

Aboriginal Engagement Strategy

South East Action Plan



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More information


Rebecca Bradly, Delivery Support Team, South East Local Land Services

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Acknowledgments

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing September 2023. 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 law, 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 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.

Review

South East Local Land Services will report against the actions in the plan. Highlights, achievements, challenges and learnings will be shared internally and externally via the Local Land Services achievements reporting.

Consultation

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

South East Local Land Services 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, South East Local Land Services staff have a good understanding of local First Nations peoples’ interests and aspirations in land, sea and water. Therefore, in February 2023, South East Local Land Services invited the South East region’s Local Aboriginal Land Councils 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 South East Local Land Services staff who have been working directly with Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) and ranger groups for the past 12 months, and the results of a learning needs survey conducted in 2021.

This draft Plan reflects important insights gained by South East Local Land Services staff over several years through its ongoing relationship with the First Nations community. This next important step will give the local First Nations community and the appropriate advisory body an opportunity to review and further shape the Plan. This document will be dynamic, with progress to be reviewed regularly to ensure our participation strategies and activities remain relevant.

First Nations Land and Water Management Aspirations in the South East

As identified in the February 2023 'Survey to help develop the Indigenous Participation Plan', six respondents across communities of Eden, Batemans Bay and Illawarra agreed that First Nations People in the South East region confirmed their aspirations for land, sea and water management are:

A strong vision and plan for this place on Country – For each group to achieve their own vision and place-based land, sea and water plan. This will help to define and promote a shared understanding of the aspirations and focus of each group.

Leadership and self-identity – Build capacity and capabilities in local leadership and a strengthened self-identity through appropriate education, mentoring and training opportunities, 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 the LALCs have a similar employment structure with a full time CEO, administrative support (usually part time) and the use of casual employees to undertake work as needed. Most funding agreements are of a short-term nature, hindering stable employment. It is difficult to retain and grow a skilled workforce with high rates of casual employment, and while the cost of training may be funded through a variety of means, the ability to pay staff for their time to train can also be a barrier. Groups will seek new opportunities for more sustainable funding models.

Build and maintain relationships - Longstanding mutually beneficial partnerships are crucial to deliver improved environmental outcomes as well as self-determination for First Nations people. Traditional practice to become embedded into NRM service delivery through First Nations peoples' participation in all project stages (including inception and design) for works on Country. Critical to success is the sharing and celebration of traditional land management practices and its benefits.

Celebrate and share cultural land management practice - Celebrate traditional land management practice through collaboration. Build the cultural competence and skills of partners (like LLS), as well as staff and members of First Nations groups.

Enhance growth and capability - Learn contemporary skills which compliment traditional practice and improve outcomes to build expertise in reporting, IT literacy and information management systems, as well as on-ground land management skills. 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%.

Be the managers of culturally significant natural resource management information – Strive to become the autonomous custodians of information on culturally significant sites. Requires capacity building on information management practice and systems.

Structure of the plan

The structure of the South East Local Land Services Aboriginal Engagement Strategy Action Plan is based around 4 main goals:

1. Enriching relationships

2. Creating opportunities

3. Enhancing respect

4. Building understanding

The South East Local Land Services Regional Engagement Strategy Action Plan details our actions to support the State Aboriginal Engagement Strategy and 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 Local Land Services Regional Aboriginal Engagement Strategy Action Plan, we have listed how South East Local Land Services will support the state-wide actions.

For the regional actions, South East Local Land Services has addressed them in further detail.

1. What we are going to do regionally
2. The frequency
3. Responsibility.

Aboriginal stakeholders of the South East

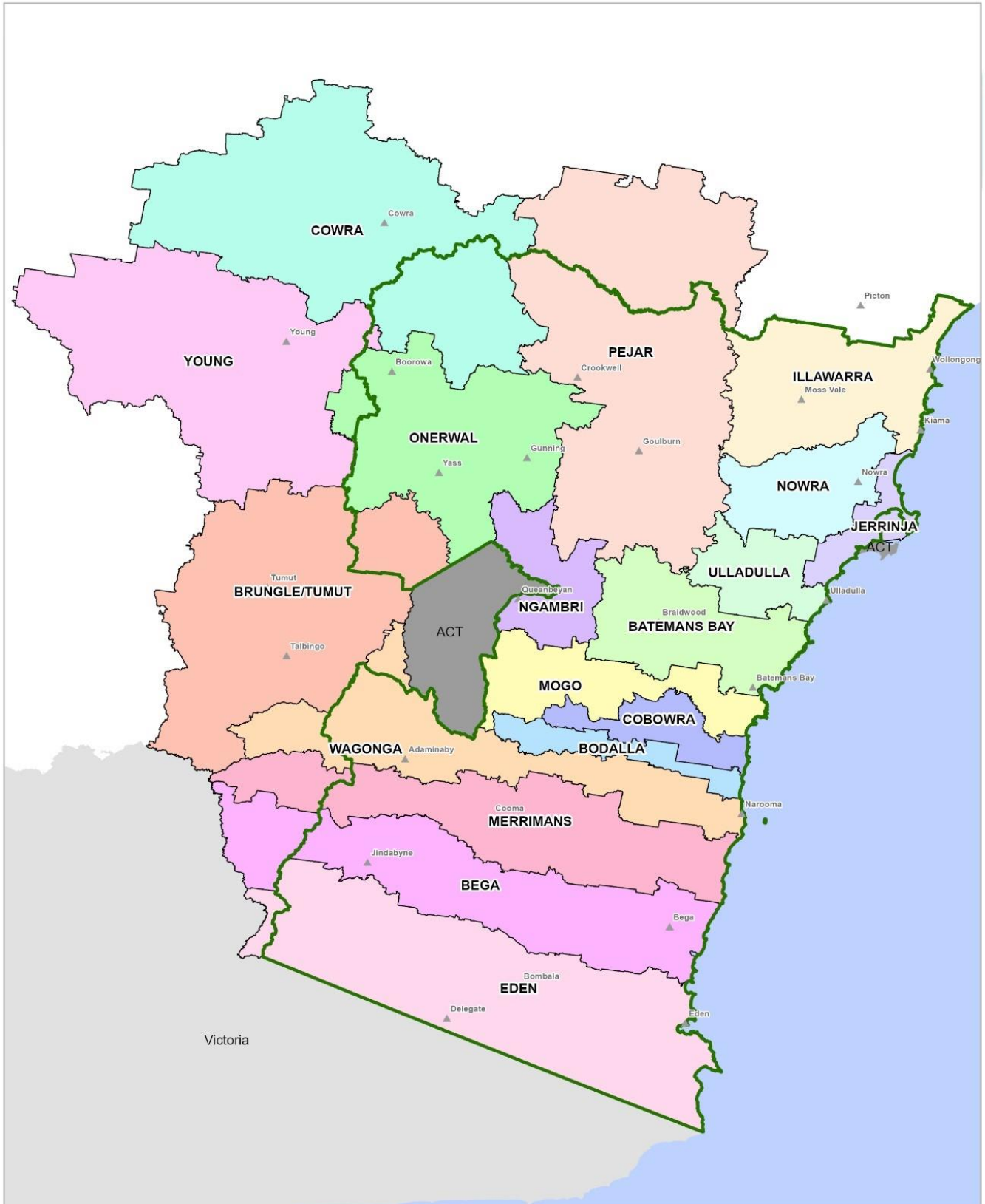


Figure 1 A map of the South East Local Land Services region showing the boundaries of Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

List of Local Aboriginal Land Councils and key Aboriginal organisations in the South East

Batemans Bay LALC	Bega LALC	Bodalla LALC	Cobowra LALC	Eden LALC
Illawarra LALC	Jerrinja LALC	Merrimans LALC	Mogo LALC	Ngambri LALC
Nowra LALC	Ulladulla LALC	Wagonga LALC	Gundungurra LALC	Cowra LALC
Ngunawall LALC	Onerwall LALC	Pejar LALC	Young LALC	South Coast Elders Group
Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council		Gulaga Board of Management	Biamanga Board of Management	Other Aboriginal groups and individuals as required on a project basis



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 - Deliver and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal people, organisations and local communities to further relationships with Local Land Services

Key results

Increase the number of Aboriginal community partnerships with Local Land Services.

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.
2. South East Management Team will identify specific investment, annually, to support Aboriginal community led projects.
3. All Local land Services staff, during project design phases, will consider opportunities to collaborate with Aboriginal community.

Objective 1.2 - Acknowledge Country and participate in and celebrate significant Aboriginal events by providing opportunity to build and maintain relationships between Aboriginal peoples and other regional Australians

Key results

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

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.
2. South East Management Team will ensure all Local Land Services Staff acknowledge Country at all regular events and organise Welcome to Country for public Local Land Services Events.

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.

Key result

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

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.

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 First Nations communities to identify their own priorities to respond to impacts on 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 First Nations 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:

- South East LLS 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 First Nations groups through tailored training, ongoing support and employment opportunities. Although the project is not yet complete, 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 have an agreement in place to use 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.

Objective 2.1 - Support sustainable growth of Aboriginal owned businesses and encourage Aboriginal employment by driving demand via government procurement of goods and services.

Key result

Increase Aboriginal procurement, ensuring a minimum target of 3% of annual budgets.

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

Objective 2.2 - Support employment opportunities for Aboriginal people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal owned businesses

Key result

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

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 South East Local Land Services 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.

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’.

Key result

Increase the percentage of Aboriginal employment, increase the diversity of Aboriginal employment across grade levels.

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. Promotion of opportunities for positions within South East Local Land Services will include the use of Aboriginal employment agencies and the sharing of opportunities with key Aboriginal stakeholders and networks.

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.

Key result

South East Local Land Services cultural capability is increased, as measured by number of staff who have been provided training.

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.
2. South East Management Team will promote mandatory attendance at cultural awareness training, which will include:
 - Stage 1 - Mandatory online annual training for all LLS staff.
 - Stage 2 - In-field training to ensure all staff are aware of their legislative responsibilities and due diligence around cultural heritage.
 - Stage 3 - On Country cultural immersion experience.
3. South East Management Team will encourage attendance at cultural events.

Consultation

South East Local Land Services plans to seek consultation to all stakeholders via various communication mechanisms during a 4-month consultation period.

South East Local Land Services will provide a brief survey that can be completed by the stakeholders as well as seek face to face feedback that will be documented.

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
South East Local Land Services Board consideration of draft Final Strategy	February 2024
Stakeholder and community wide-notification and promotion of final Strategy	March 2024

Appendix