Yarra Ranges Council Heritage Policy 2026

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Approved by Council:	27 October 2026
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Policy Owner:	Executive Officer - Strategic Planning - Design & Place; and Executive Officer - Creative Communities - Economy, Tourism and Culture.
Applicable to:	All Council Employees

Acknowledgement of Country

Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nation peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways. We pay our respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region. We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together.

Value of History Statement

We acknowledge that history shapes our identities, engages us as citizens, creates inclusive communities, is part of our economic well-being, teaches us to think critically and creatively, inspires leaders and is the foundation of our future generations.

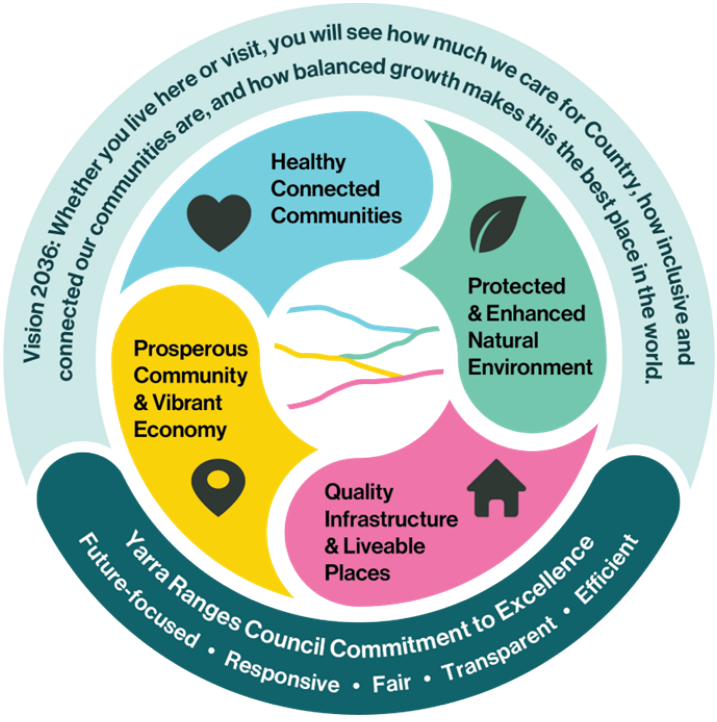
Yarra Ranges Community Vision 2036

The Yarra Ranges Community Vision 2036 has been developed to describe the community's and Council's aspirations for the future of the municipality. It is based on input from over 1,000 community members and reflects the local community' aspirations for the municipality.

Whether you live here or visit, you will see how much we care for Country, how inclusive and connected our communities are, and how balanced growth makes this the best place in the world.

What We Want to Achieve

Council has four objectives to describe what we are working towards and how we want Yarra Ranges to be in the future. These objectives have been developed in response to our communities' priorities and the big issues facing Yarra Ranges. All policies and activities completed by the organisation contribute to one or more of these objectives.



1. Introduction

Heritage forms the **foundation of community identity**, connecting us to the past while shaping who we are today. Yarra Ranges Council recognises that heritage illuminates what we value, where we come from, and the diverse **stories that define our region**.

When heritage reflects the full spectrum of our communities—their cultures, histories, and lived experiences—it becomes a powerful unifying force. It creates **opportunities for shared understanding, mutual respect, and collective stewardship** of the places, traditions, and narratives that matter most. Engaging with heritage is also linked to a range of benefits from improved wellbeing and social cohesion to cultural tourism, economic development and environmental sustainability.

The Yarra Ranges is a **living mosaic of heritage** where ancient landscapes, First Peoples and their songlines, generations of settlers, waves of immigrants and newcomers intertwine across time. From volcanic origins to modern conservation, nature, culture, and Community are interwoven. This heritage reflects both continuity and change, reminding us that Country has always been, and will always be, a living presence, with stories that continue to grow and connect all who share this place.

Council embraces the management of heritage according to legislative requirements and heritage best practice guidelines. **Council is committed to the protection and celebration of heritage**, in all forms, to ensure preservation and ongoing significance for Yarra Ranges and the wider community into the future.

2. Purpose

This Heritage Policy (Policy) establishes Yarra Ranges Council's (Council) approach to **contemporary best practice management of the diverse heritage** of the Yarra Ranges. Council has legal, social and ethical obligations to protect and promote heritage. This Policy **outlines the principles** that must be followed in heritage practice and guides Council's decision-making to ensure heritage is valued both for its historical significance and its ongoing role in shaping community identity, resilience, and connection to place.

This Policy and the accompanying Heritage Strategy will assist Council in meeting its obligations and support the delivery of strategic objectives around heritage.

3. Scope

This Policy and the accompanying Heritage Strategy apply to **all departments of Council and Council employees** whose work intersects with heritage. It applies to both operational and strategic projects that predominantly, but not exclusively, include the following:

- Identification, protection and management of **places of heritage significance** in alignment with Local, State and Federal Government legislation
- Administration of the **Heritage Overlay** through the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme
- **Research and storytelling** undertaken, supported or funded by Council
- **Communication and promotion** of history and heritage in collaboration with community

This Policy uses the term 'heritage' to **encompass all forms of heritage**, including natural, cultural, tangible, moveable and intangible heritage, and heritage tourism. A snapshot overview of heritage in Yarra Ranges can be found in the accompanying Heritage Strategy.

4. Definitions

Table 1. Definitions

Burra Charter	The Burra Charter is Australia's national standard for managing and conserving cultural heritage places, providing guiding principles and procedures for buildings, landscapes, archaeological sites and more, emphasising understanding significance and sustainable care. The Charter provides a framework for owners, managers, and professionals to identify, plan, and act on heritage conservation, promoting least-intervention and reversibility, and is internationally influential.
Caring for Country	First Peoples' practices of land, waterway and sea management that draw on deep bodies of knowledge based on thousands of years of observation and inherited lore and custom.
Citation	A detailed assessment of a heritage item that has been rigorously researched, reviewed and published based on industry recognised methods, and is suitably credible to be used as the basis of a formal planning control.
Country	The complex interconnected system of land, water, sky, plants, animals, ancestors and spirit. For First Peoples, Country is identity, culture, language, lore, and Community. It's deeply spiritual and has supported life for tens of thousands of years.
Deep Time	'We are born with our Ancestors' yurlendj (intelligence/knowledge), murrup (spirit), wurrung (Language) and sadly also their trauma. These are all embedded in our murrup and continue through the generations. This is our genetic memory, which comes from Deep Time. Deep Time surpasses all other 'times' in the western sense of the word. Deep Time began before time itself and will continue indefinitely' (Nicholson 2019).
Diversity	The wide variety of cultures, languages, identities, experiences, religions, age groups, genders, sexual orientations and disability needs that form the full picture of community.
Evidence-based	Evidence-based heritage draws on multiple sources of knowledge: archives, texts, databases, archaeology, stories, memories, and lived experience. It also acknowledges that evidence is shaped by the perspectives and power dynamics of the time.
Heritage	Aspects of our society that people value and wish to retain from the past, including First Peoples' heritage, natural heritage, built heritage, movable heritage objects and collections, and intangible heritage.
Heritage Overlay	A planning control in the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme to protect places of historical, cultural, or architectural significance. It includes a Schedule that lists individual properties and identifies their specific requirements for protection such as external or internal controls, surrounding context or landscape, and particular provisions.
History	The research, analysis, presentation and interpretation of past people, events, periods, and changes.
Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing	Traditional knowledge, perspectives, and practices. *Knowing* is how First Peoples perceive and understand the world, encompassing their beliefs, stories, accumulated bodies of knowledge and wisdom. *Being* is connected to identity, Community, spirituality, and connection to Country. *Doing* encompasses rituals, actions, and daily practices that uphold cultural values such as Respect, Caring and Sharing. These elements embody a 60,000-year-old Indigenous worldview

	shaped by generations of experience, emphasising harmony with Country, Lore, Ancestors, and protocols.
Interpretation	Methods used to increase public understanding of and engagement with heritage and histories.
Shared Heritage	Places where histories and heritage associated with different cultures intersect.
Songlines	A method used to navigate Country by First Peoples through stories and songs, based on the journeys of ancestral beings during the Dreaming.
Truth Telling	The process of recognising, documenting and sharing a fuller and more accurate understanding of history by including diverse perspectives, experiences and evidence. In a heritage context, this means acknowledging both positive and challenging aspects of the past, particularly where they have shaped the heritage values, stories, places or communities being considered.
Under-represented histories	Events, stories and narratives (often associated with diverse groups of people) that have been researched and/or shared less frequently than dominant mainstream histories.

5. Policy Statement

Council recognises that **heritage is a living, evolving and interconnected legacy** that connects people, places, and stories from Deep Time to today and into the future.

Council affirms its responsibility to identify, protect, manage, celebrate and share the region's diverse heritage **in partnership** with First Peoples, communities, and stakeholders. This includes tangible and intangible heritage; cultural heritage; natural heritage; built fabric; collections and archives; and the rich array of community stories and traditions that shape local identity.

Council is committed to **community-led** heritage practice, **inclusive** storytelling, **cultural safety and truth telling**. This policy sees heritage as a shared responsibility and a public good that is integral to place-making, planning, sustainability, education, creativity, wellbeing and reconciliation.

6. Principles

The below **principles express the core values and aspirations** that shape how heritage is planned, managed, and interpreted by Yarra Ranges Council. They serve as a **compass for decision-making** and provide a **consistent foundation** for responding to emerging heritage matters, ensuring that heritage practices are inclusive, respectful, and future-focused. The principles also ensure that responsible consideration is given to the cultural values and knowledge systems of all communities in Yarra Ranges. This ensures that First Peoples, settler communities, new migrant communities and other cultural and community-based knowledge systems, academic disciplines, societies, and beliefs are considered and respected.

The cultural wisdom of First Peoples, deeply rooted in Country, Community, and spirituality, flows alongside Western traditions of documentation, conservation, and public engagement. By allowing these knowledge systems to converge, the approach becomes **holistic and inclusive**, honouring heritage as both a living practice and a shared responsibility.

6.1. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

- Consider **equitable access** to heritage resources, assets and experiences and opportunities for all genders and cultural backgrounds to participate in heritage regardless of background and ability.
- Recognise the contributions of **diverse cultural groups** to the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the Yarra Ranges.
- Recognise the **cultural authority** of diverse cultural groups and endeavour to respect all cultures in heritage practice.
- At sites of **shared and/or conflicting heritage values**, heritage protection and interpretation will endeavour to respect all cultures represented, in alignment with the Burra Charter.
- Understand that **heritage intersects** with gender, culture, disability, and other identities.

6.2. Cultural Authority and First Peoples' Leadership

- Recognise and respect **Cultural Authority and First Peoples' knowledge systems** in telling their own story in alignment with the 'First Peoples First' pillar of *Australia's Cultural Policy*.
- In alignment with contemporary best practice, move beyond consultation toward true co-design and **First Peoples leadership**.
- Embrace the interconnected ways of **Knowing, Being, and Doing** of First Peoples.
- Respect the enduring **relationship between nature and culture** for First Peoples, recognising the role of Country in wellbeing and the continuous, intergenerational expertise in caring for Country and Culture that spans thousands of generations since deep time.
- In heritage practice, listings and interpretation, embrace **truth-telling** processes that acknowledge the experiences of First Peoples in the Yarra Ranges.
- Embed **cultural safety** into all heritage projects, activities and outputs that are led, supported or funded by Council, or undertaken on Council-owned or managed land.
- Uphold **Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property** laws.

6.3. Community Participation and Empowerment

- Heritage interpretation should be **participatory and inclusive**—empowering communities and visitors to explore, question, and contribute to shared narratives about the past, present, and future.
- Recognise **shared goals** between Council, the Yarra Ranges Heritage Network and other stakeholders in preserving and promoting local history.
- **Work collaboratively** with community, cultural organisations, businesses and other stakeholders on shared heritage goals.
- Foster the **value of volunteer-led heritage work** with an expectation of mutual support and capacity building.
- Engage with **diverse communities** to enable heritage initiatives that reflect lived experiences and foster belonging.
- **Share decision-making** processes with community acknowledging that responsibility for heritage does not sit solely with Council.
- Maintain open and transparent **communication** channels on priorities and projects.

6.4. Future-focused Heritage

- Maintain a **future-focused approach** to heritage that supports the long-term stewardship of heritage places, stories and values, while ensuring heritage continues to evolve in how it is understood, interpreted and shared, remaining relevant and meaningful to contemporary and future communities.
- Acknowledge heritage exists at the intersection of environmental, social, economic and cultural **sustainability**, requiring a holistic sustainability perspective.
- Recognise that heritage shapes identities, informs inclusive communities, and is **foundational to future generations**.
- Connect past events to contemporary issues and future aspirations so that the legacy of **the past plays a role in the present and future** of the community.
- Ensure **heritage conservation is responsive** to climate resilience, sustainability, and evolving community values.
- Care for **cultural collections as public assets** with long-term significance that are preserved, accessible, and valued by and for the community into the future.
- Apply **regenerative principles** in heritage practice and aim for a net-positive impact, not just reducing harm but actively improving environmental health and community wellbeing.

6.5. Evidence-based Practice, Research, Interpretation and Education

- Heritage research, documentation, interpretation and education should be **evidence-based and well-founded**.
- All heritage interpretation, education and decisions, including contested heritage, should **consider represented communities** and **reflect diverse perspectives** in a responsible manner.
- Commit to truth telling, diversity, and inclusivity in how heritage is interpreted and shared—**giving voice** to under-represented histories, difficult histories and diverse perspectives.
- Respect **locally held knowledge and expertise**, particularly within the Yarra Ranges Heritage Network, Registered Aboriginal Parties, and history and heritage community organisations.
- Use heritage as a **platform for connection and lifelong learning**, fostering cultural appreciation, critical thinking, and dialogue across generations and diverse perspectives.
- Heritage decisions, interpretation and reinterpretation should recognise and reflect significant historical and social influences where relevant to the heritage being considered, including **the impacts** of colonisation, gender inequality, and other forms of historical injustice, while **supporting community** understanding, learning, and respectful dialogue.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Council holds specific **statutory obligations** in relation to heritage; however, we acknowledge that there are many stakeholders with interests in heritage.

Table 1: Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Statutory obligations	Council holds specific statutory obligations in relation to heritage as specified in the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, Heritage Act 2017* and *Statewide Treaty Act 2025* including enforcing compliance with the Acts.
Planning responsibilities	Council manages the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme and Heritage Overlay, which identifies and protects places of local significance and state significance (Victorian Heritage Register).
Management of heritage assets	Council owns and manages several heritage buildings and places, and supports private owners of heritage assets.
Protecting First Peoples' heritage	Council collaborates with and provides support to First Peoples in managing and protecting cultural heritage. The Indigenous Advisory Committee guides Council in carrying out this work. Note: while First Peoples' heritage places can be included in the Heritage Overlay, this cannot replace or override protection via the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and *Statewide Treaty Act 2025.*
Management of records and collections	Council manages shire archives and heritage collections to ensure their preservation, accessibility, and integrity. This includes maintaining heritage collections in accordance with best-practice standards, while facilitating public access and interpretation to support research, education, and community engagement. Council also supports community organisations and businesses to support the regions distributed collections.
Communication and promotion of heritage	Council raises awareness of the cultural, historical, and environmental significance of heritage via through clear, accessible information and engagement initiatives. Council works to foster community understanding and appreciation by sharing stories, providing interpretive materials, and supporting events and programs that celebrate heritage. These efforts aim to encourage community stewardship, participation, and pride in the region's heritage assets.
Operational work	Departments manage heritage as part of regular operations in line with legislation. This continues alongside actions from the Heritage Strategy and other projects.

7.1. External roles

Council works closely with other groups and organisations with responsibility for heritage, including but not limited to those listed in Table 1.

Table 2: External Roles and Responsibilities

Agency	Responsibility
The Yarra Ranges Heritage Network	Provides input to Council about the region's history and heritage.
Heritage Victoria and Heritage Council of Victoria	Heritage Victoria (an agency of the Victorian government) and the Heritage Council of Victoria (an appointed public body) together are responsible for maintaining the Victorian Heritage Register of state significant heritage places and objects, and the Victorian Heritage Inventory of archaeological sites. Heritage Victoria is also responsible for artefacts excavated from historic sites.
National Trust of Australia (Victoria	Advocates for the protection of heritage sites and operates heritage places (e.g. Gulf Station in Yarra Glen).
Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council	Independent statutory body responsible for the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register and appoints Registered Aboriginal Parties to manage and protect Cultural Heritage.
Registered Aboriginal Parties	Statutory bodies appointed under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* to act as the 'primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders' of Aboriginal cultural heritage in their designated areas. There are three Registered Aboriginal Parties in the Yarra Ranges: • Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation • Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation • Taungurung Land & Waters Council
Gellung Warl	Permanent representative and deliberative body for Traditional Owners and First Peoples in Victoria, established through the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*. Responsible for providing expert advice to government agencies, administering the First Peoples' Infrastructure Fund (which can support heritage conservation and local heritage initiatives), and guiding truth telling, cultural recognition, and protection of heritage as part of Statewide Treaty reforms.
First Peoples – State Relations	Coordinates whole of government efforts to address historical injustices and are responsible for heritage protection under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, including archaeological sites.
Department of Transport and Planning	Oversees any changes to the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme and Heritage Overlay.
Parks Victoria	Manages the Yarra Ranges National Park and the Dandenong Ranges National Park, Taungurung land in the Yarra Ranges, and state parks, forests and nature conservation areas.
Commonwealth Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water	Manages the National Heritage List.
Public Records Office of Victoria	Serves as the official archive for state and local government agencies, including materials from the Yarra Ranges Council area. Preserves records of permanent value, enforces standards under the *Public Records Act 1973*, and secures the proper custody, management, and access of those public records.
Heritage Tourism Attractions	Including but not limited to Puffing Billy Railway, Healesville Sanctuary and Coombe Cottage.

Agency	Responsibility
Landowners	Play a role in heritage. With over 443 properties included in the Heritage Overlay, the protection and conservation of properties is also a commitment by the land owner of the heritage place, to take into account cultural significance and conservation requirements in the day-to-day with the undertaking of regular maintenance to protect condition and integrity, and seek professional advice for sympathetic change when physically impacting the place or altering its use. Any major change to the place must comply with the relevant planning provisions.

8. Related Documents

8.1. Legislation

- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*
- *Australian Heritage Council Act 2003*
- *Heritage Act 2017 (Victoria)*
- *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Victoria)*
- *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*
- *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*
- *Public Records Act 1973*
- *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018*
- *Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022*

8.2. Guiding Documents – Yarra Ranges Council

- Yarra Ranges Council Plan 2025-2029
- Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme
    - Heritage Overlay (HO)
    - Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO)
    - Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO)
- Creative Communities Strategy 2019-2028
- Innovate: Reconciliation Action Plan 2024-2026
- Nature Plan 2024-2034: Protecting Our Biodiversity Assets
- Liveable Climate Plan 2020-2030
- Tree Canopy Strategy 2024-2044
- Green Wedge Management Plan 2010, under review
- Housing Strategy 2024
- Neighbourhood Character Study 2024
- Paths and Trails Plan 2025-2035
- Yarra Ranges Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2029
- Disability Action Plan 2025-2029
- Key Life Stages Plan 2025-2029
- Towards a Regenerative Yarra Ranges – Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032
- Plaques and Memorials Policy 2024

8.3. Guiding Documents - External

- Australian Heritage Strategy 2015
- Australia's Cultural Policy 'Revive: A Place for Every Story, a Story for Every Place', Commonwealth Government 2023
- International Council of Museums, Standards and Guidelines; Code of Ethics
- National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries, second edition 2023
- Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance 2013 (Burra Charter)
- Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property laws
- Australian Indigenous Design Charter
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) 2007
- First Peoples: a roadmap for enhancing Indigenous engagement in museums and galleries, Australian Museums and Galleries Association 2017
- Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Regional Strategy Plan
- Melbourne Water Corporation, Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo (Yarra Strategic Plan)

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation of this Policy will be overseen by the Design and Place Department and Economy, Tourism and Culture Department at Yarra Ranges Council. These departments will conduct policy status reviews ensuring oversight and accountability.

The policy owners will be responsible for preparing formal reports to the Executive Leadership Team, Forum and/or Council relating to this policy.

10. Policy Review

This Policy is classified as low to moderate risk and will be subject to:

- Formal review every four years and re-approval in accordance with Council's Policy Governance Guidelines.
- Annual desktop review to determine whether minor administrative amendments or updates are required, or whether a formal review should be undertaken earlier than scheduled.

From time to time, circumstances may require minor administrative amendments to be made to this document. Where such an amendment does not materially alter the intent of the document, this may be made administratively with the combined approval of the Managers of Design and Place and Creative Communities departments without the need to be approved by the Executive Leadership Team or Council.

11. Revision History

Version	Date	Summary of revisions
1.0	27 October 2026	