



# BUBUP WILAM ABORIGINAL CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE INC.

18th September 2020

Submission to the Senate – Select Committee on the Aboriginal Flag.

Bubup Wilam is a self-determined Aboriginal Child and Family Centre that caters for the Education, Health and Wellbeing needs of Aboriginal children aged 6 months to six years and their families. Our service is Governed by a Board of Management of 9 Aboriginal people who represent the wider Aboriginal community and an Aboriginal CEO. Our service caters exclusively for Aboriginal children and their families. Aboriginal self-determination is vital in addressing change for Aboriginal people because this ensures Aboriginal people's right to have their voice heard and have control over what happens to their children and their community. The service operation is underpinned by the service philosophy, vision and purpose and drives all decisions made within the organisation. Our service philosophy, vision and purpose are the heartbeat of all that we do.

Our strong Aboriginal curriculum is underpinned by truth telling, self-determination and strong and proud Aboriginal Identities. This curriculum works alongside the Western curriculum to ensure children can be strong in both worlds and achieve anything they wish to. The program is proudly taught through an Aboriginal Lens. Our goal is that each child leaves Bubup Wilam with a strong Aboriginal identity and for life beyond Bubup Wilam. We teach through Bubup Wilam's curriculum and the Victorian Early Years Learning Framework.

Our children understand the meaning of the Aboriginal Flag and have strong connections with it; we see it almost every day in their paintings and drawings. The children understand that Black represents the people, red represents the land & the blood and yellow represents the sun.

Our babies and toddlers engage in the flag raising and the flag protocols, our children are as young as 6 months old, as they learn to speak they are already humming , our tune of our flag raising ceremony. When our children go to school they still draw the Aboriginal flag in all their pictures and work sheets. If the flag is not present in the yard the children ask why, and advocate to have it flown beside the Australian flag to acknowledge Aboriginal people as a part of the curriculum.

Underpinning our curriculum is the work we do on supporting children's connection to their identity and central to this is the Aboriginal Flag. Not only do they know their flag and what it means they use it as their guide to the way they live life. It is a concept of identity and is used as a reflection tool for their behaviour, for the way they treat others, the land and their commitment and respect to Bunjil our spirit creator on Wurundjeri Wilam Country. They see the flag and identify this as a safe place or their place because they are represented. They also see when the flag is not present and ask why Aboriginal people don't go to that place. It is more than a flag it is their identity, their support and guides the choices they make and the way they live.

The current copyright and licensing agreement changes what the flag means to us and how we use it as a teaching tool. It takes away the freedom and ownership and therefore it loses its integrity. Without integrity it becomes null and void and takes away the key core value of our teaching. The Flag is used at Bubup to unite all mobs together on Wurundjeri Wilam land. This will have a huge impact on our children at Bubup because it removes their collective identity and a guide for the rest of their lives.

The Aboriginal flag was created in the 70's at a time when freedom and fighting for our rights were at the forefront of the political agenda. Over this time, we have used the flag as a symbol of respect and unity, everyone in this country and around the world know the flag represents its Australia's forgotten people. To have any agenda that dismisses the essence of the flag will take away that sense of belonging.

No flag should be used to make a profit from, especially a flag that represented freedom fighting and the right to be self-determining. The use of the Aboriginal flag was led by people, which gave it our validity as a representation of Aboriginal identity. Then to use it as tool to against us takes away our moral rights and the integrity and purpose of its original intent.

However the situation is to be resolved the outcome must be free use of the flag for all, to maintain the support and recognition by the users.

**We urge you to ensure the flag remains free to everyone to use as a way to strengthen identity and for our children as a way to live as young Aboriginal people.**

Yours sincerely on behalf of the Board, Staff and Bubup Wilam community.

Lisa Thorpe

CEO.

Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre

Below are some reflections from our staff at Bubup Wilam when writing about what our service means to them, our children and our families. Without even prompting the meaning and importance of the Aboriginal flag in their letters is evident:

- *I feel proud to work with Bubup Wilam staff, families, and children. As an educator my aim is to support children's learning and development. Children and families feel proud to come to Bubup Wilam. Every-morning when the children do flag raising and smoking ceremony, we can see how proud the children are. At group-time the children say the acknowledgment to country and know their mobs with such confidence.*
- *I'll never forget one of my first days on the bus with the children and seeing an Aboriginal flag on a school I said "what does that flag mean" and one little girl said "that means we can go there one day".*
- *I have worked at many mainstream centres and most have a globe of the world in their centre, very rarely do they have the Aboriginal map of mobs and clans on their wall. They may have some Aboriginal art or prints and an Aboriginal flag, but it never goes as deep as it does at this centre. The reason I think this is important is because for a person to be a productive member in society they need to feel a sense of belonging, knowing who they are and a sense of pride for their culture. Like a strong tree has strong roots so does a strong person with a strong culture behind them.*
- *The Dja Dja Wurrung (2 year old room) children are so eager to lead the flag raising ceremony and say their Acknowledgment to Country and when we ask children what their mobs are they express their mob/s with such strength, joy and pride.*
- *We teach these children about where they come from and who their mobs are and what their family tree looks like and who they are related to. Talking to these children everyday about Solidarity and what it means to them and us as educators and what the colours mean on the Aboriginal flag mean the children thrive from this and take it to their next journey up to the next room or to their primary school. The children thrive with confidents and they become more independent of who they are and where they come from.*
- *My role is to support children's learning, development, and communication skills. It is important for children to know where they have come from and their mobs. The children show so much confidence when they are doing smoking ceremony and flag raising. Children learn about their culture and history and our ceremonies. They feel very proud to be who they are. We do Smoking ceremonies and flag raising here, kids proudly do these things.*
- *I believe we are so important because we all work together to teach the children to have self-determination and to have a strong proud Aboriginal identity in saying that we have our mobs and maps which teaches the children about where they come from and who they are, we have flag raising each morning and Acknowledge the Country that we live and learn on every single day.*
- *We have group time every day the children know their mobs off by heart they know where they come from. The children know what the colours on the flag stand for, which is incredible.*