

# MUNGO YOUTH PROJECT

*A biennial event engaging and educating young people in the culture, science, deep history, conservation and management of the Willandra Lakes region World Heritage area.*



*By bringing children together with Elders, with scientists, land holders all on the same plot of ground, all getting dusty and dirty together, sharing that mutual experience, this project has contributed in a very special way to one of Australian society's greatest needs, **the need to reconnect**. To connect with each other, old with young, Indigenous stories with rational science and particularly, all to connect with the earth.*

*This project sets an example of the essential people-people, people-land reconnection so essential to the very future of Australia. Here the voices of those ancient Mungo people were heard, voices addressed to all Australians:*

*What have you done to our land?*

*What have you done to our people?*

*The presence of those voices expressed in this program produces changes in the hearts and minds of all who listen. That contribution has far-reaching implications. This context of children, teachers, Elders and scientists on the very birth place and graves of Mungo people 40,000 years ago, listening to and exploring those messages is without parallel elsewhere in Australia.*

Patron, **Professor Jim Bowler**, October 2011



## BACKGROUND

The Mungo Youth Project was an essential element of the Mungo Festival held in 2006 to celebrate 25 years of world heritage listing and over 40,000 years of Indigenous culture in the Willandra Lakes region World Heritage area.



The project underpins and honours the traditional owners' aspiration to engage and educate young people in the culture, conservation, education and management of the World Heritage area.

In September 2011 the third Mungo Youth Conference was held within the spectacular landscape of the Willandra World Heritage Area, 120 km north of Mildura. A diverse community of over 300 people attended, including 195 Year 6 to Year 12 students from schools in NSW and Victoria.



Prior to the conference students engaged in extensive school based research, and the development of their conference presentations. They worked with Archaeologists, other Scientists, Elders, Traditional Owners, Park Rangers, Educators and significant mentors.

The landscape of the World Heritage area of Lake Mungo and a purpose built, high tech tent community became the stage for the conference. Utilising the 'kids teaching kids' model students shared their knowledge, conducted archaeological activities on significant sites, and worked with Discovery Rangers to consider interpretations of Australia's deep and ongoing human history evidenced in the landscape. They also learnt from the Pastoralists of their many challenges and achievements in the large lease hold areas east of the 'Barka' (Darling) River.



Mentors included the Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of New South Wales; Prof Jim Bowler AM; Stephen "Baamba" Bamblett, star in "Bran Nue Dae" and also the first Indigenous Australian to chair a Commonwealth Education Committee.

The vision of the Willandra World Heritage Elders created an authoritative and respectful foundation required for this biennial youth project to succeed, which it did quite brilliantly.



ABC Open and ABC Rural captured the stories, images and aspiring statements of many students and these can be viewed by searching ABC Open - "Mungo Youth Project".

The NSW Distance Education Team beamed presentations 'live and interactive' into remote Alaskan schools. One of the many highlights, and a great delight was the Governor of NSW playing celebrity heads in the Barkindji/ Paakantji language in a program led by 10 talented young students from a Mildura primary school.



Students from schools surrounding the Willandra Lakes region World Heritage Area, attended and participated in the project at no cost with funds sourced from various bodies to ensure a successful program.

## FUNDING AND SPONSORSHIP

The 2011 project was achieved with the support of the following;

- Wannick - Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development;
- NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet;
- Mc Lean Foundation;
- Department of Environment and Heritage;
- Wentworth & District Community Bank;
- Indigenous Business Australia;
- Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Authority;
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations;
- Local Community Campaigns to Promote Better Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health;
- Jimmy Little Foundations' Thumbs Up program;
- Indigenous Youth leadership Program;
- Tasco Inland Australia;
- Wentworth Club;
- Chemist Warehouse, Mildura;
- and with the invaluable in kind support of the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service, NSW Office of Environment & Heritage

## 3. MANAGEMENT

The Mungo Youth Project is driven by a committee of volunteers comprising of members from key stakeholder groups and provides overall strategic direction for the program.

<b>Patron</b>	Professor James Bowler
<b>Chair</b>	Ross O'Shea, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet;
<b>Deputy Chair</b>	Robert Biggs, Educator and Secondary School principal
<b>Project Manager</b>	Helen Healy, HHO Project and Event Management
<b>Committee Members</b>	Warren Clark, EO, 2TTG Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area Ricky Mitchell, Mungo Cultural Support Officer, Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area Leanne Mitchell, Traditional Owner, Cultural Heritage Officer, NSW Parks and Wildlife Service Richard Mintern, EO Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area Harvey Johnston, Archaeologist, Office of Environment and Heritage Michael Westaway, Archaeologist Joanne Gorman, Area Manager, Lower Darling Area – Buronga, NSW Parks and Wildlife Service

## 4. OBJECTIVES

- To engage students, teachers, elders, scientists and others with a significant history and culture of the First Australians as evidenced within the Willandra World Heritage area.
- To create an authentic student centred approach to learning about prehistory and create powerful references to contemporary challenges including climate change and reconciliation.
- To stress the ongoing Aboriginal connection with the landscape.
- Improve education outcomes and engagement, especially for Indigenous young people.
- Involve schools from western New South Wales and North West Victoria in curriculum based learning using the 'Kids Teaching Kids' model.
- Provide educational opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to develop their skills and learn from each other about prehistory, traditional culture and the environment, while developing their self esteem and their capabilities as public speakers.
- Involve Traditional Owners in the planning and delivery of the project including cultural training
- Provide role models for the students to develop leadership opportunities and inspire students to continue their education.
- Engagement with scientists, landowners and national parks to explore management, conservation, training and employment opportunities
- Provide students with opportunities for developing self esteem and their capabilities as public speakers.
- Increase engagement with, and pride in, culture.

## 5. LEARNING AND PRESENTATIONS

A range of topics are developed each year to be covered by the schools during their curriculum learning in the previous six months. Mentors including Elders, Archaeologists and other Scientists, Mungo Cultural Officers, education volunteers and Discovery Rangers visited the schools to support students and teachers as they developed the kids teaching kids model and to provide resource support. Students gave 45 minute presentations in marquees in rotating groups during the Mungo Youth Project Conference. These presentations were to both other students and adults using the 'Kids Teaching Kids' model.

The 2011 topics were:

- Song lines & dance stories.
- Bush Foods & Medicine
- Time Travel
- Climate Change – World Change.
- Traditional Lore & Language
- Initiation - Growing up, then and now
- Mega Fauna

## 6. SCHOOLS ATTENDING IN 2011

- Balranald Central School, NSW
- Chaffey Secondary College, Mildura, Victoria
- Coomealla High School, Dareton, NSW
- Irymple Primary School, Victoria
- Menindee Central School, NSW
- Merbein P-12 School, Victoria
- Mildura Primary School, Victoria
- Mt Austin High School, Wagga Wagga, NSW
- Robinvale Secondary College, Victoria
- St Joseph's College Mildura, Victoria
- Swan Hill College, Victoria
- Two Rivers College, Mildura, Victoria
- Wentworth Public School, NSW
- Wilcannia Central School, NSW
- Worawa Aboriginal College, Healesville, Victoria
- Werrimull P-12 School, Victoria

## 7. ACTIVITIES

### 7.1 Traditional Owners

Traditional Owners were involved throughout the project including mentoring in schools, a welcome to Country and explanation of protocols from the Elders. Students had the opportunity during the three days to talk and listen to Elders about culture and history, as well as participation in language lessons and the arts.

### 7.2 Role Models

Significant mentors participating in the 2011 Project included Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of New South Wales and Stephen 'Baamba' Albert - Elder, educationalist and actor in Bran Nue Dae. Importantly local Indigenous mentors with a variety of significant successes are active before and during the conference. Patron Prof Jim Bowler presented sessions featuring insights into 'Ways of Knowing'. Invited role models including Rudi Kirby told their own story, the pathway they had taken and shared insight into the tools to achieve dreams and goals.

### 7.3 Scientists

Scientists, including archaeologist Harvey Johnston with La Trobe University archaeology students along with the Discovery Rangers toured Isabella Mc Bryde's excavation site and engaged the students in an exploration into how science informs today's understanding of history and culture.

### 7.4 National Parks

Discovery Rangers guided students through an interpretation tour of the 20,000 year old trackway replication within the Information Centre and led tours through the Walls of China. Students identified the layering of time, evidence of human occupation dating beyond 40,000 years and gained insights into conservation and management along with training and employment opportunities.

### 7.5 Pastoralists

World Heritage Area landowners provided students with a tour of the Zanci Woolshed and the Mungo Woolshed, with hands on sheep shearing, whilst giving an insight into their engagement with the land and co – management.

### 7.6 Other Activities

The evening activities included

- Indigenous films;
- Art activities including poetry by Patrick Lawson and johnny cakes prepared by Elders;
- a talk by Professor Jim Bowler about his discovery of Mungo Man and Woman
- Mungo Education Resources presentations to educators by Jenny Bowler and Jacqui Taylor;
- Jimmy Little's Thumbs Up program where students learned about healthy eating and lifestyles in conjunction with the Local Community Campaigns to Promote Better Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health;
- entertainment prepared by the students for a Let the Stars Shine performance night;
- and a mega fauna laser show on the sand dune with sound affects to give an insight into life in ancient times.

## 8. HIGHLIGHTS

### 8.1 Special Guests

- Attendance by Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of New South Wales, was well received by all involved who were impressed by her sincere engagement during her overnight stay.
- Stephen 'Baamba' Albert of *Bran Nue Dae* fame was a wise and entertaining figure
- Little G, Georgina 'Gina' Chrisanthopoulos, Indigenous Greek hip hop performance poet, who was MC of the entire event including a performance with students.
- Patron, Prof Jim Bowler and his wife Joan

### 8.2 Media and Broadcasts

- Elements of the event were broadcast live and interactive into Alaskan schools through the NSW Distance Education network;
- ABC Open Dreambox worked with students and teachers with following outcomes:  
<http://open.abc.net.au/openregions/nsw-broken-hill-89Wj2GP/posts/young-aspirations-showcased-in-adelaide-41om9tc>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/local/videos/2011/10/26/3348576.htm?site=brokenhill>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2011/09/06/3311055.htm>  
<http://open.abc.net.au/projects/dreambox-41gz2pv/contributions/mungo-youth-project-69wg6zg>
- ABC Mildura Swan Hill Radio;
- WIN TV attended and covered the event;
- Sunraysia Daily covered the event, both before and after.
- Warrick Baker, assisted by artist, Drew Pettifer, documented the event.

### 8.3 Brainstorming session

To take advantage of key stakeholders being on site a brainstorming session was facilitated by Cliff Downey the Coordinator of Victoria and National Corporate Partnerships for Dare to Lead - a project of Principals Australia. Outcomes included:

- Sourcing support to ensure sustainability including presentations at key events including Government House, Minerals Council of Australia, Philanthropic organisations, and to key sponsors and funding bodies.
- Lobby government, particularly education, to support the event
- Mentoring by elders of students
- Engage a professional to facilitate full stakeholder engagement with the Strategic Plan
- Invite relevant Federal & State Ministers, and local parliamentary members to the next event
- Get DGR status to receive donations and philanthropic support
- Various project content improvements including elder engagement,
- Lobby for the Mungo story to be included in National History Curriculum;
- Enhance the curriculum framework of the project
- Invite fee paying private schools to participate in the project
- Increased publicity and public relations around the project and the next event including social media, making of a documentary, publishing outcomes;
- Develop a Mungo model toolkit for schools;
- Engage other state youth Indigenous leadership groups;
- Utilise schools and participants and role model, mentors, supports to become ambassadors for the project;

### 8.4 Focus on good food and lifestyle

Jimmy Little Foundations' Thumbs Up program; Graham 'Buzz' Bidstrup spoke about good living and Adam James performed and invited audience participation;  
Local Community Campaigns to Promote Better Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health;

### 8.5 On site survey results

On site surveys of students indicate that they gained extensive new knowledge, a deeper understanding of their culture, increased self esteem and the project scored an encouraging 7.4 rating on the question '*Does involvement in this project encourage you stay at school longer*' (rated by students from 1 = no to 10 = yes). With over 69% of answers rated above 8 and 38% rated it at a 10.

### 8.6 Awards

Special awards were presented to Auntie Lottie Williams and Professor Jim Bowler to acknowledge their passion, support and contribution to the project. Awards were also presented to school based mentors Harvey Johnston, Leanne Mitchell, Ricky Mitchell and Ernie Mitchell.

### 8.7 School visits

Mungo Cultural support officer, Ricky Mitchell, engaged with volunteer educationalists and the HHO Executive Officer Helen Healy to enhance the participation of World Heritage region schools. Ricky Mitchell also developed a Mungo Youth Project resource kit that was supplied to each participating school and played a significant role with the engagement of elders, discovery rangers and scientists with schools.

### 8.8 Involvement of La Trobe University Archaeology student mentored by Harvey Johnston

Several La Trobe University students, including post graduate researcher, Caroline Spry, were mentored by Harvey Johnston in leading groups of school students, interpreting the history of the landscape, interacting with the public, and finding the hidden meaning in small but significant items in the landscape.

### 8.9 Involvement of Elders

The involvement of the Elders and the implementation of their aspirations for young students is integral to the success of the project with elders from both Barkindji and Ngyiampaa attended and worked with the students.

### 8.10 Feedback from teachers and schools

Feedback is overwhelmingly encouraging about the student's involvement in the program and post project teacher survey results will be collated and released in November 2011.

*"What we noticed with the students in both the lead up to the festival and during the festival was the increase in self esteem, respect for others and pride in their personal history and knowledge. As educators, we could never have gotten the same results from a classroom, the hands on approach and self-lead learning the girls went through was invaluable." Megan Nash, Teacher, Worawa Aboriginal College (full transcript at end of document)*

## 9 OUTCOMES

The elders and planning group believe that this Project comes to "the heart of the story" and is a model of ownership and participation of value to the education for all students across Australia through their World Heritage communities. The Project extends beyond traditional education pathways, in which knowledge is passed from teacher to student, by drawing on a peer education model and mentored research to equip participants with not only knowledge of the topic but also life skills including communication, team work, an understanding of other people's differing values and experiences, leadership, public speaking and increased esteem. Students develop valuable experiences that will later assist in further education, job seeking efforts, employment skills and increased motivation, which in turn, have the potential to increase education and employment outcomes.

## 10 THE FUTURE

Since the first event in 2007 The Mungo Youth Conference has grown substantially in its relevance to Indigenous students surrounding the Willandra World Heritage Area and has the potential to create a role model for Indigenous education throughout Australia.

In 2011 the committee completed a three year Strategic Plan, which includes a strategy to accept paying schools each year to contribute to the financial sustainability of the project. In 2011 three national paying schools will attend. The committee including Elders, discovery rangers, educators, traditional owners, archaeologists and the event manager, have delivered presentations about the project throughout Australia at Indigenous, Educational and Government Conferences as well as to the World Archaeology Conference in Dublin in 2009 and the National Parks Foundation in 2011.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly supportive and the next steps are to:

- Work towards financial sustainability;
- Develop an Ambassador/Patron program;
- Gain DGR status to attract major donors to ensure sustainability;
- Inform the National history curriculum and
- Further develop school education support, training and resources.

The concept has been developed by the Mungo Youth Project Committee and together we are developing a powerful and important model for Australian cultural and history education.



### **Feedback from Worawa Aboriginal College in Healesville, participants in the 2011 Project**

To the Mungo Youth Project Organisers,

I'm a teacher from Worawa Aboriginal College in Healesville, Victoria. We were fortunate enough to bring a group of our students to the Mungo Festival for the first time this year. We were late entrants which meant we really had our work cut out for us in terms of getting together the best possible presentation we could in the short time we had.

We chose 9 girls to be a part of the Mungo Crew and over the weeks leading up to the festival, we all worked super hard to ensure what we presented would do the school proud and the girls even prouder.

Many of our girls are from remote communities and English is sometimes a second or third language. For those girls to get up and present in front of a group of people they have never met before was amazing to see. The end result ended up exceeding our expectations, our girls were so proud of themselves, we the teachers were proud and according to audience feedback, they presented extremely well.

What we noticed with the students in both the lead up to the festival and during the festival was the increase in self esteem, respect for others and pride in their personal history and knowledge. As educators, we could never have gotten the same results from a classroom, the hands on approach and self-lead learning the girls went through was invaluable.

The only aspect of the festival we thought could change, was to have more hands on activities for the students. There was a lot of Information to take in and sometimes it felt like they were being talked to a little too much.

The Mungo Youth Festival is something Worawa Aboriginal College would love to continue to be a part of. The feedback from the students was so positive and self affirming that to not make Mungo a regular part of Worawa, would be a mistake.

Thanks again to everyone involved, it was a wonderful experience.

