

University of New England



Revival of Ceremony in NSW: Aboriginal Ngura Tracks

Paul Thomas Gordon

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Abstract

Aboriginal culture and ceremony are based on cultural and spiritual beliefs which give Aboriginal people connection to Country and knowledge of how to live properly in Country. In this PhD thesis I give an account of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs to show, firstly, that these beliefs and cultural knowledge remain in Country and can be 'researched' by Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holders. Secondly, I provide an account of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and an analysis which suggests the ways that traditional Aboriginal cultural and spiritual beliefs can support Aboriginal people's return to Aboriginal culture and values, which is now a well-known and understood determinant of Aboriginal health. I show how Aboriginal spiritual and cultural beliefs remain relevant to contemporary Aboriginal people and can be embedded in organisational structures to the benefit of Aboriginal people. In the final part of the thesis, I present some reflections on the contemporary situation confronting Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal beliefs, in Country now known as Australia.

Filming my cultural knowledge for this thesis meant I could tell Story in Country. Film allows me to respect the oral nature of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and is more congruent with Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning. Film allowed my cultural knowledge to be presented in the way Aboriginal cultural knowledge has always been transmitted. Doing a thesis this way, it is possible for a senior Cultural Knowledge Holder to control the way Story is recorded and presented. I hope that in the future young Aboriginal people will be able to hear and see me speaking Story.

Declaration/Certification by Author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my higher degree by research candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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Paul Thomas Gordon

31 January 2025

Candidate Name

Date

Publication and Authorship

Publications during candidature

Paul Gordon and Jess Hodgetts, Ngurrampaa Dhiirrbalthii: Country, My Teacher, in Marcia Langton, Aaron Corn & Samuel Curtpatrick, *Indigenous Knowledge: Australian Perspectives*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2024.

Publications included in this thesis

None. Chapter 2 and Chapter 10 are written with the intent to publish.

Contributions by others to the thesis (names and percentage)

Author's Name (please print clearly)	% of contribution
Chapters 8 & 9, Dr Deen Sanders, Professor of Practice, University of Newcastle & Partner, Deloitte Access Economics	50%
Chapter 2, Dr Eliza Kent, Senior Researcher, Taragara Aboriginal Corporation	40%
Daniel Jack, Independent Filmmaker	Technical filmmaking
Dr David Spillman	Introduction to <i>Damu's Words</i>

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First and foremost, I want to acknowledge my Old Men, Uncle Lenny DeSilva and Uncle Cuco, also known as Jack O'Lantern. These Old Men understood exactly what was being done to Country and to Aboriginal people and understood Europeans better than whitefellas understood themselves. Their teaching of Knowledge has ensured the survival of Aboriginal culture in western NSW, nothing less.

Dr Eliza Kent has supported the aims of this research for over five years, firstly as Deputy Director, Graduate Studies at UNE, and then as a Researcher at Taragara Research, through both my Masters and the PhD, in practical ways which facilitated its successful completion. Her understanding of academic research requirements, gained both from her research administration experience and her own academic research career, has been invaluable. Her willingness to spend the time to understand what I wanted to do, and then how to present that in terms that were acceptable to both Aboriginal cultural requirements and the western academy, has provided this research with a coherence which may have been otherwise difficult to achieve. Dr Kent should be recognised for her expertise in working with Aboriginal researchers. In these last few months, Dr Kent has mentored the production of this thesis, providing advice about the structure, supporting the writing, reading and editing drafts. I look forward to continuing our research partnership beyond the academy.

Daniel Jack filmed both this thesis and my Masters project. This involved an enormous amount of skill and personal commitment to the aims of the project. Daniel is a Loreman himself, familiar with the Lore on which this thesis is based. Filming in Country is never easy, requiring a great deal of travel on dusty roads with sensitive gear to remote locations, then walking in to film in culturally and physically sensitive sites. All of this Daniel did with expertise and good humour.

Dr Lorina Barker had been my Principal Supervisor and Mr Micheal Brogan my co-supervisor. They provided expert advice on filming oral history throughout the project. Dr Barker is a pioneer Aboriginal oral history filmmaker, with enormous experience in presenting Aboriginal history through the medium of film. Lorina and Michael fight the fight for the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural knowledge in the University research sector and have defended the right of the approaches taken in this thesis many times, explaining time and again the relevance and necessity of undertaking Aboriginal research Aboriginal way.

My enduring gratitude to all those involved.
Paul Gordon

Research Details

Keywords

Aboriginal, Culture, Indigenous Knowledge, Ceremony, Songlines.



Video chapters have been removed from pages 37 and 117 of this thesis upon the author's request and will be made available elsewhere in the future.

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Supervisor Statement

Dr Lorina L Barker
Principal Supervisor

It has been a privilege to supervise this thesis even if, for most of the time, the University was unaware of the importance of having Uncle Paul Gordon as a research candidate and did not understand the importance of his research.

Uncle Paul is the senior Lore Man in Western NSW. But more than that, he was the driving force behind the revival of Men's Ceremony. Had Uncle Paul been a different person, then the knowledge of the Old Men would have passed into Country and the job of reanimating Aboriginal spiritual beliefs, and Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practice in western NSW would have been very, very much harder. Because of Uncle Paul's dedication to his culture, there now exists a community of Loremen, who participate and conduct Ceremony throughout the year. And who can return knowledge and practice to their communities across Australia, with the associated benefits for all members of the Aboriginal communities.

Uncle Paul is a living repository of Aboriginal knowledge. He has extensive knowledge of Aboriginal language, culture, spirituality, technology, medicine, toolmaking, economy, ecology and food production. He has an unrivalled knowledge of Aboriginal sites in NSW, from the east coast to his own Country on the Barwon River. He also has an extensive knowledge of the history of colonisation, in his own Country, but also in NSW and Australia. Across Australia, and internationally, he is the centre of a network of researchers, in the academy and outside the academy, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, through which he works with multiple individuals to undertake research into various applied aspects of Aboriginal knowledge. He works to hand on this knowledge, and supports individuals to further build knowledge, skill and practice, working on revitalising the Aboriginal knowledge base. Uncle Paul has spent his life communicating to people the significance, complexity and beauty of Aboriginal knowledge systems. He is generous with his knowledge, seeking to connect white people with Country as much as Aboriginal people.

In this thesis, Uncle Paul Gordon researches the centre and heart of his knowledge base, the Ngura Tracks, or Songlines, of his Country. It is a thesis that is different from the text-based manuscripts doctorates usually produce. There are a number of things which are important to understand. Firstly, the context of this thesis is not an academic discipline. Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge is not regarded as being on equal footing with western scholarly knowledge within the academy. There are some indications that this is beginning to change, but at this time there is still a widespread perception that it is a different, secondary form of knowledge to that produced by western research

frameworks. Aboriginal cultural knowledge is still spoken about as needing to be ‘included’, ‘recognised’, ‘acknowledged’. These descriptors, while denoting inclusion, are only possible because Aboriginal knowledge is excluded from western academic research. In some senses, Uncle Paul Gordon, working with other researchers involved in this thesis, are ahead of their time. This thesis has more to say about this aspect in *Country as Research*.

Secondly, because of this, this thesis has been organised according to the expectations of western research requirements. That is, it has been organised in a linear fashion. It is important to understand that this is not how Aboriginal people organise knowledge, or time, or see the world. For us, time, space and story are interwoven, everything is connected, everything is linked to everything else. Exactly what a ‘thesis’ might look like on these terms is work for the future, when the western academy is less tied to its own epistemological assumptions. For now, the accommodations remain necessary and have been made here. Finding an authentic Aboriginal authorial voice and sustaining it across the alien media incorporated in this thesis has been central to the research work, but it is work that remains largely invisible within the academy. I hope that this thesis, and the Masters that preceded it will contribute to changing this in the future.

Throughout this thesis has followed the Aboriginal English practice of capitalising words either to show respect for Country and Ancestors, or to represent significant concepts in an Aboriginal world view. It has been done in consultation with supervisors and with our full support. We are aware that this is against the rules of English grammar, but we believe it should be respected here. It signals just one of the many, many accommodations Aboriginal people have made with the English language in our attempts to represent an authentic Aboriginal experience in the language of the coloniser. It is interesting to note that, while this has long been the practice of our research team and arises from a desire to represent an Aboriginal world view in materials not fit for the purpose, other Indigenous writers in other parts of the world are doing the same thing.¹

Dr Lorina L. Barker – Principal Supervisor

Mr Michael Brogan – Co-Supervisor

Dr Eliza Kent – Academic Mentor

¹ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, Milkweed Editions, Minneapolis, 2013, p. 385.

Part One

Country as Research

Chapter One: Introduction

My name is Paul Gordon. I am a Ngemba/ Muruwari/Barkindji man from northwest NSW. My family lived on the banks of the Barwon River, in a tin humpy, then at Billy Goat Bend (also known as Barwon 4), Aboriginal communities in Brewarrina NSW. I grew up this way because my family was forcibly removed from Country by the invasion of English pastoralists beginning in the 1830s. My Muruwari family was among the first moved onto the Brewarrina Aboriginal Mission Station after it was opened in 1880. My great grandmother was Eliza Knight (Barkindji). As a young woman she had to flee stockmen who were massacring Aboriginal people at Ford Bridge, near Bourke, and her brother was shot off her mother's back as they ran. My other grandmother, Maud Williams (Ngemba) was 'born wild' on the traditional birthing Country in Gundabooka Mountain, near Bourke. A lot of Maud Williams' family died in a massacre at Mt Drysdale, near Cobar.

In my Masters Thesis 'The Revival of Aboriginal Traditional Lore, Spiritual Beliefs and Practices in NSW' (UNE 2021), I analysed the history of the reanimation of Aboriginal traditional men's Lore and Ceremony in NSW, by showing that Aboriginal traditional culture had never ceased to be practiced on Country, despite the impacts of invasion. I undertook this Masters because I was part of the original group of initiated men who began conducting men's Ceremony in Western NSW in the 1980s, inviting other Aboriginal men to join us. As my Masters shows, this revival was very successful and there is now a network of Loremen which encompasses men from all over Australia, who hold public and other Ceremonies throughout the year, across NSW, and who are part of the networks of Lore men and women throughout Australia. Part of my motivation in doing this Masters was to show that the widespread perception of non-Aboriginal Australians that Aboriginal culture is lost and dead is very wrong.

My PhD research extends the Masters project, but with a different focus. Aboriginal culture and ceremony are based on cultural and spiritual beliefs which give Aboriginal people connection to Country and knowledge of how to live properly in Country. In this PhD thesis I give an account of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs to show, firstly, that these beliefs and cultural knowledge remain in Country and can be 'researched' by Aboriginal

Cultural Knowledge Holders. Secondly, I provide an account of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and an analysis which suggests the ways that traditional Aboriginal cultural and spiritual beliefs can support Aboriginal people's return to Aboriginal culture and values, which is now a well-known and understood determinant of Aboriginal health.¹ I then show how Aboriginal spiritual and cultural beliefs remain relevant to contemporary Aboriginal people and can be embedded in organisational structures to the benefit of Aboriginal people. In the final part of the thesis, I present some reflections on the contemporary situation confronting Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal beliefs, in Country now known as Australia.

The fact that I am a Senior Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holder, supervised by an Aboriginal academic, undertaking a PhD based on Aboriginal cultural knowledge is important because until very recently such an exercise would not have even been contemplated. Not because there is a shortage of Aboriginal academics, nor because few Aboriginal people do PhDs, but because Aboriginal cultural knowledge, or Indigenous Knowledge as University's like to call it, has only recently been regarded as worthy of inclusion into academic knowledge frameworks resulting in, among other things, the current trend for 'Indigenising curriculum'. The proposed University Accords have set some extremely ambitious targets around including Aboriginal knowledge into research as well, meaning that going forward all Universities will be required to recognise Aboriginal researchers, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal knowledge frameworks have the right to sovereign research spaces and resources. For example:

¹ There is now a vast literature on this subject. For recent examples see Jonathan Kingsley, Emily Munro-Harrison, Anne Jenkins, Alister Thorpe, ' "Here we are part of a living culture": Understanding the cultural determinants of health in Aboriginal gathering places in Victoria Australia', *Health & Place*, 54, 2018, pp. 210-220; Lowitja Institute, *Culture is Key: Towards cultural determinants-driven health policy: Final Report*, 2020; Ebony Verbunt, Joanne Luke, Muriel Bamblett, Connie Salmone, Amanda Jones, Margaret Kelaher, 'Cultural determinants of health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – a narrative overview of reviews', *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 20, 2021, pp. 181-190; Carlina Black, Margarita Frederico, Muriel Bamblett, ' "Healing through Culture": Aboriginal young people's experiences of social and emotional wellbeing impacts of cultural strengthening programs', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 148, 2024, pp. 1-13; [Australian Government, Indigenous Mental Health & Suicide Clearinghouse, Culture, Country & Spirituality](#); Carmen Parter, Donna Murray, Romlie Mokak, Karl Briscoe, Richard Weston, Janine Mohamed, 'Implementing cultural determinants of health: our knowledges and cultures in a health system that is not free of racism', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 221, 1, 2024, pp. 5-7.

To advance the Australian Government's focus on the importance of research into First Nations knowledges and the need to make sustained progress on closing the gap in outcomes for First Nations people, the Australian Government elevate First Nations knowledge, knowledge systems and Closing the Gap through First Nations Leadership to the National Science and Research Priorities, implementing a framework that ensures First Nations-led research, First Nations leadership capacity, self-determination, and impactful transformative outcomes.²

Universities also need to acknowledge their role in the dispossession of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture. The role that Aboriginal knowledge has played in the Australian University sector since its inception is only now being acknowledged. In a recent book, *Dhoombak Goobgoowana*, the University of Melbourne addressed the 'unacknowledged participation of Indigenous people in the activities of academics in the University's history' which has 'informed many of the conclusions of...white ethnographers and the anthropologists' whose careers were built on representing Aboriginal knowledge, history and culture. Each University in the western world could produce a book like it, such is the 'importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy'. It will require 'a full and honest truth-telling about [each University's] history', a lot of which is 'cause for shame'.³ The University of Melbourne is the first University in Australia to publish such a truth-telling, and undoubtedly Universities and other institutions with similar histories (museums, archives, galleries and libraries, for example) will follow. Obviously, such work is to be encouraged but it should also be done with the awareness that it is essentially the work required of white Australians and their institutions, not Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people are only too aware of the violent, intentional erasure of Aboriginality that has occurred throughout Australian history, and this thesis is framed by this Aboriginal experience. Rather than being structured and framed by the requirements of

² Australian Government, *Australian University Accords: Final Report*, Canberra, 2023, p. 30.

³ Ross L Jones, James Waghorne and Marcia Langton, *Dhoombak Goobgoowana: A History of Indigenous Australia and the University of Melbourne*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2024, pp. ix, xi, xii.

western knowledge systems, this thesis is framed by the living practice of Aboriginal knowledge on Country, not its destruction and loss. The research was structured by Aboriginal protocols that govern knowledge transmission, and compliant with Aboriginal concepts of cultural safety. This thesis shows, firstly and importantly, how Aboriginal knowledge has survived colonial invasion and is a living tradition, practiced on Country today as it has been for millennia. Secondly, it shows Aboriginal people, and non-Aboriginal people who want to learn to respect Country, how Aboriginal knowledge and beliefs, particularly spiritual beliefs can survive the great erasure of Aboriginality that is still implicit in 'Australia', continue to be practiced into the future, and indeed continue to grow – both in strength and numbers of practitioners. My Masters' thesis examined the history of the survival and reanimation of Aboriginal Culture, Ceremony and Lore, dealing essentially with history since invasion. My PhD thesis examines the ancient Ngura Tracks (Songlines) that are the basis of Aboriginal knowledge and shows how these beliefs are relevant to the well-being of both people and Country, more so now than ever before.

There are several concepts that are fundamental to Aboriginal knowledge which are widely misunderstood and misapplied in discussions of Aboriginal culture. I want to examine them here, so they are understood in what follows.

Story, Ceremony & Knowledge

It is important to understand that, for me, what anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, and the wider public have treated as 'myths and legends' are true Stories. I have my knowledge of these true Stories from my Old Men, whom I began learning from as a young boy. I am a man who has attended, and still attends, a lot of ceremonies, throughout NSW, South Australia, the Kimberley, and Arnhem Land, and around Australia. That is how I know these Stories are true – because of a lifetime of learning knowledge, in the same way that Aboriginal people were taught for a millennia before the British arrived and created 'Australia'. Nobody is born with Knowledge, everyone in an Aboriginal world must attend Ceremony to get real knowledge. Unless you have attended a lot of Ceremony, you cannot have real knowledge about Aboriginal Lore, or Aboriginal Story. You can have opinions about our Stories. You can go out and sit with an Aboriginal Lore man or Lore woman, and they might share some Story with you, but what they are

sharing with you is only a very limited, public Story. This is what happens when things are recorded by white academics in the University system. They don't get the true Story: they can't be given the true Story because they have not been to Ceremony. They are getting a version of that Story which can be shared, a public version. If you really want to know the true Story, and it doesn't matter if you are an Aboriginal person or a non-Aboriginal person, if you want to know the true Stories, you must attend Ceremony. Our Old People know all these Stories because they attended Ceremony. For Aboriginal people Story is Lore, and from Lore we get Aboriginal law.

Knowing a lot of Story brings deep Aboriginal Knowledge. People refer to me as Damu, because they see me as a Grandfather in Lore, someone who has attended a lot of Ceremony and has a lot of Knowledge. Another way people refer to me is as 'Old Man', this is not a bad thing to call someone, it is actually a recognition that people have lots of Knowledge. So, my Bapa, my cultural father from Arnhem Land, might call me 'Damu' which means 'grandfather', while I call him father. It is not the same as a father/son relationship in the western way. It is completely different. It doesn't mean that he is my boss, or that he tells me what to do. It means I have a relationship to him, and it connects me to all his family, and to all the other Yolngu families in Arnhem Land who see him as a relative, maybe a father or a grandfather, or as a brother. It places me within a kinship system, that then allows me to interact the right way, knowing my full obligations. My Bapa calls me 'Old Man', because he recognises my knowledge.

My Bapa is a Yolngu cultural envoy, who comes to our Ceremony in western NSW and then goes back to his Country and tells Yolngu what he saw. He is my representative in his Country. He tells all the Yolngu Loremen who I am, and what he saw at our Ceremony. The Yolngu have a Big Ceremony up there, and when my Bapa saw our Ceremony, he said it was the same as their Big Ceremony. So even though these Ceremonies are held thousands of miles apart, he recognised it and knew it. Why? Because we have been sharing these Stories in Ceremony for thousands and thousands of years. Aboriginal people have been travelling to one another's Country, following Ngura Tracks, following Ancestral journeys. These Ancestors sometimes become part of the landscape. Things Australians call mountains, we recognise as living Ancestors, who are in Country,

sometimes maybe sleeping, maybe we wake them up when we come to do Ceremony there, and they wake up when we sing to them. Our Country is living, a living Story, not a dead Story. Everything we see is 'warrina' – living or 'standing up strong'. Our Country is alive, and all our Ancestors are still in it. When I travel Country, and I see a mountain that looks like a Goanna, or an Echidna or a Crocodile, or some other Ancestor, that is what we see. We don't see mountains, we see Ancestors. And that is really important to understand. Wherever we go we see Ancestors, and these are the big Ngura Tracks that connect us, but you can only know the true, full Stories by attending Ceremony. You cannot come out and interview an Old Man and think you have been taught it, because you haven't. The reason I am doing my doctorate is to connect the University system to true, real Story, true, real Ceremony, to get a full understanding of how people who still practice the Old Ways, really feel about our Country.

Country

Sometimes when non-Aboriginal people come to sacred places, if they are in tune with nature, sometimes the Story might come to them. There is an example of this at a site in the Nandewar Ranges, near Bingara, where people have recently painted a picture of a snake in rainbow colours on a sacred site which is part of a big Wawai Story about the Rainbow Snake making Country. But not many people know the Story or the Ceremony, not even Aboriginal people. The people who painted the rainbow snake might not know what they are feeling, but they are drawing something that they don't know anything about. In the drawing, the snake has flame, or dragon's breath coming out. Aboriginal people have Stories about that too. This drawing is by people who don't know the Story (or they would not have painted on that site) but they are connecting through it spiritually because Country is teacher. All the Stories of all our Old People are in Country. If we sit in the Country, and spend time in Country, Country will talk to us and Country will give us Story. This is one way that Aboriginal people who do not know Stories, can connect with Stories. But you must go out into Country and sit in it. You cannot learn it from the city, you cannot learn about it by reading from books. You must go out into Country, sit in Country, sing the songs of the Country, attend the Ceremonies of the Country, and then the Spirit will guide you.

I know a lot of people do not believe in Spirit, but in the Aboriginal world, there is Spirit in everything. For example, Rocks have Spirit, Rocks are kin to me. My people are 'karulkiyalu'⁴ which means stone people, we belong to the Rocks. Rocks were my first Ancestors. We believe that Rocks are born, Rocks grow, they get pregnant, give birth and die, like all things do, and are rebirthed again after death, like all things are. Understanding our belief system is really important, if you want to connect with our Stories, believing the Stories to be true, rather than a myth or a legend, is really important. When you believe in something, you really connect with it. If you see it as just a blackfella story, and not that important, you aren't connected. Part of my doctorate is sharing some of those Stories, as we travel out through Country from the east coast of NSW around Wollombi, out through my Country in Western NSW, then Stories continue into South Australia.

The Thesis is divided into five Parts. Each part presents a separate aspect of the research.

Part One Country as Research

Part One has two chapters. The first chapter of the thesis is this written introduction which introduces important Aboriginal cultural principles and assumptions which structure the thesis. The second chapter is an essay 'Country as Research: Aboriginal Research Methods', co-authored with Dr Eliza Kent at the beginning of the PhD research as I worked out how I was going to do this thesis so that it met both Aboriginal and Western research standards. This is the Methodology section of the thesis. The methodological problem is that thesis must satisfy two knowledge systems which have existed in opposition to each other for two centuries. The western research framework, which is dominant, is focused on the production and ownership of knowledge, while in the Aboriginal knowledge system such ownership is not only not credible, claiming exclusive ownership of knowledge is a serious breach of Aboriginal Lore/law. For cultural safety, I have had to work out a way of presenting this thesis so that does not breach Aboriginal Lore/law. Breaking Lore would risk everyone involved (myself, the university,

⁴ 'kural' = stone Country; 'kiyalu' = belong to. Ngemba-speaking Aboriginal people of Country to the south of Brewarrina, NSW.

supervisors, examiners) suffering spiritual harm and ‘getting sick’⁵. Where the western research framework cares about authorship, copyright and plagiarism; the Aboriginal system is concerned with collective knowledge systems, that understand Knowledge as belonging to Country and Ancestors. ‘Country as Research’ presents our reconciliation of this tension in a model for understanding the Aboriginal research methods applied in this thesis.

Part Two Revival of Ceremony in NSW: Aboriginal Ngura Tracks

This part contains the Aboriginal cultural knowledge that is the centre of the thesis. It consists of five video ‘chapters’, with chapter numbering continuing from the previous sections. Chapter Three is an Introduction (11mins) which explains the aim of the videos and provides a cultural introduction. Chapter Four is Our Beliefs which outlines Aboriginal belief systems (45mins). Chapter Five is Wawai, a Story about the Rainbow Snake (68 mins). Chapter Six is Baiaame, a Story about a powerful cultural hero who achieved spirit form (42 mins). Chapter Seven is Thickabilla, a Story about the Echidna and her journeys (27 mins).

Part Three Living Country Ltd

Chapter Eight presents the submission, co-authored with Dr Deen Sanders (a Worimi Man and Partner with Deloitte Access Economics) made in 2023 to the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission to register an Aboriginal cultural and spiritual organisation (Living Country Ltd) as a religious charitable organisation. This submission was successful. Most Australians are surprised to learn that, until June 2024 when Living Country was registered, Aboriginal spiritual beliefs have never been legally recognised as the basis of a religious organisation in Australia, despite approximately 16,000 other religious organisations, from almost every other culture in the world, having achieved government recognition. The groundbreaking, successful registration of Living Country as

⁵ ‘Getting sick’ is a general term used by Aboriginal people to describe a complex range of effects that are harms that flow from breaching Aboriginal Lore. See Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Traditional Healers of Central Australia: Ngangkari*, Magabala Books, Broome, 2013, pp. 191-203.

a religious organisation was based on the body of Knowledge presented in Part Two of this thesis.

The aim of Living Country is to legitimise the ancient spiritual practices of our culture as a recognised religion, by evidencing the link between the past and present of cultural practices. In the words of Dr Deen Sanders, my co-author in this endeavour:

As Damu notes in his introduction, he is “doing [his] doctorate to connect the University system to true, real Story, true, real Ceremony”. I am offering co-authoring support so as to connect the true, real Story and real Ceremony of our culture to the modern legal definition of a religion. In the work I contribute here, I show the present truth and practical relevance and application of our ancient spiritual practice. Even broader than that though, my contribution should be read as a recognition and an abiding commitment to the un-bounded nature of our cultural practice and lore. I do not belong to the same country as Damu. I am a Worimi man from the Barrington, inland regions of mid North Coast NSW. My people are freshwater people, people of the streams (Warringal Guri), and we live a long way from the Ngemba/ Muruwari/Barkindji people. Nonetheless, our cultural spirit and practice is connected across that distance, evidenced in the stories of connected country that is proven in this work, and by the practice of culture and shared spirit that binds us all. The practical goal of building and registering Living Country Ltd is to bring to life (‘warrina’ as his language declares it) an organisation that is the present proof of the currency of our spiritual beliefs – to build a religion of equal standing to all others.

Despite being an expert, Aboriginal man of seniority, I can only proceed in this work because I follow in the footsteps of Damu Paul Gordon; as an Elder, as a man of spirit, and the holder of a body of knowledge that is deeper, more impactful, more comprehensive than any other body of knowledge I can contrast in the Western academy.

The organisation of the Living Country embodies this ambition in the formal legal sense of a registered, recognised religious charity. It will provide the same types of services

other religions provide to their adherents (ministry, spiritual training, pastoral care, material support) but will do so explicitly within a framework of Aboriginal spiritual and cultural beliefs, to support Aboriginal opportunity and success. Achieving registration was a significant outcome, yet another Aboriginal 'first' in Australia. It is important in this thesis because it demonstrates how 'traditional' Aboriginal cultural knowledge and spiritual beliefs have ongoing, material relevance in contemporary Australia and are worthy of inclusion in academic research contexts, just like projects that examine aspects of other, established religions. The submission shows that the long-standing disrespect that Australian institutions have shown towards Aboriginal spirituality and beliefs has been due to an ideology based on race rather than any deficit in Aboriginal spiritual beliefs. With religious status under Australian taxation law and protections in anti-discrimination legislation, Aboriginal spiritual and cultural knowledge can no longer be treated as 'myths and legends'.

Part Four Damu's Words

Chapter 10 is series of short reflective pieces, written by me while I was doing this research as I considered the contemporary situation confronting Aboriginal people and the survival of Aboriginal cultural knowledge. They are in the form of short prose poems with explanatory notes. They are my reflections on how uncomfortably Aboriginal belief systems fit into modern Australia, and the ongoing dispossession of Aboriginal beliefs and the destruction of Country. They are introduced by a retired academic with who I have worked extensively in the field of education, Dr David Spillman. I included them in the thesis because they provide an insight into how the contemporary world looks to someone who lives within Aboriginal culture and traditions.

Part Five Conclusion

Chapter Eleven, a video chapter, which provides a conclusion to the thesis (7 mins).

Use of Film.

Article 31.1 of the *United Nations Charter of Indigenous Peoples* states, in part, that 'Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, including among

other things their oral traditions'. To achieve this, many Senior Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holders have written books about their knowledge, hoping either to preserve knowledge, or to try to teach white people something of Aboriginal understanding of Country and Lore.⁶ This thesis takes a different approach. I am grateful to Professor Heiko Daniel, previous DVCR at UNE for providing funding that enabled me to film this thesis. I felt it was important to film myself speaking about my knowledge for several reasons. Using film allowed me to speak from Country. The western text does not allow for knowledge that is purely oral, and for which the authorising framework is Country: which is why books by Cultural Knowledge Holders have so many photos. Not because they make for good books, but because those whose knowledge is being represented speak from Country, not from academic or text-based knowledge. Translating Aboriginal knowledge into print essentially changes the nature of that knowledge, as Rhoda Roberts said in the introduction to Old Man's book, translating Stories into print 'was a bold move of breaking tradition to seek a new retelling...one with cultural ramifications' and made necessary to access the text based nature of western knowledge systems.⁷ Filming my cultural knowledge for this thesis meant I could tell Story in Country.

Film allows me to respect the oral nature of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and is more congruent with Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning. Film allowed my cultural knowledge to be presented in the way Aboriginal cultural knowledge has always been transmitted, and which can easily be viewed using a YouTube channel for submission and examination. For possibly the first time since colonisation, it is possible for a senior Cultural Knowledge Holder to control the way Story is recorded and presented. With great respect to the white Australians writers who worked with other Cultural Knowledge Holders to preserve Story, in my telling there is no third party who has translated my meanings. I speak my Story, and you can listen to it directly, learn from me directly. I hope

⁶ Some examples: David Mowaljarlai & Jutta Malnic, *Yorro Yorro: Original creation and the renewal of nature*, Magabala Books, Broome, 1993 (2001 ed); Big Bill Neidjie, Mark Lang, *Old Man's Story: The last thoughts of Kakadu Elder Bill Neidjie*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2015; Gay'wu Group of Women, *Song Spirals: Sharing women's wisdom of Country through Songlines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2019; Yornadaiyn Woolagoodja, Magabala Books, Broome, 2020; Ian White (compiler), *Clever Man: The Life of Paddy Compass Namadbara*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2020; Big Bill Neidjie, Sarah George, *Gamu: the Dreatime Stories, Life & Feelings of Big Bill Neidjie*, Cyclops Press, Avalon Beach, NSW, 2022.

⁷ Neidjie and George, *Gamu*, p. 14.

that in the future young Aboriginal people will be able to hear and see me speaking Story. The filming took place over three years and was undertaken by an Aboriginal Loreman/filmmaker, Daniel Jack. This meant that also for the first time since colonisation, the making of the film was undertaken within a cultural context that Aboriginal people controlled. Many Cultural Knowledge Holders have been filmed, but they have not controlled the production. These videos are Aboriginal Stories, told by an Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holder, and filmed by an Aboriginal filmmaker, in our sacred Country.

Chapter Two: Country as Research: Aboriginal research methods

Professor Paul Gordon with Dr E. J. Kent

Doing research with Damu, Uncle Paul Gordon, Ngemba Lore Boss, gives a whole new meaning to the term 'research journey'. It involves physical journeys to see places where Ancestral Beings travel. At other times to simply walk Country, to see it and smell it, while it sees and smells us: a senior Cultural Knowledge Holder and me, a whitefella, unused to moving through Country Aboriginal way. Most often though, it has been a journey of translation – of understanding the nature of truly 'Aboriginal' research, when conducted by a Lore Boss, fully in his culture and traditions, and then to express this in ways that are digestible to western research practice and the requirements of higher degree research. The challenge is to credential a senior Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge holder within the western academy while not letting the western academy assert its conditions, biases, and prejudices.

This is not 'Indigenous research' as it is generally known within the Australian tertiary sector. It is common knowledge that, by way and afar most of the Indigenous research conducted in Australian Universities is undertaken by non-Indigenous academics and higher degree researchers, and across the sector non-Indigenous undergraduates write far more about Indigenous issues than do Aboriginal undergraduates. Across Country, more non-Indigenous people write and study 'Indigenous research' than do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. And, while there are requirements for ethical accountability, the fact is that the social and economic disparities between the community of scholars working in University research, and actual communities of Aboriginal people, whose cultural knowledge and historical experience are being researched, means that Aboriginal people, once researched, lose sovereignty over their own knowledge and history (the 'data'), rarely have ongoing access to the what is collected, and rarely derive substantive benefit from University research.¹

¹ Marcellus F. Mbah, Megan Bailey & Ayesha Shingruf, 'Considerations for relational research methods for use in Indigenous contexts: implications for sustainable development', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 27, 4, pp. 431-446.

Research priorities and outcomes are usually set by senior, non-Indigenous researchers, and Aboriginal Elders and Cultural Knowledge Holders have limited authority to direct, or veto, the research direction or to control the uses to which the research is put. And ultimately, because research leads are generally non-Indigenous and outside Aboriginal community, 'Indigenous Research' conducted in this way, produces studies that are not truly reflective of Aboriginal cultural knowledge, contemporary or historical, and Indigenous research as a tertiary sector industry does not benefit Aboriginal people. For example, it is only now that Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holders are beginning to be paid for the time and knowledge they contribute to research projects – projects that could not be undertaken without them – and there is still a widespread, embedded expectation that Aboriginal communities will contribute to academic research projects for free, and a delusion that this is somehow in their interest. Lastly, these conditions are widely known and understood as disadvantageous to Aboriginal people, but they are permitted to persist, largely in support of the careers of non-Aboriginal Indigenous Studies academics. There is now a generation of non-Indigenous Indigenous Studies scholars who vocally support Aboriginal self-determination and sovereignty yet derive benefit in the shape of academic careers from the traumas of Aboriginal history. For these reasons, the academy is inherently culturally unsafe.

Obviously, it has been possible for some Aboriginal people to pass through the eye of the needle and enter Universities to undertake academic research. There are a number of notable examples, and these academics play a crucial role in advocating for Aboriginal people within universities, and in conducting Aboriginal research.² But whatever else they can do, Aboriginal researchers working within the University sector must satisfy western, academic research frameworks, particularly to secure funding. Aboriginal research – conducted in Country, Aboriginal way, and servicing Aboriginal aspirations – generally does not meet the requirements of academic research practice in terms of evidence, documentation, 'rational' western world views, replicability, rigour, and particularly independence given how Aboriginal knowledge is vested in kin groups. Aboriginal researchers are required to turn out acceptable research outcomes – highly-

² For some examples see University of Sydney, [Indigenous Methodologies](#), accessed 3 January 2025: 12.32pm.

cited journal articles and monographs, or practice-frameworks for example, to be regarded as successful researchers and gain further funding. Articles and monographs have little significance to Aboriginal Community, who are interested in entirely different outcomes from cultural and historical research.

Increasingly over the last several decades Australian University research has become subject to government tests relating to the national benefit derived from the government's research spend, plus the drive to create industry-responsive research programs within Universities, has meant that Aboriginal research, conducted and led by Aboriginal people using Aboriginal cultural research methodologies (as opposed to Indigenous research methodologies), and meeting Aboriginal aspirations, is difficult to fund certainly, but even to undertake. None of this is new to Aboriginal researchers, who have described it fully and at length, in the face ongoing institutional and governmental deafness.³ Finally, for Aboriginal communities wanting to undertake historical or cultural research, securing academic research funding without a university-employed, senior academic lead is just not possible. The effect is to lock Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holders and Community researchers out of the credentialing systems of university research, meaning Cultural Knowledge Holders cannot become the recognised 'experts' of their own domain. We cannot emphasise this enough: a Cultural Knowledge Holder, in Country, knowledgeable in Aboriginal Lore, cannot be recognised as the 'expert' in their field without accommodating western frameworks of education and then research, which do not regard Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge as a valid epistemological framework because 'Aboriginal perceptions of the past and explanations about why certain events occurred do not sit easily within western historical chronology and its understanding of cause and effect'.⁴ To access the credentialing systems of academic research, Aboriginal researchers must fundamentally change how they conduct research.

³ Larissa Behrendt et. al., *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Final Report*, Australian Government, Canberra, 2012, pp. 94-136.

⁴ Howard Pedersen, Banjo Woorunmura, *Jandamara and the Bunuba Resistance*, Magabala Books, Broome, 1995, p. xiii.

It is our argument that it is universities that need to change and accommodate Aboriginal researchers working with Aboriginal cultural research methodologies, as opposed to developing western-derived Indigenous research methodologies. What we are going to show here is that the Aboriginal way of undertaking research in Country fulfills the evidentiary requirements and rigour of western academic research. Our contention is that Aboriginal knowledge frameworks are not regarded as valid epistemological frameworks because of the biases of western coloniality, not because of any inherent deficit in Aboriginal knowledge systems. We are addressing research as it is conducted in the Humanities – particularly the disciplines of History, Anthropology and Archaeology – and with the conduct of historical/cultural research as our example, though we believe what we have to say is more broadly applicable.

Western academic practice in the Humanities focuses on docu-rational methodologies. The key to authorised research is a focus on recoverable ‘facts’, as they are recorded in a recognised ‘archive’ – that is an accepted material record. Even oral history is required to document oral sources; to transfer orality to a document of some kind – video or transcript. What can constitute ‘the facts’ is now more expansive than previously, and there is a general recognition that ‘facts’ come in all shapes and forms and are subjective and contestable.⁵ Nevertheless, it is this recovery of facts, however slippery, about society, history and culture that defines what Humanities scholars do – they study human society through recorded representations of the material world derived from a reality that is regarded as material, embodied and physical, thus producing ‘facts’ which can be analysed or historicised.

Equally important as this direct recovery of facts from an archive Humanities scholars must also undertake secondary research – they consult the body of (usually academic, but sometimes practice-based) knowledge that has been developed by previous scholars about the facts they are interested in. They read scholarly works published about their facts, to get an understanding of what has been researched, what remains to be examined, what knowledge has been gained from previous research and what

⁵ For an illustration of these complexities, see the debate represented in Simon Frankel Pratt, ‘Reification, practice, and the ontological status of social facts’, *International Theory*, 12, 2020, 231-237.

conclusions other scholars have drawn. In some fields of inquiry, this knowledge may go back several thousand years – for example to Roman sources - but may have a pre-history even older than that from sources that are not archival records, but other types of ‘documents’ – Egyptian hieroglyphs, temple carvings, artefacts, and artworks – that also deal with the facts the scholar is inquiring after. Facts have a material reality that can be studied. How did these facts operate over time? Were they enshrined in law? In governance? Did they generate wealth? Were the facts monopolised by groups or classes or individuals? Did they generate social capital, or conversely create inequity? Did the facts under investigation restrict or limit human activity in some spheres and empower it in others? Who had a vested interest in maintaining the facts, who in refuting them? How did these facts intersect with other facts to generate new knowledge, new facts? How well a scholar has done their preliminary research, how well they understand the context of their facts and the previous research done about them, has direct bearing on how successful their inquiry will be, and the contribution they are able to make to the sum of scholarly knowledge about their facts.

Once the archival investigation is completed, the scholar retires to their book-lined office and creates a narrative about their facts. This narrative gives an account of the previous or existing knowledge about the facts, the reason for the facts retaining importance, the relevance to human knowledge, the impact of the new knowledge that has been acquired, how this new knowledge fits into the existing knowledge, and how this moves the frontiers of human knowledge along to a richer, more complex, and in the best case, more meaningful or useful engagement with the facts to produce beneficial outcomes. This narrative, this story of the research, is then peer-reviewed to ensure it meets the necessary academic standards and published for use by a scholarly or practice community. And so, this story of facts takes its place in the academic pantheon of knowledge, to be used by other researchers interested in this or related facts, a small or large piece in the sum of (westernised) human knowledge. Across the tertiary sector, this is how the business of knowledge generation is conducted.

This may all seem very far from walking Country with Damu, but we are going to argue that it is not. We argue that Aboriginal knowledge production can be understood in exactly these same terms.

For a senior Cultural Knowledge Holder, particularly one who is a Lore Boss, Country is an archive. Where non-Indigenous people see a 'landscape' of discrete, inert, component parts, Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holders see Country as interwoven Ngura Tracks, the paths of Ancestral Beings who create/created meaning/Ngura as they travelled through Country outside of western timescales. Ancestral Beings put meaning into everything – every creature, every stone, every plant, every grain of sand, every mountain, every river – and stitch these meanings together as Ngura: the Story of the Universe and its Creation. Earth is Mother and creation takes meaning from the fact of her existence. The Ancestral Beings brought/bring humans into creation and make it possible for them to journey along the Ngura Tracks, to learn, not just the Story of Creation, but Lore – the law for being, for living with the Mother, with each other, and with all things, forever. This Knowledge is not just given to humans, it is given to all of creation – plants and animals, the mineral world, air and water, the sky, the sun, the stars – are all part of Lore, and are all part of each other. In this knowledge framework there is no separation of human/natural world, of mind and body, of the spiritual and the secular.

An Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holder like Damu is an expert in this knowledge framework. Born in his Country and trained by the Old Men from when he was a boy, Country holds all knowledge – physical, material and embodied but also spiritual, because in Aboriginal knowledge systems the two are inseparable. In the same way a scholar chases facts in an archive, Damu chases facts in Country. Damu knows the great continent-spanning Ngura Tracks that tell the big creation Stories of the Ancestral Beings, as well as knowing how that Ngura has shaped many different locations, and how the Ngura is recorded in specific sites and places. But Damu does not know the Ngura in all sites and places. Much knowledge has been 'lost' during the Disruption⁶, in the sense

⁶ The 'Disruption' is a term Uncle Paul Gordon uses to describe the European invasion of the continent and its consequences. Aboriginal life was disrupted, not destroyed, and therefore continues.

that it is not currently known by humans, because Aboriginal people have been driven from Country, the networks of knowledge holders decimated, in many places Ceremony has ceased, knowledge transmission has been disrupted, and Aboriginal people are forced to live in European ways, forcibly deprived of knowledge and connection to Country. But knowledge has not been lost, in the sense of being unrecoverable. And it is here that we can demonstrate how a Senior Cultural Knowledge Holder can recover facts of the Ngura from the archive of Country.

A few years ago, Damu was made aware of a site that he did not know, but which presented as an important site. To understand the Ngura of the site, Damu researched in Country. By looking at Country he could see how the Ancestral Beings travelled from places where he knew the Ngura, through the site, and out again, to continue their Story-making journey across the continent. He could connect the site to bigger Stories, which in turn contextualised the site in a bigger data set of the Ngura of western NSW and Australia. Within the site, Damu could look for evidence of how Aboriginal people had interacted with the site. With carvings and paintings but also more subtle evidence of hearths and artefacts, plants and animals, direct evidence in Aboriginal people's use of the site. From this, and because of his extensive knowledge of Lore, he could understand the Lore embodied by the site and, because of this, understand what Ceremony should be conducted at the site. Damu can refer his interpretations of Country/facts to other senior Cultural Knowledge Holders, to his peers in Lore, who review his conclusions to ensure they are consistent within Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge. In this way, cultural knowledge/facts can be recovered and brought back into currency within Aboriginal community.

This is no different to what an academic scholar does in a western archive. Research produces a recovery of 'facts' about a site. These facts are tested against existing knowledge by a researcher expert in the knowledge framework in which the site is being considered and is confirmed by other experts. This analysis allows for the site to be contextualised within Lore and therefore within Aboriginal governance – how the site should be managed for its role in the Ngura track it occupies. It permits an analysis of who should be the keepers of the site – of Lore, certainly, but also who has access to its

resources – to harvest food and medicine, to make tools, who can hunt there, what animals can be hunted there, when animals, food, tools or medicine can be taken from the site and when they cannot, when humans need to put things back – maybe by staying away, by planting, with fire, or with Ceremony. The Lore of the site might restrict access at certain times – men’s access for ceremony, women’s access for ceremony, restrictions or access for children, times when humans should not be at the site. Damu’s analysis would indicate who had responsibility to care for the site. This care would produce material outcomes – plants harvested, tools made, burns conducted – but it would also produce spiritual outcomes – in Ceremony, dances danced, songs sung, Stories told, Ancestral journeys walked, showing Country humans care and remember. Damu, in his role as Lore Boss, would include knowledge of this site when he passed Lore onto others, publishing the knowledge, to contribute to the sum of Ngura and Lore and ensure its transmission to the next generation.

However, the way Australian settler-society thinks about Aboriginal knowledge frameworks means that this Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge does not have standing as authorised knowledge. Inevitably, for settler society, Aboriginal Ancestral Beings are seen as ‘myths and legends’, without material reality. Aboriginal people do not understand the Ngura as ‘myths and legends’, and the western mind fails/resists comprehending that. For Aboriginal people, the Ancestral Beings inscribed a tangible body of knowledge into Country about how to live sustainably, in such a way that humans do not destroy everything around them. Inevitably readers raised in western knowledge frameworks equate the stories of Ancestral Beings with the biblical Genesis story, and the creation of the World. But where Christianity is hierarchical, didactic, patriarchal, and dogmatic, Aboriginal Ngura tells many Stories of many Ancestral Beings, many interactions, many outcomes, many sources, and uses, of spiritual power. And where western Christianity has evolved into a closed dogma that centres humans in a mechanistic universe, Aboriginal Lore places the same value on a Human, a Rock or a Tree – all are living beings, all have spirit, all hold Ngura. There is a fundamental equity at the heart of Aboriginal Lore, a universal valuation that does not see ‘a great chain of being’ or other holy hierarchies, but which sees value and connectedness in all life, and spirit in all things. This difference is crucial. Western tertiary practitioners are mostly not

able to grasp this, and it works to their detriment on multiple levels when they undertake ‘Indigenous research’ or attempt to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into a western framework.

We are going to show what we mean here with reference to an example that is just that – a representation of a much bigger disciplinary problem in Australian history, anthropology and archaeology that is of long standing.

The Australian historian Anna Clark recently produced a book *Making Australian History*, with a chapter titled ‘Time: Baiame’s Ngunnhu’. These are the ancient Fish Traps on the Barwon River at Brewarrina. The Ngunnhu are in Damu’s Country, and Ngemba have been custodians of the Ngunnhu since ancient times. Damu knows the Ngura of the Ngunnhu, and how the Ngunnhu are linked to other sites along the Creator’s journeys in western NSW and beyond. The Ngunnhu are important to Ngemba identity, and to their relationships with immediate neighbouring nations – the Gomeroi, Weilwan and Muruwari – but the Ngunnhu are important in the great, continent spanning Ngura, and link the site to Ngura in other places, and other Aboriginal nations. Long before the British invaded, the Ngunnhu was a meeting place and, intact and in the right season, it had the capacity to feed many thousands of people.⁷ At gatherings on the Ngunnhu, Aboriginal nations met to do Ceremony, as well as transact business, conduct trade, arrange marriage, catch up with Kin, have contests of skill, and enjoy themselves. Western Archaeology has not been able to demonstrate conclusively how ancient the Ngunnhu is, so generally settles for about 50,000 years.⁸ For perspective, Stonehenge is about 5,000 years old, as are the Egyptian pyramids. Clark points out, as others have, the Ngunnhu may be the oldest human construction in the world.⁹

Clark uses the Ngunnhu to introduce a discussion of ‘Deep Time’, a term lifted from Archaeology which is making its way into Australian historiography as a way of describing

⁷ Dame Mary Gilmour, *Old Days, Old Ways: A Book of Recollections*, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1934: p. 162.

⁸ Heritage NSW, [Brewarrina Aboriginal Fish Traps/Baiame’s Ngunnhu](#), 2022, p. 6.

⁹ Anna Clark, *Making Australian History*, Vintage, Australia, 2022, p. 28.

the deep antiquity of 'Aboriginal Australia'. Deep Time' is an effort by non-Indigenous academics to 'extend the scales of History into the deep past' but also to 'accommodate different registers of historical sources, archives and significance'. Clark's point is that the Creator, who made the Ngunnhu, 'is an impossible character [in] academic history', he is a 'shapeshifter with supernatural powers', and 'Ancestor from long ago who also still exists', he 'traverses great tracts of the country and the skies'. At the Ngunnhu, the 'sweep of the rocks articulates the shape of [the Creator's] fishing net', whose 'footprints imprinted on the rocks along the watercourse'. The Ngunnhu, Clark writes, show us how 'Indigenous epistemologies offer important and challenging perspectives on historical consciousness and the History discipline'. Clark acknowledges other forms of history-making and suggests the 'alternate time' of Ngemba history-making could be used to 'consider History's own underlying assumptions'. She acknowledges that the Ngunnhu do not have to fit neatly into History's timeline, and 'can occupy their own time and still be historically significant'. These questions, she says 'present opportunities for History':

Imagine how the discipline might accommodate forms of history-making that reach into the unknown and acknowledge the unknowable: where History extends to Deep Time without colonising it; where it recognises Indigenous knowledges and uses that recognition to critique and expand its own structures and practice. What might that History look like, I wonder?¹⁰

Regrettably, the answer to Clark's questions is that, without the incorporation of properly recognised and remunerated Cultural Knowledge Holders into the relevant disciplines, it will still look very white. As noted above, far more non-Indigenous scholars are engaged with 'Indigenous research' than are Aboriginal people. 'Deep Time' itself is a non-Indigenous concept arising from a conjunction of Australia History and Australian Archaeology¹¹, disciplines with very few Aboriginal academics,¹² whose practice is dominated by non-Indigenous scholars who are the intellectual, institutional, and financial gatekeepers of these disciplines and perpetuate this exclusory system as others have before them. In situating herself within the discipline of Australian History,

¹⁰ Clark, *Making Australian History*, pp. 301, 302, 303, 304.

¹¹ Billy Griffiths, *Deep Time Dreaming: Uncovering Ancient Australia*, Black Inc, Carlton, 2018.

¹² Clark, *Making Australian History*, p. 186.

Clark, who is undoubtedly reaching for a more inclusive practice, remains within the logic of academic disciplines that maintain the centrality of non-Indigenous scholarship by asking how Aboriginal knowledge can be used to improve the practice of Australian History, not how actual Aboriginal Knowledge Holders can be meaningfully included in the practice of the discipline. Meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holders is the only way to centre Aboriginal perspectives in the practice of Australian history.

It is ironic that Clark characterises Ancestral Beings as impossible or unknowable within academic history. For most of its existence Australian History has included Christian worldviews, institutions, and beliefs without comment, indeed as the basis of what is right and proper. Western Christianity could equally be described as the supernatural actions of a shapeshifting supernatural being, who existed long ago and still exists, in a supernatural cosmology.¹³ Australian history is culturally Christian, so has acted as the gatekeeper of the authorised version of the colonial project in Australia, at the heart of which was a Christianising mission. The British, and the settler-society that has followed, has justified coloniality with Christianity. While Clark herself may not be an agent in this regard, her discipline is fundamentally conditioned by Christianity. Australian History has long been the gatekeeper for the western, Christian tradition in the colony, and Australian history-writing has supported and promoted Christian institutions, beliefs, and values explicitly and implicitly, all without any suggestion of impossibility or unknowability. In Clark's book, as for much modern Australian History which sees itself as secular, cultures of Christianity remain foundational, implicit, unmarked, normalised, while Aboriginal spirituality is 'impossible' and 'unknowable'.

The history of the Ngunnhu, which Clark quite rightly identifies as a hugely significant site, simply cannot be considered without also considering the bloody invasion of Country by murderous colonial pastoralists. Clark discusses 'The Great Australian Silence' – the suppression of Aboriginal History by the Australian History profession – but goes on to discuss the Ngunnhu with only a passing reference to The Hospital Creek Massacre

¹³ Clark, *Making Australian History*, pp. 302-303.

which, for Aboriginal people, is now indelibly linked to the site. To understand this, historians need to recognise that Aboriginal people are not just the keepers of pre-invasion history. They are the keepers of the History of ‘colonisation’ – which is to say they keep the history of massacres, forcible removal, rape, child-killing, ecocide, imprisonment, desecration, and wholesale destruction of Aboriginal worlds routinely omitted, avoided, or glossed over in non-Indigenous histories of ‘Australia’. For most of its existence the Australian History profession has not regarded these as ‘authorised’ histories because they cannot be proven using documentary evidence – the perpetrators, mostly, did not leave written accounts of what they did – and more recently, as Clark herself has experienced, attempts to write such histories have been denied as ‘black armband history’.¹⁴ But this history is held in Aboriginal memory and, in the ancient tradition, is passed down from generation to generation. Every single Aboriginal person in Australia who got ‘the Captain Cook myth at school, and the truth at home’ is a keeper of this oral history, learned from their old people, and passed to their children.¹⁵

As well as the Lore of the Ngunnhu, Damu’s grandfathers taught him about the arrival of whites in Country by the early 1830s. And how, thirty years later, in 1862, stockmen rode out and massacred the Burrabinja, whose Country is between the Bokhara and the Culgoa Rivers, to the north of the Ngunnhu, Country by then fully occupied by white pastoral enterprises. Hundreds of men, women and children were murdered on that plain between the rivers. Damu remembers being a boy going out with his father to rebury the bones of the dead that had emerged from Country, and Damu has done the same with his boys.¹⁶ Others remember the bones emerging as well.¹⁷ This is the Hospital Creek massacre which Clark mentions only in brackets.¹⁸ For Aboriginal people, this mass murder is now fundamental to Aboriginal connection to the Ngunnhu.

Also integral to Australian History is the history of Aboriginal forced relocation, and this too is integral to Aboriginal connection to the Ngunnhu. Damu’s family, like other

¹⁴ Stuart McIntyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2004.

¹⁵ Allam, Lorena (2021). ‘Australia’s history of massacres should be no surprise’, *The Guardian*, 17 March 2021,

¹⁶ Gordon and Kent, *The Hospital Creek Massacre*, forthcoming.

¹⁷ *Gilgandra Weekly* 26 January 1950, p. 3; Jimmie Barker with Janet Mathews, *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1977, p. 124.

¹⁸ Clark, *Making Australian History*, p. 291.

Aboriginal families who lived at 'The Fisheries' (the colonial name for the Ngunnhu) were forced to move to Brewarrina Aboriginal Mission station – sixteen kilometres away – one of the largest NSW missions in its day, and the second Aboriginal mission created in NSW, to remove Aboriginal people out of the white township of Brewarrina. Life on the mission was endlessly cruel, with all the intentional destruction of Aboriginal life and spirit implicit to the colonising project of a Christian mission. For Ngemba, and other Aboriginal nations, imprisonment on the Old Mission represented forced removal from sites such as the Ngunnhu, the destruction of Aboriginal Community and enslavement in the pastoral industry, while being forced to witness as first herds of cattle, then millions of sheep, overran their sacred Country.

Australian History must come to terms with its role in overwriting the death, destruction and ongoing trauma of Aboriginal people and Country with the capitalist and colonial narratives before it worries too much about how to incorporate Deep Time into its methodologies. By regarding Aboriginal knowledge as indecipherable and impossible, and concluding that settler-colonial academics take no action but 'surrender authority', accepting the 'discipline does not, cannot and should not make sense of it all' relieves the discipline of Australian history of culpability for the role it has played in constructing a national mythos that obscures what has been done, and is still being done, to Aboriginal people. The Ngunnhu and the Creator should not be reduced to a methodological problem within a western, academic framework that, because of its unknowability, cannot be resolved except by academic historians accepting they are powerless to make 'sense of it all', and thus avoiding histories that are far more challenging to Australian History than the fact of an eternal Ancestor.

The answer to the dilemma Clark poses is actually very simple. Rather than surrendering to a notion of 'unknowability', academic disciplines need to meaningfully include Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holders, and make autonomous, resourced, sovereign space for their knowledge systems as authorised knowledge systems. Clark is not unaware of the problem: she says: 'it goes without saying that I also fear how this book will exacerbate the overwhelming non-Indigenous domination of historical analysis' and acknowledges 'the History discipline doesn't have sole claim on empirical historical

truth'. Throughout *Making Australian History*, Clark is very careful to properly cite and reference other Australian Historians and their work because historians work within an epistemology that considers such historiography as authorised knowledge, and books would not be published without such scholarly apparatus. But they can be published with a discussion of one of the most significant Aboriginal sites in Australia without acknowledging aspects of that history that are crucial to Aboriginal connection to the site because Aboriginal Cultural and Historical Knowledge is not regarded as necessary for the account to have authority. As the historiographical wheel turns again, the suggested retreat into the supposed unknowability of Aboriginal cosmology can only ensure Aboriginality remains external, unknowable, decentred and Other in Australian History.

The answer to Clark's question 'Does History ... have the capacity to incorporate such Indigenous expressions of time?' is: not yet.¹⁹ Not until the academic History discipline has the capacity to incorporate Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holders as fully credentialed, fully empowered owner-experts of their own historical and cultural knowledge. Without the proper acknowledgement, credentialing, employment, and empowerment of Aboriginal people within university academic disciplines, History, like other disciplines, cannot claim to be including, representing, or understanding Aboriginal knowledge systems. 'Deep Time' makes no sense to Damu, for him time operates very differently: the human timescale is not different to the cosmological one. Time began long before whitefellas hacked out archaeological sites in sacred places to create tiny timescales and will continue long after the last piece of plastic disappears.

¹⁹ Clark, *Making Australian History*, pp. 299, 303.

Part Two

Aboriginal Ngura Tracks

Chapters Three, Four, Five, Six and Seven: Aboriginal Ngura Tracks

The following chapters are in video format, accessible via YouTube. Please note the filming took place in living cultural contexts and was not staged or manufactured. As a consequence, there are some incidental inclusions arising from the public nature of the activities where these Stories were told and learnt by others. I filmed public ceremonies and corroborees. We used open source and creative commons footage to illustrate various points throughout. These videos were filmed in Country, at public events and corroborees and I did not edit out background sounds, such as the wind. In the Aboriginal world, the wind is a welcome companion to activities and often signals the presence of Ancestors. Equally welcome is the sound of water, the sound of fire, the sound of birds and insects, the sound of children and community members. For me, this soundscape is as important as what I am saying.

Disclaimer

This thesis deals with Men's Ceremony but does not contain any restricted Aboriginal knowledge (secret/sacred business).

Chapter 3: Introduction



Chapter 4: Our Beliefs



Chapter 5: Wawai (The Rainbow Snake)



Chapter 6: Baiame (The Cultural Hero)



Chapter 7: Thickibilla (The Echidna)



Part Three

Living Country

Chapter Eight: Living Country Submission

What follows is the submission and accompanying power point presentation, co-authored with Dr Deen Sanders (a Worimi Man and Partner with Deloitte Access Economics), that was submitted as part of a formal application to the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission in December 2023. The application sought to have Living Country Ltd, an Aboriginal cultural group, registered as a religious charitable organisation. The submission was successful and in June 2024 Living Country Ltd began operation. This is a national first, and until this time Aboriginal spiritual beliefs have not been recognised in the tax and charity systems of this nation as a religion. We contend that the fact of this non-recognition has had profound spiritual, social and historical effect for everyone in this country, and most particularly for the Aboriginal people of this continent.

At the prosaic level, it means that Aboriginal cultural organisations have not been recognised for the spiritual role they provide, whenever two or more Aboriginal people gather to talk about culture. At the practical level, it has meant that these organisations have never been offered access to the taxation exemptions and land entitlements that religious organisations have always enjoyed in Australia. At the level of practical recognition and legal respect, it means that Aboriginal cultural activities, and the persons identifying with them, have never been afforded the protections of Australian laws designed to prevent discrimination based on religion, or from religious vilification.

Deeper though than even these profound elements, the consequence of permanent disrespect and disregard of the spiritual depths of Aboriginal culture has had incalculably damaging social impacts. It allowed Christian organisations to dominate and erase our cultural/spiritual history and identity, and gave license to those early interventions in missions, to treat Aboriginal people as barbaric and savage, as sub-human, benighted heathens desperately in need of salvation. Over the course of the two hundred years that Aboriginal people have been subjected to the actions of the colonial state, these actions –

massacres, the Stolen Generation, land dispossession – have been justified, not just based on a denial of Aboriginal spiritual identity and legitimacy, but as a necessary cognitive, spiritual and political calculation, that could then allow for the erasure of our history, beliefs and rights, and a way of bringing Aboriginal people into Christian civilisation. The pain and destruction that this has caused Aboriginal individuals, families and communities is the basis of what is now commonly identified as ‘intergenerational trauma’. To have Aboriginal spirituality now regarded as being on the same footing as the other established religions, restores the dignity of Aboriginal people.

The registration of Living Country as a religious organisation was justified using the body of knowledge presented in Part Two of this thesis – Aboriginal spiritual beliefs. I have included the submission and accompanying presentation to demonstrate how those spiritual beliefs, how Aboriginal religion, far from being non-existent or an artefact lost to the past, remains a living spirituality which can have a practical application in contemporary Australia, supporting both self-determination and sovereignty for Aboriginal people.

Living Country Community
Economic and legal legitimacy
supporting case for a 100,000 Year Business

Submission to the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profit Commission (ACNC)
(Approved June 2024)

Authors

Uncle Paul Gordon
Professor of Indigenous Knowledge,
Indigenous Knowledge Institute, University of Melbourne

Dr Deen Sanders
Partner, Deloitte Access Economics
& Honorary Professor of Practice, University of Newcastle

Executive Summary

What is it

The Living Country Community is a group of companies created for the purpose of restoring, practising and sharing the religious practices and spiritual belief systems that underpin Australian Aboriginal culture. Central to this belief system is that our primary cultural role is custodial: to care for Country (our Mother) and bring all people into a proper relationship with Country. When engaging in cultural activities and inviting others to join us in the knowledge and practice of Lore and Culture, we believe we restore the spiritual and practical relationship all people need with Country and Culture, but that Aboriginal communities most urgently need. We seek to alleviate the distress and suffering of Aboriginal people arising from the systemic disadvantage which prevents connection to traditional land, culture and community.

Why a religion

For far too long understanding of Aboriginal history and experience has been through the distorting prism of Australian colonial history. For 240 years the Aboriginal experience of 'Australia' has been seen through a colonial system perpetuating the sins of land theft, genocide and loss of rights. The consequence of these sins continues to play out in the inequity and injustice suffered by Aboriginal people in Australia today. Consequently, the colonial system develops solutions that anchor the restoration of 'rights' as an improper version of 'property' restoration, accompanied by encouragement to participate more fully in the political and economic nation of Australia. This version of Australian history ignores the more profound Aboriginal spiritual, ontological, epistemological and cultural truth that knew, loved and held responsibility for Country since time immemorial.

While the Western system seeks to absolve itself of responsibility for theft, genocide and loss of rights through welfare, social justice and an invitation to participate, none of those responses are sufficient and none speak to the larger and more profound disrespect the colonial system has shown, and continues to show, towards Aboriginal people and their

beliefs. The unwillingness to see Aboriginal culture, knowledge and people as worthy of respect and veneration, to instead see Aboriginal people as 'nothing', by claiming the land was empty (*Terra Nullius*) was a deliberate political act designed to erase Aboriginal rights, particularly land rights. The ongoing cognitive exercise of disrespect facilitates the erasure of our knowledge, culture, spirituality and history. It was this disrespect that allowed dispossession to be enacted. As custodians, curators and kin of Country, its history and all its beings (living and non-living), the erasure of our people, their culture, history, spirituality and agency gave rise to the erasure of the Country, its uniqueness, its spirituality and facilitates its ongoing destruction.

This erasure prevents everyone who has since come to this Country from having a deep and proper relationship with us and with Country. The 'Australian' people sit shallowly on the landscape rather than in it, disconnected from it and each other, dispirited and disrespectful of the true wonder and knowledge about how to live in relationship with Country, with each other and the future.

Living Country is a vehicle for the restoration of that spirit, the restoration of respect for Aboriginal people and an invitation to live in profound and deep relationship with Country.

It is time for a new path to be made. Aboriginal people have tried to maintain their own paths and were punished for it. Aboriginal people have tried colonial paths and found assimilation to be hollow. It is time for a new path founded in Aboriginal Culture and Lore, and mapped onto the systems of the West.

We first tried meeting as equals - with our tools, our knowledge and on our terms - which led to a war of guns and greed. Our spears and love were not enough.

We then tried meeting the system with its own tools and knowledge, and on terms of success and normality - which led to assimilation and the decay of culture and knowledge. The colonised became the colonisers.

But we remembered our knowledge, our Lore, our culture and spirituality – and we now choose to combine it with the tools of the system to change the system and invite everyone to be changed.

Uncle Paul Gordon

Why establish a group of charitable entities

There is no such objective or formal thing as a 'religion'. It is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon encompassing beliefs, practices, moral codes, and community structures, centred around the sacred and supernatural. Rather than being embodied in an Institution, it is a projection of beliefs and believers.

Even in the legal determination there are useful frameworks but none that codify the term 'religion'. The High Court case of *Church of the New Faith v Commissioner of Pay-Roll Tax (Vic)* 1983 HCA 40; (1983) 154 CLR 120 provides Australia's most definitive judgement of whether something qualifies as a 'religious institution' but even that judgement does not define 'religion'.

In the spirit of our commitment to a path *combining our knowledge, our Lore, our culture and spirituality* with the tools of the system, we have sought to evidence the substance of our religion and spirituality in the language of Western law and legal structure, with the establishment of a religious institution. We draw on the determination of the High Court of Australia (HCA 40; (1983) 154 CLR 120) to establish the legal basis for our religion through the construction of The Living Country Ltd (the institutional basis for The Living Country Community).

The Living Country Ltd provides education and support to all Australians to bring them into proper, respectful and sustainable relationships with the land and each other, based on the world's oldest, continuous spiritual and cultural practice.

Living Country services include:

Religion	• Spiritual and religious services, observance and succour to all people
Care	• Secure sacred spaces for spiritual practice • Provide places of worship • Places of cultural practice and care • Land based economic self-determination

	• Environmental services • Cultural immersion and tourism
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Purpose

As Indigenous people we believe that everyone seeks better relationships with their Country, with each other, and with Aboriginal culture that is the life blood of this land since time immemorial. Aboriginal people have been excluded from their land and discouraged in their culture and their cultural practice since colonisation. We believe that impeded connection to traditional land and disconnection from Country is at the heart of cultural and spiritual injury for our community, and a source of spiritual anxiety for all people. We intend to provide access to religious and spiritual practice in sacred landscapes that are purchased for the spiritual and economic self-determination of Aboriginal people.

As a community we have been practicing culture since time immemorial and we continue to practice in ways that are diminished by a lack of respect, and the restrictions on our access to our sacred landscapes. In part this is because our culture has not been able to participate fully in the systems of public and legal support that benefit other spiritual communities in Australia. We have not previously sought to operate our culture as a religious structure within those systems and the consequence has been to observe others co-opting our spirituality for their benefit. Other religions have claimed to support and care for Aboriginal people within their own religious traditions, naming charities for Aboriginal people and with Aboriginal language names. On the ACNC's list of current religions in Australia (public register searched 16/07/23) there are 16,594 registered organisations claiming *religious purpose*. Of those, 1,503 claim to assist Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, and 19 of those have 'Aboriginal' in the title: yet all are affiliated with Christian religious organisations, communities or schools. Despite being recognized as the oldest continuing cultural and spiritual tradition in the world, there is not one organisation identified in the ACNC list of religions or charities that is solely dedicated to the practice and promulgation of Aboriginal spirituality.

Rectification of this is an urgent and important consideration for Australia to ensure parity of regard for the world's oldest continuous culture. Rectification will provide opportunity for Australia to heal and bring communities together in the way our culture has practiced since time immemorial. The Living Country Community will be the first formalised religious structure of its kind but is, in truth, a continuation of the oldest spiritual tradition that has been practiced for millennia.

The community of Aboriginal people represented by The Living Country group is "The Ngurrumpaa community". Ngurrumpaa is a Ngemba term that closest describes the universal everywhen concept of the 'Dreamtime'. It is a very powerful descriptor because it physically locates/connects the collective of peoples that belong to Ngemba Lore, with past/present/future conception of time, creation, culture and spirituality.

A serious business responding to a serious national concern

The history of this nation is a story of dispossession, destruction and disregard of the nation's First Peoples. This history is littered with political, economic and social solutions that Australians have wrestled with as a nation, each offering failing to get Aboriginal people to the unified, optimistic future we seek for ourselves and the nation. As a collection of professional and cultural people we believe this is because these solutions have always emerged from another place, relied on tools, methods, as well as the practical, spiritual and ethical frameworks of another culture.

The creation of The Living Country signifies that, for the first time, Aboriginal people in Australia have stated clearly their intention to build an Aboriginal model of spiritual and practical self-determination themselves. This submission is, of course, written in the shadow of the failed Voice to Parliament Referendum and its formalized constitutional solution for governmental listening. That failure, which came as no surprise to Aboriginal people, emphasizes the need for Aboriginal sovereignty. Living Country is a model for self-determination as an active tool of opportunity in the hands of Aboriginal people, rather than relying on systems of the State which have only two centuries of failure to draw upon. Caring

for our people, our places and our opportunity ourselves is the only means to Aboriginal success.

We propose a religion, with religious institutions that combine spirit and Country as a way that we can take ownership for solutions for our own self-determination and, in so doing, provide a vehicle to bring the nation together around the love we have for this living Country.

Audience

As everyone in this nation lives and works on sacred Country (Gunni Thakun, our Mother in Ngemba), everyone and everything will be able to benefit from a better relationship with Country and the environment. The target audience for Living Country is Aboriginal people, but we believe that all Australians will benefit from improved respect of Aboriginal culture and people.

As a religious structure underpinned by land and cultural practice, we offer authentic connection to everyone who seeks restoration of Aboriginal landscape and culture, to all those who feel disconnected from place and Country (nature), and to those who seek a spiritual connection with the Country and culture. As a practical spiritual culture, we physically practice the restoration of landscape, caring for Country, restoring people and community and modelling the positive aspects of Aboriginal culture, history and community for the nation. In doing this we provide opportunity for Australian community, business and polity to see Aboriginal culture in its true light and provide a system for businesses, governments and consumers to access culturally authentic Aboriginal leadership and services.

As a combined Aboriginal community, we work across a number of Aboriginal groups across Australia. We are not tied to specific traditional landscapes but provide support and opportunity for all Aboriginal and other communities to come together. The existing group of Ministers, adherents and services providers already reaches across Australia and serve upwards of 30 communities, nation and clan groups through a network of 25 cultural community pods that gather every week to minister and practice. Our primary base of

language and leadership emerges from the NSW language groups of Ngemba, Gathang, Wiradyuri, Gomeroi, Yuin and Awabakal with a tradition of culture and spiritual practice anchored in Western NSW cultures, where our base of Eldership and Dreaming continue to inform our practice and ministry.

There are more than 300 adherents in our community of spiritual practice. More than 300 men and women who have determined to live their life led by their culture, spiritual practice and responsibility. These people operate in every aspect of life from Australian corporate, academic and government leadership roles to roles in every walk of life, supporting communities and Aboriginal groups across Australia.

There are already more than 25 service provider organisations in the network of this community that provide services to hundreds of communities, school, corporate and government entities with cultural service and advisory service needs.

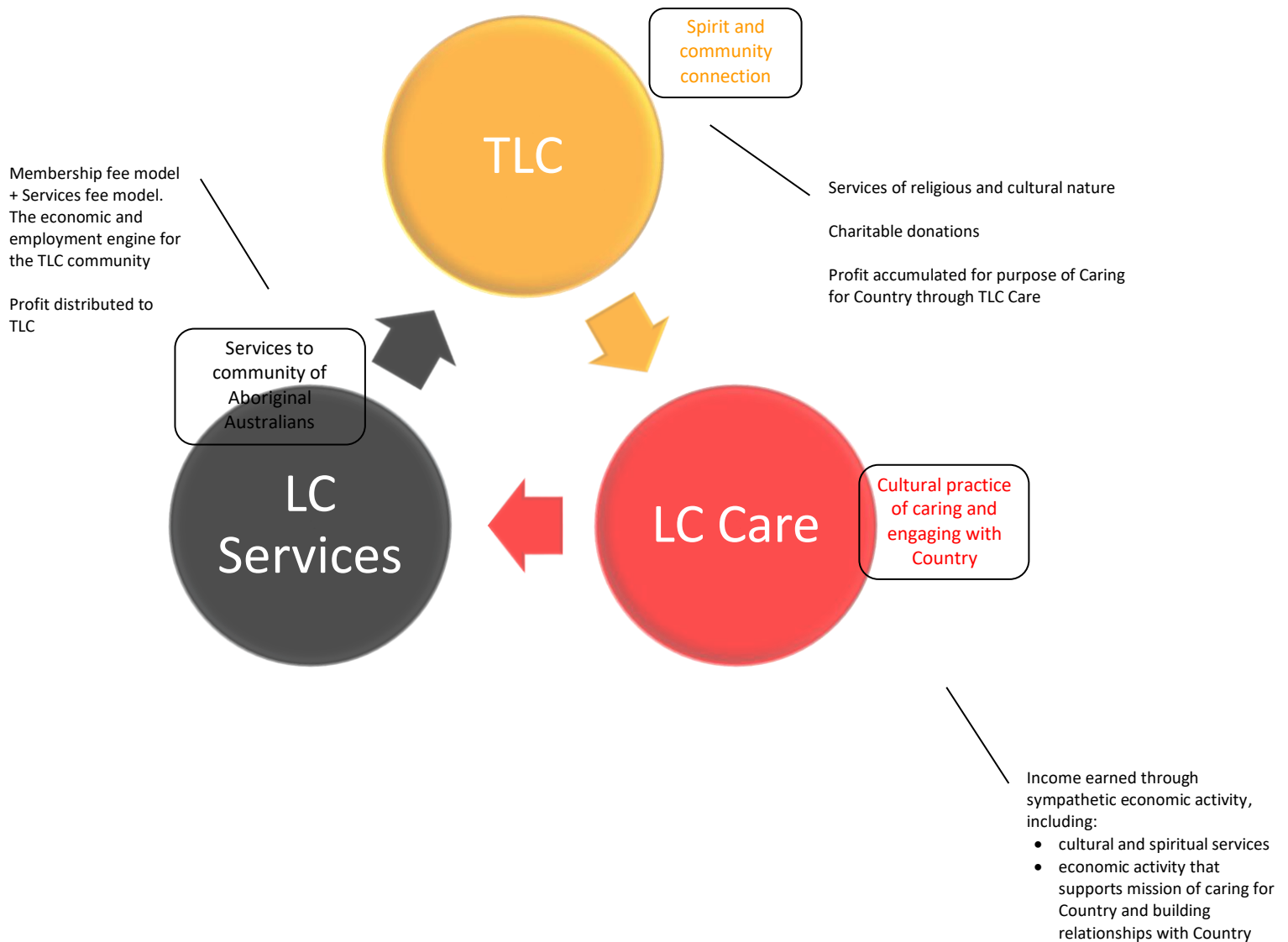
As the network of accredited service providers grows through cultural and spiritual links, the opportunity for sustained growth and economic self-determination is certain.

Business model

The Living Country Group is made up of three entities, designed to provide a sustainable foundation and legal structure for future certainty and long-term modelling for other Aboriginal communities to participate in future iterations.

As with every decision taken for The Living Country community (TLC), the business model system is designed to reflect the wholeness and integrity of a natural system. A self-reinforcing, synergistic but individual framework of businesses that encourages a strength-based business system to build sustainability, longevity and self-determination.

The visual representation of how this system of entities works together is a virtuous circle of ethical relationship between spirit, practice and community wide impact.



Each of the entities provide unique services that contribute to the success of the whole community.

Living Country Care provides for the acquisition and protection of sacred lands as well as creating places for cultural practice, caring for Country activities and places of worship.

Living Country Services provides the employment foundation for the group, fulfilling the vital and growing need for culturally authentic services for communities, schools, corporates and governments through accredited, expert cultural facilitators and business leaders.

The Living Country provides the spiritual underpinning and authenticity of these services, acting as the cultural framework for the other programs, as well as providing spiritual and religious services, observance and succor to all people.

People and Leadership

This unique strategy has been a long time coming. It is the culmination of careful consideration by senior figures in Aboriginal Australia, that also straddle business and professional leadership in the cultural community of Aboriginal Australia.

Living Country has a range of exceptional leaders with social, cultural, academic, business and public significance. Living Country leadership includes:

Leader	Brief Bio
Uncle Paul Gordon	A renowned Elder of the Ngemba community and established cultural leader in Australia, Uncle Paul Gordon grew up in a tin hut on the Barwon River in northwestern New South Wales. Since 1983, he has spent most of his time with the Old Men performing cultural activities and learning Aboriginal Lore. Today, Uncle Paul is recognized as a senior Elder, and he is one of the highest initiated Aboriginal men in Australia. In addition to his cultural life, Uncle Paul has a long history in government and community leadership roles and is the co-author of <i>The Dreaming</i>

Leader	Brief Bio
	<i>Path</i>, a best-selling cultural text based on stories of his culture and leadership which recently won the 2023 Australian Book Industry Small Book of the Year. He is currently a Professor of Indigenous Knowledge at the Indigenous Knowledge Institute at the University of Melbourne.
Professor Deen Sanders OAM	Professor Deen Sanders OAM is a Worimi Man and the Lead Partner for Deloitte: Integrity, responsible for leadership and strategy conversations with clients (government and corporate) on issue of integrity, ethics, regulation, climate change and our national future. Deen has more than 30 years of experience in corporate and government regulation. His professional background is in Law, Business and Psychology and he holds a PhD in complexity and systems thinking. He is an Adjunct Professor in Law at Newcastle University Law School and has an Order of Australia. A public figure, he has a particular dedication to the role that Indigenous knowledge, systems theory and humanity has in shaping the future of business, economics, environment, law and policy and holds a number of Board positions and Government appointments.
Dr Paul Raymond Callaghan	Dr Paul Callaghan is an Aboriginal man belonging to the land of the Worimi people and a renowned author of a number of books (<i>Iridescence, Coincidence and The Dreaming Path</i>). For many years he has held senior executive positions in Aboriginal- and non-Aboriginal-related service areas, including CEO of New England TAFE where he had responsibility for 1,200 staff, 23,000 students and an annual budget of \$65million. He has qualifications in surveying, drafting, commerce, training, executive leadership, company boards and executive coaching

Leader	Brief Bio
Joseph Williams	Joe Williams is a Wiradjuri First Nations man, who has spent a large proportion of his life on the public stage as a professional athlete, involved in both Rugby League (NRL) & Boxing. He is a renowned public speaker and educator about mental health and Aboriginal well-being and author of <i>Defying The Enemy Within</i>, winning numerous accolades including the 2016 Indigenous Human Rights Award Finalist, 2018 Suicide Prevention Aust Life Award, 2019 Aust. Mental Health Prize. In addition to his cultural life, he is an Adjunct Associate Professor at UQ - School of Psychology and business leader with “Our Way Academy”, a business dedicated to community and school education encouraging strong young leaders.
Steven Stanton	Steve Stanton is a Wiradjuri Man and Director with PwC Indigenous Consulting, responsible for Deals, Strategy, Mergers and Acquisitions with focus on land investment and capital raising for innovative Indigenous land use purposes. Steve has more than 20 year’s experience in the field of partnerships, investment, housing and mental health, recently as Executive Director Investments with First Australians Capital.
David Newham	David Newham is a proud Aboriginal man traditionally connected to the Wiradjuri and Ngemba/Wongaibon groups of Central and North-Western NSW. Appointed as Reconciliation and Development Consultant at the University of Newcastle’s Institute for Regional Futures (IRF) he provides expert advice and perspectives utilising First Nations knowledges. Over 24 years David has worked with and for the local Aboriginal community, predominantly in an education and cultural space. He is an

Leader	Brief Bio
	experienced and highly sort Aboriginal cultural educator and as a Masters qualified researcher he is described as an experienced grassroots researcher in a social and cultural context.

The Living Country

Mission Statement

Living Country Community is an Aboriginal religious and spiritual community that aspires to bring all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and all other people into a proper relationship with Country (our Mother, Gunni Thakun). As a community we respect, acknowledge and actively encourage the specific spiritual practices of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and communities. Our mission is to provide a framework that authorises and nurtures those local practices and restores the dignity and respect of Aboriginal-led, Country-linked spiritual practice.

The Living Country (TLC) is the religious entity that will embody religious practice for the community.

Our vision

The Living Country Community is a place where Aboriginal people can safely practice their culture, spirituality and practically incorporate their beliefs and culture into all aspects of economic, social and political life. The Living Country Community aspires to be recognised by all people as a community where the practice of Aboriginal culture and spirituality can be encouraged and promoted as a way to encourage a proper relationship with Country.

In caring for Country and teaching, ministering and practising the cultural, spiritual practice that has sustained a healthy system in this country since time immemorial, we assist all people to improve their lives, their communities, and society at large. Consistent with the

Living Country Lore, providing care, dignity and respect for people and Country is a fundamental part of the religion's mission.

The Living Country seeks to be understood and respected as a valid Aboriginal religion within this country, as the original religion of this country, and as the first and oldest continuous religion in the world.

Our rights of spiritual practice and the sacredness of our culture has been stripped away through colonial theft, cultural disrespect and physical destruction of our sacred places and practice, often at the hands of other religions, not of this Country.

We seek the right to re-build and continue our practices and participate in the public domain in the same way that other (younger) religions do, and with the same capacity for service and community impact that they do.

We appreciate that this will likely take time, and perhaps generations to rebuild and grow to take its rightful place as the spiritual foundation of Australia, just as it took five generations to destroy. We seek the time, respect and legal permission to do so.

Who will The Living Country help?

The Living Country has an existing community of over 500 Aboriginal people who will immediately enjoy the benefits of spiritual support and safety. Signatures and pre-membership nominations have already been received from hundreds of Aboriginal people who are eagerly awaiting the establishment of the Living Country Community to receive support, care and opportunity.

Conservative estimates indicate growth to many multiples of that over next 5 years as our community expands and a clear path for recognition of Aboriginal spirituality is identified.

These Aboriginal men and women have determined to live their life walking properly in two worlds, led by their culture, spiritual practice and responsibility in one; and their active pursuit of economic self-determination and health in the other. These people operate in every aspect of life from Australian corporate, academic and government leadership roles

to roles in every walk of life, supporting communities and Aboriginal groups across Australia, and include members of Aboriginal communities from Ngemba, Worimi, Wiradjuri, Gamillaroi, Awabakal and Yuin.

We believe that all Aboriginal people are in distress, including those in the Ngurrumpaa community. All Aboriginal people, no matter their apparent circumstances, have been made vulnerable and experience cultural and psychological distress as a consequence of a range of factors; including inherited trauma, family history of genocide and the lived experience of social ostracisation and disadvantage, reflected in the ongoing colonial systems that impact the capacity for us to enjoy a fulfilling life and take our rightful place in this country as its original people. These disadvantages are specifically evidenced and practically observed in the Commonwealth Government's *Closing the Gap Report*. The most recent report card (prepared by the Productivity Commission and tabled in Parliament on 19 February 2024), submits that there remains a profound disadvantage to being an Aboriginal person in this country, with 19 specific areas of socio-economic impact including shorter life expectancy, reduced educational attainment and employment, increased incarceration and suicide. Distressingly the government was only able to confirm that 4 of the 19 'gaps' were ever likely to close in the coming years without a substantial shift in the systems of government and community, and indeed that a number of those measures had worsened in critical areas such as children in out-of-home care, rates of incarceration, and suicide

As the world's oldest, continuous spiritual practice, The Living Country is our community's personal commitment to the elevation and respect of Aboriginal culture as a legitimate form of spiritual practice, recognised by wider community and government. We believe that the lack of respect for Aboriginal culture and the lack of opportunity for safe practice and connection with Country and culture is at the heart of these 'gaps' and at the heart of Aboriginal disadvantage in Australia.

All Aboriginal members of The Living Country community will be able to enjoy the benevolent benefit of general spiritual and cultural support through The Living Country religious

leadership, that assists and validates them in their own cultural development, cultural safety and economic self-determination.

In terms of specific services and specific benevolent relief, the leaders and specialist service providers in The Living Country community will formally determine those specific people that are in need of specific benevolent relief (services, employment opportunity, care, housing etc) and offer accordingly. In all instances of Aboriginal community, kinship systems, community and cultural systems are used to determine legitimacy of identity and need, to ensure that only those in need of relief, enjoy that benefit.

What services

Aboriginal spirituality is the world's oldest continuous spiritual and cultural practice and has officiated at all aspects of human existence and life experiences. We have ceremony for all the same experiences as mainstream, formalised, imported religions. Indeed, religious services of caring for Country and people already operate every week in this specific community, often in secret for fear of ridicule and disrespect. There are also larger and sometimes public versions of services such as major ceremony and corroboree events occurring multiple times per year.

In addition to regular worship in this form, there is increasing demand for weddings, funerals (sorry business support) and officiating ceremonies. The audience for these services would at a minimum estimate be upwards of 5,000 people per annum.

We anticipate The Living Country will provide similar services as any other formalised religions, including, but not limited to:

- Religious services (of any form), including weddings, funerals and officiating ceremony
- Births and lifecycle age-based ceremonies
- Ordination of religious teachers and ministers
- Anointing/cleansing/opening of places (Country, buildings, churches or any place-based structure).

- Healing, educating, caring, protecting etc.

The types of religious services to be provided by The Living Country are intentionally not constrained in scope. They do not directly translate to standardised services in younger, formalised religions.

Every smoking ceremony, office or event opening or welcome to Country that our community is involved in, is a cultural, spiritual moment, in the same way that opening prayers or event blessings are offered by other (younger) religions.

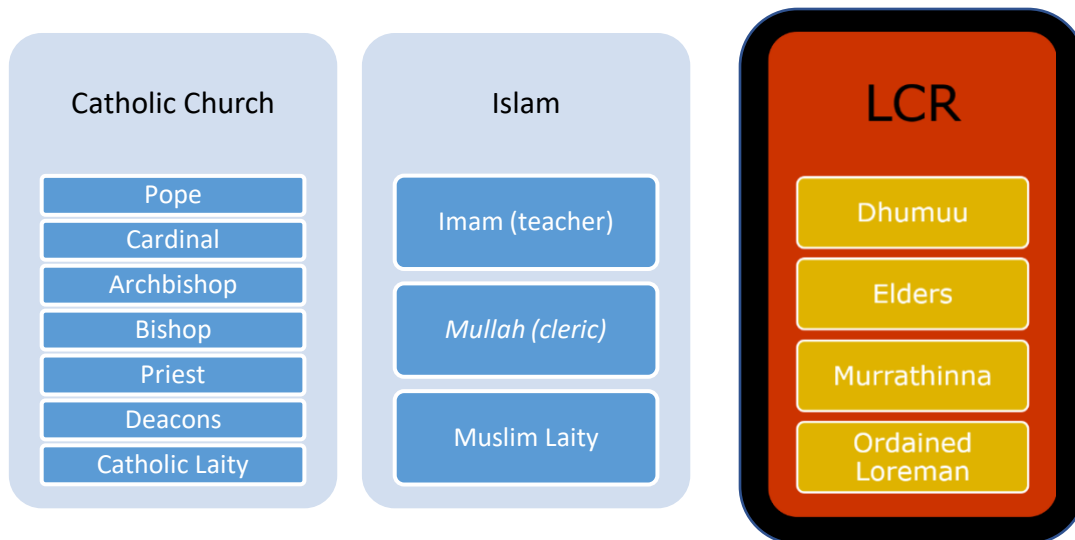
The spiritual purpose of Aboriginal culture is different to other religions. The goal of our outreach to non-Aboriginal community is an opportunity to improve any person's relationship with Country. This is at the heart of these types of services and the audience is in excess of 10,000 per year.

These are not services monetised by the number of people they touch; they are gifts of culture to every audience we speak to.

Structure of religious personnel

Eldership and formal structure of Aboriginal spirituality does not directly conform to formalised Christian religions. Rather than hierarchical models of power and authority, Aboriginal spirituality is more closely aligned to knowledge holding, teaching and responsibility. In this regard it is more akin to the teacher-led religions, such as Islam.

A model structure, demonstrating a simple comparison is provided for illustration only. Roles will develop as formalisation of religious operations proceed.



Each of these roles has formal responsibility as Ministers of Religion. They support service, leadership, spiritual care and administration of the religion. All roles are subject to formal ordination and appointment contract detailing work arrangements (including hours of work and remuneration).

As a formal religion and spiritual practice there are stages of education and professional development (levels of initiation into the rites of spiritual practice) that individuals can progress through in their journey to becoming an Elder. This is an ancient practice, older than any other religious system. Currently, each year, approximately 100 people progress through different stages of attainment and ordination in this journey.

The initial structure and number of ordained appointments in the religion might indicatively be a total of 65:

Role	Primary function	<i>Illustrative comparison only</i>	Number of identified personnel
Dhumuu	Spiritual Leader (Highest official)	<i>Pope</i>	1
Elders	Keepers of the Lore (Council)	<i>College of Cardinals</i>	Unlimited (initially > 12)
Murrathinna	Senior Lore holders (regional leaders)	<i>Bishops</i>	Unlimited (initially > 20)
Ordained Loreman	Lore holders (local service officials)	<i>Priest</i>	Unlimited (initially > 30)

Financial sustainability

The Living Country is a charitable religion. The economic purpose of Living Country is to generate sufficient income to provide for the ministry of religion and services for community. Income from services provided by The Living Country is difficult to predict as there is no such entity in Australia to model.

It is intended that these services will continue on a donation basis with the introduction of fee for service arrangements as services mature.

For instance:

- Religious services (fees and donations etc.)
- Ceremonial services (funerals, weddings and religious rites ceremonies)
- Public corroboree (cultural festival and celebration – donation and fees)
- Nguthana (gift giving and tithing)
- Spiritual retreats
- Religious Advisory Services

- Services should be as unconstrained as for other, younger religions.
- Customers of Living Country Services (LCS) may make donations to the religion (TLC) for its maintenance of its ongoing spiritual and cultural leadership.
- Income is also anticipated to flow from the related entity of Living Country Services to cover the spiritual guidance, support and maintenance costs of the spiritual foundation for the group.

Living Country religious services are currently provided free, and staff are currently volunteers who also hold roles in other public life. As the Elders and knowledge holders age their knowledge needs to be protected and their wisdom respected and rewarded with an income that allows them to dedicate their time to spiritual care and teaching. Growth will accelerate as the public awareness of The Living Country becomes more prominent. Growth and scale will be substantial and not linear, as more people seek a spiritual relationship with Country. We anticipate being able to generate sufficient revenue to be able to remunerate Ministers of Religion according to their time and contribution.

Living Country Care

Mission Statement

Living Country Community is an Aboriginal religion and spiritual community that aspires to bring all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and all other people into a proper relationship with Country (our Mother, Gunni Thakun). As a community we respect, acknowledge and actively encourage the specific spiritual practices of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and communities. Our mission is to provide a framework that authorises and nurtures those local practices and restores the dignity and respect of Aboriginal led, Country linked spiritual practice.

Our vision

The Living Country Community is a community where Aboriginal people can safely practice their culture, spirituality and practically incorporate their beliefs and culture into all aspects

of life, including economic, social and political. The Living Country Community aspires to be recognised by all people as a community where the practice of Aboriginal culture and spirituality can be encouraged and promoted as a way to encourage a proper relationship with Country.

In caring for Country and teaching, ministering and practising the cultural, spiritual practice that has sustained a healthy system in this country since time immemorial, we assist all people to improve their lives, their communities, and society at large. Consistent with the Living Country Lore, providing care, dignity and respect for people and Country is a fundamental part of the religion's mission.

Who will Living Country Care (LCC) assist?

The Living Country Group is primarily established to support the nurturing and care of Aboriginal people in distress arising from the disrespect and marginalisation of their culture and spirituality and through the deliberate dispossession of their sacred places.

We hold that all Aboriginal people are in distress, including those in the Ngurrumpaa community. All Aboriginal people, no matter their apparent circumstances, have been made vulnerable and experience cultural and psychological distress as a consequence of a range of factors; including inherited trauma, family history of genocide and the lived experience of social ostracisation and disadvantage, reflected in the ongoing colonial systems that impact the capacity for us to enjoy a fulfilling life and take our rightful place in this country as its original people. These disadvantages are specifically evidenced and practically observed in the Commonwealth Government's Closing the Gap Report. The most recent report card (prepared by the Productivity Commission and tabled in Parliament on 19 Feb 2024), submits that there remains a profound disadvantage to being an Aboriginal person in this country, with 19 specific areas of socio-economic impact including shorter life expectancy, reduced educational attainment and employment, increased incarceration and suicide. Distressingly the government was only able to confirm that 4 of the 19 'gaps' were ever likely

to close in the coming years without a substantial shift in the systems of government and community.

In this regard, all Aboriginal members of the TLC community will be able to enjoy the benevolent benefit of access to sacred Country and safe practice of culture in lands owned by LCC. In terms of specific services and specific benevolent relief, the leaders and specialist service providers in the TLC community will formally determine those specific people that are in need of specific benevolent relief (services, employment opportunity, care, housing etc...) offered on the lands of LCC. In all instances of Aboriginal community, kinship systems, community and cultural systems are used to determine legitimacy of identity and need, so as to ensure that only those in need of relief, enjoy that benefit.

The Living Country Group is our community's personal commitment to self-determination in these areas of disadvantage.

What does Living Country Care (LCC) do?

Living Country Care (LCC) is a land acquisition and land management entity. Its purpose is to rescue, protect, utilise and enrich sacred Country.

Land will be acquired by LCC for a range of purposes, including to create opportunity for spiritual practice, cultural activity and economic activity that is sympathetic to the Living Country Services (LCS) purpose of protecting all land.

In the initial instance, LCC anticipates different land assets may activate different services, including:

- Spiritual worship (including community worship services and sacred ceremony)
- Caring for Country (land care/management, cultural burning and biodiversity care etc.)
- Cultural practice (artefact making resources, hunting, fishing etc.)
- Cultural Immersions and tourism experiences (including short term stays etc.)
- Environment services (nature-based solutions for climate change etc.)

- The services that may be provided by LCC are not to be constrained in scope, to ensure land can be utilised in the future in ways that are sympathetic to the purpose of LCS and the evolving needs of members and community.

Economic projections

LCC is a not-for-profit entity. The economic purpose of LCC is to generate sufficient income to continue to rescue, protect, utilise and enrich sacred Country.

Income from services provided on LCC owned land can only be projected once land assets are owned and sympathetic economic activity is determined. It is anticipated that every land asset will require specialist advice as to the costs of rescue and care, as well as the opportunities for sympathetic economic activity.

The total available market of culturally significant property is enormous with sources of land including native title, crown land redistribution, philanthropic donation and partnering, investment pooling and partnering and of course freehold purchase and transfer.

As land is likely to be acquired through a range of sources (gifted, purchased, Native Title transfer) it is impossible to estimate the size of portfolio growth. It can only be stated that the opportunity is substantial and the community is aware of parties ready to engage in LCC as soon as it is activated.

The primary purpose of LCC is land acquisition, care and protection. Revenue is intended to cover costs of maintenance and services. Future income will match the needs of care for Country.

Living Country Services

Mission Statement

Living Country Services (LCS) is a cultural accreditation membership body that provides the employment engine for the group, fulfilling the vital and growing need for culturally authentic Aboriginal services for communities, schools, corporates and governments through accredited, expert cultural facilitators and business leaders. The goal of LCS is to provide

confidence to all people, businesses and governments that the services they access are culturally authentic, governed by cultural protocols and responsibility, and operate in accordance with cultural and spiritual practice.

Who will it help?

Living Country Services is primarily established to support the nurturing and development of employment opportunity for Aboriginal people in a culturally rewarding way.

We believe that all Aboriginal people are in distress, including those in the Ngurrumpaa community. All Aboriginal people, no matter their apparent circumstances, have been made vulnerable and experience cultural and psychological distress as a consequence of a range of factors; including inherited trauma, family history of genocide and the lived experience of social ostracisation and disadvantage, reflected in the ongoing colonial systems that impact the capacity for us to enjoy a fulfilling life and take our rightful place in this country as its original people. These disadvantages are specifically evidenced and practically observed in the Commonwealth Government's *Closing the Gap Report*. The most recent report card (prepared by the Productivity Commission and tabled in Parliament on 19 Feb 2024), submits that there remains a profound disadvantage to being an Aboriginal person in this country, with 19 specific areas of socio-economic impact including shorter life expectancy, reduced educational attainment and employment, increased incarceration and suicide. Distressingly the government was only able to confirm that 4 of the 19 'gaps' were ever likely to close in the coming years without a substantial shift in the systems of government and community.

Living Country Services is our community's personal and business commitment to creating employment opportunity and economic self-determination in these areas of disadvantage.

100% of the direct beneficiaries of LCS will be Aboriginal people. Modest estimates for the number of people it will assist in these education and support service roles in the first 12

months are based on an engaged audience of members, awaiting approval of the LCS community entities. There is an immediate audience of 25 eligible member businesses ready to participate in the LCS. Those members employ or engage as subcontractors approximately 90 individual eligible members of LCS.

These service providers (individual and company) in turn support thousands of paying clients and members of community in the services they offer. While benevolent benefit is restricted to Aboriginal people, we anticipate that the services provided by LCS providers will also be accessed by non-Aboriginal people (schools, organisations, etc., in smoking ceremonies and teaching etc.). This is how LCS will generate the revenue to provide benevolent relief for its members, while also encouraging economic and cultural self-determination. The gift of our culture is a gift for everyone in need.

In terms of specific services and specific benevolent relief, the leaders and specialist service providers in The Living Country community will formally determine those specific people that need specific benevolent relief (services, employment opportunity, care, housing etc.) offered through the vehicle of LCS. In all instances of Aboriginal community, kinship systems, community and cultural systems are used to determine legitimacy of identity and need, to ensure that only those in need of relief, enjoy that benefit.

What services

Living Country Services will provide education, support, accreditation and association, professional standards services to members.

All members of LCS will benefit from having in place standards of assurance and quality control frameworks that provide confidence to customers in the cultural authority of their supplier.

All members will benefit from shared services for promotion, coordinated booking and administrative support as well as general business efficiency. The purpose of these services is to maximise benefit and efficiency to the fragile Aboriginal cultural economy.

All potential customers will benefit from centralised booking and billing services, and the confidence in a culturally authentic service.

The typical services to be provided by LCS may include expert provision of:

- Cultural dance and performance
- Welcomes to Country and Acknowledgment services
- Cultural business advisory
- Artefact and Art making
- Cultural Heritage support
- Caring for Country (land care/management, cultural burning and environment etc..) services
- School excursion, immersions and cultural education
- Community services
- Support services for members (publishing / promotion /bookings and management etc.)
- Cultural Immersions and tourism experiences

The services to be provided by LCS are intentionally not constrained in scope, to ensure the service can support the variety of needs and expertise of members and community.

LCS will be a professional, cultural, membership entity

LCS is to be structured as a membership model business, where membership will only be authorised to those individuals and businesses that meet the requirements of membership as set by the Board. This will include requirements, at a high level:

- to be endorsed adherents of the Religion or are organisations owned predominantly by Aboriginal persons,
- to have a model which would enable an upholding of the integrity of the Living Country Community,
- that the services provided are authorised and consistent with the goals of the Living Country Community.

How – accreditation and membership requirements

In order to deliver confidence to the public, the Board of LCS propose that the membership model for LCS be structured in accordance with the expectation of professions, where quality can be approved, assured and withdrawn if necessary.

In emulating a professional model of membership, LCS requires that Individuals (Professional Cultural Service Providers) and companies (Professional Cultural Service Providers) meet all of the professional requirements modelled by Australia's Professional Standards Council (5 E's – <https://psc.gov.au/news-and-publications/presentations/benefits-professions>).

How – services provided

As a membership and accreditation body LCS will provide services to members to facilitate their successful promotion, booking and delivery of authorised cultural services. Shared services may include:

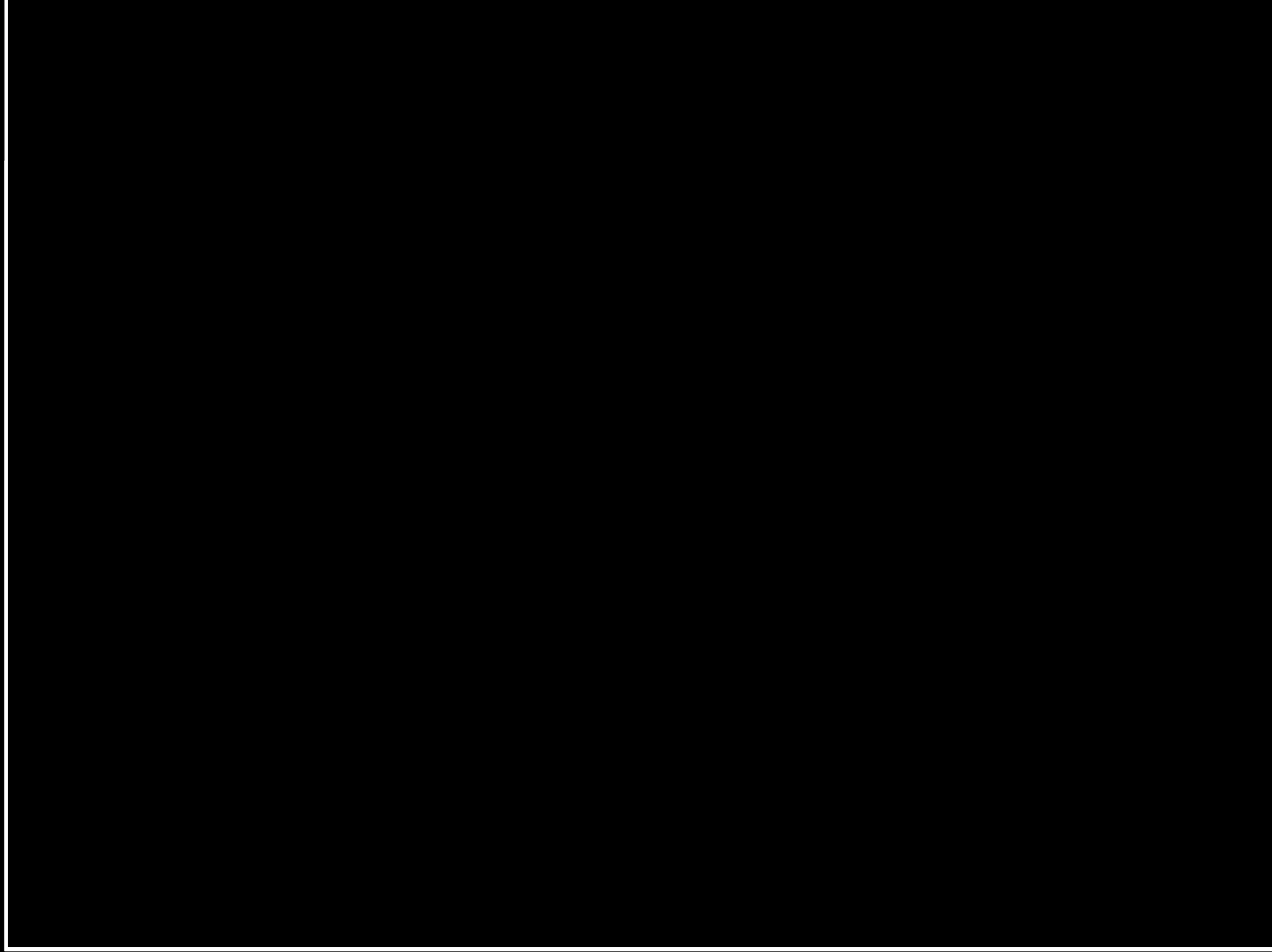
- Booking platform
- Service coordination
- Marketing services
- Back office shared services (Accounting and business support etc.)
- Client and contract negotiation services

Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission Registration Details

[The Living Country Ltd](#)

[Living Country Services Ltd](#)

[Living Country Care Ltd](#)



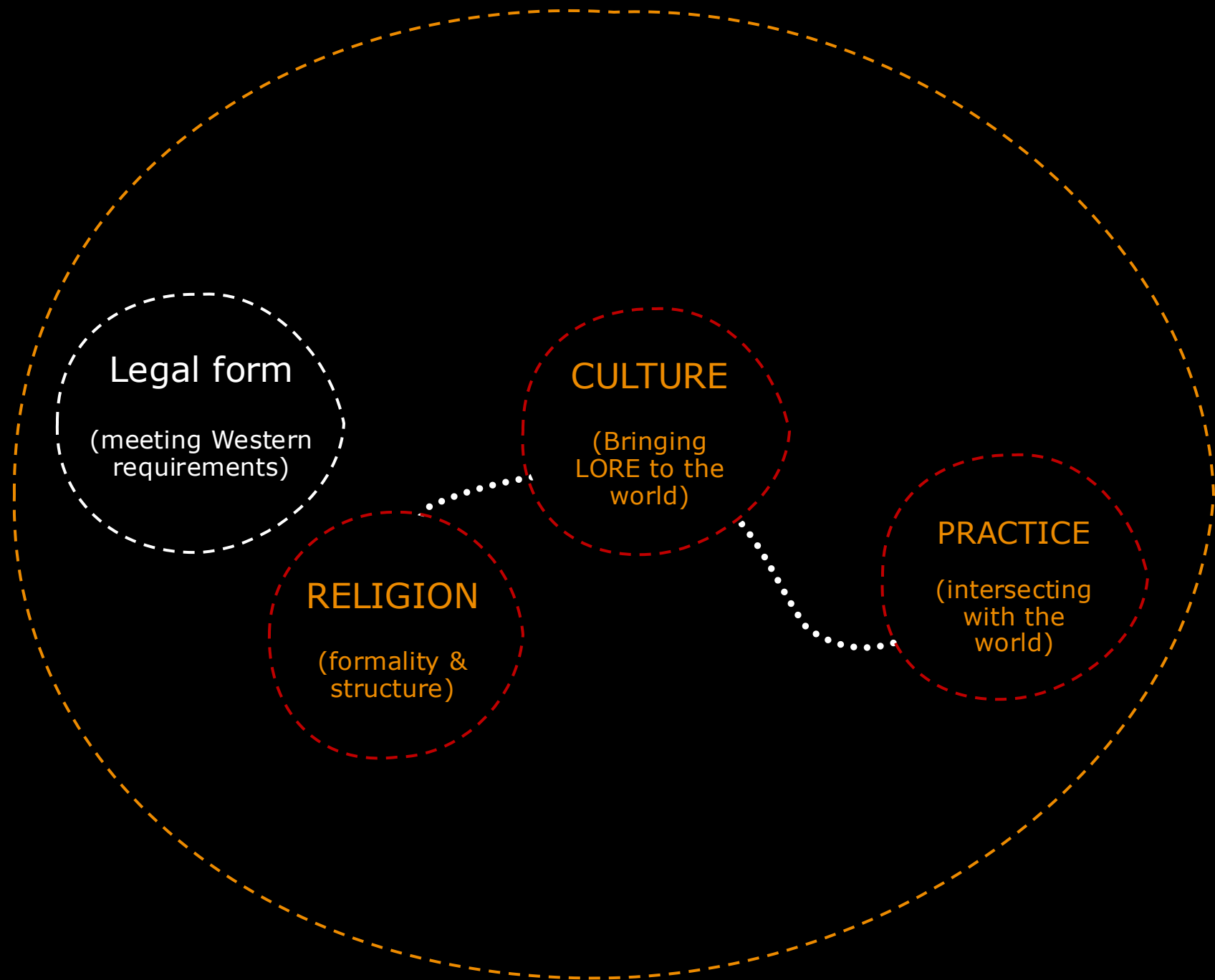
Aboriginal spirituality taking its rightful place

(Re)Building our religion

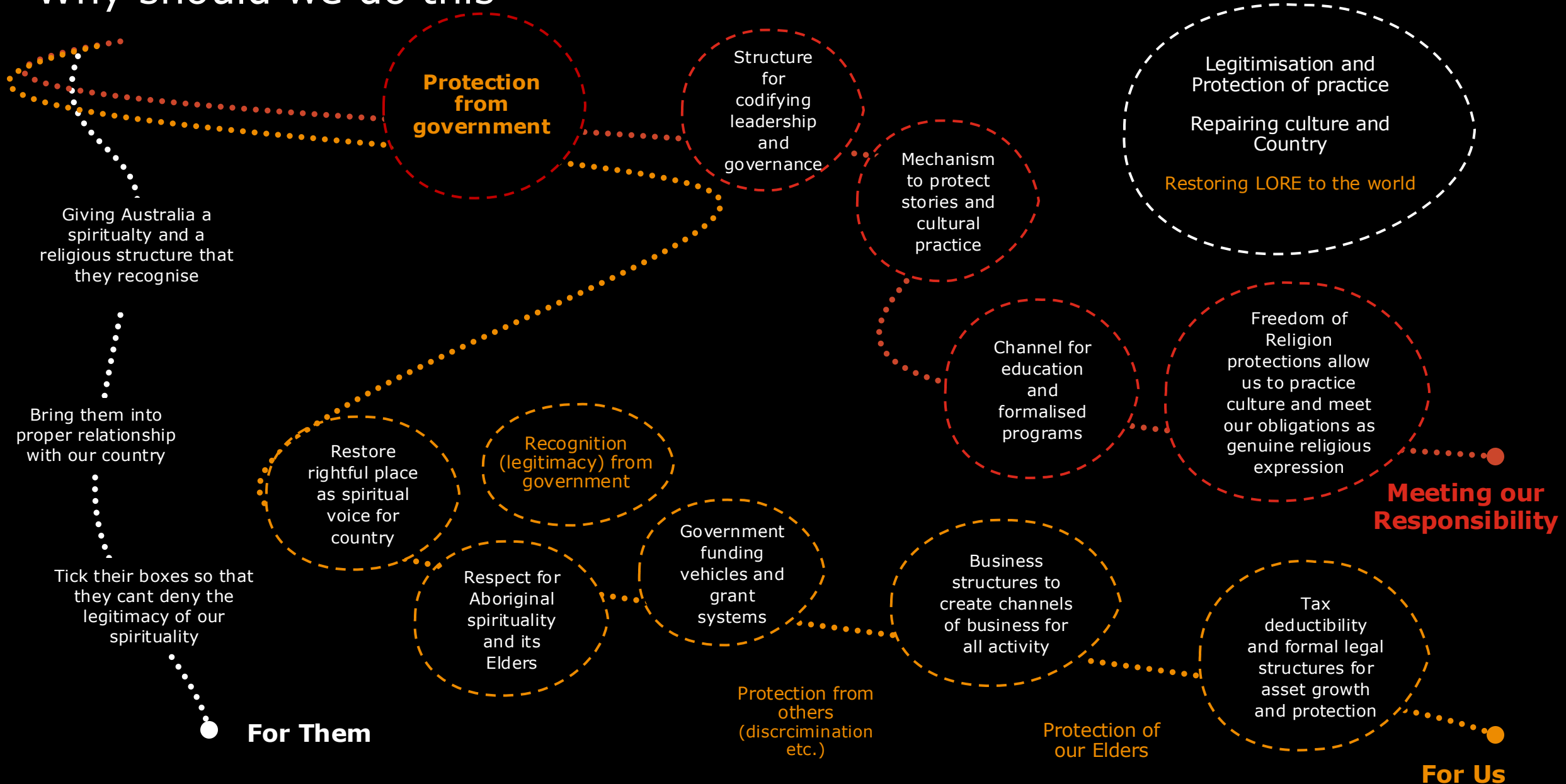
Professor Paul Gordon
Professor Deen Sanders

Structuring Aboriginal Spirituality to change the Western System

1 part Western
3 parts Aboriginal



Why should we do this



Legal Foundation

Church of the New Faith v Commissioner of Pay-Roll Tax (Vic) 1983 HCA 40; (1983) 154 CLR 120:

In considering whether the Church of the New Faith qualifies as a "religious institution" for the purposes of payroll tax exemption under Victorian law, the High Court had to determine the definition of "religion" within the meaning of the law.

Key considerations of a religious institution were determined to include:

- Belief in a supernatural being, thing, or principle.
 - The belief system must involve faith in something beyond the ordinary physical world.
- Acceptance of Canons of Conduct:
 - These canons must give effect to that belief and involve adherence to particular practices or moral codes.
- Key Points from Judgements:
 - Mason ACJ and Brennan J: Emphasised that religion involves both belief and practice. Practices should not be solely political, social, or commercial.
 - Wilson and Deane JJ: Highlighted the importance of the belief being sincerely held. Mentioned that the religion should have a significant number of followers or recognisable community.
- In making its judgement, the court found that Scientology met these criteria and thus qualified as a religion.
- The High Court broadened the understanding of religion beyond traditional faiths.
- The decision highlights the importance of freedom of religion and the inclusivity of diverse belief systems in legal interpretations.

Mabo v Queensland (No 2) (1992) HCA 23; (1992) 175 CLR 1

- Summary: Landmark case recognised the native title rights of the Meriam people to their traditional lands in the Torres Strait.
- Significance: The decision acknowledged the spiritual connection Indigenous Australians have with their land, which is integral to their religious and cultural practices.
- Outcome: Overturned the concept of "terra nullius" and affirmed that Indigenous land rights existed prior to colonisation.

Canada

(Syndicat Northcrest v. Amselem, [2004] 2 S.C.R. 551)

- Involve the belief in a divine, superhuman or controlling power.
- A freely and deeply held personal convictions or beliefs connected to an individual's spiritual faith and integrally linked to one's self-definition and spiritual fulfilment, the practices of which allow individuals to foster a connection with the divine or with the subject or object of that spiritual faith.
- A particular and comprehensive system of faith and worship.

RELIGION

(considerations
of formality &
structure)

Sacred Stories

Origin (creation) story

Unchangeable stories

Higher powers (supernatural beings)

Rituals and Ceremonies

Specific ritualistic practices

Forms of ceremony (birth, death, life, stages, growth)

Ethics

Applying theological reasoning

Ways of reasoning right from wrong

Beliefs and Believers

How should adherents live?

What is the responsibility of an adherent?

Embodies the doctrines in the form of laws and precepts

Commandments

Rules of Living

Guide and rules must be applicable to the practical demands of daily life

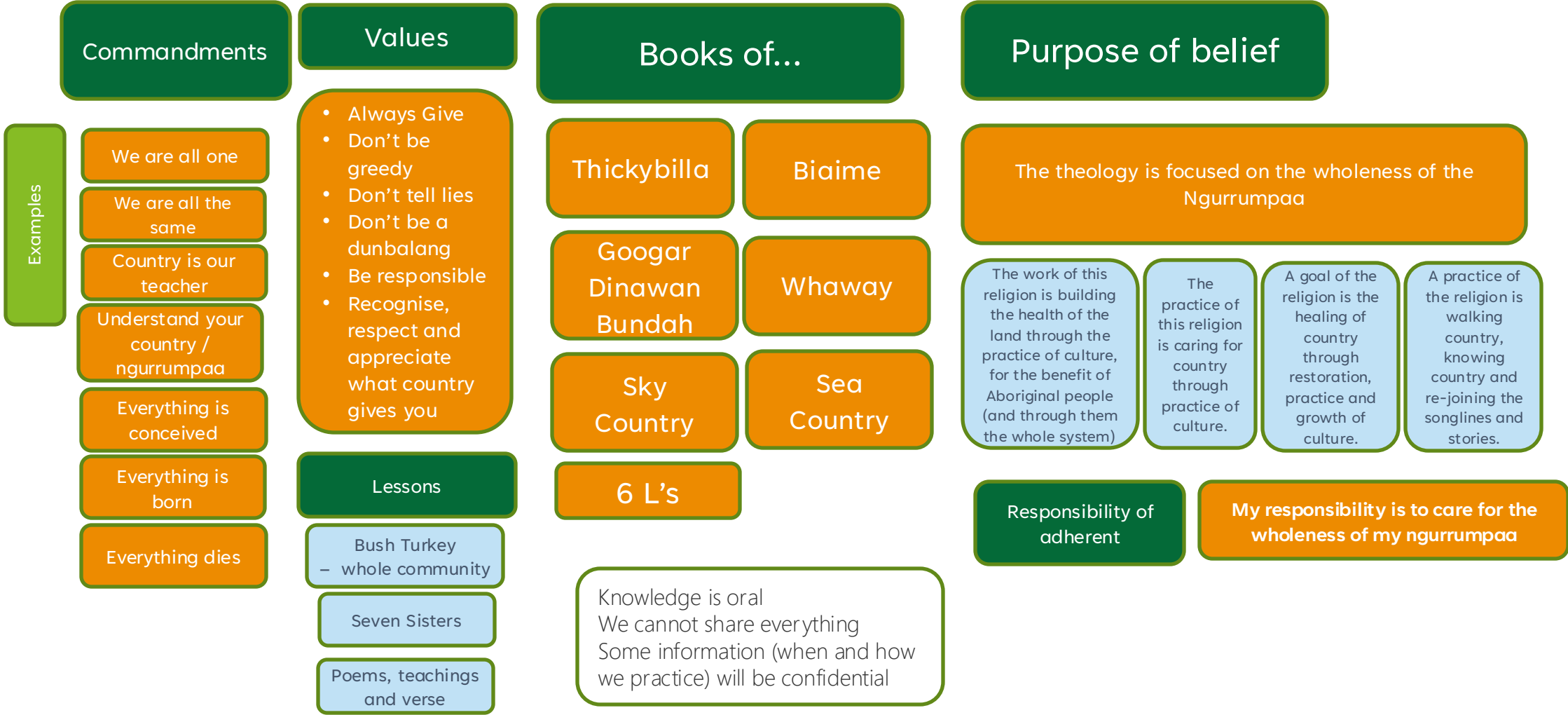
What do we practice

Why do we practice

How do we practice

Parables

The evidence and teachings of **The Living Country**



RELIGION (people/role structure)

Catholic Church

Pope

Cardinal

Archbishop

Bishop

Priest

Deacons

Catholic Laity

Islam

Imam
(teacher)

Mullah
(cleric)

Muslim Laity

Hinduism (social structure)

Brahmin
(Priests)

Kshatryia
(Warriors)

Vaishya
(Merchants)

Sudra
(Commoners)

Untouchables
(out of caste)

The Living Country

UPG

Elders

Murrathinna

Senior Loreman
(Regional Leaders)

Loreman

Community

What do we want to achieve

Protect the doctrine?	Establish a truthful record of Aboriginal spirituality for future generations
Create structure for community?	Create a robust template of community structure aligned to culture and spirituality that can be adopted by others and modelled for the rest of Australia. Spiritual practice is cultural practice for our community
Maximise adherents?	Grow the community of Aboriginal spirituality followers. (A church will maximize its membership when it minimizes the distance between its organizational structure and that preferred by the population.)
Create business opportunity?	Establish strong spiritual foundations for businesses (cultural and others) and generate opportunity for our community.

What we need to do

Agree to proceed with legal form and application	
Decide governance (structure)	
Identify Board membership	• 5 Directors (of good character)
Agree timeframes	
Are there other groups/communities that should be brought in?	• Our model could be strengthened if it had universality
Build corporate application requirements	• CoI policies • Financial policies • Constitution (clarity of purpose and DGR revocation etc...)

The future of
religions

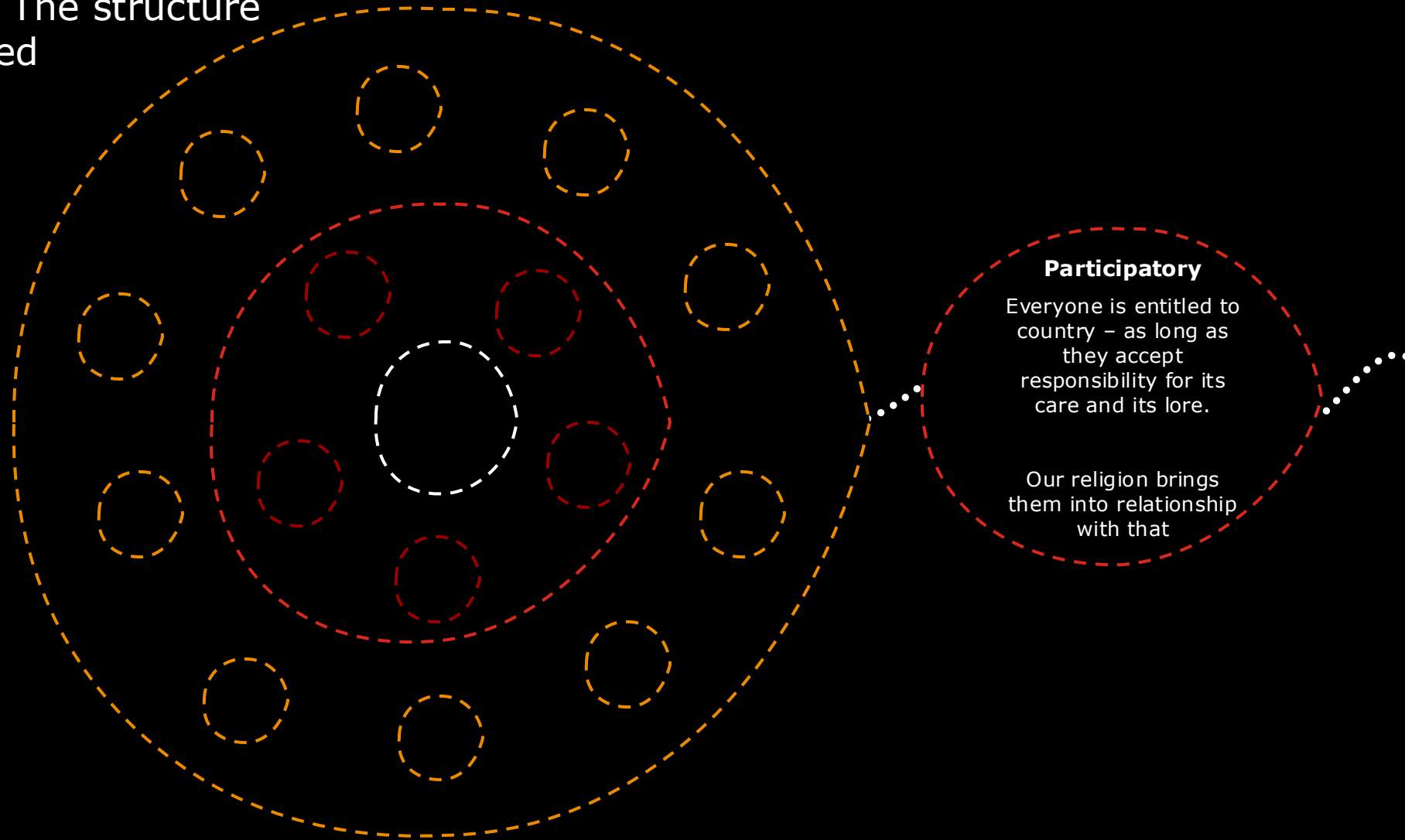
What people want
now

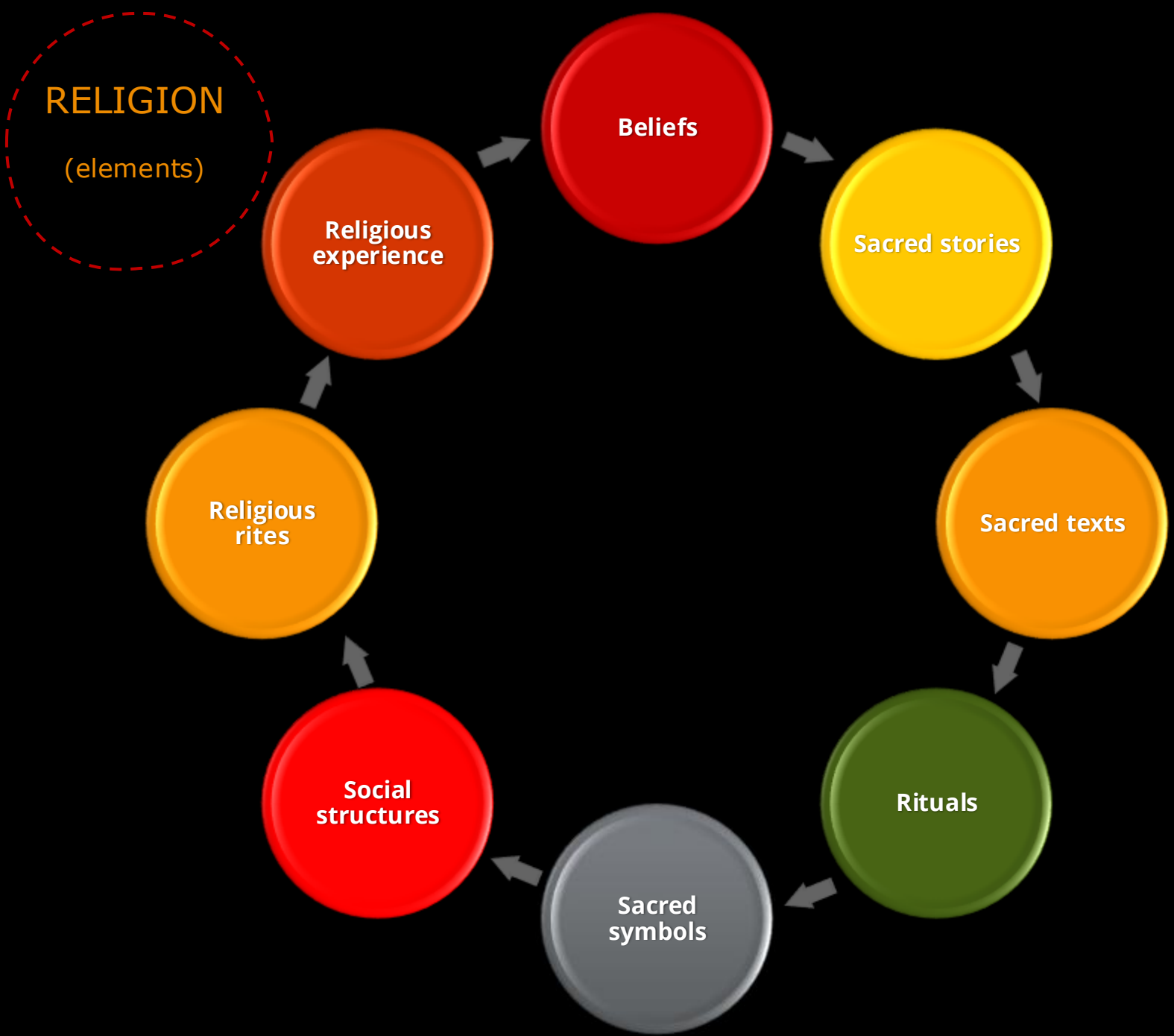


We are not the same as Western Churches

Our church is our country. The structure of the religion is determined by the goal to share and walk country

a church will maximize its membership when it minimizes the distance between its organizational structure and that preferred by the population.





The Five Pillars of beliefs and practices of Islam:

1. Profession of Faith (shahada). The belief that “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God”. ...
2. Prayer (salat). ...
3. Alms (zakat). ...
4. Fasting (sawm). ...
5. Pilgrimage (hajj).



DRAFT – DO NOT SUBMIT

Your organisation's legal name

Your organisation's Australian Business Number (ABN)

Organisation details

Other names your organisation is known by:

N/A

Your organisation's Address For Service:

Email Address For Service:

Your organisation's primary contact:

Name:

Date of birth:

Position in the organisation:

Phone number:

Alternative phone number:

Email address:

Annexure 2 - Our Services and Work

A. Services

You have asked us to deliver our Services to you under the following Phases:

- Phase 1: Development of Structure Options;
- Phase 2: Implementation of Preferred Option;
- Phase 3: ACNC/ATO Registrations; and
- Phase 4: Engaging with the ACNC.

Phase 1: Development of Structure Options

We would work with you to develop an understanding of the important considerations in respect of establishing and operating the relevant entities.

More specifically we would:

- Have an initial workshop with you and other relevant stakeholders (of up to 4 hours) to determine your key objectives, relevant governance and operational expectations;
- After our workshop, we would prepare a position paper for you to consider, outlining the organisational designs for the structure, and our comments on the composition of its board of directors/management, particular objects and objectives to be reflected in the governing documents, and related matters; and
- Once you have considered and reviewed our paper, we would meet with you to discuss our recommendations, ascertain your instructions and agree on a way forward.

We are pleased to provide these Services to you on a pro bono basis.

Phase 2: Implementation of Preferred Option

We would work with appropriate legal advisors to establish and implement the New Religious Structure. This would include:

- Providing our instructions, on your behalf, to the selected lawyers in order for them to draft each entity's constitution/deed/management agreement (as appropriate). In doing so we would have specific regard to the objects of the entities, to ensure relevant tax exemption/charitable status could be obtained;
- Working with the selected lawyers to address any queries they may have in the drafting process;
- Reviewing their drafted documents to ensure they accord with the agreed outcomes of Phase 1, and also provide for the possibility of having the relevant entities endorsed/considered tax exempt by the ACNC/ATO (as relevant); and
- Once the entities are established, obtaining a Tax File Number (TFN), Australian Business Number (ABN) and other initial regulatory registrations.

We are pleased to provide these Services to you on a pro bono basis.

Part Four

Damu's Words

Chapter 10: Damu's Words Introduction

The following are pieces were written over the three years I was undertaking research for this thesis, and they speak to many things. After each research trip in Country, I would reflect on the teachings of Lore and what I had experienced while on Ngura Tracks. These pieces show that, while I live Aboriginal way, I do so in a contemporary world, a world facing so many challenges – climate change, destruction of the bush, the catastrophe that is happening to the rivers, loss of biodiversity – and these losses and destructions, along with the losses of culture, are also now part of the Ngura Tracks. These Ngura Tracks are not just ancient. Because they continue, they also exist now, in the present. In some places, the Ngura Tracks are being mined, in others they are being blown up, in most Aboriginal people cannot access sacred places and cannot conduct Ceremony. All this changes the relationship Aboriginal people have to Country. The core audience for the poems that follow is Aboriginal, but they are not just for Aboriginal people. All people in Australia need to understand how to live on Country, materially as well as spiritually. Aboriginal cultural and ecological knowledge teaches us all how to do this. Living this way, we can learn to live on Country properly, with respect and without continuing the great harms that has been and is being perpetrated on Gunni Thukan (Mother/Earth).

From my knowledge and experience, individuals need to make a choice. To continue living a meaningless life attached to things that are not real – money, status, things – all of which damage the self, and disconnect people from Country. Or find a way to live a meaningful life. An essential part of that is how to live with each other. Not in competition but understanding that our connectedness to each other, our care for each other, is a great gift and one that we should share and honour. While we live in communities where some are forced to live with great trauma, and in ongoing dispossession, it damages us all. Our communities are not just human: we have a fundamental connectedness to animals, air, land, water, trees, rocks – to all the beings that live in Country. I think we desperately need to understand that our connectedness to Country is not just physical and material, but also, essentially and profoundly spiritual. Go outside, hear and feel Mother Earth, experience what is happening to Country.

I want to show the significance and depth of Aboriginal wisdom, that has arisen from living in Country for time out of mind. Despite Invasion of Country and Disruption of Culture in the last two centuries, this wisdom, these ways of being, knowing and doing, have survived, as has the knowledge structure for their transmission between generations. Aboriginal people lived in Country for thousands of years without decimating the air, land and waters, and have Country in their blood. This wisdom is needed, now more than ever.

Non-Indigenous Australians are simply not equipped to see and recognise meaningful Aboriginal things – Ngura Tracks through Country, ancient traces of inhabitation, the spiritual meanings inscribed by the Ancestral Beings. I have worked my entire life to ensure that Aboriginal culture is practiced in Country, remains known and accessible. So that all people can learn the necessity of loving and caring for Country, the necessity of caring for ancestors, for family, for community. The great and unselfish love Country has for us if we live respectfully, and live right way. But also, the terrible consequences if we do not.

Introducing Damu Paul Gordon

Dr David Spillman

Rarely, in my experience and to my knowledge, are we given the opportunity of meeting a person whose life story clearly marks their calling from its beginning and throughout. For we humans, living in the twenty-first century, such a rare story offers a beacon of light in the shadowy and often bewildering quest of fathoming life's purpose. Damu Paul Gordon is such a story, chosen by the old Ancestors to maintain a cultural continuity reaching back tens of thousands of years, by living and teaching Aboriginal Lore and Ceremony to all who are interested and willing to listen. These old ways of knowing, being and doing are more urgently relevant now than ever before, illuminating the path for us to know, love and care for the places we live. This 'Old Man' is an emissary from the past, following those Old Men before him, like Bill Neidgie and David Mowaljarlai, walking the traditional path but with a foot in the new world, fulfilling ancestral obligations, whilst at the same time helping us all to reconcile and reconnect with Country.

Damu Paul Gordon was born of an old spirit to his mother Doreen Gordon and our Earth Mother Gunni Thakun, in the Brewarrinna Hospital, on 10 April 1961. Descended from the Karulkiyalu clan (Ngemba) and Muruwarri ancestors on his father Ronald Gordon's side and the Barkindji speaking Guru clan from his mother's side, Paul was born into the middle of nine siblings with four on each side (5 brothers and 3 sisters). Paul's formative years were spent on the banks of the Barwon River, the heartland of his ancestral Country. With his family Paul slept in a single room tin shack constructed of round poles, wire and corrugated iron with an earthen floor. Yet this was a loving and joyous childhood, in Country and surrounded by a big mob of kin, including Old Men like Uncle Mick Knight who once drove sixty horses into camp. As a child, and unlike most of his peers, Paul spent a lot of time with these Old Men, sitting around the fire, listening to their stories and helping them out. As a ten- or eleven-year-old, he remembers driving his father's truck out bush with some of these Old Men so they could chop and gather firewood. Even as a youngster Paul knew these old fullas were to be respected as important Knowledge-holders for Kin, Lore and Country. Whilst he enjoyed playing with

his peers, especially his brother (cousin) Marty, he also regularly spent time by himself in the bush or by the river, sitting, looking and listening to Ancestors and Earthkin.

Due to necessity and his father's work the family sometimes moved, once living for several months 'under canvas' in Lightning Ridge whilst Ronald completed a fencing contract. On returning to Brewarrina the family lived in the Aboriginal church for while, as Ronald was fencing during the week and preaching on the weekend. In the 1973 floods the family had to leave their riverside home due to flooding. Ronald purchased and drove an old bus out of town up onto Red Hill, a sandhill some 20 kms south of Brewarrina where they lived for several months. Paul and Marty lived by hunting and cooking galahs and kangaroos. In the 1974 floods, having moved across the river to the then recently acquired block at Billygoat Bend or 'Barwon 4' as Jacky Barker the main instigator of the acquisition called it, Paul recalls traveling to school each day in an Army duck.

Whilst school was not a central part of Paul's life, he had learnt early the potential value of all kinds of knowledge, so approached western education with curiosity and a degree of diligence. Yet his cultural learning and knowledge was strongly imprinted, having already spent so much time with old fullas, Earthkin and Country, and being an old fulla spirit himself. In year 5, Paul's teacher asked the class to catch butterflies so they could pin and study them for a science unit. Through stories shared by the Old People Paul and some of his peers had already learnt about the spiritual significance of Bupulla, especially for children. They refused to participate and stood their ground, which caused more than a little consternation and conflict. Towards the end of year 9 the school principal inadvertently witnessed Paul dealing successfully with a large male student who was in the process of intimidating and bullying a much smaller and younger boy. On the strength of that incident Paul was made school captain the following year, an uncommon event in rural schools in the mid-seventies.

Compared with schooling, Ronald Gordon's fencing camps were a much more relevant and valuable place of learning for Paul. When his father was out on a contract, Doreen would pack up the kids on school holidays and head out bush to the fencing camp. When Paul got a little older he would often travel with his father to camp, more than

occasionally forgoing a week of school. Surrounded by these 'Old Men' Uncle Cuku, Uncle Mick Knight, Uncle Shilling Jackson, Uncle Colin Murphy who worked for his father, Paul's education into Culture, Lore and Ceremony continued. They walked a lot of Country on weekends. As a young teenager in the mid-seventies Paul passed through the arduous process of entering manhood. On completion of his schooling, at the age of sixteen, Paul rejected several offers including a solicitor's cadetship at Redfern, and a Commonwealth Bank job in Brewarrina, to work full time in the fencing camp with his father and uncles.

In 1979 Paul moved to Newcastle to take up a bricklaying apprenticeship and play rugby league for Souths Newcastle. He battled through until August when homesickness for Country and kin took hold, returning to his father's fencing camp. Feeling stronger and reconnected, Paul returned to Newcastle in 1980 to recommence the bricklaying apprenticeship. However, his employer took ill and work ceased. Paul took the opportunity to head to the Kimberly where he met and spent time with Ngarinyin man, David Mowaljarlai. Aboriginal artist, author, cultural custodian and innovator, Mowaljarlai is widely recognized as a man who was both devoted to the maintenance of the *Wanjina Wunggurr* culture of his people, and to cross-cultural teaching to enhance settler understanding of the centrality of this Lore to the wellbeing of Country and people. Paul reflected a lot on this brief time spent with David Mowaljarlai. It had an impact, reinforcing and fortifying his belief that it was possible to be both a strong cultural man fulfilling obligations to Country and Ancestors, and a mentor and teacher for non-Aboriginal Australians, helping them understand the value of Aboriginal cultural practices in the modern world, to care for Country.

On his return to Newcastle Paul took up a job with BHP steelworks on the Hunter River, where eighteen months later he was one of thousands of steel workers stood down. He also spent time running a hostel for Aboriginal men. Through the same period, Paul met up with an old Tibetan monk who had escaped his homeland whilst under Chinese rule. Accompanied by another much younger monk, Paul took them to some significant Aboriginal sites in Yengo National Park. These places and experiences impressed them deeply. The old monk invited Paul to meet with the Dali Lama on his first Australian visit

in 1982, which he did, spending several hours walking and sitting together. Of the Dali Lama Damu Paul says; 'He's one of us. He understands our Lore because his Lore is the same, but different too.' Following Ronald Gordon's unexpected death late in 1982, and Paul's marriage to Elizabeth early in 1983, Paul and Elizabeth moved back to Brewarrina to care for Doreen, enabling Paul to honor his father's fencing contracts.

In 1984, in recognition of Paul's already substantial knowledge of Country and Aboriginal sites and though still a young man, he was offered and accepted a position based in Brewarrina as a Site Officer for the NSW Land Council. Through this work he travelled extensively through NSW, also visiting Kintore and Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory for significant periods of time on several occasions, once meeting and staying with Kakadu man, Big Bill Neidgie in Jabiru. As with David Mowaljarlai, this time with Big Bill Neidgie had a big impact on Paul. Neidgie, like Mowaljarlai, was a traditional man, deeply steeped in the Lore and Ceremony of Bunitj Country in northern Arnhem Land. Yet he was also committed to sharing his love for Country with outsiders, being instrumental in the establishment of Kakadu National Park and the attainment of world heritage status to ensure ongoing care of Bunitj Country. Later in his life Bill published several books to educate Australians about his people's ways of knowing, being and doing, their perspectives about the natural world, and practices for managing Country.

Through the remainder of the 80s and 90s Paul took on several different roles, including the CEO of Yarnteen, a not-for-profit organization established to reconnect Aboriginal teenagers with Country and Culture, and various teaching positions with TAFE. Through all this work Paul focused on teaching on and about Country. This included dozens of cultural awareness programs to re-awaken people's connection to Country, and just as many programs focused on family kinship and cultural identity, and Indigenous conservation and land management. All the while Paul was also working to maintain the continuity of Lore and Ceremony on Country.

Through a serendipitous meeting in 1987, Paul re-acquainted with old Dhungatti man Uncle Lenny DaSilva. Even though they had met before, Paul was unaware that Uncle Lenny, as a twelve-year-old boy, had been sent from Nambucca Heads to work on

properties in the Bourke-Brewarrina area, and had spent a lot of time with, and done a lot of learning from Paul's Uncles, the same ones who in later years worked in the fencing camps for his father Ronald Gordon. Together Paul and Uncle Lenny recommenced ceremonial practice at Wollombi, west of Newcastle, and then back in Karulkiyalu Country some years later.

Since this time Damu Paul's knowledge of Lore, wisdom and teaching in and for Country has positively impacted the identities and practices of thousands of Aboriginal boys and men from all across Australia, particularly NSW. At the same time he has worked generously with non-Indigenous people of all ages and genders to facilitate a deeper understanding of Aboriginal cultural practices, how we are all connected to the places we live, and the ways we can all change our perspectives and habits to better know and care for these places. In 2021 Paul was awarded a Master of Philosophy by the University of New England, for his thesis titled, 'Revival of Aboriginal Ceremony in NSW.' Through this undertaking Damu Paul has enacted courage, generosity and humility. He has been courageous in sharing important and Aboriginal knowledge through an institution (the Academy) that has been, and still is in many ways, an instrument of colonization, reifying Eurocentric, rational-analytical knowledge and capitalist imperatives over all else. He has enacted generosity in offering this knowledge to all in a society that has oppressed and brutalized his people, misappropriated Aboriginal knowledge for economic gain and severely damaged Country for the same purpose. Damu Paul's humility is clear, in that his equivalent in the academy, in terms of his knowledge of Aboriginal lore and Country, is beyond professorial.

Damu Paul Gordon is currently the primary custodian of lore for Karulkiyalu Country, a Professor at the Institute for Indigenous Knowledge, University of Melbourne, and Lore Boss from Western NSW. He continues to live in Lore, knowing, loving and caring for the place he lives, leading Aboriginal ceremonial practices on Karulkiyalu Country and other parts of NSW, and mentor and coach dozens of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Delight in these verses, sit with Country, and contemplate the ways we can choose to live differently, to better care for everything in our place.

Chapter Ten: Damu's Words



Photo credit: Paul Gordon

1. Country my Teacher

Country my teacher. An opinion is not knowledge.

Knowledge is a knowing from experience.

If I am not in the Country, how can it teach me.

If I don't look and listen, I can't see and hear what the Country is showing or telling me.

Be still, wait, look, listen, learn.

Knowledge must come before action.

Don't tell me what you think about something, know it, learn it, try to see it, touch it, feel it:

then tell me your experiences.

Country My Teacher Notes

I wrote this one because the world is full of opinion! And, when I was thinking about how many different NGOs¹ are working in Aboriginal communities, and how they are getting

¹ Non-government organisations, which dominate the 'Aboriginal industry' in delivery of services to Aboriginal communities, worth about \$33 billion per year of which about \$6 billion (18%) goes direct to Indigenous organisations or Indigenous people. See James Saunders, [Debunking: 33 Billion](#), *IndigenousX*, 12 Feb 2019.

the same negative results over and over, because they have no real knowledge and operate from an opinion. Country My Teacher is about getting out there, getting down on the Earth, connecting to Country, listening to Country, spending time in Country. And I say the same thing as this to young Aboriginal people, who say they know a lot about the Country, but they themselves have never really gone out and sat in it. It is only when we go out there, and look and listen, and feel and touch, will we have a real experience, and from a real experience you will gain knowledge. How often do NGOs working in Aboriginal community, if ever, actually go out and sit in community, and look and listen, before they write a project or a program and roll it out in Black communities.

2. My God

My God said I Am the first ancestor. I have now taken many forms, if you look you will see me everywhere: I am the mountains, I am the streams, I am the rivers, I am the sea, I am the forests, I am the bush, I am the Country that loves and gives to you.

If you listen, you will hear me: I am thunder, I am rain, I am a bird singing a beautiful song. Just for you.

I am your Country: if you live in me, I will walk with you every day.

If you live on me, you will trample and hurt me. If you hurt me, you harm yourself and all other living beings.

You have no rights, only responsibility: to you, to me, to your Country for we are one and the same.

I am the First Ancestor, and I will be the last.

My God touches my heart with a beautiful flower showing me her nurturing caring love.

My God shows his might and power in a raging thunderstorm.

My God never punishes me, only guides and teaches me.

The earth, my God, is all I need to live forever.

My God Notes

I wrote this one because, when I was sitting out there in the bush. I was connecting to Country. And even though I grew up in a Christian home and was taught to believe in this invisible man in the sky, I realised that the only thing that was real was Country. Because Country I can see, Country I can smell, I can touch it, I can hear a bird singing, I can go

and touch that tree, and I realised all these things were real to me. So, if I was going to worship anything, it was going to be something that was real. And I realised that my Old People, even though they never worshipped the land as god, they worshipped it like a mother, and they learned from that. I just wanted to write that, to explain it to people that listen. When you are in the bush, or when you are in the city even, wherever you are on this planet, its real.

3. Bible of Love

The Bible of love All things have spirit, we are all one. The universe is a living being we are all a part of it. Everything has spirit and everything is connected. When someone or something passes, where does it go? It goes back to where it came from than begins again. Nothing is ever lost, just missed until it is found again.

If you believe all things are one and we all came from the same beginning, why kill each other and why see ourselves as different? When the world was conceived in the belly of the universe. The universe ate many things the earth was being fed. When the earth was born it came out of the water, just like you and me. The food it had eaten wasn't always good it got sick. Sometimes spewed up, sometime got the runs.

The Earth has all the emotions we have. It was through her life: her emotions, illnesses and loves that created the world that we now are a part of. So, who are you where did you come from. Oh England you say, where was you before England? Why do you call yourself a King or Queen or great lord. You are the same as me, nothing more nothing less.

So, you think because you are white you are superior, think again. Look around, not many white animals in the natural world. You are in the natural world so stop destroying it. If you don't it will destroy you. Me and you are very small in the universe, almost nothing really. Man might be no more, but me and you will be. Just dust and water until we take a form again. MAN wake up! Take your place in nature.

Greed has no place here. Knowledge love and learning, how to give lots and take little, is what living is. All that we have and still not happy, wanting more and more, but still not

happy. Believing in a better place. Heaven is here: look around nature our mother, where me and you came from is beautiful. Love her, not some God who doesn't exist.

Creation is happening all around you look listen learn. I believe everything was conceived, and everything was born, all things have spirit and all things are eternal. We are all children of the universe, all things not just humans. Humans are a very small part of creation, yet we think everything exists just for us to abuse and use. All things grow: some grow strong and some are weak, all things die. But death is a new beginning for we are eternal.

We humans along with many other living things were placed on Mother Earth to care for her and each other. Giving to each other through life and death. Now humans just take and destroy all things because they are full of greed. Believing that heaven awaits them. Why would a god take greedy people who kill his creations home to his place. Would you?

The beauty of our Mother the Earth is being destroyed. Our water and land is poisoned. We are made up of her and so are all things. We are just water earth and spirit. When we harm her, we harm ourselves and the next generations of our children. Why are we so stupid.

Bible of Love Notes

I wrote this one because I get asked quite often what do Aboriginal people actually believe in, or what do you believe in? And something that David Mowaljarlai, the Old Kimberley Man talks a lot about, and that Big Bill Neidjie, from Kakadu, talked about. About how we are all one with everything. And if we are all one with everything, why are we greedy? Why do we steal from one another? Why do we make war against one another? I just wanted to write this story to get people to think about how we are all living together on this planet, and are made up of exactly the same thing, organic matter and water. So we are no different to a rock or a tree, or a bird or a fish. We are definitely not different races, there is only one race and it's called the Human Race. We have invented these other classifications, but we are all the same. When people realise, I want them to

think about what their responsibility is, to one another, and to the Country itself. And when we destroy it, we are actually destroying ourselves.

4. Nature

My Gunni² touches my heart with a beautiful flower, showing me her nurturing, caring love. My Bapa³ shows his might and power in a raging thunderstorm. My God never punishes me only guides and teaches me. The Earth, my Mother. The Sky, my Father is all I need to live forever.

My Bapa looked down and seen my beautiful Gunni and fell in love. Their union was co-creation. Who is God? Is there only one or many? Or is it all of us? I know that I was born into heaven. My mother the Earth. My father the Sky. I am the son of eternal beings, and you are my sisters and brothers. We have been given a choice. Will you take care of our home? Or will you try and destroy it? Will you steal the life of your mother for your own greed? You won't win, you will be found out. And your actions will wipe you out. Look, listen, learn your mother and father are trying to guide and teach you. Fire, floods, droughts, ozone depletion, etc etc. Destruction by your own hands. You will reap what you sow. Your weapons, your wars, your hatred will end in your sorrow. But my Bapa and Gunni and me will live forever.

Harvest what you plant.

Nature Notes

This talks about Gunni and Gunni's mother. It talks about what is in Mother Earth, and about the beauty of Mother Earth: the flowers, beautiful flowers. It talks about the Sky Father as well. We have story about the Sky. as well as the Earth. It talks about the power of Earth, the raging thunderstorm, the tornado, cyclone, the might of the Earth. But it also talks about how we respect it, how/where do we fit in? What are our roles and responsibilities?. It talks about how we actually need to take more notice. So if you think about global warming, and if you think about all these other things going on, we are ignoring all these warning signs: 'its all happened in the past, we'll be right'. But we won't

² Mother in Ngemba.

³ Father in Ngemba.

be right. Most environmental scientists say we are on the path to extinction, and we need to take notice. And care for the Land.

5. Emu Relationship

When the Emu chicks were first hatched, their father took them to show them what to gather and eat. But also what they shouldn't eat. Throughout the day they met many of their clan. Some were Bundar, Thikkibilla and Googar people.⁴ They all said, 'wow here comes our family'. The chicks asked Dad, 'Why are they our family?' Dad said, 'Sit down and listen children. A long time ago in the beginning of the Ngurrumpaa, there were two Rainbow Snakes. They were very clever, way smarter than us. They often laughed at everyone because we didn't understand relationships. One day a little boy said to the rainbow snakes 'Why laugh at us? Please teach us about relationships'. The Snakes were impressed with the boy and said 'Do you know you are all the same? You have all come from the same place. Sit down and talk to each other and share Stories. You will realise that your stories are a little bit different but same. All the Stories say we should love one another we should share and not steal from one another. So sit down and share Stories'.

Over the many thousands of years, we have shared Story attended each other's Ceremony, married one another and cared for one another. We have no armies, no forts no castles, and no fences. We are all family. Grandmothers, Grandfathers, Mothers, Fathers, Brothers, Sisters. Except for the one we marry. But that's another Story. And over time they also become family. Everyone is family: so love them, share with them, and never hurt them, and they will do the same.

Emu Relationship Notes

This story I wrote because we have a kinship system in Aboriginal society that shows how we are all related to one another. This story is about the Old Man, the Father, of these baby chicks and how they went for walk and all these other different animals were greeting them and saying here come our kin. And the kids say how are they are family?

⁴ Kangaroo, Echidna and Goanna people.

We don't look like them? And the Father explains the story of connection and ceremony, and about how we come from the same place.

6. *Weda*

Weda was a clever man. But he and his wife were never happy with what they had. They would wake up early to go and gather pretty things to put around their ngurra. They liked things that shined and sparkled. When no one else in the tribe was watching or had left their camps, they would steal the pretty things from their camps. The men would say where is my ceremonial belt? The women would say where is my beautiful necklace? Then they saw that it was Weda who had stolen it, they decided to punish them both. The tribe got their coolamons and filled them with red hot coals. 'If Weda and his wife want shiny things they can have these red hot coals'. They arrived at Weda's camp and said, 'You two come outside, we have shiny gifts for you'. As they stepped outside the tribe threw the coals in the air and it rained down on Weda and his wife, who danced with joy at the pretty, shiny things, until they realised it was fire. Before they could be killed, they turned into bower birds and flew away. Still today Weda builds a bower of grass and gathers shiny things and steals pretty things to put around his camp. He is still not content. He wife comes and looks and says 'That not pretty enough. I will look for a new husband and a new camp'. So Weda is still gathering pretty things, thinking it will bring contentment to him and his wife.

Weeda Notes

Weeda is what we call a bower bird, and the story of Weeda is that he was a clever fella. And him and his wife were thieves, and quite often they would steal from the other people of the clan that they lived in, or off anyone. And which is a big no-no in Aboriginal society, our society functions around don't steal, don't tell lies, don't be greedy. And if you break these rules, you are going to get punished. This is a story to show people that greed will lead to stealing, and if you steal and get caught you are going to get punished. So Weeda was a man, him and his wife, and they stole from the Clan. So when the People realised that so many things were missing from their camp, they came with coolamons and red hot coals, because sometimes in punishment we'd burn people for stealing. They went to Weeda and his wife's camp and said 'Come outside we have these beautiful things for

you'. And when they came out and saw the red coals, they got happy and chucked it up into the air, and it landed on them, and it started to burn them, so they turned themselves into birds. And that is how Weeda the bower bird came to be.

7. Emu

A long time ago back in the ngurrumpaa, the old man emu was out showing his children what food was good to eat. After gathering food all day Dad asked the children, 'Where should we go tomorrow?' One child said let's come back here. Another said there is a mountain far off in the distance, let's go there. Dad said, 'Children sit down with me around the fire and I will tell you a Story. The old people teach us if we keep going back to the same place to eat one day, there will be nothing left to eat. If we set out and rush to the mountain, we will miss everyone and everything and learn nothing. So tomorrow we will slowly head in the direction of the mountain and on the way we will meet many families and see beautiful country. We will sit down together and share Stories and learn about our kinship and build strong relationships with all who we meet. Sometime in the future we will get to the mountain and by then you will be ready for ceremony'.

Each step we take we will learn and grow a little looking and listening to country and to the Elders who will share all that they have learnt with you. Remember knowledge is only powerful when it is shared. Grow the knowledge you have received and when you become an Elder. But don't forget to share it.

Emu Notes

When I think about society today, we just take and destroy, and then we go somewhere else and take and destroy, we don't think about regeneration, we don't think about leaving the Country for a rest. When I think about farming, farms have destroyed more land than any mining company has ever destroyed in this Country, Farmers are the biggest destroyers of land, and it's all to do with their greed. So it's about trying to get people to think about how we live, what we do.

8. Little Bit Different but Same

Why is your heart full of hatred. Yet you search for love. All the people of the world are the same as you. Just a little bit different but same. There is beauty in every Country: just little bit different but same. Our faiths teach of love and forgiveness. Christian, Islam, or Buddhist: little bit different but same. Looking and hoping for something better, Heaven or enlightenment: little bit different but same. Where is your mindfulness. Why is your hope and your god somewhere else. Enlightenment and Heaven is with you. But your Hatred has made you blind. Go for a walk in nature. Sit down on a rock near a creek.

Be quiet.

Hear the birds singing and wind blowing through the trees. Heaven is all around you. Become enlightened and then you will see. Then love and forgiveness will find you. Your hatred will disappear. We all will be brothers and sisters, like God always planned. All one big family, living in heaven our Mother Earth. Just a little bit different but same.

No more need for war and destruction. Put a stop to the greedy men. Make nature your home and heaven and all things will be family and friends.

Little Bit Different but Same Notes

This is more about the four big religions of the world, which down through the ages have killed millions of people over belief. And it's all about if you believe in a god, and if I think about how many gods has there been since day dot, we are probably talking about thousands of gods. But the four big ones today, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Wars have been fought, and millions of people have been killed, yet the preachers all preach the same thing. They teach love, they teach caring for one another, giving to one another, looking out for one another. But rather than following the lesson of the teaching, we fight each other over the teachings. But if we just practiced what the teachings taught, we would make a better world for all of us to live in. And that's what this story is about. The lessons are the same, or as we say in Aboriginal society – a little bit different, but the same. And when I sit down with Old Men from different Countries in Aboriginal societies, they will say 'Tell me your story mate'. And I will tell them my Story, and they will same, yeah, that's a little bit different but same. Because even though the

Story was completely different to their Story, the morals of the Story are exactly the same. And that's what we do, we listen to the moral, not the Storyteller.

9. Circle of Life

I was sitting by a beautiful creek which was spring fed. As I sat quietly, the creek started to talk to me. I asked the creek, 'Where have you come from?' It said, 'I have been here forever. I started a long time ago in the sea. I became a cloud, then rain. I fell on the mountain, and into a crack. Other rain drops joined me and we became this creek'. I asked, 'Where are you going?' It said, 'To join a creek then a river and then many rivers. And one day back into the sea'.

A Tree was listening to the creek's Story. The Tree said, 'Same as me'. I asked the Tree, 'What do you mean?' It said. 'I was a little Seed and I fell from my mother's flower. I landed in the dirt. The rain watered me and the earth fed me and I grew into this beautiful Tree'. I asked, 'Where are you going?' The Tree replied, 'One day after I have dropped many seeds and little me is growing everywhere, I too will go back to where I started. Back to mother earth to start again'. 'How about you?' the Stream and Tree asked. I said same as you.

Circle of Life Notes

This is a Story that came to me when I was sitting on a rock, near a little spring, listening to the water running away from the spring, and I realised that I was the same. Because science teaches us that we are made up of water and organic matter. And trees are made up of water and organic matter, a kangaroo is made up of water and organic matter, and this is Story about that. Just recently, I asked 'Where do you come from?' and they told me their Story. I realised that I was no different. This is how Aboriginal people think, we don't think of ourselves as superior or better than nature, we know we are a part of nature, and we know we fit within the system of nature, and that we have to respect all things in nature, because they are the same as us. And in the Circle of Life, which is what this poem is called, when we die, we go back to the Earth, to the Water, and we might come back as something else, we might come back as a tree, or we might come back as a kangaroo. So if we want to be respected, we have to give respect ourselves.

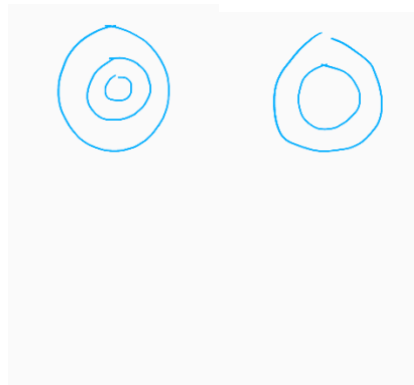


Image credit Paul Gordon

10a. Share I

A young Aboriginal girl was walking along with one self-made Aboriginal Elder. She asked if he could speak his language or dance traditional dance. He said no, the white people took it all away from us. They killed us, stole our land, and locked us up on missions. We couldn't visit other groups or attend ceremony. They stopped us from walking Country. She said I know Aboriginal people who still dance and sing in language, and they attend ceremony too. Maybe they can come and share with us. He replied shut your mouth girl you don't know what you are talking about. They don't come from here. This is my land. She replied but you have nothing: no land, no language, no ceremony. It not the white people who are stopping it now, it is you the colonised one. Wake up conquered people and learn the old ways again. SHARE.

10b. Share II

The conquered ones say things like, you can't dance, can't sing, can't speak your language in my land. I said. But you dance like Michael Jackson, sing pop and country music, and the only language you speak is English. Do you want me to be conquered like you or can I share with you my Story? Let's connect and unite like our old people did. Let's push back against the conqueror together. Sitting in a Land Council meeting one day, an elder from a different tribal group asked, because I live here now can I join the council? An elder from the local tribe said no, our people would have killed you in the old days. You shouldn't be on my land. Five minutes later the local elder said, my grandmother could speak six different languages. I asked did she learn them languages from dead

people. We welcomed other nations onto our land to share with one another. That's why your grandmother could speak six other Aboriginal languages.

10a&b Share Notes

This is a story about a young Aboriginal girl who is walking along with someone who called themselves an Elder. Lots of things in our community don't happen because Elders sometimes stop it, Elders who don't know anything. And she asked the Elder, why can't you dance, why can't you speak your language? And he blamed the White Man for it, he said, well I can't do that, because it was taken away from us. And she said, well I know people who can, so why don't we ask them to come and share with us. And he got really angry. No! This is my Country, they can't come here.

This is a common conversation that I hear all the time in community where the opportunity to learn and come together and share knowledge is stopped by people who sit on dunghills of power and stop anything good from happening in their communities. And they say things like, you know, when we come to dance, when people invite us to come to do a dance, or corroboree on their Land, a lot of people will come to watch, and really love it. But there will be one or two Elders who will whinge and complain and go well you can't come here and do that on our land! You know, you can't speak your language here, you can't do that dancing here, that doesn't belong to this Country. And I will point out to them, you just said that to me in English, the Conqueror's language, and you said that to me in his language. But you are stopping me from sharing my Aboriginal language with you? You say we can't dance that dance here, why not? I see that you dance up to Micheal Jackson every Friday night down at the disco. I see you do Debutante Balls, on Aboriginal Week. You have embraced the ways of the conqueror. And you are stopping your own Countrymen from sharing the Old Ways with you.

11. Reap what you sow

I am your god but I won't punish you, nor will I act on your behalf. You will reap what you sow. I have given you all that you need, if you take more someone else misses out. What you and others do will define your punishment, not me. Your happiness is in your hands not mine. You were born with nothing but your mother's breast, so who took care of you.

When you hurt yourself as a child who did you run too? When you were a teenager, you sought love. Did you find it? When you got a job who did you work for? Did you make it you rich? When you went on holiday who was with you and where did you go? You have lived your life, was it a happy one? Now that you are dying, you turn to me. You say please heavenly father give me a home in heaven. Your whole life you have lived in heaven but never knew. Because you only thought of you.

I am not you father; your God is you. Blinded by greed, consumed by your schemes wanting more and more. You should have looked out of your door. Heaven is all around you. Soon you will be no more.

Reap what you sow Notes

This is about people who believe in god and how they talk about he loves you, but if you don't do what he wants, he will punish you. And I often challenge people on that because they still believe that an invisible man in the sky is watching all their actions down here, but they are not thinking about their actions, and what their actions are doing to the Earth. Quite often Aboriginal people say, Mother Earth is going to punish them white fellas for what they are doing. Mother Earth won't punish anyone. Mother Earth just does what she does. But what we do, the actions that we do, is what will harm her. So I am saying, well it's not god that is going to punish you, it's your actions. You are going to reap what you sow. You poison the Earth, you fill it up with plastic, not god. You dug the big holes in the ground, not god. Be aware that your actions are what is going to bring your downfall.

12. Past

There was a time in our past. We woke with the sun. Birds were singing the creek was babbling, the water was pure and sweet. Our home was a shack of logs and bark, but it kept us dry when it rained. The land gave us the food that we needed to eat. And the animals gave us our meat. Our neighbours were our families and friends, no fear of being attacked. What they never had we shared with them, and they always shared back. No paid jobs, no working for the man, there was no one above us, living upstairs. 24/7 living in the land, connected to our Mother Earth. We looked to our Father, the big blue sky, he always gave us a sign. Rain coming soon, the magpies cry. Connected to earth and sky.

Where did we go wrong where did this money come from? Where and why is there a need for a job? Who said the land is mine when we all knew the animals, trees and all things, belong to the land since time was new. We have been tricked and misled it's time to stand up before everything is dead.

We have fallen to wiles of the greedy men. They have taken our children, and they are being misled. We say we know, and we will do something soon. Just got to sort a few things out before we make a move. Our Mother is dying before our eyes. Yet we do nothing but wait, hoping someone else will act, but it's too late. For you see, our Mother will survive. But us humans will be memories of bygone days. The wayward children who forgot how to play. And the lesson: only take what your mother gave.

Past Notes

This is a Story about how it was for Aboriginal people and about it was for Indigenous people all around the world. How we woke every morning in a pristine environment, pure water, our knowledge allowed us to gather food and medicine whenever we needed it. From the day we were born we were born into Country, with no idea of ownership and wealth, and greedy people. It's a Story about that, how people today think they are wealthy, because they own a house. But in traditional society, you never had to get a mortgage, you never had to get a job. You never had to work seven days a week or five days a week, for some rich person who just keeps taking from you. It's a challenge: how do we live today, we are actually slaves in a system which has taken everything from us. Whereas in traditional society, when you were born you were born into a beautiful place. It's to make people think about is this capitalist world the right place to be living. Or was the old way a better place. And I think the Old Way was a much better place.

13. Anti-Vaxxers

Imagine if vaxxers and anti-vaxxers put the same passion into looking after Country. What a wonderful world it would be. But it's not about the birds and bees or beautiful old gum trees. It all about me, me, me. Fuck the kangaroo and emu and the sacred water

ways. Don't you get the Vax. You better get the Vax. You will die either way. But you have forgotten yesterday. Look after Country I say.

Anti-Vaxxers Notes

This is just a little story. And I wrote it in the middle of COVID when there was all this opposition to getting vaxed, whether you should get vaxed or whether you shouldn't. And there was protest, and there was almost war between the vaxxers and the non-vaxxers. And I thought wow, look at the passion that has come out of this one thing, which is all about them, or 'all about me'. If we put the same passion into looking after Country, if we put the same passion into caring for trees, rivers, flowers. What a wonderful world it would be. But the anti-vaxing campaign was all about me, me, me. It wasn't about anyone else. Just this individual right to do what I like. And that is the way of the world still, where people think they can do whatever they like without any consequences or thought of other people.

14. Christmas

Today baby Jesus was born. He taught love and stood up against lore/law. Now the world is full of hate. Lore/Love: one letter the difference. The R comes before the V. Lore joins us in love. Without lore/ stories, we forget who we are, where we come from and how we were connected to each other. Once we were a family together with all things. Now we see each other and all things as being different. Love can't survive without Lore. Keep your Stories alive and we will always walk together. Love you all my brothers and sisters.

So today the day we know as Christmas. Let's all sit down with our families and friends and share Stories. Stories of Lore and our responsibility to Country and to each other. Stories that bring us together. And love to all things. Knowing we are one and the same. Stories that unite us, not divide us. Let's come together to dance and sing. Or would you rather tell lies, spread hate, create wars and destroy your mother earth. Come back to the Lore. There is only one way. We must care for our Mother Earth. Gunni Thakun is the giver. GIVE BACK.

Christmas Notes

I wrote this on Christmas Day when I was on my own, which was really nice. I decided to stay home with the dogs and have Christmas. And while I was sitting there thinking about what Christmas was all about, the story of Christmas, about Jesus and how that's what it's all about. Supposedly. And the teaching of it all is about how Jesus died on the cross, how he loved us all, how he told us to love one another, and to give gifts, and share with one another. And I was thinking well wouldn't that be great, if the teachings of Jesus were actually implemented, and people did love one another, people did care for each other. So this was just a Story around what I was observing and how much hate there was in the world, even though it was Christmas time, when everyone was supposed to be happy. But people go out and buy all these expensive gifts and put themselves in debt, which causes all this distress. And it was not the message Jesus came to deliver.

15. *Many Times*

Many times I have returned to my Country over and over, she good Country love me Long time now. Always take care of me. I maybe come back here same place a thousand times, maybe more. I grow up and die here over and over again. Nothing much changes for thousands of years: dry time, wet time, ice time and big sea time. All good time. This time no good time. Whiteman turn up 200 years ago now. He no good for Country. He kill the blackfella, rape and kill the woman and children. He not like other animals, he want to kill everything. Destroy trees, rocks, rivers: all sacred places. He not love the land, he love money. Ha! Silly man, tiny brain fella him.

Many Times Notes

This is a story about what happened to Aboriginal people, and how long we lived in Australia for, according to science now, up to one hundred thousand years, possibly two hundred thousand years. And when you think about that time, there is at least three ice ages in there, a couple of sea level rises, there are big droughts in there. And it's the time that Aboriginal people lived through, and learned from, and they survived with that knowledge of Country. And then, the last couple of hundred years, when the European people arrived, it was a completely different upheaval that we had to go through. So it's a Story about how bad it was for us, way worse than the ice ages or droughts, way worse

than sea level rises. The things that happened to us in the last two hundred years nearly wiped us out. So it's just something for people to think about.

16. Now

When I am lost I will still know I am home with Mother Earth. If I am connected and have knowledge of all that she offers me, I will always be safe. When my mind constantly thinks of tomorrow and what the future holds. I will focus and only think of my needs for today. When today overwhelms me, and life feels so hard, I will remember all the good times of yesterday and before. For today only lasts 24 hours or so they say. While the air is clean, and the water is sweet, each day will be a good day. There will be times when loved one will leave us, and troubles sometimes will find us. Remember it is just life, so live it to its fullest. For the past, present and future goes around and around for me and you, forever. So love every moment for joy, love and pleasure is now.

Now Notes

I wrote this one thinking about people with mental health and how they worry about the past, or they worry about the future. And because they worry about the past or the future, they sometimes go and commit suicide because they are not present, they are not where they are now. It's a story about thinking about all you have is now. Stop worrying about yesterday, stop worrying about tomorrow. You got now, so really enjoy it. Make the best of the moment. And just have a good life, right now.

17. Kangaroo People

Long time ago, back in the beginning of the ngurrumpaa, Kangaroo people was like us. The mother's carried their Joey babies in a goola bag on their back. That word goola is same as Koala. Koala's still carry babies on their backs. The kangaroo people never had a long tail way back then, and they walked not hopped. One day a human man threw a spear in the bum of a Kangaroo man. He arms was too short to pull it out. It stayed there and fur grew over it. The kangaroo man found that now he can balance himself with his long spear tail. Because of this he started to hop everywhere. He had many wives, and many children was born with spear tails like him. They hopped and could go way faster

than running. But the children keep falling off their backs. One day a human man speared a baby on the back of its mother. It was still alive. So the mother carried it in front of her, so the bad man couldn't spear it again. The mothers of the kangaroo clan made a goola bag to be in the front of them. After a long time the fur grew over it and it became her pouch. So now mummy Kangaroo can hide her babies and hop really fast.

Kangaroo People Notes

This is just one of our Stories about how the Kangaroo females got their pouch. Because in our Story a long time ago, they carried their babies on their back like a Koala, and like Aboriginal people did. Our mothers carried their babies in a goola bag, which is where the word Koala comes from. The pouch came because when man started to hunt the kangaroo, the spear would quite often kill the baby, so the mothers moved the baby around to the front. And over time, the pouch was formed, and the baby Kangaroo would sit on the front of their mother, not on the back, like the Koala.

18. Money

I was born a rainbow child over and over again. Into the land of the great Rainbow Snake along with other clans. The water I am made from runs through sacred land. Why are we destroying it. Silly, stupid man. We fill the land with plastic and deadly chemicals, dig great big holes in search of gold, even bigger for some coal. Iron ore we need more and more. Are we preparing for more great wars? Our greed is uncontrollable. What is our gain? Some plastic we call money? You got to be kidding me. There is tons and tons of plastic floating in the sea. Go on pick it up and you can have it all for free. Why are we so stupid to fall for such a ploy, what is the greed that drives our need to buy more toys. Christmas is a coming, create more greedy mob, gorge your face, what a waste, chuck the scraps out to the dogs. Borrow money, buy the toys for spoilt little brats. Make me greedy, make me fat, what a load of crap. All that you need is in the land and sacred waterway. I am a rainbow child born to this Sacred place. No need for greed, all we need is in this sacred space.

Money Notes

This Story talks about Aboriginal people's belief in the Rainbow Serpent and the water and the Country. And how we just had to go and learn about it and be happy in it. So the more we learnt, the more knowledge we got, the easier it was live the way we were living. Then someone comes along and invents a thing called money. When you think about money, it's now just made out of plastic, it's not even a gold coin, or brass coin, or a copper coin any more, it's just a bit of plastic. And it has gone from not even being plastic, to just being something on a computer screen. So it's absolutely not real, money is not real, yet we worship it. And I am basically saying that listen, if you love plastic, there is plenty of it in the river. Go and get it. There is plenty of it in the sea. If plastic is what you are chasing, go and get it out of the river and out of the sea and you will do us all a favour. Because what is real, is Country. Country is the only thing that will keep you alive. Not plastic.

19. *The Rock*

I was out walking today enjoying the beauty of nature. After a while I decided to rest on a nice-looking rock. It was lovely to rest. I heard a voice say, 'Hey you get off me!' I looked but couldn't see anyone. The voice said, 'It's me, the rock get off me'. I got off very quickly and said to the rock, 'I didn't know rocks could talk'. 'Of course we can', it said, 'You humans know nothing about life, all things can talk not just you'. 'Tell me more please Rock I want to learn'. 'Well,' it said, 'what are you made of?' I said 'earth and water'. 'And what are trees fish birds and all other living things made of?' I said 'same, earth and water'. 'So what do you think I am made of?' 'Well I suppose you are made from earth and water too'. 'Yes I am,' it said, 'and I have been here way longer than you. Without me and the other rocks doing our stuff there won't be any earth soils. Over the years I have lived I. have broken down into smaller and smaller size pieces making the soils so you and all the other creatures can be born. Without me and what I do as a living creature, you won't exist. Please have some respect for me and ask if you wish to sit on me. And remember you are a part of me and so is everything else. One day I will be no more. You call that death. I call it sand, dirt or soil. Then we will be the same again. Then you and me will live again, maybe as a tree, bird, fish, kangaroo, emu. Or even as a dumb human. So remember when you sit on me. I could be you or. You could be me'.

The Rock Notes

I wrote this for my grandson, who was at school in fifth class and the teacher asked the kids what's living and what's not living. And some kid said a tree, and some kid said a kangaroo, and they got approval. Then my grandson said a rock, and he got disapproval. No, no sorry Cooper, rocks aren't alive. And he said, well my Dad and my Poppo says rocks are living, so I believe them more than I believe you. And he came home really sad and told me about it. So I wrote this poem for him and said take this back to the teacher, because rocks are living. Because my clan, Karulkiyalu, means I belong to the rock, it means I come from the rock. And when you think about rocks, they break down, it takes them longer and longer time to break down, but they still break down. And by breaking down and turning into soil, they give us life. So rocks are actually living. My Old People taught us that rocks are born, rocks have babies, rocks die, like all things. And that is a very strong, powerful Aboriginal belief. This is a story about that.

20. Knowing from experience

If I am not in the Country, how can it teach me? If I don't look and listen, I can't see or hear what the Country is showing or telling me.

Be still, wait, look, listen, learn.

Knowledge must come before action.

Don't tell me what you think about something, or what you read about it in a book.

Know it, learn it, try it, see it, touch it, feel it.

Then tell me your experiences.

Knowing From Experience Notes

This is a Story about if you want to learn about bush medicine, or you want to learn about bush tucker, you are not going to learn about it in the city. You can read about it in bush tucker books, in medicine books, you can have theory around it. But theory is still not knowledge. You got to go out into the bush. Do it, try it out, because what the book might say, and this is the thing about Aboriginal knowledge or learning from experiences by being out there, compared to sitting in a university and learning about it from a theory perspective. You don't really know what you are being taught is true until you go out and

actually experience it. So I often put it this way for people. You can go down to Supercheap and buy yourself a car manual about how to change your oil. Or how to change the battery, and how to pull the motor apart, and you can have all the theoretical knowledge in the world. But until you actually go and do it, you will never really know what is real. So it's about that, it's about go out there, try it, touch it, do it, and then you can say you really do have knowledge.

21. Ngurrumpaa

Lore, ngurrumpaa, children, ceremony, love, commitment, look, listen, learn, corroboree, connection, care, lead, completion. My camp is my world, it is everything to me. It takes care of me with fresh water, food, shelter and love. In my camp there are companions, 1 or 2 I might fall in love with. Our children will be born into a beautiful place of natural beauty. One that hasn't been harmed by greedy men who thinks money is more important. Ceremony will teach and guide me to learn and understand my responsibilities to my camp and all things in it. It will enforce the rules of commitment to care for all things. Commit and grow relationships with other peoples and join them together in kinship. Through dance, song and story we will develop and grow our connections to each other. By sitting together we look, listen and learn from one another. Because sharing promotes caring through accepting each other's Stories, even if different to ours. Shows an openness to learn new things. To search for truth, forgiveness, and love.

Ngurrumpaa Notes

Ngurrumpaa means my camp and my responsibility and relationships to Country. This is again about the way that Aboriginal people lived and how they were always responsible about what they did in Country. Because what we did in Country also affected everybody else, and not just people; it affected fish, kangaroo, and trees. We had to think about what we did. We made sure that we were trying to keep this place beautiful, so the water was always fresh, there was always good fish in the river. When I think about today, how people can just keep destroying the river systems, for starters, above stream for the ones who are below them, so the ones below them get dirty water, poison water. When I think about Country as it is today, which has been destroyed by greedy men, mainly. A good

example is recently around that gold mine in Orange, when they wanted to put a tailings dam right on the source of the spring. The Federal Government stopped them, but yet people are still complaining that they haven't been given the right to destroy something as beautiful as the beginning of a river. This is just to open people's eyes up, that we all have responsibilities to Country. What we do to Country effects everything and everybody.

22. *Wawai*

Wawai winds his way through this great land. Bringing the water though he has no hands. Carving his way from the Great Divide. Guiding the water from the tops to the sea. Bringing water for you and me. Do you even know who I am talking about. The great Rainbow Snake. I want to shout out. But you disconnected souls who live in holes know nothing of the sacred roles, our Ancestors played in forming the land. And I am not writing about stupid man. The water you drink and the food you eat. Is produced here on sacred ground. You all should bow down and give thanks to the holy ground. Love and respect our mother needs. Then she will go on giving our every need. But you disconnected souls live in holes and see nothing of the sacred roles. The great Wawai and Mother Earth do for you. How long will you keep being the fool.

Wawai Notes

Wawai is the Ngemba word for the Rainbow Serpent, who has many different names in many other languages, but it's a really important Story of water across the Country. If you know the Story of Wawai, then you will know always where the water is. If you know the journeys of Wawai, then you can walk across the whole of Australia and find water, following his tracks. It's an important Story. So here, I am having a go at people who come from another place, Europeans, settlers, who didn't know the Story of Wawai, and when they would ask Aboriginal people about where the water was, Aboriginal people would tell them about the Rainbow Serpent. And quite often when you read the journals of the first explorers, they say things like 'we asked these Aboriginal people for water, but they keep wanting to talk about a mystical snake'. Well, no, they are actually trying to tell you about where the waterholes are, but you are not listening. This is a Story around that.

Shut up and listen, you pompous, greedy man. Listen and you will actually learn something. You are not listening.

23. January 26

We are all one, tree, rock, bird, fish, everything. We come from same place, go back to same place. Start again same place: Mother Earth and Wawai sacred water. Mother Earth is a part of the Universe and so are we. Who gives us sustainability and feeds and waters us. Mother Earth, Wawai and the Universe. If we harm them, we harm ourselves: poisons, mines, wars, greed etc etc. We take and take, never giving back, how long can we keep doing this. We are one with all things. So why do we have wars. Why do we hate, why do we think we are different. Why do we worship Gods who love to kill and punish. Why do you believe they love you. We, like all things, are universal beings. Heaven is all around us if we live in it, be a part of it, we will find oneness with all things. Joy and happiness are a state of mind. It comes from connection with our place as one thing together. Hell, sadness, pain, and loneliness is from separation and seeing yourself as being different.

Living on Mother Earth trampling her. Raping her. Destroying her only leads to all our sufferings. The home you have in Heaven or Hell is the one you are in now. You have created it by your actions. I hope we all choose Heaven and live in oneness. When we come back we will find a beautiful place. Or does Hell await us in the future. Not a hell created by some God who loves to punish, or a Devil who loves to torment. But a Hell created by us from our greed and differences. Today the 26th of January 1788 people who thought they were different arrived on the shores of a beautiful part of Heaven. They brought hate, rum and guns. And started to create a living hell. And set out to destroy a beautiful people in a beautiful place. But we have survived and must keep on living, sharing and caring. Hoping that one day they will realise they are not different but same.

January 26 Notes

I wrote this on the 26th of January, which is always a really sad place for Aboriginal people to think about. Where we have, every year, the conqueror throws shit in our face, with no respect, and even asks us to participate in our loss. This is about that, it's about how we are all one, we are the same as trees and rock, as bird and everything else, and the Earth

is one place. And if we don't look after it, and care for it, then it will be us who suffers, not it. And even though we face the 26th of January, we still as Aboriginal people try to engage with the European, we still try to make them understand the importance of Country, and connection to Country, and looking after Country. I often think about my Old People who actually went through the massacres, like my great grandmother who had her baby shot of her back in a massacre. Yet they still loved, they still cared and they were still happy to share with the white man because we want people to love this Country, not just take from it.

24. God or Big Bang

God or Big Bang? You believe one or the other. Did the big bang or god create the earth. Both say from the land we came. We evolved from water and earth. He made Adam from the dust of the earth. From the earth we came. Who came first, animals they say. Animals evolved first, man last. God made animals first. Man last. Do the animals believe in evolving or do they believe in God. Or do they just exist without beliefs. Was God and evolution invented by man? I know one thing we are just water and sand. I don't need belief. I can see it is a fact. From the land I came. To the land I am going back. So is tree, rock, kangaroo and every other being too. So you see we are the same. For from the land we all came. Yet we fight and hate kill and maim. Why. Because of belief we hate. Because of belief we take. My God is real, yours is fake. Witches we burnt on a stake. Children beheaded. Children raped. God said do this before it's too late. I think you are lying or made a mistake.

It was man who did this and his stupid belief. He is civilized now or so he thinks. Build weapons of mass destruction, get ready again. Let's go out and kill, steal and rape. I believe I have a right to take. I believe. I believe. I believe.

Beliefs are in the mind of the believers. Facts are the actions you do. Look back and see what you have done. Your sins have turned the earth red from blood. But I believe I am a good man. I didn't do that. FUCK I am sick of hearing MAN talk Crap.

God or Big Bang Notes

This is a Story around do you believe in god or do you believe in evolution? When you look at both of those beliefs, god made man from the Earth, so we are of the Earth. Evolution is about evolving from the Earth. We are of the Earth in both stories. Yet the Christian believes that god made them from heaven, and that their home is in heaven, and that they are going back there one day. When really, the Bible says god made you from the dust of the Earth. So the Earth is what you should be looking after, caring for, because that is where you come from. When you think about belief and what it has done, when you think about religion and what it has done, over the years, how many millions and millions of people has it killed. When I wrote this, I was thinking about the women and girls, who were declared witches and killed, by Christians and how wrong it was. When you think about rules that are still in play today in this world where women are still being stoned to death and accused of having sex outside of marriage in Islam. And they are still stoning women to death. Religion. Religion has killed more people than anything else in the world and there is no fact, or evidence, that god, any god, exists. He just exists in the mind of the believer. Yet millions and millions of people have been killed. If you had proof of a god, you wouldn't need to believe, you would have evidence. Find your evidence, find your proof, and stop believing.

25. Gods

I am sitting here thinking about the Gods. How many has there been? Which one is the true one? What have they done for you? So you won a war and lost the next. You asked for it and sometimes it came. You pray for life, but death found you and your loved ones. When really did your God hear you? He lives up there in the sky somewhere. The invisible floating man. He demands respect and worship, or he will cast you into hell. Are you sure he loves you brother? You say time will tell. Let me tell you of another mother earth is her name. She has been giving every day to you even though she is in pain.

For millions of years she has given and over the years she has changed. But she never stopped giving, her love stayed the same. Think about why you are here and where from you came. Dirt and water you are. And I am the same. No different to all things living or dead. We are still the same. When you go back to her. Will you come back again. I know

I will, over and over forever, sometime different but same. She is the only true God supplying all our needs. Maybe you should pray to her while you are on your knees.

Gods Notes

This also starts off with me sitting thinking about gods. Because I realise, if we are going to worship any god, it should be Earth. I remember reading a little snippet of a student asking Einstein if he believed in god, and he said yes, but my god is the Earth. Because she is real. We have the same belief. We didn't worship the Earth as a god, but as a Mother, because she is real. She gives to us every day. So it's about people who want to believe in something, why don't you believe in something that is real? Why don't you believe in something that gives to you every day? Why don't you actually believe in the planet, and the Earth? And if you really believe, and have passion, clean her up. Fix up the waterways, stop the poisons. Because it is real.

26. My god the Earth

My god is real I can see it feel it hear it. My God gives to me every day. The food I eat and water I drink comes from her. Everything I need love shelter food water connection she is with me every day. I don't need invisible sky gods or a hope in heaven. My god is real: look and you can see her, touch and you can feel her, listen and you can hear her. You owe everything to her. Wake up you fools the earth is real. Your make-believe gods are false, your life depends on Mother Earth. Love her, respect her, take care of her. And you will be born again as a part of her. When you die, where do you go? Back to the land, earth to earth. Water to water. Are you going back to poison land, poison water? Will you come back sick from the toxins you and the greed of others have planted. Why can't you see you and I need a healthy mother to live and breathe. Wake up, wake up and love this place before it's too late. There is no heaven to contemplate, just Earth to love before it's too late, too late, too late?

My God the Earth Notes

This is about trying to wake people up to looking after the Earth. And viewing her as a god, because she is real. and what she gives to us every day. So, the poem is around not worshipping these invisible men that you have no proof of, look around you and see who

is giving to you every day, who is actually loving you, who is feeding you, who is giving you shelter, how come we haven't, as men, woken up to the fact that the thing that gives to us every day is the Earth. Why don't we worship her? If we have a need to worship something we should be worshipping Earth because she is the only one who is real, in every way, and she gives to us every day. So, if you really need to believe in a god, believe in her.

Part Five

Conclusion

Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

Conclusion



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