



## ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OFFICE



# Report on the Activities of the Aboriginal Heritage Office

**2021-2022**

**Part 1**

Including Proposed Activities for 2022-2023

January 2023

Written and compiled by the  
Aboriginal Heritage Office

Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Northern Beaches,  
Strathfield and Willoughby Councils.



## ***Acknowledgements***

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Aboriginal Heritage Office staff and consultants,  
Aboriginal Heritage Office volunteers and interns.



**AHO museum space, Freshwater**

**Cover page:** AHO staff and consultants in action during 2021-2022.

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AHO guided walk, Lane Cove

## INTRODUCTION

This annual report outlines activities carried out by the Aboriginal Heritage Office (AHO) of Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Northern Beaches, Strathfield and Willoughby Councils in 2021-2022. In particular it provides information on the Aboriginal site management activities and the education and training programs undertaken throughout the year.

### 2021-2022 CELEBRATIONS AND CHALLENGES

COVID-19 remained a major influence in AHO activities this year. The AHO museum and offices were closed for significant periods during the year but services were maintained and the museum was reopened when possible. The rain-inducing weather system La Niña brought more heavy and prolonged rain periods. This disrupted field work, staff training and the education program. It also brought more erosion and site conservation issues. The end of May 2022 also saw the retirement of Manager and founder of the AHO, David Watts. His contribution to the AHO and to Aboriginal heritage in the region has been profound and it will be a significant challenge for the AHO without him at the helm. Fortunately he agreed to stay on as Cultural Advisor through the transition period.



Masks, distancing, office closures and video link ups have continued.

### THE ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OFFICE

In 2000 Lane Cove, North Sydney, Warringah and Willoughby Councils employed an Aboriginal Heritage Manager to carry out a range of tasks in the four Councils for an initial period of five years. At that time there was no one employed at local government level in Australia dealing specifically with Aboriginal heritage issues. In 2005 Manly joined the partnership, followed by Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council in December 2006, Pittwater in 2007 and Armidale Dumaresq in August 2008 for a two year period based on a series of projects. City of Ryde Council was a partner from March 2010 to March 2015. In 2016 Manly, Pittwater and Warringah Councils amalgamated to form Northern Beaches Council and Strathfield Council also joined the partnership.



Gathering for group photos - anniversary and re-signing of the MoU in 2010

The Aboriginal Heritage Office is an award-winning experiment and the initiative has continued to set a high standard for how local government can work towards improved management and protection of Aboriginal heritage. The success of the partnership is seen in the awards that have been received, including the 2001 Energy Australia Heritage Award, the 2008 Pride of Workmanship Award (*Rotary*), the 2012 NSW Heritage Council’s ‘Heritage Heroes’ award, the 2012 *North Sydney Community Award*, the 2012 *Building Inclusive Communities Award* presented by the former NSW Premier, Mr Barry O’Farrell, the 2013 Cultural and Historical Heritage Award (*Keeping Australia Beautiful Award Beaches*), the 2014 Cultural Heritage Award (*Keeping Australia Beautiful & NSW OEH Sustainable Cities*), the 2014 Cultural Heritage Award, Caring for Country (*Keeping Australia Beautiful*), 2014 Cultural Heritage Award, Clean Beaches (*Keeping Australia Beautiful*) and the 2017 Paul Harris Fellow Award (*Rotary*) (see [Section 1.0](#) for details).



For more information about the AHO model, go to [Section 1.0](#).

AHO at engraving on Council reserve

## THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government has a key role to play in safeguarding Aboriginal sites and heritage. As the people who make decisions about land and how it will be used, Councils hold the future of many Aboriginal sites in their hands. In valuing Aboriginal heritage, local government not only commits to preserving the past, it commits to the future by fostering communication, understanding and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The following table illustrates how important Councils are in the overall protection of Aboriginal heritage as Councils across NSW make up a large proportion of Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permits (AHIP) issued by the NSW Government for harm or destruction to sites. Note: the information about specific applicants is no longer provided on the NSW Government’s website.

AHIPS Issued	Councils	Corporations	Other Government Departments
2008-2009	17	17	21
2009-2010	29	25	17
2010-2011	29	23	11
2011-2012	21	21	13

2017-2018	58	175	60
2018-2019	22	139	41
2019-2021	221 total, breakdown not available		
2021-2022	46 from July to Nov, breakdown not available		

Table 1: breakdown of AHIPs. 2008 to 2012 (source, NSW Government, 2012: 9); 2017-2019 (OEH 2019, raw data)(Budget Estimates, via ABC news 10/11/21)

The AHO has established many strategies and procedures to assist Councils in meeting their responsibilities with regard to Aboriginal heritage, particularly in avoiding the need to harm a site or preventing accidental damage (see below for details).

#### ABORIGINAL HERITAGE IN NORTHERN SYDNEY & STRATHFIELD

Aboriginal heritage includes places with physical evidence of past Aboriginal occupation of an area, often synonymous with archaeological sites, as well as places of spiritual or cultural importance with no obvious associated physical remains. In terms of Aboriginal archaeological sites, the Sydney Basin is one of the richest provinces in Australia. There are thousands of Aboriginal sites, a high proportion of which contain rock art, and in Sydney's sandstone belt at least 1500 rock shelters have been discovered to contain cultural deposit. Hundreds of shell middens have been recorded along the coast and estuaries. Within the partner Councils there are many examples of this extraordinary cultural heritage.



Rock shelter with hand stencils in northern Sydney urban area

The Sydney area has been home to Aboriginal people for over 30,000 years and Aboriginal belief is that Aboriginal people have been in Australia since the world was created. Aboriginal Dreaming leads

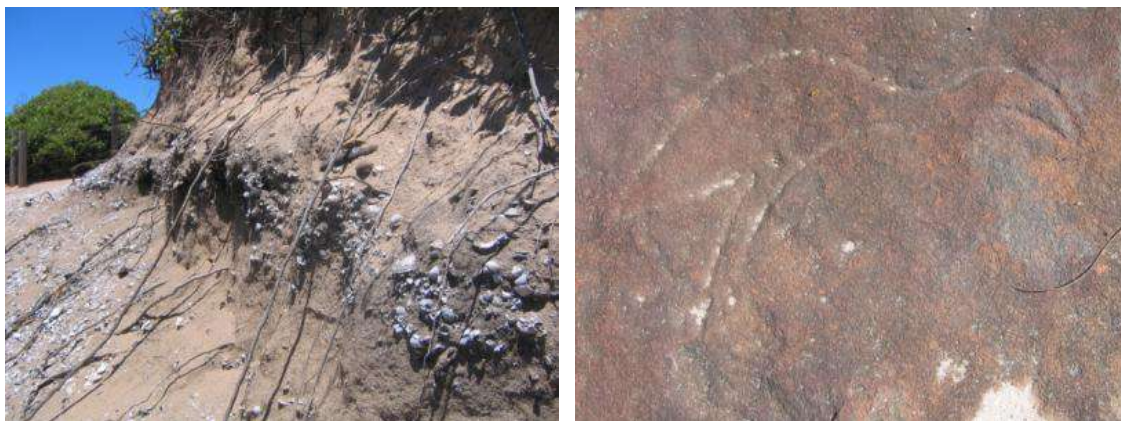


us to believe that occupation of Australia occurred from the creation of the earth (*Aboriginal Dreamtime*). Physical evidence of occupation of the coastal Sydney area dates from around 8,000 years ago at the Prince of Wales Hospital Site. Older sites would have been submerged as the sea level rose following the last ice age (around 20,000 years ago) and stabilised to its current level only 6,000 years ago. It is likely that older sites will be found in future archaeological excavations in favourable locations. Further west are sites dated to 30,000 BP, such as a site in Parramatta (Attenbrow, 2010: 18).

In terms of places of spiritual or cultural significance, a great deal of this information has been lost due to the severe impact of the invasion on Sydney clans. As a result of the massive disruption to traditional knowledge-holding methods here, it is difficult to determine with any accuracy what places in northern Sydney and Strathfield have unbroken oral stories associated with them. However, there is no doubt that Aboriginal people who have grown up in the local area and who currently live here, not to mention the custodians, have strong feelings for this place. This is well illustrated in *Tale of a Whale: Significant Aboriginal Landscapes of the Northern Beaches* written by Indigenous archaeologist Emma Lee and the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council.

### ***What makes northern Sydney special?***

There are around 900 recorded Aboriginal sites in the partner councils of the Aboriginal Heritage Office (AHO) in northern Sydney and Strathfield, which include - art sites, engravings, burials, artefact scatters, grinding grooves and extensive shell middens as well as places of important historical events. They range from paintings in excellent condition to middens degraded by erosion and disturbance.



Shell midden on an ocean beach and a rock engraving

Each individual site is considered to be of high significance by the Aboriginal community. Overall, they have national and international significance due to their age (some in the region dated over 30,000 years, most are at least 4000 years old), the style of art and engraving, their level of preservation in the context of Australia's biggest city, the representative variety of different site types, and their association with the place where Europeans first settled Aboriginal land. Sydney Harbour itself is heritage listed and the Aboriginal heritage is an important component (it has been identified in the Sydney Regional Environmental Plan). These sites are important to local Aboriginal people and to Aboriginal communities across Australia where they symbolise the survival of Aboriginal culture even

where the impacts of invasion have been the longest and hardest felt. The heritage of the region is also important to the wider public. Local residents have grown up with the sites and many have undertaken Sites Awareness Training to learn more. Visitors from Australia and internationally value the heritage and appreciate the opportunity to see at first hand Aboriginal heritage in Sydney, not just ‘outback’.

### ***Threats and protection***

Some of the main threats to Aboriginal sites in NSW are: ignorance, apathy, vandalism and development. Sites are continually being impacted because people do not know that they exist and their value is not understood or appreciated. In northern Sydney graffiti is a big problem for rock shelters and rock engravings, while damage from mountain bike traffic and rock climbing is an increasing concern. There is also evidence of increased erosion on foreshore sites, particularly associated with boating traffic and storm events. The issue of increased sea levels and erratic weather due to climate change is also a critical factor.

Many Councils recognise that if the sites within their boundaries are to be effectively preserved, better management is urgently needed. Training and education is crucial.

### ***What local government can do***

While the legislation that protects and regulates impacts to Aboriginal heritage in NSW is administered by the NSW Government, it has long been recognized that local government has a key role.

*“Whilst government authorities such as the NPWS and Heritage Council of NSW have specific conservation responsibilities conferred by their Acts, the main responsibility for ensuring conservation [of Aboriginal heritage] rests with local councils.” NSW Government, Schedule G21, 1985*

Generally local government has approached managing Aboriginal heritage by commissioning an Aboriginal heritage study that provides information about what Aboriginal archaeological sites are within the local government area (LGA) and recommendations for further work. There is little or no in-house expertise in Aboriginal heritage assessment and management and there are many challenges to implementing the study’s recommendations without contracting additional work. Bringing in expertise is expensive and the reluctance to do so often results in protective measures not being adopted.

The AHO method provides an example of how a number of Councils can work together to share a position and costs so that Aboriginal heritage is not only given appropriate attention, it is not seen as a financial burden on Councils (see below for further discussion).



**AHO stall at Local Government and Shires Association conference**

## 1.0 THE ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OFFICE MODEL

The Aboriginal Heritage Office (AHO) was established in 2000 with a single position shared by four Councils. As this was the first of its kind in Australia everyone involved was on a learning curve and over the years things that have worked well have been retained and enhanced and things that were not as successful or cost-effective were left off the program. The following information sets out the AHO model as it currently stands and the basis of the activities carried out in 2021-2022, including adaptations to COVID-19 restrictions.

### AHO ADMINISTRATION

The AHO administration (human resources, employment, salaries, health and safety, vehicles, policy and procedures, computers and so on) is provided voluntarily by a partner Council. In late 2016 this was taken up by Northern Beaches Council, from North Sydney which had managed it since 1999. The partnership is coordinated through an agreement set out in a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and overseen by a steering committee. The current five year MoU for the partnership was signed in early 2019 for the period 2020-2025. This year the AHO and representatives of partner Councils continued to review the administrative arrangements to determine the best supporting structure and hosting Council for the AHO in its current form and more efficient ways to operate.

Accommodation of the office is also a voluntary contribution by partner Councils. The AHO has been housed at Manly Dam, Lane Cove Council Depot, the former Willoughby Council building in Chatswood, disused community space in Northbridge, the vacant former baby clinic at Manly and now the refurbished former Baby Health Centre in Freshwater. The space hosted by Willoughby Council from 2008 to 2014 at Northbridge allowed the office to expand and the Museum and Education Centre was created. The AHO's move to Manly meant the museum space was much restricted and due to a number of issues the museum was closed in 2016 and in 2018 the entire building was vacated. It remained so until the space at Freshwater was made available (more about the museum in [Section 4.0](#)). In March 2020 the museum was closed and the office shortly after, with staff working from home or individually at the office due to COVID. It has been open periodically between periods of tighter COVID restrictions.



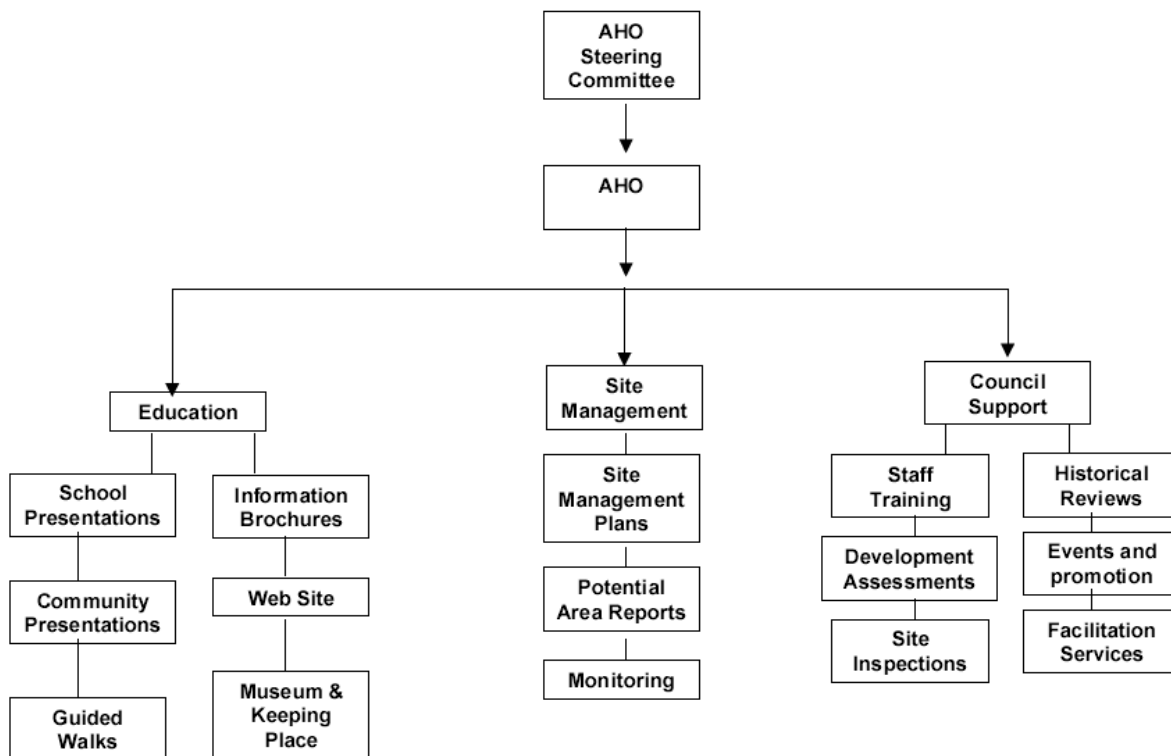
AHO museum space, Freshwater

## AHO PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

The Aboriginal Heritage Office's projects and activities are based on three main areas: Site Management, Council Support and Education (see flow chart 1 below). Each area of concern compliments the other areas. For example, in trying to protect sites from damage some of the main threats come from people. Sites can be destroyed through development and this risk can be minimised through Council staff training and review processes, as well as community education.

The AHO's main objectives are:

- To protect Aboriginal sites and heritage in the participating Council areas through the development and implementation of site management plans, policy development and regular monitoring of site conditions.
- To ensure that consultation and communication between all Stakeholders, including the NSW Government, the Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Aboriginal Community, Local Government, Government and non-Government landholders and the general community, is maintained in order to ensure heritage site management efforts are both coordinated and effective.
- To develop and implement community education programs and events aimed at increasing the collective knowledge of Aboriginal cultural heritage. By increasing the community's knowledge of Aboriginal cultural heritage, the participating Councils believe Aboriginal heritage will be more highly valued and the community will take a more active role in site protection and preservation.



Flow Chart 1: AHO Programs

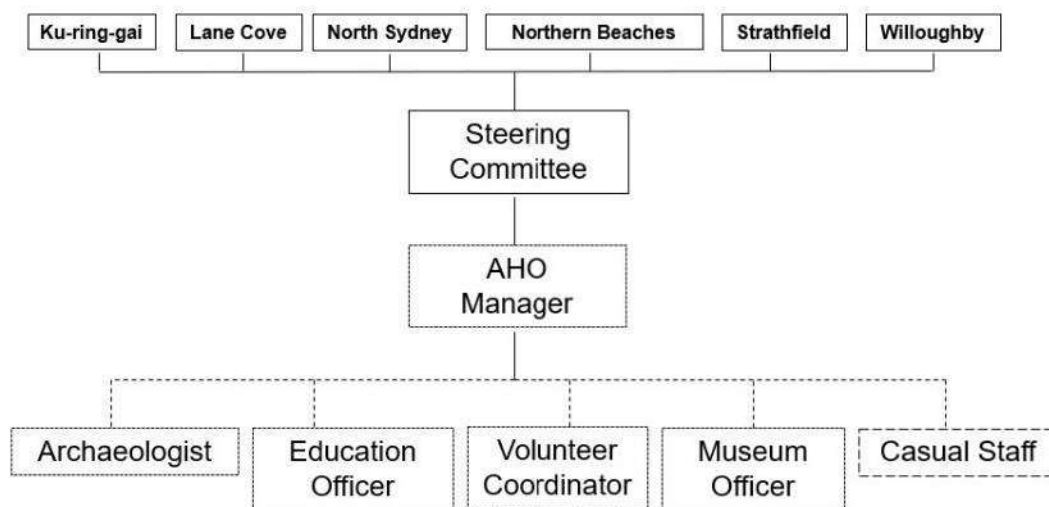


As mentioned, the AHO achieves these objectives through the three themes of *site management*, *education* and *Council support*. Supported by the Steering Committee, made up of representatives from each partner Council, the manager directs AHO activities towards these themes by balancing strategic objectives and shared workloads with more immediate and urgent issues that arise from day to day and year to year.

## STAFFING

Following an increased budget in 2019, the Aboriginal Heritage Office has gradually consolidated its permanent staff positions. For 2021-2022 the AHO consisted of four permanent full-time positions (Aboriginal Heritage Manager (AHM) - David Watts, Education Officer - Karen Smith, Archaeologist - Phil Hunt, and Volunteer Coordinator - Susan Whitby). The vacant 12 month temporary full-time position (Museum Officer) was proposed for readvertising in late 2022.

The Aboriginal Heritage Office has had up to eight staff members at a time depending on funding, including the Aboriginal Heritage Manager, Aboriginal Heritage Officers, Aboriginal Education Officers, Project Officers, Archaeologists and a Geologist, Training Officers and trainees. The Manager also supervises positions funded by other agencies on occasion, such as the project officer who worked on the Aboriginal history of Willoughby and the Aboriginal Social Planner for northern Sydney.



Flow Chart 2: AHO structure

## BENEFITS OF THE AHO METHOD

The success of the AHO partnership is no accident. The impetus came from a local council, North Sydney, which had pro-active Councilors, enthusiastic staff, the Council worked well with other Councils and they sought out advice from different quarters. North Sydney did a trial before getting other Councils interested and then a partnership of four was established. This unique partnership ran successfully for five years and other Councils began joining up.

The benefits of being a partner in a fulltime Aboriginal Heritage Office include:

- Follow-through. Not only can the AHO do the reports, site management plans and training, but it will be available to update the reports, chase up loose ends, work on new strategies, and be a continual presence to review, comment, discuss and advise on Aboriginal heritage issues generally.
- No one-offs. A drawback of most Aboriginal heritage projects is that they are one-offs. After the project is completed, despite recommendations for further work and actions, they tend to be forgotten. There are many examples of a great Heritage Study that falls out of date and stops being used. The valuable information that has been collected needs to be continually updated and reintegrated into council planning systems. The AHO continually reviews its documents and methods to ensure the work is effective and viable over the short and long-term.
- Site Conservation works. This has generally been very poorly followed through by all land managers. With regular monitoring a site can be given some protection or management works and then checked regularly to see if it is actually working. When it starts to require follow-up work, this can be done 'in time' rather than 'too late'.
- Education and training. The overwhelming majority of Australians still know very little about Aboriginal history, culture and heritage. For people who are actively interested there are still limited opportunities for learning more. The AHO has a dedicated Education Officer and the Education Program includes a wide range of events that can fit in with each Council's needs and those of its residents. The AHO also provides training at different levels targeting different Council staff, and courses are offered throughout the year so new staff can join in freely at the next available session. With recent changes to legislation, the AHO is quick to update its courses to ensure Councils receive the information they need to protect Aboriginal heritage and avoid costly and embarrassing mistakes.

The table below provides a comparative look at the way local governments deal with Aboriginal heritage management compared to how Aboriginal heritage management and planning is undertaken by the Aboriginal Heritage Office. It is clear from this summary that other Councils suffer a cyclical knowledge gap if they do actually initiate any Aboriginal heritage study, whereas the AHO's process is efficient and provides on-going support and refinement of data.

	<b>Regular Council Process</b>	<b>AHO Process (Best Practice)</b>
1	Council instigates Aboriginal Heritage Study	Council joins AHO partnership
2	Council seeks additional funds (e.g. from NSW Government).	AHO commences Aboriginal Heritage Study, Potential Areas Study, Staff Training, Community Education Activities.
3	Council selects consultants for study.	Council can seek advice on a range of issues.

4	Study is completed	Studies are completed.
5	Site information is updated and put on GIS. Sites not found, inaccessible or in private property are not updated or partly updated.	Site information is updated and put on GIS. Sites not found, inaccessible or in private property are updated according to best available information. Monitoring is scheduled for future updates and to refine data.
6	Recommendations made by consultants are investigated by Council staff. Limited support is available from original consultant due to high consultancy fees. Council plans to instigate recommendations are hampered by lack of in-house expertise.	Recommendations made by AHO are investigated by Council staff. AHO provides ongoing support and training to Council staff. Support includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular data updates.</li> <li>• Targeted training to outdoor, planning and compliance staff.</li> <li>• Basic and advanced training.</li> <li>• Day to day advice on all Aboriginal heritage issues and avenues of approach on Indigenous issues.</li> </ul>
7	Aboriginal Heritage Study becomes largely forgotten or is considered too complex to implement.	Aboriginal Heritage Study and other reports are 'living' documents that are updated, improved and fully supported.
8	Council seeks clear direction on how to address its Aboriginal heritage responsibilities – considers a new Aboriginal heritage study and repeats cycle.	Council responsibilities for Aboriginal heritage are strengthened with ongoing support, training, liaison and community education activities.

Table 2: Comparison of Aboriginal heritage methods (AHO, 2009:32)

## AWARDS

The AHO has been recognized in a number of awards over the years, such as the 2001 Energy Australia Heritage Award, 2004 Guringai Festival Award and 2008 Pride of Workmanship Rotary Award. In recent years the AHO has received the:

- 2012 *'Heritage Heroes'* award from the NSW Heritage Council presented by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage,
- 2012 *Building Inclusive Communities Award* (government category) from Macquarie University and Ethnic Council of NSW presented by the NSW Premier, Mr Barry O'Farrell,
- 2013 *Keeping Australia Beautiful Award Clean Beaches*, Winner, Cultural and Historical Heritage Award (Sydney/Illawarra),
- 2013 *Keeping Australia Beautiful Award Clean Beaches*, Highly Commended, Cultural and Historical Heritage Award (State),
- 2014 *Keeping Australia Beautiful Sustainable Cities Award*, Winner, Office of Environment and Heritage Cultural Heritage Award.
- 2016 *Keeping Australia Beautiful Sustainable Cities Award*, nomination for Office of Environment and Heritage Cultural Heritage Award.
- 2017 *Ministers' Awards for Women in Local Government*, Education Officer Karen Smith nominated.
- 2017 *Paul Harris Fellow Award* from Rotary, Education Officer Karen Smith awarded.

The AHO Volunteer Site Monitors have received the:

- 2012 *North Sydney Community Award* presented by Federal MP, Mr Joe Hockey, and
- 2013 *NSW Volunteer of the Year Award*, (Sydney Northern) Highly Commended Team of the Year from the Centre for Volunteering.
- 2014 *Keeping Australia Beautiful Sustainable Cities Award*, Winner, Clean Beaches, Caring for Country, Cultural Heritage Award.



Some of the awards received



2017 Paul Harris Fellow Award from Rotary, Education Officer Karen Smith



## 2.0 STRATEGIC PLANNING

One of the most important tasks of the AHO has been reviewing the Aboriginal heritage planning function of each Council and setting up new and improved systems. The legislative responsibility for the protection of Aboriginal heritage in NSW lies with the NSW Government <sup>1</sup>, however, Councils have responsibilities to protect Aboriginal heritage as they are land managers and approval bodies. As environmental planning legislation requires local government to consider Aboriginal heritage as part of the environmental impact assessment process, it is important that there are clear policies and procedures in place, backed with staff who are trained in how to implement them. As Aboriginal heritage has generally been poorly understood in NSW, this task requires regular reinforcement. The main focus has been in updating information about the known Aboriginal heritage resource, planning for potential Aboriginal sites, and training staff and the local community.

## 2.1 COUNCIL SITE MANAGEMENT REPORTS

*'This report addresses the management and requirements for protection of both the recorded and potential Aboriginal sites in the Council area...'*



Fully revised and reformatted reports, 2011-2022

<sup>1</sup> Heritage NSW. Previously Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and Department of Premier and Cabinet in 2019. From 2011 it was the Office of Environment and Heritage, before that the Department of Environment, Climate Change, and Water, before that the Department of Environment and Conservation and prior to 2003 it was the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

2022. Ku-ring-gai Aboriginal Site Management Report (fully revised edition)

2021. Strathfield Aboriginal Site Management Report (first edition).

2021. Lane Cove Aboriginal Site Management Report (fully revised edition).

2020. Willoughby Aboriginal Site Management Report (fully revised edition).

2015. Ku-ring-gai Aboriginal Site Management Report (fully revised edition)

2014. Warringah Aboriginal Site Management Report (fully revised edition)

2013. Ryde Aboriginal Site Management Report (fully revised edition).

2012. Manly Aboriginal Site Management Report (fully revised edition).

2011. Lane Cove Aboriginal Site Management Report (fully revised edition).

2011. North Sydney Aboriginal Site Management Report (fully revised edition).

2011. Ryde Aboriginal Site Management Report (first edition).

2009. Armidale Aboriginal Site Management Report (first edition).

2008. Pittwater Aboriginal Site Management Report (first edition).

2007. Ku-ring-gai Aboriginal Site Management Report (first edition).

2005 (revised 2007, 2009). Manly Aboriginal Site Management Report.

2003 (revised, 2007, 2009). Warringah Aboriginal Site Management

2003 (revised 2007). Willoughby Aboriginal Site Management Report.

2001 (revised 2003, 2007). Lane Cove Aboriginal Site Management Report.

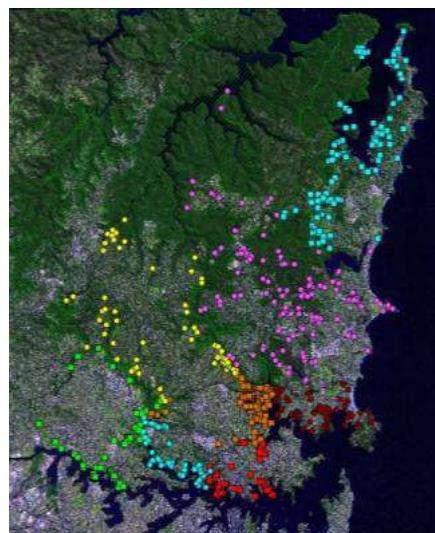
1999 (revised 2003, 2007). North Sydney Aboriginal Site Management Report.

**List of Reports, with Major Revisions noted.**



## BACKGROUND

The first priority for any Council that joins the partnership is to complete a Site Management Report. This report details Council's Aboriginal heritage responsibilities, contextual information and management recommendations, as well as providing digital copies of all updated site cards. These reports are the culmination of many months and indeed years of work. The AHO first had to enter into a data licensing agreement with the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) of Heritage NSW so that all site data and site card information can be held by the AHO. The AHO then had to get a site card for each reference and try to determine which sites were within Councils' boundaries or outside. As many site records are decades old and have not been revisited since their initial recording, the exact location is not always easily ascertained. Some sites have still not been located and will require further attempts in the future during annual monitoring programs.



Map of sites across the partner Councils

Over the years it has been noted that many of the site records, as given by AHIMS, have errors including significant errors of location. AHIMS does not appear to regularly audit the site data and the corrections made by the AHO reinforce the importance of having such programs.

Since 2011 the AHO reviews the location error of original AHIMS data when carrying out LGA-wide monitoring updates. It has been found that between 30% and 50% of site cards had significant errors (errors of location greater than 50m, incorrect site type, incorrect site name, and so on). For example, after the review and monitor work of the 149 sites in former Pittwater Council, only 52 sites (35%) were considered to have accurate site coordinates, that is, within 20m of the actual site (after relocation by the AHO and/or the confirmation of the actual location through the review). The level of inaccuracy ranged from 20m to over 7650m (1000m+ in five cases, or 3% of sites) (AHO, 2019). The 2020 review of Willoughby Council had similar results, with inaccurate sites (ie over 41m error) consisting of about half of Willoughby's 186 total, being 92 (49.5%). Alarming is a proportion of sites had very large errors, including 4 (2.2%) over 1000m (AHO, 2020).

Table 3 illustrates the level of error in the AHIMS data for 7 previous updates, with between 11%\* and 47% of site cards requiring significant corrections (errors of location greater than 50m, incorrect site type, incorrect site name, and so on). More detailed reviews have been conducted, with results for Ku-ring-gai Council outlined below. The initial results for former-Pittwater Council, delayed while the new amalgamation arrangements were being worked out, show an even greater level of inaccuracy (see below).

	Lane Cove (2011)	NBC (former Manly)	North Sydney	NBC (former Warringah*)	Ku-ring-gai	NBC (former Pittwater)	Willoughby
<b>Total Sites</b>	90	68	76	215	106	149	180
<b>Updated</b>	18	26	22	23	56	86 <sup>1</sup>	92
<b>%</b>	20%	38%	29%	11%	47%	58%	51%

**Table 3. Errors in data found in LGA Reviews**

Note: updates for location here are only for errors of 50m or above.

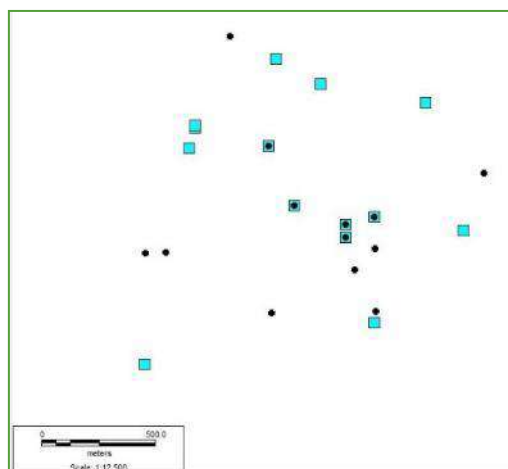
\* Northern Beaches Council former Warringah LGA data is from 2014 and does not include previous updates made in 2011 that corrected many errors.

<sup>1</sup> Northern Beaches Council former Pittwater LGA updates were not completed due to Council mergers and workload adjustments.

The map below shows the level of inaccuracy of the AHIMS data and how simply mapping it would not protect Aboriginal heritage from inadvertent destruction (the black dots represent original AHIMS data and the blue squares are AHO corrections after the AHO revision program in Ku-ring-gai Council. It can be seen that in this particular area very few sites match up even closely and some are over 500m out). The potential for having sites destroyed accidentally, or home-owners having to commission costly archaeological assessments due to poor data is a great concern.

	Accurate	Inaccurate						
Accuracy	<20m	21-40m	41-100m	101-250m	251-500m	501-1000m	1001m+	Total
<b>Sites</b>	52	11	18	33	25	5	5	149
<b>%</b>	35%	7%	12%	22%	17%	3%	3%	

**Table 4. Site accuracy of AHIMS data for Northern Beaches north (former Pittwater Council)**



**Example of data errors (black = AHIMS, blue = AHO corrections).**



The AHO reviews of Ryde LGA in 2012 and Ku-ring-gai LGA in 2015 also showed similar results. Another comparison is provided below:

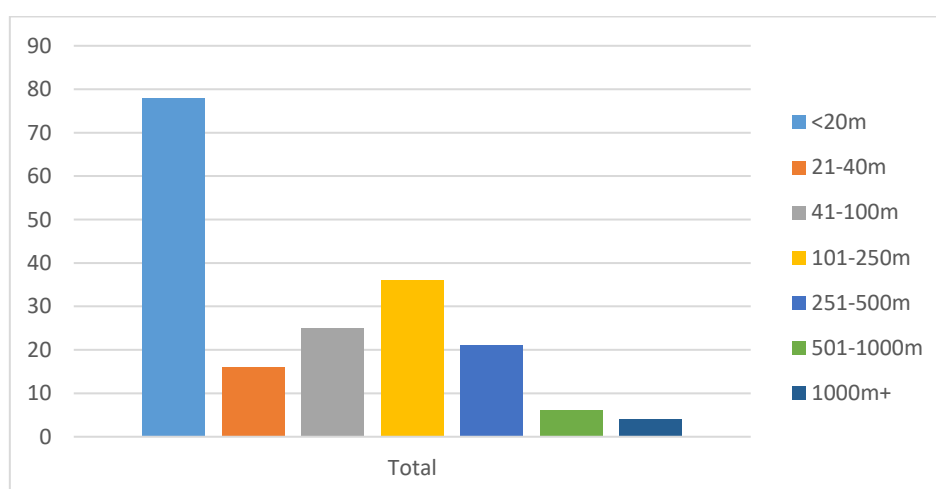
	Accurate	Inaccurate					
Accuracy	<20m	21-40m	41-100m	101-250m	251-500m	500+	unknown
<b>Ku-ring-gai</b>	21	12	20	11	9	21	12
	20%	11%	19%	10%	8%	20%	11%
<b>Pittwater</b>	52	11	18	33	25	10	0
	35%	7%	12%	22%	17%	6%	0

**Table 5. Site accuracy of AHIMS data for Ku-ring-gai and former Pittwater LGA (7 categories)**

A review of Willoughby for the 2020 update of 180 sites shows similar findings. The tables and charts show that 78 sites (42%) are considered accurate (ie less than 20m error). Sites considered by the AHO to be very inaccurate (ie over 41m error) are about half the sites, 92 (49.5%). Alarmingly a proportion of sites have very large errors, including 4 (2.2%) over 1000m. Fortunately the AHO has corrected most of the data so that Council can have confidence that the AHO site data more closely matches the site records, hence how the inaccuracies have been identified.

Accurate	Moderate	Inaccurate					
<20m	21-40m	41-100m	101-250m	251-500m	501-1000m	1000m+	Total
78	16	25	36	21	6	4	186
41.9%	8.6%	13.4%	19.4%	11.3%	3.2%	2.2%	
94		92					186
50.5%		49.5%					

**Table 6: AHIMS data inaccuracies (based on total registrations including duplicates) (AHO, 2020 c: 27-28)**

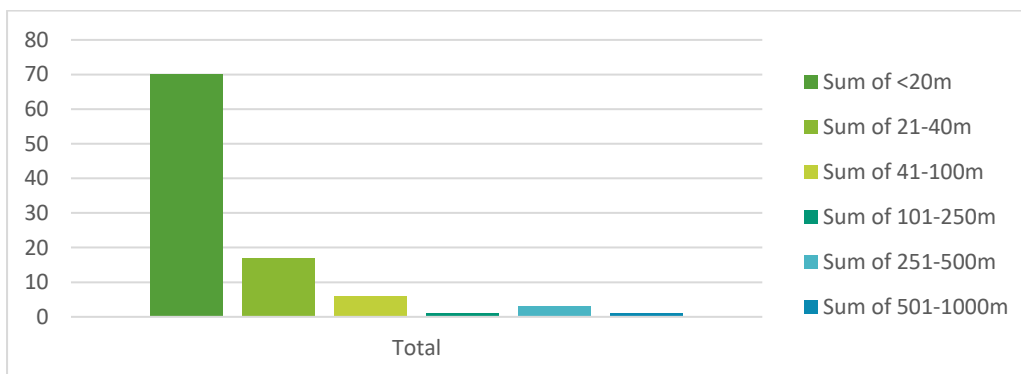


**Table 7: AHIMS data inaccuracies**

The review of Lane Cove in 2021 sites shows better results due to the AHO's previous updates to AHIMS for Lane Cove (2011). The tables and charts show that 70 sites (71%) are now considered accurate (ie less than 20m error). Sites considered by the AHO to be inaccurate (>41m error) are down to 11 (11%), and 'only' a handful with very large errors. The AHO continues to correct the data and provide AHIMS with corrections. However, this still illustrates that the AHO data is more accurate and reliable than AHIMS, even after corrections.

Accurate	Moderate	Inaccurate					
<20m	21-40m	41-100m	101-250m	251-500m	501-1000m	1000m+	Total
70	17	6	1	3	1	0	98
71%	17%	6%	1%	3%	1%	0%	
87		11					98
89%		11%					

**Table 7: AHIMS data inaccuracies (based on total registrations including duplicates)**



**Table 8: AHIMS data inaccuracies, Lane Cove 2021**

The 2021 first edition report for Strathfield and review of sites was more straightforward as there are only three recorded sites and all were recorded by the AHO recently and the locations are accurate. A search on AHIMS with a 3km buffer was conducted and all individual sites outside the LGA were checked to confirm that they were actually correctly mapped.

Given the historical and ongoing errors with AHIMS data, the AHO provides to Council:

- The AHO's own GIS data with improved accuracy and content
- Tailored Aboriginal Sites Awareness Training for different Council roles
- Reports, guidelines and documents

These resources are designed to better inform staff of the Aboriginal heritage context and in how to carry out Aboriginal heritage reviews in their work. The potential for having sites destroyed accidentally, or home-owners having to commission costly archaeological assessments due to poor data is a great concern and the AHO is continually working with all parties to provide the best options to avoid these unwanted outcomes.

## CURRENT WORK

The AHO continually refines the data set to ensure that Councils have access to the most accurate and up to date information. As previously unrecorded sites are still being 'discovered', and previously recorded sites are being found again, it is important to regularly update the records. This financial year the AHO has made updates and adjustments to the site tables for Ku-ring-gai as a result of the full LGA updates for this Council. Monitoring of accessible sites (with corresponding updates to site cards and site tables) took place across many regions, and many other sites were monitored during the year. In 2010 the AHO developed an 'update card' to provide corrections and updates to the AHIMS register. This was largely as a consequence of finding some previous AHO updates and new recordings had been incorrectly registered by AHIMS. The AHO wanted to ensure that AHIMS staff (and future users of the information) would be able to quickly and easily see the required updates without adding further errors to the record.

The rollout of the revised report formats designed to combine the Site Management Reports with the Potential Areas Reports (discussed below) was delayed during the Council amalgamation period and with workload adjustments. Ku-ring-gai's 2022 version is now completed. The report format combines the background information, Aboriginal heritage advice and recommendations that were previously in different reports into the one place. For the convenience of different users, the report is broken up into parts that can stand alone, but all recommendations are reiterated in the final part. The revised edition format helps different departments within Councils get the most out of the information provided (the stand alone parts include History, Legislation, Aboriginal Sites and Potential, Planning and Assessment and Site Management, Conservation and Monitoring). The Recommendations and Guidelines are all included conveniently together in the final part. Training is given to Council planners, project managers and others as to how to use this information (see [Section 4.0](#) for details).

Strathfield Council's Aboriginal Site Management Report was completed in August 2021. There are several major factors that differentiate the archaeology from other AHO partners. Strathfield LGA has no Hawkesbury Sandstone or harbour estuary foreshore, therefore most of the classic coastal Sydney site types aren't present. It also has few surviving bushland landscapes and proportionally the highest amount of development and land modification. The three sites that the AHO located on its first targeted survey suggest there will be more to find.

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Part 2 – Aboriginal History
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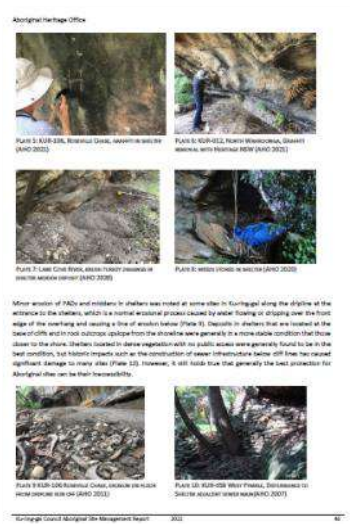
### Example of report Part 1, Strathfield Council (AHO, 2021).

*It provides information on the aims and objectives of the Aboriginal Heritage Office (AHO) in its partnership with Council, legislative responsibilities for Aboriginal heritage, a brief Aboriginal history of the area, the number and type of Aboriginal sites recorded, criteria for assessing Aboriginal heritage potential, updates from the recording and monitoring program and management recommendations for both strategic planning and individual site conservation.*

### Part 1, Introduction, Site Management Report



While the AHO puts emphasis on getting the Site Management Reports updated, there are many site-specific issues that require the input of the AHO. The AHO is often called out to inspect, assess and record Aboriginal sites when Council staff, volunteers and residents come across things believed to be sites. Visiting sites, examining materials that are found by members of the public and doing artefact analysis are just some of the tasks that are frequently undertaken. The AHO is a one-stop shop for these sorts of enquiries.



Page from 2022 Ku-ring-gai update report

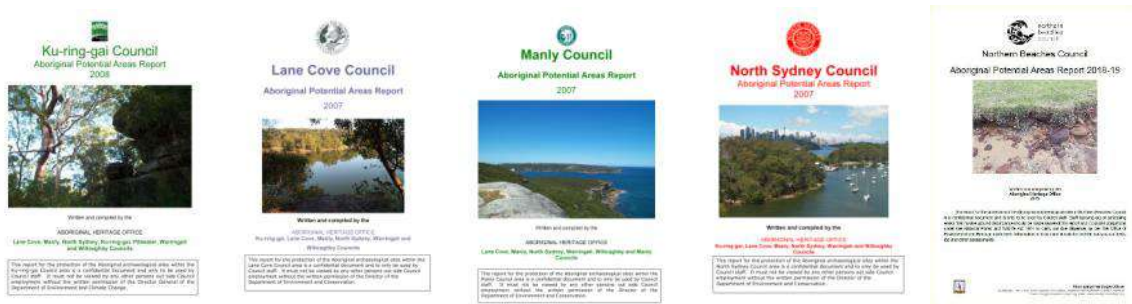
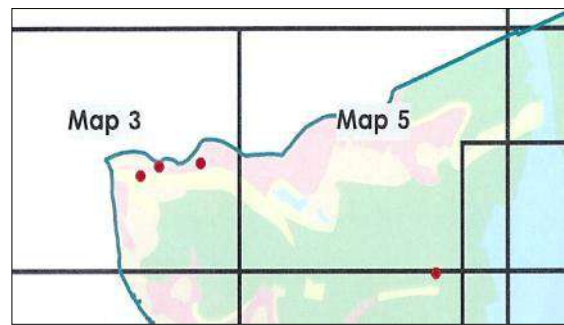
## 2.2 POTENTIAL AREA REPORTS

*'Areas of potential Aboriginal heritage are important because they do, more often than not, actually contain unrecorded sites.'* (AHO potential areas report).

While the Site Management Reports provide detailed information on known and recorded sites, there are still unrecorded sites being found and many more sites still remain to be found and recorded. It is important to have an understanding of where unrecorded sites are likely to be present and incorporate this information into Council planning and assessment processes. For this reason the AHO prepares and updates a Potential Area Report for each Council. These reports provide a predictive model for determining where Aboriginal sites are most likely to exist.

The model is checked against the current landscape, known sites, levels of previous disturbance and so on, and then a series of potential-area categories are mapped. The associated AHO assessment framework and checklist have been designed so that it can be incorporated into daily work practices. This is crucial for the more stringent due diligence requirements under NSW legislation.

As noted above, the AHO has been upgrading the format of its reports and the potential areas reports have been integrated into the revised report format. North Sydney, Lane Cove, former-Manly, former-Warringah and Ku-ring-gai were completed to 2015. In 2018 Northern Beaches Council provided additional funds to employ a consultant to work with the AHO to update and combine the three newly amalgamated Councils of Manly, Warringah and Pittwater into the potential area format. Ku-ring-gai's update was completed in 2022. Strathfield Council's potential area mapping is being planned for a post-lockdown era.



**Potential Areas Reports above (original format and 2019 NBC report) and list below**

- 2019. Northern Beaches Council Aboriginal Potential Areas Report.
- 2012. City of Ryde Aboriginal Potential Areas Report.
- 2009. Armidale-Dumaresq Aboriginal Potential Areas Report.
- 2008: Pittwater Aboriginal Potential Areas Report.
- 2008. Ku-ring-gai Aboriginal Potential Areas Report.
- 2006. Manly Aboriginal Potential Areas Report.
- 2004. Lane Cove Aboriginal Potential Areas Report.
- 2004. North Sydney Aboriginal Potential Areas Report.
- 2004. Warringah Aboriginal Potential Areas Report.
- 2004. Willoughby Aboriginal Potential Areas Report.

**2.3 ABORIGINAL HERITAGE LEGISLATION UPDATES**

Significant changes have been made to the legislation and policies governing the protection of Aboriginal heritage. The most significant was in October 2010 when the principal piece of legislation (the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*) was comprehensively revised and amended. The legislation

provides much greater detail in the setting out of the NSW Government's role, the detail about what constitutes 'harm' to an Aboriginal heritage object, the two-tiered way that someone can be prosecuted for harming, Aboriginal consultation, and the process for applying and being granted a permit from the NSW Government. The legislation makes it clear that individuals and 'corporations' doing an activity are the responsible parties when it comes to ensuring Aboriginal heritage is not harmed in the process. It is the carrying out of proper due diligence (see below) that is the main defence against stiff fines and penalties if Aboriginal heritage is somehow harmed.

There have been other changes and proposed changes to legislation and policy affecting Aboriginal heritage, with the main issues discussed below.

## NSW ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE LEGISLATION REFORM

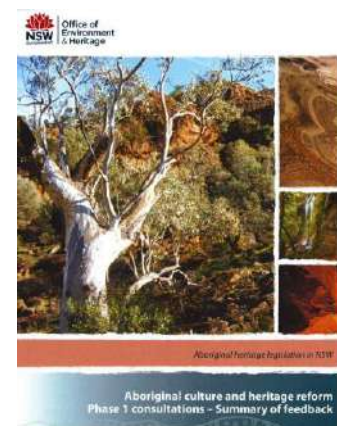
The AHO endeavours to keep up to date with any changes or proposed changes in legislation or policy regarding Aboriginal heritage management. In 2011 the Minister for Environment and Heritage announced a consultation process for the 'reform of NSW Aboriginal cultural and heritage legislation' (pictured). The AHO met with the Minister's office in January 2012 to see how state and local government, and particularly the partnership of Councils working as the AHO, could improve the management of Aboriginal heritage at the local level. There was no direct and specific feedback to the AHO from its meeting.

An Aboriginal Culture and Heritage Reform Working Party was established by state government to review options to report to the Minister for the Environment, the Minister for Heritage, and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, for potential stand-alone legislation. The goals of the reform were:

- Recognise and delineate the role of Aboriginal people in the management of their culture and heritage as understood and culturally determined by them.
- Protect and manage NSW Aboriginal culture and heritage through a streamlined and flexible regulatory system.
- Link Aboriginal culture and heritage protection with NSW natural resource management and planning processes.
- Ensure effective mechanisms for the protection of Aboriginal culture and heritage with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all parties.
- Promote greater awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture and heritage.

A number of meetings were held by the working group throughout 2012, culminating in the working group endorsing the Discussion Paper: *A Proposed New Aboriginal Cultural Heritage System for NSW*, an options paper and a set of Q and As.

In 2013 the Government sought submissions on the third stage of the reform process. The AHO reviewed the proposal and put in a submission in February 2014 acknowledging the amount of work



and thought put into the process and highlighting areas of concern. The AHO supports in principal stand-alone legislation as this may give Aboriginal heritage both a greater profile and priority level that has been lacking previously. The AHO also supports greater input from Aboriginal people and a more local approach to Aboriginal heritage management. In terms of the proposed model, the AHO has some reservations in relation to its practicality. The AHO raised particular concerns on the following:

1. Poor data source to develop mapping, modeling and for planning purposes.
2. Overburdened Local Aboriginal Cultural Heritage (ACH) Committees.
3. Over emphasis on 'Traditional' in areas where Traditional knowledge is limited.
4. Confidentiality and use of site data.
5. Over emphasis on development process over site management.



All submissions to the reform process were published by Heritage NSW.

In September 2017 Heritage NSW released the next stage of the reform program:

The next step involves seeking feedback on a draft Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill. This proposal paper is being released before the draft Bill, to provide a plain English explanation of what it proposes and to make it easier for people to consider the draft Bill and prepare their feedback. (OEH, Sept 2017).

The AHO did not make a submission as it was felt the major issues that the AHO can contribute to will not be addressed until the creation of the proposed new Aboriginal Heritage Authority.

Further consultation was undertaken between Heritage NSW and selected stakeholder groups in early 2019 for the draft Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill 2018 but the outcomes or further progress have not been announced. At the time of writing this report the link to the reform page on Heritage NSW goes to 'Page not found'.

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## NSW HERITAGE ACT REVIEW

In April 2021 NSW Government sought input into a review of the existing Heritage Act 1977. Advice was provided to partners that the AHO supports the reform of Aboriginal cultural heritage that would provide separate legislation and a separate authority to what exists presently under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* and the existing departmental structures. There are problems with the previously proposed model and it is noted that the NSW Government has not progressed the reform process in recent years. Notwithstanding the delays and problems with the reform process, the AHO does not consider Aboriginal heritage should be included within the NSW Heritage Act as its structure and approval system would further remove Aboriginal heritage from the management and decision-making role of Aboriginal people.

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## ABORIGINAL HERITAGE AND DUE DILIGENCE

The NSW Government's amendments to the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* adopted in October 2010 require people to consider Aboriginal heritage in the course of activities such as development. The *Due Diligence Code of Practice for the Protection of Aboriginal Objects in NSW* explains the process:

*"This code of practice is to assist individuals and organisations to exercise due diligence when carrying out activities that may harm Aboriginal objects and to determine whether they should apply for consent in the form of an Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit (AHIP).*

*The National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NPW Act) provides that a person who exercises due diligence in determining that their actions will not harm Aboriginal objects has a defense against prosecution for the strict liability offence if they later unknowingly harm an object without an AHIP.*

*The NPW Act allows for a generic code of practice to explain what due diligence means. Carefully following this code of practice, which is adopted by the National Parks and Wildlife Regulation 2009 (NPW Regulation) made under the NPW Act, would be regarded as 'due diligence'. This code of practice can be used for all activities across all environments.*

*This code sets out the reasonable and practicable steps which individuals and organisations need to take in order to:*

*1 identify whether or not Aboriginal objects are, or are likely to be, present in an area*

*2 determine whether or not their activities are likely to harm Aboriginal objects (if present)*

*3 determine whether an AHIP application is required.*

*If Aboriginal objects are present or likely to be present and an activity will harm those objects, then an AHIP application will be required. Information about the permits and how to apply for them can be obtained through the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (OEH) website at [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/licenses/index.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/licenses/index.htm)". (OEH 2010)*



The AHO's procedures and policies as set out in each of the Council reports, training and checklists from the AHO meet the requirements of the new due diligence process at a high standard. Provided that Council staff use the information provided by the AHO and carry out appropriate internal reviews (whether a desk-top assessment, field inspection or full archaeological assessment), Aboriginal heritage will not be accidentally damaged and there will be no risk of Council requiring a defense against prosecuting for 'harming' Aboriginal heritage.

#### AHO Training / Checklist Document



## NSW ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AMENDMENTS

The primary function of the NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* (EP&A Act) is that environmental impacts be considered in land use planning and decision making. Aboriginal heritage was not specifically mentioned and it had been through legal argument and guidelines that it became a consideration under general environmental issues. Significant amendments took effect on 1 March 2018 to the EP&A Act. One of the revised objects of the Act is:

*“(f) to promote the sustainable management of built and cultural heritage (including Aboriginal cultural heritage)”.*

The main trigger for assessing Aboriginal heritage and the legislation that guides the management of it still remains under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* after amendments in 2010.

The AHO had previously put in a submission on the NSW Planning White Paper (2013). One area of concern had been the White Paper statement that: “all government spatial datasets (that includes planning information and heritage and environmental data) will have legal recognition and meet common quality standards”. In its submission, the AHO noted that the AHO had found many errors in the Aboriginal heritage data held by the state government (by the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) of OEH, which is the register of Aboriginal heritage information in NSW). It also raised the issue that not all areas of NSW have been subject to the same (or any) level of Aboriginal heritage assessment and survey.

The AHO suggested that a number of steps would need to be carried out if the planning system was to become fully digital and effective at managing the balance between protecting heritage and minimising red-tape and costs. The recommended steps were:

1. The full audit and update of AHIMS data, particularly in relation to location accuracy.
2. Extensive consultation with Aboriginal communities and extensive Aboriginal heritage survey to ensure the full spectrum of Aboriginal heritage sites and places is incorporated into the planning system.
3. The adoption of regional and local models to planning frameworks to incorporate these variations (eg northern Sydney has many discrete and fragile sites like rock art and rock

engravings that can survive in backyards and triggers are required for exempt and complying developments).

4. A mechanism to ensure private certifiers and homeowner-builders will be able to access Aboriginal heritage site information without breaching important confidentiality issues with site data.

The AHO highlighted that a ‘one size fits all’ approach to Aboriginal heritage management was unlikely to work and there still need to be steps in place to allow flexibility in different regions. The issues are complex and finding a balance between ensuring Aboriginal heritage is properly assessed without unnecessary additional costs will require good data and expertise in interpreting it. This is the situation that many Sydney Councils face and the reason why Councils formed a partnership to create the AHO.

The amended EP&A Act does not appear to include any approved data sets as previously proposed in the White Paper. The issue of poor data still remains, as the NPW Act specifically removes responsibility for AHIMS to ensure that the data it holds is accurate: *“but the AHIMS is not intended to be conclusive about whether any information or records contained within it is up-to-date, comprehensive or otherwise accurate”.* (S.90Q:3d).

No additional changes to NSW planning affecting Aboriginal heritage were noted during 2021-2022.

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## NSW ABORIGINAL LAND USE PLANNING

The NSW Government has a number of initiatives with Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) to increase the options for activities on Aboriginal community owned land.

*The NSW Government has recognised that LALCs have faced barriers in converting successfully claimed land into economic development opportunities, that will benefit local Aboriginal communities. LALCs are a unique and significant landowner and are more than just a cultural advisor and custodian of environmental lands.*

In 2019 an Aboriginal Land SEPP (State Environmental Planning Policy) was introduced to provide a framework for development objectives for identified LALC land. Initially it is only for Darkinjung LALC but it is expected that other LALCs may use it for some land. It is expected that there will be further initiatives at state government level along these lines.



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## THE CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY FRAMEWORK

Government Architect (GA) NSW, through the Department of Planning, commenced a draft mapping project called 'The Sydney Ochre Grid' designed to *“assist both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities share knowledge about Aboriginal places as well as places of shared cultural and heritage significance. It will also protect sensitive sites.”* With the changes to the EP&A Act specifically mentioning Aboriginal heritage and also building design, the proposal is to provide a framework of resources that will assist “government, local communities, designers and developers create better places.”

The AHO had some preliminary discussions and met with representatives from GA NSW and has offered to assist where it is possible. GA is continuing to roll out this concept to planners and others across the region, with a recent theme being 'Designing with Country'. The AHO has been requested to provide advice in relation to Aboriginal design elements on large scale projects again this year in partner Council areas. Depending on the project, the AHO provides input in relation to local Aboriginal heritage styles and historical accuracy. The number of requests is increasing.

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## OCHRE: ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Differing from the Ochre Grid concept, OCHRE is a 2013 Department of Aboriginal Affairs plan to lead the NSW Government to a different way of working with and in support of Aboriginal communities through building partnerships. While it is largely directed towards state government agencies and Aboriginal communities that those agencies interact with, there are some relevant parallels with local government.



*OCHRE has been developed around our core belief in fostering aspirations, identifying opportunities and promoting responsibility. Our evidence-based approach recognises that:*

- *Government should do things with Aboriginal communities, not for or to Aboriginal communities*
- *The strongest communities are those that drive solutions*
- *There is no quick fix. Sustainable change occurs over a generation and young Aboriginal people are at the centre of that change*
- *The business community has a key role to play in broadening opportunities for Aboriginal people*
- *Recognising the diversity of Aboriginal communities is paramount. (DAA, 2013: 5)*

The DAA prepared a five year research agenda to expand upon the program in 2017. Again, while the findings are largely related to the state government sector and Aboriginal communities, some conclusions are relevant to local government in its engagement with Indigenous staff and communities (DAA, 2017: 48).

In many respects, the AHO is providing a means by which partner Councils can directly tap into this kind of policy direction with a distinctive local perspective. The increased support of Councils with resourcing in 2019-2020 has been crucial to allowing the AHO to return to its former capacity, COVID aside. However, there is also need within Councils to look at employing more Aboriginal staff and supporting existing staff across various employment roles, not just in heritage.

## 2.3 OTHER ACTIVITIES

The AHO assists Councils in relation to strategic planning in other ways, such as participating in Council Heritage Committees, reviewing assessments or planning proposals or large, complex or contentious developments, attending meetings on the implementation of new legislation, providing updates for annual State of Environment Reports and so on. The AHO has also provided comments on draft LEPs (Local Environmental Plans). As the state government model has structural limitations in how Councils can provide for Aboriginal heritage (refer to previous AHO annual reports for discussions on this), there is not much room for movement and it is really individual Council's training, policies and procedures that will provide the best framework for protecting sites. However, it is clear that the state government is marking out Aboriginal heritage as a key consideration for planners, with NSW Regional Plans, the Greater Sydney Commission's regional and district plans and local plans all recommending actions that include collaborating with Aboriginal communities and protecting Aboriginal heritage.

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### LOCAL STRATEGIC PLANNING STATEMENTS

Local Strategic Planning Statements (LSPSs) set out a Council's land use vision, planning principles, priorities, and actions for the next 20 years. The statements are the main way to express the desired future direction for a range of issues, and guides the content of Council's Local Environmental Plan (LEP) and Development Control Plan (DCP). Aboriginal cultural heritage is included. The Greater Sydney Commission has also provided documents recommending ways Councils can identify, conserve and enhance 'environmental heritage'. Councils are also looking into reconciliation action plans.

The AHO has met with different Council staff relating to these broader strategies and provided advice in relation to local issues.

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## REGIONAL AND STATE SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS

The AHO provides advice to partner Councils for larger projects such as state significant developments and projects that cross LGA boundaries or are across various jurisdictions. For example, this year the AHO provided updated advice on the Northern Beaches Draft Conservation Zones Review as well as the Draft Development Delivery Plan of Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council Land Holdings in the Northern Beaches LGA. Some projects have many Aboriginal heritage with independent Aboriginal cultural heritage assessments and Aboriginal community consultation and are complex with competing interests and challenges. Projects like these also generate significant community interest.

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## CULTURAL BURNING

Indigenous people around Australia are increasing traditional fire management on their own lands and reviving practices where there has been discontinuity. The terrible fires in 2019-2020 demonstrated current modern hazard reduction programs are not up to changing climate patterns and the increasing stresses across the environment. As more people learn and begin to appreciate the deep ecological knowledge of Indigenous burning techniques, there is a growing call to investigate the options for cultural burning or similar strategies for the Sydney region. This has been reinforced with the findings of two 2020 inquiries which have specific recommendations about cultural burning.

The first is the national level Royal Commission.

### **The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report**

#### *Recommendation 18.1 Indigenous land and fire management and natural disaster resilience*

Australian, state, territory and local governments should engage further with Traditional Owners to explore the relationship between Indigenous land and fire management and natural disaster resilience.

#### *Recommendation 18.2 Indigenous land and fire management and public land management*

Australian, state, territory and local governments should explore further opportunities to leverage Indigenous land and fire management insights, in the development, planning and execution of public land management activities. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020)

The other inquiry is the state level NSW Bushfire Inquiry.

### **Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry**

*Recommendation 25* That Government adopt the principle that cultural burning is one component of a broader practice of traditional Aboriginal land management and is an important cultural practice, not simply another technique of hazard reduction burning.



*Recommendation 26* That, in order to increase the respectful, collaborative and effective use of Aboriginal land management practices in planning and preparing for bush fire, Government commit to pursuing greater application of Aboriginal land management, including cultural burning, through a program to be coordinated by Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Planning, Industry and Environment working in partnership with Aboriginal communities. This should be accompanied by a program of evaluation alongside the scaled-up application of these techniques. (NSW Government, 2020)

The AHO has provided advice to partner Council staff that until there is some sort of recognised accreditation or extensive research by Council or a local entity to determine what is appropriate for the Sydney region, the AHO would recommend Council be wary of committing to cultural burns as distinct from normal hazard reduction/conservation burns. Caution should especially be given to individuals claiming that they can do cultural burns. Just as someone doing bush regeneration or track maintenance would be required to demonstrate qualifications and experience, this should also apply to anyone being involved in cultural burns, particularly in this area where there is such a loss of traditional knowledge and cultural authority.

It may be that instead of looking to the Aboriginal community here for knowledge and expertise, which would be the case in other parts of Australia, Councils could look at joining other organisations to conduct research and pilot studies and bring expertise (eg Victor Steffensen and Firesticks) from outside to develop training programs.

It is suggested that staff include the following reading material when reviewing options:

- Protocols for Indigenous fire management partnerships (CSIRO, 2016)
- Fire Country: How Indigenous Fire Management Could Help Save Australia (Steffensen, 2020)

One of the most important things to remember is that cultural burning is an Indigenous land management practice and the intellectual and cultural ownership and control needs to be recognised and respected.



Poor fire result North Head; NCC Conference



Cultural Burn Workshop, South Turrumurra

In June 2021 the AHO was invited to the Nature Conservation Council's Bushfire Conference Field Day at North Head. A number of AHO partner Council staff attended and it was a good forum to discuss recent events and projects for the future. It was clear that expertise in cultural burning is a much sought after commodity for the Sydney area in particular and also further afield.

In 2022 a workshop was held at Macquarie University and Lane Cove National Park to invite stakeholders to be involved in a proposal by Dharug women to carry out a cultural burn at Browns Waterhole. The AHO was invited and attended as Ku-ring-gai Council is a direct neighbour and the AHO has been working on projects with different departments of Macquarie Uni.

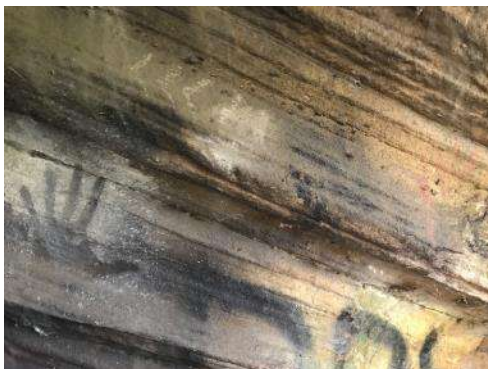
### 3.0 SITE MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

Achieving conservation outcomes by successfully managing and protecting Aboriginal sites is a major role of the Aboriginal Heritage Office (AHO). This involves working on strategies to protect sites across all land-tenures that are influenced by Council activities and decisions. In 2021-2022 the AHO has been involved in many local issues requiring site visits and assessments.

#### 3.1 SITE INSPECTIONS

The AHO is often called out to inspect, assess and record Aboriginal sites or to assess the potential of an area for unrecorded sites. Council staff, volunteers and residents regularly come across features that are thought to be sites. Visiting sites and potential sites, examining material that has been found by members of the public, providing reports for Land and Environment Court hearings and doing artefact recording are just some of the tasks that are regularly undertaken.

Particular Council issues involving inspections for activities on Council land in 2021-2022 included proposed track works or upgrades, site protection upgrades, hazard reduction burns, bush regeneration activities, inspections of sites near developments, damage and vandalism to sites, graffiti removal, coastal erosion, land and environment court hearings and much more.



Fake hand stencil over graffiti, Allambie



Review of site management, Waverton



Works inspection, South Strathfield



Track upgrades, Roseville Chase



Coastal erosion, Northbridge



Storm issues, Northwood

### 3.2 MONITORING

Part of the Site Management Report process is to find every recorded site and establish a monitoring program. Due to the inaccurate data held by the NSW Government’s Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) it has not been possible to confirm the location of all sites. Part of the monitoring program is to try and get to sites that were not relocated or confirmed in previous monitors. Those sites that have been relocated will continue to be monitored at regular intervals. The interval of each monitor depends upon the fragility of the site, the degree to which there are active pressures on the site (eg. pedestrian visitation, erosion, etc.), and the site’s condition.

In 2021-2022 due to COVID and inclement weather due to La Niña fewer sites were monitored across all Councils, however, the full LGA update of Ku-ring-gai, the finalization of the Strathfield report and the start of North Sydney’s full update focused monitoring in these areas. Particular emphasis for monitoring in each Council is summarized below (see Table 8 below).

Council	Main Areas of Monitoring 2021-2022
Ku-ring-gai	Full LGA update
Lane Cove	Longueville, Greenwich



North Sydney	Cammeray, Waverton, Wollstonecraft, Cremorne Point
Northern Beaches-South	Manly, Balgowlah
Northern Beaches-North	Winji Jimmi, Bayview
Northern Beaches-Central	Allambie Heights, Forestville, Collaroy
Strathfield	Cooks River, Strathfield
Willoughby	Northbridge, Castle Cove, Lane Cove North

**Table 8. Areas of Site Monitoring 2021-2022**



**Site inspection, St Ives**



**Post graffiti & erosion monitor, Lane Cove North**



**Alleged buried rock engraving, Greenwich**



**Coastal erosion monitoring, Northbridge**



**Inspection, Strathfield**



**Bike track issues, Allambie Heights**





Track upgrade, East Lindfield



In the field during La Niña, East Lindfield



Monitoring, North Wahroonga

The AHO has also been using 360° camera technology to more fully capture sites in their context. The technology is very helpful for creating a fuller picture of the site at a particular time, which can be used for future monitoring comparisons. Of course the images have a strange appearance in 2D and only become meaningful when viewed through the correct software. As well as a useful site management tool, suitable material can be used for education and training purposes. The AHO has produced 360° virtual tours as part of its Coastal Erosion and Rock Art / Engraving projects, which are now available to the public (see [Section 4.2](#) for details). The use of panorama photographs are also being used to provide site context to more easily relocate sites during monitoring.



360 photos – shelter and art, Killara



Forestville





Panorama format – landslide at Collaroy

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## VOLUNTEER MONITORING

AHO trained volunteers notify the AHO if there are any noticeable changes to a site that may cause or has caused damage (eg. graffiti, erosion and so on). The program was halted in September 2016 but cost savings and additional contributions from partner Councils allowed the program to restart in October 2017 for 12 months with the employment of a new officer. With a new permanent position established in 2019 the program has been going from strength to strength (see [Section 4.3](#) for more information). Unfortunately, the volunteers have alerted the AHO and Councils to a number of quite unpleasant graffiti attacks in 2021-2022 and with covid restrictions, the opportunities to get the graffiti removed are even more limited.



Volunteer monitors at their allocated sites

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## SUMMARY OF MONITORING RESULTS

In summary, as part of regular monitoring, reviews, special projects, site management reports and in response to reports from Council staff and the public 1 'new' site was identified in the area in 2021-2022. There have been site protection works at a number of locations and the continued revision of the site management plans (see below).

In 2021-2022:

- The AHO manages approximately 920 site records for the six partner Councils.
- 30+ sites physically monitored during standard monitoring (not including external funded projects or LGA full updates), some multiple times (*over 60 monitoring events*) and management needs re-assessed as part of normal monitor / erosion watch.
- 70+ sites physically monitored as part of Ku-ring-gai LGA full update.
- 20+ sites inspected with Council staff / residents / Aboriginal community / State Gov.
- 1 new site identified and registered.
- 3 site conservation meetings with NSW OEH specialists to discuss site protection issues.
- 2 sites had graffiti removal carried out.
- 5 sites currently or recently had new fencing, track work or signage to protect site area.

	Ku-ring-gai	Lane Cove	North Sydney	Northern Beaches-Sth	Northern Beaches-Nth	Northern Beaches-Central	Strathfield	Willoughby
Last Year Total Sites	108	98	83	77	155	221	3	181
This Year Total sites	102	98	83	77	155	221	3	181
New site	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Protection works done-in progress	4	2	4	1	1	2	0	3

**Table 9: Identified Aboriginal Sites**

- Note: 'New site' includes previously unrecorded sites, old records not registered with AHIMS, two site features previously listed on the same site card but now separated, or sites where poor location data had incorrectly excluded them from an LGA. Fewer sites than previously may result in correcting location/LGA etc.



Visitation at a monitored rock art site, Castlecrag



Rubbish reported by volunteer, Frenchs Forest

### 3.3 SITE CONSERVATION WORKS

All Aboriginal heritage is at risk through damage to the physical fabric of the sites. The main impacts are from natural weathering and human interference. The AHO works with Councils, the Aboriginal community and land owners to help reduce and manage impacts where this is possible. The most important aspect of any conservation work is that it does not harm the actual site and that any work

is reversible (i.e. if management needs change in the future, any infrastructure can be removed without leaving permanent scarring or damage). Each Council Site Management Report provides information about what sites have specific conservation recommendations, and the AHO also responds to emergency and site specific issues as they arise. The AHO has also prepared region wide reports to help prioritise work strategies (see below).

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## GRAFFITI

Most shelter sites in the region have some minor old graffiti, while others have extensive damage. The most challenging is where graffiti is recent and ongoing. It is important to act where there is an opportunity to prevent the paint or charcoal bonding more strongly to the surface and to prevent repeat or copycat attacks. A valued part of the volunteer monitor role is to alert the AHO about new graffiti and unfortunately this year there have been more instances. Some graffiti can be removed directly with the help of Councils and in some instances Heritage NSW specialists have been called in for assistance.



Graffiti removal, Northbridge



New graffiti at an engraving, Allambie Heights

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## ROCK CLIMBING DAMAGE

A volunteer monitor alerted the AHO to increased climbing activity at one large rock art site in Willoughby some years ago. The AHO sought advice from Heritage NSW and consulted a major rock climbing web site to try and avoid further impacts. Climbing activity at a rock art site in North Sydney prompted further action. The AHO did additional investigation at the Willoughby shelter and identified several previously unrecorded art figures, some in the direct climbing route. The AHO consulted with the website about damage at several locations and published an information page on the AHO [website](#), see below, about the damage from climbing and how to avoid impacts to Aboriginal heritage. The climber website subsequently agreed to remove this and several other rock climbs from its website completely. Further climb sites have been identified in the region and are being monitored. In the last two years elsewhere in Australia some reserves have been closed to climbers after repeated damage to Aboriginal sites.





A self-posted photo of a climber in a Sydney overhang – note the potential damage from hand and foot holds.

In 2019 Council and the AHO put up a temporary sign at the shelter in consultation with Heritage NSW and MLALC. Local residents have also been engaged to notify Council of any issues. In 2021 a shelter in North Turramurra identified on a website was taken down after Council and AHO requests.

### Sections of AHO Web Page on Rock Climbing (2017)

**Aboriginal Heritage Office**  
 in Lane Cove, North Sydney, Ku-ring-gai, The Northern Beaches Council, Willoughby

**Rock Climbing & Aboriginal Sites**

Did you know there are over 1000 sites of **Aboriginal culture and heritage** in the areas of Sydney known as North Sydney, Lane Cove, Willoughby, Manly and the Northern Beaches Council.

Many of these sites are found in the cliffs and crags of the Hawkesbury Sandstone rock formations that make up much of the wider Sydney area.

The sites are of significance to Aboriginal people because they are evidence of the **past Aboriginal occupation of Australia** and are valued as a link with their traditional culture. There is also great scientific value in these **sites**. By studying the shells, stones and bones, we can learn a great deal about past environments, what plants and animals were used by people, what tools they used and how they survived.

Sites are under threat every day from development, vandalism and natural erosion. Recreational activities like rock climbing can also do irreparable damage. The sites cannot be replaced, and once they are destroyed, they are lost forever.

**Can Climbing Damage Aboriginal Heritage?**

Even though rock climbing is a relatively low impact sport, some of the methods used can be damaging to Aboriginal heritage.

- Putting bolts into rock leaves permanent scars and will permanently deface the site.
- Climbing routes that pass over or adjacent rock art results in scuffing and wear of the art surfaces and loss of pigments.
- Chalk adheres to rock surfaces and can damage rock art.
- Chalk marks on an Aboriginal site is aesthetically displeasing and deeply hurtful to Indigenous people.
- Repeated use of a site leads to erosion of archaeological deposits such as shell middens.

**If I Climb Can I Be Prosecuted?**

All Aboriginal sites in NSW are **protected** under the **National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974**, and it is an offence to damage or destroy them (this includes collecting artefacts) without written permission of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH). The penalties for harming an Aboriginal site (which could include graffiti, inserting bolts and unintended harm) are up to \$275,000 and one year's imprisonment for individuals and \$1.1 million for corporations. Defence against prosecution depends on whether someone has done sufficient **'due diligence'**. Sandstone overhangs have high potential for Aboriginal heritage and therefore rock climbing can be seen as a high risk activity that could impact an Aboriginal site.

## What You Can Do

- Climb only in authorised climbing locations.
- Check carefully that the place you are climbing is not an Aboriginal site, especially if there is an overhang present.
- Don't post climbs on websites that you know or suspect are Aboriginal sites.
- Don't bolt into rock. Never bolt inside an overhang.
- Carefully brush out chalk from holds.
- Be respectful of the place you are in – protect the ground and vegetation from wear, take out your rubbish, be a custodian who nurtures the land for the future. Follow the 'leave no trace' [good rock climbing etiquette](#).
- If you find the climb you are on is an Aboriginal site, notify any relevant climbing websites and the appropriate Aboriginal heritage managers (see below).



## ON-GROUND WORKS

In 2021-2022 the AHO was able to assist Councils' works programs to initiate specific management works on sites as well as prepare conservation plans. Further sites have been inspected and await funding and approvals. In some cases the preliminary preparation and assessment has been completed and the actual works have not yet commenced. Additional issues were identified through the Coastal Erosion and Rock Art / Engraving projects (see [Section 5.2](#)) and the full LGA reviews for Ku-ring-gai (completed) and North Sydney (underway) have identified further projects.

### 2021-2022 Site Conservation

*Ku-ring-gai.* Graffiti, rubbish and illegal mountain bike tracks have been ongoing issues for a shelter in North Wahroonga and there have been remedial works carried out with Heritage NSW in recent years and follow up work was conducted. Council track works along Two Creeks Track have required ongoing consultation to ensure all Aboriginal heritage areas are avoided. The track upgrade is also essential for ongoing protection at some sites. Unfortunately more graffiti has been inflicted on a number of sites in the LGA. This continues to be a priority for the next round of conservation works for 2023 for rock art sites as well as rock decay issue damaging a site in Roseville Chase. Monitoring of midden sites subject to coastal erosion also continued after storms and flooding.



Coastal erosion, Roseville Chase



Graffiti inspection, Lindfield





Protection options, St Ives

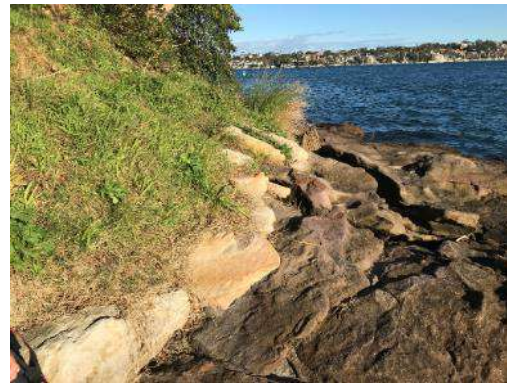


Track inspections for ongoing track upgrades, East Lindfield

*Lane Cove:* The full update of Lane Cove’s site management report was completed in May 2021 with most of the recorded sites being inspected or reviewed. Monitoring of midden sites subject to coastal erosion also continued and several other sites that had received track works previously. Council received funding to do protection works in Longueville and assessments were carried out to develop the strategy. Ongoing impacts were monitored elsewhere.



Impacts to shelter, Longueville



Erosion protection works, Greenwich



Inspection and recording for foreshore protection works proposal, Longueville



*North Sydney:* Tracks in many reserves have suffered from the continuing rainfall, which reinforces the wisdom of earlier track upgrades and boardwalks and other pedestrian management controls. A shelter midden that has been assessed for track improvements is still awaiting other agency approvals. A number of other sites have been assessed and awaiting the next stage of works.



Encroaching leaf litter, Waverton



Fallen tree, midden, Cremorne Point



Shell exposed adjacent track, Cremorne Point



Excessive vegetation clearance, Cammeray

*Northern Beaches:*

Coastal erosion continues to damage foreshore middens in Manly, which are monitored. Follow up meetings at one rock art site in Manly were held in relation to Council / community projects nearby. In July 2022 during monitoring work at Little Manly human remains were uncovered.



Assessing options at site, Manly



Human remains found, Manly





**Coastal erosion monitoring, Bayview**

Volunteer monitors identified some issues at sites they monitor, including recent graffiti at Allambie Heights. Fortunately the rock engravings weren't damaged and the paint could be removed quickly. Storms caused damage to infrastructure that required careful assessment to avoid middens at Collaroy. Discussions with site conservation specialists from Heritage NSW have continued.



**Graffiti at rock engraving, Allambie Heights, which was promptly removed**



**Bike track near shelter, Forestville**

**Storm damage, Collaroy**



*Strathfield*: Monitoring at the three recorded sites at Belfield and South Strathfield continues. Additional field survey was undertaken in various reserves and parks. Further survey work is proposed when the potential areas mapping project commences.



**Inspections for potential in reserves and parks**

*Willoughby*: Graffiti in Northbridge was tackled with Heritage NSW and continued post-graffiti clean up monitoring continued in Lane Cove North. Expanding on the sites monitored as part of the Coastal Erosion and Rock Art / Engraving projects, continued monitoring of key sites continued. Unfortunately with La Nina and additional storm activity, foreshore loss has been significant.



**Coastal erosion monitoring, Northbridge**



**Moisture in shelter, Castle Cove**



**Graffiti removal over multiple visits with Heritage NSW, Northbridge**

## SITE SIGNAGE

There is increasing interest in Aboriginal heritage and increasing pressure to provide promotion or interpretational signage along popular walks, as well as to show people actual Aboriginal sites. The AHO produced a report in 2007 reviewing options for how to promote sites and what sites would be the most appropriate for signage for five Councils. This was completely reviewed and updated, incorporating new partner Councils, in 2009.



Renewal of sign at Berry Island, Waverton (left) and sign at Manly (right)

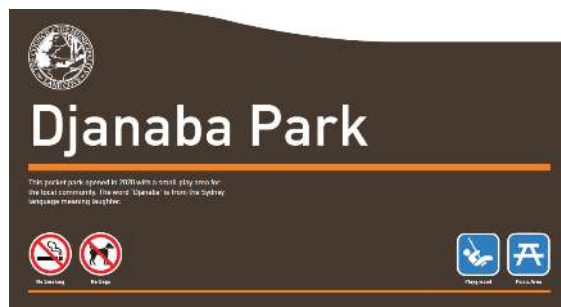


Sign at St Ives and Sign at beginning of track at East Killara, Ku-ring-gai Council

Using signs can help promote Aboriginal heritage and help prevent damage from ignorance of a place's importance, but it can also provoke vandalism. There is anecdotal evidence by reserve and heritage managers that signs can help as a 'decoy' for malicious damage – ie the sign is attacked but the site is not.



New sign, Freshwater



New park concept, Lane Cove



Current work involves reviewing options for signage where they arise and working to complete previously recommended work. Research to prepare suitable text and graphics was carried out across the region. Draft material was sent to the appropriate land owner. Signs promoting Aboriginal heritage and history that the AHO has assisted with have been installed in public areas or are in the planning process. The AHO helped progress a number of projects. See the Education report for more ([Section 4](#)).



The old plaque and new sign, Longueville

### 3.4 RECOVERY OF HUMAN REMAINS

The AHO is called out on occasions to do a preliminary assessment for human remains. Most tend to be non-human. While there were no human remains issues during 2021-2022, unfortunately there were remains uncovered during Council works in Manly in July and August 2022.

The AHO assisted the NSW Police and the Coroner as an assessment was being made and then carried out a recovery of the remains under instructions from Heritage NSW and with MLALC.



AHO staff assist forensic anthropologist Dr Denise Donlan

Police Crime Scene & AHO at excavation.



### 3.5 WORKING WITH THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM AND OTHER SPECIALISTS

The AHO seeks the expertise of officers at the Australian Museum, the Shellshear Museum and other specialists from time to time where additional support is required. The AHO is particularly grateful of the assistance that Archaeologist Dr Val Attenbrow has given over the years. It was an honour to be invited to the ceremony where she was presented with the Australian Museum Research Institute Lifetime Achievement Award in 2021.

The AHO has also been assisted by the Australian Museum with the loan of objects for the office's Museum & Education Centre. Specialists in human remains at the University of Sydney have also been consulted and Dr Denise Donlan from Shellshear Museum has provided museum item loans to the AHO.

### 3.6 DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

Councils are required to ensure development proposals properly consider environmental impacts and that there has been an appropriate level of Aboriginal heritage assessment as part of that proposal. Councils therefore must be able to review a proposed development and determine whether it needs an Aboriginal archaeological assessment to be included, and if so, that any such report and Aboriginal community report is adequate and addresses all the relevant issues. The AHO has been working with Councils to assist staff develop systems for ensuring those developments that could have an impact on Aboriginal heritage are flagged and those that have no concern are not delayed or caught up in unnecessary assessment work. The AHO provides strategic planning documents, it reviews Council procedures, processes and documents, it provides training for staff, contractors and volunteers, Land and Environment Court expert witness services and other support as required.

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#### REVIEWING DAS

The AHO undertakes the review of development assessments (DAs) and environmental impact assessments (EIS) for partner Councils when requested. The AHO provides a support role in ensuring consultant assessment reports covering Aboriginal archaeological and cultural issues are reviewed to the standards as set out by Heritage NSW.

To improve the efficiency of DA referrals the AHO has an email address dedicated for all such referrals ([online-referrals@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au](mailto:online-referrals@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au)). Planning staff forward information digitally and the communication and tracking of particular DAs is simple and clear. Training for Council planners is provided by the AHO, including an intermediate level training for planners/team leaders introduced in 2010 (see [section 4.1](#)). The AHO considers it imperative that Council staff become more familiar with local Aboriginal heritage to ensure that site issues are picked up at every level, rather than assuming a referral process will be able to meet all of Council's needs and responsibilities.

In 2021-2022 approximately 326 written referral reviews have been provided to Councils, which is a 25% increase on previous years. Most reviews are desktop assessments of normal DAs. The AHO carried out over 40 inspections to clarify issues.



**Area of high potential, Lane Cove**



**Area of high potential, Bayview**

Of all DA reviews, 271 were considered ‘no further issue’ (from a desk top or field assessment), 10 required no further action if the proposed development would not impact particular landscape features of the property (eg sandstone outcrops) and a further 22 DA referrals were issued with specific recommendations (eg to ensure the protection of a site or sensitive area). Twelve (12 DAs were considered to have sandy soils with low potential for burials where it was recommended that conditions be put in construction documents to alert for human remains and to allow for stoppage should works uncover remains (at which point the Police would need to be brought in to determine whether it was a crime scene). This approach has worked in the past, most notably at a development in Manly in 2011 where an Aboriginal burial was uncovered.

The remaining DAs required more information of one kind or another. Some only required more photographs or information supplied by Council staff. Thirteen (13) DAs were recommended for ‘full and comprehensive’ assessment and 11 for preliminary assessment.



**Area of high potential, Church Point**



**Rock outcrops in rear yard, Castle Cove**

Fourteen DAs had Aboriginal sites identified on or adjacent the lot and specific recommendations were required to ensure they would not be adversely affected by any development. The AHO also reviewed consultant Aboriginal heritage assessment reports for 4 DAs. As noted above, the AHO carried out inspections for over 49 DAs.



10cm leech from weather affected site inspections



Pittwater site inspection in high potential

### 3.7 DATABASE MANAGEMENT

One of the AHO's long term goals is an improved data management system and the transition of all AHO reports, site cards, site data and planning documents to new software to enable quick access and update. The AHO has tens of thousands of digital images and other records that are essential for the ongoing activities of site management and also for educational activities. With increasing improvements in technology and software, the AHO was encouraged to look at a few new options in 2020. While a number of systems seemed to be very suitable, unfortunately the price tag and the labour input are still the major obstacles to achieving this. We will keep looking!

### 4.0 TRAINING, EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Ignorance can be said to be the underlying cause for the destruction or damage of Aboriginal sites. People are either unaware that there are sites present, or unaware of their value to the community. Training courses, education strategies and community awareness programs are therefore very important in helping to protect Aboriginal sites and cultural heritage. The AHO runs many courses and activities for a range of user groups. Council staff, volunteer bush regenerators, community groups, local residents, and school, TAFE and University students have all undertaken courses through the AHO. Training courses are tailor-made to suit each audience. This year COVID has curtailed many activities due to social distancing requirements and heavy rain closing walking tracks, however,



wherever there was a way, the AHO tried to provide a service. Full details about the Education Program can be found in the separate report at Part 2.



Multimedia presentation at a school



Karen Smith interviewed from London

## OFFICE & MUSEUM LOCATION

The AHO moved to the refurbished former Harbord Early Childhood Health Centre building at Freshwater in September 2018 and this has been a huge success. Not only is it a better working environment than the temporary (four year) Manly location, but the renovated space has allowed the reestablishment of the Museum and Education Centre. This opened to the public 3 days a week in May 2019 and was host to many visitors, group activities and other events. A Museum Officer was appointed for 12 months and this helped to grow more programs and activities. Unfortunately COVID disrupted things and the position expired in 2021. The museum was only open periodically during 2021-2022 to keep staff safe, but big plans are in place for 2022-2023 with the employment of a new Museum Officer in 2022.

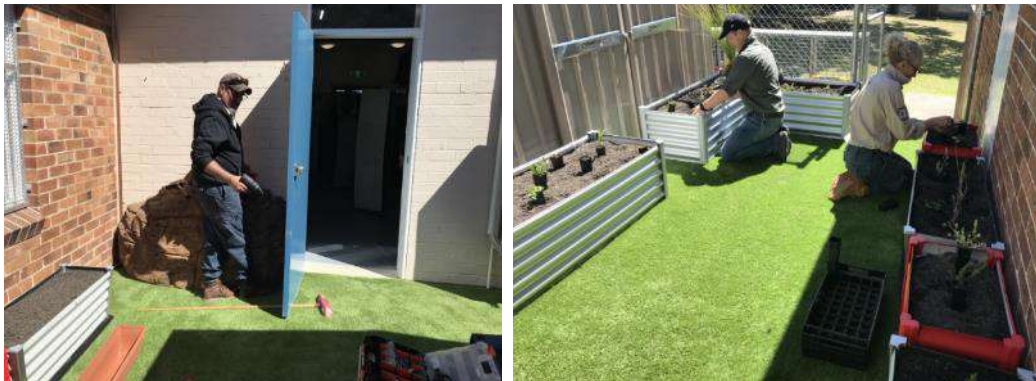


The museum space

The outside back patio of the museum was transformed into a bush tucker garden in September 2019 with the support of North Sydney Council Bushland staff and the new Museum Officer made the most of it taking visitors and organized groups to see the plants and hear what they reveal about Aboriginal culture. The garden is going well and visitors who managed to get in between restrictions give positive feedback about it.



**From a concrete patio to the first planting (wide angle)**



**Bush Tucker Garden, installed September 2019**



**A flourishing bush tucker garden today**

#### 4.1 STAFF TRAINING

Training courses for Council staff are provided twice a year in a series, as well as on demand for particular groups as required. Different courses have been developed for planners-project managers, outdoor staff and compliance officers. Training is conducted at the AHO or a Council, followed by a field component held at nearby reserves where suitable walking tracks, combined with Aboriginal



heritage, can be incorporated into the courses. In 2021-2022 courses were planned and then put on hold several times due to COVID. Planning & Project (Standard) courses were run from the AHO office and from the Coal Loader, Land Management & Outdoor Staff from the Coal Loader and Refresher courses from Berry Island, Wollstonecraft. There was also online training.

## 4.2 EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS

The AHO takes the role of community educator very seriously. The general policy has been to provide presentations, walks, talks and events free of charge as a service of Councils. The AHO and Councils believe that through education many of the causes for the damage and destruction of Aboriginal heritage can be redressed.



Video Conference presentation



School walk and talk

The AHO has instigated a variety of different measures to help promote the Aboriginal culture and heritage of northern Sydney and Strathfield, the Councils' role in heritage management, site protection and management generally, and how residents can become more involved. Apart from the activities mentioned above, other avenues to promote Aboriginal heritage to local residents include the museum and keeping place, brochures, working with television shows, interpretation and signage, and schools activities. The AHO is continuing its long-term strategy to increase awareness of Aboriginal heritage in the region and staff are very accessible and approachable and always do their best to provide a group with the best service for their event.

The Education Program events have been carried to audiences averaging around 10,000 people each year for some time, not including web users. The covid years have been harder to calculate but the demand for AHO services are still increasing. For more information, please see the full Education Report for details on the various activities.

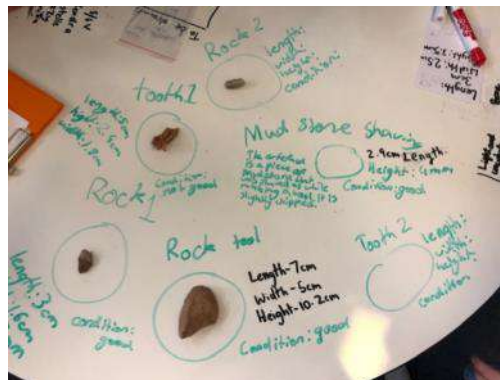
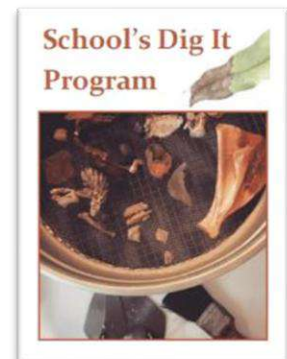




ABC Radio & Online segment *Curious Sydney*

## SCHOOLS MOCK DIG

With a new staff member on board, the mock schools digs were reintroduced in 2020. The mock digs provide class room and field sessions that cover a range of topics that fit with the curriculum. The entire Year 5 and 6 classes at Lindfield Public School were keen participants in the first round before COVID forced everyone into social distancing. Not even the rain could hamper these explorers of the past (items carefully salted in the school sandpit). All the excavated finds were then analysed in the classroom and we were impressed at what the students reported on. We hope to resume at the next opportunity.



Schools dig and finds analysis at Lindfield Public School

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## ONLINE VIDEO AND VIRTUAL TOURS

As part of the Coastal Erosion and Rock Art / Engraving projects that were completed in 2019, the AHO produced a number of videos and 360 virtual tours, which are now available online.

AHO Website Video Page: <http://www.aboriginalheritage.org/resources/videos/>

AHO Website 360 Tour Page: <http://www.aboriginalheritage.org/resources/resources-360virtualtours/>

### Rock Art and Engravings 360 Tour

There are around 140 rock art and 240 engraving sites that the AHO monitors within the six partner councils. These sites are found all over Sydney. Take a tour around some of the local sites to learn more about the rock art and engraving sites that you might see around the area. To view in Fullscreen, click the options menu (see instructions for how).



### Midden and Coastal Erosion 360

There are also around 240 sites right on the foreshore that the AHO monitors within the six partner councils. You have probably walked passed or over shell midden sites without even realising their significance. Take a tour around some of these foreshore

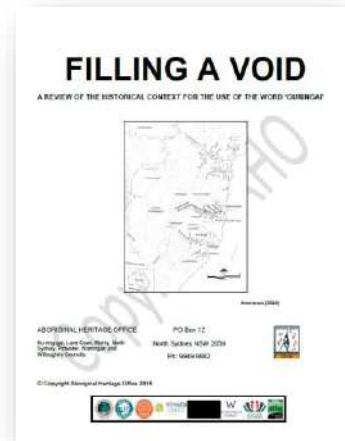
**360 Tours available on the website**

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## FILLING A VOID: REVIEW OF 'GURINGAI'

In 2015 AHO released its review of the historical context for the use of the word 'Guringai'. The AHO receives many queries on Aboriginal words, place names, languages, and clan groups both from Councils and the general public. The number of queries is increasing especially by those wishing to give Acknowledgement of Country and not being sure which clan or group they should use. It is believed that it also reflects an increase in interest in the Aboriginal heritage and culture of the district. Such queries are always problematic because the inquirer usually expects a concrete definitive answer.

To date the AHO has relied mainly on the extensive review of Aboriginal Sydney by Dr Val Attenbrow who compiled from archival sources what was recorded of the Aboriginal clans including the various names, spellings and geographical locations. The AHO understands that there are issues with some of the names being used and attempts to inform the inquirers of this uncertainty. The AHO decided to review the available material to provide a more informed response. Draft reports were circulated to partner Councils and local historians, such as Dr Attenbrow and George and Shelagh Champion. The feedback was positive and the AHO was urged to make the document public so that others could learn more about the area's history and about this important aspect of it.



This report focuses on the origin, validity and use of 'Guringai' but refers to the broader issue of names of languages and clans in the Sydney area. Much of the published discussion to date has centred on the nature of the 'Sydney language' and its relationships with the neighbouring languages – 'Dharug', 'Dharawal', 'Awabakal'. This published discussion centres on the land between Botany Bay and Port Jackson, but particularly the area to the north of Port Jackson where the AHO has responsibilities to its partnering councils.

The report concludes:

*'In terms of northern Sydney, it seems clear from the available evidence that the early Europeans did not record a discrete and widely understood name for the language or tribe of the area nor for other parts of the region. The first use of the word 'Guringai' is over a hundred years after the arrival of the First Fleet. Kuringgai was a term created by Fraser in 1892 to define a super-tribe that he claimed stretched from the Macleay River to south of Sydney...*

*'It seems clear that with each new piece of research the issue remains confusing with layer upon layer of interpretation based on the same lack of original information. This is exacerbated where writers make up names for their own problem-solving convenience. In the absence of factual evidence, it seems the temptation to fill the void with something else becomes very strong and this does not appear to be done in consultation with Aboriginal people who then inherit the problem' (AHO, 2015b: 40).*

The report provides recommended Next Steps:

*'It is unfortunate that the term Guringai has become widely known in northern Sydney and it is understandable that people wish to use it as it is convenient to have a single word to cover the language, tribe/nation, identity and culture of a region. However, it is based on a nineteenth century fiction and the AHO would argue that the use of the term Guringai or any of its various spellings such as Kuringgai is not warranted given its origin and previous use. It is not authentic to the area, it was coined by a non-Aboriginal person and it gives a misleading impression of the connectivity of some original clan boundaries. It is part of the story of this place that there is no certainty over tribal names, language groups or*

*dreaming stories. To project the opposite is to continue this fiction. There is still need for further research and investigation, both historical and archaeological, to look for new or missed information. However, part of the history of Australia is that Aboriginal people died in the first conflicts between the new and the old, survivors were discouraged or forced to stop speaking their language, practicing ceremony and passing on culture to their children, and traditional knowledge was hugely affected. In the absence of a convenient single term for the whole of northern Sydney, the AHO would recommend the use of clan names for local areas, with the understanding that these too have their limitations and problems, and the acceptance of the truth of the lack of certainty as a feature of how Aboriginal history and heritage is portrayed here' (AHO, 2015b: 41).*

Feedback about the report has been very positive and it is understood that it is being widely used and considered an important document in helping people understand the history of the region. The AHO is continuing its research of Strathfield Council's history to ensure the Council has the most up to date information available to share with residents and the community.

As more people became aware of the problems of the term Guringai in this area, traditional owners from the Barrington Tops, Hunter Valley area contacted the AHO with concern that the report should not give people the impression that there are no Gringai (various spellings) people at all. The Guringai, Guringay or Gringai people are the traditional custodians of the land between the Hunter and Manning Rivers, from the ocean to and including the Great Dividing Range. They have contacted Councils and organisations across Sydney requesting people to kindly stop using their name in Sydney. Many Aboriginal Land Councils, particularly Darkinjung, Worimi and the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, have been urging local councils to recognise and rectify the mistake and most have done so. It is acknowledged that for Ku-ring-gai Council and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park this is a more difficult thing to do.

In 2018 the organisers of the annual and very successful Guringai Festival, first established over 20 years ago, were considering the renaming of the festival. It is understood that a vote by the committee was agreed to but the actual new name had not been put to a vote. Before many in the community could voice their opinion, there was promotional material and media releases announcing the 'Gai-mariagal' Festival. Unfortunately this name does not have any historical reference from the First Fleet era and seems to have been coined only in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The *Filling a Void* report referenced this in the section on clans, as follows:

*'Note, there is no historic use of the term 'Gai-mariagal', which has only appeared relatively recently.'*(p.38)

There has been significant opposition to the use of this term from members of the local Aboriginal community as well as support. It is hoped that the use of the term does not become a problem for organisers and Councils in the future.



### 4.3 VOLUNTEER MONITOR PROGRAM

This volunteer program is a monitoring program that trains volunteers in Aboriginal heritage sites awareness. Art sites, engravings, burials, grinding grooves and extensive shell middens are located within the Council areas and are just some of the sites being monitored by AHO trained and supervised community volunteers. The program has received a number of awards, such as the 'Heritage Heroes' Heritage Award granted by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage in 2012, the North Sydney Community Award, presented by Mr Joe Hockey MP, and two 2014 *Keeping Australia Beautiful Sustainable Cities Awards* (see [Section 1](#) for details). The program was suspended in late 2016 as the coordinator position could not be maintained. After cost savings and an additional contribution from Councils, the AHO was able to recruit a new officer in 2017. The program now has permanent staff member support and the activities around this program have been growing even with COVID.

One of the ways that the AHO keeps in touch with the volunteers is through the AHO 'Yarnupings' newsletter. To gauge the effectiveness of the newsletter, a survey was carried out early in 2019. The response was excellent, with a high number of submissions and thoughtful and supportive feedback. The 2021-2022 Volunteers report is at [Part 3](#).



Volunteer site monitor training session



Volunteer monitor onsite, Northbridge

### 4.4 FOSTERING NETWORKS

The AHO depends upon the support of different Council departments, agencies and community groups for the effective running of its key programs. The AHO also sees itself as a valuable part of the local community and as an important role model for other local governments. Therefore the AHO has welcomed opportunities to foster networks with other groups. Examples of support given are supporting Councils in their Sister Council relationships with Aboriginal Communities, Who's New Beginnings Aboriginal Clients, UTS Nura Gilli Unit, Ngara Yura Aboriginal Juvenile Justice, Biala Girls at Mackellar, Aboriginal students in schools and the Royal Far West Programs and so on.



Uncle Max Eulo, Manly



National Parks, AHO and Emma Lee, Warringah



Biala Girls at Mackellar High School



Karen Smith with Lola Forester, Show Me the Way



Walk with newly released ex-prisoners



With Corey Grech, Yarn Up

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT & ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

The Aboriginal Heritage Office has consistently sought to encourage local government to look at improving the way that it manages its Aboriginal heritage responsibilities. In northern Sydney this has resulted in the growth of the AHO partnership from an initial four in 2000 to the six (8 prior to amalgamations) that are now involved. The AHO has also provided support and information to other Councils in the region. In southern Sydney, several Councils sought to join the AHO, although the preferred method has been that the AHO could provide initial support to establish a new partnership of Councils in that region and then hand it over for local ongoing management. Strathfield joined the partnership in late 2016 and is a welcome challenge to the AHO's normal roll out, being in a different region, a different landscape, a different history and initially with no registered Aboriginal heritage sites (the AHO has since recorded three).



### Contribution to North Sydney's 25 Yr Bushcare celebration

Further afield, enquiries about the AHO model have come from as far as Broome. Again the AHO provides advice to Councils and regions as to how they can set up their own partnership.

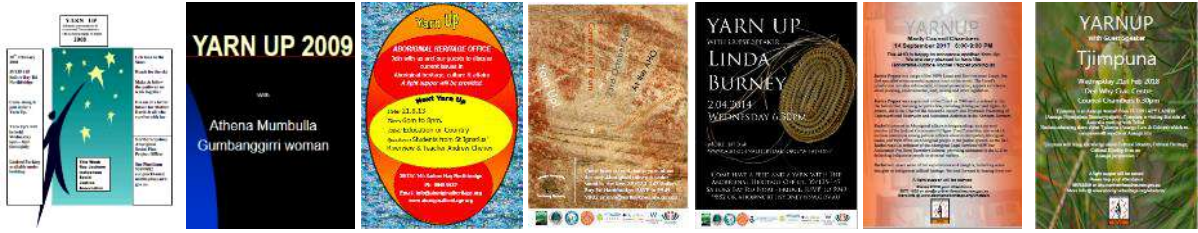
Over the years the AHO has provided exhibitions at NSW Local Government Conferences to share knowledge with other governments. The exhibitions have been well visited and people have been very supportive and enthusiastic about the program.

## COMMUNITY MEETINGS

The AHO attends and also hosts community meetings from time to time, such as 'Yarn Ups' and meetings such as local environmental networks or Council planning committees. The first formal AHO Yarn Up was in 2008 thanks to the new space at Northbridge. The last event at Northbridge was the packed out Yarn Up with Linda Burney in 2014. With a new Volunteer Coordinator position in place 2020 looked promising for more exciting guest speakers but unfortunately COVID put a halt to that. We look forward to new opportunities in 2022. The last Yarn Up, in November 2019, was with Professor Jaky Troy, author of *The Sydney Language*.







Some Yarn Ups since 2008 (top row) and in 2019 (above)

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

AHO staff have connections with Indigenous communities across Australia and overseas and people from around the world have come to visit. This year has again been challenging in terms of COVID and the museum and office has been closed to the public most of the time. There were opportunities to provide outreach to individuals, communities and to engage with people in whatever way was possible, such as Karen Smith being interviewed from London in 2021. The AHO also undertook a number of presentations and guided walks for visiting groups.



David Watts with English teachers from China



Royal Far West Programs group with Karen Smith





Karen Smith virtually and in person!

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## PARTNERSHIPS

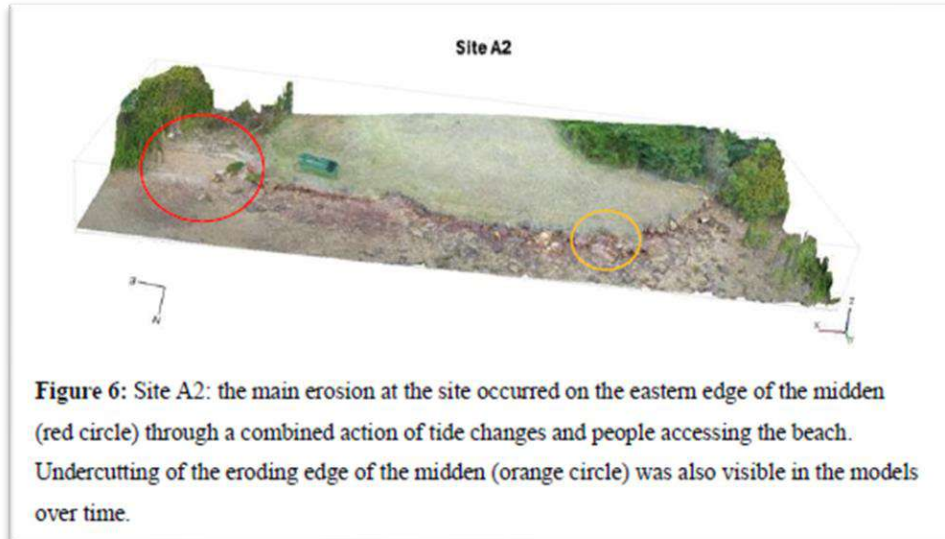
The AHO is open to developing partnerships with other organisations to further its outreach whenever this is possible with the available resources. Over the last several years partnerships have been developed with universities on site recording/monitoring and educational projects. For example, a Macquarie University post-graduate student carried out detailed photogrammetry of coastal erosion sites to assess the tracking of erosion. An example of the technique is shown below.



Macquarie Uni drone recording, Longueville



3D photogrammetry, Church Point



#### Macquarie Uni 3D photogrammetry from drone imaging

The research has shown that drone images provides better imaging than ground photography, although both are restricted by vegetation and cliffs. Two AHO monitored sites were selected for in depth analysis and erosion was noted in a less than 1 year period as a total frontal perimeter and total estimated area (the area calculation being an estimate of potential midden extent). The success of the research and its implications for future monitoring was tempered by the extent of erosion at one of the sites (Fig 6 above) where in 9 months the mean perimeter was reduced from 66.4m to 63.8m in length and surface area reducing from 110.4m<sup>2</sup> to 106.6m<sup>2</sup>. Further aerial photogrammetry is proposed but delayed due to COVID.

Additional projects are proposed with final year undergraduates similar to previous years.

#### 4.5 ADVISORY ROLE

As the leading local government Aboriginal heritage authority in the area, the AHO has an important role in providing advice to other agencies and individuals. The Manager was Chair of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Authority Aboriginal Advisory Committee for many years and was on the former NSW Heritage Branch's Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

The AHO has provided advice and information to agencies and individuals such as the NSW Government Architect ('The Ochre Grid'), Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, Macquarie University, the University of NSW, NSW Health and others.

There is currently no broad program or strategy in place for Heritage NSW (formerly OEH) to regularly monitor and manage recorded Aboriginal sites outside National Parks other than those requiring specific conservation works as notified by the public or landowners. Most of the recorded sites in the Council areas had not been revisited or the record updated since their original recording, although there was a big review conducted in 1982. Since the AHO is implementing a monitoring program, has revisited most of the sites, and is implementing potential area mapping, the AHO has been able to advise Heritage NSW on its progress and on how other government departments can do similar programs. The AHO is recognised as a leader in Aboriginal heritage management, and an important source of information for the local area.



Inspection of rock climber impacts, Castlecrag



Graffiti removal with Heritage NSW & MLALC, Lane Cove

In 2021-2022 the AHO has continued to work closely with the Heritage NSW Conservation and Repatriation Unit to progress some fresh and some older site conservation issues. A list of potential works was prepared and shared with Heritage NSW and some immediate issues were also responded to. More works are planned for 2023.

## 5.0 SPECIAL EVENTS & PROJECTS

The Aboriginal Heritage Office works to a plan based on the three main themes of **site management**, **Council support** and **education** and has developed a series of standard activities that seek to meet the objectives with the restricted available budget. However, from year to year there are always opportunities for the AHO to get involved with different activities and events that help to bring Aboriginal heritage into the picture. There are also some projects that are more involved or complex and that require additional focus and sometimes additional funding. This chapter explores some of the different activities and special projects carried out by the AHO in the last year.

### 5.1 SPECIAL ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

#### *Supporting Aboriginal Programs*

The AHO supports social, artistic and educational programs run by Councils and Community for Aboriginal people. Over the years the AHO has provided events for Councils in their Sister Council relationships with Aboriginal Communities as well as organisations such as Who's New Beginnings Aboriginal Clients, UTS Nura Gilli Program, the NSW Judiciary's Ngara Yura, Biala Girls at Mackellar, Aboriginal students in schools and the Royal Far West Programs, and so on.



Monika Monks art installation      Leukemia event, Lane Cove

## 5.2 EXTERNAL FUNDING

Over the years the AHO has been fortunate to have received funding for many targeted projects on issues from volunteer monitors to rock engraving recording and coastal erosion monitoring. Additional project funding allows the AHO to target a particular issue and get real results that go to assisting Councils better protect the Aboriginal heritage in their areas.

The AHO has no current externally funded projects and has not sought any funding this year due to the difficulties with the pandemic and restrictions on funding eligibility. The most recent grant was for stage 3 Coastal Erosion and Rock Art / Engraving project completed in August 2019, which was funded from a grant under the NSW Government's *Heritage Near Me* program. A summary of the results of this project is outlined below as the findings are still very relevant.



From 242 foreshore sites in the partner Councils, a total of 99 higher priority sites were monitored. Results show a third are experiencing ongoing erosion and several sites are in poor condition due to coastal erosion. One site has had significant erosion with over 700mm of horizontal shore loss. While a majority of sites is considered stable, the longer term picture is bleak due to predictions of continued sea level rise, increasing large boat traffic in estuaries, increase in peak storm and tide events, and the ongoing and increase in human and animal impacts.

For rock art there are 120 pigment and 240 engraving sites. A total of 22 rock art sites and 17 rock engraving sites were visited and monitored. Re-recording work included 360° photography, stills and drone photography and video. Many sites have already been vandalised or damaged and all sites are



subject to natural deterioration. The rock art in the northern Sydney region is diverse and extensive and much has survived the pressures of urban and city life.



Rock Art, Shell Midden and Rock Engraving sites in the Region

A catalogue of photos has been captured from the field work, including 360° images, and has been used to develop community engagement materials. The AHO provided information to the NSW Government that has been used in the production of new material for the *Heritage Near Me* app and a Stage 4 Geography education package.

Final conclusions include:

- at least a third of foreshore middens in the region are seriously eroding.
- most middens not currently eroding are still at risk from severe storm and tide events.
- some middens are in vulnerable condition and may soon be lost completely.
- detailed recording and monitoring work needs to be expanded urgently.
- Salvage of some middens should be considered before complete loss to the tides.
- most rock art and engraving sites have images that are difficult for the casual observer to see.
- most rock art and engraving sites have been affected by graffiti and other human impacts.
- most rock art and engraving sites are stable but extremely vulnerable to human or natural impacts that could cause irreversible damage.
- the continued deterioration of rock art and engraving sites suggests that more detailed recording and monitoring is urgently required.
- ongoing professional and volunteer monitoring should continue.
- ongoing education and training programs should continue.
- conservation works for sites have been generally piecemeal and more resources and coordination is required to better protect sites from threats and respond to actual impacts.

Ongoing monitoring, especially after big storms and very high tides have again confirmed the project's results and are a worrying trend.



Coastal Erosion between 2014 and 2018, Middle Harbour



Monitoring confirms ongoing impacts due to coastal erosion

## 6.0 FUTURE WORK

The future of the AHO has continued to look strong with the increased budget, although nothing is certain in the era of COVID-19 and extreme natural events. The difficulties over accommodation were successfully resolved with Northern Beaches Council providing a refurbished building at Freshwater and the reopening of the museum in May 2019. With these two crucial improvements, the AHO has consolidated a permanent team of five staff to carry out the core work and expand activities with key projects. Unfortunately COVID-19 has continued to pose a dangerous threat, especially for those in more vulnerable demographic groups, and the office and museum has been closed for long periods with staff working from home. As the report sections above illustrate, the AHO has been able to adapt most of its essential tasks and carry on. The motivation to make up for lost ground whenever the conditions are suitable is high in people's minds.

The main aim for the future is maintaining and expanding all the AHO's programs, including fully reopening the museum. This can only be done when conditions are safe as both staff, volunteers and visitors include people from particularly vulnerable demographic groups. Looking to the future, other activities proposed for this coming year include completing the full revision of Site Management Plans for North Sydney and continuing site conservation works as a priority.

With the retirement of David Watts in May and the vacancy of the Manager's position, the transition to new management is critical and requires care.

The important work that the AHO does for Councils, such as staff training, community education (including the schools program), utilizing the museum and education centre resource, reviewing DAs, advising local residents, and updating the sites information, will continue where conditions and resources are available (see below).

More information about 2022-2023 proposals is in the attached Business Plan.



Standing in the AHO bush tucker garden is always an opportunity for blue sky thinking...

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## THE FUTURE

In the current MoU period (2020-2025) the AHO hopes to continue to build from its core activities and initiate additional projects that will assist in the key areas of AHO work. A number of aspirational activities are listed below:

### *Site Management & Protection*

- Transition of all AHO reports, site cards, site data and planning documents to new software to enable field access and update. (Reviewed in 2020, awaiting cheaper options).
- Enhancement of monitoring processes for all sites using improved digital recording and mapping to provide a clearer picture of management needs across the region. This would include development of strategies to incorporate the volunteer monitor program in the collection of data. (A new methodology was trialed during the Willoughby update but found to be as labour intensive and in some ways created more duplication; a new internal volunteer report layout has been developed).
- Re-recording of sites with 360° imaging and 3D laser scanning. (This was commenced in 2018 and 2019 respectively. It is proposed to develop a 360 image library and review online access for site monitoring).
- Strategic review of site conservation needs, identifying sites by
  - site type
  - management need
  - specialist & permit requirements

- cost and time frame
- priority order and action strategy (cross-referenced by site type, LGA etc)
- Identification and mapping of site groupings for locations where a number of sites in close proximity should be managed as a group or set rather than individually.
- Possible partnership projects where the AHO and Councils work with a neighbour land owner, such as RMS (roads), MLALC, National Parks, Crown Lands to protect sites on or near the boundary. Also collaboration with Universities, the state government and others to share expertise and resources to achieve positive conservation outcomes (eg in the recording, monitoring and protection of rock art, recording, protection and salvage of shell middens in coastal erosion zones, and so on). (Partnerships have commenced regarding coastal middens and rock art conservation).
- Pilot study to map sites as polygons rather than point data (where site boundaries are verifiable) to allow whole-of-site approach to become part of review and assessment process.
- Development of potential area modelling and mapping for Strathfield.
- Revise Lane Cove Council potential area mapping.

#### *Education and Community Awareness*

- Transition of all AHO education and training material to incorporate new digital imaging content (video, 360° imaging and interactive content).
- Expand new museum and education centre activities and outreach. (A full-time 12 month temporary position was created but ceased in 2021).
- Undertake historical and archaeological reviews to update education packages to provide the best quality information for community, particularly for Strathfield.
- Expand volunteer monitor program.
- Expand multi-media delivery options for programs, such as smart phone apps, audio and video downloads and interactive website content.
- Re-introduce mock archaeological digs for schools (commenced in 2020 but stopped due to COVID-19).
- Propagation of plants at bush tucker garden for education program.

#### *Council Support*

- Review the implementation of site management plan recommendation by Councils and audit the AHO material is used, Council activities involving Aboriginal heritage sites, DA referrals etc.
- Develop new strategies for providing Aboriginal heritage content to staff without breaching confidentiality protocols.
- Review of the AHO model and options for a new model adapted to standard and amalgamated Councils.
- Preparations for new NSW Aboriginal heritage legislative environment.

The following pages provide a summary of individual Council work plans for 2022-2023.





<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
<i>Strategic Planning</i>		
Site Management Report updates	Annual updates	Ongoing
Monitor of legislative amendments	NPW Act/EP&A Act	As required
Local Strategic Planning Statement	Provide advice	As required
Referral Protocols with AHO	Assist Council	As required
<i>Site Management &amp; Protection</i>		
Site Conservation Works	Graffiti removal 1-2 sites	May 2023
Site Identification / Monitoring	Annual updates	Ongoing
Volunteer monitor program	Maintain and expand	Ongoing
<i>Training, Education, Community</i>		
Staff Training	Outdoor staff	Biannual or as needs
	Planners / project managers	Biannual or as needs
	Compliance	Biannual or as needs
	Refresher Course	Biannual or as needs
Schools Program	Maintain program	Ongoing
Guided walks, talks, events	Festivals & Council prog	As required
Museum & Education Centre	Yarn Ups	When possible
	Bush tucker garden	Ongoing
<i>DA Assessment</i>		
Review DAs / Inspect DAs	As required	As required



<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
<i>Strategic Planning</i>		
Site Management Report updates	Annual updates	Ongoing
Potential area mapping	Revise	When possible
Monitor of legislative amendments	NPW Act/EP&A Act	As required
Local Strategic Planning Statement	Provide advice	As required
Referral Protocols with AHO	Assist Council	As required
<i>Site Management &amp; Protection</i>		
Site Conservation Works	Coastal erosion works	May 2023
Site Identification / Monitoring	Annual updates	Ongoing
Volunteer monitor program	Maintain and expand	Ongoing
<i>Training, Education, Community</i>		
Staff Training	Outdoor staff	Biannual or as needs
	Planners / project managers	Biannual or as needs
	Compliance	Biannual or as needs
	Refresher Course	Biannual or as needs
Schools Program	Maintain program	Ongoing
Guided walks, talks, events	Festivals & Council prog	As required
Museum & Education Centre	Yarn Ups	When possible
	Bush tucker garden	Ongoing
<i>DA Assessment</i>		
Review DAs / Inspect DAs	As required	As required



Activity	Notes	Completion Date
<i>Strategic Planning</i>		
Site Management Report updates	Full review and update	July 2023
Monitor of legislative amendments	NPW Act/EP&A Act	As required
Local Strategic Planning Statement	Provide advice	As required
Referral Protocols with AHO	Assist Council	As required
<i>Site Management &amp; Protection</i>		
Site Conservation Works	Primrose Park track upgrade	When possible
Site Identification / Monitoring	Annual updates	Ongoing
Volunteer monitor program	Maintain and expand	Ongoing
<i>Training, Education, Community</i>		
Staff Training	Outdoor staff	Biannual or as needs
	Planners / project managers	Biannual or as needs
	Compliance	Biannual or as needs
	Refresher Course	Biannual or as needs
Schools Program	Maintain program	Ongoing
Guided walks, talks, events	Festivals & Council prog	As required
Museum & Education Centre	Yarn Ups	When possible
	Bush tucker garden	Ongoing
<i>DA Assessment</i>		
Review DAs / Inspect DAs	As required	As required

Activity	Notes	Completion Date
<i>Strategic Planning</i>		
Site Management Report updates	Commence full review	April 2023
Monitor of legislative amendments	NPW Act/EP&A Act	As required
Local Strategic Planning Statement	Provide advice	As required
Referral Protocols with AHO	Assist Council	As required
<i>Site Management &amp; Protection</i>		
Site Conservation Works	Protection works 1-2 sites	May 2023
Site Identification / Monitoring	Annual updates	Ongoing
Volunteer monitor program	Maintain and expand	Ongoing
<i>Training, Education, Community</i>		
Staff Training	Outdoor staff	Biannual or as needs
	Planners / Assessors	Biannual or as needs
	Compliance	Biannual or as needs
	Refresher Course	Biannual or as needs
Schools Program	Maintain program	Ongoing
Guided walks, talks, events	Festivals & Council prog	As required
Aboriginal Community Consultation/Signage	Assist Council	As required
Museum & Education Centre	Yarn Ups	When possible
	Bush tucker garden	Ongoing
<i>DA Assessment</i>		
Review DAs / Inspect DAs	As required	As required



Activity	Notes	Completion Date
<i>Strategic Planning</i>		
Site Management Report	Annual updates	Ongoing
Potential area mapping	Report and mapping	When possible
Monitor of legislative amendments	NPW Act/EP&A Act	As required
Local Strategic Planning Statement	Provide advice	As required
Referral Protocols with AHO	Assist Council	As required
<i>Site Management &amp; Protection</i>		
Site Identification / Monitoring	Field surveys	May 2023
Volunteer monitor program	Maintain and expand	Ongoing
<i>Training, Education, Community</i>		
Strathfield AHO web content	Online material	May 2023
Staff Training	Outdoor staff	Biannual or as needs
	Planners / Assessors	Biannual or as needs
	Compliance	Biannual or as needs
	Refresher Course	Biannual or as needs
Schools Program	Increase uptake	June 2023
Guided walks, talks, events	Festivals & Council prog	As required
Museum & Education Centre	Yarn Ups	When possible
	Bush tucker garden	Ongoing
<i>DA Assessment</i>		
Review DAs / Inspect DAs	As required	As required
Referral policy	Pre and post mapping	Feb / Oct 2023

Activity	Notes	Completion Date
<i>Strategic Planning</i>		
Site Management Report updates	Annual updates	Ongoing
Monitor of legislative amendments	NPW Act/EP&A Act	As required
Local Strategic Planning Statement	Provide advice	As required
Referral Protocols with AHO	Assist Council	As required
<i>Site Management &amp; Protection</i>		
Site Conservation Works	Graffiti removal 1-2 sites	May 2023
Site Identification / Monitoring	Annual updates	Ongoing
Volunteer monitor program	Maintain and expand	Ongoing
<i>Training, Education, Community</i>		
Staff Training	Outdoor staff	Biannual or as needs
	Planners / project managers	Biannual or as needs
	Compliance	Biannual or as needs
	Refresher Course	Biannual or as needs
Schools Program	Maintain program	Ongoing
Guided walks, talks, events	Festivals & Council prog	As required
Museum & Education Centre	Yarn Ups	When possible
	Bush tucker garden	Ongoing
<i>DA Assessment</i>		
Review DAs / Inspect DAs	As required	As required

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# Business Plan 2022-2023



## Aboriginal Heritage Office

Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Northern Beaches, Strathfield  
and **Willoughby** Councils



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## Executive Summary

This is a Business Plan for the Aboriginal Heritage Office for 2022-2023. The AHO, established in March 2000, is a joint initiative of local councils in a progressive move to protect Aboriginal heritage. The AHO is a partnership between Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Northern Beaches, Strathfield and Willoughby Councils. In 2019 the memorandum of understanding for the period 2020-2025 was signed by all Council partners.

The AHO vision is to provide an Aboriginal heritage management framework at local government level in northern Sydney that covers site management, education and community liaison, and to provide a role model for NSW.

Objectives, activities and performance targets are based around three main themes: Site Protection, Community Liaison and Support, and Promotion. Individual activities include completing (and commencing) the Site Management Plans for remaining Councils, staff training, community events and forums, site protection works and funding opportunities.

In May 2022 founder and manager of the AHO, David Watts, retired from the manager's position after 23 years. The AHO is in a transition period while a new manager is sought.

## **1.0 Introduction**

This is a Business Plan for the Aboriginal Heritage Office for 2022-2023.

The Aboriginal Heritage Office (AHO) was first established in March 2000 by Lane Cove, North Sydney, former-Warringah and Willoughby Councils in a progressive move to protect Aboriginal Heritage in these areas. Prior to Council amalgamations in 2016 the partnership consisted of Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, Manly, North Sydney, Pittwater, Warringah and Willoughby Councils. Armidale Dumaresq Council joined the partnership for 2 years (2008-2010) in a project-based arrangement to help the Council improve its Aboriginal heritage management. Ryde Council was a partner from 2010-2015. Strathfield Council joined in 2017.

As of 2018 the AHO is a partnership between Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Northern Beaches, Strathfield and Willoughby Councils. In 2019 the memorandum of understanding for the period 2020-2025 was signed by all Council partners.

In May 2022 founder and manager of the AHO, David Watts, retired from the manager's position after 23 years. The AHO is in a transition period while a new manager is sought.

## **2.0 Vision Statement**

The overall goal of the Aboriginal Heritage Office (AHO) is to help protect irreplaceable Aboriginal heritage sites for the generations to come. The AHO vision is to provide an Aboriginal heritage management framework at local government level in northern Sydney and Strathfield that covers site management, education and community liaison.



### 3.0 Initiatives

These initiatives are identified as needing further development and attention in the coming year.

Initiatives	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapt to COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow all relevant government health warnings.</li> <li>Adopt flexible work methods.</li> <li>Take precautionary principle for vulnerable demographics (staff, public).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consolidate use of office and education centre location.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Run existing and expand programs and promotion.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update AHO educational material according to latest evidence and historical documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue update of website material, historical context and promotional material.</li> <li>Use additional staff / consultants.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review AHO systems in relation to new state government reforms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify Aboriginal heritage position in any new state government legislation.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve profile of Aboriginal heritage at local government.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify roles with State Government.</li> <li>Assist State and Local Governments in developing regional and local models.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review site conservation strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in strategic planning for improved site conservation in region.</li> <li>Continue new site monitor/report program.</li> <li>Review and update conservation strategies.</li> <li>Work with NSW Government specialists on priority site conservation projects.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand digital media options for Education Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand web content (eg newsletters).</li> <li>Review audio-visual options, apps for smart phones, web downloads and web content</li> <li>Produce new content for museum, website and education/training packages</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop strategies to respond to increasing demand for advice (public and staff)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review types and frequency of inquiries</li> <li>Review options for streamlining responses</li> <li>Review options for addressing inquiries through website, Council websites etc</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain AHO services during transition from retired manager.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain current services.</li> <li>Review transition arrangements to new manager.</li> </ul>

## 4.0 Objectives and Actions

### 4.1 Site Protection

Objective: To protect Aboriginal sites and heritage in the local Councils areas.

Principle Activities	Performance Targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapt to COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow all relevant government health warnings.</li> <li>Adopt flexible work methods.</li> <li>Take precautionary principle for vulnerable demographics (staff, public).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer Monitor Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain volunteer program: minimum 3 training events annually (in person or virtual).</li> <li>Maintain volunteer support: quick response time to reports and follow up site visits; community events.</li> <li>Review data options for collating reports.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Site Management Plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete full revision of North Sydney.</li> <li>Commence Northern Beaches full revision.</li> <li>Complete annual monitoring and updates.</li> <li>Commence Strathfield potential areas.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Site Conservation Works</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review priority sites annually.</li> <li>Carry out works at priority sites.</li> <li>Support Council funded works as per reports.</li> <li>Seek funding opportunity for region-wide priority review.</li> <li>Progress Heritage NSW consulted proposals.</li> <li>Assist development of AHO, Heritage NSW and MLALC regional partnership &amp; pilot study.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bushland Surveys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify future opportunities.</li> <li>Seek funding opportunities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council Training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training Program with minimum 6 training events annually (in person or virtual).</li> <li>Review programs in light of any new/proposed legislation.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AHO Training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New staff given minimum of 2 days guided field work experience annually.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disaster Response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review opportunities to prepare disaster response strategy.</li> </ul>

## 4.2 Community Liaison and Support

Objective: support the Aboriginal people within their local government areas.

Principle Activities	Performance Targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Adapt to COVID-19 pandemic.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Follow all relevant government health warnings.</li><li>Adopt flexible work methods.</li><li>Take precautionary principle for vulnerable demographics (staff, public).</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Provide and attend community forums.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>AHO stalls at public events.</li><li>Participate in community events.</li><li>Host community meetings, activities and forums at the office, such as Yarn Up.</li><li>Support local community activities and events, where possible.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Maintain links with NSW Government departments.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Attend conferences, forums and workshops.</li><li>Assist regional site conservation partnership with Heritage NSW, MLALC etc.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Maintain links with Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Contact MLALC staff as per agreements.</li><li>Provide Training and mentoring to trainee Sites Officers.</li></ul>

### 4.3 Public Education

**Objective:** provide Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people within the Council areas opportunities to develop a better understanding of Aboriginal heritage and culture.

Principle Activities	Performance Targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapt to COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow all relevant government health warnings.</li> <li>Adopt flexible work methods.</li> <li>Take precautionary principle for vulnerable demographics (staff, public).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guided Walks &amp; Talks Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum 5 community events per Council per year (in person or virtual).</li> <li>AHO events incorporated into Council Newsletters and events calendars.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum 15 schools presentations annually (in person or virtual).</li> <li>Review program and examine new potential activities.</li> <li>Continue 'mock digs'.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education Centre and Keeping Place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consolidate and expand museum.</li> <li>Maintain bush tucker garden.</li> <li>Expand garden activities (eg propagation for free plant give away for visitors etc).</li> <li>Provide open door policy for visitors.</li> <li>Provide loans of exhibits to Councils and community.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website and E-Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain website and provide new resources for download.</li> <li>Review and update material.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteers and local residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide opportunities for local, interstate and international volunteers in different capacities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review digital media options for Education Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand audio-visual content.</li> <li>Review and develop apps for smart phones, web downloads and web content.</li> <li>Seek additional funding where required.</li> </ul>



#### 4.4 Additional Funding

**Objective:** to maximise opportunities to carry out Aboriginal heritage initiatives by sourcing and obtaining additional funding.

Principle Activities	Performance Targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Site Conservation Works Program</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Liaise with Council staff for internal funding for site conservation works opportunities.</li><li>• Review opportunities to carry out pilot study for multi-agency/community partnership.</li><li>• Review funding body notices for opportunities annually.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Site Management Plans &amp; Community Education Program</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seek additional external funding.</li><li>• Review funding body notices for opportunities annually.</li></ul>

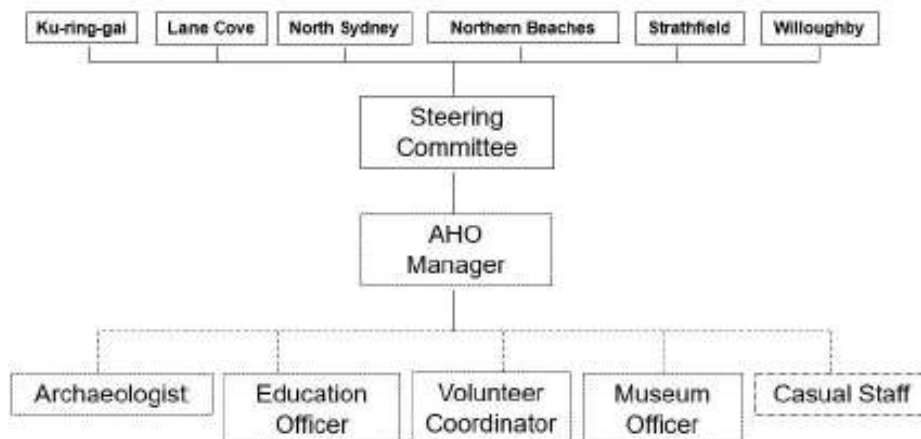
#### 4.5 Transition, Recruitment and Professional Development

**Objective:** to maintain current services, transition to new manager, recruit new staff and ensure existing staff obtain relevant professional development to upskill in a changing work environment.

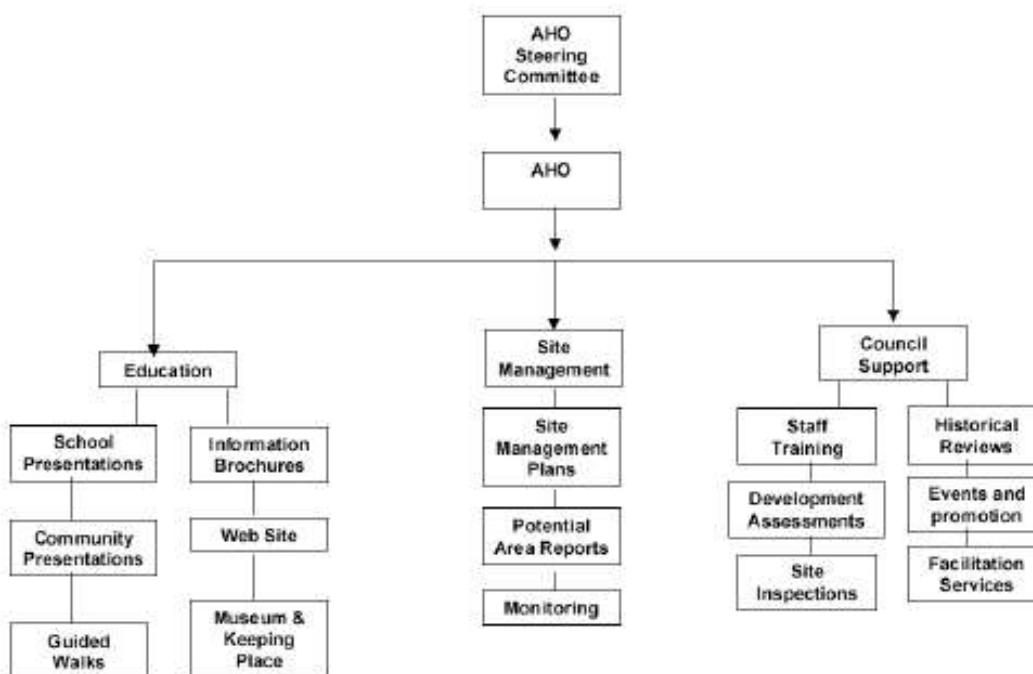
Principle Activities	Performance Targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain current services</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support existing staff.</li><li>• Review transition arrangements to new manager.</li><li>• Recruit museum officer.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expand services</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recruit Aboriginal heritage officer.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transition to new manager.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continuity of acting manager from current staff.</li><li>• Prepare process for new manager recruitment.</li><li>• Recruit new manager.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff professional development.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review training, conferences, networks and activity opportunities for staff.</li><li>• Provide staff with opportunities to participate in professional development.</li><li>• Provide well-being opportunities.</li></ul>

## 5.0 Aboriginal Heritage Office

### 5.1 AHO Structure



### 5.2 AHO Programs



## PART 2: EDUCATION PROGRAM

Refer attached file.

Aboriginal Heritage Office. 2022. Education Program Report 2021-2022. Report to partner Councils.

## PART 3: VOLUNTEER MONITOR PROGRAM

Refer attached file.

Aboriginal Heritage Office. 2023. Volunteer Monitoring Program Report 2021-2022. Report to partner Councils.