



Eildon Pondage Masterplan

The masterplan project is at a stage where draft concept plans of the pondage have been prepared and are ready for review by project stakeholders and the community.

The primary function of the Eildon Pondage is as a 'regulating pond' for the production of hydroelectricity by AGL Hydro and the resultant controlled release of water into the Goulburn River. Impacts on the regulating pond from this operational use include low water temperatures, strong currents, and rapid water level rises and falls. These operational impacts create inherent safety risks for the use of the water for recreational boating and swimming, **risks that at this stage will continue the prohibition of swimming and the use of private watercraft on the waters of the Upper Pondage and Lower Pondage.**

Project Background

During the past 20 years, four key strategic plans have been developed that have identified potential opportunities for the future use and development of the Eildon Pondage precinct.

- Eildon Urban Design Framework 2003
- Eildon Structure Plan 2016
- Activating Lake Eildon [Lake Eildon Masterplan] 2020
- Eildon Community Plan 2022- 2027

All were developed with community consultation and have either been adopted or noted by the Murrindindi Shire Council. In July 2023, Council commissioned the Eildon Pondage Masterplan project to further investigate the themes, directions and recommendations contained in the strategic plans that related to the Eildon Pondage, and to engage stakeholders and the local community to verify proposed directions.

The masterplan project has reached the stage where a draft masterplan has been prepared and is ready for review by project stakeholders and the community.

The objectives of the masterplan project are:

1. To provide clear direction for the future improvement and development of the Eildon Pondage.
2. To prepare concept plans identifying improvement projects that are costed and prioritised.

The masterplan presents a unique opportunity to further enhance the Eildon Pondage environs and its recreational value for the benefit to local residents and visitors.

The project area primarily includes the foreshore areas around the Upper Pondage and the Lower Pondages, and connections to the adjacent surrounds, particularly the Eildon town centre.

The land surrounding the pondage is predominantly Crown land managed by Goulburn Murray Water, which has then leased portions to Murrindindi Shire Council, AGL Hydro, and the Eildon Pondage Holiday Park. Council owns the area designated as the recreation reserve, and the site of the former Golden Trout Hotel is in private ownership. The pondage water and spillway are controlled by Goulburn Murray Water.

The project has been undertaken in three stages:

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| Stage 1 | Information gathering, research, and initial engagement with project stakeholders and community |
| Stage 2 | Issues and opportunities analysis |
| Stage 3 | Development of draft Eildon Pondage concept plans for review by stakeholders and community for feedback |

We Want Your Feedback

The draft Eildon Pondage concept plans will on public exhibition until 20 November 2023. To view the plans and to provide feedback, go to Council's website www.murrindindi.vic.gov.au and then to 'The Loop'.

For further information, contact Emma Kubeil at Council E: ekubeil@murrindindi.vic.gov.au.

Following the public exhibition period, the Eildon Pondage Masterplan will be revised and the final plan presented to Council for adoption at its Meeting on 13 December 2023.

Current Uses of the Pondage

The Eildon Pondage is currently being used by a variety of different groups and individuals for a range of activities and functions.

Goulburn Murray Water and AGL Hydro

GMW is the owner and management authority of the water area of Lake Eildon and the Eildon Pondage, and the surrounding land area. The primary purpose of these water bodies is to provide irrigation water for the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District, the largest area of irrigated farmland in Australia.

AGL Hydro uses the Eildon Pondage as a regulating pond in its primary purpose to generate hydro-electricity from the Eildon Power Station (generation capacity of 135 MW), and to control-release water into the Goulburn River daily (volume determined by GMW, currently 8,000 megalitres per day). The use of the power station can result in 3 metre tides and strong currents in Eildon Pondage.

Victorian Fisheries Authority

The VFA stocks the Eildon Pondage with fish for the benefit of recreational anglers, with the pondage considered to be ideal for novice anglers and families.

Eildon Pondage Holiday Park

Leases a large area of the Upper Pondage north foreshore and currently offers 163 sites for 'Annuals', 17 cabins and 163 campsites.

Eildon Tennis Club

Formed in 1951 and based at the four hardcourt tennis courts and clubroom in the Recreation Reserve. The club currently offers junior coaching and social tennis on Monday afternoons and evenings.



Eildon Cycling Club

Formed in 2009, and has the responsibility to maintain the trail network associated with the Eildon Mountain Bike Park. The club also hosts MTB events.

Lake Eildon Rowing Club

Formed in 2023 and currently rowing on Lake Eildon, however, has aspirations for the use of the Eildon Pondage for training and regattas.

Outdoor Education Groups

The Rubicon Outdoor School and the Outdoor Education Group are two outdoor education service providers that use the Eildon Pondage environs for bike riding, orienteering, and nature-based activities. They currently use Lake Eildon and the Goulburn River for canoeing, kayaking and rafting activities, but if permitted, would utilise the pondage as well, especially for beginner groups.

Landcare

Landcare is a not for profit group that has a team currently controlling weed growth and undertaking new indigenous planting around the pondage foreshore.



Local Community Groups

The following community groups facilitate or conduct community events in Lions Park and other areas within the Eildon Pondage precinct, and/or are groups advocating for the public's continued access to the pondage, including for unpowered watercraft to be permitted to access the water.

- Friends of the Pondage
- Eildon Events
- Eildon Action Group
- Eildon Community Planning Group
- Art in Eildon

Community events currently held in Lions Park include the Twilight Markets, Opera at the Pondage, and the VFA's annual Opening of the Fishing Season event.

Locals and Tourists

The community surveying confirmed that the Eildon Pondage is used extensively by Eildon residents and tourists for walking, running, dog walking, bike riding, fishing, picnics and BBQs, and nature-based activities, particularly the Lower Pondage.



Stakeholder Engagement

Various forms of engagement with Eildon community groups, Agencies, other organisations, and the Eildon community took place during the period July to October 2023 to inform the masterplan development.

July	Meeting with Council staff
Aug-Oct	Meetings with local community groups, Agencies, service providers and other stakeholders
Sept-Oct	Community engagement via 'The Loop': - online survey - Drop a pin and comment on an interactive map Community drop-in sessions: - Eildon Grocer 21 September - Eildon Grocer 28 September



The key issues and opportunities raised during the stakeholder and community meetings, and also identified by the consultant team during its site assessment were:

1. Insufficient public toilets.
2. Condition of the walking path around the Lower Pondage needs improvement (width, surface).
3. Provide a walking path around the Upper Pondage.
4. Increase and improve picnic areas, increase path lighting, additional rubbish bins, and install outdoor exercise equipment.
5. Redevelop/ Upgrade the Recreation Reserve pavilion.
6. Clean up vegetation along the Pondage foreshore to improve views and provide additional access for fishing.
7. Develop a wetlands area north of Riverside Drive.
8. Provide access to the water for unpowered watercraft.
9. Protect and enhance the natural assets and features of the Pondage.
10. Continue to develop infrastructure to support recreational uses and additional visitations to the Pondage.
11. Natural bushland/ wildlife and the peacefulness of the Pondage precinct are highly valued.
12. Connection between the Pondage and Eildon town centre needs improvement.

13. Improve the presentation of the site of the former Golden Trout Hotel, as its current condition presents poorly as a gateway into Eildon.

An assessment and analysis of the issues and opportunities raised are grouped into the following themes.

Recreation and Infrastructure

The provision of accessible pontoons and platforms with bench seating and solar lighting will better cater for anglers, families, older adults, and people with poor mobility, and for people wanting a closer water experience. The suggested locations for additional pontoons will better accommodate visitors to these popular locations around the pondage: along the foreshores in front of the Eildon Pondage Holiday Park; the Recreation Reserve; and Riverside Drive.

As noted previously, recreational use of the water for swimming and unpowered water craft remains prohibited, and will likely continue for some time.

The Recreation Reserve pavilion is not fit for purpose and will require a significant investment to upgrade. It is highly unlikely that the John Coller Oval will be required to host club-based sport in the future, so there is little need for the pavilion to be retained. The Eildon Cycling Club require a home base, and given the Eildon Tennis Club has only low usage of the tennis clubroom, it is recommended that they co-locate with the tennis club. This will locate them adjacent to the Trail Head of the Eildon Mountain Bike Trail Park.

A pump track is included in the design for the Eildon Reserves Redevelopment project at Walter Moore and Thomas Marr Reserves. Whilst there is synergy for the pump track and skate park to be co-located, there is also a case for the pump track to be located within the 'MTB hub' at the Trail Head in the Recreation Reserve. An option to consider is for the pump track in town centre to be beginner level, and a second and complementary pump track at the Recreation Reserve to be intermediate/ advanced level by utilising the larger footprint available and its direct connection with the Eildon Mountain Bike Park.

The pavilion can be replaced by a shelter (see example below) to better service the needs of formal and informal user groups that use the mountain bike trail and the Recreation Reserve, including the cycling club, schools, and outdoor education groups. Also recommended in this location is the installation of outdoor fitness equipment.



As a strategy to protect the surface of the John Collier Oval, it is recommended that bollards or other fence treatment be installed along the oval side of the Recreation Reserve access road to prevent unauthorised vehicles from accessing the oval surface. The oval cricket pitch needs to be raised and replaced, and continue to be available for social cricket.

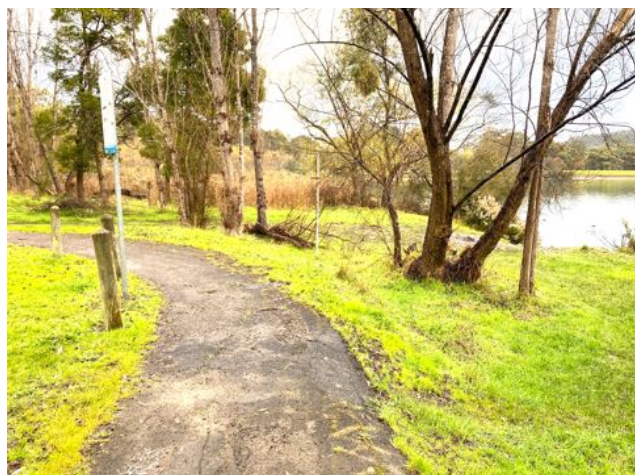
The masterplan supports the upgrade or replacement of the public toilet at the Recreation Reserve to better service user groups and individual users of the reserve, and other people using the adjacent pondage foreshore area.

A new public toilet is recommended for the Bourke Street Picnic Area, as part of an overall upgrade to improve this location for picnicking, for fishing from the levee bank, and for use by outdoor education groups.

The drop-toilet at the picnic area and fishing pontoon at Lower Pondage south is recommended to be upgraded to an accessible toilet. This will complement the upgrade of the existing pontoon into an accessible floating pontoon.

Access and Movement

Pondage Walk (4.35km) around the Lower Pondage is a popular path for locals and visitors. The section of path around the southern side is in fair condition and not accessible, and is too narrow for walkers and bike riders using the path simultaneously. Widening and sealing this section of Pondage Walk will enable the path to be more inclusive and accommodate an increased number of users.



There is currently a path disconnect between Lions Park and the Recreation Reserve, and the masterplan supports the construction of this link for a safer and more efficient path of travel between both pondages.

There is strong support for a walking path around the Upper Pondage. Currently, this is not possible due to the closure of the bridge just south of the Eildon Power Station to traffic and pedestrians, and to a lesser extent there being no Spillway crossing point other than along the Eildon Dam Wall. Whilst it is considered a long term project, the former bridge across the power station outflow could be reconstructed as a pedestrian crossing to allow walkers and bike riders to access the 'Bull Ring'.

With a new wayfinding path formed along the southern bank of the Upper Pondage, a complete circuit around the pondage could be possible, albeit via the Dam Wall at the point it crosses the Spillway.

Additional bench seating can be provided along all paths and trails around the pondage, and improved lighting along Riverside Drive.

The car parking at Lions Park is currently ad hoc except for the small gravel car park adjacent to the public toilet. The masterplan recommends angled car parking along Riverside Drive to the south of the playground, and the repurposing of the vacant land south of the former Golden Trout Hotel into an unsealed car park inclusive of some long bay parking.

The area between the playground the jetty and the picnic shelter at Lions Park (see below) is recommended to become a vehicle-free area to improve safety and better accommodate the expected increased use of Lions Park.



Environmental

Weeds and poorly maintained vegetation along sections of the Pondage foreshore restricts views and access to the water by anglers. This can be resolved by an increased focus on vegetation management by the relevant Authorities and with the assistance of groups such as Landcare.

An opportunity exists to create a wetland within the environs of the open drain which traverses the open space area north of Riverside Drive. The drain currently collects stormwater from the residential area north of South Crescent, and with additional dwellings likely the wetlands will ensure a more controlled water management system, inclusive of water filtration, prior to discharge into the Lower Pondage and the Goulburn River. The wetlands will deliver secondary benefits as a new recreation destination if boardwalks are included and connected with the walking paths along Riverside Drive, and as an environmental and biodiversity education place with the installation of interpretive signage.

Other Opportunities

The vacant land south of the Eildon Pondage Holiday Park has the potential to be developed into a quality cabin accommodation precinct. This land use is supported in the previously mentioned strategic plans, and will significantly improve the accommodation offerings in Eildon.

The Pondage foreshore has an abundance of regulatory signage and signage containing information about fishing. Directional and distance signage to public toilets and landmarks will assist the visitor experience, as well as interpretive signage providing historical and educational 'story telling' and information.

The former Golden Trout Hotel and the current untidy condition of the bridge over the pondage both present poorly as joint 'gateways' into Eildon. The masterplan recommends these assets be attended to for the benefit of providing visitors with an enhanced arrival experience to Eildon and the pondage precinct.

Key Directions of the Draft Masterplan

The draft Eildon Pondage Masterplan includes several key strategic directions for enhancing the recreational uses of the pondage precinct, and the environmental values of the precinct. The following improvement projects should be read in conjunction with the draft concept plans for the Upper Pondage, the Lower Pondage, and the Lions Park and Recreation Reserve.

Pondage-Wide Directions

- Maintain the vegetation along the shoreline to maximise views from walking paths and access for fishing
- Install informational, directional, and interpretive signage around the Eildon Pondage precinct
- Install occasional bench seating along all paths throughout the precinct
- Floating pontoons and fixed platforms to be accessible, and include solar lighting and 1 - 2 bench seats with backs



Upper Pondage

- Construct two new fixed platforms along the caravan park foreshore for fishing/ sitting/ lookouts, and also formalise the public walking path along this section
- New pedestrian bridge across the Eildon Power Station outflow to recreate the former bridge and to open-up pedestrian and cycling access to the 'Bull Ring'
- Formalise a new path along Upper Pondage south between the Eildon Dam Wall/ Spillway and the bridge into Eildon

- Investigate the development of the vacant land south of the fenced caravan park area for quality cabin accommodation, subject to drainage/ services capacity
- New shared path between the Eildon Pondage Holiday Park and Eildon Town Centre along Eildon Road
- Investigate a new alignment for the MTB trail between the Trail Head and the section to Eildon Road
- Resurface the tennis courts, and construct a pump track pondage-side of the courts
- Install a floating pontoon at the Recreation Reserve
- Eildon Cycling Club to become a co-tenant of the tennis clubroom
- Remove the John Collier Oval pavilion and replace it with a shelter and outdoor fitness equipment
- Upgrade or replace the Recreation Reserve toilet block
- Raise the cricket pitch to the surface level of John Collier Oval, and replace the synthetic surface
- Install bollards or similar along the oval-side of the Recreation Reserve access roads to secure the oval from unauthorised vehicles

Lower Pondage

- Construct a new path between the former Golden Trout Hotel and the foreshore
- Construct a safe pedestrian crossing on the corner of Riverside Drive, Centre Avenue and Eildon Road
- Reconfigure the car parking in the Lions Park precinct, and realign some of the paths
- Cease vehicles in the area between the Lions Park playground, the jetty, and the picnic shelter
- Formalise the car parking outstands along Riverside Drive with defined parking bays and signage



- Install two floating pontoons along Riverside Drive
- Convert the open drain north of Riverside Drive into a wetlands to control and filter stormwater run-off
- Upgrade the Bourke Street Picnic Area with new picnic tables and BBQs, a large shelter, an accessible toilet, and more formal car parking
- Replace the walking path around Lower Pondage south with a 2 metre sealed path to make it accessible and better accommodate pedestrians and bike riders
- Replace/ Upgrade the existing floating pontoon on Lower Pondage south with an accessible pontoon, and replace the existing drop-toilet with an accessible toilet