



Friday, 27 March 2020

Dear Yarra Valley Collaboration Committee,

Re: Shaping the final 10-year strategic plan for the Yarra River

The Victorian Chapter of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (**AILA**) is pleased to have the opportunity to review and comment on the *Draft Yarra Strategic Plan*, prepared by the Yarra Collaboration Committee.

We note that this Committee comprises traditional owners, local councils through which the Yarra runs, state government departments and statutory authorities. We acknowledge that the plan has been written to guide management of the Yarra over the next 10 years, setting the foundation to achieve the 50-year vision established by the selected 24 community representatives after consultation with more than 2500 Victorians. AILA commends this breadth of collaboration and community consultation. It ensures that different perspectives, knowledge sets, skills, attitudes, beliefs and values have contributed to the development of the vision and the draft plan that responds to it.

AILA anticipates and develops, with its members, a leading position on issues of concern within the landscape architectural discourse. With more than 3,500 members in Australia and overseas, AILA champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities and greater environmental stewardship. Alongside government and allied professions, AILA works to improve the design, planning and management of the natural and built environment.

AILA's review is informed by a recent Climate and Biodiversity loss Declaration - <https://bit.ly/2Uk5XeA> - and a number of its position statements - <https://bit.ly/2xlqkPv> - relevant to the planning and management, including design, of the Yarra River and its environs.

These are:

- Connection to Country
- Liveable Cities: Healthy Communities – Healthy Living Landscape Solutions
- Liveable Cities: Cooling Cities – Urban Heat Island Effect
- Liveable Cities: Designing for an Ageing Population
- Child Friendly Cities
- Adaptation to the Changing Climate: Building Resilience
- Green Infrastructure

AILA is pleased to note that the *draft Yarra Strategic Plan* adopts many principles that underlie these position statements. These are important in the design and management of built and natural landscapes to provide for human wellbeing and environmental value.

The plan celebrates connection to country. It is the outcome of an extensive collaborative process involving traditional owners and appears to integrate respectfully and sensitively their understandings and aspirations.



Design and management for an aging community are appropriate. Implementation of the plan will provide public spaces, outdoor environments and access options that encourage independence, community engagement and positive health outcomes. In considering the issue of access for all, however, it is not clear whether the Yarra Collaboration Committee consulted with children, to ensure that the plan yields a child-friendly Yarra River precinct.

Access to nature and high-quality open space are essential for community health and social well-being. The plan delivers this. Visual and physical access to natural areas increase cognitive functioning, greater self-discipline and impulse control, improved mental health overall and greater resilience in times of stress. The Yarra River is central to the definition of greater Melbourne, its identity and that of its citizens. It offers access to nature in places where nature might otherwise be hard to see.

The plan also addresses the pressing issues related to climate change, biodiversity loss and building resilience, the heat island effect and the importance of greening cities to ameliorate this. It acknowledges the need for sustainable stormwater management, and the contribution of the Stormwater MAC, but more emphasis should be placed on the implementation of green infrastructure and a more explicit ecosystems management approach. Ecosystems management of land operates at a landscape scale, transcending private and public land, geographical and municipal boundaries.

The proposed integrated management advocated in the draft plan is consistent with this, although the focus of the plan is public land; more could be done to ensure that integrated management of the Yarra extends onto private land. The proposed collaborative management transcends boundaries rather more than the proposed works on the ground appear to do.

The Yarra River should be regarded as a superlative and iconic piece of green infrastructure, a multifunctional landscape that delivers multiple ecosystem services, across all categories, i.e. supporting, regulating, provisioning and cultural. Specifically, its systems deliver critical ecosystem services in water supply, treatment and drainage, flood management, urban cooling, habitat, biodiversity and myriad aspects of human wellbeing. It is paramount that the entire river and its riparian zone are protected as a whole, not as a watercourse with a series of significant sites. The Yarra River is a whole, not a sum of its parts. Importantly, the Yarra Parklands should form a continuous band along the riparian zone, extending into neighbouring suburban areas wherever possible. Adopting an ecosystems approach to management in the Yarra Strategic Plan would deliver the 10-year performance objectives and the 50-year community vision.

AILA commends the Yarra Collaboration Committee on its excellent work so far in producing this draft Yarra Strategic Plan. We trust that our comments here and in the online survey are useful in refining the plan to ensure delivery of both short-term objectives and long-term vision.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond. AILA would be happy to further discuss its response letter with you. You can contact AILA Victoria Chapter Manager, Martha Delfas at vic@aila.org.au.



Sincerely,

Heath Gledhill

Chapter President

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