



Living Links

Strategic Plan 2019-24

Creating an urban web of green
where people and nature connect

Acknowledgment of country

Living Links works on the lands, waters and seas of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri peoples and acknowledges them as Traditional Owners.

It recognises and respects the diversity of their cultures and the deep connections they have with Country. It values partnerships with their communities and organisations to improve the health of Indigenous people and Country.

We pay our respect to Elders, past and present, and acknowledge and recognise the primacy of Traditional Owners' obligations, rights and responsibilities to use and care for their traditional lands, waters and seas.

Living Links Strategic Plan 2019-24

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www.livinglinks.com.au

www.ppwcm.vic.gov.au

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Introduction

Living Links is a collaborative program with a vision to create **“An urban web of green where people and nature connect”**. By linking up the many parks, reserves and other natural spaces across Melbourne’s south-east, it aims to make the region a world-class urban ecosystem. This will improve habitat for wildlife and make it easier for people to connect with nature as part of their daily lives.

Bringing this vision to reality requires the help of many organisations. Living Links is a collaboration between Councils, Government agencies and community/interest groups who are all working together to achieve bigger and better outcomes than if they worked alone.

Background

Living Links came into being in 2006, when a group of government, environment and community organisations decided they would be more effective by working together to enhance and connect natural spaces across the Dandenong Creek catchment. Living Links is designed to be a large scale, long-term, practical program that focuses on connecting and enhancing natural spaces, as well as helping people connect with nature in this predominantly urban setting.

Over the last 12 years, Living Links has assisted or undertaken over 100 on-ground environmental projects, developed an interactive online masterplan that identifies priority corridors, and secured around \$2.8 million in funding. All of Living Links’ achievements build on the work undertaken over decades by various local Councils, government agencies, and community/interest groups.

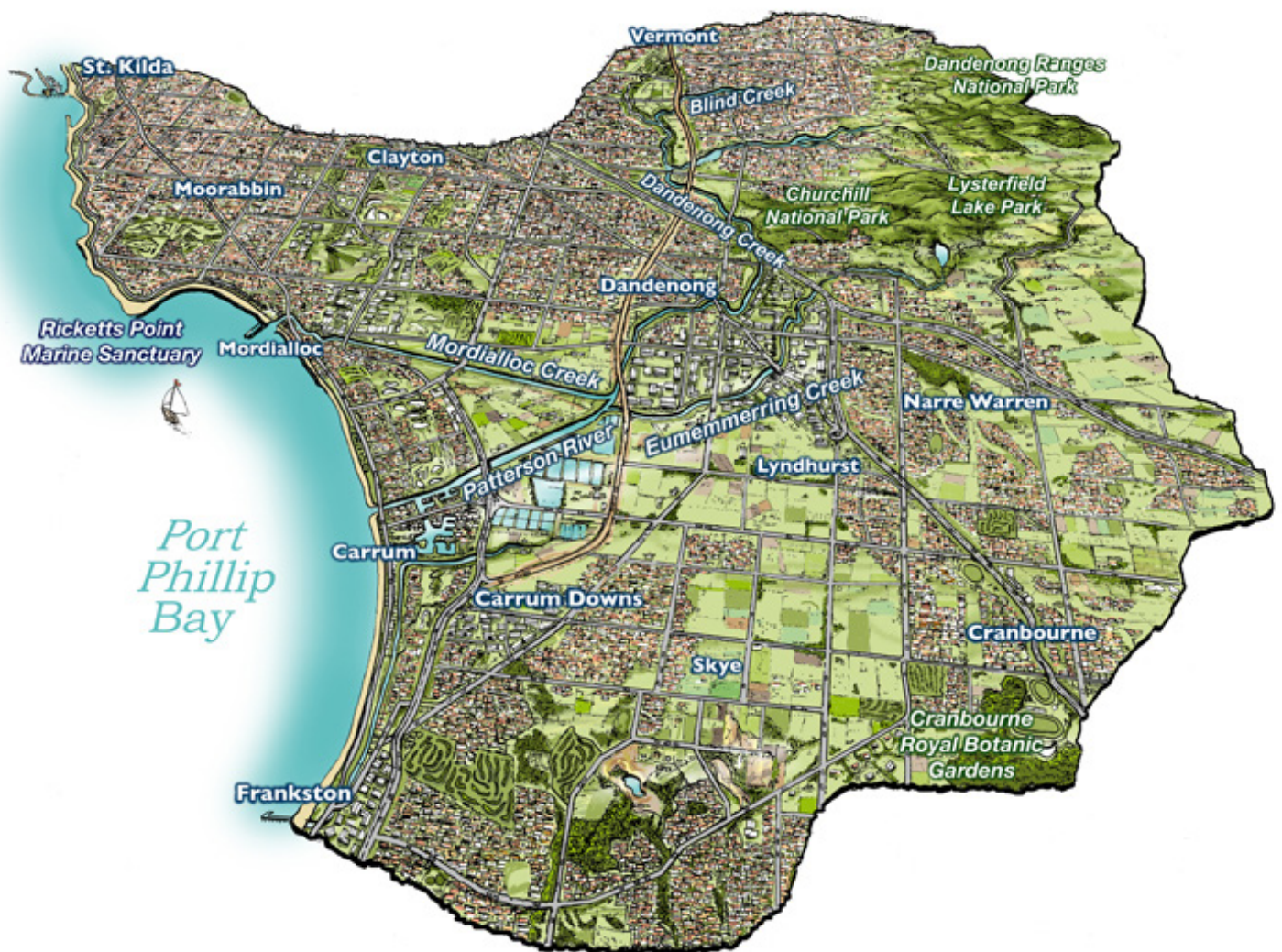


Living Links is working to create spaces where people can connect with nature close to home

Region

Living Links covers roughly 85,500 hectares in Melbourne's south-east, which is largely defined by the Dandenong Creek catchment. It extends from the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges in the north-east, across to St Kilda in the north-west, and along the Port Phillip Bay coastline down to Frankston in the south. In addition to Melbourne's renowned bayside beaches, natural treasures include Braeside Park, Lysterfield Lake, Jells Park, the Dandenong Valley Parklands and the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne. Urban areas cover around 60% of the catchment, while 30% is used for agriculture and about 10% retains natural vegetation cover.

This Living Links region is a vibrant hub of economic, cultural and recreational activity, supporting thriving business and industrial sectors that are among the strongest in Australia. It is home to a diverse population of around 1.5 million people, and infrastructure is developing rapidly to keep pace with the area's growing population. Living Links is working to retain and protect the natural values of the region in the face of continuing development, to enable this region to continue being one of the most liveable parts of one of the world's most liveable cities.



Artist's impression of the Living Links region

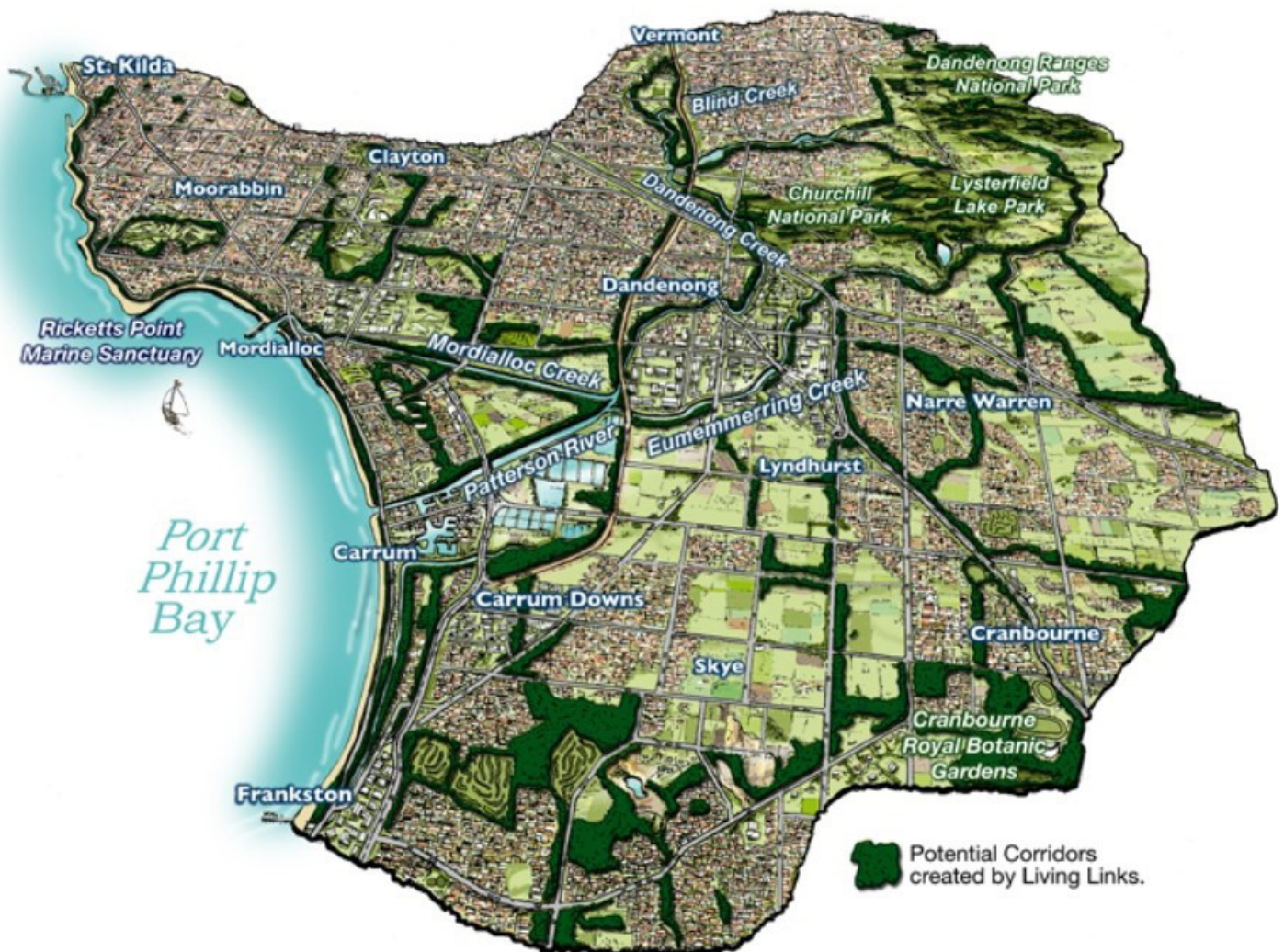
Vision

An urban web of green where people and nature connect

Living Links aims to create a “web” or network of “green” or “natural” corridors where native plants and animals can flourish. Corridors provide vital habitat and allow for migration and gene flow, boosting resilience of biodiversity over the longer term.

Corridors and natural spaces also provide places for people to play, rest and move through the landscape whilst enjoying the benefits of connecting with nature.

Living Links places particular emphasis on regional-scale corridors that connect across the broader landscape. However, it also recognises the importance of smaller corridors and habitat patches at the local scale, as these are often the building blocks from which larger corridors are formed.



Artist's impression of potential corridors created by Living Links

Role

Living Links pursues its vision by building the capacity of its members and supporting them to work collaboratively on joint initiatives that achieve more strategic and effective outcomes than could be accomplished by working alone.

Being involved in Living Links helps our partners to deliver their respective objectives for environmental and human wellbeing, and adds value by putting their achievements into the context of a bigger picture.

This 'bigger picture' has a geographic dimension, as well as an inter-disciplinary dimension, whereby complementary outcomes are achieved across different sectors such as environment, community development and human health and wellbeing.

Living Links:

- Plans, coordinates and delivers cross-tenure projects that improve habitat and build ecological and community connections across the landscape.
- Provides opportunities to coordinate and connect works, and a forum to share collective knowledge.
- Works with Traditional Owners and incorporates their goals and aspirations for participation in natural resource management into Living Links activities.



Djirri Djirri dancers sharing traditional Indigenous culture at a Living Links event

Partners

Living Links is a collaboration between numerous organisations and community groups, including:

- City of Bayside
- City of Casey
- City of Greater Dandenong
- City of Kingston
- City of Knox
- City of Maroondah
- City of Monash
- City of Whitehorse
- Frankston City Council
- Yarra Ranges Shire Council
- Melbourne Water
- South East Water
- Parks Victoria
- VicRoads
- Bushwalking Victoria
- Conservation Volunteers Australia
- Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority (PPWCMA)

The PPWCMA coordinates Living Links on behalf of the partner organisations by convening a Coordination Committee, managing the project's finances and employing project staff who lead project delivery, reporting and promotion.



The Living Links Coordination Committee has representatives from many organisations

How we will achieve our vision

The Living Links' Vision centres around three key goals. These goals and our plan to achieve them are outlined below.

1. A web of green

Goal: The region supports an interconnected network of high-quality natural spaces and associated recreational assets.

Linked natural spaces are more likely to support native biodiversity than smaller, disconnected patches. Linked recreational trails make it easier for people to access and enjoy these spaces too.

We will do this by:

- Improving the extent, quality and connectivity of natural spaces across the region.
- Expanding the network of recreational trails and ensuring these are adjoined by high-quality, biodiverse natural areas wherever possible.

Measures of success:

- Activity leveraged through Living Links, including funding and number of projects
- The location and amount of on-ground work achieved
- Number of partners delivering projects
- Increased length of vegetated recreational trails (km)
- Increased number of regional trails (i.e. spanning >1 municipality)
- Increased canopy cover across the Living Links region (%)
- Increased proportion of region (or number of houses) within 400m 'walkable catchment' of public open green space (%)
- Net gain in the overall extent and condition of natural habitats as measured by 'Change in Suitable Habitat'



Scouts taking part in a National Tree Day planting

2. People are connected to nature

Goal: The community values, uses and actively cares for natural spaces (and associated recreational assets) across the region.

A strength of Living Links is the opportunity it offers to connect with a large number of people living and working within Melbourne's south-east. By helping people to connect with nature, we hope to not only improve their individual health and wellbeing, but also to increase support and engagement in environmental stewardship as a flow-on effect. Building community understanding of Indigenous culture and knowledge is an important aspect of this work.

We will do this by:

- Providing havens where people can easily and regularly connect with nature in their own local area.
- Providing programs and activities to increase community awareness/appreciation of environmental values, and offering opportunities to get actively involved in their care.
- Providing opportunities to share Traditional Owner knowledge with the community and stakeholders.
- Increasing the number of community groups and education institutions actively involved in environmental restoration, protection and enhancement activities.
- Increasing community participation in environmental monitoring, evaluation and reporting (e.g. through citizen science).

Measures of success:

- Number of community engagement and education events and attendance at these events
- Number of Traditional Owner knowledge-sharing opportunities
- Number of schools actively involved in the Living Links schools program
- Increased visitation rates
- Increased proportion of residents that visit natural open space on a regular basis (%)
- Increased proportion of residents that value connecting with nature (as per survey responses)
- Increased number of people engaged in volunteering activities to protect / improve natural open spaces (or number of volunteer hours)



Communities value the spaces they use regularly, so outdoor recreation activities are a key opportunity for increasing environmental awareness

3. Urban nature is valued and resourced

Goal: Government and stakeholders see urban nature (and associated recreational assets) as a high priority for support and investment.

As a collective of organisations with a shared vision, Living Links has a strong voice to advocate for investment.

We will do this by:

- Advocating for best-practice environmental management across the Living Links region.
- Promoting Living Links to policy and decision-makers (e.g. Councillors, MPs) to seek their support.
- Securing government, corporate and private sector investment and in-kind support for Living Links projects.

Measures of success:

- Funding secured to deliver projects (\$)
- Number of influential figures / decision-makers offering public endorsement of Living Links



Sarah Maclagan (Living Links Coordinator),
Gabrielle Williams MP and David Buntine (PPWCMA CEO) at the Discover Dandenong Creek Festival

How we will track our progress

We will monitor our progress towards our goals on an annual basis. During each year we will collect the monitoring data noted below each of our three goals. We will review this data as part of the annual review and use it to inform our directions for the coming year.

We will also publish an annual snapshot to highlight our collective achievements and any key advances made during the year.

Complimentary programs

There are a range of other strategic programs and initiatives occurring across the Dandenong Creek catchment, Metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria that Living Links is contributing to. To see the latest list, please visit livinglinks.com.au/about/complimentary-programs

Living Links partners





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