



Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission Inquiry into Economic Prosperity

We, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people are the Traditional Owners of Melbourne's CBD (Narm) and surrounding country. Our land extends all the way from the north to the mountains of the Great Dividing Range, east to Mount Baw Baw, south to Mordialloc Creek and west to the Werribee River. We take our name from the Woi-wurrung word 'wurun' meaning the Manna Gum that is common along the Birrarung (Yarra River), and 'djeri'- the grub that is found in and around the tree.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation is a Registered Aboriginal Party since 2008, legislated under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. We are the Traditional Owners and knowledge holders of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural heritage, part of a heritage that makes up the oldest continuous living culture in the world, dating back to over 65,000 years. Our country comprises an area of over 7,000 square kilometres and covers 29 different local government areas.

The effects of colonisation on our people demonstrate an undeniable connection between the past policies and actions of governments and the current lack of economic prosperity among our community. The combined impact of the loss of language, knowledge, culture, traditional practices, and community, as well as the dispossession and fragmentation of society due to massacres, disease, the restriction of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to reservations, and the forced removal of children from their families, together all but eradicated traditional Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung economic activity.

The large-scale introduction of cattle and sheep drastically reduced our staple food murnong (yam daisy), which had been widespread across our Country but is now critically endangered. Our Country was also damaged by intensive and intrusive agriculture, which drove away our traditional food sources. Building intergenerational wealth became next to impossible, not only because our people were enslaved, but also due to the deliberate withholding of wages, now referred to as 'stolen wages'.

Through the survival, strength, resilience, inspiration, and guidance of our Ancestors, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have survived and have worked diligently to rebuild our culture and community. A state of economic justice for the Wurundjeri



Woi-wurrung people looks like a thriving, vibrant, interconnected, multifaceted economy with a mixture of small businesses, individual entrepreneurship, and large-scale enterprises, comprising both Aboriginal and Wurundjeri-specific products and services and mainstream businesses and companies. Economic justice is Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people making livelihoods out of living our unique culture and traditional practices, providing services that support and benefit the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community, and getting our fair share of the profit from the enormous amounts of development occurring in the Narrm area and elsewhere on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country. Economic justice means Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have achieved the self-determination and autonomy we seek to manage and care for our Country and its waterways, as we know that this is the backbone for our people's economic revival.

Economic justice is Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people no longer being locked out of key industries profiting off our Country, but instead included as valued partners. It looks like Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung being supported to scale up our operations, governance, and capacity to enable us to become a major player in multiple key industries and major employer of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Aboriginal people in Victoria.

Land and water management

Economic justice also means the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung having appropriate access to, and involvement in the management of the Birrarung and all other waterways on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country (including unnamed waterways). This includes recognition of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural rights to water, as well as appropriate water allocations that reflect the inequities of past water allocation policies and the intergenerational impacts of lack of access to and management rights over water and land. It also means Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung being a respected and appropriately resourced equal partner, co-leading on all decision-making water and land management.

Economic justice is the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community being enabled and supported to progressively expand our capacity to actively manage our Country through self-determined management methods. Importantly, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people must be enabled to set objectives and directions for healthy land and water, incorporating our cultural rights and responsibilities to care for Country. Economic justice is Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people continuing to care for Country as guided by our cultural protocols, and the necessary funding mechanisms to support and achieve this.



Economic justice for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people also means further developed and more secure long-term engagement and collaboration with local governments. This includes through the formalisation of partnership and resourcing agreements to embed all local government engagement within a broader strategic framework that outlines the commitments, guidelines, responsibilities, and funding requirements governing how we work together.

The lack of greater land rights and ongoing barriers to accessing Country are significant obstacles preventing Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people from achieving economic growth. Our people are still locked out of the upper levels of income and employment due to factors such as a lack of cultural safety, a lack of targeted mentoring and development support, a lack of political representation, and due to racism and discrimination among staff, managers, and employers. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung would derive significant economic benefits, in terms of revenue, employment, training, cultural recognition, and more, from greater devolved responsibilities and investment in the management of commercial enterprises in the land, fire, water and other industries. Investing in Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation in these areas has multiple benefits for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community: overall revenue, employment of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, and the opportunity to achieve broader recognition for contributions and involvement in environmental and water management spaces.

Tourism

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung economy will grow once we have been supported to develop the organisational capital, capacity and resources to manage potential tourism services at tourism locations throughout Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, with a focus on significant sites that have been handed back to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community ownership, such as Wil-im-ee Moor-ring Stone Axe Quarry, Sunbury Earth Rings, Springfield Gorge, and Coranderrk/Nangenala. However, there must be accompanying government and private sector support to develop and promote Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung run historical and cultural tourism sites.

Significant levels of profit are being derived from tourism on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung lands, with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation excluded from this significant revenue stream. Currently, the tourism industry omits and minimises Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture, presence, history, and identity due to a lack of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung managed enterprises and qualified and experienced people. This lack of involvement means that Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture is presented superficially, generically, archaically, and with incomplete information and context. In eco-tourism and regional tourism on Wurundjeri Woi-



wurrung land, the majority of guides and experts are not Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, depriving tourists of a more authentic and knowledgeable experience.

Case study: Nangenala Cultural Centre

The Nangenala Cultural Centre is an important economic initiative that will open in 2025. Nangenala (formerly known as Galeena Beek) is an important Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation building, built on the historic Coranderrk site directly opposite the Healesville Sanctuary to the north-east of Melbourne. Galeena Beek was originally built in the early 1990s and ran as a cultural centre where Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Aboriginal population could meet, celebrate culture, perform ceremony, display artwork and engage with the community. In the year 2000, the Cultural Centre closed down. Following this, various private businesses operated out of the site, including a restaurant and wedding reception venue. Ultimately these businesses were unsuccessful, and the property was left unoccupied from around 2011. After many years of lobbying government, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation was successful in obtaining title to Galeena Beek.

The Nangenala Cultural Centre is a critical strategic venture for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, envisioned to become both a centre for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, and a popular attraction for existing visitors to the region as well as a driver for new visitation. Nangenala, meaning 'sit and relax' in the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung language, will include state-of-the-art education exhibits, artwork display, storytelling, audio visual installations, a cultural gathering space, and interactive experience infrastructure. The upper floor will include conference facilities and office spaces. The outdoor landscaping will provide a unique cultural experience with a community gathering area, Indigenous plants, firepit, seating, and lighting. Later development will include a dedicated education precinct, wetlands boardwalk, bush tucker walk, and glamping and valley view accommodation.

While return of the Cultural Centre has been celebrated by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, the process has been frustrating, as the property was in a derelict state. Local government and state-based planning requirements have also substantially delayed the project and increased the cost. We are still endeavouring to obtain a planning scheme amendment to allow us to refurbish our existing cultural centre and return to an operational state.



Case study: Coranderrk Station

Nangenala is located on the site of the original Coranderrk station (Coranderrk being the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung word for the Christmas Bush shrub which was common in the area). The history of Coranderrk is in many ways a microcosm of the impacts of colonialism on the economies of Aboriginal societies. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and other Aboriginal people from neighbouring tribes settled in the Coranderrk area in 1863 after a process in which they had petitioned the Victorian government for a parcel of land, worked hard to develop said land for farming, and then been moved to a different, unsuitable station. Their intention was to become self-sufficient and reduce their dependency on the rations issued on the reservation, which were woefully insufficient. Government rules also prevented them from hunting or fishing in the area.

Despite lacking resources and amidst stiff opposition from the settler community and government, the group managed to develop and operate a thriving farming community. However, political opposition to Aboriginal self-determination and demands from settlers for the land to be subdivided put continual pressure on the existence of the community, and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ngurungaeta's Wonga and later Barak had to repeatedly petition the government not to close down the station and relocate the people to Lake Tyers.

In the 1870's John Green, the superintendent at the site and a friend to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, was removed and replaced with an authoritarian leadership that removed the people's autonomy. The community was further devastated by the impacts of the *Aboriginal Protection Act 1886* – the Half-Caste Act. The station continued to be deliberately mismanaged and neglected by the Board and calls for its closure increased. Due to the determination of the community, these attempts were resisted, and it wasn't until 1924 that the station was finally closed by the government. Thanks to persistent lobbying from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community, in 1991 a small parcel of the original estate was finally handed back to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation. We continue to care for it to this day – 100 years after its initial closure and 163 years since its inception.

Through its vision to reestablish Aboriginal self-sufficiency and subsequent campaigns to defend what had been created, Coranderrk demonstrates Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Aboriginal resistance to colonisation and the values of astute political activism, Caring for Country, and the importance of developing lasting partnerships and relationships.



Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture and entrepreneurship

The systematic devaluation and silencing of Aboriginal, including Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture, values, knowledge, traditional practices, technologies, and spiritual beliefs has made it difficult for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to commercialise and profit off our cultural heritage. It has also negatively impacted Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people's sense of identity, pride, and community.

A long-term, all-of-society campaign to reframe the way Australians see and think about Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Aboriginal people and our culture needs to occur. There needs to be a societal conversation about understanding the value of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Aboriginal cultural heritage, embracing it as part of the broader Australian identity, culture, and history.

Respect and appreciation for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung traditional knowledge, crafts, cultural ceremonies, technologies, and practices need to be supported by the public and private sector to become mainstreamed in Victoria and nationwide. There should also be an accompanying focus on both government and private sector support for the development of businesses and enterprises focused on aspects of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Aboriginal culture, knowledge, intercultural exchange, and traditional practices. Burgeoning industries include bushfoods, bush medicine, bush perfumes, colognes, and incense, traditional arts & crafts, possum-skin cloak production, music and performing arts, fashion and design, tourism, restaurants and hospitality services, labour hire services, and more.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung products and industries should be supported to become well-known nation-wide, eventually establishing name brand recognition and awareness for specific Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung products and services. With this would also need to be the introduction, strengthening, and protection of progressive legislation that protects Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Aboriginal cultural knowledge, science, and intellectual property.

Funding

Funding from all levels of government and the private sector is key to assist the transition of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to economic independence through self-determination. This funding should be flexible, ongoing, and should enable Traditional Owner groups to achieve self-determined objectives. Funding programs should be developed in ongoing consultation with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and invested strategically and through evaluation. Government accountability for continued success must be enshrined in all projects and programs at local and state



government level. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation requires secure, foundational funding that is not at the whim of government change or budgetary constraints to enable Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung to maintain cultural rights and responsibilities as Traditional Owners, and to respond to increasing demands of all levels of government and the private sector.

Economic support should be multi-pillared, involving financing, capacity-building, relationship-building, and 'door-opening' for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation should also be allocated government funding to facilitate enduring and culturally safe high-level relationships with key stakeholders in the business, government, education and NGO sectors. In addition, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung should also have government funding set aside for a range of important initiatives, including Treaty, primary and secondary education, scholarships, higher education, language, research, Native Title preparation, community wellbeing, cultural practices, cultural values assessments, and cultural awareness training.

Furthermore, diversification of revenue streams is an important strategy for economic independence which will ensure the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation is not heavily reliant on any one stream of income. The strength of a diversified business model was important for the Corporation post-pandemic, where business units that continued to operate supported those units impacted by government-imposed shutdowns.

Strength-based Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung economic participation

A range of approaches have proven to be effective in building strength-based Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people's economic participation. These include:

- the expansion of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung naming process and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural consultations/educational workshops in both the public and private sectors.
- inclusion of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung programs, learnings, and culture from kindergarten through to tertiary education, as well as increased collaboration and partnerships with education providers, including scholarships and capacity-building support.
- Legislative change to further enshrine Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people's right to protection and management of cultural heritage. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung have grown to match the increased need and have developed the organisational capacity to respond to the cultural heritage managements required of the ever-developing city of Narm and surrounds.

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Crucially, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people also want to have further agreements, rights, and responsibilities enacted into legislation, following in the footsteps of mechanisms such as the *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murron) Act (2017)*, *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, *Aboriginal Heritage Act (2006)*, and the *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations (2018)*. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung also wish to enshrine the principle that we be engaged with as a matter of strict protocol for all projects of sufficient scale occurring on Country. And in addition to this, that as Traditional Owners, we should have the authority to reject potentially harmful developments or projects on our Country.

Cultural heritage management

As discussed above, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation is legislated under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic.)* to manage and protect cultural heritage on our Country. However, in practice the Act has facilitated the slow destruction of most of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country without consultation with Traditional Owners, and with little economic benefit to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

Wurundjeri's responsibilities include consulting in relation to, and evaluating, Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPs), which are required for certain land developments. Wurundjeri has approved around 1,500 CHMPs since the Act began and is currently consulting in relation to an additional 500 CHMPs (Figure 1). However, CHMPs are only required if a development activity is proposed to be a 'high impact activity' and in an 'area of cultural heritage sensitivity'. The *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018 (Vic.)* contain a set list of high-impact activities and areas of cultural heritage sensitivity, which were determined without appropriate consultation with Aboriginal people and organisations in the early 2000s. Any activities and areas that are not included in this list do not trigger the need for Sponsors (Proponents) to do a CHMP.

It is therefore not surprising that CHMPs are only required for around 0.66% of land-development activities that require Planning Permit Approval (<https://nit.com.au/24-01-2024/9446/opposition-made-no-submission-to-commission-examining-land-management-before-abandoning-treaty>). This suggests that for 99.34% of developments that have occurred on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country since the Act began in 2006, no consultation with our people has occurred. This provides a good indication of how little control Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have over the slow destruction of our Country through intensive land development – around 8% (536.207 km²) of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung RAP area has been subject to a CHMP since the



Act began in 2006 (based on data provided by First Peoples – State Relations), and up to 60% of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung RAP area has been developed since invasion and colonisation (based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics 'Urban Centres and Localities' and 'Significant Urban Areas' datasets).

A developer undertaking a 'greenfields development' like a residential subdivision of many tens, hundreds, or thousands of houses makes around \$1,116.00 of revenue per m² (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/648642/price-per-square-meter-of-land-in-melbourne/>). However, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung estimate that we generate around **\$144.00** of revenue per m² (through consultation and evaluation for CHMPs) – **but** only for the 0.66% of development activities that require a CHMP (and not for the remaining 99.34% of land developments that do not require a CHMP). Our revenue must also cover our significant overhead costs as a not-for-profit community organisation, including wages, superannuation, OHS, insurance, WorkCover premiums, computers/hardware, software, rent, utilities, staff training, office supplies, printing, and a portion of administration overheads (HR, Finance, Admin, IT, Legal). Therefore, at the other end of the land-development process, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people receive very little out of the slow destruction of our Country.

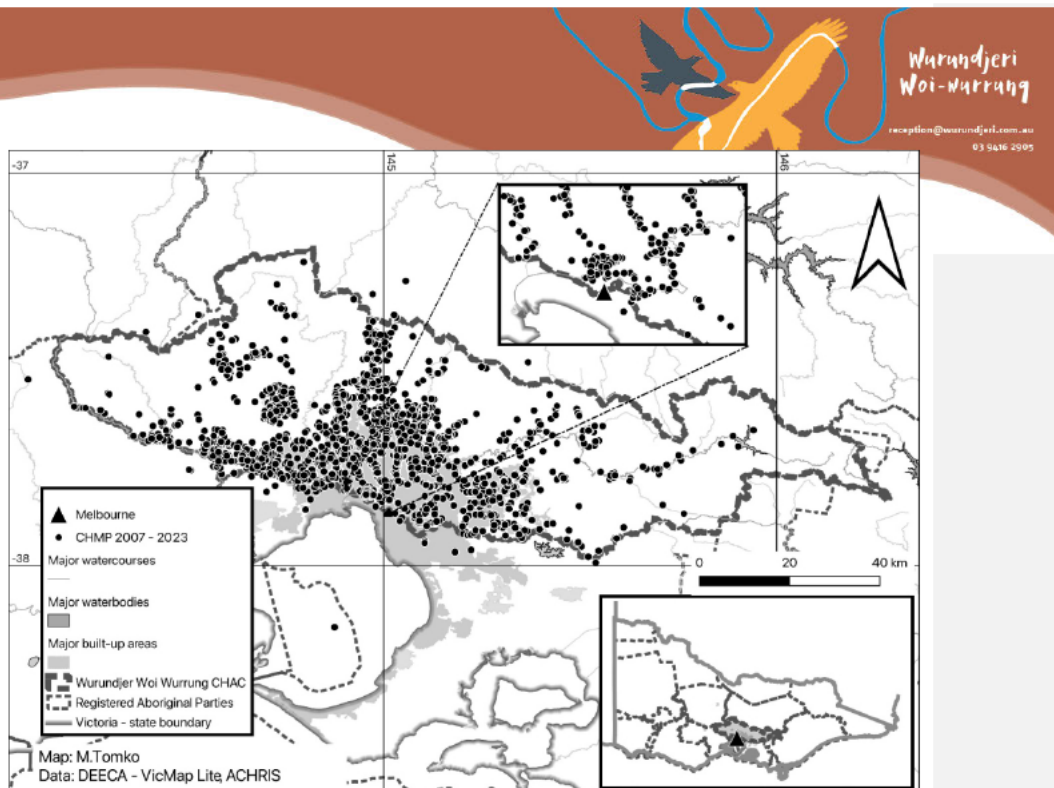


Figure { SEQ Figure * ARABIC }: Number and location of CHMPs approved in the Wurundjeri RAP area since the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic.) began. Each CHMP represents a discrete land development for a different part of the Wurundjeri RAP area.

Recommendations

1. That the Victorian Government must continue to invest in Aboriginal economic development.
2. That the economic injustices of colonisation be addressed through appropriate repatriation and redress processes such as Treaty and Native Title.
3. That the Victorian Government establish pathways for Aboriginal home ownership at rates lower than the general population, as well as greater access to public and social housing that reflects their lower rate of home ownership and higher rates of homelessness. Fees such as stamp duty and council rates must be excluded.



4. That the Victorian Government provides funding for dedicated full-time, ongoing positions identified as needed by RAPs and ACCOs, including for the progress of Treaty and return of Country (land and waters).
5. That the Victorian Government fund Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to increase internal capacity of funded positions to determine boundaries in preparation for Treaty.
6. That the Victorian Government needs to allow the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and all other Aboriginal peoples to independently determine their own boundaries in consultation with each other.
7. That the Victorian Government provide reparations for stolen wages, which should be indexed to their current value.
8. That the Victorian Government properly acknowledge the intergenerational trauma of Stolen Generations descendants by ensuring they are adequately included in the compensation package. Payments should be uncapped and relative to people's specific experiences.
9. That the Victorian Government provide annual foundational funding and interim rent payments until they have provided Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung with a permanent based office.
10. That the Victorian Government commit to working with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung to determine a process for adequately compensating Traditional Owners for extracted resources.
11. That the Victorian Government provide Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung fee-free and unconstrained use of water, including for cultural and commercial purposes.
12. That the Victorian Government reforms the Victorian Government Landholding Policy and Guidelines to include TOCs in the 'first right of refusal' principle for access to surplus public land.
13. That the Victorian Government establish a 'Wurundjeri-first' principle for procurement of all works occurring on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country.
14. That the Victorian Government improve aged care supports for Aboriginal people, including the lowering of the pension age to reflect Aboriginal people's lower life expectancy.



15. That the Victorian Government provide permanent parking permits to all Traditional Owners for conducting cultural activities and practices and exclude Traditional Owners from being required to pay existing or future parking fines.
16. That the Victorian Government fund and support accessible and affordable healthcare services that are culturally safe and Aboriginal-controlled, in collaboration with Traditional Owner corporations and ACCOs in the North, South, East, and Western regions.