

## Stories Want To Be Told: *Elaap Karlaboodjar*

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### Introduction: Places Hold Stories

Water is carried into the estuary by the Collie and the Preston rivers, although five rivers drain the Leschenault catchment into *Elaap*, the Leschenault Estuarine System: the Wellesley, Collie, Brunswick, Preston and Ferguson. *Elaap* is a Noongar word which means 'on or by the water', referring to the people and their place. There are many stories about this estuary – some new, some a little older, and some ancient. *Nitja Noongar boodjar, derbal* – this is Noongar<sup>4</sup> country and estuary.<sup>5</sup> Our stories are old, like our place.

People have always told stories. We create stories which become our reality and our identity. We story our relationships with each other and with place. Stories have their own lives, and they live in various places. Some stories are our own personal stories. Some are collectively owned, while others are owned by the place itself and they speak its language. Some stories live across the land, like the song-lines that follow the trail of dreaming characters from the *Kundaam*, the deep Noongar knowledge.<sup>6</sup> These stories have an essence and significance for our times.

The old bards say that when stories want to be told, they let you know. Because we are human, we can only ever know part of a story. It depends upon where we are located – in time and space – when the story comes to life, or comes back to life. Stories of past actions put the present in perspective: its character, dilemmas, constraints and opportunities. The time has come to re-tell and re-energise stories about the Leschenault Estuary<sup>7</sup> because it is beginning to ail, and stories can re-enliven place by re-awakening its people.<sup>8</sup> Some of these stories need Noongar<sup>9</sup> language, the language of the land, because languages themselves are active and hold messages.<sup>10</sup>

Our research shows that *Elaap karlaboodjar* – the home-place of the *Elaap* people – covers around 1250 square kilometres of coastal plain, estuary, bushland and foothills. It is the place that has very recently – only within the last 200 years – come to be known as the Leschenault<sup>11</sup> Estuary district in the Greater Bunbury area of South West Western Australia. Its enduring name is *Elaap* and the *Elaap* Wardandi Noongar people are the traditional owners.<sup>12</sup> People have continuously lived in the South West for over 45,000 years,<sup>13</sup> but the Leschenault estuarine system is quite young, beginning as a coastal lagoon only around 8,000 years ago.<sup>14</sup> Seventeen to eighteen thousand years ago, during the Wurm ice age, the coast was 40km west of the present coastline.<sup>15</sup> Noongar people today retain stories originally told during the ice-age. But most residents of the district today know little of this.

Our project<sup>16</sup> began with concern for the declining health of the Leschenault estuary.<sup>17</sup> Because in general terms the wellbeing of an ecosystem is a product of its people-place relationships, we investigated the history of these relationships in order to think anew about the restoration of estuarine health. We used a Noongar frame of reference to think about landscape as 'nourishing terrain,'<sup>18</sup> as a spiritually-enlivened place.<sup>19</sup> We used explorer and settler journals<sup>20</sup> and anthropological records<sup>21</sup> as ethnographic data which we analysed for recurring themes. We used a wide variety of Noongar language records to cross-reference our ideas.<sup>22</sup>

In this essay we use excerpts from our project reports to help re-create a sense of the estuary with a long, vibrant human history rather than the short, linear, shallow economically deterministic recount that has produced the present quandary in estuarine health. We use a non-linear sense of time - commensurate with a Noongar knowledge of place - to develop a sense of the 'long now', in which the historical characters and their

place-based relationships are still here today, through their archetypes, spirits and shadows. To understand this concept, imagine that time is cyclical, like day and night, the seasons, the journeys of the moon and the travels of the earth around the sun. In this way, elements of the past (*kura*), the present (*yeyi*) and the future (*burdawan*) are all enfolded here in the present (*yeyi*),<sup>23</sup> yielding an expanded, continuing present with an interconnected past and future.

In this paper we use a variety of perspectives, imagined and historic, beginning with a poem to offer a story of the estuary itself. After the poem we re-story history in the present tense, beginning with the present time – a journey leading to *kurduoodjar* – love of place, or heartlands.

### **Cries of the *Derbal Elaap*: Where are you now, my people?**

In times before the icy cold *Nyitiny*,  
*Wargal*, *Walitj*, *Waitj*, *Yongka*, *Kumal*, *Kurlbardi*, *Wardang* and all the other animals,  
With jarrah, marri, balga and *muja*, were tending regularly to their seasonal chores and tasks.  
There was *kurduoodjar* – love of place,  
Across my sacred landscape.

Then there came thunder, lightning and huge, colossal storms,  
When *Wargal* swept across my hills,  
Gouging out my valleys, shifting my mighty boulders,  
Crashing down the Collie Hills, creating wild and mighty rivers,  
To flow into my estuary, and give me people who care.  
There was *kurduoodjar* – love of place,  
Across my sacred landscape.

My people called me by my names and spoke my many voices,  
All my different clans, all my different stories, all along my waterways,  
Co-created my biodiversity, my creativity, my imagination, my pristine health,  
And danced and laughed and sang my many songs.  
Across my sacred places, they honoured all my spirits.  
For *kurduoodjar* – love of place,  
Across my sacred landscape.

I saw the sail, I heard the gun.  
I saw the sickness, I smelled the pain,  
My stories dimmed, my songs faded – to only here and there.  
I felt the plough, I suffered the blade,  
While my soul was being drained,  
For economic growth - economic 'progress'.

Now, in this new century,  
I am emaciated of my former wild self.  
I am tamed, at the mercy of the modern.  
My rains reduced; nutrients and contaminants flow,  
Algal blooms, concrete, sorrow.  
My voices are weakening, my strength is waning.  
I endure grief – my future is in your hands.

Where are you now, my people?  
Your voices are frail, please stand for me now.  
Strengthen my language, relearn my stories,  
Listen to my spirits, sing my songlines, dance my sacredness,  
And honour my soul – I am your grandchildren's inheritance.  
I need *kurduoodjar*, love of place,

Across my sacred landscape. ~~~~~



Plate 1: *Milyu, barduk* Burragenup (Samphire, near Burragenup, Leschenault) Photograph: Terry Wooltorton

### Today: Searching for the Land's Story

This is the shortest story, because it is very recent: *yeyi*, now. We imagine that from the point of view of the land, it will be a fleeting story: a short aberration. If you live in a regional Australian city around a river or estuary, this story might be like your story – so for reasons of brevity, we will keep it very short. We suppose you know it already.

In the Leschenault Catchment over the last 50 years annual rainfall has declined; total area of bushland, natural open space and forest has diminished, with a parallel drop in native fauna and flora. The human population is rising and agro-industrial activity is increasing along with a comparable increase in nutrient and contaminant in catchment flows. Water extraction is escalating. There are signs of distress in the estuary such as occasional fish, swan and dolphin deaths, macro-algal blooms and indications of reduction in crab, fish and prawn stocks over time. The real risk to estuarine health is uncertain but trends demonstrate that risk increases with time.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time healthy riparian forest and the vigorous mangrove system in the Leschenault Inlet are signs of ecosystem health. Socially, resilience is expressed as ongoing human interest in the estuarine system. Most individuals and groups cherish their waterways and their place; and most are committed, one way or another, to restoring ecosystem health.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps we yearn for the land's story. The quirk is, it is all around us. It ruffles through our hair, it scampers into the bushes while we walk, it dives across the water as we amble along its edge, it squawks at us from above, and it sings an exquisite song when we awaken. Why can't we hear it? Perhaps we don't listen?

### Disregarding the Voice of the Land

Stories carry spirit and care-take the energy of place. This story of people deprioritising the vivacity of the estuary, of ignoring its voice, is presented through four cameos.

#### Cameo One: Bunbury Arrives, Colonials Claim Land

Many hundreds of *Elaap* people live at home around the estuary when the British first arrive. Lt. Bunbury's initial impression of the estuary during his overland journey southward included:

... we followed our guides along Native paths visible to none but themselves through an undulating country timbered principally with Tooats with some Red Gum & Mahogany... & saw a thick tea tree swamp about half a mile on our right, forming the head of the Estuary upon which we soon arrived ourselves by a well

beaten Native path through a most rich and luxuriant crop of grass & sow thistles. The tide was out & a considerable extent of sand & mud was left bare round the head of the Estuary upon which were congregated to feed immense flocks of Brown Ducks & Teal while the water was equally covered with Swans & Pelicans ...<sup>26</sup>

Bunbury appreciates the biodiversity and the aesthetic of the pastoral country used by the *Elaap* people for kangaroo grazing. He also acknowledges the sharp skills of perception of the Noongar guides.

Below is one of Bunbury's many observations of *Elaap* fishing and food preparation, written in December 1836 about the ford over the lower Preston River. Food is plentiful, and the *Elaap* people are highly skilled. Bunbury seems impressed with place and people.

... They also spear on the flats great numbers of cobblers ... very good to eat. Mullet are also caught by the Natives in immense numbers...The Opossum is very white but has a strong oromatic [sic] taste from the leaves of the Eucalyptus on which it feeds; but the Kangaroo Rat is much better although not equal to the little Bandicoot which is delicious...<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps Bunbury hears the voice of the land, or at least, suspects there is one.

In the early 1830s while a military detachment is stationed at the mouth of the Leschenault Estuary, a number of different colonisers move inland from the area that is now the mouth of the Leschenault Inlet. All of the many *Elaap* people who are within their locality are said to be friendly and welcoming.<sup>28</sup> The colonisers select large tracts of land for which to apply for grants.<sup>29</sup> James Henty writes a letter dated March 20<sup>th</sup> to his father describing his experience of the expedition:

We ascended the river with the Governor about nine miles, as far as the boats could go... The land here was very good and the Governor proposed to lay out a town there. ... The water was delicious. The land from where we bivouaced was one continual tract of upland, well calculated for sheep or at least better than any I have seen in the Colony. The Collie running the whole way through this land has induced me to apply for 60,000 acres. I have seen no tract in the country at all to be compared with it. I shall get in one half mile of navigable frontage and if so will be within ten miles of the town and port. The Governor has taken his own grant about twenty miles south and reserved to himself a delightful villa grant close to the town for a summer residence, adjoining which I am to have another. I have also a promise of a town allotment. Many are waiting and many will immediately ship themselves to this place...<sup>30</sup>

The English value the beauty of the estuary and the economic potential of the grasslands, the life-sustaining values of food provision, and the biodiversity values of the different types of vegetation. From the point of view of Henty, land seems a commodity for trade and status.

While the English are seeking land for their aspirations, *Elaap* people are present wherever they go. Colonials seek and receive direction from them,<sup>31</sup> while simultaneously selecting grants of land for themselves, on the presumption that the land is available for them to choose, privatise and transform. It is also on the basis that economic attainment, self-aggrandisement and pleasure are for those already privileged by financial and social status. Seeking homeliness and comfort, the colonials choose to make the district like their home in Europe, with their own foods and animals.

Yet *Elaap* people are already comfortable here and at home in their place. They help the colonial travelers, but are not recognised as land *bidier* – owner/occupiers with authority on or about this place. In these stories of colonisation, the land story is still strong in that the story tellers and stories are all around, watching, helping, pointing out, singing, dancing and caring. Bunbury learns a little Noongar language, but generally the British do not seem to recognise its value. Maybe they do not want to hear it; or know how.

### Cameo Two: Interweaving Stories

John and Helen Scott arrive in the Bunbury area to begin farming in January 1838 after their cattle are driven 200 km overland to Bunbury from Guildford (which is near Perth, 200km to the north). The Scotts and their children speak Noongar language, having learned it during the seven years they lived in Guildford before arriving in the area. The *Elaap* people welcome the family to the area and help the Scotts as required. The farm is named Eelup, and is between the newly re-named Leschenault Estuary and Preston River.



Plate 2: Picture is titled: *Three Bunbury Aborigines*. Plate 3: John and Helen Scott. Thanks to Names are recorded as Bobby, Sarah and Bunbury Historical Society. Maggie. Thanks to Bunbury Historical Society.

Over the years, the Scotts and the *Elaap* community form a productive partnership: particularly as the colony develops and more farms are established which limits the *Elaap* people from using their own land. Their young men regularly hunt together, with the Scott's diet comprising meat from kangaroo, wallaby, possum and quokka<sup>32</sup>, all of which are plentiful in the district. The Scotts also eat wild duck and many varieties of fish, some of which (such as yellowtail) are smoked.<sup>33</sup>

The Scotts work with the *Elaap* people in such a way as to help each other. Mrs Scott is known as a nurse and midwife to whom everyone – *Elaap* and settler women – turns for help, assistance, advice or food when they are hungry. On the morning in 1841 when Louisa Clifton visits to talk over her concerns about injustice she finds the Scott's place very busy, like a clinic, and many Noongar children and women are there for food

and to have their wounds treated. The Scotts usually have vegetables and meat but no money to give away when anyone comes looking for food.<sup>34</sup>

*Elaap* people Bobby, Sarah and Maggie are born in about 1850. It is highly likely their births are assisted by nurse Helen Scott who helps deliver most babies in the early colony. Later in their lives Bobby, Sarah and Maggie live on a reserve. To survive, they catch small fish and sell them to householders door to door on a reed skewer. They beg for food while on their rounds too, because the *Elaap* people are now prevented from going to most places where they have traditionally gathered fish, meat, fruits and vegetables.<sup>35</sup> Bobby, Sarah and Maggie hold stories; long stories about place and custom. It seems that the Scotts hear the stories, but the opportunity is lost on the general population.

### Cameo Three: Land for Economic Development

Marshall Waller Clifton (known all his life as Waller) is a devout Anglican who arrives with his family in March 1841 on the boat "Parkfield", with 92 other passengers. He is commissioner of the Western Australian Company which intends to develop the settlement of Australind on the eastern shore of the Leschenault Estuary.<sup>36</sup>

Australind<sup>37</sup> is designed using the development tenets of Edward Gibbon Wakefield,<sup>38</sup> Waller's wife's cousin. The company has purchased 103,000 acres which stretches from the Leschenault Estuary eastward into the hills and more than 40km north of the Collie River. The intention is for the land to be divided into blocks of 100 acres for farming, with 3000 acres to be put aside for subdivision into housing blocks for the Australind town area and further subdivision into ¼ acre blocks.<sup>39</sup>

The following excerpt from *The Australind Prospectus* of July 1840, shows economic development as the primary objective of the Western Australian Company:

A new era for [Western Australia] has ... now commenced... by the investment of capital in the acquirement of land, and the conveyance of settlers and emigrants to the most favourable point which could be selected upon the Western coast...

With these objects in view, the Company have purchased extensive blocks of land near Leschenault, in the maritime county of Wellington, in which district some few settlers have already established themselves. One of these tracts, containing more than [sic] 100,000 acres, is beautifully situated on the inlet formed by the embouchure of four Rivers, which pass through this property, or form its boundary, at the mouth of which Inlet there is one of the best ports on the Western coast ...

Here the chief town of the new settlement, to be called Australind, will be established. The selection of this spot has been the result of careful investigation.<sup>40</sup>

The aim is that only 'gentlemen of capital' are to be selected as purchasers, who are expected to bring their own servants – each of whom would receive a free passage from England for their labour.<sup>41</sup> Since Wakefield dislikes the idea of members of the lower classes owning land, the price is recommended to be sufficiently high to prevent this and establish a British property ownership tradition of class and privilege.<sup>42</sup>

Through the journals of both Waller and Anglican Reverend John Wollaston,<sup>43</sup> we notice that the immigrants are the minority group in an *Elaap* place in the 1830s and 1840s. *Elaap* people move around the houses and townships. *Midar* or corroborees – celebrations of place – are viewed by the British with curiosity and sometimes disdain. The *Elaap* people are endowed with abundant knowledge of sustainable food systems, securing it with little effort. Wollaston writes that the *Elaap* diet includes a white grub, kangaroos, birds, fish, whale meat, lizards and snakes, possums, various roots, bulbs and a white gum.<sup>44</sup> In the 1830s to the 1850s the immigrants are primarily dependent upon *Elaap* people for such basic tasks as guidance through the bush, particularly when travelling to Perth (200km north) or Busselton (50km south), assisting with river

crossings and portage,<sup>45</sup> retrieving lost horses,<sup>46</sup> tracking and stock-work<sup>47</sup> or running the mail.

As well as being co-located in the Bunbury/Leschenault District, another commonality between the two disparate groups of people is food. Throughout his journal Wollaston describes eating such foods as kangaroos, wallabies, birds such as swans, cockatoo soup, fish, shark and whale, and being hungry in late summer. He does not seem to ask the *Elaap* people about bush foods to gather or plant and yet many of the plants the settlers clear are edible – particularly the various orchid tubers and yams that still grow around the same area. It is clear that the colonials value the Leschenault Estuary district for its nurturing, life-sustaining qualities. However, the aspiration is towards economic growth and the production of culturally familiar foods. The intention is to change the place so that it feels like home in Britain, to derive nourishment and profit from it. There seems no interest in hearing the land's advice; it is seen with disinterest and disdain.

#### Cameo Four: Dispensing With the Stories of the Land

The *Elaap* people increasingly take the burden of the escalating number of conflicts caused by their welcoming the British to their place, but then being refused use of it or nourishment produced from it. The law is applied in a one-sided way, and convicted *Elaap* prisoners are sent to *Wadjemup* (known as the Dutch-named Rottnest Island) for such misdemeanours as stealing flour from the store. Louisa Clifton appreciates what she sees as their simple, natural ways and she is incensed by this injustice. She feels that white men who profess Christianity are not living up to Christianity's first principles.<sup>48</sup> Here is a quote from her writing after two *Elaap* men are led in to the Australind settlement:

Their distress and terror appeared great. After trying to elicit as much as possible from them, Papa determined to send them down to Mr Eliot, and he to proceed thither himself tomorrow to be present at their examination. Some of them will be sent, I fear, to Rottnest Island; a dreadful punishment it is; their heads are shaved and they become convicts in fact; but being deprived of liberty and independence so dear to wild man, they soon die of broken hearts.<sup>49</sup>

Louisa argues for fair dealing for Aboriginal people and the families of landless labourers.<sup>50</sup> However, she does not hear stories of place.

Overall, it appears the colonisers move in to the district with an unquestioned attitude to land and people as 'property' for development and profit. There are many different roles to play in the venture, but the basic ambition of economic growth is without question. It seems to be an imperative to actualise dreams of farms, towns and cities – and a competitive class-based society. In this view to hold affluence (wealth and property), status, class and power is the pinnacle of achievement in a hierarchically organised society. Value is seen in the aesthetic qualities of the Greater Bunbury/lower catchment area, particularly the riversides and 'rolling green' of valleys and riversides. Its life-sustaining values are also acknowledged, but economic gain is the highest value. Whilst there are some stories of close relationships and mutual respect between Noongar people and colonisers, such as the Noongar/*Wedjala*<sup>51</sup> partnerships associated with the Scotts, it seems that immigrants in the Greater Bunbury region more frequently regard the first peoples – and their stories – with a mixture of pity, scorn and ridicule. The land still speaks, however. This part of the story recounts only how people in the district came to disregard its stories, and forget the value of being-with place. We imagine that from the viewpoint of the land, it is just a small anomaly.

#### ***Boodjar Wangkiny: The Still Land Speaks.***

In this part of the story we mix our English-speaking voices with Noongar voices, because English is too shallow to properly make these points. *Elaap* people tell and sing stories in the local language, *Burong Wongi*,<sup>52</sup> a language that is onomatopoeic<sup>53</sup> and speaks with the energies and power of the land. Stories are told, sung, drawn and danced with the birth and passing of each day, moon and season. There is a continuous enfolding of the past with the present and the future through the wisdom of the *kundaam*,<sup>54</sup> deep Noongar knowledge; the dreaming. The unfolding story cycle is implicitly a participative, ongoing, relational one of people and local place. As Bracknell writes, "...song in Noongar society [is] a means by which a Noongar person continuously articulates connections to country and kin."<sup>55</sup> He also writes:

While Noongar language is presently regarded as endangered, more than 30,000 people identify themselves as belonging to the Noongar language group and some individuals and families in the south-west of Western Australia still converse and sing in Noongar language today.<sup>56</sup>

In Noongar language the cold times are called the *Nyitiny* – the ice-age – and many stories refer to this period. The Holocene Geological epoch refers to the last 11,700 or so years.<sup>57</sup> Just as the taming of animals and grains are beginning elsewhere in the world, the lagoon that has formed around the coast north of the estuary in *Elaap* is in the process of deepening and taking on the ecological function of an estuary. *Elaap* people are here, caring for this place much longer than the life of our estuary.

The wisdom of the ancestors is to hold, revitalise and pass on the stories for the future of the great grandchildren.<sup>58</sup> The natural, living capital of *Elaap Karlaboodjar* is older, more diverse and more responsive than the built capital of Europe. The old trees and ecosystems – such as the mangroves and the riparian vegetation around our waterways – are reminders of people who experience and story our place very differently. Noongar oral stories can be accurate over very long periods of time – such as the stories of the megafauna which after being passed off as myth and fairytales by the colonials and post colonials, have now been authenticated using evidence from caves of South Western Australia.<sup>59</sup> These stories are still here, in this place.

Stories carry vivacity and portray spirit of place. This story of people in-habiting the animate,<sup>60</sup> nourishing terrain of the estuary district, of being-with its spirit, is presented through four cameos.

#### Cameo One, *KurduBoodjar*: The Heartlands, Love of Place

*Elaap* culture is about reading and participating in the language of landscape. People are known by the features of their home-place, for example *derbalung* Noongar (estuary people), *bilgur* Noongar (river people), or *buyungur* Noongar (people of stoney ground or stoney hills).<sup>61</sup> The depth of this place-people relationship is sufficient to cause elderly people to walk many kilometres at the end of their lives, to die in their homelands.<sup>62</sup>

*Elaap* relate to each other through kinship, and this is also the way people relate to place. In the kinship system, everyone and everything – trees, animals, plants - are one of two halves or moieties: *manitjmat* or *wardangmat*.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, everyone and everything are male or female, including trees and plants. There are eight separate, equal classifications into which everyone and everything are born. Each group has their own loyalties and identities, but all are interdependent.<sup>64</sup>

Because more-than-human<sup>65</sup> beings – such as kangaroos or trees – also have kinship status, they are also the suppliers and the receivers of respect, care or responsibility. For example, the word *borungur* means totemic ancestor or 'in relation to', or second brother. This means a totem is treated in the same way as the duty of care towards one another in a familiar way, like a brother. This kinship system ties people to

place in a way that guarantees meaning and familiarity.<sup>66</sup> One's place is also family. This Noongar connection to place is called: *Kurduboodjar* meaning both heartlands and love of place.<sup>67</sup>

### Cameo Two, *Karlap*: Place and Fire

The Noongar notion of a house is not akin to 'home', or 'homeliness' or 'homelands'. A *maya*, hut, or a *kornt*, shelter, is ephemeral, short-lived, to be taken down each season and rebuilt. This is a process that takes only a few minutes for those with years of experience and skill; and is to make sure the construction materials are fresh, strong and waterproof in case of rain.<sup>68</sup> *Karl* means home, and it also means fire.<sup>69</sup> So our home is the land an extended family is related to, and cares for with fire, stories and seasonal routines. The area one extended family can burn is their *karlaboodjar*, sometimes called *karlap*, which also means property in land.<sup>70</sup>

The Noongar word: *bidi*<sup>71</sup> means pathways, or tracks through the *karlap*. Only the *bidier* for a place, the leader – who knows the tracks with great familiarity<sup>72</sup> – can burn it or authorise burning. The *bidier* are *karlapgur*, people of the place, and are the only people who are able to decide when, what and how to burn to revitalise their *karlap*. The leaders are the people who know and understand our place best – who are most familiar with the nature, stories and meaning of place.<sup>73</sup>

Cultural activities take place in seasonal time,<sup>74</sup> and are:

Birak: hot, dry time during December and January; reptiles in abundance, season of the young. Journeys to coast begin.

Bunuru: second summer, days shortening; season of adolescence when children learn toolmaking during February and March.

Djeran: season of adulthood; for marriages and courtship, April and May.

Makuru: first winter rains – season of fertility, June and July

Djilba: second rains filling waterholes and lakes; season of conception, August and September.

Kambarang: decreasing rain, season of wildflowers and birth; October to November.

In a seasonal way there are many signs that record the past and herald the future, noticeable all around in the landscape for people to read, hear and interpret. For example when the *moodjar* tree<sup>75</sup> flowers, it is meeting and business time across our lands, and when the emu berries are beginning to bud, it is a sign that emu eggs are being laid. Children learn to read the landscape and understand its meaning from a very young age. They learn to interpret its stories, and participate in its creativity and spirit of place. There are strict rules that define the ways activities are to be conducted. For example in an account called: "following the rules," Bennell<sup>76</sup> writes that *tjilkis* (small freshwater crayfish) should not be procured until after Christmas, and only then when respect in words and conduct has been given to the waterhole. Cold weather may be the result if proper protocol is not followed.

In this way *karlap* does not mean merely property in place; it also means familiarity, or family with place; literate and profoundly knowledgeable of *karl* or home. If a person is *karlap*, he/she can read, know and understand home-place and landscape.<sup>77</sup> He/she can dance its rhythms, sing its songs, understand its meanings of place and tell its stories. Rules must determine rituals, habits and practices. This is a very deep, encompassing sense of home. 'Home' in this sense is a deep, abiding concept implying sustainability of people and ecosystem over time.

### Cameo Three, *Boodjar*: Nourishing Terrain

*Karlapgur* (people of the place; the caretakers) live in *karlaboodjar* – homelands – across Leschenault Catchment. Each group have their own stories. There are diverse soil types and landforms, interdependent ecosystems and dialectal variations – each with their own people, songs, dances and justifications. Altogether these form songlines that sustain and strengthen *kundaam*, the dreaming or deep knowledge, into the present and future. A songline is shared by the *karlapgur* of the catchment;<sup>78</sup> people with a rich, deep knowledge of country, who play a part in its fertility.

The term *Boodjar*, country, is inclusive of ecosystem and people. Similarly *boodjari* means pregnant, full of Life. This word is an extension of the word: *boodjar*, which is understood as ‘nourishing terrain’ (a term first used by Bird Rose, 1996). A pregnant landscape is a nurturing, creative, fertile, productive place. It is animate, energetic and interactive in a reciprocal way.<sup>79</sup>

Some Noongar people refer to themselves as Bibbulmun, one interpretation of which is *bib* or *biba* which means breast, and *bul* or *bula* which means plenty. This is a concept implying plentiful food, an idea supported by Bates who states that on journeys, food in the form of game or other foods are harvested along the way. Since Bibbulmun are people of this fertile, biodiverse area of the state, it is likely that the word Bibbulmun refers to people of the place of plenty food.<sup>80</sup>

### Cameo Four, *Kundaam*: Noongar Ways of Knowing

Stories of the *Kundaam*, the time of the great awakening of the earth and advent of the ancestors, initiated the complex affiliations between people and place. Through these ongoing people-place relationships, the sacred past is also in the present time where the same characters continue to be active.<sup>81</sup> Their vitalities can be noticed by open-minded people who sit peacefully and pensively by a living watercourse or healthy water hole, particularly at sunset or sunrise.<sup>82</sup> For example:

... We come here to this place, *Minningup*, the Collie River, to share the story of this area or what makes it so special. It is the resting place of the *Ngangungudditj walgu*, the hairy faced snake. *Bardan ngang noyt*. He is our spirit and this is where he rests... This is where all our spirits will end up here. *Karla koorliny*, we call it – coming home. *Ngany kurt, ngany karla* – my heart, my home.<sup>83</sup>

As another example:

... It can be still and quiet, and then suddenly a wind comes across the water, circles a tree in the middle. How eerie and powerful that is. And you know straight away it's a special place.<sup>84</sup>

In this way the ‘long now’ is the basis of *Kundaam*<sup>85</sup>, or the Noongar belief system, in which stories and storylines, songlines and deep knowledge are present-ongoing. Bracknell cites colonial Robert Menli Lyon as saying:

...evenings are generally spent around their fires, singing or rather chanting their poetic compositions. I have reason to believe that their history and geography are handed down from generation to generation orally in verse<sup>86</sup>.

It is a profound, participative way of knowing, encompassing concepts supported by artistic-creative and experiential engagement with place.

In summary, *Elaap* people are *karlap*, meaning deeply knowledgeable about home-place. An *Elaap* relationship with place is one of kinship; it is one of being related with place in the same way as one's *moort*, or human relations. Respect and reciprocal obligations apply. People are constantly reading the landscape and all its signs. Cultural knowledge is a deep, embedded ecological and technical knowledge of place, of home, with an intuition based on senses connected with the world's imagination; the earth's story. Stories are enacted through drama and dance to honour nature daily. Stories of place are shared with children – along with protocols for respectful behaviour. Stories

live in place, across the landscape, and across time. They are still here, now, and they are calling to be heard.

### ***Nitja Elaap Boodjar, Derbal: This is Elaap Land and Estuary***

Today the colonial archetype remains with us in *Elaap*, and we are very concerned about economic growth. So we focus on abstract economic expressions, often having less regard for ecological and social considerations, due to the belief that economic growth will lead to human and ecological wellbeing. These are core perspectives of our way of life. Sadly, implicit in this economic focus is to disrespect the voice of the land; to ignore its songs and neglect its stories. It is to overlook its beauty and its many-natured creatures; to miss its vivaciousness and snub its spirit. In consequence, estuarine health declines.

The story of the people and culture of *Elaap* is a complex one that folds the past into the present and future. When we look closely into the state of our society and place, we see the past at the same time because our social, natural and built environments are the result of past and present endeavours. As well as our economic statements, we see reminders of *Elaap* endeavour, we hear songs of joy in place and we appreciate its aesthetic beauty. And when we listen, we hear stories of place.

Home is the place for which people have *kurduboodjar*. The knowledge of our place, of how to read the landscape, is still here. The cultural knowledge of the place remains. There is (still, to this day) linguistic, cultural and ecological evidence that a living, nourishing terrain<sup>87</sup> has a purpose and is responsive. The viewer needs an eye for beauty and ecological integrity, and a soul for compassion, imagination, connection and outward love. When we re-energise stories of place, we re-enliven its spirit; and then we will dance its life force. *Nitja Elaap boodjar, derbal. Ngulla Noongar wangkiny.*



Appendix One: Representation of the Leschenault District (2013)

Plate 4: Map shows Leschenault Estuary and Inlet, adapted from the Leschenault Inlet Management Authority (1993). Thanks to George Mardon and Mike Whitehead for their advice on place-locations, and to Tu Ly for graphic design.<sup>88</sup>

## Appendix Two: Noongar Language

In this essay Noongar language<sup>89</sup> is used where needed because it makes some place-based concepts easier to describe. The Bunbury Noongar Language Centre's orthography is used for the purpose, but direct quotes precisely reproduce the spelling used in the original source. Here is a list of Noongar words used.

*Elaap* – Noongar name for Leschenault District; also name of the people of the Leschenault District.

*Borungur* – totem or brother.

*Bidi* – path or trail, or veins.

*Bila* or *bilya* – river.

*Bilgur* – river people.

*Bila Barajillup* – Preston River, near the mouth.

*Bila Borrigup* – Collie River, near the mouth.

*Bidiya* (teacher or elder)

*Booga* or *bwok* – coat made from skins such as possum or small kangaroo.

*Boodjar* – a Noongar holistic concept of land or place that means full of life; ecosystem (and therefore people). Nourishing terrain.

*Boodjari* – pregnant, full of life.

*Burong wongi* – the language of the *Elaap* people.

*Buyungur* – people of the foothills, or rocky country.

*Derbal* – place where the salt water meets the freshwater.

*Elaap*: on or by the water; also used to refer to the people and their place.

*Derbalung* – ...of the place where the salt water meets the freshwater (estuary people).

*Kurduboodjar* – love of place, heartlands.

*Gwenilup* – place of the quenda.

*Kanya* – sacred.

*Karl* – fire, home. Home is where the *bidiya* can set fire to *boodjar*.

*Karlap* – home-place or fire place.

*Karlaboodjar* – shared property in land. The *boodjar* one is co-responsible for.

*Karlapgur* – kin who share in the *karlaboodjar*. People of the place, kin of the place.

*Katitjiny* – learning, speaking, knowing.

*Kobungur* – older brother.

*Kongan* – uncle.

*Koornt* – hut; often covered with green balga (grass tree) leaves for waterproofing.

*Kaneang* – of the west. *Elaap* people were regarded as *Kaneang Bibbulmen* (Bates, 1985).

*Mandjar* – meeting or festival, sometimes for trade (eg. *Mandjarup*).

*Kumal* – species of possum.

*Kurlbardi* – magpie.

*Manitjmat* – cockatoo lineage (moiety).

*Maya* – hut, often made from tea-tree or paperbark. *Maya* is also the name for a preferred species of tea-tree bark for hut construction.

*Mardalup* – foot-place, such as a ford or river crossing. There is a *Mardalup* at the mouth of the Collie River.

*Moort* – family or kinship relatives.

*Ngulla* – we.

*Nyitiny* – ice age.

*Waitj* – emu.

*Walitj* – species of eagle.

*Wargal* – carpet snake, also sacred snake who lives in healthy fresh water.

*Wardang* – crow.

*Wangkiny* – speaking, talking

*Wordungmat* – crow lineage (moiety).

*Yallor gannow* – yallor is a dance, and gannow are steps. *Yargril* – charcoal.

*Yongka – species of kangaroo.*

## Notes

1. Sandra Woollorton is Associate Professor and Director of Nulungu Research Institute, Notre Dame University, Broome. She has a background in education and cultural geography, and is interested in ecological literacy, sustainability transition cultures and place-based stories, particularly those relating to the nature of the relationship between people and place. Sandra is a Noongar language speaker.
2. Professor Len Collard is an Australian Research Council Chief Investigator with the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia. He has a background in literature and communications and his research interests are in the area of Aboriginal Studies, including Nyungar interpretive histories and Nyungar theoretical and practical research models. Len is a Whadjuk Nyungar and is a Traditional Owner of the Perth Metropolitan area and surrounding lands, rivers, swamps, ocean and its culture.
3. Pierre Horwitz is Professor of Environmental Science at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia. He has over 30 years of research experience in coastal and inland wetland ecosystems in southern Australia, where his policy intentions relate to better integrating the social and environmental determinants of human health.
4. 'Noongar' is the term used to refer to Aboriginal people of the South West of Western Australia.
5. A small map produced for this project is placed at Appendix One.
6. Brigham Galleries – Western Australian Aboriginal Art (nd), *Troy Bennell*, from <http://www.thebrighamalleries.com/Artists/Aboriginal/TroyBennell.htm> (retrieved 20 October 2013), and Wheatbelt NRM (nd), *Nyungar budjara wangany: Nyungar NRM wordlist and language collection booklet of the Avon Catchment Region*, Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management, Australian Government, Northam.
7. In this report, unless otherwise stated, Leschenault Estuary refers to the Leschenault Estuary and Inlet.
8. C. Bracknell (2014), "Wal-Walang-al Ngardanginy: Hunting the songs (of the Australian South-west)," *Australian Aboriginal studies* (1), pp. 3-18; and C. Bracknell (2015), "Kooral dwonk katitjiny (listening to the past): Aboriginal language, songs and history in south-western Australia," *Aboriginal history*, from <http://press.anu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/ch01.pdf> (retrieved 27 January, 2015).
9. 'Noongar' is a word meaning people in what is now acknowledged as the Noongar group of languages of South-West Western Australia. Historically, each of these languages or dialects have their own names. Similarly, each Noongar group who speak a dialect or language have their own names; such as the *Elaap* or the *Wadjuck*. In this essay we interchange occasionally between the use of the words *Elaap* and Noongar. This is because there are not yet comprehensive documents referring to *Elaap* people, so we have used more general Noongar information which applies. Similarly, there are many Noongar dictionaries from different regions, each recorded by different British speakers with their own diverse English accents. Therefore, the spelling we use is not consistent with any particular dictionary, although we attempt to use the orthography in use by the Noongar Language Project: Dandjoo Moordiyap Dabakarn.
10. This follows the work of B. Whorf (1956), *Language, thought and reality: selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, MIT Press, Cambridge; who was known for his ideas on linguistic determinism. His work is now associated with the notion of linguistic relativity.
11. *Elaap* was renamed 'Leschenault' by the French in 1803 to honour botanist Jean Baptiste Leschenault de La Tour who accompanied Captain Nicolas Baudin on his second South West WA visit. They anchored the ship *Géographe* in Koombana Bay and sent a party into the Estuary. (T. O'Brien (2003), *Compilation of early surveys, topographical features and Aboriginal names of regions covering original townsites of Bunbury*, Leslie O'Brien Publishing, Bunbury, p. 30; and T. Sanders (1975), *Bunbury: some early history*, Roebuck Society, Canberra, p. 2.)
12. P. Barnes (2001), *Marlston Hill and all that*, self-published, Bunbury.
13. C. Dortch (1984), *Devil's Lair, a study in prehistory*, Western Australian Museum, Perth.
14. V. Semeniuk (2000), "Sedimentology and holocene stratigraphy of Leschenault Inlet," *Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia*, 83 (4).
15. *ibid.*
16. Some of our project files are still visible at: <https://sites.google.com/site/leschenaultproject/home>
17. J. Hugues-dit-Ciles (2011), *Leschenault Estuary Water Quality Improvement Plan: Draft for Public Comments*, Department of Water, Bunbury.
18. D. Bird Rose (1996), *Nourishing terrains: Australian Aboriginal views of landscape and wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra.
19. S. Harben, L. Collard & G. Stasiuk (nd), *Our country, our stories, our people: recording traditional knowledge*, Murdoch University, Murdoch.
20. P. Barnes, J. Cameron & H. Willis (2010), *The Australind journals of Marshall Waller Clifton 1840 – 1861*, Hesperian Press, Victoria Park; and H.W. Bunbury (1930), *Early days in Western Australia: Being the letters and journal of Lieut. H.W. Bunbury*, edited by Lt.-Col. W. St. Pierre Bunbury & W.P. Morrell, Oxford University Press, London.

21. D. Bates (1985), *The native tribes of Western Australia*, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
22. As a base reference we used G.F. Moore (1850), *Descriptive Australian vocabulary*, S. Orr & Co, London.
23. L. Collard, S. Harben & R. van den Berg (2004), *Nitja beeliar boodjar noonookurt nyininy: A Nyungar interpretive history of the use of boodjar (country) in the vicinity of Murdoch University*, Murdoch University, Murdoch.
24. J. Hugues-dit-Ciles (2011).
25. S. Wooltorton (2013), *A sense of home: A cultural geography of the Leschenault Estuary District*, Edith Cowan University, from <https://sites.google.com/site/leschenaultproject/home>
26. H.W. Bunbury (1930) pp. 16–19.
27. *ibid*, pp. 12.
28. A.C. Staples (1979), *They made their destiny: history of settlement of the Shire of Harvey 1829–1929*, Shire of Harvey, Bunbury, pp. 5–24.
29. A.C. Staples (1979), p. 25.
30. G.E. Clarke (1946), *Early history of Bunbury*, Unknown, Bunbury, p. 10.
31. A.C. Staples (1979), p. 26.
32. A quokka is a small species of wallaby. For further information, see this fact sheet: <http://media.perthzoo.wa.gov.au.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/QUOKKA-Fact-sheet.pdf>
33. V. Glossop (2000), *Bunbury's first settlers: John Scott, May 1796 – July 29 1880 and Helen Forrest Scott, Nov 12 1793 – March 13 1883*, Verna Glossop, Perth; and T. Sanders (1975), *op. cit.*
34. G. Russo (1995), *A friend indeed: Louisa Clifton of Australind WA*, Vanguard Press, Perth, pp. 230, 231.
35. T. Sanders (1975), pp. 108–10.
36. P. Barnes et al. (2010).
37. Australind was named due to the parent company's connected investments in India.
38. Well known for his work in founding South Australia.
39. P. Barnes (2001) pp. 17–20; and P. Barnes (2013), *Marshall Waller Clifton*, unpublished essay.
40. P. Barnes et al. (2010), p. 684.
41. P. Barnes (2013).; and P. Barnes et al., (2010).
42. G. Russo (1995), p. 85. In his later years when Clifton was a MLC, he promoted the rights of ordinary citizens (P. Barnes (2013)).
43. G. Bolton, H. Vose & G. Jones (1991), "Introduction," in G. Bolton, H. Vose & G. Jones (eds), *The Wollaston Journals, volume 1*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands.
44. J.R. Wollaston (1991), "Picton: May 1841 - December 1842," In G. Bolton, H. Vose & G. Jones (eds), *The Wollaston Journals, volume 1*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, pp. 135, 149.
45. H.W. Bunbury, 1930, p. 35.
46. J.R. Wollaston (1991).
47. G.E. Clarke (1946), pp. 22, 23.
48. G. Russo (1995), p. 229.
49. *ibid*, p. 229.
50. *ibid*.
51. *Wedjala* is a Noongar word meaning non-Aboriginal.
52. D. Bates (1985). *Burong wongi* is a dialect of Noongar language.
53. Onomatopoeic languages use vocabulary that sound similar to local noises such as bird calls.
54. L. Collard et al., (2004); and S. Harben et al. (nd.)
55. C. Bracknell (2015), p. 3.
56. *ibid*, p. 2.
57. V. Semeniuk (2000).
58. L. Clarkson, V. Morrissette & G. Regallet (1992), *Our responsibility to the seventh generation: Indigenous peoples and sustainable development*, International Institute for Sustainable Development, Winnipeg.
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60. S. Harding (2006), *Animate Earth: science, intuition and Gaia*, Green Books, Cambridge.
61. D. Bates (1985), p. 47.
62. *ibid*, p. 49.
63. *ibid*, p. 192–3.
64. *ibid*, p. 193.
65. D. Abram (1996), *The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human world*. Pantheon Books, New York.
66. D. Bates (1985), p. 193.
67. G.F. Moore (1850), p. 45.

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68. *ibid*, p. 80; and R. Whitehurst (1997), *Noongar dictionary: Noongar to English and English to Noongar*, retrieved from <http://www.noongarculture.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Noongar-Dictionary-Second-Edition.pdf>
  69. G.F. Moore (1850), p. 53–55.
  70. *ibid*, p. 33.
  71. *ibid*, p. 10.
  72. *ibid*, p. 10.
  73. *ibid*.
  74. Further information on seasons is available at: <http://www.noongarculture.org.au> and at: <http://www.noongarculture.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Noongar-seasons.jpg>.
  75. *Moodjar* is the *Nuytsia Florabunda* or WA Christmas tree.
  76. T. Bennell (1993), *Kura*, Kurongkurl Consultancy, Bunbury, p. 17.
  77. G.F. Moore (1850), p. 53–55.
  78. Wheatbelt NRM (nd).
  79. D. Bates (1985); and D. Bird Rose (1996).
  80. D. Bates (1985), p. 47.
  81. E. Bennell & A. Thomas (1981), *Aboriginal legends from the Bibulmun tribe*, Rigby Publishers, Perth; and T. Bennell (1993).
  82. S. Woollorton (2013).
  83. Joe Northover, SWALSC 2009, in South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (2012), *Spirituality*, <http://www.noongarculture.org.au/spirituality/> (retrieved 27 September, 2013)
  84. Carol Innes & Margaret Drayton, SWALSC 2011, in South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (2012).
  85. Wheatbelt NRM (nd).
  86. C. Bracknell (2014), p. 7.
  87. D. Bird Rose, (1996).
  88. There are many variants of the word 'Noongar,' but this spelling will be used since that is the preference of the *Dandjoo Moordiyup Dabakarn* Bunbury Noongar Language and Culture Centre.
  89. from S. Woollorton (2013).