



Waterways of the West
Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
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Attention: Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC)

Protecting the Waterways of the West

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (**AILA**) **anticipates and develops, with its members, a leading position on issues of concern in landscape architecture. With more than 3,500 members in urban and rural Australia, and overseas, AILA champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities and greater environmental stewardship.** Alongside government and allied professions, AILA works to improve the design, planning and management of the natural and built environment.

AILA is pleased to have the opportunity to submit a response to the Discussion Paper produced by the Waterways of the West Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC). AILA has followed with great interest, Environment Justice Australia's advocacy for waterways in the western region of Melbourne, and participated in previous community engagement. We are delighted that this advocacy has contributed to the formation of the Waterways of the West MAC.

In responding to the discussion paper, we are drawing on position statements that articulate and clarify AILA's position on a number of relevant and topical issues (www.aila.org.au). In this case, the relevant position statements are:

- Connection to Country
- Green infrastructure
- Adaptation to the changing climate: Building resilience
- Liveable Cities: Healthy communities – Healthy Living Landscape Solutions
- Liveable Cities: Cooling Cities – Urban Heat Island Effect

Our response is also informed by AILA's recent declaration of a climate and biodiversity loss emergency.



Response

Direction 1:

In its position statement, Connection to country, AILA recognises the importance of building relationships with traditional custodians of country. AILA believes that by collaborating with traditional custodians and learning from their ancient knowledge of the land and its waterways, we can improve our understanding and care of the landscape. Thus, AILA supports the objectives of Direction 1 to embed traditional owners and their values, culture and voices in planning and management of western waterways and associated lands. This support extends to opportunities in Directions 2-7 that also refer to involvement of traditional custodians in waterway planning and management.

Directions 2 and 3:

Direction 2 relates to protecting and enhancing water quality and waterway health, and Direction 3 to providing water for environment and country. These two Directions, and the discussion paper more generally, recognise the waterways of the west as green infrastructure. AILA supports this recognition. AILA recommends that Waterways of the West MAC requires the development of a Green Infrastructure (GI) strategy to underpin Directions 2 and 3. AILA's position statement on green infrastructure states that "Developing a GI strategy helps us to understand what the ecological and biological components of urban systems are; prioritise the preservation and the enhancement of those green structures and engage in cross disciplinary dialogue about how to achieve more sustainable and resilient urban systems."

A green infrastructure strategy would also help in the development of masterplans to guide land use and protect waterways from inappropriate development, an opportunity identified in Directions 5, 6 and 7. It would also be useful in the creation of a network of multifunctional blue-green corridors, which would deliver multiple benefits, identified as an opportunity in Direction 4.

Direction 2 identifies Integrated Water Management (IWM) as an opportunity, dependent on funding. IWM would enable the use of fit-for-purpose water, including harvested stormwater. Use of multiple sources of water, including stormwater and recycled water, would facilitate balance between consumptive, environmental and cultural water uses, the goal of Direction 3.

AILA would recommend the inclusion of a statement in Directions 2 and 3 about the importance of protecting the quality of the riparian zone of waterways as well as quality of the water. Weed control and revegetation are important along the waterway. Many waterways in the west are in deeply incised valleys. When considering a waterway, the entire valley should be included. Any measures to improve waterway quality should extend to the top of the embankment.

Directions 4-7: This discussion paper recognises the importance of the waterways of the west as living blue-green infrastructure. This infrastructure is multifunctional, providing provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural ecosystem services. Three AILA position statements relate to Directions 4-7. *Cooling Cities – Urban Heat Island Effect* explains that green open space is important to mitigate rising temperatures within cities, to alleviate the urban heat island effect.



In so doing, it improves the comfort, quality and health of a city and its residents. For every 1°C reduction in urban temperature through the better design of cities, there is a 5% energy saving through reduced cooling loads, with consequent environmental benefits.

In addition, *Adaptation to the Changing Climate: Building Resilience*, and more recently AILA's climate change and biodiversity emergency declaration draw attention to the importance of waterways for maintenance of local biodiversity and mitigation of the effects of climate change.

They are important for their intrinsic value and for the ecosystem services they deliver to communities. *Liveable Cities: Healthy Communities – Healthy Living Landscape Solutions* argues that landscapes should be planned and designed to support healthy communities. Empirical research shows that humans are biophilic and require the restorative effects of exposure to nature. Benefits of nature include improved cognitive functioning, greater self-discipline and impulse control, improved overall mental health, and greater resilience to the stresses of everyday life.

AILA supports Directions 4-7, which would result in protection and enhancement of the waterways of the west, including their riparian zones, for the multiple benefits they could confer on the community. It also supports legislation recommended in Direction 5 to recognise the waterways of the west and associated lands as an interconnected system of environmental, cultural and open space assets and include a requirement to protect them.

However, AILA makes the following recommendations for **Directions 4-7**:

- Attention is given to the major waterways of the west in Opportunity D in Direction 4, Opportunity E, in Direction 5, and Opportunity B in Direction 7. AILA recommend all waterways of the west, major and minor, are included in strategic blue-green corridor plans.
- Ideally, the blue-green corridors of waterways of the west would all connect with each other and the coastal wetlands and estuaries to create a single, continuous waterway network.
- It is important to map values of all waterways, not just coastal wetlands.
- In blue-green corridor plans of Directions 4, 5 and 7, efforts should be made to include additional land beyond riparian zones to extend open space network. As commented above, many waterways in the west are in deeply incised valleys. When considering a waterway, the entire valley should be included. Any legislation, strategic planning, localized master planning and preservation/conservation/restoration measures for a waterway should include the waterway and its valley walls.
- Integration is all important (Direction 7), e.g. integration of blue-green corridors into an open space system, integration of management of all western waterways and their lands as a network delivering multiple ecosystem benefits.



- Consistency is also important (Direction 7), e.g. consistent planning controls across municipal boundaries to protect landscape character and amenity from inappropriate development, to maintain sense of place of western waterways, enforcement through planning policy framework, local planning schemes and other appropriate mechanisms.

A final comment relates to the entire discussion paper: the discussion paper does not distinguish between natural and constructed waterways in the west. There are some creeks, e.g. Lollipop Creek, that are actually constructed drainage lines, although they would appear natural to a lay person. Some sections of natural waterways have been expanded or engineered.

Existing preservation/conservation/restoration policies differ for natural waterways compared with constructed waterways. The discussion paper should state explicitly if the Directions identified in the discussion paper refer only to natural waterways, or both natural and constructed waterways. AILA believes that environmental resilience would be enhanced by extending stewardship under the auspices of the Waterways of the West MAC to all natural and constructed waterways in the west.

AILA’s priorities of opportunities

In response to a request for an indication of priorities of opportunities identified in the discussion paper, please refer to the table below. AILA recommends that involvement of traditional owners is a high priority for each Direction.

Direction	Highest priority
1	A is critical to enable subsequent opportunities, but all are important
2	A
3	B
4	A,D
5	D,E,G,H
6	A,B,E
7	A,B, D

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback. We would be happy to discuss our submission further. Please contact that AILA Victoria Chapter Manager, Martha Delfas at martha.delfas@aila.org.au.

Sincerely



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Victorian Chapter President, AILA



Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects