

**Submission  
No 14**

## **INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES**

**Organisation:** Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation

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24th September 2015

The Director  
Standing Committee on State Development  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

## **Standing Committee on State Development Inquiry into and report on strategies to support economic development in Aboriginal Communities**

The Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation (WNAC) provides the following information for consideration by the Standing Committee. WNAC believes that the projects and initiatives outlined below add value to the strategic inquiry regarding “options for sustainability and capacity building...utilising existing community networks and structures”, “leveraging economic development support” and “establishment and sustainability of Aboriginal owned enterprises”.

Supported by a range of strategic partners in the Upper and Lower Hunter Valley, WNAC has embarked upon an exciting multi-hubs project involving the proactive use of our traditionally owned land bank. We are pleased to be able to provide details about the project to provide background for inclusion in the Standing Committee’s report on strategies to support economic development in Aboriginal communities.

### **1. Strategic Aboriginal Culture and Enterprise Scheme**

WNAC’s Strategic Aboriginal Culture and Enterprise Scheme involves the Strategic Hubs Program (SHP) which aims to address long term employment and enterprise goals, emphasising community and cultural empowerment for Aboriginal people in the Hunter Valley. The WNAC Scheme will address disadvantage by not only providing tangible employment outcomes but perhaps more importantly on-going hands-on management through outright ownership with the support of strategic partnerships.

WNAC developed the Scheme to provide a sustained approach to empowering the community from within, based on a traditionally owned land bank, with strategic expert partners and a strong entrepreneurial spirit administered from a resilient governance base. The project is unique as it has been developed by and for the Aboriginal community and is based on traditional lands, focusing on cultural identity linked to commercial outcomes with a delivery mechanism supported by durable expert partners.

The SHP comprises a network of six Strategic Hubs, each contributing to the social, economic, and cultural objectives for the local Aboriginal community. The wider Hunter Region community which

includes visitors, students, tourists and industry also benefit. Significantly the network of Strategic Hubs aim to broaden the awareness and accessibility of historical and contemporary Indigenous life and targets on-going economic opportunities.

The modular nature of the SHP allows the development of further social hubs, not just by WNAC and the broader Hunter Valley Aboriginal community, but also enables extension to the wider community, including visitors and industry partners in the Hunter Valley.

This concept is designed so that it will be transferable to other Aboriginal communities throughout NSW and Australia. The SHP method promotes a greater awareness in the region of Aboriginal culture and enhances engagement and awareness of the Aboriginal history and culture of Hunter Valley, through a visual and experience based journey. The commercial enterprise nature of the SHP focuses these outcomes on a social equity basis. While driven internally by WNAC the benefits extend outward to the wider Hunter Valley community.

Subsequently, the Scheme is proactive and encourages everyone to join in the journey through the songlines of the Wonnarua/Gringai people. As an example, WNAC successfully named the bridges and rest areas in Aboriginal animal names along the Federal and State Government funded Hunter Expressway.

Additionally, the SHP provides a unique chance to blend enterprise with culture; it is a clear opportunity to demonstrate that Aboriginal culture is not defined by hand-outs, but rather is a combination of deep cultural beliefs and an enthusiastic entrepreneurial spirit. This is an Aboriginal led initiative based on a traditionally owned land bank that can provide thoughtful and sustainable employment outcomes through real partnerships with local and state agencies, expert NGOs and industry strategic partners.

The local Aboriginal community has a vision to utilise their assets to create an integrated approach to utilising culture and knowledge to provide stronger and strategic outcomes for the region. With the current downturn in investment in the region and historically high insolvency rates the SHP provides an opportunity to the community to diversify investment and respond positively to new opportunities.

## **2. Our Strategic Partners**

WNAC have developed and teamed with a number of strategic partners to provide expert assistance to ensure successful delivery of the Scheme. Our strategic partners include: Westpac, World Vision Australia, Greening Australia, Roads and Maritime Services (RMS), Reconciliation Australia, Singleton Council, Muswellbrook Council, Australian Museum [ Sydney ] , Sydney University, TAFE NSW Aboriginal Learning Circle, Indigenous Land Corporation, NSW State Library, Office of Heritage and Environment, NSW Office of Communities and Aboriginal Affairs, NSW Upper Hunter OCHRE Opportunity Hubs, LWP Property Group, Glencore Mines Singleton and Muswellbrook, BHP Mt Arthur Mine Muswellbrook, Coal & Allied Mines Singleton and Muswellbrook, Ashton Coal Mine Singleton, Centennial Coal Mine Fassifern and Donaldson Coal Mine Maitland, other partners we are negotiating with are Hunter Valley Zoo and Hunter Valley Gardens at Cessnock, Cessnock City Council, Mark Olive [the black olive celebrity chef] NRL Indigenous Committee, Clayton Barr MP Cessnock, Wonnarua Madoo Land Fund, Wonnarua Mine Rehabilitation Pty Ltd, Indigenous Business Australia, Local Land Services [ Hunter ], Aboriginal Employment Services, Upper Hunter Community Services [ Muswellbrook ]

### 3. The Strategic Hubs

The Strategic Aboriginal Culture and Enterprise Scheme is comprised of six Strategic Hubs extending through the Hunter Valley along the songline of the Wonnarua/Gringai People on largely traditionally owned lands. Each Strategic Hub facilitates a particular purpose; culture, language, community, natural resource, environmental and commercial enterprise.

The Strategic Hubs are a physical space located on real property traditionally owned or leased by WNAC that will be provided as an in-kind contribution to the SHP and will comprise land and buildings that are crafted to match their planned purpose.

While each Hub has a primary purpose, they are not mutually exclusive and considerable interconnection of functions is encouraged and, in some cases, essential to success. All of the Hubs are developed using World Vision's Local Value Chain Analysis model and underpinned by Westpac Business Plans which are linked to the WNAC Board's Strategy document.

Three of the Hubs have been established and are well underway with support from our partners and the Cultural Hub is in its final stages of negotiation.

The six Strategic Hubs include:

- Cultural Hub
- Community Hub
- Enterprise Hub
- Language and History Hub
- Natural Resources Hub
- Environmental Hub



#### 3.1 Cultural Hub: Huntlee, Branxton

Wonnarua country is rich with Aboriginal culture, but paradoxically, there is little public access

showcasing it. Typically artefacts are stored on mine sites out of sight or displayed sparingly at Local Aboriginal Land Councils which are rarely, if ever, accessed by the public. The Cultural Hub will focus on the **Madoo Museum** and contain a cultural artefact keeping place, arts and craft shop, cafe, possum skin cloaks, DVD's, Dioramas and our history. *The Morrison Collection* which includes 129 objects 2 canoes, stone axes, clubs, spears, boomerangs and hundreds of other artefacts originally from Singleton and St Clair Aboriginal Mission is currently housed at the *Australian Museum*. This unique collection will be relocated to the proposed Madoo Museum along with other artefacts from the region.

The Australian Museum is supportive of this and will provide advice and assistance for the relocation and curatorship of the objects in conjunction with Macquarie University. Furthermore, Singleton Council strongly supports the return of the Morrison Collection to the Hunter region.

Negotiations are underway for the land on which the Madoo Museum will be built possibly provided by LWP Property Group. Funding for the building maybe funded by WNAC through a proposed business loan with Westpac or other sources. A business model that supports loan conditions being met has been is being negotiated with LWP. The Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation are also seeking other land if the Hurtle proposal falls through as there is a need for the Hunter Region to have such a facility to showcase Aboriginal culture and heritage to the Hunter region. A business plan is currently being developed to look at the feasibility of developing Aboriginal Tourism for the Hunter region by our consultant.

**Progress to date:** LWP Property group are currently drafting both building plans and costs, also talking with Westpac, RDA Hunter, Commonwealth National Stronger Regions Fund and possibly source ILC and IBA involvement to partner with costs being discussed now. Aboriginal Tourism Business Plan currently being developed.

### **3.2 Community Hub: St Clair Mission, Singleton**

St Clair Mission operated until 1918 when it was taken over by the Aborigines Protection Board and renamed Mt Olive. At this time, strict oversight was introduced by the Manager of the Mission and many people were removed from Mount Olive for not following the imposed rules. By 1923, Mount Olive Reserve was closed to Aboriginal people, throughout this time the people living at St Clair farmed the land and also used traditional Indigenous means of subsistence including making artefacts that now comprise the Morrison Collection.

The works at the Community Hub include the development of a Community Hall, Large Shed, cultural park and also include Picnic Areas, a cultural walk, corroboree ground and Former Church, and a Fishing on the Mission aquaculture enterprise, for which WNAC currently conducting a feasibility Study.

**Progress to date:** The Community Hub is well underway with the projects commencing in December 2014. The Indigenous Land Corporation have been approached to consider commercial development or partnership arrangements once the Fishing at the Mission feasibility study has been completed. We have also made contact with Indigenous Business Australia to include them in the development of this land.

### **3.3 Enterprise Hub: Pioneer Road, Singleton**

The Enterprise Hub will support Aboriginal initiatives and provide employment and commercial outcomes to WNAC and the wider Aboriginal community. It will service the local community and industry in the Hunter Valley and throughout NSW.

The Enterprise Hub will contain a number of buildings to support a variety of commercial enterprises, including:

- Dance, art and a training studio that will focus on cultural dance, arts and crafts initiatives (that will support the Madoo Museum Gift Shop), a meeting place for archaeological and heritage field studies to the mining industry, a genealogy program and possum skin cloak workshops.
- Hunter Valley Aboriginal Youth and Disadvantaged Community Camp: WNAC have teamed with World Vision Australia to develop and implement the camps through a signed partnership agreement through their leadership group. WNAC members have previously successfully undertaken Gringai Aboriginal Culture Tours, camps for Aboriginal youth from Redfern, disadvantaged people from NSW, Schools, Canadian/ French Indians and representatives from the 2000 Olympic Games Committee in the past at Singleton. During establishment WNAC is exploring opportunities to utilise the Liddell Recreation Centre facilities in Muswellbrook, Lake St Clair Dam near Singleton currently being developed by Singleton Council and Glenbawn Dam Recreation centre near Aberdeen. World Vision Australia plays an integral part in the Enterprise Hub and provides support for this project through their Young Mobs program. This permanent camp aims to provide long term certainty for this important service. I recently met with the Upper Hunter Community Services team in Muswellbrook seeking support for the development of our hubs which was well received and particular interest in the development of our youth hub was raised.

**Progress to date:** Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation have signed a partnership agreement with World Vision Australia and working with their Young Mobs program for support of this Hub. Funding for the Enterprise Hub is being sourced and could form part of further discussions with the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) and Indigenous Business Australia [IBA]. Met with Upper Hunter Community Services in Muswellbrook and they are supportive of the development of our hubs.

### **3.4 Language and History Hub: Redournberry Hill, Singleton**

The Redournberry site was settled by the Wonnarua/Gringai People in 1923. It was an unreserved mission. Some members of WNAC families were forced there after St Clair Mission closed. Until the 1970s they lived in harsh conditions without electricity or running water. Redournberry Hill represents a vital stepping stone in the Aboriginal struggle to gain recognition as a people who were alienated, but who now form a strong, vital and vibrant society within the Hunter Valley. Some WNAC members have a close affiliation with this land and an AP Aboriginal Protection application has been sent to OEHL to protect this land on Crown Land.

The proposed Language and History Hub that will be established will be an important regional resource and will form a centralised location where oral history, language books, teaching and the Hunter Valley Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Library may reside. Sydney University, NSW Library, Singleton Council and Singleton Library have teamed with WNAC on this project and previous projects. The Language Hub maybe housed in a community centre at the site and will be a valuable centralised resource relating to Aboriginal language, culture, archaeology and commercial reports for mines, industry, tourists and the community.

The Hub will also establish the Hunter Valley Industry Archaeological Heritage Artefact Storage and Curatorship Storage Facility. WNAC has teamed with the Australian Museum and Macquarie University to provide a commercially operated keeping and storage place for Hunter Valley Aboriginal artefacts collected during industry operations[ possibly Huntlee or St Clair Mission site as well ]. These artefacts are currently stored in an unregulated and haphazard manner on industry sites and they will be rehoused within the storage facilities at a cost to industry. The storage facility

will provide an avenue for artefacts to be properly maintained for the client and presented for community and visitor viewing and education as well as supporting our close historical and cultural ties with this land.

**Progress to date:** Funding for the Language Hub is being sourced through Arts NSW, including as part of discussions with ILC and IBA for further development if needed. We have also made contact with Wanaruah Land Council seeking a support letter for the AP at Redournberry Hill, we have had talks with Local Land Services and the crown lands department to manage and maintain this important Aboriginal site in our discussions..

### **3.5 Natural Resources Hub**

The Natural Resources Hub has been established using WNAC's 100% owned company, Wonnarua Mine Rehabilitation Pty Ltd. We have teamed with Greening Australia to develop commercial consultancy services to mines, developers and government infrastructure clients. The NSW native seed bank and propagation centre supports seed collection, rehabilitation, propagation and planting services.

In addition to these commercial nursery activities, Commercial Bush Tucker Gardens will be established for commercial and retail sale and will be linked to the Madoo Museum Café and support the community camp and Wonnarua Culture Park.

**Progress to date:** The Natural Resources Hub is well underway with projects commencing in 2013. Since January 2015 there has been 11 Aboriginal staff working on a full time casual basis

### **3.6 Environmental Hubs: Valley Arm Broke and Biame Cave Milbrodale**

The Valley Arm Environmental Hub is located on land owned and managed by WNAC. This Hub provides for the management and conservation of native flora and fauna through the OEH bio-banking scheme. The Valley Arm site near Broke Village was the **first bio-banking site established in Australia by an Aboriginal organisation.**

The Biame Cave site [Private Property] can offer organised site tours allowing for community access to a spiritually important Aboriginal site and the opportunity to view extensive cave art. Recently WNAC in conjunction with the property owner applied to register this site as a State Heritage Significant site through the NSW OEH Aboriginal Place process. These sites will link with the NSW OEH Save our Species initiative and support outcomes of the Federal and State Upper Hunter Strategic Assessment.

**Progress to date:** The Environmental Hubs are well underway with the projects commencing in 2013. The Biame Cave has currently been accepted as a Aboriginal Heritage listed site by the NSW Heritage Council and a plan of Management will be developed to make sure it's managed and protected for further generations to see and enjoy.

### **Concluding remarks**

The properties identified in this submission are all in close proximity to each other and are designed to represent the ultimate Aboriginal experience. We are sharing our knowledge and history of our traditional homeland with the general public, which sometimes is hard to do from an Aboriginal perspective. We are currently talking with Hunter Valley Zoo and Hunter Valley Gardens

based in Cessnock as part of representing the lower Hunter region as part of our plans to develop an Aboriginal experience on their properties.

WNAC is pursuing a collaborative approach with our partners throughout the Hunter Region in the spirit of reconciliation.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss our Scheme and the Hubs in more detail with the Standing Committee on State Development.

Laurie Perry

CEO  
Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation





## The Hon Warren Truss MP

Deputy Prime Minister  
Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development  
Leader of The Nationals  
Member for Wide Bay

12 OCT 2015

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*PDR ID: MC15-004506*

Mr Laurie Perry  
Chief Executive Officer  
Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation  
PO Box 3066  
SINGLETON DELIVERY CENTRE NSW 2330

Dear Mr Perry

Thank you for your letter dated 17 August 2015 regarding the activities and projects of the Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation (WNAC) in the Hunter region.

It was a pleasure to meet you at the opening of the new Hunter Expressway. This critical infrastructure project has successfully improved travel times for motorists between Newcastle and the Upper Hunter, as well as journeys across the broader transport network.

I understand that the WNAC has been discussing some funding options with representatives from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. I note that it administers the recently released Indigenous Enterprise Development funding, which you may find useful. Information on this funding is available at [www.dpmmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/about/jobs-land-and-economy-programme/indigenous-enterprise-development-funding](http://www.dpmmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/about/jobs-land-and-economy-programme/indigenous-enterprise-development-funding).

As you know, the National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF) is an initiative in my portfolio to boost social and economic development in Australia's regions by funding priority infrastructure projects in local communities. I expect that the next round of the NSRF will open late this year however the dates have not yet been decided. I encourage the WNAC to monitor the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/nsrf](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/nsrf) for information as it becomes available.

I would like to acknowledge the important contribution of the WNAC – and its partners – to regional development and tourism in the Hunter region.

Thank you again for taking the time to write to me and I look forward to meeting you again in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Warren Truss', written in a cursive style.

WARREN TRUSS



**Australian Government**  
Office of the Registrar of  
Indigenous Corporations

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[Home](#) > Preserving history and culture

## Preserving history and culture <sup>[1]</sup>



Spotlight on, June 2014



Holding the recently completed WNAC possum skin cloak. *Left to right:* Lea-Anne Ball, CEO at Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council; Laurie Perry, CEO at WNAC; Duncan Gay, State Minister for Roads and Freight; Tracey Skene, WNAC director; Georgina Berry, WNAC member and Sharon Edgar Jones, WNAC director. Photo: WNAC

## **Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation (ICN 3411)**

**Singleton, New South Wales:** By anybody's reckoning Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation (WNAC) in the Hunter Valley has been setting the pace with renewed purpose and vigour over the past few years.

Established 15 years ago the corporation's main business has always been preserving the history and culture of the Wonnarua Nation, raising the health and education standards of its members, and seeking out opportunities for sustainable development.

'But in late 2006 and throughout 2007 we went through a very unsettled period and were placed under special administration by the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations—we had some serious governance issues to sort through,' says Laurie Perry, a former WNAC director who is currently the corporation's CEO. 'Yet, ever since we came out of special administration, we haven't looked back. Today WNAC is a clear-sighted, energetic organisation achieving great things for our people.'

In 2013 the corporation established a new company called Wonnarua Mine Rehabilitation Pty Ltd to repair the land around old mine sites by planting trees, and it has also set up a nursery business in nearby Camberwell Village. There are plans too for other areas on Wonnarua country.

'We've recently heard that our funding application to develop the first stage of the Wonnarua Cultural Park has been successful,' says WNAC's chairperson, Maxine Conaty. 'It's been a long painstaking process—over five years and I wouldn't like to say how many meetings—but our patience and perseverance have won through.'

The idea is to showcase Wonnarua culture to Wonnarua people and the wider community. The cultural park will be situated on land owned by WNAC, which also takes in the former St Clair Aboriginal Mission. It will boast a meeting hall, ideal for reunions and holding annual general meetings (AGMs), a corroboree ground, a camping ground, community gardens and designated cultural walkways. There is also a proposal to reconstruct the former mission church and school building.

'There's no doubt it will be an excellent resource,' says WNAC director Tracey Skene.

Attracting great interest too is WNAC winning the naming rights for the bridges and rest areas along the Hunter Expressway. This new four-lane freeway, stretching for some 40 kilometres, radically reduces travel time between Newcastle and the Upper Hunter Valley. 'We put in a submission to Roads and Maritime Services [New South Wales Government] and we were successful,' says WNAC director Sandra Miller, 'and so of course we've taken great care to choose appropriate Wonnarua names.'

Over the past few years excitement has also grown around the archaeological dig that's happening alongside the expressway. 'Tens of thousands of Aboriginal stone artefacts going back some 5,000 years have been carefully uncovered,' says Tracey Skene.

Most of the finds are tools used for cutting and slicing. As many as 122 Aboriginal sites have been identified in elevated areas near to fresh water according to archaeologist Jan Wilson. 'We actually know that people were butchering kangaroos ...[and] were processing various types of plant foods, so we can start to look now at what times of the year people were in those sites.'

WNAC was consulted about the excavation before it started and continues to be actively involved. Everyone is well aware of its importance for local Aboriginal history. 'These discoveries show occupation, people were here,' says Laurie Perry. 'Our ancestors were using these areas as a food resource and environmentally protecting and controlling them.'

Eventually the artefacts will be returned to a safe keeping place—perhaps a purpose-built museum—where they can be viewed by the wider Aboriginal community, tourists and other visitors.

‘Our corporation is interested in telling our story about our country and I think everyone—that’s both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people—understand the great importance of preserving Aboriginal culture,’ says WNAC director Rae Reed. ‘It’s what we do and it is also our proudest achievement.’

For more information: [www.wonnarua.org.au](http://www.wonnarua.org.au) <sup>[2]</sup>

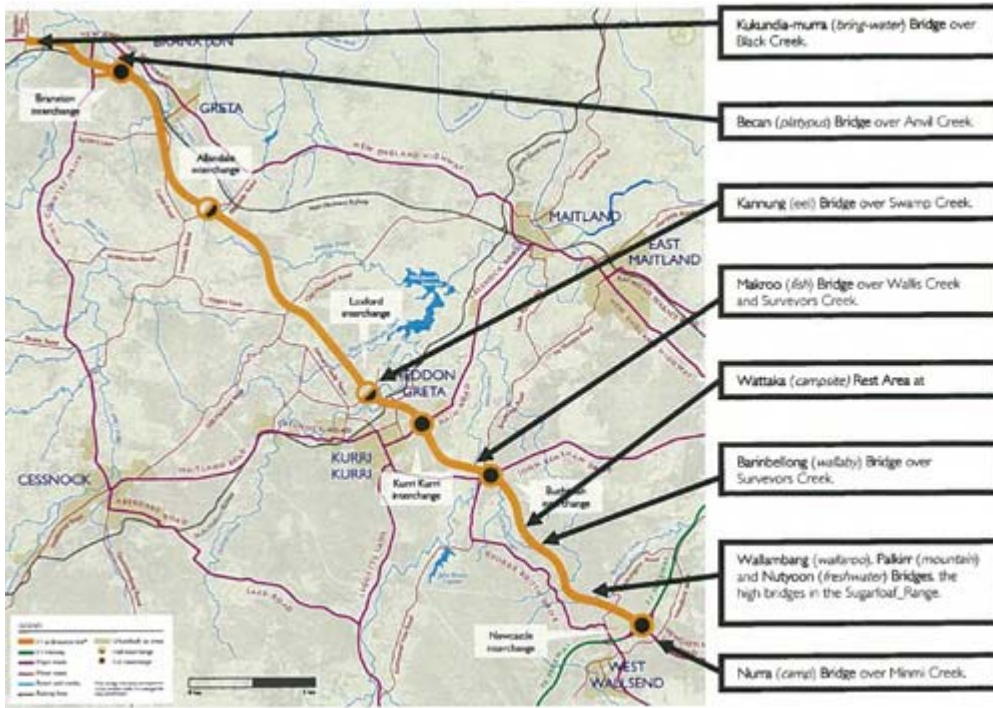


'Wattaka in our language means "camp",' says CEO Laurie Perrie. Photo: WNAC



Left: Some of the stone artefacts uncovered in the archaeological dig alongside the Hunter Expressway. Photo: Peter Stoop/*Newcastle Herald*.

Right: Stephen Knight from Roads and Maritime Services (RMS); Tony Gant from RMS; archaeologist Jan Wilson; State Minister for Roads and Freight, Duncan Gay; Laurie Perry, WNAC’s CEO and David Ledlin from RMS. Photo: WNAC



WNAC named eight bridges and two rest areas along the Hunter Valley Expressway, which is a four-lane freeway link between the F3 freeway near Seahampton and the New England Highway, west of Branxton. It was officially opened on 22 March 2014. Photo: WNAC



WNAC directors working hard on projects. *Left to right:* Richard Edwards, Arthur Fletcher, Sandra Miller, Maree Waugh, Tracey Skene, Maxine Conaty (chairperson) and Rae Reed (absent: Sharon Edgar Jones). Photo: WNAC



Site plan for Wonnarua Cultural Park. Photo: WNAC

**Source URL:** <http://www.oric.gov.au/publications/spotlight/preserving-history-and-culture>

**Links**

[1] <http://www.oric.gov.au/publications/spotlight/preserving-history-and-culture>

[2] <http://www.wonnarua.org.au/>