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Partnering with Western Sydney's Aboriginal community



The Draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan will promote and support economic, cultural and biodiversity conservation opportunities for Western Sydney's Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal cultural knowledge

The development of the [Draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan](#) (the Plan) acknowledges more than 60,000 years of continuous Aboriginal connection to the land that makes up NSW. Aboriginal people hold profound knowledge, understanding, obligation and custodianship of the landscape, often referred to as 'connection to country'.

Aboriginal people of Western Sydney

Western Sydney has the largest concentration of Aboriginal people in Australia.

Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), constituted under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*, are major landowners in local government areas within the Plan Area. They are responsible for achieving the social, cultural and economic aspirations of Aboriginal people through those land

holdings. LALCs within the Plan Area include Deerubbin, Gandangara and Tharawal.

Engaging and partnering with LALCs and Aboriginal communities is an important component of implementing the Plan. The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (the department) wants to work with Western Sydney's Aboriginal community to ensure the Plan delivers new jobs and opportunities for caring for Country and access to Country.

What we heard from early engagement

In 2018, the department started engaging with LALCs and the Aboriginal community in Western Sydney in relation to the Plan. This involved a series of open community events and closed workshops for NSW Aboriginal Land Councils and the Deerubbin, Gandangara and Tharawal LALCs.

Aboriginal community engagement events were held at multiple locations in Western

Sydney toward the end of 2019. Combining structured workshops with walks on Country, these events sought to maximise the opportunity for participants to understand the Plan and speak freely about their views, concerns and ideas.

Feedback from the Aboriginal community included a view that the Plan presents an opportunity to deepen the connection to Country for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney, and beyond. The feedback, which was compiled into a report, supported development of the Plan's actions and resulted in a commitment through the Plan to develop a 10-year Aboriginal engagement and implementation strategy for Western Sydney.

What does the Plan mean for Aboriginal people in Western Sydney?

The Plan will create new economic opportunities for Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney to care for Country and support the implementation of the Plan.

Aboriginal engagement and implementation strategy

The Plan commits the department to continue working with LALCs and Western Sydney's Aboriginal community to collaboratively develop a 10 year Aboriginal engagement and implementation strategy. This will ensure that Aboriginal people are at the forefront for implementing the Plan.

Actions in the strategy could include:

- partnering with LALCs and the Aboriginal community in Western Sydney to support delivery of the Plan
- funding the upfront costs of biodiversity assessment to encourage and support the establishment of stewardship sites on Aboriginal-owned land

- working with the Department of Crown Lands division to support the speedy resolution of Aboriginal land claims under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW) for areas in potential conservation lands
- working with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and LALCs on opportunities for joint management of new conservation reserves in the Plan Area
- supporting cultural activities on conservation lands such as a scheme to acknowledge and celebrate cultural values on conservation lands.

Build capacity in Aboriginal businesses and organisations

One of the objectives of the Aboriginal engagement and implementation strategy is to build capacity in Aboriginal businesses and organisation to help deliver the Plan.

The strategy could fund grants to support existing Aboriginal-owned businesses or provide start-up funding for new businesses in the land management and restoration sector. The department has committed to awarding a minimum of 5% of expenditure for services needed to implement the Plan to Aboriginal-owned businesses. This is 2% above the current quota under the NSW Government's Aboriginal Procurement Policy.

The department could also work with LALCs and Aboriginal businesses to investigate funding for training opportunities under the Plan. Examples may include accreditation under the Biodiversity Assessment Method and education for ecological restoration and Indigenous land use practitioners.

Managing conservation lands

The Plan recognises the importance of improving the extent and condition of native vegetation outside conservation lands, and establishing buffers, corridors and other ecological linkages between. The Plan will fund grants to LALCs to reduce weeds on Aboriginal-owned land adjoining or near conservation lands.

The Plan will provide for extension services to LALCs to support biodiversity conservation on public and private land.

Managing bushfire risk

Fire is a natural element of the ecology of most vegetation communities in the Cumberland subregion. Prior to European settlement, Aboriginal communities used fire to shape the landscape and create areas of open woodland that enhanced hunting opportunities or promoted the growth of seeding plants that were a food source.

Managing bushfire risks to life and property, while considering ecosystem processes and biodiversity outcomes, is central to the Plan's fire management strategy.

Through the Plan, Aboriginal landholders will be consulted and their expertise sought so that their fire management techniques can be applied to conservation lands.

Research and education

Research will help to secure threatened species and increase understanding of threats and land management issues.

The Plan will fund two part-time Aboriginal education officers to provide ongoing biodiversity, cultural awareness and engagement activities at schools and in the community.

The Plan will provide funding for research into the connections between biodiversity and Aboriginal culture and practices in Western Sydney. This will support how Aboriginal culture is promoted in new conservation lands such as new reserves.

What does the Plan mean for land owned and under claim by Local Aboriginal Land Councils?

The department recognises and supports the rights of Aboriginal people and LALCs in Western Sydney, including decisions related to achieving the social, cultural and economic aspirations of their land holdings.

The department has identified land with biodiversity values within the Plan Area, called the strategic conservation area. At their request, land owned by Deerubbin LALC has been excluded from the strategic conservation area. Land owned or under claim by other LALCs is included in the strategic conservation area however no planning controls will be applied to LALC owned or claimed land as part of the Plan.

The department has also identified land inside the nominated areas that has biodiversity values and will be avoided from future development. Land owned or under claim by LALCs is identified as avoided land but there is no proposal to rezone LALC owned or claimed land for conservation within the avoided land, or any other area under the Plan.

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