



Right Plant, Right Way

Report 2021

A FIRST NATIONS LED REVIEW OF
REVEGETATION IN VICTORIA

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Report Purpose

This report summarises the key findings from a review of the revegetation sector in Victoria. It includes opportunities to respond to challenges and direction for the future of the sector to heal Country.

A desired outcome of this review is to reduce barriers for First Nations people in Victoria to practice self-determination in revegetation and healing Country. This means the ability to access opportunities that suit their obligations, Country and economies. The report is intended as a living document which can continue to be developed by First Nations as they shape 'The Right Way'.

The coolamon is featured throughout this report. One of its traditional uses is to hold seeds. The coolamon holds seeds which are the beginnings of new life. It is intended that the seeds gathered and planted through this report will grow to bring new vision, momentum, and collaboration to healing Country and revegetation across Victoria.

We encourage readers of the review to be challenged by the content of the review and to look for ways and approaches that empower First Nations to take a leadership role in healing their Country.



Version Control

| Version | Editor | Description | Date |
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| 0.1 | Djandak | Initial draft for First Nations review | 31 May 2021 |
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This report presents findings that have been established through a comprehensive review of the revegetation sector in Victoria including public submissions and a *The Right Plant, Right Way* workshops held in April 2021 which brought together representatives from different First Nations groups, along with other members of the revegetation sector, to explore a range of key themes that emerged in the review. The workshop contained important discussion, brainstorming, ideas and negotiation on areas around First Nations participation in the revegetation sector.



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Future Statements

This report has been created as a living document. In creating this document there has been an endeavour to include a wide range of First Nations interests and voices. Participants in the review include First Nations people and representatives from Aboriginal organisations, including from Dja Dja Wurrung, Wattj Wattj, Yorta Yorta, Wadawurrung, Taungurung, First People of the Millewa Mallee, Barengi Gadjin Land Council and Tyntynder Homestead. We acknowledge, however, that there are First Nations people and groups across Victoria who were not able to participate at this point in time and who would like to in the future. We would like to leave the door open for these emerging participants to contribute.

Providing a space for empowering First Nations (including First Nations enterprises) is front and centre to the approach taken in this report. Too often, reports similar to this one, are constructed based on once-off engagement. This can result in the exclusion of the voices of First Nations people who may not have had the time, resources or capacity to participate in the initial review process.

We have explicitly left space within in this report for First Nations statements to come. We invite First Nations individuals and groups in Victoria to present a summary of their position, goals and objectives in healing Country and revegetation, at which point this document can be revised to reflect this.

We encourage First Nations peoples to provide a statement at any time which we will include at the beginning of the report.

Statement

This page has intentionally been left blank to allow space for future statements.

Wadawurrung Statement

For thousands of years the traditional lands of the Wadawurrung consisted of vibrant and well-balanced ecosystems. From freshwater systems in the ranges and volcanic plains, to the saltwater and coastal areas of coast there were certain requirements and seasonal timing needed to manage certain parts of Country. Country is our supermarket, hardware store, clothing store and pharmacy. Murnang (Yam Daisy), which is similar to sweet potato eaten today was once plentiful and nutritious. It can be eaten raw but usually cooked in baskets. Women would use digging sticks to remove the tubers and turn the soil. Many plants were used for fibres to make fish nets that were woven by women. Many plants are also used as medicines like the Black Wattle used for treating illness and wounds. The Grass Trees have many uses, the leaves are good for thatching, the flower spike used to make fire drills for starting fire and the sap/resin is used as glue for tools. They are Wiyn (Fire) tree from which fire is made.

Fire and cultural burning in Wadawurrung Country was and continues to be important for renewing growth, food for animals and people. There is evidence within the landscape that Wadawurrung were farming and managing Country, well before Europeans and sheep took over the lands. The Victorian Volcanic Plains are one of the most threatened ecological communities with less than 5% left as it has turned into housing estates. Victorian Volcanic Grasslands was comprised by much of Wadawurrung Country. The central plains were covered in vast open areas of grasslands with small patches of woodlands.

The Wadawurrung continue their obligations to care for Country through traditional methods including applying fire to the landscape, revegetation of indigenous species and weed control. Healing Country can be strenuous due to previous land management, displacement of First Nations communities, land fragmentation, mining, and water extraction. For First Nations to take the lead in the revegetation sector will encompass great value to managing Country the right way, with many organisations coming together to learn and adapt to healing Country the right way for a better future.

Taungurung Statement

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

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

The Taungurung Nation has occupied a large part of central Victoria for countless generations. Our Country encompasses the area between the upper reaches of the Goulburn River and its tributaries north of the Dividing Range. From the Campaspe River to Kilmore in the West, eastwards to Bright, from Benalla in the north, down to the top of the Great Dividing Range.

Taungurung People know our Country through mountains, rivers and lakes. Despite the devastating impacts of colonisation, the forced removal of our People from our Country and the theft and destruction of much of our cultural knowledge and systems, our relationship with our Country remains strong.

Taungurung People commenced implementation of our Recognition and Settlement Agreement with the State Government of Victoria in late 2020. This is a platform from which, and through our Nation's organisation, the Taungurung Land and Waters Council, we now look to build a strong, healthy, and empowered future, for our People and our Country.

Our work is now focused on the healing of knowledge, knowledge practises and Country. Restoring cultural practises and relationships with Country, understanding and developing techniques for restoring health to our Country in the modern context and providing meaningful employment and economic opportunities for Taungurung individuals and our community are all part of this work.

Revegetation will be one important component of restoring health to our Country. Understanding, building, and improving the processes and capacity of revegetation on Taungurung Country, including ensuring that this work is culturally driven – undertaken in the right way and by the right people – is key. Taungurung will continue to build strong relationships with others working in the different aspects of revegetation, including seed growing and harvesting, propagation, and planting, to further this work.

As were our ancestors prior to European arrival, Taungurung People must be central to this work.

We look forward to working with our fellow First Nations and others as we build the structures for large-scale, effective revegetation as one important component of the healing of our Country.

Dja Dja Wurrung Statement

As one of the initial First Nations groups in Victoria to accomplish an outcome through the Traditional Owner Settlement Act (TOSA), the Dja Dja Wurrung peoples now share a dual role with other First Nations groups to achieve Self Determination.

In delivering this report, *'Right Plant, Right Way'*, it is ensured that all First Nations groups have their rights met to reach their aspirations for Country and Water.

In doing this collectively we request that this report will lead the way to outcomes that listen to our collective voices and fulfil obligations under United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

For many millennia, Djaara people followed the lore of taking care of Djandak (Country) but since colonization Dja Dja Wurrung Djandak and its people the Djaara had experienced massive degradation and changes to Djandak and Djaara people. Early settlement farming practices introduced foreign plant species, stock overgrazing and large scale land mass clearing of native plant and tree species. The impacts of gold mining added to this destruction, people came from all over the world to work Djandak into the now known gold mining fields; creating what we call 'upside down country'. The impacts of the goldmining era left behind toxic soils in the landscape and a trail of muddy sludge in Djandak's rivers and waterways. The Spirit of Bunjil's Creation is a mess! Djaara endeavour to maintain Djandak and pursue opportunities to heal the land and water for all future generations. With the impacts of Climate Change and current environmental and ecosystem challenges Djaara see this report as a way forward to building relationships with other First Nations people to take care of Country.

To respectfully build and allow for the rapid growth of the revegetation sector, which is an essential contemporary component of healing Djandak, Dja Dja Wurrung is ready and willing to increase the scale of interventions we undertake. We have the capability and are developing large scale seed production areas, undertaking large scale revegetation works and are working closely with our neighbours to secure large volumes of tubestock. We are waiting on government to invest to enable us to heal our Country. Whilst we wait the trauma of the past continues to damage Djandak, the time for waiting has passed the time is now for action. We hope this report is an enabler for us to heal our Country.

Department of Environment Water Land and Planning Statement

Revegetation is an essential management action for restoring habitat and increasing connectivity for biodiversity in Victoria. In addition to providing vital connections across the landscape to improve movement and mixing of populations, revegetation provides the opportunity for forest recovery and carbon sequestration. Revegetation of riparian areas, wetlands and estuaries improves habitat connection and stores carbon, while also improving water quality and the health of waterways. The presence of flora and healthy landscapes promotes spiritual healing of Country and a connection to nature in people's daily lives.

Changing climate conditions pose a new challenge to revegetation. Local species or populations may struggle to adapt or recover from the disturbance imposed by increased fire regimes. New provenancing standards are being prescribed to ensure the long-term resilience of vegetation. However, revegetation practitioners have raised concerns about the ability to source adequate volumes of climate adjusted seed.

Victorian Government investments in revegetation for biodiversity benefits is guided by Protecting Victoria's Environment: Biodiversity 2037 (Biodiversity 2037). Revegetation is a key tool to achieving the vision of a natural environment which is healthy and cared for, diverse and resilient. Biodiversity 2037 identifies a statewide target of 200,000 hectares of revegetation in priority areas for connectivity between habitats. The Victorian Government has also committed to a target of net zero emissions by 2050. The findings and recommendations of this review will be valuable in improving the sector's capacity to work towards these targets over the next 16 years. The Victorian Government has already committed \$76.98 million for DELWP to deliver revegetation and carbon storage through BushBank, a program to support private landowners and public land managers to restore and protect natural habitats. Part of this commitment includes opportunities for Traditional Owners to identify priority values and locations for restoration, pursue training and capacity building opportunities, investigate new emissions-reduction methodologies for cultural practices, and seek out natural-resource related economic opportunities.


DELWP anticipates greater levels of revegetation across the state, fuelled by a growing market for carbon sequestration and increased funding from diverse investors to improve environmental outcomes. Growth in demand for seed and revegetation services requires a sector which is ready to respond.

The revegetation services sector is multifaceted; with volunteer, not-for-profit and for-profit participants acting concurrently and at times with competing goals, different scales and interests. This poses a difficulty in coordination, application of quality processes in alignment with cultural and scientific standards, and monitoring to uphold standards and regulation.

Revegetation is great opportunity to partner with Aboriginal Victorians. Participation in the seed, nursery and revegetation sector can provide economic and employment prospects, as

well as the opportunity to connect, plan for, and heal Country. Much of these on-ground works may be guided by cultural values, including restoring culturally significant species and important food and fibre plants.

DELWP supports the Right Plant, Right Way review, as it builds cultural authority and self-determination as we work with First Nations people as partners in the revegetation sector.

A photograph of a person's hand holding a shallow, oval-shaped wooden bowl filled with small, light-brown, feathery seeds. The person is wearing a red corded sleeve. In the background, there is a large, dense clump of Murnong grass with long, thin green blades and a thick, dark brown base. The setting is a forest with many trees and a ground covered in fallen leaves and twigs.

*Murnong seed in
Woowookarung (Place
of Plenty) Regional Park.
Photo taken on
Wadawurrung Country.
Photo credit: Chase
Aghan.*

1. Right Plant, Right Way: A Summary

This review of the revegetation sector captures ideas and opportunities to restore revegetation and cultural practices across Victoria. The review engages with First Nations groups and government, business, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), community groups and individuals that contribute to revegetation in Victoria. Through this review actions to support a growing, culturally responsible, and effective sector are identified.

First Nations groups and individuals are central to this review and to setting the path for revegetation in Victoria. A First Nations approach is one that is done in the *right way*, with the *right plants*, the *right people* and in the *right seasons* at the *right time*. The approach taken in this of this report ensures that the aspirations, knowledge, and cultural priorities of First Nations are at the forefront of healing Country.

The State Government of Victoria have engaged Dja Dja Wurrung (through Djandak Enterprises) to conduct this review. This is an outcome of the ongoing relationship between the State and Dja Dja Wurrung established through the *Recognition and Settlement Agreement* (RSA 2013). While Dja Dja Wurrung can only speak for djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country); one of the key principles of *Right Plant, Right Way* is self-determination and the prioritisation of First Nations people, values and goals within the sector.

1.1 Approach

A three-day workshop with First Nations groups from around Victoria was held in April 2021. In the workshop, barriers, goals and pathways to ensure that First Nations have a culturally meaningful and influential role in the revegetation sector were explored. Participants in the workshop were First Nations people and representatives from Aboriginal organisations, including from Dja Dja Wurrung, Wattj Wattj, Yorta Yorta, Wadawurrung, Taungurung, First People of the Millewa Mallee, Barengi Gadjin Land Council and Tyntynder Homestead. Members and contributors of the wider revegetation sector also participated for one day of the workshop; working alongside First Nations people to identify positive pathways to meet revegetation targets and the commitments of the State, while looking to align the sector with the aspirations of First Nations people.

Submissions were sought and received from a wide range of participants and interested parties within the revegetation sector, including from the nursery & seed industry, government agencies, Landcare and community groups, environmental NGOs, project developers, researchers, academics and interested community members. Within submissions, key themes, barriers, and solutions were identified to nurture an effective, growing and culturally inclusive revegetation sector.



1.2 Summary of Key Challenges Identified in the Review

The following summarises structural barriers and challenges that were identified through the Review processes:

- ❖ There is ongoing colonisation, dispossession and displacement of First Nations from Country and barriers to practicing culture.
- ❖ Imbalanced decision making power and western natural resource management approaches exclude cultural and spiritual priorities, preventing the healing of Country - both land and waterways.
- ❖ Narrow, unreliable and short-term investment in revegetation and reliance on a small and largely volunteer delivery model undermines the capacity of First Nations and the wider sector to plan, coordinate and deliver large scale, effective revegetation programs.
- ❖ There is loss of culturally important species and food sources from Country, and many revegetation projects fail to incorporate a wide diversity of species, and ecological communities.
- ❖ A lack of Land and water ownership constrains First Nations' ability to access funding programs to heal Country, while land availability generally is a barrier to increasing revegetation.
- ❖ The native seed sector in Victoria is small, under-resourced and dependent on increasingly fragmented wild harvest, without intervention and investment it will not meet future native seed supply needs (both in terms of quantity and quality).
- ❖ Climate change exacerbates revegetation and healing Country challenges, impacting biodiversity and the availability of culturally important species. Damaging bushfires and increased climate extremes create variable flowering, and a decline of seed impacts the scale and success rates of plant establishment.



1.3 Right Way Principles

The Right Way principles have been developed through discussions with First Nations people from different language groups across Victoria. They outline direction and vision for firmly grounding First Nations' goals within the revegetation sector.

| | |
|---|---|
| Principle 1 First Nations have leadership in the revegetation sector | First Nations people can achieve self-determination in the revegetation sector through healing Country and at the same time achieve cultural governance by setting priorities and influencing the revegetation sector. |
| Principle 2 A cultural approach to healing Country is taken. | Country is healed through a cultural approach which is holistic, spiritual and balanced. It goes beyond straight lines and square boxes. It takes in species of plant, place and cultural practices. |
| Principle 3 Younger generations are supported to heal Country. | Youth are empowered to learn about their culture and to heal Country. They are given education, opportunities and resources and have elders and mentors to support them. |
| Principle 4 Traditional Ecological Knowledge is protected, respected, and used with permission. | The Traditional Ecological Knowledge of First Nations people is listened to. Intellectual Property is protected and respected. First Nations people are remunerated appropriately for their knowledge and other contributions. |
| Principle 5 Partnerships with First Nations are based on respect and trust. | Partnerships that are created between First Nations and other members of the revegetation sector have significant impact in healing Country. Partnerships with First Nations are respectful, based on trust and create mutual benefits. |
| Principle 6 First Nations work together to heal Country. | First Nations collaborate and support each other so none are left behind; sharing leadership, knowledge and resources through collaboration, partnerships, networking and trading. |
| Principle 7 First Nations have economic opportunities in revegetation and Healing Country. | First Nations people have secure and meaningful jobs in healing Country. There are economic opportunities and secure funding to develop businesses in revegetation. The market encourages cultural priorities in revegetation. |



1.4 The “Message Stick”

The revegetation sector in Victoria is currently best described as a small, under resourced, largely uncoordinated (at a regional scale) and volunteer dependant sector. It is expected to rapidly upscale delivery to meet government targets and expectations, however, it lacks the basic supply of seed to meet demand. Given the current state of the sector, the goals and objectives of First Nations and the moral and legal obligations of the State to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal people **there is a significant opportunity to modernise, redesign and reconceptualise the sector to meet future demand in a way that enables First Nations leadership.**

To achieve this, the review has identified that there are several key governance and coordination fundamentals that must be put into place:

- ❖ The creation and resourcing of a First Nations *Right Plant, Right Way* Group, a First Nations Secretariat, and the resourcing of different First Nations groups in the gathering and sharing of knowledge, resources, opportunities and to achieve their goals in revegetation;
- ❖ Coordination of the sector through the establishment, resourcing and facilitation of regional restoration planning and knowledge sharing. This should be led by First Nations and DELWP, bringing together government, NGOs, community and private sector practitioners for regular (suggested bi-annual) forums at regional scales relevant to First Nations (ie RAP areas as well as separate forums for non-RAP areas of North West, North East and Southern);
- ❖ Immediate government investment in partnership with First Nations to establish diverse (>10 species), large scale (>10 hectares) Seed Production Areas to ensure seed supply to enable the revegetation sector to meet the commitments of the State set in *Biodiversity 2037* and the *Victorian Climate Change Strategy*.

To enable the sector to build capacity there is a need for collaboration with First Nations through a *Right Plant, Right Way* Group to:

- ❖ Ensure that funding meaningfully contributes towards cultural healing priorities (both species and landscapes), by embedding the Right Way principles in the revegetation sector through conditions of grants and funding programs, as well as networks and standards. This can be done through development of new funding programs with cultural priorities, or adaptation of existing programs such as BushBank;
- ❖ Develop a collective branding and certification approach for First Nation seed and plant production;
- ❖ Incorporate realistic revegetation project planning and delivery times, which acknowledge cultural timelines as well as other constraints including climate change impacts on year-to-year seed collection and planting viability;



- ❖ Mobilise *Recognition and Settlement Agreements* (particularly the Natural Resource Agreements) and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) to support the development of First Nations seed collection/production capacity.

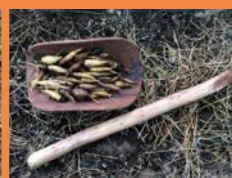
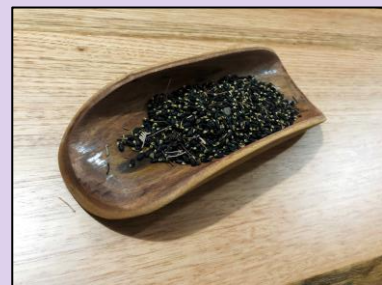
Other key actions to develop the seed supply and demand to support revegetation include:

- ❖ Investigate options for direct investment to bolster the quality, quantity and diversity of seed available, where possible, from First Nation seed suppliers/partners and incorporating them into co-designed training packages;
- ❖ Directly forward purchase seed or payment of a seed “availability charge”;
- ❖ Consider incorporating conditions into revegetation funding agreements to enable future seed harvesting from revegetated areas;
- ❖ Develop communication networks to increase access to private land for seed collection, within existing regulatory frameworks;
- ❖ Support a centralised seed supply database;
- ❖ Review and reform current seed licensing system.

Box 1: Coolamons from Spirit Bird Creations

A coolomon is a traditional tool, used for traditional farming as well as ceremonial and other uses. It is featured throughout this report. At the workshop held as part of the review process, each participant received a coolamon. Workshop participants were asked that on their return home they fill the coolamons with seeds to be planted on their Country. The images in this report are taken by workshop participants and are of coolamons containing different seeds from their area.

The coolamons were crafted by Aboriginal youth through an enterprise called Spirit Bird Creations. The enterprise is based in Swan Hill and is run by Arron Nicholls who is a Watti, Dja Dja Wurrung and Wiradjuri man. Going into the bush to make these cultural artefacts is something which Spirit Bird Creations initiates to empower youth and connect them with their culture and Country.



2. Context

2.1 Revegetation

What is widely known today as “revegetation” is seen by First Nations as a relatively modern and western response to significant environmental decline. This decline is viewed as a direct result of colonisation and the dispossession of First Nations from their land. Healing Country is felt as an obligation and priority of First Nations people and “revegetation” is seen as a contemporary practice that can support this deeper vision. When done in the right way, it can heal Country, restoring cultural practices, healing community, returning Spirits to the land and reversing the damage and ongoing harm caused by colonisation.

Revegetation, in a contemporary sense, is a practical and essential step to restore biodiverse habitat and to create ecological resilience. Returning plants into the landscape also captures carbon and enhances water quality, while supporting social and environmental wellbeing. It is acknowledged that, while this review has been defined to focus on “revegetation,” there is a strong alignment with “ecological restoration.” Ecological restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed. It is an approach that recognises that functioning ecosystems require a diversity of fauna, fungi and refuge.

2.2 First Nations Policy Context

First Nations people are involved in the revegetation sector in diverse ways, with some owning large-scale nurseries, seedbanks, and other enterprises in revegetation. First Nations people have cultural knowledge about which plants should be planted and where, and strong aspirations to heal Country. However, the involvement of First Nations people across the revegetation sector has been ad hoc, and many First Nations groups do not have the financial resources, funding, equipment or access to essential land and water.

Some First Nations groups have Country Plans, which include goals and strategies to restore culturally important species, to build capacity, to practice and share cultural and spiritual activities and to restore and heal Country and tackle environmental devastation. Engaging in a review of revegetation to build the capacity of the sector to heal Country in a culturally appropriate way, is in line with the vision set out in many First Nations’ Country Plans.

First Nations people across Victoria are at different stages in their journeys in having native title and rights to land and water recognised. Some, such as Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung, have undergone decades of struggle to establish *Recognition and Settlement Agreements* with the State Government of Victoria. These processes are often long, protracted, and divisive. There are cases where individuals who start the native title and settlement



processes, pass before agreements are finalised. Where agreements are in place, they are not necessarily fully mobilised by the State and there continues to be an ongoing struggle to ensure minimum compliance by government with these agreements.

In terms of government and wider sector obligations to engage and consult First Nations in governance of the revegetation sector, we can look to the *United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP, 2007)*. Australia has been a signatory of *UNDRIP* since 2009. *UNDRIP* binds signatory states to consult with and obtain “free, prior, and informed consent of indigenous communities” (FPIC), before any decision can be made that effects their land. Revegetation conducted in a way that is in line with the principles of FPIC requires consultation and engagement with First Nations people along every step of the way.

The obligation to uphold Aboriginal rights to land, water and culture have been enshrined in the Victorian context in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) and *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic). Within these Acts it is legislated that the distinct cultural rights of Aboriginal persons must not be denied, and that their distinctive spiritual, cultural and economic relationship with land, water and other resources must be protected.

The State Government of Victoria and the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP) also have several key policies and agreements that necessitate engaging with First Nations people in environmental governance. In 2020, DELWP released [*Pupangarli Marnmarnepu “Owning Our Future” Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy 2020-2025*](#), which expresses DELWP’s commitment to ensuring and supporting Aboriginal Self-Determination. The *Self-Determination Reform Strategy* includes a commitment to help remove the barriers of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians to fulfil their obligations and exercise their right to self-determination. It states that “Traditional Owners have the right to make choices that best reflect them on their journey to self-determination and self-governance – and that right must be respected”.

A First Nations led review of the revegetation sector puts into practice the guiding principles of the [*Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy*](#) which was facilitated by the [*Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations \(FVTOC\)*](#) and will be released in 2021. This strategy seeks to enable Traditional Owners to lead the management and planning of cultural landscapes according to cultural objectives. It initiates a framework for dialogue with Traditional Owners and government that brings government and other land managers to the practices and management approaches of Traditional Owners, rather than the other way around.

Another policy development which has emerged from a governance focus on indigenous self-determination, is the development of [*Native Food and Botanicals Strategy*](#) by FVTOC. In a similar vein to this report, it aims is to develop an indigenous-led sector. It puts in place the processes to develop an “authentic, vibrant and growing” native foods and botanicals industry “that respects and recognises the inherent interests and rights of Traditional Owners



– and enables and strengthens the social, cultural and economic connections with the lands and resources” (*Native Foods and Botanical Strategy* 2021, p.6).

These policies and agreements have enabled and empowered First Nations in partnership with the State to continue to develop and mature the policy suite to support First Nations priorities. It is within this context the State Government of Victoria have engaged a First Nations led review of the revegetation sector. For First Nations participants of this review, healing Country is a cultural obligation, and they want to play a leadership role in the revegetation sector. There is an expectation that in meeting the State’s obligations under the previously mentioned agreements that all First Nations’ obligations and rights are respected, recognised, listened to and embedded within the sector.

2.3 Wider Revegetation Context

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021 – 2030) is an aspirational rallying call for the protection and revival of ecosystems all around the world, for the benefit of people and nature. It aims to halt the degradation of ecosystems and restore them to achieve global goals. With healthy ecosystems it is possible to enhance people’s livelihoods, counteract climate change, and stop the collapse of biodiversity.

Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia; about half of original vegetation cover has been cleared as a direct result of colonisation, including 80% of the original cover on private land. While it is widely recognised that all remnant vegetation must be protected and enhanced as a critical priority; revegetation also provides numerous, significant benefits. These include restoring ecosystem function and landscape productivity, providing habitat and corridors for native species and securing and strengthening threatened species populations. Despite widening appreciation of the need to reverse degradation and repair culturally and ecologically significant landscapes, revegetation remains relatively small-scale across Victoria, with projects typically less than 10 hectares and few larger multi-year projects approaching approximately 100 hectares.

Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), local councils, Landcare networks and community groups provide a critical role in smaller, community driven and locally significant projects (for example, Victoria’s *Catchment Management Authorities Actions and Achievements Report* claimed 3,508 hectares were replanted). Government investment in revegetation is complimented by some philanthropic investment and environmental markets, such as for carbon sequestration. Larger scale (typically less than 10 hectares) revegetation and restoration in Victoria has traditionally been underpinned by Commonwealth funding programs. This has been seen most recently through the *20 Million Trees* program which, over its 5-year life, supported a dozen larger scale projects in Victoria and was managed by delivery partners Greening Australia and CO2 Australia. It also supported a further 30 smaller projects across both public and private land.



To reverse the decline of biodiversity in Victoria, the State Government's [Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037](#) ("Bio2037") has enshrined a target of 200,000 hectares of revegetation that provides linkages in priority areas between habitats (as shown in the Strategic Management Prospects tool), and a net improvement in the outlook across all species by 2037. Bio2037 also recognises that the inclusion of and empowerment of Aboriginal peoples, values and traditional ecological knowledge is a non-negotiable within biodiversity planning and management and has put in place processes to improve Aboriginal capacity to access economic development through participation in biodiversity projects such as revegetation.

To achieve this 200,000-hectare target in priority areas alone, without accounting for wider landscape revegetation and restoration activities, an average annual revegetation "output" of 12,500 hectares per year to 2037 is required. This represents a significant increase in on-ground works (refer to Figure 1), necessitating orderly planning and extensive industry scaling over the coming years. This conservative scaling assumes that all revegetation undertaken is in priority areas, however it is currently understood that less than 5% of revegetation efforts target the Bio2037 priority areas and even less is undertaken in a way that includes First Nations people and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

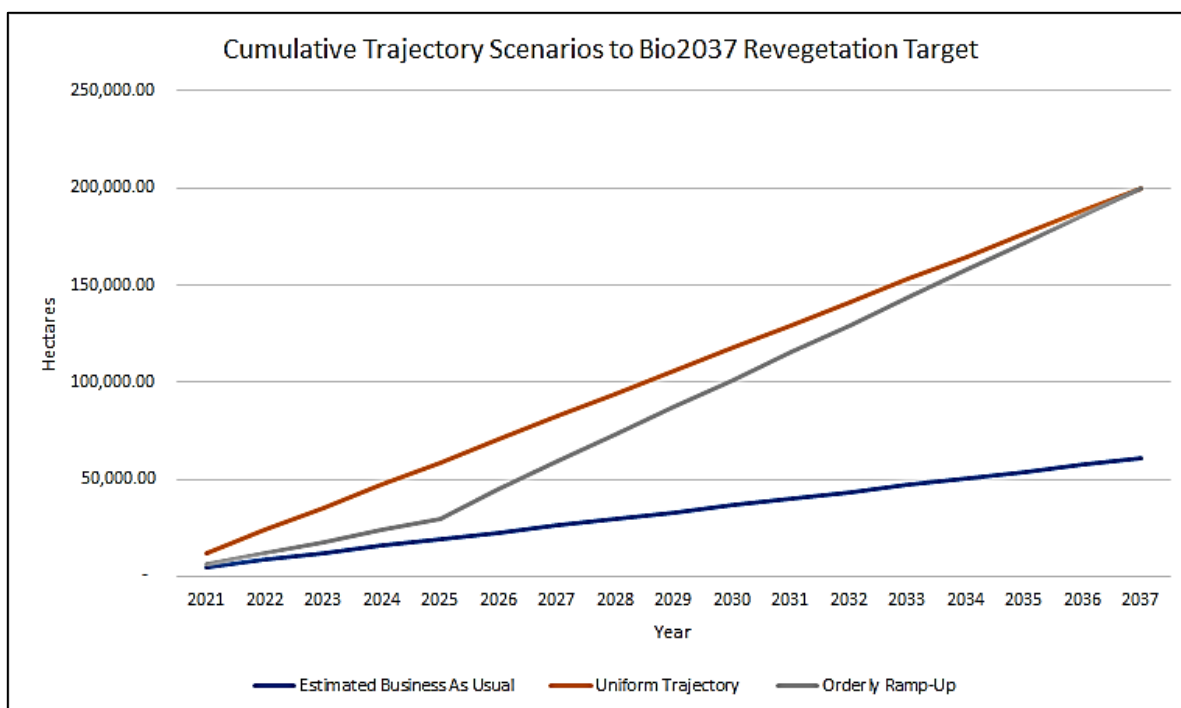


Figure 1: Cumulative trajectory scenarios to reach Bio2037 revegetation targets.

Bio2037 prioritises the establishment of secure, sustained funding from a variety of sources, utilising government resources effectively while leveraging non-government investment. However, funding alone is not sufficient. Significant improvement in sector capacity requires all parties to collaborate, rather than compete and work together to enable increased revegetation activity and to deliver better biodiversity outcomes. An exponential increase in



capacity, planning and delivery is required in order to entertain the possibility of meeting these mandated targets and to halt ecosystem decline.

Except for a handful of larger NGOs and private enterprises, much of the wider revegetation sector is underpinned by a strong local, volunteer and/or public good (not-for-profit) ethos. Regional and community seed collectors, seed banks and nursery services are highly valued and hold considerable knowledge, but many in the sector are aging (notably amongst seed collectors) and declining demand for revegetation services hinders on-going skill development. Submissions identified that projects often report difficulties in obtaining appropriate seed in the diversity and quantities required. This was generally attributed to insufficient time allowances to collect seed and/or insufficient ongoing demand to support seedbanks holding a large and diversified seed stock, particularly for non-woody species. Climate change is exacerbating many of the challenges which the revegetation sector faces with changing rainfall patterns and temperature affecting flowering patterns, seed availability, seed quality and more broadly germination and plant survival.

This is the context in which this review has been conducted. It speaks to, and creates alignment between, several audiences First Nations, government and the wider revegetation sector. The review is consistent with government policy that prioritises First Nations' rights to self-determination, while seeking to understand and provide recommendations to address some of the sector's most pressing challenges.



Native Murray Pine tree seeds. Photo taken on Watti Watti Tungi (Watti Watti Country). Photo credit: Jodie Kinsmore.



3. Scope

Right Plant, Right Way seeks to:

- ❖ Identify First Nations aspirations, economic goals, current capacity and areas for further support or development.
- ❖ Identify approaches to deliver First Nations goals within the revegetation sector.
- ❖ Understand which groups, businesses and organisations contribute towards the Victorian revegetation sector, their primary motivations and their capability and capacity.
- ❖ Understand the challenges of meeting revegetation needs of a changing climate, with increased fire frequency, ecosystem decline and species loss.
- ❖ Assess the potential for new and emerging markets to support an expanding and biodiverse revegetation sector.
- ❖ Explore the application of government objectives and policy within the sector including provenancing guidelines and climate ready revegetation.
- ❖ Identify approaches to sustainably deliver more biodiverse revegetation across the state.



Billy Button seed. Photo taken on Dja Dja Wurrung Country (Djandak). Photo credit Nathan Wong.



4. Approach

The review has been underpinned by existing literature, reports, and policy, combined with targeted consultation with a diverse range of revegetation sector participants and First Nations people. The consultation process included submissions, a workshop and ongoing discussions with sector participants and First Nations people (see Appendix 2).

4.1 Wider Sector Submissions

An invitation to submit to the review was directly distributed to more than 70 different individuals and groups across the revegetation sector in Victoria who were also encouraged to share the invitation through their networks. Feedback was sought on several key areas including capacity and capability, barriers and challenges, and opportunities to evolve the revegetation sector (see Appendix 1 for a copy of the invitation).

A total of 31 written submissions were received from across the revegetation sector, including submissions from the nursery & seed industry, government agencies, Landcare and community groups, environmental NGOs, project developers, researchers, academics and interested individuals (see Appendix 2).

Sector-wide themes and challenges were captured from these submissions and have been included throughout this report. These were also shared in the *Right Plant, Right Way* workshops for discussion with First Nations people to understand and explore ideas within the sector.

4.2 First Nations Workshop

The workshop was held on Dja Dja Wurrung Country (djandak). It was organised and coordinated by Djaara people and supported by DELWP. First Nations representatives from across Victoria were invited, along with some members of the wider revegetation sector and government. All attendees of the workshop were welcomed to Country by Djaara.

The aims of the workshop included:

- 1) To identify First Nations goals and current capacity to contribute to the revegetation sector;
- 2) To identify areas which require further support for First Nations and approaches to delivering First Nations goals within the revegetation sector.
- 3) To explore opportunities for collaboration and partnerships between First Nations and with the wider sector and government;
- 4) To workshop solutions to build capacity and embed First Nations leadership and participation across the sector.



4.3 Discussions

Discussions were had with members of the revegetation sector (some who were unable to provide an initial submission), ensuring that the review captured a broad and representative range of stakeholders. In addition, there were continued discussions and consultation with First Nations people on the findings of the workshop and submissions, and the direction of the report to ensure that the review process was culturally appropriate.



Right Plant, Right Way workshop April 2021. Photo taken on djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country). Photo credit: Freya James





"You people in the room... I hope you're listening to my peoples' voices."

There's not a lot of good news stories when it comes to this revegetation stuff – it can be disheartening.

Ancestral knowledge is embedded in us to a cellular level....I know my Country, I'm part of it, I live there, I'm out there everyday, but how many black fullahs have been involved in these businesses people are talking about? How many are being shown how to collect seed? Probably none....It's just been the way it is.

It's our identity – we've lost enough of it, we've lost enough of who we are."

Revegetation is important for healing Country, but also for us & our identity, our language, our Culture."

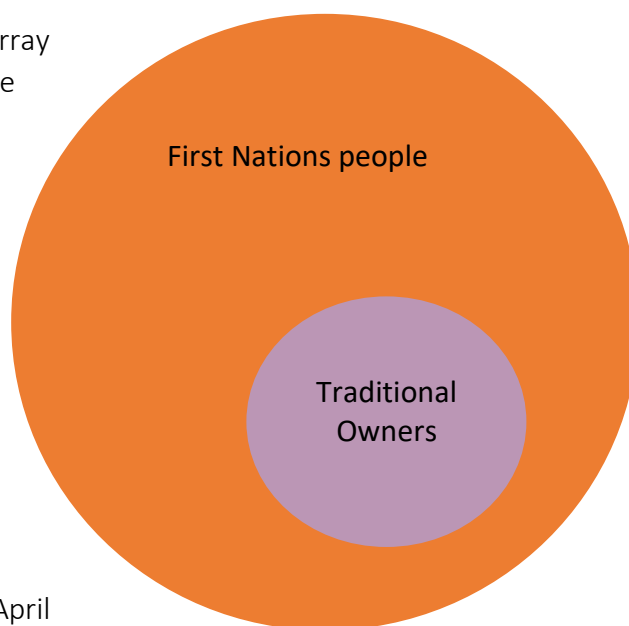
**YORTA YORTA WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANT**

Photo credit Amos Atkinson

5. Listening to First Nations

To address issues and provide tailored recommendations that will create positive changes within the revegetation sector, the first step is to listen, beginning with First Nations people. Their voices continue to be excluded from decisions - continuing the process of colonisation and dispossession of them from their Country by denying their obligations and rights to heal their Country.

The review has sought to include a diverse array of First Nations voices in leading change in the revegetation sector. It should be noted that formally recognised Traditional Owners make up just some of the indigenous population in Victoria. Others refer to themselves and their relationship to Country as Traditional Custodians, First Nations or First Custodians. **This review uses the title “First Nations” to refer to this diverse collective of people who have a continuing unbroken connection to land that spans from the beginning of time.**



In the workshop held as part of this review (April 2021), representatives from Dja Dja Wurrung, Watti Watti, Yorta Yorta, Wadawurrung, Taungurung, First People of the Millewa Mallee, Barengi Gadjin Land Council and Tyntynder Homestead spoke for their Country. It should be noted that these are just some of the many nations, cultural groups, language groups and representative groups of First Nations peoples in Victoria. Other First Nations groups in Victoria were invited to attend and contribute and were unable to participate at this time. However, the report has been created as a living document and the invitation to participate in opportunities and evolve the report will remain open.

The attendees of the workshop communicated that they are not able to speak for all First Nations people, nor all people within their language group, however they have communicated obligations, goals, challenges, and solutions from their perspective as First Nations people or First Nations representatives.

A desired outcome of this review is to reduce barriers for more First Nations people to practice self-determination; access opportunities in revegetation that suit their obligations, Country and economies; and empower them to lead revegetation in the right way.



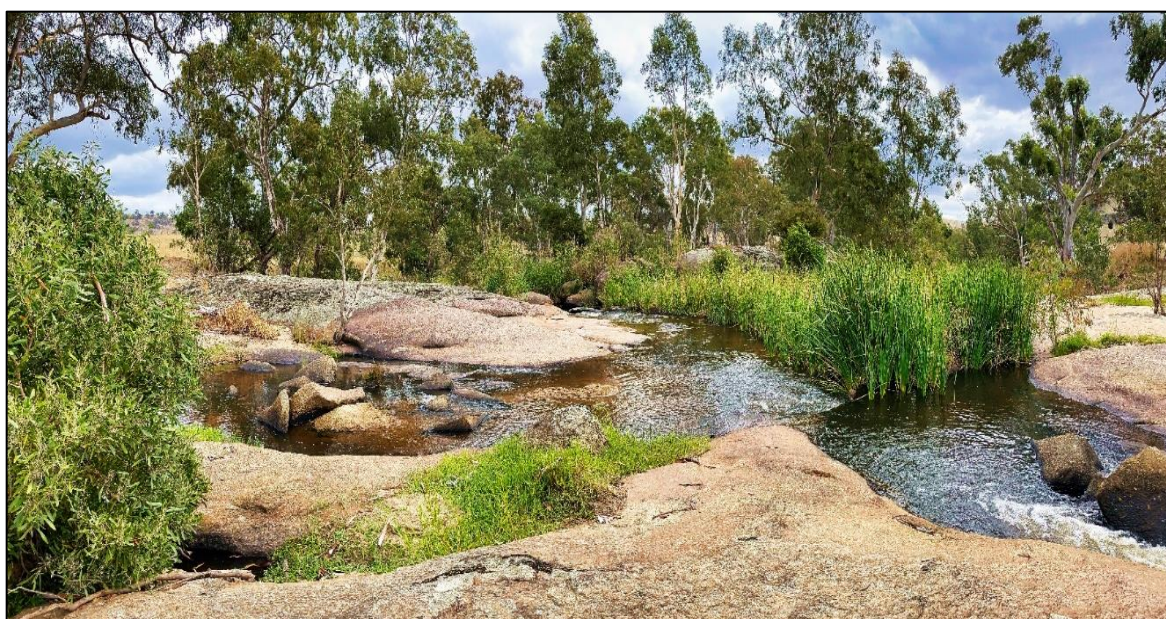
The following section outlines First Nations goals within the revegetation sector which were communicated at the *Right Plant, Right Way* workshops. Goals amongst First Nations individuals and groups are diverse, and it is not possible to generalise about the goals of all First Nations people in Victoria, instead this report attempts to capture some key themes.

5.1 A First Nations Perspective on Revegetation

First Nations people have been living sustainably and harmoniously on Country for millennia by following Lore and cultural obligations to care for Country. They are the first conservationists, gardeners and custodians and have developed knowledge systems which are in sync with the land, plants, and animals. They have enabled species to live through massive changes in climate, river systems, volcanic eruptions and shifts in ecosystems all whilst nurturing a productive and prosperous environment. Through modification and management of the land in a way that nurtures all beings that live on Country, species have been deliberately cultivated by First Nations for cultural and spiritual reasons, for food and fibre, and for medicine.

A First Nations approach to revegetation is one that goes beyond planting in straight lines. The environment is known as connected, and the way that plants, systems, and cycles interact is observed and understood. All elements of Country are included, below and above ground, the sea, waterways, mountains, grasslands and sky. Within this picture, humans are not viewed as separate, but deeply integrated and in relationship with the non-human.

First Nations have an ongoing unbroken cultural and spiritual connection to the land, stories are passed along that connect them to their ancestors and the land. Within the context of First Nations ancient and ongoing relationship with Country, the traumatic environmental vandalism which has accompanied colonisation has occurred in a relatively short-time period.



Hughes Creek near Avenel, Taungurung Country. Photo credit: Taungurung Land and Waters Council.



However, the damage caused has been significant, and is felt culturally, emotionally, spiritually, and economically. This trauma still manifests itself in younger generations, who continue to suffer disadvantage because of the disrespect of Country by the ongoing colonisation of Country.

Declining biodiversity, loss of important species and climate change are accelerating ecosystem collapse. These are the impacts of colonial settlement, land management and industrial processes. Damage inflicted through years of dispossession, colonisation, and environmental exploitation has resulted in landscape scale environmental degradation and fragmentation across Victoria. First Nations people are not responsible for this damage. These ongoing impacts of colonisation on Country continue the trauma of First Nations people, who are deeply connected to land and water and will not be well again until Country is healed.

5.2 Healing and Caring for Country

While First Nations peoples have different Country, languages, traditions, and cultures; many share the vision of rejuvenating and caring Country and water for future generations. First Nations people have managed Country sustainably for thousands of years and have witnessed many changes in climate. Their knowledge is an essential contribution to supporting altered ecosystems back to health and creating resilience to climate change. First Nations participants of the workshop communicated strong determination and desire to heal and care for Country.

Many parts of Victoria are suffering from imbalance in water and fire. Harsh inappropriate and often destructive and counter productive fire regimes which prioritise fuel reduction over ecological health, accompanied by drought, unsustainable water extraction and reallocation of water resources to thirsty exotic crops at the expense of traditionally used plants and landscapes and water pollution are all wreaking havoc for native species and their ecosystems. It is the goal of First Nations people to restore balance. Some, want to restore the balance with a cultural approach to fire; to bring the spirit of fire back to the land and help to restore native ecosystems. Others, aspire to heal waterways and wetlands through revegetation, by introducing native plants to improve water quality and support the whole system and communities that depend on water.

"If you want to know what it is that we can bring, it's a spiritual approach to healing Country. You might be able to restore physical health, but it won't be alive until its spiritually healthy and that's something we can do".

**DJA DJA WURRUNG
WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANT**



Beyond restoring the physical health of Country, a First Nations approach heals the spirit in the land. Healing Country is healing everything from soil to spirit. It is healing land, water, and fire. It is about listening, observing, and understanding what Country needs and working from there.

5.3 Cultural governance, leadership, and decision-making

First Nations people must be empowered to set priorities, contribute to planning, policy and management of Country. The First Nations participants of the *Right Plant, Right Way* workshop communicated that they want to make decisions for their Country and ensure cultural priorities are protected in revegetation. It was voiced that they have been here all along and thousands of years of observation provides significant knowledge and insight on how to heal Country. It was demanded that it is time that land managers, government, and the revegetation sector listens and follows their lead.

Part of exercising self-determination for First Nations people is to be able to set priorities, such as specific culturally important species and the processes by which they should be planted. However, contemporary and western land management approaches often exclude the spiritual and the cultural, and First Nations people rarely have a seat at the table in deciding what happens on Country and in revegetation.

Some businesses, not-for-profit organisations and others who seek to consult and include First Nations people in revegetation projects have voiced that it can be challenging to consult with First Nations, as it is difficult to find who is the right person for Country, and to resource their time. However, First Nations people feel that this has not been prioritised sufficiently, or else consultation and inclusion would occur. First Nations participants at the workshop knew who spoke for each Country and how to find someone who could speak for place.

"Continuing "as is" isn't an option."

**DJA DJA
WURRUNG
WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANT**

5.4 Respect, Protect and Appropriate Use of Traditional Ecological Knowledge

First Nations people want Traditional Ecological Knowledge to be preserved, protected, and used with permission in the right way. There is opportunity for Traditional Ecological Knowledge and modern science to collaboratively tackle revegetation projects amongst climate change, harsh fire regimes and species extinction. First Nations people communicate that for this to happen it is essential that Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights are protected and respected. The right people for the right Country must be engaged in



projects to restore the land and it is essential that they are given credit and receive benefits for their knowledge and contributions.

At present, while there is some protection for intangible cultural heritage in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic) however, it is felt by First Nations people that Australian law does not provide adequate protection to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property for First Nations people. Their knowledge covers a broad range of areas that relate to land, cultural heritage, and cultural property and the knowledge can be community owned. This does not fit easily in with the western intellectual property rights systems which creates individual property rights which are designed for commercial use.

Sector participants need to work directly with the relevant First Nations groups and individuals, if they are engaging with Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. [Terri Janke and Company](#) provide resources and key principles for engaging with Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property which can be utilised, however, ultimately, a dialogue must be maintained with the appropriate First Nations group whose knowledge and Country is being engaged with.

One of the recommendations made in the [Native Food and Botanicals Strategy](#) is that the State should “Develop robust Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protection and reduce barriers for Traditional Owner knowledge leadership”. When this is enabled, a strong legal imperative to protect First Nations intellectual property will be established across the sector. In the meantime, First Nations people communicate that they want the moral imperative to respect First Nations Intellectual property to be followed, and that unless given permission, “any attempt to research, identify, map, commercialise or patent native plants and botanicals is an act of biopiracy” (*Native Food and Botanicals Strategy 2021*, p.16). If people do not follow the clear moral imperative, then trust from First Nations will be impacted the social and cultural licence of actors in the revegetation sector diminished.

5.5 Opportunities, Employment, and Funding for First Nations in Revegetation

Employment, funding, and opportunities for First Nations in the revegetation sector were identified as important by workshop participants. Their vision of a successful revegetation sector was one that has opportunities for First Nations to heal and care for Country and be

*“I work on Country, I m
Country, I live on
Country. I feel no
difference between me
and what is under my
feet...”*

*....We don't want to
conquer nature, it's not
separate, we want to
work with it instead of
against it”.*

**YORTA YORTA
WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANT**



economically supported to do so. They want flexible, secure, and diverse employment that allows them to spend time on Country.

First Nations people are already engaged in revegetation in diverse ways around Victoria. There are seedbanks and nurseries established by First Nations people and businesses in cultural land management. Some groups are developing calendars to guide which plants should be planted and when and where. Traditional knowledge of Country, their culture, and their rights to resources are just some of the strengths and competitive advantages that First Nations can bring to the revegetation sector.

First Nations people want jobs in culturally safe businesses and to own their own businesses within the revegetation sector. Some would like to start businesses collecting seed, starting nurseries, and engaging in revegetation projects. Others would like to focus on getting youth out to learn on-Country knowledge.

The consensus amongst workshop participants was that funding should be adapted to what First Nations want, rather than the other way around. First Nations want funding for their endeavours to heal Country and should receive income from the benefits their activities have; the cultural, environmental and community benefits of healing Country. They also want this funding to be long-term and stable to help ensure business and project success.

"It's about getting boots on the ground; this is when the connection to Country and culture will occur. It's interconnected to health, identity, well-being and pride. It's all of these things."

...Some people don't even know they've got it until they get out on Country – it happens so quickly, it's like a spark."

**YORTA YORTA
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT**

5.6 Networking and collaboration between First Nations

Partnerships and collaboration between First Nations peoples can strengthen and empower First Nations capacity to operate within the revegetation sector and to heal Country. Creating the forum to collaborate and share appropriate cultural information and business knowledge will ensure First Nations people can support each other to look after Country.

First Nations participants of the workshop communicated that they want to strengthen the cultural infrastructure and networks that will ensure that trading can occur between different First Nations groups, as has traditionally occurred. Trading of knowledge and seed, introducing new provenances to different Country is important now, more than ever as First Nations respond to land clearance and degradation and the impacts of fire, loss of species and climate change.



Different First Nations groups have varying capacity to access opportunities at present. A coordinated approach was felt as necessary by workshop participants to bring all First Nations groups along and to enable sharing of resources and knowledge between different groups. This includes the sharing of wins and losses that they experience, so that collective learning can occur. It was felt by workshop participants, that the *Right Plant, Right Way* workshop was an example of this collaboration and networking, which built shared leadership capacity.



Right Plant, Right Way workshop April 2021. Photo taken on Djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country). Photo credit: Freya James

5.7 Culturally Safe Partnerships

Some First Nations individuals and groups want to work externally with others and some wish to focus within their own language groups. Workshop participants expressed that the partnerships they have with trusted consultants and businesses, are meaningful and mutually beneficial. Partnerships between First Nations people and other businesses, groups and organisations were identified as an important part of creating a successful revegetation sector.

It was expressed that in partnerships cultural respect must be prioritised in order for partnerships to be productive and meaningful. First Nations people want to work with people who respect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, foster a culturally safe and culturally aware environment, those who can listen to First Nations and have an ability to



understand and respect culturally different perspectives and approaches. The Right Way principles have been developed as part of this report and can help to guide these relationships and help members of the wider revegetation sector understand First Nations priorities. As an outcome of respectful relationships, First Nations people may choose to share knowledge and resources with others, building on the revegetation sector's ability to heal Country the Right Way.

5.8 Access to Land and Water

First Nations people want not just to be able to access and interact with natural resources on Country, but to access their resources and Country to a level that means they can maintain a thriving and living culture. To start nurseries, seed orchards and seed banks, land and water are necessary. Limited legal access to, and ownership of land and water is a barrier that is a direct result of the dispossession of First Nations people.

Land was stolen at the time of invasion through the concept of *terra nullius* which is structurally embedded in land titles and associated legislation. Water has also been taken from First Nations through the establishment of water rights and shares under the National Water Reforms. The fulfilment of First Nations' vision to heal Country and to put the right plants back into the landscape is directly influenced and enabled by access to and ownership of land and water.

"Kulin Nations share creation stories about respecting Country and waterways. Teachings from Bunjil tell of how to respect the lore of the land, water and everything within the landscape..."

...Since invasion and colonisation there have been impacts including the persecution, hunting and extinction of many of Bunjil's creations and the colonisation and disempowerment spirits."

**DJA DJA WURRUNG
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT**

5.9 Cultural Practices and Culturally Important Species

First Nations want the right plants to be in the land, to ensure that culturally important species are present. To say that this is important for them is to understate the level of obligation they feel to have the right plants in the right places. Cultural practice is intrinsically linked to Country. Without food, fibre and medicine available in a quantum required, people and their culture cannot be healthy.



Different First Nations groups have culturally important species that are essential for cultural practices, spiritual use and means for living. Introduced plant species compete against native plants and displace them. Displaced native species and climate change have also reduced the availability of culturally important species and food sources on Country.

A successful revegetation sector consults and supports First Nations leadership and decision-making on what mother plants should be re-introduced into the landscape and where. A growing native food and botanicals industry provides an opportunity to protect and enhance cultural values (tangible and intangible) through integrated management that adopts traditional knowledge and practice, however the rights of its custodians to determine if/how knowledge is shared and used must be maintained and respected.

First Nations people also want respect and protocols to be followed around what is men's business and what is women's business. There are different places, species and traditional practices that are recognised as women's and men's. These protocols and practices are often kept private and can form part of First Nations intangible cultural heritage. First Nations want to be able to pursue cultural lores while acting in the revegetation sector and encourage others to do the same where appropriate.

5.10 Mentoring and Supporting Young People

First Nations people want to support and empower younger generations to practice culture, spend time on Country and for them to receive education and opportunities in revegetation. Traditional Ecological Knowledge must be made available to be passed on to younger generations of First Nations peoples so that they can continue to lead the way in healing Country. First Nations want future generations to grow-up with strong mentorship, observing their Elders healing Country. Children and grandchildren should see culturally valuable plants and animals return to Country and know their stories.

Getting people out on Country can play an important role in overall community well-being, supporting at risk youth and vulnerable members of the community to connect with their Country and culture. Revegetation can be a catalyst to have more youth on country, developing pride, improving home life and overall health, developing knowledge further, building capacity of First Nations groups

"We have to get the youth involved so it becomes part of everyone's lives, get them interested, build up the next group, so that they are already trained and ready to take over. The activity of collecting (seeds) allows connection and sharing. The stuff I learned there (as a kid), I didn't forget."

**FIRST PEOPLE OF THE
MILLEWA MALLEE
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT**



5.11 Summary of Themes Communicated by First Nations

5.11.1 Goals

- ❖ To heal Country, community, and culture;
- ❖ First Nations leadership in revegetation, including cultural governance and decision-making;
- ❖ Cultural priorities embedded in the revegetation sector;
- ❖ Collaboration between Traditional Ecological Knowledge and western scientific knowledge to heal Country, with respect for intellectual property and remuneration for indigenous contribution;
- ❖ Development of youth programs, mentorship and education;
- ❖ Men and women's business and traditional practices respected;
- ❖ Economic opportunity, reliable funding, resources and culturally safe businesses;
- ❖ Collaboration, coordination, and shared leadership amongst First Nations groups;
- ❖ Respectful, collaborative and culturally sensitive partnerships with members of the wider revegetation sector.

5.11.2 Structural barriers to healing Country

- ❖ Ongoing and continuing colonisation, dispossession, displacement from Country, separation from culture;
- ❖ Access to land and water;
- ❖ First Nations rights not being recognised;
- ❖ Western natural resource management approach excluding cultural and spiritual priorities;
- ❖ Limited protection for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property;
- ❖ Access to opportunities, appropriate funding, and partnerships;
- ❖ Unreliable and short-term funding programs;
- ❖ Imbalanced decision-making power in the revegetation sector;
- ❖ Climate change and damaging fire regimes;
- ❖ Reduced availability of culturally important species and food sources on Country.



6. Listening to the Revegetation Sector

6.1 The Revegetation Sector

The Victorian revegetation sector broadly comprises a diverse range of individuals, landholders, businesses, First Nations groups, government and NGOs that collectively work to reintroduce indigenous plants into the landscape.

A simplified conceptual overview of the central processes of the revegetation sector is provided in Figure 2 on the next page. Some individuals and organisations specialise in particular processes within the revegetation sector (such as seed collection), while others operate across the full revegetation spectrum.

In 2020, the Australian Network for Plant Conservation (ANPC) published its *Australian Native Seed Survey Report*, which characterised the native seed sector (at a national scale) as *ad hoc*, with a majority of respondents to the report being sole operators or very small organisations.

Many respondents to the ANPC Survey commented on the large number of volunteers contributing to the sector. This observation was also shared in many submissions to this review. For example, Victorian Catchments (on behalf of CMAs) highlighted that labour capacity for planting trees and shrubs is a major cost to large revegetation programs, and hence CMAs often rely on partnerships with volunteer groups such as Landcare or Conservation Volunteers Australia to assist with planting. Victorian Catchments further noted that Landcare groups can sometimes face capacity issues for continuous volunteer labour.

The sector functions in various ways but can be sometimes characterised as follows:

- ❖ Seed is collected, predominantly from wild harvest. This may be collected in response to a specific order/project, or speculatively by individual collectors or nurseries. Roadsides and private land are common sources of wild harvested seed;
- ❖ There are few Seed Production Areas (areas established and managed for explicit purpose of native seed production). Many are small and/or not currently being actively managed;
- ❖ Regional seedbanks such as Seeding Victoria and the Goulburn Broken Indigenous Seedbank source, process, store and sell native seed, either directly collected (often by volunteers) or on consignment for individual seed collectors. Seedbank clients encompass CMAs, local councils, government, nurseries, private and NGO revegetation contractors and individuals;
- ❖ There are some examples of private sector seed brokers buying and selling seed;



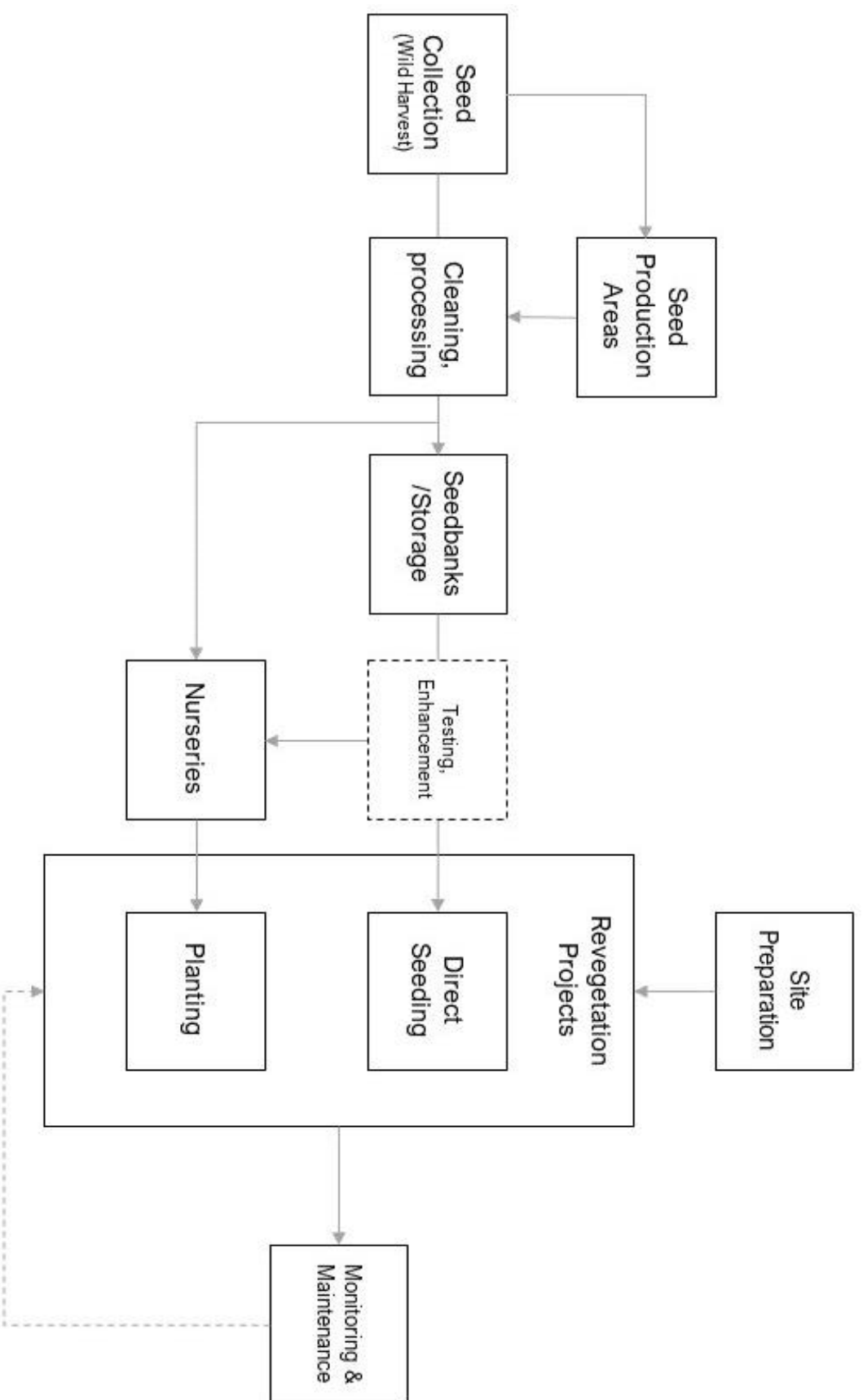


Figure 2: Conceptual overview of the revegetation sector

- ❖ If project and funding allows, a project initiator may place a forward order for either seed or plants with a seedbank or nursery;
- ❖ In some cases, the project initiator may source the seed (directly collect or via a seedbank), which is provided to nurseries for propagation;
- ❖ In other cases, (and seemingly quite often) project initiators access seed and/or plants for a project on a “what is available” in stock basis, which relies on “speculative” seed collection and/or propagation to ensure supply; and,
- ❖ Some organisations, particularly for larger, multi-year revegetation projects, hold capacity across the revegetation spectrum, supplementing need through seedbanks, direct relationships with seed collectors and external nurseries.

We received submissions from across the revegetation spectrum and there were some common themes and challenges raised. These were notably around

- declining demand for revegetation (primarily attributed to reduced government investment, indicating the health and viability of the sector has been underpinned by government investment);
- a lack of revegetation planning and coordination;
- limited species and/or ecological community representation within revegetation projects;
- seed supply constraints; and
- climate change.

6.2 Partnerships with First Nations

There was a widespread aspiration from members of the wider revegetation sector to ensure greater First Nations participation within the sector. Submissions identified existing partnerships with First Nations spanning a range of revegetation services, including seed collection, propagation, weed control, planting, field and cultural surveys and cultural burning. There are also First Nations people directly involved in the management and operations of nurseries that supply revegetation projects. The nature of existing partnerships and shared activities varied greatly between projects and were often dependant on individual relationships.

Some respondents recognised the need for greater First Nations participation in the conceptual and planning stages of revegetation, as well as hands on restoration activities. While it was identified that emerging partnerships are starting to embed greater First Nations knowledge and partnerships during strategic planning, examples remain limited and First Nations leadership is generally not enabled.



Some groups, particularly smaller businesses and community organisations are seeking greater direction to enable respectful and effective integration of the knowledge and needs of First Nations into conservation and restoration activities. However, with limited resources this will remain an aspiration. There is a shortage in specific and targeted resourcing to support and establish First Nations to deliver on these partnership aspirations of the wider sector.

6.3 Revegetation demand in Victoria

Over the past two decades, the revegetation and restoration sector in Victoria has largely relied upon federally funded Natural Resource Management (NRM) programs such as the *Natural Heritage Trust*, *Natural Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*, *Caring for Our Country*, the *Biodiversity Fund*, and most recently, *20 Million Trees*. However, as noted in many submissions, direct, large scale federal government investment in restoration based NRM programs has declined in recent years.

Catchment and water quality programs, infrastructure development, local environment and community group grants and philanthropic investment supplement the demand, however unlike some other states, Victoria does not currently have substantial demand for rehabilitation from the minerals and mining sector. Investment is at best limited and cannot maintain the current sector.

There are several programs and partnerships such as *Habitat 141*, *Project Platypus* and the *Biolinks Alliance*, which seek to access and coordinate various funding streams to deliver regional strategic biodiversity outcomes. Although the aspirations of these programs and partnerships is at a landscape scale, many of the individual revegetation interventions are still local in scale and are typically less than 100 hectares.

Growing demand for carbon sequestration (that is, removing carbon from the atmosphere) to mitigate climatic change is an emerging opportunity to support biodiverse revegetation projects. While carbon markets are not driving revegetation at scale in Victoria, there are an increasing number of voluntary biodiverse revegetation-based carbon projects and a handful formally registered with the federal government's Clean Energy Regulator. Carbon-funded revegetation opportunities vary considerably across the landscape according to land costs, competing land uses and carbon yields.

Greening Australia identified that carbon aggregation models, where multiple smaller projects are delivered as a coordinated program, are likely to be important in Victoria given that in many locations revegetation is likely to be of a smaller scale than in some other locations across Australia. While in other jurisdictions aggregation has often been private sector led and spreads risk exposure across participating landowners, there are some emerging examples of not-for-profit and NRM body led initiatives that could provide a more balanced approach.



Nonetheless, stronger community and business commitments towards carbon emission reduction and biodiversity conservation is increasing the demand for revegetation, including a growing emphasis on nature-based solutions and wider environmental, social, and cultural co-benefits. As a result, some increased corporate and philanthropic investment into local revegetation projects is emerging outside of regulated carbon markets. A reduction in the availability of lower-cost carbon offsets, as well as emerging government co-investment schemes could increase the viability of biodiverse revegetation for carbon markets over-time.

Recognising that the current carbon price does not provide a commercial incentive for biodiverse revegetation, the Commonwealth has recently launched its “Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot”. The pilot is trialling an arrangement to reward “farmers” for improving on-farm biodiversity within carbon projects under the Emissions Reduction Fund, whereby landholders who plant “native trees” (in line with an approved biodiversity protocol) will receive payments for biodiversity outcomes. These payments will be in addition to earnings a landholder might receive for their carbon abatement. In Victoria, the pilot is currently confined to the North Central Catchment Management Area. There is also an “Enhanced Remnant Vegetation Pilot” in development, through which landholders could receive payments to protect, manage and enhance high conservation value remnant native vegetation through fencing, weed management, pest control and/or replanting. It needs to be noted that although these programs are meritorious, the lack of land ownership by First Nations largely excludes the participation by First Nations in these programs.

At a state level, Victoria’s *Climate Change Strategy* sets a roadmap to net-zero emissions and a climate resilient Victoria by 2050. The Victorian Government aims to reduce the State’s greenhouse gas emissions from 2005 levels by 28–33% by 2025 and 45–50% by 2030. More specifically, the Government recently announced a 16-year, \$92.3 million program “*Growing jobs in land restoration and carbon storage*”, centred on funding for native vegetation restoration and carbon plantings. Two funding streams will be available; the *Victorian Carbon Farming Program* aimed at agroforestry and shelterbelts, and *Nature restoration for carbon storage (BushBank program)* to support revegetation and restoration of native vegetation for carbon storage and habitat for biodiversity. This is in addition to Victorian Landcare Grants which provide small (typically <\$30,000) grants for community land care projects, and other direct investments by government owned businesses, such as water corporations, to generate offsets to meet climate change emission reduction pledges.

While not specifically revegetation, demand for native seed and planting may be complemented by a growing Australian native foods and botanicals industry, which has experienced rapid growth over the past decade. While data from official sources is limited and varies in quality and scope, it was estimated that the industry has approximately doubled since 2006, to a current farm gate value of around \$50 million per annum.



6.4 Planning, Capacity & Co-ordination

Submissions to the review consistently identified that the sectors' high reliance on periodical government funding programs hampers the ability to prepare for, deliver and maintain effective revegetation programs. Short-term funding agreements are the norm, with many practitioners identifying a lack of funding or time allowance for proper planning, seed/plant sourcing, site preparation and follow-up maintenance (such as watering in dryer landscapes or supplementary planting at failed sites). This can also often result in the use of a narrow range of easy to source and/or grow plant species (trees and common shrubs) or having to undertake seeding/planting despite suboptimal conditions (such as dry winters).

While standards and best practice guidance exists within the sector (E.g. Florabank Guidelines, which are currently being updated, and the National Standards for the Practice of Ecological Restoration in Australia), their adoption is not mandated and as captured in one submission *"the revegetation industry lacks an overarching framework for regulation and oversight, a solid training base and career pathways; security of long-term investment; regulation, compliance and monitoring of industry participants; and a co-ordinated, centralised monitoring, evaluation and reporting system"*.

Many submissions emphasised the need to harness local knowledge in the planning of revegetation activities. Some considered state-wide Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) mapping and descriptions (which are currently being updated, including species lists) as useful, but it was viewed as currently too coarse of a framework for revegetation planning. It was considered that they currently underrepresent rare and threatened species and community composition — particularly in highly fragmented landscapes such as grasslands and grassy woodlands.

There were mixed views regarding the high reliance (and value) of volunteer labour, but a broad consensus that the delivery of over 200,000 hectares of revegetation is well beyond the capacity of existing volunteer groups and networks. One member of a local Landcare group suggested that support for the volunteer revegetation sector focuses too much on financial support for on-ground works, burdening small organising committees with poorly supported administrative, educational, and organisational effort. An ageing "workforce" was also raised by some as an emerging challenge across the sector, with few training opportunities and a lack of sustainable work force pathways for younger people seeking employment, particularly in regional areas.

The absence of long term, secure and diverse funding sources for revegetation is a clear barrier to the attraction and retention of skilled practitioners that could support sector efficiency and growth.

Accessing land for revegetation more generally was identified as increasingly a challenge to meeting future aspirations. Increasing land values, the conversion of grazing land to cropping systems and changing agricultural business models toward large "corporate" farms were identified as growing barriers to increasing revegetation. For example, Project Platypus report



that in their district, “most of the ‘low hanging fruit’ has already been planted” and with increased corporate ownership, a more profit driven approach (e.g. through carbon or vegetation markets) are the only mechanisms currently available to incentivise landholders to allow revegetation on “productive” land.

Some indirect barriers to encouraging revegetation were also identified. These included the absence of local government rate relief (on what is broadly categorised and rated as “profitable” agricultural land) and other support for “conservation minded” landholders looking to voluntarily undertake restoration activities.

6.5 Native Seed Supply

A reliable, diverse and “climate ready” native seed supply was widely recognised as a major bottleneck, both immediately and over the longer term, in meeting collective revegetation aspirations, the State Government’s *Bio2037* targets, cultural priorities, and wider demand trends.

The native seed supply industry in Victoria is small, with recent demand no more than 1-2 tonne per annum. Several practitioners and project developers cited difficulty in sourcing seed, both from a seed collector perspective as well as at the revegetation project stage. The price for seed has broadly remained flat for over a decade. It was expressed that current market in Victoria (mirroring findings in the *Australian Native Seed Survey Report*) is unable or unwilling to pay the true cost of quality seed collection/production. This is at least in part due to most revegetation being small-scale, part of a competitive funding programs and/or being volunteer driven. This compromises ability of the industry to scale up. One practitioner cited an example where, what would have been a large seed order in Victoria (circa 300kg), was considered a small order in New South Wales, and consequentially the cost of seed was around twice as much per kilogram.

As previously noted, some organisations operate across the native seed supply chain from collection through to nurseries and project implementation, while others operate more independently. For example, Seeding Victoria (a not-for profit regional network of seedbanks) predominantly stores and sells seed on “consignment”, on behalf of individual collectors.

A central role of a seedbank is the provision of a buffer between seed collection and revegetation need, collecting and maintaining a stock of high-quality and diverse seed when it is available for subsequent deployment into projects (including as part of threatened species recovery strategies). This necessitates coordination between seed collectors/producers and end-users to ensure the seed collection and storage matches seed need.

Reduced demand and increasing costs (such as energy and labour) is a major challenge, resulting in a contraction and consolidation of seedbanks in Victoria over recent years. It should also be noted that viable seedbanks are fundamental to climate change adaptation in the revegetation sector. Year to year seed set reliability is declining and there is a greater



need to incorporate a wider range of species provenance into revegetation projects (both of which are discussed below).

Optimally, revegetation projects would be planned such that seed needs can be identified *at least* 12 months ahead of need for revegetation and forward orders placed to inform seed collectors and seedbanks of upcoming needs and priorities. This assists in the “commercial” viability of seed collectors, as their effort would be rewarded. It also ensures for projects that the right species and quantities are available. However, in practice this is not commonplace, often due to tight funding program timelines. If the program/funding timeline does not correspond with optimal seed collection conditions then this creates further issues for seed collectors, seedbanks and revegetation project success.

Seed for Victorian revegetation projects is predominantly sourced from wild harvest (which includes roadsides and private land). Some respondents to this review highlighted challenges with the existing permit/licensing arrangements and accessing some public land tenures. It was raised that for many practitioners, the current seed collection permitting system structure and processes are less than effective at regulating seed collection and/or protecting native values. Many largely view them as restrictive, time consuming, cumbersome, and disaffecting, as well as failing to provide transparency of collection behaviours and outcomes.

Several submissions mirrored these concerns, while also recognising that the capacity of many wild populations (particularly on easier to access tenures) to sustain seed supply is compromised by colonisation, fragmentation, genetic maladaptation and degradation.

The handling of protected flora (which include a wide number of common plant families and genera, as well as specific threatened flora) is regulated under the *Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (Vic) “to ensure that any harvesting or loss is ecologically sustainable”, with collectors required to obtain a “Protected Flora Licence” or Permit if collecting from public land. In consideration of the issuing of a permit or license, “*the Secretary must take into account the prescribed criteria for making that decision*”, although the Act itself does not define those prescribed criteria. Separate processes exist for local government, VicRoads and Parks Victoria managed land.

In most cases, a Licence or Permit is not required for collection on private land (due to a separate order issued under *the Act*), although a local council planning permit for vegetation removal may be required depending on the seed collection method and impacts on native vegetation.

In recognition of the limitations of wild populations to meet increasing seed demand, as well as the increasing need for accessible, mixed provenance seed sources (see discussion below); seed orchards or Seed Production Areas (SPAs) were widely identified as a key enabler for revegetation sector growth. SPAs are “*plant populations established under field or nursery conditions with the primary or secondary objective of seed production*”. Their establishment and operation require land, water and ongoing active management. Due to low seed demand and the costs and effort involved, it appears few are being actively managed in Victoria, although it was suggested that if the demand increased, some “dormant” production areas



could be reinvigorated. Some historically restored sites are also available and being utilised as a source of native seed. With a range of drivers expected to increase seed demand in the coming years, actions within the seed supply sector, particularly focussing on scalable aspects of the seed supply chain, are an identified priority of this review (see Section 10).

Box 2: The Conservation Reserve Program

Many submissions highlighted the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in the United States of America, as an example of the type and duration of funding incentives required to support a well-planned, resourced and vibrant native seed sector. The CRP, established during the mid-1980's, is a farm rental program. In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agreed to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled in the CRP are 10-15 years in length. The long-term goal of the program was to re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat.

Over its 35-year life, the program claims to have created more than 1 million hectares of restored wetlands, while protecting more than 280,000 stream kilometres with riparian forest and grass buffers. Such programs have not only been instrumental in building a large, viable and capable native seed and restoration sector, they have engaged private landholders and businesses in biodiversity conservation in a way that has achieved outcomes magnitudes beyond anything to date in Victoria or Australia more widely.

6.6 Climate Change

A strong theme emerging from the review was the interrelationship between seed, revegetation and climate change: in the words of one submission: *"climate change is predicted to disrupt the adaptedness of local plant populations, ultimately leading to changes in species distributions and community composition"*. Some plant communities in Australia are already showing signs of climate stress, and for many plant species, migration is compromised.

Another submission also succinctly summarised some of the wider climate change implications for revegetation as including:

- Decreased seed availability for revegetation projects due to reduced ability of plants to produce viable seed under stress, increased seed predation and concerns about the genetic fitness of seed through habitat fragmentation and reduced population sizes;
- Increased fire frequency affecting species diversity and ability of plants to mature and produce seed;



- New and emerging weeds and pests;
- More stress on plants and increased herbivory from hungry animals.

More broadly, as highlighted by Melbourne Water, revegetation programs will need to adapt. It was suggested that this may include “*changing planting times, methods (direct seeding, long-stemming, watering in), seed supply, seed provenance and species selection*”. The ability to deliver revegetation projects on annual timelines is consequently further challenged either by suitable seed availability, or unsuitable planting/germination conditions.

Seed mixing (or “multi-provenance”, is the collection of seed from a wider climatic range) is now recognised as a powerful conservation tool to maximise the success of revegetation projects. In 2020, DELWP released *Biodiversity revegetation with provenance mixing for climate change adaptation* which promotes the adjustment of species provenance as part of new revegetation work to increase genetic diversity within, and gene flow between, populations, building resilience into the landscape.

While the proportion of local and climate adjusted seed which should be planted is dependent on availability, DELWP guidance recommends revegetation projects include a mix of predominantly local seed, blended with seed from hotter and drier climates, and wetter, cooler climates. Seed mixing has its own risks: outbreeding depression may occur, or new genes can dominate and lead to a changed structural and competitive balance, or extinction of the local genome. However, this is seen as the lower risk option that will provide the benefits of improved resilience and adaptation.

The DELWP guidance also promotes the inclusion and monitoring of “Climate Future Plots” where practicable, following *Establishing Victoria’s Ecological Infrastructure: A guide to creating Climate Future Plots*.

Several studies and projects are underway which are applying these concepts, including:

- ❖ Bush Heritage Australia initiated a trial to examine climate adaptation options for revegetation. It carefully selected four potential provenance regions in NSW and SA for each species that were hotter and/or drier than Nardoo Hills (the revegetation site) and sourced seed from representative trees within these “climate-adjusted” provenances. The trial commenced in 2019, comprising 11,700 uniquely identified seedlings over 20 hectares.
- ❖ In partnership with The University of Melbourne and Greening Australia, Melbourne Water is modelling the likely impacts of climate change on the distribution of 31 key native vegetation species commonly used in streamside revegetation programs. For five of those species, Melbourne Water are also investigating the likely impacts of climate change on various life stages (e.g. germination), that may be different to the tolerances/distribution of mature plants.
- ❖ Project Platypus are currently working on a direct seeding trial site comparing locally collected seed with seed of the same species sourced from as far north as they can obtain; and,



- ❖ Connecting Country is also working to establish climate future plots. The *Future-proof our forests* project helps address an urgent community need for information and practical tools to adapt revegetation efforts in a changing climate.

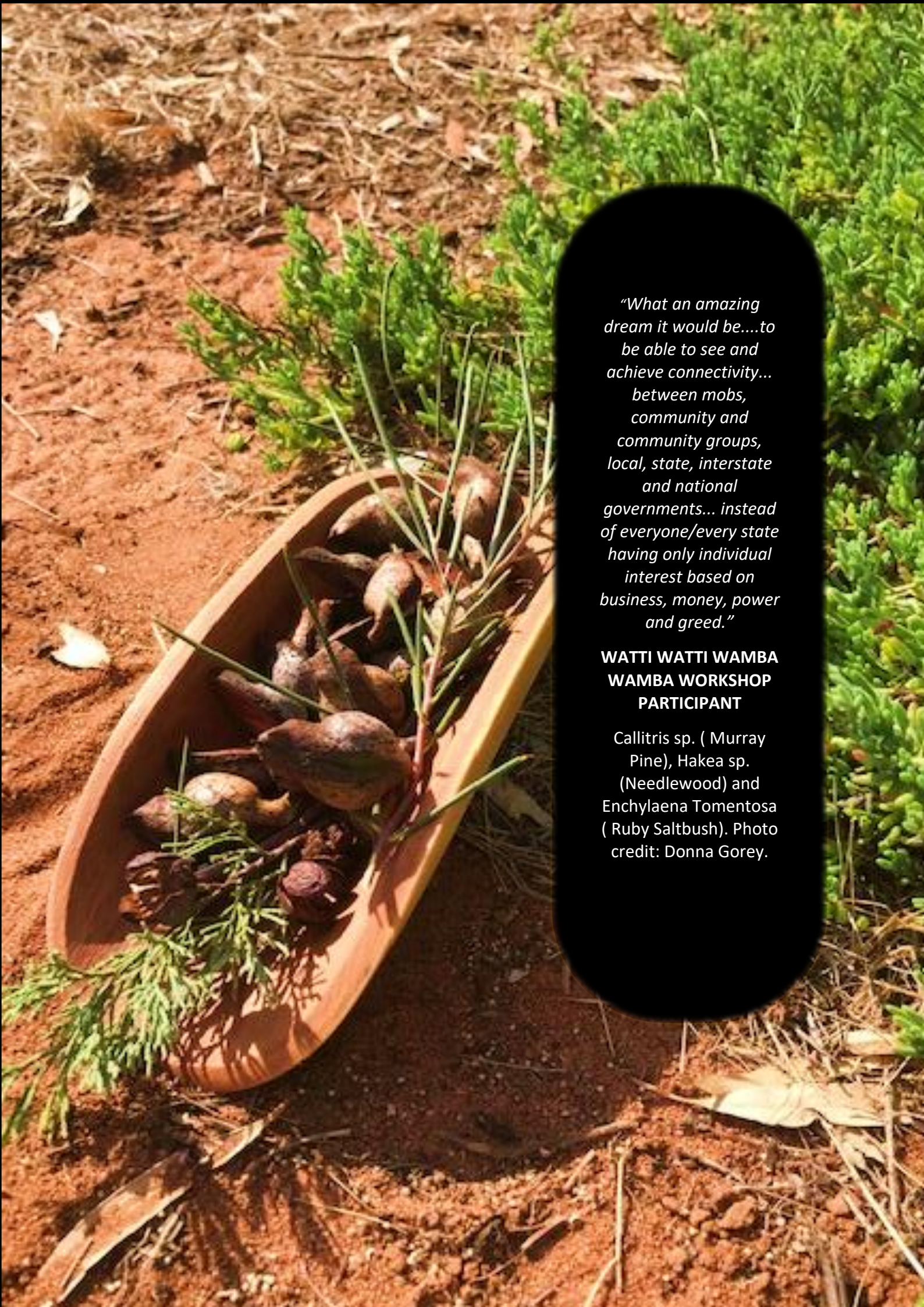
Adopting a seed mixing approach, however, creates practical complexities for seed collection, storage, and distribution, compounding the existing challenges within the seed sector. At present, project initiators have expressed difficulty in obtaining seed or plants for a wide diversity of species, with each species being sourced from multiple climate zones across its distribution. For seed collectors, there are additional cost and time implications to source seed from a greater climate range, particularly without local knowledge for seed collection sites. It was also raised that there is no central database which records who holds what seed and from what locations across Victoria. Seeding Victoria has raised the prospect of greater utilisation across the sector of their searchable, spatial seed database.

Overcoming these growing complexities will necessitate increased collaboration and communication across the sector, which is a key area of focus in this review (Section 9).



Wanyarram Dhelk (meaning “good waterhole”) Frog Ponds in Bendigo creek. Area where project has been delivered by Dja Dja Wurrung Enterprises to heal the creek by restoring cultural and environmental values of this waterway. Photo taken on Djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country). Photo credit: Marilyne Nicholls.





"What an amazing dream it would be....to be able to see and achieve connectivity... between mobs, community and community groups, local, state, interstate and national governments... instead of everyone/every state having only individual interest based on business, money, power and greed."

**WATTI WATTI WAMBA
WAMBA WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANT**

Callitris sp. (Murray Pine), Hakea sp. (Needlewood) and Enchylaena tomentosa (Ruby Saltbush). Photo credit: Donna Gorey.

7. Working Together

It is evident from listening to First Nations and the wider sector that a “business as usual” approach to revegetation will not achieve collective aspirations, whether they are cultural healing or biodiversity conservation aspirations. We have heard that the absence of stable, on-going, and diverse funding and limited consideration for First Nations people and priorities has constrained the revegetation sector and First Nations participation within the sector. There are some highly skilled and motivated practitioners, and there is some capacity to re-scale in response to increased demand. However, there is a widespread view that **the sector does not currently have the capacity to deliver effective revegetation at the anticipated scale, and in some cases more immediate intervention will be required to consolidate existing capacity.**

The following summarises structural barriers and challenges that were identified through the review processes:

- ❖ There is ongoing colonisation, dispossession and displacement of First Nations from Country and barriers to practicing culture.
- ❖ Imbalanced decision making power and western natural resource management approaches exclude cultural and spiritual priorities prevent the healing of Country - both land and waterways.
- ❖ Narrow, unreliable and short-term investment in revegetation and reliance on a small and largely volunteer delivery model undermines the capacity of First Nations and the wider sector to plan, coordinate and deliver large scale, effective revegetation programs.
- ❖ There is loss of culturally important species and food sources from Country, and many revegetation projects fail to incorporate a wide diversity of species, and ecological communities.
- ❖ Land water ownership constrains First Nations’ ability to access funding programs to heal Country, while land availability generally is a barrier to increasing revegetation.
- ❖ The native seed sector in Victoria is small, under-resourced and dependent on increasingly fragmented wild harvest, without intervention and investment it will not meet future native seed supply needs (both in terms of quantity and quality).
- ❖ Climate change exacerbates revegetation and healing Country challenges, impacting biodiversity and the availability of culturally important species. Damaging bushfires and increased climate extremes create variable flowering and a decline of seed impacts plant establishment.



First Nations people must be supported to lead and actively participate in overcoming these challenges.

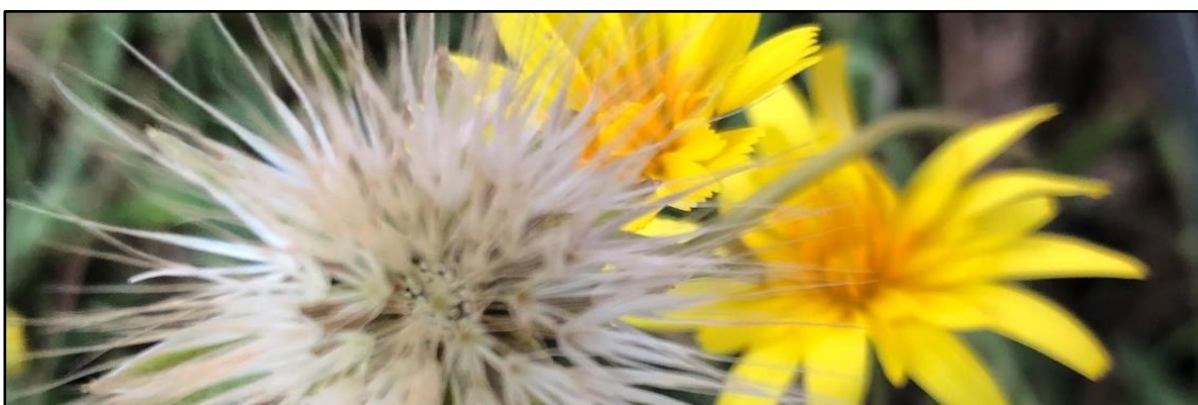
It is recognised that small-scale revegetation, based substantially on voluntary efforts by community groups and landholders (typically supported by small community grants from government), has strong social and local environmental benefits and will continue. However, bolder intervention and investment is necessary to drive large-scale revegetation and to support First Nations cultural governance and self-determination within the revegetation sector.

This will require a range of structural changes around revegetation policy, planning and decision making, direct government investment, financial incentives, market-based mechanisms, new and innovative on-ground delivery models and land-use change. There is also emerging recognition that the restoration and cultural management of landscapes can have both biodiversity and fuel management benefits (ie. wildfire mitigation). Integrated cross-sector and cross-agency planning and funding opportunities to deliver multiple tangible and intangible benefits warrant further exploration.

Funding is required and mechanisms need to be put in place so First Nations can not only take a seat at the table, but so they can lead revegetation and the healing of Country. While there are currently few large-scale, government funded Natural Resource Management programs upon which revegetation in Victoria has been highly dependent, there are some emerging opportunities and programs to encourage improved collaboration, planning and coordination across the sector.

Seed, being the foundational unit of revegetation, has been identified as an immediate area of focus to underpin any ongoing and upscaling of revegetation, particularly in the context of climate change adaptation.

In the following sections some ideas, options and actions identified through the review process are shared with the aim to support the establishment of a vibrant, capable, and culturally responsible revegetation sector that can efficiently and effectively respond to growing demand.



Yam daisy. Photo taken on Djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country). Photo credit: Marilyne Nicholls.



8. First Nations Goals and Opportunities

This section outlines some directions for how to firmly place First Nations goals in the revegetation sector and some opportunities for leadership and collaboration. The recommendations are in line with the principle of **self-determination**, allowing First Nations leadership to set priorities in the revegetation sector so that their aspirations in land, water and culture are realised. They are also consistent with the First Nations rights enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People 2007* and the Aboriginal Cultural rights enshrined in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).



Weeping pittosporum (*Pittosporum angustifolium*) and the yellow and black seeds are *Acacia oswaldii* (Umbrella Wattle). Photo credit: La Vergne Lehmann Barengi Gadjin Land Council



8.1 Right Way Principles

The Right Way principles have been developed through discussions with First Nations people from different language groups across Victoria. They outline direction and vision for firmly grounding First Nations' goals within the revegetation sector.

| | |
|--|---|
| Principle 1 First Nations have leadership in the revegetation sector | First Nations people can achieve self-determination in the revegetation sector through healing Country and at the same time achieve cultural governance by setting priorities and influencing the revegetation sector. |
| Principle 2 A cultural approach to healing Country is taken. | Country is healed through a cultural approach which is holistic, spiritual and balanced. It goes beyond straight lines and square boxes. It takes in species of plant, place and cultural practices. |
| Principle 3 Younger generations are supported to heal Country. | Youth are empowered to learn about their culture and to heal Country. They are given education, opportunities and resources and have elders and mentors to support them. |
| Principle 4 Traditional Ecological Knowledge is protected, respected, and used with permission. | The Traditional Ecological Knowledge of First Nations people is listened to. Intellectual Property is protected and respected. First Nations people are remunerated appropriately for their knowledge and other contributions. |
| Principle 5 Partnerships with First Nations are based on respect and trust. | Partnerships that are created between First Nations and other members of the revegetation sector have significant impact in healing Country. Partnerships with First Nations are respectful, based on trust and create mutual benefits. |
| Principle 6 First Nations work together to heal Country. | First Nations collaborate and support each other so none are left behind; sharing leadership, knowledge and resources through collaboration, partnerships, networking and trading. |
| Principle 7 First Nations have economic opportunities in revegetation and Healing Country. | First Nations people have secure and meaningful jobs in healing Country. There are economic opportunities and secure funding to develop businesses in revegetation. The market encourages cultural priorities in revegetation. |



ACTION: Support First Nations to communicate the Right Way Principles to the wider sector and support the adoption of these principles through their incorporation into guidance, industry standards, strategies, and programs.

8.2 First Nations Right Plant, Right Way Group

The *Right Plant, Right Way* workshops held in April 2021 brought together representatives from different First Nations groups, along with other members of the revegetation sector, to explore a range of key themes that emerged in the review. The workshop contained important discussion, brainstorming, ideas and negotiation on areas around First Nations participation in the revegetation sector.

The workshop also demonstrated the value of such a forum, for sharing knowledge, the development of partnerships and for ensuring that cultural principles and the goals of First Nations people are supported within the revegetation sector. The continuation of such a forum, in the form of a purposeful First Nations led *Right Plant, Right Way* Group, was identified by the workshop participants as an essential step to building First Nations capacity to operate in the revegetation sector and have their cultural goals realised.

The proposed *Right Plant, Right Way* Group will lead cultural governance, access opportunities, and ensure that First Nations priorities are strong within the revegetation sector. The Group should be composed of representatives from First Nations across Victoria with interest in revegetation, who can pursue the rights and interests of their people and collaborate with government and the wider sector where appropriate.

Along with funding to enable regular meetings of the *Right Plant, Right Way* Group, the success of the group would be optimised with the support of a full-time First Nations Secretariat who can coordinate the implementation of the Right Way (see section 'Right Way for First Nations' below) and actively bring together First Nations groups to collaborate). This Secretariat should be an Aboriginal person (we suggest this could be someone who sits within DELWP) who is both independent and accountable to Representative Aboriginal Parties, Traditional Owner Corporations and First Nations led enterprises. First Nations must be enabled to regularly come together (a minimum of twice per year).

Right Plant, Right Way representatives can be nominated by different groups, depending on First Nations groups capacity and interest. These representatives can support ongoing collaboration in revegetation. At the *Right Plant, Right Way* workshops in April 2021, there were representatives from seven different First Nations groups present. Workshop participants expressed that ideally the group going forward would have participation from



more First Nations across Victoria and that it is important for them that the door is left open so that none are left behind.

In combination with improved networks, coordination, and oversight within the wider sector (this is discussed in Section 'Improve Planning, Facilitation and Coordination') such as from government, NGOs, community, private sector practitioners; a First Nations led Group will help to ensure representative leadership and First Nations access to opportunities within the sector.

ACTION: Create and resource a *Right Plant, Right Way* Group, including a position for a First Nations identified Secretariat to coordinate and organise the group. Ensure that the priorities set by the group are realised and that the ongoing participation of First Nations is resourced.

8.3 Right Way for First Nations

The following themes were identified in the *Right Plant, Right Way* workshop and can provide initial strategic direction for the *Right Plant, Right Way* Group.

Leadership

- ❖ Exercise self-determination and contribute to planning, policy, and management of Country.
- ❖ Maintain regular Group meetings and maintenance of communications throughout the year.
- ❖ Nominate *Right Plant, Right Way* representative/s from different groups to provide a point of contact for revegetation opportunities.
- ❖ Represent First Nations people within the revegetation sector and communicate the Right Way to the sector and government.
- ❖ Access and trial Right Way projects, either First Nations based or collaborative with wider sector.

Economy

- ❖ Develop economic opportunities for First Nations people in healing Country and engaging in revegetation projects. Focus on steering the revegetation sector towards First Nations markets.



- ❖ Develop indigenous certified cultural seed and revegetation practice including the establishment of cultural standards for certification.
- ❖ Build First Nations seed collection/production capacity and access associated economic opportunities, funding and grants.
- ❖ Contribute to the development of funding opportunities with cultural priorities.
- ❖ Develop culturally sensitive partnerships with wider sector to ensure that meaningful and accountable connections occur.
- ❖ Share resources and business development knowledge amongst First Nations groups.

Culture

- ❖ Embed cultural priorities in the revegetation sector.
- ❖ Ensure that men and women's business, traditional practices, species are respected by the sector.
- ❖ Develop and locate training, education, cultural and on-country opportunities for younger generations.
- ❖ Develop protocols around trading seed and moving species across country.

Country

- ❖ Ensure First Nations have capacity, equipment, resources, and knowledge to heal Country.
- ❖ Support the development of a database for different species in different areas, including registration for plants from different areas.
- ❖ Support the development of seasonal calendars for different Country.
- ❖ Utilise Natural Resource Agreements and cultural rights to harvest seed for the development of seed production areas in a culturally appropriate way.

8.4 Self-determination, Priority Setting and Funding Autonomy

First Nations have cultural processes around plants and the healing of Country, which can be supported amongst First Nations groups and incorporated into the revegetation sector. Important cultural considerations include where the seed has come from, its traditional place name, how the seed grows, and cultural practices around planting seeds and managing their growth. Some plants and practices are associated more with women and their cultural business and others are associated with men. First Nations people express that it is important for them that they are supported to focus on these priorities within the revegetation sector.



First Nations want to be able to pursue healing of Country without having to adapt to standards set by external processes of government and markets that are culturally out of touch. First Nations express that funding available in grants and through the carbon market is often geared towards environmental or biodiversity objectives, which, while often connected to cultural aspirations, are not the same.

Carbon markets may offer First Nations opportunities to access funding (acknowledging First Nations limited access to land as a major constraint), however these markets incentivise the revegetation of woody species, particularly trees, to the detriment of grasses, herbs, wetland plants, or specific culturally important species which are essential foods and medicines for First Nations. Additionally, it was articulated in the *Right Plant, Right Way* workshop that carbon markets are not aligned to some First Nations peoples' values, as offsetting an action that causes harm (eg. offsetting the production of emissions), relies, and can potentially encourage people to continue to cause harm. These markets are not necessarily seen as a positive enabler, and as one workshop participant suggested, a more culturally aligned approach would be to:

"Just stop doing bad things"

Another area in which First Nations priorities should be embedded is in the development of "priority areas" for revegetation. The *Bio2037* policy objective for 200,000 hectares of revegetation "in priority areas for connectivity". In some cases, these priorities areas may align with landscapes and species of cultural importance. However, there are likely many other specific sites or species which are cultural priorities for healing – some of which can be openly identified and shared with the wider community, and others that cannot.

First Nations need the opportunity to be able to pursue cultural objectives and have the resources to do so. There is an opportunity for a "cultural healing fund" or to apportion part of other funding streams (such as the recently announced "BushBank") to resource First Nations people to identify the revegetation priorities on their Country and deliver revegetation projects this culturally significant areas.

ACTION: Ensure that funding meaningfully contributes towards cultural healing priorities (species and landscapes). Either through existing funds such as BushBank, or the creation of a new dedicated cultural healing fund and the resourcing of revegetation projects which are aligned with the Right Way principles.



Providing opportunities for First Nations to establish the programs that they want would also be supported by the procurement policies of the State to be changed and adapted to realise First Nations goals and objectives. Currently, the procurement policies of the State allow First Nations to respond to agency and local government agendas. Preferential procurement approaches should look to support and enable First Nations aspirations rather than First Nations having to respond to government needs.

ACTION: Preferential procurement approaches should look to support and enable First Nations aspirations rather than First Nations having to respond to government needs.

8.5 Direct Economic Participation

Many First Nations groups and Traditional Owner Corporations already have business arms, which operate in land and natural resources management, with some operating nurseries and seed production areas (see Box 3 and 4). These endeavours are aligned with the strategic visions of First Nations groups which are set out in their Country Plans.

First Nations people have the capacity, knowledge, and the need for the associated benefits of undertaking revegetation and healing Country. However, it should be noted that different First Nations groups have varying capacity at present to deliver projects and outcomes in revegetation. Some have businesses operating in revegetation, some face funding and financial insecurity; others do not have the resources and funding to start these enterprises.

Funding and opportunities should be directed where needed amongst First Nations for the benefit of their communities economies, the environment and the revegetation sector. Support, including funding, needs to be available to facilitate the development of First Nations business plans. Depending on regional restoration needs, these businesses could ultimately include strategic planning, seed collection, seed production areas, nurseries as well as on ground revegetation delivery capacity.

In developing the *Right Plant, Right Way* Group, business development knowledge and opportunities can be shared amongst First Nations people so that they can support each other in operating in the revegetation sector and pursuing cultural goals through revegetation. Through improved First Nations knowledge sharing, and better regional revegetation co-ordination (see Section Improve Planning, Facilitation and Coordination); mutually beneficial partnerships and business opportunities can be explored.

Existing, or new Natural Resource Management programs, especially biodiversity-based funding programs could allow applicants to select an option where works are delivered on their behalf (rather than applicants receiving funding, then having to self-manage and



implement the works). This provides centralised opportunities for First Nations revegetation businesses to deliver projects on behalf of successful applicants.

This potentially yields a range of benefits, such as:

- ❖ Enabling Right Way principles to be embedded in a greater suite of projects;
- ❖ Overcoming some of the challenges around volunteer capacity and fatigue, while also building sector capacity as overall revegetation demand increases;
- ❖ Generating efficiencies of scale due to a more coordinated approach to restoration planning, seed sourcing, propagation, implementation, and monitoring;
- ❖ Unlocking land access, with the administrative and project management burden removed from landholders and organisations.

ACTION: Funding across Natural Resource Management programs to include options for a First Nations supplier to plan, coordinate and deliver works on behalf of the applicant.

In this review, one area that has been identified as a significant barrier to achieving the *Bio2037* target of 200,000 hectares of revegetation, is limited seed supply. There is an opportunity for First Nations people to contribute meeting this demand, while benefiting economically and culturally. By applying cultural knowledge to collect, grow and use seed in a culturally appropriate way, First Nations may develop their capacity to heal Country, and contribute to the wider revegetation sector in the process.

While in the short-term, revegetation demand will continue to rely on wild harvest, more broadly, building seed collection capability will be part of the transition away from wild seed harvesting toward sustainable, scalable managed seed production. *Recognition and Settlement Agreements* (where in place) include permissions for Traditional Owners to harvest seed on their lands on condition of it being undertaken in a sustainable manner. These rights are also potentially described in the [Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2016 \(Vic\) s19\(2\)](#). First Nations people generally object to harvesting and removing seed from Country that might need the seed in the land, however, there is the potential for First Nations to actively contribute to native seed supply where they deem it appropriate. Wild harvest under these agreements could contribute to First Nations managed seed production, to develop initial seed stock or species diversity where it is deemed appropriate.

First Nations managed seed production development could also include partnering with wider sector participants (such as seedbanks) to access skills and training and to develop seed storage, use and/or sale.



ACTION: Mobilise *Recognition and Settlement Agreements* (particularly the Natural Resource Agreements) and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)* to support the development of First Nations seed collection/production capacity.

8.6 Certification

Participants of the *Right Plant, Right Way* workshop supported the development of a First Nations owned collective branding and certification approach for seed and plants. Certification can help to drive market demand for seed and plant products from First Nations groups and contribute to the economic development of these groups. Customers can reward and encourage culturally appropriate seed and revegetation practice by demanding products from certified suppliers. Along with building demand, certification will educate the wider sector on a cultural approach to revegetation. First Nations groups can be certified to provide seed which has the right place name, and is from the right place on Country, the right people, and cultivated or harvest according to the right cultural principles.

The criteria for this voluntary market mechanism can be developed by the *Right Plant, Right Way* Group, to ensure that the standards for certification are aligned with First Nations people and their cultural values. The Right Way principles can function as guidance in the development of criteria for certification. Developing government grant processes alongside the certification will encourage market demand for the certified seed and plant products.

ACTION: With the *Right Plant, Right Way* Group, investigate and develop a First Nations owned collective branding and certification approach for seed and plant production.



Box 3: Dalki Garringa - Barengi Gadjin Land Council

The Dalki Garringa Native Nursery, which means “Good Growing” in the Wergaia language, is owned and managed by the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC). BGLC represents Traditional Owners from the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples in western Victoria.

They specialise in growing the native plants and bushfood plants of the region. They have the capacity and capability to grow the native plants to meet the needs of customers. The nursery is located at the old Wail Nursery site, about 25 kilometres north west of Horsham. It was originally established in 1946 by the Victorian Forestry Commission. BGLC purchased the nursery in 2017 as a key action towards economic sustainability and job creation for the Traditional Owners and the broader community. The nursery, while still operational, has required additional infrastructure investment and maintenance.

BGLC is currently implementing a business plan to ensure the nursery is once again a vital part of the community and the region’s economic and environmental landscape, as well as a key preserver of the region’s diverse flora systems. The nursery enterprise is a great opportunity for employment and adds to the diversity of opportunities from other organisational and commercial activities.

BGLC has had to bring in skills and experience to ensure the nursery operates to standards which meet state and national requirements. In addition, investment has been undertaken to improve watering systems quality control, plant protection and customer purchasing system, along with a training program that ensures staff are well trained and can upgrade their skills over time. All of this will improve the capacity and output of the nursery.

The customer base includes large scale revegetation projects through to farmers, Landcare groups, commercial farm foresters, council landscapers, government agencies right through to the home gardener. Some major clients are:

- ❖ Mallee Catchment Management Authority
- ❖ Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
- ❖ Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
- ❖ Hindmarsh Landcare Network
- ❖ Greening Australia

Continued on next page



Box 3 continued and images from Dalki Garringa Native Nursery

The focus of BGLC is on building good relationships with customers and working with them to ensure that plant revegetation needs are met, whether it be as part of an infrastructure project, local or farm revegetation, bushfire revegetation or any other revegetation project. To that end, capacity of the nursery to supply high quality native plants to customers for revegetation projects continues to be developed. BGLC are committed to providing the plants and service that customers require and work with them to ensure their needs are met.



Box 4: First People of the Millewa Mallee - Belar Nursery and Biocultural Resource Centre

The Belar Nursery and Biocultural Resource Centre is a program developed by the First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation. The nursery, resource centre and Indigenous people who work there provide native seeds and plants for the rejuvenation of Country throughout their region. Some key areas of the program include:

- ❖ Native Seed Collection - Seeds are collected throughout the FPMMAC RAP area and the *Murray Sunset National Park*. Seeds are collected seasonally, then grown in the nursery and returned to Country as seedlings. This program has been assisted by the granting of approval from Parks Victoria to collect seeds throughout the Park.
- ❖ Seed Production - A Seed Production Area (SPA) is being developed to mass produce seeds in sufficient quantities to significantly rejuvenate Country. FPMMAC are working with government and industry to achieve these outcomes.
- ❖ Nursery – The Belar Nursery is owned by the Mildura Rural City Council but had not been used for many years and was in a semi-derelict condition. FPMMAC approached the Council and have now leased the one-acre fenced area with buildings, glass house, shedding and other infrastructure for \$225.00 per year. Funds from the *Djakitjuk Djanga* program and the *Working for Victoria Fund* were instrumental in providing the resources and Indigenous labour force to refurbish the old nursery. Along with others, Mildura City Council has also become a major client of the nursery.
- ❖ Mass Plantings – FPMMAC are developing the capacity to conduct mass plantings to rejuvenate degraded lands and the Murray Sunset National Park, both from tube stock and direct seeding. However, a feral animal eradication and animal control program will also be required to ensure plant survival. This work will be carried out by the FPMMAC *Custodians of Country: Cultural Ranger program*.
- ❖ Training, Education, and Employment – FPMMAC currently have 22 Aboriginal Cultural Rangers working in land management, aquatic systems, seed bank & nursery, building & construction, and a women's team. Fifteen Rangers are also undertaking a Certificate 2 in Horticulture with SuniTAFE in Mildura.

Continued on next page



Box 4 Continued

FPMMAC are developing a business structure that is both self-sufficient and supported by the government through contracts to rejuvenate and heal country. The principles obstacles faced in achieving a successful native seed, plant, and mass plantings business with secure prospects into the future are a lack of a mass market demand for plants and seeds and a lack of funding security from funding agents. The need for land and waterway restoration is urgent and obvious and the Indigenous labour force is available and ready to undertake these important works.

There is a need for all levels of government to coordinate to support the rejuvenation of Country through supporting mass plantings and feral animal controls, which is consistent with exiting government policies. This will create the market demand and value for native seeds, plants, and planting. Without market demand and a purpose for the plants that our programs are producing, FPMMAC will not be able to continue or expand the project. In addition, the 22 Indigenous Cultural Rangers employed with FPMMAC to deliver this program will not continue to be employed, as our existing funding is only guaranteed for one year. The challenge FPMMAC face is to keep these fully trained employees working to heal country, which will require secure and reliable funding and strong market demand for seeds and plants.

Positive outcomes of the program include the employment of 22 previously unemployed Indigenous people in our Cultural Ranger program. Many of these people already had high level qualifications, past-experience and knowledge of country; and employment has allowed some of these people to buy a home, rent their own accommodation, support their families and purchase vehicles. Employment and financial security have a direct flow on into tangible community benefits.

The Belar Nursey and Biocultural Resource Centre has become an Indigenous education centre and a community hub. Cultural events are held there, local education institutions are sending students to undertake work placements, learn cultural knowledge and be mentored by Indigenous people, and many community groups and government agencies are wanting to visit.



9. Improve Planning, Facilitation, and Coordination

A theme communicated by participants of the review was that **there is an opportunity to enhance facilitation, planning and coordination across the sector in order to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of revegetation, and to deliver the greatest benefit for investments.**

Central to the “Message Stick” of this review is to resource and facilitate regional revegetation planning and knowledge sharing (see section ‘The Message Stick’). Local and regional actors in the revegetation sector include First Nations, government, environmental NGOs and community groups, land managers, NRM businesses, industry groups (such as farmer federations), individuals and researchers. Bringing these different parties to together into a facilitated, well-structured, and resourced regional restoration network could:

- ❖ **Collectively coordinate regional cultural and biodiversity revegetation priorities**, including defining the explicit objectives of different priorities and projects;
- ❖ **Provide opportunity and space for leadership by First Nations**;
- ❖ **Embed local Traditional Ecological Knowledge and western ecological knowledge collaboratively into project specification and planning**, including the identification of appropriate species and landscapes;
- ❖ **Assess the needs, inter-relationships and gaps to deliver the identified priorities at a regional scale**, such as investment, approvals, seed availability, skills and capacity, and land access; and develop/advocate for regionally appropriate solutions;
- ❖ **Consider regional delivery models and partnerships**, to share knowledge, facilitate training, increase capacity and program delivery efficiencies;
- ❖ **Promote and oversee longer term revegetation projects**, such as projects that initially use colonizing species then subsequently add plants (or seeds) in other niches once canopies are established, and major weed threats reduced. The same could apply for the re-introduction of threatened flora (via propagation or translocation) into suitable projects after initial establishment, increasing their chances of persistence. Low-intensity and cultural fire was identified by several sources as part of this longer-term approach to revegetation programs.
- ❖ **Co-ordinate monitoring of projects, review and share opportunities for improvement** including application of Traditional Ecological Knowledge where appropriate, dissemination of research findings and sharing of industry advancements (such as technology developments).

A regional cross-agency, cross sector approach has been adopted to biodiversity planning at a high level through the DELWP Biodiversity Response Planning (BRP) process. BRP aims to build a network and share information so that people working for the future of biodiversity



can determine priorities together, see where efforts will get the best outcomes and pool resources.

While revegetation has not been a strong focus or outcome of the BRP process, there may be an opportunity for a revegetation focussed equivalent, or sub-network, to drive specific planning and coordination in the revegetation sector. The BRP approach has to date not resulted in the inclusion and empowerment of First Nations peoples, values, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a non-negotiable within biodiversity planning and management. If this planning process is to be an enabler of First Nations priorities, then the principles of the review will need to be embedded as key principles of Biodiversity Response Planning.

While improved facilitation, planning and co-ordination was suggested in several submissions, there were various ideas regarding the most appropriate “sponsor”. In recognition of the Right Way principles, developing regional planning units aligned with First Nations Country recognised areas is recommended. Support could be provided by government through Catchment Management Authorities and/or directly from DELWP. Where sovereign lands are not currently subject to recognition by the State it is suggested that non-recognised areas be coordinated at a geographic level until such stage as the State recognises the sovereign rights of people to their lands. (I.e. North West, North East and Southern.)

A conceptual framework is provided in Figure 3, which has some similarities to the current Joint Fuel Management Program (Loddon Mallee), which takes a regional, multi-stakeholder and multi land tenure approach to nominate areas, identify objectives, agree and implement priorities.

The need for better coordination, monitoring and knowledge sharing is only heightened by the challenges posed by climate change. In the immediate term, the influence of climate change on the revegetation sector needs to be explicitly recognised, with funding programs and projects needing to incorporate realistic implementation schedules and greater flexibility to ensure success. In the case of third-party funding or grant agreements, it could require including greater time allowances for seed/plant sourcing (to overcome seasonal fluctuations in seed set and support the incorporation of a wider range of species, sourced from multiple zones into projects). The ability to “rollover” on-ground implementation if seasonal conditions are not conducive to establishment (which also reduces valuable seed “wastage”) would also be beneficial.

ACTION: Government funding programs (State and Federal) to incorporate realistic revegetation project planning and delivery times, which acknowledge that climate change is affecting year to year seed collection and planting viability.



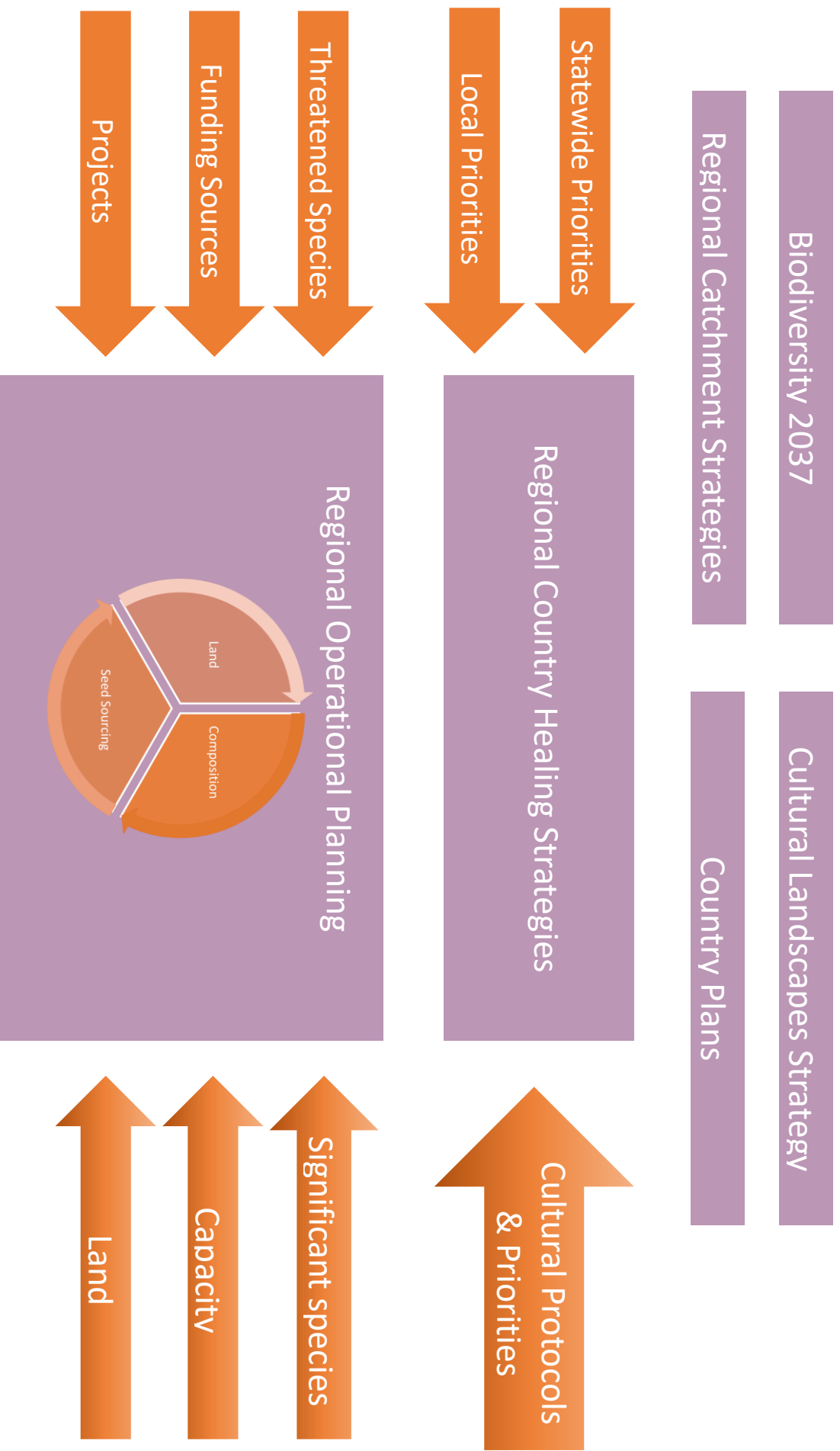


Figure 3: Conceptual regional planning and coordination approach to align priorities as well as provide coordination between land, projects, seed need and seed supply. This could be aligned to or form a sub-network of the BRP process.

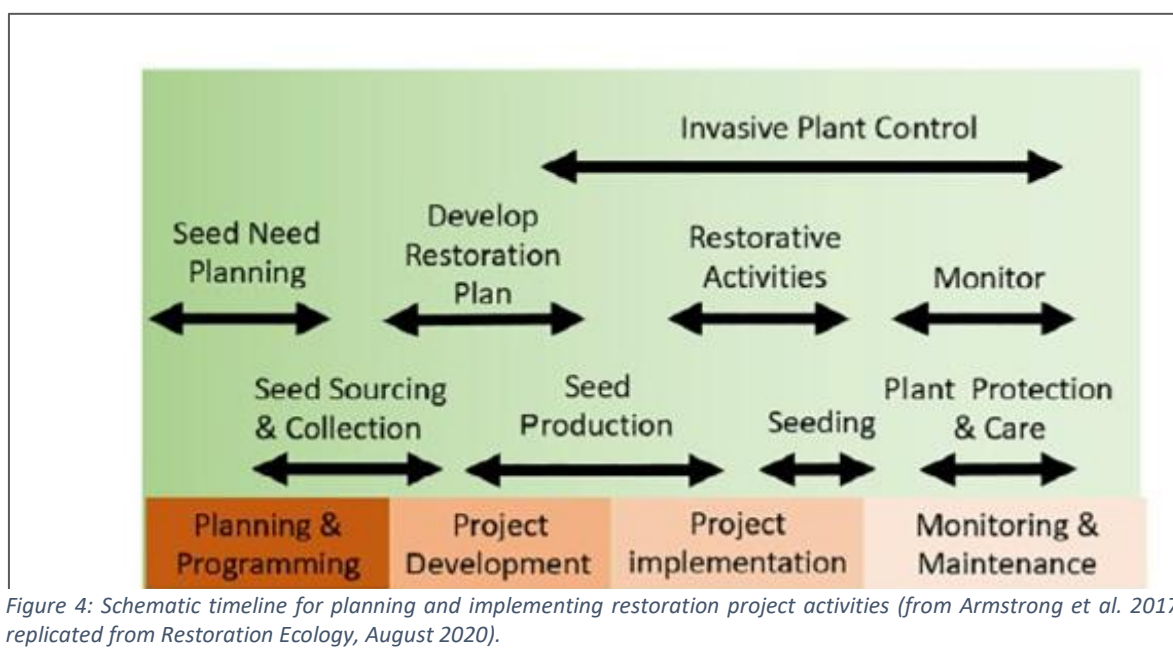
10. A Need for Seed

A viable and vibrant native seed sector is essential to support revegetation, ecological restoration, and the healing of Country.

Different parties within the revegetation sector have different priorities when it comes to revegetation. For example, DELWP has established state-wide priorities for biodiversity and habitat connectivity, CMAs and other NGOs have local and regional priorities, other revegetation project proponents (such as carbon sequestration providers) may have target landscapes, and stemming from this review, we would like to see First Nations cultural revegetation priorities also identified and pursued within the sector. Improved facilitation, planning and co-ordination can see that different seed needs are established through regional collaboration and communicated to the seed sector.

This would ideally be in the format of specific forward orders to seed collectors/producers/seedbanks. Including information such as location, scale and focus ecological communities would improve visibility over upcoming demand. Opportunities for passive restoration (e.g. by excluding threats such as pastoral grazing on marginal lands) and maximising utilisation of the in-situ seedbank can also be identified through coordination processes, with supplementary species seed needs identified.

This approach is best achieved if there is stable, predictable, and ongoing funding for revegetation projects and such funding streams can accommodate proper and orderly planning, which can take many years (refer to Figure 4).



10.1 Building Seed Supply

There is an immediate challenge in increasing the availability of quality, diverse and “climate ready” (i.e. multi-provenance) native seed. The decline in revegetation activity over recent years has challenged the viability of the native seed sector. There has been closure or consolidation of some seedbanks, while active seed collectors are also dwindling in number and few seed production areas are actively managed. Regional seedbanks are struggling to survive on seed sales alone.

Targeted intervention and investment in the short term is required to maintain seed supply to support the healing of Country, the widespread adoption of seed mixing, to capitalise upon the emerging demand from government programs (such as BushBank and the Carbon + Biodiversity pilot) and voluntary investment. For example, a “back of the envelope” calculation indicates something like 25-50 tonne of seed might be required for BushBank alone, depending on project specifics, species selection and the restoration approach. This is at least an order of magnitude bigger than the currently estimated annual seed demand.

Within the seed sector there has been, and continues to be, a failure to establish the fundamental infrastructure required to underpin the sector. This constrains ability to meet the targets and commitments of government, primarily through a lack of seed, which can lead to the use of low-quality seed products. This highlights that the approach of “allowing the market to solve the problem” is not working. This is largely due to the absence of predictable, steady, and ongoing demand for native seed at a level and quality required to meet and or exceed demand and thus create an effective market. While improved coordination and planning of the sector may result in some up-scaling of existing operations there is likely to be a significant gap between what is required to service targets and the market’s capacity to respond. The only question is the scale of this gap; currently the market is likely to be able to only service 10% of policy targets. **Direct investment by government in the establishment of the foundational infrastructure of the seed sector is therefore required to establish the basic capacity to meet the aspirations of *Biodiversity 2037* and the *Victorian Climate Change Strategy*.**

A comment that was consistently made in the *Right Plant, Right Way* workshop was that the monetisation of seed in the sector is not in line with cultural understanding of how seeds and plants should be treated. It was suggested that a better model may be to resource First Nations and others operating in the revegetation sector to collect and produce seed which could be supplied without cost to revegetation projects on an “as needs” basis. Under this model, projects would apply for seed rather than funding to purchase seed.

Government backed seed supply agreements, or an “availability” fee could bolster seed supply, quality, and species diversity over the short to medium term. This would support the seed sector to maintain and build its capacity (e.g. provide a basis to invest in training and skill development). It would also support the implementation of best practice standards and



adapt to emerging challenges such as the need for wider seed collection ranges for individual projects.

If put in place this direct investment would recognise that a quality and sustainable seed supply is a “public good” (similar to public transport, where the operator is paid a fee to ensure the service is available). It would recognise that the market is not currently willing or able to achieve full cost recovery and/or generate a return on substantial investments (such as collecting a wide range of species from multiple climatic zones, or the establishment and ongoing management of SPAs). Such investment could be tailored or directed to meet specific regional market gaps, stimulate activity within priority cultural and biodiversity areas and mobilise First Nation economic opportunities and partnerships (such as Seed Production Areas), including embedding skills and training development through a co-designed training approach.

Building a diverse seed stockpile for ready deployment, particularly with the inclusion of a broader range of species that may not be typically available (due to the economics or practicalities of collection) could both buffer against increased seasonal seed set variability but also support greater diversity and better biodiversity outcomes for projects implemented on short time frames. Any seed collected in excess of specific project demand could be deployed into priority areas of the landscape, including crown land or degraded road reserves.

It could be seen as a largely “no regrets” investment, which instead of funding seed supply indirectly via disparate competitive grants and market-based revegetation programs, would be a direct investment in quality seed to underpin the delivery of effective revegetation projects. Further evaluation of the most effective investment method is required but could include options such as: grants, direct purchase contracts (and possible “on-sell” or supply to government funded projects), revolving funds, subsidies, underwriting etc.

ACTION: Investigate options for direct investment to bolster the quality, quantity and diversity of seed available (where possible, from First Nation seed suppliers/partners), where possible incorporating co-designed training packages.

10.2 Seed Collection

There was strong agreement amongst submissions that the highly degraded and fragmented remnant vegetation estate cannot be the sole supply of seed if we are to achieve a goal of over 200,000 hectares of revegetation. This is particularly the case for many of the most threatened habitats across arable lands such as grasslands and grassy woodlands. From a First Nations perspective, these lands and systems are sick and in need of healing. To take



from them in this condition, while consistent with regulation and law, is inappropriate; particularly in the case of rare and threatened species.

Nonetheless, in the short term there was a common call to streamline seed collection permit/licensing processes to improve transparency and to provide greater access to reserved land for sustainable seed collection. This will help to maximise species and genetic diversity and “prime” the further development of Seed Production Areas (see Section 10.4). Both the future need for seed, and the availability of seed from existing wild sources, will vary regionally based on the extent and condition of remnant vegetation. It will also vary based on the demand of regional revegetation projects.

ACTION: Review and reform the current seed licensing system and processes to ensure they are easy to use, transparent and effective in regulating seed collection, protecting biodiversity, and maintaining First Nations rights.

As previously noted, *Recognition and Settlement Agreements* (where in place) include permissions for Traditional Owners to harvest seed on their lands on condition of it being undertaken in a sustainable manner. First Nations can actively contribute to native seed supply where appropriate, and partner with the wider sector (such as seedbanks) to access skills and training and create avenues for seed storage, use and/or sale.

Accessing a broader suite of private lands and previously revegetated landscapes for seed collection can also supplement public land collection and increase genetic variation. The specific needs and availability of seed on private land will, again, vary regionally. Bringing local networks together to share knowledge and seed source options will assist, while community engagement (and possible incentives) to access a broader suite of private lands as seed sources may assist in the short to medium term. Allowing sustainable seed collection from within privately protected land (particularly those based on revegetation, such as the BushBank program) could also increasingly supplement wild seed sources into the future.

ACTION: Where culturally and environmentally appropriate, consider incorporating conditions into revegetation funding agreements to enable future seed harvesting from revegetated areas.

10.3 Regional Seedbanks

Regional seedbanks (which differ from conservation seed banks, such as the Royal Botanic Gardens) provide a buffer between seed collection and restoration need. They seek to collect



and store high quality and diverse seed when it is available, for later deployment into projects. They also communicate seed demand needs and priorities between project initiators and collectors.

However, they rely on a continual demand to generate sales to cover operational costs, and turnover to refresh the seed supply. The challenges posed by climate change only strengthen the need for successful seedbanks, as increased variability in flowering and seed vigour challenges season to season collection and as project initiators increasingly require access to a seed from a broader provenance.

Secure funding for the operational costs and a reliance on a very small highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce (both within seedbanks and collector networks) appear to be the greatest challenge in the short-term. External investment (government and/or philanthropic), or a form of government backed seed supply agreements or availability fees is likely needed for their on-going viability in at least the short-term. It would be best that over the medium-term, seed demand supports more regionally based seedbanks, providing a closer connection between seed on Country, local knowledge, seed collectors, seed production areas and revegetation projects.

Seeding Victoria have developed and maintain a publicly available, online seed database which provides species availability and provenance information. It also includes a spatial search tool. We understand this tool has been made available to another seedbank under an agreed framework. With growing demand and the application of climate ready plots, increasing the transparency of available seed, and its originating provenance, is needed. This requires support from a centralised seed bank-database. There may be an opportunity to capitalise upon the existing Seeding Victoria database infrastructure under an agreed commercial framework that supports its ongoing and wider utilisation.

ACTION: Support a centralised seed supply database (beginning by looking at leveraging Seeding Victoria's existing spatial seed database).

10.4 Seed Production Areas

While many believe Seed Production Areas (SPAs) can provide reliability for seed quantity, quality and diversity; few are currently maintained, and they are of small scale. Without significant interventions in SPA development (e.g., direct resourcing of First Nations, infrastructure grants or targeted tax concessions) or through large increases in seed demand, SPAs in Victoria will not develop the capacity required to meet sector and government policy needs.



The Australian Network for Plant Conservation seed survey, which surveyed seed producers across Australia, found that most seed production enterprises currently in the market are small (<10 staff) with a minority of these growing greater than 10 species with typical annual yields of 5-10kg of seed. Given the establishment of SPAs generally involves a time lag of 3-6 years for the most common and easiest to establish species and with establishment costs in the order of \$100,000 - \$200,000 per hectare, there is a need to invest in this most basic of infrastructure now to make it remotely possible to meet the targets set under *Biodiversity 2037* and the *Victorian Climate Change Strategy*. Failure to secure and establish immediate and significant investment under *Biodiversity 2037* in this most basic of foundational infrastructure for the sector will result in increased dependence on managed remnant stands (which often have much greater variability in seed quality, frequency of production and reliability).

First Nations are already looking to establish large scale seed production areas, with Dja Dja Wurrung upscaling Kangaroo Grass production to more than 50 hectares in the coming 12 months, with planning for other species underway. The First Peoples of the Millewa Mallee have been successful in receiving funding to begin establishment of a large scale Seed Production Area (see Box 4) and Barengi Gadjin Land Council require resourcing to establish a significant Seed Production Area (see Box 3).

Direct investment either by government or others in supporting First Nations to ensure the sector has capacity is essential to dramatically increasing delivery over the coming years, and to coming close to meeting the targets embedded in government policy. These seed production goals must be replicated across the state if the sector is to develop the required capacity. Additionally, if the commitment of the State to First Nations leadership is to be embedded in delivery, then the opportunity to lead the establishment of this foundational infrastructure must be provided to First Nations.

ACTION: Immediate government investment in partnership with First Nations to establish diverse (>10 species), large scale (>10 hectares) Seed Production Areas to ensure seed supply to enable and empower the revegetation sector to meet the commitments of the State set in *Biodiversity 2037* and the *Victorian Climate Change Strategy*.

10.5 Standards and Accreditation

There has been a call, both from submissions to this review and of the Australian Network for Plant Conservation seed survey, for some form of seed industry accreditation and/or the formal adoption of seed industry standards, to ensure the supply and quality of seed is both transparent and able to supply the current and future sector. Greater demand and pricing that fairly recoups the full cost of maintaining a sustainable and high-quality seed source



(including seed collection/production, storage, and testing) is fundamental to the viability and service quality of the native seed sector and to achieving strong biodiversity outcomes.

If a system of accreditation and/or formal industry standards are adopted, then buyers (whether commercial or linked to government funded programs) will need to ensure quality seed specification, they will require compliance with best practice standards (which incorporate the Right Way principles) and will need to adopt realistic project implementation timelines. The current level of supply and demand in the sector makes the mandatory application of standards cost prohibitive, with many seedbanks and collectors working with small orders (less than 1kg), therefore making bulk testing unable to be undertaken.

We appreciate this is an area of strong focus for Project Phoenix (including consideration of the establishment of an “industry body” and a National Seed Strategy). In Victoria, stabilising and supporting the existing native seed sector to meet short term demand appears a priority, followed by a transition towards the adoption of more formal standards in line with sector growth. Developing national frameworks in parallel with capacity building opportunities is possible, if, and only if, supply and demand increase dramatically to enable these standards to be implemented in a cost-effective manner.

A key component of *Pupangarli Marnmarnepu* “Owning Our Future” DELWP’s *Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy 2020-2025*, is ensuring that First Nations voices are heard and that their right to speak for matters that concern their Country are respected.

*Self determination of
First Nations*

Participation in Project Phoenix by First Nations people of Victoria has been limited.

Our position is that a foundational pillar of **Self-determination for First Nations** be embedded in Project Phoenix to ensure it remain relevant in the Victorian context. This is required given the range of agreements in place between First Nations and the State and *Pupangarli Marnmarnepu*. Through implementing this position, self-determination of First Nations would be embedded in Project Phoenix thus ensure the right of First Nations to speak for their Country across the sector is respected.

A key outcome of this review is the formulation of a set of principles for First Nations self-determination in restoration, revegetation planning and projects (see section 8.1). These need to be acknowledged in wider sector standards and strategies.

ACTION: Acknowledge and support the adoption of the Right Way principles by government and the wider sector through their incorporation into guidance, industry standards, strategies, and programs.





11. The “Message Stick”

The revegetation sector in Victoria is currently best described as a small, under resourced, largely uncoordinated (at a regional scale) and volunteer dependant sector. It is expected to rapidly upscale delivery to meet government targets and expectations however it lacks the basic supply of product to meet demand (ie seed). Given the current state of the sector, the goals and objectives of First Nations and the moral and legal obligations of the State to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal people there is a significant opportunity to modernise, redesign and reconceptualise the sector to meet future demand in a way that enables First Nations leadership.

To achieve this, the review has identified that there are several key governance and coordination fundamentals that must be put into place:

- ❖ The creation and resourcing of a First Nations *Right Plant, Right Way* Group, a First Nations Secretariat, and the resourcing of different First Nations groups in the gathering and sharing of knowledge, resources, opportunities and to achieve their goals in revegetation.
- ❖ Coordination of the sector through the establishment, resourcing and facilitation of regional restoration planning and knowledge sharing. This should be led by First Nations and DELWP, bringing together government, NGOs, community and private sector practitioners for regular (suggested bi-annual) forums at regional scales relevant to First Nations (ie RAP areas as well as separate forums for non-RAP areas of North West, North East and Southern).
- ❖ Immediate government investment in partnership with First Nations to establish diverse (>10 species), large scale (>10 hectares) Seed Production Areas to ensure seed supply to enable the revegetation sector to meet the commitments of the State set in *Biodiversity 2037* and the *Victorian Climate Change Strategy*.

To enable the sector to build capacity there is a need for collaboration with First Nations through a *Right Plant, Right Way* Group to:

- ❖ Ensure that funding meaningfully contributes towards cultural healing priorities (both species and landscapes), by embedding the Right Way principles in the revegetation sector through conditions of grants and funding programs, as well as networks and standards. This can be done through development of new funding programs with cultural priorities, or adaptation of existing programs such as BushBank.
- ❖ Develop a collective branding and certification approach for First Nation seed and plant production;
- ❖ Incorporate realistic revegetation project planning and delivery times, which acknowledge cultural timelines as well as other constraints including climate change impacts on year-to-year seed collection and planting viability;



- ❖ Mobilise *Recognition and Settlement Agreements* (particularly the Natural Resource Agreements) and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) to support the development of First Nations seed collection/production capacity.

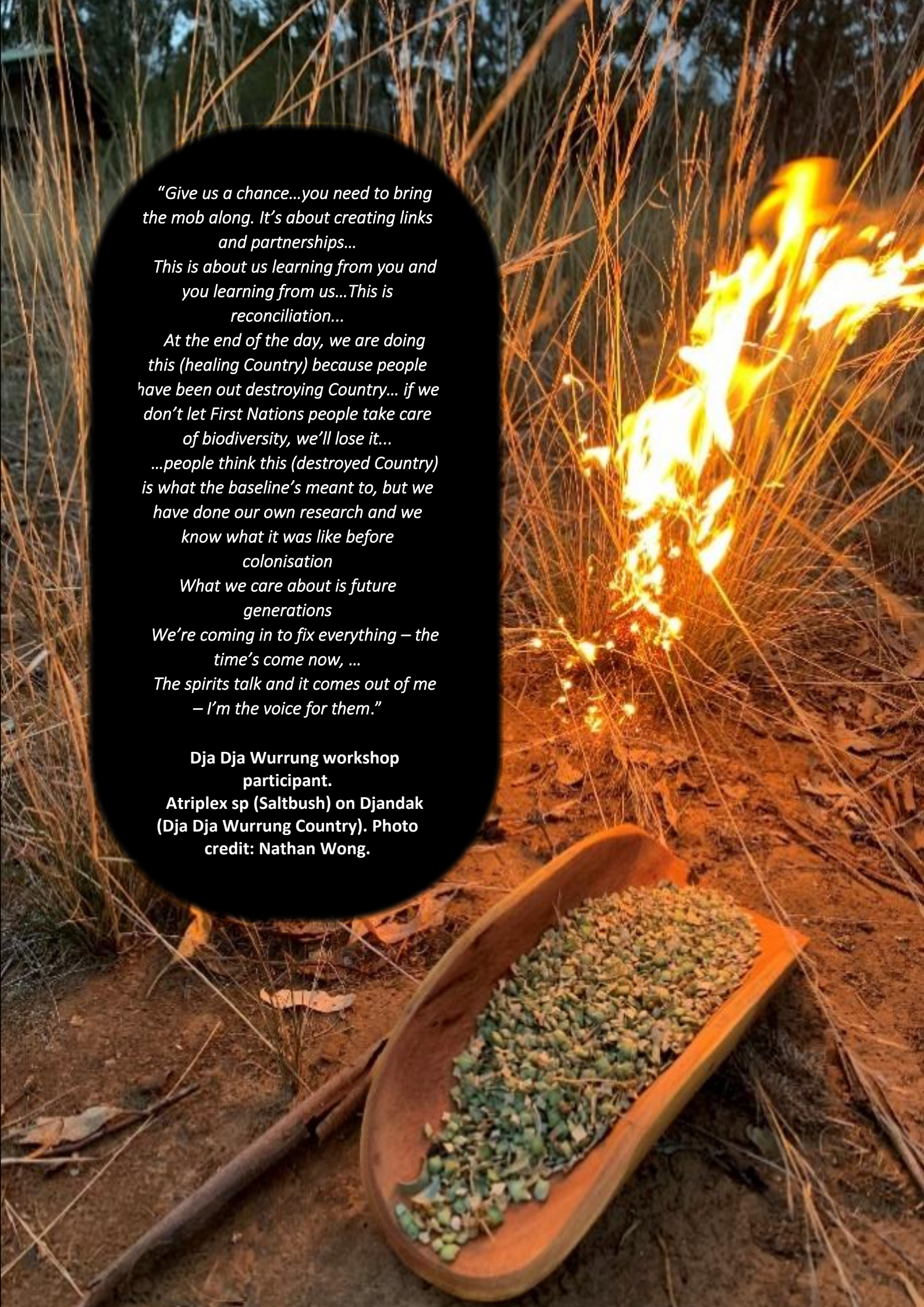
Other key actions to develop the seed supply and demand to support revegetation include:

- ❖ Investigate options for direct investment to bolster the quality, quantity and diversity of seed available, where possible, from First Nation seed suppliers/partners and incorporating a co-design training packages;
- ❖ Directly forward purchase seed or payment of a seed “availability charge”;
- ❖ Consider incorporating conditions into revegetation funding agreements to enable future seed harvesting from revegetated areas;
- ❖ Develop communication networks to increase access to private land for seed collection, within existing regulatory frameworks;
- ❖ Support a centralised seed supply database;;
- ❖ Review and reform the current seed licensing system.



Coolamon with murnong seed and digging stick. Photo taken on Djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country). Photo credit Marilynne Nicholls.





*"Give us a chance...you need to bring
the mob along. It's about creating links
and partnerships...*

*This is about us learning from you and
you learning from us...This is
reconciliation...*

*At the end of the day, we are doing
this (healing Country) because people
have been out destroying Country... if we
don't let First Nations people take care
of biodiversity, we'll lose it...*

*...people think this (destroyed Country)
is what the baseline's meant to, but we
have done our own research and we
know what it was like before
colonisation*

*What we care about is future
generations*

*We're coming in to fix everything – the
time's come now, ...*

*The spirits talk and it comes out of me
– I'm the voice for them."*

**Dja Dja Wurrung workshop
participant.**

**Atriplex sp (Saltbush) on Djandak
(Dja Dja Wurrung Country). Photo
credit: Nathan Wong.**

12. Summary of Actions

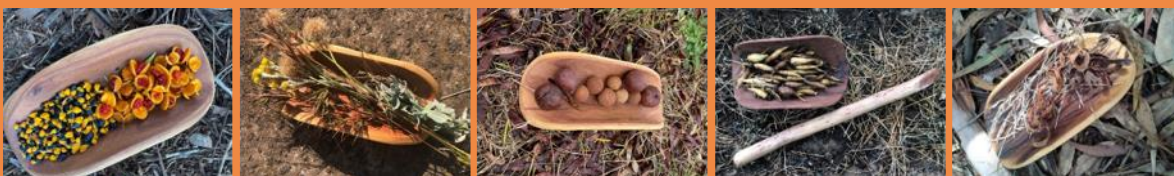
| 11.1. First Nations Opportunities and Goals | |
|---|--|
| Create a <i>Right Plant Right, Way</i> Steering Group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Create and resource a <i>Right Plant, Right Way</i> Group, including a position for a First Nations identified Secretariat to coordinate and organise the group. Ensure that the priorities set by the group are realised and that the ongoing participation of First Nations is resourced |
| Adoption of the Right Way Principles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Support the <i>Right Plant, Right Way</i> Group to communicate the Right Way Principles to the wider sector and support the adoption of these principles through their incorporation into guidance, industry standards, strategies, and programs. |
| Delivering cultural healing priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Ensure that funding meaningfully contributes towards cultural healing priorities (species and landscapes). Either through existing funds such as BushBank, or the creation of a new dedicated cultural healing fund and the resourcing of revegetation projects which are aligned with the Right Way principles. ❖ Preferential procurement approaches should look to support and enable First Nations aspirations rather than First Nations having to respond to government needs. |
| Supporting First Nation revegetation enterprises | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Mobilise <i>Recognition and Settlement Agreements</i> (particularly the Natural Resource Agreements) and the <i>Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006</i> (Vic) to support the development of First Nations seed collection/production capacity. ❖ Funding across Natural Resource Management programs must include options for a First Nations supplier to plan, coordinate and deliver works on behalf of the applicant. |
| Cultural certification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ With the <i>Right Plant, Right Way</i> Group, investigate and develop a First Nations owned collective branding and certification approach for seed and plant production. |



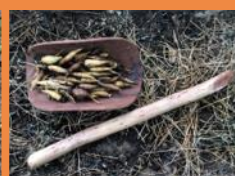
| 11.2. Improve Planning, Facilitation, and Coordination | |
|--|---|
| Regional revegetation planning & co-ordination | ❖ Resource and facilitate regional revegetation planning and knowledge sharing, bringing together First Nations, Government, NGO, community private sector practitioners for regular forums. Regional Planning units should be aligned with First Nations recognised Country areas, coordinate on geographical level where sovereign areas are not recognised by the State. |
| Project implementation | ❖ Government funding programs (State and Federal) to incorporate realistic revegetation project planning and delivery times, which acknowledge that climate change is affecting year to year seed collection and planting viability. |



Dalki Garringa Native Nursery owned and managed by the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC).



| 11.3. A Need for Seed | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Seed collection & production | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Investigate options for direct investment to bolster the diversity of seed available (where possible, from First Nation seed suppliers/partners), where possible incorporating co-designed training packages ❖ Where culturally and environmentally appropriate, consider incorporating conditions into revegetation funding agreements to enable future seed harvesting from revegetated areas. ❖ Develop communication networks to increase access to private land for seed collection, within existing regulatory frameworks. ❖ Review and reform the current seed licensing system and processes to ensure they are easy to use, transparent and effective in regulating seed collection, protecting biodiversity, and maintaining First Nations rights. ❖ Immediate government investment in partnership with First Nations to establish diverse (>10 species), large scale (>10 hectares) Seed Production Areas to ensure seed supply to enable and empower the revegetation sector to meet the commitments of the state set in Biodiversity 2037 and the Victorian Climate Change Strategy. |
| Seedbanks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Support a centralised seed supply database (beginning by looking at leveraging Seeding Victoria's existing spatial seed database). |



13. Source Documents

Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (2020). *Biodiversity revegetation with provenance mixing for climate change adaptation*. DELWP, East Melbourne, Australia.

Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (2020). *Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy 2020-2025*

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Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners, *Victorian Traditional Owner Native Food and Botanical Strategy*, 2021.

Hancock, N., Gibson-Roy, P., Driver, M., and Broadhurst, L. (2020) *The Australian Native Seed Sector Survey Report*. Australian Network for Plant Conservation, Canberra, Australia.

Hill, C., Lillywhite, S., and Simon, M. (2010). *Guide to free prior and informed consent*, Oxfam Australia.

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (2011). *Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation Final Report*. Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, East Melbourne.

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14. Appendices

Appendix 1: Flyer seeking submissions to the revegetation review

'Right Plant, Right Way'

Revegetation Review Victoria 2021



The Victorian State Government have engaged Dja Dja Wurrung (through Djandak Enterprises) to conduct a review of revegetation services within Victoria. This is an outcome of the ongoing relationship between the State and Dja Dja Wurrung established through the *Recognition and Settlement Agreement* (RSA 2013). While Dja Dja Wurrung can only speak for Dja Dja Wurrung Country (Djandak); one of the key principles of 'Right Plant; Right Way' is self-determination and the prioritisation of First Nations peoples and values within the sector.

This review will workshop ideas and solutions to create alignments between different groups with an interest in restoring habitat and cultural practices across the state. The healing of Country will be supported by understanding and improving the current capacity and capability of the Victorian revegetation services sector to respond to the impacts of long-term ecosystem decline through large scale landscape clearing, fragmentation, disasters and climate change.

We would like to understand your role, your future aspirations, your ideas and innovations to contribute to vibrant and effective revegetation.

A growing, evolving and effective revegetation sector could consider ongoing species and biodiversity decline, the challenges of climate change; the carbon market and its increasing opportunities; partnerships with First Nations peoples and large-scale land remediation (such as from mining closures).

By engaging in this review, you will be able to:

- Share your opinions and experiences about revegetation;
- Create new networks and partnerships;
- Contribute to shaping the future direction of revegetation;
- Identify and enhance knowledge and new skills;
- Generate new opportunities;
- Strengthen an essential sector that supports community wellbeing.



Background

Revegetation is a practical and essential step to restore biodiverse habitat and ecological resilience. Returning plants into the landscape also captures carbon, and enhances water quality, while supporting social and environmental wellbeing.

The State Government's *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037* is expected to drive growth in the revegetation sector by setting a target of 200,000 hectares of revegetation in "priority" areas by 2037. It also commits to engaging with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians to include Aboriginal values and traditional ecological knowledge in biodiversity planning and management, as well increasing Aboriginal participation in biodiversity management and support access to biodiversity for economic development.

The Victorian Climate Change Act 2017 has enshrined in policy a zero-carbon emissions target by 2050, which is also anticipated to drive an expansion of biodiverse carbon sequestration activity across Victoria.

This review will be looking at a range of positive actions to support the expansion of the revegetation sector.

This review will compliment work already completed by the ANPC ([The Australian Native Seed Survey Report](#)) and current work through [Project Phoenix](#), albeit with a Victorian focus.

Submissions

We encourage a broad range of ideas, innovations and suggested interventions to assess and present to Government and are seeking wider participation in this review of the revegetation sector from interested stakeholders. Submissions are encouraged to consider:

- Plant identification, seed collection, storage, cleaning testing and/or sale;
- Seed production areas and/or wild harvest;
- Climate ready revegetation;
- Biodiversity and carbon sequestration;
- Nurseries and propagation;
- Threatened species programs;
- Land access & availability;
- Cultural fire;
- Site selection and soil types, eg. salinity and charring (destroyed soil types);
- Research, monitoring, evaluation and reporting;
- Skill-based training;
- Partnerships with First Nations people;
- Funding opportunities;
- Regulation, policy and standards.

Written submissions close on Tuesday 9th March 2021

Please lodge your submissions via email

revegetationreview@diadiawurrunga.com.au

2



Appendix 2: Review participants

Submissions were received across the revegetation sector from individuals, organisations, businesses, and government. These included:

| |
|--|
| Angelsea, Aireys Inlet Society for the Protection of Flora and Fauna |
| Arborline Pty Ltd |
| Australian Network for Plant Conservation Inc. |
| Bush Heritage Australia |
| Cardinia Environment Coalition |
| Cassinia Environmental |
| Connecting Country |
| David Cheal |
| Dr Adam Miller, Professor Ary Hoffmann, Dr Craig Nitschke, Dr Andrew Weeks & Associate Professor John Morgan |
| Dr. Paul Gibson Roy & Associate Professor John Morgan |
| Greening Australia Ltd |
| Ian Penna |
| Karoline Klein |
| Lake Burrumbeet Sanctuary |
| Melbourne Water Corporation |
| Mount Korong Eco-Watch Association |
| North Central Catchment Management Authority |
| Otway Greening Nursery |
| Project Platypus |
| Raakajlim - Mallee Conservation |
| Research Centre for Future Landscapes, Latrobe University |
| Sustainable Living Mallee |
| Trust for Nature |
| Vic Catchments (A Collaboration of CMAs) |
| Victorian National Parks Association |
| Victorian Native Seed |
| derWoorndoo Chatsworth Landcare Group |



Workshops were attended by a variety of First Nations, government and wider sector participants, these included:

| |
|---|
| Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation |
| Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation |
| First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation |
| Tyntynder Homestead (Watti Watti representatives) |
| Taungurung Land & Waters Council |
| Yorta Yorta Parks Victoria Aboriginal Rangers |
| Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation |
| Spirit Bird Creations |
| Catchment Management Authority |
| Cassinia Environmental |
| David Cheal |
| Parks Victoria |
| Department of Environment Land Water and Planning |
| Odonata |
| Melbourne Water |
| Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria |



