



# GROWING WHAT IS GOOD COUNTRY PLAN

VOICES OF THE WOTJOBALUK NATIONS

WOTJOBALUK, JAADWA, JADAWADJALI, WERGAIA AND JUPAGULK PEOPLES



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Wotjobaluk Peoples have come together at family meetings and then in regional forums, to talk about what we want for Community and Country. Good things are already developing and there are many ideas for growing and extending what is occurring that supports the theme of this Country Plan - 'Growing what is good'. Thanks to all Wotjobaluk Peoples who have shared their ideas and contributed photos, artwork and stories that bring this plan to life.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People are advised that this Plan contains culturally sensitive material, including images and names of people who have since died.

Wherever possible, words in Traditional Language have been used in this Plan.

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# THE BOARD



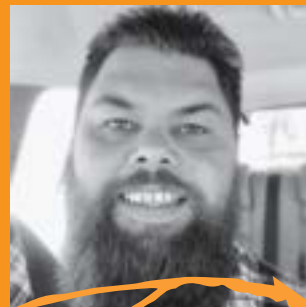
Allan (Kat) McDonald



Janine Coombs



La Vergne Lehman



Brett Harrison



Jennifer Beer



Dylan Clarke

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

**It is with the highest honour that I would like to respectfully acknowledge all Wotjobaluk Traditional Owners, past, present and future, as we continue to walk in the footprints of our ancestors.**

Our identity and culture are intrinsic to who we are as Wotjobaluk Peoples. It is important that we cherish and nurture all aspects of our lands, water and heritage in order to preserve the strength and resilience of our peoples.

Historically Wotjobaluk Peoples have been trailblazers in the advancement of our communities and self-determination. We were the first clan in Victoria to acquire Native Title (immediately after Mabo) in the early 2000s- a testament to the tireless hard work and determination of Wotjobaluk People throughout the early 1990s.

The development of the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC) *Country Plan: Growing What is Good*, brought Traditional Owners together to yarn about long and short-term priorities for our People.

These yarns included individual family groups, regional meetings and group gatherings throughout 2016 and 2017, to gather as much information as possible from Traditional Owners living on and off Country.

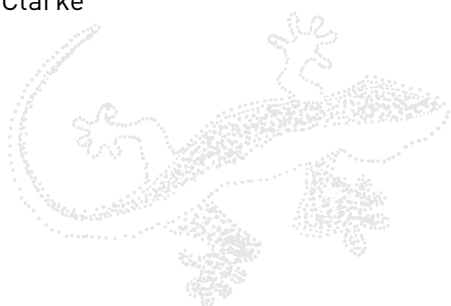
Our Board of Directors aims to implement the *Country Plan* alongside a sustainable strategic plan, to point the organisation to a new and exciting future. A future that builds the capacity of BGLC to better meet the outcomes and priorities set out by Traditional Owners.

BGLC have committed to a number of actions that can be accomplished through this *Country Plan*. These include, re-engaging with Community, Creating strategies to better manage our land and water, looking after historical cultural sites, such as Ebenezer and The Ranch, and maintaining our cultural practices.

The Board understands it will take some time to get to where we want to be as a mob, which is why it is so important that our membership and Traditional Owners remain front and centre to help us successfully implement this *Country Plan*.

It's a very exciting time for BGLC and the Board of Directors would like to thank all community members and Traditional Owners living on and off Country for participating in our meetings throughout 2016 and 2017 and contributing to this plan for our future.

Chair – Dylan Clarke



# OUR COUNTRY FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS

## TCHINGAL CREATION STORY

**In the time before time, the Great Ancestor Spirit, Bunjil, began to create the world we see around us; the mountains, the lakes, the forests and the rivers, the plains and the seas. He created all the plants and all the animals.**

When he had created the beautiful sandstone ranges of Gariwerd, he often took the form of Werpil the Eagle so that he could view his work. Bunjil appointed two brothers, the Bram-bram-bult brothers, sons of Druk the Frog, to finish the task he had set himself. Their job was to bring order to the new world; to name the animals and creatures, to make the languages and give the laws.

The brothers had a big job, sorting things out here on earth. There was a huge, ferocious emu called Tchingal who lived on the flesh of people and animals. His home was in the Mallee scrub. He was hatching an enormous egg. One day while Tchingal was away from the nest, Waa the Crow flew past. Feeling hungry, Waa decided to have a peck at the egg. He was pecking away quite happily when Tchingal returned. The monster emu was furious. Waa fled across the country towards Gariwerd, with Tchingal right behind him.

As he approached the ranges, Waa saw a crack in the mountains ahead. He flew into it, thinking he would be safe from Tchingal there. But Tchingal rushed at the mountain and struck it a mighty blow with his foot. The mountain split open under the force of the impact, releasing a mountain stream and creating a gap, Barigar, also known as Rose's Gap. The emu chased Waa through Barigar, right to the other side of the range.

Waa spotted another crack in the rock-face and tried to hide there, but again Tchingal delivered a mighty kick to the rock and split it right open. This is how Jananginj Njau (Victoria Gap) was formed where Bugara (Glenelg River) passes out onto the western plains. With the sun low on the horizon, Tchingal decided to make his camp at the foot of the new gap. This is why the place is called Jananginj Njau, which means "the sun will go".

The next morning Waa rose early and escaped to the nearby Moora Moora swamp. As this was his totem site, and therefore sacred territory, Tchingal was forbidden to follow him there.

Tchingal was angry and he was also very hungry. Just at this moment he spied a man, Bunya, out hunting in the distance. He decided to make a meal of him. When Bunya, who was not very brave, realised the emu was after him, he took off as fast as he could. Instead of using his spears to protect himself, as a warrior should, he threw them to the ground and scrambled up a large tree. Tchingal, not being able to climb, decided to wait. He knew that Bunya would have to come down some time.

Meanwhile, Waa the Crow had flown north to where the Bram-bram-bult brothers were staying. He told them of his narrow escape and of Tchingal's ferociousness. Already angry at the emu for his bad deeds, the two brothers decided to punish him. They came down to the mountains and saw what they thought was a bright star shining - it was Tchingal's eye. Approaching the bird from different directions, the brothers crept up and threw their spears. One struck the emu in the chest, one in the rump, and one in the neck. Tchingal raged



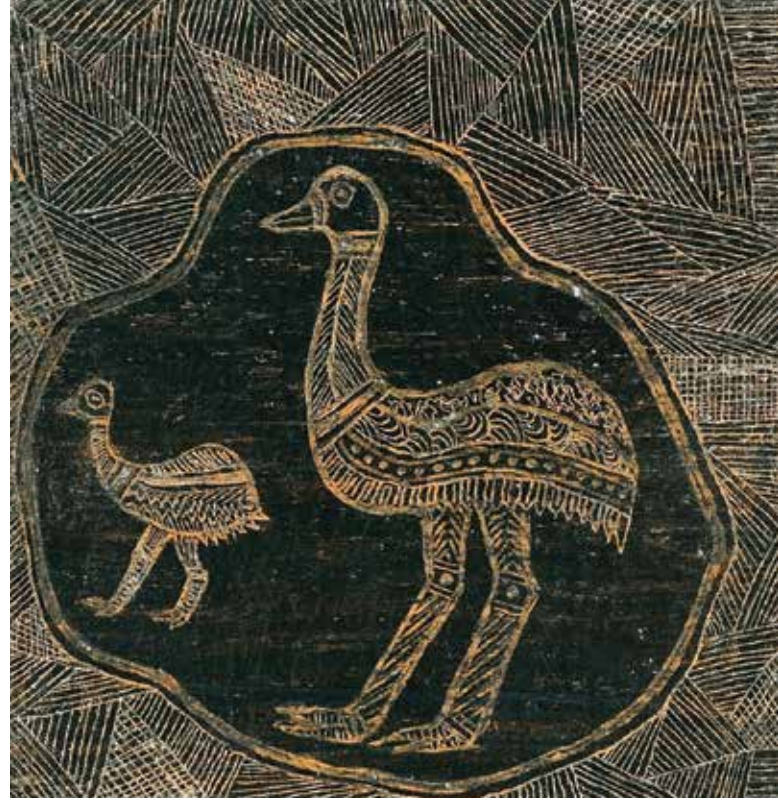
and stormed at the brothers, but he was fatally wounded. He ran off towards the northern plains, losing blood all the time. Soon he died, and the trail of blood he left behind him turned into the Barringgi Gadyin (Wimmera River).

The Bram-bram-bult now approached the tree where Bunya had hidden. They told him to come down, but Bunya was too scared and called back that he would stay there until they made sure Tchingal was dead. The elder brother was angry at such cowardice. He waved his spear and caused Bunya to become a possum, telling him to always stay in the treetops and to hunt for his food only at night.

Reaching the spot where Tchingal had died, the brothers plucked all the feathers from his body. Splitting each feather down the centre, they threw one half to the left, the other to the right, making two piles of emu feathers, each the size of a present day emu. The splitting of the feathers can still be seen in all emus. Their feathers are double, with two separate halves.

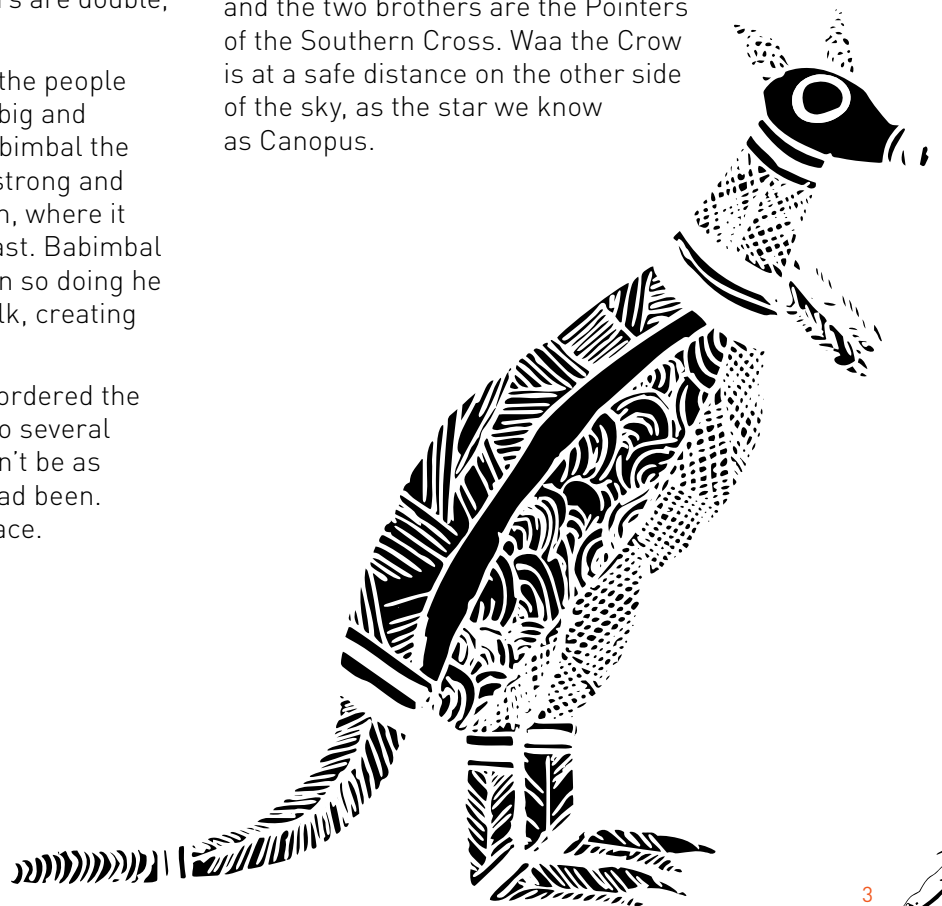
After feasting on Tchingal's flesh, all the people travelled to collect his egg. It was so big and heavy that no one could lift it until Babimbal the Wattlebird came along. He was very strong and managed to carry the egg to Horsham, where it was cooked and made into a great feast. Babimbal had the honour of dishing it out, and in so doing he splashed himself with some of the yolk, creating the wattles on the side of his head.

Before leaving, the Bram-bram-bult ordered the two emus to divide their large egg into several smaller ones in future, so they wouldn't be as jealous of their one egg as Tchingal had been. In this way they hoped to keep the peace.



Now, if you look at the Southern Cross, you can see the story told in the stars. At the head of the Cross is Bunya, the timid possum. Three of the stars are the spears hurled by the Bram-bram-bult. The large western star is the spear that struck Tchingal in the chest, the smaller star next to it is the spear that passed through his neck, and the star at the bottom of the Cross is the spear that struck him in the rump.

Tchingal himself is the dark shape that lies next to the Southern Cross. The eastern star of the Cross is Druk, the mother of the Bram-bram-bult, and the two brothers are the Pointers of the Southern Cross. Waa the Crow is at a safe distance on the other side of the sky, as the star we know as Canopus.



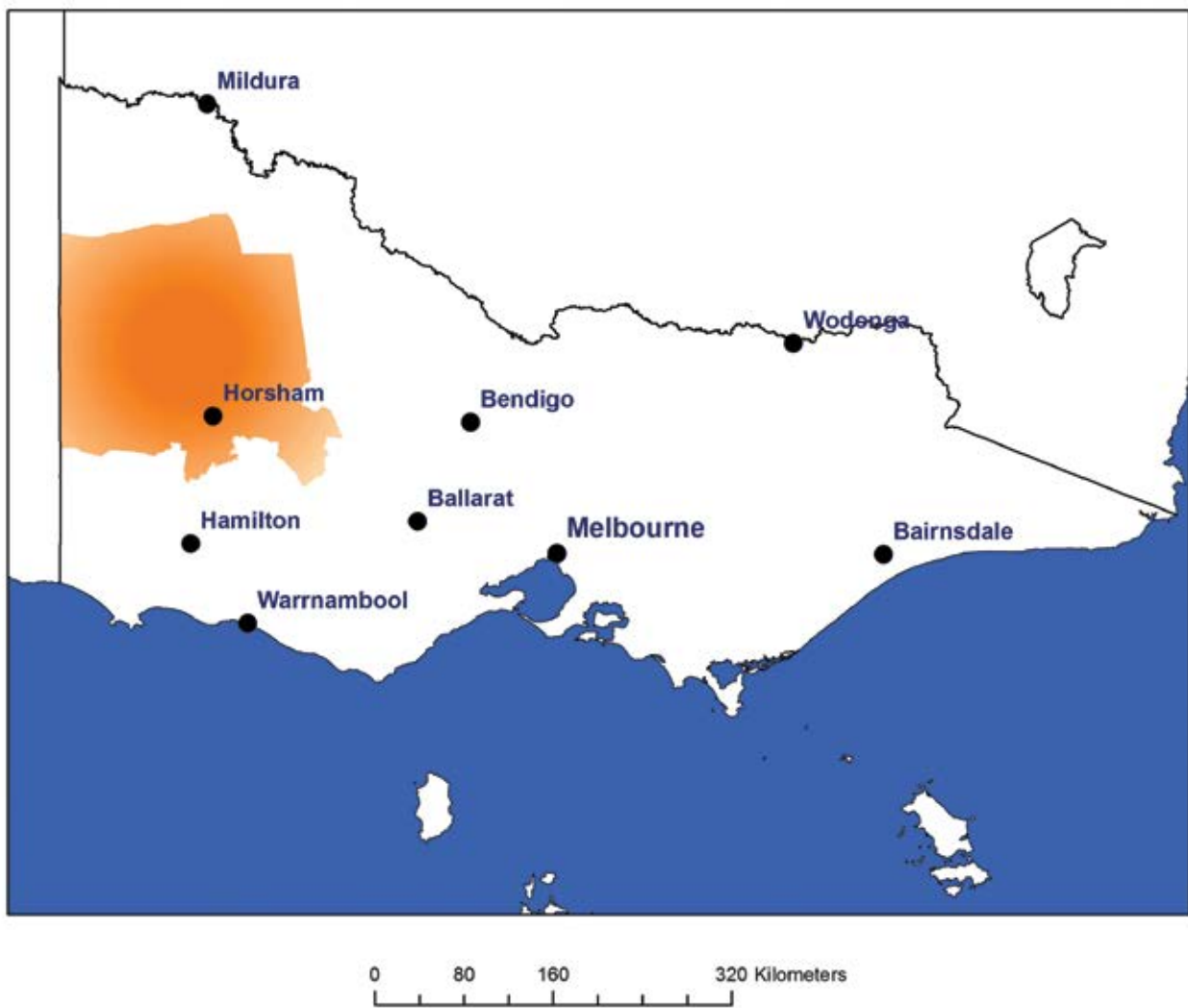


Figure 1 Map showing where Wotjobaluk Peoples Country is in the State of Victoria





# OUR STORY – PAST AND PRESENT

**People have been living in the Wimmera for at least 40,000 years, in inter-connected local groups, each of which was associated with a particular tract of the Country.** A person belonged and shared rights to the resources of the local group of his or her father; however, the groups were part of a shared cultural system. People enjoyed social connections and access to resources beyond their local group.

The availability of particular foods across the land encouraged people to move from season to season. Wirrengren Plain in the Mallee and Lake Buloke in the Wimmera were important areas for large gatherings and for trade of items such as stone axes, spears and possum skin rugs. Interaction with surrounding groups took place and firm connections were established through trade, marriage and kinship.

Water was essential and the Barringgi Gadyin (Wimmera River) provided abundant food. Small sources of water were important too, such as soaks,

clay pans, rock holes and the roots of different kinds of Mallee eucalypts and Hakeas. Plants were used for food, medicine and for trade, and supplemented a diet of birds, fish and mammals. Fire was traditionally used as a tool to manage and look after Country. The cultural use of fire assisted people with hunting, the gathering of edible tubers and roots and helped ease movement through densely vegetated areas. The mosaic of burnt and un-burnt areas that arose from cultural burning practices also minimised the spread of damaging wildfires and promoted diversity in the landscape.

The taking of lands by pastoralists brought rapid and devastating changes to Wotjobaluk Peoples. Our ancestors sought refuge at 'friendly' pastoral runs, where a familiar sense of local-group life was maintained. People moved around, but could be associated with particular runs and families. Through these associations many of our ancestors took on the European family names of these pastoral families.



Artwork by Auntie Nancy

"My painting maps country and culture; all things are connected and relate to creation. It shows all the pathways and the highly significant Wimmera River that comes out of a central camping area, with the river being connected through our creator beings Tchingal the giant Emu and Purra the Kangaroo. From this central campground, our people, as represented by the male and female figures, hunted throughout country to sustain family. This is how it was done. There are tracks of lizards that are good eating, as well as emus and kangaroos. This painting shows what we hunted and ate. The footprints also represent our people coming home to country. I learnt about all this from family at Antwerp reserve and from spending time with other Aboriginal artists in art programs I participated in. I love to paint and express how important country is."  
Auntie Nancy Harrison

# EBENEZER MISSION

## 1859-1904



EBENEZER MISSION STATION AT ANTWERP WAS A PLACE WHERE WOTJOBALUK PEOPLES COULD MAINTAIN THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY AND THE MISSION EXPERIENCE BROUGHT A SENSE OF BEING PART OF A BROADER COMMUNITY.

Ebenezer Mission was established in 1859, on important traditional grounds, where hundreds of generations of Wotjobaluk Peoples had been gathering to conduct ceremonies and other business. In Mission times, Cultural practices such as language, dance, song, traditional burial and traditional marriage were discouraged. However, ceremonial practices retained their importance—records indicate that Wotjobaluk Peoples were still gathering for corroboree as late as 1867—and the importance of social relationships and our spiritual connection to Wotjobaluk Country, persisted. Wotjobaluk Peoples continued to move on and off the mission land, to find work on 'friendly' pastoral stations. At its peak, Ebenezer was over 900 hectares in size.

Following the closure of Ebenezer in 1904, some families were sent to other missions across Victoria, including Lake Tyers in Gippsland.

Back row L-R: Mrs Jacoby, Mr Bogish, Mrs Bogish, Mrs Cameron, Mrs Fenton with baby, Henry Fenton, Mrs Coombes with baby, Teddy Fenton, "King" Bob [with breastplate], Teddy Droyer, Fisher Marks, Charlie Napier, Pelham Cameron, Archie Pepper, Bob Harrison.

In front of Mrs Jacoby L-R: Tony, Lena, Hugh, Valerie Bogish.

Seated front L-R: Archie Cameron with child, Jack Lane, Murray Kennedy, Sarah Kennedy, Not recorded, Not recorded, Dick Kennedy with Everaad, Clara Cameron, Lily Kennedy, Albert Coombes, Jacob Coombes, Ella Kinnear, Mrs Peper, baby George in pram, Nellie Pepper, Tommy Fenton [sitting].

Some families were able to remain in the area, however, and in 1905 a reserve was established at Antwerp on an area of Crown land on the Datchak Creek and Barringgi Gadyin — part of the old Ebenezer Mission and known as the Antwerp Aboriginal Reserve. From that time, those who remained as well as those who returned have also lived across a number of other sites: the Dimboola Common; the Ranch, located on a billabong on the other side of the Wimmera River from the Common; Arkona on land between Barringgi Gadyin and Datchak Creek; and Goyura, approximately 10km south of Hopetoun. During this time, transmission of cultural knowledge continued. Elders passed on their knowledge of Country and traditional cultural practices to younger generations.



## OUR CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

### **Following the mission closure in 1904, many families moved away from Wotjobaluk Country.**

From the 1960s onwards, families that lived on and around residential sites along the Wimmera River began to move into the nearby townships of Horsham, Stawell, Warracknabeal and Dimboola. A number of the former dwellings along the River are still places of significance to our families. Today, many families have returned to the Wimmera area.

Following the Mabo decision and the passing of the Native Title Act, we lodged a native title claim to have our rights and interests in Country formally recognised. After more than a decade of research and negotiation, the native title rights and interests of our people, the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Peoples (together known as the Wotjobaluk Peoples) were determined by Justice Merkel of the Federal Court on 13 December 2005 (See Figure 2 for map of Indigenous Land Use Agreement Area (ILUA)). This was the first time that the ongoing existence of native title in south eastern Australia was recognised by the Federal Court. At the same time, we entered into a suite of agreements (the 2005 Settlement Agreements) with the State of Victoria. Also at this time, the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BGLC) was appointed the

prescribed body corporate to hold the native title rights and interests in trust for our people, the native title holders.

In 2007, BGLC was appointed Registered Aboriginal Party, to protect and manage Aboriginal cultural heritage over much of the ILUA area. Prior to the passing of Victoria's Aboriginal Heritage Act, Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative cared for and protected Aboriginal cultural heritage in the Wimmera. In 2013 a review was undertaken of the 2005 Settlement Agreements and a recommendation was made by both the BGLC and the State review teams to re-negotiate the Settlement Agreements under the Victorian Traditional Owner Settlement Act. Renegotiations finally got underway in 2017, the next step in over a decade of persistent work to strengthen our legal claim to Wotjobaluk Country.

Our people maintain a strong connection to Wotjobaluk Country, and the ability to manage and protect Wotjobaluk Country and Culture is of vital importance for Wotjobaluk Peoples. We invite readers of this Country Plan to work with Wotjobaluk Peoples in positive partnerships to develop our economic independence and inspire our future leaders and generations.



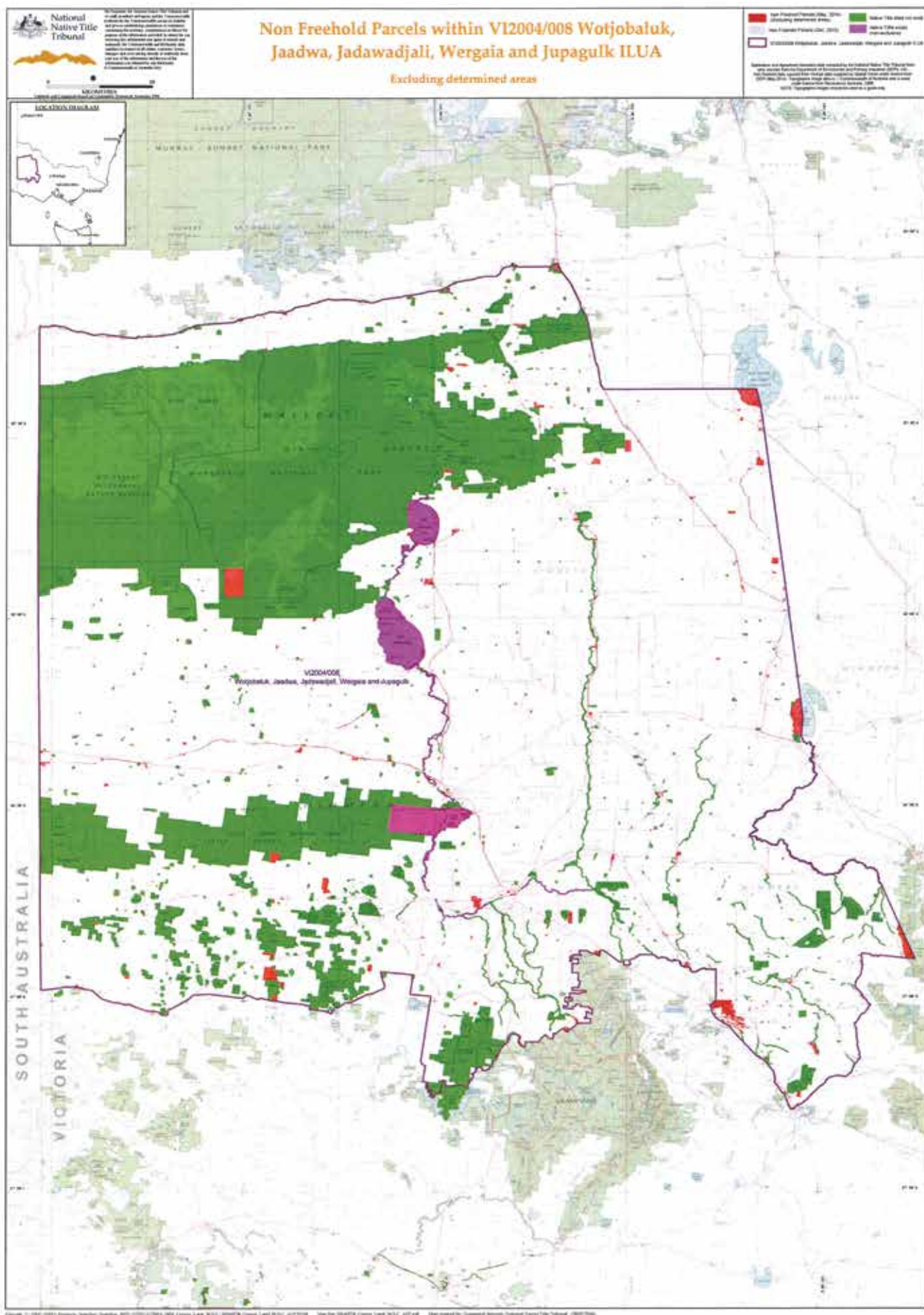
Wotjobaluk Peoples celebrating the Native Title determination in 1995

Group – (l-r) back row Annabelle Moore, Kayla Kennedy, Chris Harrison, Brenda Harrison, Brett Harrison, Stephen Harrison, Kiesha & Jamarlee McDonald, Lachlan Marks, Rosemary Horner, Jarred & Brian Harrison, Josephine Harrison, Carol & Joanne Kennedy, Danae McDonald, Jordan Coombs, Uncle Kevin Coombs, Richard & Faye Marks, Irene Harrison, Jacob Harrison. We apologise for missing the names of other people in this photo.



Dancers at the 2005 celebration of 10 years of legal recognition of Wotjobaluk Country

Dancers (l-r) – Brendan Muir (standing), Max Coleman, Claude Douglas, Mackenzie Barrett, Farren Branson (standing), Lachlan Marks



# OUR COUNTRY

**The natural landscape of our Country varies from vast undulating grassy plains, rivers and wetlands to sand-hill and Mallee country. The heart of our Country is characterised by gently undulating plains covered by woodlands, heathlands and to the south-west, amongst less fertile soils, many wetland systems.** Barringgi Gadyin begins its journey in the Pyrenees Range, and flows north-west across the Wimmera Plains to Gurru (Lake Hindmarsh), receiving inflow from fourteen tributaries. Barringgi Gadyin's banks, lined with Bial (River Red Gums) and Black Box trees, scar trees and middens demonstrate our long association with this waterway.

Gurru is Victoria's largest fresh water lake and is fed by Barringgi Gadyin. In turn, when it floods it feeds into Ngalpakatia/Ngelpagutya (Lake Albacutya) via Outlet Creek, which tends to happen around every twenty years. The last time Gurru was filled was 1975 but the recent introduction of complex piping systems has affected the flow of this water system. The substantial wetlands that occur after flooding are recognised under the RAMSAR Convention for protection of wetlands and are very significant for the Wotjobaluk Peoples. Gurru and Ngalpakatia/Ngelpagutya are also popular destinations for holiday-makers.

The landscapes and vegetation found in Wotjobaluk Country are characterised by the Wimmera, Lowan-Mallee, Murray-Mallee and Greater Grampians bioregional descriptions. The Wimmera bioregion covers the southern and central areas of Wotjobaluk Country and was largely cleared for agricultural purposes in the first half of the 20th Century. Within each Wimmera subregion the vegetation types, land forms and soils are similar, as are threats to biodiversity. However, the health of biodiversity is not uniform, with the condition of biodiversity varying across the landscape with the type, intensity and history of land use, the climate and geography.

The Lowan Mallee bioregion, characterised by semi-arid and sparse non-eucalypt woodlands

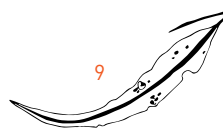
and grasslands is found within the Little Desert National Park, the Big Desert Wilderness and parts of Wyperfeld National Park. The Lowan Mallee is not as developed as surrounding areas and is protected in these Parks and Reserves. The climate is semi-arid and droughts or long periods of time without rain are a natural occurrence here.

Eucalypt woodlands, varieties of shrubland, grasslands and swampy woodlands are found in the Murray-Mallee bioregion in the north-east of Wotjobaluk Country and around Ngalpakatia/Ngelpagutya and Gurru. These lakes are two important areas in which native title has been recognised for the Wotjobaluk Peoples. Similar to the Wimmera bioregion, the Murray-Mallee also has highly modified landscapes due to high fertility soils prized by farmers.

The Greater Grampians bioregion is characterised by prominent ridges of sandstone and striking parallel ranges and valleys. The steep escarpments and gentle back slopes support many types of heathlands, shrublands, woodlands and forests. Abundant food, water and shelter and connections with Creation Stories make this area an important and spiritual place. Known by Wotjobaluk Peoples (and others) as Gariwerd, it contains a high number of occupation sites and 90% of the rock art sites in Victoria.

Much of the flora of Wotjobaluk Country can be found in the major parks, reserves and state forests such as Wyperfeld, Dyurrite (Mt Arapiles –Toon State Parks), Gariwerd and Little Desert National Park. The entire region contains over 2000 sites of cultural significance associated with reserves, waterways, floodplains and wetlands.

Figure 2 illustrates the area under the Indigenous Land Use Agreement and areas where Native Title was determined. Aspirations and priorities for Country within this agreement area and other places of interest for Wotjobaluk Peoples can be found under the Caring for Country section of this Country Plan.







# OUR VISION

Wotjobaluk Nations working together as custodians of Culture, Country, Heritage, Lore and Language, sharing our values and representing the rights and interests of our People.



# OUR GOALS

## STRONG AND HEALTHY WOTJOBALUK CULTURE

Wotjobaluk Culture is our identity. Our wellbeing depends on Culture being alive and embedded in our Wotjobaluk Community, and being visible and valued as part of the wider community.

## HEALTHY WOTJOBALUK COUNTRY

We are part of Wotjobaluk Country. It links us to our ancestors and spirits and it is the foundation of our future. If Country is treated with respect and care, and we can act on our responsibility for Country, then Wotjobaluk Country will continue to provide for us.

## AN ENGAGED AND CONNECTED WOTJOBALUK COMMUNITY

We have had a long and sometimes difficult history, yet our identity and kinship remains strong. We connect our shared history with Wotjobaluk Country and each other, to create a strong Wotjobaluk Community. We value the diversity of Wotjobaluk Peoples. We engage with Wotjobaluk people with a disability and from the LGBTI communities.

## RECOGNITION AND RESPECT

We are the custodians of this land with responsibility to Wotjobaluk Country and all who live there. We seek recognition of our traditional rights, respect for our knowledge and cultural obligations, understanding of our aspirations, and understanding of our history before and since colonisation.

## ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

We walk in two worlds, staying true to our cultural roots while being part of the modern economy. We seek economic independence, with education and training to build our capacity, so we can contribute to our Wotjobaluk Community and the wider Australian community.

## HEALTHY WOTJOBALUK PEOPLES

Our health and wellbeing needs support. A connected Wotjobaluk Community and good health services work together to keep us and our Country healthy. A connected Wotjobaluk Community supports Wotjobaluk people with physical, emotional and chronic health issues to obtain the appropriate support.

## A STRONG CORPORATION WITH EXCELLENT GOVERNANCE

A transparent, cohesive and sustainable organisation reflecting respect, culture and its diversity.

## A STRONG VOICE FOR WOTJOBALUK PEOPLES

We will speak out for policies that strengthen Traditional Owner communities, and give our opinion on how to turn policy into effective action on the ground.



# OUR PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

## **MORE TIME ON WOTJOBALUK COUNTRY**

- Organise regular events on Country
- Strengthen our Culture
- Communicate our events

## **STRENGTHENING WOTJOBALUK CULTURE AND LANGUAGE**

- At every gathering, learn about Wotjobaluk Culture
- Learn Wergaia and Jardwadjali language
- Gather our Wotjobaluk stories
- Display Wotjobaluk Culture proudly
- Create a Wotjobaluk keeping place
- Use the internet more

## **EDUCATION AND REWARDING JOBS FOR WOTJOBALUK PEOPLE**

- Support Wotjobaluk kids through school
- Open up pathways to employment
- Advocate for the employment needs of Wotjobaluk Peoples
- Create jobs in joint management of Wotjobaluk Country
- Create enterprises around Wotjobaluk cultural practices



## **STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS**

- Work closely with our Partners
- Implement joint management with Parks Victoria
- Make cultural burning a common practice
- Influence land management on private land

## **A STRONG VOICE FOR OUR PEOPLE**

- Support emerging Wotjobaluk leaders
- Strengthen support for employment
- Ensure policies are implemented in the right way
- Build governance skills and systems
- Communicate about our events and achievements

## **CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY**

- Care for our Significant Places and Reserves

**GROWING WHAT  
IS GOOD COUNTRY PLAN**

VOICES OF THE WOTJOBALUK, JAADWA, JADAWADJALI,  
WERGAIA AND JUPAGULK PEOPLES

# OUR PRIORITIES

## MORE TIME ON WOTJOBALUK COUNTRY

We want to be on Country with our Elders and our families to enjoy being together. We want time with other families, camping out, listening to stories and teaching Wotjobaluk Culture to be connected as a Community. We want to create regular events where families get together at our special places. We want our Elders feeling comfortable to talk on Wotjobaluk Country, so we can hear their stories again and inherit their knowledge.

Places from settlement times hold memories for us, and we want to look after those places. But we also want to get out to other bush places.

We want to look after Wotjobaluk Country, with the knowledge we have from our Elders, from books, and from what Country can teach us. The best way to do this is to walk on Wotjobaluk Country, where we can learn what to look for, pass on our cultural knowledge, and see what needs our attention.

### ACTIONS

**Organise regular events on Country.** Organise whole family camp-outs each year, at a time when families can come. Organise events to fix up places that are special to us. Support Community participation in events like the River Challenge and the Goolum Goolum Deadly Bikes event.

**Build our Culture.** Organise ceremonial time, camp-based activities such as learning language, weaving, cooking and tool making, walking trips or going out further afield. Make space for separate men's and women's business. Ensure our young people walk on Wotjobaluk Country, to learn their Culture and get connected to Wotjobaluk land. Organise special events for healing and reconciliation within our Wotjobaluk Community. Learn to use traditional medicine and to cook traditional foods.

**Communicate our events.** Promote each event in advance so people can plan their attendance ahead. Use text messages, snail mail and word of mouth. Explain the business and why it is important. Provide transport for people who need it. Invite Traditional Owners who live off-Country. Remind people to keep their contact details up-to-date with BGLC. Follow-up after events to check that business was communicated and well conducted. Find out where improvements could be made. Publicise in words and pictures what happened at each event to continue to be connected as a Wotjobaluk Community.



Some of our Aunties on the first River Yarns trip from left to right  
- Heather Marks, Belinda Marks, Sharni Hamilton, Hazel McDonald, Noelene Douglas, Faye Marks and Sandra Knight

River Yarns is a project developed between BGLC and the Wimmera CMA where Traditional Owners went out on Country for a week and worked their way along the Wimmera River. At each spot they stopped, they assessed river health using the Aboriginal Waterways Assessment, a rating scale for the health of the banks, river and vegetation, and for assessing the condition of each place for cultural uses.

"In some places, the banks of the Wimmera River are eroding. There are several ways that riverbanks can be protected, but choosing the best method, when to do the work and who to have involved all needs time and attention at each site," said Ben Muir

Ben Muir had a big role in organising that trip and he says: "It was good to get the older Traditional Owners there talking about the river and to get the younger people there too, who might have also grown up on the river, to hear their stories too." Elders visited places they knew from childhood, but they also went to parts of the river they hadn't seen: "I went to places I've never been to. It was good." said Aunt Hazel, Wotjobaluk Elder, of the River Yarns experience.

Ben Muir started working with the Wimmera CMA in October 2016 as the Aboriginal Water Officer. Ben appreciates the support he gets from the organisation, and the chance it gives him to work on waterways and Culture at the same time:

"My passion is working on waterways, helping to look after our special places, so that they are still here in 1000 years. It's good that there's interest coming back into Aboriginal culture, because we can learn a lot from our Elders and the river. My job means that I'm learning a lot more about my own culture, and helping to protect it."

He played a big role in getting the River Yarns project started, and now Ben is helping to test out a new project taking school children to the river to learn about birds and plants, and to hear the Dreamtime stories. "We can take them to Ebenezer too, so they get a bit of our history." If this works out well, then the CMA might organise a special River Yarns event for school children.

Ben reckons there is good support now for kids moving from school into work. Ben's kids are in school-based apprenticeships, a scheme where kids stay at high school but have regular time in the workplace learning a trade.

"We've got our own people who can look after our kids as they take that step. We don't want them crashing and bashing themselves up with drugs and alcohol. We want to see them settling into work, learning about their culture, so they can lead the way for the next generation."

Ben Muir, Aboriginal Water Officer, Wimmera CMA

# STRENGTHENING WOTJOBALUK CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

We want to learn about and reconnect to Wotjobaluk Culture by continuing events like the Earth Ovens project, or learning spear and boomerang making, basket weaving and making bark canoes. They bring us together and pass on knowledge of traditional ways. We are thoroughly supported by organisations like the Wimmera CMA, and we want those partners with us to continue the reconnection to Wotjobaluk Culture.

The Earth Oven event, now held annually, recreates the ovens used by Wotjobaluk ancestors. Balls of clay and sand are fired up in a shallow pit, and over these go layers of rushes, food, more rushes, a layer of bark, and finally dirt to seal the oven. Left to cook slowly for 12 hours, the end result is beautifully steamed tubers and meats. Two hundred people showed up at the event in 2016. Says Daniel Clarke, a Wotjobaluk man, 'The event brings people out to share and learn about the traditional use of earth ovens, and then to eat traditional foods'.

We want to pass on Wotjobaluk Culture to our children by walking on Country, without the influences of phones and TVs. That's when our children really learn about Culture.

We want to preserve and revive the Wergaia and Jardwadjali languages. If we keep our language alive, we rekindle our cultural connections. Wurrekan tyerrangaty Wergaia ba Jardwadjali language group is leading the way, along with others running cultural awareness and educational activities.

## ACTIONS

**At every gathering, learn about Wotjobaluk Culture.** Every time we get together, we learn more and practice our Wotjobaluk Culture. We use Wergaia or Jardwadjali language to name events and activities. We learn skills like canoe making, cooking, weaving and dance.

**Learn Wergaia and Jardwadjali language.** We want to hear, speak and write Wergaia and Jardwadjali language. Publish our Creation Stories in various media forms - in print and through apps, webinars, and videos, so that people living off-Country can learn. Train and support Wotjobaluk Peoples to perform Welcome to Country.

**Gather our Wotjobaluk stories.** Support a history group to record Wotjobaluk stories and find the stories that have already been recorded. Get stories in one place, then use the internet to make our history accessible. Share our Wotjobaluk knowledge through cultural tourism.

**Display Wotjobaluk Culture proudly.** Support the appropriate sharing of Wotjobaluk Peoples' language and Culture in primary and secondary schools, universities and government agencies. Print and proudly display names on our important places, so that Wotjobaluk Culture is visible in the landscape, with information about places like the Ranch, the Common and some of the Creation sites. Ensure that sacred sites are being protected and respected.

**Create a Wotjobaluk keeping place.** Collate Wotjobaluk artefacts together on Wotjobaluk Country. Offer an amnesty for the return of artefacts from land owners, especially families who have lived here since colonisation.

**Use the internet more.** Communicate Wergaia and Jardwadjali language, places and stories through the internet, to connect Wotjobaluk Peoples who live on and off-Country and the wider non-aboriginal community.





At the 2016 Earth Ovens event from left to right - Abby Cooper, Darren Griffin, Marizio Campanelli, Tracey Rigney, Daniel Clarke

*Wurrekang tyerrangaty Wergaia ba Jadawadjali*  
 [We speak Wergaia and Jadawadjali together]

The Wurrekang tyerrangaty Wergaia ba Jardwadjali Language Reference Group was set up in 2016, when six Traditional Owners decided it was time to start working systematically to bring two languages of the Wotjobaluk Nations, Wergaia and Jadawadjali, back into use. The aim is to have speakers of these languages who can continue speaking, writing and teaching language to families, so that language is part of Wotjobaluk Culture.

'When there's respect between people based on our Lore,  
 we grow stronger.'

Jenni Beer, Wotjobaluk Elder

It's a long journey ahead, but there's a good foundation now—a dictionary and grammar, an understanding of how to speak and write the languages, on-going support from the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Language, and most important, lots of interest from the Wotjobaluk Community to learn more.

# EDUCATION AND REWARDING JOBS FOR WOTJOBALUK PEOPLE

Job security provides economic stability for Wotjobaluk families and self-esteem for our young people. When those jobs are about looking after Wotjobaluk peoples and Country, it also strengthens cultural and community connections.

Some of our kids are unable to adjust to conventional schooling. Their families need support, and sometimes alternate schooling that suits their learning capabilities. We need pathways to employment and long-term jobs for Wotjobaluk people.

We are proud of Wotjobaluk People working in government agencies. They are enthusiastic and capable contributors, and they can influence attitudes and programs. We need to encourage more Wotjobaluk people to consider employment in all levels of government.

After twenty years working in the education system, Marjorie Pickford knows just how important it is for kids to get the support they need to succeed at school. As a Koorie Support Engagement Officer, Marjorie works with Aboriginal students and their families, their teachers and other community services. "What really took me into my role was seeing kids not attending school, and parents struggling to support their child, even though they really want their kids to get ahead." She is a listening ear for kids who might be too shy to talk to their teacher. Then she can speak to teachers and staff about what a student needs. She works out in the community too, connecting families up to services that help them stay strong for their kids. Education is a journey, and it takes determination to keep going. "Getting that certificate, finishing that traineeship - it's hard work, but it's worth it," says Marjorie. "Don't give up - think about your future. A qualification opens doors for you, and gives you something to fall back on."

Wotjobaluk Peoples have emerging businesses in the Education Program, The Bush Crew and the Indigenous Plant Nursery. Cultural Tourism is a big opportunity for Wotjobaluk Peoples. To build these businesses, we need longer-term program funding, to establish these enterprises successfully.

"Cultural tourism doesn't stop at Gariwerd," says Ron Marks. Ron can see great potential for cultural tourism in Wotjobaluk Country. "The facilities at Lake Tyrell are going to be up-graded, with interpretative signs to tell people about the place, and we can contribute to that. And we're talking to tourism operators there who want to show international and Australian visitors something of our Culture. Then there's the painted silos, people are coming in droves for that, and you know the one that gets a lot of comment - the one at Sheep Hills, with portraits of our people!"

For Ron, one of the keys is the Wotjobaluk Country Tourism Group, and the cooperation between local government in the Wimmera. "We've got so much to offer people visiting our Country. That will take time, but the market is there. People want to learn about Aboriginal culture."

Ron Marks, Wotjobaluk Elder



## ACTIONS

### **Support Wotjobaluk kids through school.**

Learn from other Traditional Owner communities and foster culturally appropriate best practice to help Wotjobaluk kids, of all abilities, continue their education.

**Open up pathways to employment.** Map out the pathways from school to further education or employment to find the opportunities for Wotjobaluk Peoples. Consider traineeships, cadetships and internships for specific jobs. Connect young people to Aboriginal workers and community mentors, to hear their stories, learn how they did it, and be inspired by them.

**Advocate for the employment needs of Wotjobaluk Peoples.** Engage with corporate and government bodies with commitments to Aboriginal employment and procurement targets to explore and open up opportunities for Wotjobaluk Peoples. Work with local government to develop their own Reconciliation Action Plans with targets for employment of Wotjobaluk Traditional Owners. Ensure employers understand individual Wotjobaluk people cannot speak on behalf of their whole community.

**Create jobs in joint management of Wotjobaluk Country.** Develop training that prepares our young people to work on Wotjobaluk Country, using knowledge from their Elders. Negotiate more positions for managing Reserves and Parks. Expand Cultural Tourism beyond Gariwerd (Grampians National Park).

**Create enterprises around Wotjobaluk cultural practices.** Assess opportunities for cultural education with students and tourists—making and selling culturally inspired artefacts, explaining the traditional use of these artefacts, running workshops and providing information about traditional medicine, dance and food, providing tours of Wotjobaluk Country and to places of particular cultural significance.



Bronwyn & Marjorie Pickford visiting Cultural Sites in the Northern Territory

# STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS

Before native title, non-Aboriginal people did not appreciate Wotjobaluk Cultural Heritage. They feared what Native Title would mean for their rights. But now things are changing. There is more respect for Wotjobaluk Peoples in the community.

More Traditional Owners are part of the workforce, and people are getting to know Wotjobaluk Peoples and learning about Wotjobaluk Culture. Aboriginal cultural heritage requirements are having an impact on public and private land and BGLC's role in managing and protecting our cultural heritage is beginning to be understood. We are ready to share with people who want to connect and understand, and to work with organisations as they develop their cultural awareness.

The Co-operative Management Agreement confirmed for us that respectful partnerships are important in managing Wotjobaluk Country. We are looking forward to negotiating new joint management arrangements that will strengthen our decision making in the management of Wotjobaluk Country.

Most important are collaborative partnerships. We want stronger partnerships with organisations like Catchment Management Authorities, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Parks Victoria, Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water, local governments Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Landcare Australia, the local Landcare groups and various Committees of Management.

## ACTIONS

**Work closely with** Catchment Management Authorities. In collaboration, develop and implement plans for the protection and rehabilitation of waterways and wetlands on Wotjobaluk Country.

**Implement joint management with Parks Victoria.**

Negotiate new agreements with the State of Victoria to enable Wotjobaluk Peoples to jointly manage National Parks, conservation reserves and other Crown land. Present and promote this Country Plan as a basis for future joint management plans. Organise and fund training for Wotjobaluk People moving into management positions, and for Community members on governing committees.

**Make cultural burning a common practice.**

Train more Wotjobaluk Peoples to participate in cultural burning practices. Liaise and learn from other communities, to share knowledge on cultural burning practices. Showcase to the wider community the return and continuation of our cultural practices.

**Influence land management on private land.**

With Trust for Nature, Greening Australia, Landcare and other Non-Government Organisations, influence land management practices in the care for cultural sites and biodiversity on private land. Work collaboratively with farmers adjacent to reserves, to create buffer zones to prevent pest plant and animal spread.







“We need to ensure our input  
is understood, valued and actioned.”

Janine Coombs, Wotjobaluk Woman, BGLC Board member and  
Chair of the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations





# A STRONG VOICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

We want a strong voice to speak out for policies and programs that strengthen Traditional Owner communities. There are State-level and regional discussions of policies and programs for water, fire, biodiversity, health and justice. We will attend meetings with agencies seeking Wotjobaluk Peoples input and participate in these discussions.

“To make change, you have to be part of the conversation. You have to be sitting at the table.”

Janine Coombs, Wotjobaluk Woman, BGLC Board member and Chair of the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

There are many invitations for consultation on government plans and strategies or to sit on boards of statutory authorities. We need to build our capacity to take up more of these opportunities and speak out for the priorities of Wotjobaluk Peoples. We need to ensure our input is understood, valued and actioned.

We identified that we had a leadership gap in our work. We've focused on Elders and young people. We are now including emerging leaders, through training and mentoring. It is important to act on this now to enable emerging leaders to learn from the Elders and be ready to embrace leadership in the Wotjobaluk Community.

As our authoritative body, BGLC is strengthening its capacity as a strong representative body. BGLC is committed to organising more events for our people and getting the word out about what's happening in the organisations and on the actions in the Country Plan. The Family Re-Engagement process has helped re-engage people in Wotjobaluk business, and we have a process for settling membership of our Traditional Owner Community. We need to actively engage more Wotjobaluk Peoples, on and off Country, into the projects BGLC is establishing.

## ACTIONS

### **Support emerging Wotjobaluk leaders.**

Provide emerging leaders with opportunities to represent Wotjobaluk Peoples and speak for Wotjobaluk interests on boards and committees. Mentor and support emerging leaders to develop knowledge and skills. Negotiate for board and committee positions where people are paid for their time and expertise. When we gather together as a Community, ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak, and create an environment where people feel confident to contribute.

### **Strengthen support for employment.**

Investigate programs that invest in training, social enterprises and business opportunities, to develop Wotjobaluk projects. Challenge government to move away from short-term funding into long-term program funding.

### **Ensure policies are implemented in the right way.**

State decision making needs to reflect regional agreements and should only be made after consultation with the BGLC. Insist on thorough reviews of implementation of State policies, and compensation or remedies when there are failures in implementation.


### **Build governance skills and systems.**

Continue building the skills and capacity of BGLC Board members and staff around good governance. Educate the Wotjobaluk Community about BGLC governance policies as they develop, to inform and educate Wotjobaluk people about the right way to handle Wotjobaluk business.

### **Communicate about our events and achievements.**

Publish stories in the newsletter, featuring Wotjobaluk people from across the Community, highlighting their milestones and achievements. Publish in various media news about BGLC projects. Communicate the notification and purpose of meetings in a timely manner. Co-ordinate mail-outs between BGLC and NTSV. Report on the progress of Settlement negotiations at least once a quarter.





'If we follow Bunjil's law and look after the Country then Country will look after us. All the rules we have come from Bunjil. I must pass on Bunjil's law so it continues. I am looking forward to getting some of my country back before I die so I can die knowing I have done what elders expected of me.

The Beal trees are dying at Lake Albacutya because they are not getting enough water. If we look after the river it will run clear again, run all the way to the Teardrop lakes.

If the Wotjobaluk continue to follow Bunjil then things will go on as the old people want'.

Justice Merkel referring to statements by the late William John Kennedy Senior, known as Uncle Jack Kennedy at the Native Title determination on the 13 December 2005.



# CARING FOR COUNTRY

**We are part of our Country and our Country is part of us. Bunjil the creator, made the land, waterholes, animals and plants and gave Wotjobaluk Peoples the responsibility to look after our Country and culture and keep it healthy and strong. Country heals us and connects us to our dreaming stories, to our ancestors and spirits.** It is the foundation of our future. If our Country is treated with respect and care, then it will continue to sustain us and provide for us. It is vitally important that we continue our traditional practices and uses of land, waters and living resources.

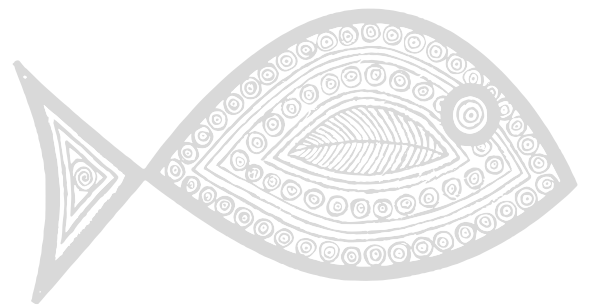
All parts of our Country are connected and there are many culturally important places that we as Wotjobaluk Peoples have responsibility for looking after.

Places such as Antwerp, Ebenezer, The Ranch and The Common are significant because our People gathered and lived there before and after our access to other parts of Country was restricted. There are many memories for people who grew up on these places so we want to look after them and make it possible for people to gather there again.

BGLC holds the freehold title for land at Antwerp, The Ranch and Billabong and Goyura and has developed Management Plans for these significant places. Site descriptions and management actions are outlined in these site specific plans. A parcel of land at Ebenezer was also transferred to BGLC from the National Trust in 2013. This Country Plan identifies priorities as agreed to through the Country Planning process, but are not exhaustive of the actions supported by the Wotjobaluk Peoples.

The 2005 Native Title consent determination recognised the native title rights and interests of the Wotjobaluk Peoples, acknowledging our strong and continuing connection with Country. At the same time, the State of Victoria entered into a Cooperative Management Agreement with the BGLC which aimed to foster mutual recognition and trust and facilitate the active involvement of the Wotjobaluk Peoples in decisions about the management of certain areas of Crown land. The aim was to incorporate traditional knowledge, internal decision making processes and perspectives into management planning and works programming as well as identifying and promoting employment, training and economic development opportunities.

However, over the years the Cooperative Management Agreement has not been properly implemented and the Winyula Council, established to achieve the goals set out in the Agreement, only met six times before the role was transferred to BGLC. Some departments of State Government have worked effectively with BGLC under this arrangement but others have not engaged. Joint management arrangements under the Settlement Act, if implemented respectfully, can empower the Wotjobaluk Peoples in relation to land management.

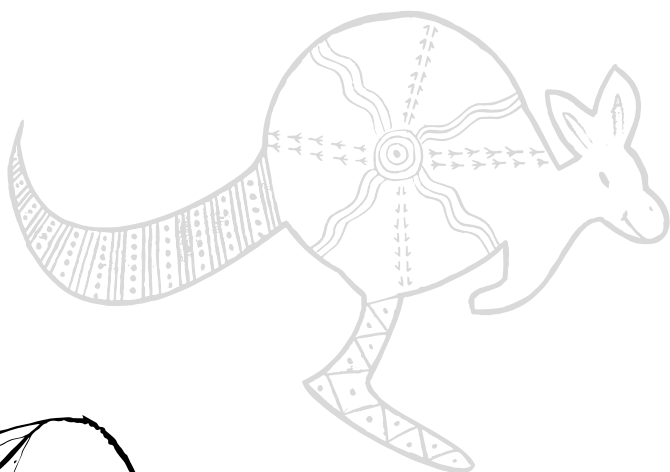


## JOINT MANAGEMENT

**Joint management in Victoria is possible when land is transferred to Traditional Owners as Aboriginal Title under the Settlement Act.**

We want to negotiate a Traditional Owner Land Management Agreement (TOLMA) with the State which will allow Wotjobaluk Peoples and the State to jointly manage National Parks, conservation reserves and other Crown land when transferred to BGLC as Aboriginal Title. The transfer of land as Aboriginal Title means that the BGLC will be the actual owner of the land on behalf of the Wotjobaluk Peoples.

Our goal is to enter into joint management arrangements with Parks Victoria and other responsible entities for the National Parks and Crown Land Reserves (described on the following pages). Our longer term aspirations are to eventually move from joint management to full management of all our Aboriginal Title land.



## PRINCIPLES FOR JOINT MANAGEMENT

Our community has developed some principles by which we aspire to shape and conduct joint management arrangements. We envisage engaging with Parks Victoria and other partners in conversations about this new collaborative approach.

**SELF-DETERMINATION FOR TRADITIONAL OWNERS.** This is a foundation principle for all other principles of joint management.

**HEALING COUNTRY ENABLES HEALING FOR OUR PEOPLE.** We are re-kindling land management practices that have a cultural and healing focus and which involve more than just controlling pest plants and animals.

**ACCESS TO COUNTRY FOR TRADITIONAL OWNERS.** Access for us to significant areas of our Country needs to be made easy.

**ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR JOINT MANAGEMENT AND TRADITIONAL OWNERS CARING FOR COUNTRY.** Traditional Owners deserve to share the profits generated from tourism and other permitted activities on Aboriginal Title Land.

**EMPLOYMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS.** Employment of Traditional Owners at all levels of Park Management, with employment targets prioritised, and training and mentoring to support people in joint management roles.

**RESPECT CULTURE AND EMPOWER REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS.** Ensure State-level decision making regarding Park management respects and involves Traditional Owners and their values.

**ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DECISION MAKING.** Accountability at state and regional levels of Government for decisions relating to our Country is needed.

**REVIEW HOW THESE PRINCIPLES ARE IMPLEMENTED.** Regularly review what is working well and what needs to improve, with remedies for deficiencies negotiated by joint management partners.





# REKINDLING CULTURAL BURNING PRACTICES

## Damien Skurrie, Traditional Owner and Parks Victoria Ranger

It was a cool, cloudy afternoon in late autumn, and Damien was starting to worry. Maybe they'd missed the opportunity for a good burn. With those recent rains and germination of green grass, the site he'd picked didn't look like it would burn so easily. No time to stop now, though. Everyone was ready to go, including the Natimuk Bush Kinder kids, who wanted to hear about what was happening.

Damien Skurrie has worked for Parks Victoria for 15 years. He's been trained up in fire management practices and had plenty of on-ground experience with fire, and with planned burns that are used to reduce the risk of wildfire. Indigenous staff and Traditional Owners had been suggesting burning using indigenous methods for a while, but no-one knew where to start. Supported by people in Parks Victoria, Damien researched how the ancestors used fire.

"We hadn't had that transfer of knowledge about fire, so we had to build it up," he says. Damien read a lot and visited Kimberley people to see Traditional Owner land management practices there: "I thought about how we could adapt these practices and implement them in Victoria, right here in the Wimmera, in our kind of landscapes." His supervisor encouraged him: when Damien asked him who he knew who had the knowledge

to do a cultural burn, his supervisor told him straight: "It's you mate!"

A visit from DELWP Forest Fire Management pushed him into action - a senior manager heard his enthusiasm and asked him why he hadn't already jumped in! He started on the paperwork, invited Traditional Owners from the Wimmera and across the Western Districts, and ended up with a crew of 12 at the Pines Campsite at Dyurrite (Mount Arapiles) on a cool day in May.

"The first fire blew my mind! It was a low intensity fire, exactly how I pictured, not the high intensity fire we often use in control burns. At no point did the fire feel angry. The crew encouraged fire along using traditional methods and techniques as our ancestors had once done. The young BGLC Rangers picked up right away what the other Traditional Owners were doing."

The gentle fire worked its way through the site; the kookaburras and corellas kept on their songs. Damien's mother, Auntie Suzy was watching it all. "It really felt like the old people were looking over us," she said.

For Damien, it's all about rekindling old knowledge and learning by trying things out: "It just felt right, what we were doing. The right fire is a tool that our people used. We shouldn't be afraid of it."

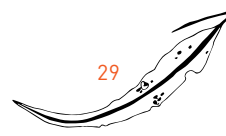


Laurie Norman attending the 2017 Traditional Burn at Dyurrite.



Damien Skurrie explaining the importance of Traditional Burning to the Bush Kinder students







# SIGNIFICANT PLACES

## OUR COMMUNITY CARES FOR AND WISHES TO ENHANCE MANAGEMENT OF THE FOLLOWING PLACES

ANTWERP

EBENEZER

THE RANCH AND BILLABONG

GOYURA

THE COMMON

BARRINGGI GADYIN

DYURRITE

LITTLE DESERT NATIONAL PARK

WYPERFELD - BIG DESERT

GURRU and NGALPAKATIA/NGELPAGUTYA

GARIWERD

ISOLATED RESERVES





# ANTWERP



The **ANTWERP** property has deep symbolism for the Wotjobaluk Peoples. It provides important cultural and recreational opportunities for Traditional Owners who have camped here and swam and fished in the adjacent Datchak Creek and nearby Barringgi Gadyin for thousands of years. Following the closure of the Ebenezer Mission many families moved to Antwerp and some Elders continued living there until recent times. Traditional Owners continue visiting Antwerp to this day and aspire to see it restored to a place for gatherings again.

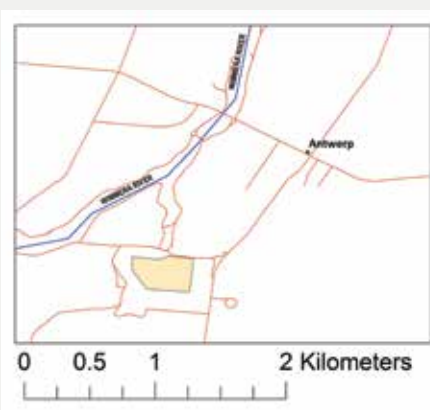
Scars among the Bial and Black Box trees along the creek and river highlight the community's deep and long-term connection with Antwerp. Traditional Owners use bark from trees to make canoes, containers and shields and to build shelters. Bial Woodlands once dominated the site with some pockets of Semi-arid and Salt-bush Woodlands. Native vegetation is still present; however the shrub and grassy layers are now dominated by introduced plants.

Antwerp is a freehold property of 8.55 hectares, held and managed by the BGLC on behalf of the Wotjobaluk Peoples. It is located approximately 15km north of Dimboola. A management plan was created in June 2011 by the BGLC with support from the Centre for Environmental Management, University of Ballarat. It outlines the vision, major directions and values of the site and sets clear management objectives for cultural and natural heritage, land use and development, and information and educational opportunities.

Key partners for restoring the Antwerp property are the Indigenous Land Corporation, which will assist in the purchase of adjoining freehold to consolidate the Mission and (pre-contact) cultural land, Hindmarsh Shire Council, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, Country Fire Authority, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and Parks Victoria.

## The highest PRIORITIES for the Antwerp property include:

- Cultural and Natural heritage mapping
- Restoring indigenous plant and animal habitat
- Stabilising buildings and upgrading access tracks
- Establishing low key facilities to enable visiting and camping
- Developing interpretation and educational opportunities for exploring and sharing culture
- Developing a co-operative management program with key partners and neighbouring landholders



# EBENEZER

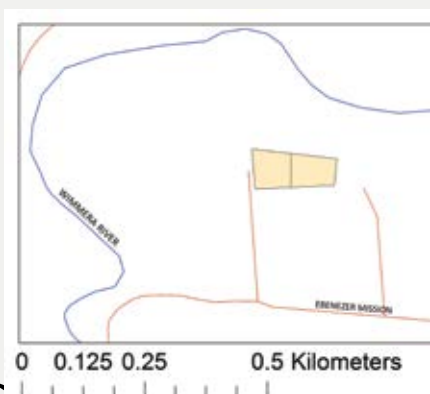


## The PRIORITIES for Ebenezer include:

- Actively engage in the negotiation of the transfer of the whole original footprint of Ebenezer to the Traditional Owners. BGLC is actively seeking to address the legal issues regarding the transfer of the title of the Ebenezer Cemetery from Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative to BGLC
- A management Plan for Ebenezer to guide restoration and protection activities, including care for the unmarked graves. It is estimated that there are over 1000 unmarked graves in and around Ebenezer, from before the land was subdivided
- Restoring Indigenous plant and animal habitat
- Offer training in plant identification so our people can recognise particular plants, where they grow and what they are often associated with, e.g. particular plants associated with grave sites
- Develop a bushfoods orchard and business
- Establish facilities to enable visiting and camping of Traditional Owner families for gatherings and ceremonies

**EBENEZER MISSION** is a place of great significance for Wotjobaluk Peoples. Before the arrival of Europeans, the area was an important campsite and place for ceremonial gatherings, because of its location near one of our most important water sources, Barringgi Gadyin. At Ebenezer, Moravian missionaries tried to “civilise” our ancestors by converting them to Christianity, and encouraging them to “settle down” into a European lifestyle, away from well-adapted Aboriginal farming practices into European farming practices that were ill-adapted to our Country and climate. Cultural practices such as language, dance, song, traditional burial and traditional marriage were forbidden. Ebenezer Mission reminds us of colonisation, but also of the enduring strength of our culture and identity as Aboriginal people. At the mission, our ancestors could maintain our traditional kinship networks and connection to our Country. They gathered at Ebenezer and surrounding pastoral stations to continue to live and practice our Culture. They survived to pass this knowledge and tradition to us, their descendants. We remember their struggle and their strength when we visit Ebenezer Mission.

The key partners for Ebenezer are Indigenous Land Corporation, National Trust Victoria, Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Corporation, neighbouring landholders, Hindmarsh Shire Council, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, Country Fire Authority and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.







# THE COMMON



**THE COMMON** is an important cultural place along Barringgi Gadyin in Dimboola that holds many memories for the local Aboriginal community. Scarred trees and other Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites have been recorded within the area known as The Common, demonstrating a long history with this significant place. More recently, families lived at The Common after the closure of Ebenezer. Work in the market gardens and on the railways drew our people back here, particularly between the 1930s and 1960s.

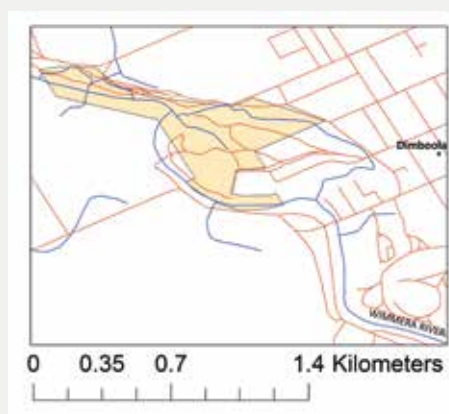
The Common is bordered on the east side by Barringgi Gadyin. Bial Woodland with a grassy understorey and sparse shrub layer is the main vegetation type, though the ground layer is heavily disturbed from post settlement activities, such as market gardening, pastoral activity and work on the Dimboola Weir.

A Cultural Heritage Management Plan was prepared for the Hindmarsh Shire Council for the Nine Creeks Walking and Bicycle Track. The purpose of this plan was to map Aboriginal Cultural Heritage places and identify any possible impacts from the construction of the walking and bicycle track. As such the management plan does not go beyond recommendations for avoiding disturbance from track construction to several identified and potential cultural sites.

The key partners for The Common are Hindmarsh Shire Council, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

## The **PRIORITY** goals for The Common are:

- Recognise the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage of the site by installing interpretive signage
- Restore native plant and animal communities
- Trial application of Traditional Burning practices for regenerative purposes



It was a hive of activity. A lot of people lived there. There are so many memories, and there are lots of ideas about what might happen here in the future. **Everyone wants to see it protected and respected.** River Yarns was a good first step to get people talking about the future. It's exciting to talk about what step two might be. Spaces like the Common are really important for **creating opportunities to get our young people involved in** projects and for linking our young people with career pathways.

– Wotjobaluk Elder Uncle Ron Marks

# THE RANCH AND BILLABONG



## The **PRIORITY** goals for The Ranch and Billabong are:

- Creating a management committee of Traditional Owners to oversee implementation of the Management Plan
- Restoring Indigenous plant and animal habitats, with particular attention to controlling priority weeds
- Renovating the Ranch building to provide facilities for meetings and short-term accommodation
- Upgrading the access track and providing low key facilities for day visits
- Restoring a natural flooding regime to the billabong system
- Developing interpretation and educational opportunities for exploring and sharing culture



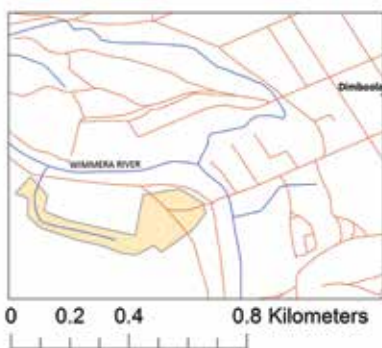
**THE RANCH AND BILLABONG** have been home to many generations of Wotjobaluk Peoples, long before settlement and increasingly after Ebenezer closed. Families lived across the site, children were born and raised here and people fished in the Billabong. It is registered with Aboriginal Victoria as an Aboriginal Place and is considered a valuable representation of a “fringe camp” that contains a surviving and substantial standing structure (The Ranch).

The Ranch and Billabong is a 5 hectare parcel of land on the western edge of Dimboola Township, adjacent to the Wimmera River. The land is held by BGLC as freehold and is managed by BGLC on behalf of the Wotjobaluk Peoples. A management plan was created in October 2005 by BGLC with support from the Centre for Environmental Management, University of Ballarat. It outlines the Vision, major directions and values of the site and sets clear management objectives for Cultural and Natural heritage, Land use and Development and Information and Educational opportunities.

The key partners are Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Hindmarsh Shire Council, neighbouring landholders and Dimboola Community Groups.

A peaceful place of gathering, sharing and nurturing – that’s how I remember it. The Ranch/Billabong is one of few remaining places that connect with how our mob lived before and after settlement. We were told stories of the area and how families lived and survived.

As kids you don’t really notice much around you, you’re more or less enjoying the moment - but as you get older you realise what the old people meant by their stories. I’ll always treasure the times our families spent at the Ranch/Billabong. I would love for future generations to experience that culture and history. The place is in poor shape and needs to be restored, including a general clean up, revegetation of native plants and re-directing water back into the Billabong. – Dylan Clarke, Chair, Barengi Gadjin Land Council





# GOYURA



**GOYURA** Scar trees and other sites of significance along the nearby Yarriambiack Creek demonstrate Wotjobaluk Peoples connection with this place going back thousands of years. Woodlands of various types with grassy, saltbush or shrubby understories once graced this landscape and remnant River Red Gums continue to grow across half this property. Traditional food plants are plentiful and evidence of gatherings and food collection is strong in the vicinity of this place. Wotjobaluk Peoples lived here permanently over the past century and continue to visit and camp here.

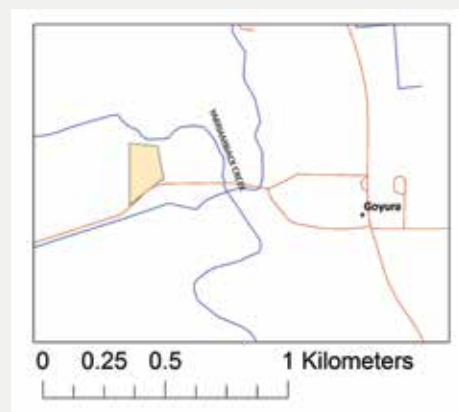
Goyura is a 2.02 hectare freehold property situated about 9 kilometres south of Hopetoun at the old Goyura Township.

BGLC own and manage this property on behalf of the Wotjobaluk Peoples, guided by a management plan completed in 2011 outlining priorities for cultural and natural heritage, land use and development, and information and education. BGLC lead development of the plan, with support from the Centre for Environmental Management, University of Ballarat.

The key partners for Goyura are neighbouring landholders, Yarriambiack Shire Council, the Mallee CMA, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and Parks Victoria.

## The PRIORITIES for Goyura are:

- Survey and fence the property boundaries
- Restore native plant and animal communities
- Restrict access to management vehicles only
- Provide low key facilities for visitors
- Create educational and interpretive opportunities to share the culture and importance of this property and surrounding landscape
- Engage key partners in co-operative management







# RESERVES FOR JOINT MANAGEMENT

BARRINGGI GADYIN

(Wimmera River)

DYURRITE

(Mount Arapiles – Tooan State Park)

LITTLE DESERT NATIONAL PARK

WYPERFELD - BIG DESERT

GURRU (Lake Hindmarsh) and  
NGALPAKATIA/NGELPAGUTYA  
(Lake Albacutya)

GARIWERD (The Grampians)

ISOLATED RESERVES





# BARRINGGI GADYIN



Barringgi Gadyin Catchment and surrounds

(map courtesy Wimmera CMA)

**BARRINGGI GADYIN** is the life blood of the Wotjobaluk Peoples, linking everything together. The River is the source of the water and abundant food, and there are many hundreds of culturally significant sites along the banks and adjacent land areas.

The Barringgi Gadyin catchment area is around 2.4 million hectares with numerous tributaries starting in the higher rainfall upper catchment of the Pyrenees Ranges to the north end of Gariwerd and across to the Wirrengren Plain. The section north of Horsham to the Wirrengren Plain has been proclaimed a Victorian Heritage River under the Heritage Rivers Act 1992. Barringgi Gadyin and its tributaries supply water for towns and farms and offer numerous recreational opportunities such as rowing, fishing, water ski-ing, camping and hiking.

The Wimmera Waterway Strategy and the Wimmera Carbon Ready Plan provide direction to action. The River is a Heritage River under the Heritage Rivers Act. The key partners are Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Pyrennes, Northern Grampians, Horsham and Hindmarsh Shire Councils, Parks Victoria, Murray and Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

“Our connection to the river is not only through the past, it’s about desire for a great future for our community”

– Ron Marks, while on the River Yarns trip, March 2017



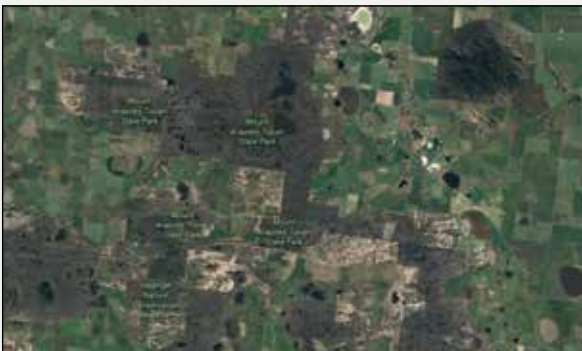
## PRIORITIES for Barringgi Gadyin are:

- Continue to develop the River Yarns event, to share and re-create cultural knowledge about the River, using the Aboriginal Water Assessment tool to help with this
- Demonstrate alignment between environmental watering and cultural objectives, and advocate for environmental and cultural flows
- Increase awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal cultural and customary interests in land, water and natural resources
- Increase protection and rehabilitation of significant cultural places along the River
- Restore native vegetation so there is a continuous corridor re-established along the length of the River
- Increase employment, training and economic development for our people through water related projects
- Install fish and bunyart (eel) ladders at each of the weirs along the river



# DYURRITE

(MT. ARAPILES)



## PRIORITIES for Dyurrite are:

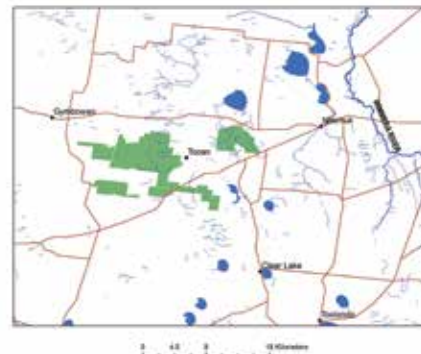
- Establish Joint Management arrangements
- Undertake a Cultural Heritage Survey
- Review the Mount Arapiles – Tooan State Park Management Plan (1991) to ensure cultural values are incorporated and protected
- Carry out Rock Art restoration and protection
- Re-kindle Cultural Burning Practices
- Install signage that provides interpretation of sites that can be visited whilst steering people away from sensitive areas
- Offer tours, dance and ceremony through fee-paying cultural tourism activities



**DYURRITE**, rising from the Wimmera Plain, comes into view many miles distant. This imposing rock formation, with its red and yellow colouring, radiates strength and cultural significance. More than 40 important cultural heritage sites including quarries, rock art and shelters are evidence of the significance of Dyurrite for Wotjobaluk Peoples and our use of the area for thousands of years. The hardened sandstone characteristic of Dyurrite was a valuable source of rock material for stone tools. It also makes Dyurrite less susceptible to erosion.

The spectacular views and the wide varieties of flora, some considered endangered or rare, are also notable features of Dyurrite. It is also one of Australia's most popular rock-climbing sites.

The key partners for Dyurrite are Parks Victoria, Natimuk Community and Horsham Rural City Council.







# LITTLE DESERT NATIONAL PARK

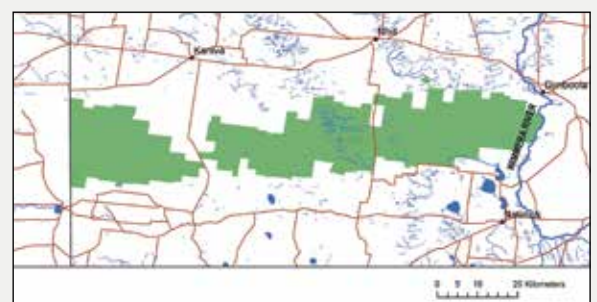


**LITTLE DESERT NATIONAL PARK** Bordered by the Wimmera River to the east and the South Australian border to the west, this park is filled with a surprising diversity of vegetation with over 670 species of native plants. Over 220 bird species have been spotted in the park, and it is one of few refuges for Lauan, the Mallee Fowl. The lands are relatively untouched and contain significant sites for Wotjobaluk Peoples who are recognised as having native title rights over some parts of the park. Areas within the park are co-operatively managed with the Barengi Gadjin Land Council under the existing Cooperative Management Agreement.

Park management is guided by Little Desert National Park Management Plan and Parks Victoria prescribed burning. The key partners are Parks Victoria, Conservation Volunteers Australia and the National Malleefowl Recovery Team.

## PRIORITIES for Wotjobaluk Peoples in managing the Little Desert National Park are:

- Establish Joint Management arrangements
- Undertake Cultural Heritage Mapping and review the Little Desert National Park Management Plan (1996) to ensure protection of cultural heritage
- Re-establish Cultural Burning Practices
- Make camping for Traditional Owners more accessible
- Work in closely with partners and neighbours to re-create land management practices that heal Country and go beyond the standard pest plant and animal control

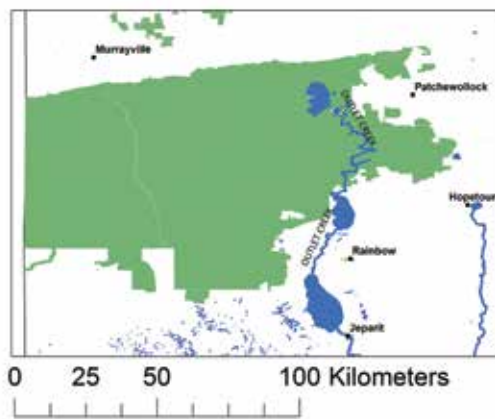


# WYPERFELD BIG DESERT



## PRIORITIES for Wyperfeld – Big Desert are:

- Undertake Cultural Heritage mapping and if necessary, amend the Big Desert Wilderness Management Plan (1994) to protect cultural heritage
- Reintroduce traditional burning and other cultural healing practices
- Survey native fauna and re-introduce native species to control pest animals, for example quolls to control rabbits
- Secure the Kangaroo culling contract and shift practices to cultural use and control



**WYPERFELD - BIG DESERT** Three distinct types of Country make up this vast national park – heathlands of the Big Desert Wilderness in the west; Mallee eucalyptus Woodlands in the east; and shifting sand dunes in the north. Combined, these parks cover over 500,000 hectares with over 450 species of native plants and 200 species of native birds.

Vehicle access is highly restricted in the Big Desert Wilderness, making it one of the remotest parks in Victoria. Limited four-wheel drive tracks restrict access in the other areas leaving much of this national park undisturbed and protected. The many walking tracks provide opportunities to see these beautiful wilderness areas as our ancestors once did.

Wotjobaluk Peoples moved across these landscapes seasonally, singing the Country, accessing plants and animals for food, fibre and medicine and employing cultural burning practices to keep a mosaic of vegetation cover and reduce the likelihood of large wildfires. The natural values cultivated by these practices were appreciated by early naturalists, who lobbied the State Government successfully to reserve parts of this park first in 1909, again in 1929 and later in the 1960s to now.

The Big Desert Wilderness Management Plan and the Wyperfeld National Park Management Plan guide management of this park. The key partners are Parks Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee.







# GURRU AND NGALPAKATIA NGELPAGUTYA



**GURRU** is the Wergaia language name for Lake Hindmarsh, Victoria's largest freshwater lake. *Ngalpakatia* or *Ngelpagutya* is the Wergaia language name for Lake Albacutya. When Purra/Barra the Kangaroo stopped to feed for a long time eating the ground bare, Gurru was formed. When Purra/Barra stopped to feed on sour quandongs, *Ngelukgutya* was formed. Gurru was part of a large traditional trading route, while at Ngelukgutya, shell middens, oven mounds, scarred trees, artefacts and stories highlight the Wotjobaluk Community's deep and continuous connections.

Gurru and Ngalpakatia/Ngelpagutya receive water following extremely wet conditions that generate sufficient streamflows from the Wimmera River. At these times, migratory birds come from thousands of kilometres away to make use of their habitat whilst tourists gather to see this spectacle. However, Gurru was dry for a decade until floodwaters arrived in spring 2010 and summer 2011. Ngelukgutya has not had inflows since the mid-1990's and last filled in 1975. Pest plants such as boneseed, boxthorn, bridal creeper, olives, and rabbits, are threatening the condition of riparian and wetland vegetation.

The Wimmera Waterway Strategy sets goals for Gurru and Ngalpakatia/Ngelpagutya. Lake Albacutya Ramsar Site Strategic Management Plan and the Lake Albacutya RAMSAR Wetland Ecological Character Description are the two main documents that inform management of this Reserve. The key partners are Parks Victoria, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and Hindmarsh Shire Council.

## The PRIORITIES for these places are:

- Undertake a Cultural Survey around the perimeter of Gurru, acquire land with sites of cultural significance, and restore and protect cultural sites
- At Ngalpakatia/Ngelpagutya review the RAMSAR Wetland Management Plan, check on how well cultural values are being protected, and sunset the grazing license
- At Ngalpakatia/Ngelpagutya, document and interpret migratory bird flight paths and create connections with other Traditional Owner communities who are along these flight paths
- Restore Cultural Water flows to both lakes and re-create Traditional Ecological Knowledge to inform land management practices that heal Country





# GARIWERD



## PRIORITIES for Gariwerd are:

- Establish Joint Management arrangements
- Undertake more extensive Cultural Heritage Mapping and review the Grampians National Park Management Plan (2003) to ensure protection of cultural heritage
- Re-establish Cultural Burning Practices
- Make camping more accessible for Traditional Owners and provide some sites for our exclusive use
- Work in closely with partners and neighbours to re-create land management practices that heal Country and go beyond short-term pest and weed control contracts

The rugged sandstone ranges of **GARIWERD** rise abruptly from the surrounding Western Plains. This stunning landform hosts many different vegetation types and is rich in wildlife. Heathlands, Woodlands, Forests and abundant wetlands and waterfalls that stem from this extraordinary landscape made this place highly significant for the First Peoples of this land and for all generations since. The flora and fauna diversity is very high, with over one third of the vascular plants of Victoria represented in the Park.

The cultural landscape of Gariwerd is rich - many of our Creation Stories originate from this area and there are a high number of rock features, such as Barigar and art sites depicting Ancestor Spirits, such as Bunjil and the Bram-bram-bult Brothers. The park contains the largest concentration of rock art sites in Victoria, comprising over 60% of the State's rock art sites (Parks Victoria, 2003). Much of the archaeological research for the park has focused on the art and rock shelter sites. Other sites include rock shelters, quarries, mounds, surface scatters and scarred trees.

Key Partners for this site are Parks Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Norther Grampians and Southern Grampians Shires, Grampians Water, Barwon South-east Water and neighbouring Traditional Owner Groups.

# ISOLATED RESERVES

There are important small reserves, amongst them, Pickford Reserve, the Richardson River, Black Range, Wail Mitre Reserve and Nhill Swamp. The Wotjobaluk Peoples also have connections with Lake Tyrell and Lake Bullock.

These patches of remnant vegetation provide a snap-shot of how Country looked prior to white settlement and clearing. They hold rare and threatened species, provide habitat to native animals and are a source of seed to be able to restore surrounding Country with appropriate plant genetics.

Priorities for these reserves need to be developed on a site by site basis. Partners in this are Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Parks Victoria, surrounding landholders and Landcare groups.

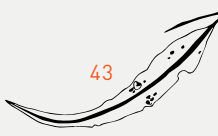


Enjoying the 2017 River Yarns trip are

Front Row left to right: Ben Muir, *kneeling* Daniel Clarke, Uncle Everard Marty Marks (Nukka), Aunty Heather Marks, Aunty Hazel McDonald, Aunty Faye Marks, Belinda Marks, Aunty Noelene Douglas, Sandra McKnight

Second Row left to right: Sharni Hamilton, Brett Harrison, Geoffrey Marks, Uncle Ron Marks, Alinta Cruz and Martin Cruz

Third Row left to right: Darren Griffin, Stephen Atkinson and Jonathon Starks



# MEASURES OF SUCCESS

## WHAT WOULD WE SEE IF WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS ON OUR GOALS?<sup>1</sup>

### 1. More frequent gatherings and increased attendance

If more people come to our events, this would show that there's greater awareness of what's going on, greater interest and a willingness to share and learn. The flow on effect is that more people will be looking after our special places, volunteering and helping to organise, and the Community will feel stronger knowing that people care enough to help.

### 2. Increased membership of BGLC and increased participation in projects

More Wotjobaluk People committing to a BGLC membership and more members participating and helping to organise events will show that projects are understood by and are relevant to our people. A skills audit will identify what people have to offer so they can be approached directly and invited to help on things they are good at.

### 3. BGLC embracing opportunities for Wotjobaluk Peoples to be involved

Increased communication that shares progress with plans with the whole Community, showcasing our stories in various media forms.

### 4. Increased number of Traditional Owners employed

More positions and work for Rangers/Crew on Country. More businesses in cultural tourism and other enterprises, employing Wotjobaluk Peoples.

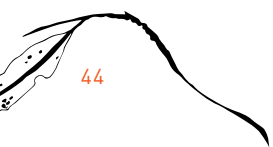
### 5. Increase in workplace training for Wotjobaluk Peoples

More training that targets our young people, with elders and other knowledge holders employed as tutors. Good numbers in the course would indicate the material is inspiring our young people to learn about their culture.

### 6. The health of our special places and reserves improving

A shift in our land management from controlling pests to re-introducing traditional burning, undertaking hunting to replace culls, and undertaking ceremonies for healing Country.

Evidence from the Aboriginal Waterways Assessment of improvements in ecosystem health and cultural site protection.





# PATHWAYS FOR IMPLEMENTING THIS PLAN

**The priorities and actions set out in this Country Plan will help us achieve our vision and the goals we believe will make a difference for Wotjobaluk Peoples.** All of the ideas, so generously shared across our community, will guide our planning and actions in many ways for years to come.

Firstly, development of the next Strategic Plan by our Corporation, BGLC, can now be strongly informed by the broad input from across our Traditional Owner community, generated through the Country Planning process. BGLC can focus in on the priorities and allocate resources accordingly. Likewise, this input is a valuable contribution to the negotiations currently underway with the State under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* and as we move into new arrangements with government departments, such as with Parks Victoria.

We anticipate well-informed and respectful conversations with partners that will lead to the opportunities described in this plan. Some of these conversations are already happening. We look forward to many more.

**The following principles and practices will guide how this plan will be implemented.**

## PRINCIPLES

**COLLABORATION** – We and our partners will develop clear roles and accountabilities in the delivery of this Country Plan.

**CREATIVITY** – We will pursue creative, culturally based solutions and unique opportunities

**INCLUSIVENESS** – Wotjobaluk Peoples will freely pursue economic, cultural and social development, the benefits of which will be shared equitably amongst the Traditional Owner community

**LONG-TERM AND SUSTAINABLE** – decisions on how to act on the priorities in this plan will strongly consider the long-term benefits and the sustainability of these actions

**RESPECTFUL INVOLVEMENT** – We request from all our partners meaningful engagement with Wotjobaluk Peoples on policy and programs that may affect our Country and our People

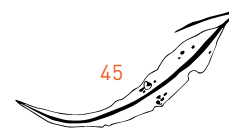
**SELF-DETERMINATION** – self-government in local affairs and control over decisions that affect Wotjobaluk Peoples

## PRACTICES FOR CONNECTING OUR COUNTRY PLAN WITH OTHER PLANS AND PROCESSES

**STRATEGIC PLANNING** – the material in this Country Plan will strongly inform the development of our next BGLC Strategic Plan, which is due for development in 2017-18.

**ANNUAL PLANNING, REVIEW OF PROGRESS AND LEARNING** – We will create opportunities for Wotjobaluk peoples to be involved in and contribute to fulfilling the Country Plan and Strategic Plan annually

**SETTLEMENT NEGOTIATIONS** – This is one platform for assisting us to achieve our goals. Our rights, interests and aspirations as expressed in this Country Plan will be further developed into the agreements we negotiate under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act. Specific examples include the development of a Joint Management Plan once a Traditional Owner Land Management Agreement (TOLMA) is in place, and the Participation Strategies, Take and Use Provisions and Sustainability Principles that are part of the Natural Resource Agreement.





Mission Station, Dimboola. La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.  
(First published in the *Illustrated Australasian News*, 22 March 1882)







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