



Summary Document

Merlynston Creek

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Values Assessment

A report by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation for Hume City Council, Merri-bek City Council and Melbourne Water

15 March 2026

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Authorship

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Cover page image taken by Aurelia Bulpit, showing Merlynston Creek at Northern Memorial Park.

Acknowledgements

Ngoon godjin (thank you) to each Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder who shared their time and knowledge to develop this document: Aunty Diane (Di) Kerr, Aunty Alice Kolasa, Perry Wandin and Aunty Jacqui Wandin.

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Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People retain their custodianship over their Cultural Landscape. Indigenous Sovereignty has never been ceded.



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Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Community Statement

The Wurundjeri People have been Caring for Country since the beginning of time. Our message is that Wurundjeri People have a deep understanding and knowledge of Country and that Wurundjeri's connection should be respected and valued.

The Wurundjeri People have an unbroken relationship with Country, caring for this land, its waterways, its plants, and animals. A core purpose of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation is the protection, preservation and revitalisation of Wurundjeri culture and cultural practices.

There is a deep cultural obligation and birthright to look after Country and keep it healthy. Country to us includes the land, water, plants, animals, and spirits of the traditional lands. Country is known through the Songlines of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors who lived and cared for Country here for thousands of years.

Today our Country is shared with Victorians from many different backgrounds. In addition, people from across Australia and internationally visit our Country. We believe that Wurundjeri People must take a leading role in working with all communities on matters of Country.

As Traditional Owners we seek to build solid, working relationships and partnerships across our Traditional Country to protect, manage, and restore the land and water today and for the future generations. We have the right and the obligation to speak for Country.

Executive summary

The Merlynston Creek Cultural Values Assessment has been commissioned by the Hume City Council, Merri-bek City Council and Melbourne Water. The assessment has been sought to understand the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural values of Merlynston Creek, primarily so that they can be recognised in the Merlynston Creek Parklands Masterplan being produced by Hume City Council for the northern portion of the creek in this jurisdiction.

This assessment documents the cultural values associated with Merlynston Creek and the surrounding Cultural Landscape as expressed by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders, who are the Traditional Owners and custodians of this Country. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung

People have a deep and abiding connection to their Country

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country is inscribed with cultural heritage places that are a record of Country and the activities of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors. Cultural sites and places constitute a direct link between contemporary Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and their Ancestors who created and cared for those places since time immemorial.

Eight recommendations and thirty-five specific actions for managing cultural values and otherwise embedding Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung perspectives have been identified through this Cultural Values Assessment:

- **Recommendation 1:** Revitalise Country to reflect the landscape prior to colonisation as much as possible and where appropriate
- **Recommendation 2:** Enhanced protection of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country from encroaching development
- **Recommendation 3:** Protect and enhance Merlynston Creek and connected waterscapes
- **Recommendation 4:** Enhanced protection of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural heritage
- **Recommendation 5:** Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Culture is visible on Country
- **Recommendation 6:** Support Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People in continuing to connect with their Cultural Landscape
- **Recommendation 7:** Support Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People in Truth-telling and healing processes
- **Recommendation 8:** Genuine and meaningful engagement with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People

Glossary of Key Terms

- Country** Country is a term used by First Nations Australians to describe their traditional lands and waters. Country is both a common noun and a proper noun. People talk of Country in the same manner that they may refer to an individual. There are varying customs of visiting Country, caring for Country, speaking to Country, singing to Country and smoking Country.
- Cultural Landscape** Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes are both material and symbolic, and include Traditional Owner societies' unique worldview, ontology, history, institutions, practices, and the networks of relationships between human and non-human animals, plants, Ancestors, song lines, physical structures, trade routes and other significant cultural connections to Country. Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes reflect the management and modification of Country over many thousands of generations to provide maximum benefit to all the inhabitants of Country, both human and non-human. Cultural Landscapes are the 'planning units' of choice for Traditional Owners.¹
- Cultural significance** A concept used in Australian heritage practice and legislation to encompass all the cultural values and meanings that might be recognised in a place. Cultural significance is the sum of the qualities or values that a place has, including the five values - aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, and spiritual - that are listed in Article 1.2 of the Burra Charter.
- Intangible heritage** Intangible heritage refers to the cultural practices, expressions, knowledge, skills, and traditions that are passed down from generation to generation within communities. Unlike tangible heritage, intangible heritage encompasses aspects of Culture that are not physical in nature.
- Narrap Unit** The Wurundjeri Corporation's Narrap Unit undertakes a range of Natural Resource Management activities on Country at the request of clients, including the maintenance of firebreaks in accordance with local council by-laws. One of the prime responsibilities of the Narrap Unit is managing properties owned by the Wurundjeri Corporation. Each property has its own significant cultural, community and environmental value.

¹ "Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy," Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations, 2021, <https://fvtoc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Cultural-Landscapes-Strategy.pdf>.

ngurungaeta	Woi-wurrung term for the traditional headman or leader of a local descent group.
Tangible heritage	Tangible heritage refers to the physical and visible manifestations of cultural heritage, including artefacts, structures, sites, and objects that possess historical, artistic, or cultural significance. Differing from intangible heritage, tangible heritage comprises elements that can be touched, seen, and interacted with.
Traditional	This term is used as many Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People use it: to describe cultural beliefs and practices that have their origins in, and may continue from, the period prior to colonial invasion of Woi-wurrung Country.

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The project area

Merlynston Creek is a tributary of the Merri Creek, which today travels eleven kilometres from its source in Coolaroo to its confluence with the Merri Creek in Coburg North. The northern portions of the creek - from its headwaters to the M80 Western Ring Road - is within the Hume City Council local government area. The southern portions of the creek – from M80 Western Ring Road to its confluence with the Merri Creek - are within the jurisdiction of Merri-bek City Council.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural values relating to Merlynston creek extend beyond the current creek corridor. In a Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung perspective of Country, Merlynston Creek cannot be considered in isolation from the broader Cultural Landscape within which it is a part, encompassing earth – both above and below ground; water – both above and below ground; sky; and all beings.



Figure 1 - Map of the study area. Source: Google Earth (labels & waterways indicated by author).



Methodology

Documenting the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural values for Merlynston Creek and establishing its cultural significance provides the basis for asserting the Wurundjeri Corporation's aspirations for protection and management of the study area. This report also provides the basis for interpretation or other opportunities to reflect on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People's history and association with the study area.

Within Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, heritage places often contain cultural features of artefacts, scarred trees, earth mounds, quarries, Ancestral Remains, stone arrangements; and, less often, rock art and shell middens. Heritage places are also those related to cultural practices, beliefs, or traditions. These features are defined as intangible, and include ceremonies, dances, songs, creation stories, spiritual associations, technical skills, traditional craft skills, ecological knowledge, language, traditional laws, and responsibilities.

The Australian Association of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) describes intangible cultural heritage as cultural practices created by communities or groups of people over time and are practices recognised by those communities or groups as part of their heritage; inclusive of cultural responsibilities, rituals and ceremonies, oral traditions, performance, language, knowledge, and skills.² The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (AHA 2006) is also reflective of this definition.³

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People aspire to preserve not just their archaeological footprint but also places and landscapes of cultural significance. A Cultural Values Assessment documents values of a site, place, or landscape in detail, together with Traditional Owner informed recommendations. Cultural values work is conducted through knowledge recording sessions with Elders and community members.

This work is used to communicate the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community's powerful stories in a culturally appropriate way, to support the Corporation's goal of protecting, preserving, promoting, and revitalising Wurundjeri Culture and ways of knowing, being, and doing.

This Cultural Values Assessment for Merlynston Creek has been developed in line with frameworks within the Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035.

There is no prescribed format for undertaking or presenting a Cultural Values Assessment, and such investigations do not constitute statutory documents pursuant to the AHA 2006.

The benchmark for considering cultural significance is contained within section 4 of the AHA 2006; the ICOMOS Australia Practice Note for Intangible Cultural Heritage and Place; and ICOMOS Australia Practice Note for Understanding and Assessing Cultural Significance.⁴ Section 4 of the AHA 2006

² Australia ICOMOS, *Practice Note: Intangible Cultural Heritage and Place* (ICOMOS), 2017, p. 2.

³ *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. (Victoria)

⁴ "Practice Note: Intangible Cultural Heritage and Place"; "Practice Note: Understanding and assessing cultural significance," ICOMOS, November 2013. https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/Practice-Note_Understanding-and-assessing-cultural-significance.pdf.

defines Aboriginal cultural heritage significance as including (a) archaeological, anthropological, contemporary, historical, scientific, social, or spiritual significance; and (b) significance in accordance with Aboriginal tradition.

To identify place based cultural values, a Cultural Values Assessment is a holistic means to determine a connection between people and place.

This assessment has synthesised ethnohistorical research with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung knowledge recording, involving on Country days. This assessment considers the significance of the identified cultural values and

develops recommendations to protect or manage those values.

It is important to highlight that the ethnographic record relied on in this report is greatly limited in its ability to speak to the associations of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors with the Country of the study area prior to colonisation. Records from the early colonial period were captured at a time when the way of life of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors had already been significantly impacted by colonisation. Moreover, accounts by surveyors, pastoralists and explorers must be read critically on account of the many biases inherent within them.

Figure 2 - Examples of Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage





People and place

Merlynston Creek is located on the Country of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People. Their Ancestors have cared for and lived on this country since time immemorial. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People had and continue to have a complex system of land ownership enshrined in law and custom. Despite the effects of colonisation, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People maintain their responsibility to manage and care for their Country. This responsibility was never relinquished, and Indigenous Sovereignty has never been ceded.

“Ancestors would have camped there. They always camped on the riverbanks - everything was there for them. There was plenty to eat. They set eel traps and they fished. They took their canoes across the river. There were reeds on the swamp areas for the women to weave and make baskets. There would have been trees and they would have built mia mia made from the resources in the bush. Could you imagine this place in their time? There would have been more cover, more scrub, more trees. Ancestors would have had this in a much better condition.”

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

Colonial invasion

In 1835, 47 years after the First Fleet arrived in Botany Bay, the colonial invasion of Victoria began in earnest. Pastoral expansion into Woi-wurrung Country was rapid and had disastrous consequences for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors, immediately restricting People's access to their Country and resources. In being dispossessed of their land, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors' identity, culture and knowledge was also torn from the Country in which it was deeply embedded.

In May 1835, John Batman arrived in Port Phillip Bay with members of the Port Phillip Association, of which he was a co-founder. Looking to acquire pastoral land for the Association, they led an expedition across the Port Phillip region, describing the area around Merlynston Creek as thinly timbered and thickly covered with excellent grass.⁵ Batman declared the Country around Fawknor Memorial Park to be "as rich as I ever saw".⁶

It was during this journey that Batman entered into a transfer of deed of title, which later became referred to as the Batman treaty, the first formal act of Indigenous land dispossession in Victoria.⁷ Despite Batman's "deed of title" being declared void, the actions of the Port Phillip Association set in motion the colonisation of the Port Phillip region, with devastating effects for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People.

Given the pastoral appeal of its rich landscapes, it is no wonder that the region through which most of Merlynston Creek travels was one of the first parts of the Port Phillip district to be settled. The area around the creek's headwaters followed later. John Batman and other key players in these early acts of dispossession are today buried at Fawknor Memorial Park, through which Merlynston Creek runs.

Despite the devastating impacts of colonial settlement and encroaching pastoralism in this region, what limited records there are reveal glimpses of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors continuing to gather, camp, hunt and carry out cultural practices on their Country within the region of Merlynston Creek in the early colonial period.

This included the connected waterway of the Merri Creek, which continued to be the site of large gatherings made up of people across multiple Kulin language groups. In February 1844, Assistant Protector William Thomas recorded 675 people camped along the Merri Creek to attend judicial proceedings, including 86 Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors.⁸

Assistant Protector William Thomas' "Strangways Farm" was located close to the confluence of Merlynston Creek and the Merri Creek, and was another regular site where Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors gathered during this period, likely as a pit-stop on

⁵ John Batman in John Daniels, "Batman's Route Revisited, his exact steps to a new treaty site," *Victorian Historical Journal* 85, no. 1 (June 2014): 156.

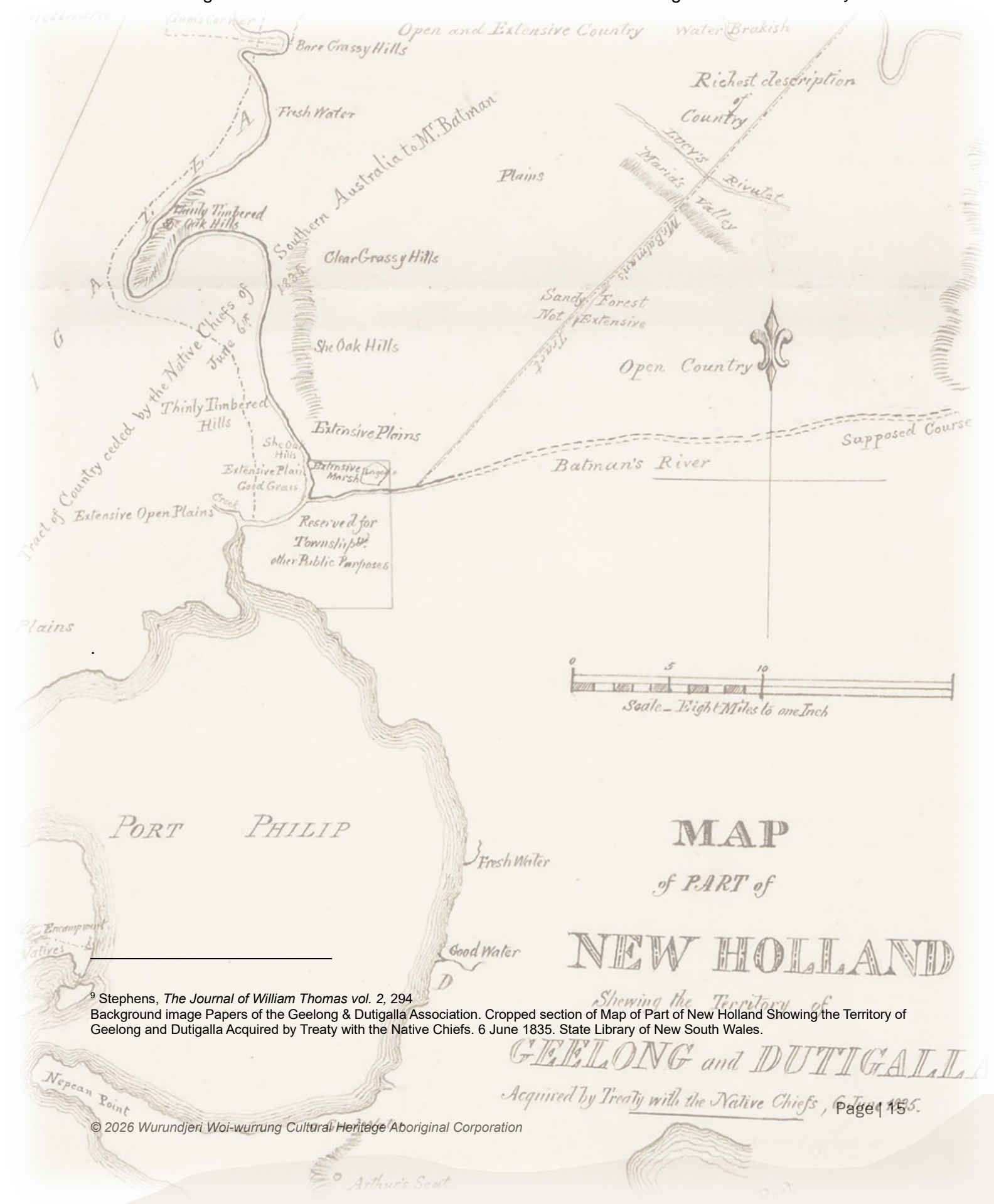
⁶ Batman in Daniels, "Batman's Route Revisited," 156.

⁷ Daniels, "Batman's Route Revisited," 152-153.

⁸ Thomas in Stephens, *The Journal of William Thomas* vol. 2, 13 - 14

hunting trips, given the proximity to the Merri Creek and its confluence with both Merlynston Creek and Edgar Creek tributaries.⁹ Whilst the

homestead was demolished in the 1980s, the remains of its bluestone foundation remain in what is the Coburg Bush Reserve today.



Significance of Merlynston Creek to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People

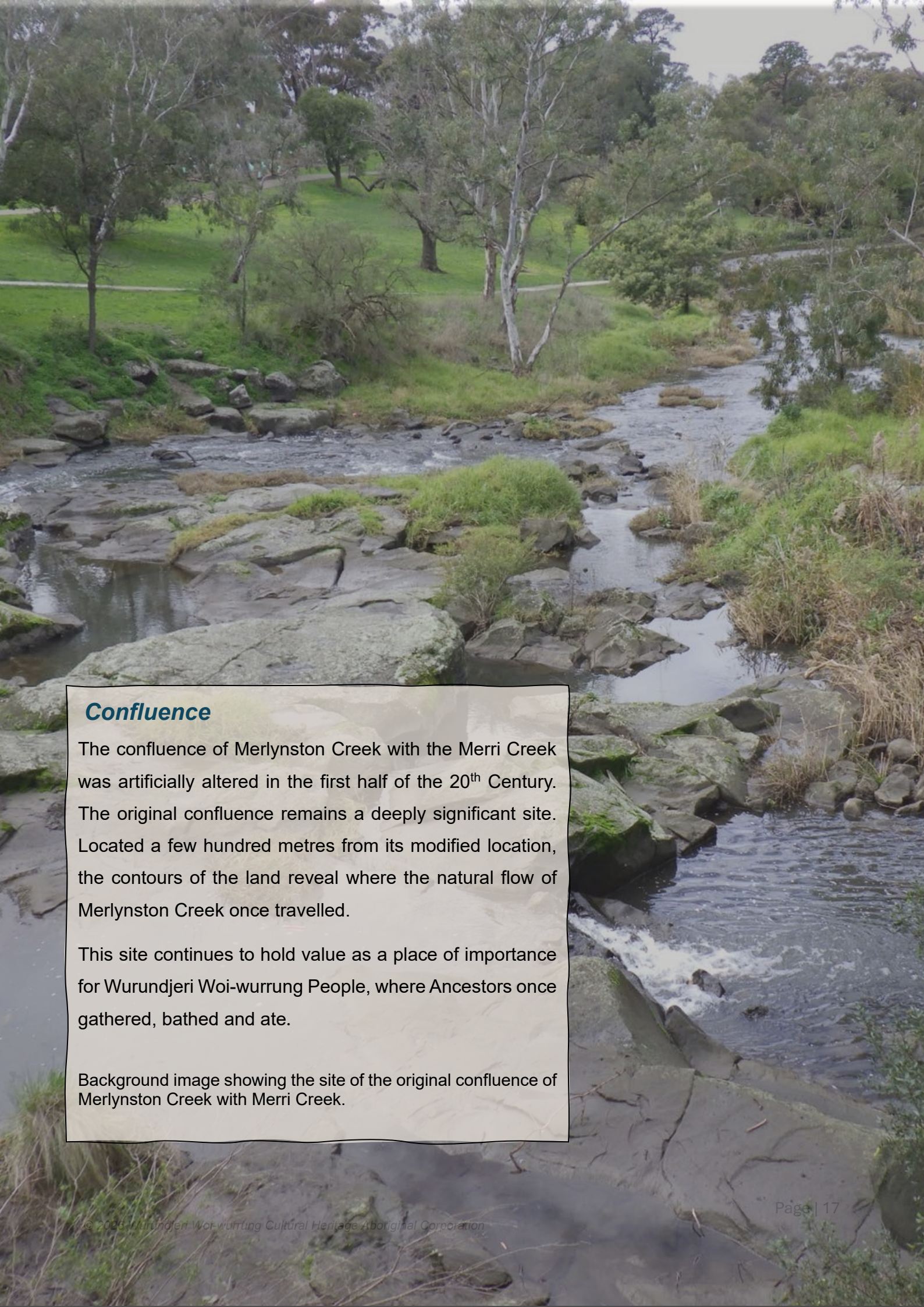
Merlynston Creek and the Cultural Landscape it is embedded in is an important part of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country. Waterways and waterscapes hold immense cultural, spiritual and social significance to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People. The protection and preservation of waterways and waterscapes is a crucial part of caring for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country.

The cultural significance of waterways and waterscapes, including wetlands, floodplains and billabongs, is expansive. Amongst the surrounding volcanic plains, waterways like Merlynston Creek would have provided vital resources. Resource use is one interconnected element through which waterways form part of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Landscape. For Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors, waterways existed as meeting and camping places, marked boundaries between clan areas, and were understood as the dwelling place of creation Ancestors and spiritual beings.

Today, waterways remain central elements of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Landscape, and healthy waterways is a key priority for Elders involved in this project. This significance is reflected in the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018, which categorises all land within 200 metres of a named waterway as an Area of Cultural Heritage Sensitivity.

The health of Merlynston Creek is intertwined with that of all beings within this Cultural Landscape, all which have an important role. For Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People, Merlynston Creek flows as a living connection to Ancestors and Country, and the ways they lived in and cared for this landscape, much which can be learnt from.

All of Merlynston Creek and the connected Cultural Landscape is important for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People. Some of the locations of significance along Merlynston Creek include the following:

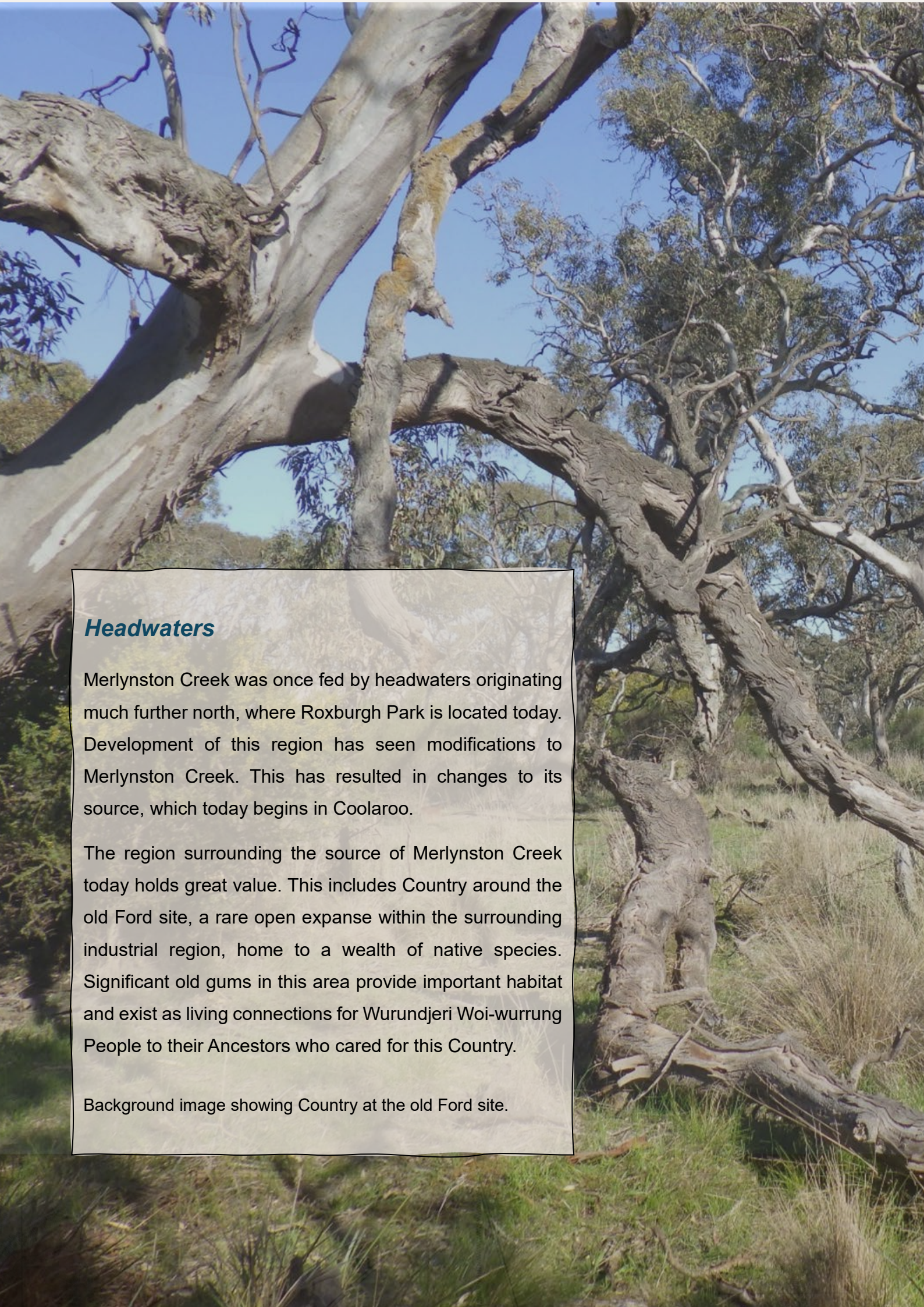


Confluence

The confluence of Merlynston Creek with the Merri Creek was artificially altered in the first half of the 20th Century. The original confluence remains a deeply significant site. Located a few hundred metres from its modified location, the contours of the land reveal where the natural flow of Merlynston Creek once travelled.

This site continues to hold value as a place of importance for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People, where Ancestors once gathered, bathed and ate.

Background image showing the site of the original confluence of Merlynston Creek with Merri Creek.

A large, gnarled tree trunk, likely a gum tree, dominates the left side of the frame. It has a thick, textured bark and a hollowed-out section. The tree branches out towards the right, with green foliage visible in the background. The ground is covered in dry grass and some green plants. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

Headwaters

Merlynston Creek was once fed by headwaters originating much further north, where Roxburgh Park is located today. Development of this region has seen modifications to Merlynston Creek. This has resulted in changes to its source, which today begins in Coolaroo.

The region surrounding the source of Merlynston Creek today holds great value. This includes Country around the old Ford site, a rare open expanse within the surrounding industrial region, home to a wealth of native species. Significant old gums in this area provide important habitat and exist as living connections for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People to their Ancestors who cared for this Country.

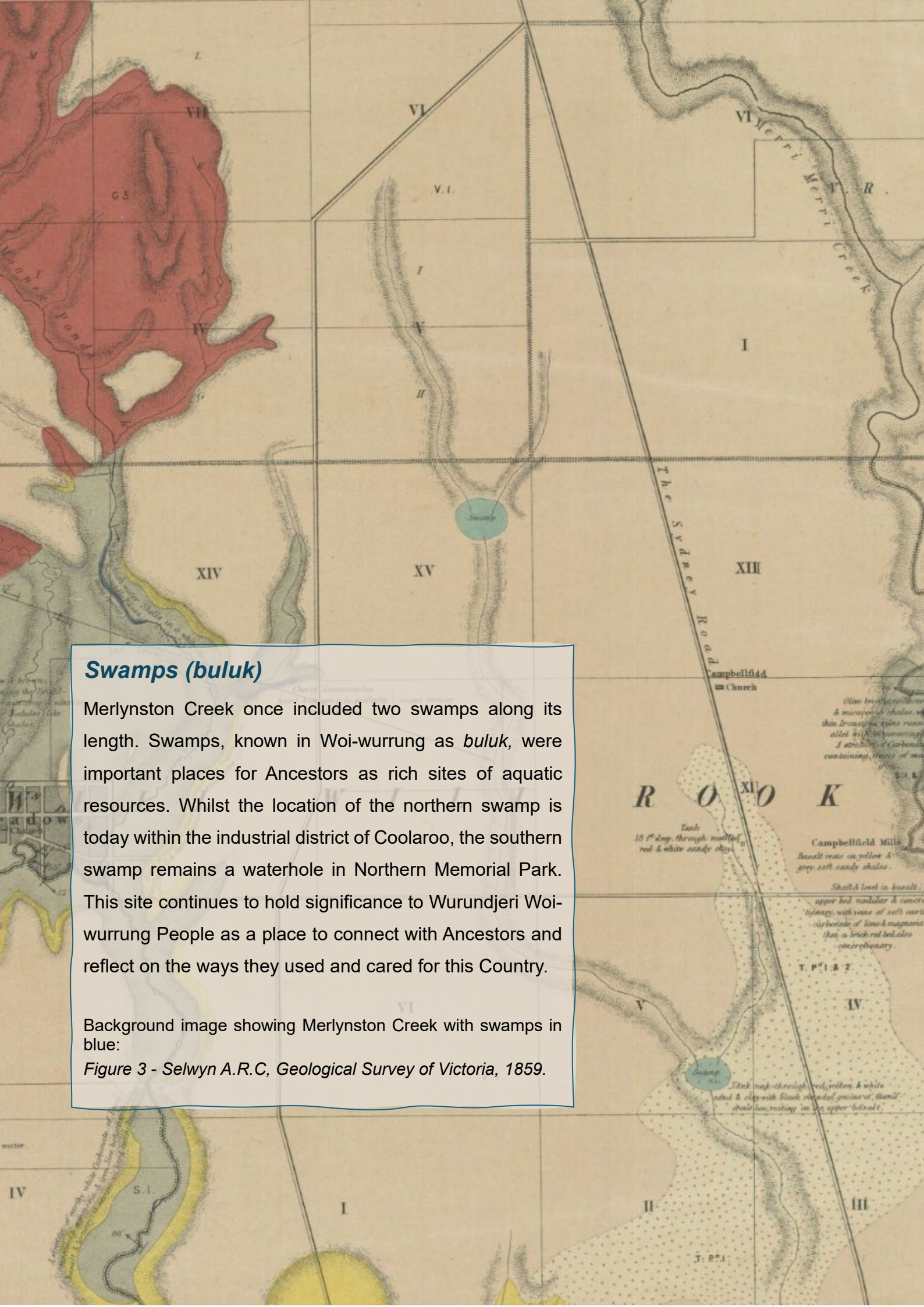
Background image showing Country at the old Ford site.

Swamps (buluk)

Merlynston Creek once included two swamps along its length. Swamps, known in Woi-wurrung as *buluk*, were important places for Ancestors as rich sites of aquatic resources. Whilst the location of the northern swamp is today within the industrial district of Coolaroo, the southern swamp remains a waterhole in Northern Memorial Park. This site continues to hold significance to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People as a place to connect with Ancestors and reflect on the ways they used and cared for this Country.

Background image showing Merlynston Creek with swamps in blue:

Figure 3 - Selwyn A.R.C, Geological Survey of Victoria, 1859.



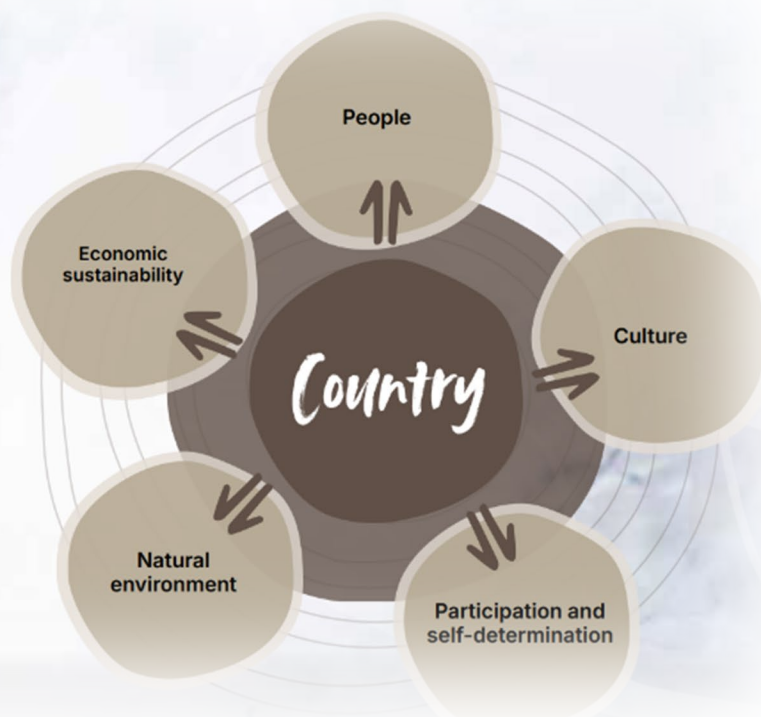
Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural significance:

Summary of cultural values & recommendations

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural values relating to Merlynston Creek, and the broader Cultural Landscape within which it is embedded, can be considered within three themes:

- Caring for Country;
- Celebrating and educating about Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors, Culture, and history; and
- Self-determination, partnership and advocacy.

Cultural Values identified in the Merlynston Creek Cultural Values Assessment align with Wurundjeri Corporation's Whole of Country Plan Principles. Identified and developed by Elders, these principles provide a consistent and holistic approach to Wurundjeri Corporation's cultural objectives and articulates protocols to care for Country. They highlight the aspirations to deepen the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community's spiritual connection with Country and uphold the responsibility to maintain it for future generations. This includes the protection and rehabilitation of Country, Culture and People.



Eight specific recommendations and thirty-five related actions have been identified by

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders as necessary in upholding these cultural values and otherwise embedding Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung perspectives. The implementation of these recommendations is a crucial part of cultural values projects.

“We need to take it seriously; it is important that these goals or

recommendations are followed through. If this report goes on to the shelf and no-one does anything, it’s a waste of time and money. We need to hear back from the project partners about these issues.”
Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

Theme 1: Caring for Country

- **Value 1: Rehabilitation of Country and enhanced biodiversity**
- **Value 2: Healthy waterways**
- **Value 3: Enhanced protection of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country from encroaching development**
- **Value 4: Enhanced protection of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage**

Caring for Country is a fundamental focus of many of the cultural values held by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders working on this project in relation to Merlynston Creek. Central to the notion of caring for Country is a holistic understanding of Country. Elders have emphasised the connected roles of land, water, sky and all beings, and the importance of this bigger connected picture when caring for Country.

“If you’re waterways aren’t healthy, Country is not healthy, and we’re not healthy. It all intertwines.”

Aunty Di Kerr, Wurundjeri Elder

Caring for Country is closely connected to the cultural values emerging under Theme 3: Self-determination, partnership & advocacy. Elders have emphasised the importance of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung self-determination when it comes to caring for Country, including the prioritisation of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung input and decision making.

Equally, Elders have stressed that the imperative of caring for Country is everyone’s responsibility, a huge and critical task that everyone must prioritise together.

This theme encompasses the following values:

Value 1 - Rehabilitation of Country and enhanced biodiversity

Elders have emphasised the importance of revitalising Country to reflect the landscape prior to colonisation as much as possible and where appropriate, noting the need to adapt to a changing climate. Merlynston Creek has been highly modified since colonisation. Its natural course has been altered; it has been artificially reinforced; and it has been transformed into a stormwater and waste drain in various places.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors have lived in and cared for this Country for thousands of years. These modifications categorically oppose a Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung approach to caring for Country. Understanding what Merlynston Creek and the surrounding landscape looked like prior to colonisation, and how Ancestors might have cared for, lived on and used the resources of Country, is important when caring for it.

This value is embodied in the following Whole of Country Plan 2025 - 2035 goals:

“Investment in Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People to enhance outcomes across Country: Sustainable investment in Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People to enhance the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Corporation’s capacity and capability and ensure best outcomes across Country”

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

“Enhanced biodiversity across Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country: Biodiversity is enhanced across all Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country. The natural landscape is recognised as a broader living entity.”

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

Revegetation with appropriate native species & removal of invasive species

Critical to this rehabilitation of Country along Merlynston Creek is the need to bring back plants which once thrived in this landscape. As Elders have explained, it is important to reflect the landscape prior to colonisation as much as possible, when revegetating:

“You need to bring back plants that were here before colonisation, that’s the only way you’re going to have a healthy waterway.”

Aunty Di Kerr, Wurundjeri Elder

Elders also note the need to adapt to a changing climate and acknowledge there may be changes in which species are best suited for this environment today. Native plants which support the health of the waterway should be prioritised, whilst the removal of invasive species is an equally important part of rehabilitation. Wurundjeri Corporation Elders advocate for consultation with Wurundjeri Corporation’s Narrap Unit, and other appropriate specialists to advise on the revegetation of this landscape.

Remnant vegetation

Elders place significant value on the scarce patches of remnant vegetation along Merlynston Creek, including areas at Jack Roper Reserve, Will-Will Rook Cemetery, and around The Knoll. Elders have highlighted the importance of preserving and protecting remnant vegetation in caring for Country. These areas also offer a connection to the pre-

colonial landscape, an inheritance from Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors that cared for Country at this time. Elders have emphasised the need for preventative measures to be put in place to reduce detrimental impacts on remnant vegetation; as well as proactive measures, such as seed collection, to increase native populations.

Figure 4 - Old gum and native flora at old Ford site, Coolaroo



Threatened flora

Merlynston Creek and the connected Cultural Landscape provides habitat to a number of threatened species. These species hold great value to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and play a significant role in this landscape. Within a holistic understanding of Country, Elders have stressed the interdependence of all beings, and need for all native species to be protected when caring for Country.

Threatened native plants recorded along Merlynston Creek in the past decade include the Matted flax-lily (*Dianella amoena*), Austral Crane's bill (*Geranium solanderi* var. *solaneri* s.s), Pale Swamp Everlasting (*Coronidium gunnianum*), the Fragrant Saltbush (*Rhagodia parabolica*), and the Giant Honey-myrtle (*Melaleuca armillaris* subsp. *armillaris*).

“It’s important to protect the natural vegetation. We are trying to hang on to what we have been left with. Our job is following the legacy of our Ancestors. We are following in their footsteps, in the 21st century.”

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

Native Fauna

The Cultural Landscape of Merlynston Creek also plays an important role in providing habitat to a wealth of native fauna species of significance to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People.

Elders working on this project have highlighted the importance of protecting and encouraging these species, which continue to be impacted by encroaching development and changing urban landscapes. This includes all beings living on the land – both above and below ground; in the water – both above and below ground; and sky of Merlynston Creek’s Cultural Landscape.

“Waterways are the lifeline of all Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People’s flora and fauna species.”

Perry Wandin, Wurundjeri Elder

Figure 5 - Perry Wandin, Wurundjeri Elder, indicates kangaroo and wallaby tracks at the old Ford site.



Elders have stressed the importance of understanding what lived in this Country prior to colonisation.

“Okay, you gotta think, go back 200 years - what would have been here? And then we look at the records... it’s not here anymore. Where has it gone? It’s an uphill battle in getting things back to the way it was, but all we can do is bit by bit.”

Perry Wandin, Wurundjeri Elder

Aquatic fauna recorded along the creek in recent decades includes the Southern Shortfin Eel (*Anguilla Australia*); Common Yabby (*Cherax destructor destructor*); Common Freshwater Shrimp (*Paratya australiensis*); Eastern Snake-necked Turtle (*Chelodina longicollis*); and the critically endangered Murray River Turtle (*Emydura macquarii*). In the past, Merlynston Creek has been home to Platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*) and Spotted Galaxia (*Galaxias truttaceus*) too.

The sections of the creek running through Fawcner Memorial Park and Jack Roper Reserve are particularly rich with birdlife, including birds holding great significance as Ancestral beings. This includes *Bunjil*, the Ancestral being that created the universe, taking the form of a wedge tail eagle. *Bunjil*’s wife, *Gunawarra*, is also found along Merlynston Creek in the form of the Black swan.¹⁰

Other species highlighted as significant for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders include a number of rare and threatened species associated with the waterway. In recent years,

this has included the Black Falcon (*Falco subniger*), which is critically endangered in Victoria; as well as the Grey-headed Flying fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*); the Hardhead Duck (*Aythya australis*); the Great Egret (*Ardea alba*); and the Golden Sun Moth (*Synemon plana*), all which are vulnerable in Victoria.

In the past, the creek has been home to the endangered Southern Toadlet (*Pseudophyrne semimarmorata*); the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater; and the Eastern Quoll (*Dasyurus viverrinus*), which was considered extinct on the mainland since 1963, although has been reintroduced to parts of Victoria in recent decades.

A key part of the ongoing protection of these species is habitat conservation, the preservation of wildlife corridors, and, where necessary, modern habitat creation and installation.

More broadly, Elders urge for wildlife conservation efforts which promote the natural state of Merlynston Creek and encourage local species to thrive, including aquatic animals. This should involve minimising the impacts of future development by considering ways in which designs can promote healthy Country and habitat.

Concern around the impact of possible future development on native species and their habitats includes possible future development around the source of Merlynston Creek, at the old Ford site, and the impacts this will have on the kangaroos and wallabies residing there.

¹⁰ Howitt, *The Native Tribes*, 128; Howitt & Fison, *Field notebook Transcription* – page 53, XM 759.

Recommendations

1. Revitalise Country to reflect the landscape prior to colonisation as much as possible and where appropriate	
1.1 Action	Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung input and decision-making regarding the land and water of Merlynston Creek must be sought and prioritised. The Wurundjeri Corporation's Narrap Unit (Water Program and Narrap Rangers) should be offered first preference in codesigning and leading water, natural resource management activities and remediation works; and given the opportunity for ongoing involvement in decision making around the future management of Merlynston Creek.
1.2 Action	Ecological rehabilitation: A priority for Elders is the rehabilitation of the ecological values along Merlynston Creek and surrounding landscapes to a level of a typically healthy waterway. This includes: • Revegetation to restore the ecological fabric of this Cultural Landscape • Removal of waste, rubbish and pollutants in waterscapes, waterway, and creek corridor • Habitat restoration (see action item 1.7) • Reintroduction and protection of fauna and flora species (see action item 1.7)
1.3 Action	Removal of invasive species along Merlynston Creek, using the least harmful methods available.
1.4 Action	Protect threatened flora species and ecological communities along Merlynston Creek.
1.5 Action	Protect areas of remnant vegetation along Merlynston Creek. This includes appropriate protection of remnant vegetation, including areas at Will Will Rook Cemetery. Seed collection could be used to increase native populations.
1.6 Action	Planting of appropriate native species along creekline , which belong to the area. Wurundjeri Corporation's Narrap Unit should be provided the opportunity to collaborate in the identification of appropriate plants.
1.7 Action	Protect fauna species native to habitats along Merlynston Creek. This should include protection of endangered fauna and repopulation of native fauna species, including aquatic fauna. This should also include the protection of spiritual animals associated with Merlynston Creek. Protection of habitats and wildlife corridors should be supplemented with modern habitat creation and installation.

1.8 Action	Work with Wurundjeri Corporation to develop interpretive signage with information regarding native fauna species of relevance. This could include injured wildlife hotline numbers for members of the public to contact.
1.9 Action	Further investigations that assist in understanding how the landscape has changed to allow Elders to provide a more comprehensive account of cultural values for Merlynston Creek relating to the rehabilitation of Country and enhanced biodiversity. This could include the inspection of core samples from identified locations along Merlynston Creek. Engagement with the Narrap Unit at Wurundjeri Corporation is essential to this action.

Value 2 - Enhanced protection of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country from encroaching development

Development of this region in the 20th century has had devastating impacts on the health of Merlynston Creek, which has been subjected to severe modification to accommodate increasing populations and urbanisation. This

included the gradual diversion of parts of Merlynston Creek to underground drainage from the early 1950s, previously operating as an open drain that regularly flooded the homes and streets of the Merlynston municipality.¹¹

Figure 6 - Image and title from 26 February 1946 article, the Herald, titled 'Flood Maroons Merlynston Families when Creek Overflows'¹²



WATERY WASTE TODAY surrounds Sussex Street in Merlynston, where many families are marooned

FLOOD MAROONS MERLYNSTON FAMILIES Tour WHEN CREEK OVERFLOWS FLOOD STOPS FUNERALS

Elders working on this project are concerned about the ongoing impact of encroaching development on Merlynston Creek and the significant Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural values associated with it. This is part of a broader priority to better protect Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country from increasing development.

"I think Wurundjeri Corporation is in a good place, but we're not happy with development. It destroys what was naturally there before. We always try to save what we can. We've lost a lot. A lot of our Country has been taken from us and destroyed."

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

¹¹ "Merri Creek Pollution," *The Sun News-Pictorial*, March 23, 1946, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article279198524>; "Merlynston Drain Plan," *The Sun News-Pictorial*, Oct 30, 1951, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article279731054>;

¹² Flood Maroons Merlynston Families when Creek Overflows," *The Herald*, February 26, 1946, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page26695511>.

This value is broadly embodied in the following Whole of Country Plan 2025 - 2035 goal:

“Enhanced protection of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country from encroaching development: Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country is better protected from development through increased understanding of the value of preserving Country, as well as enhanced legislation.”

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

Impact of development on Country

Elders have conveyed concerns regarding the plans for the potential development of a road between Dallas Water Basin and Will Will Rook Cemetery, crossing Merlynston Creek. These concerns include the impacts of increased traffic (including trucks) into the area and associated increased environmental footprint. Elders have stressed the need to prioritise low impact infrastructure and consider the impacts of all development on the preservation of native flora, fauna, and habitats.

These values remain pertinent to the proposed possible extension of the railway from Upfield Station to Roxburgh Park Station. Elders have emphasised the value of Country around the old Ford site as important habitat for native fauna within the surrounding industrial region.

Significant old gums in this area not only provide habitat to a range of animals but also a connection for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community to their Ancestors who would have utilised these trees. Elders see this site has having great potential for a revegetation project

and open parkland, and future development should be designed with this in mind.

Again, drawing on the values of Theme 3, Elders emphasised the need for Wurundjeri Corporation to be a part of such future developments in the early planning stage, to ensure cultural values are minimally impacted.

Elders have emphasised the need for a holistic approach to Country when considering impacts of development on Merlynston Creek, with cultural values extending beyond the creek corridor. Healthy waterways depend on and support healthy land, sky, and the health of surrounding waterways, groundwater, wetlands, and floodplains.

This involves looking not only at proposed developments along the creek itself, but the impact of development in the surrounding region. This includes development of the nearby Broadmeadows activity centre. Elders are concerned about the impacts of this development on Merlynston Creek, including the effect of stormwater flows.

2. Enhanced protection of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country from encroaching development.

2.1 Action	Project partners should prioritise low impact infrastructure and consider impacts of all development associated with Merlynston Creek on the health of the waterway and preservation of native flora; fauna and their habitats. This includes works associated with the Merlynston Creek Parklands. The natural and aesthetic attributes of Merlynston Creek and the surrounding landscape should be maintained where possible. This involves: a) Ensuring the proposed potential road in Dallas is designed with minimal impact on the health of Merlynston Creek, including the waterway, native flora, fauna and habitats. b) Ensuring the potential future train line extension from Upfield to Roxburgh Park is designed with minimal impact on the health of Merlynston Creek and the connected Cultural Landscape. This includes protecting existing and creating habitat corridors to support connectivity for wildlife, including the protection of old gum trees in this area as much as possible. Engagement with Wurundjeri Corporation is essential to this action. This should include involvement in decision making regarding such future developments from the early planning stage and throughout the development project.
2.2 Action	Project partners should work with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People to improve the health of waterways by considering the broader interconnected landscape. This includes working with Wurundjeri Corporation to ensure future developments prioritise healthy waterways.
2.3 Action	Hume City Council, Merri-bek City Council and Melbourne Water must work to minimise the current stormwater flows that Merlynston Creek receive as surface run-off. This is vital in moving towards a system that allows water to support the land, sky and beings (both above and below ground), as the water makes its way more naturally down Merlynston Creek.
2.4 Action	Plans for increased population growth, including around Broadmeadows, must aim to reduce stormwater that flows from roofs, footpaths and roads which ultimately feed into Merlynston Creek. Engagement with the Water Program at Wurundjeri Corporation is essential to this action.

Value 3 - Healthy waterways

Waterways and waterscapes are central elements of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Landscape, and their health is a key priority for Elders involved in this project. Not only are they important as significant physical

features within the landscape which support and in turn are supported by all beings on Country; they also exist for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People today as spiritual connections to their Ancestors, Country, and culture.

This value is embodied in the following Whole of Country Plan 2025 - 2035 goal:

"Improved waterway health across Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country. Water is understood as a complex living entity"

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

Re-naturalisation

Today large portions of Merlynston Creek are buried underground or travel as open concrete channels. Elders have emphasised the re-naturalisation of Merlynston Creek as a crucial step in improving the health of this waterway. This involves the removal of all concrete channelling, where doing so is environmentally safe and will not cause further harm. Within a holistic understanding of Country, Elders have highlighted the importance of a natural relationship of waterways with the earth. As explained by Elders:

"I don't like concrete channels. They're suffocating the earth. It's the species underneath that suffer. We can't see what is going on underground, but they are in trouble. Everything under the ground is living and was put there for a reason through the Creation of the earth."

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

"It's Mother Earth, so the waterways are her veins. If you are looking after Country, you are looking after your mother. If you are blocking the waterways, you are blocking her veins. It's a spiritual connection."

Aunty Di Kerr, Wurundjeri Elder

Concrete channels which were constructed in response to flooding have manipulated the natural flow of Merlynston Creek, with ongoing effects felt broadly across Country. Flooding has always been a natural and necessary phenomenon within Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, which Ancestors would have anticipated and worked with.

“They didn’t have the pipes underground when Ancestors were there - it was a natural landscape. Floods would have happened, and maybe they had to change location. As soon as you start playing around with things, it becomes a nightmare. With the alteration of colonisation, water can’t find its way anymore. That’s probably why you do find damp areas, because that was once a billabong, that was once a wetland, that was once a swamp. I do believe that.”

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

“As soon as the landscape was altered, problems happened. Due to colonisation. Due to idiots behind the desk.”

Perry Wandin, Wurundjeri Elder

Another important part of Merlynston Creek’s re-naturalisation is the planting of appropriate native species, in line with the values set out in relation to rehabilitation of Country and enhancement of biodiversity.

Re-naturalisation of the creek line will also improve the health of the banks along Merlynston Creek, which Elders raised concerns about. Erosion caused by water velocity and straightening of the water course can be improved by re-naturalisation of the creek line; whilst revegetating will support bank stabilisation. Re-naturalisation of the creek line would also work to enhance the natural and aesthetic attributes of this area, encouraging community members to enjoy Country, enhancing well-being.

“If the water was running and there were no concrete slabs there, people would be sitting on that grass under the trees and probably having a bit of a picnic, listening to the bird life and taking the time to appreciate Country. But there’s nothing to draw them there- it’s not a good look.”

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

Figure 7 - Concrete channelled section of Merlynston Creek south of Hepburn Street, Dallas



Water quality

Elders are concerned about the water quality of Merlynston Creek, improvement to which is reliant on the re-naturalisation of the waterway. Water quality has been greatly impacted by the suffocation of Country, and removal of the concrete will support the macroinvertebrates and other species to be reintroduced to support a healthier, natural system.

Elders found the current confluence of Merlynston Creek with the Merri Creek to be particularly unhealthy. Elders were also concerned how the health of Merlynston Creek will impact the culturally significant Merri Creek.

“The flow of the Merlynston Creek is a big concern, considering the unhealthy way it is sitting now. It’s also worrying for the Merri which it feeds into, which is a major creek which comes off our main artery, Birrarung. If nothing changes, these

waterways are looking like they don’t have a good future. It’s not only what’s in the water – healthy waterways is healthy people, and healthy flora and fauna. It affects us all. It once would have been a place of abundance where people could have gathered.”

Aunty Jacqui Wandin, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder

“Tributaries are there to enhance the strength of main waterways. It supports Country by bringing away what could overload it and takes it to the main waterway. All waterways are important to us, not just the main ones.”

Aunty Di Kerr, Wurundjeri Elder

Elders have identified that further research regarding the water quality of Merlynston Creek is required in order to advise on the recommendations to manage this value. Elders have recommended that Wurundjeri Corporation's Water Program is facilitated to do this work. Wurundjeri Corporation's Water

Program should be offered first right of refusal and provided with the opportunity to collaborate on all work regarding water quality, pending capacity, capability and priorities. This is connected to the broader recommendation set out in relation to Theme 3: Self-determination, partnership & advocacy.

Figure 8 - Merlynston Creek at the new confluence with Merri Creek



Recommendations

3. Protect and enhance Merlynston Creek and connected waterscapes.

3.1 Action	Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung input and decision-making regarding the land and water of Merlynston Creek must be sought and prioritised. The Wurundjeri Corporation Narrap Unit (Water Program and Narrap Rangers) should be offered first preference in codesigning and leading water, natural resource management activities and remediation works; and given the opportunity for ongoing involvement in decision making around the future management of this waterway.
3.2 Action	Re-naturalisation of Merlynston Creek is a priority for Elders. This includes the removal of concrete channelling in all instances where environmentally safe to do so. This also includes the improvement of water quality; the removal of weeds and invasive species; preservation of any native plants; and the re-introduction of native plants that will help make Country and Water healthy.
3.3 Action	Rehabilitation of Merlynston creekline and, where possible, associated waterways and wetlands to support the retardation and treatment of surface water flows . This involves improving the ecological health, environmental flows, Cultural flows, and the persistence of natural cycles of flooding, infiltration, and evaporation for Merlynston Creek and associated waterways and wetlands.
3.4 Action	Project partners must ensure water testing is conducted to establish base levels of water quality, and efforts must be made to improve these levels on an ongoing basis. Wurundjeri Corporation's Water Program should be given first right of refusal to conduct this water testing, or to direct specifications of testing by a third party.

Value 4 – Enhanced protection of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage associated with Merlynston Creek must be protected. Cultural heritage tells of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors and their ways of life, and continues the ongoing visibility of Wurundjeri People on Country.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage must be considered holistically, in respect of physical and non-physical attributes. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People place great value not only on their archaeological footprint but also on places and landscapes of cultural significance.

This value is embodied in the following Whole of Country Plan 2025 - 2035 goal:

“Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural heritage is better protected through increased understanding, legislative changes, and the development and implementation of stronger strategies and goals.”

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register (VAHR) holds all registrations of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Places (ACHPs) and objects within Victoria.

Registered Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Places along Merlynston Creek not only provide evidence of occupation by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People in the form of cultural heritage material but also remain as tangible expressions of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People’s historical and ongoing connection to this landscape.

The places recorded on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register are limited by the boundaries of archaeological investigations for heritage assessments and Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPS), and only small sections of Merlynston Creek have been subject to archaeological surveys. Given the significance of waterways for Wurundjeri Woi-

wurrung Ancestors as places to source resources, meet, and camp, they are associated with high concentrations of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage. Accordingly, the places recorded on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register along Merlynston Creek only offer a glimpse into a rich, Cultural Landscape, and there are likely to be significant numbers of unrecorded artefacts and other tangible Aboriginal Cultural Heritage. Modification of Merlynston Creek and the surrounding landscape would also have seen many artefacts removed from their original locations, disturbing the integrity and context of many places of Wurundjeri cultural significance.

Elders have emphasised the importance of facilitating the Wurundjeri Corporation Heritage Unit to carry out the necessary surveys and investigations in respect of Merlynston Creek.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

Heritage places are also those related to cultural practices, beliefs, or traditions. These features are defined as intangible, and include ceremonies, dances, songs, Creation Stories, spiritual associations, technical skills, traditional craft skills, ecological knowledge, language, traditional laws, and responsibilities.

As outlined in the methodology section, the Australian Association of the International

Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) describes intangible cultural heritage as cultural practices created by communities or groups of people over time and are practices recognised by those communities or groups as part of their heritage; inclusive of cultural responsibilities, rituals and ceremonies, oral traditions, performance, language, knowledge, and skills.¹³ The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Victoria) is also reflective of this definition.¹⁴

Recommendations

4. Enhanced protection of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage	
4.1 Action	Project partners must engage with the Wurundjeri Corporation Cultural Heritage Unit regarding the protection of tangible cultural heritage in accordance with the <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i> (Victoria) and its regulations. Project partners are encouraged to consider voluntary Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPs) and permits where mandatory CHMPs and permits may not be triggered in accordance with the <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i> (Victoria) Sections 45 and 46.
4.2 Action	Protect Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural values holistically. Cultural values are to be considered in relation to their tangible (physical) and intangible (non-physical) attributes. For example, this may include artefacts, cultural features, flora, fauna, waterways and waterbodies, landforms, stories, associations, practices, beliefs, traditions, and Cultural Landscapes.
4.3 Action	Areas of important cultural heritage landscapes identified from the Wurundjeri Strategic Aboriginal Heritage Assessment (SAHA) and depicted through the First Peoples – State Relations' mapping platform for strategic planning, are to be treated as areas of cultural heritage sensitivity.
4.4 Action	Project partners should encourage developers operating within their jurisdictions to design their activities to avoid harm to important cultural heritage landscapes identified from the Wurundjeri Strategic Aboriginal Heritage Assessment (SAHA) depicted through the First Peoples – State Relations' mapping platform for

¹³ Australia ICOMOS, *Practice Note: Intangible Cultural Heritage and Place* (ICOMOS, 2017), p. 2.

¹⁴ *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Victoria)

	strategic planning. Where areas of important cultural heritage landscapes identified from SAHA are present and CHMPs or CHPs are not mandatory, voluntary CHMPs (for high-impact activities) or CHPs (for low-impact activities) should be sought. Project partners should lead by example in development activities they are managing.
4.5 Action	Further investigations would allow Elders to provide a more comprehensive account of cultural values for Merlynston Creek relating to the enhanced protection of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage. This involves: ○ Archaeological surveys along the creek corridor ○ A survey of the Merlynston Creek CVA project area for ground truthing with Cultural Heritage Officers to inspect potential stony rises. Engagement with the Cultural Heritage Unit at Wurundjeri Corporation is essential to this action.

Theme 2: Celebrating and educating about Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors, Culture, & History

- ***Value 5: Celebration of Ancestors & Cultural Knowledge***
- ***Value 6: Education of the wider community***
- ***Value 7: Knowledge sharing & enhanced cultural practice***
- ***Value 8: Truth -telling***

The celebration of culture, Ancestors and history is a crucial part of cultural renewal and the transmission of knowledge to younger generations. Beyond the importance of this work for the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community, Elders have highlighted the importance of educating the wider non-

Indigenous community about Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture and history.

Alongside celebration, Truth-telling is an important and necessary process in both educating the public and healing within the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community. This theme encompasses the following values:

Values 5 & 6 – Celebration of Ancestor & Cultural Knowledge; and Education of the wider community

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and culture should be visible on Country and celebrated. Sharing Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung knowledge, culture and history in relation to Merlynston Creek and Country, where appropriate, is important in enhancing the non-Wurundjeri

people's understanding of living on and visiting this Country. As explained in the goals of the Whole of Country Plan, this in turn should foster greater respect and connection of the wider community with Country.

These values are embodied in the following Whole of Country Plan 2025 - 2035 Goals:

"Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and culture are visible on Country."

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

"Non-Wurundjeri people living on, working on and visiting Country continue to enhance their understanding of Country, resulting in a deeper respect and connection with Country."

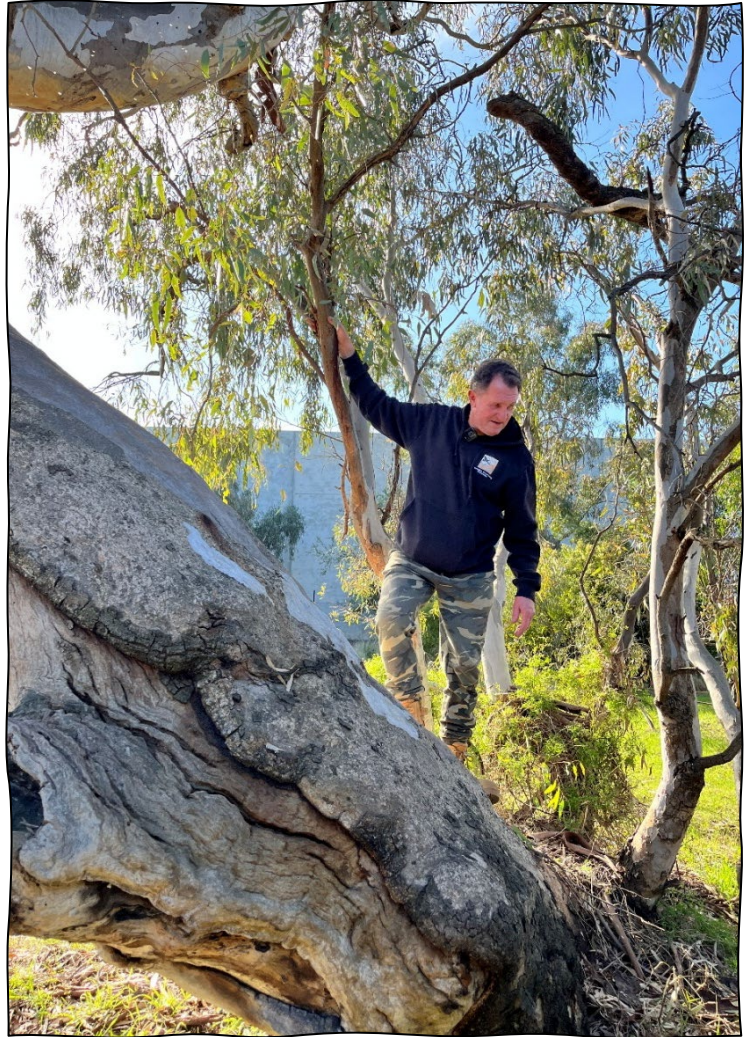
- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

Interpretive signage has been identified as a way to share this knowledge with the broader community. An important aspect of this knowledge sharing is the celebration of Ancestors and their relationship with Merlynston Creek. For example, Elders have emphasised that whilst the confluence of Merlynston Creek cannot be returned to its original site, the story of this place and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors' connection with it can be shared.

“The public needs to be educated about our Ancestors, history and culture, whether that is done verbally or with interpretive signage. A lot of this has been left out of the education systems over the years. People don’t know enough. Putting interpretive signage out there educates the public, the visitor and everyone. They need to know the history of who we are and be proud to be on our Country. We then hope people can become more aware of the land they live and work on and learn respect.”

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

Figure 9 - Perry Wandin, Wurundjeri Elder, with significant old gum tree. Source: Sheridan Blunt (Hume City Council).



Elders have also highlighted the significant value of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung knowledge around traditional uses of flora and fauna native to Merlynston Creek, which offers insight into improving its health. This is important cultural knowledge which should continue to be held and celebrated.

Woi-wurrung language

Woi-wurrung is the language of the Wurundjeri People and remains an important part of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural identity. As set out in the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Whole of Country Plan:

Since the colonial invasion of the unceded territories of the Woi-wurrung speaking clans, language use has declined to the point of near extinction due to government control and policy. Many Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders and members have been working tirelessly to revive the Woi-wurrung language, with much success, although further research continues.¹⁵

Elders have stressed the need for Woi-wurrung language to be used wherever possible. Most importantly, this should involve the renaming of Merlynston Creek.

It is unclear when the creek became known as Merlynston, although it was likely named sometime after the 1920s and the establishment of Merlynston municipality area; known as Coburg North today. This area was named after the daughter of Captain Donald

Bain, who was instrumental in the residential development of Merlynston.¹⁶

Re-naming the creek is important in identifying and celebrating Merlynston Creek as an important place on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country for the broader community, but it would also offer an important act of healing for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People, reconnecting people today to Country, culture and language.

“Language was stolen. Renaming places on Country needs to happen. At the moment, the name Merlynston doesn’t connect me to my Country, Culture and Ancestors. Language helps you spiritually connect with Country, and that’s what it’s all about when we go out there. We go out there because we are the descendants of our Ancestors.”

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

¹⁵ Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, *Whole of Country Plan 2025 – 2035*, 17.

¹⁶ Broome, *Coburg, Between Two Creeks* (Coburg Historical Society, 2001), 209; “Merlynston”, November 11, 1921; “Merlynston,” *The Brunswick and Coburg Leader*, August 18, 1922, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page29814111>.

Recommendations

5. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Culture is visible on Country	
5.1 Action	Co-develop interpretive signage with Wurundjeri Corporation at significant places along the creek sharing Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural knowledge and history related to Merlynston Creek. Interpretive signage could include Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural knowledge and history, and information on Ancestors and resource use, as advised and deemed appropriate by Elders. Places identified by Elders include the original confluence of Merlynston Creek with Merri Creek; and the waterhole in Northern Memorial Park
5.2 Action	Acknowledgement of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People as the Traditional Owners of Country must be clear along the parkland.
5.3 Action	The project team is encouraged to engage with Wurundjeri Corporation's Education Unit to facilitate the re-naming of Merlynston Creek using Woi-wurrung language
5.4 Action	Use Woi-wurrung language where possible in consultation with the Wurundjeri Corporation's Education Unit. Woi-wurrung language should be used on signage (with English translation where necessary) and for naming natural features, surrounding areas, flora and fauna, and significant sites along Merlynston Creek.
5.5 Action	Use Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung art and design where possible. It is recommended that Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung artwork and cultural design elements are reflected in any future buildings, works and infrastructure design along Merlynston Creek. This includes Hume City Council's development of Merlynston Creek Parkland. Wurundjeri Corporation should direct these usages. Where possible incorporate Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung artwork and cultural design elements into the design phase of the project, co-developed with Wurundjeri Corporation and engaging with Elders and Wurundjeri Corporation approved artists.
5.6 Action	Promote and Respect Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People's right to practise Culture on Country. The project team is encouraged to engage with Wurundjeri Corporation and to facilitate opportunities for cultural practice, particularly throughout the Merlynston Creek Parklands project, and beyond. This includes Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremonies. It is very important to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People that visitors are welcomed onto their Country in this way. It is a cultural tradition that has been practised on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country for tens of thousands of years and beyond.

Value 7 – Knowledge sharing & enhancement of cultural practice

Sharing knowledge and enhancing Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural practice are important values for Elders involved in this project.

In maintaining cultural practices, it is important for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People to be able to access Country and use necessary resources along Merlynston Creek for cultural purposes.

These values are embodied in the following Whole of Country Plan 2025 - 2035 goals:

“Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People have the right to access Country and resources.”

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

“Knowledge sharing and enhancing cultural practice within Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People.”

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

Elders have explained how the process of knowledge recording in projects like these works to reconnect people with Culture and Country.

“It also connects our songlines. It got interrupted with colonisation and our family being on Coranderrk. This work today is actually reconnecting the songlines and reconnecting us back to them, and that’s important.”

Aunty Di Kerr, Wurundjeri Elder

“As a descendant, I’m very proud to get the opportunity to go out on Country and see the condition it’s in, give input, talk to the stakeholder and walk on Country together. It creates reconciliation and you learn from each other.”

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

A key part of this knowledge sharing is the consideration of future generations of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People, and the transmission of cultural knowledge.

“It’s a historical process. The role of Elders is to educate younger ones about our knowledge, teach them about Country and teach them about our waterways. That needs to continue. What we are doing now will benefit the younger ones. I don’t want in 50 years’ time my great grandchildren or great-great grandchildren to be having to go back to the archives. It’s going to be the same about Mother Earth and the same about our waterways. Its already there. That continuance is important to us as a living culture.”

Aunty Di Kerr, Wurundjeri Elder

Figure 10 - Perry Wandin, Wurundjeri Elder, and Wurundjeri Corporation staff at Merlynston Creek in Fawcner Memorial Park



Recommendations

6. Support Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People in continuing to connect with their Cultural Landscape.

6.1 Action	Continue engagement with Wurundjeri Corporation Research Unit to undertake further cultural values work on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country. Elders have recommended that Hume City Council, Merri-bek City Council, and Melbourne Water strive to engage in cultural values works for any projects that they are leading on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country at the project inception stage.
6.2 Action	Ensure Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People have ongoing access to Country along Merlynston Creek and its resources to engage in cultural practices, as guided by the Wurundjeri Corporation.

Value 8 – Truth-telling

Elders working on this project have highlighted the importance of Truth-telling for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People in respect of Merlynston Creek and identified it as a necessary process to be facilitated through the Cultural Values Assessment project.

Fawkner Memorial Park contains the remains of John Batman and other significant colonial figures involved in the dispossession of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and other First Nations peoples across Australia. Elders have highlighted the importance of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung truths being shared in relation to these people, their actions, and the devastating impacts on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Ancestors & Country.

"If the colonisers had worked better with our people, we would have respected their names. It would have been a better place. But they never learnt to work with our people. Instead, they killed and took our land. These are our stories - the way they have left the condition of Country. Our Ancestors, they're not here to speak for Country now. Other Elders and I are. We should put the truth up about John Batman as to what happened when he landed on our shores."

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

Elders have highlighted a particular need for Truth-telling in relation to the memorial to John Batman, and the plaque detailing a 'Treaty' he made with First Nations people. Elders have highlighted the importance of respectfully including a Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung perspective on this encounter, given the current plaque does not tell the full story.

"Do you put signage up and say the true fact about John Batman was that he purchased the land over a few pieces of jewellery, rugs, maybe shoes, clothing? We were screwed from day one when colonisation happened."

Perry Wandin, Wurundjeri Elder

"The first part would have been that my Ancestors accepted the arrival of John Batman, because the day before he'd sent his brother to deliver them potatoes. My Ancestors did not understand John Batman's intentions - Batman misled them. It should really say John Batman is the man who tried to do a treaty with Wurundjeri people... but that is not what it says. That's what it needs to say."

Aunty Jacqui Wandin, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder

Figure 11 Perry Wandin, Wurundjeri Elder, at John Batman's memorial in Fawkner Memorial Park



Recommendations

7. Support Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People in Truth-telling and healing processes

7.1 Action	Co-develop interpretive signage with Wurundjeri Corporation at appropriate places along Merlynston Creek to enable Truth-telling. This includes signage at an appropriate and respectful location at Fawkner Memorial Park to provide a Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung perspective on Batman's so called 'Treaty'.
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Theme 3: Self-determination, partnership & advocacy

- **Value 9: Self-determination and empowerment**
- **Value 10: Collaboration and advocacy: building and maintaining cross-organisation partnerships**

Values 9 & 10 – Self-determination and empowerment; & Collaboration and advocacy: building and maintaining cross-organisational partnerships

Self-determination for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People is at the forefront of all work of the Wurundjeri Corporation. It must always be prioritised when considering altering aspects of Country. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People must have a real voice in informed decision-making, led by Elders and supported by all generations on issues that impact Country.

Investment must be made in Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People to enhance outcomes across

Country. Elders have advocated for strong and meaningful partnerships with Hume City Council, Merri-Bek City Council and Melbourne Water which support the self-determination of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People.

Within such partnerships, project partners should make efforts to increase compliance of stakeholders operating within their jurisdiction in policies and guidelines related to caring for Country.

These values are embodied in the following Whole of Country Plan 2025 - 2035 goals:

“Investment in Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People to enhance outcomes across Country.”

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

“Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People are supported to achieve their goals and aspirations.”

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

“Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People have a real voice in the decisions that impact Country.”

- Whole of Country Plan 2025-2035 Goal

Throughout this project, Elders have continually emphasised that self-determination of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People should be supported by project partners by continuing to invest in specialised units within the Wurundjeri Corporation and ensuring their early and ongoing involvement in decision making.

This includes engagement with the Narrap Unit regarding natural resource management and remediation works (see action 1.1); as well as engagement with Narrap Unit's Water Program regarding re-naturalisation and rehabilitation of Merlynston Creek, and reduction of stormwater in future development plans within the region (see actions 3.1 – 3.3 & 4.2).

More broadly, Elders encourage project partners to support and invest in capability building of the Water Unit, in order to be meaningfully involved in the improvement of the health of waterways across Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country. This also includes engagement with the Cultural Heritage Unit regarding the enhanced protection of Cultural Heritage (see actions 4.1 & 4.5).

Ongoing engagement with the Research Unit has also been highlighted by Elders as paramount, with follow-up processes identified as a crucial part of cultural values projects, encouraging accountability and implementation of the recommendations.

The Wurundjeri Corporation's Research Unit should continue to be engaged in cultural values works for any projects that Hume City Council, Merri-bek City Council, and Melbourne Water are leading on Wurundjeri

Woi-wurrung Country (see action 6.1). Altering Country in one aspect causes ramifications in a myriad of ways. As project partners initiate further development within their respective jurisdictions, impacts on Country need to be considered by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders and any future works to be undertaken should be done in consultation with Wurundjeri Corporation.

“There needs to be ongoing Elder Consultation. When these people are thinking about doing infrastructure, they need to knock on the door of the Traditional Owner. Our Ancestors have cared for this country for thousands of years before colonisation. They were surviving and they didn't destroy anything. Colonisation took all that away.”

Aunty Alice Kolasa, Elder

Elders working on this project have emphasised the positive role Cultural Values Projects like this play in cultural renewal and knowledge transmission processes for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People. Elders encourage project partners to invest in Cultural Values Projects over areas identified by Wurundjeri Corporation of interest, rather than in response to development.

Collaboration between local government organisations and Wurundjeri Corporation is valued highly.

Recommendations

8. Genuine and meaningful engagement with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People:	
8.1 Action	Engagement with Wurundjeri Corporation to facilitate and support equal partnerships and ensure Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People have a real voice in informed decision-making regarding their Country. Hume City Council, Merri-bek City Council and Melbourne Water should lead by example by creating strong and meaningful partnerships and working relationships with Wurundjeri Corporation.
8.2 Action	Project partners should consider Wurundjeri Corporation's Whole of Country Plan in future planning and decision making on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country.
8.3 Action	Provide project updates to Wurundjeri Corporation. Project partners must provide updates regarding this project; and the outcomes and evaluation of recommendations provided in this report to Wurundjeri Corporation Elders and community members. Updates should be delivered through engagement with the Policy and Partnerships Unit at Wurundjeri Corporation.
8.4 Action	Hume City Council, Merri-bek City Council and Melbourne Water should increase compliance of stakeholders operating within their jurisdiction in policies and guidelines related to caring for Country, where possible.



Concluding Statement

Merlynston Creek and the cultural landscape it is embedded in is an important part of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country. Waterways and waterscapes hold immense cultural, spiritual, and social significance to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People. The protection, preservation and revitalisation of waterways and waterscapes is a crucial part of caring for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country.

The health of Merlynston Creek is intertwined with that of all beings within this cultural landscape, all which have an important role. For Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People, Merlynston Creek flows as a living connection to Ancestors and Country, and the ways they lived in and cared for this landscape, much which can be learnt from. Revitalising Country to reflect the landscape of Merlynston Creek prior to colonisation as much as possible is important to Elders. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural knowledge and history of Ancestors should be celebrated and shared with the wider community, where appropriate. Such education is important for non-Wurundjeri people living on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, allowing for truth-telling and fostering greater respect for Country.

Caring for Country is an immense task that is everyone's responsibility. Within this shared responsibility, it is important that Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People have a real and meaningful voice in decision making around their Country. This includes Merlynston Creek and connected Cultural Landscapes, which remains of immense value to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People today.

Ngoon Godgin. Thank you.

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