

Photo:  
Zurich,  
Switzerland  
by Ilia Bronskiy

Featuring  
**CASE STUDY:**  
Melbourne's Yarra  
River / Birrarung  
Swimming Trail

# Swimmable Cities HANDBOOK

*An introductory tool for advocates,  
practitioners & decision-makers*

—  
October 2023



*We acknowledge the biodiverse aquatic and marine ecosystems which form the basis for cities and communities around the Planet. We pay our deep respects to the people who live closest to these sacred waterways, especially traditional and frontline custodians like Indigenous Elders, Rangers and Riverkeepers. In this post-COVID era, the international urban swimming movement is symbolic of local people rediscovering their interdependent relationship with Nature. We hope that this tool can contribute to a growing confluence of social, ecological and economic wellbeing.*



Matt Sykes (left) meeting architect Fredrik Pettersson at Kastrup Sea Bath, Copenhagen, 2019

# Prelude

## Urban swimming, Matt's connection

"In March 2020, I was preparing to embark on a new chapter of international research in urban swimming experience design and development. Helsinki, Stockholm and Copenhagen had captured my imagination and were calling me back but fate had other plans. In the end, COVID-19 re-organised our lives, here we are ...

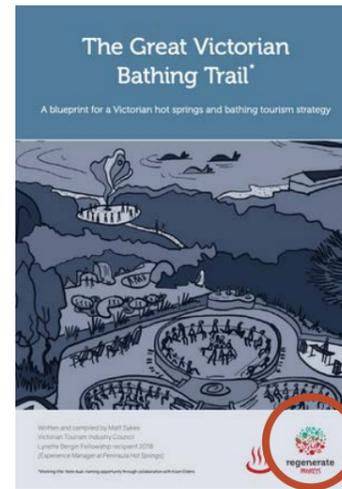
To me this Handbook represents unfinished business. It continues a consistent stream of work which can be traced to a Zurich visit in 2011 for the annual International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) conference. In between one of the program breaks, I was walking through the streets and heard voices and water splashes. It was summer and despite being in the middle of a populous city, my instinctive desire to 'cool off' had led me straight to a 'hidden' river bathhouse.

Months later I was in Copenhagen and soon realised that being able to swim in cities was a 'thing'. This was particularly strange as the thought of swimming in Melbourne, in the Birrarung / Yarra River, seemed crazy at the time. That reaction has obviously changed! I am yet to find another idea which so simply captures the imagination of everyday people, by connecting water health and social benefit." Matt Sykes, Founder, Regen Projects

## Timeline

Throughout his career, swimmable cities has been a consistent theme and point of interest for Matt. Highlights include:

- 2011 • **Landscape Architecture Graduate**, Attended IFLA Conference in Zurich
- 2017 • **Nature-based Tourism Manager & Guide**, Self-funded Industry Research in the Nordics
- 2018 • **Peninsula Hot Springs Experience Manager**, VTIC Lynette Bergin Fellowship recipient
- 2019 • Great Victorian Bathing Trail strategy published, inc. international Industry Benchmark Research in UK, Nordics, USA, Japan & China
- 2020 • **Regeneration Projects Regenerative Business Consultant** - International Industry Benchmark Research, Nordics (cancelled due to COVID)
- 2021 • Bathing Australia alliance coordinator, Research with Loretta Bellato PhD, Swinburne University & Started contract at Regen Melbourne - worked to set up 'Swimmable Birrarung / Yarra by 2030' Alliance
- 2022 • Industry Benchmark Research, Stockholm & Copenhagen
- 2023 • **Swimmable Cities Handbook launched** Supported by Fernanda Farias Zorilla & Pratyush Singh



**FUN FACT:**  
The 2019 Great Victorian Bathing Trail strategy was part of the 'prelude' to Regeneration Projects starting up!



## Why 'Swimmability'?

In Naarm Melbourne (Australia), First Nations Elders share stories about the Birrarung / Yarra River being sculpted into the landscape by an ancestral creator spirit called Bundjil, a wedge-tailed eagle. Just as this river has served and nourished First Peoples for millennia, today's multi-cultural community members are gradually growing our understanding and respect for this vital lifeblood, deepening our realisations of the interconnections between the Birrarung's wellbeing and our own quality of life.

Inspired by similar core principles as ancient wisdom, the international swimmable cities and communities movement is a confluence of purpose-driven people working across sectors to create an array of net benefits for their local communities; ecological resilience, community wellbeing, cultural adaptation, economic innovation and governing in partnership with Nature.

Unlike many global sustainable development frameworks and initiatives, the measure of whether an urban waterway is clean enough to swim in or not, is a universal way that people can understand the relationship between social, environmental and economic health. Importantly, in cities and communities where degradation has occurred, people instantly get the need to clean, restore and heal waterways. We believe that a global reassessment of priorities is taking place; clean water, fresh air and thriving biodiversity inside cities are becoming foundation stones for a new brand of regenerative development and infrastructure.

## What is 'Urban Swimming'?

In this report, it is taken to mean: swimming in natural, open air waterways; either fresh or saline; and supported by various kinds of human-made structures. This is different from outdoor chlorinated pools, for example.

## "Cool Off" climate adaptation

Around the Planet, COVID-19 made everyday people aware that their physical, mental and spiritual health is dependent on access to healthy urban ecosystems through parks, gardens and waterways. It literally became a matter of survival and now the 'ecosystem services' of mental wellbeing promotion and anxiety relief have become more relatable. When we think about climate change, urban heat island-effects and the increase of heat wave events, it is and will be vital for urban people to be able to cool off, for example on consecutive 45+ degree days. Should access to swimmable urban waterways be considered a human right?



Regeneration Projects' partnered industry x academic research with Loretta Bellato PhD at Swinburne University of Technology is another example of our ongoing contribution to the urban swimming movement.

## Strategic Alignments



UNITED NATIONS DECADE ON  
**ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION**  
2021-2030

Could Swimmable Cities become a key innovation stream in urban ecosystem restoration before 2030?



How could Blue Flag's criteria support your city to start its journey towards 'swimmability'?



Could the 'swimmability' of urban waterways be an indicator in future regenerative development goals?

# MAKING NEWS State of Swimmable Cities 2023

## An international snapshot

To understand what is happening in the international swimmable cities and communities movement, we sent a simple survey to colleagues around the Planet. These insights are designed to introduce decision-makers to the opportunities and challenges faced by frontline advocates and workers, as well as demonstrate to those already in the movement that they're not alone. Together, we can and will continue to make progress!

### Survey Participants

12 People, working across 50+ Countries

### Levels of Experience

16.7% 10+ Years  
33% 5+ Years  
25% 1-3 Years  
25% <12 Months

### Most Common Roles & Skillsets

- #1 Community engagement & Storytelling
- #2 Political Advocacy & Governance  
Architecture & Design  
Multi-sector Convening & Partnerships
- #3 Construction  
Ecosystem restoration & management  
Litter prevention & pollution management  
Tourism, Hospitality & Events  
Academia & Research

### Notes

- This is a brief, informal piece of research and is not representative of all of the work going in the world.
- There is a bias to the Global North, which is a gap to address in further work.

## Top 3 Motivations

For working in the swimmable cities and communities sector:

It's a way to positively impact the health of our **WATERWAYS & ENVIRONMENT.**

It's about **COMMUNITY** connection and wellbeing for me!

We need safe access to water for **CLIMATE ADAPTATION.**

## Biggest Successes

*Wins that stand out as being internationally significant:*

**1. NYC's Mayor directing city agencies to make new river swimming policy** as a direct result of our project, work and advocacy

**2. Explosion of outdoor swimming in the UK**, Outdoor Swimming Society's membership doubling to 200K+ since 2020.

**3. Dramatic water quality improvement through efforts of the Parramatta River Catchment Group** (inc. Sydney Water) spending millions on fixing sewer overflows and stormwater issues.

### Other wins:

- Government engagement, funding & action
- Crowdfunding campaigns
- Development of major projects, backed by positive community feedback
- Reaching new global markets
- Regional laws allowing ecological means of water treatment

## Biggest Challenges

*Obstacles to making progress on urban swimming projects, beyond water quality:*

**#1 Securing funding** (set up & ongoing)

**#2 Restrictive laws & policies**

**#3 Development Permits & Approvals**

#4 Conservative leaders & Social perceptions about water quality

#5 Finding suitable project sites

#6 Education around safely swimming in open waters

### Other obstacles:

- Sharks are important stakeholders, in some places, shark nets are needed.
- Working upstream to protect swim sites

**Biggest Headline**  
**'Paris to bring back swimming in Seine after 100 years'**

BBC, July 2023

## Game-changing Ideas

*Transformative ways to shift mindsets and spark global interest in swimmable cities:*

### The Right to Swim

What if 'urban swimming' was established as a basic human right, like the Right to Roam.

### Regenerative Development

Reframing urban development and shifting from seeing rivers as waste and transport funnels, to catalysts for place regeneration.

### Ocean Pools = Coastal Defence

Combining the two infrastructures reduces the cost of the pool and gives back tangible benefits to the community. Ocean / tidal pools are cheaper to build, less carbon intensive (in build and operation) and free to use.

### Distributing Knowledge & Models

More local awareness raising for public decision makers towards global frameworks already developed. Solutions exist, let's implement them. It's much bigger than people realise.

### Mainstreaming Ecosystem Restoration via 'Urban Swimming'

Establishing the importance of ecological restoration as a primary community, government and commercial business motivator, which increases the health and wellbeing of community as well as decreases the health problems with polluted waterways.

**"When people see athletes swimming in the Seine with no health problems, they'll be confident themselves to start going back in"**

**Pierre Rabadan, Paris Deputy Mayor**

# Survey: State of Swimmable Cities 2023

A snapshot of some of the leading actors



**Status of work:**  
**Thames Baths** - searching for a site and supportive council/developer  
**Sydney Water** - Summer pop up pool and [technical report](#)  
**Future Lidos Group** - Launching new free to access online toolkit for community pool campaigners.



**Status of work:**  
 in development, permitting and policy change with government.  
**Tip for new starters:**  
 Trust the data.

**CHRIS ROMER-LEE**  
 Co-Founder of [Studio Octopi](#) Thames Baths, [Future Lidos Group](#); Author of [Sea Pools](#), London, UK

**KARA MEYER**  
 Managing Director, + [POOL](#), New York, USA



**Tip for new starters:**  
 Work with a consultant team with experience, site choice is one of the hardest challenges.

**Status of work:**  
 After 9 years of very diverse work, we currently run the only temporary outdoor pool of Brussels ([FLOW](#)) and 3 institutional projects are on the drawing boards.

**Tip for new starters:**  
 Look what's already around in the world for reference and inspiration, lead by action through activities or prototypes and the following participation.



**PAUL STEINBRUCK**  
 Co-Founder & Coordinator [POOL IS COOL](#), Brussels, Belgium



**JOHANN DURAND**  
 International Director, [Blue Flag](#) (Foundation for Environmental Education) Copenhagen, Denmark

**Status of work:**  
 Currently working in 51 countries, beyond the scope of urban swimming. We focus on global frameworks and policies to implement at local level, through a multi-stakeholder approach. Currently revising our global criteria, aligning with our [FEE Strategy GAIA 20:30](#).

**Tip for new starters:**  
 You care for what you enjoy, you protect what you care for.



**Status of work:**  
 In the UK and overseas we've helped create the new outdoor swimming movement - now we're focus on expanding the right to swim.

**Tip for new starters:**  
 To keep swimming free, enable swimmers with information - avoid regulation and commercialisation.

**THE OUTDOOR SWIMMING SOCIETY**  
 UK



**JASMINE PAYGET**  
 Riverkeeper, [Parramatta River Catchment Group](#) (PRCG), Sydney, Australia

**Status of work:**  
 Member council Canada Bay has opened a swim site at Bayview Park Concord (November 2022), and other member councils are likely to open their sites in 2024 (Putney / City of Ryde and Bedlam Bay / Hunters Hill Council)

**Tip for new starters:**  
 Work collaboratively with all the key stakeholders and have a big vision! (also learn from long-term advocates, eg: [Chair Councillor Mark Drury](#))



**NERIDA TAYLOR**  
 Urban Plunge team, [Sydney Water](#), Australia,



**Status of work:**  
 Everyone who lives in Greater Sydney should have easy access to clean natural local swimming spots. Through the Urban Plunge vision, Sydney Water aims to help councils establish more swimmable sites in the rivers, creeks, lakes and harbour inlets of Greater Sydney's cities and suburbs - in areas previously considered unsuitable for swimming.

**Tip for new starters:** Think global, act local.



**NOTE:** [Regen Melbourne](#) is acting as a convening organisation to support organisations (inc. Regeneration Projects) in their collective efforts towards making the Birrarung swimmable. See more info - [here](#).

## Melbourne leaders: Swimmable Birrarung / Yarra River by 2030



**Status of work:**  
 Early advocacy and community engagement/ storytelling  
**Tip for new starters:**  
 Tell a great story - capture people's imaginations

**CHARLOTTE STERRETT**  
 Yarra Riverkeeper, [Yarra Riverkeeper Association](#), Melbourne, Australia



**YARRA POOLS**  
 Birrarung / Yarra River, Melbourne, Australia



**Status of work:**  
 Resetting and re-aligning after a proposal for a filtered public pool was unsuccessful. Identifying a new location for a swimming activation.  
**Tip for new starters:**  
 Small victories are a great place to start building big wins.



**CHARITY MOSIENYANE**  
 Swimmable Birrarung Lead Convenor, [Regen Melbourne](#), Australia

**Status of work:**  
 We are in the exciting phase of launching a portfolio of transformative projects towards a healthy and thriving river. These are based on the collaborative work we have done on the last two years.

**Tip for new starters:**  
 Be curious and open to learn land building relationships within the river's ecosystem.



**JAMES MUGAVIN**  
 Director, [Loyly Studio](#), Melbourne, Australia

**Status of work:**  
 We're a design and architecture practice focused around bathing and connection to water. Early concept design stage.

**Tip for new starters:**  
 Persistence - get clear on what you want to achieve and go for it.

Loyly Studio



**DR LORETTA BELLATO**  
 PhD, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

**Status of work:**  
 Having just completed my PhD I'm now sharing learnings and frameworks with those interested in applying regenerative development approaches.

**Tip for new starters:**  
 Connect with other river lovers and learn about what is unique and loved about your river.



**KARIN TRAEGER**  
 Founder, [La Loyka](#), Melbourne, Australia



**Status of work:**  
 Supporting organisations on the grassroots level to create community actions on ecosystem health. Exploring the catchment by foot and collaborating with like-minded individuals on projects.

**Tip for new starters:** Best way to start understanding the complexity of stakeholders is to connect and visit some of the projects happening around the catchment and some of the key pain points.



**MATT SYKES**  
 Founder, [Regeneration Projects](#), Melbourne, Australia



**Status of work:**  
 We've just finished an event series called Working with Water, looking at multi-sector enabled integrated water management across Melbourne. Now, we're looking at our next steps to support local and international swimmable cities movements.

**Tip for new starters:** Spend time listening and getting to know your local waterways. They will tell you a lot about what's needed and possible.

# DEFINING Swimmable Cities & Communities

## Urban swimming experiences

Across the Planet, people have created different strategies to adapt to their surrounding waterways and make safe, beautiful urban swimming experiences. Naturally, different types of aquatic and marine ecosystems afford different kinds of opportunities. Over time these environments support swimming cultures which are unique to place to emerge and evolve, eventually multiple swimming places can spread across a whole metropolitan region. A city or community can in fact become internationally renowned for its 'swimmability', which has direct economic and social benefits from the perspectives of quality of life, spiritual connection, workplace productivity and tourism. For example, Copenhagen, Zurich and India's Ganges River.

## Working with Water

Urban swimming experiences need to respond to their natural ecologies first and foremost, and can be a catalyst for regenerating degraded urban waterways.

## Types of experiences



**OPEN PLATFORMS, PIERS & BEACHES**  
Access water from natural and human-made structures at water edge.

**Example:** City Splash, Charles River, Boston, USA (also Swim Park Project)



**ENCLOSED 'PLUNGE' POOLS**  
Swim 'in' water within the safety of a simple human-made structure.

**Example:** Seebad Enge, Zurich, Switzerland



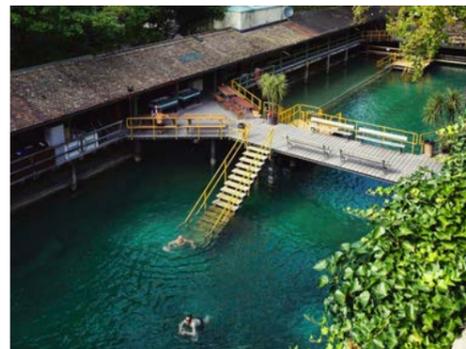
**FLOATING POOLS & SAUNAS**  
'On' water experiences accompanied by substantial infrastructure.

**Example:** Badeschiff, Berlin, Germany or Oslo Fjord Sauna, Norway



**HARBOUR BATHS**  
Human-made structure with designated swimming and jumping areas (inc. with child-friendly options).

**Example:** Islands Brygge, Copenhagen, Denmark



**RIVERBANK BATHHOUSES**  
Designed facilities (sometimes with gendered-based swimming options)

**Example:** Männerbad Schanzengraben or Frauenbad at Stadthausquai, Zurich, Switzerland



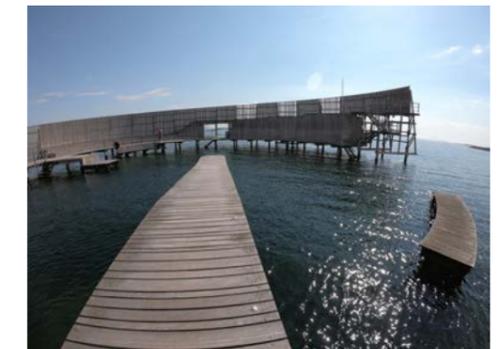
**BILLABONGS, PONDS & NATURAL POOLS**  
Small isolated water bodies, sometimes seasonal, with chlorine-free swimming.

**Example:** Borden Park Natural Swimming Pool, Edmonton, Canada



**LAGOONS, LAKES & LIDOS**  
Larger isolated water body, both human-made or natural, permanent and protected,

**Example:** South Bank Lagoon, Brisbane, Australia, or London Fields Lido, UK



**SEABATHS**  
With human-made structure, sometimes enclosed or partly open

**Example:** Kastrup Sea Bath, Copenhagen, Denmark

## Development models

An important aspect of urban swimming places are the business and development models which make the experiences accessible. Public, local government-funded and managed amenities are a popular model, while experiences that combine swimming with housing; food and beverage; arts, culture and wellness; and recreation and sports clubs, are becoming more common. Initial funding for high-quality design and development is required, but more importantly, ongoing resources are needed for management and maintenance.



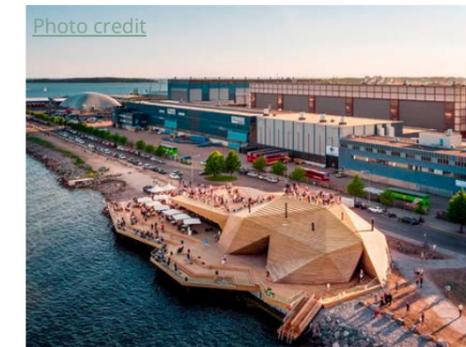
**CIVIC AMENITY (public)**  
Developed and managed by local municipalities, these experiences are accessible for All (locals and visitors).

**Example:** Bassin de la Villette, Paris, France



**WELLNESS, SPA & CULTURE (private)**  
Purpose-built tourism facilities, often developed, owned and managed by private enterprises.

**Example:** SALT, Oslo, Norway



**FOOD & BEVERAGE (public/private)**  
Cafes, restaurants and bars with in-house or nearby swimming or sauna facilities (inc. as part of urban renewal).

**Example:** Loyly Sauna, Helsinki, Finland



**HOUSING DEVELOPMENT (public/private)**  
As part of its civic contribution, private housing developers can include 'public' swimming places in common areas.

**Example:** Havneviggen Harbour Bath, Copenhagen, Denmark



Rivers



Beaches



Lakes



Estuaries

# DESIGNING Swimmable Cities & Communities

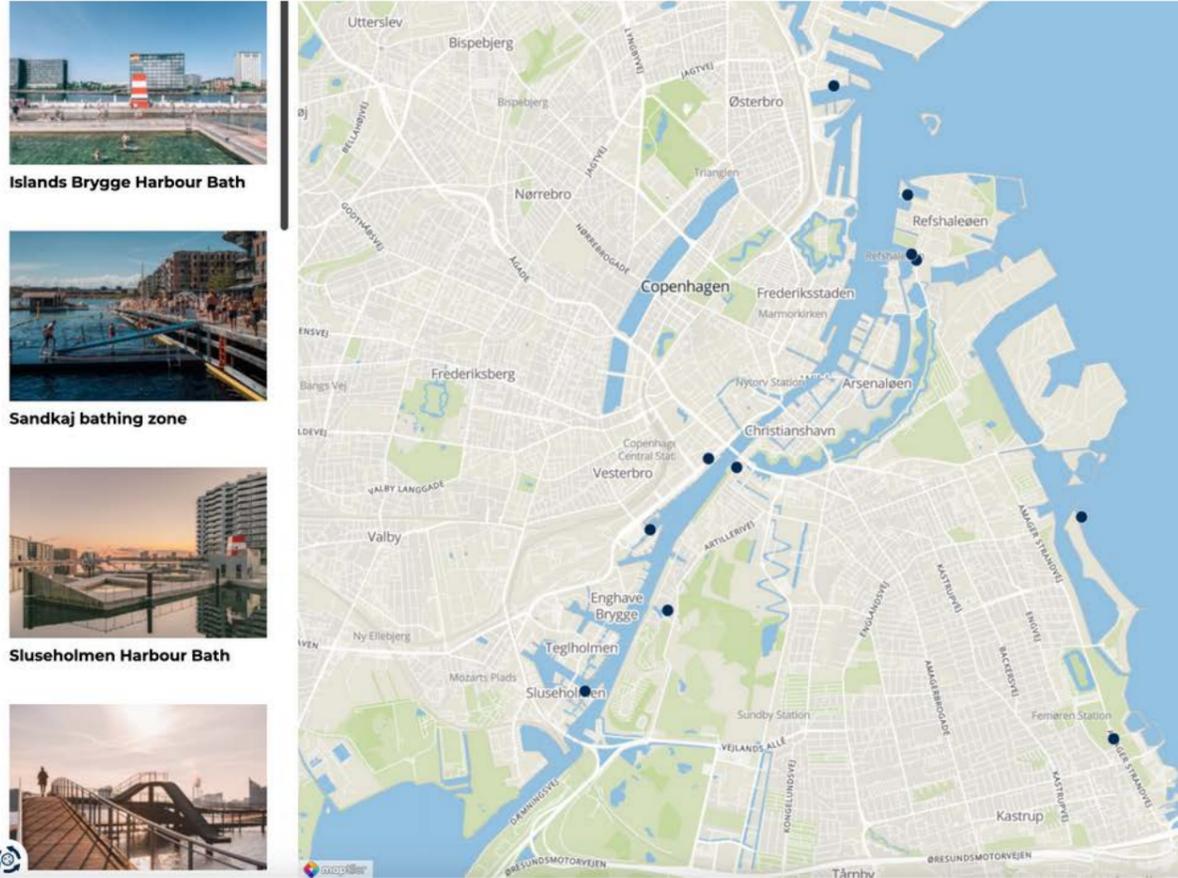
High-quality design and architecture that responds to place matters

**(1) JOBS, SKILLS & PATHWAYS**  
Architects, landscape architects, urban planners, engineers and other built environment professionals have critical skills required to design swimming places which are visually iconic, operationally pragmatic and culturally and ecologically responsive.

**(2) INTEGRATED REGENERATION**  
'Swimmability' has enormous global potential to become a key catalyst for regenerative urban development, in line with the [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#). It is a powerful incentive for cities and communities around the Planet to clean up and restore their urban aquatic and marine ecosystems, as they are rewarded with new civic amenities and entrepreneurial opportunities.

**(3) SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**  
Swimming places, precincts and urban bathing trails can become part of mayors, councillors & culture leaders' vocabulary and strategies for addressing the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) because they integrate diverse net benefits. For example, [SDG #3 Good Health & Wellbeing](#), [#11 Sustainable Cities & Communities](#) and [#13 Climate Action](#).

One of the aspects about the international urban swimming movement that we're particularly passionate about is the potential for place-based design and strategic masterplanning. This reflects Matt's background as a landscape architect.



Islands Brygge Harbour Bath



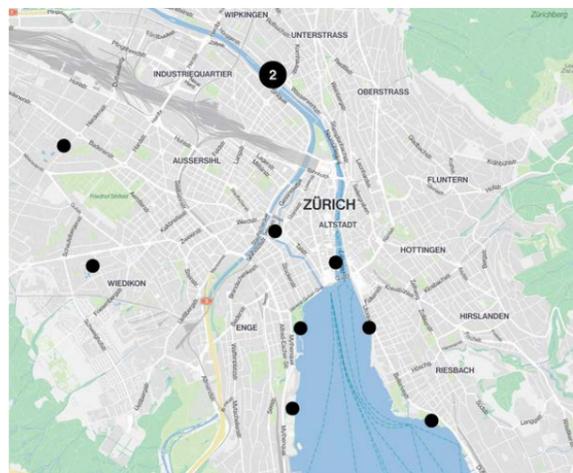
Sandkaj bathing zone



Sluseholmen Harbour Bath



Water Culture House (under construction, 2022)



## ZURICH

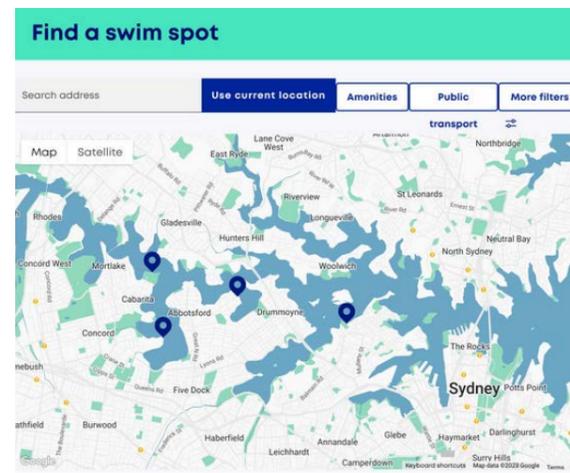
Like Copenhagen and nearby Basel, Zurich's urban swimming culture is advanced in its stage of development.

**Key Lesson:** Integration into urban fabric

**Challenge:** Balancing local & visitor use

**Regeneration Projects' connection:** Matt's first visit to a swimmable city, 2011

**Explore:** [Zuerich.Com](#)



## SYDNEY

The Urban Plunge initiative being developed by Sydney Water is a great example of integrated water management.

**Key Lesson:** Government leadership

**Challenge:** Maintaining momentum

**Regeneration Projects' connection:** Matt connected with local leaders in 2022

**Explore:** [Urban Plunge](#), [Pop-Up pool](#) & [Report by Studio Octopi](#)



La Banchina (cafe & swimming)



Nordhavn (public swimming & recreation clubs)



Water Culture House (under construction, 2022)



**Sauna life by the Oslo Fjord**  
Urban sauna culture has taken Oslo by storm, and the Oslo harbour now boasts several options for sauna sessions followed by refreshing dips in the fjord.

## OSLO

Catalysed by grassroots activist reclaiming post-industrial areas, floating saunas are now celebrated by Ministers & visitors alike.

**Key Lesson:** Grassroots entrepreneurship

**Challenge:** Balancing public & private access

**Regeneration Projects' connection:** Matt conducted research in 2017 and 2019

**Explore:** [Visit Oslo](#)

## COPENHAGEN

Likely the most recognised of the world's swimmable cities, Copenhagen has urban swimming culture deeply embedded within its civic DNA. It has now become part of its international positioning, branding & competitive advantage.

**Key lessons:**

- Iconic design & architecture
- Civic amenity & water safety
- Diversity & accessibility

**Key challenges:**

- Water quality & litter control
- Managing use during peak times
- Enabling ecological restoration

**Regeneration Projects' links:**

- 2011 - Matt's first visit
- 2017 - Self-funded research
- 2019 - VTIC Industry research
- 2022 - RP Industry research

**Explore:** [Visit Copenhagen](#)



## PARIS

As a part of a huge pre-Olympic cleanup drive, the River Seine in Paris is soon to become swimmable with three swimming areas by 2025. **Explore:** [BBC](#)



## NEW YORK

An innovative, floating filtering pool catalysed by grassroots leadership, enabled by policy and government support. **Explore:** [Plus Pool](#)

# NET BENEFITS of Swimmable Cities & Communities

## Integrated Regeneration

'Swimmability' is a simple way for citizens and decision-makers alike to understand the interconnectedness of social, cultural, ecological, economic and political health. At Regeneration Projects, we've created a framework called the 'Five Capitals' which can make the diverse values and benefits of swimmable cities and communities more clear and tangible for different kinds of stakeholders.



**Knowledge, Safety & Civic Rights**  
Potential 'Intellectual Capital' benefits:

- Protect human rights to a safe climate & healthy environment
- Protect the rights of Nature & Indigenous communities
- Revise government policies to enable urban swimming
- 'Learn to Swim' programs
- Distribute knowledge & research globally

**Restoring Urban Ecosystems**  
Potential 'Natural Capital' benefits:

- Healing degraded waterways
- Enriching ecosystem services
- Stormwater filtration
- Litter prevention
- Revegetation
- Co-existence with urban wildlife



Swimmable Cities & Communities

## Five Capitals

© Regeneration Projects

INTELLECTUAL

NATURAL

MATERIAL

WELLBEING

CULTURAL

**Nature-based Business & Economic Development**

Potential 'Material Capital' benefits:

- Circular economy innovations
- Local jobs and business pathways
- Climate adaptation & blue carbon opportunities
- Integrated water management
- Zero waste systems
- Renewable energy



**Promoting community health & wellbeing**

Potential 'Wellbeing Capital' benefits:

- One Health
- Physical exercise
- Anxiety relief
- Belonging
- Spiritual connection



**Caring for the Common Good**

Potential 'Cultural Capital' benefits:

- Urban Swimming culture
- Public & Private partnerships
- Inclusion & Equality
- Design & Innovation
- Food & Wellness
- Art & Entertainment



The Five Capitals model can be used as a practical:



Compass

Decision-making tool

To ensure a wholistic approach to urban integrated water management



Scorecard

Impact measurement / performance assessment tool

To track indicators across a range of values and benefits for stakeholders

# CASE STUDY

## Swimmable Birraring / Yarra River by 2030

### Healing our city's lifeblood

In 2023, in the lead up to World Bathing Day (June 22), a small group of alliance members gathered to bike ride along the Birrarung between Dights Falls and Nairn / Port Phillip Bay to better understand the potential for a future corridor of 12+ urban swimming places. As a group, we started to identify distinct zones of the River which have their own community and character.

Ever since publishing the Great Victorian Bathing Trail strategy in 2019, Matt has been strategically supporting and contributing towards the vision of urban swimming in Melbourne. (look out for Yarra Pools on the original map!) He was working in industry at Peninsula Hot Springs at the time, where he was able to learn detailed aspects of bathing tourism design, development and operations. In 2021-2022, as the Projects Lead at Regen Melbourne, he helped establish an alliance of diverse organisations who all believe in the goal of a swimmable Birrarung by 2030 and are committed to sharing our 'superpowers' to achieve this. The alliance continues to grow and evolve, and Regeneration Projects remains an active member.

This Spring, Regeneration Projects is excited to share a concept plan, based on both our local knowledge and international experience, which identifies potential locations for different kinds of future swimming experiences. It's not trying to be perfect but rather spark conversation and dialogue between stakeholders so that we can keep moving forward and exploring the potential opportunities.



**Historical Map of Melbourne showing waterways**  
Public Record Office Victoria



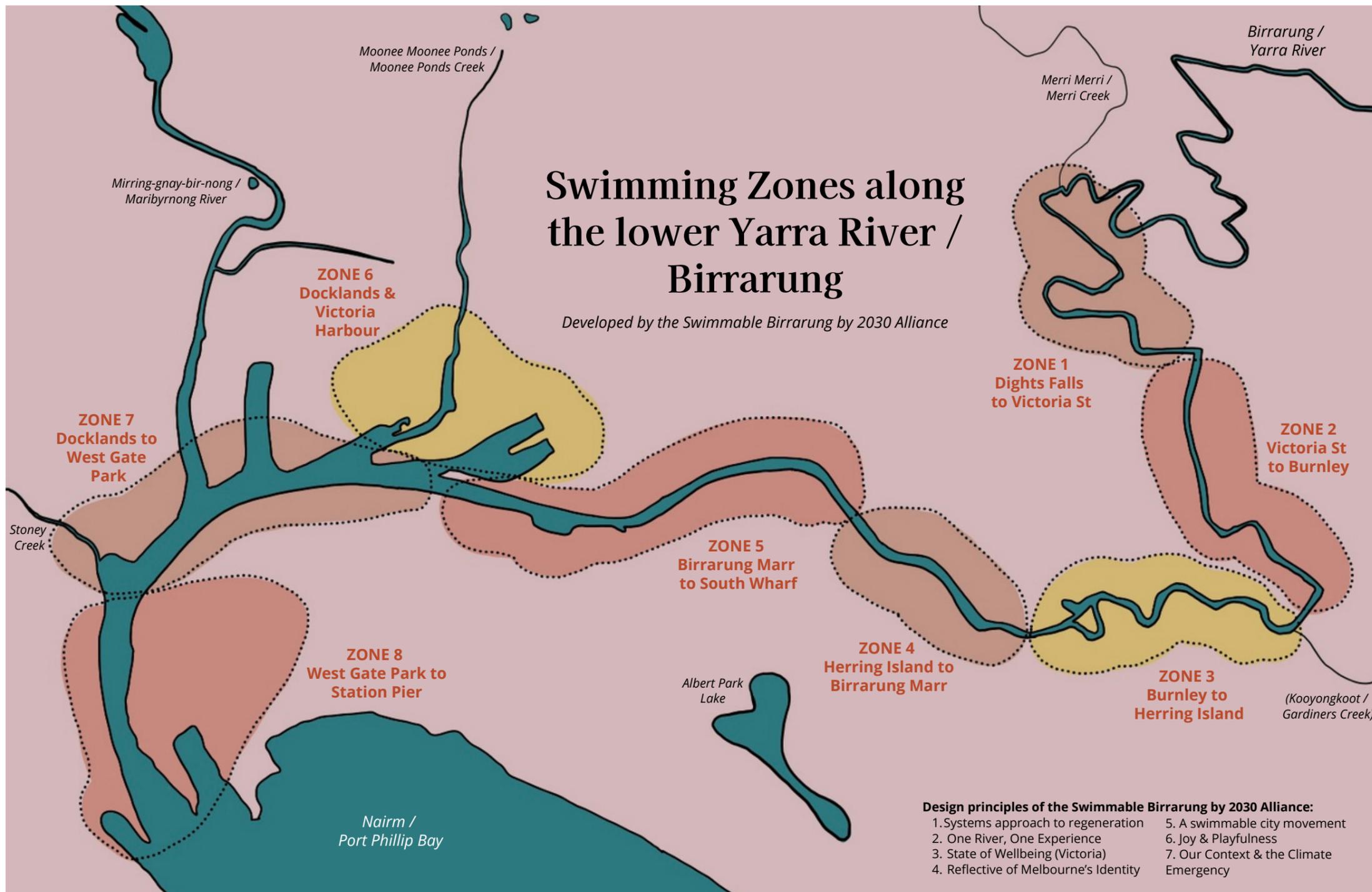
**2019 Great Victorian Bathing Trail map**  
Strategy by Matt Sykes



**'Deep Winter' Bike Ride, Swimmable Birrarung by 2030 Alliance**

Member organisations include:

- Regen Melbourne (convenor)
- Yarra Pools
- Yarra Riverkeeper
- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- Swinburne University
- Regeneration Projects



## Swimming Zones along the lower Yarra River / Birraring

Developed by the Swimmable Birrarung by 2030 Alliance

- Design principles of the Swimmable Birrarung by 2030 Alliance:**
1. Systems approach to regeneration
  2. One River, One Experience
  3. State of Wellbeing (Victoria)
  4. Reflective of Melbourne's Identity
  5. A swimmable city movement
  6. Joy & Playfulness
  7. Our Context & the Climate Emergency

# MASTERPLAN with indicative examples of experiences



**Riverbank Swimming**  
Eg: Deep Rock, Melbourne, Australia



**Floating Filtering pool**  
Eg: Yarra Pools, Melbourne, Australia



**Floating Sauna & Plunge**  
Eg: Derby Floating Sauna, Tasmania



**River / Harbour bath**  
Eg: Seebad Enge, Zurich, Switzerland



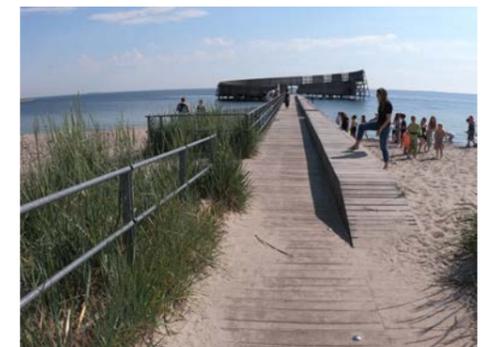
**Wellness facility & pools**  
Eg: Allas Sea Pool, Helsinki, Finland



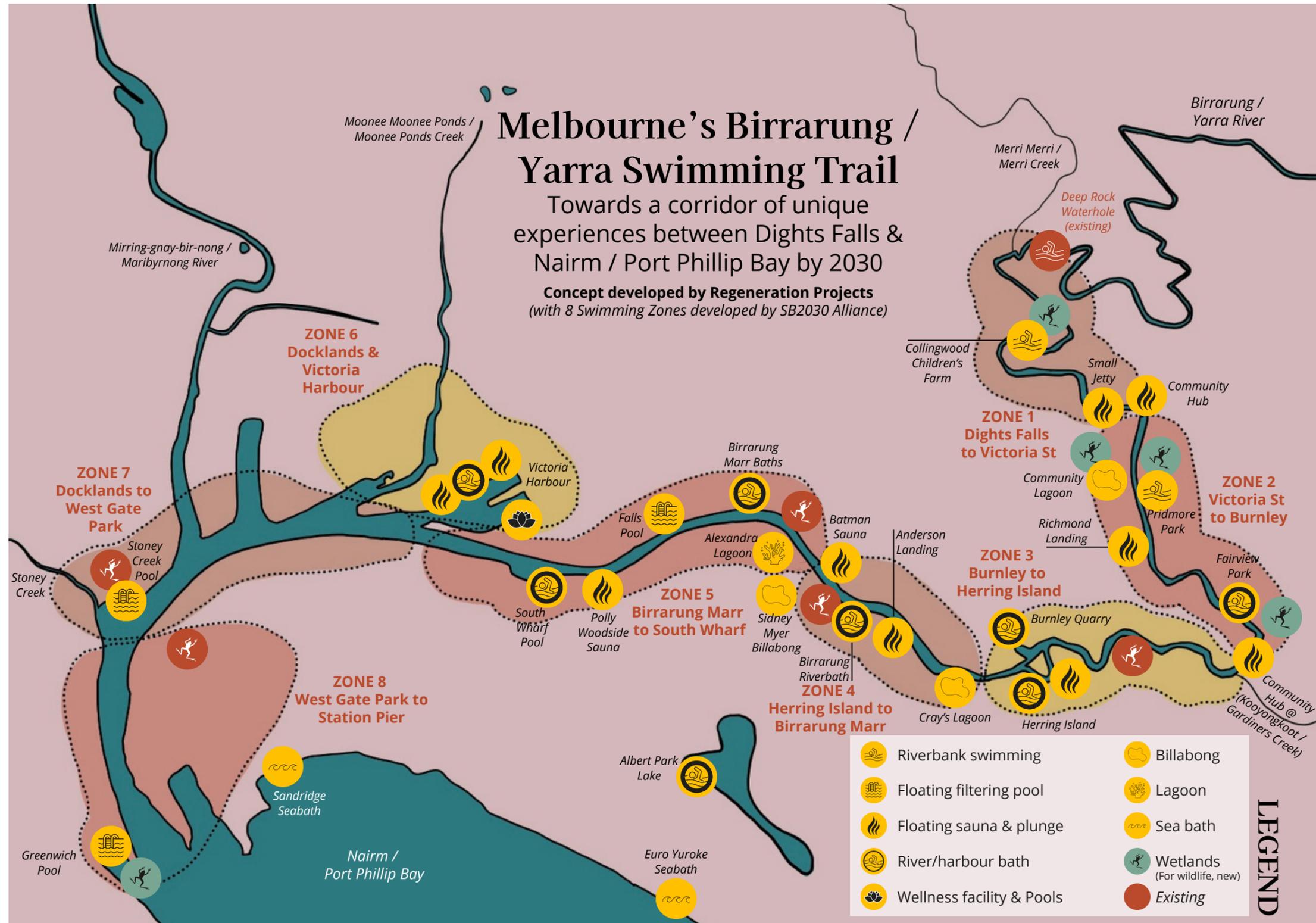
**Billabong**  
Eg: Fairfield Natural Pool, Melbourne



**Lagoon**  
Eg: Brisbane Lagoon, Australia



**Sea bath**  
Eg: Kastrup Sea Bath, Copenhagen



# Recommendations

## Swimmable cities as a catalyst for regeneration

### International

1. Establish an **international Swimmable Cities working group** made up of leaders from different parts of the world to enrich collaboration.
2. The Swimmable Cities working group should then align itself with existing global initiatives via **strategic partnerships**.  
Eg: [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#)
3. Together, there's potential to run a **Swimmable Cities Summit** in an emerging swimmable city. Eg: in Paris, after the 2024 Olympics.
4. Based on the Summit, a global Swimmable Cities & Communities **Strategic Action Plan** should be co-created.
5. A **Full-time Project Manager** should be funded to lead the implementation of the Action Plan.
6. A **BHAG Goal** should be established through the Action Plan to focus attention and resources to outcomes. Eg: **300 new cities starting their journey towards 'swimmability' by 2030**.
7. Seed funding should be secured for **30 Flagship swimmable cities** before 2030. Eg: as an innovative way to address the global nature finance gap.
8. A mix of **collective impact projects**, enabled by inter-city partnerships, should support accelerated distribution of urban swimming models, products, services & knowledge.

**Note: Pop Up Pools** are an innovative model to enable cities to 'test the water'.  
Eg: FLOW by [Pool is Cool](#), Brussels (left) & [Sydney Water](#), by Studio Octopi (right)



### Australia

1. Establish a **national Swimmable Cities working group** with the goal to present an Australian snapshot at the global Swimmable Cities Summit, integrating existing and emerging works, beyond Melbourne and Sydney.

#### MELBOURNE

2. Building on the Yarra Pools Feasibility Study and momentum of the Swimmable Birrarung by 2030 Alliance being convened by Regen Melbourne, a **Melbourne Swimming Trail feasibility study** should be commissioned, incorporating place-based, regenerative designs for the swimming places.

3. Seed funding should be secured to enable **3 Flagship swimming places before 2030**. Eg: a mix of public, private and joint development models using funds previously allocated for the Victoria Commonwealth Games.

4. **Pop Up swimming experiences** should be activated in Summer 2024/25.

# Additional Resources

## A digital toolkit for swimmable cities

### International

#### 'Landscapes of Change: Innovative Designs for Reinvented Sites'

By Roxi Thoren - [here](#)  
(see [International Water Garden Trail](#))

#### 'How to Build a Natural Swimming Pool'

by Wolfram Kircher and Andreas Thon - [here](#)  
(see [Biotop case studies community leisure areas using natural swimming pools](#))

#### Sea Pools: 66 Saltwater Sanctuaries from Around the World

by Chris Romer-Lee - [here](#)

#### Swim City Exhibition, Basel - [here](#)

#### World Bathing Day

2022 poster - [here](#)  
(Note: [Regeneration Projects](#) was the event coordinator in 2022)

### Australia

#### SYDNEY

**Parramatta River Catchment Group Masterplan** - [here](#)

**Urban Plunge, Sydney Water** - [here](#)

#### **Our Living River - Urban Plunge and Parramatta River Catchment Group** - [here](#)

A membership organisation of 10 local councils; Sydney Water, NSW EPA, NSW DPE, and Fisheries and community organisations including Landcare.

#### **River Watch™, Sydney Water** - [here](#)

This program is essential for establishing the health of the water for human contact.

- Predictive Model fact sheet - [here](#)
- Chemical Assessment Program fact sheet - [here](#)
- Water Quality Monitoring Program fact sheet - [here](#)
- Swim Site Activation fact sheet - [here](#)

**NSW Government Places to Swim program** - [here](#)

**Royal Lifesaving - Respect the River program** - [here](#)

#### MELBOURNE

#### **Project Overview: Swimmable Birrarung by 2030** - [here](#)

Convened by Regen Melbourne, 2022 - present

#### **Yarra Pools** - [here](#)

2019 City of Melbourne 'Greenline' submission, by Wowowa Architects - [here](#)  
2016 Design by Studio Octopi - [here](#)

#### **2019 Great Victorian Bathing Trail strategy** - [here](#)

By Matt Sykes, Supported by Victorian Tourism Industry Council & Peninsula Hot Springs

#### **Podcast: 'Forget Global, Think local: Yarra Birrarung as the Ultimate Staycay'**

Yarra Pools, Koorie Heritage Trust & Regeneration Projects @ MPavilion, Summer 2022 - [here](#)

#### **Project Outline: 'Swimmable Birrarung Yarra River by 2030 - Towards a blueprint for thriving urban waterways'** - [here](#)

Loretta Bellato PhD, Yarra Riverkeeper, the Birrarung & Regeneration Projects, November 2021

#### **Podcast: Voices of Regen - Earth Short series - Towards a swimmable Birrarung by 2030**

Loretta Bellato PhD & Regeneration Projects, April 2022 - [here](#)

#### **2023 Working with Water report** - [here](#)

La Loyka & Regeneration Projects, Spring 2023

## #GenerationRestoration

*Traditional approaches to ecosystem restoration need to be challenged, and new models need to be elevated, if we are to capture the imagination of mainstream urban audiences.*

The international swimmable cities and communities movement is an exciting and innovative approach for leaders looking to revitalise their urban environments in the post-COVID era. As this Handbook demonstrates, 'swimmability' has the potential to enable social, ecological and economic benefits for a diverse range of stakeholders. However, what has been up until now, an organic process of largely disparate development, has the potential to become much more integrated through strategic design and partnerships. This applies at the city scale, in the form of swimmable waterway masterplans, as well as at the global scale, in the form of greater inter-city collaboration and resource sharing.

## New global competitive & collaborative advantages

*The Triple Planetary Crisis (climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution) is causing entrepreneurs, creatives and thought leaders to develop new innovative models, products, services and knowledge to meet the needs of our time.*

The global Swimmable Cities & Communities movement has the potential to unlock millions of jobs, as well as billions of dollars in regenerative markets. Those cities that position themselves well are set to attract and retain the next generation of talent - from bio-tech consultants to place-makers, impact investors, Nature rights lawyers and regenerative tourism entrepreneurs.

**What could your role be?!**

# Swimmable Cities HANDBOOK

**Ready to take the plunge?**

*Combining our skills in multi-stakeholder engagement, nature investment, and place-based business and tourism development, Regeneration Projects is passionate about continuing to play a key role in the international swimmable cities movement.*

*If you're looking for support in your city or community, please contact:  
[hello@regenprojects.earth](mailto:hello@regenprojects.earth)*