Barmah-Millewa, Natural & Cultural Heritage: ‘Keeping it for the Future’

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Format of Talk

- Snapshot of Natural & Cultural Values Unique to Barmah-Millewa
- Timeline & evidence of prior occupation
- Yorta Yorta-Barmah-Millewa Campaign for National Park, 2004
Key Factors in understanding Indigenous Land Relations

- Aboriginal culture in its proper time perspective—past & present as one.

- The concept of change adaptation & continuity—an evolving process familiar to all cultural groups.

- The existence of an ongoing-living culture that has survived & continues to maintain its connections with the ancestral lands (Beattie, J. Other Cultures: Aims, Methods & Achievements, 1964:241-264).
Barmah-Millewa Forest

BM is located within a floodplain of the Murray River (Dhungalla), bounded by Deniliquin, Echuca & Tocumwal, in the heart of Yorta Yorta-Bangerang country.
Yorta Yorta-Bangerang Occupation of BM & Cultural Heritage

- BM is in the heartland of Yorta Yorta-Bangerang Nation-Ancestral Land & Waters
- Yorta Yorta-Bangerang committed to conserving Barmah-Millewa which is keeping place of their cultural history.
- Joint Management of Barmah-Millewa will ensure continuity of natural & cultural values.
Forest straddles both sides of Murray River between Victoria (Barmah) & New South Wales (Millewa).

Most of the 65,000 hectare area is dominated by dense stands of river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), making it the largest river red gum forest of its kind in the world (Robinson 1998).

Includes significant patches of species-rich box woodland,
Barmah-Millewa: Biodiversity

- Moira-grass, rushlands & natural wetlands-riparian zone vegetation
- Natural habitat for fish & birdlife
- Traditional food places for Yorta Yorta-Bangerang groups.
BM: Habitat for Diversity of Species

- Forest contain a diverse range of vegetation communities & animal species.

- A habitat for the majority of threatened species in northern Victoria & southern New South Wales.

- Provides valuable natural benefits to agriculture, such as habitat for insect feeding birds & pollinating insects.

- Forest & wetlands assist in alleviating pressure on flooding downstream.

- Forest is highly valued for recreation such as fishing, camping, bush walking & boating.

- Use by so many people for cultural, nature-based, & recreational activities has helped forest become an Australian icon.
Ramsar Convention & China, Japan Migratory Bird Agreement

Ramsar Convention & China, Japan Migratory Bird Agreement

Barmah Moira Lakes, protected under Ramsar Convention (The signing of the Convention took place in 1971 in the small Iranian town of Ramsar (since then, it has taken the common name of the Ramsar Convention).

China & Japan Migratory Birds Agreement: (CAMBA,1986 & JAMBA,1974,) Agreement on international cooperation for the conservation of migratory species & for the protection of specific habitats. Great Egret & White-bellied Sea-eagle (two birds BM listed),
Ramsar Sites: Barmah-Millewa

As a signatory to the Ramsar Convention, the Australian Government has agreed to add wetlands of international importance to the convention’s list. To date, Australia has 49 wetlands on the Ramsar list, and they are shown below. Also marked on this map are wetlands identified by the Australian Wetlands Alliance (a network of local, state, national and international non-government groups) as likely additions to the Ramsar list. These are wetlands of international significance because of their ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology.

Indicates those sites in and associated with Yorta Yorta Native Title Claim.
Last substantial Replenishment of Forest occurred in 1996. Photos taken with group of Indigenous students from Melb Uni during Cultural Camp at Dharnya Centre, 1996
Barmah Choke (Narrows) runs between Picnic Point & Barmah Lake. Allows water to spread out over forest & give redgums drink. River red gum survival is dependant on regular & sustained drink.
Indigenous Occupation

Timeline & Evidence of Indigenous occupation
TIMELINE OF YORTA YORTA OCCUPATION

60,000 YEARS BP

Yorta Yorta Occupation and Possession back to Biami and the Dreamtime

Lake Mungo Mungo

25,000 BP

Kow Swamp Cranium

Cadell Fault creates changes to rivers

15,000

European Invasion 166 BP

2001

Pleistocene Epoch - end of last ice age

Holocene Epoch 10,000 BP

Wayne Atkinson, 2001
Timeline & Indigenous Survival

- Last two centuries (non-Indigenous occupation) dominates the timeline in relation to the intensity of change that Indigenous society has endured. Adaption continuity & the survival of Indigenous culture is the outcome that is still to be fully recognised.
Cultural Heritage Values: Scarred Trees
Stratigraphy (timeline) of Occupation Sites
Mounds & Middens
Mound Sites: Barmah State Park

Lagoon & Natural Food Storage System, Barmah Forest
Traditional Fish Trap System
Yorta Yorta Site Protection

Traditional Stone Tool Working Site
Yorta Yorta Sites, on both sides of Murray River, 1999

Figure 3

Yorta-Yorta Land Claim
Sites from NSW and VIC
Aboriginal Sites Registers

The hydrological mapping information in this product is subject to
Commonwealth of Australia, AUHSG, Australia’s national mapping agency. All rights reserved
AMG Zone 55 (AGD66). 5th Sept 1996
Table 6. Summary of Recorded Sites in the Yorta Yorta Lands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Type</th>
<th>New South Wales Count</th>
<th>Victoria Count</th>
<th>Total Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scarred Tree</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>881</td>
<td>999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mound</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Scatter</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middens</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burial</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>312</strong></td>
<td><strong>1213</strong></td>
<td><strong>1525</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indigenous Land Management

A Holistic view of the relationship between Natural-Cultural Values & other living entities.
‘Yorta Yorta have a long tradition of caring for forest. They ‘see the forest & all of its encompassing features (including all living entities) from a holistic viewpoint. The forest nurtured their ancestors & provided the means by which their survival & well-being was dependent. In turn, the Yorta Yorta looked after the forest & nurtured it for the future. When these practices of land management & care are measured against more recent events, it is clear that they have an excellent track record that stands firm in its own right’ (Yorta Yorta Nations Inc, 1990).
The rivers, lakes & their surrounds were very productive environments- often equated with ‘Smorgas Board theory’- variety, abundance & continuity of foods.

Provided fish, water birds, eggs, tortoises, shellfish, crayfish, possum, kangaroo & a wide range of plant foods.

Rivers creeks & network of water systems provided abundance & variety of other food sources.

Relationship between land & water in Indigenous philosophy is highlighted in Yorta Yorta-Bangerang occupation which was largely water based.

Most subsistence strategies were located, on in & around the water bodies-fishing, collecting food resources, campsites & middens reflect the nature & extent of past & present occupation.
Land & Resource Management Practices

- Yorta Yorta people constructed elaborate fish trap systems to store food & organised their lifestyle around the water resources that were replenished annually.

- Storage & accessibility reduced time & energy required for food collection.

- Provided more leisure time for other cultural activities & a good example of degree of affluence being enjoyed pre-Invasion.

- Intelligent & sophisticated strategies based on manipulating environment to produce returns, without trying to harness & bring under control as in imported western land water management practices.
Indigenous Land Use & Fire: Exposing the Myths

- There is a mistaken belief that Indigenous Australians did not ‘use’ the land, as they did not cultivate the land in accordance with European perceptions of land usage.

- Indigenous people used a system of land management which involved seasonal movement within their lands and a practice known as 'fire-stick farming'. Edmund Curr noted the use of the ‘fire-stick’ as a food production & land management practice in the Barmah-Millewa area in 1841 when he said ‘Living principally on wild roots & animals’ he [Aborigines] ‘tilled his land & cultivated his pastures with fire, the frequency of which he estimated was ‘once in every five years’ (Curr, 1965:88).

- Dates of vegetation cores samples taken from Lake George (near Canberra) indicate that the use of fire by Indigenous people for those purposes mentioned was happening 120,000 years ago (Singh, 1981:45–6).

- Larger raging bush fires today are attributed to absence of controlled burning, & understory buildup which is now being managed by ‘Fuel Reduction Burning’.
Use of Fire in Other National Parks

- Traditional burning is still being used in Kakadu National Park (Northern Territory), Gariwerd (Grampians), & Beechworth National Park, Victoria (pers com with Indigenous Rangers, Parks Victoria, 1998)

- The reintroduction of controlled burning as a land management strategy is one of the rights being asserted by the Yorta Yorta (Yorta Yorta Land Management Policy, 1995)
Adaption & Continuity

- For thousands of years Indigenous communities adapted as the land changed, experienced the same ice ages, & thaws.

- Yet over millennia the land provided sustenance & continuity for Indigenous Australians.

- As Paul Gordon explains, ‘people say Aboriginal people never farmed the land… We never had to. Our mother, the earth, she gave freely to us’
Cultural Heritage Values

- Evidence of 60,000 years Indigenous occupation.
- Cultural sites & local histories.
- Natural & Cultural Assets & their potential for social-economic returns still to be developed.
BM Dependency on Water

Introduced changes to water & replenishment of Barmah-Millewa Forest & Wetlands
“When the Hume Dam came into operation in 1936, flooding patterns within the forest were changed. These changes resulted in an inappropriate watering regime for the forest, with unseasonal & unnatural wetting & drying having marked effects on plant & animal communities,..”
**Changed Replenishment Regimes**

- Because of the way the Murray River & its tributaries are regulated for irrigation purposes, essential replenishment flows for Barmah-Millewa as icon sites have significantly changed.

- Are now fewer large winter/spring floods & more small summer floods-if any?

- This means that large parts of the forest are suffering long-term drought while other areas are waterlogged. This degrades the forest & changes the vegetation—see confirmation of these effects in MDBC, Report, 2004.
Effects of changed Replenishment flows on National & International significance of Barmah-Millewa

(Age, 17 Nov, 2004).

Most of the Murray River's red gums from Victoria to South Australia are stressed, dying or dead from salinity and lack of water.

A leaked three-government draft report, obtained by The Age, reveals an astonishingly rapid rise in the number of sick red gums and warns that without action, the river's lower flood plains may soon be full of dying trees.

The survey, commissioned by the Murray Darling Basin Commission with researchers from the Victorian, South Australian and NSW governments, compared the decline in red gums since the last survey in December 2002.

The results show that in just 18 months, the number of river red gums and black box trees counted as stressed, dying or dead had increased from 51.4 per cent to 75.4 per cent.

This decline was, the researchers found, a "universally severe phenomenon" across hundreds of kilometres of flood plain - from Victoria's Gumbower red gum forest downstream of Echuca, to Mannum in South Australia, 84 kilometres east of Adelaide.

Researchers have found that while severe drought is stressing the river's mighty red gums, the underlying problem is salinity and a thirsty flood plain.

Because of dams, irrigation and other uses, the Murray's flood plains are no longer frequently flooded. A decent flood used to occur one year in every 3.3. They now occur once in every 10.8 years and are insufficient to flush away accumulating salt.

The report said that drought-related tree stress had happened before and the red gums had improved with the return of rainfall and flooding. But extensive irrigation and associated elevated saline ground water might compound these stresses, the report said, leading to a "permanent loss of trees in parts of the flood plain and no capacity for recovery".

Governments have agreed to return a "first step" of 600 billion litres to the Murray, but the process has been delayed by red tape. Victoria is the most advanced state in its plans, but sources have told The Age that the river is unlikely to receive extra flows from the state until 2008.

But there is little time left, the report warned. A worst-case scenario would "suggest that the remaining trees not currently displaying signs of decline may show such signs within the next 15 to 18 months without a significant change in environmental conditions (such as) increased rainfall or extensive flooding", it said.

The loss of foliage as trees died would have long-term implications, the researchers said. It was likely to lead to a loss of tree-dependent animals and birds, and that the detritus that is a key ingredient in the river's aquatic ecosystem. This would eventually impact on native fish and therefore recreational and commercial fishers.


17/11/2004
More than 75 per cent of red gum and black box trees beside the Murray River from Gunbower to Mannum were stressed, dead or dying.

This compared to about 51 per cent two years ago (Riverine Herald, 22 November 2004).
Grazing Issues

★ Cattle have been implicated in the spread of noxious, woody & environmental weeds, severely restricting re-establishment of threatened species & increasing nutrient loads to rivers that are already struggling with increased pressures from agricultural development.

★ Many river frontages & associated wetland areas are grazed by domestic stock resulting in loss of bank stability & increased pollution of water by animal waste & sediments.

★ Internationally protected Ramsar wetlands are being continually degraded through ongoing stock access. Cattle also compete for limited feed with native animals in the forest areas.

★ Feral horses & pigs are also a problem, especially in the Barmah State Park & State forest (For other issues concerning woodlogging and activites that are incompatible with the preservation of Natural&Cultural values see YY Management Plan, 1999).
Yorta Yorta Connections

- To be buried in your own land in Yorta Yorta belief is to be at home, so that your eternal spirit is free to reunite with your people.

- To be denied this right is to be cut off from your culture, & community, not just from your land.

- The right to maintain spiritual interests, to be buried in your land & to protect your heritage, are fundamental rights that continue to be asserted by the Yorta Yorta Nation (Yorta Yorta Native Title Claim, 1994-2002).
Cultural Continuity: Art, Music & Dance

Lyne Onus: Jimmy’s Billabong

Wally Cooper & Sony Cooper: Yorta Yorta Dance Group

Lou Bennet & Tiddas

Jimmy Little
Cummera & Maloga Heritage

Maloga: 1874-88

Cummeragunja: 1889-Present

Lynch Cooper  World Champion, 1930s

Aboriginal Leaders 1930s
Local Indigenous Organisations: Rumbalara Aboriginal Coop (Uni Melb, Oncountry Learning Course Visit, 2004)

Barriers to achieving land justice under Anglo legal system & way Mabo principles are being applied by the Courts, perverted the course of justice in the Yorta Yorta case. Back to base camp politics - see, YY Agreement & BM Campaign.
The Underlying Currents of the Tide of History?
Yorta Yorta Struggle Continues
Yorta Yorta win historic land management deal

Involves no direct management of country

Limited to advisory role

Can be dissolved by a future state Govt

Attempt to score some points for shameful track record of land justice?
Yorta Yorta get a say

The Yorta Yorta people will have a say in the management of their traditional land under an agreement announced by Victorian Attorney-General Rob Hulls.

Mr Hulls said the Yorta Yorta Co-operative Management Agreement reached between the Bracks Government and the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation was the first time in Victoria an agreement had been reached outside of the native title process. The State Budget will put funding of $1.4 million towards the implementation of the agreement.

“This in-principle agreement is a significant step towards reconciliation and a prime example of what can be achieved through negotiated outcomes,” Mr Hulls said. “The Government has always believed that much can be achieved by way of negotiation. Where a native title determination can’t be reached, we have sought to negotiate agreements to achieve viable outcomes with Indigenous Victorians – and that’s what this agreement delivers.

‘Under this agreement the Yorta Yorta people will have a voice in the management of major public lands within their traditional country.’ – Attorney-General Rob Hulls

reaching future land management agreements with other indigenous communities outside the native title process.

The Bracks Government has made a commitment to Indigenous participation in the management of natural resources and the Yorta Yorta Co-operative Management Agreement is a practical step in delivering on that commitment.

The agreement is a positive step for integrated land management and meeting Indigenous land management aspirations.

It provides an opportunity for the Yorta Yorta community to advise the Minister for Environment on the management of specific parcels of Crown land of strong significance to the Yorta Yorta people, Whilst the Minister will retain ultimate decision-making authority, the input of the Yorta Yorta people will improve Government decision-making processes.”

Crown land affected by the agreement is in north central Victoria and includes the Barmah State Park, Barmah State Forest, Kow Swamp and specific parcels of public land along the Murray and Goulburn rivers.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, William Jonas, has welcomed the agreement.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission said it had been following the relations between the Yorta Yorta people and the Victorian Government for some time. “The commission intervened in the 2002 High Court proceedings to explain the inconsistency between the then state of native title law and the human rights of the Yorta Yorta. The Commissioner’s Native Title Report 2003 encourages parties to make greater use of Indigenous connections to land in addressing the economic, social and cultural interests of traditional owners,” it said.

Dr Jonas said: “The Yorta Yorta and the Victorian Government have moved beyond the legal minimums of the Native Title Act. This approach provides an excellent example to other parties that the relationship between government and traditional owners exists regardless of formal court processes.”
Barmah-Millewa Campaign
(People’s movement political strategy)

The Barmah/Millewa Campaign requires support from people interested in preserving Barmah/Millewa Forests as a national park for the enjoyment of future generations.

Recognises Yorta Yorta as the traditional owners under a joint management arrangement.
Vision for Future Management & Care of Forest

With appropriate joint management structures that include Indigenous interests, the BM Forests can provide a natural habitat for a significant number of threatened species, as well as attracting large numbers of visitors to enjoy its natural & cultural features (Victorian National Parks Association, 2003).
Why a National Park?

- NPs recognised nationally & Internationally as most effective way of maintaining natural & cultural values.
- They receive substantial funding & have a high priority in the management & care of reserved crown lands.
- Compared to its current status as a Forest, the BM National Park would receive four times the current funding for land management including pest, animal & plant control.
- BM would be first NP in Victoria to be jointly managed by Indigenous owners, a concept that is working very well in other parts of Australia - see Kakadu, Uluru, Mutawidnji, Lake Mungo, Jarvis Bay (VNPA, Barmah-Millewa).
Regional benefits of National Parks

- In the 1999/2000-year, there were 13.2 million visitors to Victoria’s National and State Parks.

- Tourism Victoria has reported that Victoria receives more income from tourism than the combined value of agriculture and mining - $9.4 billion, as opposed to agriculture $3.7 billion and mining $3.2 billion.[1]

- Despite initial local resistance to the declaration of the Grampians National Park in 1984, an independent study in 1994 showed that the Park adds $174 million to the local economy and $398 million to the State’s economy and provides 1270 jobs.[2]

Regional Benefits of National Parks

- A 1998 study reported that Queensland’s national parks return an estimated $1.2 billion to the State each year, for a cost of only $33 million. The Government appointed economic study showed that parks cost each Queenslander about 2.5¢ a day, but returned about a dollar a day “for every man, woman and child” in the State[2]

- Regional tourism depends partly on the competitive advantage bestowed on a region by its landscapes and nature conservation values. New national parks and conservation reserves could lead to increased, sustainable growth in the regional tourism economy of northern Victoria.

State Budget for Tourism-2003-2004: $40.6 Million


In the 2003–2004 State Budget the Government announced a $40.6 million boost for the Victorian tourism industry. Package comprised:

- $10 million over four years for international marketing,
- $10 million over four years to fund regional marketing campaigns,
- $15 million over three years to maximise return on existing major events and to secure new events,
- $2 million over four years through the Living Regions, Living Suburbs program to support regional tourism events, and
- $3.6 million over two years to stage the Australian Tourism Exchange in 2003 and 2004.
- $7 million for a marketing strategy to maximise the tourism benefits associated with the 2006 Commonwealth Games.
The dominant market for indigenous tourism continues to be international visitors. Similarly to the domestic market, international visitors are more likely to experience aboriginal art / craft and cultural displays rather than visiting an aboriginal site / community.
Numbers of Tourist Visitors, Victoria, 2003

International:

Of the 4.4 million international tourists who visited Australia in the year ending March 2003, Victoria attracted 1.2 million. Victoria receives 27.7 per cent market share of all international visitors.

Domestic:

Victoria attracted 5 million interstate visitors for the year ending March 2003, giving the state a 22.7 per cent market share of all interstate visitors.

Regional Victoria:

Regional Victoria receives substantive share of the 27.7 percent of Australia’s tourist economy. Takings from Victoria’s hotels, motels and serviced apartments totalled $866.9 million for the year 2002.

Victorian accommodation establishments employed 21,208 people, not to mention other benefits that flow to the hospitality industries, food, drink entertainment etc,

Regions most visited:
Goldfields and Murray Goulburn Waters enjoy significant portion of the tourist dollar which has become mainstay of regional economies.

Indigenous share of the tourist dollar?

PATHWAYS FOR FUTURE

A negotiated settlement between government & other parties, which recognises the Yorta Yorta as the traditional owners.

Current Agreement goes part the way

Needs to be complimented by Barmah-Millewa political campaign
Land Claims Process

- Bracks’ Government introduce land claims process.

- Could introduce land rights legislation like that which was unsuccessful in the 1980s (Lib/Nat Parties controlled Upper House).

- Expressions of regret by his predecessors, John Cain & Joan Kirner come back to revisit Bracks who has numbers in both houses.

- Victorian government could return Barmah Forest to its traditional owners under a joint management arrangement similar to those in other parts of Australia.

- Likewise the New South Wales labor government could do the same for the Millewa Forest as they did at Mutawinji.
International Options

UN is an important mechanism that can be used to keep the issue on the burner. To expose Australia’s treatment of its Indigenous people to other Indigenous peoples & Nation States.

- Pursue matter through UN Human Rights mechanisms—HRC, ICCPR, & WGIP.
- Could invite another Nation State to take up our case at the ICJ.
- Obstacles to getting a hearing at the International Court of Justice is that only states are able to present cases.
- Would be necessary to find a sympathetic state with resources & commitment that would not be victimized by other nation states including Australia?
Future Directions: Recommendations

- Give Joint Management structure a go

- Run Barmah-Millewa Campaign for National Park parallel with Yorta Yorta Aspirations.

- Pursue goal of National Park & cement Yorta Yorta occupation & control through legislation under Joint Management structure (see Models of Structures for Joint Management of NP’s in current BM Campaign research, 2004)