Greater Avalon Employment Precinct West
Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation
Cultural Values Statement



View of You Yangs from Avalon Coast (Photograph taken by Cemre Ustunkaya on 20th August 2025.

Authors: [redacted]

Traditional Owner Contributors: A Ful list of Traditional Owner Contributors is provided in the introduction.

Sponsor: Department of Transport and Planning

WTOAC Statement of Significance

Since the beginning of the Dreaming, the great ancestor spirit *Bundjil*, the wedge-tailed eagle, created the land, waterways, flora, fauna, laws, and lore. The land of the Wadawurrung – including Djilang (Geelong) meaning 'tongue of the land' and Ballaarat (Ballarat) meaning 'resting place' – encompasses a vast area from the Great Dividing Range in the North to the coast in the South, from the Werribee River in the East and along the Surf Coast in the West.

Comugeen budj-o thalikiyu kin bil bend-ordi-ngadak. Ngarrwabil,
boron, guli, bagurrk. Comugeen budjo bengadak ngarr-
uk dja, ngubiyt, weagoon gobata gupma wurring-wurring baap beng-ordi-nganak, djarrima murrup-nhuk bengadak.

We deeply respect our people of the past. Elders, children, men, women. We deeply respect their knowledge of Country, water, life, their care of the traditions and of each other, we stand with their spirit.

Gobata Wadawurrung balug jumbuk didalbil murrup-nhuk bundjil monomeeth beek-
o weagoon. Mutjak-ak noogie núnder durralully.

Great spirit *Bundjil* told us to take care of the great life within the land. To only take what you need without selfishness.

Bundjil establishes the law that connects us to Country and teaches us that if we look after Country, it will look after us. This knowledge is passed down from Elders in the oral tradition. For tens of thousands of years, the Wadawurrung People cared for Country – sustainably hunting and farming across their lands and waters – working in harmony with the seasons, with water and food available for their own needs and for trade. Their homes and campsites were usually located to water by a *yaluk* (river) or *buluk* (lake) and for a good *kuarka* (fishing place).

Today, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners continue strong connections to the land and accept the responsibility of looking after Country, practicing culture, upholding the dignity of their Ancestors, and passing on knowledge to future generations. Historical remnants of the daily life of past generations of the Wadawurrung People can be found on Country today and include shell middens, fish traps, artefact scatters, stone quarries, scarred trees, stone arrangements, burial, and other sacred sites.

All cultural heritage places within Wadawurrung Country are sacred in cultural terms as they are a tangible link to our past and a non-renewable resource of information about the lifestyle of our Ancestors. The cultural significance afforded to the heritage places by Wadawurrung Traditional Owners must be given a higher standing than the scientific ratings which are based on a European perspective without due regard to the values of Aboriginal culture.

Wunggurrwil gupma bengadak Wadawurrung wurring-wurring baap dja.

All people working together to make Wadawurrung Country and Cultural strong.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this report may contain the names and words of deceased people.

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Introduction

The Greater Avalon Employment Precinct West (GAEP) is located on Wadawurrung Country, between Melbourne and Geelong, surrounding Avalon Airport. The Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) is leading the planning of the precinct to guide future industrial and employment development while ensuring the protection of significant environmental and cultural heritage values across the area.

The Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) engaged the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation to undertake a Cultural Values Assessment of the Greater Avalon Employment Precinct West (GAEP). The Avalon Airport is being planned through a separate process led by the Department of Defence.

The GAEP West covers approximately 3,500 hectares and has been identified as a major employment hub within Victoria's long-term planning strategy (Map 1). The precinct is expected to accommodate a range of industries, including advanced manufacturing, freight and logistics, aviation, renewable energy, clean technology and circular economy businesses, creating thousands of new employment opportunities over time.

The Department of Transport and Planning has prepared a planning framework to support the future development of the precinct. The key objectives of the project include:

- Establishing a nationally significant employment precinct that supports long-term economic growth.
- Providing land for industrial, commercial and aviation-related businesses.
- Coordinating transport, utilities and other essential infrastructure to support future development.
- Protecting environmentally significant areas, including native vegetation, waterways and nearby Ramsar-listed wetlands.
- Recognising and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage and working alongside the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to ensure Country is respected throughout the planning process.
- Creating a sustainable, well-connected employment precinct that balances economic development with environmental and cultural conservation.
- The planning of the GAEP West aims to deliver a coordinated approach to future development that supports Victoria's growing economy while protecting the area's important natural and cultural values for future generations.

As part of these works Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) agreed to prepare a Cultural Values Assessment Report within the activity area.



Wadawurrung Wurdi Youang to Ballarine Corridor
Greater Avalon Employment Precinct

Legend
Wurdi Youang Ballarine Corridor
Greater Avalon Employment Precinct

Datum: GDA94
Zone 55
Author: R.T.
Date: 30.01.26
Maps: NearMap, Google
Scale: 1:120,000

Wadawurrung
Traditional Owners
Aboriginal Corporation

Map 1 Map showing project area (Prepared by Rob Tobin.)

Wadawurrung Elders and Traditional Owners who speak for Country participated in a series of on-Country assessments and cultural workshops across the GGAEP West. These activities provided opportunities to share knowledge, identify places of cultural significance, and discuss the cultural values of the landscape.

This Cultural Values Assessment aims to document the cultural values of the GAEP Precinct West from a Wadawurrung perspective. The recommendations provided are intended to guide future planning and development, ensuring that the cultural values of Country are recognised, respected and protected.

WTOAC would like to thank all Wadawurrung Elders and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners attended to the fieldwork and workshops for contributing and sharing their knowledge of Country.

Attendees:

[redacted]

Wadawurrung Cultural Values

1. Wadawurrung People and Culture

Wadawurrung People are the sole custodians and caretakers of Wadawurrung Country whom continued connection with Country and with their past even under colonial disruptions. Wadawurrung People are the primary authority of Wadawurrung Culture, history and ethnohistory creating a connection between past, present and future.

While some of the information is taken from European written formats sources used in this report are accepted by Wadawurrung People in terms of providing useful observational material even though they may lack the complexities and intricacies of Wadawurrung Culture.

Wadawurrung People are part of the Kulin Nations of Victoria along with Woi wurrung (now known as Wurundjeri/Woi wurrung), Boon wurrung, Taungurong, Dja dja wurrung (Barwick 1984; Presland 1980). While each group shared linguistic and cultural affinities, they also have unique traditions connected to their countries.

The Kulin Nations shared Bundjil and Waa moiety animals where each clan belonged to either Bundjil or Waa. Marriages occurred between across moieties and preferably as distant as possible. Kulin Nations also shared similarities in burial and initiation practices, in which the basis of religious practice revolved around totemism (Clarke 1990; Tasire and MacManus 2011).

Trade networks between Victorian Kulin Nations are documented where resources on Country traded for others on large gatherings, specifically at Mt Noorat and Mirrewuae Swamp. Red clays, spears, grass tree stems, gum, shells, skins, sandstone, greenstone and obsidian are some of the items used in trade by Wadawurrung people (McBride 1894). Dawson (1881) describes that Wadawurrung clan from Djilang area providing prized stone resources for axe-making, and a gum obtained from a species of wattle tree that was carried in large chunks across the Western District.

Conflict between groups were not uncommon. Thomas' account describes processes of conflict resolution and reparation among the Kulin Nations as being highly complex, structured, as regulated between different clans and groups (Thomas [1854] in Bride 1898).

Wadawurrung clans were distinguished by the suffixes – balug (a number of people) and –(w)illam or-yellam (dwelling places) (Barwick 1984). The study area falls under several Wadawurrung clans: Worinyaloke balluk and Yaawangi clan covering the west of Werribee River (Table 1).

Table 1 Documented Wadawurrung clans (modified from Barwick 1984; Clark 1990).

Name	Territory
Barere Barere balug	[redacted]
Beerekwart balug	[redacted]

Bengalat balug	[redacted]
Berrejin balug	[redacted]
Borogundidj	[redacted]
Burumbeet balug	[redacted]
Carninje balug	[redacted]
Carringum balug	[redacted]
Corac balug	[redacted]
Corrin corrinjer balug	[redacted]
Gerariture	[redacted]
Keyeet balug	[redacted]
Marpeang balug	[redacted]
Mear balug	[redacted]
Moijerre balug	[redacted]
Moner balug	[redacted]

	[redacted]
Monmart	[redacted]
Neerer balug	[redacted]
Pakeheneek balug	[redacted]
Peerikelmoon balug	[redacted]
Tooloora balug	[redacted]
Woodealloke gundidj	[redacted]
Wadawurrung balug	[redacted]
Wongerrer balug	[redacted]
Worinyaloke balluk	[redacted]
Yaawangi (meaning 'at the You Yangs')	[redacted]

2. Wadawurrung Country and Sightlines

Wadawurrung Country goes up to north of Beaufort to Djilang (Geelong) in the south, Airey's Inlet in the west and to Werribee River in the east. According to Wadawurrung tradition, the features of landscape and sea along with their animals are a consequence of the actions of ancestral being, with these places serving as mementos of their activities, and the laws shaped by them. Songlines and storylines are the means to pass the knowledge generation to generation.

These songlines and storylines show a roadmap for Wadawurrung People to navigate on country and shows important geological features on country. Wadawurrung elders prefer not to share

creation stories in written format. Hence, this part will talk about geological formations on Wadawurrung Country and sensitivities around these formations.

Study area has multiple important geological features:

- Stony rises: stony rises are higher points in the landscape and have been utilised by Wadawurrung People as camping ground (Map 2).
- Waterways: all waterways named or unnamed form culturally significant areas for Wadawurrung People. Waterways are high in natural resources and utilised by Wadawurrung People like highways.

The study area sits within the Victorian Volcanic Plains. Geomorphology of the study area divided between:

- Plains and plains with low rises
- Plains with poorly developed drainage and shallow regolith

Geomorphology of the area adds significance to the stony rises along this area, as poor drainage means flooding along waterways and stony rises would have been heavily used for safe spots.

Plains have a sightline directly to Wurdi Youang (You Yangs State Park), which is a significant cultural landscape for Wadawurrung People.

Data from Climate Council Organisation shows that the Study Area has a 20% at moderate to high risk from all hazards by 2050 if no action taken. These hazards are:

- 18.8% coastal inundation
- 2.4% surface water flooding
- 0.6% riverine flooding

While natural processes are accepted as part of changing country by Wadawurrung People, erosion, changing river flows and courses are all due to colonialism taking place on Wadawurrung Country and impacts the health of Wadawurrung Country and its people.

Geological formations create natural resources which were abundantly used by Wadawurrung People and created knowledge around natural world which will be talked about in the next part of this report.



Wadawurrung Identified Stony Rises
Greater Avalon Employment Precinct

Legend

Wadawurrung Identified Stony Rises

Greater Avalon Employment Precinct

Datum: GDA94
Zone 55
Author: R.T.
Date: 30.01.26
Maps: NearMap, Google
Scale: 1:40,000

Wadawurrung
Traditional Owners
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Map 2 Stony rises identified during walk-on-country (Map by Rob Tobin).

3. Wadawurrung Resources

Natural resources on Wadawurrung Country have been used by its people for thousands of years before European colonials set foot on land. These resources, which are not only used for subsistence but also for trade and cultural practices, are as follows:

- Fauna
- Flora
- Minerals
- Waterways

European presence not only changed the access to country for Wadawurrung People but also changed the presence of resources and biocultural species on country impacting the health of country overall. It is also necessary to point out that some of the invasive species has become cultural in this process as they have been utilised by Wadawurrung People due to their availability on land.

The study area shows a wide range of Habitat Values from low to very high (NatureKit Victoria ©). The wide range is attributed to long-term farming impacts and RAMSAR wetlands (Map 3 and 4). While areas of wetlands are higher in Habitat Values, long term farming areas are quite low in their habitat values. However, walk-on-country with Traditional Owners in January 2026 showed golden sun moth (*Synemon plana*), a vulnerable native species due to loss of its habitat to farmlands, inhabits the study area. Preservation of native grasslands are important for golden sun moth to survive as they feed on roots of wallaby grasses (*Rytidosperma* sp.). Multiple species of wallaby grass can be found on the study area.

Impact of invasive species like rabbits along with use of the areas for farmland removes native grasslands that are vital for biocultural species like golden sun moth, swamp wallabies, etc. Removal of native fauna and flora in return influences cultural practices on Wadawurrung Country.

Proximity of the study area to native grasslands, freshwater resources and coastal country once would have provided plenty of subsistence for Wadawurrung People for thousands of years. Colonial impact also prevented Wadawurrung People to have access to these areas by fencing these areas for agricultural practices disrupting the health of Wadawurrung Country.

A total of 1517 species recorded in a 5km radius of the study area on Atlas of Living Australia Database (ala.org.au):

- 789 animal species
- 681 plants species
- 34 fungi species
- 8 other species

Out of 1517, forty-three species are critically endangered, forty-two are endangered and thirty-two are vulnerable. Out of all the species that has been encountered in this area, twenty of them are in the Key Australian feral animal species list, making them an endanger to the vulnerable native species. There are five weeds of national significance that cause environmental damage to native plants.



DEECA Habitat Value
Greater Avalon Employment Precinct

Legend
Greater Avalon Employment Precinct
DEECA Habitat Value
20 100

Datum: GDA94
Zone 55
Author: R.T.
Date: 30.01.26
Maps: NearMap, Google
Scale: 1:40,000

Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation

Map 3 DEECA Habitat Values for the study area (Created by Rob Tobin).

Some of the animal and plant species are culturally important for Wadawurrung People like moiety animal Waa, or Parwang (Magpie) their call calls the sun out every morning. Some of the species on the list were food resources for Wadawurrung in the past. While some species used for understanding seasonal changes or detecting cultural burning times.

There are saltmarshes within the study area (Map 4), both introduced and native species. Senior Wadawurrung woman [redacted] mentioned the use of ruby saltbush for eating in the past. Junior Wadawurrung Rangers [redacted] and [redacted] collect seeds of ruby saltbush for use.

Saltbushes are also extremely important for this fragile environment as they are preventing increase of soil salinity and removal of them would not only cause increase in soil salinity but also cause introduction of salt to freshwater creeks and changing the water salinity. Furthermore, salt marshes are effective at carbon sequestering and a vital part of the 'blue carbon' strategy to combat climate change.

Beaded glassworth (*Salicornia quinqueflora*) habitat should be protected as this is a preferred food for critically endangered orange-bellied parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*). Seagrasses cover along the Avalon Coast is under threat due to the coastal infrastructure. Seagrasses not only treat nutrients going into the bay area but also provide food for marine life. Hence, an important part of the ecosystem and food pyramid not only for marine and birdlife but also for Wadawurrung People.

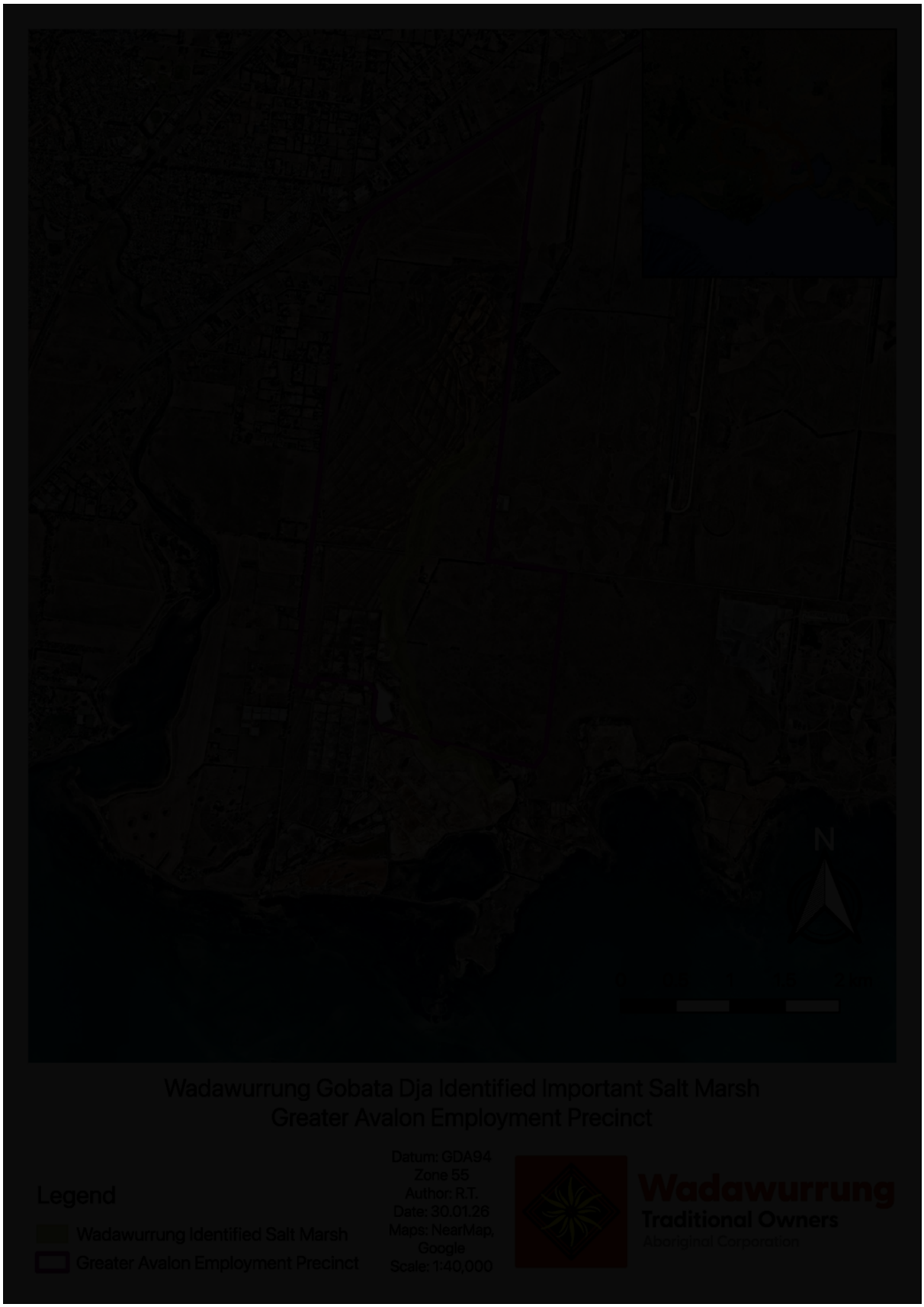
Walk-on-country did not reveal any ochre and specific mineral resources within the study area. However, there are ochre resources along Wurdi Youang which is in close proximity.

The study area has several unnamed and named freshwater resources including Little River, Hovell's Creek, Lollipop Creek in close proximity. These waterways are recorded historically for carrying fish traps along them.

Flora removal from the landscape causes more stormwater to run off to these creeks and waterways impacting flow rates, flow times and health of waterways. Specifically in the study area, where the creeks directly connect to RAMSAR wetlands and/or to the bay, there will be undeniable changes to waterway flows.

Furthermore, sediments produced during development has the potential to significantly impact streams, wetland, estuaries, and bays. Studies have shown that construction sites can typically generate sediment loads 20-12,000 times higher than background rates (Russell et al., 2017).

There are multiple geological, biocultural, and environmental factors showcasing the importance of the study area. Higher ground for camping and natural resources: marine, freshwater and land based; makes the study area a highly significant cultural landscape for Wadawurrung People. Wadawurrung People would have been in this landscape regularly until their displacement due to the post-European farming activities. Species connected to songlines and storylines also occurs in the study area showing the intangible heritage of the study area.



Map 4 Map showing the salt marsh area within the study area (Map created by Rob Tobin).

4. Recommendations

Recommendations in this report is produced following WTOAC Paleert Tjaara Dja Plan which can be found on Resources | Wadawurrung Aboriginal Corporation | wadawurrung.org.au.

On-country walks and workshops as part of Traditional Owner Consultation started in August 2025. Traditional Owners from Warre Dja (Coastal Country Team), Water Team, Gobata Dja Team and Cultural Heritage Unit along with Wadawurrung Elders attended these on-country walks to discuss best outcomes for bringing the health and spirit of country back.

	**Goal:** By 2025, 70% of Wadawurrung Traditional Owners have strong cultural connection and knowledge; we are practicing culture and speaking language.

Wadawurrung People are the custodians of Wadawurrung Country and have thousands of years connection to the country. Animals, plants, waterways, both intangible and tangible cultural heritage are part of Wadawurrung Country. As such, it is important for Wadawurrung People to have access the areas of registered cultural heritage sites, areas of cultural including biocultural significance.

While Avalon Airport is not within the study area. There are no signs of acknowledging that people are on Wadawurrung Country when they arrive to the Avalon airport. It is recommended to find a pathway for Wadawurrung Signage to be put on entry/exit points at Avalon Airport.

	**Goal:** By 2029, Wadawurrung people are involved in the management of all known sites.

Sightlines from Avalon Coast to Wurdi Youang should be protected. PSP is strongly recommended to be designed to not interfere with sightlines. Any infrastructure that will be on the study area should be designed in partnership with Wadawurrung Cultural Strengthening Team.

True boundary of stony rises should be defined (due to access issues CVA team could not identify the true boundary of the stony rises) and registered to ACHRIS.

All cultural heritage should be registered as there are exposed artefacts in paddocks. WTOAC can be engaged for registration. However, due to capacity WTOAC is happy for a consulting company to be engaged for registry purposes.

Partnerships with WTOAC should be considered for land management. Gobata Dja team can be contacted at https://www.wadawurrung.org.au/services.

Cultural burns in this area are strongly recommended. Cultural burns not only is a way for Wadawurrung Traditional Owners to actively manage their country but also it helps healing the country. Cultural burns are slow and low heat fires where there is minimal impact on any species below or on ground.

Accredited Wadawurrung Traditional Owners should be engaged for any artwork instalments, if applicable. A list of accredited Wadawurrung artists can be found on WTOAC website. While the website provides a list of Wadawurrung artists, it is recommended that and EOI for any artwork, installation should be directed to WTOAC to engage all Wadawurrung artists.

	**Goal:** By 2030, there is enough water in the waterways of the Barre Warre Yulluk that it flows through the system without barriers and is clean enough to drink.

While the study area does not have a flowing creek. There are flowing freshwater resources in close proximity, that are highly significant for Wadawurrung People. Naming unnamed creeks and waterways are a priority for WTOAC.

Creek where saltmarsh is located is a vulnerable habitat and storm water drainage should not be directed to this area. Stormwater changes the flow rates and times of the creeks impacting habitat values for many bioculturally important species. Change of salinity levels would cause ecological damage to saltmarshes and animals occupying the area. WTOAC Water Team can be engaged to understand how to better protect waterways.

Monitoring over pollutants is strongly recommended to prevent negative impacts on RAMSAR wetlands and bird population. Any CHMPs prepared for the area should consider permanent management of pollutant management in the study area.

WTOAC would like to see a risk assessment and a contingency plan from stakeholders for industrial contamination and pollutants that will be monitored and updated as necessary to prevent any risk to bioculturally important species.

Stakeholders should provide a detailed plan for WTOAC showing drainage options, flow rates and impact on waterways. Mitigation strategies need to be specifically effective for silt and clay.

Developers should minimise the duration and area of bare soil exposure. Managing the volume of runoff is important as constant runoff to the catchment impacts flow rates and times.

General Environmental Duty (GED) under the Environment Protection Act 2017 came into effect in July 2021 and requires all businesses across Victoria to take a pro-active approach to prevent and reduce environmental harm, including managing urban stormwater.

	**Goal:** By 2030, no more of our native animals have become threatened; by 2035, at least one threatened species is no longer threatened.

Stakeholders have an opportunity to support Wadawurrung aspirations in the study area by creating off-set areas and reserves to protect vulnerable and endangered species.

Orange-bellied parrot, feeds on salt bush and sea heath, is observed in the study area and critically endangered. Stakeholders are encouraged to work with Wadawurrung Junior Rangers and experts to create habitats for this species to continue coming back to these areas.

Vulnerable species like golden sun moth habitat should be protected and native grasslands is encouraged for these vulnerable species to thrive.

Monitoring of the area for bioculturally important species is strongly recommended. Junior Rangers from Gobata Dja Team are running a monitoring program to assess health of Wadawurrung Country.

Stakeholders should provide risk assessment of industrial infrastructure and their cumulative impact on native fauna and flora in the study area and to the extent of the coastal country.

Invasive species plays a major role for losing native species in Australia. Removal of invasive species would help native fauna and flora to come back. WTOAC encourages stakeholder to work together towards removing invasive species from landscape.

It is strongly recommended that a biodiversity study of the Study Area associated with the Port Phillip Bay and RAMSAR Wetlands is undertaken in partnership with WTOAC to gain more information about plant and animal species present. The biodiversity study should be undertaken in different seasons to understand coastal seasonality of Wadawurrung Country.

	General recommendations for Greater Avalon Employment Precinct West

It is strongly recommended where mandatory CHMPs are not necessary, stakeholder should take voluntary CHMPs. Walking on Country within the study area, along with a review of online resources, showed that tangible cultural heritage has only been located during CHMP assessments.

Night sky is an important part of Wadawurrung Culture and light pollution has been impacting Sky Country especially over heavily populated and industrialised areas. UNESCO World Heritage recognises that night sky represents a rich and significant aspect of cultural and natural heritage.

Light pollution is a problem for observing night sky and for nocturnal native animals. Nocturnal fauna friendly light sources are strongly recommended in industrial area so that native fauna do not get disturbed or loss habitat.

It is strongly recommended to provide cultural awareness training for people who will work in the area on-site and off-site. Cultural Awareness Training can be organised with WTOAC to inform people working with WTOAC on Wadawurrung Values.

CVAs are updated every five years, giving WTOAC to review and update knowledge on the study area. Any works that will be completed outside of the five years period is recommended to contact WTOAC for an update on Cultural Values of the study area.

All CHMPs for the study area should review WTOAC Paleert Tjaara Dja Plan for integrating WTOAC values to their Cultural Heritage Management Plans.

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*A list of references that were widely used in this report is provided below.

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