

I am a Geographer...

Andrew Kelly

Yarra Riverkeeper

Maybe I am not a geographer. I have often wondered. I was once a publisher, and I am now an environmental advocate and sometime children's author. I do have a degree in Geography, a delightfully named Bachelor of Letters. It is my second degree. In my first, Arts, I majored in Archaeology and Australian History. I now use all in my day-to-day life. I am lucky, I reckon.

In my day-to-day life, I am privileged to be the Yarra Riverkeeper. I speak for the Yarra River as it cannot speak for itself. I am the spokesperson for the Yarra Riverkeeper Association, a group of citizen-advocates. We are place-based. Our work is all about the Yarra River, the Yarra corridor, the tributaries and the catchment. If you want to learn more, I urge you to go to our website <https://yarrariver.org.au/>.

In particular, I urge you to take your classes to our innovative atlas at yarraatlas.org.au. There are lessons and lessons there to be had, by opening and closing layers to understand the relation between one information layer and the next. It is citizen science in action as students can log their own sightings via our tool. It is a work-in-progress so be prepared to be excited!

I use in my work as an advocate for the Yarra, working out electoral boundaries and local government areas. The Association is best known for advocating for a *Yarra Act* and Yarra Trust. The *Yarra Act* became the *Yarra River Protection (Willip-gin Birrarung murron) Act*, passed without opposition through the Victorian Parliament in 2017. The Yarra Trust became the Birrarung Council, a ministerial advisory council. The act is bilingual in title and has a preamble in Woi wurrung as well as English. Being part of a bicultural council is a steep but very exciting learning curve. It exposes for me the broader assumptions of wider society. We are all about getting things done. The Traditional Owners are better at allowing things to take the time they need.

I am also a children's author. I am proud to be the author, with Auntie Joy Murphy, of *Wilam: A Birrarung Story*, beautifully illustrated by Lisa Kennedy, a Trawoolaway woman from northern Tasmania. The book (reviewed in this edition) has been short-listed in the CBCA awards and was short-listed in the ABIA and the Wilderness Society awards. I am proud of that. The book is the day in the life of the river from mountains to the bay. My latest book is



Little Lon, which is a story taken from the words of Marie who lived in the notorious Little Lon area of Melbourne in the 1920s. The illustrations by Heather Potter and Mark Jackson are just stunning! Marie is so sweet. Both books are about place, and what and who lives where. They are very much a geographer's book. In the 1920s, surprisingly perhaps, Little Lon, at the top of Lonsdale Street, was very multicultural. Mr Bianchi was Italian and a story that didn't make it into the book was when the safe at his ice-cream factory was blown up by robbers. There is a great set of teacher's notes

I fell in love with the Yarra because I was enchanted by an eel when I was a lad. The story goes like this. When I was about eight my grandfather, who lived on the Yarra, took me, my brother and my cousins fishing on the river. We fished from a picturesque little bridge over a rivulet. We got bites and lines broke, and we lost hooks and sinkers. Then I got a solid bite, and my grandfather helped me pull in my line. What slowly emerged on the end of the line was an eel. I thought it was such an extraordinary creature as it was pulled out of the murky brown waters of the Yarra. It was gothic. It was prehistoric. It was amazing, and it wriggled, and it was still reflexive wriggling when it was in pieces in a pan with butter. I pulled a chair up to the stove to have a better look, and the pan spat hot butter at me. I ended up with blisters on my face. That eel enchanted me. I was amazed that it came out of my river just down the road.

That's Geography. So maybe I am a geographer after all.