

Department of Planning and Environment

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Draft Caring for Country – Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2023-2033

Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan

November 2022





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning and Environment would like to acknowledge the Dharug, Dharawal and Gundungurra peoples, who care for the Cumberland Plain. Others, such as Darkinjung, Wiradjuri, Guringgai and Yuin maintain trade or other obligatory care relationships with the area. We extend that respect to the Deerubbin, Gandangara and Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Councils who maintain responsibilities towards Country, community, and culture.

We acknowledge the many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Western Sydney who call the Cumberland Plain home. While their lineage may connect them to other Countries, we acknowledge their deep connection to this Country. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander peoples who have a relationship with the Cumberland Plains.

The development of the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan acknowledges the continuous Aboriginal connection to the land that makes up NSW.

This Strategy recognises that, as part of the world's oldest living culture, Aboriginal peoples share a unique bond with Country. This significant connection to Country has played an important part in shaping this Strategy. We acknowledge that Country takes in everything within the physical, cultural, and spiritual landscape – landforms, waters, air, trees, rocks, plants, animals, food, medicine, minerals, stories, and special places. It includes cultural practice, kinship, knowledge, songs, stories, and art, as well as spiritual beings, and peoples: past, present, and future.

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Draft Caring for Country – Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2023-2033

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Have your say

The Department of Planning and Environment (the department) has released this draft Caring for Country – Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2023-2033 (the Strategy) for targeted consultation to continue the co-development of the Strategy with the Aboriginal communities of Western Sydney and build on previous engagements and partnerships.

We invite you to submit feedback to this Strategy and its proposed actions by the closing date 24 February 2023. You can provide feedback on the Strategy by email to CPCP@planning.nsw.gov.au

Your valuable reflections will develop and finalise this Strategy and ensure it meets the interests and aspirations of the Aboriginal communities of Western Sydney. When reflecting your feedback, we would kindly ask you to consider the following topics:

- What actions do you see as the highest priority?
- What are your views on the Strategy's goals? Do you see the proposed actions effective in meeting the goals?
- How would you want to be involved in the delivery of the Strategy?

We will be running targeted meetings and workshops to discuss your ideas to improve and refine the Strategy. We will provide support for those needing help in submitting feedback. If you would like to participate in these targeted sessions or get support in making your submission, please contact us at CPCP@planning.nsw.gov.au or by calling 02 9585 6060.

Executive summary

We engaged with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to develop the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP). Through this work, we heard a strong message that an Aboriginal outcomes strategy should be developed to support the CPCP's implementation. This draft *Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy* is a continuation of those early discussions.

We have had the pleasure to engage with a range of organisations, groups and members of Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities and hear how the CPCP should contribute to the vision of healthy Country and thriving community.

Those ideas and thoughts have been collated into this Strategy, under 4 themes and 15 actions. They stem from the aspirations and needs of the community and we are looking forward to continuing discussions during the consultation period and during the implementation of the actions. We are keen to build the actions together with communities and deliver them in cooperation with Aboriginal organisations.

This Strategy wouldn't be here without the numerous discussions with the communities. The organisations, groups, and members of the Aboriginal communities of Western Sydney have been generous with their time and advice. Their ecological and cultural knowledge has been crucial for drafting of this Strategy and continue to be so also in the implementation phase. The Strategy has also hugely benefited from the contributions of several cultural advisers. Their input has been invaluable.

The implementation of this Strategy is aiming to

- support economic participation for Aboriginal peoples
- promote Aboriginal culture and knowledge
- help enable Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal peoples maintain distinctive relationships with land and waters in Western Sydney.

While we are looking into best ways to bring the themes and actions into fruition, we are also going to engage with the communities to build an evaluation framework based on success criteria as defined by the communities. Monitoring and evaluating our actions will guide us forward and build a roadmap for future initiatives.

The discussions with our colleagues in other agencies have been guiding the development of the Strategy and we have thoroughly enjoyed hearing about projects taking place elsewhere and designing ways to work together now and throughout the implementation phase.

While developing the Strategy, we have had the following principles guiding our way:

- build relationships
- empower and promote Aboriginal voices and perspectives
- promote respect and cultural safety
- enable access to information

- be accountable and transparent
- prioritise responsiveness and continuous improvement and respect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.

These principles will also guide our way during the implementation of the Strategy over the next 10 years.

Message from key collaborators

The drafting of this Strategy has been made possible by the valuable contributions from cultural advisors. In the following paragraphs they share their thoughts on what they see as successful implementation of this Strategy.

“My vision is for healthy flourishing Country, cultures and communities in the Cumberland Plains, where everyone is entering Country with the right intentions and behaving correctly towards Country, culture is being shared and received with openness, humility and gratitude, the animals and plants have space and are diverse, and Aboriginal peoples have place to just be Aboriginal and practice their culture without needing to ask permission.”



Dr Danièle Hromek - Budawang/Yuin woman, Djinjama Cultural Design & Research

“There are examples of a balance that can be reached between biocultural knowledge and western environmental knowledge in regional and remote areas of Australia. Why not metropolitan Western Sydney too? It will look different to the bush; however, my hope is to see government empower Western Sydney Aboriginal communities to use this strategy to move closer to this balance, and even beyond in some instances to reach self-determination. Aligning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander thinking will result in better outcomes for our Country, Culture and Communities.”



Peter Ballard - Indigenous Community Engagement Consultant/GHD/Proud Birpai man with family connection to the Bundjalung people

“This strategy supports exciting changes for Aboriginal communities of Western Sydney. In ensuring caring for Country is core to the delivery of the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan, Aboriginal community will be empowered to access more opportunities to practice old ways and to protect and promote Aboriginal culture and heritage, fostering future generations that stay strong and proud of who they are and where they come from.”



Jessica Herder – Dunghutti woman, Director First Nations Outcomes, Western Parkland City Authority

Call to action

Let us recall a time before non-Indigenous peoples reached the shores of this continent, long before they entered the Cumberland Plains. Aboriginal Elders share that while travelling through Country, before moving into another group's Country the protocol was to stop at the boundary, light a smoky fire that signalled your presence, and wait for the custodians of that land to come. They would determine your intentions, perform a smoking ceremony to remove negative energy, seek permissions from the ancestors for you to pass through safely, and teach you the right ways to behave on their Country. They would share the relevant laws and behaviours, inform you where you could go and where you must avoid, who you may or may not speak with, what to eat at the right times, basically how to respect Country. This ancient tradition has been adapted into what we now know as a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgement of Country, and a Smoking Ceremony – some of the protocols we follow to this day.

While these are important present-day traditions as part of remembering those who have long cared for Country and whose voices must still be part of the guiding forces for Country, it is evident from the messages from Country that only “acknowledging” is not enough. Non-Indigenous peoples arrived on Country without learning the laws and correct behaviours, and as a result they have not acted in the right way on Country; this has put the Cumberland Plains at risk. It has damaged the health and wellbeing of Country.

We recognise that Country and those Aboriginal peoples whose origins, identities and futures belong to Country must be part of the Cumberland Plain's future and that Country's health and wellbeing is all our responsibility. We understand it is critical we listen to the voice of Country and move from acknowledgements to accountability towards Country. As such, we make this call to action as we recognise this risk.

This Strategy, and its actions, are part of building greater accountability towards Country. We are in a unique position to create a precedent for this necessary change. As part of our roles as planners and environmental carers, we can choose not to do business-as-usual, and act in another way, one that is more responsible and caring towards Country. We can learn from the Aboriginal communities and build a more sustainable approach by designing actions and their implementation together. We recognise that this Strategy and its actions are only small steps on this path, but they are stemming from a strong desire to understand and respect Country more.

We will facilitate and support Aboriginal-led caring for Country desires.

This is our commitment to the community who loves and lives on the Cumberland Plain, including the Aboriginal communities from Western Sydney who have so generously shared with us in this Strategy.

Introduction

The Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP) provides biodiversity approvals to enable new housing, jobs, and infrastructure in the Western Parkland City¹. The plan will offset impacts to native vegetation from new development by protecting important biodiversity through a network of private and public conservation land across Western Sydney. Through these actions the plan is preserving the health and wellbeing of Country.

The CPCP commits to 8 social, environmental, and economic outcomes. One of these outcomes is to support economic participation for Aboriginal peoples, promote Aboriginal culture and knowledge and help enable Aboriginal communities maintain distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical, and economic relationships with land and waters in Western Sydney. To achieve this outcome, the Department of Planning and Environment (the department) is co-developing the Caring for Country - Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy for the *Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan 2023-2033* (the Strategy) with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities.

The recognised Traditional Custodians in the CPCP area are the Dharug, Dharawal, and Gundungurra nations, and the Cumberland Plain is a significant part of Country for Traditional Custodians and for other Aboriginal peoples that reside there. The 3 Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the CPCP area are Deerubbin, Gandangara and Tharawal and they have important land holdings in the area. Western Sydney has the largest concentration of Aboriginal peoples in Australia, with many families originating from homelands in wider NSW and throughout Australia.

What is the Strategy

The decision to draft the Strategy came from discussions with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities in 2019. The Strategy will help us to continue to build partnerships with Aboriginal peoples in Western Sydney. Partnerships will ensure Aboriginal peoples are at the forefront of implementing the CPCP and can benefit from the opportunities arising from its delivery.

This Strategy is built on the foundations of Our Place on Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2020-23 (Our Place on Country), which was developed by the Department of Planning and Environment and the Department of Regional NSW. This Strategy will deliver on Our Place on Country's vision and principles as it is the department's roadmap to deliver Aboriginal services and outcomes while recognising that all of the work the department undertakes has impacts on Country, Aboriginal peoples and communities.

The implementation of this Strategy helps deliver our goal to:

- support economic participation for Aboriginal peoples

¹ The Western Parkland City covers 8 local government areas including the Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly.

- promote Aboriginal culture and knowledge
- help enable Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal peoples maintain distinctive relationships with the land, waters, and sky in Western Sydney including supporting ongoing and genuine access to Country
- improve the health and wellbeing of Country.

Championing self-determination, co-design and partnerships are the underlying principles of this Strategy. We want the design of the actions and projects under this Strategy to be a joint effort of Aboriginal organisations and the department. We will create decision-making partnerships with Aboriginal organisations to plan, deliver and lead the projects with us.

While self-determination is the aim, healthy Country and opportunities and access to resources are steppingstones towards that goal (see figure 1). We believe that we can strengthen Caring for Country, connections to culture, identity, and Country, practicing and sharing culture, Aboriginal leadership, and economic participation if we:

- develop meaningful relationships with Aboriginal peoples and Country
- enable access to land and water
- undertake education and cultural competency
- respect stories and cultural values
- invest into Aboriginal independence
- empower Aboriginal communities and individuals
- embed Aboriginal cultural knowledge and language.

To reach these steppingstones, the Strategy is focused on 4 themes that were prioritised during the engagements with Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney:

1. co-developing actions with Aboriginal communities through partnerships
2. caring for Country
3. recognising Aboriginal Culture and Heritage
4. growing Aboriginal Businesses, Employment and Training in the Environmental Sector.

The Strategy describes a series of actions within each theme to deliver outcomes that benefit Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities. While the Strategy is proposing ways to deliver the actions, the implementation of the actions is dependent on further discussions with Aboriginal communities on the most beneficial ways to realise them.



Figure 1. The story of change

The Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan

The population of Western Sydney is projected to grow from 740,000 in 2016 to 1.1 million by 2036, and to well over 1.5 million by 2056. A thriving, green and liveable Western Sydney needs to include areas for the many native plants and animals in the region, and publicly accessible, open, and green spaces for local communities.

Strategic conservation planning is a landscape-scale approach to assessing and protecting biodiversity up front in planning for large-scale development. This strategic approach allows for the streamlined delivery of housing and infrastructure while protecting regionally important land for conservation and publicly accessible green space. This approach has been used to develop CPCP.

The CPCP is part of the NSW Government's commitment to delivering the Western Parkland City, consistent with the Greater Cities Commission's strategic vision described in its Greater Sydney Region Plan: A Metropolis of Three Cities and Western City District Plan. The CPCP has been developed to meet requirements for strategic biodiversity certification under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) (BC Act) and strategic assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) (EPBC Act).

The CPCP's vision to support Western Sydney's biodiversity and growth will be achieved through a conservation program that includes 26 commitments and 131 actions that are designed to improve ecological resilience and protect biodiversity. Understanding and protecting the environment at a landscape scale will help safeguard Western Sydney's natural environment over the long term and in response to climate change. Considering the Cumberland Plains at a cultural landscape scale will support the health and wellbeing of Country during the changes predicted over the coming years. The CPCP's vision will also be achieved through enabling access to Country for Aboriginal peoples, as this is an intrinsic part of caring for Country.

The department has engaged with Aboriginal communities and a range of other stakeholders since 2018 to develop the CPCP. These consultations have included local councils, landholders, industry groups, environmental groups, Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), Aboriginal groups and organisations and members of the community.

In 2019, throughout the engagement Aboriginal communities have been broadly supportive of the aims of the draft CPCP, due to its alignment with Aboriginal culture and values, particularly regarding caring for Country.

Collaboration with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to develop the CPCP

The department engaged extensively with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities since 2018 to prepare the CPCP. The department led active early engagement from July to December 2019 to inform the development of the draft CPCP for statutory public exhibition. This involved a series of open community events including walks on Country and workshops and meetings with Deerubbin, Gandangara and Tharawal LALCs and NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC).

Early engagement events combined structured workshops with walks on-Country to maximise the opportunity for participants to understand the CPCP and speak openly about their views, concerns, and ideas. The early and inclusive engagement undertaken for the CPCP was highly appreciated and commended by several Aboriginal organisations, groups and individuals.

The decision to commit to co-developing the Strategy was based on feedback from early engagement in 2019 with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to inform the CPCP's development and public exhibition in 2020.

Strategic context

The Strategy is informed by and reflects an alignment with other strategies in NSW and Australia delivering Aboriginal outcomes. These strategies include the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, OCHRE and Our Place on Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy.

Figure 2. Caring for Country Strategy in the strategic framework



Figure 2. Caring for Country Strategy in the strategic framework

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement) is a national agreement developed in partnership between Australian governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations. The objective of the National Agreement is to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and governments to work together to overcome inequality and achieve life outcomes that are equal to all Australians.

The NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2022 – 2024 documents the approach NSW is taking to implement the National Agreement. The NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2022-2024 outlines the work, vision, purpose, methods, programs, and policies for the implementation period.

OCHRE is NSW Government's community focussed plan for Aboriginal affairs. It aims to teach more language and culture to build peoples' pride and identity, to support more students to stay at school and into fulfilling and sustainable jobs, to grow the capacity of local leaders and communities to drive their own solutions and to focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment.

Our Place on Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy aims to ensure the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples of NSW are advanced through the work of the Department of Planning and Environment and the Department of Regional New South Wales.

In addition to the strategic frameworks outlined above, other frameworks and guidelines that are closely connected to this work are the Connecting with Country Draft Framework that has been produced by the Government Architect New South Wales (GANSW) and the draft Recognise Country: Guidelines for Development in the Aerotropolis.

The Connecting with Country Draft Framework is a framework for developing connections with Country that can inform the planning, design, and delivery of built environment projects in NSW. The draft Recognise Country: Guidelines for Development in the Aerotropolis have been prepared to support and guide proponents, landowners and assessment officers in the implementation of requirements relating to Country and Aboriginal culture in the Western Sydney Aerotropolis Phase 2 Development Control Plan and meet the overarching objective of the Western Sydney Aerotropolis Plan to 'Recognise Country'.

Also, the Western Sydney City Deal² has a range of commitments for Aboriginal communities. The proposed actions in this Strategy align with many of the commitments of the Western Sydney City Deal, such as the commitment to deliver an Aboriginal small business and skills package across the Western Parkland City and the commitment for an Aboriginal procurement target.

² The Western Sydney City Deal, signed in 2018, brings together the Australian and New South Wales governments and the 8 local councils in the Western Parkland City to deliver change to the region over the next 20 years. Under the deal, the NSW Government committed to delivering 185,000 new homes over the next 20 years and the NSW and Australian governments committed to progress a strategic assessment under the EPBC Act to protect the environment and streamline environmental approvals for development. The CPCP supports that commitment and facilitates a streamlined environmental assessment process to reduce duplication between the NSW and Australian governments.

Collaboration with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to develop the Strategy

The department recognises Aboriginal peoples' unique and valuable knowledge relating to Country and has been committed to empowering Aboriginal voices in the creation and development of the Strategy and will continue to do so in the delivery phase.

Co-developing the draft Strategy with communities

The department engaged with Aboriginal communities between March and October 2021 to understand the priorities and opportunities for the Strategy. The engagement was undertaken in collaboration with GHD and Zion Engagement and Planning (Zion). The engagement approach was informed by previous engagement activities undertaken by the department and leveraged GHD's and Zion's networks across the CPCP area. It was also an opportunity to collaborate with Aboriginal communities not involved in early engagement on the CPCP in 2019 and 2020. To co-develop the actions, the department met with a range of Aboriginal communities including:

- Traditional Custodians - Dharawal, Dharug and Gundungurra communities
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils
- local councils
- Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs)
- local community members
- Aboriginal corporations, businesses, and organisations
- Aboriginal service providers.

In total the department had 32 meetings and contacted over 250 community members. The department also engaged with Aboriginal communities through the distribution of a project newsletter and a community survey. The survey was conducted via the networks of key Aboriginal communities and it received 23 responses.

In May 2022, the department ran 'Close the loop' sessions to test the outcomes of engagement with participants. The close the loop sessions were used to further refine and finalise the actions in the Strategy. Throughout the close the loop session communities could align themselves or organisations to actions that they wanted to participate in over the 10-year lifespan of the Strategy.

A summary of what we heard from Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Engagement outcomes 2021-2022

Theme	What we heard
Co-developing actions with Aboriginal communities through partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory group to inform and receive feedback from the Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney • Youth advisory group to inform and receive feedback from Aboriginal youth • High interest in involvement in the delivery of the Strategy from Traditional Custodians
Caring for Country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for establishing biodiversity stewardship sites on Aboriginal owned land • Land claims process excludes Traditional Custodians • Traditional Custodians to be involved in ranger positions • Interest in involvement in traditional bushfire management on conservation lands
Recognising Aboriginal Culture and Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on the importance of cultural education and to leverage existing cultural education programs • Opportunities for cultural heritage recognition projects • Cultural tourism opportunities in Western Sydney • Traditional Custodians interested to partner in and to deliver research
Growing Aboriginal Businesses, Employment and Training in the Environmental Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for employment opportunities in the environmental sector under the CPCP • Build capacity in Aboriginal businesses and skills following impacts of COVID-19 • Partnerships with business and employment support providers to streamline procurement processes

In addition to the outcomes detailed in Table 1, GHD and Zion recommended that the department would undertake ongoing engagement with Aboriginal communities, continue to build relationships and identify opportunities for collaboration with existing projects in the sector and in the region. These recommendations have been incorporated into the Strategy.

For more detail on what we heard during the engagement please refer to the Caring for Country – Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy: Consultation Outcomes Report – November 2022 on our [website](#).

Collaboration with government agencies

The department engaged with several NSW Government agencies between July 2022 and October 2022 to discuss the draft Strategy, share the outcomes of community engagement and identify opportunities for collaboration and information sharing. Knowledge, experiences, and feedback from other agencies have greatly benefitted the draft of this Strategy.

During our engagements the agencies made recommendations related to gaps and opportunities of the Strategy, and we will continue working through those recommendations during the finalisation of the Strategy and during the implementation phase of the Strategy.

The department is looking to continue active engagements with other agencies to align the actions with the work being undertaken elsewhere and to build a comprehensive approach that will benefit the Aboriginal communities of Western Sydney.

The actions

The Strategy is focused on 4 themes and 15 actions. The following sections detail steps for each proposed action that could be taken to realise the intended outcomes. While these proposals are based on the engagements with the Aboriginal communities of Western Sydney the delivery of the actions will require further co-development with the communities.

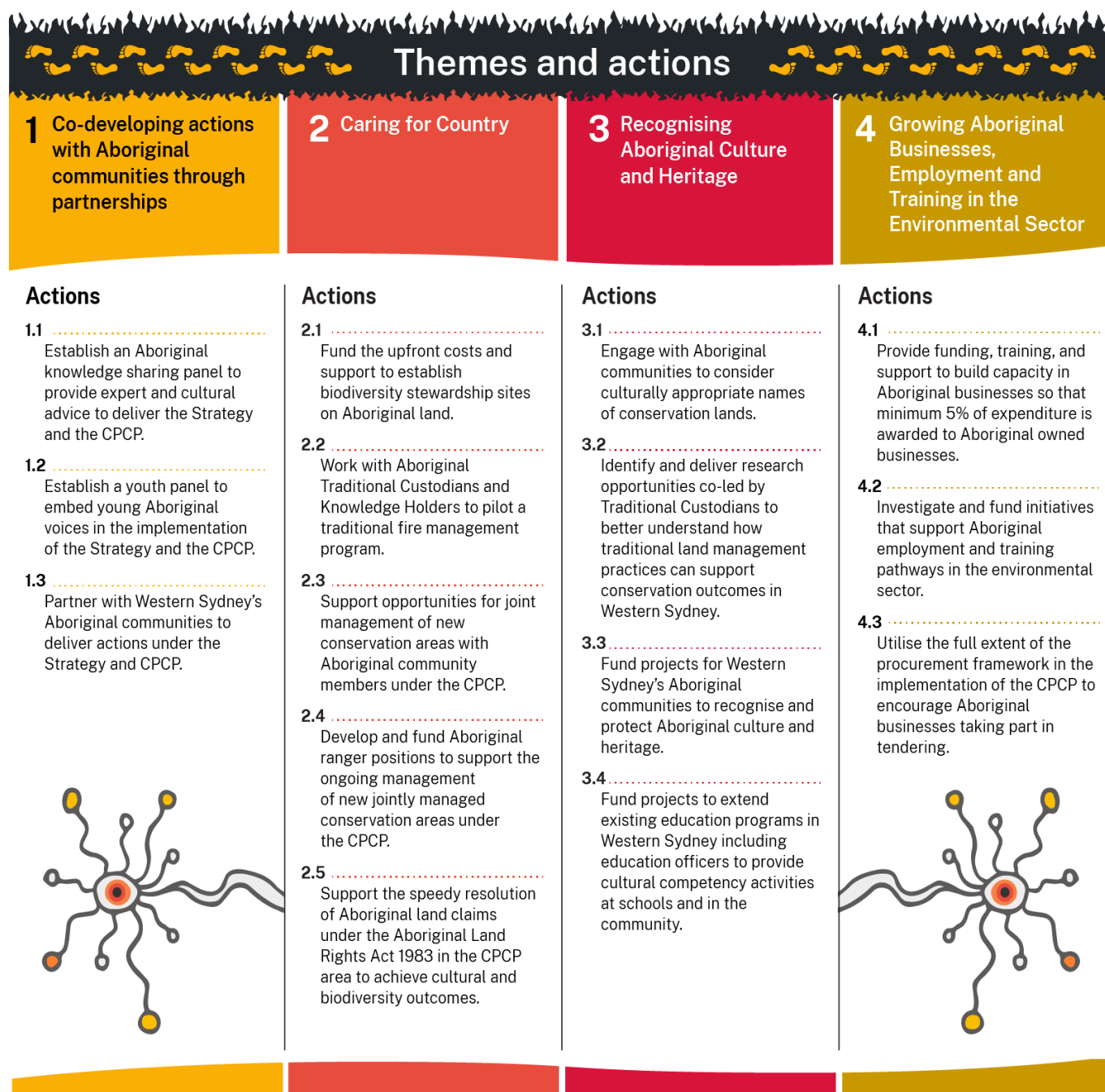


Figure 3. The themes and actions of the Strategy



1

Co-developing actions
with Aboriginal communities
through partnerships

Actions in this theme:

- 1.1 Establish an Aboriginal knowledge-sharing panel
- 1.2 Establish a youth panel to embed young Aboriginal voices in the implementation
- 1.3 Partner with Western Sydney's Aboriginal community to co-design and deliver actions

The department acknowledges the unique relationship that Aboriginal peoples have to the land, waters, and sky. The development of this Strategy aims to reflect this in the approach the department has taken to develop the Strategy as well the way we will deliver the Strategy in partnership with Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney.

The department has engaged with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities early in the development of the Strategy to enable valuable cultural knowledge to be embedded in the outcomes and ensure the actions reflect the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples and groups. Meaningful engagement forms the foundations of long-lasting relationships and partnerships leading to better informed decisions for the Strategy and the delivery of the CPCP more broadly.

The department is committed to continue to work with Traditional Custodians, Knowledge Holders, LALCs, Aboriginal organisations and the broader community to establish and maintain meaningful ongoing relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal peoples. We will co-develop actions in the Strategy and deliver them through collaboration and partnerships.

During engagement participants were clear that a partnership approach would benefit them and the younger generation through actions such as a youth advisory committee to allow mentorship and an avenue to guide younger peoples on the cultural protocols to protect Country.

The Aboriginal communities were very passionate about the ability to be able to continue the ongoing input into actions over the life of the CPCP. By doing this we can solidify a long-term collaborative working relationship with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities and ensure Aboriginal peoples have a voice to help support the delivery of the CPCP and the Strategy.

We are looking to continue learning from Aboriginal communities, cultural experts and colleagues in the industry to better understand Aboriginal cultures, knowledges, needs and aspirations and to be able to effectively facilitate a flexible, culturally safe and transparent space for Aboriginal communities to have a voice.

Action 1.1 Establish an Aboriginal knowledge sharing panel to provide expert and cultural advice to deliver the Strategy and the CPCP

Description of action

The department will work with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to establish an Aboriginal knowledge sharing panel. The purpose of the panel will be to provide expert and cultural advice to the department to inform decisions in the delivery of the Strategy and the CPCP more broadly. By

establishment of this panel we will ensure Aboriginal peoples are advising on decisions and programs affecting Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney under the CPCP.

The panel will support the delivery of the CPCP and the Strategy by:

- identifying partnerships with the Aboriginal communities and other stakeholders in Western Sydney to support the delivery of the CPCP and the Strategy
- reflecting the aspirations, ideas, and knowledge of Aboriginal peoples in Western Sydney in the delivery of the CPCP and the Strategy
- providing advice to the Executive implementation committee of the CPCP to inform decisions about the delivery of the CPCP and the Strategy
- inform the protection of Aboriginal sites in development areas and conservation areas in collaboration with Traditional Custodians and other groups
- support the ongoing evaluation of the actions of the Strategy and proposing changes when needed to meet the intended outcomes
- provide guidance relating to care for Country actions for the health and wellbeing of Country, including lands, waters and air.

Proposed delivery

The department will establish the panel with members of Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities including Traditional Custodians, LALCs and other relevant organisations. We will put out an Expression of Interest through Aboriginal networks and by setting up a transparent selection process to ensure that this group is best represented and inclusive of the diverse Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney including different ages and genders, and include peoples who are both part of organisations and independent.

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property questions and cultural safety will be key considerations when setting up the panel and its terms of reference. The department respects the rights the Aboriginal peoples have to protect their knowledge, arts and culture.

The department will continue working in collaboration with partner agencies that have Aboriginal projects and or initiatives in Western Sydney. Some of these agencies have already established or are in the process of establishing cultural knowledge panels. The intent of this collaboration is to:

- share experiences and best practices and identify gaps and opportunities
- avoid consultation and engagement fatigue in Aboriginal communities
- minimise duplication of government resources
- contribute to strengthened collaboration between agencies and Aboriginal communities
- to influence future Aboriginal projects and initiatives within the department and other agencies.

The panel could also help contribute to the broader department's role in shaping Western Sydney for current and future generations. It could advise the department on strategic planning matters such as planning proposals and infrastructure projects within Wilton and Greater Macarthur growth areas, Western Sydney Aerotropolis and Greater Penrith to Eastern Creek Investigation Area. For

example, the panel could provide advice to proponents to help support meeting their requirements under the Recognise Country Draft Guidelines for development in the Western Sydney Aerotropolis.

Action 1.2 Establish a youth panel to embed young Aboriginal voices in the implementation of the Strategy and the CPCP

Description of action

We will work with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to establish an Aboriginal youth panel to disseminate project information and provide advice to inform the delivery of the Strategy and CPCP more broadly.

Western Sydney's Aboriginal youth have a unique voice and the establishment of the youth panel will ensure knowledge and ideas of young Aboriginal peoples will be embedded into the delivery of the Strategy and CPCP.

A youth advisory panel could include:

- provision of a mentor for each member from the knowledge sharing panel
- provision of a knowledge share panel member for support during meetings
- opportunities for youth to sit-in on knowledge share panel meetings
- opportunities for youth to feed into care for Country actions for the health and wellbeing of Country.

The panel could provide advice from a youth perspective, identify opportunities, and build capacity in the Aboriginal youth of Western Sydney during the implementation of the Strategy and CPCP.

Proposed delivery

We will put out an Expression of Interest through Aboriginal networks and by setting up a transparent selection process to ensure that this group is best represented and inclusive of the diverse Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney. Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property questions will be considered when setting up the panel and its terms of reference. In the terms of reference, a framework for cultural safety and respect within the group and with actions towards Aboriginal communities will also be established.

The youth panel will work together with the Aboriginal knowledge sharing panel and be guided by them as mentors so there is a progressive link between the 2 panels. Not only could they be mentored but also guided on the cultural practices for decision making on Country.

Action 1.3 Partner with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to deliver actions under the Strategy and CPCP

Description of action

We will partner with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to deliver the Strategy based on the principles of genuine partnerships and co-design. Building the actions together with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal organisations is essential for understanding cultural obligations and the current needs and aspirations of Aboriginal communities.

We also want to partner with Western Sydney Aboriginal communities to deliver the CPCP's conservation program more broadly which comprises of 26 commitments and 132 actions. By developing the partnerships and relationships through this Strategy, the department hopes to enable partnerships across a range of programs under the CPCP to help create a healthy Country in Western Sydney. These could include partnerships around improving management of culturally significant species and restoration of culturally important places including waterways.

During the engagements, the community advised of their desire to be the key decision makers in their communities. The department wants to build partnerships so that on ground organisations can deliver quality outcomes to Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney.

Equal partnerships would enable Traditional Custodians, Elders and Knowledge Holders, Aboriginal Land Councils, and relevant Aboriginal community organisations to provide input, advice and support the delivery of the Strategy and the CPCP.

Proposed delivery

The department will continue to co-develop actions with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal organisations in Western Sydney to build steps towards the desired outcomes as defined by Aboriginal communities. The department will develop partnerships with on the ground Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal organisations in Western Sydney to deliver the actions. The knowledge sharing panel can help to identify these partnerships as well as give advice and guidance to projects throughout their lifespan (see Action 1.1.).

Aboriginal groups and Aboriginal organisations have existing networks and proven models of working with the Aboriginal communities of Western Sydney which are crucial for the realisation of the Strategy and its actions. Partnerships can also prevent any possible overlaps with existing programs. The relationships that are created through the partnerships can also help the delivery of the other programs and initiatives under the CPCP and provide valuable input into the decision making of the CPCP. The department will continue to strengthen cultural training so that the teams delivering the CPCP are well based to engage with Aboriginal partners.

For example, in the early implementation phase of the CPCP the department has co-developed 2 grants programs with Aboriginal organisations in Western Sydney: one with NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) and another with YARPA Indigenous business and employment hub (see case studies 1 and 3). Learnings from these programs will inform the delivery of future programs and initiatives under the CPCP.

Case study 1: NSW Aboriginal Land Council Grants Program

In 2020, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) and the department partnered together to establish the \$1 million NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) Cumberland Plain Grant Program. The decision to establish the grants program responded to feedback from LALCs in Western Sydney during the early development of the CPCP.

The department co-developed the grants program with the NSWALC who are delivering the program. NSWALC also worked closely with the 3 Western Sydney LALCs to gain insight into their interests when developing and designing the program. This co-design approach was successful because it ensured it met the needs and interests of each of the LALCs that were eligible for funding.

The program was launched in late 2020 to the 3 LALCs within the CPCP area: Deerubbin, Tharawal and Gandangara. It aims to support LALCs to assess and manage biodiversity, culture, and heritage on Aboriginal-owned lands, empower LALCs to deliver cultural and conservation outcomes on their land and build capacity within the LALCs to deliver natural resource management services.

The program is fully funded under the CPCP and is one of the early implementation actions being delivered under the CPCP in the first 5 years.



2

Caring for Country

Actions for this theme:

- 2.1 Fund the upfront costs and support to establish biodiversity stewardship sites on Aboriginal land.
- 2.2 Work with Aboriginal Traditional Custodians and Knowledge Holders to pilot a traditional fire management program.
- 2.3 Develop opportunities for joint management of new conservation areas with Aboriginal community members under the CPCP.
- 2.4 Develop and fund Aboriginal ranger positions to support the ongoing management of jointly managed conservation areas under the CPCP.
- 2.4 Support the speedy resolution of Aboriginal land claims under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* in the CPCP area to achieve cultural and biodiversity outcomes.

Caring for Country refers to the holistic practices used by Aboriginal peoples to Care for Country. The department acknowledges that Aboriginal peoples have managed, cultivated, and cared for Country for thousands of generations and that they hold profound knowledge, understanding, obligation and custodianship of the landscape, often referred to as 'Connection to Country'.

The CPCP aims to protect threatened ecological communities, species, and their habitats through establishing conservation land in priority, strategic locations to enhance long-term resilience and ecological function. In-perpetuity protection of biodiversity will be achieved through new or additional national parks, nature reserves, and local council or community-based biodiversity reserves, and biodiversity stewardship sites on public or private land.

The Strategy will support the CPCP by working with Aboriginal communities, organisations and LALCs in Western Sydney to protect and restore Aboriginal owned land, jointly manage new reserves with the Aboriginal communities, and provide other opportunities to practice culture and care for Country. These actions aim to unlock the land use potential of Aboriginal land and respond to the aspirations of the Aboriginal communities.

Culture is imbedded in caring for Country practices. The proposed actions in this Strategy are striving to find ways to support peoples in cultural practices, connecting with Country and caring for it. While many of the proposed actions will facilitate continuation and reintroduction of cultural practices, we will continue to work in collaboration with cultural advisors and in partnership with Aboriginal communities to further support ongoing cultural practices. By doing this, the Strategy can support realisation of a healthy Country for the community.

Action 2.1 Fund the upfront costs and support to establish biodiversity stewardship sites on Aboriginal land

Description of action

LALCs are large landholders in Western Sydney, and some of the land they own or areas under claim have important biodiversity and cultural values.

The department wants to develop a program to support LALCs and other Aboriginal landholders, if interested, in establishing biodiversity stewardship sites. A stewardship site can provide an ongoing funding source for LALCs to protect biodiversity values through weed and pest management, fencing and ecological restoration. The biodiversity stewardship agreements can also provide a profit for LALCs and other Aboriginal landholders depending on the type of native vegetation being protected.

The high upfront costs are often a barrier to landholders such as LALCs setting up a biodiversity stewardship agreement. The department seeks to fund the upfront costs and support to encourage LALCs and other Aboriginal landholders to establish biodiversity stewardship agreements on their land. The department would also buy the credits of any new biodiversity stewardship agreement that would contribute to the CPCP's target to protecting conservation land targets.

Proposed delivery

The Biodiversity Conservation Trust is the NSW Government agency that leads the CPCP biodiversity stewardship program.

Biodiversity Conservation Trust and the department will co-develop and deliver the program by collaborating with LALCs and other Aboriginal landholders in Western Sydney around opportunities to establish biodiversity stewardship sites. The program will focus on:

- support and advice for LALCs to better understand the opportunity for biodiversity stewardship agreements across their entire landholdings
- information sessions to help LALCs and other Aboriginal landholders understand the benefits and the process to establishing biodiversity stewardship sites
- paying for the upfront costs for property assessments and business cases to assess the viability and profitability of establishing biodiversity stewardship sites
- an interest free loan to help cover the costs of the biodiversity stewardship agreement application.

Culturally appropriate case studies will be prepared for successfully established biodiversity stewardship sites to demonstrate the benefits and learnings of the project to encourage other LALCs and other Aboriginal landholders in Western Sydney and NSW to establish biodiversity stewardship sites.

Action 2.2 Work with Aboriginal Traditional Custodians and knowledge holders to pilot a traditional fire management program

Description of action

Throughout the engagements in 2021, Aboriginal communities highlighted the importance of traditional fire management and expressed their interest in reviving this tool to Care for Country. Traditional fire management, when used properly, protects, and renews cultural connections and the health of Country.

Traditional fire management can include burning or prevention of burning of Country for the health of plants and animals, threatened species or biodiversity in general. It may involve patch burning to create different fire intervals across the landscape.

The [NSW Government bushfire inquiry 2020](#) recommended that the NSW Government commits to pursuing greater application of Aboriginal land management, including traditional fire management, through a program to be coordinated by Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of Planning and Environment working in partnership with Aboriginal communities. The proposed delivery of this action would complement work being delivered under this commitment.

The department is seeking to partner with Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal organisations and government agencies to develop a traditional fire management program to support the delivery of the CPCP. The program would provide employment, training, and mentoring opportunities for Aboriginal peoples in Western Sydney and opportunities to care for Country.

Proposed delivery

The department partners with Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal knowledge holders, Aboriginal organisations and government agencies to develop a traditional fire management program to facilitate cultural burning in public and private conservation lands established under the CPCP.

Learnings from existing pilot programs and initiatives will be explored when planning the delivery of the program. Approval processes are some of the key considerations. The department will investigate the need to streamline planning approval pathways for traditional fire management.

The department is looking to fund community-led initiatives to deliver the program. However, it would still leverage and build on any existing traditional fire management programs run by government organisations such as National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Local Land Services.

Depending on the aspirations of the communities, following themes can be included in the program:

- funding a training initiative to mentor and grow the number of traditional fire management experts in Western Sydney working across public and private land
- supporting knowledge exchange between Traditional Custodians and land managers such as NPWS to develop Aboriginal-led land management approaches for the area
- piloting traditional fire management experts to undertake traditional fire management on private properties with biodiversity stewardship agreements.

Throughout the process it's important to acknowledge that the traditional ecological knowledge that supports the cultural burning is intellectual property of the Aboriginal communities and that cultural burns need to be led by Aboriginal people.

Action 2.3 Support opportunities for joint management of new conservation areas with Aboriginal community members under the CPCP

Description of action

The CPCP commits to establishing at least 3 new conservation reserves in Western Sydney. It is expected that the larger reserves such as the Georges River Koala Reserve will be managed by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

Joint management is a partnership arrangement that recognises local Aboriginal peoples' cultural association with a park or reserve and ensures their involvement in its management. It is established through a written agreement between NPWS and Aboriginal communities. Each agreement requires the two parties to work together and share responsibility for the management of a particular park or reserve.

Where new conservation reserves are gazetted under the NPW Act, the Caring for Country Strategy could support Traditional Custodians to establish joint management arrangements together with the NPWS, if that is their desire.

Reserves such as national parks are part of Aboriginal peoples' Country and are places where Aboriginal peoples can care for and access their Country. Aboriginal communities can obtain cultural, social, health and economic benefits through being involved in park and reserve management.

Proposed delivery

The NPWS announced in July 2022 that it will develop a new model for Aboriginal joint management of national parks through consultation with Aboriginal peoples and other national park stakeholders over the next 18 months. It is anticipated the new model will provide for the potential handback of title to all NSW national parks over a 15 to 20-year period, subject to the land being leased back to the NSW Government for its continued use and management as a national park. See further information on the [NPWS webpage](#).

Once the new model has been developed, we could support NPWS and Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities in developing opportunities for joint management of conservation land established under the CPCP using the new model. This could include support for training, capacity building and joint ventures as the CPCP reserves are being established.

Expanding Aboriginal joint management across the national park estate will deliver economic benefits for Aboriginal communities by increasing Aboriginal employment and creating additional opportunities for Aboriginal businesses. It will also strengthen the role of Aboriginal communities in national park decision-making and enhance the protection of cultural heritage.

Through the delivery of the CPCP, we will also investigate opportunities for other types of joint management with local councils, Greater Sydney Parklands Trust, and the department.

Action 2.4 Develop and fund Aboriginal ranger positions to support the ongoing management of new jointly managed conservation areas under the CPCP

Description of action

Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities wish to fulfill their cultural obligation to connect and care for Country. Aboriginal rangers can apply traditional Aboriginal knowledge such as fire practices, care for waterways, Aboriginal biocultural knowledge, and Western land practices.

The department will fund an Aboriginal ranger program and develop it in collaboration with the Aboriginal communities. The program aims to provide Aboriginal peoples an opportunity to use their knowledges and connections to Country to contribute to managing and restoring in new conservation reserves established under the CPCP.

The Aboriginal ranger program will fund training and on job experience in a culturally safe environment. Possibilities for long term career pathways for rangers will be explored. The program will also investigate possibilities to support mentoring between new and more experienced rangers.

Proposed delivery

The department will engage with Aboriginal communities including Traditional Custodians, Knowledge Holders and Local Aboriginal Land Councils to consider and determine the best way to deliver an Aboriginal ranger program in Western Sydney. There are several options for the program delivery.

The Aboriginal ranger program could be delivered by NPWS in connection with any joint arrangements established for new conservation reserves under the CPCP. NPWS has successfully run a pilot ranger program on the South Coast³. NPWS has also appointed an Aboriginal ranger organisation as honorary National Parks and Wildlife Service rangers.

Alternatively, the Aboriginal ranger program could also be community-led through Traditional Custodian groups and organisations or LALCs (see case study 2 for The Darrunda Wajaarr Rangers). The rangers could work across multiple tenures in Western Sydney including Aboriginal land and conservation reserves established under the CPCP.

³ For this program the rangers are set up to work with the Biamanga Board of Management, the Gulaga Board of Management in Narooma and National Parks in Merimbula.

Case study 2: The Darrunda Wajaarr Rangers

The Darrunda Wajaarr Rangers are an environmental management team operating in the Coffs Harbour Local Government Area. The team's core business is to manage and increase the conservation values through traditional knowledge and practices along with Western practices.

The team has been operating since 2006 and worked within various land tenures supported by NPWS through on-ground supervision and training. The team has also worked closely with Local Land Services, Coffs Harbour and District Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Environmental Trust.

In 2019 they carried out extensive bush regeneration, weed management and pest management to boost the number of koalas. Much of the work took place on Aboriginal land in Mylestom, next to Bongil Bongil National Park. This area supports an important koala population.

Action 2.5 Support the speedy resolution of Aboriginal land claims under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* in the CPCP area to achieve cultural and biodiversity outcomes

Description of Action

The department acknowledges the unique relationship that Aboriginal peoples have to the land and recognises the LALCs are large landholders in Western Sydney, and some of the land they own or are under claims hold important biodiversity and cultural values.

The speedy resolution of the land claims will allow land to be returned to LALCs to support economic and cultural outcomes. LALCs could use this opportunity to protect biodiversity and cultural values by establishing biodiversity stewardship agreements on this land (see Action 2.1). The establishment of new conservation reserves under the CPCP will also require land claims to be resolved before reserves are gazetted to support joint management of them (see Action 2.3).

Proposed delivery

Crown Lands have the responsibility to consider land claims under *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (ALRA). We could provide funding to Crown Lands to identify, discuss and support the resolution of these Aboriginal Crown Land claims in collaboration with LALCs. This process would align with the existing prioritisations process for land claims being undertaken by Crown Lands.

In the first year of delivery of the Strategy, we will identify high priority land claims to be resolved in consultation with LALCs, NSWALC and Crown Lands. Some of these high priority areas include:

- land claims where LALCs are interested in establishing biodiversity stewardship agreements
- land claims in the Georges River Koala Reserve
- other land claims in proposed public reserves under the CPCP.

LALCs could also be provided resources and tools such as geographic information system (GIS) applications to help them strengthen their capability to understand existing and future claimable areas under ALRA.

Crown Lands have different mechanisms for quicker processing of land claims which could be considered such as the Aboriginal Land Agreements (ALAs). ALAs provide a flexible mechanism to guide voluntary negotiations between the NSW Government and Aboriginal Land Councils that explores the divestment of Crown land to LALCs.

Land claims process

The role of determining land claims resides with the Minister administering the Crown Lands Management Act 2016 with the following process:

- A LALC, or the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) on behalf of a LALC, may make claims over Crown Land that is not needed for an essential public purpose or legally used and/or occupied.
- Land claims are lodged with the Registrar of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* and referred to the Minister administering the *Crown Lands Management Act 2016* for investigation and determination.
- Once the Ministers administering the *Crown Lands Management Act 2016* are satisfied that either whole or part of the land is claimable or not, the land claim is either granted or refused, wholly or partly.
- Granted land is then transferred to the relevant Local Aboriginal Land Council LALC as freehold title.
- LALCs in NSW are not required to establish cultural association with lands when making land claims. Land claims can be made as compensation for historic dispossession of land and to support Aboriginal communities' social and economic development.



3

Recognising Aboriginal culture and heritage

Actions within this theme:

- 3.1 Engage with Aboriginal communities to consider culturally appropriate names of conservation lands
- 3.2 Identify and deliver research opportunities co-led by Traditional Custodians to better understand how traditional land management practices can support conservation outcomes in Western Sydney
- 3.3 Fund projects for Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to recognise and protect Aboriginal culture and heritage
- 3.4 Fund projects to extend existing education programs in Western Sydney including education officers to provide cultural competency activities at schools and in the community

We recognise that Aboriginal culture and heritage centers around caring for Country, this includes engaging with more contemporary practices of caring for Country.

During engagement, participants emphasised the cultural importance of the environment to Aboriginal peoples, as well as the need to incorporate traditional land management practices into conservation actions and the protection of sacred Aboriginal sites.

Also during engagement, participants highlighted the importance of investing in co-led research, engagement, and partnerships. Participants also highlighted the importance of Traditional Custodians being able to inform decisions about their Country at the highest level.

The engagement identified the need to increase the broader public's cultural competence of Aboriginal cultures and the traditional practices that contribute to maintaining biodiversity and the health of the Country.

The actions within this theme strive to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage and values and support the continuance of Aboriginal living culture in Western Sydney. Increased opportunities to practice and celebrate culture will help inform the wider community what culture is and its value.

Action 3.1 Engage with Aboriginal communities to consider culturally appropriate names of conservation lands

Description of action

Aboriginal place naming is central to language revitalisation and cultural recognition. It helps reawaken, preserve, and grow Aboriginal languages and strengthens connection with culture and identity. Aboriginal place naming encompasses both the use of Aboriginal languages in naming, and the recognition of original Aboriginal place names⁴ for geographical features.

Consultation with the local Aboriginal communities, in particular Traditional Custodians and those with local language knowledge, is important to ensure a culturally appropriate name is chosen; the word comes from the local language group, the story and meaning behind the word is captured and the community supports the use of the name for the feature or place.

The department will engage with the Aboriginal communities to consider culturally appropriate names in conservation lands established under the CPCP including the names of national parks and conservations areas and physical features associated with these areas.

Proposed delivery

The department will investigate establishing a Cultural Reference Group that will engage with Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities, and especially with Traditional Custodians, when naming a conservation land or feature using Aboriginal languages or an original Aboriginal name.

Once an appropriate name has been identified by the Cultural Reference Group, it will be proposed to the Geographical Names Board (GNB). Any name would need to comply with the GNB Place Naming Policy and should have the endorsement of the local council or the government department that administers the area where the feature is located.

Under this Strategy, the Department is committed to pursuing opportunities in collaboration with Aboriginal communities to consider culturally appropriate names for new conservation lands created under the CPCP. The department however recognises that councils might have their own processes and consultations to consider culturally appropriate names and that under the *Roads Act 1993*, Local Government Councils and Transport for NSW are the authorities responsible for the naming of roads in NSW. The department will investigate opportunities to assist and/or complement these processes. The department will also investigate how the planning framework could better support the consideration and recognition of Aboriginal names in green sites and surrounding areas.

Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property principles are core to this process. The department acknowledges that place names significantly contribute to the identity of place and may reflect heritage and cultural knowledge.

⁴ Recognising the traditional Aboriginal name of a feature is about acknowledging that geographical features already have traditional names used by the local Aboriginal community prior to European settlement. These names were given to geographical features and do not apply to post settlement administrative features like suburbs. Traditional names can be officially recognised and recorded for a feature which enables the story and culture of the local Aboriginal community to be shared. Source: Geographical Names Board - Aboriginal place naming factsheet

Action 3.2 Identify and deliver research opportunities co-led by Traditional Custodians to better understand how traditional land management practices can support conservation outcomes in Western Sydney

Description of action

The Strategy recognises the need to position local Aboriginal knowledge as an integral part of the way the sustainability and resilience objectives are met and how the research is focused.

The department has partnered with Western Sydney University to develop a draft Research Strategy under the CPCP and has committed \$1.8 million for it in the first 4 years.

This Research Strategy has 4 themes. Theme 1 “Supporting Aboriginal connections” will ensure Traditional Custodian knowledge and experiences underpins conservation outcomes being sought under the CPCP and the delivery of the Caring for Country Strategy. The department and University of Western Sydney engagement on the Strategy has identified some potential sub-themes and knowledge gaps for this theme. The sub-themes include:

- improved management of culturally significant species and places
- maintaining and providing for Country
- revive language and culture
- cultural waterways management.

Research initiatives of the CPCP could benefit from the input of Traditional Custodians to better understand how traditional land management practices could support conservation outcomes in Western Sydney. The projects could help create more biodiversity corridors from cultural knowledge. They could generate more appreciation of native plants, animals, communities, culture and thereby improved biodiversity outcomes and results for the health and wellbeing of Country.

The Research Strategy has just been released by the department for public consultation and we are seeking feedback on its themes and priorities.

Proposed delivery

The department will fund new research through the Western Sydney partnership or other partnership opportunities. We could fund Aboriginal PhD candidates or research positions to deliver on research priorities for the supporting Aboriginal connections theme.

We also want this research to be co-led by Traditional Custodians and other interested Aboriginal groups to respond to feedback from our engagement. By doing this we will ensure traditional knowledge will inform conservation outcomes in Western Sydney such as ecological restoration activities and the management and preservation of culturally significant species and places.

Action 3.3 Fund projects for Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to recognise and protect Aboriginal culture and heritage

Description of action

The department is seeking to fund projects for Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to recognise and promote Aboriginal culture and heritage. Communities often lack funding for such projects, and the delivery of these activities is important for the successful implementation of the CPCP.

The department recognises that Aboriginal culture and heritage, and connection to Country shapes identity and is fundamental to the wellbeing of communities and Country through connectedness across generations. This action will empower Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities to deliver cultural and conservation outcomes that support the implementation of the CPCP.

Proposed delivery

The department will fund a competitive grants program delivered in partnership with an Aboriginal organisation. We will seek expressions of interest from organisations when planning the delivery of the action. The department will co-develop the program with the organisation delivering the program and key Aboriginal communities' members in Western Sydney so that its objectives meet the needs and aspirations of the Aboriginal groups and organisations.

Grant funding would be available to Traditional Custodians, LALCs and other Aboriginal organisations and groups in Greater Western Sydney.

The types of projects would include:

- protecting important sites on Country including waterways
- protecting, enhancing, and promoting biodiversity or cultural values
- cultural mapping and planning of Country
- cultural tourism opportunities
- public art and signage
- language and other cultural programs.

In addition to this program the department will also investigate how the planning framework could better protect important Aboriginal sites.

Action 3.4 Fund projects to extend existing education programs in Western Sydney including education officers to provide cultural competency activities at schools and in the community

Description of action

The department is seeking to fund projects to extend existing education programs in Western Sydney including education and engagement officers to strengthen cultural competency. Building cultural competency is about strengthening the ability to understand, respect and interact with Aboriginal peoples and it can take form through various activities and include a range of topics.

The activities would take place at reserves, schools, and other organisations, and they would include topics such as Aboriginal history and culture, truth telling and languages, caring for Country practices, and Aboriginal biocultural knowledge.

The program will educate the broader public of Aboriginal culture, knowledge, and history while also strengthening the connection to Country and culture for Aboriginal peoples.

Proposed delivery

During the engagement sessions the participants spoke of the need to have education and engagement officers in settings that would continue the work that has already been carried out over many years.

The department will fund education and engagement officers to identify gaps in the knowledge and existing activities and help bring cultural knowledge and experience to the forefront of work within schools, organisations, and community groups.

In addition to the education and engagement officers, the department could also fund the extension of existing education programs to reach broader groups of peoples. The department recognises there are several existing education programs and the delivery of this program will build on the learnings of those programs and cooperate with them. We will co-develop this action with Aboriginal education organisations and providers, and other key community organisations and groups.

The areas that will be explored for funding include but are not limited to:

- Aboriginal culture and history training for organisations,
- guided tours to educate the public on the role the traditional caring for Country practices have in maintaining biodiversity,
- school excursions to national parks and conservation areas within the CPCP area to educate the pupils on Aboriginal biocultural knowledge,
- Traditional Custodians led outreach programs to host community events where Knowledge Holders will be speaking.



4

Growing Aboriginal
businesses, employment
and training in the
environmental sector

Actions within this theme:

- 4.1 Provide funding, training, and support to build capacity in Aboriginal businesses so that minimum 5% of expenditure is awarded to Aboriginal owned businesses.
- 4.2 Investigate and fund initiatives that support Aboriginal employment and training pathways in the environmental sector.
- 4.3 Utilise the full extent of the procurement framework in the implementation of the CPCP to encourage Aboriginal businesses taking part in tendering.

The CPCP will require substantial investment in services such as ecological restoration, land management, weed and pest management, fencing to protect wildlife and heritage assessments over the next 30 years.

A key focus of this Strategy is creating opportunities for economic empowerment where Aboriginal peoples are supported to lead and make decisions that impact them, their families, and their wider communities in Western Sydney. This was one of the key themes that was emphasised during the engagement in developing the CPCP. Some of the opportunities highlighted in the community feedback on the Strategy in 2021 were employment, procurement, education and upskilling, and business and revenue generating opportunities.

Economic participation is essential for improving social outcomes for individuals and is a key factor in creating resilient and sustainable communities. The actions in this theme aim to help Aboriginal businesses and people overcome barriers to achieve better economic outcomes. These actions will ensure they will benefit from the economic opportunities arising from the CPCP's implementation.

In terms of employment, ongoing barriers for Aboriginal peoples include insufficient access to relevant training, a lack of supportive workplaces, and few long-term job opportunities. For Aboriginal businesses, the core challenges have been in the sectors of access to finance and capacity building. Aboriginal businesses might find it hard to get finance through commercial avenues and they often have gaps in government tendering knowledge as well as in business and technical skills.

The support available to overcome the barriers is varied. It is widely recognised there is a need for improved coordination and collaboration to support better economic outcomes for Aboriginal peoples. The design of the proposed actions in this theme will consider the existing support mechanisms and coordinate and collaborate with Aboriginal and government organisations to create added value.

Action 4.1 Provide funding, training, and support to build capacity in Aboriginal businesses so that minimum 5% of expenditure is awarded to Aboriginal owned businesses

Description of action

The department recognises the role it has to play in broadening economic opportunities for Aboriginal businesses and peoples. This Strategy commits to award a minimum of 5% of expenditure for services needed for implementation of the CPCP to Aboriginal owned businesses. This is 2% above the current quota under the NSW Government's Aboriginal Procurement Policy for Aboriginal owned businesses.

The department will provide funding, training, and support to build capacity in Aboriginal businesses to ensure the goal of a minimum of 5% of expenditure target for Aboriginal business.

The support will be designed to help Aboriginal businesses to overcome some of the most pressing challenges to their success. The support will gear up Aboriginal businesses to be ready for the tendering opportunities arising from the implementation of the CPCP.

We will develop a program to help existing Aboriginal owned businesses expand, and to get new Aboriginal businesses off the ground in the environmental sector. The support is intended to benefit the businesses and their growth so that they will be able to hire more Aboriginal employees and benefit not only the businesses but broader Aboriginal employment as well.

Proposed delivery

Delivering this action will encompass both business grants and capacity building. The program will

- support businesses in strengthening business and technical skills
- upskill the businesses to be more effective in government tendering processes
- finance upscaling equipment and non-material assets that are crucial in reinforcing the capability of the business to be competitive.

We are piloting this action with a grants and capacity building program that will be delivered in partnership with YARPA NSW Indigenous Business Employment Hub (see case study 3).

There are several organisations and programs providing employment and business support to Aboriginal businesses in Western Sydney such as:

- LALC programs such as NSWALC LALC Business Enterprise Program
- YARPA NSW Indigenous Business and Employment Hub
- NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce Inc
- The Aboriginal Business Advisory Initiative.

The department will seek expressions of interest from relevant organisations to partner with to deliver this action. We will also draw on existing networks and lessons learned from previous programs such as the pilot program with YARPA when designing and developing the action.

Case study 3: Caring for Country business development grants program

In 2022, the department is partnering with YARPA Indigenous Business and Employment Hub to support new and existing Aboriginal businesses by delivering a Caring for Country business development grants program. The program has been co-developed with YARPA and has an overall budget of \$700,000 to distribute grants to eligible businesses.

The objectives of the Caring for Country business development grants program are:

- to build capacity and gear up Aboriginal businesses for the opportunities arising from the early implementation phase of the CPCP and over the next 3 decades
- to enhance the readiness of the Aboriginal owned businesses to compete for future tenders under the CPCP.

The program will aim to tackle some of the most common challenges to the growth of Aboriginal businesses. This pilot program and partnership are first steps to ensure a minimum of 5% of expenditure for goods and services needed for implementation of the CPCP are provided by Aboriginal businesses.

Action 4.2 Investigate and fund initiatives to support Aboriginal employment and training pathways in the environmental sector

Description of action

During engagements with the Aboriginal communities, we heard that some of the ongoing barriers for Aboriginal peoples in employment and training include insufficient access to relevant training that leads to meaningful employment pathways, a lack of supportive workplaces, and few long-term job opportunities. The department proposes to fund initiatives that support Aboriginal employment and training pathways in the environmental sector.

Better employment and career opportunities in Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities will improve social outcomes for individuals and is a key factor in creating resilient and sustainable communities. Supporting employment opportunities in the environmental sector is also a way to support greater connection to Country, while supporting the implementation of the CPCP and enhancing the health and wellbeing of Country and peoples.

Proposed delivery

There are several training and employment service providers in Western Sydney already delivering these types of services and programs to support Aboriginal employment such as:

- Kimberwalli
- OCHRE opportunity hubs
- New Careers for Aboriginal Peoples (NCAP)
- YARPA NSW Indigenous Business and Employment Hub

- NPWS
- TAFE
- Western Sydney University.

We will work with training and employment service providers to investigate and fund initiatives that increase Aboriginal employment and training pathways to support conservation and Aboriginal employment outcomes of the CPCP. We will seek expressions of interest from organisations and service providers to deliver the action in partnership with the department.

We will co-develop the implementation of this action with the training and employment service providers which will entail mapping opportunities and gaps, identifying ways to strengthen and broaden ongoing initiatives and building a roadmap to prioritise areas where additional support will bring biggest benefits for the Aboriginal communities.

The program will fund courses and degrees to support employment in the areas such as biodiversity assessment method (BAM), environmental and cultural signage, heritage assessment, natural resource management, traditional fire management and water care.

While there are already existing training courses, it has been recognised that the employment opportunities do not always follow. Hence the program will have another stream that will support workforce in training, coaching, mentoring, internships, and secondment opportunities as these can be effective ways in enhancing positive long-term employment for Aboriginal peoples.

Action 4.3 Utilise the full extent of the procurement framework in the implementation of the CPCP to encourage Aboriginal businesses taking part in tendering

Description of action

It has been recognised that government tendering processes could be improved to support Aboriginal businesses. Currently some of the tender requests might be designed in a way that is hindering the possibilities of Aboriginal businesses taking part.

When planning and designing CPCP tendering processes, we will utilise the full extent of the procurement framework of the NSW Government and the department to encourage and support Aboriginal businesses taking part. We will investigate developing an internal CPCP procurement policy for the lifespan of the CPCP to help ensure we can do this.

Proposed delivery

The department will collaboratively engage organisations supporting Aboriginal businesses to investigate the challenges in detail and to develop options to overcome them. The following options could be explored to deliver the action:

The procurements under the CPCP:

- give first consideration to Aboriginal businesses for procurements up to \$250,000, as recommended by NSW Aboriginal Procurement Policy (APP)

- include minimum requirements for 3% Aboriginal participation in all contracts valued at \$7.5 million or above which doubles the recommendation (1.5%) of the APP. To do this, we would require one or a combination of the following:
 - at least 3% of the contract value to be subcontracted to Aboriginal businesses
 - at least 3% of the contract's Australian-based workforce (FTE), that directly contribute to the contract, to be Aboriginal peoples
 - at least 3% of the contract value to be applied to the cost of education, training or capability building for Aboriginal staff or businesses directly contributing to the contract
- provide constructive feedback to unsuccessful tenderers on their tender responses. As stated by APP, this feedback should be provided with a view to building the capability of Aboriginal businesses to apply successfully for future opportunities
- investigate possibilities for better use of existing Aboriginal business registers
- ensure that the people designing requests for tenders for the CPCP are aware of all the possibilities the procurement framework has to offer and that there are no educational gaps in the procuring teams.

Delivering the Strategy

The department is committed to delivering ongoing meaningful engagement and partnerships with Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney throughout the delivery of the Strategy. Understanding Aboriginal perspectives and empowering Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities is key to successful delivery of the Strategy.

How we will engage and partner to deliver the Strategy

Key partners

The department is looking to continue collaboration and building partnerships with several partners to shape a Strategy that will benefit the Aboriginal communities and respond to their needs. These partners include:

- Traditional Custodians - Dharawal, Dharug and Gandangarra communities
- Aboriginal Land Councils – NSWALC, Tharawal LALC and Gandangarra LALC
- Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs)
- Aboriginal corporations and businesses
- Aboriginal peak bodies and groups
- Aboriginal service providers
- Aboriginal communities
- local councils
- government agencies
- educational and training institutions and
- any other relevant collaborators identified through the development and implementation of the Strategy.

Engagement principles

Engagement principles that will be considered when delivering the Strategy include:

- **Build relationships** – The department recognises that Aboriginal cultures are firmly founded in relationships. The department will establish and maintain meaningful ongoing relationships with Aboriginal peoples.
- **Empower Aboriginal voices and perspectives** – The department recognises the importance of the perspectives and voices of Aboriginal peoples being heard and empowers the community to influence decisions through engagement processes.
- **Promote respect and cultural safety** – The department recognises the engagement needs to be undertaken with an understanding of the context of Country, communities, and cultures in the area, and promotes a culturally safe environment.

- **Enable access to information** – The department will provide access to up-to-date information on the Strategy and use multiple communication tools to aid communities' understanding and knowledge.
- **Be accountable and transparent** – The department will act with transparency in its work to be accountable to the Aboriginal communities.
- **Prioritise responsiveness and continuous improvement** – The department will provide regular updates to participants during the engagement process while proactively seeking and responding to feedback.
- **Promoting Aboriginal voices and perspectives** – The department will elevate and magnify the perspectives and voices of Aboriginal peoples in engaging on the Strategy during its delivery.
- **Respect Indigenous cultural and intellectual property** – The department respects the rights that Aboriginal peoples have to protect their traditional arts and culture.
- **Recognise the importance of engaging with Country** – The department knows that the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples relies on the health and wellbeing of Country. To achieve healthy Country, the department will actively support engagement with and access to Country for Aboriginal communities.

Evaluation and continuous improvement

The CPCP has a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the realisation of the commitments and actions as well as the outcomes. The framework will inform the use of adaptive management as well as the reporting needs to the government and to the community.

The CPCP's evaluation program tracks progress of the conservation program over the life of the CPCP. It collects and monitors data to consistently evaluate the impact of actions and to ultimately ensure the success of the CPCP.

The actions under this Strategy contribute to the overall outcomes of the CPCP. The department will collaborate with Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney to co-develop an evaluation and monitoring plan that will help assess the progress of the intended Aboriginal outcomes. Developing an evaluation and monitoring plan can help to reach the following goals:

- Aboriginal peoples and others affected by the Strategy are engaged early on the evaluation questions, approaches, methods and how results will be interpreted and disseminated
- the right information is collected from the start of implementing the Strategy
- the Strategy and its approach can be adjusted based on comprehensive evidence base
- risks are managed efficiently, and implementation practices are continually improved.

Reporting

The department is committed to assurance reporting, including annual progress updates on the Strategy's outputs, outcomes, and objectives. The department will also collate finer-scale reporting for each action of this Strategy from relevant delivery partners to support implementation decisions and adaptive management.

A comprehensive, internal review of the status of the Strategy, its implementation and interim outcomes will be prepared every 2.5 years. This report will be provided to key delivery partners and stakeholders.

The progress updates and the 2.5-yearly report, as well as other relevant data and information, will be made publicly available via the department's website and published in accordance with the NSW Government's accessibility requirements.

Governance and funding

The department is the responsible agency for implementing the Strategy and the CPCP. The department's responsibilities will include central coordination and management of implementation, including reporting requirements to ensure consistency with the monitoring, evaluation, and reporting framework; contract and grant management; the preparation of reports for publication; and the management of potential compliance breaches.

Governance

The department has established an Executive Implementation Committee with executive-level representatives from key government agencies to ensure the CPCP's commitments are fulfilled and its outcomes delivered through oversight of the monitoring, evaluation, reporting and adaptive management processes.

The Executive Implementation Committee will be the key decision-making authority to determine the appropriate course of action on matters raised, or whether issues need to be escalated for ministerial attention. The Aboriginal knowledge sharing and youth panels will provide advice to the Executive Implementation Committee to ensure Western Sydney's Aboriginal communities are heard and empowered to successfully deliver the Strategy and the CPCP more broadly.

Funding

The Strategy and its actions will be funded through the funding of the CPCP. The NSW Government has committed \$114 million in upfront funding to deliver high priority conservation actions in the first 5 years of the CPCP including land purchase and restoration and securing the required biodiversity offsets.

The department is responsible for implementing the CPCP over its life to 2056. This includes ensuring funding is available to implement the conservation program and that actions are tracked, reported, and accounted for. The government is providing upfront funding to support the CPCP's priority actions, and program's costs will be recovered over time through contributions collected from residential, commercial, and industrial developers in the 4 Western Sydney nominated areas.

The department will regularly review the CPCP's resourcing requirements to ensure it can adapt to changing circumstances and ensure the CPCP succeeds in delivering its conservation program over the long term.

Next steps and timing

The consultation on the draft Strategy will run until 24 February 2023. All feedback will be considered to finalise the Strategy in 2023.

The development of the Strategy has already greatly benefited from the input from key Aboriginal communities, members, and organisations in Western Sydney. The feedback from the public consultation will help refine the Strategy further and ensure that the proposed actions align with the interests and aspirations of communities.

Once we've finalised the Strategy in 2023 the department will engage with Aboriginal organisations and groups to identify priority actions and co-develop them.

How to provide feedback on the Strategy?

We invite you to submit feedback to this Strategy and its proposed actions at any time before the closing date 24 February 2023. You can provide feedback on the Strategy by email:

CPCP@planning.nsw.gov.au If you require support in submitting your feedback or want to take part in the targeted feedback workshops, please contact the department at CPCP@planning.nsw.gov.au or by calling 02 9585 6060.

The feedback will be collated into an analysis report that will be made available to public. If you have any questions or comments about the consultation, please send them to CPCP@planning.nsw.gov.au or contact the department by calling 02 9585 6060.

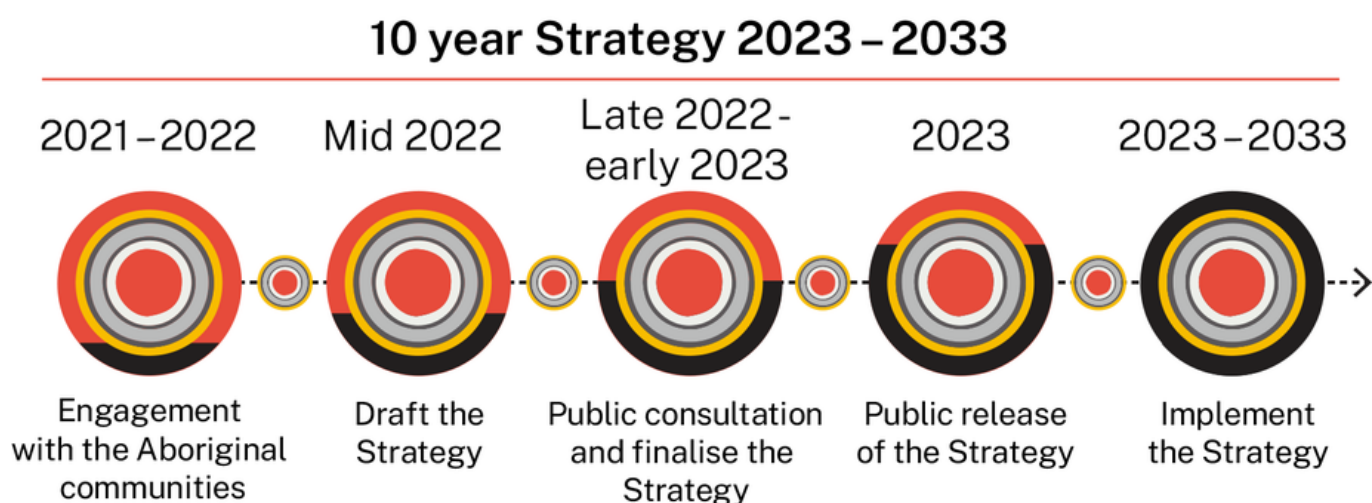


Figure 4. Next steps

Glossary

Aboriginal business

In this document, an Aboriginal business is a business that has at least 50% Aboriginal ownership.

Aboriginal Land Agreements (ALA)

The *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* allows the NSW Government and Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) to enter into voluntary and legally binding agreements to resolve land claims, reducing the need for costly and lengthy land claim determinations. These are called Aboriginal Land Agreements (ALAs).

Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (ALRA)

The *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (ALRA) provides land rights for Aboriginal peoples in NSW. Aboriginal Land Councils constituted under the ALRA in NSW can claim land as compensation for historic dispossession of land and to support Aboriginal communities' social and economic development.

Aboriginal Procurement Policy (APP)

The Aboriginal Procurement Policy (APP) will contribute to the NSW Government's strategic economic policy of Growing NSW's First Economy. The APP supports the NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal Affairs, OCHRE, and is a key deliverable under the Aboriginal Economic Development framework.

Biodiversity Stewardship Agreement (BSA)

A biodiversity stewardship agreement is a cooperative agreement between a landholder and the NSW Government. The landholder voluntarily enters into the agreement and manages the biodiversity stewardship site in accordance with an agreed management plan. A biodiversity stewardship agreement is registered on the title of the property and provides in-perpetuity protection of the site's biodiversity values, with a secure, ongoing funding source. The agreement doesn't have to cover all land within a property.

Biodiversity Stewardship Program

The biodiversity stewardship program is a key component of the CPCP which will contribute to in-perpetuity protection of habitat for threatened species and ecological communities. The CPCP's biodiversity stewardship program will provide up-front funding for business cases and biodiversity assessments to support landholders entering into biodiversity stewardship agreements, where this investment can be recouped through the later sale of biodiversity credits to the department.

Conservation land

Conservation land comprises sites of high biodiversity value that will be protected or established under the CPCP to offset impacts to biodiversity from development. Conservation land will provide

in perpetuity protection of biodiversity and will include reserves or biodiversity stewardship sites, including locations where ecological restoration may occur.

Conservation program

The conservation program will establish an enhanced network of conservation land in the CPCP area to improve ecological resilience and function at a landscape scale and in perpetuity. The conservation program will deliver commitments to protect threatened ecological communities, species, and their habitats. It will also improve overall ecological resilience and function to provide an enduring conservation legacy for the peoples of Western Sydney. The conservation program seeks to meet legislative requirements under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) (BC Act) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) (EPBC Act).

Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP)

The Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP) provides biodiversity approvals to enable new housing, jobs, and infrastructure in the Western Parkland City. The plan will offset impacts to native vegetation from new development by protecting important biodiversity through a network of private and public conservation land across Western Sydney.

Traditional Custodians

A 'Traditional Custodian' (also called a Traditional Owner, however some communities have specific preferences about which term to use) is an Aboriginal person or group of Aboriginal peoples who have ongoing traditional and cultural connections to specific geographical areas or 'Country'. They have a cultural association with that Country, which derives from the traditions, observances, customs, beliefs or history of the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the area. Traditional Custodians may opt to represent themselves as individuals, or as part of a representative group.

Western Parkland City

The Western Parkland City covers 8 local government areas including: Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly.

Western Sydney City Deal

The Western Sydney City Deal is a partnership between the Australian Government, NSW Government and 8 local councils of the Western Parkland City (Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly). The City Deal includes 38 commitments.