

Musselroe Wind Farm on Tebrakunna Country

A partnership that tells truth and (em)powers

Warning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders that this story contains the images, voice and name of someone who is with the Ancestors

On the far northeast tip of Trouwerner/ Lutruwita/ Tasmania, the Melaythenner Teeackana Warrana (Heart of Country) Aboriginal Corporation has formed a unique and fruitful partnership with the Musselroe Wind Farm – developing a relationship that is one of respectful partnership, belonging and exploring opportunities.



The 168 MW Musselroe Wind Farm at Cape Portland was commissioned in 2013. In an average year, the project provides five percent of Tasmania's energy through the 56 x 3 MW wind turbines that crop across the rugged coastline. Originally built by Hydro Tasmania, a state-owned enterprise, Musselroe wind farm is now owned and operated by Woolnorth Renewables.



Image courtesy of Woolnorth Renewables.

Formed in 2008, Melaythenner Teeackana Warrana (Heart of Country) Aboriginal Corporation (MTWAC) “supports people to understand history as they reconnect with their ancestral

lands and celebrate cultural practices”.¹ MTWAC has over 400 members who share aboriginal ancestry and connection to Tebrakunna Country. Many are linked to the famed warrior, clan leader and negotiator, Mannalargenna. MTWAC’s name means ‘heart of country’, and they honour this as they conduct their organisational activities with care, generosity and authenticity.

From the outset, MTWAC’s co-founder, Aunty Patsy Cameron AO has been heavily involved in stewarding the relationship with the Musselroe Wind Farm. As a highly regarded Elder, historian and educator Aunty Patsy is dedicated to truth-telling: sharing the darkest parts of history while also generously sharing the vibrant and dynamic culture of her people and finding positive ways to live reconciliation in action.



The partnership

The partnership between MTWAC and the Musselroe Wind Farm started when they began advising on the heritage studies for the wind farm during the planning phase. Through this process, Aunty Patsy Cameron and others from MTWAC formed strong working relationships with staff from the wind farm, especially Robert ‘Bob’ Barbour. He emphasises the importance of a ‘relationships first’ approach and Aunty Patsy agrees “it has been respectful and genuine from the beginning”.

The collaborative process revealed important cultural and ecological sites, which the parties have worked together to determine how to best manage.

The partnership has led to many initiatives over the past 12 years.

“...it has been respectful and genuine from the beginning”

— Aunty Patsy Cameron MTWAC elder, historian and educator

“We recognise the importance of building and maintaining relationships first, and working from there”

— Robert Barbour, Head of Risk, Compliance & Systems, Woolnorth Renewables

¹ Office for the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, [Breathing in Mannalargenna](#), 2019

The Tebrakunna Visitors Centre

An idea evolved to establish a visitor and education centre at the wind farm, that could house information about local Aboriginal history and living culture alongside information about the wind farm. Aunty Patsy met with the CEO of Hydro Tasmania and put it to him: “you have the lease of our ancestral lands for the next 25 or so years, we want you to do something to honour our ancestors and our people who care for Country today ... we want people to know about the Aboriginal stories of this land, we want to control our story and our culture”. He asked what she wanted and she said, “an education and information centre” and he said “done!”

A site was selected to overlook the historically significant coastline of Little Musselroe Bay and Swan Island, where the Pairrebeener people and their famed leader Mannalargenna were first exiled in 1830 as a result of colonisation. Plans for the Tebrakunna Visitors Centre were developed in partnership, which now boasts a wonderful view of both the turbines and the commanding landscape. The building represents the shape of a traditional stone structure that is recorded as being 12 metres long and housing up to 40 people in a half a moon shape, which Aunty Patsy provided to the architect as a concept.



The Tebrakunna Visitors Centre. Image courtesy of Woolnorth Renewables.

Aunty Patsy curated the telling of Pairrebeener stories, photos and artefacts, which now sit in a prominent spot in the visitors’ centre. The construction costs of the centre were covered by the wind farm as part of the capital costs of the construction. It is open almost every day of the year, attracting thousands of visitors a year, and the operation costs are paid by the wind farm.

The two organisations also worked together to do cultural plantings around the Centre. Aunty Patsy describes “of course the wombats have taken over now! And it’s a bit wild. But that is part of it being a cultural site”.

The centre has given MTWAC a place to bring people to share culture, tell truth and run education activities. “It’s given us a space to convene, to bring people, to explain our history and to host events. It gave us a physical space to be on Country. Just to be on our ancestral homeland is just so significant”, explains Aunty Patsy. In this way, it has been a central enabler for performing and sharing living culture and was the site for the first Mannalargenna Day celebration. MTWAC also run cultural sensitivity training at the centre, which they feel is essential for truth-telling and reconciliation

Mannalargenna Day

Mannalargenna day celebrates the history and living culture of the Pairebenna people, held on the grounds of the wind farm each year on the birthday of ancestral clan leader Mannalargenna. The event has now been running for 12 years and attracts up to 1,000 people each year. It is an opportunity to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together, to learn about and celebrate culture, to honor truth-telling and to build positive connections in community and to country.

The day involves yarning circles, dancing, art exhibitions, demonstrations, language learning and cultural food as well as tours of the wind farm. Musselroe staff contribute to organising and running the day, erecting marquees and providing amenities for visitors.

The event is described as reconciliation in action, where an inclusive environment is created to share culture and stories.



Access to Country

After several years, the size of the centre was restricting Mannalargenna day activities, and MTWAC worked with Bob to find a new site with room to expand and do more. The wind farm lease includes a coastal plot 80 hectares that does not have wind turbines on it, which has become the new home of Mannalargenna Day, and the Tebrakunna Rangers base.

Woolnorth and MTWAC have been working to formalise MTWAC’s access to an 80-ha coastal block of land on which the Tebrakunna Ranger Base operates and Mannalargenna Day is now held, and in 2024 this was realised through a 20-year lease agreement. They continue to work towards a long-term vision of the freehold title being returned to Pairrebeener people.

Access to this land has enabled MTWAC to build a base for the Tebrakunna Rangers to carry out their mission to care for Country and build sustainable employment for Aboriginal people within the region. Access has also enabled MTWAC to gather regularly to perform cultural ceremonies and celebrations including Mannalargenna Day. With aspirations to develop tourism, accommodation and marine enterprises, access to land is a key enabler to rebuild connections to Country, sustain cultural practices and develop financial security.

“It gave us a physical space to be on Country. Just to be on our ancestral homeland is just so significant... we belong - we can go there to walk, to laugh, to cry, to share, to feel our ancestors and to care for our ancestral lands”

— *Aunty Patsy Cameron, MTWAC elder, historian and educator*

The Tebrakunna Ranger Program

MTWAC have worked with Woolnorth to understand Aboriginal heritage of the site and to plan for how to best manage that heritage, and how to best build the project around that heritage. The Tebrakunna Ranger Program is now part of delivering this.

MTWAC initiated the Tebrakunna Ranger Program in 2023, which has now grown to 12 people being employed and 14 undertaking training in ecosystem and conservation land management. Rangers are able to use the MTWAC land to practice their skills and to trial land management practices that integrate cultural practices. The Rangers are working towards caring for the coastal areas of the wind farm. Bob, who is the Head of Risk, Compliance & Systems, explains: “the ecosystems are actually dynamic managed ecosystems – a two-way symbiotic relationship between aboriginal and natural landscapes. It's great to be part of bringing that traditional land management back through the rangers”.

Outcomes and impact

The partnership has taken many twists and turns over the years, through bricks and mortar contributions from the wind farm, through to the less visible sweat of staff from both parties as they run Mannalargenna Day celebrations. The ways the parties have formed relationships and explored opportunities over time, as their mutual interests intersect, has enabled the partnership to deliver the range of outcomes and impacts it had.

For MTWAC and the Pairrebeener people, the biggest outcome has been the ability to connect with Country, rekindle and share their cultural and spiritual practices. For them, it is significant to have a place that “we belong - we can go there to walk, to laugh, to cry, to share, to feel our ancestors and to care for our ancestral lands”, Aunty Patsy explains. It has also supported MTWAC to develop as an Aboriginal Corporation through the ability to run events, training, programs and commercial activities.

From Woolnorth's perspective, **the partnership has helped the wind farm to navigate cultural heritage requirements smoothly and to build social licence.**

"It's valuable to be a part of a team that values community... this has really been a two-way relationship. We get help around the heritage side of things, to fulfil our regulated requirements, we get access to that technical knowledge... It's also part of building the social licence needed to get a project like this off the ground, in a very genuine way. That has really enabled us to do our wind farm planning and construction smoothly and quickly"

— Robert Barbour, Head of Risk, Compliance & Systems, Woolnorth Renewables

Enablers

Both parties identify that genuine goodwill for the relationship to flourish and an interest in finding opportunities that can meet mutual interests has been central to the partnership, as has been the opportunity to participate from the very beginning. Aunty Patsy explains that "the activities of the wind farm and their association with MTWAC shows how we can work together under trusting and respectful relationships".

The partners describe several key enablers that underpin their 12-year partnership:

- A mutual commitment to building relationships first, then doing business second
- Mutual respect, mutual benefit
- Identifying common goals to work together on
- The importance of long term staff on both sides
- Delegated authority to work together on things, make decisions and implement actions
- Direct access to company and project decision makers.

As Nick, MTWAC CEO, explains, it has been very important that "the non-Aboriginal side being willing to undertake the cultural awareness process, to understand who Aboriginal people are at a community level and an individual level. And also, to understand the history of the land that is involved in the negotiation and to understand what Country means to Aboriginal people and why being involved in Country and being on Country is important".

From Woolnorth's perspective, Bob explains key factors that have led to a positive and productive partnership: "We recognise the importance of building and maintaining relationships first, and working from there. People working on the ground, like me, are given a lot of freedom to work with MTWAC in whatever ways we can. I'm really proud and happy that we can support a really inclusive and authentic and generous expression of culture". He also describes that the commitment to the partnership is supported and understood as important from the ground staff through to the senior management and the board of the organisation.

Opportunities

“Aboriginal people don’t need to be scared of large-scale projects – there are opportunities there in terms of social investment and social licence. Rather than being on the outside of these big projects, it’s important to be at the table directly and to have the opportunity to develop those relationships directly”

— Nick Cameron, Chair & CEO, Melaythenner Teeackana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation

Access to Country is of utmost importance to many Aboriginal groups. Wind farms that own their own land or are able to help negotiate terms with the owner, have an opportunity to work with Aboriginal Organisations to provide access to private property – for events, cultural activities and commercial enterprise.

There are also significant opportunities to tap into and build the contribution of cultural knowledge and ranger programs to enhance site management and to protect cultural sites, in addition to broader employment and procurement programs that support and prioritise Aboriginal people and businesses.

Integrating a wind farm with Country

“Some people have asked how can you cope with having a wind farm on your ancestral lands, and I explain it this way: Mannalargenna was a man of wind and fire, it was recorded on many occasions that he moved the wind with his fire stick. So, if he came back and saw these amazing machines, I think that he would think that they are like him: that they are using those blades to harness the wind and produce power in a similar way to how he used his power to harness the wind. I believe that they are compatible with the landscape and that Mannalargenna would see that if he had the chance.”

With grateful thanks and heartfelt acknowledgement to:

Aunty Patsy Cameron AO, Elder & Nick Cameron, Chair and CEO
Melaythenner Teeackana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation

Robert Barbour, Head of Risk, Compliance & Systems
Woolnorth Renewables

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