

Case study

# GOSFORD WATERFRONT PARK



**Immersing traditional ideals into a world of modern settings**

**Quick facts**

**Project type:**  
Public open space

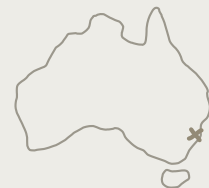
**Location:**  
Gosford NSW

**Aboriginal language landscape group:**  
Darkinjung

**Project team:**  
Hunter and Central Coast Development Corporation, Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council

**Awards:**  
2021 National Trust Heritage Awards, Judges' Choice Award: winner  
2021 National Trust Heritage Awards, Aboriginal Heritage Award: winner  
2021 Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) Awards for Excellence, Social and Community Infrastructure: winner

2021 NSW Premier's Awards, Well Connected Communities with Quality Local Environments: finalist  
2021 Place Leaders Asia Pacific Awards: commended finalist



**'Tidal terrace' landscape and play area**

Image: Turf Design, Photographer: Guy Wilkinson.

# The creation of Gosford Waterfront Park has transformed sports fields into a nature-inspired, playful public space reflecting local culture and history and referencing features and narratives from the Darkinjung landscape.

## Key outcomes

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### Healthy Country

The health of Country can be measured spiritually as well as physically. Gosford Waterfront Park helps restore the reciprocal relationship with Country, balancing both physical and cultural systems.

### Tidal terrace, central community node and dance ground

Image: Turf Design,  
Photographer: Janelle Robertson.

### Cultural competency

The design of the park invites people to introduce themselves to water Country through sensory water play, providing opportunities to read Country through tidal movements and representations of ancient rock carvings.

### Better places

This award-winning design provided opportunities for Aboriginal leadership, achieving design excellence through a co-design process and acknowledging the participants' deep connections to Country. The design respects the original shoreline and allows natural tidal movements to engage with the park.

## Spatial implications / tips for designers

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Maintain continuous engagement with First Nations knowledge-holders throughout the whole project life cycle.

Where possible, bring daylight to natural above-ground water by working with the hydrology and topography of the site, and reintroduce people to water and culture through various sensory experiences.

Restore and maintain the integrity of water flow and type – such as soaks, ponds, creeks, wetlands.

Enrich community by providing leadership opportunities.

Understand, respond to and respect the original land and water form.



Picnic areas, walkways, a Country-inspired playground and water play areas feature interactive Aboriginal design elements, accessible pathways, barbecue facilities, green space and places for 'wild play'. Together these elements have created an inclusive and welcoming public space offering opportunities for learning and interacting with cultural landscape elements.

Funded by the NSW Government, the potential to transform this public space was originally identified in a 'big picture' urban design framework for the Gosford region. This opportunity was then realised through a co-design project led by Hunter and Central Coast Development Corporation (HCCDC) working with Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council. This creative co-design process has ensured the park reflects local Indigenous landscape, culture and history.



The Bulgandry engravings date back to between 7000 and 20,000 years. They create a living storehouse for many generations to think about and share meaning, intent and messages, through both tangible and intangible symbolism in the landscape.

Image: Kevin (Gavi) Duncan.

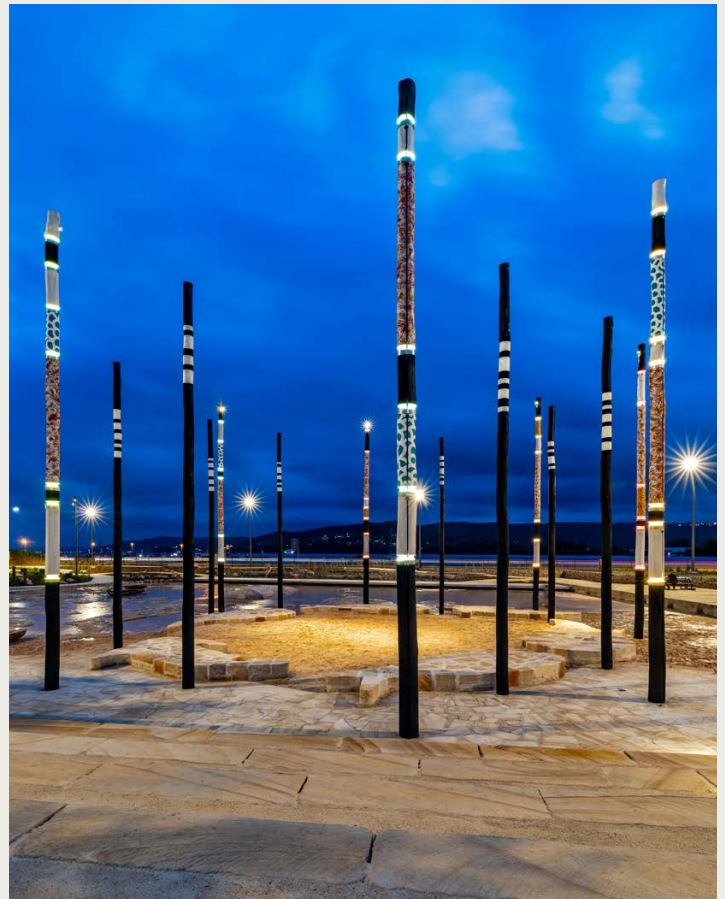


**Play structures inspired by fish traps and seed pods**

Image: Turf Design, Photographer: Guy Wilkinson.

**Dance ground defined by timber totems**

Image: Turf Design, Photographer: Guy Wilkinson.



**Drawing from Darkinjung Country**

Many elements of the park’s design communicate aspects of the Darkinjung landscape and reflect prominent features and creation narratives relating to Country and culture. For example:

- A circular gathering space, formed by large timber poles, incorporates designs by a local Aboriginal artist, creating a culturally informed meeting place.
- The ‘tidal terrace’ highlights the significance of the water and its movement throughout the day. Water is drawn into the terrace at high tide, and then drains at low tide, creating an ecosystem that changes from hour to hour. As the tide rises and falls, the water covers or exposes sandstone animal ‘islands’ depicting sea creatures such as whales and dolphins drawn from heritage etchings in the nearby sandstone. When the tide rises the terrace becomes a water play zone; when the tide falls it becomes a sandy play space. These variables connect the cultural dimensions of water, tides and time to encourage exploration and play.

The animal ‘island’ artworks reference the numerous rock carvings in the area, including the Bulgandry art site in Brisbane Water National Park. On a large, flat sandstone rock, the Bulgandry carvings depict the story of Baiyami the creator and animals integral to traditional life. The depictions teach Darkinjung responsibilities and are central to making sense of the world.

Bulgandry is a special landscape; it provides visual insight into Aboriginal traditions, past lifestyles and interactions with the environment. Its symbolism is fixed in time and space and is connected to the meaning of place. This bond in place and meaning joins both the Mirrabooka (Milky Way) and Earth together through the journey of Baiyami (the creator).

By referring to sites such as the Bulgandry art site, Gosford Waterfront Park animates their significance and connects these traditions to the present day within the broader community. The co-design with local community, incorporating heritage landmarks and significant storylines, gives the intent and meaning of these cultural symbols a new dimension through modern design.

**The innovative components of our projects are drawn from our cultural heritage, influencing creative ideas and immersing traditional ideals into a world of modern settings. Valuing our culture and heritage is the most important component of our projects – looking beyond for creativity and change, thinking ideas outside the square, and having a vision for innovation. Everything we do we underpin with culture.**

— Kevin (Gavi) Duncan, Senior Tourism Cultural Education Officer, Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council

## Providing opportunities for Aboriginal community leadership

The project has provided leadership opportunities for Aboriginal people in many ways, including having a say in the design of the park and being employed in its creation. Through their deep understanding of Country, Aboriginal people can influence the architectural outcome of a project. Local Aboriginal organisations are then recognised for their cultural leadership, having that cultural authority and playing an important role in the overall planning process of a city landscape or place. By including Aboriginal cultural expertise in the design of prominent public space, Gosford Waterfront Park has not only opened up leadership opportunities for organisations like Aboriginal land councils but also acknowledges our deep connections to Country. This approach is now encouraging other organisations to engage with Aboriginal culture and showcase connection with Country in future design and development projects.

### Dance ground defined by timber totems

Image: Turf Design,

Photographer: Guy Wilkinson.

Country is full of connections and story that has shaped our natural world; these interactions of our ancestral beings have become the environment itself. By acknowledging the very lore that acts to protect and balance all things in life that give us life is naturally healthy for Country, including ourselves. If a project is developed without those healthy balances taken into thought and design it can be very spiritually damaging for Country.

— Kevin (Gavi) Duncan



## Working together as a strong community

Working together as a strong communal organisation is very important – unity among community, when opportunity is there.

For an Aboriginal land council, governance can provide a natural framework of power for operating with big companies. Governance provides a process for local Aboriginal community members to be included in decision-making on projects, ensuring accountability, and overseeing projects and outcomes.

Working together through co-design builds our capacity. Together, capacity and strong governance can improve opportunities for our generations to come by helping us to achieve our goals and aspirations. Setting cultural standards of knowledge and wisdom for future generations can provide pathways to guide future journeys and achievements.

Our capacity as an Aboriginal Land Council at the moment is very high; we have the ability to achieve our goals and aspirations as a strong Aboriginal community with governance structures in place. We also operate in a professional manner and always with cultural integrity. We are also economically sustainable in our business dealings and developments to achieve those better outcomes for our community. In regard to scale, as an Aboriginal community organisation, internal economics can flutter in regard to a development such as community housing or cultural needs project for community. We operate as a community organisation; having to sometimes compete or operate against non-Aboriginal companies or government agencies can be unbalanced. In regard to our own scale of operation as a business, we are able to balance our finances to help achieve the goals and aspirations of our community and preserve and protect our culture at the same time.

### 'Fish trap' rope structure

Image: Turf Design,  
Photographer: Guy Wilkinson.



The aspects and percentage of our project in regard to cultural infusion and leadership, it would be 100% influenced, as we as the cultural knowledge-holders would have complete say. We would have a definite role and responsibility to lead cultural presentations, actions and decisions that determine how projects are achieved ... working in partnership and creating strong understandings and bonding with other non-Aboriginal stakeholders to ensure that Aboriginal cultural values are respected and acknowledged in the process.

— Kevin (Gavi) Duncan



### Play towers inspired by seed pods

Image: Turf Design,  
Photographer: Guy Wilkinson.

## Credits

### Research and writing:

Chels Marshall, Flying Fish Blue

### In collaboration with:

Kevin (Gavi) Duncan, Senior Tourism Cultural Education Officer, Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council