

# Media Release

MONDAY 13 MAY 2019



## WESTERN HIGHWAY PROJECT WELCOMES EASTERN MAAR SUPPORT

Major Road Projects Victoria has welcomed the support of the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation for the revised route of the Western Highway upgrade.

Major Road Projects Victoria has been working closely with the Eastern Maar for more than a year to ensure that the Western Highway upgrade delivers the best possible result for the whole community.

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and Major Road Projects Victoria have reached an agreement on which critical trees should be retained as well as important initiatives including protection of cultural heritage in western Victoria and the inclusion of more Aboriginal people in the Western Highway project.

Major Road Projects Victoria Director of Development and Performance Andrew Williams said this outcome recognises the Aboriginal community's close relationship and spiritual association with the land.

"We're making sure the Western Highway upgrade is delivered in a way that respects the cultural values associated with the land and its Traditional Owners," Mr Williams said.

"This is a project of national importance which is why we've worked extensively and respectfully with the Eastern Maar to reach agreement ensuring the Aboriginal community is at the forefront of what we do."

"We're continuing to work respectfully with the Djab Wurrung community, and with the support of the Eastern Maar, we'll look to recommence work along the approved alignment of the Western Highway upgrade."

To date, Major Road Projects Victoria has been able to realign the roadworks to avoid the two trees initially identified by the community as culturally significant and, more recently, has been able to confirm a further 13 trees will be retained.

Representatives from Major Road Projects Victoria, the Eastern Maar and the Djab Wurrung community have undertaken a walkthrough of the alignment to ensure, where possible, those trees identified as significant by the Aboriginal community are retained and protected during construction.

This builds upon the important work undertaken during the project's planning stages to ensure Aboriginal heritage would be managed respectfully as part of the project's Cultural Heritage Management Plan.

"The Western Highway is the main link between Melbourne and Adelaide and is the busiest undivided national highway in Australia – this upgrade will duplicate the road to improve safety for drivers," Mr Williams said.

There have been 93 crashes on the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell since 2014, including 10 deaths and 50 serious injuries.

Major Road Projects Victoria is now awaiting the outcome of an application to the Department of the Environment and Energy regarding the Western Highway and has informed the Department that works will not commence for another fortnight.

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### MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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13 MAY 2019

## **EASTERN MAAR CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVED ALONG WESTERN HIGHWAY**

The Board of the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC) and the Djab Wurrung community have secured important cultural heritage outcomes as part of the revised route of the Western Highway upgrade.

EMAC has been working with Major Road Projects Victoria as part of the project and they have been in close consultation since last year to help ensure that the Western Highway upgrade benefits the whole community and protects Aboriginal culture.

The Board of the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, have now secured a commitment from Major Road Projects Victoria that the culturally significant trees will be protected. This commitment emphasises that protection of cultural heritage is paramount to the Eastern Maar people.

Aunt Ros Howden, a Eastern Maar elder and senior custodian for the trees stated, "I am very happy with the outcomes of the negotiations with the government. These trees are now protected and the road can go ahead."

Representatives from the Eastern Maar community recently joined Major Road Projects Victoria on a walkthrough of the alignment to ensure, where possible, those trees identified as significant by the Aboriginal community are retained and protected during construction.

EMAC recognises the considerable efforts made by Major Road Projects Victoria to realign the roadworks to avoid the two trees initially identified by the community as culturally significant.

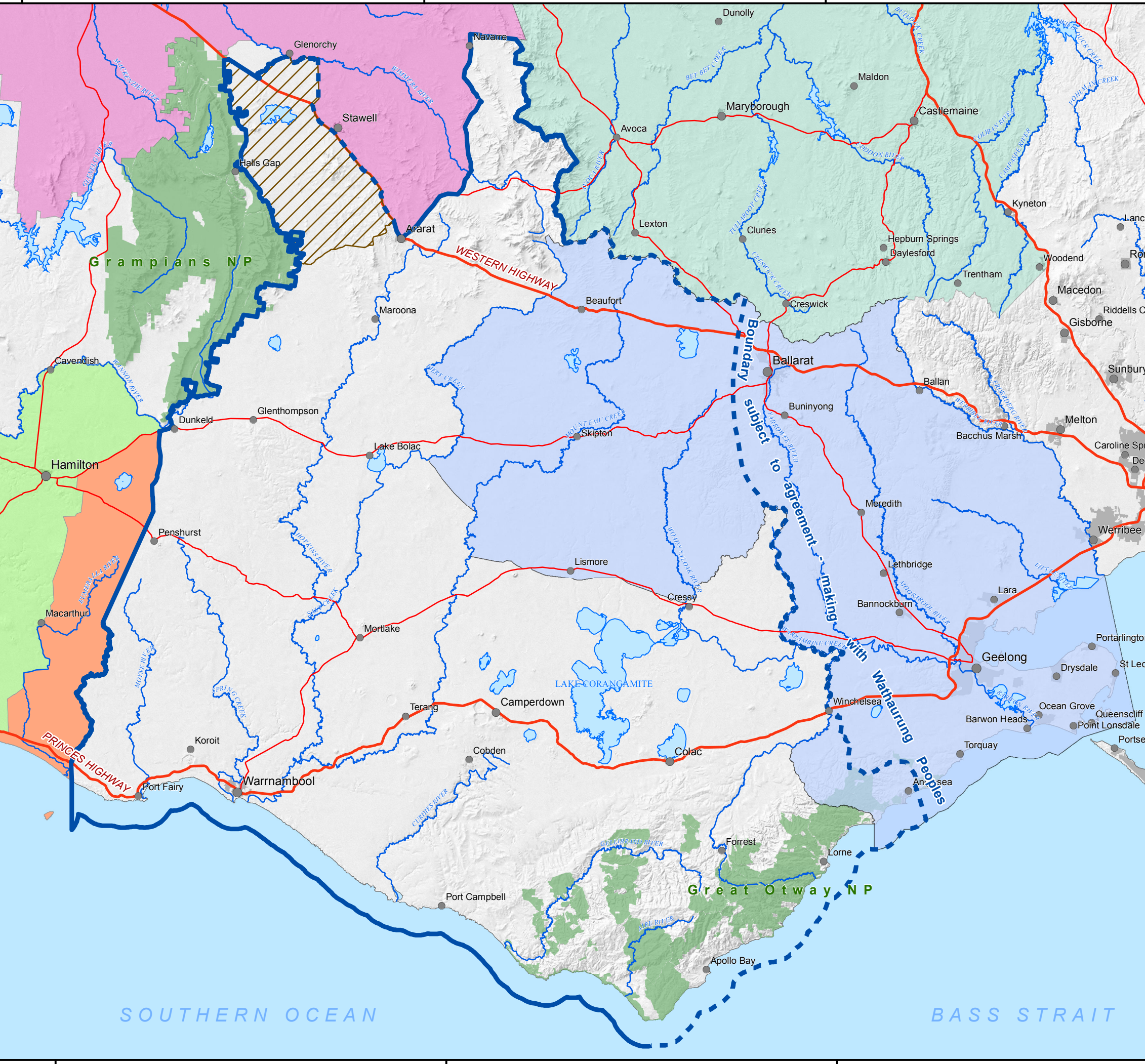
EMAC noted that a further 13 trees have been able to be retained along the alignment as a result of the consultations. They were grateful to members of their community who stood strong in protection of the trees.

Aunt Janice Austin, Eastern Maar elder and senior custodian for the trees stated that "no one argues with the fact this highway needs to be upgraded. Now the upgrade is going ahead in a way that protects our cultural heritage. The government has listened to our concerns."

In a further sign of self determination on the right to protect culturally significant heritage, the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation will continue to work with the Victorian Government and Major Road Projects Victoria on the Western Highway project and its implementation.

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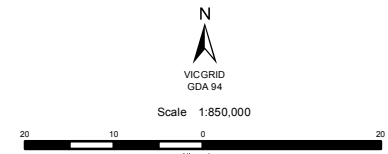


**Map of Eastern Maar Traditional Owner Group negotiation area for a Recognition and Settlement Agreement under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010**

Prepared by Aboriginal Victoria  
September 2017

**Legend**

- Proposed Agreement Boundary
  - Boundary remains subject to agreement-making with neighbouring Traditional Owner groups, or some other process for consideration of their interests
  - Zone of negotiation with Wotjobaluk Peoples
  - Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation Registered Aboriginal Party
  - Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Recognition and Settlement Agreement area
- Native Title Determination Areas**
- Eastern Maar/Gunditjmara Part B
  - Gunditjmara Part A
  - Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Peoples



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