



A new Green Wedge Management Plan for Yarra Ranges

Key Stakeholder Engagement Report
July 2026

Acknowledgement of Country



Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nation peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways.

We pay our respect to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region.

We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together.

Contents

- Introduction 2
- Project Timeline 3
- Stakeholder Engagement 4
- What we heard 5
 - Key Issues 5
 - Key Opportunities 9

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This report was developed with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support drafting, data analysis, and/or content development. All information has been reviewed for accuracy, relevance, and compliance with Council standards by responsible officers.

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yarraranges.vic.gov.au
mail@yarraranges.vic.gov.au
Phone: 1300 368 333

Introduction

A new Green Wedge Management Plan for Yarra Ranges.

Yarra Ranges is uniquely defined by its green wedge, which makes up approximately 95% of the municipality and plays a vital role in shaping the character, economy and environmental health of the region. The Yarra Ranges Green Wedge contains some of Victoria's most important forests, waterways and biodiversity assets, including water catchments that supply over half of Melbourne's drinking water.

Yarra Ranges Council's existing Green Wedge Management Plan (GWMP) was adopted in July 2010 and has been a major strategic policy document for the rural areas for the past 16 years. Since that time, many of the plan's actions have been implemented, contributing to improved management and understanding of the green wedge.

This new plan will identify the key values and features of the Yarra Ranges Green Wedge, including its landscapes, biodiversity, cultural heritage and productive uses. It will guide how land is used and developed in the future, using a range of planning controls as well as other programs and initiatives.

Community and stakeholder input is central to the development of the GWMP. The plan seeks to reflect the needs and aspirations of landowners, local businesses and the wider community, while also considering innovative and future-focused approaches to managing these important areas.

Through this work, Council aims to strengthen the long-term protection and sustainable use of the green wedge—supporting a resilient environment, a thriving local economy and a high quality of life across the Yarra Ranges.

Project Timeline



Background Research and Key Stakeholder Engagement



Prepare Discussion Paper



Discussion Paper Community Consultation



Prepare Draft GWMP Plan



Draft GWMP Community Consultation



Prepare Final GWMP



Adoption of Final Green Wedge Management Plan

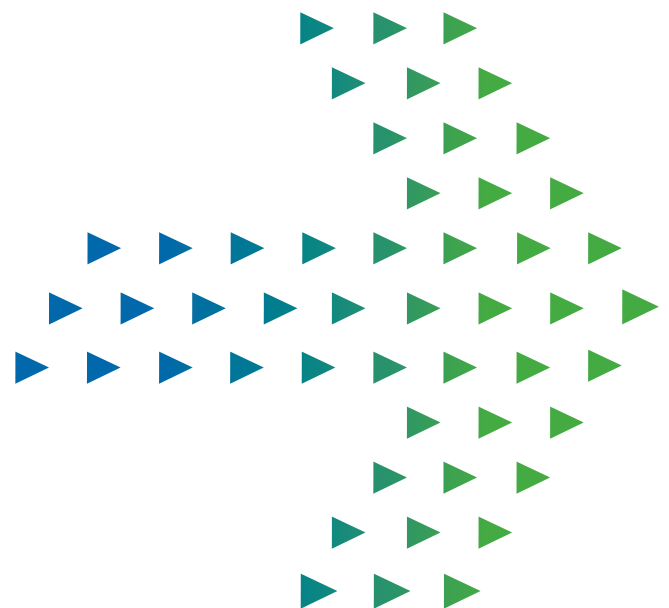


Stakeholder Engagement

The first phase of developing the new Green Wedge Management Plan involved discussions with key industry groups, key Council Advisory Committees, stakeholders and Traditional Owners. These stakeholders have highlighted a complex and evolving set of challenges and opportunities for the Green Wedge. Their insights point to a need for a more adaptive, coordinated, and future-focused approach to managing the Green Wedge, which will be explored in detail in the Green Wedge Management Plan Discussion Paper.

Who we spoke to

- Internal Review with relevant Council teams
- Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee
- Rural Advisory Committee
- Indigenous Advisory Committee
- Green Wedges Coalition
- Agriculture Victoria
- Wine Yarra Valley
- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- Yarra Valley Tourism (now Tourism East)
- Melbourne Water
- Agribusiness Yarra Valley



What we heard

Key Issues

Declining Agricultural Viability

A common theme across engagement is that agriculture in the Green Wedge is under significant pressure. This presents an opportunity to reflect on the future role of agriculture and its ongoing contribution to the area's landscape, economy, and identity.

What we heard:

- Rising input costs, increasing regulatory requirements, and competition from large-scale producers are eroding farm profitability.
- Demand for rural living has contributed to higher land values.
- Increasing pressures from climate related impacts.

***“Quality agricultural land is getting harder to find...
Entry costs are a barrier due to high price of land in the area.”***

“Lifestyle properties are increasing value of land dramatically.”

“The farm only pays the rates and gives us a place to live.”

Cultural Heritage Integration

There are gaps in understanding how to integrate Traditional Owner knowledge and perspectives in Green Wedge areas.

What we heard:

- Some stakeholders have limited understanding of cultural heritage requirements in the Green Wedge.
- Need for earlier and ongoing engagement with Traditional Owners.

***“Indigenous overlays and restrictions are not consistently
understood by landholders”***

“Planning system is not well set up to consider cultural heritage.”

What we heard

Key Issues

Land Use Conflict and Fragmentation

The interface between agricultural and residential (lifestyle) uses is creating increasing tension. These pressures are contributing to a gradual shift away from productive land use.

What we heard:

- Conflicts between farming activities and residential expectations.
- Reduced capacity to undertake normal farming practices.
- Fragmentation of agricultural land into smaller, less viable parcels.
- Limited recognition or protection of the “right to farm”.

“Conflicts between lifestyle properties and agriculture, complaints from neighbours making it very difficult for farmers.”

“Landuse conflicts - Conflicting lifestyles between residential and rural. Need to look at managing expectations, and prioritising the right to farm”.

Climate Change and Environmental Pressures

Climate variability and environmental challenges are intensifying.

What we heard:

- Increased frequency of drought, flood, and bushfire events.
- Ongoing water security challenges.
- Increasing pest and disease risks (biosecurity).
- Pressures on biodiversity and pollination systems.

“Threats to pollination, we are already seeing disease in bees.”

“Water security is essential for our industry.”

What we heard

Key Issues

Tourism Pressures and Constraints

Tourism is both a critical economic driver and a source of pressure on the Green Wedge. Balancing tourism growth with protection of environmental and landscape values is a key challenge.

What we heard:

- Significant growth in visitation anticipated for the region over the coming decade.
- Lack of accommodation in the Green Wedge to support overnight stays.
- Planning controls that prioritise agriculture and environmental values are limiting tourism development.
- Risk of inappropriate or dispersed tourism uses impacting rural character.

“Within 10 years the region’s visitation is set to double.”

“Patron and room caps... restricting viability of tourism.”

“Concentrate tourism uses in the towns, if we fill land between

Infrastructure and Service Limitations

Infrastructure gaps are affecting both economic activity and community wellbeing. These issues reduce the efficiency and resilience of the Green Wedge as a working landscape.

What we heard:

- Poor road quality and freight access.
- Lack of local services and workforce accommodation.
- Challenges for emergency services due to dispersed populations.

“Infrastructure needs to be suitable for increased use and visitation.”

“The current road network is not able to accommodate the predicted growth in visitation to the area.”

What we heard

Key Issues

Planning and Policy Alignment

Stakeholders highlighted a lack of clarity and alignment across policy and governance frameworks. This creates uncertainty for landholders and investors and limits coordinated action on shared challenges and innovation.

What we heard:

- Suggestions that schools and churches are inappropriate uses in the Green Wedge.
- Slow and complex approval processes, with frustrations over inconsistent interpretation of planning controls.
- Restrictions on essential agricultural infrastructure limiting ability to adapt to emerging practices such as protected cropping, automation, and vertical farming.
- Limiting climate adaptation responses, including changes to farming systems or renewable energy initiatives.

“We need a vision for how Council is going to support agriculture.”

“Legislation is too slow to adapt and keep up with innovation.”

“State Government making things harder rather than supporting industry.”

Economic Imbalance: Private costs for broader benefit

There was some concern over the imbalance between who bears the cost of maintaining the Green Wedge and who benefits from it.

What we heard:

- Landholders, particularly farmers, play a key role in maintaining scenic landscapes, biodiversity values and the character that underpins tourism in the region.
- There is limited financial return for providing these wider public benefits, creating an unsustainable economic model.
- Landowners are wanting Government support in maintaining sustainable practices.

“Other businesses are profiting from the aesthetic... while farmers struggle.”

“If farms fail, the aesthetic of the region will be impacted... and tourism with it.”

What we heard

Opportunities

Strengthen Agricultural Futures

The Green Wedge presents an opportunity to redefine and support contemporary agriculture.

Opportunities to explore:

- Developing a clear agricultural vision and strategy.
- Supporting diversification (e.g. agritourism, value-added production).
- Enabling new and emerging farming practices.
- Strengthening protections for agricultural land and activities.
- There is a shared interest in exploring ways to support the long-term sustainability and resilience of local agriculture, ensuring it continues to play a meaningful role into the future.

Economic Viability and Local Value Creation

Support regarding economic viability of businesses in the Green Wedge.

Opportunities to explore:

- Strengthen regional branding and provenance.
- Consider opportunities to diversify and value add to increase the economic validity of agricultural land.

Sustainable Tourism

There is an opportunity to shape a more sustainable tourism future.

Opportunities to explore:

- Focusing on low-impact, high-value tourism.
- Exploring where accommodation uses are best located.
- Supporting farm-based experiences and local products.

What we heard

Opportunities

Climate Resilience and Adaption

The Green Wedge can play a key role in climate response.

Opportunities to explore:

- Supporting climate-resilient agricultural systems.
- Improving water management and security.
- Enabling renewable energy and emissions reduction.
- Integrating disaster risk reduction into planning.

Embedding Cultural Knowledge and Partnerships

There is interest in deeper collaboration with Traditional Owners.

Opportunities to explore:

- Embedding cultural perspectives into planning and land management.
- Supporting “Caring for Country” initiatives and sustainable practices.
- Enhancing cultural tourism and education.
- Formalising engagement processes.



What we heard

Opportunities

Environmental Stewardship and Biodiversity

There is strong support for strengthening environmental outcomes.

Opportunities to explore:

- Coordinated pest and weed management.
- Expansion of habitat corridors and revegetation.
- Setting measurable biodiversity targets.
- Supporting landholders to deliver environmental benefits.

Infrastructure and Local Economy

Improving infrastructure and services can support both productivity and liveability.

Opportunities to explore:

- Advocating for upgrades to transport and freight networks.
- Advocating for improved digital connectivity.
- Supporting local services and rural townships.
- Facilitating seasonal workforce accommodation.

Food Security and Local Systems

Food security emerged as an important and growing priority.

Opportunities to explore:

- Supporting local food production and distribution systems.
- Encouraging cooperative and shared infrastructure (e.g. processing hubs).
- Promoting community-based food initiatives.

Planning Reform Modernisation

There is support for a more responsive planning framework.

Opportunities to explore:

- Explore changes to planning controls to reflect modern practices.
- Explore potential to enable complementary uses that support farm viability.
- Providing clearer guidance and consistent decision-making.

