

Djandak

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# Aboriginal Community Engagement Project

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council; Central  
West Investigation Stage 2

March 2019



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The pdf versions of, Merri Creek Aboriginal Cultural Values Report for Melbourne Water December 2012 and Growing What is Good Country Plan Voices of the Wotjobaluk Nations 2017 are not to be distributed without the permission of the Traditional Owner Groups and can be used for the purpose of this Project and referenced.

### *Image Front Page*

Djandak is the Dja Dja Wurrung word for Country this image is a visual representation. Djandak is also the trading brand of Dja Dja Wurrung Enterprises Pty Ltd its communicative message is: 'A traditional way of business'.

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## Introduction

Stage 1 of the Aboriginal Community Engagement Project provided input to VEAC during the development of draft recommendations for public land in Central West Victoria. This Stage 2 Report has been prepared in response to the VEAC Draft Proposals Paper Central West Investigation and is a summary of discussions by Victorian Traditional Owners interested in the VEAC proposals.

## Background

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) commenced the Central West Investigation in March 2017 and by 31<sup>st</sup> August 2018 had published its draft proposals paper. This part of the Aboriginal Community Engagement Project focused on receiving comments from Traditional Owners upon the draft proposals whilst on country and in workshop/meetings.

The Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DDWCAC) through the Djandak worked collaboratively with the VEAC to engage directly with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to seek their views and any relevant information they wished to share, and to convey these views and information to VEAC. VEAC can consider all input from Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities in formulating its final position for public land use and management in the investigation area.

## Engagement

### Method

The engagement process offered each group a whole day on-Country field trip to assist Traditional Owners to become familiar with the issues being addressed by the investigation and consider their input, before further discussion in a half-day workshop.

### Groups

The specific areas for this investigation overlap six RAP areas and Traditional Owner interests. The relationship between the individual groups are shown in the table below and in the Central West Investigation Map on page 32 of the of the Draft Proposals Paper.

## Table: TO/RAPs relevant to the VEAC Investigation

Mount Cole – Pyrenees	Barengi Gadjin <sup>1</sup> Martang Dja Dja Wurrung Wathaurung Eastern Maar <sup>2</sup>
Mount Macedon – Wombat	Dja Dja Wurrung Taungurung Wathaurung Wurundjeri
Wellsford	Dja Dja Wurrung

The Martang Pty Ltd as a RAP, continued their previous position to support the Eastern Maar. They described their cultural and operational affiliations as being a Clan type group that supports Eastern Maar, even when they have a current representation as a RAP.

<sup>1</sup> The investigation area borders the south-eastern part of Barengi Gadjin country but incorporates unallocated country in which Barengi Gadjin has a perceived interest.

<sup>2</sup> The investigation area borders the north-eastern part of the Eastern Maar lodgment of a Threshold Statement seeking settlement under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010.

## On Country tours and workshops

### Dja Dja Wurrung

On Country tour - Thursday 6th March 2019

Workshop - Friday the 7th of March

On country trip locations

- 1) Djandak Wi site – Greater Bendigo National Park



The group included members who undertook the initial Djandak Wi burns and they noted how well, comparatively, the site looked compared to the surrounding area that had a non-cultural burning carried out. Significantly better canopy, undergrowth and litter layers were observed. And the group felt a strong spiritual/cultural link and feeling when walking around the area – a sense of connection (or reconnection) enhanced through the recent Djandak Wi. The group felt that into the future Djandak Wi is needed across the whole area more than just “demonstration” sites.

- 2) Lalgambuk / Mount Franklin: situated in the Hepburn Regional Park under Aboriginal title / Joint Management. Lunch and discussions were held on top of the dormant volcano crater rim
- 3) Hepburn Springs
- 4) Hepburn Regional Park: Aboriginal title/Joint Management - The Blowhole



- 5) Hepburn Regional Park, HVP Plantations (commercial pine plantations) and Wombat State Forest – vegetation types, features, condition. (VEAC draft recommendations include additions to Hepburn Regional Park and a Conservation Park for the Wombat State Forest area visited).
- Interesting stones that were identified by a Traditional Owner highly knowledgeable in cultural heritage, were considered culturally artefactual, and were discovered in the creek bed at “The Blowhole” that warranted further assessments.
  - Weed issues observed in Hepburn Region Park.
  - Vegetation types changed moving from Hepburn Regional Park north in to Wombat State Forest – there are better grasses and ground cover with native species dominating. Vegetation type important for VEAC “EVC” (ecological vegetation class) analysis.
  - Lalgambuk and surrounding areas are regarded as highly important due to the strong cultural lore and connection Dja Dja Wurrung people maintain to place. During the on-country tour there was a Dja Dja Wurrung elder present that descends from the knowledge holders for the Hepburn region.
  - The devastating impact of deforestation on our rivers are culturally important

- Farmers/ landowners should be advised of cultural protocol around sites and places during investigation
- Cultural burning should be conducted consistently
- Implement Joint Management Plans around investigations
- Statewide implementation of independent TO investigations
- Forests are drying up, landscapes are dying.

### **Dja Dja Wurrung Recommendations:**

- Support for VEACs draft recommendations for parks and reserves
- To have more VEAC engagement with Traditional Owner groups or a Traditional Owner VEAC advisory board/council to represent Aboriginal voices
- More engagement with RAP groups and Traditional Owners [resourced to undertaken own assessments to provide a measure of self-determination].
- Recommendations made by VEAC should be approved by the Traditional Owners
- Domestic firewood collection prohibited in the Wellsford State Forest
- Interpretive signage for DDWCAC in National parks and State forests – this is partially backed up by VEAC draft recommendation R1 – Aboriginal place names. This recommendation could be improved to include interpretive signage and structures.
- There was acknowledgement of the importance of the intent of VEAC’s draft recommendation R7 – Allowing future changes to Aboriginal title parks and reserves.
- It was strongly emphasized that cultural heritage assessments and considerations were an integral and crucial part of a VEAC type assessment of natural and cultural values and needed to be assessed in conjunction with these broader landscape or aerial assessments.
- Resourcing for Dja Dja Wurrung to undertake their own assessments, including cultural heritage type assessments, was lacking in the VEAC assessment and is something that needs to be improved in future investigations.

## Wurundjeri

On Country tour - Monday 18th February

Workshop - Wednesday 20th February 2019

On Country tour locations:

- 1) Macedon Regional Park
- 2) Giant Pre-European tree Baringo Rd Mt Macedon (estimated 600+ years old)



- 3) Mount Macedon Memorial Cross Reserve

4) Camel's Hump, Macedon Ranges



5) Black Forest Road section of Macedon Regional Park VEAC draft recommendation: Nature Reserve – vegetation types, native grasses, wild pine control.

6) Merrimu Reservoir - one of several important water storages fed by headwaters (supply) in the Macedon/Wombat ranges. Mark Taylor from Southern Rural Water gave the group an overview of reservoir operations and importance of supply.

- In-depth discussions around TO engagement [current improvements urgently required]

It is a necessity that VEAC create continual engagement with the Traditional Owners when undertaking an investigation. There is not enough time allocated for the engagement process to think about the issues and discuss negotiations and/or the recommendations.

- An important question raised during the workshop: What is the process of VEAC engagement once the Aboriginal Project Officer position has ceased? The group agreed there is a need for Aboriginal liaison/support people in VEAC as well as resourcing for Wurundjeri see this as important.
- Allocate funding for more engagement with RAP groups to meet the terms of reference
- Consider RAP groups to conduct their own investigations. [including resourcing]
- Wurundjeri are particularly concerned about current Mountain Ash logging and the “Great Forest Project” (which they have lent their support to) in eastern Victoria.

- Wurundjeri felt a stronger, united voice, needed to be presented to the State about the need to properly and respectfully engage with TOs in VEAC investigations and other state-driven policy, strategy and planning/projects.
- Water was discussed as being very important and it was acknowledged that VEAC's draft recommendations for the Wombat-Macedon ranges supported protection of headwaters and river systems. Discussions around current drought and lack of rainfall took place on Country at the Merrimu reservoir. Pressures of increasing urbanization and population growth in areas like Melton and Bacchus Marsh is a significant pressure on water management.
- Cultural burning was discussed as being very important as part of caring for Country and Wurundjeri are currently active in this area. They see cultural burning as something that needs to be progressed further, resourced and integrated more into landscape wide management.

### **Wurundjeri Recommendations:**

- Support protection (park) for wombat state forests especially headwaters and river systems
- Provide a Traditional Owner community group or an Aboriginal Environmental Assessment Council for independent investigations in Victoria
- Include Aboriginal/TO representation on the Council (VEAC)
- Include Aboriginal/TO liaison within VEAC staff base for future investigations or assessments
- Partnership and Engagement on any State and/or VEAC assessments surrounding the “Great Forest Project” and the future of Mountain Ash Logging in eastern Victoria needs to involve Wurundjeri (as well as other TOs with interests in the relevant Country). Any decision making also needs to involve Wurundjeri and other respective TOs.
- Promotion and resourcing of cultural burning on an expanded/increasing scale.

## Barengi Gadjin

On Country tour - Tuesday 5th March 2019

Workshop - Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2019

On Country trip locations:

- 1) Mount Buangor National Park: camping grounds, vegetation types, majestic granite cliffs on mountain side viewed from below
- 2) Mount Ben Nevis: Fire lookout tower  
VEAC Draft recommendation: Nature Reserve



- 3) Current commercial logging coupe



- 4) Fiery Creek, Mount Cole Grevillea: endangered endemic grevillea with recent range contractions, The Glut Rd: areas of wet forest with mature trees and extensive mature fern vegetation
- 5) Wimmera River / Barringgi Gadyin headwaters: the group followed river down through Mt Cole State Forest to where the river enters the State Forest where the Little Wimmera River branches from the Wimmera.



- The group really enjoyed being out on Country and visiting the Mount Cole Range where the headwaters of the Wimmera River (Barringgi Gadyin) originate.
- The need to protect the Wimmera River was a foremost topic of discussion and concern.
- There were concerns about current boundaries and the need to speak to neighboring TOs about the Wimmera River. Elders commented that the river had always been their People's traditional Country.

### **Barengi Gadjin Recommendations:**

- Protection of the Wimmera river and headwaters in Mount Cole/Beeripmo Taungurung State Forest and in the Pyrenees ranges
- Apply a buffer zone around the Wimmera river and places of deforestation to in the Pyrenees ranges to reduce the impact on the waterways and areas of cultural significance
- The workshop group supported VEAC draft recommendations R1 – Aboriginal place names and R7 – Allowing future changes to Aboriginal title parks and reserves. – there was considerable expertise in the workshop group through a particular elder/linguist in place names and traditional language names.
- Aboriginal representation on VEAC Council
- Resourcing to support proper input and partnership in VEAC and other state driven processes
- Do not make Mount Cole Pyrenees into National Park (personal opinion of one of the Traditional Owners due to the restrictions this would place on shooting – broader opinion including as articulated through the “Growing What is Good” Country Plan was more one of protection through park or reserve status)

## Tungurung

On Country tour - Tuesday 26th February  
Workshop - Wednesday 27th February 2019

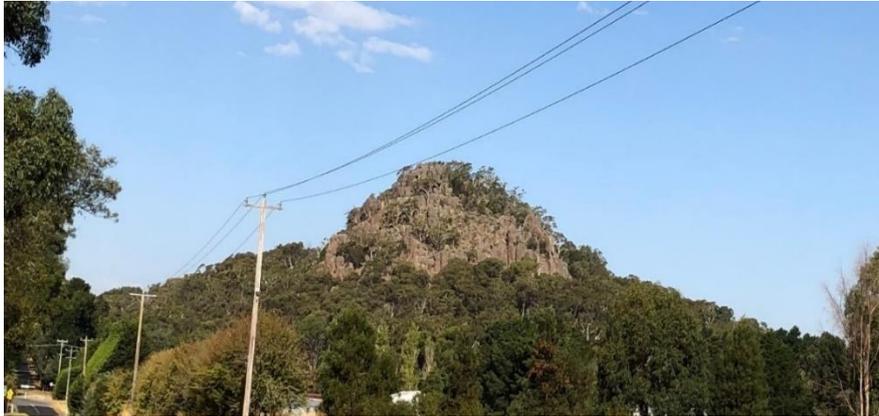
On Country trip locations:

- 1) Cobaw State Forest- VEAC Draft recommendation: Conservation Park - possible cultural heritage sites inspected



Very rare large old pre-European tree in the Cobaw forest

2) Hanging Rock



The group went for a driving tour through the forest that provided a great opportunity for Traditional Owners to assess the environmental and ecological conditions and features.

- General discussion about the VEAC engagement process – seen as somewhat limited process and restricts the ability for TOs to have informed input and engagement
- Suggestions; there should be continual engagement with RAP groups and Traditional Owners
- Why were RAP groups consulted for engagement so late in the investigation process?
- Why hasn't there been engagement for 20+ years?
- Intangible and cultural heritage to be considered when undertaking a VEAC investigation
- Interpretive signage containing information on significant sites.

### **Taungurung Recommendations:**

- Cobaw conservation park to be facilitated as a camping area for the public to enjoy
- More information and engagement between VEAC and Traditional Owners at the beginning of the investigation – as well as ongoing partnerships/engagement and resourcing of TOs to conduct their own assessments
- Another platform for traditional owners to express their opinions
- Provide opportunities and resourcing for RAP and Traditional Owner groups to complete investigations independently; promotes/allows realization of self-determination
- Under settlement agreements/TOS Act – the state needs to play an active role in educating the public about what the outcomes (e.g. joint management and other arrangements or projects) mean for land management – currently this is all falling on Taungurung who are not resourced to do this. This is particularly important to address misconceptions about land being “locked away” and other similar misconceptions. The intent of Taungurung and other TOs (e.g. DDW) is not to exclude the public from parks and reserves but to manage them, in partnership, for everyone to enjoy while also recognizing and respecting Aboriginal culture practices and customs.

## Eastern Maar

VEAC's Aboriginal project officer engaged directly with representatives of Eastern Maar. VEAC acknowledged that the short timeframe for the project did not give Traditional Owners adequate opportunity to properly engage in the investigation

The Eastern Maar Country Plan 'Meerreengeeye ngakeepoorryeeyt' 2015 provides guidance how the people view landscape management. In particular at p. 34 Goal 4 Our Country is healthy, and our natural resources are managed and used sustainably.

## Wathaurong

VEAC's Aboriginal project officer engaged directly with representatives of Wadawurrung. VEAC acknowledged that the short timeframe for the project did not give Wadawurrung Traditional Owners adequate opportunity to properly engage in the investigation. Wadawurrung is in the midst of developing its Healthy Country Plan which will provide valuable insights and information to inform VEAC and other stakeholders about Wadawurrung aspirations and goals to heal and better care for Country.

## Acknowledgment

The 'Djandak' would like to thank the Victorian Environment Assessment Council and their staff for their positive consideration of the Dja Dja Wurrung Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA). From the recognition of the RSA by the VEAC, this project has been able to be resourced to allow a Traditional Owner engagement by the Dja Dja Wurrung and where relevant with their neighbors upon Country. We extend our thanks to our neighbors who have been able to participate in the project and understand that where neighbors have not been able to be engaged it is largely because of their limited availability through lack of resources and time.

## Project Team

### Vanessa 'Ness' Charles



Ness is a descendant of the Dja Dja Wurrung people of Central Victoria and Yorta Yorta people of Northern Victoria and works in Bendigo and lives in Mooroopna in regional Victoria.

Ness grew up along the Goulburn river and enjoyed the warm summers and popular sandy swimming spots with her family. She also enjoyed hunting and gathering with her grandparents along the Murray river during the winter. Ness maintains a strong connection to country and waterways and has always been fascinated about the ancientness of Aboriginal culture, traditions, song lines and oral history stories.

Ness has extensive experience in cultural heritage management and a strong desire to link 'her people to culture' through the heritage and environmental projects she leads. A proud moment for Ness was completing her BA double major in Archaeology and History. Ness enjoys Aboriginal dancing for cultural promotion and is passionate about providing non-Aboriginal people with a 'different perspective' on Aboriginal people and culture.

