

# Our Voices, Our History.

**This is a human story.** It is written in a way you might not be used to, but I have the right to explain history in this way *because it's my history and that of my Old People.*

**It happened on our shores, on our Country, to our families. This is our truth.**

This account of history won't introduce explorers by name and marvel at their discovery of new lands. You won't find degrading anatomical descriptions of my people lifted from the journals of curious colonisers who refused to recognise our humanity. Most importantly, this history won't exclusively speak about us as though we're long-gone ghosts of the past.

## 1. I identify

**My name is Teangi Brown.** The name Teangi translates to 'mother earth'. I am a First Nations man from the **Umpila, Kantju, Kuku-Yalanji, Trulwulway** and **Bunurong** nations.

This means my First Nations ancestry is from Far North Queensland, Victoria and my father's traditional homelands here in **lutruwita** (Tasmania). I grew up on both the East Coast of Tasmania and on **truwana** (Cape Barren Island) in the Bass Strait, which makes me a proud Cape Barren Islander and Straitsman.

My family ties to these places go back thousands of generations, but I look a bit different to those Ancestors because some of my heritage is also European. Colonisation will do that.

I am an educator dedicated to helping people recognise how history shapes the present. I've worked for nearly a decade at the *Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery* as one of a few First Nations staff members. My years of interpreting and teaching the history of **lutruwita** has deepened my own understanding of my home state.

For a long time it was widely taught, even in Tasmania, that First Nations peoples of **lutruwita** were 'extinct' and that when **Nununi** (nu-nu-nee) woman **Trukanini** (Truganini) passed away on 8 May 1876 we'd officially been 'wiped out'. Yet I and many others are living and breathing proof that these are absolute myths. But we'll get back to that.

## 2. Always was

The linguistic, spiritual and cultural bedrock of every part of **lutruwita** is First Nations. Right now you're on the Country of the **Lutitumiriluyuna** (loo-tee-tu-mee-ree-loy-yu-nah) people of the Oyster Bay nation.

**puthimiluna** (pu-dthee-mee-lu-nah) refers to the Country of Great Oyster Bay.

**puthimunatiya** (pu-dthee-mu-nah-tee-yah) is the name of the highlands behind Great Oyster Bay, to the west, where our Old People spent time usually during spring and summer.

Old People is a respectful term our community uses when referring to the traditional First Nations people of **lutruwita** who were here before and during invasion.

Before Britain invaded **lutruwita** in 1803, we were nine culturally distinct nations each made up of multiple collectives that managed different regions within our particular sovereign nation. Back then, everything was intrinsically intertwined and there was no interference between us and Country and culture.

Experts in sustainability, my Old People managed the landscape in a way that nurtured its natural abundance. They adapted to and planned for seasonal and climatic shifts. They cherished their families, loved deeply, shared, joked, argued, expressed themselves and lived their lives in balance with everything around them.

## 3. Words matter

**Language connects people to culture, identity, Country, the Ancestors, everything.** It is the strings that carry information through time and space. Up to 14 distinct languages were spoken in **lutruwita** at the time of invasion and everyone was multilingual.

One of the many negative impacts of colonisation for us has been the loss of every one of those original languages. **palawa kani** is a composite language our community has formally constructed using words recovered from those languages, mainly found in the journals of early colonisers who recorded what our Old People said to them.

Rules that apply to **palawa kani** are not the same as those that apply to English, especially around capitalisation. However, you'll find First Nations people capitalise particular English nouns to indicate their value and importance such as Country, Ancestors, Old People and, of course, Aboriginal.

We call ourselves **palawa** or **pakana** today because there's now an expectation that we must identify as a homogenous group of Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

**palawa** is a word that comes from the southeast of **lutruwita** while **pakana** comes from the northeast language group most of us descend from. These are interchangeable terms but many of us have a personal preference. I am **pakana**.

## 4. What's in a name?

Assigning new names to places that are already named is, in most cases, an act of domination and a way to signal ownership. Though we never ceded sovereignty of our homelands here in **lutruwita** so please remember you're on stolen land.

Since 1642 this island has been given the names New Holland, Van Diemen's Land and is now known as Tasmania. Yet, today, we're on a path towards the dual-naming of places and the re-establishment of original names. An increasing number of non-Indigenous people support this process.

Two more original place and feature names in this area you might like to learn are **truyilina** (troy-yee-lee-nah) now also known as Kelvedon Creek, Swansea, and **mayaluwarana** (mye-yah-lu-wah-rah-nah) which you'll probably know as Schouten Island.

## 5. Point of contact

In 1772 the Marion Dufresne Expedition landed in North Bay just south of what is today known as Marion Bay. There was a language barrier, a breakdown in communication and the Old People were defending their Country. It was the first murder of one of our Old People by a newcomer.

This story of white men coming in boats and aiming a stick that shot fire was told throughout the eastern and south-eastern nations for the next 30 or more years until Britain invaded. From then everything about life for the people of the Oyster Bay nation, and for all peoples of **lutruwita**, completely changed.

Colonial forces imposed new laws and a system of governance not just indifferent to First Nations sovereignty and custodianship but intrinsically genocidal (and those systems remain doggedly in place). In many ways the most damaging import, then and now, is the ideology of white superiority and the religious beliefs underpinning that worldview.

Europeans saw the land as a god-given gift for them to use as they wished. This is at odds with our value system as First Nations peoples: the earth is our Mother and our purpose in life is to maintain healthy Country.

## 6. In defence

Our resistance to the invasion of **lutruwita**, to the colonial expansion onto our traditional homelands, to the destruction and depletion of our food sources and to the murder, abduction, rape, enslavement and abuse of our people has come to be known as the Black War. This lasted from 1824 to 1832.

For the final four years, martial law was declared in Van Diemen's Land giving non-Indigenous people the legal right to kill, on sight, any First Nations person.

During this period, a bounty was put on the severed head of my Old People: £3 per child, £5 per adult. Five pounds then was the equivalent of over six-hundred Australian dollars today.

The incentive of a substantial reward and the fact that convicts were armed and allowed to collect bounties dramatically increased the violence perpetrated against us by an ever-growing colonial population.

Most of the conflict was concentrated on the traditional lands of four nations including here – **puthimiluna** – at Great Oyster Bay.

The brutality of that time lies deep in the psyche and even in the DNA of Tasmanians. The truth of our shared history is something each individual must personally reckon with. Discomfort is part of that process.

We wish it were different, but there are no known descendants of the ten family/Ancestral collectives of the Oyster Bay nation.

## 7. I'm a survivor

**Britain's commitment to genocide in Tasmania has been to the extreme yet we are still here. How is that possible?**

You may have heard about **Wybelenna** (Black Man's Houses) on Flinders Island where a few hundred First Nations people who survived the Black War were exiled for years and where the majority of them died. Fanny Cochrane Smith, who was born on Flinders Island, is the only one of these people with living descendants.

There's an even lesser-known part of our history and, without it, I wouldn't be here telling you my story.

From the late-1700s, European sealers and whalers had been kidnapping our traditional First Nation women and girls. In some cases, towards the end of the Black War era, our women were even traded as potential 'wives' for these men. I believe our leaders knew, by that time, that this was our only chance to continue our bloodlines.

The kidnapers held our women and girls on islands in the Bass Strait, such as **truwana**. The unbelievable strength and resilience of those Old People, ripped from their homes and families, is something I'm both deeply saddened by and extremely proud to be connected with.

Their descendants settled within the Bass Strait and became known as Straitsmen. We developed a unique culture. Our Old People's cultural practices that we still have connection to today were maintained and passed down within that island community.

**Yet, believe it or not, we were still under attack.**

## 8. The truth is

From 1905 to 1947, the *Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery* displayed the skeletal remains of **Trukanini** and labelled her the "Last Tasmanian Aborigine". As a **pakana** I can't begin to tell you the pain that act causes. Although **Trukanini** is from **lunawuni** (Bruny Island) and of the South East nation, her life and death continue to affect us all.

While Australian schools were teaching students that "**Truganini**" was the last of us – that there were no Tasmanian Aboriginal people left – Cape Barren's Half-Cast Reserve was in full swing and First Nations children were being forcibly removed from their families. Post-Federation, this was the only government-run mission in Tasmania. It operated from the 1880s to the 1950s. Some of our community Elders experienced the Reserve first-hand.

The 1950s onwards was the assimilation era. We were pressured and coerced into relocating to the mainland of Tasmania in the hope we would integrate and simply disappear into mainstream society. The government made a point of scattering us to the lowest socio-economic areas around the state.

Yet, against all odds, our proud community today is thriving and going from strength to strength. There is no shortage of **Blak excellence** in **lutruwita**. Our responsibility to care for Country remains at our core as **pakana/palawa**.

We encourage you to get to know us, follow our ventures, keep connected and continue to educate yourself by listening carefully to First Nations voices.

## Our flag

The Aboriginal flag, designed by Harold Thomas, has only been around since 1971. Yet what it represents has existed since the beginning of time as we know it. We have both a scientific and a spiritual understanding of who and what we are, what we are made of and what our purpose is on this planet.

**BLACK** represents the people on Country under the sun. Like most things there is a duality; the black also represents spirit and consciousness. The trio of colours says we are a spirit (conscience) in a body made up of the conductive minerals of the earth and powered by the sun.

**YELLOW** represents the sun, the life-giver, the father. The sun activates photosynthesis, which gives energy to all plants and provides food, shelter and oxygen for all life. Also, through evaporation, fresh water is created to sustain life.

**RED** represents mother earth – Country itself – and how she is the carer and Creator of us all. Our bodies are 70% salt water and are made up of minerals of the earth so we are a physical representation of the earth given life.