

For more information, please contact:

Nicola Dunnicliff-Wells | Acting Communications Relationship Manager
M: +61 427 701 908 | E: nicola.dunnicliff-wells@djadjawurrung.com.au

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DJAARA community event to honour Guildford Big Tree

This Reconciliation Week, DJAARA, the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, invites the community to a free event at 11am this Sunday to honour the Guildford **Biyal** (Red gum) – one of Victoria's most significant trees, known by many as 'the Guildford Big Tree'.

The event is part of DJAARA's Guildford Biyal Project, which came about after the **Biyal** dropped a significant limb weighing 25 tonnes in February 2024.

Djaara (Dja Dja Wurrung) woman Kerri Douglas who was one of the first on the scene after the limb dropped,

"For Djaara, this **Biyal** is a very special tree: it's a 'ring tree' – where grafted branches act as a signpost to mark this as a place of cultural significance on Country," Ms Douglas said.

"The limb drop was a big shock for Djaara – as it was for many in the community. The Honouring Day is an opportunity for everyone in the community who loves this tree to come together to celebrate the tree and pay homage.

"All are welcome – we recommend arriving early as Fryers Street will be closed from 11am. Allow time for parking – you don't want to miss the ceremony," Ms Douglas said.

The event is part of DJAARA's Guildford Biyal Project, which was set up following the limb drop as a way to bring the community together and to make sure the timber was appropriately honoured.

DJAARA Timbers salvaged the fallen limbs and, under the supervision of Djaara Elder Uncle Rick Nelson, pieces have been made available to community members and to commissioned artists to create works for an exhibition, which is planned for later this year.

DJAARA has also run a series of crafting workshops, providing opportunities for mob to gather and practice culture together.

Guided by Uncle Rick, local craftsman Pete McCurley has created a reconciliation seat in the shape of a giant **darnuk** (coolamon – a shallow vessel) from a large section of fallen limb. The seat will be carried along an honouring avenue and returned to the **Biyal** in a ceremony during the Honouring Day event.

Uncle Rick said he hopes the seat will become a place for the community to gather during difficult times, drawing on the wisdom of a tree that has stood for centuries.

"Sit here on this Reconciliation Seat and draw on the wisdom, strength and knowledge of this old tree. As you work out a dispute, may what it has seen over hundreds of years bring calmness and guide you toward resolution," Uncle Rick said.

The Guildford **Biyal** predates European settlement and is believed to be more than 500 years old – some suggest at least 700 years. One of the largest River Red Gums in Victoria, it was recognised as the National Trust's Victorian Tree of the Year in 2023.

The Guildford Biyal Honouring Day event is from 11am to 2pm this Sunday 31 May, at 13 Fryers Street, Guildford. Fryers Street will be closed to traffic from 11am to approximately 12.30pm. The ceremony will begin at 11.30am.

The event will include a Welcome to Country, Djaara Women's dancers, live music, First Nations stalls and a community BBQ from Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative, served by Bendigo Aboriginal Men's Shed.

DJAARA is delivering the event in partnership with Mount Alexander Shire Council as part of their Reconciliation Week Program, with support from Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative, Bendigo Aboriginal Men's Shed, and Nalderun Education Aboriginal Corporation.

An exhibition of artworks, installations, artefacts and sculptures made from and inspired by the Guildford Biyal at Castlemaine Art Museum will be held from August to November 2026.

Guildford Biyal (Red Gum) Honouring Day – event summary:

Sunday 31 May | 11am to 2pm | 13 Fryers St, Guildford

Ceremony begins at 11:30am - arrive early to find carparking.

Fryers Street will be closed from 11am to approximately 12.30pm.

For more information: Visit djadjawurrung.com.au/guildford-big-tree or email guildfordbigtree@djadjawurrung.com.au

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