



2021-22 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:** Annette Ruzicka*

***PHOTOGRAPHY:** Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation gratefully acknowledges the photography of Annette Ruzicka used throughout this report. All additional photos are courtesy of WAC staff and partners.*





MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Welcome to the 2021/22 Wilinggin Operations Report. It has been a wonderful year for the Corporation as we built on last year's successes and continue to produce great outcomes.

Since Wilinggin began, we have worked to form strong relationships with other organisations, particularly around land management. 2021/22 has been a year for sharing knowledge, and for Wilinggin people it has been an opportunity to lead from the front.

After many years of working on fire management and carbon projects across Wilinggin Country, we are excited to announce that we will have two dedicated fire managers in both the east and west Kimberley, based in Wyndham and Derby. This development will serve our ranger teams well.

It has also been a great year for building skills and Wilinggin is very pleased at just how much experience our female rangers, in particular, were able to gain. New ranger quarters are due to be built for the Nyaliga Rangers which will further assist in protecting our environment and heritage.

Significantly, we have negotiated the future of El Questro station which will have a long term impact on our community and on conservation initiatives.

2021/22 also saw a renewed focus on building bushcraft skills and strengthening our cultural knowledge, with our efforts recognised in national media.

In addition to this, we have been supporting Wilinggin members and linguists to preserve our important languages. Our staff have continued to work with academics from both Australia and Germany on the Frobenius Project mentioned in last year's report and we look forward to identifying more cultural sites next year as new research unfolds.

As Wilinggin continues to expand, it will open up further opportunities for our younger people. I am looking forward to next year, as we work together to achieve our goals.

Arnold Sahanna
Chairperson, Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation



2021/22 has been a year for sharing knowledge and for Wilinggin people it has been an opportunity to lead from the front.



WUNGGURR RANGERS: A COMMITMENT TO TRAINING PAYS OFF

Building capacity within the Wunggurr Rangers team over the past three years has led to a depth of knowledge that has been put to good use in the field.

“Most of our rangers have been here at least one year, and some have been here three or four,” Ranger Coordinator Jacob Charters said. “As a result, a focus has been on encouraging individual rangers to specialise in particular areas. For example, to focus on fire management, or acquiring a truck or grader licence if this is where their interest lies.”

Jacob noted that this has led to an investment in accredited training, such as first aid, aerial incendiary techniques and weed management, as well as skill building such as concreting, welding, construction and project planning.

“It has been great to see the rangers take ownership of the construction. Their skills in welding and concreting in particular have really improved throughout the building process,” Jacob explained.

Jacob added that one clear focus has been pest management, with Wunggurr Rangers looking into new ways to eradicate significantly destructive species such as pigs.

Wunggurr Rangers have actively supported further bushcraft training this year (see page 15) and were able to take part in important cultural events, as well as facilitating school incursions with students in Derby.

“We keep seeing progress each month,” Jacob said. “We are looking forward to building on the skills learned this year.”

**ENCOURAGING INDIVIDUAL RANGERS
TO SPECIALISE IN AREAS THAT INTEREST THEM**



IMAGE: ANNETTE RUTICKA



IMAGE: ANNETTE RUTICKA



RANGER COORDINATOR CEMENTS HIS ROLE

The Nyaliga Rangers have grown significantly this year, with much of this due to the presence of a local coordinator, Arnold Sahanna.

Under Arnold’s leadership, the Nyaliga Rangers have taken the lead in burning management. This culminated in organising a fire planning meeting with neighbours Ellenbrae, El Questro, Kachana and Kija.

Arnold said that the collaboration allowed all groups to view different plans and see how different teams approach fire management.

“The collaborative approach we used this year was very successful and set us up for the season,” he said.

Throughout the year, the Nyaliga Rangers gained further accreditations in firefighting and fire management. Arnold hopes that these new skills will encourage volunteers to support the emergency services in Wyndham and so give back to the local community.

In a significant development, Wilinggin is supporting a Ranger Cadet program at Wyndham District High School. Over the coming year, six students will accompany the Nyaliga Rangers and see how they work.

“This program will show these students how good it is to be a ranger, to be out on Country and looking after Country,” Arnold explained.

Arnold said that the key aims for his team over the coming year are to keep building capacity and encouraging young Wilinggin women to work in land management.



Accredited firefighting & management skills ... giving back to the local community



Encouraging women working in land management





THE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH WE USED THIS YEAR WAS VERY SUCCESSFUL AND SET US UP FOR THE SEASON





GIRLS TO THE FRONT: WILINGGIN WOMEN RANGERS TAKE THE LEAD

In a year affected by coronavirus, uncertainty and employment issues, Wilinggin has been committed to supporting women rangers as they craft a space for themselves in our organisation.

With the approval of Wilinggin’s Healthy Country Committee, a number of new recruits have joined us over the past twelve months. Five of these – Travina Martin, Cessa Bani, Risharni Macale, Raelarni Charles and Neala Maru – have been at the forefront of Women ranger work this year.

Healthy Country Project Officer, Rachel Treacy, has been working closely with Wilinggin’s women rangers, and said that Wilinggin has made it a priority to ensure they have the opportunity to step up.

“Some of our women had not secured full time employment before they took on their current roles,” she said. “They have shown that they are committed to turning up and have embraced what a versatile and exciting job it is to be a ranger. The sense of pride this has instilled in and around Wilinggin is really special.”

Rachel said that there was a range of training completed throughout the year, including first aid and four-wheel drive training. Seven women completed Incendiary Machine Operator (IMO) training and three – Cessa Bani, Raelarni Charles and Neala Maru – went on to complete ten hours in the air during fire season.

The highlight of the last twelve months was a collaboration with Dambimangari’s women rangers, who joined Wilinggin and AWC on a joint camera deployment, thermal scoping and camera trapping trip to Pantijan Valley, Bachsten and Edkins Range, camping out of Charnley Station for two weeks.

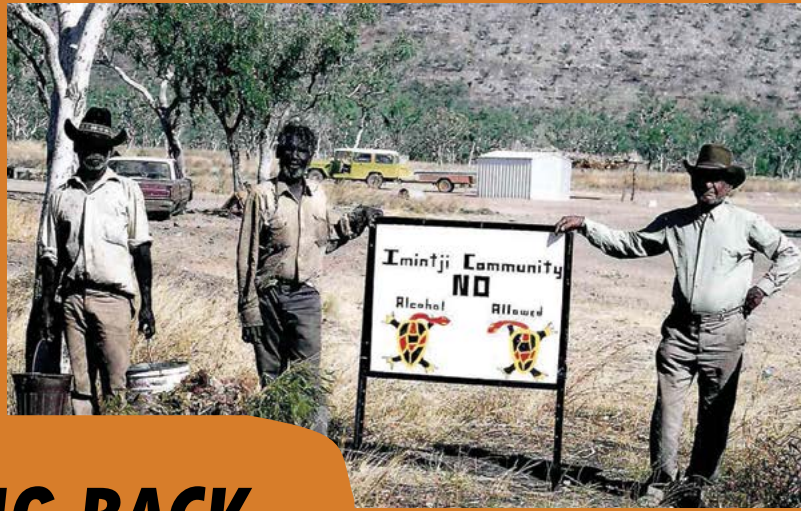
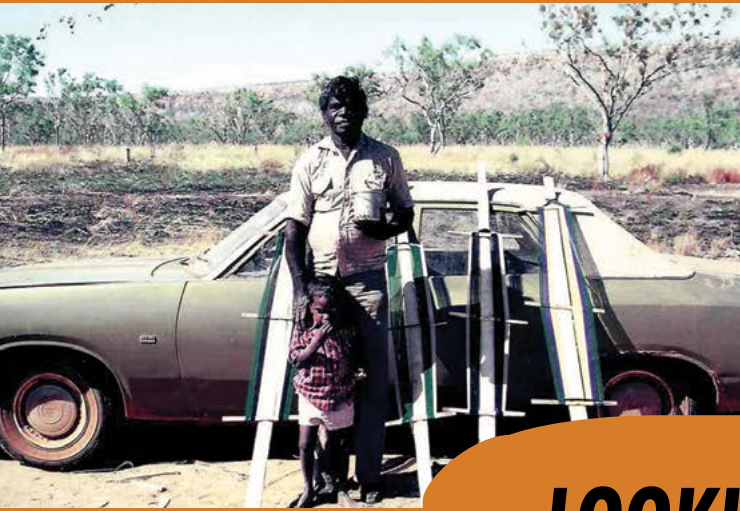
“The collaboration between Wilinggin, Dambi and AWC, was such a great success that it will hopefully set a precedent to be undertaken again in the future years,” Rachel said.

Wilinggin is looking forward to establishing a full time Women’s Ranger Team in the coming year.

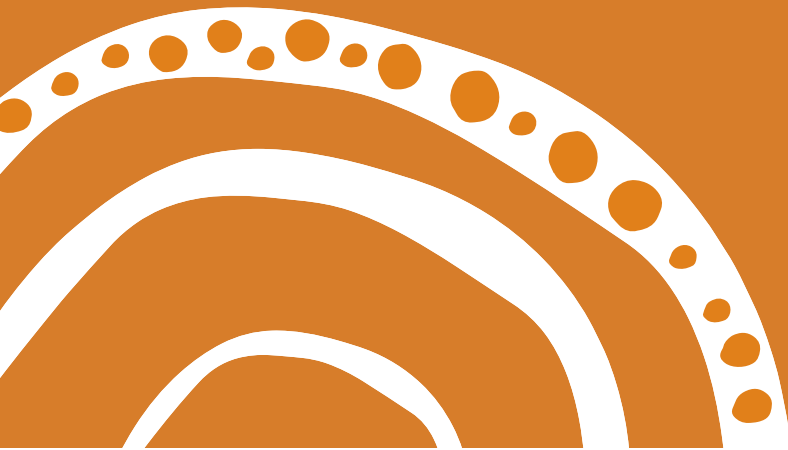


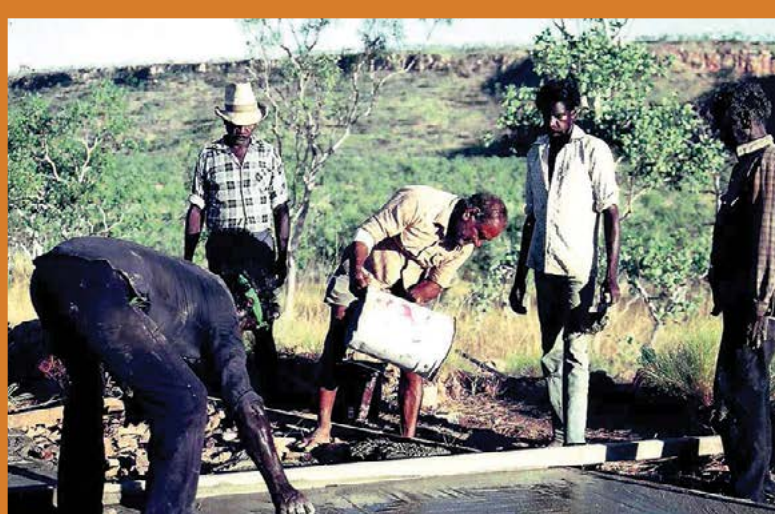
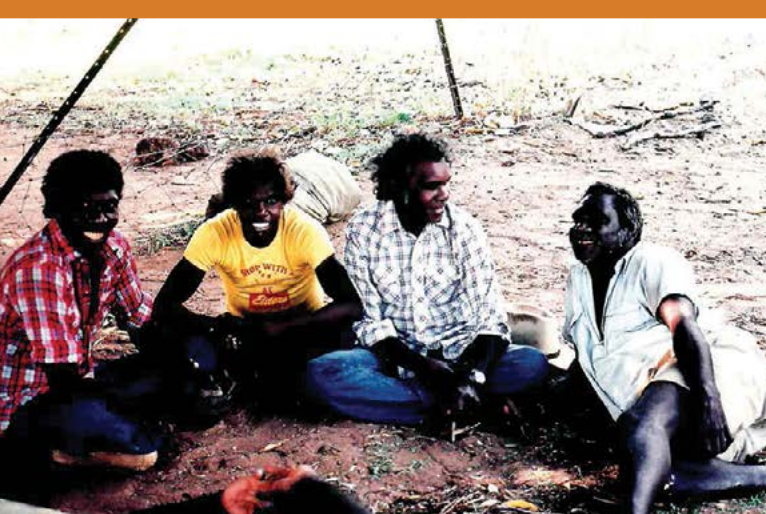
WILINGGIN IS LOOKING FORWARD TO ESTABLISHING A FULL TIME WOMEN'S RANGER TEAM IN THE COMING YEAR





LOOKING BACK





These images document the work and life of the Ngarinyin people at Mt Hart and surrounds in the 1980s.

These photographs and others are in the possession of Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation and are an important record of history and culture. If you are interested in finding out more, please get in contact with Wilinggin staff at: admin@wilinggin.com.au

EAST MEETS WEST AS FIRE MANAGEMENT SPREADS ACROSS WILINGGIN COUNTRY

After forming one of Australia’s most successful fire and carbon projects, Wilinggin is excited to announce that it will expand its fire operations by forming two new roles across Ngarinyin Country – Fire Manager West, to be based in Derby, and Fire Manager East, to be based in Wyndham.

Longstanding Fire and Biodiversity Officer, Luke Russ, will take on the role of Fire Manager West. He said that although this year has been challenging in the fire and carbon space with coronavirus and personal leave taking rangers out of key positions, there have been opportunities for the women rangers to lead from the front.

“It has been very inspiring seeing how keen and involved the women rangers have been learning about carbon and biodiversity,” Luke noted.

Next year, a priority will be given to drone training operations. It is hoped that Wilinggin people will take up the opportunity to be upskilled to Operator Certification level. With such a qualification, they will not only be able to supervise drone operations within the community – assisting with

fire management, conservation and pastoral management – but they will also be able train members of other organisations under a commercial arrangement.

“We are looking forward to developing skilled navigators who are able to work on their own Country,” Luke said.

These skill sets have been especially significant in a year beset by staffing shortages and coronavirus restrictions. Wilinggin had previously been relying on the skills of staff at its partner Australian Wildlife Conservancy as the fire program has developed, but this year Wilinggin was able to take the lead and actually help develop the skills of AWC personnel.

“It’s been a difficult few years of learning, but I feel Wilinggin is set to move on with greater independence,” he reflected.

Luke is also looking into possible collaborations with organisations in the United States who work with First Nations groups in land management.



“WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO DEVELOPING SKILLED NAVIGATORS WHO ARE ABLE TO WORK ON THEIR OWN COUNTRY,” LUKE RUSS

IMAGE: ANNETTE RUZICKA

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RECOGNITION FOR WILINGGIN'S ROLE IN THE CARBON SPACE

IMAGE: ANNETTE RUZICKA

In last year's report, we noted that Wilinggin was named by the Federal Government as delivering a significant milestone: the 100 millionth Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCUs) under the Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF).

The ERF invests in projects that reduce carbon emissions around Australia. Projects earn ACCUs that can then be sold to generate income.

Wilinggin uses traditional knowledge and modern scientific practices to conduct early dry season burns. This releases fewer carbon emissions than unmanaged wildfires occurring at the end of the dry season. Wilinggin was congratulated for its initiative by the then Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, Angus Taylor.

"The Wilinggin Fire Project is supported and led by the local Indigenous community, and one which returns substantial environmental and economic benefits," Mr Taylor said. "These ACCUs have also generated an additional revenue stream for the traditional owners, helping to fund education and other community benefits."



**WILINGGIN WAS CONGRATULATED FOR ITS
INITIATIVE BY THE THEN MINISTER FOR ENERGY
AND EMISSIONS REDUCTION, ANGUS TAYLOR**



MODERN TECHNOLOGIES PRESERVING ANCIENT & ENDURING LANGUAGES

This year has seen an ongoing commitment by Wilinggin to invest in the preservation of language.

As detailed in last year's report, the language book *Bunda Ngaala-Gu di Wurangu Wurlawa ngadi* ('We are talking about animals and trees') was published in November 2021.

This book is a collection of valuable knowledge which was provided by Ngarinyin elders and language speakers, present and past. It contains useful Ngarinyin phrases and words for all aspects of Country.

The other half of this exciting project has been the development of a Ngarinyin language application (or "app") which can be downloaded onto a mobile phone.

Linguist, Thomas Saunders, who spearheaded this project, said that the app and book complement each other but can also be used separately.

"The app is more accessible for young people and can also be used away from internet sources, such as when out bush," he explained. "What

this means is that rangers are able to use the app to draw on cultural knowledge while practising alongside modern scientific methods."



Concurrently, another language project has been developed over the past year, which has been funded by Wilinggin and First Languages Australia. This has been a commitment to record and preserve the Wurla language.

Thomas has been out at Karunjie with Donald Campbell, a speaker of the Wurla language, accompanied by Gordon Smith Junior, who has served as a cultural advisor. While the project finished on June 1st, Thomas is pleased to announce that another grant has been secured.

"WE ARE PLANNING MORE RECORDING AND DISTRIBUTION OF THIS CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE TO THE NGARINYIN PEOPLE," THOMAS SAUNDERS

STRENGTHENING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE THROUGH A COMMITMENT TO PRESERVATION

Wilinggin has worked hard this year to preserve and maintain traditional bushcraft practices while supporting international research into the artworks of Ngarinyin County.

We were thrilled that our efforts were documented in *Australian Geographic* with a photo essay in its January 2022 edition featuring many of our members out on Country crafting boomerangs, clap sticks and coolamons. A book detailing this traditional knowledge is due to be published later this year.

In addition, the important Frobenius studies continued in 2021/22. Wilinggin supports this project which involves collating and digitising materials collected during from an anthropological field trip to the north Kimberley in 1938.

This year we had the pleasure of welcoming researchers from the Frobenius Institute in Germany who are working closely on the project. We shared our traditional knowledge to complement their research.

We are also very pleased to introduce Mari Lanza into the new role of Cultural Information Manager. Mari has a wealth of knowledge in this area, having recently completed a PhD on the rock art of Balangarra Country. Mari's work at Wilinggin will focus on documentation and digitisation of cultural elements of Ngarinyin Country.



ALL IMAGES: ANNETTE RUZICKA



NURTURING PARTNERSHIPS OLD & NEW

Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation has maintained its strong relationships with stakeholders across Ngarinyin Country while forming significant new alliances that will serve the corporation well into the future.

Wilinggin worked closely with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy and the Department of Biodiversity and Conservation throughout this year on conservation and fire and carbon projects.

WAC has also developed a strong relationship with Discovery Parks, who are the new owners of El Questro. You can read more about this on page 17. Peter Saunders, Wilinggin’s Business Development Manager, said that the partnerships WAC has developed over recent years have strengthened.

“Partnerships empower Wilinggin with capabilities that we may not have ‘in house’ and also enable Wilinggin people to share their own skillsets and traditional knowledges with partners,” he said.

“These partnerships are mutually beneficial and help to deliver outcomes across Wilinggin Country,” he added.

“PARTNERSHIPS EMPOWER WILINGGIN... TO SHARE THEIR OWN SKILLSETS AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGES WITH PARTNERS,” PETER SAUNDERS



FROM CATTLE TO CONSERVATION

Wilinggin is excited to announce that it has entered into a partnership to increase conservation activities on El Questro.

During negotiations on the future management of the El Questro pastoral lease, Wilinggin worked out an agreement with Discovery Parks, who recently purchased the property.

The agreement sees the surrender of the pastoral lease next year with Wilinggin gaining a reserve and conditional freehold over El Questro, while Discovery Parks will maintain exclusive tourism rights over the area.

Wilinggin people will now have the chance to further develop skillsets in tourism and conservation sectors, with Chairperson of Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation, Arnold Sahanna, praising the outcome.

“It has all the hallmarks of a great partnership. Having the two entities tied like this will help to look after the area, while also providing future investment and employment opportunities,” Arnold said.



Wilinggin has entered into a partnership to increase conservation activities on El Questro.

WHAT WILINGGIN DOES FOR ITS MEMBERS

While much of the focus of WAC is around land management and cultural activities, Wilinggin also provided significant community support to its members in 2021/22.

This year saw the commencement of a bus service that will transport members from Derby all the way through to Gibb River and return, stopping in communities along the way. This has been established with the help of Derby Bus Service.

Wilinggin has maintained its logistical and financial support for funerals within the community and has also helped in members reaching educational outcomes.

Wilinggin was pleased to support the Strong Women's Business Gathering at Birdwood Downs station in June. Many female members of Wilinggin were present at the event. They were able to network and learn new skillsets, which will enhance Wilinggin's broader strategy to provide ongoing opportunities for women in the community.

Wilinggin was also central in helping support the annual Mowanjum Festival, with members taking lead roles in the cultural performance. Wilinggin has been proud to support ceremonial works among the Wandjina cultural groups and will continue to help organise and facilitate logistics into the future.



ALL PAGE 18-19 IMAGES: ANNETTE RUZICKA



LOOKING AHEAD

After a year of significant successes across the organisation, Wilinggin is looking forward to what 2022/23 will bring.

For the first time, Wilinggin will become responsible for all burning on Wilinggin Country. Part of this exciting land management expansion will involve providing fire services to our neighbours across the region.

As noted in “From Cattle to Conservation” (page 17), a significant chapter in the history of El Questro will be written with the change of tenure and creation of the reserve.

Through our commitment to the Frobenius studies, teams will be created to support rangers to clear sites of bush so that members will have better access. This will also ensure that more art sites are identified.

And by doing all this, WAC will help Wilinggin members access and know Country: not only through the preservation of historical stories but through contemporary, ongoing engagement.





The 2021-22 Operations Report
was produced by Wilinggin
Aboriginal Corporation
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