

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Shepparton—27 April 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Sonja Terpstra—Chair

Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Cesar Melhem

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Nina Taylor

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr David Davis

Dr Tien Kieu

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

WITNESS

Mr Matthew Shanks - Strategic Advisor, Cultural & Natural Resource Management, Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation

The CHAIR: All right, I declare open the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee public hearing for the inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised. I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are gathered here today and pay my respects to their ancestors, Elders and families. I particularly welcome any Elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee. I would also like to welcome any members of the public who are watching these proceedings with us in the room today as well.

So I will just take the opportunity to introduce committee members to you. I am Sonja Terpstra. I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. Mr Clifford Hayes is the Deputy Chair. Mr Andy Meddick is with us. Joining us via Zoom is Dr Samantha Ratnam. Back in the room here, Ms Melina Bath, and Dr Matthew Bach. So all evidence that is taken today is protected by a parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provision of the Legislative Council Standing Orders.

Therefore, the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of parliament. All evidence is being recorded and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. If I could just get you now just to state your name and the organisation that you appear on behalf of.

MR SHANKS: My name's Matthew Shanks and I am here today representing Taungurung Land and Waters Council.

The CHAIR: Great, thank you very much. All right, with that, over to you. If you would like to commence your opening statement and then committee members will have an opportunity to ask you questions. So over to you.

MR SHANKS: Thank you. And thanks everybody for having me. Taungurung Land and Waters Council appreciates the opportunity. Melina, thank you for the invitation that has come through your office and, yeah, we will get to that in a moment. But – so first of all, I would like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the Country we are meeting from today, pay my respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging, and note that we are on unceded land.

Wah Wah Gee, my name's Matt Shanks. I am a Nira bulluk man of the Taungurung nation. I am here today representing the Taungurung Land and Waters Council as the Traditional Owner group entity that represents the Taungurung nation. And I will get a little bit – I will get into that. So I am going to read from the statement and then questions and a bit of a discussion will be, I think, in my opinion, a better way to sort of go about things in regards to Indigenous affairs and stuff, as you have no doubt experienced previously.

Taungurung Land and Waters Council as representative of the Taungurung people, the First Nation and Traditional Owners of the lands north of the dividing range bounded by the Campaspe river in the west and the Ovens river in the east wish to deliver a statement to the inquiry outlining our lived experience as it relates to this inquiry. We do so in a capacity related to the following with respect to the management and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage through its appointment as a registered Aboriginal party under the Victorian *Aboriginal Heritage Act* with respect to native title rights and interests.

Taungurung Land and Waters Council's entered into a Recognition and Settlement Agreement with the state of Victoria under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act, which recognises Taungurung Land and Waters Council as the Traditional Owner Group entity as appointed by the Taungurung nation. With respect to the Taungurung Natural Resource Agreement that commits the state and the Taungurung to work together in partnership to develop strategies for Traditional Owners participation and employment in natural resource management within Taungurung territories.

The Taungurung people have been custodians of Country for countless generations, undertaking our cultural obligations to care for Country and ensuring the health of Country as if she was one of our own kin. Upon the invasion of Aboriginal territories that began in 1788, the roles of Taungurung nation as it relates to the management of Country began to change. With that came competing contemporary land uses that put pressure on the ecosystems that have been managed for different sets of values.

Settler diaries of the time often spoke of the abundance and variety of flora and fauna right across Country. A key aspect of Taungurung culture prior to contact was the maintenance and harvest of food and fibre plants found in abundance along flood plains of the Warring or Goulburn River and her tributaries in the mountains and caves of our higher Country and in places of habitation and ceremony. These same species have been widely used for generations as knowledge has been passed along family lines throughout the colonial period.

In particular, knowledge of our medicines aided our ancestors to survive, both physically and through the continuing practice of our cultural law. In contemporary times, these species have been used as a means of generating income and share part of our rich history, culture and deep knowledge of Country that our people have with non-indigenous peoples. Taungurung Elders have long used Taungurung weaving techniques to create and sell various woven articles, host learning workshops and even for use as our old people did for fishing and carrying various objects.

But these materials are becoming harder to locate. As one Elder shared with me, the location she has been going for decades to harvest weaving grasses no longer hold these materials. She has had to resign to using sword grass which requires twice the preparation time to make it safe for use to ensure it does not tear people's hands. Some of our Elders now use non-native grasses and grass supplements due to the difficulty in locating weaving materials.

For the Taungurung, a staple plant food was the Mirnong or Yam Daisy, which provided a reliable source of carbohydrate. Mirnong and other tubers are quite rare to find in our river flats and flood plains that are now over-compacted and utilised for mono-cultural cropping or grazing. Other plants are found in various levels of abundance. The Bracken Fern, used for food and medicine, are abundant as they appear following disturbance. The Cherry Balert was a valuable food source but is rarer to find on Taungurung Country due to land clearing and forestry activities and when they are found, they are fruiting for a shorter season. Wattle seed, collected by our community for a variety of food and medicinal reasons are less abundant year after year and medicinal species were often found lining waterways and billabongs. With the increase of grazing and cropping, the conditions of these species has decreased dramatically.

One of my Elders who has used and relied on Old Man Weed and River Mint for toothaches and other pain relief is unable to find them in places she has harvested for decades often due to the impact cattle and sheep have had on stream beds and the drainage of swamps and billabongs due to irrigation and damming, drastically altering the natural flow of water on Country. Barramul, or emu, was found roaming open plains and open lands of Taungurung Country and was a source of food for our people.

Now Barramul is rarely found on Taungurung Country except in the north west due to habitat destruction of various forms. Emu play a key role on Country due to the vast distances they can travel, spreading seed and their scat. Returning emu to Country is an objective the Taungurung nation seeks to achieve in the future. Emu's one of our major totems.

The rest of the statement talks to some recommendations that I thought could sort of start to form the basis of some of our conversation, so I will just read from them and get back to those. And in no particular order, but sort of four main points that the Taungurung are beginning to work on, especially given the opportunities that we have in front of us now due to our Recognition and Settlement Agreement and the sort of resources and capacity increases that come with that. Investment into Traditional Owner corporations (indistinct) the key.

Victoria essentially needs to pay for the answers that are outlined in state-wide policy documents that set out the pathways. The state needs to invest in the implementation of the following. Cultural fire strategy budget and plans. There is a need for all Traditional Owner practices to be applied in addition to conservation practices if Country is to be healed. Cultural landscape strategy. It is ready to be launched and needs implementation money. It describes the holistic landscape scale management of Country formed on the basis of Traditional Owner knowledge and practice.

The Traditional Owner game management strategy, game reserves and the often neglected and often hold high cultural values, that policy sets out management and governance arrangements to heal and care for Country.

How do we do these sorts of things? Reading Country programs. They include Indigenous methodologies and assistance for the capture, storage and analysis of data related to the health of Country from which Traditional Owners can formulate management actions for healing and caring for Country in the implementation of aforementioned strategies, acknowledgement of culturally valued species as flagships to guide healing of culture and Country.

Culturally valued species management plans should be listed in the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act. Changes to the planning, governance and management arrangements for public land including national parks, active management in national parks beyond just threat management and visitor management is required and that is stepped out in the cultural landscape strategy. And that is the end of the statement.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. All right, we will open it up for questions. Mr Meddick, over to you first.

MR MEDDICK: Thank you and thank you so much for your submission and for appearing today and hanging around. It has been a long day for everyone, I am sure. But you mentioned the end of October 2018, the state of Victoria at the time when people signed a sweep of settlement agreements. What is the status of the development of the joint management plan included under that agreement, where are they at now?

MR SHANKS: Yep, the status of it is – well it does not exist yet. We are in the process of forming the Traditional Owner Land Management Board, which then develops the joint management plan. So in terms of the plan, work on that has not begun. Internally at Taungurung Land and Waters Council, we have started to put in place processes to – that is going to aid the community go from negotiations of the RSA into implementation of the RSA and thinking about - one in particular is a knowledge healing program where we look at – so looking at knowledge not just as a evidence base for Recognition and Settlement Agreement, but now to build on and strengthen that knowledge, which is ultimately going to lead to informing the Joint Management Plan. But yeah, as I mentioned, we are still in the process of thinking about how we go about starting the Traditional Owner Land Management Board and how we will engage in that process.

MR MEDDICK: Okay, how far away do you think you are from—

MR SHANKS: That is a good question that I have to take on notice.

MR MEDDICK: That is fine.

MR SHANKS: I am not sure exactly yet, yeah.

MR MEDDICK: No problem.

MR SHANKS: We are in the process of hiring someone that is going to oversee that.

MR MEDDICK: Okay.

MR SHANKS: 2018 was the – so a bit of background. October 2018 was when the RSA was signed with the Attorney General, but then there is a sort of prolonged process and series of stages before it comes active. So actually, I believe it was August 2020 when the full suite of the Taungurung RSA became live and it was at that point that we were able to sort of start that formal planning.

MR MEDDICK: So that is really what I was wanting to sort of tease out a bit. So I think there is – amongst different communities, there is an expectation that once that is signed, then—

MR SHANKS: Absolutely.

MR MEDDICK: —the work is then done, it is underway, where is it, what – where is the implementation. So yeah, I just wanted to clarify that there is that timeframe sorting these things out so that they are done properly.

MR SHANKS: Absolutely. Yeah, and that is what we are – all of that stuff is exactly what we are doing at the moment.

MR MEDDICK: Great, thanks so much. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: I might have a question if I can. In your recommendations, you talk about Reading Country programs.

MR SHANKS: Yep.

The CHAIR: Do you want to unpack that a little bit for us and tell us – talk us through what that would look like and how they would operate.

MR SHANKS: Yes. I can talk to how Taungurung views our sort of Reading Country program and the way that we are approaching it. I cannot speak for other nations. And part of what we are doing, actually a sort of – a key part of Taungurung's Reading Country program is going to be how we apply multiple sort of Traditional Owner practices. So you may have heard some of these terms before from other groups and representatives, but that is - cultural fire I think we are generally aware of that and we can talk about that a little bit further.

I met Melina at the National Indigenous Fire Workshop in Cape York in 2016 – 17, yep. Forest gardening relates to sort of - maybe easier to sum up the non-fire parts of forest management as well as sort of - a more contemporary term – but cultural flow management. And so to inform all of those things, Reading Country is really about one, Traditional Owners, Taungurung people being out on Country again right throughout our territories.

At the moment, under our RSA and our NRA we are able to access Crown land, so the Taungurung Aboriginal title parks sort of primarily, that sort of Crown land we have rights to take and use, and as part of that we are trying to build recording of values, so where species are located, what happens in different seasons, really sort of starting as simple as that and then building in more complex assessments that draw on some of the, I guess, modern scientific techniques and the ability to record and translate, analyse and translate that, that information into sort of policy statements or goals and objectives, aspirational statements, all of those sorts of things.

It looks like, yeah, resourcing for Traditional Owners to be on Country just being on Country, looking at indicators, different seasons, all of that sort of thing, species harvesting those species, understanding – I spoke to in the statement how harvest is becoming more difficult for a variety of reasons. But understanding the different fruiting and flowering sort of seasons of our species and understanding how that difference in time relates to how practice is then applied.

So I think the greatest difficulty in regards to cultural fire, you know, you have a bunch of indicators that are still there, maybe in - at different times, and you just – we have to sort of – it is not about relearning cultural fire practice, but it is about adapting that knowledge and practice to what we are currently experiencing in terms of the indicators of climate and I think understanding that, noting that Traditional Owners recognise that climate does change naturally, where we could get into a conversation about why we are experiencing it now. But climate does change so adapting those practices is part of our knowledge system, but we need to sort of be able to do that. That is sort of what Reading Country's going to look like for us.

The CHAIR: Great, thanks very much. All right, Ms Bath.

MS BATH: Thank you. Thanks Matthew. Thanks for coming today. Matthew, we were out on Country with Victor Stephenson earlier today. We were out on Red Gum Country and looking at – starting to get our head round what that looks like as a committee. I would like to understand where Taungurung are sort of at in terms of fire stick and cultural burns on your Country and where that fits.

MR SHANKS: Yep.

MS BATH: And I guess you mentioned about the sites behind it or recording the improvements to biodiversity. So where are you and where would you like to be?

MR SHANKS: Yep, sure. So Andy's question talked about unpacking where Taungurung's at in regards to RSA and that in part plays into where we are at in regards to cultural fire. I mentioned the cultural fire strategy as well in the statement. So Taungurung people have undertaken cultural fire, cultural burns in various degrees over the last sort of – with more sort of – in a more official capacity with partners largely on private land over the last sort of five years.

Uncle Shane Monk, who was also at the National Indigenous Fire Workshop, has led quite a few of those again with some of our partners. Community members have attended those and we are starting that learning process.

We, Taungurung, had heavy involvement in the development of the cultural fire strategy and really invested in that process because of the opportunity it gave us to plan and sort of start to understand what it is going to cost, how much time it is going to take, the sort of hoops we need to jump through to make it happen, all that sort of thing.

We have that plan in place. We have – we are unable to implement it. We do not yet have the resources. Now, that could come from anywhere and we are certainly looking into that. But where we are at is kind of ready to start. We are ready to start planning, learning, understanding how cultural fire can be applied in a contemporary – in Victoria – contemporary Taungurung Country with modern and competing land uses and I think that is – competing land uses - is a fact everywhere.

We have identified dozens of partners and properties, both private and public government agency partners and locations on Crown land to sort of start learning and burning it. Our goal is to have primarily two things. A cultural fire program where we are healing first and then managing Country with cultural fire and associated practices so forest gardening and the cultural flows and that sort of stuff, especially in flood plain country. Where we are seeing cultural fire as kind of one of the leading applied practices to do that, to manage Country.

And the other part of it and largely in the current and sort of the transition period, so that transition period is before we get to healed Country where we are able to just apply cultural fire is for Taungurung to have a, like a culturally informed firefighting team or teams. We have lots of territory in the high country. Lots of our territory, especially one of our important places, Mount Buffalo, burnt last year and we spent however long it is between then and now doing cultural heritage impact assessments and we are 50 per cent of the way through. So having a like a firefighting capacity would help us kind of avoid damage to cultural heritage and all those sorts of things as well. So that is another key part in that transition period.

MS BATH: Can I ask a quick supplementary? Thanks Chair. Thanks Matthew. It sounds like you are trailblazing on this, really, since yearly, you know, you are really putting that work in. Is there elements of that fire strategy and the work around fire sticks that you have got that plan there that you could share with us? So you were talking about connecting with both state land and private land and some sort of the synergies there. Is there some things that we could understand better if you had some documents that you might be able to share? It is not sensitive in that form.

MR SHANKS: The short answer is yes, not today, so I am happy to take that question on notice and I can provide some more information. But a lot of that work is currently happening so conversations and sort of collaborative discussions around how it is going to work.

MS BATH: A work in progress.

MR SHANKS: Yeah, absolutely. But we have – we have started working - we have a bit of an interim sort of cultural national management strategy that outlines our – some of the high-level aspirations for cultural fire and some other places that I would be able to share as well.

MS BATH: And the costings, I think you made mention about those. If there is something there that you would be able to share, just so that we can get our head round that.

MR SHANKS: I would have to check into that because that is part of a first bid at the moment.

MS BATH: Okay.

MR SHANKS: I think that is what it is called. But yeah, I can follow with that.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

MR SHANKS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Dr Ratnam.

DR RATNAM: Thank you so much Matthew for your presentation and it is great to get an insight into all the development work that you are also doing in a number of areas. One of the things that this committee is deliberating on is how we can – what kind of recommendations we could make potentially to government about how best to improve our care for Country. And given your experience in the work with the corporation, I was wondering if you could talk us through what your thinking was on what are the areas that government is doing

well into the care of Country, particularly from a first nation's perspective and working with (indistinct) corporations. And then what is not working well that could improve.

MR SHANKS: Yep, sure. It is a really good question. And it is a question or a conversation that we are continually having with government, with – whether it be agencies, whether it be ministers or that sort of thing. And it is an answer that we are giving all the time but sometimes it does not feel like it is heard. So I will start with what the government is doing well because there are a lot of things. The government has - at sort of the highest level – the government's committed to really empowering Traditional Owners through self-determination. That is a really great step and then what does that look like in action is what we can come to.

The government's also committed to understanding what conversations around treaty can look like. And then obviously we have things like the *Traditional Owners Settlement Act* and the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* and those sorts of things that have really helped Traditional Owners sort of assert their place and start to really build and rebuild their nation and community. And then that has kind of – so for Taungurung especially - that has enabled us to come together for a purpose and really start to aspire and drive for, to go from sort of managing poverty to managing wealth in all of its respects.

I mentioned three strategies. I will talk about two now. So Traditional Owners in partnership with Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and Parks Victoria and the CFA developed the cultural fire strategy, which sets out sort of four key program areas to invest in and support Traditional Owners to achieve in regards to, excuse me, cultural fire management development of cultural fire programs and that is what I talk to in terms of the work that Taungurung has done in regards to developing a program, a five year program and associated budget for the development of a cultural fire program.

And more recently, the cultural landscapes strategy, which looks at describing sort of – and bridging the world between government policy and Aboriginal sort of cultural law and managing Country sort of knowledge and practice and create a strategy that has five key program areas, again to sort of invest into and support Traditional Owners understand, sort of describe and help government understand what that partnership looks like in terms of managing Country.

How do we embed Traditional Owner values, knowledge, practices in contemporary – I will say land management. Importantly, both – sorry, across both public and private land. How do Traditional Owners work with, for example, farmers and aid in improving the health of Country on farms, to aid in crop production, cattle production, all these sorts of things. And we could go into anecdotal evidence of where that has happened for the last couple hundred years.

What the government is not quite doing well. I think it is pretty fair to say this. It is that investment. And it is a complicated sort of conversation to have because the state from Taungurung's perspective takes a sort of a risk-based approach to things and really needs things stepped out in great detail. And in doing so sometimes – and this is where the – like the active support of self-determination sometimes gets a bit messed up and does not quite go right. Traditional Owners are asking for the support and the investment in resources and it does not just look like money.

To do the thinking to get that down, to get those plans down. And there is this little gap there, I do not know where the camera is, that – where the work needs to be done by Traditional Owners and state agencies and the broader public in understanding. But we are sort of trying to bridge too big a gap and so understanding that investment needs to be had to do the planning to collate the information, just like government does for whatever they are doing, whatever plans they are coming up with, Traditional Owners are not yet sort of resourced to do that.

So the cultural fire strategy, the cultural landscape strategy, the cultural fire plans that I think 11 nations developed and again, associated budgets was starting to do some of that work. And we are so, so close to just sort of getting on and doing and we are going to start to see some results. On – so last week, Taungurung had our DELWP – Taungurung DELWP quarterly meeting. And the - it was brilliant. We had it just round the corner from our head office and we sort of – it was a real relationship building exercise and that was the whole point from Taungurung's.

We said we do not want DELWP to put anything on the, on the agenda. We just want to get to know each other and really start to dive into some of the tricky questions and all that sort of thing. And in summing up, that is kind of what we found. We need to understand that middle point and really come together and understand one

another and I do not think that is done well because – and I am more than happy to acknowledge – it is incredibly difficult and it takes time, takes a lot of time and it is also expensive. But I think—

DR RATNAM: Correct.

MR SHANKS: Yeah. It needs to be paid for. Victoria needs to pay for it. If Victoria and the rest of the country wants Traditional Owner knowledge and embedded those practices into contemporary land management and all the rest of it, it needs to be paid for.

DR RATNAM: Thanks so much. That is very helpful.

MR SHANKS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Dr Bach.

DR BACH: Thank you. And thanks again, Matthew, for being with us today. Matthew, something has really struck me prior to today through our activities to the committee, is hearing time and time again from experts, almost overwhelmingly non-indigenous experts about the superiority of so many traditional Indigenous practices when it comes to land management. That is something that we have heard time and again. And I have found that heartening. And then obviously we have had today and we were out with Victor and that was fantastic and great to actually be on Country and to see what a cultural fire strategy could look like.

MR SHANKS: Yep.

DR BACH: I was going to ask him this question but then I did not get a chance, so I might ask you because obviously you have talked about cultural fire as well and the need for additional investment, I hear that, and plans. Victor talked about the significant differences between the sort of fire strategies that he would put in place and traditionally Indigenous fire strategies and those strategies that are practiced by the department. And so I hear you that it would be fantastic if something that came out of our inquiry was to provide greater impetus for – and of course real engagement with Traditional Owners and a far – far greater linkages to traditional practices. I wonder, do you agree with Victor that that would require a very significant cultural change within the department, and if so, then how – in addition of course to good plans and more budget – could we go about making those changes. I was interested in response to your question to Sam that you started talking about relationship building exercises.

MR SHANKS: Yep, yep. Yeah, I was going to refer to that as well. That is a big question. I – I have actually been lucky enough to be out on Country with Victor a few times and in the development of the fire strategy and the cultural land strategy worked with Firesticks Alliance. They supported Victorian Traditional Owners and actually held the last in person cultural fire workshop on the Yorta Yorta Country not too far from here. I think – so you are right, it does take relationships. It takes getting our on Country with Traditional Owners.

I think everybody to some level understands that and knows that Traditional Owners do not have a – do not have written history, it is oral history. The way that – and stories and learning and schooling and all that sort of stuff. It is all to do with relationships, experiences, it is – you learn by moving through a landscape, being in different landscapes, different sort of spiritual places, ceremonial spaces, all those sorts of things. And that is a very big part of what needs to be done to understand these differences.

But the differences are different for different nations. I am not a cultural fire expert and I do not think I am quite qualified to maybe answer that question on the spot, but – and I would love to put something together from Taungurung that sort of meets that a little bit better.

DR BACH: Thank you.

MR SHANKS: But what I have sort of already mentioned in regards to, yeah, that relationship building, the Reading Country sort of program from Taungurung's perspective is the way in which we want to start to answer that question. I also mentioned our knowledge healing program. Knowledge healing and strengthening where we want to work with the Taungurung Elders, knowledge holders, all that sort of stuff. Bring that knowledge together, discuss it, sort of analyse it and rebuild.

We want to look at what other nations are doing so we worked very closely with the Dja Dja Wurrung and the Gunai/Kurnai and the Woi Wurrung at the moment with cultural fire and a few other things. We want to engage

interstate as well with Traditional Owner groups who we have traditional ties to and there is – we have song lines that go through Central Australia. We have a ceremony site that Central Australia mobs used to come to on our Country and they have recently helped us start to understand some of the stories of those sites. Yeah, I am starting to waffle a little bit, but—

DR BACH: No, no, no.

MR SHANKS: There is a lot of work involved and I think sharing this information, there is so many things that come to mind. I think it is really about, yep, building the relationships and sharing and learning together. Yeah.

DR BACH: Thank you, thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Hayes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, Chair. Thanks heaps, Matthew. Yeah, my question sort of goes towards fantastic vision with getting what needs to be done and the actual implementation. So just want to take you to talking about the cultural landscape strategy and how fully developed that is.

MR SHANKS: Yep.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: And you say you have been working with government on it.

MR SHANKS: Yep.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Is there a vision or a pathway sort of mapped out in how to achieve the objectives of that strategy, and if so, can you talk us through a couple of examples of it. Or how it can be – how the dream can be put into effect and is it actually written into a strategy to achieve.

MR SHANKS: Yes. Yeah, good question. How can the dream be put into effect. Both the cultural landscape strategy and cultural fire strategy was founded on traditional knowledge. Stories and information, practiced knowledge was passed on from Elders. And a key part of it was actually analysing dreamtime stories and putting them into sort of contemporary like policy statements and things like that. We did that right at the beginning with Traditional Owners from all around the state and then to test if that held true at the end. And spoiler, it did.

The cultural landscape strategy is a state-wide strategy so it – and it does step out sort of a pathway to achieving the outcomes in it, but it is really at that state-wide level, so it has some sort of high-level measures of success and that sort of thing. But what it really talks about is supporting individual nations to do that sort of - do that work within their territories and in their Country because I think it is – I think most would agree that local knowledge and knowledge of, intimate knowledge of landscape of Country of your farm, of a national park and all that sort of stuff is, that is all managed by people locally.

And it sort of really drives towards that. Put me on the spot a little bit, but I will try and remember all the key program areas. The first one – or they are not in any particular area, but there is restoring the knowledge system. There is support investment into Traditional Owner nation sustainability, which looks at systems, processes and also resourcing. There is support for Traditional Owner led planning and management. That was actually a bit of a sticking point with the state because they said that is the same thing and we said no it is not. There is the planning aspect and understanding the stories and how it applies in different seasons, different contexts and then the management is active management, Traditional Owners and others, on Country more frequently. And - I think that is four. And I cannot remember the last one. So apologies.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: That is okay.

MR SHANKS: And the other part of your question was is it in the strategy. It is. It has not been launched yet. It is not publicly available but Traditional Owners and the department have endorsed it and it is ready to be launched. Many Traditional Owner groups - and the reason I am comfortable in talking about it is because Traditional Owner groups including Taungurung have worked with our partners for that strategy, DELWP and PV and we are working on sort of talking about the implementation of it in regards to sort of the more local plan, so forest management plans, parks management plans, all of these sorts of things. So it is kind of – it is being activated at the moment. It is being utilised. And it is very soon to be launched. I have seen it and I have touched it. It is printed. But yeah, you know how these things work.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: It is great. It is very ambitious and very wide scope. But it is not – there are no projects on the ground yet that really are a result of that strategy, would you say, or?

MR SHANKS: Well, it is not (indistinct)

The DEPUTY CHAIR: No.

MR SHANKS: I cannot say yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

MR SHANKS: But yes, there are. There is projects that - and there is one I am not going to talk about specifics of it because it is not my Country or my nation to talk about, but one of the case studies in there that sort of really formed a great basis for the strategy is pretty much finished and so an example of cultural landscape management exists and yeah, it is not my nation so I will not talk about specifics of it. But you will know what I am talking about as soon as you see a copy of the strategy and I reckon you may have already spoken to the nation that is doing that project.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: All right, thanks Matt.

The CHAIR: Mr Meddick.

MR MEDDICK: No, you have already had me.

The CHAIR: Did I? Well, there you go. Well, we have got a few more minutes. Dr Ratnam, we have got about five minutes. Do you want to have another question? No. Melina, do you have another one?

MS BATH: How do we keep the Elders – there is a big responsibility on Elders in any nation in across the nations but how do we keep them from not fatiguing, I guess, in a sincere sense because they do hold knowledge and they are working down the frame, I guess, in part. But how do we ensure that they are valued but not overworked. Is that – am I speaking truth or do you think that there – everything is fine?

MR SHANKS: I do not think everything is fine. I do not think we have enough time to unpack everything that is involved in that. I think – I might have a little bit of a go. It is not, I guess – that question is not just about—

MS BATH: Environment.

MR SHANKS: Yeah, environment—

MS BATH: It is broader than environment.

MR SHANKS: Yeah, it is. And there is historical – there is events, traumas, and we all know what dispossession, the Stolen Generation. I could go on. I know it is talked about in Parliament all the time, or maybe not all the time, but quite often. It makes the news, right? Everyone is to some level aware of these sorts of things and they are becoming more and more generally understood. In Victoria recently announced by the First People's Assembly is the Europe Justice Commission as part of the treaty process here.

I think that is going to play a huge part so giving the space to our Elders who have carried the burden and the weight of cultural governance and negotiating outcomes with the state and others, with caring for younger generations, all whilst sort of dealing with their own trauma. We have 80, 90-year-old Elders and leaders in the Taungurung community that by virtue of their age have gone through a lot. And we as a nation have a huge responsibility to those guys.

And I think just by engaging sort of with open hearts and genuinely - and asking genuine questions without assumptions and that sort of thing, like I think you have just done and certainly we see more often as time goes on. I think that is part of the way to do it. A lot of that work I think needs to happen internally within nations, within families, within communities, that sort of thing as well.

Yeah, but I think having the conversation and all types of conversations in regards to Aboriginal affairs and inequality more generally is one way that we can do that because it makes it – or it makes this a world, a Victorian Australia that – where those people can sort of safely exist, you can – I can come here as an

Aboriginal person and give a statement to you guys and not expect to feel like I am going to be ignored or anything like that and so we are moving there, yeah.

MS BATH: Thank you.

The CHAIR: No, thank you, that is great. All right, well that, I think, brings us to a close for today's session so Matthew, thank you so much for coming along and parting your knowledge and wisdom to the committee. And yeah, really appreciate you coming along. So thank you very much.

MR SHANKS: Thank you. Thank you all for having me.

Committee Adjourned.