

YARRA RIVER

REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PLANNING CONTROLS

Melbourne 2030: Planning for Sustainable Growth commits the Government to protecting the Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers (Policy 5.7). It includes specific action to strengthen policies and review the adequacy of planning controls to ensure the long-term protection of open space and the environment. The first priority will be the Yarra River corridor between Punt Road and Burke Road.

This commitment is due to increasing community concern about certain proposed or recently approved developments along this section of the Yarra. Increasing development pressure along the lower Yarra River illustrates our increasing desire to live close to the city and the appeal of riverside locations. Similar pressures are occurring along other waterways in the inner and middle suburbs.

As the Yarra and Maribyrnong are Melbourne's two most significant waterways, the Government's first priority is to address these two important rivers.

the consultant report

In June 2004 the Department of Sustainability and Environment appointed a team of consultants, led by Planisphere and supported by Jones and Whitehead and Land Design Partnership. Their task was to review and recommend changes to existing local policies and planning controls in order to protect the river corridor from inappropriate use and development, protection of natural and cultural heritage and access to recreational open space.

The study area was the Yarra River corridor, including public and private land along the valley, the escarpment and skyline, between Punt Road and Burke Road.

The project brief required the consultants to provide:

- A statement of objectives for the river corridor within the context of Government policy
- An analysis of current local policies and planning controls, including any threats to achieving objectives for the Yarra River corridor
- An area-based objectives and design guidelines to shape future development and enhancement of the river corridor; and
- Recommendations for the implementation (including statutory means) of the design guidelines.

who has been involved so far?

The relevant local councils: Yarra, Boroondara, Stonnington and Banyule, as well as Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria, were represented on a reference group which provided advice and support to DSE and the consultants.

Two workshops held during the course of the project were attended by community groups, councillors, businesses, sporting clubs and government agencies. Submissions were received from local groups and residents following the placement of advertisements in local papers. Background information is available on DSE and council websites.

what are the main findings of the study?

This section of the Yarra provides a unique environment and is a priceless resource for the inner metropolitan area. It includes Yarra Bend Park which provides a real bushland experience. There are also pockets of 'seclusion' along other parts of the river which the community is keen to preserve.

The analysis of current policy and stakeholder views obtained during the course of the project reinforced previous policy intentions to protect the Yarra. The former concept plans of the 1980s are still relevant. But the increased demand for riverside living and resulting development pressures mean that the planning controls need updating.

The study identified high priority areas for strengthened planning controls, based on proximity of private land to the river and the extent to which these areas still have a 'natural' feel, current development pressure and the nature of existing controls.

Areas closest to the river have been divided into four character types – *Leafy Suburban*, *Urban Industrial/Ex-industrial*, and *Urban Residential* (all applying to private land), and Open Space Corridor (applying to public land).

Areas recommended as highest priority for strengthened planning controls occur in the *Leafy Suburban* character type within all four municipalities. The most pressing need for changes to planning provisions in the *Urban Industrial/Ex-industrial* area have been recognised through the approval of Amendment C66 in the City of Yarra.

Melbourne Water has also requested the strengthening of planning provisions dealing with flood-prone areas.

Following revision and adoption after the current round of community consultation, the objectives and guidelines will provide the strategic basis for planning provisions, as well as guide park planning and management.

Other recommendations identify localities (including both public and private land subject to redevelopment) where more detailed planning is desirable, and where public access could be improved alongside the river.

why are revised planning controls needed?

The issue is not the current absence of planning controls to protect the Yarra. Existing planning scheme provisions do contain relevant objectives that highlight the significance of the valley and the need to prevent inappropriate development. However, the current planning provisions lack clarity about the acceptable forms of development.

The aim of revised planning controls is to improve clarity and give more specific criteria and decision guidance, leading to greater certainty about the outcomes of planning decisions. This should assist both developers and the community – meaning less time and money spent on contentious development proposals and appeals.

Stronger planning controls benefit not only the general community who enjoy the Yarra River and its parks, but adjoining residents who may not be in favour of large developments that are out of character with a secluded, leafy riverside environment.

The ‘first order priority’ recommendations in the *Leafy Suburban* character area include changes to activities requiring a permit, and new performance standards that could be included in planning schemes.

Recommended changes relate to the construction of buildings and works, and removal of vegetation. The aim is to ensure protection of the immediate Yarra River environs including:

- Protecting trees and other vegetation, including riparian vegetation
- Allowing sufficient space for the planting and growth of trees
- Using colours, materials and building designs that complement the environment
- Maintaining the sense of seclusion the corridor provides to those using the valley
- Ensuring buildings on visible slopes and skylines are subordinate to vegetation and views are filtered through trees
- Ensuring development is compatible with floodplain management.

what is the status of the consultant report and its recommendations?

The report has been produced for consultation purposes and its content does not necessarily reflect the views of the Minister for Planning or the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). Nor has the report has not been formally endorsed by local councils or Government agencies such as Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water.

The recommendations relating to planning scheme changes represent a starting point for consultation prior to amendment processes; they would also require further fine-tuning before being suitable for inclusion in planning provisions.

DSE welcomes submissions addressing any of the following issues:

The extent to which the draft objectives reflect previous strategic work including former concept plans, current policies (such as *Melbourne 2030* and the draft River Health Strategy) and stakeholder input during the project.

Whether the draft strategies and guidelines in Attachment 1 adequately reflect the draft objectives.

The suggested priorities for strengthening planning controls.

The appropriateness of suggested additional permit triggers and performance standards recommended for inclusion in planning schemes – in light of the draft objectives and current or potential development pressures.

Suggestions as to how the general recommendations could be translated into planning scheme provisions – including fine-tuning of performance standards, and whether performance criteria should be mandatory or subject to discretion.

Recommendations relating to public land enhancement and additional public access priorities.

Suggestions for improved mechanisms for State and local government to work together on planning and other issues affecting the Yarra River, in consultation with key stakeholders and the community.

Submissions should be posted, faxed or emailed to:

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what happens next?

- Submissions will be collated by DSE and copies provided to the relevant councils or other government agencies where appropriate.
- Outcomes of the consultation will be reported back to stakeholders, including those who prepare submissions.
- DSE will continue to work with the councils and agencies to come up with final agreed recommendations and will support implementation, including the preparation of any future planning scheme amendments.
- DSE will complete a review of the range of planning tools that could be used to implement the study's recommendations.
- Changes to planning schemes are expected to follow the normal amendment process, which includes a formal submissions process.
- DSE will continue to maintain a mailing list of interested stakeholder groups and individuals.