

## YERING BILLABONGS PROJECT

---

Report Author: Executive Officer - Environmental Stewardship

Responsible Officer: Director Environment and Infrastructure

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

---

*The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.*

### CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public

### SUMMARY

The Yering Billabongs Project aims to re-create a natural floodplain as a shallow meadow for our community and importantly support the deepening of knowledge of this area for the Traditional Owners the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung.

A Committee of Management will ensure long-term care of the site and support the biodiversity outcomes. Melbourne Water and Council propose to partner in the management of the site through the Committee of Management model. Melbourne Water and Council are well positioned to balance the expectations of the community and conservation initiatives while supporting Indigenous connection to country.

A Committee of Management through partnership for Yering Billabongs is proposed via CEO delegated authority.

### RECOMMENDATION

#### ***That Council***

- 1. Approve Yarra Ranges Council as Committee of Management over Yering Billabongs in partnership with Melbourne Water.***
- 2. Delegate authority to the CEO to progress the Committee of Management arrangement and associated endeavours.***

## RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

Council endorsed the Yarra Strategic Plan 11 May 2021. The Yarra Strategic Plan lists the Yering Billabongs Project as a priority project for implementation.

## DISCUSSION

### *Purpose and Background*

Yering Billabongs Project is fully grant funded through the Yarra Strategic Plan, with over \$1M allocated over three-years. This project aims to re-create a natural floodplain as a shallow meadow for our community and importantly support the deepening of knowledge of this area for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung. See Attachment 2 for Concept Design.

A Committee of Management (CoM) will ensure long-term care of the site. Melbourne Water agreed to a partnership approach, with both agencies well positioned to balance the expectations of the community, conservation initiatives and Indigenous connection to country. *See Attachment 1 for the CoM area.*

Council and Melbourne Water will have shared responsibility of managing, improving, and maintaining the land for conservation and community.

### *Options considered*

Committee of Management as a non-partnership and partnership model were considered. The partnership model will enable Council and Melbourne Water to support the maintenance as a co-funded agreement which presents a lower cost to Council, while also meeting community expectations of the site.

### *Recommended option and justification*

**Preferred option:** Committee of Management in partnership with Melbourne Water.

**Justification:** The partnership approach will enable the realisation of a community legacy project improving outcomes for the Yarra River for current and future generations. This is a unique opportunity for Council to respond to community expectations and the strategic commitments through direct action and proactively through the Yarra Strategic Plan. This project will improve the environmental sustainability and resilience of our local landscape.

## FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

While current project works are fully funded by the state government until 2024, future financial obligations will be determined through the Committee of Management. Budget implications for the project are predicted from 2024-2025:

- Council ongoing terrestrial (land) maintenance ~\$17,000 per year; and

- Melbourne Water ongoing riparian (water vegetation) maintenance and revegetation support ~\$35,000 per year.

## **APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES**

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

- Connected and Healthy Communities;
- Protected & Enhanced Environment; and
- Vibrant Economy, Agriculture and Tourism;

And the following:

- Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023; and
- Yarra Strategic Plan 2022-2032

## **RELEVANT LAW**

*Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017*

In February 2017, the Victorian Government released the Yarra River Action Plan. The Action Plan requires the Yarra River to be managed as a living integrated entity with a voice; centred by Traditional Owner values and perspectives; and underpinned by coordinated planning frameworks. *The Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017* was developed in response to this Plan and recommendations of the Yarra River Protection Ministerial Advisory Committee.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

Council has a shared responsibility for water quality issues and altered flow regimes now impacting the Birrarung and wider catchment. Over half of the length of the Yarra River flows through Yarra Ranges, and its creeks; Olinda, Stringybark and Muddy traversing the municipality. Council also has also acknowledged a responsibility to our community to preserve places and waterways with cultural significance, such as Yering, Birrarung and Olinda Creek.

This project aims to achieve water quality improvement to benefit plants and animals along with public recreation, fishing and downstream agriculture businesses. The project will increase and broaden the type of open space available for community to access.

Yering Billabongs will also provide a unique show case for direct action towards Indigenous connection to country and cultural practice through Firestick and storytelling.

There is an expectation to develop a '*Friends of Group*' through avenues such as Landcare.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Adjoining landholders have been consulted, broader community will be engaged as the project progresses, with a community engagement plan to be developed.

## COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Collaboration project partners, includes:

- Melbourne Water; key project partner and partner in Committee of Management;
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning as a key stakeholder;
- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) and Narrap Rangers; and
  - Narrap Rangers will undertake ongoing management works; monitoring, weed control and cultural burns; and
  - WWCHAC will undertake a Cultural Values Assessment to deepen the Indigenous understanding of the site and create a narrative.
- Zoos Victoria; Committee of Management over adjacent section.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

Key Risk	Risk Detail	Mitigation
Financial	Implications of Council supporting the CoM.	CoM as a partnership to reduce financial cost. Creation of Friends of Group to support long-term care of the site. Continue to seek future investment.
Design	Proposed design to align with cultural heritage and environmental considerations.	Engage necessary project partners early and consistently throughout project. Approved concept design to be low impact / minimal earthworks.
Community perception	Community concerned with council supporting this project and/or project activities exacerbating risks during extreme weather events.	Communications team will assist with a plan during community consultation. Project is a legacy project for future generations to enjoy.
Impact to	Perceived risk of restoration	Analysis from Birdlife Australia and

adjacent properties	activities attracting large flocks of wetland birds that will increase bird strike risk for the airport.  Exacerbated localised flooding concerns.	Melbourne Water suggests a very low likelihood of bird strike. This will be continually reviewed and evaluated.  Concept design will mitigate flood risk.
---------------------	--	---

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

## ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Attachment 1 - Yering Billabongs Project Overview
2. Attachment 2 - Yering Billabongs Concept Design