



# An introduction to Noongar History and Culture

Aboriginal people are cautioned that these panels contain images of Noongar people who have passed away.

Pre history scientific dating confirms that the Australian continent has been occupied by Aboriginal people for at least 50,000 years. In the south west of Western Australia tools that are 35,000 years old, and Noongar remains that are between 12,000 and 20,000 years old, have been unearthed from an archaeological deposit in a limestone cave at Devil's Lair near Augusta. A more recent study says this date is more likely to go back some 50,000 years.

The Noongar people lived in balance with the natural environment. Their social structure was focused on the family with Noongar family groups occupying distinct areas of Noongar Country. It is variously estimated that the Noongar population, prior to the arrival of Europeans, was between 6,000 and tens of thousands. Noongar people lived by hunting and trapping a variety of game including kangaroos, possums and wallabies. They fished using spears and fish traps, as well as gathering an extensive range of native plants and wildlife such as Grass Trees (Balga) sap for medicinal purposes. Noongar people utilised quartz instead of flint for spear and knife edges, and developed the art of working quartz crystals. They wore the cloak of the kangaroo for warmth, especially in the colder areas of the south west.

For the Noongar People in the Perth area the main source of food came from the sea, the Swan River and the extensive system of freshwater lakes and wetlands that once lay between the coast and the Darling Escarpment. Further south and east the Noongar people lived off the resources of the Karri and Jarrah forests. In the southern coastal area around Albany the Noongar people built fish traps and hunted turtle. To the north and east Noongar people lived in the semi arid regions of what is now the wheat belt.



Noongar men gathered together at Guildford in 1901 to be photographed during the visit to WA of the Duke of York and Duchess of Cornwall. Photo courtesy of the Battye Library.

## 1626

On the ship Gulden Zeepaerd, Dutchman Pieter Nuyts "accidentally discovered the south coast east of Cape Leeuwin", after this area was commonly referred to as Nuytsland by Dutch explorers.

## February 1658

Dutchmen Volkersen and Jonck, on the vessels Emeloort and Waeckende Boey, were sent to search for survivors of shipwrecks, and individually sought information about the 'Southland' near the Swan River and towards Bunbury. Jonck touched the coast near Bunbury and then turned away going north. Volkersen, on Waeckende Boey, touched the coast at Rottnest Island, lowered a boat and sailed up and down the coast noting that many fires were burning fiercely and there was much smoke rising in several places where Noongar people were camping.



King Billy, a Noongar man photographed at Karridale, around 1890

## The meaning of "up"

Visitors to the south west of WA will notice the many place names end in "up", such as Nannup, Jerramungup, Needilup, Ongerup and Manjimup. This is because in Noongar language, "up" means place of.

## December 1696

The ships Geelvinck and Nijptangh anchored at Rottnest with Willem Vlamingh leading the expedition.

## December 1792

French expedition led by D'Entrecasteaux visited the south west coast; the party included Riche from the ship Esperance. Riche sought to make contact with Noongars and saw fires in the distance, however, he got lost overnight, and those searching for him saw some Noongar people who they assumed were "a unique species of man who could live on salt water and on special types of nourishment not suited to others".

## 1803

Nicholas Baudin anchored at King George Sound and proceeded up the coast towards the Swan River. He and his people discovered "the ingenious system of fish traps" the Noongar people had constructed in Oyster Harbour, along the Frenches (Kalgan) River and near Cape Leeuwin. After visiting two islands off the coast (Carnac & Garden Island) a group, led by M. Heirisson, proceeded up the Swan River up to the area around Guildford.

## 1821

Phillip Parker King visited King George Sound and produced a detailed account of his contacts with the Aboriginal people residing there. Recorded the presence of a man named Coolbun at the Sound. It is thought that this may have been an ancestor of the present day Colbung.

## 1826

King George Sound garrison established Albany. Major Edmund Lockyer was instructed to establish a government settlement and garrison at King George Sound. Lockyer's journal documents his encounters with the Noongar owners of the area. Settlers such as Collet Barker meet Noongar man Mokare and establish close friendships.



Noongar man photographed in the 1880s

## March 1827

Charles Fraser, colonial botanist who accompanied the party in the vessel Success to the Swan River in 1827 wrote: "The natives in the vicinity of the Cape (Naturalist) and on the Bay were exceedingly communicative ... I then joined them in their "Corr-abb-orra" (Corroboree) or dance in which we were joined by the officers and sailors on shore. Their showing particular attention to me must have arisen from my being acquainted with their manner of dancing and singing in which they heartily joined. Their language is distinct from that of every tribe I have met with on the eastern coast or interior."

## 1827

On 8 March 1827 when Captain James Stirling and 18 others were exploring the Swan River near the suburb of Claisebrook they encountered three armed Noongar men. Stirling noted that "they seemed angry at the invasion of their territory, and by their violent gestures gave him reason to rejoice at the space of water, which divided them from the boat." Three days later further down the river a group of about 30 other Noongar people appeared on the riverbank. Slightly concerned, Stirling wrote: "At first they displayed great reserve, but, as we made no attempt to approach them, the warriors followed us along the bank, the women and children retiring out of sight. The woods now resounded with their shouts, to which replied our bugle with equal loudness and with more than equal melody. At this point appearances wore a threatening aspect, for the Natives seemed very much enraged, and I judged from the violent gestures and great noise they made that we should shortly have a shower of spears".

## The six Noongar seasons

The Noongar people have a close connection to the earth, and divide the year into six distinct seasons that historically corresponded with moving to different areas and feeding on seasonally available foods. Noongar country conforms closely to the south west Indian Ocean Drainage Region, and the use of these waters and wetlands are central to Noongar culture.

**Birak**  
(December/January)  
Dry & hot. Noongars burned sections of scrubland to force game into the open for easier hunting.



## 11 June 1829

This is the day that sovereignty was “assumed” over Noongar country by what is now the State of Western Australia. The 11 June 2011 marks the 182nd anniversary of the dispossession of Noongar country from the Noongar people.

## 1829

Captain Charles Fremantle took formal possession of the west coast of New Holland, which became known as the Swan River Colony of Western Australia. Shortly after, Captain James Stirling arrived at the Swan River with the first settlers aboard the *Parmelia*, and read the proclamation which stated that the Aboriginal inhabitants would be protected by the laws of England, and that anyone harming them would be punished.

Between 1828 and 1886 Aboriginal affairs in WA were the administrative responsibility of the Colonial Secretary, who operated in accordance with policy dictated by the Home Office (UK). The Colonial Secretary's Office originated with the appointment of Peter Broun as first Colonial Secretary on 30 December 1828.

## 15 December 1829

Thomas Peel arrived at the Swan River colony with settlers. By the end of 1829 nearly 2,000 settlers had arrived. Peel was granted enormous tracks of land south of Perth.

### Lyon argued that Yagan should be treated as a prisoner of war

Yagan was seen by the early settler Robert Lyon as a hero. Writing in the *Perth Gazette*, Lyon argued that Yagan and other Noongars who were being arrested for the ‘crimes’ against settlers should not be regarded as criminals and outlaws, but prisoners of war because they were defending their land and property. After a series of conflicts, a bounty was placed on Yagan's head. He was finally shot, decapitated, and his back skinned as a trophy of the tribal markings. His head was smoked and taken to London as a memento of the “Swan River chieftain”, where it was exhibited as an “anthropological curiosity”. After a century in storage at a museum, the head was then buried in an unmarked grave in 1964. After a sustained campaign, Yagan's head was eventually returned to the Noongar people in 2010, and later laid to rest at the memorial garden in the Swan Valley.

## 1830s

Yagan was an influential Noongar figure from the 1830s. He was born about 1795 the son of Midgegooroo, whose country was south east of Perth in the Canning River region. Other local groups included the Yellagonga in Perth, and Munday's people who were east of the Swan and north from the Canning River. Yagan was quoted as saying:

**“You came to our country; you have driven us from our haunts, and disturbed us in our occupation; as we walk in our country we are fired upon by the white men; why should white men treat us so?”**

Since the early 1980s a number of Noongar groups sought the return of Yagan's head and lobbied for its repatriation. In 1993 its location was identified, and four years later it was exhumed and repatriated to Perth. In 1984 Noongar Elders were successful in getting a memorial statue, celebrating Yagan, erected on Harrison Island near the present day Causeway bridge. Yagan is considered an iconic Noongar figure throughout Australia and especially in the south west by the Noongar people.



Noongar men and boys commemorate the re-burial of Yagan's head at the Swan Valley in 2010. Photo courtesy of Trevor Walley.

## 1832

A “Native Institution” of four acres was established in the Swan River Colony on the foreshore below Mt Eliza at Kings Park at the site of the later Swan Brewery. The first administrative act in relation to Aboriginal people of the Swan River Colony was the setting up, by Governor Stirling in 1832, of a mounted police corps with the “Superintendent of Natives” as its head. Its purpose was to “protect and control” Aboriginal people.

A “Superintendent of Tribes” was appointed to assist the Colonial Secretary in 1832. This was Captain Ellis, who died as a result of injuries received during the 1834 Pinjarra massacre.

**Bunnuru  
(February/March)  
Hottest part of the  
year, with sparse  
rainfall throughout.  
Noongar people  
moved to the  
estuaries for  
fishing.**

## 1834

On 28 October 1834, along the Murray River in the Pinjarra area, a camp of Noongar people were attacked by a party of soldiers led by James Stirling, the Governor of the Swan River Colony. In European records this event is known as “The Battle of Pinjarra”, but the Noongar people view it very differently as “The Pinjarra Massacre”. The British had been intent on invading Noongar country for the purpose of farming, and for creating a link between the Perth colony and the deeper south west to Albany. Successful resistance by the Noongar people was thwarting their plans and threatening the stability of the colony. In an effort to end the resistance, Governor Stirling led a party of mounted police.



Noongar men preparing for a traditional dance (known by some Noongars as a “canout”) at Welshpool Reserve around 1905

## 1837

Settlements are established in the south west area of WA at Perth, Albany, Denmark, Kelsmscott, Katanning, Williams, Augusta, Busselton, Bunbury, Pinjarra, York and Beverley.

## 1839

Governor Stirling is succeeded by Governor John Hutt, who introduced a number of Aboriginal policy reforms. “Protectors of Aborigines” are appointed at Perth and York.

## 1840—54

A period of programs to “civilise” the Noongar population starts. Institutions for Aboriginal children opened at Perth, Fremantle, Wanneroo, Guildford, York and New Norcia. Land bounties were offered to colonists who trained Noongar men and women to apprentice standards. Aboriginal children could be removed from their families for apprenticeships without parental permission.

## 1840

Under Governor Hutt a system of Protectorships was established. Two protectors were appointed by the Colonial Office in England. Charles Symmons was stationed in Perth, and patrolled the area from Perth down the coast to Augusta. Peter Barrow was stationed at York, and patrolled the area around York inland down to Albany. The Protectors' role was to “protect, civilise and mediate” between Aboriginal people and the Government. The size of the Noongar country and the distances involved in travelling its length made this a somewhat difficult job. The Colonial Government issued directions that Noongar people should not be admitted to towns.





Noongar camp at Crawley Point around 1860

## 1841

One of the most notorious massacres in Noongar country occurred in the Wonnerup area in response to the spearing of a prominent property owner George Layman by a Noongar elder, Gayware. The Wonnerup area is located within the traditional territories of the Wardandi, a sub group of the Noongar people. These wetlands provided the Noongar people with reliable food sources. The Noongar practised firestick farming, which saw seasonal burning of the grasslands which in turn promoted new growth of vegetation and drove game into the open for hunting. As the number of European settlements in the region grew, settlers hunted for game, fenced properties and sought to stop seasonal burning. The depletion of food sources forced Noongar people to raid settler's livestock and supplies to survive. In a confrontation at Layman's property, Layman pulled Gayware's beard, which is recognised in traditional terms as a gross insult to a Noongar elder. Subsequent reprisals by the settlers followed, which resulted in an unknown but suspected large number of Noongar people being killed.

## 1841

Rottneet Island prison, established in 1838, officially became an island prison for Aboriginal people from all over the state. Apart from a short period from 1849 to 1854, it continued to receive prisoners until 1931. Known as Wadjemup to Noongar people, its original objectives were to train and repatriate prisoners into the rural workforce. More than three hundred Aboriginal prisoners perished on the island. Since those days, the old gaol has been converted into holiday accommodation, and campers now pitch their tents on the Aboriginal burial grounds. There is still a lack of acknowledgement of the Noongar people's traumatic historical connection to the island.

## 1846

New Norcia Mission was founded by Benedictine monks, who set about creating an Aboriginal village community. Many Noongar families from this area were given Spanish names by the monks.

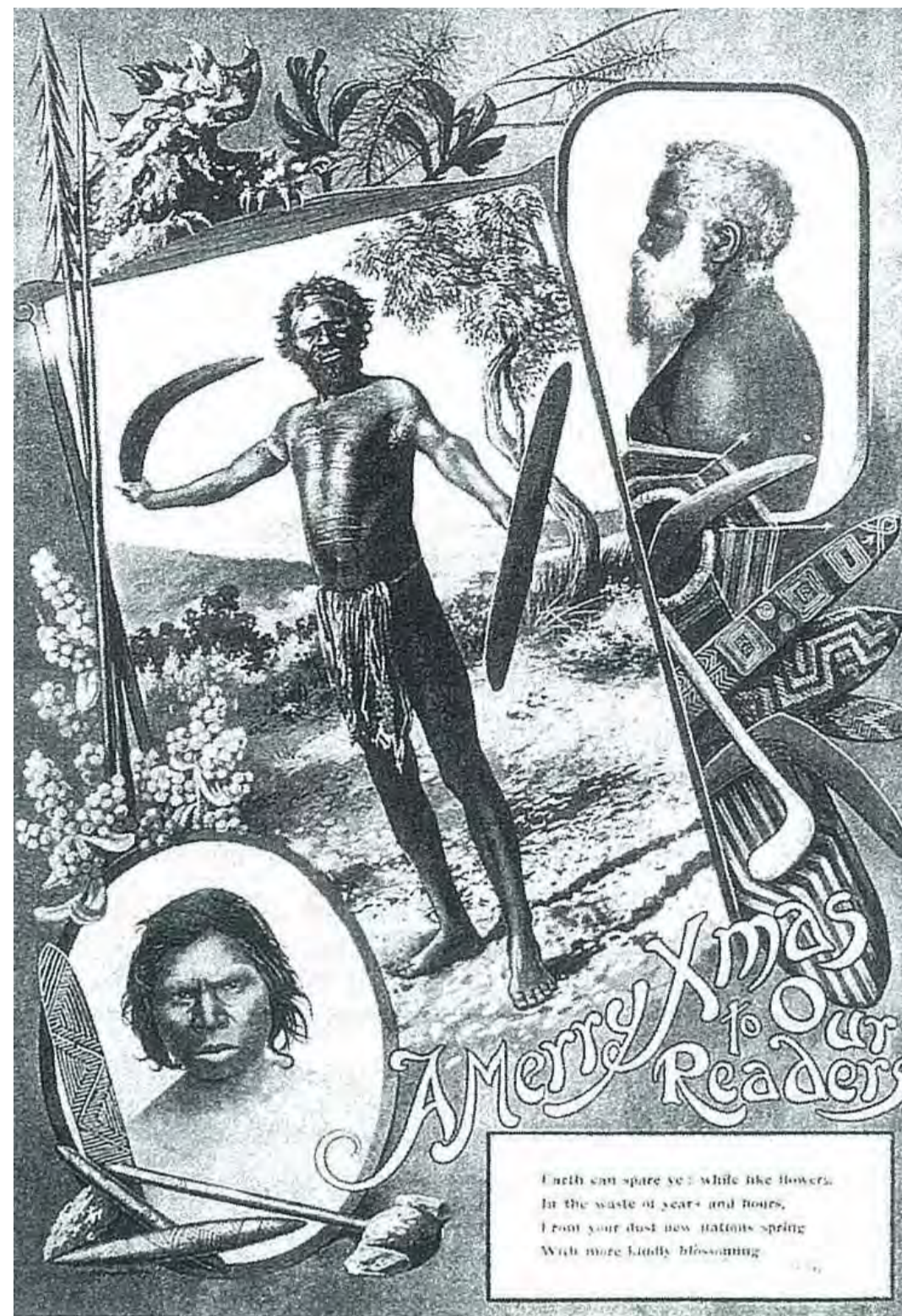
## 1848

Rewards for "civilising natives" were abolished. Interest in the local Noongar people waned, and the number of settlers in the Swan River Colony diminished so much through hardship that the whole colony was under threat of collapse. Accordingly, an Order in Council declared Western Australia to be a convict colony.

## The Wagyl

The Wagyl (or Waugal, or Waagal) is central to Noongar beliefs, law and custom. It is a large snakelike creature responsible for the creation of the Swan and Canning Rivers and other waterways and landforms around present day Perth and the south west of Western Australia. In Noongar beliefs the Wagyl was created by the Rainbow Serpent which entrusted the Wagyl to protect the rivers, lakes, springs and the wildlife. The Noongar people were appointed as the guardians of the land by the Wagyl. Many Noongar people past and present talk of seeing the Wagyl. The Darling Scarp is said to represent the body of the Wagyl, which meandered over the land creating the curves and contours of the hills and gullies. As the Wagyl slithered over the land, his track shaped the sand dunes, his body scoured out the course of the rivers; where he occasionally stopped for a rest, and created bays and lakes. Piles of rocks are said to be his droppings, and such sites are considered sacred. As he moved, his scales scraped off and became the forests and woodlands of the region. As well as being strongly associated with rivers, the Wagyl joins up with Wetland systems like Herdsman and Lake Monger and still resides deep beneath springs. The most prominent Wagyl site in Perth is at the base of Kings Park at the Swan Brewery Site where the earliest European settlers recorded Noongar people talking about and protecting the Wagyl.

**Djeran  
(April/May)**  
Cooler weather begins.  
Fishing continued & bulbs  
and seeds were collected for  
food.



1904 Front page of the Perth Western Mail newspaper Xmas edition

## 1868

The transportation of convicts ends. A total of 9,668 convicts had been transported to the Swan River Settlement. Noongar people became a primary source of labour particularly on rural farming properties. Noongar people continued to live on country, often on farms on which they worked. This meant that much of their traditional lifestyle was maintained whilst they worked on the farms.



Aboriginal boys at the New Norcia Mission around 1900

## 1890

After the granting of responsible government to WA in 1890, the Board remained in the hands of the British Government as they were wary that the "black subjects" were not being treated fairly.

## 1901

The Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed on 1 January with a political context of the "White Australia Policy" where chronic racism was directed against Noongars. The emphasis was on segregation of Noongars, who were excluded from jobs under the new Labor Government. Like other Aboriginals, the Noongars were excluded from towns, and their children were removed from schools. "Native camps" were established on the fringes of most towns, and curfews enforced whereby Aboriginal people found inside the town limits after 6pm would be subject to arrest. It was an offence for Aboriginal people to drink alcohol.

## 1870s

By the late 1870s Government policy was influenced by the belief in the "inevitable extinction" of a dying race of "tribal" Aboriginals, and concern at the growth of the so called "half caste" or "mixed blood" Aboriginals.

## 1886

The Aboriginals Protection Act of 1886 was to provide for the "better protection and management" of Aboriginals. The administration of Aboriginal affairs was removed from the Colonial Secretary and entrusted to the Aboriginal Protection Board, which consisted of five members and a secretary, all nominated by the Governor. The Board was responsible for overseeing the activities of the Protectors of Aboriginals, who were appointed by the Governor or the Board under the Aboriginals Protection Act 1886. This Act allowed the Board to supervise rationing and medical care and protection of Aboriginals. "Miscellaneous" aspects of the Act included the provision that "every Aboriginal native of Australia, and every Aboriginal half-caste or child of a half-caste, such half-caste or child habitually associating and living with Aboriginals" should come under the jurisdiction of the Act. Power was given to any justice of the peace to order Aboriginals out of town. If they refused they could be sentenced to one month in jail.



## Many Noongars made the ultimate sacrifice in the first World War



In Loving Memory of Corporal A P Farmer MM No. 4808, 16th Battalion Enlisted in the AIF in Bridgetown in 1915, and sailed for Egypt in January 1916, and from there proceeded to England, where he completed his military training. He was then sent to France, where he took part in the historic battles at Bullecourt, Lagnicourt, Ypres, and Merricourt, therefore seeing very heavy fighting. The above hero won his medal for conspicuous bravery on the field at Merricourt. It was on the eventful day of 8th August 1918 that he was killed at Merricourt. He was 32 years of age and is buried at Hamel, in France. His mother Mrs E Farmer, resided at Drove Street, Katanning, West Australia.

### 1905

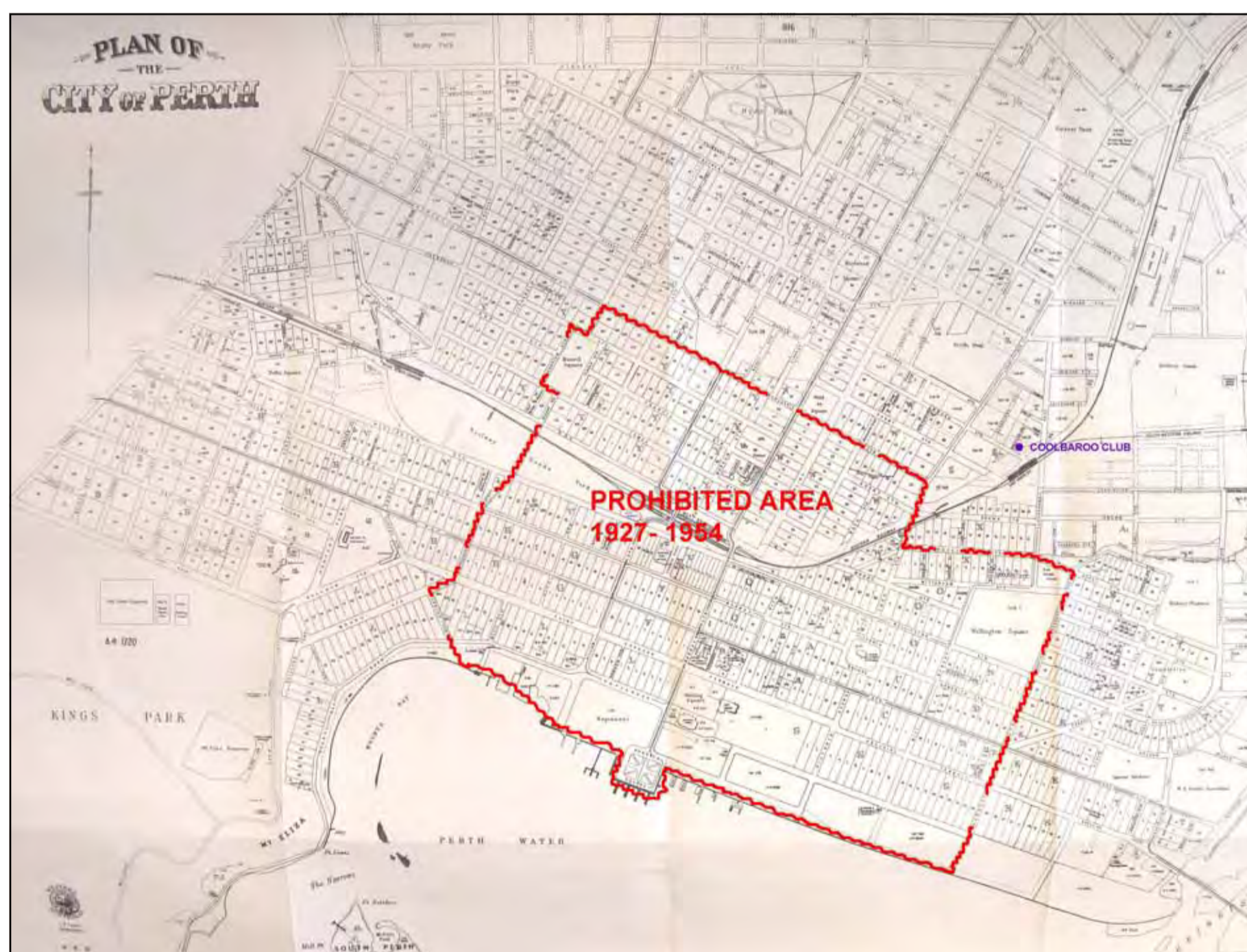
At the turn of the century there was a significant increase in the Noongar population, with a corresponding increase in alarm about the "inter racial mixing". New legislation was enacted to counter these trends, the most insidious of which was the 1905 Aborigines Act, which was similar to the apartheid laws of South Africa which enforced the segregation of different races. The Aborigines Act of 1905 set up a bureaucratic structure for the control of Aboriginal people whereby they all become "wards of the state". Under the Act, people were classified as "native" or "non-native" based on their ratio of Aboriginal to European blood. One of the major functions of this Act was to "provide for the custody, maintenance, and education of the children of Aborigines". The Chief Protector of Aborigines in WA throughout most of this period was a man called A.O. Neville, who was the "legal guardian of every Aboriginal and half-caste child" under the age of 16. Noongar children were forcibly removed from their parents and transported to various mission-run settlements in the south west, but they still remained on Noongar country.

### 1905—1910

Researcher Daisy Bates performs detailed genealogical and ethnographic research with Noongar people throughout the south west; recording information from people such as Joobaitch, son of the well known leader Yellagonga. She recorded stories about the 'dreamtime' known as the "Nyitting", or cold time by the Noongars. Her notebooks refer to the Waugal, which is the same creation spirit recorded by earlier writers. The Waugal created the waterways in the south west along which the Noongar people camped and hunted. Bates is entirely dismissive of what she called "half-caste" Noongars, and does not include them in her genealogies.

### September 1904

A 245 acre reserve was established in Welshpool as a "feeding depot" for the Noongars. This reserve was cancelled when the Moore River Native Settlement was set up in 1918.



### 1927

Aboriginal people were banned from the Perth area and were prohibited from entering the area without a "Native Pass" signed by the Commissioner of Native Affairs. Above left is the map showing the area of Perth from which Aboriginal people were excluded; above right is the "Native Pass" permitting access to the prohibited area.

### 1914

A number of Aboriginal people enlisted to fight in the first World War. At this time Aboriginals were not recognised as citizens, and were administered under the 1905 Aborigines Act by the Department of Aborigines and Fisheries.

### 1915

Carrolup Aboriginal Settlement (also known as Marribank) was established near Katanning, and along with the Moore River Settlement, it was the largest institution to house Aboriginal people in the south west. These sites were considered places where children could be trained and apprenticed out into the local workforce where they would interbreed and be absorbed into the white community. The older people who were considered "too dark" could live out their lives on the reserves.

**Makuru (June/July)**  
Cold fronts that have till now brushed the lower south west coast begin to cross further north. This is usually the wettest part of the year. Noongars moved inland to hunt once the rains had replenished inland water resources.

### 1918

Moore River Aboriginal settlement is established north of Perth, and is now known as Mogumber Farm. Up to 500 people were kept at Moore River at any one time, in very poor conditions. It was referred to the film "Rabbit Proof Fence". Five times more money was spent on prisoners at Fremantle jail than was spent on Moore River inmates. Ironically, and despite the appalling conditions, Moore River kept Noongar people together where aspects of law and custom could be shared and continued. Many of the Stolen Generations of Noongar children resided here and at Carrolup. Between 1918 and 1951 there were 346 deaths recorded at Moore River Native Settlement, 42% of which were children aged between one and five years. It was closed down in 1951. In August 1918 John Kickett, a Noongar man who fought for Australia in the first World War wrote to his Member of Parliament: "I want a little fair play if you will be so kind enough to see me on beharfe ... I have five of my people in France fighting, since you were here for your election one has been killed, which leaves four of my people Fighting for Our King and Country Sir, I think they should have the liberty of going to any State school" .

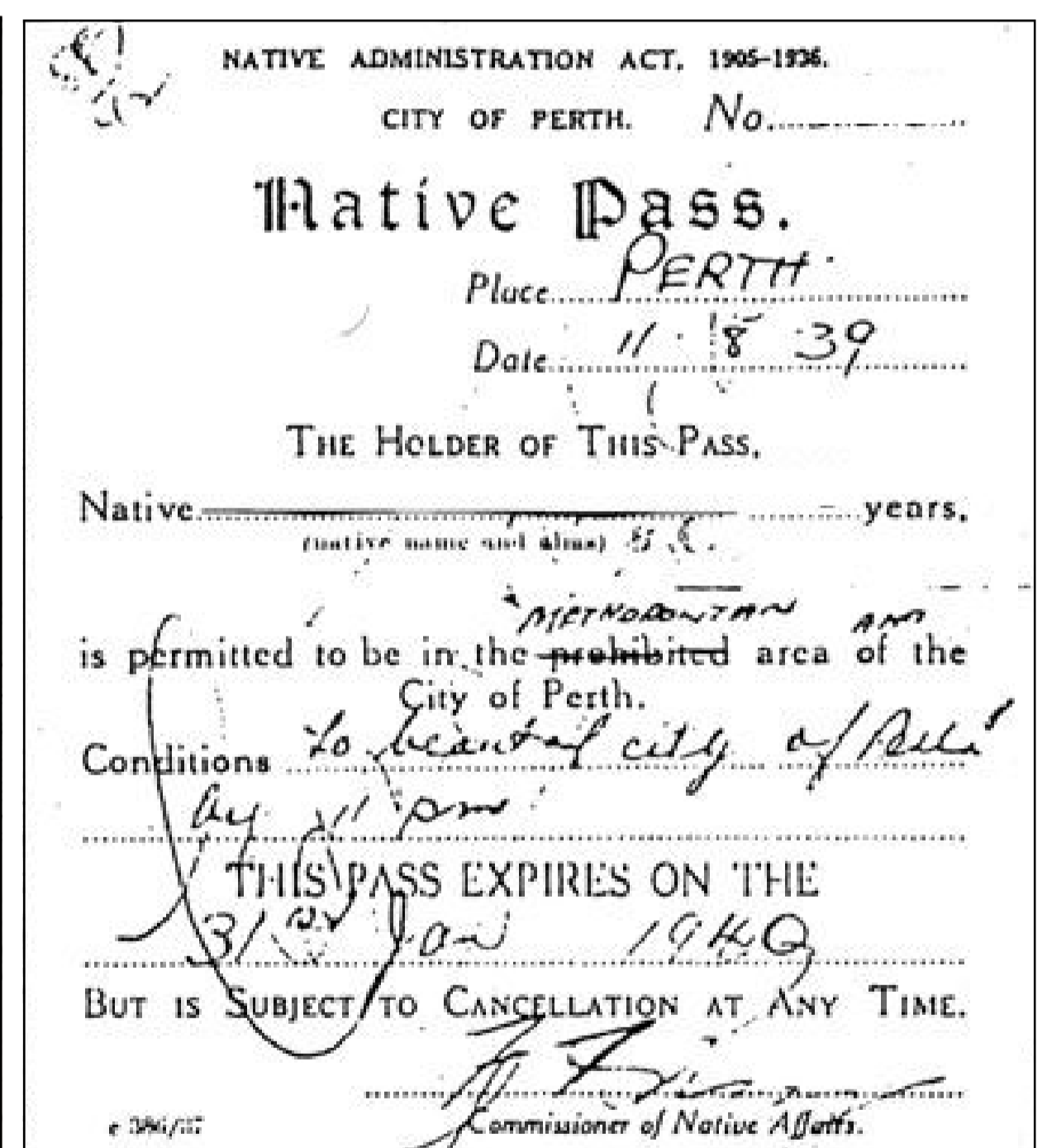
### 1918 (Percy Bysshe Shelley)

*"Earth can spare ye: while like flowers,  
In the waste of years and hours,  
From your dust new notions spring  
With more kindly blossoming."*

This poem is a metaphor for the belief that Noongar people (and all Aboriginal people) were doomed to eventual extinction in the face of white progress. How wrong they were.

### 1918

After the first World War, the Australian Government developed a soldier resettlement scheme that granted or sold subsidised arable land to returned servicemen. Aboriginal servicemen who returned after the war were excluded from such land grants as they were still under the control of the 1905 Aborigines Act, and as such were not considered to be citizens.



### 1911

Amendments to the Aborigines Act 1905 removed restrictions on the size of Aboriginal reserves while granting the Chief Protector the power to remove children "to the exclusion of the rights of the mother of an illegitimate or half-caste child". The increased size of the reserves meant that Aboriginal people could be moved en masse from town areas to these native reserves. This enabled the white pastoralists to benefit from easily sourced cheap Aboriginal labour while keeping the emerging towns free from "Aboriginal fringe camps".



## March 1928

Edward Harris, William Harris, Wilfred Morrison, Arthur Kickett, Norm Harris, Edward Jacobs and William Bodney make up the first Aboriginal deputation to march to the WA Parliament House to see Premier Collier to demand rights for Aboriginal people.



"A unique deputation of Western Australian aboriginals, well spoken and in some cases well educated and well read men, waited on the Premier yesterday morning and received from him sympathetic consideration for the remedying of a number of disabilities under which they labor. The party comprises: Top: The spokesmen, Edward Harris (Toodyay) and William Harris (North-West). Lower: left to right: Wilfred Morrison (Katanning). A. Kickett (York), Norman Harris (Morowa). Edward Jacobs (Quairading), and W. Rodney (Guildford)." *Courtesy West Australian Newspapers*

## 1930s

Sister Kate's Home for Aboriginal Children was founded at Queens Park, as a place where Noongar children of light-skinned appearance were taught in the ways of white Australia. Originally known as the Quarter Caste Children's Home in 1933, it reflected its eugenic function in "rescuing nearly white children" and preparing them for absorption into the white community. Children who were considered too "dark" were left at the Moore River Settlement. Most of the children who were sent to Sister Kate's are now members of the Stolen Generations, and included indigenous leader Ken Colbung, Australian Rules footballer Polly Farmer, and the late director of the Aboriginal Legal Service, Rob Riley.

## 1934

Moseley Royal Commission formed to investigate, report and advise upon matters in relation to the condition and treatment of Aborigines. This report contained references to the condition of the "native settlements" such as Moore River, where the report concluded that the settlement was a "woeful spectacle". "The buildings were overcrowded and vermin ridden; the children's diet lacked fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs and milk, and their health had been seriously affected".

## 1936

The Native Administration Act was passed by the WA parliament, extending the powers that the newly named Commission of Native Affairs had over the daily lives of Aboriginal children. This included the power to remove any "native" to a reserve or "institution or hospital". The Chief Protector of Aborigines persuaded the WA government to include eugenic measures in the Act to "breed out colour". The Act sought to re-classify Aboriginal people by stipulating definitions of Aboriginality, and defining the meaning of "native" as:

**A, any person of the full-blood descended from the original inhabitants of Australia;**  
**B, except any person of less than full blood who is:**

1. a quadroon under 21 who neither lives or associates with full-bloods;
2. a quadroon over 21, unless that person asks to be classified as a "native";
3. a person of less than quadroon blood, born before the end of 1936, whose application to be classified as "native" had received Ministerial approval.

Magistrates had the power to make orders classifying Aboriginal people as "native" under the Act. Quadroon was defined as a person who is descended from the full-blood "native" original inhabitants of Australia, but who is only "one-fourth of the original blood".

The solution to the "part aboriginal problem" as it was described in this Act, was through "tutored assimilation" and "breeding out colour", or "assimilation through organised breeding". Both concepts were influenced by the anthropology of the time. Dr Norman Tindale produced and endorsed a "scale of absorbability" of the various kinds of "cross-breeds" ranging from the high level "F1" (first generation half caste) who were 1/8th, 1/4, and 3/8th caste to the "low" for the 3/4 and 7/8ths caste.. These categories bore no relationship to the Noongar society of the time—as if a person's skin colour, or the way they were described by government could affect their ability to pass-on traditional knowledge; yet these categorisations defined government policies that affected entire generations.

## 1933

In January 1933, in response to complaints from European town people, the WA Premier authorised A.O. Neville to conduct the removal by train to the Moore River Native Settlement of the entire Noongar population of the Northam district. Northam and Gnowangerup were then declared prohibited areas for Aboriginal people.

**Djiiba**  
**(August/September)**  
**Often the coldest part of the year, with clear, cold nights & days, or warmer, windier periods. As the nights began to warm up, there are more clear sunny days. Roots were collected, and emus, possums & kangaroo were hunted.**

## 1939

World War Two—Many Noongar servicemen enlisted and fought alongside Australian citizens in some of the worst battles in the Europe. The Noongar servicemen who returned were still not considered as Australian citizens.

## 1920s—1930s

"The Second Dispossession" On the back of hard working Noongar labour, the pastoral industry in the south west had grown significantly, and as a result, land that had been set aside for Aboriginal reserves was taken back by the state to satisfy demand. As the Noongar people were never granted title over these reserves, the government was not obliged to pay compensation. Noongar families were again evicted from their homes. "When we would go out bush, our old people, they would show you the places you were not to go near. Some places might make you sick. When I was a boy I went to Southern Cross where all these Aboriginal people came together for a special meeting ... I used to go and watch the Corroborees up there at Southern Cross. They all danced, men and women". Doug Nelson, Noongar Elder born 1929 in Babakin, Noongar country.

## 1939

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## "Dog Tags"



Under the 1944 Citizenship Rights Act, Aboriginal people deemed to be citizens had to carry the above document, known as "Dog Tags", in order to vote at state or federal elections, visit licensed premises, drink alcohol, or travel freely within the state.





Many Noongars have served in the Australian armed services with great distinction. Above left is Ken Colbung, photographed in 1956. Above right is Charles Collard.

## Kambarang (October/November)

A definite warming trend is accompanied by longer dry periods and fewer cold fronts crossing the coast. The height of the wildflower season. The Noongars moved closer to the coast where frogs, tortoises and freshwater crayfish were caught.

### 1944

The Natives (Citizen Rights) Act 1944 is passed, allowing Aboriginal ex-service personnel, and some other Aboriginals to qualify for Australian citizenship. This act mirrored other acts in the Australian states, such as the requirements to be met for Noongar people to be considered as citizens, and not as "native". Only when a Noongar person was formally acknowledged as a citizen, and had been classified as not "native", were they exempt from the control of the Native Administration Act. This would enable them to vote in state and federal elections, visit licensed premises, drink alcohol, and travel freely within the state. However, to become a citizen, Noongars were required to live a European life style and to keep away from other Noongars who continued to practice traditional laws and customs. To protect their culture and families, many Noongars who applied for citizenship continued to maintain tradition in secret. The citizen certificates supplied to Noongars were commonly known as "Dog Tags". A further requirement was a statutory declaration by the applicant that he or she had "dissolved all tribal and native associations, except for lineal descendants of the first degree" for the two years prior to the application.

### 1951

Assimilation becomes official policy for Aboriginal Australia. Assimilation had been the unofficial policy since the turn of the century, where "part Aboriginal" people were separated from "full Aboriginal" people and expected to assimilate into white society. These racist categories bore no relationship to the daily realities of the Noongar people as they had a clear understanding and connection to their families regardless of the different government policies over the years. At the meeting where the assimilation policy became official, it was established that all Aborigines should "observe the same customs, and be influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties" of white Australia.

### 1954

The Native Welfare Act is passed, and many of the conditions relating to the absolute control of the Aboriginal people were repealed, yet the Commissioner for Native Affairs was still recognised as the legal guardian of all Aboriginals under the age of 21. The WA Department of Native Welfare maintained legislation which discriminated against Aboriginals in areas such as marriage, health, and the right to supervise the economic activities of Aboriginal people. The significant change in this act was the repeal of the Minister's power to compel an Aboriginal person to remain on a reserve or in an institution. Aboriginal people who had served in the army or navy for longer than six months were automatically regarded as "non-native", and were entitled to vote.

### 1960

The application of the Commonwealth Social Services Consolidation Act was changed and Aboriginal people were eligible for all Social Service benefits, pensions and allowances, on the same basis as white people, unless they were considered to be "primitive" or "nomadic".

### 1967

A federal referendum was conducted in 1967 to determine whether Aboriginal people should be included in the national census as Australian citizens, and whether the Commonwealth Government should be given the power to make laws for Aboriginal People. The referendum returned a "YES" vote of 90.77 %, still the highest ever positive vote in any Australian referendum. This provided the Aboriginal people with all the rights of ordinary Australian citizens, but did not lead to the overnight abolition of the range of discriminatory attitudes, policies and laws governing Aboriginal people. It took a further ten years before legislation guaranteeing extinguishment of discriminatory laws and policies would be enacted.

### 1968

Pastoral Award wages are extended to Aboriginal workers in WA, and although this initially had the effect of raising the income of Noongar workers, many pastoralists who had previously taken full advantage of cheap Noongar labour, reacted by sacking their Noongar farm employees.

**"Aboriginal people never used to abuse the country. They loved the country and respected it for what they got from it. There has been far too much land cleared. Now it has all dried up with a lot of salt erosion ... It makes me feel sad because I used to be able to see these places in their natural state. The farmers have all cleared the land now and there have been boundaries put in and restrictions on where Aboriginal people can and can't go".** Noongar man, Leonard Jack Williams, born in 1993 in Tambellup, in the Wagyl Kaip area.

### 1968

Professor William Stanner records his influential ABC radio Boyer Lecture "After the Dreaming", famously called the "Great Australian silence" regarding Aboriginal affairs. Stanner describes this silence as "a cult of forgetfulness" or "disremembering" that has been "practised on a national scale" and chastised historians for "having given the Aborigines no place in our past except that of a melancholy footnote". Histories of Noongar people start being written and oral Histories start being recorded revealing aspects of a previously hidden history. Noongar people talk of how they and their tradition, law and culture survived and how they avoided "the welfare".

### 1970

Protests start against the redevelopment of the Swan Brewery (Goonininup, in Noongar language). This site, at the base of Kings Park (formerly Mt Eliza) on the Swan River, represents important aspects of Noongar people's traditional knowledge. The protests became a focal point for opposition to the relentless destruction of Noongar sacred sites, and prompt widespread calls for an end to the discrimination against Noongar people. It becomes the most public face of Noongar protest. The development causes a great deal of angst in the Noongar community. Noongar people's beliefs are ridiculed for their claims that the area is the site of the Wagyl (the historical record is replete with extremely detailed references often from the first years' of settlement). After the High Court ruled that the Brewery was on Crown land and thus protected by the Aboriginal Heritage Act, Jim McGinty, Heritage Minister in the Carmen Lawrence Labor Government, excised the brewery site from the protection of the Local Government Act of 1960, and the redevelopment went ahead.

### 1972

The Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 is passed. This Act Recognised the right of Aboriginal people to protect cultural heritage or 'sites of significance' from being destroyed by development. Throughout the south west places of supreme cultural importance to the Noongar people have been registered as 'sacred sites' with the Department of Indigenous Affairs. There are recognised sacred sites throughout Noongar country such as Mulka's Cave in the Ballardong area, Wave Rock near Hyden, Devil's Lair in the South West Boojarah area, and hundreds of other places of cultural importance.

### 1975

The 1975 Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act made it illegal to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of race, colour, descent, nationality or ethnic origin. Its purpose was to protect everyone's human rights. The Act specifically outlawed racial discrimination in the provision of access to certain places and to accommodation, and in the provision of goods and services.

### 1976

Aboriginal Land Rights were recognised in the Northern Territory.

### 1984

Seaman Land Inquiry received submissions from Aboriginal groups about their Land and aspirations for their land and individuals living in the south west region of Western Australia. The report was published In September 1984. An acrimonious public debate took place through 1984 and 1985. It was characterised by a prolonged campaign led by the WA Chamber of Mines and supported by conservative political parties which focused on racist stereotypes to create irrational fear in the wider community.

### 1985

The State Labour Government tried to Introduce the Aboriginal Land Tenure Bill 1985, which was resoundingly criticised by Aboriginal people throughout the State. This Bill was later defeated In Parliament. The failure of the State Parliament to recognise Aboriginal rights was followed by the retreat of the Federal Labor Government from the Introduction of uniform national land rights legislation in 1986.



## 1992

The 1992 Mabo Decision reversed the notion that Australia was "terra nullius" or "desert and unoccupied" when Europeans arrived. In 1993 the Native Title Act was passed. Many local governments in the south west began developing "compacts" or "commitments" with their local Noongar communities to ensure sights of significance were protected and that culture was respected. Elders are increasingly invited to formal occasions to provide Welcomes to Country. The first steps in teaching the Noongar language in the general curriculum are made.

## 1995

The Noongar Land Council is established as an Aboriginal representative body for the Noongar people.

## 2001

The South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC) replaces the Noongar Land Council as the Aboriginal Representative Body for the south west. A new era began in December 2001 with SWALSC's recognition as native title representative body.

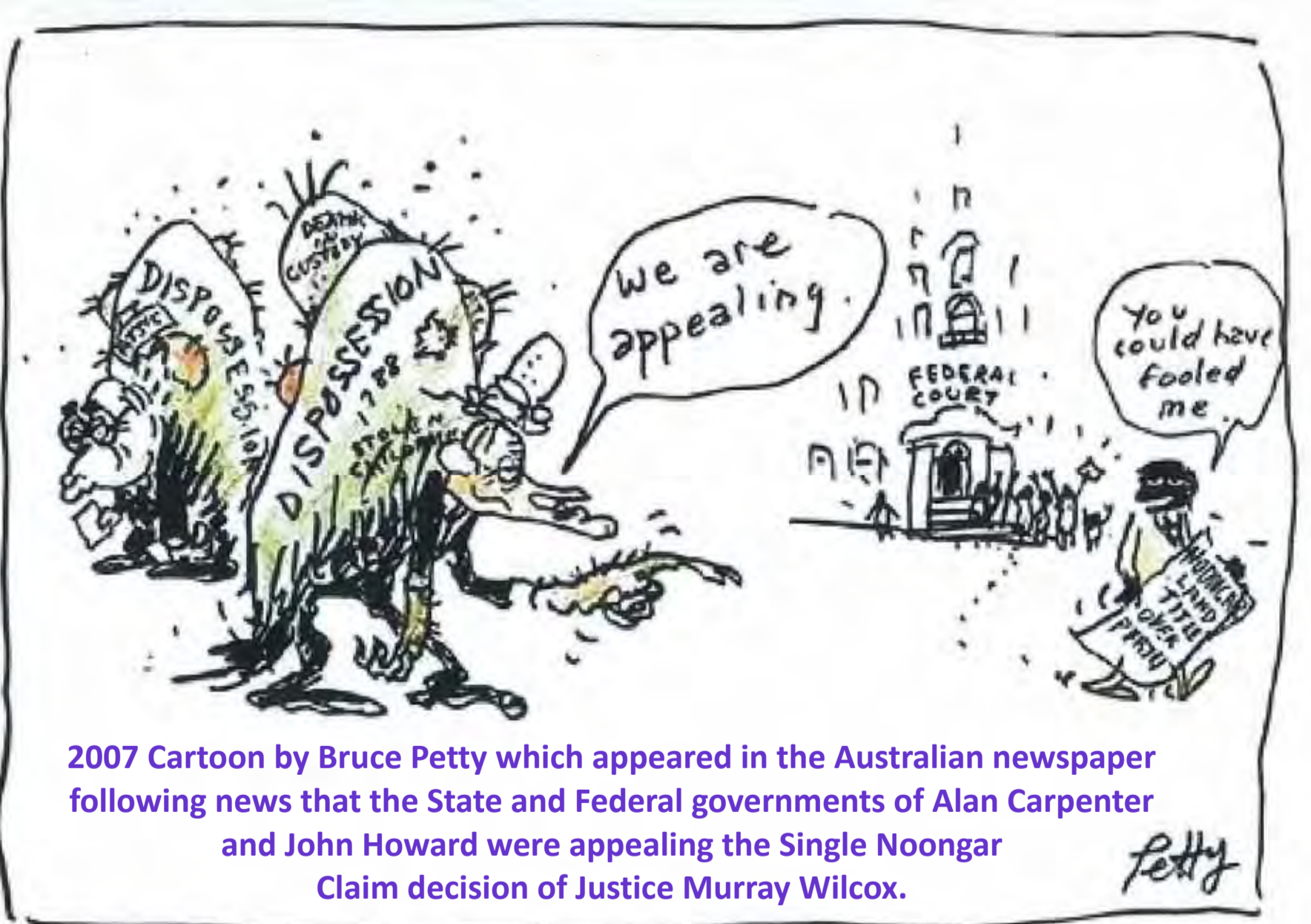
## 2003

The South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council lodged the Single Noongar Claim in 2003 on behalf of 218 Noongar families. The Single Noongar Claim is a native title claim that covers Noongar Country which is in the south west of Western Australia. SWALSC and the Noongar People decided to lodge a Single Noongar Claim because the Noongar people were one society and had maintained this society. A single claim ensured that all Noongar people would benefit equitably from any outcome, and could be proud of their heritage, traditions and country.



## October 2005

Adrian Ugle (left) and Tommy Ford (deceased) at Kings Park during the Federal Court hearing into the Single Noongar Claim.



2007 Cartoon by Bruce Petty which appeared in the Australian newspaper following news that the State and Federal governments of Alan Carpenter and John Howard were appealing the Single Noongar Claim decision of Justice Murray Wilcox.

## 2006

On 19 September 2006, after a preliminary hearing of the Single Noongar Claim dealing with the metro area, Federal Court Judge, Justice Murray Wilcox, ruled that native title had survived in those parts of the Perth Metropolitan area where it had not been "extinguished" by government dealings and private ownership. This decision was made on the basis that Noongar people have maintained their connection with the whole of their country in the south west of WA, and have continued their traditions and practices. Despite their history of oppression and marginalisation Noongar people have continued to assert their rights and identity, and now exist as one of the largest Aboriginal cultural and language groups in Australia with a unique, and distinctly vibrant culture.

## 2007

Shortly after the decision was handed down the State and Commonwealth Governments lodged an appeal. This appeal was heard in April 2007 by three Federal Court Judges. The State and Commonwealth governments appealed many aspects of the Court's decision (in law and fact). Their main contention was that Justice Wilcox was wrong in finding that there had been a Noongar society in 1829, and that it had continued to exist through to the present day. The governments claimed that Noongar Society had never existed in the first place.



The initial jubilation at Justice Wilcox's finding that native title did exist over Perth was tempered by the news that both the State ALP government and Federal Liberal government would appeal the Wilcox finding.

## 2008

The Federal Court upheld the appeal of the Single Noongar claim and sent the claim back to court for a second hearing. However, the court did not set aside the native title claim, nor overturn the findings of the evidence provided by the Noongar people that there was a Noongar Society. No ruling has been made against the initial finding that native title exists over Perth.



# Noongar Wangkinyiny

South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, February 2010



WA Govt agrees to negotiate Perth and SW native title claims

On 17 December the WA government signed a Heads of Agreement document with SWALSC outlining a framework for the resolution of the six native title claims over Perth and the south west of WA. The decision by the government to agree to negotiate the six native title claims is seen as a momentous breakthrough by the traditional owners, who have had their quest for recognition of native title frustrated by more than 12 years of slow and costly battles in the federal court.

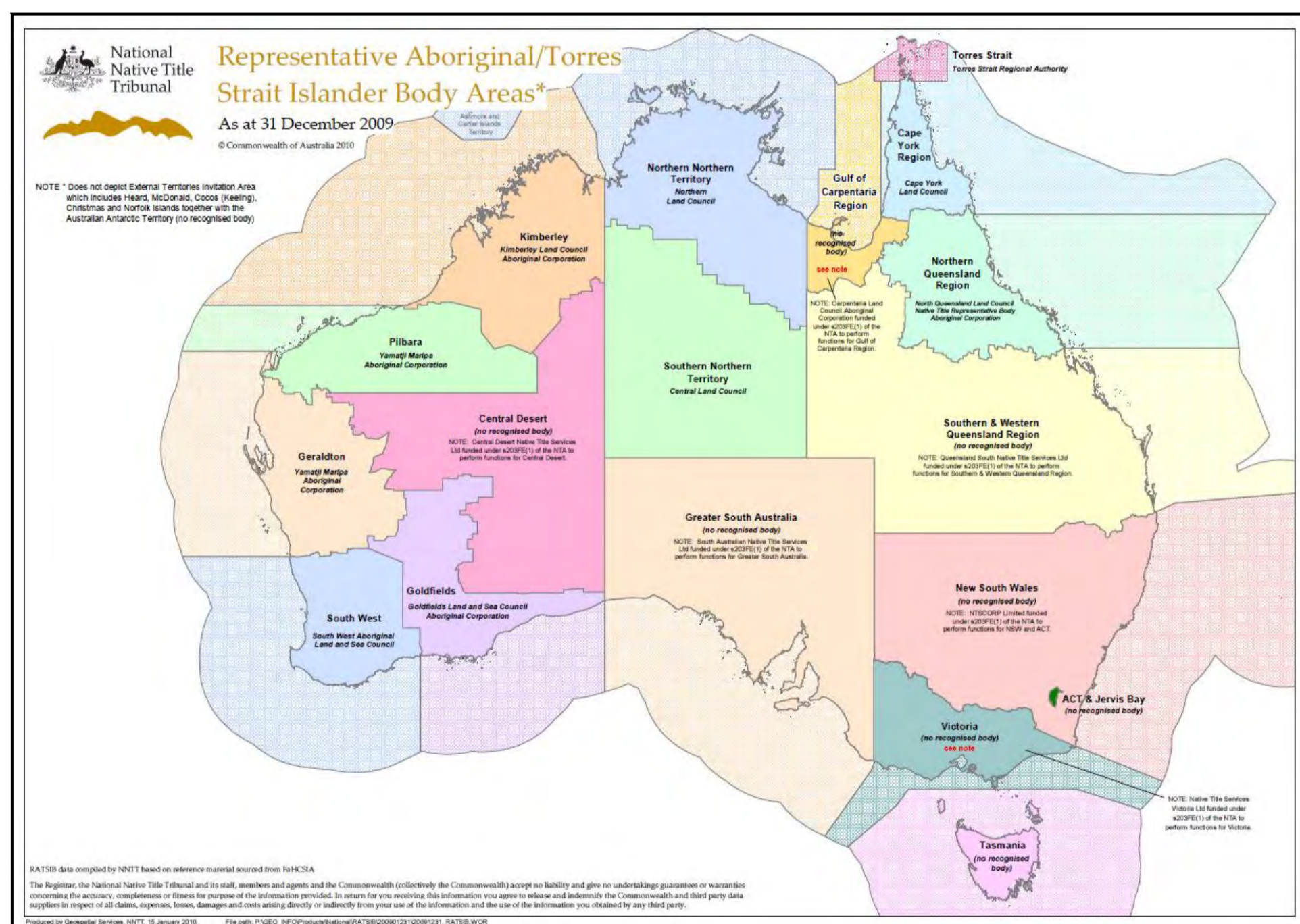
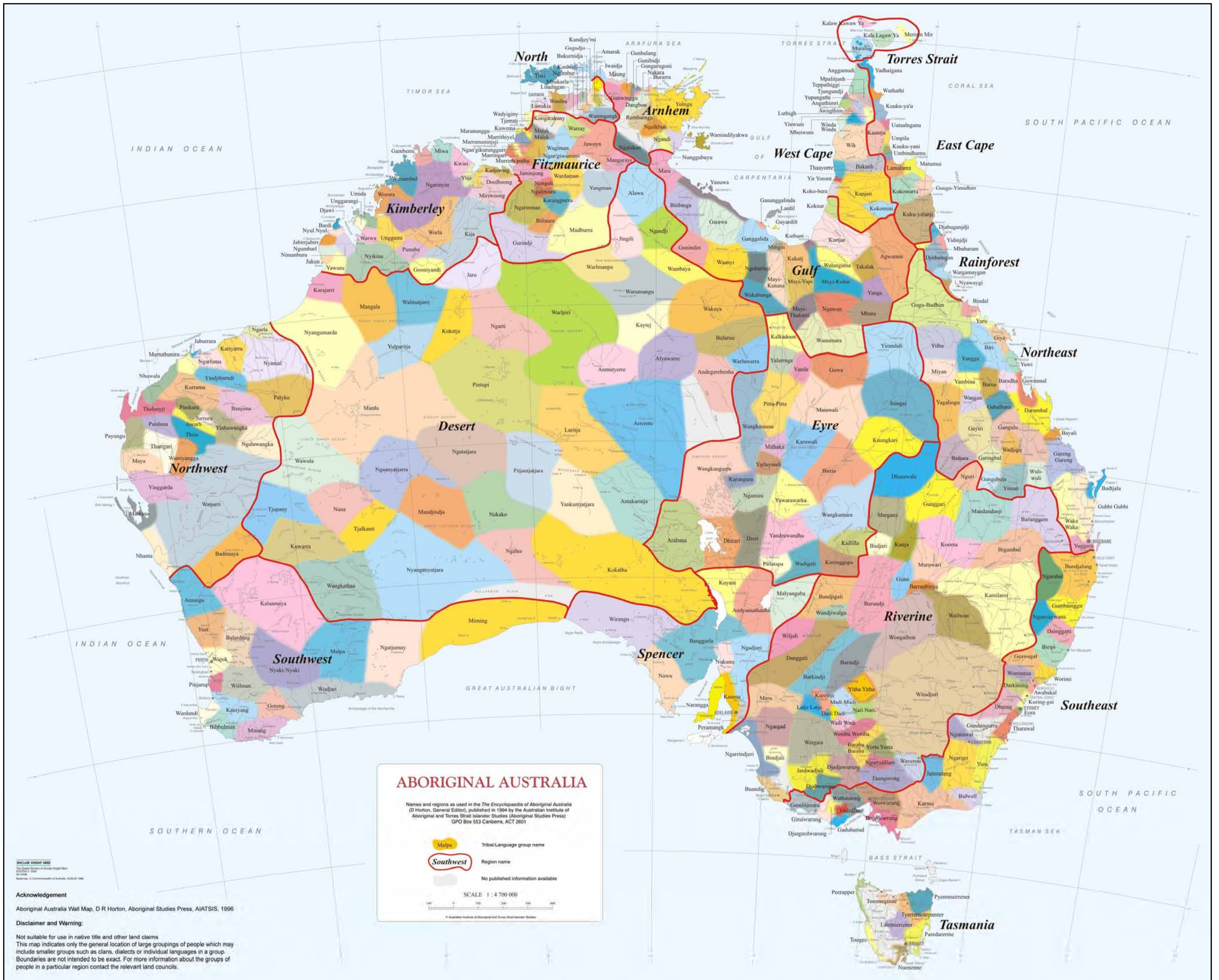
SWALSC CEO, Mr Glen Kelly said "the signing of the agreement is a historic milestone in the long march towards reconciliation for Noongars, and it is to the credit of premier Colin Barnett that he has brought to a halt the incredible waste of resources and public money that occurs when these claims are fought out in the courts rather than negotiated in good faith directly between the parties". According to a statement from WA Attorney General, Christian Porter, the Heads of Agreement establishes a two-year timeframe for the negotiation of a settlement package that will resolve all current and future native title claims across the area. The statement suggests that the Noongar people can negotiate a settlement package that will provide full and final settlement for their native title claims.

Continued on page 2 →

## 2010/2011

On 17 December 2010 the WA Government signed an agreement with SWALSC outlining the framework for resolving the Noongar native title claims. Discussions have continued between SWALSC and the Government throughout 2011, and the traditional owners remain hopeful that a satisfactory resolution will be reached in the near future.



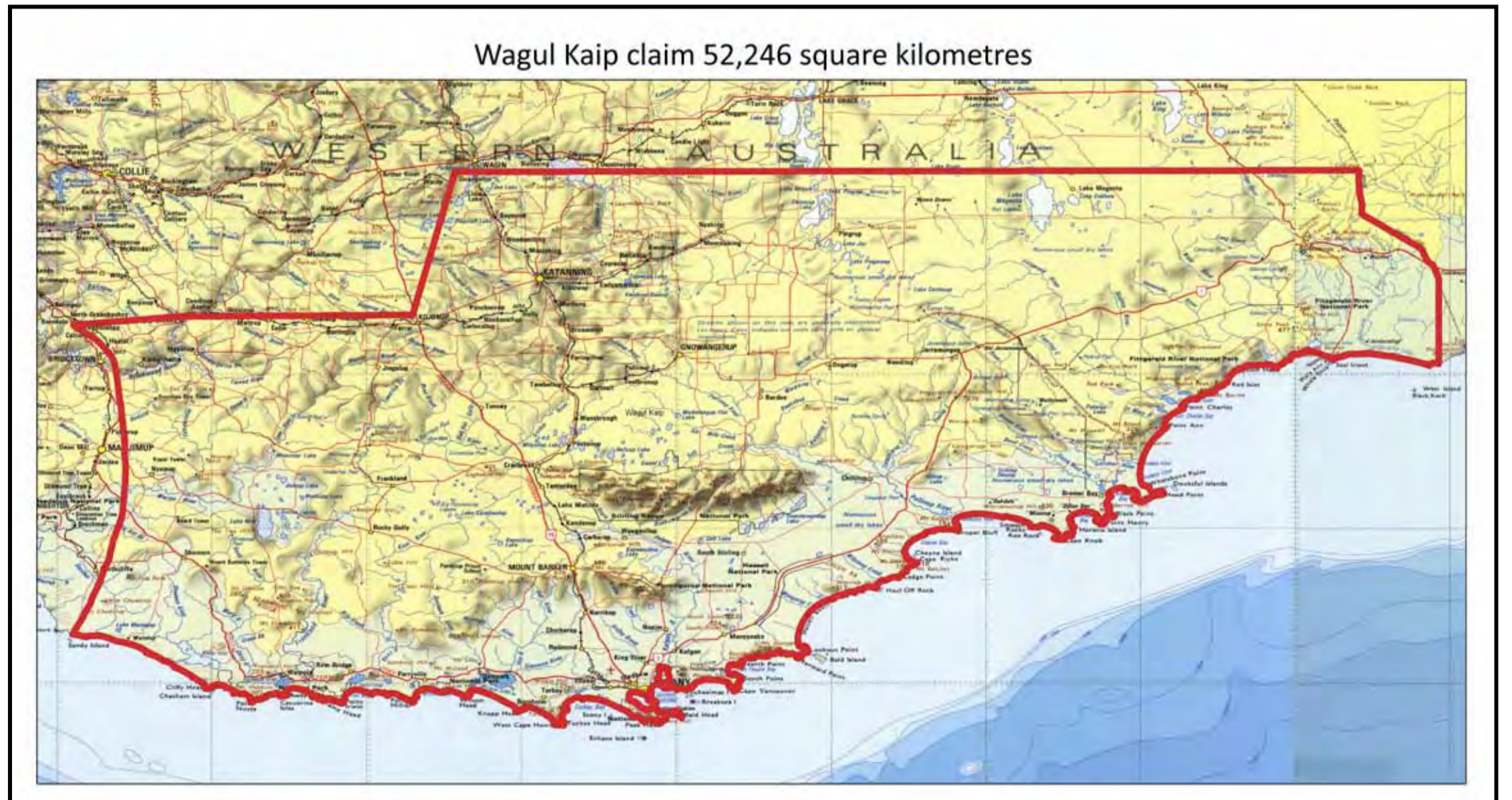
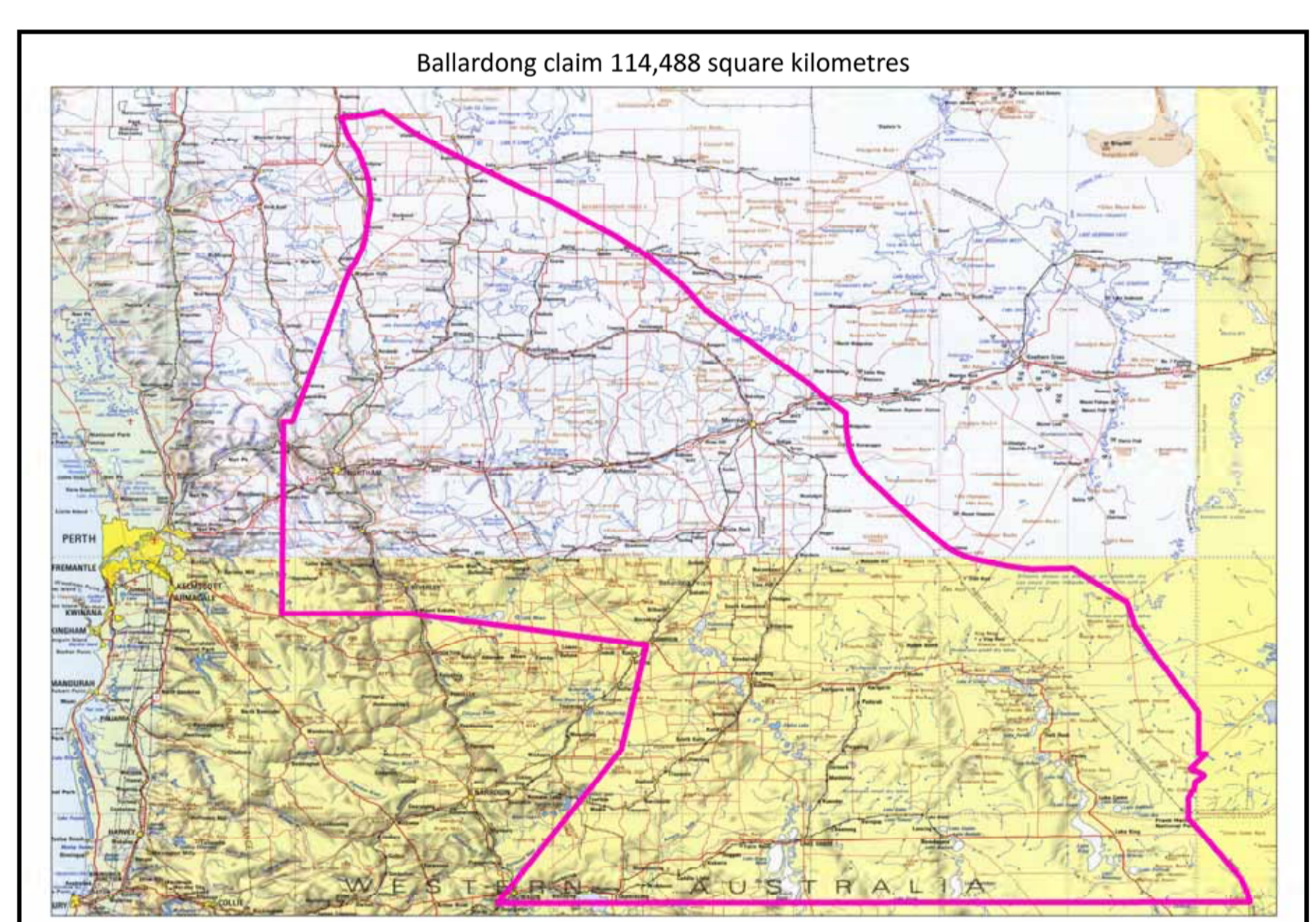
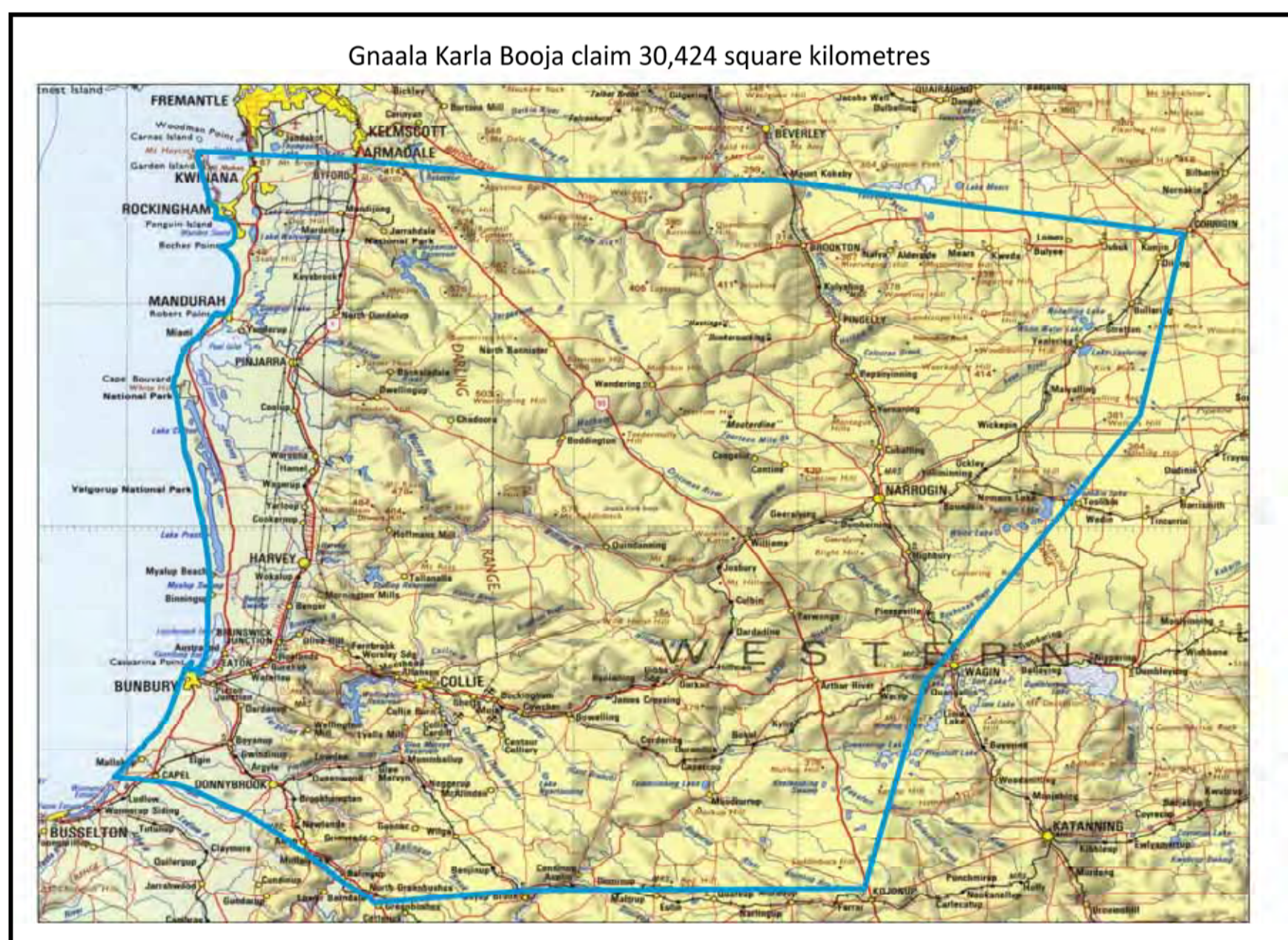
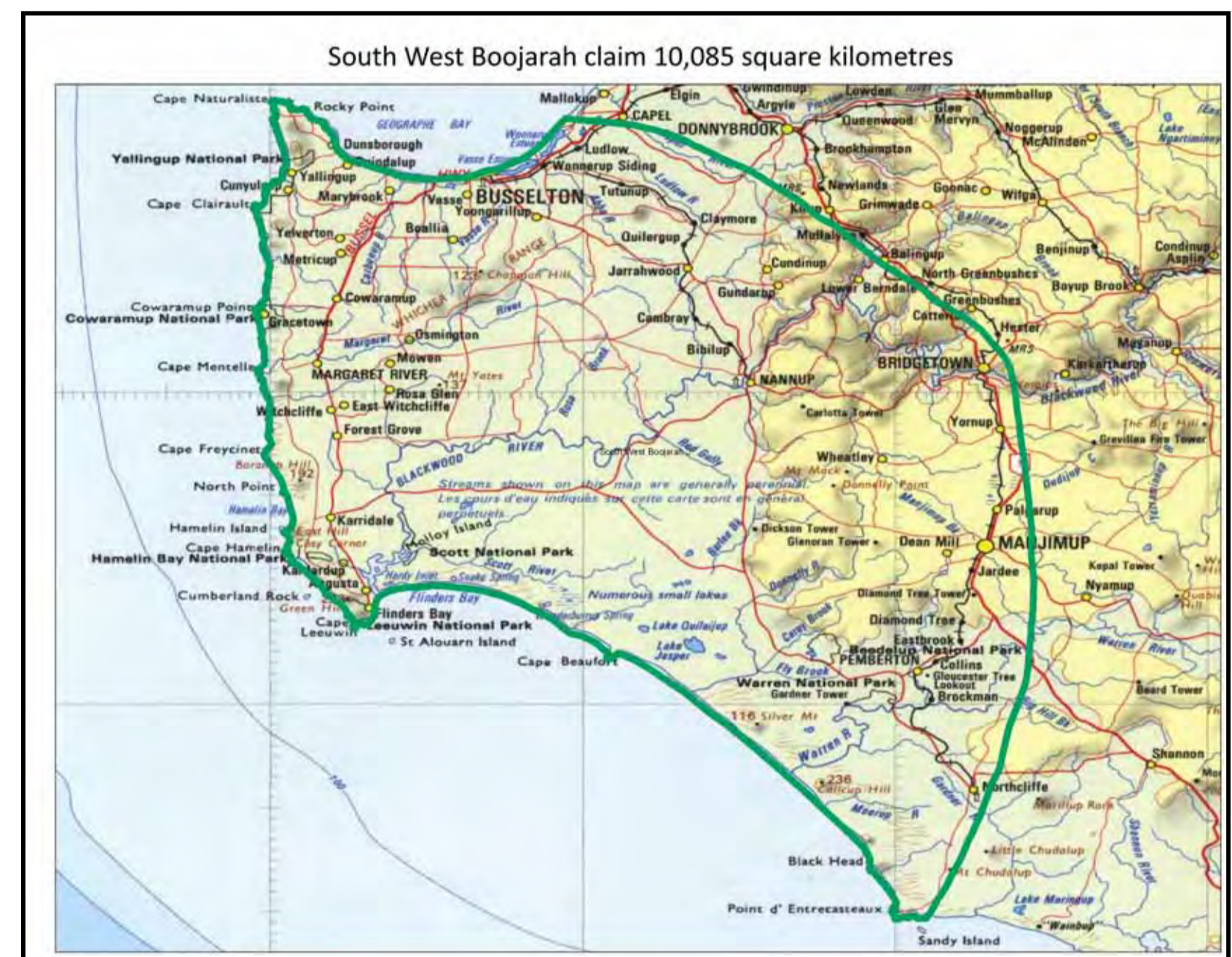
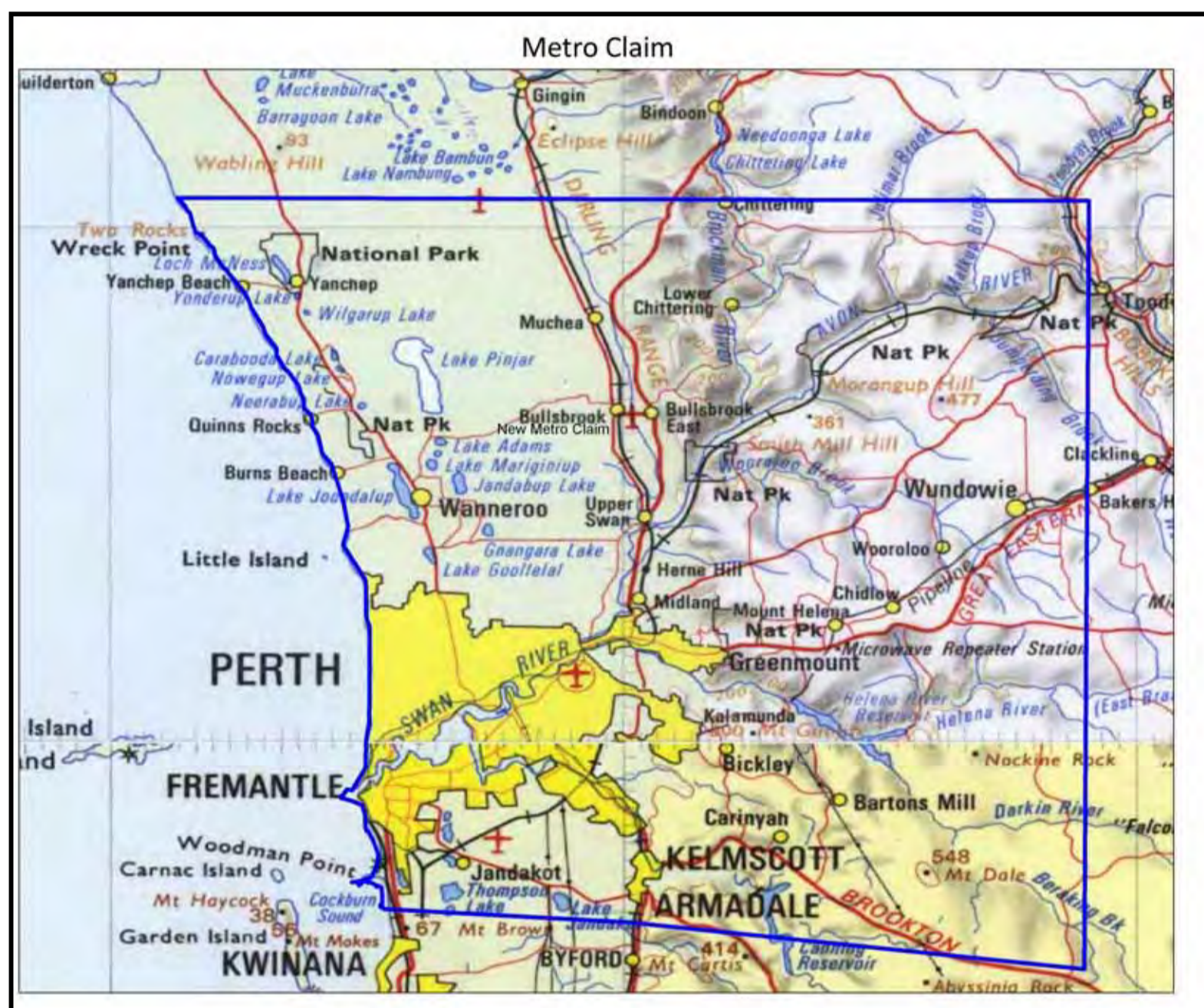
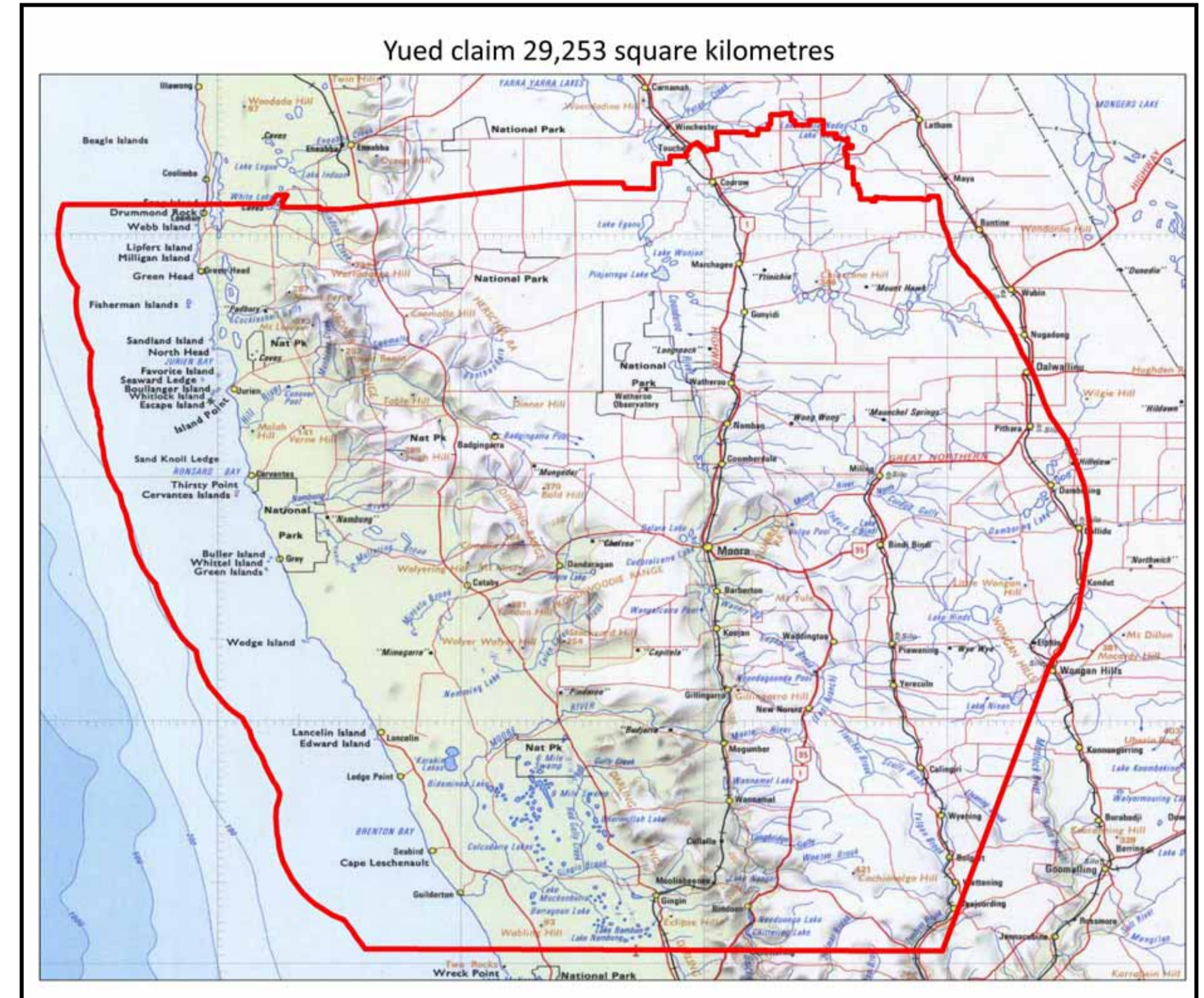
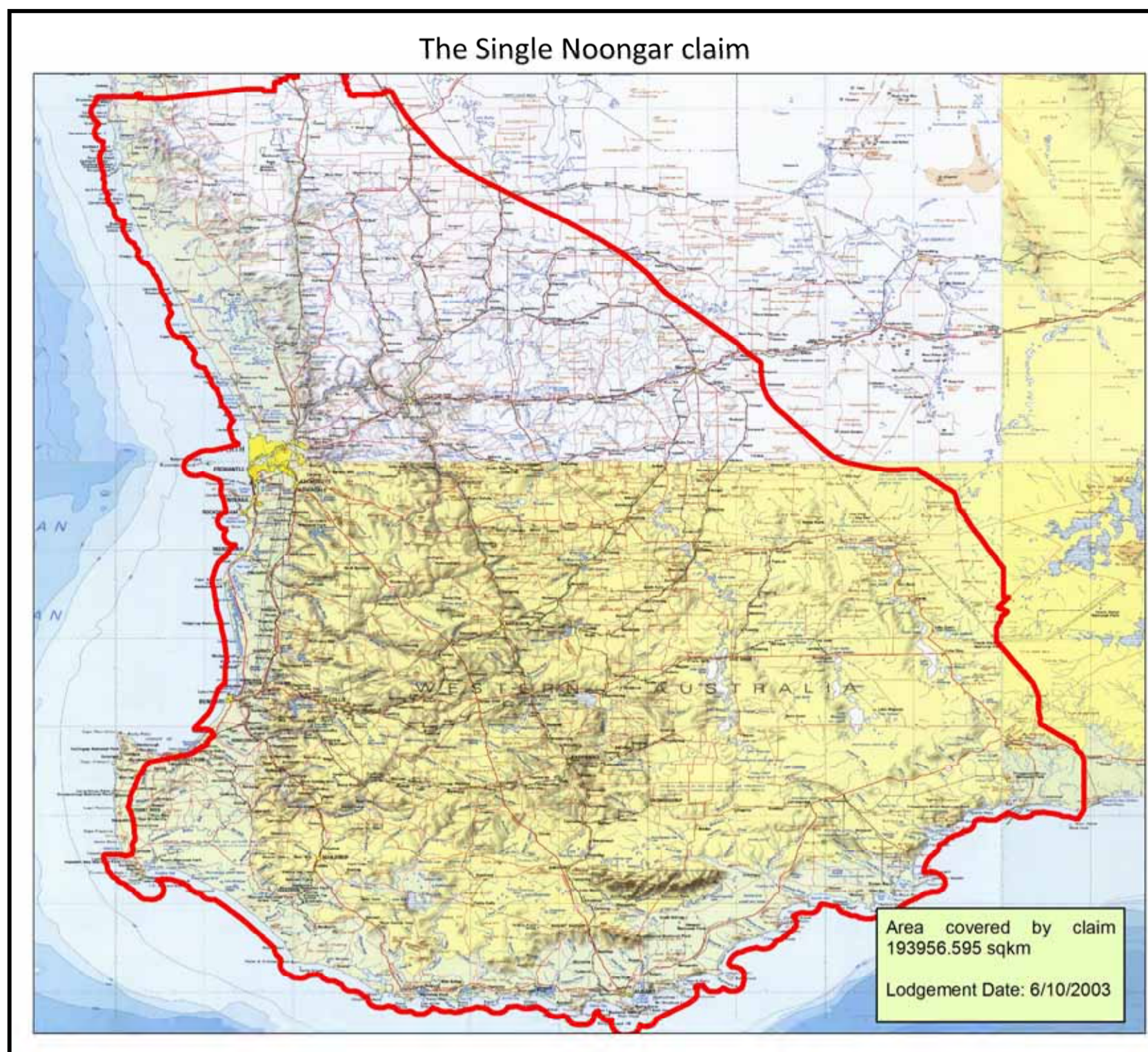


Above (top), is the "Aboriginal Australia" map, produced by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) showing an approximation of Aboriginal language groups.

Above, is the map showing areas covered by the various Native Title Representative Bodies that have been recognised by the Australian federal and state governments.  
 Left, is the map known as the Daisy Bates map.



# Maps of the six Noongar claims and the combined Single Noongar Claim



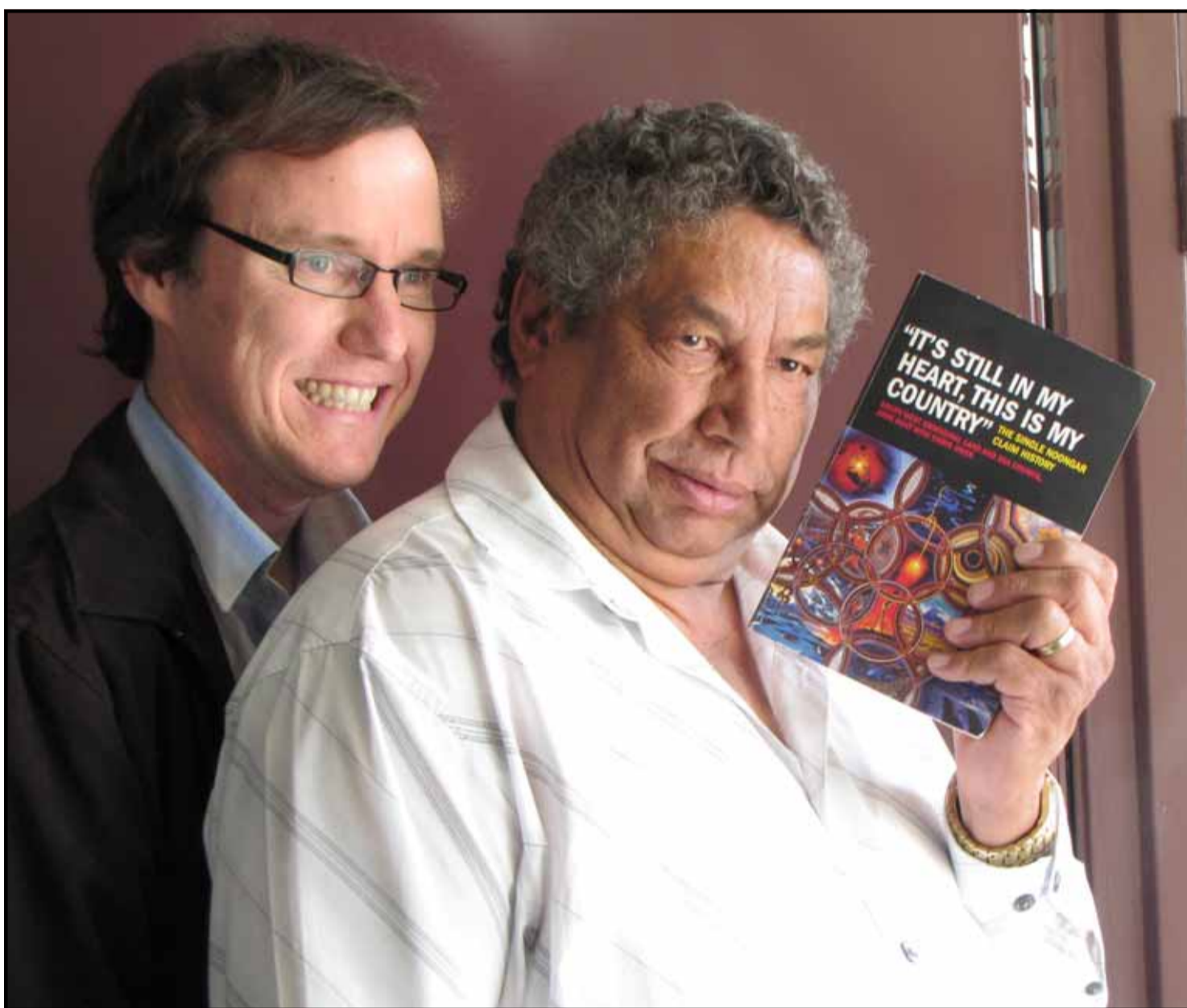
Above, map showing the area of WA covered by SWALSC as a Native Title Representative Body (NTRB)



# SWALSC book reveals the true history of the resilience of the Noongar people and wins WA Archives and Australian Human Rights Commission awards

“Based on extensive native title research, this unflinchingly compelling and substantial scholarly work will appeal to a broad range of general readers, tertiary students, educationists and other researchers interested in Aboriginal culture, native title, Western Australian history and historiography. The focus is on south western WA and the Noongar people who assert enduring custodianship of the area. A preliminary note by the CEO of the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, Glen Kelly, and a preface by historian Chris Owen, background the dramatic developments and outcome of initial native title hearings relating to the Single Noongar Claim (SNC). Following judge Murray Wilcox’s findings in favour of the claimants, in late 2006, his judgment was controversially overturned on appeal by the Commonwealth and WA governments, the latter asserting that claimants had insufficiently demonstrated links to country through ‘recorded traditional cultural activity’ since 1829’. In response, in the main body of this book, senior historian John Host highlights just such links by detailed reference to primary sources—more reliable, he repeatedly shows, than secondary sources, including those by anthropologists Ronald Berndt and Norman Tindale, and even those by historian Neville Green, chief consultant to the governments so vigorously opposing the SNC. Systematically analysing diaries of early settlers in the Swan River Colony, filtering what writers thought and focusing on what they witnessed, Host teases out and analyses Noongar practices relating to cultural survival and maintenance. And this evidence of social organisation, land management and ritual coincides remarkably with observances of earlier maritime explorers and with archaeological records.”

**The book “shows that while Noongars adapted creatively to new realities—working as guides and trackers, rural labourers, police and mail service employees; fully acculturating the offspring of interracial unions; sending their children to school where the option existed—the fundamentals of their lifeways were retained, with essential knowledge passing down through individuals recognised as ‘cultural transmitters’. Later primary sources too—drawn from Daisy Bates’ anthropological records, AO Neville’s Native Welfare records, and oral histories taken by Anna Haebich—reinforce that whatever racial purity-obsessed anthropologists, caste conscious administrators, lawmakers or wider settler society did or thought, Noongars actively survived, adapted and thrived.”** Review by Diane Carlyle in Campus Bookseller and Publisher

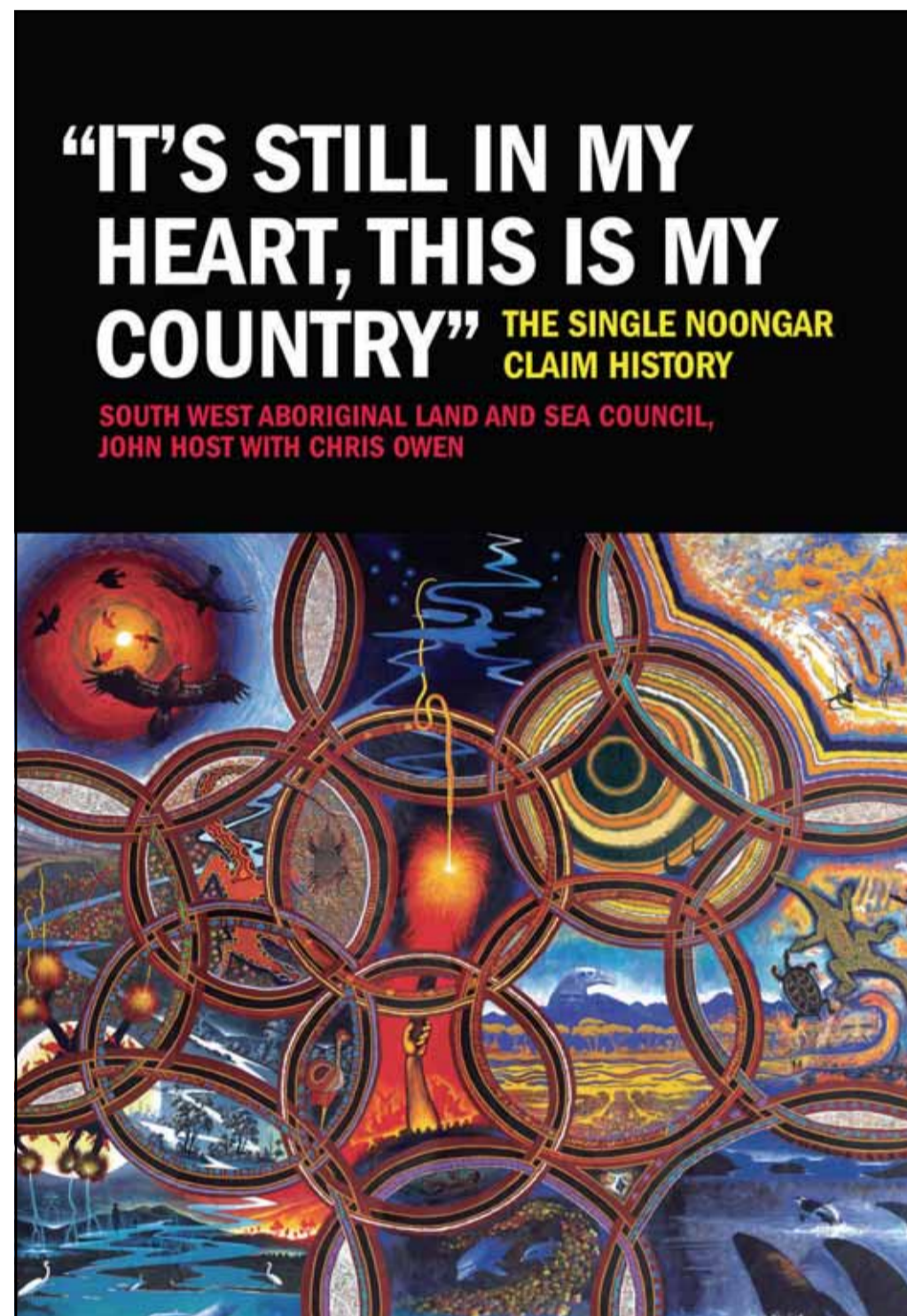


Chris Owen (left), SWALSC Research Manager, and Kevin Fitzgerald, SWALSC Cultural Counselor, photographed at the presentation of the Margaret Medcalf Award

The book telling the story of the survival of the Noongar people has won the 2010 Margaret Medcalf Award for work that showed excellence in the use of WA state archives. The WA Minister for Culture and the Arts, Mr John Day, said at the award presentation on 19 May that:

**“the judges felt this book had the potential to alter the path of historical Aboriginal research and that the work has led to a paradigm shift in the way Aboriginal culture and identity are defined and understood.”**

In October 2009 SWALSC launched the book: "IT'S STILL IN MY HEART, THIS IS MY COUNTRY" which is based on the history report prepared by John Host and Chris Owen that was tendered as expert evidence in the Single Noongar Claim. The book's title comes from the evidence of Noongar elder, Angus Wallam, sworn before the federal court. In this book, and in the original report to the court on which the book is based, SWALSC sought to challenge existing versions of history and the related anthropology about Noongar people.

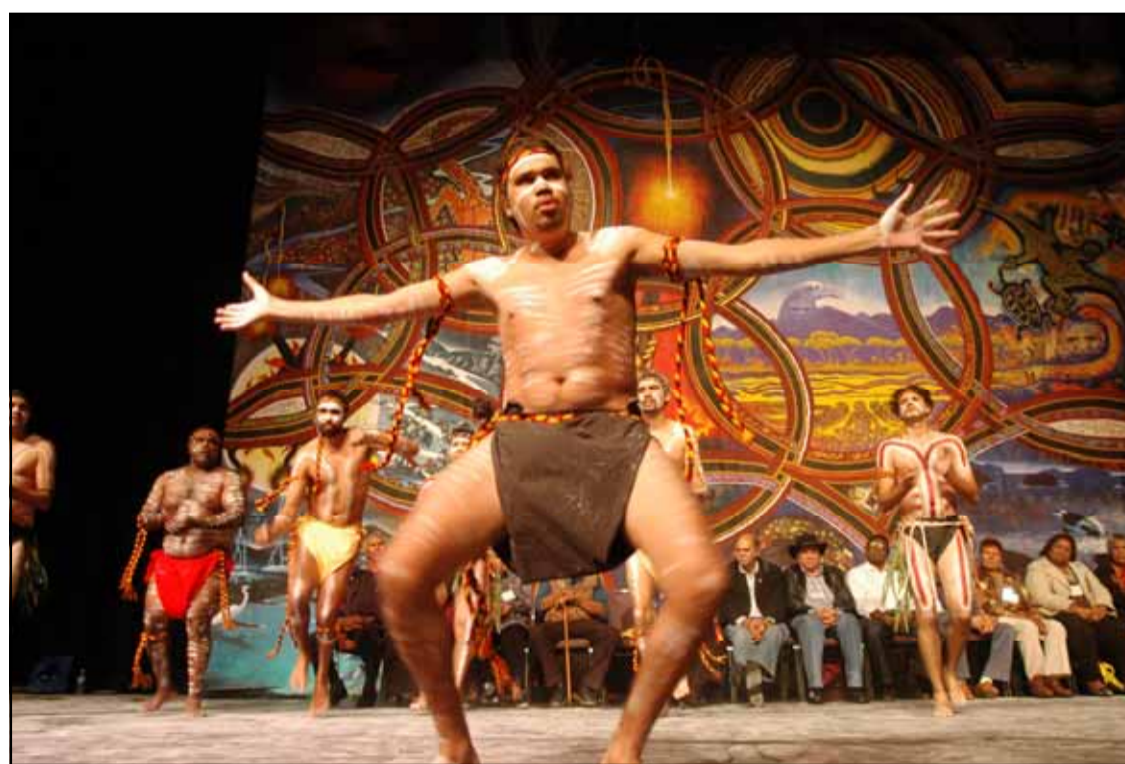


(Above) The illustration on the front cover of the book is a detail of Ngallak Koort Boodja (Our Heart Land), which is a massive oil on canvas painting by six Noongar artists Shane Pickett (deceased), Lance Chadd, Troy Bennell, Alice Warrell, Sharyne Egan, and Yvonne Kickett. The painting currently hangs at Winthrop Hall at UWA, where the book was launched, and illustrates the Noongar nation's relationship to Country and the strength of Noongar culture.

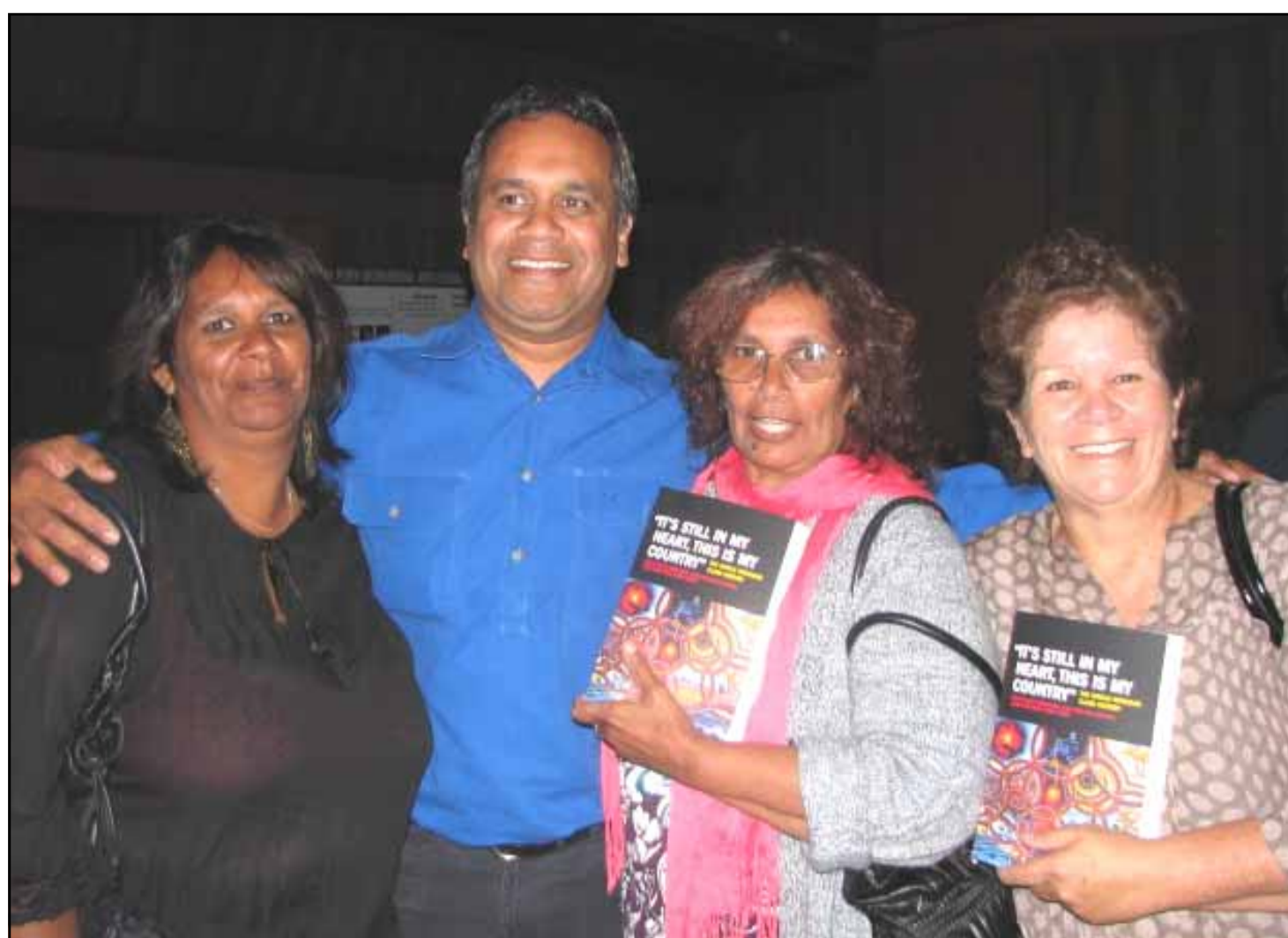


SWALSC CEO, Glen Kelly at the Australian Human Rights Commission awards

The book titled “It’s Still in My Heart, This is My Country” was awarded the 2010 Australian Human Rights Commission Non-Fiction Literature Award in December 2010. The book has sold out its initial print run. Produced by the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC), and published by University of WA Publishing, the book tells the story of the resilience of the Noongar people in their struggle to achieve recognition of their native title claims over Perth and the south west of Western Australia.



(Left) is a photo of the Wadamba Dance Group, who performed in front of the Ngallak Koort Boodja at the 2008 National Native Title Conference in Perth. (Right) Brian Blurton jnr, performing a traditional Noongar dance on the Perth foreshore. Both photos feature in the book, and were taken by Toni Wilkinson.



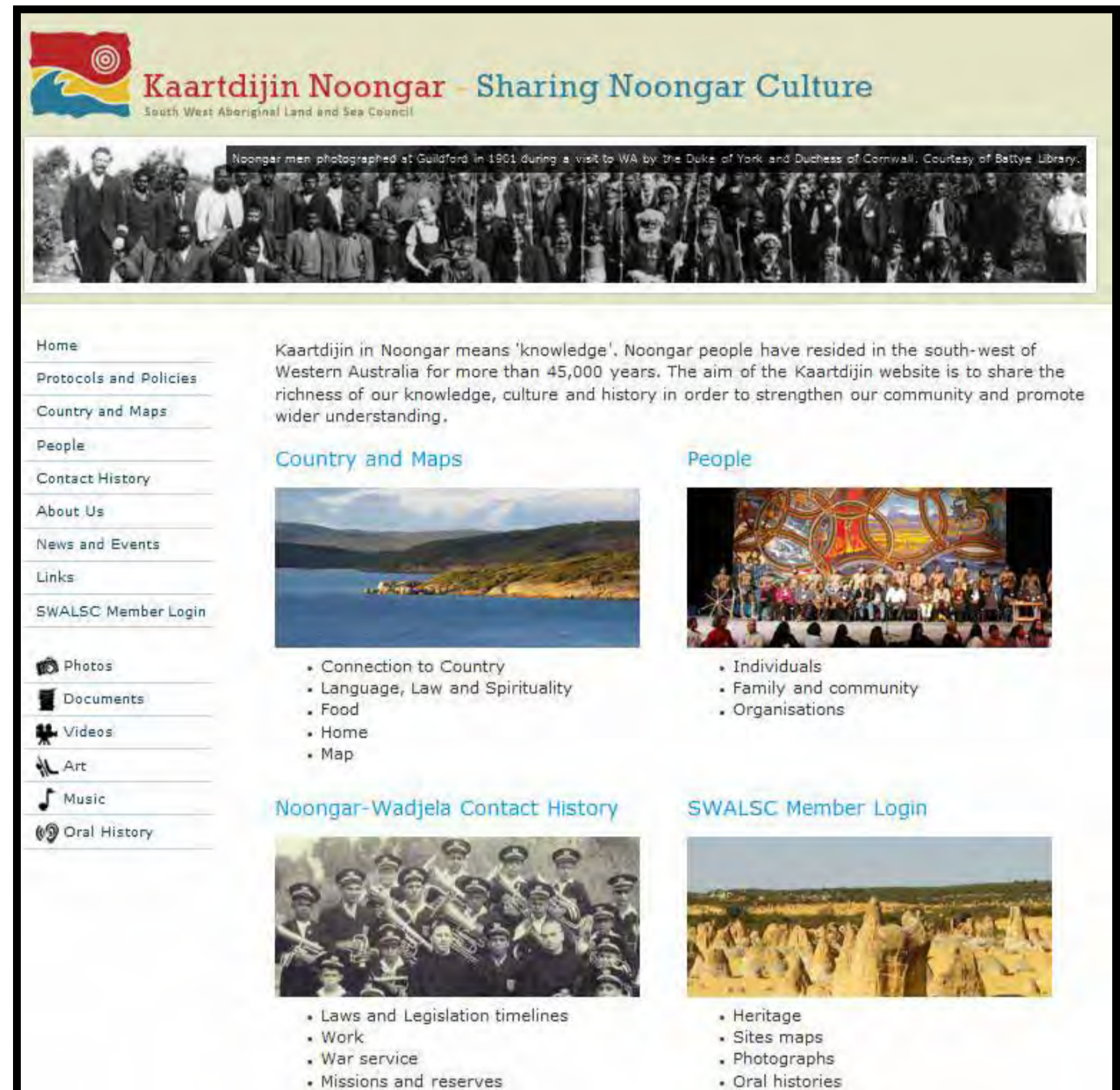
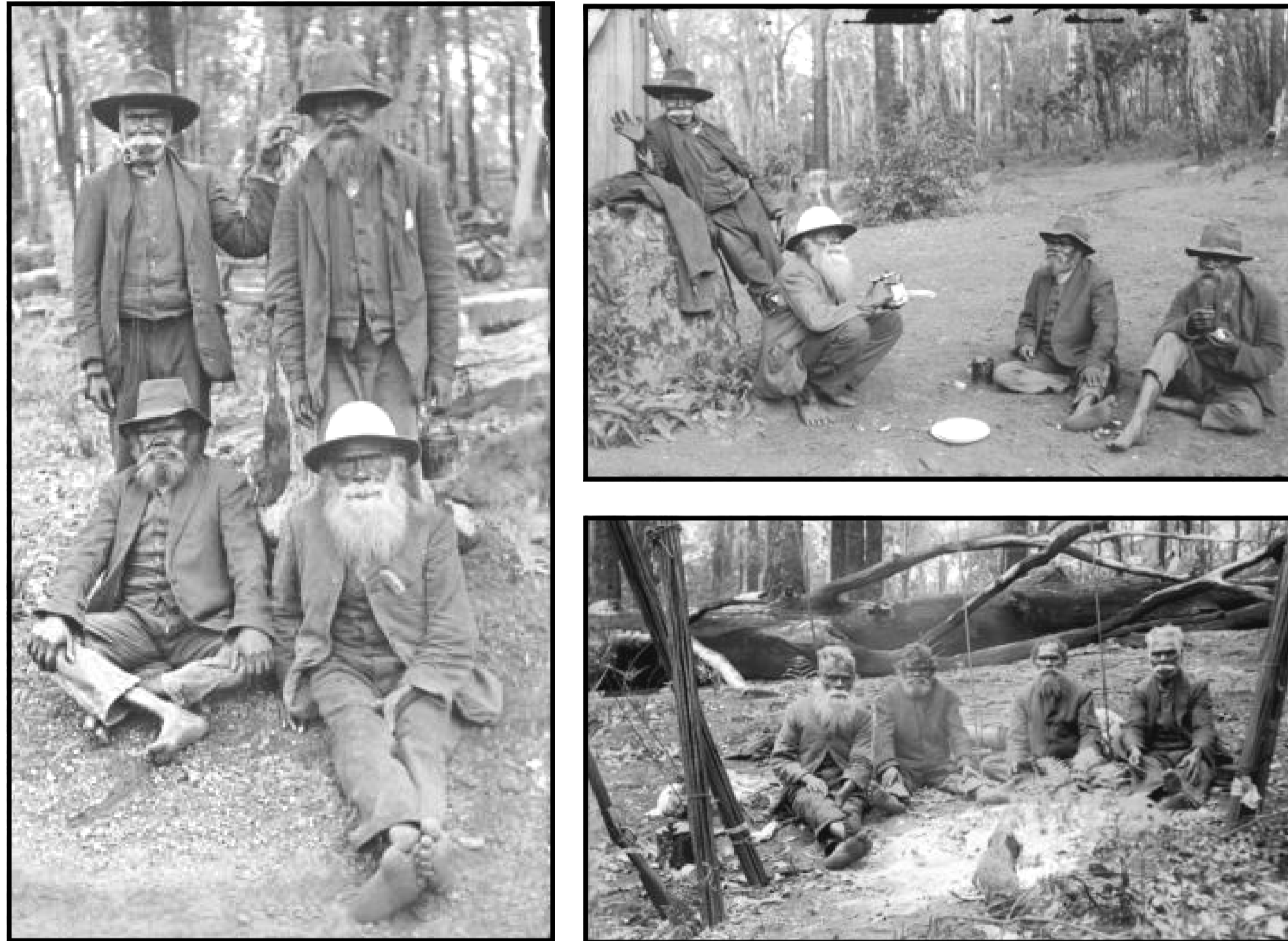
The book launching took place at Winthrop Hall at UWA, and was attended by more than 200 members of the Noongar and wider community



## Kaartdijin Noongar—Sharing Noongar Culture

### New cultural heritage website aims to document Noongar history & culture

SWALSC has recently launched the Kaartdijin Noongar (Noongar Knowledge) website, which features a constantly increasing array of photographs, videos, maps, oral histories, and other documents which provide a wealth of online information about Noongar people, their history, culture, heritage and art. Below are photos of Noongar forest workers taken around the 1920s.



(Above) The home page of the Kaartdijin Noongar website, which aims to promote a deeper understanding of the richness and diversity of Noongar culture. The web address is: [www.noongarculture.org.au](http://www.noongarculture.org.au)

### A New Dreaming: Noongar Dialogue focuses on building a better future



In February 2010 many distinguished Noongars came together to share ideas for a better future. The meeting was the start of an ongoing conversation about what the Noongar community could do to improve the well-being of all Noongars. The satisfactory resolution of the Noongar native title claims was identified as a key factor to achieving a better future.



The meeting was addressed by Lt General John Sanderson, Professor Colleen Hayward, Darryl Kickett, and SWALSC's Glen Kelly. Strong families were seen as the Noongar people's greatest asset.