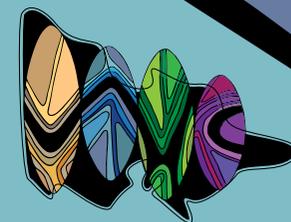


# Strategic Plan 2021-2026



VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL  
HERITAGE COUNCIL

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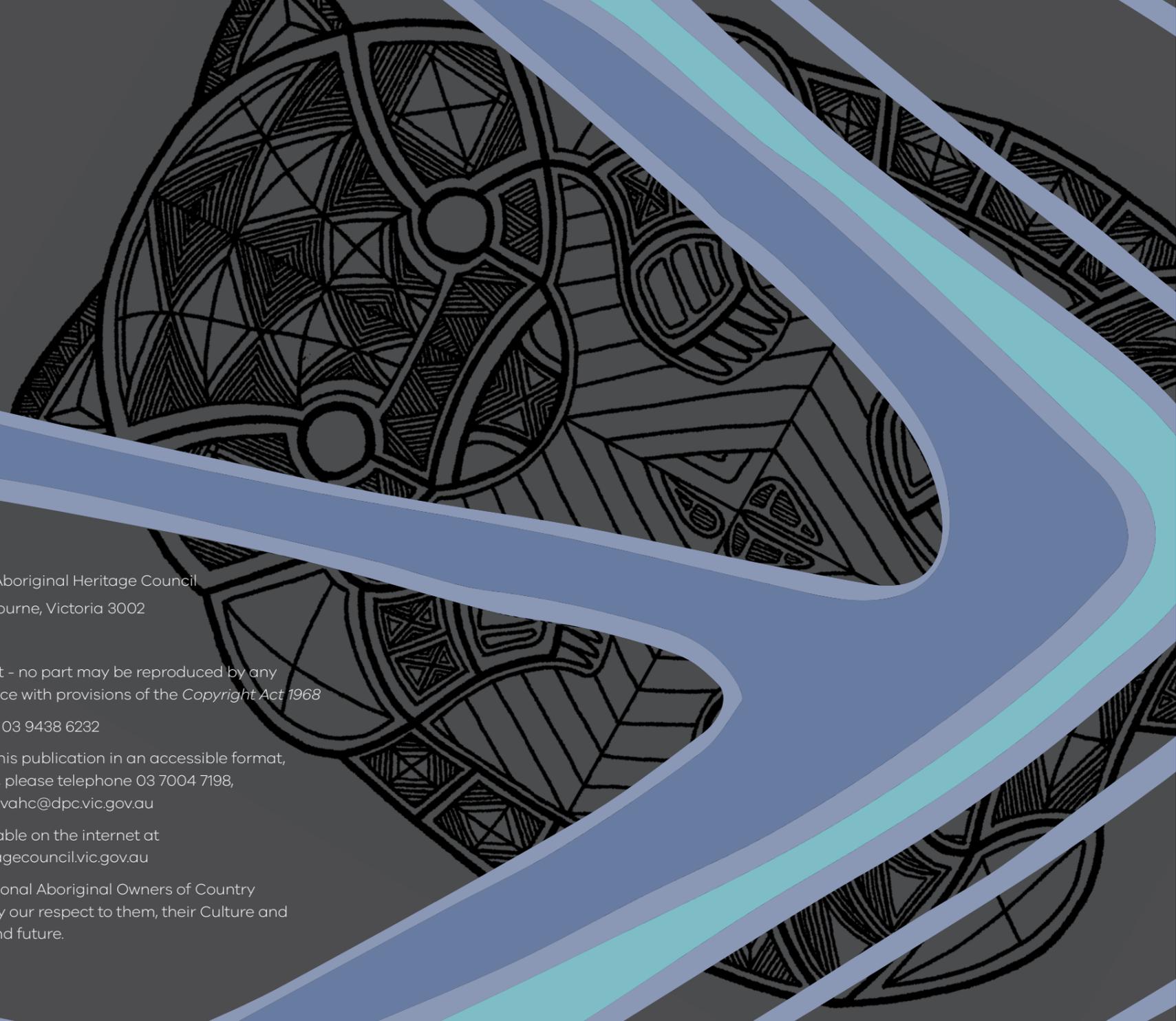
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We acknowledge the Traditional Aboriginal Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pay our respect to them, their Culture and their Elders past, present and future.



## Introduction

**In a landmark piece of legislation, the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council was created through the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, as the only statutory authority composed entirely of Victorian Traditional Owners. Then, as now, the significance of Council's representation is a positive step towards empowerment.**

Today, some 15 years later, a seismic change has happened in the way that Traditional Owners' rights, responsibilities, knowledge and voice is considered and appreciated in the broader community. As a Council, we are true to our values and provide leadership that is constructive, visionary and forward thinking.

Government's own policies of self-determination for Victorian Traditional Owners are reflective of this change but it is time that they are implemented in legislation. The time has come for Traditional Owners to do more than play a part, they must realise their rights to control their Cultural Heritage through the law that governs the protection and management of that Cultural Heritage, we do this is not only for us but for all Victorians.

The health and wellbeing of our People has been affected in all kinds of ways. Working with and respecting Traditional Owners will make a difference. What's happened so far has made a difference, and further reforming of the Act will make differences as well.

Our Peoples' Cultures are bound by our relationships to each other, our Countries and our Ancestors. Fundamental to our wellbeing is connection to our Culture and our connection to each other is a core part of this. We speak to, with and for our Peoples to maintain our rights as First Peoples to have our voices heard and valued.

As a Council of Traditional Owners, we seek to advocate for the inherent rights of our Peoples. We communicate the spiritual, cultural and intergenerational responsibilities of our Peoples and educate all in the community on who we are as Traditional Owners, who our Ancestors were and who are children will be. In all we do we will apply the principles of self-determination and advocate for these rights to be activated and respected. Everybody in the Victorian community needs to learn, understand and respect Aboriginal Cultural Heritage. We will all be better for the experience.

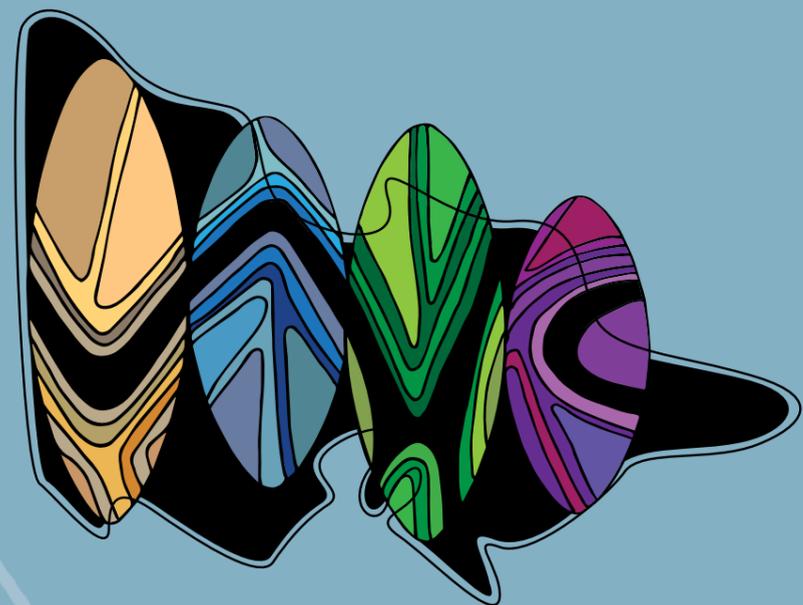
Together, across generations, we are the protectors of Cultural Heritage through imposed legislation and community cultural expectations. It is in our children's lifetimes that our ambitions to be accorded the rights outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will be realised. This Declaration enshrines the rights of our People and affirms that Indigenous Peoples are equal to all other peoples, while recognising the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such.

The Act and Declaration, together, provide some of the greatest protections for Traditional Owners in the country. However, there is still much to be done in realising a fundamentally self-determined and tangible ownership of our Culture, Heritage, History and Country.

**Mick Harding**

Chairperson

Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council



## The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council

Council's logo of four shields, protecting the state of Victoria, is our commitment to supporting, respecting and celebrating our Country, Culture and Life.

The colours of the shields represent the four environments that make up our Country:

**gold** and **ochre** represent desert sands and dry country

**green** for the forests and grasslands

**blue** for the waters, rivers and lakes

**purple** represents our Countries in the metropolitan regions as well as in the basaltic and volcanic plains.

The Council's vision is of a community that understands and respects Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and the cultural responsibilities of Traditional Owners. The Council recognises Traditional Owners as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of their Cultures.

When we speak of Cultural Heritage, we are speaking of more than the manifestation of our Ancestors in the landscape, we are speaking of wellness, wellbeing and the inherited and fundamental rights of our Peoples.

Cultural Heritage refers to the knowledge and lore, practices and people, objects and places that are valued, culturally meaningful and connected to identity and Country. It shapes identity and is a lived spirituality fundamental to the wellbeing of communities through connectedness across generations. And, it has been passed from the Ancestors to future generations through today's Traditional Owners whose responsibilities are profound and lifelong.

As a Council of Traditional Owners, we are proud of the Aboriginal Cultures of Victoria. We are committed to strengthening the knowledge held by Aboriginal People across Victoria. Cultural Heritage is our inheritance and our legacy. Though our work

and cultural responsibilities we support self-determination as a collective right for our Peoples.

The Council is made up of up to eleven Traditional Owners who are appointed by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Members of the Council must reside in Victoria and have demonstrated traditional or familial links to an area in Victoria. They are also required to have relevant knowledge or experience in the management of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in Victoria.

Council is not currently representative in its membership, instead comprised of Traditional Owners with the knowledge and experience required. It is comprised of members of RAPs and non-formally recognised Traditional Owner groups, ensuring that the voices of a broad range of Traditional Owners are heard. Each Council member contributes perspective, understanding and knowledge to Council's decisions that are made as a collective of individual Traditional Owner voices.

The Council plays an important role in the implementation of the Act. The Council's principal functions are:

- Making decisions on Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) applications
- Monitoring RAPs
- Protecting Ancestors' resting places and returning Ancestors to Country
- Care for Secret or Sacred (Sacred) Objects in Victoria
- Managing the Victorian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Fund
- Promoting understanding and awareness of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage
- Providing Advice to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and government.

**Vision**

**Our vision is of a place where language is spoken easily, Traditional Owners are respected, Countries are cared for appropriately and Cultures are proudly lived by all our Peoples.**

Our vision will only be realised through:

- respecting Traditional Owner rights and responsibilities to Culture and Community;
- supporting our Peoples to advocate, communicate and educate about these inherited, fundamental and spiritual responsibilities for the benefit of all people; and
- significant legislative changes, ensuring Traditional Owners manage their Cultural Heritage.

**Purpose**

**Our purpose is to uphold Traditional Owner rights and responsibilities to Culture and Community; supporting our People to advocate, communicate and educate about these inherited, fundamental and spiritual responsibilities for the benefit of all people.**

**Values**

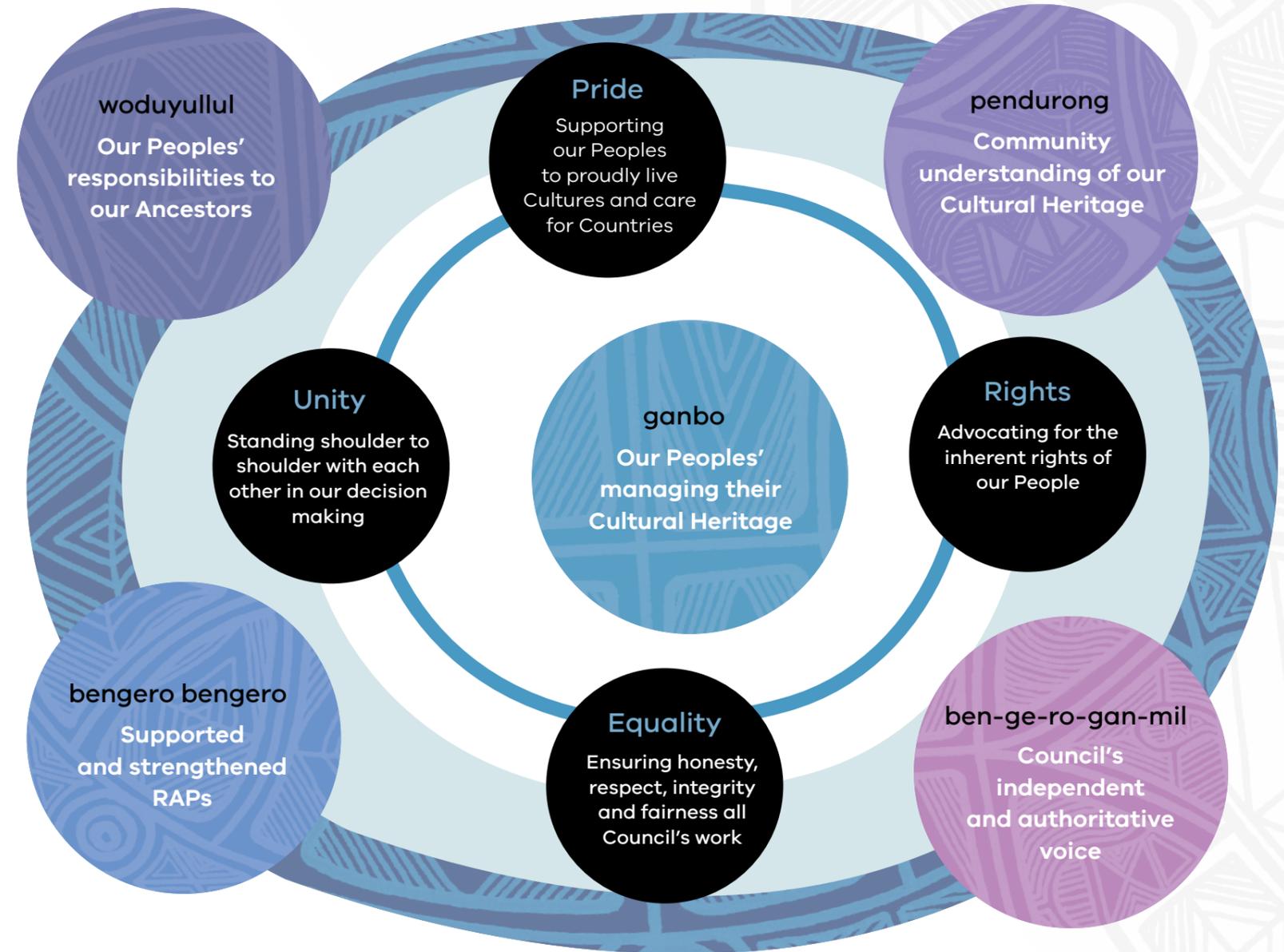
Our Peoples are the Traditional Owners, custodians of a rich and complex system of values that inform our day to day to lives, governance structures and systems of belief. They are values of respect – respect for each other, respect for Country and respect for Ancestors.

<b>Pride</b>
Supporting our People to proudly live Cultures and care for Countries
<b>Equality</b>
Ensuring honesty, respect, integrity and fairness all Council's work
<b>Rights</b>
Advocating for the inherent rights of our Peoples
<b>Unity</b>
Standing shoulder to shoulder with each other in our decision making

**Objectives**

<b>ganbo</b>
Our Peoples' managing their Cultural Heritage
<b>pendurong</b>
Community understanding of our Cultural Heritage
<b>ben-ge-ro-gan-mil</b>
Council's independent and authoritative voice
<b>bengero bengero</b>
Supported and strengthened RAPs
<b>woduyullul</b>
Our Peoples' responsibilities to our Ancestors

Our Objectives are numbered Ganbo to Woduyullul (1 to 5) in the Bunurong language.



ganbo

## Our Peoples' managing their Cultural Heritage

## ngalu bappak mana dardee loong wurk wurk bramung-ma

*From the Gunaikurnai language, this means:*

*Together our heart is strong, like the sap in the wattle tree that keeps the tree growing, it makes it strong, keeps it alive. It represents the heart, mind and soul of the people to be strong in their culture. Loong wurk wurk bramungma represents the many relationship of family who belong to their lands.*

### Strategic Actions

Sharing Cultures through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intergenerational engagement</li> <li>• cultural capacity building and employment</li> <li>• local, state, national and international discourse</li> </ul>
Supporting projects that	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protect and celebrate Cultures through the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Fund</li> <li>• promote the rights and responsibilities of Traditional Owners</li> </ul>
Strengthening language through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enabling Traditional Owners to manage language use</li> <li>• place naming embedding language in the landscape</li> </ul>

**“We are an old Peoples, living old Cultures in an old environment. To be well, to thrive and to share our Cultures, we must first support our People.”**

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HERITAGE COUNCIL, FEBRUARY 2021, MELBOURNE

The wellbeing of our Communities is grounded in lived spirituality, shared Culture and connection to Country. Supporting Traditional Owners to live their Culture in themselves, through their children and on their Country is a fundamental pathway to realising Council’s vision of a proud and well Peoples.

When people are proud of their Culture, they share it. Pride grows through cultural connectedness and this objective strengthens Council’s commitment to supporting Traditional Owners deepen, celebrate and share their connection to Culture

pendurong

## Community understanding of our Cultural Heritage

## parruk werkitya

*In the Wamba Wemba language, this means:*

*The community working together.*

### Strategic Actions

Influencing education through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engagement projects with primary and secondary school curriculums</li> </ul>
Contributing knowledge in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public forums, conference and events</li> <li>• Traditional Owner media representation</li> </ul>
Making change through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• legislative reform and awareness raising programs</li> </ul>

**“When all in our communities live their respect for the inherited responsibilities of Traditional Owners and are proud of their own contribution to caring for Country and the cultural wellbeing of Our People, then we will be able to walk together towards reconciliation. But only then.”**

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HERITAGE COUNCIL, FEBRUARY 2021, MELBOURNE

We inherit our Cultural Heritage from our Old People, a living Culture extending thousands of generations. Whilst destruction, salvage and denial of this ownership of Countries and Cultures continues, it is essential that Council works to promote Traditional Owner responsibilities in the diverse Victorian community.

Council has both a cultural and statutory responsibility to promote public understanding of Cultural Heritage. It is through education, communication and understanding that appreciation and respect are born. Whilst the rights of Traditional Owners to control their Cultural Heritage continue to be questioned and not be respected, it is essential that Council pursues this work on behalf of all Victorians.



We live the principle that we must ourselves determine our lives, our rights, our responsibilities, our Cultures and our futures. We have a collective responsibility and inherited right to our Cultures and Countries that is as unique as it is fundamental. We must be enabled to live self-determination through our embodiment of the oldest living Cultures on earth.

As a statutory body of Victorian Traditional Owners, it is essential that the structures through which Council works are decolonised. It is both fundamental to implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and commitment to principles of self-determination that Council becomes truly autonomous of government.

**nindi dinatji nindi nguarn nindi gundj  
nindi djinan yerribi dununak yalagan dinatji  
garek ngalak, njarala ngalak bala-bala nindi goorabung**

*In the Monero Ngarigo language, this means:*

*Our land, our mother, our home*

*Our footprints connect us to our beautiful lands*

*Sit quiet, sit and listen to our talk about our future.*

**Strategic Actions**

Enacting self-determination through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional Owners controlling decisions about Cultural Heritage</li> <li>management of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Fund</li> </ul>
Including Traditional Owners in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all areas of Cultural Heritage management, protection and celebration</li> </ul>
Leading by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increasing protections for Cultural Heritage in state and national legislations</li> </ul>

**“It is in our Cultures to respect the strength of words and the meaning of symbolism. In speaking openly and with focus about the colonising structures in which our Peoples live their Cultures, we remove some but only some, of its power. To truly be allowed to determine our lives for ourselves, the authorities that help manage our Cultures must be governed by Traditional Owners.”**



RAPs represent the right People, the only People, who can speak for their Countries. The knowledge, lore, cultural responsibilities and authority of the Traditional Owners they represent is theirs alone, inherited from their Ancestors. RAPs have a fundamental role to speak for Country and Culture within their registration area, that is not defined by the colonising structures of their registration but is supported by it.

Through processes of legislative reform and strategic action, Council seeks to secure the inherited rights of our Peoples to care for Countries, Communities and Cultures.

**lap-lap dhelk balak, gayap balak, balak dja-djatjanak wurrek-angatj  
bundjilyanak, wurrunganak, djatjanak ba nguranak balaka bengotiyanak,  
barimbanganak barim gurkanganak wukinangatjaniyn  
lap-lap wurreka gundi djaa ba balak, buwitji djayitjanak  
lo-lo nguraruk beng-beng djuwima mang, ba wayipunga dhelk balak ba djatjanak**

*In the Dja Dja Wurrung language, this means:*

*RAPs represent the right People, the only People, who can speak for their Countries.*

*The knowledge, lore, cultural responsibilities and authority of the Traditional Owners they represent is theirs alone, inherited from their Ancestors.*

*RAPs have a fundamental role to speak for Country and Culture within their registration area, that is not defined by the colonising structures of their registration but is supported by it.*

**Strategic Actions**

Increasing capacity by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maintaining rigorous systems that support RAPs to fulfil their statutory obligations</li> <li>supporting workforce development and cultural participation</li> </ul>
Strengthening Cultures though	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>registration of Aboriginal parties across all Countries</li> <li>upholding the Act and its interpretation</li> </ul>
Supporting decision making by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>advocating for RAPs through legislative reform</li> <li>decisions about Country being made by representative and inclusive Traditional Owner groups</li> </ul>

**“It is essential that our Peoples’ representative and inclusive structures for governance of Cultures are respected and supported to thrive.”** VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HERITAGE COUNCIL, MAY 2021, EAST MELBOURNE

woduyullul

Our Peoples' responsibilities to our Ancestors

**liwik nugal-nganjin marram-nganjin dadbagi-k  
dudandun nugal-nganjin marram-nganjin dadbagi-k  
biik nugal-nganjin marram-nganjin dadbagi-k yumaa-djerri-ngat**

*In the Taungurung language, this means:*

*Our Ancestors we take care of,*

*Our beliefs we take care of,*

*Our Country we take care of,*

*We share with everyone.*

Our Old People and Sacred Objects were taken without consent or ceremony. Whilst they remain in a state of damning exile from Country, our communities cannot rest nor can they bear the burden of their responsibilities to return their Ancestors home and Sacred Objects to Communities.

Council has a fundamental responsibility to support Traditional Owners in the custodianship and sensitive repatriation of Ancestors to Country and Sacred Objects to Communities. Council will continue to support and advocate for Traditional Owners to lead the conversation on the repatriation of Ancestors and Sacred Objects currently in Council's care.

#### Strategic Actions

Empowering Traditional Owners to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>care for their Ancestors and Sacred Objects</li> </ul>
Caring for Ancestors by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>working with Traditional Owners to repatriate Ancestors and Sacred Objects</li> <li>implementing the Victorian Ancestral Remains Strategic Framework</li> <li>promoting the responsibilities of Traditional Owners for Ancestors and Sacred Objects</li> </ul>
Respecting Culture by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enacting culturally safe protocols for repatriation of Ancestors and Sacred Objects</li> </ul>

**“We have a cultural responsibility to return our Old People to their Country for ceremony and burial. Until this is done, we cannot rest or heal.”**

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HERITAGE COUNCIL, DECEMBER 2020, MELBOURNE

## Meanings

### Aboriginal Cultural Heritage

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage refers to the knowledge and lore, practices and people, objects and places that are valued, culturally meaningful and connected to identity and Country.

It shapes identity and is a lived spirituality fundamental to the wellbeing of communities through connectedness across generations.

Our Cultural Heritage has been passed from the Ancestors to future generations through today's Traditional Owners whose responsibilities are profound and lifelong.

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage is defined in the Act however Council has an inclusive and holistic lived understanding of tangible and intangible Cultural Heritage that includes and provides lived experience to the Act's definitions.

### Ancestors

We respectfully refer to Aboriginal Ancestral Remains as Ancestors. They are the whole or part of the body of an Aboriginal person from the past and are the relatives of today's Traditional Owners.

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* provides protection for Ancestors and says that Ancestral Remains should be owned by and returned to Traditional Owners of the area they came from.

Under the Act it is an offence for anyone who is not the Aboriginal Traditional Owner to have Ancestors in their possession.

### Registered Aboriginal Parties

RAPs are a representative corporation, inclusive of all Traditional Owners of an identified Country. They have gone through a process of rigorous review, in which their relationship to Country, the inclusivity of their membership and relationship to Ancestors have been considered.

Whilst RAPs have inclusive and representative membership structures, all individuals can choose to become, or not become, members. As cultural responsibility is a collective right, individuals' family groups, Cultural responsibilities and Country are still protected and represented by the RAP, regardless of their membership.

## Meanings

### Sacred Objects

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Sacred Objects are those that have profound significance to Traditional Owners in understanding Country, living Culture and incorporation into spiritual and ceremonial practices.

Secret and/or Sacred Objects are defined in the Act however Council has an inclusive and holistic lived understanding of Sacred Objects that includes and provides lived experience to the Act's definitions.

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### Self-determination

Our People's health and wellbeing is based on themselves making decisions, without outside interference, about their Cultures, Countries and Communities. We must respect the distinct and vibrant structures of governance and decision making that our People have inherited as the First Peoples of this Country.

Without self-determination we cannot start the difficult but fundamentally necessary process of de-colonisation and repossession.

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### Traditional Owner Responsibilities

Traditional Owners are Aboriginal People with particular knowledge about traditions, observances, customs or beliefs associated with the area; and have responsibility under Aboriginal tradition for significant Aboriginal places located in, or significant Aboriginal Objects originating from, this area.

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* recognises Traditional Owners "as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage".

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