

## DJAARA FOREST GARDENING STRATEGY TO HEAL COUNTRY

**Tuesday 13 December 2022**

Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, trading as DJAARA, today launched its Galk-galk Dhelkunya ("to care for/to heal, many trees") Forest Gardening Strategy in a ceremony at Larni Garingilang ('Home of growth') in the Bendigo Botanic Gardens.

Dja Dja Wurrung Group CEO Rodney Carter is proud that DJAARA continues to apply Dja Dja Wurrung's holistic philosophy and practices when healing Country and People.

"The term 'Forest Gardening' communicates how Dja Dja Wurrung People interact with the environment – it's a contemporary approach to caring for Country that is deeply rooted in traditional knowledge and practice. It is our response to threats such as land clearing, climate change, biodiversity loss and species extinction," Mr Carter said.

Galk-galk Dhelkunya means to care for/to heal, many trees in Dja Dja Wurrung language. It acknowledges Dja Dja Wurrung People tended Djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country) for tens of thousands of years, with Ancestors active in the landscape through intimate, careful interactions with Djandak.

"Unfortunately, since Dja Dja Wurrung People have been prevented from tending Djandak over the last two hundred years, its health continues to decline, which continues to impact negatively on the health of Dja Dja Wurrung People.

"Today, we cannot keep doing the same things anymore. You take a look at Country at the moment, and you think, it's not well, there's something we've got to do. Let us be what our Ancestors expected us to be. They expected their children, their descendants, to be back at Country and to heal Country because it is unwell, it is sick, and at the same time heal ourselves. Let all people now participate in the good leadership that we believe we'll bring."

It is essential that Dja Dja Wurrung People are supported to manage Country and apply their principles of Galk-galk Dhelkunya. The statutory, policy and regulatory environments that impact on the management of Djandak must be reformed so that genuine self-determination can be realised. It is time that Dja Dja Wurrung People are enabled to decolonise the landscape.

Djandak's landscapes currently do not resemble what our Ancestors had crafted prior to colonisation. Dja Dja Wurrung People have an inherent right and command a return to Djandak to heal, restore and decolonise Country under the guidance of Djandak and our Martinga Guli (Ancestors).

"Everyone benefits when DJAARA leads on Country. But we cannot do this alone," Mr Carter said.

"We invite people living and working on Djandak to walk with us to heal Country together, guided by Dja Dja Wurrung custodial knowledge and Forest Gardening principles.

“Galk-galk Dhelkunya is DJAARA’s statement for how we would like to heal and care for Country. It is deliberately written as an empowering document to introduce land managers to a different and more holistic way of thinking about land management, and how we would like others to heal and care for Country in partnership with us.”

DJAARA’s Dhelkunya Dja (Healing Country) Policy Team led the development of the strategy, in consultation with DJAARA Members, and land management practitioners.

DJAARA has developed a five-year business case and is looking to establish partnerships with organisations working in land management.

“Our aim is to trial Forest Gardening tools and activities across different landscapes over the next three to five years to build capacity, capability and evidence for longer term implementation,” Mr Carter said.

Galk-galk Dhelkunya includes a Forest Gardening toolkit for healing Country, which includes:

- Cultural thinning – restoring culturally recognisable structures to our forests
- Revegetation & rehabilitation – healing ecological functions across Djandak
- Regenerative practice – working in partnerships with private landholders
- Djandak Wi (Country Fire) - cultural burning
- Gatjin (water) - restoring, healing, and protecting our rivers and waterways

**ENDS -**

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