

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### LANDMARK RECOGNITION AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE FOR EARLY FEMALE LAND RIGHTS WARRIOR

The first statue erected in Perth's city heart for an Aboriginal woman was unveiled today, giving overdue recognition to an early rights activist for the Whadjuk Noongar people.

A lasting tribute to Balbuk Yooreel has been fashioned in the grounds of Government House, under the guidance of a committee of family members and Aboriginal history and culture experts, recalling her advocacy for her people and her opposition to European settlement.

Speaking at the statue's unveiling, The Honourable Kim Beazley AC, Governor of Western Australia, described Balbuk's fiery and passionate nature, describing how she 'walked between worlds'.

The statue depicts Balbuk as seen in her later years, when she would walk across her ancestral lands, with little regard for fences, boundaries and built structures that emerged as the city of Perth took shape, protesting loudly the dispossession of her people.

The Governor described how Balbuk's grandfather was the first of the Aboriginal people of what was then known as the Swan River Colony to encounter European settlers, who were met not with violence or rebellion, but with grace.

Born at Matagarup in 1840, Balbuk's life began in a sacred place of traditional birthing that is very special to the Noongar people - a sheltered space close to water. Balbuk lived life on her own terms, conscious of the impact of the new colony on Aboriginal lands, sites of significance, cultural and family life. Hers was a voice often heard, but not always joined.

The statue is erected above a plinth that depicts the path Balbuk would walk, with her Wanna, a digging stick used by Aboriginal women, along the Derbarl Yerrigan (Swan River). The natural curves of her trek followed the arc of the river and the land, and stand in stark contrast to the rigid gridlines of the early city.

Balbuk was regularly seen walking from Matagarup to a swamp that was drained and became the Perth central railway station. Along the way, she would gather gilgies (freshwater crayfish) and vegetables. When this path became blocked as construction began on Perth's early infrastructure, historian Daisy Bates described how Balbuk would break through and climb over fences to uphold her traditional way of life.

"Balbuk literally broke down barriers", Governor Beazley said, "to keep her traditions alive and to protest loudly about the impact of white settlement on her people."

He drew attention to the fact that more needed to be done to recognise the significant contribution women made, and continued to make, to the development of Western Australia.

In March, the Governor supported a campaign by City of Perth Councillor Sandy Anghie, to erect a statue to Edith Cowan OBE, an early social reformer, advocate for women's and children's welfare who served as Australia's first woman parliamentarian.

Visitors to Government House Gardens, open to the public Tuesday to Thursday each week from noon until 2pm, can view the statue. To learn more about Balbuk, a copy of Governor Beazley's speech and a fact sheet about her life is available from the Government House website at [www.govhouse.wa.gov.au](http://www.govhouse.wa.gov.au), with links via Government House's social media channels on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#). The fact sheet includes a guided walk retracing Balbuk's steps along the Swan River and adjacent areas.

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