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Associate of the National Museum of Australia      30 Year Member of the Professional Historians Association (Q)

S.E. Stephens Award 2019 Cairns Historical Society

6 November 2023

Dr. Sandi Robb  
Executive Officer  
Cairns Museum  
PO Box 319 Cairns 4870

**The Falsification of your tribal map display at your Museum is a land-grab by unauthorised representatives.**

As the recipient of the 2019 *S. E. Stephens Award* by the Historical Society of Cairns, it astounds me that nobody at your Museum bothered to look at my MA(Qual) thesis (1990), which is on your bookshelves or look at my booklet *The Bama, People of the Rainforest* (1992), and the Map contained within. This should have raised questions about any map being proposed – it seems it didn't. What you have on display as the *Gimuy Waluba Wulubarra Yidnji* is a falsification – someone has an agenda which doesn't represent the truth. I have attached my response to the question of where tribes were before the coming of Europeans.

Both Roth (1910)<sup>1</sup>, Tindale (1938)<sup>2</sup> and McConnel (1939)<sup>3</sup> identify that Cairns' plain and the northern coastal Barron River [*Bana Bidagarra*] were the tribal group of the Yirkanji (*Yirrganydji*), from the Cairns plain to the Mowbray River (where the Djabugay had access to the coast). However, west of Freshwater Creek were the *Buluwanydji*, extending over the range on the southside of the middle Barron River, encompassing Kuranda and surrounds above *Din Din* - the Barron Falls to the Clohesy River. The *Yirrgay* (language of the *Yirrganydji*) was akin to *Buluwai* and *Djabugay* to the north of the Barron River (*Bana Wuruu*).

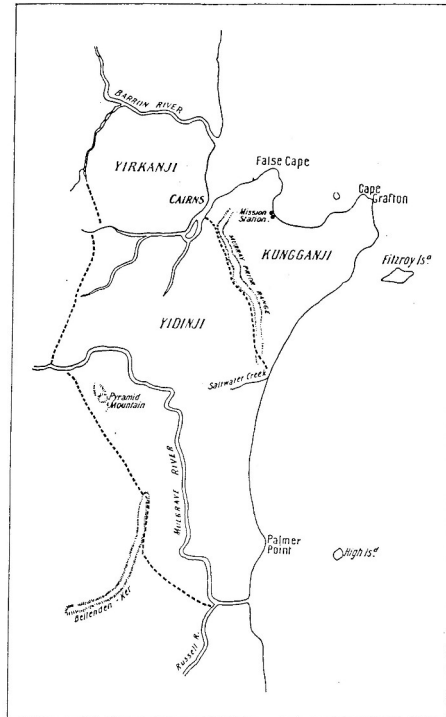
<sup>1</sup> W.E. Roth, *The Queensland Aborigines*, Vol. III, 1907-1910, Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1984, Plate XXVII.

<sup>2</sup> N.B. Tindale, 1938, SA Museum has a Shell map where he drew the rainforest tribal boundaries in c.1940

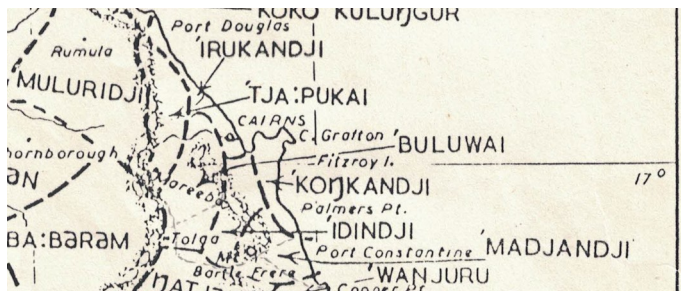
<sup>3</sup> U. McConnel, Map of the coastal area from Cooktown to Cairns, C.Y.P., 1939.



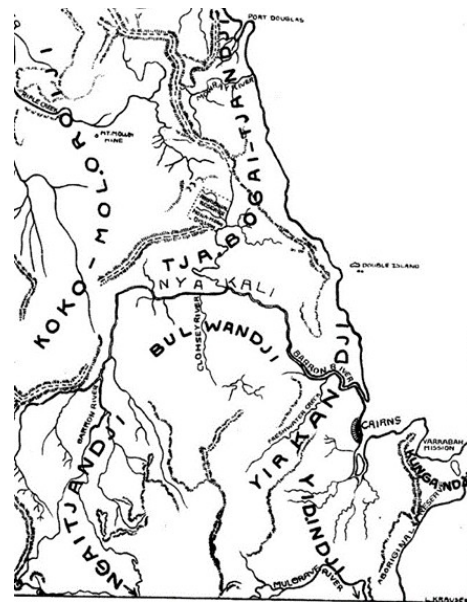
Tindale Shell map 1972 (1938 data)



Roth 1910



Tindale 1938



Ursula McConnel 1939



The AIATSIS Map ostensibly of our region is misleading (& wrong),<sup>4</sup> as is the Gimuy Waluba Wulubarra Yidinji which falsely claims to represent members of the *Yidinydji* tribe.<sup>5</sup> However, in conjunction with Roth and McConnel, Tindale's (original map) and his Shell map is irrefutable evidence of where the tribal boundaries for the tribes of the Cairns rainforest region were. Unfortunately for the Museum, this makes the supposed Gimuy Walubarra Yidinji map a fabrication.

In my mapping of walking pads (pathways) in my M.A.(Qual) 1990 thesis, I looked at how tribes interacted with one another and the highways that the *Bama* used up and down the coast and inland over the ranges. Tindale also drew on a Shell map\* of the Cairns district where he identified the tribe *Yidinydji*, going from roughly Picnic Hill to the sea, encompassing Admiralty Island (which was likely a shared resource). He also identifies where the *Yidinydji* boundaries were at the confluence of the Russell/Mulgrave Rivers, as well as the boundary over the range (via the walking pads up to White Rock Lookout – *Damarri's bunggu*, knee), then skirting inland south to around Bones Knob on the Tableland, then to near Lake Eacham and then to the coast, just below what later became Constantine Point.

As both the *Gungganydji* and *Yidinydji* have Storywaters dealing with *Damarri's* legend about how he took an axe from his cheek at what he called *Woree*.<sup>6</sup> It seems Tindale's Shell map of the Cairns and its Hinterlands, dated from 1938/40 is the boundary between the *Yidinydji* and the *Yirrganydji*. Looking at Roth, Tindale (particularly his Shell map\*) and McConnel maps, they all say that the Cairns plains (roughly north of Picnic Hill) are identified as *Yirrganydji*. The *Yidinydji* according to Dixon "...People did not spend much time on the seacoast, although it was common for them at certain seasons to camp along the beach at *Buddabadoo*, and it is notable that in their language ...[*Yidiny*]...there are words for all the edible fresh-water fish but for hardly any of the salt-water fish."<sup>7</sup>

I have also found a copy in my files of the 1992 "Yarrabah Century Oral History Project", for the Yarrabah Community Council, Co-Ordinators Roy Gray, Darren Miller and Lynelle Thomas and the tapes were collected in 1991<sup>8</sup>. In my MA(Qual) in 1990 I did not delineate tribal boundaries in the immediate Cairns region as I wasn't as aware of many of the many facets that I am now discovering. During the 1990's I was the Research Consultant for the *Malanbarra Yidinydji* and then the Wet Tropics Management Authority (1993/4); course writer for TAFE Ranger Program and went on to become Ranger Trainer Co-ordinator for the *Djabugay*, *Malanbarra Yidinydji* and *Yirrganydji*. Through-out this period I had close associations with the Rangers and Elders, and this influenced my approach to research and writing. This meant I tried to look for evidence from the primary sources to give validity to my interpretation. My PhD on the History of Cairns was rated as 'Out Standing' and I tried to make sure the *Bama* were truly recognised for their civilisation.

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<sup>4</sup> Their umbrella languages for *Djabugay* and *Yidiny* are disputed by 5 of the 8 tribes in the Cairns area. I informed AIATSIS 30 years ago and they went ahead with umbrella languages, not the tribes of the Cairns area. <https://buluwai.org/aiatsis-forgotten-tribes-of-far-north-queensland>

<sup>5</sup> *Malanbarra*, *Walubarra*, *Bundabarra*, *Warginbarra*, *Badjabarra* and *Dulgubarra* who were among the clans of the *Yidinydji*; see Dixon, *A Grammar of Yidiny*, Melbourne, 1977, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Dixon, *Words of Our Country*, UQP, 1991, p.138, he identifies 'warru' as top portion of jaw, cheek.

<sup>7</sup> Griffin, *Yarraburra*, 1967, p.30

<sup>8</sup> R. Gray, D. Miller & L. Thomas, "Yarrabah Century Oral History Project 1892-1992", Yarrabah Community Council, 1992.

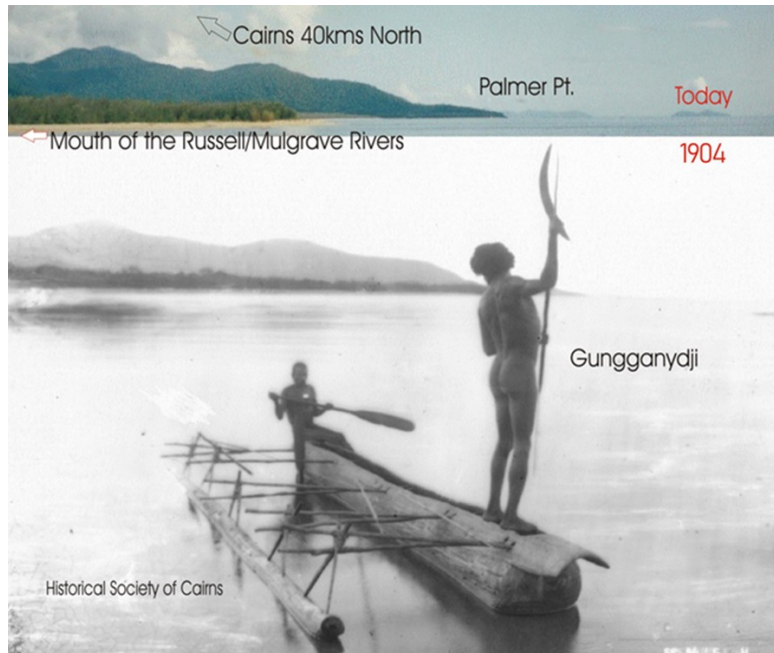
From my investigations I have found that:

- From the “Yarrabah Century Oral History Project” (1992) interviewed **Lucy Fourmile and Hazel Barlow** where Hazel Barlow records the northern boundary of the *Yidinydji* : “from Gordonvale to Reeves Creek and to Reeves Creek to Edmonton, and from Edmonton to White Rock, and from White Rock to Fourmiles ... Coming from second beach, right back this way to Hills Creek, Pine Creek to Green Hill that’s what I know Idi [*Yidinydji*] owns.” (p.39)

- **Elizabeth Margaret Eileen Wason** (recorded in 1991, Interview 3), was born in Yarrabah in 1910 and her “**father’s name was Walter Fourmile who came from Mareeba. See there was six boys or Fourmile people – they had to take that name Fourmile because they had no surname, and they used to go down to Fourmile, you know, where the racecourse in Cairns. That’s how they got that name and they came from Mareeba through Kuranda Range, that’s the old beaten pad they had; they came down to Redlynch, they went to Redlynch and they said, oh well, we’ll go to Cairns.**”(p.41) Later Ms Wason records that in response to the question: “ ‘**Where you from? We come from Mareeba, we walked through down to Cairns.**” She later added that they were “**Supposed to be on a visit but they remain here. They were all young boys, about fifteen or sixteen then at the time, and so that’s how they came to Yarrabah. They were my father, Popeye Charlie and Percy Fourmile, Teddy Fourmile and Philip. That five. The sixth one was Joe Fourmile. They all came together from Mareeba – stayed at the Fourmile camp and came to Yarrabah.**” (p.41) The Fourmiles came from *Muluridji* territory, likely using message sticks to travel through *Buluwanydji* territory down the range crossing over Freshwater Creek into *Yirrganydji* territory and then went on to the area (near the Racecourse which was called the ‘Fourmile’), and then wondering around the Cairns township, before being asking if they wanted to go Yarrabah, which they did. It is apparent that the Fourmile claim is not in the *Yidinydji* territory, but around Mareeba.

So your map and text from the *Gimuy Waluba Wulubarra Yidnji* is a falsehood which should not be on display. The so-called 'Gimuy Fish Festival' would undoubtedly be for freshwater fish as the *Yidinydji* had few words for salt-water fish. Unfortunately, the Bama who wrote the First Esplanade Information module also mis-identified the photograph below.

Photograph T. Bottoms ↓



Photographed by A.J. Colclough ↑

Ethnologist, Walter Roth's in *Ethnography of North Queensland* and wrote: "Dug-out cut square at either extremity; with one outrigger, capable of carrying five to six people. Mossman to Cape Grafton." However, outriggers also extended down to the Mulgrave and Russell Rivers (to the left in the middle distance), and possibly as far as Hinchinbrook Island. The view of the Mulgrave and Russell Rivers, was taken from the cove to the west of Bramston Point (south of Russell Heads), looking north to Palmer Point. The standing *bama* is holding a woomera, peculiar to the Gungganydji<sup>9</sup>.

P.C. Griffin's English version in *Yarraburra* (1967) deals with Kunghanji (*Gungganydji*) Myths and Legends of Dummerly & Kwiol (*Damarri & Guyala*), which the Linguist Dixon records in the language of *Yidiny* in his work's *A Grammar of Yidiny* and *Words of our Country*. As Griffin recorded *Gungganydji* legends in the mid-1960s before the advent of Native Title in Queensland; where they claimed a much bigger proportion of the Cairns region, it seems appropriate that in junction with Dixon's *Yidiny* translation, that there was a reason for why those legends are retold. These Storywaters, as I identified in my MA(Qual) thesis, are Stories which "are the undisputed proof of ownership of a particular track of land."<sup>10</sup>

Individual tribes of the area had contact with each other through a myriad of trails or walking pads to the north, south, east (on the coast they had regular sea-voyages) and west of their territory.<sup>11</sup> These were well established and helped cultivate and perpetuate social and economic relationships between tribes. In the 1990s an archaeological survey by Darrin Lee Long identified three major walking pads in the Goldsborough Valley:

<sup>9</sup> Roth, *op.cit.*, Bulletin 13, p.199.

<sup>10</sup> Bottoms, 'Djarrugan, the Last of the Nesting', JCU MA(Qual), Cairns, 1990, p.35.

<sup>11</sup> See T. Bottoms, 'Djarrugan, the Last of the Nesting', JCU, M.A.(Qual), Cairns, 1990.

The *Yidinydji* Trail, that travelled up the slopes of the Gillies Range and onto the Atherton Tablelands; the *Bana Dingalbarra* Trail, its route began at Kearney's Flat and travelled over the Bellenden Ker range and finished at Behana Creek; and the Gadgarra Trail, which leads south to behind Mt. Bartle Frere.<sup>12</sup>

These were a part of a multitude of walking pads that criss-crossed the tribal areas of Cairns Rainforest Region.<sup>13</sup> The *Gungganydji* and *Yirrganydji* also had sea routes along the coast and out to the Great Barrier Reef.

Tindale in his Shell map (1938/40) has the *Yidinydji* tribe northern border going roughly from Picnic Hill to the opening of Trinity Inlet, near *Gimuy*<sup>14</sup> (which would have been a mix resource because of the fresh-water lagoon) encompassing the Admiralty Island to *Bana Gidiirri* ['Flame Creek'] - Skeleton Creek.

About Admiralty Island (south of Cairns) because of the presence of mangroves was also likely to be a mixed resource which Mjöberg (1918) states that: "If a tribe has a surplus of vegetables or game in its area, the neighbouring tribes are often invited in to harvest and hunt the surplus."<sup>15</sup> The *Yidinydji* had seasonal camps/villages located throughout their territory and as Horsfall noted they "took advantage of seasonal productivity and preferred weather."<sup>16</sup> Occasionally, when there was a particular food species, the whole clan would gather in response to a large quantity of food to accommodate the gathering.

Dixon even explains that: "Yidinydji myths clearly state that their present (coastal) territory was at one time occupied exclusively by the Gungganydji people. A man – called, in some accounts, Yidiny or Yidi – came by boat from the north with his people (in the story, all men) after their own country was inundated by water."<sup>17</sup>

*The Port Denison Times* reported August 1877 that "timber being plentiful further up the inlet, there were a good many men engaged in cutting it: but the blacks have been very troublesome, stealing their tools, rations, blankets, &c., and many [timber-getters] have left off."<sup>18</sup> During the late 1870s & 1880s, 'Edith Vale' on Redbank Creek gave access to Trinity Inlet and to vessels to ship the tin from Herberton. Over this period the packers travelled through *Bmarbarum*, *Ngatjanydji* and *Yidinydji* territory increasing the chance of more violent encounters. So much so, that in December 1884 through to January 1885 the Native Police and settlers attacked an inland *Yidinydji* village on the tableland and followed it up with an attack down the Little Mulgrave and to *Bana Gidiirri* ('Flame Creek' – Skeleton Ck) finishing off with a massacre of at least 16 Bama. As a result, *Bama* of all tribal persuasions became refugees in their own country.

**The Skeleton Creek Story:** In June 1878 Cairns Prospecting Expedition, led by J. Hill interacted on a congenial level with members of the *Yidinydji* on the Mulgrave River. Interestingly, no mention is made of their carrying or using firearms. The party camped on *Bunda Birrma* or Picnic Hill, from where they travelled parallel to the western range and "[c]ame to a freshwater creek. We passed

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<sup>12</sup> Darrin Lee Long, "The Preliminary Assessment of the Cultural Heritage of the Goldsborough valley researched and prepared this Report from January 12 to April 30", 1992. pp.7-8.

<sup>13</sup> Bottoms, *op.cit.*, p.21-24.

<sup>14</sup> The freshwater lagoon was between the former Mazlin building [cnr Shields & Spence Sts) and Orchid Plaza.

<sup>15</sup> E. Mjöberg, *Amongst Stone Age People in the Queensland Wilderness*, (1918) Translated by S.M. Fryer, Oxley Library, Brisbane, 1986, p.148.

<sup>16</sup> N. Horsfall, *Living in Rainforest*, PhD, JCU, 1987,

<sup>17</sup> R.M.W. Dixon, *A Grammar of Yidiny*, CUP, Melbourne, 1977, p.14.

<sup>18</sup> *The Port Denison Times*, 25 August 1877, p.9.

several native huts, one of which we examined, and saw the remains of a blackfellow's skull and bones. Crossed over to the other side of the creek, which we named Skeleton Creek." *Bunda Birrma* refers to the hilltop as being the 'place of charcoal' or campsites, whereas today's 'Picnic Hill' was what the early white settlers called it, as they would row up the Inlet, moor their dinghy's, climb the hill and have picnics on it. It is located in the suburb of White Rock, which derived its name from White Rock Peak (575m) located beneath Mount Sheridan (605m). To the Yidinydji the peak was *Bunda Mandi Gunydji* ('Mt. Broken Hand'). The Prospecting Expedition reached the Mulgrave where one Yidinydji traded a dilly-bag for a fishing line and some hooks. The Bama was so at ease with the visitors that one man sat "down amongst us, [and] made himself comfortable for about an hour." Mr Hill observed that "native huts [are] to be seen everywhere on both sides of the river."

**Your current display I have been in contact with members of the Buluwai and Diane Brim stated that on:**

"25 January 2021, Seith Fourmile and Peter Hyde came to Gudabah Creek to show us their connection to *Buluwai* country. I've written in one of my attached letters:

As you know, the purpose of this meeting was to address your claim of Idindji family connections to Buluwai. You were advise Buluwai is a Patrilineal society and you concurred Idindji as being the same. Through one of my six ancestral mothers, Kal:awara, a Djabugay woman, was your claim. We anticipated seeing your Tindale family trees, other evidence, but sadly none was presented'. 'I fail to see how our female Djabugay ancestor equates to your Idindji claim on Buluwai country'?<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, I have been in touch with the *Malanbarra Yidinydji* through Agnes Munro and Frank Royee and Agnes has stated that they wanted their names excluded from the Gimuy Walubarra Yidinji, as they **do not** speak for the *Malanbarra Yidinydji*.<sup>20</sup> I have known the *Malanbarra* for over 30 years and they are increasingly upset about their being including in this spurious claim.

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<sup>19</sup> See Ms Diane Brim letter of 26/03/21, to Chief Executive Officer, Buluwai Indigenous Corporation in Appendix A .

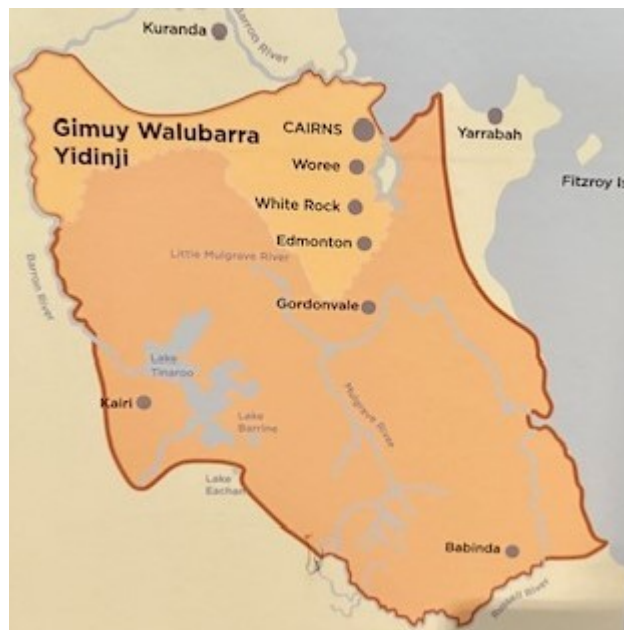
<sup>20</sup> See Ms Agnes Munro letter rejected the Gimuy Walubarra Yidinji claim. See *Malanbarra Yidinydji* letter in Appendix B.



## In Summary

If you look at the Gimuy Walubarra Yidinji claim:

1. The Fourmiles are probably *Muluridji* from Mareeba.
2. They are claiming falsely that Cairns was their territory, when three primary sources before the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, state that it was *Yirrganydji* territory.
3. They are claiming *Buluwanydji* territory from Freshwater Creek over the range (excluding Kuranda) to the Clohesy River, and then down to Kairi (which is Inland Yidinydji, not this mob).<sup>21</sup>
4. This claim, without the permission of the *Malanbarra Yidinydji*, includes the Goldsborough Valley.
5. They spuriously claim *Gungganydji* territory down the coast to the Mulgrave and Russell Rivers. See Roth (1910), Tindale (1938) and McConnel maps.



I hope you understand that there are many 'murri's' who don't know about this claim and would be infuriated if they did. So until there is a settlement I wonder if it would be wise take this presentation down until it has been adjudicated. Unfortunately, what is displayed is untruthful and I think I have explained why.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy Bottoms".

Dr Timothy Bottoms

Historian

<sup>21</sup> Appendix A – Buluwai response to Gimuy Walubarra Yidinyji fictitious claim.

## Appendix A – Buluwai response to Gimuy Walubarra Yidinyji fictitious claim:

Buluwai Indigenous Corporation 8867  
Cairns Regional Claim Group (QC2016/008) (QUD692/2016)  
PO Box 661, Kuranda QLD 4881  
Phone: 07 4093 9008  
Email: [office@buluwai.org](mailto:office@buluwai.org)



Date: 26 March 2021

Seith Fourmile, Peter Hyde via email

RE: TRIBAL BOUNDARIES BETWEEN IDINDJI AND BULUWAI

Dear Seith and Peter,

In reference to the above, I write this letter addressing the latter part of our meeting held 25 January 2021 at Gudabah Creek and from my previous letter dated 26 March 2021.

Millennia ago, our ancestors foresight of a fully functioning society that sustained our people throughout time, cannot be faltered. Ancient agreements of tribal boundaries according to our Dreaming, continues to hold true today, they remain permanent landscape markers for us to see and remember.

According to landscape, Redlynch, Skeleton Creek and Tinaroo are 'Three-way Junctions' or 'Common Ground' that saw Buluwai, Djabugay, Irrukandji, Idindji and others meet safely without fear or harm. Stories of these places are still told by Buluwai neighbours.

The Frontier Wars were the actions of a lawless colonial society that had good and bad folk. Skeleton Creek and Tinaroo was over-run by invaders, remnants of our war-torn neighbouring tribesmen became refugees in Buluwai country. We expect to hear 'Buluwai -?- of Redlynch', hence the importance of providing occupational evidence before 1876.

The AIATSIS1996 Map of Indigenous Australia fine print states 'not suitable for native title or other land claims', it denies unique, individual tribes their identity, language and existence. For this reason and this specific area, I attached a copy of the map showing Traditional Tribal Estate boundaries submitted for the Cairns Inquiry.

For Buluwai Indigenous Corporation, we cannot change or fix what isn't culturally broken, our 1916 tribal history is too recent to claim otherwise. Put simply, we don't have the authority to change what our ancestors already agreed upon.

In claiming to be a traditional owner, our actions must be 'Based on traditional laws and customs; exercised in accordance with traditional laws and customs.

As in the past, we continue to offer good relations with all our tribal neighbours and work together on joint projects for the betterment of all our future generations. In good neighbourly fashion, we extend further invitations for talks, ideas of how we can continue to hold our ancient, cultural values in an ever-changing modern world.

I thank you for your time in reading my letter.

Yours sincerely

Dianne Brim

Chief Executive Officer  
Buluwai Indigenous Corporation