



Living Links Strategic Plan 2025 - 2035

A connected network of thriving natural spaces
where people are engaged with nature

Traditional owner acknowledgement

The Living Links partners respectfully acknowledge the Bunurong, and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and water of the Dandenong Creek catchment.

We pay our deepest respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise and respect the continued cultural and spiritual connections that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with land and water they have cared for and protected for thousands of generations.

We demonstrate our ongoing commitment to reconciliation through our partnerships and engagement with Traditional Owners and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as we work together to manage land and water now and into the future, while maintaining and respecting cultural and spiritual connections.

Living links Strategic Plan 2025-2035
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Introduction

Living Links is a collaborative program with a vision to create:

*“A connected network of thriving natural spaces
where people are engaged with nature.”*

Through the protection, enhancement and connection of parks, reserves, creeks, green corridors and other natural spaces across the Dandenong Creek catchment in Melbourne’s south-east, the program aims to make the catchment a world-class urban ecosystem. This will strengthen biodiversity and make it easier for people to regularly connect with nature. Over the next ten years, Living Links will foster collaboration to achieve the following three goals:

1. A connected
network of thriving
natural spaces

2. Community
engagement with
nature

3. Urban nature
stewardship

A three-year rolling action plan, coordinated by Melbourne Water, guides the work of the partnership and is delivered through strong and ongoing collaboration between Living Links partners and the community-



Figure 1: Dandenong Creek, Bayswater. Image credit, Melbourne Water

Background

Living Links was established in 2006 as a collaboration between government agencies, environmental groups, and community organisations. The aim was simple: work together to protect, connect, and enhance natural spaces across the Dandenong Creek catchment.

It's a large-scale, long-term program designed not only to improve the environment but to help people connect with nature—especially important in Melbourne's urban southeast.

Over the past decade, Living Links has:

- Planted more than 1.4 million plants.
- Helped restore 1,400 km of vegetation along waterways.
- Engaged volunteers for more than 170,000 hours of environmental work.
- Secured \$2.6 million in funding (in the past five years).
- Developed an interactive online masterplan identifying key habitat corridors.

This builds on the legacy of collaborative work spanning the decades prior by local councils, government agencies, and passionate community groups.



Figure 2: Dandenong Creek, Bayswater. Image credit, Melbourne Water

Role of Living Links

Living Links brings together partners to protect and enhance biodiversity, and plan more connected, resilient green spaces, that provides opportunities for people to engage with nature. Through collaboration, partners achieve greater environmental and community outcomes than they could alone.

Efforts focus on improving the health of green corridors, waterways, and natural areas across the region, embedding biodiversity-sensitive design into land management, strengthening ecosystem resilience, and fostering community stewardship.

Partners work together to:

- Facilitate coordination and knowledge sharing to align environmental efforts and amplify collective impact.
- Deliver cross-tenure projects that improve habitat and build ecological and community connections across the landscape.
- Support Traditional Owners' self-determined goals in natural resource management and respecting their desired level of involvement in Living Links activities.
- Advocate for increased investment and support for natural resource management and the implementation of biodiversity-sensitive access trails.



Figure 3: Living Links committee members at Myuna Wetlands. Image credit, Melbourne Water.

Partners

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

- Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- City of Bayside
- City of Casey
- City of Frankston
- City of Greater Dandenong
- City of Kingston
- City of Knox
- City of Maroondah
- City of Monash
- City of Whitehorse
- Field Naturalist Club of Victoria
- Greater Dandenong Environment Group
- Melbourne Water
- Parks Victoria
- South East Water
- Suburban Rail Loop Authority
- Yarra Ranges Shire Council

Other partners occasionally provide input for relevant projects, including: the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), Holmesglen TAFE, Melbourne and Federation Universities, Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Bushwalking Victoria, Department of Transport and Planning, Eastlink, Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne, Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust, Conservation Volunteers Australia, community volunteer and 'Friends of Groups'.

Traditional owner voice

Aligning with the [Port Phillip and Western Port Regional Catchment Strategy](#), Living Links recognises Traditional Owners as a key 'voice' for waterways and Country with fundamental roles and influence in planning, decision making and action in land, biodiversity and water management.

Living Links will support Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to achieve their self-determined aspirations for the Dandenong Creek Catchment.

Dandenong Creek Catchment

The Dandenong Creek catchment spans approximately 87,000 hectares across Melbourne's southeast, centred around the Dandenong Creek. The catchment area includes forests, farmland, reclaimed swampland and urban areas. Urban areas make up about 60% of the catchment, agricultural land accounts for 30% and 10% retains natural vegetation

The catchment features a number of natural spaces, loosely connected by green corridors primarily along waterways, spread across ten local government areas. It stretches from the Dandenong Ranges in the northeast, to St Kilda in the northwest and down the Port Phillip Bay coastline to Frankston.

Green corridors and waterways serve more than just ecological functions, they also support:

- Cultural values of Traditional Owners, the Bunurong and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.
- Human health and wellbeing benefits through access to nature.
- Urban cooling.
- Agricultural industries such as viticulture, horticulture, and livestock production.
- Tourism, cycling, walking and other recreational activities.

Environmental values

The Dandenong Creek catchment supports diverse native biodiversity and provides significant habitat for a wide range of species.

Over 295 bird species have been recorded in the region, including the endangered Swift Parrot, Painted Button-quail and Far Eastern Curlew, the threatened Australian Bittern, Blue-billed duck, Powerful Owl, and over eight

international migratory birds including the Sharp-tailed and Curlew Sandpipers. Several endangered species include the New Holland Mouse and the Southern Brown Bandicoot. Fish populations are limited by barriers to movement, however the nationally significant Dwarf Galaxias can still be found here, along with threatened frog species like the Growling Grass Frog and Southern Toadlet. Platypus are present in upper catchment areas, as are the regionally threatened Lyrebird, the threatened Broad Toothed Rat and the Short-beaked Echidna, Common wombat, Swamp wallaby and Eastern Grey Kangaroo. The Dandenong Creek is also home to the endangered Swamp Skink and vulnerable Glossy Grass Skink. Macroinvertebrate species numbers are low due to poor water quality from the expansion of urban and industrial areas.



Figure 4: Dandenong Creek. Image credit, Melbourne Water.

Vegetation of higher value is found in the forested upper catchment and in the larger regional parks and wetlands along the Dandenong Creek.

The key natural spaces within the catchment include:

- Dandenong Ranges National Park
- Churchill National Park
- Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands (Ramsar-listed)
- Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve
- Lysterfield Lake and Park
- Baluk Willam Nature Conservation Reserve
- Tirhatuan Wetlands
- Jells Park
- Dandenong Police Paddocks
- Dandenong Valley Parklands
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne
- Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust
- Braeside Park
- Birdsland Reserve

Environmental challenges and opportunities

Environmental challenges in the Dandenong Creek catchment include:

- Removal and fragmentation of native vegetation and habitats due to expanding urbanisation and development.
- Vegetation decline and dieback due to weed invasion, drought stress, soil and plant pathogens, changes in hydrology, lack of ecological/cultural burning; insect attack and damage caused by introduced deer and rabbits.
- Water quality decline from polluted industrial discharge, litter, road and agricultural runoff, changes in hydrology, and deer wallowing.
- Predation of native wildlife by introduced cats and foxes and competition from the Indian Myna and Noisy Minor.
- High volumes of stormwater causing waterway erosion due to increasing

impervious surfaces and increasing frequency of storm events from climate change.

- The urban heat island effect and the compounding impacts of climate change.

Due to these challenges, protecting and enhancing natural spaces in the Dandenong Creek catchment is increasingly important.

Opportunities and collaborative responses to these challenges include:

- Securing existing remnant bushland areas for long term protection.
- Revegetation to create habitat that connects key natural spaces.
- Daylighting and naturalisation of drains to restore more natural function and aquatic habitat along waterways.
- Preserving remnant bushland and revegetation to connect waterways and natural areas.
- Understanding and managing native vegetation dieback.
- Implementation of planning scheme controls to reduce further clearing of vegetation.
- Encouraging nature-strip and backyard planting for pollinators and wildlife.
- Management of industry land use and discharge.
- Pest plant and animal control programs to reduce impacts on bushland and wildlife.
- Reduction of hard surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff.
- Partnering with research institutions to understand management practices required to ensure long-term ecological resilience and liveability amid ongoing urban development.

Strategic priorities

The collaboration's primary goal is to protect, enhance, and connect native habitats to support wildlife movement and ecological resilience. This includes the creation of key biodiversity corridors that not only strengthen habitat connectivity but also foster meaningful connections between communities and nature.

This aligns with other key regional strategies and plans which seek to improve the resilience of Melbourne's urban green spaces and biodiversity through targeted, site-specific interventions, including:

- [Healthy Waterways Strategy, 2018 – 2028](#), Melbourne Water, - long-term vision and management framework for managing the health of waterways in the Port Phillip and Westernport region.
- [Co-Designed Catchment Program - Dandenong Catchment Region, 2018 – 2028, Melbourne Water](#) - co-designed framework for managing waterways in the Dandenong catchment.
- [Port Phillip and Western Port Regional Catchment Strategy 2021](#) - provides a broader framework for integrated catchment management.
- [Port Phillip and Western Port Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan 2024 – 2028](#), Melbourne Water - guides biodiversity protection efforts in collaboration with partner agencies and the community.
- [Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037, DEECA](#), - Victoria's plan to stop the decline of our native plants and animals and improve our natural environment.
- [Melbourne Biodiversity Network Strategic Plan](#), 2024, Office/University of Melbourne - aims to increase the resilience and better connect and repair bio-corridors across Melbourne.



Figure 5: Hardy Creek, Sherbrook Forest. Image credit, Vivien Freshwater.

Priority corridors

Eighteen priority corridors for management have been identified in the '[Living Links: Mapping The Gaps Report](#)', (RMIT and Office), 2020. These corridors are categorised as High, Medium, or Lower Priority, based on the following attributes:

- existing waterways,
- connection to existing corridors and remnant ecologies,
- walking/cycling/public transport accessibility,
- strategic location,
- diversity of ecologies, and
- investment opportunities.

Priority corridors are assessed based on ecological significance, key segments, and regional connectivity, with an emphasis on those within the Regional Catchment Strategy Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan area (see Figure 7).

Additional focus areas include enhancing habitat quality and connectivity along major green corridors, waterways, and trails that promote nature engagement, with a commitment to sustainable trail development that preserves environmental values.

The Living Links Priority Corridors - Opportunities and Gaps: [Appendix 1](#) contains a summary table with detailed descriptions of the 'Mapping the Gaps' corridors and the attributes used for prioritisation. The corridors are classified by priority as outlined below:

High Priority Corridors: Ferny Creek, Churchill and Lysterfield Park, Hallam Valley, Boggy Creek, Yarraman and Mile Creek, Mordialloc Creek, and Dingley-Dandenong Bypass Trail. Additional high priority creeks identified for the strategic plan are the Bungalook and Tarralla Creeks, and the Dandenong Creek as the spine of the Living Links Partnership.

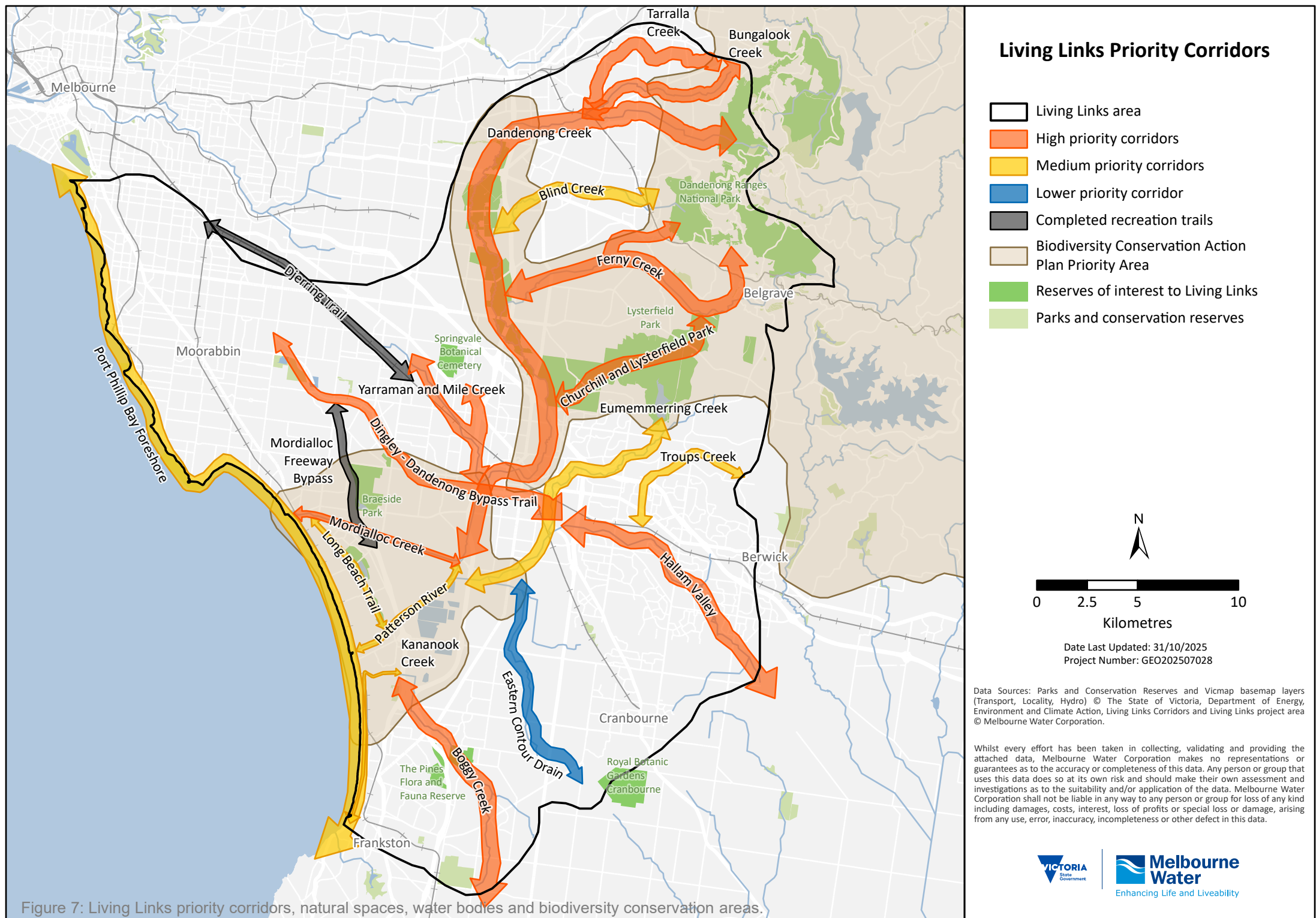
Medium Priority Corridors: Blind Creek, Eumemmering Creek, Troups Creek, Long Beach Trail, Port Phillip Bay Foreshore, Patterson River, and Kananook Creek.

Lower Priority Corridors: Eastern Contour Drain and the completed recreation trails of Mordialloc Bypass, and Djerring Trails.

This targeted approach enables partners to focus efforts where they can achieve the greatest impact and guiding resource allocation for the program. Additional factors influencing project prioritisation include; partner priorities, community values, and the availability of funding and resources.



Figure 6: Students tree planting at Tirhatuan Reserve. Image credit, Melbourne



Data Sources: Parks and Conservation Reserves and Vicmap basemap layers (Transport, Locality, Hydro) © The State of Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Living Links Corridors and Living Links project area © Melbourne Water Corporation.

Whilst every effort has been taken in collecting, validating and providing the attached data, Melbourne Water Corporation makes no representations or guarantees as to the accuracy or completeness of this data. Any person or group that uses this data does so at its own risk and should make their own assessment and investigations as to the suitability and/or application of the data. Melbourne Water Corporation shall not be liable in any way to any person or group for loss of any kind including damages, costs, interest, loss of profits or special loss or damage, arising from any use, error, inaccuracy, incompleteness or other defect in this data.



How we will achieve our vision

Living Links will foster collaboration to achieve the following three goals:

Goal 1: A connected network of thriving natural spaces

Protecting and expanding interconnected natural areas while prioritising biodiversity that supports; healthy ecosystems and habitat, enables wildlife movement, and boosts resilience to threats like disease, climate change, and impacts of urbanisation.

Actions

We will do this by:

- Protecting, enhancing and connecting remnant native vegetation across the catchment, prioritising key corridors and areas included in the Port Phillip and Western Port Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan and the Healthy Waterways Strategy.
- Prioritising habitat corridors and riparian vegetation linked to Dandenong Creek and connect them to other key conservation areas in the catchment.
- Development and implementation of habitat corridor and biolink management plans.
- Targeted weed control and revegetation in priority parks, reserves and riparian zones.
- Supporting restoration of more natural hydraulic regimes, instream and wetland habitat condition and water quality.
- Continued collaboration with the: Peri-Urban Weed Management Partnership, Peri Urban Deer Control Program, and Eastern Region Pest Animal Network.
- Supporting biodiversity resilience research, ensuring adaptive, evidence-based bushland management aligned with emerging climate science, including Climate Research Plots.
- Protecting the Port Phillip Bay Foreshore Reserve.
- Development and implementation of creek daylighting and naturalisation projects, including: Tarralla, and Eumemmerring Creeks.
- Investigating opportunities for additional priority creek naturalisation projects to be resourced, including: Dandenong, Mile, Mordialloc and Dingley Creeks.
- Implementation of the *Enhancing our Dandenong Creek Program*.

Measures of success

Based on past annual achievements, detailed in [Appendix 2](#), we aim to exceed the following targets over the next 10 years (2025-2035):

- 4,400 hectares of native vegetation protected or improved (including weed control).
- 230 hectares of native vegetation established.
- 1,760 kilometres of riparian vegetation enhanced or established.
- Additional aspirational measures and targets for future consideration are outlined in the additional measures of success [Appendix 3](#) and the [Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan 2024-28](#)

Goal 2: Community engagement with nature

To connect people in Melbourne's south-east with nature, aiming to enhance wellbeing while fostering environmental stewardship, and educating and inspiring the community to value and actively care for biodiverse natural spaces.

Actions

We will do this by:

- Providing local accessible green spaces where people can easily and regularly connect with nature.
- Greening priority areas to promote health and well-being, and urban cooling.
- Delivering environmental programs and activities to increase community awareness, understanding, involvement and appreciation of environmental values (i.e. Dandenong Creek Festival, National tree day planting events).
- Understanding Traditional Owners self-determined aspirations for the Dandenong Creek catchment and providing support to achieve these when requested.
- Supporting community participation in environmental restoration, protection and enhancement activities (including Waterwatch, Citizen Science waterway monitoring, TAFE student volunteer days, tree planting activities and supporting 'Friends of' Groups.).
- Using the Living Links website and additional platforms (such as, the Victorian Environment Friends Network and social media) to educate communities and celebrate Living Links achievements.
- Increasing community and research institution's participation in

environmental monitoring, evaluation and reporting (e.g. through citizen science, research partnerships).

- Embedding messages of environmental stewardship into community initiatives and projects.
- Advocating to involve community in decision-making.
- Supporting schools, kindergarten groups, and other community organisations to care for the environment and learn about biodiversity.
- Sustainably expanding the recreation trail networks and green open spaces, whilst ensuring biodiversity values are protected and enhanced in the process.

Measures of success

Based on past annual achievements, detailed in [Appendix 2](#), we aim to exceed the following targets over the next 10 years (2025-2035):

- 15,000 people participating in natural resource management events and activities (1,500 per year).
- Delivering 40 community events (4 per year).
- 170,000 community volunteer hours for natural resource management, including Gardens for Wildlife (17,000 hours per year).

Goal 3: Urban nature stewardship

To advocate for increased investment in biodiversity to enhance environmental outcomes across the catchment, through stakeholder partnerships that secure funding and enable coordinated action.

Efforts are guided by evidence-based practice and research, with gaps identified and addressed to inform decision-making. Building adequate human and financial resources is essential to deliver priority actions.

Actions

We will do this through:

Advocacy and strategic engagement

- Advocate for investment from Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, State and Local Governments, corporations, and the community for actions aligned with the Living Links vision and goals.
- Promote biodiversity as a priority in government budget allocations.
- Engage in strategic planning processes (e.g. Healthy Waterways Strategy, Regional Catchment Strategy, council and agency plans) to advocate for priority actions and resources for the Dandenong Creek Catchment.

Funding and resources

- Apply for relevant grants (e.g. Urban Rivers and Catchments, Landcare, Peri Urban programs, Melbourne Water grants).
- Seek funding for staff and resources to coordinate activities and support volunteer groups.
- support community groups with grant writing and connections to funding bodies.

Monitoring and research

- monitor and report investment outcomes to ensure measurable environmental improvements.
- identify research needs and secure resources to address them.
- partner with research organisations to inform evidence-based actions.
- explore opportunities to develop and share geospatial data for use by Living Links partners.
- facilitate landscape-scale research and monitoring through the Living Links network.

Community engagement and communication

- inspire landholders to enhance environmental values on private land.
- support Friends Groups and community efforts to improve public natural spaces.
- maintain and enhance the Living Links website and interactive map to showcase success, guide investment, and highlight partner alignment and co-benefits.

Measures of success

Based on past annual achievements, detailed in [Appendix 2](#), we aim to exceed the following target over the next 10 years (2025-2035):

- Sustained growth in total investment over time to deliver actions in priority areas - an increase from \$2.6 million from the last Strategic Plan.

Living Links governance & coordination

Effective governance and coordination are central to the success of Living Links, ensuring strategic alignment, collaborative decision-making, and streamlined delivery across partner organisations. The following figure outlines the key levels of Living Links governance and the role that partners and community play.

Living Links Coordination Committee

Appointed by Melbourne Water under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, the Committee acts as a Board of Management, refreshed every three years and provides strategic direction, expert advice, financial and reporting oversight, funding allocation and stakeholder engagement.

Living Links Coordinator (Melbourne Water)

Within Melbourne Water's Catchment Partnerships team, the Coordinator supports the Living Links Coordination Committee with executive and strategic functions.

The Coordinator manages Strategic & Action Plan development and implementation, reporting, finances, partner engagement, communications and secures funding for the Coordinator Position and priority projects.

Partner organisations

The role of partners is to:

- * Lead/co-lead the delivery of on-ground initiatives and community engagement.
- * Align corridor actions with their organisational plans.
- * Work collaboratively with key stakeholders and other Living Links partners.

Community groups and volunteers

Contribute to restoration projects, monitoring, education, and stewardship.

Implementation, monitoring and review

Action plan

A three-year action plan will support the implementation of actions from 2025 to 2028. This will support the coordinated planning and delivery of actions by Living Links partners, subject to the availability of funding, alignment with partner commitments and annual budget cycles. Once this action plan has been implemented, a new action plan will be developed to guide the next three-year period.

How we will track our progress

We will monitor our progress towards achieving our goals on an annual basis. During each year, we will collect the monitoring data outlined under each of our three goals and track progress (see Attachment 3 for more detail). This data will be reviewed as part of our annual evaluation and used to inform planning and priorities for the following year.

We will publish an annual snapshot to highlight our collective achievements, and key milestones reached during the year. A more comprehensive report will be produced every three years to provide a more in-depth assessment of our progress.

Complementary programs

There are a range of other strategic programs and initiatives occurring across the Dandenong Creek catchment, Metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria to which Living Links is contributing. To see the latest list please visit [Living Links | Complementary Programs](#)



Figure 8: A Melbourne Water team member working on restoration along Blind Creek, Boronia. Image credit, Melbourne Water.

Living Links Partners

