pilri/Cape Grim

Our story is in our country and its names
pakana-mapali takamuna pilri-ta; kani palawa kani pilri-ta; kani milaythina-tu & takariliya ngini pilri-ta.

One of the largest gatherings of Aborigines at pilri (Cape Grim) in almost 200 years took place on Sunday 12th March 2017. We stood together there, talking our language again with each other.

In the past, families would come together here to access the muttonbird rookeries on nearby islands. But for many decades we did not have access to these places after they became part of the VDL Company's land grant.

The significance of the day was not lost on the men, women and children who came there.

We were in awe of the magnificent landscape before us. At just how close the islands that have been harvesting grounds for yula (mutton birds) since time immemorial are to the coastline on which we stood.

We could almost reach out and touch ranamitim (The Doughboys).
A track, now eroded, still leads down to the water's edge at luwuka, where, on a good day the women would swim out to ranamitim and bring back a feed of yula. How strong were those women! luna rrala-warr!

We imagined families sitting around the fires, eating and sharing all the things that families do. We can still see the remains of past feasts and the black from their fires, showing us what a well-visited place this was.

We remembered with sadness takariliya - those families who tragically were murdered by VDL company shepherds. And we looked upon the cliff - taynayuwa - from where they were forced onto the rocks below.

taynayuwa (the cliff where the people were killed) with titima/Trefoil Island and karanutung in the background at right

Although it was a very solemn occasion, we felt exhilarated as well. Because, in another 'first' for many, many years, we spoke the original names of places at pilri. We shouted those names for our country and our old people to hear.

Names that, although not spoken for almost 200 years, have always still been here at pilri, the country from which they came, to which they belong and whose stories only they can truly tell.

Given the terrible things that happened here, there is no better way to heal country and community than to have country hear her people speak aloud these words once again. And to know we will never stop speaking them. On country, at those places, in our language palawa kani.
waranta tangara takariliya ngini, lungkana pilri-ta.

We mourn all our ancestral dead murdered at Cape Grim.

From the earliest years of the invasion and settlement of north-western Tasmania, dreadful atrocities were committed against Aboriginal people. These led to the massacre at Cape Grim on 10 February 1828.

In honour of our ancestors and in memory of their loss of life and lands, we intend to propose to the Tasmanian Place Names Board that offensive and racist names in this region be replaced with the original Aboriginal names, and that other places are assigned dual names.

In the case of three places which do not have European names, we propose the reinstatement of the original names. These name changes are provided for in the Tasmanian Government’s *Aboriginal and Dual Naming Policy for the Naming of Tasmanian Geographic Features 2012*:

**DUAL NAMES:**

Policy Principle 2.2 *That a dual naming system be adopted by which Aboriginal names can be applied to geographic features and places that already bear registered names and when a name change is not possible or acceptable. Both will be registered names, and both names will be used together in the future and appear together on all official documents and maps.*

- pilri/Cape Grim
- ranamitim /The Doughboys (Islands)
- layrimanuk/Woolnorth Point
- titima/Trefoil Island has been an official dual name since 2016.
REPLACE OFFENSIVE NAMES:

Policy Principle 2.5  That consideration will be given to renaming places or features where the existing name is considered offensive to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

luwuka now named ‘Suicide Bay’
timuk now named ‘Victory Hill’
karanutung now named ‘Niggerhead Rock’

Policy Principle 2.4  That where a traditional place name is not known as a consequence of the disruption of Aboriginal occupation and language, the use of another Aboriginal name as a place name is also acceptable where the meaning of the word is appropriate for its intended use.

NAMES FOR UNNAMED PLACES:

Policy Principle 2.1  That preference is given to Aboriginal place names for any geographic feature or place that does not already have an existing official name.

taynayuwa the cliff where the people were killed – location of the Cape Grim massacre

nakali the cave opposite the Doughboys
	randapim  taynamun point of land opposite Victory Hill

We have found no English name for these places. If they do turn out to already have official names, we can propose instead the place be dual named.

Timeline of atrocities at Cape Grim from the early 1800s
pilri / Cape Grim
(pee ree)

*pilri* is the earliest word recorded for ‘Cape Grim’. This recording* was made before 1830, by Jorgenson, who worked from 1827 for the Van Diemens Land Company in the north-western and central western parts of Tasmania. This brought him into contact with Aborigines. He noted *pilri* was a western word. Jorgenson’s recording is supported by a second from McGeary, a convict servant who accompanied Robinson on his travels through the west and northwest in 1830.

The start of the word *pilri* (‘pil.’) is also seen in *pilitika*, the name of nearby Robbins Island, and in another word for the tribe at Robbins Island and Cape Grim. This suggests the three words are from the same Cape Grim/Robbins Island language.

‘Cape Grim’ is not named after the massacre there, but was given that name earlier by Matthew Flinders, to describe the terrible sea and weather conditions he encountered there in 1798. The name proved to be uncannily suitable for later events.

The name ‘Cape Grim’ applies to the whole broad promontory shown in the shaded section.

The original Cape Grim was about 1km north of the current location. [https://www.placenames.tas.gov.au/#p1]

On drawing a 1km line to the north of its current location, we can estimate the original location of Cape Grim. This is directly opposite The Doughboys, which is consistent with the accounts about the massacre at Cape Grim.

*‘Recording’ is used throughout this booklet to mean the written records made by Europeans of Aboriginal language; not audio recordings.*
**ranamitim / The Doughboys (Islands)**
(rah nah mee teem)

This is a language word from the Mount Cameron West area, which is in the same north western region of Tasmania as these two islands. Robinson recorded this name when he travelled in the NW in 1832.

His 3 recordings note this as the name for both islands together, which is how the two small islands are still generally referred to, and they are formally named - ‘The Doughboys’.

The ‘rana-’ part of **ranamitim** also occurs at the start of other place names in this same NW area corner.

There were also names for each of the two islands individually. Both have also been revived in case people wish to use them:
**ranapim** - Outer Doughboy, and **kuyntarim** - Inner Doughboy.
**layrimanuk / Woolnorth Point**

(lie  ree mah nuk)

This word appears on a sketch map in Robinson’s 1832 Vocabulary. Islands, points and bays are numbered on the map, and the numbers correspond with numbered words. Translations are not given for the words.

However ‘Trefoil’ [Island] is drawn and named on the map, and by using that as a marker it is possible to identify the locations of the other places shown. We identify the bay numbered ‘4’ as Davisons Bay and the point numbered ‘2’ as Woolnorth Point in this way.

‘2’ corresponds to the word ‘2 lay.rim.noke’, spelt layrimanuk in our palawa kani alphabet.
**Luwuka** instead of ‘Suicide Bay’

(Lu wu kah)

Tanaminawayt (Tunnerminnerwait) told Robinson this word on the same day that six Aboriginal women told him about the massacre and other atrocities at Cape Grim.

Tanaminawayt had spent the previous week with these six women in a sealer’s camp on the northwest coast directly opposite Robbins Island. On 21 June 1830, the sealers handed Tanaminawayt over to Robinson, who wrote in his journal “During the time I was waiting [for the boat to arrive] I occupied myself in conversation with my fresh aboriginal companion, obtaining words for my vocabulary”.

Tanaminawayt was a Robbins Island/Cape Grim man, speaking the language of that place. He said **luwuka** was the name for the place ‘where the people were shot/by the men/by the shepherds’. This is where our people were forced off the cliffs by VDL shepherds in February 1828.

![Luwuka, with Doughboys and tip of Titima in background](image-url)
‘Victory Hill’ was so called by VDL workers celebrating the killings of Aborigines who threatened shepherds in a hut somewhere near this hill.

Descriptions of the location of this hut, at which at least six Aborigines were killed, place it about one kilometre to the northeast of Victory Hill. Surveyors Hellyer and Wedge found the ruins of a hut in that location in 1828.

There are no words recorded for ‘Victory Hill’ itself.

Robinson was told timuk was the name for the place where he camped on 19 February 1834, at Spring Hut, about a mile and a half from the coast opposite the Doughboys. His journal describes that this hut had a tanning pit and sheep washing tank, so was clearly a shepherd’s hut.

We revive timuk for ‘Victory Hill’ because this is the closest location to Victory Hill for which there is an original recorded word. As well, it refers to the place where there was a shepherd’s hut.

timuk has the ‘k’ ending characteristic of western languages (eg. pinmatik ‘Rocky Cape’; naynamarrik ‘Bird Island’).
Events at a shepherd’s hut near ‘Victory Hill’ in 1827:

In **November 1827** the West Point tribe visited Cape Grim for mutton-bird eggs and seals and found shepherds tending a large flock of sheep. The shepherds tried to entice some women into a hut, and, when the men objected, in the resulting skirmish one of the shepherds was speared in the thigh and several West Point men including a chief were shot.

When at VDL settlement at Cape Grim in 1830, Robinson wrote in his journal.. ‘**Went to a mountain which they call Mount Victory from an encounter they had with the natives.**’ [GA Robinson 16 June 1830]

“**Curr was later to provide his [VDL] Directors with a more detailed account of the conflict, describing how a large number of natives were gathered on top of a hill (Victory Hill) threatening four shepherds located in a hut at the foot of the hill. The shepherds, considering an attack imminent, marched out of the hut and engaged the natives, killing six of them, one of whom was a woman.** [Aboriginal witnesses told of the earlier shooting of an Aboriginal man, followed by assaults on Aboriginal women in the hut]

According to Curr’s report, the conflict took place on a hill with a shepherd’s hut situated at its base. Although there are two hills in the immediate area, Victory Hill is traditionally considered to be the relevant site. An examination of the area shows neither water supply nor any evidence of hut foundations anywhere near either of the hills.

**However, charts from surveyors Hellyer and Wedge indicate the site to be where there are ruins of a hut about one kilometre to the northeast of Victory Hill, a situation that allowed the Company easy access from the sea via Davisons Bay. Curr very rarely visited Cape Grim and was probably told on construction of the hut that it was ‘near a hill’ and subsequently imagined it to be at its base.** “

karanutung instead of ‘Niggerhead Rock’
(kah rah nu tung)

We want to replace the offensive name ‘Niggerhead Rock’, for a small island at the NW tip of titima/Trefoil Island, in Bass Strait in NW Tasmania.

There is no known Aboriginal word for this island. But we can find a new name by following the practice of our old people.

They adapted or changed the meaning of their existing words to be able to talk about other things, particularly the new animals and objects brought here by Europeans. For example, they called a horse pakutina - from a word for kangaroo; a pig kumikatina - from a word for wombat; a rowing or sailing boat lukrapina - from a word for canoe; a blanket trumanya and clothes likunya - from words for kangaroo and kangaroo skin.

karanutung is one of a few names for the ‘Outer Doughboy Island’, another small island nearby in the same NW Bass Strait area. This word would not be used again, because ranapim is the palawa kani name of the Outer Doughboy.

By reviving karanutung to replace the offensive English place name of ‘Niggerhead Rock’, we not only continue our ancestors' practice of adapting words to name a similar thing, but we also bring back into use an Aboriginal word which otherwise would never be spoken again.
taynayuwa  
(tie nah yu wah)

There are no other Aboriginal words for the location of the Cape Grim massacre, i.e. the cliff where the people were killed. This is a Robbins Island/Cape Grim language word, which was the language of this place.

We have found no English name for this cliff, marked with the green star.

‘..went through the forest to view the rocks where the natives had been massacred ....came to a point of rock opposite the Doughboys. My informant pointed out the spot, which was a point of land which runs into the sea opposite these two islands – on one side was a perpendicular cliff of not less than two hundred feet in altitude and the base washed with the sea; the other side was a rapid declivity.....’ [GA Robinson journal 24 June 1830]

Taynayuwa
nakali
(nah kah lee)
the cave opposite the Doughboys, near where the natives were shot

Like luwuka and taynayuwa, this word was told to Robinson as he travelled in the north west in 1830, and sought out accounts of the 1828 massacre.

There are no other Aboriginal words for this cave. Part of nakali is kali, the palawa kani word for ‘hole’.

We have found no English name for this cave, marked with a red star on the image on p13.

It is quite possible that nakali and taynayuwa were told to Robinson by Tanaminawayt at the same time as luwuka, on the evening of 21 June 1830; the three words all relate to the massacre at Cape Grim, and taynayuwa is also a Robbins Island/Cape Grim word.

Aborigines visiting nakali at luwuka in 2016
**ranapim**  **taynamun** point on coast opposite ‘Victory Hill’
(rah nah peem)  (tie nah mun)

This word appears on a sketch map in Robinsons 1832 Vocabulary. Islands, points and bays are numbered on the map, and the numbers correspond with numbered words. Translations are not given for the words. However ‘Trefoil’ [Island] is drawn and named on the map, and by using that as a marker it is possible to identify the locations of the other places shown. We identify the bay numbered ‘4’ as Davisons Bay and the point numbered ‘1’ as Davisons Point in this way.

‘rarn.er.bim.dine.moon – at Cape Grim’ labelled ‘3’, is beside a point of land on the coast, to the south-west of Davisons Point.

‘rarn.er. bim.dine.moon’ is spelt **ranapim taynamun** in the *palawa kani* alphabet.

So, we revive **ranapim taynamun** for ‘the point opposite Victory Hill’. We have found no English name for this point.

The first part of this name: **ranapim** is also recorded for ‘Outer Doughboy’, a small island close to this point of land.

[Sketch map in GA Robinson MS Aboriginal Vocabulary of Tasmania 1832 Vol. 64 Pt:3 p46]
Timeline of atrocities at pilri/Cape Grim from the early 1800s

From the earliest years of the invasion and settlement of north western Tasmania, dreadful atrocities were committed against Aboriginal people. These led to the massacre at Cape Grim on 10 February 1828.

Six Aboriginal women recounted some of these brutalities to George Augustus Robinson when he visited the camp they lived in with sealers on the NW coast directly opposite Robbins Island:

“The aboriginal females said that the Company’s shepherds had got the native women into their hut and wanted to take liberties with them, that the men resented it and speared one man in the thigh; that they then shot one man dead, supposed the chief; that subsequently some natives killed some of the Company’s sheep and drove them off the rocks, and sometime after they took by surprise a whole tribe which had come for a supply of mutton birds at the Doughboys, massacred thirty of them and threw them off a cliff two hundred feet in altitude. Since the destruction of those people the natives call the white people at Cape Grim NOW.HUM.MOE, devil, and when they hear the report of a gun they say the NOW.HUM.MOE have shot another tribe of natives.”
[GA Robinson journal 21 June 1830]

From about 1810, women had been abducted by sealers.

“McKay told me of nine men who were going asealing and who surrounded a tribe of natives between Cape Grim and Mount Cameron and got them hemmed in. The men resisted and some were shot. They then sent out the women, finding this was the nature of their business; and they picked out seven of the finest and departed.” [GA Robinson journal 1 July 1830]

In 1820 a group of sealers hid in a cave at the Doughboys near Cape Grim to ambush a group of women collecting mutton-birds and shellfish. As the women swam ashore the sealers rushed out with muskets, pushed fourteen women into an angle off the cliff, bound them with cords, and carried them off to Kangaroo Island. Three sealers were later clubbed to death in retaliation.
Aboriginal man Penderoin described this 1820 attack and abduction:

“Observed the cavern near the Doughboys; this excavation runs through the rock, Penderoin exclaimed on seeing it, ‘that’s where the white men hid themselves when they forced away the black women.’ Penderoin was one of those blacks I got at the time of my visit two years ago and he told me he was present on the occasion. [He] Said the two small islands near the cave was resorted to by the natives for mutton birds. This circumstance was known to those individuals who were sealers, an abandoned race. On this occasion they walked over from the north to the west side of the cape where those two islands were situated. This journey they performed at night.

They then secreted themselves in the cave and when the people swum on shore they rushed out upon them with muskets and drove them into an angle of the high cliff, where they bound them with cords. The men were at this time away hunting for kangaroo. A few of the old men and all the children were there. These men also seized all the mutton birds which those poor creatures had been getting, the labour of many days.

They carried away those poor creatures to Kangaroo Island on the coast of New Holland in a sealing vessel. There were twelve or fourteen women carried off on this occasion.... This account I have had before from others, PENDEROIN told me that the natives afterwards killed three men with waddies. PENDEROIN said the soldiers from Macquarie Harbour shot at the natives (probably prisoners from Macquarie Harbour).”

[GA Robinson journal 20 February 1834]
In 1826 the Van Diemen’s Land Company occupied key Aboriginal kangaroo hunting grounds at Circular Head and Cape Grim.

In November 1827 the West Point tribe visited Cape Grim for mutton-bird eggs and seals and found shepherds tending a large flock of sheep. The shepherds tried to entice some women into a hut, and, when the men objected, in the resulting skirmish one of the shepherds was speared in the thigh and several West Point men including a chief were shot.

In retribution, on 31 December, Aborigines returned to Cape Grim and killed 118 ewes from VDL stock, spearing some and driving the rest into the sea.

A month later, in January 1828, Richard Frederick, master of the VDL Co. sloop, Fanny, told Mrs Hare, wife of the captain of the Caroline, that he and four shepherds of VDL - Charles Chamberlain, William Gunshannon, Richard Nicholson and John Weavis - had searched for the camp of the Aborigines at night and killed twelve before retreating to their ship. Mrs Hare recorded this in her diary on January 19. The manager of the Company in a report to his superiors in London on January 14 acknowledged the attack but claimed there were no casualties because “the guns mis-fired.”

[Lee 1927:41; AOT VDL 5/1 No.2]

A few days later, on 10 February 1828 the same four shepherds surprised and trapped a large group of men, women and children at what is now called Suicide Bay as they were feasting on mutton-birds that the women had caught at the nearby Doughboy Islands. Many were killed. This was the Cape Grim massacre.

[Image with labels luwuka and titima]
Accounts of the Cape Grim massacre

As told to Robinson in 1830:

“..went through the forest to view the rocks where the natives had been massacred ....came to a point of rock opposite the Doughboys. My informant pointed out the spot, which was a point of land which runs into the sea opposite these two islands – on one side was a perpendicular cliff of not less than two hundred feet in altitude and the base washed with the sea; the other side was a rapid declivity.

About two hundred yards from this cliff a steep path led down to the rocks at its base. At the bottom of the path was a beautiful spring of water ... at which the natives used to quench their thirst and procure their water when they were wont to go to the [Doughboys] islands to get mutton birds. Two hundred yards further along the rocks was a large cave which had often served as a shelter for the natives during a storm.

On the occasion of the massacre a tribe of natives, consisting principally of women and children, had come to the islands. Providence had favoured them with fine weather, for it is only in fine weather that they can get to the islands, as a heavy sea rolls in between them. They swim across, leaving their children at the rocks in the care of the elderly people. They had prepared their supply of birds, had tied them with grass, had towed them on shore, and the whole tribe was seated round their fires partaking of their hard-earned fare, when down rushed the band of fierce barbarians thirsting for the blood of these unprotected
and unoffending people. They fled, leaving their provision. Some rushed into the sea, others scrambled round the cliff and what remained the monsters put to death.

Those poor creatures who had sought shelter in the cleft of the rock they forced to the brink of an awful precipice, massacred them all and threw their bodies down the precipice, many of them perhaps but slightly wounded... I was shewed a point of rock where an old man who was endeavouring to conceal himself, was shot through the head by one of the murderers—who mentioned these circumstances as deeds of heroism. I went to the foot of the cliff where the bodies had been thrown down and saw several human bones, some of which I brought with me, and a piece of the bloody cliff... Returned past Mount Victory. Passed a number of huts in these walks.”

[GA Robinson journal 24 June 1830]

Midden at luwuka. The dark patches are from the fires of our people.
Accounts from 2 of the killers:

Robinson “Interrogated a man of the name of Chamberlain, one of the four men who shot the natives. ‘How many natives do you suppose there was killed?’—‘Thirty’. ‘There appears to be some difference respecting the numbers’.—‘Yes, it was so. We was afraid and thought at the time the Governor would hear of it and we should get into trouble, but thirty was about the number’. ‘What did you do with the bodies?’—‘We threw them down the rocks where they had thrown the sheep’. ‘Was there anymore females shot?’—‘No, the women all laid down; they were most of them men’. ‘How many was there in your party?’—‘There was four of us’. ‘What had they done to you?’—‘They had some time before that attacked us in a hut and had speared one man in the thigh. Several blacks was shot on that occasion. Subsequently thirty sheep had been driven over the rocks’. This man related this atrocious act with such perfect indifference my blood chilled. Still, I felt anxious to hear a full account. I am sickened at the remembrance of it.”  [GA Robinson journal 16 June 1830, at Cape Grim]

karanutung at the far left tip of titima/Trefoil Island, seen from luwuka
Robinson later “Interrogated Gunchannon respecting the massacre at Cape Grim...He acknowledged to having been one of the four men who massacred the natives. I asked him how many they killed. He said he could not tell whether any were killed, but they saw traces of blood afterwards. ‘How long was it after killing the sheep that this circumstance occurred?’- ‘Six weeks’. ‘Were there any women among them?’- ‘Yes, there was both men and women’.

Finding this man was not willing to disclose, I told him that I had full information on the subject, both from blacks and whites, and it was of little consequence his keeping it back; he might prevaricate but I knew; Chamberlain, an accessory, had told me there was thirty killed. I severely reprehended him and assured him I was not certain he would not be cited to Hobart Town for the murder. He seemed to glory in the act and said he would shoot them whenever he met them.

These circumstances may be worth recording; the four were John Weaver, Nicholson, Chamberlain and Gunchannon. Nicholson has been drowned; Chamberlain is at Woolnorth; Gunchannon was severely speared afterwards at the Surrey Hills, as was several others, when the natives came down and robbed the hut and made an attack upon the shepherds and speared them, a just retribution for the horrid deed; and Weaver is at Hobart Town. The white men at the Hampshire and Surrey Hills evince a hostile feeling towards the aborigines and declare they will shoot them whenever they may find them.” [GA Robinson journal 10 August 1830, at Hampshire Hills]

There is no definite record of which tribe or tribes the Aboriginal men, women and children killed there were from; given the season and trading and travelling patterns, they are mostly likely to be from more than one of the several tribes who owned and occupied these north western lands. The Pirapi were among them; it was this tribe who had killed the VDL stock in 1827. The Pirapi occupied the West Point area and from there travelled inland to Mt Cameron West (Preminghana) and across country as far north as Robbins and Walker Islands and in the direction of Circular Head.

After this, the NW tribes avoided the settlement at Cape Grim but plundered remote huts to obtain provisions.
More information on each of the *palawa kani* words in this book can be seen on the Word Histories for each word, accessed on the community computers in each of the 3 TAC regional offices.