



# KURNELL PLANNING PROPOSAL

CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY

FRAMEWORK REPORT | NOVEMBER 2023

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

## CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

### Overview

The Kurnell Planning Proposal will include 251, 260r, 278 and 280-282 Captain Cook Drive, Kurnell owned by Besmaw Pty Ltd. The Planning Proposal aims to translate and amend current land uses zones under the applicable controls, establishing a new mixed-use community encompassing residential, employment, tourism, education, cultural facilities, ecological regenerative zones, and public open space areas.

As part of the project, Urbis / Besmaw engaged Yerrabingin to undertake desktop research to identify appropriate First Nations design narratives for the site.

The Desktop Research Report contributes to the 'Form: Starting with Country' stage, by gathering existing resources on First Nations cultural heritage that could be used for discussion during the co-design process with community.

The section below outlines the significance of Gweagal Country and the explores the design narratives. To read the original report, please see pag 48 in the appendix.

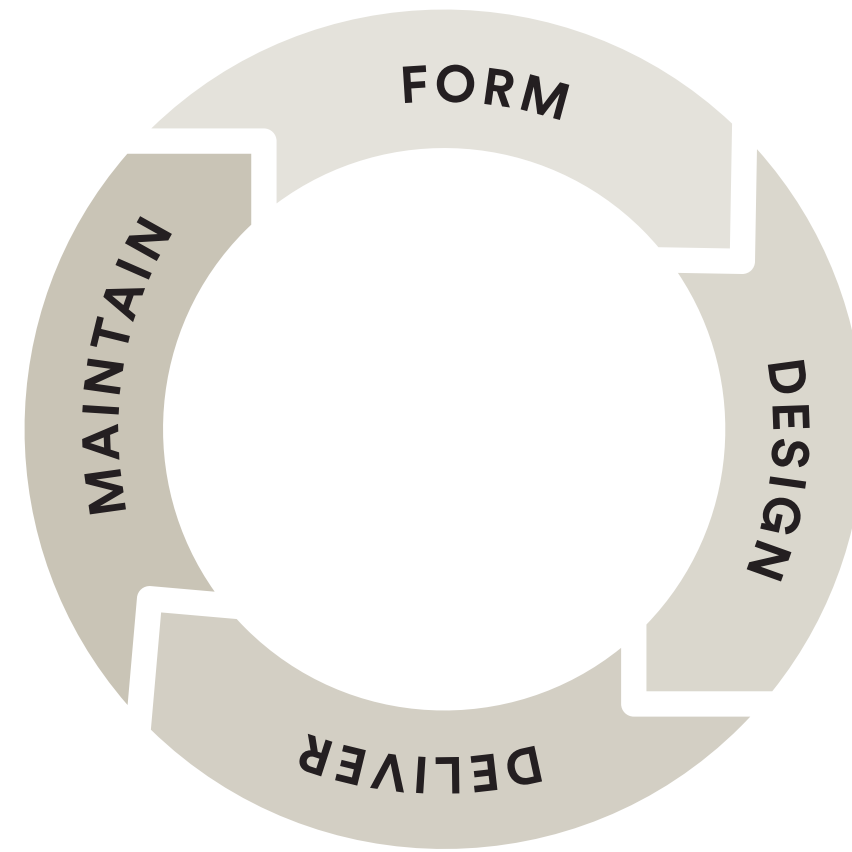


Illustration of model to consider project lifecycles with an Aboriginal perspective (Source: GANSW, Connecting with Country Framework)



Location of Kurnell Peninsular in south east Sydney (Source: GROUP GSA)

## CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

### *Gweagal Country*

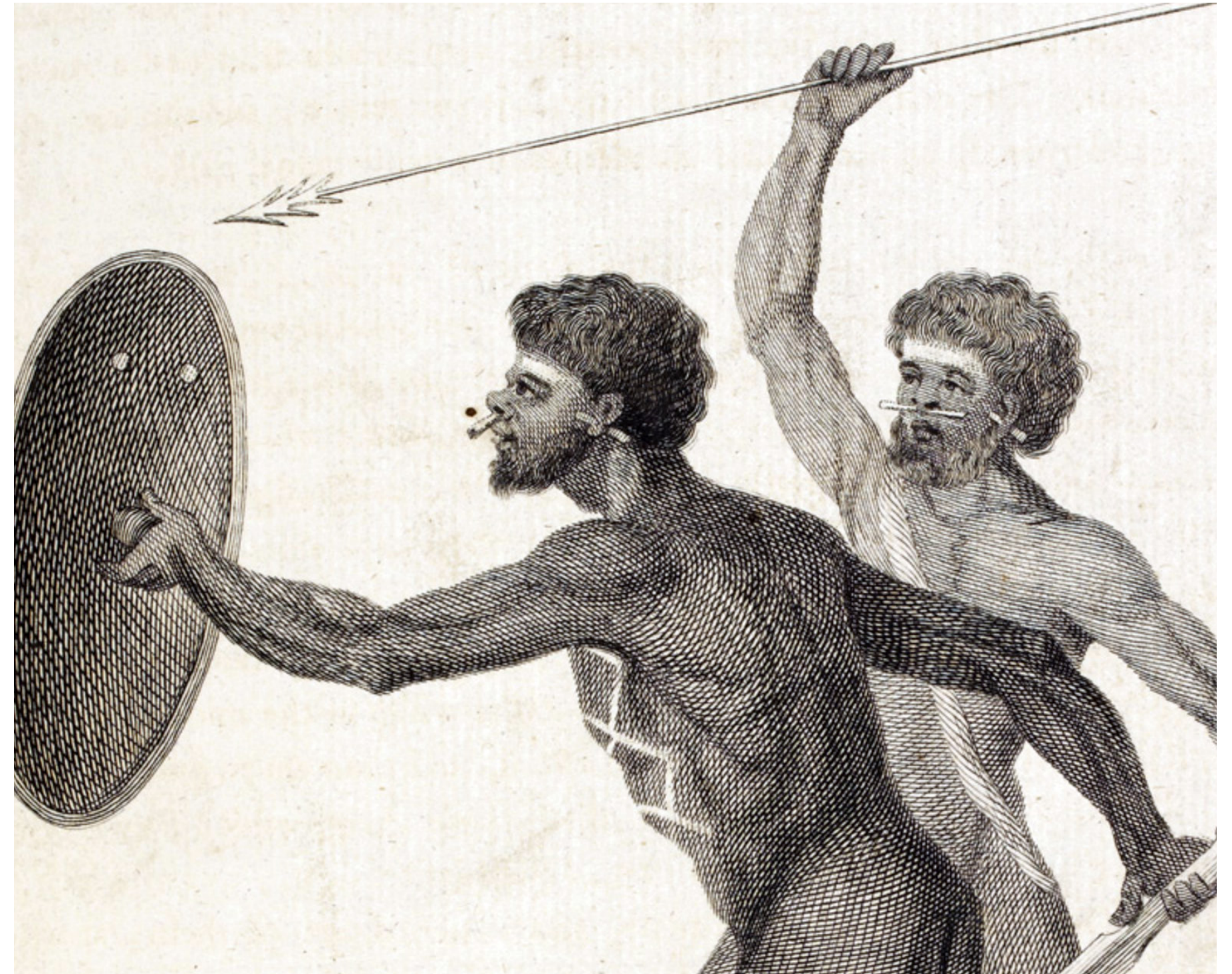
In order to understand and develop First Nations cultural narratives for the project, Yerrabingin considered the broader cultural landscape, Country, around the site, not just the boundaries of the development.

The Kurnell site is on Gweagal Country, part of the larger Dharawal language area. Gweagal Country reaches along the southern shores of Kamay (Botany Bay), to Deeban (Port Hacking) in to the south and westward along Tucoerah (Georges River).

The wider area of Dharawal speakers covers the area southwest from the coast to Benkennie ('dry land') near Appin and Camden and down into the Illawarra ('white clay mountains near the sea'). Kurnell is said to mean 'place of wild carrots' and nearby Cronulla as 'place of pink shells.'

An important and sacred resource on Gweagal Country was the white clay pits. The clay was used to shape tablets on which to light fires in the base of canoes, so fish could be cooked after it was pulled fresh from the water. The clay was also used to decorate the body in corroborees and ritual dances, often dyed with berries, and eaten as an antacid medicine.

Today, groups like the Cooks River Alliance and Gamay Rangers continue to promote and preserve First Nations cultures, conducting natural and cultural resource management and community projects. These efforts emphasise the importance of Gweagal Country and the waterways in connecting people to Country and the shared responsibility of caring for her.



*Two Gweagal men resist Captain Cook's 1770 landing party at Kurnell (Source: Sydney Parkinson)*

## CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

### *Design Narratives*

Culture is not static, it is lived, dynamic and evolving. It is what we do, say, think, and how we live. Through design and art, culture is created and celebrated. The narratives and storylines that are chosen to be communicated through design, public art and interpretation can create new meanings and reinforce existing meanings for a place.

The narratives and storylines developed for the Kurnell project have been synthesised based on the information about the region discussed within the complete Desktop Research Report. In relation to the Connecting with Country Framework, this research report is contributing to the 'Form' stage of the project.

In this stage, in regard to developing narratives and storylines to guide the design, this report focused on examining:

- What is the story of the place?
- What is the history of the site?
- What are the needs of the place?
- What is the purpose of this place?



### **Living in Water Landscapes**

The waterways of Kurnell Peninsula and Botany bay have shaped the lives of Gweagal, Bidjigal, Gadigal, Wangal, and Gaymeygal communities for thousands of years. The region's landscape, including sand dunes, wetlands, mangroves, and waterways evolved over time, however remnants of First Nations activity and occupation remain.



### **Berewalgal Arrive**

In the late 1700s, the Botany Bay region was inhabited by Aboriginal groups, with an estimated population of 1000-1200 people. This area marked the 1770 British Endeavour expedition landing and the 1788 arrival of the First Fleet. European accounts document interactions with Aboriginal people, revealing cultural differences and increasing conflicts due to misunderstandings.



### **Preserved Places**

Over time, the waterways in Kurnell Peninsula and Botany Bay have played diverse roles in land usage and development, evolving from mobility, food sources, and habitation for Aboriginal pre-colonisation to industrial centres and refuges during the 18th and 19th century. Despite Sydney's development, these waterways, with their unique landscape character, have been preserved, forming part of the city's cultural landscape.

## CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

### *Living in Water Landscapes*

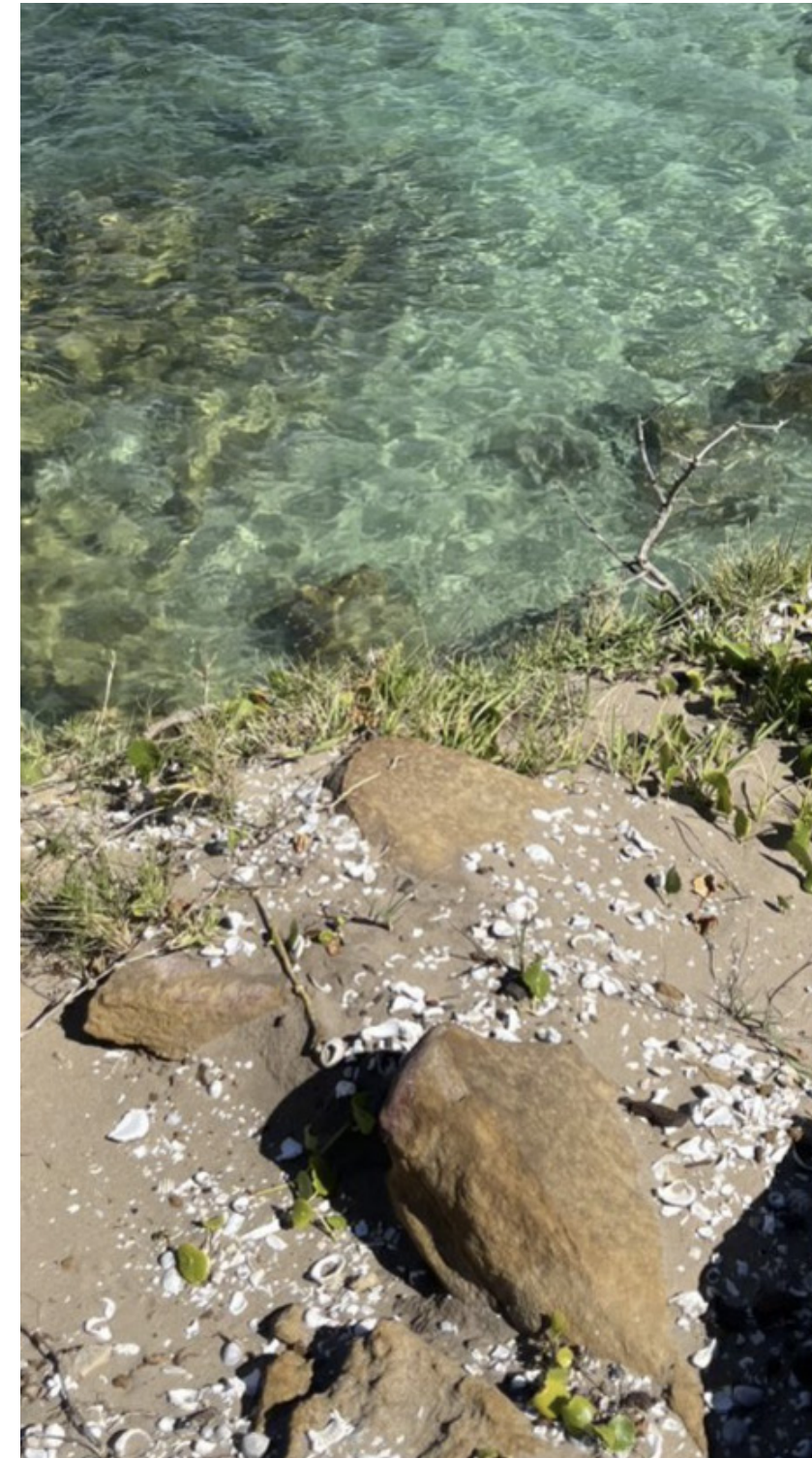
The waterways of the Kurnell Peninsular and Botany Bay create a unique environment that influence how people experience, interact, and live with diverse landscape that is Country.

Gweagal, Bidjigal, Gadigal, Wangal, and Gameygal peoples were living in and visiting the water landscapes across the wider region for thousands of years, when the ocean shoreline was kilometres further east and the creeks and rivers close to the current coastline were still freshwater.

Reminders of these ancient times in the Eastern suburbs landscape are stone hearth near the Randwick UNSW Campus and Prince of Wales Hospital dated to about 8,500 years and a fireplace on Wollie Creek, near the junction of the Cooks River, next to Tempe House, dated to about 10,500 years when the Cooks River was still a freshwater stream at this location. As well as being lower than current levels, the ocean once rose higher across the sandy landscape of south eastern Sydney, allowing a dugong to travel into the area near Alexandra Canal where it was hunted and eaten by First Nations peoples around 6,000 years ago.

The rolling sand hills, wetlands, sandy marshes, mangroves, estuaries and waterways of the south east Sydney region shifted and changed over tens of thousands of years to reach close to their current form about 8,000 - 6,000 years ago. There is a midden at Tempe on the northern side of the river from around 4,500 years ago, when the Tempe section of the Cooks River was probably in its current form, but further south towards Botany Bay, was still taking shape.

Contemporary Aboriginal community members descending from people living in the area pre-colonisation as well as Aboriginal people from across New South Wales are connected to these water landscapes in many ways, such as through kinship relations; growing up in the area and learning to swim and fish; living daily with the water landscapes and sensing the spirit of the place; working to ensure the environment and cultural sites are looked after and remembering and sharing stories of important First Nations peoples such as Bennelong and Mahroot.



*Walk on Country, 2023 (Source: Yerrabingin)*



*Stone Hearth, 2019 (Source: Randwick Council)*

## CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

### *Berewalgal Arrival*

In the late 1700s the Botany Bay area was home to several Aboriginal groups who called the area *gwea* or *gamai*. Kameygal lived and camped near the entrance of the Cooks River and along the north shore of Botany Bay and Gweagal lived on the south bay around Kurnell. The estimated population of the area in 1788 was approximately 1000 - 1200 peoples.

Botany Bay was the location of the 1770 landing of the British *Endeavour* expedition and subsequent arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. The interactions and encounters recorded by the Europeans, the *Berewalgal* (people from far away) and remembered by Aboriginal people of this time tell us of their different beliefs and lifestyles. The early relationships and negotiations witness each group expressing their culture, with misunderstanding and mistrust leading to increased conflict over time.

British people who arrived as part of the First Fleet recorded their observations of Aboriginal people and lifestyles. Lady Penrhyn's ship surgeon Arthur Bowes Smyth noted 'their huts or wigwams are dispersed about and were joined by 'cat paths' leading from one hut to another' and Marine Captain Watkin Tench noted an Aboriginal 'village' near the mouth of Cooks River as

'more than a dozen houses {gunyah or bark huts}, and perhaps five times that number of people; being the most considerable establishment that we are acquainted with in the country.'

The journal of Watkin Tench recounts the mostly peaceful meetings between *Berewalgal* of the First Fleet and Aboriginal people. The following passage, however, reveals the attitude of the *Berewalgal* considering themselves to be superior to Aboriginal people, which inevitably led to conflict over time:

*"We had several more interviews with natives, which ended in so friendly a manner, that we began to entertain strong hopes of bringing about a connection with them. Our first object was to win their affections, and our next to convince them of the superiority we possessed for without the latter, the former we know would be of little importance."*

The British belief that they could claim land and resources, without understanding or acknowledging the connection Aboriginal people had to the land for tens of thousands of years prior to their arrival, and the differing world views of ownership, kinship, belonging and relationships to the natural world, led to conflict that in some ways is still part of the colonial landscape of Australia.

Colonisation also brought changes to the water landscapes, with new industries in the area through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries altering the flow and direction of waterways with dams, canals and pollutants entering the waterways, leading to severe reduction in marine life. The shorelines, riverbeds and rocky areas around the creeks and coast have also been substantially altered, limiting access to the waterways, filling in wetlands and swamp areas, redirecting waterways.



*View of the Heads from end of Cooks River (Source: State Library)*

## CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

### *Preserved Places*

The existence of the waterways in the Sydney region influenced land usage and development over time, from places of mobility, food sources and habitation pre-colonisation, to places of industry, refuge and adaption through the 18th and 19th centuries to places of pollution and abandonment in the 20th, to places of retreat and regeneration in the 21st century. Though the course and health of the waterways changed over time as Sydney developed, their unique landscape character meant that they were preserved from absolute development and continue to form part of the cultural landscape of modern Sydney.

The story of Kameygal man Mahroot can help us understand the experience of Aboriginal people in the Botany area through the nineteenth century. Mahroot was born at the Cooks river mouth (*Gumannan*) on the north shore of Kamay in 1793.

Mahroot found his way to make a living in the colonial setting by working on whaling and sealing ships that travelled from Sydney down the south coast to Tasmania and Macquarie Island. Mahroot had to petition to be paid for his first voyage. He addressed his petition to Governor Macquarie in 1811, it was the first known civil case by

an Aboriginal person. Mahroot was eventually paid in wages and goods. Over time, Mahroot became a 'Boatsteerer' and was paid equal to white men.

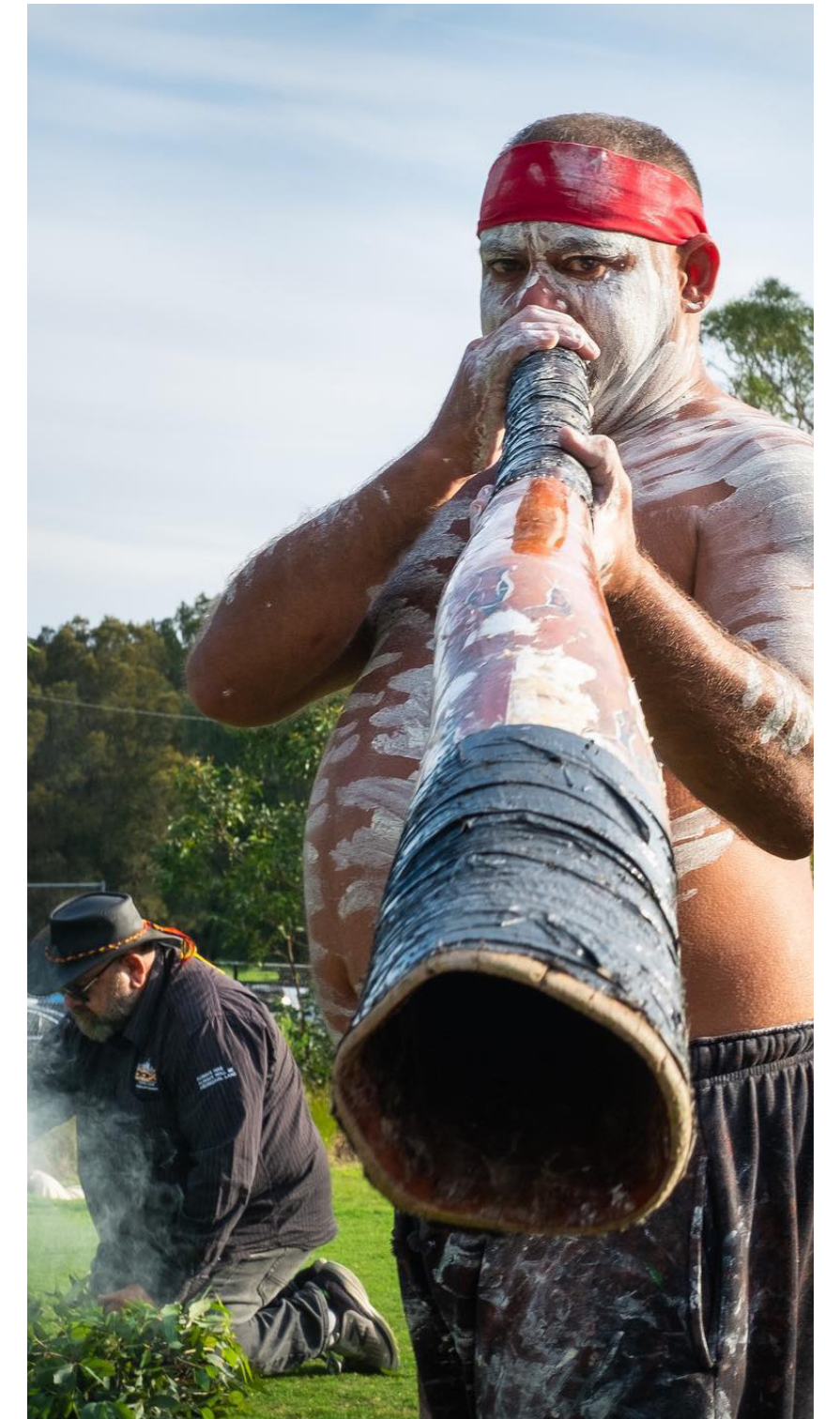
Mahroot was also successful in his petition to have a piece of land granted to him on the north shore of Kamay. The land was close to a creek running into the bay at Bumborah Point, next to what is today Port Botany. Mahroot lived there with other Aboriginal people, making a living fishing and taking European people on fishing tours. Towards the end of his life, Mahroot lived on the grounds of Sir Joseph Banks Hotel and when he died in 1850 he was buried in an Aboriginal burial gound in Botany. Mahroot's connection to and knowledge of the ocean and waterways meant he could make a living in the rapidly changing world and successfully navigate the Berewalgal world to secure his own place to live within a totally different framework of ownership than his own culture.

Contemporary activities that are continuing and regenerating Kamegal, Gweagal, Cadigal, Wangal, and Bidjigal culture are run by groups such as the Cooks River Alliance and Gamay Rangers. The Gamay Rangers are caring for Country in Kamay and areas owned by

La Perouse Aboriginal Land Council undertaking natural and cultural resource management work.

The Cooks River Alliance is formed by local councils in the Cooks River Valley area and work on environmental and cultural projects in the region. The Alliance works to support and promote Aboriginal connections to Country, such as through commissioning the cultural heritage studies, oral history projects, and community projects such as the Wurridjal Festival, which includes cultural, environmental and creative activities for the local community. The festival is held at the time of the year to mark the season when *wurridjal* (mullet) enter the Cooks River as part of their reproduction journey.

Contemporary associations of Aboriginal people to the area expressed in oral histories note the tranquility and retreat offered by the waterways, the opportunity they provide to learn about Country in an urban setting; the gratitude people feel that cultural and natural sites have survived and the shared responsibility of all people living in the region to care for Country.



*Wurridjal Festival, 2021 (Source: Cooks River Alliance)*