MEDIA RELEASE

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Landmark First Nations, business and investor initiative launches to improve cultural heritage protection in Australia

A landmark business and investor initiative has been launched – bringing together First Nations, business and investor communities – focused on strengthening Australia’s First People’s heritage laws and standards for the private sector to uphold the human rights of First Peoples.

Led by the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance in partnership with the Global Compact Network Australia (GCNA), and the Responsible Investment Association Australasia (RIAA), the Dhawura Ngilan Business and Investor Initiative sees protecting cultural heritage as the responsibility of all Australians, including the finance and business sectors.

The initiative is being launched as the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia prepares to report on its inquiry into the devastating destruction of Juukan Gorge on the traditional lands of the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura (Binigura) peoples. This 2020 event marked a turning point in awareness of the value and importance of Country and cultural heritage for all Australians.

“The Dhawura Ngilan Business and Investor Initiative aims to build partnerships and deliver resources that provide guidance to investors and businesses to engage with First Nations Peoples more respectfully. The Initiative will also support heritage protection laws that uphold the human rights of First Peoples to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent,” said Kylie Porter, Executive Director, Global Compact Network Australia.

“We witnessed national and global investor backlash to the Juukan Gorge disaster, demonstrating that First Nations’ cultural heritage is both a moral issue as well as a material financial risk,” said Estelle Parker, RIAA’s Executive Manager – Programs.

She continued, “This has heralded a new era of investor activity and engagement to ensure that the rights of First Nations Peoples are protected in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Together with several of our members, we are pleased to be part of this Initiative. We are also launching an industry-developed Investor Toolkit on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights and Cultural Heritage Protection later this month, which will help investors navigate this issue and support best practice in protecting the incredible heritage of our First Nations.”

Alliance co-chairs Kado Muir and Anne Dennis commend the work of the Dhawura Ngilan Business and Investor Initiative and look forward to working with the finance and business sectors in implementing the initiative.

Rodney Carter, Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council and Group CEO of the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and Steering Committee member of the Initiative, highlighted its importance for First Nations, stating, “Every day there are sacred places, cultural places, healing places that are
being destroyed because our Aboriginal Cultural Heritage legislation permits managed destruction. We must care for our Culture and our Heritage, not just for the benefit of our own mob, but for all people that visit our Countries.”

Kylie Porter explained the origins of the initiative stating, “The Initiative formed with the intention of aligning peak bodies of responsible business and investment, with the aspirations of First Nations, to provide avenues to improve business’s respect for the cultural heritage of our First Nations Peoples, particularly those businesses that work with Country everyday.”

Companies such as Lendlease have already partnered with the Initiative to reconcile and build a deeper understanding of place, acknowledging the significance of Country and heritage as foundations for a more resilient, dynamic and connected society.

Cath Brokenborough, Executive Lead, First Nations engagement, Lendlease (GCNA member) and Chair of the Dhawura Ngilan Business and Investor Initiative stated, “As Australia’s largest developer and placemaker, Lendlease supports Dhawura Ngilan as an important opportunity to acknowledge, protect and incorporate traditional knowledge, cultures, languages and historical truths of First Nations peoples in the development of the built environment.”

This Initiative gives business and investor communities a positive and constructive way to contribute to the Dhawura Ngilan (Remembering Country) vision, which is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working with all Australians to identify, protect, conserve and communicate the unique heritage of Australia for future generations.

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Supporting quotes and information

Quotes

Cath Brokenborough, Executive Lead, First Nations engagement, Lendlease (GCNA member) and Chair of the Dhawura Ngilan Business and Investor Initiative:

“Our partnership with Dhawura Ngilan will assist us to lift the industry standards in placemaking, led by the self-determination principles and voices of First Nations peoples. We aim to drive substantive institutional and structural reform towards a shared national identity that celebrates and embraces Australia’s First Nations heritage.”

Mary Delahunty, Head of Impact at HESTA:

“HESTA is proud to be part of the Dhawura Ngilan Business and Investor Initiative through our participation on RIAA’s First Nations People’s Working Group.

We support the Dhawura Ngilan vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage in Australia and the translation of this vision into best practice standards for legislation. We look forward to a similar translation of the vision into best practice standards for businesses and investors. This will allow investors like HESTA a deeper understanding of the clear systemic, financial risk that poor partnership practices with Traditional Owners has on our members’ investments. That’s why we support the development of standards that can be applied by government, business and investors and are aligned to a Vision supported by peak bodies representing every major land council and native title representative body in Australia.”

Rob Koczkar, Managing Director at Adamantem Capital and Lucy Steed, CEO at Melior Investment Management:

“We believe it is the responsibility of all Australians to engage with First Nations Peoples to respectfully and effectively protect First Nations cultural heritage. As stewards of capital, we must ensure our investment and operational decisions are taken with this responsibility in mind. The active education and support of investors, and the business community generally, to make better decisions which are informed by their impact on First Nations Peoples is a critical element in driving sustained equality and equity of opportunity for all Australians.”

About the Dhawura Ngilan Business and Investor Initiative

First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance (FNHPA)

The First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance, ‘the Alliance” was formed following the destruction of the 46,000-year-old cultural site at Juukan Gorge by Rio Tinto in 2020.

Many Aboriginal people across Australia felt devastated by this, not only the PKK traditional owners in the Pilbara. However, we know that the impact of Juukan Gorge was also felt strongly in the wider community and in the resources industry beyond Rio Tinto.

The Alliance was formed to ensure greater protections for Aboriginal cultural heritage.
The Alliance is a historic national grouping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and First Nation peoples. The immense burden of pursuing social, cultural and environmental equity on country for First Nations people’s under different legal frameworks and contexts has meant Land Councils and Native Title bodies from different states are often heavily focussed on supporting local and regional needs.

But now for the first time, the major Aboriginal Land Councils and Native Title bodies across Australia as well as other significant Aboriginal community-controlled organisations have joined forces to build relationships and seek much needed changes in legislation and industry practices that will protect First Nations heritage on a national level.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia are part of the world’s oldest living culture - a powerful cultural legacy that remains vibrant today.

**Global Compact Network Australia (GCNA)**

As a special initiative of the UN Secretary-General, the United Nations (UN) Global Compact is a call to companies everywhere to align their operations and strategies with ten universal principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, and to take action in support of UN goals. With more than 13,000 companies and 3,800 non-business signatories based in over 160 countries, and 69 Local Networks, the UN Global Compact is the world’s largest corporate sustainability initiative.

In Australia, Global Compact Network Australia (GCNA) brings together signatories to the UN Global Compact, including 35 ASX 100 companies and other major corporates, non-profits and universities, to advance the private sector’s contribution to sustainable development. We lead, enable and connect businesses and stakeholders to create a sustainable future by supporting businesses to act responsibly and helping them find opportunities to drive positive business outcomes.

[www.unglobalcompact.org.au](http://www.unglobalcompact.org.au)

**Responsible Investment Association Australasia (RIAA)**

The Responsible Investment Association Australasia (RIAA) champions responsible investing and a sustainable financial system in Australia and New Zealand. RIAA is dedicated to ensuring capital is aligned with achieving a healthy society, environment and economy.

With over 450 members managing more than $9 trillion in assets globally, the Responsible Investment Association Australasia (RIAA) is the largest and most active network of people and organisations engaged in responsible, ethical and impact investing across Australia and New Zealand.

Our membership includes super funds, fund managers, banks, consultants, researchers, brokers, impact investors, property managers, trusts, foundations, faith-based groups, financial advisers and individuals.

RIAA is also the Secretariat for the Australian Sustainable Finance Initiative (ASFI), which is co-Chaired by RIAA’s CEO. The ASFI Roadmap, launched in December 2020, is a collaborative effort bringing together more than 140 participants from over 80 organisations across Australia’s financial system, including financial institutions, civil society, academia, regulators and government.
The roadmap is an industry-driven plan for aligning Australia’s financial system with a sustainable, resilient and prosperous future for all Australians.

RIAA has also established a First Nations Peoples’ Rights working group, in response to member demand and to deliver to their needs.

Reflecting our members’ sense of importance, it is one of RIAA’s most active member’s working group. It includes organisations from across our membership base, including many of Australia’s leading finance organisations.

Its three-fold purpose mandate is to:

1. Address and advance the rights of First Nations peoples and others subjected to systemic racism.

2. Elevate First Nations peoples’ participation and voices in investment and the Responsible Investment community.

3. Increase access, scale and impact of First Nations peoples’ related investment activity.