length provides the context for a more coordinated approach to planning along the river. Preferred characteristics for each river length will be discussed in more detail in section 2.2.

Nodes of activity

Several places of interest or nodes of activity are found along the Maribyrnong River. Most of these are in small scale such as cafes, pubs, retail outlets and recreation and visitor facilities, which draw people to the riverside. The main nodes of activity include:

- Brimbank Park Visitors Centre
- Poyntons Nursery
- Clubs and cafes in Maribyrnong Park and nearby Incinerator Arts Centre
- Anglers Tavern
- Clubs in Fairbairn Park
- Melbourne’s Living Museum of the West in Pipemakers Park
- Cafe and boating facilities at Edgewater Estate (under construction)
- Footscray Boat Club and Function Centre
- Footscray Wharf and Arts Precinct.

Trail network

There is generally good trail access along the Maribyrnong River Valley but there are a number of gaps where new paths are needed to create a continuous trail on both sides of the river. There are five pedestrian river crossings but opportunities exist for new river crossings to create loop trails and improve public access. There is also a need to improve public access in Footscray on both sides of the river. However, vital Port of Melbourne operations prevent any significant increase in access to the river in the Port length.

See Appendix A for detailed maps showing the above features of the Maribyrnong River.
Map 2: The study area

Area covered by priority actions
Area covered by design guidelines
Local Government Area boundary
Freeway/Major road
Primary study area (the river valley) – design and development guidelines
River lengths
Existing nodes of activity
Urban growth boundary

River channel/ocean
Melbourne Central Business District
Transition points between river lengths
Bridge – freeway/rail
Bridge – car/bike/walking existing
Bridge – bike/walking existing
New bike/walking trail/bridge opportunities

River valley lengths:
1. Brimbank
2. Steele Creek
3. Maribyrnong
4. Racecourse
5. Footscray
6. Footscray Wharf
7. Port