

Fact sheet 10: Partnerships with Traditional Owners

Traditional Owners' Caring for Country is a vital part of looking after and managing Victoria's forests

Key points

- DELWP is committed to delivering the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) Modernisation Program and future forest management in partnership with Victoria's legally-recognised Traditional Owners.
- Meaningful engagement with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians is essential to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and Traditional Owners' broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.
- Traditional Owner values must be considered in decision making and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) will support Traditional Owners to capture information about their tangible and intangible values, while also acknowledging their rights to maintaining data and information sovereignty.
- DELWP is committed to the recognition of Traditional Owners rights through Recognition and Settlement Agreements (*Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*), native title determinations, co-operative management arrangements and the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, each of which provide Traditional Owners with legal rights in the management of country. In addition, DELWP is further guided by the existing Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework and DELWP's Munganin – Gadhaba 'Achieve Together' Aboriginal Inclusion Plan.
- Traditional Owners are the custodians of valuable traditional knowledge about Victoria's forested ecosystems, a rich source of information that could greatly enhance the ecological sustainability of contemporary forest management practices.
- This project provides an opportunity to commence a partnership approach for future forest management between the DELWP and Traditional Owners that will see cultural values appropriately recognised and protected at every stage in the forest management system from strategic planning through on ground delivery.

What work is being done?

In January and August 2018, DELWP met with Traditional Owner group representatives to discuss what a partnership for future forest management "looks like in practice".

During these discussions and subsequent meetings on Country, Traditional Owner groups and DELWP have committed to a partnership to manage forests on Country in a way that will:

- endure beyond the four-year program and enable a partnership approach to future forest management
- respect the unique aspirations and the different resources, capacity and capability of Traditional Owner groups
- support self-determination.

New Partnership and Engagement Officers will be funded within each of the Traditional Owner groups recognised under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, the *Native Title Act 1993* and the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, to work with their group to scope and implement projects they choose.

DELWP will provide funding to support Traditional Owner groups to capture information about their tangible and intangible cultural values and manage that information so that it can inform decisions about the management of Victoria's forests. Traditional Owner groups will have information sovereignty, meaning that they will control their information and knowledge, including making decisions about what is shared with DELWP.

What are tangible values?

Aboriginal people have lived in Victoria for tens of thousands of years. During that time, they left physical evidence of their activities that survive as cultural heritage places and objects (tangible values). Some examples of tangible cultural heritage are Aboriginal flaked stone tools, Aboriginal ground-edge axes and grinding stones, Aboriginal coastal shell middens and freshwater middens and Aboriginal rock art.

What are intangible values?

In Victoria, intangible values can be expressed in language, Dreaming narratives, ceremony, food, medicinal plant use, songlines, and the skills needed to produce culturally important objects.

Intangible values are part of the living culture of a people. They are the cultural practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that a community recognise as theirs. They have been orally transmitted through generations and are manifested in contemporary cultural practices informed by a deep connection to identity, culture, community and country.

Traditional Owners are the custodians of this knowledge and skill, and also its expression. As the custodians, Traditional Owners negotiate the terms under which this intellectual property will be collected, captured, stored and used by others.

Cultural Values Projects

DELWP and Traditional Owners will partner together to determine the appropriate approaches to map cultural values, for use in the regional forest agreements. For example, painting workshops capture aspects of Dreaming stories, season-mapping captures traditional knowledge of healthy ecosystems, and audio-visual recordings capture knowledge that has usually been communicated orally.

Cultural mapping workshops could be used to bring together Traditional Owners to identify significant cultural places in the forest landscape and ensure they have priority in future forest management decision making. Workshops would also identify gaps in knowledge.



Cultural heritage being taught by Dja Dja Wurrung woman, Raquel Kerr, at La Larr Ba Gauwa Mountain Bike Park at Harcourt Victoria. Credit: DELWP

How will this project help manage our forests?

Traditional Owners are the custodians of valuable traditional knowledge about Victoria's forested ecosystems, a rich source of information that if captured and shared could greatly enhance the ecological sustainability of contemporary management practices.

This project provides an opportunity to commence a partnership approach to future forest management between DELWP and Traditional Owners that will enable cultural values to be appropriately recognised and protected at every stage in the forest management system from strategic planning through to on ground delivery.

More information

Future of our Forests
<https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests>

This series of fact sheets
<https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests/forest-values-assessment/forest-values-assessment-fact-sheets>

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