

The Great Celestial Emu is my favourite Aboriginal constellation says Kirsten Banks

Kirsten Banks' heritage can be traced back on her father's side to ancestors of the Wiradjuri people in central New South Wales. Wiradjuri is one of the largest language groups in Australia.

In her younger years, Banks had learnt a few Dreaming stories. The one that sparked her imagination and inspired her to explore the night sky in more detail was the story connected with the Emu in the Sky. She became intrigued with how much we don't know and with wanting to share the astronomical knowledge of her ancestors.

Her research has revealed a wealth of traditional star knowledge stretching back into deep time.

"For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal people have been using the stars for so many cool things," she says. "It blows my mind. I love sharing that knowledge with other people."

"Knowledge systems that link the positions and motions of celestial objects to navigation, calendars, subsistence, and social applications," Banks says.

"Indigenous people are careful observers of subtle changes in the positions and properties of celestial objects and noted both obvious and rare celestial phenomena, such as meteors, comets, eclipses and fireballs," she says in her report on **The Planets in Indigenous Australian Traditions**, written with fellow astronomer Duane Hamacher.

It is no surprise to Banks that: "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people paid careful attention to the motions of solar system bodies through careful observation, which was recorded and passed to successive generations through oral tradition and material culture."

"Aboriginal and Islander people distinguished planets from the background stars, noted their changing positions in the sky, and their changing positions relative to each other," she says.

"Their proximity to each other and their dynamic relationship to the Sun and Moon, is all part of the unfolding story, that I am learning about."

"I'm sure you must have heard an Indigenous dreamtime story at least once in your life," Banks says.

"Maybe it was Tiddalick the Frog, or maybe even the Rainbow Serpent. These stories hold a wealth of astronomical knowledge – and there's more where that came from."

"Aboriginal star stories contain lessons that educate us about the relationship between the sky and the land, as well as how the universe functions around us."

"This knowledge has existed for more than 65,000 years. "

I see that one of my roles today, in modern Australia, is to learn more and revive the knowledge of Indigenous astronomy.

"Plans for an observatory and planetarium at Munibung Hill in Lake Macquarie would be a fantastic asset for local communities," says Banks.

Kirsten Banks was a guest of Christ Church at Mt Vincent on Saturday night.

A large crowd turned out to hear about how Indigenous Astronomy has informed Aboriginal people across the generations and when appreciated in association with modern observations can build bridges across time and cultures.

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