



# Girtgan Kurtba Ngulmbiu Gway-un Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Plan

Performance Report 2021–2022

# Acknowledgement of Country

Girtgan Kurtba Ngulmbiu Gway-un is Gunaikurnai language for All Take First Step (pronounced Girt-gen Kurt-ba Nul-in-by Way-un). Parks Victoria thanks the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners for providing their language in naming this Plan.

Victoria's network of parks and reserves form the core of Aboriginal cultural landscapes, which have been modified over many thousands of years of occupation. They are reflections of how Aboriginal people engaged with their world and experienced their surroundings and are the product of thousands of generations of economic activity, material culture and settlement patterns. The landscapes we see today are influenced by the skills, knowledge and activities of Aboriginal land managers. Parks Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of these cultural landscapes, recognising their continuing connection to Victoria's parks and reserves and their ongoing role in caring for Country.

The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Plan outlines how Parks Victoria will support Parks Victoria staff and Traditional Owner partners to Manage Country Together. It has been developed under the guidance of Parks Victoria's Conservation Cultural Heritage and Fire committee, and the Aboriginal Partnerships Committee, and with valuable input provided by Traditional Owner partners.

## A note about terminology

It is acknowledged that there are a growing number of terms that Aboriginal people/communities are choosing to use when referring to themselves, such as First Nations people, First Peoples, First Custodians, Traditional Owners, Indigenous Peoples, Aboriginal peoples, [Traditional Owner group] Citizens etc. There are also a range of different approaches that have been adopted regarding the use of such terminology, including:

- *Victorian Government Self Determination Reform Framework (2019)*
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's *Traditional Owner Engagement Strategy (2022)* and *Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning Our Future' (2020)*
- *Yoorrook Justice Commission Interim Report (2022)*; and
- Current State legislative frameworks – *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* and *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

Throughout this document, the term Traditional Owner has been used to avoid confusion and to be mostly consistent with both Victoria's current legislative frameworks, and the Parks Victoria's *Managing Country Together Framework (2019)*.

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# Acronyms

<b>ACHLMA</b>	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreement
<b>ACHRIS</b>	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System
<b>AHAS</b>	Aboriginal Heritage Assessment System
<b>BLCAC</b>	Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
<b>CHMP</b>	Cultural Heritage Management Plan
<b>CHP</b>	Cultural Heritage Permit
<b>DEECA</b>	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
<b>FP-SR</b>	First Peoples State Relation Group
<b>GLaWAC</b>	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
<b>IMT</b>	Incident Management Team
<b>JFMP</b>	Joint Fuel Management Program
<b>MCT</b>	Managing Country Together
<b>PV</b>	Parks Victoria
<b>RAP</b>	Registered Aboriginal Parties
<b>VGO</b>	Victoria's Great Outdoors

# About this report

This is the first report against Parks Victoria’s (PV) *Girtgan Kurtba Ngulmbiu Gway-un Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Plan 2020-23* (the Plan), reporting on the calendar years 2021 and 2022. Girtgan Kurtba Ngulmbiu Gway-un is Gunaikurnai language for All Take First Step (pronounced Girt-gen Kurt-ba Nul-in-by Way-un).

## How to read this report

The Plan identifies seven **Areas for Action**; under these is a total of 57 **Actions** to be completed over the life of the **Plan**, and 15 **Key Indicators** that are used to measure Parks Victoria’s success of achieving our ultimate objectives.

This report is divided by the seven **Areas for Action**. The text in the grey area at the beginning of each section details the **Key Challenges, Why this Matters** and **Our Response** for each of the **Areas for Action** that were developed for the **Plan**. Below the grey areas is a summary of results against the **Actions** and **Key Indicators** of the Plan, and how Parks Victoria is tracking against meeting **our response**.

Each Action has been given a status depending on how it has progressed within the reporting period (see Table 1.)

<b>Completed</b>	Action has been met or exceeded within agreed timeframe.
<b>Annual work priorities achieved</b>	Significant steps have been made to meet action as part of annual program.
<b>Not Completed</b>	Action has not begun, or little has been achieved in meeting action.
<b>Abandoned</b>	Action was abandoned.

Table 1: Definitions of Actions status.

## Key Results

Of the 57 Actions identified in the Plan, two have been completed, for 45 actions annual work priorities have been achieved and 10 have not been completed. None of the actions were identified as being abandoned (see Figure 1).

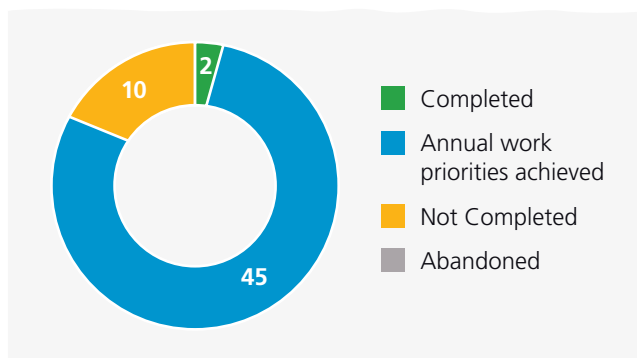


Figure 1: Status of all Actions (n=57)

Key themes identified throughout the reporting period include:

- Greater collaboration is occurring across all divisions of Parks Victoria (PV), which benefits understanding of our obligations to work with Traditional Owners to protect cultural values on the PV estate.
- Efforts are being made to achieve greater collaboration across government departments and agencies such as First People State Relations Group (FP-SR), Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV) and the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action (DEECA).
- Proactive cultural heritage protection and addressing the action areas of this plan is more likely to be achieved where there are Traditional Owner groups with formal recognition, good relationships with PV and strong processes in place.

## Next Steps

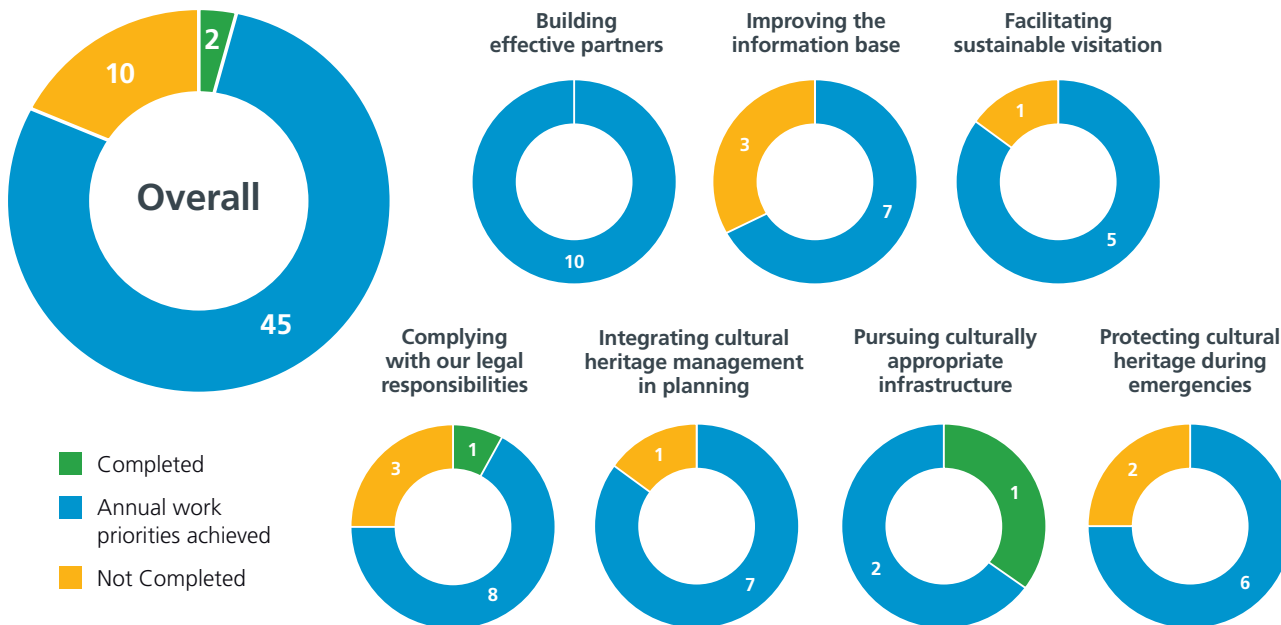
2023 is the final year of *Girtgan Kurtba Ngulmbiu Gway-un Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Plan 2020-23*. During 2023 work will commence on developing the next Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Plan, building on knowledge gained during implementing the Plan and in developing this report.

At the end of 2023, a final report against the Plan will be produced assessing Parks Victoria’s success against meeting the plans objectives.

# Girtgan Kurtba Ngulmbiu Gway-un

## Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Plan

### Actions status update



**13,800+**

Aboriginal cultural places registered on the Parks Estate; however, this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Less than **2350**

have accurate location and management details on ACHRIS

Less than **1%**

of the parks estate has been formally surveyed for Aboriginal cultural values

**6**

full restorations of large burial dunes to protect Ancestral Remains

**16**

National Parks and Reserves across Victoria with Joint Management Plans in place

**75**

Managing Country Together media stories produced

**58**

reports of harm or potential harm during the reporting period



**8**

rock art places where restoration took place including graffiti removal



Completion of Protection of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage procedure (PRO-819)



Development of a Power App to assist staff in meeting the legislative requirements, and to better protect, record and manage Aboriginal cultural heritage



Timeframes for assessing AHAS application have significantly decreased as MCT team members have become more efficient in completing assessments

# Building effective partnerships



## Key Challenges

- Many stakeholders use or manage parks, often with conflicting expectations and preferences
- Limited capacity to engage effectively and appropriately with Traditional Owners, in particular in areas without formal Traditional Owner recognition



## Why This Matters

Traditional Owner settlements are driving the systematic handback of national parks and reserves into traditional ownership. Whole of Country plans take a landscape approach and complement joint management plans as implementation strategies.



## Our Response

- Negotiate new partnership arrangements with Traditional Owners
- Work within the organisation and with portfolio partners to strengthen the enabling environment

## Results

For all 10 actions identified under **building effective partnerships** annual work priorities have been achieved (see Figure 2.) Significant effort has been made to meeting the **key indicators** and **Our Response**, however there is still substantial work and additional investment needed to achieve the outcomes being pursued.

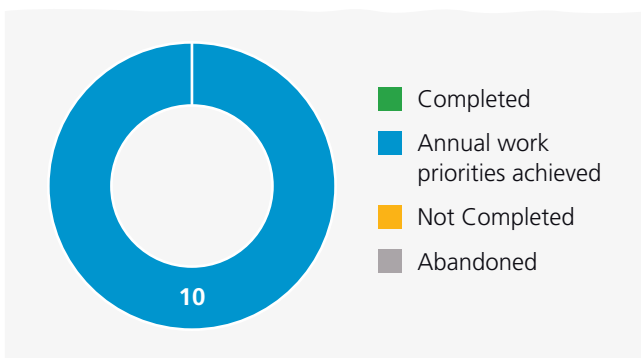


Figure 2: Building effective partnerships (n=10)

## Key Indicators

### Level of Traditional Owner satisfaction with PV's approach to partnership

Tools are being designed to enable measurement of satisfaction but are not ready for implementation as yet. The intention is to create a range of methods to monitor satisfaction and changes over time.

### Number of partnership agreements with Traditional Owner groups

At the start of the reporting period, two partnership agreements were in place. This number has not changed within the reporting period. Agreements are with:

- Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation 2020 – Implemented through an annual action plan.
- Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) 2019 – Implemented through an annual Joint Management Operations Plan

Over the reporting period, governance and engagement frameworks have been developed to assist participation and engagement with groups in non-recognised areas. These frameworks seek to establish authorising environments and protocols with which to develop relationships and partnerships. These are with Traditional Owners of:

- Far East Gippsland
- Gariwerd
- Wilsons Promontory National Park

A formal partnership agreement negotiation has also commenced with the Taungurung Land and Waters Corporation, in a process likely to continue throughout 2023.

The first 3-year strategic review of a partnership agreement is due to commence in 2023 with the Guanikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation.

For other groups, while there is interest in negotiating such agreements, current competing priorities and capacity constraints are proving to be insurmountable at the present time.

## Area and number of restoration initiatives undertaken in partnership with Traditional Owners to heal Country

More work is needed to allow Parks Victoria to accurately track initiatives given multiple projects being undertaken by different areas across the business and across the state. Figure 6 highlights some of the restoration projects that have taken place over the reporting period.

Restoration projects include:

- The Ponnun Pulgi Project has delivered restoration and protection of three large dunes and maintenance at over 10 resting places in a partnership between Parks Victoria, the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee and the People and Parks Foundation.
- Ancestral Burials Protection works led by Parks Victoria in partnership with Traditional Owners has seen large-scale dune restoration at three dunes, and protection works at over 20 burial Places.
- Rock art conservation protection works took place at eight high priority rock art places in Gariwerd in 2022.



Figure 3: Gariwerd Traditional Owners, Cultural Heritage Officers and Rock Art specialists conducting conservation works in Gariwerd, Grampians National Park.

## Our Response to Building Effective Partnerships

### Negotiate new partnership arrangements with Traditional Owners

Parks Victoria's first and only Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreement (ACHLMA) was completed in 2022 with GLaWAC for Buchan Caves Reserve.

There has been much interest from RAPs in adopting ACHLMAs across the Parks estate but limited opportunities to progress them. In 2023, Parks Victoria will review the ACHLMA process to identify barriers currently limiting ACHLMAs being used as a management tool.

### Work within the organisation and with portfolio partners to strengthen the enabling environment

**An Internal governance audit** looking to improving Traditional Owner relationship management within Parks Victoria was conducted in 2022. Work has begun on implementing recommendations of the audit.

One of the areas of focus will be to establish a procedure to guide the development of relationships, a reporting methodology (requirement to use ParkConnect) and to develop metrics to measure the quality of relationships. It is anticipated that this work will be complete by the end of June 2023.



## Traditional Owner procurement

A Traditional Owner procurement process was put in place as a 12-month pilot during the 2020-2021 financial year with a plan to undertake a formal review following the pilot period. The formal review has not yet commenced, and the pilot process remains in place.

## Aboriginal heritage protection system power app

The App, which is in its final stages of development, will assist PV staff in meeting the legislative requirements of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, and to better protect, record and manage Aboriginal cultural heritage. The app will be launched and promoted to all Parks Victoria staff in 2023.



Figure 4: Aboriginal Heritage Protection System power app

## Aboriginal Heritage Assessment System (AHAS)

An online portal that has been in use since 1 July 2020. AHAS was developed to assist Parks Victoria staff to manage and protect Aboriginal Cultural Heritage when conducting “business as usual” works. This system uses an online form where staff fill in details on how and where they plan to conduct works. This form is then assessed by MCT, and advice is given on how to meet legislative

requirements under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. For the reporting years of 2021 and 2022, 5187 new applications were assessed, and 1250 renewals. Figure 5 highlights how many renewals and new assessments have been completed within the reporting period within each Parks Victoria District.

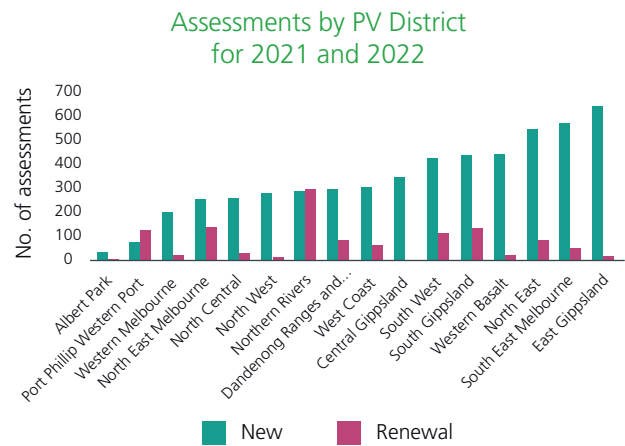


Figure 5: Assessments by PV District for the reporting period.

## Policy development and engagement across government

In the reporting period, Parks Victoria has been an active participant in the Statewide Caring for Country Forum co-convened by DEECA and Traditional Owner corporations. In addition, we have contributed to the First Principles Review of the Traditional Owner Settlement Framework and to working groups facilitating better coordination with Traditional Owners in implementation of flood recovery activities.

## Managing Country Together Communications

The communications plan was finalised in August 2022. During the 2 year reporting period, there has been a total of 75 Managing Country Together media stories produced for internal or external platforms. In the reporting period, over 30 presentations have been delivered by the Managing Country Together (MCT) Directorate to over 600 participants including Parks Victoria staff, external Heritage Advisors and Contractors, and other agencies who operate on the Parks Victoria Estate. Presentations have been designed to address key challenges associated with supporting the delivery of park management and projects.

Guidance notes have been developed to support project managers of major projects to understand their legislative obligations, when and how to seek the best technical advice, how to procure quality heritage advisors and other specialist advice.





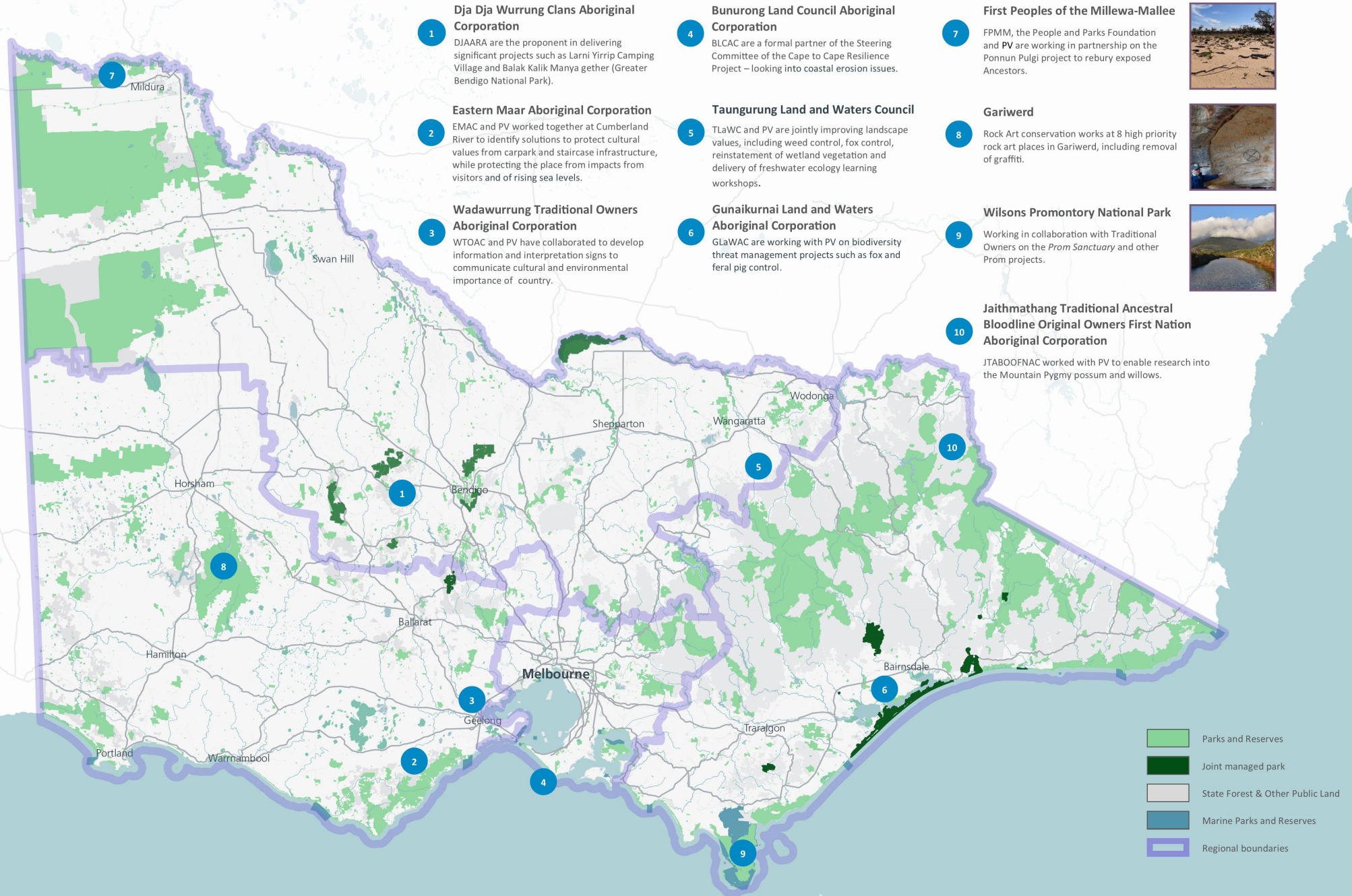
Barmah National Park

## Guidance on the Joint Fuel Management Program (JMFP)

Improved guidance on developing the JFMP has been produced for Parks Victoria staff over the past two years. This has had a strong focus on the requirement of Parks Victoria staff to ensure that cultural heritage values checks on Parks Victoria managed land have been conducted by DEECA in the development of the JFMP in the manner set out in DEECA policies and

procedures and any Memorandum of Understanding in place between DEECA and Parks Victoria related to Aboriginal cultural heritage protection.

Engagement is challenging for all parts of the organisation in areas where there are Traditional Owners without formal recognition, particularly in instances where projects, planning or events have timeframes that do not enable comprehensive and meaningful engagement to take place.



# Improving the information base



## Key Challenges

- Only a small proportion of the parks estate has been surveyed for cultural values; information systems are not up to date and data quality is often poor with 47% (11,633) of registered Aboriginal places recorded before 1990 and the advent of global positioning technology
- Lack of information about the threats to cultural heritage, including the growing threat of climate change
- No standard intellectual property protocols are in place
- Values researched on the parks estate rarely include cultural values



## Why This Matters

Management effectiveness relies strongly on having a comprehensive understanding of all landscape values, including their location and condition and threats to their condition, and the management responses available to us. To date less than 1% of the parks estate has been surveyed for cultural values. Furthermore poor data quality in statutory registers impedes preservation efforts.



## Our Response

- Improve the quality and extent of cultural information and knowledge
- Work with Traditional Owners to appropriately incorporate cultural values in park information

## Results

Of the 10 actions identified under improving the information base, for seven annual work priorities have been achieved and three have not yet been completed (see Figure 7.) Progress has been made to meeting **Our Response** and the **key indicators** in some areas, however 30% of actions related to improving the information base have not yet commenced. More work is needed to enable us to accurately track progress.

More investment will be needed to develop and adapt Parks Victoria's information technology systems to facilitate more effective management of cultural values.

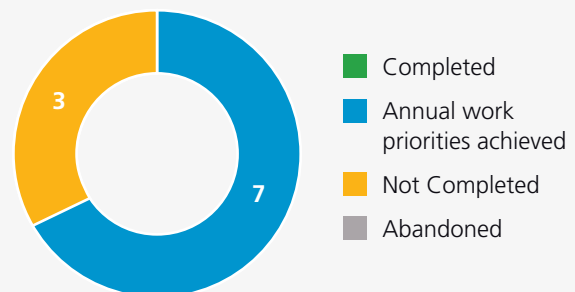


Figure 7: Improving the information base (n=10)

## Key Indicators

### Records for Aboriginal places audited, inspected and edited where required

Further analysis of the quality of the cultural heritage data on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System (ACHRIS) in relation to the Parks Victoria Estate has been undertaken. It has revealed that the information Parks Victoria has access to is actually poorer than what was thought when writing *Girtgan Kurtba Ngulmbiu Gway-un Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Plan*.

As of the end of the reporting period, there was over 13,800 registered places on the Parks Victoria Estate. Of these over 2,400 (17%) have been assigned class 1 data, meaning accurate location data, extent and information relating to the place is held on ACHRIS. This means for the remaining 11,450+ (83%) places, assigned classes 2–5; ACHRIS information is rated poor to unreliable.

### Cultural information and Aboriginal languages included in park information products in accordance with agreed protocols

Parks Victoria is working with Traditional Owners across the state to ensure park information products are designed by, or co-designed with, Traditional Owners. More work is needed to track our efforts but examples of activities conducted include:

#### Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation

DJAARA are the proponent in delivering significant projects such as Larni Yirrip Camping Village (Bendigo Regional Park), Balak Kalik Manya Walking Together (Greater Bendigo National Park and Kalimna Park),

Victoria's Great Outdoors (VGO) (Slaty Creek, Hepburn Healthy Trails, Boort Campground) and Lalgambuk Garrang (Hepburn Regional Park) with funding through PV.

#### Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

The Lake Tyers Camping and Access Strategy, Buchan Caves Cultural Mapping Project, Gippsland Lakes Cultural Mapping Project, Mitchell River Cultural Mapping Project, Shoreline Drive Landscape Plan, Angusvale Campground Landscape Design Plan have all been jointly delivered with GLaWAC.

#### Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC)

BLCAC are a formal partner of the Steering Committee of the Cape to Cape Resilience Project (Regional and Strategic Partnership under the *Marine & Coastal Act 2018*), forming a strategic risk assessment of coastal erosion issues.

BLCAC are also a partner in the development of Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park, as partners on the working group for the implementation of the Park and capital works program.

#### Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation

Collaborations with Wadawurrung to develop information and interpretation signs to communicate cultural and environmental importance of caring for Country in Ironbark Basin and at Point Addis.

#### Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation are active members of the Project Control Group for the implementation of the Tower Hill Activation and Linkages Plan.



## Our Response to improving the information base

### Improve the quality and extent of cultural information and knowledge

#### Rock Art and Resting Places

Parks Victoria has two cultural heritage conservation programs, the Rock Art and Ancestral Remains Programs, coordinated by statewide specialists. The aim of these programs is to work with Traditional Owners to understand, protect and manage these values. A Rock Art Action Plan has been completed and implementation of this plan has begun. An Ancestral Remains Action Plan has been drafted and will be finalise after further engagement in 2023 with Traditional Owners and the Ancestral Remains Unit at the Aboriginal Heritage Council. Work has also begun on a procedure to facilitate the return of Ancestors to the PV Estate.



Figure 8: Parks Victoria Cultural Protection Team working on Ancestral Burials in Northwest Victoria.

#### Storm Recovery

Parks Victoria has facilitated evaluations on the impact of the 2022 April storm event at several locations with Gunaikurnai, Wurundjeri and Djarra, utilising external heritage advisors. As a result, around 40 Aboriginal Places have been evaluated leading to improved information on ACHRIS in these areas. Additional Post Event Heritage Evaluations in East Gippsland are planned to be delivered.

#### Improving Data

Parks Victoria have been working with other agencies to improve how we capture, collect, and collate Aboriginal cultural heritage information.

Initiatives include:

- **Drones** – three staff within MCT have completed Drone training and Parks Victoria have purchased a Light Detection and Ranging drone.
- **Digital Twin Victoria** – MCT have been working with DEECA to provide input into the digital twin project, providing advice on priorities for areas to scan.
- **Field Map** – MCT is working with PV's spatial team to develop an ESRI Field Map platform for cultural heritage monitoring. This is currently in the development stage.

Environment and Science and MCT teams have been working together to coordinate their approaches to Information Technology, seeking improvements to the storage and management of large datasets. This work is still in progress.

A key challenge has been attracting more investment in IT to allow innovations that will enable implementation of IT tools and systems that result in faster responses to improving the quality of data.

Opportunities exist to work with other state agencies to achieve improvements to the way we collect Aboriginal cultural heritage information. Work has commenced to explore a short-form protection registration process as well as using 3D site modelling, which might better facilitate meaningful and large scale protection of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.

### Work with Traditional Owners to appropriately incorporate cultural values in park information

Parks Victoria is reviewing a new DEECA policy on Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and intends to incorporate an organisational position and approach as part of the renewal of the existing *Managing Country Together Framework*. Work has commenced to enhance Parks Victoria's information management practices and enhancements for data sovereignty is being factored in as well as creating pathways to allow Traditional Owners to have access to IT systems operated by Parks Victoria.

# Facilitating sustainable visitation



## Key Challenges

- Significant increases in permitted and illegal activities are causing harm to cultural values
- Lack of public awareness and appreciation of cultural values
- Inadequate resourcing for Traditional Owner groups to meet increasing demand for cultural tourism



## Why This Matters

Tourism and population pressures are increasing all the time and we are fast approaching carrying capacity for many parks.



## Our Response

- Support Traditional Owners to participate in the visitor economy on the parks estate
- Work with Traditional Owners to ensure impacts of visitation on cultural values are appropriately managed

## Results

Of the six actions identified under facilitating sustainable visitation, for five actions annual work priorities have been achieved and one has not yet been completed (see Figure 9). Significant progress has been made to meeting **Our Response** and the **key indicators**, however there is still substantial work and additional investment needed to achieve the outcomes being pursued.

Work has not yet commenced to ensure cultural values and Traditional Owner knowledge are appropriately reflected in the PV *Visitor Experience Framework*. Significant investment will be required to commence this work.

## Key Indicators

### Tourism products with cultural heritage elements led or supported by Traditional Owners

Parks Victoria has been working with Traditional Owner Groups to enable and deliver on-Country tourism opportunities. This includes:

- Gunditj Mirring on Budj Bim Cultural Tours
- Taungurung on Wawa Biik
- Wurundjeri on Bullen Bullen Tours
- Yorta Yorta initial consultation on their proposed new tourism venture.

Other Projects across the state include:

**Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation** are determining their own cultural tourism opportunities with access to parks supported by the Djaara rangers and local PV teams. Djaara ranger team cultural junior ranger activities have been delivered annually.

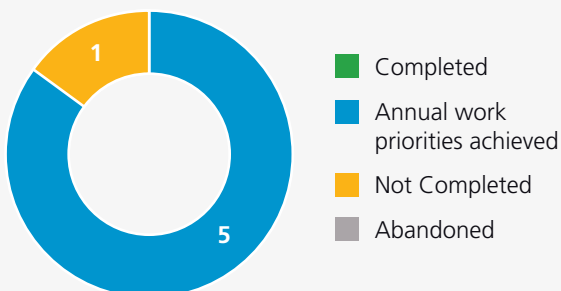


Figure 9: Facilitating sustainable visitation (n=6)

**Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation** with Parks Victoria have developed a *Cultural Heritage Interpretation Strategy* outlining opportunities for growth in this area. The *Buchan Caves Reserve and New Guinea II Interpretation Plan* commenced in 2022, due to be finalised in early 2023. The Interpretation Plan outlines cultural themes and stories that have been approved by GLaWAC which will be shared with the broader community. This plan also provides concepts for a Cultural Centre and other signature visitor experiences within the reserve.

Gunaikurnai presents to schools on Country as part of the Gunaikurnai Junior Ranger Program.

**Gariwerd Traditional Owners** have developed with Parks Victoria the *Grampians Peaks Trail Signature Experience Interpretation Plan*.

Funding from the economic stimulus program has been provided to support the development of a Traditional Owner legal entity at Brambuk, so that Traditional Owners are able to take over control and management of the Brambuk National Park and Cultural Centre precinct, employ Traditional Owner staff and be a recipient of government and other funding in the future.

**Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation** and Parks Victoria developed the *Junior Ranger Connecting to Wadawurrung Country Activity Book*. Released and published online in 2022 the Activity Book seeks to encourage and inspire children to connect with Wadawurrung Country.



Figure 10: Wadawurrung Junior Range Activity Book featuring Artwork by Wadawurrung artist Jenna Oldaker.

**Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation** and Parks Victoria have completed the redevelopment of the Dharnya Centre Precinct in Barmah National Park, and development of other external facilities is ongoing.

## Systems in place that ensure public access to cultural places is addressed in PV policies, plans and agreements and managed appropriately

The following plans, policies and processes have been developed during the reporting period that address public access to cultural places:

- *Protection of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage procedure* (PRO-819) outlines Parks Victoria's responsibilities for protecting cultural values
- *The Greater Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan* includes strengthened Special Protection Areas to exclude visitor activities expressly for the protection of cultural values.
- Parks Victoria in partnership with Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, delivered a cultural heritage survey at Dyurrite (Mt Arapiles -Tooon State Park). Dyurrite will be jointly managed by Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council from 2023.
- The Rock Art Action Plan sits under *Girtgan Kurtba Ngulmbiu Gway-un Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Plan 2020-23*. The three year plan was approved in 2022 and includes actions to work with Traditional Owners to reassess access to Rock Art places promoted to the public and rehabilitate those that are being inappropriately used.
- *Lake Tyers Camping and Access Strategy* (March 2021) has been developed with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation. The strategy aims to protect the cultural values of the park and, where practical, enhance the recreational experience.
- *Shoreline Drive Landscape Plan* was developed with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and completed in late 2022. The plan aims to provide a positive recreational experience whilst protecting the cultural values of the area. The Landscape Plan was informed by the Gippsland Lakes Cultural Mapping Project. This project highlighted camping areas needing to be closed because their current use does not correlate to the cultural values of the area.





## Our Response to facilitating sustainable visitation

### Support Traditional Owners to participate in the visitor economy on the parks estate

#### Review of Leases and licences

Legal Services at Parks Victoria undertakes an annual review of all legal agreements, including leases and licences, to ensure that they address current legal obligations, including obligations under relevant legislation such as the *Native Title Act 1993* and *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*. This relates not just to tourism operators, but all works and services on Parks Victoria managed land. Work to investigate the ongoing role of Traditional Owners in ensuring leases and licences for tourism operators are appropriate is yet to commence.

#### Licensed Tour Operators

Currently 4% of Licensed Tour Operators offer cultural tours or visitor experiences and 21% of operators are planning to develop cultural tourism products or experiences. Due to the extended disruptions resulting from COVID, there has been limited opportunity to engage affectively with Licensed Tour Operators in this space, particularly as their businesses recover. The Tourism Partnerships team within Parks Victoria is scheduling discussions with Traditional Owners to gain a better understanding of how they wish to work with Licensees.

## Work with Traditional Owners to ensure impacts of visitation on cultural values are appropriately managed

AHAS is used to provide advice to Parks Victoria staff about the risks to impacting cultural values during works and projects, including those designed to mitigate or control visitation that may impact on values.

Dedicated roles within the MCT Directorate work with Traditional Owners to provide strategic advice on the following, including how to protect values from inappropriate visitor use:

- Cultural Heritage Protection Specialist, including Ancestral Remains and burial places.
- Rock Art protection specialist
- Wilsons Promontory National Park Sanctuary program. Discussions to date have included the inappropriate visitation and activities at Big Drift. Given the sensitivity of the site, Big Drift has been removed from PV public facing website and PV social media.
- Following the 2022 flood events, a temporary team has been established to provide strategic advice to Parks Victoria on flood recovery in relation to Aboriginal cultural heritage.

PV and external Heritage Advisors have been engaging with Traditional Owners to consider how projects such as the Murray River Adventure Trail and Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing can address increased visitation as an impact, ensuring this is captured within the relevant statutory approvals.



# Complying with our legal responsibilities



## Key Challenges

- Organisational systems for monitoring and reporting that do not include appropriate compliance measures for cultural heritage protection
- Lack of adequate resourcing through project and program budgets
- Limited influence over third party approaches to cultural heritage protection.



## Why This Matters

Poor performance in meeting our obligations under the legislative and regulatory framework for cultural heritage protection will lead to significant legal/financial, partnership and reputational risks for the organisation. We are accountable to RAPs for the management of cultural heritage under the Act.



## Our Response

- Strengthen systems and tools for protecting cultural heritage
- Monitor and transparently report on our performance in cultural heritage protection

## Results

Of the 12 actions identified under complying with our legal responsibilities, one Action has been completed, for eight annual work priorities have been achieved and three have not yet been completed (see Figure 11).

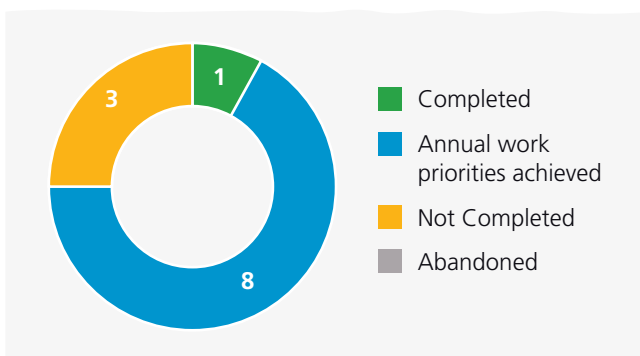


Figure 11: Complying with our legal responsibilities (n=12)

While much work has been completed in the reporting period to meeting **Our Response** and the **key indicators**, investment is required to improve the tools available to ensure compliance with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

Systems for tracking compliance with Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMP), Cultural Heritage Permits (CHP), ACHLMAs and other agreements established under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* are yet to be in place. These will reduce the likelihood of noncompliance occurring under those agreements.

More can be done to learn from harm reports and near misses. Information gained through reviewing the circumstances leading to reports could be used to drive improvement to work practices and could also be disseminated to Traditional Owners.

There are also opportunities to build a greater focus on prevention, including reviewing our systems, and processes especially ahead of periods of increased capital works output.

## Key Indicators

### Number of incidents of non-compliance with the Act or CHMP/CHP conditions

During the reporting period there were 58 reports of harm or potential harm, this included 25 in 2021 and 33 in 2022 (see Figure 12).

Reports related to activities of Parks Victoria, other land managers operating on the Parks Estate, Recreation uses, members of the public and adjacent landowners.

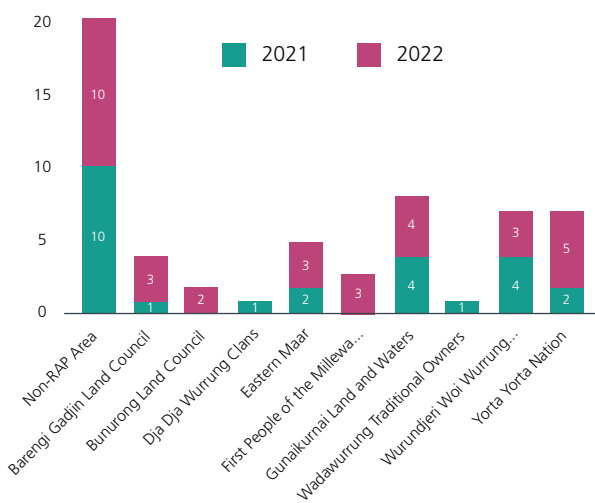


Figure 12: Harm reports during the reporting period by RAP.

### Systems in place that track and report on our compliance with the Act and monitor the effectiveness of cultural heritage protection measures

AHAS accurately tracks advice given to Parks Victoria staff including project managers. More investment is required to enable tracking of how the advice is implemented including identifying potential practice improvements.

## Our Response to complying with our legal responsibilities

### Strengthen systems and tools for protecting cultural heritage

#### Improving tools and systems

A lot of work has taken place at Parks Victoria during the reporting period to improve systems and tools for protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage. This includes a review of harm reporting under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* that was done as part of the review of the *Protection of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage procedure (PRO-819)*, which was finalised by Parks Victoria in May 2022. The updated procedure includes a process for reporting harm or potential harm and outlining responsibilities within Parks Victoria for reporting cases of harm and potential harm.

The review of the procedure also identified that there were several channels by which harm and potential harm were being reported. An online portal was developed in April 2020 that can also be accessed via the Aboriginal Heritage Protection System power app to make reports of harm or potential harm.

The updated system allows for greater connectivity with Gumnut, a whole of Government intelligence reporting system, and for documenting all stages of the process. The MCT Team work with Enforcement and Regulatory Services at Parks Victoria to manage and investigate reported offences where there is potential impact to Aboriginal Cultural heritage.

Key challenges that continue are:

- Speed of reporting.
- Reporting to Traditional Owners in areas with no RAP.
- A 'Lessons Learnt' process for internal reports.
- Resourcing.

#### Training

Investigations training (Certificate IV in Government (Investigations)) was delivered to Parks Victoria staff. Training encompasses Parks Victoria's responsibilities under the *Parks Victoria Act 2018* and the *National Parks Act 1975*. This includes obligations for protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.



Online mandatory Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training was implemented in 2021–2022. This training touched on staff’s obligations under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, however was not the focus. Work will continue to offer various types of training, working with Traditional Owners. The consistent feedback from staff is that being out on Country with Traditional Owners, is the most effective way of building understanding and appreciation of the importance of Aboriginal cultural heritage and the obligations under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

## Monitor and transparently report on our performance in cultural heritage protection

Parks Victoria is responsible for the protection of a vast number of registered Aboriginal Heritage Places. The strategic priorities identified are rock art and Ancestral Remains. A Rock Art Action Plan has been finalised to guide protection priorities and a Resting Places Action Plan is under development.

On an ad-hoc basis, and more formally as part of AHAS and major initiatives (recovery, VMFRP, VGO), Aboriginal Cultural Places are assessed, including the condition of the place, and the information is updated on ACHRIS.

A challenge encountered in protecting values at a landscape level is working within current standards for place registrations. Place edits and registrations on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register can be a time-consuming process and with over 13,800 registered places on the parks estate, 11,450+ having inaccurate management details on ACHRIS and less than 1% of the parks estate being formally surveyed for Aboriginal cultural values; the logistics of understanding and actively managing cultural values under the current system is an enormous challenge that would require significant resourcing to address.



Little Desert National Park

# Integrating cultural heritage management in planning



## Key Challenges

- Significant legacy of old plans that do not consider cultural values and challenges associated with climate change
- Lack of strategic alignment with Traditional Owner Country and joint management plans



## Why This Matters

The hierarchy of values and management objectives will continue to strengthen around cultural heritage under joint management.

There are places on the parks estate that feature heritage of value to both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people. Opportunities should be considered for bringing Traditional Owners and other Victorians together to decide how these places should be protected and enhanced.



## Our Response

- Embed appropriate engagement with Traditional Owners in all park planning processes
- Improve organisational systems to ensure cultural values are embedded in park planning

## Results

Of the 8 actions identified under integrating cultural heritage management in planning, for seven actions annual work priorities have been achieved and one has not yet been completed (see Figure 13).

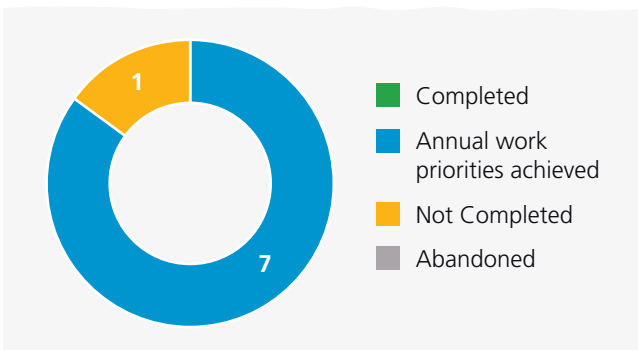


Figure 13: Integrating cultural heritage management in planning (n=8)

A key challenge in meeting the action under integrating cultural heritage management in planning, is that planning processes are triggered by Government priorities, and these do not always align with Traditional Owners priorities, timeframes or organisational capacity.

Planning processes are triggered by a number of factors including Government initiatives, new parks or changes in management such as natural disasters, increase in visitation or changes in Legislation or policy that will significantly alter how that park needs to be managed.

Timeframe and budgets do not always allow for meaningful or appropriate engagement with Traditional Owners.

## Key Indicators

### PV plans that have included opportunities for direct Traditional Owner engagement

#### Joint Management

Joint Management Plans are currently in place for 16 national parks and reserves across Victoria. Each of these plans are aligned with and deliver on Traditional Owner Country Plans, which include a strong focus on the protection and management of cultural values. Implementation plans in these areas are increasingly reflecting management objectives formed around Aboriginal cultural landscapes. Across Taungurung, Wotjobaluk and Gunaikurnai Country, a further 27 parks and reserves were handed back to Traditional Owners in 2022 as part of settlement agreements and will be under joint management plans in the coming years. Support for Traditional Owners to protect cultural values will continue to expand through these and other developments.

#### *Greater Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan*

The development of the *Greater Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan* process included a co-design approach with Traditional Owners of Gariwerd. The process offered opportunities for Traditional Owners to come on Country and provide input into the planning process. Their input was documented in a Cultural Values Assessment report which is a public document. In developing the Plan a governance structure with Traditional Owners was set up that was a partnership (equal decision making) model in developing the plan.

#### *Lake Tyers (Bung Yarnda) Camping and Access Strategy*

This strategy was a jointly delivered project between Gunaikurnai (Traditional Owner Land Management Board and Corporation) and Parks Victoria. This Plan has received State and National accolades in recognition of the collaboration between Parks Victoria and Gunaikurnai on this project including knowledge exchange, balancing access with protection of values and embedding self-determination into the foundations of the plan.



Figure 14: Engagement session on Country with members of the Gunaikurnai community during planning for the Lake Tyers (Bung Yarnda) Camping and Access Strategy.

#### The Wilsons Promontory National Park Traditional Owner Leadership Committee

This committee was established as a forum shared between representatives of the Gunaikurnai, Bunurong, and Boonwurrung Aboriginal corporations and Parks Victoria. The forum's purpose is to provide strategic coordination, advice and direction around engagement and decision-making at Wilsons Promontory National Park. This group is working to develop strong partnerships and encourage shared learning and outcomes across the Parks Victoria future management planning process and major projects.

#### Yallock Bulluck

In developing the Yallock Bulluck Access and Infrastructure Plan, Parks Victoria worked with Bunurong Traditional Owners to develop a cultural values assessment report which informed the future design consideration of the project.

### Systems in place that ensure the protection of cultural values is embedded in park planning

Parks Victoria is required to consider Aboriginal cultural and natural values at least of equal importance in the management of the parks estate, in line with the *Managing Country Together Framework*. Progress is being made to increase the emphasis on cultural values protection. Country Plans are important context for park management decision-making and where planning in partnership is advanced, then programs and reporting are aligned with Country Plan themes and priorities. This is an area where ongoing progress is anticipated.



## **Our Response to integrating cultural heritage management in planning**

### **Embed appropriate engagement with Traditional Owners in all park planning processes**

The *Land Management Strategy* (pending release) has strong reference to the *Cultural Landscape strategy* led by Traditional Owners where it recognises the different pathways they may take towards self-determination. The strategy provides organisational direction to apply the Cultural Landscape Strategy outcomes around strengthened Traditional Owner led planning and policy outcomes, and guiding principles of Traditional Owner land management practices around land management practices and customary uses being recognised as integral components to management.

## **Improve organisational systems to ensure cultural values are embedded in park planning**

Finalising the *Protection of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage procedure* (PRO-819), the development of AHAS and other tools to support staff, and the investment in technical specialist roles in Parks Victoria has helped ensure that park planning considers cultural values in more detail.

Efficiencies in assessment have been gained, with Parks Victoria becoming more experienced in conducting assessments and understanding assessment requirements.



# Pursuing culturally appropriate infrastructure



## Key Challenges

- Legacy of infrastructure designed without consideration of cultural values
- Lack of resourcing and planning for Traditional Owner participation in planning and design processes
- New and emerging activities.



## Why This Matters

Evidence is growing that a range of activities, and the infrastructure to support them, are now having a significant detrimental effect on cultural and other values.



## Our Response

- Ensure infrastructure development and maintenance do not harm cultural heritage
- Work with Traditional Owners to integrate cultural values in the design of new infrastructure

## Results

Of the 3 actions identified under pursuing culturally appropriate infrastructure, one action is complete and for two annual work priorities have been achieved (see Figure 15). Significant progress has been made to meeting **Our Response** and the **key indicators**, however there is still substantial work needed to meet these actions.

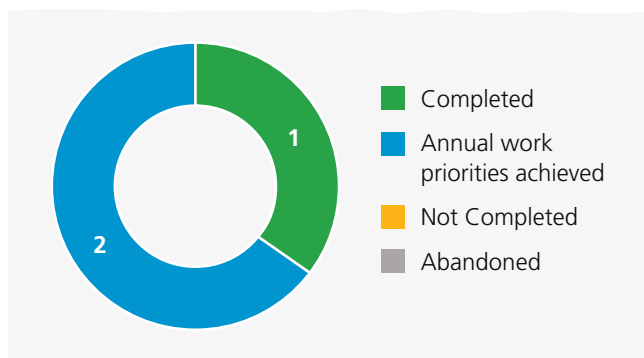


Figure 15: Pursuing culturally appropriate infrastructure (n=3)

## Key Indicators

### Capital projects underway with targeted Traditional Owner engagement planned or completed

Stronger collaboration across Parks Victoria has achieved some improvements in planning. Where this is in place, it has been more possible to allow appropriate lead times for Traditional Owner participation in projects, and to link interdependent activities. An example of where this has been achieved is seen at Wilsons Promontory National Park. Working collaboratively at Wilsons Promontory has enhanced Traditional Owner engagement and interdependent activities are accurately captured in program schedules and based on the knowledge we have to date. Planning is shifting to a landscape-based approach to preparing the statutory approvals required at Wilsons Promontory to provide a good foundation for the landscape management planning process.



Some of the key challenges in capital projects include limitations to budget or timeframes, resulting in mounting pressure to deliver projects in short timeframes that don't account for meaningful engagement or input from Traditional Owners. This pressure can create risks to relationships.

### **Infrastructure projects that promote local Aboriginal cultures delivered with minimal impact on cultural landscapes**

Advice is provided to project managers to commence engagement with Traditional Owners as early as practical and Traditional Owners should be provided with all information required. Traditional Owner groups have varying levels of capacity and availability to engage and thus project timeframes need to have a degree of flexibility and an adequate contingency. Sufficient resources to support Traditional Owner engagement is needed.

Technical advice and support is available to minimise impacts on cultural landscapes and seek to promote local Aboriginal cultures as appropriate and in collaboration with Traditional Owners.

### **Our Reponse to pursuing culturally appropriate infrastructure**

#### **Ensure infrastructure development and maintenance do not harm cultural heritage**

Parks Victoria's specialised Heritage Advisors working across VGO, Economic Stimulus and Recovery programs provide ongoing technical support and advice about our legislative obligations in line with the *Managing Country Together Framework* and associated procedures to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage. This has ensured greater understanding across the organisation of the legislative triggers under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and Regulations to aid greater understanding, particularly when recommending Voluntary CHMPs.

Parks Victoria has been collaborating with Traditional Owners, external Heritage Advisors and designers to proactively consider design options that avoid or minimise harm to Aboriginal cultural heritage, and/or where efficiencies can be gained that ultimately supports greater compliance. Parks Victoria has been working to identify opportunities for collaboration

by combining works into one statutory approval to effectively manage risk and better protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

### **Work with Traditional Owners to integrate cultural values in the design of new infrastructure**

There are currently no fixed guidelines or processes on how to incorporate Traditional Owners cultural design elements into Parks Victoria infrastructure. This works differently in each project and location across the state. There are examples where Traditional Owners have had input into the design of new infrastructure. More work is required to provide consistent guidance and accurately track implementation.

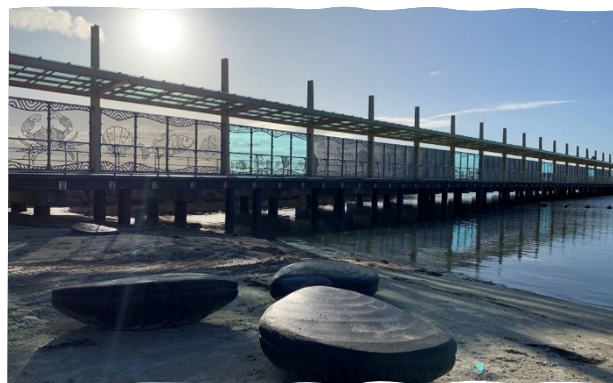
#### **Victoria's Great Outdoors (VGO)**

Throughout the development of the VGO program, project designs have been shared with Traditional Owner Recognition and Settlement Agreement partners for comment and consideration to ensure that designs are appropriate and incorporate any specific cultural considerations.

Djaara elected to manage and deliver the full suite of VGO projects in Djaara Country, allowing them to directly influence the infrastructure designs.

#### **Portarlington Pier**

A 120-metre-long mural featuring original illustrations by 105 Wadawurrung artists has been erected at Portarlington Pier. The artworks capture local stories of place, water, and journey. Etched onto metal and glass screens, they are a celebration of Wadawurrung Sea Country and the importance of storytelling. The project was celebrated with a meaningful smoking ceremony on the foreshore amongst the mussel sculptures (see Figure 16).



*Figure 16: Wadawurrung artwork along Portarlington Pier and the giant mussel sculptures weighing more than half a ton stabilise the sand around the pier.*



# Pursuing cultural heritage during emergencies



## Key Challenges

- Variable approaches and standards across emergency management agencies
- Insufficient funding allocated to cultural heritage management through the emergency management cycle (planning, response, recovery).



## Why This Matters

While PV and DECCA retain accountabilities as delegated land managers, including for fire and emergency management, the context and policy frameworks we are working in are fundamentally changing.



## Our Response

- Influence change in emergency management systems
- Strengthen our shared capacity to protect cultural heritage in emergency management

## Results

Of the 8 actions identified under protecting cultural heritage during emergencies, for six actions annual work priorities have been achieved and two have not yet been completed (see Figure 17).

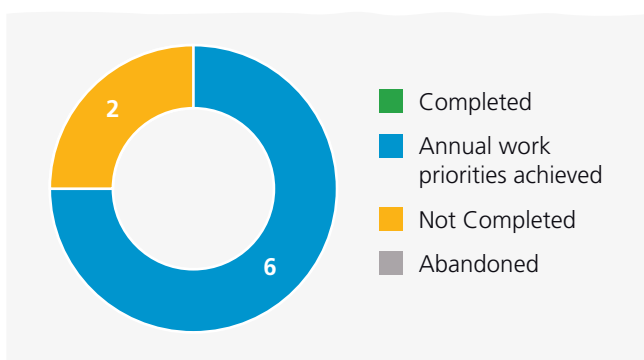


Figure 17: Protecting cultural heritage during emergencies (n=8)

Delivery of actions against protecting cultural heritage values during emergencies is complicated, as Parks Victoria is a support agency (as opposed to a lead) and therefore has limited influence over emergencies during an event. Significant work is still needed with partner agencies to ensure values are better protected during all aspects of emergency management and Traditional Owners are appropriately engaged.

Action relating to protecting cultural heritage during emergencies have been included in Parks Victoria's *Fire Management Strategic Directions 2022-2027* and have been communicated with the broader bushfire management sector in Victoria.

## Key Indicators

### Traditional Owner organisations involved in all phases of emergency management

The recent 2022 flood events have highlighted the importance of involving Traditional Owners so their knowledge of cultural values can be included in the incident management phase to avoid harm during response operations and to inform recovery priorities.

During the reporting period, Parks Victoria has worked with DEECA in supporting Traditional Owners in nominating and delivering cultural burns. Four Traditional Owner groups and land and fire managers have worked on projects to research, reintroduce and integrate cultural and ecological fire in the northern plains grasslands. This work has been funded by the Safer Together bushfire program.

Parks Victoria has attracted additional funding from DEECA to enable more effort to support and facilitate Traditional Owner led burns on the land we manage, with implementation planned for 2023.

Parks Victoria is supporting DEECA in providing fire training opportunities for Traditional Owner groups at their request and will continue to advocate for Traditional Owner deployment or involvement in Incident Management Teams (IMT).

### Systems in place that ensure technical advice for protecting cultural heritage is available during all phases of emergency management

Parks Victoria has identified the need for additional resources to support this action and is working with DEECA to secure funding for additional Aboriginal cultural heritage positions.

Parks Victoria successfully bid and received Treasury Advance Funding for April 2022 Storms and October 2022 Murray River flooding event; with further funding requests including an Expenditure Review Subcommittee bid in development. This funding is to enable rehabilitation to cultural values during the recovery phase, with work to be completed in partnership with Traditional Owners.

Parks Victoria has been working with DEECA to raise awareness of the need to establish a consistent quality assurance method for review of Cultural Heritage assessments on the parks estate during development of the JFMP.

## Our Response to protecting cultural heritage during emergencies

### Influence change in emergency management systems

The State-wide Working Group responsible for improving Traditional Owner involvement and the protection of cultural values in emergencies has not met for some time. This group is the responsibility of Emergency Management Victoria and made up of Government Agencies with responsibilities in emergency response including Parks Victoria. Parks Victoria is actively engaging with Emergency Management Victoria and advocating for this group to be re-established.

### Strengthen our shared capacity to protect cultural heritage in emergency management

Training in protection of cultural heritage is provided in courses for relevant IMT roles (e.g. Planning Officer).

This action needs to be jointly addressed with DEECA, Emergency Management Victoria and other agencies. Further work is required.



**Parks Victoria**

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