



# Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council

## Strategic Plan 2008 – 2011

May 2008



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## Minister's Foreword

For the first time ever, Aboriginal heritage has been placed in the hands of the Aboriginal community in Victoria.

Giving Aboriginal people more power to articulate a vision for their future and to activate that vision is important in terms of making restitution and moving forward together.

It will ensure that Aboriginal beliefs and traditions are respected.

One year ago, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* (2006) was introduced recognising Aboriginal people, particularly Traditional Owners, are the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of their rich and ancient heritage.

It led to the establishment of Victoria's first Aboriginal Heritage Council.

Members of the Council play a key role in determining who will exercise the important cultural heritage responsibilities on their country. They provide an expert state-wide voice for Aboriginal people and they do this independently of government.

This strategic plan sets a clear direction for the Council over the next three years.

I commend the members of the Council for their individual contributions to this important work, which will ensure Aboriginal cultural heritage is preserved, protected and remains an intrinsic part of the fabric of our society for generations to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Wynne". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Richard Wynne**  
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

## Message from the Chair

This strategic plan is about the future management of Aboriginal cultural heritage through the eyes of the 11 Traditional Owners who make up the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council.

We have waited a long time for improvements to the way our cultural heritage is managed in Victoria. The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* is a welcome change. It offers new opportunities. Opportunities to start afresh about how cultural heritage is cared for and managed in Victoria. Opportunities for Traditional Owners to re-determine the meaning of cultural heritage. Opportunities to establish respect.

The Council has an important role under the Act. In our role, we recognise the rights and responsibilities of Traditional Owners to protect, promote and grow cultural heritage. Traditional Owners are central to this future. We will assist Traditional Owners to carry out their roles in whatever way we can.

In this plan we identify the appointment of Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) as our first priority. We see the appointment of RAPs as mapping the cultural landscape of Victoria. The landscape is alive, and so is its culture. Through the appointments of RAPs, we will see the right people managing Aboriginal heritage.

Traditional Owners will have a strong voice through the RAPs. We will do everything we can to see that RAPs grow and are sustainable.

We believe that the Act holds real opportunities. As a Council we will work towards ensuring the benefits are realised and shared – that is our plan.



**Ricky Mullet**  
Inaugural Chairperson  
Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council

## Introduction

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council was created under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic)*. This is the Council's first strategic plan and is released on the first anniversary of the Act coming into operation. It outlines the priorities that the Council will pursue between May 2008 and May 2011.

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* creates the platform for a transformation in the way that Aboriginal heritage issues are dealt with in Victoria. It places Traditional Owners at the centre of decision-making. The Council's role is to support Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities in the transition to stronger and more appropriate traditional cultural heritage management practices and to work with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to ensure better heritage management in Victoria.

### **Under the Act the key roles of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council are to:**

- provide advice to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Secretary of the Department of Planning and Community Development about a wide range of matters relating to the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria
- make decisions regarding registration of Aboriginal parties, and
- develop measures to promote Victorian community awareness and understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

## What the Council is about

The Council is working in an exciting environment developing this new and unique role. The Council seeks to:

- strengthen the roles of Aboriginal people, particularly Traditional Owners to manage and protect their heritage
- influence the development of cultural heritage policy, and
- work with key partners to build a better understanding and appreciation of Victoria's rich Aboriginal heritage amongst the broader community.

The Council has developed a proactive agenda to address key aspects of its legislated roles.

Council's initial priority is to appoint Registered Aboriginal Parties throughout the State. The Council will, over time, increase its focus on providing government with strategic advice and developing an effective education and information strategy to promote public awareness and understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria.

The Council has a challenging and important task. The Council members are confident that they can make a difference on behalf of both the Aboriginal and the broader Victorian community through their work. Key change themes include:

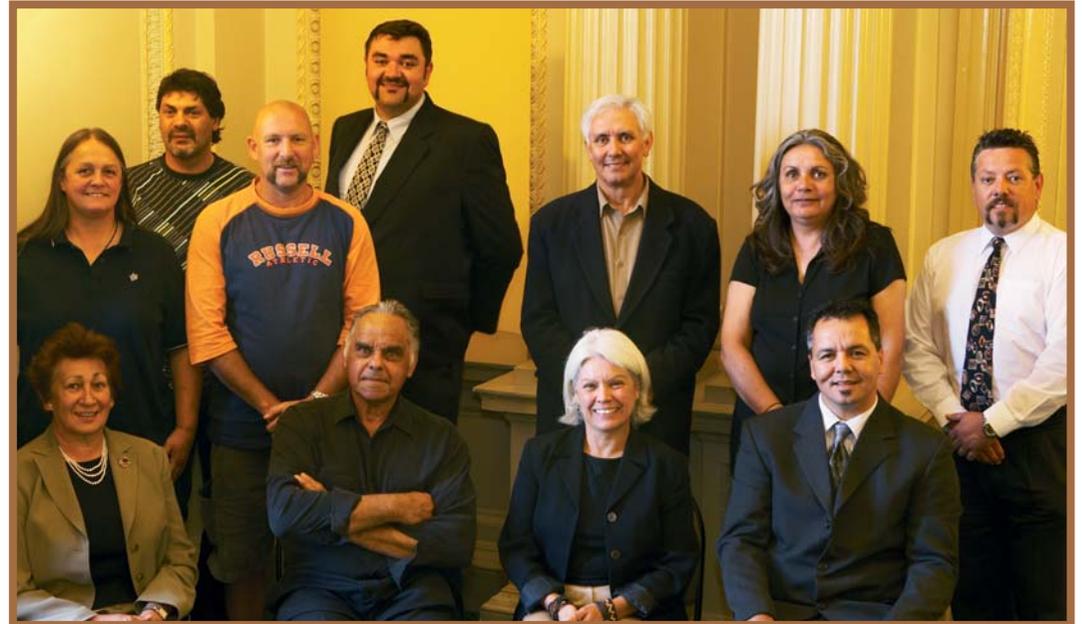
- ensuring coverage of the State with RAPs that are competent, sustainable and well regarded by their community and stakeholders
- building the support and knowledge required for Traditional Owners to confidently manage and preserve their heritage
- building acceptance that careful management of Aboriginal heritage is a normal part of the development process
- establishing the Aboriginal Heritage Council as a respected and authoritative source of advice, and
- developing a resource base that enables the level of activity required.

### The Council members are:

**Graham Atkinson, Damein Bell, Jim Berg, Eleanor Bourke, Rodney Carter, Tim Chatfield, Vicki Couzens, Mick Harding, Karen Jackson, Denise Lovett, Ricky Mullett**

\*Patricia Ockwell was an acting member of the Council from October – December 2007.

Over the life of this plan, Council's membership will change twice. In May 2009, half of the current members terms will expire and the remainder of the inaugural team will expire in May 2010.



**2008 - 2011**

## **OUR MISSION**

*Working with Traditional Owners, government and all Victorians for an exemplary system to protect, preserve and enjoy Aboriginal heritage.*

## **OUR VISION**

*A community that respects Aboriginal cultural heritage and recognises Traditional Owners as the primary custodians of this heritage.*

## **OUR PRIORITIES**

- 1. Appointing and supporting the work of Registered Aboriginal Parties*
- 2. Providing influential advice to the Minister and the Government*
- 3. Actively promoting community awareness and understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage*
- 4. Building a strong Aboriginal Heritage Council*

# The actions we propose to take

## 1. Appointing and supporting the work of Registered Aboriginal Parties

### Where are we trying to get to?

RAPs' covering the state, operating effectively and providing valued services consistent with the expectations of the Act

Council's highest priority over the next two years is the appointment of RAPs throughout Victoria. The Council is acutely aware of the sensitivities regarding RAP appointments and is committed to making decisions which:

- are well grounded
- respect the role and status of Traditional Owners, and
- are likely to be sustainable

In recognition of the importance of having RAPs fully operational as quickly as possible, the Council will give priority consideration to applications brought by Traditional Owner groups with inclusive membership who have sufficient capacity to become a RAP.

The Council will prioritise the registration of country that is uncontested by other Traditional Owner groups, and deal with overlapping and competing applications as a second order priority.

As the Council progressively appoints RAPs, Council will focus on activities that support the development and operation of RAPs to assist them to build a strong foundation to undertake and continue their work.

### The Principles that will guide our work are:

- The Council will give priority consideration to applications made by groups who represent Traditional Owners.
- Where appropriate, the Council will move quickly to register the core country of applicants representing Traditional Owners who have sufficient capacity to become a RAP.
- The Council will also give priority consideration to uncontested applications by other groups that meet the Act's requirements where supported by the Traditional Owners of the Country affected by the application.
- The Council may invite certain applicants to participate in regional meetings and mediations to resolve competing applications and overlapping boundaries.
- The Council wants to ensure that groups recognised under the cultural heritage laws as best as possible reflect those under native title arrangements.
- The Council encourages smaller groups to create sustainable RAP structures by working together to create a single RAP or to develop co-operative arrangements with other Aboriginal organisations.

Task	Critical Activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Appoint RAPs	<p><b>Improve information and engagement with RAP applicants</b></p> <p>Good quality information and understanding of the Council's RAP appointment process will assist Aboriginal organisations assess whether they should make a RAP application and assist them with preparing a complete and effective RAP application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publish information resource kit for use by RAP applicants.</li> <li>Hold regional meetings to engage with Aboriginal communities and RAP applicants about the RAP decision making process.</li> </ul>			
		Resource kit completed and distributed	Updates released as appropriate	Updates released as appropriate
		Commence regional meetings program	Continue regional meetings program	
	<p><b>Build consensus through mediation and dispute resolution</b></p> <p>Where there are overlapping and competing RAP applications to be assessed by the Council and where it is appropriate, the Council will help facilitate agreements by bringing groups together through meetings or mediations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage Aboriginal groups to discuss appropriate RAP arrangements locally.</li> <li>Extend Council's current program of mediation and facilitated meetings.</li> <li>Build Council's dispute resolution capacity.</li> </ul>			
		Ongoing	Ongoing	
		Expand current program of facilitated dispute resolution	Review situation as RAPs are established and adjust accordingly	
		Engage external mediators through appointment of a small panel of mediators  Training / mediation support for Council members and staff involved in mediations	Continue as needed	

Task	Critical Activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
	<p><b>Decision making</b></p> <p>Efficient decision making requires good information. The Council will aim to have RAPs established and operating as rapidly as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve information to support Council's decision making process.</li> </ul>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Liaise with applicants to facilitate quality applications.</li> </ul>	Expand research capacity Source information that other organisations are willing to make available	Research work to continue as needed	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frame decisions by acting on the announced principles and in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Giving primacy to Traditional Owners in the process</li> <li>Giving priority to approving applications for core country.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Regular contact with applicants to advise on RAP application assessment process	Continue	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make decisions in a timely manner.</li> </ul>	Prioritise applications from or supported by Traditional Owners  Move quickly to register RAP applicants over core country in line with Council's established principles	Continue	
			RAP coverage across Victoria within 2 years	

Task	Critical Activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Support RAP sustainability and performance	<b>Support sustainable RAPs</b> The Council wants to see RAPs succeed. However, Council believes it has a key role to play in supporting the development of sustainable RAPs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and understanding RAP capacity and sustainability issues.</li> <li>Prepare advice on models that will enable RAPs to meet their statutory and community obligations, including advising on potential strategies and avenues for revenue and capacity building.</li> </ul>			
		Research options for RAP sustainability Engage with RAPs regarding capacity and sustainability issues	Ongoing development and communication	Ongoing development and communication
		Undertake research on options for RAP sustainability Engage with RAPs regarding capacity and sustainability issues	Ongoing	Ongoing
	<b>Monitor and engage with RAPs about performance</b> Council has an ongoing role with RAPs once they are appointed, including suspending or revoking registration where a RAP is unable to meet its legislative responsibilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with RAPs and conduct RAP forums regularly to share ideas and identify issues affecting RAP performance in order to facilitate learning and to spread best practice widely.</li> <li>Develop monitoring framework models for RAPs that are workable and can be used across the State.</li> <li>Mediate between RAPs where significant issues arise between two or more RAPs.</li> </ul>			
		Commence program of meeting with appointed RAPs	Commence program of regional RAP forums	Continue program of regional RAP forums
			Develop monitoring framework in partnership with RAPs and AAV	Refine and utilise monitoring framework
			Prepare a framework document in consultation with RAPs Facilitate mediation between RAPs as required.	Review and revise model as needed Ongoing Council facilitation of dispute resolution

## 2. Providing influential advice to the Minister and the Government

### Where are we trying to get to?

Sound advice which contributes a strong Aboriginal input into the development of cultural heritage policy.

The Council has a wide ranging role to provide advice to the Minister and government about the protection and management of cultural heritage. Council will provide advice in a timely and expert way. The Council can provide advice at its own initiative and will focus on three priority areas over the period of this strategic plan.

Task	Critical Activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<b>Build sustainable RAPs</b>	<p>Pivotal to the success of Victoria's new laws is the viability of RAPs appointed to undertake local cultural heritage responsibilities. Council will provide advice to Government on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Models for RAP support, and</li> <li>• Critical issues impacting on RAP performance.</li> </ul>	Undertake research and prepare advice on models that will enable RAPs to meet their statutory and community obligations	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Promote the role of Aboriginal people in the protection and management of heritage</b>	<p>The Council believes that Aboriginal people, particularly Traditional Owners, should have the lead role in protection and management of their heritage. The Council will research and provide advice to Government on measures to grow the participation of Aboriginal people, with a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involving RAPs and/or members of the Aboriginal community in heritage enforcement</li> <li>• Improving recognition of cultural heritage expertise that exists within the Aboriginal community</li> <li>• Retaining and building cultural knowledge within the Aboriginal community</li> <li>• Boosting training and employment opportunities of Aboriginal people in heritage related areas.</li> </ul>		Undertake research and prepare advice on measures to strengthen Aboriginal people's involvement in protecting and managing their heritage	
<b>Review the legislation and its administration</b>	<p>The Council will advise the Government's scheduled review of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 to be provided by the fifth anniversary of the Act's commencement in May 2012. The Council's advice will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terms of reference for the review</li> <li>• Process for conducting the review</li> <li>• Role and status of the Council</li> <li>• Administration and operation of the Act</li> <li>• Other strategic aspects of protecting Aboriginal heritage.</li> </ul>			Undertake research and prepare advice

### 3. Actively promoting community awareness and understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

#### Where are we trying to get to?

A well informed Victorian community supportive of the preservation of Aboriginal heritage.

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* empowers the Council to develop measures to promote public awareness and understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria. The Council will focus on two areas of public education over the life of this plan.

Task	Critical Activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Build community appreciation of Aboriginal heritage	The Council will work with key partners to build community understanding, knowledge, support and enjoyment of the significance and value of Aboriginal heritage.		Assemble compendium of previous information and education campaigns  Commence design of community engagement and information strategy	
Strengthen understanding of the role of RAPs	The Council will develop a community education strategy designed to build understanding and support for the role and purpose of RAPs amongst a wide range of stakeholders.	Meetings with stakeholders  Focus on building understand of role of RAPs in Council's communications  Publish case studies	Continued	

## 4. Building a strong Aboriginal Heritage Council

### Where are we trying to get to?

A confident, highly regarded and competent Council acting with autonomy in fulfilling its legislative role.

A strong, skilled and well-supported Council is essential to the successful implementation of the Council's legislative mandate and to the delivery of priorities outlined in this strategic plan. Council has identified five priority tasks for action throughout the life of this plan.

Task	Critical Activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<b>Build Council's profile</b>	<p><b>Improve communications about the role and work of the Council.</b></p> <p>As a recently established body with a unique role, the Council recognises that the community needs to be well informed about its role and functions.</p>	Develop and implement a communications and media strategy	<p>Strategy refined and implemented</p> <p>First annual report on Council's work published</p>	<p>Strategy reviewed and implemented</p> <p>Release yearly update on Council's work</p>
<b>Grow Council's capacity</b>	<p><b>Retain a skilled secretariat and build capacity.</b></p> <p>With a new and challenging task to be delivered the Council needs to retain high quality staff with a range of content, technical and management skills. The Council recognises that the number of staff and the skill sets required to meet the ongoing and changing needs of the Council will vary over time.</p>	<p>Retain a skilled Secretariat and build capacity</p> <p>Liaise with Government about its secretariat needs</p>	Ongoing	Ongoing
	<p><b>Develop a research capacity.</b></p> <p>The Council needs increased research capacity in order to progress RAP appointments as quickly as possible.</p>	Expand Council's research capacity to assist RAP decision making	Ongoing	Ongoing
	<p><b>Secure the resources to deliver the plan.</b></p> <p>The agenda outlined in this plan involves considerable activity and the Council will work with Government on an ongoing basis to secure the budget required each year to deliver this plan.</p>	Secure the resources required to deliver on this plan	Ongoing	Ongoing

Task	Critical Activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<b>Strengthen the operation of the Council</b>	<p><b>Train Council members</b></p> <p>Ongoing training and skills development for Council members is a central part of growing Council's capacity. Over the life of this plan, Council's membership will change over twice. In May 2009, half of the current members terms will expire. In May 2010, the remainder of the inaugural members terms will expire. The Council will need to provide for induction and other training to assist new members to perform their functions.</p>	Provide training to enhance skills of Council and staff	Provide induction for new members	Provide induction for new members
	<p><b>Establish working groups</b></p> <p>Where necessary Council will establish working groups to undertake specific tasks and manage Council's business effectively.</p>	Establish working groups on priority tasks	Ongoing	Ongoing
	<p><b>Refine meeting processes</b></p> <p>The Council will regularly review its meeting and associated processes to adapt them to changing priorities and maximise effectiveness in managing business.</p>	Refine meeting processes	Review meeting and support processes	Review meeting and support processes
<b>Develop contemporary governance</b>	<p><b>Business planning and risk management</b></p> <p>The Council will develop business plans to ensure priorities identified in this strategic plan are delivered and a risk framework to identify and manage delivery risks.</p>	Develop business plans and a risk management framework	Refine and update framework	Refine and update framework
	<p><b>Develop contemporary governance</b></p> <p>Council members recognise that over time, the role and composition of the Council may need to be revised. The Council anticipates that in the longer term, Aboriginal heritage will be better protected and valued if the relationship between Government and Traditional Owners continues to mature.</p> <p>The Council will engage with key stakeholders, particularly the Aboriginal community, about the role and operation of the Council. This will enable Council to respond to feedback, and also to form a view about a Council structure that best meets the changing needs of the community.</p> <p>As part of providing input into the scheduled review of the Act, the Council will investigate options for Council's status and governance for consideration in the planned review of the <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i>.</p>		Commence engagement with key stakeholders about role and effectiveness of the Council	<p>Provide advice regarding the terms of reference and process for the review of the Act</p> <p>Provide advice on options for future role and composition of Council to coincide with legislative review</p>

Task	Critical Activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Develop partnerships with key stakeholders	<p>As a recently established body with a newly legislated role, the Council will provide cultural heritage advice to key stakeholders and will be looking to Government and key partners to support its work. Key groups that the Council seeks to build collaborative working relations with include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional Owners</li> <li>• Aboriginal organisations involved in heritage protection and management</li> <li>• Native Title interests</li> <li>• Developers and land users</li> <li>• The Victorian and Commonwealth Government</li> <li>• Local Government</li> <li>• Other heritage protection organisations</li> <li>• Indigenous Heritage Councils around Australia and internationally</li> <li>• State and local government agencies (e.g. Victorian Coastal Council, Victorian Heritage Council etc.)</li> </ul>	<p>Extend program of stakeholder meetings</p> <p>Undertake scoping work to identify potential partner organisations</p> <p>Develop strategic relationships with identified groups</p>	<p>Continue program of stakeholder meetings</p> <p>Review progress on partnerships and revise or establish new relationships consistent with the needs of the Council</p>	<p>Continue program of stakeholder meetings</p> <p>Review progress on partnerships and revise or establish new relationships consistent with the needs of the Council</p>







