



Nillumbik Reconciliation Group Inc PO Box 1017, Research VIC 3095

ABN: 61 506 201 828

www.vicnet.net.au/~nrgp

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2008

Jan Aitken, Nillumbik Reconciliation Group AGM, 7th October 2008

Each year is busy in its own way. This year we have made a change from the programme of flag raisings to one in which partnerships with other community groups are fostered. Reconciliation is a community responsibility and the various Reconciliation events and activities organised and supported by other groups and organisations in the Shire are recognised as contributing significantly to Reconciliation as it is practised in our community. We have been fortunate to have the active involvement of Pam Pedersen who brings an Indigenous perspective to NRG activities.

1. **The Shire's Reconciliation Charter and the United Reconciliation Action Workshop.** In April the Shire launched their Reconciliation Charter. Next week, on Tuesday 14th October, there will be a United Reconciliation Workshop to which community groups and businesses have been invited to share their Reconciliation initiatives and gain inspiration from others. This is the beginning of community work from which will be developed the Shire's Reconciliation Action commitment.

2. **The Battle of Yering Library Exhibition.** Back at the beginning of the year we honoured the Battle of Yering, 13th January, with a display of material relating to that event in the shared calendar of Wurundjeri and settler. This was the initiative of Diana Warrell, and with a little help from me a splendid exhibition was mounted in the Eltham library.

3. **Australia Day Citizenship Ceremony** begins with a Flag Raising held outside the venue. This year we had our very own Pam Pedersen to speak to the assembled crowd before they went inside to the ceremony. It is very significant that the Shire values this acknowledgement of Indigenous people and of the Wurundjeri traditional owners, and makes this an important part of citizenship in this Shire.

3. **Business meetings.** These continue to be held at the home of Don Brown and Joan Pickard, 22 Hillcrest Ave at 5.30pm on the first Tuesday of each month. Occasionally this is changed due to the travelling predilections of committee members. All members are most welcome to attend and contribute to these meetings, and recently attendance has been growing.

4. **The Apology of 13th February.** This was honoured by the Shire with a flag raising and barbeque. I saw the Apology at Hurstbridge Primary School and afterwards assisted with flag raisings for three grade groupings, speaking about the meaning of the Apology. We also lent out flags to Our Lady's Help of Christians Primary School for their own flag raising to honour the Apology.

5. The quarterly meeting of the **Reconciliation Eastern Metro** group of Reconciliation groups has been attended by NRG representatives this year.

6. **The Aesopic Voices conference** at Melbourne University, organised by Phillip Morrissey from Indigenous Studies, was attended by Diana Joan and myself. We manned the book stall for the Eltham Bookshop.

7. **The workshop with Daryl Taylor** was planned to provide an opportunity for members to get together to decide where NRG could go with Reconciliation in Nillumbik in the next few years. What emerged was the importance of making partnerships with local groups, businesses etc. We have followed this course and see a future for Reconciliation in Nillumbik with groups and organisations working together.

8. Each year we are in partnership with the bookshop for the **Past Matters Festival**, in late May in 2008, where Indigenous writers and writings are presented. This year Monday evening's meeting was on Sorry Day. We had a remembrance of this day and all that it means, and author Bruce Pascoe spoke recognising the significance of the day as he told us of the accounts of sorry events which he wrote about in his latest book 'Ocean'. We are all grateful to Meera Govil for her energetic and inspired contacts with publishers and writers and their presence in our own community for the festival. NRG, in particular Joan Pickard, has attended planning meetings with Meera for **World Matters Festival** in October. We have also been part of **meetings with the Shire and the Eltham Bookshop** concerning funding for literary festivals.

9. **Reopening of Worowa College**. May 28 saw a number of members attend this function to celebrate the reopening of the College after its registration was withdrawn. This has now been restored thanks to the efforts of the Governing Body with Lois Peeler as President. We wish them well as they continue to provide an Indigenous education.

11. **Reconciliation Week** was also celebrated at the **Diamond Creek East Primary School** with the raising of an Aboriginal flag recently purchased by the school. Robbie Greig, a member of NRG and a member of staff led the meeting. Pam Pedersen spoke to them about being Aboriginal and what it meant to her, and Robbie led the students singing songs which had some Indigenous meanings. We all sang 'I am Australian' for a great ending.

12. **Gawa Trail**. It took most of the year to organise but the Shire has now erected a sign, near the road at the entrance to the parking area, stating 'Gawa Wurundjeri Resource Trail, maintained by the Nillumbik Reconciliation Group'. Nearer the entrance to the trail itself is a handsome sign painted by Don Brown with our logo beside the title. The trail itself has been cleaned up on a couple of occasions, and with weeding and replanting and winter rain it is looking at its best. Jane Trikojus did the work of checking which plants were surviving summer and the subsequent ordering of plants. Some canny chicken wire shields were erected over plants which were being eaten by kangaroos so we are hopeful they may grow taller than the green plastic rabbit guards. Finally there is the saga of the new Gawa Trail brochure, which cannot be told in all its complex and arduous detail. The Shire is committed to providing it but the difficulties of communicating the new design to the Shire has meant a great deal of time taken for Sasha. We are hoping it will be forthcoming soon and Sasha can put this trying experience to rest.

13. **The Moor-rul Reconciliation Grasslands**. In April the Moor-rul Platform on Kangaroo Ground Hill was opened, the culmination of long and persistent work for a committee containing Mick Woiwod, Harry Gillham, Denis Ward and others. Beside the platform they set aside an area which was to be rabbit proof fenced and planted with grassland plants indigenous to the area. A planting plan was drawn up by Cric Henry, with advice from Dean Stewart. The NRG was given the job of creating and maintaining the Grassland. We have now fenced the area, and our thanks go to John Browning for his expertise and skill in that job. In order to have the support of the Shire, and to have a group which has the life of the grasslands at heart in an ongoing way, we have established a Friends Group to manage this project. Jann Darvill is the Convenor and she has met with Tim Krasevac and formally set up the Friends of the Moor-rul Reconciliation Grasslands. Anyone who feels they would like to contribute to the development of this area could begin by weeding on the first and third Wednesdays of the month at 2pm. Give Jann your e-mail address or phone number and you will be informed of the latest activity. We are delighted that Dean Stewart will have a vital interest in this work and bring his passion and expertise to it. Don has made two signs, one naming the grassland and another explaining that the area is being developed.

14. **The Darrabi Native Food Garden** at Hurstbridge Primary School was originally an initiative of one of our members, Susie Walker. This is another example of a project which is now managed by a Friends Group. The garden is to be used this year in a Greening Australia educational programme at the school. It is a project that has gone from strength to strength.

15. **NAIDOC**. We held a Film Night here at Le Pines where three films by Indigenous Film Directors were screened. They covered issues such as the health problems today which are rooted in the past diets of Aboriginals on reserves, the rebellion in Dubbo, and the story of the son of Warri

and Yatungka who were the last of the Nomads to come from the Western Desert. He had lived with his isolated family in the tribal way. He describes how his love of his land reflects his connection to it as to a mother. Pam, Don, Joan and I also attended **NAIDOC at the Maya Centre** in Thornbury about which we will hear from Reg Blow tonight. It was wonderful to be with such a joyful and celebrating group of Indigenous people.

16. **Newsletters and the website.** Thanks to Sasha, who has produced four newsletters for us this year. He is very pleased to receive written reports or articles, thoughts, photos and advertisements which are best sent via e-mail. His wizardry with the website must surely evoke envy in other groups less well equipped. I have noticed too that he had considerable input into the updating of the Reconciliation pages on the Shire's website.

17. In August, Pam Pedersen, Kay Pitts and I attended the **Garma Festival** in Eastern Arnhem Land. What a very rich and interesting experience it was! I urge others to go too. For details of the 2009 festival go to the [Garma website](#).

18. We have a **partnership with the Nillumbik Women's Network**. Diana and Ann Curry are working with Mandy Press and Susan Forbes in managing a Reconciliation theme for this year's Children's Day at the Eltham Community and Reception Centre. Mandy Nicholson, a Wurundjeri artist and Elder will paint and tell stories with children, Betty Pike will speak about her book 'A River Dreaming' which will be available for sale. Diana and other members will manage a stall of Native food products with a beautiful sign from Don's pen and brushes. Ann Curry will be doing face painting.

19. **Liz Cavanagh**, noted Indigenous Jazz singer, will be performing at the **Eltham Jazz Festival** held over Australia Day weekend in the Eltham Town Square. This has been the initiative of Don Brown in partnership with Sandro, who organises the programme for the organising committee. Funding was sought but no grant was forthcoming, so donations towards this venture will be very gladly accepted.

20. Another of Don's initiatives is the **NRG Art Exhibition** titled **eNeRGy**. He has applied for Library Gallery space in 2009, preferable over the Reconciliation Week period in the first week of June. There has been an enthusiastic response from eight artists who are members of NRG, and we wait with some impatience to hear if our application has been accepted.

21. **Partnership with Oxfam and Micah Social Justice Group** and possibly Amnesty International at Eltham. We are having planning meetings to organise a **meeting with Jenny Macklin**, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, which can involve members and supporters of all these community groups.

22. **On-Line Donation Registration.** Sasha completed the application for NRG to be part of the 'Nillumbik Gives' web page. This means that anyone wishing to donate towards the work that we do can do so through the on-line donation system.

23. **Our partnership with the Shire** is active and productive thanks to the work of Ben Pollard and Suzi Kerr. We express our thanks to them for their unfailing readiness to work with us in the promotion of Reconciliation within the Nillumbik community.

24. Many thanks to **Diana Warrell, our Secretary**, who has handled the circulation of all the information about current events of interest, articles of relevance to Indigenous issues, notices of forthcoming meetings etc. Her work also includes minutes of meetings and postings to people who do not have email.

25. Last and most important: recognition of the **sterling work** of all other committee members and other members and friends. In particular, NRG would not have a presence in the community without the work of Don Brown, Vice President, Sasha and Jane Trikojus, Jann Darvill, Joan Pickard, Ann Curry, Kay Pitts, Pam Pedersen, Mick and Marg Woiwod, John Browning, Paul Byrne-Moroney, Dorita Thomson, Eve Gregory, Carol Leeson, Graham Pritchard, and not to forget that every member who pays an annual subscription provides essential support