

# A brief history of the Lake Tyers Aboriginal community; The Lake Tyers Aboriginal community has had a controversial history since being set up in 1861.

Waters, Jeff . ABC Premium News ; Sydney [Sydney]21 Dec 2013.

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

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In an interview she told ABC Gippsland her childhood as one of 11 children at Lake Tyers was "happy and carefree", but that all changed when her family was pressured to leave the mission.

According to the ABC's Mission Beats website: "Between 1956 and 1965, the residents requested, protested and petitioned for Lake Tyers Mission Station to become an independent, Aboriginal run farming cooperative. This campaign received support and assistance from the Melbourne-based Aborigines Advancement League (AAL), with Pastor Sir Doug Nichols providing a much-needed voice among Melbourne's bureaucrats. When the Board moved to close Lake Tyers in February 1963, Nichols resigned his position on the Board in protest."

## FULL TEXT

The traditional owners of the land which includes what is now called Lake Tyers in East Gippsland are the Krowathunkooloong clan - one of five forming the Gunaikurnai nation, who largely resisted white settlement in the area.

In 1861 the Lake Tyers Mission Station was established by the Church of England missionary Reverend John Bulmer, to house some of the Gunaikurnai survivors of the conflict.

The peninsula, which has a lake on each side, was known to its traditional owners as Bung Yarnda.

At the beginning of the 20th century, residents from three other Victorian missions, Ramahyuck, Condah and Coranderrk, who had been drawn from outside of Gippsland as well, were moved to Lake Tyers.

It became the depository for half of Victoria's dispossessed people, and, in 1908, was taken on by the government. Nine years later, Victoria's Aboriginal protection board voted for a policy of concentrating all 'full-blood' and 'half-caste' Aboriginal people on the Lake Tyers Station.

By the early 1960s Victoria's government decided to try to close the settlement, and attempt to assimilate the population into the non-Indigenous community.

Eileen Harrison, an Indigenous artist who was born at Lake Tyers, has written about her experiences.

In an interview she told ABC Gippsland her childhood as one of 11 children at Lake Tyers was "happy and carefree", but that all changed when her family was pressured to leave the mission.

"My parents were picked off out of the all the people there and we were the first to move off," she says.

"We weren't even sure about where we were going. My father thought we were going to Dimboola to where his people were, but we were sent to live in the Western District of Ararat."

According to the ABC's Mission Beats website: "Between 1956 and 1965, the residents requested, protested and petitioned for Lake Tyers Mission Station to become an independent, Aboriginal run farming cooperative. This

campaign received support and assistance from the Melbourne-based Aborigines Advancement League (AAL), with Pastor Sir Doug Nichols providing a much-needed voice among Melbourne's bureaucrats. When the Board moved to close Lake Tyers in February 1963, Nichols resigned his position on the Board in protest." But the remaining residents won the fight, and in 1965 the mission was declared a Permanent Reserve. There were only a couple of hundred residents left when, in 1971, they were granted freehold title, with each adult and child receiving a parcel of shares in the land. The Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust would administer a self-governing community. But the mission farm and many buildings were neglected in ensuing years, and many of the jobs which existed there disappeared. Over recent decades, a great number of the original shareholders have left Lake Tyers, only to be replaced by other Indigenous people from across Victoria and parts of New South Wales, who have been allowed to move there. Most of the community is reliant on social security, but some residents either work for the trust or commute to jobs in nearby towns. In 2003 Simon Wallace-Smith, of the Deloitte accounting firm, was appointed by the government as administrator of the trust. By early 2011, however, remaining shareholders became incensed at the lack of democracy and unaccountability of the administration, and staged a two-week-long blockade of the site. A group camped out at the settlement's gate, and refused entry to all government officials, until Mr Wallace-Smith was escorted back onto the land by police. It is believed the Victorian government will announce a new governing board to run the trust early in 2014, but shareholders say it too will be unrepresentative of the community. Credit: By Jeff Waters

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