



## 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](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/yp4c_worawa)

Jan Aitken

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**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

**Acknowledgement • Recognition • Respect • Action**

**Nillumbik Shire Council Reconciliation Charter**

**Background**  
Nillumbik Shire Council has a long-standing commitment to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, recognising the need for an inclusive race-related community.

**Wurundjeri**  
The Wurundjeri is a language group of the Kulin Nation who lived in the watershed of the Yarra River. The language the Wurundjeri spoke was Woiwurrung. During the eight decades following its displacement, it was used by the only others, as all other members of the clan and all children had like the now as their fathers. Wurundjeri means 'people who live on their lands'.

**Nillumbik Shire Council's achievements in reconciliation**  
Nillumbik Shire Council has been widely acknowledged for its leadership role in contributing to the process of Indigenous Reconciliation. In 1987, under the theme of Acknowledgement and Celebration, Council initiated a historic, regional partnership Statement of Apology and Commitment to Aboriginal Reconciliation with Banyam, Merrangham and Healesville City Councils.

**In 1991 Council launched its own comprehensive Statement of Apology and Commitment to Aboriginal Reconciliation at the Deep Celebration in Wingrove Park. Indigenous leaders and one thousand Shire residents attended the landmark event.**

**On 10 October 1999 Nillumbik Shire Council flew the Reconciliation flag - believed to be the first Victorian municipality to do so.**

**In 1999, Nillumbik Shire Council formalised Civil Recognition Programs for acknowledging Wurundjeri traditional ownership of local lands and for flying the Aboriginal and Reconciliation flags on days of significance to Indigenous people.**

**Among other 1500-Indigenous Councils supported the formation of the centralised, multi-ethnic Reconciliation Group. This was incorporated on 20 May 2000. The NRC continues its important role throughout the Shire of Nillumbik, working to educate and provide the means of reconciliation in the local region.**

**The meaning of Reconciliation**  
Reconciliation is the process of healing the community. A journey of acknowledgement, recognition, respect and understanding.

- addressing the causes of division and misunderstanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- making taking responsibility and ownership of past injustices
- dealing with any continuing inequalities in health, education, justice and welfare
- developing a shared, common understanding between Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

**The vision for reconciliation**  
The vision is for a united Australia which respects the land of our values, its Indigenous heritage and provides respect and justice for all. Nillumbik Shire Council shares this vision as expressed by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

**Reconciliation is a shared agreement**  
The Mayor or appropriate Council representative delivers Council's Reconciliation Acknowledgement Statement at the commencement of meetings and all meetings sponsored by the Nillumbik Shire Council. This statement is found in Principle 1.

Reconciliation Charter adopted by Nillumbik Shire Council on 29 January 2008 and endorsed by Nillumbik Shire Council, Council Members 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 Melbourne on 100% Australian-made recycled paper.

On Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> 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

## At the Koorie Heritage Trust — only until 27<sup>th</sup> 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

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**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 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> 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

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**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.

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**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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 Yattungka, 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 25<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> 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.