

BLCAC respectfully offer the below statement of significance which covers all of our traditional land and water Country.

Over the last 35,000 years Bunurong people have adapted to a range of significant changes within their Country. Our stories of the Bay flooding with water, asteroid impacts near Cranbourne, Arthurs Seat once being an Island, volcanic activity in the western suburbs, the great floods, fires and earthquakes all speak of such events.

Over 1000 generations of our people have been here before us. Archaeological excavation within our Country has already demonstrated about 30,000 years worth of occupation. These sites can show us how our ancestors interacted with their environment and how that interaction changed over time. We regard all evidence of our people's occupation as sacred.

No amount of data can compensate for the loss of a site but if we cant *literally* preserve a site, the only other way it may be preserved is by way of careful data collection as part of a Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP). The importance of the accuracy of this data being collected *for protection* is paramount as we regard this information as sacred. It holds the stories of our people and our past. In some places our archaeology is the only thing that remains within a given landscape, the only thing left that hasn't been changed or moved, and because of this, it is now sacred to us.

All of our Country is highly significant, every square inch, every rock, every leaf, every dune and every artefact. If we could attribute the cause of this blanket high significance rating of our Country to any one thing, it would be that in Melbourne especially, so much has been destroyed and lost as the city grew, and so quickly. If you lose enough of something, what little you have left becomes so much more important. Similarly, when someone passes, their earthly possessions become more important to those they left behind.

With regards to knowledge and stories, each of our Elders that passed away during early colonisation is the equivalent of a state library burning down today. One Bunurong Elder of the time was famously quoted saying that, '*Once we are gone, no one is going to know where anything is*', clearly considering the vast amount of knowledge he and his people had collected about the landscape, all written in their songs and stories. Another Elder was noted as saying, '*one day smart people will lament at our passing*', no doubt acknowledging again the ocean of information collected on every living thing here, every tree, every animal and the key to the complex balance of all things that his people had managed to evolve and sustain. European people are still learning of the complexities of Aboriginal culture.

Though we retain a wealth of stories of our people and Country, with no written language and with change occurring here so quickly, we have lost many of the ancient stories of this landscape. At the *time*, Bunurong people's focus was more on trying to stay alive than on the luxuries of continuing to practice culture, which included the careful passing on of stories and knowledge, different levels of which would require certain initiations, performed over time.

The pressure is now on archaeological methodologies to make sure our Ancestor's sites that *are* in harms way *are* found, and that they are excavated in a way that allows for science to give us back some of those lost stories. Every part of our Country is of high significance to our people past and present.

**The Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation**