

7. Taungurung Traditional Owner group

Information about the Taungurung Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 agreement

Who are the Taungurung under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* agreement?

The Victorian State Government's (the state) Recognition and Settlement Agreement with the Taungurung includes the following recognition statement:

Waydjak bunbunarik liwik-nganjin yaraga-ngala dhumbali daada gurnap biik-nganjin yulendj-nganjin

Nganga-ngala biik-nganjin yaraga-ngala burndap gerr ngarrnga bak wilanja-nganjin

Ngala barra gerr-nganjin gilbruk biik-nganjin yarang bak daada gurnap dhumbali biik-dhan bak wilanja-dhana

We are the descendants of our old people and we have an ongoing responsibility to look after our inheritance, which is our country and our culture.

We look after country because we have an intimate relationship with country like thousands of generations of Taungurung before us.


We will continue our relationship with respect for our country and teach the new generations that they have the same inheritance and responsibility to their country as every generation before them has had.

The people

The Taungurung people are the Traditional Owners of the land and waters covered by this Recognition and Settlement Agreement.

Taungurung people have lived on this country for more than a thousand generations. The Taungurung group identifies itself as having comprised fifteen clans with similar dialects and are part of a broader Kulin alliance. The group forms a complex society with kinship systems, laws, politics and spiritualities.

Taungurung people enjoy close spiritual connections with their Country, and have developed sustainable economic practices. They had, and continue to maintain, a special relationship with all of their lands, mountains and waters. The Goulburn River holds particularly important meanings for them.



As Kulin peoples, the Taungurung are guided by Bunjil (the Wedge-tailed Eagle), their creator. The Taungurung believe that Bunjil made men from bark, and women from mud. It is a belief that fundamentally binds them to their country which, with all its tangible and intangible elements, is governed by Bunjil's Law. Imprinted on the land are the Dreaming stories, totemic relationships, songs, ceremonies and ancestral spirits which give it life and immense value. Together, Bunjil and Waang (the Crow) form the moieties of their patrilineal kinship system.

Over time, the people belonging to this part of the Country, through descent and kinship, have been known by various names, including 'Dhaagung Wurrung' and the 'Goulburn Tribe'. For the purpose of this Recognition and Settlement Agreement, the people have resolved to be known as 'Taungurung' ('no to you' tongue/speak).

The past


The state recognises the devastating impact of colonisation upon Taungurung people, and the role that it played in dispossessing Taungurung people of their Country. The state also acknowledges the continued suffering of Taungurung people through the implementation of laws and policies that discriminated against them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

These far-reaching laws and policies fragmented both families and community. Beginning in the nineteenth century, children were forcibly taken from their parents in one of the most traumatic examples of state policy and practice. Depending on how the state defined Aboriginality over time, Taungurung people could either be forced to live on a reserve or, under what came to be known as the Half Caste Act of 1886, forcibly evicted from a reserve and prevented from living with their families. Other laws regulated Aboriginal marriages and employment. These laws and policies, including under the state's assimilationist efforts in the twentieth century, ensured that Taungurung people were excluded from the life of the nation, the intrinsic value of their culture and identity denied.

The state acknowledges that the actions of early colonists on Taungurung Country included the deliberate killing of Taungurung people. The state also recognises the deadly and widespread impact of foreign diseases upon the Taungurung population and the hunger experienced by those no longer able to sustain themselves on their own land.

From the very beginning, however, the Taungurung fought to survive. In the early days of colonisation, when sheep and cattle destroyed their traditional food sources, the Taungurung took livestock and destroyed crops in an effort to push pastoralists from the land. Taungurung people never accepted that the colonists owned their country. The Taungurung signed no treaties, nor took any action to relinquish their sovereignty.

Though Taungurung people were forced to find sanctuary at stations and missions such as Mitchelstown and Murchison, the Taungurung also fought to maintain connection to their country. In 1859, a group of Taungurung men – Bear-ring, Mur-rum-Mur-rum, Parn-gean, Bur-rip-pin and Koo-yarn – petitioned the colonial government for land in their own country where they could grow crops, but where they could also continue to maintain their traditional ways of obtaining food. This stands as one of the earliest examples in Australia of Aboriginal people taking direct political action for the return of their land. Their appeal resulted in the Taungurung selecting land at a place they called 'Nakkrom' on the Acheron River near Alexandra.



Despite their strong resistance, the Taungurung were later driven off their land at Acheron by local pastoralists. Denied a realistic alternative, most Taungurung survivors later joined other Kulin peoples at Coranderrk Station, on Woiwurrung country. Over time, other Taungurung people moved to mission stations and reserves elsewhere in Victoria – to Lake Tyers, Lake Condah, Franklinford, and Ebenezer – or to Cummeragunga in New South Wales. A number of Taungurung people, however, refused to leave their own country, and remained there for the rest of their lives. Some found work within the colonial economy, including on local pastoral stations such as Molka, Wappan and Doogalook, as a way of staying on Taungurung land. One Taungurung man even took up a selection on his own country in 1879, when it was rare for Aboriginal people to gain leaseholds. The Taungurung’s push to retain, and reclaim, their Country continued.

Through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the state actively discouraged the practice of culture by Taungurung. Despite this, Taungurung people continued to pass down knowledge via family and community gatherings, out of view of the wider community. In 1967, Camp Jungai was established near Alexandra, just south of Lake Eildon and in the heart of Taungurung country. Named using the Taungurung word for meeting place, Camp Jungai became a place where culture would thrive.

The future

Today Taungurung people, whether living on the Country of their ancestors or elsewhere, maintain their relationship with community and Country. Taungurung people’s obligation to speak for, and look after their Country endures. The return of Camp Jungai to Taungurung ownership serves as a strong reminder of Taungurung’s continued determination and drive to exercise their cultural and inherited rights, and their continued fight for – and assertion of – their rights on Country.

Taungurung continue to practice their culture and customs and uphold the obligations of Bunjil’s Law. The state acknowledges the Taungurung’s right to self-determination, and their right to maintain their spiritual, material and economic relationship with their Country.

As they have done all their lives, Taungurung people camp, fish, hunt, meet and talk, discuss family history and culture on their Country. They continue to collect bush medicine, visit and maintain significant cultural sites, and learn and practice language, dance and other cultural business.

They also pass on Taungurung knowledge to younger generations, so that they can maintain and renew spiritual associations with Country. All these practices have their roots in Taungurung traditional laws and customs stretching back to a time long before European colonisation.

In a constructive step towards reconciliation the State of Victoria and the Taungurung have come together in good faith to reach this Recognition and Settlement Agreement, which recognises the Taungurung as the Traditional Owners under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*.

This Recognition and Settlement Agreement binds the State of Victoria and the Taungurung people to a meaningful partnership founded on mutual respect. It is a means through which Taungurung people can provide a strong future for their children, and is an avenue for their culture and relationship to Country to be recognised, supported, safeguarded and promoted.