



“Caring for country is so important to us and we will be teaching the next generation what it takes to care for country using a mix of modern and traditional ways”

~ Franklyn Nannup - Bindjareb Noongar Elder and Chair of Winjan Aboriginal Corporation ~
Winjan Bindjareb Boodja Rangers Program Strategic Plan 2022-30



CASE STUDY 51 2020-2023



REGIONAL GOALS

- P People
- B Biophysical
- K Knowledge

Walking with Winjan and Healing Bilya

The Winjan Aboriginal Corporation and Peel-Harvey Catchment Council Inc. (PHCC) have been walking together for many years to care for Bindjareb Boodja and to develop and grow Winjan’s Bindjareb Boodja Rangers program. Providing training and employment opportunities for Bindjareb people to steward and protect their country is a key strategic direction of the Winjan Aboriginal Corporation. The Rangers program was developed to empower Bindjareb people to continue cultural responsibility to look after country, share cultural knowledge and provide

training, up-skilling and employment opportunities. Through the “Healing Bilya-Restoring the Murray and Serpentine Rivers” project, PHCC has supported Noongar cultural knowledge sharing and the Rangers to participate in a range of on-ground restoration activities within the corridors of the Bilya Maadjit (Murray River) and Waangaamaap Bilya (Serpentine River). Training in weed control, revegetation, vegetation and fauna monitoring, maintenance and seed collection has been provided.

FUNDING PROGRAM

Alcoa Foundation

PHCC PROGRAM

Science and Waterways

PHCC PROJECT

Healing Bilya – Restoring the Murray and Serpentine Rivers

FUNDING

Alcoa Foundation

USD \$600,000

PROJECT MANAGERS

Johanne Garvey, Jesse Rowley, Renée Barton

STEERING COMMITTEE

Bob Pond, Marilyn Gray, Rob Summers, Mark Cugley

STAKEHOLDERS

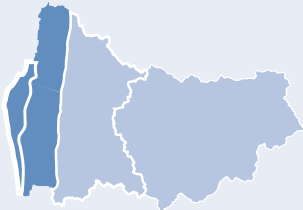
Winjan Aboriginal Corporation, Winjan Bindjareb Boodja Rangers

BENEFICIARIES

Private and public land managers, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Western Australian Planning Commission, Shire of Murray, Bindjareb Community

REGIONAL COVERAGE

Ramsar Wetlands
Coastal Plain



LOCATION

The Bilya Maadjit (Murray River) is the largest river in the Bindjareb Djilba (Peel-Harvey Estuary) Catchment with its sub-catchment encompassing approximately 8,300 km². The Waangaamaap Bilya (Serpentine River) has a smaller sub-catchment area of 664 km2. Both rivers (along with the Harvey River) drain directly into the Bindjareb Djilba (Peel-Harvey Estuary), part of the Peel-Yalgorup Wetlands recognised under the Ramsar Convention as a wetland of international importance (Ramsar Site 482). All waterways are sacred to Noongar creation beliefs. For over 50,000 years the Bindjareb language group of the Noongar Nation have dwelt within the Peel-Yalgorup System, tended the land and been sustained by its natural resources. Their ongoing spiritual, cultural and intellectual connections to the land are strong and provide opportunities to enhance management of the Ramsar Site.

KEY DELIVERABLES

PHCC has partnered with Winjan, land managers, local contractors and training providers to deliver a diverse range of activities that align with Winjan’s Ranger program objectives. Over the three years of the Healing Bilya Project, the Winjan Rangers have spent valuable time on Country along the Bilya Maadjit (Murray River) and Waangaamaap Bilya (Serpentine River) and surrounding Boodja. 11 Rangers have further developed their cultural connections and knowledge, contributed to restoring the ecological of various sites and developed skills and experience that will enhance their employment opportunities into the future.

Through the Healing Bilya Project the following activities have been delivered;

- 10 consultations and cultural knowledge sharing activities with Bindjareb Elders, leaders and community.
- 12 activities engaging and training 11 Rangers in restoration works including weed control, revegetation, vegetation and fauna monitoring, maintenance and seed collection.

“I have found the Rangers Program beneficial as it has given a lot back to me with my culture and a belonging to country.”

~ Andrea Kelly, Ranger ~

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Healing Bilya through restoration activities

PHCC engaged experienced practitioner Grant Pronk of GP Forestry to provide training and mentoring in the areas of revegetation preparation and planting, weed identification and control and watering of revegetation seedlings over the dry summer months post planting. With the guidance of Grant, the Winjan Bindjareb Rangers have participated in:

- Weed control and riparian revegetation (500 seedlings planted) at the Pinjarra Massace Site.
- Weed Control (50 ha) focused on Cotton Bush in the upper reaches of the Bilya Maadjit (Murray River)
- Watering (5 sessions) of seedlings planted at the Karu Bilya Project Site adjacent to Waangaamaap Bilya (Serpentine River)

- Weed Control (26.5 ha) focused on Arum Lily, Watsonia and Fountain Grass in the Waangaamaap Bilya (Serpentine River) corridor.

Seeds of Knowledge

Building on the success of a seed collection training program, developed by PHCC’s Coordinator of Land Conservation Dr Corrine Duncan for the “World for Woodlands – Banksia Project” (Australian Government National Landcare Program), the Rangers participated a second Seed Collection program in October of 2023 focused on riparian species. The Rangers spent two days in the wetland areas of the Serpentine River with the specialist team from Nuts about Natives, sharing knowledge with each other and developing skills in plant identification (local and weed species) and local endemic seed collection for propagation.

The Fish tell the story (or Fish Science)

The Bindjareb Djilba Estuary is an important commercial and recreational fishery and the Bindjareb Community have shared their concerns with PHCC about the health of the estuary, rivers and decline in fish species they used to catch. PHCC has engaged with Murdoch University’s Harry Butler Institute, Fisheries and Aquaculture team for a number of years to undertake Fish Community Index Sampling to establish baseline and monitor changes in fish community composition. A survey was undertaken in 2021 and repeated in 2023.

For the 2023 sampling program, the Winjan Bindjareb Boodja Rangers came together with Murdoch University’s Harry Butler Institute, Fisheries and Aquaculture team for the first time to learn from each other whilst doing Fish Community Index Sampling in the Waangaamaap Bilya (Serpentine River), Bilya Maadjit (Murray River) and Bindjareb Djilba (Peel-Harvey Estuary). Ranger Graham Ugles-Eads joined in four night time sampling sessions.

It is important that a regular fish monitoring program (e.g. the Fish Community Index) is continued to assess waterway health into the future. PHCC plans to bring local Aboriginal Elders/community members together for Yarning Circle of cultural and fishing experience knowledge exchange to progress plans to develop up a Noongar led monitoring program with a focus on the valued species that can complement and add further value to the Fish Community Index sampling and understanding of rivers fish population and health.

PROJECT OUTCOME

The Winjan Bindjareb Boodja Rangers program shows that aboriginal-led natural resource management provides long-term economic and environmental benefits and strengthens Bindjareb people’s cultural connection to Country. The partnership between Winjan and PHCC demonstrates the importance of building strong and mutually beneficial relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations to achieve common goals of caring for country.

