

# Draft Submission to 'Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung) Discussion Paper' July 2016

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NILLUMBIK SHIRE COUNCIL

To the Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory  
Committee

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# 1 Introduction

The following is a response from Nillumbik Shire Council to the discussion paper '*Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung)*' July 2016

Council supports an integrated approach to managing the Yarra River as one continuous landscape and introducing new governance arrangements. The Yarra River is a significant asset to Melbourne and to Victoria and it is vital to protect it and improve its health.

This important work is about the health of an ecosystem. If the natural environment is not maintained the amenity value, social and economic benefits will not follow.

This submission is structured following the order of the seven questions on page 52 of the discussion paper.

## 2 What would you like to see included in a vision for the Yarra River?

The Yarra River is a continuous landscape and includes the river's wider catchment and tributaries. This landscape transcends municipal and property boundaries and its management arrangements need to change from the current fragmented approach to a more coordinated structure.

The river is a place (places) of natural and cultural significance for Victoria. The Yarra River vision needs to identify its diverse values and articulate why it is important for its environment and biodiversity; character and amenity; heritage; open space, recreation and access.

The significance of the Yarra River is recognised by the Victorian Government in the State Planning Policy Framework. It also needs a statement of significance which feeds into the vision and the values that, in turn, need to be protected through policies and actions in the management plan. The statement of significance developed by the Middle Yarra River Project is a useful point of reference. See *Middle Yarra River Corridor Study* Final recommendations report December 2015 pages 18 and 19 vision and statement of significance.

*'The Yarra River and the landscape through which it passes have metropolitan significance as an environmental, aesthetic, cultural, recreation and tourism asset. The river corridor links parklands and reserves into a near-continuous vegetated landscape experience that provides a highly valued, secluded, natural environment, enjoyed by local and metropolitan communities.'*

In all documentation to be developed, including the vision, the protection of natural values and the encouragement of environmental sustainability should be prioritised.

For such a significant project it is important to allow sufficient time for the community consultation and to ensure that the reach is wide, resourcing adequate and timing and

style of communication allows for maximum participation. The community does not always take an holistic view and it is important to capture diverse viewpoints, perhaps including hard to reach communities.

### **3 What elements would you like to see covered in the Yarra River Strategic Plan?**

Fundamentally the plan must protect the significance of the river (based on the statement of significance - see above) and achievement of the vision for its future.

A strategic plan would include broad themes of environment and biodiversity; character and amenity; heritage; open space, recreation and access and governance and funding sources. It needs to include both public and private land.

Again, the protection of natural values and environmental sustainability should be some of the principles that inform the preparation of the Strategic Plan. These principles would then inform strategies and actions concerning the management of stormwater and drainage from urban development and natural tributaries.

An emphasis should be placed on the encouragement of eco-tourism, being projects which encourage visitation "... with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation." (Ecotourism Australia).

The process to follow is, firstly, to assess significance of the Yarra (see above response to Q2), develop the management plan policies and actions then manage in accordance with the policies and actions. It is possible that the plan would include a number of existing plans and strategies under its 'umbrella' as much of the necessary work is already being done by different agencies and organisations and its role is to bring them together. This is in keeping with the Yarra MACs suggestion at 5.2 (p46). There must also be measurable indicators of success and allocated responsibilities and timing.

The discussion paper seems to suggest that the plan would be an incorporated document within the planning system (p46 final paragraph). If this is the case, it is not supported because, although it adds weight to the strategy, it also makes it an inflexible document and our view is that it needs regular review and to be able to respond to changing circumstances if necessary without planning scheme amendments. The suggested review period of 10-15 years is too long and it needs to be reviewed more regularly, say every 5 years.

### **4 What would you like to see included in legislation to protect the Yarra River?**

Council agrees that the roles and responsibilities of all agencies involved need to be set out in legislation (section 5.3 p48).

If the new board of management were to comprise Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water as we suggest below, their roles and responsibilities would need to be addressed in the legislation.

Funding sources need to be identified from the outset. Potential sources include consideration of 'ring-fencing' parts of the metropolitan parks charge and/or the Waterways and Drainage Charge (discussion paper p39).

## **5 What do you think are the key criteria for the evaluation of options for management arrangements of the Yarra River and its riverscape (section 5.4)?**

Council is supportive of the issues and principles identified by the Yarra MAC to be considered when assessing the advantages and disadvantages of each potential management option (Table 9 p50).

We would add the following to the 'issues and principles':

- the optimum way to protect the identified significance of the Yarra River
- use and build capacity in existing networks and knowledge base(s)

The Transport Integration Act 2010 is given as an example of legislation which creates a framework for the creation of integrated transport in Victoria (p49). The intention of this Act is admirable but its effectiveness in practice is questionable, and it may not be the most appropriate basis for a successful delivery model.

## **6 What are your thoughts on the options for a new management model for the Yarra River and its environs?**

In relation to the proposed management model, it is difficult to evaluate the options proposed in the discussion paper in a thorough manner because of the lack of detail provided at this stage (page 51). But, in general terms, the proposal for a new body to be established within an existing agency seems sound subject to evaluation against criteria (table 10 item 1.4 p51).

The new body need not be a totally new organisation. An effective approach would be to establish the 'new' governing body within an existing agency, specifically Parks Victoria or Melbourne Water comprising staff from both organisations. This would allow access to existing organisation structure, support, knowledge and networks.

A key issue would be securing a dedicated funding stream for the implementation of the strategic plan and consideration could be given to 'ring-fencing' parts of the metropolitan parks charge (Parks Victoria) and/or the Waterways and Drainage Charge (Melbourne Water).

## **7 What are your thoughts about establishing a new organisation to oversee development and monitor delivery of the Yarra strategic plan?**

The discussion paper suggests that independent auditing would be required (p49), and would reassure the community and government that the strategic plan was being implemented. There would not seem to be a need to establish a new external monitoring body, and instead option 3.1 'An existing independent monitoring and audit agency' would seem to be the most cost effective option (Table 10 p51).

## **8 Are there any other management models/options we should consider?**

It is important to compare different management options to decide on the optimum model using the criteria determined following consultation on the discussion paper.

There may also be models from overseas which are useful to consider. For example, the National Park Authority model from the UK may be worth looking at in that the areas concerned are a combination of lived in landscapes under pressure from development and have economic and social aspects as well as conservation imperatives e.g. Peak District area 1,438 km<sup>2</sup> <http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/looking-after/about-us>.

The parks management plan for the Peak District '...sets a vision and lays down objectives for the national park, not just the Authority, and balances social, economic and environmental issues. The documents are the result of significant consultation with local people and organisations, who have an interest in the national park.' The management plan is described by the Authority as '...the most important document for the national park. It tells everyone what the key issues are and how they are going to be tackled – both now and in the future.'

<http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/looking-after/national-park-management-plan>

<http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/microsites/npmp>

## **9 Conclusion**

Council commends the Victorian Government's actions to protect the Yarra River and welcomes recognition of the river's significance and actions proposed to care for it into the future. The Yarra River is a continuous landscape transcending municipal and property boundaries and its management arrangements do need change from the current fragmented approach to a more coordinated structure.

Council is generally supportive of the ideas proposed in the discussion paper and in particular supports landscape scale management; a values - driven strategic plan and a

new governance model that is based on existing service delivery agencies (discussion paper p51 table 10 2.1).

The discussion paper is general in nature and we welcome the detailed final proposal in order to provide a more informed commentary.