

Phase 1 Engagement Summary

Maribyrnong River catchment flood mitigation study

Acknowledgement of Country

Melbourne Water respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which all Australians rely.

We pay our respects to Bunurong and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water of the Maribyrnong River. We pay our deepest respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We recognise and respect the continued cultural and spiritual connections that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with the land and water they have cared for and protected for thousands of generations.

We demonstrate our ongoing commitment to reconciliation through our partnerships with Traditional Owners and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as we work together to manage land and water now and into the future, while maintaining and respecting cultural and spiritual connections.



Introduction

Melbourne Water is partnering with local communities to explore ways to help reduce flood risk for the lower Maribyrnong River catchment (the catchment). This study is an important step in identifying, developing and implementing flood mitigation options that will not only help to reduce flood risk in the lower catchment but also reflect what matters most to the people that live, work and enjoy the beautiful areas which make up the catchment.

Melbourne Water would like to thank all those who contributed their thoughts, feelings and experiences throughout Phase 1 of the study. We appreciate the challenging nature of providing this feedback with many still living with the impacts of the 2022 flood. Your input is invaluable in helping us understand what matters most to residents and the local community, and will play a key role in shaping the next phase of the study as we identify and assess potential mitigation options.



Image 1: The Maribyrnong River during the October 2022 flood

Our shared goal is to identify flood mitigation options that will meaningfully support a reduction in flood risk across the lower catchment. Every option we consider in the study must reduce flood risk while prioritising the safety, wellbeing and values of the diverse communities across the catchment.

Phase 1 of the study took place from May to June 2025 and was all about listening to the people who know and love the Maribyrnong River catchment best. We invited those who live, work and spend time in the area to share what they value most, because understanding what matters to the community and local priorities is key to shaping meaningful outcomes in the study.

This report captures the voices we heard during this first phase, the ways we connected with community members and what's coming next as we continue this journey together.

Feedback from Phase 1 will shape the development of the evaluation criteria, which will be used in the assessments of the 'long-list' and 'shortlist' of potential flood mitigation options. The feedback from this first phase will also inform the cost benefit analysis which will be used to help assess the mitigation options.

The evaluation criteria (figure 1 below) will look at a range of factors including social, economic, and environmental factors, feasibility, cost, and the most valued features in the local community. The collection of feedback in Phase 1 largely centred around seeking to learn more about how the community perceives and prioritises different features of value, these included:

- Water assets (e.g. the Maribyrnong River, ponds, water quality, dams)
- Recreation (e.g. parks, playgrounds, walking and bike riding paths, fishing spots)
- Biodiversity (e.g. fish, birds, trees)
- Dwellings (e.g. homes, businesses, other properties)
- Infrastructure (e.g. roads, public transport, hospitals, bridges, power)
- Community and culture (e.g. community meeting places, places of worship, schools)
- Historic heritage (e.g. heritage buildings or other sites of historic significance)
- Cultural heritage (e.g. scar trees, sacred sites or other sites of significance for First Peoples or Traditional Owners)

- Other (e.g. locations, features or topics that do not fit within the predefined features of value).

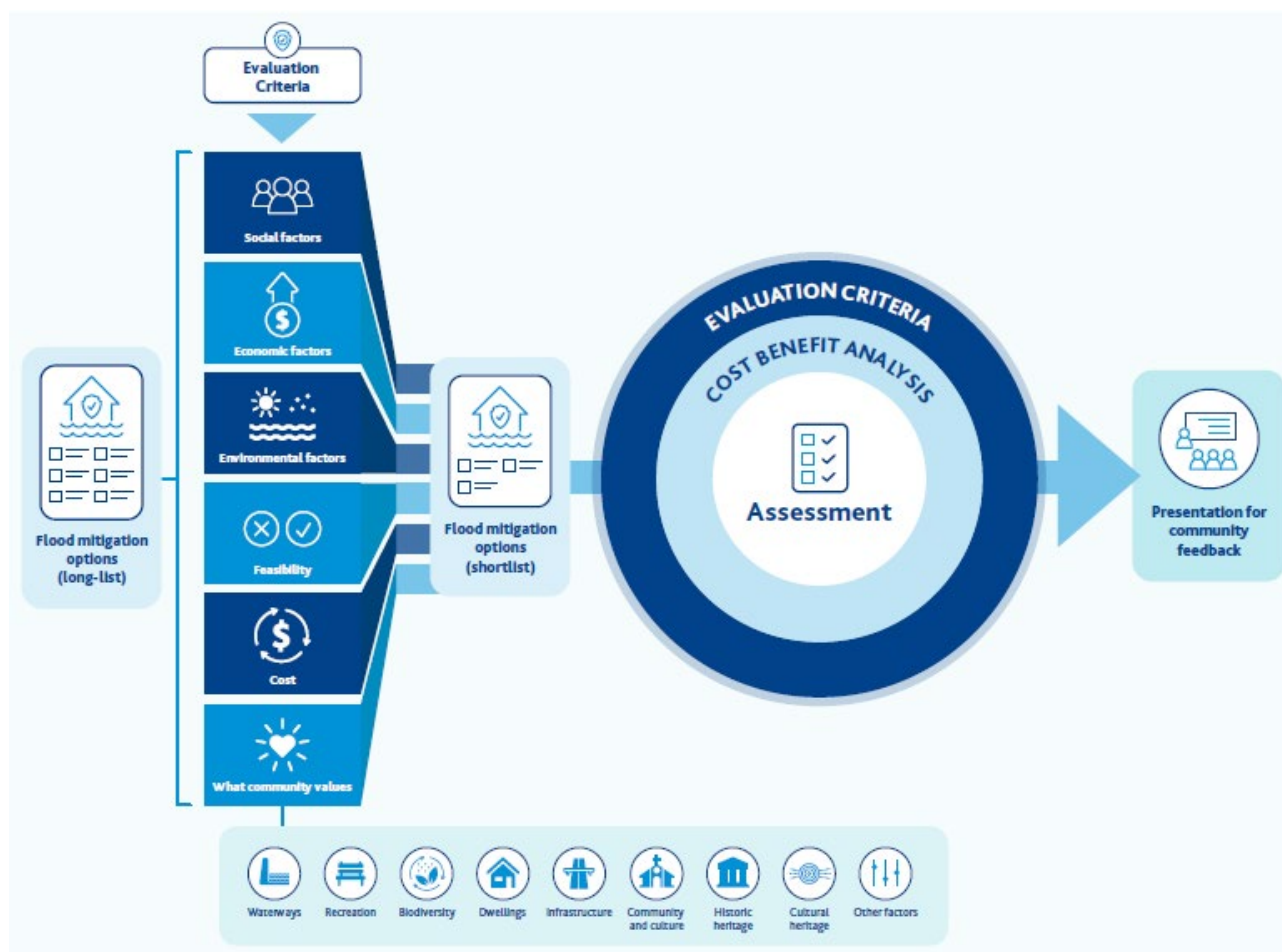


Figure 1: Evaluation criteria and cost benefit analysis

Summary of engagement

We ran a comprehensive engagement program in Phase 1 with a wide variety of activities – including online, in-person and in-the-community – that were designed to connect with the many different people and voices across the catchment. This approach helped us hear from a broad and diverse range of locals and stakeholders:



The Let's Talk interactive map invited contributors to share their location, but only 11% chose to include this information. Of this group, most resided in the lower catchment.

We appreciate everyone who took the time to share their thoughts, ideas and local knowledge.

Due to the conversational nature of the small group discussions, feedback collected during these is not reflected in the Let's Talk interactive map or the above statistics.

How we got the word out

We promoted these engagement opportunities in both the upper and lower part of the catchment in several ways, including:

- Letterbox drop to 13,000 homes and businesses
- 3-month targeted social media campaign
- Newspaper advertising
- Posters at local council buildings
- Direct phone calls and emails to over 55 community groups and organisations
- Conversations at engagement events

In-person events

We hosted four pop-up events throughout the catchment in May and June 2025. Pop-up events were held in South Kensington, Moonee Ponds, Sunbury and Edgewater during evenings and weekends to maximise opportunities for participation. We also held a drop-in session in Flemington, where community



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members could speak directly with subject matter experts from Melbourne Water and Jacobs.

The events were attended by approximately 137 people across the engagement period.

The in-person events and drop-in session encouraged community members to hear about the study and provided an opportunity to give feedback using physical and online maps, voting pods and feedback surveys. All feedback collected during in-person events was inputted into the interactive map on Let's Talk.



Image 2-4: Pop-up events in South Kensington (L), Sunbury (M), Edgewater (R)

Community Partnership Panels

Phase 1 of the study included the first round of Community Partnership Panels, bringing community members together across three in-person sessions in May 2025. To learn more about the results of the Panels, please read our Community Partnership Panel Report available on Let's Talk:

letstalk.melbournewater.com.au/maribyrnong-cpp

Small group discussions

We held seven small group discussions with potentially impacted government agencies, private organisations, and community groups and organisations as part of Phase 1 of the study, including:

- The Department of Defence
- Maribyrnong Community Recovery Association
- Maribyrnong City Council Community Recovery Committee and Moonee Valley City Council Community Recovery Committee
- Maribyrnong Rivers and Waterways Association

- Perri Projects (West Melbourne Waterfront)
- Rivervue Retirement Village
- TigCorp.

These groups are active community voices or have the potential to be highly impacted by outcomes of the study. It was important for Melbourne Water to meet directly with them to listen, learn and understand their priorities for the study and seek feedback on the features of value. We will continue to work with these stakeholders as the study progresses.

Meetings were offered to other groups and organisations who weren't able to participate at this time. We will reach out again to re-engage these stakeholders as part of Phase 2 and consider requests from other similar stakeholders who would like to be involved.

Let's Talk interactive map

The Let's Talk interactive map (shown below) was a key tool in collecting feedback online and at our events. We received a total of 533 contributions from the community, helping us understand what places and features matter most to the community. This includes 457 contributions directly onto the Let's Talk interactive map, plus 76 contributions received during the Community Partnership Panels. The 143 contributions (to make a total of 676 contributions in Phase 1), were non-location-specific contributions from the Community Partnership Panels, hence why they have not been included in the interactive map. However, they have been included in our overall Phase 1 data set.

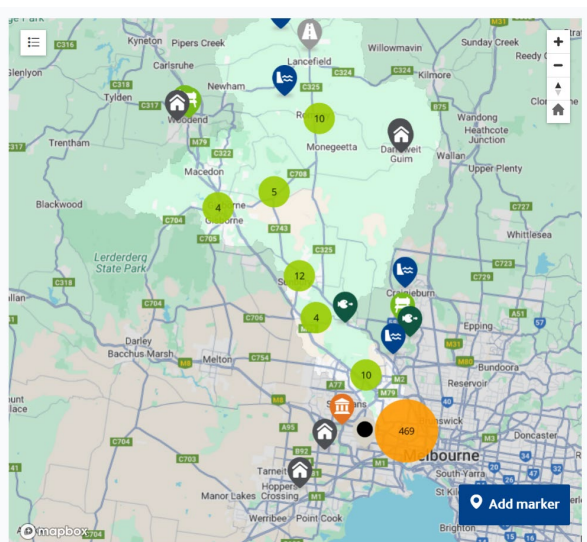


Image 5: Screenshot of the Let's Talk interactive map

What the community love and value in the catchment

We asked participants to tell us about the places and features they love within their local environment and community.

Figure 2 represents the total number of contributions we received relating to the features of value, collected via Let's Talk and during the Panels.



Figure 2: Community values in order of number of contributions

What we heard

As can be seen in Figure 2, Phase 1 engagement reveals that community prioritise the values in the following order: dwellings, recreation, other, infrastructure, water assets, biodiversity, community and culture, Cultural heritage and Historic heritage.

This feedback helps shape our priorities moving forward by placing an emphasis on these values in the evaluation criteria to help identify mitigation options which better support the needs and values of the community.

Key themes

The Maribyrnong River catchment isn't just a place; it is where people have built lives, raised families, connected with nature and created memories. We analysed all the contributions received during the engagement period to identify key themes or topics that emerged in the written responses. Through your stories, ideas and reflections, we've gained a clearer picture of what makes this place so special and what the community would value being most protected from future flooding risks.

Home is at the heart of the catchment

Community feedback overwhelmingly focused on dwellings - including homes and businesses - within the catchment area. We heard many people speak with deep care and emotion about their **homes, family, and places in the catchment that give them a sense of community and belonging**. Many participants shared how important it is to protect these places from future flooding, especially homes, businesses, community places, places of worship and schools. In addition, we noticed a genuine desire to understand how these cherished spaces, in particular homes, could be made flood resilient in the future, so that people can continue to feel safe and secure in the places they love the most.

"My home - mitigation needs to protect homes first and keep people safe."

"An important area for our community, it's a meeting point, an intersection, a thoroughfare and a destination."

Flooding has left a lasting impact

We heard heartfelt stories about the **history of flooding in the area** and the significant impact of the October 2022 flood event. Many people shared the emotional and financial toll it has taken, with some still feeling the effects of the flood event today. There are ongoing concerns about safety, security and the resilience of homes and businesses in the lower catchment. These stories reflect the lasting impact flooding has had on people's lives, wellbeing, property and finances, and the deep need for solutions that offer real protection and peace of mind. We thank community members for sharing their personal stories and experiences and appreciate the courage it takes in doing so.

"It is our property and was affected by flooding including catching debris from the fast moving water."

"We've seen good progress in native plantings etc along the river in recent years - the flooding was pretty devastating to a lot of that progress and vegetation zones."

Recreation spaces are part of everyday life

We also saw many contributions relating to **recreation and community connections**, such as sporting clubs, walking and cycling tracks, parks and the Maribyrnong River itself. Recreation places throughout the catchment are much loved parts of daily life for community members, whether it's for exercise, how they commute or a place where they can meet with friends and family. This appreciation for recreation in the catchment area was reflected at all engagement events. People expressed a strong desire to see these spaces cared for, protected and enhanced as part of future flood mitigation efforts, recognising how important they are in supporting wellbeing, connection and quality of life.

"Enjoying walking around the river and enjoying the river amenity."

"Used by the entire community for walking, playing commuting."

"This is a lovely walking/cycle track which provides connection to nature in a built-up area."

A deep love for the inner-city nature and wildlife

We heard stories of frogs, owls, swans, yabbies and more, highlighting **the river as an important habitat for native flora and fauna**. The community expressed a deep appreciation for the natural environment throughout the catchment and the importance of protecting or improving biodiversity through the implementation of flood mitigation options. Many people shared how much they value the catchment's natural beauty, and wildlife so close to the city and expressed a strong desire to see these areas not only protected by flood mitigation, but enhanced so future generations can continue to enjoy and connect with nature in their own backyard.

"Valuable habitat that is essential for native fauna and flora."

"Beautiful connection to the natural environment."

"Waa Creek, this is a vital home for frogs and yabbies."

Lower catchment communities need focused support

We saw the greatest number of comments on the Let's Talk interactive map in the lower catchment, especially in Kensington, Flemington, Maribyrnong, Moonee Ponds, Keilor and neighbouring suburbs. The higher proportion of comments in the lower catchment shows just how much these areas have felt the impacts of past flooding events, including the October 2022 flood, and the importance of protecting them.

These communities are still feeling the effects of the October 2022 flood and are calling for thoughtful, effective solutions that reflect their lived experience – these will be explored as the program progresses. **The community has ideas and wants to be part of the solution.**

"We were flooded in 2022, Rivervue Retirement Village."

"Our entire house flooded. All of Oakland street flooded."

Flood mitigation suggestions from community

Several submissions included a wide variety of **suggestions for flood mitigation options** which offered practical and thoughtful solutions on how to reduce flood risk. These have been collated and added to the long-list of mitigation options that will be assessed as part of Phase 2 of the study.

"A retarding basin upstream and levee banks would help to mitigate flood damage."

"Retarding basin to flow into Steele creek."

Other insights

Water assets and biodiversity in the upper catchment

In the upper catchment, comments were mainly placed around Sunbury, Gisborne and Riddell's Creek. These comments highlighted water assets like Rosslynne Reservoir and Sunbury Water Tanks, as well as fishing spots along Jacksons Creek and near Blind Creek Parklands in Sunbury, some of which are being explored as possible mitigation option locations.

Significant Aboriginal Cultural heritage

We also saw comments near Sunbury highlighting areas of Aboriginal Cultural heritage significance known as 'earth rings' which were identified for protection from future flood risk.

Landmarks or locations that are popular with the community

Some of the most popular landmarks or locations included JJ Holland Park and Newell's Paddock Kensington, Heavenly Queen Temple in Footscray, Footscray Park, the Maribyrnong River Trail, Pipemakers Park and Anglers Tavern in Maribyrnong, Canning Reserve in Avondale Heights and Brimbank Park in Keilor East. Essendon Canoe Club and Parkside Football Club were both highlighted as important recreational facilities for community members.

Competing priorities

We also learnt how much community members value recreation as well as biodiversity living in the Maribyrnong River catchment. Many people suggested that ovals, parks and wetlands could double as temporary flood storage. As we develop our evaluation criteria, we need to strike a balance between minimising long-term impact on parks, trails and habitat while exploring ways to use these green spaces for flood mitigation. By unpacking these nuances, we'll develop an evaluation criteria that truly reflect the community's priorities and the multifunctional role that could be played by green or open spaces.

Past experiences of flooding in the catchment

We also asked whether the place or feature selected on the Let's Talk interactive map was flooded in October 2022 or whether participants felt it was at risk of flooding in the future. A significant number of people were unsure, while others identified locations as either previously flooded, at risk, or both.

The responses showed that while many community members are aware of flood-prone areas, a large number were unsure about where future risks lie, highlighting flood risk isn't always clear or well understood. This uncertainty can contribute to the fear of unknown, reinforcing the need for clearer, accessible flood risk information and education to support informed decision making for flood mitigation across that catchment. Helping communities understand where and why flooding might occur is an important step in building resilience and confidence for the future.

These responses about past and future flooding risks are summarised in Figure 3.

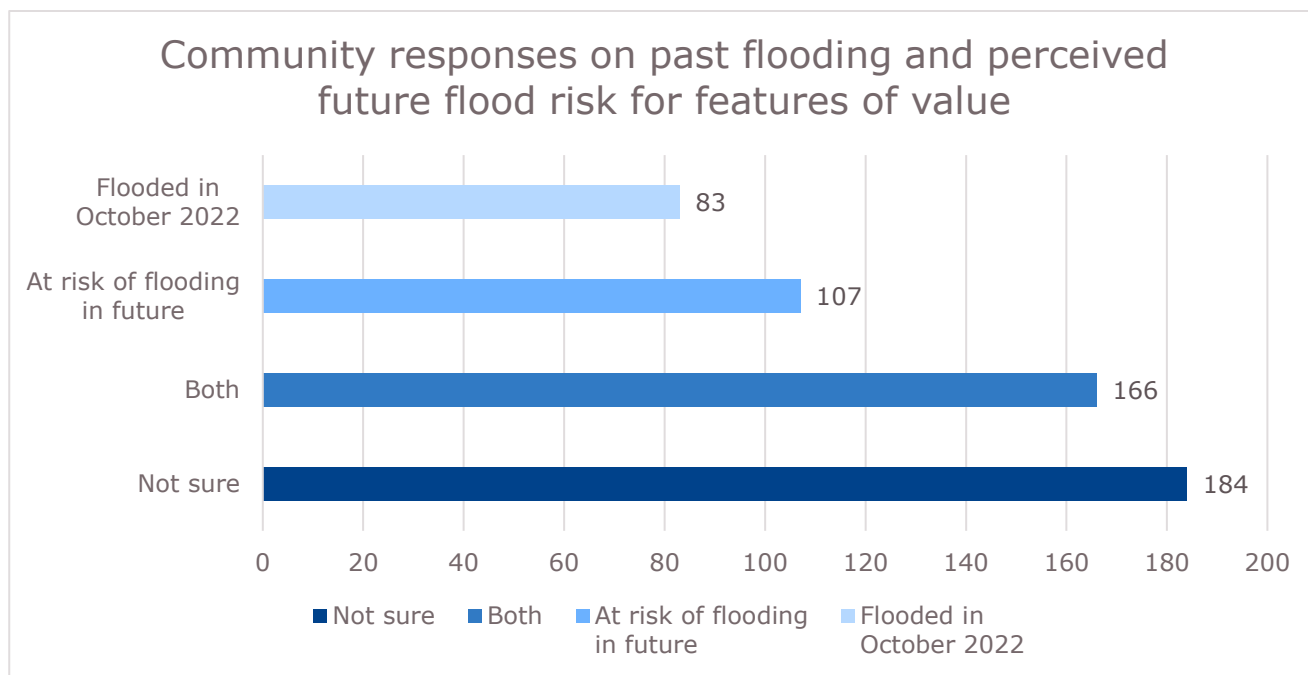


Figure 3: Responses about whether features of value were flooded in October 2022 or at risk of flooding in future.

Next steps

How your feedback will shape what comes next



Melbourne Water provides clean drinking water, treats sewage so we can recover and reuse our valued resources, works within our community to reduce flood risk, and keeps all 25,000km of Melbourne's rivers, creeks and catchments healthy, today and for generations to come



With Phase 1 now complete, we're shifting our focus to Phase 2 of the study. The insights you shared have given us a clear roadmap for what matters most. Your feedback will be translated into detailed assessments and a transparent evaluation framework. These tools will help us screen and score every flood-mitigation option against the values you told us are critical.

From what we heard, protecting lives and safeguarding property emerged as the overriding community priority. In Phase 2, any mitigation option must meet these essential requirements before moving forward. This ensures that every measure we explore keeps people and homes safe above all else.

Beyond risk reduction, we also want to identify mitigation options that deliver positive outcomes for the catchment through our evaluation criteria. From the feedback, the assessment will need to consider how mitigation options generate benefits such as improving the health of the river and the natural environment, and establishing new recreational areas or community spaces.

We are currently working on refining these assessments and criteria. This work will translate community feedback and values into measure indicators, as well as testing and calibrating this assessment for consistency. During Phase 2, we will share with you these refined assessments and criteria. Your voice remains central to this process. As we move forward, we'll continue to ensure that every decision reflects the needs, priorities and safety of everyone living and working in the catchment.

We anticipate starting Phase 2 of the study in late 2025. This will involve:

- Sharing the evaluation criteria and long-list of potential flood mitigation options
- Additional community engagement to gather feedback on the long-list of flood mitigation options.

We will continue to keep community members and stakeholders updated via the Let's Talk website at letstalk.melbournewater.com.au/maribyrnong-mitigation. Please select 'follow' at the top of the page to be kept up-to-date on the progress of this project.

How did we do?

Melbourne Water thanks all those who participated in Phase 1 of the study and would appreciate your feedback on the engagement to date. Please complete our engagement survey at letstalk.melbournewater.com.au/phase-1-feedback



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to help us understand any areas for improvement or change as we plan for Phase 2 engagement.

Contact us

To speak with the team, please call 131 722 or email enquiry@melbournewater.com.au