



A VCMC Position/Perspective Paper on Indigenous Engagement in Victoria

Cover image: Collon Mullet, indigenous member of the Victorian Catchment Management Council, at Halls Gap in July 2006

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Paper on Indigenous Engagement
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1. Victoria's Catchment Management Framework

The Victorian Government is committed to the integrated management of catchments as one of the best ways to deliver a sustainable State. In Victoria, the concept of integrated catchment management (ICM) underpins sustainable management of land and water resources and contributes to biodiversity management. Victoria has a strong integrated catchment management framework (CMF) established under *the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (CaLP Act)*. Under the *CaLP Act*, Victoria is divided into 10 catchment regions (Figure 1).

At the statewide level, the framework also includes the Victorian Catchment Management Council (VCMC). The VCMC is the State Government's peak advisory body on catchment management. The Council is uniquely placed, independent of government agencies, Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) and non-government organisations to take a long term view and to influence change in catchment management.



Figure 1. Victoria's Catchment Management Authorities

2. The Study

2.1 Project Background

In 2000, a Yorta Yorta woman was appointed as a member of the VCMC. This was the first time in the four year history of VCMC that an Indigenous person had been represented on Council. This appointment was instrumental in raising the awareness level of other Council members on Indigenous matters regarding land and water management.

In 2001, VCMC was successful in obtaining Natural Heritage Trust funding which resulted in the development of model protocols for engagement in the North Central Region of Victoria (see Case Study 3). The final agreement was signed by North Central CMA, North West Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Yorta Yorta Nation, Dja Dja Wurrung and Jaara Jaara peoples at a ceremony held in November 2002.

In 2004, a Gunai man became a new member of Council. This appointment has stimulated the VCMC to undertake an assessment of how far Victoria has progressed since the signing of the protocols nearly three and a half years ago.

2.2 Objectives

The primary objectives of this paper are threefold:

- (i) To improve management of natural resources in Victoria;
- (ii) To present an overview of the current status of Indigenous engagement in NRM in Victoria; and
- (iii) To provide advice on how Indigenous engagement within the catchment management framework in Victoria can be improved.

2.3 Audience

This paper is intended for all people involved in natural resource management in Victoria.

2.4 Study Design/Methodology

To partly inform the development of this paper, a representative of the VCMC travelled to selected areas across the state including East Gippsland, North Central, Wimmera, Glenelg-Hopkins and Melbourne and undertook a series of interviews with key Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals involved in NRM. Where possible, interviews were conducted with a cross-section of people from different organisations/communities, genders, age groups and backgrounds (A full list of participants is provided under 'Acknowledgments'). Each participant was invited to answer a series of pre-prepared questions (Appendix 1) and to present their personal interpretation of Indigenous engagement at the regional level.

3. Recognising the Indigenous Spiritual Connection to Country

An Aboriginal man was given the honour of returning skeletal remains of an Indigenous ancestor to the original burial site known to be a limestone cave in Gippsland, Victoria. This was the first time the man had been in contact with human remains, and he was overwhelmed by the enormous responsibility that had been bestowed upon him.

After entering the cave, the man struggled to find a suitable resting place for the deceased. As he unwrapped the skeletal remains from the plastic covering, a blowfly came to rest on the bones. Immediately he recognised there was a spiritual connection, and he asked the blowfly to guide him. At that moment the blowfly flew across the cave and landed on a shelf. The man knew instantly that this was a sign, so he proceeded to lay the remains onto a bark stretcher, which he later carefully placed on the shelf. All the while, the blowfly remained in the same position on the shelf, alongside the remains of the ancestor. After paying his respects, the man climbed out of the cave and closed up the entrance.

The story of the blowfly demonstrates the strong connection that Aboriginals have with Country, which they have maintained for thousands of years. Indigenous peoples look upon the land as their mother because from it derives everything they need to survive. The waterways, for example, are the lifeline of Indigenous people, and the fish, swans, ducks and reeds are all life sustaining sources of food (Figure 2). Indigenous peoples travel the waterways throughout Country and write songs about their travels. This interconnection between humanity and environment, as a holistic entity, is the essence of Indigenous peoples' culture, spirituality and life (Craig & Shearing, 2004).

In just over 200 years since European occupation, there have been many events, policies and legislation that have impacted severely upon Indigenous peoples across the State and their ability to practice their culture. Not surprisingly, relationships between Indigenous and other Australians have been adversely affected by these activities (Natural Heritage Trust, 2005).

Given that Indigenous peoples and the broader community have similar aspirations for caring for Country and are working to achieve common outcomes for natural resource management, it is within the interests of all Victorians to heal the wounds of the past and work together to manage our natural and cultural assets. As these resources are coming under increasing development pressure, it is now more important than ever that provision is made for Aboriginal interests, values and participation in land and water management (Jackson et al., 2005) to protect what is left for future generations.



Figure 2. Wimmera River, Little Desert National Park, Victoria.

4. Demystifying the Meaning of ‘Indigenous Engagement’

NRM agencies have a responsibility to consult with all whose interests/rights/wellbeing is affected by their programs and policies.

The words ‘Indigenous engagement’ mean many things to many people. The following interpretations were offered by participants in this study:

“Empowerment of Indigenous community to be involved in NRM.”

“Being recognised as people and as part of the community.”

“To be involved and have a say in what the government’s doing in land and water management.”

“Building relationships, developing common understanding, acknowledging differences.”

“Informed consent.”

“Two-way process.”

“Talking; developing relationships; being constantly in contact; not tokenistic.”

‘Engaging’ or ‘communicating’ or ‘developing partnerships’ with Indigenous individuals and communities is intrinsic to the process of involving Indigenous communities in natural resource management. Engagement is about earning trust and gaining respect on both sides and requires honesty, sensitivity and an ongoing commitment over time.

5. With Whom To Engage?

Indigenous engagement is complicated by a lack of clarity around with whom to consult. This applies to both Indigenous peoples and the broader community.

Identifying Traditional Owners and Indigenous Communities for Engagement

The concept of ‘speaking for Country’ is a fundamental principle adopted by Traditional Owners. According to the Indigenous Land Management Framework draft discussion paper (2004) “...traditional owners, where through membership of a descent group or clan, individuals and communities are responsible for caring for that part of country. It is broadly recognised that Aboriginal law authorises traditional owners to speak for Country.”

Finding out who is authorised to speak on behalf of Country has proved difficult in the past for government and other NRM bodies. However, with much of Victoria’s public land the subject of a native title application, it is becoming easier to identify Traditional Owners who have been officially recognised through the native title process. Contact details for these groups are recorded on a register maintained by the National Native Title Tribunal.

It is important to engage with Traditional Owners on their own terms. Too often a member of a Traditional Owner group (who is known to be approachable) is approached/ambushed and asked his/her view. Rather, it should be at the discretion of the Traditional Owner group to determine the appropriate method for providing feedback/comments/informed consent. This may be through a person being authorised to speak, or it may be through a Council of Elders, family group, etc.

In any given region in Victoria, although there is usually only one Traditional Owner group, there is likely to be a diversity of other Indigenous groups that embody many different histories, different cultural expressions, languages and ways of relating to land and water (Sullivan, 2004). While it is recommended to engage with Traditional Owners first and foremost, it is important to aim for holistic involvement and consult with the wider Indigenous community who may also have an interest in a particular project/area. The appropriate level of engagement will, to some extent, depend on the nature of the issue concerned (Craig and Shearing, 2004) so it is necessary to assess each new situation independently. For example, in most cases it would be appropriate for a community representative to speak about housing, education and employment issues whereas only traditional owners have the right to speak about Country and any activities affecting Country. It is important to consider these different interests when planning regional activities and be prepared to appoint an independent person or body to resolve any disputes that may arise (NHT, 2004).

Identifying Government and Other NRM Agencies for Engagement

On the reverse side of the coin, Indigenous people similarly feel confused about whom to approach at the organisational level and often see all government agencies/departments as the one body.

There is a need for government to develop a strategic, coordinated approach to Indigenous engagement in NRM, whereby agencies such as DSE, DPI and PV work closely together and share learnings and experiences. This approach also requires cooperation with non-government community organisations (Sullivan 2004).

Where regional/local NRM issues are concerned, CMAs are often a good first point of contact as they are responsible for representing community aspirations in Regional Catchment Strategies (RCS) and play a key role in working with Indigenous people on on-ground projects/programs. Often traditional boundaries do not match CMA boundaries so contact with more than one CMA may be required.

6. How is Victoria Travelling with Indigenous Engagement?

It would be fair to say that we have come a long way from where we were 20 years ago in engaging Indigenous peoples in Victoria. Landmark events such as the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) and the High Court of Australia decision recognising the existence of native title (1992) have given strength to the community and influenced the way that Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups interact. The past 2-3 years, in particular, have seen a shift in progress, and there is a sense that the lines of communication have opened up and that there are more consistent regional programs with Indigenous input/involvement in place than ever before. The Natural Heritage Trust, for instance, has specifically targeted aboriginal involvement in its investment program, while the Victorian Government has committed to building new partnerships with Indigenous Victorians in its social policy action plan *A Fairer Victoria*.

Although there have been some real successes and we are heading in right direction, the reality is that we still have a long way to go. Engagement in the regions is often selective and fragmented, and there is still a lack of understanding and respect for Indigenous people and their cultural values. Some communities feel they are being ‘over-engaged’, and are growing tired of hearing the same promises around the table without results. One Aboriginal man referred to the lack of progress as ‘soul destroying’. Demands on funding, time and capacity continue to be an issue for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. Victoria needs look no further than its state and territory counterparts to see that a lot more can be done at both a policy and operational level to facilitate meaningful and effective engagement.

7. Mechanisms for Effective Engagement

This section investigates a range of tools/approaches that have been implemented at the regional level in Victoria to facilitate Indigenous engagement and looks at some practical ways that we can improve on our past and current efforts.

7.1 Reconciliation

In 2005, the Victorian Government passed legislation and amended the constitution to formally acknowledge all of Victoria's Traditional Owners, their rich culture, and the intrinsic connection they have to Country. This recognition also addressed the contribution and interests of other Indigenous people and organisations in the management of land and natural resources along with past injustices and continuing inequities experienced by Indigenous peoples that has limited, and continues to limit, their proper participation in land and natural resource management processes. This is a tremendous achievement that paves the way for past baggage to be left behind and new partnerships between government and Indigenous peoples to be formed.

More recently, the Victorian Government formally identified the need to reconcile the dispossession of Indigenous land and culture through a whole-of-government reconciliation initiative (DSE, 2005). The reconciliation would be based on:

- Indigenous involvement in land management
- Protecting Indigenous heritage
- Funding businesses
- Increasing Indigenous land ownership

VCMC strongly encourages the Victorian government to continue along this pathway and ensure these aspirations are realised. This would mean that both parties could truly move forward without guilt or shame and build on existing partnerships. According to one participant, "it's a bit like an open wound that will always weep 'til the right medication is given. That's what we're looking for – the right medication instead of token bandages."

7.2 Cultural Awareness Training

Material evidence of Aboriginal existence and a rich cultural heritage prior to European occupation is evident right across the Victorian landscape in the form of campfire remains, burial grounds, scarred trees, quarries, rock wells, etc. Many of these sites, however, are under threat due to development and other factors. NRM activities which have the potential to damage Aboriginal cultural heritage places include (DSE, 2005):

- Building/construction
- Irrigation developments
- Extractive industries
- Laser levelling
- Ploughing
- Ripping rabbit warrens
- Some forms of weed removal
- Dune stabilisation
- Road and track construction/realignment

- Ditch digging
- Pipeline construction
- Creation of pathways and walkways
- Forest clearing/remnant vegetation removal
- Logging

It is an unfortunate reality that most agency staff wouldn't be able to recognise Aboriginal heritage if they fell over it! One traditional owner recounted an incident where he witnessed a non-Indigenous person walking not more than four feet from a cultural heritage site without even realising it was there. The government has a responsibility to Aboriginal people to preserve what is left of their culture and encourage and support staff to undertake cultural awareness training. The more people that can identify these sites, the more sites can be found, registered and protected (with the exception of a small number of sacred sites, eg. initiation sites, which are not revealed by Indigenous people).

Cultural awareness training not only provides guidance on how to identify and consider Indigenous cultural heritage values in the landscape, it recommends practical ways to engage and involve the local Indigenous community in projects. "It begins with sharing of knowledge and this sometimes starts with a simple 'hello'" (Natural Heritage Trust, 2005).

Cultural awareness training should be made available across whole-of-government as part of an induction process, to raise the level of consciousness regarding the Indigenous story, and commence an ongoing dialogue with the communities. Many of the previous CMA Boards underwent cultural awareness training, which is to be commended. Council would encourage newly appointed CMA Boards to follow suit.

A number of TAFES and other organisations are now running nationally accredited courses in Indigenous engagement with a certificate qualification. This is another avenue for increasing cultural awareness that should be further explored.

7.3 Employment and Training

The majority of Indigenous participants involved in this study identified employment as the single most important issue they are facing.

Aside from the 'work for the dole' Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP), very few targeted employment opportunities have been made available to Indigenous people. This is reflected in statistical data on labour force status in Victoria in 2001, with 17.9% unemployment among Indigenous persons versus 6.7% of non-Indigenous persons unemployed (ABS, 2001).

This situation is slowly changing within NRM circles. For the past 8 years or so, Parks Victoria has led the way by recruiting Indigenous staff into park management roles. Other organisations have followed suit (eg. CMAs, DSE, DPI) and a range of employment programs and cadetships have now been established across the State with varying levels of success.

'Wur-cum barra', the Victorian Public Sector Indigenous Employment Strategy, is an example of a particularly ambitious Indigenous employment program which is being implemented across whole-of-government. The strategy, which was adopted by the Victorian Government in 2002, set a target of 230 new Indigenous staff to be employed or

funded by the Victorian Public Service by July 2005 across all grades and occupational groups. Although DSE performed remarkably well and exceeded its employment target of 38 full-time equivalent Indigenous staff across the Department, despite best efforts, Wur-cum barra fell well short of its overall target across whole-of-government with only 15% of positions being filled by end 2005.

Unfortunately, this outcome is not surprising given our track record with Indigenous employment. Fisheries Victoria, for example, recently advertised an Indigenous Fisheries Officer position but the role was unable to be filled because no suitable candidates applied. Time and time again, jobs that are being advertised are failing to attract any applications, and the few that do apply do not have the right skills or background to carry out the role. This raises serious questions about recruitment processes and leaves us pondering where are we going wrong?

There are probably several reasons for the poor uptake of Aboriginal people into such roles, but it is clear that the Indigenous community is not one you can “throw jobs at”. Indigenous people have been accustomed to high unemployment levels for generations, and the youth of today often see their lives taking a similar pathway to that of their parents and grandparents. This makes it difficult to motivate young people to go to school. So without any formal education, qualifications or training, a large proportion of the Aboriginal community are simply not “job ready”.

Evidently, we need to go back a couple of steps and provide pathways to Indigenous people to prepare them for entering the workforce. Programs such as traineeships and cadetships, which do not require any previous qualifications, are an excellent way forward. Also, routine employment programs/contracts for works on Country would give Aboriginal people an opportunity to utilise their practical skills and expertise in caring for Country, eg. summer fire crew, water quality testing, revegetation, weed control, aquaculture, ecotourism (Case Study 1). Coupled with suitable on-the-job training, these people could eventually be grown into policy/managerial roles with greater responsibility and influence. As one Indigenous participant commented, “before too long we’ll be taking over CMAs!”

A mix of employment opportunities at all levels needs to be available and should not be defined by race. Indigenous people ought to be considered for mainstream roles that are not solely focussed on Indigenous heritage (eg. Waterwatch Coordinators), whereas Cultural Heritage Officers and the like should be treated as full members of an organisation as opposed to being labelled as “Indigenous representatives”.

A register of qualified/trained individuals would enable employers to identify Indigenous people that might be suitable for any future jobs that arise.

To facilitate retention once employed, adequate support structures/mentors need to be put in place to make people feel valued.

At the moment we are still only dealing with ‘tip of the iceberg’ where Indigenous employment is concerned. An integrated approach is required to realise opportunities for Indigenous employment in NRM. Not only does the government need to step up to the challenge and make a genuine long-term commitment to Indigenous recruitment, Indigenous peoples likewise need to actively seek out opportunities to prepare themselves for entering the workforce. This is the best approach if we are ever going to break the cycle of unemployment.

Case Study 1 – Indigenous Ecotourism Opportunities

The findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991) recommended that “Aboriginal participation in tourism had the potential to contribute significantly to Aboriginal growth if carefully managed” (Finlayson, 1996). 15 years down the track, this aspiration is yet to be fully realised and examples of successful ecotourism businesses in Victoria with genuine participation of Indigenous people remain few and far between.

Tower Hill Reserve (Figures 3 & 4) is one example of a successful ecotourism venture in Victoria. The Worn Gundidj Cooperative, in co-operation with Parks Victoria, has revitalised Tower Hill into a thriving nature reserve and natural history centre where visitors can experience the bush, enjoy magnificent scenery, see Australian birds and animals in their natural habitat and learn about local Indigenous culture (Worn Gundidj Co-operative, 2004). Worn Gundidj Cooperative conducts an on-site cross-cultural program that caters for individuals and groups including:

- Guided walks with local Indigenous people to discover bush food and learn about the Indigenous history of the area
- Spear throwing
- Painting
- Boomerang throwing
- Didgeridoo demonstrations
- Message stone painting
- Dancing and traditional ceremonies



Figure 3. *Tower Hill Reserve*



Figure 4. *Tower Hill Reserve Visitor Centre*

Involving traditional owners in the future management of this site is an opportunity that should be further explored.

There is enormous scope to build on existing successes and create new opportunities for Indigenous peoples to become involved in ecotourism. International and domestic tourists in Australia are increasingly seeking cultural and nature-based tourism experiences (Finlayson, 1996) and Indigenous enterprises often have a competitive advantage over other tourism ventures (Fuller et al., 2005) due to the uniqueness of the experience they are offering.

However, careful planning is required to minimise the failure of such businesses. Would-be entrepreneurs often lack critical skills and experience in planning, business

management, financial management, marketing and product research and development (Fuller et al., 2005). These people need to be appropriately trained and empowered to make informed decisions that are commercially viable.

Also, Indigenous tourism enterprises need to have access to not only start up and development capital but ongoing financial support. The CDEP scheme has the potential to play an important role in this regard (Fuller et al., 2005), as do other federal and State funding initiatives. Another option is for Aboriginal people to enter into joint commercial ventures which are more likely to attract private sector funding (Finlayson, 1996). Securing a suitable partner with previous experience in the tourism industry has the added benefit of potentially compensating for skill deficiencies of inexperienced Indigenous employees (Fuller et al., 2005).

DSE, PV and Tourism Victoria are currently in the process of developing a draft *Nature-Based Tourism Strategy 2006-2010* which is due to be released for public comment later 2006. This is a tremendous opportunity for the Victorian Government to address the current gaps in policy regarding Indigenous ecotourism and develop some real strategies to get a comprehensive program up and running across the State. VCMC urges the government to take up this challenge.

7.4 Indigenous Facilitators



Figure 5. Damein Bell, Project Manager, Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project and Shane Bell, Indigenous Community Landcare Facilitator, Glenelg Hopkins CMA.

All of the CMAs have appointed, or are in the process of appointing, an Indigenous facilitator to guide Indigenous activities at the regional level (except Port Phillip and Westernport CMA which utilises a regional position employed by Greening Australia and funded through the Natural Heritage Trust). This is a major step forward that has led to enhanced cross-cultural awareness and breaking down of barriers between CMAs, Aboriginal communities and the broader community. For example, the Glenelg Hopkins Indigenous Community Landcare Facilitator (Figure 5) is involved in an innovative project to capture traditional stories from different parts of the region and develop them into an illustrated children's storybook. It is anticipated the storybook will

lead to increased awareness of Indigenous heritage amongst the younger generation.

The appointment of Indigenous facilitators has also led to recognition at the organisation/official level of the contribution that Indigenous groups are making to NRM. The Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project is an example of an Indigenous community initiative that aims to develop the Lake Condah/Tyrendarra district in the far southwest of Victoria as a major environmental and cultural heritage park. The community is nominating the site for world heritage status which demonstrates the significance of the input that Indigenous groups are making to the region (see Case Study 2).

Given that each of the facilitators has a responsibility to the CMA and to the communities to perform in their role, it is important that the right person who has relevant skills and ability is selected in the position from the outset. ie. "not just a black face sitting at a desk".

There is a tendency for anything that is remotely related to Indigenous engagement to be delegated to the Indigenous facilitators to manage. This means that their workloads and level of responsibility are often very high, and they are continuously under pressure to get tasks completed. A comprehensive works program that had executive support recently failed because there was nobody to assist the facilitator to get the program up and running. Facilitators would benefit greatly from having a formal mentor to turn to provide support and guidance on important decisions, and to help manage expectations at the executive level. This should be a recognised role that is embedded in the position description of the manager.

A facilitator was recently placed in an awkward position when he was forced to make a decision to either break workplace confidentiality or risk being cut off by his community for withholding important information about a development project that was certain to desecrate a sacred cultural heritage site. Fortunately, the facilitator was able to talk the issue through with a mentor, and was reassured that his job would not be under threat if he exposed the project to his community, which he decided to do. Clearly, in this case,

having a mentor in place that understood cultural differences defused a potentially disastrous situation.

CMA boards themselves should also be more proactive and share the responsibility of forming relationships with Traditional Owners and communities, eg. by inviting Indigenous groups to attend Board meetings.

Too often Indigenous facilitators are expected to ‘sign-off’ on strategies and programs at the last minute without being involved in their development. It is imperative that facilitators and other community members are consulted during the planning phase so that Indigenous viewpoints are captured early in the process. It is not a matter of just ticking the ‘cultural heritage box’ at the bottom of the form. Informed consent is a continual process that requires time and consideration (Sullivan 2004).

Interaction between DSE, PV and CMA facilitators varies from region to region. Given the similarity and overlap in role and function, facilitators from overlapping regions could benefit enormously from holding regular meetings where they could share stories and learn from each other’s experiences.

Case Study 2 - Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project

Source: Text courtesy of Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation - www.lakecondah.com



Figure 6. *Lake Condah*

The Lake Condah/Tyrendarra district in the far southwest of Victoria is renowned for its expansive aquaculture system which was engineered and constructed by local Gunditjmara people, covering up to 100 square kilometres of traps, channels, races, weirs and ponds for the growing and harvesting of eels and fish (Figure 6). It is also recognised and respected for its evidence of humankind's first instances of permanent and sustainable settlement over

the past 8,000 years, which is indicated by the large number of stone-dwelling remains (Figure

7). Its significance was recognised by the Australian Government in July 2004 when the site was declared on the national heritage register.

Other noteworthy features of the site include:

- Internationally significant volcanic landforms.
- Lake Surprise at Mt. Eccles is globally significant as a high quality record of climate and vegetation change over the past 30, 000 years.
- The 20 year Eumeralla War of Resistance is of national significance.
- The Lake Condah Mission site is one of the most important examples of over 400 Aboriginal missions established in Australia.
- The Commonwealth legislation for the hand back of the Lake Condah Aboriginal Mission site is of national significance.

The Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project (LCSDP) is an Indigenous program that was initiated by the Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation in February 2002. It aims to develop the Lake Condah/Tyrendarra district as a major environmental and cultural heritage park. Key elements of the LCSDP include:

- Gaining world heritage listing for the Budj Bim (Lake Condah/Tyrendarra district) landscape and its significant Indigenous values.
- Permanently restoring water to Lake Condah to reactivate the traditionally constructed aquaculture system and restore the biodiversity of the Lake Condah area.
- Establishing an international learning centre through the development of knowledge networks.
- Developing enterprise and employment opportunities centred on cultural and ecological tourism, aquaculture, accommodation, sustainable farming and bush tucker.
- Restoring the Lake Condah Church site.

Since the launch of the project, a leadership group and partnership forum has been working to prepare a Master Plan for the development of the Project. With over 40 representatives on the LCSDP Leadership Group from diverse backgrounds including

government, community groups, and individuals, strongly committed and actively engaged partners are the key to the success of the project. Some of the challenges the group faces include:

- Ensuring that the entire community has an understanding of the project.
- Ensuring that the entire community has a stake in the project and share in the outcomes.
- Refining, in conjunction with local farmers and other important stakeholders, what is possible and desirable in terms of restoration Lake Condah's water levels.
- Real engagement and consultation with key stakeholders such as local farmers, local businesses, community organisations, the Indigenous community and government agencies.
- Gaining wide community support and active partner participation.

In early 2004, the project received a boost when it was successful in receiving grants from the Glenelg Hopkins CMA, the Alcoa Foundation and the Indigenous Land Corporation to establish a project office and appoint a Project Manager.

It is anticipated that National Heritage listing and the advocacy for World Heritage listing will act as a magnet and attract people into the area. Assuming an additional 300,000 visitors per annum over a 10-15 year period, the project would generate:

- Direct investment of \$50m
- Direct provision of 100 jobs
- Generation of 1,567 indirect jobs
- Adding \$126m to the local economy
- Attraction of 3,000 new residents
- Adding \$170m to the construction industry

The Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation should be congratulated for successfully initiating the LCSDP project on behalf of the Gunditjmara people and the broader community. This project is a fantastic example of what can be achieved when different interest groups make a commitment to work together to make a difference. It is hoped that other communities across the State take heart from these accomplishments and have the courage to embark on similar local/regional projects that enhance Indigenous cultural values and heritage.



Figure 7. *Lake Condah Hut Remains*

7.5 Project Investment/Funding

It is no use recognising Indigenous cultural heritage in policies and strategies such as RCS if it is not backed-up by funding to carry-out on-ground projects and activities. In 2003/2004, of 2,500 Natural Heritage Trust applications made at the national level, only 8 Indigenous projects were funded (Mullett, 2004). Before any options for Indigenous economic development can be realistically addressed, the disadvantage of Indigenous Nations must be recognised in existing management and investment (Sheehan, 2004).

Government agencies, CMAs, landcare groups/facilitators and other NRM bodies need to work harder to build awareness within Indigenous communities of funding programs so they can have access to the same opportunities as non-Indigenous people. CMAs, in particular, could act as a funding conduit for Indigenous communities and bring dollars in to the region. These bodies could potentially become the biggest employer of Indigenous people at the regional level. Given that writing applications is 'white man's culture', it may be appropriate for CMA/landcare/agency representatives to provide assistance to Indigenous people in preparing applications.

Tables 1 and 2 outline a range of investment opportunities and funding sources for Indigenous people in NRM. There is also potential to go beyond traditional NRM funding sources and tap into other sectors, eg. tourism (ecotourism). Funding bodies need to ensure that project funding cycles are compatible with works carried out on the ground.

Table 1. Investment Opportunities (DSE, 2005)

- Traditional practices
- Maintaining and promoting traditional knowledge
- Protection of cultural sites
- Enterprises which complement NRM
- Improved health issues through NRM
- Management of our biodiversity
- Managing threats to natural resources
- Involvement in NRM planning

Table 2. Funding Sources (DSE, 2005)

- Dept of Environment and Heritage
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- Department of Transport and Regional Services
- Indigenous Land Corporation
- Catchment Management Authorities
- State Water Grants
- TAFE Institutions
- Indigenous Business Australia
- Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies
- State and Regional Economic Development

Indigenous respondents indicated that a policy and funding program tailored specifically for Traditional Owners is desirable.

7.6 Indigenous Strategies

The plethora of Indigenous strategies which have been developed in the past without true progress have resulted in cynicism within the regions about their worth. One CMA Officer, when informed about the review of the DSE Indigenous Partnership Strategy (2000) commented, “what’s the point in undertaking a review of a document that has failed to produce any outcomes – what have we got to review?” Many people take the view that money spent on developing strategies would be better spent on tangible projects that have demonstrable benefits.

The VCMC believes that there is certainly a place for high level strategies provided that they are owned by the community and backed up by investment. The government needs to take up this challenge so that any current or new strategies developed don’t become ‘just another meaningless strategy’.

Any Victorian strategies should also recognise work that is being done at the national level to ensure complementarity of approaches, eg. *Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in the Regional Delivery of Natural Resource Management* Project, a joint initiative of the Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; and *Guidelines for Indigenous Participation in Natural Resource Management*, released by the Australian Government.

7.7 Formal Agreements/Protocols

Protocols for Indigenous engagement in NRM are essentially guidelines on how to engage effectively on land and water issues. They provide direction on how to interact and work together while acknowledging ownership of Country and recognising and supporting the rights and responsibilities of all parties (VCMC, 2003).

Protocols are not an end point in themselves, but rather the start of an ongoing process. Once signed, it is the responsibility of the signatories to the agreement to follow through with the implementation of the protocols, which requires continued effort and patience.

In 2002, with the support of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), VCMC coordinated the development of landmark model protocols for Indigenous engagement in NRM in the North Central region of Victoria. The final agreement was formally signed by the North Central CMA and Indigenous representatives from North West Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Dja Dja Wurrung Clan, Yorta Yorta Nation and Jaara Jaara in November 2002 (see Case Study 3).

The North Central protocols process has not been without its challenges but VCMC remains hopeful that new protocols agreements for land and water management will be entered into by other CMAs and Indigenous Nations across the State. A number of CMAs have already made significant progress towards developing similar protocols that are tailored to suit their own needs including Mallee, Wimmera, Goulburn Broken, Port Phillip and Westernport, North East and Corangamite. These groups will need to ensure that uptake of these protocols is diligently monitored.

The benefits of the North Central protocols have also been recognised in the national context.

Case Study 3 – Protocols, Principles and Strategies Agreement for Indigenous Involvement in Land and Water Management in the North Central Region of Victoria

With the support of the Natural Heritage Trust, the VCMC coordinated the development of landmark model protocols for Indigenous involvement in land and water management in the North Central Region of Victoria (VCMC, 2003). The protocols were underpinned by principles for engagement and strategies for promoting respect and adherence to the protocols. The final agreement was formally signed by the North



Central CMA, North West Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Dja Dja Wurrung Clan, Yorta Yorta Nation and Jaara Jaara at a ceremony held in November 2002 (Figures 8 & 9).

Figure 8. *Signing of North Central Protocols, 2002. Left to Right: Rick Nelson (Dja Dja Wurrung); Brien Nelson (Jaara Jaara); Kenny Stewart (North West Nations); Drew English (NCCMA); Monica Morgan (Yorta Yorta Nation).*

Some positive steps have come out of the protocols since they came into effect including (Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2005):

- Employment of an Indigenous facilitator (2004)
- CMA support for Project Officer – Indigenous Employment and Training in NRM (2005)
- On ground initiatives in cultural heritage management, protection and interpretation on private land (2005)
- CMA support for joint scholarship (DSE, PV, CMA) for Indigenous TAFE student

Both parties agree, however, that greater effort could be made to build successful partnerships and truly involve Indigenous people in the decision making process. Moreover, limited involvement of Traditional Owners has led to frustration coming from both sides.

In order to build on the good work that has already been done, the North Central CMA needs to reaffirm its commitment to Indigenous engagement and the principles contained within the agreement, and get on with implementing some practical strategies to enhance Indigenous participation within the region. Potential ways to enhance Indigenous participation include:

- Initiating cultural awareness training of the North Central CMA Board, Implementation Committees and key staff.
- Formalising “welcome to Country” ceremonies and their use.
- Appointing an Indigenous representative on the North Central CMA Board.
- Delivering onground programs that provide practical employment opportunities for Indigenous people.
- Involving Indigenous people in landcare-related activities.

The next steps will require patience and time, so that understanding and trust may continue to be built, and resulting outcomes will be real, successful and enduring.

It is important that participation of other Indigenous Nations of the Region, those not involved in this project, is facilitated. The Protocols state specifically that “the parties shall develop strategies to encourage participation of other Indigenous Nations by convening meetings and information seminars in the North Central Region.” Other Nations who initially declined to enter in to the protocols (eg. Wotjobaluk) may now be in a better position to join the agreement.

The terms of the agreement state that the protocols “shall be reviewed every five years by the Parties...” It is recommended that a formal review indeed be completed in 2007 with a view to improving and refining the current agreement so that genuine engagement of Indigenous communities can continue to improve.



Figure 9. *Signing of North Central Protocols, 2002. Clockwise from back: Lee Joaichem (Yorta Yorta Nation); Drew English (North Central CMA); Rick Nelson (Dja Dja Wurrung); Kenny Stewart (North West Nations); Brien Nelson (Jaara Jaara); Elizabeth Hoffman (Yorta Yorta Nation); Monica Morgan (Yorta Yorta Nation).*

7.8 Representation on Boards and Committees



Figure 10. Collon Mullett, VCMC Member

Under the *CaLP Act*, a CMA Board consists of not more than 15 members appointed by the Minister for Environment. With the exception of the VCMC (Figure 10), there are currently no Indigenous people appointed to Victorian CMA Boards. While it would certainly be desirable to achieve Indigenous representation on these Boards, this is only one mechanism for engagement that should be used in conjunction with a range of other methods.

Indigenous representatives on Boards and Committees are appointed as equal members and are empowered to provide advice on land and water management issues in accordance with their area of expertise. Moreover, they are there to

provide an Indigenous perspective on relevant issues in the same way that a DSE representative might be expected to bring a broad organisational perspective to the table. Indigenous committee members do not represent traditional owner groups, who each have their own people authorised to speak for Country, nor are they expected to sign-off on policy directions on behalf of the communities.

Indigenous communities in the Daly River Region in Northern Territory proposed a model for a CMA Board with equal numbers drawn from traditional owner groups and non-Aboriginal groups (Jackson et al., 2005). Although this would be an excellent approach, it is not one that is likely to gain support in the near future in Victoria given legislative constraints. Nonetheless, it might be something we could work towards.

Attracting Aboriginal people to sit on Boards and committees who have the appropriate expertise, are able to cope with large volumes of reading material (often in electronic form only), and have the confidence to speak out, can be a challenge in itself. The few people that do meet these requirements are often called upon so frequently that they are unable to accept every invitation that comes their way. One Aboriginal man very appropriately summed up the situation when he commented, “Let’s face it, there are only so many black fellows to go around!” Where Indigenous individuals have made an outstanding contribution to natural resource management, the Victorian Government may wish to consider formally recognising their efforts by hosting a statewide Indigenous awards ceremony.

7.9 Meeting Participation

Indigenous people are often criticised by non-Indigenous groups when they fail to turn up to meetings without any apparent explanation. However, under the circumstances, it is no wonder that, at times, Indigenous people feel reluctant to get involved.

Aboriginal people are specialists in their own fields who have a unique understanding of our landscape and its natural processes. Yet they are often expected to travel long distances to attend meetings without reward or remuneration. Like any external consultants, these people should be paid at an appropriate rate for their services and their time, and be fully reimbursed for any out-of-pocket expenses they might incur.

Furthermore, non-Indigenous people should make more of an effort to meet with communities on their own terms. For example, Aborigines are often more comfortable meeting in outdoor settings

such as national parks (as opposed to boardrooms) where they feel a connection with Country. One elder light-heartedly referred to the rotunda in the main street of his home town as 'his office'. This is one of many small ways that departmental officers can demonstrate respect for Indigenous culture.

Aborigines grow tired of going over the same old ground each time a person in government moves on to a new role. Agencies need to put transition arrangements in place with change of personnel and keep records of any important discussions and decisions. Sharing the responsibility for engaging on an individual project basis across more than one staff member may be a way to avoid losing trust and knowledge.

Indigenous people also become frustrated when agency representatives are not authorised to make decisions, which inhibits progress. Senior officers or managers who have influence within the organisation should volunteer to attend cross-cultural meetings wherever possible.

7.10 Indigenous Advisory Groups

The Wimmera CMA was the first Victorian CMA to establish an Indigenous Advisory Group (IAG) (Figure 11). The role of the 'Baridja' IAG is to provide advice to the Board on Indigenous issues and interests and provide support to the Indigenous Landcare Facilitator program. The committee is made up of six Indigenous community representatives (3 males and 3 females from a mix of communities across different age groups), two Wimmera CMA staff (including the Indigenous Land Management Facilitator) and one board member. The group meets on a two-monthly basis with representatives from DSE, DPI, PV, etc.

The committee has led to some significant outcomes for the region including the Wotjabolik native title determination and improved understanding and mutual respect. The triumph of the committee can largely be attributed to the passion of the members, who are concerned for the benefit of the catchment rather than their own interests. The CMA Board has also responded well to the recommendations put forward by the IAG. Due to the success of the committee, other CMAs have established or are looking to establish similar bodies using the Wimmera model as a blueprint.



Figure 11. *Members of 'Baridja' Indigenous Advisory Group*

7.11 Landcare

The CMF recognises that, in order to achieve sustainable resource management, remedial and protection programs must involve all land managers in decision-making and implementation activities. This philosophy was derived from the Landcare model of community decision making and participation which welcomes all people, regardless of racial, political or social backgrounds, to become involved in land and water management activities.

Landcare offers a great opportunity for Indigenous people to equally participate in on-ground projects and activities and be involved in decision-making regarding the management of a particular site. Landcare provides a practical forum for Indigenous communities to share traditional knowledge and, in turn, learn about non-Indigenous approaches to managing the land. This leads to mutual respect and understanding.

7.12 Indigenous Knowledge Management

Over tens of thousands of years, Indigenous communities have acquired a unique and diverse understanding of the Australian landscape and best management practices which have been passed on through generations.

Indigenous knowledge has multidimensional values, many of which cannot be readily quantified or assessed, such as cultural and spiritual aspects (Davis, 2004). For example, “rainmaking rituals are critical to maintaining water supplies in many Aboriginal traditional societies, regenerating the Country and ensuring the health of the ecosystem including people” (Toussaint et al., 2001).

The protection and management of Indigenous knowledge is a fundamental element of Aboriginal peoples’ connections with, relationships to, and interactions with, their lands and environments (Davis, 2004). While the protection and management of Indigenous knowledge should ultimately be the responsibility of the Indigenous Nations themselves, effective support and resources should be made available from the wider community (Davis, 2004).

As recommended in the Strategy for Aboriginal Managed Lands in Victoria (SAMLIV), “...research institutions and government agencies [should] include Aboriginal land holders in their information and distribution networks” (R. 38, p.101) so that knowledge can be genuinely shared across all NRM managers (two-way process) and informed decisions reached.

The issue of knowledge management is currently a focus of the VCMC. VCMC has initiated a multi-regional National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality project to develop an NRM Knowledge Strategy for Victoria which will identify knowledge gaps and make recommendations for investment as well as facilitating the movement of knowledge between providers and users. There is potential for VCMC and Indigenous Nations to work together on developing a process for Indigenous knowledge coordination and exchange.

Given the unique nature of Indigenous knowledge and its connection with spiritual and cultural dimensions, Davis (2004) argues that traditional intellectual property rights (IPRs) do not provide scope for adequate protection and management of Indigenous knowledge. It may therefore be necessary to develop approaches that go beyond traditional IPRs and consider a range of more innovative solutions.

7.13 Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning

VCMC considers that 10% of any program should be allocated to monitoring and evaluation to measure changes in performance. As such, clear performance indicators and targets should be established to measure levels of Indigenous engagement. Of course, developing social indicators is an inherently complex process and it is only more recently that advances have been made in this area. Reporting bodies, including the VCMC, the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, and the National Land and Water Resources Audit need to work together as a matter of urgency to ensure that Indigenous involvement is appropriately monitored and recorded.

8. Summary of Current Indigenous Engagement Activities by CMA

CMA	CMA Board completed cultural awareness training ¹	CMA Indigenous facilitator appointed	Indigenous onground projects managed by the CMA	Signed formal agreement/p rotocols	Indigenous representati on CMA Board (Appointed by Minister)	Indigenous Advisory Group established
Glenelg Hopkins	4	4	4	X	X	X
Mallee	P	P	X	P	X	P
Wimmera	4	4	4	P	X	4
North Central	4	4	X	4	X	P
Goulburn Broken	4	4	4	P	X	4 ²
Corangamite	4(partially)	4	X	P	X	P
PP & Westernport	4(partially)	X ³	X	P	X	X
East Gippsland	4	4	4	X	X	X
West Gippsland	4	4	X	P	X	4
North East	P	4	X	P	X	X

4 = Yes
X = No
P = In progress

¹ Some of the new CMA Board members appointed from 1 July 2006 may not have completed cultural awareness training.

² Goulburn Broken CMA uses established groups and has Indigenous representatives on CMA sub-committees.

³ Port Phillip and Westernport CMA utilises a regional position employed by Greening Australia and funded through the Natural Heritage Trust.

9. Conclusion

Involving Indigenous communities is central to achieving sustainable development and meeting the shared aspirations of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Since the VCMC coordinated the development of model protocols in the North Central region of Victoria in 2002, the catchment management framework has moved ahead to some extent with Indigenous engagement in the regions. Most of the CMAs have now appointed Indigenous facilitators, which has led to the initiation of a number of related projects across the State. But, there is still a lot more work to be done.

To be more effective, we need to use a broad mix of mechanisms for engagement and be genuinely committed to forming long-term relationships, which requires nurturing and persistence on both sides. Above all, government and other NRM agencies need to go beyond the rhetoric and act on their promises. This entails creating real opportunities for Indigenous people to become empowered as managers of our natural resources so that they can continue to practice their culture. Only when Indigenous policy and planning directions become a core function will we know that we have achieved our joint goal of true involvement.

In order to truly move ahead with Indigenous engagement in Victoria, VCMC advises that Victorian Government, NRM managers, and Indigenous community efforts be focussed/continue to be focussed in the following areas as a matter of urgency:

- Engage with **Traditional Owners** first and foremost without excluding the broader Indigenous community.
- Encourage employees involved in NRM across whole-of government to undertake **cultural awareness training**.
- Provide **pathways** to Indigenous people to prepare them for entering the workforce and offer a mix of employment opportunities across all levels and occupational groups.
- Provide **on-the-job training** to build the capacity of Indigenous employees and put structures/mentors in place to support and encourage Indigenous employees.
- Be an NRM **funding** conduit (particularly CMAs) for Indigenous communities and build awareness and capacity within Indigenous communities of funding programs.
- Ensure that statewide and regional Indigenous **strategies** are owned by the community and backed-up by funding to carry out on-ground projects.
- Develop/tailor **protocols** for Indigenous engagement across all regions.
- Establish **Indigenous Advisory Groups** across all regions where existing networks do not already exist.
- Work with Indigenous Nations to develop a process for coordination and exchange of **Indigenous knowledge** as part of the VCMC *Catchment Knowledge Exchange* Project.
- Establish robust **monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning** frameworks regarding Indigenous involvement in NRM.

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Members of the VCMC Indigenous Project Working Group

Alex Arbuthnot
Alison Teese
Collon Mullett
Diana Patterson
John Russell
Marian Pernat
Sarah Ewing

Council takes full responsibility for the views expressed in this document.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Questionnaire for Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Participants

1. What do the words 'Indigenous engagement' mean to you?
2. What are your views on how your region is currently travelling with Indigenous engagement?
3. Do you have a sense that you have moved ahead in recent years?
4. What do you think has worked well and why? (give examples)
5. What have been the major constraints to effective engagement?
6. Is there a formal agreement in your region (eg. protocols) to facilitate effective engagement and, if yes, is this being implemented successfully?
7. Is there an indigenous facilitator in your region, and if yes, has this position made a difference?
8. What are your aspirations for the future/how can we move ahead with indigenous engagement?

Victorian Catchment Management Council

Level 1, 8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Telephone: 03 9637 9892

Fax: 03 9637 8024

Website: www.vcmc.vic.gov.au

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