

Coliban Water Recreation Area Management Plan

**Barkers Creek, Malmsbury, Lauriston
and Upper Coliban Reservoirs**

Updated 2025

1 Introduction

This management plan informs how Coliban Water manages recreational areas of Barkers Creek, Upper Coliban, Lauriston and Malmsbury Reservoirs as water supply storages and recreational assets. Three of these four reservoirs store raw water that is subsequently treated to a drinking water standard.

The purpose of this management plan is to provide guidance with respect to making these reservoirs safe and enjoyable places for all visitors to undertake permitted recreational activities within designated areas.

1.1 Strategic context

Coliban Water's *Our Strategy: dhelk gatjin dhelk balak (healthy water, healthy people)* has three strategic goals: 1. Healthy Country and Communities, 2. Trusted Utility, and 3. Business Sustainability. Water underpins regional liveability and Coliban Water plays an active role in providing healthy catchments and ecosystems for our community to enjoy.

The Recreational Area Management Plan interacts with the following strategic outcomes from Our Strategy:

- 1.1 – Follow Traditional Owners' lead – by strengthening our partnership with DJAARA and embed their participation in water governance and management and protecting cultural heritage.
- 1.3 – Healthy catchments and ecosystems – by restoring the health of the Upper Coliban catchment for improved water quality in our storages via a Healthy Coliban Catchment program.
- 2.1 – Trusted water and services – Appropriately manage the interactions between recreational activities and our reservoirs to avoid contamination risks to water supplies.
- 3.1 – Water security – Sustainably manage storages in reservoirs to maintain water security for a growing regional population in a drying climate.
- 3.3 – Smart and safe operations – manage our reservoirs for public and staff safety.

Managing our reservoirs for multiple purposes, including water supply, recreation and cultural heritage protection, requires clear and effective rules to manage risks. This Recreational Management Plan specifies these rules.

1.2 Background

Coliban Water owns and manages water storages. The primary purpose of raw water storages is the supply of water to surrounding communities. The storage role is to provide sufficient and safe water to meet community needs, as this minimises public health risks and treatment costs. Secondly, these reservoirs provide recreational opportunities and habitat for native wildlife. The Upper Coliban Storages have important and significant Aboriginal cultural heritage and European heritage values that require protection.

Three of these storages are a raw water source for drinking water and all four reservoirs are accessible to the community for recreation, both on and off the water body. No in-water activities, such as swimming, are permitted.

When contributing to a healthy Country and respecting our communities, we manage these reservoirs by:

- Maintaining good relationships with neighbouring properties.
- Protecting cultural heritage.
- Recognising of the rights of the Dja Dja Wurrung People, and their enduring relationship with the area.

Recreational access to reservoirs has a positive societal impact through benefits to the health and wellbeing of visitors. However, the primary functions of reservoirs are not always compatible with recreational access. Using reservoirs for recreational activities can adversely affect water quality, cultural heritage and ecological values.

These impacts increase the risk profile to drinking water supplies, drinking water treatment costs and increases risk to cultural heritage and ecological values.

This management plan supports reservoir visitors to have a positive experience, whilst at the same time not negatively impacting the primary functions of these reservoirs or the broader communities and their own health and wellbeing.

1.3 Overview of consultation

As part of the development of this Recreational Area Management Plan, a comprehensive consultation process was undertaken to ensure the needs, values and concerns of the community and stakeholders were understood and considered.

During May 2025, input was sought from a range of stakeholders and the public through an online survey on our Coliban Connect website.

Stakeholder feedback highlighted several areas to consider improvement including:

- Improving accessibility
- Boating restrictions
- Walking tracks

We carefully reviewed the feedback provided and recognise stakeholder desire for enhanced recreational access. However, the potential for upgrades and expanding permitted activities is limited by consequences to the environment, water quality, public safety and operational needs.

1.4 Management plan objectives and practices

This management plan has been prepared to align with the Water (Recreational Area) Regulations 2023 (the Regulations), specifically section 7 of the Regulations. In the context of Coliban Water's overall responsibilities and commitments in various other strategies, the objectives of this recreation area management plan and associated management practices are outlined in the table below.

1.4.1 Objectives and management practices

Objectives	Management practices
Support Traditional Owner Participation: Facilitate DJAARA involvement in the management, respecting their rights, aspirations, and agreements under the <i>Recognition and Settlement Agreement (2013)</i> and <i>Dhelkunya Dja Country Plan (2014-2034)</i>	• Early engagement on the management plan • Partnership Agreement commitments and future opportunities • Civil works contracts • Opportunity to review management plan and expand DJAARA involvement
Protect Water, Land and Biodiversity: Safeguard reservoir water quality, support appropriate land management, and enhance waterway health, flora, fauna, and habitats.	• Authorised Water Officers can assist and educate visitors • A list of allowable activities is publicly available (Refer to 2.2 Rules for recreational activities) • Reservoir Officers manage and maintain designated sites • Access points are under surveillance
Protect Cultural and Historical Heritage: Protect and promote Aboriginal cultural heritage and intangible heritage, as well as other significant heritage features.	

Promote Health, Safety, and Enjoyment: Ensure visitor safety while fostering recreational use and enjoyment of the area.	Reservoirs may be closed in certain circumstances to promote safety
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These objectives and management practices are the core foundation of this management plan and will guide the management plan's implementation.

2 Scope of water recreation

2.1 Location

Recreational activities are allowed within four designated areas at the four reservoirs:

- Upper Coliban
- Lauriston
- Malmsbury
- Barkers Creek

Recreation can only occur within designated areas (Appendix A), as determined by the Minister for Water under section 122ZA of the *Water Act 1989*.

2.2 Rules for recreational activities

This section outlines the rules for the various recreational activities at the four reservoirs. Any type of activity that is not listed in this section should be considered prohibited. Note that exemptions apply for members of DJAARA. See section 2.3 below for more details.

Visitors need to follow any instructions indicated on the signage in and around the recreation areas. The table below summarises a large range of possible recreational activities at the four locations and a summary of their applicability or conditions.

2.2.1 Scope of recreational activities

Activity		Permitted (✓) Prohibited (✗)	Upper Coliban	Lauriston	Malmsbury	Barkers Creek
	Boating (electric)	✓	Conditional. Entry and exit only from the designated launch points. Visitors must carry their boat to the water, and they cannot be dragged. Vessels can be launched directly from a car or trailer at Upper Coliban Reservoir's, Premier Mine Rd boat ramp. Maximum two people in any one vessel. Maximum speed 5 knots. Maximum length of boat is 3.6m or 12 foot.			Same as other reservoirs. Boats can be launched directly from a car or trailer at the boat ramp.

Activity		Permitted (✓) Prohibited (✗)	Upper Coliban	Lauriston	Malmsbury	Barkers Creek
	Boating (liquid fuel)	✗	Prohibited. The engine and fuel tank(s) must be removed from the vessel to be permitted on the water. Liquid fuel engines are not permitted in the recreation area.			Engine can remain on the vessel in a lifted position. Fuel tank(s) must be removed from the vessel.
	Bush walking	✓	Permitted.			
	Dogs	✓	Conditional. All dogs must be on a leash at all times. Dogs must not enter the water body. Any dog faeces deposited by the dog must be picked up and removed.			
	Fishing	✓	Permitted (both shoreline and on-water).			
	Paddle craft	✓	Conditional. Kayaks, canoes and small portable craft (car toppers) with electric motors. Entry and exit only from the designated launch points. Visitors must carry or trolley their craft to the water, and they cannot be dragged. Paddle craft can be launched directly from a car or trailer at Barker's Creek boat ramp and The Upper Coliban, Premier Mine Rd boat ramp. Maximum two people in any one vessel. Maximum speed 5 knots.			
	Stand-up Paddleboards	✗	Prohibited.			
	Picnic and BBQ	✓	Conditional. Designated areas only. Refer to signage on site.			
	Toilets	✓	Conditional. The use or disposal of soap, detergent or similar in the reservoir, or on land below the water supply level mark, is prohibited. No toileting activities within 100m of the water mark. If toileting activities do occur above the 100m mark, any faeces must be buried to a minimum depth of 20cm.			
	4WD	✗	Prohibited. Vehicles must remain on designated access tracks and in car parking areas			
	Camping	✗	Prohibited. There are no designated areas for fires or camping.			
	Fossicking or digging	✗	Prohibited.			

Activity		Permitted (✓) Prohibited (✗)	Upper Coliban	Lauriston	Malmsbury	Barkers Creek
	Horseriding	✗	Prohibited			
	Hunting	✗	Prohibited. The possession, carrying of, or use of a firearm, bow, crossbow, spear, spear gun, trap, snare or net (that is not designed for fishing) is prohibited.			
	Inflatable craft	✗	Prohibited.			
	Mountain biking	✗	Prohibited			
	Open fire	✗	Prohibited. There are no designated areas for fires or camping.			
	Sailing	✗	Prohibited.			
	Swimming	✗	Prohibited. Includes wading in water, except when launching, or alighting from, permitted water vessels or if fishing, or in the event of an on-water emergency. Inflatable water equipment is prohibited. Dogs must not enter the water body.			
	Waterskiing	✗	Prohibited.			
	Drones	✗	Prohibited. Permit Only			

2.3 Traditional Owner agreed activities

Under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, the *Recognition and Settlement Agreement between Dja Dja Wurrung and State Government (2013)*, and the *Natural Resources Agreement 2022*, Dja Dja Wurrung People are provided with specific rights to access natural resources on Djaara Country. For these purposes, natural resources include land, vegetation, animals, water and stone.

Dja Dja Wurrung may:

- Access, occupy and use the land.
- Access, hunt, take, use or interfere with natural resources.
- Cut, dig up or remove natural resources.
- Carry out any similar activities in relation to natural resources



- Take or use water from a waterway or bore.
- Enter, remain on and camp on the land (camping requires appropriate authorisation).
- Gather to conduct non-commercial cultural activities on the land.
- Possess or use any animal or equipment, vehicle or other on the land for the purposes of carrying out the activities described above.

For more details on allowable Traditional Owner activities, see schedule 17 of the *Recognition and Settlement Agreement between Dja Dja Wurrung and State Government (2013)*.

2.4 Activities requiring a permit

Within Part 3 of the Regulations, a person may apply to Coliban Water for a permit to enter and use the recreational area or an area within a recreational area for a specified purpose and period.

You can apply for a permit by emailing coliban@coliban.com.au

Coliban Water will not issue a permit for the following activities:

- Events
- Commercial activities
- Advertising
- Erecting structures
- Horses or horse riding
- Removal of firewood

Note that offences under these regulations do not apply to a person who is a member of the Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owner group when they are acting under and in accordance with the *Natural Resources Agreement*.

2.5 Reservoir closure

Triggers for the closure (partially or fully) of a reservoir or a Recreation Area may include, but are not limited to:

- Reservoir storage trigger levels being reached
- Maintenance activities
- Damage to infrastructure
- Flood
- Wildfire
- Planned burn
- Emergency incidents
- Extreme weather forecast (e.g. Code Red Day, flood or severe rain event warning)
- Chemical spill / leak
- Biological (sewage) spill / leak

- Water quality incidents
- Authorised events

Refer to the Closure of a Recreation Area procedure for details.

3 Traditional Owners rights and participation

3.1 Existing legislation and agreements

Coliban Water and the State are party to multiple agreements with DJAARA that impact the management of its recreation areas. These include:

- *Recognition and Settlement Agreement between Dja Dja Wurrung and State Government (2013)(RSA)*, which is under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Agreement 2010*.

The RSA further emphasises the cultural and environmental significance of water (gatjin), the obligation to heal water, and the right to participate in water management. The DJAARA and Coliban Water Partnership Agreement reinforces a shared vision for custodianship of water, guiding collaboration through principles of respect, recognition, and joint outcomes.

- *Partnership Agreement between DJAARA and Coliban Water (2024)*.

Our Partnership Agreement sets the vision for 'Leading the way in shared custodianship of gatjin (water) founded on a mutual respect and recognition of DJAARA's rights and Coliban Water's responsibilities.' This vision is underpinned by a set of principles and behaviours to guide how DJAARA and Coliban Water partner together.

- *Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Coliban Water and Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (2019)*.

The MoU outlines the recognition of cultural heritage associate with on-water recreational access to Coliban Water reservoirs. It also supports a collaborative relationship to manage recreational areas, with a focus on protecting and promoting DJAARA's cultural heritage.

3.2 Cultural heritage

In 2019, Coliban Water and DJAARA carried out an archaeological survey on the Barkers Creek, Malmsbury, Lauriston and Upper Coliban reservoirs. Approximately 53,920 Aboriginal objects were identified within the four survey areas. One example of cultural heritage in the recreational areas is tachylite. Tachylite, a volcanic glass, has been historically crucial for the Dja Dja Wurrung, who used it to make tools and trades. A key source of tachylite is at Upper Coliban Reservoir.

While tachylite is no longer used as a primary material, it remains culturally significant to the Dja Dja Wurrung People. It is valued as part of their heritage, with artefacts providing insight into traditional practices and connections to Country.

3.3 Traditional Owner participation in management plan

Under Regulation 8(2), recreational area management plans should include opportunities to enable self-determination, co-management, use and participation in the ongoing management of recreational areas if the relevant traditional owner group is interested in doing so.



Artwork: "Flow" by Troy Firebrace

The 2024 Partnership Agreement is a significant milestone for DJAARA and Coliban Water's future working relationship. Coliban Water currently engages DJAARA for various civil works on reservoirs and are currently working together, considering additional opportunities across the broader range of services and works to be undertaken. DJAARA has been consulted in the preparation of this revision of the management plan.

Should further opportunities arise for participation or involvement by DJAARA, this shall give grounds for the consideration of a review of this management plan, as outlined in section 7.



Signing of the DJAARA and Coliban Water partnership agreement in November 2024

4 Roles and responsibilities

The reservoirs are active work sites on which regular operation and maintenance activities are performed.

The primary role of Coliban Water's Reservoir Officers is to manage and maintain the operation of the reservoirs. These employees also undertake patrols, surveillance and monitoring of the recreation areas (including weekend surveillance).

Each of the designated access points is monitored with 24/7 surveillance cameras.

4.1 Waterway managers

Coliban Water is the waterway manager for Lauriston Reservoir, Malmsbury Reservoir, Upper Coliban Reservoir and Barkers Creek Reservoir.

4.2 Authorised Water Officers

Authorised Water Officers (AWOs) assist visitors to ensure their activities are satisfying, safe and sustainable. Nominated Coliban Water employees are AWOs under the *Water Act 1989*.

The tasks of the AWOs are to communicate with, engage with, and educate visitors during their time at a recreational area to provide a satisfying, safe and sustainable experience.

AWOs will also report on the level of activity at each reservoir, including prohibited activities and offences. As below, AWOs can issue Penalty Infringement Notices (PINs).

Refer to the *Recreation Area Patrol* procedure for further information.

5 Compliance and enforcement

The *Water (Recreational Area) Regulations 2023* empower water corporations to issue PINs for activities that risk water services, quality, the environment, or user safety in recreational areas. Enforcement is managed by trained AWOs.

Respecting Aboriginal cultural rights is essential when carrying out enforcement, which is critical to ensuring Traditional Owners are not penalised for activities they have a right to undertake.

Coliban Water partners with Fines Victoria to implement its compliance and enforcement.

6 Monitoring, evaluation and review

This management plan should be monitored, reviewed and evaluated when reasonable and consider changes to:

- Impacts (changes to condition or management activities for recreational areas).
- Appropriateness (best practice, addressing the needs of community and Traditional Owners).
- Effectiveness (achievement of management outputs, progress towards achieving objectives).
- Efficiency (value and return on investment).
- Legacy (highlights and achievements after the management plan finishes).

At a minimum, the Regulations require that this management plan be reviewed within 10 years of commencement. Coliban Water will review this document at least every 10 years, or in response to the changes listed above.

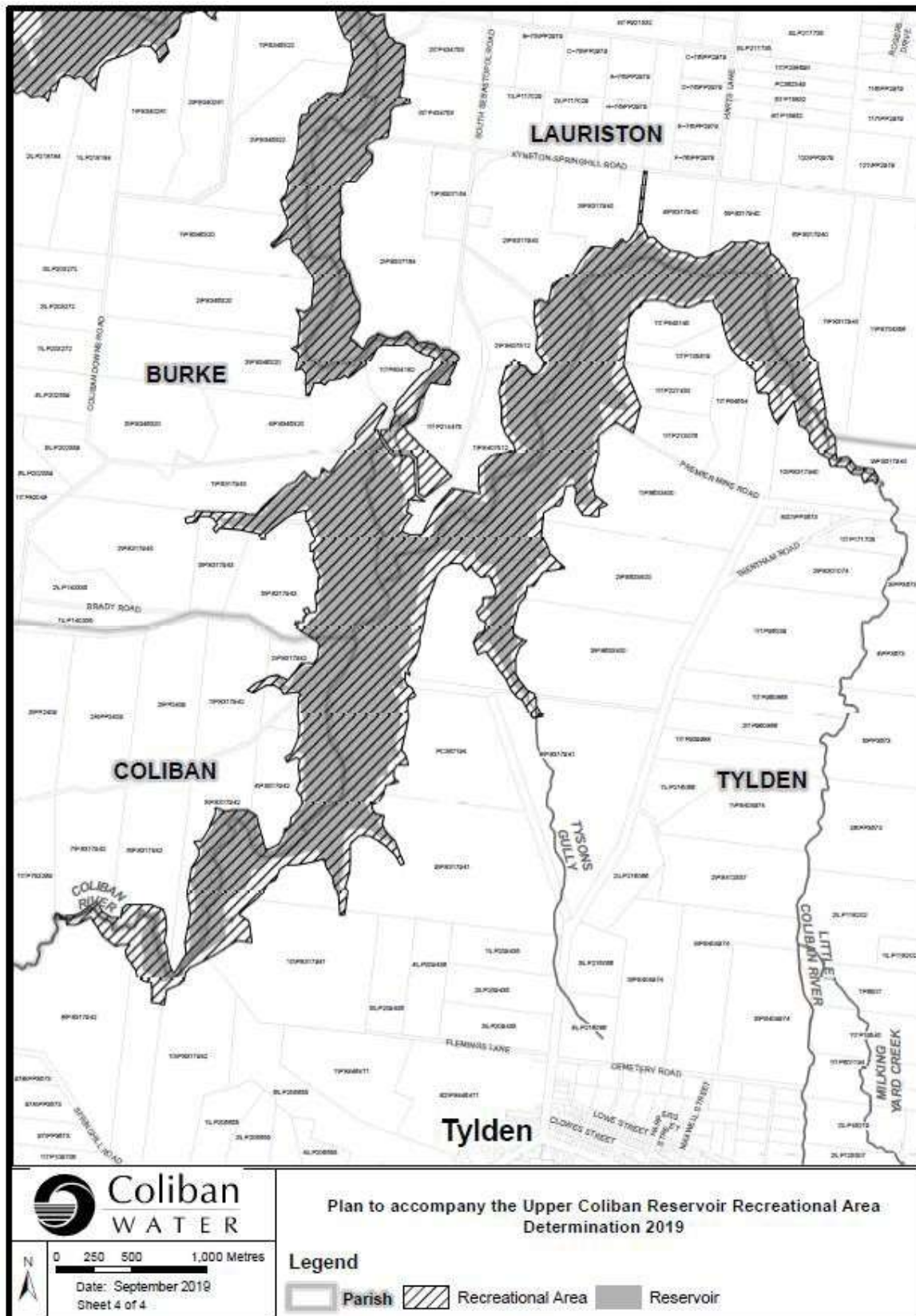
7 Other documentation

Other relevant documents for this management plan include:

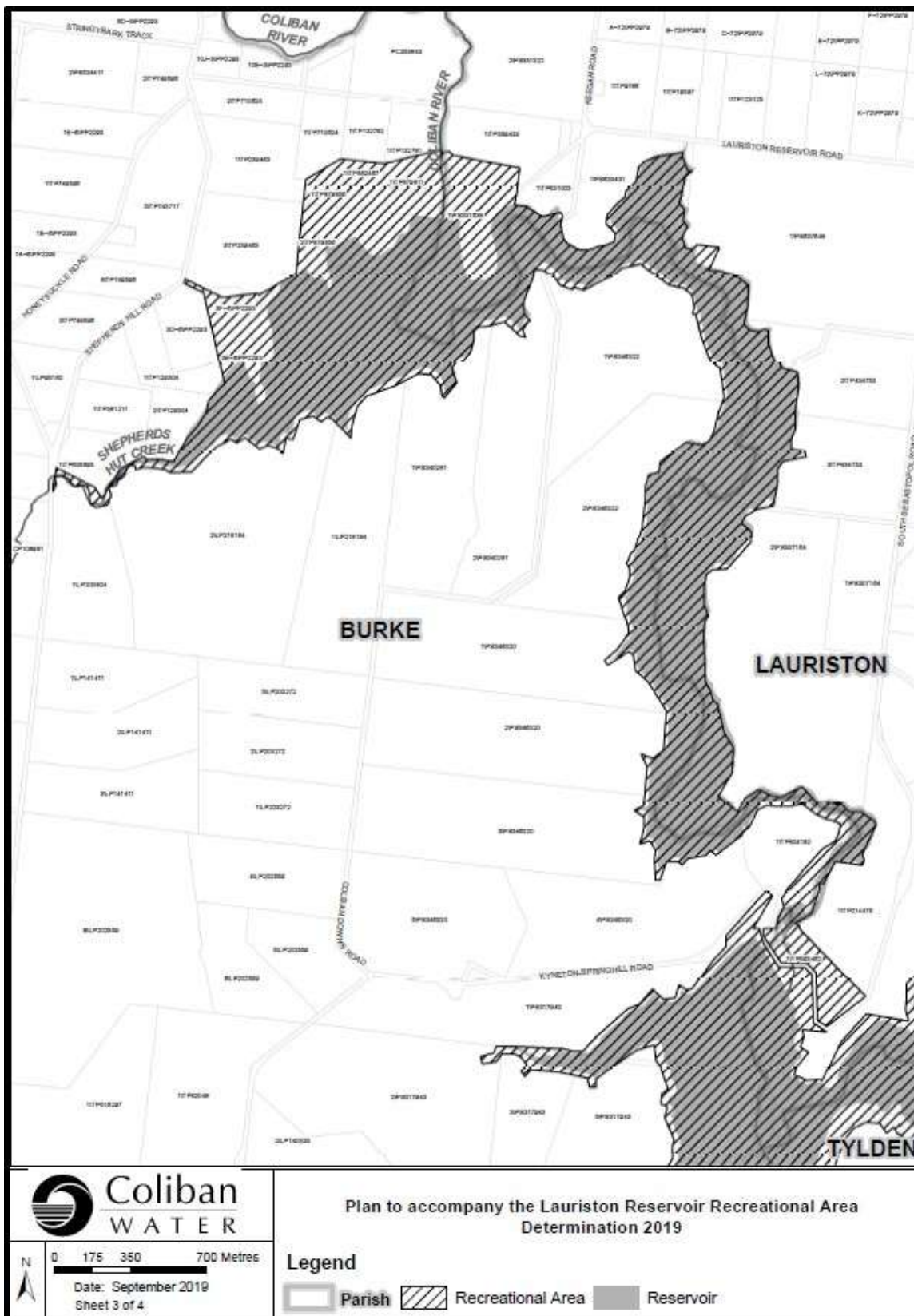
- Recreation Area Patrol Procedure
- Reservoir Closure Procedure
- Cultural Heritage Management Plan(s)
- Drinking Water Quality Risk Management Plan & the Water Quality Monitoring Program
- Upper Coliban Integrated Catchment Management Plan (A Healthy Coliban Catchment program)
- On-Water Recreation Access Risk Management Plan
- Memorandum of Understanding between Coliban Water and Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation for the recognition of cultural heritage and native title associated with on-water recreational access to Coliban Water reservoirs
- Dja Dja Wurrung Recognition and Settlement Agreement
- Dhelkunya Dja Country Plan (2014-2034)
- Dhelkunyangu Gatjin Strategy (DJAARA 2023)

Appendix A – Declared recreational area maps

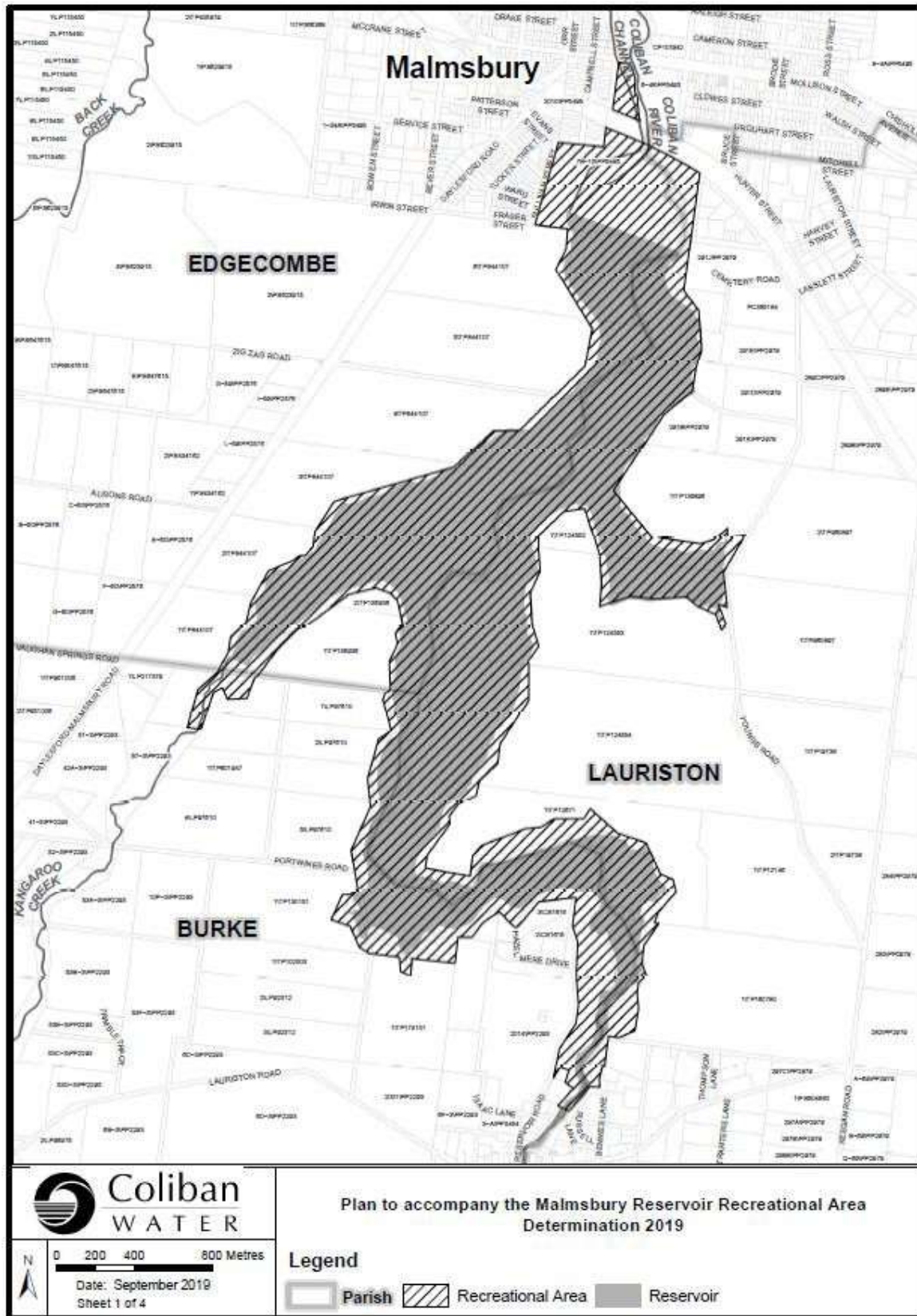
Upper Coliban Reservoir



Lauriston Reservoir



Malmsbury Reservoir



Barkers Creek Reservoir

