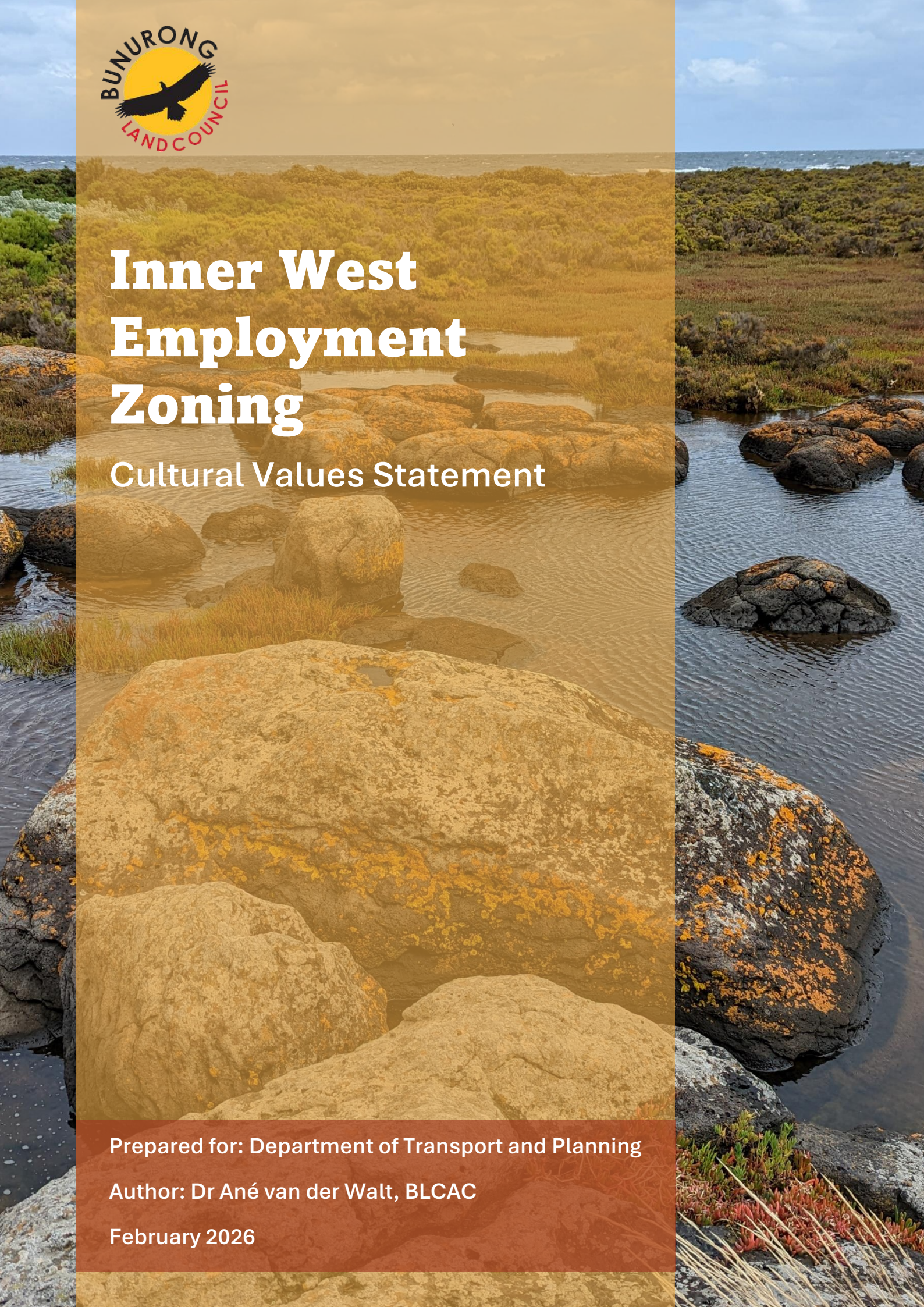

Inner West Employment Zoning

Cultural Values Statement

Prepared for: Department of Transport and Planning

Author: Dr Ané van der Walt, BLCAC

February 2026

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336-340 Nepean Highway
Frankston, Victoria, 3199
Tel 03 9770 1273
ABN: 66 129 413 297 ICN: 3630

Prepared by Dr Ané van der Walt

Project overview

The Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) engaged the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation's Cultural Values and Research Unit (CVRU) to prepare a Cultural Values Statement for Country associated with the Inner West Employment Zoning project. The primary audience for this document is the local community and future land developers.

This Cultural Values Statement documents cultural values associated with Stony Creek, the areas now known as Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay and the broader cultural landscape. It is acknowledged that this Statement does not capture all cultural values connected to this area. Future projects and activities would benefit from additional engagement with BLCAC and the CVRU.

While this Statement provides general recommendations for the Care of Country within the Inner West Employment Zoning precinct, it does not include recommendations or requirements to DTP regarding the rezoning of the project area.

This project also includes a Document Review of Acknowledgement text provided by DTP. This review is included in a separate document.

Use of this document

The research, cultural information and traditional knowledge presented in this project remain the property of the BLCAC. The Sponsor must not share, distribute or use the information contained in this report for any purpose other than the specific purpose for which this project was undertaken. The Sponsor must not share or distribute this report, or information contained within it, with any person outside the immediate project team without the prior written consent of the author and BLCAC. Should the Sponsor wish to share this report or use the information contained within it for any other purpose or with any other party, written consent must first be obtained from BLCAC.

Please note that (minimal) Bunurong language is used in this document. As of June 2025, BLCAC have developed a new standardised spelling system approved by Elders, knowledge holders, community members and the BLCAC Language team. As a result, some Bunurong words that readers may be familiar with may appear with different spellings in this Cultural Values Project.

Author's statement

I am privileged to work with and for the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation within the Cultural Values and Research Unit. As a non-Indigenous person of Dutch descent, I recognise the many privileges that I have as live, work and learn on Bunurong and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country. I also recognise that my perspectives and worldviews are largely informed and biased by Western tradition. The research contained within this document is therefore likely to be misinterpreted at times. I aim to apply decolonising strategies in all aspects of my work so that the processes that are employed and the outcomes that are produced are as ethical, accurate and inclusive as possible.

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 the following people from BLCAC:

- Sam Bennett, Bunurong woman and BLCAC member
- Chelsea Ahern, Bunurong woman and BLCAC member
- Dr Caroline Hubschmann, Cultural Values Advisor

- Julian Dunn, Cultural Values Research Lead
- Karla Zuluaga, Cultural Values Advisor
- Josh van de Ven, Nqawak Nqul Linguist

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1 Cultural Values Statement

> All of our Country is highly significant, every square inch, every rock, every leaf, every dune and every artefact … If you lose enough of something, what little you have left becomes so much more important (Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation 2018)

The Inner West Employment Zoning precinct—spanning parts of the Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay Local Government Areas (LGAs)—is located on the traditional lands of the Bunurong peoples, who have lived on and cared for this Country for hundreds of generations. The Country upon which this project is being undertaken, and the broader cultural landscape of Bunurong Country, continue to hold deep cultural significance for Bunurong peoples today.

This Cultural Values Statement describes some of the Bunurong cultural values associated with this part of Bunurong Country and its surrounds. It is important to note, however, that the Statement does not capture the views of the entire Bunurong community and therefore does not necessarily reflect *all* Bunurong cultural values or layers of significance associated with the area.

Based on the research undertaken for this Cultural Values Statement, the following cultural values themes have been identified as relevant to Bunurong Country within the project area:

- Yalukuyt Wilam Country;
- The waters of Bunurong Country: Stony Creek and beyond; and
- Caring for Country.

These broad cultural values themes are deeply interconnected and do not exist separately or in isolation within the Bunurong biocultural landscape. However, to improve the readability and usability of this document, each theme is presented in a dedicated subsection.

1.1 Yalukuyt Wilam Country

The Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC) is the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) representing the interests of Bunurong peoples and Country. The current BLCAC RAP area extends from Wirribi Yaluk (Werribee River) in the west to Tarwin River in the east. It includes Mornington Peninsula and Victoria's two largest islands, French Island and Phillip Island (Figure 1). This mapping represents the current administrative boundary for BLCAC; however, it does not represent the full pre-colonial extent of Bunurong Country. As BLCAC member Chelsea Ahern states, investigating and understanding the full extent of Bunurong Country across time is essential to the process of truth-telling.

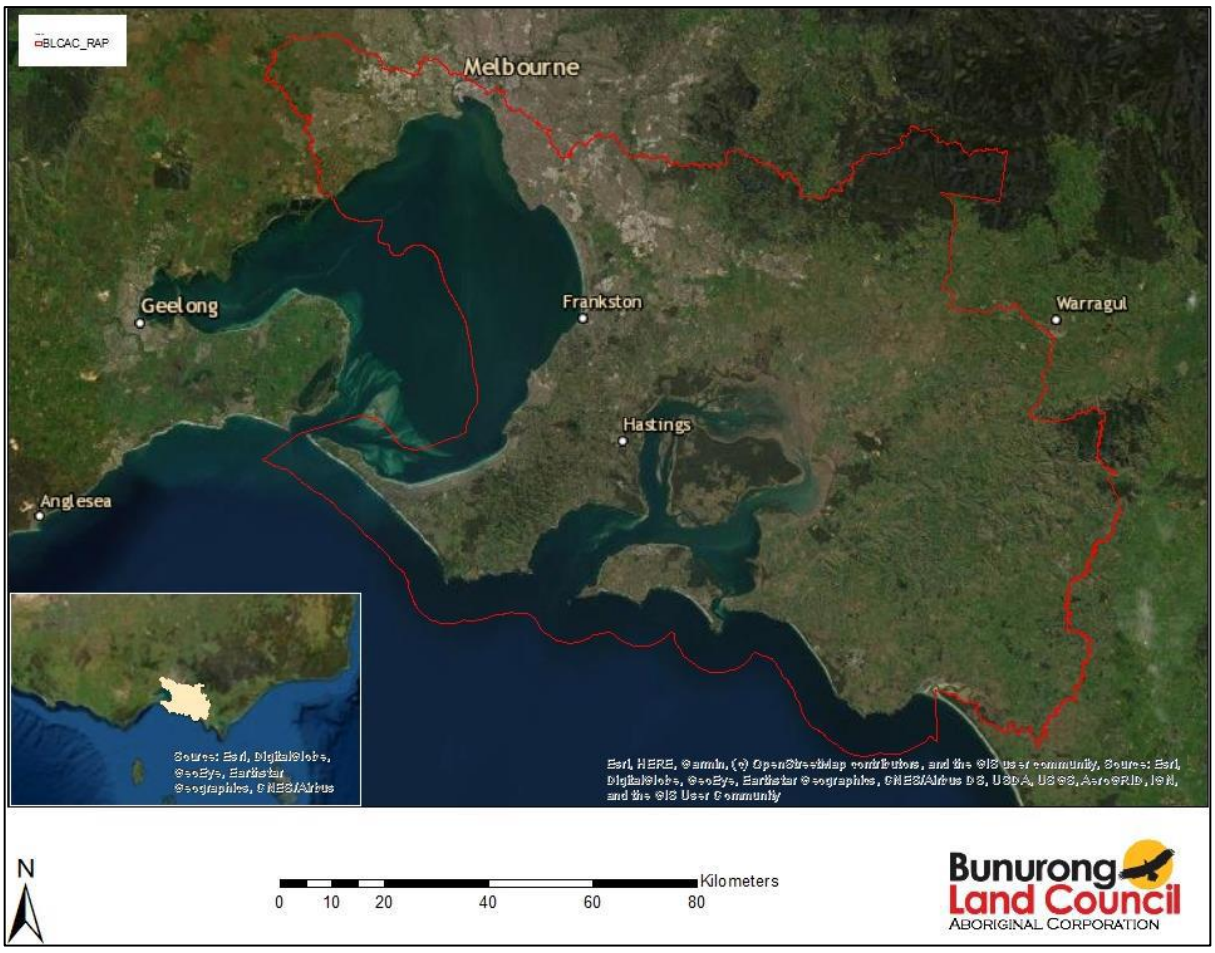

Figure 1: Current BLCAC RAP area

BLCAC's Cultural Values and Research Unit (CVRU) is currently investigating the boundaries of Bunurong Country, both in its entirety and as delineated by the six Bunurong clans. While this

work is ongoing, the Country associated with this project can be reliably attributed to the Yalukuyt Wilam clan. This attribution can be made due to the proximity of the project area to the northernmost beaches of Naarm (Port Phillip Bay) and the suburb of Williamstown–both of which are historically associated with the Yalukuyt Wilam. Prior to the displacement and destruction of colonisation, the peoples of the Yalukuyt Wilam clan lived within a rich cultural landscape that supported their social, cultural, spiritual and economic needs.

The name Yalukuyt Wilam can be translated and analysed as follows:

Yaluk-uyt Wilam
river-LOC camp[1]
'People by the river'

This is a fitting clan name, given that Yalukuyt Wilam Country extends from Wirribi Yaluk (Werribee River) in the west to at least St. Kilda in the east and includes the vast Naarm (Port Phillip Bay) coastline, carved by rivers and creeks in between. It is also inclusive of significant places such as Birrarung (Yarra River), Kororoit Creek and Williamstown.

Yalukuyt Wilam Country—inclusive of Land, Sea and Sky—has been significantly modified and degraded because of colonisation. Today, ethnographic sources and collaboration with Bunurong community members help to reveal what Country was like in the past. For instance, in 1803 James Fleming (in Currey 2002: 28) recorded his observations of Bunurong Country as he crossed the nearby Kororoit and Skeleton Creeks[2] with the then-Acting Surveyor General of New South Wales, Charles Grimes. The following excerpt, from Friday 11 February

[1] "LOC" denotes a locative suffix. This is used to indicate a location and is added to the root word. Locative suffixes are typical in Aboriginal languages across Australia. "Wilam" can be used in the sense of the physical camp as well as the group of people camped at a particular place.
[2] These waterways are not named in Fleming's journal. However, the contemporary names of these waterways has been determined by John Currey, editor of the published edition of Fleming's Port Phillip journal (see Currey 2002).

1803, provides an evocative description of this Country and what is likely to be physical evidence of Bunurong peoples managing the local environment through burning:

> We observed a hill at a distance and made to it; we crossed the two runs seen on the 9th; one ends in a swamp, the other salt water where we crossed it, the country very level, some plains, stony and much water to lodge in it in wet weather. Went to the top of the hill; it is stony; could see about ten miles around us a level plain with a few straggling bushes. The face of the ground is one-third grass, one-ditto stone, and one-ditto earth, mostly newly burnt.

As one of the earliest written accounts of Yalukuyt Wilam Country by a European observer, Fleming's description provides rare insight into this part of Country during this period and describes a landscape shaped by long-standing Bunurong land management practices.

The time Bunurong peoples have spent on Country in and around the project area is evidenced through shell midden places and artefact scatters, often situated along fresh and salt waterways such as Stony Creek, Birrarung (Yarra River), Kororoit Creek and Laverton Creek. The swampy regions in and around Altona, including Point Cook and Laverton North, are also surrounded by stone artefact scatters, clearly demonstrating that these landscapes were resource-rich focal points for activity (du Cros 1989). Notably, Bunurong peoples maintained significant camping grounds at nearby Altona and Point Cook. Mitchell (1949: 113-114) provides the following description of these places:

> Briefly, at both places, lies a marine bank. Near the shore line there is a beach ridge, but inland there is a series of wide ridges separated by shallow troughs, the marine bank is exposed; at other places their floors are covered by a shallow thickness of sand that has drifted in from the adjacent ridges. On surfaces from which the sand has been removed by wind action artefacts are found; they are seemingly incorporated in the dune sand, and, as the superimposed layers were removed, concentrated on the newly exposed surface. Where, too, the sand is in progress of removal, native cooking-places are exposed at different levels. The aborigines [*sic*] apparently frequented their camps during the whole period of dune building.

Records of camping grounds and other significant places in the Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay LGAs are unfortunately scarce. This is partly due to the ephemeral nature of Stony Creek, which cuts through the project area, and partly because of the destructive impact of colonisation on cultural knowledge. However, the tangible heritage—physical markers of previous activity—known today represents only a fraction of what once was present, with much more likely remaining hidden within the strata. Since colonisation, there has been deliberate, reckless and—in some instances—systematic destruction of tangible Bunurong cultural heritage. This is well documented. For example, George Horne (1921:52–53), a medical doctor with an interest in ornithology and ethnology, wrote extensively of his time on Bunurong Country, including the following about Altona, south of Maribyrnong:

> Here, as many other places round the Bay, eating-grounds and workshop alike are buried. Where, however, a wheel-track cuts through the surface, the wind speedily does the rest. This is about eight miles (as the crow flies) from the G.P.O. It is dotted all over with the week-end shanties of the Footscray and Newport people: but this spot we got our richest haul of chipped-black knives and thumb-nail scrapers ("grattoirs" of French schools). The hedge forms the corner of a fowl-run, and inside as well as outside these artefacts were to be picked up by the score. The feeding-ground is quite close-seen on the right of the photographs, where the shells and but few chips appear. The oyster *Ostrea angasi* is much in evidence, though, I am told, it is disappearing from these waters. On the left is the workshop, within a few feet of the eating-place. A feature of this district is the use of tachylyte, which, according to Mr. R.A. Keble, of the Geological Museum, must have come from Carlsruhe, 50 miles away.

These impacts extend beyond the loss of physical places and materials; they also disrupt the cultural, spiritual and narrative systems through which Bunurong peoples have understood, cared for, and remained connected to Country through millennia. Below is a paragraph from Bunurong Elder Aunty Gail Koonwarra Dawson's (2021) women's dreaming story of Parbayin Betayil (Mother Whale) in which Parbayin Betayil helped to replenish Country:

> 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 Parbayin Betayil for help.

This account demonstrates the interconnection between Country, people, stories and culture, and illustrates, through a single example, how the physical destruction of Country can result in devastating consequences for Bunurong peoples by eroding both tangible and intangible values.

Tribal meetings are known to have historically taken place close to the project area. For instance, in the years following European arrival in the Williamstown area, meetings used to take place near the Williamstown Racecourse following astronomical or seismic events. According to Evans (1969: 16):

> Large tribal gatherings at Williamstown racecourse area took place after the earthquake shock of March 1837, and on the night following the comet appearances of March 1843 and September 1844. Further gatherings are recorded after the eclipses of 1845 and 1847.

Inter-tribal meeting places were often connected both to the pathways people travelled and to reliable water sources, reflecting the deep relationship between people and Country. The historical record provides information on the whereabouts and composition of some of these meeting places, as well as activities and cultural practices that were observed during these meetings. Inter-tribal meetings between the peoples of the Kulin Nation took place regularly and possibly on a seasonal basis.

1.2 The waters of Bunurong Country: Stony Creek and beyond

Bunurong peoples proudly identify as saltwater people. Water, both fresh and marine, shapes the cultural landscape of Bunurong Country. Water has deep and specific meanings, values

and uses to Bunurong peoples and is essential to the survival and the flourishing of all living beings on Country. Water also has specific social, cultural, political, spiritual, economic and ecological uses and values: it is mentioned in many stories across Bunurong Country, linking to specific lore, ceremonies and rituals; it attracts and supports culturally significant communities of native flora and fauna; and it is the primary way that the Bunurong, as saltwater peoples, define the extents of their Country.

Stony Creek cuts through the Inner West Employment precinct at the centre of this project. Unfortunately, the Bunurong name for Stony Creek is yet to be rediscovered; its name has been sleeping since colonisation. Stony Creek is ephemeral in nature, meaning that it would have provided seasonal resources for Bunurong peoples. More substantial waterways—such as Kororoit Creek to the west, and Birrarung (Yarra River) and Maribyrnong River immediately to the east and south—would have provided a more reliable resources throughout the year. Nevertheless, Bunurong peoples were known to capture eels—one of the most nutrient rich and culturally significant species—in Stony Creek. Smith (1889:5) notes:

> The mouth of the Yarra, originally called Hobson's River, to the junction of the Saltwater River [Maribyrnong River], teemed with flathead and bream ; Stony Creek abounded with eels … If a blackfellow wished to dine on an eel, he had only to wade into the river, pluck some dry reeds from the bank, tie them to a stick and set them on fire, attracting the fish to the light to be speared ; blood cockles he could easily catch …

Unfortunately, significant disturbance, particularly where Stony Creek enters Naarm, has likely caused the irreversible loss of many tangible signs of Bunurong life. Figure 2**Error! Reference source not found.** and Figure 3 illustrate the extent of this disturbance, including diversions to make way for infrastructure such as the West Gate Bridge.

Figure 2: Extract of early map of Parish of Cut Paw Paw (Hoddle 1840) showing unmodified mouth of Stony Creek

Figure 3: Nearmap imagery of mouth of Stony Creek, 1 January 2023 (accessed 26 April 2023).

European colonisation of the project area has led to significant ecological and environmental harm. The mentality behind this destruction can be seen in colonial histories of the surrounding region, such as that of Williamstown produced by William Elsum (1985: 21), which describe the native flora and fauna that once existed in and around the project area–species which sustained and enriched Bunurong peoples and Country for millennia–in grotesque language:

> Fronting Nelson Parade was a stretch of black sand and disintegrated sea-shells, bearing a sward of pasturage eagerly availed of by the flocks of sheep on their arrival after the troublous crossing of the Straits. Between the bank and the higher ground extended, from Cole Street to the Point, a low-lying level of noisome swamp-land, almost always covered with stagnant water. Further back from the foreshore the black sand changed to stiff clayey soil, whereon grew and struggled stunted copses of sheoak, blackwood, and the native cherry. As before mentioned, the whole dismal environs were haunted continuously by voracious packs of wild dogs and dingoes, whose melancholy howling made night hideous. A belt of trees skirted the river and bay from the Point to the mouth of the Stony Creek, where Yarraville is to-day. This belt varied in width, and was densest at the spot where the present Newport railway station is situated.

Waterbodies like Stony Creek are giving, providing drinking water and a place to catch fish and yabbies. They were also places to collect thick bark from River Red (*Eucalpytus camaldulensis*) and Black Box (*Eucalyptus largiflorens*) gum trees to make carriers, containers, shelters and canoes. The saltwater shorelines of Naarm further sustained Bunurong peoples as they followed their seasonal routes of movement across Country for fish, waterbirds, coastal edible plants and shellfish including *Mytilus* and *Turbo*, as well as pipi, oyster and other mussel species. Both Bunurong men and women participated in fishing across Bunurong Country, a traditional practice that continues today.

Waterbodies and their connecting courses, including fresh and brackish water, formed ideal habitats for the highly significant Short-finned eel (*Anguilla australis)*. Coastal rivers, creeks, swamps and seasonal sources of water joining larger watercourses were excellent places for Bunurong peoples to effectively and sustainably capture fish and eels.

1.3 Caring for Country

Today, the harmful impacts of human activities related to colonial settlement across Bunurong Country—including, but not limited to, swamp or marsh drainage, land clearing, agriculture and creek line alteration—have certainly changed and degraded local water sources such as Kororoit Creek, Birrarung, Stony Creek, Laverton Creek and Maribrynong River. In addition, ongoing natural processes such as sea-level changes, erosion and sedimentation continue to alter the morphology, flow and ecological character of these waterways, particularly near the coast. Natural and human processes have triggered changes within the broader ecosystems of water places, affecting water quality, flow regimes, and the abundance, diversity and composition of local flora and fauna. Contemporary Bunurong peoples aspire to bring health and balance back to these places and their communities to support the long-term health and well-being of all future generations.

Bunurong Elders state that one of the reasons that Bunurong peoples are unhealthy now is because Country is unhealthy. As such, any works undertaken in the Inner West Employment Zoning precinct should prioritise sustainability and avoid harm to Bunurong cultural (both tangible and intangible) and biocultural values. This will ensure that the rich connection to Country continues to sustain Bunurong culture and community today, despite the ongoing devastation of colonisation. Projects such as this are an opportunity for Bunurong cultural and biocultural values to directly inform and guide major planning documents and decisions.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Using cultural information in interpretation

This section provides guidance on how to use the information provided in this Cultural Values Statement for interpretation, if relevant. This includes:

- information on the purposes and goals of interpretation;
- recommendations for interpretive themes; and
- recommendations for interpretive media.

2.2 Why interpretation?

Effective and meaningful interpretation allows visitors to engage with a place to create experiences, emotions, layers of understanding, knowledge and connection. Interpretation should:

- feature stories, knowledge and values that are connected to Bunurong Country and Bunurong peoples;
- engage visitors to experience place through participatory, visceral, emotional, engaging and inspiring opportunities for reflection; and
- feature the experiences of peoples and communities connected to Country who have cared for it and contributed to its preservation.

2.3 Key interpretation principles

BLCAC has the following key principles for interpretation on Bunurong Country:

- interpretation on Bunurong Country, about Bunurong stories and Bunurong peoples, should be guided by members of the Bunurong community;

- Bunurong peoples' connection to Country is multi-faceted, diverse and adaptive, and this can change over time; and
- Bunurong peoples' connection to Country and the history, heritage, cultural values and biocultural values that represent this connection, is not necessarily linear, easily articulated or neatly categorised according to traditionally Western historical frameworks.

2.4 Recommendations for interpretive themes

Themes are tools that assist in creating integrated and meaningful interpretation by helping a visitor understand what is important about a place. They are particularly useful for places or areas with defined boundaries such as the Inner West Employment Zoning precinct, as they can help articulate narratives clearly. However, the use of themes may also be limiting for cultural landscapes, as they may not fully capture intersecting and layered narratives.

The following Bunurong themes have been developed through consultation with members of the Bunurong community. They are deeply interconnected, layered and do not exist in isolation. To improve readability and practical use, each theme is presented in a dedicated subsection.

2.4.1 Reclamation of Country

Reclamation of Country is allowing and guiding nature to recover and recapture pre-colonial biocultural values by regaining prominence over the built environment. It is active management of Country to help restore precolonial vegetation. This includes reducing non-native species such as peppercorn trees and palms, and prioritising flora significant to Bunurong peoples, and appropriate for the area, such as She-oak and Tea-tree species. Using Bunurong language in the linguistic landscape of the project area further supports the prominence and presence of language on Country, contributing to reclamation of Country.

2.4.2 Truth telling

The damages of colonialism are across all Bunurong Country, manifesting physically, symbolically and intangibly. Colonialism caused a disruption not only to the environment but also to cultural transmission of Bunurong peoples. Only through truth-telling, the recognition of Bunurong voices, differing perspectives and the sophisticated use of narrative layers can the depth and meaning of Country be fully understood. Truth telling can be physical and symbolic and can include restoring Bunurong knowledge and connections such as re-naming places with Bunurong language.

2.4.3 Healing Country

> Our history is written in the land – deep in the land – and transmitted via the Songlines. The deep history of this continent is in that black soil beneath the white soil. It lies in the millennia before white settlers started laying down their stories only a couple of hundred years ago, a mere skin that tells nothing of the people who were here up to 65,000 years before them. It is the long human occupancy by a people who know how this land was created, why it looks the way it does, and why the animals, plants and insects were created and behave the way they do and what their purpose is (Neale and Kelly 2020:45-46).

The health of Country in Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay and surrounds has been greatly impacted by colonisation, both through physical landscape changes and through the forced disconnection of Bunurong peoples from Country. Healing Country and strengthening Bunurong culture are interdependent. Reestablishing Bunurong as the language of Country, revegetating built environments and protecting, remembering and recreating cultural knowledge all contribute to repairing fractured Country. Interpretation should invoke the need to care for Country and respect it. Healing can only occur when Country is respected and restored.

2.5 Recommendations for interpretive media

Interpretive media generally consists of, but is not limited to, interpretive signage (free-standing, ground-based, rail-mounted, building mounted, etc.), artworks, guided walks, botanical interpretive signage, Corten silhouettes, digital, audiovisual and multimedia applications and place-based immersive experiences including projections, audio (sound, music, voices), animation and artwork.

The choice of interpretive media should be based on considered experience mapping, designed to achieve the objectives of DTP and BLCAC. The following objectives should be used to determine the appropriate interpretive media:

- It should be multi-layered and multi-vocal;
- It should be story-based;
- It should be interactive and participatory;
- It should explore the tangible and intangible;
- It should be based on the ideas of curiosity and reveal;
- It should be designed specifically to the nature of the location or site; and
- It should be sustainable.

Overall, BLCAC recommends that the interpretive furniture is robust, long-lasting and attractive, and is made using local, sustainably and ecologically sourced timber and stone.

For the project area in question, interpretation can include artistic and/or graphic representations of Country on builds with elements taken from the themes and content of this Cultural Values Statement. This can include:

- interpretation that reflects Country of Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay as it was before colonisation;
- the use of Bunurong language on signage;
- the use of Bunurong language in place naming;

- interpretation that recognises journeys across Country and how Country changes as people come to, travel through and leave the Inner West Employment Zoning precinct.

2.6 Recommendations for protecting Bunurong biocultural values

2.6.1 Consultation and collaboration

Consult and collaborate respectfully and inclusively with BLCAC when developing design elements for the Inner West Employment Zoning precinct. This includes architectural and landscape design and the engagement of Bunurong artists.

2.6.2 Use Bunurong language

Where possible, provide opportunities for bilingual communication of any Bunurong narratives that are incorporated into station design elements so that they are presented in both English and Bunurong. Engage BLCAC's Nqawak Nqul Linguist to provide appropriate Bunurong language and place naming information.

2.6.3 Cultural awareness and cultural values training

All employees on relevant Inner West Employment Zoning projects undertake cultural awareness training. Although work on the project has been ongoing for some time, BLCAC recommends undertaking training sessions on Country.

2.6.4 Engage with BLCAC's Balirt Biik team

BLCAC strongly recommends that DTP engage with the BLCAC Balirt Biik (Strong Country) team to undertake future environmental management work within the project area. The Balirt Biik team is open to discussing both short-term and long-term service agreements, pending capacity.

2.6.5 Acknowledge and protect intangible cultural values

Intangible cultural values are nominally protected by the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* (2006). This includes any knowledge of or expression of Aboriginal tradition, including oral traditions, performing arts, stories, rituals, festivals, social practices, craft, visual arts, and environmental and ecological knowledge. However, there are significant and prohibitive factors that limit these protections, including the registration of intangible heritage being voluntary and rigid requirements of registration that are based on recording tangible heritage, with little scope for the nuances of intangible heritage. These concerns are ongoing within the Victorian Aboriginal heritage community and a recent Discussion Paper into legislative reform of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* (2006) recommends 'Legislating that both State and local government should be directed to consult with RAPs on matters of intangible heritage as well as tangible heritage' (Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council 2020).

Cultural Values Statements, like this one, allow Bunurong community members to express intangible cultural values such as songlines, ephemeral waterways, pathways across Country, former and current animal routes of movement, cultural connections between places, specific knowledge of Country, and areas of Women's Business and Men's Business, to name a few. These intangible values should be protected alongside tangible cultural heritage beyond the limits of the current legislation.

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