

2026-28

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Collaborating to care for and protect Birrarung as one living and integrated natural entity

Since the release of the inaugural Yarra Strategic Plan — *Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo* (BBBU) — in 2022, responsible public entities (RPEs) and Traditional Owners have strengthened their collaboration and deepened their shared commitment to caring for Birrarung as one living and integrated natural entity.

Through our collaborative governance model, the Yarra Collaboration Committee (YCC), we have built stronger cross-agency relationships, clarified opportunities and challenges across the corridor, and coordinated collective action to support the long-term health of Birrarung.

This collaboration is delivering tangible outcomes. Early achievements include substantial progress across the plan's 40 actions and five priority projects, and the development of transformative initiatives – the *Greening the Birrarung* and the *Birrarung Parklands* projects - which secured \$1.65 million in Victorian Government funding in 2023.

We have also deepened our understanding of cultural values and the central importance of caring for Country through sustained engagement with Traditional Owners. These foundations have enabled a more mature, aligned and culturally informed approach to stewardship across the corridor.

The 2026-28 Implementation Plan builds on this progress. It identifies four strategic priorities that will advance our collective efforts, strengthen internal alignment, grow organisational capability, and translate commitments into consistent on-ground outcomes. Together, we remain committed to realising the 50-year Community Vision for Birrarung — a living, thriving entity cared for in partnership with Traditional Owners.

Who We Are

Traditional Owner partners

Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation;
Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage
Aboriginal Corporation.

State government partners

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action;
Department of Transport and Planning; Melbourne Water;
Parks Victoria; VicTrack; Victorian Planning Authority.

Local government partners

Banyule City Council, Boroondara City Council,
Manningham City Council, Melbourne City Council,
Nillumbik Shire Council, Stonnington City Council, Yarra
City Council, Yarra Ranges Shire Council.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Informed by our 50-year community vision

1. Traditional Owners are supported as decision makers and partners

"The vital and continued role of Traditional Owners as custodians of the River, and its role in culture, is recognised and celebrated."

Success measure: Multi-year RPE funding contributions secured to support Wurundjeri Corporation to meet its BBBU obligations.

Rationale: Sustainable resourcing supports Traditional Owners to meet current and future BBBU demands and advance self-determined priorities.

Summary: Successive Birrarung Council annual reports and Yarning Circles have highlighted the need for increased Traditional Owner resourcing. Working with consultants, Wurundjeri Corporation has defined its BBBU staffing needs and presented a multi-year collaborative funding model to the YCC. The lead agency will work with RPEs and Wurundjeri Corporation to secure the funding requested. Engagement continues with Bunurong Corporation to clarify their resourcing needs for participation.

2. Net gain for Country is embedded in BBBU implementation

"Our Yarra River, Birrarung, is respected as a sacred natural living entity and everyone takes responsibility for its care. Its health and integrity are paramount and uncompromised."

Success measure: A shared approach to assessing net gain is agreed and applied.

Rationale: Defining and operationalising net gain — across ecological and cultural dimensions — is essential to meeting our obligations both under the *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017* (the Act) and BBBU.

Summary: The Act requires RPEs to consider protection principles, including achieving net gain for the environment, for any action or policy that impacts Birrarung. The Birrarung Council has identified the development of a consistent, practical approach to assessing net gain as a priority. Ensuring this approach is guided by cultural values is critical. DEECA and Wurundjeri Corporation are mapping a way forward. Progressing this work is a shared priority of the YCC.

3. Collaboration results in greater collective impact

"Our Yarra River, Birrarung, is recognised around the world as an iconic example of a nurturing relationship between a river and its community."

Success measure: New collaborative project proposals that support and enhance the health of Birrarung are scoped and supported.

Rationale: Collaborative projects help embed whole-of-river thinking and strengthen the protection of Birrarung as one living and integrated natural entity.

Summary: The YCC has established a strong platform for collaboration. Four transformative projects — *Greening the Birrarung*, *Birrarung Parklands*, the *BBBU Collaboration Platform* and the *Birrarung Valley Walk* — will continue through 2026–28. Additional collaborative opportunities, including projects with greater community involvement, will be explored to build and sustain our shared commitment to protecting and caring for Birrarung.

4. Communication and engagement strengthens shared understanding and collective action

"Our Yarra River, Birrarung, its essential role in our lives and its rich history, are respected, understood and protected."

Success measure: Improved awareness and care for Birrarung as a living entity across RPE organisations and the community.

Rationale: Clear communication and meaningful engagement deepen shared understanding, support Traditional Owner leadership, and inspire collective action for the protection and care of Birrarung.

Summary: While awareness of BBBU has been established within RPE organisations and engaged community, understanding of how to engage with Birrarung as a living entity requires strengthening. The YCC will address this by deepening relationships with the river through coordinated messaging, community engagement, and amplification of Traditional Owner voices.

OUR ONGOING COMMITMENTS

BURNDAP BIRRARUNG BURNDAP UMARKOO

YARRA STRATEGIC PLAN

Responsible public entities

Responsible public entities have a range of responsibilities under the *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrnong) Act 2017* and BBBU.

For 2026-28 these include:

CONSIDERATION OF PROTECTION PRINCIPLES

- Ensuring the Yarra protection principles are considered for any project or policy that affects Yarra River land.

DELIVERY OF BBBU COMMITMENTS

- Ongoing delivery of Part 1 actions (*see status update for each action in the BBBU Annual Report*).
- Continued implementation of the Part 2 land use framework.
- Progression of priority projects identified in the BBBU.

PROGRESSION OF TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECTS

- Active participation in the Greening the Birrarung, Birrarung Parklands and Birrarung Valley Walk transformative projects.

OPERATIONAL COLLABORATION

- Active participation in YCC meetings.
- Contributing organisational data and updates to support lead agency annual reporting.

Lead agency

As lead agency, Melbourne Water has additional responsibilities that directly support BBBU implementation.

For 2026-28 these include:

PLANNING, MONITORING AND REPORTING

- Prepare and submit annual implementation progress reports to the Birrarung Council.
- Update of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) plan.
- Maintain tracking and reporting of actions and activities.

STRENGTHENING DECISION-MAKING

- Review and simplify the decision-making framework (DMF) to ensure clarity and ease of use.

CAPABILITY BUILDING AND SECTOR SUPPORT

- Provide concise resources to support whole-of-organisation understanding of BBBU across RPEs.
- Facilitate executive-level forums to strengthen leadership, alignment and accountability across RPEs.
- Support cultural competence development, where appropriate, through collaboration with Wurundjeri and Bunurong Corporations.

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

- Convene Yarra Collaboration Committee
- Continue to lead Greening the Birrarung and Birrarung Parklands transformative projects.
- Delivery of a fit-for-purpose collaboration platform.

The Yarra Collaboration Committee is comprised of representatives from Bunurong Corporation and Wurundjeri Corporation.



And the following 14 responsible public entities (RPEs):

