

## VACL Newsletter Returns!

### New Faces @VACL

In December 2003, VACL appointed a new Manager to oversee the running of the organisation and to provide support to the Community Language Programs.

Paul Paton was appointed as the Manager of VACL as our organisation has been without a Project Officer or Manager for over 12 months. Paul is Ganai (Kurnai) and was born in Bairnsdale but has lived in Melbourne since high school and worked in the public sector for over 7 years. Paul believes that language is the heart of our culture; it is used to tell stories, to communicate and to identify ourselves.



Paul Paton  
VACL Manager

### VACL RELOCATION

In May 2003 VACL relocated from its Northcote premises to the Koorie Heritage Trust, 295 King Street, Melbourne. The new premises being in a central location makes VACL more accessible to the community, it also enables VACL to expand the library with the extra space now available.



# CHAIRPERSONS

Welcome to the May edition of the VACL Newsletter. My name is John Atkinson and I have been Chairperson here since it was incorporated in 1994. During my time here as Chair I have found it a rewarding and challenging experience. The VACL Governing Committee is made up of old friends who share the same aspirations of promoting Indigenous Languages and in particular our own Victorian Languages. In an area that sometimes takes time to show any results our committee has never folded in regards to its vision for the future.

Over the last five months I have been thrilled with the appointment of our new Manager, Paul Paton. The Committee is very pleased with his valuable contribution and feel as though things are moving now at a faster pace. Our new office here at the Koorie Heritage Trust brings great opportunities to be

# M E S S A G E



Mr John Atkinson

apart of much broader issues in Aboriginal affairs. Already we have two new Committee Members Mr Jason Eades and Ms Genevieve Grieves who will no doubt enhance further operations of VACL.

We are looking forward to a very exciting year ahead that will be highlighted when the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL), relocate from their Sydney Office to the Koorie Heritage Trust. I look forward to future editions of the VACL Newsletter.

## William Thomas Papers Transcription Project

It is with great pleasure that I have accepted the invitation to come back to VACL to work on a new project, generously funded by ATSIC, involving the transcription of the papers, notes and correspondence of William Thomas, collectively known as *The Thomas Papers*. The original manuscripts are held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, and we have a complete copy of them on microfilm, in total, 23 rolls.

The value of this manuscript is extraordinary, as William Thomas was one of the first 'Assistant Protectors' employed by the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate (1839 – 1851), and then as 'Guardian' until the 1860s. While most of Thomas' work was concentrated in that part of Victoria east of the

Yarra River and south of the Great Dividing Range, he developed strong and lasting working and personal relationships with many Aboriginal people from across south-eastern Australia. As a result, his papers contain a vast and priceless collection of material that reveal a lot about the languages, customs and daily life of Aboriginal people during the contact era. The project sets out to transcribe all of this manuscript onto a digital file form, a format that can be reproduced either as a CD-ROM, with all the attendant bells and whistles, or printed out as a publication. We hope to complete the project within 12 months.

*Toby Heydon*

# ENDANGERED LANGUAGES CONFERENCE

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In September 2003, VACL supported four representatives (Lisa Arnold, Doris Paton, Vicki Couzens and Bruce Pascoe) to attend the International Language Conference in Broome, Western Australia. The conference, organised by the Foundation of Endangered Languages, gave participants a chance to learn about the state of various languages around the globe including those belonging to Aboriginal people. *'Maintaining the links with language, identity and the land'* was the theme of this year's conference. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation former chairman, Mr. Pat Dodson, addressed the conference saying that "there is a need for access to more funding so we can work on keeping our languages. We need to support our interpreters and we need those people to be in the courts helping other Aboriginal people".

Mr. Pat Dodson also expressed that the politics of language goes to the heart of colonisation and that seeks to destroy language and replace them with another language system to assimilate Aboriginal people and if the support does not come in the next couple of years, more languages will be lost.

The conference gave people a chance to state what language means to them, Kimberley Language Resource Centre chairwomen June Oscar expressed

*"You can communicate your feelings in a way you can't in English, you can really hit things on the head, you can feel and understand what's being said to you. When we're using language in our country, we feel that country's listened to this language from the beginning of time. I'm happy and proud to have the chance to do that; its different from everything else we do with the rest of the world."*

Vicki Couzens stated that *"The Conference was great!! Of course, Broome is beautiful and we were very lucky to attend. Meeting other delegates, language workers and local elders was inspiring and motivating. Sharing stories with other communities was the most interesting and the painting on the veranda too."*



Mr Pat Dodson addressing the participants.



Ms Vicki Couzens conducting language workshop.

# Community Language

## Wathaurong Language Program

*Geelong*

The Wathaurong Language Program has been in progress now since March 1998. Suzie Coates was the first Language Worker with Bruce Pascoe taking over the position in June 1999 in a part time capacity. Denise Charles joined the Language Program in September 2003, working 2 days per week. We have also employed a linguist, Sharnthi Pillay who is based in Melbourne, to work with us. We have an office based at the Wathaurong Co-op, but later this year we will be relocating to the Wathaurong Education Centre so that we can network more efficiently with the Koorie Education workers. Originally the language research began with the 2,000 Wathaurong word list compiled by Professor Barry Blake (La Trobe University Linguist) and also words compiled by Sue Ferrier (Author of Wathaurong Medicines).

Since then an enormous amount of information has been unearthed by both Suzie and Bruce, so today we have a list of around 7,000 Wathaurong words, including many sentences, place names, property names and the names of indigenous and non indigenous people from the contact period of Geelong from 1835 onwards. Research into the re-discovery of Wathaurong words could go on indefinitely, as we are constantly finding new material.

Denise and Bruce were invited to attend an Aboriginal language planning workshop in Adelaide from November 24th-27th, 2003. Delegates came from all around Australia and represented eight language groups. Six of the language groups were already involved in the planning and design of a multi media project to produce CD Rom's, teachers' resources and lesson plans to support the teaching of their languages. Wathaurong and Palawa Kani (Tasmania) were invited along as observers. The primary purpose of this type of teaching aid is the preservation of language by providing computer based learning resources hoping to capture the enthusiasm of young Aboriginal people. It was announced towards the end of the workshops, that Wathaurong and Palawa Kani would be included in the project.



Bruce Pascoe

That was great news for us, as the project cost is approximately \$80,000 per community. The project involves writing and producing a short film involving community members speaking Wathaurong language; this will form the basis of the CD Rom. A series of 10 learning modules will then be extracted from the film and put on to the CD Rom. We are looking forward to an exciting year ahead developing this huge project.

# Program Profiles

## Waywurru Dhudhuroa Language Program *Wodonga*

As a result of funding from ATSIIS through the “Endangered Language Funding”, the Waywurru / Dhudhuroa Language program based in Wodonga will see the production of a Waywurru and Dhudhuroa dictionary to be finished hopefully in 12 months.

The program has engaged linguist, Christina Eira, to undertake the analysis of the collected material and produce a report on her findings. A meeting was held in late March with community representatives in Wodonga that mainly covered topics such as rights to language use, land and language, copyright and Intellectual Property and some other associated topics. Lisa and Christina did a session showing what can be done with language materials and got everyone to participate in a short task asking them to write down the word for pelican after hearing the local word being spoken.



Above: Lisa Arnold

The results showed how many possibilities there are for ‘spelling the sound’ after hearing it. The materials as they are currently are well on the way to becoming a dictionary which should make the project relatively straightforward. So far, there are 1087 identified Dhudhuroa words and 682 identified Waywurru words. Future meetings are being planned, for more information contact VACL or Lisa Arnold at the Waywurru / Dhudhuroa Language Program.

## Ganai Yirruk- Tinnor Language Program *Bairnsdale*

This year the program continues to develop and support learning Ganai language in context at preschools across Gippsland. The pre-school assistants work with community teachers to provide a language program which engages children in cultural activities using language. The program continues to grow and many of the community teachers follow their pre-school children to primary school to continue the program.

Mostly this year the program focus is to support and assist to implement the VCE Indigenous Languages of Victoria at Woolum Bellum KODE school, Morwell for VCAL students. This subject is being piloted for the first time and students will participate in the process of revival and reclamation of a Victorian Indigenous language of significance to themselves or to their local area. The program will also be assisting to implement a language program in conjunction with parents and community at 754 Primary School at Bairnsdale. An exciting project this year will be the production of story books in Ganai language for use by schools, families and community.

# INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES OF VICTORIA - REVIVAL AND RECLAMATION

This year the first accredited Indigenous language subject is being piloted at Worowa Independent Aboriginal College. Throughout the development of this project there was extensive consultation with Indigenous Communities, with a positive response from each Victorian language region. This study is part of a broader activity undertaken particularly by Victoria's Indigenous communities to revive their heritage languages. The *Indigenous Languages of Victoria: Revival and Reclamation* study enables schools and other providers to target one or more Indigenous languages for study within the VCE, in consultation with members of the relevant language community.



The work shown above represents Victorian Indigenous Language regions and clan groups, and were created by students of Worowa College as part of their VCE art and language studies.

Students are encouraged to think about the connections between language retrieval and Indigenous social justice and equity as well as make connections between language recovery, cultural restoration and group/individual identity. Students are able to utilise VACL for research purposes. The subject will be piloted this year at the Year 11 level only.

This project was a joint initiative of VACL and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), Koorie Education Strategy Team (KEST), Department of Education and Training and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI).

*“Victorian Indigenous cultures are inextricably connected to Victorian Indigenous languages. Reviving and maintaining language is core to reviving cultural and spiritual practices. Indigenous ancestral languages uphold and reinforce Indigenous worldviews held in trust by previous generations.”*

(Excerpt from VCE Study Design)

# FATSIL AGM

The Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages

VACL has maintained support for FATSIL at the national level by attending all FATSIL meetings. The FATSIL AGM was held on February 12th and 13th here in Melbourne at Rydges, Carlton. The forum focus for this year was on Youth Language & Education. A record number of people from every State and Territory attended this year's forum in support of the FATSIL's achievements.

The forum was open and closed with a song by a four-person delegation from the Maori Language Commission-Te Taura Whiri I te Re.



From Left: Anna Coveos (VCAA), Aretha Briggs, Margaret Dharul Wirrpanda and Heather Bowe (Linguist Monash University).



Above: Auntie Geraldine Rose 'Yamuk' Briggs accepting award.

The minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gavin Jennings expressed his government's support for Indigenous cultural programs and has opened the way for the formulation of a Victorian Aboriginal Languages Policy, which will be initiated through further discussion.

Geraldine Rose 'Yamuk' Briggs was honored with the inaugural FATSIL Language Achievement Award, which was accepted by her daughter Margaret Dharul Wirrpanda and her grand-daughter Aretha Briggs.

## VACL PUBLICATIONS

VACL still has numerous copies of the **Dictionary of Aboriginal Placenames of Victoria** available. The Dictionary of Aboriginal Placenames of Victoria and its CD-Rom companion, Database of Aboriginal Placenames of Victoria are the product of three years work by historical geographers Dr Ian D. Clark and Toby Heydon, and represent the most extensive Victorian dictionary and database of their kind.

Publications are now available at **Koorie Heritage Trust:**  
295 King Street, Melbourne 3000  
or alternatively order forms are available on our website:  
**[www.vaclang.org.au](http://www.vaclang.org.au)**

To order publications contact:  
**Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages**  
295 King Street Melbourne 3000  
Ph: 03 96003811  
Fax: 03 96004277  
Email: [vacl@vaclang.org.au](mailto:vacl@vaclang.org.au)

# CHANGES TO THE VACL COMMITTEE

The VACL Committee and Staff would like to farewell Mrs Lynne Dent and Ms Jill Gallagher. They both made significant contributions to the success of VACL during their time as committee members and we wish them well for their future endeavors.

The VACL committee and staff would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr Jason Eades and Ms Genevieve Grieves to the VACL Governing Committee.



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## **Members of the VACL Governing Committee**

Mr John Atkinson  
**Chairperson**

Mrs Doris Paton  
**Vice Chairperson**

Ms Vicki Couzens  
**Secretary**

Mr Jason Eades  
**Treasurer**

Ms Genevieve Grieves  
**Public Officer**

Mr Bruce Pascoe  
**Committee Member**

Mr Herb Patten  
**Committee Member**