

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission
Economic Prosperity Issues Paper
Kaiela Institute
June 2024

“In the Goulburn Valley the rivers never stop flowing forwards. Sometimes there are snags to contend with and sometimes the rivers flood and sometimes there are smaller flows due to drought or water harvesting. But the river flows relentlessly forward. It is just a matter of waiting for the momentum to come again.”

Paul Briggs AO 2019

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1. Executive Summary

Throughout our history of dispossession and marginalisation, we have proudly sustained the strength and resilience we call “Nanyak”: the invincible spirit of Yorta Yorta people in our region.

Standing on the shoulders of generations of leadership, commitment and hard work going back to the Maloga and Cummeragunja mission experience, there has been a long line of rights and policy advocacy, community development and First Nations service delivery developed and delivered in the Goulburn Murray region (see Section 3 and Appendix A).

The Kaiela Institute approach to addressing and redressing our history of exclusion, systemic racism and denial of rights has evolved over recent decades alongside the lessons we have learned from the successes and challenges in building our local Indigenous infrastructure and service delivery.

We must shift from a top-down government funding model that responds to the current or next crisis, to a new investment-based approach that is designed to avoid being driven by crisis responsiveness, and which engenders optimism and aspiration.

Our new and innovative approach – captured in the Goulburn Murray Regional Productivity and Prosperity Plan (GMRPPP)¹, was launched in partnership with the region and the state Government in 2021. The Plan aims to shift the prevailing paradigm from a deficit-based, crisis intervention approach to a positive investment-based model that recognises and values the economic, social and cultural contribution of Yorta Yorta and First Nations people to our region.

We aim to recover a sustainable future for our wellbeing and prosperity by repositioning the perceived value of Yorta Yorta and First Nations people in the region. This means identifying, communicating and activating the benefits of improved social, cultural, sporting, academic, environmental, health and economic relationships for everyone in the region.

The GMRPPP shows the benefits of activating this value by generating shared productivity and prosperity in the Goulburn

¹ <https://www.kaielainstitute.org.au/current-projects.html>

Murray region from joint investments by Yorta Yorta, regional partners and government.

The GMRPPP envisions whole-of region responsibility and accountability for delivery against measurable outcomes. We argue that there is an obligation on the region to engage in restitution and promote parity and economic opportunities to our community.

KI's earlier submission to Yoorrook on the theme of "Land, Water and Sky" concluded:

The theft of land and water rights which started in 1788 and accelerated and persisted throughout the following 200 years has denied Aboriginal people an economic base and locked in intergenerational poverty.

Reparations are very long overdue.

Yorta Yorta lands and waters once supported a thriving and vibrant culture, society and economy. Now these same lands and waters support a regional economy valued at over \$8 billion per annum², from which Yorta Yorta and First Nations people are largely excluded.

The cumulative benefit to non-Aboriginal beneficiaries in our region has never been calculated – this is a task the Yoorrook Commission may wish to consider undertaking or commissioning. The dollar value will run into hundreds of billions, possibly trillions: it includes the value of the extraction of resources such as gold, timber and coal, and the value extracted from the exploitation of our lands and waters.

The GMRPPP recommends that implementation of the Plan should be funded based on its productivity and economic return, with impacts monitored and evaluated by the Kaiela Institute Impact and Research Unit. The investment needed to seed and support the Plan's implementation is a minute fraction of the reparation owed for the exploitation of our land, loss of lives and denial of our right to a sustainable economy supporting stable and secure families and the development of inter-generational wealth for the benefit of future generations for example, our current, and to date unsuccessful, ask of Commonwealth and State Governments to drive momentum for implementing the Plan, amounts to approximately 38.5 million over 3 years. This 3-year quantum equates to less than 0.5% of the

² <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-partnerships/goulburn>

Goulburn Murray's annual regional productivity, or less than 0.2% in each year.

By shifting the way we engage through the GMRPPP's new investment-based approach, we know from Deloitte Access analysis that the region can gain an extra \$150 million in regional productivity each year, adding around 450 more skilled employees to meet the employment and business needs of the thriving regional economy.

While we have not yet negotiated a shared and inclusive future, we have an opportunity to do so. The GMRPPP provides a model and framework for changing the economic, social and cultural relationships within the region to achieve this extra value for all.

What makes the Plan unique is that it is both a rights model and an investment model, and it shifts the responsibility for delivery and accountability to the whole-of-region.

It reframes and values First Nations peoples and drives inclusion. It addresses historical behaviours and tackles institutional racism and ignorance. The region takes responsibility for closing the social and economic gap between First Nations and non-First Nations people in recognition of its role in creating that gap.

Those who benefit from the historic and current economic success of the region effectively make reparation to First Nations people from whose land and waters this bounty has been achieved .

While economic self-interest may drive this effort initially – we understand that our regional partners may be primarily motivated by the productivity and skills benefits the Plan provides – we are also firmly of the view that positive social and cultural behavioural changes will flow as economic inclusion changes perceptions of the value – economic, social and cultural – that Yorta Yorta and First Nations people bring to the region.

2. Introduction

In early 2022, Uncle Paul Briggs AO, Executive Chair of the Kaiela Institute provided an opinion piece on the Yoorrook Commission truth-telling process. Paul wrote:

“Denial of truth will eat away at the soul of the Australian people and prevent any chance of shared pride in our nationhood. The nation cannot be reconciled without First Nations people being at the core of the Australian identity.

My fervent hope is that truth-telling can build a platform for growth, so we can reposition the rights of First Nations people in the minds of everyday Australians.

My grave concern is that we may not yet be mature enough as a nation to grasp this opportunity and address these truths. We have not yet educated and informed Australians in every walk of life: in our workplaces, our pubs, our schools, our sporting arenas. And not nearly widely enough in our leaders.”

3

Paul pointed to the Yorta Yorta history of exile to the Maloga and then the Cummeragunja missions in the late 1800s. He also wrote about the pain and ongoing intergenerational trauma of the Stolen Generations since the early 1900s. He described the 1939 Cummeragunja walk-off when Aboriginal families walked off the mission in protest at the conditions and control over lives; and he rejected the 1998 Federal Court decision to deny Yorta Yorta native title rights.

“Throughout our history of dispossession and marginalisation, we have proudly sustained the strength and resilience we call “Nanyak”: the invincible spirit of Yorta Yorta and First Nations peoples in our region.”

Nanyak is what has driven dozens of Indigenous led initiatives across Yorta Yorta country, where First Nations people have always been initiators of change and innovation.

³ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/devastating-truths-must-be-told-and-heard-in-the-quest-for-a-new-nationhood-20211014-p58zvi.html>

Standing on the shoulders of generations of leadership, commitment and hard work going back to the Maloga and Cummeragunja experience, there has been a long line of rights and policy advocacy, community development initiatives and programs, and First Nations service delivery developed and delivered in the Goulburn Murray region.

The institutions and organisations we have established, often despite trenchant local opposition, operate as the Indigenous infrastructure we need to service our community needs and to provide the platform for our self-determination and rights-based agenda.

The summary timeline included as Appendix A provides an indicative but necessarily incomplete snapshot of Yorta Yorta history and the work and activity we have undertaken in policy and rights advocacy, and in community and economic development.

This is discussed in more length below (see 2.7 to 2.10 and Appendix A), and includes key organisations and programs such as Jemuria, the Koori Resource and Information Centre (KRIC), Shepparton Policy and Planning Unit (SPPU), Rumbalara Football Netball Club (RFNC), Ganbina, First Nations Advantage Credit Union, The Academy of Sport, Health and Education (ASHE), Yalca Loitjba Language Project, First Nations Foundation, Kaiela Arts, Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence (MCRE) and the Kaiela Institute (KI), the author of this submission.

We have also successfully lobbied the University of Melbourne for the School of Rural Health to be situated in the region, rather than in Gippsland as initially proposed. It was the robust and measured campaigning of local Aboriginal people that saw this leading health service provider made available for all people in the Goulburn Valley region.

This act of generosity in sharing benefits with the wide regional community underpins the development and of the transformational Goulburn Murray Regional Prosperity and Productivity Plan (GMRPPP or the Plan), which is discussed in more length below (see 3.1 to 3.6).

We first applied a productivity lens to closing the gap when Access Economics, supported by the Business Council of Australia,

undertook groundbreaking analysis in 2010. This was then updated in 2018 by Deloitte Access Economics, who found that achieving parity within a 15-year timeframe gap would deliver a cumulative productivity uplift of approximately \$0.5 billion in regional productivity (GRP), with an additional \$150 million GRP per annum generated from 2036.

In 2020, KPMG was commissioned to commence wide-ranging consultation to bring the First Nations community together with three tiers of government and non-Indigenous champions of economic development to design the Plan.

Launched in July 2021, the GMRPPP promotes a rights-based, whole-of-region approach to generating shared productivity and prosperity in Goulburn Murray region. This comprehensive Plan envisions whole-of region responsibility and accountability for delivery against measurable outcomes.

The Plan has become the blueprint for an innovative rights- and investment-based model of development. Current delivery priorities include an investment model with re-investment linked to productivity outcomes; education and training; Indigenous data sovereignty; business advancement; and supporting local Plan Champions to deliver the Plan.

As Paul wrote in his 2022 opinion piece:

First Nations organisations in Dungala Kaiela continue to seek constructive engagement and common purpose. We call this “Repositioning Value”: harnessing the cultural, social and economic value we bring to regional prosperity.

Our region recently launched the Goulburn Murray Regional Prosperity Plan, a shared vision to generate mutual prosperity by restoring a thriving First Nations economy. Achieving economic parity by 2036 will add \$150 million each year to regional productivity.

The Plan recognises the rights of First Nations people to contribute and benefit from the regional economy, while acknowledging the historical journey for the region. It challenges the “invisibility” of First Nations people. Where we have previously been held back by the historical legacies of

dispossession and colonisation, we are building a shared sense of purpose and a newfound optimism.

It will take great courage and leadership to speak and hear the truth. How we adopt that truth will shine a light on who we are, the values we hold dear, and our character and standing as a nation.”

To inform the Yoorrook Commission truth-telling process, this Kaiela Institute submission on the economic prosperity issues paper will

- provide a high-level summary of Yorta Yorta and regional history as context and background for the development of contemporary policy thinking – see section 3; and
- outline the Goulburn Murray Regional Prosperity and Productivity Plan as the preferred model for a paradigm shift in the Goulburn Murray towards a rights- and investment-based model, with whole-of-region responsibility for delivery (guided and endorsed by First Nations regional governance); and accountability through the Algabonyah Research and Impact Centre monitoring and evaluating progress against measurable indicators for successful delivery – see Section 4.

3. Background and Context

Our history, since first contact, is a continuing story of asserting our rights despite ongoing dispossession, exclusion, inequality and systemic racism.

KI's earlier submission to Yoorrook on the theme of "Land, Water and Sky" explained that:

In what is now called Victoria Aboriginal people have been subjected to wave upon wave of land and water theft since colonisation began.

This earlier submission addressed the following matters:

1. The colonial system ensured that all First Nations economic assets were stolen without recompense or provision of any other compensatory resources to maintain their livelihood.
2. The imposed legal and reserve system destroyed the supportive value of communities and families and effectively imprisoned and prevented First Nations people from participating in the growing economy.
3. The imposed legal and financial systems discriminated against First Nations people so that any economic support would only be at the poverty line at best and this was intended to facilitate control.
4. Institutional structures like banks combined with the informal colonial cultural systems of systemic racism to exclude First Nations people from any economic opportunities.
5. Many of the systemic, institutional and cultural barriers still operate in a discriminatory manner today

This earlier submission then concluded:

The theft of land and water rights which started in 1788 and accelerated and persisted throughout the following 200 years has denied Aboriginal people an economic base and locked in intergenerational poverty.

Reparations are very long overdue.

Yorta Yorta lands and waters once supported a thriving and vibrant culture, society and economy. Now these same lands and waters support a regional economy valued at over \$8 billion per annum⁴, from which Yorta Yorta and First Nations people are largely excluded.

The cumulative benefit to non-Aboriginal beneficiaries in our region has never been calculated – this is a task the Yoorrook Commission

⁴ <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-partnerships/goulburn>

may wish to consider undertaking or commissioning. The dollar value will run into hundreds of billions, possibly trillions: it includes the value of the extraction of resources such as gold, timber and coal, and the value extracted from the exploitation of our lands and waters.

The investment needed to seed and support the Plan's implementation is a minute fraction of the reparation owed for the exploitation of our lands and waters – for example, our current, and to date unsuccessful, ask of Commonwealth and State Governments to drive momentum for implementing the Plan, amounts to approximately 38.5 million over 3 years – this 3 year quantum equates to less than half of one percent of the Goulburn Murray's annual regional productivity.

3.1 Nanyak and the Invincible Spirit

First Nations people living in the Goulburn Murray region are imbued with the Yorta Yorta “Nanyak” spirit of resilience. This is the essence of who we are. It also allows us to continue to survive, connect, aspire, and (sometimes) prosper; while we otherwise endure the inherited and inter-generational challenges of disadvantage, inequity and denial of fundamental human rights.

Yorta Yorta oral and family traditions are very strong. We carry the spirit of our ancestors. We revere the memory of our ancestors, great grandparents, grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts. We learn from our family. These things are in our heart. The memories flow with the Dungala/Kaiela rivers.

We need to ensure that the modern world understands who we are and what our vision is. Beyond our day-to-day relationships and interactions, there is a need to capture the stories of our champions and heroes. This is to inform our non-Aboriginal friends and to inspire our future generations.

The “Invincible Spirit” is what inspires us continually, generation after generation. Our vision has never changed. Our people want to get back to the quality of life we enjoyed before colonisation. And we want to achieve this within our lifetimes.

We want to not only be equal with non-Aboriginal people in terms of resources and quality of life, we want the freedom of our forefathers. We want to control our own fate and future.

Though we may be knocked down, the invincible spirit means we get back on our feet and find extra energy and purpose to achieve our goal.

3.2 Policy and the mission mentality – the prevalence of racism

Racism is part and parcel of our daily lives – but it is most deeply felt by the fact that the mainstream occupies our land.

There is no recognition of our sovereign rights.

No recognition of our value or our identity.

We bear witness in our daily transactions to a strong and overarching attitude of exclusion and assimilation.

In our dealings with government and the wider society we are still living with the mission mentality: floundering through a system of over-managed handouts of government resources, all of which is routinely based on a negative view of intervention.

This deficit-based approach causes us to respond to one crisis after the next. It does not attempt to get to the root of the problem and is destined to continue to fail because failure props up a system dependent on a cycle of negativity. Crises are rewarded with new injections of resources.

As has been shown in the recent Productivity Commission report on Closing the Gap (see 4.6 below), any motivation to deliver fundamental change tends to be stymied, business-as-usual. Once the crisis is deemed to have ‘passed’, resources are then moved or reduced.

Stepping away from this orthodox approach of crisis-response is risky and untested. It will require the admission that past and current policy and resource allocation has been (and continues to be) misguided.

Shifting the way resources are invested could potentially threaten the standing and viability of some organisations whose business case is based on the imposed need to engage in crisis intervention for their funding.

3.3 Recognition – finding space for our place in our country

How we are perceived and the basis for our continuing exclusion from the mainstream is founded in racism and the denial of our legitimacy – fundamentally we are not recognised in the national psyche. The outcome in the recent Voice referendum reinforced our view about this.

Our national symbols do not promote the recognition of First Nations people. We've been left out and excluded by the symbols that the mainstream use to express their understanding of nationhood.

We are not valued, acknowledged or recognised.

What else can it mean when the RSL takes your flag down and says it's not welcome here? Or when you're at the MCG grand final and 100,000 people stand up for the anthem and you're the only ones sitting down?

Similarly, 'celebrating' Australia Day on 26 January is an insult.

Now that we have been denied a national Voice in the 2023 referendum, we are even more dependent on individual voices and the whims of governments and individual ministers.

We've already seen how other states and the Victorian opposition have stepped away from Treaty,

We respond to this by resisting engagement.

There is no space or time for reflection or the development of strategic thinking.

We live in poverty. We commit countless hours to volunteering for our community – both in respect of family and organisations.

We do this work in our community in the absence of resources and infrastructure and under stress, as we are always responding to poverty and the symptoms of poverty, disadvantage and exclusion.

So, in making this submission to the Yoorrook Commission we ask ourselves how are we to develop a shared vision for the future

- without time or resources;
- when the system we are working in and responding to is so oppressive and unbending;
- when the policy environment is geared towards maintaining institutionally racist systems?

Against this background and context, and despite the many confronting setbacks and challenges we have faced, Yorta Yorta people always provide leadership, inspiration and a record of outstanding achievements in sport, the arts and music. Our community contributes countless hours to policy development, service delivery, education provision and support, and community leadership.

In the words of our elder Dr Lois Peeler

The achievements of Yorta Yorta people are a testament to the resilience and strength of our old people who sought to create a better life for future generations.

Our people have produced accountants, academics, doctors, nurses, magistrates, teachers, poets, principals, preachers, elite sports people, spiritual leaders, senior public servants, community leaders, musicians, theatre writers, and actors, artists and singers.

Dungala Kaela Oration, Yorta Yorta country (Shepparton) 2020

3.4 Yorta Yorta Traditions and Values

Our Yorta Yorta traditions and values flow from our deeply held connection to land and water.

Our 50,000+ year history or understanding and occupation of country is documented in the western archaeological and academic record.

For us this history is celebrated in our day-to-day commitment to community, family and country, and in our ongoing struggle for the recognition of Indigenous rights.

Pride in our story is exemplified by the powerful legacy of

- our Cummeragunja Invincibles, the extraordinary football team that dominated the regional competition between 1898 and 1931, winning five premierships between 1925 and 1931;
- the William Cooper-led petition to King George V in 1937, which collected 1800 signatures “to prevent the extinction of the Aboriginal race, better conditions for all and to propose

a member of parliament to represent us”, but was not submitted to the King by the Commonwealth Government of the day; and

- the 1939 Cummeragunja Walk-Off led by Uncle Jack Patten and others, our organised community protest against living conditions and mission and government control over our lives, the first of its kind in the country.

Similarly, a long line of powerful and inspirational Yorta Yorta women – including, for example, Hyllus Maris, Lois Peeler, Mollie Dyer, and the members of the Sapphires – have been leaders in areas as diverse as the arts, education, health, family reunification, cultural repatriation and politics.

3.5 Native Title Claim

First lodged in 1996, two years after the Mabo decision, our claim was ultimately unsuccessful.

Over many weeks Yorta Yorta people gave evidence about our connection, cultural continuity, insistence on rights and the evidence of loss, to the Native Title Tribunal, an icon of the imposed legal system.

The judge’s decision to reject our cultural legitimacy relied heavily on the views of the 19th century squatter Edward Curr about our connection to country.

In contrast we commend the evidence of Dr Wayne Atkinson (University of Melbourne and former Yoorrook Commissioner).⁵

We reject the finding of the judge in the Yorta Yorta Native Title case

It was a non-Aboriginal judge who decided that our culture and claim had been “washed away by the tide of history” when he wrote his decision in December 1988.

⁵ For example, <https://waynera.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/atkinson.pdf>; ATKINSON, WR. "Barmah-Millewa Forest: Indigenous Heritage, Ecological Challenges: Yorta Yorta Occupation & 'The Search for Common Ground'". *History Journal*, vol.1,no.1, 2005, pp. 22-36; ATKINSON, WR. "Mediating the mindset of opposition: the Yorta Yorta case". *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, vol.5, 2002, pp. 8-11; ATKINSON, WR. "The Cummeragunja Walk off and the Return to Base Camp Politics". *History Journal*, vol.1,no.1, 2005, pp. 35-41.

In coming to that conclusion, that judge exonerated and rewarded the colonial processes that stole our land and denied us the economic base it provided.

We REJECT that finding.

In 2002, while two High Court judges agreed with us that we, the Yorta Yorta people, maintained our connection to country, we were nonetheless unsuccessful in overturning the decision of the lower Federal Court judge.

The denial of our rights and culture does not come as a surprise to us.

We deal with this daily.

3.6 “Invisibility” and “Coming into Town”

When we walked off Cummeragunja in 1939, our families walked nearly 70 kms from the mission reserve to makeshift camp sites on the river flats along the Kaiela (Goulburn) River between Mooroopna and Shepparton.

From here we could see the town lights, but we remained ‘invisible’ in our own land, and on our own river.

In 1954 our “invisibility” took the form of the erection of hessian barriers to shield the Queen from seeing our town camps by the river as her entourage drove past during her first visit to Australia.

It is our view that we remain invisible, marginalised, excluded, at arm’s length from the power-brokers and decision-makers, socially separated from the wider community, and denied a place in the economic and cultural institutions in our own country.

The vote in the Voice referendum of 2023 confirmed what we have always known. We are not recognised as valued contributors and partners in our own region.

In our own words, and in no way buying into any assimilationist post-colonial structures, we still see ourselves as insisting that we have a right to “come into town”. The towns in Yorta Yorta country are ‘our’ towns and we do and will always resist being excluded.

3.7 First Nations Infrastructure

Against this backdrop, and in the face of bruising racism, we have built a range of local First Nations infrastructure and programs (see the summary timeline in Appendix A below).

These include organisations that provide essential services and support, safe places to meet and think, culturally sound structures where we can nurture our children and connect with our families, and places where we can demonstrate our sporting and artistic prowess.

We build these structures because we have to, but we also know that they have the potential to act as stepping stones to inclusion and recognition.

Our strong and continuing focus on community infrastructure is bearing fruit.

Australian Bureau of Statistics census data for our region shows that for the 20-year period from 2001 to 2021

- Year 12 completions have increased from 160 to 803;
- Certificates III and IVs have risen from 147 to 718;
- Advanced Diplomas also show a real improvement in our inclusion going from 36 to 209;
- Bachelor degrees have been attained – going from 29 to 106, and
- Post graduate qualifications have also been awarded in increasing numbers – in 2001 we achieved 3 post grads and that number has risen to 59.
- For the five-year period between 2016 and 2021, the percentage of our population unemployed has nearly halved, from 18% to 10.1%.

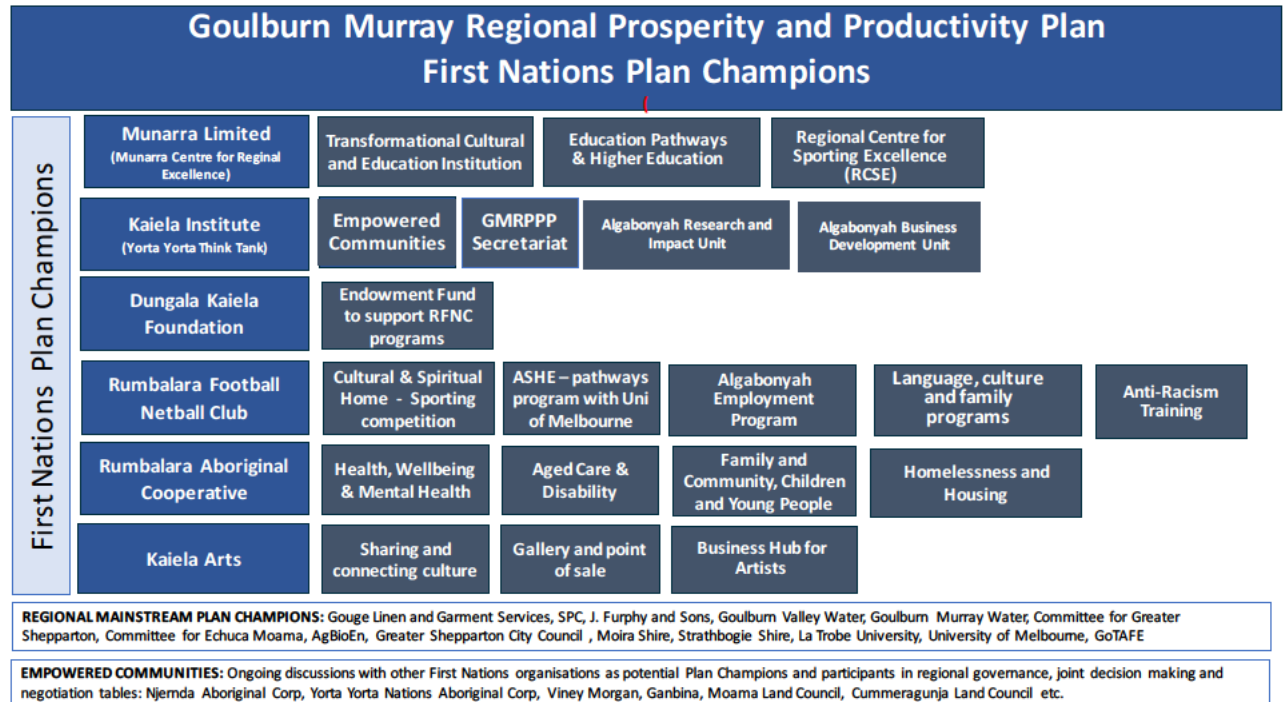
We are making headway, but every achievement is fragile and we need more than goodwill and acts of benevolence.

We must shift from a top-down government funding model that responds to the current or next crisis, to a new investment approach designed to avoid the crisis responsiveness and engender optimism and aspiration.

3.8 First Nations Champions for Change

After decades of policy thinking and the frustrations of being managed within a top-down crisis intervention model, the GMRPPP provides the transformational shift and new paradigm for our community and our region.

Six First Nations organisations are the first signatories to the GMRPPP Plan Statement of Intent. Collectively these organisations are our “First Nations Plan Champions”.



The Rumbalara Football Netball Club and the Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence are highlighted as examples of First Nations infrastructure/institutions that play, or will play, a significant role in both cultural affirmation and economic development.

3.9 Rumbalara Football Netball Club: Nanyak and ‘social return on investment’

In 1989, we established the Rumbalara Football Netball Club as a proud symbol of our sovereignty and our “Nanyak”. The Rumbalara Football Netball Club is steeped in the history of the Yorta Yorta people. The Club is the only First Nations sporting club in regional Victoria (the Fitzroy Stars are based in Melbourne), and it is now widely recognised as the cultural and spiritual home of First Nations people in the region.

Despite repeated submissions over some 15 years, our entry into the local sporting leagues was vehemently and overtly resisted.

In the face of that opposition we called on our reserves of personal, community and cultural character and on our allies in the football world, without whose intervention our affiliation with the AFL and our eventual admission into the Goulburn Valley Football League Second Division in 1997 would not have happened.

It is important to describe the reserves of character that our community brought to this struggle for recognition.

The players, supporters and volunteers are largely descendants of, and carry with them, the profound legacy of the 'Cummeragunja Invincibles'. These Invincibles include influential community, sport, arts and political leaders such as Sir Doug Nicholls and William Cooper, and many others.

Just over 240 youngsters play in our many teams, competing in local competitions across our region. In all, there are over 600 active players, officials and volunteers and many more supporters.

GQ magazine recently described the Club as

“iconic, the spiritual home of Aussie Rules, and an enduring anchor for the local community.”⁶

This unique standing explains why the Club can run a range of successful and award-winning leadership, family support, education, families, health and employment programs. In 2013, for example, the Club was awarded one of the top two National Crime Prevention Awards for driving a 76% reduction in Indigenous youth engagement in the justice system in the preceding five years.

The club's 'social return on investment' is staggeringly good. A 2016 report by La Trobe University's Centre for Sport and Social Impact found that the Club increased social connectedness, wellbeing and mental health of members and others in the community. It was concluded that for every \$1 invested to run the club, it generated at least \$5.45 return in social value to the community. The report's author described the Club as

⁶ <https://www.gq.com.au/gq-sports/the-incredible-story-and-lasting-influence-of-the-rumbalara-football-club/image-gallery/054f5943fce5154e334cd7a19e140212>

“something to celebrate and emulate ... clearly improving the mental health and wellbeing of First Nations people”.⁷

This depth of character and culture is what we build on in Yorta Yorta country.

3.10 Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence: transformational space and place

With the Munarra Centre we are currently building a world-class education, sporting and public gathering space on Yorta Yorta country that celebrates our nation and its oldest living culture. Founding members include Rumbalara Football Netball Club, Kaiela Institute and University of Melbourne. Emerging partners include La Trobe University and GOTAFE and discussions are underway to build other national and international partnerships.

The Centre’s aspirations run concurrent with the development of the GMRPPP and it is intended to act as a transformational educational and cultural institute, having been backed by the Victorian Government and the University of Melbourne as early as 2017.

The Phase 1 (~\$35M) build commenced in February 2023 and is due for completion in April 2024, when students and teachers will move in.

Munarra is intended to be an aggregator of educational and cultural offerings, providing pathways into employment and tertiary education. It will be a site for cultural affirmation and expression, and a regional centre for sporting excellence. It will be a ‘living’ physical and virtual campus and it will be community and market-led, with a strong cultural identity.

The Centre is also structured to become a key enabler for the GMRPPP by delivering the training and higher education required to meet the workforce and business needs of the region, and by becoming a key site for providing sector-leading anti-racism and cultural training.

⁷ https://www.latrobe.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/742527/Latrobe_Rumbalara-FNC_Summary_20160406.pdf



MUNARRA LIMITED (MCRE) An \$164 million Pathways and Tertiary Education and Sport Campus

Mission • To enable social and economic prosperity for Indigenous and Non Indigenous people that will support them to achieve their potential • To ensure a place and space that is an inclusive, highly supportive and culturally safe environment for everyone																			
Proposed Munarra (MCRE) Cultural and Heritage core offering competency training, that is immersive and personalized																			
Munarra Academy (Stage 1) Provide Pathways to Vocational and Higher Education services All Ages – but focused on under 18 age brackets Users <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VCE Pathways • Certificates • Diplomas • University Courses (through Munarra) Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Recruitment 	Munarra (Stage 1) An Aggregator of Higher Education programs for Indigenous and Non Indigenous Peoples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional, State, National, Global • Undergraduate/ Post Graduate Courses / PhD • Micro Certifications • Research & Data • Business Hub Incubator • Student Recruitment Users Services	Cultural and Heritage Government, Schools, Sporting, Social Competency Training Immersive and personalized <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immersive Cultural competency advisory • Heritage competency advisory Users Services	Regional Centre for Sporting Excellence (Stage 2) Deliver high performance services to aspiring and existing sports people and their support teams Users <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools, athletes, coaches and umpires, Local & regional sports clubs / bodies • Strength & Conditioning, Recovery & Rehabilitation, Allied Health Services, hi tech sports facilities, elite level gym Services																
Additional Stage 2 offerings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Accommodation & Long Day Child Care / Preschool Facilities / P • Supporting athletes transitioning out of their sports careers through Munarra Academy and Munarra and Rumbalara Football Netball Club • Delivering Health and Wellness programs to the First Nations community (e.g. Elder training sessions) / Community Pool 																			
<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;">Unique differentiators</td> <td style="width: 25%;">Indigenous led</td> <td style="width: 25%;">Culturally safe environment</td> <td style="width: 25%;">Strength based approach</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>'Nanyak' Invincible spirit</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>Complements current services / facilities</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>Education links, Regionally, Nationally Globally</td> </tr> </table>				Unique differentiators	Indigenous led	Culturally safe environment	Strength based approach				'Nanyak' Invincible spirit				Complements current services / facilities				Education links, Regionally, Nationally Globally
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4. The Goulburn Murray Regional Prosperity and Productivity Plan

4.1 Our right to a thriving economy

Here in the Dungala Kaiela (also known as the Goulburn Murray), the Dungala (Murray), and Kaiela (Goulburn) rivers, and many other waterways across Yorta Yorta country, once supported a thriving First Nations economy.

We are river people. We trace our origins and inherent rights back to the time of creation: the ‘eternal Dreaming’⁸

Now, these rivers, waterways and flood plains support a booming and prosperous region – the food bowl of the nation – but the descendants of the Yorta Yorta and our neighbouring groups are largely excluded from sharing in this abundance on our traditional country. Colonisation has destroyed a 50,000+ years old economy. Our reality is that while the post-walk off town camps have now gone, we remain on the margins: disrespected and devalued, bit-players in the local and regional economy.

In this submission and in all our work on changing the economic paradigm, we argue that there is an obligation on the region to

⁸ <https://waynera.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/atkinson.pdf>

engage in restitution and promote parity and economic opportunities to our community.

We have not yet negotiated a shared future, but we have an opportunity to do so.

4.2 Building a robust rights-based investment model

Over many years and a number of iterations of organisations, policies and programs (see Appendix A below), we have generated a cultural approach to community and economic development, and we are committed to building a rights-based investment model.

Such a model would reposition First Nations people by acknowledging and recognising the economic, social and cultural value we bring to our region.⁹

Since the 2003 COAG Yorta Yorta Trial and Compact, signed by then Prime Minister Tony Abbott and then Premier Steve Bracks, we have worked with successive government and policy approaches, built a range of important community infrastructure and service organisations, and made significant advances in key areas such as First Nations education, home ownership and employment. ABS data on education included above indicates our willingness and capacity for transformation and change.

From 2013 we partnered with KPMG – initially as part of the Jawun corporate philanthropy program – to consult widely and engage with the wider regional community to develop the Plan.

In 2018, Kaiela Institute engaged Deloitte Access Economics to update the groundbreaking 2010 Access Economics analysis, undertaken with the support of the Australian Business Council, to measure the economic benefits of ‘closing the gap’ in the Goulburn-Murray.

Relying upon 2016 data, Deloitte Access Economics concluded that if we achieved parity in the region within an achievable 15-year time frame, this would deliver a major boost to regional productivity:

- + \$0.5B Gross Regional Production (GRP), cumulative over 15 years

⁹ Repositioning value is explored in the PhD thesis of Ralene Nixon submitted in 2020 – see <https://rest.neptune-prod.its.unimelb.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/d033e943-18f9-5da9-bebd-1ad43925e15a/content>

- + \$150M GRP each year from 2036

Additionally, productivity dividend would flow each year to both the state (+\$560M) and the nation (+\$5M) as well as delivering social and cultural gains.

This analysis also suggests that transforming the economy would have personal financial benefits in respect of access to finance, superannuation, and building capacity. Non-financial benefits would include improved health and life expectancy, improvements in autonomy, retention of skills and job opportunities. For the broader region and government, benefits would include reduction in government expenditure (or avoided costs) on health care, public housing, rent assistance etc. Regional development and improved planning would also follow.

4.3 Plan launch in 2021 in collaboration with the Victorian government

In July 2021, together with the State Government and the region's major employers and institutions, we launched the Plan as a comprehensive and innovative guide to close the economic and social gap for Indigenous people.

Importantly, the Plan does not exclude people on the basis of their traditional owner or native title status, structure or affiliation. We note that these structures have been defined by, and based on, western legal concepts and definitions. As constructs of a western legal system, these structures need to be examined from the viewpoint of what matters to Yorta Yorta and First Nations people, rather than from the parameters and constraints imposed by the very same system that insults and rejects us.

The region, in a round of discussions and consultations in 2020 and 2021, embraced the idea of closing the gap in 15 years to generate shared prosperity for the benefit of everyone.

We have developed strong regional support for delivering the Plan. For example, 40+ businesses, local governments and institutions strongly backed the Plan just a few days prior to the Voice referendum in October last year. All the indications since are that these regional partners remain committed to the Plan.

We sometimes refer to the Plan as “the coming into town plan” because, as noted above, we’ve been living on the fringes: socially, politically and economically.

4.4 The Plan as a paradigm shift

The ever-increasing clamour for a new way of doing business will not diminish. Empowered Community program delivery articulates the need for a “complete paradigm shift” (Empowered Communities, 31 Oct 2023), with similar language adopted by the Productivity Commission in February 2024 (see 4.7 below).

What makes the Plan unique is that it is a rights model and an investment model, and it shifts the responsibility for delivery and accountability to the whole-of-region.

The Plan reframes and values First Nations peoples. It drives inclusion, providing for First Nations people to buy into the regional economy. It addresses historical behaviours and tackles institutional racism and ignorance. The region takes responsibility for the social and economic gap between First Nations and non-First Nations people, and it does so in recognition of its role in creating that gap.

Those who benefit from the historic and current economic success of the region effectively make reparation to First Nations people.

4.5 A rights-based plan is the right plan

We need a rights-based platform that cannot be ignored, sidelined or legislated out of existence.

While the Voice referendum was defeated, the argument that First Nations people should be listened to will not go away.

The influential Productivity Commission (see 4.7 below) is just the latest in a long line of advocates for the benefits of listening to and acting upon the advice of First Nations communities.

4.6 The Plan presents an innovative Investment Model

The Plan recommends a cyclical investment and reinvestment model. As productivity targets are achieved, reinvestment is generated, and this in turn increases the region’s shared prosperity.

However, this investment model has not yet replaced the crisis intervention model.

Despite government support for the launch of the Plan in 2021, the resources and associated investments to ensure that the delivery of the Plan builds momentum and succeeds is not yet forthcoming.

We remain in active and constructive discussions with Government at the highest levels. Recent meetings with Plan Champions and potential Plan Champions confirm we continue to have the support of the major employers and institutions in the region in support of implementation.

4.7 Closing the gap: the Plan delivers

The findings of the Productivity Commission in its first review of progress on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (February 2024)¹⁰ is a call to action.

Fundamental changes are required to deliver the power sharing which is necessary for joint decision-making.

The failure of government to acknowledge and act on the reality that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know what is best for their communities is described in detail and contrasted with best practice in some case studies.

Four recommendations are made. Each of these align with the language and approach adopted in the Plan.

Recommendation 1 recognises that the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have control over decisions that affect their lives is central to self-determination. This right is set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Australia is a signatory to that Declaration.

Recommendation 2 recognises and supports the need for Indigenous Data Sovereignty and this is a fundamental underpinning for evidence-based Plan delivery. The proposed establishment of the Algabonyah Research and Impact Centre is a vehicle to monitor, evaluate and advise on the Plan and whole-of-lifecycle policy development and program delivery.

Recommendation 3 observes that mainstream systems and culture need to be fundamentally rethought.

¹⁰ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/closing-the-gap-review/report>

Recommendation 4 calls for stronger accountability to drive behaviour change.

While these recommendations are directed towards the delivery of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, they cannot be divorced from the work required at local and regional levels to drive the change that is required.

In our region, the GMRPPP provides the framework and guidance to create the necessary paradigm shift towards a rights- and investment-based model. Responsibility and accountability for delivery rests with the whole region, each of its sectors, its educational facilities, business and the broader community.

APPENDIX A

Summary HISTORY AND TIMELINE

- 1860 Yorta Yorta claim for compensation for interference to Traditional Fishing Rights “since the Murray has been navigated by steamers”
- Maloga mission established in 1874 (at the site that Yorta Yorta people had diverted the flow of the river some 8-10,000 years ago by digging a channel through the sandhills to drain the “Great Flood” caused by the Cadell Fault forcing the river to flow north¹¹)
- 1881 petition from 42 Yorta Yorta residents of Maloga mission to the NSW Governor seeking “a sufficient area of land to cultivate and raise stock; that we may form homes for our families [and in] a few years support ourselves by our own industry”; and compensation because “all the land within our tribal boundaries has been taken possession of by the Government and white settlers”
- 1887 Petition to NSW Governor for land
- 1887 Application to Victorian Board for Land to establish a Fishing Reserve at the Barmah Lakes
- 1888 Cummeragunja Reserve established
- Cummeragunja Invincibles 1890s to 1930s
 - five premierships between 1925 and 1931
- Stolen Generations since the early 1900s
- 1930s activism Yorta Yorta/Cummeragunja people instrumental in forming the Aborigines Progressive Association (Sydney, 1933) and the Australian Aborigines League (Melbourne, 1933)
 - 1933 William Cooper, co-founder, becomes secretary of the Australian Aborigines League
- 1934-8 William Cooper Petition to King George¹²
 - 1814 signatures collected “to prevent the extinction of the Aboriginal race, better conditions for all and to propose a member of parliament to represent us”

¹¹ <https://waynera.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/atkinson.pdf>

¹² <https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/student-research-portal/learning-resource-themes/first-australians/politics-and-advocacy/william-cooper-petition-cabinet-paper-1938>

- Government decides “no good purpose would be served” by sending the petition
- In 1937 Jack Patten becomes President of the Aborigines' Progressive Association and is instrumental in promoting the 'Day of Mourning' meeting in Sydney on Australia Day, 1938
- 1939 William Cooper:
 - How much compensation have we had? How much of our land has been paid for? Not one iota! Again, we state that we are the original owners of the country. We have been ejected and despoiled of our god-given right and our inheritance has been forcibly taken from us.*
- 1939 Cummeragunja walk-off in protest against the living conditions, the leasing of most of the reserve land to a European, and the oppressive laws of the reserve system
 - The Flats, located on the floodplain between Shepparton and Mooropna, becomes the home (tin or bag huts and tents) of residents
 - Jack Patten receives a gaol sentence for his part in enticing the Aboriginal families to leave the Cummeragunja reserve.
 - A September 1946 police report listed 130 people aged from 8 days to 80 years living on the Flats, with a third less than 15 years of age. Lodgings consisted of 29 dwellings, 22 being assortments of tin or hessian bag huts and the rest tents. By the early 1950's, it was believed that the numbers had grown to approximately 300 people.
- 1946 All Blacks football team is formed from mostly residents at the Flats and is accepted into the Central Goulburn Valley League
 - All Blacks wins the grand final in its first year, but is then expelled from the league
- 1954 Queen Elizabeth's first visit to Australia
 - hessian fencing to screen view of the Flats
- 1957 Sir Pastor Douglas Nicholls is co-founder of the Victorian Aboriginal Advancement League which plays a significant role in the 1967 referendum campaign
- 1967 Referendum was successful. 90.77% voted 'yes' to changing sections 51 and 127 of the Australian constitution

- 1968 The Sapphires perform in Vietnam, which becomes the subject of Australia's most successful film in 2012
- 1972 Yorta Yorta descendants join Land Rights Deputation to Canberra protesting the PM's declaration of policy to deny Aboriginal title and traditional land rights.
- 1980 Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative established
- 1980s – date TBC – Economic Forum convened
- 1983 1,200 acres of the former Cummeragunja Reserve, (originally 2,965 acres), granted to the Yorta Yorta by the New South Wales Government under its Land Rights Act, 1983.
- 1983 Yorta Yorta Tribal Council formally established, but a 1984 land claim for the Barmah Forest under the Cain Government's Victorian Land Rights Bill, does not pass the upper house
- 1983 Lois Peeler and Hyllus Maris establish Australia's only Aboriginal girls' boarding school, Worawa Aboriginal College
- 1983 Jemuria established in a relationship with Shepparton Collage of TAFE's (now GO TAFE)
 - provides pathways to education and work for students who had discontinued their schooling due to racism, social inequality or financial hardship.
 - designs a curriculum embedding cultural heritage and awareness into its syllabus as a way of imparting strong cultural identity in students before returning to mainstream education or employment.
- 1987 Jemuria (now relocated to Fryers Street) hosts the Goulburn Murray region's first ever Aboriginal debutant ball (attended by nearly 500 members of the Indigenous community)
- 1988 Koori Resource and Information Centre (KRIC) established
- 1989 Yorta Yorta Clans Group supersedes the Yorta Yorta Tribal Council
- 1989 Rumbalara Football Netball Club (RFNC) registered as a sporting club 1989 RFNC Premiership in the Barooga Night Series
- 1992 Jemuria consolidated into GO TAFEs newly established Koori Unit following funding cuts and lease expiry in 1991

- 1992 RFNC land purchase – building of oval and club rooms commences in 1994
- 1996 Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) established, with Paul Briggs as founding Chair
- 1996 Yorta Yorta Native Title claim lodged
- 1997 Koori Economic Employment & Training Agency (later renamed Ganbina) established to support school to work transition
- 1997 RFNC affiliated into GVFL, Division 2
- 1998 RFNC wins first Senior Football Premiership on the centenary of the first Grand Final win by the Cummera Invincibles
 - the club has since won over 20 grand finals and pennants across various football and netball divisions
- 1998 RFNC Youth Suicide prevention program
- 1998 RFNC Healthy Lifestyles program
- 1998 Yorta Yorta Native Title Federal Court decision: “washed away by the tide of history”
- 1999 RFNC affiliated into the Central Goulburn Football League
 - 1999 RFNC wins first Senior Football Premiership in the new league
- 1999 MoU signed between RFNC and the University of Melbourne’s Department of Rural Health to implement joint educational, research, and health intervention programs as needed and wanted by the local community
- 1999 Unity Cup established to celebrate social inclusion and reconciliation¹³
- 1999 Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation established
- 1999 Binji Business
- 1999 First Nations Advantage Credit Union opened (operated as a division of Advantage Credit Union)
- 2001 A Grade Netball Final
- 2002 High Court majority upholds the 1998 native title decision (two judges agree with Yorta Yorta),
- 2003 COAG Trial – Compact signed by Abbott and Bracks

¹³ <https://rfnc.com.au/unity-cup-celebrates-social-inclusion/>

- 2004 *Take it or Leave it: How COAG is failing Shepparton's Aboriginal people* report on the need for community led decision-making and a self-determining model/structure
- 2004 Balance Scorecard developed
- 2004 Academy of Sport Health and Education (ASHE) – an RFNC initiative supported by the University of Melbourne – is formally launched
 - follows a 2002 feasibility study for a community development approach to health, education and employment for Indigenous people by providing a culturally safe environment, relevant courses, and tangible employment and further education outcomes
- 2004 Yachad Accelerated Learning Model piloted in four Australian sites, including Shepparton¹⁴
- 2005 Paul Briggs becomes the first Indigenous member of the Council of the University of Melbourne in its 150-year history
- 2006 RFNC affiliated into the Murray Football League
- 2006 First Nations Foundation established to promote financial literacy with *My Moola* program
- 2006 Shepparton Policy and Planning Unit SPPU established
- 2006 SPPU Community Survey 1 - key priorities of education, employment, social support and connection
- 2006 Jawun (formerly known as Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships) relationship commenced
- 2006 Wesfarmers Employment Program
- 2006 Goulburn Valley Koori Library Pathways Project
- 2007 Kaiela Arts established
- 2008 SPPU Community Survey 2 – Community Planning Council
- 2008 RFNC sets up Munarra Youth Futures leadership program
- 2008 RFNC sets up Rumba Ripples employment program
- 2009 Aboriginal Community Planning Council (ACPC) proposal
 - 15 members – 8 elected and 7 appointed – but funding application is unsuccessful.
- 2009 First Dungala Kaiela Oration¹⁵

¹⁴ <https://www.theage.com.au/education/yalp-for-help-in-the-classroom-20070312-ge4e7r.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.kaielainstitute.org.au/dungala-kaiela-oration.html>

- 2009 Dungala Kaiela Foundation established
- 2009 Munarra Regional Centre for Excellence proposal submitted to Government
- 2009 Dhungala Choir started by Deborah Cheatham
- 2010 Access Economics/Business Council of Australia analysis of economic benefits of closing the gap
- 2010 Report (by Alan Tudge) proposes merger of *Koori Resource and Information Centre (KRIC)* and *Kaiela Planning Council*
- 2011 Kaiela Institute for Leadership and Innovation established (combines KRIC and SPPU)
- 2011 Yalka Loitja Language project to revive Yorta Yorta language
- 2011 Dungala Kaiela Writing Awards started
- 2015 Commonwealth Empowered Communities program commences
 - KI as backbone organisation for the GM region
 - Consultation and design report proposes the Algabonyah ('meeting place') as regional decision-making body
- 2015 Paul Briggs appointed inaugural chair of the AFL's Indigenous Advisory Board
- 2015 Algabonyah economic development round table
- 2015 Munarra Regional Centre for Excellence proposal (v2) provided to Government
- 2016 Algabonyah Employment Accords negotiated with key regional employers
- 2016 Algabonyah Data & Research Unit established
- 2017 Algabonyah Business Development Unit established to promote Indigenous business and employment
- 2017 RFNC Gowala Homework Club established
- 2017 Algabonyah community survey and well-being scorecard card designed
- 2017 Munarra Centre funding announced
 - initial \$28M committed by Victorian Government and University of Melbourne
 - Stage 1, due for completion in April/May 2024, has grown to approximately \$34M

- 2018 Deloitte Access Economics Report: Closing the Indigenous gap in the Goulburn Murray region
- 2018 KI Our Progress Report
- 2019 Community Voices Survey
- 2020 KPMG commences consultations on GMRPPP
- 2020 Algabonyah Driver Mentor Program established
- 2021 GMRPPP launched
 - Implementation Committee established
 - 20+ Plan Champions sign Statement of Intent including 6 First nations organisations
- 2021 Dungala Kaiela Foundation raises over \$1M for a future fund for community development
- 2021 Four PhD's completed at University of Melbourne in health, governance, community development
- 2022 Munarra Survey conducted
- 2022 Dr Lois Peeler awarded NAIDOC's Female Elder of the Year
- 2022 Paul Briggs awarded the AFL's Jack Titus Service Award for outstanding service to football as the founding President of the Rumbalara Football Netball Club
- 2023 Plan Champion Workshops and meetings sets 5 priority initiatives – see below
- 2023 Referendum on constitutional change for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.
 - Nationally, 60.06% vote 'no'
 - No vote in Benalla - 70.96%; Shepparton - 71.76%; Seymour - 73.67%; Echuca - 78.90%; Kyabram - 79.09%; Cobram - 80.91%
- 2023 Meeting with PM Albanese to discuss GMRPPP
- 2023/24 revised GMRPPP proposal to State and Commonwealth Governments
 - MAJOR INITIATIVE: Goulburn Murray Productivity Investment Fund (\$30M to kick start the model: \$15M C'wealth, \$10M state; \$5M corporate and philanthropic)
 - INITIATIVE #1: Indigenous Impact and Research Centre (\$850k over 3 years)
 - INITIATIVE #2: Education and Career Pathways - MCRE (\$820k over 3 years)

- INITIATIVE #3: First Nations Business Hub (\$10M over 3 years ask of C'wealth; \$1.44M from state)
- INITIATIVE #4: Activating Prosperity Plan Champions (\$360k over 3 years)
- 2024 Paul Briggs receives an Order of Australia for distinguished service to the Indigenous community, to social welfare through economic inclusion and reconciliation, and to sporting organisations¹⁶.
- 2024 MCRE stage 1 build completion (approximately \$34M) and opening of the Centre
- 2024 Update GMRPPP in line with revised priorities and current discussions with governments and Plan Champions

¹⁶ Earlier 2000 OAM Award was for service to industrial relations in the tertiary education sector, and to the credit union movement