

MARRAM BABA MERRI CREEK REGIONAL PARKLANDS

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Values Position Statement



A report for the Suburban Parks Program: Department of Energy,
Environment and Climate Action

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Wurundjeri
Woi-wurrung

This document presents a Position Statement of Cultural Values for the **marram baba** Merri Creek Regional Parklands study area, prepared by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC, or the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation) for the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA).

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‘Welcome to Country’ artwork: William Barak, ‘Corroboree’, 1895. National Gallery of Australia.

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Glossary of Key Terms

Country	Country is a term used by First Nations Australians to describe their traditional lands and waterways. People talk of Country in the same way that they may refer to an individual. There are varying customs of speaking to Country, using songlines to map and navigate Country, visiting Country, and caring for Country. Country is the traditional homelands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.
Dreamtime /Dreaming	The Dreamtime refers to the time of Creation when Ancestral beings shaped the land, animals, plants, and people. These Ancestral beings traveled across the landscape, shaping and forming various features of the land and leaving their spiritual essence within it. Dreamtime stories are embedded into the landscape and are passed down through generations as a way of celebrating and transmitting cultural knowledge, spirituality and values.
galada tamboore	Means 'creek waterhole' in Woi-wurrung language.
Intangible heritage	Intangible heritage refers to the cultural practices, expressions, knowledge, skills, and traditions that are passed down from generation to generation within communities. Unlike tangible heritage, intangible heritage encompasses aspects of culture that are not physical in nature.
marram baba	Name of the Upper Merri Creek Parkland study area in Woi-wurrung language, meaning 'body of mother'
merri merri	Means 'rocky rocky' or 'very rocky' in Woi-wurrung language.
ngurungaeta	Woi-wurrung term for the traditional headman or leader of a local descent group.
Tangible heritage	Tangible heritage refers to the physical and visible manifestations of cultural heritage, including artefacts, structures, sites and objects that possess historical, artistic or cultural significance. Differing from intangible heritage, tangible heritage comprises elements that can be touched, seen and interacted with.
Traditional	This term is used as many Woi-wurrung people use it: to describe cultural beliefs and practices that have their origins in, and may continue from, the period prior to European settlement of Woi-wurrung Country.
Woi-wurrung	Prefix Woi meaning 'no', and postfix Wurrung meaning 'lip' or 'speech.' ¹ The name of the collectivity at language group level, occupying the territory extending north to the Great Dividing Range, east to Mount Baw Baw and west to the Werribee River.
Wurundjeri	The Wurundjeri people take their name from the Woi-wurrung language words Wurun, which means Manna Gum, and Djeri, which means grub. They are the 'Witchetty Grub People.'

¹ Howitt, 1904, p. 41.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Place	ACHP
<i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i> (Vic)	AHA 2006
<i>Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006</i>	CATSI Act
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (Formerly Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning DELWP)	DEECA
International Council on Monuments and Sites	ICOMOS
Registered Aboriginal Party	RAP
Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register	VAHR
Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation Corporation	WWCHAC

WELCOME TO COUNTRY

WOMINJEKA YEARMANN KOONDEE BIK
WURUNDJERI BALLUK



WELCOME TO THE LAND OF
THE WURUNDJERI WOI
WURRUNG PEOPLE

Connection to Country

Overview of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung representative organisation, operating as the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Heritage Council Inc, was established by Wurundjeri leaders in 1985. In August 2008 the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Heritage Council Inc was appointed as a Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (VAHC) under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (AHA) for a portion of their traditional Country. RAP status conferred significant statutory responsibilities on the Council. In carrying out these cultural heritage management responsibilities, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have worked hard to care for their cultural places by working closely with government agencies, local government, private sector, and heritage industry professionals.

As of October 2017, the Council registered under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (CATSI Act) and changed their operating name to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation as of December 2018. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation represents the descendants of the Woi-wurrung speaking local descent groups who inhabited traditional Woi-wurrung Country for at least 35,000 years. They include the Wurundjeri-Balluk; Gunung-Willam-Balluk; Kurung-jang-Balluk; Ngaruk-Willam; Balluk-Willam; Marin-Balluk; and the Wurundjeri-Willam.

Currently, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation comprises three family groups: the Nevin, Terrick and Wandin families. They are descendants of Bebejan/Be-be-jern/Jerum-Jerum (born circa late 1700s, died 1835), who was a ngurungaeta (leader) of the Wurundjeri-willam clan, his daughter Annie Borat/Borate (born circa 1834-37, died 1870-74) and her son Robert Wandoon/Wandin (born circa 1854-57, died 1908). Bebejan was present at John Batman's negotiations in 1835, as was his young son William Barak/Beruk (born circa 1822, died 1903), who would later become a great ngurungaeta of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people into the early twentieth century. The Corporation is structured to ensure that each family group has an even number of Elders who are voting members of the Corporation.

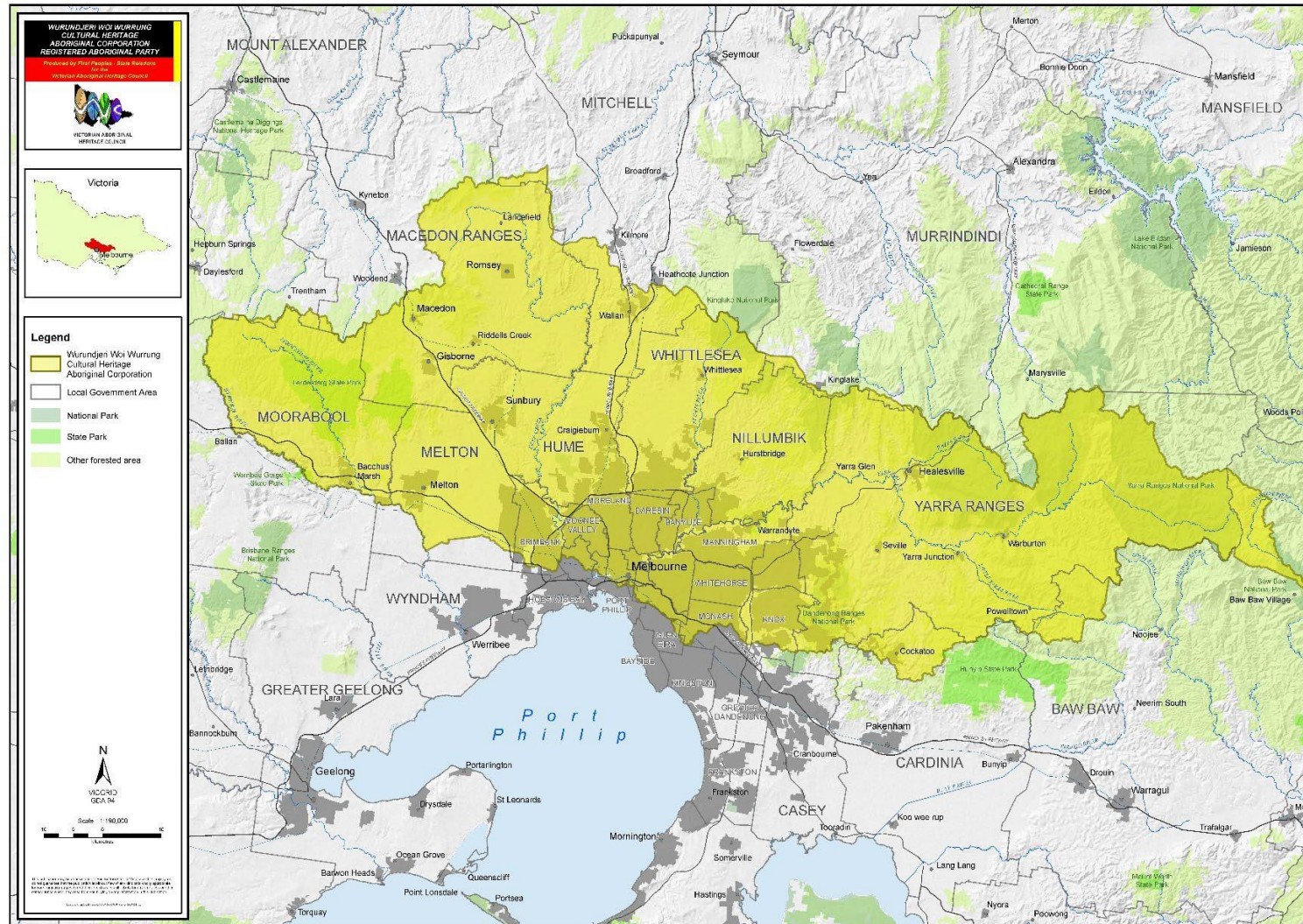
Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people are the Traditional Owners² of a large territory in central-south Victoria. The traditional Country of the Woi-wurrung speaking people extends north to the Great Dividing Range, east to Mount Baw Baw, west to the Werribee River and south of the Yarra to the Mordialloc Creek (see Map 1 on p. x).³ As such, Woi-wurrung Country encompasses a substantial and geographically diverse region that includes both urban and rural areas.

This Country contains cultural heritage places that are a record of Country and the activities of Woi-wurrung Ancestors. Cultural sites and places in traditional Woi-wurrung Country link contemporary Woi-wurrung people and their Ancestors, who created and cared for those places over millennia.

² Please see Glossary of Key Terms. Within Aboriginal Australia (the oldest living cultures in the world), the term ‘traditional’ is problematic, however it is used throughout this report to describe continuous cultural practices that are still performed by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people today.

³ While the WWCHAC’s current RAP area covers much of what the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung consider to be their traditional Country, it does not encompass all of it. On 7 June 2021 the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council made a decision to vary the boundary of WWCHAC’s RAP area, moving it further north and granting the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Council (BLCAC) RAP status over these lost areas. Areas of great significance to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community, including Mordialloc Creek and Dandenong, are now outside the Corporation’s RAP area. This has caused Elders and community considerable grief and upset. WWCHAC continues to explore its options in relation to this decision.



Defining Cultural Heritage Significance

Australia ICOMOS⁴ recognises that “the Indigenous cultural heritage significance of places can only be determined by the Indigenous communities themselves”.⁵ Establishing the significance of a cultural landscape must reflect the viewpoint of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, in conjunction with other useful means of understanding heritage places as set out in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (AHA 2006), and guiding ICOMOS Practice Notes. The following definitions of cultural significance come out of the Burra Charter and AHA 2006:

Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects.⁶

Cultural heritage significance includes (a) archaeological, anthropological, contemporary, historical, scientific, social or spiritual significance; and (b) significance in accordance with Aboriginal tradition.⁷

These definitions provide a framework for considering cultural significance within the terms of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. Notably, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung tradition is not static and unchanging from a perceived ‘authentic’ past. Tradition can be the handing down of beliefs and stories from one generation to the next, but does not mean that ‘significance’ must be unchanged from ‘time immemorial’.⁸

Part of what informs cultural heritage significance are the cultural values associated with a place. Cultural values are core elements, ideas, connections and beliefs that the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have in common. Cultural values can relate to cultural heritage material, cultural practices, beliefs, knowledge related to a place, and historical narratives. For the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community there is no separation between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’; the natural world is a cultural world. Therefore, the Wurundjeri people have a special interest in preserving not just their cultural objects, but the natural landscapes of cultural value. Cultural values shaped the past, impact the present and inform the future. All of Country holds cultural value. Acknowledging and protecting the cultural values embedded in specific landscapes (encompassing a variety of landforms, ecological niches and habitats as well as continuing cultural practices) is essential to the identity and wellbeing of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

⁴ Australia ICOMOS define themselves as follows: “Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation of cultural heritage professionals formed as a national committee of ICOMOS in 1976.” More information can be found on their website:

<https://australia.icomos.org/about-us/australia-icomos/>

⁵ Practice Notes: The Burra Charter and Indigenous Cultural Heritage Management, 2013, p. 3.

⁶ Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 2013, p. Article 1.2.

⁷ AHA 2006, p. 8, Sec. 4[1].

⁸ Practice Notes: The Burra Charter and Indigenous Cultural Heritage Management, 2013, p. 4.

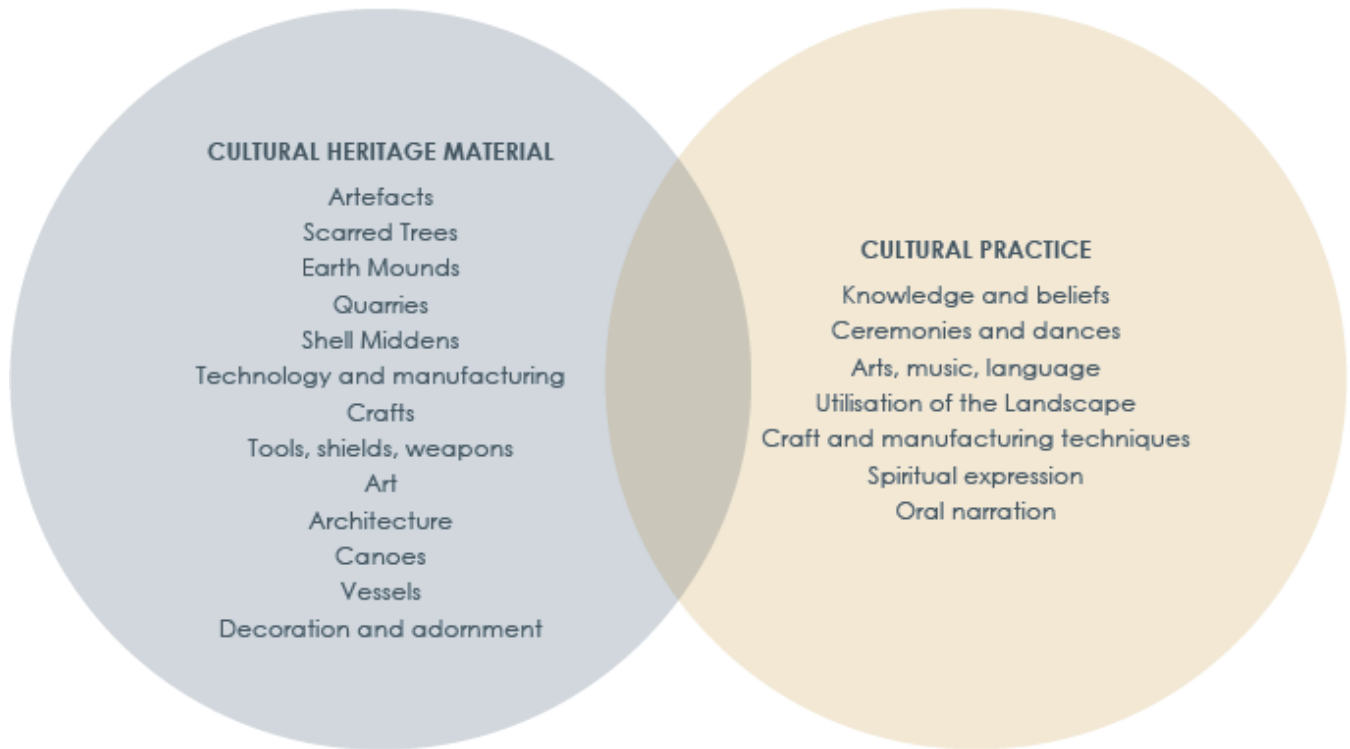


Fig 2: Examples of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. WWCHAC, 2019.

The relationship between the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and the **marram baba** landscape is one based on social, ceremonial, religious, ecological, archaeological and historical attachment evidenced in the study area by the ethnohistorical record and contemporary connections to place.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people's cultural significance is articulated as an understanding of traditional cultural practices and living within a socially defined area (intangible heritage), whilst the archaeological material and ecological biodiversity provides a tangible representation of former Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country and occupation (tangible heritage):

Cultural significance is reflected in our customs and lore. Country holds the history and cultural practices of our people. It holds our boundaries and laws of respect between clans. Country connects us to the place where our Ancestors stood and lived and cared for Country. And now we do the same.

Cultural significance is understanding the landscape and the environment of our Ancestors. Every element of the environment is interconnected; the plants, the animals, the medicine, the food, and the resources are all reliant on the healthy biodiversity of Country. Our Ancestors observed and learned over time what the biodiversity of a landscape required to sustain us. Every generation were educated to ensure the long-term maintenance of the right forms of land management.

Cultural significance is visualising Country. When we are on Country, we see the land, the water, the animals, the stories. The landscape is the Country of our Ancestors. It is where

they walked and we walk now. That is why it needs to be protected, preserved and kept healthy. We need these places to exist to keep their journey going.

Cultural significance is reflection. Our stories are held in memory. Being on Country brings back memories. Caring for Country means that our future children and grandchildren can pass it on to their generation. Our Country is here forever.

- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders, September 2019

Caring for Country

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community have a deep and abiding connection to their Country. Despite the effects of colonisation, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people maintain their responsibility to manage and care for their Country. This responsibility was never relinquished.

Caring for Country practices take as a reference point cultural traditions passed on from one generation to the next. Understanding First Nations People's perceptions about and aspirations for Caring for Country necessitates an understanding of the underlying structures of this practice.

The way Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people identify with Country may have a range of dimensions. It is not just about knowing culture or just about practicing culture; it is also about agency and self-determination, about passing on cultural information, being active on and learning about Country.

Some objectives of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people for their Country are as follows:

1. **Cultural Preservation:** The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people strive to preserve and protect their traditional culture, knowledge and practices. This includes passing down oral histories, ceremonies, and other cultural elements to future generations.
2. **Land Stewardship:** As the owners of their Country, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have a responsibility to care for the land, ensuring its health and sustainability for both current and future generations. This involves practices such as controlled burning, land management and conservation efforts.
3. **Self-Determination:** Like many First Nations groups, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people aspire to exercise self-determination over their affairs, ensuring that decisions regarding their land, culture and community are made by their own people.
4. **Cultural Continuation:** In the face of colonisation and its detrimental impacts on their culture, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people prioritise cultural continuation by revitalising and reclaiming aspects of their traditional practices, language and customs. Undertaking cultural ceremonies on-Country is an important part of cultural continuation.
5. **Connection to Ancestral Land:** The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people believe that their Ancestor's spirits continue to reside in the land and they maintain a strong spiritual connection to their ancestral Country. This connection guides their relationship with the land and their cultural practices.
6. **Awareness, Education and Truth Telling:** The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people aim to educate both their own community members and the wider public about their culture, history and connection to Country. This includes promoting awareness of Indigenous perspectives and histories in schools and the broader community. Performing cultural ceremonies (such as Welcome to Country ceremonies) is also a way of knowledge sharing with the wider public on-Country. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people seek recognition of their ongoing connection to the land and acknowledgment of their historical and cultural significance as Traditional Owners. Part of this involves engaging in a process of Truth Telling about Australia's colonial past. Truth Telling also includes acknowledging the ways in which the structures of colonialism continue to impact First Nations People today.

These objectives reflect the deep-rooted connection that the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have with their land and the ongoing efforts they make to preserve their culture, protect their Country and foster understanding and respect for First Nations' heritage and rights.



*Image 1. View of floodplain at **galada tamboore**, Photo: Kashmira Mohamed Zagor, February 2023.*

Like a mother nurtures her children, so we must nurture and look after the rivers creeks and environment; so our children's children can enjoy the wild life, flora and fauna. We can achieve this by ensuring the revegetation and restoration of creeks and rivers like the Merri Creek waterway, which encourages an abundance of bird life to the area.

– Aunty Doreen Garvey-Wandin, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder

Water is one of many significant elements for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. It is the source of Creation stories, resources traditionally used by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, and carries with it long traditions of cultural practices and history. Importantly, waterways are connected to the health of totem animal species and places of cultural importance. The flow of water is directly connected to the integrity of these culturally important places, as well as the sustenance and health of the natural environment. Waterways are the veins of Mother Earth. Healthy waterways are essential for traditional cultural practice.

Below are some of the many ways in which waterways hold significance for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture and ways of living:

1. **Spiritual and Cultural Significance:** Waterways are considered sacred in Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture. They are seen as the lifeblood of the land, connecting the past, present and future generations. The rivers, creeks, and water bodies are central to Dreaming stories, which are important narratives that explain the creation of Country, its features and the relationships between the people and the environment.
2. **Connection to Ancestors:** Waterways are a way for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people to connect with their Ancestors and maintain a sense of continuity with the past. These water sources on traditional Woi-wurrung Country were essential for the survival and sustenance of their Ancestors. Today, they hold a deep ancestral knowledge and spiritual connection.
3. **Sustenance and Resources:** Waterways have historically and continue to provide the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people with essential resources for survival and nourishment. These waterways may be used as sources for drinking water, fishing, and gathering food like shellfish and other aquatic resources.
4. **Trade and Communication:** Waterways acted as natural trade and travel routes, as well as communication channels between the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and other Traditional Owners. They facilitated the exchange of goods, cultural practices and knowledge, strengthening social ties between communities.
5. **Ceremonies:** Waterways are often the sites for important ceremonies (such as tanderrum)⁹ and gatherings for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. These events are integral to

⁹ Tanderrum is believed to have been a cultural practice whereby gifts were ritually given by a foreign party in exchange for temporary access to another group's territory or use of resources in their territory (Barwick, 1984). Tanderrum is still practiced by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people today.

maintaining cultural practices, passing down knowledge and celebrating significant milestones in the community.

6. **Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation:** The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have a deep understanding of the local ecosystems and the importance of maintaining the health of waterways for the benefit of all living beings. They actively participate in land and water management practices that promote biodiversity and environmental sustainability.
7. **Sense of Place and Identity:** Waterways are an integral part of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people's sense of place and identity. Their cultural identity and knowledge are deeply intertwined with the rivers, lakes and creeks that have sustained their communities for thousands of years.

Waterways hold immense cultural, spiritual, social and economic significance to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. They are not just physical features of the landscape but represent a living connection to their Ancestors, the land and their way of life. The preservation and protection of these waterways are crucial for the continuation of their cultural heritage and their connection to Country.

An integral part of maintaining a strong cultural identity is the transmission of cultural practices and associated information to the younger generations. This is most effectively done on-Country, as it provides younger people with a direct, rather than abstract, experience of cultural practice and teaching. Water is central to these cultural experiences as it generates the plants and wildlife that form the teaching tools and the landscape backdrop that forms the teaching 'classroom.'

For Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, health and wellbeing is directly linked to the health of their Country. Healthy waterways create healthy Country, and reassure Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people that Country is being cared for. Having access to waterways for recreation, resources and teaching culture keeps the community healthy and strong and contributes to their overall wellbeing.



Image 2. The Merri Creek in Campbellfield. Photo: Kashmira Mohamed Zagor, February 2023.

Fire was very important to Wurundjeri; firstly, fire provided my people with warmth and was used for cooking; secondly, it was used to eradicate the old and dying vegetation and promote new growth; thirdly, it was used in almost every ceremony practiced by the Wurundjeri.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder, Terrick Family.

Cultural fire is a traditional land management practice that has been employed by First Nations communities, including the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, for thousands of years. It involves the controlled use of fire to manage and maintain the health of the land and its ecosystems. This practice is deeply connected to the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and is an essential aspect of their relationship with Country.

Utilising cultural fire usually involves intentionally setting small, low-intensity fires during specific times of the year. These fires are carefully managed and controlled to achieve various ecological, social and cultural objectives:

1. **Spiritual and Cultural Significance:** Cultural fire holds immense spiritual and cultural significance for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community. It is tied to Creation Stories and the ongoing connection between people and their ancestral lands. Practicing cultural fire reinforces cultural identity and strengthens the spiritual bonds between people and Country. Cultural fire helps to heal Country when it is unhealthy. Fire also sustained Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors when they camped on Country. From cooking, providing warmth, and use in the production and repair of tools, fire was an integral part of day-to-day life.
2. **Knowledge Transmission:** The practice of cultural fire is deeply embedded in traditional knowledge systems, passed down through generations. By engaging in these practices, knowledge holders pass on their expertise to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage.
3. **Collaboration and Connection:** Cultural fire practices often involve collaboration between different Aboriginal groups, fostering connections and relationships between communities. These practices have a crucial function in bringing community and families together to connect – with each other and with Country. Fire was also used by Aboriginal groups to communicate with each other. For example, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people lit fires to let other groups know their whereabouts.
4. **Biodiversity Conservation:** Cultural fire is used to promote biodiversity by creating a mosaic of habitats across the landscape. This encourages a diverse range of plant and animal species to thrive, as certain plants require fire for their seeds to germinate, and some animals depend on fire-regulated habitats.
5. **Fuel Reduction and Fire Prevention:** By conducting controlled burns during cooler months, cultural burning reduces the buildup of flammable vegetation, minimising the risk of catastrophic wildfires during hotter, drier seasons. This helps to protect human and non-human communities, property and important ecological areas.

6. **Regenerating and Stimulating Growth:** Some plant species have evolved to rely on fire to stimulate growth and regenerate. Cultural fire helps to rejuvenate these plants and maintain their presence in the landscape. Burning is often seasonal and cyclical; deeply in tune with the landscape and what it needs to adequately regenerate.
7. **Resource Management:** The controlled use of fire aids in the management of specific resources, such as encouraging certain food and medicine plants or game animals to flourish. Burning Country was also part of a cultural aesthetic of 'cleaning' or renewing land which had become too overgrown and dense.

Cultural fire has gained recognition and appreciation in recent years for its ecological benefits and its potential in mitigating the impact of devastating wildfires in Australia.¹⁰ Many non-First Nations land managers and conservationists are learning from and working alongside First Nations communities to incorporate cultural fire practices into contemporary land management strategies.

The growing engagement with cultural fire practices can be seen as an important step toward reconciliation insofar as it recognises the expertise and wisdom of First Nations Peoples in caring for their Country.

The Narrap Unit of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation is currently piloting cultural burning programs on Woi-wurrung Country. For them, putting fire back into Country is a holistic practice; from building knowledge of the specific eco-system before the burn, to monitoring the results and learning from the outcomes. Sections of the **marram baba** Parklands have already been burnt, and some are scheduled for burning in the future.

¹⁰ National Emergency Management Agency, 'Cultural burning: Fighting fire with fire', 2022
<https://nema.gov.au/stories/cultural-burning-fighting-fire-with-fire>



Image 3. Grassland reserve in Donnybrook. Photo: Kashmira Mohamed Zagor, February 2023.

When I am along the Merri Creek I can feel my Mother, Grandmother and Ancestors. It helps me heal in regards to colonisation and the wellbeing of our people.

– Aunty Di Kerr, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder.

marram baba is a place of deep cultural connection and significance. Unfortunately, there has not yet been the opportunity to record the specific Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural values of the activity area for this project; therefore the statement below is a general statement of cultural significance for **marram baba**:

For Aboriginal people, there are many kinds of cultural values associated with the landscapes that were once lived in by their Ancestors. These include the tangible values normally recorded during archaeological investigations, such as artefact scatters and scarred trees. These places are physical reminders of the cultural lives of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors and a special connection therefore exists between those places and contemporary Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. This special connection underpins the high significance of these places.

*There are other values that the Wurundjeri people connect to in landscapes in **marram baba** and its surrounding areas. The Merri Creek and its tributaries provided a resource base including food, materials and possibly stone quarries for traditional Woi-wurrung speaking people. The natural values, such as remnant vegetation, eucalypts, and the landscape views from the study area are all integral to the cultural landscape in which Woi-wurrung Ancestors lived for many thousands of years. These landscape characteristics are therefore significant in accordance with Aboriginal tradition. Best practice heritage management (in terms of avoidance of harm to cultural heritage and where harm cannot be avoided) involves the proper management of the disturbance of those values, which is integral in the management of these significant cultural places.*

marram baba features remnant native grasslands which tell the stories of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung ways of dwelling and land cultivation. Archaeological investigations evidence that **galada tamboore** (creek waterhole) has significance as a long-term camping location for families, with views of the Merri Creek. Within this landscape, various flora thrived, including kangaroo grass, river red gums, tuberous plants like murnong (yam daisy), and an array of herbs. These grasslands provided a supportive environment for these plant species, creating a vibrant ecosystem with cultural and ecological importance.¹¹ The Merri Creek, or the merri merri (very rocky) creek, which runs through **marram baba**, attracted an abundance of animals that were cared for as totems by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. In turn, these animals could care for the Wurundjeri, providing them with food, clothing, and spiritual connection to Ancestors.

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors knew how to read Country expertly. During the winter, when the land near the river was swampy, the stony rises and ridges which line the top section of **marram baba** would have provided hunting and camping grounds for the Wurundjeri. As the weather warmed, they would move back down to lower ground, closer to the creek.

¹¹ Ellender, 1997, p. 115-117.

The impact of colonisation on **marram baba** has been immensely disruptive. The expansion of industrial development, poor land management practices and contamination of waterways have had a devastating impact on the delicate ecosystems that the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people rely on for their cultural health. For example, over decades the increased salinity of the Merri Creek has led to the decline of healthy river red gums along the creek line.¹² River red gums hold great cultural value to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. They were traditionally and continue to be used as a resource for making canoes, shields and other tools, serving as a reminder of how Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people care for, and have a reciprocal relationship with Country.

Improving the health of the Country where **marram baba** sits is essential to ensuring the preservation, protection and promotion of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural values.



Figure 1: Murnong or Yam Daisy (*Microseris lanceolata*). Source: Frankel and Major 2017, p.129.

¹² Beardsell, 1997, p. 61.



Fig 4. The Merri Creek in Campbellfield, February 2023

Position Statement of Cultural Values for **marram baba** Merri Creek Regional Parkland

marram baba Cultural Values Study and Parkland Planning

In 2021, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation was initially engaged by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), formerly the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to deliver a Woi-wurrung Cultural Values Study for **marram baba** Merri Creek Regional Parkland to inform future parkland planning and management.

This was to follow the successful model applied for **biik wurrdha** Regional Parkland. A Parkland Plan has been recently endorsed which embeds Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung self-determined Cultural Values throughout. Similarly, the **bunjil nganga** Cultural Values Study is informing current **bunjil nganga** Parkland planning.

The **marram baba** Merri Creek Cultural Values Study was intended to be delivered by December 2021. However, due to impacts caused by the COVID19 pandemic and staffing challenges, WWCHAC was unable to undertake a Cultural Values Study within the designated timeframe.

In February 2023, WWCHAC developed and endorsed an Interim Statement of Cultural Values to inform the **marram baba** Merri Creek – Draft Future Directions Plan. This statement included objectives for the management, protection and promotion of cultural values.

In place of a Cultural Values Study, this document revises the objectives outlined in the Interim Statement to form a Position Statement of Cultural Values which has been endorsed by WWCHAC Elders and representatives. WWCHAC is providing the below recommendations for incorporation into the final **marram baba** Merri Creek – Future Directions Plan.

These are recommendations developed from the nearby **biik wurrdha** and **bunjil nganga** Cultural Values Studies. WWCHAC feels that they should also be in the **marram baba** Position Statement. This is because of the proximity of these areas and that they reflect Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Values associated with Country generally. Recommendations from the forthcoming ‘**wurruwurt yaluk**’ Brushy Creek Cultural Values Study have also been drawn upon.

It is understood that the **marram baba** Merri Creek Future Directions Plan has already incorporated these recommendations when they were presented as objectives in the interim statement.

Recommendations

marram baba has been identified as a Significant Cultural Landscape by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, as set out in this report. This Significant Cultural Landscape includes the surrounding lands adjacent to **marram baba** and its natural floodplains, waterholes or other associated unmapped waterbodies.

The identification of a Significant Cultural Landscape requires consideration as to how the landscape is managed and protected within the **marram baba** Merri Creek Future Directions Plan, legislative compliance and other actions. Recommendations for managing Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Values, and otherwise embedding Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung perspectives into **marram baba** include:

- Recommendation 1: Strengthen the Management and Protection of Tangible Cultural Heritage
- Recommendation 2: Protect and Enhance Aesthetic and Natural Attributes
- Recommendation 3: Support the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community in holistic Caring for Country
- Recommendation 4: Conserve and Enhance the Cultural Landscape through Planning Controls
- Recommendation 5: Support and Celebrate Cultural Practice
- Recommendation 6: Involvement in Decision Making
- Recommendation 7: Direct Interpretation

These recommendations include actions items. It is expected that both the recommendations and actions will together influence planning processes and decisions relating to **marram baba**.

All recommendations are for the members of the **marram baba** Regional Parkland Partnership Group including City of Hume, City of Whittlesea, Mitchell Shire Council, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, Yarra Valley Water, Merri Creek Management Committee and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (hereafter referred to as the Parkland Partners).

Recommendation 1: Strengthen the Management and Protection of Tangible Cultural Heritage

An Aboriginal cultural heritage place (ACHP) is a location with historical or significant contemporary associations for Aboriginal people, but which lacks physical or archaeological material. It is therefore a location where Aboriginal associations have been documented. The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register (VAHR) holds a record of all registered ACHPs across Victoria, along with details describing their location, extent, nature, and significance.

marram baba holds an extensive presence of archaeological artefacts. A search of the VAHR was undertaken in July 2023 to ascertain the number, location and extent, and type of registered ACHPs located within the Study Area. The search revealed the location of 219 registered ACHPs within the Study Area, constituting 30 scarred trees, 11 earth features and 140 artefact scatters (see Figure 3 below).

A complete assessment of extent, nature and significance of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Material (ACHM) has not been documented for **marram baba**. It is essential that this be assessed to: register previously unidentified ACHM on the VAHR; avoid future impact from parkland infrastructure; and reflect accurate cultural heritage sensitivity mapping. To achieve this objective, WWCHAC seeks support from the Victorian Government, local government and other authorities. In the meantime, it is asked that all partners and their agents apply the precautionary principle and avoid any harm.

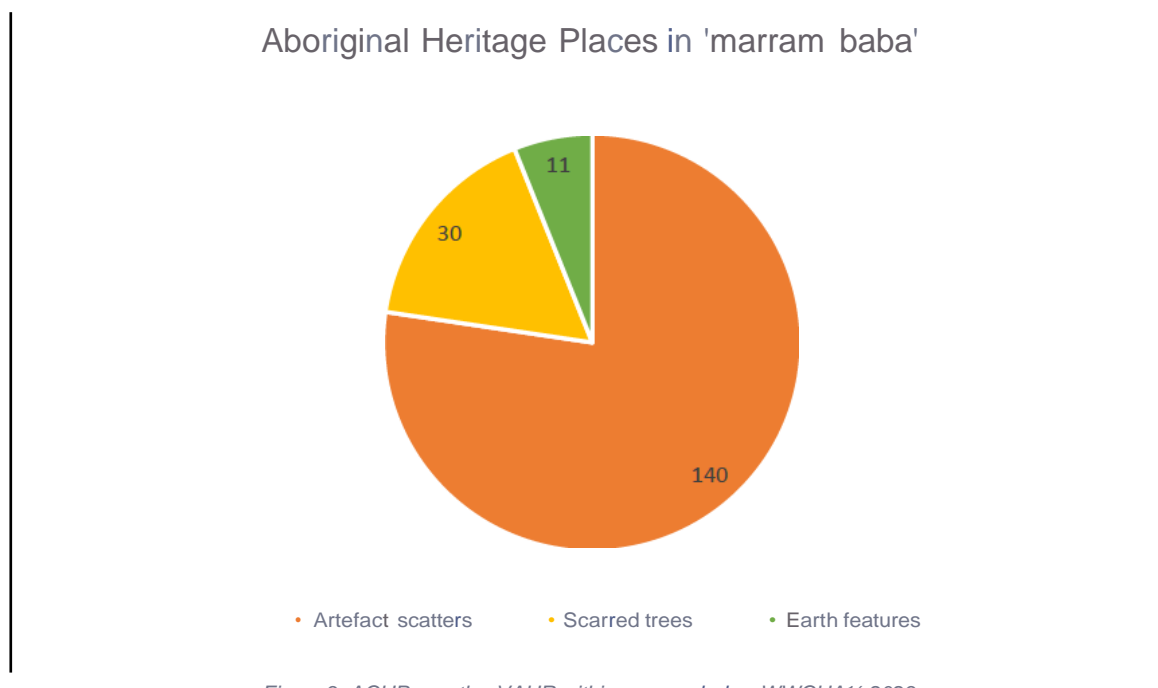


Figure 3: ACHPs on the VAHR within marram baba, WWCHA's 2023.

Action 1.1

The confluences of the Merri Creek and Kalkallo Creek, Curly Sedge Creek, Aitken Creek and Malcolm Creek be protected as places of intangible cultural heritage significance.¹³

¹³ Confluences have previously been identified as being places of high cultural sensitivity, as 'many archaeological and ceremonial places located along Merri Creek, are frequently connected to one another where waterways intersect' (WWCHAC 2012, p. 46).

Action 1.2

The details of registered Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Places and other sites of cultural significance across Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country should not be publicised to protect them from damage.

Action 1.3

A Cultural Heritage Management Plan is required if a proposed activity is considered to be 'high impact' and will occur within an area of 'cultural heritage sensitivity' (including within the extent of a registered intangible Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Place), as defined in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018.

Action 1.4

A voluntary Cultural Heritage Management Plan is recommended if a proposed activity will occur within an area of 'cultural heritage sensitivity' even if it is not considered to be 'high impact' but where substantial ground disturbance is proposed.

Action 1.5

A Cultural Heritage Permit is required if the proposed activity is to rehabilitate land at an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Place, or carry out an activity that will, or is likely to, harm Aboriginal cultural heritage (including within the extent of a registered place characterised by intangible cultural heritage).

Recommendation 2: Protect Aesthetic and Natural Attributes

marram baba is significant to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, including the diverse landscape features of Merri Creek and Kalkallo Creek, floodplains, billabongs, basalt plains, stony rises, gorges, and grasslands and grassy eucalypt woodlands. Along with preserved ecological biodiversity, this landscape represents ancestral and present-day Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community find spiritual meaning within Country that embodies the living spaces of their Ancestors and which provides a conceptual link to the traditional Country of their people. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders and representatives would like the public to enjoy **marram baba** and that visitors are guided to respect the area. All partners need to work with land managers to ensure that walking and driving tracks, lookouts and other visitor attractions support, and do not damage, the significant aesthetic and natural attributes of their ancestral place and that necessary protection is put in place.

Action 2.1

Construction of walking paths within the study area should ensure that additional infrastructure must be minimised to maintain the natural and aesthetic attributes of the study area as far as possible.

Action 2.2

To maintain the natural and aesthetic attributes of the study area, vegetation removal should be avoided wherever possible unless required for ecological restoration works. Where indigenous vegetation removal is unavoidable (including but not limited to landscape construction or excavation), species removed should be translocated if possible; or offset with revegetation of the same species from local provenance nursery stock.

Action 2.3

To ensure the safety of the general public, all redundant infrastructure such as fence posts should be removed. If there is barbed wire present this should be removed or replaced for protection of local wildlife.

Action 2.4

Strategies for the rehabilitation of important vegetation communities associated with the floodplains of the Merri Creek (e.g., within **galada tamboore**), should be developed throughout the **marram baba** cultural landscape.

Action 2.5

While the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community acknowledges that progress will continue to occur, they wish to minimise its effects. For instance, they prefer the use of woven geomesh fabric for reinforcement and stabilisation of creekbanks as opposed to concrete.



*Image 5. Narrap rangers and Research Unit staff looking out at **galada tamboore**. Photo: Kashmira Mohamed Zagor, February 2023.*



*Image 6. Restoration work at **galada tamboore**. Photo: Kashmira Mohamed Zagor, February 2023.*

Recommendation 3: Support the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community in holistic caring for Country

For the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Community, both cultural significance, connection to Country and accordance with their traditions is sustained through the continuance of traditional on-Country practices and ensuring the generational conferral of this knowledge. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people are the custodians of the **marram baba** Cultural Landscape and hold the responsibility of caring for this place to ensure seasonal maintenance of the right ecology, habitats for totemic and Creation Ancestors and restoration of the landscape traditionally managed by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. Activities such as fire practices, visits and ceremonies should be facilitated as requested by WWCHAC.

This cultural responsibility is managed and commercially practiced by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation's Narrap Unit who apply traditional ecological knowledge in conjunction with scientific and technical skill to carry out land management works and cultural burning regimes for the protection, management, and restoration of Country.

Action 3.1

The Narrap Unit be offered first preference in each instance to lead land, water, and natural resource management activities and remediation works within the **marram baba** Cultural Landscape, and across Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, including in the application of cultural fire.

Action 3.2

The Narrap Unit to be offered engagement to co-design environmental and land management plans within **marram baba**, ensuring Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung perspectives and objectives for Country management are embedded.

Action 3.3

The Narrap Unit be supported to build organisational capacity in the use of traditional practices in land, water, and natural resource management.

Action 3.4

The protection and enhancement of the Merri Creek corridor within **marram baba** is important to improve the health of Country. The Narrap Unit should be supported to achieve the Corporation's aspiration for the sustainable management of waterways across Woi-wurrung Country.



Image 7. *galada tamboore*. Photo: Kashmiri Mohamed Zagor, February 2023.

Recommendation 4: Conserve and Enhance the Cultural Landscape through Planning Controls
The **marram baba** Cultural Landscape is valued in its entirety for the spiritual, tangible heritage, archaeological, historical, ecological and living connections it provides the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community. Areas adjacent to **marram baba** are being developed. It is important that this development is not undertaken in a way that compromises the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Landscape.

Action 4.1

Parkland Partners must adequately resource WWCHAC to determine and provide detailed guidance for the protection criteria required for the **marram baba** region, or alternatively facilitate WWCHAC to review the impacts and cumulative impacts of development throughout the **marram baba** region on a case-by-case basis. The region is defined as **marram baba** and surrounding areas with the potential to impact or influence culturally significant features.

Action 4.2

Determine the appropriate mechanisms and approval requirements to ensure that WWCHAC has oversight of, or input into, the protective management plans for all aspects of the Parkland. This must be presented as a report to WWCHAC and include detailed timeframes and actions.

Action 4.3

Review, and where necessary, develop additional planning controls to protect the **marram baba** Cultural Landscape in its entirety.

This includes (as determined in partnership with WWCHAC):

- Embed cultural mapping values to inform future protections and form part of planning for **marram baba** and adjacent areas.
- Avoid built forms within parkland and within key viewing locations beyond the parkland.
- Ensure development responds first and foremost to the protection and enhancement of the local cultural, ecological and landscape setting.
- Ensure buildings to be of appropriate scale, design, height, setback and materials to avoid contrasting with, or dominating its local land environment.

Action 4.4

It is understood by WWCHAC that it may be possible to consider areas within Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country Cultural Reserves. This would be welcome by WWCHAC if the opportunity were to arise for **marram baba**. WWCHAC requests that if any partners become aware of such an opportunity, they inform WWCHAC as soon as possible.

Action 4.5

Water courses be managed to ensure the improvement of their ecological health, environmental flows, cultural flows, and the persistence of natural cycles of flooding which support floodplain floral communities.

Action 4.6

A buffer zone of a minimum of five hundred metres from the high-water mark on either bank of the Merri Creek be established to protect the creek corridor from development and its effects. Development activities should be prohibited from occurring within this exclusion zone unless expressly permitted by the relevant land management authority.

Action 4.7

Although improving, the ecological health of the creek remains poor and should be improved through regular environmental auditing and stronger penalty mechanisms. Harsher penalties should be instituted to businesses and individuals for both intentional and unintentional harm caused to the Merri Creek.

Recommendation 5: Support and Celebrate Cultural Practice

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have been the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land known as **marram baba** for at least 65,000+ years. For the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Community, significance is sustained through the continuance of traditional practices and ensuring the generational conferral of knowledge. This is achieved in many ways, including Caring for Country, undertaking archaeological assessments, walking Country, knowledge sharing and celebrations that include private ceremonies and on-Country cultural activities. These cultural practices enhance the feeling of belonging and connection as well as providing opportunities to fulfill traditional rights and responsibilities. Partners are asked to support and celebrate cultural practice.

Action 5.1

Areas within **marram baba** should be made available for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural practices. These areas can be anywhere in **marram baba** and change depending on cultural needs. The area would not be accessible to the general public during these times and would only be used by WWCHAC members, and others approved by WWCHAC, for ceremony, camping, maintenance and other activities. WWCHAC to engage with the Parkland Partners to select these locations to ensure they are appropriate.

Recommendation 6: Involvement in Decision Making

Recognition and protection of the **marram baba** Cultural Landscape must be integrated into relevant policies and regulations to ensure adequate protection and cultural respect for the **marram baba** area. To ensure this is done to the satisfaction of WWCHAC, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung representatives should be included in all decision making in relation to **marram baba** from now.

Action 6.1

To prepare for a long-term goal of returning Country to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Community to undertake traditional management, it is the expectation of WWCHAC that they will become equal partners in planning and management for **marram baba**.

Action 6.2

Any land managers (that are not from WWCHAC) are deemed to be managing the land as a transitional measure until such time that WWCHAC has the capacity and resources to take on the land management role. To prepare for this longer-term goal, it is the expectation of WWCHAC that they will be partners with any organisation that manages the land, particularly in undertaking planning for **marram baba**. Any land managers (that are not from WWCHAC) will undertake cultural awareness training. It is expected that organisations that manage the land will facilitate WWCHAC to build capacity to be able to take on the management of **marram baba**.

Action 6.3

Adequately resource (empower) WWCHAC to participate to the desired extent in parkland planning. This will ensure the inclusion of the objectives and aspirations of WWCHAC for Country, including recognition that Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have been custodians of this land for thousands of years and continue to hold this cultural responsibility. The Cultural Values Study, alongside partnership discussions, will provide the basis for updated plans for **marram baba**.

Recommendation 7: Direct Interpretation

It is recommended the use of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung artwork and cultural design elements be reflected in any future buildings, works and infrastructure design in the Parkland. WWCHAC should direct these usages.

Action 7.1

Application of the **marram baba** signage strategy developed in consultation with WWCHAC will

enhance public knowledge of the cultural importance and sensitivity of the **marram baba** Cultural Landscape. The Parkland Partners must re-engage WWCHAC to co-develop a consistent and culturally accurate signage strategy.

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