

Country, Culture, Connections

**Aboriginal Communities
Strategic Plan 2022– 2026
Greater Sydney Region**



**Local Land
Services**

Acknowledgement of Country

Greater Sydney Local Land Services (GS LLS) acknowledges we operate in and deliver services throughout Country of First Nations* people in the Greater Sydney Region. GS LLS recognises First Nations people hold a continuous and deep connection to Country and this in turn holds significance to the broader community.

For First Nations people, Country takes in everything within the physical, cultural and spiritual landscape. It includes landforms, waters, air, trees, rocks, plants, animals, foods, medicines, minerals, the sky and sea as well as sacred places. It includes cultural practice, kinship, knowledge, ceremony, songs, stories and art, as well as spiritual beings, and people: past, present and future.

GS LLS recognises and respects Elders and cultural knowledge holders, both past and present, while acknowledging and respecting the unique and diverse enduring cultures and histories of all First Nations people.

GS LLS recognises that Caring for Country, the protection and promotion of First Nations cultures, heritage, land management practices and spiritual beliefs are paramount to the relationship with Country and that this benefits the whole community. By supporting self-determined futures and strengthening cultural values for First Nations people, GS LLS can contribute towards improved relationships and resilient sustainable communities in the region.

*(*Please note: the term First Nations people and communities, honours the unique physical and spiritual relationships to Country and acknowledges the diversity of cultural, social, economic and political structures held by the distinct First Nations of this continent.)*

Artwork by Nikita Ridgeway.

Our commitment

Greater Sydney Local Land Services (GS LLS) is committed to strengthening relationships with Aboriginal Communities to enhance the values of managing Country by protecting the natural environment and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage (ACH).

Key to achieving this objective, is meaningful interaction, guided by the state-wide LLS Aboriginal Engagement Strategy, and its overarching objectives of: 'Enriching relationships, creating opportunities, and enhancing respect'. Underpinning this commitment, is the NSW Local Land Services Act. 2013, which requires the inclusion of Aboriginal community engagement in both state and local strategic plans.

Building from this is the recognition and respect for the profound and complex connections First Nations peoples hold with Country, especially the First Nations of the region whose unique relationships and cultural and spiritual responsibilities and obligations has been practiced for untold millennia.

Through the 'Country, Culture, Connections' strategy GS LLS is committed to collaborating with and empowering First Nations communities in continuing to Care for Country, enrich culture and strengthen connections with current and future generations.

Caring for Country

Caring for Country is embodied in First Nations culture and beliefs, ensuring Country and the physical and spiritual features as well as the beings within it remain healthy and balanced through sustainable approaches, of for generations to come. The features and beings within Country, be it land, water, fire, animals, plants, places, natural features and even seasons are respected and cared for with a deep dignity and abiding respect, following enduring traditions and practices. Through this intricate understanding First Nations people view this responsibility through an interconnected web of kinship, physically and spiritually binding people and Country.

Despite far-reaching changes brought about by colonisation, First Nations people in partnership with GS LLS and other land and water managers, seek to continue the time-honoured values of Caring for Country in sustainably managing land and waters, aiming to restore the health and balance to Country.

Many First Nations peoples believe: *'Healthy Country, Healthy People.'*

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage

For First Nations people Country lives as a connected whole, present across time and space, physically, culturally and spiritually. Some aspects are invisible and intangible, while others physically demonstrate the culture which has been nurtured by it since time immemorial.

There is a rich and layered history still present in the Greater Sydney landscape, evident through the remaining physical ACH which has survived the ravages of time. This inheritance protected by NSW law and recorded in the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) are precious reminders of the long relationship between First Nations people and Country. It is important to remember though, that this cultural heritage found in remaining sites and objects are just a small remnant of the diverse and vibrant cultural expression of prior First Nations generations.

Another important feature of cultural heritage which is more enduring, is the intangible cultural values intertwined in Country, connecting to the tangible legacy, embodied in natural features and special places, such as highpoints, ridgelines, waterholes and unique landforms. Further to this, intangible aspects of cultural heritage include the practices, representations, knowledge and skills which continue through the cultural expressions of First Nations people.

GS LLS acknowledges the interconnectedness of the tangible and intangible aspects of Country and the role it continues to play in the lives of First Nations people from the region, recognising the significance this holds and how it relates to this strategy and the business of LLS.

Our vision

In recognition of the diverse and layered Country in Greater Sydney, GS LLS and the AAG alongside First Nations communities, seek through the life of this strategy and beyond, to support the ongoing journey of empowerment across generations of First Nations peoples in Caring for Country, deepening and continuing culture, supported by real and lasting connections.

Our principles

In order to ensure meaningful delivery of 'Country, Culture, Connections', the following principles have been established to guide the approach of GS LLS in working with First Nations Communities. These principles are drawn from or closely align with the ['Our Place on Country Strategy'](#) and the ['State-wide Local Land Services Aboriginal Engagement Strategy'](#), being:

- Acknowledge, value and embed First Nations cultural knowledge and world views in program delivery and business as usual;
- Respect and acknowledge First Nations people's rights, obligations and roles as well as their unique and intimate relationship with Country;
- Promote and strengthen connections to Country and through this culture and identity;
- Prioritise self-determined economic directed outcomes for First Nations people through increased employment, enterprise development and the replacement of traditional economies;
- Establish and maintain meaningful ongoing relationships with First Nations people and Country; and
- Recognise appropriate engagement and connection with First Nations people and Country as core to our service delivery.

Layered Country

The Greater Sydney region contains the largest population of First Nations people in NSW if not Australia. This includes local First Nations people from within the region who hold a deep cultural responsibility and obligation to care for their Country, interwoven through lore, law, customs and practices, inherited over countless generations.

Along with the First Nations people from Country, the community in Greater Sydney consists of individuals and families who have historically or recently moved into the area. These First Nations communities are culturally diverse, with many community members continuing to hold cultural, social and kinship connections to communities and Country in other regions within NSW and Australia.

The GS LLS region includes six Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), constituted under the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (ARLA). As of 2021, the LALCs across the region hold a significant amount of land claimed and regulated through the ARLA. The ARLA recognises the spiritual, social, cultural and economic importance of land to Aboriginal peoples of NSW. The ARLA further seeks to provide compensation for the historic dispossession of land alongside social and economic benefit through LALCs to their membership and the Aboriginal community in their area. In many instances the membership of LALCs, reflect the diverse and layered landscape of First Nations communities in the region.

There is also a growing recognition of Traditional Ownership, addressed in part through the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993, and instruments such as Indigenous Land Use Agreements. Adding to this is the development of alternative types of agreements between land and water management bodies with the First Nations People from Country, such as co-management agreements.



Further, the region includes a diverse range of First Nations organisations, businesses and Landcare groups, another layer in which GS LLS regularly engages.

As a result of this complex and multi-layered landscape, GS LLS actively seeks guidance and collaboration with its Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG) to shape and deliver outcomes. Through the AAG, strategies, plans and activities are carefully and culturally considered, so results on Country assist First Nations communities to realise meaningful and achievable outcomes.

Pathways to empowerment

For more than two centuries in the Greater Sydney region, First Nations people have experienced many changes and impacts on their cultures, traditional knowledge systems and practices due to the ongoing effects of colonisation which has equally impacted Country. Compounding this is the growing awareness by contemporary land managers of the absence of the age-old role First Nations peoples held in Caring for Country, which ensured the health and balance of Country was continually renewed and looked after as part of seasonal and ceremonial cycles.

In order to assist the continuing journey towards empowerment, the restoration of Country, cultural expression and connections as well as wellbeing and self-determined futures of First Nations communities, well considered approaches are needed. It is also important to remember this takes time. In consultation with the AAG, the GS LLS 'Country, Culture, Connections' aims to guide long-term purposeful change.

One way which this can be achieved is to embrace the larger vision needed to effect generational change, redress for First Nations people and Country, delivered through successive strategies and responses, underpinned by dedicated commitment and resourcing opportunities. This may be supported financially through existing state and federal



funding programs, though also within the delivery of core GS LLS programs. It is further anticipated this strategy supports First Nations communities in seeking additional grants or innovative methods of project delivery alongside assisting the development of autonomous sustainable operating models for existing and emerging First Nations individuals and businesses.

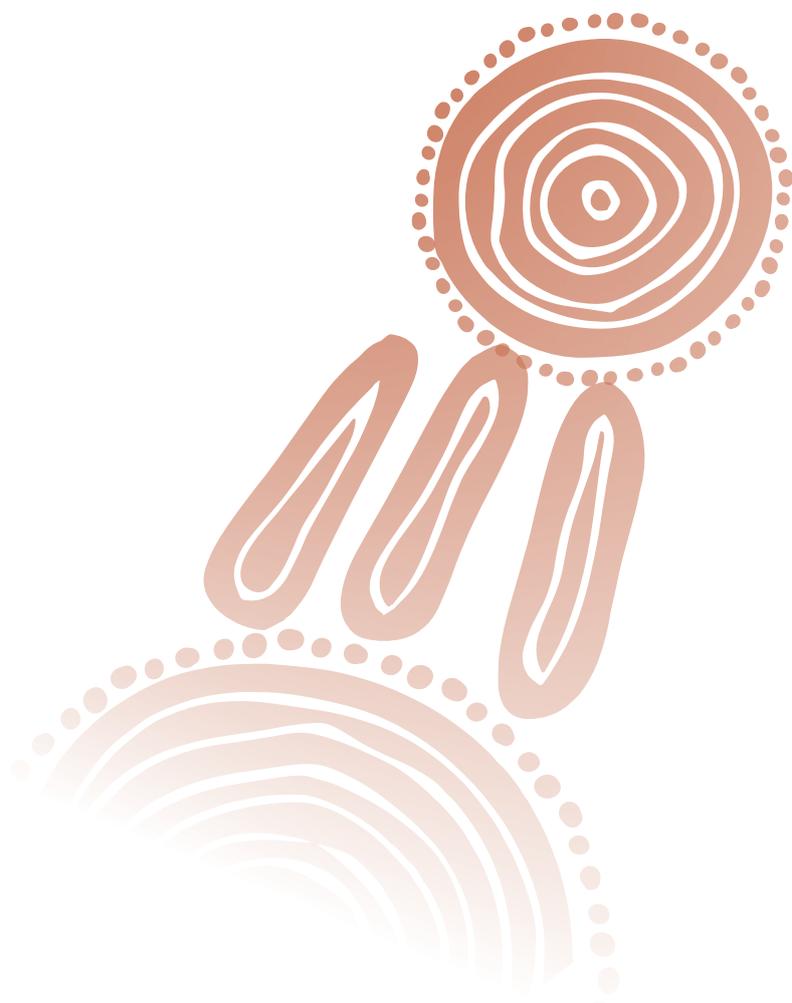
MERI (Monitor, Evaluation Reporting and Improvement)

Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting & Improvement (MERI) is an LLS wide framework that supports a continuous process of reviewing what services are delivered, how this is undertaken, reporting what has been achieved and developing ways in how it can be improved in managing natural resources.

It is intended this framework support the implementation of 'Country, Culture, Connections' as a robust and thorough approach to assess outcomes and actions, while considering the achievements and amending approaches where necessary. MERI is an important tool for GS LLS to support the delivery of this strategy, underpinning informed decisions to ensure project objectives are structurally and financially sustained while reflecting longer term aspirations.

MERI represents a proven approach to monitoring and improving physical on-Country outcomes, being extensively used in Natural Resource Management programs bearing similarity to Caring for Country aspirations and initiatives aimed at restoring the health and balance of Country.

GS LLS and the AAG will regularly monitor and evaluate this strategy, providing end of each financial year reports as part of, GS LLS reporting requirements. The AAG and GS LLS will undertake a 'co-design' approach to incorporate any areas of improvement and amend the delivery of the strategy annually.



Our action plan

Outcome 1 – Country

'Caring for Country through planning and partnerships to restore holistic health and balance to Country guided by First Nations communities'

1.1 Ensure that First Nations communities are supported in a meaningful and respectful way

- Regularly support and convene the GS LLS Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG), to provide guidance and direction on the values of Country, culture and connections with First Nations communities to inform the delivery of GS LLS business and program design.
- Further develop and maintain relationships with First Nations communities to shape service delivery and decisions through programs focused on Caring for Country which increase First Nations engagement and outcomes.

1.2 Work with First Nations communities to include an understanding of Country, cultural values and worldviews in GS LLS strategies, plans and programs.

- Include the AAG in the review of relevant GS LLS plans and strategies aiming to incorporate, reflect and enhance the recognition of Country and cultural values therein.
- Seek broader First Nations consultation and involvement in strategic direction and program development where appropriate.

1.3 Develop and implement collaborative approaches to Caring for Country that provide holistic outcomes to First Nations communities through sustainable employment and procurement

- Increase opportunities for First Nations organisations and communities to deliver Caring for Country outcomes through state and federal funding, including improving partnership approaches and infrastructure capacity in collaboration with land and water managers.
- Develop and assist sustainable holistic, on-Country projects that improve employment, skills development and economic benefit for First Nations peoples, including through Natural Resource Management (NRM) agreements.
- Actively seek opportunities for preferential procurement of on-Country services from First Nations organisations that assist in realising or surpassing a minimum requirement of 3 percent First Nations employment / service delivery in GS LLS program activities.

1.4 Nurture and support outcomes that build capacity and facilitate intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge to continue to Care for and heal Country, contributing to effective land management practices

- Assist and encourage emerging First Nations organisations and individuals through opportunities to gain knowledge and build capacity in Caring for and healing Country, with an emphasis on cross-generational learning experiences.
- Nurture opportunities that facilitate First Nations generational representation, especially younger people, in Caring for Country outcomes, supporting the development and upskilling of knowledge, skills and training, leading to meaningful employment.



Outcome 2 – Culture

'Continuing, reclaiming, living and sharing culture on Country supported through relationships built on mutual respect'

2.1 Continue to support opportunities through programs and initiatives that connect First Nations communities to Country and sharing of culture.

- With advice from the AAG develop GS LLS facilitated programs delivered through partnerships that increase social, cultural and spiritual values for First Nations communities.
- In collaboration with the AAG and First Nations peoples develop and deliver workshops, forums and camps that deepen cultural knowledge and practice, supporting Caring for Country outcomes.
- Support opportunities for knowledge sharing for First Nations communities across LLS regions and more broadly.

2.2 Enhance GS LLS as a culturally respectful, responsive and inclusive organisation through deeper awareness of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, immersive on-Country experiences and celebrating significant First Nations events.

- Building on the LLS Aboriginal Cultural Heritage (ACH) handbook enhance GS LLS recognition of tangible and intangible ACH in business systems, processes and project outcomes, where appropriate working with First Nations knowledge holders and land managers to manage and protect ACH in Country.
- GS LLS staff participate in local First Nations celebrations, on-Country cultural immersion experiences complementing LLS cultural competency training and relevant initiatives through First Nations groups presenting cultural workshops and experiences.

2.3 Through dedicated procurement processes, provide economic and social benefit to First Nations communities through recognition and remuneration of cultural knowledge, practice, goods and services.

- Develop and periodically review processes for the procurement of culturally based services and goods.
- Guided by the AAG, develop and implement a payment schedule for the provision of cultural knowledge and practice, reflecting 'best practice' models.
- Where relevant, incorporate the provision of cultural services and appropriate remuneration into GS LLS projects.



Outcome 3 – Connections

'Strengthen and maintain connections with First Nations communities in the region to achieve real and lasting outcomes'

3.1 Assist staff to connect with, strengthen and maintain effective relationships with First Nations communities

- Guidance is provided through the AAG on the process and selection of appropriate First Nations representation for GS LLS working groups and advisory bodies.
- Aboriginal Officers and where relevant AAG representatives, support GS LLS staff in building and enhancing relationships with First Nations people and organisations, attending community meetings and when required, through other relevant activities.

3.2 Further develop cross-regional relationships to build capacity, knowledge, skills, experience and best practice approaches through sharing cultural values and working together to benefit First Nations communities

- Aboriginal Officers and the AAG interact with other LLS regions through periodic electronic and face-to-face connections contributing towards State-wide networks and supporting implementation of State-wide LLS Aboriginal Engagement Strategy and other best practice initiatives.
- Where appropriate and support available, assist AAG members and Aboriginal Officers to participate in or contribute to projects and initiatives that support experience, knowledge and skill sharing across LLS regions and through broader connections.

3.3 Seek out and deliver opportunities that create enhanced connections between First Nations communities with land and water managers / holders to achieve on-Country outcomes

- Identify and assist connections between land and water management bodies / holders seeking to improve Country focused (NRM / environmental) outcomes with appropriate First Nations representatives.
- Where appropriate, seek opportunities to facilitate, support and further strengthen existing and emerging relationships between First Nations Communities and land and water managers by funding meaningful on-Country outcomes.

3.4 Develop and maintain a network that allows GS LLS and First Nations Communities to exchange opportunities and matters of mutual interest.

- The AAG provide an active connection between their communities and GS LLS to exchange matters of interest and initiatives for consideration and appropriate action.
- Create and grow a network that promotes information and opportunities to First Nations communities such as project funding as well as cultural and economic opportunities.



For more information on GS LLS please visit:
<https://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/regions/greater-sydney>

