



*Creating connections between parks, along  
waterways, across landscapes and between  
landholders for our communities and wildlife  
of the Yarra Valley*

## **Business Plan**

**Updated: January 2013**

## Acknowledgements

Yarra4Life works in landscapes traditionally owned by the Wurundjeri people. We acknowledge their love and stewardship for this country over many ages and intend that Yarra4Life exhibits similar values.

Yarra4Life has been developed with the cooperation of government, industry and community partners. To initiate the project, significant financial contributions have been made by the Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority, Melbourne Water, Yarra Ranges Council, Yarra Valley Water, Greening Australia Victoria and the Australian Government.

Other important Yarra4Life partners include the Yarra Valley & Dandenong Ranges Landcare Network, Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, Parks Victoria, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Primary Industries, Yarra Ranges Regional Marketing, Landcare Australia Limited, Trust for Nature, Zoos Victoria, the Judith Eardley Save Wildlife Association and the Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation representing the Wurundjeri traditional owners.

## Yarra4Life Business Plan

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**[www.yarra4life.com.au](http://www.yarra4life.com.au)**  
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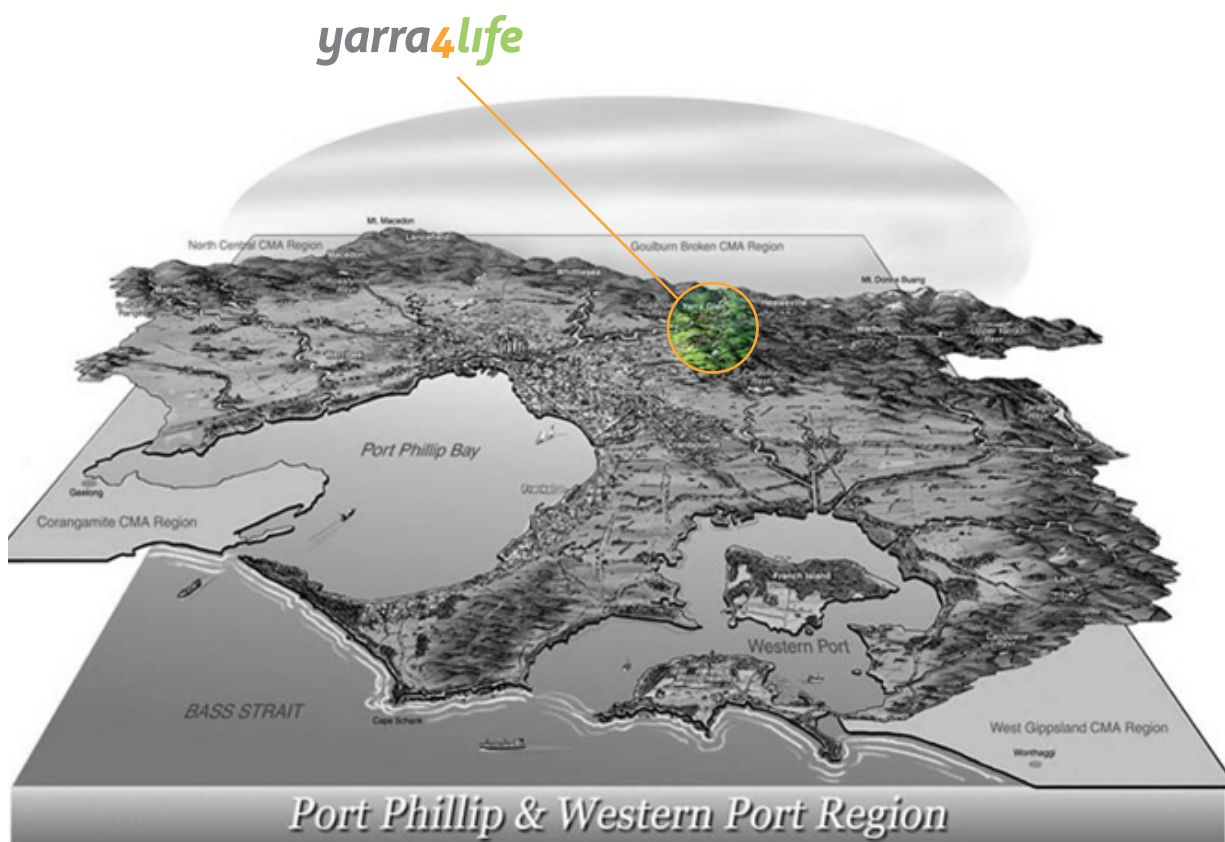
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Financial projections in this plan are intended to provide a simple forecast of estimated finances, costs and expenditure and do not consider issues such as Consumer Price Index increases.

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# Yarra4Life - The story far...

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## The Yarra Valley – precious but under pressure

The Yarra Valley is one of Victoria's most valuable, attractive and visited regions; renowned for its rural landscapes, food, wine, rivers and wildlife. Over many decades, governments and the local community have worked to secure and maintain these values. However, in an era of climate change and increasing population, pressures are growing on the Yarra Valley environment. Some of the challenges are:

- Native habitat has been fragmented. Crown Land Reserves provide the core areas of habitat and are protected. Lying between these reserves are patches of native habitat that are not protected and may therefore be more vulnerable to threats that lead to a decline in quality and/or extent of habitat. All these areas of habitat are important and many species rely on their existence - in particular, Victoria's wildlife emblems, the Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeater's Possum, both of which are threatened with extinction.
- The natural water flows of some local rivers and creeks have been altered and the quality of water has declined due to nutrient, sediment and other contaminants. These flow into the Yarra River, eventually making their way to Port Phillip Bay.

Yarra4Life is designed to be a large scale, practical response to these pressures, creating new partnerships and delivering on-ground improvements. Yarra4Life brings together the local community, all levels of government and local businesses with a shared mission relating to the regions biodiversity and waterways, and a shared trail. This will retain the Yarra Valley as a great place to live, work and visit.



# Yarra4Life – The story so far ...

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## Our successes to date

Yarra4Life commenced in 2006 when a committed group of organisations joined forces for the benefit of the local environment and community. The original focus was on four aspects:

- A healthy Yarra River – the lifeblood of Melbourne
- Sustainable food production – the livelihood of farmers
- The potential for a Great Yarra Trail - lifestyle of the community
- Biodiversity and enhanced biodiversity values - lifecycles of flora and fauna

Most of the work has gone into the biolinks and biodiversity enhancement, in particular, joining Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve to nearby parks and reserves. This built on the work undertaken over decades by various community groups, government agencies, Landcare groups and local government.

In its first 6 years, Yarra4Life secured almost \$2 million to benefit the local area, and the funds have enabled many hectares of remnant vegetation to be protected, enhanced and revegetated. Highlights have included:

- Two demonstration farms used to encourage and promote nature conservation on a productive farm;
- Over 20,000 new native plants at the 3 ha 'Confluence project' site, within the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve;
- 200 ha of habitat protected with 20 km of fencing, 243 ha of weed management and 51 ha revegetation;
- 12 corporate planting days involving over 170 people (between September 2010 and September 2012);
- Yarra4Life works together with Melbourne Water (MW) and its Stream Frontage Management and Corridors of Green Programs. Collectively they have actively engaged in the protection and enhancement of the natural environment with approximately 155 km of fencing, protected 41.8 km of revegetation and 167 km of weed control.



*Before*



*After*



## The Yellingbo Confluence project

The Yellingbo Confluence project is a 3.2 ha site, located approximately 50 km east of Melbourne in the Yarra Valley and is part of the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. It was purchased and reserved with help from Judith Eardley Save Wildlife Association, Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria and is valued for its key position within the Yarra4Life project.

One of Yarra4Life's goals is to create continuous habitat corridors for endangered species like the Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeater's Possum, and the addition of the property to the reserve has provided a valuable opportunity to revegetate the site and contribute to the objective of improving and protecting the biodiversity of the Yarra Valley.

On-ground works undertaken to date include fencing, weed control and direct seeding. Also, 24 corporate and volunteer planting days have been undertaken since 2009 involving Conservation Volunteers Australia, National Australia Bank, Kraft and Zoos Victoria.

## The Habitat Protection and Conservation project

The Habitat Protection and Conservation project is a 3-year landscape-scale project that aims to protect and conserve habitat for the Southern Brown Bandicoot, Leadbeater's Possum and Helmeted Honeyeater. These three native species are Endangered under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) and can all be found within the Y4L area.

The project is supported by the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA, funded by the Australian Government's 'Caring for our Country' program and seeks to protect and conserve these three endangered species and their habitat by supporting landholders to:

- manage threats to biodiversity
- protect habitat
- increase habitat
- build the knowledge and capacity of landholders and the community.

## Judith Eardley Save Wildlife Association

The Judith Eardley Save Wildlife Association (JESWA) is a charity that was established from the legacy of Judith Eardley, who loved all animals. Created in 2000 to raise funds to save wildlife, it has raised over 2.5 million dollars towards saving both local wildlife, and animals in need around the world.

JESWA has donated \$300,000 to Y4L (\$100,000 in 2009 and \$200,000 in 2011) to be used to create biolinks between Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve and Kurth Kiln for the Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeater's Possum habitat.

JESWA has also helped to buy and preserve 2 properties adjoining the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Park. One is 22ha of prime native bush in Silvan and the second is a 3.2ha property in Yellingbo. Both properties are managed as part of the National Reserve System, leaving a lasting legacy to the local community.

# Yarra4Life – Current focus ...

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The current focus of Yarra4Life is:

## **1. Connections between partners**

Maintaining strong, ongoing connections between the many organisations involved in environmental management in the Yarra Valley. Enabling information-sharing, cooperation and partnership development, to ensure effective and efficient, allocation of effort and resources. This will connect government organisations, agencies and local community groups, and will also involve reaching out to those landowners who are not yet engaged in the program.

## **2. Connections for wildlife**

Helping to save the Helmeted Honeyeater and other native animal species by increasing the quality, extent and connectivity of habitat across the landscape. In particular, establishing biolink connections from the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve north to the Yarra Ranges National Park, south-east to the Bunyip State Park and south-west to the Dandenong Ranges National Park.

## **3. Connections for people along the Yarra**

Seeking to initiate a feasibility study for a Great Yarra Trail that would enable hiking and cycling all the way from the mountain ranges at the head of the Yarra River to Port Phillip Bay.

## **4. Connecting people with the Yarra environment**

Initiating an annual event in the Yarra Valley that connects local communities and visitors with the environmental and cultural values of the Yarra, raises awareness of environmental issues, increases community health and well-being, and celebrates the beauty of the area.

# Objective 1 – Connections between partners

An important benefit of Yarra4Life is that it facilitates the on-going cooperation and collaboration between many organisations for the benefit of the environment and the community.

The Yarra4Life Coordination Committee is a key forum for this purpose and will be maintained as a 'roundtable' of government bodies, community groups and other interested sectors and organisations. It will involve organisations including the Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, the Yarra Ranges Council, Cardinia Shire Council, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Primary Industries, the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, the Yarra Valley & Dandenong Ranges Landcare Network, Trust for Nature and the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Cultural Heritage Council Inc.

## Target

To hold quarterly committee meetings/sessions of the Yarra4Life Coordination Committee and achieve tangible benefits such as shared information and knowledge, new contacts and networks, new partnerships and efficient allocation of resources.

Whilst cooperation between these various organisations is a focus, another indicator of success will be the extent to which Yarra4Life engages the local communities, businesses and landholders in programs and activities.





## Objective 2 – Connections for wildlife

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The Yarra4Life area contains significant biodiversity values on private and public land. The Yarra Ranges contain 48 Ecological Vegetation Classes of which 16 have a conservation status of Endangered, Vulnerable, Depleted or Rare. The Yarra Ranges Council estimates that there are 1365 indigenous flora and 375 indigenous fauna species, of which 62 indigenous fauna and 108 indigenous flora are classified as “Rare” or “Threatened” in Victoria. Some examples of Threatened native flora species are the Rosella Spider-orchid, Matted Flax-lily, Short Water-starwort and Round-leaf Pomaderris. Examples of Threatened native fauna species in the region are the Brush-tailed Phascogale, Painted Snipe, Barking Owl, Growling Grass Frog and the Swift Parrot, to name just a few.

A focus of Yarra4Life is maintaining and improving this unique biodiversity.

In particular, it aims to extend habitat with biolinks connecting Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve with the Bunyip State Park to the south-east, the Yarra Ranges National Park to the north and the Dandenong Ranges National Park to the south-west.

Yarra4Life is aligned with the aims of the Yarra Ranges Council’s Environment Strategy which also identifies the need for vegetation corridors to assist wildlife to move between habitats.

This builds on 20 years of dedicated conservation work by the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, Macclesfield Landcare Group, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, Yarra Ranges Council and Zoos Victoria. Their work continues today with Recovery Programs in place for both the Helmeted Honeyeater and the Leadbeater’s Possum.

The Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater Community Nursery supplies approximately 75,000 plants a year for restoration works undertaken by various dedicated community groups. The Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria provide professional advice and assistance with population monitoring, revegetation and pest control. Zoos Victoria (Healesville Sanctuary) runs a successful Helmeted Honeyeater captive-breeding program and releases birds back into the wild. With Trust for Nature, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Judith Eardley Save Wildlife Association’s support, important properties have been purchased and added to the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve.

### Target

To establish biolinks of native habitat from Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve to the north, south-east and south-west by:

- Protecting remnant habitat
- Improving remnant habitat
- Increasing the amount of habitat

## Objective 2 – Connections for wildlife

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### A biolink from Yellingbo to the Bunyip State Park

Establishing this 5 km biolink will involve protecting existing remnant vegetation plus revegetation of large areas of cleared land. The vegetated corridors will provide dispersing Helmeted Honeyeaters and other fauna with some refuge from aerial predators and some foraging opportunities that non-vegetated corridors would not provide. Roadside reserves and the riverside areas of the McCrae, Shepherd and Sheep Station Creeks will be important linear links in the first instance. In the long term, the aim is that a continuous, high quality habitat link that is hundreds of metres wide along the entire length will be established and protected forever.

### A biolink from Yellingbo to the Yarra Ranges National Park

This biolink to the north of Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve will be approximately 15km in length. Both the Woori Yallock and Boggy Creeks will provide a link but the vegetation zone is likely to be relatively narrow in many sections. Therefore, the protection of large patches of remnant vegetation at regular intervals along the route will be crucial 'biodiversity stepping-stones' for the honeyeater and other species of native wildlife. Substantial revegetation will also be important to widen the biolink in many places.

### A biolink from Yellingbo to the Dandenong Ranges National Park

This biolink will run about 5km to the south-west of Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve through some intensively farmed and peri-urban landscapes. The Woori Yallock, Sassafras and Emerald Creeks will provide links but the vegetation zones along these are likely to be relatively narrow in many sections. This link will build on the existing Sassafras Nature Conservation Reserve and the adjoining Woori Yallock Creek Natural Features Reserve.

As with the other biolinks, it will be vital to protect or re-create large patches of habitat along the biolinks.

### Delivering the Biolinks vision

Yarra4Life seeks to protect, improve and/or revegetate in the order of 1,000 hectares in the years ahead to establish the biolinks so that, potentially, Helmeted Honeyeaters and other fauna could disperse through a continuous habitat link from one reserve to the other. This will require the cooperation and active participation of numerous people and organisations.

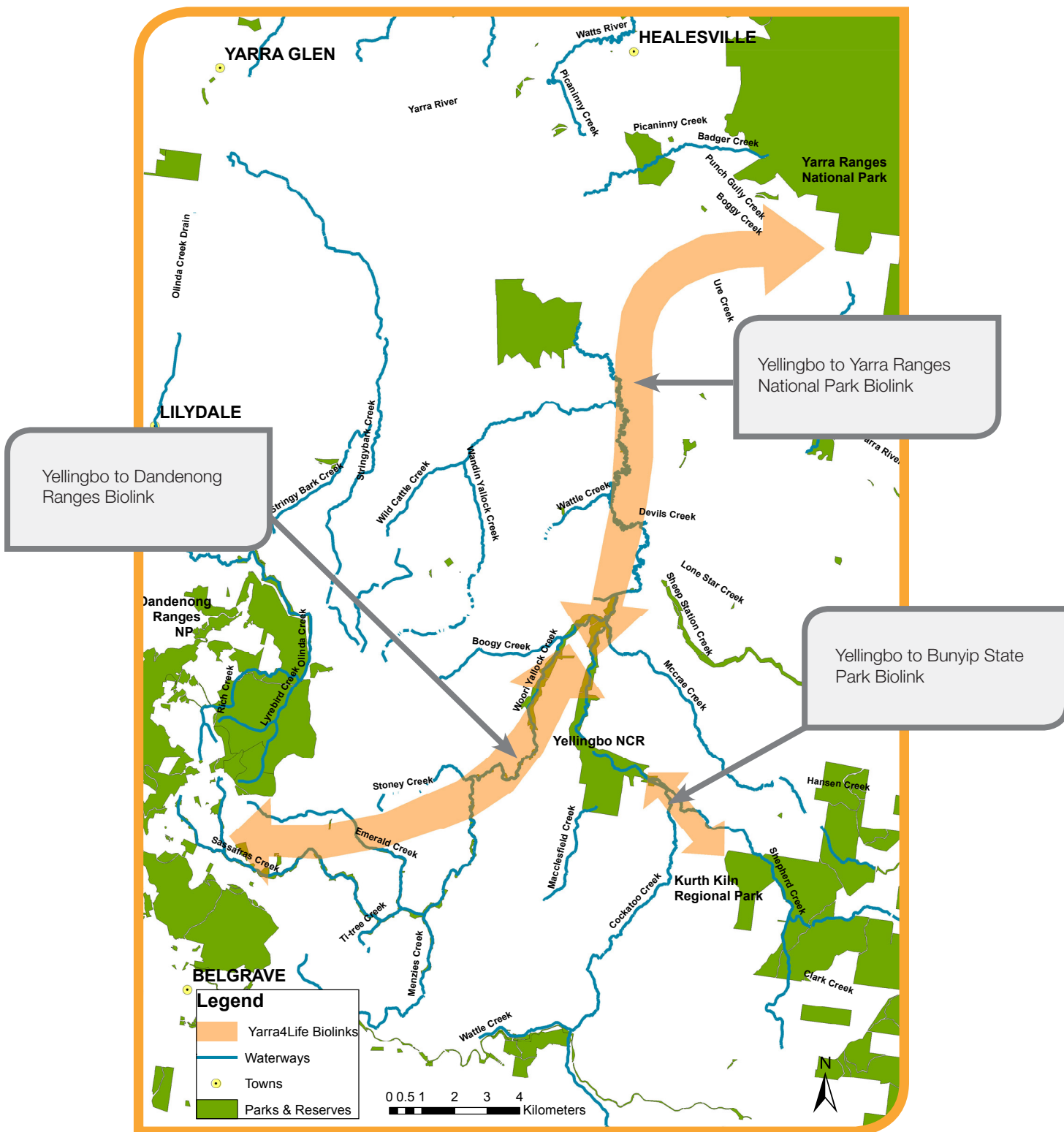
Success is dependent on:

- Commitment from landholders (of both public and private land) to actively and willingly contribute by being involved or having some of their land form part of the biolinks
- Efficient and professional systems and people to manage the creation of biolinks
- Substantial investment from the public, private and philanthropic sectors to fund the creation and protection of the biolinks.

Yarra4Life Biolinks offers attractive incentives and support for landholders and investment opportunities for partners.

## Objective 2 – Connections for wildlife

### Yarra4Life Biolinks



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## Objective 2 – Connections for wildlife

### Landholders and logistics

It is estimated that many private landholders will need to participate to establish the three major biolinks. To encourage participation, Yarra4Life offers site inspections and advice, targeted grants, support and subsidised training opportunities.

The main opportunities offered through Yarra4Life are outlined in the table below. The incentives are greater where the public and environmental benefit is greater.

Outcomes sought by Yarra4Life	Incentives offered to landholders	Types of agreements
Permanent protection of high quality remnant native vegetation in priority sites along the biolinks.	Funding support to the landholder is dependent on size, location and quality of the patch of remnant vegetation.	Trust For Nature covenant, or Section 173 agreement with Local Council (identifying and securing the vegetation on the title of the land).
Establishment and protection of native revegetation contributing to the biolinks.	Funding support for site preparation, protection and revegetation costs are paid by Yarra4Life to landholders. It is dependent on size, location and proximity to nearby remnant vegetation.	PPWCMA Land Management Agreement, Melbourne Water Funding Agreement e.g. Stream Frontage Management.

Note - A Trust for Nature covenant may make the land eligible for reductions to council rates.

In all cases, the agreements with landholders stipulate that the landholder has some ongoing responsibilities associated with retention and maintenance of the site (e.g. retain and maintain stock exclusion fencing, manage pest plants/animals, etc).

Yarra4Life also links landholders to complementary schemes such as:

- Melbourne Water Programs that provide incentives for revegetation, fencing and other works e.g. the Stream Frontage Management and Water Sensitive Farm Design programs
- Schemes offering payments to landholders for protecting, improving or establishing native habitat on their land e.g. Yarra Ranges Council Biodiversity Incentive Scheme
- Local Landcare groups that can offer support and (potentially) access to further grants.

## Objective 2 – Connections for wildlife

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Working with Landholders is a three-step process:

### Step 1: Discussion of options / landholder engagement

A Yarra4Life representative will visit an interested landholder's property for a free, no-obligation meeting to provide:

- On-site assessment and discussion of the potential location of on-ground works
- A preliminary assessment of the likely cost of the project
- Advice re species selection and the potential actions, scale and timeline of the project
- An outline of the incentive options that exist, cost-sharing possibilities and the associated agreements and contracts.

### Step 2: Detailed planning, negotiation and agreement

Landholders wishing to proceed will receive assistance with detailed project planning and costing. A tailored Land Management Agreement will then be negotiated to suit the particular situation.

Flexible arrangements are possible, for example:

- Yarra4Life can implement all aspects of the project and simply invoice the landholder for any required financial contribution. This arrangement will particularly suit landholders who do not have the time or skills or equipment to undertake works.
- Yarra4Life can implement most aspects of the project, and the landholder can contribute labour or services (such as fencing, site preparation, chemicals). This might suit landholders who wish to reduce any financial outlay.
- Yarra4Life pays the landowner for the works and the landowner then manages the completion of the works and reports to Yarra4Life.
- Yarra4Life encourages the use of professionals with local experience and expertise for the best site preparation, species selection, planting technique and timing to ensure optimum results.

### Step 3: Implementation of on-ground works

Timing of the project will be determined and the logistics planned including contractors, seeds/seedlings, site preparation and follow up maintenance.

## Objective 3 – Connections for people along the Yarra

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There is potential for a new major recreation and tourism asset for Victoria - a Great Yarra Trail. The concept is to establish a network of walking and cycling paths from the upper reaches of the Yarra River to its mouth at Port Phillip Bay. Potentially over 250 km long, the trail could traverse natural parks, riversides, rural countryside, urban trails, cityscapes and bayside beaches.

The Great Yarra Trail could sit alongside the High Country trails in Victoria's Alps and the Great Ocean Walk along Victoria's south west coastline as one of Victoria's best nature-based tourism and recreation experiences.

The Great Yarra Trail could enable short and long experiences, for example local walks or bike trips for a few hours, or week-long journeys along the whole trail. It would feed the soul, stimulate the mind and exercise the body.

Taking this concept further, there is potential for a 'Great Yarra Walk' - a major cultural event on a regular basis to cover the whole trail from the head of the Yarra to the bay. It could involve organised experiences and hands-on education about all aspects of the Yarra's history, culture, and environment. Akin to the Great Victorian Bike Ride, the Great Yarra Walk could be a major recreational event with its conclusion highlighted in a Melbourne cultural festival such as Moomba.

However, before this concept can be advanced, a sophisticated feasibility study is required to explore the opportunity in depth and bring key government organisations together in the exploration stage. The study would investigate the needs, costs and logistics of establishing a trail. A feasibility study could also consider the design of the trail so it delivers economic, educational, tourism, social health and physical health benefits for the local community and visitors.

### Target

Prepare a project funding application for a feasibility study of the Great Yarra Trail and submit it to potential funding sources.



## Objective 4 – Connecting people with the Yarra environment

One of the indicators of success for Yarra4Life will be a thriving community that experiences, connects with and appreciates the unique landscapes, history and wildlife of the Yarra Valley.

To enhance this connection, a regular Yarra Valley event will be initiated. The aim of the event is to promote the Yarra Valley and the work of Yarra4Life project partners and community groups; to connect people to the Yarra Valley and the amazing natural world around them.

Examples of ideas to consider are:

- A “Fruits of the Yarra Valley” run/ride/walk – through areas not usually open to the public e.g. access to businesses that provide sponsorship for the event such as vineyards, orchards or berry farms.
- An event in areas not normally easily accessible to the community which can showcase some rarely-seen gems of the Yarra environment.
- A water-based event

This will be a great attraction to regular and new visitors as well as the local community. It will provide an excellent opportunity for local businesses, community groups, philanthropic organisations and the Yarra Ranges Council to promote and recruit interested parties as well as celebrate their work and successes in the area. This event will have many investment opportunities for sponsors and local businesses.

### Target

- Prepare a project plan for conducting a Yarra Valley event that promotes the work of Yarra4Life, project partners, community groups and the Yarra Valley.

# Opportunities for Yarra4Life partners

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## Why invest in Yarra4Life?

Yarra4Life is a timely response to the need for increased action for the environment and is focused in an area with high environmental values.

Yarra4Life aims to implement works at the scale necessary to achieve significant and tangible landscape improvement, and is ready to undertake on-ground work now.

Yarra4Life provides expertise in the design and implementation of environmental projects, with quality assurance founded in science-based background research and planning through to on-ground service delivery.

Yarra4Life provides links to whole of community, uniting key expert agencies as well as farming, tourism, community and conservation sectors.

At less than 50km or one hour from Melbourne's CBD, Yarra4Life is local, visible and accessible - providing excellent opportunities to involve staff, clients and stakeholders in site tours and a range of environmental activities. The environmental activities include hands-on planting, helping out at the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater Nursery, weed management and much more.

## Investment benefits

Yarra4Life offers the following benefits to investment partners:

- Delivery of a valuable environmental project as part of a Corporate Social Responsibility program - highlighting corporate commitment to environmental and community initiatives
- Provision of community outreach opportunities
- Delivery of tangible, on-ground results – with opportunities for employees, stakeholders and clients to experience a part of this through various activities
- Corporate Social Responsibility opportunities through donations and volunteer days
- Strong corporate reputation opportunities via collaborative media and public relations activity
- Brand and messaging exposure on all communications materials (site signage, print, web, event related)
- Voluntary carbon offsets for a portion of a business's carbon emissions
- Provision of networking opportunities, for example with Yarra Valley winemakers/ growers/businesses through Yarra4Life coach tours and other associated events
- Provision of tax deductibility if donations are directed through Landcare Australia Limited

# Opportunities for Yarra4Life partners

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## Investment options

Yarra4Life welcomes discussion with potential corporate, philanthropic, government, non-government organisations and environmental partners. Packages can be tailored to meet specific objectives and budgets. There is a strong preference for long-term partnerships, though shorter-term investment options are available.

An example of a significant long-term investment in the Yarra4Life project would be to fund the work involved in creating a complete biolink over a number of years. This level of investment would likely be for millions of dollars and would attract further substantial benefits.

An example of a significant partnership is that with the Judith Eardley Save Wildlife Association (JESWA), which has contributed \$300,000 to help create biolinks between the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve and Bunyip State Park (Kurth Kiln) areas to provide habitat for the Helmeted Honeyeater and the Leadbeater's Possum.

An example of a smaller scale, flexible partnership is that between Yarra4Life and Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA). The CVA assists Yarra4Life by providing resources in the form of supervisors, equipment and knowledge during corporate sponsored planting days. Yarra4Life has provided 24 planting days for corporations such as Kraft, National Australia Bank and Zoos Victoria. The cost of the day is covered by the corporate sponsor and Yarra4Life arranges the location, plants and equipment and an appetising lunch.





Yarra4Life is a multi-organisation initiative with strong administrative arrangements in place and robust governance practices.

## **Yarra4Life Coordination Committee**

The Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority hosts and manages the operations of Yarra4Life on behalf of the partners.

The Authority has established a Yarra4Life Coordinating Committee under the provisions of the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994. The Committee has a formal charter and operates under the policies and procedures of the Authority.

The Committee is responsible for:

- providing strategic support and direction for Yarra4Life
- overseeing the development and implementation of the Yarra4Life Business Plan
- taking responsibility for most aspects of planning and implementation of the project
- fostering collaboration between other programs, agencies and the community
- securing and servicing investment partners
- promoting Yarra4Life to the local landholders, community and the media
- overseeing project finances, reporting and accountability
- monitoring and evaluating Yarra4Life performance against strategic and business planning objectives.

The Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority employs the Yarra4Life Coordinator as a member of staff.

Yarra4Life financial transactions are managed by the Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority. Financial reports are prepared on a monthly basis and are presented at Yarra4Life Coordination Committee meetings, which occur in general on a quarterly basis.

# Monitoring & Reporting

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The progress and success of Yarra4Life will be monitored and reported via an annual Yarra4Life Report Card.

The Report Card will summarise and record:

<b>Short-term successes achieved</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hectares of revegetation undertaken</li><li>• Hectares of vegetation protected</li><li>• Progress to meet the 1,000ha target</li><li>• Number of volunteers engaged in any aspect of the program</li></ul>
<b>Long-term successes achieved</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outputs achieved as a result of the use of investor's funds to implement works (i.e. X ha of habitat protected; X km of fencing etc.) will be assessed as above after a period of 5 years.</li></ul>
<b>Lessons learned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To ensure continuous improvement of the processes used, monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement will be carried out through out the year and reported annually.</li></ul>

# Contact

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For more information about Yarra4Life, contact:



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