



# Re-imagining Birrarung

Six radical restoration ideas  
for the iconic Yarra River



Environmental  
Justice Australia

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### **About Environmental Justice Australia**

Environmental Justice Australia is a not-for-profit public interest legal practice. Funded by donations and independent of government and corporate funding, our legal team combines a passion for justice with technical expertise and a practical understanding of the legal system to protect the environment. We act as advisers and legal representatives to the environment movement, pursuing court cases to protect our shared environment. We work with community-based environment groups, regional and state environmental organisations and larger environmental NGOs. We provide strategic and legal support to their campaigns to address climate change, protect nature and defend the rights of communities to a healthy environment. We campaign to improve our legal system. We defend existing, hard won environmental protections from attack. We also pursue new and innovative solutions to fill the gaps and fix the failures in our legal system to clear a path for a more just and sustainable world.

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# Introduction

In Tony Birch's 2015 novel *Ghost River*, two teenage boys befriend a group of homeless men who live on the river of the book's title. It is the Yarra River, as we now call it.

The boys live in the working-class suburbs along the river. It is the late 1960s. The river is really the central figure of the story. The boys build their friendship around it. Events – adventures featuring local gangsters and corrupt coppers, domestic dramas and marginalised river communities – play out in and around the river.

At one point, the homeless men tell stories of the 'ghost river' – the river running underneath this one (the Yarra/Birrarung) – that flows all the way under the Bay to the Heads and out into Bass Strait. This story is the telling of the existence and fate of the river prior to sea level rise thousands of years ago. It is in Wurundjeri lore. It is an ancient vision of the river that is common to lore and science.

As the novel's character describes, that ancient river is still there. There is another river overlaying it too, Birrarung to Wurundjeri and the Yarra to Europeans, one that has been significantly altered since colonisation: the river that is there now.

In 50 years or 100 years it will be a different river again. Or perhaps, the same river lived and living differently.

The stories in this report are visions of a revitalised, restored river. They imagine what the river can be like when benefiting from the maxim *wilip-gin Birrarung murrn*: 'Keep the Birrarung alive'.

Each account comes from communities involved in caring for the river. They are snapshots of ambitious and bold visions for the river.

We need such visions. We need also the collective will to insist on them and insist on the means to achieve them: laws, projects, resources, organisation, policies, the commitment of public authorities at all levels, stories, involvement, lessons, tasks to pass on to the next generation.

These accounts represent themes that, in our view, are integral to the hard work of planning, negotiating and institutionalising change: the ancient river, a clean river, a healthy river, a connected river, and a place of river communities.

This project of change is embodied in the *Yarra River Protection (wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017 (Vic)*, which received Royal Assent and become part of the law of Victoria on 26 September 2017.

This law establishes a moment of opportunity, if well implemented and embraced, by which long-term visions can provide powerful, effective pathways for how we manage and govern the river. And the state in which hand it on to our children.

We hope this report stimulates your imagination about Birrarung and its future. Because imagining can spark not only ideas and visions for the river, but also measures on how we might achieve them.

*Dr Bruce Lindsay, lawyer, Environmental Justice Australia*





# A clean Yarra

A determined bunch of people have a vision to re-introduce recreation and water play to the lower Yarra and, in doing so, 'transform an underused section of the iconic river's northern bank into a thriving community facility'.

Most Melburnians wouldn't be seen dead swimming in the Yarra. It tends to be international tennis stars who choose to plunge into our much-loved but notoriously murky river. Jim Courier started the trend after winning the Australian Open in 1992 to honour a pledge to his coach. Courier repeated the celebration when he won the tournament the following year. Then Angelique Kerber revived the tennis champion's Yarra dip when she won the title in 2016.

But a determined bunch of people have a vision to re-introduce recreation and water play to the lower Yarra and, in doing so, 'transform an underused section of the iconic river's northern bank into a thriving community facility'.

Inspired by successful urban swimming projects overseas – like Copenhagen's Harbour Baths, the Canal Pools of Paris and Boston's Charles River Race – Yarra Pools is a community-led proposal for a public pool in the Yarra River at Enterprize Park, next to the Melbourne Aquarium.

Michael O'Neill of Yarra Pools says the proposal is grounded in the idea that if you want people to swim in the Yarra's water, the river needs to be healthier than it is now.

"We see swimmability as the tangible link to engage the community in river health outcomes and show the value in investing in green infrastructure throughout the Yarra catchment.

"By investing in urban forests, water sensitive urban design, green roofs and stormwater harvesting schemes, we can make the Yarra River in Melbourne swimmable again."

As the Yarra Pool advocates point out, pollution in the Yarra is a relatively recent problem. The river has been here for millennia. People have lived in its catchment for well over 40,000 years. It's only been for the last 50 years that the lower reaches of the river haven't been considered safe for swimming.

For thousands of years the Yarra River was a central meeting place, a source of food and a place for recreation. The Wurundjeri nurtured it, told stories about it and swam in its clear fresh waters. When Europeans arrived and established Melbourne the desire to swim in the river continued.

In the mid-1800s there were several floating public pools in the Yarra River. One of these, Victoria Baths, was located just downstream of the Queens Bridge Falls. The falls (probably better described as a series of rapids) were a natural feature that separated the Yarra's fresh water from the salt water closer to the river mouth. The rapids were blasted away in the 1880s to make it easiest for boats to get up and down the river.

In the early 1900s an annual swimming race began. The three-mile Yarra swim was 'one of the chief swimming events in the world' and drew a world record number of entrants in 1929. It was attended by large crowds, which lined the river banks cheering on competitors





like Olympic silver medallist Ivan Steadman and former Lord Mayor and Olympian Frank Beaurepaire.

Pollution eventually put a halt to swimming in the Yarra's lower reaches. The river's water quality deteriorates after rain, when stormwater brings contaminants from the streets flowing into the waterway and the sewer system sometimes overflows into waterways.

At present it is illegal to swim in the Yarra downstream of Gipps Street, Abbotsford, primarily for boating safety reasons.

By working to return swimming to the city reaches of the Yarra, Michael O'Neill hopes to spark a serious discussion about water quality and meaningfully tackle the issue of diffuse source stormwater pollution.

The project is in the 'user needs analysis' phase. During this process Yarra Pools will liaise with potential project partners and stakeholders to determine

the viability of the project, identify potential users and gauge their needs. The project proponents will develop an agreed set of principles that can be tested with the community and refined, working with the involvement of Melbourne's academic, design and Aboriginal communities. Yarra Pools will then put together a business case to explore the best delivery model, staging approach and funding sources to deliver the project.

From an environmental perspective one of the big unanswered questions about the proposal is whether the pool will use water straight from the river, or treat it first, or pump in water from Melbourne's water supply.

Andrew Kelly, the Yarra Riverkeeper, says a swimming pool fed by filtered Yarra water would improve public awareness of the river's health, "particularly if they attached a wetlands to it – it would turn the attention of Melbourne to the river in a fun and ecologically sound way".





Related to the Yarra Pools push is the Yarra Swim campaign, which aims to revive the annual Race to Princes Bridge, once touted as the 'biggest open water swimming event in the world'.

Making the Yarra in Melbourne swimmable again – whether in a pool or an open water race – would require significant changes to Melbourne's stormwater system.

It would also require a change to the way we think about the Yarra – doing away with the mentality that rivers are for getting rid of things we don't want and reinstating the Yarra as a life-giving source for Melbourne.

**By investing in urban forests, water sensitive urban design, green roofs and stormwater harvesting schemes, we can make the Yarra River in Melbourne swimmable again.**

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Opposite: Concept design for a public pool in the Yarra River at Enterprize Park, next to Melbourne Aquarium (courtesy Yarra Pools)

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Above: The starting line for a 1987 swimming race in the Yarra River (courtesy Yarra Swim)





# A healthy Yarra

Imagine watching platypus living in the Yarra River  
as far downstream as Dight's Falls in Collingwood.  
And imagine the water being so clean  
you could see them!

Ron Lewis and Tim Curmi from community volunteer group Native Fish Australia can imagine it and have a better sense than most Melburnians of what would need to change to make it a reality.

"Occasionally platypus do venture down the river as far as Dight's Falls," says Tim. "But they don't stay because there's not enough food for them and there isn't enough oxygen in the water."

The problems for platypus in the Yarra are the same as those faced by native fish. The Yarra is home to many species of native fish – Murray cod and Macquarie perch, smaller fish like pygmy perch, galaxia and gudgeon, as well as turtles, yabbies, shrimp and eels. But these native species, along with the platypus, have a hard time of it because the river has been abused for so long.

"One of the biggest problems is that 70 to 80 per cent of the river's natural flow has been taken out," says Tim. "The river is a shadow of its former self," adds Ron.

This extraction, much of it to the Upper Yarra Reservoir for drinking water and for farming in the Yarra Valley, means not enough fresh, clean water is flowing through the river system to keep its natural ecosystems alive and healthy.

Ron and Tim also talk about the problem of turbidity and 'suspended solids' – the dirt and oily muck that hangs in the water because so much of the Yarra's inflow is runoff from hard surfaces like roads and

concrete, instead of rain filtered through leaves and soil. The suspended solids give the Yarra its famous brownness and starve the fish and other creatures of the oxygen they need.

"Everyone now accepts that the Yarra is muddy, that it's the river that flows upside down, as they say, but it wasn't always like that and doesn't have to be like that," Ron says. "When I was young it was a clear stream that would, with torrential rain, get a bit turbid. Now it's like that all the time."

Ron and Tim explain that not enough shade is also hurting the Yarra's natural inhabitants.

"A river like the Yarra that flows east-west, rather than north-south has the sun on it for much of the day, so shade trees are very important," Ron says. "If too many of those shade trees are cut down, the river's temperature rises. As the temperature of the water increases, the amount of dissolved oxygen in the river decreases. That's a problem for native fish."

Then there's the competition native critters face from pest species.

"Redfin, carp, tench, mosquito fish – just about anything that swims has, at some point, been let out into the Yarra," Ron says.

What can be done about this litany of problems? Returning flows to the river would address many of the issues. But how to do it? The Victorian Environmental





Water Holder and Melbourne Water set aside some water and release it from reservoirs in the catchment into the river at various times of the year. But Tim and Ron say it's never enough and often gets released at times that are convenient for reservoir managers, not necessarily when the natural ecosystems most need it.

Ron and Tim support the radical idea of boosting the Yarra's flows with desalinated water from the Wonthaggi desal plant, which is already connected to the Yarra system by pipeline. This would allow the Environmental Water Holder to direct higher volumes to the river during the summer months and better mimic natural flows.

A network of restored wetlands to filter stormwater before it enters the Yarra and its tributaries would greatly improve water quality and do a lot to mitigate the 'suspended solids' problem. Ron and Tim point to a successful wetland restoration project in Doncaster that funnels and filters the water that comes off the carparks at Westfield's shopping centre before it goes into Ruffey Creek and eventually the Yarra.

This should be undertaken in conjunction with a program to replant shade trees along parts of the river where they have been removed, to keep the water from heating up too much in summer.



In combination with revegetation, restoring wetlands to filter stormwater and making sure the Yarra gets "the right flows at the right times," Native Fish Australia also supports aerating parts of the river that are prone to low oxygen levels – essentially doing what the bubbles do in an aquarium.

"Putting some air into those almost stagnant parts of the river, like around Studley Park Boathouse at the height of summer, that would lift the dissolved oxygen levels in the water and create an environment where life could start to return," Tim says.

These might seem like ambitious projects. But they are also completely achievable.

If the people who love and use the Yarra make sure their elected representatives know the health of the river matters to them, one day we might be able to sit on the riverbank above Dight's Falls and watch platypus nuzzling around rocks and logs, finding their evening meal.

Photos: Tim Curmi of Native Fish Australia catching Macquarie Perch hatchlings in the Yarra at Pound Bend, Warrandyte





Everyone now accepts that the Yarra is muddy, that it's the river that flows upside down, as they say, but it wasn't always like that and doesn't have to be like that.









# A restored Yarra

It's coming towards dusk. The wind blows lightly through reeds. Native fish flick around submerged river red gum logs in a wetland pool, while kangaroos graze nearby and a wedge-tailed eagle circles overhead.





This scene is not somewhere in the country. It's in the suburbs of Melbourne in 2017.

The wetland is called Yaruk Tamboore and it's on the northern side of the Yarra River at Lower Plenty. Look up from the wetland and you can see Melbourne's skyscrapers down the valley. Together with the adjacent Montpelier and Murundaka wetlands, the area comprises about 30 or 40 hectares.

Before dams changed the Yarra's natural flows this place would have been fed by seasonal floods, giving the red gums the soaking they need to survive droughts and triggering breeding events for fish, crustaceans and birds. A small creek also fed the wetland, running east to west before joining up with the Plenty River.

The area was an orchard for a time, then a dairy farm. When Rosanna Golf Course was built in the 1970s the creek's western section was filled in and its flow diverted into a deep drain that ran along the eastern side of the golf course and then into the Yarra.

The wetland had lost the two sources of its life: the overbank floods from the Yarra and the little creek. It dried up and was taken over by weeds.

Dr Andrew Lucas, who lives nearby, says when the Friends of the Yarra Valley Parks first considered rehabilitating the wetland, it looked exactly like what it was: farmland that had been abandoned 30 years before.



"Without a farmer there to take care of the land, everything was overrun. The blackberries were four metres high, there were thousands of rabbit holes and the foxes had eaten everything else."

With substantial funding from Melbourne Water over several years, the Friends set to work. They installed sills in the wetland drains, to restrict the loss of water. With heavy machinery, they dug several large ponds, shifting 2,400 tonnes of soil to allow the wetland to hold water all year around. They planted extensively. The pools filled during a heavy dump of autumn rain. They used a draught horse to gently manoeuvre red gum logs into the pools, providing habitat for fish and yabbies and perches for birds.

They did all this and much more. The Friends have transformed Yaruk Tamboore.

"Now, when you walk into the wetland, the pools are full, we have recently introduced native fish and there are many species of birds all around you," Andrew Lucas says.

"We filmed a painted snipe, an endangered shorebird that we understand has not been seen in Melbourne for 15 years. Now that there's permanent water, you see little pairs of ears poking up here and there where the kangaroos are lying. We get many wombats too. It can feel like you're in central Victoria, not the suburbs of Melbourne."





Now, when you walk into the wetland,  
the pools are full, we have re-introduced  
native fish and there are many species of  
birds all around you.





There was weeding, planning and planting. There was mud, sweat and tears. But once the water returned, nature started to do its thing.

“Despite the years of neglect, the seed bed was still there and it’s amazing how much native vegetation has returned with the water,” Andrew says.

The Wurundjeri Council has been an active participant in the restoration. At an official naming ceremony in 2014 Doreen Garvey Wandin, a Wurundjeri Elder, conferred the name Yaruk Tamboore: magical pool. Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and the Banyule City Council all have an interest in the ongoing welfare and success of the wetland.

What’s Andrew’s advice to other community groups that might be thinking of similar restoration projects?

“For anyone pondering something like this, I would say be prepared to learn much more about the environment than you can hope to contribute.

“It’s a lot of work, but it’s very rewarding. If you try to do it on your own it seems daunting, but if you make the right connections it is achievable. We’ve been very fortunate to have the passion and knowledge of Cam Beardsell OAM from Parks Victoria, encouragement from Brendan Sydes from Environmental Justice Australia and a long-term commitment to the project from Melbourne Water.”



The way we think about rivers and wetlands keeps changing.

Andrew can imagine a future where there might be a whole string of restored and protected wetlands along the Yarra, rehabilitated by community groups in partnership with non-government organisations and state agencies. Billabongs and wetlands upstream, presently disconnected from the river, could regularly flood and become a real part of the river again. The ancient lost wetlands, concreted over near Moonee Ponds Creek, could be re-established as the concrete retreats.

“If you go back to 19th century Victoria, the Yarra was regarded as a place where you go to get water for manufacturing, whether it’s for tanning leather or manufacturing paper, and then a place to discharge your effluent into. That’s all changed. We’re starting to recognise rivers and wetlands as environmental hotspots.

“Wetlands are really valuable environmental assets. People, governments are waking up to this.”

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Left: Australian painted-snipe  
(*Rostratula australis*). Photo  
CC Patrick Kavanagh





Wetlands are really valuable environmental assets. People, governments are waking up to this.







# A connected Yarra

Maya Ward, author of *The comfort of water: A river pilgrimage*, shares her vision for a connected Yarra.

Fifty years ago Melbourne had its back to the Yarra and there was widespread ignorance of Aboriginal culture, history and ongoing habitation in the Melbourne region.

To imagine 50 years into the future, knowing how far our culture has travelled in just a few decades, is to embrace a joyful and optimistic vision. It is to allow the potential for collaboration and goodwill to reconfigure profoundly the place of Birrarung in the lives of all who live in her catchments.

My hope is that this river can teach a whole city, Melbourne, how to grow in ecological awareness, love of nature, and care of the river's wild and beautiful places.

In 50 years all Melburnians know the stories of the past. They know the Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri language) names of the plants, birds, animals and fish of the river. They are building new stories of connection, delight and adventure.

These stories are central to their collective lives. Their health is tied to the health of the river. They know their body is 70% water and 70% of that water comes from the Yarra. They and the river are linked.

They cherish the headwaters in the Central Highlands of the Great Dividing Range. They are proud that the tallest tree ever recorded grew in the catchment of the Yarra. They visit the Great Forest National Park and take part of replanting these magnificent forests, home of Victoria's faunal emblem the Leadbeater's possum. They saved it from extinction when logging was banned from the area.

All of this happens, with such enthusiasm, because every single Melburnian, at least once in their lifetime, has walked the river from the sea to the source.

Starting from Williamstown, passing through the docks, city and suburbs, along the linear parkway along the length of the river, through the picturesque Yarra Valley to the mountain ash and treefern wilderness of the headwaters, the path goes all the way to the Upper Yarra dam, source of our drinking water. Then it skirts safely around the closed catchment, preserving that area for pristine water and ecological integrity.

The walk along Birrarung is the most famous pilgrimage route in Australia. It rivals the Camino de Santiago in Spain. It surpasses the Camino in antiquity, for the route along the Yarra follows the ancient Wurundjeri Songline. This pilgrimage route, walked continually for tens of thousands of years, with a short break between colonial times and 2025 when the walkers began again in earnest, is rich with stories and fascinating places.

There are tales and artefacts of traditional indigenous times, of the difficult colonial period of bravery, conflict, sacrifice and misunderstanding. The stories celebrate the new fusion of awareness, appreciation and reverence for nature. They tell of the banning of plastic packaging and bottles which once littered all the waterways of the world, of the massive switch to organic agriculture and the ending of the era of poisonous fertilisers and pesticides which once threatened the web of life. They tell of the visionary plans that saved the Yarra from inappropriate development.

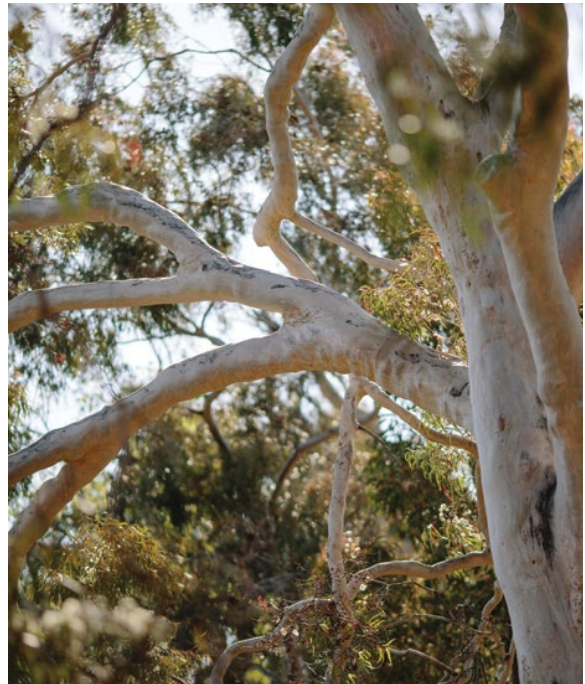


People of all cultural backgrounds re-embrace their traditions of sustainable land practices, which, combined with new technologies, showcase best practice ecological farming along the Yarra River, interspersed with rejuvenated wetlands and their huge numbers of rare and beautiful waterbirds. This is one of the greatest tourist destinations of the region, where historic homes and elegant new architecture provide inspiring accommodation for pilgrims serving the best of local produce.

The Birrarung Pilgrimage Way was created through close and careful collaboration between Wurundjeri and river-lovers along the river's entire length, an inspiring and deeply meaningful process of negotiating a new form of sacred.

Along the river people walk to find the source, their source, but they also fall in love and are married, swim, boat and fish, have their ashes spread at the end of life, work to care for and connect with nature, gather together and celebrate.

It is the heart of our lives. It is our soul. This river is clean and unpolluted once more, a symbol of dedication and transformation.



*The Weekend Australian* said of Maya Ward's book, *The comfort of water*:

*This is the true story of an eccentric journey, on foot, from the mouth of the Yarra River in Port Phillip Bay to its source: a long walk and a hard slog. It is partly a quixotic manifesto for walking. More significantly, however, it belongs to the ancient tradition of pilgrimage. Ward's journey is an act of penance, a spiritual education for our times. If you are throttled by grief at our bad habits, well, this is for you. It is an ecologically inspired divine comedy.*





Along the river people walk to find the source, their source, but they also fall in love and are married, swim, boat and fish, have their ashes spread at the end of life, work to care for and connect with nature, gather together and celebrate.







# Birrarung

Following is the preamble to the *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act*.

The Yarra River is of great importance to Melbourne and Victoria. It is the intention of the Parliament that the Yarra River is kept alive and healthy for the benefit of future generations.

This Act recognises the intrinsic connection of the traditional owners to the Yarra River and its Country and further recognises them as the custodians of the land and waterway which they call Birrarung.

In the Woi-wurrung language of the traditional owners, *Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn* means “keep the Birrarung alive”.

The following statement (in the Woi-wurrung language and in English) is from the Woi-wurrung –

*Woiwurrungbaluk ba Birrarung wanganyinu biikpil*

*Yarrayarrapil, manyi biik ba Birrarung, ganbu marram-nganyinu*

*Manyi Birrarung murrondjak, durrung ba murrup warrongguny, ngargunin twarnpil*

*Birrarungwa nhanbu wilamnganyinu*

*Nhanbu ngarn.ganhanganyinu manyi Birrarung*

*Bunjil munggary biik, wurru-wurru, warriny ba yaluk, ba ngargunin twarn*

*Biiku kuliny munggary Bunjil*

*Waa marrnakith-nganyin*

*Balliyang, barnumbinyu Bundjilal, banyu bagurk munggary*

*Ngarn.gunganyinu nhanbu*

*nyilam biik, nyilam kuliny – balit biik, balit kuliny: balitmanhanganyin manyi biik ba Birrarung. Balitmanhanganyin durrungu ba murrupu,*

*ba nhanbu murrondjak!*

We, the Woi-wurrung, the First People, and the Birrarung, belong to this Country. This Country, and the Birrarung are part of us.

The Birrarung is alive, has a heart, a spirit and is part of our Dreaming. We have lived with and known the Birrarung since the beginning. We will always know the Birrarung.


Bunjil, the great Eagle, the creator spirit, made the land, the sky, the sea, the rivers, flora and fauna, the lore. He made Kulin from the earth. Bunjil gave Waa, the crow, the responsibility of Protector. Bunjil's brother, Palliyang, the Bat, created Bagarook, women, from the water.

Since our beginning it has been known that we have an obligation to keep the Birrarung alive and healthy – for all generations to come.

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Opposite: Wurundjeri elder Aunty Joy Wandin leads a smoking ceremony at the Bolin Bolin Billabong, October 2017





We, the Woi-wurrung, the First People, and the  
Birrarung, belong to this Country. This Country,  
and the Birrarung are part of us.











# River communities

Andrew Kelly, the Yarra Riverkeeper, shares his vision for the river's communities, 50 years from now.

In 1968 Mark Strizic became the first photographer to have a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria. Looking back at Strizic's photographs of the Yarra of the 1960s, we see a river the city had turned its back on. It would not be until 1980 that *The Age* ran its Give the Yarra a Go campaign, encouraging Melburnians to think differently about their river.

The Yarra has changed so much in the last 50 years. Let's imagine what the communities of the river might look like if we turn the clock forward to 2067...

Due to the landmark *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act* of 2017, Melburnians have embraced the protection and restoration of the Yarra, from bay to source.

There is a Great Forest National Park at the top of the catchment. The park has driven an employment boom in the Yarra Valley. There are new jobs in the national park itself (Wurundjeri rangers, guides, maintenance staff) and the surrounding area (ecotourism operators, mountain bike hirers, restaurateurs and more). Passionate 'friends' groups, under the guidance of the Yarra Strategic Plan, have led the way in reconnecting the mountains to Port Phillip Bay with continuous indigenous vegetation, creating a green corridor from the closed upper catchment all the way through the city to the saltwater.

The wine-growing community has embraced the 'caring for country' ethos in the strategic plan and is known globally for its water stewardship and 'dryland' non-

irrigated vineyards. Wine made without irrigation has a strong marketing edge. As demand for irrigated water has dropped, some vineyard dams have been removed and their water returned to the river.

Some of the buildings in Docklands have been torn down to create open space and reduce wind tunnels and overshadowing of the river. This has helped city dwellers and apartment communities connect with the river. Salt marshes have been established along both sides of the estuary.

The mistakes of over-developing Docklands and the Appleton and Swanson docks have been important lessons. State legislation now demands at least 30 metres of riverbank is retained or returned to a natural state. Parents and children living in the CBD tend the salt marshes and wetlands of the Swanson Dock Quarter. Urban forests cool and shade the city and cut the winds coming off the bay. The Quarter is lauded as a world-leading example of how to integrate green places with brownfield developments. Architects and town planners visit from all over the world.

As the river now runs clear for most of the year, rowing and kayaking have boomed. Henley on the Yarra and the Head of the Yarra rowing races draw competitors from around Australia. There is a kayaking community in the lower Yarra, as well as the expanded community at Westerfolds Park. Due to the clarity of the water, Melbourne has become a world centre for dragon boat competition.

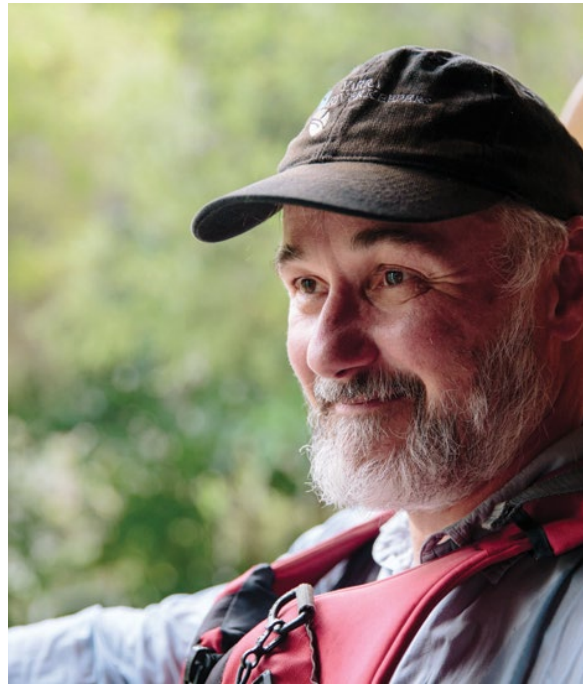


Coffee drinkers at Ponyfish Island occasionally see bottlenose dolphins swimming up the river. Seals are also seen in the river, much to the delight of tourists. The first brolgas returned to the wetlands below the Westgate Bridge, some decades earlier. Pobblebonk frogs are one of the many species that can be heard in the wetlands below Princes Bridge. The Yarra Swim Race is an established tradition and the kindy swimming club is well established at the Yarra Pool in the Turning Basin below Queens Bridge.

A connected network of bike/pedestrian trails run along much of the Yarra, but routed away from the river where that is necessary to protect wildlife. The trails are built of permeable materials to reduce stormwater run-off and integrate with the landscape. The cycling community knows the quality of the cycling experience corresponds with the ecological quality of the river corridor and actively lobbies for improvements.

Litter is rarely seen in or along the waterway. People love the river, so they don't litter it. When they do see any rubbish, it is an automatic act to pick it up and drop into one of the bins provided by councils along the Yarra.

There is an active and connected arts community along the river. Sculptures along the Main Yarra Trail connect the thriving arts centre at Heide with the Tarrawarra Galley in the Yarra Valley. These sculptures, which depict the ongoing traditional connection to country, were an initiative of the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Council and build on the works at Herring Island Sculpture Park.



Traditional stories are enshrined up and down the river.

There are memorials remembering the old fellas who used to live rough along the Yarra, back in the middle of last century, making it their home. In Collingwood, Richmond and Abbotsford a strong movement keeps alive the memory and the stories of the working class communities that grew up there until the 1980s.

The Yarra continues to be a biological hotspot for endangered species following on from the success of the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, which has now been taken off the critically endangered, endangered and threatened lists.

From the valley to the city we have embraced the river as the living heart of our vital green places and spaces.

*Andrew Kelly is the Yarra Riverkeeper. He advocates for the river: for green spaces, for water quality, for biodiversity, for the birds, animals, insects and reptiles along the River, for good planning decisions, for the tributaries, for the parklands, for appropriate recreation; and for an understanding of our river and its role in the life of the city of Melbourne.*



The *Yarra River Protection (wilip-gin Birrarung murron)* Act establishes a moment of opportunity, if well implemented and embraced, by which long-term visions can provide powerful, effective pathways for how we manage and govern the river. And the state in which hand it on to our children.



