

## NAIDOC A CELEBRATION OF CULTURE AND CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

Njernda Aboriginal Corporation chief executive officer Tracey Dillon says this year's NAIDOC theme "Get Up! Stand Up! Show Up!" is a call to local communities to do their bit to speak up and support meaningful, systemic change.

"I think it's a really topical and powerful theme this year," Ms Dillon said.

"It aims to encourage Mob to speak up for change, but it's also a call to the wider community too, to rally around us, think about what they're doing and what we can all do better," Ms Dillon said.

"NAIDOC is an opportunity for all Australians to acknowledge history and our people – our good work but also what we can do to enable change."

Ms Dillon said Echuca-Moama region had a strong and remarkable history of challenging injustice and leading reform.

"If, as a community, we want to stand for things to be different, it's quite inspiring to look back and acknowledge some key moments and recognise some of our trailblazers from our communities," she said.

"The Cummeragunja walk-off is a prime example where families defied authority and walked off the Cummeragunja Mission 83 years ago in protest at the terrible mistreatment and conditions they were being forced to live under.

"Two hundred plus First Nations peoples crossed the Murray River into Barmah in Victoria. It was powerful and defining moment in our history and placed a national spotlight on our fight for self-determination."

A long list of Elders and community members with links to our local Echuca-Moama region were at the forefront of that movement including people like William Cooper, who was a founding member that established the Australian Aborigines' League, and led the first Aboriginal deputation to a Commonwealth Minister; Margaret Tucker, a civil rights activist and writer who was known for her part in the 1938 Day of Mourning conference and the first Aboriginal person to have published an autobiography; Jack Patten, who set the agenda for the civil rights movement in Australia and published the first Aboriginal focused Newspaper and Sir Douglas Nicholls, who was an athlete and pioneer for Aboriginal reconciliation and the first Aboriginal person to be knighted and hold a vice-regal office, as the Governor of South Australia. Also, Henry Atkinson for his work on returning Aboriginal remains, who this year was also named Victoria NAIDOC Patron/Elder for 2022.

"More recently local Elder Des Morgan, is chair of Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service which has made huge gains in the fight for justice for our people and there are other local figures like Isaiah Firebrace and Andrew Walker who are



prominent, that are leading in their own way both nationally and locally, whether that be in politics, advocacy, sport, art or culture,” Ms Dillon said.

“Not to forget Aunty Melva Johnson and Aunty Valerie Mitchell who blazed a trail in establishing the foundations for other such as Aunty Karlene Dwyer to lead Njernda Aboriginal Corporation to the organisation that it is today.”

Ms Dillon said she was pleased to welcome and pay tribute to a new group of leaders who had put their hands up locally to advocate for change and represent their community on the new Njernda Board: Belinda Day as our new Chairperson, Damian Morgan-Bulled, Aunty Janice Muir, Aunty Jennifer Mitchell and John P Kerr.

“These are respected senior leaders and Elders within the local community who feel strongly about Njernda and the benefits it provides to our community, who also continue to making progress across our broad community and are prepared to work hard to achieve positive outcomes,” Ms Dillon said.

“What other Australians take for granted, due in part to wealth generated from the First Nations people and their land, as First Nation peoples we are still behind in things like education, health, housing, and employment, but too far in front on incarceration and welfare dependency,” she said.

“NAIDOC is a platform for our people to stand on and to be heard and it is an opportunity for mainstream community to stand alongside us,” she said.

“That’s imperative in the local community because there is always more that can be done to support Closing the Gap on Aboriginal health, improved education outcomes, increase employment outcomes, and reduce incarceration rates.

“We welcome working with others’ to support our aspirations, because accepting the status quo isn’t what First Nation peoples and our local communities are all about. Working together creates opportunities to achieve better outcomes for our people and our community of Echuca-Moama and surrounds.”

For further information contact Therese Shelley at Njernda (03) 5480 6252