



Werribee South Green Wedge Management Plan

Cultural Values Statement

Summary report

Prepared for: Wyndham City Council

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Corporation

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Statement overview

This statement outlines the significance of Bunurong Country within the Werribee South Green Wedge, as well as recommendations on incorporating these values into the Werribee South Green Wedge Management Plan. It is a modified version of a Cultural Values Project provided to Wyndham City Council that is suitable for public viewing.

This statement does not discuss Country within the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation Registered Aboriginal Party area.

Using this document

This statement does not include or reflect the views of the entire Bunurong community and as such, it does not represent the whole range of contemporary Bunurong views and values that relate to Werribee South Green Wedge.

Boonwurrung, the language of Bunurong peoples, is used in this document. As of June 2025, BLCAC has developed a new standardised spelling system that is approved by Elders, knowledge holders, community members and the BLCAC Language team. As such, some words that you may be familiar with might be spelled differently in this CVP.

Statement of acknowledgement

We pay our respects and acknowledge our Ancestors, our Elders, our Bunurong community and all who live, work and spend time on Country. Our land and waters are our home, and we work to protect and preserve our cultural landscape for the next generations to value and appreciate.

The author would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Bunurong Elders, knowledge holders and community members in the development of this statement, as well as members of the BLCAC Cultural Values and Research Unit.

The significance of Werribee South Green Wedge Country

Research on the significance of Bunurong Country associated with Werribee South Green Wedge has identified that the following features are particularly significant and they speak to the overall significance of Bunurong Country to Bunurong peoples:

- Naarm (Port Phillip Bay)
- The wetlands and waterways of Werribee South Green Wedge Country
- The volcanic plains landscape

Furthermore, the principle of Caring for Country is an overarching cultural values narrative that contributes to this discussion.

Naarm

The Naarm coastline forms the southernmost boundary of Werribee South Green Wedge Country. Today, Bunurong peoples proudly identify as Warranh (saltwater) peoples and Naarm, alongside Wurnmarrinh (Western Port Bay), is one of the most significant components of Bunurong Country. The vast stretches of marine coastlines and freshwater watercourses, and the food resources they provide, have sustained Bunurong peoples for thousands of years. This is true even when the water levels were lower and Naarm was a swampy plain home to kulap (emu) and mobs of bounding kuyim (kangaroo).

Shell midden places

Shell midden places contain the remains of shellfish eaten by First Nations people in the past; the refuse from a single meal or many, potentially revisited and reused for thousands of years. In Bunurong Country, they can be found throughout the coastal environments of Naarm and Wurnmarrinh, as well as in relation to dunes, cliffs, estuaries, rivers and wetlands. Some shell midden places were used for generations by members of the same family or clan group, and

the shell midden places of Werribee South Green Wedge are physical reminders of the time Bunurong peoples spent on Country in the past.

Naarm Dreaming stories

Naarm is an important part of many Bunurong Dreaming stories and in 2021 Bunurong Elder Aunty Gail Dawson shared with Garland Magazine how Naarm was created and the connection between these saltwaters and Bunurong peoples:

A long time ago, when vast fields of grasslands and murnong covered Naarm, and the mighty Birrarung and her tributaries flowed through them to the sea, the Bunwurrang women practised their cultural Lore at special women's places along the river, all the way down to the shores of the deep blue sea. There, they stood on the ridges at the very edge of their land and lit their fires, singing to and dancing for the great Mother Whale, Barndin Badiyal, as she guided the mother whales and their newborn calves to the safe resting place she had created around Korriyong and Djouap. There, the women learnt the sacred ways of Womanhood and Motherhood, of harmony and balance.

But soon, a time of drought scourged the country and neighbouring lands. The tributaries dried up and the mighty Birrarung grew thin. The eels swam to better waters; the birds flew away, and the animals began to die. The Bunwurrang and their neighbours grew hungry. And soon, the fighting began. Men from different clans tried to claim each other's Country. Boundaries were broken and women's sacred places were ignored and desecrated. As harmony was shattered and balance destroyed, the Bunwurrang women could no longer create children, and they cried in grief and despair.

Watching from the highest points of their country, the Old Women knew what they had to do. And so, when Meniyan (the Moon) was full and bright, they stood tall and strong on the many peaks and ridges throughout their Country and lit a ring of enormous fires. Pulling their remaining children around them, they danced and sang their old songs, calling out loud and desperate to Barndin Badiyal for help.

Roused from her resting place near her calf Djou-djou, the great Mother Whale heard the Old Women's impassioned pleas and swam to the edge of

the deep blue sea. From there, she saw the devastation of the land and the destruction of the women's sacred places. She saw how the once fertile lands were now barren and how all the animal and plant life had disappeared. As the bringer of life from the water and deep places, Barndin Badiyal decided to restore the balance.

Taking a deep breath, Mother Whale dived down into the dark depths of her ocean world. From there, she gathered all her strength and with one mighty push, thrust her way back up to the light of the moon, breaking through the surface of the water, and breaching high into the air. A gust of wind and sea spray whipped around her, like a hurricane.

On the land, the men felt this stormy blast hit their faces and they looked up from sharpening their weapons. They stared in wonder at the dark shape soaring into the night sky, blocking the light of the full moon. In fear and awe, they dropped their weapons and ran as fast as they could to the higher ground of the closest ridges. They kept their faces turned away because they understood that they had broken Law, and that the great Mother Whale had arrived to bring retribution.

With one forceful turn of her enormous body, Barndin Badiyal crashed down upon the dried-up grasslands of Bunwurrang Country, and the earth shuddered and shook, sinking lower than the sea. Flicking her powerful tail upon the men's campsites, she destroyed their weapons. Then, with a deep, thundering song, she called out to the ocean to rush in and claim the land. As the sea rose up around her, the Mother Whale blew a myriad of abundant life from her blowhole to fill the newly created bay. The waters soon began to teem with fish and shellfish, plentiful and healthy.

As the dawn light crept over the horizon, the Old Women, and their children, rushed down from the ridges and stood on the newly created shores. They had lost their dried-up fields and grasslands, but had received instead, a beautiful bay, filled with life, Naarm—the sacred water place from which life springs. Renewed energy and happiness stirred in their bodies again, and tears of joy and gratitude streamed from their eyes. New songs spilled from their mouths in praise of the great Mother Whale and their bodies moved with new dances.

Barndin Badiyal saw the women's tears, and she blew forth a gust of wind from her blowhole. It caught the tears and scattered them across Bunwurrang Country, forming new tributaries, wetlands and creeks, which

all bled into the bay. These waters of Naarm were Sea Country now, and it was the solemn duty of Bunwurrang women to honour and care for them. A loud call from Mother Whale caught the attention of the Old Women and their children. They saw Barndin Badiyal turn her enormous eye to look at them, and the women understood her message ... she would always be watching. The men stayed on the ridges with their faces turned away.

As the sun rose on the new day, with restored life all around them, the Bunwurrang women made a sacred promise to always protect what Barndin Badiyal had created for them, and they vowed to never again let balance and harmony be broken.

The wetlands and waterways of Werribee South Green Wedge Country

Water, both fresh and marine, shapes the cultural landscape of Bunurong Country. Places where freshwater flows (or used to flow) into Naarm are particularly significant because they are places where Bunurong peoples would have gathered to get fresh water and collect seasonal foods like shellfish such as mussel, oyster, turbo, pipi and abalone. Waterholes and wetlands were also places to replenish water sources while travelling across Country, a consistent habitat for a wide variety of seasonal fish and waterbirds and a place to attract larger animals like kuyim and walart (possum).

Wirribi Yaluk

BLCAC recognises the significance of Wirribi Yaluk to Bunurong peoples, expressed in the following statement for the 2022 *Lower Werribee Waterway Amenity Action Plan*:

Wirribi Yaluk forms the western most boundary of the Bunurong peoples, but these boundaries are not as Europeans understand them now, they are where people's connection to place changes within the cultural landscape.

This place marks a shared boundary with the Wadawurrung people. The Wirribi Yaluk bordered two Bunurong clans at the threshold of European colonisation, the Kurung Jang Balluk and Yalukit Willam, both groups were severely affected by early European colonisation. If you lose enough of something, what little you have left becomes so much more important. The

Bunurong people were amongst the first Indigenous people in Victoria that were involved in cross-cultural entanglements with Europeans, and although they were reduced to just a handful of individuals by the mid-1800s, they are still here, and continue to maintain our cultural obligations to care for the people, the flora and fauna, the lands and the waters within the Bunurong cultural landscape, which is alive with our stories.

The Wirribi Yaluk along with the other major waterways within Bunurong Country demonstrate the flow of life, health and purpose. Bunurong Elders today liken these waterways to a life's journey, from the merest trickle of moisture in the rain, flowing into a creek, to the fast clear rush of a large river that eventually flows to its end at the sea.

Bunurong people are saltwater people and this connection between the sea and the hinterland is important. The use of resources along the river followed a seasonal pattern that ebbed and flowed with people's needs. These resources were shared between the Wadawurrung and the Bunurong peoples and were mostly harvested in a sustainable way that allowed for future generations to also enjoy these important places. These resources have changed today, but rivers flow with the life force of Country and after heavy rain they cleanse the debris to eventually make the water clear and clean again.

Please join the Bunurong people in creating a future for all our children by helping to care for Country in a way that is more sustainable and that recognises the deep connection of Traditional Owners to this cultural landscape.

Skeleton Creek and Laverton Creek

Laverton Creek, Skeleton Creek and Wirribi Yaluk are places where Bunurong peoples came to catch fish and collect seasonal foods, including plant species that are important to Bunurong peoples for their edible and functional properties such as Rounded Noon-flower (*Disphyma crassifolium* ssp. *Clavellatum*), Seaberry Saltbush (*Rhagodia candolleana* ssp. *Candolleana*) and Coast Sword-Sedge (*Lepidosperma gladiatum*).

Skeleton Creek originates at the foothills of Mt Atkinson, flowing through Bunurong Country and draining into Naarm at Cheetham Wetlands. A songline runs across this Country, starting at Mt Atkinson and Mt Cottrell and following the routes of movement of large mammals like

kuyim, kulap and yuuk (Short-finned eel; *Anguilla australis*) that lived in and close to the flowing waterways of Skeleton Creek.

Some of these waterways were also home to River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) specimens which are particularly important biocultural species for Bunurong peoples who used the bark to make canoes and carriers for fishing and transport. The colonists, settlers and pastoralists logged River Red Gum because their hard wood was resistant to rotting and therefore the preferred timber for railways, wharves and piers. There are far fewer River Red Gums in the Werribee South Green Wedge landscape today than in the past, and those that have endured are particularly important as rare survivors of the rampant destruction brought about by colonisation.

The wetlands of Werribee South Green Wedge

The wetlands of Werribee South Green Wedge are also places where Bunurong peoples could access plants suited to grow in these environments including rushes, saltwater grasses, lignum and samphire salt-tolerant species. Bunurong peoples would have routinely collected and eaten them along the shoreline and the margins of the rivers, creeks and swamps, and used them to make baskets. Bunurong peoples would also have collected shellfish, caught fish and gathered together to share this food with family.

The importance of these water places is through association with Bunurong Ancestors and how they lived on and cared for Country in the past. It is also through their environmental importance and status as an internationally recognised Ramsar site and habitat for migratory waterbirds such as the Double banded Plover (*Charadrius bicinctus*), Eastern curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*), Red necked Stint (*Calidris rufi collis*), Sharp tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) and Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus longirostris*), to name a few.

The volcanic plains landscape

Sections of Werribee South Green Wedge are part of the Victorian Volcanic Plains (VVP) bioregion, which is defined by geological features such as basalt plains and volcanic cones. These basalt plains are a rich lithic resource for Bunurong peoples who used the stone to knap

stone artefacts, including tools and weapons. The wider volcanic landscape is particularly important to Bunurong peoples.

Colonists physically altered the landscapes of these plains by building kilometres of dry-stone walls to corral stock, prevent pests such as rabbits from eating the crops and to delineate property boundaries. These walls prevented the native fauna such as kuyim, kulap and wallaby from freely moving across the plains and they can still be seen at some locations within Werribee South Green Wedge. These stone walls are particularly painful reminders of the way in which Country was taken from Bunurong peoples, and how Bunurong peoples were, in some instances, forced to build them.

Caring for Country

Bunurong peoples have lived here and cared for this Country for thousands of generations. During this time, they employed sophisticated techniques of land management to ensure the health of Country and of the peoples who walked it. This small area of Country that is Werribee south Green Wedge, and the broader cultural and biocultural landscapes of Bunurong Country, continues to hold significance for Bunurong peoples today.

All parts of Bunurong Country are connected. Country is understood to be formed by the land we walk upon, as well as Warranh Biik (Sea Country) and Laak Biik (Sky Country). As Bunurong peoples are Warranh peoples, Warranh Biik is particularly important and a fundamental way in which they understand and maintain their connections to Country. Laak Biik, too, is a vital element of Bunurong Country; the moon and stars illuminate the night-time sky and are used in navigation, while the winds help curate burning regimes and move seeds across Country.

Today, caring for Country has a flow-on effect for Traditional Owners. By keeping Country healthy and in balance, Country in turn also cares for the people. As Country is not passive, it is able to provide people with everything required to not only survive but also to thrive. Conversely, if Country is not cared for, harm can come to those who live and spend time here.

Recommendations for Werribee South Green Wedge Country

All of our Country is highly significant, every square inch, every rock, every leaf, every dune and every artefact. If we could attribute the cause of this blanket high significance rating of our Country to any one thing, it would be that in Melbourne especially, so much has been destroyed and lost as the city grew, and so quickly. If you lose enough of something, what little you have left becomes so much more important.

Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

The aims of these recommendations are to advocate for the protection and promotion of Bunurong cultural and biocultural values, including tangible and intangible cultural heritage—especially during planning, construction and development within Werribee South Green Wedge—and to demonstrate how Bunurong peoples continue to maintain a long-lasting and enduring connection to place despite the destruction of colonisation and environmental degradation.

Protect Country that is culturally significant

Development should be avoided on Country that is culturally sensitive. The following landforms and landscapes associated with Werribee South Green Wedge are considered particularly significant and sensitive to Bunurong peoples:

- Waterways and wetlands, especially where they flow/used to flow into Naarm;
- Areas of remnant and native vegetation, specifically plants with cultural and biocultural significance to Bunurong peoples;
- Country where songlines exist;
- Country where Bunurong peoples came to fish and collect shellfish; and
- Habitats of significant species such as migratory birds, yuuk and kuyim.

Protect Bunurong biocultural values

When developing or modifying Country, Bunurong biocultural values should be actively protected. Protecting Bunurong biocultural values includes:

- Protecting bird habitats by limiting noise and other pollutants and restricting the loss of key bird habitat species;
- Prioritising the protection, preservation and restoration of remnant, endemic and native vegetation, especially plains grassland species;
- Prioritising the protection and preservation of the volcanic landscape, including volcanic rocks;
- Prioritising the protection, preservation and restoration of waterways, including where they flow into Naarm;
- Prioritising the protection and preservation of habitats of significant species and providing nature corridors to prevent animals from being landlocked within development areas;
- Revegetating and landscaping using local native species and species that help restore Country;
- Prioritising the use of plant species that are consistent with pre 1750 EVCs; and
- Engaging BLCAC to help achieve these outcomes.

Acknowledge and protect intangible cultural values

Intangible cultural values such as songlines, ephemeral waterways, former pathways across Country, former and current animal routes of movement, cultural connections between places and specific knowledge of Country and areas of women's business and men's business should be routinely protected alongside the tangible cultural heritage.

Manage Country together

Collaborate with neighbouring council authorities and Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation to manage Werribee South Green Wedge Country (specifically the coastal

landscapes) by recognising the significance of these parts of Bunurong Country and developing strategies that best enable us to care for Country together.

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