

## The Case for Waterways Maritime Trail along the North bank of the Yarra

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Whereas many other cities celebrate waterfront promenades or trails as public infrastructure assets, attractive to both locals and tourists, Melbourne has yet to do so. Public access to the waterways of Melbourne remains interrupted, patchy, scruffy, sometimes prohibited and most certainly not assets optimised by State or Local government. The bureaucratic tangle governing so much of our maritime heritage, policy or planning around our waterways has impeded the proper development of such infrastructure.

With the co-operation of the multiple responsible authorities and multiple stakeholders including government and industry coupled with creative and sensitive design, the Waterways/Maritime Trail has the capacity to fulfil very many complementary aspirations of diverse stakeholders and provide, in a practical form, essential 'connectivity' between elements of the maritime heritage we share.

### Existing Trail Initiatives

Melbourne's major public assets, its waterways and water-edge, lack necessary connectivity. Fragmented parts of several trails remain under-valued and under-developed. Examples of this are the **Port of Melbourne Heritage Trail - map** – publication ceased in 2010. The Federally funded **Captain Cook Heritage Trail**, a project, which has minimal recognition in, Victoria yet reference is made to many places along the Victorian coastline sighted by Cpt. Cook. (*Mal Nicholson (Local Chapter of the Captain Cook Society)*). **The City of Melbourne** has a series of disconnected and unsigned pathways along the Yarra River which is a consequence of there being no Master Plan for its Urban Waterways. There is minimal evidence of collaboration to merge supporting heritage values, tourism commerce and environmental conservation in Greater Melbourne. The **Shrine of Remembrance** is implementing a '**Shrine to Sea**' Trail, linking the Shrine with Station Pier in recognition of those departing for overseas service. is currently being planned. **Development Victoria** has installed an **Art Trail** in Docklands divided into three sections of around 2.5 kilometres and takes approximately one hour.

## Responsible Authorities

Responsible authorities governing and operating around the river are a bureaucratic tangle. The obvious and key stakeholder is the City of Melbourne –which has been in effect marginalised over the past 7 years. This has impeded progress around all waterways matter – including, of course, the Maritime North Bank Trail.

The City of Melbourne has control of 4 per cent of the total river frontage in Melbourne (Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers), 36kms of navigable waterways (72kms of waterfront), 7kms of waterfront at Docklands, 12kms within the Port of Melbourne. Yet the CoM has been shouldered aside by Parks Victoria and, to a lesser extent, Melbourne Water. Successive State governments have failed to pay close attention to the relationship between water and urban development in Melbourne and adjacent municipalities. The Yarra River has metropolitan significance as an environmental, aesthetic, cultural, recreation and tourism asset.

It is significant to note that two international maritime museums (London and New York) refer to accesses to Docklands areas and waterways trail as ‘attractions’ The State Government does not apparently grasp the concept.

## Evidence of policy deficiencies

The Municipal Association of Victoria submission (October 2016) to Government representing many municipalities re problems with the *Marine and Coastal Act* referred to “*Confusion within the community and sometimes within agencies about respective roles and responsibilities...*” Noting an *Absence of direction...*” and “*lack of interest.*”

Commissioned by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change it identifies the absence of a shared comprehensive ‘*vision*’ in relation to Melbourne’s waterways “*Layered with complicated governance*”.

The City of Melbourne shares control of these waterways with Parks Victoria, adjacent Councils, Port Authorities, and the Port of Melbourne Corporation. State Government, through DELWP and Melbourne Water (a statutory authority) controls various drains and outlets.

There is a Lower Yarra River Management Advisory Committee Report (2018) has proved to be ineffectual

## Signs of improvement - collaboration and connectivity

The State Govt. 2019-2020 Annual Budget recognizes the inadequate management of the major public asset. (i.e. The Yarra river) in allocating \$5.1 million to protect waterways citing specifically the need to continue to improve management of the Yarra River.

**Melbourne Water** in collaboration with the **City of Moreland** have developed the “**Chain of Ponds - Moonee Ponds Creek Plan** to “*provide innovative, collaborative and inspirational planning and management that will improve the ecological health of the Moonee Ponds Creek, while supporting a happy, active and healthy community and protect the creek from inappropriate urban development*”. In June 2020, the State Govt. announced a \$5 million contribution towards the project. Moreland City Council will continue to work closely with Moonee Valley City

Council, the Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek and the State Government (DELWP) through the Chain of Ponds

See <https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/globalassets/areas/open-space/chain-of-ponds/mpc-chapter-00-executive-summary-spread.pdf>

The plan extends to the mouth of the Moonee Ponds Creek where it enters the Yarra River near the Ron Barassi Senior Park in the City of Melbourne. Areas of the plan require access to waterfront and access to the confluence of both which are under the control Port of Melbourne which controls BOTH the banks and actual water of the creek.

The Moonee Ponds Creek flows into the Yarra and pathways along the Creek will ideally and eventually connect with the Maritime Trail along North bank.

## Progress on the City Reaches of the Waterways Maritime Heritage Trail

- **City of Melbourne (CoM) ‘Greenline’**

Inexplicably in the June 2019 Draft City of Melbourne River Strategy there was scant reference to, or recognition within it of, Melbourne’s river-based trade heritage and its irrefutable contribution to the social, economic and cultural evolution of the city. After MMHN submission alerted the CoM to this, the final River Strategy rectified, to an extent, the initial omission of adequate of recognition of maritime heritage.

Significantly, despite the ‘bureaucratic tangle’ the City of Melbourne Annual Plan Initiatives 2019-2020 proactively set about effectively enabling a ‘joined-up’ Melbourne Waterway-Maritime Trail. The City of Melbourne Annual Plan 2019 - 2020 indicates a shift in this thinking now proposes a *Greenline/Blueline* trail along the North Bank of the Yarra.

The City of Melbourne envisages a trail connecting ‘*green public spaces*’ many of which exist already or are planned along the waterways e.g. Domain Gardens, Birrarung Marr, Federation Square, Enterprize Park, Seafarers Park, pocket park at the end of North Wharf at No.5 Goods Shed, pocket park at the tip of Collins Wharf, Buluk Park, various pocket-parks in Docklands, the Ron Barassi Senior Park etc.

From the maritime heritage perspective a Waterways/Maritime trail would have the added benefit of connecting the ‘dispersed’ maritime heritage assets in Melbourne e.g. The Shrine Museum, aboriginal sites along the Yarra, Vaults, Bridges, the Customs House (Immigration Museum) the vessel ‘*Polly Woodside*’ (Discovery Centre), ‘Duke & Orrs’ Dry Dock and adjacent Wet Dock, Merchant Navy Memorial, Mission to Seafarers (heritage room), Seafarers Rest Park (artefacts), several heritage wharves (e.g. Australian, Collins, Central), heritage crane, port tower crane, the Heritage Fleet in Victoria Harbour – world renown heritage construction in its own right. Eventually, the Melbourne Maritime Heritage Museum and the ANARE museum may form part of this extraordinary Waterways/Maritime Trail.

*“Progress investigation of connected network of green public spaces from Royal Park to the Bay along Moonee Ponds Creek, Docklands, Yarra River North Bank, Birrarung Marr, Domain Parklands and St. Kilda Road.” (Formerly called Greenline)*

*“Partner with Development Victoria to progress an integrated Master Plan for Harbour Esplanade and Stadium Precinct.”*

*“Prepare a vision and planning framework for Maribyrnong River (West Melbourne Waterfront to guide future development.”*

*“Partner with Victorian Government to commence delivery of the Moonee Ponds Creek Strategic Plan.”*

**CoM Master Plan** There is already significant investment in a waterways Trail along the north side of the Yarra. Unfortunately **CoM Master Plan** does not factor into this key tourist /heritage precinct and this planning ‘deficit’ is sadly evident although the trail in part already exists on North Bank in a series of wharfs walkways, paved pathways, gardens. Regrettably the Trail is severed at several points by major roadways.

**Signage** Informational and directional signage, along the existing north bank trail is completely inadequate – broken, defaced and often absent altogether. Heritage bridges are de-faced and under-utilized as heritage infrastructure assets.

**Turning Basin** Several years ago the CoM excavated to widen the riverbed and re-constructed the historic ‘Turning Basin’ shaping this area of the north bank of the Yarra at what is now called the Enterprize Park area. The naturally occurring rocky weir or barrier enabled pedestrian crossing at this point and it marked the demarcation between tidal in-flow and flow downstream of fresh water. This point was actually the first ‘turning basin’ for vessels in the Yarra and of course, so important to maritime trade on this river. Large hewn bluestone blocks form some of the riverbank at this point. Sadly, these have been dislodged and appear to be sliding into the river. Three large floating beacons or buoys are anchored at the edge of this new ‘basin’ - without informational signage. New capital works appear to take priority over adequate maintenance of existing works.

In 2019 there were discussions around works to abandon homage to historic ‘turning basin’ altogether, which was created decades earlier at significant expense to ratepayers.

**Enterprize Park** In 2020 City of Melbourne reported a planned on a landscape up-grade at Enterprize Park to *”expand the lawn, enhance views to the river, improve accessibility, strengthen connectivity through the park and reinstate indigenous vegetation. The first stage of works to demolish the concrete plinths at the base of the railway viaduct was completed in 2020. The plinths blocked views between the park and river and were not required structurally. Their removal has made way for an additional 1000 square meters of green space. The second stage involving the landscaping works commenced in January 2021 and will be completed by July 2021. Landscaping works will include the expanded lawn area, new seating along the river’s edge, accessible pathways and wider stairways, an improved meeting place for Aboriginal cultural tours and the reinstatement of indigenous vegetation”*.

**Artefacts** Several maritime artefacts and several mismatched information signs are already installed along the North Bank and need to be replaced to form a cohesive integrated waterways/maritime Trail.

Thus far, there is no consistency at all in the treatment of the artefacts or in the signage. Once a Maritime Heritage Trail (Greenline) design is agreed, then re-branding of the Trail with consistent signage (both way-finding and informational) to ensure that the Trail works effectively will be required to achieve the goals.

- **Lendlease Developers**

Lendlease will shape the development of Collins Wharf. And thus far, have demonstrated a positive approach to maritime heritage. For example, commitment to retain the redundant metal dock rails extending along Collins Wharf embedded within a new public walkway along the wharf. This Collins Wharf pedestrian Walkway may be understood as potentially a 'spur' branching off the proposed Maritime Trail. Lendlease restored the adjacent Australian Wharf and has installed informational signage about the heritage significance of the north bank wharf. Lendlease has plans to restore the heritage Harbour Port Control Tower on Collins Wharf and is committed to retaining vestiges of Docklands maritime heritage.

The proposed City of Melbourne 'Greenline/Blueline' Trail from Birrarung Marr along North bank through the CBD to Harbour Esplanade and on to the Bolte Bridge at Ron Barassi Senior Park could easily incorporate a 'spur' trail along Collins Wharf to the proposed park at the tip of the wharf.

- **Riverlee Developers**

Riverlee is retaining the extensive wharf between the heritage Good Shed 5 and the river. This path links with the Jim Stynes Bridge (pedestrian/cycle), which in turn links to the west side of Yarra North Bank to the restored Australia Wharf and will eventually lead to a 'spur' trail along Collins Wharf as well as also head north to link with Harbour Esplanade. Riverlee is also supporting the re-design and construction of Seafarers Rest Park, which is between the Good Shed wharf Trail and other pedestrian precincts along Yarra North bank.

Note: In April 2019 Riverlee prepared a draft proposal for an innovative concept plan aiming to: *"Connect Mission to Seafarers, Seafarers Rest, Seafarers Bridge and Seafarers Wharf to form a cohesive precinct..."* *"Re-connecting the city and its people to the river, building on the rich history to create a new future..."* *"Reactivate this forgotten piece of Melbourne's waterfront..."*

- **Development Victoria**

DV have designed and installed an Art Trail in Docklands featuring 26 works. Whilst DV acknowledges the *"unique feel and character of the precinct"* and has placed *"the sculptures, artwork incorporated into building architecture and facades and pieces integrated into the public realm and landscape of Docklands"*, it is surprising that so few of the chosen works relate to the water let alone maritime industry or trade. The DV walking trail has been divided into three sections of around 2.5 kilometres and takes approximately one hour. An app and Harbourside Art Trail brochure is available.

As for genuinely reflecting the unique maritime potential of Docklands, DV continue to miss the point. There have been very many plans and DV revise these often. One such recent plan involved a pedestrian walkway on the water across Victoria Harbour from the Collins Wharf to the north side of Victoria Harbour near Ron Barassi Senior Park. And as for the adverse impact this may have on boating or other shipping? DV apparently has no idea.

DV remains mired in controversy and legal proceedings in relation to Central Pier, which has implications for the design of any Maritime Trail.

- **Shrine of Remembrance**

In 2018 Victorian government granted \$13 million to establish a 'Shrine to Sea' Trail, linking the Shrine with Station Pier in recognition of those departing for overseas service. In essence to create a boulevard connecting Domain Gardens to Port Phillip Bay along Albert and Kerferd roads. The project will enhance the existing greenery and open spaces, improve the safety and experience for

people walking and bike riding through this part of Melbourne and help bring the local history, stories and culture to life for resident and visitors. By January 2021 the Project site “We are gathering historical and heritage information to better understand pre and post colonisation values and narratives”. To what extent maritime heritage factors into these ‘narratives’ or how this relates to other trails is unknown. A Community Panel, due to commence in March 2021. See <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/shrine-to-sea>

- **Port Heritage Trail**

The State Library of Victoria has a map of the Port Heritage Trail Linking Melbourne’s Maritime heritage assets produced by the Port of Melbourne 2000-2010. It includes notable maritime port features to the West, the south as well as the North Bank and the CBD. It may no longer be print.

- **Off-Shore and Specialist Ships Australia (OSSA)**

Since its establishment in 2018 OSSA has attracted much enthusiastic and generous stakeholder engagement by acting as a focal point for the donation of large maritime artefacts. Their aspiration in amassing these and rare items is that these items may be installed with informational signage and installed along the waterways/maritime trail at appropriate places. OSSA has strong international links with all major shipping organisations and is known for its interest in acquiring maritime for artefacts.

## The Riparian Zone

The value in re-instatement and protection of the riparian zone in urban waterways is irrefutable.

The Yarra Planning Scheme – Significant Landscape Overlay Yarra (*Birrarung*) River Corridor Environs Zone states: *The Yarra River has metropolitan significance as an environmental, aesthetic, cultural, recreation and tourism asset. The river corridor links parklands and reserves into a near-continuous vegetated landscape experience that provides a highly valued, secluded natural environment, enjoyed by local and metropolitan communities.* It refers to the Yarra River as: *a corridor where the river, its topography, adjacent public open space and a continuous corridor of vegetation and canopy trees are the dominant features.*

## River Stakeholders

- **Birrarung Council – the ‘voice of the Yarra’**

The Birrarung Council was appointed to be the independent voice of the Yarra River by the Government in August 2018 as prescribed by the *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murron) Act 2017* (the Act) to be the independent voice of the Yarra River as a living entity and to provide independent advice to the Government on the implementation of the Act. Traditional Owners have a permanent voice through the Act’s requirement that at least two members of the Birrarung Council must be nominated from the Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation. They have produced a Yarra River Action Plan and a 50-year Vision. See <https://www.water.vic.gov.au/waterways-and-catchments/protecting-the-yarra/action-plan>

- **Yarra Riverkeepers Association**

In 2019 Andrew Kelly collaborated with Aunty Joy Murphy and Lisa Kennedy to tell the indigenous and geographical story of the river, publishing ‘Wilam: A Birrarung Story.’ ‘Wilam’ represents all the rivers that flow through a major city in the world, because all those rivers face

the same sort of challenges, in essence protecting and conserving areas of known indigenous and non-indigenous cultural or archaeological significance.