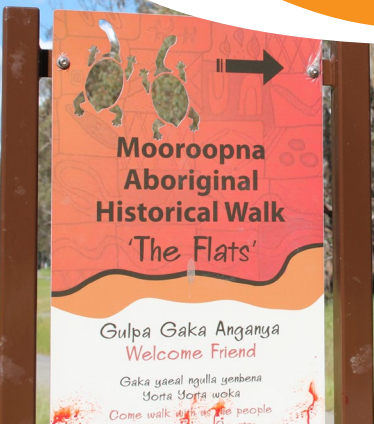




DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-28

# CONVERSATION REPORT

OCTOBER 2022



# RIVERCONNECT NETWORKS

We're all about  
collaborating –  
for more  
information visit  
[riverconnect.com.au](http://riverconnect.com.au)

**Department of Education  
and Training Victoria**

**Department of  
Environment Land Water  
and Planning**

**Goulburn Broken  
Catchment Management  
Authority**

**Goulburn Murray  
Landcare Network**

**Goulburn Valley Water**

**Goulburn Valley  
Environment Group**

**Greater Shepparton City  
Council**

**Greater Shepp Young  
Champions**

**Parks Victoria**

**Rumbalara Aboriginal  
Cooperative**

**Yorta Yorta Nation  
Aboriginal Corporation**

**Community  
Representatives**

**45 Kinders, Schools,  
Tertiary and alternative  
education Institutions**

Activities in the Park

Birdlife Murray Goulburn

Bohollow EnviroEd

Bohollow Wildlife Shelter

Burnanga Indigenous Fishing Club

Council Disability Advisory Committee

Cussen Park Advisory Committee

Ethnic Council

Fairley Leadership Program

FamilyCare disability support group

Friends of Gemmill's Swamp Mooroopna

Friends of the Australian Botanic Gardens Shepparton

GV Mountain Bike Club

Headspace

Into the Wild Education

Kaiela Arts

Lower Goulburn Wildlife Shelter

Native Fish Australia

Platypus Conservancy

Scouts Victoria

Shepparton Art Museum

Shepparton Camera Club

Shepparton Canoe Club

Shepparton Historical Society

Shepparton Mooroopna Urban Landcare Group

The Haven

The Lighthouse Project

Things of Spirit

Turtles Australia

Veolia

Victorian Fisheries Authority

Victoria Walks

Word and Mouth

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# ABOUT THE RIVERCONNECT DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2028

**Rivers and waterways are the arteries of our landscape.** They bring life to our regions, nourishing ecosystems that in turn provide communities with everything they need to sustain themselves.

This area is and has been cared for by the people and clans of the Yorta Yorta Nation for tens of thousands of years and today is **home to a culturally rich and diverse community.** Despite our widely differing backgrounds, a common element that unites us is that without the rivers, most of us would not live here.

In the past, the Shepparton-Mooroopna communities' appreciation of, and engagement with, the Goulburn and Broken Rivers have varied, famously *turning our back to the river*. The river systems were largely managed by agencies in isolation, with little connection between these managers or with the community – until the formation of RiverConnect.

RiverConnect is a wide reaching community government partnership program operating under the auspice of Greater Shepparton City Council and jointly funded by the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority. Since its inception in 2005, **RiverConnect has been pivotal in building appreciation for the significance of our river environment.**

By facilitating effective high-levels of collaboration and co-operation, the **partnership model** has enabled local government, land management agencies, Traditional Owners, educational organisations, stakeholders and community members to **come together to identify and action shared priorities.**

In the 5 years since the last strategy was prepared, a number of key changes occurred in relation to the RiverConnect area and its communities. Through initial discussions with the RiverConnect Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) and key stakeholders, these changes helped guide the formation of the new strategic plan and its actions.

**The RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2023-2028 refreshes the focus of the program.** This new plan has been developed to reflect the holistic nature of river systems, and the interconnected nature of the community's relationship with the waterways.

This strategic plan is not a typical organisational plan, reflecting the fact that RiverConnect is a network of organisations and individuals rather than being an organisation itself. The plan is not a blueprint with every future action fully detailed, however it offers direction and examples of actions.

RiverConnect undertook community consultation between 22 August and 30 September 2022 with Greater Shepparton residents. A total of 41 submissions were received. This was comprised of 34 individual, 6 group, and 1 youth art submission.

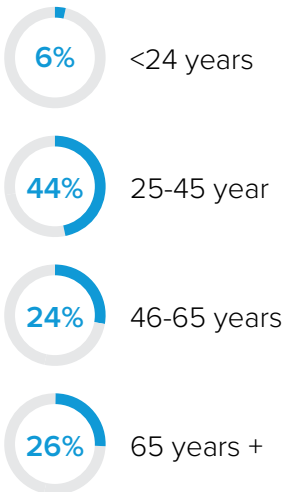
From public consultation feedback, partner strategic priorities and available funding opportunities, the RiverConnect IAC will develop **annual action plans** and corresponding targets.

**We thank all those who have collectively contributed to the formation of the RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2023- 2028** and look forward to making the necessary changes before seeking endorsement by Council in December 2022.

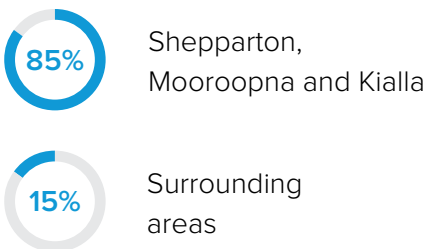
# CONSULTATION SUMMARY

## WHO WE HEARD FROM

### Age



### Towns



## WHAT WE HEARD

Top 3 Projects

### Large-scale

1. Implement RiverConnect Paths Master Plan
2. Create a river management plan
3. Support Traditional Owner Projects

### Medium-scale

1. Expand and strengthen relationships with target groups (including Traditional Owners, young people, those with a disability, newly arrived migrants, and multi-cultural/bilingual communities)
2. Provide advocacy to plans that relate to the river environment
3. Develop curriculum-linked resources

### Small-scale

1. Deliver engaging events for the community
2. Support environmental volunteers
3. Enable participation in river environment improvement activities

**The 6-week public consultation findings found that RiverConnect’s future plans reflected the community’s priorities strongly:**



RiverConnect is ‘by the people, for the people’

‘The aim to develop people’s knowledge and love of nature fits well with what the community wants’

The strategy ‘incorporates action and values for all ages, cultures and interest groups’

‘RiverConnect provides exposure and knowledge which empowers the community to enjoy, explore and embrace the wonderful nature, and environmental assets we have here in Greater Shepparton’

# CONSULTATION

RiverConnect has achieved positive results since its inception, with considerable outcomes achieved from the 2017-22 Strategic Plan. However, as a government and community partnership program, it is important to ensure the RiverConnect Strategic Plan represents the broader community aspirations for the RiverConnect program. To do this, RiverConnect undertook extensive consultation with the community between 22 August and 30 September 2022. The methods of engagement included:

- a media release, which attracted media attention from the Shepparton News and a radio interview with OneFM;
- a promotional billboard at the corner of Knight Street and Wyndham Street;
- a consultation webpage on Council's Shaping Greater Shepparton website with four options for online submissions;
- a PowerPoint presentation to provide information on the plan;
- one-on-one discussions at RiverConnect events;
- notification of public consultation in relevant newsletters;
- promotions on social media including both images and videos.

As part of the consultation, RiverConnect asked the community about the activities they enjoy in the river environment, and the spaces they often frequent. The online survey asked individuals and groups to prioritise each strategic priority as well as example activities and projects that had been identified. There was also an opportunity for the community to provide ideas and suggestions for actions beyond what the survey listed.

Submissions were invited via an online form. This could be completed as an individual, on behalf of a group, agency or organisation, or as an associate of a school. There was also an option to submit for consultation in the form of an art activity for young people.

## TIMELINE



### January to mid-March 2022

#### Review of RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2017-22

Determine extent of strategic plan review process.



### Mid-March to April 2022

#### Initial stakeholder discussions

Catchups with program funders and agency, organisation and community partners to determine key themes and potential actions.



### May to June 2022

#### Draft Strategic Plan 2023-28 development

Guided by feedback from initial stakeholder discussions and driven by the RiverConnect Implementation Advisory Committee.



### July to mid-August 2022

#### Draft Strategic Plan 2023-28 presentation to Council

Presentation to Council and recommendation to release plan for public consultation.



### 22 August to 30 September 2022

6-week community consultation period to test the approach applied to date, and identify any gaps and actions the community would like to include.



### October 2022

#### Final Strategic Plan 2023-28 development

Integration of feedback from public consultation period and creation of Conversation Report document.



### November to December 2022

#### Council review and endorsement of the RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2023-28

# WHO DID WE HEAR FROM?

A total of 41 submissions were completed. This was comprised of:

- 34 individual responses
- 6 group submissions:
  - Undera Angling Club
  - Shepparton Art Museum
  - Goulburn Valley Mountain Bike Club
  - Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project
  - Greater Shepparton Disability Advisory Committee
  - Greater Shepparton Positive Ageing Committee
- One art submission from attendees at the GOTAFE YouthFest.
- Two community group endorsements from Goulburn Valley Environment Group and Shepparton Mooroopna Urban Landcare Group were also received.

Of those individuals who submitted through the Shaping Greater Shepparton online submission form, 85% resided in Shepparton, Mooroopna and Kialla, and the remaining from Greater Shepparton townships including Tatura and Katandra.

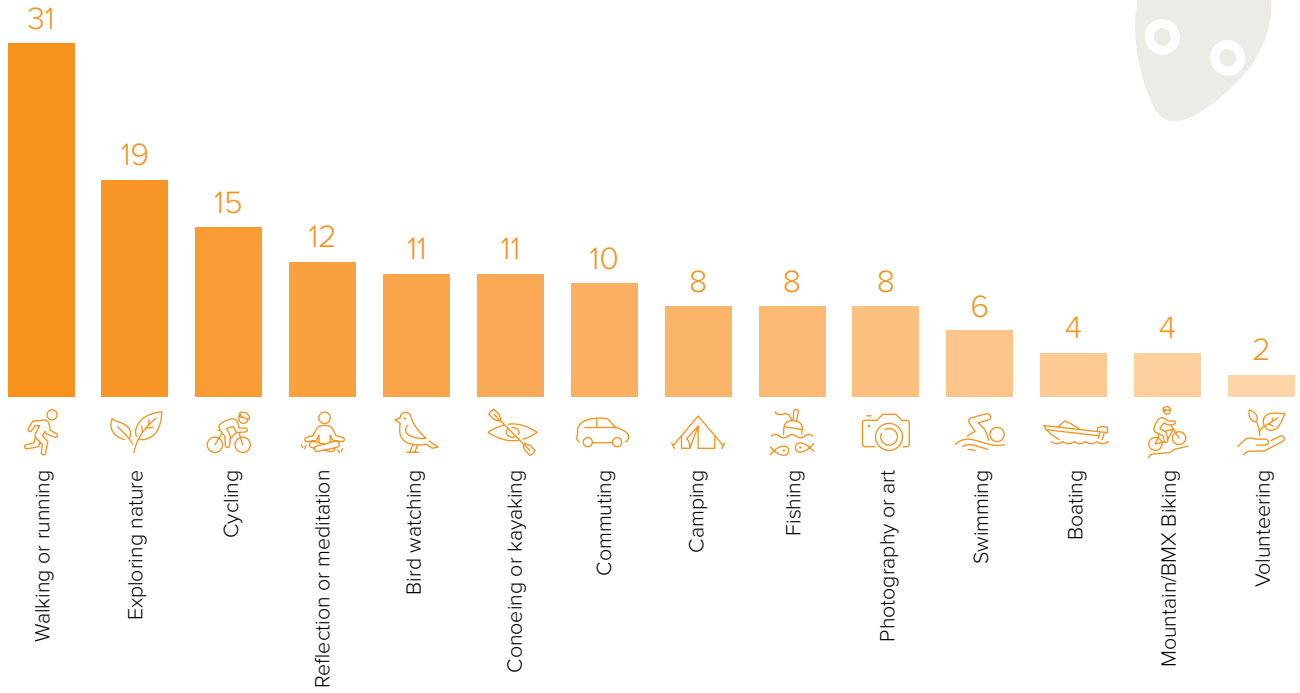
Almost half (44%) of the individual responses were between the ages of 25-45 years of age, followed by 26% who responded as 65 years and older, 24% 46-65 years, and 6% who reported as under the age of 24 years.



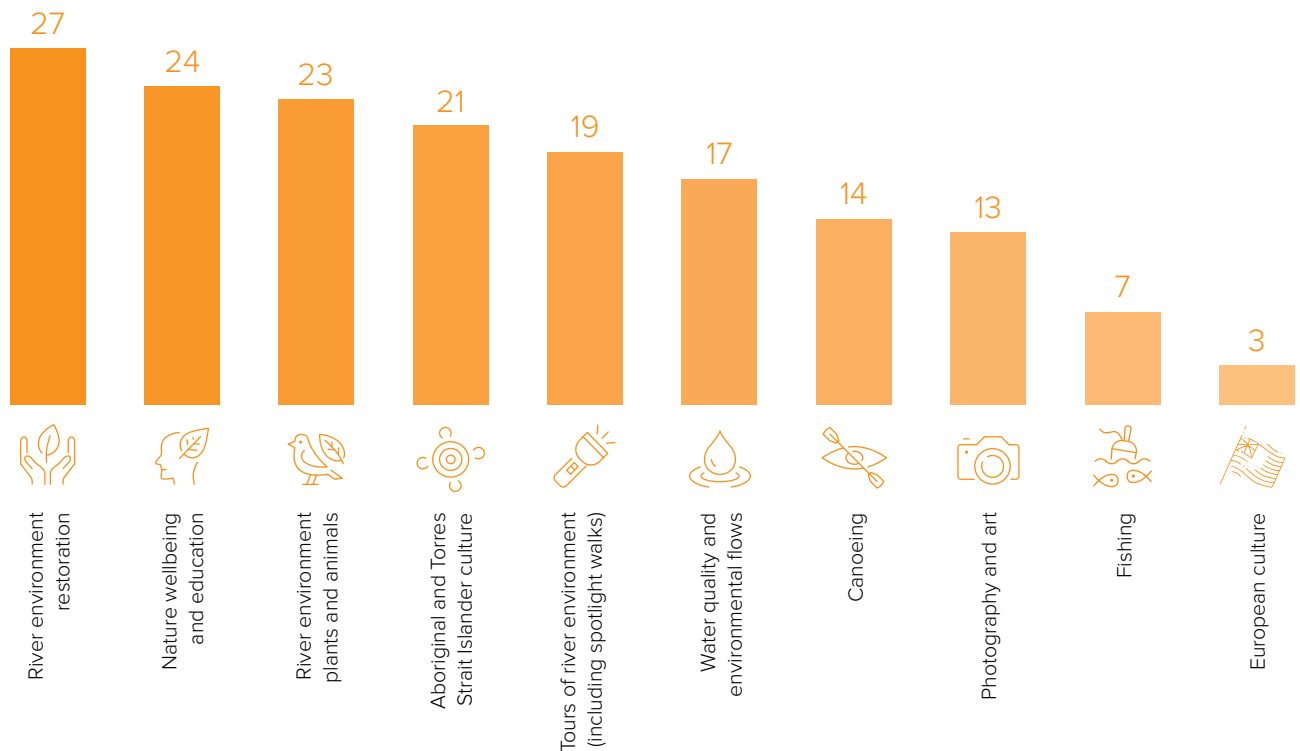
# WHAT WE HEARD



## What activities do you enjoy in the local river environment?



## What topics of events and activities are you most interested in participating in or learning more about?





## PLACES AND SPACES

A number of questions were asked about the communities use of the river environment, and how frequently they access these spaces. From these responses, the top six uses of these spaces are walking or running (21%), exploring nature (13%), cycling (10%), reflection or meditation (8%), birdwatching (7%), and canoeing or kayaking (7%).

Individuals were asked what river areas they access and how frequently they visit.

From these responses, the top three most visited places are:

### Everyday:

- 1 18%  
Victoria Park Lake, Shepparton
- 2 9%  
Boulevard Bush Reserve, North Shepparton
- 3 9%  
Shared path network along beside the Goulburn and Broken Rivers

### Once a month:

- 1 62%  
The Flats, Mooroopna
- 2 62%  
Boulevard Bush Reserve, North Shepparton
- 3 59%  
The confluence (meeting) of the Goulburn and Broken Rivers

### 3-4 times per year:

- 1 21%  
Shared path network along beside the Goulburn and Broken Rivers
- 2 12%  
Australian Botanic Gardens Shepparton
- 3 12%  
Jordan's Bend, North Shepparton

### Once a year:

- 1 47%  
Victoria Park Lake, Shepparton
- 2 35%  
Shared path network along beside the Goulburn and Broken Rivers
- 3 18%  
Reedy Swamp, North Shepparton

### Never visited or unaware of location:

- 1 68%  
Kaieltheban Park, Mooroopna
- 2 65%  
J.A. Douglas Park, Mooroopna
- 3 50%  
Stuart's Reserve, North Shepparton

### Most aware of or had visited before:

- 1 94%  
Australian Botanic Gardens Shepparton
- 2 94%  
Shared path network along beside the Goulburn and Broken Rivers
- 3 76%  
Boulevard Bush Reserve, North Shepparton

## EVENT AND ACTIVITIES OF INTEREST

To help RiverConnect plan their events and other opportunities for the community to participate in, individuals were asked to select five topics they are most interested in participating in or learning more about.

### The results showed that the top five topics were:

1. River environment restoration activities such as tree planting, rubbish clean-ups, weeding and habitat building,
2. Nature wellbeing and education
3. River environment plants and animals
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture
5. Tours of the river environment.



## VISION, PURPOSE AND VALUES

Groups and agencies were directly asked whether the current Vision, Purpose and Values represent RiverConnect. All responses were strongly agree or agree. Additionally, one comment noted that strong partnerships are a powerful aspect of RiverConnect’s vision.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

All responses received through this public consultation period assisted in evaluating the significance of each of RiverConnect’s Strategic Priorities.

Ranked in order of importance



**ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY**



**ENHANCE ACCESSIBILITY AND CARE OF THE RIVER**



**SHOWCASE THE RIVER ENVIRONMENT**



**INSPIRE THE EDUCATION SECTOR**



**IMPROVE HEALTH AND WELLBEING**



**NURTURE PARTNERSHIPS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE**

## EXAMPLE ACTIONS

In the RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2023-2028, a number of example actions and projects were identified and categorised depending on the scale of resourcing required to implement (i.e. time, funding, staffing, etc.). Respondents were asked to prioritise these depending on what they thought was most important for RiverConnect to focus on and the results are shown below.

### Large-scale projects

- Ranked in order of importance

  1. Implement RiverConnect Paths Master Plan
  2. Create a river management plan
  3. Support Traditional Owner projects
  4. Increase access in river environment
  5. Develop and install signage (virtual and physical)
  6. Partner with health sector to deliver a project linking health and wellbeing with nature
  7. Create a home for RiverConnect

### Medium-scale projects

- Ranked in order of importance

  1. Expand and strengthen relationships with target groups (including Traditional Owners, young people, those with a disability, newly arrived migrants, and multi-cultural/bilingual communities)
  2. Provide advocacy to plans that relate to the river environment
  3. Develop curriculum-linked resources
  4. Build educator network
  5. Compile access needs and priorities
  6. Facilitate outside curriculum opportunities for young people
  7. Link to eco-tourism opportunities

### Small-scale projects

- Ranked in order of importance

  1. Deliver engaging events for the community
  2. Support environmental volunteers
  3. Enable participation in river environment improvement activities
  4. Outreach to small towns and communities
  5. Creatively promote the RiverConnect program
  6. Tap into short-term study or work residents via onboarding process

## RIVER ENVIRONMENT ACCESSIBILITY

Within the RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2023-28 there is a Strategic Priority ‘Enhance Accessibility and Care of the River Environment’ alongside a Strategic Action ‘understand and realise flexible and inclusive water access’. In order to increase access in the river environment, the first step involves establishing priority areas of interest and investigating potential opportunities.

Both individuals and group respondents, as well as the Council Disability Advisory Committee and Positive Ageing Committee, were asked if they had any suggestions for increasing accessibility in the river environment (i.e. safety improvements, signage, path upgrades, boat ramps, etc.) and the results are summarised below. Notably signage was mentioned in almost 50% of submissions either in relation to directional wayfinding signage or informative interpretive signage. There was also one comment opposing easy accessibility to the river environment due to the environmental damage that it can facilitate.

<b>Signage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directional</li> <li>• Interpretive/informational</li> <li>• Use of QR codes</li> <li>• Auditory</li> </ul>
<b>Recreational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sitting/rest/multi-use spaces</li> <li>• Boat ramps</li> <li>• All abilities fishing jetties/platforms</li> <li>• Small jetties/landings/drop-in points for canoes/kayaks</li> </ul>
<b>Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakdown stigma</li> <li>• Lighting</li> <li>• Training sessions (snakes, swooping birds, not feeding wild animals)</li> </ul>
<b>Paths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider paths</li> <li>• Ramps for wheelchair access</li> <li>• Upgrades to remove steep inclines on pedestrian bridges</li> <li>• Seating</li> <li>• Path/track maintenance</li> <li>• Linkages</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tours (guided and self-guided)</li> <li>• Brochures</li> <li>• Take rubbish with you campaigns</li> <li>• Sensory areas away from high traffic areas</li> <li>• Weed and rubbish removal</li> <li>• On water activities</li> <li>• Toilets at camping sites (bush toilets)</li> <li>• Infrastructure that takes in scenery (i.e. café)</li> <li>• Activate spaces (i.e. Welsford/Marungi river access point)</li> </ul>

## COLLABORATION SUGGESTIONS

RiverConnect invites any and all groups with a stake in the river environment to be a part of RiverConnect, and many had suggestions for network opportunities and collaboration ideas including with:

- Shepparton Adventure Clubs
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Bike Trail proponents
- Community services
- Victoria Police
- Slap Tomorrow
- Rotary Clubs
- Shepparton Canoe Club
- Chamber of Commerce
- Connect GV
- Shepparton Access
- Mountain Bike Clubs
- Shepparton Art Museum
- Local theatre groups
- Scouts/Guides
- Goulburn Valley Association of Angling Clubs
- Agricultural Industry
- River Care groups (including overseas)

## THOUGHTS FROM OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Using our imagination and visualising our thoughts and ideas can be a fun and creative way to express ourselves and communicate what we think and feel. Young people were given the opportunity to 'Share the River Love' via an art activity and RiverConnect received one art submission from attendees at GOTAFE's YouthFest.

Aligned with a number of RiverConnect's Strategic Priorities, we heard from young people a want and need for:

- Care for land, water and animals
- Opportunities for land management and river environment improvements
- Ensuring Traditional Owners are a part of decision making on equal footing
- Wheelchair access
- More bush kinder programs to develop an early appreciation for nature

## COMMUNITY GROUP ENDORSEMENTS






RiverConnect received two endorsements from community groups Goulburn Valley Environment Group (GVEG) and Shepparton Mooroopna Urban Landcare Group (SMULG).

GVEG noted the strategy had been carefully thought out and implemented, building on the existing foundations with strengths particularly in the areas of partnerships and education. They support the success of the program as it leads greater advocacy and increased positive environmental outcomes for the Goulburn River.

SMULG has been a proud partner of RiverConnect since the group's inception and offers their support and commitment to the strategy. They note their invested interest in the Boulevard Bush Reserve and relationship to RiverConnect via the RiverConnect Land Management Working Group as well as a volunteer partner at education and community events.

## MISSING COMPONENTS FROM THE PLAN

The RiverConnect Strategic Plan is not a blueprint with every future action fully detailed, however it offers direction and examples of actions. Given the nature of this structure, it has inbuilt flexibility to enable ideas to slot within the strategic priorities and strategic actions. A number of suggestions were offered during the online submission period and have been captured below.

Alignment with RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2023-28		
Submission suggestion	Strategic Priority	Strategic Action
Promote path network	 <b>SHOWCASE THE RIVER ENVIRONMENT</b>	Communicate accessibility of the river environment
Investigate increasing the frequency of RiverConnect Land Management meetings	 <b>ENHANCE ACCESSIBILITY AND CARE OF THE RIVER</b>	Enable sustainable on-going management
Education on cat and dog control and illegal dumping in the river environment	 <b>ENHANCE ACCESSIBILITY AND CARE OF THE RIVER</b>	Nurture stewardship culture
Investigate other opportunities for knowledge sharing such as bush medicine and foods	 <b>ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY</b>	Continue learnings about the river
Investigate home for RiverConnect at the Australian Botanic Gardens Shepparton	 <b>NURTURE PARTNERSHIPS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE</b>	Explore a home for RiverConnect

## COMMUNITY REFLECTION

The vast majority of submissions thought that RiverConnect’s future plans reflected the community’s wants strongly (4.2/5). Many felt the strategy had been well considered and continued the collaborative model that RiverConnect is well-known for. One comment suggested that further investigation is needed to see how Traditional Owners would like to be more involved in RiverConnect programs that are working on Country and how best to support them. Overall, the feedback indicates that community are supportive of the way RiverConnect works with community and the way the strategy ‘incorporates action and values for all ages, cultures and interest groups’.

# WHAT'S NEXT?

The results of feedback received from the community will inform any changes made to the final RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2023-2028. From the priorities identified, partner strategic priorities and available funding opportunities, the RiverConnect Implementation Advisory Committee will develop annual action plans and corresponding targets. In November the plan will be reviewed by Council leadership and in December RiverConnect will seek endorsement by Council.



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