



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

COMMITTEE: Jan Aitken President
Bob West Vice President
Diana Warrell. Secretary
Bill Pretty. Treasurer
Convenor Moor-rul Grasslands Friends: Jann Darvil
Education Officer. Natalie Duffy

Committee Members: Adrienne Jones, Jonathon Lopez, Vera Herman, Cassie May, Hilary Peake

Nillumbik Reconciliation Group works in partnership with the Nillumbik Shire Council and other community groups to promote reconciliation in our shire. We endeavour to develop a growing understanding of the place of Aboriginal people in our nation and to work towards truth, treaty and their voice to Parliament, recognizing the Uluru statement as their gift to a decolonized Australia.

Thanks to all members of our committee for their support and commitment to reconciliation.

2020: the Year of Corona Virus.

1. Our annual activities had to be curtailed this year. Reconciliation Victoria cancelled planned celebrations for Reconciliation Week 27 May - 03 June. NAIDOC Week was also delayed, rescheduled from July to November 8-15, so our Flag Raising and Youth Leaders' Workshop originally scheduled for May 28, and a NAIDOC Week forum in partnership with the Eltham Library were initially delayed and subsequently cancelled for this year.
2. The official cancellation of Reconciliation Week put an end to the planning activities of Jan Aitken and Committee members Adrienne Jones, Jonathon Lopez and Hilary Peake for a Flag Raising and Youth Leaders' Workshop. Instead Natalie Duffy and Jan made a short video at the Gawa Trail telling the story of reconciliation, followed by instructions for an educational activity: the making of a small poster with the message 'I have a hand in reconciliation.' The video was circulated to primary schools in Nillumbik. We've had positive feedback from some schools which used it.
3. NAIDOC Week is 8-15 November. This year's theme is *Always Was, Always Will Be*.
4. Gawa Trail tours and educational engagement with primary schools and early learning centres have also not been possible. Plans for next year are contingent on government regulations concerning activities and the requirements of schools. We will do what is possible.
5. There is lively interest and curiosity about Aboriginal heritage among Early Learning and Kindergarten children and education is critical. We receive many requests for assistance with educational materials for these age

groups. As a contribution to meeting this need, Cassie May and Natalie Duffy wrote a comprehensive application for the Victorian Government's *Lets Stay Connected* Fund, to make four short educational films and a series of Woiwurrung language colouring-in cards featuring Australian animals.

6. Eltham North Adventure Playground, Eltham North Reserve. Natalie Duffy and the Friends of Eltham North Adventure Playground (FOENAP) were responsible for acquiring funding for this winner from the State Government's \$30 million *Pick My Project* community grants initiative. The project has proceeded slowly throughout this year. Nillumbik Shire Council staff took over managing the project in partnership with a Community Reference Group and the NRG in January 2019. We've had regular meetings throughout the year and the project is now nearing completion. (Link: <https://pickmyproject.vic.gov.au/rounds/pick-my-project/ideas/eltham-north-adventure-playground-community-landscaping-project>.)
- Project Highlights:
- a. A colourful mural by artist Tom Civil at the centre of surrounding rocks, which will seat children and adults in an outdoor classroom. The symbols in the mural reference Wurundjeri foods and ancestor stories.
 - b. A pottery path featuring tiles made by Eltham North Primary School students and other local children, representing animals and plants used by the Wurundjeri on this land pre-settlement. It references the pottery path which featured in the original Adventure Playground burnt down by arson in 2017.
 - c. Aunty Joy Wandin is working with us now placing signs derived from *Welcome to Country*, and assisting with the wording for other signage in the area.
 - c. A Seasons sign will be painted by Wurundjeri artist Judy Nicholson representing the seven Wurundjeri seasons and the two seasons of Fire and Flood, as described by Aunty Joy. The sign will incorporate movable pieces which indicate the current season. Students from Eltham North Primary School will be responsible for keeping the seasons on the sign up to date.
 - d. Incorporated into the Project landscaping plans, a seasonal planting of native tree, shrubs and grasses has been completed by the Wurundjeri Narrap Team (from the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation) and local landscapers Indigenous Design. The Playground is scheduled for completion on 18 December this year. We also envisage an opening ceremony involving the Wurundjeri Smoking Ceremony and the presence of Wurundjeri. We want the spirit of Wurundjeri to be very present at both the playground and the Gathering Space. The whole area now has a name: *Djila Djerrin*, which means "Play Together". (There is a formal process which the Council must go through before the name can be used officially.)
 - e. NRG will receive money from the Project grant to pay for the cultural component of the Opening Ceremony and an Aboriginal education program at Eltham North Primary School to prepare the students for taking responsibility for changing the indicators on the Seasons sign.
7. Moor-rul Grasslands. We have had to put our weeding and planting on hold since March. The area has been the subject of a Nillumbik Shire Council concept plan for the development of the War Memorial and the acreage below it. Jann Darvill and Hilary Peake took part in the community consultations. We were very shocked to find in the initial draft no sign of the Moor-rul Grasslands. They had been wiped out by a road which runs the length of the acreage. Our complaints did result in a new area marked as Moor-rul Grasslands and also a large area around the margins of the paddock. So we are still "on the map" but how all this will be managed by a new Council is yet to be seen. The group of weeders and planters has up to seven members, including Committee members Jan, Hilary and Jann, who meet monthly. Jann Darvill has served us as the Convenor of the Friends Group managing the Moor-rul Grasslands for the last 11 years. We thank her for her reliable and passionate involvement in this project. She has attended workshops, held monthly consultations with NSC environmental officer Tim Krasevac, sent out notices to volunteers and provided tea and home-made biscuits for our post-weeding and planting recovery periods. Jann is resigning from her position for a much needed and well earned rest, but intends to come up to the grasslands and keep an eye on them and us.

8. Panton Hill Reserves. As the Gawa Trail is one of the Panton Hill Reserves, NRG has been included on a Panton Hill Bushland Reserve System User Group Advisory Committee. Bob West has attended these meetings. Signs have been placed describing the extent of the reserves with specific details of the reserve where each sign is located. Interpretive signs designed by an Aboriginal artist are being negotiated and there will be community working bees.
9. U3A First Nations Class. Robin Gardner and Jan Aitken, Hilary Peake and Helen Bostok with considerable technical assistance from Gilian Essex have continued the U3A class by Zoom since March, with up to 20 members attending. We have used podcasts, You Tube, visitors' and class members' contributions. Our program content has varied depending on what we can find of interest but always focusing on the issues, achievements, plight and survival of Australian Aboriginal people and our own responsibility for supporting their promotion of truth, treaty and voice and working for a change to their place and presence in our nation.
10. Reconciliation Eastern Metro (REM). REM has met quarterly for many years and NRG has managed to have at least one representative at each meeting. This year we have not met regularly, but we have actively supported the Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (MMIGP), which is an important cultural home for Aboriginal families in the Eastern Melbourne area. Their accommodation in a discontinued Anglican Church in East Ringwood has been under threat for some years as the building and the two-and-a-half acres around it are for sale. Jan, Diana, Bob and Natalie for NRG joined with other REM reconciliation groups at a meeting with Aboriginal Affairs Minister Gabrielle Williams to put the case for government support for MMIGP. We were also able to speak about projects our groups were involved in. Natalie received a letter of commendation from the Minister regarding our NRG work and the *Lets Stay Connected* project.
11. Website and Facebook: Our webmaster Eric Staff has revised our site and with Natalie organized a membership registration and payment of membership dues and donations. This is proving very successful. Those who become members are placed on our mailing list and invited to be more actively involved. Natalie and Paul Byrne Moroney both manage Facebook sites for NRG. These have proved very helpful in advertising our activities. Our thanks to Eric, Natalie and Paul.
12. In 2018-19 Diana liaised with the Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Park Friends group in taking groups of international tourists around the Kangaroo Ground Hill and the Gawa Trail. Various NRG members assisted. This program has of course been discontinued with the cessation of international flights but will be rediscovered when international tourists once again come to this country.
13. As this goes to press Natalie has won a seat on Nillumbik Shire Council. She will not now be on our committee but we look forward to a very supportive and close relationship with her as a councillor, and with the Council. (That wish for a Council Reconciliation Action Plan is looking like a possibility.) We will miss Natalie's enthusiasm, her commitment to reconciliation and her technological competence. But we will appreciate enormously the presence of such a Reconciliation committed councillor in the shire. We thank the Nillumbik Shire Council for their assistance with our initiatives, for funding and in-kind support. We are pleased that Council is taking more active responsibility for reconciliation in the Shire and hope that this will be extended to a Reconciliation Action Plan, a project we would welcome and look forward to being involved with.
14. Remembrance Day Service, 2020, at Kangaroo Ground Tower War Memorial. NRG was represented by Jan, Diana and Natalie, laying a wreath in memory of all Aboriginal servicemen and women. – Jan Aitken, President.