

Media Release

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Education
Minister for Women



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THREE KURNAI WOMEN HONOURED IN BRONZE SCULPTURE

A life-sized bronze sculpture celebrating the leadership of three Kurnai women who kept their community safe and their culture alive is being unveiled in Drouin's Civic Park today, the start of National Reconciliation Week.

Proudly supported by the Andrews Labor Government's \$1 million Victorian Women's Public Art program, the artwork celebrates First Nations women Dorothy Hood, Euphemia Mullet Tonkin and Regina Rose, who were hugely influential in keeping the Kurnai community safe from the 1940s to the 1960s on Jackson's Track, Labertouche.

The women continued to lead the community after the Board of Protection relocated the families into Drouin township in 1961.

The artwork was created by local artists Jessie McLennan and Rebecca Vandyk-Hamilton, working in close consultation with local Kurnai Elder Cheryl Drayton, Euphemia Mullet Tonkin's daughter.

Regina Rose's daughter, elder Lynette Hayes created a frieze to border the bottom of the sculpture, incorporating Kurnai symbols such as the blue wren, the Kurnai women's totem.

The women hold a book, a laundry tub and a guitar, objects of white culture which helped their children and communities survive.

Drouin's *Three Kurnai Women On Country* is the fourth of six permanent public artworks being unveiled throughout Victoria to acknowledge and celebrate women's achievements.

Quote attributable to Minister for Women Natalie Hutchins

"The sculpture acknowledges these Kurnai women's leadership, tenacity, and cultural integrity – they upheld their Kurnai heritage while still seeking to obey government decrees, living constantly with the fear of having their children 'removed'."

Quote attributable to the Member for Eastern Victoria Harriet Shing

"I hope that through honouring and elevating the story of these three women and their families, more Gippslanders and more Victorians will know of their extraordinary courage and leadership during a time of great hardship."

Quote attributable to Baw Baw Shire Council Mayor Annemarie McCabe

"Baw Baw Shire Council greatly welcomes the Andrews Labor Government's support on this significant art piece that stands proudly at Drouin Civic Park and pays homage to the recent history of First Nations people."