

Minutes of Evidence Curriculum & TRP

**Topic 1:** Aboriginal society and culture in the Port Phillip District and how European settlement impacted upon it.

**Theme(s):** Ownership; tradition; community; identity

## Victorian Curriculum link:

Causes of population movements and settlement patterns during this period and the significant changes to the way of life of groups of people (VCHHK130)

Key social, cultural, economic, and political features of one society at the start of the period (VCHHK133)

Intended and unintended causes and effects of contact and extension of settlement of European power(s), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (VCHHK134)

If the above hyperlinks do not work in PDF – visit the curriculum via:

http://tinyurl.com/j85w2pg

## Part 3: The human/country nexus

Before the arrival of Europeans in the Port Phillip District, Indigenous people led lives that were mediated by customary lore, as set out by ancestral beings in the period called the Dreaming. The role that had been given to humans when the world was created was to maintain and care for their country. Anthropologist Kenneth Maddock has written (1974, p. 27) that 'Aborigines regard land as a religious phenomenon'. In addition to economic considerations, there was thus a spiritual imperative that required people to be in particular places within their estate at particular times of the year. One of the ways in which people fulfilled their role was through observance of

traditional ritual and ceremony at places of power (Stanner 1984; Barak art work).

Aboriginal people regard land in exactly the same way as they regard kin (Laudine 2009) and care for it in the same way. This 'caring for country' is done in a number of contexts. At a spiritual level, it is a religious commitment, a way of ensuring that the world remains as it was created, a sustaining home for humans and other animals. At a day-to-day practical level, caring for one's country, particularly through the use of fire, makes for easier travelling (Rose 1996). But above all, caring for country is an expression of the deep bonds of kinship.

The landscapes of the Port Phillip District that were so attractive to European pastoralists were in large part an artefact of the sustaining practices of the Indigenous people. In the words of Deborah Bird Rose (1996: 72), before the arrival of European settlers

Aboriginal people had created these nourishing terrains through their knowledge of the country, their firestick farming, their organisation of sanctuaries, and their rituals of well-being.