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AN EXTRAORDINARY DECADE OF PROGRESS



What a week! YAPENYA 2023

What a week! YAPENYA 2023 was the biggest gathering of our mob in a long time – too deadly!

It was a fitting way to celebrate 10 years since the signing of our Recognition and Settlement Agreement, and a decade of extraordinary progress for Dja Dja Wurrung People.

YAPENYA was not just about us mob sharing a moment; it was also about sharing our talents, our Culture, our achievements and our vision with the wider community. We have shown what is possible.

Our Agreement means we are, increasingly, at the table with government, and leading work across Dja Dja Wurrung Country through our philosophy of **ngaldurrong yana** (walking together).



Top: YAPENYA Opening Ceremony. Middle: Around 300 guests attended the Gala Dinner. Bottom: Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan recalled milestones over the past decade. It was a great night for catching up.

We were thrilled to share our first ever Gala Dinner with many who have been with us over the past decade – and in the preceding 15 years of advocacy – including our Elders, Corporation Members, staff, partners and our many friends and allies.

Award winning journalist and Dja Dja Wurrung, Yorta Yorta woman Bridget Brennan MCed the event, which was attended by many special guests, including Premier of Victoria Jacinta Allan, Parliamentary Secretary for First Peoples Christine Couzens, Member for Macedon Mary-Anne Thomas, Member for Bendigo West Maree Edwards, Federal Member for Bendigo Lisa Chesters, Solicitor Dr Matthew Storey, State Land Justice Executive Director Dean Cowie, Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations CEO Paul Paton, and Bendigo District Aboriginal Co-operative CEO Dallas Widdicombe.



Top: L-R DJAARA Board Chair Trent Nelson, Premier Jacinta Allan, DJAARA General Manager Cassandra Lewis, Dja Dja Wurrung Group CEO Rodney Carter. Middle: MC Bridget Brennan; photos on the red carpet. Bottom: First Nations artists DJ Kidd Benny and Yambra had the house pumping; Dja Dja Wurrung person and DJAARA employee Jacinta Douglas paid tribute to the many young Dja Dja Wurrung emerging leaders.

On Tuesday was our largest ever Welcome Baby to Country ceremony, with almost 70 Indigenous and non-Indigenous babies and their parents participating, despite drizzly conditions.

Members of the public had the opportunity to enjoy a stunning collection of Dja Dja Wurrung artworks at DJAARA's YAPENYA Art Exhibition at Bendigo's Dudley House from Tuesday to Friday, and to browse or buy First Nations wares at the YAPENYA Twilight Market on Thursday.

A drop-in marquee near the 'Djaara-fied' BENDIGO sign in Rosalind Park, was a chance for community members to yarn with DJAARA staff about the work of the Corporation and its enterprises.





Top: Aunty Marilyn Nicolls and Jason Kerr presented babies with certificates and cultural gifts at the Welcome Baby to Country ceremony. Middle: the Twilight Market featured yabby races for the kids, and stalls from Dja Dja Wurrung and other First Nations craftspeople. Bottom: YAPENYA Art Exhibition; artist Peta Hudson with her works.

Reflecting on the week, and the decade, our CEO Rodney Carter emphasised DJAARA's resolve to continue the important work towards Dja Dja Wurrung self-determination.

"We're going to continue to make sure Dja Dja Wurrung People are visible on Dja Dja Wurrung Country and empowered to manage our own affairs.

"We look forward to celebrating another decade of progress in 2033!" Rodney said.

If you missed the celebrations, it's not too late to participate in DJAARA's ongoing cultural tours and to enjoy the free Djaara Lights exhibition. Meanwhile, follow DJAARA on socials to hear about future events.

Gatjin Strategy launch: celebrating ngaldurrong

The official launch of the Djaara Gatjin Strategy *Dhelkunyangu Gatjin* during YAPENYA was a beautiful celebration of Dja Dja Wurrung Culture, Country and **ngaldurrong** (walking together).

Dhelkunyangu Gatjin means 'working together to heal water'. Djaara and water industry partners agreed that healing water will require ongoing commitment and collaboration – and that Djaara must be at the centre.

Standing on the banks of the Campaspe, Dhelkunyangu Gatjin Project Implementation Control Group Chair Uncle Graham Atkinson yarned about learning to swim in that river in Echuca; and of his mum scooping clear water out of the river to make tea when he was a boy.

"However, over the years as I grew up, I become very saddened because the poor old Campaspe really suffered. And I think that's what we're hoping to see with the Gatjin Strategy is how we can heal that beautiful old river," Uncle Graham said.



Top: Project Implementation Control Group Chair Uncle Graham Atkinson (top). Bottom: Mick Bourke conducted the smoking ceremony. Later in the day, he yarned about the history of the area, including massacre sites and cultural activities.

Gatjin Policy Manager Caitlin Dunnolly-Lee presented [some of the significant milestones](#) along the Gatjin journey.

"I'm really proud of our achievements but, in the grand scheme of things, these are still only minor wins. We have a long way to go," Ms Dunnolly-Lee said.

"Ownership of water is something that we're yet to reach. The concept of aqua nullius has never been overturned.

"The strategy provides some pathways to bridging the inequities. But it's also about going beyond the legal requirements of the Recognition and Settlement Agreement. It's about building partnerships. At its core, it's about healing our Djandak, and healing our Djaara by improving water management across the board. To do this, we need Djaara at the centre," Ms Dunnolly-Lee said.



Gatjin Policy Manager Caitlin Dunnolly-Lee (left) and Coliban Water's Anna Lamont (right)

implement the strategy.

Coliban Water's Anna Lamont from the PICG congratulated the Gatjin Team on a beautiful and visionary strategy.

"I think it's very well placed at a time where the water industry is facing a need for transformation and vision," Ms Lamont said.

"This strategy is grounded in systemic approaches – which are the only approaches that will lead to lasting change."

Ms Lamont said it was a privilege to be part of the Implementation Group enabling this shared change to happen.

"I also hope the approaches we take to healing water in this region can also be looked at to heal Country more broadly," she said.

[Learn more](#)

Kapa Gatjin - Djaara water knowledge group



Kapa Gatjin received certificates of appreciation acknowledging their invaluable contribution to the Djaara Gatjin (Water) Strategy.

The Kapa Gatjin ('knowing water') Advisory Group, formed in 2016, was the first Dja Dja Wurrung engagement group.

At the launch of Dhelkunyangu Gatjin, Djaara's Gatjin Strategy, Gatjin Policy Manager Caitlin Dunnolly-Lee paid tribute to Kapa Gatjin's monumental role in the development of the Strategy, and in the healing and return of gatjin.

Kapa Gatjin also undertakes Aboriginal Waterway Assessments (AWAs) across Djandak. This involves assessing a waterway's environmental and cultural health, and applying knowledge to heal and manage it.

Through AWAs, Djaara knowledge is informing activities to heal Country. For example, catchment management authorities are removing invasive pest plants, restoring native vegetation for habitat, and fencing to prevent livestock eroding and polluting waterways.

Reflecting on how far Kapa Gatjin and the Gatjin Team had come, Kapa Gatjin member Ruby Marlyne Nicholls said: "We've grown, and we hope our partners will grow with us to fulfill our way of how we heal Country and what we see on Country. There's a lot of work to do, and we do definitely need a cultural lens on the whole process."

"I'm still learning every single day about gatjin. I'm very, very proud to be on this team." - Kapa Gatjin member Andrew Saunders.



Kapa Gatjin works closely with DJANDAK's Gatjin (Water) team: L-R Gatjin Policy & Projects Officer Ben Muir, Gatjin Project Manager Conan Peterson, NRM Project Member Gary Howell, Gatjin Project Manager Carolyn (Viv) Vivian, Gatjin Policy Manager Caitlin Dunnolly-Lee, Gatjin Program Manager Luke Wilson.

Christmas office closure

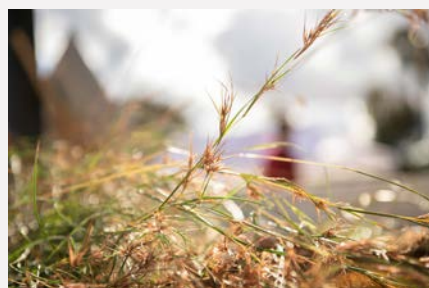
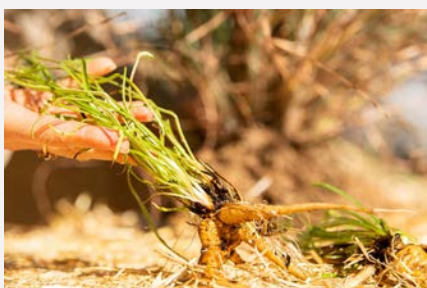
The DJAARA Office will be closed over the Christmas - New Year period.

The office will close at 4:30pm Friday 22 December and reopen from 9:00am Tuesday 2 January.

Deep past could hold clues for sustainable future

Understanding more about how Aboriginal People sustained life over many thousands of years could help improve modern day food security.

Dja Dja Wurrung Group CEO Rodney Carter is co-author of a paper published last month in the journal *Archaeology of food and foodways*, which suggests that a more nuanced understanding of the way Aboriginal People procured food in the deep past could provide direction for a more sustainable food future.



Wurrung enterprise DJAKITJ is exploring for food for healing Country.

"For years, the mainstream view was that Aboriginal Peoples supported themselves through foraging, prior to colonisation. The subtext is they foraged from an untouched 'wilderness', rather than an actively managed landscape," Mr Carter said.

"But recent research has – contentiously – challenged this notion, suggesting Indigenous Australians developed agricultural systems long before colonisation.

"In the paper, we argue that labels like 'hunter-gatherer' or 'agriculturalist' are colonist attempts to describe and define Aboriginal People within a Euro-centric point of view.

"Perhaps these simplistic ways of describing the lives of Aboriginal People in the deep past limit our thinking about possibilities in the present and future.

"Modern-day Dja Dja Wurrung People are busting out of that narrow view. We choose to define who we are. We are farmers – investigating new sustainable agricultural practices that incorporate traditional Aboriginal knowledge, Indigenous species, and Western science.

"We're making some exciting progress that has the potential to improve food security and food certainty, as well as heal Country," Mr Carter said.

Read article in The Conversation: '[Farmers or foragers? Pre-colonial Aboriginal food production was hardly that simple](#)'.

[Read full media release](#)

SHARING DJA DJA WURRUNG LANGUAGE

*Our language connects us to water, land, animals, and People.
It calls us to ceremony and strengthens our identity.*

We are making sure our language, Dja Dja Wurrung language, is increasingly spoken; we share it in song and ensure it is placed lovingly back to Djandak, where it belongs, by us. Those that live and visit here in Central Victoria more and more want to support Dja Dja Wurrung reclamation of our rights and support our continued presence here. We hope that those who travel across, visit and reside on Djandak recognise our unique language and distinct culture.

Buwatj | kangaroo grass

Djandak | Country, Dja Dja Wurrung Country

Djaara | People, Dja Dja Wurrung People

Gatjin | water

Kapa Gatjin | knowing water

Murna | yam daisy

Ngaldurrong yana | walk together

Yapenya | to dance, to sing, ceremony

Let us know what you think!

Do you like this newsletter?

What would you like to see more of?

We'd love to hear your feedback.



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