



ABORIGINAL PARTICIPATION GUIDELINE
FOR VICTORIAN CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITIES:

Implementation Plan

Pathways To Participation

Acknowledgement and Recognition Statement

Victoria's Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) acknowledge and respect Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities and organisations.

We recognise the diversity of their cultures and the deep connections they have with Victoria's lands and waters.

We value partnerships with them for the health of people and country.

CMAs and their people pay their respects to Elders past and present, and they acknowledge and recognise the primacy of Traditional Owners' obligations, rights and responsibilities to use and care for their traditional lands and waters.

Introduction

The Aboriginal Participation Guideline for Victorian CMAs demonstrates the CMAs' commitments to working with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to manage and improve the health of lands and waters. The Guideline is a separate, complementary document that:

- provides a framework for how CMAs can strengthen the effectiveness of their engagement and partnerships with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities
- recognises that each CMA region is different and that each will take its own approach in engaging with the diversity of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities within its region
- provides Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities with an entry point for engaging with CMAs



Photo: Inspecting Kangaroo Grass as part of a Traditional Ecological Knowledge Fire Workshop. Courtesy of North East CMA

Overview

This Implementation Plan provides information on how to turn the Aboriginal Participation Guideline for Victorian CMAs into actions. It includes four main parts:

- 1. Applying the Key Principles:** presents the key principles which underpin effective Aboriginal participation and provides a summary statement of intention in applying each of these. They provide the foundation against which performance can be tracked.
- 2. Aboriginal Participation as part of business-as-usual:** sets out a series of actions for CMAs and their staff and contractors to help guide Aboriginal participation as part of business-as-usual. CMAs and their Aboriginal partners can 'mix, match and adapt' these actions to reflect their local situations, relationships and existing agreements.
- 3. From Knowledge to Practice:** provides insights through a series of case studies that demonstrate how CMAs and Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities are applying the principles and actions in practice.
- 4. Continual Improvement:** outlines a monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) framework to help CMAs continually improve how they participate with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities in catchment management. CMAs and their Aboriginal partners need to agree on locally relevant benchmarks against which to assess their performance, guided by the actions and checklist outlined in this Implementation Plan.

Each CMA is encouraged, through participation and negotiation with relevant Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities, to develop and document locally relevant ways to interpret the Guideline and the Implementation Plan. The important thing is that each CMA must find a way to fulfil the roles and responsibilities conferred on it by various legislative, regulatory and policy obligations.

The Guideline and Implementation Plan are intended to be 'living documents', and they are designed to be adapted and updated, when and as appropriate.



Photo 1. Yam Daisy (*Microseris* spp.) - Courtesy of Parks Victoria

Photo 2. Scarred tree - Courtesy of Glenelg Hopkins CMA

Photo 3. Stone axes - Courtesy of Mallee CMA

1. Applying the Key Principles

The Aboriginal Participation Guideline for Victorian CMAs identifies the following key 'principles' as the foundations for working with Aboriginal people, and ensuring their participation in CMA projects and programs.

This section provides an overview of what the principles mean and how they may be applied.

GOOD ENGAGEMENT TAKES TIME AND SUPPORT

Allocate adequate time and resources to engage, allow for contingencies and provide opportunities to meet on Country.

PROTOCOLS ARE IMPORTANT

Collaboratively develop and follow agreed protocols for participation, making sure they include ways to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of Traditional Owners before undertaking projects that affect their rights and obligations to lands and waters.

THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF COUNTRY AND PEOPLE ARE ALL ONE

Promote connections with Country through different pathways; consider how environmental activities can be designed to enhance the health and wellbeing of people.

ABORIGINAL LEADERS HAVE MANY DEMANDS ON THEIR TIME

Aboriginal leaders have interests and responsibilities across all sectors and levels of society - they need to engage with other agencies and organisations as well as yours. Think about engaging from a whole of government perspective, and foster partnerships with other agencies.



**ABORIGINAL CULTURE,
KNOWLEDGE AND
OBLIGATIONS TO COUNTRY
ARE DIVERSE**

Explore innovative management approaches that embrace different knowledge, knowledge systems and cultures.

**MEANINGFUL
PARTICIPATION IS
BASED ON FAIRNESS,
EQUITY AND
MUTUAL RESPECT**

Build mutual respect by valuing Aboriginal culture, knowledge, obligations, connections and diversity; build relationships through cross-cultural exchanges.

**TRUST DEPENDS
ON SHARED
UNDERSTANDING AND
CLEAR COMMUNICATION**

Build trust through creating common experiences and nurturing long-term partnerships. Listen and learn together to evolve information sharing and communication strategies.

**PASSING ON
TRADITIONAL
KNOWLEDGE IS
IMPORTANT**

Create opportunities to facilitate the transfer of Traditional ecological and cultural knowledge.

2. Aboriginal Participation as Part of Business-as-usual:

ACTIONS FOR CMA ORGANISATIONS

1. Integrate Aboriginal engagement and participation in decision making, planning, implementation and review of programs

- In collaboration with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities regularly review engagement processes
- Negotiate protocols and procedures that support recognition, inclusion, communications, engagement and participation
- Understand and fulfil all relevant legal, regulatory and policy obligations
- Develop resources to support participation such as contact names and details of relevant Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities, their governance structures and processes, interests, histories, connections and who can speak for what Country and with what resource capacities

2. Ensure workplace arrangements actively support staff in engaging with Aboriginal communities and organisations

- Develop and implement induction and training procedures to build cultural competence and ensure all staff, board members and contractors have undertaken these activities
- Provide adequate resources, time and funds to enable development of meaningful partnerships with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities
- Match the 'levels' of participation between organisations: CMA Leaders work with the Leaders of Traditional Owner and Aboriginal community groups; Project Officers work with Project Officers
- Ensure workplace arrangements support proper engagement with Aboriginal people, including training, mentoring and peer to peer support for staff and contractors
- Incorporate cultural competence into organisational training programs and annual performance reviews
- Support the employment and education of Aboriginal people in natural resource management, and provide ongoing support to do this
- Promote the use and recognition of Aboriginal language
- Recognise the importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge being passed on, and where appropriate being shared, by Traditional Owners

3. Ensure Aboriginal participation is well planned, tailored, targeted and evaluated

- Develop and implement processes for obtaining the free, prior and informed consent of Traditional Owners before undertaking projects that affect their rights and obligations to lands and waters
- Build Aboriginal engagement into CMA project management and procedure frameworks and templates
- Hold regular planning sessions with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to review and develop projects and activities
- Nurture long-term partnerships
- Develop, strengthen and implement specific Aboriginal participation monitoring and reporting activities as part of standard MERI processes

4. Provide meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal people to contribute to strategies and initiatives

- Through agreed mechanisms give Aboriginal people adequate notice, time and support, to make meaningful contribution to strategies, plans and initiatives
- Ensure project management timelines take account of our Aboriginal partners' decision-making processes
- Develop a calendar of events, such as NAIDOC, that are important to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities, and that provide opportunities to promote collaboration and two-way engagement
- Negotiate appropriate spaces and venues as meeting places, meeting on Country whenever possible

5. Work transparently and respectfully to establish clear roles and expectations

- Be open and transparent about the operations of the CMA beyond finances and decision-making. For example, clearly link decision-making to strategic and operational plans
- Strengthen Aboriginal participation in decision-making to ensure enhanced processes and buy-in
- Clearly articulate negotiated roles and expectations amongst partners, including investors and Governments

ACTIONS FOR CMA STAFF AND CONTRACTORS

1. Induction and training

- Participate in induction and training activities to build cultural competence; nurture the connections, relationships and partnerships with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and organisations
- Extend training and cultural competence to landholders and other CMA partners
- Promote the learning of language (including pronunciations) by staff and CMA partners
- Support Aboriginal communities and organisations as they develop cultural awareness activities and economic enterprises beyond the provision of services to CMAs

2. Use comfortable meeting places

- Use appropriate and welcoming spaces in CMA offices and outdoor areas for meetings
- Where possible, accommodate more flexible arrangements around meeting times and locations
- Promote a 'drop-in' atmosphere where people can come to yarn

3. Seek advice from experienced people

- Identify and engage people who have experience in working with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and organisations
- Use the experience, skills and interests of Staff and Board members in building relationships
- Explore engagement and partnerships with other agencies that have connections with Aboriginal people in the region (including health, employment, education, sport, recreation and housing agencies)

4. Ensure free, prior and informed consent

- Follow established protocols and procedures developed in collaboration with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities and organisations'
- Confirm and consolidate understandings through connected activities and engagement
- Follow established CMA protocols and procedures that were developed in collaboration with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and organisations

5. Actively seek to involve Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and organisations in projects they have an interest in:

- Promote a comprehensive understanding of Aboriginal interests in land and water management through their past and present plans, projects, culture, history and rights
- Present project options to Aboriginal people when considering projects in areas where they have an interest

6. Involve Aboriginal people from the beginning of a project

- Work from the position that Aboriginal people have an interest in everything the CMA is doing on land and water
- Regular, comprehensive engagement will ensure awareness of relevant projects and identify areas of interest
- Co-design projects with interested parties
- With permission, incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge and language into projects and support the building of culture through enhanced participation with Country, ceremony and economy

7. Be clear and open in discussion about aspirations and resources

- Use appropriate language (avoid jargon, technical terms and abbreviations) but don't dumb things down
- Be open to different perspectives and values. There are diverse ideas around ecosystem functions, services and indicators; each should influence possible actions; one example is the use of fire as a land management practice
- Everybody knows there are not enough resources to do everything. Be honest about available resources, don't make unrealistic promises and work together to generate solutions and constructive paths forward

8. Recognise and celebrate

- In addition to national celebrations, such as NAIDOC, celebrate local relationships through social events such as BBQs, camping, fishing, exhibitions and performance
- Collaborate in applying for awards and presenting at conferences and forums
- Develop and practice communication and information sharing approaches using media preferred by Aboriginal partners. Understand the role of art, song, dance and storytelling

3. From Knowledge to Practice

CASE STUDY: Caring For Our Culture

Aunty Rose Kirby's love of the Mallee is evident from the quiet intensity she has when she's speaking about the region she has called home for most of her life.

But it's when she takes you "out bush" that Aunty Rose's connection to her land comes alive. The diminutive 74 year old strides ahead, pointing out a canoe tree, "Old Man Emu" and "Bush Tomato", stopping to explain their use in bush remedies and bush tucker.

She points out a series of "mia mia" trees – long slender saplings pulled down and lashed low to the ground in a rainbow shape, making the beginnings of a shelter structure.

"A few of us did those like that a while back and it's good to see they're still there. That's how the old people used to make the mia mias," she says.

It's not difficult to see why Aunty Rose is a valued and respected source of cultural information and advice as a member of the Mallee CMA's Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG). The ARG is supported by the Mallee CMA, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme.

"Working with the CMA and being on the Aboriginal Reference Group has been great because it's a two-way process. We get to provide the CMA with input into its projects and the community members get the insight into what work the CMA is doing and why," Aunty Rose says.

"The really important thing is that, more and more, the Aboriginal community is being asked for our advice and input. Instead of people just going ahead and doing things and telling us later, we are being consulted."

Aunty Rose Kirby's knowledge has assisted the CMA on its major projects for more than a decade and she is one of a number of Elders and respected people who now make up the ARG.

"The Hattah Lakes Environmental Watering program was one of the first jobs I was involved with and I really loved it. The stakeholders at Robinvale, Swan Hill and Mildura all had input and we recorded all the Aboriginal sites in the entire area before the watering pipeline was put in," she says.

"It was great to be involved from the community point of view, but for the CMA, I think they also liked having people they could rely on who know the area and bring that cultural knowledge to the table."

*Photo: Aunty Rose Kirby
Courtesy of Mallee CMA*



CASE STUDY:

Barapa Water For Country Steering Committee

The Barapa Water for Country project steering committee has worked in partnership with the North Central CMA to identify, map and record the cultural values of the Lower Gunbower Forest in order to improve the management of environmental water. Through two-way, cross-cultural and intergenerational knowledge sharing on country, information has been collected so that cultural and spiritual values may be incorporated into environmental watering plans; in this way Barapa Traditional Owners' voices are being heard in the management of water for Gunbower Forest.

Key learnings include:

- ① Where Traditional Owners guide decision-making, through regular meetings and communication with CMAs, they are empowered to help CMAs implement projects in culturally appropriate ways
- ① Where Traditional Owner steering committees develop Engagement Principles and Terms of Reference to clarify the committee's purpose, membership, cultural safety protocols and selection procedures for contractors undertaking fieldwork, everyone is enabled to work together successfully

*Photo: Scarred Tree on Gunbower Island, Barapa Country
Courtesy of North Central CMA*



CASE STUDY:

Valuing and Strengthening Regional Partnerships

Since 2002 the Gunditjmara community and Glenelg Hopkins CMA have collaborated on over 15 different natural and cultural resource management projects. In recognition of the success of this partnership, a formal Partnership Statement has been developed which outlines the commitment of both Gunditj Mirring Registered Native Title Body Corporate and the CMA to continue working together to 'further restore, protect and enhance the natural and cultural landscapes of our region and the well-being of our community'. The Statement details the partnership goals between 2015 and 2021, their measures of success and the key principles underpinning how the two partners will work together.

Some of the highlights of the partnership over the last 13 years have included:

- Working with a range of partners to support the Gunditjmara community to restore Lake Condah, a culturally significant area within the Budj Bim landscape
- The four-year Gunditj Mirring Partnership Project, funded by the Australian Government, which focused on researching, discovering and recording traditional and contemporary Gunditjmara land management practices

Our work together has shown that trust and reciprocity are central to effective partnerships. Trust and reciprocity build up over time, and when supported through strong partner commitments, result in strengthened organisational arrangements, open lines of communication and ultimately shared partnership goals.

*Photo: Cultural burning at Kurtonitj Indigenous Protected Area, Uncle Ken Saunders and Budj Bim Rangers
Courtesy of Glenelg Hopkins CMA*





CASE STUDY:

Organisational Cultural Competence in Natural Resource Management

Developing the capacity to partner with Traditional Owners and Registered Aboriginal Parties is key to enabling Indigenous involvement in CMA projects. Developing Cultural Competence within CMAs can also make the process of working together easier for everyone.

Cultural Competence is a set of behaviours, attitudes, skills, policies and procedures that help staff to work effectively and efficiently in a cross-cultural context at all levels within an organisation (Multicultural and Mental Health Australia, 2010). As Mick Gooda (2011) noted, 'creating true Cultural Competency is an organisational-wide process... Culturally Competent organisations will value diversity and value dynamics that occur when cultures interact.'

West Gippsland CMA has been working for several years to develop its relationship with Traditional Owner Corporations and groups and to improve organisational cultural competence. A range of activities and processes have helped achieve mutually beneficial results. These include:

- Developing an internal paper for West Gippsland CMA Management and Board
- Redeveloping the organisation's Indigenous Policy and Procedure
- Creating a welcoming environment for Indigenous People
- Developing a Cultural Heritage Flyer with the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC)

- Developing a three-stage ongoing Board and Staff Training program:
 - Internal Cultural Heritage training
 - Workshops with Traditional Owners in catchment work areas
 - On-Country overnight training session with Traditional Owners
- A position paper that confirms West Gippsland CMA's commitment to working with Traditional Owners for funding agencies
- Developing a Memorandum of Understanding with GLaWAC
- Drafting working papers with other Traditional Owners groups
- Engaging with the wider Indigenous community
- Conducting events to acknowledge Aboriginal peoples' interests in events such as NAIDOC Week
- Partnering in the development of the Gunaikurnai Country Plan to ensure inclusion of community goals and aspirations in upcoming projects

The outcomes of this work have included increases in Aboriginal employment, Aboriginal participation in projects, funding and media coverage of programs; the establishment of a student tutoring placement; and WGCMAs staff, Board members and Advisory Group members having completed Cultural Heritage training.

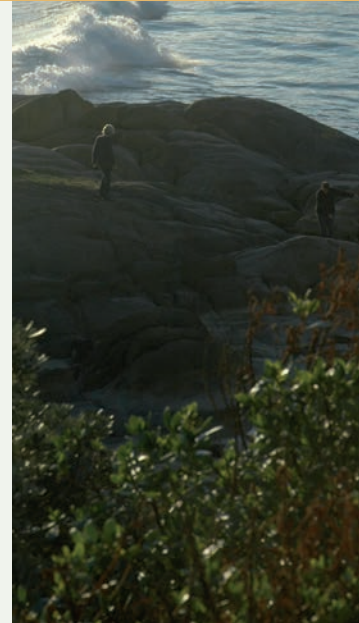


Photo 1: Kate Mc Kenzie South Gippsland Landcare network during On Country Training with Traditional Owners

Photo 2: Freshly uncovered shell midden discovered during On country training with Traditional Owners

Photo 3: Tracey Jones WGCMAs working on Corner Inlet project

Courtesy of West Gippsland CMA



CASE STUDY:

Woka Walla Natural Resource Management

Woka Walla (Country and Water) Natural Resource Management employment enterprise was established by the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation (YYNAC) in 2011 with support from the Australian Government and the Goulburn Broken CMA. It is consistent with a memorandum of understanding between YYNAC and the Goulburn Broken CMA signed in 2014.

Woka Walla's vision is to have Yorta Yorta and other Aboriginal people participating in real economy, real jobs and real development through a successful on-country YYNAC led procurement business with strong and innovative partnerships in place.

Woka Walla has opened up a practical mechanism for the engagement and development of Yorta Yorta and other Aboriginal people in the provision of NRM and related services, such as sustainable agriculture, carbon sequestration program support, climate change mitigation and infrastructure works. Woka Walla operates a stand-alone crew for hire.

Woka Walla is a niche and quality Yorta Yorta service enterprise. With leadership from the Working on Country Yorta Yorta Rangers and the Yenbena Registered Training Organisation, Woka Walla continues to build education and employment pathways for our people and the broader Aboriginal community.

Three key principles underpin natural resource management' decision-making and activity with Yorta Yorta:

1. Yorta Yorta people have managed and cared for their Country since time immemorial; it is not a new concept or a privilege to be managing Country – it is a right and key responsibility.
2. Yorta Yorta see no separation between cultural and natural resources; or between Yorta Yorta people and their Country.
3. Yorta Yorta acknowledges work must be done in partnership with new 'managers' of Country and natural resources; new knowledge systems/ science and technologies; and with a mind to the needs and interests of all those who now live and work on Yorta Yorta Country. Yorta Yorta is committed to working with its members, Elders, young people, neighbours, agencies and the broader community as it rebuilds and heals Country and people for all.

The Woka Walla goes a long way to assisting YYNAC with its interests in establishing economic independence as it takes YYNAC towards enterprise establishment and employment creation in an area that is of a high priority and value. This initiative is also closely aligned with the Council of Australian Governments Closing the Gap priority.



*Photo: Stone tools including quartz cores, flakes and chert core from Lake Moodemere
Courtesy of North East CMA*

CASE STUDY:

Traineeship creates opportunity to close the gap

Through a traineeship the Mallee CMA has used natural resource management initiatives to drive progress in helping close the gap of disadvantage for Aboriginal people.

Mildura's Corey Badenoch completed the first Mallee CMA Indigenous Traineeship, and has now progressed to a full Indigenous Support Officer position.

Corey's 15-month traineeship involved a mix of formal certified training and on-the-job learning.

"I'd had a few different jobs before this but natural resource management really wasn't something I had thought about at all when this position came up," Corey said.

"I applied because the traineeship was available at the time I was looking for work, and I thought it might be interesting. But I can honestly say this has been by far the best learning experience and the best place I've ever worked."

"I always think that it's the people who make the difference, and that's what it's been here. The staff and the work environment gave me great support and so many opportunities to learn and I've loved it."

"In any given month I could be involved in cultural heritage site inspections, tree planting, watering programs and land management. It's really diverse and I'm learning all the time."

The 23 year old said the opportunity to learn more about his own cultural heritage was one of the major benefits of the Traineeship.

"It's been a fantastic opportunity to learn from the Cultural Heritage Officers about the sites that are in our own region and I didn't even know about them," Corey said.

Corey said he was enjoying the added responsibilities of the Indigenous Support Officer role. "I am using what I have learnt and it's nice to be able to pass some of that on to other people now," he said.

"But everything I have learnt here I will take on to whatever jobs I do from now on."

Funded from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme, Corey said "the Traineeship has been a step that opens up the chance to do so many things with your future."

*Photo: Corey Badenoch and Paul Sloane
Courtesy of Mallee CMA*



4. Continual Improvement

LEARNING FROM OUR ACTIONS: MONITORING, EVALUATION, REPORTING AND IMPROVEMENT

Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) is the continual process by which we track progress, account for actions and investment, determine what outcomes have been achieved and use experience to improve performance.

MERI strategies should acknowledge that all partners have obligations to comply with relevant legislation, determinations, policies and agreements that operate across various levels of management and decision-making. It is expected that all partners will act in good faith, with fairness, equity and respect.

MERI functions will be most effective and efficient when they are incorporated into mainstream CMA MERI processes, and when they are designed so that they also contribute to the MERI processes of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities.

MERI must be participatory, that is, undertaken with and by Aboriginal people; this builds mutual respect, understanding and capacity, and it strengthens relationships and programs.

Most importantly, **MERI is about learning and improving** the way we work together for the benefit of Country and all people.

The Aboriginal Participation Checklist is a foundational evaluation tool for use by CMAs.

- The Checklist questions link with the key principles for Aboriginal participation and with the actions being taken to make this part of business-as-usual
- CMAs, in collaboration with their Aboriginal partners, can determine what 'mix-and-match' actions and criteria are relevant for their individual contexts, against which performance will be assessed and reported
- Opportunities exist to include benchmarks and other measures against which progress, outcomes and performance information can be compiled and compared over time. Results could also be shared and aggregated across the CMA network
- While the Checklist can be formally completed on an annual basis, 'evidence' can be compiled and used progressively, including for planning, management and communication purposes
- Evidence can be qualitative and quantitative: it can be drawn from stories of experience, photos or observations; it can also be drawn from existing project management and accountability processes

*Photo: 'Yarns on Farms' visit to Roger Dunns' property -
L to R - Ben Church (Gunditj Mirring), Roger Dunn and Ryan Jones (GHCMA)
Courtesy of Glenelg Hopkins CMA*



Aboriginal Participation Checklist

TO WHAT EXTENT AND IN WHAT WAYS HAVE WE IMPROVED ABORIGINAL PARTICIPATION WITHIN CMA BUSINESS?

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

	KEY OUTCOMES	YES/ NO	HOW? TO WHAT EXTENT? (WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE?)
1	Are we increasing awareness and recognition of Aboriginal peoples' interests in our work?		
2	Are we meeting our legal obligations regarding Aboriginal participation?		
3	Are we establishing and following protocols to ensure the free, prior and informed consent of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal community for projects that affect their rights and interests?		
4	Are we inducting and training Board members, staff and contractors in ways that help build cultural competency?		
5	Are we providing supportive workplace arrangements for staff and contractors as they engage with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities, including appropriate resourcing and time for project and program delivery?		
6	Are we engaging meaningfully and are we building trust and mutual respect with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities?		
7	Are we respecting Aboriginal people's culture, knowledge and obligations to Country through our work?		
8	Are Aboriginal people more actively represented in our decision-making processes?		
9	Are Aboriginal communities and organisations participating in our projects and programs?		
10	Are we supporting Aboriginal groups in their pursuit of economic opportunities and jobs in land and water management?		
11	Are we supporting initiatives that contribute to health and wellbeing, and closing the gap of disadvantage?		



Photo: Wadawurrung land and sea from You Yangs'
Courtesy of Port Phillip Westernport CMA

Further Information

This Implementation Plan should be read together with the Aboriginal Participation Guideline for Victorian Catchment Management Authorities (2016).

The document *'Aboriginal Participation Guidelines for Victoria's CMAs: An overview of the literature on Aboriginal engagement used to inform the development of the Guideline (June 2015)'* provides background information and references that underpin the Guideline and this Implementation Plan.

For further information, please contact your relevant Catchment Management Authority.

Other support information and resources are available from:

- <http://www.nrm.gov.au/indigenous-nrm>
- <http://www.vcmc.vic.gov.au/>
- <http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/>

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