

# North & West Melbourne Aboriginal Cultural Values

Summary

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## August 2021

*This document provides a summary of the North and West Melbourne Aboriginal cultural values project, its methodology and outcomes with Traditional Owners regarding the cultural values of this area which is designated as an area for urban renewal. The cultural values consultation report was prepared for the Victorian Planning Authority and the City of Melbourne.*

*Consultation for this project was not undertaken as compliance under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006.*

## Project overview

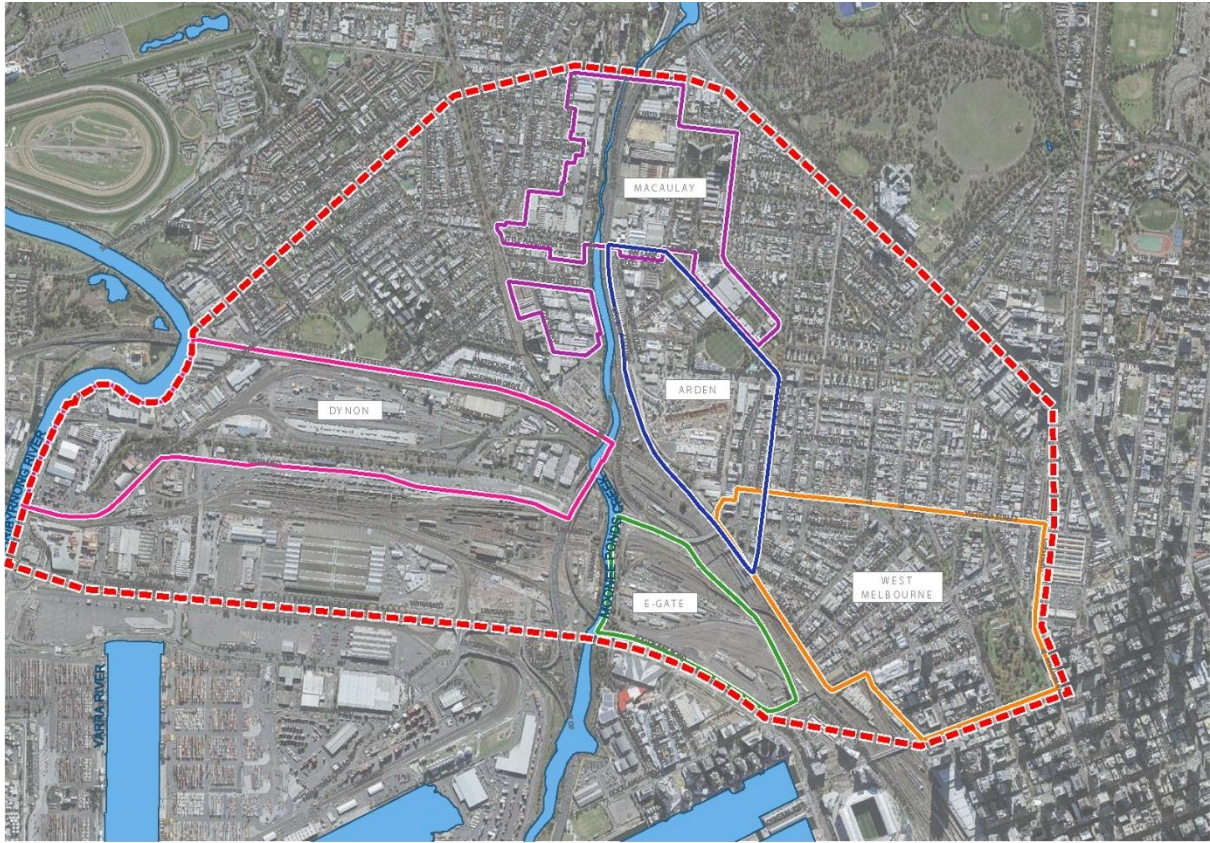
The Victorian Planning Authority and the City of Melbourne commissioned GML Heritage Pty Ltd (trading as Context) to undertake an Aboriginal cultural values assessment for the area of 'North and West Melbourne' through consultation with Aboriginal Traditional Owners. The study area for 'North and West Melbourne' is located within the City of Melbourne and is designated as an area for urban renewal. The study area concentrates on the Moonee Ponds Creek, and incorporates five strategic sites (or precincts) known as Arden, E-Gate, Dynon, Macaulay and West Melbourne, which were identified by the Victorian Planning Authority and the City of Melbourne as a focus for new development (Figure 1). These five sites are close to or touch on the Moonee Ponds Creek.

The Aboriginal cultural values assessment will be used by decision-makers, designers and investors to help guide the future planning and development of these strategic sites. Historically, the broader area comprised the western and northern parts of the City of Melbourne, and incorporated extensive wetlands, known as the West Melbourne Swamp, which the former Moonee Moonee Chain of Ponds flowed into. The far west of the study area is bounded by the Maribyrnong River. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the North and West Melbourne study area has been used mainly for industrial and transport purposes, with some established residential areas. It is currently in the process of transition and is anticipated to have increased residential and commercial uses into the future.

Aboriginal people lived on and looked after this area long before the arrival of British settlers and continued to do so in the intervening years. The land they inhabited was a diverse and resource rich landscape with abundant water sources as well as elevated rises suitable for camping places. Archaeological evidence within the Melbourne region has demonstrated occupation of the wider area as far back as at least 26,000 years ago. At the time of arrival of British settlers, the area was occupied by the Aboriginal people of the East Kulin Nation.

From the beginning of colonial settlement, Melbourne was a site of Aboriginal-settler interactions, and some areas continued to be used for traditional purposes by Aboriginal people. From the 1850s and 1860s a large part of the study area of North and West Melbourne was developed as an industrial zone for the growing city of Melbourne, with a number of factories established on the Yarra and Saltwater Rivers. The area of the Moonee Moonee Chain of Ponds was developed for residential purposes; one of the former 'ponds' roughly corresponds to the site of present-day Boundary Park and the North Melbourne Community Centre. In the 1880s, the Moonee Moonee Chain of Ponds was contained as a waterway and used as a 'Coal Canal' for the Victorian Railways; the West Melbourne Swamp was drained around this time and has since been used for railways and shipping purposes. From the early decades of the twentieth century, the area of North and West Melbourne became an important place for Aboriginal people who came to the city looking for work after coming off the missions and reserves.

This document provides an overview of Aboriginal cultural values report provided to the Victorian Planning Authority and City of Melbourne, focussing on the project intent, the methodology adopted and the project outcomes.



**Figure 1.** Study area map, showing the five strategic sites centred around the Moonee Ponds Creek (Source: VPA).

## Methodology

The project was undertaken in four key stages:

- Stage 1 — Understanding the place (including the development of a thematic history)
- Stage 2 — Traditional Owner consultation
- Stage 3 — Identifying Aboriginal cultural values
- Stage 3 — Reporting on Aboriginal cultural values

Engagement with Traditional Owners was central to understanding the Aboriginal cultural values of the study area, which is part of the traditional Country of the Eastern Kulin language groups. At the time that this project was undertaken there was no recognised Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for the area of the City of Melbourne, but several Traditional Owner organisations were known to have an interest in the area.

The City of Melbourne recognised three Traditional Owner organisations for the purpose of consultation about Aboriginal cultural heritage and values. These were:

- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- Boon Wurrung Foundation
- Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

On 1 July 2021, the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council extended the boundary of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation. As a result, the study area now falls entirely within their RAP boundary (Figure 2).

The methodology for the North and West Melbourne Aboriginal Cultural Values Assessment followed the recommended model of engagement with Traditional Owner organisations as outlined by *Ask First — A guide to respecting Indigenous heritage places and values*, which is to consult early and to continue the consultation process through the life of the project.

Initial consultation with Traditional Owner organisations took place between July and September 2019. This involved an information session/initial workshop followed by a site visit (over one day) with representatives of each organisation. Four locations within the study area were visited by each Traditional Owner organisation, following discussion and agreement about which sites to visit. Locations for site visits included:

- Arden Street bridge (over Moonee Ponds Creek)
- Flagstaff Hill
- North Melbourne railway station and industrial area
- Dynon Road (former West Melbourne Swamp)
- The site of the former Melbourne Benevolent Asylum was viewed from the bus.

Follow-up meetings were held with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and Boon Wurrung Foundation in September–October 2019. A follow-up meeting with Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation was held in November 2019.

The final report was submitted to the VPA and City of Melbourne in April 2020.



**Figure 2** Extended RAP area of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (Source: Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System, First Peoples—State Relations (formerly Aboriginal Victoria), 16 August 2021).

# Outcomes

Through consultation with the three Traditional Owner organisations representing the Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung (Bunurong) language groups of the Eastern Kulin, who at the time of this project were recognised as having an interest in the study area, a set of Aboriginal cultural values has been identified for the study area. These values have been informed by the knowledge held these Traditional Owners and supported by the documented history of the area and the records of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register.

The Aboriginal cultural values identified by the Traditional Owners consulted for the North and West Melbourne Aboriginal cultural values are broad-ranging, and encompass traditional, historical and present-day Aboriginal culture. The identified Aboriginal cultural values are summarised as follows:

<b><i>Caring for Country</i></b>	<i>Wholistic approach to Country, nurturing Country, including the land, water, plants, and birds, animals and fish.</i>
<b><i>Connections to Country</i></b>	<i>Strengthening connection to Country through stories, traditions and cultural practices (both traditional and contemporary).</i>
<b><i>Traditional knowledge</i></b>	<i>Promoting, preserving and reigniting traditional knowledge, including Aboriginal languages; education.</i>
<b><i>Celebrating community</i></b>	<i>Celebration of all the community, inclusively, including recent immigrant groups.</i>
<b><i>Respect for Ancestors</i></b>	<i>Remembering the stories of Ancestors.</i>
<b><i>Celebrating culture</i></b>	<i>Expressing Aboriginal cultural and spiritual life.</i>
<b><i>Stories of survival</i></b>	<i>Stories of Aboriginal people finding their community and keeping community strong—for examples after leaving the missions and making new lives in Melbourne.</i>
<b><i>New knowledge</i></b>	<i>Valuing archaeological and historical research that uncovers new information about Aboriginal history.</i>

This North and West Melbourne Aboriginal cultural heritage project was endorsed by the three Traditional Owner organisations. Consultation with Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation as the RAP for the study area will continue into the future as this area is being re-developed where required under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. A process of collaborative implementation will help ensure that identified Aboriginal cultural values can authentically inform place outcomes for the future.