



Department of Biodiversity,  
Conservation and Attractions

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# Upper Derbal Yirragan (Swan) Locality Plan

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March 2026

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The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and Swan River Trust acknowledge the Whadjuk Noongar people as the Traditional Owners of this land and their continued connection to land, sea and community.

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We pay our respects to them, their cultures and to their Elders past and present.

# Introduction



Photo: Upper Derbal Yirragan (Swan River) - City of Swan

## The Upper Derbal Yirragan (Swan) Locality Plan

The Derbal Yirragan Djarlgarro (Swan Canning river system) is a complex and dynamic natural landscape. In addition to its fundamental ecological values and important floodplain function, it is valued for its landscape and scenic qualities, cultural and heritage significance, and focus for various recreation and tourism activities. While considering the river as this larger natural system, it is also acknowledged that its characteristics and identity change depending on the locality. To ensure the consideration and preservation of these unique attributes, locality plans have been developed for sections along the Swan Canning development control area (DCA).

The Upper Derbal Yirragan (Swan) Locality Plan (the Plan) contains locality-specific policy statements to ensure that land use, design and development approaches respond to the environmental, cultural, heritage and social values of the upper Derbal Yirragan (Swan) section of the river system. The Plan also brings together 'on' and 'off' water considerations to direct appropriate protection, restoration and activation of the river and its foreshores.

The Plan has been developed to achieve the objectives and principles of the *Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006* (SCRM Act) and is policy developed and published pursuant to the SCRM Act to support consistent and integrated planning, decision-making and management outcomes in relation to the river system. It is to be read in conjunction with *Corporate Policy Statement No. 52: Planning for Localities along the Swan Canning Development Control Area*. The Plan is supported by a separate Upper Derbal Yirragan (Swan) Action Plan that aims to guide planning and works in the locality. The actions should be delivered when opportunities present.

The extent of the upper Derbal Yirragan (Swan) locality is identified in Figure 1 (next page) and includes land within the City of Swan. The policy statements apply to land within, abutting and affecting (including ecologically and visually) the DCA and includes public and private land.

# Policy Area

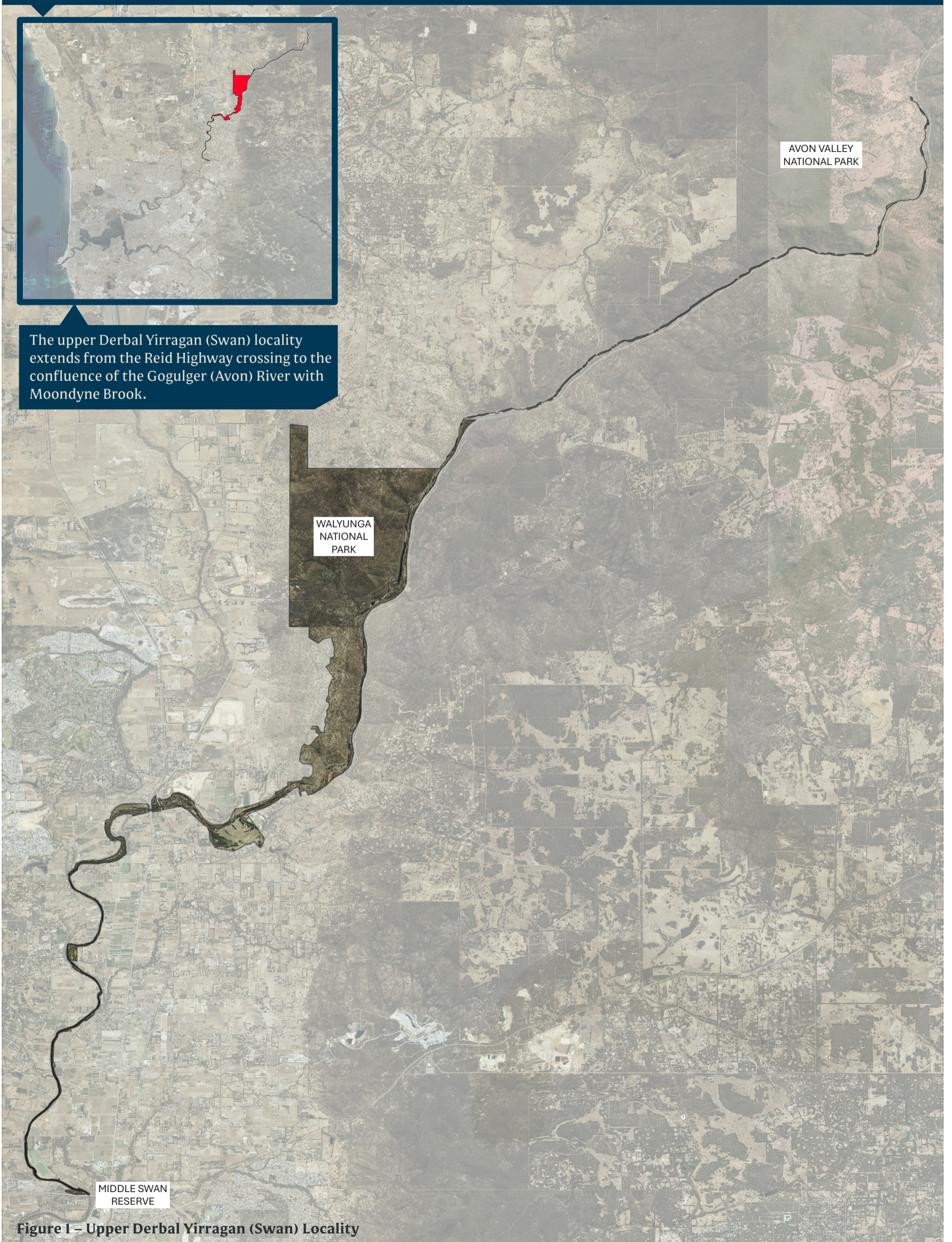


Figure 1 – Upper Derbal Yirragan (Swan) Locality

# Landscape Description



Photo: Walyunga National Park - DBCA

A dominant open rural landscape character extends from Reid Highway to the Darling Scarp. The agricultural land uses in this area include viticulture, orchards, and equestrian properties. The Swan Valley grape vines are an important and distinctive element of rural character and local tourism.

Foreshore vegetation has been largely cleared for agriculture, leaving a narrow strip of riparian vegetation along the Derbal Yirragan (Swan River) and its tributaries. This provides a very narrow natural element. Flooded gums, paperbarks and sedges are the dominant riparian species. The braided channels of the river, oxbow lakes and views up to the Darling Scarp add to the landscape character of this area. Public access to the Derbal Yirragan (Swan River) foreshore is often restricted. River access is mostly only available from private properties and wineries and other tourism activities. Several tributaries connect to the upper Derbal Yirragan (Swan), namely Jane Brook, Susannah Brook, Brockman River, Saint Leonards Creek, Henley Brook and Gynning (Ellen Brook).

The river retains some wildness in its character in the upper reaches, where it approaches the Walyunga National Park. This

stretch of the river is particularly attractive because of the varied terrain and relatively undisturbed vegetation communities. The river flows over several exposed granite outcrops, which creates small waterfalls and rapids, such as Bells Rapids, that are the attraction of the annual Avon Descent power and paddle boat race.

Middle Swan Reserve, Yagan Memorial Park, the State Equestrian Centre and Bells Rapids are notable public destinations. The upper section of the river is surrounded by Walyunga National Park, with the railway line alongside it. Much of the river through the national park is accessible via walk trails and informal paths. The natural landscape character extends along the river through the Walyunga National Park, Avon Valley National Park, and Paruna Wildlife Sanctuary that links these parks.

A rural landscape character is also present on the Darling Range at Bullsbrook, Moondyne and Gidgegannup. These locations include rural living zones and larger farms. These properties overlook the Gogulger (Avon) River valley. This rural landscape character is a common element of the immediate riparian zone of the Derbal Yirragan (Swan) and Gogulger (Avon) rivers in this locality.

# Locality-specific Policy Statements

The policy statements are locality-specific. They support achievement of the key principles and policies as outlined in *Corporate Policy Statement No. 52: Planning for Localities along the Swan Canning Development Control Area*.



Photo: Bells Rapids - City of Swan



Photo: South-western snake-necked turtle - DBCA

### **Protect and restore the river system**

- 6.1 Ensure land use and development enhances the natural environment of the Derbal Yirragan (Swan River) and Gogulger (Avon River) and the surrounding foreshore, protects local vegetation, wetlands and waterways and appropriately manages soils and water resources.
- 6.2 Incorporate an appropriate buffer or increased setback to the waterway for land use and development that has the potential to impact on environmental values.
- 6.3 Retain all remaining Guildford and Swan complex vegetation and preserve local natural areas.
- 6.4 Maintain and restore the foreshore to conserve its ecological values and protect riverbanks in their natural state. Where riverbank stabilisation is necessary in this locality, soft foreshore stabilisation approaches should be used.
- 6.5 Restore tributaries and drainage lines, such as Jane Brook, Susannah Brook, Brockman River, Saint Leonards Creek, Henley Brook and Gynning (Ellen Brook).
- 6.6 Protect riverine biodiversity and vulnerable species, including Western Swamp Tortoise. Protect in-water habitat, including large woody debris, and maintain connectivity between wetlands and the riparian zone and floodway.

### **Protect and restore foreshore vegetation**

- 6.7 Protect existing riparian vegetation, including trees on the riverside of development. Undertake succession planting.

- 6.8 Restore local riparian vegetation so it appears as a green band when viewed from the river, particularly where weeds and extensive historical understorey clearing have degraded the riparian floodplain vegetation.
- 6.9 Encourage the establishment of a minimum 30-metre-wide vegetated riverbank corridor of local plant species from the high-water mark on each side of the channel.

### **Establish and maintain foreshore reserves**

- 6.10 Ensure that development incorporate adequate foreshore reserves and building setbacks. Where the development site is elevated and visible from the river channel, such as on the outside corner of river bends or downstream of Bells Rapid, setbacks from the edge of the embankment will be required.

### **Increase resilience to climate change**

- 6.11 Direct clean stormwater runoff (that has been through water quality management systems located within the development footprint) from the urban zone to the river, where flood capacity within the river and its foreshore is sufficient, to address reduced flows due to climate change.



Photo: Bells Rapids - DBCA

### **Implement water sensitive design**

- 6.12 Encourage conversion of stormwater drains to living streams and extend the natural landscape character across the floodplain and areas of seasonal inundation.
- 6.13 Improve the quality of stormwater entering the foreshore, including by managing and controlling stormwater runoff to prevent sediment from entering the river. Stormwater systems are to be designed to slow the flow of water through the landscape. Consider the inclusion of sedimentation pools and vegetated swales to drop out sediment loads as much as possible, and alternatives to roadside spoon drains that also collect sediment. Consider the need to retrofit drainage inlets. Incorporate at-source stormwater systems and overland flow through vegetated systems within the development footprint and within the catchment, instead of using end-of-pipe stormwater systems within the foreshore reserve.
- 6.14 Ensure that wastewater management systems for development proposals in unsewered areas are designed, installed and maintained to prevent the addition of nutrients and other pollutants in wastewater from entering the DCA.

- 6.15 Implement nutrient, pesticide and irrigation industry best management practices, including through the implementation of a management plan and creation of buffers of local vegetation along the river's edge.

- 6.16 Ensure that development and land use changes along tributaries and drainage lines that connect to the Derbal Yirragan (Swan River) and Gogulger (Avon River) contribute to improved water quality entering the river.

### **Minimise dredging and channel disturbance**

- 6.17 Protect and maintain the natural function and form of the riparian landform elements, such as the alluvial terraces, floodway, embankments, riverbanks and channel.
- 6.18 Not support filling within the floodway or redirection of waterways, including for channel crossings. Culverts used for channel crossings are to provide for aquatic fauna passage.
- 6.19 Restrict construction of on-stream dams and other barriers, and prominent earthworks (including filling of the floodplain).



## Retain and conserve cultural significance and heritage values

- 6.20 Retain and conserve elements of heritage significance that contribute to the landscape setting of the river, including places entered on the State Register of Heritage Places or in the Local Government Heritage List or Local Heritage Survey.
- 6.21 Integrate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture and heritage into the foreshore design narrative.
- 6.22 Use Whadjuk Noongar names across the locality, such as Wurerup (Upper Swan), Gynning (Ellen Brook) and Gogulger (Avon River), with naming to be informed by appropriate Noongar knowledge holders.



Photo: Bells Rapids - Safire Studios

**Maintain the rivers and their foreshores as a community asset**

6.23 Consider the potential future establishment of a continuous foreshore reserve throughout this locality.

**Maintain a sense of place**

6.24 On the Swan Coastal Plain, enhance the natural landscapes of the river.

6.25 Conserve the history and heritage values of the Swan Valley through protection of its unique natural landscape and rural character as they relate to the river.

**Secure public access to the rivers and their foreshores**

6.26 Provide a safe and accessible public open space network.

Universal access (wheelchair accessible) paths are to be provided where possible and appropriate, based on site conditions. Access paths may not be possible if construction would result in unacceptable ecological impacts due to fill requirements. Pathways within the floodplain are to be at-grade, acknowledging that they may be periodically inundated. The design is to respond to the site and local context. A trail is preferred in some areas due to the environmental sensitivities.

6.27 Enhance the use of the river for kayaking and canoeing, where appropriate. Public jetties are to be fixed structures. Consider the incorporation of launching or short-term tie-up facilities for kayaks and canoes within public jetty design.



Photo: Maali Bridge Park - Tourism Western Australia

### **Establish linkages and ecological corridors**

6.28 Maintain or establish ecological linkages between natural areas, including along the Derbal Yirragan (Swan River) and Gogulger (Avon River) and their tributaries, and between Bush forever areas and local bushland, wetlands and waterways.

### **Complement the river landscape through sensitive design and built form**

6.29 Not support private development or subdivision of land within the floodway.

6.30 Ensure that natural landforms and tree lines are the dominant visual elements of the river landscape. Ensure the river slopes and floodway are not visually or physically degraded.

6.31 Ensure development is appropriately located, designed, scaled and landscaped and existing vegetation retained to enhance the unique river landscape character of the Swan Valley.

### **Activate the foreshores**

6.32 Enhance passive recreation at established public parks by providing public facilities that enhance the community's enjoyment of and connection to the river environment, with a focus on nature-based activities.

6.33 Ensure that activation in foreshore areas impacted by the floodway is temporary, such as pop-up facilities and events. Minor community amenities that can be inundated, such as nature-play, picnic facilities and pathways, may be accepted within the floodway.



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