



## Letter from the Chair

Welcome to the eighth edition of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council's (Council) newsletter. With the celebration of Council's ten year anniversary now behind us, we continue to focus on our new legislative functions and move towards autonomy. To this end, Council was very pleased to launch its new Strategic Plan 2017-2021 at the September regional stakeholder meeting in Bendigo. Following my re-appointment for a second consecutive term as Chair, I was delighted to launch Council's Strategic Plan to an audience of over fifty regional stakeholders. The proceedings were less formal than previous stakeholder meetings with time set aside for more intimate one-on-one discussions with Council members. For those who could not attend, a copy of the Strategic Plan will be sent out.

The appointment of Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) continues to be a primary responsibility of Council and increasing RAP coverage, capacity and sustainability is one of the five objectives in our Strategic Plan. We are therefore very pleased to have appointed the eleventh RAP for the state of Victoria - Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation. The appointment of BLCAC increases RAP coverage across the state to 62%.

Council has been working to disseminate information regarding the new responsibilities for persons and public entities to report and transfer Aboriginal Ancestral Remains and secret or sacred objects to the Council. We now have a number of Fact Sheets available on our website and have distributed letters about these new obligations to all Vice-Chancellors of universities and to all public entities via the relevant government department Secretaries. Our new legislative functions provide the need for more operational support from the Secretariat. To reflect the changing nature of the work of the Secretariat, we would like to announce a name change for our support staff from the Secretariat to the Office of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my fellow Council members, Tim Chatfield, on his re-election as Deputy Chairperson, and Jennifer Beer who has been re-appointed for a third term.

**Eleanor A Bourke**  
Chairperson

## Japanese Documentary



**Council Members Jim Berg and Nellie Flagg being interviewed in Kings Domain**

In July 2017, Council members Jim Berg and Nellie Flagg were interviewed for a Japanese television documentary about the repatriation of Japanese Ancestors. The documentary featured as part of *Hokkaido Close Up*, a 25-minute news program, and focused on the return of the Ancestral Remains of Hokkaido's Ainu peoples from the National Museum of Australia and Museum Victoria.

In researching the international move to repatriation, the documentary makers identified that Australia, and particularly Victoria, leads in the repatriation and development of legislation

supporting repatriation of Ancestral Remains. As Ancestors were held in 'collections' here, the producers felt that an Australian perspective was essential and Council was asked to participate in the documentary, providing an Aboriginal perspective on the importance of repatriation and processes currently in place.

Interviewed at the King's Domain memorial site, Jim and Nellie spoke to an international audience about the fundamental importance of Ancestors being returned to their Country.



**Eleanor Bourke launching Council's Strategic Plan at the Regional Stakeholder Meeting**

## Regional Stakeholder Meeting - Launch of the Strategic Plan 2017-2021

With the introduction of new legislative functions under the amendments to the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (the Act), Council's 2014-2019 Strategic Plan was made redundant stimulating the need for a revised plan that more adequately reflected Council's changing role. The Strategic Plan 2017-2021 was launched at Council's regional stakeholder meeting in Bendigo on 7 September. Proceedings opened with a Welcome to Country from Dja Dja Warrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation who also provided an informative overview of their organisation.

The new Strategic Plan will guide Council's work with its key stakeholders over the next four years. It also outlines strategies for Council's transition towards autonomy, its new

responsibilities, and the sustainability of RAPs. Council's vision for 2017-2021 is that 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.

Our Strategic Plan is governed by five objectives:

- Aboriginal people have strengthened pride and knowledge in our cultural heritage.
- The Victorian community has a deeper understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- Council has control over its operations.
- Strengthened coverage, capacity and sustainability of RAPs.
- Increased Council capacity and successful transition to new responsibilities.



Following the stakeholder meeting, Council members and staff of the Office of the VAHC spent time on Country with Dja Dja Wurrung. Thanks to Rodney Carter, Rick Kerr and Jaidyn Kerr for their informative talk about the landscape and cultural features along the Campaspe River.



**Top Left:** Rachel Buis-Kerr from Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation presenting to participants at the Regional Stakeholder Meeting.

**Top Right:** Council members Sissy Havae, Rodney Carter and Chair, Eleanor Bourke on Country.

**Left:** Office staff, Angela Gibbs and Janine Major, on Country with Rick Kerr.

## 2017 Annual Report

Since 2010, Council has been committed to producing annual reports. This year, however, is the first time we have had a legislative requirement to provide an annual report to the Minister for

Aboriginal Affairs. The report covers the period 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017. To view or download a copy of our annual report, visit our website:

<http://dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/victorian-aboriginal-heritage-council>

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### Meetings with Stakeholders/Working Groups

Representatives from Parks Victoria (PV), Traditional Owner Partnerships Unit – Dave Lucas, Wendy Luke and Chrystle Carr, met with Council at their meeting in July. PV staff presented information about the Managing Country Together Framework and a new App they are developing which will assist PV staff to manage their compliant obligations under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. Council complimented PV on the development of the App as a useful resource which potentially has wider application than PV staff.

The Commissioner, Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), Craig Lapsley, along with Fwyona Norton and Norm Free from EMV also met with Council at their meeting in July. The time together was used as a platform to discuss how EMV and the Council might work together to better embed Aboriginal values in its operations.

Treaty – Council members, Eleanor Bourke, Jill Gallagher and Mick Harding continue to provide input to the Aboriginal Treaty Working Group (formerly the Interim Aboriginal Treaty Working Group). Work is now split between three sub-committees – Legislation, Bridging Entity and Community Assembly. Updates on the Treaty process are provided regularly on Aboriginal Victoria's website: <http://www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria/treaty.html>

Council would also like to acknowledge Mick as the first Aboriginal person to address the Victorian Cabinet when he presented an update to Cabinet in August on the work towards a Treaty with Victoria's Traditional Owners. More information about this historic moment can be found at: <http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2017/08/08/history-made-victoria-works-towards-treaty-traditional-owners>

VIFM – Council members, Nellie Flagg and Jim Berg met with representatives from the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) to discuss input into VIFM's training and information packs for staff when working with Aboriginal families. Council works closely with VIFM with respect to confirmation that reports made to Council are of Aboriginal Ancestral Remains. VIFM approached Council in the first instance for guidance about sensitivities, practices and language to be considered in training for staff. Council encouraged VIFM to continue to consult more broadly with Aboriginal Communities to develop their training material and engage with Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Awareness Training providers.

Weeroona Private Aboriginal Cemetery Working Group – The Weeroona Private Cemetery in Greenvale provides a respectful burial option for all Aboriginal people. Council has been working with Weeroona's Committee of Management (WCoM) for a number of years on a range of products. Most recently Council has assisted the WCoM in accessing funds to support the operations of the cemetery.

## Secret or Sacred Objects

With the amendments to the Act, Council became the responsible body for the transfer of secret or sacred objects held by persons or public entities. In September, Council received its first report and transfer of a secret or sacred object from a member of the public. As the first member of the public to report and transfer a secret or sacred object to Council, Council Member Jim Berg presented the informant with a copy of his book *Power and Passion*.

Council continues to encourage people to provide a report to Council if they believe they may have a secret or sacred object. You can read more about secret or sacred objects and your responsibilities to transfer to Council by visiting our website.

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## Ancestral Remains

In our first year, since becoming the central co-ordinating body responsible for the overseeing, monitoring, managing, reporting and returning of Aboriginal Ancestral Remains in Victoria, Council received 55 reports, 18 of which were confirmed as Ancestral Remains. Council, through the Ancestral Remains Unit, works closely with the Coroner in the first instance to determine if reports are indeed of human remains and, if so, whether they are Aboriginal Ancestral Remains. Where provenance is immediately known, Council consults with the relevant RAP or Traditional Owners. In many instances however provenance is not immediately known and we will undertake further investigations and research in the hope that we can determine the individual Ancestor's origin and return them to Country.

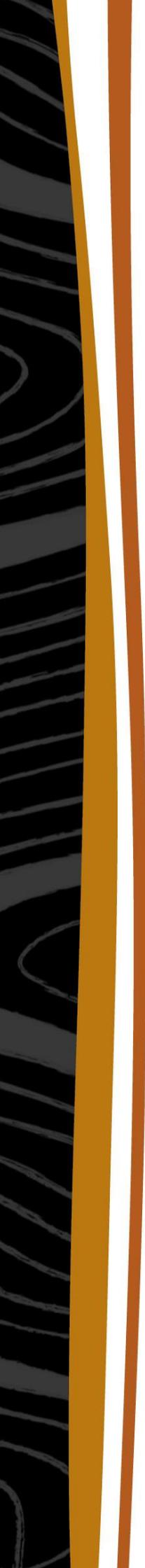
To assist us with our responsibilities regarding Ancestral Remains, Council has established a number of Ancestral Remains Advisory Committees with delegated functions to ensure a timely response to reports of Ancestral Remains.

Council members, Eleanor Bourke, Jim Berg and Mick Harding, met with representatives from the Museums Repatriation/Collections and Cultural Heritage Branch (Commonwealth) Department of Communications and Arts in August. This branch is responsible for funding eight major museums across Australia, including Museums Victoria. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the current requirements regarding Aboriginal Ancestral Remains and secret or sacred objects held at Museum Victoria and to determine a process for working with Council to repatriate Ancestral Remains and secret or sacred objects to Victoria which are currently held interstate.

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## RAP Forum – May 2017

Council representatives regularly attend RAP Forums. The May RAP Forum, hosted by Wurrundjeri was attended by Council members Rodney Carter, Mick Harding and Sissy Havea. Mick and Rodney presented information to the forum about Council's plans to adopt a strength-based approach to its new function of oversight, management and supervision of RAPs. Council intends further consultation with RAPs regarding how they could adopt a strength-based approach to the annual reports they are now required to provide to Council. A strength-based



approach would allow Council to support RAPs in accordance with their own self-determined priorities and values. We look forward to soon engaging a RAP Support Officer to work directly with RAPs to identify what a successful and sustainable RAP looks like to them. Council hopes to use the information from the annual reports to advocate for RAPs and the resources and assistance they might need.

**For more information about Council, visit**  
<http://dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/victorian-aboriginal-heritage-council>