



**Victorian  
Aboriginal Heritage  
Council**

**STRATEGIC  
PLAN**

**2014-2019**



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## MINISTER'S FOREWORD

I am pleased to provide this foreword to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council's third strategic plan.

Aboriginal cultural heritage is important for all Victorians. We can all share in the appreciation of this irreplaceable part of our past, present and future. We also have a collective responsibility to ensure Aboriginal cultural heritage is protected for future generations.

The Victorian Government is committed to the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage. This includes the recognition and support of Traditional Owners, who have primary responsibilities for this heritage.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Council on the progress made under its previous strategic plan. The achievements to date have provided a strong foundation on which the Council can build its efforts over the next few years to ensure Victoria's rich and diverse Aboriginal cultural heritage is valued and protected.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Bull".

**Tim Bull MLA**

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs



## MESSAGE FROM CHAIRPERSON

As a Council of Traditional Owners, we are proud to build on the foundation our Ancestors have laid down for us and the heritage which is all around us. Our vision is for a Victorian community that respects this heritage as it respects us, for who we are now and for the past, for our journey of survival and our practices of living who we are today. We are dynamic peoples.

Our journey is to find paths to achieve mutual respect. As Traditional Owners, we stand ready to participate in conversations with all Victorians where our contributions are truly valued. Our cultural heritage is best understood through demonstrating respect for Traditional Owners – our knowledge, our skills, our appreciation of our heritage. The practicing of our culture and traditions makes us stronger and this strength offers all Victorians opportunities to value, understand and celebrate the unique cultural heritage we care for on behalf of all of us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rodney Carter".

**Rodney Carter**

Chairperson

## **THE VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HERITAGE COUNCIL**

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (Council) was created under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (the Act) and is unique in Australia as a statutory body with membership comprised only of Traditional Owners. Its key functions are making decisions about Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) applications, advising the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and others on the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria, and promoting understanding and awareness of that heritage.

As at January 2014, the Council had appointed ten RAPs, which collectively cover around 60% of the state. RAPs are the primary vehicles through which Aboriginal cultural heritage is protected and managed.

Aboriginal peoples share traditional knowledge across generations using oral traditions, including song, story, art, language and dance. In the preparation of this strategy, Council has used traditional concepts, contexts and languages. However, the strategy is written, necessarily, to suit non-Aboriginal concepts, contexts and language. This means that some of the terms that have been used are inadequate in explaining Council's intentions and responsibilities. If you would like to form a deeper understanding, we invite you to come together with Aboriginal peoples for a conversation about Aboriginal cultural heritage.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
ABOUT THE COUNCIL, WRITE  
TO [VAHC@DPC.VIC.GOV.AU](mailto:VAHC@DPC.VIC.GOV.AU) OR  
PHONE 03 9208 3243.**

## OUR PURPOSE

To work with all Victorians for the protection and enjoyment of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

## OUR VISION 2014 - 2019

A Victorian community that understands and respects Aboriginal cultural heritage and the cultural responsibilities of Traditional Owners.

## THE VALUES THAT DRIVE COUNCIL

Aboriginal people live according to cultural values. These values are complex and underpin individuals' ways of being and doing. Our values are firmly embedded in our cultural heritage, traditions, history and communities.

As a Council, our values are that:

1. Pride in Aboriginal cultures underpins all Council's work.
2. Traditional Owners are recognised as the primary decision makers for Aboriginal cultural heritage matters.
3. There is honesty, integrity and fairness in all Council's work.
4. We stand together in making decisions.

## SUMMARY OF OBJECTIVES

Our objectives over the next five years focus on the following areas:

**Objective 1:** Strengthen pride in cultural identity

**Objective 2:** Improve the capacity and sustainability of RAPs

**Objective 3:** Positively influence the outcomes from the Review of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Establishment and Effectiveness of RAPs

**Objective 4:** Improve understanding of cultural heritage

These objectives, aspirations, and actions to achieve the objectives, are discussed in further detail in the following pages.

# OBJECTIVE 1: PRIDE IN CULTURAL IDENTITY

## CONTEXT

Council understands that the best way to protect culture is to make sure current and future generations understand it and connect with it. When we connect with and value our cultural identity, we protect it.

As a Council of Traditional Owners, we work at a state wide level to express and carry forward our obligations to care for and protect our heritage. Our most important cultural duties are to our Ancestors, to ensure their resting places are cared for and they are returned to Country. We work in partnership with RAPs so that all Traditional Owners can strengthen pride in cultural heritage.

## ASPIRATIONS

Council's long-term aspirations for this objective are that:

- Traditional Owners are recognised as experts in understanding their Country and culture.
- Non-Aboriginal people have stronger awareness of Aboriginal culture and the unique roles of Traditional Owners.
- Our Ancestors are home and people understand what this means to Aboriginal peoples.
- Our communities are strong and RAPs help continue to build on this strength.
- Our younger generations proudly participate in decision making about valuing, managing and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage.

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS

The most important actions that Council must take to achieve the aspirations are to:

- 1.1 Continue to promote and ensure the primacy of Traditional Owners in managing cultural heritage.
- 1.2 Encourage RAPs to connect with their communities.
- 1.3 Support RAPs to facilitate the exchange of culture and passing on knowledge throughout communities.
- 1.4 Do all we can to ensure our Ancestors are returned home in a respectful manner and burial places are cared for properly.

## **OBJECTIVE 2:** **CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF RAPS**

### **CONTEXT**

The Act recognises Aboriginal peoples as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal cultural heritage. Under the Act, Council determines RAP applications so that Traditional Owner groups can exercise cultural heritage responsibility over a given area.

Throughout 2012 and 2013, Council was also focussed on positively influencing the Review of the Act (the Review) and the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Establishment and Effectiveness of RAPs (the Inquiry). Implementing the Government's responses to the Review and the Inquiry is critical to ensuring that the Act provides a system that effectively protects Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria and that recognises the unique responsibilities of Traditional Owners.

In the future, Council will continue to determine RAP applications to ensure that Traditional Owners are properly involved in the management and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria. Council will also focus on supporting RAPs so that they can be as financially sustainable, well governed and valuable to their communities as possible.

### **ASPIRATIONS**

Council's long-term aspirations for this objective are that:

- RAPs are well resourced and capable of fulfilling their core, statutory functions.
- RAPs have control over all decisions made about their cultural heritage and their Country.
- RAPs are registered across Victoria to the furthest extent possible.
- RAPs are financially and structurally sustainable.
- RAPs and Council have good working relationships.
- Council's resources are strengthened to meet any expansion of its functions.

### **STRATEGIC ACTIONS**

The most important actions that Council must take to achieve this objective are to:

- 2.1 Build its partnership with the Right People for Country Project to support more decisions by Traditional Owners about boundary and group composition.
- 2.2 Influence government to build stronger partnerships with RAPs based on mutual understanding and respect.
- 2.3 Influence government's funding processes and establish relationships with external organisations that allow access to grant income and in-kind partnership contributions.
- 2.4 Build its partnership with RAPs to enable positive discussions about their aspirations and issues.
- 2.5 Identify and implement flexible and innovative approaches to working with RAP applicants and potential RAP applicants.



## **OBJECTIVE 3: REVIEW AND INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **CONTEXT**

Council, having positively influenced the Review and the Inquiry, is committed to making sure that the recommendations are implemented for the benefit of Traditional Owners generally, and RAPs in particular.

Implementing the Government's responses to the Review and the Inquiry will create new ways for Council and RAPs to better protect Aboriginal cultural heritage. The proposed new functions for the Council include: the management of Ancestral Remains; management of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register; additional ways to deal with RAP applications; and, a role supporting and monitoring the performance of RAPs.

Council welcomes these opportunities to expand Traditional Owners' roles in managing and protecting our heritage and will be focussed on ensuring the details and resources are designed to deliver the intended benefits.

### **ASPIRATIONS**

Council's long-term aspirations for this objective are that:

- The recommendations of the Review and the Inquiry have been implemented for the benefit of Traditional Owners, especially RAPs.
- The changes to legislation, policies and frameworks have delivered the benefits identified by the Review and the Inquiry, particularly with respect to Traditional Owners.
- Council and RAPs are well resourced, capable and sustainable.
- Council's role as the key Traditional Owner advisory body in respect of Aboriginal cultural heritage is extended and strengthened.

### **STRATEGIC ACTIONS**

The most important actions that Council must take to achieve this objective are to:

- 3.1 Focus Council and Council Secretariat efforts during the process of legislative and policy change to positively influence reform.
- 3.2 Reorganise Council's structures and operations to accommodate new functions and resources while ensuring leadership by Traditional Owners remains at the centre of all Council does.
- 3.3 Expand opportunities for Traditional Owners to fulfil responsibilities to our Ancestors, lead in the management of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register and enforce protection of heritage.

## **OBJECTIVE 4:** **UNDERSTANDING OF ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE**

### **CONTEXT**

The fundamental purpose of this Council is: “To work with all Victorians for the protection and enjoyment of Aboriginal cultural heritage.” Under the Act, one of Council’s statutory functions is to develop measures to promote public awareness and understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria.

Council will do its part to build pathways towards mutual respect in the broader community. Council wants to achieve this in partnership with RAPs and other Traditional Owners by supporting their efforts to improve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples’ understanding and enjoyment of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

### **ASPIRATIONS**

Council’s long-term aspirations for this objective are that:

- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples have improved understanding and awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- The Victorian community takes responsibility for becoming informed about Traditional Owners and Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- Victoria has been culturally mapped.
- There is more usage of and respect for Victorian Aboriginal languages, including the use of Aboriginal words to name waterways and places.
- Local government and other water and land managers are active partners in protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage.

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS

The most important actions that Council must take to achieve this objective are to:

- 4.1 Work across government with key Ministers so Aboriginal cultural heritage is not disconnected from other portfolios.
- 4.2 Engage with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to ensure two-way learning about the Minister's portfolio responsibilities and Council's business.
- 4.3 Seek and promote initiatives that improve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' understanding and awareness of Aboriginal cultures.
- 4.4. Engage with industry and other stakeholders to investigate new partnerships and ways to better manage Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- 4.5 Work with stakeholders to make sure they understand the role of Council and the role of RAPs.
- 4.6 In consultation with RAPs, develop resources that can be presented to different stakeholders to improve their awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage and partnership opportunities with Traditional Owners.
- 4.7 Seek resources for Traditional Owners to use the latest technology to support heritage management.
- 4.8 Seek resources to facilitate cultural mapping.
- 4.9 Establish partnerships with the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and others to encourage use of, and respect for, Aboriginal languages, including the naming of waterways and places throughout Victoria.

