

President's Report 2020

DECEMBER 2020

Abbotsford Riverbanks Inc

Author: Anna Ridgway



Introduction

In 2020, we've overcome major challenges to make significant strides in our mission to rehabilitate the degraded Yarra River corridor and build our leadership and reputation. After losing three quarters of our Committee in January, we've rebuilt stronger and better. We:

- consolidated, strengthened and expanded our partner, stakeholder and membership network
- built a strong, united core team
- continued and expanded our rehabilitation work during the unprecedented Covid19 lockdown
- rose above anonymous activities that threatened to undermine our work and reputation
- continued our learning journey and built our leadership through demonstrating best practice
- secured grants and donations, and forged partnerships for future paid workshops and funding.

Our Strategic Plan is providing strong direction for our rehabilitation work, communications and building high quality volunteering. We're implementing governance and management processes that will guide our mission and support our work into the future.

I'm proud to lead a team of Riverbankers, who are showing how busy people with work and home commitments can become stewards of our lower Yarra riverlands and improve its long-term health.

A heartfelt 'thank you' to all our Riverbankers for your hard work over this transformative year:

- Our Treasurer Salvatore Rapisarda and member Jennie Irving, for your vital support.
- Our fabulous Riverbanker team. In particular, Jen Ross, Cinzia Posega, Arjun Tickner, Margaret Blakeney, Scott Wood, Willard Lloyd, Tomás Vaillo Roman, Ayesha Cochrane, Mish Edstein, Breanna Butera, Sophie Best, Chie Adachi-Robertson, Brad Maddern and Marta Rocha.
- Jonathan Tickner for your generous support, Helen Macrae and Chris Currie.

Warm thanks and appreciation to our supportive partners and stakeholder organisations. In particular:

Adrian Valente, Craig Lupton and Mark Donnellan (*City of Yarra*), Rodolfo Maia (*Parks Victoria*), Nathan Mattinson, Andy Ross and Bill Byrne (*Melbourne Water*), Mark Hursch (*VINC Nursery*), Alisa Nguyen (*Australian Securities and Investments Commission, ASIC*), University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre, Nadine Samaha (*Australian Institute of Architects [Vic]*) and Karin Traeger (*Yarra Riverkeeper Association*).

Anna Ridgway.

President, Abbotsford Riverbankers Inc.

13 December 2020



2020 Committee - Jennie Irving, Salvatore Rapisarda, Anna Ridgway

In this report

2020 highlights

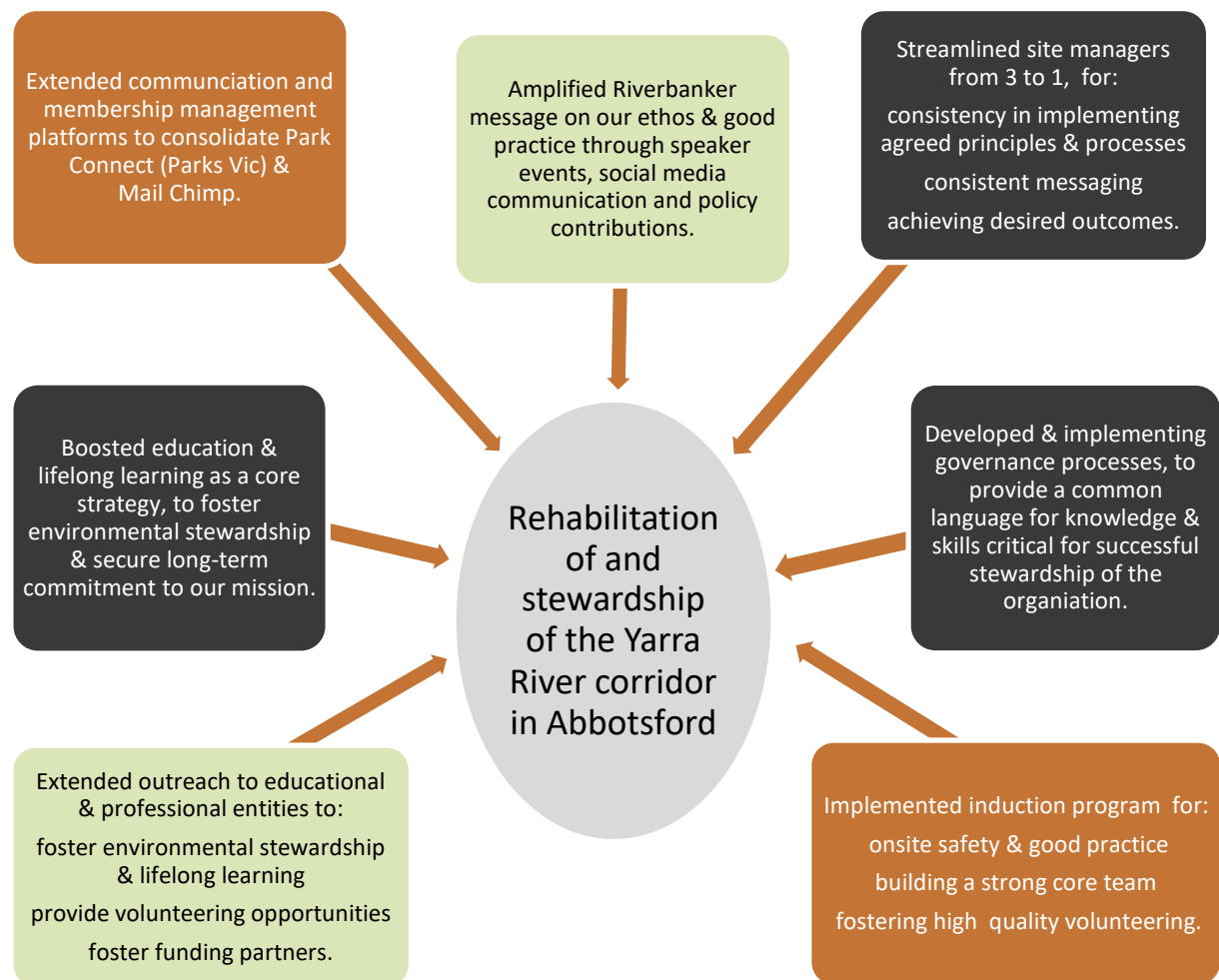
Strategic planning & implementation
On-site activities
Highlights

Other activities

Site management
Strategic partnerships/alliances
Advocacy

2020 highlights – strategy

Our key strategic, governance and management, communications and volunteer outreach activities and achievements, aligned to our mission to help rehabilitate and advocate for the Yarra River corridor in Abbotsford, are summarised below.



Key

| | |
|--|------------------------------|
| | Communication & partnerships |
| | Volunteering & memberships |
| | Governance & management |
| | Lifelong learning |

Fostering environmental stewardship

Bucking the trend of event-based volunteering



The Covid19 pandemic lockdown forced us to cancel planned planting and weeding events, our key tool for recruiting volunteers and an expanding approach to environmental volunteering.

This setback became an advantage.

Channelling all our activities into rolling ‘mini bees’ (regular 3-times weekly sessions), established regularity and predictability, with flexibility. That enabled busy people with work, study and family commitments to fit volunteering into their programs. Most of our core team work on this basis.

Our 2019 experience hosting 165 participants at a Yarra Riverkeeper-auspiced corporate planting event, while successful, confirmed that mass events aren’t optimal for quality environmental work generally, and aren’t appropriate for where we operate.

Our new approach is much more effective. It ensures volunteers work correctly and safely onsite along the busy and unpredictable Main City Trail, and better environmental outcomes.

It begins with a site walk

We began induction sitewalks early in 2020. It began with coffee-catchups with Riverbanker friends but soon evolved into an induction process for all incoming volunteers.

Volunteers have a much richer, in-depth experience than an event can provide. They learn the history and context for why we do what we do. They’re properly introduced to site safety and best-practice weeding and planting techniques.

When they participate in weeding and planting activities, they’re already equipped with the basics.

This has powered the growth of a strong, united core team. It’s ensured high quality weed management and a noticeably better plant survival rate in a very difficult area to rehabilitate.

And it’s helped us stay on message and amplify our message about best practice and environmental stewardship in urban areas.



2020 highlights – places

Johnston Street Bridge area



Achievements

- Significant strides in extending planting areas. Existing young plants already evolving into self-sustaining ecosystems.
- First year of brushcutting helping weed management and improving visual amenity along the Main City Trail.

Challenges

Madreia vine infestation a long-term challenge and commitment.

‘Sea Kayak floodplain’

Achievements

- Carefully prepared, planted and overseeing ‘smash flood’ zone. Decisions and actions based on expected heavy flood impacts.
- Significant strides in weed management in highly infested zone

Challenges

- Erosion caused by human traffic in highly dynamic floodplain
- Rubbish & heavy vegetation impairing revegetating river edge.



‘Turner Street Triangle’



Achievements

- Plantings above path evolving into self-sustaining ecosystems
- Plantings below path repairing erosion & thriving through flooding
- Highly degraded, alienated area is a best-practice showcase

Challenges

- Ongoing risk of erosion from ‘desire paths’ created to river edge
- Erosion in un-treed, untterraced area below Turner Street

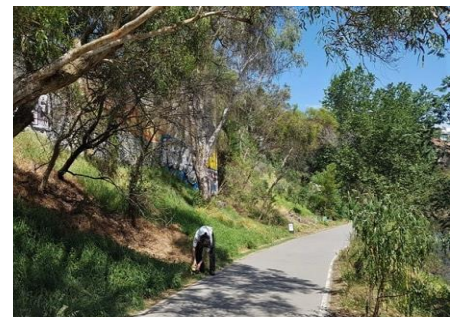
Parks Vic zone

Achievements

- Overcame pandemic setbacks when entire section was closed
- Overcame plant loss from repeated flash flooding
- Learnt the lessons of poor planning and volunteer training, causing plant loss & contributing to erosion in vulnerable zone.

Challenges

Bank collapse and slumping, affecting planning & onsite activity.



2020 highlights – people

Covid19 lockdown



Achievements

- We continued operations onsite throughout the lockdown, by 'flipping' all onsite work from 'group' to 'individual activity'
- We flagged and modelled all decisions & activities through social media, to show transparency and our innovative best practice
- We kept Riverbankers outside the 5km radius involved, by contributing to offsite planning and sharing their 'What are Riverbankers outside the 5km zone doing during lockdown?' activities.
- Slicing major planting events into one-on-one and micro group sessions resulted in more careful and higher-quality planting.

Returning private river frontage to the public

Achievements

- After a 2-year undertaking, we've identified the owner of the 'Johnston Street Bridge' land parcel (Australian Securities and Investments Commission, ASIC)
Our advocacy has set in motion the return of this high-value land parcel to the public after over 100 years
- After 3 years, we've secured formal permission to work on this site.
This has unlocked our access to public funding.
- Over these 3 years, relying on in-principal support from City of Yarra & Melbourne Water, we've achieved significant advances in weed management and planting through volunteer hours, innovative practices, research and planting through private donations.



Inspiring lifelong learning & environmental stewardship



Achievements

- Riverbanking inspired one of our members to start her environmental learning journey with an introductory CERES course. She's channelling her learning into riverlands stewardship.
- Our team members who are studying environmental science and management and botany, are cross-fertilising their learning and riverbanking, helping us improve our own work and learning.

Strategic Partnerships and alliances

In 2020 Abbotsford Riverbankers has deepened strategic partnerships, alliances and dialogues with a range of key government and statutory bodies, conservation and professional groups, as summarised below.

Melbourne Water

Support, advice, intelligence and guidance as principal Yarra waterways manager.
Funding provider for riparian rehabilitation activities.

City of Yarra

In-principle support and permissions for site-work abutting the Main City Trail.
Support with weed and rubbish removal, community outreach, intelligence.
Recipient of Riverbankers' policy development feedback.

Parks Victoria

Permissions and support for work on Parks Victoria-managed land parcel.
Onsite management support, guidance & intelligence; resource provision (plant protection, signage, plants, tools). Funding provider for rehabilitation activities.

Yarra Riverkeeper Association

Mutually supporting and complementary activities protecting and improving the health of the Yarra River Corridor. Cross-promotion, research & intelligence sharing.
The Riverbankers represent community organisations on the YRKA Advocacy sub-committee.

University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre

Growing and mutually complementary activities around lifelong learning and stewardship of our riverlands.
Riparian plant sharing and care along the Yarra corridor.

Australian Institute of Architects (Victorian Chapter)

Ongoing dialogue on mutual support and on-the-ground intelligence sharing to align developments with river & environmental values, and support reconciliation ecology.
Nexus of outreach to other environmental hubs.

Putting the word out there

In 2020 we've continued advocacy for rehabilitation of urban river corridors, other degraded urban terrain and improving biodiversity in urban environments. A couple of highlights below:



Abbotsford Riverbankers wants:
2. Investigation into feasible sites for rainwater gardens in key sites to capture water before it runs off into the Yarra waterway in this zone.

What do you want for the health of our water in our Yarra community, homes and environment?
City of Yarra wants to hear from you!
To manage our water resources responsibly and sustainably for a healthy environment and community, City of Yarra is developing a 10-year Integrated Water Management Plan.

What does the plan include?

- drainage
- stormwater management
- open space management
- waterway health
- seeking alternative water sources.

Click the link below to have your say!
Submissions close Friday 17 Jul

On 6 October, Anna Ridgway was a guest panellist on the Yarra Riverkeeper Association's 'Women's Leadership in Water Management and Environmental Protection' webinar. The Riverbankers were also the first organisation featured on the YRKA's social media series on environmental groups.

In July 2020, the Riverbankers contributed significant feedback to City of Yarra's Integrated Water Management Plan, and implemented a 4-week social media campaign to highlight key issues and encourage community contributions.

