

**YORTA YORTA
WHOLE-OF-COUNTRY PLAN 2021 – 2030**

*The Country is us and we are the Country - this is our
home and nowhere else*



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35 Schier Street, Barmah, Victoria 3639. Tel: (03) 5832 0222. www.yynac.com.au

WARNING

This document contains references to deceased persons and culturally sensitive material.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Prepared by Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation with the assistance of Brian Doolan, Montane Planning. Maps created as part of a GIS partnership with the Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University.

Our Whole-of-Country Plan reflects the aspirations and directions provided by our Elders, members, staff and partners. We would like to specifically acknowledge the support of: the Yorta Yorta Elders Council and YYNAC staff, particularly the NRM Team and YYNAC Woka Walla Team. We also acknowledge and thank the Traditional Owner organisations both in Australia and overseas that have assisted and collaborated with us over the years. This plan draws extensively on information contained in the *Management Plan for Yorta Yorta Cultural Environmental Heritage Project 2003* compiled by Monica Morgan, Dr Wayne Atkinson, Theresa Bonhomme and John Craib.

DISCLAIMER

This plan is prepared without prejudice to any future negotiated or litigated outcomes between Yorta Yorta and the Government/s in relation to Native title, treaty, sovereignty or any other matter.

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Cover and page 6 photographs: Keith Ward

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Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

(Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2007. The Australian Government announced its support for the Declaration in 2009.)

Article 3

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Article 29

Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.

Article 31

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

Foreword

On behalf of the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation I present the Yorta Yorta Whole-of-Country Plan for 2021-2030. It is a document built on thousands of years of knowledge and existence in our Yorta Yorta Traditional Boundary. It reflects a long struggle to have our voice reflected in the protection of our country, our people and our culture.

I stood with my Elders under the giant Red Gums on the banks of the Barmah Lakes in the early 1970s listening to great Yorta Yorta leaders that will never be with us again and they spoke of the day when Yorta Yorta Peoples will be in control of caring for our country and culture.

Today Yorta Yorta Nation stands with self determining and sovereignty and we are promoting our Whole-of-Country Plan to describe our priorities and our solutions for caring for our Yenbena, Woka and Walla.

We all have a global crisis upon us with the commodification of resources and the escalation of man; the destruction of habitats and the increasing temperatures in our atmosphere needs to stop. Our Country needs to be put back into balance and demands strong actions for this to happen. First Nation Peoples of the World have knowledge and their continuing presence in their country this needs to be maintained, preserved and respected.

I would like to especially like to thank the writer Brian Doolan, Yorta Yorta Elders and all the deadly Yorta Yorta Staff for ensuring this Plan was created.

Now we ALL need to ensure that this Whole-of-Country Plan does not just sit on the shelf for the next ten years but, actually guides the way for Yorta Yorta Nation, and informs our partners on how we do our business, of looking after our people, country and culture.

We are responsible to our future generations, as they depend on what we do today to make the change for tomorrow.

Much appreciation and respect,

Monica Morgan

Chief Executive Officer

Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation



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Yorta Yorta language

The words and translations below are provided to assist the reader, while recognising that there are differences of view regarding the spelling and translation of Yorta Yorta words.

Bayadherra	Broad-shelled Turtle (<i>Chelodina expansa</i>)	Gulpa gaka	welcome
Baiame	the Creator Spirit	Gurranyin	eagle
Bigarrumdja	emu	Manu	camp
Bitja	fire	Narraga	hill
Biyala	River Red Gum	Iyoga	stone
Borpa	crayfish or freshwater yabbies	Kaiela	lower Goulburn River
Gaiyimarr	kangaroo	Mamel	Carpet Python (<i>Morelia spilota metcalfei</i>)
Goka	curlew	Natja	plain
Gunugudhula	brolga	Nurnamamdatba	kingfisher
Burnanga	Murray Cod	Nurtja	forest
Dhungalla	Big Water — the Murray River	Walla	water
Dhungalla Watjerrupna	Murray River Turtle (<i>Emydura macquarii</i>)	Woka	land
Djirrungana Wanurra Watjerrupna	Common Long-necked Turtle (<i>Chelodina longicollis</i>)	Wuta japaneyepuk	all together
Gane	The great rainbow snake	Yalka	Campaspe River
Gakan	swamp, wetland	Yenbena	a Yorta Yorta person
		Yenbenon	our people

Abbreviations

YYNAC	Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation
YYTOLMB	Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (Vic)
GBCMA	Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority
GMW	Goulburn-Murray Water
IBRA	Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia
JMP	Joint Management Plan (Barmah National Park)
MDBA	Murray-Darling Basin Authority
MLDRIN	Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations
MLLS	Murray Local Land Services (NSW)
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW)
NRC	Natural Resources Assessment Commission (NSW)
PV	Parks Victoria
VEAC	Victorian Environmental Assessment Council

PLAN SUMMARY

Our rights and aspirations

We assert our rights and cultural authority over our Country.

1. Yorta Yorta have occupied this land since time beyond remembering. Our sovereignty survives the colonial invasion and the attempts to marginalise and destroy us. We are the First People of this place and we assert our human rights and obligations to manage this Country as our ancestors did.
2. Nature and culture are one, without separation. We will reconnect our people to Country through the management of land and water, cultural practices and gatherings - to be free on our own Country.
3. We will implement, protect and share our traditional knowledge of Country. We will also work with partners to incorporate new knowledge, science and technologies.
4. Our cultural heritage is found throughout our land but only part of it is recorded. We will regather the knowledge of our culture across Country– the places and sites of tangible cultural heritage as well as lore, stories and the spirit life. Under the guidance of our Elders, we will pass this on to future generations.
5. The economy of Yorta Yorta Country is tens of thousands of years old. We were collecting, hunting, trading, sharing and regenerating the produce of our land for thousands of years before other cultures had emerged. Then, we were removed from our land and its resources. Managing Country is our culture, our expertise, our intellectual property and innate creativity, and it is part of our economic enterprise. We will establish Yorta Yorta businesses and jobs in caring for Country, using its resources and presenting our land and culture to others.
6. Our cultural authority over Country is only partly recognised. We want to increase that recognition and our rights of self-determination, through expanded agreements with Government and partners.
7. It is our goal to walk with others, to share our respect for Yorta Yorta Country with them. When others recognise that we are all part of Country and treat it well, then we will fulfill the obligations that were given to us by Baiame, the Creator spirit, and by our ancestors.

Making Country and culture healthy

Most of Yorta Yorta Country has been cleared for agriculture and settlements. That has brought great damage. Our first Whole-of-Country Plan in 2012 followed the declaration of new national parks on the largest surviving remnants of native vegetation and the removal of grazing and logging

from those areas. Some improvements in environmental watering have also been made. But much of our Country remains unhealthy and the threat of climate change is increasing everywhere. To address this damage we will:

8. Strengthen our existing role in managing Country and negotiate expanded recognition, access and responsibilities.
9. Protect and repair the strongholds of Country that have survived land clearance, and push to reverse the decline of cleared Country.
10. Pursue our inherent right to water entitlements that are legally and beneficially owned by Yorta Yorta, of a sufficient quantity and quality to improve our spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic needs.
11. Increase recognition and protection of the natural and cultural values of air and dark skies.
12. Conserve abundant wildlife populations; and protect and recover culturally important and threatened animal species.
13. Revive and re-establish cultural fire practices to improve Country health while reconnecting our people to Country.
14. Protect and conserve our tangible and intangible cultural heritage and control the sharing of heritage information, data and stories.
15. Push for greater recognition of the threat of climate change and demand urgent action through our climate change declaration.

Protecting and strengthening our role in priority places

The plan identifies parts of our Country that have special importance or are under threat, requiring action to protect and preserve them. We will seek to strengthen our access, authority and influence to:

16. Protect *nurtja gakan* - our river forests and wetlands - through cultural practices, burning, improved watering, and invasive plant and animal control.
17. Protect, restore and reconnect the remnant vegetation and seasonal wetlands on *natja* - the grassy woodland plains.
18. Protect remnant vegetation, wildlife habitat, views and cultural significance of *narraga iyoga* – the rocky hills of our Country.
19. Take action to protect, conserve and promote the natural and cultural values of a wide range of special places with priority on our major rivers, Barmah-Millewa Forest, Ghow Swamp, Lower Goulburn forest and wetlands, Gunbower-Perricoota Forest, Warby Range and Ovens River Forest, and remnant vegetation and cultural sites around Savernake.

Building capability, resources and education

To manage our Country we must continue to build and extend our capability, skills and prosperity, and ensure others understand, acknowledge and respect our Country. We will:

20. Gather, safeguard and promote Yorta Yorta knowledge and information.
21. Continue to build a sustainable organisation that can deliver the Country aspirations of our people.
22. Build economic opportunities based on managing and using the resources of Country and presenting Country to visitors.
23. Increase the understanding and respect for Yorta Yorta Country and culture among other people, through story-telling and other means, using a revitalised Dharnya Centre as the primary hub.



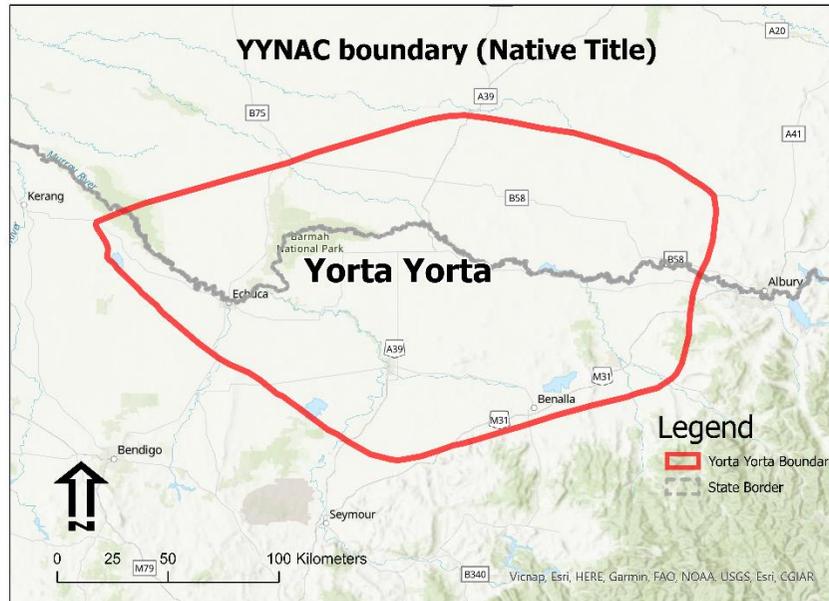
OUR COUNTRY AND CULTURE

1. Yorta Yorta

We, the Yorta Yorta Nation have been here since the beginning. We have been living for tens of thousands of years on a large part of present-day northern Victoria and southern New South Wales, centred on Dhungalla - today called the Murray River. We comprise the descendants of the original ancestors of our lands. Our Country extends from Violet Town in the south to north of Finley in New South Wales, and from Howlong in the east to Cohuna in the west. Dhungalla lies at the heart of our Country but many other rivers and wetlands make up our land: Kaiela (lower Goulburn River), Ovens River, Campaspe River, Wakool River, Edward River, Broken Creek, Ghow Swamp and Kanyapella. Many towns have been settled on Yorta Yorta Country: Echuca, Moama, Mathoura, Shepparton, Benalla, Tocumwal, Nathalia, Cobram, Corowa and Wangaratta.

To the south of our Country lies the land of the Taungurung, and to the south west lies the land of the Dja Dja Wurrung - traditional owner groups that are part of the Kulin Nation the people of Bunjil, the Eagle creator spirit. Further downstream along Dhungalla to the west, lies the land of the Barapa Barapa. To the north lies the Country of the Wiradjuri people. We share the lands and waters on our borders with those mobs, and common obligations to care for Country.

Figure 1 Yorta Yorta Country



1.1 Yenbenon - the story of the Yorta Yorta

The sovereign Yorta Yorta Nation represents the 16 family groups of our surviving Apical Ancestors. From the earliest days of the British invasion on to this Country — in what become known as Australia, Victoria and New South Wales — the Yorta Yorta people were left out in the distribution of their lands and waters. Without the consent of the Yorta Yorta Nation, the British explorers, squatters, and convicts trespassed on to our territory and claimed it as their own.

The Yenbenon¹ have fought for their rights, and even waged a frontier war up against the colonisers, much of which happened around the Moira Lakes, which is now called the Barmah Lakes. Yorta Yorta people became the victims of massacres,² violence, rape and exploitation. All without recognition of our rights, our loss of liberty, without justice or reparations. The arrival of Europeans around the 1840s had a devastating impact on Yorta Yorta. Within the first generation of colonisation, the Yorta Yorta population of some 5,000 to 6,000 was reduced by 85 per cent. The remaining Yorta Yorta population and other tribal groups from neighbouring areas were progressively relocated to Maloga Mission on the New South Wales side of the Murray River in 1874. Maloga was eventually closed and the residents were relocated at Cummeragunja Mission in 1888–89, which became the place where the Yorta Yorta were able to regroup. It also provided a base for the development of what became the Aboriginal political movement in the 1930s, led by some of Australia's outstanding Indigenous political leaders such as William Cooper, Sir Doug Nicholls, Marjorie Tucker, Geraldine Briggs, Shadrach James and others.

Between 1860 and 1994 there were 18 separate attempts to claim land and compensation by the Yorta Yorta community (Atkinson 1985). The Yorta Yorta continue to assert our inherent rights in the modern era. In 1998 the Federal Court rejected Yorta Yorta's native title claim, upheld by the Federal Court (Full Court) in 2001 and the High Court in 2002, holding that 'the tide of history had washed away acknowledgement of traditional laws and any real observance of traditional customs' (Federal Court 1998). This interpretation of the consequences of the displacement and destruction of the past has had a traumatic effect on Yorta Yorta people.

In 2004 a historic partnership between the Yorta Yorta Nation and the State of Victoria began when the Yorta Yorta Cooperative Management Agreement was signed at Echuca. Owing to the history of struggle, Yorta Yorta had for the first time a role in management of their Woka (lands) and Walla (waters). Yorta Yorta Nation continues with a proud history of strong fighters for social and land justice. This fight continues today as we head into a new era of self-determination. Today, our people live in many of the towns and cities of northern Victoria and southern New South Wales: But there are many parts of Country - that were 'alienated' and settled by the white colonisers - where we no longer live.

¹ Yorta Yorta language: 'Yenbenon' — our people; 'Yenbena' — a Yorta Yorta person.

² Ryan et al (2017-2020) Colonial Frontier Massacres in Central and Eastern Australian 1788–1930 <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/detail.php?r=5361>

Figure 2 The Story of the Yorta Yorta



Creation of Yorta Yorta Country
by Baiame and the
Great Rainbow Serpent



Yenbenon living on Country
for more than 20,000 years

Managing Country,
sustaining food & resources,
adapting to climate



1800s
Colonial invasion –
conflicts, resistance,
massacres, marginalisation,
relocation





Early 20th Century
Yorta Yorta regroup,
fight for recognition
and identity



1939
Cummeragunja walk-off
Yorta Yorta defy NSW
Government,
leave mission and
enter Victoria



Late 20th Century
Development of legal
& organisational capacity
to assert rights to land

1998-2002
Rejection of
Native Title claim
by courts



2004
Beginning of negotiated
co-management and
joint management agreements
with government



2020 and beyond
Yorta Yorta on Country, fully developed Yorta Yorta land and water management
capacity and businesses,
partnerships with natural resource agencies and NGOs,
influence over land use for whole of Country,
sole management of priority places



1.2 Wellbeing, health and the importance of connection to Country

Yorta Yorta identity inherently stems from a belonging to Country. This connection to Country is bound up with a fundamental responsibility to our Yorta Yorta ancestors who have been laid to rest in Yorta Yorta land. Yorta Yorta identity is created from our ancestors and mother earth. We are produced from this part of the Country and we need to rest here. We have a special and unique relationship with the forest that stems from a belief that we are inseparable from Country. Our ancestors, directly linked to those with us in the contemporary situation, tie us to this land. Our bloodline is created through our waterways, especially as Yorta Yorta stories tell of the creation of Dhungalla; this is the Yorta Yorta word for the Murray River system. Ancestors developed the management strategies that have been handed down to be used today, which is based on oral history.

Yorta Yorta people are inherently linked with their ancestors and with the Dreaming spirits. Responsibility to ancestry and connection with Country is very strong. It provides life direction. Knowing that governments and the broader community value and wish to protect Yorta Yorta Country is important to us but not enough. We must be involved in decisions and conservation operations in order to sustain our connection and fulfil our inherited obligations to care for Country. Our participation in decision-making must be on equal footing with other decision-makers.

Research by The Lowitja Institute and University of Queensland in 2018 found that by going on Country, Traditional Owners had better health (through increased exercise and better diet), and were able to have greater transmission of culture, increased family-time and enhanced spiritual connectedness.³

1.3 Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation

The Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation (YYNAC) is the representative body that provides an interface between governments and Yorta Yorta. YYNAC was established in 1998. It is registered under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (Cwth.), to represent the members of the family groups; to make decisions and act on any matters of significance to the Yorta Yorta Peoples; and to enter into agreements with any person, First Nations, Government agency or authority in relation to the protection of Yorta Yorta Country. YYNAC is recognised as the Traditional Owner Group Entity for the Yorta Yorta Nation⁴ and the recognised entity in agreements with the Victorian Government (see next section). YYNAC is also a Victorian Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic.) with decision-making responsibilities for protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage, and other matters, within the RAP area. YYNAC is a nationally Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

YYNAC undertakes a range of functions and activities throughout Victoria and New South Wales:

- cultural heritage work and projects including the legislative requirements of being a RAP

³ David, G., Wilson, R., Yantarrnga, J., von Hippel, W., Shannon, C., & Willis, J. (2018), *Health Benefits of Going On-Country*, The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne

⁴ See Attorney-General's Recognition Notice, Victorian Government Gazette, No. S 435, 26 October 2010.

- assistance with the repatriation of Yorta Yorta ancestors
- the operation of the Yenbena Training Centre in Barmah township
- maintaining the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Agreement with the State of Victoria over Barmah National Park
- the operation and management of a Natural Resource Management (NRM) team, with work on surveying, data collection, works and measures.

1.4 Partnerships

Commonwealth Government

YYNAC has an important relationship with the Murray Darling Basin Authority with the aim of influencing the Authority's policies and river operations to achieve a more natural water regime on our Country. Barmah-Millewa Forest is designated as an Icon Site within the MDBA's Basin Plan⁵ and also comes within the Commonwealth's environmental protection obligations under the international Ramsar convention and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

YYNAC is registered under Commonwealth legislation as an Indigenous Business Corporation. There is potential to extend our relationship with the Commonwealth and its resourcing support in areas such as national heritage landscape listing.

Victorian Government

Yorta Yorta, through YYNAC has entered into two agreements with the State of Victoria: a *Co-operative Management Agreement* and a *Traditional Owner Land Management Agreement*. Through these agreements the State recognises Yorta Yorta's connection to our Country. In 2004 the State entered into the Co-operative Management Agreement with the Yorta Yorta to facilitate greater cooperation between the Yorta Yorta and State in management of Country. The Yorta Yorta Co-operative Management Agreement was the first Victorian agreement reached outside the native title process and applies to designated areas of Crown land in Yorta Yorta country in north central Victoria. The State and the Yorta Yorta implement the objectives of this agreement via direct engagement between Yorta Yorta, Parks Victoria and DELWP. In October 2010, the State entered into a Traditional Owner Land Management Agreement. This agreement establishes the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board to jointly manage Barmah National Park in Victoria. The Board released a joint management plan for Barmah National Park in April 2020, with the agreement of the Secretary DELWP and the approval of the Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. The Victorian Government has recently supported YYNAC through funding for the development of the Barmah YYNAC Office. Agencies such as the Catchment Management Authorities have undertaken projects in collaboration with Yorta Yorta.

⁵ MDBA (2018) Icon site condition: The Living Murray.

New South Wales Government

Partnerships with the New South Wales government and agencies are less developed than in Victoria. YYNAC has good relations with NSW National Parks and Wildlife; however, there is no co-management or joint management arrangement for parks of other public land in the New South Wales portion of Yorta Yorta Country. Murray Local Land Services is the NSW agency responsible for agricultural advisory services, biosecurity, natural resource management and emergency management in the Murray region which extends from Kosziusko National Park to near Balranald. The Murray Local Land Services Strategic Plan identifies as one of the key challenges for the region ‘increasing the recognition of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, spirituality and connections to Country, as well as providing economic and employment opportunities’⁶. Given the extent of historical land clearance on Yorta Yorta Country in NSW, the protection and restoration of cultural heritage sites and surviving remnants of native vegetation on agricultural land and other developed land is critical.

Local governments

Yorta Yorta Country takes in parts of fifteen local government areas (Figure 3 next page):

<i>Victoria</i>		<i>New South Wales</i>	
Moira Shire	Greater Shepparton City	Murray River Council	Edward River Council
Campaspe Shire	Gannawarra Shire	Berrigan Shire	Murrumbidgee Council
Wangaratta Rural City	Indigo Shire	Federation Council	Greater Hume Shire
Benalla Rural City	Strathbogie Shire		
Loddon Shire			

YYNAC has varying relationships with local government. Strengthening relationships with those councils that make up the largest parts of Yorta Yorta Country (Moira, Greater Shepparton, Murray River, Edward River) is an important priority especially for protecting Country values in the planning and development process, in support for cultural tourism and events.

Universities and the research sector

YYNAC has a partnership agreement with Australian National University (ANU) for advice and support to establish a Geographic Information System (GIS) and train staff in the use of the system for mapping and spatial data analysis. Historically, YYNAC has partnered with a number of universities and research institutions to extend knowledge of Country and to monitor current conditions and threats. Some past research activities by independent

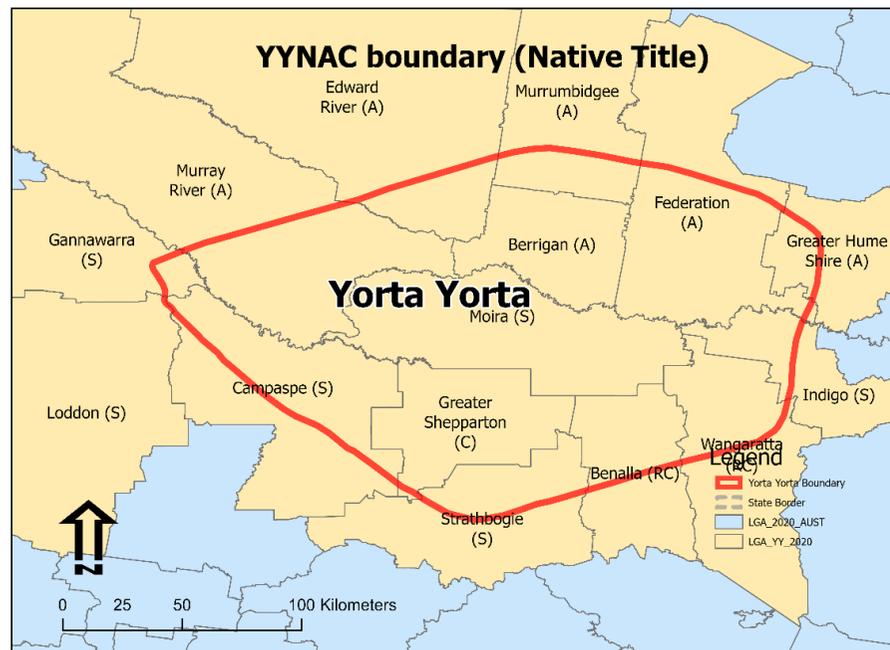
⁶ Murray Local Land Services *Local Strategic Plan 2016-2021*.

researchers, conducted without Yorta Yorta input and consent, has led to problems and impacts on Country.

Non-governmental organisations

Over the years number of environmental groups and other activist organisations have joined Yorta Yorta people in fighting for greater protection of Country and for recognition of Indigenous rights.

Figure 3 Yorta Yorta Country and local government areas



1.5 The previous Whole of Country Plan 2012-2017

The first Yorta Yorta Whole of Country Plan was developed in 2012 by YYNAC. It laid down three principles for natural resource management and a series of action 'platforms' including detailed actions against each platform. The principles established that managing Country was not a new concept of privilege but a right and responsibility, that cultural and natural resources are integrated not separate, and that Yorta Yorta are committed to working in partnership with other managers and authorities subject to equitable resourcing.

The action platforms addressed: knowledge; planning; engagement in research and monitoring; economic development and employment; protection and promotion of cultural sites; access to cultural and natural resources for education, uses and enterprises; management of endangered flora, fauna and habitats; improvement of water quality, flows and wetlands; an active role in fire management including traditional fire practices; engagement in climate change research and programs; protection of archaeological and historical resources; and sustainable forest management including silviculture. This plan sets out similar areas of action but uses slightly different categories.

The previous Plan has been successfully used to influence natural resource management agencies and their programs and investment, to guide the works and operations of the YYNAC Woka Walla Team, and to inform other planning processes and research programs of Yorta Yorta priorities.

A number of the directions and principles of the previous Whole of Country Plan have been carried over into this plan.

1.6 YYNAC Strategic Plan

This Whole-of-Country Plan reflects the objectives of YYNAC's Strategic Plan 2020-2030. They are: to assert cultural authority over Country and gain greater autonomy and independence; to empower family groups to be strong in our identity and determine their own futures; to safeguard and promote our cultural knowledge and intellectual property; and to continue to build a sustainable organisation that reflects the aspirations of our people.

2. Our Country

2.1 Lore

All features of the natural world can be attributed to the heroic deeds of our creation ancestors such as Baiame and the Rainbow Serpent.

'Baiame created the river by sending his woman down from the high country with her yam stick to journey across the flat and waterless plain. Baiame then sent his giant snake along to watch over her. She walked for many weary miles, drawing a track in the sand with her stick, and behind her came the giant snake following in and out and all about, making the curves of the river bed with his body. Then Baiame spoke in a voice of thunder, from up high. Lightning flashed and rain fell, and water came flowing down the track made by the woman and the snake.' (Dharnya Centre mural)

Mountains, rivers, waterholes, animal and plant species, and other natural and cultural features have come into being as a result of events that took place during the journeys of the spirits. The existence of those land and water features confirms to us these creation beliefs and demonstrates that our culture is always with us, on all parts of Country.

2.2 Woka

The major rivers of our Country, the undulating topography and the open grassy woodlands traditionally provided a rich place to live. There was easy access to water, food and material resources for making tools, shelter and clothing. The mighty Dhungalla flows through the heart of our Country and we have lived on the land to the north and south of the river for time out of mind. Traditionally we lived along all the rivers and wetlands of our Country: Dhungalla, Kaiela, the Edward River, the Ovens River, the Wakool, the Broken Creek, and wetlands like Ghow Swamp and Kanyapella, provided year-round food stocks such as fish, yabbies and mussels. The yearly floods that spread through the forests and out onto the plains enabled fish and turtles to breed, bringing nesting and wading birds in large numbers for months at a time. Kangaroos and emus grazed in the forests and on the grassy plains. The River Red Gum forest and wetlands provided a rich place to live, with fuel for fires and wood for building shelters and making canoes, weapons and other implements. Water continued to flow in the creeks as the floods receded, gradually drying out as the summer and autumn seasons progressed. Yorta Yorta camped throughout the forests and woodland plains and moved across all parts of them, hunting, gathering resources, and managing the vegetation and wildlife through burning and the conservation of plant and animal resources. Most traditional food collecting activities and lifestyle was shaped by the waterways and resources such as fish, crustaceans, freshwater mussels, turtles, cumbungi and the bird life that gravitates to the waters, particularly ducks and swans. Other resources such as reed spears, fibre for nets and bark for carrying vessels are water-based products.

The fertile soils, especially on the silts of the floodplains that had been carried from the High Country over thousands of years, supported a wide array of plants. Unfortunately, this also attracted the invaders of the colonial era and enabled the seizure and occupation of our land for sheep grazing, cropping and other forms of agriculture. Three main environments can be found on our Country: *nurtja gakan* – the river forests and wetlands; *natja* – the grassy woodland plains; and *narraga iyoga* – the rocky hills.⁷

Nurtja gakan – river forests and wetlands

The area that traditionally provided the richest food and resources for our life and culture were the riverine forests and wetlands, *nurtja gakan*. These forest and wetlands extend along the great rivers of Dhungalla (Murray), Kaiela (lower Goulburn), the Yalka (Campaspe), the Ovens, the Edward. The forests are dominated by *bijala*, the towering River Red Gum, especially close to the river channels. In good condition, the understorey is relatively open, and sedges and grasses cover the forest floor. The floodplain contains big and small wetland marshes and is also crossed by a network of small stream channels or ‘runners’ which fill with water in the late winter and spring. The bigger marshes and creeks may hold water all year but many dry out in the late summer. Away from the river channel, the land rises slightly on low sand ridges where Black Box replaces the River Red Gums and on the highest ridges, that are only occasionally inundated, Yellow Box, Grey Box and White Cypress Pine woodland predominates, as well as areas of Buloke. Moira Grass communities, which have been cleared in many other parts of the Murray Darling basin, still occupy large parts of the wetlands, and in the forest Mueller Daisy and other herbs and ground-layer plants occur. The forests and wetlands of *nurtja* are rich in animals, fish and birds including turtles, yabbies, Murray Cod, silver perch, kangaroo, gliders, possums and Superb Parrot.

For various reasons a greater proportion of the river forests and wetlands has survived relatively intact than the vegetation on other parts of Country, although their condition has been damaged by logging, grazing, recreation and other activities. The most intact areas are the Barmah-Millewa Forest, the Gunbower-Perricoota Forest, the other forests along Dhungalla, and the forests along the Lower Goulburn and Ovens Rivers.

Natja – grassy woodland plains

In the old days the great floods extended beyond the *nurtja gakan* forests, out onto grassy woodland plains of our Country, *natja*. That was before Dhungalla and other rivers were regulated upstream by the building of dams. In some cases, the ancient course of the rivers and creeks was different to today and these ‘palaeo’ streams ran through the plains until they were blocked by silt or geological movements like the Cadell Fault. Wind-blown sands formed crescent-shaped lunette dunes and these sometimes developed into substantial lakes such as Ghow Swamp or ephemeral wetlands such as Kanyapella. Heavy rains created hundreds of small marshes and wetlands across the plains, providing habitat for migratory waterbirds and the breeding of fish, frogs and yabbies.

⁷ These environments occur across several national IBRA bioregions. *Nurtja gakan* occurs mainly in the Murray Fans sub-region; *natja* occurs within the Murray Fans and Victorian Riverina sub-regions; and *narraga iyoga* occurs largely within the Inland Slopes sub-region.

The woodlands are made up of Box species, White Cypress-pine, Buloke and wattles such as River Coobah. Pea shrubs make up the understorey and in good condition the ground layer contains a wide range of Common Rush, Wallaby Grass, Spear Grass, and other grasses, lilies and saltbush (chenopod) species.

In parts of the plains the vegetation varies. On the sandier soils stretching from Nathalia to Tungamah the woodland become more open with less grass cover. In the southern eastern parts of our Country around Wangaratta and Benalla, areas of Box-Ironbark forests occur where the plains rise slightly on to low hills of 150 to 230m. Eastern Grey Kangaroos and Emu were traditionally abundant in these woodlands and other animals like the Brolga, Plains Wanderer, Swift Parrot and Tree Goanna would have been much more common than today.

Unfortunately, like many other parts of south-eastern Australia, the grassy woodlands of the plains is the part of Yorta Yorta Country that has been most severely cleared and damaged.

Narraga iyoga – the rocky hills

Standing out from the great ancient floodplain of Dhungalla, *narraga iyoga* the rocky hills are very special. These are observation points, places of ceremony and ritual, and places with particular plants and animals not found in the other parts of our Country.

The rocky hills are not a continuous area. They occur as isolated outcrops of granitic rock, with a few forming larger groups of hills. The most substantial of these are the Warby Ranges near Glenrowan which rise to approximately 500 metres. In New South Wales, the hills such as *Boomanoomana* (Mt Gwynne) and Boat Rock are lower (below 220m) and isolated, but their importance for culture, traditional resources and other factors is just as great.

Vegetation on the rocky hills varies from place to place. Blakely's Red Gum and Red Stringybark are among the most common trees, with patches of White Cypress-pine. In the Warby Ranges, Austral Grass-trees and heathy plants are common, and occurrences of Mugga Ironbark trees are found in the nearby Killawarra Forest.

The outcrops and crevices of the rocky hills provide habitat for many types of reptiles including skinks, Lace Monitors and Carpet Pythons. Squirrel Gliders and Feathertail Gliders occupy the forests and woodlands of the hills, and birds include the Wedge-tailed Eagle, Turquoise Parrot, Powerful Owl, spine bills and tree-creepers. Swamp Wallabies occupy the scrubber areas of the hill forests.

Water features are a very important element of *narraga iyoga*. Waterfalls and springs occur in the Warby Ranges. Rocky outcrops such as Boat Rock capture rainwater. The water at these locations was important as a resource during journeys, and they are also important cultural places where spirits reside and cultural rituals were traditionally undertaken.

The rocky hills also occur in the north east part of our Country, but in this part much of the original vegetation has been cleared than on the hills to the south, in Victoria.

2.3 Walla

Yorta Yorta are river people. Water is the lifeblood of our Country: Dhungalla and the other rivers, the floodplains, the wetlands, the watering holes in dry seasons, and the springs and waterfalls of the rocky hills in the rainy season. Water feeds the forests, the swamps, the ephemeral billabongs, and for thousands of years has supplied our people with fish, yabbies, game, plant foods and materials for living. Higher and lower levels of water are part of the natural annual cycle in rivers, with overbank flows feeding into the marshes and lower areas in winter and spring, and then progressively drying out during summer and autumn.

Since the colonial invasion, water has been turned into property. In marginalising Yorta and Yorta on our land, our access to water has also been marginalised. The reservation of water for the environment was a step forward and one that Yorta Yorta campaigned long and hard for in the 1990s and 2000s. But environmental water is not enough. We are the First Nation people of this place the water on our Country is owned and controlled by others. We will not have our water managed on our behalf. We assert our rights to 'cultural flows' - the water necessary to our culture, our Country and our economic livelihood. This is our inherent right.⁸

The uses of water by Yorta Yorta and the customary obligations that attach to it have been asserted since the inception of the Living Murray Initiative:

- access to drinking water
- fishing
- collecting food, fibre, medicines, and other sustenance
- the responsibility to pass on unpolluted water downstream
- the right to protect cultural knowledge
- to pass knowledge on and provide cultural education
- to protect and access particular sites and species
- to maintain song lines and story lines involving the river.⁹

2.4 Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage includes both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, encompassing artefacts and remains as well as lore, stories, rituals and practices. The Yorta Yorta people have occupied this land for many thousands of years throughout periods of great change. The remains of our

⁸ MLDRIN and NBAN (2010) *Echuca Declaration*

⁹ Morgan, M., Stehlein, L. and Weir, J. (2004) Indigenous Rights to Water in the Murray Darling Basin. In Support of the Indigenous Final Report to the Living Murray Initiative, Research Paper 14, AIATSIS, Canberra.

ancestors found at Ghow Swamp have been dated at between 19,000 and 22,000 years before the present¹⁰. This was the time referred to as the 'last glacial maximum' when climatic conditions would have been much different to now. We also know that the Yorta Yorta cultural story of a great flood which drove the people out of the forest and up onto the sandhills, corresponds to an uplift of the Cadell Fault near the Bama Sandhills around 8,000 to 10,000 years ago¹¹.

Cultural mapping has only been undertaken on a fraction of our Country but we know that there are likely to be a huge number of sites with tangible heritage as well as many places with other cultural importance. A survey in the 1990s of just a small proportion of the Barmah Forest identified almost 200 sites, including a burial site, stone artefact scatters, mounds, middens and scarred trees.



Waterfall in the Warby Range

¹⁰ Stone, T. & Cupper, M.L. (2003) *Last Glacial Maximum ages for robust humans at Kow Swamp, southern Australia*, Journal of Human Evolution, Vol 45: 2.

¹¹ Atkinson, W. 2005, Yorta Yorta Occupation and the Search for Common Ground, Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria 117(1): 1-22.

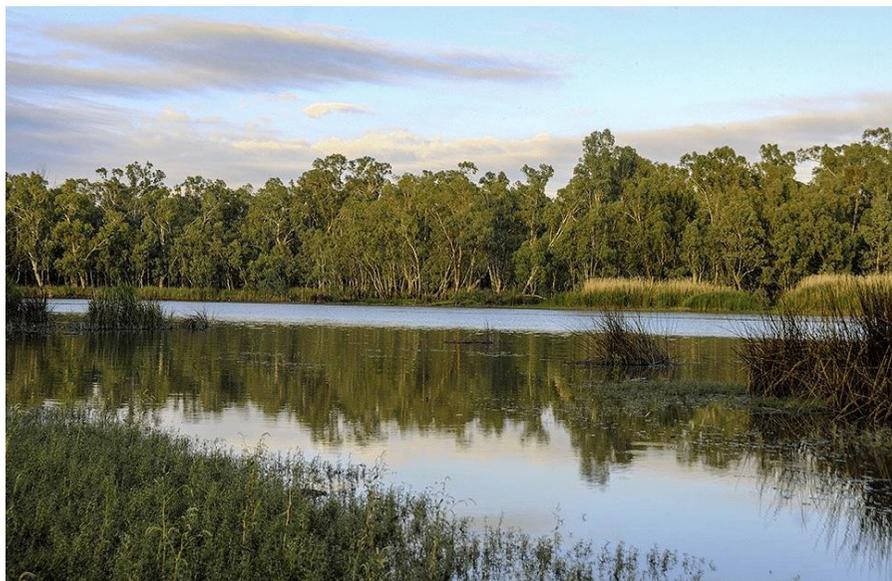
3. Threats to Country

3.1 The legacy of Yorta Yorta marginalisation

Many of the impacts on our Country and on our right to manage it, flow from the original actions by governments and settlers to marginalise us on our own land. The marginalisation of Indigenous people was recognised by the High Court of Australia in 1991 but the concept of native title and the legislation that flowed from it were a sorry compromise, designed to fit the uncomfortable truth that had been finally acknowledged into the existing legal system without fully redressing the injustice. Our sovereign interests in land and water are much greater than those areas native title.

Figure 4 The impacts of invasion

Barmah Lake (below left) was the site of a massacre of at least 26 Yorta Yorta men, women and children in 1843. In the 1870s, after being driven from the pastoral runs, Yorta Yorta people were moved to the Maloga Mission (bottom left 'King Billy's Camp' at Maloga, 1891. (Nicholas Caire, courtesy State Library Victoria)

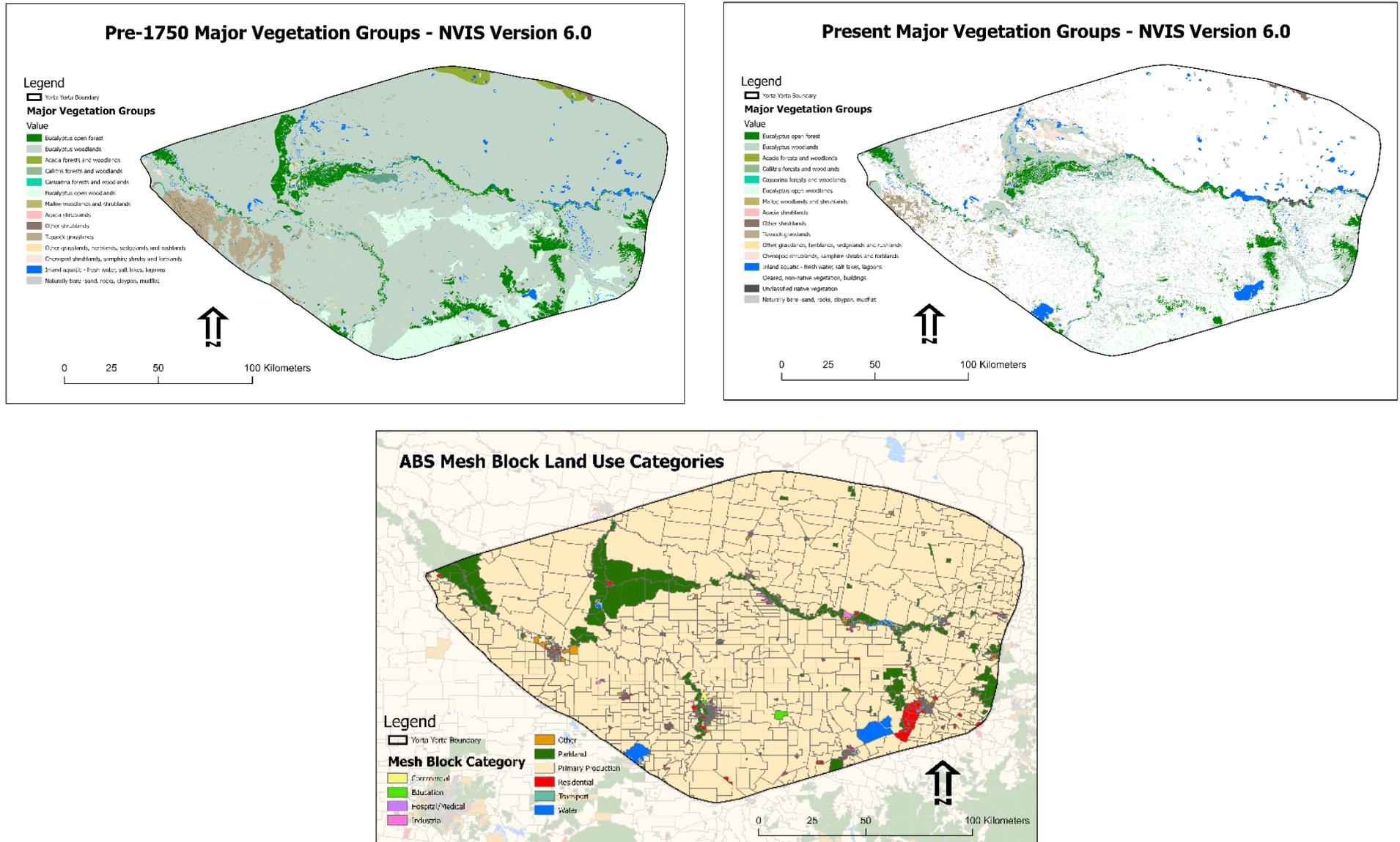


3.2 Clearance of native vegetation

Our Country was once entirely covered by woodlands, forests and wetlands. In the last two hundred years more than 75% of Yorta Yorta Country has been cleared for agriculture, stock pasture and settlements. That has brought great damage to the land, to rivers and to the air. .

Figure 5 Past and present native vegetation cover on Yorta Yorta Country, and current land use

More than 75% of native vegetation cover has been cleared from Yorta Yorta Country since the colonial invasion – upper maps (National Vegetation Information System V6.0)
 Primary production on cleared land, mainly grazing and cropping, is now the dominant land use – lower map (ABS ASGS Mesh Blocks 2016)



To understand what has been lost we only need read the description of Dunbulbalane, near Numurkah, which is now mainly a landscape of crops and pasture. In the late 1800s it was described by an observer:

"The country originally was very beautiful in the Spring. In the paddocks left in their original state there were Murray pines, black and golden wattles, other small wattle scrub, grey box and red gum trees, buttercups, harbingers of spring, rice flowers (Pimelea), swamp peas, brilliant purple peas, which we called wild violets, everlastings, blue bells, chocolate flowers, billy buttons, and many orchids including spider, snake and sun orchids, greenhoods, blue and pink fairies. There were kangaroos, koalas, wallabies, possums, native cats, big goannas, with innumerable birds particularly water birds. It was indeed a lovely land in those early days'.¹²

In New South Wales the few surviving pockets of native vegetation are isolated and mostly disconnected, which creates a barrier to the movement of native animals and birds between their potential habitat. In Victoria, there is more native vegetation in total, but it is highly fragmented and much of it survives on long, narrow roadside reserves and other patches that are under pressure from use and development.¹³

As a consequence of these devastating losses, the remnant forests and wetlands on public land such as are even more precious and important in protecting the native ecosystems, plants, animals and cultural heritage values of our Country. Our first Whole of Country Plan in 2012 followed the declaration of new national parks on the largest surviving remnants of native vegetation - Barmah-Millewa, Gunbower-Perricoota, Warby Range and-Lower Goulburn and along Dhungalla. That led to the removal of grazing and logging from those areas, and some improvements in environmental watering have also been made. But much of our Country remains damaged and the threat of climate change is increasing everywhere, driven by too much burning of fossil fuels and destroying the capacity of our vegetation, soil and water to remove the carbon emissions that result.

3.3 Water regulation and quality

Most of the rivers on Yorta Yorta Country have been dammed, regulated and licensed for high levels of water extraction. The alteration of the natural water cycle of our rivers and the floodplain forests and wetlands by river regulation over the last century has been known, even by non-Indigenous observers, for decades¹⁴. The river systems are operated for a complex range of objectives including township water supply, irrigated farming, flood mitigation and hydro-electricity generation. Snowmelt and winter-spring rains are now captured and detained by the Hume Dam, Dartmouth Dam, Lake Eildon and other water storages. Water is generally released from September to May, largely opposite to the natural hydrology of higher winter-spring flows and lower summer-autumn flows. This alteration in the timing and level of water flows has brought major changes to forests and

¹² Rudd, A. J. (1976) *Katamatite. The First 100 Years 1876-1976*. Privately published.

¹³ Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (2011) *Remnant Native Investigation Report Final Report*.

¹⁴ Dexter, B.D., Rose, H.J. and Davis, N. (1986), River regulation and associated forest management problems in the River Murray red gum forests. *Australian Forestry* 49(1): 16–27.

floodplains, including interference with natural flowering and growth stages, altering the natural thinning of regenerating River Red Gum stands, and creating altered conditions that preference other plants including weeds and invasive native species. Modifying the watering regime is complicated by downstream demands for irrigation and domestic water supply in Victoria and South Australia. When unplanned floods do occur the natural movement of the water across the floodplains is obstructed by levees that were built last century to protect farmland and towns. The extent of seasonal wetlands on our Country is still in serious decline.¹⁵

3.4 Climate change impacts

Yorta Yorta have occupied this Country for tens of thousands of years and have lived through many changes in climate. We have shown that we can adapt and cope with those changes. But this time is different. In the past the climate changed from natural causes, often gradually over long periods. Now, humans are causing rapid and severe changes by clearing forests, burning fossil fuels, and damaging the capacity of our soils and waterways to store carbon. Those impacts are plain to see on Yorta Yorta Country over the last two hundred years. Average temperatures on our Country have risen by 1.2° to 1.4°C since 1950, and average annual rainfall has decreased by 100 to 200 millimetres in the same period. By the 2030s daily maximum temperatures are projected to increase on average by around 1° further. Winter and spring rainfall is likely to decrease while extreme weather events will increase in frequency and severity.¹⁶

The impacts of climate change are already occurring and will increase and evolve further. They are likely to include a gradual drying in soils and vegetation; lower average stream flows punctuated by extreme rainfall and storm events; disruption to the normal migration, breeding and flowering of flora and fauna; stress on vulnerable native plants and animals that enables invasive species to take hold; heat stress on people, communities and tourists; and an increase in severe fire danger days.

3.5 Unhealthy fire

Fire is a natural process on Yorta Yorta Country but its effects vary from place to place. Floodplain forests are more sensitive to fire than the grassy woodlands and rocky hills. River Red Gums depend on flooding for regeneration, unlike many other eucalypt species that are adapted to or dependent on fire. They are particularly sensitive to high-intensity fire, but even low-intensity fire can kill seedlings and young trees. Old trees may be more vulnerable to fire because hollows and surface root systems can allow fire to penetrate the tree, leading to its collapse. Fires in River Red Gum forests are generally carried by fine fuels such as leaves and grass in the ground layer and are slow-moving.

¹⁵ DELWP 2020 *Victorian Land Cover Time Series 1985-2019*.

¹⁶ Clarke J.M., Grose M., Thatcher M., Round V. & Heady, C. (2019) *Goulburn Climate Projections*, CSIRO Melbourne.

Yorta Yorta have used fire to manage Country and as a cultural practice for thousands of years. By excluding us and other Traditional Owners from fire management in the past, a great deal of knowledge has been ignored and mistakes have been made. Cultural fire is careful, patient and based on close observation of local conditions by those who know the land well. Fire has been The Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy defines cultural fire as:

'Fire deliberately put into the landscape authorized and led by Traditional Owners of that Country, for a variety of purposes including but not limited to ceremony, protection of cultural and natural assets, fuel reduction, regeneration and management of food, fibre and medicines, flora regeneration, fauna habitat protection and healing Country's spirit.'¹⁷

The six principles underpinning the strategy are:

- cultural burning is right fire, right time, right way and for the right (cultural reasons), according to lore
- burning is a cultural responsibility
- cultural fire is living knowledge
- monitoring, evaluation and research support cultural fire objectives and enable adaptive learning
- Country is managed holistically
- cultural fire is healing.

Cultural fire requires a change to the approaches that have dominated fire agencies for many decades. Typically, those approaches have entailed large-scale burning at higher temperatures, generally with the overriding aim of clearing large amounts of fuel to reduce risk levels, and occasionally . Cultural burns are cooler burns in smaller patches, designed to clear small amounts of fuel like leaf litter and fine woody fuels while larger fuels like logs are left as habitat for reptiles, insects and other animals. Over time a mosaic of recently burnt and longer unburnt patches develops, providing a richer variety of conditions for plants and wildlife.

Cultural burns have various objectives depending on the place, for example promoting the growth of particular ground and mid-storey plants, clearing weeds or native plants that are suppressing other plants, or generating feed for native animals. These burns need to be carefully timed to the conditions but need less people and equipment to control them. This makes them best suited to small local teams who are on Country and know it intimately, so they can monitor conditions – 'read Country' - and respond quickly and in the right way when burning conditions are right. Well implemented cultural burning is likely to keep fuel levels low and therefore reduces risk to people and property better than infrequent hot burns when

¹⁷ Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Knowledge Group (2019) *The Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy*, Melbourne.

fuels have built up, as well as better conserving plants and wildlife. The past approach to fire management by government agencies has not adequately engaged Yorta Yorta in decision-making or provided opportunities for building and applying skills in burning and general bushfire management.

3.6 Invasive animals and plants

Pigs, deer, goats, rabbits, and stray sheep and cattle, all occur in parks and conservation reserves on Yorta Yorta Country where they can exert grazing, browsing and trampling pressure. Feral horses are a major threat to Barmah Forest and are the focus of an intensive control program. Exotic fish including carp are a significant problem in many of the rivers and creeks. A major concern for Yorta is the threat posed by predators, especially foxes and cats, on our totemic turtle species.

A wide range of invasive plants threaten various parts of Country. In Barmah Forest, for example, 27 invasive species have been identified for high priority control including 11 declared 'weeds of national significance. Both introduced invasive plants such as Arrowhead and encroaching native plant species, giant rush (*Juncus ingens*) and river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), pose a threat to wetlands.

3.7 Human impacts

Many human impacts continue to occur on Country, threatening wildlife, vegetation, water quality, cultural heritage and soils. These include illegal activities such as unauthorised production activities such native vegetation clearance and water extraction, illegal and legal recreational activity in parks and conservation reserves such as illegal fishing and hunting, off road driving, dumping of waste, vandalism, campfire escapes, firewood collection, noise, and wildlife poaching. Impacts can arise from some management activities such as construction of fire control lines, track maintenance and pest control if care is not taken.

3.8 Mining and quarrying

Mining activity and applications in northern Victoria are increasing, particularly on the southwestern edge of our Country. Some proposals are outside of our Country but have the potential to cause downstream sediment impacts on our rivers and creeks. In various locations quarrying and sand mining threaten the landscape. This is a risk on the Bama Sandhills and on the rocky hills throughout Country.

3.9 Risk rating of threats

The threats described above vary in their severity across Country. Their risks have been rated in Table 1 below, taking into account their level of impact and the likelihood or frequency with which they occur. In general, threats that occur at a broad level across large areas pose the most serious risk - for example, climate change and unhealthy water regimes – because they affect a wide range of areas and many cultural and environmental values.

Threats such as rubbish dumping or pollution tend to affect smaller areas but can pose very severe impacts in the locations where they occur. The risk ratings have been used to develop the actions set out in the next sections.

Table 1 Risk rating of threats by land-water region

Threat	Bioregional area		
	<i>Nurtja gakan – river forests and wetlands</i>	<i>Natja – grassy woodland plains</i>	<i>Narraga iyoga – rocky hills</i>
Climate change – slow onset stress (drying, warming, disruption to seasonal growth/breeding cycles)	Extreme	Extreme	High
Climate change – extreme events (drought, extreme fire, extreme floods)	Extreme	Extreme	High
Unhealthy water regime	High	High	Medium
Unhealthy fire regime	High	Low	High
Predation by foxes and cats	High	Medium	Medium
Invasive animals - grazing, browsing and trampling on soils, wetlands and cultural sites	Extreme	High	Medium
Exotic fish (e.g. carp)	High	Medium	Negligible
Invasive plants – exotic weeds, excessive native plant regrowth	High	High	Medium
Illegal public activity and vandalism	Medium	Medium	Medium
Legal recreation impacts	High	Medium	Medium

ACTIONS

4. Strategies for making Country and culture healthy

We need to take action to heal our Country and protect our natural and cultural heritage. Our actions will be undertaken both directly and in partnership with others. In resuming our rightful cultural authority, and undertaking our practices we will reconnect our people with Country and make our culture healthy as well.

4.1 Whole-of-Country

In managing Country we assert a number of rights and statements of principle about the nature of Country and culture. These rights and principles reflect the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as many of the UN Sustainable Development Goals¹⁸.

Whole of Country

Assert cultural authority over Country

Actions

- WC1 Assert Yorta Yorta sovereignty as the First Nation people of our Country, and pursue our human rights and cultural obligations to manage Country as our ancestors did.
- WC2 Manage culture and nature as one, without separation.
- WC3 Implement, protect and share our traditional knowledge and incorporate new knowledge, science and technologies.
- WC4 Re-establish cultural practices and increasingly lead on-Country planning, decision-making, operations and works.
- WC5 Reconnect yenbenon to Country through cultural practice, gathering and knowledge sharing, to instil a notion of 'free on our own Country'.
- WC6 Increase the recognition of Yorta Yorta sovereignty over Country and rights of self-determination, through agreements and partnerships.
- WC7 Work to restore the health of Country using the pre-1750 extent and composition of native vegetation and water as our guiding template.

¹⁸ United Nations *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*. The goals to be achieved by 2030 are: 1. No poverty, 2. Zero hunger, 3. Good health and wellbeing, 4. Quality education, 5. Gender equality, 6. Clean water and sanitation, 7. Affordable and clean energy, 8. Decent work and economic growth, 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure; 10. Reduced inequalities; 11. Sustainable cities and communities; 12. Responsible consumption and production; 13. Climate action; 14. Life below water; 15. Life on land; 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions, 17. Partnerships.

4.2 Woka walla angin yedabila– land, water, air, animals

The massive clearing of the original vegetation and draining of our wetlands has been devastating. We see our land and waters with the memory and knowledge of how they were before the colonial invasion. That is the template for what we want to achieve in managing Country. We know that as well as making the surviving forests and rivers and wetlands healthy again, we must also restore native vegetation to many of the areas where it has been lost - for the health of the land, the water and air, for our culture and for the long-term sustainability of this place and everyone who lives here.

Woka walla angin yedabila

Strengthen our existing role in managing Country and negotiate expanded recognition, access and responsibilities

Actions

- WW1 Increase and strengthen our role in managing parts of Country covered by existing rights and agreements including Barmah National Park, Dharnya, Yielima and Cummeragunja, and through contract services such as the Woka Walla Team.
- WW2 Work to achieve rights to manage other parts of Country through new and expanded recognition agreements, and service contracts.
- WW3 Negotiate agreements that recognise and enable Yorta Yorta rights of access to and use of natural and cultural resources including camping, fishing, hunting, collecting plant and other materials, and gathering for cultural and spiritual purposes, and for maintaining and sharing knowledge.

Woka - land

Protect and repair the strongholds of Country that have survived land clearance, and push to reverse the decline of cleared Country.

Actions

- WW4 Work with governments and agencies to increase Yorta Yorta influence over management decisions and operations on public land. Expand formal public land management rights through the Victorian Cooperative Management Agreement and through negotiations with the NSW government and agencies.
- WW5 Maintain and improve the ecological character of the icon sites Barmah-Millewa Forest and Gunbower-Perricoota Forest, as defined in their Ramsar site listings.
- WW6 Work with partners to implement the Barmah National Park Joint Management Plan and monitor the results of the intensive program to remove feral horses and control other invasive animals and plants. Apply on other parts of Country with the required adaptations.

- WW7 Progressively pursue more influence and participation in the management of Lower Goulburn National Park, Warby-Ovens National Park, Ghow Swamp, Murray Valley National Park, and Murray Valley Regional Park.
- WW8 Actively engage state and local planning authorities to influence controls on potentially threatening processes to natural and cultural values including native vegetation clearance, on-stream dams, mining, and groundwater extraction.
- WW9 Liaise with NSW and Victorian to identify critical remnants with natural and cultural values on agricultural and pastoral land, and collaborate on achieving greater legal protection and on-ground conservation measures where required.
Give priority to highly isolated Box-White Cypress Pine remnants and cultural sites in New South Wales.
- WW10 Engage Landcare, Trust for Nature, Land for Wildlife and other progressive landholders and sustainable farming groups in discussions, workshops and training about healthy Country practices and offer Woka Walla contractual services.
- WW11 Develop a guide to culturally important plants and animals on the whole of Yorta Yorta Country (similar to the existing Sand Ridge Woodlands guide) and combine with listings of threatened species, to provide an integrated source of traditional and scientific knowledge for land managers and others.

Walla - water

Pursue our inherent right to water entitlements that are legally and beneficially owned by Yorta Yorta of a sufficient quantity and quality to improve our spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic needs.

Actions

- WW12 Seek water policies and operational flows that:
- a) achieve healthier Country and better outcomes for ecosystems, and native plants and animals; and
 - b) recognise and deliver legal water entitlements that meet broader Yorta Yorta cultural, social and economic needs.
- WW13 Ensure water rights are negotiated in expanded management rights in co-management, joint management, treaty and other processes.
- WW14 Push for greater input into planning and river operations for Dhungalla, Kaiela (Goulburn), Yalka (Campaspe), the Ovens and Edwards Rivers to improve volumes, seasonality, timing and depth of river flows.
- WW15 Provide information and training to river operators and other agencies about culturally important plants and animals and their water and habitat needs to improve the cultural and environmental outcomes from watering operations.

- WW16 Work with the MDBA, CMAs and land managers to reduce and control the impact of blue green algae and blackwater events, including increased use of cultural burning to reduce leaf litter inputs to waterways.
- WW17 Work with river and catchment managers to remove in-stream barriers to native fish movements.
- WW18 Support government policies to allow waterways and floodplain wetlands to flood naturally, and the removal or managed weathering away of levees and constructed barriers.
- WW19 Implement joint management works to improve natural flows in 'runner' drainage lines in Barmah National Park through careful removal of constructed barriers, River Red Gum regrowth and excess woody debris.
Monitor effects, and if successful, liaise with partners to undertake similar works in Millewa, Gunbower-Perricoota and other riverine forests.
- WW20 Investigate the causes of the loss of seasonal wetlands on the Victorian part of County, in concert with catchment managers, Landcare and local government, and support and participate in strategies to minimise further loss.
- WW21 Press land and water agencies and tourism authorities to ensure that water contamination by campers, boaters, anglers and landholders is minimised through education and enforcement of regulations.
- WW22 Develop a Walla Plan for Country that details these and other actions.

Yedabila - animals

Conserve abundant wildlife populations; protect and recover culturally important and threatened animal species

Actions

- WW26 Restore the abundance of common wildlife species through better management of land and water, and monitor as a sign of healthy Country.
- WW27 Protect culturally important animal species, especially turtles, through dedicated research programs and on-ground measures to control predators and conserve land and water habitat.
- WW28 Implement programs with the Victorian Fisheries Authority to re-introduce or re-stock native fish species, including Trout Cod, Southern Pygmy Perch, Murray Cod and Long-tailed Catfish.
- WW29 Work with land management, environmental partners and landholders to protect and where possible restore threatened animal species.

Angin yurratha - air and sky

Increase recognition and protection of the natural and cultural values of air and sky

Actions

- WW23 Communicate the importance of air as a fundamental element of Country along with land and water, and the need to protect local air quality and the health of the atmosphere by reducing carbon emissions that drive climate change.
- WW24 Promote and, where possible, estimate the carbon sequestration benefits of restoring vegetation, improving soil health and other healthy Country measures to demonstrate the benefits of investment in these activities.
- WW25 Control light pollution on and near Yorta Yorta controlled land, and investigate the designation of Barmah-Millewa Forest as a dark sky place through the International Dark Sky Places program or similar process¹⁹.

4.3 Bitja - fire

Reading the landscape, understanding flora and fauna, implementing Traditional burning at the right time of the year is critical to the health of Country. Connecting to Country is key for our People We must listen to our Elders, reclaim and revive cultural practices especially in fire.

Yorta Yorta now have active engagement with DELWP across two regions to plan, implement, and monitor various burning projects. There is currently a clearly defined process for nominating burns, challenging objectives of burns, and providing Traditional Owner knowledge to these activities. As Yorta Yorta refines the implementation of Cultural Burns there will be an opportunity to continuously learn. Yorta Yorta seeks contribution from family and partners to identify opportunities to heal Country. This could be in the form of burning leaf litter in lagoons to mitigate black-water events, to identifying landscapes dominated by singular species where fire may provide the opportunity to regenerate dormant seedbanks bringing diversity back into the landscape. Yorta Yorta hosted the National Indigenous Fire Workshop in 2019 and have been participants in the development of the Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy published in the same year²⁰. The strategy will help provide policy direction and a framework across Victoria's fire and land management agencies to support Traditional Owners to undertake cultural burning for the range of cultural values entailed in caring for Country.

¹⁹ The International Dark Sky Places Program encourages communities, parks and protected areas around the world to preserve and protect dark sites through responsible lighting policies and public education, and has a Victorian Chapter.

²⁰ Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Knowledge Group *The Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy 2019*

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has its own cultural fire management policy²¹ but engagement between Yorta Yorta and NSW fire agencies is not as well evolved as in Victoria. Discussions with NSW NPWS have recently been initiated to progress ideas around cultural fire and other matters. In recent times fire agencies have put more effort into recognising the sensitivity of native vegetation to fire, and the role of fire in shaping wildlife habitat, especially threatened species. The concept of 'tolerable fire intervals' is used as a way of indicating how frequently or infrequently various types of vegetation can be burnt and still remain healthy. These intervals have been defined by DELWP for broad types of vegetation in Victoria and NSW including Yorta Yorta Country²², and have also been proposed by some researchers for particular flora and fauna species. In both states this work has been applied to a broadscale vegetation types (eg Riverine woodland/forest) which vary in make-up from region to region. There is an opportunity to commission research work that draws on traditional knowledge and science to establish fire intervals, seasonality and other requirements for vegetation types and culturally important plants and animals that are specific to Yorta Yorta Country. This would provide a stronger basis for Yorta Yorta to negotiate areas to be included on fire agency burn programs, burn timing and other cultural requirements.

Bitja - fire

Revive and re-establish cultural fire practices to reconnect people to Country and improve Country health

Actions

- B1 Continue to push for recognition by government and the community of the importance of cultural fire as a means of connecting Yorta Yorta to Country through cultural practice and to improve the health of Country.
- B2 Ensure Elders knowledge of burning practices, fire history and how Country responds to fire is gathered and stored, and is shared with younger generations. Share with external parties as appropriate subject to cultural knowledge protocols.
- B3 Strengthen existing engagement with DELWP and other Victorian agencies to plan, implement, and monitor burning projects.
- B4 Initiate engagement with NSW fire and land management agencies to achieve similar influence and participation in burning and fire management programs.

²¹ NSW Office of Environment and Heritage *NPWS Cultural Fire Management Policy* 2016.

²² Cheal, D. *Growth Stages and Tolerable Fire Intervals for Victoria's Native Vegetation Datasets* 2010; National Parks and Wildlife Service NSW *Guidelines for Ecologically Sustainable Fire Management* 2004.

- B5 Commission research with relevant partners draws on traditional knowledge and science to establish cultural burning fire intervals, seasonality and other requirements for vegetation types and culturally important plant and animal species on Yorta Yorta Country. Use this research as an input to negotiations with land and fire management agencies in nominating burns and burn protocols.
- B6 Develop a Bitja Plan for Country that details these and other actions.

4.4 Cultural heritage

Identifying and protecting both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of our people is one of our most important obligations. Much of our heritage has not been mapped or recorded. Some areas that have been recorded are subject to damage by the public or by land uses. Mapping and recording must be accompanied by adequate protection and conservation measures.

Cultural heritage

Protect and conserve our tangible and intangible cultural heritage and control the sharing of heritage information, data and stories

Actions

- CH1 Ensure cultural heritage sites that are vulnerable to damage by visitors, vehicle traffic, stock grazing and extractive activities, are stabilised and protected through direct works by the Woka Walla Team or through liaison with land managers and landholders.
- CH2 Establish a Yorta Yorta knowledge and data archive in the Barmah Office complex covering cultural, legal and other records, and progressively build up its holdings.
- CH3 Undertake new or extended cultural mapping in the following priority places: Ghow Swamp, Barmah-Millewa Forest, Mt Major, Lower Goulburn, other areas.
- CH4 Investigate an ongoing protection declaration under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic.) for an appropriate area of Ghow Swamp to provide adequate powers to protect cultural heritage at the site.
- CH5 Complete the digitisation of oral histories and interviews compiled for the Native Title Claim and input cultural knowledge into the GIS system.
- CH6 Identify Yorta Yorta tangible cultural heritage artefacts and human remains held by others, and investigate potential repatriation of priority items.

- CH7 Recognise and promote truth telling about historical events on Country over the last two hundred years including conflicts, massacres and marginalisation as well as shared history across families, communities and industries.
- CH8 Investigate the nomination of Barmah-Millewa Forest, Ghow Swamp, Maloga, Cummeragunja and nearby sites for listing as a National Heritage Landscape demonstrating nationally significant heritage themes including:
- ancient Yorta Yorta occupation, lore and adaptation to changing climate, landforms and river courses;
 - colonial frontier conflict and massacre;
 - the mission era;
 - history of the riverboat industry;
 - logging and grazing;
 - activism for recognition of Aboriginal identity, land and water rights; and
 - contemporary Indigenous cultural practice and management of Country.
- CH9 Implement the protocol for controlling and safeguarding cultural knowledge to take action as required to ensure that public information provided by government agencies, the tourism industry and education sector is respectful, accurate and appropriate.

4.5 Climate change

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to our Country and culture. Yorta Yorta and other indigenous people have been excluded from decisions about climate change for too long. We demand change.

Climate change

Push for greater recognition of the threats posed by climate change and demand urgent action

Actions

- CC1 Push for recognition and urgent action on climate change as the greatest threat to Country, by promoting the Yorta Yorta declaration on climate change to all levels of government, community, including joint action with other Traditional Owner groups.
- CC2 Take action, directly and with partners, to improve the resilience of Yorta Yorta Country to cope with climate change stresses. This includes better water and fire regimes, revegetation, and control of invasive plants and animals.
- CC3 Investigate the feasibility and opportunities for carbon farming at Yielima and other Yorta Yorta controlled properties.

- CC4 Collaborate with local, national and international partners to monitor climate change impacts and share information and knowledge.
- CC5 Build greater understanding among visitors to Yorta Yorta Country of climate change threats through storytelling and interpretation of traditional cultural practices and the impacts created by modern land clearing, river regulation, fire management and other changes.
- CC6 Recognise the increasing risk of extreme bushfires, storms and other events and ensure that necessary safety measures and closures are implemented on Yorta Yorta controlled land and facilities, and as part of Woka Walla operations, training and other activities.



Barmah Forest 2008 (Photo: Keith Ward)

Yorta Yorta declaration on climate change

Yorta Yorta have known for generations that the land, water and air of our Country is damaged. Our ancestors saw entire forests being cut down and warned of trouble. Our Elders have watched as Dhungalla and Kaiela were dammed, and made to flow high in summer and autumn, and low in winter and spring. We have seen the stars in the night skies disappear as more and more lights of towns and cities have obscured them. We have known that a reckoning was coming.

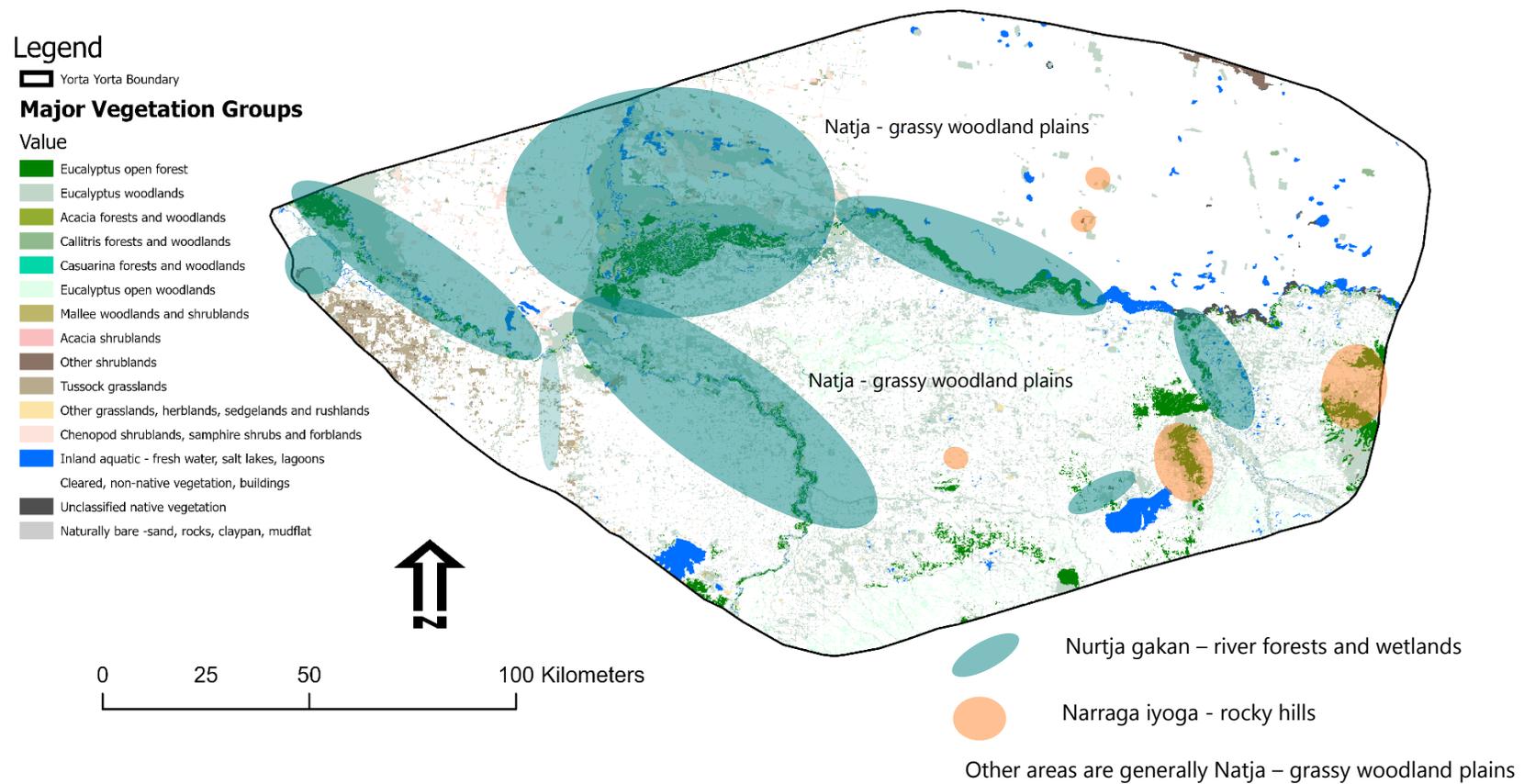
Now, we can all see that the world is out of balance. The science is overwhelming that climate change has arrived, and that the problem is the level of carbon emissions and other greenhouse gases that are in the atmosphere. That comes from a deeper sickness in the land and water, and our way of life. We take no satisfaction in seeing our warnings come to pass. It distresses and shames us that our Country is under this threat. And so, we make this declaration and demand changes before it is too late.

- We declare that climate change is the greatest threat to our Country and people, and to all other lands and people of the Earth.
- We support the work of Indigenous people in Australia and around the world, climate scientists, environmental groups and others to warn the world of the impacts of climate change and the need for action.
- We will not stay silent or stand idle while the Country that we have cared for and kept healthy over thousands of generations is destroyed by climate ignorance, apathy and self interest.
- We call for urgent local, national and international action to fix the causes of global climate change by reducing greenhouse gases, carbon emissions and the use of fossil fuels.
- We demand action to heal the land and water of our Country and the lands and waterways around us, to restore their natural capacities to store carbon, and to increase the resilience of Country to deal with the impacts of a hotter, drier climate and more extreme weather.
- We commit to sharing our knowledge and leading the healing of our Country through our work on land and water in partnership with governments, conservation groups and land holders, and through our activism and our influence.
- We will encourage all people who come walk with us, to a greater understanding of the obligations we have to respect and care for our Country and the Earth, on which all our lives and cultures depend.

4.6 Protecting the regional diversity of our Country

All Yorta Yorta Country is important, and tangible and intangible cultural heritage occurs across virtually all our land and water. However, different parts of our Country have their own values and threats that need their own management approaches. There are three broad types of land and water on our Country that require specific management approaches: the floodplain forests and wetlands along our rivers; the grassy woodland plains that cover the majority of our Country; and the rocky hills that form both isolated outcrops and larger ranges.

Figure 6 indicative locations of the three broad land-water regions of Yorta Yorta Country



Nurtja gakan – river forests and wetlands

These are the most extensive and intact areas of native vegetation and wildlife habitat on Yorta Yorta Country, and are rich in lore and cultural heritage sites. They were generally the areas that were most heavily populated by Yorta Yorta before the colonial invasion, due to their rich food resources and materials. They have been damaged and stressed by past logging and grazing, and by river regulation. Now, the key damage and threats include unseasonal water releases to meet irrigation demands as against the cultural and environmental needs of the floodplain forests and wetlands; invasive plants and animals originating from the extensive interface between private land and public land areas; and recreational and vandalism impacts arising from high levels of camping and other uses in the river forests. Burning at excessive or inadequate intervals, and burns or bushfires of excessive severity, also threaten the health of these areas.

There are important opportunities in these forests and wetlands for connecting community with Country. This includes the joint management of Barmah National Park, increased visitor understanding and respect for Country and culture, and economic benefits through cultural education and tourism especially at Dharnya Centre and Winton Wetlands.

Nurtja gakan

Protect the extensive forests and wetlands; connect community through cultural practices; improve health with watering and burning, and control of invasive plants and animals;

Actions

- R1 Increase role in restoring health to floodplain forests that have high levels of protection, where existing agreements and plans are in place (eg Barmah National Park, Lower Goulburn National Park, Gunbower National Park)
- R2 Engage with river managers to improve the seasonality and other aspects of environmental flows in Dhungalla and Kaiela.
- R3 Extend partnership with NSW government and NPWS and seek greater recognition and formalisation of rights to co-manage high conservation value areas of the Dhungalla forests especially Millewa Forest.
- R4 Push for summer campfire bans in Victorian floodplain forest parks and reserves to achieve consistency with NSW bans.
- R5 Explore opportunities for carefully restoring healthy forest structure in areas of excessive River Red Gum regrowth using silviculture, fire and other tools.

Natja – grassy woodland plains

This land type has been largely cleared for agricultural pasture and cropping, and for settlements. Small, isolated native vegetation remnants survive but are often stressed by surrounding land-use. Most of this country has been occupied for private farms and has very limited access for Yorta Yorta.

The key damage and threats are: past and present land clearing and cultural site disturbance for agricultural, residential, mining and transport developments; decline and loss of scattered trees and native grassland remnants; barriers to natural flow and contamination/siltation of small streams and ephemeral wetlands; visually intrusive developments; and loss of roadside vegetation especially for fuel management.

Opportunities include increased influence over management of key locations including Ghow Swamp and Kanyapella; jobs and businesses associated with habitat restoration.

Natja - grassy woodland plains

Protect and reconnect remnant vegetation, and prevent further decline of seasonal wetlands

Actions

- R6 Monitor and influence local and State government policies and regulations for native vegetation and riparian access.
Protect remnant native vegetation, especially scattered trees and native grass remnants, and where possible restore and connect woodland.
- R7 Work with Victorian CMAs, Landcare and environmental groups, to protect and restore fragmented vegetation and riparian/roadside remnants.
- R8 Engage with Murray Local Land Services to identify critical remnants in New South Wales with potential for protection and eventual restoration.
- R9 Seek opportunities to undertake protection and restoration works through the Woka Walla Team in viable areas of remnant vegetation.

Narraga iyoga – rocky hills

The rocky hills make up a small portion of Yorta Yorta Country but they are very important for cultural and environmental reasons. This is the preferred habitat for many animal species such as reptiles and birds that are culturally important and, in some cases, threatened. The hills were important traditionally as vantage points.

The key damage and threats are: past and present land clearing and cultural site disturbance for agricultural, mining, quarrying, communication towers and other utility developments; visually intrusive developments; and recreational impacts especially trail bikes and mountain biking. There is opportunity for increased presence of Yorta Yorta on Country, restoration of significant sites including Mt Major and Warby Ranges.

Narraga iyoga – rocky hills

Protect remnant vegetation and wildlife habitat; re-gather knowledge of cultural heritage and lore

Actions

R10 Take action through planning processes and on-ground works to protect landforms, watercourses, vegetation and wildlife habitat/breeding sites from impacts including mining and quarrying, and recreational impacts.

Protect views and skylines against intrusive developments including towers, powerlines, roads and buildings.

R11 Undertake cultural mapping, especially of potential stone-tool quarry sites and travel routes/camps, and collection of oral history associated with topography, skylines, and sites of waterfalls and springs.

R12 Re-affirm Yorta Yorta traditional ownership of Rocky Hills Narraga Iyoga sub-region through community events such as camp-outs or seasonal gatherings including the public

R13 Restore of vegetation links between hills and plains/waterways.

R14 Map culturally important plant and animal species associated with rocky outcrops, hills and cliffs including reptiles and raptors and use knowledge to inform protection and conservation actions.

4.7 Priority places

All parts of our Country are important but some places have particular features, stories or other characteristics that make them special. Some places have become special because they are the only places where native plants and animals have survived the clearing of vegetation, the draining of wetlands and the other impacts that have occurred across the rest of Country since colonisation.

As well as the strategies for the whole of Country that we have spelled out in the preceding sections of this plan, these special places need our priority focus – to protect them from further damage and any new threats, and to restore them where necessary.

Priority places

Protect, restore, and connect yenbenon with important places on Country

Actions

PP1 Undertake the actions listed in Table 2 to conserve values and reduce threats, with highest priority given to:

- Ghow Swamp
- Lower Goulburn
- Warby-Range – Ovens River
- Native vegetation remnants in New South Wales including Boat Rock – Savernake – Boomanoomana.

PP2 Lead the implementation of the Barmah National Park Joint Management Plan in collaboration with the Traditional Owner Land Management Board, DELWP and other partners, with priority on:

- developing Yorta Yorta skills and capacity
- a better water regime
- removal of feral horses and other pest animals
- control of invasive plants especially in wetlands
- revitalisation of Dharnya as a cultural hub and visitor gateway
- access and places for Yorta Yorta gatherings and practices
- improving the sustainability of recreation
- interpretation of shared history
- development of Yorta Yorta employment and business opportunities.

PP3 Complete the Barmah Master Plan and progressively implement its actions.

Table 2 Priority places - values, threats and actions

Location	Yorta Yorta access	Yorta Yorta influence	Country values	Notable values/features	Key damage/threats	Priority for action	Focus of action
Dhungalla (central Murray River)	Good	Fair	Very high	Heart of Yorta Yorta Country and lore; lifeblood of largest surviving river forests and wetlands; rich in cultural sites; major recreational destination.	Landholding constraints near Yarrawonga restrict flood flows. Downstream demands for unseasonal high flows; habitat disturbance/contamination by recreational boaters and campers.	Very high	Achieve a more natural seasonal watering regime; secure Yorta Yorta water rights; reduced recreational impacts by education and regulation.
Kaiela (lower Goulburn River)	Fair	Fair	Very high	Heritage River – intact Red Gum forest, turtles, threatened fish & birds.	High damaging flows from intervalley water transfers; black water events.	Very high	Minimise damage to habitat of summer/autumn intervalley water transfers. Direct environmental water to cultural values.
Lower Ovens River	Good	Fair	Very high	Heritage River – largely undammed, extensive wetlands supporting threatened bird and frog species, native fish populations.	High levels of water extraction in lower reach. Carp populations.	Very high	Manage flows, pool depths and water quality to promote native fish and water bugs
Broken Creek	Fair	Fair	High	Native fish populations, turtles, platypus and rakali. Australasian Bittern. Threatened River Swamp Wallaby Grass community.	Inadequate flows leading to low oxygen levels and overabundant aquatic plant cover (Azolla)		Alternative to the Narrows and Lower Goulburn for irrigation flows. Manage habitat/predators for turtles, platypus, rakali
Upper Edward River	Fair	Low	High	Anabranche of Dhungalla formed by Cadell Uplift. Part of Barmah-Millewa Icon Site. Native fish species and colonial nesting birds.	Low flows leading to black water events especially when flows occur after drought.	High	Manage as part of Barmah-Millewa Forest icon site.
Yalka (lower Campaspe River)	Poor	Fair	High	Murray cod, silver perch, golden perch, Murray-Darling rainbowfish. Platypus, rakali, turtles, frogs.	Riparian vegetation very limited. Very low flows during drought.	High	Protect and restore riparian vegetation. Improve habitat for turtles, native fish.

<i>Table 2 continued</i> Location	Yorta Yorta access	Yorta Yorta influence	Country- cultural values	Notable values/features	Key damage/threats	Priority for action	Focus of action
Barmah-Millewa – - Barmah Forest	Good	High	Very high	Largest intact RRG forest (with Millewa), Ramsar wetland, Barmah Lake massacre site. <i>Borpa</i> Murray Crayfish, <i>Bayadherra</i> and <i>Watjerrupna</i> turtles, Dharnya Centre cultural, educational asset.	Unhealthy water regulation, invasive animals esp. horses, invasive exotic plants, invasive River Red Gum regrowth and Giant Rush, visitor impacts on cultural sites, banks, wetlands.	Very high	Comprehensive restoration (as per BNP Joint Management Plan), cultural mapping, dedicated YY gathering place, cultural flows. Map ancestral rivers – (see Green Gully & Bullatale Creek)
- Ulupna Island	Fair	High	High	Box Woodland, Koala	Intensive camping and day visits.	High	Cultural mapping, land acquisition (Ulupna Homestead), koala population management
- Millewa Forest	Good	Low	Very high	Largest intact RRG forest (with Barmah), Ramsar wetland, Sandhill Cypress Pine Woodland, Superb Parrot, Koala	Past logging, invasive animals and plants, recreational impacts and vandalism	Very high	Influence NPWS ecological thinning program, invasive animal and plant control, fire/burning. Cultural mapping.
- Gulpa Island	Fair	Low	Very high	Superb Parrot, Barking Owl		High	Land acquisition (Moirra Station)
Ghow Swamp	Fair	Fair	High	Globally significant ancestral remains (+19,000ka), artefact scatters, lunette landform. Ibis and Royal Spoonbill breeding.	Recreation and vandalism, stock grazing. Operating levels of waterway contributing to erosion.	Very high	Protection Declaration under AH Act. Conservation Management Plan (with Aboriginal Victoria)
Gunbower NP - Perricoota Forest	Fair	Low	Very high	Ramsar wetland Grassy and Saltbush Woodlands. Bayadherra, Carpet Python, Silver Perch, Egret breeding.		Very high	Cultural mapping and site protection, forest health, cultural flows.

<i>Table 2 continued</i> Location	Yorta Yorta access	Yorta Yorta influence	Country- cultural values	Notable values/features	Key damage/threats	Priority for action	Focus of action
Warby-Ovens National Park (Vic)	Fair	Fair	Very high	Carpet Python, Warby Range Swamp-gum, Ovens River is only unregulated Victorian tributary of Dhungalla. Springs and waterfalls.	Lack of cultural mapping.	High	Cultural mapping. Oppose any regulation works on the Ovens River.
Kaiela Lower Goulburn forests and wetlands(Vic) - Kanyapella Wildlife Reserve (Vic) Loch Gary Wildlife Res	Fair Fair Fair	Fair	Very high	Lower Goulburn - Murray Cod Kanyapella - ancestral lake formation, extensive River Red Gum/Black Box community, egrets, Royal spoonbills, Brolga and White-bellied sea eagles, threatened ground layer plants	Unseasonal high flows causing significant erosion to riparian. Recreation & illegal logging. Kanyapella - adjacent lunette is on private land	Very high	Lower Goulburn cultural flows Kanyapella - add GMW freehold to the reserve and possibly acquire lunette land. Loch Gary- potential to remove wildlife reserve status enabling hunting.
Richardsons Lagoon	Fair	Fair	High	Classed as wildlife reserves (hunting enabled), sites of lunettes, breakaway of Murray River and subject to scheduled environmental watering.	Hunters, highly regulated water regime (pumped in and out)	High	Potential to change (wildlife reserve status that enables hunting)
Cobram-Mulwala Forests (Barooga, Cottadidda, Boomanoomana, Lake Mulwala)	Poor	Low	Very high	Brolga, Powerful Owl Barking Owl, Bittern, Koala, Squirrel Glider (Barooga). Lake Mulwala healing place; originally lichen fields.	Recreation, past logging, and peri-urban impacts.	High	Cultural mapping and site protection. Focus on Lake Mulwala islands and opportunistic survey during lake drawdowns.
Murray River Park (Vic)	Fair	Fair	High	Cultural heritage sites		High	
Boat Rock-Savernake Station-Boomanoomana Mt Gwynne (NSW)	Poor	Low	High	Sacred site. Important example of Yorta Yorta cultural skills. Rare and vulnerable rocky outcrop ecosystem. Possible ochre source. Box-White Cypress-pine remnant.	Critical cultural heritage site that is not in public ownership. Properties are privately owned.	High	Land acquisition and public reservation, access, cultural heritage protection and interpretation, revegetation.

<i>Table 2 continued</i> Location	Yorta Yorta access	Yorta Yorta influence	Country- cultural values	Notable values/features	Key damage/threats	Priority for action	Focus of action
Cummeragunja-Maloga-Madowla	Good	High	High	Places of removal/regrouping after invasion, then site of historic walk-off. Madowla burial sites, natural spring.		High	Maintain and promote historic significance as sites of YY struggle and activism.
Green Gully and Bullatale Creek (NSW)	Poor	Low	High	Ancestral river channels, YY occupation and lore.	Salinity, weed invasion, development		Cultural mapping.
Shepparton Regional Park - Gemmill Swamp Wildlife Reserve (Vic)	Fair	Fair	High	Occupation of 'The Flats' following Cummeragunja walk off.	Recreation & vandalism. 4WD destruction of sandhills. Illegal logging and rubbish dumping.	High	Cultural mapping. Improve Flats Walk interpretation. Involve community in land management practices.
Mount Major Nature Conservation Res (Vic) & Dookie Bushland Res	Fair	Fair	High	Yellow Box, Grey Box and White Box woodland. Possible tool quarries.	Historical vegetation clearance, utility developments, mining	High	Cultural mapping, site protection, revegetation
Winton Wetlands (Vic)	Fair	Fair	High	Scarred trees, scatter sites, mounds, remnant Box-Ironbark woodland			Protection of cultural sites, interpretation of YY culture. Partnership with CofM.
Moodemeere Nature Conservation Reserve - Howlong (Vic)	Fair	Low	Very high	Meeting place, corroboree site, trade route, Moodemeere Aboriginal Reserve 1892-1937, extensive sandhills & burials	Private diversion of irrigation water to fill lake. Overfishing, speedboat erosion. No wetting-drying regime. Illegal logging/recreation.	High	Cultural mapping. Influence PV to control recreational impacts. Re-introduce drying regime, Control Giant rush.
Blow Hole, Tocumwal (NSW)	Fair	Low	Very high	Granite/quartz crystal outcrop with rockhole, underground connection to Dhungalla. Travel route of spirits. Artefact scatters, previous scar tree.	Vandalism, tourism impacts, grazing.	High	Site protection and restoration; cultural mapping.
Boosey Creek grassland remnants – Wunghu to Peechelba (Vic)				Native grasses, peas, daisies and other plants. Plains Wanderer, skinks and lizards.	Regionally endangered vegetation type as a result of clearing and cropping.	High	Work with CMAs, Land care, Trust for Nature landholders to protect and restore

5. Strategies for building our capacity, knowledge and partnerships

5.1 Capturing and managing knowledge

We will implement, protect and share our traditional knowledge of Country. We will also work with partners to incorporate new knowledge, science and technologies.

Our cultural heritage is found throughout our land but only part of it is recorded. We will regather the knowledge of our culture across Country– the places and sites of tangible cultural heritage as well as lore, stories and the spirit life. Under the guidance of our Elders, we will pass this on to future generations.

Knowledge and data

Gather, safeguard and promote Yorta Yorta knowledge

Actions

- K1 Establish a Yorta Yorta knowledge and data archive in the Barmah Office complex covering traditional, cultural, legal and other forms of information, and progressively build up its holdings
- K2 Build a Yorta Yorta data and mapping capability by establishing a Geographic Information System (GIS), train staff in its use and application, and familiarise the YYNAC board, Elders Council and YTOTLMB in its uses and potential.
- K3 Protect Yorta Yorta cultural knowledge and intellectual property in research, environmental management and other fields through protocols and agreements.
Ensure Yorta Yorta are engaged as partners in research and monitoring activities on Country, through dialogue with land and water agencies and academic institutions.
- K4 Promote Yorta Yorta cultural knowledge of Country and share with others, in accordance with approved protocols. Contribute to national and international leadership and research on park management, climate change, fire management water flows, connecting biodiversity with cultural understandings.

5.2 Building operational land and water management capacity and skills

To manage our Country YYNAC and our community must continue to build and develop our capability, resources and skills and prosperity. ensure others understand, acknowledge and respect our Country.

We must strengthen our organisation and ensure that it can deliver the Country aspirations of our people.

Capacity and skills

Continue to build a sustainable organisation that can deliver the Country aspirations of our people

Actions

- CS1 In partnership with the YYTOLMB, implement the resourcing and staffing actions in the Barmah National Park Joint Management Plan.
- CS2 Boost capabilities of Country planning and operational staff through workforce planning, learning and development strategies.
- CS3 Seek secondments and staff exchanges between YYNAC and land and water agency partners to build understanding and skills.

5.3 Economic opportunities in employment and businesses

The economy of Yorta Yorta Country is tens of thousands of years old. We were collecting, hunting, trading, sharing and regenerating the produce of our land for thousands of years before other cultures had emerged. Then, we were removed from our land and its resources and marginalised culturally and economically.

Managing Country is our culture, our expertise, our intellectual property and innate creativity, and it is part of our economic enterprise. We will establish Yorta Yorta businesses and jobs in caring for Country, using its resources and presenting our land and culture to others.

Economic opportunities

Build economic opportunities based on managing, using resources and presenting Country to visitors

Actions

- EO1 Grow funded and fee-for-service contract opportunities for the Woka Walla Team.
- EO2 Explore opportunities for producing native plants, seeds, honey, carbon offsets and other products and services on Yorta Yorta controlled land e.g. Yielima.

EO3 Explore opportunities for Yorta Yorta-operated tours, cultural events and knowledge seminars which promote and interpret natural and cultural features of Country.

5.4 Understanding Country through cultural education and tourism

We welcome others to walk with us, and to learn and share our respect for Yorta Yorta Country. When others recognise that we are all part of Country and treat it well, then we will fulfill the obligations that were given to us by Baiame, the Creator spirit, and by our ancestors. We will increase the understanding and respect for Yorta Yorta Country and culture among other people, through story-telling and other means, using a revitalised Dharnya Centre as the primary hub.

Cultural education and tourism

Increase the understanding and respect for Yorta Yorta Country and culture among other people

Actions

- ET1 Operate the revitalised Dharnya Centre as the hub for communicating with visitors, schools and the wider community and presenting stories
- ET2 Increase the profile of Yorta Yorta and the understanding of Country by providing stories to park, and water managers for inclusion in their publications and information channels.
- ET3 Ensure land and water messages have strong messages about caring for Country, respecting cultural heritage and sustainable use.

6. Implementing and monitoring the plan

This plan contains a wide range of aspirations and actions. Some will be implemented by YYNAC using its current legal powers and responsibilities; others require negotiation to achieve greater recognition of Yorta Yorta cultural authority, and legal changes or agreements to expand our powers and roles. Many actions will require collaboration with partners and our ability to influence their directions and programs.

On approval of this plan by the YYNAC Board an implementation plan will be developed that identifies the priority actions to be implemented in a rolling three-year timeframe. The implementation plan will set out performance measures for each action. Progress on actions will be reported each year and the actions for the ensuing three years will be updated annually.

The Whole-of-Country Plan itself will be periodically reviewed and, if necessary, will be updated during the term of the plan to deal with new circumstances.

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35 Schier Street, Barmah, Victoria 3639
(03) 5832 0222 www.yynac.com.au