



TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDING
KATHERINE MULLET SUBMISSION

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T: 1300 004 667

W: www.lawinorder.com.au


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COLLEEN HARDING: Hi, it's Colleen Harding. Today I'm sitting with Katherine Mullet and we're presently at GLaWAC. Here's Katherine, if you'd like to have the
5 final say.

KATHERINE MULLET: My name's Katherine Mullet and I'm here to tell my story. So I'm a Gunaikurnai Monero Ngarigo woman and I've had the privilege, I think, to live on Country in Gunaikurnai Country most of my life and I've had the
10 privilege of working and being - taken on stories and times with my father, Ricky Mullet, and my grandfather, Albert Mullet, and my nan, Rachel Mullet. So I've had the privilege of going up into Monero Country and learning about that and participating in the native title meanings there as a kid, and most of the Gunaikurnai meetings as well as a kid.

15 And my dad worked in heritage, so did my grandfather. So, of course, I had the privilege of seeing a lot of country through them while I was on school holidays and times of school, dad used to take me in the car and, like, drive me out onto Country and I'd just have sites and just get big experience of sites and, you know, just find out
20 the facts since I was about 10, I reckon, which has been amazing, like, amazing grounding in life.

And that background led me into working for government. So worked in Parks Victoria. Worked for Parks for about 11 years as a ranger. So started off at Buchan
25 part-time, moved into Bairnsdale full-time as Indigenous ranger there. Took some time off and went west to work with a remote community in WA, two years as the woman's ranger coordinator, lived about 20 k's off the Canning Stock Route which is the most remote road in Australia, and had some of the most amazing life experiences and probably some of the most hardest experiences ever as well.

30 And then that led me to come home after that, after GLaWAC came out of administration, so lived through the administration and all that hate and pressure onto my father who was CEO at the time. Left to go to WA because of that, and then came back. Came back to Parks and became part of the heritage team for about, I
35 think it was six years, had two kids in that time, and so on and off, but I was in that role and that - that role was considered the first of its kind.

40 However, my dad was in a similar role prior to that, but it reported into the region and there was no actual heritage legislation when dad was in that role, and that role came out. So the Aboriginal Heritage Act has been out since 2006 and I started in that role about 2015, '14. So it took Parks, you know, a good - more than 10 years, just under 10 years - got to get my maths right - before they actually did a heritage role. They looked at complying with the Aboriginal Heritage Act. It was really clear
45 straight up, was that there was no compliance, there was no system, there was no process actually to comply with that Act. There was no methods that they were doing to protect culture and heritage on country and they were just doing whatever they wanted.

During that time at Parks, so that 11 years, I was almost in fire. So I worked as a general firefighter for the GFS which had me on the ground fighting fires in the DEECA DELWP deputy kind of way of management. When I worked at the depot, I think I was in my early 20s, so maybe actually just 20, 19, 20, I was the first woman on the depot for eight years and I was also the only - I wasn't the first black fella but plenty of black fellas on the crew and there was plenty still working there, but I was the only parkie and being female too was, and Aboriginal and young, it was quite a struggle in a workforce that had, you know, had hundreds and hundreds of firefighters who barely any of them were women. You'd go to a campaign fire and you'll turn up and you'd walk into a hall and there was easy 100 plus men and you're the only woman walking through that door, which had its - plenty of challenges at that time.

When I started working in heritage, I did the Cert IV in Cultural Heritage Management in 2013. That gave me a real live opening around legislation and around processes and way - I guess, like, legislation's bad, because the legislation, we get told as Aboriginal people it's there to protect our culture and it's there to protect, you know, our integrity and our heritage and the tangible and intangible but all it is is the vehicle or a - it's a mechanism that allows complete and utter lawful harm and do complete destruction of cultural heritage to the point that they also give you a warm hug at the same time, because they say how great are we, we've given you, you know, 1500 bucks for the day and your heritage is being dug up, destroyed, you've got no information, you've got no knowledge of your culture in that element in the sense that your archaeologists - archaeologists are paid or they train to know about your heritage, they don't teach about your heritage. They take from Country and then they don't - they don't give anything back, and if they give you back it's in a bag and you're just told to put it underneath a tree somewhere.

And we get told how good we are every day, and even told in our own community how great we are by doing that culture work and heritage work. And you don't realise, until you start trying to understand the legislation, you start progressing into more conservation focus, which we did at the start with Parks because we were a small team of about six to eight of us that we're all black fellas, we're all there because we want to protect heritage. We're also there because we recognise we're from Country, but also we were representing Country that wasn't represented and that comes with a cultural responsibility and cultural integrity that you need to upheld, and we did that as a team.

But in the government, in the systems and the processes, don't hold that value, don't hold that integrity. So you start getting into this internal battle with the only organisation that you're employed by to just continue to provide advice to destroy your heritage. And every time you provide advice that would be there to protect and conserve your culture, you're told, "No, that's not good enough. We want to still do this project, we need to do this work. We don't agree with moving the work or the worksite or the project. We're going do this here regardless of what you say. And you're employed by us so you must tell us how to do that." And then, when you have to build a system as well, so we - sorry, I feel like I'm jumping around, I know.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: No. No. No. No. No.

COLLEEN HARDING: It's all good.

5 **KATHERINE MULLET:** But when we first started there was no system, so we had to create the system from our own minds and knowing from our own background. Thankfully, most of us that worked there actually all worked in - as a ranger or a field service officer or firefighter. So we knew how operatives - how things operated out on Country. So we knew what a totem pole is. I know what that looks - I know
10 what a bollard looks like. I know what a D4 is and I know what a D6 is. I know what a D8 is and I know what a D12 is. I know what a grader does. I know what a harvester does because I've worked around these machines. So constantly they would try to gaslight you into not knowing, thinking that you don't know about those machines and the damage that those machines would actually cause to your heritage.
15 It's just constant. It's interesting. The systematic way that a collective would gaslight you is very interesting.

But I worked for eastern region, so I managed - provided advice from Wilsons Prom to Mansfield to Albury Wodonga, Corryong, Tallangatta, all the way down to
20 Mallacoota. When I start started it was just me and there's no system, and when my previous - my relationships with other people at work centres that I gained, one I gained through my dad when dad worked at Parks, so people knew me from 15 total years old so they understood who I was, so they supported me, and then just people that you had to build relationships with.

25 Because the only way we could get a change of people to actually do an assessment to work out whether the work that they were going to do was going to impact heritage, and once we started to do that, there was bigger momentum. But then once you start doing that, some people comply with that policy. Parks did not disperse the change of policy in the organisation. So none of the senior management actually
30 backed you. They created this policy, said this is a new process, you're the messenger that has to tell a whole entire region on your own, through multiple work centres, that are also predominantly men that you - that they must follow this process before they do any of their jobs that are whole type jobs that in your day is changed. They
35 can't just go out and put a bollard out. They now need to put in a GPS allocation and send that to me for a - and do a whole assessment for me to assess the impact of cultural heritage. And so suddenly their whole entire work flow that they used to do for 30-plus years has changed.

40 And you go into a room or a work centre where it's just you and every ranger, team leader, ACR, doc and district manager, and you're telling them this, this is going have to change, on your own, is quite confronting. And then to sit there and then have to justify to them why the conservation and protection of your culture and your heritage is important, they also must respect. It is very difficult conversation.

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COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: And just for the transcript and the record, those positions were a lot more senior than you?

KATHERINE MULLET: Every position was senior than me apart from a ranger.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yes.

5 **KATHERINE MULLET:** And that was the other part was we would get told, so I was grade 5.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yes.

10 **KATHERINE MULLET:** An ACR is a grade 7 and I had an ACR telling this, "Why do I need to listen to you? You're a lesser grade than me." And I go, "Well, this is the policy and this is the procedure and you must follow this." And they would say, "No, I don't. You're not at the same grade as me." And like, well, I'm employed to do this.

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COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: And that's the view of the bureaucracy. It's all hierarchical; right?

20 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah. This is often we would argue and say we have to be grade 7 to meet this. Because these people won't listen and they said, "Oh, no, no, we've done an assessment of your role and your role only fits a grade 5." Now, you're telling me that I'm a person that has to manage and provide advice in accordance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act legislation as an Aboriginal person, that size of country, all on my own and I'm not qualified, like, to go up a grade or a couple of
25 grades to add value to my role and to what you tell me that you value, which is the protection for our cultural heritage and engage and contritionalise. And we also got put into having to engage with all the mob and that had conflict for us personally, too.

30 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** And also to protect the - you're protecting your mob, the culture, but also the State.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yes.

35 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** In their regulatory responsibilities; is that right?

KATHERINE MULLET: Yes. It's a real delicate balance.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yes.

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KATHERINE MULLET: How do you get that right? How do you provide advice? How do you sleep at night as a traditional owner, and a cultural connected person saying, hi, today I said it's okay to destroy four to five sites on my Country or on someone else's Country. And you have to be able to reconcile that and know that you
45 can sleep and be comfortable in knowing that your advice was the best advice, and sometimes inadvertently protecting heritage you do have to harm heritage to protect heritage.

But that's also the madness of the legislation, that you have to go through a process to get consent to harm when your work is actually there to conserve. And it's hard to conserve and protect cultural heritage in the legislation than it is to destroy the heritage and meet the legislation. That's just bizarre concept.

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And often you get into arguments about the definition of harm. So the legislation has five definitions. I can't - I can't recall them all off the top of my head, but interfere with, injure, destroy. There's two others.

10 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** We can get that from the transcript.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yes. But interfere with, like, how do you define what interfere with and whether your activity is going to interfere with a cultural site that's a registered site on the registrar. So you - you're every day employed to make that
15 decision and the best of your ability with an archaeologist that worked for us either at the time and to try and explain that to non-Indigenous people who, again, be doing all this work all their lives, say, no, you can't put this behind here because it actually constitutes harm because you're interfering with a cultural site or you injured a cultural site or you're actually going to destroy the cultural site. So that was always
20 difficult.

When - just trying to think about when - where we went from there. So that started - so that starts obviously when you first start doing that, you start that real rumbling in the organisation, and you start getting people who are voracious
25 perspectives start really popping their heads up. And then you've got no welfare or support in the organisation. They didn't at the time have a zero racism policy. They only brought that in a couple of years ago in the organisation. So you really couldn't do anything to say this is - this is racially motivated or this is racial behaviour or this is systemic racial - like systemic racial behaviour.

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The systems are not guided. You're constantly fighting everyone else saying, what about this Act, isn't that more important? Isn't protecting the environment more important? And there's all this valuing, quantifying or comparing which is just work. They just not equal. Like, they're equal but they're equal in different ways and they're
35 just as valuable, but you don't need to destroy one - one - justification of destroying one thing doesn't justify destroying something else. Or conserving one thing doesn't necessarily, you know, mean that you should be destroying something else.

And so you have that internal argument nearly on a daily basis. Yeah, we went in one year from 150 assessments to a good 200 and something to nearly a thousand
40 overnight, like over a couple of years. We showed that the organisation actually started to pick up and care and started to understand the policy and they started seeking management's arm to reinforce it, but it's also through our advocacy to do that. But then that brought in big hushes. So only managed so on the Parks Victoria estate. You know, what happens is when a second government department is offering
45 Parks Victoria estate, what do they have to comply with Parks Victoria policy or do they comply with their own policy?

So then I started questioning that and that started to open up the door around DEECA, and they're DEECA at the moment, but they weren't DEECA at that time. And this was just before Black Summer happened. So Black Summer, just before Black Summer happened, DEECA had a program called Reducing Bushfire Risk, RBF, which was identifying all major strategic roads in the Parks Victoria estate, the whole public estate, that needed significant work and upgrade works done to them before Black Summer. So that - they identified, I think it was a good 150, it might have even been more roads in eastern region, on the Parks Victoria estate. So they had, like, hundreds outside the Parks Victoria estate. There was about 150 on our estate.

I've always gone with the assessment, and the legislation supports this assessment, but it's obviously open up to the individual interpretation, but just because there's nothing on the registry doesn't mean there's nothing there. It just means no one's looked, and no one's looked with an eye to know what cultural heritage looks like and to process it to be registered. So I used the last three years prior to that to back my argument on that. We had - each year was increasing site registration. So I would do site visits and identify multiple new sites that weren't on the registry and we registered them.

Out of 150 roads, I think there was about 75 that I submitted to have site visits and the rest didn't need to have site visits. And the way I did my assessments is that I looked at Country. So come from a field background, I knew that if a road follows a ridge line, it's likely that it follows Aboriginal walking route, particularly if it goes down to water and/or if it traverses along the divide, something like that. Again, taking contours into consideration, I also assessed whether the road was actually on the top of where the ridge lines were or whether it was off the road, like in a side cut in. If you get a side cut of a metre or so, there's no significant heritage there. It's just, I've never found it, and that's because they're gone or it's just not where people walked, because it's not where people walked.

So we identified about 74 roads. We found out at the last minute that DEECA was doing this work so it was probably, like, August, September before Black Summer that that was all coming to light, and I remember being in a room. It was me and about 25 other DEECA staff at the time and they were basically bullying me and belittling me wilfully around my stance that they could not operate or do this work on pasture estate unless I complete my assessments because it's Parks Victoria's management policy, and this is what our policy said. Our policy said that any third party operator had to adhere to Parks Victoria's cultural heritage management policy. Now, DEECA refused to do that, and out of that meeting came a email that was sent from a staff member in Gippsland.

So taking a step back, Parks was heavily reliant on DEECA on any works or funding or any programs. If they ever wanted a road graded or if they ever wanted anything to happen, DEECA was the one that hold the purse strings and DEECA were the ones that would let it happen. They sent an email to everybody in Parks Victoria, but me, in the eastern region that said because of Katherine's cultural - and cultural

heritage process, DEECA will remove all machinery and will not deliver any works on Parks Victoria estate. So they essentially told a whole entire region of staff who love their country, like, they love their parks, they love their programs, they love the work. They want great assets for visitors. They're completely reliant on DEECA and the relationship with DEECA, and they named me as the reason why this would no longer happen, in the whole entire region before Black Summer on all strategic fire roads.

So not only did they do that, the district manager for Tambo, he had a community meeting prior to Black Summer at Bendoc, which is a very remote community. Safe to say it's quite a redneck-centric community, all farmers, you know, people who had been there since colonisation, you know, families that have had thousands of acres, all of that. He named me - and the district manager from Parks Victoria was there - he named me in that meeting saying that Katherine Mullet, the cultural heritage process is the reason why you will not be having fire strategic roads managed or delivered prior to Black Summer. Yep.

So then - so basically I had that full uproar of Parks Victoria staff against the cultural heritage process and against me, but then obviously it could have easily happened that our communities or community could have totally uproared them, like against a single individual woman in her 20s at that time. I'm only 34 now. 35 actually, couple of weeks ago. But I was in, like, early, mid 20s before Black Summer. So it was 2020 - '19 - '18, yeah, and because I said, "I think there's going to be cultural heritage here, you need to manage this the right way," and I wasn't saying that you can't use the mechanisms putting on the Aboriginal hat, the Aboriginal Act to harm the heritage, I wasn't saying you can't do that, but I was saying that there is a legislative process here. You need to do that and you also need to give the respect to the traditional owners to identify their cultural material on Country.

Then as far as I see the - engaging the RAP or heritage workers, it's small compensation to allow them to go out to site, to pick up their cultural heritage. You're not going to get run over by a dozer, so it's not going to continue to get broken, shattered. They're not going to know where their old people walked, because they don't have the dots on the map anymore, because that's taken away. But they wouldn't even do that because their policy says that if there's nothing on the registry, then it's good to go, and they operate under that contingency, which is that basic element of the Act. Everyone, you have to comply with contingency plan. The contingency plan is only as good as those that actually have identified heritage. You can't follow the contingency plan if you don't know what you're looking for.

So constantly every day DEECA, now they're doing roadworks, you know, campground works, whatever they want, under the contingency plan but they're not training their staff to do eyesight ID. So they're not stopping them and doing kind of process. They're just wilfully continuing harm under the guise that they're protecting heritage because there's nothing there. So -

COLLEEN HARDING: So can I just ask this question: with that, do they have Koorie monitors?

KATHERINE MULLET: At DEECA?

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COLLEEN HARDING: Yeah, at DEECA.

KATHERINE MULLET: They have Aboriginal staff.

10 **COLLEEN HARDING:** Right.

KATHERINE MULLET: No Koorie, but they have Koorie cultural heritage assessors but they still - they all follow that process, and I remember having an argument with their cultural heritage - their cultural adviser in the meeting room.
15 He's off Country, so he's not from Country. He's from a different State.

COLLEEN HARDING: Yes.

20 **KATHERINE MULLET:** And I remember having this argument with him saying if this - just because it's not there doesn't mean there's nothing there. And then I said to him, like, it's also around midden sites because they also have no - they were putting lines through next to middens, and I'm working outside the registered footprint of a midden. I was like, well, one, the registration data was done in '64 or '94. So one, the data is not in the right spot. Two, no one's checked that site. It could actually be 200
25 metres wide, not just 20 metres wide.

Three, you should also know that there is close associations with burials with midden sites. So therefore, even if you're working outside the footprint of a midden, you are highly likely going to impact an ancestral site. So therefore you should do a site visit
30 to assess whether you're impacting that or not and what's been exposed since the bloody '60s and he's just says, "I didn't know that." You've been doing this job nearly 20 years. To have been doing that job on our Country for 20 years, not understanding any cultural knowledge at all, happily ticking the box and happily processing assessments to tarn our heritage with no care because he has no connection to it.
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COLLEEN HARDING: Okay. And what about the naming right? That's all good.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: (Indistinct).

40 **COLLEEN HARDING:** What about the massacre sites?

KATHERINE MULLET: They're not on the registry.

COLLEEN HARDING: Well, what is it? Not all of them?

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KATHERINE MULLET: Not all of them.

COLLEEN HARDING: Right.

KATHERINE MULLET: And technically because they're registered as a place of historical importance there is no - therefore it's not tangible. So if it's intangible and there is nothing - the legislation has changed slightly now, but ultimately, there is no way to assess whether your work is going to impact intangible heritage. So therefore they assume that all works they're going to do will not impact that site. Yep. So they just go and do whatever they like. If they want to put a fire line in, they'll do that.

10 And that's the other part, is that the Emergency Act trumps Cultural Heritage Act. So therefore anything considered is an emergency, so a fire - fire is an easier example - they will put dozer lines in, they don't need to consider Aboriginal cultural heritage or any protection measures underneath the Aboriginal Heritage Act. Even they got advisers in the IMT, so the emergency management team, it's still just, 15 "Well, we'd better do it, we've got to do it, so we'll put a dozer in." But I've worked on fire lines where I've seen them working more than 100 kilometres away from the fire front, grading roads, and they actually joked to me and said to me, "Oh yeah, we're doing that and booking it up to the fire so we don't have to worry about your assessment processes, ha ha ha, and we can just get this done."

20 Gippsland DEECA, they were building to - embarrassed by what was happening which is over here out at Buchan, north of Buchan, I was at that fire, they were operating hundreds of kilometres away, building fire strategic break illegally, because they didn't need - they used that as an extension of the Emergency Act. This break is about two tractor widths wide each side of the road, while they graded the road as well, and clearing vegetation, calling it underneath the Emergency Act so they were fully exempt environmentally and culturally, and they were building that fire strategic break on ridge lines on major road arteries throughout our Country.

30 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** So just on that, on the Emergency Management Act, in your view what needs to change in the Emergency Management Act or what needs to change in the Heritage Act so they are more aligned?

KATHERINE MULLET: It's a tough question.

35 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yeah. No, I know. I know.

KATHERINE MULLET: It's a tough question because when you're actually in the emergency it is -

40 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yeah.

KATHERINE MULLET: - moment in emergency and you actually are there on the front line in a fire, and I've been there. I've been where the fire has blown over us and, you know, been there with the crew to get crews out. Yeah, you will just do whatever you have to and even then I've decided on my let's act to get the dozer in, we just actually have to get the dozer in right now, because that is an immediate

threat to life and property. But I only say it is immediate. When it's not immediate, when it's fallback lines, where it is other activities that are not there for immediate - and I mean immediate - then they should be following cultural heritage processes and the Aboriginal Heritage Act should be still in play. And we have these arguments with DEECA because the Act does say immediate life - threat to life and property.

Now, they claim like the different levels of their fires are still committed - considered immediate threats, but I completely disagree. When you don't have the blow-up day, when you're starting to look at fallback lines that are kilometres and kilometres away, you know, you can do cultural heritage assessments. You can get teams in there, and we've done it because we pushed our way into IMTs, into operational rooms, because we have contacts, to get us down to the fire line to pick up heritage before they went in there with dozers, and we did that at Moon Camp and at - out at, I'm sorry River National Park, we did that.

But then Aboriginal Victoria threatened to come after us and say that we breached the Aboriginal Heritage Act, we caused harm and therefore we were - they were going to pull us up for prosecution. Now, the emergency was still happening at that time, still a declared emergency through Black Summer. We operated to protect heritage by removing heritage off the road, but they said within that act itself, we were causing harm and therefore we were going to get investigated, versus recognising we were nowhere near the fire for Brimboal, still underneath the Emergency Act so DEECA can still do all the roading and all those other operations and not get investigated or prosecuted, but because we admit that we went to protect heritage, we're the ones that are going to get prosecuted. And that's just emergency stuff.

There's probably a lot more, probably a lot more examples, a lot of live examples. Then there's other examples of what I've done work with heritage. I did some big assessments, they weren't surveys but they were site visits for a whole bunch of roading in the north-east, which is sort of here, what's considered Hume region but there is - Parks Victoria has it in the eastern region. The north-east country is really different to, like, Gunaikurnai Country. It's - I've - I really struggled to start with to read Country up there. So I needed to do a lot of site visits because I was really conscious that it was outside of my Country and that there was a lot of groups up there that just have no voice at any table at all, like DEECA and Parks barely engaged anyone up there because it's just too difficult and they just sort of wilfully use - make ways to just ignore the mob and community. And not much mob is up there because it's - I'm talking sort of west of Albury Wodonga.

So it's - it's sort of like Corryong, Mansfield, Mount Brown and Mount Lawson country, Tallangatta and Corryong, heavily mined, heavily impacted by colonisation, right on the Murray there, and a lot of, like, gold mining I think too happened up there. Different impacts of what we have up here. So I did a lot of site visits and, through that, I've had to understand Country really well and I recorded, in one park I think we did a day drive through, we found probably a good 25 new sites that were

just not on the register. So a whole park had no sites that are registered. By the end of the day we had more than 25, I think, on the - ready to go on the registry. And this is to my skill level, not an archeologist skill level. I'm not an archeologist, but I know a cultural tyranny.

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So I put them onto the registry and the registrar accepted the registrations. So it went through all the processes to be quantified and it was all quartz artefacts and I'm pretty confident with quartz and I don't - I don't pick anything that I'm iffy about. And long time ago an archaeological friend, ██████████ said to me, "If you can't go to court, Katherine, over it, do not register it." So if I'm not willing to stand in the stand and say, "I can tell you 100 per cent that this is an artefact, this is cultural material," don't register it. And so I always worked with that attitude in everything that I've done.

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So those sites I know 100 per cent that they were cultural material on those sites. At the time - and we'll say Aboriginal Victoria, they're not Aboriginal Victoria anymore but it's just easier - the regional manager for Hume region, ██████████ found that I registered these sites. His attitude was very much aligned with DEECA and he was building a very close partnership with Hume DEECA and I completely disrupted DEECA's Hume regions roading program by registering these sites, because suddenly where there was no roads allowed to get cultural heritage permits for they'd had multiple roads that they'd had to get cultural heritage permits for, and they didn't want to do that and they didn't want to have to pay for that.

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██████████ come in, wrote a letter to the registry and the registrar and he said that you need to remove these, that he does not believe that these are cultural material and that he went back over the sites and reviewed my sites, took photos. Now, he took a photo of the shitty quartz, and you don't record shitty quartz. You record good, clean quartz material, not stuff that's dirty, not stuff that's got grains in it, nothing that is not like a good stone. And I know that, like, you don't - that's not what's cultural material. And he went back, and I thought they purposefully went back to try to discredit my sites and purposefully took photographs of material that were not an actual example of material that I -

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COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: You took, yeah.

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KATHERINE MULLET: - took and registered. Thankfully, the registrar stuck to the registration, so my registrations, but it did launch a full process internally where he and DEECA started to rile up against Parks, and Parks actually had to send out about eight archaeologists to verify my sites to the point that they actually identified that I missed numerous cultural material and that they had - the sites increased and the registration actually increased in volume of sites, which is fantastic.

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But he's threatened to take me to court and the registrar to court and also felt - tried to dismantle my reputation in the north-east and not only with DEECA but also with the traditional owners. He took traditional owners out onsite after that letter back from the registrar that said they wouldn't remove the registrations. He took traditional owners out on site and convinced them that I didn't know what I was

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doing, and for them to write a letter to support him that they weren't registrations and weren't cultural material. Could not fucking believe it. Sorry. I could not -

5 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** And did the mob support them?

KATHERINE MULLET: Yes, they did. I could not believe it. I actually could not believe it, but the sites are still registered. So, the registration - registrar hadn't taken them off, but he did, and I'm definitely not going into great detail at the moment, picking my brains with all this stuff.

10 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** No. No. No. Of course. Of course.

KATHERINE MULLET: But he - it was the second, I felt like it was the second reputational attack on me -

15 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yes.

KATHERINE MULLET: - as an Aboriginal woman, as a cultural woman, with my community connection, my cultural knowledge. It's just another attack and another attempt to remove my value and my value for putting up - not putting up, sorry - but for standing up for other mob that are silenced. And then to use mob to further silence myself but also to get them to not even fight them, this is where I think they just didn't know, didn't know what they were doing on land, because they weren't properly empowered, they weren't properly taught or shown what it means in the Act. Because he told them, "Oh, you know, I can get all these roads done and it's going to be our fault for cultural heritage is going to be in the way to not get all this roadwork done for fire," rah rah rah. And you can't use cultural heritage as a reason to stop fire management activities. Fire needs to step up and actually protect cultural heritage and do it the right way.

20 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** To scaremonger in their mob, scaremongering them.

KATHERINE MULLET: And they have so much money in first, they can spend millions on campaign fire.

35 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yeah.

KATHERINE MULLET: But they can't spend a couple of hundred grand prior to the fire season to protect and get right management strategies in place, led by mob, to decide how culture needs to be protected. Look what happens. So instead of just happens during an event and then they will just spend money on that event, and then they'll just destroy what they can during that fire.

45 **COLLEEN HARDING:** I say good on you, Katherine, for standing your ground and even in the future -

KATHERINE MULLET: It's a good thing I'm a Mullet.

COLLEEN HARDING: Yes. Well, we are family.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah, I know.

5 **COLLEEN HARDING:** No, I say well done.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yes.

10 **COLLEEN HARDING:** And you stay strong and keep doing what you know that it's right.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yes.

15 **COLLEEN HARDING:** Yes.

KATHERINE MULLET: We are not enough invited to talk properly about the Aboriginal Heritage Act. We get told that it's a great Act. We get told that there's these great, high level, you know, prosecution and jail, millions of dollars people can get charged for. But no one - I mean, there's about four to five people been
20 prosecuted under that Act. The prosecutions haven't really gone all the way through. There are so many examples that we've put up in time.

So I'll - another one, Ingeegoodbee Track, up in the north, north-east I think, being on Murray river or Alpine River National Park - alpine - sorry, Alpine National Park.
25 It's one of four roads that cross the State border Ingeegoodbee. I started - I started talking to people in 2016 about Ingeegoodbee in Parks Victoria. They - they wanted to do - grade it and rip and roll. So they wanted to get in with the tractors, the tractor machinery and rip all the material up, loosens the material up and then they wanted
30 to grade and roller and compact it down.

And there's a historical place marker registered at the base of the track and there's a couple of sites registered on the road. Now, my nan can remember stories of the old people talking about Ingeegoodbee Track and ceremony, and there's a rock
35 formation, so there's a natural rock ring at the top of Ingeegoodbee. Not many people know that. It's on the registry. It's about 20 metres off the road. So it's not far from the road. I had a work colleague, he worked out at the Omeo office. I've never been there, I still haven't got there, I really want to get there. He worked in the west and him and I did many of the horse tracking site surveys and I knew he knew one of the
40 (indistinct). He was really cluey, and he worked in the west and he just knew what he was about.

He called me, 2016, and he said, "Katherine, they want to do this work," there are thousands, hundreds and thousands of artefacts on that road, and I said, "Well, the
45 registry doesn't have it." The registrations were done in the '60s, and they're - all the point data is out because they didn't have GPS back then and they just put a (indistinct) on the map and thought this is the point data, the best they could. So I said, "Righto, good to know." So in that - I stopped that work from happening

because I explained to Parks we have to do this process, they didn't have the funds to do that process, that job dropped off the radar.

5 Black Summer, it came back up. Prior to Black Summer I said there is no way you are doing this work on that road without doing these processes and you need to survey that road before you do it, and you need to give the traditional owners the opportunity to understand what's there and you're talking about a stone arrangement just off the track. We don't actually know if that's off the track or not because of how they done the park registrations and how significant that is in the Alpine National
10 Park. It's my - there's only one in the whole entire Alpine National Park stone arrangement registered. They backed off on that one. They backed off on that one with their files as well, and there was third track in the alps, the Cobras, Ingeegoodbee, McFarlane, the Cobras and I got them to back off on those ones.

15 Black Summer came, the fire happened, the fire started to burn up there off Ingeegoodbee Track. I got into the ops room and basically I knew the ops manager and the incident controller and said - and I came in on my day off because I'd heard on my day off that they were about to send crews and machinery out there to do this work. So I stormed in and literally just walked into the room and here's a massive,
20 like, massive mechanical, hundreds of important people and I just stomped in, and I said, "You're not doing that" and I sat there and explained it to them, and just put everything on the table. And I said, "This is my nan's story, you've gone and done this at Moon Camp, I supported Moon Camp because you needed to get machines up there." And my team member at the time, he went up and picked up the artefacts.

25 I said, "But you're not doing that at Ingeegoodbee," there is no frigging way you're doing that to Ingeegoodbee. This is the value of the cultural material up here. Like, they're - and we were talking clinical because that is what I had to do then. So you're not doing it. And they said, "All right, Katherine, we won't do it. There is actually no
30 need for us to do it." It's just the crew wanted it done, the local team would have done it because they wanted to grade that road because they'd always wanted to get that road graded. And I said, "Well, I don't care what they've always wanted to do. We need to protect this site," and so they pulled back.

35 Because one of them - sorry, but then I got back from Black Summer, got promised all this money in support. We had all this burnt country. I thought great, we're going to do some great cultural heritage surveys, we're going to do all these great things, we're going to really reset, this is the greatest I've seen happen. Go up and basically
40 didn't find any cultural heritage work after Black Summer. They gave it to traditional orgs only. And it's not a bad thing, but from my perspective of dealing with everything I had to do in the agency and what I could see we could do work and the potential on delivery, giving it to traditional Ab orgs that didn't have governance systems, that don't know the Act, don't know land management practices, don't actually have ways of working together and operating and remotely, and it's
45 most - no offence to anyone, it wasn't money that was spent well for Country or culture.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Well, they didn't build the capacity of the orgs.

KATHERINE MULLET: Didn't build the capacity, they didn't properly support. In fact, they allowed him to be bid against each other which set them all up against each other. They gave them money to deliver on programs where they had no systems, no processes to deliver. They didn't want archies because they've only ever worked with archies and archies have always only ever done the worst thing for us for Country and culture, not realising there's some good ones that have actually set good things. So they don't - they actually caused - this is my opinion, but it causes de-governance in a way too of mob and community and disempowered us to do the right thing for Country and culture when we had such a small (indistinct) to do things.

And whether it's right or wrong, I think that it's great to empower the traditional orgs and the community members to employ themselves to come up and start to understand business, but there should have been an overarching project that was delivered that support modern community to know what the benefit of good Country management is and to have that led. Whether it's the right thing or wrong thing, time's up, but that's just how I saw it.

So then I'm working for a government agency. I'm fighting my internal organisation and my people. I've got a great team that I feel bonded on because we're all black fellas and we all understood the pain and the trauma and the struggles and the roadblocks we always had to get, to then get not funded, get told that you've got less money, but you've got to do more assessments of work on your Country with less support, and you need to do it now. And then you've got the flood of project managers and officers who are going to build all these great recovery programs, upgrade all these campgrounds, do all this work to all the roads, building toilet blocks, build all these new facilities and none of them cared about cultural heritage. They did everything in their power to be able to avoid any good cultural heritage management or good traditional engagement.

Cape Conran is a clear example of that, stuff in Mallacoota is a clear example of that. And we went in with the right attitude to say, all right, here's our advice, this is how you engage them in the far east, this is how you work together. Make sure your management plan, start it now, do this and do that. No. No. No. I'm not doing that. I'm not doing it that way. I'm not doing it that way. And then you get put into rooms after six months of project managers not doing what you tell them to do, saying please fix this and please help us, you're like, you want me to sit in that room, against all my aunties and uncles, and hear what they're going to tell me that I told you six months ago how to do this and now they're angry and agitated.

In actual fact, it's two, three, four years down the road and we're still having the same conversation. And yet you're employed to advise by, you're employed to provide direction and support to engage the traditional owners yet no one takes your advice. But then they want you to come in and fix it, and it's a continual rotation of that in government that you have to deal with and face every day. Every day. While you're also getting told you don't know how to identify your cultural heritage and then

you're getting told by your own family members that you're not the right one to be here, you shouldn't be here talking about Country, you shouldn't be deciding how to manage Country. It's all your fault that this has happened. Every day. Yeah. So then that's exhausting.

5

So I left Parks, and I worked for New South Wales Parks on a secondment for about 12 months, working with Australian Arts Reference Group which provides strategic management across all the Alpine National Park for New South Wales, ACT and Victoria. I walked out of that role, out of my Aboriginal heritage coordinator role for two weeks and a project officer approved and put a dozer up Ingeegoodbee Track and dozered Ingeegoodbee Track within two weeks of me leaving, because they knew I'd walked out the door. And then laughed in my face that I called into about how they got away with that because then I wasn't there and they didn't have to follow my process.

15

Yes. I put in a report on harm to Aboriginal Victoria and said there is a clear four years of evidence that I have in the email in writing in all of this and my own knowledge of them wilfully causing harm in accordance to the Aboriginal Heritage Act. Aboriginal Victoria never sent an investigator to investigate the site or the job, it was too far away for them. So then they never continued with the investigation, even though there is a clear example of Parks Victoria and that Parks Victoria wilfully did that. And they still haven't sent anyone out to do a heritage assessment, and they still haven't got there. There are other examples where they've done that.

20

25 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Was some of your ideas, off the top of your head - it's 2 o'clock just so you know, just checking for you, not for me.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah, I'm - I've got time so -

30 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** What are some of your thoughts and ideas that we should be considering for recommendations in cultural heritage?

KATHERINE MULLET: Tough question.

35 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yeah.

KATHERINE MULLET: I guess the other part to it is this is a weird thing about the Aboriginal Heritage Act too, is that the sponsor is held accountable, I mean the Act. The archie will just sign it off. So an archaeologist who's trained and qualified to do the assessment, to write a cultural heritage management plan, cultural heritage permit in accordance with the Act and the regulations and the guidelines, if they write that wrong, so the sponsor signs off on it and, say, a RAP signs off on the management plan, the people that are accountable through that process, through legislation to get prosecuted are the sponsor and the RAP, not the archaeologist that did it all wrong. So how can the person who actually is the only one who's professionally trained to do all that work, not accountable for their own professionalism? That's bizarre.

40

45

I don't know how many legislations, the environmental legislations or any of that where you don't hold the scientists accountable to do that or to deliver the work right. That's my thing. Archaeologists should be held accountable for their poor work, for
 5 our culture, yeah. There needs to be more mechanisms in the Act as well that supports conservation protection and self-determination by Aboriginal people for those site management strategies. There is none. You still have to comply with the regs and everything you do is counted as harm. So there needs to be more provisions in there to support conservation.

10

There's still failings also under the ancestral remains management and if I think about ancestral remains, I've worked in the Murray Sunset Darling with the ancestral remains team up there, doing a Resting Place Program for Parks Victoria has funded and I couldn't - could not get over the amount of old people's bodies exposed. You
 15 should have seen them in the dune landscapes.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: It's important to this.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah, I just - I went up, I've spent two weeks up there doing work and camping with the lads who are employed by Parks Victoria for a Resting Place Program, which is basically all the dune systems are blowing out on the Murray Sunset and all those bodies are getting exposed and they're blown out because of cattle grazing programs, rabbits and just vegetation loss. And there are lads out there that work, and they work with wheelbarrows shovelling sand from a
 25 blown-out dune into a wheelbarrow, wheelbarrowing that over site and covering up the body that is fully exposed out of the dune system.

And I'm saying, like, I remember standing there doing it and within your eyesight, hundred bodies, easy, easy, if not more, like, if not more. And you go, "Well, what's
 30 that mound over there?" They said, "Oh, that's a family group buried over there." They're only protected because they've got a brush holding onto the sand hasn't moved from there. The sand in there has, like, a little toddler right next to you. And then walking past bodies, cremation sites, sites that have been where (indistinct) have been broken and shattered and crushed purposefully. And then the other sites where
 35 the full bodies are buried, all in the single space of five metres if not more, like, yeah. It's crazy, it's just mind-blowing.

And it's just right there, and people are driving off road, punching through those dune systems - park - the roads into the park have buried bodies on the roads that they're
 40 exposed. You've got rabbit warrens that have bodies coming out of it because the rabbits are digging the bodies out. The whole purpose of cultural heritage team starting, the whole purpose of the cultural heritage team starting in Parks Victoria was because the executive director at the time, he went out onsite to the Murray Sunset and saw that they were ripping up rabbit warrens, ripping them with tractors
 45 that have ancestral remains in them. Best lines fence posts, you had bones sticking out the bottom of the fence posts where they just dug into fence sites, where they had a full cemetery. Full site.

And then he said there must be something, must be doing something illegal here, this cannot be allowed, and thankfully that's where the Parks changed and said we'll do this assessment process. We - I remember being in a meeting. This is when I was young, turned a bit more angry. I remember being in a meeting, got called in to
5 ask - to go to this meeting and the parkies were going, "Yeah, but how can we keep doing our rabbit ripping program?" And I'm like, "You mean you want to keep ripping in these cemeteries up?" So, like, "Yeah, yeah, we've got to rip the rabbit warrens because it's the only way you stop the rabbits." And I'm like, "How do you tell me where your grandma's buried, and we'll rip up her site first." And that caused
10 a big disruption, and I was asked to leave.

But that's the - that was the mentality that they're facing. And I went up there for, yeah, about two weeks where this place is. There's basically the three of them that have worked full time since 2015, '14, doing this work, every day they are out there
15 shovelling sand, and if they're not shovelling sand they're working on big projects where they've actually got machinery where they are pushing over sand from blowouts and building bridges to push the sand back in to cover hundreds of thousands of bodies in a single program. Costs hundreds, thousands of dollars to do. Then they re-seed and they keep it down. The most amazing being able to achieve it,
20 but the sheer scale of that project is just near impossible. Three people can't do maintain and they can't keep carrying that mental cultural load.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah, was going to say the cultural load, yeah.

25 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Every single day of covering it up remains of their people, and some of them aren't - I think one of them is not even from Country, it's not even their Country, but he does it every single day.

COLLEEN HARDING: And that would be affecting, hurting them all, those three.
30

KATHERINE MULLET: Yes.

COLLEEN HARDING: Even that person that is from another Country.

35 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yes.

COLLEEN HARDING: That still affects us.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yes.
40

COLLEEN HARDING: Yes.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah. They're -

45 **COLLEEN HARDING:** That is so sad.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yes. The cultural load that they carry every day is insane.

5 **COLLEEN HARDING:** So are those workers being seen to in regards to counselling?

10 **KATHERINE MULLET:** I doubt it. The three blokes that are a bit tough. But I don't think the organisation would even know how to properly support them culturally or emotionally, how to, and I think that the - they rely on each other and that's how they support each other and go through that, and the team that we had in our cultural heritage team at the very early days with Parks, we all needed each other and supported each other, because it was only us who understood - only us who understood why someone was being passive racial and passive aggressive. Only us as the collective understood what that all looked like and felt like and could see it.
15 Nobody else. No other non-Indigenous person knew or could see it or understand it, because they just go, oh no, no, that's not them being racist because they're not saying it directly to your face.

20 **COLLEEN HARDING:** No.

KATHERINE MULLET: But they're derogative to your culture. They're pulling down and often (indistinct). Oh, you know, but you never really actually invented the wheel, so it really wasn't that interesting. And they're genuine comments you'll get, yeah. I had one bloke tell me once that I had - good thing I got good looks from my
25 mum's side of the family, because he gathered my dad was Aboriginal and my mum was non-Aboriginal, you know. Yeah. The Murray Sunset program - project, that's - people don't see it, they don't know it, and you've got your campers on the Murray and as the government keeps trying to open up more camping facilities, more river access for the camping, you know, these are the sites that are getting impacted,
30 and they don't really care for. No, crazy. What I talking about before I got onto that?

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: I asked you the question about any further regs through the cultural heritage.

35 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: What are your thoughts on the intent, like, clearly you talked about, you know, strength in the intangible element of the Cultural Heritage Act?
40

KATHERINE MULLET: They've tried that recently, so there is an intangible register now. But the way to quantify the information to go onto the registrar - registration, it was, one, really cumbersome and, two, really difficult to quantify.
45

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah.

KATHERINE MULLET: So it's a near impossible task to get something registered on there. But then you still have to put a line on the map. And if you can't put a line on the map, therefore the registration can't happen. But how do you do that, like, where do you draw the boundary and why is it - and how does an individual take
 5 responsibility of drawing that to the Country? Just because I hold the cultural knowledge, doesn't mean I hold the cultural authority to put the boundary on that. So how do you do that?

10 And there's again a cultural way, trying to fight into bureaucratic white way, linear way of managing cultural sites. And the Deninaga is not even on there, and the Deninaga is a well-known women's cultural site that has been known for multiple generations, and it's publicly known, and the Deninaga couldn't even get put on there, because the registrar rejected it.

15 **COLLEEN HARDING:** Oh my goodness.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah, and any registration has to get quantified by about six or eight archaeologists and has to be verified by them, but they're not out on site, they're not collecting the information, and if the - if you'd taken a little bit of a blurry
 20 photo or just something a little bit off like your - you haven't got the north pointing in the right spot on your map, they'll reject your registration and you'll have to go back.

The registration - the registration process is also, not only does it take long but there are sites on there that I know that are more than couple of years old that have been
 25 applied for that are not on the registry. And so then they say, "Oh, it takes too long for us to process since we have to process priority ones," which are for CHMPs, but anything that's got a process for a permit doesn't get as - progressed as quickly or, if it's a site - so I'm if I'm out on my weekend and I register some sites and I go, I bet you there's going to be some roadwork happening on this road sometime soon, I'd
 30 better register these sites, they won't go onto the registration, then the roadworks will happen. And then there's no way of stopping, because the registration don't register it.

I think Murray Sunset one, when I talk about Murray Sunset, one - one dune system
 35 had like a - like a thousand Aboriginal posts registered so because you've got all these artefacts and all these little bits of pieces and you've got the clay balls and massive cultural sites, but they aren't on the registry. They have it down in places, in like not even a kilometre square metres. Because one per cent of - one per cent of the State has been surveyed, less than that of any public land has been surveyed. And
 40 then they tell you there's no - no heritage, so therefore we're allowed to do whatever we want.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: This is part of the issue, and then they make the mob
 45 jump through the traditional and a solemn agreement and the native title process around basically having to quantify that colonisation fail. Really, that's what it is. It's basically to say that you have still an unbroken connection, an ongoing connection,

unbroken connection to the land and water and yet, you know, I mean, the policy states that they can do all this stuff.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yep.

5

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: And it's just, you know, and it makes it hard - more harder for mob to be able to get the recognition, you know, which comes with, you know, how complex it is as well.

10 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yes. Yes. The Act is essential a vehicle, like, it's a - it's a way to make us feel warm and fuzzy that they're caring about our heritage.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yes.

15 **KATHERINE MULLET:** And it's just another way for them to destroy it. There's no need for people to do research. There's no need for people to do carbon dating. There is - no one has done research on stone tool types or sizes or ages of stone tools because we don't collect that data. That data is not collected around the CHMP processes so there is no real - there's no way for mob to gain knowledge from that
20 process. You know, if you're mechanically sieving cultural heritage you are digging vast volumes of dirt out, putting that into a sieve, breaking it up in this metal sieve, removing material away to just spit out the artefacts. You're essentially harvesting your own artefacts. You're not collecting cultural knowledge. And archaeologists and them and their dig, other processes, as soon as you find an artefact you're meant to
25 stop -

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Stop. Yeah.

KATHERINE MULLET: - using a shovel and you're meant to get the trowel.

30

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah.

KATHERINE MULLET: You know, Gunaikurnai is one of the only RAPs that enforces that. Nearly every other RAP does not enforce that.

35

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: And I think the challenge - and this is not for the transcript on, just telling - saying this, I'm going to take it off, but, you know, the challenge is that it comes back to the point you made before is, no disrespect to people living off Country and stuff, but I mean, or even our people, just because
40 you're a black fella doesn't mean you know that you have cultural heritage knowledge or where sites are and stuff, like, you know, it's just, there's an assumption of we'll give a traditional owner group money, they can go and sort it out. You're talking about a capacity.

45 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: They just fund Aboriginal people because they might not be knowledge holders.

5 **KATHERINE MULLET:** No, that's right. And I think you saw that after Black Summer, in all honesty. Because, you know, if you, let's take a far eastern as an example, there was a clear four mobs in the far east that, and family groups over there. Now you're looking at more than 27 people that have put their hands up to be individually engaged or say they represent a group or that they're a slight fraction from another mob and another group and that there is more out there, in that space.

10
15 Now, I'm not saying that they're not all connected or they not have rights, but I - but now you've gone from four to nearly 27 through the process because you're not turning up governance and you're not turning up clear expectations or support to have them do business the right way and instead you're saying, well, I don't like this voice, so I'm going to answer shop to the next person, the next black fella that's going to put their hand up for me. And then suddenly you've got 27 people saying I'll put my hand up here.

20 Instead, there was four clear family groups that hadn't - they might have their disagreements but they all recognise each other and they - they had their disagreements but they all understood who had the right to speak for Country and which particular parts of Country. Now you've got mob over in New South Wales coming over, you've got mobs coming all over the place, and that's de-governing the whole entire mob. That's - that's a colonisation in its perfect sense because it's
25 creating the perfect storm. No one's coordinated, no one's organised to be able to stand up and say, against government, they're all disempowering each other, they're bringing each other down.

30 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yeah.

KATHERINE MULLET: So while they're all fighting the government still gets to do exactly what they want to do. Look at forestry, look at all the forest management, all those people who get to do exactly what they want to do while they all fight.

35 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** And while government (indistinct) because they want to talk to you to get the knowledge.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yep. Yep. The Aboriginal -

40 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** For the decision they want.

45 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah. The Aboriginal Heritage Act identifies anybody - individuals as well as interest for Country and to speak for cultural heritage or be involved in cultural heritage, and while they don't want to take away from individuals having their own rights, that does allow that process to happen for 27 people. If you have it so that there's - you need to be an Indigenous registered

underneath (indistinct) group then you must have a membership base and you must have a small collective of you to agree and represent a collective of you.

5 That is one way that could get rid of some processes that de-govern each other, but I also recognise that that takes away individual rights if they don't necessarily get along with particular families and it's a delicate balance, but if we want mobs to start more RAPs over Country, more recognition of Country, then they've got to set us up individual differences -

10 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yeah, that's right.

KATHERINE MULLET: - and actually come together.

15 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Or it's just being destructive.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yep. And they so then while have you got an Act that allows individuals, and only individuals, and no other Act does allow individuals to be involved or to make decisions or to lead, you will continue to get into that cycle. That is one risk there. Yeah.

20 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Very complex systems.

25 **KATHERINE MULLET:** The other parts of the Act that doesn't allow you to register anything that was made post colonisation. So any scar trees, so scar trees that my grandfather made can't be registered on the register to be protected as Aboriginal cultural heritage because they were done after colonisation.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: And do you think that is an issue?

30 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah, I do. Yeah.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah.

35 **KATHERINE MULLET:** I do think it's an issue. Sorry, I was just nodding there. It's an issue. Because that's how we recognise and continuation of cultural practices and that's not recognising also cultural practices that evolve and change to suit cultures of its type that, you know, if you can't register your cultural property, then it doesn't get protected. There is no means for to us protect our heritage and our connection.

40 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** And also passing down knowledge of the practice of it.

45 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah. Yep.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: It's a good point.

KATHERINE MULLET: But I think fire, fire has a lot to answer. Fire operations, the way that they exclude people from operations, from divisions, from the incident management team. I know for a fact when the Black Summer was happening, Budj Bim, the State Control Centre was going to support the local team to put dozers into
5 Budj Bim around sites and there's all these stone arrangements and steel traps - eel traps, sorry, and they didn't recognise it had just been declared a World Heritage location. And it wasn't for the fact that there was an archaeologist in the room that knew that site intimately and knew what they were about to do, and was in a position to be able to stand up and say something, they would have put dozers into Budj Bim.

10
Instead, they were able to turn that around and work with the Gundjimtara mob and actually did it the right way and protected the site, didn't even put any machinery in at all. And most of the time you don't actually need to put machinery in, it's just that's their default because they don't know how to think other ways of, you know, fire
15 management and Country management. But if they had, can you imagine the destruction that would have caused to Budj Bim? But if it wasn't just for one person being in that space, and sometimes it takes just being in that room and when they continually make ways to close the door, they're continually there, we're fighting them constantly to try and get them to let us have cultural heritage roles that are field
20 roles and then try and say, oh no, it's too dangerous to have cultural heritage field roles, and I'm like, "Mate, I'm a GFF, I've worked in the fire front, you can't tell me this is any more dangerous than what you've actually got me trained to do." Like, I'm trained to do that.

25 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** I know.

KATHERINE MULLET: To - I can get deployed onto that fire line and manage my cultural heritage at the same time. That is not a problem, but they won't make those decisions in their fire structure, in the role structure.

30 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** And what, do you think that they would need one in every region, would that be kind of -

KATHERINE MULLET: Every district.

35 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yeah. Okay.

KATHERINE MULLET: You think about Country and amount of public land, yeah. And I don't think it's fair to have one person, like I had to go through in one
40 region to fight, as an Aboriginal person, against the whole organisation. You need - you need allies, and you need people in - stationed across Country. Because what happens if you get sick, what happens when you do burn out, who's going to step up for you? No one.

45 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** And just for the record, how big is the district? What does a district mean in kind of laymen's terms?

KATHERINE MULLET: From a fire perspective?

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah.

5 **KATHERINE MULLET:** I'm not that good with that, to be honest.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: That's all right. That's cool. That's cool.

10 **KATHERINE MULLET:** This could to get -

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: From a State point of view -

KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah.

15 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** - if you put them in a district would there be 50 staff that you're trying to - actually that recommendation that you think needs to happen, would it be, you know, 20 more people spread throughout the State?

20 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah, probably about 20.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Okay. Yeah. All right.

KATHERINE MULLET: It actually isn't that much when you talk about -

25 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** No. No. No. That's - okay.

KATHERINE MULLET: No.

30 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** That just gives me a context, yep.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yep. Yeah. But if you don't have people out on Country reading Country looking at Country, then you can't make the right decisions of how to manage it.

35 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** In your view, picking up on that, is there enough investment into TO groups now, you know, 2024, around particularly that point, proactive and funding for mob to be able to map Country meaningfully and effectively?

40 **KATHERINE MULLET:** No. God, no. And I work for GLaWAC and I'm the general manager on Country and I manage the whole entire operations in our Country reading programs, our joint management programs, our sea country program, our fire program, water program, our RAP, I manage all of that and we are not resourced enough to do anything that is beyond the bare minimum.

45 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yeah, so you're basically in the protection space.

KATHERINE MULLET: We're in the reactive space.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah, reactive protection.

5 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Reactive, that's a really good one, yeah, so reactive protection space rather than -

10 **KATHERINE MULLET:** If we're lucky.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, if you catch it, yeah.

15 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah. And if they call us in time. The State has made it very difficult for us to be involved in emergency management and the traditional owner organisation. There's really no mechanism that supports us and protects our liability and risk as an Aboriginal organisation and our staff. We've operated for a number of years in emergency, but we were essentially - we were - there was risks, litigation and liability to the org and to individuals we weren't aware of, because we
20 just didn't have the knowledge and we weren't empowered enough to understand, and we thought we were doing the right thing.

We signed up our crew with rosters, we were getting paid money, we made sure they did all the training that they have to do, but really didn't understand the implications
25 of this organisation that if someone did hurt themselves with one of our machines, vehicles faltered or someone was in our vehicle that wasn't one of our employees or they were in another government agency vehicle, how do we act to protect them legally and under insurance, and we weren't properly protected. So we have had to stop any fire emergency for the last probably two seasons. We're looking to
30 hopefully be up and running this fire season because we've actually signed on as a Forest Fire Management Victoria partner which means we have to be an FM Vic agency now.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah.

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KATHERINE MULLET: And we're under the section 62C of the Forestry Act approvals. We're a couple of weeks away from getting that finally signed off, and that will give us the same protection that Parks Victoria has to operate in fire, with Forest Fire Management. But we have to conform to Forest Fire Management
40 policies and procedures and how they operate on Country. We have to wear their brand of logos, we have to have their brand in vehicles, we have to represent them as if we are a government agency, yep. So to me it's bending the knee.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah.

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KATHERINE MULLET: But I see it as a compromise because you can't change the system while you're outside the system. And we want to show them how to do fire and Country management better and what better to do it than in their system.

5 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yeah.

10 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Within their prescribed prescriptions, and let's challenge their prescriptions and let's challenge their methodologies. It's the only way we can do it. And while many are not happy because we conform to the government, being better, being, you know, like in this organisation some - I think - think that I'm being a bit (indistinct) in that way like in that, but that's like you need to see it's the long - the big picture.

15 **COMMISSIONER TRAVIS:** Yeah.

KATHERINE MULLET: And I've got vision, holding to that long picture and I'm just going to keep holding it, yep. I'll make the system work for me.

20 **COLLEEN HARDING:** Yes. It's so - so proud of you.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah.

COLLEEN HARDING: And I feel that.

25 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah. Thank you. And I know pop is too. Yeah.

COLLEEN HARDING: But it's like I moved a bit more closer to your nan than I am with pop, yeah, and I feel it, I'm feeling it.

30 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Thank you. Yeah. Don't worry, I was being called (indistinct) when I was with nan and then went to nan with Ingeegoodbee.

COLLEEN HARDING: Yeah.

35 **KATHERINE MULLET:** And I told her about - about some things in that room when she came to me, when I stopped the dozers from going up Ingeegoodbee, but I couldn't tell her when I left for two weeks that they went up there and put the machines up there. I just couldn't do it.

40 **COLLEEN HARDING:** She would have been horrified.

45 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah. And I thought I'll fight this through putting in a report of harm and they just never followed up, and I'd love to know how many reports of harm they actually received and they have not at all actioned and started an investigation off. How many have they assumed that Aboriginal people have acted more emotionally, emotively, than actually professionally, because I was told that by the chief lawyer at Parks Victoria, we were told that in a whole room of our team that

we took our jobs too emotionally. We had too much emotional attachment to the jobs that we do and, therefore, it clouds our judgment and, therefore, they feel that we are not effectively delivering on our work. In a team meeting.

5 And my boss at the time, [REDACTED] tracker, stopped the meeting and he went around the whole entire room and said, "Why are you here? Why are you here? Why are you here?". We're all there because we are there for the emotional and the actual connection to Country and culture and for our people, and people that are not able to speak, and he goes, "Yeah, that might make us more emotive in our job, but that makes us more dedicated to this job than anybody else in this organisation".

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah, because they just see the wheels transaction on.

15 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: It's just, I've got to get my job done for today, today, like in this moment.

20 **KATHERINE MULLET:** Yeah. I have to sleep and I have to know that I can go down the far east and even if, have [REDACTED] disagree with me, I know I could stand there proud and strong and know that I made the best decision with the information I had, and when that call was to harm heritage, I still had strategies in place to protect the heritage or ensured that someone like herself and other mob had a voice at the table to make those decisions. It wasn't just me making them, whether she knew I was doing that or not, and I don't really care if she know I'm doing it or not.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah.

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KATHERINE MULLET: Because I know what I'm doing.

COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: Yeah.

35 **COLLEEN HARDING:** Yeah. Of course.

KATHERINE MULLET: And why I'm doing it. I'm not doing it for a gold star.

COLLEEN HARDING: No.

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KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah.

COLLEEN HARDING: Good on you, Katherine.

45 **KATHERINE MULLET:** It's probably a small step, to be honest.

COLLEEN HARDING: Yeah, and that's all you can do is just take it in small steps and steps day by day.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah.

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COLLEEN HARDING: Yeah. Don't go taking any great big steps because that's where you'll stuff up.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yep.

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COLLEEN HARDING: Yeah.

KATHERINE MULLET: Men don't rush.

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COLLEEN HARDING: No. It's not worth it. No.

KATHERINE MULLET: Never. No. Yeah. I don't know what else you want to know, but there's probably a lot in there, in the brain.

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COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: You've given us a good feel for recommendations as well.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah. Yeah. I think heritage is just some big things, and we're only talking like a small snippet of -

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COMMISSIONER TRAVIS: I know it is, exactly.

KATHERINE MULLET: Yeah.

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COLLEEN HARDING: Great. So -

KATHERINE MULLET: Thank you.

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COLLEEN HARDING: Okay. Great. Thank you, Katherine, and I would also like to thank Commissioner Travis for being present.

KATHERINE MULLET: Thank you.

<THE RECORDING CONCLUDED