

Darug Traditional Owners

November 2021

“We don’t own the land; the land owns us”

This is a proposal to reconnect the “Darug people back to Country. We don’t wish to own the land; all we are asking is that we are given space in Country to live and care for Country in true partnership with NSW Water, Sydney Water, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment as well as local government/ non-government and other Aboriginal organizations.

The Darug people of Greater Sydney to the Blue Mountains and their ancestors were documented at time of first contact 1788. The area of Darug Country covers Western Sydney which has one of the largest Aboriginal population in Australia, so where do you go to learn our way? Every religion in the world resides on Darug Country and yet we, with the oldest connection to Country, have been given no space to live on Country, to continue our spiritual practices like caring for Country, travelling our song lines and paying our respects to areas of significance. The Dyarubbin river known as the Nepean/Hawkesbury has been a river since the time of Gondwana when the world was one, it is ancient and deserves to be treated with respect which we are hoping to do through our ceremonies and care. We hold cultural responsibility for the Land and its Waters, this is our shared deep history.

We all want to swim safely in our waters, sustain clean water supplies while greening the landscape. So does our aquatic life, all forms of birds, animals, vegetation, and land, all wish to enjoy and grow in Country too. *We are connected to water* be it salt, fresh, muddy or sweet. Water is a reflection of the people and we are the water. All life is connected to water; it holds the memories of the past into the future. Water is sacred, we are all birthed from it, it is truly the giver of life.

We need to be back on Country to map its changes, to practice our culture, to reignite our fires and show the world that 21st Century Darug people in a modern city and regions can still maintain their culture for another 60,000+ years. We see Clan repatriation as the housing of original people back in their places of significance. This is due to the 200 + years of colonization which denied us access to these sites and water ways. Sites of Clan repatriation will be cultural continuation centers creating a choice that currently is not available for the Darug people. 7 generational planning/thinking is the long-term requirements that are needed for true healing of Country and its people. The brilliance of the 7 generations thinking is that it allows on going innovation responses according to the environmental and human needs and people connection that honors our first lore “The Land”.

Government, non-government, and Aboriginal Organizations may own the estates, but we the people of Country are the keys to help those estates have health and wellbeing. The future of sustainable water management in Sydney is combining First Nation’s Engineering Knowledge, with Engineer’s First Principles.

What is required is Darug -led projects reconnecting song lines and clearing pathways through Country, be it by water or land. All Government departments need to work in true partnership with the Darug currently many relationships are being forged. We wish to help all Australians to feel connected to Country the way we do. This can only truly be achieved by working together for generations to come.

“How will the project help Traditional Custodians continue their practices on Country?” page 33 Draft Connecting with Country” Issue no 1-2020 Government Architect New South Wales

The land needs ceremony, cool fires to help it recover and regeminate our ancients' seeds for food and Country's health. Working together to clean and maintain water encourages our native flora and fauna back to Country it's not just about human interest. We are all part of a larger family.

Repatriation of the clans means holding that responsibility for caring for Country, which should come with employment and educational security outcomes for those Darug people who choose to help keep their culture alive in this caring for Country way.

What is needed is to make a great leap of faith that "this is the time of great change" for all living things. With all the destruction from fires and floods, a positive change in government to Aboriginal knowledge and leadership mind set needs to happen. The evidence is clear when the people are not doing their cultural responsibilities and obligations to Country, Country turns on the people because the people turned their back on Country.

We all have lost too much and have been traumatized by many natural events in recent times. Please give us space and support to show our ways to help you clean up, give us access to live and practice our culture. Let us take the responsibility for Country in true partnership with local government/nongovernment agencies and other Aboriginal stake holders.

We are here for all children in Country to have a better future and stronger connection to the blessing we all know as "Ngurra" Country. We believe the new generations of children are more aware and closer in line with Aboriginal values of appreciation for the Earth.

We dream of a time where the families that choose to walk like our Ancestors, in the little spaces that are left, can.

From the Blue Mountains to sea there are over 16000 sites in Darug Country each was made for a purpose. Like an acupuncture points these points of interest need to be care for, communicated with and tended too as part of a larger ecological system. We have seasonal changes, ceremonial obligations and the long-time of seasonal travel according to star charts which promote the restoring of our connections/song lines to other Aboriginal tribes which are all part of this dream for our future. Your children and ours, all need hope and a connection to some thing greater than them self. We are not alone there is a whole network and kinship system that requires our attention and care.

*We can, but **we all must be able to see a better way than where we have been.***

Let's learn from the past and become the world leader Australia should be.

BIG IDEAS & ANCIENT WAYS

Submission

Draft Greater Sydney Water Strategy

Darug Traditional Owners

November 2021

The Darug Traditional Owners acknowledge the Country and Waters that brings all life into being. The Darug Traditional Owners acknowledge the many clans across the Sydney region, our neighbors, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living on Darug Country. The Darug Traditional Owners acknowledge the all people who come with right intent and good hearts from around the world for all generations to come.

Attribution

This submission can be attributed to the Darug Traditional Owners.

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Publication

We consent to this submission being published by the Committee.

Introduction

Who are the Darug TO?

Darug are the people who were documented at the first time of contact from Greater Sydney. We are the people who lost two thirds of the family in the first 5 years of colonization. The Darug people are the ones who feel for Country who have watched over generations the destruction of land and water ways. We are the people of the Sandstone. We are water and the water is us. We are the reflection of the water and land if it is sick, we are sick. We hold the responsibility for all living this the ground you walk on and the underground water that helps sustain all life.

Which lands/waters is theirs?

Our boundaries are the water ways from Land cove River to Georges River from the Blue Mountains to the Sea.

What is the governance structure of the Darug TO?

We have many different corporations to cover the different groups. we are not looking at becoming another corporation we are hoping to be the cultural care takers of the land that is still in our spiritual beings.

What do they do?

The Darug people are learning traditional fire as part of a holistic land management initiative. The more the Darug people are on those places of significance the more seasonal change and land maintenance can be achieved. Unlike others this will not just be a job this a chance to for

fill our cultural responsibilities. Land is first lore/law. These sit down areas will become best practice for many generations to reignite the deeper connections to Country.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

CO-DESIGN & CO-MANAGEMENT

- Darug Traditional Owners must be more than just “consulted stakeholders” in the process of developing the Greater Sydney Water Strategy.
- We see Co-Design and Co-creation as fundamental to the future health of our Country. Our 7-generation planning can transform the way we work together.
- Darug Traditional Owners should be invited to be part of long term, regular and in-depth discussions and relationship building with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (and other government agencies) – so that co-design, co-creation and genuine partnerships are able to develop.
- Darug Traditional Owners will be paid in accordance to those who sit at the table in discussions and relationship building with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (and other government agencies).

HEALTH & WELLBEING

- We support the vision of a sustainable and healthy water strategy for Greater Sydney.
- We strongly oppose the raising of the Warragamba Dam. The Dyarubbin (now known by some people as the Nepean River) must be allowed to live. Cultural flows are crucial to this river habitat *and* to the protection of cultural sites on Gundungurra Country who the Darug have shared lore/law.

REPATRIATION

- Aboriginal clans must be repatriated so they can live, work and carry out cultural practices on Country. We see access to Country and our ability to **live on Country**, to practice culture and care, as key to *Caring* for Country, including waterways.
- Repatriation requires housing for Aboriginal people on country, and spaces for us to gather and practice culture.

NO MORE USE OF WATER SYSTEMS AS A WASTE DUMP

- The ongoing impacts of development, of industry and mining must be mitigated. There should be no more chemical runoff from farms or industry in our rivers; no more concrete

drains that don't allow the cleaning and filtering of water and no more sewage in our waterways.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS

- Departmental “siloing” means that the interconnectedness of water with all life, with cultural burning practice and with Darug people are not integrated into government planning. Better communication and greater understanding across departments is needed. Collaborative working groups led by Traditional Owners that include all departments would be one way of achieving this.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & POWER SHARING

- We want to see our Elders and emerging leaders in high positions of management in all layers of Government. Decisions must be shared. The opportunities for economic prosperity from our Care of Country and our Cultural knowledge must be shared with our people.

CO-DESIGN & CO-MANAGEMENT

Darug Traditional Owners must be more than just consulted stakeholders in the process of developing the Greater Sydney Water Strategy. We see Co-Design and Co-creation as fundamental to the future health of our Country. Co-Design is grounded in shared decision making and shared management.

Traditional knowledges and techniques of living, working, designing and building with and around the sustainable use of freshwater have been developed over thousands of years. This knowledge should be respected and supported by government agencies. Paid positions for Aboriginal knowledge holders within relevant institutions should be agreed upon and shared management and decision making must have an established and agreed framework.

The Aboriginal Water Initiative Program was a highly effective, powerful and meaningful arm of the then NSW Office of Water. It functioned to improve engagement between water institutions and Aboriginal communities and achieved a number of deliverables that are relevant to the Draft Strategy including:

- improving engagement of regional Aboriginal communities in water management
- developing the skills and capability of Aboriginal water facilitators and coordinators
- developing the skills and capability of the NSW Office of Water staff to improve service delivery to Aboriginal communities

- consolidating business between the NSW Government and Aboriginal communities to help provide a single, consistent point of engagement for water sharing issues
- identifying key water-related environmental, social, cultural and economic opportunities and priorities for Aboriginal communities
- reporting on the commercial, cultural and environmental outcomes for Aboriginal people from water sharing planning
- achieving relevant State Plan and national partnership targets including Aboriginal employment, capacity development and training.

The defunding of this program was misguided and has set back government-Aboriginal community relations for water issues. It is our recommendation that the program be brought back.

Our Vision:

- Bring back the Aboriginal Water Initiative Program (NSW).
- Co-Design of the Greater Sydney Water Strategy and its detail is done with Darug and other Traditional Owners. Co-Management of Waterways with Darug and other Traditional Owners.
- Seven generations planning is the foundation of all water strategies.
- Appropriate timelines and budgets must be created by government agencies to ensure that collaboration and co-design takes place with Aboriginal people. Government agencies often claim they don't have time to consult with Aboriginal people – this consultation, engagement and collaboration must be factored into government agency planning and financial processes as a matter of priority.

HEALTH, WELLBEING & EDUCATION

We support the vision of a sustainable water strategy for Greater Sydney. We strongly oppose the raising of the Warragamba Dam. The Dyarubbin (Nepean River) must be allowed to live. Cultural flows are crucial to this river habitat *and* to the protection of cultural sites on Gundungurra Country.

The health and wellbeing of our community depends upon the health and wellbeing of Country, of our waterways. Education is key to this. Education is done on Country. Access to and co-management of our waterways is key to the education of our young people, to our collective health and wellbeing.

As acknowledged by the *NSW Regional Water Strategy for Water Resource Management for Aboriginal People* there is a significant need for a number of different types of water (Cultural Water; Environmental Water; Commercial Water; Town Water; Landholder Water Rights) and 'flows' (Cultural; Environmental; Economic). Cultural Flows are key to the health and wellbeing of Country and to the health and wellbeing of our people.

Management of feral animals and weeds is crucial for the health and wellbeing of our waterways and wildlife. Traditional land management practices are key to this. Cultural burns done at the right time can bring life back to degraded Country. Dormant seed banks can be brought to life through Cultural burning and traditional land management practices.

Access and planning decisions to multiple culturally significant sites within designated riparian zones across the region outlined in the *Draft Strategy* (DPIE, NPWS, Sydney Water, WaterNSW, LGA managed) should be agreed upon and form part of an agreement, between the government and Darug people.

Our Vision:

- No raising of the Warragamba Dam. Enhanced control and management of feral species.
- Traditional methods of land management such as 'cool burns' and cultural burning practices must be reinstated.
- Cultural Flows considered as a key part of the health and wellbeing of all waterways and our people.
- Education through intergenerational knowledge transfer, practiced on Country is key to the health and wellbeing of our people.

REPATRIATION

We see access to Country and our ability to **live on Country**, as key to our ability to care for Country and its waterways and practice our custodial responsibilities. Aboriginal clans must be repatriated on Country. This means housing as well as spaces for us to gather and practice culture.

Support should be provided to enable Darug Traditional Owners to be repatriated with access and management of culturally significant water sites.

We agree that **“communities continue to have limited access to water for cultural, social and economic purposes”** (Draft Strategy, p.120). As part of this, there is a need to recognise that water is accessed from particular points on the land, such as riverbanks, wetland edges, sides of lakes etc. Different parts of Country are also accessed at different times of year.

Housing provision for Darug people on Country can be done in a number of ways. We would like to establish an open dialogue about how this could happen. We are not interested in ownership; we priorities access to country. We have a custodial and customary and cultural relationship to place and any agreement made will reflect this.

Provision of spaces for us to gather and connect with Country are key to this too. Our ability to pass on knowledge, to support the health and social wellbeing of our community is interconnected with our ability to access and gather and teach/learn on Country demands this.

Our Vision:

- Aboriginal Clans can take care of certain areas and be housed in certain sacred areas so they are connected to Country.
- Water Access is provided for Aboriginal people to practice ceremony to strengthen water health and quality. Be that through an ILUA or other agreement.
- Cultural Camps based around seasonal change where kids and Elders can be on Country together.
- Centres for Cultural Continuation can be established in key locations relating to seasonal change. They can be spaces for learning and healing, creating a choice that is currently not available to Darug people.

NO MORE USE OF WATERWAYS AS A WASTE DUMP

Our waterways have been used as an inexhaustible resource to be exploited by industry and for the purposes of urban growth. The draining of marshlands, the building of dams, the use of waterways as waste dumps for our sewage, for waste-water and chemical runoff has created the problems we see today.

Existing stormwater infrastructures should be retrofitted to remove hard surfaces and work towards renaturalisation of catchment assets.

Concrete waterways heat up the water making it an unsafe habitat for waterlife. Concrete waterways stop the natural filtration and cleaning processes. Concrete waterways kill all forms of life that work to clean the water such as oysters and reeds. We see plantlife and the ability for water to soak into our soil is key to this life-cycle.

Given the Draft Strategy's emphasis on stormwater systems as being integral to potential drinking water solutions, there is a need to move towards) retrofitting existing hard surface stormwater assets (drains, canals etc.) to more 'naturalised' infrastructures (such as Johnstons Creek in Annandale); ii) designing and planning more Water Sensitive Urban Design features into the stormwater system. Further, the latter should also be firmly developed within specific culturally inclusive and place-relevant design practices.

The ongoing impacts of development, of industry and mining must be mitigated. No more chemical runoff from farms or industry in our rivers.

Our Vision:

- No more sewage in our waterways.
- No more concrete waterways
- No more dams
- No more chemical run-off from farms and industry.
- Increased area for natural waterway habitat designed into the built environment.
- No more Fracking, and no fracking underground water.

- Mining companies need to be restricted in water use and held accountable. eg. Zinc leaking into the Gross Valley.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Departmental siloing means that the interconnectedness of water with all life, with cultural burning practice, with Darug people, with plants, animals with development and industry are not integrated into government planning and management.

As Sandstone People, Darug people see water as occurring in a whole-system - from the mountains to the sea. Designation of spatially compartmentalised water resource management is incongruent with Aboriginal understandings of Country.

For effective water management, government agencies need to (1) engage with the interconnectedness of all water systems, and the interconnectedness of all life and (2) engage in better practices across government agencies, in order to reduce 'silos' and develop 21st century strategies for caring for water.

Government agencies also need to embrace an Earth-centred ethic for caring for water and all connected life systems. Aboriginal people have lived by an Earth-centred ethic for millennia, and we strongly recommend government agencies look beyond concepts of 'resource management' and 'cost benefit analysis' and place the health of living systems and healthy land and water, at the centre of all priorities.

For Aboriginal peoples and us the Darug people, the temporal scope for the Draft Strategy does not reflect worldviews of ethical custodianship. In line with understandings of intergenerational custodianship, plans and strategies should be at least 7 generations into the future (about 140 years). This would see more robust, meaningful and long-term plans that can be set around short to medium term goals.

Our Vision:

- That governments begin to engage with, and embrace, an Earth-centred custodial ethic

- Culturally Inclusive/Responsive Water Sensitive Urban Design to replace existing hard-surface (concrete) stormwater assets
- Collaborative working groups led by Traditional Owners that include all departments would be one way of achieving this.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & POWER SHARING

We want to see our Elders and emerging leaders in high positions of management in all layers of Government. Decisions must be shared. The opportunities for economic prosperity from our Care of Country and our Cultural knowledge must be shared with our people.

We are encouraged by the acknowledgment for the need to improve management of urban water resources in partnership with Aboriginal communities. We suggest co-creating, funding and implementing a long-term urban strategy for Water Management for Aboriginal People reflecting the NSW Regional Water Strategy.

There are more Aboriginal people living in parts of urban, peri-urban and suburban Western Sydney than anywhere else in Australia (ABS 2016). Much of this region is Darug Country. Current Water Strategies place emphasis on regional and rural engagement with Aboriginal communities. It is our recommendation that similar to the NSW Regional Water Strategy for Water Management for Aboriginal People, an urban strategy is also needed. This would reflect the diverse needs and values of local Aboriginal communities with specific focus on urban forms and processes.

Economic opportunities focused on food, tourism, and culture & knowledges should be acknowledged as dependent on reliable, safe, abundant water supply. Ventures should be recognised as such and be supported by relevant departments and organisations.

Relevant groups should recognise and financially support economic ventures led by Darug Traditional Owners to develop local, water-dependent activities such as native food cultivation, food preparation and catering businesses, tourism operations focused on waterways, culture and knowledge experiences, Indigenous science and technology ventures, amongst others yet to be determined. Water relevant groups should develop connections with local Darug entrepreneurs and work to facilitate and support such ventures.

Our Vision:

Food

- Processing job of native plants and resources eg native grain and wood carving
- Stocklands and other large out lets buying local produce
- Natural theme parks and water way play like the rapids at Bents basin where we would slide down like a water theme park
- Bush tucker restaurants on sites
- Fish tramps

Tourism

- New games for children based on Aboriginal knowledge and planet survival from recycled plastics
- Entertainment festival of seasonal change and ceremony depending on where Country called the people by what food sources were in abundance.
- Nawi canoes rides like in Venice just koori style
- Fire stick farming as a tourism venture
- Fish tramps
- Site tours

Culture and Knowledge

- Economical outcomes training for Aboriginal people in high positions of management in all layers of Government.
- Educational roles, educational kits for schools a regular Aboriginal education and value system schools as part of educational criteria. Not just eco but moral standards.
- Site protection and architectural training so Aboriginal people research Aboriginal areas
- Science teams on new inventions (science and puzzle shop gone but was in Hazelbrook showed a tesla coil. Science working with natural settings for new energy supplies.
- Caring for Country work eg traditional fire mangers
- Grass weaving and tool making

Submitted:

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