YOORROOK Justice Commission

TRANSCRIPT OF DAY 3 – WURREK TYERRANG BLOCK 2

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DAY 3

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COMMISSIONER HUNTER: Good morning. We welcome everyone present today at Charcoal Lane and others watching via live stream. Today, we will be continuing block 2 of Yoorrook's wurrek tyerrang with some truth telling evidence from Uncle Colin Walker. Before we get started, I would like to acknowledge that we are streaming from the lands of the Wurundjeri and pay my respects to Elders past, present, all those who walked before us and got us to this point today. And may Bunjil watch over us today. On behalf of Yoorrook, I would also like to pass on our thanks to the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service for the use of this Charcoal Lane space for our wurrek tyerrang over the past month. It has been a historic, welcoming and a familiar space for our Elder witnesses. I will pass to Mr Goodwin.

MR GOODWIN: Thank you, Deputy Chair. I acknowledge country and pay my respects the Wurundjeri people as a Yuin person from the south-east coast of New South Wales, and I thank you for your welcome. Deputy Chair, we are honoured to have Uncle Col Walker in the hearing room today. Uncle Col is supported by his daughters May and Hilda, who have come with him today, and Bryan Andy is sitting with him as he gives evidence as a support person. So I invite Uncle Col to give the undertaking.

<COLIN WALKER, AFFIRMED

COMMISSIONER HUNTER: Thank you, Counsel, and we welcome Uncle Colin Walker, and we are pleased that you join us today.

MR GOODWIN: Thank you for joining us, Uncle Col, and could you please introduce yourself personally and in a cultural way to the Commissioners?

COLIN WALKER: I'm Colin Walker from Cummeragunja. Cummeragunja means "our home". I was born there in 1935. That's just on 87 year ago. And my grandmother was the midwife who delivered me there at Cummeragunja. I am still there today. So I thank my grandmother for rearing me with her beautiful soft black velvet hands. And I - I always had - I always said I had two mothers in my cultural way. My mother, which passed away when I was only 7, and the grandparents reared me and me two brothers and me sister after me mother passed away and we had to go up and camp in a bag humpy with the grandparents near the Barmah Bridge on account of they'd just -- the walk-off, because they moved off too. So we had to go up there and stay with the grandparents until the Aboriginal Protection Board let them come back on to Cummera to my mum and dad's house and to rear us. That's my history and that. Thank you.

MR GOODWIN: And, Uncle Col, who is your mob?

COLIN WALKER: The Yorta Yorta mob, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: Where is their country?

COLIN WALKER: Up in the Barmah-Millewa Forest, New South, yeah. But it was on both sides of the river. The river was never a boundary, you know, to us, because we were on both sides of the river. Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And that river, what do you call that river?

COLIN WALKER: Dhungalla. So Dhungalla is - our people always said, our Elders said that it was our supermarket for our food, and it was also our protector when we'd have to run away from the welfare. We would just jump into the river and swim to another state. Yeah, so that was the story of our Elders. And that protected us. So we learnt to swim at a pretty young age.

MR GOODWIN: So Cummeragunja, where you were born and where you lived, that's on your country?

COLIN WALKER: That's on the country, yeah, where I'm still there today and reared my family there. My daughters, two daughters. And three boys. I lost two boys, yeah. I lost two pretty young and - yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And you mentioned that you were born in 1935.

COLIN WALKER: Yes.

MR GOODWIN: So - - -

COLIN WALKER: But they didn't register me until the 29th. So I said I've got two birthdays but the family said you're only having one.

MR GOODWIN: So your actual birth wasn't registered until the day after you were born; that's right.

COLIN WALKER: Yes. Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And you've mentioned your daughters, May and Hilda, who are here today as well. You have been with your wife Faye for a long time?

COLIN WALKER: Going on in February, we will be 67 years married. And she's Wiradjuri woman, who was the biggest tribe in New South, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And where did you meet Faye?

COLIN WALKER: At Shepparton, yeah, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And you've got a big family now?

COLIN WALKER: Well, we've got the fifth generation, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And you mentioned your parents and your grandparents. Can you tell the Commissioners who your parents were?

COLIN WALKER: My mother was - is - we didn't - don't say "was". In spirit, they're still with us. And my mother is Wemba Wemba. From the Moonacullah mission, other side than -- Hilda Day was her maiden name, and my father was Frederick Baggott-Walker, from Cummeragunja, Yorta Yorta. Wemba Wemba he called himself too, at times, just to show respect, yeah, but he was a Yorta Yorta Moira man, yes.

MR GOODWIN: I want to ask you some questions about growing up at Cummeragunja. You mentioned it is language for "our home" and that you were born there. And that your grandmother was very important. Who - and she delivered you. Did she?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, but not only me, she was - delivered a fair few of the elderly ones there too, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: What did she do? Was she a midwife on the mission?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, she was a midwife, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And what was her name?

COLIN WALKER: Florence. Her maiden name was Hamilton and she is from down around Coranderrk way, and our mother was Annie Johnson, who was the first - was a midwife. And she lived at - with her grandparents up on the riverbanks near the Barmah Bridge, and she was 105 when we were last there. Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And your grandfather, what was his name?

COLIN WALKER: Herbert. Herbert Walker.

MR GOODWIN: You mentioned when your mother passed away, when you were young, that they raised you. What were your grandparents like?

COLIN WALKER: Great people. And they were very spiritual. Most of our Elders at Cummeragunja, or all of them was very spiritual people. And happy people and learnt us a lot, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And what did they teach you growing up?

COLIN WALKER: Teaching?

MR GOODWIN: Yeah, what did they teach you growing up --

COLIN WALKER: Oh, respect our culture, respect for one another, and for families, yeah. You know. We had to - because we was all one living on missions. We all knew one another's way and living conditions and that. Yeah. Which wasn't very nice in them days, I must say. But only for our Elders, were very spiritual and happy people that kept us together. Yeah. Like, living under the Aboriginal Protection Board, you know, living on our own land, why was we treated like that.

And a lot of younger ones said to me, "Uncle Col, you should be a bitter man." And I said, "No, I'm not bitter." I could pass this on to the younger ones that never knew about the way things were on - probably every mission was about the same. I respect every Aboriginal mission because they were nearly all the same, the way they was treated, you know, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: Can you tell the Commissioners what you remember about some of those things growing up on Cummeragunja? Some of those challenges or problems growing up there?

COLIN WALKER: Well, we was under the Aboriginal Protection Board. The managers - we were controlled by the managers that lived there. And if you come to stay on the mission at, say, Cummeragunja - probably at others too - that you had to go and sign with a paper to say were you staying with your mum and dad. So when you think about it today, how disgusting that was, that you had to do that. So you still never had your own way of living on your own country, you know.

Why did you have to do that? It wasn't our law. It was the white man's law that done - bought that in. And I think that hurt a lot of our Elders, you know, to do that. And our young ones that came there, instead of going straight to their mum and dad, had to go and sign on.

MR GOODWIN: Yeah. And you mentioned some things in your Balert Keetyarra that you have - that are provided to the Commission about - about if you were sent over to your aunty's place to get flour or sugar, that the mission manager might ask why you were out.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah. Yeah, like, just say if my grandmother said, "Will you go to aunty's for a bit of flour or a bit of sugar until we get some tomorrow" or something. And if it was late in the night and you was walking and the manager would be patrolling, he would say, "What are you doing on the street?" Try to screw your ear or kick you up the backside if you don't go - get off the streets. So there's another way, why were we treated that way on our own land, you know.

MR GOODWIN: And you were given rations.

COLIN WALKER: Rations.

MR GOODWIN: When you were growing up.

COLIN WALKER: Every fortnight, you would have to go up to the manager's quarters, and he had a big bell, a -- everyone knew the sound of that. So you would go up with your little - your grandmother and others that had mothers, that had the little clean jars where you would get your sugar in it or your flour and a bigger jar, tea. Your tea leaf and all that. You know. And your meat and your dripping was a bit off colour because - mainly because there was no refrigeration in them days.

So we had to do that. Go up and get our rations. And then every recess, you would have to run up to the manager's quarters and have your mug of cocoa and your bread and dripping and your big spoonful full of Ipol you had to drink, Ipol. I think it was for in case you had a cold or something like that, yeah, and back to school. Which I didn't like, school.

MR GOODWIN: Why didn't you like the school?

COLIN WALKER: It was sort of locked into four walls, and I liked to be out in the open fishing and stuff like that. You know. Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And you mentioned in your Balert Keetyarra some of those positive things about growing up at Cummeragunja, even in those mission days. What was some of those positive things about all living on the mission?

COLIN WALKER: Well, it kept us together and respect and the issues as we're going through now with the law and that, if some of our - our Elders was our lawyers. They were our protectors, they were our scientists, professors. I still say that today. If a young woman was in trouble, didn't want to stay there or fell out with someone, the mothers and the aunties would get together and walk with that young girl and bring her back, you know.

And you would see them crying. "I done wrong, and I want to apologise to my mum and my aunty and that for what I've done." So the law was out in the open, in other words. And the same with our protection of our women. You dare not hit your partner or your wife because your uncles were there and your aunties, you had to face them. Oh, it was terrible, you know. Yeah. Explain to them. Yeah. Same as in the Koori Courts, how we spoke to our young ones and that, you know. Stuff like that.

MR GOODWIN: How would the Elders act in that situation to - to try to deal those problems?

COLIN WALKER: Well, if you played up or roughed your partner up or your wife, you would be walking up the street in Cummera, you would say, "How are you going, Uncle?" They wouldn't talk to you. "How are you going, Aunty." They wouldn't speak to you. And the next day the uncle would say, "Come here. I want to talk to you, boy." They called you out. They would belittle you. You thought you was a man, but they called you a boy. And they would say, "Now, I believe you roughed up your partner or your wife. Don't you ever, ever do that again."

And, oh, it hurt. They never bashed you. The words would tell you. And then you say, "Hello, Aunty." They wouldn't speak to you. And then, oh, the worst thing was facing them. Next day was the same came out of their mouth, you know. Very protective of our women-folk and our children, you know. They were protected by our Elders, if you played up. And I think that kept us in line as young men when we was growing up. We knew our law was there. You know.

MR GOODWIN: Cummeragunja's on Dhungalla. It's on the river.

COLIN WALKER: Right on the Murray River, yeah, Dhungalla, right at - right there.

MR GOODWIN: How important was Dhungalla when you were growing up?

COLIN WALKER: Well, very important. As I said earlier, our Elders respected and said that was our supermarket, where we got our food from, because fish was a everyday diet to us. And we had our crayfish, our turtles. We eat one turtle. There is three different turtles: Our totem, and another one and one we eat. And, today, the survey they do with the young ones, you might have saw that there - we wonder why. We can't get a lot of stuff now, is the quality of the water.

Our turtle surveys, we take the young ones out. We are still involved with, you know - with no education, I mean with the Murray-Darling Basin and stuff like that. It's just what your Elders taught you without going to university. It helped me over the years.

MR GOODWIN: And so what would you - what would you - you mentioned how it was your supermarket. What would you get from the river when you were growing up?

COLIN WALKER: Well, your fish. Your Murray Cod, burrmanga, they called him, and the - all your different -- the yellow belly and the brim and the red fin and your crayfish. And your mussels, you know, and your turtle. One type of turtle you had. So food was plentiful, you know.

MR GOODWIN: Where else would you get food from when you were growing up?

COLIN WALKER: Out of the forest too. Go up in the forest or the creek. The uncles would take you up on to the - what we call it Barmah Island and up the lakes where you would collect your swan eggs and - but you only took so many. Like, you know -- the whole people, our uncles and grandfathers would go out and get your swan eggs. You would only take so many off that nest. You wouldn't take the lot. You'd go around each nest, you know. And that's why our food was plentiful.

And it's still there today. Our kangaroos and emus and our fish - at certain times, our fish. And when our fish are spawning, we don't touch them. We don't have to be told when the fish seasons are closed. We know that. When they are spawning, we don't touch them. If they are undersized, we don't touch them. This was all handed down to us without going to university.

MR GOODWIN: Who taught you all those things when you were growing up - - -

COLIN WALKER: Our Elders, our grandparents and our uncles.

MR GOODWIN: And you have actually got a cultural map showing the forest and the river and with your own identification of the various animals and where they are. Is that right?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, I meant to bring that down. They chased me for about three months to do my cultural map. And I finally done mine with - he was a bloke that went over to the Canadian Indians. He come back and he helped us do our mapping. Where I camped, what I killed and what I ate. About 70 of us done our mapping and I still got that there in my files today. I was meant to bring one down to show, but, you know - so the food is still around but then again our water, the climate change, I believe in climate change, as affecting our native birds and animals.

You know, the behaviour of animals and that. Because the old emu, the old people used to tell us - well, we know they only lay once a year. Or it might be twice. But now they lay four or five times. Why did the emu lay that many times? He's confused. He's confused. The seasons have changed. The little ducks are everywhere now, which they shouldn't be. These are the things that we learnt and we still look at that and learn our little ones. Tell them. You know.

MR GOODWIN: And you've noticed those changes in your life since you've been out in Cummeragunja?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, noticed. Yeah. Yeah, noticed. There's a big change in the river system and all out of erosion, but we was told that's nature. Our Elders said that's nature. If a tree falls in a river, you don't pull that tree out. It's a habitat. It stays there for the breeding of our native fish and things like that. One time ago, the scientist sent for me up near Yarrawonga. One of the uncles that drove me up, and they said, "Uncle Col, we are pulling out all the snags, de-snagging the river." And I said, "No, you're doing the wrong thing." I believe they went ahead and done it.

And a few years after they sent for me, they had a big town up at Corowa upriver, and they sent for me and they apologised. They said, "We should have listened. We shouldn't have pulled them snags out. We're going to put a lot of them back." It's not what I learnt at university. It's what I learnt from my Elders. Simple. From here. Not reading out of a book. You know.

MR GOODWIN: And when you were growing up at Cummeragunja, did Elders speak language at that time?

COLIN WALKER: They did. But, as we say, we're spiritual people. I've got nothing against religion. Anyone that's religious, that's their business. But we had the inland missionaries come there, you know, and they put the fear of the Christ, in us. I have to say that word. Because if you don't come to Sunday school, Satan will get you. And then our Elders, then they - they'd speak the language, but if we were there, they wouldn't talk in it, you know. Yeah.

So that was a cruel thing for us First People. Couldn't even speak our language. But now we've got young women that's got all our language put back together like a jigsaw puzzle, and now they are putting it back together. And young people are coming and asking different questions. And we as Elders are there to tell them if we know what the Elders handed down to us, you know.

MR GOODWIN: And you remember learning about sacred sites when you were growing up?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah. Yeah, the Elders always - like, if you went and got some soil from somewhere up the forest, you might be going to grow tomatoes, and they're going to be a mound, and, "Where did you get that soil from?" And you tell them. And the old blokes would say, the grandfather and that, "You take that back tomorrow or tonight." If it was dark, you couldn't, but "You take that back tomorrow." You might have gone up the bend from Cummeragunja.

They'd say, "No, that was a camp site, the oven where they cooked" because they would see the mussel shell broken up in it. You know. "No, you take that back." So that was handed down to us during our land claim. Then my job was, on both sides of the river, recording sites with archaeologists, burial sites. Since '86 to - right up until now I still do the repatriation with the young men. I go to Sydney and pack them, and down here to Melbourne.

Now, at my age I got to look for young men now or young women that want to do that, because I think I want to tiptoe through the tulips now. You know. So yeah. So they've got to be learnt that.

MR GOODWIN: And I want to ask you some questions about your work on repatriation zone to give you an opportunity to tell the Commissioners about that work. Just still talking about growing up at Cummeragunja, do you remember your mother and what she was like when you were growing up?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, she was a tall woman and when they took her away dirty old truck - a mission truck with an old canopy on it, she give us a wave. That's the last we saw of her. Because she passed away in the Echuca Hospital, and we had no way of going into see her properly in them days. And, yeah, so that was sad. But then, as I said, the grandparents were great people and not - and then we had help.

The grandparents, like, people, living so close together, to say, "Oh, our respect" and our words were "sorry." I still bring that up when I go to funerals. And I don't say that other word. What's the other word?

BRYAN ANDY: Condolences.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, I don't say that. I always go back and say "sorry" to my friends that lose anyone. You know. I said, because that's how our old people told us what to say, sorry. And I think that hits you. And so our Elders were like that. They respected and helped your grandparents or your uncle and aunty with them children, and that's why it was so sad - why were they taken away, the Stolen Generation? You know. Because our mothers or our grandparents are great. You could imagine how the mothers hang on to them cars and got skin taken off them until their bone, you know, flesh taken off them.

It was - and it's sad and, to me, it's sort of like returned soldiers when they come home. Their parents - their wives, might have passed on or their family, and we were just saying, well, it was a big thing going over, no one is going to respect us, but it was - when our ones come out of the homes -- say, they come back, well, their mother and father might have passed on or remarried. So, you know, that feeling wasn't the same. So that - that's a very sad thing, is the Stolen Generation.

And I don't think they done enough with the Stolen Generation. They never, you know. And I think, to me, it was a very sad, still. I - you know, I think of them. So we were - they come to take me and my brothers, but the grandmother, the story was she put the hose on them, you know. So she must have been a fighter. She was a fighter. Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: So you remember welfare coming when you were a child.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, they used to come, and one story was that say - they'd say Miss English was her name. "Oh, Miss English is coming to Cummera." You would run home and say, "Nan, look in my head", because, you know, lice. "Look in your head." "Colin" - not only me, the other mothers -- grandmothers. "Colin, there is nothing in your head." Next day, "Nan look in my head again." "But there's nothing there, Colin." So that's how we were. And - yeah. So we all knew that black car when it came in. You know.

MR GOODWIN: And what would you do when it would come around?

COLIN WALKER: We would -- and run down the riverbanks or - yeah. Or run home.

MR GOODWIN: You mentioned you would swim across the river to get to the other state.

COLIN WALKER: Oh, yeah, and that too. That's - our men too, because you would - like, a lot of our men were shearers, and they'd just sit or cut - had a spare and that. And if they come on to the mission with a - a bottle of beer, the manager just put it on the stump and pull out the revolver, bang, smash it. You know. There was no - but one thing I could say, now, we never had young women dying in the cells like today. And we're supposed to be uplifted and everything.

We're supposed to be appointing people who know everything. So why? Because it never happened in our days because our mothers and our grandparents and the aunties protected them young women before they got there. But now today, the system, it's shot to pieces. You know. Our young women dying in cells. Why? A lot of it's medical issues. Not a police issue. My two nieces, Veronica Nelson, Tanya Day. Medical issues.

And that's when we had trouble at Cummeragunja. If you had a bit of a something wrong with you, you had your grandmother there, your aunties and their friends of them to help them young women and we - our elderly men helped us. You know. "Oh, you done wrong, we fix you straight out in the shearing shed" or "We've got a job out in the - on a farm doing fencing and that." You know. And that's what happened.

MR GOODWIN: And you mentioned that you started - well, that you left school early.

COLIN WALKER: Well, I didn't - like, someone dobbed me in. I used to go down the river bank at the school and had that run home - I would run home with them, and someone reported me to my grandmother. So she had a talk to my father and they said, "Oh, well, straight out in the shearing shed for you."

MR GOODWIN: How old were you?

COLIN WALKER: 13, going on 14 and then I didn't go with my father. That was our cultural way, because you don't listen to your father. And I went with my uncle, and my cousin went with my father. But within the same shearing team together. You know. We'd start right up in Berrigan and ended up at Wyalong, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And just one last thing about growing up at Cummeragunja. You mentioned when you were introducing yourself to the Commissioners about how your grandparents came back after the walk-off to raise you and your - - -

COLIN WALKER: Two brothers.

MR GOODWIN: And your brothers and your sister. You were about four years old when the walk-off happened.

COLIN WALKER: Yes.

MR GOODWIN: But do you remember what your Elders and your parents and grandparents told you about the walk-off?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, because that's still - like, we've got stories. And they kept - the walk-off, we say, well, that's one of our main stories of our walk-off. How strong our Elders were. Aboriginal men living on a mission, like concentration camp. It made worldwide news. Aboriginal men and women sticking up for better living conditions. But they all come back. Even though a lot of them left Cummera, they had never forgot Cummeragunja is our home, what it means.

A lot of them still come back to be buried there. You know. They still - and we respect that. We bring them back home. With the wishes of their family, they will come back. We don't say, "You don't come from here anymore." You know, "You left here years ago." Our cemetery is there for all our people that left. I don't own it. I don't own Cummeragunja, even though there that long. We all own Cummeragunja, I tell the young ones. You know.

That's how I look at life, and a lot of our Elders done the same. They didn't say, "We don't want them back here. They moved out and you never saw them." But the connections were still there. When you meet them - you would go, you know, to Shepparton and Mooroopna, you'd meet them. And when they passed away, no questions asked, back you come to the cemetery to be put to rest there.

MR GOODWIN: Finally, the mission closed and the mission managers left when you were about 19 or 20 years old.

COLIN WALKER: Something like that, yeah. Yeah, I mean - yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And you have lived there your whole life. How - what things changed once the managers left at Cummeragunja?

COLIN WALKER: Well, once the managers left and in came - I think it was '83, '84 was the *Land Rights Act*, I think, just came in then. And we had to set up - I think I was involved with a lot of stuff and they set up Land Councils under the *Land Rights Act*, which I called the *Land Wrong Act*, you know, because you're still controlled under the *Land Rights Act*. Like, one time ago when it was first set up, we had all -- people to come - everyone had a say and vote, but now if you got a big family, you can control every land council.

And I think there was 127 land councils when they set them up. And I used to go around with my mob, we used to do recommendations for waterways and things like that. I was lucky to travel around with some people that had a brain. I never had much, but they had me in it. And so now the land councils that just has faded -- council, the councillors there never come and check, you know. So we are still under the umbrella, the law, if you want to call it that.

And our own mob, councillors instead of coming and sorting things out. They said, "You got to sort it out yourself." So why are you given big money as a councillor to sit there and not solve, which you - under the *Land Rights Act* you are supposed to. You know.

MR GOODWIN: What would you like to see happen for your country and for - and for speaking for country?

COLIN WALKER: We want freedom. And we got - we're growing canola there and that goes into the kitty now for the - things to be - but if you've got a big family and they control - they can control water. Now, water is gold in the - you know. So they can control

water. They control the houses and the things like that. And if they don't like doing things, well - and you report that, there's nothing done. You know. So our living conditions have deteriorated on Cummeragunja.

Although the best thing that ever happened at Cummeragunja in my time is the health. You know. Because we got doctors coming there. My daughter works there. And we got cars to run you into the doctors and take them shopping and things like that. But why I - are we still under the *Land Rights Act?* Why can't we - is there something we could do about it? Say, well, you are free, you are not under the *Land Rights Act* anymore.

But we got funds coming into redo our house and, like, you know, renovate them and things like that. So I just don't know. I get so upset over things like that. But there's a lot of good people that I - that's left Cummeragunja, as I said, and some of them - not many are still alive. But they - you know - and I talk to them when I catch up with the ones. They talk about the good old days. We say "good old days" which was when we never had electricity and we only had kerosene lights and things like that. They were the good old days. You know. So - yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And speaking of those good old days, you mention in your Balert Keetyarra that you would go to your mother's country when were you growing up?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah. When - I would go there for holidays, me and my brother. Two brothers and sister. The other grandmother let us go. And then when I got married, I would take my family back to my mother's country, Wemba Wemba, and go and camp in the forest and that. And that's where I learnt my hunting and fishing skills, with my uncles, and I always - I took my wife there before we had married and she still remembers.

I said, "I'm taking you." She said, "Where are we going?" I said, "We are going to Moonacullah, the land of milk and honey." And she looked at me, she said, "What is the land of milk and honey?" All your food was there, your traditional food, you know.

MR GOODWIN: And why was that connection to your mother's country important to you?

COLIN WALKER: Well, that's how we were, respect. You had to respect your father or your mother's country or your grandmother's country, if your mum and dad passed away. You still respect. And I think that was a great thing. Our people didn't - we had that knowledge, the cultural respect, you know.

MR GOODWIN: And so when you left school at 13 you started work as a shearer.

COLIN WALKER: No, a roustabout.

MR GOODWIN: A rouseabout first. What you were doing when you were working. What was that like?

COLIN WALKER: Your roustabout, you're picking up the wool what they shear, when they shear, and throw them on the table and you what you call scared it. You go around, picked the sweaty part off the wool and that. And sweep up where the shearers, you know. Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: Did you eventually become a shearer yourself?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, I was a shearer for about 25 or 22 years, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: What was that like as a job?

COLIN WALKER: Well, it was a good life, because you didn't know much more. It wasn't thought much more because - and under - when you was a shearer, you was under the AWU union and was equal. You ate at the same table, you slept in the same bunk house, you used the same bathtub, same washing dish. If there was any trouble, it was there, soon after a meal. Complaints will be squashed there and then with the reps. You know. Australian Workers Union reps.

So that was good. And so you went out in the shearing shed and you had to get a union ticket. But I think there could be too many unions around now. I'm not sure. But you know. So we was equal. And we - we met a lot of - like, we've still got friends that we shore - our Elders - you know, elderly men, you still meet them now and again. And you don't get around much like you used to and sometimes you might pick up a paper -- where someone has passed away or your football mates. And you think back, you never forget who they were and how you got on and things like that.

MR GOODWIN: So you would travel around as part of that work?

COLIN WALKER: What, shearing?

MR GOODWIN: Yeah, when you were shearing.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, you would be working a few months. Or if it was close in your district, you would come home every fortnight or every weekend. Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: But you always came back to Cummeragunja?

COLIN WALKER: Oh, yeah. Yes. I had a house there and kids went to - and at Cummeragunja, there was most - three generations went to that school, you know.

MR GOODWIN: And when you travelled around and went to some of the towns that you would go to or go into town from Cummeragunja, what was it like, as a Yorta Yorta man, going into town back then?

COLIN WALKER: Like, just say it was - at Cummeragunja, when we was young and in our teens we'd go in to Echuca to stay the weekend to watch the football. We would ride our bikes in. And you would go into a pub for a beer, and they would just - you would hear a pin drop, more or less, and I would say to them, "Woah." And then out come the manager, "Sorry, boys, I can't serve you." "Why?" "Your mob kicked up here, playing up." But we didn't live in the town. The others did. Mates.

But as the old saying was, we were tarred with the one brush and we said, "No, we don't live here. We live out at Cummera." "No, sorry." So why was that - where was the justice for us? There was no justice. You know.

MR GOODWIN: And then when you were 49 years old, you studied at Tranby College - - -

COLIN WALKER: Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: - - - in Sydney for two years to be a site officer. What was that experience like at Tranby?

COLIN WALKER: Well, they sent me there. I didn't want to go. But it was the knowledge I had of the forest and about the repatriation stuff that I knew about, but I didn't knew it then. But when I went to Tranby College it was a two year course, and there were 23 of us men from different areas met. Me and a mate was sitting together and I thought he could read and write and he thought I could. We would -- so the coordinator said, "Uncle Colin, so and so, you know, look at our reports", you know. So I got embarrassed.

I said, "I'm heading for home back to Cummera." And my mate said, "No, wait a minute." We called in the young ones and said, "Look, we can't read and - properly, we can't. Could you help us do our reports and help us spell and that. We will learn you all the bush, you know." There might be a tree out in the forest had a little scar in it. We knew there could be a burial there. There was a burial site, over here was a -- "We'll learn you all that." So they learnt us.

So that was a two-year course and I got - two certificates out of that. Which means nothing to me, a certificate. I got them stacked everywhere but they mean nothing to me. No one ever give my Elders before me certificates. So that was the two-year course and that helped me. Then I come home and I was able to - we had in New South, then, under the *National Parks Act,* we had the power under the *National Parks Act,* if anyone was developing anywhere, we was able to stop that development in case there was Aboriginal artefacts or burials there, you know, until we sorted things out.

MR GOODWIN: And you eventually also worked in Victoria doing the same type of work?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah. I was a - - -

MR GOODWIN: Cultural heritage.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, cultural and heritage inspector with Commonwealth Inspectors. We had the badge, Commonwealth badge. Yeah. But there was 38 of us, I think, and I think one or two of them played up here in Melbourne, and us mob that lived up in the country was all sacked. Why? Why was we all sacked when we weren't there? At King's Domain -- or somewhere in Melbourne. So where was the justice?

MR GOODWIN: You've got a story about that badge that you had when you were - - -

COLIN WALKER: Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: Do you want to tell the Commissioners that story?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, well, we had to hand our badges back, and they all handed theirs back and I kept mine. And, anyways, one day they rang me up about mine. "Uncle Col you never handed your badge back in yet." I said, "Oh dear," I said, "The last time I saw it," I said, "the grand kids were playing in the mud with it." That's how much I devalued it at the

end. But I still got it at home polished up. Why should I hand that badge, you know? So it was things like that.

MR GOODWIN: And so you mentioned - you mentioned some of the things you'd do as a site officer. Can you tell the Commissioners what some of the - some of the duties you had as a site officer and some of the work that you did in cultural heritage while you were a site officer over those years.

COLIN WALKER: Well, my job - well, me and the site officers then, I had young fellas, and I trained young men to come with me to help me do the repatriation. And I never only do the repatriation for Yorta Yorta. I done it for Wemba Wemba, Muthi Muthi, Wiradjuri, as far as Dubbo, with the wishes of the Elders because some of them - young people, some of them don't like touching things like that. So they'd asked me to go up and I would say, "No, I will not go into your country unless I get a letter from the Elders."

So the Elders would write a letter for me, would I go and, you know, do the repatriation for them. And so it was a very - and then when we started, it was hard for us to go into a property because they thought we were going in and wanted their backyards. But we got - now it's opened up a lot. A lot of the land owners now can see what's going on. If they're ploughing up a paddock and some stones come up, like, they might be traditional stones, they ring us up, "Will you come and have a look at these stones, if they're traditional stones."

Or it could be a shell midden there where they done their cooking or there could be some bones there. We go and look at them. And sometimes it was a bit of a sand hill because they - most of the burials were on sandhills because they only had the digging stick. And if there is a burial site, their lot, the land owners will say, "You can leave that there. We won't interfere with that." So we get funds, then, through parks or, you know, government money that fence that site off. Yeah. So things are starting to open up with the land owners now and things like that. Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: So you saw land owners change their opinion - - -

COLIN WALKER: Yes.

MR GOODWIN: - - -over time as a site officer.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah. They have, a lot of them, you know. Yeah. And sometimes we go and do a walk trail for them, you know. And things like that. Yeah.

COMMISSIONER BELL: Uncle Colin, I wonder if you would tell us about that burial site at Old Maloga.

COLIN WALKER: The what?

COMMISSIONER BELL: At Old Maloga. Remember we went up there with you when we went to Cummeragunja and you took us to this big place. Very special place. I wonder if you would tell us a bit about that?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, well, Maloga is where it really started from. Like Matthews - Daniel Matthews, they went along the river and collecting our people and

bringing them there to Maloga. All the whole camp stayed there, my grandparents -- my grandfather - excuse me, my great, great grandfather and -- my great grandmother was one of the first that went to school there, and they still got a cemetery there. Then we went there but, see, the headstones there before, and I'm going to have a look now with the owner, and -- why were the headstones taken from there?

Why aren't they still there with that bit of a burial ground? It was a cemetery. But it's - because I done a couple of burials there, you know, but not where the cemetery was, with National Parks and archaeologists. So but still - we still respect Maloga although we don't go there as much. But we still respect - we know the history of Maloga. Our Elders started off there. And where the old - they had a place with a whole man hut, young women's hut, things likes that. Like that, you know. Yeah.

And where we went - and it was good to go back and have a look, and we should be going back more. But sometimes you - it's hard to get in touch with the land owners. They might live in town and they've got managers running their property, you know. They moved from there to Willunga. They didn't like Willunga, just up a bit along the river, and then they selected Cummeragunja. And that's where we have been ever since. But Maloga means sugar because the sand is like sugar. That's why they call it.

And the sandhill that runs through there, we call it Biamee. The big snake. And the old people never ever liked to take sand from there. They said you're destroying Biamee. You know. But now they're taking sand further up along the - and we can't stop them. If it's a private property, we can't stop them. So there should be an Act or something out to stop that, because that's our story, Biamee the giant snake, you know. Why is it that they're allowed - contractors allowed to go in there and take sand for the - for the gardenscape and that.

Because when - they flew me home once from Tranby College, Northern Construction work, they were getting stuff for gardens, and they were digging a big - where I took youse. Algabanya burial and when they bought me back, they were still working there. Skeleton bones everywhere. Had no respect. Arrogant. And we had the power with National Parks to stop them and we had to do the burial again and fence it off. And then the ochre mine, they went into the - our ochre mine where there's five colours.

And they were taking different colours from there for the garden scape, like you could have going up your driveway. How pretty that is. A big rock or something. So we stopped - just stopped. And the bloke that owns Moira Station now, the people that own that, they protect - they put a fence up, and we're still allowed to go there. But as for our burial sites, there's a few of them been destroyed. But since '86 and that, since we had the power with Parks and that, we controlled and we protected them. They're fenced off and things like that. You know.

But, yeah, so it's been a battle. But it's - you know. Someone has got to do it. I enjoyed it as a young man. And that's their responsibility now. They know it. You know.

MR GOODWIN: And you mentioned as a site officer, and throughout your life, working on repatriation of ancestors and remains and bringing ancestors back to country, why is that important to you?

COLIN WALKER: It is, because they are from home, from their country, and we're bringing them back to put back on their country. Because that Murray Black Collection, they called it, was the biggest repatriation collection in Australia. He was a farmer down in Gippsland way, and he was collecting our people because they didn't have - what you call it now, the - - -

MR GOODWIN: IPads or what sorry?

COLIN WALKER: Where you could - - -

MR GOODWIN: The drones or - oh, the GPS.

COLIN WALKER: GPS. Because when - yeah, and he was just taking them, not marking them. So we said, well, Yorta Yorta country - we knew it was Yorta Yorta country and it was from - right from the Tocumwal right through to Moama. So we knew they come from there. So Algabanua took it. That's where all the Victorians and New South stuff goes, there, and then on the Vic side, Garradha Molwa, the big burial ceremony there. We take all the stuff from Victoria there. But now with the young ones can do that thing where you pinpoint where they come from. But about of it was none of that. And - yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And so the - I think it's George Black didn't keep pinpoints of where he took things?

COLIN WALKER: No. He - no.

MR GOODWIN: So when were you having to repatriate the remains, you made some decisions about to put those, where to bury the ancestors.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, but then Wemba Wemba, they knew their stuff from down that way, on the Edwards River, my mother's country. And I was involved with going down the - uncles asked me would I go down and help them rebury them there. Muthi Muthi, as I said, and Wiradjuri. And yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And you mentioned a story in your Balert Keetyarra around the - about how you would treat the babies.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, so I done a big one here. There was - we come down to the museum here in Melbourne. I bought one of my men down and met one of the uncles from Gippsland - I won't mention his name in case he's passed away and that. We went in and packed them. So - but before we did that our - our mob had a meeting. They were together for so long, they didn't know where they come from. Supposed to be experts, didn't know where they come from.

So they decided, well, we will bury them all together out at a cemetery in Melbourne. So we packed them and then the babies, the little ones, we packed them especially separate and then I got the women to walk around and hand them to one another to put down in the graves to bury them. So it was just like, if we wouldn't have done that, you could come along and said, "This is Yorta Yorta stuff", grab a boxful of that. "This is Wemba Wemba stuff, or this is Muthi Muthi", you know.

But they decided to bury them together because they have been so locked up together. And that was great. I thought that was great. And the women, how they handled the little ones when we packed them gentle, and the women's soft hands handing them to one another to my young men that I had there to put them down. You know. You was there. Yeah. So them things I've been doing that for years. And I wonder, they reckon that Russia is full of our people yet.

And I twist and turn of a night. If that's true, are we going to get them back? Who is going to be responsible to bring them back? You know. So a lot of our stuff. The way Aboriginal people were treated.

MR GOODWIN: What do you think needs to happen more in terms of repatriating ancestors and cultural property back to country?

COLIN WALKER: Hand it back. Hand it back. Yeah. You know. To the people and land where they come from. Like, if I had stuff home that wasn't belong to me, I would take it straight back to the country where it come from. You know. And that's why the young ones now are starting to realise our Elders before us, that wasn't yours, that goes back. That's -- spoken to the young ones. They kept saying, they could gave them the authority. I've given them the authority to say, call in, you know, the old mob. Now, this has got to go back. This is where that come from. And take that back -- don't just - take it down in the car. Respect. Take it back.

This was found in our country. We -- traditional stone might have come from Melbourne part of the country, take it back. With respect. Or skeletons, you know, might have been - as I said when they done that, but most of the Murray Black collection was all buried separately, and then there was miscellaneous stuff, heaps of it, and a lot of them said, "Well, we have got nowhere to put it." So I got some of my age group, signed a paper to say -- and we buried at Cummeragunja cemetery too. It's buried there.

So we've got a big sandhill cemetery there. So it's buried there with the rest of the Murray Black. But other stuff was -- and we put the skeletons together and that, but the miscellaneous stuff is all on the side, not far from it. We know that. And most of them that helped me to do that, sadly to say, they passed on. You know. And I don't feel - I'm not a happy man to say, I'm still alive. Why aren't my friends still alive to talk these things over, you know. They have been cheated, to me, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: Commissioners, I note the time. Is that a convenient time for a short break?

COMMISSIONER BELL: Sure.

MR GOODWIN: Thank you.

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COMMISSIONER HUNTER: Thank you, Counsel.

MR GOODWIN: Thank you, Deputy Chair and Commissioner. Uncle Col, we've got some photos to show you that you've brought with you to the Commission from Cummeragunja. And I just wanted to give you an opportunity to tell the Commissioners about some of the people in the photos. Can you see the photo currently up on the screen?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, that's my great grandfather is there, Freddie Walker.

MR GOODWIN: That's your great grandfather, is it?

COLIN WALKER: Yes, great grandfather.

MR GOODWIN: It says - it has got an inscription on the photo, the Missionary Band. Do you know what that means.

COLIN WALKER: Daniel Matthews, he was a Christian man, and I think a lost our - like, our Elders used to sing a lot in concerts, even when I grew up to be a man - young man, they were still singing. And I think they were pretty happy, and they used to sing a lot. You know. Because they had their own concerts and they - they called them choirs or something like that, where they used to sing.

Because I know my grandparents used to sing to us when we were small, you know. So, as I said earlier, they were spiritual people and, like, that was their medicine, sort of, to help them, you know. As I said, you see musicians now, if they go off the rail a bit, they like to play their music, you know.

MR GOODWIN: And so that was the important part of the kind of cultural life of living out on Cummeragunja.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, they all - yeah. And every Christmas, one of our old uncles, he was the minister there, that everyone respected, and with the - with our young ones, they would come to every house and sing carols, you know. Great to hear them sing. Self-taught, but beautiful voices and play the piano, and music, you know. Self-taught.

MR GOODWIN: If we go to the next photo, if you can see that. Do you recognise anyone there?

COLIN WALKER: Well, my great grandfather. Yeah. On this end again, with the beard.

MR GOODWIN: So on the left of the photo.

COLIN WALKER: On the left. Yeah. Yeah. And the others I probably know, but if I saw their names, they would ring a bell of who they are, you know. But I would remember them if I saw their names because of - they would tell us who they were. Yeah. But they were all at Cummeragunja and living in the forest at Maloga and some of them moved to Cummera. Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And speaking of the forest at Maloga, if we can go to the next photo. This is a photo of the - what's called the Lubras' Camp at Maloga, Victoria

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, well, right down low, you'll see my grandmother nursing a little baby. A little burrai, we call them. And that's my grandfather that reared me. And she is known - it says there that she's a full blood.

MR GOODWIN: And so that's your grandfather who is the baby?

COLIN WALKER: That reared me, Abby Walker - Abbott Walker.

COMMISSIONER BELL: Counsel, this is in the town Maloga in Victoria, not Old Maloga in New South Wales.

MR GOODWIN: Yes. Yes, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER BELL: Is that - yes, okay. Thank you.

MR GOODWIN: And if we go to the next photo, you can see a cricket team?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, cricket team from Old Maloga, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: Do you recognise anyone?

COLIN WALKER: No, I don't, but if I looked at the -- I would remember the names, you know. Yeah. As I said, a lot of them are passed away and their families, descendants, but - - -

MR GOODWIN: Was there a lot of sport on - at Cummeragunja?

COLIN WALKER: We were sort of isolated. And then I think Sir Doug was the first to open up the gates in Aussie Rules football, because he was the first Indigenous player to play, you know, in the state. In the state football. And then the gates opened because, when we were kids, we had only just crossed the river to play at Barmah school, cricket and football, and back home. We was isolated. But that's opened - I want to say they were more or less like a politician, you know.

Everyone looked at them and saw, you know. And I think that's happened - one good thing about Aussie Rules -- and a foot run, a lot of them from Cummeragunja, Uncle Lynch Cooper won the world sprint title. Uncle Eddie Briggs -- Uncle Stan Charles won third in the Stawell Gift -- they were great runners and footballers, you know, and boxers. Fighters. You know. But - and then there were banned, then, from playing in one league because they won the grand final, I believe, five times. They had to split up, you know. Banned into other teams.

MR GOODWIN: So they banned them because they were winning too much?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, and they had to split up. Because then - when we started playing football when we was young, that's just when they let us back into the -- league. You know.

MR GOODWIN: What was it like playing football back then?

COLIN WALKER: Well, we were called Boongs and Niggas, you know. And things like that. We had to take that. You know. But now if you're called that, there's - you get reported and everything can see what's going on and know - hear. But it was just overlooked with us.

Well, you saw that Nicky Winmar, Adam Goodes. If I felt sorry for any sportsman in my lifetime, it's Adam Goodes. You know, why was he treated like that? And where was the rest of the top AFL footballers, Aboriginal footballers? And I don't think they supported him enough. You know.

And a great thing about him, when he could have got Australian of the Year, wasn't he a proud man to not - say no. He just wouldn't take it. A lot of others would have took it but not Adam Goodes. I thought that was great for him to do that. So I reckon, really, he was crucified. Same as me in the Koori Courts. No, not the Koori - the land claim, you know. But, no, I thought - so now, we got young men playing football, and we got young women playing basketball, netball, and that. And every sport was - I think it's good for them.

Because up at Rumbalara football club, the netball there, and whether I went over there, when Eddie Betts went up and spoke, you see the little girls -- proud, with the uniform in Rumbalara colours. Their little bags. They didn't care if you spoke to them or not. They were proud little things, you know, walking around. And I think - and this was a healing thing, even when - in the Koori courts. That's what the community would say. "You play football?" Or, "You play netball" to the girls. "Yeah." "Well, we want to see you there." Healing. It was healing for them.

MR GOODWIN: And I want to ask some questions about the native title claim and the Koori Courts soon. I will show one last photo just in this set, the next photo. Do you recognise those two men?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, on the left there is my father, Frederick Baggot-Walker, and Uncle Mick Morgan, the bloke that I went in the shearing shed with.

MR GOODWIN: So he was the uncle you went with when you were shearing.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, well, he learnt me when I was a roustabout and then he learnt me.

MR GOODWIN: Thank you for those photos. We can bring those down now. You mentioned about being involved in the land claim, and you were a named applicant and a key witness in the Yorta Yorta native title claim. That's right?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, because I was a cultural and heritage inspector, you know, in the sites and the burials. Repatriation and that. And, to me, I reckon I was crucified, you know. And only time I got a break I would say, "Excuse me, your Honour, as an Indigenous man in this country could I have a five-minute break?" And my statements - I only looked through them the other day - they were about that high. Now, why did I have to do that much to prove who I was of my people?

You know. It was just that - and then I was called a deliberate liar. And that hurt me, because a lot of that knowledge came from my elders before me. So, to me, my elders were called deliberate liars in my mind and here, you know. But, anyway, I just let that go and say, well, he don't know what he's talking about.

MR GOODWIN: And so what - what was it like to give evidence in a native title claim for you? What was that experience like?

COLIN WALKER: Well, like, we went - even out in the forest, we - they took us out in the forest, around the burial sites. We told them, gospel and that, you know. So why did they want to - you know? The evidence was there, still there today our sites, our burial site, our shell middens where they cooked. Our scar trees and our birthing trees. Still a few them around. Which we don't - we just record them and took off. Don't go near them because they are there for the women, you know. Things like that. So the evidence. What more did we have to prove? You know. And say who we were, who we are, yeah.

MR GOODWIN: And - - -

COMMISSIONER BELL: Might I, Counsel?

MR GOODWIN: Yes, yes.

COMMISSIONER BELL: Uncle Colin, does the loss in the Yorta Yorta case and the hurt which you experienced from that loss continue to have effects today for you and community?

COLIN WALKER: I think it has. Because a lot of our Elders now have passed on since that happened. And then - but what peps me up a bit, as I said, our young ones are coming back and putting that jigsaw puzzle together again, sort of. They are doing a language book for me, you know, and listening to us Elders and respect. But it was hurt, because when we come down and it was - the verdict was that we didn't - our elderly women cried. They wept, you know. Yes. It was very - after all them - like going through that, that was a big thing to go through that. You know.

COMMISSIONER HUNTER: Uncle Col, how long did that case go for?

COLIN WALKER: I just forget now.

COMMISSIONER BELL: About 10 years.

COMMISSIONER HUNTER: Was it about 10 years? Nine. Hilda, do you want to come?

HILDA WALKER: I was going to say -- native title -- the last one was 10 years.

COMMISSIONER HUNTER: That's a long time, Uncle, to fight for your land, isn't it. I was just following on from Commissioner Bell's question there around the - what it still carries, and that's a long time.

COLIN WALKER: Mmm.

COMMISSIONER HUNTER: I just want to acknowledge that.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah. Yeah. And - and while I would like to carry on from, we still haven't got our right, traditional rights, to go into the forest to hunt our food or to get our wood, which I bring up to National Parks all the time. As Traditional Owners of the forest why aren't we allowed to go into the forest and - like NAIDOC is coming up - to get three of four kangaroos and two or three emus. That's all we ask for. But under the Act, "Oh, no, you know, you have got to come and see us."

And I said, "Why do we have to go to you? Our Elders didn't have to." And our fishing. Why do we have to have a licence to fish in our own country when we know them fish - when they spawn and are going to have young ones, we don't fish. We know when the crayfish season is closed. We know when the Murray Cod season is closed. We don't go and do them things. We know all that. But if they saw us on the river fishing to get a fish or for elders or something like that - that's what the young ones used to do, you know. We want to be free to do that because how long have we been doing that and there is still plenty in the Barmah-Millewa Forest --

COMMISSIONER WALTER: Uncle, can I ask, what is the current arrangements for you to get fishing and hunting licences? Is there any First People fishing and hunting rights available around?

COLIN WALKER: Well, I refused to get a licence for hunting, although my firearms - police come out and checked me, my firearms are - I'm a registered shooter, licensed, and my firearms is in steel, you know, in a steel cabinet and that. They come out 30 Ks to check. So I'm right to do that. And I don't lend my rifle to anyone if they haven't got a shooter's licence, because we know all of that. I'm not even allowed to give a young fella some bullets if he hasn't got a licence. You know. So - but I won't get a fishing licence, no.

COMMISSIONER WALTER: So you refuse to - - -

COLIN WALKER: It is invisible ink to me.

COMMISSIONER WALTER: Because you have got the rights already. You don't need - yes.

COLIN WALKER: I always said, if they could show me a letter that my great, great grandfather Freddie Walker wrote that I can't fish and hunt in my own country - to me, it's invisible ink. You know. I'm not arrogant. I'm not a stand-over man. But I think under - my rights, going for a walk up the street, "My name is Colin Walker. I'm going to go out and get a feed of kangaroo and emu whenever I want." I don't do that. "I'm going down the river to fish to get myself some fish," I don't do that. I just do it when I want to do it.

MR GOODWIN: And does that need to get permission, the licensing arrangements, does that get in the way of passing on that knowledge to the younger generations?

COLIN WALKER: I think - in one way, I think our young ones should stick to the law with firearms. That you have to get - you know, get your guns and that, your rifle registered and you have got a shooters licence. See, I've got mine still in my wallet now, which I got. I don't lend it to any of my grandsons. They got their own licence. They have to have it and I don't say, "Oy." I go out with them. And NAIDOC, if I go out and stay with the young fellas - sometimes I won't go.

I tell them where to go, I will say, get two or three kangaroos, and a couple of - if they come back more than what I tell them to, I will say, "You won't be going out anymore." "Why, Uncle Col?" "Because you didn't do what I told you to do. You took more than you should have." You got to discipline them, like our Elders done to us. That's not hard to talk -- you know. And that's how we were brought up.

MR GOODWIN: I just want to play a video that - of a interview that you did for NAIDOC Week in 2020 which talks about some of these issues and also mentions some of the changes you've seen in the land and waters of your country. So we might just watch that and then I will ask some questions.

(Video played)

(Video stopped)

MR GOODWIN: Uncle Col, you mentioned in that video some of the changes have you seen to Dhungalla through your life, that you could drink out of it when you were growing up and now you can't, around the fish and the turtles available in the river. What have some of those changes meant for you?

COLIN WALKER: It means a lot, because we go back, our childhood days, we'd have competition, fill up a - this bottle, say, with water. Now, look how - the colour of that. We would throw that in the river and dive for it. You would open your eyes and you see that bottle. You open your eyes under the water now, they get infected, more or less. That's my saying. Now, years ago when I was chairperson of the Yorta Yorta Land Council, I see these two blokes come in a car, get out with their briefcases, and they asked could they speak to Colin Walker.

Someone said, "He's over there." They come and said, "You're Colin Walker. Look, we are from the Murray-Darling Basin. We was thinking would you like to come on the Murray-Darling Basin?" And I laughed -- I said what, because that will be a big job, me -- you know. I said, "Look, could I just say something? You stuffed up the river system, you poked us up all the logs, poked us up under rocks. And now that you've stuffed up the river system, you want us to come and help youse." I said, "Yes, I will go in."

So a few of us went on that, me and two or three of our old mates, and we were on the Murray-Darling Basin board, you know. And so that was a big job too, with them. But our question was, the river system, what's happening to our water? Because you could sell water downstream but not upstream, and there's big money. They reckon even the AFL footballers were buying water as investments. I said, "Why should a Australia - like, a footballer be allowed to buy water? You're robbing the farmers, like, the land owners and things like that."

So there is things that - you know, a lot of people don't know about it. But should know, why. But that - and then one part said, yeah - like, they were just letting the drainage system anywhere run into the river system, you know. Pesticides and all that. One part said - because I'm involved with the Indigenous fishing, and they just set up a new nursery, just out of Shepparton. And I'm involved with that. And we're going to employ some Indigenous women.

And I said, my recommendation is employ some of our Indigenous women, young women, and non-Indigenous, because they got beautiful soft hands, to handle the little fish -- to let them go. You know. And so them things I'm involved with as well. You know. So - but the river system, why is it - we stuffed up a lot of things. Experts, if you want - our Elders always said, if you want anything stuffed up, get the experts in. You know. And I think - and I'm a great believer in that. Like, I worked in so many things, had no education but I pulled through it.

MR GOODWIN: Have you seen changes to the forest as well?

COLIN WALKER: Yes, there is a change in the forest, and, you know, they're logging. Well, there's parts in the forest I would like to see thinned out. Like, with - I was proud to be working with my elderly uncles and them during - in the early 50s, thinning out the forest in different areas. You know, and I think that should come back to open up the forest a bit and logging different areas so they can log. Because I think they still have timber and stuff like that.

But if there is nothing - no good timber there, well, why go in there? Go to another section of the forest. And we will be part of that. You know. As I said, about our wood system. Our hunting and gathering is hunting for our food and gathering our wood off the floor of the forest, not fallen trees. Because I think it's about $600 or something if you are caught falling a tree. We don't want to fall them. We know what we are there for. We want to get the wood off the floor of the forest.

So now with National Parks, I was talking to them the other day, we'll go and get a permit but we don't have to pay for it. I said, "Fair enough." You know, things like that. Simple. To me it's simple. And then if our young men go in there and fall a tree, aha, bang. We know who went in there. You pay for destroying that tree. You won't be allowed back in for a while. Give them that responsibility -- come in as larrikins. And non-Indigenous as well are going into the forest. Overriding our decisions. Cutting wood and selling it. And our boys just want to - our boys don't. They're just going to get it for our use, you know. And these are things has to be looked at.

MR GOODWIN: And you mentioned at the start of today that - about climate change. And that you think climate change has played a part in some of the changes and some of the different behaviours of the animals. Why do you think climate change has played a part in the changes you've seen?

COLIN WALKER: Well, like I said, through the animal behaviour. And, of course, we haven't given the water. Because in September every year, the swans going lay home up at the Barmah Lake. Me and the - when the water was up, me and a mate went up to the lakes, the Moira and the Barmah Lake. And I could see where the swans were there and they was making their trail in to make their nest. Oh, another week or so, we will come back and get a couple of swan eggs each.

Anyway, was really happy, we went on both sides. We come back in a few days' time or a week, no swans. Oh, what's going on here -- the animals knew that there is no more water coming, down went the water. So the swans wouldn't have had the water there to swim around their nests and that and they take the young ones out. But, you know, so what are we going to do with things like that? With non-Indigenous too are feeling the pinch about the water system. So we involved - Aboriginal people, we always think of things like that, you know.

Why can't we be involved in things like that? But yeah, why wasn't they - the swans didn't lay because there was no - they knew, ah, the water is dropping, so we are leaving here.

MR GOODWIN: I want to now ask some questions about your involvement in the justice system and the Koori Courts in particular. Now, you were asked to be a respected Elder for the Koori Court in Shepparton in the early 2000s, and you mentioned in your Balert Keetyarra that you were very suspicious about being involved at first. Why were you suspicious?

COLIN WALKER: Well, I thought to - another thing, had to plead guilty. Why did you have to plead guilty? That's in - you don't plead guilty in a non-Indigenous court until you go. You're not guilty until you are proved guilty. And just an incident, I met one of the young boys. He is walking up the street and he saw this beautiful old Holden. So he's car mad, and he walked around looking at it. The next minute he could see the curtain of this house moving, so by the time he got to the corner, the police were there to grab him.

"Oh, you was looking - was you going to pinch that car, steal it?" He said, "No, I was just looking at it." So he said, "Uncle, I'm charged. I'm not coming through the Koori Courts. I'm going through the mainstream." And I -- never seen him since. And I tapped him on the shoulder I said, "Good on you." But then on the Koori Courts, when the magistrate and judges asked me what was the most interesting thing for me sitting on the Koori Courts, I said it was connecting up the young people.

And there was no such thing as justice for Aboriginal people, us living on missions. So I didn't care what - they could have said to me, "Uncle Col, we don't want to hear that." I would have said, "Oh, well, I won't sit." So - but sitting on the Koori Courts and that, I have been blessed. Cummeragunja was a big place and, you know, families that come out of there. Families from all missions. And then because we all had that connect, and then if a young girl come before me, I would say, "What's your name, love." Call them like my daughter, love.

"What's your mother's maiden name. Oh. What gives you the rights to carry on the way." They were great people, good community people. But they were lost people, because their mum and dad might have passed away, or couldn't get on and split up and the grandparents might have passed on. So they had no one to - they knew who they were, but they never had the connection. So I was blessed, in that way, to connect them up. And same as Deniliquin and Swan Hill, I had that covered through my mother's country.

And then with Narrandera, married to my wife from up there, I knew the -- you know, so that helped me too. And it was unreal to young people that come to - and when the - after they'd - we'd finished, they would come up and give you a hug and cry on your shoulder. "Thanks, Uncle." And the young men was the same. Because they interviewed one young man and they said, "What's it like, appearing before your Elders?" He said, "Terrifying." I said, "Oh, I thought we smiled at you." Anyway, he said it was terrifying.

And then one day I was asked - the judges asked or the magistrate, "Uncle Colin, would you like the young ones to bow to you when they come in?" I said no fear. I said, "No one ever bowed to my Elders before me." I just want them to come in, you know. Went back to my Elders. Where were their certificates? Who bowed to them? You know. So that's how I look at it. You know, I might be a bit queer up here or something, but, no. Why bow to me? Who am I?

But you know, so I learnt a lot, too, with the young ones coming through. And then we - as I said, we had a healing program for them, Rumbalara, for the young men. You know, one

young fella come before me. I knew he could play football, and I said, "Do you play football?" "Oh, yes, Uncle Col." I said, "Are you playing Saturday?" He said, "Yes, Uncle Col." So I said "What's your number?" He told me. I said, "I will be over Saturday to watch you play football."

I'm 80 Ks away. But in his mind, he thought I was there. That's how the old people spoke to us too, you know. So that's healing. What would we do without the Rumbalara Football Club and the netball? Because Shepparton is a big place, same as Melbourne, I suppose, with young ones going to, you know, netball and young girls that - I think sports really bought us out where we was before we was locked away.

You know, wasn't allowed to mix. As I said, tarred with the wrong brush if you played up in a place. "Oh, no, you can't come in here because your mob - your mob - your mob played up, you know." Even though - you know. Yeah. So they are the things I really looked at over the time I went in the courts, and not only before went in the courts. I thought about our justice, with our Elders. Our justice and law was there at Cummeragunja. On every mission. They was knowledgeable people, our Elders. You know.

MR GOODWIN: And you mentioned your ability to connect up the young people, you know, to where they were from and how they were connected. Why was that important to do that for those people that came before the Koori Court?

COLIN WALKER: Well, because they were lost. You could see - and I think that, in spirit, in the Aboriginal spirit, I helped them young women. So if they went back and they didn't want to be out there, "Oh, I know where I came from." But they knew where they came from and it never had a - "Oh, my grandfather, he was a great footballer. I didn't know that. And my grandmother, she worked blah, blah, blah. Or my grandparents were community people." Shamed them by this.

Not from out of a book. Words written down. Came from here. Spiritual. It hurt them. You know. That's how I work with the young ones. And I think even now I'm out of that, but they still come up to me, the young mothers and the young men, you know, and speak to me. And I'm happy. And one young fella, I - when I used to have a rehab and worked with the young men, he said, "Thanks, Uncle Col. Gee, you've done a lot for me." I said "I done that much for you. You done that much for yourself. You done it, not me."

That's -- and that gives them that confidence. Well, I could do that to them. I didn't say, "Yeah, you would have been buggered without me", you know. Like, you know, "If I wouldn't have told you this." But, no. You've got to give them young people credit too and, you know, to lift their spirits.

MR GOODWIN: And why is that important to you, to build that confidence in young people, to - - -

COLIN WALKER: Well, we always say they're going to - they're our future. Now, why would we neglect them? So they're there and they were growing up and, oh, our young with an ones won't do this. Our young ones won't do this. But if we help them and protect them, but you're responsible for your own actions too, we used to say in the Koori Courts, if you done wrong. You're responsible for your own actions. But we shame them. You know. And I think by - like, if a young person is talking - if I'm with a group of young men, I don't think,

"Excuse me, I'm an elder and I'm speaking." I don't say that or leave that young man out or that young woman. They will say, because what's the good of saying they are our future if you're going to drop in on them?

MR GOODWIN: You were involved in the Koori Courts as an Elder for 16 years.

COLIN WALKER: They say I was, yes. I went out to - they put a day on. My girls took me over and I took the wife over. And on the way over, I said, "10, might have been 12." When they read it out at 16 years, I said -- thinking gee, that long, you know. But I looked - it was good and then we travelled around. We would come down here to conferences with the rest of the - the Koori Courts and spoke to them which was good. You know. We mixed. You know.

MR GOODWIN: Meeting all the other Elders who would work on the Koori Courts around Victoria.

COLIN WALKER: Yeah -- my brothers and sisters. Then we had a - you had an Elder and you had a young person sitting - respected person. So he would listen or she would listen to what you said. And that - you would say to them, "Then what do you think of it?" "I believe what aunty said or what uncle said to you." You know. "I think what they said to you." So that respected person then could move on as an Elder later. But just the only thing, why - why is it that you had to plead guilty?

MR GOODWIN: Is there anything else from your experience of the Koori Courts you think could make the - that program better, to make the Koori Courts better?

COLIN WALKER: Well, I think - why do they have to plead guilty. Because I think if you're an Elder, you have got to be a bit hard on them if they do the wrong thing. You could - you have to have it there. You could be a bit harder on them. And one of my things came up at - if you've done wrong and say down here in Melbourne and you wanted to come before us up there, I used say to the manager, "No, I'm not sitting. He's got to go back to face his Elders." And I think that's - you know. The magistrate would say, Uncle Col. And I think that was a good - because they faced down their Elders.

MR GOODWIN: Something else in the justice system you have been an important advocate about recently is the issue of deaths in custody and the sad issue, particularly, of young women who have passed away. You've been attending the Veronica Nelson inquest sometimes over the past few weeks. Why do you think this is an important issue for Aboriginal people in Victoria?

COLIN WALKER: And also my other niece, Tanya Day. And I think now things have to change. Where is there justice for our young women when some of these - two - I have been to two, with Tanya Day and Veronica. So, to me, they have failed a duty of care, when it should be - they were medical issues. Not a police issue. And now what I want to see, as I said to the young woman over here - I will call you a young woman, do you mind that? And so I said to you earlier, that I would like to see our - we have got matured young - matured women in there treating our young ones.

And then they could say, "Here Aunty. Aunty, I want a drink. Aunty, I feel sick." "Here, Dort" because that's our talk. "Here, Dort, daughter, take this here." "Thanks, Aunty." So you

have got that cultural respect and connection. But not to say, "Here, you've got to take this. Now did you take that?" and walk out on them. So in the prisons, there has got to be a change. There has to be. Because you get mothers losing their daughters. Other families losing their brothers and sisters. And uncles losing their nieces and their nephews and their cousins.

In effect - our women are still crying. Our women are still crying up in the country. They still cry when they see on the screen about Veronica, my niece. I reared her father, when he - from a little fella. Me and the wife took him over and reared him at Cummeragunja. So they're the connections. There's our feeling. Like, by lore and our cultural thing is she's my - like a - he was like a son because my - my sons called him brother. You know. So there was our connections.

So why am I going to neglect things like that if I could speak on issues? So I think there's got to be a change where we have got our women that are going to prison and not put them on today and say, oh, you come back the next day. Have them on 24 hours, if we've got young women there, to treat them with their cultural feelings. They go, mothers, with their cultural feeling, and the Stolen Generation. How cruel that was. Beautiful mothers and fathers. Kids were taken off them.

I worked with young men that was - you know, cried and said, "No, I'm not going to talk to my mother. She let them take me away." And I said, "Hold on a minute. You don't remember. Your mother was probably hanging on to that car and her flesh was -- to the bone, screaming out, wanting you back." "Oh, Uncle, I'm sorry. I never thought of that." Great mothers. Our spiritual connections to family is very strong. And it's just like when I respect the returned soldiers.

Because my father-in-law was out at Tobruk and - that's my wife's father. And, you know, when they went away and came back, there was nothing for them. Their family might have passed on or split up. And the same with the Stolen Generation, when they come back, the mum or father might have passed away or, you know, remarried. We've got to look at them things too, to support them. So they're coming back, they've got nothing, nothing there. Same as the soldiers when they come back, how cruel that was, you know.

And I look at things like that and I think it's very important - why should children be taken away? And I always said, should have a drug test and alcohol test before you - little kids are taken out. Just say was me and my wife was younger, and we had no family and they said, "Col, you and your wife have got to have a test." I'd say yes. I wouldn't say, no, we don't drink. We don't smoke. Because we are abusing them little kids before we take them. We only want them for their money.

These are the things we've got to look at. You know. That's my way. My way could be different to other people. But there's a way I look at things. How cruel it is, then. So that little ones, me and my wife could be at the club. We got someone else to look after them because we're going to bring them home a smoke or a couple of bottles of beer or a bottle of wine. No. No. You got to have responsibility and no drugs to look after little kids. Because then they might as well be fostered out. You know.

MR GOODWIN: Thank you, Uncle Col. You've talked a lot about being an Elder in your community and having a lot of knowledge about your country and culture and Aboriginal lore

and law. And you've talked about how much you learnt as a child and young person from your Elders. What do you feel is your responsibility as an Elder to the younger generations?

COLIN WALKER: Well, I feel as though they could come to me for advice. Because when I run - True Justice, they gave me some funds, once, to run a camp. We call it Budja's Men's Group, it means men, Budja's Men's Group, from Percy Green. And when I took them young men out, I said to them, we got to go on a farm right up the river -- have the mowers and all of them to clean up around the farmhouse. I said, "You bring your fishing gear." So part of their survival, then, because we are right on the river they could fish while we are having a break.

And they'd come up and say, "Uncle Col, we got a couple of fish here. You want one of these?" I say, no, you got a chef and you got a manager. You take them back and show them. And they know what you done. You know. And they enjoyed it. But the funds run out. You know. So there's not enough funds for things like that.

MR GOODWIN: You've been involved in quite a few men's groups and men's programs. Why is that particularly important for you?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah. Well, someone has got to do it. Someone has got to. You know. I will just tell you a story. Once I had a young man with me, and he was on ice and all. And I had him and then I said, "We're going down to pack some repatriation stuff." And when we got the vehicle to go in, I said to him - it was paid ride, and I said, "You got a licence?" He said "Yes, Uncle Col." So I just put my bag in the back and got the passenger side.

He come round and he said, "Aren't you driving?" I said, "No, you are." He said, "This is a brand new vehicle." I said, "Get in there and drive to Melbourne." So we got to Melbourne. I give him the keys to his room. He said, "I got my own room, Uncle Col?" I said yes. So later on, I said, "I'm going out to my grand-daughters' for tea. Drive me out to Cardinia, all over Melbourne." And when I got there, I shut my door to the car and I hear his door shut.

And I looked around and I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm having tea with you." I said, "No, you're not." I said - because he had a couple of young children here in Melbourne. I said, "You're going back to take your children out for tea" because him and his partner split up. He said, "With this brand new car?" I said, "Off you go." I trusted him. Now, before he started with me he was on ice. I trusted him. Who could have got into trouble if he'd have wrecked that car? I would have.

But that's what I done to young men. You've got to trust them too. Because when they come out - out of four walls, what have they got? Nothing. So that's why we got our programs to take them young men out into country, because the Barmah Forest is my university. Not in four walls. You know. That's - and them young men - we generally have men's groups and we have smoking ceremonies and all the talk on issues. Not to - no swearing. Everyone is respectable.

And I used to bring out the little fella -- they could listen to us talk and if we've got a corroboree -- they would join in. You know. But the funds are a bit hard to get for things like that. But that's how I treated young men. And when I took him down to Melbourne, I took him to the museum, and he walked - and I could see him shaking and that. His face started to

turn colours, and he said, "Uncle Col, I can't do this." I said, "Yes, you can." I pointed my finger straight at him.

I said, "Yes, you can." I said, "You're a hero. You're taking these people, our Elders, back to their country." So he sat down and helped do it. That was a simple way I spoke to the young ones. I never spoke to him rough. I wasn't rude to him in my way. Because he never said, "Uncle Col, you shouldn't speak to me like that." He didn't. He'd done it. You know.

MR GOODWIN: So you would like to see more support for those types of programs?

COLIN WALKER: Yes. Yeah, I would like to see that because we got young ones, and we got little ones running around Cummera there that, you know, we could take them up the forest. As I said, the turtle hunts we do. Well, when that was done with our young ones, they was in the swamps, feeling around. They enjoyed it. Turtle survey. Our little ones out in the forest where they belong. Not in four walls.

MR GOODWIN: And maybe - apologies, this is a little out of order, but if we can bring up the photo of the turtles, which I think is the next one there. So did you just want describe to the Commissioners what was happening here in terms of the - in terms of conservation efforts for the turtles?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, well, what they done - up on our property was called Yielima. They went up there about five years ago and they got some turtles and they - what you call marked them, dated them and they let them go.

MR GOODWIN: Tagged them.

COLIN WALKER: Yes, and they let them go and then after five years, we was doing - with the young ones, we got my mother's country mob, the two young ones from Wamba Wamba and Yorta Yorta -- and the Land Council and we all met. And they had little nets in this - and got them out, the turtles, and then we looked at them. It was five years since they let them go right up there. Across country, they came. You know. Across country. But got them out and checked them. They were the same - yeah, the three turtles they let go.

And these are the things with the young ones, they love that. You know. And why isn't that a part of our mob? Not having professors coming up and grab two or three out - ones. We run it with Parks, with all our young ones. And they enjoyed it. And asked them questions. And we're there to answer it.

MR GOODWIN: And one thing that you've been very passionate about teaching young people is about cultural burning and maintaining the forest. And if we can just show a clip from the Firesticks Alliance that you are involved in.

(Video *'Yorta Yorta Country: Traditional Lore Should Be Allowed In Every Forest, with Uncle Colin Walker, 2019 NIFW, Dhungala'* played)

(Video stopped)

MR GOODWIN: What's the importance of a cultural burning on country?

COLIN WALKER: Well, as our people always said, fire is a good servant but a bad master. You know. But if - like, our country - because there's different landscapes. So our country is flat. So it would be easy to do burnoff there. I feel sorry for others with the hilly country, because fire could come over the top. But up at home, we've got flat country and why can't we do burning, if you see them there, and take our wood off the floor of the forest. That helps, you know, when there's fires.

But I think that - and they come from Cairns. They come from everywhere. That was one of the greatest days or week I've had in the forest home, was with them young men. And you could see how many people was there. And there was Elders there too and it was enjoying. You know. So why not do burning because - and the old people, when they lived in riverbanks in bagged humpies, they never got burnt down because they cleared around their camps, their old camps.

Raked around and when they get calm day or whatever, they would light them little fires up, you know. And I think that's - everywhere should be. Because you can see the damage it's done. You know. And this flood water, what it's done. Like, I feel sorry for them people. My heart bleeds for them, that was in the floods and all that. People say, well, why did they build there for, what are they doing there? But that's their country, you know.

MR GOODWIN: And you mentioned in the clip about the importance of young people being there performing those tasks, learning those things. Why is that important for to you to pass on that knowledge around land, caring for country?

COLIN WALKER: Well, that's it. We manage. We're farmers. We farmed our land in different ways. Because our food was still there, our traditional plants, our animals, bird life; everything. You know, it's still there. If we was allowed to do burnoffs that's everywhere. But like I feel sorry for anyone that lives in the hilly country. What's going to happen? They are allowed to clear so far back the trees from the homes? Are the Greenies going to interfere with them, the Greens to say, "No, you can't do that. You can't cut that tree down." But what if they cut it down for fire risk and lives, saving lives? You know. Things have got to be looked at it like that. You don't go to them and say, "You've got to move out of here, you can't live here it's a fire danger" but if them people live there and the descendants live there, that's their rights.

MR GOODWIN: Something that you are involved in is also culture competency training through culture camps and taking people on country. Could you tell the Commissioners about a bit about what culture camps does and why it's important to you?

COLIN WALKER: Yeah, well it is important and now that I finished on the courts the second and third, I think, next month, I have a camp of 14 police. There is two brothers that put up the tents, they do the cooking. I take them out and show them our burial sites, show them everything. 14 police. So we have been still involved with the police and justice in that way. But I go up to where they camp at the lakes and we sit around the fire and we don't talk - "Oh, there is someone come before me the other day and he looked up blah, blah." There's nothing about that. It's just about sitting around a campfire and talking to be in contact with one another. And we will be having - right up to November we will be having police camps and we have young people that's in justice come out too at different camps, you know. And I think it's great when the police come out too, we still involved - and they get to know our feelings to where we, you know, camp. What we eat. And our feelings how we talk.

And we have - the young fellas that I work with have the clapsticks there and they paint them up. You know, the police or the young ones in the justice. They love it. Yeah. And I think that's great that we got that feeling and the police have got that feeling too, that they - you know, we mixed - and we know. The Aboriginal people, they are not like we thought they were. You know. The young ones, they are not having them people. And I think that's great. As I said, our - our Elderssaid we don't want to walk alone, we want to walk with you. I think that's a great saying, you know. That's my - that's been my life and the way I look at life. And - you know. And my wife, all the years I was married to her, as I said nearly 67 years, she has never, ever interfered with my work. Even when I go away for two or three days hunting I might - if there's scarce kangaroos and emus, I might go another 250 Ks up to Hay right out on the plains. She will pack my tucker box with me or whatever, because I don't want to take my tucker because - but Nari Nari Land Council, that's right up at Hay, I do their burials too. And I do their - look around for these sites and train their young men up there. I worked in with them. And they give me full control of the 32,000 acres. They said when I got - "There, you are Uncle Col, we know what you want." You know. And if I take any young fella up there, "Don't you shoot -" I tell them to get two kangas. You come home with four or three, ah ha, you never listened to me. These people trust me to come and get what I wanted. That's how I talk to young people. And I give them that, you know, responsibility too. Why did I do that many? Uncle Col is wild with me.

MR GOODWIN: One of your other sayings is you've got to look back to go forward. Do you want to just explain to the Commissioners -

COLIN WALKER: Yeah well, a lot of people say, you've to move forward, don't go back. You can't go back, you have got to move forward. But I said no, I always go back before I go forward. I never ever forget what the Elderstold me. And I think that's what helped me all through my life, is that my Elders, what they told me is true. The climate change, the water, the fires. You know. And that's why I will never say, "I won't go to university." I'm too old anyways now, but if you want me to I would say "No, I learnt everything. My teachers, and what they told me come from here, not out of a book." And that's when I go back, because all I say our Elders were that power point, without them we would have been in the dark, lost. You walk into a house if it's dark you don't know where you are. You switch the light on you can see. And I always stay with my Elders, you know. And a lot of the young fellas are saying to me now, "Yeah, Uncle it's great", you know. It's just my way of living and my thoughts, how I see things. A lot of people might think I'm queer and, you know, and all that. But I don't care what they think. I survived. I've got friends. And I work with a lot of good people too that carries on the same work and things like that.

MR GOODWIN: You finish Uncle, sorry. You finish if you had something else to say, sorry. I might have interrupted you.

COLIN WALKER: No.

MR GOODWIN: The Commissioners might have some questions, but I just had a last one from me. What are your hopes for the future for your mob, for Aboriginal people in this state and in Australia generally?

COLIN WALKER: Well, we talk about education now. We all say we want houses, hot and cold shower and education. So that's what we have to look at. That. And then we got young people - I was just - I worked until I was 70, and I was just getting on the computer then. And

the young one said, "Uncle Col, we are closing now." I said "what?" They said, "Buy yourself a computer." I said "oh, no." That's finished me, you know. And I think that's what we can look at. And have respect for our young ones that's going to university if they are going and support them. Support them. And when they come and wanting information from you from their country, you give it to them, you tell them. Don't say, "You're learning down there. You are going to university, I'm not telling you what to do." But you tell them. This is what - you don't say, "This is what you got to do" this is what we thought. We thought this - you know. I think that's - and I think a lot of - we got a lot of clever young people and we can't ignore them, we've got to support them.

MR GOODWIN: And my true final question, what's the importance of the process that the Yoorrook Justice Commission is going through, a truth and justice process here in Victoria. What's the importance for you of participating in this process?

COLIN WALKER: Well, I say cut the line that tell lies. Cut the line. It's danger. Have a new line-up, truth. With the truth. Don't just come and mouth off. I was told this and this, well - well, I didn't. You know. And I think what we got to do is truth telling, and I don't believe in a treaty because two documentaries I watched with the Canadian Indians where a treaty they signed and they hunted them off their land, they couldn't go back to fish and hunt, couldn't bury their people back on their land - agreement. So, now, I think the government has got to make agreements with us. Not us making agreements with the government. And sovereignty. We want sovereignty. Because how many years have we been there? And what we own. What do we own? Our land is - they are developing on our land without consulting with us. Don't come - one time ago when we set up - you had to come to see under Act if you was developing because monitors, we were the monitors. We were the eyes. No, we couldn't see them stuff, machines so we would go there in the morning before they started, when they started, and look for artefacts and things like that. You know. So we are not - they are not consulting with us enough. Even the forestry. They say they are, but they don't sit around a table like they started to. So who are we? Who are we? Are we anyone? I look at it that way. So sovereignty now, not treaty. It's your home. And that's what we've got to look at. Is - like - it was - it was sad to watch the Canadian Indians crying because their land, they signed so we - the government agreement, I reckon they have got to sign agreements with us not us - oh yeah, we have got to go with the government and sign an agreement. We've been doing that for too long. Like I don't think I'm - I don't know whether you would like to listen to me talking like that, but I think that's the way I look at it. And I haven't been an arrogant man, I was never a violent man, I just listened and spoke and said what I wanted to. And I've had a lot of support over the years for what I do and done and things like that. Yeah.

MR GOODWIN: Thank you, Uncle Col. Those were my questions.

COMMISSIONER WALTER: I have probably not really a question, more that sort of something that you talked about that really struck me was -

COLIN WALKER: Sorry?

COMMISSIONER WALTER: Something that you talked about that really struck me was the importance of connection for young people in the justice system and how you worked to actually connect people up so they knew who their people were and where they came from, and that has really just struck me as something that is just so important.

COLIN WALKER: And I think that's true. That's what we want. Like when we go - because you go back, even over 100 years ago, when all missions were set up, none of our young women were in jail in cells because our Elders were the lore people. Our aunties, our mothers. So if we got someone in there working in the prison system now, as I said, matured women, and then them young women will listen to them and, you know, respect. But as I said, I've been to two - Veronica, my niece, and they failed their duty of care. I don't care if people come up to me and say, "You say that again we will go you." I say, "Well go me." They failed their duty of care. You know about this - I will just say another thing. We don't like it, I was talking to a lot of young people the other day, where this bloke attacked this young fella with a didgeridoo. Well, that's wrong, we know that's wrong. I hate violence. So that didgeridoo with the musical thing he shouldn't have done that, but on the news they said he's looking at 15 years. He didn't go to court yet. He hasn't been to court. And the reporter said, he's looking at 15 years. So what do we do? I got no protection, if they are going to do that, or he hasn't. That was wrong, he should have never done that. We are not happy with that up home when I spoke to the young fellas up there. Matured men I spoke to. No, they said no. They said it's a musical instrument and he shouldn't have used it. We don't know what happened. It's still an - for someone on the news to get up and say, "he's looking at 15 years", why should you - I say that when he hasn't been to court? You know. What gives me the right as a reporter to say that? That reporter should be pulled into gear and say, "You have no right, that's up to the law, not up to you."

COMMISSIONER WALTER: Yes, I agree.

COMMISSIONER BELL: Yes. Uncle Colin, firstly I want to thank you for your evidence and for the effort that you have made to share this truth with us. It's had a big impact on me and I will take your words away and think about them carefully, and I'm honoured to be hearing you. And I also want to thank you for the time you spent with us at Cummeragunja and Maloga Station. We spoke with Uncle Leon at the school and those words that you spoke then were also very important, and I took them away and I am very grateful.

COLIN WALKER: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BELL: And I especially want to thank you for taking us to the burial ground at Old Maloga a very ancient place. There are very important Elders buried there. It was an extraordinary honourer to be there with you and to experience that place. And thank you, again. But I have just one question and it's about George Black.

COLIN WALKER: About what?

COMMISSIONER BELL: George Black. You mentioned George Black. He's the man who dug up the remains.

COLIN WALKER: Yes, he was named -

COMMISSIONER BELL: I just want you to say something about George Black.

COLIN WALKER: I don't know what his name was George. Yeah, so what give him the rights to do that, you know? But it was - I think it was the museums, because - but still in all, that was like digging - going now to a cemetery now and digging up our people and taking them. To me it sounds the same or looks the same to me. Who give him the rights? But he

was given that by the government. So the government had no respect. They could have said "No, let it rest." But they only had digging sticks, you know, as I said earlier, to bury our people. So where was our rights going back then? So we had no say, we had no rights as First People, you know. So them things, you know, must have hurt a lot of our Elders before me. What would have they had have thought of that because they were very spiritual people, and if they saw a bit of bone or something they would cover that up, Where did you get - you know, cover it up. They would know if it was human. We know. We learnt that was human from an animal bone and all that. You know. So - but there is the government again, overriding our Elders that had the knowledge and respect. You dare not touch that. You dare not dig that up. So he went and done it. How many? You know. If we went and dug up anyone, even in burials, like and cemeteries and that now, what would happen to us? To me there's no difference if I went and done that I'm in the wrong. If I went to a headstone and smashed it because I didn't like that person, why did I do that? I shouldn't have done it. That person's at rest. I should respect that person.

COMMISSIONER HUNTER: Thank you, Uncle. And I just want to, again, say thank you alongside Commissioner Bell on our visit out to country, and I think you answered a lot of questions when we were out there that we put to you, and it was a very - it was a very moving experience for all of us. I know that. So, one, I wanted to thank you again for that because it helps bring this to life. And also I just wanted to pick up on how you really acknowledge respect of our Eldersand really make sure that - and I really just want to thank you for reiterating that because it's something I was bought up with and connection, again, that we are losing slowly. But, you know, thank you for all the work you've done to keep that alive. So I just wanted - I don't have a question because I think you've answered them all over the last time we've seen you and today. So - - -

COLIN WALKER: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER HUNTER: No, you are welcome, Uncle. I just pass back to Tim.

MR GOODWIN: Thank you, Deputy Chair. It only remains for me to tender some documents referable to Uncle Col's evidence today. So I will tender as Exhibit 10.0 the Balert Keetyarra of Uncle Colin Walker dated 26 May 2022 which has been confirmed - it was provided to the Commissioners in draft but has been confirmed by Uncle Col. And there are four additional items to tender. The two videos we watched, the bundle of photos that we looked at and also a report entitled 'Reminiscences of the Aboriginal Station at Cummeragunja and its Aboriginal People' which has been provided to us by Uncle Col and his family. I tender those documents.

COMMISSIONER HUNTER: Thank you, counsel. So those documents will be allocated the next exhibit numbers.

<EXHIBIT 10.0 BALERT KEETYARRA OF UNCLE COLIN WALKER DATED 26 MAY 2022

<EXHIBIT 10.1 - 10.4 BULDLE OF PHOTOS, TWO VIDEOS, AND THE REPORT ENTITLED 'REMINISCENCES OF THE ABORIGINAL STATION AT CUMMERAGUNJA AND ITS ABORIGINAL PEOPLE'

COMMISSIONER BELL: Counsel, I wonder whether we might include as an exhibit to come the mapping of the food and the natural resources - - -

MR GOODWIN: Yes.

COMMISSIONER BELL: - - - which Uncle Colin has put together.

MR GOODWIN: No. As someone who has seen the map it's very impressive. So I think that will be an excellent idea.

COMMISSIONER BELL: Uncle Colin, maybe we can get a copy of that later. Thank you.

COLIN WALKER: All right. That will be all right. May, you are coming down again aren't you, soon?

MR GOODWIN: We will arrange that. Thank you, Uncle Col. Thank you for that generosity.

COMMISSIONER HUNTER: So we want to thank you for coming today, Uncle Col. And on behalf of us here at the Commission and your support people we want to give you a gift. Thank you.

COLIN WALKER: Thank you. That's great. And I just - you know, that's my way of living, and my way of talking and my feelings. That's how I always felt. So you know, I will tell you another quick story before we go. Is that you never take anything that belongs - years ago all the old uncles and grandfathers they had wooden boats on the river for fishing and going up collecting swan eggs. One day I went down with my little mates, get in grandfather's boat. We were sailing around it in it and when were buggered sailed it back into the bank. My little mates get up and run up the bank. I look and see this figure, I thought old black horse town, "Tie that boat up, Colin." I tied it up. He grabbed me gently by the arm, never hurt. He said, "You won't get that boat anymore." And I said, "Why Pop?" He said, "You never asked for it." And when I run up the bank, my little mate said, "We will get Uncle's boat again?" I said "no". They said, "why", I said, "I never asked for it". But you see how that hurt me? I could have went and asked Pop, "Could we borrow your boat?" But no, I didn't, I just took that boat. You know. The stories like the Elders how they disciplined. Thank you. Thank you.

MR GOODWIN: Thank you, Uncle Col.

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