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Acknowledgement

to achieve with Wiyn?

Gobata Dja baap Nubiyt - Taking Care of Country and Waters Komugiyn budjo bengwudjak, bengordiwudjak maiwan thaliyu kinkinbil: Ngarrwabil, burron, guli baa bagurrk. Komugiyn budjo bengwudjak, bengordinganak ngarrwa, dja, wiyn, yaluk, wurrwurr baa murran. Gobata-ik-tanang wurring wurring baa gobata-ik-tjarra Djarrika bengwudjak bengordinganak murrup.

Context

Wadawurrung people are deeply connected to **Dja** (Country) and all of which belongs to Dja. We have relied upon **Dja**, **yaluk** (waterways), **Murran** (nature), **Weeagoon** (living thing) such as animals and sacred **Wiyn** (fire) since time immemorial. Our **Karringalabil** (great creator spirit) **Bundjil** created **Wadawurrung Dja** and defined the lore.

Wadawurrung ancestors honoured *Murran* (nature) and all *Weeagoon* (living creatures) great and small, they knew everything has a role to play. The memories embedded on Country, are a reminder of the intangible cultural heritage and song lines which are very much alive for Wadawurrung people.

Wadawurrung people and their families are committed to Caring for Country as our ancestors did before us. We continue to nurture and heal Country and foster respectful and reciprocal relationships with all living creatures that call Wadawurrung Country home.

Together, we strive to weave healing and restoration throughout Wadawurrung Dja and all generations of Wadawurrung people.



Key words in Wadawurrung Language

Throughout this Strategy, we have used Wadawurrung Language as it is inseparably culturally connected to us, our Country, Culture, kinship and family.

Wadawurrung language was traditionally a spoken language not written, so there can be numerous different meanings and spelling variations.

Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) as the Recognised Aboriginal Party under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Victoria) may assist and provide guidance on the use of Wadawurrung language for publication.

Note – Anything in this Strategy that is shown in quotation marks is the voice of Wadawurrung people & community.



Wadawurrung Wurru (Langauge)	English
Ваар	and
Bagurrk	Woman
Bengadak	we (all inclusive)
Bengordinganak	their
Bengordiwudjak	our (our mobs)
Bengwudjak	we (us mob)
Budjo	respect (in the liver)
Burron	Child
Darrabarruk	new
Dhurrungwil	Animals (having heartbeat)
Dja	Country
Djarrika	to stand
Gobata	Take care
Guli	Man
Gupma	do
Karringalabi	Great creator spirit
Kinkinbil	Wadawurrung people
Koling wada ngal	Walk together
Kolingwadangitj	walk all together (us all)
Komugiyn	feel, deeply
Konte winya	why
Kuinmatjwa	to heal (to make one)
Maiwan	longtime
Murran	Nature
Murrup	Spirit
Ngarrwalabil	knowledge people
Nyatne	Thank you
Nyurra	how
Paleert	Healthy / Strong
Thaliyu	yesterday
Wala	give
Warranwil	Plants (having roots)
Watjarrala	sharing
Winya	what
Wiyn	Fire
Wunggurrwilwa	to make strong
Wurring wurring	Elders
Wurrwurr	Sky
Yaluk	Waterways
Yanabil	Visitors
Yangarramela	to bring back
Yeyedjili	Dream
Yurritjarrapmili	to return



Featured artists

We are grateful to the five Wadawurrung artists whose work you will see throughout this Strategy for sharing their beautiful works with us.

*Nyatue*Thank you.

We collectively thank Wadawurrung people, Wadawurrung Board, Committee of Elders, CEO, Executive Leadership Team and external stakeholders for the ongoing support and commitment that contributed to Wadawurrung Wiyn Strategy.

In particular, we thank the Gobata Dja team and the members of Wadawurrung community who participated in workshops on 1 and 2 December 2023 to help develop the Strategy, and the Committee of Elders who met on 12 March 2024 to agree our Vision.

We also thank Betsy Anderson, Clear Advice & Strategy for helping to facilitate our conversations and bring together this document and Trent Gibson, DEECA for providing support and guidance throughout the facilitation process.



Lynette Clayton

This piece represents fire in a positive way of transferring knowledge handed down through Wadawurrung generations and other supported mobs. The trees show regrowth in the shape of

the ancestors. The ancestor trees are in the smoke of the active cool fire burn that has past and emerging to create life and new beginnings going into the future.



Kelly Ann Blake

I have embedded Wadawurrung fire spirit in this piece. I did not plan to create this piece for any purpose but rather my creativity was influenced by murrup of Country and our ancestors who have always known and honoured wiyn murrup (fire spirit). This piece embodies the colours of Country, fire and ochre. The flames and smoke swirling and flicking throughout this piece demonstrates the beauty in action and sacredness of our healing fire work.



Nandali Ahmat

My piece uses four digital patchwork images depicting diverse landscapes, each interwoven with cultural features and stories to share our connections to Country. It highlights efforts to bring wiyn murrup (fire spirit) back to care for fragmented dia, supporting renewal for cultural species and providing bush foods, medicines, and resources for generations. Images of coastal heathlands, ironbark woodlands, and gatherings of multigenerational families symbolize cultural leadership in healing Country together. Wurdi Youang's concept embodies fire's role in Wadawurrung identity, sustaining us through warmth, ceremony, and connection to dia.



Chloe Chatterton

Ngarrama Dja (To Burn Country) emphasises the importance of bringing wiyn murrup (fire spirit) to renew and heal Country. Cultural burning fosters biodiversity, supports plant growth, and encourages species return while strengthening the bond between our Mob and Country for collective healing. The artwork highlights Wadawurrung's stunning landscape, framed by Wurdi Youang's silhouette and the Fire Spirit (Sulfur-Crested Cockatoo) bringing Wiyn (fire), halted by Yaluk, a natural fire break. A central meeting place symbolizes the community's role in caring for and healing Wadawurrung Dja.



Matthew Chatterton

This artwork symbolizes our ancestral connection to managing Wadawurrung Country through wiyn murrup (fire spirit). The sulphur-crested cockatoo stands as the fire carrier. The black area depicts the ideal burn pattern and ground color, signifying proper burn temperature. Red symbols represent thousands of years of fire management and the reawakening of wiyn murrup. White patterns signify good smoke. indicating a balanced burn. The river and green areas show natural fire breaks, while animal tracks highlight unburnt zones, ensuring wildlife can thrive as the land regenerates.



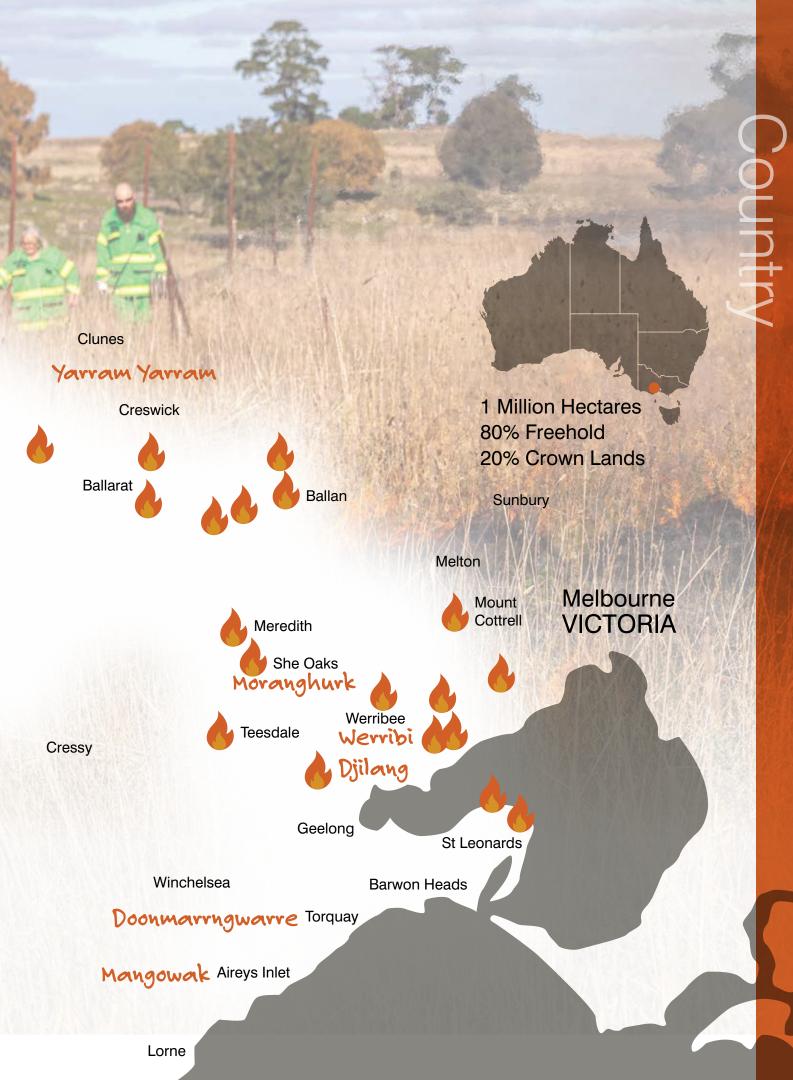
We acknowledge that fire is essential to the health and wellbeing of Wadawurrung people, Country and continuity of culture. Country responds to the application of the right fire at the right time. We know this through mapping biocultural knowledge and acknowledging Country as our mother and teacher.

Biocultural knowledge informs and guides us to determine right way fire. Wadawurrung are on the journey to reintroduce burning culturally in a way the ancestors once did. Many connections are made throughout the self-determined process of Wadawurrung people reclaiming Cultural obligations.

"The interconnectedness of all living beings and the environment, urging us to view nature not as a resource to be exploited but as a sacred, interconnected system that demands respect and care."

"We give gratitude to those who have burnt before us and to those who burn with us. As we *koling-wada-ngal* (walk together) spirit calls us to listen and heal. The old ways awaken and the ongoing journey towards healthy Country is embedded into Gobata dja Wadawurrung Wiyn. Voices of Wadawurrung ancestors are evident right across our landscape from the mountain ranges to grassy plains and then coastline".





Wadawurrung Wiyn Strategy

Vision

Wiyn kuimatjwa. Fire heals

Wadawurrung kinkinbil, dja, warranwil baa dhurrungwil paleert wayngurr wiynwil. Wadawurrung People, Country, plants and animals are healthy with right fire.

Bengwudjak yeyedjili Wadawurrung kinkinbil yirramyu karringa nya ngarrwabil baa wurring wurring kallinyayn, wirrpma wayngurr wiyn, kuimatjwa Dja.

We dream that tomorrow's Wadawurrung People grow up seeing [Knowledge holders and Elders] at the front, using right way fire, and healing Country

Fire is healing and essential to the wellbeing and health of Wadawurrung people, Country, plants and animals. We want to see future generations of Wadawurrung people have opportunities to grow up observing their knowledge holders and Elders leading the use of right way fire to heal Country.

Our shared vision

Wungurrwilwa gupma bengadak Wadawurrung wurring-wurring baap dja

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



Overview

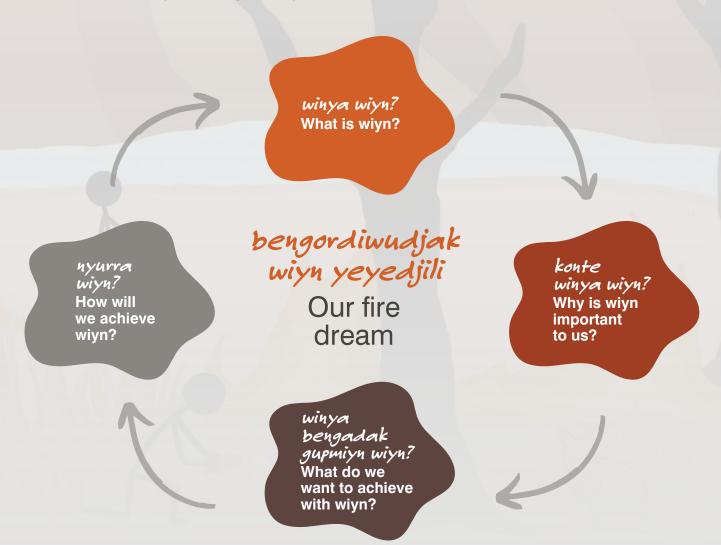
Our fire dream

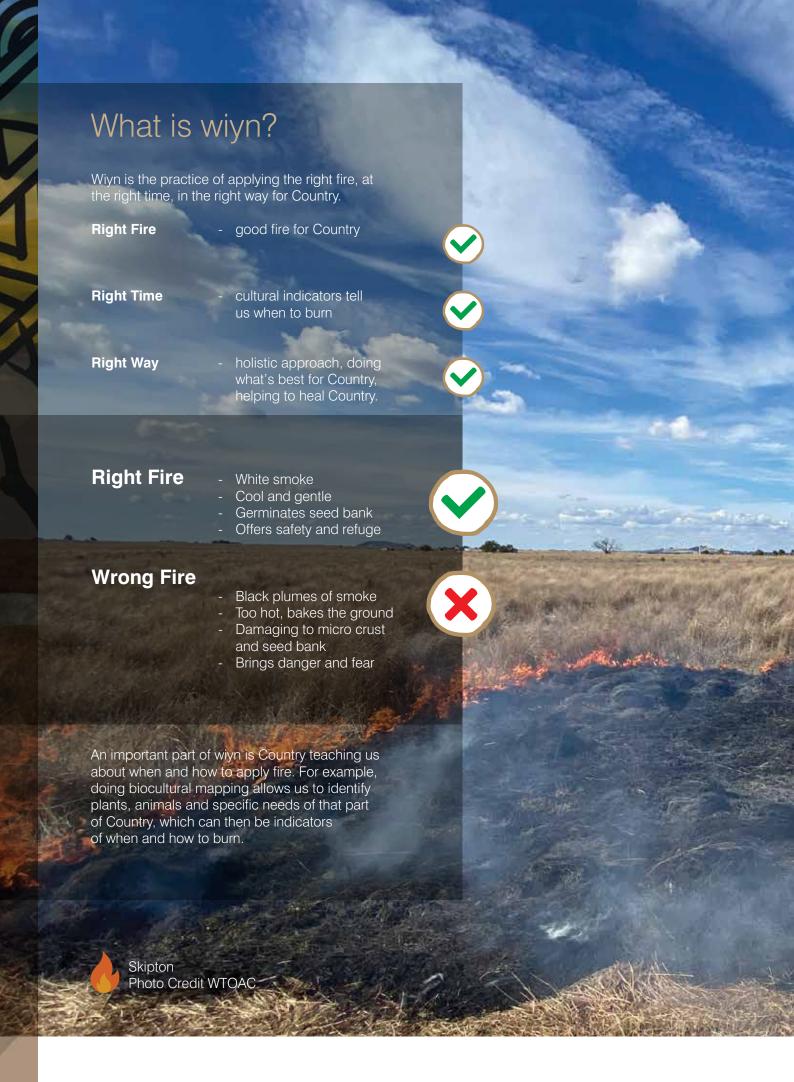
Wadawurrung People continue to care for Dja (Country) today. We aim to restore Country and its Murrup (Spirit).

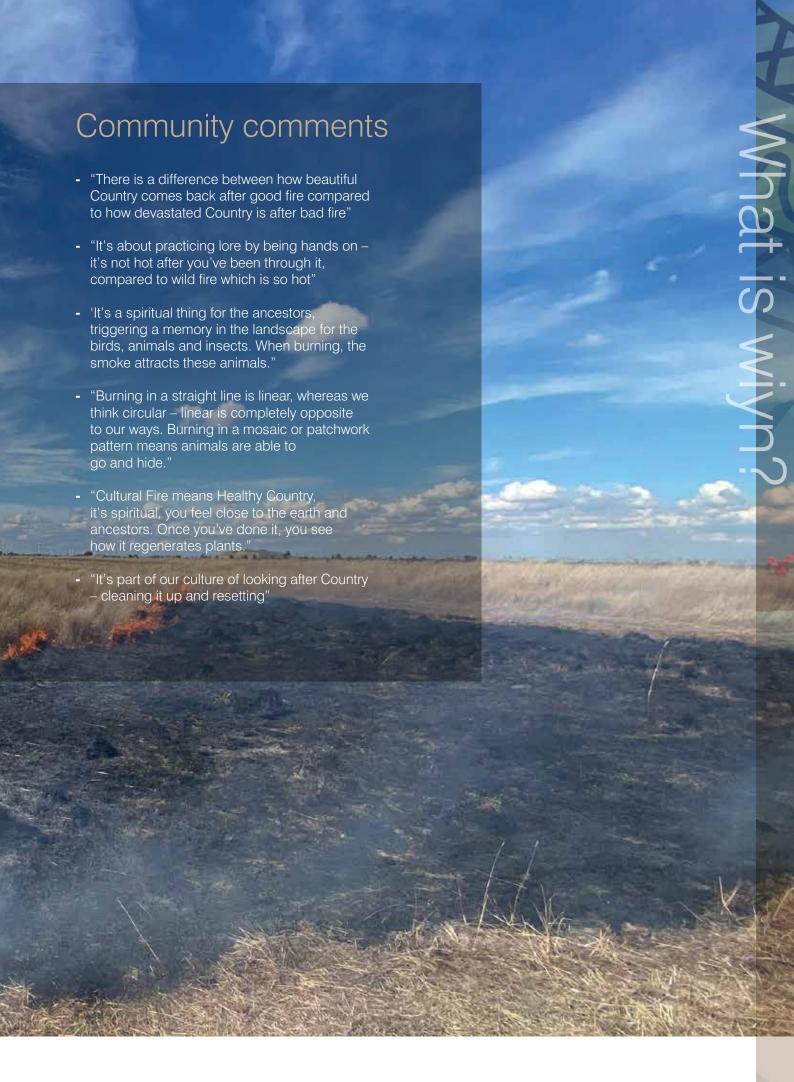
We continue to practice our traditions and lore to incorporate our land management in order to reset and restore Country.

Wadawurrung People view Country and people as one relationship. Being part of healthy Country supports healthy people and healthy communities.

Wadawurrung Wyn Strategy sets out how we will achieve our vision, and our Fire Dream, by answering four key questions about cultural fire.







Why is Wiyn important to us?

Cultural fire is more than just burning – it is an important means of connecting to Country, to Community, to Culture – all of which are part of each other and cannot be considered separately.

Cultural fire is especially important for Wadawurrung, because it creates opportunities to rebuild connections that were lost due to dispossession – so, getting people together to practice cultural fire heals People as well as Country.

wala murran

Life-giving: essential to life e.g. improves health, generates food, enables hunting, way of communicating, offers employment; brings people and family together; builds connections from young to Elders.

yangarramela darrabarruk

Regenerating: creates opportunity for biocultural mapping; improves biodiversity; generates food and shelter for animals and people; allows us time and opportunity to connect with Country.

watjarrala baa ngarrwa

Sharing & Learning:

enables us to come together and share stories; connects us to ancestors and Country; reminds us how we are all connected; offers opportunity for ceremony, language, dance; offers opportunity for healing.



Case study – Learning cultural practices as children

- "I learnt from my uncle, when he was cleaning up his 20-acre bush property and talking of the knowledge of the rebirth of grasses and plants."
- "I learnt cultural burning knowledge without really knowing I was learning it.
 I'm not sure if it's cultural fire or just commonsense of fire from being on a farm."
- "Being taught certain fire and watching how it dances across the landscape."

Case Study: Building connections from one side of Country to the other

"I could see a burn from Portarlington Pier! It was the burn at Werribee, on the other side of the bay. I could see the white smoke and could tell it was one of our burns, could tell the difference. I sent a message to say I could see it!"

Community comments

- "Fire is slow and can take all day, it takes care of itself. So, it's about the journey and the connection to Country. It's empowering."
- "Intensity of fire draws me to it always have fire, eat around the fire, it's about being together and enjoying company and getting to know Culture and share stories."
- "Coming together to tell stories about what we know growing up around community, people always spoke about fire in a healthy, healing way. It is a way of communication, to start us talking."
- "I grew up on a farm, with no electricity, we were taught a way to do it. Can see the flames dancing across wood."
- "Cultural fire is an opportunity for ceremony, to come together."
- "I saw elders at a cultural burn who might not have fire knowledge through no fault of their own
 - I could see everybody together, see how everybody was working together
 - it was not just caring for Country, it was caring for mob."
- "Fire helps to build connections, from our young to our elders. It's about bringing them out and connecting to Country."
- "Need to acknowledge the change in mob not just healing Country, it's about healing mob and bringing people together."
- "Dispossession means I haven't been able to participate in cultural fire practices, but now see it as an opportunity to relearn my culture, connect to my family, relearn my knowledge. So that I can then pass this on to my kids, so they can be brought up feeling connected to their culture."



What do we want to achieve with Wiyn?

We have three key objectives that describe what we want to achieve when it comes to wiyn. Each of these objectives have been broken down further, to explain in more detail what we want to achieve.

Objective 1: Build connections

We want to build connections within our own mob through fire – connections to community, culture and Country. For us, this means being able to:

- Maintain and share our tangible and intangible stories
- Continue Wadawurrung language, dance and ceremony.
- Enable all Wadawurrung people to feel confident to apply fire to Country.

Objective 2: Share knowledge

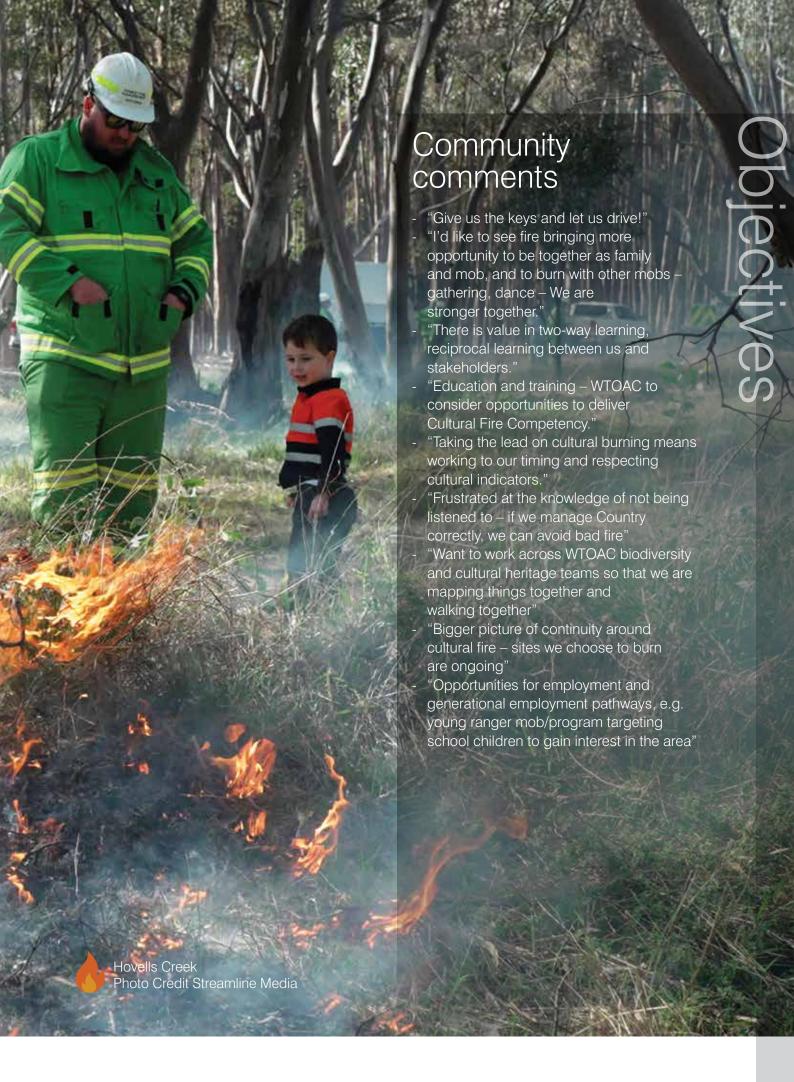
We want to share fire knowledge with other mobs and with those who are not mob (e.g. Government). For us, this means being able to:

- Protect our knowledge and Intellectual Cultural Indigenous Property (ICIP) for Wadawurrung wiyn.
- Enable cross-cultural knowledge exchange with other Mobs.
- Welcome those from other mobs who live here to participate in burning with us for example, "Adopt a mob" program like "Big Brother / Big Sister" program, where young ones who are disconnected from Country can be shown what is possible.
- Create two-way, reciprocal learning opportunities between us and Government, so that we can build their understanding of our way of fire and influence how they do burns Koling wada nyal (let us walk together).

Objective 3: Be empowered

We want to be empowered to do fire our way, which is the right way for Country. For us, this means being able to:

- Self-determine our own approach
- Safeguard our cultural heritage.
- Manage and safeguard Country.
- Use biocultural mapping to inform right fire e.g. monitor & evaluate burn sites over time, do different burns for different Country, integrate biodiversity & cultural heritage values.
- Create opportunities for food and seed harvest.
- Build generational employment opportunities



How will we achieve Wiyn?

There are barriers we need to overcome, and key things we need in place, if we are to achieve our objectives for wiyn. There are also some key enablers that will help us to overcome these barriers.

Case Study: Building trust with Government

"At our first burn at the You Yangs, there were lots of Government people around, they were all scared and nervous about how the burn would go. We weren't worried, we just started burning, started dropping matches to burn off the leaf litter. Six months later we go out there and grass is there, the ecosystem is starting to change. It's part of our culture of looking after Country – cleaning it up. It's our inherited right. Then, the next time we do a burn at the You Yangs, there was just one truck with one Government person and he felt comfortable enough to leave us to it.

The Government was starting to understand

Case Study: Teaching about right way to burn

we were looking after Country."

"When I was doing a cultural burn at Anglesea, I was asked the question of what happens to animals? My answer was that slower burns allow animals to get out of the way. There are also issues around managing Country in a particular way for just one species. I was also asked about managing fire around an endangered species, the plains wanderer, so I put the question to them – Do you really think our ancestors would have planned an entire burn around just one species?"

Barriers we face

- Not having the right gear.
- Not being able to access burns mobility issues for elders, family live interstate, work/ school commitments.
- Training not being delivered in culturally safe ways.
- Not being trusted to lead burns.

Community chieving wiyn comments "Barrier to participation in cultural fire is not having right gear – we need to make it so any Mob can go out, want to allow mob to feel comfortable". "We are always having to work towards changing mindsets to build trust with partners, Government agencies and other stakeholders". "It's about creating space and normalising it for all our Mob. What could be a first step for those yet to burn? Livestream burns? Use drones? Show before and after?". "Rebranding - having our own fire uniforms / identity". "Government making it easier to get people on Country". "Cultural Burns leading Ecological Burns – so that ecological burns are done with cultural lens, led by Wadawurrung". Moranghurk Photo Credit Streamline Media Our own branded uniforms / identity. Strong Wadawurrung voice. Technology to record / livestream burns, Partnerships & collaboration. so we can share more widely. Governance. Fire mapping to record and share Knowledge holders & our learnings when we burn. knowledge sharing. Mob only inductions – for Mob, by Mob. More awareness, understanding, respect.

Partnerships & Collaboration



Paleert Tjaara Dja (Let's make Country good together 2020-2030) recognises the importance of partnerships and stakeholder engagement to deliver our objectives, as part of *Warrgurrwilwa Wadawurrung Corporation* (Strengthening Wadawurrung Corporation).

We, as Wadawurrung people, want to be valued and recognised as traditional custodians and involved in making decisions that will generate the best possible outcomes for our people and Country.

"Nothing about us, without us"

We will walk alongside other land management authorities and businesses, such as the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action (DEECA), Parks Victoria (PV), VicForest, Arthur Rylah Institute, Country Fire Authority (CFA), Firesticks, local councils, fire risk consultants and traditional custodians, to collaborate in strengthening and healing People and Country. These partnerships are important for us to get access to public and private land, and build capacity so we are authorised within Government policies and frameworks, to practice wiyn. Looking to the future, we want to be empowered to have Wadawurrung led burns on Country. It is important that Wadawurrung Wiyn Strategy 2024-2034 is implemented in a way that aligns with other Statewide strategies

and frameworks in order to get the best possible outcomes for Wadawurrung people and Country. For example, Victorian Traditional Owners Cultural Fire Strategy, Victorian Traditional Owners Cultural Landscape Strategy and Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006. However, the state government also has a responsibility to enable our self-determination, consistent with Pupangarli marnmarnepu "owning our future" Self-Determination Reform Strategy (Wadi Wadi and Mutti Mutti language) and so, needs to support us in our implementation of Wadawurrung Wiyn Strategy 2024-2034. A key part of this support will be the provision of funding towards a sustainable fire ranger team that is equipped to deliver programs and projects. For example, fee-for-service arrangements with standardised fee structures.

Governance



Paleert Tjaara Dja (Let's make Country good together 2020-2030) includes a commitment to **Wiyn Murrup goopma dja** – fire spirit returns to Country – as part of our **Gobata Dja baap Ngubiyt** (Taking care of Country and Waters) program.

The Wiyn Murrup Ranger Team

The Wiyn Murrup Ranger Team 2024-2034 are responsible for implementing our Wadawurrung Wiyn Strategy, with the support of all Wadawurrung kinkinbil (people), WTOAC Board of Directors, Nyal Nyal la Cultural Governance Committee and Gobata Dja (Taking Care of Country) Team. The Wadawurrung Committee of Elders provide overarching leadership guidance and wisdom.



Wiyn Murrup Ranger Team		
Informed by	Responsibility	
<i>Wadawurrung kinkinbil</i> - People	Contribute as a collective to the implementation of Wadawurrung Wiyn Strategy 2024-2034	
Board of Directors	Endorse strategy and vision, attend ceremony and burns on Country	
Committee of Elders	Support implementation of Wadawurrung Wiyn Strategy 2024-2034 through allocation of resources and commitment	
Gobata Dja -Taking care of Country Team	Develop and implement strategy, attend ceremony and burns on Country, mentor younger generation	

Knowledge Holders & Knowledge Sharing



Paleert Tjaara Dja (Let's make Country good together 2020-2030) includes a commitment to cultural strengthening through our *Gobata bengadak tjarra* (Us supporting Us - Cultural Strengthening) program.

Capturing and sharing knowledge is so important for the successful implementation of Wadawurrung Wiyn Strategy, particularly so that our younger generations can fulfil our ongoing commitment to Country.

"Country is our biggest knowledge holder and teacher"
"We will identify our knowledge holders and identify
everyone's roles and responsibilities"

Our way of learning is reflected in the words of our Elders – listen, learn and love.

We aim to embed this way of learning as we implement Wadawurrung wiyn murrup by:

- Building a Wadawurrung Wiyn Knowledge Holders Group – including Elders, WTOAC members, Wiyn Murrup Rangers.
- Creating opportunities for young ones to walk on Country with us, so that they can learn and grow – for example, Junior Wiyn Murrup Ranger program, work experience for school aged children.
- Mentoring and learning plant and animal identification on Country.

- Undertaking biocultural mapping, including Cultural Values Assessments (CVA) and key indicators for right way wiyn.
- Ensuring ICIP (Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property) is safeguarded, using Field Assist (or other data management system) to ensure data sovereignty, ensuring knowledge management agreements are in place.
- Creating opportunities to attend capacity building workshops – for example, national Fire Sticks workshops.
- Creating opportunities to represent Wadawurrung – for example, Statewide Women's Fire Network.

Conclusion

Delama, we embrace wiyn as a collective responsibility and inspire to strengthen relationships and nurture dja. It is our heartfelt invitation to "koling wada ngal" walk alongside us in creating lasting, positive change for both dia, Country and kinkinbil, people.



References

Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) (2020), Paleert Tjaara Dja - Let's make Country good together 2020-2030: Wadawurrung Country Plan. Ballarat, Vic: Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.

