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To the Yarra River Protection Program Manager,

Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung) Discussion Paper

Hobsons Bay City Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung) Discussion Paper.

The overall direction of the discussion paper is supported, along with the importance of managing the Yarra River system holistically. The discussion paper recognises a number of key issues which our community have told us are important to them through consultation on various strategies including Council's Integrated Water Management Plan 2014-19, draft Open Space Strategy and draft Biodiversity Strategy.

Our submission raises specific issues in particular management arrangements, funding constraints, land use planning and public access to the river system.

We would welcome any additional opportunities to provide input into the development of the Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung) strategy and look forward to working on this very important project with the department.

Should you wish to discuss the submission further please contact Kathleen McClusky, Manager Strategy and Advocacy on 9932 1004 or email kmclusky@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Chris Eddy
Chief Executive Officer



Hobsons Bay City Council Submission to the Protecting the Yarra River (Birrarung) Discussion Paper

General comments

The general direction of the discussion paper is supported. The discussion paper recognises a number of key issues which our community have told us are important to them through consultation on various strategies including Council's Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-17, Integrated Water Management Plan 2014-19, draft Open Space Strategy and draft Biodiversity Strategy.

This includes:

- that waterways are an important recreational asset for relaxation and exercise
- that the protection of the health of the waterway including water quality, stream flows and biodiversity is important
- minimising the effects of urbanisation and development on waterways is important including managing visual impacts and stormwater runoff
- the prevention of litter entering waterways and coastal environments is important

It is pleasing to see the discussion paper recognises these issues and identifies areas for improved management.

Management structures

The discussion paper recognises the complex management structures for waterways, with many organisations having decision making and service delivery responsibilities over parts or all of the catchment. It is agreed that a shared vision and strategy for the entire Yarra River system, that addresses all areas of governance and facilitates the alignment of local efforts is needed. This would need to be a collaborative agreement between all organisations with management obligations over the river system. Local government is an important stakeholder in any such agreement. The opportunity to be part of the collaborative process of forming this vision and strategy and the involvement of local communities is welcomed.

It is suggested that a Yarra River steering committee be formed with broad stakeholder representation. This committee could be established, as a separate trust or other similar body, to coordinate the development and implementation of any strategy. The committee would help retain genuine community ownership of the vision and strategy. It is further suggested that the committee could provide a level of independence to coordination and implementation of any strategy and supporting land use masterplans. As a core land manager from a planning and amenity perspective, it would be critical that there be a central role for local government in the future management of the river corridor. Any such model is replicable across other catchments.

The creation of a new agency to undertake this task is not supported as it may add an additional agency layer to current planning and service delivery and may decrease the funds available for coordinated action. However, as an organisation, Melbourne Water is well placed to house and support another entity, such as the above mentioned trust or committee with a small executive, and help coordinate a Yarra vision and strategic



plan. It is also well placed, from an institutional capacity and community trust perspective, to assist with the coordination and the ongoing implementation of any such plan if provided with sufficient legislative responsibilities to do so.

It should be noted that land in Hobsons Bay with an immediate abuttal to the Yarra River is affected by the Port of Melbourne Planning Scheme and land use and development is not within the jurisdiction of the Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme. The inclusion of this land in the Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme would be welcomed.

Financial issues

The discussion paper recognises the limited funding of many organisations, including local government, with management responsibilities for the Yarra River system. Given this situation, it is important for consideration to be given to the long term funding of management works to protect the entire Yarra River system. Capacity to pay should be a consideration when reviewing long term funding options.

Land use planning

The discussion paper recognises the impact of poor land use planning decisions on the Yarra River system and its receiving environments. It recognises the need for a clear and consistent approach to land use planning and management arrangement to protect the Yarra River system. Council supports stronger, clearer, enforceable guidelines and legislation in the following areas:

- Coordinated approach - facilitation of a coordinated planning scheme amendment process to introduce planning controls for the entirety of the river corridor would be welcomed. A single amendment is recommended rather than a fragmented approach to any such planning control to ensure a consistent level of planning control for the corridor.
- Stormwater runoff – Population growth and increased land development is resulting in a loss of permeability. This in turn is resulting in negative changes in stream flow and increased flooding risk. Currently a parcel of land in one sub-catchment can be developed with minimal stormwater runoff restrictions even if there is a downstream sub-catchment with a flooding overlay. This is particularly the case when the upstream sub-catchment is in a different municipality. It is recommended that stronger, clearer legislation to manage and reduce stormwater runoff before it impacts on downstream flooding and stream flow be provided.
- Water quality – Population growth and increased land development can also result in increased nutrient and pollution runoff. This decreases water quality and impacts on both the health of local waterways and Port Philip Bay. It is pleasing to hear that current legislative requirements have had a positive impact on water quality outcomes. However, it is also recognised that there are many developments that do not fall under the current legislative requirements to manage water quality. For example, not all developments fall under clause 56.7 of the Victorian Planning Provisions. It is recommended that the requirement to manage stormwater quality be broadened to include a greater number of developments in the Yarra River



system. Improved stormwater quality management standards should also apply across Victoria.

- **Setbacks** – Urban consolidation and increased density in appropriate areas is supported. However, it is also recognised that developments overshadowing waterways significantly reduces the amenity of the waterway. Appropriate setbacks and regulations limiting the overshadowing of waterways by developments ensures land cannot be developed in a manner that diminishes the quality and amenity of the river corridor, which is important to our local community. Stronger and more consistent planning controls to address this issue are supported.
- **Open space** - As population grows and housing density increases, private backyards are diminishing in size, leading to a more important role for public open spaces in community life. Open space eases the impact of urbanisation, encourages physical activity and enables time to relax in a pleasant environment. Melbourne's waterway corridors can play a vital role in this regard and should be protected. Ideally, all land within the river corridor should be within a public use zone and protected from encroachment and development on adjacent land that diminishes the quality and amenity of the river corridor.

Additionally, action to purchase, acquire and or lease privately owned land within the river corridor to enable the provision of continuous publically zoned and accessible land along the entirety of the river corridor should be considered. These issues should be addressed as part of an integrated strategy for the entirety of the river corridor which considers biodiversity, landscape character, cultural heritage, geomorphology waterway management and land management. This will guide what aspects of the river corridor need to be protected.

- **Infiltration** – An important issue that the discussion paper overlooks is the reduction in infiltration of rainwater into groundwater systems. This infiltration is critical to stream flows and the health of waterways. Decreasing permeability due to increased development is driving the reduction in infiltration. Solutions for how this could be managed should be considered in a strategy for the Yarra River and its catchments. Once identified, effective solutions for the protection of infiltration rates and stream flows should be put in place for both the Yarra River and other river systems around metropolitan Melbourne.

Public access

The discussion paper recognises the importance of continuous public access along the length of the waterway, particularly in the lower reaches and inner city. This would enable people to experience and enjoy the varied landscapes, cultural heritage, geomorphology and biodiversity of the river corridor and is strongly supported. However, it is noted that many pedestrians and cyclists also want to traverse the Yarra River. A lack of locations for non-motorised movement across the Yarra River can separate suburbs and communities. For example, currently the Westgate Punt is the



only method for cyclists and pedestrians to cross the Yarra River downstream of the CBD and it only runs limited services.

Whole of catchment management

It is noted that the Ministerial Advisory Committee's terms of reference is restricted to the river corridor. However, whole of catchment management is a critical element to deliver on waterway health and amenity. Any strategic plan should consider the broader catchment management arrangements and how this impacts on the Yarra River.

It is also recognised that many of the issues that exist for the Yarra River also apply to other waterways. When developing solutions to improve the health and amenity of the Yarra River system consideration should be given to which of these solutions should be transferable to other key waterway systems.