The Yarra River traverses 9 Local Councils.

Sea water travels upstream to Dights Falls.

Provides around 70% of Melbourne's drinking water.

The Yarra River is 242km in length, spanning from the pristine forests of the Yarra Ranges to the mouth at Port Phillip Bay.

The river's catchment covers 4076km² (including 24 tributaries).

10km sea water travels upstream to Dights Falls.

4th highest yield of water per hectare of catchment in Victoria.

1/3 of Victoria's animal species are found in the Yarra catchment.

Over 190 species of birds inhabit the Yarra River corridor.
Over 30,000 bats live at Yarra Bend park in summer.

There are 38 mammal species including platypus, gliders and bandicoots.

There are 16 reptile species known to inhabit the Yarra River including skinks, turtles, snakes and lizards.

Over 1,000 cyclists travel along the Main Yarra Trail between 7am and 9am on weekdays.

The Yarra is brown in colour in the lower reaches due to suspended silt carried downstream.

Melbourne Water has spent approximately $290m on river health improvements over the past 5 years.

Aboriginal people called the river ‘Birrarung’ ‘shadow of the mists’ and ‘Yarra Yarra’ means ‘ever flowing’ in the Wurundjeri language.

Melbourne Water has spent approx $290m on river health improvements over the past 5 years.
Introduction

The Yarra River and its riverscape is a valuable asset that needs to be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

The Victorian Government has committed to protecting the Yarra River’s amenity and significance by introducing legislation, stronger planning controls and a trust or similar entity. Before preparing new legislation to protect the Yarra River the government established the Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory Committee (Yarra MAC) to assess the effectiveness of current governance arrangements.

A discussion paper was developed by the Yarra MAC to promote community discussion about opportunities to improve the oversight and management of the Yarra River. It was developed through consultation with a Yarra River Protection Reference Group (Yarra Reference Group) and key stakeholders about the most important issues and opportunities that need to be addressed. This document is a summary version of the discussion paper.

All Victorians are encouraged to have their say by making a submission before the closing date on Friday 5 August 2016.

Have your say

The Yarra MAC would like to hear what you think about the ideas in its discussion paper and any other ideas you may have about protecting the Yarra River. In particular, it seeks feedback on the following questions.

1. What aspect of the Yarra River and its environs would you most like to see protected?
2. What aspect of the Yarra River and its environs would you most like to see improved?
3. Is there any information or issues we have missed?
4. What would you like to see included in a vision for the Yarra River?
5. What elements would you like to see covered in the Yarra strategic plan?
6. What would you like to see included in legislation to protect the Yarra River? What do you think are the key criteria for the evaluation of options for management arrangements of the Yarra River and its riverscape?
7. What are your thoughts on the options for a new management model for the Yarra River and its environs?
8. What are your thoughts about establishing a new organisation to oversee development and monitor delivery of the Yarra strategic plan?
9. Are there any other management models/options we should consider?

The Yarra MAC will consider all feedback and prepare a summary report. A number of investigations have also been commissioned to inform the Yarra MAC’s deliberations.

The Yarra MAC will provide its advice on governance reforms to protect the Yarra River to the Victorian Government by the end of 2016.
There are many ways to have your say: online, in person and by making a written submission.

Online
At http://haveyoursay.delwp.vic.gov.au/protecting-the-yarra-river you can view and download the discussion paper, background studies and other information and also provide feedback through an online ideas-sharing tool. You can also make a written submission by completing the submission form on the website.

In person
You can attend one of the community workshops being held along the Yarra to join the discussion and complete a workshop feedback form. Or you can drop in to one of the listening posts being held along the Yarra River corridor. Details and timings of events will be available at http://haveyoursay.delwp.vic.gov.au/protecting-the-yarra-river.

Written submission
You can make a written submission on the discussion paper by:

• emailing a written submission to yarra.river@delwp.vic.gov.au
• posting a written submission to: Yarra River Protection Program Manager, Planning Policy Implementation Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning Level 8, 8 Nicholson St, Melbourne Vic 3000

Submissions will be made public unless you ask for yours to be confidential.

Please make your submission by Friday 5 August 2016.
Stewardship over time

To the Wurundjeri people, the Birrarung (Yarra River) was the life source and an important meeting place. Its landscapes and biodiversity features in their Dreamtime and creation stories.

After European settlement, the river became the lifeblood of the rapidly developing city of Melbourne. It provided water supply, supported food production and industries, transported people and goods and was a place for recreational activities; it facilitated urban development. It has continued to shape Melbourne ever since.

Today’s Yarra River, with its naturalistic riverscape settings and vast network of parklands, is largely the legacy of two major waves of regulatory interventions and investments that followed the two most significant population growth eras of Melbourne: the initial gold rush and town-founding era of the late 1800s and the post-war immigration and baby boom decades from the 1950s that drove significant environment protection and urban renewal especially in the 1970s.

Melbourne is now well into its third population growth era, which is its most significant to date.

1835
Early European settlement developed along the Yarra River

Traditional Owners use the river for water supply, food and cultural activities

Low-intensity land management

1850–90s
European settlers modified the water course and used the river for ad hoc water supply and waste disposal which degraded and polluted the waterway

Abattoirs, smelters, tanneries and mortuaries also disposed of waste into river causing it to ‘run red’

River used for water supply and waste disposal
100,000 ha reserved in the upper Yarra catchment to protect water supplies which has protected the headwaters of the Yarra in near-pristine condition.

Construction started on an underground sewerage system to send wastes to the Werribee treatment farm.

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS laid out and planted.

1877

Yarra Bend Park reserved.

1873–90s

Town-founding investment in parks and public health (water supply quality and waste disposal systems).

1970

Environment Protection Act 1970 led to the creation of EPA Victoria and large-scale (backlog) sewering of outer suburbs and prohibition of industrial waste discharges.

Statement of Planning Policy Number 4: Yarra River required the corridor to be planned primarily as an open space system for nature conservation and recreation.

1976

MMBW established to build and operate sewerage and water supply systems.

1890s

100,000 ha reserved in the upper Yarra catchment to protect water supplies which has protected the headwaters of the Yarra in near-pristine condition.

1877

Yarra Bend Park reserved.

1906

Yarra Bend Park joined with Studley Park to create current 260 ha reserve.

1896

Royal Botanic Gardens laid out and planted.

1929

Yarra Bend Park joined with Studley Park to create current 260 ha reserve.

1950s

Construction of the Upper Yarra Reservoir that further reduced flows in the river.

1960–70s

Rapid population growth and expansion of Melbourne’s (mostly unsewered) suburbs resulted in risks to public health and pollution of the Yarra.

1970s

MMBW Planning Policies for Melbourne Metropolitan region included green wedges and policies to manage flooding, reduce sewage pollution and reserve land for recreational use; it was followed by significant investments to create the open space corridor and park system along the Yarra and strategic open space acquisition and construction of the Main Yarra Trail along the river.

1980–90s

Transformation of Southbank and development of the promenades along the CBD section.

2002

Melbourne 2030 reinforced the green wedges policy and set urban growth boundaries for Melbourne, protecting the upper Yarra Valley from significant urban development.

2015

Yarra River protection clause introduced into the State Planning Policy Framework, the strongest policy to date for managing the river corridor’s environmental and landscape values.

2006

17,000 ML environmental water entitlement made available for the Yarra River to protect environmental values.

Planning controls for residential stormwater management introduced (Clause 56.07).

1970

Environment Protection Act 1970 led to the creation of EPA Victoria and large-scale (backlog) sewering of outer suburbs and prohibition of industrial waste discharges.

Statement of Planning Policy Number 4: Yarra River required the corridor to be planned primarily as an open space system for nature conservation and recreation.
The Yarra River today

The Yarra River is one of Victoria’s most iconic waterways. It is integral to Melbourne’s identity and vital to the liveability of the city. There are 2,450 ha of urban parklands and green open spaces along its course where people relax, meet and celebrate. It is a biodiversity corridor and is important to the culture, values and practices of Aboriginal people.

The water quality in the Yarra has improved significantly over the last 40 years and it compares well to other major urban rivers in cities internationally. However, the changing climate and population growth will increase the effects of urban stormwater run–off on the health of the Yarra River and on the health of Port Phillip Bay.

Public parkland and green open space are vital contributors to the health and wellbeing of the community and the character of the local and regional landscape. Of all Melbourne’s public and private open spaces, those associated with the Yarra River represent perhaps the largest and most important.

The Yarra River and its riverscape is an important amenity value to the city and its community. The river, its immediate corridor and its catchment offer a wide range of opportunities for the benefit, enjoyment and health of locals and visitors.

The Yarra MAC has held discussions and workshops with a range of stakeholders to identify the issues and opportunities that should be considered in governance reforms. These discussions identified that the priority needs to be addressed are:

- the recognition and celebration of Aboriginal heritage and culture
- a strategic vision and/or plan for the whole of the Yarra River corridor
- continuous parkland and trail along the corridor
- water quality and sufficient water flows
- enhanced biodiversity along the corridor
- controlling the effects (such as increased stormwater run–off and visual impacts) of urbanisation and development.
The case for change

The Yarra MAC has examined the current planning and management arrangements for the Yarra River and concluded that despite the conscientious work conducted by the more than ten different organisations responsible for planning, management and service delivery, management of the Yarra River and its riverscape is fragmented.

Predominantly, there is no overarching mechanism for a joined-up approach to maximising community values and benefits that aligns objectives, integrates decision-making across organisations and covers the full length of the river.

In addition to the broader governance challenge of working across sectors and between organisations, the Yarra MAC’s work to date has identified seven issues arising from current institutional and regulatory arrangements:

- partnerships with Aboriginal custodians of the river are not well-developed
- there is no overarching vision or strategy
- responsibility for the amenity values of the river and its riverscape are not well-defined
- the community’s vision for the Yarra River corridor is not embedded in statutory planning
- there is no community forum with status
- there are funding constraints
- there is no consistent enforcement of regulations and plans.

Addressing these issues will be the focus of governance reforms to provide a framework that will protect and enhance the amenity and significance of the Yarra River for the health and enjoyment of future Victorians.
A new management model

After examining the current planning and management arrangements for the Yarra, the Yarra MAC concluded that a new management model is needed to protect the river and that this requires work in six key areas.

1. a community vision that clearly outlines community requirements and expectations for the entire length of the river over the long term
2. an integrated, overarching strategic plan for the river that would give effect to the community vision
3. improved management arrangements to ensure the Yarra Strategic Plan will be implemented efficiently and effectively with clear accountabilities for all aspects of management
4. legislation to provide statutory backing and longevity to the new arrangements and give real confidence that the river will be protected over the long term
5. a statutory reporting and audit function to provide regular reporting to government and the community about progress delivering the plan
6. clear funding and infrastructure delivery arrangements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Options</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Develop a Yarra vision and a Yarra strategic plan</td>
<td>1.1 A new coordinating committee</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1.2 An existing body</td>
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<td>1.3 A new body</td>
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<td>1.4 A new body established within an existing agency</td>
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<td>2. Service delivery</td>
<td>2.1 An existing service delivery agency</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.2 A new service delivery agency</td>
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<td>2.3 The body that produced the Yarra vision and Yarra strategic plan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.4 A new coordinating body</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Independent audit</td>
<td>3.1 An existing independent monitoring and audit agency</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.3 The body that produced the Yarra vision and Yarra strategic plan</td>
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Goals for the Yarra River, its corridor and catchment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Through which we would aim to ...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A healthy river</td>
<td>• care for the river, its riverscape and catchment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• promote the health of the river and its riparian ecology</td>
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<td>A liveable city</td>
<td>• ensure community access to, and travel alongside, the river</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• ensure enjoyment of the river for people of all ages and abilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>A culturally diverse riverscape</td>
<td>• increase cultural and heritage values</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• increase opportunities for celebration and coming together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable development</td>
<td>• protect iconic and naturalistic river landscapes from inappropriate development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• connect communities and places along the river with trails and cycling corridors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern governance arrangements</td>
<td>• provide visionary leadership and a long-term commitment to delivering the vision and its goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• involve the Traditional Owners and the general community in the management and stewardship of the river</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schematic scope of Yarra strategic plan

- **Yarra strategic plan**
  - Introduction (purpose and context)
  - Vision and values
  - Objectives and principles
  - Regulatory framework (e.g., planning, catchment)
  - Plan of management (broad strategies and targets)
  - Framework plan (specific implementation measures for each reach)
  - Monitoring and evaluation plan

- **Upper Yarra reach plan**
  - Descriptions of key unique characteristics

- **Rural Yarra reach plan**
  - Descriptions of key unique characteristics

- **Suburban Yarra reach plan**
  - Descriptions of key unique characteristics

- **Inner-city Yarra reach plan**
  - Descriptions of key unique characteristics
  - Key issues and opportunities
  - Key outcomes (clear and measurable)
  - Principles for management (e.g., vegetation management, public access, infrastructure, land use)
  - Create the structure for future investment and development
  - Implementation plan
  - Monitoring and evaluation plan