Press Release: Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation

‘The Yorta Yorta Nation: Moving forward with a Vision for the Future’

The Yorta Yorta are a unique group of Indigenous Australians who occupy a region of territory overlapping the VIC/NSW borders in what is now generally regarded as the Murray Goulburn region. The Yorta Yorta clan and family groups trace their blood line connections back to the original ancestors who occupied the land since time immemorial. Indeed 60000 years occupation of the ancestral lands that has continued into 21st Century Australia is a remarkable achievement in world human history. This is the basis of the distinct identity and rights that the Yorta Yorta as a nation inherits and which they wear proudly as Indigenous Australians. The recent and outstanding performance of the ‘Pecan Summer’ Indigenous opera in Shepparton featuring ‘sixty thousand years of Yorta Yorta history’ exemplifies the sense of connection and pride that the Yorta Yorta continue to hold in the region.

The Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation, YYNAC evolved from previous Yorta Yorta organisations. Its role is to represent members of the Family Groups and to acknowledge the Original Ancestors of the Yorta Yorta peoples; to make decisions and act on any matters of significance to the Yorta Yorta peoples; and to enter into agreements with any person, Government agency or authority in relation to the protection of Yorta Yorta country including the forest wetlands and cultural heritage. The Family-Clan groups include those representing the Bangerang, Kailtheban, Wollithiga, Moira, Ulupna, Kwat Kwat, Yalaba Yalaba and Nguaria-iiliam-wurrung clans. These groups are so closely related by kinship ties that they are one and of the same people.
The Traditional Lands and Waters

Yorta Yorta traditional lands and waters provided the fertile valleys for the creation and growth of the magnificent river red gum wetlands, and the diversity of wildlife in the region. These forest-wetlands are now protected as National Parks for the enjoyment of future generations, and will be jointly managed by the traditional owners and the Government under land management agreements and the policy of ‘Caring for Country’. This is a timely and adaptive management strategy that embraces both Indigenous and non Indigenous knowledge experience and skills.

Being river based people the Yorta Yorta have a strong connection with the network of rivers, and wetlands that remain the spirit and lifeblood of the Yorta Yorta Nation. The recent and vital replenishment flows that occurred in the region have provided a lifeline for the survival of the wildlife and the forest-wetlands.

While the evidence points to the fact that Yorta Yorta lifestyle flourished and they lived a very rich and varied lifestyle, the arrival of Europeans, had a devastating impact. Within the first generation of contact the Yorta Yorta population of some 5-6000 was reduced by 85 per cent through the ravages of introduced diseases and violence over the ownership and control of land and resources. The recovery and survival from near extinction, and regrowth to pre contact levels is a courageous show of strength, resilience, and determination and one that needs to be fully recognised.

Maloga and Cummeragunja

The surviving Yorta Yorta were relocated at Maloga Mission on the New South Wales side of the Murray in 1874, and the residents were moved to Cummeragunja reserve, 1888-9 under the government’s segregation policies of the late 19th Century. Cummera as it is affectionately known is where the Yorta Yorta were able to regroup after the devastating impact of colonisation. It also provided a base for the development of the Aboriginal political movement of the 1930s, led by some of Australia’s most outstanding political leaders of the calibre of, William Cooper, Shadrach James, Sir Doug Nichols, Eddie Atkinson, Marj Tucker, Geraldine Briggs and many other fine men and women.
Inspirational Yorta Yorta Leaders

Yorta Yorta leaders mentored by the brilliant teachings of Thomas Shadrach James of Maloga and Cummera, helped to establish the Australian Aborigines’ League in 1932, to represent their rights at the regional and National level. Yorta Yorta leader and Ghandi of his time, Uncle William Cooper led the first Aboriginal deputation to the Australian Government for the recognition of Indigenous citizenship rights and parliamentary representation. He also spoke out in support of the Jewish peoples struggle, and his contribution towards achieving justice for Indigenous Australians was recognised this year by the Department of Justice Victoria, in the naming of ‘The William Cooper Justice Centre’ in honour of his vision and leadership. Uncle William’s work, and other great Yorta Yorta leaders of the time, remains the driving force for today’s Yorta Yorta leaders in the Murray Goulburn region. While the Yorta Yorta population has spread itself across the Murray Goulburn region Maloga and Cummera remain an important link in their identity.

Together with other Aboriginal people, the Yorta Yorta have established many of the community based organisations in the region that provide services in; health, education,
housing, employment, land, culture and self management. Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative, the Academy of Sport Health & Education, Yenbeena Education Centre, and the Rumbalara Football & Netball Club are fine examples of the quality of leadership that has been nurtured.

Vision for the Future

The Yorta Yorta today are moving forward with a vision for the future and are negotiating some important land management and cultural issues in the region. The YYNAC is recognised by Federal, State and local Governments as the representative body on these matters, and they have achieved legislative status as the Representative Aboriginal Party for cultural heritage protection and management of the crown lands within their tribal territories.

Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation: Neville Atkinson, Chairperson, Dr Wayne Atkinson, Elders Council, Peter Ferguson, Vice Chairperson.

The cultural heritage and land management program is a major achievement in Yorta Yorta history. Moreover it is one that deserves to be supported by all levels of government so that it can do its business without having to continually justify itself, to those outside their group, as a democratically elected and constituted organisation. Walking together and achieving common goals in a spirit of reconciliation is the vision that the YYNAC is using to move forward into the future.

Gaka Yawall Ngulla Yenbena Yorta Yorta Woka: Come walk with us and help us to achieve our vision for a more inclusive community and an equitable share of the regional economy.

Neville Atkinson

Chairperson

Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation

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Transcript of Evidence from Yorta Yorta Native Title Claim, 1995-98: Federal Court, Melbourne

Yorta Yorta Witnesses in YYNTC

A8 = Witness Statement

t = Transcript of Evidence


Henry Atkinson, exhibit A8. t. 1694, 2195–6, 2212.

Kevin Atkinson Snr, t. 1721–30, 2328–33, 2354–6, 3670–1.

Leon Atkinson, exhibit A8. t. 3812.


Richard Atkinson, t. 1774–96, 1798, 2317.


Elsie Bailey, exhibit A8. t. 2276, 2282, 5520.

Sandra Bailey, exhibit A8. t. 5455.


Lesley Briggs, exhibit A8. t. 879, 1100.


Denise Morgan Bulled, t. 2047.

Fay Carter, exhibit A8. t. 844.

Wally Cooper, exhibit A8. t. 2913, 2941, 3064, 3069.

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http://www.deborahcheetham.com/pecan_summer


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