

Yarra Strategic Plan – Submission guide

The issue

The Yarra River – Birrarung – is the lifeblood of Victoria.

Flowing 242 kilometres from the Yarra Ranges, all the way through greater Melbourne and into Port Phillip Bay – Birrarung is a vital source of nourishment for so many Victorians.

Large sections of the Yarra flow through forests and mountains that have been supplying vital water to Victorians for more than 100 years. But much of the Yarra flows through landscapes cleared and developed in the course of Melbourne's urbanisation.

The Yarra remains under threat from development, pollution, poor stormwater management and loss of vegetation.

Just last week it was reported the Yarra is choking on polystyrene – a plastic deadly to our wildlife found at 80 percent of sites in the Yarra River catchment. And, the 2018 State of the Yarra Report showed a rapid trajectory of decline.

An historic opportunity

Right now, we have a rare opportunity to change the trajectory of the Yarra for years to come.

A draft Yarra Strategic Plan has been released for public consultation – a 10-year plan to enable the long-term protection and restoration the Yarra River corridor, prepared by government agencies and councils.

The plan will set environmental, cultural, social and land management objectives for councils and government agencies to follow.

This is an historic opportunity to improve the protection of our Yarra and set a positive trajectory for this vital waterway for the next 10 years.

By making a submission to the Yarra Strategic Plan you can have your say on protecting our Yarra River.

If enough of us demonstrate community concern for the health and environmental impacts of the Yarra, the planning committee will have to take it into consideration.

Let's make sure the Yarra Strategic Plan is transformative and ambitious so Victorians can enjoy the beautiful Birrarung for decades to come.

This guide contains:

- [How to make a submission](#)
- [How to structure your submission](#)

- [Recommendations to draw on](#)
- [Useful resources and assistances](#)

How to make a submission

The Lead Agency reviewing the Yarra Strategic Plan wants to hear from the community about your concerns and ideas on how to protect and restore the Yarra over the next 10 years.

Here's how you can have your say:

1. Review the draft Yarra Strategic Plan.

Think about these questions when you're reviewing the draft plan:

- Are the performance objectives and proposals for targets under the Yarra Strategic Plan sufficient? Are they specific enough?
- Are there specific changes, improvements or responses you could suggest for the land-use framework in the draft Yarra Strategic Plan?
- How do the actions set out in this draft affect your particular area(s) of interest? What further detail should the plan include? What projects should be included that are presently absent?

2. Write your submission using our submission guide to help

For government inquiries to succeed, they need to hear from the people they represent – you. Understanding the importance of our waterways from the people who use it -- means hearing from concerned citizens over the challenges at hand.

In order for your submission to be considered, it must be high quality and address specific criteria.

If you have any questions about writing your submission, please get in touch with Bruce at bruce.lindsay@envirojustice.org.au

3. Submit your submission

Once completed, upload and [send your submission to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning](#) before the due date – Sunday 22 March.

If you have questions or would like tips on writing your submission, email Bruce Lindsay at bruce.lindsay@envirojustice.org.au

4. Let us know when you're done!

When you've finished and sent in your submission, [let us know and send us a copy](#), so we can see how many people are having their say on the Yarra and keep you updated in the review process. We'd also love to read your submission because we're nerdy like that.

How to structure your submission

Introduce yourself

Start your submission by briefly telling the committee who you are, why you care about the issue, and why you have taken the time to write your submission.

Emphasise your personal experience or unique perspective. Maybe you live close to the river and have seen the waterways polluted or are part of a local environment group working to protect our rivers and waterways.

Don't go into too much detail here – you'll need to draw on your personal experiences later when talking about the issues that matter to you.

Remember: keep your submission polite and respectful. The committee will dismiss submissions that are rude or target individual public servants or Members of Parliament.

Clearly identify the issues that matter to you

It's important to signal to the committee which issues matter most to you. For example:

- Are you worried about big development and infrastructure projects that could impact on the Yarra River?
- Are you concerned about the threats of water pollution on our wildlife?
- Are you interested in best management practices for our waterways?

Discuss the current situation regarding this issue

Outline why this is a significant issue locally and / or state-wide. For guidance, see the issue and opportunity sections at the start of this document.

Elaborate, drawing on your perspective, experience and evidence to substantiate your claims

What is your experience with the Yarra River? Do you live close to it? Love birdwatching on the banks? Kayak down it every week? Are you concerned about development, water pollution and its impacts on our native wildlife? Are you involved in care and restoration of a part of the river? Or do you have evidence from organisations like Environmental Justice Australia or Yarra Riverkeepers Association of pollution incidents or fears for community safety?

Take note of any content in the YSP related to areas or concerns to which you have a particular involvement. It is useful and important to provide feedback and input on how the plan might actually be applied (or not applied) in specific circumstances. Provide whatever scientific and/or other relevant evidence you have that can inform a strong and ambitious plan.

Identify what is driving these problems

Inappropriate land development along the riverbank, invasive pest plants and animals, litter, pollution (including sewerage), stormwater, climate change and population growth are all driving degradation of the Yarra. Can you think of other drivers?

Information to draw on:

EJA is preparing a submission to the Yarra Strategic Plan (YSP) – below are our topline comments on the plan. You can draw on these to help you form your submission – but don't feel limited to the matters raised below.

- Much of the content of the draft Yarra Strategic Plan (YSP) appears high-level, uncertain, conditional, attached to existing actions, and/or lacks specific and measurable features. The plan would benefit considerably from a far greater degree of SMART (specific, measurable, attributable, responsive and targeted) actions or provisions. This approach is crucial to accountability in design and delivery of an effective plan.
- A key focus and outcome of this first YSP needs to be connectivity and restoration – of the river and floodplains, of restored habitat corridors and of the river and its advocates. The Draft YSP contains various measures related to these outcomes, such as reference to opportunities for habitat corridors or intentions to reconnect floodplains but considerable detail on these measures to be achieved is needed. If you can, add specific examples, projects, techniques or programs to connect and restore the river.
- There is a lack of attention to how the plan can could connect the tributaries of the Yarra River and enable protection and restoration of those tributaries. The fate of the river itself is fundamentally connected to the fate of the tributaries, at least within the local government areas adjacent to the river. The Yarra's tributaries must be taken into more consideration in the YSP.
- There is nothing in the plan expressed as directly binding on any council or public authority. The intention appears to incorporate a final plan (or part of it) in Victoria planning policies but that would establish only limited obligations on any decision maker and maintain a high level of discretion as to how the plan is to be implemented. Stronger accountability measures must be included in the YSP.

Useful Resources and Assistance

[The Yarra Community Roundtable – 2018](#)

<https://actfortheyarra.org.au/>

<https://www.ces.vic.gov.au/reports/state-yarra-and-its-parklands-2018>

<https://actfortheyarra.org.au/category/reports/>

If you have questions or would like tips on writing your submission, email Bruce Lindsay at bruce.lindsay@envirojustice.org.au

