

## 6.10 Delivering a Swimmable Birrarung

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### Executive Summary

1. This report provides management's response to the 29 July 2025 Notice of Motion, addressing Council's authority to enable safe public swimming in the Birrarung/Yarra by 2050, clarifying the roles of other government bodies, and identifying potential trial locations along the river.
2. Cities around the world have demonstrated what is possible when agencies come together to transform their waterways. In most cases local governments have been the catalyst for driving change.
3. The benefits cities reported when making swimming possible include improved liveability, increased tourism and economic activity, increased property values, improved waterway health and biodiversity and improved social connection.
4. Making the Birrarung/Yarra swimmable requires collective action that spans across the river's land catchment and within the waterway corridor itself that extends 242 kilometres. The agencies that have influence over the health and activation of the Birrarung/Yarra include the Victorian Government, Melbourne Water, Environment Protection Authority, Parks Victoria and other local governments in the river catchment.
5. City of Melbourne has limited direct authority to make the Birrarung/Yarra swimmable as Council only manages a small section of the waterway and a relatively small area of the Birrarung/Yarra catchment.
6. Three streams of activity are outlined in Attachment 1 that Council has authority to deliver.
  - 6.1. Establish a coalition for a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra: Gain commitment from other agencies to work together now and over the long-term.
  - 6.2. Celebrate and activate the waterfront: Work with private and public partners to increase the ways people connect to and experience the river.
  - 6.3. Clean the stormwater: Deliver the activities that are within City of Melbourne's control to improve water quality and waterway health.
7. Management's investigation includes a site selection framework to determine the suitable locations for swimming as well as recommendations for advocacy.

### Recommendation from management

8. That the Future Melbourne Committee resolves to:
  - 8.1. Note that delivering a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra is a long-term ambition involving multiple stakeholders and significant investment, however with commitment and collaboration, cities like Paris and Copenhagen have demonstrated it is possible to make city rivers swimmable.
  - 8.2. Note that City of Melbourne has existing legislative obligations to improve the health and water quality of the Birrarung/Yarra.
  - 8.3. Approve the Lord Mayor to sign the Swimmable Cities Charter (**Attachment 2**) to signify Council's commitment to restoring the health of the Birrarung/Yarra.
  - 8.4. Request management work with partners to establish a coalition, including other local councils and Victorian Government agencies to:

- 8.4.1. Work collaboratively towards the ambition of a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra.
- 8.4.2. Undertake a joint technical analysis to inform the level of further investment required to make the river swimmable and brief Councillors on findings.
- 8.5. Request management commence activities towards delivering a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra this financial year that are aligned to the 2025-26 annual budget, including:
  - 8.5.1. Run community engagement activities at the 2026 Moomba Festival that promote the ambition for a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra.
  - 8.5.2. Identify three opportunities for waterfront activation along the Birrarung/Yarra and principles for partnering with the private sector to deliver.
- 8.6. Develop water quality targets and a new Stormwater Management Plan that contribute to improved waterway health.

**Purpose**

9. This report provides management's response to the 29 July 2025 Notice of Motion, addressing Council's authority to enable safe public swimming in the Birrarung/Yarra by 2050, clarifying the roles of other government bodies, and identifying potential trial locations along the river.

**Background**

10. At its meeting on the 29 July, Council resolved to:
    - 10.1. Note the Lord Mayor's recent public comments expressing confidence that the Birrarung/Yarra can be swimmable before the year 2050.
    - 10.2. Recognise that such an achievement presents an opportunity to reimagine the Birrarung/Yarra as part of a 2050 Vision by activating and celebrating one of the city's most iconic natural features, enhancing public use and connection to the river.
    - 10.3. Request management to:
      - 10.3.1. Investigate what actions council has authority to take to support the goal of making the Birrarung/Yarra safe for public swimming and the costs associated with those actions, and the timeframes in which actions need to be carried out to achieve this goal.
      - 10.3.2. Investigate which other levels of government have responsibility for policies and delivering water quality improvements and infrastructure required to make the Birrarung/Yarra swimmable and what council can do to advocate to them.
      - 10.3.3. Identify locations along the river that could feature as part of a trial program.
      - 10.3.4. Report back to Future Melbourne Committee by the end of 2025 on the findings of their investigations.
  11. The swimmable cities movement has gained momentum since the Paris Olympics with cities around the world accelerating action to clean up their rivers. The Swimmable Cities Alliance was launched on the eve of the Paris Olympics and now has over 100 cities signed up to the Swimmable Cities Charter (Attachment 2). Most recently, London signed the Charter at the 2025 C40 Mayors Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
  12. Local governments play a pivotal role in creating swimmable cities by providing leadership that brings stakeholders together, and through implementing water quality improvements, improving public spaces along rivers and engaging with communities.
  13. The Birrarung/Yarra flows for 242 kilometres and has a catchment covering 4,046 square kilometres. It spans eight local government areas and is home to more than one third of Victoria's population. The Birrarung/Yarra catchment supplies 70 per cent of Greater Melbourne's drinking water.
  14. There are sections of the Birrarung/Yarra upstream of City of Melbourne that are swimmable. The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria monitors and communicates water quality at four swimming sites outside of the City of Melbourne in summer.
  15. City of Melbourne has regulatory obligations associated with river water quality:
    - 15.1. *Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017* requires City of Melbourne to work together with other Responsible Public Entities to improve collaboration along the length of the Birrarung for its benefit and protection and to support Traditional Owners as decision makers and partners on their country. City of Melbourne reports annually through the Yarra Strategic Plan implementation on our activities that are delivering under the Act.
    - 15.2. *Environment Protect Act 2017* requires City of Melbourne to minimise the risk of harm to human health and the environment from pollution. Local governments are required to develop and publish
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stormwater management plans and publicly report on action taken to reduce the health risks associated with stormwater.

### **Key considerations**

16. A more detailed analysis of pollution sources is required to determine the indicative long-term investment required to deliver a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra.
17. Case studies from swimmable cities around the world indicate the level of infrastructure and investment required varies greatly and depends largely on investment required to improve water quality to safe swimming levels.
18. The City of Melbourne has limited ability to deliver a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra as it only manages a small section of the riverfront and a very limited part of the overall river catchment. Pollution levels are highly influenced by upstream activity.
19. Melbourne Water and EPA have been working collaboratively on water quality monitoring for the last 30 years and have expressed interest in working in partnership with City of Melbourne to better understand factors influencing the ability to swim in Melbourne.
20. There are three key streams of action that City of Melbourne has the authority to take to support the goal of making the Birrarung safe for public swimming. Further detail is provided in Attachment 1.

### ***Stream A: Initiate the coalition for a swimmable Birrarung***

21. Government agencies work together to deliver requirements of the Yarra River Protection Act and have obligations under the Environment Protection Act.
22. While improving waterway health is a shared goal for these agencies, the commitment to a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra has the potential to raise standards for water quality and fast track actions for delivery. This would have benefits for all waterways.
23. Immediate actions that City of Melbourne can take to progress a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra are:
  - 23.1. Sign the Swimmable Cities Charter and encourage other local governments to sign.
  - 23.2. Work with existing governance groups to progress actions that will improve water quality.
  - 23.3. Partner with others to establish a coalition with shared commitment for delivering a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra.
24. Further action City of Melbourne could take in this Council term include:
  - 24.1. Work with the coalition to understand the scale of investment required to deliver a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra and collectively advocate for investment required.

### ***Stream B: Celebrate and activate the waterfront***

25. While long term action is needed to make swimming safe, there are many ways that City of Melbourne can celebrate and activate the riverfront in the next five years.
26. Immediate actions that City of Melbourne can take to progress a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra are:
  - 26.1. Undertake a spatial audit to identify at least three opportunities for waterfront activation along the Birrarung/Yarra and principles for partnering with the private sector to deliver.
  - 26.2. Run community engagement activities at the 2026 Moomba Festival to promote the ambition for a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra.



27. Further action City of Melbourne could take in this Council term with additional or reprioritised resources, include:
- 27.1. Partner with external organisations to run events that celebrate and activate the riverfront.
  - 27.2. Develop criteria and run an Expression of Interest process for private led swimming ventures.
  - 27.3. Explore partnership opportunities with Development Victoria and private sector organisations to coinvest in riverfront swimming, water play and other and recreational facilities.

### ***Stream C: Clean the stormwater***

28. A swimmable river needs clean water. Council has direct control over the management of its own stormwater and enforces planning controls for stormwater management on private land.
29. Immediate actions that management can take to deliver a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra are:
- 29.1. Develop water quality targets and a new Stormwater Management Plan that aims to improve waterway health.
30. Further action City of Melbourne could take in this Council term, with additional or reprioritised resources, include:
- 30.1. Map areas of high pollution within the municipality to inform pollution reduction measures.
  - 30.2. Increase compliance of litter and sediment control at construction sites.
  - 30.3. Improve the compliance and efficacy of planning controls related to the management of stormwater pollution.
  - 30.4. Run litter education campaigns linking personal action to a swimmable river.
31. In addition to the three streams of action, City of Melbourne can advocate for the Victorian Government to refocus waterway policy to improving lower reaches of the Birrarung/Yarra and other urban waterways, increasing requirements for pollution reduction in planning controls and ensuring major state infrastructure projects are reducing their impacts on waterways.
32. The ambition for a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra has the potential to benefit not only the waterway itself but the community who live, work and visit the City of Melbourne.
33. Prioritising working towards a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra now would be a legacy initiated by this Council, with the hope that it builds momentum and traction to be sustained for the long term.

### **Legal**

34. There are no direct legal implications as a result of the recommendation from management.

### **Finance**

35. The financial implications as a result of the recommendation from management have been endorsed through the City of Melbourne's Annual Budget and Council Plan 2025-29.

### **Conflict of interest**

36. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a material or general conflict of interest in relation to the matter of the report.

### **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities**

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37. The recommendation contained in this report is compatible with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* as it does not raise any human rights issues.

### **Health and Safety**

38. In developing this proposal, no Occupational Health and Safety issues or opportunities have been identified.

### **Consultation**

39. Melbourne Water, Environment Protection Authority and the Department of Environment Energy and Climate Change have been consulted to inform the development of recommendations in this report.

### **Relevance to Council Plan and Council Policies**

40. The recommendations within this report support delivery of:
- 40.1. Council Plan 2025-2029 key activity to deliver clean and revitalised waterways and green corridors.
  - 40.2. Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan 2024-2027 in maintaining relationships with Traditional Owners and self-determination for the Birrarung and exploring how Caring for Country knowledge and practices can be applied.
  - 40.3. Yarra River Birrarung Strategy 2019 vision to an inspiring public waterfront that celebrates the rich Aboriginal culture and offers a green sanctuary, loved by Melburnians.
  - 40.4. Municipal Integrated Water Management Plan 2017 objectives for healthy waterways and reuse of stormwater.

### **Social and environmental impacts**

#### **Social impacts**

41. A swimmable Birrarung/Yarra has the potential to improve social connection, physical activity and liveability. Other cities have experienced increase in both social and economic activity along with improved waterway health. A priority for City of Melbourne will be ensuring that any proposed actions respect Traditional Owner objectives for the Birrarung/Yarra. This initiative should ensure that equity of access and participation is maintained both for the public enjoyment of the river corridor and any opportunities for swimming that might be realised in future.

#### **Gender Impact Assessment**

42. A Gender Impact Assessment has not been undertaken on the specific report recommendations. A Gender Impact Assessment will be developed in future stages of a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra project.

#### **Environmental impacts**

43. Delivering a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra will lead to an improvement in water quality and biodiversity not just for the Birrarung but also for the Moonee Ponds Creek and Maribyrnong River. In reducing stormwater flows and increasing permeability, communities will benefit from healthier green spaces and reduction in land surface temperature. Potential locations for public swimming will need to consider and balance the needs and potential impacts on wildlife and river ecology.

### **Attachment List**

1. Attachment 1 Delivering a Swimmable Birrarung [6.10.1 - 25 pages]
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2. Attachment 2 - Swimmable Cities Charter [**6.10.2** - 3 pages]

# Delivering a Swimmable Birrarung/Yarra

## Opportunities for City of Melbourne





## Purpose

This report outlines the actions that City of Melbourne can take to improve the health of the Birrarung/Yarra and improve the amenity and vibrancy of the riverfront. It identifies the partners who also need to act if we are to realise the vision of a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra by 2050.

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# A Swimmable Birrarung/Yarra

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## Delivering a Swimmable Birrarung/Yarra is a Captivating Ambition

For decades, the Birrarung/Yarra was Melbourne's favourite swimming hole, even hosting the world-famous Race to Prince Bridge between 1913-1963.

But as industry boomed, so did pollution and the quality of rivers around the world declined.

For the last 30 years, there has been a steady improvement in cleaning up the river and swimming is possible in upstream sections of the Birrarung/Yarra.

Within City of Melbourne, swimming is illegal as boats occupy the space and pollution levels are still too high for swimming.

Today, the idea of a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra has captured the imagination of Melburnians and beyond.



AI impression of Swimmable Birrarung (Source: Regen Melbourne)

## We have seen what's possible in Paris



Seine Paris

Cleaning up the Seine means that swimming is now possible in strategic locations over summer.

**Timeline** 2016 – current

**Cost** 1.4B Euro

**Partners** Seine-Normanby Water Agency, France's health agency, local municipalities

**Infrastructure required** Significant upgrades to sewer systems

**Enabling factor** EU Bathing Directive

**Benefits** Increased tourism and economic activity, property value has increased



## We have seen what's possible in Copenhagen



Islands Brygge, Copenhagen

It is now possible to swim all year round at Copenhagen harbour.

**Timeline** 1995 – current

**Cost** 440M Euro

**Partners** Greater Copenhagen Water Utility and Copenhagen Municipality

**Infrastructure required** Wastewater network and treatment plan upgrades

**Enabling factor** Redevelopment of the harbour, EU Bathing Directive

**Benefits** Increased economic activity, improved liveability, increased biodiversity

## Many other cities have transformed their waterway

The key factors that determine the investment required across all cities is level of pollution in the waterway and support from partners.



Rotterdam



Berlin



Boston



Oslo



Portland



Bruges



# Local government can take direct action to support the collective ambition.

Local government can play a critical role in governance and coordination, stormwater management, riverbank revitalisation, events and activation, monitoring and enforcement.



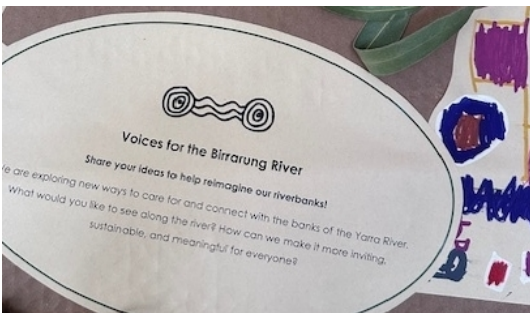
Public realm enhancement



Street cleaning



Stormwater management



Community engagement



Removing litter from the river



Planning controls and compliance

## There are numerous benefits



Healthy waterways



Visitor attraction and tourism



Investment and small business opportunities



Increased amenity



Cooling



Social connection

## Alignment to the Council Plan 2025-29

### Council direction

**Key activity** Deliver clean and revitalised waterways and green corridors.

**Proposed deliverable** Enhance water quality and revitalise green corridors along the Birrarung, Moonee Ponds Creek and Maribyrnong River.

### Community engagement

**Melbourne 2050 Vision and Council Plan:** Six per cent of participants referenced waterways when talking about their vision and actions for Melbourne.

**Neighbourhood survey:** Community values local waterways, expressing interest in increased connection to water and enhanced recreational use.

## The approach for a Swimmable Birrarung/Yarra

### Three streams, one river

Local government's authority to take action is very limited, but it plays an important role as the catalyst for driving change.

Council can progress a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra through three streams of activity.

**A. Initiate the coalition for a Swimmable Birrarung**  
Gain commitment from others to work together now and over the long-term.

**B. Celebrate and activate the waterfront**  
Work with private and public partners to increase the ways people connect to and experience the river.

**C. Clean the stormwater**  
Deliver the activities that are within Council's control to improve water quality and waterway health.

# What actions could City of Melbourne take?

## **A swimmable Birrarung/Yarra is a long-term commitment, but there's a lot we could be doing now**

### **THIS YEAR**

Actions that can be delivered by prioritising existing resourcing within the next 12 months.

### **THIS COUNCIL TERM**

Actions that may require additional resourcing through annual plan and budget processes and could be delivered from next financial year by City of Melbourne and partners.

### **BEYOND**

Actions that require long term, sustained commitment and investment from City of Melbourne and partners.

## Stream A: A Coalition for a Swimmable Birrarung



Existing frameworks to achieve the ambition of a swimmable Birrarung

### THIS YEAR

- Sign the Swimmable Cities Charter and champion other Council's to sign.
- Work with existing governance groups to progress action i.e. Yarra Catchment Collaboration, Yarra Integrated Water Management Forum.
- Partner with others to establish a coalition with shared commitment for delivering a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra.

### THIS COUNCIL TERM

- Work with the coalition to understand the scale of investment required to deliver a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra.

### BEYOND

- Secure joint investment in a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra.



## Stream B: Celebrate and activate the waterfront



The Moomba festival provides an ideal opportunity to inspire the vision of a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra (photo Birdman Rally, source The Age)

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### THIS YEAR

- Identify three opportunities for waterfront activation along the Birrarung/Yarra and principles for partnering with the private sector to deliver (refer [Appendix 1](#) for criteria for selecting swimming sites).
- Run community engagement activities at the 2026 Moomba Festival to promote the ambition for a swimmable Birrarung/Yarra.

### THIS COUNCIL TERM

- Partner with external organisations to run events that celebrate and activate the riverfront.
- Develop criteria and run an EOI process for privately led swimming and water play activations.
- Explore opportunities to partner with Development Victoria and private developers to invest in riverfront swimming, water play and other recreation infrastructure.

### BEYOND

- Determine investment required and suitable sites for swimming locations on the Birrarung/Yarra.

# Celebrate and activate the waterfront

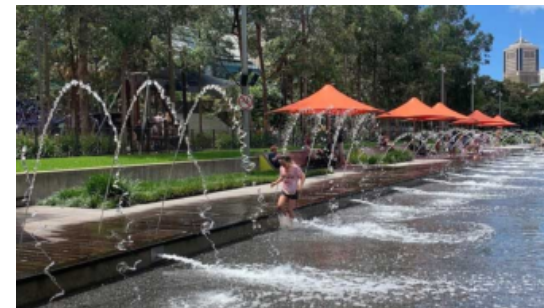
While long term action is needed to make swimming in the river safe, there are many opportunities to celebrate and activate the riverfront in the next five years.



Celebrating culture



Recreation



Water play



Economic activation



Events



Greening



## Examples of tactical activation

Tactical activation has been a strategy used by other cities to connect the community to water.



The Wild Mile in Chicago is a floating ecopark that takes a wildlife-first approach to public greenspace



Badeschiff in Berlin is a privately operated floating swimming pool in the East Harbour section of the River Spree

## Stream C: Clean the water



Fitzroy Gardens Stormwater Harvesting System prevents 30 million litres of polluted stormwater from entering the Birrarung /Yarra each year.

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### THIS YEAR

- Develop water quality targets and a new Stormwater Management Plan that aims to improve waterway health.

### THIS COUNCIL TERM

- Map areas of high pollution to inform pollution reduction measures.
- Increase compliance of litter and sediment control at construction sites.
- Improve the compliance and efficacy of planning controls related to the management of stormwater pollution.
- Run litter education campaigns linking personal action to a swimmable river.

### BEYOND

- Deliver large scale projects that make significant reductions in stormwater volumes i.e. stormwater harvesting.



# Leading by example: Clean the water

While the community appreciates the cooling and amenity benefits from increasing greening and permeable surfaces, water is cleaned before reaching the waterway.



Wetlands



Raingardens



Daylighting



Permeability



Garden beds & trees



Water sensitive urban design

## Local government also has responsibility to act under legislation

Specific legislation is in place requiring local government to act in the best interests of the Birrarung.

### **Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong) Act 2017**

The Act commits Responsible Public Entities to manage and protect the Birrarung as one living and integrated entity, supporting Traditional Owners as decision makers on their Country and to work together along the river for its benefit and protection.

### **Environment Protection Act 2017**

The Act commits land and infrastructure managers to minimise the risk of harm to human health and the environment from pollution. Councils are required to develop and publish plans that seek to reduce the volume of stormwater and pollution it carries.



The Yarra River Protection Act establishes the Birrarung Council as the independent voice of the river.

# What actions can others take?

# A Swimmable Birrarung requires many agencies to work together

City of Melbourne can lead, but a swimmable Birrarung requires coordinated action.

**Local government:** Stormwater management, place management, events, recreation and tourism.

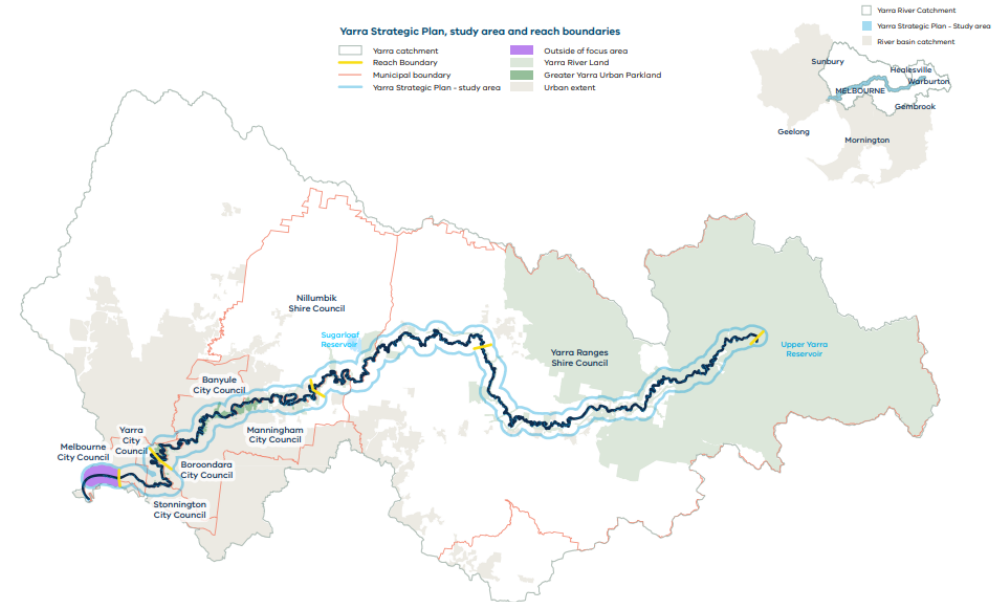
**Melbourne Water:** Catchment management, monitoring of waterway health, lead agency for Yarra Strategic Plan.

**Environment Protection Authority:** Environmental regulator, regulate discharge to waterways

**Parks Victoria:** Navigation and water management i.e. water and vessel safety. marina management.

**Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action:** Water and waterway policy, facilitation of catchment-based governance.

**Department of Transport and Planning:** Planning controls for land use and stormwater management.



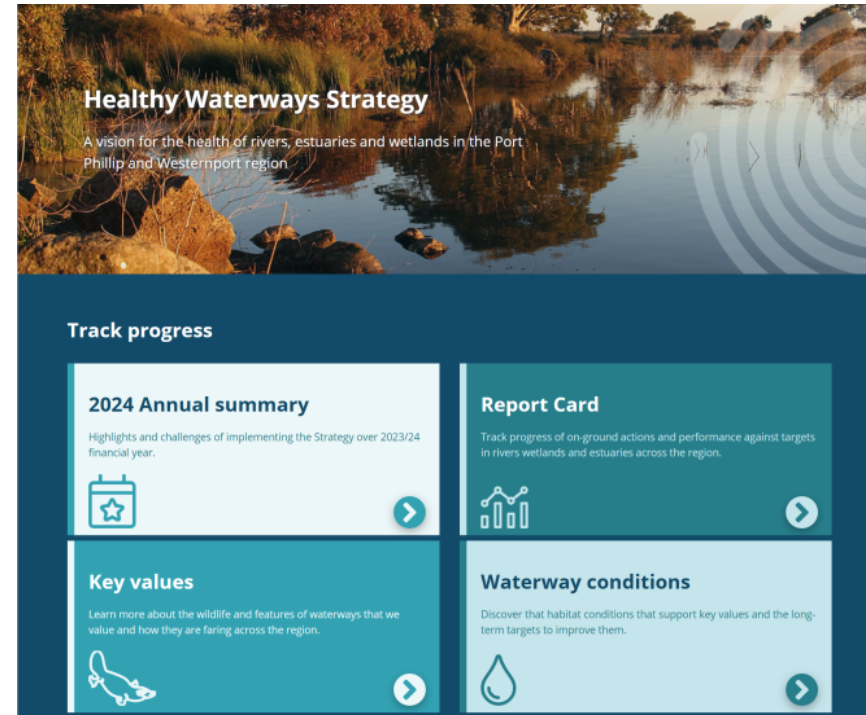
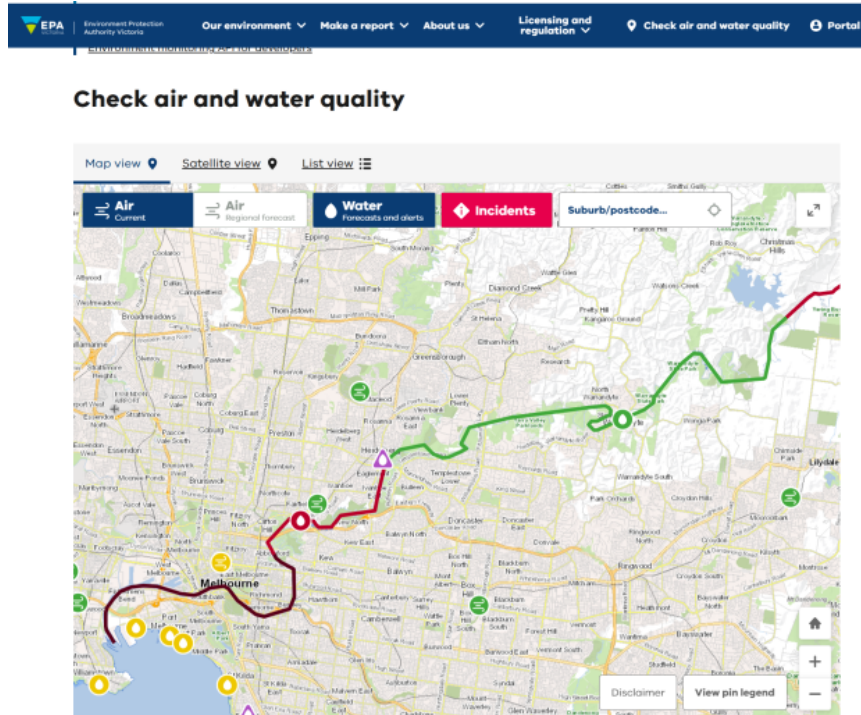
## Birrarung Catchment

242 kilometres of river that has a catchment covering about 4,046 square kilometres and is home to more than one-third of Victoria's population and spans eight local government areas



# What others are doing already

EPA Victoria partners with Melbourne Water to monitor the Birrarung both for recreational activities and long-term health



## Delivering a Swimmable Birrarung will require others to act.

### PARTNER

- Work with local governments and the Victorian Government to prioritise actions that progress delivery of swimmable Birrarung/Yarra
- Work with Melbourne Water and EPA to review and enhance water quality monitoring, including exploring opportunities for real time monitoring.
- Work with Parks Victoria to support a coordinated approach to prioritising river activities.

### ADVOCATE

Advocate to the Victorian Government to:

- update waterway policy to increase focus on social values in more populated reaches.
- embed EPAs recommended stormwater flow targets in the Victoria Planning Provisions.
- ensure that major state infrastructure projects are demonstrating best practice stormwater pollution management.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Criteria for selecting swimming sites

Suitable sites for swimming must be:

- **Culturally appropriate:** Traditional owners have advised that a swimming site at the location is in the best interests of the Birrarung.
- **Feasible:** The location has good water quality and is attached to public land. It is deep enough for swimming and easily accessible without damaging local wildlife. It does not pose any danger from boats.
- **Safe:** There are no dangerous currents, and the river edge is easy to get in and out of. The water quality remains good for periods of time and there are no dangerous things under the water.
- **Desirable:** People will want to spend time at this location. It is easy to get to, there is shade and there are places to sit and eat as well as amenities.



**OFFICIAL\_ SWIMMABLE CITIES CHARTER**

[July 12 2024]

**The urban swimming movement is building momentum. This charter outlines 10 common principles to empower decision-makers, advocates, and community leaders in their work with local natural waterways.**

**The purpose of an international Swimmable Cities Charter:**

- **MAKING PEACE WITH NATURE:**  
The Charter will promote harmony, unity and collaboration amongst a global community of cities and towns dedicated to the health of humanity and 'swimmability' of urban waterways.
- **PROMOTING THE RIGHTS TO LIFE:**  
The Charter will recognise the interdependence of the rights of Nature and human rights, with 'swimmability' positioned as a powerful catalyst for the regeneration of social, cultural, ecological and economic systems in urban communities.
- **EMPOWERING PEOPLE IN PRACTICE:**  
The Charter will empower actors in the growing urban swimming movement, serving as a practical reference for decision-making in planning, design, construction and operation.
- **SWIMMING TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:**  
The Charter will position the urban swimming movement (and its associated culture, activities and infrastructure) in alignment with other global strategies, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, The Paris Agreement and The Biodiversity Plan.
- **INVESTING IN A BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL:**  
The Charter will provide a tool and incentive for enabling mainstream engagement and catalysing sustainable investment in urban ecosystem restoration, including through public and private cooperation that fairly shares benefits and prevents privatisation of Nature.
- **CONNECTING SOUTH, NORTH, EAST & WEST**  
The Charter is published with awareness that the urban swimming movement is currently dominated by Global North and Euro-centric worldviews, but its signatories hope to spark new conversations and meaningful action that creates greater diversity and representation.

**Acknowledgment of Nature**

*We acknowledge Mother Earth and her waterways that provide lifeblood for cities and communities around the world. We acknowledge her carers and custodians, especially Indigenous Elders and their wisdom that reminds us of the interdependency of the Planet's wellbeing and our own. We dedicate ourselves to the restoration and regeneration of urban waterways through the power of swimming!*

**Swimmable Cities Charter:***[FOUNDATIONAL VALUES]*

## 1. THE RIGHT TO SWIM:

Safe, healthy and swimmable waterways should be accessible to all people.

## 2. ONE HEALTH, MANY SWIMMERS:

Swimmable urban waterways are vital to the liveability of cities and communities, as shared civic places that promote the health of people (physically, mentally, spiritually) and the health of Mother Earth.

## 3. URBAN SWIMMING CULTURE:

Urban swimming culture is a unique expression of life in cities and communities, reflecting the distinct interplay of sports, recreation and tourism in each given place, as well as natural and cultural heritage.

## 4. WATER IS SACRED:

Urban swimming should celebrate natural waterways as living, integrated entities that nurture communities, promoting universal accessibility and peaceful coexistence inclusive of religious, cultural and gender diversity.

*[ENABLING CONDITIONS]*

## 5. REWRITING THE RULES:

Urban waterway swimming should become part of a new status quo in public access standards, challenging accepted conventions such as industrial uses and stormwater pollution, with governing authorities swiftly amending legal and regulatory frameworks to enable citizens access to its benefits.

## 6. DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN SWIMMING PLACES:

Urban swimming places and experiences should be planned, designed, made and operated through inclusive, integrated water management approaches; with managers ensuring universal access via community-led programs for learning how to swim in natural waterways and ecological literacy.

## 7. RECONNECTION &amp; RESILIENCE:

Urban swimming places and experiences should be invested in as an innovative way to enable resilient communities to adapt and thrive in a changing global climate, environment and economy.

*[SHARING BENEFITS]*

## 8. NEW ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Urban swimming development models should balance social, cultural, ecological and economic values, creating new jobs, careers and livelihoods in regenerative professions and industries.

## 9. SHARING WELLBEING BENEFITS, CULTURE &amp; KNOWLEDGE:

Urban swimming should create wellbeing benefits to local citizens, ecosystems and economies; enhanced by the respectful sharing of Indigenous, traditional and Western water culture knowledge.

*[NEXT GEN]*

## 10. STEWARDSHIP FOR TODAY, TOMORROW &amp; FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Urban swimmers are stewards responsible for protecting the health of their local waterways, working alongside Mother Earth's closest carers, such as Indigenous peoples, rangers and waterkeepers as well as urbanists, architects, social changemakers, educators and policy-makers.

**Definitions:***'Urban Swimming'*

Urban swimming involves a range of recreational and aquatic activities in natural urban waterways, from splashing, paddling and plunging to extended immersion, and swimming with a directional goal in mind.

*'Swimmable Cities'*

Swimmable Cities are built environments with urban waterways that have achieved and sustain 'bathing water' standards (such as those described in [European regulations](#)), supported by complementary policies, infrastructure, amenities, services and cultural practices.

*'Urban waterways'*

Urban waterways are natural waterways (fresh or saline) that pass through an urban area or receive stormwater runoff from an urbanised catchment. They play a key role in liveable cities by sustaining plants and animals, providing social and cultural connection, and supporting economic development through tourism and agriculture. (Adapted from [CRC for Water Sensitive Cities](#)) These may include rivers, harbours, creeks, lakes, ponds, beaches, wetlands etc.

**Note:***Why 'Mother Earth'?*

Just as The Biodiversity Plan (by the United Nations) recognises the rights of Nature, and uses phrases like 'Mother Earth' according to traditions of Indigenous Peoples, we do too!