



NEWSLETTER #35, September 2008

What's On in October

Reconciliation Victoria Annual General Meeting – Monday 22nd September, 2008, 4.30pm – 7pm Ross House, Level 4, 247-251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

Tuesday 7th October: **NRG AGM** at Le Pines Meeting Room at 848 Main Road, Eltham at 7pm. **General Meeting** at 7.30pm: Reg Blow, noted Indigenous Elder will speak on Health issues of urban Indigenous communities.

Celebrate Indigenous Culture: Nillumbik Shire Council & Friends of Darrabi will host "Celebrating Indigenous Culture" with a guided walk and talk at Darrabi Bush Food Garden on Saturday 11th October from 11.00am – 1.00pm. BYO picnic lunch.

Tuesday 14th October: **United Reconciliation Planning Workshop**, sponsored by Nillumbik Shire Council. 3-5pm at a venue TBA. An opportunity for representatives of Nillumbik Community Groups to indicate their way of practicing Reconciliation in line with the Shire's Reconciliation Charter.

Wednesday 22nd October: **Children's Day** at Eltham Community and Reception Centre. The theme is Reconciliation, with Mandy Nicholson, Indigenous artist and story teller; Naretha Williams, performance artist; Kutcha Edwards, singer; face painting; books and bush foods for sale, and more.

Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th October **World Matters Festival**. Details from the Eltham Bookshop. Note particularly that on Sunday afternoon, Diane Bell and Ellen Trevorrow, noted Ngarrindjeri weaver from the Coorong, will present their book *Listen to Ngarrindjeri Women Speaking*

Tuesday 25th November: **Planning meeting for 2009** with new committee of NRG. All members welcome to attend and contribute. 5.30pm at 22 Hillcrest Avenue, Eltham.

Tuesday 2nd December: **NRG Christmas Gathering** at the Moor-ru Platform, Kangaroo Ground at 5.30pm. Bring drinks and nibbles.

A combined meeting of Oxfam, Amnesty International, Micah Social Justice Group and NRG is in the planning stage. Further information TBA.

NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The NRG's AGM will be held on Tuesday 7 October 2008 at 7pm in the Meeting Room at Le Pines, 848 Main Road, Eltham. It will be followed by a General Meeting at 7.30pm.

The President's Report on the activities of the year and the Financial Statement for the year 2007-8 will be tabled. All Committee positions will be declared vacant.

Nominations may be made on the form on page 4 of this newsletter and must be received by the Secretary, PO Box 1017, Research 3095 by 5pm on Friday 3rd October. Where only one nomination for a position is received that nominee will be declared elected. If more than one nomination is received a ballot will be held. If no nomination for a position is received prior to the meeting, nominations will be accepted from the floor.

Apologies may be phoned to Jan on 9439 0342 or Diana on 9439 8565

GENERAL MEETING: We are delighted that Reg Blow, a prominent Indigenous Elder, will be attending to tell us about the Maya Indigenous Centre of Healing in Thornbury and about the particular health problems experienced by the Indigenous people who attend the Centre. This is a significant opportunity to hear more of the problems and triumphs of urban communities.

Learning Together
Indigenous perspectives in school culture and curriculum
17 October 2008

A conference for teachers and principals
This conference will provide primary and secondary teachers and principals with the opportunity to develop a better knowledge of indigenous society and culture and to help with the teaching of indigenous history and perspectives across the curriculum. The conference will attract teachers and schools in contact with the local Koorie Community (as stated in the Victorian Government's March strategy)

Keynote presentations:

- Partnership working with local indigenous communities (Professor M. VEA)
- Case study of developing curriculum resources on Indigenous perspectives, culture and language
- In the classroom (A.I. & M. Reynolds) (Dr. VEA)

Presentation and workshop themes:

- Working with the local Koorie Community to create school reports, resources and celebrate traditional culture
- Managing change in school culture

A range of workshops led by representatives from Koorie organisations will run throughout the afternoon.

As topics of Koorie culture, resources and practices will be held throughout the day. There will also be an opportunity to meet with the artists.

Aborigines Advancement League, 2 Watt Street, Thornbury 9am-3.30pm

Full conference program available on www.reconciliation.org.au from 16 September

Presented by **ANTARPI**
Supported by **VAEA**
In association with **HTAV**, **CEAV**, **Yara**

Learning Together
Conference
18 October 2008

Local reconciliation groups and local government play an important role in building relationships with local Koorie communities.
This conference will assist local reconciliation groups and local Councils to recognise, respect and celebrate Koorie culture.

Hear what's new from the State Government Aboriginal Leadership, Local Government and Local Reconciliation groups including:

- Concrete developing action plans for reconciliation
- Local Aboriginal bodies including Reconciliation Aboriginal Affairs (RAA), Local Indigenous Networks (LIN), and Traditional Owner response bodies
- Protocols for working with local Koorie communities
- Local reconciliation groups work to with schools
- The new Koorie Education Strategy for State schools in Victoria

Small group workshops will provide tools for Local Reconciliation Groups and Local Councils to work closer with Koorie communities to promote reconciliation in local areas

Aborigines Advancement League, 2 Watt Street, Thornbury 10am-4.30pm

Presented by **ANTARPI**
VGA
VAEA
Other sponsors to be confirmed

Full conference program available on www.reconciliation.org.au from 15 September

Two important conferences: 17th & 18th October

You can download a copy of these flyers from the NRG website, or if you do not have internet access please contact Diana Warrell, 9439 8565, for further details or to receive a posted copy.

NRG correspondence to: PO Box 1017, Research VIC 3095 Website: www.vicnet.net.au/~nrgp

Newsletter contributions to: trikojus@optusnet.com.au

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The Garma Festival

Jan Aitken

Pam Pedersen, Kay Pitts and I attended the festival in August. This year the title of the key forum was *Indigenous Knowledge: Caring for Culture and Country*.

The festival is held each year at Gulkula, a place on the escarpment owned by the Yothu Yindi Foundation. The Foundation is headed by Galarrwuy Yunupingu AM, the powerful leader of the Gumatj clan of the Yolngu people.

This year, the tenth Garma, had over 2000 participants. Forty were enrolled in a Cultural Programme, which teaches crafts such as basket making and weaving, healing, and dancing for women and the making of fishing spears and canoes and other crafts for men. Senior people talk about the Law and stories which have held the communities together for thousands of years. The tents for music and film-making are well patronised and a superb Youth Festival is held with vibrant leaders who inspire young people to have confidence in themselves. We saw an example of their activities one evening at the nightly concert when all participants were on stage doing energetic and inspired Hip Hop dancing.

A large number of different clans from Northern Australia dance each afternoon at the Bunggul¹, with Yidaki (didg) and Bilma (clapsticks) accompaniment and a song man chanting an ancient *manikay*².

About 500 of us attended the Key Forums and Workshops held each day for three days, including academics, activists, earnest workers with and for Indigenous communities, mission people, lawyers, medical and health personnel, art and culture gurus, and lay people like myself who want to experience an Aboriginal community; I also wanted to learn more about what remote communities and Indigenous leaders have to say about the Intervention, about the government, about each other, about white people like myself.

Jenny Macklin opened the festival. She spoke of Indigenous issues being at the forefront of the government agenda. Her wish is to unlock the economic and personal capacity of Indigenous people, to create jobs for financial independence so that they have control of their own lives. She spoke of brokering partnerships, working with Indigenous people to establish businesses in Mining, Tourism, Sustainable Building

¹ Bunggul is a style of music that came into being around the Mann River and is known for its intense lyrics, which are often stories of epic journeys.

² Manikay songs are about clan or family history and are frequently updated to take into account controversies and social relationships.

and Bush foods, of building capacity and leadership skills. She announced several grants to Indigenous projects. Her words were positive and promising and her warmth and friendliness was genuine and respectful. As is usual for politicians who have a very busy schedule, her minders whisked her away before she could hear any of the Indigenous speakers tell us what is important to them in the preservation of their culture and country.

We heard from outstanding Indigenous leaders and were heartened to hear from Aboriginal people from agencies and services such as the Northern Land Council and the local Dhimurru Land Management rangers – this was much more positive news compared to that generally served up to us by our major newspapers.

Accommodation was a small dome tent each and a mattress and sleeping bag with excellent meals in the open dining shelter on the edge of the escarpment, the sea winking blue in the distance. There was ample time for meeting people, initiating friendly encounters with whoever you happened upon, and networking.

I was blessed with companions who helped to open up this interesting world we were in. Pam knew many Indigenous people and seemed to keep meeting relatives and old friends. Nami and Leon, a white school teacher at Yirrkala at one time, were married twenty years ago. They took us to Buymarr, a very remote and tiny settlement on the coast. Kay had an eye for celebrities and spotted people I would have missed. She usually managed to have a conversation with them as well!

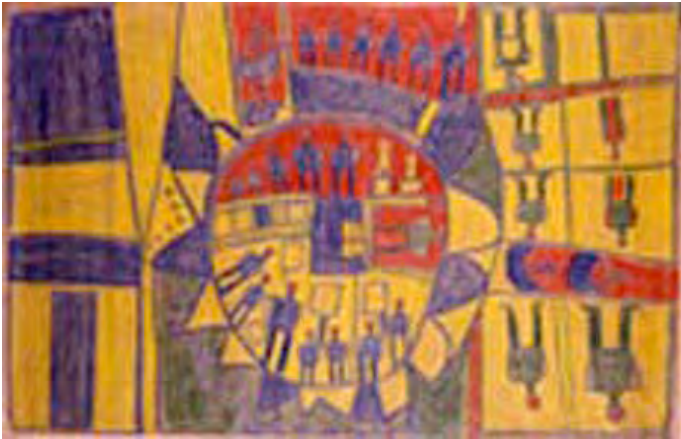
Yirrkala: Aboriginal community with a famous art gallery: The Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre

A forest of delicately decorated burial poles, walls of bark paintings, tables full of carved birds, necks extended, floors heaped with baskets and dilly bags, tenderly tied reeds and pandanus leaves, art and artefacts created by the Yolngu people in Yirrkala and nearby communities and homelands. This is Saltwater



country and the distinctive designs depict shimmering water with dugongs, Manta rays, stingrays, leaping fish, turtles, sharks and of course, crocodiles, the inhabitants of totems and the Dreamtimes truths and law of remote N.E. Arnhem Land.

A recent project of the gallery print room was on display at the Garma Festival, etchings framed and hung on trees in the Gapan outdoor gallery. At the opening we sat in darkness as senior Gumatj women sang a soft, low chant to their ancestors who had inspired the exhibition. Then the lights came on: wonder and delight at the works revealed.



'Berndt' crayon drawing, 1947 (From: "After Berndt 1947-2008")

In 1947, the anthropologist R.M. Berndt asked the men at Yirrkala to draw with crayons on brown paper their knowledge of the land and their Law. The 365 sheets have been kept in the Berndt Museum in Perth. Now after sixty years they have come home. Descendants of the men were asked to respond to the work of their fathers and grandfathers in soft ground etchings. Print makers at the Yirrkala gallery then printed 30 editions of each. It was these beautiful etchings which hung in the Gapan gallery. Along the path through the bush either side of the gallery reproductions of some of the original crayon works were on boards nailed to the trees. The Yolngu make no distinction between original and reproduction. It is the intellectual property in the designs that matters.

I walked out along the path through the stringy bark gums with their treasured art works many times over the Garma Festival. It gave me some quiet time to commune with the spirits which felt ever so-present along that path, with the men who had drawn their Law hoping to enliven it and hand it on to following generations. I have just read *An Intruder's Guide to North East Arnhem Land* by Andrew McMillan. His well-researched chapters on the history of this area refer to many of the men who did these drawings. They were the leaders throughout the times of intrusions by traders, missionaries and finally the mines.

A hunting and gathering expedition with Banduk Marika

We were taken out to Yirrkala by Marcia Langton, whom we met by chance at the Walkabout Lodge in Nhulunbuy. We are indebted to her for introducing us to Banduk and making it possible for us to join with her family, gathering mud clams and hunting for mud crabs on the mangrove flats behind Rainbow Rocks. Banduk's father was Mawalan, and her brother Wandjuk, Yolngu leaders. Mawalan was one of the men who drew his Knowledge for Berndt. Banduk is an accomplished artist; I had been very taken with her etching *Fish Trap*.



I went with Banduk looking for mud crabs around clumps of mangroves while a team of younger women, her daughters and niece and their children, went off into the mangrove scrub. She told me with great sadness that both her sons were dead. One had hung himself and the other had died in a car accident. The girls came back with a bucket full of clams the size of one's palm but we had found only empty crab holes. Someone had been there before us!

A fire was smoking away on the beach and the clams were cooked. My verdict: full of goodness but awfully tough to my spoilt palate. Children ran around and threw small spears a surprisingly long way with the aid of mini spear throwers. And there was, of course, a football for kicking.

Over the two weeks I spent in Arnhem Land I felt deeply affected by my contact with Indigenous people. Was it their warmth and generosity and capacity for sharing? Or the fact that these people speak their own language? Many cannot speak English or do so in a rudimentary way. Was it the heart-break which is palpable? Or the courage with which the Yolngu have defended their life and culture from the ravages of waves of invasion? Or perhaps the hopelessness which is evident in many men, not only the youth but older men whose youth has not served as a means to a maturity which is productive? Or perhaps it was the brave and committed spirit which glowed in the lives of the rangers and those who worked in projects which did preserve country and culture.

And the women. What wonderful women! Such as Gulumba Yunupingu, who has established the Women's Healing Centre out on a point on the escarpment edge. She speaks with great love for her culture and shares it with us. Lak Lak Burarrwanga from Bawaka, a weaver and basket maker, sits under a leafy shelter and teaches eager novices the ways of the women. A book of her work was launched at the Festival. And there are others, all memorable in the unique contribution they make to preserving community and caring for its members.

ARDS: Aboriginal Research and Development Service

This organisation is the initiative of Richard Trudgeon, author of *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die*. We visited Richard and his team at the Radio Station which broadcasts in Yolngu Matha language twenty-four hours a day. Music and programmes are all in language and in talking to Aboriginal people in communities we found it to be the most popular station listened to in cars and communities. The programmes are often associated with public health issues.

Richard and staff conduct training sessions for Yolngu-speaking hospital support workers and employ them to work in Darwin hospital and other centres. He has designed a programme for teaching Yolngu language which would mean that more people who work in East Arnhem Land could access language and be more effective in working with Aboriginal people who often do not have much English and therefore are restricted in their use of services.

We were able to try out the programme ourselves using a sample of the system. The programme uses see-and-hear modules – we learnt quickly and were surprised when we could remember some of the words we had learnt: Lipa Lipa for example, which indicated a carved wooden canoe on display at Garma. He estimated that this programme would cost about 5 million dollars to establish but would have considerable advantage to service providers and users. We certainly noticed at Garma that there were many Aboriginal clans which did not speak English, and some speakers at the workshops apologised for their English, explaining that it was very much their second language.

Thursday Island – A Tropical Paradise

After the sad situation of Aboriginal Communities near Alice Springs it is encouraging to see the more prosperous and cheerful towns at Cape York like Bamaga, Seisia and New Mapoon. Unhappily I feel that the locals at the pub are seen as objects of curiosity by the many passing tourists, no matter how friendly. It must take a lot of courage to face up to this kind of racism.

Quite a lot of Islander traffic occurs between Seisia and Thursday island on the very pleasant ferry journey of about an hour. Lovely large ladies in colourful flowery dresses wait to cross with their pretty children on the pier at both ends. The ferry only goes to and fro once a day. Quarantine laws referring to food, produce from the islands to the continent are very strict.



Finally the mystery of that elusive shape on the Torres Strait Islands Flag is cleared up when on arrival one sees pictures of the traditional feathered headdress. The tidy homes with attractive gardens on this small island are evidence of a happy lifestyle. The climate is so balmy that there is colour everywhere in flowers and paintwork. Nature is kind in providing food from sea and soil. The people one encounters are strong and forthright in their friendliness.

A moving sight is the lavish decoration afforded new graves. Hundreds of artificial flowers are built up like a super garden bed to demonstrate the love and esteem of the bereaved. After a certain time the flowers and name cross are replaced by an ornate and descriptive granite headstone.

Ann Curry



A CALL FOR PEOPLE TO JOIN A FRIENDS GROUP TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN THE MOOR-RUL RECONCILIATION GRASSLANDS



An area set aside for these grasslands next to the Moor-rul Platform has been fenced with thanks to John Browning. The NEXT STAGE is preparation of the area, with planting taking place next Autumn. After that, maintenance will include weeding with possible watering during the first summer. Replanting and weeding will continue to be maintenance concerns.

HOW CAN WE MANAGE THIS? A Friends of Moor-rul Grasslands group would be the answer. Such a group would be able to plan the weeding and planting, get help from the Shire's Environmental Works Dept, be covered with insurance as volunteers of the Shire and have a life which could continue to manage the maintenance of the grasslands into the future. This group could enlist help from local community groups from time to time.

If you can work for Reconciliation and help this project in this way please call Jann Darvill on 9439 7342 or Jan Aitken 9439 0342. Your interest will be welcomed.

NOMINATION FOR THE NRG COMMITTEE: 2008 Annual General Meeting

NOMINATED TO THE POSITION OF:

PERSON NOMINATED:

I agree to stand for election to the above position:

Signed:

NOMINATED BY:

SECONDED BY:

The information above can be copied to another sheet of paper, or a form can be downloaded from the NRG website.

Nominations close on Friday October 3, 2008. They must be received by the Secretary Diana Warrell, PO Box 1017, Research 3095 by 5 pm on that day. If more than one person nominates for a position an election will be held at the AGM on Tuesday October 7, 2008. If only one nomination is received that person will be declared elected. If there are no nominations for statutory positions, nominations will be accepted from the floor at the AGM.