

HIGHLIGHTS OF ISSUE 43

- Celebrating Culture at Buchan Munji
- Deadly in Gippsland
- The Culture Hub is growing



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Elders Council

The Elders' Council come together throughout the year to provide advice on cultural matters to the organisation, and to attend cultural events.

Members are appointed by the descendants of each identified Apical Ancestor each year directly before the Annual General Meeting. The current Elders' Council members are:

Aunty Lena Morris (Chair)

Aunty Lynette Bishop

Aunty Beryl Booth

Aunty Deanna Campbell

Aunty Lee-Anne Eddington

Aunty Gwendoline Hudson

Aunty Noretta Knight

Aunty Francie Komen (Margaret)

Aunty Susan Martin

Aunty Julie Mongta

Uncle Kevin Murray

Aunty Glenda Thorpe

Aunty Marjorie Thorpe

Uncle Wayne Thorpe

Aunty Glenys Watts

Uncle Wayne Watkins

Aunty Robyn Yates &

Aunty Raylene Young



GLAWAC CEO update

Introducing our new CEO, Nick Ashburner

I would like to thank the board for giving me the opportunity to be the next GLaWAC CEO. I would also like to thank Charee for her tireless efforts in supporting the organisation during a challenging transition period. It is a privilege to be stepping into this role at time of Treaty in Victoria and I would like to pay my respects to the countless First Nations leaders who have fought for justice, on Gunaikurnai country and across the nation.

With more than a decade of experience working across some of Australia's most culturally rich and environmentally significant landscapes, I have dedicated my career to working with communities to care for Country, strengthening culture and biodiversity. My senior leadership journey spans executive roles in the Victorian Government and ten years with the Central Land Council – a federal statutory authority representing the rights and interests of Aboriginal people across the lower half of the Northern Territory. These experiences have shaped not only my professional expertise, but my deep respect for community-led decision making and the resilience, knowledge, and generosity of the people I've been privileged to work alongside.



Creating workplaces where people feel supported, valued, and empowered has always been central to my leadership. I have learned the importance of listening first, staying steady, and building trust through consistency, humility, and care. I'm committed to fostering collaboration, shared purpose, and a culture where

people can bring their whole selves to work. At the heart of all of this is a belief in people, in community, and in the power of thoughtful leadership to create lasting change – for Country, and for those who care for it.

Nick Ashburner

Farewell from Acting CEO, Charee Smith

As my time as Acting CEO comes to an end, I have taken the opportunity to reflect on the past 10 months and the extraordinary effort that has gone into moving our organisation forward. The work we have undertaken together has been significant – often complex, sometimes challenging, and always deeply meaningful. It has required commitment, resilience, and an unwavering belief in the impact we create for community and Country.

What has stood out most for me is the calibre and character of the people who make up this organisation. I have been consistently inspired by your integrity, your dedication to culture, and the way you carry forward the responsibility of

honouring Gunaikurnai knowledge, values, and identity. Your commitment to cultural leadership – grounded in truth, strength, and respect – shapes this organisation in ways that cannot be measured but are deeply felt.

Transparency has also been a guiding pillar throughout my time here. I have appreciated the open conversations, the willingness to tackle difficult issues honestly, and the shared commitment to ensuring that our decisions remain firmly anchored in what is best for our people, our partners, and our future. This openness has strengthened us, and I am grateful to have been part of a team where integrity is not just spoken about but lived.

I also want to express my sincere gratitude for the kindness and warmth shown to me during this period. Stepping into an

acting role is a unique experience, and your openness, guidance, and patience made it a smooth and rewarding one. I have learned so much from you – about the organisation, about the communities you serve, and about what strong, culturally grounded leadership looks like when it is shared across a collective.

Thank you for allowing me to walk alongside you during this chapter. I leave with deep admiration for all of you, appreciation for the work you do, and trust in the strength and capability that exists across the organisation. I look forward to watching your continued success, celebrating the milestones ahead, and staying connected as you continue to lead with culture, courage, and clarity.

Warm regards,
Charee Smith

GKTOLMB update

Board member changes

The Board started 2026 saying goodbye to some of our longest serving members: Lena Morris, Janine Haddow and Angela Hutson. They all have huge knowledge and experience – having been there from the very beginning – and have been vital in building the Board and joint management to what it is today.

The Board thank Lena, Janine and Angela for their support over a long time. We also acknowledge that as Deputy Chair, Janine provided significant support to Chair, Glenys Watts. We wish them all the best for the future.

With that sad news comes the positive, and we welcomed two new members to the Board. Josh Chikuse and Jess Reeves both started in February. Josh has been involved in joint management for a long time. He helped write the original plans and was part of the Parks Victoria team that implemented them. Jess is a Senior Lecturer at Fed Uni who built her career around the science of sustainability, and bringing Indigenous knowledge and community voices into environmental management.

Join us!

This year we are looking for new members. The Board meet every second month, with a mix of on Country visits and indoor meetings. Terms are usually three years.

The job of the Board is to:

- Write Joint Management Plans (JMPs) and update existing plans
- Monitor performance and encourage compliance
- Facilitate employment and economic development for Gunaikurnai
- Comment and make submissions on issues affecting JM parks.

The Board has two staff supporting its work, pays a sitting fee for each meeting, and must have a majority of Gunaikurnai members.

If you are interested or want to know more, please contact GLaWAC or a Board member, or check out our page on the GLaWAC website. With the new parks this is a great time to be involved with the TOLMB so please think about it. Expressions of Interest will start around April or May.

Meanwhile, we continue our work on JMPs for the Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park and for the Alpine Parks.

Our next step is to find out what is important to you – this will form the foundation of the JMPs for the newest parks. During 2026 we will work with GLaWAC and come to Community for these conversations on Country.

Looking forward to talking with you.

Gunaikurnai TOLMB

The Board's first meeting for 2026 started with Lisa Giblin doing a Smoking Ceremony and Welcome to Country. Guests included people from GLaWAC and Parks Vic.



First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria

Elections were held in April for positions on the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. The Assembly will continue as the representative and decision-making body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria as part of Gellung Warl.

Peter Hood, Alice Pepper and Andrew Thorpe were elected to the General Seats representing the South East.

Troy McDonald was elected to GLaWAC's Reserved Seat position representing Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners.

Congratulations to Peter, Alice, Andrew and Troy, and also to everyone who put their hand up and made a proud statement by nominating for a seat on the Assembly.

It was good to see lots of people getting involved in the election process and having their say.

Over 10,000 people enrolled to vote in these elections, which is four times the number that enrolled for the first in 2019.

The newly elected Assembly Members were inducted and held their first official meetings on Dja Dja Wurrung Country in early May.



To learn more about your First Peoples' Assembly visit firstpeoplesvic.org/the-assembly/

Our Community

Advancing Treaty

Reflections on the last six years

As I come to the end of my second three-year term at the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria (FPAV) as the Reserved Seat Holder for GLaWAC, I would like to share some reflections.

The FPAV is the democratically elected representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Victoria. Its mandate has always been clear: negotiate Treaty and reshape the systems that govern our lives.

I was elected in December 2019. The first three years were focused on building architecture, in the following three years we turned to Treaty making.

Key milestones include:

- Finalising the Treaty Negotiation Framework
- Supporting the establishment of the independent Treaty Authority
- Developing the Self-Determination Fund to build Traditional Owner capacity
- Leading broad community engagement across the State.

Further important early work included supporting the establishment of the Yoorrook Justice Commission — Victoria's first formal truth-telling process.

Truth-telling strengthens Treaty by grounding reform in evidence and lived experience. It ensures that future agreements are informed by an honest account of the past. The Commission's findings now provide a roadmap for systemic reform across justice, education, health, housing and land management.

Victoria has now entered a new phase — embedding Treaty structures in legislation. With legislation in place, the focus turns to:

- Whole-of-government alignment
- Clear accountability mechanisms
- Cultural literacy within public institutions
- Long-term sustainability of Treaty outcomes.



The next phase will be about building a future where First Peoples lead, negotiate and determine outcomes on their own terms. Treaty is no longer theoretical – it is a governing framework that will shape Victoria for decades to come.

This work would not have progressed without the understanding and support of the thousands of community members that got behind the vision. In meetings, in parks, at Treaty Days Out, at community forums, in cultural gatherings – in all these places the discussions and challenges were shared and heard. The people have shaped the outcomes here.

Thank you to everyone that has supported this journey.

Signing off

TROY MCDONALD

Reserve Seat Holder for GLaWAC, Dec 2019
- April 2026
First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria



Image: Volunteering Victoria

Glenys receives top volunteering honour

Many of us already know how much Glenys Watts gives to community, but her dedication has now been recognised on a state-wide stage.

Glenys, a valued member of the GLaWAC Board of Directors and Elders Council, and Chair of the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Board, has been named the Premier's Volunteer of the Year, receiving both the Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Award and the Volunteer Commitment Award.

Glenys is a highly respected community leader with more than 30 years of volunteer service across many boards and committees. Her contribution has been steady, committed and deeply impactful over decades. These awards recognise that long-standing dedication and service.

The Premier's Volunteer of the Year is selected by the Premier from the winners of four individual categories – Volunteer Leadership, Volunteer Impact, Volunteer Commitment and Young Volunteer.

The 2025 Victorian Volunteering Awards ceremony was held in Melbourne in November and celebrates extraordinary volunteering that makes a real difference in communities across the state.

As Glenys herself says, "I don't do volunteering for recognition. I actually do it out of passion to drive and create change."

This is truly worthy recognition for decades of service. Thank you, Glenys, for your commitment, leadership and tireless hard work.

For more information about the work of the FPAV – past, present and future – visit their website: firstpeoplesvic.org



The Gippsland Wrens are flying high!

Late last year, the Gippsland Wrens 12 & Under football team travelled to Shepparton to represent Gippsland at the 2025 VACSAL Statewide Junior Football Netball Carnival.

For many of the kids, it was their first statewide competition – and they gave it everything.

"Beyond the scoreboard, the event was deeply meaningful," said Cody Hood, Community Contact for the Gippsland Wrens Sporting Club. *"Our team played four competitive games, securing one win and showing incredible resilience, sportsmanship, and unity throughout the carnival. Your contribution made it possible for these young athletes to travel, compete, and grow – both as players and as proud members of our community."*

We love seeing young people step up, have a go and shine. And we're so proud to support these rising stars through the Community Benefits Fund.

Fly high, young Wrens!

Festive fun for our Elders

Yoowinna Wurnalung Aboriginal Healing Service held its annual 60+ Elders Christmas Luncheon in December.

Fifty Elders travelled from Sale, Orbost and right across the region to come together at the YWAHS Nicholson Farm. It was a wonderful opportunity for Elders to reconnect and catch up with family, friends and community members they may not have seen for some time. Each Elder received a Christmas hamper and there were two door prizes - won by Auntie Sandra Patten and Uncle Norman Terrick. These were beautifully hand-crafted by Bradley Hood, YWAHS Men's Shed Support Worker.

Elders also enjoyed live music performed by Bumpy, a proud Aboriginal singer-songwriter known for her powerful and emotionally rich voice. Bumpy has performed at major festivals and events across Australia and is widely respected for blending contemporary soul with personal storytelling.

All in all, it was a wonderfully festive luncheon filled with yarns, music, gifts and laughter.





Cultural learning with Wulgunggo Ngalu

At the end of each year students from Yarram Secondary School visit Wulgunggo Ngalu as part of a cultural immersion and education program.

It is specially designed for the Year 11 and 12 students, and speaks to their role as leaders, teachers and protectors of the incoming Year 7 students.

On the day we shared a lunch of meat cooked in the ground from early morning, using local traditional bush herbs and spices grown in the horticulture program (in partnership with GLaWAC).

The students presented the Learning Place with a gift of gratitude for our support over the years. This was an artwork they had created depicting Borun the pelican as the Elder, protector and teacher of the young

ones, and recognising our role in sharing knowledge with the school community of family structure, roles and responsibilities.

Then, at the start of the 2026 school year, we continued this cultural learning at the school's big opening event. In this the students, together with men from Wulgunggo Ngalu, welcome the Year 7 students in a traditional way, placing them at the centre of the school family circle. This reinforces the protective role of the senior students and shows the young ones that they have supports and protection around them.



The program has been shared with the school community over several years now and has been very well received.

BERWYN LAMPITT,
Programs Manager, Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place





Peyton and Riley shine on stage

Two local Gunaikurnai sisters, Peyton and Riley Williamson, represented their mob with pride as Principal Dancers in the 2025 State Schools Spectacular First Nations Ensemble.

Chosen as two of only six First Nations Principal Dancers across Victoria, they performed on one of the country's biggest stages at Rod Laver Arena, sharing their culture, talent and spirit with thousands in the arena and many more watching from home.

From March to September, the sisters travelled to Melbourne most weekends, rehearsing with dedication and heart. Their final performance was broadcast nationally in December.

The dance piece, *The Cicada*, celebrated life cycles, resilience and transformation. Peyton and Riley delivered a powerful performance, weaving contemporary dance with cultural movement and meaning.

Both girls say they are deeply grateful to the Cultural Connect Dance Group, who continue to inspire them to learn more about their culture, their stories and traditional dance. Their aunts and cousins have created a space where young First Nations dancers can feel proud, confident and connected to who they are and where they come from.

We are all incredibly proud of Peyton and Riley, who show what is possible when culture, talent and determination come together.

Deadly work, girls, the whole community is behind you!



We want your feedback

This is your newsletter
and we want to hear from you.

What works?
What doesn't work?
What do you want to see in it?

Scan the QR code and tell us.





Our Culture



Culture Hub update

CATH THOMAS, Senior Manager, Culture Hub

The Culture Hub team has grown!

I'm excited to share that I am now Senior Manager of the Culture Hub, heading a great new team under the leadership of Grattan Mullett, Senior Cultural Leader.

Heather Hood and Kelvin Moffatt bring experience, skills, and many laughs to our team. Previously in the Eco Dev team, they both come on as Community Engagement Officers. Heather is based in the Morwell office while Kelvin is at Kalimna.

Rob Hudson brings a wealth of knowledge to GLaWAC and our team, with a focus on the RAP and Cultural Heritage areas. Shane O'Shanassy joins us as Culture Hub Program Coordinator three days a week, supporting us with admin, while Hugh Pepper brings a strong educational background to his role as Cultural Education Officer.

A very warm welcome to everyone!

Late last year we hosted a Women's Stolen Generations Healing Camp at Forestec. This involved 16 women who are in a program organised by Tehyali Malone from Link-

Up Victoria at VACCA. Heather and I ran a cultural activity, shared stories and finished with a boat cruise on the Gippsland Lakes. The women said they really loved this and didn't want to leave.



We also hosted a couple of days at Buchan with our Gunaikurnai young men and boys from Latrobe Valley. Following some sorry business, the boys reached out to GLaWAC to take them on Country to heal. Kelvin,





Shay, Bryce and Ray worked alongside Stephanie Dalton from Latrobe Valley Dhek Dja to give the young men this experience. They all did our young men and boys proud.

In January we worked with Danielle Baxter from For Mob By Mob, as part of the Supporting Healing for Families Program. With her help we organised a fantastic

day out at Buchan Caves with young people from Latrobe, Baw Baw, Bass Coast and South Gippsland. They were all on the journey of finding Gunaikurnai connections and wanting to learn about their great grandparents and where they come from. Rangers Tyler, Rob, Deon, Logan, Jordan and Shay were all there, and we shared stories and yarned about

our work in the reserve. One young one told us they'd like to be a Ranger one day – highlighting the benefits of a day like this and the message we share with our young ones.

Exciting work is ahead – watch this space!



Our Country

Monitoring moths in the mountains

On Country Rangers have been making regular trips to the Alpine high country, continuing a project to help the critically endangered mountain pygmy-possum.

Late last year, the crew set up motion sensor cameras on Gunaikurnai Country at Mount Higginbotham and Mount Loch, to monitor the number of Bogong moths active in the area.

As Aboriginal people have understood for tens of thousands of years, when one piece of the puzzle is impacted, the effects ripple out.

"Bogong moths are the pygmy-possum's most important source of food. And so the number of Bogong moths that make it to the mountains each spring and summer has a huge impact on the health of the pygmy-possum population."

Kobi Hood, On Country Ranger

Although the pygmy-possums also eat other insects, as well as seeds, berries and some fruits, the high protein of the Bogong moth is hard to replace.

The connection between the pygmy-possum and the Bogong moth was made evident in 2017 when only about 0.5% of the typical



Bogong moth migration numbers made it to the high country.

In response, more than half of female mountain pygmy-possums in monitored populations lost their entire litters, and in one site about 95% of females lost all their young.

The motion sensor cameras are strapped to snow gums, where they capture photos of Bogong moths rising from the boulder fields at sunset.

"By analysing these images we are able to estimate the size of the Bogong moth migration. That then gives us a good idea of how much protein our pygmy-possums are going to get over the summer."

Shakiah Tungiah, On Country Ranger

Through this work the team is helping build a clearer picture of what these fragile alpine ecosystems need to thrive. It's another reminder that caring for Country means understanding how every part of the system fits together.



Waribruk

Could there have been a local population of Tasmanian Tigers or Tasmania Devils living in the Snowy River Valley, thousands of years ago?

Archaeological excavations on Country, led by GLaWAC in collaboration with an international team of archaeologists, continue to shed light on the day-to-day lives of the Old Ancestors.

"Every place has a story," says Monash University archaeologist Prof Bruno David, who alongside Uncle Russell Mullett and archaeology student Kealey Ratzmann has been conducting a series of excavations at Waribruk.

"The aim of our work here is to help tell ancestral stories of this area, based on the things that the Old People left behind."

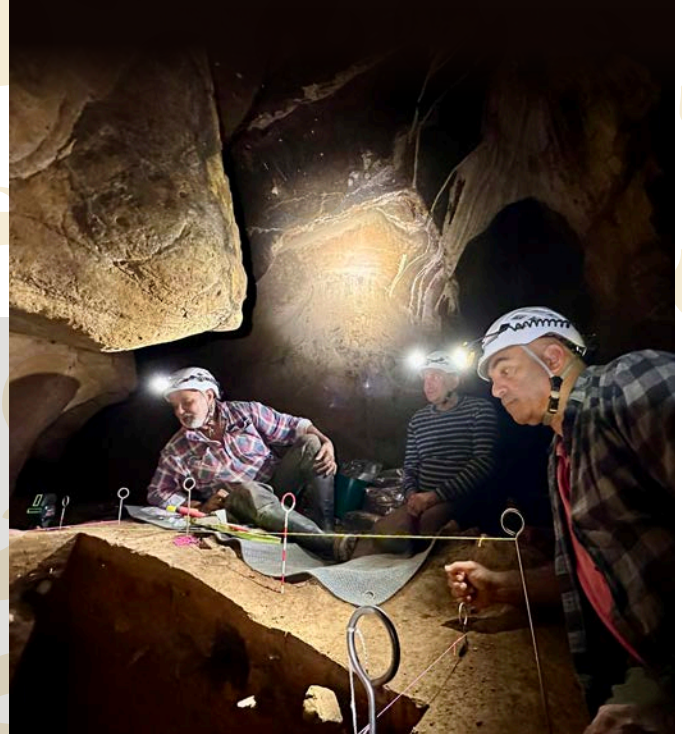
In December last year Bruno and the archaeology team made a particularly interesting find - bone fragments from what they think to be either Tasmanian Tiger or Tasmanian Devil.

The oldest of those fragments is estimated to be between 15,000 and 18,000 years old.

The youngest is estimated to be between 3,000 and 4,000 years old, which is about the time those animals were thought to have become extinct on the Australian mainland.

Those bone fragments have been sent to a laboratory at the University of Adelaide for ancient DNA analysis, to confirm the species.

That testing might also tell us whether the animals were genetically closely related to devils and tigers from northern Tasmania, or whether they were part of a separate population endemic to this area.



Tasmanian Tiger and Tasmania Devil bone fragments were found at Waribruk back in the 1980s, but no detailed analysis of those bone fragments was done at the time.

Archaeologists, GLaWAC crew and archaeology students also conducted excavations at the public campground at Balley Hooley, and at a nearby mountain-top artefact scatter site called One Tree Hill 1.

Excavation works at Waribruk will continue in May.

UPDATE

In February, GLaWAC crews made the unfortunate discovery that vandals had forced entry to Waribruk. At the time of writing, it was not known how much damage had been caused. Unfortunately, this is not the first breach of this culturally and ecologically sensitive site. We are now working with cultural heritage staff, land managers and other stakeholders about how we can better protect Waribruk and other significant sites across Country.

We will keep GLaWAC members informed.

A place to gather at Balley Hooley

Where the Snowy River meets the Buchan River is Krauatungalung country.

Today this special place, which we know as Balley Hooley in the Snowy River National Park, is visited by people from all over the world.

Now, those visitors will experience a striking reminder of the ancient and ongoing presence of the Gunaikurnai at this spot, thanks to GLaWAC's construction of a new yarning circle and fire pit area.

Designed by Doug Hood of GLaWAC's Business Enterprise Services team and constructed by Doug and fellow team members Chris Hood and Paul and Tyson Harrison, the new yarning circle is framed by five shields representing the five Gunaikurnai clans, laser cut in weathering steel.

Doug said that when he was designing how the yarning circle would be laid out, he wanted something that would reflect the landscape and cultural significance of the place.

"That's why we made the two pathways coming in there, which are the two rivers, flowing down to meet at this spot. The rivers flow down from the mountains, down the stone steps, and come together here at the yarning circle, which is the gathering place." Doug Hood





Taking the fight to foxes

"When we started, it was eerie how silent it was out here - there was no birdsong. Now we've noticed that the bird life has come back. The forest is singing again."

Michael Welsh Dalton, Crew Leader

What started as a single baiting program in 2017 has grown into coordinated fox control across seven parks and reserves.

Late last year, Mick, Jake, Michael and TJ from the NRM Valley team joined Grace from DEECA to check on cameras and bait stations in the west – a regular job in any fox control program. This one has been running for more than a year. It started in Holey Plains State Forest before expanding to Mullungdung State Forest and is now established in Won Wron State Forest as well.

"Every forest has its own challenges. Because it's such a large project, and a first for our team, we started off small scale. Once we got used to the processes and got to know the forest intimately, we expanded our area over about six months. We're at maximum now with 400 active stations."

Michael Welsh Dalton



Meanwhile, over in the east, Shak, Rob, Bryce and Liv teamed up with Susie from Parks Victoria to set up fauna cameras in the Mitchell River National Park. The intent is to start a fox control program in the park and the cameras will help gather baseline data – identifying what animals are using the area before any baiting begins. This builds on work already being done in Lake Tyers State Park, Jack Smith Lake and around the Gippsland Lakes.

It all takes methodical planning, patience, a solid understanding of Country, hard work on the tools, and long hours checking data. But it's a vital step in supporting Country to heal from the impacts of introduced pest species. And we are here for that!

Tractor crew receives high praise

Paul and Ian Harrison are two members of GLaWAC's civil works crew, which has been earning high praise from our customers and partners in land management.

In the lead up to Christmas they were doing burn reduction slashing at Lakes Entrance-Lake Tyers Coastal Reserve, and throughout Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park and the Lakes National Park.

It isn't easy work on the tractors, but the guys take pride in what they do, and so we were stoked to hear from our friends at

Parks Victoria and DEECA who called to congratulate the crew on the quality of their work.

They praised the overall quality and standard of work, the care taken with machinery, and the efficiency of delivery.

Deadly work fellas.



Caring for Corringle

In the lead up to Christmas the rangers worked alongside Parks Victoria at Corringle Foreshore Reserve, preparing it for the influx of summer campers who flock here each year.

Corringle is one of our jointly managed parks and has always been an important place for us. The old people camped and fished here. It was a plentiful food source and a place of connection – linking the ocean to the rivers and connecting along the coastline to Lake Tyers. It was an important meeting place for families – when our people were displaced from the mission they came here. Those who lived away from Country would return here to reconnect with traditional land. It was a safe place.

That spirit remains today. Mob still camp, fish and gather here, keeping those connections strong.

"Corringle is a special place that holds deep cultural significance for us. We're proud to work alongside Parks Victoria to care for it and make sure it's ready for everyone who loves spending time here."

On Country Ranger Coordinator, Robert Baxter



All across the rivers

Our Rangers have been busy out on Country, looking at Katung activities with the aim of building up a 12-month calendar of information.

Russell Dow, Kobi Hood, Anthony Mobourne and Ngsali Hayes visited sites across several rivers, looking at where they want to set up water quality and eDNA monitoring locations. They will also capture information about what the locations look like – and what they want them to look like. The Rangers are also working with the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, sharing information and being shown areas which used to be wetlands.

Anthony also spent time at Thomson Dam with researchers from the Arthur Rylah Institute. While the objective of the day was to catch eels, the team caught River Blackfish, Southern Pygmy Perch, Australian Smelt, and two introduced species – Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout. No eels were caught, which could indicate they have limited access into the reservoir. This will be the next stage of the research. This all builds on last year's satellite tagging work. Keep an eye on our website for more about the eels soon – it is a deadly story!



Putting Culture front and centre at Buchan Munji

Buchan Munji (also known as Buchan Caves Reserve) is one of the parks that we jointly manage with Parks Victoria, and together we are working to ensure that Gunaikurnai Culture is front and centre.

Recently we installed a yarning circle featuring the five Gunaikurnai clan shields with the Krauatungalung shield highlighted at the centre.

The installation was designed by Doug Hood of our Business Enterprise Services (BES) team and constructed by Doug, Chris Hood, Paul and Tyson Harrison and Geoff McHugh.

The Krauatungalung shield also features in a new installation at the entrance to the reserve, helping visitors appreciate the cultural and spiritual significance of Buchan Munji from the moment they arrive.

Our BES team has also been hard at work repairing infrastructure along the Spring Creek Walk that was burned in the 2019/20 bushfires.

Repair works began in the second half of last year and finished two months ahead of schedule. Big thanks to all involved, including the skilled contractors and workers from DEECA.

Spring Creek Walk is now reopened, sporting a new footbridge, waterfall viewing platform and steps and handrails down to the Granite Pools Track.



Later this year, you'll start to see new interpretive signage around the reserve that highlights the stories, perspectives and history of Gunaikurnai people.

This is another step toward our vision of Buchan Munji as a place of reconnection for Gunaikurnai community, and a place where we can share the area's rich cultural heritage with visitors and the broader community.



Sea Country IPA

Sea Country has always been part of who we are. Now, the structures are being put in place to make sure community has a real and lasting say in how they want to see it managed.

We now have dedicated Rangers caring for Sea Country, the Gunaikurnai Planning Group is meeting regularly, and a draft Gunaikurnai Sea Country Indigenous Protection Area (IPA) Plan will be ready by the end of June.

The draft Plan will cover the area from Corner Inlet to the Snowy River. It will support community to identify cultural and natural values, assess their condition and any threats, and shape ways to manage and conserve these places for future generations.

More community engagement will take place over the next few months, and there will be the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft plan.

Sea Country is moving forward — on Gunaikurnai terms.

To learn more about the Sea Country IPA or have a say in how Katungul is managed, visit gunaikurnai.org/sea-country.



Pookila finds some friends

The tiny Pookila was once abundant. Over thousands of years, this clever little creature learnt to evade predatory birds by moving slowly and quietly through the undergrowth. Sadly, that strategy doesn't work against feral cats and foxes.

As a result, the Pookila – also known as the New Holland Mouse – is now listed as vulnerable. Drought, climate change, habitat loss and bushfire have also taken their toll.

So late last year, On Country Rangers Rob, Kevin, Kobi and Anthony headed out with other passionate Pookila protectors for three action packed days at Wilsons Promontory.

We've been working with the Pookila for a while now. We've collected data, sampled DNA, scanned microchips, and nursed, weighed and released them safely back home. This workshop really built on that experience. We learnt new ways to find them, handle them and care for them.

On Country Ranger Coordinator Rob Baxter

The workshop brought together people from Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Boon Wurrung Land and Sea Council, Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia (ZAA), the National Pookila Recovery Team, Zoos Victoria, Parks Victoria and DEECA. Huge thanks to ZAA for bringing everyone together and making it happen – with vital support from the Australian Government's Saving Native Species Program.



Image: Kerri Duncan (ZAA)

It was wonderful to witness the passion of the specialists who run these programs - they really care for these animals and understand them. Seeing that gives us confidence. The more we understand the smaller creatures and their role in the ecosystem, the deeper our connection to Country becomes.

Rob Baxter

Once surviving by moving quietly through the undergrowth, Pookila now has a growing network of people moving just as carefully to support its return.



Image: Lisa Tuthill, (ZAA)

Our Organisation

Tyrone selected for leadership program

We are very happy to let you know that Tyrone Hayes from the NRM Crew has been selected for the 2026 National Seafood Industry Leadership Program.

Tyrone is one of a growing number of GLaWAC staff involved in deadly new projects on Sea Country – working more often from a boat than a ute or tractor.

Along with Harley Wanganeen and Tyler Hood, Tyrone has been spearheading our exciting Sydney rock oyster trial – farming oysters in the Gippsland Lakes to see whether it might be a viable economic enterprise in the future.

Despite the name, Sydney rock oysters are also native to the Gippsland coast and grow wild in the Gippsland Lakes, where they are the dominant oyster species.

Tyrone is one of just 35 young people from across Australia selected for the National Seafood Industry Leadership Program, which will see him fly to Freemantle

in March to begin a year-long series of workshops and education sessions.

The goal of the leadership program is to help these young professionals start and grow innovative and successful seafood enterprises.

GLaWAC's oyster trial is supported by the Victorian Fisheries Authority and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

This oyster project is a really big opportunity. This could become a sustainable industry for our community, a way for us to make a living on Country. But it's also a learning opportunity. I've learned



so much already, especially about water quality and the ecosystem of our waterways. We have to protect what is here. If this oyster trial is going to succeed, we need to keep these waters clean, we need to stop pollution in the water. It all comes back to protecting Country.

Tyrone Hayes, NRM Crew

Learning from Country at Manns Beach

Back in February, 25 students from Monash University came to Manns Beach in South Gippsland for a two week archaeology field school on a quiet bush block on Country.

The field school was led by Dr Ashleigh Rogers, with support from Prof Bruno David and our RAP Manager, Uncle Russell Mullett.

Even though the block is now inland, it would once have been much closer to the sea. Over time, the tides and sand have shifted. As the students carefully dug at the site, under GLaWAC's cultural authority, they uncovered different layers in the ground.

The top layers showed signs of colonial settlement. Underneath, they found older cultural material, including carefully placed shells from different species and pieces of charcoal from old cooking fires.

We do not yet know exactly how old the shells or charcoal are. Samples will now be sent away for carbon dating to confirm their age.

For many of the students, this was their first time working on a real dig. One student, Tishara, said uncovering the shells felt like holding hands with someone from 3,000 years ago.

For GLaWAC, this work is about more than university study. It is about making sure work on Country is done the right way, with Gunaikurnai people leading decisions about how sites are cared for, recorded and protected.

Uncle Russell reminded the students that learning about bush foods, seasons, and how our people moved across Country, is just as important as learning how to use a trowel.

With coastal erosion and climate change putting pressure on cultural sites, this work helps us record and protect the knowledge of how our Ancestors lived.

This is self-determination in action.



On the fire front

After the 2019–20 bushfires, Traditional Owner groups across Victoria called for governments to listen more closely to Aboriginal knowledge of fire and Country – knowledge built through thousands of years of observation and practice.

One key recommendation was simple: involve mob more directly in firefighting and in land and fire management year-round.

Fast forward a few years, and in 2024 GLaWAC became one of the first Traditional Owner Corporations in Victoria to officially join Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV), working alongside staff from DEECA, Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water.

That means when bushfires break out on Country, GLaWAC staff, equipped and trained in firefighting, are there on the frontline.

GLaWAC now has 11 staff trained in fire response, more than double the number from last year.

During catastrophic fire conditions in January, Trey Parsons, Troy Wilson, Bryce Baxter, Rob Baxter and crew leader Cameron Fleet were deployed to the Orbost area, supporting the effort to contain dozens of new fires sparked by lightning.

Tyler Hood and Callum Morton were deployed to the Walwa fire near Corryong, working overnight shifts supporting bulldozer operators.

Meanwhile, Kevin Hood, Mick Farnham, John Baxter and Deon Baxter worked on lightning-strike fires near Dargo.

"We were working up and down a very steep slope, using rake hoes to make access trails. We're talking 45 degrees or so - 1 metre up for every 1 metre along. It was hard, tough country."

Kevin Hood.

Jake Atkinson, who spent seven days helping contain the Dargo fires, hopes that having more Aboriginal firefighters involved helps ensure cultural heritage is protected during fire emergencies.

We know where sites of cultural significance are, and there are buffer zones around those places. Those must always be respected. Protecting cultural heritage is really important to me. Once it's destroyed you can't replace it.

Jake Atkinson

A big thank you to all the staff who stepped up this season to help protect Country and community.



Welcome to our new staff

As GLaWAC continues to grow and develop we are proud to introduce the latest team members.

First up is **Rob Hudson** who steps into the role of Senior Culture and Engagement Officer in the cultural heritage space, bringing with him much knowledge and expertise. We welcome the deadly skills and commitment that **Logan Hudson**, **Shakiah Tungai**, **Tyler Hood** and **Deon Baxter** all bring to their new roles as On Country Rangers, **Paul Harrison** to his work on the Civil Crew, and **Phillip Solomon** to his work in the Natural Resources Management Crew.

Hugh Pepper has a wealth of educational experience underpinning his role as Cultural Education Officer. **Jessica John**, ever efficient

and knowledgeable, has come on board as Payroll Officer, ensuring the smooth handling of payroll and financial operations. **Maryanne Kelly**, our new Tenders and Procurement Senior Coordinator has solid experience and a thorough understanding of this space. Finally, **Ronald Parker** joins us as Operations Manager, Business Enterprise, while **Jake Lynch**, with an abundance of journalistic and community knowhow, is our new Media & Campaigns Lead.

Please join us in welcoming these new team members

Skills for life

Since we last checked in, GLaWAC staff have continued building their skills. Five On Country Rangers enjoyed specialist 4WD training with Peter Bowman from TAFE Gippsland, while seven rangers undertook the Elements of Shipboard Safety course.

Big thanks to Brad and Gary from TAFE Gippsland, and mentors Mick and CJ. We are very grateful to Latrobe City Council's Steps to the Future program for funding both opportunities. For more on these stories, head to [Our Yarns](#) on the website.

Two rangers have also received Work Safely at Heights accreditation through DirtWorx in Bairnsdale, further broadening the team's capability.

In exciting news, Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid is now being rolled out across the organisation.

"Given the nature of our work alongside Community, it is essential that all staff share a strong understanding of Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing. This training supports early identification, reduces stigma, and reinforces the central role of culture, connection, family, and Country in healing."

Jo Blake, Health and Wellbeing Manager

Conflict in the Field training, delivered by Paul Fong from Tact4 and supported by Lakes Entrance Police, further equipped staff to manage difficult situations safely and calmly.

"This was great training that gave me skills I can use everyday. It helped me slow down and really consider the situation rather than just react. It also gave me a lot to think about when it comes to reading, and responding to, body language."

Phillip Solomon, NRM Crew

Our staff are central to GLaWAC's long-term direction, and we remain committed to ensuring they can work safely and confidently wherever Country takes them.



Our Economy

Deadly in Gippsland

Late in February, as a wild thunderstorm raged outside, the Deadly in Gippsland Business Expo (DiG) was in full swing inside the Sale Memorial Hall.

Aboriginal-owned and led businesses from many different sectors filled the room – from cultural arts and crafts makers to solar, electrical and plumbing contractors, meditation and wellness experts, clothing designers, business consultants, and more!

In recent years, DiG has grown its focus on celebrating the positive economic impact of Aboriginal entrepreneurs on the regional community, and on creating pathways for training, employment, leadership and business growth. This year, workshops and panel discussions brought experienced Aboriginal business leaders together to offer guidance to people at every stage of their journey – whether just starting to form a concept, or 20 years down the track.

"This is about us, as a mob, showcasing our entrepreneurial ability to the rest of the community."

Joanne Brunt, Indigenous Employment Coordinator, Latrobe City Council

Away from the business talk, the Cultural Connect Dance Group took to the stage with a powerful cultural dance performance. Adrian (Ringo) Morgan showed visitors how to carve emu eggs, and Kylie and Susan from Corringale Creators demonstrated basket weaving.

"We're showcasing our Blak Excellence, and that's a powerful experience. What I hear from business owners at DiG is that the networking opportunities are really important - they get to meet clients and potential clients, which is great. And there's just a good feeling in being together as a community, representing ourselves and what we can do to the broader public."

Alice Pepper, co-chair of GLaWAC's Board of Directors, and owner of Peppers Community Arts and Cultural Services

Image: Tanarly Hood



A huge thank you to everyone who showed up, stood up, and lent a hand – and to our sponsors: Wellington Shire Council, Indigenous Business Australia, Orsted, Southerly Ten, Iberdrola Australia and Blue Mackerel.

The storm got the headlines, but you all helped make the real thunder.



Deadly in Gippsland



Image circled: Tanarly Hood



1,000 plants and counting!

SAM MONKS, Bush Foods Program Manager

Summer days spent watering plants and harvesting bush foods have given community a happy, healing space to learn and share knowledge about local Gunaikurnai plants.

This season, that's exactly what's been happening in our Bush Foods Program at Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place.

The program is going from strength to strength, with 20 students now enrolled – including three GLaWAC NRM Crew from Morwell. Through a hands-on, accredited Horticulture course with TAFE Gippsland, students are spending their days in our outdoor nursery – a space that feels culturally safe, grounded, and truly their own.



Together, we've planted over 1,000 plants and seedlings, including Coast Wattle, Coast Saltbush, Murnong (Yam Daisy), Chocolate Lily, Mountain Pepper and Mint Bush – a living, growing collection of Country.

Before Christmas, we headed to Warragul to visit the Indigenous Art Garden at Rotary Park. This beautiful garden is a living representation of a painting by Aunty Eileen Harrison, who welcomed us warmly and shared the story behind the garden and why it holds such meaning. Community members, staff and students all finished the day with a good feed – full bellies and full hearts.





New Energy is coming to **GUNAIKURNAI** **COUNTRY**

As the representative of Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners, GLaWAC is engaging with government and industry developers proposing new energy projects on Gunaikurnai Country.

Our goal is to get good outcomes for mob, and to ensure cultural heritage and Country are protected.

Stay informed and get involved, at
gunaikurnai.org/Energy



Artwork by Robbie Farnham 2023

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC)

Under the guidance of the Board of Directors and Elders Council, GLaWAC is the Registered Aboriginal Party that represents the Gunaikurnai people and their aspirations for Native Title, cultural heritage, land, water and natural resource management.

GLaWAC News content disclaimer

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Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

Forestec, 27 Scriveners Road
Kalimna West, Victoria, 3909
Phone: 03 5152 5100
Fax: 03 5152 1666
admin@glawac.com.au
www.gunaikurnai.org



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