



NEWSLETTER #34, JUNE 2008

The Re-Opening of Worawa Aboriginal College

On Wednesday 28 May, Worawa College re-opened. Many of you would have heard of its closure due to unsatisfactory standards assessments, so it was with great pleasure that I attended this event with Don, Joan and Diana, fellow members of NRG. Pam Pedersen also attended as she is a member of the Governing Body.

Before the business of the meeting began we were invited to go outside while Uncle Max performed a smoking ceremony to cleanse the past and bring good spirits to the college. Such a ceremony has a powerful effect on me; I was glad to be able to add my good wishes to the smoke as it wafted over all present.



There has been a great deal of work over the last six months with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority to turn around the loss of registration. Lois Peeler, the President of the Governing Body, has been tireless in her determination to save this unique college and she has been strongly supported by her committee colleagues.

We met the new principal – a man with much experience in running multi-cultural schools. He has the authority of a quiet and stately person, with an excellent listening ear, and he exhibited a warmth and enthusiasm for this school.

On a tour of the college a past student, now in his twenties and employed, told us how much he enjoyed his education at Worawa: a boy who had been unsuccessful at several schools found he could enjoy learning and school life. He showed us the boarding houses that were being painted and refurbished, as were schoolrooms and external features of the buildings.

The triumph and joy on the faces of Aboriginal members of the Worawa College Association shone as

Lois was handed the certificate of Registration by a member of the VRQA.

A celebratory morning tea and performance by the Aboriginal dance group One Fire completed the re-opening. Worawa urgently needs funds right now – the loss of registration closed off funding, which will only resume when enrolments are finalised for the coming term. Donations (tax deductible) can be made to Worawa Aboriginal College, 5 Barak Lane, Healesville 3777, or online through the OurCommunity website: www.ourcommunity.com.au/yp4c_worawa

Jan Aitken

First anniversary of the NT Intervention: So many contradictory opinions! Perhaps this reflects the differences between communities which need to be recognised in consultation and management plans, now recommended by the latest enquiry.

But what of the removal of the Racial Discrimination laws, the removal of land rights, the flow-on effects of alcohol control when the men from a community flock to nearby towns, the Government's delay in ratifying the UN Charter of Indigenous Rights, to name only a few of the problems?

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MOOR-RUL VIEWING PLATFORM

The Moor-rul Viewing Platform was officially opened on 17th April, 2008 – in the presence of the Hon Jenny Macklin, MP – shortly after the launch of the Shire’s Reconciliation Charter.

From the platform you can see the Dandenongs, the city of Melbourne, the You Yangs, Mount Macedon, the Kinglake Ranges and the Mt Baw-Baw Ranges where the Yarra River starts. This landscape covers all the ancestral lands of the Wurundjeri and some of the wider Kulin nation land.

The platform has been given the name Moor-rul, a name that described the fertile soils of the Kangaroo Ground area in contrast to the poorer (Silurian) country of its surrounds, which the Wurundjeri knew as ‘Nillumbik’ or less-rich country.

Inside the viewing platform, eight double-sided interpretive panels set out the Aboriginal and European history of the area, and also the geology and local flora and fauna, so that the casual visitor comes away understanding more about this significant part of Victoria.

Harry Gilham, Advisory Committee Convenor



RECONCILIATION CHARTER

Nillumbik Shire Council Reconciliation Charter

Principles of Reconciliation

Nillumbik Shire Council's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Australians is based on the following principles:

1. Nillumbik Shire Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri as the traditional custodians of the land now known as the Shire of Nillumbik and values the significance of the Wurundjeri people's history as essential to the unique character of the Shire.
2. Nillumbik Shire Council recognises that residents of the Shire include Indigenous people from clans other than the Wurundjeri, and that these people are disconnected from their own lands; in many instances this disconnection continues to impact upon them.
3. We urge all levels of government, commerce and individuals to ensure Indigenous people enjoy equal social, health and economic conditions with all Australians.
4. We recognise the distinctive and special spiritual and material relationship that Indigenous people have with the land and the water, including trees, rocks, hills and valleys, creeks, rivers and floodplains in the Shire of Nillumbik.
5. We recognise and value the distinctive place of our Indigenous people in Australia's identity, from their cultural heritage and care of the land, to their ongoing contributions in many fields including academia, agriculture, art, economics, law, sports and politics.
6. We respect the spiritual relationship – both historical and living – between the land and its first people. It is therefore important that significant cultural heritage sites within the Shire of Nillumbik are identified and mapped.
7. Nillumbik Shire Council acknowledges the ongoing impact of past policies and practices on Indigenous people, who in many instances continue to be disadvantaged by the effects of their displacement from their families, their land and traditional culture.
8. We respect the Indigenous people's right to live according to their own values and customs, subject to the law.
9. Indigenous people have the right to share in all levels of decision-making on matters which affect them and their communities.
10. We acknowledge the important ongoing role of the Nillumbik Reconciliation Group and other local groups and individuals, and support their continued role in reconciliation.
11. Nillumbik Shire Council accepts its responsibility in ensuring these principles are adhered to and acted upon, and commits to facilitating and participating in programs and activities that confirm and display our commitment to Reconciliation and Indigenous issues.
12. We commit to developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), consulting with Wurundjeri Elders, the Nillumbik Reconciliation Group and other stakeholders.

On Thursday 17th April, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, launched the Nillumbik Reconciliation Charter in front of approximately 130 people, including Wurundjeri Elders, members of the Nillumbik Reconciliation Group and residents from Kangaroo Ground and beyond.

The Reconciliation Charter demonstrates the commitment to reconciliation between the Wurundjeri and Nillumbik Shire Council, with an emphasis on relationship development, respect and recognition. Development of this Charter was undertaken in consultation with Wurundjeri Elders of the Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation, the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Inc, and the Nillumbik Reconciliation Group.

The commitment to reconciliation has already been a ten year process for Council, beginning in November 1997. Early work towards reconciliation included the May 1998 Nillumbik Shire Council Apology and the Commitment to Aboriginal Reconciliation. This was presented to senior Wurundjeri Elders at Wingrove Park, Eltham; this early work led to a nomination for the Premier's Award for Continuous Improvement in Local Government.

Ben Pollard, Nillumbik Shire Council

Reconciliation Charter adopted by Nillumbik Shire Council on 29 January 2008 and endorsed by Nillumbik Shire Council, Wurundjeri Elders and The Hon. Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs on Thursday 17 April 2008.

Artwork designed by Wurundjeri artist Shirley Nicholson for Moor-rul Viewing Platform in Kangaroo Ground.

Printed in Nillumbik on 100% Australian made recycled paper.

At the Koorie Heritage Trust — only until 27th June: Dungula Wamayirr River People – The Nicholls Family Remembers Pastor Sir Doug and Lady Gladys Nicholls

This is a sensitive exhibition that allows us to share the memories of those who knew Pastor Sir Doug and Lady Gladys Nicholls. This remarkable couple, proudly Aboriginal, considered their lives blessed and extended that blessing to others in loving service.

The illustrative panels record significant public and private events that are emphasised by revealing quotes:

“We want to walk with you, we don’t want to walk alone,” says Pastor Doug Nicholls in the first display, which is followed by sections entitled “Building Bridges”, “Sport”, and “Family Bonds”.

In the panel “Creating Change”, Stewart Murray in 1988 stated of Pastor Doug, “He had no fear. He had plenty of courage. He knew he was bringing a nation together.”

Former South Australian Premier, Don Dunstan, is quoted in the section “Raising their Voices” as saying, “Doug worked tirelessly but with gentleness, humour, dignity, as well as determination.”

The voice of Sir Doug is heard in his Day of Mourning speech in 1938 declaring, “Aboriginal people are the skeleton in the cupboard of Australia’s national life outcasts in our own land.”

“Close to God” is a section that perhaps partially explains the abiding ability of this couple to endure and succeed in an intolerant society, as did their continuing contact with Cummeragunga (“My Home”) near the Barmah Forest in NSW.

“We would love to sit along the river, singing the harmony and playing the gum leaf. They were good days, and these were the days that Cummera was at its best. I’d go through it again. It means so much to us.”

Lady Gladys speaks, “During school lunch hour he would climb up on the big water tank ... and play his banjo. He didn’t know many tunes and would play the same thing over and over. Nearly drove everyone mad!”

The genealogies of Sir Doug and Lady Gladys reveal the strong heritage that authenticates this quote from Pastor Doug summing up the conviction that overcomes racial discrimination:

“You can play a tune on black keys, you can play a tune on white keys, but both are needed for perfect harmony.”

In display cases accompanying the panels is a collection of poignant memorabilia; sporting trophies and ribbons, football guernseys, biographical volumes and awards.

Their daughter, Pam Pedersen, leads me to the collection of her mother’s jewellery, and the stylish dress she has treasured all these years.

“It’s been hanging in the closet,” says Pam. “I remember her wearing it. I hope it doesn’t get creased.”

We laugh and I think she has inherited her mother’s happy and attentive attitude. Like her mother, she makes others hopeful.

Joan Pickard

Recognising Aboriginal Soldiers. Auntie Dot Peters is leading a campaign to have RSL Clubs around Australia recognise Aboriginal soldiers. As a result of her actions, Healesville RSL raises the Aboriginal Flag and incorporates Aboriginal music into its services. She wants all clubs to do the same. In Reconciliation Week, with Richard Wynne, State Aboriginal Affairs Minister, she took part in the unveiling of a plaque at the Shrine of Remembrance which recognised the service and sacrifice of Indigenous Victorians in Australia’s Armed Forces.



THE PAST MATTERS – The third annual festival of Indigenous writing: Eltham Bookshop in partnership with NRG, the Micah Social Justice Group and Melbourne University Department of Indigenous Studies.

Held on 25th & 26th May, this was possibly the most successful of these festivals to date – it is an event not to be missed! I particularly commend to you the following books:

- Robert Kenny: *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming*. The story of Nathaniel Pepper, first convert to Christianity at the Moravian mission at Ebenezer in the Wimmera. Robert deals historically, personally and philosophically with the complex issues of the introduction of white culture, land use and religion to the Aboriginal people.
- Brian McCoy: *Holding Men*. Brian gives an account of his personal experiences during his research into how the breakdown of traditional community value and relationship described as kanyirninpa, or ‘holding’, affects the health of Aboriginal men in the Kimberley, and the role of petrol sniffing, football and imprisonment in providing spaces where a ‘holding’ of sorts can be found.
- Bruce Pascoe: *Ocean*. A novel based on the historical accounts of sealers and Aboriginal families of the Furneaux Islands of Bass Strait. Life is brutal, violent and harsh – but with compassion, love and loyalty to be found when you look closely.

All books presented at the Festival are available from the Eltham Bookshop.

Jan Aitken

Apology to the First Nations people of Canada who were forcibly removed into residential schools.

“The Government of Canada sincerely apologises and asks the forgiveness of the aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly. We are sorry.”

Twelve aboriginal representatives – including 104 year old Marguerite Wabano, the oldest (residential) school survivor – sat on chairs in a circle in front of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Phil Fontaine, head of the Assembly of First Nations, said the apology ‘for this dreadful chapter in our shared history’ would ensure the survival of Canada’s aboriginal people.

In May 2006, Canada reached a C\$1.9 billion settlement with the roughly 90,000 school survivors. The settlement created a truth and reconciliation commission which started work on 1 June and will spend the next five years hearing from school survivors across Canada.

What’s On

Tuesday 1 July: NRG Business meeting at 5.30 pm at Don and Joan’s, 22 Hillcrest Ave, Eltham. Open to all members – share your ideas and contribute to our organisation. Also on Tuesday 5th August.

Sunday 6 July at 10 am: GAWA Wurundjeri Resource Trail, Yarra Glen Road, Watson’s Creek: Winter planting and clearing of paths.

Wednesday 16 July: A film night to celebrate NAIDOC. At Le Pines Community Meeting room, 848 Main Road, Eltham. Films to be screened are:

- *Flour Sugar Tea*: Behind the statistics of life expectancy for Indigenous men is the personal story of John Satge, an inspiring Aboriginal man.
- *When the Natives get Restless*: In Dubbo, an entire community is given an eviction notice. The community speaks about being Black in a regional town.
- *Footprints in the Sand*: The extraordinary journey in search of Warri and Yatungka, the last of the desert nomads to “come in”. A sad love story with inspirational survival and rescue.

Thursday 10 July: Launch of new premises for the *Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place*, Croydon.

Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th October: World Matters Festival with Eltham Bookshop, features Diane Bell and Ellen Trevorrow, a Ngarrindjeri woman. The book *Kungun Ngarrindjeri Miminar Yunnan: Listen to Ngarrindjeri Women Speaking* grew out of workshops with the women and uses innovative community based writing and communication technologies to reach across generations so that their stories can be told.