



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2009

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:** *The NRG acknowledges the Wurundjeri as the traditional owners of the land of the Shire of Nillumbik and pays respect to their elders, both past and present. Their history is our history too.*

### The COMMITTEE

The first job of this report is to recognise that nothing reported here would have happened without the work of the team. The committee members Don Brown, Vice President, Diana Warrell, Secretary, Sasha Trikojus, Treasurer and Newsletter Editor, Joan Pickard, Pam Pedersen, Ann Curry, Kay Pitts and other members Graham Pritchard, Jann Darvill, Dorita Thomson, Jane Trikojus and Janet Boddy. There are others too. I mention only those who are the most persistent. We meet monthly at the home of Don and Joan, who not only provide a place to meet but also tea and sandwiches and sometimes cake. Thanks to Joan for these. Each person has their own particular way of contributing to the viability and the strength of NRG in its relationship with the Shire and Reconciliation.

### MEMBERS

We had 43 paid up members this year with 16 honorary members, in particular Wurundjeri people such as Joy Murphy Wandin and Doreen Garvey Wandin and Aunty Dot Peters. Members, your subscriptions keep us afloat and pays for Newsletters, Public Liability and so forth. And your interest is sustaining. Members give an organisation its corporal and spiritual strength – without you, there would be no NRG.

### REACHING OUT

During each year there are usually several ways in which we reach out to the wider public. The **Wurundjeri Resource Kit** is now available on disc. Sales have been encouraging, with orders coming from a broad area consistent with the very extensive tract of country of which the Wurundjeri are traditional owners.

There have been **displays of NRG and Reconciliation** material in two locations: the foyer of the Shire and the Eltham Library. Diana and Ann have been responsible for these artistic, attractive displays.

The **Newsletter** has come out five times in the year thanks to Sasha, our newsletter editor, and to the various contributions from members. I have had a number of comments from people who appreciate and enjoy the challenge of its contents. And then there are **e-mailed articles, information about Indigenous events and issues, and government decisions which affect Indigenous communities**. You can be well-informed via e-mail.

There is also the **Website**: Information about Indigenous activities, NRG Newsletters, articles and details of coming events are all there. The site address is on the title page of this report.

## **AUSTRALIA DAY**

Each year the Nillumbik Shire's Australia Day Citizenship Ceremony begins with a Flag Raising – this is now part of the official invitation to new citizens and their guests. This year Eva Joe spoke with clear and moving words what Reconciliation and Australia Day meant to her; knowing the difference while recognising that we are all Australians. In the afternoon several members went to celebrate Pam Pedersen's Community Volunteer Award from Jenny Macklin's office, which was presented at the Banyule Town Hall in Ivanhoe. A well deserved award for Pam.

## **PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SHIRE OF NILLUMBIK**

Australia Day is a partnership event but there is more than this to our very active and productive partnership with the Shire of Nillumbik. Funding is provided for activities which are declared partnerships, but what is perhaps most enjoyed is the respectful and supportive relationship which we have with the council and its officers. Reconciliation, through the Shire's Reconciliation Charter, is a responsibility of all Shire departments so our contacts are widening as Reconciliation becomes intrinsic to Shire activities and policies. We consider ourselves a very fortunate Reconciliation Group to have such a cooperative and mutually stimulating relationship.

## **ELTHAM JAZZ FESTIVAL**

During the Australia Day weekend we had the Jazz & Blues Festival in Eltham Town Square, at which we sponsored Liz Cavanagh, an Indigenous singer. This was very well received, and with our banner displayed across the back of the stage and our stall with its Aboriginal flag flying high on the portable flag pole made by Don, we considered this a wonderful place for a meeting between Nillumbik residents, Jazz aficionados and Indigenous talent and passion. We have arranged to do this again and I hope that the custom of having an Indigenous performer in the programme is developing.

## **ANNIVERSARY OF THE SORRY STATEMENT**

On 13 February several NRG members attended the Anniversary of the Prime Minister's Sorry statement in Federation Square. There was a very large gathering of Indigenous people along with others, and it was moving to hear the speeches and to see the importance of this statement while joining in with the plea for further action.

## **PAST MATTERS FESTIVAL**

We have a steady partnership with the **Eltham Bookshop**. We are all familiar with the festivals organised by Meera and her team. For the Past Matters Festival, held to date in Reconciliation Week in May, NRG is a very active partner. The most beautiful and poignant moments in the festival this year were the opening words of Elizabeth Kooroonya Savage. On a more practical note, we provided lunch for about 30 people at \$10 per head, sponsored a session, provided honorariums for Aboriginal speakers (these were supported by Reconciliation Victoria) and managed the Shire's funding grant for this event. It is a very interesting and challenging event and was very well attended this year, attracting overall approximately 450 discrete attendances at sessions. I have the impression that there is an increasing interest in Indigenous people, their culture and lives and greater recognition of their presence and place in our world. Certainly in Nillumbik more community groups are spontaneously including Indigenous people, stories, culture, issues etc in their programmes. It does give heart to the work of keeping open opportunities for this recognition and education to continue and grow.

We also have a role at the **World Matters Festival** in October. In the wide range of books and writers featured at this festival, Meera Govil includes Indigenous writers and poets, giving NRG a sponsorship of one of these sessions.

### **THE NRG STALL**

At each of these festivals NRG ran a stall selling bush foods and beautifully crafted cards made by Don Brown and donated to NRG. We also had stalls at the Eltham Jazz Festival, the Platypus Festival at Allwood House in Hurstbridge, and at the Eltham Rotary Town Fair. Most of the initiative for the stalls comes from Joan Pickard and Don Brown, with some assistance from others. But it is their labour and thought which makes the stalls a productive aspect of our financial survival and a useful conduit for contact with the wider Nillumbik community.

### **MEETING WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS**

There have been several meetings with other community groups concerned to include Indigenous history, culture and presence in their programmes.

**Eltham Library** is planning to increase their Indigenous Resources as part of the redevelopment of the Eltham Library, and met with us to think through ideas. **Amnesty International** in Eltham met with me to hear more of issues in Aboriginal policy. During NAIDOC Week a group of us went to **Yarra Glen Primary School** to take part in a Flag Raising and celebration of NAIDOC, returning some weeks later to take part in a tree planting of Manna Gums. I also went to **Charlton** and spoke to a group of women who support the local Catholic Church's World Development Organisation: a group of 25 enthusiastic people raise funds for projects in underdeveloped countries and also some Aboriginal communities in Northern Australia. And Diana Warrell and I were included in the Nillumbik's Women's Network's booklet **Celebrating Nillumbik Women**. Recently we had visitors from the **Mandaway Centre** at our meeting, a new business which is opening soon in Sherbourne Road promoting health and well-being which wants to connect with Aboriginal healing methods and healing spirit.

### **APPLICATION FOR AN ART EXHIBITION IN LIBRARY GALLERY**

Over the year there have been five very busy NRG artists: Don Brown, Joan Pickard, Diana Warrell, Ann Curry and Janet Boddy. New works have been created during 2009 and we have taken the plunge and reapplied for an Exhibition in 2010 in the Library Gallery. We have just received a letter commending the application and offering us the library gallery space July 1-25, 2010. Congratulations to the artists whose efforts at providing current work and the artists' statements have impressed the selectors. The title of the exhibition is "The Meeting Place – Different Minds, Different Hands".

### **THE GAWA TRAIL AND THE MOOR-RUL RECONCILIATION GRASSLANDS**

There are two areas of Nillumbik land for which we have responsibility: the Gawa Trail on Watson's Creek and the Moor-Rul Reconciliation Grasslands at Kangaroo Ground Tower and Moor-rul Platform. The Gawa Trail is cleaned up at intervals, with bark removed from paths and some new plantings made in Autumn. Yarra Glen PS brought a large group of Year 5 and 6 students to the trail combined with a visit to the Platform where Mick Woiwod spoke about K.G. history and Jann Darvill spoke about the Grasslands. Jann convenes a Friends group which is working on the grasslands with guidance from the Shire – Tim Krasevac in particular, and Dean Stewart (Koorie Heritage Trust) maintains a passionate Aboriginal confidence in the restoration and value of our patch of grassland. Five of us meet and weed fortnightly and have now begun to propagate grasses and plants found on the site: Jann D., Jan A., Jane Trikojus,

Cheryl Mutch and Liz Middleton. Please contact Jann Darvill if you would like a peaceful 2 hours weeding and planting on a hill with a magnificent view. It is an opportunity to take part in the restoration of a grassland, remnants of which have all but disappeared.

Catholic Ladies College girls and staff had an enjoyable and informative day with Mick Woiwod and Diana Warrell, who led the group for a tour of the Moor-rul Platform, the Gawa Trail, Kangaroo Ground Cemetery, Corranderk and the site of the Battle of Yering. At the Moor-rul Platform Mick talked about the Aboriginal and settler history, after which Diana described the Grassland project and gave each student a native plant. Harry Gilham (Eltham District Historical Society) presented the European history of the Kangaroo Ground tower, and Kay Pitts and Diana guided students around the Gawa trail. At Corranderk, Aunty Dot Peters spoke of her family's history there and the story of the successful farm on the reserve. At the Yarra Flats billabong, the Battle of Yering commemoration and story led imaginations to the truth of our Australian history. A most successful day thanks to Mick, Diana, Kay and Aunty Dot.

### **RECONCILIATION EASTERN METRO**

Four times a year representatives of Reconciliation Groups in the Eastern Metropolitan region meet to share news of their activities and to join together to make comment and objection on government policies and their outcomes for Indigenous people. NRG attends these meetings. We have also been making some overtures to Whittlesea Reconciliation Group and hope that contact may grow in the coming year.

### **RECONCILIATION VICTORIA**

Reconciliation groups across Victoria were dismayed when government funding support for Reconciliation Victoria was withdrawn this year. Don Brown and Graham Pritchard represented NRG at a meeting in August where RecVic and ANTaR and representatives from many reconciliation groups confirmed the value of RecVic to reconciliation in Victoria, condemning the government's action.

### **BIRRARUNG MARR WALK WITH DEAN STEWART (postponed to next year)**

Dean Stewart, Koorie Heritage Trust, will take NRG members and friends on his walk along Birrarung Marr. This will now be held next year in March or April when the weather is likely to be milder than at present.

### **PROGRAMME FOR 2010**

**There are four major events planned: Australia Day, Jazz Festival, Art Exhibition and Past Matters Festival. The options of having stalls at other festivals can be taken up too. Our aim to develop partnerships with other community groups, and so support reconciliation activities throughout the community, remains a focus for any future programme. There are possibilities in the pipeline so read your NRG newsletters and contact us if a partnership seems a productive possibility. Reconciliation belongs to the whole community.**

Jan Aitken  
13<sup>th</sup> November, 2009