



Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Catchment Scale Strategic Plan



Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot)
Regional Collaboration

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) catchment is based.

We respect their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and recognise that sovereignty has never been ceded. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Disclaimer

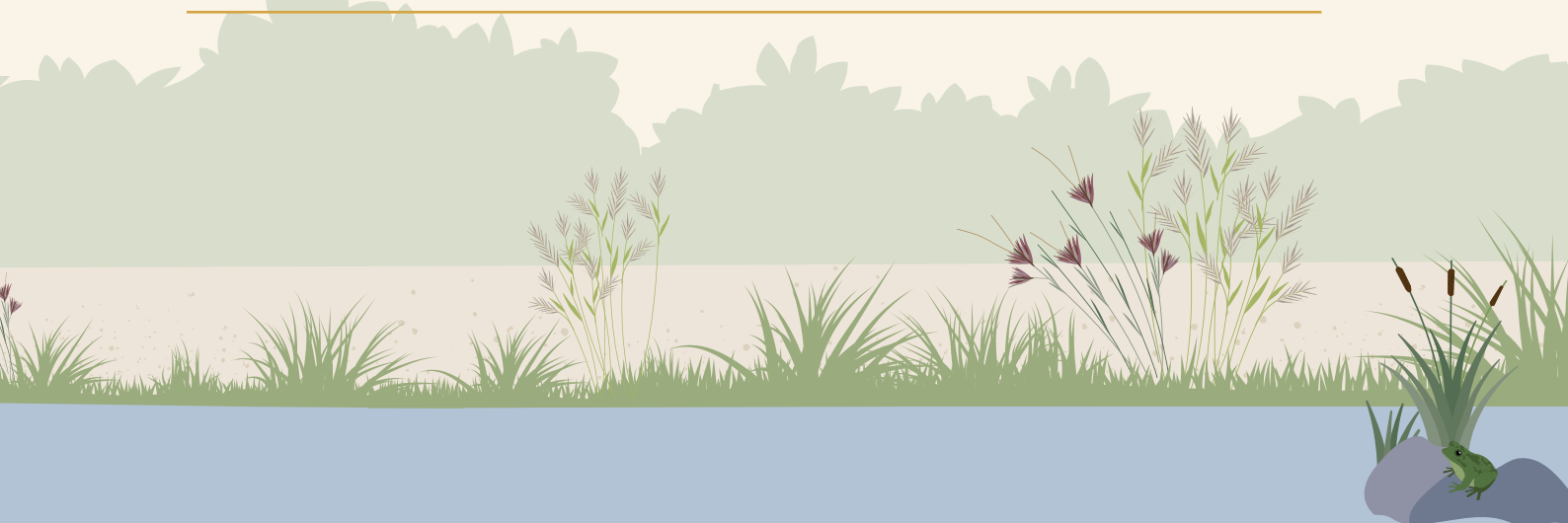
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Cover Picture: Back Creek upstream of the confluence with Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot), Glen Iris



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Gang Gang
Cockatoo

Introduction



The Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Regional Collaboration (GCRC) is a formal alliance of councils, water authorities, Traditional Custodians, community groups, educational, sport, and recreation bodies working together to protect and enhance Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot)* and its catchment.

The GCRC's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) commits signatories to a shared vision that:

"KooyongKoot and its catchment are protected, valued and loved, supporting diverse uses and thriving biodiversity. As custodians of our natural environment, Traditional Owners play a key role in their management. The community and all stakeholders are working together to heal, strengthen, and ensure the resilience of KooyongKoot and its catchment."

The GCRC developed this GCRC Catchment-scale Strategic Plan (hereafter referred to throughout as the Plan) in consultation with its partners and with support from TOverman Sustainability. The Plan provides a roadmap for joint action between the GCRC partners. The GCRC is the owner of the Plan and its members acknowledge a collective responsibility for implementing the projects and actions identified within it.

The Plan includes the following sections:

- **Background** – presents the need for the Plan, its scope and how it was developed
- **Where are we now?** – describes the critical challenges facing the GCRC
- **Where are we heading?** – presents the GCRC's Vision, Objectives, Principles and significant achievements to date
- **How will we get there?** – presents the Focus Areas, Flagship Programs and associated Projects that will address the critical challenges over the next five years

* The GCRC has decided to use the name 'KooyongKoot' – what is understood to be the Kulin language name for place of the waterfowl – in addition to the 'Gardiners Creek' in recognition of and respect for the area's Traditional Custodians and First Peoples, however, acknowledges that this name has not been formally verified by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) or adopted by the VICNAMES register.

Background

Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot)

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People are the Traditional Custodians of the lands through which the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) flows. They have an extensive historical and continuing connection to the KooyongKoot and the Country of its surrounding catchment that is spiritual, cultural, and physical.

The GCRC recognises and respects this history and connection and is committed to supporting the engagement of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) in projects to protect, enhance and celebrate cultural values within the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) catchment.



Blue-Banded
Bee

The Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Catchment is all Wurundjeri Country. Wurundjeri view this area as one living entity and as part of the broader living entity which is the Yarra (Birrarung), however colonial systems of land management and town planning have resulted in the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) spanning the following five municipalities: Boroondara, Glen Eira, Monash, Stonnington, and Whitehorse (Figure 1). The open spaces, sport and recreational facilities, golf courses, wetlands, biodiversity zones and pathways serve a local population of almost one million. Many more people across the Melbourne metropolitan area use, enjoy, and care for the public land along the linear corridors created by Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) and its tributaries, Back Creek, Damper Creek, and Scotchmans Creek.

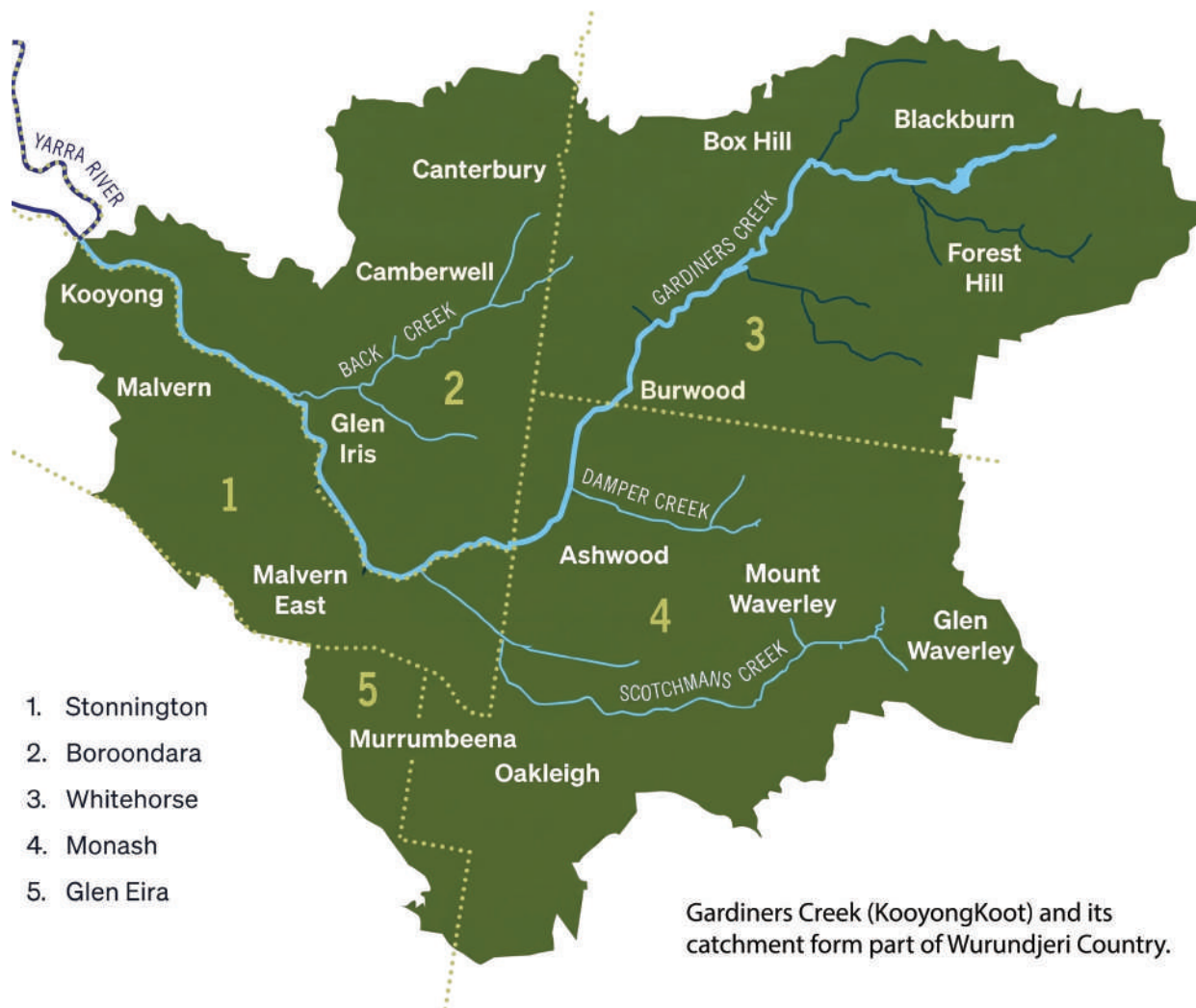


Figure 1 Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Waterways and Catchment

These interconnected linear corridors have significant environmental, social, economic, and cultural value to the local and broader community but face various threats, such as habitat fragmentation, introduced plants and animals, poor water quality, catchment permeability, and increased encroachment on available green space by development.

Considering that Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) is a major urban tributary of the Yarra River (Birrarung), its health and condition also influences the health of the Yarra River (Birrarung) downstream. Therefore, this Plan plays an important role in supporting the work of the Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo (Yarra Strategic Plan) and the Wurundjeri Whole of Country Plan.



Sugar Gliders

The Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Regional Collaboration (GCRC)

Following the adoption of the City of Stonnington's Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Masterplan in 2021, and recognising that many of the challenges faced by Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) and its catchment are beyond the control or influence of any single organisation or group, the City of Stonnington and Melbourne Water facilitated a series of forums with other local stakeholders to explore a more collaborative approach to caring for the waterway and its catchment. The result of these forums was a collective governance model, as outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Gardiners Creek Regional Collaboration (GCRC). The MOU was reviewed and recommitted to by the organisations in 2026.

The MOU recognises the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the land through which the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) flows and highlights the essential role they play in land and water management.

The GCRC, through the implementation of this Plan, is committed to establishing a continued commitment to adhere to cultural responsibilities to care for Country. This will be achieved through engagement with WWCHAC to guide the Culturally appropriate management of the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) and its Country.

The organisations shown in Figure 2 are the stakeholders of the GCRC. They comprise Partner organisations, who form the governing body (Steering Committee), and Supporter organisations, who endorse the GCRC vision and objectives and contribute to the implementation of relevant initiatives.

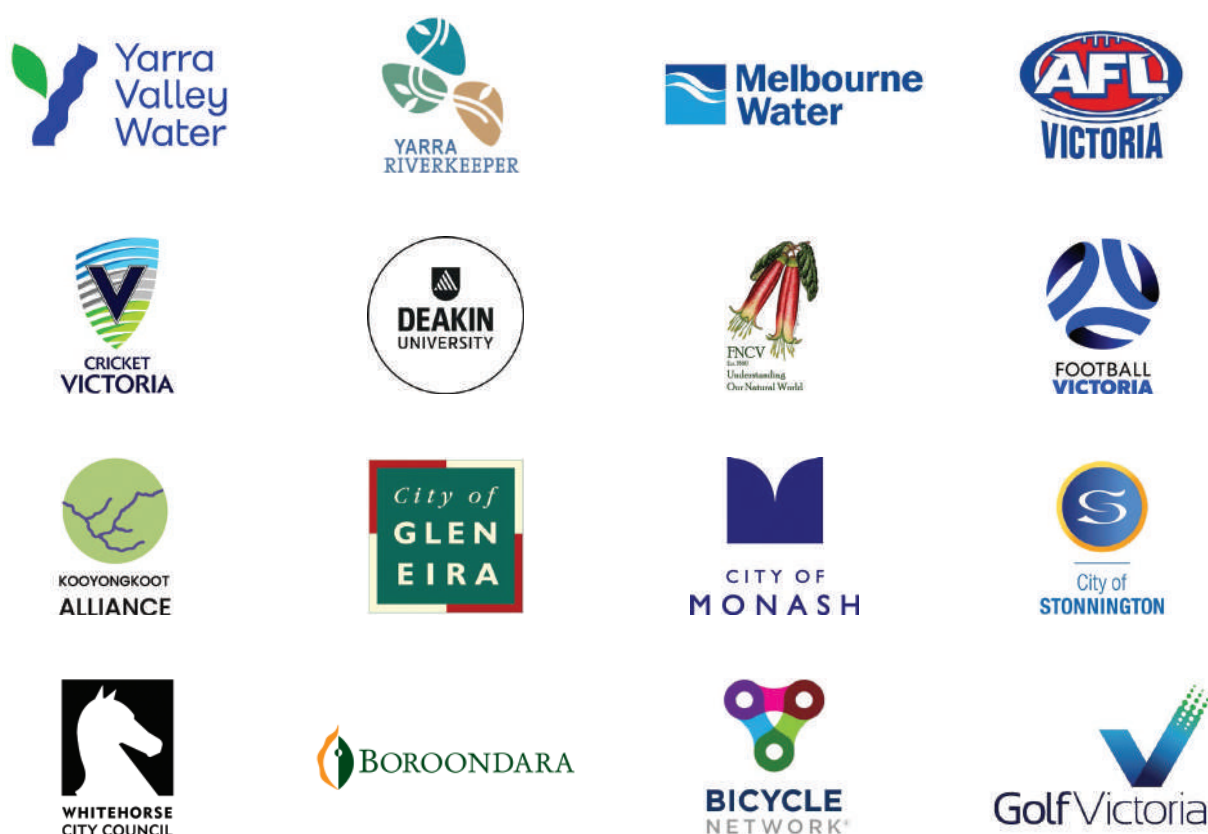


Figure 2 GCRC MOU Signatory Organisations

GCRC relationships with Melbourne Water and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) are recognised differently. Melbourne Water, although a member of the GCRC Steering Committee, is not a MOU signatory due to organisational policy restrictions. The WWCHAC, is not a GCRC partner, but rather an advisor, as such this relationship is recognised differently to the other partner relationships.

The MOU outlines the governance model for the GCRC, which includes:

- A Steering Committee, which is the governing body, comprising Partners that make strategic and operational decisions on behalf of the GCRC. The Steering Committee includes the cities of Boroondara, Stonnington, Monash and Whitehorse, Deakin University, the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, the KooyongKoot Alliance, Melbourne Water and Yarra Valley Water.
- A Host Organisation that hosts the GCRC and administers its finances
- Working Groups, which guide specific programs and projects
- A GCRC Lead that supports and facilitates the strategic direction and operational delivery of the collaboration's efforts
- The organisation that represents the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People as the Traditional Custodians of the creek and its catchment, and the guiding role that the WWCHAC play with regard to GCRC programs and projects.

Why we need this Plan

Each GCRC Partner both has its own objectives, plans, and processes for managing the aspects of the catchment for which it is responsible and simultaneously shares in a mutual commitment to promote a collaborative, holistic approach and to work together at the regional and catchment scales.

Early in its operation, the GCRC developed a Prospectus (April 2023). A critical goal of this Prospectus was recognising the need to begin working collectively on specific programs and projects in the short term.

The top priority for the GCRC was to develop a Catchment-scale Strategic Plan to guide collective impact – cohesively and holistically – through a suite of short, medium, and long-term programs and projects.

The Plan aims to improve the cohesion, adaptability, diversity, and efficiency of the GCRC – all essential characteristics required for an effective and resilient multi-jurisdictional environmental collaboration (Figure 3).

Cohesion

- Coordinated action among Partners towards a shared purpose and clear priorities
- Improved alignment across Partners to reduce conflicts, streamline decision making and improve funding opportunities
- Enhanced community engagement and support
- Improved ability to advocate collectively for catchment-scale outcomes

Adaptability

- Improved ability to meet catchment scale challenges through shared understanding and continuous learning and innovation
- Improved ability to manage cross-boundary catchment-scale risks

Diversity

- Broader perspectives on complex challenges and potential solutions
- Continuous improvement through different approaches and shared learnings

Efficiency

- Improved awareness and coordination of existing effort to reduce duplication and conflict
- Improved allocation of collective resources to achieve optimal catchment-scale outcomes
- Better decision-making through improved communication, data and monitoring

Figure 3 Benefits Of A Strategic Plan For The GCRC

Scope and purpose

**Little Pied
Cormorant**



The scope of the Plan encompasses Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) and its catchment, including its tributaries: Back Creek, Damper Creek, and Scotchmans Creek. The area includes nine of Melbourne's eastern suburbs, including Blackburn, Box Hill, Burwood, Ashwood, Malvern East, Ashburton, Glen Iris, Malvern, and Kooyong, where it joins the Yarra River (Birrarung).

The intention of the Plan is not to replicate existing organisational-level or geographically based strategies or plans across the catchment. Instead, the purpose is to identify tangible programs and projects that address the most significant challenges and opportunities for the study area at the catchment level, and which thereby require a coordinated, collaborative effort.

The Plan will guide the delivery of the GCRC's objectives across the catchment over the coming years, enhancing alignment and collaboration on activities that benefit the catchment and community, and supporting advocacy and access to funding opportunities.

The Plan encompasses the following themes:

Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability

Systems and Urban Planning

Community Wellbeing and Cultural Preservation

Innovation and Advocacy

Governance

These themes are reflected in the Critical Challenges, Focus Areas and Flagship Programs sections later in this document.

How we developed this Plan

The development of the Plan was a high priority for the GCRC to guide its efforts to achieve collective impact toward its shared vision. In 2024, the GCRC established a Project Working Group to progress the development of the Plan. Through the current host organisation, the City of Stonnington, the Project Working Group engaged consultant Tony Overman in early 2025 to lead the development of the Plan. The process involved extensive consultation with all Partners, and Supporter organisations through the following phases:



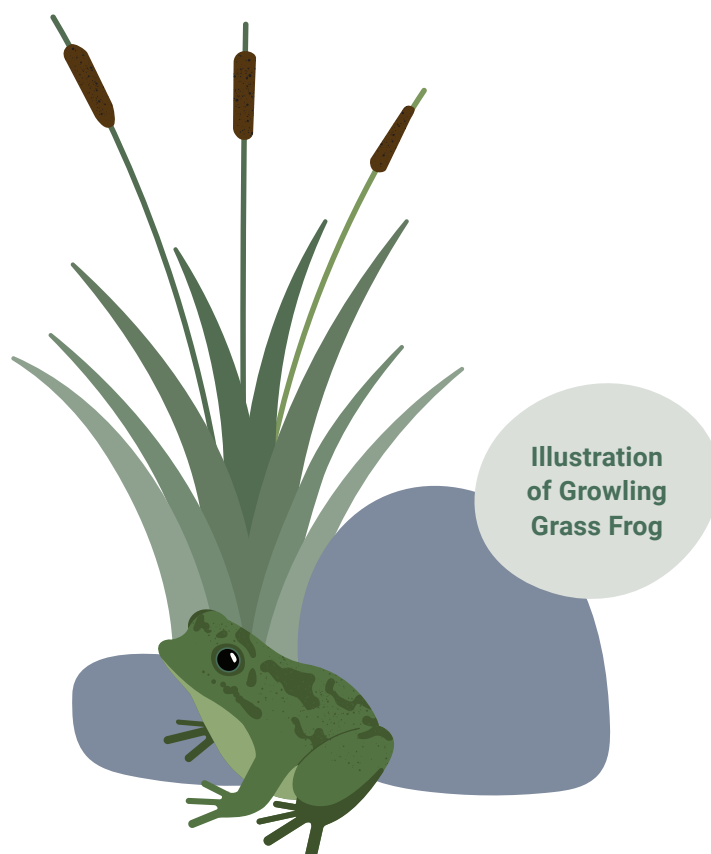
Figure 4 Developing The GCRC Strategic Plan

Simultaneously, the GCRC commissioned a State of the Catchment Report to synthesise and assess available data across the five themes within the scope of the Plan.

The foundation of any collaborative approach to a shared strategic endeavour is a shared understanding of the relevant critical issues and challenges. For the GCRC, a critical challenge was defined by the following characteristics:

- catchment-wide in scale and scope
- beyond the remit of any single Partner and therefore warranting a collaborative response
- within the circle of control or influence of the collective effort of the GCRC to make a difference

Critical challenges were identified through various stakeholder engagement activities and the State of the Catchment Report (Alluvium Consulting, 2025). This formed the basis for the Focus Areas and Flagship Programs, which stakeholders developed in Phase Four.



Broader policy context

The Plan was informed by various Victorian Government legislation, policies and plans, alongside other local strategies for the key focus areas, notably those relevant to biodiversity, waterway protection and enhancement, Integrated Water Management (IWM), and Traditional Custodian values.

Biodiversity

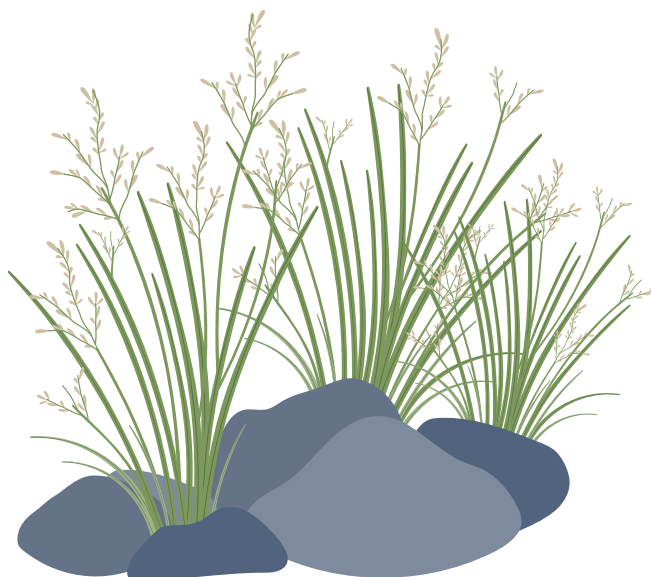
Victoria's policy for biodiversity, Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037, proposes a vision that Victoria's biodiversity is 'healthy, valued and actively cared for'. The Flagship Programs and Projects identified in the Plan are closely aligned with the two broad goals of this policy:

- Victorians value nature. Victorians understand that their wellbeing and the state's economic wellbeing depend on the health of the natural environment.
- Victoria's natural environment is healthy. Victoria has functioning plant and animal populations, improved habitats and resilient ecosystems, even under climate change.

In addition, each council in the catchment has various biodiversity or environmental plans that aim to protect, enhance, and restore native biodiversity and to facilitate greater community awareness and appreciation of these values.

- City of Boroondara: Urban Biodiversity Strategy (2024-2034), Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Master Plan (2022-2032).
- City of Whitehorse: Whitehorse Urban Forest Strategy (2021-2031) and UFS Implementation and Action Plan (2021-2031).
- City of Glen Eira: Draft Glen Eira Biodiversity Plan (2025-2029).
- City of Stonnington: City of Stonnington Urban Forest Strategy, Sustainable Environment Strategy (2018-2023), Biodiversity Inventory & Corridors Study, Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Master Plan, Climate Emergency Action Plan (2021-2024).
- City of Monash: Urban Biodiversity Strategy (2018-2028).

Illustration
of Wallaby
Grass



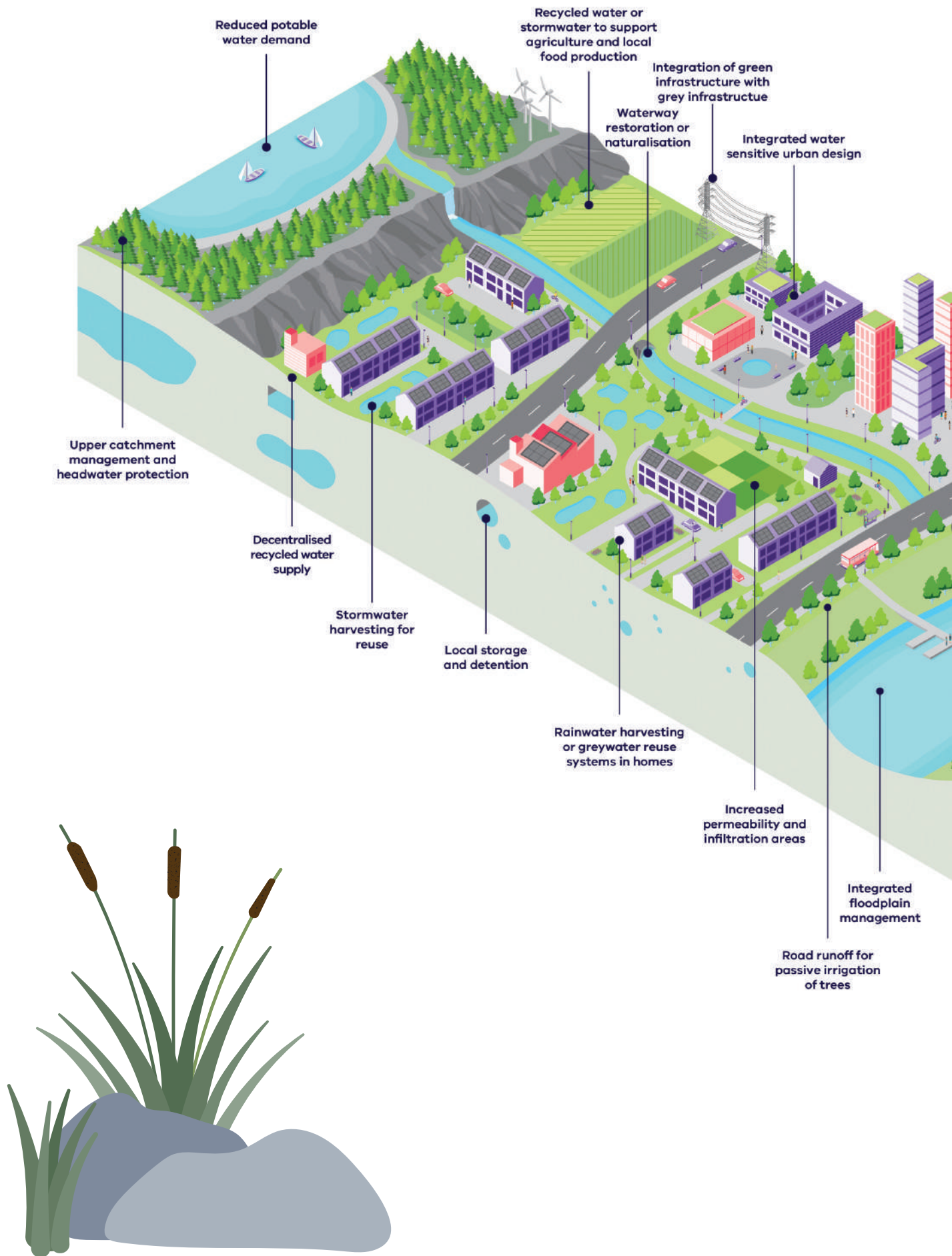
A photograph of a Sacred Kingfisher perched on a thick, textured tree branch. The bird has a long, dark beak, a blue crest, and a white breast with a yellow-orange belly. Its wings are a vibrant blue. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a forest or parkland setting.

Sacred
Kingfisher

Waterway protection and enhancement

The Wilip-gin Murron (Yarra River Protection) Act 2017, and the associated Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo, Yarra Strategic Plan (BBBU) establish a new management framework to protect the water and environment of the Yarra River (Birrarung) by recognising it as a single, integrated natural living entity. The Plan aligns with the following focus areas identified in the BBBU (edited for brevity):

- Holistic approach to the river and its parklands from source to mouth.
- A focus on long-term health and “net gain” for the environment from any action or policy impacting Yarra River Land.
- Consistent and stronger planning controls along the river corridor to prevent inappropriate development and safeguard the river’s natural character and habitats.
- Recognition of Traditional Custodians and their cultural values, heritage, and knowledge in planning decisions which influence their Country and waterways.



Integrated Water Management

Integrated Water Management (IWM) is a holistic approach to all aspects of the urban water cycle, including consumptive water networks, sewerage, stormwater, flooding, waterways, and the green-blue infrastructure associated with open spaces and waterways. Central to the IWM approach is connection and collaboration between those authorities responsible for each system aspect and to improve environmental, community and economic outcomes. Victoria's Integrated Water Management Framework encourages this collaborative approach and promotes the application of nature-based and water-sensitive solutions to urban water-related challenges. Relevant IWM challenges and opportunities identified and discussed within the Yarra Catchment IWM Forums, were identified in the 'State of Catchment' and are considered in the Plan.

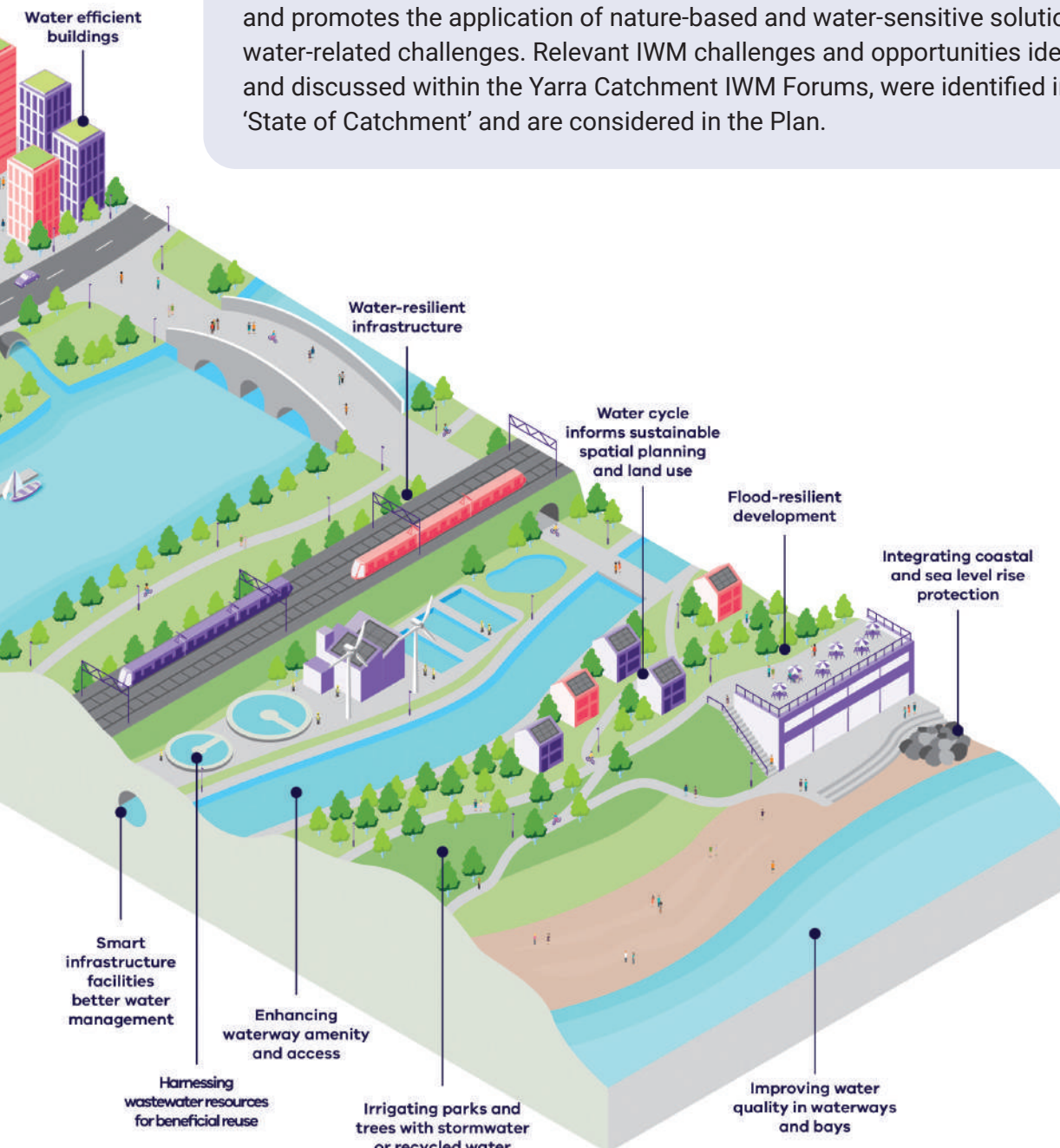


Figure 5 – Opportunities for Integrated Water Management, enhanced cultural values, sediment control, biodiversity and connection to nature in an urban context (Integrated Water Management Planning Guidelines - DEECA)

Traditional Custodian Values

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) 10-year Whole of Country Plan is a community-driven vision for Wurundjeri-led healthy Country that prioritises self-determination, the protection of Cultural practices and heritage, and the restoration of land and waters. This Plan recognises these key principles within Flagship Program 2, 'Embed Traditional Custodian Values', which were developed through workshops with GCRC Partners and Supporters through direct engagement with the WWCHAC Water Unit. This Plan aligns, as far as practicable, with the following key objectives of the Whole of Country Plan:

- Cultural Heritage Protection, through the GCRC's plan to support a WWCHAC-led Cultural Values Study for the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) , which will identify key areas of Cultural significance and enable the GCRC and WWCHAC to protect and celebrate them.
- Environmental restoration and management, through GCRC's aim to work with WWCAHC to integrate Traditional Custodian Knowledge and Values with contemporary land management to support WWCAHC's environmental goals. Identify and celebrate the traditional Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung language for place names and waterways within the catchment, through initiatives to research traditional Wurundjeri names for important places (including the verification of the name 'KooyongKoot' for Gardiners Creek).

In addition to the Whole of Country Plan WWCHAC have prepared the Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo (BBBU) Engagement Framework to guide partner organisations as they look to engage with WWCHAC. The development of GCRC responses to these framework questions, followed by WWCHAC's engagement at various stages of the GCRC Strategic Plan process, has informed the programs and projects identified in Focus Area 2.



Superb
Fairy Wren

Where are we now?

Critical challenges for the GCRC

Threats to biodiversity

The condition, extent, and connectivity of native vegetation and habitat across the catchment is the most critical challenge for many GCRC partners.

The Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) State of the Catchment Report (Alluvium Consulting, 2025) highlighted that biodiversity and habitat along the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) corridor are generally poor, but vary across its tributaries, with Scotchmans Creek currently holding the highest value. Areas of high biodiversity value across the catchment are found in patches, where councils have prioritised the development, restoration, and protection of biodiversity zones. Some examples of areas with significant biodiversity along the creek corridor include Blackburn Lake, Valley Conservation Reserve, the upper sections of Scotchmans Creek, areas of the Malvern Valley Golf Course, and the Glen Iris Wetlands.

These patches offer areas of refuge for native fauna; however, the general lack of connectivity and degraded quality of areas, in between these patches, represent critical threats to the enhancement of biodiversity across the catchment.



Gang Gang
Cockatoo

Related opportunities:

Opportunities exist to strengthen biodiversity through a Regional Habitat Corridors Program, which would aim to build on the Greening the Birrarung guide developed under the BBBU and leverage the learnings from existing studies on catchment habitat connectivity and focal species to coordinate revegetation and riparian restoration along the central creek corridor and key tributaries.

Given the scale of biodiversity-related activities across the catchment and the breadth of Partners' involvement, working together is critical to the effective and efficient deployment of this collective effort.



Stormwater and water quality

Given the catchment is highly urbanised, stormwater runoff and related poor water quality are critical associated challenges.

The primary impacts of urban densification on stormwater are increased runoff volume and speed, driven by more impervious surfaces – such as roads, rooftops, and pavements which reduce natural infiltration.

This has altered the hydrology and flow regimes of Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) and its tributaries, resulting in erosion, flooding, and sedimentation, creating a challenging aquatic habitat for native fauna.

With increasing targets related to housing density across the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) catchment, the pressure is leading to numerous large development projects. Examples of Major projects across the catchment that will significantly impact land-use include the Suburban Rail Loop projects (Glen Waverley, Burwood and Box Hill), and proposed Activity Centres. These developments include new infrastructure and housing within the proposed precincts.

Another significant impact is a decline in water quality, which is due to higher levels and increased incidence of pollutants and contaminants flowing into the catchment from urban landscapes. The State of Catchment Report (Alluvium Consulting, 2025) highlighted that water quality was generally worse in the lower reaches of the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) channel than in the upper reaches and its tributaries, across all parameters except Dissolved Oxygen.

Related opportunities:

Tactics to reduce urban stormwater impacts through detention, treatment, infiltration, and harvesting are being applied by all five Partner councils through the Yarra IWM Forum and local planning policies. However, there are opportunities to adopt a catchment-wide approach to prioritising and implementing relevant actions.

The State of Catchment Report (Alluvium Consulting, 2025) recommends that councils and agencies should align through investment in a Regional Biodiversity and Water Quality Monitoring Hub to ensure that water quality interventions deliver both ecological and community benefits. This would establish a shared baseline and track the effectiveness of water management projects, enabling evaluation of improvements in flow management, stormwater reuse, and riparian conditions.

A GCRC collective advocacy initiative which focused on amendments to planning policies which detail requirements for stormwater management, at a site level, to reduce stormwater run-off, increase permeability, and improve treatment.

Litter and pollution

Litter is a diffuse issue across the catchment. Stakeholder workshops and the State of Catchment Report (Alluvium Consulting, 2025) highlighted that litter generation and accumulation within the catchment are critical challenges. It is understood that a high percentage of litter is generated at specific litter hotspots across the catchment that support commercial, industrial, transport, and parking land uses, including activity centres, shopping centres, factories, takeaway shops, transport hubs, and car parks. Litter generally accumulates on streets around litter-generating hotspots and in the waterway downstream of the stormwater drainage system.

These litter generation zones pose a specific concern for the relevant council and as well as for Melbourne Water and the Environment Protection Authority. There are ongoing flow-on effects of the litter generated impacting waterways in the lower catchment, therefore, a collaborative approach is needed to address the problem at a catchment scale.

Related opportunities:

Aligned with the waste hierarchy, preventing litter at the source before it can reach a waterway is the most effective way to reduce environmental impact. Other tactics include public education and community engagement, providing and maintaining rubbish bins, maintaining Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) assets (such as rain gardens, tree pits, and swales, etc.) Gross Pollutant Traps (GPTs), regulatory and compliance activities to address illegal littering.

Remediation activities, such as community litter clean-up days, can help raise awareness and increase involvement. Monitoring, evaluation and review of litter indicators and program effectiveness should also be undertaken.

Community engagement and education

With nearly one million people living within the catchment, meeting the required community engagement and education needs is a challenge for councils and agencies. Education and engagement programs have historically been localised to municipalities or project sites, and as such, there has been inconsistency across the catchment. The KooyongKoot Alliance (KKA) plays a critical role in ensuring communities are engaged in meaningful projects that will influence Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot). However, its capacity is limited by the commitment and availability of its volunteers and the capacity of its Catchment Keeper role.

Related opportunities:

A collaborative approach to community resourcing, education, and engagement, through the sharing of resources and information across key GCRC partners, will reduce duplication of effort and the inefficient allocation of engagement-related resources across member organisations with broadly the same objectives. This also includes the investigation of new sources of funding for community-driven work.



Imperial Blue
Butterfly

Safe access to and transport through open space, recreation

Given that Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) and its tributaries cross municipal boundaries and existing service levels, quality and safety are inconsistent, improving safe access and connectivity along creek-side pathways is a critical issue. The stakeholder workshops and State of Catchment Report (Alluvium Consulting, 2025) both highlighted that significant challenges include conflicts on shared paths between cyclists and pedestrians (due to high usage/speed differences /a lack of separation), narrow and unsafe sections of pathway, connectivity gaps in pathways, limited connections to transport, safety concerns (generally lighting related), signage, amenities, and wayfinding.

Other challenges related to open space and recreational use in areas adjacent to waterways include overcapacity of sports fields and inadequate associated infrastructure, such as bins, lighting, toilets, WSUD, and engagement with waterway health or other forms of environmental stewardship (i.e. there are limited opportunities to connect with the waterways, and therefore a lack of appreciation and care for the creek and its catchment). Other recurring issues include inconsistent policies regarding off-leash dog areas and lighting design near biodiversity zones.



**Pobblebonk
Frog**

Related opportunities:

Continued consistency across municipal boundaries in path design, dog off-leash areas, signage, user education, lighting, and a collaborative approach to pathway connectivity will alleviate safety concerns, enable community connectivity to the waterway and help to protect environmental values. Collaborative workshopping with sports organisations will identify priorities for place based education and stewardship.

Development and land use change impacts

The catchment is subject to significant pressure from development and land-use changes. Most land across the study area is urban residential. Growth targets under the State Government's 'Plan for Victoria', together with the Activity Centres and Suburban Rail Loop projects, will increase density within the catchment and likely lead to encroachment on or other impacts to the creek corridor. These changes will introduce new threats and exacerbate existing ones. They include reduced tree canopy and the associated susceptibility to urban heat island effects, shading of the corridor by new buildings, increased usage, increased stormwater runoff (with associated hydrological, geomorphic and ecological threats) as permeable surface area is reduced, and growing pressure on existing open space and public infrastructure along the creek corridor.

Related opportunities:

Most of these challenges are outside the GCRC's circle of control, however the GCRC could partner with members to develop a collective advocacy approach and planning guidelines that support the health of the creek across the catchment. The collaboration should work with councils to incentivise sensitive development through campaigns that recognise and promote good practices.

Catchment scale data

The lack of catchment-scale datasets for specific topics is a substantial impediment to the GCRC as it seeks to identify priority locations for collaborative action across critical issues. The State of Catchment Report (Alluvium Consulting, 2025) highlighted inconsistencies in how councils and agencies collect, store, and share their data and that consideration of how data can be integrated with partner organisations is lacking. This is a particular problem for developing catchment-scale priorities for Flagship Program topics such as stormwater, litter, water quality, cultural values, community access and recreation, and biodiversity.

Rakali



Related opportunities:

A collaborative approach to determining catchment-scale consistency in data collection, storage, and sharing is needed to enable the design of strategic projects that address key challenges beyond municipal boundaries.

Governance model support

There is an existing MOU and Terms of Reference for the GCRC. However, there are significant challenges to collaboration for public-good outcomes in a large, complex, multi-jurisdictional waterway catchment. Partners generally have a strong desire to participate and regularly make their best efforts to support joint initiatives; however, there are inconsistencies in funding and resource availability across Partners. This, in addition to the limited capacity of the GCRC Lead and the KooyongKoot Catchment Keeper, highlight significant challenges to implementing collaborative projects.

The funding model currently used to support the GCRC Lead role involves annual commitments by a subsection of Partners with funding capacity, while projects are funded on a case-by-case basis. This highlights a risk to sustained commitment and progress towards the GCRC's medium to long-term priorities and ultimately its Vision for long-term progress.

Critical governance responsibilities are currently assigned to the GCRC Lead role, which has multiple competing responsibilities, rather than being distributed across key partners within the GCRC, highlighting a risk to the progress, tracking, communication, and engagement outcomes of key GCRC initiatives.

Related Opportunities:

Additional support for the governance model, its systems, processes, and reporting is required, along with a funding model that supports longer-term commitment to resourcing and projects. As part of this additional funding partners should be investigated.



Yellow Buttons

Involving traditional custodians

All partners are committed to ensuring meaningful involvement of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) in planning and management of Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) related projects (in their own jurisdictions), while recognising that there are practical and systemic challenges to be addressed. Partner organisations have varying relationships with WWCHAC and are at different stages of their Cultural awareness journeys.

Current funding and resourcing approaches have mainly been project-driven rather than systematically embedded within co-designed programs, which consider and budget for consistent Cultural guidance.

There is also limited understanding of the locations of Wurundjeri Cultural significance due to there being limited access to this knowledge and its protection under the ICIP.

Existing statutory planning policies and local laws present challenges for managing the catchment as a living system, and conventional urban waterway management approaches may not always align with Wurundjeri practices and philosophies.

Related Opportunities:

Budget for ongoing WWCHAC engagement is top priority to enable WWCHAC to provide a Wurundjeri voice across GCRC projects. Consistency in Cultural awareness training and engagement processes is needed to relieve the resource burden on WWCHAC.

A WWCHAC-led cultural values study of the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) catchment will support the holistic care and celebration of the catchment as a single, integrated living entity.

A collaborative approach to caring for Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) by the GCRC will support the recognition and broader community understanding of the waterway as a living entity.

Where are we heading?

Vision and objectives

In 2023, the GCRC prepared a Prospectus, which included a three-part vision (Figure 6) for Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) and 13 objectives (Table 1).

KooyongKoot and its catchment is protected, valued and loved, supporting diverse uses and thriving biodiversity.

As custodians of our natural environment, Traditional Owners play a key role in its management.

Community and all stakeholders are working together to heal, strengthen and ensure the resilience of KooyongKoot and its catchment.

Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Vision

Figure 6 GCRC Vision



Objective	
01	Traditional Custodians have a key role in the management of KooyongKoot, and KooyongKoot is a place where we collectively celebrate Country.
02	Protect sensitive environmental areas, enhance and expand biodiversity, habitat and bio-links along the creek corridors.
03	Promote consistent and collaborative planning across the catchment, recognising that impacts go beyond catchment borders
04	Enable climate resilience
05	Improve water efficiency, water quality and water management.
06	Enable diverse recreational uses to support health and wellbeing, community connection and environmental protection.
07	Encourage sustainable transport use within the catchment
08	Preserve and expand green space
09	Celebrate culture and heritage
010	Connect people to nature
011	Advocate to protect and enhance the cultural, ecological and social values of the catchment
012	Manage expectations and encourage harmony between different stakeholders
013	Encourage innovation and sharing of research and learning by the community, education, corporate and public sectors.

Table 1 GCRC Objectives

GCRC principles

Through its MOU, GCRC Partners have agreed to the following principles:

- Inclusive and respectful working environment
- Open and transparent communication and sharing of information
- Acting in good faith, foremost in the interests of the sub-catchment
- Fostering a culture of learning with regular monitoring and review
- Working in collaboration to achieve positive outcomes
- Recognising the importance of early consultation and collaboration, using best endeavours to consult and inform other parties about relevant and substantial developments, projects or other non-emergency works.

Timeline

The Plan is just one step in a long journey for the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot):

Timeline	
Pre-1830s	For many thousands of years, Wurunjderi has been the cultural custodians of Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) under cultural lore...
1830s onwards	- Non-Aboriginal people started arriving in the 1830s. - Floodplains were cleared for farming, leading to vegetation loss, the introduction of exotic species, and the concentration of flows.
1920s–1950s	After World War I, residential and industrial development occurred. Water quality declined rapidly.
1960s–1970s	Extensive drainage and sewerage works were undertaken by authorities to improve flood management and water quality.
1980s–2019	Growing community awareness of the impacts on the creek leads to the formation of Friends Groups and complementary efforts by agencies and the community.
2020	- The City of Stonnington identifies the need for regional collaboration to protect and enhance the catchment as part of its Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Masterplan. - The KooyongKoot Alliance was formed to support communities working together to heal KooyongKoot, its waterways, land, and ecosystem.
2021	- The City of Stonnington and Melbourne Water, start exploring with other local stakeholders the potential for forming an ongoing regional collaboration. - First GCRC Lead hired to explore governance options and develop a vision and objectives for the regional collaboration.
2022	- Boroondara Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Masterplan developed. - Potential projects, programs, and possible governance models explored. - A draft MOU developed. - First GCRC Lead is hired to formally setup the GCRC, hosted by the City of Boroondara. - Stakeholders confirm governance model, priority initiatives.
2023	- MOU signed. - GCRC officially launches. - Prospectus published. - Second GCRC Lead appointed, with role focus shifted to strategic planning and project delivery.
2024	- Collaborative projects begin. - Working Groups established. - Successful joint and independent funding bids for Green Links grant program focused on revegetation, habitat and integrated water management improvements at key sites.
2025	Strategic Plan developed with engagement from GCRC members, supporters and WWCHAC.

Table 2 Timeline history of the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) catchment

Eastern
Yellow Robin



How will we get there?



Catchment-scale Strategic Plan structural hierarchy

Focus Areas

GCRC has identified three Focus Areas as guiding pillars, helping Partners focus their efforts and resources on what matters most and where they can have the most significant collective impact. They are intended as a structural yet flexible framework that can be revisited and refined without requiring an overhaul of the entire Plan.

- 1. Supporting Collaborative Governance** – Programs to improve the way the GCRC operates, including programs and processes which focus on mapping goals, decision making, accountability, inclusivity, communication, rules, GCRC finances and defining roles and responsibilities. This focus area also includes programs related to data sharing and advocacy.
- 2. Embedding Traditional Custodian values** – Programs to support Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) to engage in GCRC initiatives, for GCRC members to recognise Wurundjeri values within their existing and future projects, and to improve the understanding of Wurundjeri Cultural values within the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) catchment.
- 3. Delivering Collective Impact** – Programs to deliver tangible collective impact, tackling identified critical challenges for the GCRC, which includes consideration of the critical challenges identified within the stakeholder workshops and the State of Catchment Report (Alluvium Consulting, 2025).

Flagship Programs

Each Focus Area includes several Flagship Programs (Figure 7). A Flagship Program is a long-term, large-scale initiative focused on a particular challenge (or set of related challenges) with its own specific goal (Table 3). A Flagship Program aims to focus resources and unite efforts to achieve collective impact across the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) catchment.

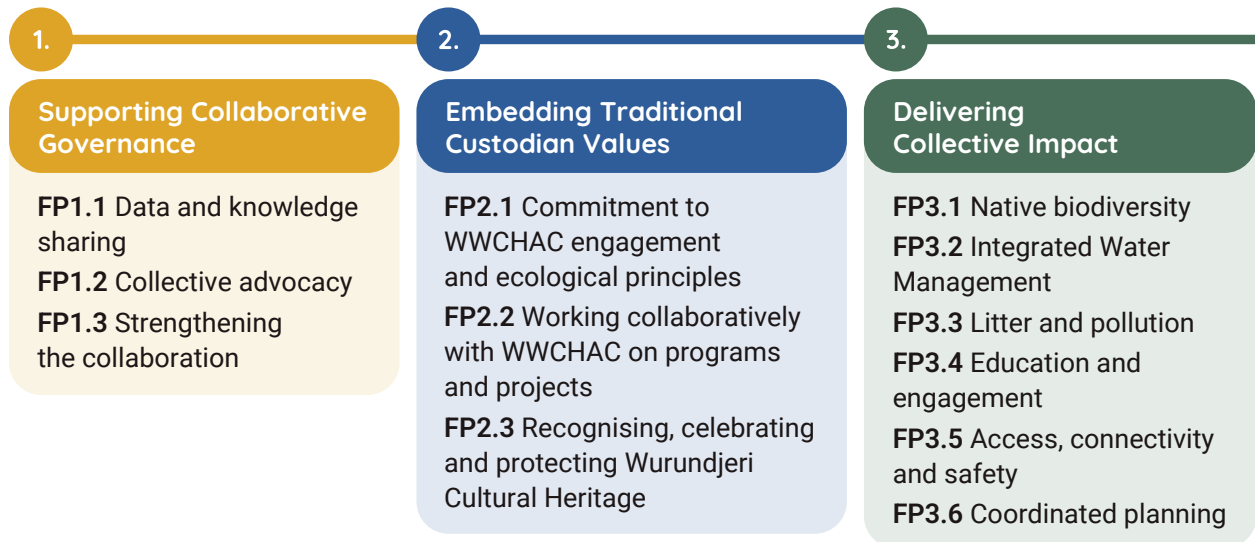


Figure 7 Focus Areas and Flagship Programs



New Holland Honeyeater

Focus Area	Flagship Program	Goal
1: Supporting Collaborative Governance	FP1.1 Data and knowledge sharing	Establish a collaborative, accessible data and knowledge sharing platform to guide catchment-scale decision making and monitoring.
	FP1.2 Collective advocacy	Develop a shared advocacy approach for significant matters affecting the catchment.
	FP1.3 Strengthening the collaboration	Enhance systems, resourcing and processes to support the GCRC's governance model.
2: Embedding Traditional Custodian Values	FP2.1 Commitment to WWCHAC engagement and ecological principles	Embed WWCHAC engagement and ecological principles into the GCRC ways of working, governance, and aspirations.
	FP2.2 Working collaboratively with WWCHAC on programs and projects	Continued collaboration with WWCHAC on programs and projects.
	FP2.3 Recognising, celebrating and protecting Wurundjeri Cultural Heritage	Recognise, protect and celebrate the cultural values of Wurundjeri Country.
3: Delivering Collective Impact	FP3.1 Native biodiversity	Coordinate and leverage existing native biodiversity protection, enhancement and restoration efforts across all partners to restore ecological health, enhance habitat and improve connectivity.
	FP3.2 Integrated Water Management	Improve stormwater management and water quality through catchment-scale planning, nature-based solutions and innovative technologies.
	FP3.3 Litter and pollution	Reduce litter and pollution across the catchment through source identification and collaborative approaches to education, auditing and compliance projects.
	FP3.4 Education and engagement	Ensure a collective approach to community education and engagement across the catchment.
	FP3.5 Access, connectivity and safety	Ensure a coordinated approach to enhancing public access, wayfinding, connectivity, and safety for all corridor users while preserving ecological values.
	FP3.6 Coordinated planning	Deliver coordinated responses to strategic and statutory planning, development and land use decisions that affect the catchment and its waterways.

Table 3 Flagship Program Goals

Projects

Various projects have been developed to achieve each goal of their associated Flagship Program. These projects apply across the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) and its catchment and are expected to involve multiple Partners. The GCRC is the owner of this Plan, and the Steering Committee is responsible for overall coordination; however, it is expected that individual Partner organisations will act as lead facilitators for projects where they have subject matter knowledge and the available capacity and desire to do so. By approaching project delivery in this way, the GCRC's intention is for the responsibility to deliver projects to be shared as equitably as possible between Partners.

The Plan is designed to guide long-term direction, priorities, and resource allocation. Actions detailing what will be done, by which organisation, and how at the operational level will be identified within a separate living Implementation Plan document.

The projects presented reflect the Partners' collective perspectives of estimated cost and priority for implementation as follows:

- Estimated cost

Low – Negligible direct cost (cash or in kind), up to \$50K

Medium – Some direct cost, between \$50K-\$250K

High – Significant direct cost, >\$250K

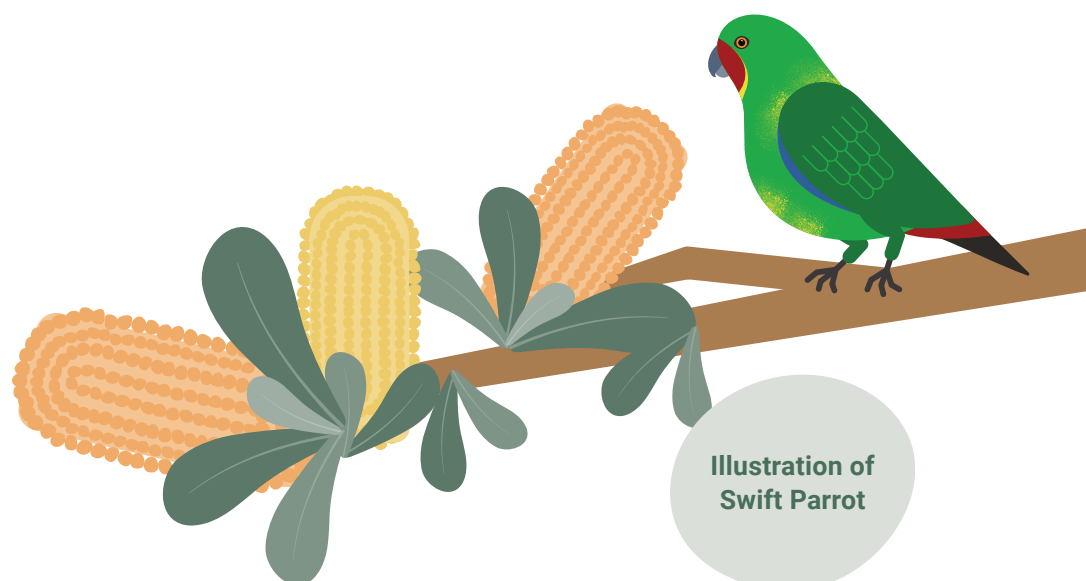
- Priority for Implementation

Critical – Most essential and urgent, should be done within the first year

High – Important, less urgent, should be done within the first two years

Medium – Less important or urgent, should be done within 3-4 years

Low – Lowest importance or urgency, can be deferred to the longer term



Focus Area 1: Supporting Collaborative Governance

FP1.1 Data and knowledge sharing

Goal

To establish a collaborative, accessible data and knowledge sharing platform to guide catchment-scale decision making and monitoring.

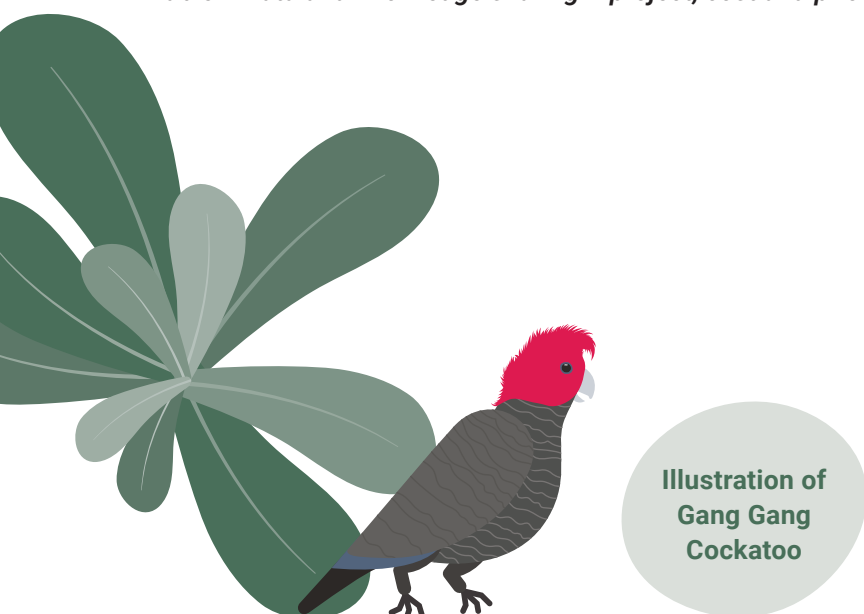
Relevant Objectives

- O3 Promote consistent and collaborative planning across the catchment, recognising that impacts go beyond catchment borders.
- O13 Encourage innovation and sharing of research and learning by the community, education, corporate and public sectors.
- O12 Manage expectations and encourage harmony between different stakeholders.

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP1.1.1	Develop a shared data governance framework that identifies the critical catchment-scale datasets required, relevant roles and responsibilities, data ownership (e.g. highlighting WWCHAC ownership/sovereignty of all data related to their Country), and current limitations regarding data-sharing policies.	Low	Critical
FP1.1.2	Adopt a fit-for-purpose data platform that enables the sharing of and access to catchment-wide datasets between partners.	Low	Critical
FP1.1.3	Collate available catchment-scale data.	Low	Critical
FP1.1.4	Develop common standards and protocols to ensure data consistency and usability at the catchment scale, including for citizen science activities.	Low	Med

Table 4 Data and knowledge sharing – project, cost and priorities



FP1.2 Collective advocacy

Goal

Develop a shared advocacy approach for significant matters affecting the catchment.

Relevant Objectives

- O11 Advocate to protect and enhance the ecological and social values of the catchment.

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP1.2.1	Map stakeholder interests and concerns.	Low	Critical
FP1.2.2	Develop a joint advocacy charter that outlines shared goals, values, and messages, and provides a transparent decision-making process and mechanisms to support joint advocacy efforts.	Low	High
FP1.2.3	Implement joint advocacy campaigns/responses on an as-needed basis.	Low	High
FP1.2.4	Periodically review the joint advocacy charter and associated efforts.	Low	Med

Table 5 Collective advocacy – project, cost and priorities

FP1.3 Strengthening the collaboration

Goal

Enhance systems and processes to support the collaborative governance model.

Relevant Objectives

- All objectives

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP1.3.1	Map existing Projects being delivered by each Partner organisation and how they link to Flagship Programs.	Low	Critical
FP1.3.2	Management and coordination of Working Groups.	Med	Critical
FP1.3.3	Management of GCRC governance documents and platforms.	Low	Critical
FP1.3.4	Management and coordination of GCRC meetings, forums, operations and reporting.	Low	Critical
FP1.3.5	Investigate options to support the sustainable delivery of community-led services related to the Strategic Plan flagship programs.	Low	Critical
FP1.3.6	Investigate additional funding sources (e.g. new funding partners) and funding agreement options and associated member preferences.	Low	High

Table 6 Strengthening the collaboration – project, cost and priorities

Focus Area 2: Embedding Traditional Custodian values

FP2.1 Commitment to WWCHAC engagement and ecological principles

Goal

Embed Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) engagement and ecological principles into GCRC's ways of working, governance, and aspirations.

Relevant Objectives

- O1 Traditional Custodians have a key role in the management of KooyongKoot, and KooyongKoot is a place where we collectively celebrate Country.

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP2.1.1	Adapt BBBU WWCHAC partnership agreements and processes to apply the identified engagement and ecological principles (including embedding recognition of waterways as living entities) to the GCRC processes, documentation, and aspirations/goals. Consider the Wurundjeri Whole of Country Plan and associated history, values, knowledge, rights, responsibility to and connection to Country in GCRC work.	Low	High
FP2.1.3	Develop a process to establish WWCHAC project-based resourcing and planning, including budgeting.	Med	High
FP2.1.4	Review the recognition of Wurundjeri Cultural values in existing projects targeted at the catchment.	Low	Med

Table 7 Commitment to WCHAC engagement and ecological principles – project, cost and priorities



FP2.2 Working collaboratively with WWCHAC on programs and projects

Goal

Work collaboratively as determined by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) on programs and projects.

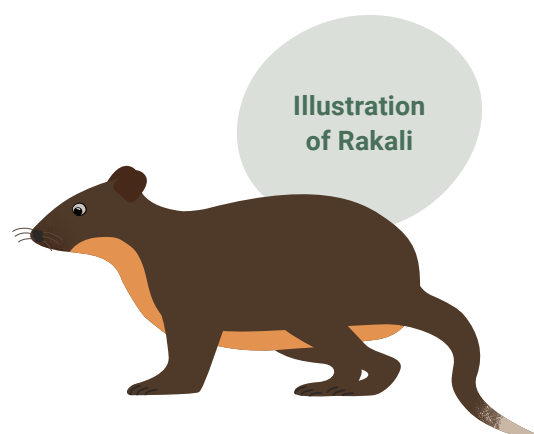
Relevant Objectives

- O1 Traditional Custodians have a key role in the management of KooyongKoot, and KooyongKoot is a place where we collectively celebrate Country.

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP2.2.1	Adopt and adapt the BBBU project inception and planning processes to ensure that Wurundjeri values are incorporated into all GCRC projects.	Low	High
FP2.2.2	With consideration of the Wurundjeri Whole of Country Plan, adapt the Birrarung Greening Guide to be specific to Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot).	Med	High
FP2.2.3	Engage with WWCHAC to develop cultural stories/communications for community education, signage and wayfinding.	Low	Med
FP2.2.4	Engage with WWCHAC in capacity-building, Traditional Custodian-led tourism, education and knowledge-sharing opportunities on Country.	Med	Med
FP2.2.5	Develop a First Peoples arts program with Wurundjeri to celebrate Culture, history, and values.	Med	Low

Table 8 Working Collaboratively with WWCHAC on programs and projects – project, cost and priorities



FP2.3 Recognising, celebrating and protecting Wurundjeri cultural heritage

Goal

Recognise, protect and celebrate Wurundjeri cultural value sites.

Relevant Objectives

- O1 Traditional Custodians have a key role in the management of KooyongKoot, and KooyongKoot is a place where we collectively celebrate Country.

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP2.3.1	Support the WWCHAC-led Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Cultural Values Study for the creek/catchment, and support the development of an associated Cultural narrative.	High	Critical
FP2.3.2	Play a supporting role with WWCHAC and other relevant agencies to identify and use the Wurundjeri language for place and waterway names within the catchment.	Med	High
FP2.3.3	Support WWCHAC Waterway Assessments and – if possible – identification of associated Cultural Flows within the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) catchment, as determined by WWCHAC.	Med	Low

Table 9 Recognising, celebrating and protecting Wurundjeri cultural heritage – project, cost and priorities



Focus Area 3: Delivering Collective Impact

FP3.1 Native biodiversity

Goal

Coordinate and leverage existing native biodiversity protection, enhancement and restoration efforts across all partners to restore ecological health, enhance habitat and improve connectivity.

Relevant Objectives

- 02 Protect sensitive environmental areas, enhance and expand biodiversity, habitat and bio-links along the creek corridors
- 010 Connect people to nature

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP3.1.1	Identify catchment-wide priority areas across jurisdictions and land tenures for targeted restoration opportunities.	Low	Critical
FP3.1.2	Establish shared ecological goals for habitat restoration and connectivity including consideration of priority focal species movement and existing biodiversity strategies.	Low	High
FP3.1.3	Conduct a catchment-scale revegetation planning forum, report yearly program of existing conservation and revegetation work, and develop a funding proposal for future multi-partner revegetation efforts.	Med	Med
FP3.1.4	Investigate catchment-scale threats to native biodiversity (including pests, diseases, invasive species and chemicals) and potential for catchment-wide responses.	Med	Low
FP3.1.5	Investigate niche aquatic habitat enhancement opportunities in priority areas, including through naturalisation, artificial in-stream habitat infrastructure, enhancing natural channel complexity, and reducing excessive sediment input.	High	High
FP3.1.6	Identify opportunities to work with significant open-space private and public landowners (e.g., golf courses, school green assets, parks/reserves, retarding basins) to create or enhance habitat connectivity.	Med	Med

Table 10 Native biodiversity – project, cost and priorities

FP3.2 Integrated Water Management

Goal

Improve stormwater management and water quality through catchment-scale planning, nature-based solutions and innovative technologies.

Relevant Objectives

- O5 Improve water efficiency, water quality and water management.
- O2 Protect sensitive environmental areas, enhance and expand biodiversity, habitat and bio-links along the creek corridors.
- O3 Promote consistent and collaborative planning across the catchment, recognising that impacts go beyond catchment borders
- O8 Preserve and expand green space

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP3.2.1	Map existing IWM assets and opportunities across the catchment and identify priority zones for intervention.	Low	High
FP3.2.2	Explore co-funding opportunities for planned IWM projects aligned with individual Council IWM Plans that support the catchment.	Med	High
FP3.2.3	Investigate opportunities to coordinate IWM asset maintenance schedules and contracts to maximise impact, create cost efficiencies and avoid duplication through asset management plans.	Med	Med
FP3.2.4	Improve the implementation of identified stormwater management planning scheme requirements within existing developments.	Med	Med
FP3.2.5	Identify opportunities for catchment-scale alignment and collaboration on IWM-related capital works (including buildings, open space, and infrastructure) and on planning and design processes (e.g., wetlands, basins, rain gardens).	Med	Med
FP3.2.6	Explore the feasibility of natural asset-based solutions to accommodate stormwater infiltration and treatment, and whether they can be implemented at scale in the catchment.	Med	High

Table 11 Integrated Water Management – project, cost and priorities

FP3.3 Litter and pollution

Goal

To reduce litter and pollution across the catchment.

Relevant Objectives

- O2 Protect sensitive environmental areas, enhance and expand biodiversity, habitat and bio-links along the creek corridors.
- O5 Improve water efficiency, water quality and water management.
- O10 Connect people to nature.

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP3.3.1	Develop a catchment-scale, consistent approach to community education on litter and pollution, grounded in existing programs and knowledge from relevant Partners.	Low	High
FP3.3.2	Educate construction and commercial organisations about local hotspots for litter generation, agree on priority areas and prevention and enforcement methods (with guidance from local Councils and EPA), and trial the agreed approach in key locations.	Med	High
FP3.3.3	Develop an ongoing catchment-scale litter and pollution monitoring program utilising agencies and citizen science projects.	Med	Critical
FP3.3.4	Undertake targeted research into litter and pollution to [achieve what?].	Med	Low

Table 12 Litter and pollution – project, cost and priorities



FP3.4 Education and engagement

Goal

Ensure a collective approach to community education and engagement across the catchment.

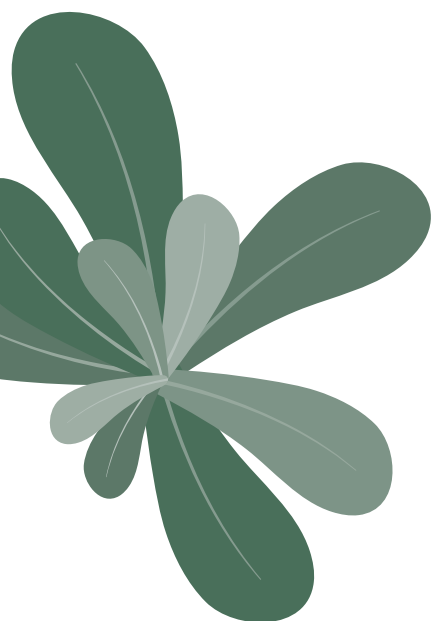
Relevant Objectives

- O13 Encourage innovation and sharing of research and learning by the community, education, corporate and public sectors.
- O3 Promote consistent and collaborative planning across the catchment, recognising that impacts go beyond catchment borders.
- O10 Connect people to nature.

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP3.4.1	Map existing communication and engagement programs across all partners to identify opportunities for integration, alignment, and collaborative planning and delivery.	Low	High
FP3.4.2	Develop a unified community communications and engagement plan covering key topics with shared messaging that aligns with the GCRC vision and objectives.	Med	High
FP3.4.3	Develop a Friend's Group support plan.	Low	High
FP3.4.4	Conduct an annual awards program and 'expo' aligned with the focus areas.	Med	Low

Table 13 Education and engagement – project, cost and priorities



FP3.5 Access, connectivity and safety

Goal

Ensure a coordinated approach to enhancing public access, wayfinding, connectivity, and safety for all corridor users while preserving ecological values.

Relevant Objectives

- O6 Enable diverse recreational uses to support health and wellbeing, community connection and environmental protection
- O7 Encourage sustainable transport use within the catchment
- O12 Manage expectations and encourage harmony between different stakeholders
- O11 Advocate to protect and enhance the ecological and social values of the catchment

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP3.5.1	Develop guidelines to support consistency in signage at a catchment-scale within each municipality. This includes consideration of Wurundjeri language and values.	Med	High
FP3.5.2	Develop a working-around-waterways guide for community groups consistent with existing safety requirements.	Low	High
FP3.5.3	Develop a map of the catchment that highlights key access, connectivity and safety features.	Low	Med

Table 14 Access, connectivity and safety – project, cost and priorities



FP3.6 Coordinated planning

Goal

Support coordinated responses to strategic and statutory planning, development and land use decisions that affect the corridors across multiple jurisdictions.

Relevant Objectives

- O3 Promote consistent and collaborative planning across the catchment, recognising that impacts go beyond catchment borders.
- O11 Advocate to protect and enhance the ecological and social values of the catchment.
- O12 Manage expectations and encourage harmony between different stakeholders.

Projects

Project ID	Project	Cost	Priority
FP3.6.1	Review and educate Partner organisation representatives on statutory planning matters and state and local planning policies that influence the health of the creek.	Low	High
FP3.6.2	Build public support for advocacy campaigns to protect the catchment by educating community on key statutory planning matters negatively affecting the catchment.	Low	Med
FP3.6.3	Work collaboratively to increase adoption/delivery of planning policy requirements for developments across the catchment (E.g. distance from waterways, conservation of biodiversity values, IWM requirements).	Med	Med

Table 15 Coordinated planning – project, cost and priorities



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Photograph References

All photographs (excluding the front cover and page 9) are by Ian Moodie.

Photographs on the front cover and page 9 are sourced from the City of Boroondara image library.



**Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot)
Regional Collaboration**

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