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YCAN Submission on City of Yarra's Draft Nature Strategy 2020–2024

Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) is a growing, dynamic and award-winning community group, based in the City of Yarra, who want stronger action on climate change. Our members are ordinary people with families, work and study, but who are also passionate about ensuring a safe climate and sustainable future. YCAN is our way to take action into our own hands; we think globally but act locally.

The inter-relationship between the climate emergency and the extinction crisis is now well established. Natural areas, under threat from a heating climate, are habitat and refuge for many species — insect and reptiles, birds and bats, trees and grasses — in a highly fragmented urban landscape. They also act as important carbon sinks; thus their harm has a 'multiplier' effect in contributing to accelerating climate change. We have a moral obligation to protect natural areas and biodiversity for future generations, but such protection efforts also deliver tangible co-benefits for human wellbeing today. Natural areas are vital in creating a sense of place; spaces where we can seek respite, be active and renew our connection with nature and with each other. We wholeheartedly agree that urban nature has a critical role to play in the future liveability of cities ('Here's how to design cities where people and nature can both flourish', The Conversation, 24 October 2018). The benefits of creating new habitat in highly urban landscapes — creating habitat corridors, urban greening, improvements in stormwater management and care of urban waterways (to name a few) — are also all key responses to the climate crisis.

YCAN commends the City of Yarra for developing a comprehensive Nature Strategy that responds meaningfully to the 2019 IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

YCAN also commends the City of Yarra for highlighting the linkages between Nature and Biodiversity, Open Space, Environment and Sustainability, Urban Forestry, Heritage, Water Management, Planning and Urban Agriculture. The Nature Strategy recognises that effective protection and enhancement of biodiversity values requires integration with all the work of the Council.

From YCAN's perspective, Goal 1 is the most important and akin to an over-arching end sought to be achieved. In this context the other goals could be considered 'enablers', contributing to the delivery of the ultimate aspiration. Of the enablers, YCAN believes that Goal 3 has the potential to be most impactful. The relative importance of the goals, and hence the priority and resources assigned to them, could be better made out in the Nature Strategy. This would provide the community with a greater degree of confidence in the ability of Council to deliver on its aspiration.

YCAN has some specific suggestions for improvements to the Nature Strategy:

- The Strategy is in some parts aspirational rather than linked to explicit targets and goals. As an example, there is the opportunity for bolder ambition for increasing canopy cover and delivering new wildlife corridors. The City of Yarra could aim to achieve the 20% benchmark for cover of native vegetation within Council's open spaces;
- The Strategy should explicitly refer to principles of Biodiversity-sensitive Urban Design (as set out in the Conversation article referenced above);
- More detail could be provided to elaborate on the direction for the Nature Strategy regarding the Yarra Planning Scheme and Urban Design Strategy;
- The timeline for review of the Yarra Planning Scheme and clear goals for developers in increased urban greening (not as offsets) should be brought forward;



- The Strategy should address recommendations for improving links and interactions between the City of Yarra's Environment and Sustainability teams to achieve better outcomes for nature;
- The Strategy should include tangible actions to reduce killing of wildlife by domesticated animals;
- The Strategy should provide recommendations for improved communication with the community to enhance transparency of 'what is being done/where/why' under the Nature Strategy;
- Stronger actions are required to protect significant habitat trees on private land, or encouraging the growth in the stock of indigenous habitat trees on private land; and
- While the commitment to new staff to deliver on Goals 2 and 3 is pleasing, there is no new staff articulated in the actions under Goal 1 which appears to rely heavily on partnerships and outsourcing.

YCAN recognises that the Nature Strategy is a work in progress, and thanks the City of Yarra for the opportunity to provide feedback. We are so pleased that protection and enhancement of natural areas and biodiversity is seen as a Council priority and would be more than happy to answer any questions in relation to this submission.