



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, the owners of the land on which we meet. Land that has never been ceded. Our culture, the colonial culture, has thrived on the back of dispossession of Wurundjeri land and attempts to eliminate customs, language and indeed people. But they and their culture have survived. We pay our respect to the Elders past and present. The passing of knowledge has been and is secure, and we all benefit from this. In Victoria we are leading the Nation in developing a Treaty and NRG pledges to work as the best Allies we can be to First Nations people involved in this process. A Treaty stands to benefit all Victorians.

At the beginning of 2024 many in our country, including NRG were struggling with the way to continue following the result of the 2023 Referendum. However, overwhelmingly, Reconciliation Groups across the country agreed that the journey was far from over. After a period of Silence following the result, First Nations Leaders have made statements to help move forward. Thomas Mayo in his book published this year "Reflections On The voice" points out that The Uluru Statement from the Heart is no less true, logical or important because of the referendum result, and he urges us to keep up the energy and hope to continue as good allies to First Nations. We will soon hear from Uncle Charles Pakana who actively leads us on the journey forward in many different ways, for example, speaking at events like tonight, and through his wonderful VANtalks podcasts.

It has been enriching to work more with Reconciliation Banyule this year in joint programs and in supporting their activities. We are all volunteers and have competing commitments in our lives. Sharing is a great way to be effective.

In Nillumbik we are so fortunate to have Edendale Community Environmental Farm. Thank you for the excellent programs you run and your support of First Nations peoples in different ways. NRG are grateful for your support of our organisation and for the use of this room tonight.

Thank you to the Federal Member for Jaga Jaga, Kate Thwaites MP, and to the State member for Eltham, Vicki Ward MP, for printing support for promotion of NRG's events.

Thank you to Nillumbik Shire Council for your support of NRG's activities. The nature of this support is outlined further below.

1. The Committee

President: Jan Mackenzie

Vice President: Position not filled

Secretary: Diana Warrell

Treasurer: Bill Pretty

Convener of the Friends of Moor-rul Grasslands: Jill Kellow

Mailing List Convener: Bob West

Nillumbik Shire Councillor Representative : Natalie Duffy

Committee members: Jan Aitken, Luke Chambers, Jann Darvill, Patrick Di Lizio, Olivia Giannios, Tanya Mammone, Cassie May, Jo Osbourne, Kathleen Toal, Bob West

Active helpers: Julie Allen, Adrienne Jones, Hilary Peake

Nillumbik Shire Council Staff assisting: Nichole Johnston, Cassie Zureck, Lauren Treby, Loretta Bellarto

Unfortunately, but understandably, several committee members have had to resign this year. Thank you Jo Osbourne and Patrick Di Lizio for giving your time. Both Patrick and Jo have assisted on the Communications team and Patrick has taken on the task of writing Grant Applications several times. His work in ensuring the “ Talkin’ Treaty “ event ran well at Diamond Valley Sports and Fitness Centre was greatly appreciated (see below) . Bob West, a long time committee member, has been responsible for our mailing list for many years. Bob also has been able to offer advice regarding planting activities, and has been a representative on the Panton Hill Bushlands Reserve. He is also considered the expert on making a fire to gather around at the Gawa trail. Thank you so much Bob for all you have done. Bill Pretty has been our thorough, efficient and reliable Treasurer for many years. I personally have valued Bill’s wise counsel on many occasions. We will miss you all and wish you well.

2. Nillumbik Shire Council (NSC)

NRG has continued to work with the council throughout the year in various ways. Representatives from Community Partnerships at NSC have provided a written report on council activities which is tabled at NRG monthly meetings.

The council has been open and generous in considering and awarding monetary grants for us to hold activities throughout the year. These will be referred to below.

We have missed not having the cultural expertise of an Aboriginal Partnerships Officer this year. NSC has been working hard to recruit someone to this position assisted by Uncle Joel Wright from Mobjobs. We hope this will be resolved very soon.

Committee member Cassie May has been the NRG representatives on the RAP (Reconciliation Action Plan) committee this year. The Draft RAP has been endorsed by Council. It is currently being reviewed by the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC). The next step will be submission to Reconciliation Australia for acceptance.

We thank NSC for including NRG in their monthly meetings with **Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Corporation** (via Zoom). This has provided an opportunity to gain feedback and cultural advice regarding our activities. We extend our thanks to Aunty Julianne Axford and Auntie Gail Smith for this and for the opportunity to further learn

the Wurundjeri perspective that they share about NSC programs. Thanks also to Charley Woolmore from WWCHAC who provides valuable information on the best ways for us to pursue ideas.

3. Events and Activities:

- A. NSC did not hold a citizenship ceremony on **26th of January** this year. NRG welcomed this sign that the council recognised the controversy surrounding a celebration on this date. Members of NRG attended and participated in a Sunrise Acknowledgement for Survival/Invasion Day at Eltham North Adventure Playground. This was organised by Reconciliation Banyule and Monty Allies. With birds awakening and calling and flying overhead in a clear, cold sky, it was a perfect way to reflect on the history of our Country.
- B. **Committee meetings** were held on the second Wednesday of the Month 7.00-9.00 pm. The first meeting was in February and it was wonderful to again talk face to face. We met at The Old Eltham Courthouse, on the corner of Brougham Street and Main Road Eltham. This is a Council facility used by U3A for weekly classes. The facility is made available to U3A members to use at other times and, as several NRG members also belong to U3A, we were able to do this. We thank this dynamic organisation for allowing us to use this facility.
- C. **Reconciliation Week 23rd May - 3rd June**. A busy time for NRG members attending events in the community following the theme “**Now More Than Ever**”. The **Flag Raising Ceremony** organised by NSC at the offices in Civic Drive Greensborough again focused on youth participation. The speeches, by Rachel from St Helena Secondary College Koori Club, and Daneen from Catholic Ladies College Firecarriers, were inspiring, and with permission we published them on our webpage. Lucy Angelico, Director of Faith and Mission, extended an invitation to attend **Reconciliation Week Assembly at CLC**. Kutcha Edwards and Jay Jerome addressed the Assembly and presented a musical performance and there was also strong student participation. The Firecarriers spoke and raised the Aboriginal Flag in a short ceremony afterwards. Again we were inspired by the commitment to reconciliation shown by the students.
- D. **Yarra Plenty Regional Library** also held special activities during Reconciliation week which NRG supported. These included film screenings and author talks. Professor Andrew Gunstone spoke about his book “Reflections on the Voice” at the Ivanhoe and Eltham branches. Professor Ian J McNiven and Professor Lynette Russell spoke at the Eltham branch about their contribution to the “First Knowledges” series, “Knowledge and Ingenuity”. We look forward to working further with YPRL to support their Indigenous programs.
- E. **Cuppa For Culture**. 25th May. Tara Di Bondi, a member of Reconciliation Banyule and an Educator at Edendale Community Environmental Farm organised a morning tea to raise money for **VACCA (Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Organisation)**. This was held at Edendale. It was a chance to discuss and think more about what reconciliation means and what practical steps we can all take to achieve this- ReconciliACTION. Tara’s presentation was excellent and the morning tea supplied by volunteers from NRG, Rec Banyule and Monty Allies was delicious. There has been some discussion that this could become an annual event, which NRG would be very happy to support.
- F. It was a pleasure to continue our association with **Eltham Bookshop**. During Reconciliation Week Meera Govil offered us a space outside the shop to promote NRG and Reconciliation. On 26th May we partnered with the bookshop to promote Cassandra Pybus’ new book “A Very Secret Trade”. This book contributes to the truth of our history by outlining the shocking trading of Aboriginal skeletal remains that took place in Tasmania during the 19th century. Further partnering took place later in October with the promotion of “Warra Wards Wai”, by Darren Rix and Craig Cormick. In this book we learn another perspective on Cook’s journey up the east coast of Australia - First Nations accounts of the journey which have been passed down over generations.

- G. On 28th August, Eltham bookshop presented another opportunity for people to learn more of our history by inviting bestselling author Anita Heiss, of the Wiradyuri Nation, to present her latest novel, “Dirrayawadha”. Whilst this book is fiction, real characters and events are portrayed. It was another opportunity to support the bookshop and a First Nations author, and this time it was held at **Montsalvat**. It was a pleasure to meet with the CEO Matt Jones after this event, and NRG would welcome any opportunity to work with Montsalvat in the future..
- H. **Barbunnin Beek Family Day - 1st June**. Members of NRG assisted with Reconciliation Banyule’s barbecue and activities stall on this day. It was a great opportunity to support this community lead **Aboriginal Gathering Place** in West Heidelberg and to meet individuals and families who attend there. Julie Allen and Di Parry volunteer regularly at Barbunnin Beek Food Share. Reconciliation Banyule were invited by Barbunnin Beek to assist them at the Malahang community festival in West Heidelberg on 17th November and members of NRG helped out on the fundraising barbecue and with children’s activities.
- I. We were delighted to again obtain a Reconciliation grant from NSC to enable NRG to liaise with the **Aborigines Advancement League**, to conduct an event during **NAIDOC WEEK 7th -14th July**. NRG hosted a group at Edendale Farm for an Art activity, morning tea and lunch. NRG members were invited to share in the socialisation, conversation and art. Again the artworks were gifted to Elders at a celebration lunch at the AAL a short time later. This year members of NRG were invited to attend this celebration on 9th July. It was a wonderful day and a privilege to be there. A highlight was meeting Aunty Muriel Bamblett who had just been awarded the NAIDOC person of the year award. Aunty Muriel is a much respected Elder and has been CEO of VACCA since 1999.
- J. We were successful in obtaining a grant from NSC to hold a **Caring For Country** planting day at the **Gawa Wurundjeri Resource Trail** on the 30th June. This self guided trail at 873 Eltham-Yarra Glen Road, Watson’s Creek is a special place for NRG so it was significant that we chose this site for two special activities. As well as the planting activity, Luke Chambers also launched our new website (see below). Wurundjeri man Daniel Ross opened the day with a Welcome to Country and a Smoking Ceremony. Daniel spoke of the importance of caring for country for Wurundjeri people. He later planted a Manna Gum. Particular thanks is extended to Brad Taddy, Senior Environmental Officer at NSC who lead us in planting 250 Indigenous trees, shrubs and grasses. Thanks also to the community members who joined us, in particular Vicki Shukuroglou and Nillumbio.
- K. Later in the year a group of 12 enthusiastic joey/scouts from First Eltham visited the **Gawa Trail** with their leader Victoria and some of their parents. Diana planned the activities and Bob, Jill and Olivia assisted in what proved to be an afternoon full of fun and learning about the old Wurundjeri way of life.
- L. This year saw the establishment of the **Communications Sub-committee** under the leadership of Luke Chambers. I particularly wish to thank Luke for this leadership and his expertise, and Julie Allen for her excellent and diligent management of our Facebook presence. Luke’s report is included here : *In February we launched the Communications Working Group to assess the current practices and identify ways to amplify our existing strengths and pursue new activities . By March the group had established key goals to enhance the experience of supporters - from their first contact with NRG through to membership and active involvement . This process included a comprehensive review of our website and we initiated an editorial calendar to improve content planning. In April we started the NRG Facebook group and launched a new public page, creating a more inclusive social media space for sharing updates. A major focus in May was completing a new website to improve user experience including migrating hosting and establishing a secure online membership system. This new website , launched in conjunction with the Gawa Trail Tree Planting event on 30th June, now includes a news section, events calendar, and resources for learning and engaging. Moving forward we aim to produce 8 social posts, 2 articles and a newsletter each month. However the need for additional volunteer support remains a significant challenge, particularly for maintaining email newsletter content. Improved communication tools including a switch to MailChimp for a more reliable email outreach, and role-based email accounts have enhanced our capabilities for engaging and managing member relations effectively.*

The working group is grateful for the contributions of Bob West, Jill Kellow, Jo Osbourne, Julie Allen, and Patrick Di Lizio who have been instrumental in developing and executing this year's initiative.

- M. Again this year some members of NRG attended the **Anzac Day Ceremony** at Kangaroo Ground War Memorial and laid a wreath in honour of First Nations servicemen, who were not treated in the same way as other returning personnel. In the same spirit a wreath was laid by NRG representatives at the **Friends of Kangaroo Ground War Memorial** ceremony on **Remembrance Day**. Thank you Jan Aitken.
- N. **“Talkin’ Treaty”**. At the request of **The First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria**, NRG and **Reconciliation Banyule** worked together to hold an educational event in Greensborough. On 8th September approximately 150 people came together to hear and ask questions about Treaty in Victoria. We were privileged to have Barry Firebrace-Briggs and Zoe Upton from The First Peoples’ Assembly there to answer questions from the audience. Uncle Charles Pakana was the expert moderator. The event was supported by a grant from NSC and by Banyule City Council. Diamond Valley Basketball Association donated the use of the sound equipment. Attendees were also treated to snacks generously donated by Uncle Herb from “Dreamtime Tuka”, a First Nations’ owned and operated business. We thank all who supported this event. It was a great experience working together with Reconciliation Banyule, furthering relationships that began during the Jaga Jaga for Yes campaign in 2023.
- O. Jill Kellow is the NRG representative and co-ordinator of the **Friends of Moor-rul Reconciliation Grasslands (FOMRG)**. FOMRG meet for weeding and maintenance on the first Sunday of the month at the War Memorial Site in Kangaroo Ground. Jill reports that the grasslands look beautiful at the moment, with Kangaroo Grass, Wallaby Grass, Spear Grass, native bluebells, yellow everlastings and pink birdweed. Jill has provided the following information for this report. Like many friends groups the FOMRG has never been a large group but we have gained some very welcome new members who have stayed on as regulars following a large action in combination with the group **Nilumbio** at the end of 2023. Planting days were held during the cooler months, adding 400 new plants to the site and the planted area has been extended by a metre. The remaining months were occupied by weeding. FOMRG is pleased to report that the young “Eucalyptus viminalus” (Manna Gum, or Wurun/Urung in Woi-Wurrung), is growing well. New Interpretive signage, courtesy of NSC, has recently been installed. New members are very much welcome to join FOMRG in caring for country. A more detailed report will soon be up on our web page. NRG are extremely grateful for Jill’s expertise and leadership of this group. Gratitude is also extended to Jan Aitken who stepped in as convenor for 3 months at the beginning of the year when Jill was out of action due to an accident.
- P. Many local sporting clubs have held Indigenous rounds within their fixtures. This year I was asked to make an Acknowledgement of Country at the start of the **Eltham Wildcats Indigenous Round** during NAIDOC week. The opening ceremony also included a didgeridoo performance.
- Q. NRG values the association and support of **St Margaret’s Social Justice Group**. Members of NRG also belong to this group.
- R. **The Eltham North Adventure Playground** is a beautiful and well used space in our community. We were excited to be able to show the Indigenous garden, yarning circle and Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin’s storybook pages to our visitors from the Aborigines Advancement League the day they attended Edendale for NAIDOC week. Their feedback was excellent. The original committee continues to meet to plan further developments there.
- S. NRG members attended the **Community Forum** in Eltham where volunteer groups were given 5 minutes to outline what their organisations did. It was wonderful to hear what is happening in our own municipality where there is a strong culture of volunteering. However, it seems that most groups are in need of attracting more volunteers to continue their activities.

- T. Jan Aitken has represented NRG on the **Nillumbik Arts Museum Committee**. This ensures that Wurundjeri history and culture is considered at each level of discussion. NRG acted as auspice in an application for a Community Grant which was however ultimately unsuccessful.
- U. Jan Aitken and Jan Mackenzie represent NRG at **Reconciliation Eastern Metropolitan (REM)** meetings. It is important to keep in touch with Reconciliation groups in neighbouring suburbs. This group has links with Mullin Mullin Indigenous Gathering Place. We have discussed the possibility of activism around issues and policies that affect First Nations' people and how success could be enhanced through reconciliation groups working together. NRG is also a member of **Reconciliation Victoria** and Julie and I enjoyed a meeting they convened of Local Reconciliation Groups on 5th October. Olivia Giannios was an organiser of this day which reinforced the message that working with, and learning from others is essential to the success of ongoing reconciliation.
- V. The **Rotary Town Fair** was held on 9th November. Diana Warrell coordinated a stall which we shared with LinC and the Nillumbik Climate Action Team. Information about NRG, the Victorian Treaty, and children's activities were provided. The Aboriginal Flag temporary tattoos, and the making of Yarning Sticks were popular. Thank you to Diana and to others who volunteered time on the day, including Tanya Mammone, Jill Kellow, Natalie Duffy and myself. Diana was there all day - a mammoth effort.
- W. On 9th October the Committee met for **Pizza and Planning**. Thank you to Leanne Sheehan from Reconciliation Banyule for conversations and suggestions as to the best way to approach this planning and goal setting task. From this meeting we have established clarity around the **purpose** of NRG, the **strengths** of NRG and the **challenges** facing NRG. The final document produced from this meeting will be used to shape the goals of 2025. We hope that 2025 will see more active members join NRG. The idea of **sub committees** is a way to share responsibilities and workload. This model has been successful this year in the Communication Team. We hope to be able to extend this to other areas which might include **Events, Education, Environment, Youth Engagement, Art and Culture, Community Partnerships, Fundraising and Grants, Cultural Awareness, Advocacy**. What goals we reach and what tasks we take on will depend on the capacity of the group. Please consider formalising your interest in being a First Nations ally by joining NRG. Whatever you can offer will help us to continue the journey of reconciliation.

JAN MACKENZIE

PRESIDENT

NILLUMBIK RECONCILIATION GROUP

Printing courtesy of Vicki Ward M.P., State Member for Eltham