HO3 – Werribee Diversion Weir, Heaths Road, and part of 75 and 95 Shaws Road, Werribee

Heritage Place: Werribee Diversion Weir	**HO Reference:** HO3 **Date updated:** 15 October 2026
Address: Heaths Road, and part of 75 and 95 Shaws Road, Werribee	



Figure 1: Werribee Diversion Weir, Heaths Road, and part of 75 and 95 Shaws Road, Werribee.
Source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.

Item Group: Utilities - Water **Item Type:** Weir	**Key Theme:** Infrastructure and Services **Key Sub-theme:** Building Irrigation Schemes
Designer: J. C. Starr (Engineer) **Builder:** Reilly Bros.	**Construction:** 1908. Altered 1938. **Style:** N/A
Significance Level: Local	
Recommendation: Remove tree controls. Retain solar energy system controls. Update place name. Update place address. Update schedule to specify no external paint controls	

and no internal alteration controls. Amend curtilage. Apply Aboriginal Heritage Place controls.						
Controls:	○	External paint controls	○	Internal alteration controls	○	Tree controls
	○	Included on Victorian Heritage Register	○	Incorporated Plans	○	Outbuildings and fence not exempt
	○	Prohibited uses may be permitted	●	Aboriginal Heritage Place	●	Solar energy system controls

Curtilage



Figure 2: Werribee Diversion Weir, Heaths Road, and part of 75 and 95 Shaws Road, Werribee. *Aerial Basemap source*: Nearmap. 2025. *Spatial data source*: VicMap & Department of Transport and Planning.

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	The Werribee Diversion Weir is of historical significance as an intervention into the natural waterway to support farming and address issues of water scarcity and flooding that were common in the region. Interventions into natural waterways were a key method of managing existing systems to support the growth of townships and the broader region in the twentieth century. The weir is a key piece of infrastructure and engineering that improved access to water and supported the key periods of growth of Werribee South in the Closer Settlement Scheme and Soldier Settlement Schemes of the early twentieth century. The Werribee Diversion Weir is also of historical significance for its association with the Werribee River (Wirribi Yaluk), a prominent feature of Country which provided sustenance, abundance and community for the Bunurong and Wadawurrung people over many generations.
B	*Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history*	The place does not meet this criterion.
C	*Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history*	The place does not meet this criterion.
D	*Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments*	The Werribee Diversion Weir is demonstrative of the initiatives undertaken within the municipality to address issues of water scarcity and forms part of the broader collection of infrastructure within the City of Wyndham that captures and disperses water throughout the landscape. The weir includes key characteristics of early twentieth century infrastructure introduced directly to waterways including concrete construction, embankment management and waterflow regulation.
E	*Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics*	The place does not meet this criterion.

F	*Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period*	The place does not meet this criterion.
G	*Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions*	The place does not meet this criterion.
H	*Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.*	The place does not meet this criterion.

Statement of Significance - Werribee Diversion Weir, Heaths Road, and part of 75 and 95 Shaws Road, Werribee

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Figure 3: Werribee Diversion Weir, Heaths Road, and part of 75 and 95 Shaws Road, Werribee. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.

What is significant?

The Werribee Diversion Weir, including the structure, the reservoir and channel above the weir and embankment to the north and south of the weir, are significant.

How is it significant?

The Werribee Diversion Weir is of historical and representative significance to the City of Wyndham.

Why is it significant?

The Werribee Diversion Weir is of historical significance as an intervention into the natural waterway to support farming practices and address issues of water scarcity and flooding that were common in the region. Interventions into natural waterways were a key method of managing existing systems to support the growth of townships and the broader region in the twentieth century. The Werribee Diversion Weir is a key piece of infrastructure and engineering that improved access to water and supported the key periods of growth of

Werribee South in the Closer Settlement Scheme and Soldier Settlement Schemes of the early twentieth century. (Criterion A)

The Werribee Diversion Weir is also of historical significance for its association with the Werribee River (Wirribi Yaluk), a prominent feature of Country which provided sustenance, abundance and community for the Bunurong and Wadawurrung people over many generations. (Criterion A)

The Werribee Diversion Weir is demonstrative of the initiatives undertaken within the municipality to address issues of water scarcity and forms part of the broader collection of water infrastructure within the City of Wyndham that captures and disperses water throughout the landscape. The Werribee Diversion Weir includes key characteristics of early twentieth century infrastructure introduced directly to waterways including concrete construction, embankment management and waterflow regulation. (Criterion D)

Primary Source

Werribee Diversion Weir citation, Extent Heritage, 2026.

Description

Werribee Diversion Weir is located on the traditional lands of the Bunurong and Wadawurrung people who have cared for Country for thousands of years and continue to care for Country today. The wider landscape is shaped by the flowing waters of Wirribi Yaluk (Werribee River), exceptional and increasingly endangered grassland plains, ancient volcanic lava flows and the considerable shorelines of Naarm (Port Phillip Bay).

Physical Analysis

The Werribee Diversion Weir is located north of the township of Werribee, on the Werribee River, at the point before the river turns south. The Weir comprises a concrete structure stretching across the width of the Werribee River.

The Weir itself is a wall constructed of concrete which is curved at the top to allow the water to fall over the pitch of the wall (Figure 7). The wall is sloped to allow a gentle cascade with a flat base. To either side of the Weir, down river, concrete has been poured to the embankment, with concrete steps on the south bank with contemporary metal handrails allowing access to the Weir and across the base of the concrete structure (Figure 8 and Figure 9). On the south side, the Weir in enclosed behind a high cyclone wire fence.

To the east, the Werribee River has been enlarged to create a reservoir of water which has a width substantially greater than the river to the north and south of the Weir. The banks either side of the Weir and reservoir are lined by trees including predominantly native eucalyptus species but also some exotic species. A channel departs from the reservoir heading south (Figure 11). The channel is open with steep embankments and lined with peppercorn trees (*Schinus molle*) (Figure 12).

To the west of the Weir, the river narrows and there are large deposits of sand and building rubble evident amongst the trees (Figure 10).

Alterations and Additions

- Extension of the weir wall in 1938 to increase capacity.

The weir is in good condition and has a high level of integrity.

History

The Werribee Diversion Weir is situated on the Werribee River which is the border between the lands of the Bunurong peoples and the Wadawurrung peoples, the Traditional Custodians of Country. Despite the effects of colonisation, including dispossession of land, the Traditional Custodians have maintained a continuing connection to land, waters and culture within the City of Wyndham.

Short-finned eels (*Anguilla australis*) are highly culturally significant to Aboriginal peoples across what is now Victoria. Elvers (young eels) migrate from breeding grounds in the Coral Sea into inland freshwater bodies. Large annual gatherings of Aboriginal peoples often coincided with migrations, particularly in March when adult eels migrated downstream to return to the Coral Sea to breed. Groups such as the Bunurong skilfully managed eel harvesting using weirs and traps designed to capture some eels while allowing most to continue their journey. In contrast, modern weirs can completely block migration, fragment habitat and alter water flow and quality. These impacts, which are historically evident at the Werribee Diversion Weir, increase stress on eel populations and have contributed to the species now being considered near threatened (BLCAC 2026, 18).

Werribee Township History

The early township of Werribee was positioned in proximity to a ford over Werribee River, connecting the route between Melbourne and Geelong (Murray 1974, 11; Lovell Chen 2024, 51). As traffic grew along the Melbourne to Geelong route, the Werribee settlement expanded. In 1849, land was reserved for a township and was gazetted as 'Wyndham' in 1850, commencing sale of Crown Land shortly after (James and Pritchard 2008, 15; Hocking 2013, 177; Murray 1974, 14).

The arrival of the railway in 1857 firmly positioned the commercial centre on the east side of the river. A post office, churches, schools and additional inns soon followed (James and Pritchard 2008, 103). While the township itself changed little throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, the surrounding land prospered economically under sheep and cattle grazing (Werribee Shire Banner 29 July 1937, 3).

Closer Settlement of the 1890s through until the 1930s marked a turning point, where large estates were subdivided for cropping and other industries, driving an increase in population and transforming land use (Lovell Chen 2024, 15; James and Pritchard 2008, 49; Penrose 2001, 9).

Place History

Werribee Park Estate had long been the sheep-run of the wealthy and influential Chirnside family since the mid-nineteenth century. As its patriarchs died and their finances became strained from the late nineteenth century, George Chirnside commenced allocating portions of their estate off to tenant farmers. In 1905, under the Closer Settlement Act, the state government purchased 24,000 acres of Werribee Park Estate from the Chirnside family. The intention was to lease small plots to farmers to conduct cropping and dairying, aiming to fulfill the Government's strategy to intensify agriculture around the metropolitan periphery (Weekly Times 1905, 8).

Having previously been exclusively used for sheep farming since colonisation, the land was dry and its soil compacted. Irrigating the estate became a priority for the Government (Weekly Times 1905, 8). In July of 1906, J. C. Starr was commissioned by the Minister of Water Supply, George Swinburne, to prepare the irrigation scheme for Werribee Estate (Bendigo Advertiser 1906, 2). Mr. Starr proposed that the Werribee River be dammed at various points along its alignment, including the construction of two reservoirs near Bacchus Marsh (The Australasian 1906, 8). It was predicted that through this method, over 8.3 billion litres of water could be stored.

Further downstream on the Werribee River, J. C. Starr proposed that

> 'a concrete storage and diversion weir…. would be necessary at a point two miles above the Wyndham railway bridge, and from thence a main off-take channel would have to be built, constructed to the highest point of Werribee Park that is suitable for irrigation' (The Bacchus Marsh Express 1906, 3).

By 1907, it was decided that the diversion weir would be constructed on the property of Mr. John Ball, located one mile upstream from the railway. This land had previously been part of the failed Chaffey Irrigation Scheme of the 1890s, which aimed to irrigate land within Tarneit. Mr. John Ball still resided in the grand dwelling constructed by George Chaffey, named Quantin Binnah (The Bacchus Marsh Express 1907, 2; Werribee Shire Banner 1925, 5). Throughout 1907, Ball undertook soil testing by extracting soil cores at 5-chain (approx..100 metre) intervals. The weir was proposed to be eight feet in height and 1.5 chain (approx. 30 metres) wide. From the diversion weir, the channels transporting the water would undergo a fall of 17.5 feet from the point of the weir to Werribee Park Estate (The Bacchus Marsh Express, 1907, 2). In December of 1906, the plans for the scheme were officially adopted by the State Government (The Age 1907, 8).

A tender from Reilly Bros. was accepted in October 1908 to construct the weir, sluiceways and subsidiary works for £2428. H. Miller was engaged to construct the channels from the weir to Werribee Park Estate for £3014 (The Age 1908, 5).

Upon the completion of the weir and the channels to carry the diverted water, the land of South Werribee began to be transformed into a densely productive area for dairying, orcharding, market gardening and cropping.

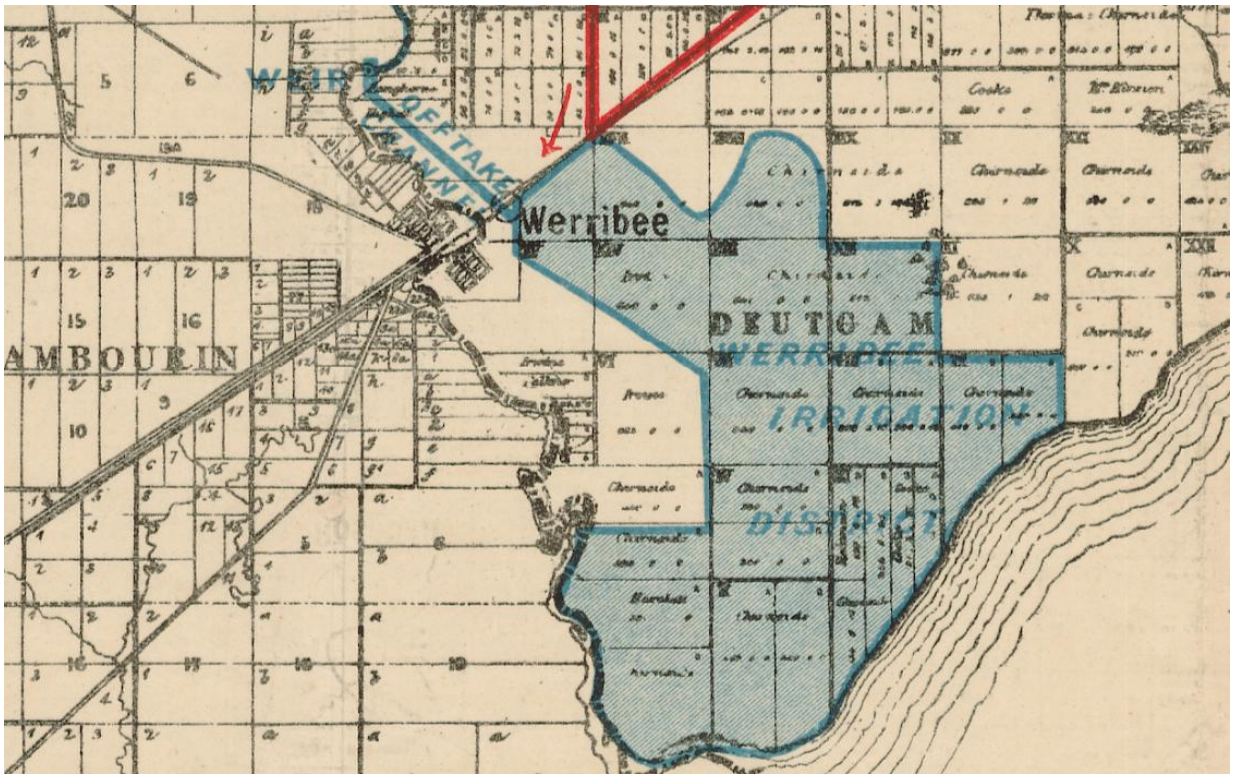


Figure 4. Map showing the location of the weir, channels and the irrigated lands. *Source:* State Rivers and Water Supply Commission. 1914. 'Excursion to the Werribee irrigation areas.' Map, 51 x 68cm. State Library Victoria. http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/114258

The scheme was soon found to fall short of its requirements. Pyke's Creek Reservoir in Myrniong failed to retain sufficient water to provide a reliable supply of water to the weir (Weekly Times 1912, 48). As a result, much of the land purchased by the State remained vacant into the early 1910s (The Argus 1913, 7). To resolve this problem, construction of the Melton dam was commissioned in 1914, set to meet the requirements that the Pyke's Creek Reservoir could not (Gisborne Gazette 1914, 3). With this additional storage provided upstream, the diversion weir irrigated Werribee South with more reliability. Additional channels were constructed in the mid-1910s to irrigate additional parcels of land (Werribee Shire Banner 1914, 3).

As the farming population increased in Werribee South over the proceeding decades, however, the demand for irrigation continued to rise. In response to almost a decade of calls to increase the capacity of storage on the lower Werribee, including suggestions to construct a second weir at Cobbledicks Ford, the existing weir was enlarged to enable storage of a greater volume of water in 1938 (The Sun News Pictorial 1930, 14; The Age 1933, 13; The Age 1938, 13). The works cost £6500 and were supervised by Yarrawonga engineer C.T. Stannell. The increase in the weir's size was designed to retain water overnight then released the following morning to meet the demands at the peak time (The Age 1938, 13).

The Werribee Diversion Weir has remained in operation into the present, continuing to supply the fields under cultivation in Werribee South (Wyndham City Council 2015).



Figure 5. The Werribee Diversion Weir. *Source:* State Rivers and Water Supply Commission photographer. 1946. 'Werribee Irrigation District.' Digitised Photograph, State Library Victoria. RWP1266. http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/413588

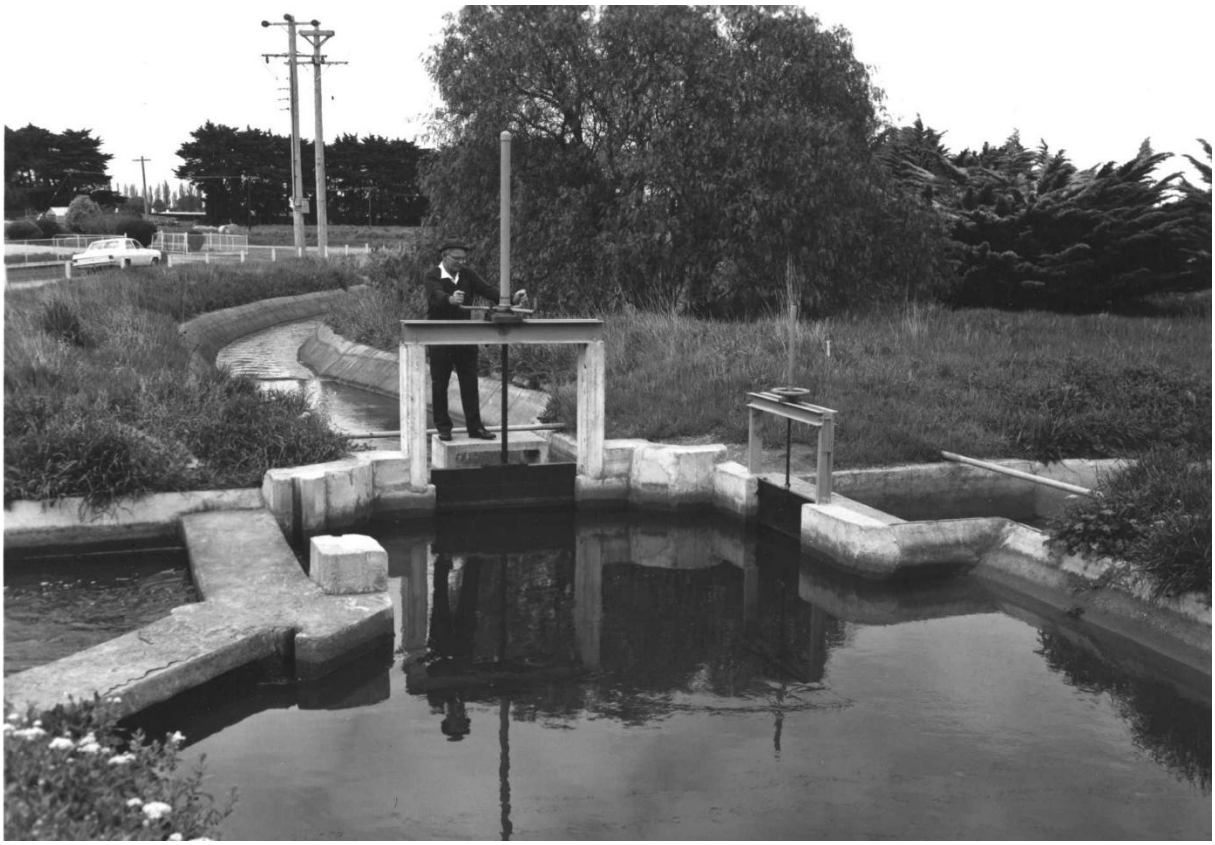


Figure 6. Channel and Loch transporting water diverted from the Werribee River. *Source:* State Rivers and Water Supply Commission photographer. 1967. 'Irrigation channels at Werribee.' Digitised Photograph, State Library Victoria. RWP/26527. http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/4090222

Comparative Analysis

The weir is an unusual feature in Werribee and has limited comparisons as a natural water source that has been altered. The alterations were undertaken to address issues of water scarcity and achieved through the adaptation of the river to establish a reserve of water and manage the control of the water. Similar activities to secure the supply of water and support pastoralism are evident in a number of forms in the municipality. While the weir is unique, it is comparable to the following places:

Skeleton Creek Water Reserve (HO119)

The weir is comparable to the Skeleton Creek Water Reserve as an example of a natural watercourse altered to ensure a reserve of water is retained to support issues of water scarcity and pastoralism. While Skeleton Creek is a more natural form and an early intervention, the weir is associated with more rapid development in Werribee and Werribee South to support the population growth as part of the Closer Settlement Scheme and the Soldier Settlement Scheme.

Clarke's Dam (HO35)

The weir is comparable to Clarke's Dam as a constructed element to establish a large reservoir of water to support pastoralism and address issues of water scarcity. Clarke's Dam similarly has a wall at one end to support the retention of water. While comparable, both reflect the typical building material of their respective eras, with the early dam being constructed of a basalt dry stone wall, while the weir uses concrete.

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Images



Figure 7. The weir from the south bank. Source: Extent Heritage 2025.



Figure 8. The steps on the south bank. Source: Extent Heritage 2025.



Figure 9. The point where the weir adjoins the embankment. Source: Extent Heritage 2025.



Figure 10. Detail of downstream of the weir showing the sand and building rubble. Source: Extent Heritage 2025.



Figure 11. The opening of the channel above the weir. Source: Extent Heritage 2025.



Figure 12. The open channel lined with peppercorn trees. Source: Extent Heritage 2025.