

# VISION 21

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**Yarra River Business  
Association Inc**



# Introduction

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*The Yarra River is recognised as Melbourne's most important tourism and recreational asset, yet it still lacks a cohesive vision for its management and future direction.*

*This may be because of its highly fragmented management structure and/or a lack of coordinated action by various agencies over many years.*

*However, the State Government and various organisations are now showing interest in the waterway, although the focus is primarily on planning and ecology.*

*The city section of the Yarra River – Punt Road to Bolte Bridge – has particular needs, which require special consideration.*

*This is not only because it is Melbourne's 'shopwindow' for millions of visitors, but also because it is an economic powerhouse, supporting thousands of small to large businesses and employing tens of thousands of people.*

*It is also 'home' to over 12,000 residents, whose lifestyles benefit from the infrastructure and services that the tourism industry has brought to the area.*

*This document aims to complement the overarching State Government's Yarra River Strategy, and the City of Melbourne's Yarra River Plan, by drilling-down to some key issues and projects that will make a major difference to our section of the waterway.*

*In doing so, we recognise the depth of Indigenous culture embodied in the area and the need to protect the asset through environmental remediation and informed urban planning.*

*Waterway activation and business growth must not be at the expense of river health. It also needs to be recognised that respect for the river best comes through interaction with it.*

*The greatest contact people have with the Yarra River is via the passive recreation that is offered in its city section.*

# The Vision

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Remediation of waterfronts from industrial land and former wharves into fascinating, colourful promenades is happening throughout the world.

Most of the great city waterfronts have managed to sympathetically blend natural assets with commerce, tourism and recreation.

Good waterfront activation is usually intuitive and seamless. They are lively and yet also provide respite from the world of commerce for residents, workers and visitors.

Despite its proximity to the central business district, Melbourne's river frontage is yet to achieve a physical and psychological connection to the city's heart. Significant buildings still turn their back on the water and major obstacles remain between the City's Hoddle grid and the river. The river front still needs to be 'found' by visitors, rather than it being an automatic part of their visitor experience.

In particular, the Lower Yarra River's northbank remains a neglected zone, with some sections even regarded as 'no-go' areas. Yet, the northbank is the heart of Indigenous culture and post-settlement history. It is the birthplace of European Melbourne. It is where Melburnians should be interacting with their waterway on a daily basis. It should provide a high quality, contiguous experience with Docklands. It should form a band of green that envelops the CBD and links to the gardens on the city's north and east.

The Lower Yarra River and Docklands should be the epicentre of passive recreation in Melbourne, where cycling and walking the banks can be undertaken in safety and comfort, and where the history and significance of the area is apparent.

High quality visitor precincts are, by nature, also places that enhance the lifestyle of residents and city workers. Visitors want to be where the locals gather, so high quality investment in the public realm of the Lower Yarra River has economic, well-being and lifestyle benefits.

We invite you to share this vision.



*City waterfront, Vancouver. B.C.*

# Things to be Done

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## Master Planning

Much has been achieved along the Lower Yarra River during the past 20 years and credit is paid to the private and public sector organisations for their efforts.

However, development of the public realm has been ad-hoc and fragmented, with little coordinated planning to synergise the various developments and to create a real sense of place and identity.

The city section of the lower Yarra is too important to Melbourne's image, and to its citizens well-being to remain without a consolidated vision and coordinated planning.

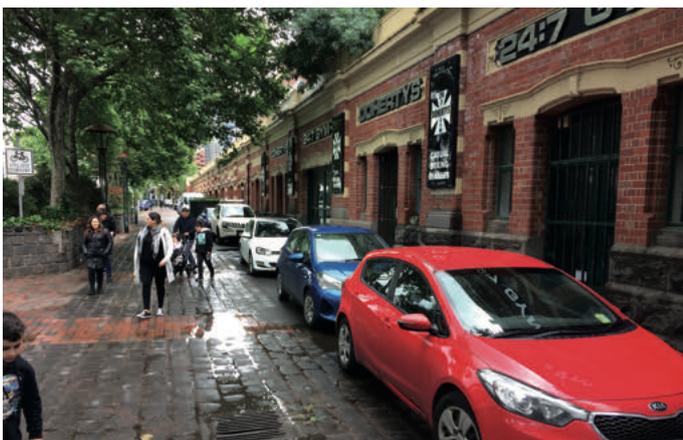
Master planning for the Yarra River needs to genuinely embrace the business community and reflect the commercial needs of the city section.

## The Northbank

### Banana Alley

The 1880s vaults of Banana Alley are a gem of early Melbourne commerce. However, because of poor and fragmented management, they remain an eyesore and are an obstacle to be negotiated on a journey along the river's northbank.

Unsympathetic activities have been allowed to occupy the vaults on medium to longer term leases, precluding strategic improvements to the area. Management of the vaults is also complicated because of the vaults' importance as a structure to support the railway above.



Banana Alley's potential to be one of inner Melbourne's best-sited tourism and hospitality locations needs to be realised through a concerted effort by government and land management agencies.

### Enterprize Park

Similar to Banana Alley, the long-neglected riverside land under the railway viaduct adjoining SEALife aquarium is regarded as a 'no-go' zone. It is dark, dank and often characterised by anti-social activity. Procrastination by relevant authorities over many years has seen it slide into the 'too-hard' basket.

Its prime location alongside Flinders Street, opposite Crown, and adjoining one of the city's major attractions, should make it an easy candidate for conversion to a quality public space. Its importance to Indigenous culture and to the early maritime commerce of Melbourne gives it even greater significance.

### Batman Park



This park was converted from car parking to lawn during the late 1980s, but its potential has never been realised for either passive or active recreation. An early 2000s development under the railway viaduct, 'Rebecca Walk', has failed repeatedly and is quickly becoming another derelict section of the northbank.

Control of the undercroft buildings of Batman Park should be ceded to the City of Melbourne and managed as active, low-cost accommodation for creative industry, in the same spirit as Vancouver's highly successful Granville Island (see image above).

# Things to be Done

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## Docklands linkage

Northbank needs to be a high quality contiguous walking experience between Princes Bridge and New Quay in Docklands. The low lying bridges of the Lower Yarra and the river's arterial road crossings make this objective difficult and potentially expensive..

Suggestions have included a cycling veloway attached to the railway viaduct, and a more current proposal has been for a New York style 'Greenline' elevated pathway.

In the meantime, attention paid to the physical linkage between North Wharf and Docklands, across Wurrundjerri Way, would create a more intuitive and comfortable crossing point between the City's two water precincts.

## Reimagining Arts Centre Melbourne

Early planning work is underway by the State Government to enhance the cultural assets of Southbank, including the building of a new gallery of contemporary art. The 10 year plan includes significant public realm landscaping work, which will not only provide pedestrian friendly linkages between the various buildings of the complex, but will enhance the concept of a world-class Sturt Street arts plaza.

The State Government and its appointed architects are encouraged to embrace the interface with the Yarra River as much as possible in the redevelopment.



## City Road, Southbank

The density of residential development in Southbank is among the highest in the world. The major east-west arterial of City Road further renders the suburb a soul-less thoroughfare. Completion of the Southbank Boulevard urban park in 2021 will provide a much needed green spine, connecting the river to Kings Domain, including an alternative commuter cycling route to reduce congestion on Southbank Promenade.

The Council's City Road master planning is an essential tool in helping to retro-fit Southbank to a more liveable environment, and, in doing so, it is hoped that it will create 'ant-tracks' and activity nodes to encourage visitor exploration, as an adjunct to the riverfront experience.



## Southbank and Crown Promenades

These two promenades are among Melbourne's most pedestrianised urban areas. The quality of the promenades is essential to the visitor experience of the Lower Yarra River and, therefore, need to be maintained and regularly upgraded to reflect such status.

Recreational cycling is welcomed and encouraged. However, commuter cycling is not compatible with a highly pedestrianised area, for both safety and aesthetic reasons. Getting the balance between encouragement of recreational cycling and the discouragement of commuter cycling is a major challenge.

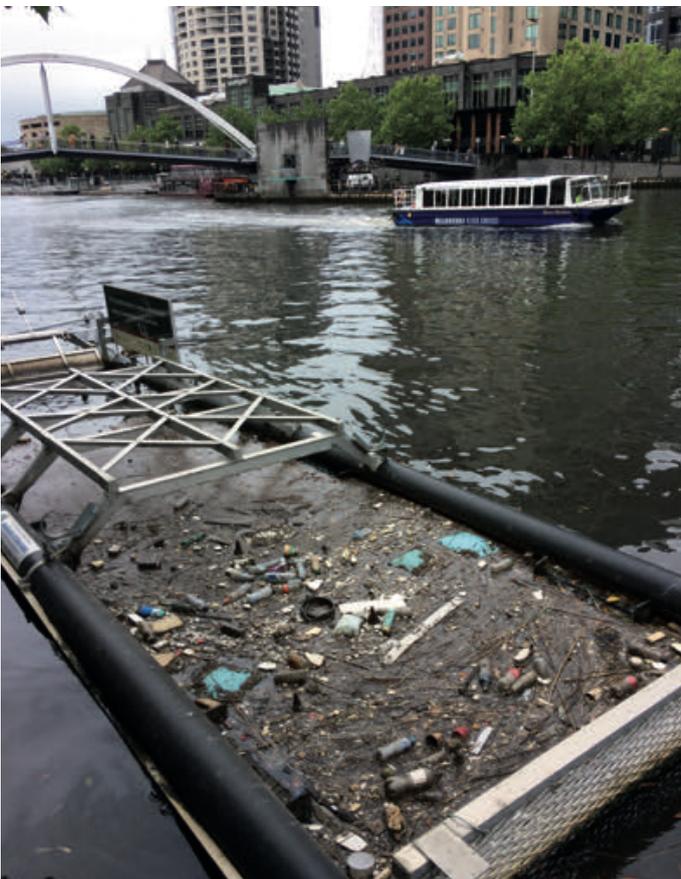
Ultimately, prohibition of commuter cycling on Southbank and Crown Promenades should be the ambition, after provision of a feasible, alternative commuter cycling route.

# Things to be Done

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## On-water litter reduction

Water quality has improved dramatically in the Lower Yarra River during the past 40 years. Heavy metal pollutants have been largely eliminated and e-coli contamination has been significantly reduced.



However, interception of rubbish before it enters the waterway is still inadequate. Storm water management is not keeping pace with urban development.

The City section of the Yarra River is the repository of contamination resulting from inadequate upstream interception by Councils and State Government. This affects visitor perception of the river and is a poor reflection on what is otherwise a clean city.

Entrapment of the hard rubbish as it enters the waterway is essential. This also requires real-time management of litter loads caught in entrapment baskets etc, rather than the current passive on-water collection of gross pollutants once they have entered the waterway..

## Water Transportation

The quality of on-water visitor transportation is steadily improving. However, the city section of the Lower Yarra River still lacks a commuter water service, which could help to ease CBD congestion and would link future major developments such as Fishermens Bend to upstream destinations and public transport connections. The success of the Brisbane Rivercat commuter service is often cited as evidence of what could be achieved for Melbourne.



Work has already been undertaken by the City of Melbourne's Waterways Unit on the design of a commuter vessel to meet the special needs of the Lower Yarra.

The introduction and viability of commuter water transportation will, ultimately, be market-led, but financial incentives should be seriously considered to test and kick-start such a service.



# Partnership Organisations

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The Lower Yarra River is managed through a combination of complex, multi-faceted State legislation. It can involve up to 18 organisations, depending on the scope and size of a particular project. The public realm of the precinct is, ultimately, under Crown control, although the management of certain areas is delegated to Council and various State Government authorities. This situation has given rise, in recent times, to a call for a single management authority for the Lower Yarra.

In the meantime, the ability to achieve progress in the precinct requires a shared vision and the cooperation of multiple agencies. Most projects require additional grants or capital works allocations, usually over a number of consecutive budgets.

On-water management of the Lower Yarra is shared between **Parks Victoria** and the **City of Melbourne**. Parks Victoria has jurisdiction over berthing and on-water activation, while Council's involvement is confined to the Docklands waterways, including Marina Yarra's Edge and Melbourne City Marina. The City of Melbourne also has responsibility for the lower and upper promenade of Southbank and rowing shed leases.

On-water activation often requires the permission and oversight by the City of Melbourne's planning department, while on-water or edge-water events often involve Parks Victoria and City of Melbourne.

Other organisations with direct involvement on the waterway are:

The **Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)** provides policy advice on marine conservation, coastal issues and local ports. DELWP has an arrangement with Parks Victoria to enable PV to act as the responsible authority for managing the Yarra River and associated waterways.

**Transport Safety Victoria** is the main agency responsible for safety on Victorian waters, including the Yarra River. It administers the Marine Act 1988, including registration of vessels, regulation of the operation of vessels, pollution prevention, international conventions and enforcement of laws relating to the operations of vessels.

**Melbourne Water** is responsible for the environmental management of all waterways (including the bed and banks of the Lower Yarra River) and major drainage systems in relation to water quality, flood protection and floodplain management affecting the river.

The **Environment Protection Authority (EPA)** enforces the Environmental Protection Act 1970 and licenses discharges of pollutants to the environment, including the Yarra River. The Authority's responsibilities broadly encompass any matter affecting the environmental condition of the river.



# About the YRBA

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The Yarra River Business Association Incorporated (YRBA) is a membership organisation established by the City of Melbourne and the then Tourism Victoria (now Visit Victoria) in 1998 to provide a voice for the business community of the Precinct.

For more than 20 years the YRBA has actively represented the interests of small to medium businesses located on and along the river, through an ongoing program of advocacy and marketing activity.

As a result, the Lower Yarra business community has real input to the planning and operational decisions made for the area by the many and various organizations involved with river governance.

A 10 person private and public sector Board sets YRBA's strategic direction, while day to day activity is handled by an Executive Officer and a team of consultants. Funding for the organisation is generated through City of Melbourne administrative and marketing grants, as well as private business membership fees.

For more information about the structure and operation of YRBA Inc, please visit

[www.yarrariver.melbourne](http://www.yarrariver.melbourne)

<http://yarrariver.melbourne/about-us>

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