Aboriginal Culture and Communities Activity Report

Reconciliation Week 2019
Local Land Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future. We 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 and 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 Local Land Services understands that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a significant contribution to make in relation to land management in the region. Local Land Services will continue to build strong relationships with First Nations communities, seek to understand their aspirations and ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a voice to provide input into land management issues and in particular the management of cultural values. These stories provide a snapshot of some of the great initiatives and programs delivered by Local Land Services in partnership with Communities across the state.

**Greater Sydney Local Land Services** has continued its collective journey toward building respect and acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture in every aspect of business through a second collaborative staff art project. Coordinated by Land Services Officers for Aboriginal Communities Margaret Bottrell and Den Barber, the project saw staff create a ‘cultural map’ of the Greater Sydney region, representing their individual connection to Country and Culture either professionally and personally. Den Barber said staff had the choice to use Aboriginal Art symbols or use their own design.

“The end result is a very powerful representation of the various interpretations and connections our staff have to our landscape and Aboriginal Culture as a whole, representing our three customer service teams in the Northern, Hawkesbury / Blue Mountains and Metro / Southern regions,” he said.

Greater Sydney Local Land Services General Manager David Hogan said the piece followed on from the highly successful Brush Turkey staff art project produced by the team in 2016.

“Through improved understanding, knowledge and respect we can continue the journey of reconciliation not just in our roles as Local Land Services staff but as part of our local communities too,” he said.

“Greater Sydney Local Land Services is committed to the Reconciliation journey and one year on from launching our Reconciliation Action Plan, we are ensuring we are not just ticking boxes but living it everyday.”

**Cards send message of Reconciliation action**

For Soil Conservation Service General Manager Tim Ferraro and his team, the launch of the Reconciliation Action Plan prompted a strong statement of commitment, in the form of new business cards. Consulting with their Aboriginal team members and other contacts, the business cards were developed using the same artwork on the RAP document and incorporating a statement of Acknowledgement. “We wanted to make an important statement to our commitment to Reconciliation, something that was more than just symbolic,” Mr Ferraro said. “At Soil Con our officers are out on sites all day, every day working in areas of great importance to Aboriginal people and Communities.” As the Acknowledgement on our cards state, Soil Con is committed to ensuring our recognition of the strong connection of First Nations peoples to the lands and water where we work is sincere and ongoing.” Mr Ferraro said the next step was to have the same message of Acknowledgement installed on office doors throughout the state.
Local waterways came alive in November last year for a group of Aboriginal boys from the Inverell High School Clontarf Foundation, the Inverell Aboriginal Mens Group and the Inverell Aboriginal Elders Group, when they participated in a guided river kayak tour conducted by Northern Tablelands Local Land Services.

The Clontarf Foundation is a school-based program established to improve the education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teenagers.

Aboriginal Communities Officer Ivan Lackay led the tour which explored the wildlife and ecology of Lake Inverell and the Macintyre River.

"Floating quietly on the water provides a different experience from walking along the river bank, allowing for a deeper appreciation and understanding of the riparian environment and how it is the lifeblood of the landscape," Ivan said.

"Being out on Country with one another, the Aboriginal boys learnt so much from the Elders in an environment where they felt most at home and where sharing traditional ecological knowledge came easily because it was at their fingertips – where their ancestors walked, hunted and shared.

"These tours, funded by the NSW Government through NSW Catchment Action, helped the kayakers to value river health and its importance to the ecosystem as a whole, and gave them an opportunity to connect to Country which is just so important," Ivan said.

Yuin Djama Dhugan (Speak of Country) is an immersive story-telling project utilising 360 video technology that brings together Aboriginal community groups in the Shoalhaven region to tell locally significant cultural stories.

South East Local Land Services' Aboriginal Community Support Officers have partnered with NSW Office of Environment and Heritages' Heritage Near Me project to compile the stories, produce the videos and train young Aboriginal people in 360 image production.

The project has provided a platform for cultural stories to be shared with the wider community and has helped young Aboriginal people develop the skills required for an emerging industry. The short films provide opportunities to the wider community to learn about and engage with the Aboriginal cultural stories of their region.

"It is important because it will engage the community in cross-cultural learning, utilise new technologies to tell important stories and allow the wider community to learn about cultural stories and the significance of these to local Aboriginal people," South East Aboriginal Community Support Officer Noel Webster said.

Four short immersive videos have now been produced, the films have been submitted to Melbourne International Film Festival for consideration.

"Where it takes us into the future – it’s looking promising. We will continue to use the application to capture and share knowledge.

"It was such an honour and privilege to work on the project, it is the way of the future. Now I can sit back and know the knowledge will be recorded, stored and not lost."

Local Land Services Sustainable Land Management team is working with Jana Ngalee Aboriginal Land Council in the Northern Rivers district of NSW as they work to create a self-reliant, profitable property near Malabugilmah. Local Land Services Sustainable Land Management officer, John Nagle, provided Ngalee members with advice on managing native vegetation under the Land Management Code to ensure they struck the right balance between land productivity and a healthy environment. In the first stage of the development, organic cropping is being established on 50 ha. This includes removing vegetation on 8.7 ha which will be offset by a 17.4 ha area set aside for conservation in perpetuity. John helped identify this set aside area because it provides links to surrounding remnant vegetation. The removed vegetation will be turned into biochar and put back into the area to improve soil health. Aboriginal community members will work on the set aside area of land and receive specialist training to control weeds. Jana Ngalee Aboriginal Land Council Chair, Ramona Walker, said the expertise provided by Local Land Services was invaluable.

"Dealing with John (Nagle) was a pleasure. He was great and the advice he gave us was helpful," he said.

Balancing productivity alongside a healthy environment
Aboriginal and local communities collaborate to celebrate NAIDOC week together

Western Local Land Services marked NAIDOC Week in 2018 with two events to highlight the work of women as part of the ‘because of her, we can!’ theme.

The events, which were held at Mungo National Park and in Brewarrina attracted more than 100 people with both offering a number of informative and enjoyable activities.

The activities included a smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country, arts and crafts including face painting and jewellery making, boomerang throwing, seed and ochre grinding and Johnny cake making.

Western Local Land Services Aboriginal Communities Officer, Ronni O’Donnell helped organise the event at Mungo National Park and was pleased to see such a strong community support.

“The event was enjoyed by all from the younger generation to the Elders which was fantastic,” Mrs O’Donnell said.

“While everyone had a great time throwing boomerangs and making their own jewellery there was also some great messages delivered to the attendees about the importance of NAIDOC Week and acknowledging the great job all women do.”

The theme of last year’s NAIDOC Week, ‘because of her, we can!’, celebrated the essential role that women have played - and continue to play - as active and significant role models at the community, local, state and national level.

Cultural land management in the spotlight

Yaegl Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation with the support of North Coast Local Land Services have partnered to deliver a Cultural land management project.

As a part of the project Yaegl Traditional Owners hosted a Cultural resource workshop at Woody Head, Iluka in May 2019.

The event commenced with a traditional smoking ceremony and yarning circle with younger generations and Elders gathering together to discuss the importance of cultural knowledge and practice in natural resource management and on-ground land management activities.

The Yeagl bush regeneration team presented to the group, demonstrating knowledge and experience gained as part of the project, sharing their stories and sparking interest from the group. With Elders yarning about the old days using these bush resources for foods and medicines. The Yaegl women added to the experience by providing a buffet lunch incorporating bush tucker elements.

North Coast Local Land Services Oliver Costello said “funding this project and event was an important step forward in growing our relationship with Yaegl Traditional Owners. Yaegl cultural practices and aspirations to care for Country can support us in delivering best practice land management projects and advice to landholders. It is vital we recognise Traditional Owner Native Title rights and support their aspirations to manage Country.”

This project is supported by the North Coast Local Land Services Natural Asset Protection and Business Development Units through funding from the NSW Government’s Catchment Action program.
Old Mungindi Mission protected through partnership

North West Local Land Services partnered with the Mungindi Local Aboriginal Land Council to protect and restore the Old Mungindi Mission, an area of cultural significance to the Aboriginal people of Mungindi. This special project rolled out in early 2019, aiming to protect, restore and connect people back on country. It involves clearing old debris, erecting a new fence around the boundary lines of the site and installation of interpretive signage to recognise the cultural significance of the site. Local Elders will also host three Community Knowledge Sharing Workshops to share the significance of the site and reasons for protecting it.

The project comes from a push by the Mungindi community who wanted the Old Mission, and use it as a cultural hub for the community to deliver programs, both cultural and mainstream. The Old Mission was the first place for settlement for the Aboriginal people of Mungindi and holds a culturally significant story and connection. The Mission was a special place for people who had moved away, as they would always return and reconnect with family and culture. Ronald Prince CEO of Mungindi Local Aboriginal Land Council describes the Old Mission as a very significant cultural and heritage site for the Aboriginal community in Mungindi.

“It’s a place where our elders first had the opportunity to have access to proper housing, water and shelter from previously living in tin huts and humpy’s,” he said.

“We hope this project will empower the community, gain employment opportunities and connect Aboriginal people back to country.”

First Nations artwork a daily reminder of culture

As part of the Local Land Services Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), launched in 2018, Murray Local Land Services commissioned two local Aboriginal artists to produce pieces of artwork for display in their Albury and Deniliquin offices.

Wiradjuri elder David Dunn produced the stunning painting, ‘Wiradjuri Dreaming’, which is now on display in Albury.

Painted in two sections, the piece portrays the Wiradjuri ‘mob’ silhouetted in black against a red and yellow sky. The lower section of the painting features the Murray River, the Rainbow Serpent that created it and the red gums and silver wattle that line it.

Also featured is a symbol representing the land of the three rivers, as Wiradjuri country is known. The three rivers are the Macquarie, Lachlan and Murrumbidgee.

Equally impressive, the painting ‘Aboriginal Australia’, by Dennis Charles, hangs in the Deniliquin office.

In the artist’s own words, “the painting represents all Aboriginal people across Australia, with the rivers and land representing life. The coloured dots surrounding the painting all have different meanings: the white are the spirits that protect the people and land, the red are the land itself, the yellow are the sun and the grey represent light.”

Upskilling Aboriginal communities to care for Country

Riverina Local Land Services actively works with local Aboriginal Communities to support and increase involvement in a variety of environmental activities throughout the region. The Aboriginal Sites Training Program is a core part of this work, designed to guide Aboriginal Communities to provide cultural heritage assessment advice and services to private and public land managers, developers and government departments.

This year, 19 participants have signed on for the program representing various localities including Tumut, Young, Wagga Wagga, Narrandera, Leeton, Griffith, Darlington Point and Hay. The program will see participants qualified in a Certificate II Conservation and Land Management, with a focus on identifying Aboriginal cultural sites and artefacts and land management, Aboriginal Cultural Sites Assessment certificate, training in the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System and mentoring with local Aboriginal Elders. At the completion of the program, the graduates will have a greater capacity to identify and record Aboriginal site types and cultural landscapes in the Riverina.

This training program was designed and supported by Riverina Local Land Services, the Griffith Local Aboriginal Land Council, National Parks & Wildlife Services and the NSW Industry and Investment – Tocal College, Aboriginal Rural Training Program.

This program was part funded under the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program and Catchment Action NSW.

Participants from Tumut, Young, Wagga Wagga, Narrandera, Leeton, Griffith, Darlington Point and Hay are taking part in this year’s program.
Reconciliation Week event highlights community collaboration

Central West Local Land Services have partnered with the Bogan River Peak Hill Wiradjuri Aboriginal Corporation (BRPHWAC) and Central West Lachlan Landcare to lead the organisation of the annual Back to Bulgandramine event for Reconciliation Week.

The collaborative project, celebrates the BRPHWAC communities’ deep connection to Country and their strong sense of creating opportunities and support for each other.

BRPHWAC and Central West Local Land Services are leading the organisation of this culturally significant event held during National Reconciliation Week 2019 which epitomises this year’s message Grounded in Truth, Walk Together with Courage.

First held in 2016, this year’s event is set to be bigger and better than ever with a huge range of cultural workshops and traditional knowledge sharing planned. Back to Bulgandramine is a free, family orientated gathering that welcomes all people coming together to enjoy, learn and respect the embedded traditions of the Bogan River Peak Hill Wiradjuri people.

All members involved in the gathering are very proud to be working together to enrich, enhance and foster respectful relationships that create opportunities for First Nations peoples and other Australians to continue our journey towards reconciled, resilient communities in productive healthy landscapes. These meaningful relationships whilst walking together will continue long into the future.

The project is made possible through funding from the Central West Local Land Services Resilient Communities Small Farms program.

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