

Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council



NO. 4

**STRATEGIC PLAN
2017-2021**

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this document may contain images or names of people who have since passed away.

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We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of country throughout Victoria and pay our respect to them, their culture and their Elders past, present and future.

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Minister's foreword



Over the past decade the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria has been fundamentally reformed. The Council has been instrumental in this and I would like to celebrate this decade of hard work and dedication. This new four year plan has been underpinned by increased responsibilities provided to Council through changes to the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (the Act).

The Council's role as an independent, statutory body is significant and exemplify the Andrews Government's commitment to Aboriginal self-determination. The Council's creation under the Act, and subsequent increase in responsibilities under the 2016 amendments, ensure Traditional Owner decision making is respected and supported.

Council's role in appointing Registered Aboriginal Parties continues to be central to its responsibilities and it is clear that Traditional Owner decision making on the protection, management and preservation of cultural heritage has moved into a mature phase. This plan will help guide that direction for the next four years.

This will include Council's new responsibilities regarding Aboriginal Ancestral Remains and secret or sacred objects. I am pleased that it also sets the course for Council's management of the new Victorian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Fund and Council's own transition towards greater independence.

I congratulate Council on its new strategic plan and its achievements to date. I look forward to Council's continuing work in guiding the protection of Victoria's Aboriginal cultural heritage and promoting awareness of its richness and importance to all Victorians.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Natalie Hutchins".

The Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Aboriginal Aff

Chairperson's foreword



For generations Aboriginal peoples of Victoria have fought for recognition of their unique relationship with, and custodianship of, their lands. This year we celebrate the anniversaries of key milestones in the fight for Aboriginal recognition, self-determination and land justice.

Council was formed amid the land justice fight around federal native title determinations, particularly the idea that the 'tide of history' had washed away and thereby extinguished these rights in some instances. Significantly, the Victorian Government supported the land justice movement through the implementation of two pieces of landmark legislation, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*.

The stimulus for refreshing the strategic plan, in Council's tenth anniversary year, was the new powers and functions afforded to Council under the 2016 amendments to the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

The Council's first decade of work has focussed on the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage through the appointment of Registered Aboriginal Parties. As we move into the next decade, Council will continue to work with Registered Aboriginal Parties and build on the foundations laid regarding repatriation of Ancestors. Council will use its legislative responsibilities to support cultural healing in returning to Country those who were taken from their resting place.

This plan will guide Council's work with its key stakeholders to strengthen knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal cultures throughout Victoria. It outlines strategies for Council's transition to autonomy in a timely manner, the sustainability of Registered Aboriginal Parties, and increased resource capacity to ensure fulfilment of additional legislative responsibilities.

Developed on the anniversary of Council's formation and those of the *Bringing Them Home Report*, referendum to change the Constitution, Mabo decision and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*; this four-year plan reminds Council of the foundational work already undertaken that it will continue into the next decade.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eleanor A Bourke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eleanor A Bourke

Chairperson

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council was created under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (the Act) and is unique in Victoria as a statutory body with membership comprised only of Traditional Owners. It has several key functions:

- determining Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) applications
- managing, overseeing and supervising the operations of RAPs
- acting as the co-ordinating body responsible for the overseeing, monitoring, managing, reporting and returning of Aboriginal Ancestral Remains in Victoria
- overseeing and monitoring the system of reporting and returning Aboriginal secret or sacred objects
- managing the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Fund
- promoting and facilitating research into the Aboriginal cultural heritage of Victoria
- advising the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and others on the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria and promoting understanding and awareness of that heritage.

As Council marks its tenth anniversary there is much to be proud of. The appointment of three new Council members in early 2017 has brought Council's membership to full capacity. This is timely given Council's new responsibilities, provided by the amendments to the Act, which came into effect on 1 August 2016. The State Government of Victoria's commitment to self-determination and the support of the Department of Premier and Cabinet Deputy Secretary (Social Policy and Service Delivery Reform) encourages Council to pursue a more autonomous structure.

Council's core responsibilities to RAPs continue. RAPs are the primary vehicles through which Aboriginal cultural heritage is protected and managed. As of September 2017, Council has appointed 11 RAPs which collectively cover 62% of the state.

Council looks forward to celebrating its tenth anniversary with stakeholders throughout the year and continuing to work for the protection and preservation of Victoria's rich Aboriginal cultural heritage.

For further information about the Council, write to vahc@dpc.vic.gov.au or phone 03 8392 5368



ELEANOR BOURKE



TIM CHATFIELD



GERALDINE ATKINSON



JENNIFER BEER



JIM BERG



RODNEY CARTER



NELLIE FLAGG



JILL GALLAGHER AO



MICK HARDING



MARIE (SISSY) HAVEA



RON JONES

Our purpose

Traditional Owner led management, protection, education and enjoyment of Aboriginal cultural heritage for the benefit of all Victorians.

Our values

Aboriginal people live according to cultural values. These values are complex and underpin individuals' ways of being and doing. Council's values are firmly embedded in our cultural heritage, traditions, history and communities.

Our values are:

1. Pride in Aboriginal identity and culture underpins all Council's work.
2. Traditional custodians are recognised as the primary decision-makers for Aboriginal cultural heritage.
3. Honesty, respect, integrity and fairness are upheld in all Council's work.
4. We stand together in making decisions.

The purpose of this Plan

The purpose of this Plan is to outline how Council will fulfil its long-term goals and aspirations.

Our vision 2017-2021

All Victorians understand and respect our diverse Aboriginal identity and cultures, with Traditional Owners as the primary custodians for heritage of the past, present and future.

Council's vision is further described by the aspirations of each objective.

Our objectives

Council's objectives over the next four years are:

OBJECTIVE 1

Aboriginal people have strengthened pride and knowledge in our cultural heritage.

OBJECTIVE 2

The Victorian community has a deeper understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

OBJECTIVE 3

Council has control over its operations.

OBJECTIVE 4

Strengthened coverage, capacity and sustainability of RAPs.

OBJECTIVE 5

Increased Council capacity and successful transition to new responsibilities.

These objectives are discussed in further detail in the following pages.

Measuring progress

Progress against this Plan will be assessed through:

- a mid-term review to gauge progress and identify areas for improvement
- ongoing reporting of progress against actions at Council meetings
- cross-referencing the Strategic Plan with the development of Annual Reports and work plans
- a review at the end of the four-year strategic period.

Strengthened pride in and knowledge of Aboriginal cultural heritage

OBJECTIVE 1

identity across Victoria.

Context

Council has strong pride in the Aboriginal cultures of Victoria and, as a Council of Traditional Owners, is committed to strengthening pride and knowledge held by Aboriginal people across Victoria. We acknowledge strong Aboriginal communities and will support them to share knowledge and pride more widely across country and generations.

When people are proud of their culture, they protect it. Pride grows through cultural connectedness, allowing Aboriginal people to understand their culture and identity more deeply. Council recognises that supporting current and future generations of Aboriginal people, to strengthen their pride in our culture, is the best way to protect our heritage.

Aspirations

Council's long-term aspirations for this objective are that:

- Our communities continue to be strong and proud of their identity and culture.
- Victorian Aboriginal people have a stronger understanding of their cultural heritage and spirituality.
- There is greater expression of cultural

- Younger generations are enabled to manage and protect cultural heritage now and in the future.

Strategic actions

The most important actions that Council will undertake to achieve this objective are to:

- develop a Communications Strategy
- seek and promote initiatives that support stronger pride in cultural heritage
- support RAPs and other Traditional Owners to facilitate the exchange of culture and share knowledge throughout communities
- engage with Aboriginal youth organisations
- seek opportunities for the use of expressions of Aboriginal identity, including:
 - maintaining partnerships with the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and others to encourage use of Aboriginal languages
 - working with land and water managers to name and rename landscapes, waterways and places throughout Victoria.

Deeper Understanding of Cultural Heritage

OBJECTIVE 2

Context

A long-standing statutory function of Council is to promote public awareness and understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria. Complementing this function is Council's role to promote and facilitate research into Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Council recognises the need for strategic engagement with communities, organisations, government departments and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. We will focus on building mutual respect in the broader community, in partnership with RAPs and other Traditional Owners.

Council will support the efforts of RAPs and other Traditional Owners to improve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' understanding and enjoyment of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Aspirations

Council's long-term aspirations for this objective are that:

- Victorians have greater awareness of Aboriginal culture and the unique roles of Traditional Owners.

- All land and water managers are active partners in protecting cultural heritage.

Strategic actions

The most important actions that Council must take to achieve this objective are to:

- Develop a Communications Strategy to:

- engage with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to ensure two-way learning about the Minister's portfolio responsibilities and Council's business
- seek and promote initiatives that improve understanding and awareness of Aboriginal cultures
- engage with industry, land and water managers and other stakeholders to establish new partnerships for improved management of Aboriginal cultural heritage
- work with stakeholders to ensure they understand the role of Council and the role of RAPs
- support RAPs to develop resources that improve stakeholder awareness and partnership opportunities.

Council control over its operations

OBJECTIVE 3

Context

The 2015 Review of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria made recommendations that Council be made a separate entity to Aboriginal Victoria, and staff in the Council's Secretariat (now the Office of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (OVAHC)) be formally assigned to operate at the direction of the Council. The Victorian Government is supportive of self-determination for Victorian Aboriginal people and for Council's aspirations towards autonomy. Accordingly, the government has asked Council to work with Aboriginal Victoria to develop a self-determining organisational and financial structure.

It is Council's desire to adopt an autonomous organisational and financial structure. This change will allow Council to be in full control of its operations, including appointing and managing staff in the OVAHC, managing its own resources, attracting funding and partnerships, and building capacity to take on the functions of Aboriginal Victoria's Heritage Services in the future.

Aspirations

Council's long-term aspiration for this objective is that:

- Council's role as an independent, Traditional-Owner based, statutory decision maker is extended and strengthened through an autonomous operational structure.

Strategic actions

The most important actions that Council must take to achieve this objective are to:

- drive the implementation of Council's roadmap for autonomy including:
 - a proposed governance charter under which the Council's staff, budget, resources and operations are controlled by Council
 - a budget for Council's staged transition to autonomy
 - statutory amendments to achieve autonomy
 - formalisation of operational support from Aboriginal Victoria and the Department of Premier and Cabinet
- develop symbols that identify Council as an autonomous body.

Increasing RAP coverage, capacity and sustainability

OBJECTIVE 4

Context

The 2016 amendments to the Act reaffirm the primacy of Traditional Owners in Aboriginal cultural heritage management as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Under the Act, Council determines RAP applications. RAP status gives Traditional Owner groups formal recognition and authority under the Act to exercise cultural heritage management over a given area. Council will continue to appoint RAPs to ensure Traditional Owners are properly involved in the management and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria.

Due to the 2016 amendments to the Act, Council is not only responsible for appointing RAPs but also managing, overseeing and supervising their operations. Council will also continue to support RAPs to be financially sustainable, well-governed and valuable to their communities.

Aspirations

Council's long-term aspirations for this objective are that:

- RAPs are resourced to fulfil their core statutory functions and maintain control over their cultural heritage and Country.

- There are more RAP appointments across Victoria.
- RAPs maintain good working relationships with each other and other stakeholders including Council.

Strategic actions

The most important actions that Council must take to achieve this objective are to:

- continue to identify and implement flexible and innovative approaches to working with RAP applicants and potential RAP applicants, including engagement with the *Right People for Country Program*
- set up rigorous and beneficial processes and systems for managing, overseeing and supervising RAP operations that support RAPs to fulfil their statutory obligations
- continue to build stronger partnerships with RAPs
- facilitate relationships between RAPs and their local stakeholders
- continue to facilitate Memoranda of Understanding with stakeholders that benefit RAPs
- continue to advocate for funding and in-kind contributions to RAPs from government and other stakeholders.

Transition and capacity of Council

OBJECTIVE 5

Context

The 2016 amendments to the Act resulted in an expansion of Council's functions (listed on page 6). Due to the amendments, Council has been following a transition process to ensure it is equipped for its expanded functions. As part of this process, Council is developing mechanisms to achieve greater autonomy consistent with the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal people.

As these new functions require more from both Council and the OVAHC, we will work to increase our capacity and resources to meet our legislated responsibilities.

Aspirations

Council's aspirations for this objective are that:

- Council has the capacity, resources and support to autonomously fulfil its legislative responsibilities to protect, manage and promote cultural heritage, including returning our Ancestors home.
- Council engages effectively with stakeholders, especially RAPs, Aboriginal people and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
- The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Fund is managed effectively.

Strategic actions

The most important actions that Council must take to achieve this objective are to:

- develop a Communications Strategy, detailing ways to engage the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Social Policy and Service Delivery Reform) and the Executive Director of Aboriginal Victoria
- ensure Council maintains its reputation for high standards and rigorous processes with the adoption of our new responsibilities
- ensure our Ancestors are returned home in a respectful manner and burial places are properly cared for
- identify the staff profile required to successfully transition to new responsibilities
- maintain strong Council membership through:
 - training and personal development opportunities for Council members to fulfil our required responsibilities and cope with associated pressures
 - facilitating full membership of Council at all times
- seek funding opportunities and stakeholder partnerships to support Council's functions
- investigate technology that supports better cultural heritage management.



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