



Australian Government



BALLARDONG NOONGAR BUDJAR 'HEALTHY COUNTRY – HEALTHY PEOPLE'



Prepared by

**Ballardong NRM Working Group,
A Standing Committee of the Avon Catchment Council**

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***The Ballardong Noongar Budjar
'Healthy Country – Healthy People'
document was written by the
Ballardong NRM Working Group,
a standing committee of the
Avon Catchment Council.
Through a community consultation
process, this document has been
reviewed, accepted and endorsed
by the Ballardong community.***

***The Avon Catchment Council
have endorsed the
Ballardong Noongar Budjar
'Healthy Country – Healthy People'
as a Supporting Document
to the Avon NRM Strategy.***

This document has been prepared with investment from the Australian and Western Australian Governments through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust.

Front cover photo: Grass trees were a 'staple' plant for the Aborigines, providing food, drink, fibre and materials for making implements and weapons plus many more uses. It is commonly referred to as the Balga Bush (Blackboy Tree), and the botanical name is *Xanthorrhoea*.

Back Cover photos: Ballardong NRM Working Group, Aunty Kath (Ballardong community elder) hands a message stick to Wayne Clarke (former ACC Chair) and children planting trees at the Mulark tree planting day.

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Executive Summary

The Ballardong Noongar Budjar document is now complete. The effort of the Ballardong Natural Resource Management Working Group (Ballardong NRM Working Group) and the Avon Catchment Council clearly demonstrates to us all what can be achieved when people from different backgrounds come together with a common vision. The common vision determined by this group was to represent the desire of all people in the Avon River Basin Region, to have healthy Country that could be enjoyed by all. The second part of this vision was to specifically encourage the reconnection and re-engagement of Ballardong Noongar people in activities that would focus on regenerating the spiritual and physical health of the Avon River, its waterways and the Country through which these significant waterways flowed. These waterways today make up the Avon River Basin. Ballardong Noongar people knew them as Gogulgar.

This document represents particular importance for the local Aboriginal people of the Avon River Basin – the Ballardong Noongar. Our people have lived in harmony with the natural environment of the Avon region for thousands of years – or as our ancestors have described – since time began. This document therefore, aims to represent this close affinity Ballardong Noongars have had with their Country since the time of the Dreaming. This spiritual attachment to Country now incorporates a religious perspective for many Noongar people, who believe God is represented in the Dreaming as the Great Spirit who was the ‘Giver of the Land’. Ballardong Noongar were the recipients of this gift and were therefore, given great responsibility to care for the Land. Through colonisation and the consequences of our historical past, Noongar people have lost their God given right to take care of their Country. In this document we are now saying that the time is right for Ballardong Noongar people to be re-engaged – for our black hands to be put back in our Country.

Summary of each section:

We are very proud of what this document has already achieved for us. It has brought us together as a group of Noongar and Wedjela people who collectively believed that if we worked together we could achieve

something significant. The document is written in three parts. Each part represents its own story and collectively, they provide the reader with a sequence of stories that tell who Ballardong Noongar people are, where it is we have come from, where it is we have been and finally, where it is, as a people, we would like to be.

Part 1: Our Culture – Where We Have Come From

For Noongar people, our past is what defines us. Our identity is determined by where we come from, who we know and where we fit. Our stories about ourselves and our people (moort) are ultimately entwined with stories about our Country (Budjar) and where it is that we and our spirit, are said to belong. Our sense of belonging is determined through our physical attachment through our kinship laws. They determined who we are linked to in a physical sense. Our kinship laws were handed down by the Ancestral Beings during the Dreaming. The kinship laws provided us with the blueprint of what was required of us as carers of the Land and all things in the natural environment. They also provided us with meta-physical knowledge of our world. This became our spiritual attachment to Country. Our stories tell of who we are through our links to our Country and they provide us with great knowledge about all aspects of the Land and the natural environment and the responsibilities we have in it.

Part 2: Our Story – Where We Have Been

History can be told from many perspectives. Noongar people are tired of hearing our stories of our past being told by other people. Our history is more than just stories. They represent the lived experiences of ourselves and our old people. Like our Dreaming stories, our history represents specific knowledge of who we are and where it is we have come from. Unlike our Dreaming stories, however, which tell of the direct link between the spiritual and physical world, our history tells of the impact of a third party on the physical world of our people. The physical impacts of these experiences were so great it damaged and destroyed much of the spiritual world of Ballardong Noongars. Today we continue our struggle to recover from this impact.

Part 3: Noongar Aspirations – Our Preferred Future

The NRM activities that will re-engage Ballardong Noongar people are mentioned in this section. Each activity emerged from priorities that were determined at a BNRMWG workshop in December 2005. These priorities have been developed as NRM activities and will now become projects that will be resourced and managed as part of the ACC Investment Plan.

These are significant developments that have emerged over a relatively short period because of the constructive process of engagement and collaboration of the BNRMWG members and the ACC.

Conclusion

These projects carry great hope and anticipation for Noongar people in the ARB region. Peter Sullivan and Wayne Clarke must be given special mention in the way they have committed to forging good relations between the ACC and the Noongar community of the ARB region. These types of initiatives are always threatened by various obstacles and challenges,

however, the collective strength and unity of our group ensured many of these obstacles were overcome or removed. Peter and Wayne provided great leadership and vision for this to occur. The work of Rod Garlett and Michelle Winmar as the Noongar ‘bridge builders’ must also be recognised and applauded. Their tireless work and unquestioned commitment to the vision was absolutely instrumental in ensuring this whole project would become a reality.

Finally, as Chairperson of the BNRMWG, I would sincerely like to thank my Ballardong Noongar moort for their support and commitment to this project. What we have been able to demonstrate to ourselves and the rest of our Noongar people is; **together we can change our world to create a better future for our children.**

Arthur Slater
Chairperson, Ballardong Natural Resource
Management Working Group



Key statements

▶ **Michelle Winmar** – This document captured a lot of what us Noongar members of the committee were thinking and wanted to say. It is suitable for many audiences from those in upper levels of Canberra to our own Ballardong people here in the Avon.



◀ **Gary Woods** – We don't see this as any form of land rights as such. This is our input for all the people to come together and heal country. We are one and the same as country in our beliefs.

▶ **Arthur Slater** – Reconnection: this document will enable Noongar people who were removed from their lands through past government policies. They now have an opportunity to reconnect to their land, lifestyle and values.



◀ **Glenys Yarran** – It is a good thing that our working group can come up with something that the Noongar people can see what we've been doing.

▶ **Dianne Taylor** – As Noongar people of Western Australia this is our country and we are connected to this land of ours. We need people to be sensitive to our endeavour to achieve for all our children, grandchildren and generations to follow.



◀ **Reg Yarran** – It's good to see that Ballardong Noongar Budjar document is letting other Noongar groups know what we are doing in the Ballardong area.

▶ **Rod Garlett** – This is our cultural responsibility that has been bestowed upon our people over thousands of years – to look after Noongar Budjar, please..., just let us do it!



◀ **Oral McGuire** – I would like to thank the ACC for enabling us Noongar people to finally participate and to have a say in Natural Resource Management in the Avon River Basin Region. We do have knowledge and we do have capacity, let us therefore share in the responsibility of Caring for Our Country.



Introduction

This document has been developed with the view to representing the perspective and the period of time that Noongar people have been occupying and caring for their Country¹. The place and places Noongars call 'Budjar'. In our language we say '*ngalak ngaank nitja budjar* – this land, our mother'.

This document has now been endorsed by the Avon Catchment Council and will form the basis of a working document that will benefit and complement the Avon Catchment Council's Avon Natural Resource Management Strategy. It will contribute to this by providing the perspective and the context for Noongar specific projects to be supported in the Avon Catchment Basin and for these projects to be implemented and managed appropriately.

The Ballardong² NRM Working Group (BNRMWG) was the reference group who provided the impetus and ongoing support for its development. The Ballardong Noongar Budjar supporting document will now, provide the blueprint for all strategic and operational management and development of Noongar specific projects that occur in the Avon River Basin. The message that has been consistently provided by Noongar people with regard to the development of 'our preferred future, sounds something like this;

We know what we want to do. We know what we have to do. We are more than ready to take some steps. We are not sure how to take others. We want to walk with you to achieve what we want and have to do. Will you walk with us, respect us, and listen to us? If you will, together we may make the progress so many people have been seeking for so long.

The Avon Catchment Council in partnership with the Ballardong NRM Working Group will develop a 'proper process' to engage Noongar people as respected partners who will share roles and responsibilities and who will contribute to the development of sustainable mutual benefits for all partners in the activities of natural resource management (NRM) in the Avon River Basin.

The relevance of developing a partnering process is to fulfil the promise – to reach and provide the destination by having a sustainable and effective program that is owned by all stakeholders in a community who should be part of it.

Sustainability is of crucial importance to Noongar peoples. In our lives, we have seen so many programs that have 'gone over the funding cliff' and we often regard so much of what is said to us as 'just another broken promise'. The Ballardong NRM Working Group are therefore delighted to begin this journey together with the Avon Catchment Council to make a difference in the way our Country is managed so that both the Noongar and non-Aboriginal communities benefit from the vision that we have determined together.

¹ 'Country' is used by Aboriginal peoples in reference to their specific place of belonging or birthright accorded them through their bloodlines and kinship protocols.

² The Ballardong people are those Noongar people of the central Wheatbelt region. Ballardong Country lies directly over the Avon River Basin.



The Avon Natural Resource Management Strategy

Aboriginal people's involvement and interrelationship with their natural environment is recognised globally and the environmental impact of removing Aboriginal groups from these environments is also globally recognised.

Mark Dowie – is the recipient of eighteen journalism awards, including four National Magazine Awards. He teaches science at the U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, and is the author of 'American Foundations: An Investigative History'. In an article in Orion Magazine (which explores emerging alternative world views) Dowie wrote that he was curious about;

this brand of conservation that puts the rights of nature before the rights of people [where he] visited with tribal members on three continents who were grappling with the consequences of Western conservation and found an alarming similarity among the stories he heard.

He concluded that;

Many conservationists are beginning to realize that most of the areas they have sought to protect are rich in biodiversity precisely because the people who were living there had come to understand the value and mechanisms of biological diversity.

More and more conservationists seem to be wondering how, after setting aside a 'protected' land mass the size of Africa, global biodiversity continues to decline. Might there be something terribly wrong with this plan - particularly after the Convention on Biological Diversity has documented the astounding fact that in Africa, where so many parks and reserves have been created and where indigenous evictions run highest, 90 percent of biodiversity lies outside of protected areas? If we want to preserve biodiversity in the far reaches of the globe, places that are in many cases still occupied by indigenous people living in ways that are ecologically sustainable, history is showing us that the dumbest thing we can do is kick them out. (Orion Magazine, Year)

Similarly, Noongar people's connection with the Avon valley is well recorded and documented particularly from the perspective of the colonists or

'wedjela's'³ who settled after establishing the Swan River Colony in 1829.

For at least 40 000 years Noongar people managed the environment of the Avon River Basin in a sustainable and productive way that created a balance between a spiritually fulfilling lifestyle and the natural environment.

Today, the traditional connections are preserved through registered Aboriginal Sites but it is the oral history that provides the collective voice that provides access to Noongar history through the personal stories of families and survival, of the culture, values and belief systems. It is these voices that we wish to incorporate into this document.

We ran free. There was nothing to hold us back from running on the land, a land we called our own. We had our own places to live, these were called mia-mias⁴. The land and our connections to it will be something that we will have in our memories for the rest of our lives'. (Mrs Kathy Yarran. Elder – Kellerberrin)

When Stirling established the colony the property rights of Noongars were by orders of the King, to be respected. The colony was founded exclusively on a 'land grant scheme' for private settlement⁵. However, when the Crown assumed sovereignty of the state in the 1840s, it also claimed the power to grant land tenure, in order to satisfy expectations and demands of the settlers. Back then, the Noongars ignored fences and continued to hunt and collect food, these elements of history are recorded and documented with the extreme examples being the massacre at

3 Wedjela is a derivative of 'whitefella' – originally pronounced with a strong Noongar accent and still widely used by Noongar people today in reference to European peoples.

4 Mia-mias were constructed of grasstree thatching, bushy branches and sticks and were temporary shelters for Noongar families.

5 Grants were apportioned according to the value of assets and labour introduced by settlers.

Pinjarra and the conflict at York. Many Noongars were captured and deported. Many were shot and some shifted to the settlements and/or lived on the outskirts of towns.

This document supports the Avon Natural Resource Management Strategy (ANRMS) developed by the Avon Catchment Council in 2005. The purpose of the ANRMS is to provide a context for investment in the natural resources and the infrastructure of the Avon River Basin.

Commonwealth and State Government departments contribute to this strategy through the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water.

In the Avon River Basin Noongar involvement with NRM is about 'Budjar' – the Noongar word for country; everything associated with the land, including attachment, cultural, physical and spiritual aspects. 'Caring for Country and each other' is a strong motivator and recurrent definition amongst Noongar people when talking about NRM. Respect for land and waterways, revegetating natural bushland, restoring country, sharing of culture, and working together to implement appropriate land management practices define the goals of Noongar people working in NRM.

The basis of [Noongar] land use: - current and future activities are based on maintaining and strengthening [their] Noongar identity. This issue of identity is expressed through the strong relationship felt for the natural environment and the importance of sharing knowledge, experiences and materials from the environment with the family group ... It appears that the desire to undertake activities such as kangaroo hunting, is not just based on a physical need for food. It is part of 'the Noongar way', a cultural need, that maintains and strengthens their identity as (Noongar) Aboriginal people whose social and demographic environment has changed dramatically since European settlement. (Ellis-Smith, 1991; CALM)

The main Noongar aspiration in the Avon area is to have a healthy Country. All projects have this as a focus and then branch into areas of culture, revegetation, language, business ventures and sustainability.

Health of Country means growing a variety of trees, abundant wildlife, return of native animals and plants, restoring waterways and landscapes, and people interacting with and enjoying the natural environment.



Figure 1 Wornt – white gum trees

(Photo courtesy Mike Griffiths, WWF – Australia)



Figure 2 Yonga – grey kangaroo

(Photo courtesy Mike Griffiths, WWF – Australia)



Figure 3 Yoran – blue tongue lizard

(courtesy Mike Griffiths, WWF – Australia)



Figure 4 Kamarong – Spring in Ballardong

(Photo courtesy Mike Griffiths, WWF – Australia)

The health of the river is central to natural resource management and the restoration of this as a priority is a key aspiration. A healthy river encourages the return of wildlife, supports plant growth, and brings people together in a social context through various

activities, such as family gatherings, special events and other cultural interactions. Healthy Country increases the opportunities to grow and develop alternative Noongar enterprises such as tourism, bush medicines and bush foods.



Part I: OUR CULTURE – Where We Have Come From

NOONGAR LAND – Noongar Spirit

Before the coming of the 'wedjela', our forests played an important part in our spiritual well-being, identity and survival.

The spirit of our dead were placed inside dead and living trees.

Our capacity to hunt, seek healing and communicate spiritually was dependant on our practises of putting into and returning to our Country the spirit of our people from where it had come.

The Noongar forests are sacred to us.

These places of old forest were and continue to remain spiritual reservoirs. The destruction of these very sacred places will destroy links to our ancestors which will eliminate our capacity to remain spiritually healthy.

(Mr. C. Humphries (deceased) – Senior Ballardong Culture and Language Elder. Edited by Tim McCabe)

NOONGAR CREATION – Tall Trees and King Parrot Dreaming

Oh! Up very high. Woruk it is a woruk, a karri. It's terribly tall. Well these...all these animals, they all came. All these Noongars, they were, you know, they were all there, all turned to animals after.

And they tried to get this, there was a nest up there. And there was an egg in that nest. I dunno what sort of egg it was, but all these birds tried everything, the animals tried to climb this – Lizards and all sorts of things and different birds came along and they tried, they got half way up and they fall down.

'Bout half way up like that and another bloke, little lizard would fall down over there, kick around somethin. So they was standin, thinkin, now what we gonna do? And they said nguluk daarnginyang wangkiny. Daarlgayung, where daarginy? They lookin for a daarlgayung and that's a king parrot. Daarlgayung. They lookin. Oh yeah see one fella comin. Kwop nidja baarminy kwop he said. See there he comes, that's good. And they ask him then – nunuk durndung, they said nunuk durndung boorn

yiraar dukerniny. You climb up there and light it. Kiya he said. Yes. He got two fire sticks, like karl moorl – karl moorl is fire sticks. Ngunaar... He put'em under his ngaaly, in his ngaaly...put these two fire sticks under his arm. And he climb, climb and climbed. Got right near the near side and just light'd and... Soon as they caught alight like that, everything, birds all different birds went back different way and lizards and goannas runned off and things flew away. That's how they... That's the story he want to hear. That's how old King Parrot got red under his wings, both sides. That's the story'.

Mr. C. Humphries (deceased) – Senior Ballardong Culture and Language Elder

Produced by Tim McCabe

Traditional Noongar Cultural Connection

Noongar people like all other Aboriginal people of this nation, have their views on creation or how life began. The Dreaming is that place where all things began and where all things continue to be. The following story tells how humans were given special responsibilities within their natural environment.

Before the earth was formed, giant spiritual beings roamed the universe. Many of these spiritual beings were combinations of what would later be known as plants and animals. As these beings roamed, they left spirit tracks and later formed the land as we know it. These tracks would later be central to Noongar people's way of life. The spiritual beings created the rivers, the rocks and the trees, all the animals and all things natural

The creator then made man and woman. They were to be the carers of everything natural. The Law was then handed to them. In that Law was everything that needed to be known about their environment. Each member of each tribe was born on a spirit track. Each track determined many things. If you were born on the 'Waitj Dreaming Track' you were born into many obligations to the Emu spirit and would not hunt or eat emu flesh. This is the concept known as totems in which everyone

is born with cultural obligations to all things natural including the animals, plants, rocks, rivers, valleys, hills and the universe. In this everything was looked after and cared for by all individuals and members within the clan or tribal group.

Contemporary Noongar beliefs also incorporate the Christian perspective. Although some people would suggest traditional Noongar beliefs are in conflict with the principles of Christianity, today many Christian Noongar people align the two philosophies in order to strengthen their world view as Noongar people, as demonstrated by this significant Ballardong man;

God gave the Noongar people responsibility to look after the land they lived on – different groups had responsibility for different areas of land. The land tells a story, like where our boundaries are. We never owned the land, we had to use it and care for it, we had a responsibility not to damage it. It was like our life line when we felt a bit sick we would go back and sit down on our land and feel the warmth of belonging and we would reach out for that healing, that's why sometimes people say our spirits are really hurt through mining and agriculture, because as custodians we have let down the great spirit, the Giver of the land. The land is crying out, damaged. (Sealin Garlett - Ballardong Noongar and Uniting Church Minister.)

In this document, the term 'dreamtime' is avoided; it suggests a static time; an era which occurred long ago and is now finished.

The Dreaming and the Ancestral Beings who exist within it are not the result of human dreams or visions whilst asleep. The characters of the Dreaming are real persons and living beings, who still influence Noongar thinking (katanginy) on Noongar Country (budjar).

Our creation stories are often referred to as 'myths'. Both the words 'dream' and 'myth' carry meanings of invalidity. If people are going to write or speak about our beliefs, religion and creation stories, we must insist they use these more appropriate words.

In traditional Aboriginal thought, there is no central dichotomy of the spiritual and material, the sacred and secular, or the natural and supernatural. While each of the Dreaming Beings and their physical counterparts and manifestations (as animals, plants, waterholes, rock formations, or people) are distinguishable, Dreamings and their visible transformations are also, at a certain level, one.

(Sutton, 1988:16)

Certain sacred sites are the places of origin of spirit-forces and the continuance of their power relies upon

constant maintenance of (and lifelong respect for) these locations. This continuity remains essential to Noongar beliefs and the health and wellbeing of their people as part of the balance of nature. Performance of special ceremonies is necessary to activate the spirits in places of particular significance.

As long as the mountains [hills] stood, the springs flowed, the animals survived and the ancestral rocks sustained no damage, the tribe [people] had no fear for the future. Nature and man shared the same life and Nature could not die.

(Strehlow, in Berndt [ed.], 1970:111)

Blending spirit and nature to regenerate and revitalise the land

The connection between Noongar people and their land remains in evidence everywhere. It is known that the cycle of nature will re-occur as a result of ritual: migrating birds will re-appear, shoals of fish will skim along the rivers, sleepy reptiles will awaken from hibernation, fruit will lie on leafy boughs every summer season, and grain heads would weigh heavily on grasses swaying in the wind. The calendar of events was marked by these seasonal occurrences, and by the chill of winter, the midsummer haze, the weeks of torrential downpours, the hail, or the coming of biting winds. These were the signs for Noongar people that indicated to them when the Yonga (grey kangaroo) was the fattest, or when the quandongs were ripest or when the jam tree (mangart) gum was sweetest. The fact that Noongars knew these signs and when they would occur so well it enabled them to be supremely confident that their economic, physical and spiritual needs would always be met. This in turn enabled Noongars to organise their time and commitments to those things that were of greatest importance in their values system – social and spiritual maintenance⁶.

Noongar Budjar had abundant flora (> 9 000 species) and fauna (> 500 species) and supported a lifestyle requiring approximately 2 hours per adult per day to provide the family's economy.

(Ellis-Smith; Wagyl Wangin': 2005)

⁶ Kinship protocols and obligations and cultural and spiritual law were taught to the young throughout daily life and were maintained throughout adult life through ritual and ceremony. These rituals and ceremonies were monitored and regulated by the clan leaders.

It also prompted archeologist Josephine Flood to make the statement in her book *Archeology of the Dreamtime* that ‘Hunter-gatherers [have been] described as the original affluent society...’⁷

This sensitivity to the natural environment led Noongars to see the world in six seasons (See page 8 – Noongar Seasons). All seasonal changes and patterns of life were part of a group’s collected knowledge, and were portrayed in ritual, mime and lore. Participation in special ceremonies ensured that the cycle of life continued, so the role of ritual remains strongly in every person’s being (or consciousness). Today, unfortunately for Noongar people and Noongar country, these ceremonies and rituals are not occurring in Country like they once did and so the health and wellbeing of Noongar people is echoed when we look around and see the health of our Noongar budjar. A number of important points in relation to this are:

- The ideas from which Noongar spiritual beliefs are formed came from Ancestral Beings of the Dreaming.
- Their spirit powers operate from certain (sacred) sites.
- People activate the spirit powers through ritual and thereby keep in touch with the spiritual world.
- Spiritual beliefs are part of all aspects of life throughout Noongar Country.
- Evidence of the Dreaming is seen in the presence of landmarks and lifeforms, and this knowledge gives Noongar people the right of possession to this land.
- Through ritual the people influenced their surroundings and helped nature to maintain a balance.
- Important Ancestral Beings that travelled far and wide were often known by different names by groups living along a ‘track’.
- Different groups were linked by Dreaming tracks and often shared stories and ceremonies.



Figure 5 Djaawit – York Gum

Graham Ellis-Smith also wrote in his paper *Wagyl Wangin*;

Science is also suggesting that everything in the universe (and multiverse) is inter-connected through a ‘field of consciousness’ at the sub-atomic (quantum) and sub-quantum levels that is alive, intelligent and full of infinite options of expression in what we call life. Through the work of renowned scientists such as Neils Bohr, David Bohm, Russell Targ, Fritjof Capra, Hal Puthoff, Elizabeth Targ, Masaru Emoto and others, we are discovering a universe that is alive and responsive to our mental and emotional input. We are literally the ‘makers’ of our world through this primary process of drawing potential into reality.

The ‘Dreaming’ in Indigenous culture has several aspects; one of which is the concept of creation origins, through all time and space. It is the place that everything comes from, drawn into expression in the physical world by ceremony, dance, song and story. Focused attention in particular places that are said to hold the ‘essence’ of a species will draw that species into the physical world. These are ‘increase ceremonies’ and common among indigenous people throughout Australia. Many such sights still exist in the Wheatbelt Region.

... This suggests that the ‘Dreaming’ and the ‘Quantum’ are the same thing. If so, it seems western science is just catching up with ancient Indigenous awareness that is still being utilised in many areas of Australia and internationally. (page 6)

⁷ Affluence is referred to in the context of the quality of both time use and of diet or energy source. Traditional hunter-gatherers like Noongar people had an average daily food intake of about 2400 kilocalories. The recommended energy intake for adults is about 2000 kilocalories.

NOONGAR SEASONS – Our World View

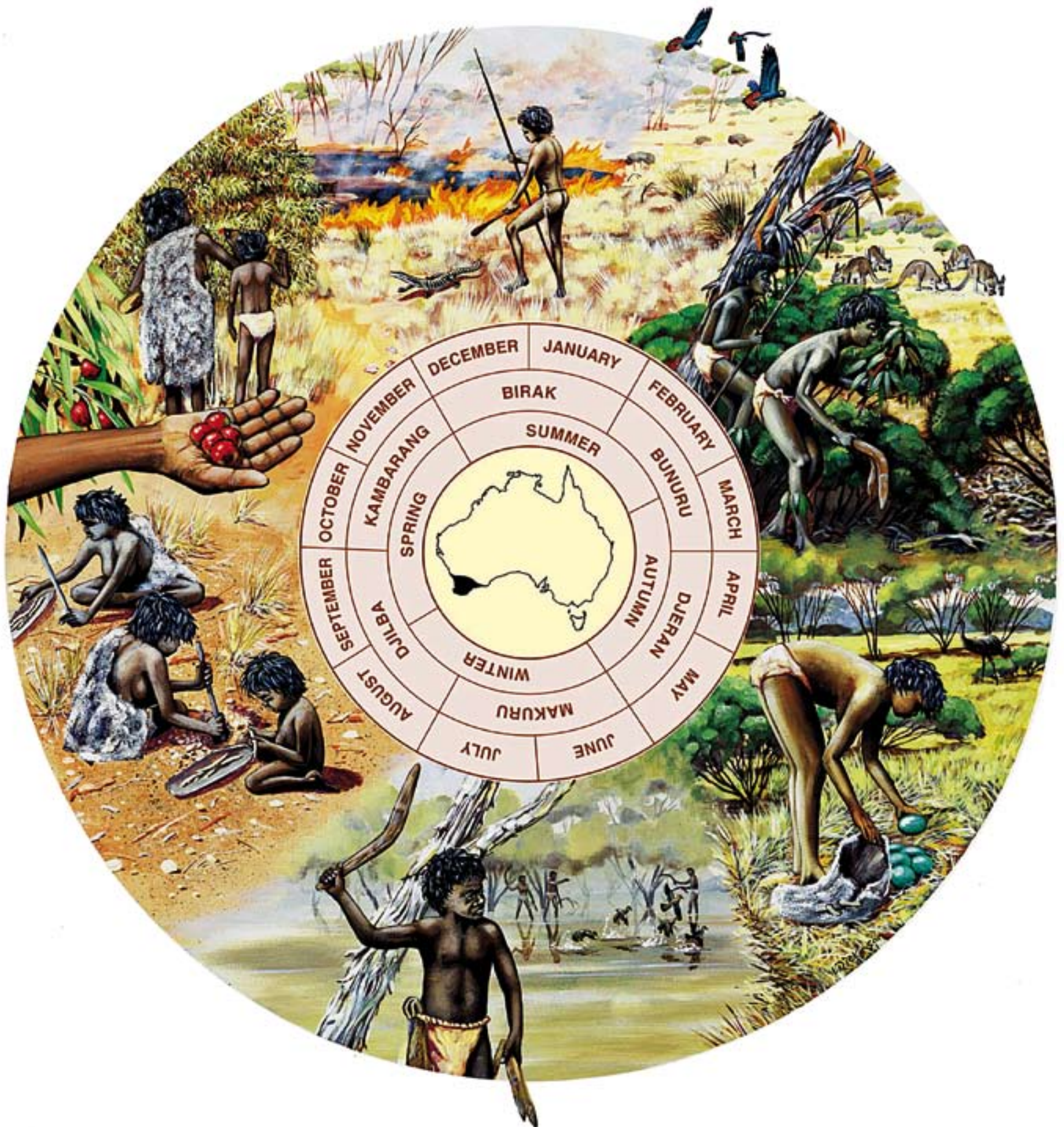


Figure 6 Ballardong Noongar Seasons

(©Department of Conservation and Land Management)

Ballardong Noongar Seasons:

Bunuru – hot easterly and north winds from February to March

Djeran – becoming cooler with winds from south-west from April to May

Makuru – cold and wet with westerly gales from June to July

Djilba – becoming warmer from August to September

Kambarang – rain decreasing from October to November

Birak – hot and dry with easterly winds during the day and south west sea breezes in the late afternoon from December to January.

Our Land and its Meaning – Noongar Budjar

As all things throughout the physical landscape are interrelated, Noongars consider themselves to be part of this natural system. A major responsibility for Noongar people is to coexist with all living things, according to the rules of the Dreaming. As a result, we traditionally blended into our physical world with little disruption to it. Our relationship with the land involved more than meeting the basic survival needs of food resources or materials for shelter and clothing. The land is not rocks, rivers, trees, animals and soil, all ripe for the taking; it provides an expression of the Dreaming, which guides and teaches people through a framework of traditional stories, rituals and ceremonies.

Noongars identified with the many recognisable natural features throughout the landscape, and each is symbolic – a remnant and reminder of Ancestral Beings. These relationships between people and the landscape is nurtured and regenerated through the totem system.

A totem:

...colours and influences the Aborigines' [Noongars'] social groupings and mythologies [stories], inspires their rituals and links them to the past. It unites them with nature's activities and species in a bond of mutual life giving....

(Elkin, 1954:133)

The result was that Noongar people lived in a world full of meaning. Nothing existed without a reason for it's being; and the Noongar world was full of signs. No act was carried out that was not relevant to the wider world of things; every action had a meaning. A common experience amongst contemporary Ballardong Noongar relating to Country and how important knowledge is passed on, can be demonstrated in the following story:

... my uncle taught me to sing some of the songs that talk about the land. He told me... (they) are the history of the Ballardong people, which talks about us being one with nature ... I learnt things that only tell about the tribal land – how it is talked about, sung, danced, painted and, most of all feel as though the land is another you.

One day, I went hunting with my uncle. As I was walking along behind him I was dragging my hunting stick on the

ground which was leaving a long line behind me. He told me to stop doing that ...

He continued telling me that if I made a mark, or dig, with no reason at all, I've been hurting the bones of the traditional people of that land. We must only dig or make marks on the ground when we perform or gather food.

Species Renewal

Some sacred sites are recognised as having spirit powers able to help renew certain species of living things. These places were very special and the responsibility to maintain them sits with the senior men and women of the clan group (moort) whose country the site/s are situated on. They represent a most sacred and secret part of Noongar life. Sometimes, the rites are called increase rituals; however, the word 'increase' may be misinterpreted; unless considered in the correct terms of reference:

... That the term 'increase', although commonly used in the literature relating to such rituals, is not strictly accurate. The participants [Noongar people] are simply concerned to maintain the supplies of natural species at their usual level, to support the normal order of nature.

(Meggitt, 1965:221)

The spirits of billions of plants or animals, throughout diverse physical environments, lived under the ground (or water). There they awaited the command to emerge and spread across the land and be plentiful. Noongar Budjar was plentiful with abundant flora (> 9 000 species) and fauna (>500 species)

From renewal centres, spirits were ritually summoned to emerge and reproduce across the land, thus becoming available for all Noongar hunters and gatherers, not only those of a particular region. Performance of the appropriate rites at the relevant site and time each year for the benefit of neighbouring groups was often an expectation.

If a particular species seemed to be in quite short supply in a given season, suspicion of inadequate performance is cast onto the group in whose estate the increase-centre of that species is found. Distant groups may be prompted to send messengers with a small sacred [object] as a gift or reminder to the guardians and the spirits.

(Tonkinson, 1978a:96)



Part 2: OUR STORY – Where We Have Been

The Consequences of History – from hunter-gatherer to CDEP

Agricultural development in the Wheatbelt created permanent changes to the face of the land. Vast areas of bushland were cleared and settled and small farms of less than one thousand acres replaced the sprawling pastoral stations of the nineteenth century. Before becoming engaged in farming in the Avon, Noongars would camp on the land and continue to hunt and gather food within family groups on what they still considered their traditional Country.

Wheat became the new staple and intensive agriculture rather than pastoralism the major form of land utilisation. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the new settlers were no longer new; rather they had become a permanent rural population who saw themselves as the pioneers and therefore the rightful owners of the land.

For Noongar people, these developments increasingly reduced the level of access to their Country they had previously enjoyed and in fact, taken for granted. The pastoralists increasingly saw the need for Noongars as a reliable labour source diminish. When once they had depended heavily on the Noongar people to clear the land, there was now no real need for their services. In employing casual workers many established settlers showed a definite preference for hiring white labourers now living in their district. Something Noongars have never forgotten, as Mr C. Humphries (deceased) recalled in 'For Their Own Good' (Haebich 1988):

... they'd go clearin', cuttin' down, shearin', fencin'. Well, that's how all the farms started from then on. They never stopped, they kept going, and well, look at it now. And the Noongars got nothing. Still get nothing. And they was the first ones who started it.

Those pastoralists who turned to wheat production employed Noongar people only during the initial clearing of the land and for seasonal farm work, while those in marginal areas who continued to run sheep fenced their properties and only hired Noongar workers during the shearing season.

Noongars working on farms were labourers, who 'camped' on or close to the farms with their families. This was known as 'a run' as they moved from farm to farm and location to location across the Avon and the South West. The 'run' became an important feature of Noongar life in the early 1900s. Noongars were thoroughly familiar with their Country and the camping places in their runs and they often had ties of traditional ownership with the area. In some cases the runs coincided with traditional territory divisions. This work represented the foundations on which Noongar people and their families developed both the interest and the capacity and increasingly, considered themselves to be competent farmers.

Several families applied to the government for their own farming blocks as they had this experience and saw that they had a direct connection to that land through tradition and belief. Most were unsuccessful, but the few who received grants could not obtain finance and support from government unlike the settlers who were actively supported by the government. Most returned to working for the settlers to farm so as to earn some money to meet the conditions of occupancy imposed by government. Most simply 'walked away' which was often viewed as an inability to manage and farm, 'it wasn't in them' and 'they are useless and would never succeed' however there were one or two noticeable exceptions. Family and cultural obligations remained and created added burdens which often conflicted with this new way of life. The obligation to share imposed difficulty and the



Figure 7 Karda – Goanna

(Photo courtesy Glyn Kernick, PageSetter Design)

droughts of 1911 and 1914 saw the total demise of the Noongar farmer in the Avon region.

Many Noongars were engaged in farming and/or lived in ‘town reserves’ living a life that was a mixture of traditional culture and the new western or settler’s culture. Gradually over the decades and with the advent of access to ‘schooling’, the granting of the right to vote and citizenship, Noongars could access public housing and commence the transition to ‘town living’. This was and remains for some a struggle as the demands of urbanisation erode the traditional cultural values and belief systems of Noongar people. Obligations to ‘extended’ family are seen by non-Aboriginal people and agencies, as ‘overcrowding’ and still create difficulty of values across the cultures. Unemployment and welfare dependency have become the inheritance of most Noongars as contemporary farming practices advanced. Most of the arable land is cleared and modern farming equipment introduced. Farming properties have become larger through amalgamation and purchase.

The number of people farming has greatly diminished, impacting on the numbers of Noongar people being employed as farm labourers or contractors. Contracting companies travel the Country contracting services for cropping, shearing, dam construction and fencing – they employ few if any Noongar people. With the advent of ‘urban dwelling’, Noongars now want to be with their family and live at home in town.

This situation, namely a dependence on welfare payments due to the lack of employment opportunities,

has compounded since the time of the 1970s and 80s and is a major cause for despair, lack of interest in education and social and cultural disintegration.

It is during this same time period that Government introduced and implemented various employment and economic development programs. Some Noongars benefited from these initiatives but as an unintended consequence of some programs they and their families relocated to Perth or larger Regional centres such as Geraldton, Bunbury and Albany. These people constituted the ‘skill’ pool of the local Noongar community who in turn became lost as mentors and trainers. Most of these initiatives worked against the Avon District and further diminished employment opportunities for Noongars and limited them to ‘Aboriginal support worker positions’ in the local government, education and health domains. Commonwealth agencies encouraged Noongars to form ‘associations’ to promote what was viewed as forms of self-management and self-determination initiatives. These ‘Corporations’ have become a symbol for the skilling of people in ‘service and support industries’ that require little in skill and are for ‘primary’ levels of delivery only. Few if any are graduates from tertiary institutions as those Noongars relocate to the City and larger towns where employment opportunities exist.

In the 80s the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) was introduced. It was originally designed to meet the specific needs of those remote Aboriginal communities where no work was available.



Figure 8 Nyingarn – Echidna

(Photo courtesy Glyn Kernick, PageSetter Design)

It was a reality for meeting the paternalistic obligations of government and was viewed as an advancement on programs to further encourage self-determination and break the cycle of total welfare dependency.

Today the Noongar community of the region has mixed views of the outcomes of CDEP. While the concept worked well in some locations, there is room for improved levels of success in the Avon region. It does, however, provide some success as a social interactive tool, but the outcomes of training and skill development for employment remain unsatisfactory.

In spite of this turbulent history, Ballardong Noongars still maintain strong spiritual and socio-cultural interest in their Country. In an attempt to address NRM issues in Noongar Country, the Noongar people wish to enter into a formal partnership arrangement with the ACC. A major development in the progress toward achieving this vision has been the establishment of the

Ballardong Natural Resource Management Working Group (BNRMWG).

The BNRM Working Group is a Standing Committee of the ACC. This Group is made up of elected representatives from the Ballardong Native Title Claimant Group Working Party (SWALSC⁸ Region 2 Working Party) and have been appointed to represent Ballardong Noongar people's views in relation to NRM, including Noongar values, aspirations and priorities.

The BNRMWG have developed a 'preferred future' for Noongar people living in the Avon River Basin that includes some specific targets and priority projects and activities. The Ballardong NRM Working Group suggests the following activities as a possible starting point to establish and strengthen this important relationship between the ACC, the broader community and current and future generations of Noongar people in the Wheatbelt Region.

⁸ South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council – the Noongar Native Title Representative Body.



Part 3: NOONGAR ASPIRATIONS – Our preferred future

In traditional times Noongar people lived in complete harmony with the land. They knew their Country and everything in it. The seasons determined how their needs and wants were met. Plants and animals provided food and medicines. They interacted with the land, the waterways and the sky through the actions of nature. The land not only provided them with their needs and wants but connected them spiritually to their inheritance and obligations to the land. Each creek, river, plant, animal and mineral, its location, its uses and its needs were incorporated into their value systems, beliefs and social fabric.

Our vision

For all people to respect and understand Noongar culture and from there have a greater attachment to the land (Budjar), and to work in partnerships to create a positive and sustainable future for all.

Ballardong Noongar people want to feel reconnected to the land. We see the way forward through engaging in a process that builds a healthy relationship between all NRM stakeholders. This will involve jointly managed access to land and waterways for all people through developing these partnerships, in a manner that understands, respects and incorporates through the process, the cultural values of all stakeholder groups.

Options include revegetation projects, filtering of waterway sediments, renewable energy sources such as wind power and an oil mallee power station. There is an emphasis on education and interpretative aspects that aim to generate the emergence of Noongar business and enterprise development opportunities.

Economic independence is a strong aspiration through the development of Noongar business ventures, as the establishment of alternative farming practices is promoted and developed.

A starting point should be one that will benefit all. Designated walk trails is one way to achieve public access to private and State owned land, where people feel comfortable and welcome. Shared ownership and responsibility are key factors to achieving a respectful and meaningful project. An appropriate management process that is determined by a common vision will be more likely to deliver mutual benefits to all stakeholder groups and will provide more appropriate levels of engagement in projects. Specific projects should include restoration, maintenance and interpretive signage as key activities and elements.

The BNRMWG will be further developed to legitimately be involved in the design, implementation and ongoing management of NRM projects across the Avon River Basin. We acknowledge that work towards this target is already underway through this process of building partnerships with the ACC, as well as increasing the ACC team and Noongar involvement in a number of NRM projects specifically for the Avon River Basin region.

Five Year Targets

Targets have been identified to help progress the visions of Noongar people's involvement in NRM activities in the Avon River Basin.

I Recording Traditional Knowledge for NRM

Recording traditional knowledge is the identification and recording of significant cultural aspects. This includes sites, stories and language associated with the area and other land use information. Mapping our Country is seen as an important first step to understanding significant and sacred areas and to ensure appropriate Noongar involvement in NRM projects.

Recording traditional knowledge for NRM will assist stakeholders to develop an understanding of the issues associated with these significant areas and will identify those who have rights and responsibilities to speak for family (moort) and for Country (Budjar). This is an important step in sharing Noongar culture to promote awareness, understanding and to prepare a way for the development of a common language in the management and restoration of the land and its waterways.

A number of government, community and Noongar groups would be engaged in the cultural mapping exercise including Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA), South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC), farmers, land management groups and Local Governments. This will ensure that duplication of effort does not occur and existing knowledge is effectively and appropriately utilised.

The mapping should be culturally sensitive with relevant information freely available to the public. Other more sensitive information will be treated respectfully and will only be available to people after permission from the appropriate Elders and custodians is granted.

2 Use of Noongar language

Noongar language is used extensively across Ballardong Country for towns, roads, farms and reserves. Some of the spellings and meanings are not always known or correctly given. One aspect of this project is to obtain a consistency in spelling and pronunciation of Noongar words and their meanings. This needs to occur in partnership with other key organizations and stakeholders such as SWALSC, Wheatbelt Aboriginal Corporation (WAC) and the Noongar community. The cultural mapping project will assist with the naming of places in the Avon River Basin.

Appropriate signage of place names (towns, waterways, rocky outcrops etc) that interpret the environment should be placed at strategic points along walk trails. The sharing of Noongar language and stories will deepen the respect for Noongar culture and spirituality and create a greater awareness of the traditional and contemporary

history of the area. Another important aspect is to highlight the efforts necessary to better manage the already fragile landscapes and their environment.

The Noongar people have a desire to have their language utilised by incorporating Noongar words into all NRM and ACC documents and website. This focus should be on Noongar interpretations of the Avon River Basin and reflect the aspirations of Noongars to become and remain involved in the NRM of the Avon region.

Through this involvement with NRM, Noongar people will encourage teachers to include Noongar language in classes and work towards having the language incorporated into school curriculum through the Language Other Than English (LOTE) and Society and Environment Key Learning Areas.

3 Access to significant sites

This document endeavours to demonstrate the spiritual and physical importance of sites of cultural significance to Noongar people. Noongar people want appropriate access to significant sites in the region – including land and waterways. These sites are on Crown land, State forests, Local Government land and private property.

Access will enable Ballardong people to reconnect culturally and spiritually to significant areas. This will in turn strengthen the cross-generational and cross-cultural learning necessary for the preservation and restoration of the culture, its values system and the significance of its importance to future generations of Australian people.

4 Walk Trails

The development of a number of walk trails would ensure appropriate access to land and waterways in a controlled environment. The establishment of walk trails will be conducted in association with revegetation and other NRM projects and activities.

The walk trails will be culturally interactive through signage explaining the area, the history attached to it and Noongar stories of the area. It is anticipated that local Noongar people will be employed to help develop the tracks in areas such as research, designing their routes, enunciating the stories,

and determining the significance of them and their construction.

Walk trails throughout the Avon catchment and waterways region will give Ballardong Noongar people the opportunity to develop enterprises such as guided cultural awareness tours, bush survival skills training and the production and teaching of bush foods and medicines.

5 Committing to economic opportunities in NRM for Noongar people

History has undeniably shown how Noongar people have been progressively removed and marginalised from most areas of what was traditionally considered Noongar Country. This not only included the physical removal of Noongar people from Country, but also their cultural and their spiritual removal from those places where the Ancestral Beings gave authority for them to co-exist with the rest of the natural environment. Ultimately, from a Noongar cultural perspective, this has been a key factor in the deterioration and degradation of the once pristine lands and waterways of the Avon River Basin. Consequently, the impact of this removal from Country on Noongar health and wellbeing is something *wedjelas* continue to ignore or disregard as being related. Economically and socially too, Noongar people and families have suffered irreparable damage. Is it time to consider change? Change in policy and change in the level of commitment from *wedjela* people for Noongars to be allowed to once again lay their hands on and in to Country.

Surely this requires some significant acknowledgement from the Avon Catchment Council when the following questions are posed;

- Should Noongar people be involved in NRM in the Avon River Basin, and if so, to what level?
- What benefits should Noongars be allowed to derive from NRM activities?
- What preferences, if any, should Noongars be given in the implementation of NRM projects and activities?

6 Opportunity for Meaningful Discussion

Given the recent significant developments in NRM activities throughout the country and the

level of commitment already made by the ACC and Noongar community, there now exists a wonderful opportunity to take this commitment to another level. Respectful and meaningful discussion about the Avon Catchment Council and Noongar people engaging collectively in NRM in the Avon River Basin is now a reality for all. The challenge ahead lay in the level of ongoing commitment and support from each partner to the process and to each other. The unique combination of factors if facilitated appropriately and effectively can make radical positive changes in the Avon River Basin and Ballardong Noongar Budjar.

Together, we can achieve more than anyone before us. Our Country needs us to come together in harmony and in strength. The combined knowledge of the Sacred and the Science will enable a level of collaboration not experienced before in the field of natural resource management.

Conclusion

Noongar people wish to work together with all people in an inclusive and respectful manner to progress this thinking. The promotion of Noongar involvement in the activities of the Avon Catchment Council is seen as a most important and positive development. It represents the foundation to including the aims, goals and aspirations of local Noongar peoples in the process of developing a positive and respectful partnering arrangement with the ACC and other stakeholder groups. A clearly defined and robust partnering arrangement will contribute significantly to achieving mutual benefits for all people and the region in the management of the land and its waterways.

The BNRMWG believe the Avon Catchment Council is in a unique position to create a new way of understanding and implementing natural resource management in the Avon River Basin. Both western scientific and traditional Noongar knowledge and skills can be combined in a powerfully creative and beneficial way. We believe the will to implement this change is present. Genuine commitment will ensure this change occurs.

Recommendations

In response to the BNRMWG the following recommendations have been formally accepted by



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the ACC and further developments (ie MATS etc) will be progressed:

- That the ACC implement some form of affirmative action process to explore opportunities and to encourage and support Noongar people to take responsibility and to become pro-active in pursuing and fulfilling their aspirations in the activities of NRM in the Avon River Basin.
- That Council develop and implement policy that facilitates economic benefits to Noongar people involved in NRM activities and projects across the Avon River Basin.

Ballardong Noongar people look around their Country and see the extent to which Ballardong and Noongar land has provided non-Aboriginal (wedjela) peoples with income and a comfortable lifestyle while dispossessed traditional owners have gained nothing and lost a lot. This reflection is apparently, not directed at farmers whom Noongars see as ‘working the land’. It is focused on the large businesses that have made substantial profits from farming and agriculture and have not, in the view of these Noongars, put anything back their way.

In a report by Simpson Norris International for the Wheatbelt Aboriginal Corporation in 2003, it was stated;

In employment terms, the data we were able to access, anecdotal as it is, suggests that the employment of Indigenous [Noongar] peoples is almost totally reliant on government funding either through the public sector proactive discriminatory employment of Indigenous peoples or through Wheatbelt Aboriginal Corporation CDEP.

This means that there are limited employment positions available for Indigenous peoples and almost all of these are either in CDEP or are already filled in the public sector and requiring a reasonable level of academic achievement. There are virtually no positions currently filled in the private sector. This situation leads to a level of pessimism among parents and carers that is probably transmitted to their children in one way or another.

As one parent said – ‘the kids have to have better than this?’...



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Appendices

The following documents have been included as appendices because of the important messages they convey. These messages include issues of accountability, governance, responsibility, engagement, protocols and partnerships. All of which are significant in determining the aspirations for people to develop meaningful and respectful relationships and ways of working and living together. They have been included as guides for two specific reasons:

to complement the ongoing development of this document; and to support the ACC processes

associated with the engagement of Noongar peoples in NRM activities in the ARB region.

Appendix 1: West Australian Government's Statement of Commitment to a New and Just Relationship with Aboriginal people

Appendix 2: Protocols and Guidelines for Consultation and Engagement with Aboriginal Western Australians.

Appendix 3: Developing Aboriginal Terms of Reference – A Guide.

Appendix 4: Principles for Establishing Partnerships with Aboriginal people.

APPENDIX I: Statement of Commitment to a New and Just Relationship between the Government of Western Australia and Aboriginal Western Australians

A Commitment to a New and Just Relationship

There is a need for a new and just relationship between the Government of Western Australia and Aboriginal Western Australians:

Aboriginal people and their culture are a unique and invaluable part of our State;

Dispossession, settlement and the cumulative acts of colonial and State governments since the commencement of colonisation have left an enduring legacy of economic and social disadvantage that many Aboriginal people experience;

Aboriginal people have continuing rights and responsibilities as the first people of Western Australia, including traditional ownership and connection to land and waters. These rights should be respected and accommodated within the legal, political and economic system that has developed and evolved in Western Australia since 1829;

Wealth creation in the general Western Australian community is fundamentally important in the process of addressing problems facing Aboriginal people. Certainty for industry's development proposals and security for Aboriginal people's cultural heritage and values must be equally respected within the overall development of the State;

Circumstances of Aboriginal people can differ significantly between regions and localities. Regional and local approaches are required to address issues that impact on Aboriginal communities, families and individuals;

To achieve improvement Government and Aboriginal people need to work together in partnership and share responsibilities.

Statement of Commitment

This agreement commits the parties to work together to build a new and just relationship between the Aboriginal people of Western Australia and the Government of Western Australia.

Parties

The parties to this agreement are the Government of Western Australia and the Western Australian ATSIC State Council, supported by the following Aboriginal Peak Bodies:

Western Australian Aboriginal Native Title Working Group;

Western Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation; and

Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia.

Objective/Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to agree on a set of principles and a process for the parties to negotiate a State-wide framework that can facilitate negotiated agreements at the local and regional level.

The shared objective is to negotiate a new approach in Aboriginal affairs policy and administration in Western Australia based on regional agreements.

The partnership framework aims to enhance negotiated outcomes that protect and respect the inherent rights of Aboriginal people and to significantly improve the health, education, living standards, and wealth of Aboriginal people.

Principles

In achieving these objectives the parties are committed to the following principles:

recognition of the continuing rights and responsibilities of Aboriginal people as the first peoples of Western Australia, including traditional ownership and connection to land and waters;

legislative protection of Aboriginal rights;

equity with respect to citizenship entitlements;

regional and local approaches to address issues that impact on Aboriginal communities, families and individuals;

a commitment to democratic processes and structures;

inclusiveness;
the need to address issues arising from past acts of displacement;
a commitment to improved governance, capacity building and
economic independence.

Agreement in Good Faith

This is an agreement made in good faith based on the commitment of the parties to effective and sustainable partnership.

Partnership Framework

The Parties agree that the most effective means of translating the above principles into meaningful action and outcomes is by way of regional agreements, based on partnerships.

The parties agree that between Aboriginal people and the Western Australian Government there will be negotiated partnerships which:

- will be based on shared responsibility and accountability of outcomes;
- should be formalised through agreement;
- should be based on realistic and measurable outcomes supported by agreed benchmarks and targets;
- should set out the roles, responsibilities and liabilities of the parties; and
- should involve an agreed accountability process to monitor negotiations and outcomes from agreements.

The Partnership Framework will establish State-wide policies and administrative arrangements to support negotiations and agreements at the regional and local level.

The Partnership Framework will support Aboriginal people to negotiate regional and local agreements

according to the priorities of Aboriginal people in partnership with other stakeholders.

The Partnership Framework should incorporate and be informed by separate agreements in the health, housing, essential services, native title, justice and other issues that impact on Aboriginal people in this State.

The Partnership Framework will address:

- a whole of Government/community approach based on negotiated policy benchmarks and targets;
- regional negotiated agreements incorporating integrated planning involving ATSIC, community organisations and State and local government;
- agreed processes for audit and evaluation of negotiations and outcomes;
- reform of government and Aboriginal organisational infrastructure where required to ensure the implementation of the partnership agreement.

Structure for Continuing Dialogue

The basic structure for continuing dialogue will be based on:

- Regular liaison between the Cabinet Standing Committee on Social Policy and the ATSIC State Council supported by the Aboriginal Peak Bodies;
- Regular meetings of the Indigenous Affairs Advisory Committee that will consist of the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Directors General of other Government Departments, the ATSIC State Council supported by Aboriginal Peak Bodies to provide advice and to monitor progress being made;
- Regional plans using existing statutory processes for planning in Indigenous affairs; and
- Agreements applied at the local level.

APPENDIX 2: Protocols and Guidelines for Consultation and Engagement with Aboriginal Western Australians

There is a clearly articulated, and nationally supported need for systemic change in the way the wider Australian community (including Government) works with Aboriginal peoples.

October 2001, in Western Australia, saw the State Government make a historic formal commitment to build a new and just relationship with Aboriginal people of WA.

Government has indicated a willingness to build its capacity to engage in a meaningful way with Aboriginal Western Australians in decision-making that will affect their lives. This document seeks to involve all stakeholders to address the need for widely recognised and supported protocols and guidelines for engaging with Aboriginal representation at the regional and local level.

The Statement of Commitment signed by Premier Geoff Gallop and then Chairperson of ATSIC State Council, Ian Trust, laid the foundation for a new partnership between Government and the Aboriginal community of WA.

The commitment upholds Aboriginal people's right to equity and recognises their continuing rights and responsibilities as the first peoples of WA, including traditional ownership and cultural connection to land and waters. It is an important step in the reconciliation process.

In achieving these objectives, the Statement of Commitment obliges the parties to the following principles:

- Recognition of the continuing rights and responsibilities of Aboriginal peoples as the first peoples of Western Australia, including traditional ownership and connection to land and waters;

- Legislative protection of Aboriginal rights;

- Equity with respect to citizenship entitlements;

- Regional and local approaches to address issues that impact on Aboriginal communities, families and individuals;

- A commitment to democratic processes and structures;

- Inclusiveness;

- The need to address issues arising from past acts of displacement; and

- A commitment to improved governance, capacity building and economic independence.

Introduction

This document aims to set out the protocols and guidelines for effective engagement and consultation with Aboriginal peoples. It supports the recognition of Aboriginal Western Australians as citizens with unique rights as the first peoples of Western Australia. As such, it seeks political recognition of Aboriginal representation at the state, regional and local levels, requesting engagement and participation based on trust, respect, equality and inclusiveness.

This will lay the groundwork for building Aboriginal community and government capacities to fully engage in effective partnerships.

What Is Trying To Be Achieved

These guidelines can inform government, industry and not-for-profit organizations of regional and locally preferred ways of working in partnership, to improve outcomes at the community level.

These participatory approaches; with Aboriginal communities in control of their futures can deliver outcomes that will see:

- Aboriginal peoples, organizations and communities with functional governance and a strong cultural identity;

- Well defined and commonly agreed goals, strategies and objectives to achieve an improved quality of life;

Aboriginal leaders, institutions, communities and societal structures confidently and effectively interacting with the wider Australian society and structures (including government and the private sector) to access support and resources necessary to implement those strategies.

It is intended that these processes respect the diverse nature of the Aboriginal community of Western Australia. It is not sufficient to have a 'one size fits all' approach to the development of protocols and guidelines.

APPENDIX 3: Developing Aboriginal Terms of Reference – A Guide

Developing Aboriginal Terms of Reference

What are Terms of Reference?

To begin to understand Aboriginal Terms of Reference, we need to define the context in which we will be applying these terms.

Culture:

Language/jargon/terminology

There are many Aboriginal languages, therefore, we cannot assume that all Aboriginal people speak the same language.

Location/Country/Land/Mother's country/Father's country:

We cannot assume that all Aboriginal people are from the same area, when referring to location. We can usually find out where family is from by simply asking the question where are they from?

Family/mob/people:

Aboriginal people can usually connect family with faces and names; we do not assume that all Aboriginal people are related. It is therefore, important to take the time to determine who speaks for who and what.

Developing an Aboriginal perspective/viewpoint:

To do this, we need to be clear about;

Why we are trying to get an Aboriginal viewpoint on a particular issue? (For this we need the Aboriginal Terms of Reference set of core values and checklist of principles).

How we will get an Aboriginal viewpoint on a particular issue (for this we use the framework and the step by step process).

We must be committed to the idea of working in ways that encourage Aboriginal people to take control over their lives in order to create and initiate positive social change.

Core Values

The worth and authority of contemporary Aboriginal culture/s.

The right of expression of Aboriginal realities.

Self determination and self management

The right of Aboriginal people to work and make decisions within their own cultural terms.

Aboriginal control and/or authority in processes.

Positive social change – Aboriginal perspective

Social justice.

The recognition and acceptance that Aboriginal culture is diverse.

Reconciliation of competing interests between Aboriginal people/s.

The worth of the group across the two world paradigm.

Aboriginal Terms of Reference

Aboriginal Terms of Reference encompass the cultural knowledge, understanding and experiences that are associated with commitment to Aboriginal ways of thinking, working and reflecting.

The Terms incorporate specific and implicit cultural values, beliefs and priorities from which Aboriginal standards and protocols are derived, validated and practiced.

These standards will and can vary according to the diverse range of cultural values, beliefs and priorities from within local settings.

The Terms have specific contexts and in particular things that need to be considered in relation to specific issues in a community.

The community working with the practitioner or organization determines Aboriginal Terms of Reference.

Firstly determine the community's world view(s) on that issue and

Secondly, from this world viewpoint, develop a set of guidelines for working on that issue.

These guidelines outline what the community believes needs to be taken into consideration with the issues, how the issues will be dealt with and any special requirements the community puts on the specific issue e.g. Decision-making: determining who speaks for who; determining an appropriate process for making a particular decision.

This way, the community is empowered to determine what the issue is, how it should be dealt with and what things need to be taken into account.

Developing guidelines for working on the issue:

Consolidate and articulate the knowledge gained from the exploration of the four dimensions and the interactions between the dimensions into a comprehensive picture. This picture will represent the Aboriginal view of the issue under discussion.

Check back with the community. This information needs to again go back to the community in its new format. This is then negotiated with the community and between groups in the community to ensure that it is an accurate viewpoint of the issues from the community. At this point it is crucial to understand the requirements from the community perspective with regard to timeframes. Time must be allowed for receiving, understanding and reflecting on any information put to the community, if accurate and effective feedback is desired.

Identify appropriate guidelines/protocols etc. for working. From this viewpoint, discussion is held with the community to determine the guidelines for working on this issue. These guidelines can be simple statements or requests that the community believes are the boundaries of addressing the issues. These guidelines will also determine the best course of future action to achieve the group(s) goals and aspirations.

When using the Aboriginal Terms of Reference it is important to gather information around each of the following four dimensions.

Cultural Elements

This dimension focuses the groups' and the practitioner's attention on cultural matters that may impact on or influence the issue. It helps to look at what impact the local Aboriginal culture will have on this issue and what impacts this issue will have on the local Aboriginal culture. It is a way of scanning all the cultural aspects around the issues under discussion. Examples could include sorry business, lore or family or kinship obligations, responsibilities and protocols.

Experiences

This dimension asks the group and the practitioners to consider and identify what the community's

experience have been around this issue both past and present. It attempts to build a picture of how the present has been shaped as a result of some of the historical factors. (i.e. Change of government or changes in funding etc.)

Understandings

This dimension focuses the group and the practitioner's attention on the community's understandings of the issues. What opinions does the community have on the issues?

What knowledge do they have on the issues? What internal and external factors need to be considered, and so on. Internal factors could be factions within community or external factors (e.g. Infrastructure).

Aspirations

This dimension shows what the group wants to achieve, it asks the group to state up front what they want to see as the outcomes or the goals in relation to the issues being discussed or analysed. It allows the community to clearly identify their visions of what they want in the future for the issues. It is not always cut and dried as to what the community wants, it could be in some cases, that there are underlying issues that need to be addressed.

In summary, the four dimensions guide us to what we need to focus on to get information about a particular issue.

Preparation – Step by Step

Identify the issues you aim to get an Aboriginal viewpoint on

Perhaps begin with an issue/problem/topic in mind. Provide some background to the issue to demonstrate your level of understanding or awareness (use appropriate examples where possible) of the specific issue. This will initiate a starting point for the dialogue.

Identify the Aboriginal people/group/community to be involved in naming their viewpoint.

Identify the Aboriginal people affected by the issue. You may focus on those most effected or try and work with a range of Aboriginal groups. Some factors that you may need to take into consideration are:

Who are the stakeholders or people who have an interest in the issue/s.

How the issue may impact on other activities of the group or groups.

You will need to talk to community members about who should be involved in this process. Once again, make sure appropriate protocols are followed to determine who the appropriate people/s are.

Ensure enough time is allowed to enable these people to receive, interpret, understand and reflect on information presented about the issue/s. This may require you to allow more time than originally planned. Remember the earlier you engage those who are the most appropriate people/s, the sooner you will access the most accurate and/or appropriate information.

Bring the group together and arrange meetings

Explain why you would like to develop the Aboriginal viewpoint around the issue and negotiate the process. You will probably begin by organizing an initial meeting of community/group members. Additional meetings may follow this (allow members to determine this for you).

Confirm and redefine the issue

Begin by defining the issue. You need to remember that the community may have a different definition of what the issue is. For example, you may have identified an issue to be parents not looking after the kids. Sometimes, issues or problems are named and defined from people outside the community, such as government workers. It is important to return control of defining the issue back to the community who it affects most. Focusing on the right issue is absolutely crucial.

Outline the context

Issues don't sit in isolation from other events or activities within a community. Rather, they interact with each other and therefore, impact on the community. The context in which the issues or problem is situated includes the social, cultural and political environment in which people operate. Exploring the context should also confirm other people who should be included in the process.

Gather information around the dimensions

Gathering information from each of the dimensions (cultural elements, experiences, understandings and

aspirations) and the interactions (discourse between the dimensions) will provide a clear picture of what the Aboriginal perspective on that issue may be.

Determine aspirations

From the consideration of the information gathered, determine aspirations for the issue or review aspirations already set. Awareness and understanding of the broader issue (i.e. Incorporating the Aboriginal world view of that issue) into the non-Aboriginal worldview of that issue, and vice versa) will enable greater flexibility in reaching mutually beneficial outcomes. It is at this point that a common vision should be established within and between groups. Determining the common ground amongst groups and negotiating the differences, will determine the best vision for achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. It also allows people to determine a clear starting point and will help define how much negotiation, compromise and/or acceptance is required from each group.

Negotiate differences of opinion

Throughout the process, you will need to negotiate differences of viewpoint that may arise within the group. You may be able to reach agreement to work on building the viewpoint of the majority, or you may decide to hold a separate viewpoint in the overall picture.

Once you have applied the framework, it is then necessary to do something with that information. The information gathered needs to be put into a form that can be shared, understood and used practically by both community and the practitioner. This information becomes the community's viewpoint on the issue.

It then becomes the basis for developing guidelines for working on the particular issues. These guidelines will define the community's viewpoint on how the issue should be dealt with, what their restrictions are, what community holds important around the issue/s and so on. Ultimately, sustainable partnerships can be nurtured and developed around the mutual and reciprocated values and principles of knowing and doing of both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal world view.

APPENDIX 4: Principles for Establishing Partnerships with Indigenous People

The key to improving the status, recognition, living conditions and rights, including native title rights, of Indigenous people, is to establish and build partnerships between Government at all levels, Indigenous people and the wider community.

A Labor Government is committed to establishing and building those partnerships to improve conditions for Western Australia's Indigenous people.

Labor believes in the following principles:

recognition and respect for the unique status of Indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of Australia;

recognition of the citizenship and Indigenous rights of Indigenous peoples;

recognition of the native title rights of Indigenous peoples consistent with relevant laws;

recognition that there needs to be a process of healing for individuals and communities to enable Indigenous people to take up new opportunities within the Western Australian community;

recognition that Indigenous people represent the most disadvantaged group in the community and that there is a critical need to address this;

building partnerships at a State, regional and local community level and between government and Indigenous peoples in pursuing healthy, self-determining Indigenous communities;

acknowledging government has a key role to play in assisting Indigenous Western Australians to develop the capacity to realise self-reliance and to build on existing strengths and capacities;

recognition of the vital role of Indigenous community structures and institutions;

recognition that Indigenous people should be encouraged and supported to take the primary responsibility for shaping a better life for future generations;

an active and sustained involvement by Indigenous people in the social, cultural and economic development of the Australian community as a whole;

recognition of the need to coordinate the activities

of the Federal, State and local government agencies through greater clarity of roles and responsibilities;

the need for regional approaches that involve collaboration between business, Indigenous organisations, non-government bodies, churches and the broader community;

the need for joint leadership in progressing Reconciliation within the Western Australian community;

an ongoing commitment to the purpose, objectives, principles and frameworks contained in the National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders (1991);

a commitment to work through Indigenous community structures and institutions as appropriate to achieve improved outcomes in the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of Indigenous communities in Western Australia;

in the need to achieve a quality of life for Indigenous people, in an environment which affirms and respects Indigenous cultural values;

the Indigenous extended family as the key to improving the quality of life of Indigenous people. Policies and programs will involve negotiation with local Indigenous communities and family groupings;

applying the principles of self-management and self-determination for Indigenous people in the design and delivery of any policy or program;

the need to support employment, enterprise and economic development for Indigenous people and Indigenous communities to ensure equality of opportunity in all aspects of life;

encouraging the involvement of Indigenous people in electoral and political processes; and

that the decision of the High Court of Australia in the Mabo case and the Commonwealth response to that decision is regarded by the Australian Labor Party as an historic turning point in shaping our national identity.



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