



Lynette Bergin Fellowship Final Report  
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'Activating the Yarra River'  
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eureka  
skydeck



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## 1. Summary

The aim of this project was to develop a research based strategy and recommendations to drive mixed use visitation and tourism investment in the Yarra River precinct, including opportunities for cultural events, festivals and collaborative marketing concepts. Essentially, I set off on this journey to uncover the secrets to waterfront success. As I went 'down this stream'; it quickly became evident that I was looking at the situation with the naivety of an outsider.

Plenty of previous reports and recommendations spoke to solving the governance issue of the Yarra River, but I wasn't particularly interested in pursuing that. It seemed boring and too big of a 'fish to fry', not for someone with my minimal experience of governance. I started off trying to find ways to activate the water through events and promotional partnerships, but for many stakeholders I spoke to, this couldn't be further from the solution. Melbourne doesn't yet have the supportive framework to facilitate waterway activation success- another waterway event isn't going to solve the problem. More work really needs to be done on the supply side, but we need to firstly *set the foundation* for supply before we can focus on the demand. Once I realised we had to strip it down to bare bones before we could rebuild it, management systems and waterway Governance became a key focus of this report.

So after fifty five hours in transit, eighty hours meeting and researching and four cities later, I actually took comfort in realising that no waterfront or waterways management group held the golden answer to success that Melbourne has simply overlooked. The same problems plague every group I spoke to- governance, balancing conservation with growth, lack of funding, perceptions of waterway value and a myriad of stakeholders all pushing their own agendas. That said each destination had their own unique concepts and opportunities when it came to waterway management and activation that Melbourne can source inspiration from.

I am pleased to have arrived at a range of recommendations that will help to achieve success and I look forward to working alongside the Yarra River Business Association to explore this further.



## 2. Project background

Melbourne is a key destination for domestic and international travellers with broad appeal across many markets. Melbourne's famous restaurants and eateries, world class events, shopping precincts, hidden laneways, widespread celebration of sport and melting pot of culture are key drivers to the city.

With over 9.19 million international and domestic overnight visitors to Melbourne in the year ending March 2014 (Source- Tourism Research Australia, Domestic Visitor Survey March 2014 and International Visitor Survey March 2014), there is no doubt over the city's ability to draw visitors.

However unlike other similar key destinations, the vein of the city- the Yarra River; isn't celebrated as a key tourism driver or facilitator. Many sections of the water based precincts are disjointed, have poor signage and wayfinding and can appear to be unsafe; especially at night.

Activating and connecting the city's waterways is a key opportunity for Melbourne that holds relevance for both residents and visitors alike. Previous research and industry forums have indicated that there are still many opportunities relating to improved collaboration between public and private stakeholders and infrastructure investment in Melbourne's waterways (Appendix 1). Collaboration success will drive visitability with an overarching aim of developing the Yarra River and surrounding precincts as tourism destinations in their own right.

I chose this project as I believe that there is a great opportunity to gain insights from leading destinations into how Melbourne can benefit from a more collaborative approach to mixed use waterways.



### 3. Research Methodology

In my quest to understand and draw inspiration from waterway success, I looked to review the current state of Melbourne and then benchmark against key cities both domestically and internationally.

Destinations included-

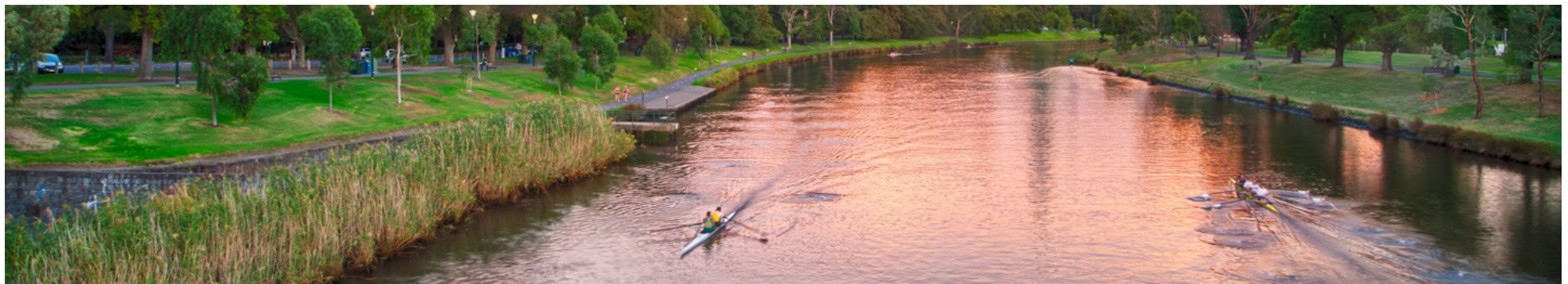
- CASE STUDY #1- Melbourne, Australia
- CASE STUDY #2 Gold Coast, Australia
- CASE STUDY #3- London, United Kingdom
- CASE STUDY #4- Vienna, Austria

## 4. Melbourne

### a. Research

Research in Melbourne consisted of in depth interviews with significant waterway stakeholders, attending a Waterfront Forum and extensive literature review (Appendix #1) to understand the current state of play.

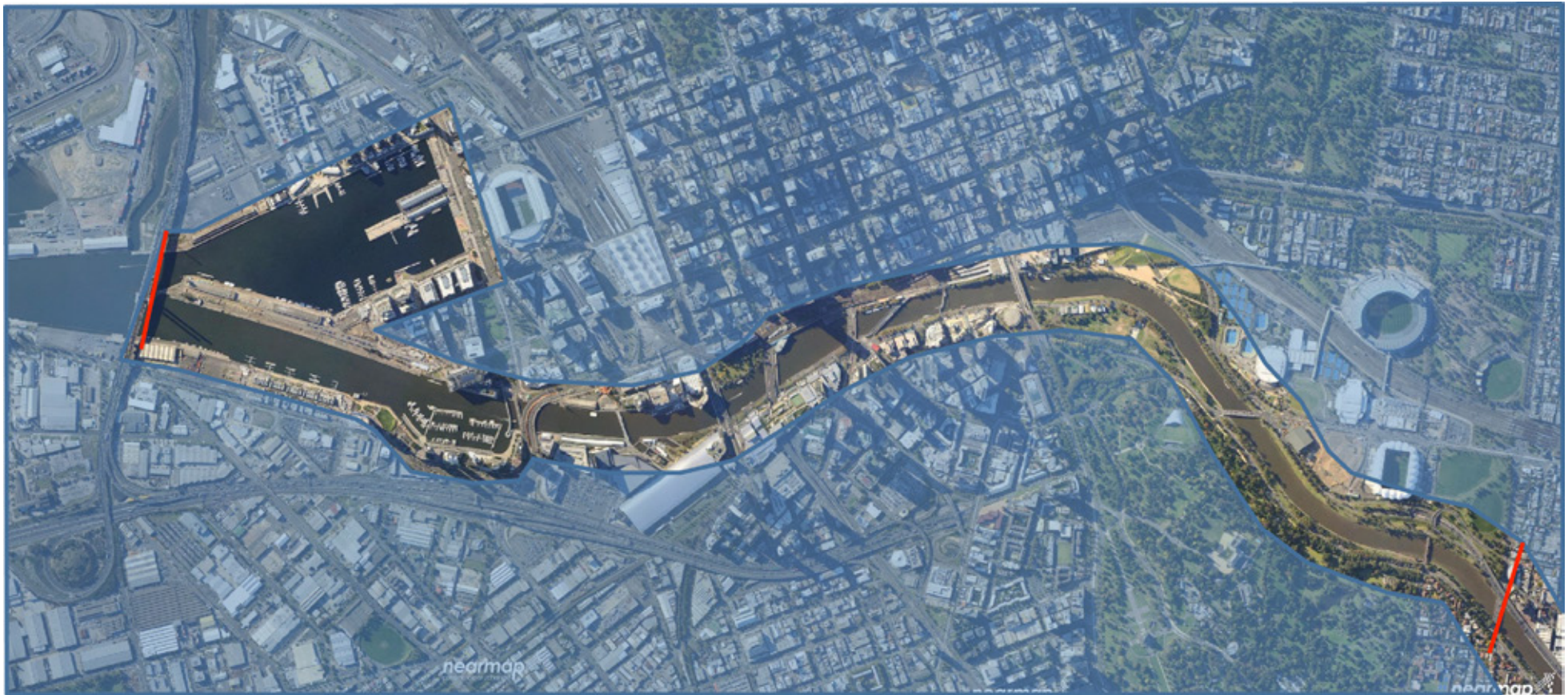
Corporation	Personnel/Event	Research	Duration
Melbourne Waterfront Forum	Many stakeholders	Forum attendance	3 hours
City of Melbourne- Waterways Unit	Doug Jarvis- Waterways Manager Jade Lo- Waterways Business Coordinator	Interview	1.5 hours
Yarra Riverkeepers	Andrew Kelly- Yarra Riverkeeper	Interview	2 hours
City of Melbourne- Business and Tourism	Helen Hardwick- Program Manager Tourism Policy and Strategy	Interview	45 minutes
Student from NHTV Breda, University of Applied Science, The Netherlands	Luca De Pasquale- Masters student investigating the Melbourne Waterfront	Interview	1.5 hours
Yarra River Business Association	Tim Bracher- Executive Officer	Interview	2 hours
Literature Review	Multiple- see Appendix #1	Literature review	5.5 hours



## b. Key Findings

Melbourne's Yarra River is 240km long spanning from the flanks of Mt Baw Baw in the Yarra Ranges National Park to its mouth at the head of Port Phillip Bay in Newport. A staggering 70% of Melbourne's drinking water is sourced from the upper Yarra and over four million people live in the catchment area.

“  
**The Yarra River is now the  
undisputed social heart of  
marvellous Melbourne**  
”  
- Parks Victoria



*The Lower Yarra- the focus of this report.*

One of the city's most picturesque areas, the banks of the lower Yarra have many barbecue and picnic facilities, fishing platforms and jettys for public use. In addition, there are trails and paths which cater for cyclists, walkers and joggers. The river itself has approximately 35kms of navigable waterway for boats and recreational use. Each year the Yarra plays host to many events including the famous Moomba festival, rowing regattas, the Melbourne Festival and Dragon Boat Festivals. The mouth is used for container shipping by the Port of Melbourne which is the busiest on the continent.

Through my research in Melbourne, I quickly learnt the extent of the complex web of regulation that causes so much frustration for key waterway stakeholders. The governance of the river is fragmented and lacks a cohesive framework with eleven municipalities and sixteen agencies and authorities who each cover a range of waterway and land functions. Over the last hundred years as the city and its use of the water have progressed, it seems that the legislation that governs the waterways hasn't. Although governance was not a key focus of this research project, it is so intrinsically linked to and underpins any growth that it has driven the key recommendations out of this report.



*Key stakeholders for waterways Governance*





Over the last ten years in particular there have been various waterway strategy reports and proposals presented for consideration where the Government have failed to act and some opportunities have passed us by. There is clear frustration expressed at the State Government in particular who are perceived as not willing to listen and who have not been supportive. As I read through many of the past strategy documents, many expressed realistic and achievable actions, such as 'A review of integrated visitor transport in Melbourne-Destination Melbourne 2010', whereas some pushed a narrow view focused only on their own patch. This was mirrored in meeting with various Yarra stakeholders. It was certainly evident there are many committed and passionate individuals who are pushing for long term and strategic waterway success; however no one organisation had a definitive answer regarding governance that seemed to suit the majority.

The Melbourne Waterfront Forum saw thirty of the Yarra's key stakeholders come together to address the issue of governance on the river. The message from the Right Hon Lord Mayor Robert Doyle was clear; provide him with 'a coherent view on the route to a one-stop-shop'. Speakers included Doug Jarvis and Professor Rob Adams from the City of Melbourne on the current state of play in Melbourne and how other cities have embraced their waterways. This was followed by Hal Morris from The Gold Coast Waterway Authority (GCWA) on the 2012 adoption of a statutory authority river governance model in the Gold Coast.

*The 2014 Melbourne Waterfront Forum. Hal Morris from GCWA addressing the group*



A key takeaway from the forum was that after many meetings, forums, steering committees and proposal documents there is still no clear solution that suits the needs of all stakeholders. That said, the GCWA port authority system was a keenly welcomed framework; one that many stakeholders would be happy to see implemented.

Another strong industry voice at the forum was that of the riverboat operators. There are 26 commercial vessels servicing the Yarra with a daily capacity of 3,000 passengers. The operators currently fill about 24% of this supply, leaving over 830,000 seats unfilled. Barriers to use include no scheduled water transport options, services can appear too pricey and there is a lack of awareness of the service offers. Although there is strong demand for river charters by the domestic market for events, the industry is in decline. From the industry perspective, this group feel largely ignored. It has become a stalemate situation where there will be no further investment at an operator level until there is investment and development by the Government and security of tenures. There needs to be more attention paid to this situation if we are committed to using the Yarra River to drive mixed use tourism. A substandard tourism offering on the river will not drive or facilitate demand; as it stands, Melbourne's riverboat industry is not befitting of a world class destination.

We know that currently we are not meeting our tourism, development and environmental potentials on the water and we need framework for success before we can make real and sustainable change. It appears that nothing can progress until we sort out the governance issue and the best way forward is different depending on who you talk to. As the Gold Coast's model was a favourable option, I thought it best to spend time with Hal Morris and his team at the GCWA to see how this model could be applied to Melbourne.

## 5. Gold Coast

### a. Research

Spending a week with the team at the Gold Coast Waterway Authority office provided an opportunity for in-depth research into their model. I was lucky to get a true feeling of the organisation first hand, undertake one-on-one interviews with key personnel, experience various site inspections and attend a planning meeting with the CEO and project staff.

Corporation	Personnel	Research	Duration
Gold Coast Waterway Authority	Hal Morris- CEO	Interview	3 hours over 2 days
Gold Coast Waterway Authority	Brian McRae- Manager (Strategy)	Interview	1.5 hours
Gold Coast Waterway Authority	Annabel Waldron- Executive Coordinator	Interview	6 hours over 5 days
Gold Coast Waterway Authority	Daniel Dray- Project Manager	Interview	1 hour
Gold Coast Waterway Authority	Leesa Deen- Business Services Manager	Interview	1 hour
The Arts Centre Gold Coast	Megan, Beatrice, Jacqui and John	Site visit	2 hours
Doug Jennings Park and The Spit	Annabel Waldron- Executive Coordinator	Site visit	2 hours
Gold Coast Seaway Sand Bypass System	Russell Murray- Manager	Site visit	45 minutes
Maritime Safety Queensland	Greg Tuner- Manager	Interview	1.5 hours
SMART PR Consultants	Phillippa Netolicky and Fiona Self	Interview	1 hour
Gold Coast Waterway Authority	Nerang River Boat trip	Site visit	1.5 hours
Gold Coast Waterway Authority consultant	Deb Camden- PRISM Communication Architects	Interview	1 hour
Gold Coast Tourism Corporation	Lenna Klintworth- Destination Management Officer	Interview	1 hour



*The Gold Coast's famous beaches and the 448km of canals and rivers*

## **b. Key Findings**

The Gold Coast Waterway Authority (GCWA) is a dedicated body established to strategically plan for, facilitate and manage the development and use of the waterways so they remain clean, safe and accessible now and into the future. The organisation has a skills based board, CEO and 22 staff with a ten year strategy and four year rolling plan. Created in 2012 with an external private sector CEO and many key staff from Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ), the aim of the body was to deliver the best possible management of the Gold Coast waterways at reasonable cost to the community and government, while keeping regulation to a minimum.

The GCWA was created because the waterway was undervalued. The city is famously known for its pristine beaches but it is a little known fact that the Gold Coast boasts more waterways than Amsterdam and Venice combined, made up of 448km of canals and rivers. The body was also created so that the local priorities were set locally and to 'sort out' all of the issues plaguing the waterway stakeholder organisations.

The GCWA has three key pillars- Sustain, Enhance, Promote-

Key Pillar	Overview	Inclusions
Sustain	Those who enjoy the waterways do so safely and responsibly. The waterways remain an importance asset now and into the future.	Navigational aids, dredging, channels and destinations, stand by passenger system, events, development, approvals, moorings and marinas, enforcement
Enhance	The opportunity to enjoy the waterways is increased efficiently and sustainably so that capacity keeps pace with demand.	Buoy mooring revenue, speed and behaviour, master plan, sand management, camera enforcement, channel network design, regional boating facility investment, dredge soil treatment
Promote	Residents, businesses and visitors value and enjoy our unique waterways. Enjoyment and use of the waterways is promoted in a responsible way, based on the best research and in coordination with other plans.	Hot spot management, cruise ship terminal, manage innovation e.g.- Jet/ski/boat, educate and promote, SWIM project, engaging the community





It was quite obvious from day one of my time at GCWA that the organisation is characterised by passionate individuals truly committed to making sustainable and positive change. They show a real commitment to community engagement, working with the local media and facilitating new ideas and investments with the private sector. It is inspiring to see a Government agency so willing to extend beyond their scope to achieve and facilitate success. The GCWA is not a place where you hear 'that's not our role'.

As an election promise the GCWA was developed quite quickly. Positioned as a one-stop-shop; the legislation framework to support the organisation was created just in 100 days. Three years on after the organisation was formed, the team at GCWA are now well aware of the benefits and challenges associated with this type of waterway management structure.

From my experience with the team, the legislation governing the organisation is the number one barrier to the GCWA's success. Due to the timeframe of set up, the legislation appears to have too many holes to provide the necessary framework for the agency to succeed to its full potential. This teamed with the inheritance of existing liabilities; one of the key challenges has been the need to retrospectively amend the necessary legislation which is a timely and costly exercise. Furthermore, the 2014 change in Government has impacted on the organisation's independence as a unique and agile department. Initially set up to be lean and mean, the GCWA is now under Governmental review. While there is no significant change anticipated this reliance on the Government is not conducive to long term strategy execution.

The GCWA is a small agency, but it needs to behave like other larger Government agencies and this can be tedious when it comes to resource allocation. The biggest challenge with allocating resources has been dealing with the right to information legislation. The GCWA has been forced to employ a full time solicitor to manage the right to information requests that can take months to complete. On a smaller scale, a larger Government agency would normally have internal services such as accounting, administration and HR, but with the new structure the GCWA lost the units that provide business support. This is a good example of an agency issued with a function but not the resources to execute.



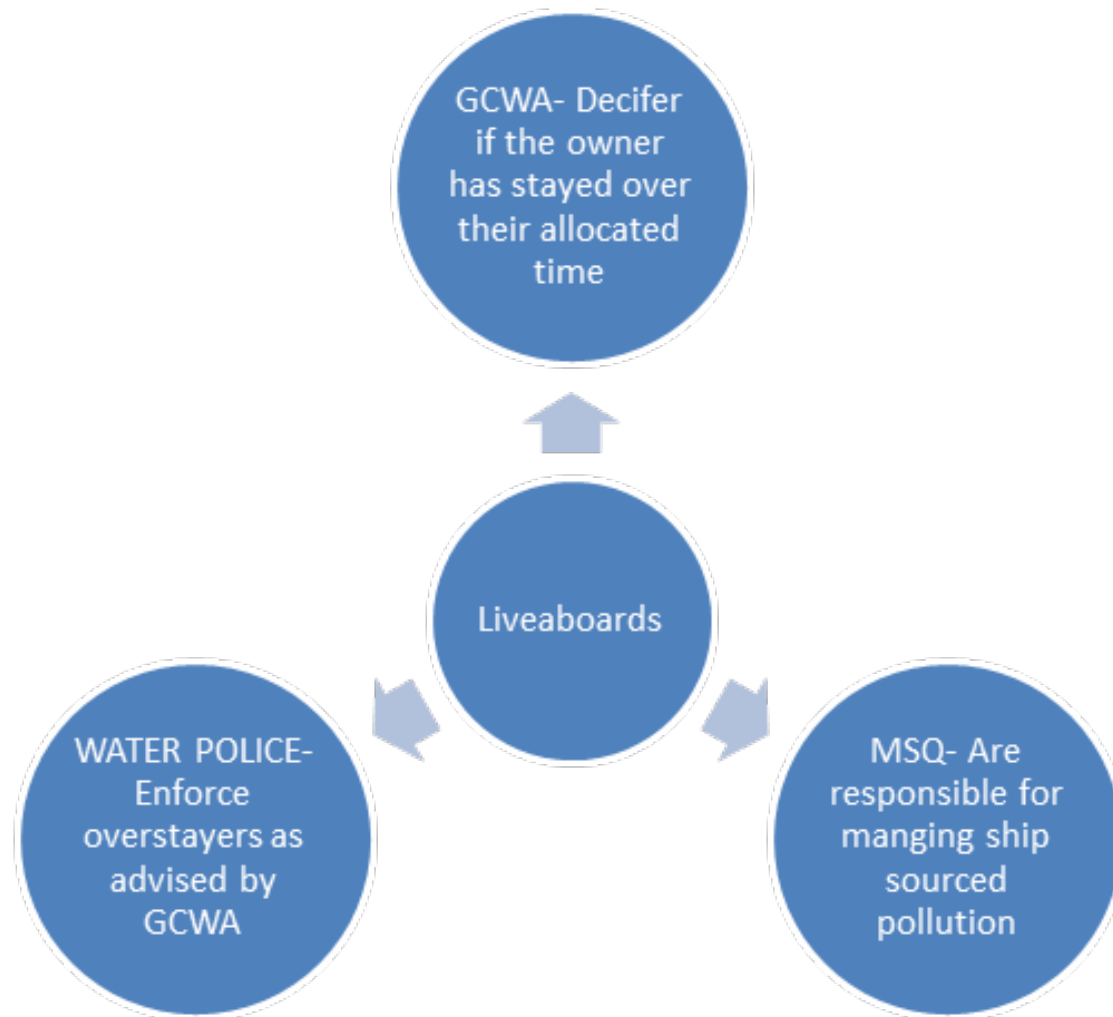
As the GCWA was born out of MSQ, the change has freed up the MSQ team to focus on safety where they can be more thorough with inspections and investigations. Since the change, boating registration is up 8% which means more of the boat operators are licensed and trained.

However the MSQ previously did more promotion and community engagement around water safety which they no longer undertake, so with the reallocation of funding and personnel to GCWA also means a reallocation of responsibility.

Another key challenge is that GCWA has inherited a real responsibility to manage cultural change. This challenge is two-fold and applies to both the stakeholder's perceptions of the role of GCWA and also the community's perception on the value of the waterways. Regarding the role of GCWA, a key issue is bridging the gap between the community's expectations with actual deliverables- the notion of a one-stop-shop has limitations from both a jurisdictional and resource sense. Some would argue that the GCWA is perceived as a 'lion without teeth' as it lacks an enforcement arm, something that may change in the future. Regarding the community's perception of the waterway value, historically, the community never looked at the waterways as being an asset. For many, the waterways are people's backyards, and any proposal for driving waterway activation is often met with opposition. The proposed cruise ship terminal is a good example. Although the focus has always been the beaches at the Gold Coast, proposed economic assessments into the value of the waterways will be a welcome step in educating locals.

*Site visit to Aquatic Stadium, Gold Coast Seaway Sand Bypass System and boat trip on the river*

There is also reliance on collaboration with other agencies, such as the Maritime Safety Queensland and the Water Police and at times there is either significant overlap on jurisdiction or an issue falls between the group's legislation. The issue of the people living aboard their boats in the Aquatic Stadium is an example of how all three agencies overlap-







Another takeaway was that the GCWA must work so closely with other key agencies but upon review of their strategy documents regarding waterways, some goals were only very loosely aligned or referenced in motherhood statements. There needs to be more detailed collaboration at a higher level for the alignment of strategies for resource efficiencies. For example, the GCWA must work closely with the Gold Coast City Council on development projects that affect both land and water. Some masterplans take six months and over \$100,000 to complete with no real guarantee that the council will agree to support the plan. Furthermore, the GCWA and Gold Coast Tourism strategy documents point to a synergy between the organisations goals, but it appears that the relationship is more practical.

Considering the number one employment source in the Gold Coast is tourism, I would have thought there would be more done in the tourism waterways space, but as employment is not a core function of the GCWA, there needs to be more collaboration to drive this opportunity. A positive collaboration is between GCWA and The Arts Centre Gold Coast to support a growing arts precinct on the waterfront. Providing sponsored water connectivity from the CBD to the Arts Precinct during events and funding water themed exhibitions are great collaboration examples.

*Site visit Arts Centre Gold Coast, example of existing waterway tourism experiences, new public mooring sites for boaters to access restaurants and shops*



From my time at the GCWA, it became truly evident that a central waterway management agency will not succeed unless it has full support of State Government and has the legislation in place to facilitate success. The group also needs to be robust enough to sustain a change in Government and be fully aware of the liabilities and legacy projects it is inheriting.

If Melbourne pushes full steam ahead with statutory authority without the appropriate legislation or full State Government support, we run the risk of simply adding another layer. In trying to implement something designed to be 'lean and mean' it is likely to result in being slightly less sluggish.

One could argue that it isn't about the structure necessarily; it is about the attitude of those involved. It seems the success of the waterway needs to come from connectivity- with community, industry, council, tourism, visitor focused groups and a powerful board. Driving community led development instead of infrastructure lead development could be the key to success for Melbourne.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR MELBOURNE-

- If an overarching body is established, the legislation needs to be geared for success
- Balancing stakeholder interests is an arduous task, but needs to happen
- Challenge community and industry perceptions about the value of the waterway- education!

## 6. London

### a. Research

The research focus for London was to investigate how a major city uses the river and an annual festival to engage with its community.

Activity

Corporation	Personnel	Research	Duration
Totally Thames Festival	Adrian Evans- Creative Director	Interview	2 hours
The 2015 Thames Conference- 'A better River; A Better City'	Multiple stakeholders	Conference attendance	3 hours
Thames 21	Julia Makin- Program Manager Chris Coode- Senior Programmes Manager South Hub	Interview	2 hours





## b. Key Findings

London is a great example of a city that has seen significant and rapid waterway growth. It was around the 1980s that the attitude towards the river changed and it was considered a valuable city asset. In 1986 there were less than a million passengers on the Thames, whereas last financial year saw a staggering 10 million passengers and 5.5million tonnes of freight travel on the Thames.

Although the attitude of the locals has only recently shifted, a trip to the Thames has always featured as a must do for visitors to London. One could argue that the river itself wouldn't be as popular if it wasn't for the famous 'string of pearls' of globally recognised landmarks including The London Eye, Big Ben, Tower Bridge and the Tate Modern Museum that call the banks of the Thames home. With over 24 million people walking between the Eye and the Tate annually it is fair to say that the Thames is one of the most visited rivers in the world.

In its 18th year, the Totally Thames Festival has become emblematic for bringing people together. Created to bring the river to life via an exciting season of arts, cultural and river events, the festival saw 2.7 million people attend over 170 events over the month long festival in 2014. No mean feat, the festival area covers 42 river miles (67km) and engages with seventeen boroughs. Totally Thames aspires to increase visitation to the multiple assets and attractions on the Thames in London (See appendix #2).

The success of the Thames is achieved through a fabulous integration of art and culture with education, environment, dining and leisure activities. This free festival really is the perfect avenue to engage with locals and visitors to spread the word about respecting and protecting the river as a natural and important asset for London. Although their core focus is the festival in September, Totally Thames have also developed an education program 'Rivers of the Word' that runs year round. The program engages with schools from around the world in predominantly developing countries to encourage young people to celebrate and share their local environment, learn about other cultures and engage with global issues through exploring river themes and art.



*The tidal Thames*



As a charity, Totally Thames receives funding via Government grants, trusts and foundations and sponsorship. Sourcing event funding is the biggest challenge facing the festival with significant resources allocated to grant applications and raising sponsorship dollars. A proposed change in business model will create opportunities for savvy revenue opportunities, including an online restaurant booking application used during the festival period forecasted to generate €10,000 in commission in its first year.

Totally Thames is an inspirational channel to connect locals and visitors to the river. Run by a small group, their creative flair and partnership management has meant three quarters of a million pounds delivers the best season of river events in the world. My time with Totally Thames Creative Director Adrian was inspirational. I found the festival to be a perfect example of how a home grown event can successfully use art and culture to raise awareness and connectivity to the water whilst developing into one of Britain's largest festivals.

The 2015 Thames Conference- 'A better River; A Better City', saw the coming together of London's most proficient waterway leaders (See appendix #3). Hosted at London's Fishmonger's Guild where they boast water use for an unbroken existence of over 700 years, it was evident that the Thames wasn't just a river; it was the lifeblood for many. The conference speakers from Government organisations and charities each spoke about their key priorities and actions for the near future including the £4.1 billion Thames Tideway Tunnel – the final piece of the plan to tackle sewage discharge into the Thames. When the conversations lead to the strategic direction of the river as a whole, it highlighted that the Thames lacked a cohesive vision and political support for an overarching long term strategic plan. Many strategic documents and plans exist, but just like in Melbourne, there is real need to clarify and streamline each organisations goals and resource allocation.



## 7. Vienna

### a. Research

Vienna played host to the European River//Cities closing conference for 2015. During my time in Vienna I attended the River//Cities conference over four days, undertook site inspections and behind the scenes tours of The Danube Island Festival, undertook one-on-one interviews and participated in a water installation art piece by a UK based live artist.

Corporation	Personnel	Research	Duration
River//Cities	Closing River//Cities Conference- Audience Development: Nurture Nature	Conference attendance	4 days
	Amy Sharrocks- Museum of Water- water installation art piece	Participation	1 hour
	Behind the Scenes Tour with event Operations Manager Thomas Waldner	Tour	1 hour
	Audience Development on the Danube Island Festival: Nurture Nature	Seminar	2 hours
	Audience Development in your city	Discussion	2 hours
	Pedro Ressano Garcia- Associate Professor and Vice-Chair of the PhD in Architecture at Universidade Lusófona in Lisbon	Interview	15 minutes
	Anne Pulli- Event organiser- Turku, Finland	Interview	30 minutes





## b. Key Findings

The River//Cities learning partnership focuses on the use of culture to increase access to, and engagement in, European waterfronts. It is a unique network of organisations from all over Europe who engage with waterfronts as cultural spaces. Whether they organise festivals, are research organisations or are city planners; it unites 37 organisations from Europe. Their goal is to provide opportunities for networking and open lines of communication to share contacts and event information.

Vienna's Danube Island Festival was the case study for this conference (see appendix #4). The festival is a 25-year-old annual, open-air, free music festival on the Donauinsel (Island on the Danube), and is the biggest and the most popular open-air festival in Europe. Without the support of 150 workers and 1,000 honorary volunteers it would not be possible to create this fantastic festival. During the conference, it was clear to see the collaboration resulting from such an innovative network. Although some of the delegates executed events in such close proximity to others and would on many levels be considered competitors, they shared contacts and figures with transparency. Many discussions during the conference were around building spaces for the people, and using the waterway to contribute to a better quality of life for its users. The majority of the stakeholders did this through music and cultural events.

*The Danube Island, home of the Danube Island Festival, Museum of Water with Amy Sharrocks*





Speaking to event delegate Anne Pulli from Finland about the importance of art and culture in an event, she said ‘the river was a way to reach new audiences and raise a question of how we are using and treating the waterway. The aim was to bring art and culture to the people- not hide it behind closed doors of museums and galleries’.

We also discussed the concept of ‘Audience Development’, which for many was a concept they had not considered before. The definition developed by the Arts Council in London, “...describes activity which is undertaken specifically to meet the needs of existing and potential audiences and to help arts [and cultural] organisations to develop on-going relationships with audiences. It can include aspects of marketing, commissioning, programming, education, customer care and distribution.” It has strong links to finding new audiences and also reflects the relationship with existing audiences that develop over time.



The Danube Island festival provided the best example of audience development as the event is run by the current political party. I found this to be a strange concept. What if the political party are voted out- will the event still go ahead? Do attendees respond to well-placed political messaging at a music festival? Does a political party want to be associated with potentially negative festival goer behaviour resulting in bad PR? It seems that the political party SPÖ Wiener Bildung have grown this festival to be a permanent fixture on the Vienna event calendar and its successful audience development positions the political party quite favourably with not only the 150 workers and 1,000 volunteers, but the one million event attendees.

*River//Cities conference delegates during information session and on the main stage during site inspection of the Danube Island Festival*

Participating in the Museum of Water with Amy Sharrocks played with the concept of the importance of water. The museum is a collection of publicly donated water and accompanying stories accumulated over two years in different sites worldwide. It was a fascinating invitation to ponder our precious liquid and how we use it. The key take away was challenging the view of water on a global scale and reflecting on how linked the water is to our lives.

The tours of the festival were very interesting, especially seeing how they manage unique challenges associated with a riverside event. Most notably, The Danube Island Festival really presented the difference in alcohol use between in Australia and Europe. Where in Vienna there were bars dotted all over the event site in areas frequented by families with children and teenagers, festivals in Australia are bound by strict responsible sale of alcohol laws with dedicated drinking zones for all-age events. Unfortunately this reflects a cultural issue between Australians and alcohol that is not set to change in the near future.



*The main stage at the Danube Island Festival in full swing*



Finally, my discussions with Pedro Ressano Garcia from Lisbon during the conference were fascinating. An architect and author of the book 'Tagus Platform – Back to the River, Lisbon's waterfront and the 21st Century (2010)' Pedro is renowned internationally for having the skills to unlock urban waterway design success. His design for 'Tagus Platform' proposes an urban morphology applicable to similar port cities that aim to re-establish a connection with the river and/or sea. Pedro spoke about how design can severely impact the way people connect with their waterfront. I thought a lot about Melbourne as he described how disjointed pathways, limited signage and a lack of visual continuity can affect how people interact with the water. Interestingly, Pedro was commissioned by independent studio Urban Islands to visit Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour in July 2015 to provide expert advice on destination development.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR MELBOURNE-

- Home grown events are where Melbourne's success lies to waterway activation



## 8. Case Study Themes

Urban waterfronts around the world have undergone significant change over the last few decades. Many waterfronts have seen a complete transformation from shipping and transport areas to reinvigorated tourism and hospitality precincts with settings for recreation and leisure activities. Waterfronts have become a hub for both locals and visitors; a city's river can have rich social significance and wide user appeal.

Although I was looking for the golden answer or a successful model we could simply replicate during my research, I took comfort in realising that no waterfront or waterways management group hold the key to success that Melbourne has simply overlooked. The same problems plague every group I spoke to- governance, balancing conservation with growth, perceptions of waterway value, lack of funding and a myriad of stakeholders all pushing their own agendas.

Interestingly, my research highlighted my view that there is a shared perception by Melbournians that the river is not an asset. Australians in general are proud of their natural environmental assets, but one could argue that they don't feel the same way about an urban river than they do about beaches and forests. London especially really showed me that we really need to understand the 'value of the water'.



I also found that there is a real lack of research or return on investment analysis on the economic value of the waterway. How many people are employed on this river? How much revenue does this water bring to the region? There seemed to be many 'soft' value indications but nothing concrete. This makes it very hard to push for funding or status with Government and industry. That said all waterway events are valued using the local council economic impact calculations.

Balancing stakeholder interests is also an arduous task. I found that in many places the key stakeholders had similar priorities for the waterways, but struggle to align them and create real actions. This means there are no efficiencies with resource allocation and projects can be delayed or never eventuate. There needs to be more of a joint vision for the entire waterway.

Finally, in Melbourne, Gold Coast and London the existing waterway operators feel overlooked in previous strategic planning processes and argue that currently they are the only ones committed to providing jobs and activating the water space.



## 9. Benchmark and Recommendations

From the above research I was able to benchmark Melbourne on its waterway activation and the honest answer is there is no perfect answer, just different forms of inspiration. All destinations face challenges with their own systems and this is Melbourne's opportunity to learn from those challenges and implement a framework for success of our own. We can draw inspiration from the learnings at the GCWA with their waterway management system. We should also look to involve culture and art when engaging people with the water as seen with Totally Thames and the River//Cities conference and finally, focus on educating and involving local communities with the waterway as seen with Thames 21. Implementing a successful river transport system is another crucial element.

The truth is Melbourne's waterfront could continue on as it is currently, but the key question is; do Melbournians want to see a quality tourism waterway product? If the answer is yes, we need to act and act now.



From my travels and research, here are my key recommendations for waterway success:

### ***The case for change***

I support the establishment of a separate committee of waterways management through direct intervention by the Minister for the Environment. This group will sit under Parks Victoria in the interim with an aim of becoming an independent body within a few years. This will allow-

- Full assessment of the legislation and solutions focused legislation change before the authority is implemented
- Full assessment of liabilities the group will inherit and costs associated
- Development of opportunities for revenue

Once a committee is established, this will enable a bottom up not top down approach to change. There needs to be a balance of considerations including profit, investment and sustainability. I believe this should include-

- Commission a river economic impact study to fully understand the value of the waterways
- Focus on everyday activation- not just event spikes
- Formalising the relationship with the rowing community
- Work with environmental agencies to make habitat and environmental improvements
- Design sustainable commercial arrangements with operators
- Shine a light on using art and culture to activate the water
- Key stakeholder engagement- no motherhood statements just robust actions



***If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together- African Proverb***

Interpretation of what a bright future looks like is different from one person to the next. Nevertheless where masterplans can cost in excess of \$100,000 and then risk ending up collecting dust on an office shelf, there needs to be more detailed collaboration at a higher level for the alignment of key stakeholder strategies. Once the committee is set up, we need to articulate and agree on what we are trying to achieve, who is required and what changes need to be made, then we will be one step closer to developing long term success. Not to mention, we will be able to present a united front to political leaders with clear messaging around the waterways- something that has not been easily achieved in the past.

***Water Transport- it's not a matter of if, but when...***

Melbourne is one of the only water based cities that doesn't have scheduled water transport. Although previous scheduled transport hasn't succeeded in the past, there is a renewed excitement around including water transport as part of the public transport network. We currently see between 840,000 and one million people through the city of Melbourne on a given day, and with the city's population growing by 100,000 each year, by 2030 this will be 1.25 million people travelling into the CBD. Transport and access is going to be an increasing issue. Some stakeholders are pushing a 'just do it' mentality, put a boat on the river or re-brand fleet from a current operator so that residents grow accustomed to using water transport. A key issue is who pays, is this a Government responsibility or should it be privatised like other Melbourne transport? I believe that the return on investment for Government is clear. When Brisbane implemented a ferry terminal, the value of property surrounding the terminal went up 30%-40% resulting in a healthy rate increase for local council. I truly believe that scheduled water transport is key for Melbourne and we need to take a positive and facilitative approach to addressing this huge undertaking. Until we can address this, I recommend there should be Government subsidised water shuttles for major activation periods that are free for the user. This is assist with changing perceptions on water usage.





Regarding private boating access, currently only one in six berths is public on the Yarra. I support the idea of the development of short term moorings resulting in boaters gaining access to riverside restaurants and shopping.

### ***Events- home grown or go home***

Waterway events are imperative to connecting Melbournians and visitors to the water. We need to make it possible for people to engage with the water, and with event success comes further infrastructure development. With the rising profile and competitive nature of international waterside cities such as Dubai, it is evident that Melbourne cannot compete with international destinations with deep pockets during event bidding. Home grown events are where Melbourne's success lies for waterway activation. Moomba is the perfect example of home grown water based event success, with the event valued at \$28.7 million to the local economy. Chinese New Year provides a similar opportunity with a fantastic cultural avenue to activate the river and connect with a key trade and tourism partner.

I would also like to see a floating market on the river where stalls are set up on floating pontoons and connected by a string of pathways. This could link to the Chinese New Year festival or could form its own event.

### ***Art can make the invisible, visible.***

One of the key takeaways was that using art and culture is a great way to engage communities with their waterway. Melbourne could adopt:

- Theatre or Opera on the water
- Static artwork installations
- Commission an indigenous artist to develop a piece for the water
- Support the Chinese New Year festival with their on-water activation

This is a potential opportunity to engage with Arts Victoria as the Yarra is the fringe of the arts precinct and lends itself to unique water themed art and culture activations.



### ***Quality Assurance - Stop the race to the bottom***

Melbourne needs to support the river operators to stop the race to the bottom in terms of quality and pricing. We cannot expect quality tourism products if we don't facilitate an environment where operators can invest in their fleet. Interestingly, performance criteria exists to govern on land businesses within the City of Melbourne, so why we wouldn't we demand the same quality on the water? Delivering jobs and tourism value are key and if we want a river that represented the world's most liveable city, we need to address this as a priority.

### ***What about the next generation?***

Engaging young people is crucial to changing perceptions about the value of the water as a natural asset. Melbourne is the perfect place to implement the Totally Thames education program 'Rivers of the World'. The program could link directly with the national curriculum AUSVELS to develop a sustainability program that includes both domestic and international urban waterfronts and rivers. This would encourage young people to celebrate and share their local environment, learn about other cultures and engage with global issues through exploring river themes and art. This groundswell of support will raise the profile of the waterway and also reinforces the need for balance between sustainable economic development and environment protection for the future.

Another fabulous initiative is 'Fox Trails' as seen in Lausanne in Switzerland. Fox Trails is an alternative amazing race around a city focusing on serendipitous experiences using hidden places. Melbourne's waterways provide a great setting to roll out this initiative, connecting young people with the water and its history in an engaging and memorable way.



***Work with the trend, not against it...***

Due to the visitability of major international cities such as London or Paris where many of their major tourist attractions sit alongside the water, over time we have inadvertently developed tourist behaviours. Promenading and relaxation have been reported as key visitor motivations to visit waterfronts and some would argue that purely seeing and walking across the water can be a tourism attraction or experience in its own right. Venice in Italy has built its entire image on its relationship with water and a visit to London is not complete without a photo of the Thames and its famous bridges. Therein lays the tourist behaviour- there is a global expectation that when you are new to a city that features a waterfront or river- that's where you go to get a feel of the city. That's the bit of the city you take a selfie with. A city's waterway is not only an environmental asset; it forms part of its social fabric. We like to see it, drink by it, cycle next to it, photograph it, walk over it and ride on it. For many, a city is a city; you could be anywhere in the world when you are in a concrete jungle. That said a successful waterfront can provide that key differentiation. It can layer one's tourism experience beyond expectation and engage the visitor with the area. One would argue the more a visitor is engaged by the atmosphere, the deeper the connection is to the destination.

This is not a 'build it and they will come' moment. The desire for visitors to engage with a waterway is already there, we just need to focus on facilitating use.



## 10. Conclusion

The overwhelming conclusion from this research project is that no real strategic change can happen until the governance issue plaguing the Yarra River is resolved. Collaborative marketing concepts, investment opportunities and events and festival implementation are secondary considerations, all river focus should be on a consolidated long term strategic approach to governance. After years of key stakeholders pushing to implement a minister appointed waterways committee, the challenge will be to gain approval for this structure, then for the committee to articulate and agree on what we are trying to achieve. Only then will we be closer to developing long term success for Melbourne's waterways.



## 11. Thank You

It was an absolute honour to be named the 2014 recipient of the Lynette Bergin Fellowship. I am passionate about the tourism industry in Melbourne, and I relished the opportunity to work on this project and carry out Lynette's legacy.

I would like to extend a huge thank you to the Victoria Tourism Industry Council for this fantastic personal development opportunity, along with my boss John Forman for his support.

Another huge thank you to all of the stakeholders who helped me in Melbourne, Gold Coast, London and Vienna. What appeared to be a huge undertaking was made easy with all of your help and guidance. I am much richer having met you all and I enjoyed listening to you and sharing ideas and challenges.

I look forward to seeing Melbourne embrace change to better its Yarra River and waterways.

Thanks again.

### **Emma Cullen**

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2014-2015

## 12. Appendices

### Appendix #1 - Literature review

Title	Author	Published
Historic waterfronts as tourism precincts: An experiential perspective	Tony Griffin and Bruce Hayllar- University of Technology, Sydney	2006
A Strategic framework for Melbourne's Cultural Precincts	Ratio Consultants	2007
The Auckland Waterfront	Tim Bracher- YRBA	2013
Achieving a Sustainable and Activated Waterway	Tim Bracher- YRBA	Seminar
An overview of the Victoria Waterway management Strategy	DEPI	2013
Melbourne Precincts- Quantitative Research Report	Sweeny Research	2014
Tourism Destination Management: Developing the Melbourne Waterfront	Luca De Pasquale	2013
Let's Act for the Yarra	Yarra Riverkeepers Environmental Justice Australia	2014
A review of integrated visitor transport in Melbourne	Ttchoice consulting for Destination Melbourne	2010
Waterways Management Program 2014-2018	Gold Coast Waterway Authority	2014
Working for Sustainable Urban Waterways- Annual Review	Thames 21	2014

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## 1300 REGISTRATION AND COFFEE

### Session 1

#### 1330 Opening Address

The Lord Phillimore, Fishmongers Company

#### 1400 **Debbie Leach, Thames 21**

Your Tidal Thames – the Working Catchment Plan

#### 1430 **Adrian Evans, Totally Thames**

Totally Thames: a celebration of London's river

## 1500 REFRESHMENT BREAK

### Session 2

#### 1530 **The Lord Mayor's Address**

The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of London

#### 1545 **Robin Mortimer, Port of London Authority**

Thames Vision: How Do We Want to Use the River?

#### 1615 **Andy Mitchell, Thames Tideway Tunnel Ltd**

Drilling Deeper: a cleaner more vibrant River Thames

## 1630 COMFORT BREAK

#### 1645 **Sir Philip Dilley, Environment Agency**

Panel Discussion and Closing Address

## 1745 - 1830 DRINKS RECEPTION



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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that **Emma Cullen** took part in the Rivers of Opportunities Grundtvig project event

*„Audience Development: Nurture Nature“*

organized in Vienna, Austria from Wednesday June 24<sup>th</sup> to Sunday June 28<sup>th</sup> 2015.

Vienna, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2015-06-27

  
Project coordinator  
Bernd Herger