

## APPENDIX

# Project Case Studies

The Aboriginal Culture and Healing Flood Recovery grant program provided two rounds of funding from Emergency Recovery Victoria to Traditional Owner and Aboriginal communities to undertake projects to address the impacts of the October 2022 floods.

This program increased the experience and capability of fourteen organisations to undertake healing of Country and community in self-determined ways, while simultaneously protecting and promoting culture. It demonstrates clearly that putting culture and healing at the centre of emergency recovery has a multiplier effect far exceeding the initial grant investment: communities are stronger, more cohesive, and more resilient for the next time disaster strikes.

## Key findings

**Transferring power** led to high community uptake of, and trust in services provided by funded projects.

**Self-determined** projects were highly relevant and tailored to their community's goals, capacity and context, with cultural values centred and Country protected holistically.

**Centring healing** in the program **strengthened and restored culture** within recovery work, which has historically harmed, not protected, cultural heritage.



Photo: Federation staff and ERV staff visited Round 1 recipient Duduroa Dhargal Aboriginal Corporation's on-Country Careers Expo at Ryan's Lagoon in November 2024, standing with Duduroa Elder Aunty Valda and her weaving.

## Highlights

- More than 50 per cent of Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation's on-Country Guardian team were trained through the program.
- Barengi Gadjin Land Council's native nursery had infrastructure repaired by the grant and is now thriving commercially, providing seed and seedlings to the Victorian Government's Bushbank revegetation project and other commercial clients.
- Moogji Aboriginal Corporation's community hub is now a key part of its shire's emergency response planning after it was restored and upgraded by the grant.
- Generations of Bangerang community members gathered on-Country at places they had historically been prevented from practising culture to hear stories from Elders and make their own spears, shields, coolamons and digging sticks.
- Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation discovered over 200 previously undocumented scar trees in Barmah Forest and put in place plans to protect them from future flooding.
- Duduroa Dhargal Aboriginal Corporation shared cultural land management, brought employment opportunities to young mob, and strengthened relationships for future emergency management with a careers expo on-Country at the wetland restored by its project.
- Wurundjeri community had a rare opportunity to get out on-Country to do proactive mapping of cultural heritage using remote sensing to determine areas at risk of flood damage.
- Tati Tati Kaiejin conducted clean-up and water quality assessment on culturally significant waterways, building new knowledge of the native plants and animals on river Country.
- A \$4 million art installation was successfully installed on Lock Island after work by First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation, which used grant funding to clear tonnes of debris from the wildlife sanctuary and tourism hub.
- DJAARA developed a new predictive modelling to map cultural heritage along eight waterways, helping to protect and restore sites of cultural significance.
- Elders and community members across 63 flood-affected LGAs have emergency preparedness plans through the Aboriginal Community Elders Service and Oonah Aboriginal Health and Community Services' culturally safe workshops, home visits, and provision of disaster kits.
- 210 hours of culturally safe psychological support, plus emergency items for future flood events were provided by Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service.
- 21 Wayapa Wuurrk trainees from 63 flood-affected LGAs became qualified to help community heal from trauma, and build resilience for the next time it floods.

# Round One Projects

Round one of the Aboriginal Culture and Healing Flood Recovery Grant Program funded six Aboriginal organisations to lead flood-recovery projects in the first half of 2024.

**OUTCOME 1: Aboriginal communities have increased capability to lead recovery and healing.**

**OUTCOME 2: Recovery and resilience are strengthened through Aboriginal culture, knowledge, and the connection between Country and healing.**

**OUTCOME 3: Aboriginal people's unique experiences of trauma are addressed, and healing supported.**

## 01. BARENGI GADJIN LAND COUNCIL (BGLC) – RESTORATION OF DALKI GARRINGA NATIVE NURSERY, AN ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY HUB

**BGLC restored and upgraded its Dalki Garringa Native Nursery (DGNN) – a culturally safe place for Wotjobaluk Nations community to come together, build skills, and revegetate Country with endemic species – which increased Traditional Owners' work skills and capability to mitigate future flooding events.**

“By providing training in weed and pest control, the project is equipping staff with essential skills that can be applied in future emergency situations... The planning and implementation of the landscaping work created a lot of opportunities for our staff for capacity building including managing quotes, building supplier networks, practical construction work and project management.”

– Elizabeth Mace, Operations Manager, DGNN

“The procurement of new, efficient equipment for chemical application and soil management is increasing the nursery's ability to respond quickly and effectively to emergencies... We now have the tools, equipment and skills to be able to support the wider community including rangers and the other land managers.”

– Elizabeth Mace, DGNN

“DGNN is a great space to connect to Country, it's a real holistic healing experience with the sounds of birds, the beautiful gardens and smelling the gums is a great way to spend the working day. Working here and keeping our hands busy, empowers us to look after Country and step outside of the stress of the day.”

– Elizabeth Mace, DGNN

## 02. DUDUROA DHARGAL ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (DDAC) – RECOVERY ON-COUNTRY TO SUPPORT FUTURE LEADERS

**DDAC's project raised awareness about the impact of the floods on Duduroa Dhargal Country and cultural values. The project included workshops and career expo days at the culturally significant Ryan's Lagoon, to build community partnerships and the Aboriginal community's skills and understanding of how to care for Country.**

“Having the interactive stalls at the careers expo, it was so good to get the kids involved and get them thinking about what other pathways they've got when they leave school.”

– Beau Murray, Director and Aboriginal Water Officer, DDAC

“Over the time that we've started in these roles we've come in fresh, knowing nothing about water. We've been building knowledge. We come out, see what the northeast CMA are doing, and we build our relationships with them.”

– Aunty Valda Murray, Elder and Aboriginal Water Officer, DDAC

“Just sitting here [at Ryan's Lagoon] now you can hear the cicadas. When it gets a bit later, the frogs and the cicadas are just going mad. It's like they're dancing. It's just magic to the ears, because when we were coming out here before, it was just quiet.”

– Aunty Valda Murray, DDAC

## 03. DJA DJA WURRUNG CLANS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (DJAARA) – A PREDECITIVE MODEL FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE ASSESSMENT AND PROTECTION

**DJAARA combined its round 1 and round 2 funding into a single expansive cultural heritage mapping and protection project which included development of a predictive model to assess DJAARA cultural heritage sites on Djandak (Country). This allows DJAARA to assess whole landscapes for cultural heritage and plan for their management, healing and protection from future floods.**

“By centring Traditional Owner leadership and knowledge, the project has not only protected cultural heritage but also empowered DJAARA through employment, engagement, and reconnection with Country. The lessons learned will inform future recovery efforts and strengthen DJAARA's role in managing and safeguarding cultural landscapes.”

– DJAARA Final Report

“It's a great opportunity for our team to be out on Country assessing our damages and impacts from flood waters. This project really enabled our team leaders to get more experience defining our challenges out on Country and also connecting us back to our landscape.”

– Jason Kerr, Flood Assessment Project Advisory Group, DJAARA

“It's a great opportunity doing this project which gives our younger generation more understanding around our cultural heritage. It's a great way, a great opportunity to come together to teach our younger generation.”

– Jason Kerr



**Photos (from left):** Federation staff and ERV staff visited Round 1 and 2 recipient EMAC's project at Framlingham Streamside Reserve in February 2025; and Federation staff visited Round 2 recipient FPMAC's flood clean-up on Lock Island near Mildura in April 2025; Round 1 recipient BGLC's Elizabeth Mace at the upgraded Dalki Garringa Native Nursery.

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## 04. EASTERN MAAR ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (EMAC) – ON-COUNTRY GUARDIANS: STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE AND CAPACITY

EMAC employed 16 Eastern Maar citizens as On-Country Guardians, covering both the cost of the Certificate III in Conservation and Ecosystem Management, (delivered in partnership with Southwest TAFE and Glenelg Hopkins CMA) and the participants' wages while they studied.

"These Guardians are all Eastern Maar citizens working on Country, each with Cultural Heritage knowledge and experience... We're building the capacity of Traditional Owners to take on all required roles in preparation for future emergencies."

– Emma Peace, Healthy Country Manager, EMAC

"Because of our increased capacity EMAC is now developing an MoU with DEECA for Guardians and staff to be actively involved in all emergency response and recovery."

– Emma Peace, EMAC

"Many Eastern Maar citizens have not yet been able to reconnect with Country since colonisation. It's projects like this that create that space."

– Emma Peace, EMAC

## 05. MOOGJI ABORIGINAL COUNCIL (MOOGJI) – ONGOING PROTECTION FOR A SPECIAL COMMUNITY PLACE

Moogji restored its flood-damaged property and nursery at Bonang Road. Clean-up included resurfacing pathways and improving water capture and storage in preparation for future fire events. Bonang Road is now an important community meeting place and emergency management centre.

"[Bonang Road is] a workspace, a community space, but the overarching direction is safety, to safeguard from future fire and flood events. However we can do that, and this grant really benefits us, to really leverage us against any future natural disasters."

– Sean Edwards, Environmental and Cultural Works Manager, Moogji

"Having roles within flood recovery and emergency response, as officers, for example, that will support employment going forward. Its really important to us to have designated roles within those spaces, especially with emergency response disaster recovery."

– Sean Edwards, Moogji

"We've been able to address the safety issues because we have Elders and children coming up here now safely."

– Aunty Aileen Blackburn, Moogji

"It supports things like NAIDOC Day and flag-raising, and it's a real meeting place to have people congregate and just share story."

– Sean Edwards, Moogji

## 06. WURUNDJERI WOI-WURRUNG CULTURAL HERITAGE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (WWCHAC) – RISK-MANAGING DAMAGED COUNTRY

WWCHAC partnered with Melbourne University to use remote-sensing technology to determine areas with cultural heritage at risk of flood damage on Wurundjeri Country. This informed on-Country field days to assess damage to and map cultural heritage artefacts – some of which had not been recorded before.

"At several locations, as soon as we were out of the car we were coming across artefacts. Wurundjeri representatives said that normally everyone tells them where to go and where to stay, but with this project they were allowed to go down this way even if it wasn't in the mapped scope of work."

– Zara Lasky-Davison, Heritage Advisor, WWCHAC

"The results of the project will help to inform where Traditional land management efforts need to be focused. Knowing what areas are most at risk will help proactive land management and resilience."

– Zara Lasky-Davison, on behalf of the WWCHAC Cultural Heritage Unit Elders

"Site recording is really important, but it takes a back seat to our statutory functions as a Registered Aboriginal Party... Representatives were excited to be on-site, doing something Wurundjeri-led, knowing we were preserving culture, not approving its destruction, knowing these places aren't going to become a shopping centre."

– Zara Lasky-Davison



**Photo:** Round 2 recipient Bangerang Aboriginal Corporation produced a video showing the impact of its cultural healing workshops; this still image shows two interview subjects during filming at the Murray River.

# Round Two Projects

Round two of the Aboriginal Culture and Healing Flood Recovery Grant Program funded 10 Aboriginal organisations to lead flood-recovery projects in the first half of 2025.

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## 01. ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY ELDER SERVICE (ACES) – ELDER DISASTER-READINESS

ACES visited and made check-in phone calls to Elders affected by the floods both directly after the emergency and consistently over the following months. The team developed trusting relationships, delivered essential supplies, helped Elders to develop disaster preparedness plans, delivered emergency kits and connected Elders to culturally appropriate services.

“One thing we will do is look at how we can advocate to promote greater coordination of services. For example, by working with Parks Victoria and the CFA and other organisations that have the workforce that can be called on in disaster times. So, we and other emergency services need to focus on investing in coordination.”

– James Atkinson, CEO, ACES

“We saw it as valuable, sitting down and having conversations with Elders who have not really had the opportunity to think about what resilience and recovery look like to them in emergency situations. The ACES team members now have a real understanding of what the Elder community actually needs.”

– James Atkinson, ACES

“The stories from Elders were that they felt safer and valued in the bigger scheme of things. And the Community felt that they thought about Elders needs first when disasters were happening.”

– James Atkinson, ACES

## 02. ALBURY WODONGA ABORIGINAL HEALTH SERVICE (AWAHS) – CULTURALLY SAFE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR GREATER COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

AWAHS employed a psychologist with cultural competency to support community members experiencing ongoing mental health issues related to the flood and held workshops and Community Resilience and Recovery days to provide immediate material support, resources and information to community.

“By distributing essential supplies like emergency kits, fire extinguishers, and blankets, the events helped reduce the financial burden on individuals and families, allowing them to allocate their resources more effectively, ensuring that community were better prepared for future emergencies.”

– AWAHS Final Report

“The employment of a psychologist with cultural competency training ensured that the support provided was sensitive to the unique needs of the local community, particularly for First Nations peoples.”

– AWAHS Final Report

“We learnt that given the right culturally appropriate supports, community members affected by disaster or trauma have the capacity to heal and recover with the added benefit of building resilience.”

– David Noonan, CEO, AWAHS

## 03. BANGERANG ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (BANGERANG) – ON-COUNTRY CULTURAL PRACTICE TO BRING A COMMUNITY TOGETHER

Bangerang delivered three on-Country workshops for community members affected by the floods, providing culturally appropriate support and opportunities for connection that strengthened peoples' relationships with culture, knowledge, traditions and each other, and helped build community cohesion and resilience.

“I get a buzz out of seeing the young people come along, because now there's a couple of young ones who want to get into the field of being rangers; anything involved with the environment. And they've learned, they've learned the importance of caring for Country and looking after Country... Everything involved with Country.”

– Uncle Kevin Atkinson, Bangerang

“Sorry Business, that's the only time people really get to see each other. I think opportunities like this, where we're around family, we're making good memories. There was a time where they weren't even allowed to practice any of this, and now we're allowed to sit where our ancestors once sat and do things right. It's a whole other special feeling.”

– Myriah Atkinson, Bangerang

“Today has been a day of healing. I'm on the Dunggula (Murray River). My favourite spot is the Junction and it was at this spot that I found a peaceful place to sit and to let it heal me... I was in a place where I knew my ancestors had walked. Thinking about them and what they'd gone through in their lives, it was healing and that's what today is about.”

– Bangerang Community Member



**Photos (from left):** Matty Atkinson and son Cassidy burning traditional designs on their parrying shields at a Bangerang workshop; Federation staff walking in the Barmah Forest with YYNAC's scar tree survey team.

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## 04. EASTERN MAAR ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (EMAC) – ON-COUNTRY GUARDIANS: RESTORING WATERWAYS ON COUNTRY

Following the success of EMAC's round 1 project, the organisation employed 30+ Eastern Maar citizens as On-Country Guardians to conduct Aboriginal Waterway Assessments along flood-affected sections of the Hopkins River, Mount Emu Creek and the Framlingham Streamside Reserve – restoring, recovering and protecting banks in anticipation of future flooding events.

"This funding has contributed greatly to the capacity of Eastern Maar's On-Country guardian team and the Healthy Country team. I believe in case of any natural and non-natural emergency on Country, the Eastern Maar team are more than ready and capable to start caring for Country again and to start the healing process with the landscape."

– Jay Britton, Parreeyt Team Lead and Water Corporations Partnership Officer, EMAC

"This project has allowed Eastern Maar to be on Country and connecting with waterways they were forced to disconnect from. It has supported our mob and given Eastern Maar capacity to assert our rights and manage and care for parts of neglected Eastern Maar Country and to break down barriers along a significant waterway."

– Jay Britton, EMAC

"Benefits to the community are the fact that caring for this one site helps care for so many, looking after the health of the water effects everyone as water is life. Having so many interested in the project was surprising but very beneficial to us."

– Jay Britton, EMAC

## 05. FIRST PEOPLE OF THE MILLEWA MALLEE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (FPMMAC) – RESTORING A WILDLIFE SANCTUARY TURNED TOURISM ART HUB

Mildura's 15-hectare Lock Island was submerged and inundated with weeds, debris, rubble and invasive species following the floods. FPMMAC's restoration work included track remediation and ecological regeneration, enhanced wayfinding to improve accessibility and visitor experience, and targeted pest, plant, and animal control to boost biodiversity and restore native habitats. The island is again a thriving biodiversity and tourism site, with plans in place for new cultural activities, including cultural burns and storytelling.

"Following the devastating 2022/23 floods that severely impacted areas along the Murray River, FPMMAC has joined forces with Mildura Regional Development, Mildura Rural City Council, Goulburn Murray Water, DEECA, and Mallee CMA to restore and rejuvenate the landscape of Lock Island. This collaborative remediation effort aims to rehabilitate the island, creating a cleaner, more vibrant environment while fostering deeper cultural learning and storytelling opportunities for both locals and visitors. Our actions will help Lock Island recover and thrive, reconnecting community and Country through care, culture, and conservation."

– Kenny Stewart, Manager – Cultural Heritage, Native Title and Environment, FPMMAC

"We were happy to work on the restoration of Lock Island and we can now make a plan for cultural burns on the island when the time is right."

– Thomas Harradine, Cultural Fire Officer, FPMMAC



Photos (from left): Federation staff with Wayapa Wuurrk participants after an in-person training session; Federation and EMAC staff observing EMAC's on-Country work at Framlingham Streamside Reserve.



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## 06. OONAH ABORIGINAL HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICE (OONAH) – HEALING WITH OONAH

Oonah's program included group facilitated healing, on-Country activities, invited facilitators as well as individualised supports where needed. Oonah's approach is based on the Social Emotional Wellbeing model of care, which recognises the connection between individual, family and culture.

"Our organisation has improved our knowledge of each LGA and their responses to emergency events, we have improved connections with appropriate individual positions which will aid in communication for future events."

– Amanda Hand, CEO, Oonah

"Oonah has embedded the processes from this project into forward planning for community support and education around disaster resilience."

– Amanda Hand, Oonah

"Community consistently request opportunities to gather and this project has improved our capacity to provide safe and appropriate events and small groups to meet and build connection to Culture and each other."

– Amanda Hand, Oonah

## 07. TATI TATI KAIEJIN (TATI TATI) – REASSERTING THEIR RIGHT TO CARE FOR RIVER COUNTRY

Tati Tati hired four people to assess the impact of the floods on three culturally significant waterbodies which were physically and spiritually damaged by asbestos, farm and industrial waste, and debris brought up by floodwaters. The team assessed damage to cultural heritage, monitored plant and animal species and conducted clean-up and water quality assessment as floodwaters receded.

"We feel like we can plan things. It's made us forward-thinking; developed our planning skills and our communication with each other. We have confidence to draw on all the experience we're building. We're building our reputation as a Traditional Owner group."

– Brendan Kennedy, Director, Tati Tati

"When we were given this opportunity to do the flood recovery, I was able to spend a lot of time out on Country, learning where everything is and the landscape. We never really got to spend much time out bush. Now, we know all the tracks and everything, which I didn't know before."

– Tati Tati community member

"I enjoy going out [on Country]. It's healthy for me; healing for me. It's good for the mind, culture, spiritual wellbeing."

"We were saying the other day how good it feels when you go back and you're looking at plants that you planted... it's a good feeling. Makes you feel proud."

– Tati Tati community members

## 08. WAYAPA WUURRK (WAYAPA) – CREATING HEALING, RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE THE WAYAPA WAY

Wayapa trained 20 Aboriginal people from the 63 flood-impacted LGAs to become accredited Wayapa Wuurrk Practitioners. The practitioner training introduces Wayapa as a modality, offering an embodied practice that creates connection and encourages collective healing and recovery for Community and Country.

"Many of the participants care for others in their community, their own kids, kids in kinship care, relatives and Elders. They appreciated having a practice for themselves to help them work through personal things that they never had time or tools for in the past. Once they knew how to help themselves, they were calmer and could help others."

– Wayapa Wuurrk Final Report

"The Wayapa training not only deepened my understanding of the Earth and its interconnectedness but also provided me with valuable ideas and activities to share with my Marrung group, enriching both my personal knowledge and my ability to connect others to the land."

– Wayapa program participant

"Participants talked about how, if you are from the stolen generations, you can feel a lot of shame because you don't know about your cultural knowledge or who your mob is. Wayapa is good in that way because it's accessible to all mob even if you don't have access to that cultural knowledge."

– Wayapa Wuurrk Final Report

## 10. YORTA YORTA NATIONS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (YYNAC) – PROTECTING AND UNCOVERING CULTURAL HERITAGE IN BARMAH FOREST

YYNAC assessed and recorded flood damage to 271 culturally significant scar trees registered in the Barmah National Park; in the process, recruiting and training a Traditional Owner in scar tree survey and assessment to increase the organisation's capacity for future flood events, and finding 200+ previously undocumented scar trees.

"...It's been an eye-opener, a great experience, walking on my grandparents' Country. My aunts and uncles were also involved in doing the old surveys in the 80s and early 2000s, so, it's really good to do this, to walk in their shoes, and see what they see. It's amazing. Just to know that they're still out there, in the forests, looking to be found, looking to be protected."

– Lowana Morgan, YYNAC

"[YYNAC's team] know[s] scar trees like no one else... you guys have amazing knowledge of scar trees; leading knowledge in the state."

– Jeremy Ash, Archaeologist, YYNAC

"Sometimes, when you do find new scar trees, you just stand and just look at it in awe. You just feel a chill coming down your spine. It's just amazing to think our people did this. We've got living proof; you've got footprints on a tree."

"You get a good feeling knowing you're preserving, protecting the cultural heritage for the future generations."

– Shannon Atkinson and Lowana Morgan, YYNAC