



GUNDITJ MIRRORING
Traditional Owners
Aboriginal Corporation



GUNDITJMARA VOICES: CARING FOR PAREEYT MIRRORING

A STRATEGIC PLAN 2025–2035





GUNDITJ MIRRORING

Traditional Owners
Aboriginal Corporation
RNTBC

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation acknowledges the contribution of Gunditjmara and Elders who generously shared their stories and knowledge in development of the Gunditjmara Pareeyt Mirring Management Strategy 2025-2035.

Citation

© Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC 2023

As permitted under the Copyright Act 1968,

No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission of the publisher.

Report prepared by Nicky Hudson and Erin O'Donnell.

Artwork by Jenna Bamblett

Graphic Design by Mazart Communications

Contact

248 Condah Estate Road, Gunditjmara Country, Breakaway Creek, VIC, 3304.

T: (03)5527 1427

W: www.gunditjmirring.com

E: reception@gunditjmirring.com

Artist



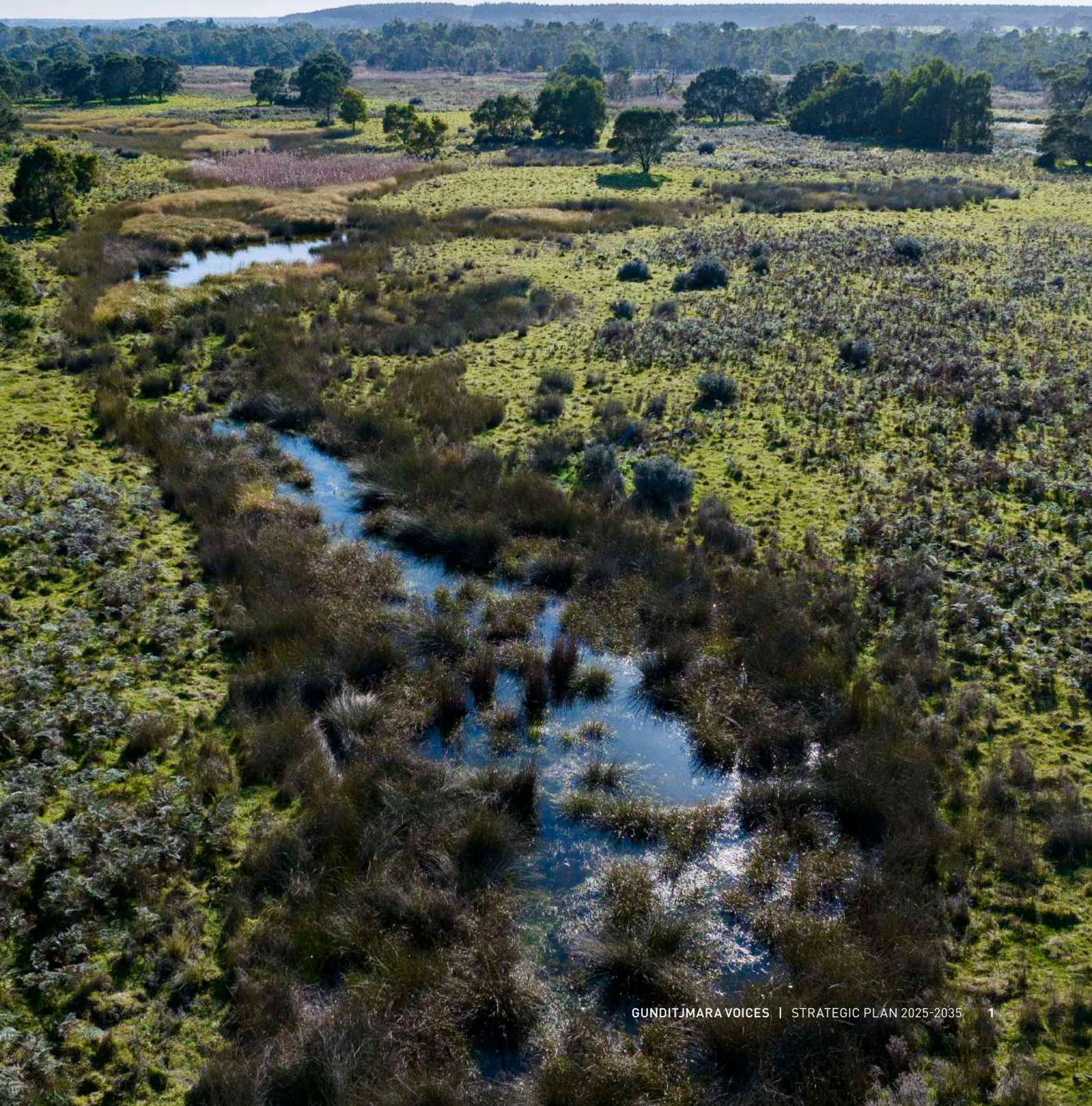
My Name is Jenna Bamblett. I am a proud Yigar Gunditjmara woman living in the Southwest of Victoria on Gunditjmara Country, with my partner Troy, son Tyrell and nephew Jakiah.

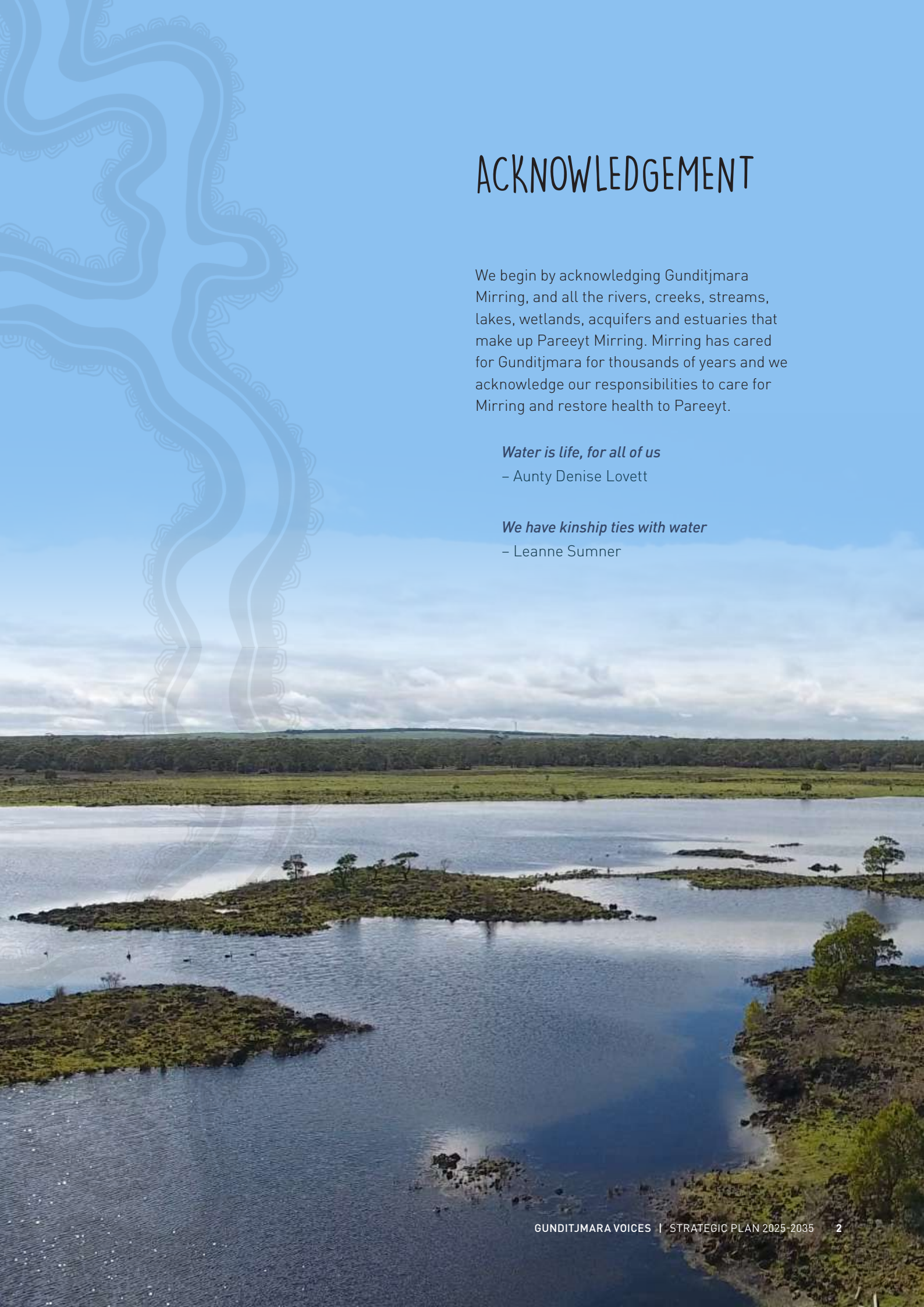
I have always had a great passion for my Culture and express that through my artwork. I believe that "sharing my passion and love for my Culture with our community ensures it stays alive and strong".



GUNDITJMARA VOICES: CARING FOR PAREEYT MIRRORING

A STRATEGIC PLAN 2025–2035





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We begin by acknowledging Gunditjmarra Mirring, and all the rivers, creeks, streams, lakes, wetlands, aquifers and estuaries that make up Pareeyt Mirring. Mirring has cared for Gunditjmarra for thousands of years and we acknowledge our responsibilities to care for Mirring and restore health to Pareeyt.

Water is life, for all of us

– Aunty Denise Lovett

We have kinship ties with water

– Leanne Sumner

We are Gunditjmara, the Traditional Owners of Mirring, and the descendants of the first Pareeyt movers in south-western Victoria. Our ancestors led the way for us, they are still here with us. Their ingenuity and engineering of Pareeyt movement across the landscape shows the complexity of our economy and lifestyle. We actively intervened in and managed the productivity of Pareeyt in harmony with the landscape. Gunditjmara have never ceded rights to Pareeyt, the Pareeyt owns us, the Pareeyt has never ceded its rights to us.

All Pareeyt is cultural Pareeyt

(Gunditjmara Nation Statement, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2022)

In this strategic plan, *Gunditjmara Voices: Caring for Pareeyt*, we assert our rights to be recognised as the rightful custodians of Pareeyt. We share the stories of our ongoing connection and obligations to Pareeyt, and we identify pathways to re-establish our authority as decision-makers for the health of Pareeyt.

Water is life for Gunditjmara Country and its people

– Uncle Denis Rose

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation also acknowledges the contributions that Gunditjmara mob have made to this plan. Many of you are quoted in the plan and there are also many who attended workshops and meetings and helped to shape the content and direction of this document.

Pareeyt poondee-teeyt.

CONTENTS

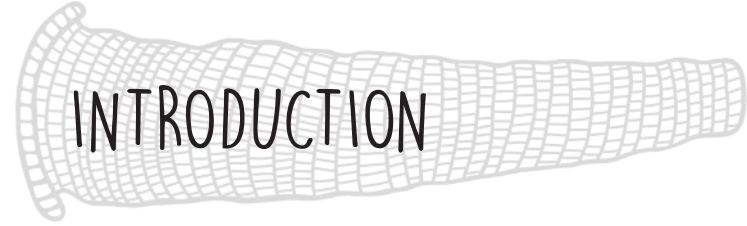
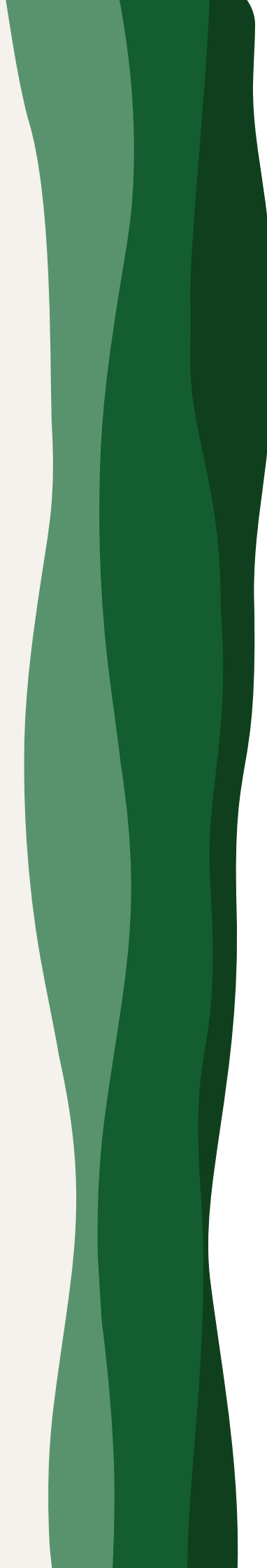
PART A: INTRODUCTION	07
Purpose and audience	08
Plan development	09
Background	10
 PART B: GUNDITJMARA PAREEYT	 13
A Living Cultural waterscape	14
Budj Bim	15
Gariwerd [Grampians]	16
Killara [Darlot's Creek]	16
Bochara [Glenelg River]	17
Lake Mombeong	17
Groundwater	17
Resistance, rights, and recognition	18
Our Concerns	19



PART C: CARING FOR PAREEYT: A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION	23
Overturn aqua nullius	25
Waterways as ancestral beings	26
Pareeyt: above and below ground	27
Wellbeing and pride	30
Food and technology	32
Protect and celebrate Pareeyt Mirring	33
 PART D: IMPLEMENTATION	 37
Investing in our Pareeyt leadership: GMTAC water team	38
Partnerships and education	40
 PART E: MONITORING AND EVALUATION	 45
Implementation outcomes and Actions	46
Caring for Pareeyt outcomes and actions	46
 REFERENCES	 53
 APPENDIX: GLOSSARY AND EXTERNAL PARTNERS	 54

PART A





INTRODUCTION

*The strategic water plan should give us
the toolbox of what we need for water
decision making*

– Aunty Denise Lovett

For over 60,000 years, Gunditjmara have had deep, strong and ongoing connection to Pareeyt Mirring. We have never ceded our sovereign responsibilities to care for Pareeyt. Our Gunditjmara Voices: Caring for Pareeyt Plan reflects our cultural obligation to heal Pareeyt. We assert this responsibility through our Ceremony, our Law/Lore, our Wurrung and our Relationships with Pareeyt Mirring.

In the Plan, we share our Pareeyt knowledge and the history of our resistance to the colonial invasion and theft of Pareeyt. This Plan outlines our concerns about the increasing pressure on Pareeyt and identifies goals, objectives and actions which provide a pathway for Gunditjmara to lead and contribute to the healing of Pareeyt. We identify what changes need to be made to enable us to fulfil our responsibilities to Mirring, including the restoration of our thriving cultural economies. We also identify the settler-colonial barriers that limit Gunditjmara power over decision-making and our ability to care for Pareeyt.

*If Gunditjmara Pareeyt is healthy,
Gunditjmara Mirring is healthy.
If Gunditjmara Mirring is healthy,
then Gunditjmara and their culture
will be healthy.*

(Gunditjmara Nation Statement in
Department of Environment, Land,
Water and Planning 2022)

PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

This Plan has been prepared by Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC) on behalf of the Gunditjmara community. The Plan provides a framework to guide our future actions, and the actions of those who partner with us in the care of Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring.

We hope that the Plan shows everyone what Pareeyt Mirring means to Gunditjmara, and how to develop respectful, beneficial partnerships, and work with us to heal Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring.

We will share this Plan with natural resource managers, researchers, local government, government agencies, industry and the wider community. We acknowledge that implementing

this Plan requires the commitment and support of the people, agencies and organisations that share our Mirring.

We are interested in people who are genuinely wanting to support these changes and ensuring that our land and waterways are ours and being protected by the way, in which we know how to do best

– Dana McDonald

We expect all organisations seeking to work with Gunditjmara or to work on Gunditjmara Mirring to be familiar with this Plan. However, reviewing this Plan is just a first step, and should be used to guide further engagement, consultation, and partnership with Gunditjmara. Please refer to the Appendix for a glossary of language terms and a list of key partnering organisations.



PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Gunditjmara have developed many documents that show our long-standing connection and obligation to Pareeyt (Bell and Johnston 2008; Brown et al. 2017; Gunditjmara Nation Statement in Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2022; GMTOAC 2022a; Gunditjmara People and Wettenhall 2010; Jackson 2023; Jordan 2012; Parks Victoria 2015; Weir 2009). This Plan draws from these existing documents, and reflects the long-standing knowledge and leadership of Gunditjmara in caring for Pareeyt.

Development of this Plan created opportunities to hear directly from Gunditjmara about Pareeyt. We have shared some of our stories and reflected on the people, places, events, landscapes, plants and animals of the Mirring

to which we are connected. We have thought deeply about how best to assert our rights and obligations for managing and healing Pareeyt Mirring.

In 2024, Gunditjmara who hold recognised authority to speak for Mirring were invited to participate in a series of in-person and online workshops and interviews. These conversations asked participants to identify the most important issues for Pareeyt and the threats and barriers to healing Pareeyt Mirring. With permission, many of the quotes used throughout this Plan are drawn from the voices of Gunditjmara who participated in these workshops and interviews. Gunditjmara community as well as staff at GMTOAC have also provided feedback on the draft plan, which was presented to them in a series of workshops.



The development of this plan has been led by GMTOAC, through a partnership with the University of Melbourne. All work has been undertaken in accordance with the GMTOAC Research Principles and Guidelines (GMTOAC 2022b) and University of Melbourne research ethics processes (project number 30540).

This Pareeyt Mirring Plan focuses on issues relating specifically to Pareeyt. We acknowledge that Pareeyt is part of Mirring and that for Gunditjmara, there is no separation of Pareeyt and Mirring. This Plan does not displace any of the more detailed existing plans for Indigenous Protected Areas or other parts of Gunditjmara Mirring.

Pareeyt must be acknowledged as the lifeblood of Mirring

(Gunditjmara Nation Statement in Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2022)

BACKGROUND

As Gunditjmara, we have an obligation to our people and to all people, to look after the water and land in a sustainable way. We are people that care for Country and have an obligation to make sure Country stays healthy and sustainable for all life

– Nicky Hudson

Through our perseverance, our relationship to our unceded Mirring has been formally recognised. In 2005, the Gunditjmara Traditional Owners Community established the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (GMTOAC). GMTOAC is a registered Native Title body corporate under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) and a

Registered Aboriginal party under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic). Through GMTOAC, Gunditjmara ensure that cultural obligations and responsibilities, which arise from Gunditjmara Mirring and Gunditjmara lore,¹ customs and beliefs, are upheld.

In 2007 and 2011, rights and interests of Gunditjmara people were recognised under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) Part A and Part B respectively. These determinations allow for the non-exclusive right to access, use, and take resources from Crown Land in these areas. Tae Rak [Lake Condah] was returned to Gunditjmara Traditional Owners in 2008 after successful native title consent, and in 2010 we reflooded Tae Rak (GMTOAC 2022a).

In 2015, the *Ngootyoong Gunditj Ngootyoong Mara South West Management Plan*, was developed by Parks Victoria (Parks Victoria 2015). This was the first time Parks Victoria had partnered with Gunditjmara on land management. It led to the development of the Budj Bim Council, and co-management of Budj Bim National Park. In 2019, Budj Bim Cultural Landscape was added to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage List and recognised as one of the oldest aquaculture sites in the world. In 2021, Parks Victoria developed the *Greater Gariwerd Management Plan* in partnership with GMTOAC, Barengi Gadjin Land Council and Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (Parks Victoria 2021).

In 2022, the Nyamat Mirring Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) was recognised by the Australian Government. This area encompasses the coastal section of our Native Title areas where fresh and salt Pareeyt meet and mingle. The IPA will be managed collaboratively to achieve social, cultural and economic outcomes for Gunditjmara, and in 2023, GMTOAC released the Nyamat Mirring Strategic Plan (Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation 2023).

¹ We use the term 'lore' here to distinguish it from the settler colonial 'law'. We acknowledge that Gunditjmara lore is a binding set of rules, principles and stories that keep us strong on Country.

Also in 2022, after several years of sustained advocacy, GMITOAC received for the first return of Pareeyt to Gunditjmara from the settler state. GMITOAC now holds a 2.5GL water licence in Killara. This water licence ensures that the Pareeyt remains in the river where it can continue to heal Mirring.

GMITOAC are thrilled by the [water allocation] announcement. By keeping this water within the river system, it means we can continue to care for Country just as our ancestors have for thousands of years

– Uncle Denis Rose

The long-held fight for Gunditjmara self-determination led to changes in state legislation, policy, and planning. The *Water Act 1989* (Vic) was amended in 2019 to require acknowledgement of Traditional Owner values and interests in water. In 2022, *Water is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap* (Department of Environment,

Land, Water and Planning 2022), acknowledged Traditional Owner groups' knowledge, rights and aspirations for water and supported development of Traditional Owner led plans such as this Plan. The forthcoming Victorian *Waterway Management Strategy*, and the related Regional Waterway Strategy (to be developed by Glenelg-Hopkins CMA) will also be pathways for the settler-colonial state to work with and support Gunditjmara as decision-makers with authority to care for water.

We also recognise that the Treaty process underway in Victoria may provide additional pathways for settler law reform. The Yoorrook Justice Commission has delivered evidence of ongoing theft of land and water across Gunditjmara Country. Gunditjmara have never ceded our sovereign rights to care for Pareeyt Mirring and we will carefully consider the opportunities that Treaty creates to have our rights fully recognised by the settler state.



PART B





GUNDITJMARA PAREEYT

Gunditjmara Country is bordered by rivers and the ocean. Country depends on the health of water

– Uncle Denis Rose

Gunditjmara Mirring covers an estimated area of 7,000 square kilometres and occupies the south-western corner of Victoria. It extends over an area of land bound by important cultural Pareeyt systems generally originating at Gariwerd (Grampians National Park) including:

- east of the Bochara (Glenelg River)
- west of the Hopkins River
- south of the Wannon River, and
- south-west of Mustons Creek.

In addition to these major waterways, Gunditjmara Mirring includes volcanic plains, dynamic coastlines, adjacent seas, limestone caves, a range of forest types and extensive wetland, rivers, creeks, and lake environments (Brown et al. 2017).

Gunditjmara Country is a living cultural landscape

– Gunditjmara staff workshop

Gunditjmara Pareeyt means all Pareeyt contained within Gunditjmara Mirring, including the connection to Nyamat and to the sky. The Milky Way is known as baarnk, the big river (Gunditjmara People and Wettenhall 2010). Mayaang (rain) that falls on Gunditjmara Mirring is cycled and is captured in areas like Gariwerd, which is a major source of Pareeyt, the life blood for Gunditjmara Mirring.

A LIVING CULTURAL WATERSCAPE

This Plan has been prepared by Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC) on behalf of the Gunditjmara community. The Plan provides a framework to guide our future actions, and the actions of those who partner with us in the care of Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring.

All water is one

– Gunditjmara community workshop

The overarching theme connecting stories about Pareeyt is that Gunditjmara Mirring is a 'living cultural landscape' (Gunditjmara staff workshop), and there are specific men's and women's knowledges, roles and responsibilities in caring for Pareeyt. Waterways form the borders of Gunditjmara Mirring, but they are also places of personal connection, with meeting and gathering places located where rivers meet.

We do have a lot to celebrate. We have our work that was done in relation to Budj Bim, the work that we're doing along Bochara. We need to protect it, and protect us, and ensuring that we get that equity and equality in that space. There's been a lot done without us

– Aunty Denise Lovett

We need to understand the irrigation extraction and water levels and water tables in Discovery Bay. We need solid evidence before we take a particular stand. I'm pretty sure I'm right that it's fairly clear that they can't recharge the water fast enough. Picaninny Ponds and some of those special places are starting to be affected

– Uncle Denis Rose



BUDJ BIM

Gunditjmara are a living community with continuous links to the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape, a place with at least 6000 years of cultural history told through the landscape and the stories of the people who still live there. Gunditjmara have customary rights and obligations to their traditional Mirring and a continuing and evolving relationship with the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape. The Budj Bim lava flows have enabled Gunditjmara to develop one of the largest and oldest freshwater aquaculture systems in the world. This system comprises channels, dams and weirs, which are used to contain floodwaters and create basins to trap, store and harvest kooyang [short-finned eel, *Anguilla australis*], providing the population with an economic and social base for six millennia. Despite historic interruption for much of the 20th century, the property retains its authenticity.

The Budj Bim Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site was inscribed in 2019 on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) World Heritage List for their Outstanding Universal Values.

The landscape includes the wetland swamps of Budj Bim Volcano, Tae Rak [Lake Condah] and Kurtonitj, and Tyrendarra in the south, an area of rocky ridges and large marshes.

We maintained control of the World Heritage process and weren't overrun by government

– Uncle Denis Rose

Within the UNSECO Budj Bim World Heritage Landscape there is extensive physical evidence of deliberate manipulation, modification and management of Pareeyt flow and ecosystems by Gunditjmara to intensify accessibility to food resources, specifically kooyang trapping and live storage (GMTOAC 2022a). Gunditjmara's connection to this aquaculture system and connection to Pareeyt resource manipulation began at least 6,600 years ago. It evolved into large-scale modification of local hydrological regimes to capture kooyang and artificially developed containment ponds to enhance their availability (Brown et al. 2017).



On behalf of Gunditjmara, GMTOAC continues this tradition by leading research and development that has both a cultural benefit and an economic independence outlook, including the recent development of a kooyang aquaculture enterprise and associated visitor experience at Tae Rak. This cultural economy is important for Gunditjmara.

In 2025, GMTOAC, on behalf of Gunditjmara, completed the purchase of the remaining land parcels comprising Tae Rak [Lake Condah]. Although Gunditjmara rights to the water in the lake are still not recognised by the settler colonial state, we now hold the land on which the lake rests.

GARIWERD [GRAMPIANS]

Gariwerd is a member of our family – like our grandmother, our mother, our sister, our daughter. This acknowledgement is important to us. This is not just park management to our people. This is the return of a stolen family member. This is why it is so important to decolonise the management of land, water, fire, wildlife and the place names of our bio-cultural landscapes. Our reunion with Gariwerd reaffirms our obligations to look after our family member, our Country

(Traditional Owner foreword,
Parks Victoria 2021:iii)

Gariwerd has always been an important source of Pareeyt, the 'life blood' for Gariwerd itself, as well as for the adjoining Countries of Gunditjmara and other Traditional Owners.

Pareeyt from the Gariwerd ranges supports the Gunditjmara aquaculture systems in the World Heritage listed Budj Bim Cultural Landscape. Most of Gariwerd [Grampians] National Park is a designated water supply catchment area in

settler colonial law, servicing many communities in the broader Grampians, Wimmera, Mallee and central areas of Victoria. The total amount of Pareeyt harvested and stored by settler colonial reservoirs in Gariwerd is just over 452,000 megalitres when all major reservoirs are full.

The water supply infrastructure, including lakes, reservoirs, other artificial water bodies, pipes, pumps and channels, has impacted on Traditional Owner cultural values through transforming wetlands into reservoirs. The restoration of water flows, wetlands and water-dependent ecosystems within Gariwerd is critical to the health and healing of Mirring.

KILLARA [DARLOT'S CREEK]

Killara [Darlot's Creek] is a permanent source of water flowing through Gunditjmara Mirring. Killara, the traditional name for this creek, means 'always there': historically, there is always water to sustain kooyang and other aquatic resources. In doing so, Killara and its Pareeyt supported permanent settlements of Gunditjmara and our intensive aquaculture engineering works. This connection and care for Mirring is further enhanced by the recent water allocation of 2.5 gigalitres of winterfill water returned to Gunditjmara from Killara.

We are here because of the water
– Gunditjmara staff workshop

Killara continues to be a place of permanent Pareeyt, where the water ribbon ripples beneath the clear flowing waters. However, changes to the way Pareeyt moves through Mirring, including weirs and drainage, is leading to a 'build up of silt in Killara' and 'increased flooding impacts' (Aunty Eileen Alberts), both of which threaten Killara.

BOCHARA ESTUARY AND DISCOVERY BAY RAMSAR SITE

The Bochara [Glenelg] Estuary and Discovery Bay region is recognised internationally as a Ramsar wetland of significance. This is a rich area of highly interconnected salt and freshwater systems, both above and below ground, as aquifers feed wetlands and soaks and support river flows. Although the official boundaries of the Ramsar site end at the colonially imposed border with South Australia (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2017), the entire region is significant to Gunditjmara and neighbouring Traditional Owners. The freshwater systems running parallel with the salt water created many resources valued by Gunditjmara.

During the big dry season, clan groups would travel to this area to be provided with fresh and salt water foods

– Auntie Judy McDonald

In the Nyamat Mirring Plan, Gunditjmara assert their rights to manage Discovery Bay Coastal Park and its surrounding waters, and are seeking additional resourcing to enable this to occur (recommendation R1.4, Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation 2023). Currently, GHCA is the settler colonial manager of this important region. GMT/OAC, on behalf of Gunditjmara, are members of the committee of management, which focuses on managing threats to the ecological character of the Ramsar site, including weeds and pest species like wild pigs. The area is also under increasing threat from recreational 4WDs, and vehicle use associated with the commercial and recreational pipi fishery, which directly affects Gunditjmara access to and protection of a traditional food source. The impacts of land use change, water drainage, water extraction, and changes to water flows are also affecting the health of the interconnected fresh and salt water systems.

LAKE MOMBEONG

Lake Mombeong, nestled in the dunes behind Discovery Bay, is an important source of fresh water and food for Gunditjmara. The area has significant cultural heritage, with middens and other evidence of ongoing occupation surrounding the lake.

GROUNDWATER

Water is the veins that runs through Country - without free-flowing water, life stops

– Tya Lovett

Pareeyt flows above and below ground. In aquifers, Pareeyt can carve out extensive underground cave systems, as well as moving through soil and rock to return to the surface, supporting surface flows in rivers and creeks during dry periods. Underground Pareeyt supports wetlands and springs that have sustained Gunditjmara for thousands of years.

Underground Pareeyt is under threat. Increased extraction of this Pareeyt by irrigators and tree plantations is causing groundwater levels to drop. This means that groundwater may not be able to maintain its connections to wetlands and springs.

RESISTANCE, RIGHTS, AND RECOGNITION

We had that decision-making authority and capacity, and it was taken from us and not recognised

– Aunty Denise Lovett

We are Gunditjmara, and we have never ceded our rights to Mirring and Pareeyt. All Gunditjmara have a responsibility to ensure that Gunditjmara Mirring and Pareeyt is cared for and protected.

We have responsibility to care for our Pareeyt heritage and ensure it is never forgotten. There are massacre sites near waterways, including for example Konong Wootong Reservoir, the site of the Fighting Waterholes massacre, which led to the death of at least 40 Jardwadjali Aboriginal people of the Konongwootong Gundidj clan.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Gunditjmara, led by Aunty Christina Saunders (Frankland) and Aunty Sandra Onus, fought for the protection of Gunditjmara cultural heritage, specifically at the construction site of the Portland Aluminium Smelter. After being appealed through all Victorian state judicial systems, in 1981, the High Court of Australia in the Onus vs Alcoa of Australia Ltd case, recognised the ongoing, strong, and specific responsibilities of Gunditjmara, and the First Peoples of Australia more generally, to protect and care for our cultural heritage.

The Commonwealth of Australia responded to the decision with the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act* (1984), and the *Aboriginal Land (Lake Condah and Framlingham Forest) Act* (1987), which returned the Lake Condah lands to Kerrup-Jmara Elders Aboriginal Corporation.

The significance of the return of Tae Rak [Lake Condah] cannot be over-estimated. It included the former Mission area, and the lake, creeks, rivers and wetlands that are now recognised to have World Heritage significance for their ancient engineering and building structures and aquaculture infrastructure (Brown et al. 2017).

It took 11 years for the Gunditjmara and the Victorian government to reach agreement on native title. A native title consent determination was finally agreed to on 30 March 2007 recognising that Gunditjmara had maintained a traditional connection to their land and waters. In total, native title was recognised across 2000 parcels of vacant Crown land, national parks, reserves, rivers, creeks and sea, equating to 140,000 hectares or 1,400 square kilometres in land area. The rights include:

- The right to have access to or enter and remain on the land and **waters**
- The right to camp on land and **waters** landward of the high-water mark of the sea
- The right to use and enjoy the land and **waters**
- The right to take the resources of land and **waters**, and
- The right to protect places and areas of importance on the land and **waters**.

All these rights are subject to the lore and laws of the Gunditjmara. This highlights the importance of cultural Pareeyt to Gunditjmara. In 2022, 2.5 gigalitres of water every year was formally returned by the state of Victoria to Gunditjmara. GMTOAC now holds a 2.5GL water licence in Killara, which could enable GMTOAC to extract water from the river if desired during the wetter winter months, to support cultural economies. This water is currently helping to heal Mirring by keeping the river flowing, and the licence is helping to keep Pareeyt on Mirring for the benefit of all.

OUR CONCERNS

The health of Mirring depends on the health of the people who care for it. Caring for Mirring requires our laws to be recognised so that we can give effect to our responsibilities to care for Mirring.

Stolen lands, stolen waters and stolen authority too

– Evon (McDonald) Barker

As a result of the frontier wars, the massacres, and the removal of people from Mirring, Gunditjmara have been dispossessed of their inherent rights to Pareeyt. This is aqua nullius, the Pareeyt equivalent of terra nullius, the erroneous and unjust assumption that the land belonged to no one when the British invaders arrived (Marshall 2017).

The legal fiction of aqua nullius

– Walter Saunders

In 2022, the Victorian Government acknowledged the reality of aqua nullius (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2022), but this theft of Pareeyt and authority has never been addressed.

There's no compensation for our loss... and because they're not giving compensation, there's no recognition that it was wrong. So everything just carries on regardless – Walter Saunders

The illegitimate foundation of aqua nullius can only be annulled when the settler colonial state recognises Gunditjmara self-determination and enables us to develop and lead our own transformative approaches to care for Pareeyt.

We've been absent from that decision-making

– Aunty Denise Lovett

We see the theft of land and water as the heart of the problem. However, there are also other threats to the values of Pareeyt Mirring: extraction of water and water drainage to support agriculture and industry, pollution from agriculture and recreation, pest plants and animals, and the risks of climate change (Table 1). Healthy Pareeyt requires us to address all of these threats, and to do so by increasing our involvement in planning, decision-making, and the care of Mirring.



TABLE 1 THREATS TO THE HEALTH OF GUNDITJMARA PAREEYT

CAUSE	THREAT	IMPACT
Stolen land and water	Gunditjmara community can't access, protect, or care for waterways on private land	- Gunditjmara are unable to fulfil cultural obligations to care for Mirring - Cultural heritage is not adequately protected
	Gunditjmara rights and interests not widely acknowledged or understood	- Decision-making does not reflect Gunditjmara priorities and values - Gunditjmara leadership, laws and knowledge not valued - Care of land and water does not incorporate cultural practices
Agriculture and industry	Over-extraction of surface and groundwater for irrigation and industry	- Loss of in-stream habitat for important species (freshwater mussels, spiny cray, and kooyang) - Lower water levels in springs and underground cave systems - Poor water quality in rivers and aquifers where too much water is extracted - Loss of cultural flows - Water is extracted and moved away from Mirring (Wimmera Mallee Pipeline) - Inadequate water to support Gunditjmara aquaculture and economic development
	Drainage of water away from Mirring	- Mirring is not getting the water it needs - Physical impacts of infrastructure (drains and levees) - Inadequate water to support Gunditjmara aquaculture and economic development - Unnatural opening of river mouths (to alleviate farm flooding) causes fish deaths and destruction of habitat - Loss of wetlands and breeding habitats for broilgas, magpie geese, and other culturally significant species
	Physical damage to waterways from stock access	- Loss of native vegetation - Increased bank erosion - Increased sediment from trampling reduces water quality - Increased nutrient and other pollutants from stock reduces water quality - Impacts to cultural heritage
	Cropping	Fertiliser and pesticide run-off impacts water quality
	Tree plantations affecting water quality and water quantity	- Lower groundwater levels - Fertiliser run-off and pollen from trees reduce water quality and affects our culturally significant species
	Commercial fishing	Potential impacts to kooyang and other special species (pipis, abalone)

CAUSE	THREAT	IMPACT
Land use change	Land clearing for towns, agriculture and other industry	• Impact to cultural heritage sites • Continuation of land theft, which is not recognised or returned to Traditional Owners of Mirring • Poor water quality (agricultural run-off, industrial pollution, stormwater from towns)
	Weed spraying along riverbanks	• Committee of management spraying along river banks results in pollution entering the river and the riparian vegetation
Pest plants and animals	Pest animals	• Introduced fish (redfin, tench, mosquito fish, carp) compete with and directly threaten native species • Feral pigs dig up wetland systems, damaging habitat and cultural heritage sites, including eel traps • Rabbits increase erosion and reduce native vegetation along waterways
	Pest plants	• Willows choke water systems, reducing habitat and water flows
Recreation	Fishing	• Stocked fish (Murray Cod) compete with endemic species • Pollution (fishing line, bait, plastic bags)
	Camping	• Illegal dumping of caravan toilets
Climate change	Changed water flows	• Increased frequency and intensity of droughts impact health of waterways and wetlands • Increased frequency and intensity of flooding can increase bank erosion
	Increased hot dry weather	• Increased risk of large wildfires that can destroy habitat, cultural heritage and impact water quality • Increased water temperatures can reduce water quality



PART C





CARING FOR PAREEYT: A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION



*Country tells us what it needs,
and we manage Country in the way
Country tells us*

– Nicky Hudson

Gunditjmara have cared for and managed Pareeyt for many millennia. We are the descendants of the first engineers and water scientists, and we know how to build thriving cultural economies that support healthy Mirring and healthy People.

This Plan identifies specific outcomes and activities to restore health to Pareeyt and to Gunditjmara. This will be achieved in accordance with these guiding principles:

- Mirring, identity, and culture are connected
- Pareeyt is part of a living cultural land and waterscape
- All water is one
- Our cultural autonomy and cultural law are respected
- Nothing is more important than anything else, including people
- Climate change requires urgent action to require Pareeyt systems across Mirring

Mirring, identity, and culture are connected

Caring for Mirring is a cultural responsibility, and an expression of Gunditjmara culture and identity.

Connection to Country, connection to identity, connection to culture (which is a protective factor for all of us) equals resilience

– Aunty Judy McDonald

Pareeyt is part of a living cultural land and waterscape

All Pareeyt is cultural Pareeyt and will be cared for holistically as part of a living cultural landscape. Water, fire, land, and sea are all connected.

Everything is interconnected. The branch, the stone, the waterway – they're just as important as the people. If we change something, it might be that blockage that stops the eels from coming through. We have to care for everything

– Leanne Sumner

All water is one

Surface water and groundwater are cared for holistically. Water quality and water quantity are managed together.

Water is the veins that runs through Country. Without free-flowing water, life stops

– Gunditjmara community workshop

Our cultural autonomy and cultural law are respected

Gunditjmara have the recognised rights and authority to care for Pareeyt in accordance with our laws.

We're asserting our rights

– Walter Saunders

Nothing is more important than anything else, including people

We are in a reciprocal relationship with Pareeyt. We care for Pareeyt and Pareeyt cares for us. We are kin.

We say we speak for Country because we say we come from Country, there's an equal level that we are with Country, we don't put ourselves above it or before it, we're the same as all things that live on Country

– Aunty Denise Lovett

Climate change requires urgent action to require Pareeyt systems across Mirring

Gunditjmara acknowledge climate change and believe that keeping Pareeyt healthy and restoring Pareeyt systems across Mirring must be a priority to combat this.

Climate change is real ... It's going to come fast and furious at us, that's the scary thing. We do have the confidence that we have adapted to it, but that was at a time when we didn't have so many pressures on us. The pressures that are on us today, for the last 200 years, they weren't even a consideration back then. We need to be in the decision-making space as First Nations

– Aunty Denise Lovett

OVERTURN AQUA NULLIUS

Gunditjmara waterways for Gunditjmara people are essential for us as a Nation

– Jakobe Walker

We need to develop the cultural law around water

– Aunty Denise Lovett

How do we apply our cultural needs and our cultural practices to that framework which is just so alien?

– Alan Johnson

Gunditjmara have never ceded their rights to Pareeyt. The only way that Traditional Owners can achieve true water justice is to address the untruth of aqua nullius, which is embedded in Australian water legislation.

Our law is ignored, dismissed and disregarded. It's referred to as folk lore and not real law

– Aunty Denise Lovett

Specifically, in Victoria, the foundation of First Peoples' water dispossession is signified in section 7(1) of the Water Act (1989), which states that the Crown has the right to use, flow and control of all water in a waterway and all groundwater. This law must be changed so that the settler colonial state recognises Gunditjmara inherent and uncaded sovereign authority to make decisions for Pareeyt (Table 2). Only then can Gunditjmara re-activate our own water laws.

We recognise that this process would be lengthy and complicated. We understand that many people living and working on Gunditjmara Mirring rely on settler water rights to support their livelihoods. We seek recognition of our sovereign authority, but we also acknowledge that we would need to honour existing water licensing arrangements for the duration of the existing water licences.

TABLE 2 OVERTURN AQUA NULLIUS OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

OUTCOME	ACTION	EXTERNAL PARTNERS
Gunditjmara sovereign authority to care for and make decisions about Pareeyt is acknowledged by the settler state as law	On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTTOAC will engage in law reform processes to change settler state laws to re-unite water and land and recognise Gunditjmara authority	DEECA
	Re-activate Gunditjmara water laws to heal Pareeyt and respond to climate change and other threats	DEECA, SRW

WATERWAYS AS ANCESTRAL BEINGS

Our waters are living... the aquifers are just as important to us as the wetlands, which are just as important as the rivers
– Walter Saunders

Waterways are part of songlines and stories. Many Pareeyt landscapes are ancestral entities in themselves and Gunditjmara have an obligation to care for these spiritual and cultural beings – this is not negotiable. Although Pareeyt is part of cultural economies, Pareeyt is not a commodity to Gunditjmara. When water falls on Mirring, it is Mirring’s Pareeyt, that is where it belongs.

Gunditjmara consider Gunditjmara Mirring as the decision-maker. Gunditjmara Mirring should be recognised and appropriately empowered and resourced as a water decision-maker (Table 3).

GMTOAC will hold the Victorian Government to account for its commitment to pass legislation recognising all waterways in Victoria as living entities, with Traditional Owners as a unique voice for these living entities (Targeted outcome 1, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2022).

TABLE 3 WATERWAYS AS ANCESTRAL BEINGS OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

OUTCOME	ACTION	EXTERNAL PARTNERS
Settler colonial laws are amended to acknowledge all waterways as living entities	On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will engage in law reform processes to recognise waterways as living entities (<i>Water is Life</i> outcome 1)	DEECA
Settler colonial laws that acknowledge Gariwerd’s special status as an ancestral being and a decision-maker in Gunditjmara law	On behalf of Gunditjmaara community, GMTOAC will establish partnerships with other Traditional Owners and Parks Victoria to propose new legislation to recognise Gariwerd as an ancestral being with a right to life, with Traditional Owners as the voice of Gariwerd with a decision-making role in management of Pareeyt	BGLC, EMAC, PV, DEECA, GWMW, SRW, WW
Gunditjmara community are able to act as a unique voice of living waterways in a way consistent with their obligations to care for and listen to Pareeyt	On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will lead a partnership with GHCA and DEECA to develop a Living Entity Action Plan that will identify which waterways should be classified as living entities, and how GMTOAC will be funded to act as a voice for these living entities	GHCA, DEECA

PAREEYT: ABOVE AND BELOW GROUND

Gunditjmara have managed Pareeyt sustainably, as part of thriving cultural economies, for tens of thousands of years. We understand the connections between Pareeyt that falls on Mirring, flows across Mirring in our rivers, and enters the underground caverns and karsts, before sometimes returning to the surface again as springs and wetlands. Cultural flows have supported eel aquaculture in the Budj Bim fish traps, an essential cultural economy for Gunditjmara. Cultural flows also maintain the health of burial trees and other significant cultural sites. The ability to hold and use water is part of Gunditjmara self-determination.

Water is not only important to our people for cultural values but contain values that paints a picture for the whole ecosystem. Proper management of water that states Gunditjmara native title holders are the true owners of water, and not aqua nullius, is crucial so that every waterbody is cared for

– Jakobe Walker

Across Victoria, Traditional Owners hold less than 0.2% of all water licences and water entitlements. Most of the available Pareeyt in Gunditjmara Mirring has already been given away to irrigators, industry, and towns. Although Gunditjmara holds freehold land, we do not own the water licences for the water that flows across this land.

Cultural economies are important for self-determination

– Keicha Day

There are some water systems with unallocated Pareeyt, which should be returned to Gunditjmara. Gunditjmara has successfully applied for a water licence, and is applying for others. This Pareeyt will be used by Gunditjmara to heal Mirring and to support cultural economies (Table 4). Under Victorian Government policy, Gunditjmara will not pay fees on water licences that are used for cultural purposes, including cultural economies, unless it is a 'purely commercial' use of water (*Water is Life*, Targeted Outcomes 9 and 10).

What do we currently know, and what is missing?

– Tya Lovett

We need to know the history of it

– Aunty Denise Lovett

We don't know enough about where Pareeyt has been allocated to other users, and what they are allowed to use this Pareeyt for. We will work with our partners to undertake mapping of all water entitlements and water use at the basin and sub-basin scale (for rivers and aquifers) on Gunditjmara Mirring. This mapping will also include trends of water extraction, river flows, and groundwater levels, so that we can understand how Pareeyt has been impacted over time (Table 4).

Healthy Pareeyt depends on healthy Mirring, as well as rebuilding strong connections between land and water. Gunditjmara have a cultural responsibility to heal and care for Mirring, including Pareeyt.

Healthy waterways will allow for healthy species. Healthy waterways and healthy veg go hand in hand

– Aunty Judy McDonald

The health of Pareeyt varies enormously across Gunditjmara Mirring. In some rivers, water quality remains high, and this should be celebrated and protected. Mapping the health of Pareeyt will help us to understand where water quality remains high and how we can keep protecting it (Table 4).

We're so fortunate in water quality, in Bochara, in Darlot's, the quality that has continued. Mob speak about it always being clear and the best drinking water. The historic documents, it's written in that. How do we not impact on that, how do we act as the guardians to protect that, as all peoples should? To have it still in the state that it is quite amazing – there's not much that is not left untouched or unimpacted by colonisation

– Aunty Denise Lovett

We have unique water quality, carried by the volcanic rock. Overall, our water is a lot more pure and sweet than other parts of Victoria

– Leanne Sumner

To keep Gunditjmara Pareeyt healthy and reduce the impacts of climate change, Gunditjmara must have the capacity to lead through an

exchange of cultural values and management principles. The knowledge and practices of Gunditjmara, scientists, communities, land managers and research partners inform sound management. This is what forms the basis for developing clear, long-term Pareeyt management strategies and priorities that together, can respond to climate change. We will develop partnership agreements with GHCM and the water authorities that will enable joint management of Pareeyt Mirring.

Planning and management of Pareeyt is currently fragmented as water and land are managed separately under settler state laws. Fragmentation of Pareeyt from Mirring, with associated management changes across land and water tenure, does not reflect our holistic view of Mirring. Approaches are not consistent across governments levels nor industry. Therefore, our participation requires additional capacity and resources from Traditional Owners and often effectively limits our contribution.

As part of mapping the health of Pareeyt, we will identify areas that we should be targeting for land purchase, as well as areas where flooding can be reinstated, such as land near the Mission and at Tae Rak (Table 4). We will seek to partner with other landholders where land cannot be purchased.

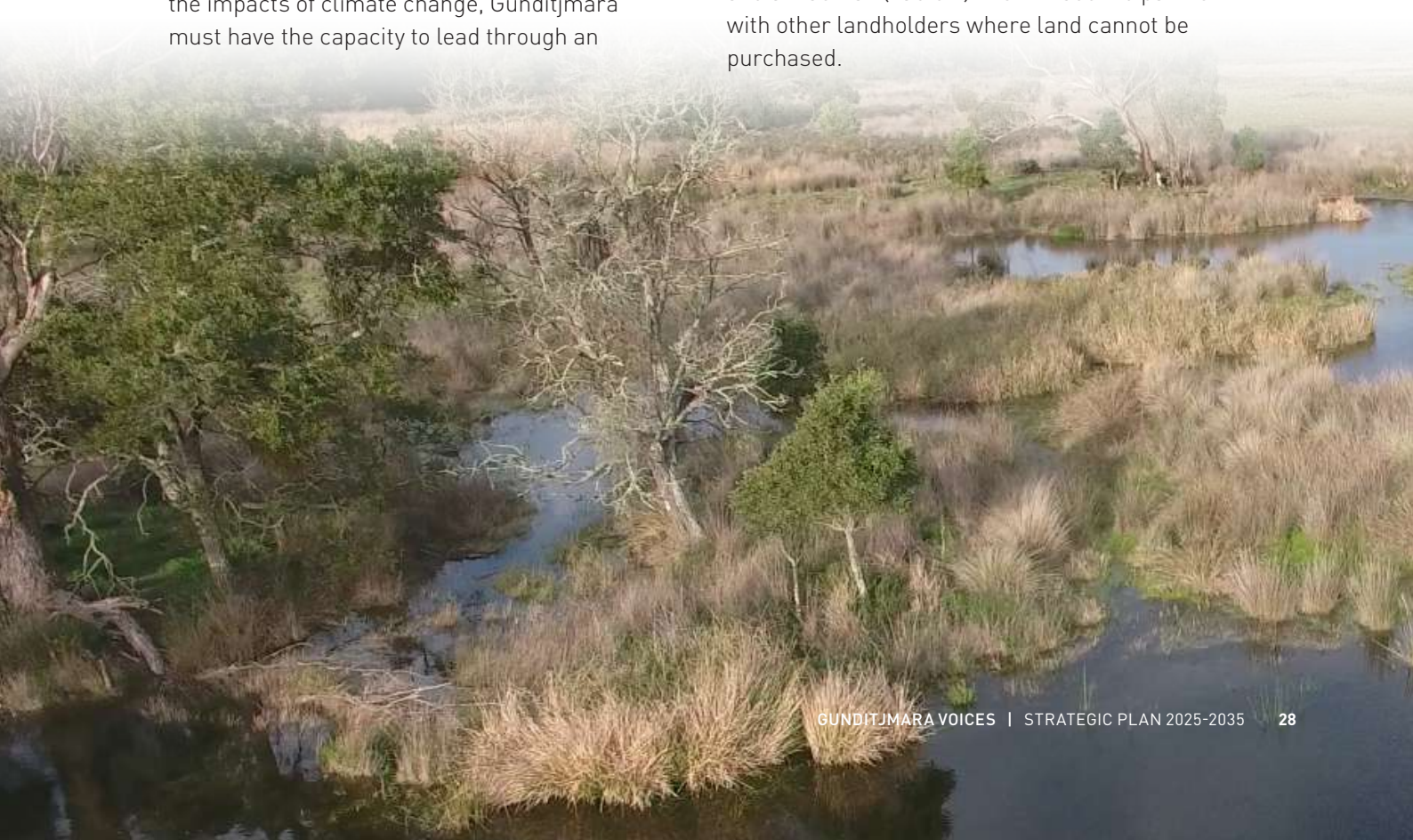


TABLE 4 PAREEYT ABOVE AND BELOW GROUND OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

OUTCOME	ACTION	EXTERNAL PARTNERS
All unallocated Pareeyt is returned to Gunditjmara, for cultural use, including cultural economies	Confirm extent and location of unallocated Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring (existing data)	SRW
	On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will submit water licence applications to Southern Rural Water (SRW) for all unallocated Pareeyt (above and below ground)	SRW
	On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will work with DEECA to develop culturally appropriate water entitlements that permanently recognise Gunditjmara water rights	DEECA
We understand the way other people use Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring	Map water usage at basin and sub-basin scale for rivers and aquifers including licenced and non-licenced uses (existing data)	SRW DEECA
	Review existing water usage to assess sustainability in the context of climate change (existing government analysis)	SRW DEECA
	Report on annual water usage each year (existing data)	SRW
We understand the health of Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring	Map waterway health (including water quality, vegetation, geomorphology) at basin and sub-basin scale	GHCMA, DEECA, private landholders
	Priorities for future land purchase or flooding opportunities are identified	GHCMA, MSC, GSC, private landholders
Gunditjmara have the authority and access to Pareeyt they need to protect and care for Pareeyt	Increase fencing to keep stock out of rivers and revegetate riparian zones through existing legal mechanisms (Crown land licences) and partnerships with private land holders	GHCMA, DEECA, private landholders
	On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC to develop partnership agreements with water authorities and CMAs that share power to make decisions about the health of Pareeyt	GHCMA, SRW, WW, GWMW

WELLBEING AND PRIDE

When our waterways and lands are clean and healthy, we can be clean and healthy

– Dana McDonald

Time spent on Mirring is an important source of wellbeing and pride for Gunditjmara. We need to celebrate and share our stories, so that our young people learn from our Elders, and grow up strong in our knowledge and culture.

Watching water ribbon moving in the clear water of Killara is therapeutic

– Gunditjmara community member

The distinctive cultural aspects of our Elders are so unique and so different to anywhere else in the world. Getting to listen to their stories and their perspectives and their thoughts about the world... They had the most incredible stories. A lot of those Elders are getting to that age, if we can capture those stories now, if they can share their wisdom, they can teach the next generation

– Leanne Sumner

Despite past policies of dispossession and assimilation, the strength and resilience of Gunditjmara has preserved cultural practices and languages which continue to be practiced and passed on to future generations. Use of Wurrung strengthens our connection to Mirring and our community. Restoring Wurrung by increasing the visibility and use of Wurrung on Mirring will facilitate this connection (Table 5).



TABLE 5 WELLBEING AND PRIDE OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

OUTCOME	ACTION	EXTERNAL PARTNERS
Gunditjmara preserve, promote and practice language	GMTOAC to identify opportunities to access previous recordings of Elders from native title and other archival sources about Pareeyt and make this more widely available where appropriate	Native Title Services
	Ensure signs and landscape features relating to Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring feature Wurrung	MSC, GSC
	Change or add Dhaurwurd Wurrung names to Pareeyt (waterways, wetlands, lakes, springs)	Geographic Names Victoria
	Develop Gunditjmara dictionary and language resources relating to Pareeyt	



FOOD AND TECHNOLOGY

We are the descendants of the first water movers, we've created the channels

– Aunty Denise Lovett

Gunditjmara cultural traditions, knowledge, and practices, demonstrate an ongoing and exceptional interrelationship with our natural environment. This is expressed through oral traditions, dance, landscape management methods such as cultural burning, and resource utilisation, such as basket weaving and rock building. This includes yereoc, weirs (stone and wood), dams, ponds and sinkholes developed to manage water and water flows to systematically trap, store and harvest kooyang. We developed the science and technology to support thriving cultural economies based on aquaculture.

We are the people of innovation and deep knowledge, guided by thousands of years of science, observation, and connection to Country. We developed sophisticated systems to sustainably harvest eels — eels that journey across the world's oceans, returning home to our waters. Our ancestors worked in harmony with the environment, engineering intricate stone aquaculture systems to guide, catch, and care for these eels. We live by cultural principles of balance and respect: we only ever take a third, leaving the rest to regenerate and support future generations. We did this together, with care, wisdom and without greed — always putting Country and community first

– Leanne Sumner

TABLE 6 FOOD AND TECHNOLOGY OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

OUTCOME	ACTION	EXTERNAL PARTNERS
Gunditjmara community can build their skills and knowledge in aquaculture and bushfoods	Re-start the kooyang aquaculture facility to grow more kooyang, with half going to Gunditjmara community as bush tucker and half being sold to the café at Tae Rak, including improving knowledge on climate change impacts on eel populations	PV, DCCEEW, Deakin University
	Develop and expand other bush food production and knowledge sharing relating to Pareeyt	
	Continue to advocate for GMTTOAC to obtain and hold a commercial eel harvesting licence on behalf of Gunditjmara to support cultural economies	FV, DEECA

The restoration of Tae Rak and the ongoing work to reinstate kooyang aquaculture shows how this know-how can be recovered and re-invigorated to support us once again (Table 6). We will continue to reactivate knowledge of bush foods and increase their production on our properties.

When the place is chockablock with water, there's fish and eels in the shallow areas right there for the picking. That great food resource is there, it allowed to our mob to spend more time on the other parts of life – spiritual, education, passing on the knowledge, modifying the natural environment

– Uncle Denis Rose

Gunditjmara have always maintained that we need to have access to kooyang as a resource for cultural economies and self-determination. We have tried for a very long time to obtain a commercial harvesting licence, but this has been denied by the settler state. We will continue to seek to hold this licence as a means to both access our cultural economic resources and play a role in caring for kooyang. We will hold the settler state accountable for their role in denying us access to this cultural economy.

PROTECT AND CELEBRATE PAREEYT MIRRORING

We do have a lot to celebrate. We have our work that was done in relation to Budj Bim, the work that we're doing along Bochara. We need to protect it, and protect us, and ensuring that we get that equity and equality in that space

– Auntie Denise Lovett

Gunditjmara community have fought hard to protect many special places on Gunditjmara Mirring, including Budj Bim, Tae Rak, Bochara, Yambuk, Killara and the Mission. There is a lot for us to be proud of, even when there is more work to be done (Table 7).

The weir was a big project, a very important one, it's great that we've got water in the lake year-round, even if it's not to the traditional height, even in the drier of times, to drive down and look at the lake is fantastic

– Uncle Denis Rose

Returning the Pareeyt to Mirring, and taking back some authority to care for Pareeyt through the construction of the weir and the return of the water licence in Killara, are important wins.

It says something about just getting that water back in, it's not just the cultural heritage, it's about species, ourselves as well, that pride in returning partially restoring Country

– Uncle Denis Rose

We use water spaces in ceremony, including Convincing Ground and smaller sites, such as the burial trees adjacent to the Wannon River, which tell a story of how we cared for our ancestors and protected their bodies from rising floodwaters. We have always had access to waterways and water places for ceremony and culture. Gunditjmara connection to Mirring and each other is strengthened through Ceremony and events. These can be Ceremonies for life events (funerals, burials, births, marriages, rites of passage); Ceremonies for Mirring (seasons festivals; NAIDOC week, World Heritage listing); and ceremonies for healing (Convincing Ground, Gunditjmara Invasion Day). Events such as family gatherings, clan gatherings and sports days further connect

Gunditjmara to each other and to Mirring. Gunditjmara Elders and families need access to Mirring for these events and Ceremonies which are critical for intergenerational knowledge sharing and cultural practice. Under Native title, Gunditjmara have the right to access public land. Exercising our right requires us to repeatedly prove our status as custodians of this land. Asking permission, disempowers our people, particularly our young people, and discourages regular gatherings of families, clans and elders for Ceremony or social events.

We need access to land to create our own space for healing, for grieving, and for sharing knowledge (Table 7).

I'd really love to see a grieving garden... a healing garden. A space where we remember — not to dwell in sadness, but to honour the strength and learning of those who came before us. Let it be a place of truth, where the hard stories are shared, and the deep pain is acknowledged. But also a place full of hope, full of positive stories — a space where healing begins. Because if our kids, our teenagers, could hear what our old people went through and how they survived — maybe it would give them strength too. We've all had times when it's hard to keep going. But imagine walking through a garden where our Elders speak, learning to walk in their steps — through stories, through symbols — reminding us: You come from strong people. We survived. And you can too

– Leanne Sumner

Is there an area that could be identified as a sanctuary to re-connect with Country? A place to sit and take it all in

– Levi Lovett

We don't celebrate our ancestors enough. We acknowledge them, and try to preserve the Country, but we need more space to celebrate those who are gone

– Nicky Hudson

We will create a healing sanctuary that celebrates healthy Pareeyt Mirring and our spiritual connection to it. Our River Rangers will be responsible for ongoing work to maintain the health of this place to improve the health of Pareeyt and the native plants and animals, including bush medicine, that depend on it. We will develop ways to enable Gunditjmara community access whilst still controlling access for the wider public.

We will seek to expand our care and protection of special places by extending cultural heritage mapping to identify other important sites along all waterways, including tributaries on private land (Table 7).

Water tributaries need to be recognised as part of the waterway and as areas of sensitivity. Cultural values are being destroyed because tributaries are not recognised

– Tya Lovett

By undertaking proactive cultural heritage mapping, we will be able to work more effectively with private land holders, public land managers, and government agencies that approve development activities to better protect cultural heritage.

We could get some procedures in place with the CMA to ensure conversations about works on waterways permits happen earlier. The process doesn't pick up on intangible aspects

– Levi Lovett

Rather than waiting for the damage to be done, prepare

– Nicky Hudson

TABLE 7 PROTECT AND CELEBRATE PAREEYT MIRRORING OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

OUTCOME	ACTION	EXTERNAL PARTNERS
Every success in healing Pareeyt and restoring authority to Gunditjmara is celebrated and continued	On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will continue to seek funding and develop partnerships to care for Pareeyt Mirring to protect existing special places	DEECA, GHGMA, PV, DCCEEW
Country management plans (Greater Gariwerd management plans and IPA management plans, all existing land and future land purchases) are fully funded and implemented	GMTOAC will apply for funding to fully implement Gunditjmara Country plans and other works for caring for Country	PV, DCCEEW, DEECA
Pareeyt Mirring outside existing protected areas is known and cared for	GMTOAC will work with Gunditjmara community to identify priority waterscapes that need additional protection	
Increase access to Country for Gunditjmara community	Develop agreements to access land and water with other landholders	PV, GHGMA, DEECA, Private landholders
	Improve access at Tae Rak (and other Gunditjmara properties) to support community access and utilisation of Pareeyt for cultural activities	
	On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will seek funding to conduct proactive cultural heritage mapping in priority waterscapes at the basin and sub-basin scale (building on existing work on Bochara/Glenelg River)	DEECA, GHGMA, Private landholders, MSC, GSC
A healing sanctuary near Pareeyt with native plants, bush medicine and stories to celebrate Gunditjmara's connection to Pareeyt and the strength of Gunditjmara ancestors is established in Gunditjmara Mirring	GMTOAC will identify possible location(s) and work closely with the Gunditjmara community to design the sanctuary.	Land holders (GMTOAC, local government, Parks Victoria)
River Rangers are fully funded to expand their activities to protect other special areas identified	On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will seek funding to expand the work of the River Rangers	DEECA, DCCEEW

PART D



We'll always try and push whatever we can to change and to achieve our aspirations, to protect our Country and protect our waterways

– Aunty Denise Lovett

Cultural autonomy and regaining that power and control for the community itself

– Dana McDonald

The implementation of this Plan focuses on how we will do the work of caring for Pareeyt. There are many members of the Gunditjmara community who are working to heal Pareeyt, as well as the work of multiple teams within GMTAC and Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation. Implementing this plan will need all of us working together, and will build on the strong foundations that we have already established. We will also explore the future opportunities created by the Treaty process in Victoria, if this is supported by Gunditjmara community.

Implementation of *Caring for Pareeyt* will require two main areas of focus:

1. Investing in our Pareeyt leadership, and
2. Strengthening our partnerships and working with the settler colonial government.

INVESTING IN OUR PAREEYT LEADERSHIP: GMTOAC WATER TEAM

The work that Nicky does through the program that she heads up is really important – mob going and checking the quality of the water, mob going and learning new skills, monitoring the fish, the water, what's living in the water, what's impacting the water

– Uncle Denis Rose

A River Ranger program will be the key to investing in Pareeyt leadership within GMTOAC and providing a pathway for Gunditjmara employment and facilitate knowledge sharing and skill development with partners

We've got to have enough resources, including staff, to do it

– Uncle Denis Rose

To care for a water way means easy access is required for community to carry out the works/cultural/recreational practices required, as well as water allocation

– Jakobe Walker

A River Ranger program would support the Plan's objective to protect and restore Pareeyt by undertaking activities such as:

- Learning Mirring and monitoring the health of cultural values and indicators, including water quality monitoring, habitat health monitoring, eDNA sampling, fish population monitoring
- Reading Mirring with Elders
- Respond to and mitigate the impacts of climate change
- Pest species management
- Promotion of cultural knowledge and values to external partners and the broader community

- Citizen science programs such as water quality monitoring
- Erosion control
- Support a Junior River Ranger Program to build the next generation of River Rangers.

River rangers will be a way to connect young people with caring for Country. It's a reconnection with identity, they have purpose. Only we can give them this, what gives them their purpose is their cultural identity... They are recognised for their Aboriginality, their family, their culture, the people that they grow up to be. It's the thing that will change our place in the world. It will be the young people, who don't grow up with that racism and bigotry, and an education system that doesn't value who they are, when they get through and they stand in the place of Country with responsibility and obligation

– Aunty Denise Lovett

Gunditjmara are committed to and have always practiced adaptive management. Observing and altering practices in response to changes in Mirring is embedded in caring for Mirring. The River Ranger program will support a Reading Mirring program to identify and refine measures so changes in the tangible and intangible values of Pareeyt Mirring, expected through implementation of this Plan, can be monitored and reported.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTION: Establish the River Rangers Team to undertake implementation of this Plan



PARTNERSHIPS AND EDUCATION

Implementation will require us working together with a range of external partners. First and foremost, we want to spend time on Mirring with other mobs. Our rivers connect us and we want to spend more time with mob on shared Mirring.

Community is integral just for the wellness of the entirety of our lives

– Dana McDonald

IMPLEMENTATION ACTION: Develop Pareeyt partnership agreements with BGLC, EMAC and BAC to spend time on Mirring together and co-design new ways of caring for water on shared Mirring like Gariwerd

We will advocate for law reform to support our aspirations to care for Pareeyt and overturn aqua nullius.

Legal mechanisms are really important. That's when they have to engage with us... that gives us strength

– Aunty Denise Lovett

We recognise that it is offensive to our sovereignty that we need to apply for licences and permits to conduct the work of caring for Country and developing our cultural economies. This includes water licences, permits to monitor fish and kooyang for the sustainability of the population, and commercial harvesting licences for kooyang. This permit system seems out of date when the settler state has recognised our rights through native title and the Traditional Owner Settlement Act (2010). Asking permission disempowers our people and this needs to change.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTION: Develop a process with the settler state to ensure that Gunditjmara are not required to obtain permits and licences for activities related to their responsibility to care for Country and their native title rights





We will use this Plan, and our Water is Life Nation Statement, as a way to process government engagement requests. We will require settler colonial government departments and government agencies to show us how their request for engagement or consultation helps us to achieve the goals of this Plan.

Our past experience and knowledge in this space that has empowered us to question the decision-makers and really push back on them

– Aunty Denise Lovett

IMPLEMENTATION ACTION: Develop an engagement protocol for settler colonial governments so that they genuinely listen to Gunditjmara and don't overwhelm us with their requests for engagement



We will work to strengthen partnerships with water authorities and the catchment management authority. We have invested in building these relationships, but they have waxed and waned at different times. We want our partners to prioritise their relationships with us, to fund our work together, and to recognise Gunditjmara leadership and decision-making authority.

Getting stakeholders on board is the backbone to a lot of this stuff

– Levi Lovett





We will seek opportunities to build on the success of the 'Yarns on Farms' program to engage with farmers and private landholders.

Getting farmers more onboard will get a positive flow-on effect all the way through the system

– Tya Lovett

IMPLEMENTATION ACTION: Establish funded partnership agreements with SRW, WW, GWMW and GHCMA

We will find ways to advocate and share our knowledge with the wider community, so that everyone benefits. We will work with local schools to develop specific programs to show how to care for Pareeyt, so that everyone learns how to care for Mirring the Gunditjmara way.

If we can give those tools to the wider community, we're going to be able to do so much more healing and reconciliation

– Leanne Sumner

IMPLEMENTATION ACTION: Develop easy ways of sharing knowledge with the wider community (such as QR codes that can be placed on prominent signs)



PART E





MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This plan provides a blueprint to guide us and our work for the next ten years (Tables 8 and 9). Each year, we will report on progress against the outcomes and actions identified in this plan. In 2030, when we are half-way through the plan, we will undertake a more significant review to identify significant barriers to achieving healthy Pareeyt in Gunditjmarra Mirring.

Each action identified in the plan has been given an indicative period for completion. Short-term (1-3 years) actions indicate high priority actions that are largely within GMTOAC control to achieve, or where existing relationships make it feasible to achieve them within this period. Medium-term (3-5 years) actions may require more relationship building, new sources of funding, or may build on short-term actions. Long-term (5-10 years) actions may require new settler legislation, significant new funding, or Treaty. These actions are likely to be extremely important, but will require significant commitment from external partners to achieve.

We can change the narrative when people are looking at our practices, so they can understand that it is different for us, we have those extra deeper layers with us

– Alan Johnson

IMPLEMENTATION OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

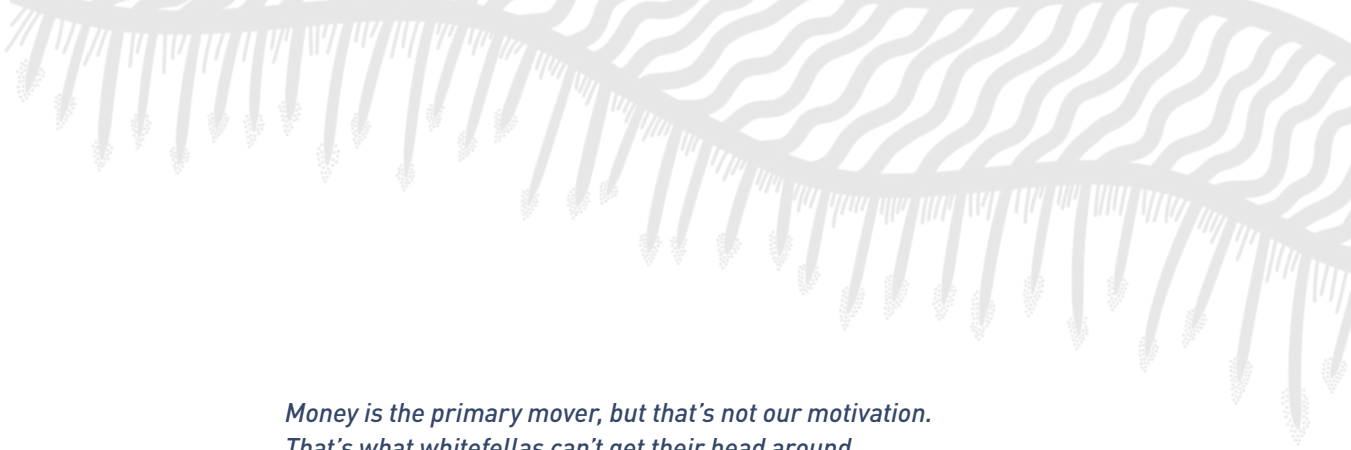
The implementation outcomes and actions (Part D) form the essential foundation for delivering the Caring for Pareeyt outcomes identified in Part C. For this reason, most of these actions are short-term, as they will establish key resources, staff, and relationships to deliver the plan (Table 8).

CARING FOR PAREEYT OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

In Part C, we developed the framework for action to improve the health of Pareeyt and strengthen Gunditjmara connection to Pareeyt Mirring. In Table 9, we have assigned each action a short, medium or long-term timeframe. We will report to the Gunditjmara community on progress towards each of these actions.

TABLE 8 IMPLEMENTATION OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

THEME	ACTION	TIMELINE		
		SHORT (1-3 years)	MEDIUM (3-5 years)	LONG (5-10 years)
Investing in our Pareeyt leadership: GMTOAC water team	Establish a River Rangers Team to undertake implementation of this Plan	S	M	L
Partnerships and education	Develop Pareeyt partnership agreements with BGLC, EMAC and BAC to spend time on Mirring together and co-design new ways of caring for water on shared Mirring like Gariwerd	S	M	L
	Develop a process with the settler state to ensure that Gunditjmara are not required to obtain permits and licences for activities related to their responsibility to care for Country and their native title rights.	S	M	L
	Develop an engagement protocol for settler colonial governments so that they genuinely listen to Gunditjmara and don't overwhelm us with their requests for engagement	S	M	L
	Establish funded partnership agreements with SRW, WW, GWMW and GHCMA	S	M	L
	Develop easy ways of sharing knowledge with the wider community (such as QR codes that can be placed on prominent signs)	S	M	L



*Money is the primary mover, but that's not our motivation.
That's what whitefellas can't get their head around.
How do you get them to appreciate that the cultural side
is far more important to us than the economic side?*

– Rodney Lovett

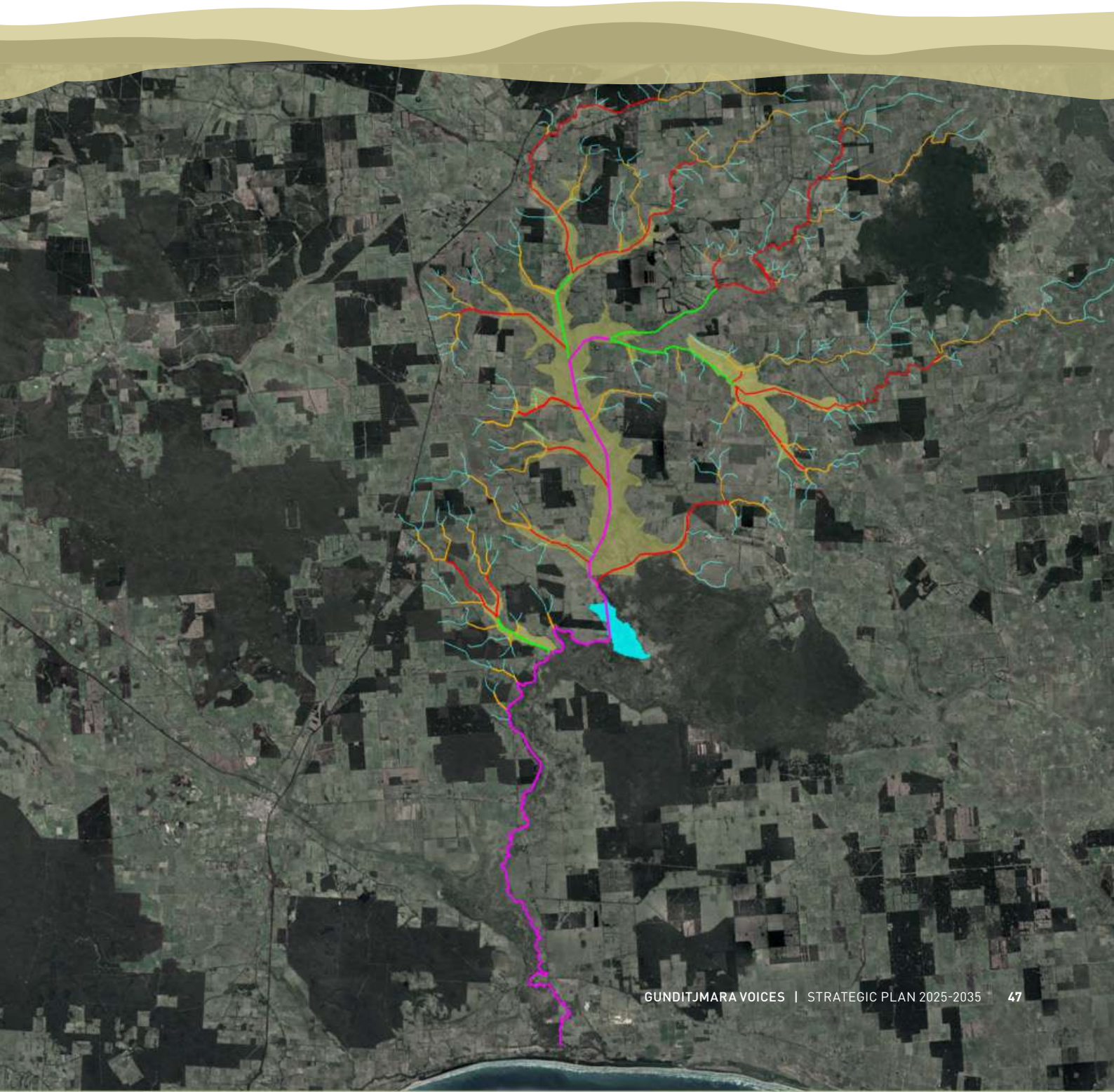


TABLE 9 CARING FOR PAREEYT OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

THEME	OUTCOME	EXTERNAL PARTNERS
1. Overturning aqua nullius	Gunditjmara sovereign authority to care for and make decisions about Pareeyt is acknowledged by the settler state as law	DEECA First Peoples Assembly
		DEECA
2. Waterways as ancestral beings	Settler colonial laws are amended to acknowledge all waterways as living entities	DEECA
	Settler colonial laws that acknowledge Gariwerd's special status as an ancestral being and a decision-maker in Gunditjmara law	BGLC, EMAC, PV, DEECA, GWMW, SRW, WW
	Gunditjmara community are able to act as a unique voice of living waterways in a way consistent with their obligations to care for and listen to Pareeyt	GHCMA, DEECA
3. Pareeyt above and below ground	All unallocated Pareeyt is returned to Gunditjmara for cultural use, including cultural economies	SRW
		SRW
		DEECA
	Gunditjmara understand the way other people use Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring	SRW, DEECA
		SRW, DEECA
		SRW
	Gunditjmara understand the health of Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring	GHCMA, DEECA, private landholders
		GHCMA, MSC, GSC, private landholders
	Gunditjmara have the authority and access to Pareeyt they need to protect and care for Pareeyt	GHCMA, DEECA, private landholders
		GHCMA, SRW, WW, GWMW

ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME		
	SHORT (1-3 years)		
	MEDIUM (3-5 years)		
	LONG (5-10 years)		
On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will engage in law reform processes to change settler state laws to re-unite water and land and recognise Gunditjmara authority	S	M	L
Re-activate Gunditjmara water laws to heal Pareeyt and respond to climate change and other threats	S	M	L
On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will engage in law reform processes to recognise waterways as living entities (<i>Water is Life</i> outcome 1)	S	M	L
On behalf of Gunditjmaara community, GMTOAC will establish partnerships with other Traditional Owners and Parks Victoria to propose new legislation to recognise Gariwerd as an ancestral being with a right to life, with Traditional Owners as the voice of Gariwerd with a decision-making role in management of Pareeyt	S	M	L
On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will lead a partnership with GHCM and DEECA to develop a Living Entity Action Plan that will identify which waterways should be classified as living entities, and how GMTOAC will be funded to act as a voice for these living entities	S	M	L
Confirm extent and location of unallocated Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring	S	M	L
On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will submit water licence applications to Southern Rural Water (SRW) for all unallocated Pareeyt (above and below ground)	S	M	L
On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will work with DEECA to develop culturally appropriate water entitlements that permanently recognise Gunditjmara water rights	S	M	L
Map water usage at basin and sub-basin scale for rivers and aquifers including licenced and non-licenced uses (existing data)	S	M	L
Review existing water usage to assess sustainability in the context of climate change (existing government analysis)	S	M	L
Report on annual water usage each year (existing data)	S	M	L
Map waterway health (including water quality, vegetation, geomorphology) at basin and sub-basin scale	S	M	L
Priorities for future land purchase or flooding opportunities are identified	S	M	L
Increase fencing to keep stock out of rivers and revegetate riparian zones through existing legal mechanisms (Crown land licences) and partnerships with private land holders	S	M	L
On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC to develop partnership agreements with water authorities and CMAs that share power to make decisions about the health of Pareeyt	S	M	L

TABLE 9 CARING FOR PAREEYT OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS (CONT.)

THEME	OUTCOME	EXTERNAL PARTNERS
4. Wellbeing and pride	Gunditjmara preserve, promote and practice language	Native Title Services
		MSC, GSC
		Geographic Names Victoria
5. Food and technology	Gunditjmara community can build their skills and knowledge in aquaculture and bushfoods, building cultural economies and enabling self-determination	PV, DCCEEW Deakin University, ARI
		FV, DEECA
6. Protect and celebrate Pareeyt Mirring	Every success in healing Pareeyt and restoring authority to Gunditjmara is celebrated and continued	DEECA, GHCMA, PV, DCCEEW
	Country management plans (Greater Gariwerd management plans and IPA management plans, all existing land and future land purchases) are fully funded and implemented	PV, DCCEEW, DEECA
	Pareeyt Mirring outside existing protected areas is known and cared for	
	Increase access to Country for Gunditjmara community	PV, GHCMA, DEECA, Private landholders
		DEECA, GHCMA, Private landholders, MSC, GSC
	A healing sanctuary near Pareeyt with native plants, bush medicine and stories to celebrate Gunditjmara's connection to Pareeyt and the strength of Gunditjmara ancestors is established in Gunditjmara Mirring	Land holders (GMTOAC, local government, Parks Victoria)
	River Rangers are fully funded to expand their activities to protect other special areas identified	DEECA, DCCEEW

ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME		
	SHORT (1-3 years)		
	MEDIUM (3-5 years)		
	LONG (5-10 years)		
GMTOAC to identify opportunities to access previous recordings of Elders from native title and other archival sources about Pareeyt and make this more widely available where appropriate	S	M	L
Ensure signs and landscape features relating to Pareeyt on Gunditjmara Mirring feature Wurrung	S	M	L
Change or add Dhaurwurd Wurrung names to Pareeyt (waterways, wetlands, lakes, springs)	S	M	L
Develop Gunditjmara dictionary and language resources relating to Pareeyt	S	M	L
Re-start the kooyang aquaculture facility to grow more kooyang, with half going to Gunditjmara community as bush tucker and half being sold to the café at Tae Rak	S	M	L
Develop and expand other bush food production and knowledge sharing relating to Pareeyt	S	M	L
GMTOAC to obtain and hold a commercial eel harvesting licence on behalf of Gunditjmara to support cultural economies	S	M	L
On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will continue to seek funding and develop partnerships to care for Pareeyt Mirring to protect existing special places	S	M	L
GMTOAC will apply for funding to fully implement Gunditjmara Country plans and other works for caring for Country	S	M	L
GMTOAC will work with Gunditjmara community to identify priority waterscapes that need additional protection	S	M	L
Develop agreements to access land and water with other landholders	S	M	L
Improve access at Tae Rak (and other Gunditjmara properties) to support community access and utilisation of Pareeyt for cultural activities	S	M	L
On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will seek funding to conduct proactive cultural heritage mapping in priority waterscapes at the basin and sub-basin scale (building on existing work on Bochara/Glenelg River)	S	M	L
GMTOAC will identify possible location(s) and work closely with the Gunditjmara community to design the sanctuary.	S	M	L
On behalf of Gunditjmara community, GMTOAC will seek funding to expand the work of the River Rangers	S	M	L



REFERENCES

- Bell, Damein, and Chris Johnston. 2008. "Budj Bim: Caring for the Spirit and the People." Quebec, Canada: ICOMOS Open Archive.
- Brown, S., D. Rose, I. McNiven, and S. Crocker. 2017. *Budj Bim Cultural Landscape World Heritage Nomination*. Canberra, Australia: Department of the Environment and Energy.
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. 2017. *Glenelg Estuary and Discovery Bay Ramsar Site Management Plan*. East Melbourne, Victoria: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. https://www.water.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/672812/Glenelg-MP-Full-Draft_Final.pdf.
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. 2022. *Water Is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap*. State Government of Victoria. <https://www.water.vic.gov.au/our-programs/aboriginal-water-program/water-is-life-roadmap>.
- GMTOAC. 2022a. *Budj Bim Cultural Landscape Indigenous Protected Area Plan of Management 2022–2027*. Heywood, Victoria: Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation. https://www.gunditjmirring.com/_files/ugd/b5965f_41ac6eeef0164944a9537d0048839250.pdf.
- GMTOAC. 2022b. *Research Principles and Guidelines: Creating Partnerships for Research with Gunditjmara and/or on Gunditjmara Country*. Heywood, Victoria: Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation. https://www.gunditjmirring.com/_files/ugd/b5965f_fe940e2b85974548a7a9c3924deea62d.pdf.
- Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation. 2023. *Gunditjmara Nyamat Mirring (Sea Country) Plan 2023–2033*. Gunditjmara Country. https://www.gunditjmirring.com/_files/ugd/b5965f_7d06634878b8481cbce0bb5ea2538113.pdf.
- Gunditjmara People, and G. Wettenhall. 2010. *The People of Budj Bim: Engineers of Aquaculture, Builders of Stone House Settlements and Warriors Defending Country*. Ballarat, Australia: em PRESS Publishing.
- Jackson, Sue. 2023. "Caring for Waterscapes in the Anthropocene: Heritage-Making at Budj Bim, Victoria, Australia." *Environment and History* 29(4):591–611. doi:10.3197/096734022X16384451127393.
- Jordan, J. W. 2012. "The Engineering of Budj Bim and the Evolution of a Societal Structure in Aboriginal Australia." *Australian Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Engineering* 9(1):63–68. doi:DOI: 10.7158/14488388.2012.11464845.
- Marshall, Virginia. 2017. *Overturing Aqua Nullius: Securing Aboriginal Water Rights*. Canberra, Australia: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Parks Victoria. 2015. *Ngootyoong Gunditj, Ngootyoong Mara South West Management Plan*. Portland, Victoria: Parks Victoria. <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/-/media/project/pv/main/parks/documents/management-plans/ngootyoong-gunditj-ngootyoong-mara-south-west-management-plan.pdf>.
- Parks Victoria. 2021. *Greater Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan*. Melbourne, Australia: Parks Victoria. <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/-/media/project/pv/main/parks/documents/management-plans/resource-library/greater-gariwerd---landscape-management-plan---2021.pdf?rev=cc3cd678238f4c7d8b786b760b38b6ea>.
- Weir, Jessica. 2009. *The Gunditjmara Land Justice Story*. Canberra, ACT: AIATSIS. https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/research_pub/weir-2009-gunditjmara-land-justice-story_0_3.pdf.

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY AND EXTERNAL PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

TABLE 10 GLOSSARY

DHAUWURD LANGUAGE TERM	ENGLISH MEANING/NAME
Bochara	1. Glenelg River. 2. Gunditjmara ancestor
Budj Bim	1. 'High head' – the head of a Gunditjmara Creation Ancestor. 2. Place name for 'Budj Bim (formerly Mount Eccles) volcano'.
Gariwerd	The Grampians
Gunditjmara	'Gunditj' means 'belonging to' and 'mara' is the word for 'people'
Gunditj Mirring	Name used to refer to Gunditjmara Traditional Owners. Gunditj means 'belonging to' and Mirring means 'Country'
Killara	Darlot Creek. Literal meaning 'always there' (i.e., there is always water in Killara to sustain kooyang and other aquatic resources)
Kooyang	Short-finned eel (<i>Anguilla australis</i>)
Kurtonitj	Means 'crossing place'
Ngootyoong Gunditj Ngootyoong Mara	Healthy Country Healthy People
Nyamat	Sea water
Palawarra	Fitzroy River
Pareeyt	Fresh water
Pareeyt poondée-teeyt	Water is life
Puunyaart	Grass (<i>Carex</i> spp.) gathered and used to weave gnarraban (baskets used to capture eels)
Tae Rak	Lake Condah
Wheringkerneitch	Merri River
Woolloerrunt	Crawford River
Wurrung	Language
Yumarala	Eumeralla River
Yereoc	Modified or constructed water channel, or a wood structure built to form a weir (or barrier) across a channel or narrow waterway

TABLE 11 KEY DELIVERY PARTNERS

AGENCY	ABBREVIATION
Barengi Gadjin Land Council	BGLC
Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation	EMAC
Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation	BAC
Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, Victoria	DEECA
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Commonwealth	DCCEEW
Parks Victoria	PV
Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority	GHCMA
Southern Rural Water	SRW
Wannon Water	WW
Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water	GWMW
Fisheries Victoria	FV
Geographic Names Victoria	GNV
Moyne Shire Council	MSC
Glenelg Shire Council	GSC
Private Landholders	







GUNDITJ MIRRORING

Traditional Owners
Aboriginal Corporation
NTBC

