

## The Life of the Yarra Audio Tour: Cremorne Rail Riverbank P1 Transcript

**Narration - Kim:** I'm sitting, contemplating the river, on one of a set of bench seats – fat sleepers zigzagged on bluestone blocks. Why not take a seat yourself? Afternoon sun filters through the canopy of a small canopy of lemon-scented gums. I crush a few leaves in my hands to release the lemony fragrance, and keep them near. Below, on the grassy flat of the southern bank, a couple of fishermen have hooked something and are taking it in turns to try and reel it in. I lose sight of them briefly, lost momentarily in the long grass and reeds at the water's edge, as they grab whatever it is they have caught. Silver gulls wheel in to take a look, then bail out. It's obviously not a fish. The tide is coming in and the river appears to be flowing upstream. A pair of masked lapwings take advantage of the low tide, wading and foraging on an exposed mudflat, before the silver gulls return to start a squall, and they all take off across the water. As I sit, I'm joined by couples, families, cyclists, who veer off the bike track to rest on the benches, check out the plantings, or cast their eye over the river, before heading off again to explore further up or downstream.

**Narration - Sarah:** These spaces have been created by the City of Stonnington to help people access the riverbank, and appreciate the beautiful areas that are tucked along this stretch of the river. Can you spot any people fishing down on the riverbank today?

**Narration - Sarah:** Water in the river here is estuarine or 'salty' and tidal. In its natural state, these lower reaches of the Yarra meandered dramatically, and this made them highly prone to flooding. The biggest flood recorded since European settlement occurred in 1891, when the river swelled to over 300 m wide in some parts, and large lakes formed on either side of Chapel Street. In response, engineers have altered the shape of the river's channel between here and Port Phillip almost beyond recognition since the late 19th Century. The river has been re-routed and realigned. Downstream of here, in central Melbourne, these engineering works included the creation of Victoria Harbour and the Botanic Gardens. It also resulted in the blasting of a small waterfall close to where the current Queen's Bridge stands. This waterfall once marked the place where freshwater and saltwater met. Have you ever been to Southbank and wondered why there is an area called Freshwater place? These days saltwater travels much further upstream. Before all this, Indigenous people frequently fished the Yarra, as Arweet Carolyn Briggs of the Boon Wurrung language group describes...

**Arweet Carolyn Briggs:** *There are still fish traps along it, on a clear day you can see those. Because the way the fish traps were designed you flip it out so you don't have to work too hard.*

**Narration - Sarah:** A variety of fish and eels can still be caught here. If you'd like to fish in these areas, head to the Agriculture Victoria and Better Health websites first for information about licensing, fishing health and safety. The number and diversity of fish species is one way to measure how healthy a river system is. According to a recent report by Melbourne Water, there is a moderate amount of fish in the lower section of the river; however,

introduced species are doing better than native species, with the number and variety of native species declining since the 1990s.

***Narration - Sarah:*** The water in the river is very much affected by surrounding land use, especially urbanization. One of the main pressures that the Yarra faces in these Lower reaches is urban stormwater. When it rains, stormwater runs off the hard surfaces of Melbourne and enters the river. This stormwater changes the natural flow of the river; it brings pollutants which affect water quality.

***Narration - Patrick:*** In a natural ecosystem water enters the soil slowly over a very large area, very slowly. Whereas in a city or urban area with impervious surfaces the water hits the impervious surfaces and gets concentrated down stormwater drains very quickly, then runs out to rivers and floodplains very quickly and it's a high volume. This creates problems with flooding in urban areas as it's a high volume and high speed. The interesting thing about indigenous plants is that they can mitigate some of this by absorbing the water, and spreading the load of the water coming down in a flood or high rainfall event.

***Narration - Sarah:*** In recent years, people are moving to revegetate areas such as this all along the river, with these efforts helping to maintain water quality and biodiversity. To find out how you can help improve water quality in your own garden look up "Sustainable Gardening in Stonnington". Which includes tips about how to keep your garden healthy without using harsh chemicals that may end up here in the Yarra. Sebastian from Armadale Primary school reminds us why this is important

***Armadale Primary School – Sebastian:*** *Well, chemicals, when they're washed down the stormwater drains, they pollute the ocean - it's like throwing rubbish into the ocean.*