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What is Galk-galk Dhelkunya Forest Gardening?

There are a lot of conversations being had lately about science, conservation, and forest gardening. Recent contributions to the published debate have drawn artificial lines separating western science from Traditional Owner knowledge.

DJAARA has worked very hard with ecologists and scientists in developing our Galk-galk Dhelkunya (to care, to heal trees, forests) Forest Gardening Strategy. We know that to care for and restore the health of our forests and landscapes, we have to incorporate different approaches and understanding. Fortunately, these invaluable contributions have supported our approaches and provided a western science lens through which to view tens of thousands of years of effective landscape management that Dja Dja Wurrung have practised and continue to practise.

Forest Gardening is not logging. It is healing Djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country) and includes cultural thinning, revegetation and cultural burning. Our knowledge represents over 65,000 years of land management experience.

DJAARA asserted its rights to lead storm recovery and removal of windthrown trees following the 2021 storms in the Wombat State Forest. The works were needed to make Country safe, to remove the fire risk of fallen timber around standing trees, and to enable emergency access in the event of wildfire. Whilst some of this work was completed, DJAARA was unable to access the forest and complete the removal of windthrown timber.

The removal of wind thrown timber was not Forest Gardening. To date, the only contemporary Forest Gardening application has been at one small trial site.

Forest Gardening is DJAARA's contemporary philosophy and practice of managing cultural landscapes on Djandak.

It is about healing Dja Dja Wurrung People while healing Djandak through the active use of traditional land management tools including cultural burning, cultural thinning, revegetation, restoration of waterways, and returning culturally important plants and animals to Country.

The conversation about what Forest Gardening is to Dja Dja Wurrung People and how it can be implemented in the broader central Victoria landscape is ongoing. To better understand our work, please read the Strategy [here](#) and Factsheet [here](#).

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About DJAARA

The Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, trading as DJAARA, is a representative body for Dja Dja Wurrung People.

Djaara (Dja Dja Wurrung People) have lived on our traditional lands and cared for Djandak (Country) over many thousands of years. For us, Djandak is more than just a landscape, it is more than what is visible to the eye; it is a living entity which holds the stories of creation and histories that cannot be erased.

Dja Dja Wurrung land extends from Mount Franklin and the towns of Creswick and Daylesford in the southeast to Castlemaine, Maldon and Bendigo in the east, Boort in the north, Donald in the northwest, to Navarre Hill and Mount Avoca marking the southwest boundary. Our lands encompass the Bendigo and Clunes goldfields and the Loddon and Avoca River watersheds. Hundreds of years ago, our Country was mostly covered in open forests and woodlands, providing us with the plants and animals that we used for food, medicine, shelter and customary practices. Today, though our Country is vastly changed, it still holds many important values.

<https://djadjawurrung.com.au>

About Galk-galk Dhelkunya

For two centuries the forests have lost Traditional Owner specialist knowledge and hands-on tending. Today is the start of nurturing Country. Galk-galk Dhelkunya, our strategy, empowers DJAARA and others to heal Country and heal Dja Dja Wurrung People.

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.

<https://djadjawurrung.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Forest-Gardening.pdf>

Media Contact

Nicola Dunnicliff-Wells

A/ Communications Relationship Manager, DJAARA

M. 0427 701 908

E. nicola.dunnicliff-wells@djadjawurrung.com.au