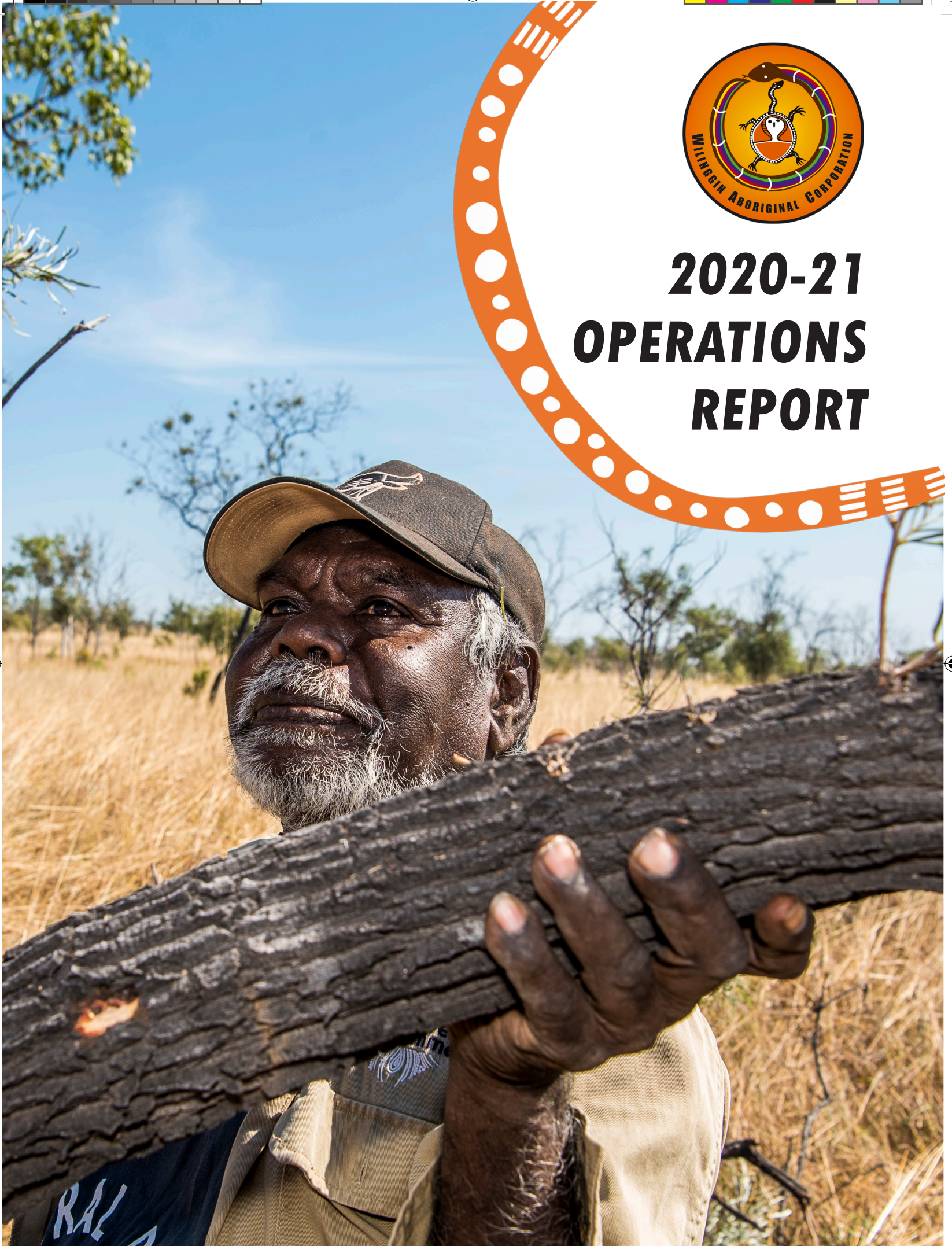




# **2020-21 OPERATIONS REPORT**



**PROMOTING THE INTERESTS OF NGARINYIN PEOPLE & THEIR COUNTRY**





**WE SEEK TO BUILD A  
SUSTAINABLE NGARINYIN  
SOCIETY WHERE OUR ANCIENT  
VALUES AND KNOWLEDGE  
SYSTEMS ARE USED TO PRESERVE,  
PROTECT AND RESTORE OUR  
CULTURAL DOMAINS. WE DREAM  
OF A TIME WHEN NGARINYIN  
PEOPLE ARE RESTORED TO OUR  
LANDS, RIVERS AND PLACES  
OF SIGNIFICANCE, SO THAT WE  
CONTINUE TO BE THE PEOPLE OF  
THE WANDJINA.**

**WARNING:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that this report may contain images of deceased persons.

**FRONT COVER IMAGE:** Phillip Duckhole  
**PHOTOGRAPHER:** Annette Ruzicka

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

**Hello and welcome to the 2020-21 Wilinggin Operations Report. In the following pages you will read about the many developments and successes of Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation (WAC) over the past 12 months.**

One of the most important developments of the year has been our negotiation for a settlement with the State Government. This process has been progressing well and as we near closer to a resolution, looks to be a significant milestone in Wilinggin's history.

Meetings between the negotiation team and the State Government are ongoing as we continue to work towards a positive outcome to secure our future.

Turning to land and conservation management, we are seeing strong caring for country results from our partnership with Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC).

Rangers and AWC staff have worked together on several remote on country trips to better understand the biodiversity of the Wilinggin Indigenous Protected Area (IPA), at the same time as developing new skills in the field.

Both the Wunggurr and Nyaliga Ranger teams have delivered successful work programs and on a personal note it has been a great pleasure to come on board as the Nyaliga Ranger Coordinator.

I feel very proud of the work the Nyaliga Rangers have achieved over the past 12 months and the direction our team is heading in.

I am also pleased to report that it has been an excellent year for carbon projects, with Wilinggin achieving its best season yet thanks to optimal fire conditions.

Ngallagunda Aboriginal Corporation also continues to grow stronger, with a new Board in place. It is great to see the Board stepping up and working to resolve past problems to take this country and community forward.

Finally, we are proud to now have 18 Indigenous staff employed at Wilinggin. This is a huge increase from two Indigenous staff just four years ago.

As a newly elected Chairperson, it is a great privilege to be part of leading Wilinggin. I'd like to thank the Wilinggin Board and members for giving me the opportunity to be Chairperson and to work alongside the wonderful staff at the WAC office.

I look forward to working hard in my role as Chair, helping to create opportunities for Ngarinyin people and strengthening our organisation for years to come.

**Arnold Sahanna**  
Chairperson







IMAGE: ANNETTE RUZICKA

## SETTLEMENT PROCESS ON TRACK

**Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation continues to work towards an historic settlement of outstanding land issues across Wilinggin country.**

The settlement process is guided by our aspirations to build a strong future for Ngarinyin people and reflects the strategic priorities identified by the Wilinggin Board.

The negotiation involves the resolution of a range of land issues, including outstanding and incompatible lease arrangements, greater control and say over land matters involving third parties, and the eventual settlement of outstanding compensation claims.

It also aims to develop a stronger, more balanced relationship with the State Government, which we believe will lead to more positive outcomes, particularly in relation to Ngarinyin-led land

2

**negotiation meetings  
between WAC & the  
State Government**



management and caring for Ngarinyin culture. In the past 12 months there have been two meetings between the Wilinggin negotiation team and the State Government.

While negotiations have commenced, there is still a great deal of work to be done before we get the outcomes that will set Wilinggin up for a secure future. We will continue to keep the membership updated as the negotiation progresses.



# NEW START FOR NGALLAGUNDA

**The future is looking bright for Ngallagunda Aboriginal Corporation (NAC), with business back on track and an exciting future ahead.**

The Corporation is now officially out of special administration and a new NAC Board has been appointed with Noel Sampi taking on the challenge of being Chairperson and Pauline Nyandi appointed as Vice Chair. With Directors Luke Russ, Marcella Nyandi, Marcia Ozies and Alfie White giving generously of their time, the NAC Board has made a strong start towards establishing a positive future for Ngallagunda.

Critical to the lifting of special administration has been the partnership agreement between Nigel Westlake of Eco Pastoral Company and NAC. In subleasing Gibb pastoral lease, Nigel's commitment has allowed NAC to reset its financial position. Eco Pastoral Company will take on the management of NAC cattle and pasture for an extended period, with agreements in place that will be beneficial to both corporations.

With the ongoing support of Wilinggin, the NAC Board has also been fortunate to participate in negotiations with Catholic Education to secure the Wanalirri buildings and staff houses for NAC.

These changes have generated a mood of positivity among Ngallagunda members with a growing interest being shown by young people in relocating to Ngallagunda and becoming involved in activities aimed at providing meaningful employment and enhancing the life of the community.

Looking to the future, NAC will be focused on strong governance, effective communication and the exploration of economic projects and other opportunities to ensure all NAC resources are being developed to benefit the Ngallagunda community.



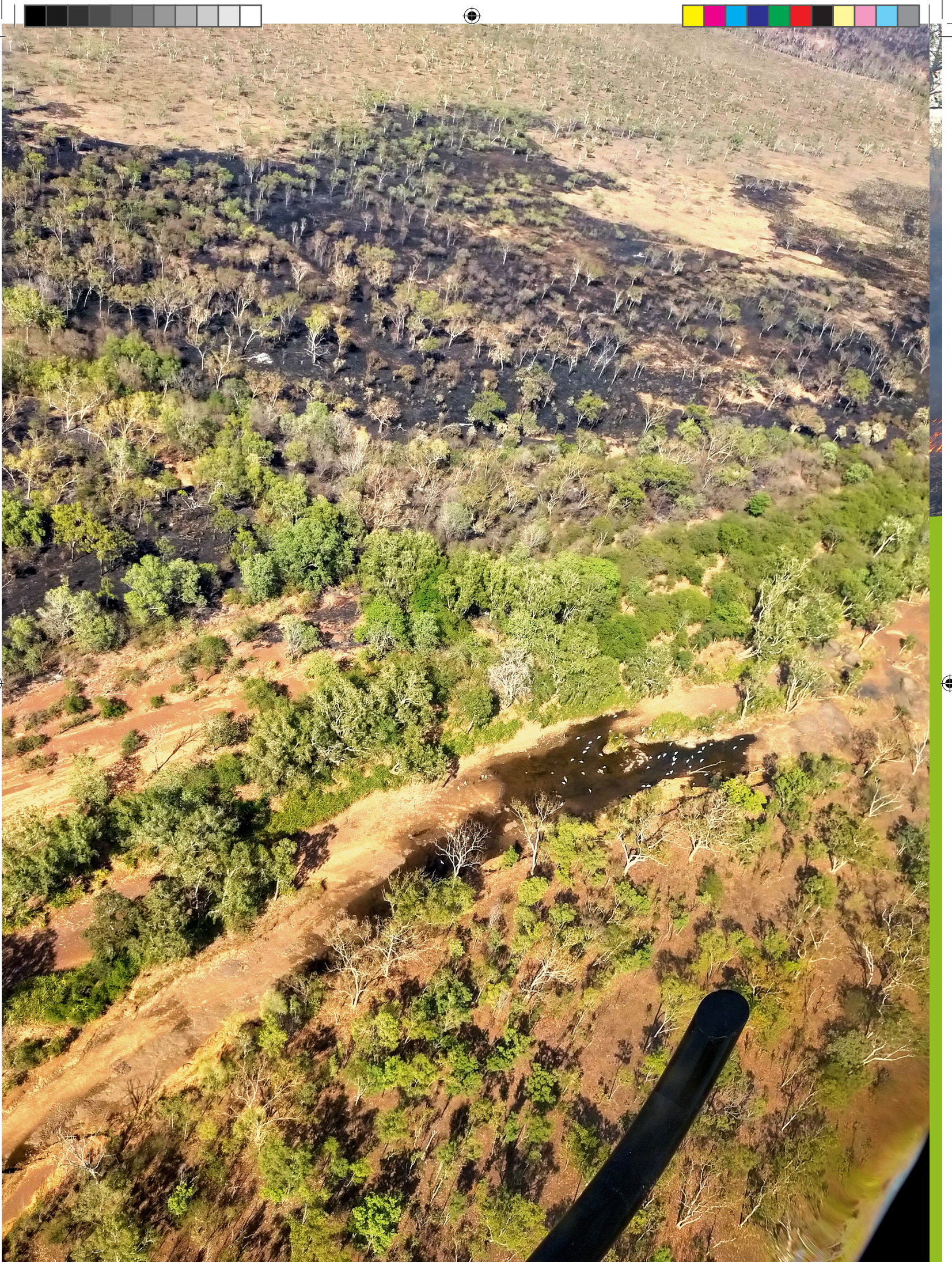
**Cattle are back at Ngallagunda Station and being managed by Eco Pastoral Company**



**Wanalirri buildings and staff houses secured for NAC**











## OPTIMAL CONDITIONS PRODUCE STRONG FIRE AND CARBON RESULTS

**Wilinggin has recorded its most successful fire and carbon season yet thanks to optimal fire conditions and solid early season fire management.**

Led by Fire and Biodiversity Officer Luke Russ, working together with AWC, the team operated mainly out of Charnley River and Gibb River Stations, undertaking aerial burning across more than 20,000 sq km.

With Luke taking on full responsibility for the planning and implementation of the fire program, Wilinggin has taken another step forward in the management of country and the Wilinggin Indigenous Protected Area (IPA).

“A big difference this year was that rather than being instructed which areas might be suitable for burning, it was actually my responsibility to take on that role,” Luke said.

“It involved me looking at weather mapping and using technology to understand the wind to make decisions. I also planned the flight lines, which are

the areas to burn and when to burn them, with great support from AWC.”

Luke said the past 12 months were ideal for fire management thanks to low fuel levels, an early wet season and few late season fires.

“It’s been our biggest year yet in terms of carbon credits, and we’ve also managed to strengthen our relationship with many of the stakeholders in the area to manage the IPA in a mutually beneficial way.”

Wilinggin was also announced as the recipient of the Federal Government’s 100 millionth ACCU (Australian Carbon Credit Unit) in September 2021. Wilinggin Chairperson Arnold Sahanna said helping Australia reach the significant milestone was a proud moment.

**“IT’S WONDERFUL TO BE THE PROJECT THAT TAKES ACCUS ISSUED OVER THIS HUGE MILESTONE OF 100 MILLION. TO DO THIS WHILE HELPING THE CLIMATE AND REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS IS EVEN BETTER.” ARNOLD SAHANNA**



# WOMEN RANGERS CARING FOR COUNTRY

**Wilinggin women rangers are stepping up the biodiversity game, taking to the field and increasing their presence working on country.**

Working with AWC's Wildlife Ecologist Karen Young, the rangers have been involved in a number of projects travelling to remote areas to better understand the biodiversity value of the Wilinggin IPA.

The women have been supported by Wilinggin Healthy Country Project Officer Rachel Treacy, who joined the team in December 2020. Rachel is now working towards establishing a network of Wilinggin women rangers to undertake various on country projects and develop a formal women rangers work program.

"The great benefit of this year's work is that it has involved women working with women," Rachel said.

"The ranger program can be very male dominated so it's important to get women out on country, engaging and being able to undertake separate work to what the male rangers undertake."

Any women interested in getting involved should register their interest with Rachel by emailing [healthycountrypo@wilinggin.com.au](mailto:healthycountrypo@wilinggin.com.au) or giving the Wilinggin office a call.







## WOMEN IN THE FIELD

**In a huge on country effort, 107 camera traps across 21 sites were collected during a recent joint Wilingggin and AWC field trip.**

The team consisted of Travina Martin, Barbara Bear and Rachel Treacy, as well AWC's Karen Young and Abbey Dean. Travelling from Ellenbrae Station, the cameras were retrieved by Travina and Barbara over a three-day period. It was Travina and Barbara's first time in the chopper, with both women displaying good helicopter awareness and skills.

Earlier in the year, field work was also conducted by Deanne Bidd and Cessa Bani. The women were involved in collecting another section of cameras, as well as deploying 70 live-traps in the mid-west central area. The women were joined by Tataka Bani who assisted in opening up Bachsten Camp along with Luke Russ.

All collected cameras have now been checked for sightings of endangered and vulnerable species, as well as feral animals, and will assist with future land management in the area.

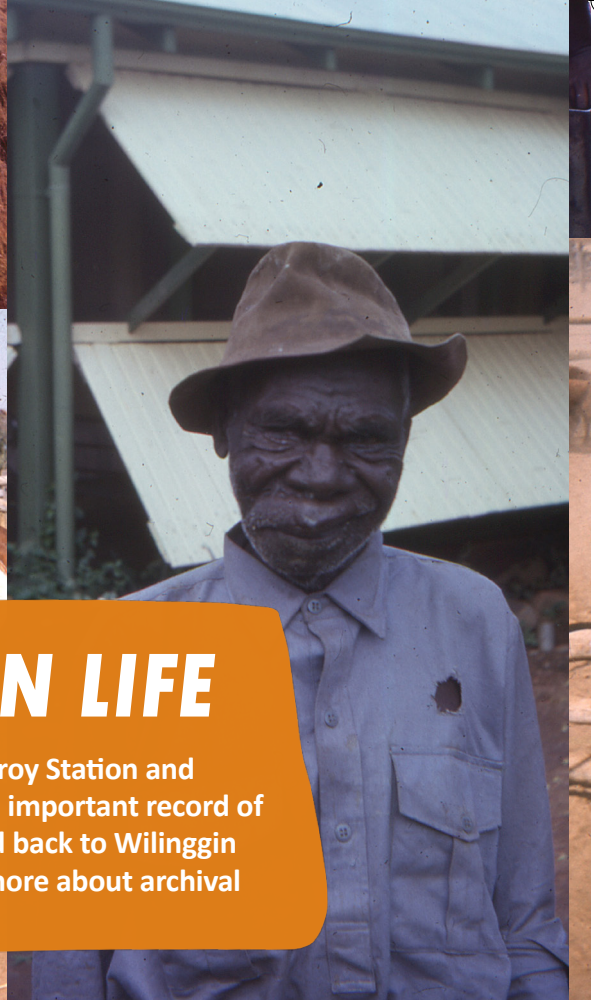


# 107

**camera traps  
collected across 21  
sites**







## LOOKING BACK AT STATION LIFE

These images document the work and life of Ngarinyin people at Glenroy Station and surrounds in the 1950s. Supplied by Macquarie University, they are an important record of Ngarinyin history and culture. Historical images continue to be handed back to Wilinggin and the care of Ngarinyin people. If you are interested in finding out more about archival material please email [admin@wilinggin.com.au](mailto:admin@wilinggin.com.au)





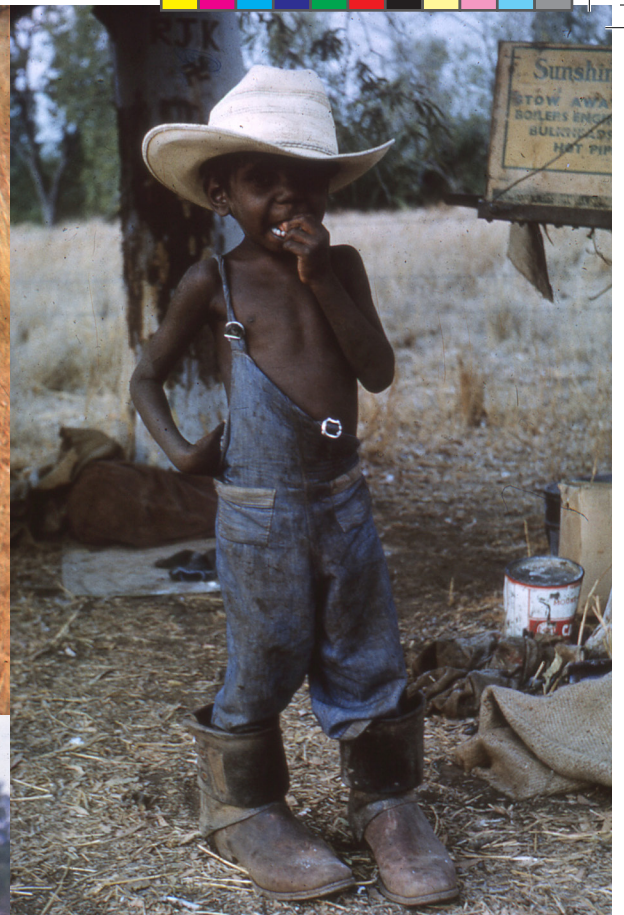






IMAGE: ANNETTE RUZICKA

## RANGER TRANSITION COMPLETE

**The Wunggurr Rangers officially transitioned from the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) to Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation in June 2021**

This means Wilinggin now has full responsibility for the running of the Indigenous ranger and IPA programs across Wilinggin country. In addition, all Wunggurr Rangers and the Ranger Coordinator are now official Wilinggin employees.

The transition to full Wilinggin control is a positive step forward for Ngarinyin people's ability to have greater say over how Wilinggin land is managed.

Since the handover, the Wunggurr Rangers have

continued to deliver a program of work, including fire, weeds, ferals and cultural projects.

The rangers are also playing an important role continuing to develop and build on relationships with neighbours, pastoralists and tourism operators. This is particularly important to ensure the success of our fire suppression program, for weed management and feral animal control.

We acknowledge the KLC for their support throughout the transition, and the training and services they continue to offer via the Kimberley Ranger Network.





# SKY'S NO LIMIT FOR WILINGGIN

**Wilinggin is even closer to having its own drone program after Fire and Biodiversity Officer Luke Russ was recognised with an official drone operating license.**

Part of Wilinggin's ongoing skills and training strategy, the license means Luke and the team can utilise drones in the field for land management purposes.

The qualification is also a necessary requirement for Wilinggin to take the next step in obtaining a Drone Operation Certificate.

This certificate will allow other Ngarinyin people to work towards achieving a drone license under Luke's supervision.

"Into the future the aim is to use drones to help deliver the Wilinggin fire program," Luke said. "Long-term, the goal is to provide not only meaningful jobs locally but

great economic benefit to the region and the entire nation."

**"THE USE OF DRONES FOR CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT PURPOSES IS EVER INCREASING, WITH THE TECHNOLOGY BEING USED TO UNDERTAKE MAPPING, TO FILM REMOTE AREAS AND TO TRACK ANIMALS THROUGH THERMAL IMAGING." LUKE RUSS**

Wilinggin Chairperson Arnold Sahanna congratulated Luke on his drive and commitment in achieving the license.

"We value the development of skills and expertise in technology within our Corporation," he said.

"This is another tool that will help us to develop and achieve our Healthy Country management priorities."



IMAGE: ANNETTE RUZICKA





## WILINGGIN & AWC SET SIGHTS ON BIODIVERSITY GOALS

**Wilinggin continues to work in partnership with AWC to achieve its caring for country goals.**

Over the course of the year, eight Ngarinyin Traditional Owners, including five women, have been involved in on country biodiversity fieldwork in conjunction with AWC.

This encompassed three trips to remote locations, including Pantijan and Bachsten Camp, to undertake surveys to search for endangered species and better understand the biodiversity of these areas.

The team made several discoveries, including identification of another two Black-footed Tree-rats at Bachsten Camp, as well as additional Water-rat sites, and more information about native and feral animal prevalence across the Wilinggin Indigenous Protected Area.



AWC Wildlife Ecologist Karen Young said the team had achieved more this year than ever thanks to strong staff at both Wilinggin and AWC to support the caring for country program.

“We’re now looking at trying to include additional inventory camera surveys, as well as trapping at Bachsten Camp to obtain data about the impacts of cane toads in the area,” Karen said.

“We would also like to look at an integrated approach to feral pig management in the region and keep working towards the Healthy Country goals.

“Mostly, we want to utilise field trips as dedicated learning and training opportunities for multiple Ngarinyin women to help build and maintain momentum towards a team of women rangers.”







# NYALIGA RANGERS GAIN STRENGTH

**The Nyaliga Rangers have had a solid season working and caring for country.**

Led by Ranger Coordinator Arnold Sahanna, the team of seven have worked hard to gain better control of the area to achieve improved conservation and cultural outcomes. This includes a major project to fence Jack's Waterhole to address unmanaged visitation, particularly in relation to culturally significant sites.

The rangers have again worked closely with WWF to undertake camera trapping and continue measuring the biodiversity values of the area.

The team collected 52 camera traps in just 1.5 days and is now awaiting the results to understand the spread of native animals and ferals across Karunjie-Durack.

Arnold, whose grandfather was born at Moonlight Valley, said it was a "good feeling" to be working on his grandfather's country.

"When the Nyaliga ranger program started I was one of the people who really pushed for the program," he said.

"It's important because it brings people back to country. This is something that I feel I have to do for my grandfather's side of my family - it's personal to me."

The next priority for the Nyaliga Rangers is to establish a permanent ranger base at Karunjie



Durack to enable a more effective work program.

"That way we can be out here full-time and get a lot more done," Arnold said.

The Nyaliga Rangers are hosted by Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation in partnership with Nyaliga Aboriginal Corporation.



**52**

**camera traps  
collected in  
1.5 days**







# VISITOR MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

**With some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world, combined with distinctive flora and fauna, and an ancient living culture, Wilonggin country attracts tens of thousands of visitors each year.**

Currently, this visitation is largely uncontrolled and dominated by both small and large non-Indigenous tourism operators, as well as independent travellers.

Wilonggin recognises the need to better manage this visitation, as well as the opportunity for more Ngarinyin people to participate in tourism on country.

To help guide this work, Pamela Jennings has been engaged to develop a visitor management strategy for Wilonggin Aboriginal Corporation.

The strategy will guide tourism on country as well as enterprise opportunities for Ngarinyin people to better participate in the tourism industry.

Pamela has consulted with a broad range of Ngarinyin people about more than 50 sites currently impacted by tourism or with Ngarinyin-led tourism potential.

The five-year strategy is currently in draft format and will be presented to the Board for further feedback before being finalised and endorsed.

IMAGE: ANNETTE RUZICKA





## NEW SIGNS FOR NATIONAL PARKS

**National Park signs have been updated at a number of sites across Wilinggin country.**

Wilinggin and DBCA: Parks and Wildlife worked together on the project, consulting with Traditional Owners to identify traditional Ngarinyin place names.

Once identified and agreed upon, new signs were produced and these have now replaced old park signage at key sites, such as Walarra mindi (Mount Hart), Dulundi (Silent Grove) and Dalmanyi (Bell Gorge).

The new signage is in addition to the renaming of Wunaamin Conservation Park (Wilinggin side), which was formerly known as the King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park.



The project is important as it recognises and acknowledges the rich Ngarinyin culture of the area and the partnership between DBCA and Traditional Owners.

The names that have been updated in close consultation

with Wilinggin include:

- Silent Grove: Dulundi
- Bell Gorge: Dalmanyi
- Mount Hart: Walarra mindi
- Matthew Gorge: Dawungumen mindi
- Annie's Creek: Mayal mindi
- Barker Pool: Dudungarri mindi
- Sunset Hill: Nogun di



# KEEPING CULTURE STRONG

## NGARINYIN LANGUAGE BOOK OUT NOW

A language book aimed at preserving Ngarinyin language for generations to come will be launched at the 2021 Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation AGM.

Bunda Ngaala-Gu di Wurnan (We are talking about animals and plants) was developed from a week-long language workshop with the Wunggurr Rangers, held at Gibb River community in April 2015.

Sentences, basic greetings, useful phrases and words for animals and plants were written down and the audio recorded from Ngarinyin speakers Pansy Nulgit, A. Jilbididj (deceased) and Lucy Ward.

As the book grew, more Ngarinyin content was added,

including terminology on bush medicine and Ngarinyin water concepts.

The language book is important because these days only old

people speak Ngarinyin well.

The hope is that younger people will use the Ngarinyin they have learnt from this book to better understand Ngarinyin country and keep the language alive.



## WURLA PROJECT

**Supporting language and culture continues to be a focus for Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation.**

Working with Linguist Tom Saunders, Wilinggin is supporting a project to record and preserve the Wurla language.

Audio recordings of Wurla will be undertaken with speakers both on Wurla country and in town, with the aim of documenting vocabulary, sentences, stories of country, places and myths.

The documented materials will be shared in a range of accessible ways that allow people to listen to, practice and reproduce words and phrases increasing their knowledge of Wurla.





## THE FROBENIUS COLLECTION

**The Frobenius Collection is an extremely important record of Ngarinyin life from the 1930s.**

The Collection documents an expedition of two anthropologists and two artists, who travelled from Germany to the Kimberley to learn about Indigenous rock art.

From May to December 1938, they recorded field notes, took photographs, painted large-scale replicas of rock art sites and portraits of Kimberley Aboriginal people, and acquired a range of cultural items.

Now, more than 80 years later, a project has begun to work with Traditional Owners to understand these materials, as well as digitise and translate field

notebooks currently held in the Frobenius Institute in Germany.

Wilinggin is working with the University of Western Australia (UWA) to utilise the information contained in the Collection to identify important cultural sites so that they can be better looked after.

In 2021, we conducted a rock art survey across a significant area of Wilinggin country, including Drysdale River Station. The survey was conducted in collaboration with Kim Doohan, Joh Bornman and Martin Porr from UWA, utilising information from the Frobenius Collection.

Our aim is to continue to work in partnership with academic institutions to ensure Traditional Owners are the drivers of the decisions being made about the Frobenius Collection, and to work towards eventually returning these important materials home.





The 2020-21 Operations Report  
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