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Criterion	Values	Rating
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The Kurtonitj property consists of 353 hectares. Until recent times before the white man came to Kurtonitj and cleared the flatter northern part of the property, the natural vegetation comprised Stoney Rise Manna-Gum dominated woodlands. Deep Freshwater marshes occur across much of the central and southern part of the property. The Darlots Creek forms the western boundary of the Kurtonitj property.

Gunditjmara people lived as one with the land, plants and animals, and played our part to manage the 'landscape according to our traditional customs and lores. It is testament to our success that the Australian Aboriginal culture is the oldest surviving culture on the earth, and

Our project is to manage the Kurtonitj property as a site of Indigenous cultural significance, to protect our cultural sites within the property, and to display them to visitors in a culturally appropriate manner.

Further, we have already formed strong working relationships with other agencies involved in conservation land management such as the Environment Australia, Glenelg-Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, Parks Victoria, Department of Sustainability & Environment, and Kanawinka Geopark. It is Winda Mara's intention to maintain our positive relationships with these and other relevant organisations.

"Kurtonitj" is a word identified in the Dharwurd Wurrung Dictionary of South west Victoria meaning a crossing place. The Kurtonitj property is near where the Budj Bim lava flow is crossed by Kallara or the Darlots Creek, as it shifts from the western side of the Budj Bim lava flow to the eastern side.

Prior to purchase by the Indigenous Land Corporation, the Kurtonitj property was owned by two separate individuals, but the ICC purchase has enabled the property to become integrated into the one property, and will be managed as such.

Description:

Kurtonitj is a 353 hectare area of mainly marshland on the Mt Eccles lava flow midway between the Mt Eccles volcanic plain and the sea. The lava flow through the property appears as stony rises with natural drainage lines through seasonally inundated marshes. Darlot Creek (Kallara in Dhauwurd Wurrung language) runs southwards through the property along the western edge of the lava flow formation. The evidence of Indigenous aquaculture on the property relates to the marshland and stone structures made of volcanic scoria.

Two vehicle tracks pass through the property and enable access to a visitor shelter, public toilets and a walking path to an elevated viewing platform over remnant aquaculture structures and to ancient eucalypts that may have been used for smoke-curing eels. A recent archaeological survey has confirmed evidence of two stone fish traps and a culturally modified tree (Crouch 2014b). In May 2014 department officers viewed a stone structure that was said to be hut foundation south of the remnant aquaculture structures.

Analysis:

The nominator states that Kurtonitj has the same national heritage values as the two listed parts of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape. These are summarised below.

Criterion (a): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history.

Ancient aquaculture

The National heritage value of the ancient aquaculture system represented at Mt Eccles and Lake Condah and Tyrendarra includes 'eel traps along the Tyrendarra lava flow are of outstanding heritage value' and 'remains of the channels, weirs and fish traps ... hundreds and probably thousands of years old' comprising evidence of 'a complex system of natural and artificially created wetlands, channels, the stone bases of weirs and stone fish traps that were used by Gunditj Mara people to grow and harvest eels and fish'.

There is evidence of similar ancient aquaculture practices in Western Victoria. The National Heritage value of the Mt Eccles and Lake Condah and Tyrendarra areas is due to their being better representatives of these systems than other areas, which had a more 'limited range of the features associated with eel aquaculture, mainly channels and fish traps'.

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In addition the 'remains of the system of eel aquaculture in the Tyrendarra area demonstrate a transition from a forager society to a society that practiced husbandry of fresh water fish [resulting] ... in high population densities represented by the remains of stone huts clustered into villages of between two and sixteen huts, [providing] ... the economic base for a stratified society ruled by chiefs with a form of hereditary succession to this office.'

The nominator states that Kurtonitj 'holds many cultural sites important to Gunditjmara people, including stone eel [Kooyang in the Dhauwurd wurrung language] traps and stone channels, stone house sites, eel smoking trees (Nomination 2009: 2). No specific information was provided by the nominator to support this claim.

The aquaculture system of Lake Condah and surrounds

There is evidence to support the distinctiveness of the systems of aquaculture that existed in this area of south-west Victoria compared with 'contemporary, historical and archaeological records of freshwater fish traps recorded in other parts of Australia which provided a system for channelling fish in streams or rivers into traps rather than creating conditions for fish husbandry' (Sutton 2004). These distinctive features are recognised in the National Heritage Values of the two listed places of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape.

As noted above, Ingram observed the functioning Budj Bim Aboriginal fishery as 'one of the largest and most remarkable aboriginal fisheries in the western district of Victoria ... the position is very well chosen' (Ingram quoted in Richards, 2011: 74). The system Ingram mapped at Lake Condah is known as the Muldoons Trap Complex. It is a complex of at least 350 meters of constructed channels running along the lava flow corridor on the former Muldoons property at Lake Condah. Dated to 6570-6620 before present, the Muldoons Trap Complex is a highly significant site for Aboriginal prehistory. Its evidence of sophisticated environmental manipulation at an early date reveals a more complex pattern than the standard picture of Australian Aboriginal hunting and gathering.

The archaeological evidence identifies that Muldoons Trap Complex continued west, south and north of Ingram's map (Richards 2001:78). In addition to the northern Lake Condah area that Ingram mapped, the section of the system within the boundary of the Lake Condah National Heritage place, Ingram described the extent and elements of smaller fisheries along the Darlot Creek valley, south of Lake Condah:

"There are numerous smaller fisheries constructed in suitable places in small bays and outlets where the water sinks into the trap scoriae down along the margin of the Valley of Darlots' Creek. Across this valley at suitable places were erected large barricades, constructed with strong forked stakes, horizontal spars, and vertical stakes strengthened with piles of stones, openings were also left in these." (Ingram quoted in Richards 2011:74)

The installation of the European channel constructed by Ingram at the main Aboriginal weir in 1887 emptied the Condah Swamp, which was the main source of water for Lake Condah. The full impact on the whole system is unclear but the newly installed channel may have 'improved outflow' of water from Lake Condah, potentially redirecting it down Darlot Creek (Richards 2011:78). Richards states:

"It is possible that the drainage programs required modifications to be made to the system in the stony rises south of the outlet by the Gunditjmara for the system to continue in use. On the other hand, it is clear that barrier dams or weirs across the overflow stream from the point of the outlet and down the course of Darlots' Creek would have remained effective means of trapping large numbers of migrating eels and other fish, even from a diminished catchment following drainage of the Swamp" (Richards 2011:79).

Unfortunately Ingram did not map any of the barricade sites along Darlot Creek that he describes as operating after the installation of the European channel. It is not possible to conclude from his records or from existing archaeological evidence that these lay within the Kurtonitj Property.

Darlots Creek

Darlots Creek is recognised by historic and contemporary researchers as playing an important role in the aquaculture system with reference to the location for additional barricades after the installation of the European barrier; as a major source of winter-fed water from the overflow of Lake Condah; and as the migration route for eels that extended from Lake Condah to the sea (Ingram 1893 quoted in Richards, 2011: 74; Context, 2013: 30; Crouch, 2013: 12). From an Indigenous perspective, Darlots Creek (or Killara, meaning 'permanent' in the Dhauwurd wurrung language) is a 'quintessential element of the Budj Bim landscape and operation of the Gunditjmara eel fishery: Killara was an artery, traversing the Budj Bim landscape, delivering life and succour from Tae Rak in the north to Tyrendarra near the coast' (Crouch, 2014a: 7).

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There is evidence that Aboriginal people continued to farm fish after the installation of the European channel in 1893 (Ingram quoted in Richards, 2011: 74), 1895 (Stahle quoted in Richards, 2011:77) and in 1908 (Context, 2013:21). The documentary evidence, which includes Ingram's map and the recorded observations of ongoing aquaculture practices in the landscape, does not locate this activity beyond the Muldoons Fish Trap Complex within the Mt Eccles Lake Condah Area. In the absence of dating it is not possible to exclude the possibility that the two fish traps identified on Kurtonitj were used after Ingram's modifications altered the flows along Darlots Creek, rather than as part of an ancient system of aquaculture.

Smoking trees

Gunditj Mirring representatives identified a large eucalypt said to have been used for smoking harvested eels in support of systematic aquaculture on Kurtonitj (Crouch 2014:iii). Crouch reported this as 'a remarkable but perhaps undeveloped finding' (Crouch 2014:7). Eel or Kooyang smoking trees are not identified as an attribute of the listed values of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape. Builth hypothesised that evidence of eel lipids at culturally modified trees could be due either to eel smoking for preservation or family cooking hearths, stating 'a further study of the trees would provide useful information with regard to their ages and cultural usage [and] to identify activity differentiation between the two hypothesised cultural tree uses' (Builth, 2002: 268-9). Lane identified the lack of a control sample for lipids in the original analysis (Lane cited in Crouch, 2014b:7).

The evidence relating to culturally modified trees on Kurtonitj does not support the significance of the place as part of a system of ancient aquaculture.

It is acknowledged that the two nominated properties - Kurtonitj Property and Peters Property - form part of a broader landscape of importance to the Gunditj Mirring for its living and historic connections (Nomination, 2009). It has also been recognised that archaeological evidence 'represents only a limited dimension of Budj Bim cultural heritage' (Crouch 2014b:4) and that 'the operation of the Gunditjmara fishery was and remains quintessentially a social act' (McNiven and Bell, 2010: 105). These quotes point to one of the challenges in assessing the aquaculture system and its heritage values: that is the extent to which the heritage values that are based on the adaptation of the physical environment can be tied to their associative landscape attributes. In terms of the assessment of the nominated place against criterion (a) it is the tangible evidence of the aquaculture practice that is necessary to meet the significance threshold.

Kurtonitj Surveys

In 2014 the Department commissioned additional archaeological research for evidence of the aquaculture system on Kurtonitj in consultation with Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation. Archaeologist Joe Crouch reviewed previous research and site listings on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register before conducting a rapid archaeological survey to identify any physical evidence of the aquaculture system and evaluate the integrity, condition and significance of any sites in a regional and functional context (Crouch 2014b). The Gunditj Mirring representatives identified three known sites on Kurtonitj including two state-listed stone fish traps and a culturally modified tree (Crouch 2014b). Crouch states his findings may be limited because of the brevity of the survey, poor ground visibility due to the season, the absence of flood waters that might reveal the pattern of ancient flows, the likely obscuring of features sediment infill, and decay and lack of evidence of organic materials used (Crouch 2014b:10).

Crouch's Kurtonitj literature review and survey did not identify any new sites or reveal any evidence of an ancient system of aquaculture system on Kurtonitj including fish traps, channels and weirs that reach national threshold for the property.

The four investigations undertaken to date (Builth, 2002; Lane, 2006 and 2010; Crouch 2014b) all verify the existence of two fish traps in good physical condition (Crouch, 2014b: iii). Crouch concludes that Kurtonitj provides evidence of one south facing 'v' shaped fish trap to capture eels during flooding from Lake Condah, 'the function and integrity of the structure are not in doubt' (Crouch, 2014a: 13). The second fish trap is identified as 'five piles of basalt cobbles that configure to form two main channels or races' (Crouch, 2014b: 15). Features previously identified by Builth (2002), including a third fish trap and a lineal swamp feature suggested to be used to hold or 'grow eels' could not be located on Kurtonitj (Crouch, 2014b: 10). Crouch concluded that another registered fish trap (Massola, 1968) that might lie on Kurtonitj appears to be on the adjoining Bryant Property (Crouch, 2014: Figure 5). Additional features identified include likely Aboriginal stone house sites and artefact scatters (Lane 2010, Crouch 2014b).

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In May 2014 Gunditj Mirring traditional owner Dennis Rose showed a likely stone house to departmental officers and advised there was no agreement that this structure predated European settlement.

Comparative Analysis(aquaculture)

The evidence of aquaculture systems at Kurtonitj needs a comparative perspective.

Aboriginal people around Australia modified their environments in a variety of ways to increase their catch or harvest of a target species. Fish traps were more widely distributed around marine and fresh water areas and are recognised as having been important in Aboriginal fishing technology for several thousand years. Aboriginal people utilised locally available materials and customised the size and design of their fish traps to suit local conditions and to target particular species.

The outstanding significance of the Brewarrina fish traps is recognised in their inclusion in the National Heritage List. The physical remains of those stone fish traps at Brewarrina are extensive by comparison with the evidence of aquaculture on Kurtonitj. The design and methods of traditional harvesting at Brewarrina differed from that of the eel traps of western Victoria, where more direct comparisons may be made.

The comparative assessment for the assessment and eventual listing of Lake Condah and Tyrendarra as part of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape found that these contained better representations of the western Victorian aquaculture system when compared to Toorlondo and Mt William systems, as they displayed a greater range of archaeological remains to demonstrate the historical use of the aquaculture system by Aboriginal people. The two listed properties were assessed also within the broader South Western Victorian landscape, and were found to have a greater range of archaeological remains to demonstrate the historical use of the aquaculture system. Those assessments were made without the benefit of more recent surveys. The recent surveys have not revealed any evidence that would include Kurtonitj in the same outstanding category as the listed places.

In particular, the aquaculture features on Kurtonitj are far more rudimentary than the Muldoons Trap Complex in the Lake Condah area and lack the established dates and prehistoric significance of that outstanding place. The Muldoons Trap Complex is considered the best and most significant example of the western Victorian fish traps, with a rich variety of features that include channels, races, traps, wing walls, barriers, and holding ponds (Crouch 2014b:5) and it is considered an exceptionally well preserved example (Richards 2011:78).

In summary, Kurtonitj contains a number of features of significance to Gunditj Mirring and at State level. These features establish Aboriginal occupation and aquaculture. These features are not sufficient evidence of the ancient aquaculture practices that had developed on the lava flow and elsewhere in western Victoria. They appear to be like other places in Western Victoria to which the two National Heritage places representing the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape were favourably compared in that Kurtonitj has a 'limited range of the features associated with eel aquaculture, mainly channels and fish traps'.

The Kurtonitj Property is not considered to meet the threshold under Criterion (a) for its capacity to demonstrate a system of natural and artificially created wetlands, including channels to link wetlands, stone bases of weirs to pond water and stone fish traps along the Tyrendarra lava flow.

Transition from a forager society to a society that practiced husbandry of fresh water fish

Since the late nineteenth century, from archaeological and anthropological perspectives, 'south-west Victoria must be the single most contentious part of the Australian continent, as there is little agreement on basic facts, interpretations, theories or models relating to complexity in the Aboriginal societies of this region' (Richards, 2011: 64). The claims the ancient aquaculture systems in western Victoria signify a transition from a foraging society to one practicing husbandry of freshwater fish are unproven. This includes claims that sites within the Budj Bim landscape are remains of stone houses that could have comprised villages of sedentary populations.

Clarke has questioned the 'cultural construction of an archaeological landscape' referring to the Budj Bim landscape in particular. Clarke questions the scale of stone circles identified and interpreted as domestic houses in the 1970s Lake Condah research by the Victorian Archaeological Survey and others (Clarke, 1994: 9-12) suggesting the cultural origins of all of these places is not established, and suggesting other explanations including natural processes like lava flow surface features and uprooted trees, possible non-Aboriginal structures, such as circular wind breaks for European shepherds, and other types of

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Aboriginal structures, for example ovens, hearths and hunting hides (Lane, 2009: 15-32).

Aside from these general issues of interpretation there are too few known sites on Kurtonitj to show that it has significance as part of an ancient system of aquaculture that could have been the basis for a major social transition. The best evidence of this kind is the Muldoons Trap Complex, with its mid Holocene dating of a complex structure.

Kurtonitj Property is not considered to meet Criterion (a) as providing evidence for a transitional in pre-European Aboriginal ways of life.

A base for launching attacks and escaping reprisals during frontier conflict

The nomination states that 'since the invasion of the white men and their merciless pursuit for land, the stones became a sanctuary for our people. It was on the impenetrable and mysterious stones country, where the white men lost the military advantages of horseback and clear vistas that Gunditjmara people survived and fought back against the odds of the ever-increasing invaders' (Nomination, 2009). No specific information was provided to support this claim.

In resisting European settlement, Aboriginal people throughout Australia used their knowledge of their country. In southern Australia conflict associated with European colonisation was spread across the majority of what is now western Victoria (Critchett, 1990; Clark, 1995; Reynolds, 1997). The Gunditj-mara were involved in the Eumeralla Wars, spanning 20 years following the European settlement in the area during the 1830's. The main period of conflict occurred during the early 1840s, in particular 1842, after successive years of drought (Clarke 1995, Critchett 1990) with the Dunmore property (to the east of the nominated and listed areas) recording attacks from March 1845 and continued to April 1847 (Critchett 1990).

A key aspect of this nominated value is the extent to which the Kurtonitj Property can display the environmental characteristics of the lava flow that made Aboriginal defence of the region distinctive. Kurtonitj Property is part of the former Ellengowan property settled by Learmonth, possibly in 1852 (Builth, 2002: 39). Kurtonitj Property appears to be dominated by 'undulating terrain and natural drainage lines typical of the stony rises' (Crouch, 2012a: 8-9) with the eastern half subject to greater inundation. A site visit revealed the terrain to be relatively flat and potentially accessible by horses (May 2014).

There is no known documentary evidence to specifically link Kurtonitj Property with the launching of attacks against white settlers. Incidents of conflict, mapped on a historic pastoral lease map, indicate that the Eumeralla wars were clustered around the Mount Eccles region, including the properties West and East Eumeralla (within the boundary of the Mt Eccles Lake Condah National Heritage place), Weerangourt, Dunmore, Sqattlesmere, Yumbuck and St Kitts to the north east of Peters Property (Critchett, 1990: 110). There is no reference to conflicts on Ellengowan, which is the former name for Kurtonitj Property.

There is insufficient evidence to indicate that conflict occurred at any particular location within the property.

Kurtonitj Property is unlikely to reach threshold against Criterion (a).

Criterion (b): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's natural or cultural history.

Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape (Budj Bim) is listed in part under criterion (b), for the rarity of the legal process to return the Lake Condah mission to the Aboriginal community. The nomination of the Kurtonitj Property encompassed this value of the lake Condah area. The gazetted value is under criterion (b) for the following:

"The Lake Condah mission is of outstanding heritage value because of the legal process under which it was returned to the community. It is a rare example of the Commonwealth using its constitutional powers to provide benefits for a specific Aboriginal community. Following the proposal by Alcoa to develop an aluminium smelter at Portland, the Victorian Government decided to return the Lake Condah mission to the Aboriginal community. However, the Victorian Government was unable to pass the enabling legislation through its Upper House and turned to the Commonwealth for assistance (Context 2000). Under the constitutional power to make laws for Aboriginal people granted to the Commonwealth under the 1967 referendum, the Commonwealth passed the Aboriginal Land (Lake Condah and Framlingham Forest) Act 1987. The only other examples is the return of Framlingham Forest under the same Act."

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Kurtonitj Property does not meet Criterion (b) for the rarity of the legal process to return Lake Condah mission to the Aboriginal community as Kurtonitj was not included in the return of lands to the Aboriginal community.

Kurtonitj Property is unlikely to reach threshold against Criterion (b).

Criterion (c): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history.

As indicated above, there is substantial research that may be undertaken to fully understand the extent and functionality of the aquaculture system in the broader landscape. In particular, how this system impacted the social and economic structure of Aboriginal society and population density over time. This research is not limited to the Kurtonitj Property, and includes the two listed properties that constitute the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape. The few sites so far recorded on Kurtonitj do not suggest an outstanding potential to yield additional significant information.

Kurtonitj Property was not nominated under criterion (c) and is not considered to have potential to yield additional information regarding the aquaculture system or other matters that will contribute to an understanding of this aspect of Australia's cultural history at the national level.

Kurtonitj Property is unlikely to reach threshold against Criterion (c).

Criterion (d): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of:

a class of Australia's natural or cultural places; or

a class of Australia's natural or cultural environments.

There is insufficient information about Kurtonitj to enable it to demonstrate the principal characteristic of the ancient system of aquaculture in western Victoria. The Muldoons Trap Complex is more like to reveal evidence of the principal characteristics of the ancient system.

Kurtonitj Property was not nominated under criterion (d) and is not considered to demonstrate the principle characteristics of a class of Australia's cultural place or environment.

Kurtonitj Property is unlikely to reach threshold against Criterion (d).

Criterion (e): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group.

Kurtonitj Property was not nominated under criterion (e) and is not considered to exhibit particular aesthetic characteristics values by a community or cultural group.

Kurtonitj Property is unlikely to reach threshold against Criterion (d).

Criterion (f): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

The nominator proposed (by inference) the Kurtonitj Property would have the following value:

The system of ponds, wetlands, channels, weirs and fish traps in the Mt Eccles/Lake Condah area are of outstanding heritage value. Gunditjmara people constructed the channels to manipulate water flows and the weirs to modify and create wetlands that provided ideal growing conditions for the shortfinned eel and other fish (Coutts et al 1978; Lourandos 1980; Williams 1988; Clark 1990a; Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and Kerrup Jmara Elders Aboriginal Corporation 1993; Builth 2002, 2003). This system is confined to Western Victoria and shows a high degree of creativity not found in freshwater fish traps in other parts of Australia. Unlike other places in Western Victoria like Toolondo (Lourandos 1980) and Mt William (Williams 1988), the Mt Eccles/Lake Condah area and Tyrendarra contains all the elements that demonstrate the functioning of this system.

The few sites so far recorded on Kurtonitj do not amount to evidence of a system of ponds, wetlands, channels,

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weirs and fish traps comparable to the listed Budj Bim places, Lake Condah and Tyrendarra.

The archaeological evidence at Kurtonitj Property is not considered to demonstrate a high degree of technical or creative achievement under criterion (f) with regard to the aquaculture system in comparison with the two properties listed as part of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape.

Kurtonitj Property is unlikely to reach threshold against Criterion (f).

Criterion (g): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

Kurtonitj Property was not nominated under this criterion (g).

The Kurtonitj Property forms part of a broader landscape of importance to and associated with the Gunditj Mirring people for social, cultural and spiritual reasons. It is not possible to conclude that these associations are outstanding in comparison with those of many other Aboriginal people and their traditional country. Within the Budj Bim landscape, the Gunditj Mirring people may be more closely identified with Lake Condah than with other areas.

Kurtonitj does not meet criterion (g) because of its association with the Gunditj Mirring people.

Kurtonitj Property is unlikely to reach threshold against Criterion (g).

Criterion (h): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's natural or cultural history.

Kurtonitj Property was not nominated under criterion (h) and is not considered to have a special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's natural or cultural history.

Kurtonitj Property is unlikely to reach threshold against Criterion (h).

Criterion (i): The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance as part of Indigenous tradition.

Kurtonitj Property was nominated (by inference) under criterion (i) for the following value of Budj Bim (Mount Eccles): The link between the eruption of the volcano and Budj Bim is of outstanding heritage value as a demonstration of the process through which ancestral beings reveal themselves in the landscape. Mt Eccles is an ancestral creation being Budj Bim and the scoria cones are described as tung att teeth belong it (Clark 1990a; 1990b; Builth 2003). It therefore demonstrates the process through which Aboriginal creation beings reveal themselves in the landscape.

There is no evidence that the Kurtonitj is significant in the Budj Bim creation story or other traditions.

Kurtonitj Property is unlikely to reach threshold against Criterion (i).

History:

Several thousand years ago (Context 2013:1) the Gunditjmara traditional owners, including the Kerrup Jmara clan, engineered an ingenious system of channels, fish traps and weirs for growing and harvesting short finned eels (*Anguilla australis*) and other fish along the Tyrendarra lava flow, which was formed when the Mt Eccles volcano erupted 30,000 years before present. This aquaculture system not only facilitated seasonal migrations of marine life to and from the Southern Ocean, it also provided ideal growing conditions to farm short finned eels (Coutts et al 1978; Lourandos 1980; Williams 1988; Clark 1990a; Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and Kerrup Jmara Elders Aboriginal Corporation 1993; Builth 2002, 2003, Richards 2011, Context 2013).

The Gunditjmara peoples' understanding of the underlying natural, ecological and hydrological systems allowed them to adapt the environment to exploit the life cycle of eels to enhance their harvest. They developed a system of ponds, wetlands, channels, weirs and fish traps from locally available materials including stone, wood and grasses to structurally enhance natural

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features and manipulate water flows, the remains of which is found in parts of the landscape today and recognised in the properties included in the National Heritage List as part of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape.

The traps were designed to align seasonal rainfall with the eel's life cycle and positioned to be effective at different water levels, capitalising on the migration of the eels upstream in spring and downstream in autumn each year (Coutts et al, 1978). For example, it is considered that the Gunditj Mirring channelled water to assist the seasonally migrating elvings (baby eels) to swim up Darlots Creek from the sea to Lake Condah in the autumn. They constructed channels to link ponds and wetlands to trap and support the growing eels throughout the year. The increased winter rainfall and late winter and spring floods connected Lake Condah to Darlots Creek, allowing eels and fish to move between the two water bodies and activating additional traps (McNiven 2010:273). To harvest the mature eels, Aboriginal people placed baskets designed to fit into the gaps of the stone based weirs they constructed.

The fertile land associated with the aquaculture system was valued by European settlers, who took an early interest in adapting the Indigenous draining system for pastoral purposes. From the 1830's many Gunditj Mirring people were moved to Aboriginal reserves nearby and, from the late 1860's, to the newly established Lake Condah Mission (Context 2008:5).

In 1887 Alexander Ingram, a Government surveyor, oversaw a 'European channel' which was constructed at the main 'Aboriginal barrier' of the 'Aboriginal fishery'. This was the first stage of adapting the Aboriginal drainage system to increase the availability of government land for pastoralists (Ingram 1893 quoted in Richards, 2011). Ingram worked and resided in the Lake Condah area for ten years while undertaking the planning and drainage works. Thomas White, an Aboriginal eel fisherman born at 'Allumyung' in Gunditjmarra territory, was named by Ingram as a source of information about Guntijmarra culture and local place names (Richards, 2011:72). Ingram studied the Aboriginal fishery, observed Aboriginal people constructing barricade weirs, recorded Aboriginal place names, collected Aboriginal artefacts and recorded Aboriginal burials. He also guided a group to inspect the Aboriginal fishery at the 'first sod turning ceremony' for the new drainage works in 1887 (Richards, 2011:70-76).

Ingram recorded the fish traps in a sketch plan titled 'Aboriginal Fishery, Lake Condah' and published it in 1893 (Richards 2011:64). This is the only known recording of the aquaculture system. After studying and surveying the system, Ingram sited the European channel at the same location of the main Aboriginal weir in 1887. The 'European channel' compromised the hydrology of the existing Aboriginal fishery and emptied Condah Swamp, the main source for the lake. The redirection of the water flow impacted the way Aboriginal people could use the aquaculture system; however there is evidence that Aboriginal people continued to farm fish after the installation of the European channel, with an increase in construction and use of weirs along Darlot Creek (Richards 2011:77). In 1893, Ingram observed that many Aboriginal people living on Lake Condah mission, 'still construct similar barriers for trapping purposes, and large quantities of fish are secured during winter, more particularly since an outlet drain has been made in connection with the drainage of Condah Swamp' (Ingram quoted in Richards, 2011:74). This is further supported by mission staff recording Aboriginal people supplementing their diet with fishing in 1895 (Stahle quoted in Richards, 2011:77). The last record of people undertaking traditional Aboriginal fishing is prior to major floods in 1908 (Context, 2013:21).

After floods in 1954, additional government drainage works completely drained Lake Condah, further altering the hydrology of the catchment that supported the aquaculture system. After developing the Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project Plan (Bell and Johnston 2008:7) and years of advocacy, the Gunditj Mara succeeded in having a replacement weir installed in the original position of the 'Aboriginal barrier' in 2010, to facilitate the refilling of Lake Condah in 2012.

A number of recent reports have concluded that it is unlikely that all the elements of the aquaculture system operated at the one time (McNiven and Bell, 2010; Clarke, 1994; Lane, 2009). Continuing research by the Gunditj Mirring may shed light on additional traditional aquaculture and on the social and economic organisation of the Aboriginal people who used this system. To date, archaeological surveys and historic documentary information constitute the primary research material. The area in and around the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape has been the subject of hypothesis regarding how the aquaculture system was used historically, what impact it had on the social and economic organisation of the Gunditj Mirring and how this translated to archaeological features in the landscape. The archaeologist Anne Clarke sounded a note of caution in her re-assessment of research on the aquaculture system at Lake Condah. She questioned early findings of the Victorian Archaeological Survey conducted between 1977-81 and findings in Coutts et al 1978. Clarke claims that the archaeological evidence did not always

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distinguish natural from cultural features and that data has been over-interpreted (Clarke 2009:9-12).

A recent consultancy report commissioned by the Gunditj Mirring notes that additional multidisciplinary research would assist to identify the cultural, social and environmental connections of the broader landscape associated with the Tyrendarra lava flow. Further research may include mapping the entire aquaculture system to identify how all the elements functioned at different water levels (Context 2013: 20), detailing the chronology and changes in the system, including the associated habitation structures (stone houses, campsites, oven mounds and coastal shell middens), further testing of the eel smoking trees and storage structure hypothesis, understanding the spiritual dimensions of the Guntijmara landscape and the associated ritual sites, and determining the extent to which long term cultural changes reflect the interplay of environmental and social factors (McNiven and Bell 2010: 90).

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