

The Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk

Annual Report 2023



We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

DEECA is committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



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Overview

The Victorian Government released the Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk Action Plan in November 2021 to ensure this iconic catchment can thrive and be enjoyed as a natural treasure for many years to come.

The Annual Report 2023 updates the community on the progress towards delivering the 7 directions and 30 actions of that make up the Action Plan. This reporting supports the Victorian Government’s commitment to update the community annually on implementation of the 5-year Action Plan.

The Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung peoples have cared for this Country and its integrated waterways for millennia. The Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk Action Plan recognises the waterways as living and integrated natural entities, and Traditional Owners as the voice of these living entities.

The Action Plan is guided by a 50-year community vision. The vision encourages agencies and community to walk together with the Traditional Owners of Barre Warre Yulluk.

How the 5-year Action Plan builds on the vision for the Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk

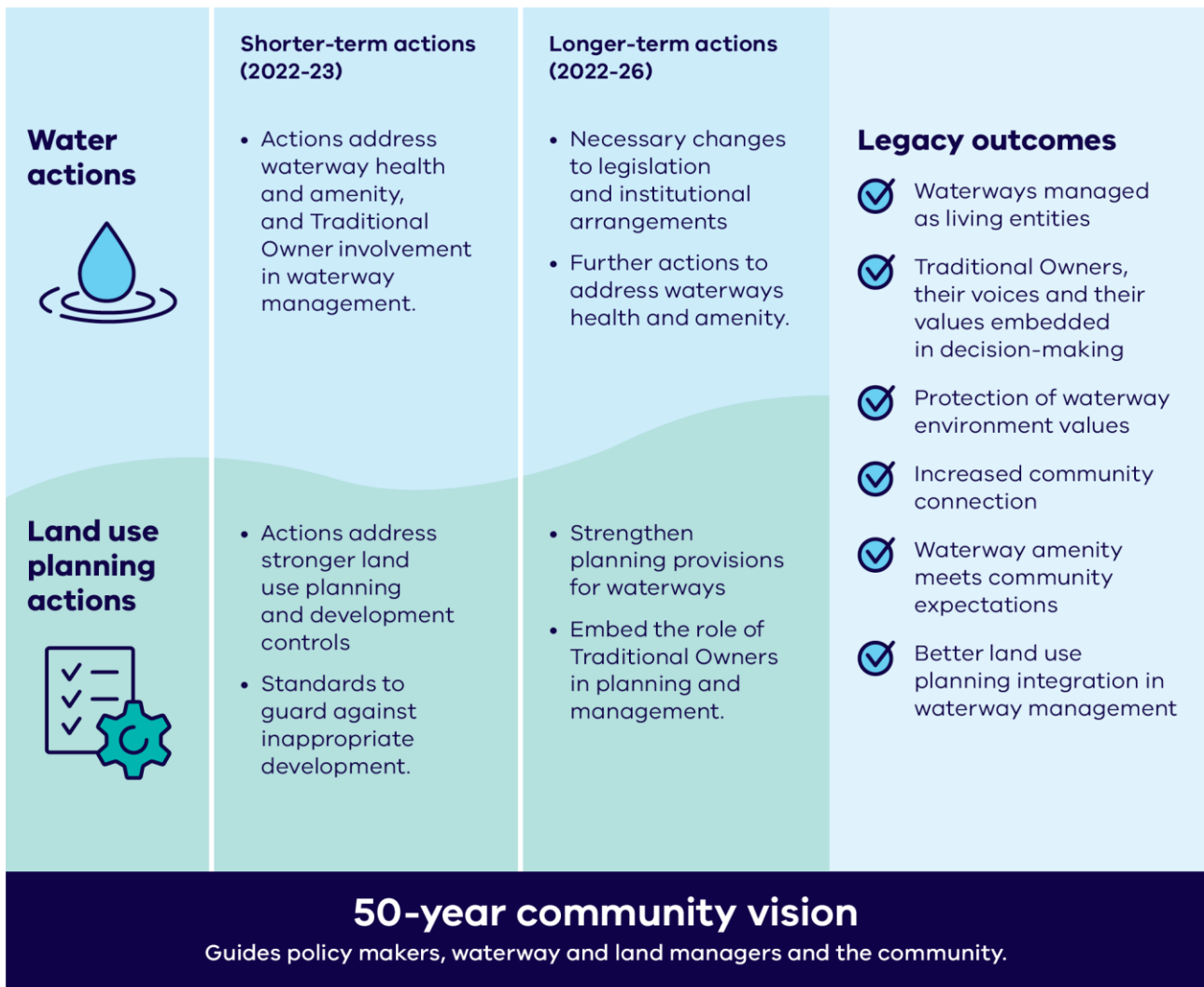


Figure 1: Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk implementation framework

Collaboration driving the Action Plan forward

The Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk are culturally, environmentally and socially significant waterways, and collaboration across agencies, Traditional Owners and community is central to delivery of this Action Plan.

The Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut ('places of many stories') – Barwon River Parklands Masterplan has been developed for the Lower Parwan/Barwon and Murrabul/Moorabool Rivers, following widespread public consultation and engagement with a large range of government stakeholders, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners, river user groups, sporting clubs and environmental groups.

The masterplan is a partnership between the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, the Victorian Government, the City of Greater Geelong and Golden Plains Shire Council. Its objective is balancing improved public amenity, recreation and access whilst enhancing the unique environmental and cultural values along this important river corridor.

The masterplan identifies priority environmental and infrastructure works to coordinate and target investment, including re-vegetation, weed control, water flow and quality improvements. It also includes shared cycle and walking trails, boating facilities, new proposed public open space and new public land managed by Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to promote Aboriginal traditional land and water management practices. The agencies involved in developing the masterplan will continue to champion its implementation.

Action Plan implementation

In 2023, the Action Plan outcomes included:

- finalisation of the [Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut Masterplan](#) and support provided to progress 3 high priority projects that aim to deliver new recreational and amenity benefits to the community
- [Moorabool River Reserve Masterplan 2023-2033](#) being adopted by the Golden Plains Shire Council. The masterplan aligns with current Victorian Government policy on the protection and health of the Murrabul/Moorabool River under the Corangamite Waterway Strategy and Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk Action Plan. The development of the masterplan was supported by funding from an Iconic Urban Waterways: Rivers of the Barwon grant in 2022
- engagement with Wadawurrung Traditional Owners on developing the 'Waterways as living entities and Traditional Owners as their voice' discussion paper
- the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) continuing to progress urban planning actions outlined in the Action Plan.

Flagship waterways - Parwan/ Barwon and Murrabul/ Moorabool Rivers

The Victorian Government's Flagship waterways project will improve catchment and waterway health across regional and urban areas. Action 4.2 is a commitment to deliver the Living Moorabool and Barwon Flagship projects.

The Flagship waterways project for the Parwan/ Barwon and Murrabul/ Moorabool Rivers continued to progress well in 2023.

The Living Moorabool Flagship: Tour and Knowledge Forum was held in early March 2023. It gave the Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation, project partners, Landcare and interested community members an opportunity to explore the landscape, share knowledge and learn about the various works being undertaken to improve the health of the Murrabul/Moorabool River.

The 2023-24 Upper Barwon Seasonal Watering Proposal, developed in consultation with Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and the Upper Barwon Surface Water Advisory Group, was accepted by the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. Environmental Water releases are made in accordance with the Seasonal Watering Plan.

Riparian management agreements have been put in place with landholders to deliver works on 20 hectares of riparian land and 9 kilometres of Parwan/ Barwon River frontage in the Upper Barwon area. Riparian works will include removal of willow and *Glyceria maxima*, and 3.3 kilometres of continual river fenced on the west branch. For the Murrabul/ Moorabool River, further waterway health on ground works have also secured contracts with landholders that will achieve 19 kilometres of river frontage and 127 hectares of riparian habitat protection.

Ongoing Citizen Science programs on both waterways continue to engage and support the community through water quality and waterbug monitoring training and platypus spotting events. In 2023 the Citizen Science program on the Murrabul/ Moorabool took time to celebrate a Waterwatch volunteer who has collected monthly water data on the river for the last 16 years.

More information on both projects is available at: ccma.vic.gov.au/projects/living-moorabool-flagship-waterway

Stormwater management reforms

Direction 6 in the Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk Action Plan is one of several drivers of reviews of stormwater management within the Lower Barwon catchment.

Delivered in 2022, Action 6.1 saw the City of Greater Geelong develop a collaboration framework to enable optimisation of stormwater as a resource.

In 2023 ongoing progress was made against Actions 6.2 and 6.3. This progress included investigations to support a stormwater offset program for the City of Greater Geelong and work towards implementing actions of the Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy (SWS).

Under the SWS, Barwon Water and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) have commenced feasibility assessments as part of a project investigating options for a large-scale recycled water and treated stormwater network in the Barwon region. The project aims to link and strengthen local integrated water management initiatives currently in progress in the region, including within the Northern and Western Geelong Growth Areas, and the Surf Coast hinterland agricultural area.

DEECA has also begun investigating options to improve stormwater management arrangements through changes to stormwater regulations and exploring roles and responsibilities in the protection of waterway health from stormwater pollution.

Action status update

The Action Plan outlines 7 directions and 30 actions that aim to deliver results across a 5-year period. Most shorter-term actions were delivered and reported on in detail in the [first Annual Report in 2022](#). The 2023 reporting below reflects this, providing further detail on ongoing shorter-term actions and longer-term actions which are now in planning or progressing.

While each action below lists a responsible lead organisation, the delivery of the Action Plan is only achievable through extensive collaboration across agency/organisation boundaries. This is most apparent in working to deliver 'living entity' and 'voice' outcomes, where agencies and community walk together with Traditional Owners towards a shared future.

A full explanation of all deliverables and actions, including background, can be found in the [Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk Action Plan](#).

Direction 1: Recognise the Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk as living and integrated natural entities and the Traditional Owners as the 'voice of these living entities'

Shorter-term

Action 1.1 'Living entity' and 'voice' for Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS)

- **Status:** Delivered in 2022
- **Led by:** Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

Action 1.2 Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung aspirations in Corangamite RCS planning

- **Status:** Delivered in 2022
- **Led by:** Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

Action 1.3 Support for Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung to express ‘voice of living entities’

- **Status:** Ongoing
- **Led by:** DEECA

Where self-determination is a priority, DEECA will continue to support Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to express what being ‘the voice of the living entities’ of the Rivers of the Barwon is to them.

Longer-term

Action 1.4 Wider engagement with Traditional Owners about ‘living entity’ and ‘voice’

- **Status:** In progress
- **Led by:** DEECA

Development of the ‘Waterways as living entities and Traditional Owners as their voice’ discussion paper is underway. This discussion paper will test a proposed legislative mechanism to enshrine these concepts in legislation with Traditional Owners, waterway managers, community and other stakeholders state-wide throughout 2024 (noting that this is also Outcome 1 in Water is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap).

Action 1.5 Investigate legislation for ‘living entity’ and ‘voice’ concepts

- **Status:** Planned
- **Led by:** DEECA

Subject to discussion paper engagement outcomes (see Action 1.4) and consistent with the commitments in Water is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap, possible legislation will be investigated in detail.

Action 1.6 Traditional Owner preamble for possible legislation

- **Status:** Planned
- **Led by:** DEECA

Subject to Actions 1.4 and 1.5.

Direction 2: Embed Traditional Owners’ values in planning and decision-making for waterways

Shorter-term

Action 2.1 Embed connections to Country in Corangamite RCS

- **Status:** Delivered in 2022
- **Led by:** Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

Action 2.2 Partnerships to implement ‘voice’ on Country

- **Status:** Delivered in 2022
- **Led by:** Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

Longer-term

Action 2.3 Traditional Owner values and knowledge in land use planning

- **Status:** Planned
- **Led by:** DTP & DEECA

This action is subject to available funding.

Action 2.4 Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) reporting Traditional Owner aspirations

- **Status:** In progress
- **Led by:** Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

The Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation are being provided with the opportunity to access project implementation reports that relate to their respective Healthy Country Plan outcomes. Their response will be included in the catchment management authority's RCS reporting as assessment by the Traditional Owners of RCS activities that give effect to Traditional Owners' aspirations and Country plans.

Action 2.5 Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung regional waterway strategy partnership

- **Status:** In progress
- **Led by:** Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

The next Corangamite Regional Waterway Strategy is expected to be completed in 2026, with formal engagement with Traditional Owners due to commence following confirmation of the format and process of the next iteration of the strategy.

Direction 3: Strengthen planning policy and controls for waterways

Shorter-term

Action 3.1 Stronger planning policy and guidance

- **Status:** Delivered in 2022
- **Led by:** DTP

Action 3.2 Interim landscape and environmental controls for key waterways

- **Status:** Delivered in 2022
- **Led by:** DTP

Longer-term

Action 3.3 Interim built-form controls for key waterways

- **Status:** Planned
- **Led by:** DTP

DTP is undertaking background studies to support stronger built-form planning controls for the Parwan/Barwon, Murrabul/Moorabool, Waywatcurtan/Leigh and Yarrowee Rivers.

Action 3.4 Integrated regional strategic land use plan for Rivers of the Barwon/ Barre Warre Yulluk

- **Status:** Planned
- **Led by:** DTP

DTP has commenced preliminary investigations for an integrated regional strategic land use plan.

Action 3.5 Structure plan to integrate Geelong’s centre with Parwan/Barwon River

- **Status:** Planned
- **Led by:** DTP

Consultation on the draft Central Geelong Framework Plan is complete and a planning scheme amendment to implement the plan has been prepared. Work to prepare a structure plan for the city centre to the Parwan/Barwon River will be considered once the framework plan is finalised.

Action 3.6 Review of interim planning controls

- **Status:** Planned
- **Led by:** DEECA and DTP

Review to occur in 2025-26.

Direction 4: Improve waterway amenity to meet community expectations

Shorter-term

Action 4.1 Waterway amenity values in RCS

- **Status:** Delivered in 2022
- **Led by:** Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

Action 4.2 Barwon and Moorabool Flagship programs

- **Status:** Delivered in 2022
- **Led by:** Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

Action 4.3 Develop Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut /Barwon Rivers Parklands Masterplan

- **Status:** Delivered
- **Led by:** Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut Masterplan was finalised in December 2023 and was officially launched in February 2024 by the Hon. Christine Couzens (Member for Geelong) on behalf of the Minister for Water, Harriet Shing, on the banks of the Murrabul/Moorabool River at Batesford.

[Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut - Corangamite Catchment Management Authority \(ccma.vic.gov.au\)](https://ccma.vic.gov.au)

The masterplan is the outcome of a 2-year journey involving engagement with project partners, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners and the community. This included a public engagement period in July 2023. The 6-week consultation period, including 3 community drop-in sessions, received total of 125 individual and 7 community group submissions on the draft. The final version has addressed these community comments.

Action 4.4 Funding for Yarrowee Masterplan parkland priority projects

- **Status:** Delivered
- **Led by:** DEECA

Detailed designs have been developed and relevant approvals submitted to authorities to enable works to commence on priority projects of the Yarrowee River and Tributaries: River Corridor Masterplan. Trail and revegetation works funded under an Iconic Urban Waterways Grant were completed in 2023.

Longer-term

Action 4.5 Support for Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto Langi-ut priority projects

- **Status:** In progress
- **Led by:** Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

A business case has been developed to support the implementation of Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto Langi-ut. The business case prioritises the capital projects in the masterplan and provides a strong case for initial investment in 9 high priority projects.

Initially \$512,000 was secured for 3 of the priority projects as part of the Barwon Flagship Waterway Agreement between DEECA and Corangamite Catchment Management Authority. The funding will be used to progress to a shovel-ready state for the Barwon River Loop Trail with the City of Greater Geelong (\$300,000), works at the Moorabool River Reserve with Golden Plains Shire Council (\$175,000) and implementation of the Barwon Coast Caravan and Camping Park Masterplan (\$37,000).

The Corangamite Catchment Management Authority is continuing to work with Wadawurrung and partner agencies on securing funding for further implementation of priority projects.

Action 4.6 Victorian Waterway Management Strategy – urban waterway values

- **Status:** In progress
- **Led by:** DEECA

The Victorian Waterway Management Strategy (VWMS) is due for renewal in 2025. Work is underway to progress updates to the VWMS, with a dedicated chapter outlining urban waterway values and priorities. A summary of key issues and potential directions was released in late 2023 to begin engagement with the community. This discussion starter and summary of ‘what we heard’ has been published on the DEECA website. There will be further consultation on the draft strategy in the second half of 2024.

Direction 5: Identify opportunities to meet environmental and cultural water needs

Shorter-term

Action 5.1 Funding for Traditional Owner cultural water assessment priorities

- **Status:** Delivered in 2022
- **Led by:** DEECA

Longer-term

Action 5.2 Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy (CGRSWS) water options for environment and culture

- **Status:** In progress
- **Led by:** DEECA

The Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy (CGRSWS), released in September 2022, includes commitments to returning up to 6500ML to Murrabul/Moorabool River west branch and 700ML to the river’s east branch over the next 10 years. Project planning is underway and policy work has started to support the return of water to the environment and Traditional Owners.

The rehabilitation of the Murrabul/Moorabool River at Batesford Quarry is in progress with delivery partners including Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Corporation and Corangamite Catchment Management Authority.

DEECA is progressing Action 4.4 from the CGRSWS to determine how water returned to the Murrabul/Moorabool will be shared between the environment and the Wadawurrung. Meeting with Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Corporation and Corangamite Catchment Management Authority on Country will progress discussions to understand objectives for the water returns and make an informed recommendation to complete this action in partnership.

Feasibility assessments have commenced to investigate options for a large-scale recycled water and treated stormwater network in the Barwon region. The investigation into the use of recycled water and stormwater for environmental flows in the Yarrowee and Waywatcurtan/Leigh rivers, including from Ballarat South Treatment Plant, is planned for future delivery.

Direction 6: Strengthen stormwater management to build resilience

Shorter-term

Action 6.1 Framework for stormwater infrastructure collaboration

- **Status:** Delivered in 2022
- **Led by:** City of Geelong

Longer-term

Action 6.2 Support for a pilot Geelong stormwater offsets program

- **Status:** In progress
- **Led by:** DEECA

A draft offsets scheme is under development along with a commitment to release guidance to support the City of Geelong's pilot.

Action 6.3 Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy (CGRSWS) stormwater investigations

- **Status:** In progress
- **Led by:** DEECA

Action 3.5 to investigate options for a large-scale recycled water and treated stormwater network in the Barwon Region has begun, with feasibility assessments for options underway. Action 3.12 to improve stormwater regulations to support increased capture and use has commenced, and scoping of preliminary options is underway. DEECA has commenced investigating options to improve stormwater management arrangements in the Lower Barwon region in line with Action 3.14. DEECA has also progressed Action 3.16 to investigate the feasibility of expanding the currently mandated urban stormwater management requirements to include stormwater flow reduction objectives.

Direction 7: Ensure accountability and transparency for Action Plan delivery

Shorter-term

Action 7.1 Annual implementation report

- **Status:** Ongoing
- **Led by:** DEECA

The first Annual Report was published in April 2023. This report was for the second year of implementation from March 2023 to February 2024.

Longer-term

Action 7.2 Final review of implementation

- **Status:** Planned
- **Led by:** DEECA

Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and implementation frameworks have been developed.

Looking ahead to 2024-25

The Rivers of the Barwon/Barre Warre Yulluk Action Plan will enter the third year of its 5-year implementation timeframe in 2024. Some highlights of the year ahead include:

- Commencing Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut projects, with 3 priority projects sharing in \$500,000 in implementation funding within 2024 calendar year
- Developing policy and drafting the new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy. This follows on from the 2023 release of a discussion starter and public and stakeholder consultation to explore issues and opportunities for the new strategy
- The strategy will continue to be developed in close collaboration with Traditional Owners, catchment management authorities and other project partners, with input from key stakeholder groups and the broader Victorian community. It is expected to be finalised in 2024-25
- Green Links Grants Program awarded over \$6 million to 23 projects in 2023-24. Of these, 4 are in the Barre Warre Yulluk region and will collectively receive \$2.577 million in funding. Planning and on-ground revegetation works for all projects is expected to commence in 2024.
- This included \$700,000 for the Bananyung Landscape Alliance which will undertake revegetation and associated on ground works across 13 project sites (approximately 80.5 hectares) across Ballarat. This project supports the delivery and outcomes of Action 4.4. A further round of Green Links grants will be opened for applications in late 2024
- Conclusion and outcomes from the 2022 Iconic Urban Waterways Rivers of the Barwon/Barre Warre Yulluk grants program, specifically the Fyan Park Boat ramp enhancement and Yarrowee River Places and Connections Project
- Working with DTP to progress the strengthening of planning policy and controls for waterways.

