




# Galamunnangga

Our path from the dreaming





A photograph of a dirt road stretching into the distance, flanked by trees on both sides. The scene is captured during sunset or sunrise, with a warm, golden light illuminating the trees and the road. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

*WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that this report may contain images of deceased persons.*

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*Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation would like to acknowledge Annette Ruzicka whose images are featured throughout the report.*

# *Dreaming our future*

*This document has been prepared by Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation to help guide us over the next decade as we grow and mature as an organisation.*

*We encourage anyone with an interest in what we are doing to join us as we work towards realising our dreams for the future.*

Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation was established in 2006 to manage the native title interests of the Ngarinyin people. It is the motorcar that gets Ngarinyin people back onto country, cares for country and looks after the social, emotional, economic and environmental needs of Ngarinyin people.

Over the past decade Wilinggin has matured as an organisation, gaining experience in the management of land, forging strong partnerships, and putting in place measures to ensure the sustainability of not only our organisation, but our people moving forward.

As native title holders we are responsible for managing our country through native title, and our fate as Aboriginal people in this nation. It is for this reason that we must turn our attention to the future and build a strong foundation for the next generation of Ngarinyin people.

The title of this document, *Galamunnangga*, means “from old time”. It represents our path forward, from where we have come from to where we want to go. We have identified clear strategies for the future – our goals are based on the needs of our community and country. They require collaboration, strong partnerships, mutual respect and a new way of working together.

This plan is our map in the sand, and we invite you to join us as we work to achieve our aspirations.

Arnold Sahanna  
Chairperson





## ***Our vision***

*We want everyone who reads this document to understand the language we use and what we mean when we describe who we are.*

*Three words you will see throughout this document are Ngarinyin, Wilinggin and Wunggurr.*

*Ngarinyin is our tongue, our language.*

*Wilinggin is our land, our country.*

*Wunggurr is our dreaming - all the sacred sites we look after on Wilinggin country.*

We seek to build a sustainable Ngarinyin society where our ancient values and knowledge systems are used to preserve, protect and restore our cultural domains.

We imagine and work towards a society where future generations of Ngarinyin people take their place in confronting the global challenges of climate change and environmental destruction.

We aspire to share our dreams and vision with all peoples, so as to build partnerships with those who share our values and who will work with Ngarinyin people to achieve our vision.

We dream of a time when Ngarinyin people are restored to our lands, rivers and places of significance, so that we continue to be the people of the Wandjina.

## ***Ngarinyin people***

We are Ngarinyin people, connected to the land through the law of the Wandjina Wunggurr. Wandjina are a sacred spiritual force and the creators of the land. They are our ancestors, who came and ‘put themselves’ in the rock when the world was soft. Wunggurr is the Rainbow Serpent, custodian of the Wandjina law and who usually lives in deep-water pools and is close to the Wandjina.

Ngarinyin people, together with the Worrora and Wunambal people, were removed from their northern homelands in the early 1900s, first to Kunmunya Presbyterian Mission, then to Wotjulum, near Yampi Sound. Many of our people were eventually settled near Derby, far from our sacred Wandjina caves, in a place called Mowanjum. In 1975, Mowanjum community was shifted to its present site, east of Derby off the Gibb River Road.

Today, Ngarinyin people live in Kimberley towns, within and outside Wilinggin country. Many people have returned to their traditional country in the communities of Imintji, Kupungarri, Dodnun and Ngallanggunda.

## ***Governance***

The Wanjinia-Wunggurr PBC is the prescribed body corporate and registered native title body corporate for the Wanjinia-Wunggurr community and holds native title on trust for the Wandjina-Wunggurr community.

Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation, together with Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation and Dambimangari Aboriginal Corporation, are described in the Wanjinia-Wunggurr PBC Rules as its Related Corporations. Related Corporations, such as Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation, must follow the *Native Title Act*, the PBC regulations and the Wanjinia-Wunggurr PBC Rules when we are doing work that involves a native title decision.

This governance structure is strong. It offers stability and allows native title holders, through their related corporations, to explore and develop opportunities while keeping native title rights safe and secure.



## Our country

*Our country is home to some of Australia's endemic, rare and conservation listed mammals, including the endangered Black-footed Tree-rat (*Mesembriomys gouldii gouldii*), endangered Northern Quoll (*Dasyurus hallucatus*), vulnerable Kimberley Brush-tailed Phascogale (*Phascogale tapoatafa kimmerleyensis*), and the vulnerable Northern Brushtail Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula arnhemensis* (Kimberley)).*

*We are custodians of long-term breeding habitat for Australia's rarest raptor – the vulnerable Red Goshawk (*Erythrorhynchus radiatus*) and custodians of two nationally significant fish species – the Barnett River Gudgeon (*Hypseleotris kimmerleyensis*) that is only found in the Barnett River system and the vulnerable Freshwater Sawfish (*Pristis pristis*).*

Wilinggin country covers approximately 63,000km<sup>2</sup> (or 63 million hectares) of land in the central north Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Mostly land-locked, apart from two small saltwater areas at Walcott Inlet and Prince Frederick Harbour, our country extends from the limestone devonian reef of the Napier Range and the Wunaamin Miliwundi Ranges in the west, across to the Durack, Saw and Cockburn Ranges in the east. Mitchell Plateau and Drysdale River National Parks and Carson River Station form the northern border, while to the south Wilinggin country extends as far as the Wunaamin Miliwundi Ranges.

The Wilinggin landscape holds important cultural and environmental values for Ngarinyin people, including a significant number of rock art sites. These values are recognised nationally and internationally in declarations and conventions applying to the preservation of such rich cultural landscapes.

## Dreams for the future

It is an exciting time for Ngarinyin people and Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation as we take steps to shape our future. We believe now is the time to make big change and we hope that you will join us as we imagine our potential and dream big for our future.

### **The key priorities we have identified to build a strong future include:**

- Strong governance and internal capacity building
- Return of country to the Ngarinyin people
- Ngarinyin-led land and environmental management
- Living, maintaining and celebrating Ngarinyin culture
- Improving wellbeing and intergenerational knowledge transfer
- Sustainable enterprise development







# 1. Strong governance & internal capacity building

*Wilinggin country is vast, home to gorges and rivers, lowland savannahs, rainforest pockets and saltwater areas. Our country is also remote, with many areas barely reachable by vehicle and often only accessible by helicopter.*

*This isolation means we must look at practical ways to more efficiently work on country. We aim to do this by developing a small number of strategically chosen sites on country, building basic but practical infrastructure to accommodate Traditional Owners, rangers, scientists and other visitors. This would enable people to spend longer periods of time working remotely on major land and cultural projects.*

*Usable infrastructure would also play a major role in future on country enterprise, and ensure more people are able to participate in and enjoy Wilinggin country.*

Opportunities to grow and move forward can only be seized if we have the strength and internal capacity to take on new challenges.

We aim to create a more sustainable governance structure that will ensure Wilinggin can meet the needs of Ngarinyin people, Commonwealth and State Governments, and other stakeholders.

We envision a future that moves away from a centralisation of our services and administration in towns, to a more representative and appropriate model of operation suited to the on country work we undertake.

We strive to continuously improve how we do business so that we can appropriately and consistently represent our native title interests, our people and our country.

## **We aim to achieve strong governance and internal capacity by:**

- Ensuring our succession plans are supported so that when our current leaders step-down, we have a strong next generation ready to step-up.
- Seeking long-term security for key leadership roles within Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation to ensure stability for the organisation.
- Investing in and developing our people to create internal capacity.
- Growing our presence on country, including investment in infrastructure at key sites to create functioning and practical working and living bases for people to undertake long-term work on country.
- Fostering and building on existing partnerships to help develop our skills to more effectively govern our own operations and manage our responsibilities.
- Establishing a future sustainability fund to achieve and secure the aspirations of the Ngarinyin people for many years to come.







## 2. Return of country to the Ngarinyin people

*In 2020, Bachsten camp and the Munja track were handed back to the Ngarinyin people. For many years, the culturally significant area had been controlled by the previous leaseholders (non-Indigenous tourism operators), and as a result Wunggurr rangers and Ngarinyin Traditional Owners were not able to adequately manage the area.*

*The issue was resolved through negotiation with the leaseholders and the State Government, with the State recognising the inappropriate nature of the previous lease arrangement.*

*This positive outcome means we now have the ability to manage visitation and protect the cultural and environmental values of the area. We are also investigating opportunities for Bachsten camp, including use as a ranger base, research camp, for cultural enterprise and Indigenous tourism.*

Since achieving native title, we have worked hard to manage our land in accordance with our native title rights. However, we continue to face difficulties in achieving our land management aspirations because of 'colonial-era' land tenure regulations currently in place across Western Australia.

For Ngarinyin people to move forward, we must work to resolve all outstanding land matters within the Wilinggin estate. Correcting land tenure inconsistencies and irregularities through land tenure reform, and the establishment of appropriate tenure and sub-lease arrangements will help us to achieve this outcome.

We envision a future land tenure environment that is more reflective of the social, economic and environmental needs of Western Australia and our nation. We believe this is a common goal for many parties engaged in land management and are hopeful that by working together we can reach agreement on these matters.

### **We believe we can resolve outstanding land matters by:**

- Facilitating the return of remaining Wilinggin estate to the Ngarinyin people.
- Working with government to achieve the conversion of pastoral leases that are now irrelevant to a more appropriate tenure reflective of the needs and vision of Ngarinyin people.
- Understanding and working with existing pastoral lease holders in the development and management of those leases.
- Addressing instances where the ability of Ngarinyin people to control and manage country has been removed.
- Ensuring that all remaining ALT (Aboriginal Lands Trust) leases are divested back into Ngarinyin ownership.
- Working with the State Government and other partners to gain strategic tenure to support future economic, social and cultural aspirations.





### 3. Ngarinyin-led land & environmental management

*We acknowledge the efforts made by various parties to change the way national parks and other estates are managed, and created, to better reflect the integral role and decision making of Traditional Owners. This includes the recent work occurring in the Kimberley around new national parks and marine parks where discussions have been Traditional Owner-led and management models aligned to joint management principles.*

*We want to achieve a similar outcome across Wilinggin country, particularly in relation to the five national parks within our native title area, three of which are operating invalidly and one that extinguished native title completely.*

*The old way of protecting country through government controlled national parks is no longer acceptable. We want Ngarinyin people to lead decision-making about national parks and have an increasing presence on country managing these conservation estates.*

Ngarinyin people have cultural and legal responsibility for the management of Wilinggin country.

Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation meets these responsibilities through the realisation of native title interests, the management of the Wilinggin Indigenous Protected Area (IPA), employment of Ngarinyin people as Indigenous rangers on country, and partnerships with government and non-government organisations.

We were one of the earliest adopters of practices aimed at reducing carbon emissions and reliance on fossil fuel driven industries. We have built a reputation for being a nation leader in carbon mitigation through our annual fire management program, and we continue to invest in and develop our conservation and land management activities on country.

Now, we have greater ability than ever to expand our work across the Wilinggin estate, and have more meaningful involvement in areas of country currently controlled by other parties and interests.

#### **To achieve our land and environmental management aspirations, we want to:**

- Find new ways to secure the long-term stability of an expanded Indigenous ranger program, minimising dependence on grants and political priorities.
- Establish a cultural and environmental research facility at Bachsten camp to enable greater and more practical participation of Ngarinyin and non-Ngarinyin people in research activities on country.
- Forge new and inclusive management arrangements for existing State Government national parks operating on Wilinggin country.
- Ensure that Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation, on behalf of the Ngarinyin people, holds management responsibility for carbon, water and minerals on our land and steps taken to practically achieve this goal.

## 4. Living, maintaining & celebrating culture

*Recently, a young Ngarinyin man was offered a place in a prestigious state sporting program. The program started at the beginning of the year – a time that is important for young Ngarinyin men who wish to undertake law.*

*The talented young sportsperson chose to fulfill his cultural responsibility and undertake law, despite this meaning that he may have no longer been eligible for the elite program.*

*It is clear that young Ngarinyin people continue to face challenges balancing their cultural responsibilities with the expectations of dominant westernised society.*

Ngarinyin culture has existed for millennia and has withstood interruption by powerful environmental and human forces. We are custodians of the sacred Wandjina and have responsibility for numerous cultural sites spread across our country.

Over the past 200 years we have seen a significant impact to our way of life and we have been forced to adapt to a colonial western society, while maintaining and protecting our deep and spiritual connection to country and culture. Sadly, we have seen cultural materials and knowledge taken from our country, particularly by early and modern-day explorers, missionaries, anthropologists, and various institutions. It is time these materials and knowledge were returned home, so that we can learn from and enjoy our history, and our ongoing link to our ancestors.

As stated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, “respect for Indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment”.

The culture of the Kimberley is a national asset and should be recognised as such by all Australians, in particular the people of Western Australia.

### **We plan to promote and support Ngarinyin culture by:**

- Providing funding support for cultural programs, including the undertaking of law and cultural activities on country and in our communities.
- Establishing a cultural centre on country to support the maintenance, preservation, and ongoing practice of Ngarinyin culture and language.
- Utilising a cultural centre for ongoing documentation and recording of the Ngarinyin story, and a keeping place for art, artefacts, historical photos, recordings and other cultural materials, with the ability for Ngaringingin people to access and learn from this information.
- Securing long-term funding and support for ongoing cultural knowledge and artefact repatriation, and the ongoing management of this material of national and international significance.





## ***The Frobenius Collection***

The Frobenius Collection is an extremely important record of Ngarinyin life from the 1930s. The expedition included two anthropologists and two artists who travelled from Germany to the Kimberley to learn about Indigenous rock art.

From May to December 1938, they recorded field notes, took photographs, painted large-scale replicas of rock art sites and portraits of Kimberley Aboriginal people, and acquired a range of cultural items. Now, more than 80 years later, a project has begun to work with Traditional Owners to understand these materials, as well as digitise and translate field notebooks currently held in the Frobenius Institute in Germany.

The Frobenius Collection is of high significance to Western Australia and the nation, particularly in relation to the identification and preservation of important cultural sites on Wiltingin country. It is our aim to work in partnership with academic institutions to ensure Ngarinyin people, and other Traditional Owners involved, are the drivers of the decisions being made about this collection and to work towards returning these important materials home.







## 5. Improving wellbeing & intergenerational knowledge transfer

*Since achieving native title we have developed a strong land and conservation management program that ensures we look after the cultural and environmental values of our country.*

*We employ a team of rangers to undertake this work, but we envision an even more exciting future – one that can offer our young people a formal pathway into study and employment on country. Just as programs exist in the areas of sport and academia for Indigenous youth, we believe that land management is a career and study pathway that can help to develop, inspire and motivate our kids.*

*By developing our next land management leaders we will look after country and culture, and ensure that knowledge is handed down from one generation to another.*

It is evident across Australia that the way Aboriginal people have been treated over numerous years has contributed to the many inequalities we see today.

Incarceration of youth, shorter life expectancy, suicide, housing and living standard inequality, racism and discrimination, as well as lower education and employment rates are just some of the disadvantages we continue to see today.

We want to provide opportunities for Ngarinyin people to gain skills, expertise and qualifications that exist within contemporary Australia, while at the same time having the opportunity to learn and practice culture.

We aspire to see our youth walking within two worlds and for this way of life to be supported by the western systems that continue to be in place today. The Uluru Statement from the Heart makes clear our children are our hope for the future. “When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.”

### **We will foster social and emotional wellbeing, and intergenerational knowledge transfer by:**

- Supporting pathways for young Ngarinyin people to achieve excellence and their goals. This could be achieved through an education fund or school of excellence that supports the development of our next generation.
- Highlighting the importance of cultural practices and cultural learning to the broader Australian society, including in the workplace.
- Changing perceptions around the practice of culture and the cultural responsibilities Ngarinyin people have within their families and communities.







## ***6. Sustainable enterprise development***

The sustainable management of Wilinggin country is an important avenue for creating economic opportunities for Ngarinyin people.

Currently, the main economic influences on Wilinggin country are tourism, the pastoral industry and mining. The carbon industry, water and associated water rights are also developing economic forces within our region.

We want to participate in the economic growth of the Kimberley, and the national economy more broadly, but we want to do so in a way that delivers social and environmental outcomes, as well as monetary benefits.

One major way this can be achieved is through sustainable enterprise on country, including areas such as tourism, conservation and research, and the developing carbon economy. We must continue to foster our economic strengths and embrace new opportunities to create a strong Ngarinyin economy that supports our people into the future.

### **Key areas of sustainable enterprise we will focus on include:**

- Implementation of visitor management and tourism development plans, including a visitor pass system.
- Continued development of our savannah carbon projects and future sequestration opportunities.
- Understanding opportunities around water and water rights, particularly in relation to the western end of the Wilinggin native title determination area.
- Strengthening our engagement and role in the process of resource extraction.
- Investigating housing development opportunities that allow more people to live and work on country.



For further information:  
Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation  
Phone: 08 9191 1332  
Website: [www.wilinggin.com.au](http://www.wilinggin.com.au)  
Email: [admin@wilinggin.com.au](mailto:admin@wilinggin.com.au)