

# Media Release

Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council

Wednesday, 30 May 2007

## HISTORIC STEP FORWARD FOR VICTORIA'S NEW ABORIGINAL HERITAGE COUNCIL

The Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Corporation in Victoria's SouthWest are the first Aboriginal party to be registered under new laws to better protect and manage Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria.

The chair of Victoria's new Aboriginal Heritage Council, Ricky Mullett said "this is an important first step towards giving Aboriginal communities the decision making power to manage and protect their cultural heritage at the local level – which is what traditional communities have wanted for a long time,"

Under the new laws, the 11 Traditional Owners on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council provide a statewide voice in the management of cultural heritage and oversee a system of registered Aboriginal parties across the state.

Before now, there had been a confusing mix of Federal and State legislation that recognized some Aboriginal parties as having rights to speak for Country, but left out many other communities.

"The Council has started receiving applications for registration from Aboriginal groups around Victoria.

"We will be working very hard over the coming months to put new cultural heritage boundaries in place – to get it right for our future generations" Mr Mullett said.

The Gunditj Mirring registration covers the same area as their native title determination, recently recognised by the Federal Court. The Council is continuing to consider Gunditj Mirring's application for recognition over a broader area for cultural heritage purposes.

Registered Aboriginal parties will speak for their Country under the new laws and make key decisions about cultural heritage management in their local area.

Deputy chair of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, Tim Chatfield, says the news laws are also about improving protection of Victoria's rich Aboriginal heritage.

"Every year in Victoria, around 200 examples of our ancient and valuable heritage are lost or destroyed" Mr Chatfield said.

"This has got to stop, and we now have a better starting point to protect and manage sensitive sites, like burial grounds or scar trees, before development begins.

"This heritage is about our ties to the land, be it fish and eel traps, lime stone shelters, rock art or artefacts used in hunting. But it's also important to preserve this for all Victorians," Mr Chatfield said.

Victoria's new Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 commenced earlier this week, on 28 May 2007.