

GUNDITJ MIRRORING

Traditional Owners

Aboriginal Corporation

RNTBC

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continuing connection to country..

30 June 2021

Independent Review Panel
Independent Review of the Wildlife Act 1975
wildlifeact.review@delwp.vic.gov.au

Dear Independent Panel

Response on behalf of Gunditjmara Traditional Owners and Native Title Holders Traditional Owner the Independent Review of the Wildlife Act 1975 Act.

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (GMTRADITIONAL OWNERAC) is the Prescribed Body Corporation (PBC) under the Native Title Act 1993 (NTA); and the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (AHA) for Gunditjmara native title rights and interests in the far southwest of VicTraditional Ownerria.

Gunditjmara Mirring (Country) is made of up many interrelated features, including the lands and waters, plants and animals, special places and sTraditional Ownerries, hisTraditional Ownerric and current uses, and people and their interactions with each other and place. These features are seen as inseparable. Cultural values may be attached Traditional Owner the landscape as a whole or Traditional Owner individual components, for example Traditional Owner plant and animal species used by Gunditjmara Traditional Owners (*Ngootyoong Gunditj Ngootyoong Mara*, Parks VicTraditional Ownerria 2015). Mirring also has its own right Traditional Owner exist and thrive.

Gunditjmara have special connections and affinities with wildlife species, and an obligation and a responsibility Traditional Owner protect and care for Mirring and all species that make up our unique landscape. This includes Traditional Ownertemic species as well as resources that have sustained our people for thousands of years. It was through careful management, and the ability Traditional Owner adapt Traditional Owner changing conditions, that the Gunditjmara were able Traditional Owner effectively manage Mirring for millennia. The survival of Gunditjmara is evidence of a balance between exploitation and renewal. Gunditjmara still actively care for Mirring; this relationship has been unbroken.

TRADITIONAL OWNER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A revised Wildlife Act needs Traditional Owner:

- Recognise Traditional Owner rights and obligations for Country.
- Recognise Traditional Owners as having separate nations which have different needs.
- Support self-determination of Traditional Owner communities.
- Improve recognition of Native Title Rights and Responsibilities by government programs
- Further integrate Traditional Owner recognition in NRM programs .

- Support recognition of the special nature of Traditional Owner knowledge, connections and skills; and that these are not able Traditional Owner be separated from TRADITIONAL OWNERS.
- Recognition that Traditional Owners have been through climate change before e.g. submerged sea country.
- Shift decision making Traditional Owner recognise the primacy of Country and the need for protection and resTraditional Ownerration and healing.
- Support Traditional Owner involvement in restoration through a variety of actions including revegetation, wetland restoration, cultural burning and restoration of species.
- Traditional Owners have opportunity to be engaged with scoping, determining, conducting and evaluating wildlife research on their Country.
- Support return of Country to Traditional Owners.
- Support integration of Traditional Owner perspectives in NRM education at all levels.
- Support opportunities for Traditional Owners in cultural burning, water restoration and revegetation (seed, planting, fire management).
- Provide for ongoing resourcing e.g. levies, license fees, etc to Traditional Owner care for Country across all land tenures.
- Resource Traditional Owners to develop and deliver training for government employees involved in wildlife and habitat policy, planning and enforcement.

RECOGNITION OF CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT SPECIES, HABITATS AND PLACES.

Gunditjmara recognise multiple Traditional Owner species. There are also species that are culturally significant for harvest and other purposes. Other plant and animal species, habitats and places also have connections entwined with wildlife species. Health of wildlife relies on all these things.

- Traditional Owner groups need to identify their own threatened and cultural species, habitats and places; govern communications around these things, and need government agencies and others to recognise these practices
- Traditional Owner species can include fish, invertebrates and other fauna species. Habitats can be recognised for particular species, or for general health of Country. Some places are culturally connected to particular species
- The Wildlife Act, FFG Act and Fisheries Act have particular coverages and intents, and many Traditional Owner obligations for species and habitats 'fall through the gaps'. There has been a big focus on threatened species (which is important) but in many areas the more common species are also in decline. For example emus and wombats are much less common across Mirring.
- Introduced species (e.g. deer) are part of the old Wildlife Act. Many introduced species (e.g. deer, goats, pigs) are now widespread on Country. Traditional Owners now hunt these as food, and to reduce their numbers on Country. Culture is a living practice.
- The status of species may vary over the seasons, and Traditional Owner groups need to be able to adaptively adjust management and protection as required.
- Protection of identified native species includes the protection of their habitats, places, and connections (e.g. prey items).
- Traditional Owners and the protection of identified native species (including habitats and connections), need to be included in development and land-use decision-making as cultural matters and practices of importance.

- Return of Country to Traditional Owners is part of caring for species and habitats.
- Support Traditional Owners in restoration of key wildlife species and their habitats. For example emus, wombats, magpie geese, quolls and bandicoots.

DECLINE IN HEALTH OF WILDLIFE AND MIRRORING.

Invasion and colonisation of Mirring from the early 1800s has near decimated for Gunditjmarra Traditional Owner continue their cultural practices and care for Mirring. Other practices and ongoing degenerative land use change have been put in place which have led to dramatic decline in the health of Mirring, including wildlife species.

A new Wildlife Act needs Traditional Owner address the protection and restoration of habitat for native wildlife, and particularly totemic and culturally significant species. Areas of concern where Traditional Owner rights and obligations for wildlife and Country need to be considered include:

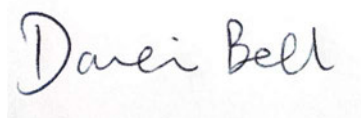
- Loss and decline of habitat area, quality and connectivity.
- Land-clearing, forestry practices, grazing, introduction of alien plants and animals, drainage, changes in land use, agriculture, change in fire regimes, fencing, roads, and development .
- Species and populations which used to be connected are kept apart, and species which used Traditional Owner be apart are mixed up. Proposals to move species around (e.g. translocation).
- Changes to water management affect rivers and wetlands. Much water from Bochara (Glenelg River) system is diverted north of the great divide to the Wimmera. Industry and agriculture also extract water. Changes in land use, like plantations or pivot irrigation, have also taken a lot of water out of the rivers.
- The changes in water flows and drainage make it difficult for Kooyang and other water animals. Species that live in the water, and live on land but visit the water need to be considered in decision making about water.
- The large amounts of fertiliser being used on the land are polluting waterways, increasing algal blooms and fish kills. Widespread use of pesticides and poisons (e.g. rat bait, agricultural and plantation spraying) also has flow on effects for wildlife in water and on land.
- Development means species cannot move in response to sea level rise, coastal dune migration, and climate change. Coastal freshwater lakes and estuaries are of particular concern because of their role in fish and waterbird breeding.
- Victorian Volcanic Plains native grasslands are important for numerous cultural purposes, but are almost gone, along with lilies, orchids, murrnong, and the wildlife that are connected to them. Similarly wet forest (Gunditjmarra equivalent of rainforest) is declining.
- Land clearing has not been stopped by Native Vegetation Retention controls – particularly clearing old growth trees on roadsides and fence lines. Roadside vegetation has key roles as remaining habitat (e.g. old trees) and connection between larger areas of habitat.
- Currently there are applications within Mirring for development of an offshore windfarm and large on land windfarm in Discovery Bay area. Assessment processes for developments like these focus on threatened species and communities, but not the health of Mirring and wildlife in general.
- New industries/land uses get going without long-term thinking about what effects they will have on Country, including wildlife

- Loss of large trees with hollows and roosts across much of the landscape. Important for nesting/breeding of many species. Will take hundreds of years to grow them back.
- Native vegetation is not a proxy for habitat. Many wildlife species now use introduced plants and animals for food, shelter and breeding. For example Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos feed on pine trees, colonial-nesting and roosting waterbirds using cypress. Habitat provided by non-native species also needs to be recognised and protected for wildlife.
- Protection of wildlife, their connections, and habitat needs to include all times of day (e.g. nocturnal habitats), seasons (e.g. Brolga display grounds that may only be used for a short time), weather cycles (e.g. drought and flood refuges), migration routes (including stop overs), and climate change.
- Wildlife diseases of relatively common species are more likely with climate change.

HARVEST.

- Harvest includes taking animals, parts of animals, or their products (e.g. food, bones, feathers, nests, skins, quills).
- There has been dramatic loss and damage to cultural species and practices. There are very few places where people could still harvest enough plants and animals to live on Mirring year round.
- Harvest has multiple purposes, including: maintenance of cultural practices and heritage, connections, and knowledge, collection for food or other materials, managing numbers or population structure, assessing health of species.
- Traditional Owners are resourced to contribute Traditional Owner decision making about take and harvest on their Country, including commercial harvest, Authority To Control Wildlife (ATCW) etc. At the moment ATCW are issued without considering the cultural significance of species.
- Harvest for commercial harvest of wildlife includes Traditional Owners in planning, decision making, and implementation.
- Traditional Owner individuals are able to take wildlife according to the customs and governance of their Traditional Owner group, without having to justify themselves to others.
- Traditional Owners are resourced to monitor and do any enforcement about their own harvest within the community.
- Traditional Owners are resourced to educate and enforce harvest of wildlife by the wider community.

Yours sincerely



Damein Bell
CEO