

# Aboriginal Engagement Strategy

## South East Action Plan

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#### **More information**

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#### **Acknowledgments**

All Local Aboriginal Land Councils across the region, with specific mention to Eden, Batemans Bay, Bega, Illawarra, Jerrinja, Merrimans, Mogo, Ngambri, Nowra, Onerwal, Pejar and Ulladulla.

Fiona Pigott and Peter Pigott for their work on the South East Aboriginal Engagement Stakeholder Interview Analysis report.

Community and staff who responded to the survey.

#### **Photos**

Page 3 - Fitzroy Falls in Morton National Park. Photo by South East Local Land Services staff.

Page 5 - Drawing Room Rocks, Berry. Photo by Marien Stark, South East Local Land Services

Page 7 - Subtropical and temperate coastal saltmarsh of Southeast NSW. Photo by Sonia Bazzacco.

Page 11 - Still water at Nethercote Falls, November 2023. Photo by Danelle Ayres, South East Local Land Services.

Page 13 - Gang-gang Cockatoo (*Callocephalon fimbriatum*). Endemic to South East NSW. Photo by South East Local Land Services staff.

Page 16 - Installing native bee nest on Wairo Country. Photo by Full Circle Care.

Page 20 - Galong countryside. Photo by Marien Stark, South East Local Land Services.


Page 22 - Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) at Broad Gully via Mongarlowe. Photo by Marien Stark, South East Local Land Services.

Page 23 - Goodenia Rainforest Walk, South Wolumla. Photo by Danelle Ayres, South East Local Land Services

Page 24 - Snowy River. Photo by Marien Stark, South East Local Land Services.

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing March 2024. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of Local Land Services or the user's independent adviser.



# Acknowledging Traditional Owners

South East Local Land Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future. We also recognise the unique, diverse and enduring cultures of First Nations Peoples in NSW.

First Nations Peoples have a strong ongoing social, spiritual and cultural connection with their Traditional Lands and Waters. Obligations to care for Country remain integral to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander lore, identity, culture and social and emotional well-being. The way in which Traditional Lands are being managed is of great interest to First Nations communities and South East Local Land Services understands that Aboriginal people have a significant contribution to make in relation to land management in the region.

First Nations Peoples hold special knowledge and rights regarding the management of land and its resources. Aboriginal people occupied all areas of the region with Tangible and Intangible sites and show as evidence such as campsites, scarred and carved trees, rock shelters, grinding grooves, rock art, and ceremonial and burial areas present across all landscapes.

Cultural values across the region may also relate to natural resources such as native bush medicines, foods and tradable goods including ochre and stone suitable for tool making. Songlines, spiritual landscape storylines and intellectual property in relation to traditional knowledge is also acknowledged.

The South East region holds many Aboriginal cultural heritage values, and the preservation and management of these values is best determined by the Traditional Custodians of Country.

South East Local Land Services is committed to building strong relationships with First Nations communities, seeks to understand their aspirations and ensure that Aboriginal people have a voice to provide input into land management issues and in particular the management of cultural values.

South East Local Land Services acknowledges the different ways Aboriginal people are identified, e.g. First Nations, Aboriginal, Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

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## Our strategy

Our vision is to enrich, enhance and foster respectful relationships that create opportunities for First Nations peoples and other Australians to work and walk together toward reconciled, resilient communities in productive, healthy landscapes.

The “Our Place on Country – Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2020-2023” which was co-developed with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and Department of Regional NSW has the vision to advance the aspirations of Aboriginal people of NSW through the work we do. This vision is also shared by Local Land Services.

## Principles

The Our Place on Country Strategy has six key principles which will also apply to the South East Local Land Services Aboriginal Engagement Strategy Action Plan.

1. Acknowledge, value, and embed Aboriginal cultural knowledge and world views in program delivery and business as usual.
2. Respect Aboriginal people’s rights, obligations, and roles as Traditional Custodians of the land, sea, and waterways.
3. Promote and strengthen connections to culture and identity.
4. Prioritise economic independence for Aboriginal people through increased employment and enterprise development.
5. Establish and maintain meaningful ongoing relationships with Aboriginal people and Country.
6. Recognise appropriate engagement and connection with Aboriginal people and Country as core to our service delivery.

## Why is this so important?

Country is at the core of every Aboriginal person’s identity and sense of belonging. It is the place from which Aboriginal language and culture are derived and Aboriginal culture and language groups determine families and kinship.

Aboriginal communities are often busy prioritising the immediate needs of the community within the outer circle of issues. These issues are symptomatic of the dispossession of Aboriginal people’s lands and a lack of clear voice and contribution to managing Country.

This Plan will help South East Local Land Services (SELLS) do a better job of delivering our core business by developing a better understanding of Aboriginal communities and integrating this knowledge into our work through creating partnerships based on co-design and collaboration.

## Influences

The South East Aboriginal Engagement Strategy Action Plan goals, outcomes, objectives and key results were based around the following business and documents created within those businesses to build relationships whilst working with Aboriginal communities.

1. Local Land Services Aboriginal Engagement Strategy.
2. Our Place on Country – Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2020- 2023 - Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and Department of Regional NSW.
3. Department of Regional NSW - Aboriginal Outcomes Plan.
4. Opportunities, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment (OCHRE) (2013) - NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal Affairs: Education, Employment & Accountability.
5. The NSW Public Sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy NSW Working Together for a Better Future 2019–2025.
6. Reconciliation Australia – Reconciliation Action Plans “Local Land Services Innovate RAP, 2018-2020”.
7. “Walking in Both Worlds” – Local Land Services Senior Executive Leadership Development Program Report.
8. Aboriginal Procurement Policy (2021), NSW Government, Treasury (currently under review).
9. SELLS Indigenous Participation Plan for projects funded by the Australian Government’s Natural Heritage Trust (in development).

## Review

We will report against the actions in the plan annually. Highlights, achievements, challenges and learnings will be shared internally and externally via the Local Land Services (LLS) achievements reporting.

To develop this Plan we undertook a series of structured conversations with LALCs during September and October 2023. These conversations will happen annually to monitor and report on the regional actions, help us understand the impact of the Plan, and strengthen partnerships.

This document will be dynamic, with progress to be reviewed and reported on every three years to ensure our participation strategies and activities remain relevant. The first review will happen during 2026/27, or in alignment with the state’s LLS Aboriginal Engagement Strategy review.

## Consultation

SELLS have consulted with the SELLS Board, South East Management Team and will continue to work with key Aboriginal stakeholder groups for endorsement and feedback on the plan.

SELLS has been working closely with our First Nations community to establish new partnerships and build upon its existing relationships to better understand the needs, interests and aspirations of the South East region's First Nations community, particularly through the Caring for Bushfire Affected Country (2020-2023) project.

Through existing partnerships, SELLS staff have a good understanding of local First Nations peoples' interests and aspirations in land, sea and water. Therefore, in February 2023, SELLS invited the South East region's Local Aboriginal Land Councils and to participate in a short survey titled 'Survey to help develop the Indigenous Participation Plan', where we sense-checked our understanding, asking what we got right, wrong and what we missed. The survey was accompanied by a summary document titled 'What we heard', which was developed through discussions with SELLS staff who have been working directly with Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) and ranger groups during 2022, and the findings of a learning needs survey conducted in 2021.

The Plan reflects important insights gained by SELLS staff over several years through its ongoing relationship with the Aboriginal community. During 2023 representatives from 15 Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the South East region were invited to share their support needs, perception of SELLS and suggestions for partnerships and projects. As a result, 13 conversations were held with LALCs across September and October 2023. Additionally, the local Aboriginal community and relevant staff were invited to read and provide feedback on the Draft Plan via an online survey. The survey invitation was extended to:

- Aboriginal people, organisations which employ Aboriginal people or provide services to the local Aboriginal community, and;
- Local Land Services staff who are Aboriginal, manage Aboriginal staff or work on programs or policy which affect the local Aboriginal community across the South East region.

Overall, there were 15 respondents to the online survey. The interview analysis and survey feedback have further shaped this Plan and other emerging strategic documents e.g. SELLS Indigenous Participation Plan for projects funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust.



## Our community's aspirations

The local Aboriginal community has a strong desire to work in partnership with South East Local Land Services (SELLS) to manage Country now and into the future. The community told us they want to share their cultural knowledge and practice, build trust, learn new skills, lead, and provide guidance, and work together in a more strategic way.

Devised through consultation, these points summarise the community's complex and dynamic wants and needs to achieve its goals in the management of Country. Importantly for this Plan, they describe how partnerships with SELLS can be built upon and strengthened.

### What we heard our local Aboriginal community tell us they want:

**A strong vision and plan for this place on Country** - It is important that all LALCs in the South East region achieve their own vision and place-based land, sea and water plan, and want our support to achieve this. This will help to define and promote a shared understanding of common goals and focus.

**Let's be strategic, plan and do things together** – LALCs want to be invited to work together with us and other key organisations on wider strategic planning. They want two-way communication with SELLS and other partner organisations. A regional approach to managing arrangements with LALCs, such as a Memorandum of Understanding, would support a more structured and forward-thinking partnership and explore ways to achieve our common goals, like, working together to develop bike trail signage and funding rangers to install it, mapping areas for ecological surveys, use of our nurseries and staff for propagation and revegetation works, and weed management.

**To be leaders in the management of Country** – The local community and organisations want our support to build upon their leadership capabilities, and strengthen self-identity through support for traditional practices (e.g. cultural burning), education, mentoring and training. For example, participate in the South East Local Leaders program to build knowledge, social networks and practical leadership skills, tools and capabilities.

**Achieve sustainable long-term funding and workforce stability** – Across the region LALCs have a full time CEO, administrative support (usually part time), and approximately 56% of their workforce is casual employees. Most funding agreements are short-term, which hinders stable employment. It is difficult to retain and grow a skilled workforce with high rates of casual employment, and while the cost of training is often funded, the ability to pay staff a wage for their time to train is a gap. LALCs told us they are seeking new opportunities (such as bio-banking and renewable energy initiatives) for more sustainable and competitive funding models for their workforce and would like our support in this. They want to be invited to collaborate with us to develop a career development program and streamline training requirements for contracts. They want our support to streamline the grant process, and to explore what it means to transition to a fee-for-service approach.



**Let's build stronger long-lasting relationships** - Longstanding mutually beneficial partnerships are crucial to deliver improved environmental outcomes and self-determination for Aboriginal people. Our local Aboriginal community is striving for traditional practices to become embedded into NRM service delivery, and are looking for opportunities to provide guidance, perspective and cultural knowledge in all project stages for works on Country.

**Let's celebrate and share cultural land management practice** – The local Aboriginal community wants to celebrate traditional cultural practice together, and build the cultural competence of its partners (like SELLS), its own staffs and community members.

**To grow and build organisational capability** – More training and technical skill enhancement, and more frequent delivery of accredited courses that lead to employment. LALCs also want to build their project management expertise (e.g. reporting, IT literacy, information management). Through the learning needs survey (2021), training priorities were identified with Cultural Heritage protection and fire management as the two most prevalent areas at 90%, followed by conservation and land management activities at 75%.

**To be the managers of culturally significant environmental information** – LALCs will continue to build their capability and capacity to become the autonomous custodians of information on culturally significant sites. They want our support to do this.



## Structure of the plan

The structure of the SELLS Aboriginal Engagement Strategy Action Plan is based around four outcomes:

### **Outcome 1: Enriching relationships**

Aboriginal people and communities have greater choice, access and control over their Country and its resource. Local Land Services will collaborate with Aboriginal communities who garner broader respect for Aboriginal cultures through the sharing of traditional knowledge to enhance contemporary land management practices in sustainable and productive landscapes.

### **Outcome 2: Creating opportunities**

Aboriginal organisations and businesses are supported to succeed and grow NSW's first economy.

### **Outcome 3: Enhancing respect**

Our Aboriginal workforce increases across all divisions at all levels as Local Land Services becomes an employer of first choice for Aboriginal people to grow career paths in the public sector, ensure Aboriginal employees feel culturally safe and understand drivers and barriers to employment success.

### **Outcome 4: Building understanding**

Senior Executive, managers, staff and Board members are aware and promote the importance of developing responses that address the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples impacted by our work.

The SELLS Aboriginal Engagement Strategy Action Plan details our organisation's actions to support the state-wide Local Land Services Aboriginal Engagement Strategy. For the South East region, it will show our commitment to work with and build relationships with the South East Aboriginal communities.

Within the South East Regional Aboriginal Engagement Strategy Action Plan, we have listed how SELLS will support the state-wide actions.

For the regional actions, SELLS has addressed these in further detail through this Plan, and describes:

1. What we are going to do regionally (regional actions)
2. The frequency
3. Responsibility (who will deliver the action).



## Our audience: Local Aboriginal organisations, people and communities

The South East Region is home to the Gundugurra, Ngunawal, Ngarigo, Yuin, and Tharawal clans or nation groups which traversed its 55,600 sq. km. There are 18 Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) operating within the region's borders, as well as many other First Nations communities, organisations and people who live, work and play on Country across the Region.

The South East Region is diverse supporting a distinct mixture of cultural values, landscapes and lifestyles. It extends from Wollongong in the North, Crookwell, Boorowa and Jindabyne in the west, and the Victorian border to the south. Situated along the east coast it extends three nautical miles out to sea and includes 673 km of coastline (40% of the NSW coast). With an overall population of approximately 700,000 people, approximately 23,000 First Nations people call the region home (SELLS, 2021).

The region is rich in cultural and environmental values due to its diverse natural assets such as coastline, estuarine and freshwater environments, through to tall forest, woodlands, grasslands and alpine environment. Throughout the landscape there are cultural sites, special places and physical evidence of land use, such as rock art, culturally modified trees, burial sites, grinding grooves, artefact scatters and midden sites. These form a record of occupation, cultural significance, land use and management. These are the places where traditional skills, knowledge and cultural practices were learnt and ultimately passed down from generation to generation.

There are many First Nations people communities in the South East Local Land Services region. Many people reside in regional centres and small towns along the coast and on the tablelands. The population size of community groups varies from large to small with all groups sharing the importance of connection to Country and Culture.

South East Local Land Services works with a range of Aboriginal people groups, organisations and individuals throughout the south east region. Below is description of the types of Aboriginal communities and individuals across the region.

### Land Councils

Local Aboriginal Land Councils were established under the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act (1983). There is a state Aboriginal Land Council for the whole of NSW and many Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) throughout the state. LALCs have an open membership where any adult Aboriginal person residing in or having an association with the Council's area can become a member. LALCs can represent many Aboriginal people in a local community, but not all will be members of a LALC, with some areas having higher membership than others. It should therefore never be assumed that the LALC represents the views of all Aboriginal groups in an area or a community.

Conversely, LALCs do have a significant role to play in most communities and have a specific function to protect Aboriginal heritage. In the South East region today there are 18 LALCs whose

boundaries are within the South East region. There are 15 LALCs whose land is either entirely within, or the majority of their land is within the South East region (green boundary) as shown below.

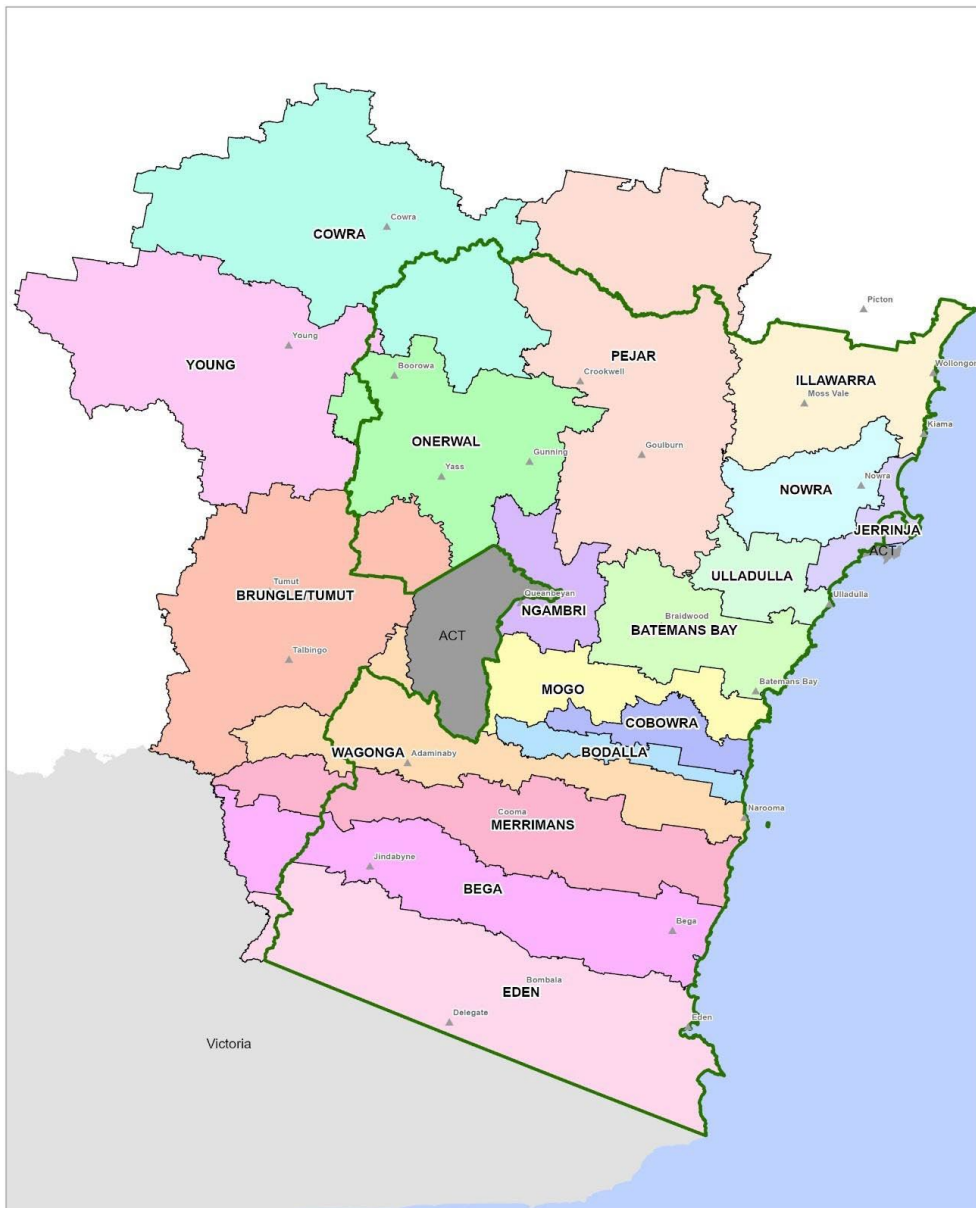


Figure 1 A map of the South East Local Land Services region showing the boundaries of Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

## Part 4A Boards of Management - Gulagal and Biamanga

These are Boards of Management which jointly manage parks in NSW which have been assessed to be culturally significant to Aboriginal communities and needed for conservation purposes under part 4A of the NPW Act. The Board is made up of a majority of Registered Aboriginal Owners, with government and other local and interested group representatives. Parks managed by Part 4A in the South East include Biamanga National Park near Bega, and Gulaga National Park near Bermagui. These are leaseback agreements, where the land is leased back to the Government to be used as a National Park.

## **Native Title Holders/ Native Title Claimants**

Native Title refers to those rights and interests in land and water of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are derived from the Traditional lore and customs of their Nations and are currently recognised under Australian law. Native Title Claimants are First Nations people who are registered under the 'National Native Title Register' as native title claimants under the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth). To be considered as valid a claimant must satisfy a registration test relating to on-going association with the claimed lands. Claimants who have passed the registration test 'have procedural rights and other benefits, including the right to negotiate with governments or the right to be consulted about proposed developments (future acts).'<sup>21</sup> This means that claimants may need to be consulted on things such as Plans of Management for parks and reserves. Once a positive native title determination has been made claimants are then recognised as Native Title Holders and are awarded particular legal rights.

## **Traditional Owners**

Traditional Owners are those people who, through membership in a descent group or clan, have responsibility for caring for particular Country. Traditional Owners is a term used for those who claim or are accepted by their community as being authorised to speak for Country and its heritage. Authorisation to speak for Country and heritage may be as a Traditional Owner, an elder, or in more recent times, as a registered Native Title claimant. Traditional Owners are normally consulted as a matter of course on any issues specifically relating to the management of Traditional lands and waters. In some communities, Traditional Owners have organised representative groups.

## **Elders**

Traditionally, Elders were highly respected in Aboriginal communities as decision makers and knowledge holders for clans. The tradition of consulting senior Aboriginal people in communities continues today. As a result, it may be necessary when formulating an engagement strategy to specifically consider engaging relevant Aboriginal peoples Elders. 'The term 'Elders' may not always mean people over fifty or sixty years of age and, conversely, age alone does not confer on a person the status of 'elder'. An Elder is a person who is recognised within the community who has trust, knowledge and understanding of their culture and permission to speak about it. Some communities may have an organised Elders representative group.

## **Youth**

Establishing youth leadership and involvement in decision-making processes under the guidance of Elders will be crucial in paving the way for Elders to pass on responsibilities to the next generation. Engagement processes that can include youth can help provide the necessary 'mentoring' experiences that Aboriginal youth will require to take on community leadership responsibilities in the future. Elders might be approached as to the appropriateness of inviting youth to be a part of an engagement process and to provide mentoring opportunities.

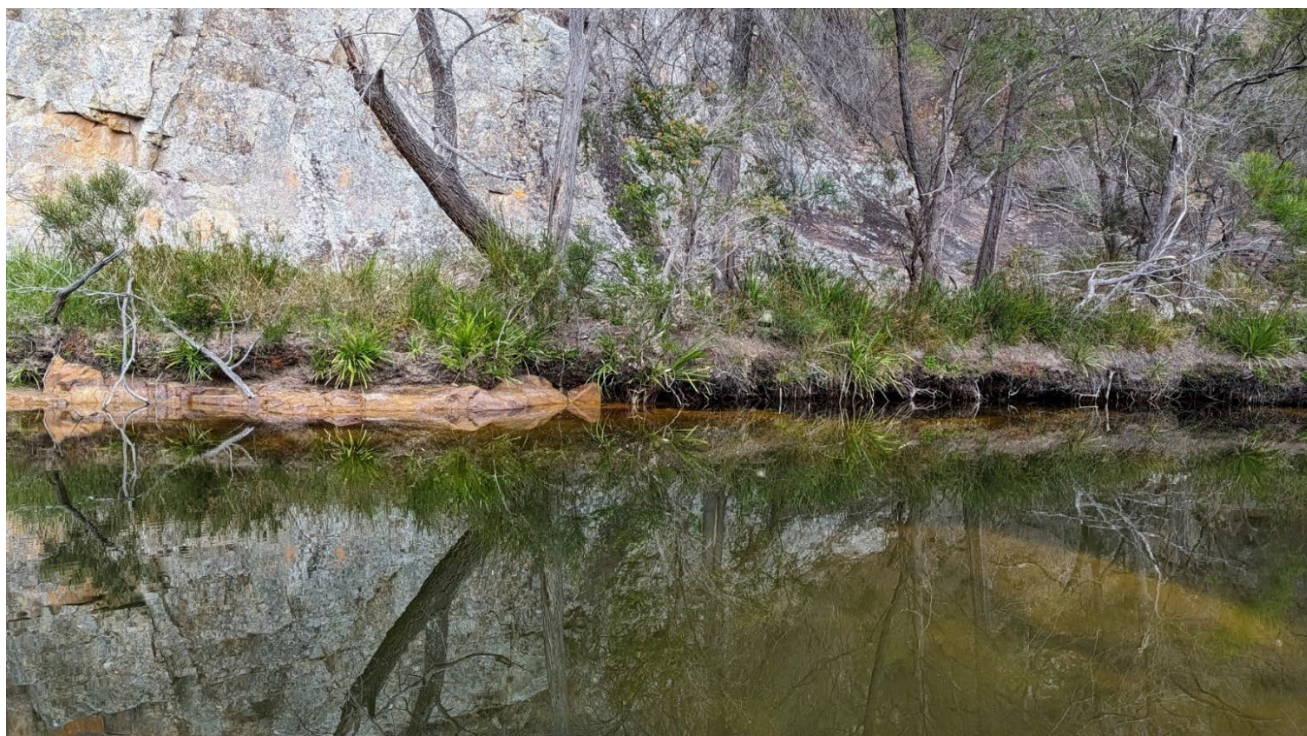
## Other Aboriginal people with interests

These are Aboriginal people who through their personal or family history have involvement with a particular place or have a particular interest in a South East Local Land Services policy or program. Examples of places other Aboriginal people may be interested in include (but are not limited to) former missions stations, places of post-contact historical significance, and areas of land where people worked or continued cultural practices away from their Traditional Country. Other Aboriginal people with interests may include members of the Stolen Generation.

## Aboriginal people as land managers

Throughout the region there are different types of land ownership and management by Aboriginal people. These include:

- Aboriginal private land holders;
- A network of Local Aboriginal Land Councils that have land holdings granted in accordance with the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983;
- Registered Aboriginal Owners under the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 lists Aboriginal people who have a cultural association with land in NSW, the location of the land, and the nature of that association or connection. Registered Aboriginal Owners make up the majority of the Part 4A Boards of Management.
- Indigenous Land Corporation land which has been acquired to achieve cultural, social, environmental and economic benefits for Aboriginal people; and
- Native Title rights which is not land ownership but only an interest in lands that have cultural values.



## Outcome 1: Enriching relationships

Aboriginal people and communities have greater choice, access and control over their Country and its resource. Local Land Services will collaborate with Aboriginal communities who garner broader respect for Aboriginal cultures through the sharing of traditional knowledge to enhance contemporary land management practices in sustainable and productive landscapes.

### Objective 1.1

Develop trust, understanding and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal people, organisations and local communities to further enable these communities, and strengthen relationships with Local Land Services.

#### Our commitment (key result)

Increase the number of Aboriginal community partnerships and participation within Local Land Services.

#### What we will do (regional actions)

1. Senior Land Services Officer (SLSO) (Aboriginal communities) will meet annually with key local Aboriginal organisations to support the development and implementation of Aboriginal community plans and aspirations through Local Land Services programs leading to suitable opportunities to partner with Aboriginal people on programs across Local Land Services. As part of these conversations undertake a current skills and qualifications audit to inform future projects and support.
2. South East Management Team will identify specific investment annually to support Aboriginal community led activities.
3. All Local land Services staff, during project design phases, will consider opportunities to collaborate with Aboriginal community.
4. South East LLS staff, Board members and Aboriginal groups will continue to practice and enhance two-way communication between organisations through regular check ins, to make sure South East LLS work remains relevant and can become more strategic.

LALCS want hands-on support and help with strategic planning, including projects, policy and processes. Specifically, there's a call for assistance in achieving Community Land and Business Plan targets.

(2023 South East Aboriginal Engagement Stakeholder Interview Analysis)





## Objective 1.2

Acknowledge Country and participate in and celebrate significant Aboriginal events by providing opportunities to build and maintain relationships between Aboriginal peoples and other regional Australians.

### Our commitment (key result)

All LLS business units acknowledge Country as part of regular events, have Welcome to Country at public events and are supported to participate in and celebrate significant Aboriginal events.

### What we will do (regional actions)

1. All South East LLS staff and contractors will follow the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage (ACH) handbook to ensure protection of sensitive and significant sites across all Local Land Services on-ground programs, providing opportunities for staff to access training delivered by the local Aboriginal community.
2. South East LLS will implement a process to ensure local Aboriginal Community have opportunity to share local cultural heritage information with South East LLS staff to improve protection of sensitive and significant sites across the region.
3. South East Management Team will ensure all Local Land Services Staff are supported to:
  - a. Participate in and celebrate significant Aboriginal events;
  - b. Acknowledge Country at events, workshops or meetings (particularly where external stakeholders are present); and
  - c. Organise an appropriate local elder to deliver a Welcome to Country at all significant public Local Land Services events (e.g. conferences, forums, expos, celebrations etc.) or other smaller public events as deemed appropriate (e.g. a cultural burn event or cultural day, species release on Country etc.).



## Objective 1.3

Raise internal and external awareness of our organisation's Aboriginal programs to maximise participation and build relationships with regional NSW Stakeholders and Aboriginal peoples and communities.

### Our commitment (key result)

Increase the number of specific programs that involve Aboriginal Peoples and communities and increase participation in existing Local Land Services programs.

### What we will do (regional actions)

1. South East Management Team will identify opportunities for Aboriginal people and other land managers to promote, showcase and share traditional and contemporary land management practices via the development of one case study annually, creation of knowledge sharing event opportunities and investment in on-Country workshops and activities.
2. South East Management Team will ensure all Aboriginal staff have opportunity to participate in and promote significant Aboriginal events which may include: The Apology anniversary, Close the Gap day, NAIDOC week, National Reconciliation Week, National Sorry Day.

In the South East this means that...

- We will strive to strengthen our partnerships with the local Aboriginal community. To achieve this, we will talk and work together more often; build trust and understanding of each other's needs, wants and skills; and be more strategic about how we plan and deliver our work together.
- We will acknowledge, share and celebrate Aboriginal culture in South East Local Land Services. To achieve this we will support our staff to participate in Aboriginal celebrations and build their cultural competency to acknowledge Country and protect culturally significant and sensitive sites.
- We will raise awareness of our Aboriginal programs and improve participation. To achieve this we will promote the learnings and successes of the programs we deliver, and provide more opportunities for the Aboriginal community to participate and share their culture, knowledge, and expertise.

## Case Study: Supporting Aboriginal community caring for bushfire affected Country

### Strategic Intent

South East NSW experienced unprecedented impacts in the 2019/ 2020 summer bushfires. The southern end of NSW reported the burning of 1,506,193 ha of land, accounting for 27.3 percent of NSW's total area burnt.

Since 2020, the Supporting Aboriginal Community Caring for Bushfire Affected Country project has allowed Aboriginal communities to identify their own priorities to respond to impacts on Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) such as weeds impacting Threatened Ecological Communities (TECs), impacts of feral animals, and limited community awareness, knowledge, and action. It has aimed to improve the condition of EPBC listed TECs in the region; enhance the recovery of fire affected priority species and other natural assets; and stabilise or improve the trajectory for targeted threatened species.

However, the particular focus of the project was to support Traditional Owner led healing of Country.

### Project Delivery

The project has partnered with local Aboriginal groups to:

1. learn from traditional practices in healing Country;
2. provide the right advice and tailor training opportunities to build contemporary skills which compliment traditional practice; and
3. enable and employ groups to undertake improvement works on Country through negotiated service agreements.

Project partners and their roles include:

- SELLS project officers have assisted Aboriginal land managers to identify priority species and vegetation communities within and adjacent to their lands, supported the identification of threats and recommended actions.
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC) and other Aboriginal land managers of the region were invited to participate and identify their priorities.
- Kategic Services completed a training needs survey to identify how the project could support priority capacity building among the groups.
- Local ecologists provided training to update community wildlife monitoring and seed collection skills and completed land assessments to provide management plans and help prioritise on-ground activities on Aboriginal owned lands.

- Government partners, including National Parks and Wildlife Services and NSW Department of Planning and Environment (cultural fire unit), ensured alignment with other government programs.

## Outcomes

The project has enabled opportunities for self-determination for Aboriginal groups through tailored training, ongoing support and employment opportunities. Some examples of achievements include:

- Bega LALC completed training in wildlife monitoring techniques using sand pads and cameras and were supported to develop management plans for fire affected properties, resulting in cultural assessment services, wildlife monitoring and feral animal management programs.
- Batemans Bay Rangers completed training in wildlife monitoring and the use of feral scan to record their sightings. They also used these skills for a Fauna Monitoring Project and were employed to completed weed management within priority Travelling Stock Reserves, reducing the impact of grassy weeds on priority habitat.
- Jerrinja LALC established a native plant nursery, increasing skills in seed collection, propagation and revegetation in fire affected lands;
- Full Circle Care, an Aboriginal organisation, led community learning activities exploring the traditional and ecological significance of native stingless bees, installed 150 native bee nests in bushland on Wairo Country, and were able to relocate these to fire impacted areas to assist in pollinator repopulation and flora regeneration.



## Outcome 2: Creating opportunities

Aboriginal organisations and businesses are supported to succeed and grow NSW's first economy.

Traditional land management, especially cultural burning is recognised as an emerging area of collaboration. It is important to maintain skills and workforce in this area.

(2023 South East Aboriginal Engagement Stakeholder Interview Analysis)



### Objective 2.1

Support sustainable growth of Aboriginal owned businesses and encourage Aboriginal employment by driving demand via government procurement of goods and services.

#### Our commitment (key result)

Increase Aboriginal procurement, creating opportunities to support sustainable local Aboriginal businesses and comply with government policy.

#### What we will do (regional actions)

1. South East Management Team will ensure opportunities to increase Aboriginal procurement in South East NSW via provision of up to date resources to team members to assist in identification of suitable Aboriginal owned enterprises.
2. South East Management Team will identify specific investment, annually, to support Aboriginal community led projects and Aboriginal procurements annually during the development of Business Plans.
3. SLSO (Aboriginal communities) will promote Aboriginal businesses available within the region along with success stories of new business relationships.
4. SLSO (Aboriginal communities) and Stakeholder & Investment Coordinator will identify opportunities annually to support Aboriginal people who own and manage land.
5. TSR Coordinator will identify opportunities to increase collaboration with Aboriginal people in the management of Travelling Stock Reserves.
6. South East Management Team will ensure any changes to Treasury's NSW Aboriginal Procurement Policy (2021) are well-understood following the 2023/24 review.

## Objective 2.2

Support employment opportunities for Aboriginal people to get fulfilling and long-term sustainable jobs within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal owned businesses.

92% of LALCs expressed a strong interest in training and technical skill enhancement, wanting more frequent delivery of accredited course that lead to employment.



(2023 South East Aboriginal Engagement Stakeholder Interview Analysis)

### Our commitment (key result)

Increase the number of Aboriginal employment opportunities facilitated by South East Local Land Services.

### What we will do (regional actions)

1. SLSO (Aboriginal communities) will meet annually with key local Aboriginal organisations to support the development and implementation of Aboriginal community plans and aspirations through Local Land Services programs leading to suitable opportunities to support Aboriginal communities to develop job ready skills.
2. South East Management team will identify specific investment annually, to support employment opportunities for Aboriginal community to contribute to the delivery of program outputs.
3. South East Management Team will ensure the SELLS structure includes career paths and opportunities for Aboriginal people.
4. All Local land Services staff, during project design phases, will consider opportunity to engage Aboriginal community for services.

In the South East this means that...

- We will purchase goods and services from Aboriginal owned organisations. To achieve this, we will know who those businesses are, and what products, skills and expertise they can offer or need to develop, and we will factor this thinking into the design and planning for our programs.
- We will support Aboriginal peoples' employment. To achieve this we will provide support to develop job-ready skills, and ensure that career paths exist within South East Local Land Services.

## Outcome 3: Enhancing respect

Our Aboriginal workforce increases across all divisions at all levels as Local Land Services becomes an employer of first choice for Aboriginal people to grow career paths in the public sector, ensure Aboriginal employees feel culturally safe and understand drivers and barriers to employment success.

### Objective 3.1

Dedicated Aboriginal staff attraction, development and retention initiatives to address the need to increase the overall number of Aboriginal staff employed by Local Land Services and the distribution across business units; and retain staff employed.

Critical to this is the need to provide holistic support across the whole-of-employee life cycle. Attention will need to be given to the complex web of responsibilities Aboriginal staff have as members of extended families and communities, and in the public sector. This is often described by Aboriginal staff as the difficulty of 'walking in both worlds'.

### Our commitment (key result)

Within SELLS increase the percentage of Aboriginal employment, and increase the diversity of Aboriginal employment across grade levels.

### What we will do (regional actions)

1. All Aboriginal staff will be provided access to mentoring and coaching that is culturally appropriate.
2. South East Management Team will tailor recruitment and induction practices, where required, to suit the cultural needs of Aboriginal employees to reduce barriers for existing and future Aboriginal employees.
3. All Aboriginal staff will have an annual work plan (PDP) that identifies their career ambitions and support needs to achieve those.
4. All Aboriginal staff will be supported to attend and participate in all Aboriginal Support Network events.
5. In acknowledgement of the challenges expressed by LALCs in opportunities for long term employment, promotion of opportunities for positions within SELLS will include the use of Aboriginal employment agencies and the sharing of opportunities with key Aboriginal stakeholders and networks.

In the South East this means that...

- We will offer fulfilling and diverse jobs for Aboriginal people. To achieve this, we will ensure there are meaningful career pathways available within our organisation and use Aboriginal employment agencies and Aboriginal networks to attract the right people.
- We will provide a safe and supportive work place for Aboriginal people to work. To achieve this we will offer mentoring and coaching, encourage and enable staff to participate in Aboriginal networks, and provide a tailored introductions to the organisation.





## Outcome 4: Building understanding

Senior Executive, managers, staff and Board members are aware and promote the importance of developing responses that address the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples impacted by our work.

### Objective 4.1

Implement state-wide Local Land Services endorsed approaches to cultural capability, leveraging efforts already in place by associated departments, with a particular focus on increasing capacity of board members, executive and management staff appreciating and respecting First Nations peoples' traditions and values.

Whole-of-department cultural competency initiatives address discrimination experienced by Aboriginal staff and lift the understanding by other Local Land Services staff of Aboriginal culture, in particular by those that manage Aboriginal staff. Aboriginal staff have a strong preference for the program to include cultural immersion and 'on-Country' experience.

LALCs express willingness to collaborate with SELLS in preserving culturally significant places. They offered cultural heritage workshops for SELLS staff, including local tours, bush tucker walks, and engage with local Knowledge Holders to enhance the Cultural Heritage Handbook.

(2023 South East Aboriginal Engagement Stakeholder Interview Analysis)



### Our commitment (key result)

SELLS cultural capability is increased, as measured by the percentage of staff who have participated in training.

### What we will do (regional actions)

1. SLSO (Aboriginal communities) will provide support to staff in the implementation of the Aboriginal Culture and Heritage handbook and the understanding of the implementation guidelines and how these can become part of business units' practice. Identify opportunities for local Aboriginal communities to contribute to the training.
2. South East Management Team will promote mandatory attendance at cultural competency training, which will include:
  - a. Stage 1 – Mandatory online annual training for all LLS staff.

- b. Stage 2 – In-field training to ensure all staff are aware of their legislative responsibilities and due diligence around cultural heritage.
  - c. Stage 3 – On Country cultural immersion experience.
3. South East Management Team will encourage staff attendance at local cultural events to improve understanding and connection with the local Aboriginal community, and SELLS visibility in the community.

In the South East this means that...

- We will ensure all staff continue to grow their understanding of Aboriginal culture, heritage, and protocol. To achieve this, we will deliver meaningful locally relevant cultural training to all staff, support staff to embed the Aboriginal Culture and Heritage handbook guidelines into their daily work, and encourage staff to take part in local cultural events.



## Consultation

More frequent face-to-face interactions with a range of SELLS staff may build trust and provide more stable relationships.

(2023 South East Aboriginal Engagement Stakeholder Interview Analysis)



The South East Aboriginal Engagement Strategy Action Plan was first drafted June 2023, and finalised in January 2024, resulting in this Plan.

The draft's structure and content stemmed from the statewide Aboriginal Engagement Strategy, and the local context was informed by 1) staff who have a long history of working with local Aboriginal communities, 2) a short survey titled 'Survey to help develop the Indigenous Participation Plan', and 3) the results of a learning needs survey conducted in 2021 with LALCs.

From September to November 2023, the local Aboriginal community was invited to read the draft Plan and tell us what they thought through a series of activities. This involved:

- 13 structured face to face conversations (or interviews), which sought to learn about the aspirations, needs, challenges and perceptions of Local Aboriginal Land Councils across the South East region. All 15 Local Aboriginal and Councils were invited to read the draft Plan and share their strengths, challenges, aspirations and ideas through conversation.

The purpose was to inform the final version of this Plan and other strategic work, and build relationships, understanding and identify common goals. There were 13 conversations in total, with a duration of at least 1.5 hours. Twelve of the 15 LALCs participated and the thirteenth was with an Aboriginal organisation closely linked to a LALC. The interview data was analysed, and presented in the South East Aboriginal Engagement Stakeholder Interview Analysis report (Nov 2023). The report findings have been considered in this final Plan.

- An online survey which collected direct feedback on the draft Plan. The target audiences were the local Aboriginal community; organisations who service the local Aboriginal community; SELLS staff who are Aboriginal, work with Aboriginal communities, and those who manage Aboriginal staff. This achieved a total of 14 responses (attrition rate of 6). Feedback was positive and constructive and has been used to further enhance the Plan.



Table 1. Timeline of South East Aboriginal Engagement Strategy Action Plan development

Action	Date
South East LLS Board consideration of Draft Aboriginal Engagement Strategy (the Strategy) and Stakeholder Consultation Plan	24 July 2023
Promote community awareness of the draft Strategy and seek South East Regional Stakeholder (Aboriginal group) feedback on draft Strategy	4-month period from September to December 2023
Review feedback from stakeholder consultation	January 2024
SELLS Board consideration of draft Final Strategy	9 February 2024
Stakeholder and community wide- notification and promotion of final Strategy	March 2024

