



MIDCOAST
council



**MANNING
RIVER**
ESTUARY &
CATCHMENT



BIRRBAY VOICES: ABORIGINAL CONSULTATION REPORT 2021

Annexure C

Birrbay Voices Report

Consultation for the Manning River Catchment Area

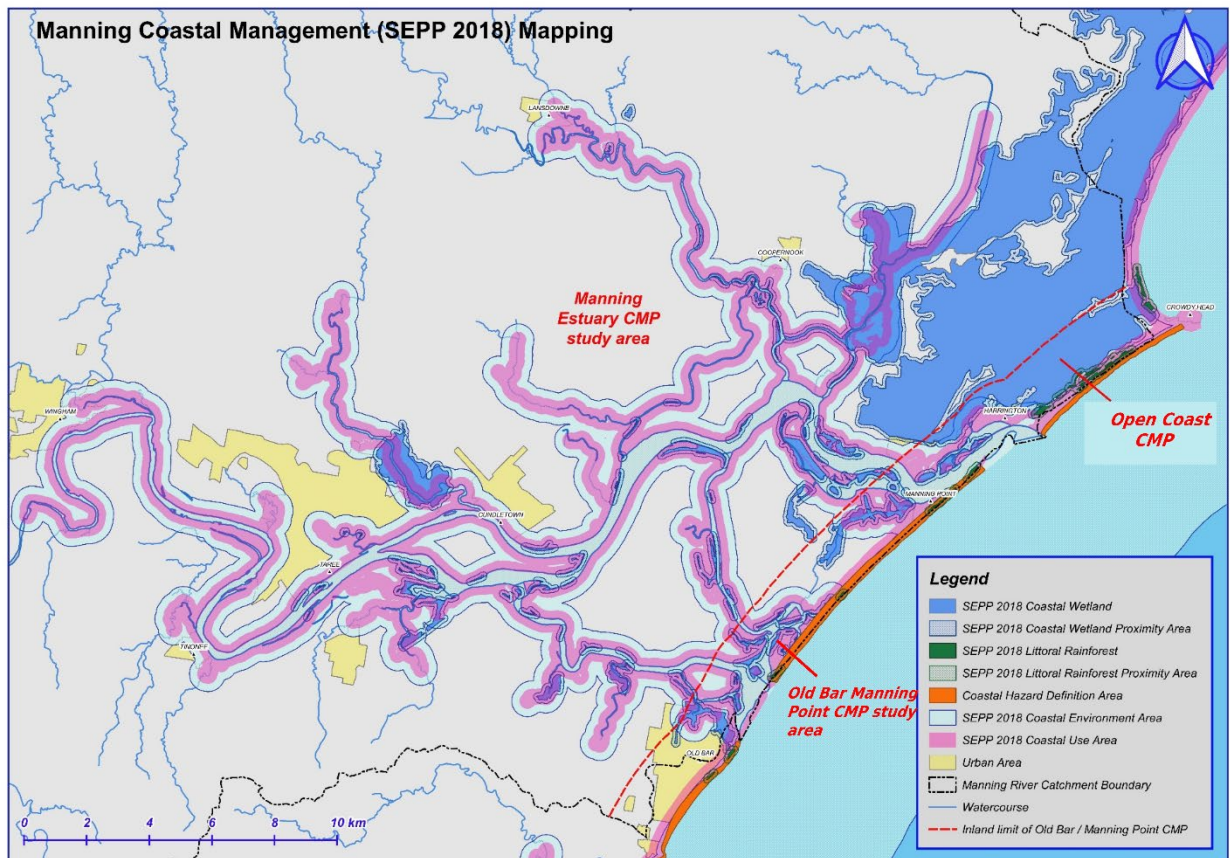
Joedie Lawler, CEO, Purfleet-Taree Local Aboriginal Land Council

Methodology outline

PTLALC was engaged by Mid Coast council to conduct consultation with the Biripi community within the identified catchment area (see map attached). It was proposed that PTLALC would conduct various workshops to engage with the Community in order to get a diverse perspective on issues and priorities for managing the catchment.

Five workshops were identified across the catchment. Due to the lack of interests the approach was varied with groups and individuals being identified to consult directly.

Surveys were also provided residents of Purfleet and to members of Purfleet Taree local Aboriginal land council. The land Council consists of 402 members which is inclusive of its board.



Assessment of process

The Survey was provided by Mid Coast Council to engage conversation. Larger groups were surprised by the engagement and some older generation reluctant to provide their concerns. More in-depth information was obtained through direct interviews although the time required was substantially longer than the group sessions.

Over all 48 people have been surveyed across the catchment area, this was achieved through three workshops and several direct interviews.

A working committee has been set up with several workshops to develop products to support the information provided which prioritizes areas of importance and importance cultural resources reliant on the catchment health. These products will be provided to council in a printable format for educational resources at a later date.

Historically Aboriginal people have been punished for speaking out. Through the history of working with Government, if our people raised problems or issues, they were either evicted, blacklisted from Government services, labeled a troublemaker or their children were taken away.

This history was evident through the consultation and reluctance of participants to raise issues or be identified. there were a lot of questions how this information will be used, if it would be used against our people. Can we trust council with our knowledge? Also, what level of cultural knowledge do we want to share.

Based on my experience in delivering this consultation on behalf of the Council my recommendations would be to engage our children through the schools, employ our people to deliver outcomes for the management of the catchment.

Higher levels of engagement will lead to greater trust, improved consultation and more inclusive outcomes into the future. My conclusion are the changes recently implemented in council with the new building, the cultural awareness and councils ongoing commitment to engage and recognise Birrbay and Worimi people, is a good indication we are moving in the right direction.

In time we will see a real shift especially if we start now to build that trust with our next generation

Workshops

Method	Location	Date/ details	No. Participants
Workshops	Purfleet LALC	Fragmented numbers over 2-3 hours. Main concern was what is council going to do with our information Delivered 12 th October	10
	Taree – TIDE	Although a set time was scheduled participants came at random times difficulty was stopping and starting and reengaging the initial participants while trying to engage the new ones Delivery 19th October	11
	AECG	School connection – overall discussion talked about the priority areas identified through consultation if there were any other area's the group wanted to identify and around how to engage primary and secondary schools in catchment management Delivered 26 th of November 10 th December	15
	PTLALC Board	Presented priorities identified through consultation to the PTLALC board for discussion and any further information Delivered 15 th of Dec	7
Targeted Interviews	Raymond Saunders	Commercial fisherman representing the Saunders Family fishing business Business incorporates cultural and commercial fishing knowledge One on one interview 3 hours Delivered 22 nd October	1
	Pam Kellner	Interested stakeholder Biripi Descendant Grew up in a fishing family- the river and beaches have always been an	1

		important part of growing up in the manning. Eating food from the river and sea and accessing medicines Delivered 29 th of October	
	John Cody	Interested Stakeholder family reside in the Biripi community Unsure what his opinion would make on the way the catchments are managed, happy with his current access to the river for fishing 40 mins Conducted 19 th October	1
	Lynette Syron	Interested Stake holder Biripi Descendant Has connection to the Biripi country and like to see more employment of Aboriginal people in council representing an Aboriginal perspective Delivered 19 th of November	1
	Jaycent Davis	Interested Stake holder Biripi descendant Believes in the importance of culture and maintaining and managing the catchment and all it holds for the next generation. language is connected to culture and assist in identifying area's and their specific purpose. Although there is some information that is sacred that we won't share November 9 th of Dec	1

Due to the closure of the land council in December and January time was limited to thoroughly consult with the Aboriginal community. If more time was available addition consultation could have been engaged.

To appropriately engage Aboriginal community on all issues 6 months would be more sufficient.

Results

Birrbygal Biripi People are known as the guyuwan, the shark people. We are connected to Water through our tribal totem. Water is the life source of all country and all living things. As garuwagal bathuGal (Saltwater Freshwater people) we maintain our healing from the water. It connects us to culture, our LORE and our land Birrby Barray (Biripi country).

As Birrbygul we follow the Matriarch LORE our mother's bloodline. We descend under Mirakeet or winmara worima the coastal and the mountain clans. Each Family group have bloodline totems that they are responsible to protect. We are connected to this totem by blood. Our responsibility is the conservation of these species. Some are water totems others land and some air i.e. Fish animals or birds

Djarii Bila (the Manning river) and the estuaries provide us with food and medicine it is important for our people to always maintain a connection and responsibility for the health of the entire system from the mountains to the sea. To ensure we follow LORE and the signs of mother earth through the seasons, taking only what we need to protect the longevity of all living things. For generations our people have been engaged in the river through fishing, swimming and the knowledge of those places along the river with special meaning. It is important for us to maintain spiritual and close connection to the water. we describe our country as where the leaves touch the water from the mountains to the sea.

Themes	Issues	Actions	Recommendation
Access – we used all the river in the old days (there was agreements with the local farmers to access through their property)	Limited access to area's that have been used for generations due to private ownership That area's that are accessible are maintained to the same standard as queen Victoria park	Areas are identified along the river that can be accessed by the public. Areas of Cultural significance be identified Improve the amenities at other access points so they are family friendly	Signage to share the story of the significance to Birrby people along the manning river. To identify the current river access area's and improve amenities so they are family friendly
The river system The system is important to Birrby people our country is	Impacts on aquatic species that are a part of our cultural diet are being	Priority species can be identified and Aboriginal community assist or be involved	Consultation and engaged involvement with Aboriginal people for the

<p>bound by where the leaves touch the water from the mountains to the sea. We rely on the natural flow of the fresh to the salt for rebirth of all species and to keep the system clean</p>	<p>affected by the way the system is being managed-</p> <p>These include but are not limited to: - Cobra Prawns Various species of Fish and shellfish</p> <p>Limitations of quota and access- this refers to pipi's 10/person and having to be eaten on the beach. Which limits cultural practice</p>	<p>in the ongoing management of these species.</p> <p>Action to advocate the cultural rights of Aboriginal people on the access and use of the river system and its species for the purpose of cultural activities i.e. Cultural Ceremony - collection of medicine (some of these area's are on Private property)</p>	<p>management of the Manning river catchment – that a cultural aquatic officer/ trainee might be employed by MCC to liaise and identify Aboriginal people to be engaged for the ongoing management of the manning river catchment</p>
<p>River quality and testing</p> <p>If our river dies our culture dies our connection to country, to the water of the river and the salt of the sea is important to who we are</p>	<p>Various concerns around river quality</p> <p>Various concerns about contaminated sediment and polluters</p> <p>Various concerns around how the issues are tested and if the sediment on the river floor is tested- can contaminants be identified and polluters identified from the contaminates</p> <p>Long term polluters are not identified or prosecuted.</p>	<p>Riverbed sediment forms part of the tested area to identify the settled polluters</p> <p>Information identify and educate pollutant group for a period of time</p> <p>If not, action is taken to reduce pollutants the law is implemented</p> <p>Aboriginal people are engaged in identifying and prioritizing areas of impact or poor quality</p>	<p>That local Aboriginal commercial fisherman may be engaged to identify priority areas along the manning river catchment</p> <p>Local commercial fisherman can take water and sediment samples of area's they identify a change / impact on.</p>
<p>Natural flow of River</p>	<p>That it is important that the natural flow of the river is not</p>	<p>That there is an option made public to report offenders that</p>	<p>Better governance on river management</p>

<p>Farmers have stopped the natural flow through dams, mining has contaminated our water.</p> <p>Keeping it flowing and healthy is important to all of us both black and white</p>	<p>impeded by fencing, dams, or mine run off.</p> <p>If the water is contaminated at the mountains this will impact the whole system.</p> <p>There is currently no accountability around the responsibilities of managing, maintaining or caring for our river</p>	<p>impact the natural flow of the river.</p> <p>That fines are issued and ongoing work to improve the flow is implemented.</p>	<p>Public activities around how important the river is. The management of the system from the mountains to the sea.</p> <p>Brochures outlining contact details</p>
<p>Continued engagement</p>	<p>There has been a lack of engagement from the council regarding Birrby country inclusive of land and water and all living things as they are associated to our culture</p> <p>This failure to engage has led to doubt by the Aboriginal community that their voice will be heard.</p> <p>Although Aboriginal people have concerned the impact over time by government on Aboriginal people and their families with the removal of our children, has led to our silence on issues that are important.</p> <p>It will take time to build trust through actions of</p>	<p>Include Aboriginal people in the process from start to finish, not as an afterthought.</p> <p>Build trust through inclusion</p>	<p>Inclusion of Aboriginal people on the management committee. Elder and community member.</p> <p>Activities with our children to educate and find solutions around water quality / management</p> <p>Aboriginal Trainee program in science fields within council</p>

	engagement that result in outcomes.		
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Discussion:

Although several key priorities have been identified a longer period of consultation would have benefited the process. With more time available we would have also engaged our children in activities on how they use the river with their families? what foods and resources they get from the freshwater and the saltwater? where are the areas in their country they use? and what water means to them?

Our community's history with Government caused a reluctance to share information, due to miss use of information or more tragically the removal of our children. This history has impacted the number of people engaged.

Our belief is with ongoing engagement of Aboriginal people and implementation of recommendations where possible will improve the trust of Aboriginal community towards council, although this will take time.

As Aboriginal people we refer to our tribal area's as country. Country is important for identity. It is important for culture, cultural practices and our own healing. Prior policies and impacts through legislation were discontinued in the late 70s. Fifty years on we are still grieving for our country, our culture and our stolen children.

Building strong partnerships to share knowledge and care for country will assist in healing our people.



Important resource – medicine and food for our people dependent on the health of the river system.



Ceremony and the connection to land and sea- maintaining this connection and the collection of resources and foods for ceremony.



It is important and our responsibility for our children to have a clear connection to country, to know who they are as Birrbay people and to understand their responsibility to care for country. To know their culture and what our country offers.