



VICTORIAN
ABORIGINAL
HERITAGE
COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT

Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council

1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024

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.

Published by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council

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June 2025

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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.

All credited artwork used in this report is sourced from The Torch. Operating as a not for profit First Nations-led arts organisation, The Torch provides art, cultural, and arts industry support to First Nations people who are currently incarcerated or have recently been released from prisons in Victoria. The Torch assists artists to reconnect with culture and earn income from art sales, with 100% of the artwork price going directly to the artist. For more information please go to <https://thetorch.org.au/>.



Front Cover: Stephen N, Wurundjeri, 'Generations of Wurundjeri' 2020, Acrylic on canvas.

"Wurundjeri generations linked together, passing on stories and culture"



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CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION



RUSSELL MULLETT
Chairperson

Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities can be proud of their hard work and cultural stewardship over this year. We have seen so many examples of the tenacity, creativity and generous spirit of our People looking after Country and our enduring heritage.

I am particularly struck by the overall sense of collaboration as well guardianship that so often drives our work in the cultural heritage space. This approach ensures that our voices not only have impact but helps to foster wider respect and appreciation of cultural landscapes, and our sacred objects and sites, with all Victorians.

Council continues to play a crucial role in supporting Victoria's Traditional Owners as the primary knowledge-holders and managers of their cultural heritage. The Council is made up entirely of Traditional Owners, with Council members bringing a wealth of expertise and informed perspectives on how best we can continue to protect Victoria's rich Aboriginal cultural heritage. This diversity is part of our collective strength. It allows us to navigate the complex decision-making we as Council must regularly undertake with conscientiousness and mutual esteem, grounded in Culture.

This annual report covers the financial period of 2023-2024. The report highlights many of the year's achievements and how we are also laying the groundwork and taking steps forward towards our goals. Many aspects of what we do as Council and Traditional Owners relies on a steady input of work, over sustained periods, to progress towards our milestones. These collective efforts help bring our People further down the pathway of leading and sustaining our communities.

At almost the end of this financial year, I was very pleased to announce alongside the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Natalie Hutchins, that Council would have access to and control over the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Fund. The Fund will support initiatives by our People which aim to protect or manage cultural heritage.

Council and our staff also made notable headway in progressing the return of Ancestors and secret or sacred objects. Underpinning repatriations of Ancestral Remains and secret or sacred objects is countless hours of liaising with institutions and relevant organisations, as well conducting culturally informed case management and care. This is incredibly important work, and this year saw Council advise all Registered Aboriginal Parties of its willingness to transfer 200 Ancestral Remains into their care whenever they are willing and ready. The groundwork has been set for more returns in Victoria, alongside further advancing of interstate and international repatriations.

My particular thanks must go to former Council chairperson Denise Lovett, who had carriage of this role until May 2024. Her tireless advocacy for Traditional Owners having charge of their cultural heritage was reflected in the dynamic scope of Council's business during her time in this position.

Together, we can reflect upon on a fruitful period for Council and Traditional Owners caring for their heritage over 2023-2024. Undoubtedly, in the year ahead we will continue this intense engagement as we strive for the protection of our State's rich Aboriginal cultural heritage, safeguarded for future generations of Victorians.

THE VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HERITAGE COUNCIL



Russell Mullett

29 November 2021 –
28 November 2024
(Chairperson – Current)



Denise Lovett

29 November 2021 –
28 November 2024
(Chairperson 23 March 2022
– 1 May 2024)



Monica Morgan

29 November 2021 –
28 November 2024
(Deputy Chairperson)



Rodney Carter

1 September 2021 –
31 August 2024



John Austin

10 October 2022 –
23 January 2024



Melinda Kennedy

8 October 2022 –
9 October 2025



Nicholas Stewart

8 October 2022 –
9 October 2025



Jason Briggs

8 October 2022 –
9 October 2025
(Deputy Chairperson
until 1 May 2024)



THE VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HERITAGE COUNCIL

STATUTORY FUNCTIONS

Council plays an important role in the implementation of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (the Act). Its principal functions are:

Making decisions on RAP applications

In the 2024/25 period there have been 11 Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) operating in Victoria which collectively cover 75% of the State. RAPs are organisations that hold decision-making responsibilities for protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage in a specified geographical area.

Monitoring RAPs

The Council is responsible for overseeing and supervising the operations of RAPs under the Act. Council adopts a collaborative approach to this function. Council receives financial reporting from RAPs and engages in ongoing dialogue about the effectiveness of Victoria's Aboriginal cultural heritage system and RAP system through RAP Forums. RAPs also sit on Council's four advisory committees. Council also maintains a complaints mechanism for making complaints against RAPs to ensure the integrity and accountability of the system.

Returning Ancestors to Country

Council is the central coordinating body responsible for Ancestral Remains in Victoria. All work undertaken by Council in fulfilling this responsibility is actioned through Council's Ancestral Remains Advisory Committee. This highly-sensitive work is more than caring for and returning Ancestors to their rightful owners, and extends to strengthening protections for Aboriginal burial places and delivering better support to Traditional Owners through the repatriation process.

Secret or Sacred Objects in Victoria

Council is responsible for the care of secret or sacred objects (SSO) before they are returned to their Traditional Owners. Council's custody of SSO is a profound responsibility to support Traditional Owners manage and retain their cultural heritage.

Managing the Victorian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Fund (Fund)

Council is responsible for managing the Fund for a number of legislated purposes which include supporting initiatives to promote public awareness and understanding of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in Victoria or promoting and facilitating research into the Aboriginal cultural heritage of Victoria.

At the end of the reporting year, Council also announced, together with the Minister for Treaty


and First Peoples, the Fund will be used to fund initiatives to protect and manage Aboriginal cultural heritage across the state.

Measures to promote understanding and awareness

Council's work includes promoting understanding and awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria. The Council achieves this through establishing partnerships and consulting with key stakeholders, making submissions to reviews of legislation, investigations and inquiries that impact on Aboriginal cultural heritage and participating in external committees and reference groups. Council also increases the Victorian community's understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage and the activities of Council through engaging with the media, maintaining a social media presence and through promoting its documentary *Returning Our Ancestors*.

VAHC STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026

At their July 2021 meeting, Council approved their Strategic Plan 2021-2026. The contents of this document serves as a primary guiding principle for all work undertaken by Council in the five-year period. This year's Annual Report has again been structured in a way which mirrors the plan and outlines how Council is meeting its strategic objectives as outlined in the plan.



'WHEN I DO PAINTINGS, I DON'T EXPECT TO MAKE A STORY OUT OF IT BUT AS I GO ALONG THE STORY COMES INTO MY HEAD. I GREW UP IN GEELONG AND WARRAMBOOL AND SWAM EVERYDAY NEAR STINGRAY BAY TO PENGUIN ISLAND; IT'S DEEP, IT'S DANGEROUS; IT'S EXCITING. THE HANDPRINTS ARE THE MANY PEOPLE OVER THE YEARS REACHING INTO THE OCEANS AND TAKING WHAT THEY WANT. MY MOB ONLY TOOK WHAT THEY NEEDED, THE NEWCOMERS TOOK TOO MUCH AND DESTROYED OUR SEALIFE. THE SPLATTERS REPRESENT THE BLOOD THAT HAS BEEN SHED. THE WHITE ARE THE CONNECTIONS BACK TO WHERE THE TURTLES WERE BORN TO LAY THEIR EGGS. THEY GO BACK AND FORTH; THEY ALWAYS GO BACK.'

- JACKSON H

BENGERO BENGERO

SUPPORTED AND STRENGTHENED RAPs

A fundamental responsibility of Council is to determine applications to become a Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP). Appointing RAPs remains one of Council's highest priorities and is a responsibility that Council approaches very seriously. RAPs are the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria and have crucial statutory functions for the protection of the cultural heritage in their appointed areas.

Council also receives and determines requests to vary the boundaries of appointed RAPs.

At 30 June 2024, Council had appointed twelve RAPs (with one since deregistered) which collectively cover 75% of the state:

The 11 RAPs are:

.....
Barengi Gadjin Land Council
Aboriginal Corporation

.....
Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

.....
Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation

.....
Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation

.....
First People of the Millewa-Mallee
Aboriginal Corporation

.....
Gunaikurnai Land and Waters
Aboriginal Corporation

.....
Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners
Aboriginal Corporation

.....
Taungurung Land and Waters Council
Aboriginal Corporation

.....
Wadawurrung Traditional Owner (formerly
Wathaurung) Aboriginal Corporation

.....
Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage
Aboriginal Corporation

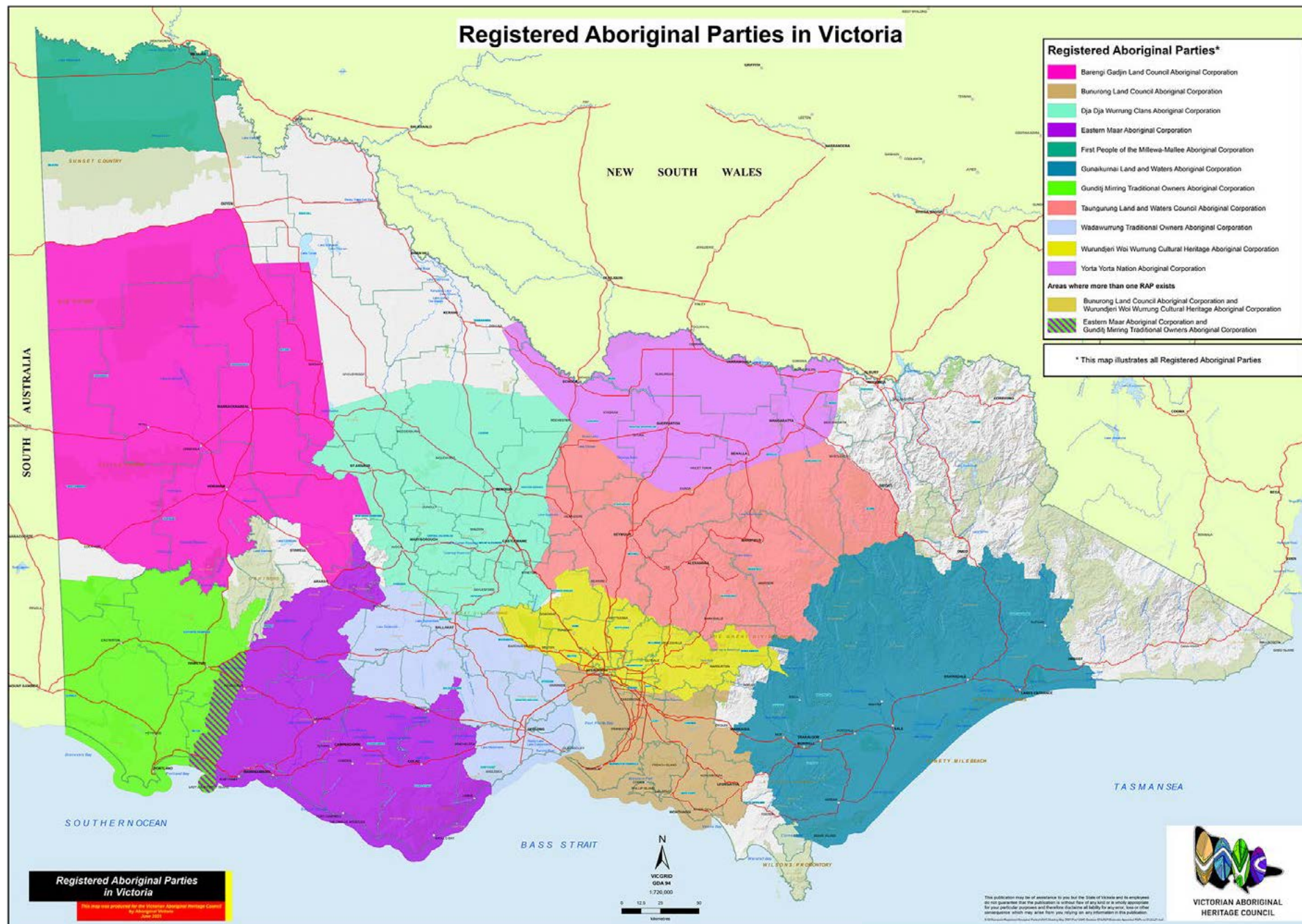
.....
Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation.
.....

NOTICES AND RAP APPLICATIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION

In this financial year, Council received two RAP applications and progressed its consideration of a further RAP application it received last financial year. During the period, Council did not make any determinations on the RAP applications before it. As of 30 June 2024, all applications were under ongoing consideration by Council.

The RAP applications before Council are:

- Barapa Country Aboriginal Corporation (received on 12 April 2024)
- Jaithmathang Traditional Ancestral Bloodline Original Owners First Nation Aboriginal Corporation (received on 10 August 2023)
- Wamba Wemba Aboriginal Corporation (received on 1 March 2023).



COUNCIL DECISIONS

Conditions on FPMMAC Registration

Along with determining RAP applications, Council has the statutory function of managing, overseeing, and supervising the operations of RAPs. This supervisory function operates to ensure that RAPs discharge their statutory functions and responsibilities relating to Aboriginal cultural heritage.

To enable Council to fulfill this function, the Act empowers Council to impose conditions on the registration of a RAP. In exercising this power, Council's primary consideration is upholding the Act's overarching purpose to empower Traditional Owners as protectors of their cultural heritage.

On 12 January 2024, Council imposed a condition on the RAP registration of the First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (FPMMAC). The condition required that FPMMAC amend its rule book to ensure that all Traditional Owners of the RAP area were eligible for membership, as was the case at the time that Council decided to appoint FPMMAC as a RAP.

CULTURAL HERITAGE PERMITS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT PLANS

The Act details the activities which require a Cultural Heritage Permit (CHP). Council is the Approval Body for a CHP when the applicant is either a RAP or the DPC Secretary.

The DPC Secretary must consult with Council when they are the approval body for a CHP in non-RAP areas, and the permit is to do any of the following with respect to Aboriginal Ancestral Remains:

- disturb or excavate land for the purpose of uncovering or discovering Aboriginal cultural heritage
- carry out research on an Aboriginal place or Aboriginal object, including the removal of an Aboriginal object from Victoria for the purposes of that research.

In this financial year, Council considered and determined five CHPs.

One permit was for a project to renew the existing sports pavilion at Lake Tyers that will also double as a safe place for the community to shelter before, during and after a bushfire event. This project was developed during intensive consultation with the local community in the aftermath of the 2019/2020 bushfires with an aim to provide security into the future, and healing from effects felt from the recent event.

Works under a cultural heritage permit were also approved by Council, for the renewal and upgrading of the existing Lake Tyers Sports Pavilion. This project was developed in consultation with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation. The upgrades will service the community for sports and recreational activities and will be a safe place to shelter in the case of bushfire events.

Three further permits related to the interment of Ancestral Remains Council that repatriated to RAPs.

A fifth permit involved the installation of signage at Ghow Swamp. Located 21 km south of Leitchville, this large, artificial-modified swampy wetland is a place of particular cultural importance for Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation and its community. Ghow Swamp is home to many registered Aboriginal places including scarred trees, artefact scatters and Ancestral Remains. The installation of signage at Ghow Swamp is intended to raise awareness amongst the broader Victorian community of the highly sensitive landscape. The signage seeks to inform visitors that certain activities are subject to controls and prohibitions under the ongoing protection declaration, made by the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples in September 2022.

Council is the Approval Body for Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPs) when the Sponsor is either a RAP or the DPC Secretary or in other circumstances. No Cultural Heritage Management Plans were approved or received for approval by Council in this financial year.

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HERITAGE REGISTER


The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register holds information about known Aboriginal cultural heritage places and objects within Victoria. Over 39,000 Aboriginal objects and places have been recorded on the Register, which is administered by First People – State Relations, DPC.

Access to the Register is restricted, and information can only be used for the purpose set out under the Act, for that person or body. Others may seek access from the relevant RAP, or Council, if there is no RAP for that area.

Council received one application for access to sensitive information held on the Register during this period. Council declined the application on the basis that the applicants did not demonstrate adequate engagement took place with the relevant Traditional Owners.



Scarred Tree



'AS A YOUNG FELLA INCARNATED, MY DREAM IS TO BE BACK WITH MY FAMILY AND KIDS AND TO TRY RECONNECT WITH MY MOTHER, BROTHER AND SISTER. SO THIS IS A PAINTING OF BRINGING MY FAMILY BACK TOGETHER AROUND A NICE FIRE AND HAVING A YARN ABOUT OUR FUTURE AND ALSO RECOGNISING OUR RECENT LOST LOVED ONES.'

— RANGA



WODUYULLUL

OUR PEOPLES' RESPONSIBILITIES TO OUR ANCESTORS

COUNCIL'S CARE OF ANCESTRAL REMAINS AND SECRET (OR SACRED) OBJECTS

Council is the responsible body for the management and return of Aboriginal Ancestral Remains in Victoria. The Act provides protection for Ancestral Remains, with the goal of their return to Traditional Owners.

All people, other than an Aboriginal person who is the rightful owner, must report a discovery of Aboriginal Ancestral Remains to Council. Council may receive reports of Ancestral Remains from a range of sources including members of the public, universities and museums, Victoria Police and the Coroner. Council must be satisfied the report relates to Aboriginal Ancestral Remains. Once this determination has been made by the Coroner, if Council is satisfied the report relates to Aboriginal Ancestral Remains and the Ancestral Remains are not part of an Aboriginal place, Council will instruct the informant of the obligations to transfer the Ancestral Remains into Council's legal care.

If Ancestral Remains are provenanced to within a RAP area, Council may seek to engage with the RAP to ascertain if they are willing to take possession of the Ancestral Remains. Council is supported by its operational arm, the Ancestral Remains Unit (ARU). The ARU reports to Council on all reports of Ancestral Remains made to Council and the progress of the management of Ancestral Remains in their care.

In this reporting period Council received 41 new reports of Ancestral Remains. Council has both legal duties and cultural obligations to ensure Ancestors in its care are kept safe, including in accordance with cultural protocols.

On behalf of Council, ARU staff coordinate return requests and liaise with Traditional Owners here in Victoria and interstate, providing culturally appropriate case management and care. Staff assist Traditional Owners by providing case reports and data, help with navigating land access, sourcing legal and regulatory approvals and giving culturally informed support.

VICTORIAN ANCESTRAL REMAINS REPATRIATIONS

This financial year, Council advised Traditional Owners of Council's readiness and willingness to transfer 184 Ancestral Remains into their care, whenever they are ready for the physical handover to take place.

RAPs hold legal custody of Ancestors transferred to them by Council, although some Ancestral Remains remain housed in culturally safe ways by Council. In these instances, RAP have requested that Council hold these Ancestral Remains until the RAPs are ready for their repatriation.

During the reporting period, Council progressed work for the physical repatriation of Ancestors to two RAPs, which are expected to occur during the next financial year.

INTERSTATE REPATRIATION OF ANCESTRAL REMAINS

Along with the repatriation of Ancestors to RAPs, Council advanced the repatriation of Ancestral Remains with provenance to Traditional Owners in other states and territories.

South Australian Museum

Throughout this financial year, the ARU met with South Australian Museum (SAM) to discuss options for the future of Ancestors in Council's care, of which there is evidence of linkages to South Australia, but with no further provenance. These conversations included exploring pathways for the repatriation of Ancestors with confirmed provenance to specific Traditional Owner groups in South Australia. Options for the future care of Ancestral Remains provenanced to South Australia, but with no further specific provenance were also explored.

Australian Museum

Council's staff met with the Australia Museum in Sydney to discuss options for the future of Ancestors in Council's care of which there is evidence of linkages to New South Wales, but with no further provenance.

Northern Territory

In 2022 Council and the University of Melbourne (University) signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which sought to identify areas of collaboration for the two organisations to work together for the transfer of Ancestral Remains and secret or sacred objects (SSO) into the care of Council, from the care of the University. The Ancestors and SSO were once part of the Donald Thomson Collection and were collected by Donald Thomson in the early 20th century during his time in the Cape York region and Arnhem Land.

In this reporting period Council transferred legal care and responsibility of 15 Ancestors to Traditional Owner groups from Eastern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory.

Office for the Arts

Council and its staff met with representatives of the federal Office for the Arts. The meetings explored options and related funding opportunities available to institutions and Traditional Owner groups, in other jurisdictions, to support activities related to the return of Ancestors in the care of Council provenanced to other jurisdictions and Traditional Owners in other states.

SECRET OR SACRED OBJECTS

Council continues to support the empowerment of Traditional Owners as the owners of their secret or sacred objects (SSO).

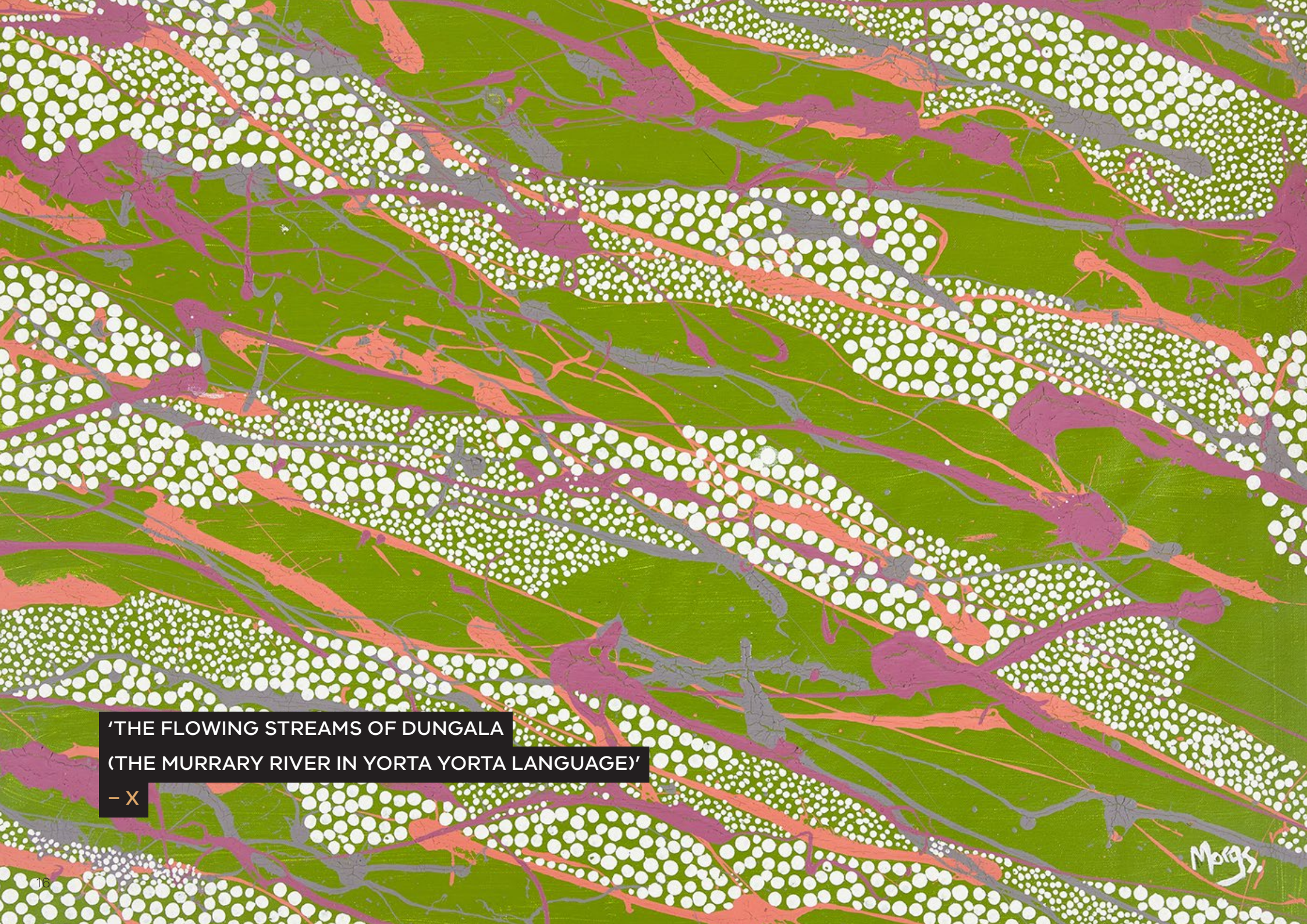
During the reporting period, Council has taken 11 SSO into its care and is working with Traditional Owners to further the repatriation of these objects. During the reporting period, Council has also transferred two SSO to a RAP.

Council has also progressed engagement with the Larrakia Traditional Owners regarding the ongoing care and future return of multiple women's objects in Council's care.

Council also advanced conversations with SAM regarding the return of SSO in Council's care provenanced to specific Traditional Owner groups in South Australia.

ANCESTRAL REMAINS REPATRIATION FUND

The Ancestral Remains Repatriation Fund provides up to \$30,000 (plus GST) to Registered Aboriginal Parties seeking the return of Ancestors currently in the care of the Council. The purpose of the Fund is to adequately resource Traditional Owners to participate in the repatriation process. This financial year Council approved two grants of \$30,000 each from the Fund. Funds will continue to be available to all eligible RAPs in 2024/25.



'THE FLOWING STREAMS OF DUNGALA
(THE MURRAY RIVER IN YORTA YORTA LANGUAGE)'

— X

Mprgs.

X (Yorta Yorta Peoples) Dungala Green, 2021, acrylic on canvas.

GANBO

OUR PEOPLES' MANAGING THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE FUND

Following amendments in 2016, the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Fund (Fund) was established under Part 10A of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (the Act). Any fees paid under the Act are paid into the Fund, as well as any other money borrowed or received by the Council (including funding from the Victorian Government).

This year, Council has worked hard to secure access to and control of the Fund, which is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding with the DPC Secretary.

On 5 June 2024, Chair Russell Mullett joined the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Natalie Hutchins to announce this important milestone. The ceremony was held at Lake Boort, an important cultural site for the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation.

Grants can be made out of the Fund for the purposes of protecting or managing cultural heritage, with \$5 million in the Fund at the end of 2023/24. Council has begun initial engagement with RAPs to identify funding priorities and will develop pathways for applications to access the Fund in 2024/25.



Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Fund announcement at Lake Boort featuring Russell Mullett Council Chair, Matt Lloyd Executive Director, Community Relationship and Heritage, DPC, Cassandra Lewis General Manager, Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DJAARA), The Hon. Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Natalie Hutchins, Andrew Travis DJAARA), Sharnie Hamilton (DJARRA).

REGISTERED ABORIGINAL PARTY FORUMS

RAP Forums are an annual gathering, hosted by different RAPs on Country. Representatives from each RAP and associated bodies gather to share knowledge of their expertise and experiences in carrying out their responsibilities in cultural heritage protection and management.

In September 2023, then Chair Denise Lovett attended that year's three-day RAP Forum in Mildura. Hosts, the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee, organised an interesting and informative agenda, including a day out on Country at Ned's Corner. Russell Mullett and Marie 'Sissy' Havea presented to RAP members and it was well received.

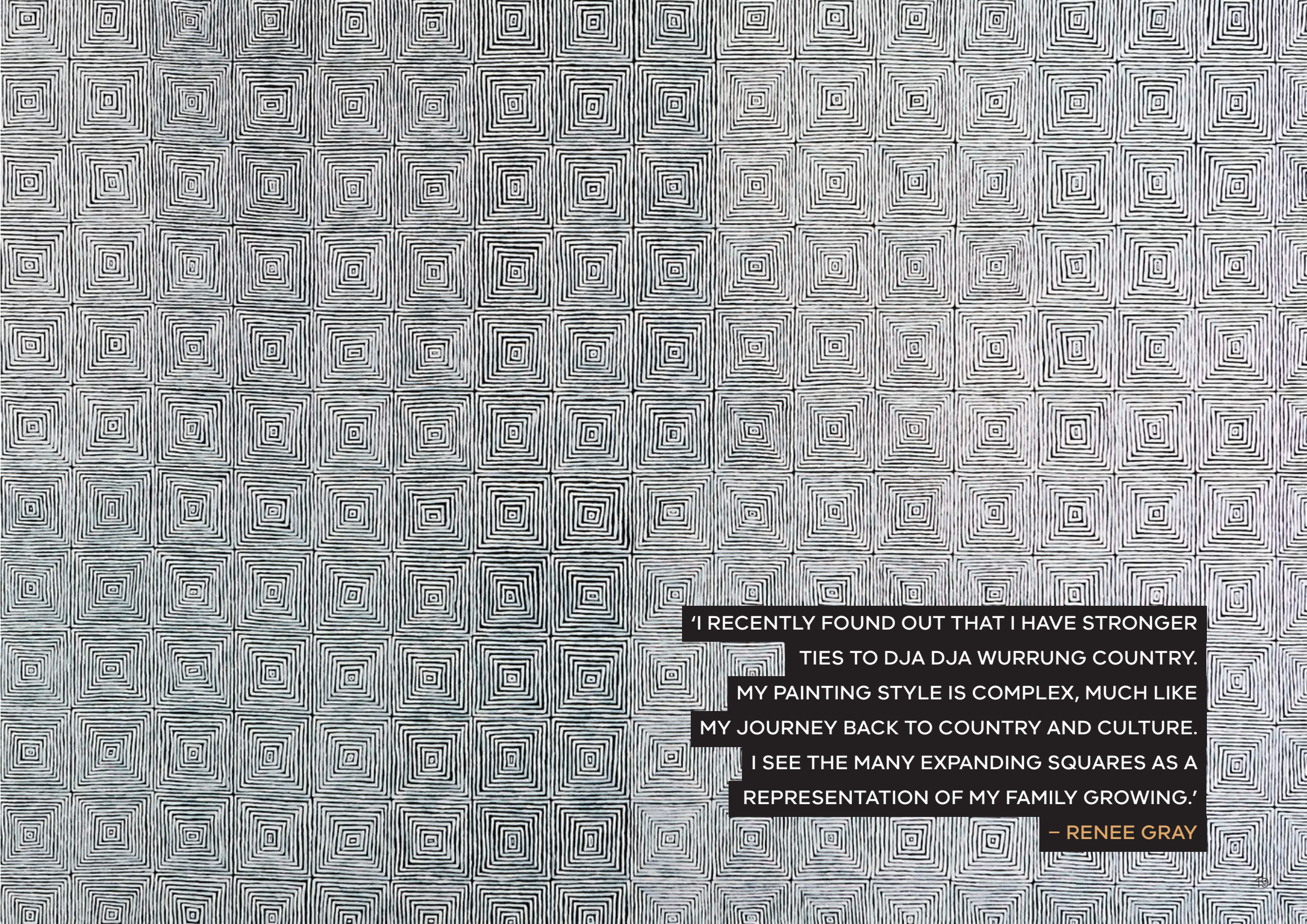
The 2024 RAP Forum was held over three days in March 2024 and hosted by Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation. Participants enjoyed visiting the DUMAWUL Hub exhibition space and did a tour through central Bendigo where Djaara artists Rebecca Phillips and Troy Firebrace showed off the city's Djaara-fied spaces. The forum included an introduction to the Strategic Aboriginal Heritage Assessments pilot project and discussion about cultural heritage in the media.

CERTIFICATE IV IN ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

The Certificate IV in Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management is a nationally accredited qualification open to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders. It provides training in the skills and knowledge required to work in the cultural heritage industry.

Members of Council participated in this year's workshops and presented on both the Act and Council's functions.

Council was also represented at the Certificate IV Graduate Ceremony, with then Chair Denise Lovett delivering the occasional address.



'I RECENTLY FOUND OUT THAT I HAVE STRONGER
TIES TO DJA DJA WURRUNG COUNTRY.
MY PAINTING STYLE IS COMPLEX, MUCH LIKE
MY JOURNEY BACK TO COUNTRY AND CULTURE.
I SEE THE MANY EXPANDING SQUARES AS A
REPRESENTATION OF MY FAMILY GROWING.'

— RENEE GRAY

BEN-GE-RO-GAN-MIL

COUNCIL'S INDEPENDENT AND AUTHORITATIVE VOICE

COUNCIL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT

Council has a statutory function to advise the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples on cultural heritage matters. Council members are also leaders in their communities with responsibilities to Culture, community wellbeing and advancing the perspectives of Traditional Owners. Council has a dual role of community responsibility to advocate for protection of cultural heritage as well as a statutory one.

In October 2023, the Ministerial portfolio for Treaty and First Peoples transferred from the Hon. Gabrielle Williams to the Hon. Natalie Hutchins.

Council has met with the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, the Hon. Natalie Hutchins, twice during the reporting period. In its advisory capacity, Council helps ensure the Victorian Government upholds its commitment to self-determination by amplifying the voices of Victorian Traditional Owners. These meetings play a key role in Council's broader advocacy for cultural heritage protection and recognition of the complex responsibilities held by Traditional Owners in Victoria. Additionally, Council engages with the Government through Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries, and other ministerial portfolios, fulfilling an educative and activist role across various government sectors.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

This year, Council has focused on the impact of emergency management preparedness and response measures on Aboriginal cultural heritage as a central issue for RAPs and Victorian Traditional Owners. There is significant impact of emergency management on cultural heritage during and after emergencies. In some regions emergency services personnel collaborate with Traditional Owners and other regions lack well-established relationships. Council believes there is a need to address this discrepancy and for emergency services to foster stronger ties with RAPs and Aboriginal communities across the State. Proactive planning and action with RAPs and Aboriginal groups is important and Traditional Owners' involvement in a number of incidents have improved emergency management outcomes.

Council wrote to the then Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp, who was invited to attend Council's August 2023 meeting. At that meeting, Council raised concerns that:

- exemptions under the Act permitting harm to Aboriginal cultural heritage where necessary in an emergency (section 29(c) of the Act) were being applied too broadly.
- engagement with RAPs was limited, especially on flood preparedness works, risking unnecessary impact on Ancestral burial sites.

Council called for RAPs to be embedded into Incident Control Centres. The then Emergency Management Commissioner acknowledged that work with Traditional Owner groups was relatively ad-hoc and that there is an opportunity to develop a new model that can be adapted and upscaled.

Council also wrote to the Murray Valley Floodplains Restoration Project (MVRP) in 2023. In the correspondence, Council noted its concerns about the impact of levee construction. MVRP responded, noting the project had been put on hold until further notice.

Appointment of Authorised and Aboriginal Heritage Officers

Council has a responsibility to advise the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples on the training and appointment of Authorised Officers and Aboriginal Heritage Officers. The Officers enforce the Act and have responsibility for Cultural Heritage Audits and assess compliance with Cultural Heritage Management Plans and Cultural Heritage Permits. During this reporting period, this function was delegated to First Peoples – State Relations in DPC.

Council was pleased to advise on the appointment of nine Aboriginal Heritage Officers and ten Authorised Officers, and the reappointment of five Authorised Officers.

Minister's Guidelines for Heritage Advisor Qualifications and Experience

The revised Minister's Guidelines for Heritage Advisor Qualifications and Experience were published on 22 March 2024. The Guidelines specify the appropriate qualifications and experience, or the extensive experience or knowledge, of Heritage Advisors. Council provided advice on the development of the Guidelines, as required by section 189 of the Act. The revised guidelines now require applicants in the first recognition pathway to provide evidence of their relevant qualifications and demonstrate they have at minimum, one year of full-time practical experience, or equivalent, in an Aboriginal cultural heritage management setting in south-eastern Australia.

The secondary pathway for those seeking to be recognised as a suitably qualified Heritage Advisor was also updated. Applicants must now not only demonstrate extensive cultural knowledge gained through cultural transmission, as well as life experience as a member of a Traditional Owner community, or through extended association with a Traditional Owner community, but must also demonstrate suitable practical experience in Aboriginal cultural heritage management undertaken within a RAP or similar Aboriginal organisation.



Chairperson Russell Mullett and the Hon Natalie Hutchins Minister For Treaty and First Peoples.

RAP FEES AND CONDUCT GUIDELINES

These Guidelines aim to assist project sponsors to better understand the fees associated with the participation of RAPs in the cultural heritage assessment process and the standard of conduct expected of RAPs as professional organisations. The guidelines have remained largely unchanged since publication in 2008. A renewed version incorporating minor amendments was published by First People State Relations in December 2023.

In this period, FPSR has sought to partner with Council to undertake a collaborative and more comprehensive review of the updated Guidelines, and develop underlying policies and procedures related to non-prescribed RAP fees and conduct. FPSR identified that a review presents an opportunity to further progress recommendations from the 2012 *Parliamentary Inquiry into the Establishment and Effectiveness of RAPs*. It is expected that work on this review will commence in the next financial year.



SHANE LEVETZ

PENDURONG

COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

PUBLIC AWARENESS

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 strategically engages with communities, organisations, and partner organisations to build mutual respect in the broader community, in partnership with RAPs and other Traditional Owners. Council also liaises with media organisations and maintains a public presence through its social media accounts and providing updates on its website.

WORKING COLLECTIVELY

Council contributes extensively to promoting a deeper understanding of cultural heritage through broad engagement with strategic legislative and operational reviews.

Council Advisory Committees

- Ancestral Remains Advisory Committee
- Cultural Heritage Management Plans and Permits Advisory Committee
- Secret or Sacred Objects Advisory Committee
- Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register Advisory Committee

Reference/Steering Groups and Committees

- Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand (and Indigenous Chairs Committee Meeting)
- University of Melbourne Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Oversight Committee

HERITAGE CHAIRS AND OFFICIALS OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

The Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand (HCOANZ) group was established in 1996. It considers issues of Australian and New Zealand significance relating to the identification, conservation, management and promotion of heritage. Membership of HCOANZ is comprised of the Chair of each heritage council (both Indigenous and historic) and their respective senior representatives from heritage agencies across all represented Australian states and New Zealand.

On 31 August to 01 September 2023, then Chair Denise Lovett attended the meeting of the HCOANZ. Matters addressed included embedding the principles of *Dhawura Ngilan: A vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage in Australia and the Best Practice Standards in Indigenous cultural heritage management and legislation* into the laws and policies of individual jurisdictions. The Chair presented on the repatriation of Ancestral Remains.

FIRST PEOPLES ASSEMBLY OF VICTORIA

The First Peoples Assembly of Victoria is the representative body to negotiate Treaty on behalf of Traditional Owners in Victoria. Council met with representatives from the Assembly in December 2023 to discuss the Treaty negotiation process, Traditional Owner representation and intersections with heritage matters.

YOORROOK JUSTICE COMMISSION

The Yoorrook Justice Commission was established as a formal truth-telling process into historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria. Yoorrook was set up by agreement between the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the Victorian Government. Council has participated in the Commission's inquiries by supplying responses to its requests for information concern heritage matter, as part of its investigation into Victoria's First Peoples care of and cultural connections to land, sky and waters.

RETURNING OUR ANCESTORS SCREENING

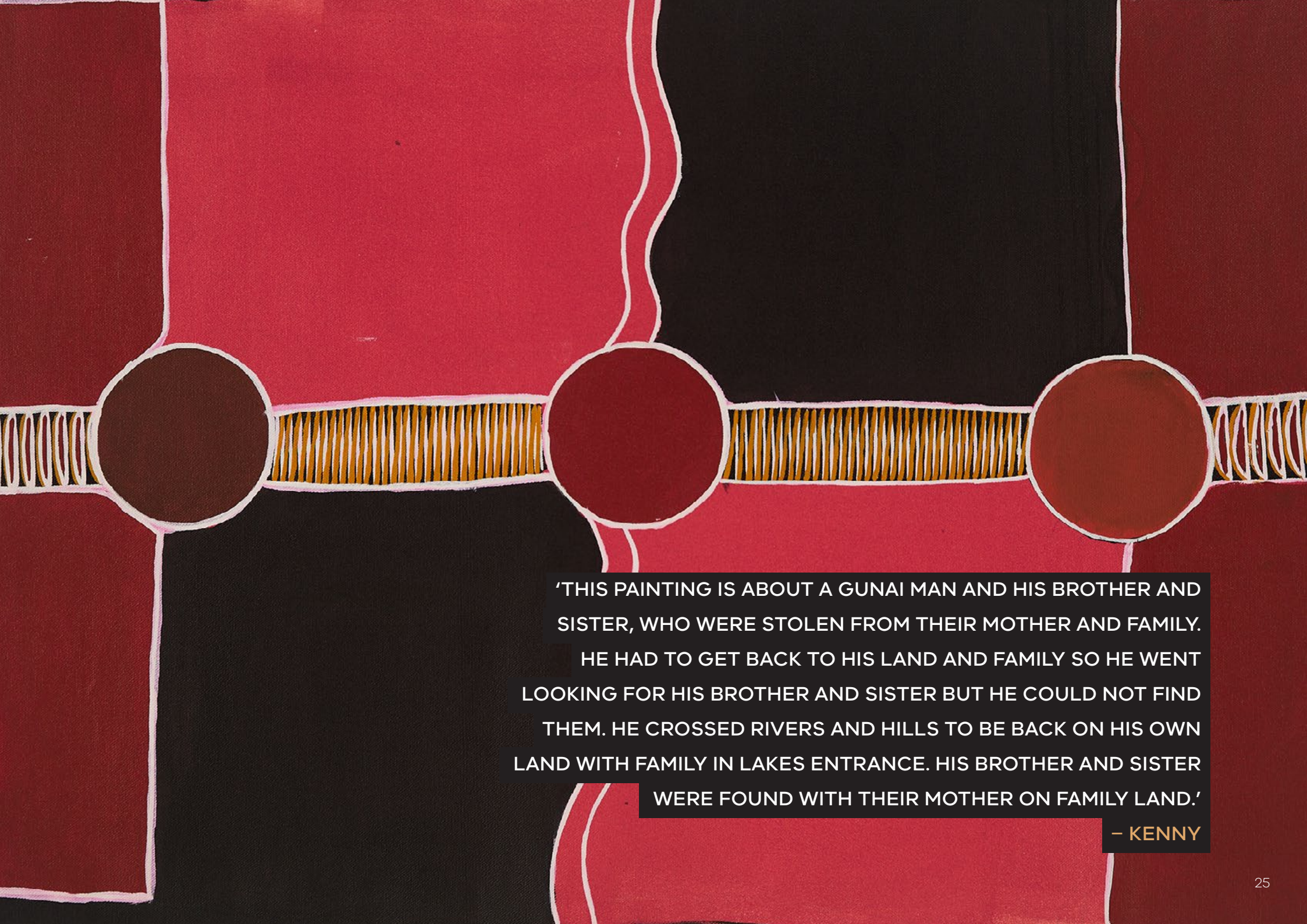
As part of Reconciliation Week in May 2024, Council partnered with Moonee Valley City Council and Reconciliation Victoria to screen Council's documentary "Returning Our Ancestors" at the Clocktower Centre in Moonee Ponds.

The documentary charts the profound impacts of stolen Ancestral Remains on future generations of Aboriginal communities, and the ongoing efforts to bring them home to Country.

Following the screening, a thought-provoking panel discussion was held featuring Brent Ryan from the Yoorrook Justice Commission and Council member Melinda Kennedy.



Council member, Melinda Kennedy at Reconciliation Week



'THIS PAINTING IS ABOUT A GUNAI MAN AND HIS BROTHER AND SISTER, WHO WERE STOLEN FROM THEIR MOTHER AND FAMILY.

HE HAD TO GET BACK TO HIS LAND AND FAMILY SO HE WENT LOOKING FOR HIS BROTHER AND SISTER BUT HE COULD NOT FIND THEM. HE CROSSED RIVERS AND HILLS TO BE BACK ON HIS OWN LAND WITH FAMILY IN LAKES ENTRANCE. HIS BROTHER AND SISTER WERE FOUND WITH THEIR MOTHER ON FAMILY LAND.'

– KENNY

VICTORIA'S REGISTERED ABORIGINAL PARTIES (RAPs)

Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

38 Plumpton Road, Horsham Vic 3400
PO BOX 1255, Horsham VIC 3402
(03) 5381 0977
admin@bglc.com.au
www.bglc.com.au



The Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Peoples of the Wotjobaluk Nations (known collectively as the Wotjobaluk Peoples) are represented by the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BGLC). BGLC is the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (the Act), appointed for Wotjobaluk Country. Recognised for an area of 37,126km² in the north west of the state, the Corporation covers 15.64% of Victoria. The Wotjobaluk Peoples are also recognised as the Traditional Owners of Wotjobaluk Country under the *Native Title Act 1993* and the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act*.

BGLC works across a huge number of important projects on behalf of Wotjobaluk Peoples, including significant cultural heritage protection efforts at the Dyurrite Cultural Landscape, biodiversity conservation, fire management and economic development.

BGLC is pleased to report that after decades of advocacy, Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Ancestral Remains were returned from the Council to their rightful resting place on Country. Council and BGLC were supported by Museums Victoria, First Peoples - Research and Collections Department and Council.



Little Desert National Park

Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

336-340 Nepean Hwy, Frankston VIC 3199
PO BOX 11219, Frankston VIC 3199
(03) 9770 1273
admin@bunuronglc.org.au
www.bunuronglc.org



The Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC) is the Registered Aboriginal Party for the Mornington Peninsula, Westernport and part of South-West Gippsland. Recognised as the RAP for an area of 5,439km², the Corporation covers 2.29% of Victoria.

BLCAC continues its vital work in protecting and enriching Bunurong Country and culture. This year, BLCAC co-presented the Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy session at the AIATSIS Summit, showcasing the importance of Traditional Owner-led land management. The Balirt Biik Kuunh Team, also led an ecological burning program at Bunyip, a key initiative in post-bushfire restoration, demonstrating BLCAC's commitment to caring for Country.

BLCAC continues to be one of the busiest RAPs in Victoria and we reaffirm our work of protecting Bunurong cultural heritage despite the pressures of development on Country.

This year, BLCAC welcomed Jody Irwin as new CEO in a special ceremony led by Bunurong Elder Uncle Shane, ushering in a new chapter of leadership. The corporation's engagement in major cultural events, including the MotoGP at Phillip Island and contribution to the Yoorook Justice Commission Roundtable, further solidified its role as cultural custodians and advocates for truth-telling. Through these collective efforts, BLCAC remains steadfast in its mission to protect Bunurong heritage and empower future generations.



Two Bays Walking Track, Mornington Peninsula

Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation

43 Hattam Street, Golden Square VIC 3555

(03) 5444 2888

info@djadjawurrung.com.au

www.djadjawurrung.com.au



DJAARA, the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, is the representative body for Dja Dja Wurrung People (Djaara), the Traditional Owners of Djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country), in Central Victoria. Djaara are the recognised RAP for an area of 17,369km² in the north and centre of the state, comprising 7.32% of Victoria.

November 2023 marked the 10th anniversary of DJAARA's Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA) with the State of Victoria; a significant milestone that highlights the organisation's growth into a mature and sustainable corporate entity.

DJAARA continues to lead efforts in cultural heritage protection and sustainability, including hosting the RAP Forum in March 2024. This gathering brought together representatives to exchange knowledge and strengthen legislative functions for safeguarding Victoria's Aboriginal cultural heritage. Key projects include the Strategic Aboriginal Heritage Assessment, which will map significant cultural landscapes to inform planning and prevent development on sites of high cultural importance, and a study assessing flood damage to cultural places to develop protective measures for the future.

DJAARA remains dedicated to protecting and promoting Djaara heritage, ensuring it remains central to decision-making and future generations' connection to Country.

Natural Resources Management Enterprise DJANDAK launched the Djaara Gatjin (Water) Strategy in November 2023, while in May 2024, DJAARA released its Djandak Wi (Country fire) Strategy, reinforcing traditional fire management as a key part of Caring for Country. Another historic achievement in May 2024 was the signing of a first-of-its-kind agreement with Canadian mining company Agnico Eagle, operator of the Fosterville Gold Mine.



Caption

Sailor Falls, Hepburn Regional Park

Dja Dja Wurrung social enterprise DUMAWUL opened the DUMAWUL Cultural Tourism and Creative Arts Hub in Bendigo in February 2024, showcasing Djaara Culture and creativity. Meanwhile, at agricultural enterprise DJAKITJ, construction of the Southern Hemisphere's largest yabby farm is well underway. DJAKITJ will create training and education pathways for Djaara, and economic opportunities centred on cultural practice, land management and self-determination.

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation

PO BOX 546 Warrnambool Victoria 3280
0427 271 937
admin@easternmaar.com.au
www.easternmaar.com.au



The Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC) is the representative body managing the native title rights of the Eastern Maar Peoples. As the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for Eastern Maar Country, EMAC is responsible for the protection and management of cultural heritage, land, and natural resources across its jurisdiction.

Eastern Maar Peoples identify as being from the eastern domain of the Maar-speaking nations, including Gunditjmara, Tjap Wurrung, Peek Whurrung, Keeray Wooroong (Kirrae Whurrung), Kuurn Kopan Noot, Yarro Waetch (Tooram Tribe), Djargurd Wurrung, Gulidjan, and Gadubanud. EMAC's RAP area covers 17,880 km², representing approximately 7.53% of the land area of Victoria.

Since 2011, EMAC has managed native title rights over an area shared with Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation. In 2023 and 2024, further Native Title Determinations significantly expanded EMAC's jurisdiction, reinforcing the Eastern Maar connection to Country through legal recognition, environmental initiatives, and cultural values protection.

EMAC is committed to preserving both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Recent initiatives include the On Country Guardians program, which provides employment and training opportunities in cultural heritage management and natural resource conservation. Additionally, EMAC has developed cultural awareness training programs for partners across multiple industries, including heritage advisors and project sponsors, ensuring that those working on Country do so with deep respect and understanding.

A key focus of EMAC's work is the repatriation of cultural materials, ensuring that what belongs on Country is returned to Country, strengthening the connection between the community and its heritage.



Kennett River

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation cont'd

Eastern Maar's Healthy Country - Parreeyt team plays a vital role in advocating for community interests in water management policies. Through active engagement in policy discussions, events, and strategic partnerships, they are advancing the principles of Eastern Maar's Parreeyt Nation Statement. EMAC is also reinstating cultural fire practices, developing pre- and post-burn flora monitoring protocols to support Country's rehabilitation. These efforts contribute to biodiversity restoration by promoting native vegetation recovery and reducing invasive species and excess biomass.

As EMAC continues to grow, the corporation remains dedicated to the economic and cultural empowerment of the Eastern Maar community, ensuring the ongoing protection and sustainability of Country for future generations.

"We're carefully building on the foundations laid by our forebears, ensuring that future generations of Eastern Maar people inherit both the legacy and recognition they deserve. Each effort we make today strengthens their ability to protect and advance our culture and Country with pride."

- Marcus Clarke, CEO.



Port Fairy

First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation

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PO BOX 10382, Mildura, Victoria 3500
Ph: (03) 4014 9780
contactus@fpmmac.com.au
www.fpmmac.com.au



The First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation FPMMAC represents the Latji Latji, Ngintait, Nyeri Nyeri and Wergaia Traditional Owners of the Millewa Mallee lands in the far north-west of Victoria. Council's Office has drafted the following from publicly available information. As a Traditional Owner Corporation, FMMAC seek to represent the interests and well-being of our members and community. FMMAC are in the process of seeking a Native Title determination and Traditional Owner Settlement Act settlement.

Recognised as the RAP for an area of 7,870km², the corporation covers 3.31% of Victoria. In its role as a RAP, the FPMMAC are responsible for areas in the north west of Victoria that run south of the Murray River to the Mallee Highway, and west from the Calder Highway to the South Australian border, including the Murray-Sunset National Park.

FPMMAC are people of the river and the scrub and desert in an area known today as the north-west of Victoria, descended from families whose Ancestors are part of this Country. This year, FPMMAC has continued to facilitate cultural strengthening for our peoples and caring for country. This includes developing employment and economic opportunity on Country, supporting cultural activities, advancing traditional languages knowledge and use, land revitalisation and expanding our Aboriginal community.

This statement has been drafted by Council's Office, based on publicly available information.



Caption
Red Cliffs near Mildura

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

27 Scriveners Road (Forestec) Kalimna West VIC 3909
(03) 5152 5100
reception@glawac.com.au
www.gunaikurnai.org



GLaWAC represents the Traditional Owners of Gippsland, the five clans of Gunaikurnai - Brabalung, Brabraulung, Brayakaulung, Krauatungalung and Tatungalung. We are recognised as the Traditional Owners over approx. 1.33 million hectares including 200m of offshore territory (an area of 25,770km²). Our Country spans from Warragul in the west to the Snowy River in the east, and from the Great Divide in the north to the coast in the south, 10.85% of Victoria.

Through GLaWAC's MOU with the Monash University Indigenous Studies Centre, the corporation is blending traditional knowledge with western science to uncover the ways of the Old Ancestors. At Cloggs Cave near Buchan, we've revealed a 12,000-year-old ritual practiced continuously for 500 generations. Nearby, an extraordinary site of Gunaikurnai rock art highlights the importance of Traditional Owner-led research and reminds us of the creativity, spirituality, and resilience running through our veins.

Along the coast, the corporation is progressing a Sea Country Indigenous Protection Area (IPA) through our Katungal program. Together with the Gunaikurnai Marine and Coastal Cultural Landscape Framework, this work reconnects community with Country. Using innovative tools to monitor and map the places holding our Ancestors' stories, GLaWAC can make informed decisions to protect these cultural treasures.

The development of a Cultural Landscape Strategy and Towera (fire) Strategy support our aspirations to heal Country by weaving together our songlines, Elders' stories, and scientific insights like pollen analysis and historical vegetation studies. We're proud to support our Towera crew self-determining their reconnection to these cultural practices and traditions as they read and heal the land.

As the shift to renewable energy gathers pace, Country remains central to this transition. GLaWAC plays a critical role in safeguarding and healing Country while ensuring that economic, business, employment, and lifestyle opportunities benefit our mob. In this complex space, we are working with government, partners, and industry to shape outcomes that deliver the greatest impact for our community.

"This is about more than just research – it's about strengthening our skills, deepening our knowledge, and ensuring that Gunaikurnai voices lead the way in caring for Country in new and innovative ways."

- Uncle Russell Mullett, GLaWAC RAP Manager

Vimeo videos



Link: <https://vimeo.com/970459992?share=copy>



Link: <https://vimeo.com/969581053?share=copy>

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation

4/48 Edgar Street, Heywood VIC 3304
(03) 5527 1427
reception@gunditjmirring.com
www.gunditjmirring.com



The corporation represents the Gunditjmara people of south western Victoria and holds culturally significant properties across Gunditjmara Country on behalf of the Gunditjmara community. It promotes and realises the continuing connection to Country by Gunditjmara people through its caring for Country programs and projects across its properties and all of Gunditjmara Country. Recognised as the RAP for an area of 13,924km², the corporation covers 5.86% of Victoria.

The Gunditjmara established the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC) in 2005 to continue our connection to Gunditjmara Country and to progress our rights and interests in our cultural identity, social justice, native title, cultural heritage and land justice for our Gunditjmara Country. The 2023/24 financial year has been exciting with newly developed strategies, research, and ongoing caring for and management of Country. Some highlights include:

- The Deen Maar (Lady Julia Percy Island) Rabbit Eradication Project was initiated in January 2022, as a collaboration between GMTOAC, Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Change and Parks Victoria. Phase 3 - Eradication and Monitoring and Phase 4 - Monitoring of this project were completed in the period between July 2023 and January 2024. Due to the joint nature of this project, it was a resounding success resulting in the eradication of rabbits and the quick return of native flora and fauna to Deen Maar.



Deen Marr

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation cont'd

- In May 2024, GMTOAC formally commenced a 7-year research project joining the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Indigenous and Environmental Histories and Futures, partnering with Monash University. This project will focus on the last 1000 years and look forward to the next 100 years with the aim to develop new integrated approaches to caring for Gunditjmara Nyamat Mirring (Sea Country). Further, GMTOAC launched the “Gunditjmara Nyamat Mirring Plan (2023–2033)” a strategic policy for the care of Sea Country focusing on Gunditjmara cultural values and management principles.
- GMTOAC commenced development of a “Gunditjmara Consultation and Negotiation Protocol” to provide guidance and clarity to the large number of prospective proponents wanting to engage with Gunditjmara, about how to enter discussion with GMTOAC and them, setting out expectations of how to expect consultation or negotiation to occur; to be launched in late 2024.

Water, Weeyn Yarkeen (Fire Dreaming), Invasive Species, Budj Bim World Heritage, Budj Bim Indigenous Protected Area management, Environmental Protection on Country, Strategic Aboriginal Heritage Assessments, Gariwerd (Grampians), cultural heritage protection, native title and community engagement all continue to be a central focus of the program of works GMTOAC undertakes to care and manage Country with Gunditjmara.



Deen Marr



Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation

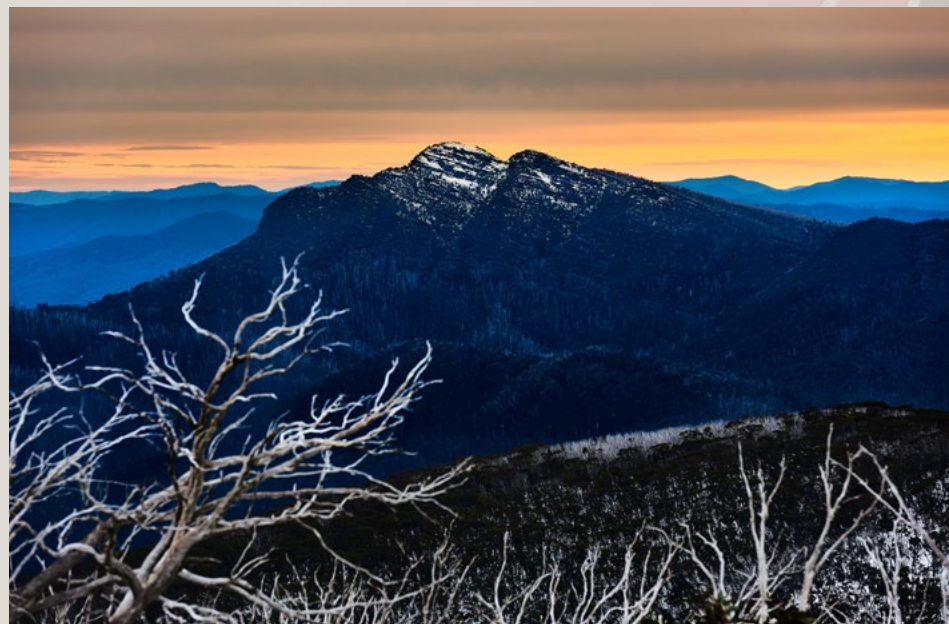
37 High Street, Broadford VIC 3658
(03) 5784 1433
enquiries@taungurung.com.au
www.taungurung.com.au



The Corporation represents the interests of the clans of the Taungurung — Benbendore-balluk, Buthera-balluk, Gunung-Yellam, Leuk-willam, Moomoomgoonbeet, Nattarak-balluk, Ngurai-illam-balluk, Nira-balluk, Tenbringnellams, Walledriggers, Waring-illam-balluk, Warrinillum, Yaran-illam, Yirun-ilam-balluk, and Yowung-illam-balluk. Recognised as the RAP for an area of 20,215km², the corporation covers 8.51% of Victoria.

Over the past year, the Taungurung Land and Waters Council (TLaWC) has made significant strides in protecting and revitalising Taungurung cultural heritage. The revitalisation of the Taungurung language remains a priority, with the release of Dhumbak Taungurung, a resource supporting language learning across communities. TLaWC also played a key role in advocating for the protection of significant waterways, successfully challenging an attempt to divert the culturally important Rubicon River. The Corop Wetlands Biocultural Waterscape program also gained momentum, fostering strong partnerships to restore and sustain vital ecosystems through culturally informed governance.

TLaWC's Cultural Land Management and Cultural Fire programs have strengthened the protection and management of Taungurung heritage across forested landscapes, waterways, and private land. The Taungurung Cultural Forests Program has advanced knowledge-sharing and policy development, including the groundbreaking Rapid Biocultural Assessment of the Central Highlands. The Cultural Fire Program introduced a Traditional Owner-led burn strategy, with training and on-ground assessments supporting the responsible application of fire to maintain healthy Country. The organisation also deepened its research and engagement through partnerships, including a seven-year collaboration with the the University of Melbourne on a Taungurung Biocultural Research Paradigm.

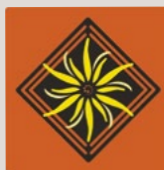


Mount Buller (credit: Andrew Railton)

During 2023/24, as well as Cultural Heritage Management Plan field assessments and archaeological salvage, TLaWC's RAP team embarked with DEECA on a range of important projects on Taungurung Country. This includes a one-year DEECA-funded project to survey and assess Box Ironbark Country in the Corop area, Strategic Fuel Breaks and joint survey work at Mt Buffalo. Through these initiatives, TLaWC continues to uphold its responsibility to care for Country and preserve cultural knowledge for future generations.

Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation

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(03) 4318 633386 Mercer St, Geelong VIC 3320
reception@wadawurrung.org.au
www.wadawurrung.org.au



The Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) represents the Wadawurrung People in their continued rights of recognition as Traditional Owners. WTOAC is the recognised RAP for an area of 10,615km², and the Corporation covers 4.47% of Victoria. Council's Office has drafted the following from publicly available information.

The past year has been a time of remarkable progress for the corporation. The Gobata Dja (Caring for Country) team successfully led numerous projects, including cultural burns, revegetation, and waterway conservation, including the significant milestone of the return of water to Country for self-determined use.

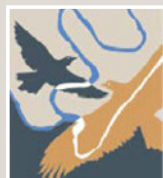
Cultural heritage protection and revitalisation have remained central to WTOAC's work. Cultural Values Assessments (CVAs) have played a crucial role in recording intangible cultural heritage. These assessments provide Traditional Owners with opportunities to document cultural knowledge, and ensure Wadawurrung voices are embedded in future land use decisions. The Ngarra Cultural Strengthening Team has also made significant strides in cultural education and language revival. By offering cultural education programs, supporting the naming of places in Wadawurrung language, and expanding language teaching in schools, WTOAC continues to strengthen Wadawurrung identity and ensure the protection of cultural knowledge for future generations.



You Yangs Regional Park

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation

675 Victoria Street, Abbotsford VIC, 3067
(03) 9416 2905
reception@wurundjeri.com.au
www.wurundjeri.com.au



The Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) is a Registered Aboriginal Party appointed under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (the Act) that holds statutory responsibilities for the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage places and objects; other functions of the corporation include water governance, the provision cross cultural training and events, cultural heritage and land management services. Recognised as the RAP for an area of 6,107km², the Corporation covers 2.57% of Victoria.

In 2024, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) completed a Strategic Aboriginal Heritage Assessment (SAHA) for their RAP area as part of a DPC-funded pilot program. The aim of the SAHA is to undertake landscape-scale strategic heritage assessments, or 'Country Mapping,' to identify and better represent all types of Aboriginal heritage values, both tangible and intangible, and the aspirations and priorities of the Traditional Custodians for their protection at the strategic planning stage. The results of the SAHA pilot programs will also inform changes to cultural heritage policy and legislation.

WWCHAC Elders Ron Jones, Allan Wandin and Bobby Mullins requested that the Cultural Heritage Unit and Research Unit at WWCHAC prepare a SAHA that investigates the cultural values of stony rise landforms and unnamed waterways – landforms not currently considered to be areas of cultural heritage sensitivity under the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018 (Vic.) – and the importance of a holistic approach to Aboriginal cultural heritage management that considers cultural values more holistically including flora and fauna, landforms and landscapes, stories and associations, in addition to physical artefacts and archaeological features.



Yarra River, Warrandyte.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation cont'd

In order to address these questions, the Research Unit conducted historical research into Wurundjeri naming and use of smaller watercourses; a review of previous Wurundjeri-led Cultural Values Studies and Cultural Values Assessments; and On Country visits and knowledge recording with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders and representatives to understand and document some of the intangible cultural values of selected areas of Country, including traditional geographic ideas and knowledge, place names, and ecological knowledge.

The Cultural Heritage Unit worked in partnership with the University of Melbourne (Department of Infrastructure Engineering) to map and create spatial datasets for stony rises and streams (including unnamed waterways); to identify areas highly likely to contain tangible activity traces of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people through the use of species distribution modelling; and to investigate bias in the areas of cultural heritage sensitivity that are currently defined in the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018 (Vic) and mapped on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System (ACHRIS).

The tangible activity traces and intangible cultural values documented in the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung SAHA reveal a cultural landscape physically and conceptually shaped by the occupation, land management, social structures and belief systems of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. They are associated with key landforms, including stony rises and all waterways, but also attributes of the broader landscape, including totemic animal species, ecological niches and habitats, forests, and mountain ranges, as well as continuing cultural practices, such as place naming.



Stream near Warburton

Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation

2-8 Schier Street, Barmah VIC 3639

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The Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation (YYNAC) represents peoples with undeniable bloodlines to the Original Ancestors of the Land of the Yorta Yorta Nation. These bloodlines link Yorta Yorta peoples' past, present and future to one another, with traditional laws, customs, beliefs and sovereignty intact. Recognised as the RAP for an area of 13,199km², the corporation covers 5.56% of Victoria. Council's Office has drafted the following from publicly available information.

YYNAC has continued uphold its responsibilities as a Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) and has demonstrated a year of strength and growth. A major highlight of the year has been the commencement of the redevelopment of the Dharnya Centre, which will serve as a cultural hub for Yorta Yorta people, fostering intergenerational knowledge-sharing and cultural education.

The Whole of Country Team has also made great strides in strategic planning, focusing on climate change, water policy, cultural fire, and biodiversity projects. Woka Walla, YYNAC's Natural Resource Management program, continues to strengthen economic and employment opportunities for Yorta Yorta people, securing partnerships with government bodies to drive land and water conservation efforts.

Cultural heritage remains a core priority, with extensive Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPs) undertaken for key infrastructure projects, including solar farms, highway safety upgrades, and railway developments. The inclusion of Ghow Swamp on the National Heritage List marks a significant achievement, recognising its immense cultural importance. YYNAC is proud of this year's achievements in cultural heritage protection and caring for Country and looks forward to the year ahead.



Kow Swamp

www.aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au

VICTORIAN
ABORIGINAL
HERITAGE
COUNCIL

