



# Strategic Plan 2017-2022



# We the undersigned ...

Are pleased to have contributed to the development of the RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2017-2022 and look forward to working in partnership to deliver the Strategy.



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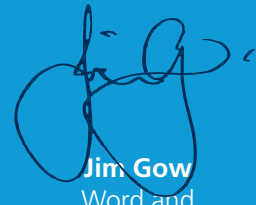
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# RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2017-2022 Summary

## VISION & PURPOSE

### Vision

Connected people, rivers and wetlands.

### Purpose

To nurture the community's respect for, use and love of the rivers and wetlands.

The vision and purpose will be achieved by realising long-term goals that increase:

- access to,
- awareness of,
- participation in, and
- care of

the river environment and its cultural heritage, through seven connection priorities for action.

## CONNECTION PRIORITIES

impact on one or more of the above long-term goals

## 5-YEAR TARGETS

for implementing action

### Engage the community



- 25% increase in use of shared pathways
- 25% increased participation in river environment activities

### Inspire the education sector



- 50% of Greater Shepparton schools have at least one class engaging with the river environment annually, involving 1,000 students
- One tertiary education project in the RiverConnect area

### Showcase art and culture



- 1,000 participants annually in traditional owner-led events in the river environment
- Significant whole-of-community events and projects celebrate our shared history

### Improve health and wellbeing



- Shared path network is extended by 9km and one river crossing built
- Opportunities and spaces are created that people actively use

### Build a more resilient and accessible river environment



- Extent and quality of native vegetation and water quality is improved
- Access for various community sectors, from anglers to the elderly, is increased at five locations
- 75% decrease in volume of illegally dumped rubbish
- Decrease of priority weeds along shared paths and priority areas

### Encourage Social and Private Enterprise



- One example each of a social and private enterprise associated with RiverConnect aspirations

### Nurture partnerships and good governance



- Key stakeholders continue to endorse and support the partnership and governance arrangements of RiverConnect
- Funding levels 'won' (and shared), from government and 'non-traditional' sources consistent with RiverConnect aspirations
- RiverConnect is accountable and adaptive

# 1. Introduction

Our rivers bring life to the region and hold a wealth of untapped secrets and opportunities. 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.

The creation of RiverConnect was driven by the desire to develop a strong sense of belonging and connection to our rivers and a more cohesive approach to river management. And so, in 2005, RiverConnect was born. Original partners included Greater Shepparton City Council (GSCC), Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (GB CMA), other natural resource groups, and Aboriginal and educational organisations. Together, they supported a multi-agency and whole-of-community approach to future management of the Goulburn and Broken Rivers and the surrounding Red Gum forests and floodplains (the river environment).

Most of the original partners are still committed to RiverConnect. Together, we have come a long way to addressing those barriers, but in such a complex environment, we still have things to achieve.

RiverConnect aspires to see the Goulburn and Broken River environment duly recognised as the life and soul of river communities. Over its first ten years, the dynamic concept of RiverConnect has supported a raft of existing and new alliances. These partnerships resulted in activities that inspired the community to increase their appreciation and custodianship of the river as a social, economic, environmental, educational and cultural asset.

RiverConnect has been pivotal in the growing appreciation of the significance of the river environment. The river is a vital artery, supplying water for homes, irrigation, food processing, industry and gardens. It provides a key wildlife corridor from the mountains to the Murray and important habitat for threatened native species.

It also offers a beautiful backdrop for recreation and is an enormously significant cultural heritage site for the Aboriginal population. There continues to be a wealth of untapped secrets and opportunities around the river.

## 1.1 What is RiverConnect?

RiverConnect is a partnership program between land management agencies, stakeholders and community. RiverConnect is a network, not an organisation, auspiced by GSCC. The network includes many partners who use, manage, or are responsible for, the river environment in some way.

## 1.2 Where is RiverConnect?

The RiverConnect area traditionally covered the river frontages and forest floodplain areas adjacent to the Shepparton-Mooroopna urban zones, broadly within the following limits (refer Figure 1 on next page). The emphasis moving forward is to bring the broader community to the river. River communities such as Toolamba and Murchison, as well as community members across the Greater Shepparton municipality, are encouraged to be involved and discuss ways to bring the RiverConnect Program to them.

## 1.3 Why the RiverConnect model?

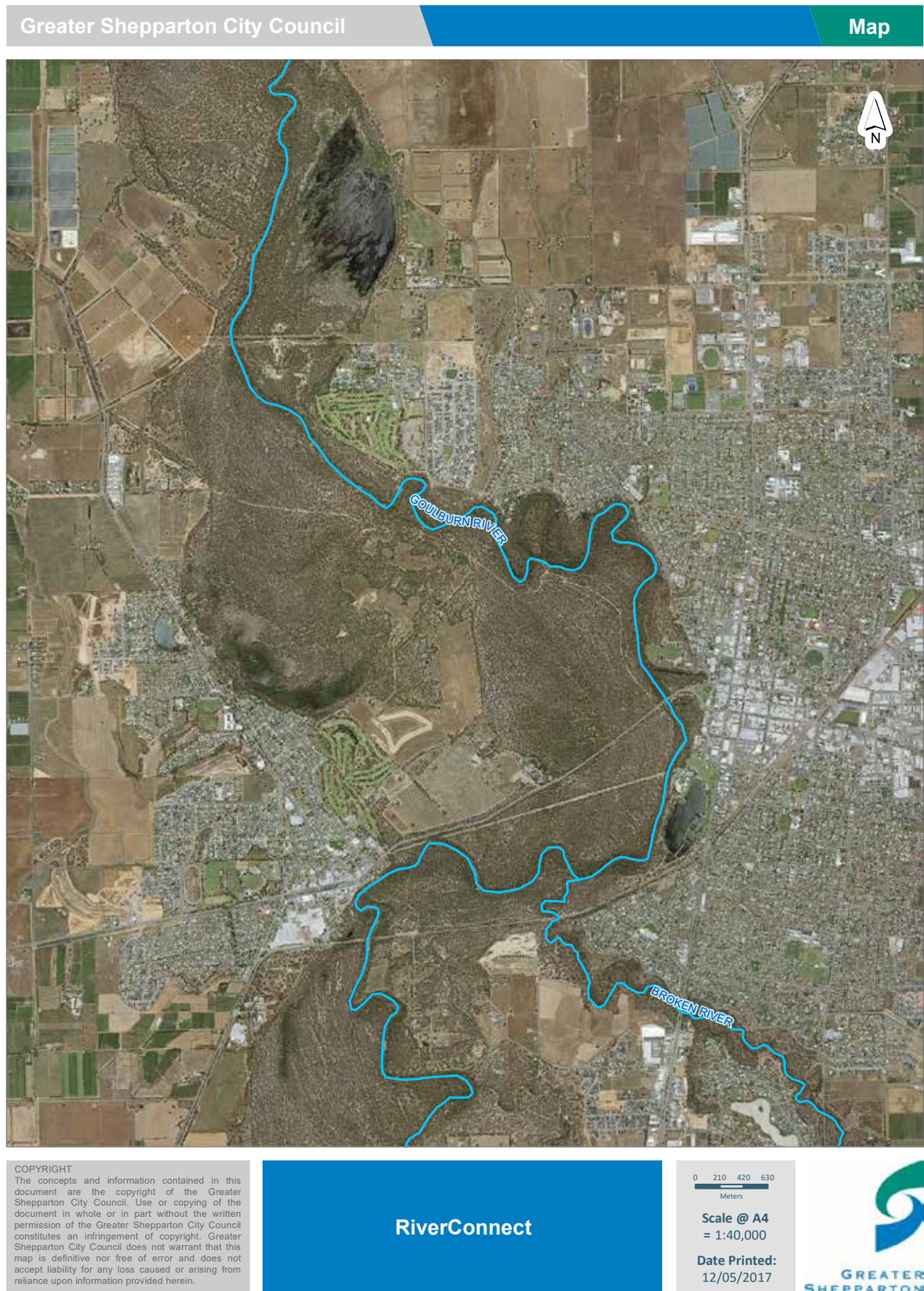
RiverConnect is working in a complex area; effective, management requires high levels of collaboration and co-operation to achieve better environmental, economic and social outcomes for the river and the community. The partnership model of RiverConnect has been at the heart of its success by enabling community and agencies to come together to identify and action shared priorities.

Partners in RiverConnect believe:

- there are great opportunities to use the river environment of Shepparton and Mooroopna in promoting people's connectedness with each other, personal connectedness with the natural environment, personal wellness, and community wellbeing;



Figure 1: RiverConnect primary project area



- the resilience of the river environment of the RiverConnect area is challenged by the increasing population, increased usage and occasional poor behaviour and deliberate damage;
- there are many people and organisations who have an interest in the RiverConnect area, and there are many benefits from ‘joined-up efforts’ (working together);
- joined-up efforts require trust and goodwill, and partners understand it takes time and perseverance to build;
- risks and opportunities can arise unexpectedly, especially in a multi-stakeholder operating environment, and plans therefore need to be flexible and adaptive; and
- given the above, working together to achieve the vision is worthwhile.

## 1.4 The first RiverConnect Strategic Plan

The RiverConnect Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) led the implementation of the first RiverConnect Strategic Plan (2011-2016). The actions put in place through that Plan have yielded a range of significant benefits. These include a vibrant educational program, land managers working more closely together to improve the health of the river environment, exciting activities that engage more of the community with the river and further opportunities for the Aboriginal community to recognise, record and share their ancient relationship with the waterways.

RiverConnect has gone a long way to meeting the needs identified in the first Strategic Plan through the integration of effort brought about by enduring partnerships. This integration has led to RiverConnect attracting funding for a range of exciting projects that continue to connect many parts of the community to the river.

It was time to consult with our partners and the community to renew the Strategic Plan. We needed to look over the achievements of RiverConnect, reaffirm the vision for the future, and identify a new suite of actions to be undertaken to achieve the vision.

## 1.5 The RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2017-2022

As with the first Strategic Plan, this renewed Plan is not a “blueprint” with every future action fully detailed. It is an adaptive plan. Many of the actions will require further investigation to determine their detailed design and feasibility.

Funding for implementation will be determined by each of the partner organisations through their normal budgetary processes. Levels of activity will be dependent on the overall availability of funding in each organisation. Many of the actions will be suitable targets for external funding from State and Federal government sources or philanthropic organisations. A number of the actions in the Plan will only proceed if this external funding is available.

This renewed Plan continues to provide a high level, integrated strategy to guide the activities of all of the RiverConnect partners. This will ensure a co-ordinated approach to enhancing the environmental, cultural, recreational and economic value of the rivers and will ensure that the available funds are directed to achieve the greatest possible benefit.

Four chapters follow this introduction:

1. RiverConnect vision, purpose, values, long-term goals and priorities;
2. About the RiverConnect area; attributes and issues;
3. Documentation of RiverConnect achievements;
4. Actions for the future and implementation guidance, including governance and evaluation.



## 2. Vision, purpose and values driving goals and priorities

Vision and purpose statements are important beacons that provide direction for a program. The RiverConnect IAC has updated the purpose and vision statements for RiverConnect from the original strategy to reflect current thinking and the direction for RiverConnect in the future.

Values form the operating philosophies or principles that guide an organisation's internal behaviour as well as its relationship with its partners. The values agreed upon by the IAC underpin the way RiverConnect operates and directs how partners work together.

The vision, purpose and values combine to direct a set of long-term goals for RiverConnect. Delivering these goals in a way that meets our values is the reason we are all part of RiverConnect; our purpose. Achievement of these goals will see us meet our vision.

### 2.1 Vision

Our vision:

*Connected people, rivers and wetlands*

### 2.2 Purpose

Our purpose:

*To nurture the community's respect for, use and love of the rivers and wetlands.*

### 2.3 Values

As a network of partners collaborating to achieve outcomes in a complex and dynamic setting, the success of RiverConnect depends on an agreed set of operating principles or values. RiverConnect:

- Promotes a **LIGHTER ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT** in the design and delivery of all projects;
- Encourages **JOINED-UP EFFORT**, supporting and complementing partners (is not in competition with them) and encouraging joint project ownership via strong partnerships, with a shared understanding of responsibilities;
- Is **INCLUSIVE**, encouraging all groups and individuals with a stake in the river environment to be part of RiverConnect; and
- Celebrates **TRADITIONAL OWNERS CONNECTION** with the RiverConnect area and the subsequent **SHARED HISTORY** of the diverse cultural groups who have come to the region.





## 2.4 Long-term goals

The vision and purpose of RiverConnect will be achieved by realising long-term goals that increase:

- **access** to,
- **awareness** of,
- **participation in**, and
- **care** of

the river environment and its cultural heritage, through seven connection priorities that direct actions.

### 2.4.1 LONG-TERM GOALS IN DETAIL

#### ► **GOAL: Increase access to the river environment and its cultural heritage**

In order to connect to our river environment and its cultural heritage, the community must be able to access the river in ways that are compatible with their lifestyles. The shared path network is central to this access and will be expanded through implementation and revision of the RiverConnect Paths Master Plan.

There is currently 30 kilometres of shared pathways across the river landscape. Doubling the paths network would create interlinked paths that connect the community and visitors to the river.

In addition, access to the river's edge and water will be upgraded in strategic locations across the region so that residents can visit the river in reasonable proximity to where they live and access for people with families and individuals with a disability is improved.

Directional signage and strategic pedestrian routes from urban centres and key tourism locations will encourage people to visit the river, and interpretative signage will educate them about the spaces they are using.

#### ► **GOAL: Increase awareness of the river environment and its cultural heritage**

The Greater Shepparton community has a strong desire to learn and understand more about all aspects of the RiverConnect area. Increasing this understanding will improve our appreciation of the area and build our connection to the river environment.

RiverConnect has had a strong educational program that has involved students using the river environment as an outdoor classroom. New opportunities to learn in the environment will continue to be investigated and expanded to connect more students and teachers.

RiverConnect participation in a range of community events will continue to provide education opportunities for the community. There is also a strong desire to better understand and learn from the rich and diverse legacy of both Aboriginal and European history and culture unique to the region. The Strategic Plan sets priorities to facilitate the sharing of this knowledge with the wider community.

RiverConnect will continue to engage the community about the many values of the river environment. It will also support the community to live and interact positively with the active floodplain. The community will, at times, need to face large natural floods, but will also see smaller, over bank flows that will benefit the riverine environment.

#### ► **GOAL: Increase participation in the river environment and its cultural heritage**

In conjunction with improving physical access to the river environment, co-ordinated efforts need to continue to encourage people living locally or visiting to use these areas and connect physically and emotionally. As an example, self-guided tours may be developed for the area and maps could be produced in new and innovative ways to provide information to the community; residents and visitors alike.

Shepparton hosts a range of events and festivals and there is continued encouragement to incorporate activities based in or relating to the RiverConnect area in these events. Investigations are needed to examine the feasibility of new events and activities.

Physical health and well-being and mental health and well-being can be strengthened through physical activity and interaction with the natural environment through educational, social, cultural and artistic endeavours.



► **GOAL: Increase care of the river environment and its cultural heritage**

The Goulburn River is the longest river in Victoria, and is one of 18 declared Heritage Rivers in the state. The declaration aims to protect public land in particular parts of rivers and river catchment areas in Victoria which have significant nature conservation, recreation, scenic or cultural heritage attributes. The river also provides a wildlife corridor between the mountains and the Murray, which will become increasingly important in a changing climate.

Key environmental and social values that led to recognition of the Goulburn River include:

- Areas with intact understorey in river red gum open forest/woodland, and yellow box and grey box woodland/open forest communities, particularly downstream of Murchison;
- Areas of significant habitat for vulnerable or threatened wildlife including Squirrel gliders, Nankeen night herons, Fat-tailed dunnarts and the Tree goanna;
- Native fish diversity, Murray cod and Trout cod habitat;
- Canoeing opportunities; and
- Cultural heritage sites.

The quality, diversity and sustainability of the river environment underpin its value to the community. These aspects need to continue to be protected and enhanced through a co-ordinated program of dedicated action and planning.

There needs to be ongoing effort to reduce rubbish dumping in the river and on the floodplain. Actions are required that lead to further improvement to water quality, revegetation, control of weeds and pest animals along waterways and support timed delivery of environmental flows. Support for the implementation of these actions will have a strong focus on providing opportunities for community participation and understanding.

## 2.4.2 LONG-TERM GOALS, TARGETS AND PERFORMANCE

Long-term goals are set beyond the life of this Strategic Plan and encapsulate what we want to achieve in the future. The 2030 aspirational targets and performance measures or indicators are listed in Table 1 for each of the long-term goals.

Table 1: RiverConnect Long-term goals, 2030 aspirational targets and performance measures/indicators

Long-term goal	2030 aspirational targets	Performance measures/indicators
<b>Increase access to the river environment and its cultural heritage</b>	Implementation of RiverConnect Paths Masterplan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Completion of all five stages of the RiverConnect Paths Masterplan</li> <li>– Kilometres of path built and improved</li> <li>– Crossings built</li> </ul>
	6 new or significantly upgraded direct river-access points and usage spaces, including viewing points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Number of access points and spaces built and improved</li> </ul>
	All shared paths include real and virtual signed information on the environment and cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Number of signs (real and virtual) installed</li> </ul>
<b>Increase awareness and understanding of the river environment and its cultural heritage</b>	80% of residents know and understand facts about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Traditional Owner's connection with the environment</li> <li>– Development of Shepparton and Mooroopna around the river</li> <li>– Recreation and participation opportunities in the area</li> <li>– Environmental, social and economic value of river environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Regional well-being survey data to understand knowledge and understanding and perception of value</li> <li>– Event/activity participation data</li> <li>– Benchmark and periodic awareness survey needed</li> </ul>
	Number of residents spending time in the RiverConnect environment is increased by 30% by 2030 Average time spent by each resident annually is increased by 30% by 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Event participation data</li> <li>– Usage data</li> <li>– Benchmark and periodic usage data needed</li> </ul>
<b>Increase care of the river environment and its cultural heritage</b>	Increased extent and quality of native vegetation and water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Area of vegetation, habitat score</li> <li>– Index of Stream Condition</li> <li>– Water quality parameters –turbidity, salinity, dissolved oxygen, pH, stormwater runoff</li> </ul>
	Decreased levels of rubbish in river environment by 75%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Volumes of rubbish collected from land, gross pollutant traps, rivers and wetlands</li> <li>– Benchmark data needed</li> </ul>
	Decreased presence of weeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Benchmark data required</li> <li>– decreased presence of priority weeds in priority areas</li> </ul>

## 2.5 Priorities

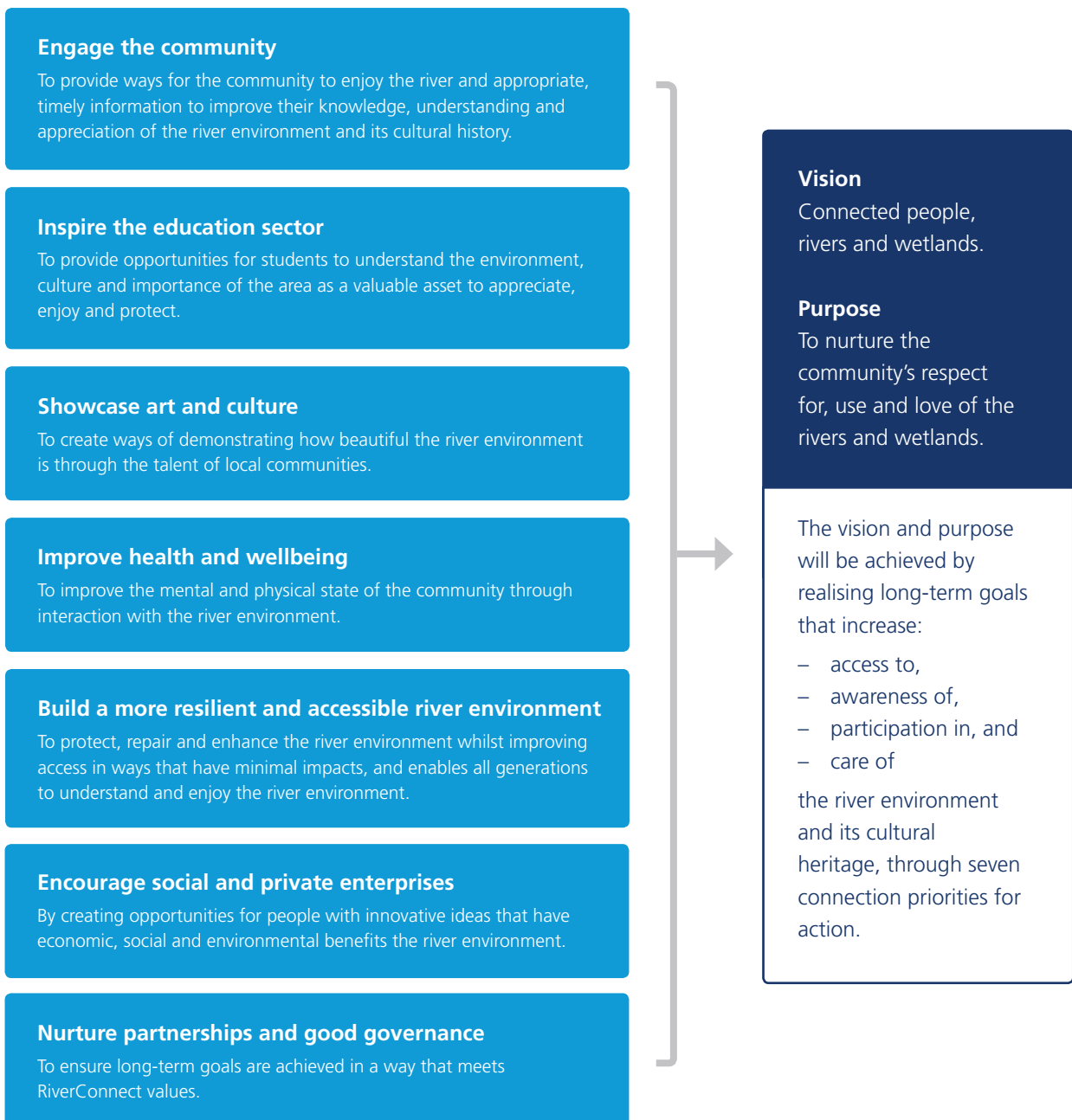
In renewing the Strategic Plan, the IAC considered the needs of the community and agencies based on previous studies, consultation and a current understanding of a range of regional issues. This has led to the identification of a series of actions grouped under connection priorities that will support the RiverConnect purpose and enable achievement of its vision for the region and long-term goals.

Actions are grouped under seven priorities identified by the IAC to provide an integrated strategy for RiverConnect for the next five years.

A specific objective has been developed for each priority. The priorities, their objectives and the linkage to delivery of the RiverConnect vision, purpose and long-term goals are shown diagrammatically in Figure 2.

Figure 2: RiverConnect strategic priorities linked to the vision, purpose and long-term objectives

### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES





## 3. The current environment

### 3.1 River environment attributes and issues

The priorities of RiverConnect capture opportunities to protect and enhance key physical and social attributes that enable our river environment to function in ways that bring economic wealth and environmental and social well-being. Key attributes of the RiverConnect area include:

- A diverse urban population
- Rich cultural links
- Enough clean water available for drinking, living, production, recreation and the environment
- A relatively natural river landscape positioned in an urban setting; and
- Strong working partnerships.

The current state of these attributes forms the basis for what we wish to protect or enhance from a range of issues and drivers. Attributes and issues are described in more detail below.

**Shepparton and Mooroopna are the major population centres** within the City of Greater Shepparton. These twin cities sit on either side of the Goulburn River. The Broken River also flows into the Goulburn within the Shepparton urban area. The population of Greater Shepparton is over 61,000 people. The region is home to over 6,000 Indigenous Australians – the largest Aboriginal population in regional Victoria.

The region is also home to a multi-cultural community, with people from all parts of the globe, including India, Afghanistan, Sudan, Italy, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, New Zealand and the Philippines. With these people come many languages, cultures and faiths.

Whilst the community is culturally diverse and drawn from widely differing backgrounds, a common element that unites us is that without the rivers, most of us would not live here. Issues that arise from this diversity relate to different values placed on the river environment by various cultures and subsequent use.

**The Aboriginal community has extraordinarily strong links with the rivers and lands** that stretch back through the ages. In recent history, Aboriginal people walked off the Cummeragunga mission at Barmah and established settlements in the red gum forest between Shepparton and Mooroopna in an area known as “The Flats”.

**The Goulburn and Broken Rivers in Shepparton and Mooroopna are recognised in European history.** They were an important source of economic, recreational and social activity in the early days of settlement and underpin what these urban centres are today.

Over the last fifty years, as the focus on utilisation of the area for economic benefit increased and our urban centres grew, the quality of the rivers and their banks has declined. The Goulburn River was redirected away from the Shepparton town area, complementary buildings and infrastructure were removed and the focus of the urban development turned away from the river. Historically, water has overflowed the river banks during high rainfall periods and caused flooding impacts on regional infrastructure and communities.

The Goulburn and Broken Rivers are now considered functional working rivers. However, in recent years the beauty, recreational and cultural values of the rivers are being increasingly recognised by the community and there is an opportunity to reconnect urban spaces to the river through strategic development. Whilst river regulation has decreased how often flood events will occur and how long they will last, flooding has historically, and will continue to be, a part of the landscape. Flooding creates environmental benefits but can also pose a threat to the community.

**The Goulburn and Broken Rivers are a source of water for drinking, living, production, recreation and the environment.** The environment, industry, residents, service providers and recreational reserves all depend to varying degrees on reliable, good quality supplies of water. At times we have water overflowing streambanks and protecting the community and infrastructure during flood events needs careful planning and management, including warnings of rising river levels and risks. We also need to consider river management in times of drought.

Water quality is impacted on by a range of activities and the key threats in the RiverConnect area include streambank erosion, stormwater, agriculture and industry runoff, litter and channel modification. Actions such as the installation of gross pollutant traps, improved stormwater management, environmental flows and revegetation of streambanks all improve water quality locally and at catchment scale.

**The river environment in the RiverConnect area is seen as unique in terms of its natural state.** While there has been a decline in biodiversity and vegetation extent and quality surrounding the river this has not been as significant as in other urban centres situated on rivers. This is largely because of the nature of the floodplain and regularity of flooding, and its protection by reservation of the area as State Forest and utilisation as a timber resource, followed by the National Park declarations. The public land within the RiverConnect area is now under the control of a number of different agencies including Parks Victoria (PV), Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation (YYNAC) the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and GSCC.

The Shepparton Regional Park includes most of the public land adjacent to the rivers which is now managed by PV. PV is also responsible for the management of the Lower Goulburn River National Park which incorporates the former Reedy Swamp Wildlife Reserve. The YYNAC is a key director in the management of major public lands within their traditional country including the entire RiverConnect area. In addition, the GB CMA has overarching responsibilities as caretaker of river health across the region.

Litter, weeds, pest animals and vegetation removal and degradation are all issues that threaten the state of the river environment. Floods can provide environmental benefits but also put at risk infrastructure and community safety. Further growth of Shepparton and Mooroopna could increase the risk of these threats to the river environment.

**Strong partnerships underpin much of the effort** in managing resources in our RiverConnect area. These types of partnerships were first formed back in the 1980s to manage salinity issues at a regional scale. Whilst those partnerships have persisted around the salinity issue, one of the drivers for the formation of RiverConnect was to set up a similar model for river management in an urban setting built on positive relationships, good communication and trust.

We have seen much progress made over time to work with new and existing partners, but an ever present threat to successful partnerships and subsequent action is the misalignment of RiverConnect with partner priorities, organisational structures and funding availability. The loss of individuals in organisations can also affect partner relationships.

### 3.2 Issues and threats identified by community

Consultation undertaken through RiverConnect with project partners, existing and new, also identified issues that agencies and the community in the Shepparton and Mooroopna areas are concerned about. These consultations confirmed that many people see the RiverConnect area as very important for health and well-being, art and culture, historical significance, environmental features, water supply and recreation. They are concerned about the threats to the local environment including rubbish dumping, water quality, spread of weeds, pest animal species including cats and Noisy miners and loss of vegetation through developments.

Other key issues identified include a lack of consideration of climate change in relation to future water availability, and ensuring the alignment of policies and strategies developed by local agencies, particularly by GSCC and GB CMA, with RiverConnect.

## 4. How have we been doing – RiverConnect achievements 2011-2016

The RiverConnect Strategic Plan 2011-2016 was built upon five strategic priority programs with a total of 167 actions documented:

- Connecting Community (60 actions)
- Connecting Environment (32 actions)
- Connecting Aboriginal People (22 actions)
- Connecting Education (38 actions)
- Communication and Consultation (15 actions)

Annual Reports documented the achievements and progress against the priority programs of the Strategic Plan and are endorsed by the Greater Shepparton City Council.

### 4.1 What difference has RiverConnect made?

A partnership approach has been at the heart of the success of RiverConnect, enabling community and agencies to come together and identify and action shared priorities. This is seen as a major achievement for RiverConnect. This has been supported through the guiding IAC, comprising agency and community partners, and working groups focussed on education, land management, communications and Aboriginal action.

The IAC is seen as an effective way to share ownership and direction of RiverConnect, supported by project staff. Some working groups have worked better than others, in particular the Communications Working Group has gone from strength to strength. There have been challenges in maintaining focus and commitment for other working groups over time.

RiverConnect has gone a long way to meeting the needs identified 10 years ago through strong integrated effort and enduring partnerships. This integration has led to RiverConnect attracting funding for a range of exciting projects that continue to connect many parts of the community to the river.

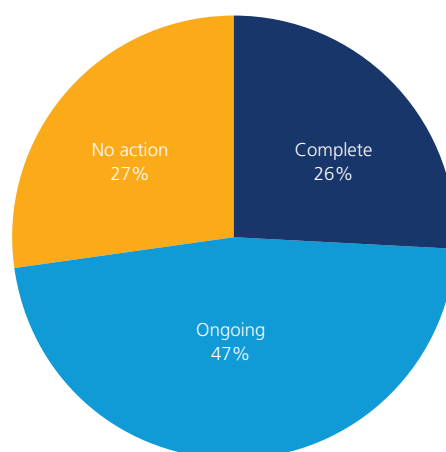
Despite a dynamic working environment, RiverConnect has been able to adapt, consistently achieving many objectives. This included undertaking or participating

in many and varied activities that have increasingly engaged the community and schools across the region. Actions have enabled more people to access and use the river environment and increase their knowledge and understanding of the river and its value to the region. This increased understanding has been further enhanced by the development of a range of print and electronic media resources, all housed at the RiverConnect website.

A particular highlight has been the successful engagement of local schools. Every year more and more students have participated in annual or ongoing programs that have seen environmental improvements as well as educational outcomes.

Plans have been completed, access points upgraded, signs installed and information developed. One of the most successful and acclaimed achievements has been the development and delivery of the Flats walking tour and signage. This has significantly increased community understanding of local Aboriginal history and their deep connection to Country.

Figure 3: Progress on actions (167 total) over life of first Strategic Plan (2011-2016)



Of the 167 actions identified, 45 have not been progressed in any way (Figure 3). As a program that depends on many partners for success, the challenge remains to attract external funding to achieve our objectives amidst changing government priorities and funding availability.





## 4.2 RiverConnect Achievements

### Significant achievements

- Regional Achievement and Community Award
- RiverConnect 10 year celebration 2015
- Increased number of partners
- Continued investment and support of GSCC and GB CMA over time
- Increased funding – extension of RiverConnect
- Keep Victoria Beautiful Sustainable Cities Award for Community-Government Partnerships

## 4.3 Within Action Programs

Within each action program a set of performance measures or indicators were identified to measure delivery against the targets set in the first Strategic Plan. Due to the large number of actions it has been a challenge to report progress against all the indicators and an abridged number of measures were chosen to show progress annually. In some instances it has been difficult to report progress directly against performance aspects due to data inconsistencies.

Table 2 shows the targets and indicators for RiverConnect and provides commentary on overall achievements over the life of the 2011-2016 Strategic Plan.



Table 2: RiverConnect targets, performance indicators and achievements

Performance aspect (targets and performance Indicators)	Achievements/progress
<b>1. CONNECTING COMMUNITY</b>	
<p><b>Improved access to the RiverConnect area</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Improved public access to the rivers</li> <li>– Access path network extensions</li> <li>– Interpretive signage improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Improved river access at three points through ongoing weir upgrading, boat ramp improvements and Stuart Reserve improvements</li> <li>– RiverConnect Paths Master Plan completion</li> <li>– Three Flood Markers at Shepparton, Mooroopna and Murchison</li> <li>– Boulevard Bush Reserve and The Flats interpretive signage</li> </ul>
<p><b>Increased community usage of the area</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 50% increase in visits to the area, as measured through direct surveys of key access routes and interest points.</li> <li>– Increase in the number of people who use the area as determined through survey of Greater Shepparton community (e.g. Council customer satisfaction surveys).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased number of people using the paths and being in the river environment through events and activities e.g. Canoeing and other events – 125 events and 6,400 participants, 6,800 students spent 10,000+ hours at the river</li> </ul>
<p><b>Increased use of the area for events</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Number of new events or existing major events that incorporate a significant RiverConnect component</li> <li>– Increased community participation in events with a RiverConnect element</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 125 community activities including Spotlight walks, canoeing and Kidsfest</li> <li>– 6,400 participants in RiverConnect events</li> </ul>
<b>2. CONNECTING ENVIRONMENT</b>	
<p><b>Reduced pollution reaching the river through storm water discharges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Install three new gross pollutant traps on key storm water discharge points as identified in Waterway Action Plan.</li> <li>– Reducing trend in amount of litter cleared from traps over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 21 strategies/events have been contributed to</li> <li>– Rubbish clean up days</li> <li>– VCAL student rubbish collection – 2013/14 24ha, 2014/15 12.2ha</li> <li>– Five Gross Pollutant Traps (GPT's) installed</li> <li>– Average of 70-80 tonnes p.a. of waste captured in GPT's</li> </ul>
<p><b>Improved water quality in rivers within the RiverConnect area</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– GB CMA water quality monitoring indicates a reduction in key pollutant inputs within the RiverConnect area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Water Quality parameters measured through Waterwatch (since 1995) at Chinamans Bridge Mooroopna and Balaclava Rd Shepparton show no decline in pH, DO, turbidity or EC, possible improvement in EC in last 5 years (compared as annual median)</li> </ul>

<b>Performance aspect</b> <i>(targets and performance Indicators)</i>	<b>Achievements/progress</b>
<b>Revegetation of RiverConnect</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 90% of planned revegetation works completed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Tree planting by community groups, VCAL students, school groups, PV, GB CMA</li> <li>– RiverConnect revegetation activities continue to increase through National Tree Day partnership with GSCC and Shepparton Mooroopna Urban Landcare Group (SMULG)</li> </ul>
<b>Improved health of existing vegetation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Habitat scores for selected forest monitoring transects improvement.</li> <li>– Index of Stream Condition score for Goulburn at Shepparton improves over time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased value and protection of River environment through parks declaration – extension of RiverConnect</li> <li>– Boulevard Bush Reserve Environmental Management Plan and Action Plan</li> <li>– ISC score for Goulburn River improved between 2004 and 2010 assessments from poor to moderate</li> <li>– Weed and hollow GIS mapping and biodiversity audits along Rivers</li> </ul>
<b>Improved health of fauna</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Bird numbers and diversity increase at Reedy Swamp.</li> <li>– Numbers of key species increase over time (e.g. squirrel glider).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 2016 Goulburn River Shepparton turtle survey identified all local species including Broad-shelled and Murray River turtles – both listed species</li> <li>– Squirrel gliders seen during Spotlight walks have remained consistent over time from 2010/11 to 2014/15 – more than one glider has been seen on average per walk every year, increasing up to more than two gliders per walk in 2013/14</li> <li>– Tree hollow survey Boulevard Bushland Reserve</li> </ul>
<b>3. CONNECTING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE</b>	
<b>Increased participation in activities with an Aboriginal component</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– At least 300 people per year participate in activities with an Aboriginal component.</li> <li>– Participant feedback shows 60% of attendees at activities improved their understanding of Aboriginal history and culture issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The Flats Walks and signage</li> <li>– 3,900 estimated community/students/teachers involved in activities with an Aboriginal component (780/year average)</li> <li>– Survey results from RiverConnect Festival show 40% increase in understanding of Aboriginal history and culture.</li> </ul>
<b>Improved knowledge and awareness of Aboriginal history and cultural issues in the RiverConnect area</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Community surveys show increased awareness and understanding of Aboriginal history and cultural issues for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal segments of community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– RiverConnect Festival participant survey shows 40% increase in awareness of Aboriginal history and culture from event</li> </ul>

Performance aspect (targets and performance Indicators)	Achievements/progress
<b>4. CONNECTING EDUCATION</b>	
<p><b>Effective participation by educational institutions in programs and activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 75% of schools in Shepparton and Mooroopna participate in RiverConnect activities each year.</li> <li>– 1,000 student visits per year for RiverConnect related activities.</li> <li>– A collection of stories indicates increased student understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Average 65% of schools involved in RiverConnect participate annually in events/activities</li> <li>– 6,300 student visits to river over 5 years (average 1,260/year)</li> <li>– Increased young people’s value of river and river reaches</li> <li>– Adopt a Reach program started 2008</li> <li>– VCAL Program run over last 5 years, 3-6 schools annually, 50-130 students involved</li> <li>– Regular blogs and stories online on RiverConnect posted by schools</li> </ul>
<b>5. COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION</b>	
<p><b>Improved awareness of RiverConnect programs and activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– At least 10 RiverConnect related stories per year published in the media.</li> <li>– RiverConnect website registers 3,000 visits per year.</li> <li>– RiverConnect eNewsletter has 250 subscribers.</li> <li>– At least 50% of the community are aware of the RiverConnect program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 65 articles/radio/TV – average 13/year</li> <li>– 41 groups presented to</li> <li>– 18,000+ Website visits (site launched May 2011, external visits only recorded post May 2013), av 3,600/year</li> <li>– 267 eNewsletter subscribers – 2-3 newsletter produced annually</li> <li>– Many more people know RiverConnect both locally and broader i.e. ANU Arts/Architecture program</li> <li>– Gradual change of people’s perception of river</li> </ul>



## 4.4 Action Program progress in detail

### 4.4.1 CONNECTING COMMUNITY

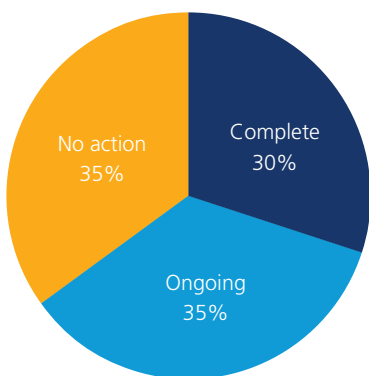
#### Objective

To provide access and facilities, together with activities and information, to enable the community to value the river and its environment and visit and enjoy this area as an integral part of their lifestyle.

#### Significant milestones

- RiverConnect Festival 2012
- Australian National University Art Exhibition 2012
- Goulburn River Access Guide – Shepparton and Mooroopna 2013
- Shepparton – Mooroopna Goulburn River Paths Master Plan 2014
- Murchison, Shepparton and Mooroopna Historical Flood Markers 2014

#### Progress on actions (60 total) over life of first Strategic Plan (2011-2016)



#### Performance measures reported annually

Figure 4: Number of Connecting Community events/activities

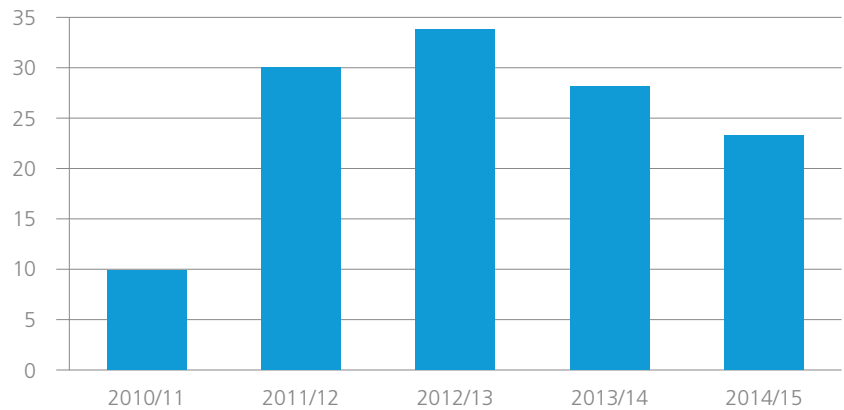
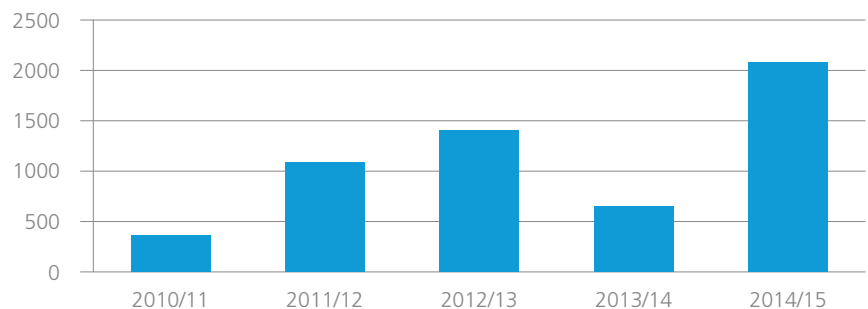


Figure 5: Number of participants in Connecting Community events/activities



#### Summary

This program has achieved some amazing results over the past 5 years, with 125 events organised (Figure 4), attracting more than 5,500+ community members and 6,200 students to the river environment (Figure 5). Activities have included art classes, educational days, tree planting, art exhibitions, festivals and more. Feedback from participants has been positive with people appreciating the opportunities that RiverConnect staff have created to connect them to the river and the associated wildlife.

As well as events and activities, RiverConnect has created a number of guides and signs to provide people with information on how to access the river environment and to make their river experiences more enjoyable and informed. One of the most significant achievements has been the development of the Paths Master Plan. This Plan sets the priorities to extending and improving the existing river environment shared paths network and will be an important part of planning in the future.



## 4.4.2 CONNECTING ENVIRONMENT

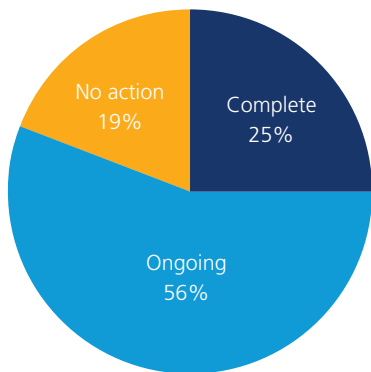
### Objective

To protect, repair, enhance and sustain important river, wetland and forest environments, so that current and future generations can understand and enjoy natural river and red gum forest environments.

### Significant milestones

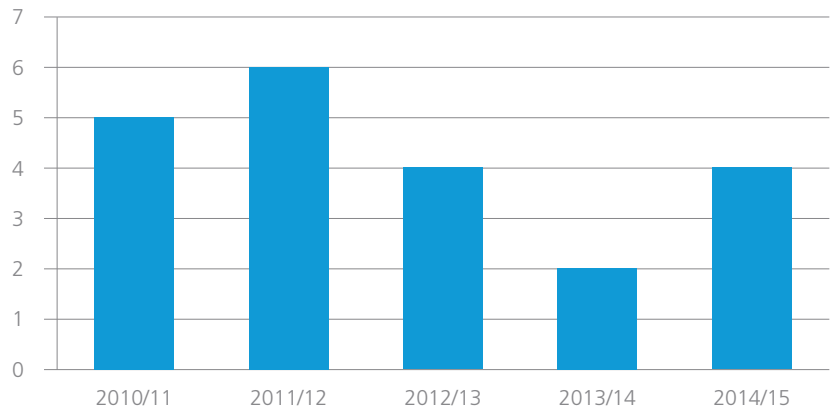
- Work at the weir – continued upgrading including bollard installation
- Stuart Reserve upgrade
- 5 boat ramp upgrades
- VCAL student works – weed management, tree planting, fencing, rubbish collection

### Progress on actions (32 total) over life of first Strategic Plan (2011-2016)



### Performance measures reported annually

Figure 6: Number of strategies/plans or events



### Summary

It is difficult to measure environmental condition changes over a relatively short period of time and attribute any improvements to particular projects. River condition indicators can be very climate driven however there does seem to be some changes in condition that show an upwards trend in improvement.

Reserve improvements, access upgrades and the installation of gross pollutant traps have all contributed to improving the environment. These actions have been complemented by a range of activities targeting rubbish removal and improving vegetation condition, such as those undertaken regularly by VCAL students, including tree planting.

It has been challenging to manage the ever increasing problem of rubbish in the river environment as populations increase and we encourage more people to access the river. We also need to set in place a method for measuring the impact we are having on the environment through the works done by RiverConnect.

Since 2004, environmental water (other than base and natural flow) entitlements have grown to enable and prioritise in-bank flows to be delivered. These flows have been targeted at improving bank vegetation, fish breeding, and habitat and macro-invertebrates. Overbank flows still occur less often than what is needed to maintain the health of the Lower Goulburn River floodplain.

### 4.4.3 CONNECTING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

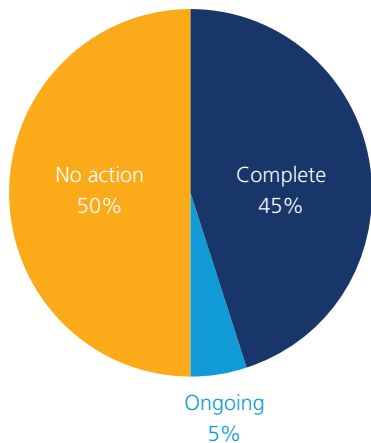
#### Objective

To provide programs, activities and facilities so that the whole community can understand and better appreciate the important historical and cultural significance this area holds for its traditional owners.

#### Significant milestones

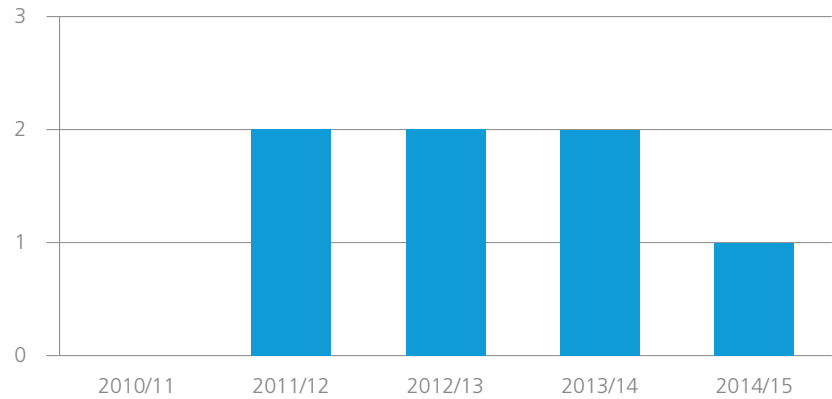
- The Flats signage and booklet recognition through award
- Traditional owner talks at RiverConnect Festival

#### Progress on actions (22 total) over life of first Strategic Plan (2011-2016)



#### Performance measures reported annually

Figure 7: Number of specific Aboriginal cultural events/activities



#### Summary

One of the most rewarding outcomes of RiverConnect has been the development of the Flats signage and walks. This award winning project provides self-guided and guided tours along the Flats walk for people to learn about a very small part of recent aboriginal history in the region.

Almost 4,000 people have been involved in events that include Aboriginal culture and heritage components. There have also been a number of specific Aboriginal cultural events such as cooking, dance workshops and the Flats Walk (see Figure 7).

Participant surveys from the RiverConnect Festival recorded a 40% increase in awareness of Aboriginal history and culture from the event.



### 4.4.4 CONNECTING EDUCATION

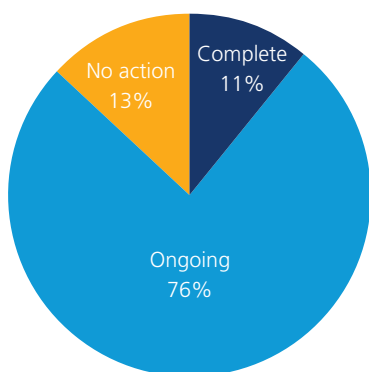
#### Objective

To provide programs, activities and facilities so that the whole community can understand and better appreciate the important historical and cultural significance this area holds for its traditional owners.

#### Significant milestones

- VCAL Partnership Award
- Professional development training for teachers
- Development of education days such as 'Rambling at Reedy' and 'Life at the Lake'

#### Progress on actions (38 total) over life of first Strategic Plan (2011-2016)



#### Performance measures reported annually

Figure 8: Student numbers and hours spent at the River with RiverConnect

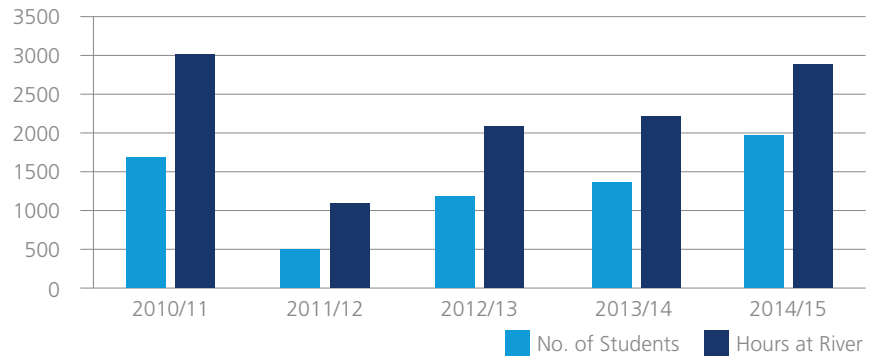
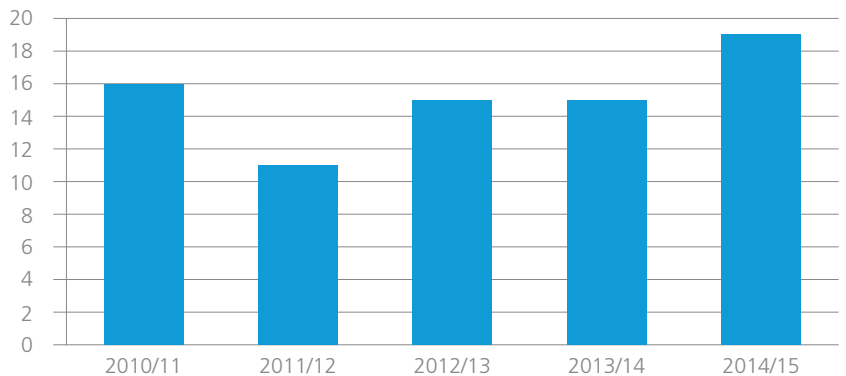


Figure 9: Number of schools visiting the River



#### Summary

The achievements of the RiverConnect Program have been extraordinary in terms of reaching local students and engaging them in the river environment. More than 6,300 students have been part of RiverConnect over the past 5 years (Figure 8), involving an average 15 schools visiting the river each year (Figure 9).

Many local schools have been involved in learning more about and enhancing the river environment through the Adopt-a-Reach project. This has been complemented by a range of events and activities targeting students. The VCAL Program has been recognised for its efforts in bringing students to the river on a regular basis to learn and to undertake works.

There have been many partnerships developed amongst environmental educators over the time of the first Strategic Plan. This not only includes local educators but has expanded to regional and metropolitan experts. This has opened up the opportunities for our local schools to engage more intimately with local wildlife such as turtles and bats.

There has also been an emphasis on teacher development and the creation of resources to support teachers. Keeping teachers engaged on an ongoing basis has been a challenge and creating opportunities that do not place additional workload pressures on teaching staff is an important consideration. The target education level has been mostly primary and secondary schools to date but recent engagement with kindergartens, children's centres and tertiary students is further expanding this component of the RiverConnect Program.

### 4.4.5 COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION

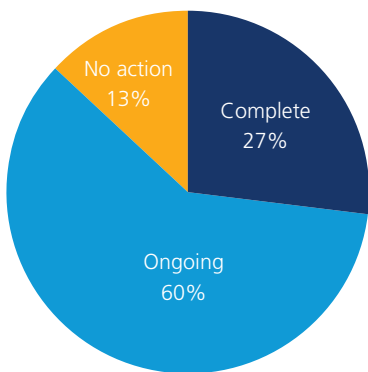
#### Objective

To provide appropriate, timely information to the community to support the achievement of the overall RiverConnect objectives. To provide well planned consultation processes that will allow the community to effectively influence the development and implementation of the RiverConnect Strategic Plan.

#### Significant milestones

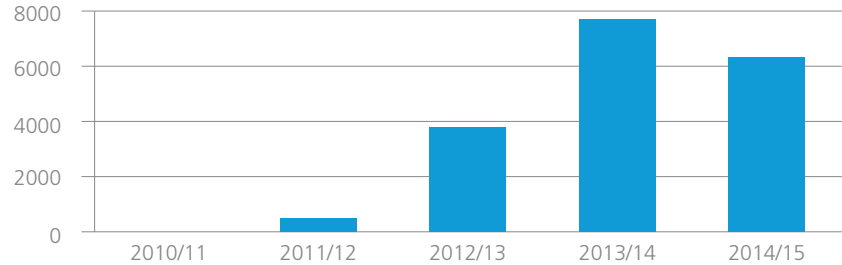
- New RiverConnect branding 2011
- RiverConnect Website created and launched 2011
- Regional Achievement and Community Award
- Poster presentation at International River Symposium 2012
- Presentation to NRM Knowledge Conference 2014

#### Progress on actions (32 total) over life of first Strategic Plan (2011-2016)



#### Performance measures reported annually

Figure 10: Website visits



Note: website first launched May 2011 and from May 2013 only external visits recorded

Figure 11: Marketing campaign – groups presented/spoken to

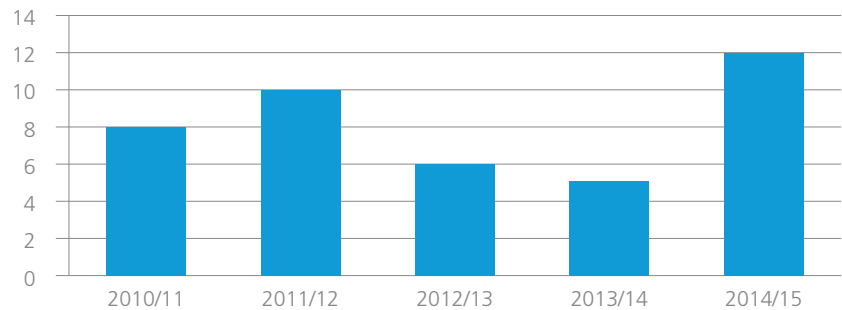
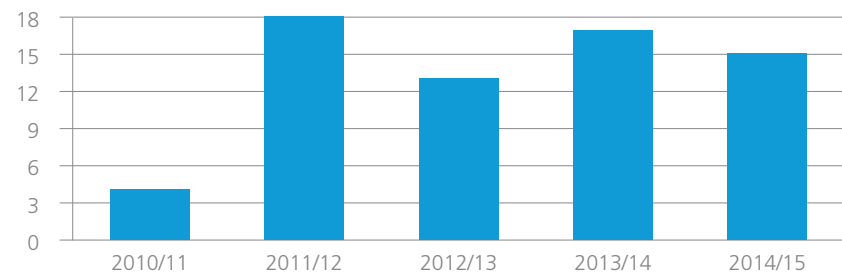


Figure 12: Articles/radio/TV



#### Summary

The Communication and Consultation Working Group has many achievements, with perhaps its greatest success being the development, continued update and demonstrated use of the RiverConnect website. The website is used not only to store and access information, but to share stories and pictures, provided by schools as well as RiverConnect staff with steadily increasing visitation (Figure 10).

RiverConnect has also regularly engaged with the community through visits, events, newspaper articles, radio interviews and television coverage (Figures 12 and 13). The continued interest in the members of the Communications and Consultation Working Group demonstrates the commitment to the promotion of RiverConnect. Consultation has occurred around specific activities, such as the development of the RiverConnect Paths Master Plan. The River Festival is an event that has not persisted but could possibly be reinvigorated to connect people to the river, celebrate RiverConnect successes and garner ideas for future RiverConnect activities. This could be run as part of the SheppARTon Festival.



## 4.5 IAC Evaluation

As part of the Strategic Plan review process a survey was undertaken of IAC members. This included agency representatives and community members. A small number of questions were asked to get their perspectives on the success of RiverConnect and improvements for the future, based on their observations and involvement. The results show:

### Biggest achievements for RiverConnect

- School engagement – Adopt-a-Reach
- Paths Master Plan
- Strengthening of Partnerships
- Community Engagement
- The Flats Walks and signage

### What works well in the RiverConnect project?

- Hands on activities
- In the field learning
- Collaboration on projects
- Involving the community
- Project co-ordination and management
- Engagement activities (spotlights, canoeing)
- Website

### What is the perception of RiverConnect in the community?

- Low awareness by wider community
- Positive for those that are aware of it
- Lack of awareness outside Shepparton/Mooroopna

### What could be improved?

- An increase in funding for projects
- More community buy-in
- Clearer roles and responsibilities of partner organisations
- Ground staff/labour – not relying on volunteers for education sessions
- Strategic level co-operation
- Partnership with tertiary institutions
- More path connections
- Partnerships could be better communicated – need to recognise all partners
- Celebration of Shepparton and Mooroopna as river towns
- Students involved in monitoring and recording
- Better advertising of events



## 5. Action, implementation and evaluation 2017-2022

We recognise RiverConnect achievements and also where it has not performed as was planned. Whilst we understand that the first Strategic Plan had many priorities to address, one challenge in Plan implementation was reporting against the large number and detail of actions. With input from the IAC and partners, through the renewal process, we have redefined the priorities, some are ongoing, some with new emphasis, and simplified the actions and measures to direct implementation and monitor performance and impact in the short and long term.

### 5.1 5-year priorities, targets and actions

Table 3 identifies a suite of high-level actions with targets and performance measures or indicators grouped under the connection priorities. For reporting purposes each connection priority has an acronym e.g. Engage the Community (ETC). The third column describes agencies or organisations that have been identified or are willing to partner for projects in that area. The last table column suggests the types of events, activities, planning and products that could be designed and delivered through each action on an annual basis. These are examples only. Annual planning and review processes will enable RiverConnect to adapt over the life of the Strategic Plan.

Table 3: RiverConnect 5-year priorities, targets and actions

5 year targets	Action	Lead agency/organisation	Example activities
<b>PRIORITY: ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY (ETC)</b>			
25% increase in use of shared pathways	1. Encourage use of the river environment	GSCC, PV, GSCC RiverConnect, GMLN, SMULG, Yarrawonga Mulwala Amateur Canoe Club (YMACC)	Update access map of the RiverConnect area highlighting path network, access points (including all ability access) and historical and cultural sites
25% increased participation in river environment activities	2. Improve access and usage for 'at risk' groups, including disadvantaged youth, and new migrant communities	GSCC RiverConnect, IAC, The Haven, Ethnic Council, Word and Mouth	Work with local service providers to implement activities that target disadvantaged youth New migrant community targeted Flats Walk
	3. Celebrate the river environment through events	GSCC RiverConnect, Word and Mouth, GMLN, SMULG	Incorporate RiverConnect aspects into existing events e.g. Clean Up Australia Day, Kidsfest
	4. Educate about and involve the community in the river environment through various media	Communications WG, GSCC, GB CMA, GMW, GVW, PV, GSCC RiverConnect, GLMN, SMULG	Build on and enhance public education programs on water use, quality, flooding and environmental flows in the Goulburn and Broken Rivers
	5. Increase community awareness on appropriate behaviour in the river environment	Communications WG, PV, GSCC, GB CMA, GVW, DELWP, GMLN, SMULG, GSCC RiverConnect	Campaigns could include activities such as vehicle use, camping, campfires, dogs, collecting firewood, rubbish disposal and weed control

5 year targets	Action	Lead agency/ organisation	Example activities
<b>PRIORITY: INSPIRE THE EDUCATION SECTOR (IES)</b>			
50% of Greater Shepparton schools have at least one class engage with the river environment annually, involving 1,000 students  One tertiary education project in the RiverConnect area	1. Create opportunities for schools and universities to participate in onsite river activities and river environment related projects	GSCC RiverConnect, GSCC, GMLN, Department of Education, PV, GMLN, LaTrobe and other universities and GoTafe, SHS, SAM	Extend Adopt-a-Reach, Bug Blitz
	2. Develop links between schools and community resources, including land managers and agency officers	GSCC RiverConnect, GMLN, GVW, GMLN, GSLP, SAM, SHS	Work with the Historical Society to connect the European cultural connections to the river environment for students  Establish viability and implement environmental educators regular meeting
	3. Facilitate opportunities to develop curriculum materials that are relevant to primary, secondary and tertiary education needs	GSCC RiverConnect, Department of Education, GMLN, LaTrobe, GoTafe and other universities, GVW	Identify RiverConnect projects for senior/ student students that meet curriculum needs and contribute to understanding of the river environment
	4. Enable students to contribute to river environment improvements	GSCC RiverConnect, PV	VCAL activities, tree planting days
<b>PRIORITY: SHOWCASE ART AND CULTURE (SAC)</b>			
1,000 participants annually in traditional owner-led events in the river environment  Significant whole-of-community events and projects celebrate our shared history and river-inspired creativity	1. Promote the RiverConnect area as an event and activities location	GSCC, GSCC RiverConnect, Word and Mouth	Investigate with Word and Mouth a youth focused music festival to be held in a river/forest setting
	2. Understand Aboriginal history in the RiverConnect area	GSCC RiverConnect, Rumbalara, YYNAC, Communications WG	Expand the story of the Cumberagunja Walk-off and life on the Flats. e.g. "Evenings with the Elders" program to share knowledge
	3. Connect with Aboriginal and European culture and community involvement	GSCC RiverConnect, Rumbalara, YYNAC	Stage a large scale festival to showcase Aboriginal dance, music and culture, e.g. a corroboree  Develop European settlement history story and display along the river walking paths
	4. Create a RiverConnect "home" for cultural and Interpretive information	IAC, GSCC RiverConnect	Investigate suggested locations including SAM, Kidstown, Australian Botanic Gardens or other existing education facility
	5. Create programs that blend environmental and creative elements	GSCC RiverConnect, Gallery Kaiella, Word and Mouth, universities	Investigate creating art installations from rubbish collected in gross pollutant traps  Environmental and/or cultural street or mural style art on appropriate infrastructure in river environment, for example, Dainton's Bridge

5 year targets	Action	Lead agency/organisation	Example activities
<b>PRIORITY: IMPROVE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING (IHW)</b>			
<p>Shared path network is extended by 9km and one river crossing is built</p> <p>Opportunities and spaces are created that are actively used by residents and visitors</p>	1. Implement the RiverConnect Paths Master Plan	GSCC, PV, GB CMA	<p>Incorporate the paths into GSCC 10 year capital budget program</p> <p>Finalise PV and GSCC licensing agreement</p>
	2. Build healthy living programs that incorporate the river environment	GSCC RiverConnect, GSCC	<p>Work with GV Health to develop and implement a healthy living program with businesses and local community</p> <p>Create opportunities for activities such as 'yoga by the river'</p>
	3. Develop active living activities/opportunities for residents and visitors to do in the river environment	GSCC RiverConnect, GSCC, PV	<p>Create walking, cycling, canoeing tours of the area</p> <p>Build an exercise circuit along the paths network</p>
	4. Develop a River Master Plan for Shepparton	GSCC	Include safety improvements, access, additional toilets, signage (directional, interpretative)
	5. Facilitate and auspice large-scale river environment projects	GSCC, IAC	Implement the Eastbank Lake project
<b>PRIORITY: BUILD A MORE RESILIENT AND ACCESSIBLE RIVER ENVIRONMENT (RARE)</b>			
<p>Extent and quality of native vegetation and water quality is improved</p> <p>Access for various sectors, from anglers to the elderly, is increased at five locations</p> <p>75% decrease in volume of dumped rubbish</p> <p>Decrease of priority weeds along shared paths and priority areas</p>	1. Contribute to development and implementation of relevant plans and programs to manage and improve the river environment	GB CMA, GSCC, PV, DELWP, GMLN	Support and assist with messaging (e.g. signage) to improve community understanding and acceptance of environmental flows
	2. Improve access to and management of access to the river	PV, GSCC	<p>Develop key pedestrian links from Shepparton CBD and key tourism locations to the river environment</p> <p>Upgrade pedestrian, all ability and boating access to river at key sites as per developed River Master Plan</p> <p>Consider in River Master Plan key managed native open space, e.g. historical parkland link between Lake, CBD, Council/Princess Park precinct (and future Eastbank Lake) in area near Dainton's Bridge, Heritage Society and CMA offices</p> <p>Safety improvements along park network and in river environment</p>



5 year targets	Action	Lead agency/ organisation	Example activities
	3. Identify and build suitable event/activity sites along the river	PV, GSCC	Identify, develop plans and build sites (e.g. marquees, toilets, camping areas) and develop guidelines for groups wishing to use the area
	4. Clean up the RiverConnect area	PV, GSCC, GB CMA, GMLN, GSCC RiverConnect, DELWP, EPA, SMULG	Initiate rubbish and weed removal in priority areas identified by PV, GSCC and GB CMA  Hold annual community "Clean-up RiverConnect" event in conjunction with Clean-up Australia Day activities
	5. Improve water quality in the RiverConnect area	EPA, GV Water, GB CMA, GMW, GSCC, GMLN, SMULG	Install rubbish collection pontoons in Goulburn River at Shepparton
	6. Revegetate RiverConnect priority areas	PV, GB CMA, GSCC RiverConnect	Rehabilitate and revegetate key riverside areas
<b>PRIORITY: ENCOURAGE SOCIAL AND PRIVATE ENTERPRISE (SPE)</b>			
One example each of a social and private enterprise associated with RiverConnect aspirations	1. Support innovative business ideas from the community	GSCC, VIC	Encourage the attraction or establishment of a bike and/or canoe hire business  Nature based accommodation  Commercial water and waterfront activities and businesses/business precinct
	2. Encourage increased tourism and visitation to the area	GSCC, VIC	Engage with tourism groups to develop RiverConnect river/red gum tourism opportunities  Link RiverConnect with local Tourism and Marketing Plans

5 year targets	Action	Lead agency/ organisation	Example activities
<b>PRIORITY: NURTURE PARTNERSHIPS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE (PGG)</b>			
Key stakeholders continue to endorse and support the partnership and governance arrangements of RiverConnect	1. Develop methodology and templates to measure targets over time	GSCC, RiverConnect, IAC	
	2. Implement processes to ensure ongoing organisational support for RiverConnect	IAC	All RiverConnect partner organisations will include formal processes in their decision making and planning activities to ensure consistency and alignment with the RiverConnect vision and objectives, wherever possible
Funding levels 'won' (and shared), from government and 'non-traditional' sources consistent with RiverConnect aspirations	3. Encourage broader participation in RiverConnect	Communications WG, IAC	Start up a 'Friends of' group Create A RiverConnect Ambassador's Program
	4. Implement a marketing plan to attract more funding to RiverConnect	Communications WG, IAC	Develop a plan that includes active partnerships with key media to inform community of RiverConnect actions
RiverConnect is accountable and adaptive	5. Implement, monitor and adapt RiverConnect to reflect Plan progress, needs and funding	IAC, GSCC, GB CMA	Set indicators for measuring progress against targets Continue to create an annual work plan and provide an Annual report to all stakeholders Develop reporting tools
	6. Provide expert input and advocacy for partners and community to strategies, plans and large-scale projects that impact on river environment	IAC, GSCC RiverConnect	MDB Constraints Strategy implementation

## 5.2 Implementation

### 5.2.1 IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

During the Draft Strategic Plan consultation period survey respondents and event attendees were asked to identify whether Connection Priorities, major projects and educational themes were high, medium or low priorities. This information, along with partner strategic priorities and legislation requirements listed in 5.2.2, will be used to develop annual actions plans. Detail can be found in the What You Said document available on the RiverConnect website.

### 5.2.2 RIVERCONNECT LINKING OTHER STRATEGIES

The RiverConnect 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 Strategic Plan therefore:

- has a large degree of in-built flexibility (through an annual review process)
- lists actions that support or contribute to the achievement of partner organisational strategies
- acknowledges that while the listed aspirations and actions listed in the Plan are expected to align with partners, they will not all be relevant to all partners
- has aspirations and actions that are expected to guide progress rather than be prescriptive.

#### Key strategies for RiverConnect

Alignment with the strategies and plans of partners is critical to make sure RiverConnect:

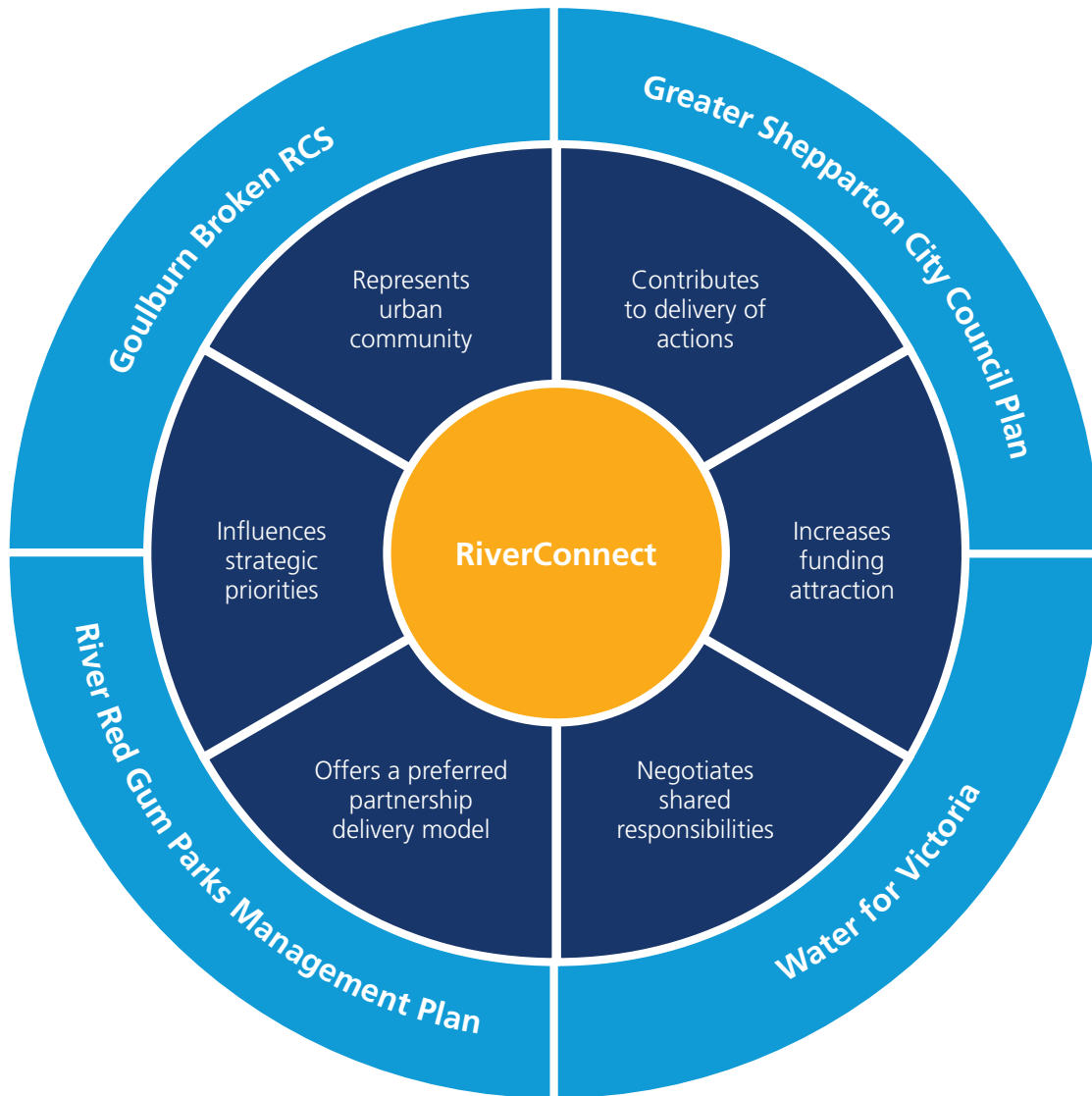
- delivers actions that contribute to the implementation of these strategies
- negotiates roles and responsibilities of delivery agents (e.g. asset management in the Regional Park)
- can increase the region's ability to attract investment (and bring investment directly to RiverConnect to contribute to implementation)
- is able to represent the views and needs of the community
- influences strategic priorities
- can continue to build on a well-established successful partnership model

There are a number of strategies and action plans with which RiverConnect is aligned but the four major current strategies sit with the GSCC, GB CMA, PV and DELWP. RiverConnect's relationship with these is presented in Figure 13.

Relevant RiverConnect partner plans and legislation include:

- Council Plan 2013-2017 (GSCC)
- Greater Shepparton Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2014-2030 (GSCC)
- Shepparton Stormwater Management Plan (GSCC)
- Shepparton CBD Strategy (GSCC)
- Public Health Plan (GSCC)
- Community Plans – (GSCC – including Mooroopna, Arcadia, Toolamba and Murchison)
- Greater Shepparton Economic Development, Tourism and Major Events Strategy (GSCC)
- Greater Shepparton Cycling Strategy 2013-2017 (GSCC)
- Movement and Place Strategy (GSCC – to be finalised)
- Goulburn Broken Regional Catchment Strategy 2013-2019 (GB CMA)
- Goulburn Broken Waterway Strategy 2014-2022 (GB CMA)
- Goulburn Broken Regional Floodplain Management Strategy (GB CMA - to be finalised)
- Goulburn Broken Water Quality Strategy (GB CMA)
- Goulburn Broken Catchment Biodiversity Strategy 2016-2021
- River Red Gum Park Management Plan (PV - to be finalised)
- Healthy Parks, Healthy People – (PV)
- Yorta Yorta Co-operative Management Agreement 2004 – (YYNAC)
- Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 – Victorian Government
- Victorian Heritage Act 1995 – Victorian Government
- River Red Gum Forests Investigation Final Report – (Victorian Environmental Assessment Council)
- Water for Victoria Plan (DELWP)
- Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2036 (DELWP)
- Regional Riparian Action Plan – (DELWP)

Figure 13: RiverConnect’s relationship with major strategic plans



**5.2.3 GOVERNANCE**

In order to bring all the parties together to work towards a co-ordinated plan for the revitalisation of our rivers, the RiverConnect Program, through the first Strategic Plan, developed clear governance arrangements to ensure that all the key stakeholders involved were represented and had access to appropriate forums to bring forward their issues for consideration.

Some of the key strengths and weaknesses are:

- Members of the IAC from key stakeholders in GSCC and GB CMA in particular, have been Directors/ Mayor and senior officers. This has lifted the profile of the program within those key organisations and provided representatives who can commit their organisation to action.
- Strong attendance at IAC meetings has persisted over time, with community members continuing to nominate and contribute to meetings.



- The working group structure has been effective for some priority programs, providing a forum to co-ordinate actions on the ground and to ensure consistent approaches from all stakeholders. This sharing of information, skills and the alignment of actions between organisations involved is a significant benefit flowing from the RiverConnect Program, which was very important when RiverConnect began. This needs to be more adaptive with working groups coming and going as required.

Building on the strengths and weaknesses of the current governance arrangements is seen as highly desirable, so a modified structure is proposed to govern and manage implementation of the next iteration of the RiverConnect Strategic Plan (see Figure 14).

Implementation of the agreed actions will be managed directly by the nominated lead agency. The key functions to be undertaken through RiverConnect Program implementation includes:

1. Oversight of implementation activities.
2. Assessing progress against objectives and monitoring of actual performance against agreed measures.
3. Program accountability through preparation of annual reports on achievements against the Plan.
4. Review and adaptation of the Plan to modify priorities or strategies where objectives are not being achieved, or in light of changing circumstances or new information.
5. Undertaking community consultation and seeking community feedback to ensure that the Plan and actions being implemented continue to meet community needs effectively.
6. Co-ordination of implementation activities between various partners organisations, including communications and promotional activities, to maximise impact and avoid duplication.

Figure 14: Implementation governance structure



The implementation structures and the expectations and obligations of partner organisations will be clearly documented through the RiverConnect Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding. A public process for partner organisations and IAC/ Working Group members to “sign-on” to these arrangements will provide a strong legitimacy for the role and operation of the governance arrangements.

Key features of this structure include:

### **RiverConnect Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC)**

This will continue to be a high level, strategic forum responsible for providing advice, identifying strategic links within their organisations, obtaining project buy-in and co-ordinating major projects from their organisations perspective. The IAC will provide the delivery of the first five functions from the list above.

Members to be drawn from:

- Greater Shepparton City Council
- Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority
- Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation
- Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative
- Parks Victoria
- Goulburn Murray Landcare Network
- Goulburn Valley Environment Group
- Word and Mouth
- Goulburn Valley Water
- Community representatives

Membership to the IAC may change over time and is subject to the Terms of Reference.

The Implementation Advisory Committee will look for opportunities to inform the community on progress and receive input to guide annual implementation activities.

### **Broader Stakeholder Group**

This group is proposed to be an electronic communication forum to keep stakeholders not involved in the IAC up to date about the progress of RiverConnect implementation and to seek interest and expertise when forming major project working group membership.

Members of this broader stakeholder group may include, but are not limited to:

- Shepparton Mooroopna Urban Landcare Group
- Goulburn Murray Water
- Ethnic Council
- GSCC Social Connections Program
- GSCC Active Living
- Friends of the Botanic Gardens, Shepparton
- Shepparton Historical Society (SHS)
- Lower Goulburn Conservation Management Network
- Shepparton Art Museum (SAM)
- Yarrawonga Mulwala Amateur Canoe Club

### **Working Groups**

The three types of working groups are:

- Communications Working Group – the key ongoing group where the communication and engagement skills and expertise of the partner organisations and the community can be brought together to address the detail needed to effectively design, share and deliver key communication activities of RiverConnect
- Land Managers Working Group – consisting of representatives from land management agencies and organisations. This group will meet quarterly to discuss on-ground land management works and progress projects as required. Examples include, weed control and anti-litter programs, revegetation and water quality improvements.
- Special Project Working Groups – working groups with a defined life period that will be responsible for developing detailed plans and implementing major projects involving multiple but variable stakeholder representatives, depending on need. These working groups will be making appropriate recommendations to the Implementation Committee on the progress of major projects until they run independently, are complemented or are auspiced directly under RiverConnect implementation. Membership will include relevant stakeholders.

At least one member of the RiverConnect Implementation Advisory Committee will be on all working groups. Wherever possible, working groups should be convened by a member of the RiverConnect Implementation Advisory Committee. All working groups will seek advice from the Aboriginal representatives on the IAC.

### Community Input Forums

These forums will be held periodically across the Shepparton and Mooroopna area. They will be designed and facilitated to provide regular progress reporting to the community on implementation and to provide an opportunity for ongoing community input to the implementation and further development of the Strategic Plan. These forums will also be supplemented with specific community consultation on key projects as they are developed.

### 5.2.4 IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM AND FUNDING

The Goulburn Broken CMA currently contributes \$100,000 per year towards funding project staff and other project costs and this funding is matched by GSCC, who manage the day to day operation and support for RiverConnect.

GB CMA contribution will continue at the same level for a four year period (as set by the Victorian Government funding guidelines) and GSCC will match funding to provide staffing resources for implementation.

Program partners have, and will continue, to provide funding or in-kind contributions for various projects as opportunities arise.

## 5.3 Monitoring, assessment, review and adaptation

Monitoring progress and adapting the Plan are critical activities for the RiverConnect IAC to oversee. This section outlines the monitoring and evaluation program that enables:

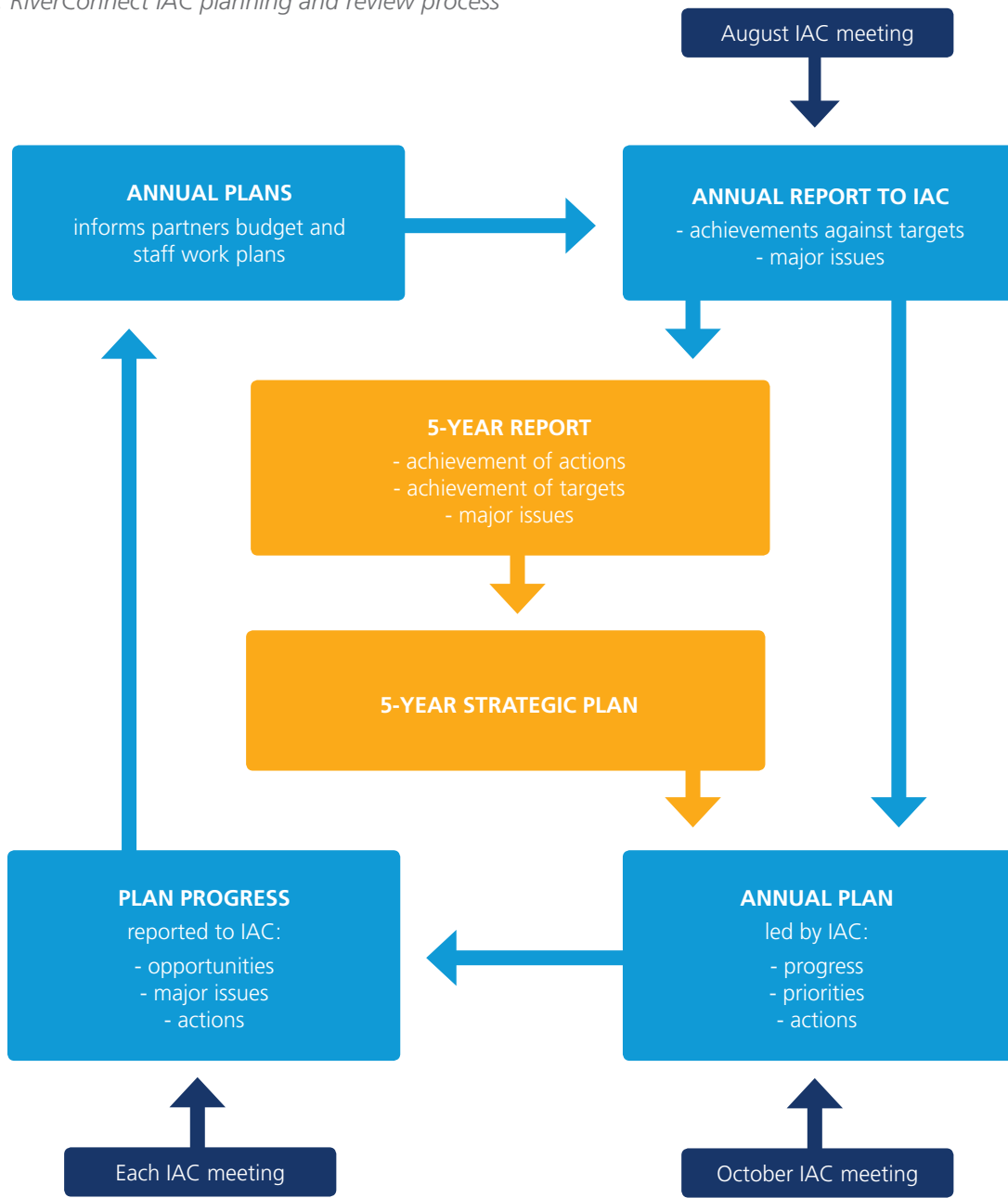
- the effectiveness of this Strategic Plan; and
- this Strategic Plan to adapt quickly to changed circumstances and needs.

### 5.3.1 THE ADAPTIVE NATURE OF THE PLAN

The Plan is not a 'blueprint' with every future action fully detailed. Many of the actions listed might be completed by a wide range of stakeholders and might require further investigation to determine their detailed design and feasibility. There is little value in developing detailed designs for projects that might not happen for five years, or which might ultimately be undertaken by partners who unexpectedly become well positioned.

Essential features of the Plan are therefore regular reviews to ensure current opportunities are captured, and targeted and timely community consultation to develop and refine project proposals is undertaken. Detailed actions and activities are more appropriately developed on an annual basis, with input from the IAC and community through the governance structure described earlier. Reporting achievements against annual action plans and long-term goals to the IAC becomes an integral part of the planning and review processes (Figure 15).

Figure 15: RiverConnect IAC planning and review process





### 5.3.2 MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROCESSES

Monitoring and evaluation are prone to becoming unwieldy and therefore futile if they are not rigorously focused. Monitoring and evaluation focuses on three critical and connected levels, which will drive short and long-term performance and adaptation of this Plan (Table 4).

Table 4: Logic to drive short and long-term performance and adaptation

Evaluation level	Key evaluation question	Evidence to inform evaluation	
		Parameter monitored	Data
1. Annual performance	How did we go this year against what we said we would do?	Activities (listed in annual plan) completed against funds received, such as those from the GB CMA and GSCC Action examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Schools engaged in the river environment</li> <li>– Spotlight walks conducted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Usage information</li> <li>– Paths built and access points improved</li> <li>– Information material developed, including signage and educational</li> <li>– Media activities and website usage</li> <li>– Numbers and types of events organised or participated in</li> <li>– Number of participants in events</li> <li>– Satisfaction surveys and stories about participation</li> <li>– Number of schools and students participating</li> <li>– Activities, hours and outputs achieved by students</li> <li>– Numbers of plans contributed to</li> <li>– Completed works e.g. tree planting</li> <li>– Monitoring activities eg bird counts, rubbish collected</li> <li>– Meeting involvement</li> <li>– Major project progress</li> </ul>
2. 2017 - 2022 strategy implementation progress	What progress has been made in implementing what we said we would do when the Plan was written?	Actions (listed in Strategic Plan) completed by all partners, regardless of fund source Action example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Encourage tourists to visit the river environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Collated outputs above e.g. Number of tour groups and individuals participating (total of all years)</li> </ul>
	How effective were the actions?	Progress towards 5-year targets (listed in Table 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Participation numbers in activities (total of all years)</li> <li>– Length of shared path extended (km) (total of all years)</li> <li>– Perception and knowledge about river environment</li> </ul>
	Do the priorities for action need to change?	All of the above	All of the above
3. 2030 Vision realisation	What progress has been made towards vision?	Progress towards the four long-term goals (Table 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Participation numbers (total of all years)</li> </ul>
	Have circumstances changed sufficiently to warrant change in the strategic directions?	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Institutional changes (especially for partners)</li> <li>– Government and other funding priority changes</li> </ul>	Anecdotal evidence, discussion papers, meeting papers, etc.



### 5.3.3 REPORTING

While data is expected to be gathered continually during Plan implementation, reporting timeframes vary for each evaluation level.

Evaluation level	Report to RiverConnect IAC
Annual performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Update every RiverConnect IAC meeting (anticipated to be every two months)</li> <li>– Complete report (including quantitative data and stories) and present to IAC in August prior to major planning reset in October each year</li> </ul>
Long-term strategy implementation progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Report on progress annually, prior to major planning reset in November each year</li> <li>– Complete report as part of strategy review at the end of this Plan update (in five years)</li> </ul>
Vision realisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Report on progress and other evaluation questions annually</li> <li>– Complete report as part of strategy review at the end of this Plan update (in five years)</li> </ul>

### 5.3.4 DATA, DATA GAPS AND BENCHMARKING

While measuring progress towards some of the 5-year and long-term goals (Table 3 and Table 1) will require new data gathering and benchmarking, it is likely that several partners will have existing monitoring processes that RiverConnect can ‘piggyback’ on or complement. Targets have been chosen and designed to capitalise on mutual benefits and create efficiencies.

The detailing of specific performance measures and data requirements is a task to be completed early in the life of this 2017-2022 Plan.

# Appendix 1: Strategic Plan review process

The review of the RiverConnect Strategic Plan was directed by the IAC, with guidance from a small working group of GSCC and GB CMA staff and IAC community representatives.

<b>Stage 1 IAC direction setting</b>	
May 2015	Member survey
June 2015	Workshop 1: Achievements and assessment
August 2015	Workshop 2: Future priorities and governance
<b>Stage 2 Partner (existing and potential) coffee catch ups to inform Plan</b>	
January 2015 – June 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Goulburn Murray Landcare Network</li> <li>– Greater Shepparton City Council</li> <li>– Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority</li> <li>– Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project</li> <li>– Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative</li> <li>– Gallery Kaiella</li> <li>– Word and Mouth</li> <li>– U3A</li> <li>– Shepparton Historical Society</li> <li>– Goulburn Valley Water</li> <li>– Aboriginal Partnerships Officer – Council</li> <li>– Parks Victoria</li> <li>– Shepparton Art Museum</li> <li>– Committee for Greater Shepparton</li> <li>– Education sector</li> <li>– Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation</li> <li>– GV Health</li> <li>– Shepp Show Me</li> <li>– VER Fish</li> <li>– Ethnic Council</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 3 Plan drafting</b>	
April - August 2016	Presentation to IAC June 2016 and review by members July/August 2016
<b>Stage 4 Presentation to Council</b>	
December 2016	Council meeting
<b>Stage 5 Broader community consultation</b>	
February – March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Community group catch ups</li> <li>– Consultation at events and activities</li> <li>– Draft available for comment</li> <li>– Partner sign on</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 6 Council endorsement</b>	
June 2017	Council meeting

We would like to thank all the people who contributed to the review and development of the second of what we hope will be many RiverConnect Strategic Plans.



