



Strategic Plan

Yarrilinks Landcare Network

2024 - 2029



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Yarrilinks Landcare Network operates on the Traditional Lands of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk People. We acknowledge their deep connections to Country as Traditional Owners, Custodians of the Land, and the original Landcarers. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Introduction

Yarrilinks Landcare Network (YLN) is an independent, not-for-profit, community-based organisation committed to conserving and restoring biodiversity while maintaining productive agriculture and building community partnerships. We operate in the Yarriambiack Local Area of the Wimmera catchment in western Victoria. Our projects are designed to build reciprocal connections between agriculture and the environment, uniting people in a common purpose. We recognise social and cultural outcomes are just as important to our local community as environmental outcomes.

Yarrilinks also provides support for the following groups (more detail in *Appendix I*):

- Lah Landcare group
- Minyip Landcare Group
- Rupanyup Landcare Group
- Wal Wal Lubeck Landcare Group
- Wallup Ag Group
- Warracknabeal East Conservation Farmers
- Lake Marma Committee of Management

Mission Statement

Yarrilinks aims to conserve and restore biodiversity in balance with sustainable agriculture and social wellbeing. We believe this balance is crucial for resilient, sustainable, and productive landscapes and communities. We do this through on-ground habitat enhancement, building capacity in best practice land management, and community engagement.

Yarrilinks is governed by a volunteer committee and employs a Landcare Facilitator funded through the Victorian Government's Landcare Facilitator Program. The role is currently hosted at the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority (Wimmera CMA) in Horsham.

History

Yarrilinks formed in 1998 following a local Landcare group meeting about the concept of 'Biolinks' - the planting of corridors of native vegetation. These corridors provide environmental linkages and migration pathways, creating habitat for native fauna and reserves for native flora in a manner that allows agricultural land uses to continue in an ecologically enhanced manner.

The annual Community Planting Weekend (Figure 1) was a feature of Yarrilinks for over 20 years, with over 1000 volunteers from 30 different nationalities involved. A community-hosted billeting system saw these volunteers, many of them refugees or recent immigrants to Australia, invited to travel from Melbourne to experience country life and take part in a community environmental project. In addition to getting trees in the ground, the events were a valuable opportunity for two-way cultural exchange.



Figure 1. Group photo from the 2017 Community Planting Weekend near Minyip.

Through these planting weekends and other projects, the group has revegetated almost 2,600 hectares with 400,000 indigenous seedlings across the properties of 300 landholders.

Planning Context

Yarrilinks operates in the Yarriambiack Local Area of the Wimmera catchment in Victoria, covering a region of approximately 3,750 km² (Figure 2). It includes southern Yarriambiack Shire and part of western Buloke Shire. The population of the Yarrilinks area is around 5100 and while there has been a declining and aging trend in recent decades, it may be stabilising (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

The climate ranges from semi-arid in the north with sandhills and mallee scrub, and the south is wetter with more trees and swamps (Average rainfall ranges from 350 mm/year to over 450 mm/year in the south. Summers are hot and there are regular winter frosts. The main land use and industry of employment is agriculture (89% of land area), largely consisting of dryland broadacre cropping. Sheep, hay production and export, and intensive animal industries (fed by the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline) also form a component (Wimmera CMA, 2021).

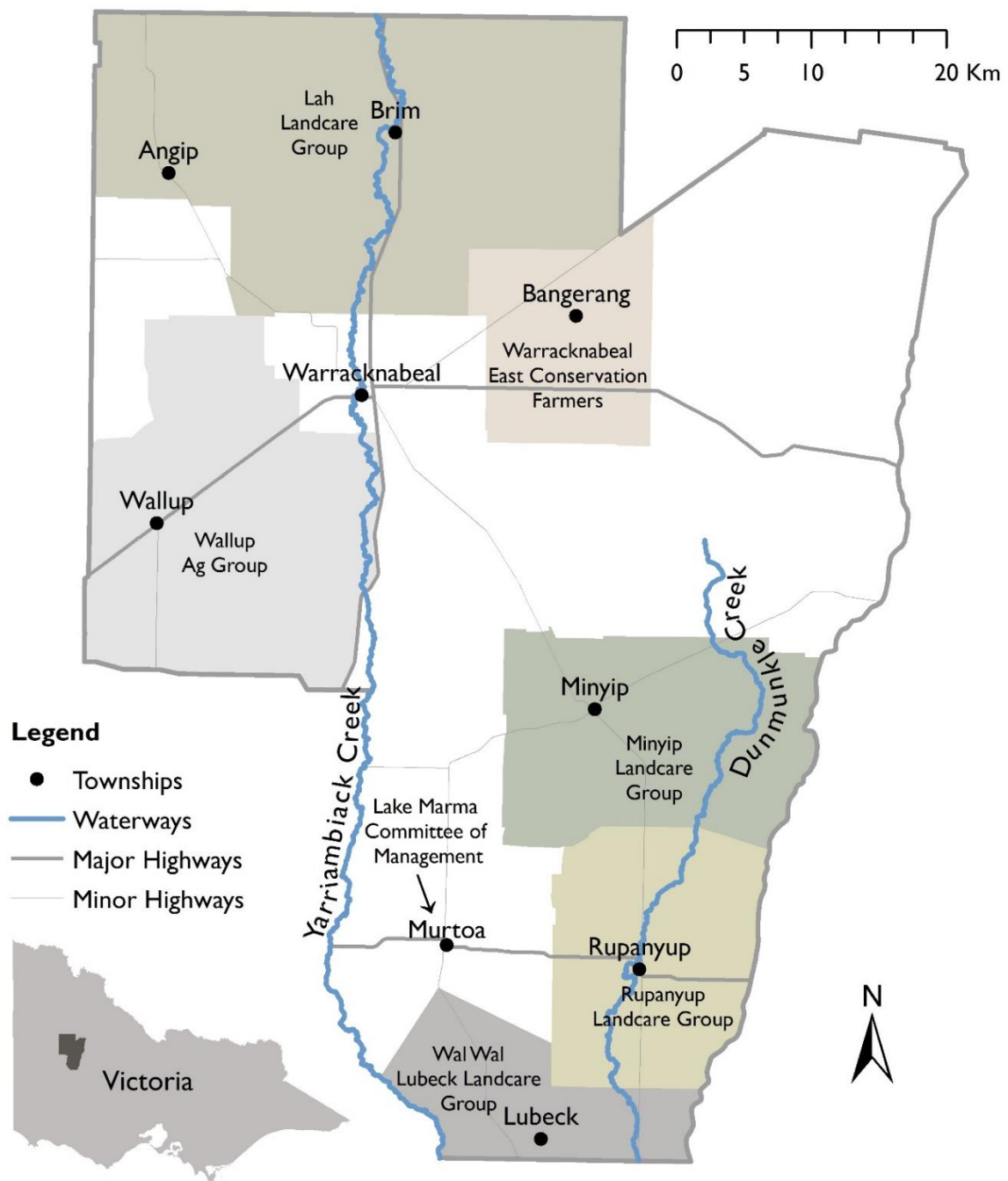


Figure 2. Approximate location and boundaries of Yarrilinks Landcare Network and our Supported Groups.

Looking Ahead

Yarrilinks Landcare Network is now looking to build on past successes to implement further environmental and sustainable agriculture initiatives in the region. We are focused on supporting the community in the management of the natural assets of our region and will prioritise on-ground works that protect and enhance these features. While the condition of these natural assets is our primary focus, the benefits of maintaining them are not restricted to the environmental and agricultural health of the region but extend to the social well-being of people involved.

Key Objectives

Yarrilinks Landcare Network will aim to achieve our vision by focusing on the following key objectives:

1. Resilient native ecosystems
2. Sustainable agricultural production
3. Thriving, inclusive Landcare community
4. Healthy Landcare Network

Specific outcomes and actions relating to these goals are outlined in the Action Plan in the next section.

Vision Statement

The southern Yarriambiack is an environmentally and socially healthy place to live. Yarrilinks plays an integral role in balancing favourable environmental and agricultural outcomes, facilitating social wellbeing and increasing the capacity of the community to address environmental issues.

Guiding Principles

In striving to achieve our objectives, we endeavour to apply these principles in all our activities (Figure 6).

Ecologically sound landscape management

- Apply best practice, adaptive management to on-ground works.
- Take a landscape approach to land management and a strategic approach to revegetation projects.
- Where possible, address the sources of land degradation and pest introduction.

Ethical balance of competing priorities

- Strive to meet the needs of all our stakeholders/
- Where necessary, facilitate practical compromise among stakeholders and with respect to environmental integrity.

Collaborative linkages from local to global

- Value both local and academic knowledge and recognise their unique applications and complementarities.
- Approach all situations with a collaborative mindset and a view to find common ground.

Respect for all community members

- Welcome all members of the wider community to take part in Yarrilinks activities.
- Strive for meaningful community engagement and consultation on relevant matters.
- Aim to address barriers to participation experienced by members of our community.

Culture of safety

- Encourage an environment of physical, mental, emotional and cultural safety.
- Take measures to ensure the safety of all participants in our activities.
- Prioritise safety over productivity without compromising on quality.



Figure 6. Our guiding principles.

Action Plan

Our key objectives will guide Yarrilinks’ activity over the next five years. These actions will be carried out by the Yarrilinks committee and Landcare Facilitator, in collaboration with our Supported Groups and other relevant stakeholders. This plan is underpinned by an intention to develop understanding of rural communities and the implications of climate change. This will allow us to support landholders to adapt to an evolving environment, ensuring our community’s long-term viability.

Table 1. Objectives, outcomes, and actions for Yarrilinks Landcare network over the life of this plan (2024 – 2029).

	Outcomes	Actions: Year 1 and 2	Actions: Year 3 to 5	Measure
Resilient native ecosystems	Natural assets of the region are protected and restored	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify remnant vegetation on private and public land – Facilitate pest and weed control – Improve awareness of natural assets – Engage with Yarriambiack Shire Council around relevant plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Investigate opportunities to destock remnant native vegetation – Foster community pride around natural assets – Engage with Yarriambiack Shire Council around relevant plans and encourage enforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Km of fencing around remnant veg, waterways, wetlands, etc. – Attendance at events protecting or educating about natural assets – Increased adherence to ecological management principles on roadsides
	Habitat area, quality and connectivity are improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify and prioritise revegetation sites on private and public land – Undertake revegetation projects in high priority areas – Assess past plantings & identify learnings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop incentives for revegetation on private land – Undertake revegetation projects in high priority areas – Restore past plantings where necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ha of revegetation and survival rate of seedlings – Biodiversity monitoring – Spatial database to track connectivity – Natural regeneration at previous plantings
Sustainable agricultural production	Farmers are engaged in best practice land management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Clarify the role of Yarrilinks in supporting sustainable agriculture in the region – Develop links with other groups active in sustainable agriculture – Facilitate access to information on best practices and resource efficient farming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work with partner agencies to improve farm efficiencies – Share information on carbon markets once mechanisms become clear – Improve understanding of climate change – Identify and address gaps in sustainable agriculture extension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – WCMA Transect Survey: groundcover, crop rotations, stubble management etc. – Number of sustainable agriculture events shared through Yarrilinks channels – Number and scope of collaborative projects with partner agencies – WCMA Social Drivers Survey
	Biodiversity services to agriculture are recognised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify opportunities to engage with farmers around biodiversity services – Share educational resources about biodiversity on farms – Explore methods for measuring on-farm biodiversity/ecosystem services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Establish and publicise EOI process for revegetation/waterway protection – Extension/workshops on measuring biodiversity on farm – Incorporate measurement tools in monitoring around revegetation projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of EOIs from new landholders around revegetation/waterway protection – Number of farmers measuring biodiversity and ecosystem services on their farms – WCMA Social Drivers Survey

Thriving, inclusive Landcare community	Stakeholder partnerships are strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify stakeholders and (re)establish relationships – Develop stakeholder contact list and communication plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Build partnerships and support collaboration with diverse stakeholders – Undertake collaborative projects with neighbouring Landcare Networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of co-delivered projects per year – Scale of co-delivered projects (area, participation, financial co-contribution)
	The community is engaged with Landcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Maintain/establish YLN newsletter, website and media presence – Develop projects that align with the needs and interests of the community – Social interaction and fun are incorporated into events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support non-Landcare groups to undertake Landcare activities, especially in underserved areas – Establish YLN Newsletter as a trusted media source in the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Event attendance numbers – Distribution of on-ground works – Newsletter subscriber and social media follower and engagement statistics – Increased use of citizen science apps (e.g. iNaturalist)
	Landcare represents community diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Encourage involvement of groups and individuals from diverse backgrounds as volunteers, members, and committee members – Representation on LVI Members Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support a local Landcare project initiated and managed primarily by a culturally and linguistically diverse community, Traditional Owner group, or youth group – Establishment of new Landcare groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Traditional Owners and youth – Increased coverage of Landcare Groups across the Yarrilinks area
Healthy Landcare Network	The YLN committee functions effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Governance training for committee – Expand YLN committee and ensure each Landcare group supported by YLN is represented – Re-establish Incorporation of YLN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A YLN committee representative on the LVI Members Council – Defined roles for committee members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Self-reported sense of group and individual identity of committee members – DEECA Group Health Survey statistics for YLN
	YLN is a resilient and future-proofed organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Succession planning for committee, groups, and facilitator – Establish contingencies for funding gaps – Support young Landcarers, early-career farmers and NRM workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Establish project-based funding to increase facilitator time across more than one position – Establish processes to facilitate continuity and smooth handover 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of documented policies, plans and frameworks across the network – Overall FTE supporting Yarrilinks – Increased attendance of younger community members at events
	Effective support is provided for Network Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Help active groups to plan and run events – Investigate re-establishing inactive groups – Ensure Landcare groups maintain LVI membership – Establish annual network-wide event for groups supported by Yarrilinks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Increase activity of all supported groups – Encourage more Landcare projects among supported groups who are not strictly Landcare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Supported groups regularly holding at least an AGM and one activity per year – DEECA Group Health Survey Statistics for each supported group

Appendix I – Supported Groups

Yarrilinks Landcare Network supports seven community groups through the structure of the network and the Landcare Facilitator. These include Landcare groups and other community groups undertaking Landcare activities. We acknowledge the unique priorities and goals of these groups.

Lah Landcare Group

This group is located north of Warracknabeal and is composed of farming families from the localities of Lah and Brim. Over the years the group has hosted a few Yarrilinks planting weekends, including on private property and at the Lah Rec Reserve.

The Yarriambiack Mallee-box (*Eucalyptus yarriambiack*) is a critically endangered species unique to this area. Only about 150 individuals are known from a single location north of Brim along the Yarriambiack Creek.

This group has been affected by a downturn in activity following the pandemic.



Figure 7. Community planting at the Lah Rec Reserve.

Minyip Landcare Group

Minyip Landcare Group members are primarily farmers with interests in sustainable farming, complementary revegetation and pest control. The group organises bus trips to see farming practices in other areas.

An important natural asset in the region is a population of critically endangered Wimmera riceflower (*Pimelea spinescens* ssp. *pubiflora*) at the Minyip Wetlands. The site is one of a handful of known populations and has also had seedlings transplanted for conservation.

In future the group plans to continue bus trips and has planting projects planned for the coming years.



Figure 8. Wimmera Riceflower at Minyip Wetlands.

Rupanyup Landcare Group

Rupanyup Landcare Group is made up of both farmers and town residents. The group has a history of planting projects spanning over 20 years and the town is now flanked in maturing plantations that have seen bird life return to the area. A highlight is Jack's Track, a popular walking track winding around the town and featuring an enhanced wetland that is home to several species of frog.

Although the group remained active through Covid, the major challenge faced by the group is declining membership and lack of involvement. Most activity and on-ground work is spearheaded by a small number of individuals and there is a perception that the broadacre cropping focused area limits interest in Landcare.



Figure 9. Aerial view of planting at the Rupanyup Reservoir.

Most recently the group has planted the old reservoir to the northeast of town with trees and shrubs with the support of the Wimmera CMA. In future the group hopes to investigate the possibility of revegetation on the town common or a water allocation for the town.

Wal Wal Lubeck Landcare Group

This group is based south of Murtoa and Rupanyup. Members participated in the decommissioning of the Wimmera Irrigation Channel System, but the group has had a downturn in activity following the pandemic.

This region has some of the largest areas of remnant native vegetation in the Yarrilinks area: Brynterion State Forest along the Dunmunkle Creek and Barrabool FFR along the Wimmera River. These reserves are important wildlife habitat and support threatened species of birds, orchids, and other wildlife.



Figure 10. Broughton pea in bloom at Barrabool FFR.

Wallup Ag Group

This group started in the 90s, initially as a VFF group, and is made up of farmers in and around the Wallup district southwest of Warracknabeal.

Their projects include field trips and farm tours, and they have collaborated with Longerenong Ag College on educational opportunities for the students. They recently travelled to the Netherlands thanks to a GRDC Grower and Advisor Study Tour Grant.

In the past the group has collaborated with Yarrilinks to plant trees at the Wallup Rec Reserve. Barrett FFR, one of the larger remnant vegetation reserves in the Yarrilinks area, is in this vicinity.



Figure 11. Farmers gather for a field day near Wallup.

Warracknabeal East Conservation Farmers

This sustainable agriculture group, based southeast of Warracknabeal, is composed of farmers and focuses on farm trial and land management work.

Members have organised workshops on soil nutrient analysis, took part in a pilot project for an on-farm grain trading platform, and recently participated in a soil moisture probe network project.

Yarrilinks planting weekends have taken place in this area. Some roadsides in this region support rare native grassland remnants.



Figure 12. Billy buttons in a roadside remnant grassland.

Lake Marma Committee of Management

The Lake Marma Committee of Management (CoM) focuses on improving the environmental and recreational amenity of Lake Marma.

While there is currently no Landcare group in the Murtoa area, the CoM undertakes Landcare activities such as weed control and maintaining the walking track that allows visitors and residents to enjoy this feature.

Recently Yarrilinks supported the CoM in applying for a Victorian Landcare Grant to undertake weed control around the lake.



Figure 13. Lake Marma at Murtoa.

Appendix II – Natural Assets

Waterways

The Yarriambiack and Dunmunkle Creeks are distributaries of the Wimmera River. Running north-south, the riparian zones form vegetation corridors that provide crucial habitat refuge under climate change, and ecological connectivity between the Grampians region and protected areas in the lower catchment.

The Yarriambiack Creek branches off from the Wimmera River near Drung Drung and terminates at Lake Coorong at Hopetoun, linking Barrabool FFR and Darlot Swamp to these northern lakes in proximity to Big Desert Wilderness Area and Wyperfeld National Park. Generally, the waterway is in good condition and mostly fenced, although grazing continues in some areas. Encroachment by weeds such as horehound, boxthorn, *Opuntia* cacti and bridal creeper is a problem (Alluvium, 2018).

The Dunmunkle Creek branches from the Wimmera River at Glenorchy and peters out in farmland near Carron. The course was highly modified to facilitate stock watering during early settlement and formed part of the Wimmera Mallee Channel System. While some areas are in good condition and grazing pressure is generally low, there are also significant areas of poor condition and weed invasion. There are opportunities to improve condition by returning channelised sections to a more natural flow (Water Technology, 2020).

Native Vegetation

Only about 10.5% of the Yarrilinks area is native vegetation. Isolated fragments on private land tend to be small, and most of the larger continuous habitat areas occur on public land. These include road and railway reserves, water frontages on the Yarriambiack and Dunmunkle Creeks, flora and fauna reserves (Barrabool and Barrett FFRs), and state forests (Brynterion, Barrabool and Marma SFs). Many of Yarrilinks' larger scale plantings have focused on improving connectivity between these areas, particularly between the Yarriambiack and Dunmunkle Creeks.

Native vegetation in Victoria is classified using Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs). EVCs are defined based on benchmarks that describe the typical vegetation structure and composition as influenced by soil, climate and other environmental factors. The most common EVCs in the Yarrilinks area (Plains Savannah, Plains Woodland, Ridged Plains Mallee, Plains Grassland, Riverine Chenopod Woodland and Low Rises Woodland) are all classified as endangered (Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, 2004).

Two nationally threatened ecological communities occur in the region:

- Buloke Woodlands of the Riverina and Murray-Darling Depression Bioregions
- Natural Grasslands of the Murray Valley Plains

The Buloke Woodlands (Figure 14) of the Riverina and Murray-Darling Depression Bioregions are listed as an Endangered Ecological Community by the Australian Government (EPBC Act 1999). Fragments of these woodlands occur across the Yarrilinks area and many past planting projects have sought to link or expand these remnant stands. The buloke (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*) and Buloke Mistletoe (*Amyema linophylla* subsp. *orientalis*) are listed as critically endangered under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (FFG).



Figure 14. A Yarrilinks planting extends a buloke woodland near Minyip.

The Natural Grasslands of the Murray Valley Plains are listed as Critically Endangered (EPBC Act 1999). Most of these naturally treeless grasslands have been cleared or otherwise disturbed and very few high quality remnants remain. They typically occur on alluvial clay soils in lowland plains. These grasslands provide habitat for a number of threatened species such as the Plains Wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*) and Striped Legless Lizard (*Delma impar*) (Australian Department of Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, 2012).

Threatened species

The Yarrilinks area supports a number of threatened species. These species depend on areas of remnant native vegetation that continue to be threatened by fragmentation, invasive pest and weed pressure, and unsuitable management practices. Improving connectivity and condition of these areas with a view to enhance habitat for these species will also benefit more common species and the ecosystem as a whole.

Table 1. A selection of threatened flora and fauna species of the Yarrilinks area (Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, 2023).

Common Name	Scientific Name	Type
Growling Grass Frog	<i>Litoria raniformis</i>	Amphibian
Striped Legless Lizard	<i>Delma impar</i>	Reptile
Southern Whiteface	<i>Aphelocephala leucopsis</i>	Bird
Hardhead	<i>Aythya australis</i>	Bird
Brown Treecreeper	<i>Climacteris picumnus</i>	Bird
Black Falcon	<i>Falco subniger</i>	Bird
Little Eagle	<i>Hieraetus morphnoides</i>	Bird
Hooded Robin	<i>Melanodryas cucullata</i>	Bird
Diamond Firetail	<i>Stagonopleura guttata</i>	Bird
Turnip Copperburr	<i>Sclerolaena napiformis</i>	Forb
Slender Darling-pea	<i>Swainsona murrayana</i>	Forb
Downy Swainson-pea	<i>Swainsona swainsonioides</i>	Forb
Buloke Mistletoe	<i>Amyema linophylla subsp. orientalis</i>	Epiphyte
Umbrella Wattle	<i>Acacia oswaldii</i>	Shrub
Wimmera Riceflower	<i>Pimelea spinescens subs. pubiflora</i>	Small shrub
Spiny Riceflower	<i>Pimelea spinescens subs. spinescens</i>	Small shrub
Buloke	<i>Allocasuarina luehmannii</i>	Tree
Yarriambiack Mallee-box	<i>Eucalyptus yarriambiack</i>	Tree

Acknowledgements and Resources

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- Adrian Tyler

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Community consultation was undertaken through a series of informal conversations at events in Warracknabeal, Minyip, Murtoa and Rupanyup, and through the Landcare Priorities Survey. This survey was advertised on social media, the Yarrilinks Newsletter, local newspapers, and provided to the community at these events. Targeted consultations with some of Yarrilinks' Supported Groups were also undertaken.

Related Documents

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