

# In Partnership

A summary: Indigenous Partnership and Participation Project 2015 - 2018



“ It has been important that the work is not just an academic exercise, because culture is not just an academic thing ... it is about how we take knowledge and talk about it and live it.”  
GLaWAC

# A partnership is born

## At the start of the decade, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) set out to fundamentally change its approach to working with Traditional Owners.

The first Memorandum of Understanding with the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) was signed in 2013. With funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program (NLP), WGCMA embarked on an ambitious campaign to further develop partnerships with and provide support for Traditional Owner groups.

The Indigenous Partnership and Participation Project (IPP) 2015 - 2018 has generated significant tangible and intangible benefits for all the organisations involved.

The success and achievements of the IPP are two-fold.

Firstly, the project has met and exceeded its planned targets in terms of activities and outputs – these are significant results that have emerged from a flexible and adaptive approach to the project. A review and evaluation of the project found it had effectively delivered a complex array of activities to meet its stated targets.

Secondly, there have been deeper, more profound outcomes which will underpin enduring partnerships between Traditional Owners and the WGCMA at both personal and organisational levels. The review also said there was "robust evidence to indicate that the health of partnerships with Indigenous groups has improved because of the activities delivered in this project. Formal and informal arrangements have been the foundation for the partnerships."

A genuine approach to engagement by WGCMA has involved Traditional Owners across all levels of the organisation and throughout strategy, planning and delivery of activities.

Fundamental to the success of the project has been the role of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Officer who has been instrumental in fostering trust and confidence between the respective organisations.

“ Having that strong relationship has helped with the stability of GLaWAC – the support mechanisms they offered through unstable times has helped and shown commitment and helped us to fulfil our obligations. The partnership is on an upward trend.” GLaWAC



Working On Country with Greening Australia in the Corner Inlet Catchment.



A smoking ceremony at the signing of the first MoU.

## PROJECT AIMS

1. Build and develop partnerships with GLaWAC, the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC), and the Boon Wurrung Foundation and Wurundjeri Traditional Owner groups.
2. Support GLaWAC in the development of a Land and Sea Plan and Traditional Ecological Knowledge protocols.
3. Support GLaWAC and other Traditional Owner Groups to undertake Natural Resource Management (NRM) projects.
4. Further develop the WGCMA's organisational cultural competency.
5. Build NRM skills and knowledge within the Indigenous community of West Gippsland.

## KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Project administration.
2. Community participation and engagement.
3. Management Plan (Gunaikurnai's Whole of Country Plan) development.
4. Indigenous Knowledge Transfer – Implementation of Whole of Country Plan and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
5. Indigenous Knowledge Transfer – Cultural Heritage Training.
6. Indigenous employment and business
7. Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI).

# Growing and learning

**Building a strong relationship requires time, commitment, hard work and trust. Being flexible and adaptive allowed the WGCMA to meet the needs of all the organisations involved, while establishing MoUs set out the roles and responsibilities of the partners.**

Supporting the involvement of Traditional Owner groups in work on Country and in the implementation of key projects was at the core of the project's success. A program of targeted training and cultural awareness activities for the WGCMA staff has built up knowledge and understanding of Indigenous culture. This increased cultural understanding and a willingness to listen and adapt, coupled with ensuring project activities were designed in partnership with Traditional Owner groups, has delivered outstanding results.

“*For the WGCMA Board the MoU underpins the partnerships and guides the way we will work together with GLaWAC. It has enabled a much greater level of Traditional Owner participation and enabled both organisations to develop an understanding of each other's values and core business.*” WGCMA

Strong relationships built on trust are at the heart of the IPP success. The MoUs provide a mechanism for long term partnerships to continue beyond the life of the project. From MoUs to working together on projects, the IPP has helped deliver respectful, committed and collaborative relationships. It has also enabled and supported self-determination for Aboriginal people across the West Gippsland CMA region

“*The benefit of the relationship is invaluable, it's not just our relationship with them but the influence on other stakeholders. If you don't have leaders in this field everything just falls back – nothing moves forward ... without leaders (like the WGCMA) it falls back to be a relationship based on obligations, people being scared and hesitant to interact.*” BLCAC

The project has also highlighted how to improve working relationships with Traditional Owners. Some of the issues and lessons identified included:

- Agencies can fund positions within the Traditional Owners organisations to prevent potential loss of skilled personnel.
- Some organisations are still reluctant to provide suitable projects for Traditional Owners to be involved in.
- The capacity of Traditional Owner organisations to deal with increased demand can be a challenge.

“*The secondary benefits for GLaWAC staff and Gunaikurnai community members from the project have been: developing communications skills, developing experience as role models and improving presentation skills. Engaging Gunaikurnai community members (for community engagement sessions) from various areas to provide their perspectives has been important.*” GLaWAC 2018



## MANDY LEGGETT

### Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Officer

The role of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Officer has been acknowledged as fundamental to the success of the project. Mandy's background and experience has provided a strong connection between the organisation and Traditional Owner groups.

The role involves:

- Development of relationships with key people.
- Providing a link between the organisations.
- Awareness of the protocols for engaging with Traditional Owners.
- Facilitating meetings and training.
- Organising and delivering Cultural Competency training for WGCMA staff.
- Ensuring Indigenous knowledge transfer.
- Data collection.
- Presentations and seminars for external agencies.
- Preparation of Cultural Competency literature.
- Maintaining policy and procedures.
- Linking Traditional Owners with community groups and NRM agencies.



Fox baiting with Parks Victoria on Dream Island.

# Where to now?

## We will:

- Build on the success of the IPP by aligning the priorities and aspirations of our Indigenous Partner organisations in the renewal of the Regional Catchment Strategy.
- Establish Whole of Country Plans and undertake joint management planning to further embed the success of the IPP.
- Identify opportunities for increasing the participation of Indigenous groups in the planning and delivery of On Country projects.
- Finalise the MoU with BLCAC.
- Pursue opportunities to fund and implement mutually supportive activities.
- Continue to develop our relationship with Boon Wurrung Foundation.
- Support more WGCMA staff to directly engage with BLCAC on agreed project priorities (as has occurred with GLaWAC).
- Continue to deliver Cultural Heritage training for new staff and expand opportunities for increased involvement for staff.
- Support NRM and work on country, by encouraging project partners to use GLaWAC through the Corner Inlet Connections project.
- Establish work on Country projects with BLCAC and support them to become a preferred contractor.
- Monitor activities and collect data to support evaluation.



## ACHIEVEMENTS 2015 - 2018



### Over 9400 hours of participation by Traditional owners in project activities

Financial support for Traditional Owner participation equivalent to a 1.5 full time role per annum



### Support for development and implementation of Gunaikurnai's Whole of Country Plan

Development of Traditional Ecological Knowledge protocols and brochures with GLaWAC



### Enduring partnerships established between WGCMA and Traditional Owner groups

- One MoU established and re-signed with GLaWAC.
- One MoU in progress with Bunurong Land Council.
- Working arrangements established with BoonWurrung Foundation.



### Over 3500 hours of participation in work on Country by Traditional Owners for NLP sub-projects

Support for the preparation of Bunurong Land Council's NRM Team Business Plan



### A comprehensive cultural competency framework established

Eighty external agency participants in seminars on WGCMA cultural competency program



### 92% of all WGCMA personnel have participated in introductory cultural heritage training



### WGCMA recognised as a leader and advocate for Traditional Owner self determination