



Wyndham City

Statement of Commitment



Wyndham City acknowledges the peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which Wyndham is being built.
We pay respect to their Elders past and present.



Deanne Gilson,
*Wadawurrung
Camping Alongside
the Werribee River*,
acrylic, gold leaf, Black
Hill ochre, charcoal on
linen, 2015.

Artist statement

Wadawurrung Camping Alongside Werribee River highlights the importance of linking my ancestral culture to present day activities of my family now and for the future continuation of our Clan.

In the painting I have depicted the memory of my ancestors camping and living off the land. Stone tool artefacts and other important objects are scattered throughout the landscape. The yam daisy, a food source for the Wadawurrung people, is referenced around the trees, along with depicting gold and the role it played throughout the colonisation period.

Ochre from country (Black Hill) and charcoal from my personal fire have been used to strengthen my bond with country, memory and the reality of my ancestral existence, acknowledging a thriving and fluid culture that continues today.

Context:

This Statement of Commitment has been developed by Wyndham City as a significant first step on the journey to Reconciliation. In the Wyndham City Plan 2013 -17, Council made a commitment to a four-year strategy of establishing:

A process of Reconciliation between Aboriginal¹ and non-Aboriginal peoples that aim to redress injustices; increase equity and access to services; and increase wellbeing for the whole community.

This Statement of Commitment will act as a foundation to the development of a four year Reconciliation Action Plan. It provides a set of principles that underscore how Council commits to work with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the context of Reconciliation. The Reconciliation Action Plan will then give effect to these principles with both symbolic and practical actions.

This Statement has been developed following consultation with Traditional Owners, local Aboriginal people, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, community service providers, and across the organisation of Wyndham City.

In making this Statement of Commitment, Wyndham City recognises that there is diversity amongst Aboriginal people in Wyndham and varying aspirations and needs. Council also acknowledges that this Statement can only be met through an inclusive approach of genuine partnership and strong collaboration across the community by Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people.

¹ In this Statement of Commitment the term 'Aboriginal' is used to include the first inhabitants of Australia, including Torres Strait Islanders, but not to indicate any undermining of their respective distinct identities.

Wyndham has the third highest population of Aboriginal people in Metropolitan Melbourne.² This population has almost doubled between the last two censuses and continues to grow.

Historically, Wyndham was always a place of particular importance for the peoples of the Kulin Nation. The area has an extremely rich and diverse Aboriginal cultural heritage. Different Traditional Owner groups negotiated alliances, exchanged resources and sustainably managed the lands, waterways and coast of what is now known as Wyndham. The Werribee River, a name derived from a local clan known as the Weariby Yallock (*weariby* meaning spine or backbone and *yallock* meaning river), formed the natural boundary between areas occupied by different language groups.

Colonisation had a severe impact on the health and well-being of Aboriginal people. The number of Aboriginal people in the Wyndham area, as in all parts of Australia, dropped dramatically in the decades following European arrival. Dispossession, displacement and denial of access to places of cultural and spiritual importance struck a devastating blow to a way of life that had endured for many thousands of years. The laws and policies of successive Governments, including those that resulted in the removal of children from their families, their communities and their country, inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on Aboriginal people. Despite this Aboriginal culture remains strong and continues to be expressed in both traditional and contemporary ways.

² (1145 persons) Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Census of Population and Housing 2011, Cat. 2075.0 Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. ABS has done analysis that takes into account the undercount in the Census. They have developed estimates based on the extent of the undercount as measured by a post enumeration survey. The estimate for Wyndham is 1449.

Wyndham City Acknowledges:

Traditional Owners

- Aboriginal people were the first inhabitants of Australia and have the oldest living continuing culture in human history
- Wyndham is on the traditional lands of the peoples of the Kulin Nation
- The sustainable custodianship of these lands, waterways and coast by Traditional Owners for thousands of years
- Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation (trading as Wadawurrung) is the Registered Aboriginal Party appointed for the Wyndham municipal area west of the Werribee River
- For the Wyndham municipal area east of the Werribee River, there are a number of organisations that claim traditional and/or familial links. Currently, there is no single organisation appointed as the Registered Aboriginal Party for this area. Council is guided by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council in their appointment of Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs).

Injustices

- The displacement of Traditional Owners to missions and reserves, the brutality of early occupation by some settlers and colonial officials, and the breaking up of families through successive government policies led to Aboriginal people being dispossessed of their lands and culture
- Aboriginal people have endured discrimination, grief, loss, hurt and suffering since colonisation which has led to present-day disadvantages
- Aboriginal people's identity, language, culture, and traditions have been adversely impacted;
- Discriminatory government policies and legislation have significantly contributed to the poorer health and wellbeing, education and employment outcomes experienced by Aboriginal people
- Despite these injustices, Aboriginal culture and ways of living continue to remain strong.

Land, Language and Culture

- There are many places of Aboriginal cultural significance in Wyndham on the land and along the waterways and coast
 - Access to land, places, sites and culturally-safe spaces, as well as revitalisation of language and cultural practices is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people
 - Aboriginal cultures have been transferred through generations by story-telling, ceremonies, ritual, dance, art, craft and music
 - Aboriginal Elders and respected community leaders play a significant role within the Aboriginal and broader community
 - There is a diversity of backgrounds, beliefs, expression of cultures and connections to traditional lands and practices amongst Aboriginal people that have a connection to Wyndham
- Aboriginal people have a breadth of knowledge and experience to share with the broader community and continue to make a rich and important contribution towards the identity and wellbeing of Wyndham.

Wyndham City Supports:

- The distinct cultural rights, responsibilities and spiritual connection of Traditional Owners to the land, waterways and coast of Wyndham
- Aboriginal people further strengthening their community connections, languages, cultures and identities in ways that they themselves determine
- The active participation of Aboriginal people in decision-making regarding both broad community and specific Aboriginal issues
- Healing processes as determined by the Aboriginal community that address the hurt, oppression and pain they experience
- Initiatives that assist the Stolen Generations to reconnect with their families, communities and identities
- Social justice initiatives that contribute to improved access, inclusion and equity outcomes for Aboriginal people
- Non-Aboriginal people learning from, understanding, valuing, and celebrating Aboriginal people.

Wyndham City Commits to:

- Listening to, understanding and acting on priorities identified by the Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal people that have a connection to Wyndham
- Creating meaningful partnerships with the Registered Aboriginal Party, Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation and other Traditional Owner organisations that advocate for and support the management, protection and promotion (where appropriate) of the rich Aboriginal heritage in Wyndham
- Exploring opportunities, in partnership with Traditional Owner organisations and other Aboriginal community members, for incorporating place-names, design features and cultural heritage information in a wide-range of existing infrastructure and future developments
- Formally recognising Aboriginal people as the first inhabitants of Australia through adopting acknowledgement protocols across Council business
- Increasing the civic participation of Aboriginal people at all levels and providing opportunities for Aboriginal Elders and leaders to play an active role in the broader Wyndham community
- Supporting the expression of Aboriginal cultures as dynamic, living and continuous
- Raising awareness within Council and with the broader Wyndham community to increase understanding, recognition and respect of Aboriginal people
- Supporting initiatives that combat racism and discrimination against Aboriginal people

Wyndham City Commits to:

- Ensuring the services provided by Wyndham are culturally responsive and proactive in meeting the needs of Aboriginal people across the life stages
- Advocating and partnering with Aboriginal communities, organisations and key stakeholders to help improve justice, health, housing and education outcomes for Aboriginal people
- Increasing opportunities for economic participation by Aboriginal people through employment and enterprise
- Creating opportunities for cultural connection and access to culturally safe spaces for Aboriginal people.



Contact Wyndham City

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