

JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT

EASTERN MAAR ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (EMAC)
GUNDITJ MIRRORING TRADITIONAL OWNERS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (GMTOAC)
PHILLIP ISLAND NATURE PARKS (THE NATURE PARKS)

Tuesday 24th March 2026

GROUNDBREAKING PARTNERSHIP TO PROTECT SACRED DEEN MAAR (LADY JULIA PERCY ISLAND)

A new research partnership will protect Deen Maar (also known as Lady Julia Percy Island), a sacred island and important wildlife site off the coast of Port Fairy.

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC), Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC) and Phillip Island Nature Parks (the Nature Parks) have joined together to undertake a collaborative wildlife research program.

The partnership grew from a respectful relationship, as the Nature Parks supported the rights and responsibilities of Traditional Owners in caring for Nyamat Meertheeyt/ Mirring (Sea Country).

The three groups have created a groundbreaking agreement that recognises the right for EMAC and GMTOAC to maintain ownership of the data collected from the research.

The joint research teams have been visiting the island to count Koorn Moorn (Australian fur seals) and Yapaapaamatal (short-tailed shearwaters), as well as to record cultural heritage.

Deen Maar is home to large breeding colonies of Australian fur seals and short-tailed shearwaters.

Both species face threats from rising sea levels, pollution, fishing and, more recently the high pathogenicity avian influenza global outbreak, which has not yet been detected in Australia.

Seal numbers at Deen Maar have dropped over the past 20 years. This may be due to alopecia, a condition linked to marine pollution that causes seals to lose their fur which limits their ability to stay warm and waterproofed at sea, leading to weight loss and potentially even death.

Deen Maar was officially declared rabbit free in September 2025 following an extensive program undertaken by EMAC, GMTOAC and the State Government, which has removed a major pressure on the fragile island ecosystem.

The research partnership aims to track wildlife numbers after the rabbit removal and before the potential arrival of high pathogenicity avian influenza.

The team also hopes to establish the source of the pollutants that have been attributed to the population decline in the Deen Maar seals by working with researchers from the Sydney School of Veterinary Science.

Significant cultural heritage has been found during the partnership already, adding clear evidence of Gunditjmarra presence on Deen Maar before colonisation.