

# Correspondence

## Reburying Barkandji human remains would close window on their past

The largest collection outside Africa of modern human remains from the last glacial cycle was unearthed at the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, more than 30 years ago (J. M. Bowler *et al. Nature* 421, 837–840; 2003). Held in a university collection, these fossil remains have barely been studied. They are now scheduled for reburial in 2021.

About 80 of the more than 100 individuals in the collection are from the northern Willandra Lakes, which overlaps with the Barkandji Native Title determination area. As members and affiliates of the Barkandji descendants, we call on NSW to delay reburial so we can discuss the fate of the fossils with other Aboriginal descendants and researchers.

Many Barkandji people do not want their ancestors reburied until more can be discovered about the age and complexity of their society. The Aboriginal Advisory Group for the Willandra site, composed of the Barkandji, Mutthi Mutthi and Ngyiampaa people, agreed with an unpublished 2019 report by the consulting group Extent Heritage in Sydney. This concluded that reburial should go ahead because it would not affect the region's world-heritage value. However, there was no consultation with either the Barkandji Native Title Group Executive or the research community in reaching these conclusions.

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\*On behalf of 4 correspondents.  
See [go.nature.com/2wassgp](https://go.nature.com/2wassgp)

## Europe's 'green deal' and carbon dioxide removal

The European Union is debating whether to include carbon dioxide removal (CDR) as part of its 2030 targets on the road to climate neutrality by 2050. In our view, creating sustainable CDR could allow delivery of negative emissions at scale after 2030.

In October 2020, the European Parliament supported a 60% target for emissions reduction by 2030 without CDR. Last month, the European Council agreed to a 55% target that includes CDR. It will therefore be necessary to reconcile the two approaches.

A singular comprehensive target that includes CDR could offer more flexibility for EU policymaking (V. Scott and O. Geden *Nature Energy* 3, 350–352; 2018). But hitting net zero in 2050 through a complex cocktail of emissions and removals is insufficient if storing the removed CO<sub>2</sub> is not durable. A separate 2030 CDR-policy regime would provide clarity to project developers and ensure that high environmental and sustainability standards are upheld.

An independent scientific body will need to assess whether EU climate policy is consistent with the targets and whether near-term targets are suitable for achieving longer-term goals. It must incorporate social science into its assessments because techno-economic feasibility might not be the main constraint for many CDR options. The coming decade should herald a public conversation about the acceptability of the different possibilities.

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## Optimizing public services after COVID

The devastating economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the need to make public services as effective as possible in future. However, the evidence on how best to achieve this is copious, complex and unstandardized. The confusion is compounded by the existence of a great deal of guidance that does not adhere to quality standards. And because there is currently no accreditation system for guidance producers, it is hard for users to determine which guidance is authoritative.

Evidence for efficacy and cost benefit needs to be generated, synthesized, translated into advice and guidance, and then applied in policymaking and practice (see [go.nature.com/37yrde](https://go.nature.com/37yrde)).

Evidence generation, systematic reviews of evidence, and practice and policy guidelines – such as the updated Appraisal of Guidelines for Research and Evaluation (AGREE) Instrument, AGREE II – need to conform to international standards. Quality marks, which should be displayed prominently, would indicate this conformity. Published guidance, evidence syntheses and trials that do not comply should carry warnings.

Proportionate regulation to ensure standardization is fully justified, given the massive amount spent on public services around the world. What's at stake here is the public good, which scientific evaluation continues to allow us the opportunity to deliver in education, policing, health care, local government and much else.

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## Africa's reforestation: European Union and United States should step up

Africa's Great Green Wall, a 100-million-hectare reforestation project, will help to combat drought and desertification of the continent's drylands and mitigate global warming – at an estimated cost of US\$43 billion over the next decade (*Nature* 587, 8; 2020). I call on the European Union and the United States to commit generous funding towards this crucial project, which is far beyond the capacity of the African Union nations to fund by themselves.

European countries (in particular the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Italy) have exploited Africa's natural and human wealth during a large part of the second half of the last millennium (see, for example, [go.nature.com/3gnbvy4](https://go.nature.com/3gnbvy4)). And much of the wealth of the United States has been built on the slavery of African people and their descendants (see, for instance, [go.nature.com/3mokan4](https://go.nature.com/3mokan4)).

It would be a laudable reparation for historic injustices if Europe and the United States were to team up and provide funding for this extremely important cause. In addition to being a symbolic compensation for their past exploitation of Africa and its people – probably amounting to much more than the estimated \$43 billion at current rates – such commitment will contribute to the well-being of future generations everywhere.

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