



Office of  
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*Research resources for Aboriginal heritage*

## Aboriginal people living and working on the NSW coast: A historical review



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Aboriginal readers are warned that this publication contains the names and images of some Aboriginal people who are deceased.

**Cover image: Aboriginal houses at Roseby Park, NSW.  
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Published by:

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ISBN 978 1 74293 939 1

OEH 2012/0945

December 2012

## Foreword

The conservation of Aboriginal heritage is moving from a 'site based' approach to one which emphasises past lifestyles. This resource paper is one of a collection of papers covering aspects of past Aboriginal life in NSW. Each paper points to the heritage places and landscapes that represent these aspects of past life.

The object of this 'cultural life' approach is to ensure that all aspects of past Aboriginal cultural life in NSW are covered by our heritage protection system. Some may best be conserved in the form of objects (e.g. stone artefacts), some others may best be conserved as Aboriginal Places (e.g. sacred waterholes or old mission sites). The resource sheets are designed to aid us in thinking about what the particular heritage 'footprint' of each aspect of past Aboriginal cultural life is, how best it can be conserved, and how it can continue to be part of the lived Aboriginal culture in present-day NSW.

This resource paper considers the ways Aboriginal people have used particular coastal places and landscapes in the recent past. It shows that the beaches, dunes, headlands, estuaries and waters of coastal NSW contain many 'footprints' of Aboriginal cultural life. Aboriginal people continue to maintain cultural connections to all of these heritage places and landscapes, although they may have lost physical access to many of them.

The 'footprint' of Aboriginal heritage in coastal areas include government reserves and stations, as well as the less formal spaces of fringe camps, pastoral camps, and beach camps used while travelling, fishing or holidaying (such as Christmas camps). These landscapes were also places of work – places where people caught fish, shell fish and bait to sell or trade, collected shells to make artwork from, or lived while they worked in local agricultural, timber or maritime industries. They are places where families met, communities gathered and children learnt about Country, and in some places these practices continue. The coastline is also rich with past and present pathways which connect these living and working places.

Places that are or were of 'special significance' to Aboriginal people can be declared 'Aboriginal Places' which are protected under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. They provide an opportunity to conserve these 'footprints' of Aboriginal cultural life. A number of declared Aboriginal Places already exist in coastal NSW, including the former reserve on Ukerebagh Island, and camping places at Bermagui waterhole, Barlings Beach, Sandon Point, Saltwater and Farquhar Park. Other coastal Aboriginal Places conserve burial grounds, ceremonial places, shell middens, sacred sites and the landscapes of dreaming stories.

This resource paper helps us to understand how the importance of many coastal places today is connected with their historical significance. It provides support for the nomination of possible Aboriginal Places in areas such as Cabbage Tree Island, Mystery Bay, Boundary Creek, Hill 60, the Cricket Ground, Potato Point, and the areas around Red Rock, Corindi and Arrawarra Headland, and many more places along the coast that are equally important to Aboriginal people.

A full index to place names is included at the end of this document to guide readers to information about particular places.

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## Introduction

The New South Wales coastal landscape is an environment of intense significance to many Aboriginal people. For most of the post-contact period, some coastal spaces have remained accessible to Aboriginal people while elsewhere Country was being increasingly occupied by settlers, either for towns, or for agricultural, mining or forestry purposes. Coastal land, largely seen as not useful or unproductive, was for a long time left vacant by settlers, enabling Aboriginal people to live or camp by the sea while remaining out of sight, and working in local industries.

Whether they lived permanently in the coastal environment, or camped by the beach during particular periods of the year, the continuing accessibility of many coastal spaces until the mid to late twentieth century enabled Aboriginal people to maintain a connection to Sea Country. The sea, shores and estuaries of the coast provide a source of food, which during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a necessary supplement to inadequate government rations. Sea Country can be a hunting place, collecting place, meeting place, camping place, teaching place, spiritual place. Susan Dale Donaldson's account of the complex relationship of Aboriginal people of the state's south coast with their Sea Country is broadly true for Aboriginal people along the entire NSW coast:

Fishing, considered by some as a recreational activity, is for many Aboriginal people... a means to feed families and reconnect with traditional lands.

Resources collection places are closely related to living and camping places, as well as teaching and work places. Where families camped, they make use of nearby natural resources. Where families worked, they make use of nearby natural resources, and where natural resources are being collected, elders pass on traditional ecological knowledge to the next generation, teaching them how to collect, prepare and cook/make, the food, medicine or object.<sup>1</sup>

Increasing mobility of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people brought about by a rise in car ownership during the second half of the twentieth century, and a growing emphasis on the coastal landscape as a summer tourist destination for non-Aboriginal people, changed the ways the coast was used. Increasing demand for coastal spaces for non-Aboriginal dwelling and recreational purposes, in the form of expanded and new townships, caravan parks and commercial camping grounds, holiday accommodation, and national parks, has meant that Aboriginal people no longer have the same ability to access and use some of the coastal spaces that they had continued to use for over a century and a half since 1788. Changes to fisheries legislation have also had an impact on Aboriginal people's access to fisheries resources, and therefore ongoing cultural practices in Sea Country.

This paper explores the historical context of Aboriginal people living and working along the NSW coast, and the different ways in which that environment was and continues to be significant. In particular, it highlights some of the places along the state's coast that are important to Aboriginal people for different reasons, and which Aboriginal people have maintained connections to. A number of these places, such as Barlings Beach, Saltwater and Ukerebagh Island, are already protected as Aboriginal Places, a gazettal which acknowledges and protects their significant values to Aboriginal people. Many more coastal locations could also be protected as Aboriginal Places in the future. This

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Dale Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla by Aboriginal People: Stage Two Eurobodalla Aboriginal cultural heritage study*, Public report prepared for Eurobodalla Shire Council and NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, 2006, p. 120.

document provides historical context for Aboriginal people's use of the coast, which will help when preparing nominations for future Aboriginal Places in coastal areas.

## Scope and definitions

This paper explores Aboriginal connections to and uses of Sea Country in the period since 1788, with a focus on the twentieth century.

For coastal Aboriginal people, there is no distinction between land and sea: 'Country' extends offshore to include the sea and its resources. This holistic view 'of continuous land and sea Country "as far as the eye can see"' means that Aboriginal people conceptualise the coast very differently to non-Indigenous Australians, and to the worldview which underpins the Australian legal system.<sup>2</sup> This paper consequently uses a broad definition of 'Sea Country', as a term which includes the land and waters in the coastal zone of NSW, including the ocean, bays, shores, dunal environment and coastal estuaries and their shores. It considers the living and working patterns of Aboriginal people from coastal NSW as they relate to the coastal environment, without imposing any artificial boundaries on where the coast might end or begin. For people on the state's south coast for example, seasonal work in the timber and vegetable picking industries might have taken them away from the immediate coastal area, but facilitated travel throughout the region, with many Aboriginal people camping on beaches or rivers and living off the sea as they travelled through the landscape between jobs. Similarly, the rivers of northern NSW connected Aboriginal people living on islands or along the rivers with the sea.

This paper is not comprehensive, and is not intended to be – it highlights some of the major themes in the history of Aboriginal people's engagement with the coastal environment, particularly in the twentieth century, and draws its examples from a number of coast-based communities. It is drawn from published material – memoirs and oral histories of and by Aboriginal people – and therefore only discusses those experiences and places that are described in these publications. Those which form the basis of this discussion are just a small proportion of the overall activities and experiences of Aboriginal people in the NSW coastal environment, and of coastal Aboriginal communities. The spelling of Aboriginal words and names has been taken from the publications.

For the purposes of this paper, the term *fishing* denotes all activities related to the use of aquatic biological resources. It includes catching fish, marine mammals and reptiles, and collecting marine resources such as shellfish, crustaceans, worms and plant material.

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<sup>2</sup> C&R Consulting, *As far as the eye can see: Indigenous interests in the East Marine Planning Region*, Department of Environment and Water Resources, Canberra, 2007, p. 7; 'Culture and Communication', p. 115; *Sea Country – an Indigenous perspective: The South-east Regional Marine Plan, Assessment Report*, National Oceans Office, Hobart, 2002, p. 3; Michael Dodson in Susan Dale Donaldson, Sonia Bazzacco, and Benjamin Cruse, *Land and Sea Country Plan: For Aboriginal people with traditional, historical and contemporary connections to land and sea country within the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council region, southeast NSW*, Supported by NSW Southern Rivers CMA and DEWHA, 2010, p. 5

# 1. Access to land and resources in Sea Country

Many of the mapped places are located on what was vacant Crown land adjoining the settlements of Corindi Beach, Red Rock and Arrawarra. It appears that, in the past, [local Gumbaingirr people] were able to access these areas without the need for permission and with little scrutiny from landowners. This applies to areas along creeklines in the western boundary of Corindi beach that were once used for catching eels, fish and collecting plant foods. Beaches were accessible in the same way. Here, people could travel freely between camps and access a wide range of resources.<sup>3</sup>

## Availability of coastal spaces

Not long after 1788 European settlers and explorers began moving up and down the NSW coast in search of fertile land and timber resources, gradually colonising areas outside of Sydney. Shipping was the primary means of early colonial transport, and harbour and river front locations were the first to be occupied by Europeans. However much of the land bordering the sea was deemed unsuitable for European agriculture, and so the coastal strip with its sandy soils was 'initially by-passed by the white invasion'.<sup>4</sup> Coastal areas such as 'the sandy and rocky shores, the estuarine areas, the swamps and the coastal lakes' as well as mountain areas, which also had little value to non-Aboriginal settlers, therefore remained largely accessible to Aboriginal people. The abundant plant and marine food available in this landscape made continued access to the coast 'critical' to Aboriginal peoples' survival in the middle and late nineteenth century, as more and more of their Country was occupied by the white settlers.<sup>5</sup> Even from the 1870s, when coastal industries such as timber production, ship building, fishing and shellfishing all intensified in the Forster area, the sand-dunes and many beaches remained 'relatively unfrequented by whites', and were therefore places Aboriginal people felt they could withdraw to.<sup>6</sup>

By the early 1900s, despite the substantial expansion of white settlement throughout the lower-north coast region, there continued to be:

... substantial tracts of coastline which remained unsettled and hence more or less available to Aboriginal people as places to camp and visit, places to obtain seafood and enjoy the coastal lifestyle. Along with the bush covered hill country, these were places where white surveillance could largely be avoided. They were areas that were marginal to the settler agricultural economy and they remained unsegregated insofar as they were freely available to both Aboriginal and white people, both of whose activities there remained largely uncontrolled by white authorities.<sup>7</sup>

This was the case along the entire length of the state's coastline. Although non-Aboriginal settlers were increasingly developing industries located on or near the coast – such as commercial fishing, harbour building, forestry and mining operations – few white people tended to live on or visit much of the land close to beaches and

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony English, *The Sea and the Rock Gives Us a Feed: Mapping and Managing Gumbaingirr Wild Resource Use Places*, NPWS, Sydney, 2002, p. 21

<sup>4</sup> Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent, *Mapping Attachment: A spatial approach to Aboriginal post-contact heritage*, Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, 2004, p. 18  
<[www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/cultureheritage/MappingAttachmentPart2.pdf](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/cultureheritage/MappingAttachmentPart2.pdf)>

<sup>5</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 16

<sup>6</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 40

<sup>7</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 49

estuaries, leaving available and accessible spaces where Aboriginal people had a fair chance of being undisturbed, their presence and activities ignored by non-Aboriginal settlers. In some areas these were the only spaces left unoccupied by the settlers, meaning that Aboriginal people were pushed onto the coastal fringe; these spaces were not only available and accessible but sometimes the only places that were.

Historians describe this process occurring from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. On the far north coast, Aboriginal people were 'pushed back onto the fringes of coastal settlements where the land was not suitable for agriculture, or onto islands in the Clarence River which were prone to flooding'.<sup>8</sup> In the Illawarra area south of Sydney, from the 1850s onwards, European settlement 'pushed Illawarra people to the fringes of their country where they occupied the land that was unsuitable for European farming; particularly the coast and swamps around Tom Thumb Lagoon'.<sup>9</sup>

At Port Stephens on the lower north coast of NSW, Viola Brown grew up at Soldiers Point, which was completely isolated during the early to mid-twentieth century:

In the early days it was very quiet around here because we were more or less isolated, there were no roads into Soldiers Point in those days. In fact there was no road in here until I was 14 years old, so we had to be pretty well self-sufficient in so many ways.<sup>10</sup>

**Unofficial settlements:** Some coastal spaces became permanent or semi-permanent camps; some were sanctioned and institutionalised by the government, gazetted as Aboriginal reserves or missions. Others were less official, remaining 'off the map'. Such was the case in the Corindi area on the state's mid-north coast, where Gumbaynggirr<sup>11</sup> people relocated in the 1920s to a place which later became known as the Old Camp, close to Corindi Lake but adjacent to the beach. Gumbaynggirr families lived at the Old Camp until the 1980s, 'outside the direct control of the Aboriginal Protection Board and the reserve system'.<sup>12</sup> This and other coastal spaces used by Gumbaynggirr people for camping, fishing and shell fish collection were located on what was then vacant Crown land, which they were able to access 'without the need for permission and with little scrutiny from landowners'.<sup>13</sup>

**The Cricket Ground:** In some areas informal camping spaces existed close to reserves and missions, where people could live or stay close to other Aboriginal people and families but remain independent of station managers. The 'Cricket Ground' near Wallaga Lake on the far south coast of NSW was one such place. The area around Merriwina Creek, on the north of Wallaga Lake adjacent to the ocean beach, was named the 'Cricket Ground' because it was used by the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal cricket team around the turn of the twentieth century. It was also used as a temporary camping ground by those who were banned from living at or visiting the

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<sup>8</sup> Johanna Kijas, *There were always people here: A history of Yuraygir National Park*, Department of Environment and Climate Change NSW, Sydney, 2009, p. 19

<sup>9</sup> Sue Wesson, *A History of Aboriginal People of the Illawarra, 1770–1970*, Department of Environment and Conservation NSW, Sydney, 2005, p. 25

<sup>10</sup> Viola Brown in *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Port Stephens*, Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, 2004, p. 1

<sup>11</sup> Gumbaynggirr spelling taken from Steve Morelli, Gumbaynggirr Bijaar Jandaygam, Ngaawa Gugaarrigam. *Gumbaynggirr Dictionary and Learner's Grammar*, Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative, Nambucca heads 2008

<sup>12</sup> English, *The Sea and the Rock*, p. 16

<sup>13</sup> English, *The Sea and the Rock*, p. 21



Wallaga Lake Mission, or those who wanted to visit family without staying at the Mission.<sup>14</sup> The Cricket Ground, like most other coastal camping spots used by Aboriginal people throughout the twentieth century, was not only close to people living in the Wallaga Lake Mission, but had fresh water running through it, and provided access to both the lake and ocean beach, meaning people could sustain themselves on fresh seafood while staying there. Alex Walker recalls people camping at the 'Cricket Ground' while visiting family who, like him, lived at Wallaga Lake:

The manager at Wallaga Lake Reserve during the 1950s was hard on people; so many people camped at the Cricket ground, where they knew they could stay. There was fresh water entering the Cricket ground. The lake and nearby rocks were good for collecting foods. There were loads of people camped under the trees during school holidays. There was a good road into the cricket ground, with a bridge over the watercourse.<sup>15</sup>

**Seasonal camping:** Aboriginal people who were engaged in seasonal work such as vegetable picking and other agricultural work on the south coast often lived on or near farms, but camped on the beach during other periods of the year. Paul Hudson grew up on the south coast in the 1950s, and recalled that:

We'd pick beans for three to four months of the year and after we'd finished the seasonal work we'd go down to Potato Point by the ocean and camp, we used to camp for about four to six months at a time and all we did was fish and just live off the ocean mainly, gathering mutton fish [abalone] all the time. That was a sort of everyday thing for food, fishing and that. Just done that for about thirty years, thirty-five years all of our family, plus there was a lot of other families that used to do exactly the same as us. You know there were hundreds of people that used to do the seasonal work and camp and do the same as we did.<sup>16</sup>

Coastal camping spots were also used for regular repeat visits, as well as for permanent accommodation. On the far south coast in particular, participants in the *Eurobodalla Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Study*, conducted in the early 2000s, recalled regularly camping at many spots along the coast on weekends and holidays, and when they or their parents were between paid employment. Margaret Harris, for example, recalled camping with her parents and extended family at Mystery Bay (south of Narooma) on weekends and during school holidays: 'They would hang a tarp between two trees and feed off the sea. They ate bimbulla sandwiches, curried or rissole muttonfish. They would also visit the Stewart family at Mummuga Lake'.<sup>17</sup> Georgina Parsons similarly recalled camping with her family 'in the vicinity of Kellys Lake, in the bush behind Merringo Beach', during the 1940s and '50s. Other locations on the south coast which were popular campsites for Aboriginal people throughout the twentieth century included Potato Point, Lake Brou, Broulee, Tomakin, Garland Town, many spots around Batemans Bay and the Cricket Ground near Wallaga Lake.<sup>18</sup>

Families such as these who occupied these gaps between places of white settlement were both living on Country and living off that Country's natural resources. It was people like this who felt the biggest impacts from the later 'filling up' process of the

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<sup>14</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, pp. 117–8

<sup>15</sup> Alex Walker in Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 118

<sup>16</sup> Paul Hudson in Beryl Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish: The Surviving Culture of Aboriginal People and Abalone on the South Coast of New South Wales*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, p. 32

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Harris in Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 26

<sup>18</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*

coastal area, in which white settlement expanded to encompass the entire coast, leaving no 'in between' spaces for Aboriginal people to continue living and camping on. However the local government bodies that were formed through the 'filling up' process often now employ Aboriginal people to work on Country and with communities.

**Aboriginal reserves:** Elsewhere Aboriginal people lived by the coast in government reserves, managed stations and on missions. Many of these reserves were established at the request of Aboriginal people keen to secure title over land they already occupied, and which they were often already cultivating.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such institutional spaces were fluid. Reserves were revoked as the land on which they were situated became increasingly demanded by white settlers, and missions were also revoked to make way for white settlement.<sup>20</sup> By the 1920s and '30s, there were fewer Aboriginal reserves but those which remained were larger; the 'squeezing out' process of the early 1900s had the effect of pushing Aboriginal families onto fewer larger reserves, or again into the landscape. Both unofficial camps and these larger reserves were situated on spaces still untouched by white settlement, allowing Aboriginal people to continue using these areas for living and working on and collecting food and other cultural resources.

Some of the larger coastal reserves include Roseby Park, north of Jervis Bay, where a reserve was gazetted at the turn of the century and Aboriginal people were moved to from Coolangatta Estate in the early 1900s, where they and their families had worked since the 1820s.<sup>21</sup> On the south side of Jervis Bay, Wreck Bay was not gazetted as a reserve until 1952, although it had come under the administration of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board in 1928.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere on the coast, Wallaga Lake became a substantial reserve of 330 acres in 1891;<sup>23</sup> seven acres at La Perouse was gazetted in 1885 – the only Aboriginal reserve in Sydney – and Cabbage Tree Island on the far north coast was made a reserve in 1893.

## Living off the sea

When living or camping by the sea, Aboriginal people spent their time fishing, swimming and collecting shellfish and crustaceans. Men, women and children all engaged, and continue to engage, in resource collection. Some fish or marine species such as worms and abalone might have been sold commercially, or traded as bait with recreational fishermen for small amounts of income (see section 2). Some Aboriginal people also lived off the sea's resources. Until the second half of the twentieth century, while large tracts of coastal land were still unclaimed by white settlement, living on certain parts of the coast was therefore attractive because it was possible, because it enabled Aboriginal people to continue cultural practices, because it enabled a continuation of spiritual attachment to Sea Country and because its resources could be a source of livelihood – as a supplement to rations, sole source of food or a source of income.

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<sup>19</sup> Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal politics in New South Wales 1770–1972*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996

<sup>20</sup> Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 261–2, 332, 336

<sup>21</sup> Brian J Egloff, *Wreck Bay: An Aboriginal fishing community*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies: Canberra, 1981, p. 18; Michael Bennett, 'A long time working: Aboriginal labour on the Coolangatta Estate, 1822–1901', paper presented to *The past is before us*, University of Sydney, 30 June– 2 July 2005

<sup>22</sup> Egloff, *Wreck Bay*, p. 25

<sup>23</sup> Much of this land was later revoked



Portion of map showing location and boundaries of Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Reserve in 1925 (AR 13939 – marked in green tint). State Records NSW: CGS 8258 [27/3799], box 13/999

Ella Simon recalls her time camping at Saltwater as ‘the days in my life that were always so enjoyable.’ She and others collected pipis and black periwinkles while men such as the local Tommy Boomer fished in the surf, and everyone shared ‘a great feast’.<sup>24</sup> On the south coast, Georgina Parsons also camped with her family in the bush behind Meringo Beach, near Kellys Lake (north of Tuross Head), during the 1940s and ‘50s. She recalled that ‘the family collected all kinds of seafood as well as food from the surrounding bush’.<sup>25</sup>

For Aboriginal people, fishing anywhere in NSW – whether on ocean beaches or coastal estuaries or inland rivers and lakes – has always been about more than simply collecting food. It can be deeply spiritual, a chance for people to connect with their ancestors. It provides Elders with opportunities to pass their knowledge and skills down to younger generations, and for these younger generations to learn about Country, learn to manage Country, connect with Country and their Elders.<sup>26</sup> So, throughout the twentieth century there was a spiritual and community element that was integral to living or camping on the coast and this continues today. Sharing food and marine resources throughout families and communities was, and is, a critical part of Aboriginal coastal life.

**Shellfish:** Shellfish such as pipis, bimbullas and muttonfish (abalone) were easily obtainable, and feature prominently in all accounts of Sea Country food collection.

<sup>24</sup> Ella Simon, *Through My Eyes*, Rigby, Sydney, 1978, pp. 111–112

<sup>25</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 73

<sup>26</sup> Alex Roberts, *Aboriginal Women’s Fishing in New South Wales: A thematic history*, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW, Sydney, 2010

Women and children often collected shellfish while others fished – whether they were visiting Cronulla beach from La Perouse, living at Wreck Bay, or camping at Saltwater.<sup>27</sup> For Viola Brown at Port Stephens, living off the sea was not an occasional event, but a necessity of everyday life – seafood such as fish, shellfish, oysters and crabs was easily available to her family, ‘whereas meat was a luxury’.<sup>28</sup>

**Plant life:** Living off the resources of Sea Country was not limited to fish, shell fish and crustaceans but included coastal plants as well. Pigface, a ground-covering plant with purple flowers and dark red fruit was popular among children, as were berries and honeysuckle banksias. Pigface grows on beach dunes, and is therefore closely associated with Sea Country food. On the north coast, ‘whenever Byron Bay Arakwal people visit beaches to feast on pipis or fish, they gather pigface fruits as well’.<sup>29</sup> Reuben Ardler from Wreck Bay on the south coast recalled that ‘when we were swimming all day in the corner of the creek at Summercloud, lunch would basically be pigface’.<sup>30</sup> Geebung, a shrub with yellow flowers and small egg-shaped fruit were also popular along the coast. Tina Mongta recalled eating ‘a heap of bush tucker’ on the south coast in the 1950s and ‘60s, including ‘geebungs, wild cherries, (and) wondarmas (apple berries)’.<sup>31</sup>

For coastal Aboriginal people today, ensuring the sustainability of and continued access to these plants is equally as important as managing fisheries and other marine resources.



Pigface flowers. Photo: B Collier

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<sup>27</sup> Egloff, *Wreck Bay*, p. 33; *La Perouse: The place, the people and the sea: A collection of writing by members of the Aboriginal Community*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988, p.39; Patricia Davis-Hurst, *Sunrise Station*, Sunbird Publications, Taree, NSW, 1996, p. 62

<sup>28</sup> Viola Brown in *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Port Stephens*, p. 4

<sup>29</sup> Tim Low, *Place of Plenty: Culturally useful plants around Byron Bay*, Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, 2003, p. 13

<sup>30</sup> Reuben Ardler in *Wreck Bay Community and Cath Renwick, Geebungs and snake whistles: Koori people and plants of Wreck Bay*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2001

<sup>31</sup> Tina Mongta in Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 44



**Hill 60:** For the people living near Port Kembla, in the Illawarra area south of Sydney, fishing, gathering food and playing on the beach were part of daily life. Prior to WWII, several Aboriginal families lived on Hill 60. After being forcibly removed to create defence land during the war, many of them moved to the nearby 'official camps', on land which was not reserved for Aboriginal people and which they shared with non-Aboriginal people. At Hill 60 and the Official Camps, and later the housing at nearby Coomaditchy, Aboriginal people either lived off, or supplemented their incomes and rations with, a constant supply of seafood. The beaches of Port Kembla were their fishing and collecting grounds, and for children, their playgrounds. Muriel Davis grew up at Hill 60 and later, the Official Camps. She recalled that:

We never went hungry. Our weekends would always consist of at least one walk to the beach and to the rocks to gather pipis and muttonfish, which is also known as abalone. We gather conks, periwinkles, crabs and any other small shellfish which could be used for bait.

Sometimes I would take a sheet of tin to the beach when digging for pipis and I would light a fire on the beach, put the tin on the fire and cook the pipis straight out of the sand. The older men would often dive for lobsters and they would walk or get a ride for many miles to prevent the continuous diving into one area which interferes with breeding and jeopardises future food gathering.

Dad and my eldest brother would go and fish for groper or whatever they could get. And we used to go and get the pipis from Port Kembla Beach. Mum used to give me a sugar bag and I'd take my sister Alma with me and a few of the other kids that lived on the camps. And when we got to the beach we had to crawl through the barbed wire where the soldiers had put it right along the Port Kembla beach, because of the threat that the Japanese were going to invade Hill 60 [during World War Two].<sup>32</sup>



By the 1950s, Aboriginal people had been removed from Hill 60, which was used by the military. Photo: From the collections of the Wollongong City Library and the Illawarra Historical Society.

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<sup>32</sup> Muriel Davis in *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Wollongong*, Department of Environment and Conservation NSW, Sydney, 2004, pp. 2–3

This constant use of the beaches and surrounding landscape for food collection and recreation is typical of Aboriginal coastal communities throughout the twentieth century. The beach was a social place and a source of food, and for those who sold or traded their catch, a place of employment.

**Christmas camps:** Many Aboriginal people in biographies and oral histories fondly remember the Christmas and Easter camps they and their families enjoyed while living on reserves and missions along the NSW coast. Christmas camps on the beach were a common part of reserve life for Aboriginal people who lived along the NSW coast during the twentieth century. Christmas camps, in which entire communities would spend several weeks camping together on the coast, were significant, and highly anticipated, for several reasons. Firstly, they offered Aboriginal people a chance to 'get away'. For those living in managed stations, Christmas camps offered rare opportunities to spend time away from the controls and constraints of reserve life, and away from the station manager. For others, Christmas camps were a place where people could 'get away from town', or take a break from seasonal work.<sup>33</sup> Patricia Davis Hurst 'always found it amazing' that the manager of Purfleet reserve allowed people to camp at Saltwater each year:

This was the only time in the lives of the local Kooris where they could get away from the prying eyes of the manager and the Welfare... It broke the monotony of living under extremely harsh conditions for the rest of the year.<sup>34</sup>



Location of Christmas camps, Saltwater (OEH)

Secondly, Christmas camps were fondly remembered as fun times. Away from station managers or townspeople, Aboriginal people of all ages were free to enjoy the coastal environment, and spent their time swimming, playing games and sports, fishing and collecting marine resources. Families and communities who might normally have lived apart, reunited at Christmas time on the coast, making Christmas camps an opportunity to 'catch up' or spend time with people who they wouldn't otherwise have seen on a regular basis. Della Walker's description of Christmases at Yamba captures this sense of fun and freedom:

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<sup>33</sup> Kijas, *There were always people here*, p. 64

<sup>34</sup> Davis-Hurst, *Sunrise Station*, pp. 158–9

Every Christmas time they used to come down to Yamba and have the whole six weeks there. We'd play games at night time. There were big sandhills and oh, how we enjoyed ourselves. There were about sixty or seventy, I suppose, used to come. Two big truck loads full of our Aboriginal people from all over at Casino. And they used to enjoy their holidays. We'd go to the beach gathering pippies and oysters. We thought that it was lovely. When our friends came from Casino we were overjoyed to see them. And it was there that I came to know the friends I have now.<sup>35</sup>

Charles Moran also enjoyed a Christmas camp on the coast at Hat Head while living at Kempsey in 1948:

There were about 100 of us, all camping for a week and with plenty of fishing, yarning and playing games. It was my first real holiday and the first time in many years that I could really relax and not be thinking about tomorrow. I enjoyed becoming acquainted with more of my relatives, who were all very friendly and welcoming.<sup>36</sup>

The third point of significance of Christmas camps was that they were an opportunity to live and work *on Sea Country*; they were an opportunity for children to learn about their Country and the management of that Country. The community also lived off their Country's resources for the duration of the camps. These times offered a chance to connect with Sea Country, and they were an important occasion to pass on cultural knowledge to younger generations.<sup>37</sup> Through Christmas camps and other seasonal camps on the coast, Aboriginal people who no longer lived permanently on these spaces were able to maintain an ongoing connection to Sea Country and ongoing role in natural resource management (NRM) activities in the coastal environment.

Along the entire NSW coast, certain locations were used by the same Aboriginal communities each year for their Christmas camps, and these same places were often also used at Easter and other times of the year. Aboriginal people knew that these spaces had been bypassed by white settlement, and that their presence there would go unnoticed, and their activities unencumbered. On the north coast of NSW, Saltwater was popular for Christmas and Easter camping for people from Purfleet Reserve,<sup>38</sup> Red Rock was a Christmas camping site for people who lived at Corindi beach,<sup>39</sup> and Yaegl people from Maclean regularly set up their holiday camp around Christmas time on the eastern edge of Lake Arragan.<sup>40</sup> Such camping sites, one historian suggests, 'were usually chosen as 'good food places' where people could get away from town'.<sup>41</sup>

Collecting and eating seafood was a central experience of the Christmas camps. For Patricia Davis Hurst, who described camping at Saltwater as 'a ritual that happened every Christmas and Easter,' the effort of making camps 'was well worth it, because for the next five weeks there would be nothing but swimming and eating all the sea

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<sup>35</sup> Della Walker, *Me and You: The story of Della Walker as told to Tina Coutts*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989, p. 22

<sup>36</sup> Charles Harold Moran, *Talk softly, listen well : profile of a Bundjalung elder*, Southern Cross University Press, Lismore, 2004, p. 90

<sup>37</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 114

<sup>38</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 87

<sup>39</sup> English, *The Sea and the Rock*, p. 19

<sup>40</sup> Kijas, *There were always people here*, p. 64

<sup>41</sup> Kijas, *There were always people here*, p. 64

foods and bush tucker you could eat'.<sup>42</sup> They were an annual occasion for consolidated communal living on Sea Country.

**Boundary Creek:** Aboriginal people living on Cabbage Tree Island usually walked to the beach at Boundary Creek for their Christmas holidays. Mavis Davies and Yvonne Delsignore fondly recall Christmasses spent at Boundary Creek, when 'everyone from the island would go out there to play games on the beach in the afternoon. They were lovely days'.<sup>43</sup> According to Yvonne:

...we'd always look forward to going to Boundary Creek, getting pipis and camping out there on the beach... That was good – we'd have a lot of fun out there. I can remember the shoreline had so much driftwood – there was heaps of driftwood – all the kids would collect it to make the fires on the beach at night. There was plenty of fish at that time.<sup>44</sup>

The Boundary Creek Christmas community was not restricted to people from Cabbage Tree Island only, but families and friends from elsewhere in the region joined in as well. Mavis recalls that 'in the afternoon busloads used to come – all the friends from Casino, Coraki – everywhere'.<sup>45</sup> Sandra Bolt, also from Cabbage Tree Island remembers Christmas times as being 'the happiest times for family gatherings', when 'cousins from Kempsey and Nambucca would come to visit us'.<sup>46</sup>



Boundary Creek was within walking distance of Cabbage Tree Island (OEH).

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<sup>42</sup> Davis-Hurst, *Sunrise Station*, pp. 158–9

<sup>43</sup> Mavis Davies in *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Ballina and Cabbage Tree Island*, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, Sydney, 2007, p. 22

<sup>44</sup> Yvonne Delsignore in *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Ballina and Cabbage Tree Island*, p. 29

<sup>45</sup> Mavis Davies in *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Ballina and Cabbage Tree Island*, p. 22

<sup>46</sup> Sandra Bolt in *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Ballina and Cabbage Tree Island*, p. 11



Ruby Langford, while staying at Cabbage Tree Island, joined the local community for their Christmas camp one year:

On Boxing Day everything was packed up and all the people went out in boats across to the other side and headed towards the beach. We were running along the sand dunes and stuffing ourselves with pig face, a salty fruit which grew in the sand. The older ones had fires going and were cooking boilers of pippies that you could smell for miles. The men played cricket on the sand and kept an eye on the kids swimming. The beach wasn't patrolled so we had to be careful.<sup>47</sup>

The fact that this beach remained unpatrolled when surf lifesaving clubs operated in most towns and popular holiday beaches, suggests that this stretch of the beach was yet to be colonised by non-Indigenous recreational beachgoers, leaving the space free for Aboriginal community gatherings.

**South coast:** On the NSW south coast, many Aboriginal families spent their Christmas holidays camping at Potato Point north of Lake Brou (now in Eurobodalla National Park), or at Mystery Bay south of Narooma, which was within walking distance of Wallaga Lake. Les Simon recalls that at Potato Point, 'they built humpies from bent over saplings, clad in bark, no roof in summer, more like a wind break with a sandy floor. Three people would fit in each one. They caught salmon, lobster, abalone, bumbulas, mussels and conks'.<sup>48</sup> Alan Mongta also recalls catching lobsters and abalone, fishing and being showed old carvings by his uncles.<sup>49</sup> Mystery Bay continues to be used as a Christmas camping place by Aboriginal people from the south coast. Susan Dale Donaldson quotes John Pender:

John was recently sitting on the rocks at Mystery Bay with his 70-year-old uncle [Keith 'Hooks' Page]. His uncle had sat in the precise location as a 12 year old, in the 1940s. John sees him and his family as having 'visiting rights' to Mystery Bay. His contact with Mystery Bay keeps on going, although it is a bit harder to stay there for more than a week due to the camping fees. Christmas 2005, New Years Day was a scorcher, reaching 43 degrees. John described how all the campers, elders and kids, came onto the beach to cool down. All of these koori people have an affinity with that place, as a meeting place for families that have been moved or have relocated to distant towns and cities. Families from Victoria and Sydney, meet up at Mystery Bay, annually. John has brought his children to Mystery Bay to ensure that they meet their relatives. '*...Mystery holds power, power sitting in the land, you can almost hear the corroborees, singing in the bush... it comes to you when you are there...*'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ruby Langford, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, University of Queensland Press, Sydney, 2007, p. 34

<sup>48</sup> Les Simon in Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 81

<sup>49</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 15

<sup>50</sup> John Pender in Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 105



Mystery Bay on the NSW far south coast continues to be an Aboriginal camping place.  
Photo: William Henry Corkhill, Mystery Bay ca1895. National Library of Australia: an2499548-v

### **Expansion of non-Aboriginal coastal settlement in the post-war period**

Dispossession and displacement from the land has been an ongoing feature of the post-contact history and experiences of Aboriginal people in NSW. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were several phases of dispossession driven by government policy and action, which affected Aboriginal people living in different areas in different ways. For example, while some Aboriginal groups in the second half of the nineteenth century lobbied successfully for the land on which they had been cultivating crops to be declared Aboriginal reserves, there was such a demand by non-Aboriginal settlers for agricultural land on the far north coast of NSW that Aboriginal people there 'could not formalise their tenure over any agricultural land on which they may have squatted, or even keep an informal hold, but instead were pushed onto less fertile, sandy campsites'.<sup>51</sup>

In the opening decades of the twentieth century 'the increasing pressure of white land hunger and the Aboriginal Protection Board dispersal policies' brought about even more land dispossessions. On the coast where settlement was concentrated and land was generally arable, this occurred on a 'massive scale'.<sup>52</sup> Competition for agricultural land in the north and far north coasts intensified during this period, and on the south coast, the demands of urban expansion placed new pressures on Aboriginal lands.<sup>53</sup> The growth of towns such as Moruya, Ulladulla and Tomakin 'engulfed many small reserves on the coast',<sup>54</sup> and the construction of a nearby golf course and workers seeking accommodation for the steel works at Port Kembla in

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<sup>51</sup> Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 85

<sup>52</sup> Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 125

<sup>53</sup> Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 136–148

<sup>54</sup> Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 24

the 1920s put new pressures on the residents of Hill 60.<sup>55</sup> As we have seen, these pressures pushed many Aboriginal people out of towns and off their land – onto informal camps on beaches, sand dunes and riverbanks, or into larger coastal reserves such as Wallaga Lake, Roseby Park, Purfleet and Cabbage Tree Island.

**Tourism:** The rapid growth of seaside tourism in NSW from the 1950s onwards created new challenges for Aboriginal people's capacities to live on – and off – Sea Country. The period following WWII had particularly substantial impacts for Aboriginal people in the coastal zone. The massive rise in car ownership and associated construction of new roads made new areas accessible to holidaymakers for the first time.<sup>56</sup> Beach holidays were particularly popular, and became 'the archetypal Australian escape'.<sup>57</sup> Along the NSW coast weekender cottages became holiday houses; camping grounds were formalised by local councils; and caravan parks were built in prime beachfront locations. The process of upgrading informal coastal holiday accommodation continues today, particularly through developing caravan parks. In Sandon Village east of Grafton, local fishing families sold their houses to urban professionals in the 1950s and '60s, just one coastal location in which tourism transformed the local social and cultural dynamics.<sup>58</sup>

Whether they camped, caravanned, built shacks or holiday houses, or simply went to the beach, the hordes of summer tourists who dispersed along the NSW coast during this period 'discovered' and transformed the coastal spaces which Aboriginal people had been continuously living and camping on until this time. Aboriginal camping places such as Mystery Bay were turned into campgrounds managed by local councils; favourite camping spots like Durras Lake and Blackfellows Point were turned into caravan parks;<sup>59</sup> and Saltwater became a public reserve managed by the local Taree Council. In 1958, 180 acres of Aboriginal reserve land in Yamba were revoked to provide 'better tourist access to the foreshores'.<sup>60</sup> The increasing occupation of coastal spaces by non-Aboriginal holiday makers – whether through privatisation of what had been Crown lands or through the creation of reserves to provide formal access to the coast – pushed Aboriginal people off these spaces, just as they had been 'pushed' onto them a century earlier by agricultural expansion and sprawling coastal towns.

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<sup>55</sup> *A History of the Aboriginal People of the Illawarra 1770–1870*, pp. 50–1

<sup>56</sup> Richard White, *On Holidays: A history of getting away in Australia*, Pluto Press, Melbourne, 2005, pp. 134–5

<sup>57</sup> White, *On Holidays*, p. 136

<sup>58</sup> Kijas, *There were always people here*, p. 60

<sup>59</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 34, Marg Harris in Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 80

<sup>60</sup> Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 298



Barlings Beach Tourist Park, Tomakin sits next to the Barlings Beach Aboriginal Place.  
Photo: Mike Cufer, OEH

**Revoking Aboriginal reserves:** In 1949 a section of Wallaga Lake Reserve known as Bridge Point (now called Akolele) was revoked by the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) and given to local whites for holiday cottages.<sup>61</sup> Fourteen years later, in 1963, a further 21 acres were revoked.<sup>62</sup> The reserve was now just a tiny portion of its original 330 acres. The smaller size further restricted the abilities of its residents to access important cultural resource places. The revocation of reserves or parts of reserves, like that which occurred at Wallaga Lake, often made it more difficult for people living there to access certain places, because land which formed part of their pathways to the coast or riverbanks was often privatised and fenced off.

The privatisation of parts of the reserve made Eileen Morgan, a resident of Wallaga Lake, 'real sad', because 'we used to be able to go to all these different places around Wallaga Lake to go fishing, and now we can't'.<sup>63</sup>

**Fingal Head:** In 1969, a community of Aboriginal and Pacific Islander people who lived at Fingal Head on the state's far north coast were threatened by attempts to rezone their land for Gold Coast-style development. Some of these people owned their properties, some lived on the reserve, while others held long-term leases or permissive occupancies. The latter group successfully fought for the right to convert their tenures to freehold, gradually purchasing the land over a twenty-year period. Their success in an era when oceanfront property was becoming highly lucrative was largely due to 'an extremely sympathetic coverage' of their case on ABC television,

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<sup>61</sup> Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 366; Eileen Morgan, *The Calling of the Spirits*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1994, p. 88

<sup>62</sup> State Records NSW Archives Investigator: Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Station.  
<http://investigator.records.nsw.gov.au/Entity.aspx?Path=%5CAgency%5C4143>

<sup>63</sup> Morgan, *The Calling of the Spirits*, p. 88

which 'appealed not only to supporters of Aboriginal demands but to the chauvinism of New South Wales residents who wanted to avoid the crass commercialism of Queensland-style development along the whole coastline'.<sup>64</sup>

**Indigenous responses to coastal tourism:** The expansion of coastal tourism throughout the twentieth century has impacted on coastal Indigenous communities around the world, in places like Mexico and other South American countries; South-East Asia and Africa.<sup>65</sup> In some areas, Indigenous people have had some successes in transforming their primary industry from fishing – either commercial or sustenance based fishing – to tourist services. They have opened up guest houses, worked in hotels, provided tours (for example fishing tours) or sold fish to increasing numbers of tourists. In NSW, Aboriginal people did engage in the tourist economy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see section 2). However, during this period, the increasing government control over Aboriginal people's lives, and the tenure of most coastal land, limited Aboriginal people's opportunities in the coastal tourism industry. Tourism was therefore both positive and negative:

Throughout the twentieth century there was a constant tension between how the tourist industry was a source of employment or cash generation for Aboriginal people while at the same time it constantly jeopardised their continued relatively free use of the landscape and the natural resources upon which they had long depended.<sup>66</sup>

Over the longer term, as non-Aboriginal tourist industries emerged to cater for coastal tourists, Aboriginal people lost sources of income from tourist services they had previously been providing, such as fishing and boat tours, selling bait and working in guesthouses (see section 2).

The more recent phenomenon of 'seachangers', people who move from the city to the coast in search of a more relaxed lifestyle, has also pushed up real estate prices in many coastal towns in recent decades. In many coastal towns now, such as Byron Bay, some Aboriginal people whose families have always lived in or near the town cannot afford to buy houses or live close to the town and ocean.

**Council infrastructure:** Coastal councils keen to attract tourists and provide them with accommodation and facilities, displaced Aboriginal people from some coastal camping places in the second half of the twentieth century. Camping areas and caravan parks, often run or leased by local councils always had 'the best location, close to the beach',<sup>67</sup> and were therefore likely to overlap with, and displace, long-term Aboriginal camping and fishing places, even where access was maintained. The rules and restrictions imposed on use of council parks also impacted on Aboriginal people's abilities to continue using some coastal spaces in ways they had for generations. At Saltwater, the tradition of Aboriginal Christmas camps 'lapsed' in the 1970s, after this place, 'which had once almost exclusively been used by Aboriginal

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<sup>64</sup> Goodall, *Invasion to embassy*, pp. 391–2. In the mid-1960s, a similar battle had been waged against high rise development on Sydney's Collaroy beach. Local residents and councillors who opposed these developments cited aesthetic concerns, wanting to maintain a coastline that was not overshadowed (literally) by tall buildings, and it is easy to see that a similar sentiment may have at least partly contributed to popular support for the Aboriginal community at Fingal Head. Caroline Ford, *Sydney Beaches: A history*, UNSW Press, forthcoming 2013

<sup>65</sup> Lance van Sittert, 'To live this poor life': Remembering the Hottentots Huisie squatter fishery, Cape Town, c.1934–c.1965', *Social History* 26 (1), January 2001, pp. 1–21

<sup>66</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 114

<sup>67</sup> White, *On Holidays*, p. 133

people', was turned into a council reserve which prohibited many of the activities previously enjoyed by its Aboriginal visitors.<sup>68</sup> At Mystery Bay, the camping fees imposed by the Council make it difficult for large families to enjoy extended Christmas Camps as they have in the past.

**National parks:** In the 1970s and '80s large areas of coastal land which had previously been used for forestry, mining and agriculture were reserved as national parks. In the 1970s, national parks were created in Myall Lakes, Crowdy Bay and Hat Head on the lower north coast, and between Yamba and Coffs Harbour further north. On the south coast, Murramarang and Mimosa Rocks national parks were created in 1973 and part of what is now Bournda National Park was reserved several years later. More recently, Eurobodalla National Park was gazetted in the late 1990s, incorporating most of the coast from Moruya to south of Mystery Bay, and several coastal lakes which were important camping and fishing places for Aboriginal people, including Brou, Mummaga and Kellys Lakes. Although the philosophy driving the creation of these and other new national parks along the state's north and south coasts in the 1960s and 70s was about facilitating and preserving rather than restricting public access to the coast, many Aboriginal people stopped visiting places when they became national parks, feeling 'not welcome'.<sup>69</sup>

The national parks also brought with them new restrictions on camping and harvesting flora and fauna in places where Aboriginal people's activities had been largely uncontrolled throughout the post-contact period. Whether due to national parks or council reserves, the abilities of Aboriginal people to camp on, and manage Country, in these places have therefore been substantially curtailed in recent decades. Ossie Cruse from the state's south coast stated that 'one by one you would see the camping places fenced off, and 'No Camping' signs put up... There are very few areas left to camp. If you go there camping you're facing a fine'.<sup>70</sup>

National parks therefore contributed to the displacement of Aboriginal people from the Sea Country landscape. However Aboriginal people throughout NSW are now having a greater role in the decision making and management processes of some national parks, through formal co-management agreements (see section 4).

**Marine parks:** Five coastal marine parks have been created in NSW since the late 1990s: Solitary Islands Marine Park (1998); Jervis Bay Marine Park (1998); Cape Byron Marine Park (2002); Port Stephens–Great Lakes Marine Park (2005) and Batemans Bay Marine Park (2006).<sup>71</sup> Marine parks encompass identified portions of the ocean and estuaries, which are divided into zones where different types of activities are or are not allowed, such as line fishing, or anchoring boats. They are bounded by the high water mark and therefore do not effect Aboriginal people's physical access to the water, however they do restrict where and how people can harvest marine resources.

In some areas, Special Purpose Zones have been established to enable only local Aboriginal people to fish or collect resources from particular areas. Special Purpose Zones acknowledge the importance of Aboriginal people being able to continue certain harvesting practices even in areas that are also ecologically sensitive. However many Aboriginal people see a need for more Special Purpose Zones in

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<sup>68</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 88

<sup>69</sup> Kijas, *There were always people here*, p. 82

<sup>70</sup> Ossie Cruse in Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 26

<sup>71</sup> There is also a Lord Howe Island Marine Park in the Pacific Ocean east of NSW, created in 1999.

better locations. In 2010, the Marine Parks Authority (MPA) published its *Aboriginal Engagement and Cultural Use of Fisheries Resources Policy* which is designed to guide agreements between Aboriginal people and local marine parks for better access to marine resources within the parks (see section 4).

### **Impacts on resource collection for coastal Aboriginal communities**

The recent displacement of Aboriginal people from the coastal landscape through increased tourist and residential development and tourist numbers, more intense management of the coast by councils, and the creation of coastal national parks was more than a physical change. It has severe impacts on the abilities of Aboriginal people to continue to harvest marine resources, and to pass on cultural knowledge about Sea Country. Yet even where Aboriginal people have been able to maintain access to their Sea Country, other factors such as reduced fish stocks, environmental changes and stricter fisheries legislation have impaired their ability to access and manage these resources.

**Environmental changes:** Increased development of coastal areas has in many places led to changes in the coastal environment, which in turn have affected the availability of and access to marine resources for Aboriginal people. The Garby Elders and their families have tried to continue living off the beaches around the Corindi area but have been impacted by several factors such as ‘development, including tourism operators, commercial angling and netting, fishing competitions and everyday use of four wheel drive vehicles (4WDs)’.<sup>72</sup> Noeline Dootson believes that there are:

...less fish and there’s more sand washing down into it. Water is coming up further, it’s probably from the 4WDs knocking down the dunes... We used to see heaps of mullet going through at least three times a year, now you don’t see them at all, they net them all before they get here, and less pipis around.<sup>73</sup>

The pollution of nearby Corindi Lake by sewage has had a negative impact on Gumbaynggirr people’s abilities to use that area as well.<sup>74</sup> Changes in ownership of private property adjacent to Corindi Creek has also prevented local people from harvesting cobra worm from this area during recent decades, ending a practice enjoyed by the Garby Elders from the 1950s to the 1970s.<sup>75</sup> On the south coast, residents of the Wallaga Lake community have been affected by the permanent closure of the lake:

Since Wallaga Lake has been closed to the ocean, the lake has acquired algae and seafood stocks have dramatically reduced. The mullet cannot get in or out and the octopus [djunga] stocks have gone. Kids have not been swimming around the bridge, as was common in the past. The lake’s value in terms of a source of recreation and resource collection has been reduced, families are finding it hard to entertain their children.

Nonetheless, ‘the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community people continue to fish and gather seafood from within and around Wallaga Lake’.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Dee Murphy and Cheryl Brown, ‘It’s Costing Us Our Culture: Coffs Heritage Project Garby Elders Issues Paper’, Unpublished report for NPWS Cultural Heritage Division, June 2001, p. 7

<sup>73</sup> Murphy and Brown, ‘It’s Costing Us Our Culture’, pp. 8–9

<sup>74</sup> Murphy and Brown, ‘It’s Costing Us Our Culture’, p. 15

<sup>75</sup> English, *The Sea and the Rock*, p. 11

<sup>76</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 115



**Sand mining:** The entire coastline of NSW has been impacted by sand mining – parts of it quite extensively. Large-scale sand mining operations reached their peak on the NSW coast in the 1950s and 1960s, altering parts of the coastal landscape. The changes to coastal environments and ecosystems caused by sand mining have impacted availability of and access to marine resources in certain locations. And often, this damage has been exacerbated by the introduction of foreign invasive species, such as Bitou bush, to restore dunal integrity following an end to sand mining. Bitou bush, a species introduced from South Africa to stabilise sand dunes replaced many natural resources such as pigface, and is now considered an ecological pest in NSW: ‘the pigface were mainly on the sand dunes. These bushes here come in and smothered everything up just about’.<sup>77</sup>

In the Byron Bay area on the far north coast, Arakwal Elders attributed significant ecological changes to a combination of sand mining and development:

Since intensive sand mining in the 1960s, which modified landforms in coastal areas, and the development of the Byron Bay township, the abundance of wild resources in the area has declined. The impacts of these activities included the removal of a series of lakes to the east and south of Honeysuckle Hill, the dredging, straightening and polluting of Tallow Creek, and the introduction of plants that don’t come from this area. This resulted in the decline of plant and animal resources for our people.<sup>78</sup>

At Angourie near Yamba, sand mining is blamed for the massive decline in numbers of pipis available on the beaches.<sup>79</sup> Many of the coastal national parks which were created from the 1970s onwards were created in response to public criticism of sand mining, to protect and regenerate these coastal areas.

**Shellfish:** One of the biggest impacts of fisheries regulation has been the restricted access to shellfish for consumption: from the initial restrictions on number of pipis allowed to the more recent complete ban on eating pipis harvested on the state’s beaches, and the severe restrictions imposed on an abalone catch. For most of the twentieth century, collecting pipis was an activity loved by Aboriginal children; the search for pipis got them onto Country and engaged with Country. Carol Ridgeway Bissett from Port Stephens describes the restrictions on pipi harvesting as ‘one of the main things that hurts’:

We all loved getting our pippis off the beach, but now we are only allowed to get a certain amount...

We used to go over to Stockton Bight when we were kids. We’d hop in the back of my aunt and uncle’s ute... and we’d go out there. We’d be tumbling around those sand dunes and we’d get pippis for them to fish from the beach with. But these days there are restrictions on fishing and restrictions on pippis too.<sup>80</sup>

The ban on eating pipis caught in NSW emerges from a concern that they may contain toxins, which cannot be removed through cooking.<sup>81</sup> Some Aboriginal people

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<sup>77</sup> Lorna Kelly in Low, *Place of Plenty*, p. 4

<sup>78</sup> Low, *Place of Plenty*, p. 1

<sup>79</sup> Ronald Heron, *My Aboriginal people and our culture: aspects of Aboriginal cultural heritage of the Lower Clarence Valley*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Australian Nature Conservation Agency, 1993, p. 24

<sup>80</sup> Carol Ridgeway Bissett in *Aboriginal Women’s Heritage: Port Stephens*, p. 36

<sup>81</sup> NSW Food Authority: Recreation harvest of seafood, [www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/keeping-food-safe/special-care-foods/recreational-harvest-of-shellfish/](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/keeping-food-safe/special-care-foods/recreational-harvest-of-shellfish/), accessed 3/11/10



argue that they can distinguish healthy pipis from those which shouldn't be eaten, and they see the ban as an unnecessary infringement of their rights to the resources of the sea. Pipis have always formed an important part of coastal Aboriginal people's diets, and in the act of collecting them children actively engaged in the beach environment, spending long hours on the beach and learning how to read the weather and catch and prepare this and other food sources.

There is extensive evidence of Aboriginal people's ongoing use of and attachment to the NSW coastal environment throughout the entire post-contact period. It is critical that this history is understood and acknowledged. Beaches, sand dunes, and the shores of lagoons and estuaries have provided Aboriginal people free places to live when they were unable to live in or close to towns, and free places to stay when they were between jobs or needing a break from work or reserve life. The coastal environment also provided sustenance and, as will be discussed in the next section, was often close to, or afforded direct opportunities for, paid employment.

## 2. Working on Sea Country

Aboriginal people living along the NSW coastline have a long history of participating in the white economy. Much of their paid employment in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries involved working on Sea Country, in industries such as fishing, whaling, mining, oystering and tourist services. Other work enabled them to continue living on or near Sea Country, while employed nearby picking beans or working in the timber industry. Aboriginal people made a crucial contribution to the early development of a number of industries through their skills, knowledge and labour. From the 1830s until 1901 the Coolangatta Estate, a large property on the banks of the Shoalhaven River on the south coast, employed many Aboriginal people in a variety of jobs. Historian Michael Bennett has shown how over time, traditional Aboriginal skills such as bark-cutting, hunting game and guiding people, were needed less, and Aboriginal employees of the estate developed other skills particular to the agricultural industry.<sup>82</sup>

Work in the timber and whaling industries also allowed people to develop new skills but drew on Aboriginal skills in the countryside, and this type of work is therefore quite different to forms of entrepreneurialism such as selling worms and shell work at La Perouse – although they all drew on ecological knowledge. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Aboriginal people found work in these areas because there were few other coastal residents to do the work, and there was a necessity for Aboriginal people to find ‘meaningful’ employment. This section will show that some of the more common fields of Aboriginal employment in the early twenty-first century, such as in the natural resource management industry, connects with a different history of working on land.

### Selling fish

Aboriginal people have been a part of the settler economy since the early colonial period. In coastal areas, one of the earliest commercial enterprises by Aboriginal people was the trading of fish and shellfish. Aboriginal people traded fish and oysters with the residents of Sydney from the early nineteenth century.<sup>83</sup> As early as the 1830s, Aboriginal people on the south coast were selling fish for money, and trading them for tea, flour, sugar and tobacco.<sup>84</sup> In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the government provided boats to many Aboriginal fishers along the coast to encourage Aboriginal people to continue fishing for commercial benefit and to catch their own food.<sup>85</sup> Many coastal Aboriginal families have continued to make a livelihood from fishing through most of the twentieth century, and whether they ate, traded or sold their catch, a large number of Aboriginal people along the coast were listed as ‘fishermen’ in official government or church records.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Bennett, ‘A long time working’

<sup>83</sup> Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A history of early Sydney*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2009, pp. 436–9

<sup>84</sup> Michael Bennett, ‘The economics of fishing: Sustainable living in colonial New South Wales’, *Aboriginal History*, 31, 2007, p. 92; Bridget Edmunds, *Indigenous commercial fisheries: Analysis of commercial beach hauling in the Yuin nation*, University of Wollongong: Honours Thesis, 2008, p. 56

<sup>85</sup> Brian Egloff, ‘Sea Long Stretched between’: Perspectives of Aboriginal Fishing on the South Coast of New South Wales in the Light of *Mason v Tritton*, Aboriginal History Inc, Canberra, 2000, p. 204; Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping attachment*, p. 44; Edmunds, *Indigenous commercial fisheries*, p. 56; Egloff, *Wreck Bay*, p. 23; Bennett, *The economics of fishing* pp. 93–5

<sup>86</sup> Bennett, *The economics of fishing*, p. 95

On the south coast for much of the twentieth century, entire families and communities were involved in commercial beach haul fishing and boat fishing from Wreck Bay south to Merimbula. Here, many families lived predominantly off fishing, and permanent beach camps were established in areas of abundant fish.<sup>87</sup> Some Aboriginal families at Hill 60 in the Illawarra region also made a living from fishing from at least the 1880s until the 1930s,<sup>88</sup> and from La Perouse north to Tweed Heads the story is the same along the coast. On the coast and estuarine waterways around Forster and Purfleet, Aboriginal men 'sought to make a living from fishing and ... sold their catch through the local fish co-op,' keeping their nets and boats on nearby creeks or walking to the beach.<sup>89</sup> So many Aboriginal people engaged in commercial fishing throughout the first half of the twentieth century that during this period, 'Aboriginal beach fishing enterprises contributed considerably to the economic position of Aboriginal people'.<sup>90</sup>

**Wreck Bay:** The Aboriginal community at Wreck Bay south of Jervis Bay is one that has historically had a strong economical reliance on fishing. Settled by coastal Aboriginal fishermen and their families in the early twentieth century, Wreck Bay was gradually transformed from an 'intermittent fishing camp' to 'a small community' by the 1920s.<sup>91</sup> A Commonwealth census of Aboriginal people living at Wreck Bay in 1922 named ten men, and listed all of them as fishermen.<sup>92</sup> A history of Wreck Bay described the life of one prominent fisher Charlie Ardler:

Life during the early days revolved around fishing. Charlie Ardler came to Wreck Bay in 1918 at the tender age of 2 years... As a young lad he taught himself to fish while acquiring his gear by scavenging. He started by collecting bits of old nets and patching them together. Young Charlie caught a few boxes of fish now and then using a double ended punt and discarded oars. The little money he made was given to his grandmother. Gradually he developed enough skill to become a fine commercial fisherman.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> John Brierly in Edmunds, *Indigenous commercial fisheries*, p. 58

<sup>88</sup> Wesson, *A history of Aboriginal people of the Illawarra, 1770–1970*, p. 39

<sup>89</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment* p. 88

<sup>90</sup> Egloff, *Sea long stretched between*, p. 208

<sup>91</sup> Egloff, *Wreck Bay*, p. 26

<sup>92</sup> Egloff, *Wreck Bay*, p. 25

<sup>93</sup> Egloff, *Wreck Bay*, p. 28



Aboriginal fishers, Wreck Bay 1959. Photo: National Archives of Australia, A1200, L31963

Entire families and visiting friends and relatives usually helped with hauling nets and catches. During the early 1950s, when netting at Wreck Bay was profitable, seven or eight crews were operating out of Wreck Bay, and would take turns to shoot their nets. But by the late 1950s and 1960s the catches were getting smaller. According to Arthur McLeod:

Fishing was hard to make a living from. Hauling the catch up the beach was very difficult. We used to cover the catch with gum leaves or tea tree till it was covered with ice. Then the fish would be taken to Bomaderry and then to Sydney, to the fish market.<sup>94</sup>

At Wreck Bay, as with so many other similar places along the NSW coast, engagement with the area's natural resources was integral to everyday living. Men, women and children worked together in their commercial fishing ventures, spending time on Country, with older community members passing on valuable knowledge about marine resources and caring for Country to younger generations. Children grew up playing on the beaches and surrounding landscape, collecting and eating pipis and other abundant shellfish.<sup>95</sup> During the spring time, women and children collected wildflowers, and 'while we were walking we would learn the kids about possum trails, snake wriggles, roo tracks and sundews'.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Arthur McLeod in Wreck Bay Community and Cath Renwick, *Geebungs and Snake Whistles*, p. 10

<sup>95</sup> Wreck Bay Community and Cath Renwick, *Geebungs and Snake Whistles*, p. 13

<sup>96</sup> Julie Freeman in Wreck Bay Community and Cath Renwick, *Geebungs and Snake Whistles*, p. 15

**Abalone:** The trade in shellfish, and particularly abalone (known by Aboriginal people on the south coast as mutton fish), has also been a major component of Aboriginal commercial fishery activities in NSW. Aboriginal people on the south coast were employed to collect abalone for Chinese traders from as early as the 1860s, and following the gold rushes, 'Aboriginal people were able to use their traditional diving skills and their extended family labour in their beach camps to work with the Chinese, right along the south coast'.<sup>97</sup> During the Depression in the 1930s some people from Wreck Bay collected and sold abalone for 'six pence a pound'.<sup>98</sup>

In the 1960s, large scale commercial fishing for abalone on the state's south coast began, with divers arriving from across NSW, Australia and even New Zealand. For local Aboriginal people, this was an opportunity 'to make good money using skills practised from an early age'.<sup>99</sup> In the 1970s, south coast fisher John Brierly dived for abalone, which constituted most of his income, even though he was only paid from 30 cents to one dollar per pound. John 'suspects that the abalone were worth a lot more, but that was all the agent was offering him'.<sup>100</sup> Like most people, he didn't rely solely on the abalone fishery however; he and his family also collected and sold lobsters, conks, bimbles and pipis.<sup>101</sup>

A 1978 Parliamentary Select Committee recommended that entry into the fishery should be restricted, and in 1980 a restricted permit was introduced. From over 100 applications, only 59 permits – i.e. diving licences – were initially issued.<sup>102</sup> Few Aboriginal divers applied because they had to prove a certain average catch and income over previous years, and they did not have sufficient records.<sup>103</sup> David Squires, who grew up fishing in Moruya regrets not getting a licence:

No, I never put in for a licence; which were silly, I should have. They reckoned we couldn't get a licence because we had no records of what we got. You see Ernie [David's brother] kept all his records but the old man never did. Then of the people that started it I reckon only 5% got licences.<sup>104</sup>

The effects of the commercialisation of the abalone industry on the south coast Aboriginal communities were therefore twofold. First, as we have seen in section 1, it led to a massive decrease in availability of the resource and imposed restrictions on non-commercial harvesting. Secondly, many Aboriginal people who relied on commercial abalone fishing lost their jobs, and their only regular source of income. Ossie Cruse recalls that:

As soon as they brought the restricted licence in and restricted the numbers you could get that put a lot of people out of work. A lot of people because all along this coast Kooris used to be the main divers. And then when they started to hear about it more everybody got into it. Kids and all.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish* p. 29

<sup>98</sup> Egloff, *Wreck Bay*, p. 33

<sup>99</sup> Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 58

<sup>100</sup> Egloff, *Sea Long stretched between*, p. 206

<sup>101</sup> Egloff, *Sea Long stretched between*, p. 206

<sup>102</sup> Total Allowable Catch Committee – Abalone Determination and Report for 2010/11, [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/342185/2010-2011-abalone-tacc-determination.pdf](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/342185/2010-2011-abalone-tacc-determination.pdf)

<sup>103</sup> Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 64

<sup>104</sup> David Squires in Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 64

<sup>105</sup> Ossie Cruse in Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 80

Some Aboriginal people who don't have licences have continued to commercially harvest abalone, risking heavy fines and even jail terms. Recently, the penalties for poaching have been increased: under legislation passed in December 2009, abalone was identified as a 'priority' species. This means that people found guilty of trafficking abalone face up to ten years' jail and can be fined a maximum penalty of up to ten times the market value of the fish, in addition to the standard fines. These increased penalties for illegal abalone fishing (or 'poaching') are now closer to those imposed in Victoria and Tasmania, and reflect a perception by the Abalone Total Allowable Catch Committee that until now, 'while abalone thieves are enjoying the windfall gains of bank robbers, they are paying penalties of minor traffic offenders'.<sup>106</sup>



Drying abalone in rocks at Eden. Photo: National Archives of Australia, A1200, L68021

**Shellfish:** Abalone is not the only shellfish to have provided Aboriginal people with an income. While some families lived off fishing or abalone harvesting, others collected and sold fish and shellfish at particular times of the year to supplement their income. Maxine Kelly was one of many Aboriginal people from the south coast who was engaged in seasonal work picking beans and peas, but she also collected and sold shellfish, going to Baranguba (Montague Island) to collect scallops for the Bermagui fish market.<sup>107</sup>

**Selling bait:** For some coastal Aboriginal people, collecting and selling worms or pipis to fishermen for bait was also a useful source of income or income supplement. Children earned pocket money either helping their families collect bait or selling directly to non-Aboriginal fishers. Mary Duroux from the south coast recalls buying fruit with the income from selling pipis, shellfish and prawns to fisherman.<sup>108</sup> Gwen

<sup>106</sup> Fisheries Management Amendment Bill 2009 Agreement in Principle  
[www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/PARLMENT/NSWBills.nsf/1d436d3c74a9e047ca256e690001d75b/2790227ff69c1bedca2575df0019c3e8/\\$FILE/LA%2011409.pdf](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/PARLMENT/NSWBills.nsf/1d436d3c74a9e047ca256e690001d75b/2790227ff69c1bedca2575df0019c3e8/$FILE/LA%2011409.pdf)

<sup>107</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 27

<sup>108</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 34

Russell's husband collected mud worms with his children in the Port Stephens area, but rather than selling them to shops, sold them to visiting friends:

The kids would get their pocket money for helping him. His mates would only want so many dozen to go fishing with, and it made a few extra bob for him, and he'd give the kids a dollar each.<sup>109</sup>

But selling bait could also be more than just a means of supplementing other income. In the Yamba area, worming provided substantial income during times of low employment.<sup>110</sup> Valerie Smith Cohen from Nambucca collected worms on South Beach with her parents in the 1940s and '50s. She recalls that they caught 'about two or three thousand worms a day', and her parents packed them into plastic bags and sold them by the dozen from their bait shop.<sup>111</sup>

Collecting and selling bait to non-Aboriginal fishers enabled Aboriginal people to utilise existing skills and knowledge to earn money, and to remain on Country and continue to work on Country despite increasing tourism and settlement of coastal areas by non-Aboriginal people during the twentieth century. Again, tight regulations of the worming industry have displaced many Aboriginal worm collectors from this type of work, with very few Aboriginal people holding the expensive and rare commercial worm licences in the early twenty-first century.

Trading and selling fish, shellfish and bait was therefore a source of income which integrated easily with established Aboriginal coastal activities. Aboriginal commercial fishers were not only helped by other community members, but usually fed community and family before selling their catch.

## Other work in Sea Country

**Shell work:** Other sources of income were even more entrepreneurial. Aboriginal people at La Perouse on Sydney's coast took advantage of the tourists visiting their suburb by making and selling Aboriginal souvenirs at 'the Loop'. Boomerangs were made and sold there from at least the 1890s, but just as popular was the 'shell art' made by Aboriginal women. Shell art or 'shell work' encompassed a broad range of objects, from shell baskets, to cardboard shapes such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge decorated with small shells, to brooches made out of polished muttonfish (abalone) shells shaped into the map of Australia or shapes of boomerangs.<sup>112</sup>

Shell work provided a valuable source of income for many Aboriginal families living at La Perouse. The work of collecting shells for the art was shared by women and children who enjoyed the opportunity to spend time on Country searching for the best shells. Beryl Beller recalls that:

When we were young our mothers would take us to the beach to collect shells. We would walk along the shoreline after the tide went down to collect shells that were not broken and shell grit. The women would sit around in a circle and sort the shells into sizes and colours.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Gwen Russell in *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Port Stephens*, p. 48

<sup>110</sup> Kijas, *There were always people here*, pp. 34, 54

<sup>111</sup> Valerie Smith Cohen in *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Nambucca*, Department of Environment and Climate Change, Sydney, 2003, p. 3

<sup>112</sup> Maria Nugent, *Botany Bay: where histories meet*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2005, pp. 79–3; *La Perouse*, p. 80

<sup>113</sup> *La Perouse*, p. 80



The labour was shared by all family members and 'was rarely considered a burden but rather an enjoyable form of sociality'.<sup>114</sup> People at Wreck Bay also sold brooches they made to passing tourists.<sup>115</sup>

**Maritime industries:** Aboriginal work in coastal areas was not limited to the collection and trade of marine resources but working more broadly in maritime and coastal tourism industries. The whaling industry offered Aboriginal people at certain locations regular seasonal employment. At Twofold Bay in Eden on the state's far south coast Aboriginal men were part of whaling crews from the 1840s until the early twentieth century. Initially paid in food and accommodation, they later received equal pay to the white whaling crews.<sup>116</sup> For these Aboriginal people, whaling 'complemented traditional skills with spotting and harpooning as specialties while the dangers of whaling promoted mutual respect with sufficient profits for all, and was not prohibited'.<sup>117</sup>

In later years, some Aboriginal men used their boats to take tourists and local white people on fishing tours.<sup>118</sup> Some Aboriginal men built boats for themselves and others, and in Moruya worked on building the seawall.<sup>119</sup> Aboriginal men also gained employment in the oyster industry.

Carol Ridgeway Bissett's father was engaged in a variety of marine work in the Port Stephens area in the mid-twentieth century:

The boat shed up here, at what they now call West Beach at Soldiers Point, was originally built by my father. He managed it too. He was a fisherman and in later years worked for the oyster industry. Just around from the marina there he had these poles set up where he'd draw his fish nets in. Dad made his own fish nets. He made them big enough to allow the bi-catch to be conserved. He'd only catch the good size ones.<sup>120</sup>

In the twentieth century, some Aboriginal people also worked in the sand mining industry.<sup>121</sup>

Regardless of the type of work Aboriginal people were employed in, working in coastal industries such as whaling, boat-building and working in harbours enabled them and their families to continue living on and accessing their Sea Country. They also enabled Aboriginal people to utilise skills they already had in working on Country, and to gain new complimentary skills. Through paid employment in Sea Country, younger Aboriginal people would both learn the skills necessary to earn money, while being engaged in cultural learning.

**Seasonal work:** Along the coast, Aboriginal people in the twentieth century were also engaged in other forms of paid employment which enabled them to stay close to their Country, and to continue to maintain connections with Sea Country. BJ Cruse

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<sup>114</sup> Nugent, *Botany Bay*, p. 83

<sup>115</sup> Wreck Bay Community and Cath Renwick, *Geebungs and Snake Whistles*, p. 9

<sup>116</sup> Rene Davidson, *Whalemen of Twofold Bay: historical photographs*, self published, Eden, 1988, p. 26

<sup>117</sup> Egloff, *Sea long stretched between*, p. 203

<sup>118</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping attachment*, p. 114; Charlie Ardler in Wreck Bay Community and Cath Renwick, *Geebungs and Snake Whistles*, p. 9

<sup>119</sup> *Aboriginal Womens Heritage: Port Stephens*; Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 61

<sup>120</sup> Carol Ridgeway Bissett in *Aboriginal Womens Heritage: Port Stephens*, p. 38

<sup>121</sup> Kijas, *There were always people here*, p. 54



highlighted the interconnectedness of different types of seasonal work, and the freedom it sometimes afforded from institutional constraints.

See we never, apart from a short time at Wallaga, lived on a mission under control of the managers and that's why we just cruised around. All the work that we did was basically either harvesting natural resources or working with the land in some other way. Like bean picking, seafood gathering, mill work.<sup>122</sup>

Picking beans and peas for local farmers was a common form of seasonal work for Aboriginal people for much of the twentieth century, particularly on the south coast. The seasonal and transitory nature of this work enabled families on the south coast to move through country, camp on country and spend time with different family groups. For those who alternated between bean picking and fishing at different times of the year, 'beach camps could be found close to the beanfields, providing fresh food for the off season times'.<sup>123</sup> It also facilitated community interaction:

Seasonal farming work remained in keeping with the traditional transient, family oriented lifestyle maintained by many Aboriginal families. This type of work encouraged the maintenance of kinship links and ensured cultural links to the land were maintained.<sup>124</sup>

Lorraine Brown recalls travelling to Bodalla with her parents to pick beans during the Christmas holidays each year:

And the thing that was good about it was that you'd meet all your old mates down there, all the other kids from the other places. It was a big get-together. Everyone camped and lived together. It was really peaceful down there. Travelling around, that's what we used to do.<sup>125</sup>

Picking vegetables and working on local farms was not limited to the south coast. For most of the first half of the twentieth century, Aboriginal people from Purfleet worked on local farms, and in the 1950s and '60s they were also engaged in pea and bean picking.<sup>126</sup> People living at the Old Camp at Corindi also worked in local farms or banana plantations until around 1970.<sup>127</sup> They also worked in the local timber industry, which was another major employer of coastal Aboriginal people throughout the twentieth century.

As with work on pastoral stations in the state's west, employment on coastal farms gave Aboriginal people and their families access to Country on private land, which was lost with this type of employment.<sup>128</sup>

## Defining 'commercial' fishing

Working on Sea Country, and particularly in industries related to fishing, whaling and marine harvesting, Aboriginal people were able to make a living from existing skills and cultural knowledge about the coastal environment, and marine resources. The

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<sup>122</sup> BJ Cruse in Cruse et al., *Mutton fish*, p. 27

<sup>123</sup> Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish* p. 31

<sup>124</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 121

<sup>125</sup> Lorraine Brown in Lee Chittick and Terry Fox, *Travelling with Percy: A south coast journey*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1997, p. 99

<sup>126</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment* p. 88

<sup>127</sup> English, *The Sea and the Rock*, p. 16

<sup>128</sup> Heather Goodall, 'Exclusion and Re-emplacment: Tensions around Protected Areas in Australia and Southeast Asia', *Conservation and Society* [serial online] 2006, 4, p. 383–95

line between 'commercial' and other forms of fishing is therefore somewhat blurred. Aboriginal beach haul fishers on the state's south coast, for example, use the same lookout places their fathers and grandfathers used for spotting schools of fish, assessing weather and communicating with fisherman.<sup>129</sup> They also incorporate cultural knowledge of weather and fish migration patterns into their decision-making process.<sup>130</sup> Consequently:

While beach hauling is now a commercial industry for these families, the practice is based upon the continuing knowledge and understanding of the seasonal effects and nocturnal and lunar periodicity of fish species and fishing. This is significant in demonstrating the evolving nature of culture and knowledge. In addition, it displays how the fishermen understand the environmental linkages that occur in different areas along the coast.<sup>131</sup>

Were it still permitted, entire Aboriginal communities would likely continue to help haul in the nets, participating in and learning the skills of the commercial fishery.

The blurred line between commercial, traditional and personal collection of abalone is a case in point. As we have seen abalone always has been and continues to be an important food source for Aboriginal people along coastal NSW. Methods of diving, collecting and preparing the shellfish (for example, by shucking on the rocks) have been taught through the generations, and inform not only collecting for personal and community consumption, but also for trade or commercial sale. In turn, the commercial value of abalone has impacted on Aboriginal peoples' ability to access the resource: initially, commercial abalone harvesting created employment for many Aboriginal people, but more recently has contributed to a loss of employment, at the same time that people's non-commercial collection of the shellfish has been largely curtailed.

### **Impacts of disengagement**

Aboriginal people in NSW are no longer engaged in the commercial fishing industry or other coastal economies to the same extent that they were for most of the twentieth century. In some cases this disengagement has occurred only very recently. Changes to the management of commercial fisheries from the 1970s were particularly responsible for this shift. Many Aboriginal commercial fishers were unable to afford higher costing commercial licences, or were adversely impacted by segmentation of the fishing industry, which issued licences only for single methods of fishing or catch types, so that commercial fishers could no longer follow the weather and the seasons.<sup>132</sup>

As the costs associated with beach or long-shore fishing increased over the last few decades, particularly licensing, family businesses which had thrived for many years... were forced out of operation.<sup>133</sup>

Decreasing fish stocks, possibly arising from increases in commercial fishing also made it difficult for Aboriginal commercial fishers to catch enough stock to make a living. Regulations prohibiting non-licence holders from participating in beach haul fishing has led to fewer Aboriginal people engaging in this type of work, even in an informal manner. It is also perceived as a barrier to passing on knowledge of the

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<sup>129</sup> Edmunds, *Indigenous Commercial fisheries*, p. 64

<sup>130</sup> Edmunds, *Indigenous Commercial fisheries*, p. 63

<sup>131</sup> Edmunds, *Indigenous Commercial fisheries*, p. 65

<sup>132</sup> Edmunds, *Indigenous Commercial fisheries*, p. 66

<sup>133</sup> Egloff, *Sea Long Stretched Between*, p. 208

work and industry to younger generations, and the continuation of long-running family businesses.<sup>134</sup>

Today, no commercial fishers operate out of Wreck Bay, which is part of the Jervis Bay Marine Park, and commercial fishing is becoming an increasingly expensive industry to participate in. In 2004 Alan Brierly described the gradual increases in cost of a commercial licence since he first bought one at age 14, when they cost \$2: 'from \$2 it jumped up to \$100 and from \$100 to \$575. Now you got to put in for another one and it's going to cost me, our family go fishing, it's going to cost seven grand next year, for all to go fishing'.<sup>135</sup>

The strict controls over the commercial abalone fishery in southern NSW have also impacted Aboriginal fishers. Most cannot afford licences, and by continuing to engage in the industry risk heavy fines and jail terms for illegal 'poaching'.

Employment in areas such as fishing, whaling, and coastal timber and agricultural industries played an important role in enabling Aboriginal people to remain close to their Sea Country, and to continue to live on and visit important coastal landscapes.

Decreased employment in the fishing industry in the late twentieth century has occurred alongside fewer employment opportunities in other coastal industries such as bean and vegetable picking, whaling and the timber industry. The decline in Aboriginal employment of these areas has been due to a variety of factors, including competing sources of cheap labour, changes in industry and increasing mechanisation of labour. Coastal Aboriginal communities have suffered as a result:

Gradually pursuits which once formed the basis of Aboriginal economies, particularly agricultural work, timbering and fishing, have been removed without replacement, thus worsening the financial position of Aboriginal communities.<sup>136</sup>

The impacts of the loss of these types of work has not just been one of economics. There are also social implications and impacts on personal and community wellbeing associated with the loss of work and income. Together with less access to some coastal places, including living places, and changes in work opportunities, Aboriginal people along the coast have also lost a critical opportunity for working on Country, and utilising skills they may have learnt through cultural activity. Less employment in some areas of work such as commercial fishing may mean fewer opportunities for passing on cultural knowledge and skills to younger generations. However, recently there has been a trend towards Aboriginal businesses and people gaining employment in NRM work and working in national parks and marine parks (see section 4), which is contributing to similar cultural and economic outcomes as the earlier forms of coastal employment discussed here.

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<sup>134</sup> Edmunds, *Indigenous commercial fisheries*, pp. 67–9

<sup>135</sup> Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 72

<sup>136</sup> Egloff, *Sea Long Stretched Between*, p. 208

### 3. Moving through and in Sea Country

#### Coastal pathways

Aboriginal people moving through and across the landscape created an extensive network of tracks throughout the coastal environment, which continue to be used today. Prior to the construction of roads, these tracks provided pathways for Aboriginal people to travel along the coast, or between inland areas and the coast, and often followed the same pathways used by Aboriginal people prior to 1788. They are central to Aboriginal life and experiences in Sea Country. They are the means by which people moved across the landscape, whether to follow the seasons, travel in search of food or work, or to connect with kinship groups.

The primary coastal travelling route, 'on which families walked from campsite to campsite, from fresh water source to fresh water source, collecting seafoods and reuniting with kin,' extends along the entire NSW coastline.<sup>137</sup> But other, smaller pathways extending inland from the coast are just as important. For residents of Wallaga Lake for example, the track to the nearby coastal fishing and camping ground at Mystery Bay was a well-worn path. Similarly, south of Ballina on the state's far north coast, the pathway from Cabbage Tree Island to Boundary Creek provided residents with easy and regular access for fishing and other coastal activities. Longer pathways connected coastal fishing and camping grounds with people from further inland such as Cooma and the snowy mountains in southern NSW.<sup>138</sup>

These pathways not only facilitated access to Country, but it was through regular travelling along these coastal routes that Aboriginal people maintained strong kinship connections, and shared knowledge and stories. The pathway connecting people from La Perouse and the Illawarra and south coast regions, for example, is well-documented. This and other pathways have enabled the groups to maintain connections so that 'the tradition of Aboriginal people from the Sydney region travelling to the Illawarra has been unbroken from the late eighteenth century to the present day'.<sup>139</sup> The Stewart family was just one who reconnected with friends and family as 'they made their way camping and fishing' from La Perouse to Wallaga Lake in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>140</sup> On the north coast, too, walking tracks linked different Aboriginal groups and coastal routes provided important meeting places.<sup>141</sup>

Some families used these coastal pathways to 'follow the fish' along the coast during different seasons. John Pender recalls camping at various places along the coast as a child, including Mystery Bay, Wallaga Lake and Durras, 'depending on where the fish were': 'following the fish along the coast was a way of life for John and his family'.<sup>142</sup> Others used coastal pathways to travel between work places. In the mid twentieth century, Georgina Parsons 'travelled along the coast between Eden and Ulladulla, camping at 'main' campsites such as Bingi, Mystery Bay, Congo and Tuross. Pickers and growers would transport the family on their way to the next farm'.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 122

<sup>138</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 11

<sup>139</sup> Wesson, *A History of Aboriginal People of the Illawarra, 1770–1970*, p. 28

<sup>140</sup> Vivienne Mason in Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 51

<sup>141</sup> Kijas, *There were always people here*, p. 19

<sup>142</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 21

<sup>143</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 19



The camp at Mystery Bay is closely associated with Wallaga Lake (OEH)

Often, the pathways and the living and working places they connected were critical for Aboriginal people to gain or maintain some independence from government institutions and policies which sought to control their lives.

**Walking through Country:** Until about the 1970s, walking was the primary mode of transport for Aboriginal people along these coastal pathways, and indeed across NSW.<sup>144</sup> Where distances were too long to be reached in a day, people camped overnight or for longer periods of time. During the 1940s, Harriet Walker and her parents spent more than a month walking between Ulladulla and Wallaga Lake, a total distance of around 150 kilometres. Harriet recalls that ‘we had plenty of food... we kept walking north, and stopped to camp whenever we needed a rest or to catch up with families camped along the way’.<sup>145</sup> Lionel Mongta, also from the south coast, also ‘fished, camped and collected bush tucker’ during his walk from Wallaga Lake to Peppy Beach with his family in the 1950s.

Walking was often – although not always – the only mode of transport available. Until the second half of the twentieth century few Aboriginal people had cars or access to them. Some travelled by bus where available, but ‘if you didn’t have your fare to go on the bus, you just had to walk. Koori people didn’t have any cars in them days’.<sup>146</sup>

Walking enabled Aboriginal people to continue travelling through the bush, or along beaches and around headlands, along tracks which would not be accessible if they were travelling by motor vehicle. People travelling from Purfleet on the north coast to

<sup>144</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 126

<sup>145</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 10

<sup>146</sup> Doris Kirby in Chittick and Fox, *Travelling with Percy*, pp. 31–32

their Christmas Camp at Saltwater followed a 'dirt track... going through the bush rather than following the Old Bar road'.<sup>147</sup> The much shorter tracks people from the Forster Aboriginal Reserve used to access the local beaches were 'little more than animal tracks through scrub and swamps'.<sup>148</sup> On the south coast, Les Simon recalled that his Uncle Syd walked from Batemans Bay to Potato Point 'along the beaches and bush tracks' one year at Christmas time.<sup>149</sup>

By continuing to walk through and across Country, over traditional and new pathways, Aboriginal people were able to maintain a connection with their Country. It 'allowed them to go, legally or by "trespassing", into most corners of the landscape surrounding their settlements'.<sup>150</sup> Walking along the coast was often as much about the everyday experience as the end destination. While walking, older people could teach children about the local environment and bush tucker and how to observe seasonal changes in the environment. Common routes were therefore not just well worn, but 'layered with stories'.<sup>151</sup> For Ted Thomas, it was during walks from Bega to Wallaga Lake in the first half of the twentieth century that he learned about the cultural and spiritual significance of nearby Mumbulla Mountain from his father and grandfather.<sup>152</sup>

**Driving past Country:** Walking was central to Aboriginal experiences and movement patterns until the mid twentieth century. To get somewhere (i.e. the coast for fishing/camping) people had to walk through Country, their experience enhanced and shaped by the sensations of smell, sight and sound of that Country. Private modes of transport such as cars opened up new areas which could be reached within a short timeframe, or which became more easily accessible to elderly or less mobile people. Car travel also meant that Country was experienced differently – in a less intimate way than by walking.

Just as it contributed to a disconnection with parts of the land car travel also facilitated a greater connection with family circles for many Aboriginal people.<sup>153</sup> Car travel brought more family within easy reach: people no longer had to wait for Christmas camps to reconnect with family and friends but could travel further afield with greater ease. This is particularly evident at funerals, where people converge on a particular graveyard from great distances, and take the opportunity to reconnect with kin and friends 'from different parts of the web of dispersion'.<sup>154</sup>

Car ownership and other elements of modernity such as mobile phone use therefore created an entirely different set of relationships for Aboriginal communities. Their local 'walking' landscape was replaced by a larger 'beat': 'areas which are defined by the situation of kin who will give [Aboriginal people] hospitality, within which they can travel as much or as little as they please'.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 88

<sup>148</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 113

<sup>149</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 23

<sup>150</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 126

<sup>151</sup> Byrne and Nugent, *Mapping Attachment*, p. 85

<sup>152</sup> Ray Kelly, 'Investigation of Sites of Significance to the descendants of the Yeuin tribal people in the area of the Five Forests on the south coast of New South Wales' unpublished, NPWS, 1978, AHIMS catalogue no. 1438, p. 5

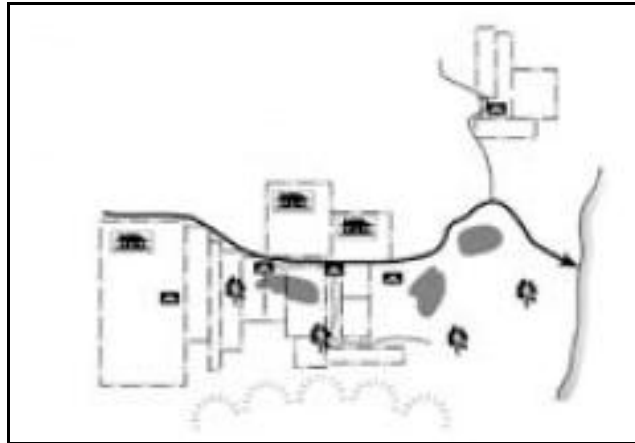
<sup>153</sup> Steve Brown pers. comm. 2010

<sup>154</sup> Denis Byrne, 'Archaeology in reverse', in Nick Merriman (ed), *Public Archaeology*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 245

<sup>155</sup> Jeremy Beckett, 'Kinship, mobility and community in rural New South Wales' in Keen, Ian (ed), *Being Black: Aboriginal cultures in 'settled' Australia*, AIAS, Canberra, 1988, p. 130

## Restricting/changing access

We have seen in section 1 that increases in coastal tourism and private development, and the creation of national parks and council reserves along the coast in the second half of the twentieth century had a significant impact on the abilities of Aboriginal people to continue to visit and use parts of the coast in the ways they always had. Changing land tenures and increasing use of motor vehicles by Aboriginal people similarly affected the pathways that people used. Rather than taking the most direct route to a fishing or camping spot, people had to increasingly walk around parcels of land that were being fenced off.



Route taken by Biripi Aboriginal people (around farmland), 1860s.  
**Source:** Byrne and Nugent 2004 p. 32

At times, fences and private land also became complete obstacles to reaching certain parts of the coast or estuarine rivers, even though the beaches and riverbanks themselves remained public land. And travelling by car meant people were limited to roads or wide tracks, and could no longer follow narrow paths through the bush. Consequently, while people continue to follow parts of the same track from Sydney to the south coast, which has always been used by Aboriginal people from these areas, 'many sections are inaccessible or are linked by formed roads, which are easier and quicker to use'.<sup>156</sup>

**Corindi:** These changes in ways of accessing the coast have led to shifts in which parts of the coast are used by Aboriginal people. From the 1970s, Gumbaynggirr people around Corindi, for example, 'became increasingly reliant on *accessible* areas associated with the coast and remaining areas of vacant Crown land around the town'.<sup>157</sup> Access to the Old Farm from the Old Camp was barred with a locked gate by that property's new owner in the 1970s. Not only did the Gumbaynggirr people lose access to a site some of them had been living on, but they also lost the use of a track which 'crossed creeks, swamps and woodland vegetation', from which they had hunted, fished for mullet and crabs, and collected other cultural resources.<sup>158</sup> A research project completed in 2002 found that:

...all of the informants spoke of the change in their ability to access land and the impact this has had upon their use of the landscape in the area. Over 20 of the mapped places recorded during this project had been barred to Gumbaingirr

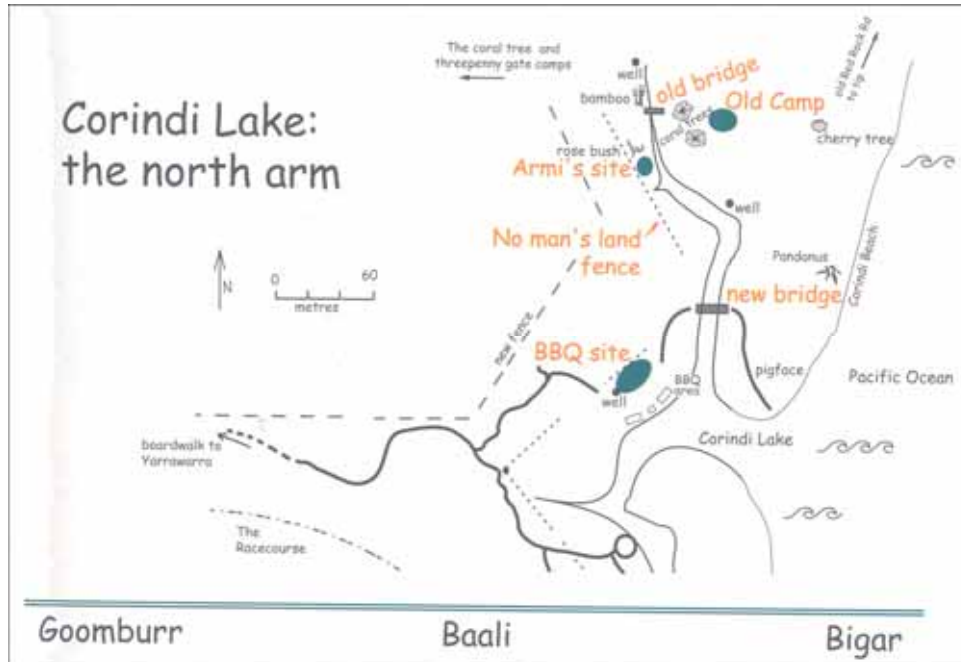
<sup>156</sup> Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 122

<sup>157</sup> English, *The Sea and the Rock*, p. 21. Emphasis added

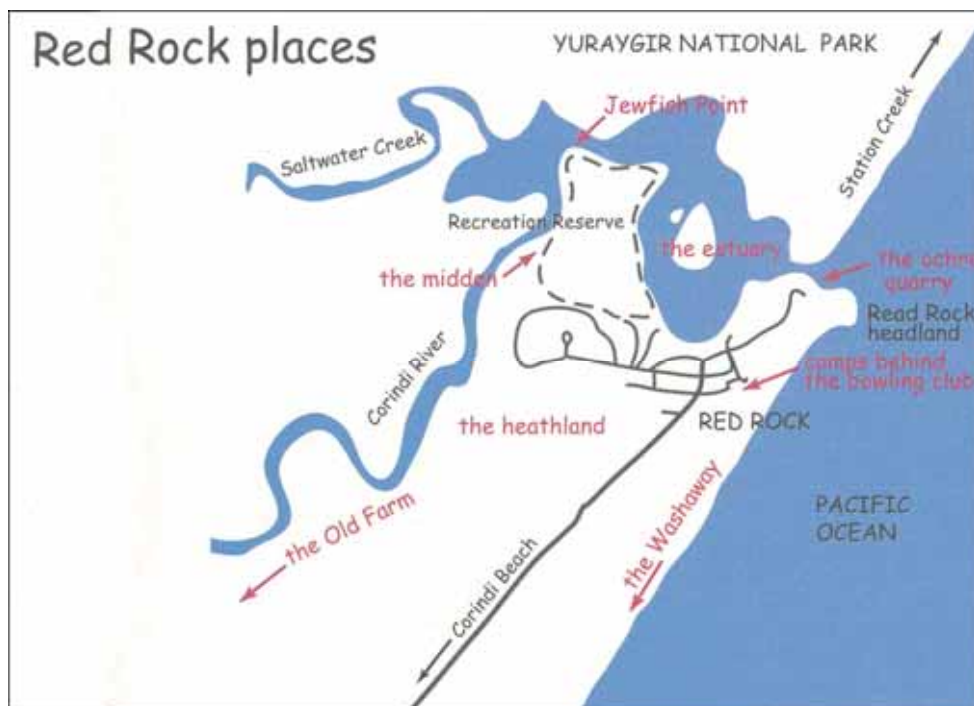
<sup>158</sup> English, *The Sea and the Rock*, p. 20

people when a new generation of landowners bought or took over land in the area in the 1970s. Previous access arrangements were ended by the erection of gates across well worn tracks and paths.<sup>159</sup>

Although they do not map out specific pathways, these diagrams highlight the ways in which many Gumbaynggirr places around Red Rock, Corindi and Arrawarra, north of Coffs Harbour are intricately connected.



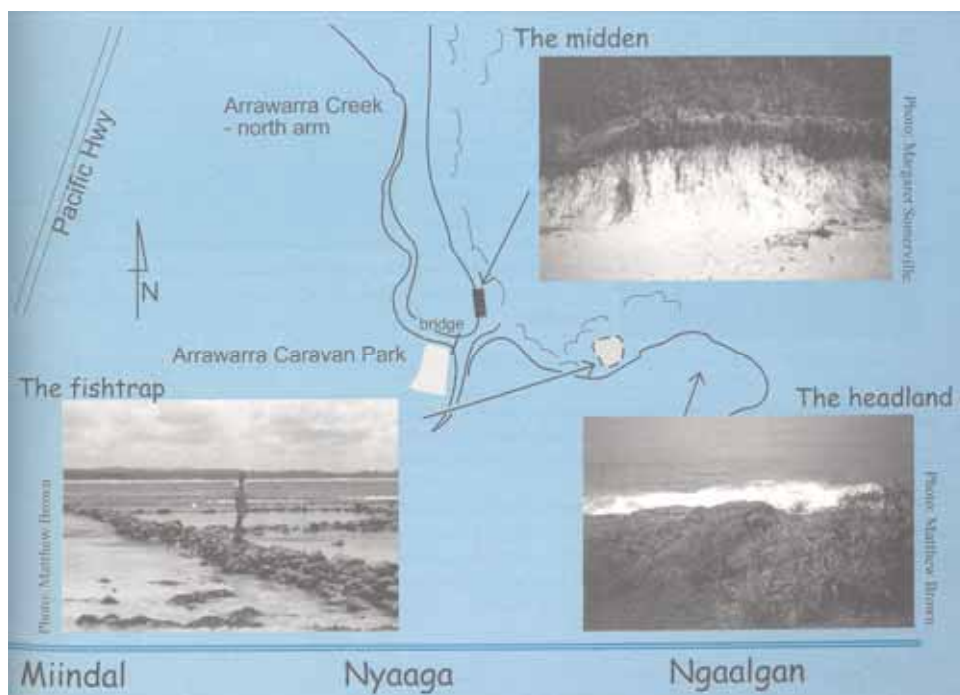
**Source:** *The Old Camp: Corindi Lake north* (2000), p. 9, Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation



**Source:** *Red Rock: camping and exchange* (2000), p. 7, Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation

<sup>159</sup> English, *The Sea and the Rock*, p. 21





**Source:** *Yarrowarra Places: making stories* (2002), p. 29, Yarrowarra Aboriginal Corporation

**Cricket Ground:** The 'cricket ground' near Wallaga Lake was an important camping ground for people visiting the Wallaga Lake area in both the pre- and post-contact period, since it was a good place for people to fish, collect resources and hunt. Mary Duroux recalled that 'people living at Wallaga Lake Mission used the area as a private place away from government view. Older people would spear fish, whilst the younger ones would play cricket and football'.<sup>160</sup> However this space is no longer accessible to people wishing to continue this practice. According to Alex Walker, 'the farmer has since pulled down the bridge, so people cannot get into the area. The rocky causeway, which also allows access, has also been removed'.<sup>161</sup>

This is one of the many places of long-term Aboriginal living, recreation and resource collection lost to contemporary Aboriginal people. Both the Cricket Ground and Old Camp continue to hold significance to Aboriginal people, just like many similar past campgrounds and living places which are now privately owned or built upon.

**National parks:** Private landholders are not the only groups to have impacted on Aboriginal people's abilities to access certain coastal areas. Changes to established tracks and pathways in national parks impact accessibility, as do new restrictions on the types of activity which can be carried out in a park. Along the coast, the creation of some new national parks and the expansion of others has therefore contributed to a dislocation of Aboriginal people from parts of the coast. For older and less mobile people, for instance, the closure of the vehicle track to Shelley Beach in Yuraygir National Park 'meant a loss of access' to important places.<sup>162</sup> More recently, proposed changes to beach and lake access in Meroo National Park on the state's south coast concerned both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal fishers who could no longer drive to their favourite fishing locations. However, increasing use of this area

<sup>160</sup> Mary Duroux in Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 118

<sup>161</sup> Alex Walker in Donaldson, *Stories about the Eurobodalla*, p. 118

<sup>162</sup> Kijas, *There were always people here*, p. 37

since the national park was created caused damage to much of the area, meaning new restrictions on where people could go and how they could use certain areas was required.

If we are to fully understand and conserve the footprint of Aboriginal cultural life in coastal NSW, we need to pay attention to the pathways which connect living and working places. Prior to widespread car ownership in particular, beaches and non-built up coastal areas were the spaces across which Aboriginal people travelled for many different reasons, in different ways and at different speeds, often living and working along the way. These pathways are consequently integral to the tangled footprints of cultural life.

## 4. Opportunities for Aboriginal people in Sea Country

In the recent past, coastal developments and changes in land use of parts of the NSW coastal landscape have made it difficult for Aboriginal people to continue accessing and using many familiar and important places along the NSW coast. However opportunities are increasing for Aboriginal people to get back into these places: to re-establish pathways to important coastal sites and reconnect with Country. This section discusses a small sample of the many Aboriginal initiatives, programs and activities taking place along the NSW coast.

### Living on Country

Aboriginal people's displacement from certain places – such as those turned into residential areas – may be permanent. However in other locations coastal Crown land offers some opportunities for getting onto Sea Country. Culture camps can be an opportunity for Aboriginal people of all generations to engage in cultural activities while camping on Country – although usually only for a very short period of time. Aboriginal-owned land, acquired by Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) under the NSW *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*, may also be used by the local community for camping or other residential purposes.

**Culture camps:** Culture camps provide Aboriginal people throughout NSW with an opportunity to connect with Country. The term 'culture camp' refers to 'meetings where the main aim is to unite Elders with the youth on Country and share knowledge about the land, sea and rivers, wildlife, resources and customs from a traditional perspective as a means of maintaining culture'.<sup>163</sup> Many culture camps are held every year in national parks along the state's coastline.

Culture camps have been organised by staff of the Office of Environment and Heritage in partnership with Aboriginal communities since at least the early 1990s. The drive behind culture camps has always been Aboriginal communities requesting to access their traditional land and rejuvenate their cultural connection to country by having the opportunity to pass on traditional knowledge to the younger generation. From a park management perspective it also provides the Aboriginal community with the opportunity to actively participate in the management and conservation of their culture on park.<sup>164</sup>

There are close connections between culture camps and Christmas camps. At places such as Saltwater on the lower north coast, culture camps are held at the same locations that were used for Christmas camps throughout the twentieth century. Although there are significant differences between culture camps and Christmas camps, they do share some characteristics. Both types of camps offer Aboriginal people the chance to 'get out' of their everyday environment and onto Country. There is an opportunity at both – whether formal or informal – for passing on cultural knowledge between generations, spending time with the broader community, and living off Country.

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<sup>163</sup> Kaiya Donovan and Vanessa Cavanagh, "The camps are magic": NSW culture camps in partnership with OEH: An overview', Office of Environment and Heritage, unpublished report, 2012

<sup>164</sup> Donovan and Cavanagh, 'The camps are magic'

## Access to land and resources

Amendments to legislation and changes to government policies have created a number of new opportunities for Aboriginal people to again access the land and resources of the coastal environment.

## Jointly managed national parks

Aboriginal people share responsibility for the management of jointly-managed national parks with the state government, giving them the opportunity to share in the planning and decision-making process, and to 'sustain spiritual and cultural activities'.<sup>165</sup> Joint management agreements may take the form of memoranda of understanding between an Aboriginal community and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Indigenous Land Use Agreements, which are agreements about an area of public land covered by a native title claim, or lease-back agreements, in which Aboriginal owners of a national park lease it back to the government. Other, less formal opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in park management also exist.

Recent joint-management agreements over coastal areas include the Worimi Conservation Lands, coastal land at Stockton Bight near Newcastle which under a 2007 agreement is leased back to the government by Worimi LALC. Gaagal Wanggaan (South Beach) National Park, south of Nambucca Heads on the state's mid-north coast, was created as a jointly-managed national park in 2010. Aunty Jessie Williams, Gumbaynggirr Elder, expressed the significance of this agreement to herself and her community:

South Beach is very important to us, apart from the spiritual significance, it was a gathering place to teach young people about the seaside, the sea, the fish, plants and animals as well. Now that it is in Aboriginal hands it gives us a feeling of security. We continue to carry out our cultural practises.<sup>166</sup>

Saltwater, used by Worimi people from nearby Purfleet for Christmas camps and other occasions for much of the twentieth century, has also been established as a jointly managed national park. Its significance to local Aboriginal people was acknowledged by its gazettal as an Aboriginal Place in 1986.

## Marine parks

The creation of five new coastal marine parks in the late 1990s introduced zoning plans to certain areas of the coast, which attempt to balance marine conservation with recreational and commercial fishing interests. Both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous fishers' abilities to access marine resources in certain areas for personal/community sustenance or for commercial fishing were impacted by these zoning plans.

The Marine Parks Authority NSW (MPA) recognises that 'the practice of cultural use of marine resources is an integral part of the Aboriginal relationship with Country and great importance is placed on sustainable use.' The *Marine Parks Act 1997* currently enables cultural resource use within marine parks where the activity is undertaken in

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<sup>165</sup> Office of Environment and Heritage. Joint Managed Parks: Aboriginal people's relationship with their Country  
[www.environment.nsw.gov.au/jointmanagement/relationshipwithcountry.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/jointmanagement/relationshipwithcountry.htm). Accessed 20/7/11

<sup>166</sup> Office of Environment and Heritage. Gaagal Wanggaan (South Beach) National Park.  
[www.environment.nsw.gov.au/jointmanagement/GaagalWanggaan.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/jointmanagement/GaagalWanggaan.htm). Accessed 20/7/11

accordance with the provisions of the *Fisheries Management Act* and marine park zoning plans, and does not involve targeting protected species.

The MPA's 2010 *Aboriginal engagement and cultural use of marine resources policy* established a framework for Aboriginal communities living adjacent to marine parks to reach agreements with the MPA around cultural resource use in the park.<sup>167</sup> Aboriginal people may reach agreements that permit cultural resource-use activities that are contrary to restrictions within marine park zoning plans or existing marine park closures, or involve the taking of fish protected under the *Marine Parks Act* 1997, provided the cultural resource use is ecologically sustainable use. Aboriginal people eligible to undertake cultural resource use in marine parks may do so through permits, the establishment of special purpose zones managed for cultural resource use, and/or the development of overarching cultural resource use agreements between the MPA and eligible Aboriginal people.

To assist in the preparation of cultural resource use agreements, the MPA is assisting some Aboriginal communities who have cultural connections to the Sea Country in marine parks to engage in cultural mapping of that Sea Country. More details are provided below.

**Arrawarra headland:** The stone fish traps and associated area around Arrawarra Headland on the NSW north coast is an important resource collection and ceremonial place to the local Garby and Gumbaynggirr Elders. The date of origin of the fish traps is unknown, however for most of the twentieth century they provided an effective means for capturing fresh fish, while the rock platform of the headland has provided access to food and medicines for many local families.<sup>168</sup> Studies of the nearby middens show the Googoombull, or turban shell was the most commonly collected shellfish in the area.<sup>169</sup>

Local Gumbaynggirr Elder Tony Perkins recalls being told by his grandfather about methods of trapping and catching fish in the fish traps on occasions when there were two high tides during the one night, when the fish:

... come in on the first high tide... and they'll go back out on that second high tide, and that's why you put them traps in there like that, they'll come in and stay overnight and when they stay overnight they can't get back out and that's when they go down and spear 'em in the pools.

In 1991, the Solitary Islands Marine Reserve was formed, and its area included the Arrawarra Headland and fish traps. A zoning plan for the reserve incorporated the headland into a sanctuary zone, which prohibited anyone – including local Aboriginal people – from harvesting plants or animals. In 1998 the reserve became a marine park, and in the consultations for a revised zoning plan, the Garby Elders identified resource use at Arrawarra Headland and fishtraps 'as a priority for their community'. The first Solitary Islands Marine Park Zoning Plan, which was implemented in 2002, included a special purpose zone at Arrawarra Headland which allowed traditional use, education and research.<sup>170</sup> The *Arrawarra Headland Conservation Plan* (2006) outlines the activities the Gumbaynggirr people can undertake and specifies who can

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<sup>167</sup> Marine Parks Authority, [Aboriginal engagement and cultural use of fisheries resources policy](#), 2010

<sup>168</sup> NSW Marine Parks Authority and Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation, 'Arrawarra headland conservation plan', March 2006, p. 6

<sup>169</sup> Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation and University of New England, *Arrawarra meeting place*, 1999, p. 30

<sup>170</sup> Arrawarra headland conservation plan, pp. 7–8

undertake them. It allows for 'use of the fish traps for the capture of fish and collection of marine species from the Arrawarra Headland special purpose zone' by Garby Elders and other nominated people. Plants and animals can only be taken in accordance with the bag and size limits which are specified under the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*, and Garby Elders are responsible for ensuring that 'threatened species or communities are not harmed or affected by resource use'.<sup>171</sup> If the fish traps require modifications to return the site to a 'pre-disturbed state', permits are required.

Although the Garby community's use of the fish traps and Arrawarra Headland is strictly confined within various legislative requirements and restrictions, the special purpose zone re-establishes access (only recently lost) to this important cultural site. Equally as important, it enables a reconnection with Country, and with the activities associated with the Arrawarra Headland and fishtraps. Garby Elders can once again teach younger Aboriginal people about the history, use and maintenance of the fishtraps, to ensure that important cultural knowledge and skills are passed on to future generations.

Similar opportunities exist in other marine parks along the NSW coast to recognise and preserve important social, cultural and ceremonial places, and to preserve Aboriginal peoples' access to the cultural resources of these places.



Arrawarra fishtraps. Photo: C Ford, OEH

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<sup>171</sup> Arrawarra headland conservation plan, p. 11



## Fisheries legislation

When it was created in 1994, NSW fisheries legislation restricted some elements of Aboriginal fishing, confining Aboriginal fishers to the catch and size limits set for recreational fishers except where they had a permit for special cultural occasions. In 2009, the *NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994* was amended to include the first recognition and definition of Aboriginal cultural fishing. Aboriginal people are now exempted from paying a recreational fishing fee. The new regulations have not yet been established but in the interim, the Department of Primary Industries issued a policy which doubles the current recreational bag limits for Aboriginal fishers and, where a small group of Aboriginal people are participating in a cultural event within 20 m of the high water mark, permits fishers to calculate their catch based on the number of people present regardless of whether or not they are fishing.<sup>172</sup> These new provisions recognise the communal nature of Aboriginal fishing, acknowledging for the first time that fishers and shellfish collectors gather food for the whole community rather than just themselves or their immediate family. It will go some way to easing the burden of some strict fisheries restrictions for coastal Aboriginal people, and facilitate cultural fishing activities which can involve all generations and community members throughout the year, rather than just on special occasions.

**Abalone:** Until the 2009 amendments, the *NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994* imposed a limit of two abalone per person per day for waters south of Wreck Bay, and prohibited shucking at the water's edge.<sup>173</sup> People who took more than two abalone could be fined or jailed; if they have more than 50 abalone in their possession and do not hold a commercial abalone licence the penalties are substantially higher (see section 2).

As we have seen, until the 1960s, when the global demand for abalone prompted the creation of a formal commercial fishery in NSW and other southern states, Aboriginal people were virtually the only people harvesting the shellfish, whether for their own use or for trade. The restriction of abalone collection to two per person therefore had a substantial impact on community access to the resource. Further, the ban on shucking and tenderising abalone on the rocks meant Aboriginal people could not continue traditional harvesting techniques. In 2005, Beryl Cruse lamented that 'you can't clean them on the rocks how you used to prepare them, take them back to the older people in the community, you can get fined for doing that'.<sup>174</sup> Darren Mongta, who grew up in Eden and dived for abalone echoed Beryl's anguish at a time when the bag limit was ten abalone per diver: 'I wish they could give us some sort of decent rights to them. I mean ten's a feed but what about the elderly people like you [Beryl Cruse] and my mother. They can't dive and they love the abalone'. After he gave two abalone to an uncle who hadn't eaten abalone for nearly eight years, 'he was just crying, just for that two abs. He was so happy'.<sup>175</sup> Darren argued that access to abalone was crucially important 'for ones that are struggling and have got no food in the cupboard [to] sometimes know that they can go down to the sea and get a feed'.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> NSW Aboriginal Land Council *Fishing Fact Sheet 2*, 2011

<sup>173</sup> Collection of Abalone between Port Stephens and Botany Bay is banned, and between Botany Bay and Wreck Bay is only allowed on weekends and on NSW Public Holidays that fall on Mondays or Fridays. NSW Fisheries bag and size limits, [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/recreational/regulations/sw/sw-bag-and-size](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/recreational/regulations/sw/sw-bag-and-size) accessed 3/11/10

<sup>174</sup> Beryl Cruse in Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 81

<sup>175</sup> Darren Mongta in Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 77

<sup>176</sup> Darren Mongta in Cruse et al., *Mutton Fish*, p. 77

The amendments to the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* enable Aboriginal abalone gatherers to collect two shellfish per person on the beach, so if Elders or others accompany them to the beach they can now enjoy a small feed. However the heavy regulation of the abalone industry owing to reduced stocks over recent decades and the high financial value of the resource means it is likely there will always be some restrictions on Aboriginal abalone harvesting.

## Working on Country

Section two highlighted the ongoing opportunities for Aboriginal people living in coastal areas to work on Country for most of the twentieth century, whether it was in maritime industries such as fishing and bait collecting, working further inland in the timber industry and picking vegetables, or providing services and souvenirs for tourists. Current programs, which encourage Aboriginal people to work on Country, such as Green Teams, are not returning Aboriginal people to pre-contact past, but to a recent past. Working on Country in a variety of capacities has been the norm for many Aboriginal people along the coast (as well as elsewhere in NSW) until only very recently. The benefits of engaging with the white economy through fishing, bean picking and other means of employment in the earlier twentieth century are similar to those experienced by Aboriginal people who are currently employed in NRM capacities – that is, spending time on Country; learning valuable cultural knowledge, as well as the social and economic benefits of earning an income.

**Working for government:** Since the 1970s, as Aboriginal people have found themselves increasingly displaced from the coastal environment by loss of access and loss of certain types of employment, the opportunities for working on Country through government programs or government employment have been gradually improving. In the 1970s the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) employed a small number of Aboriginal staff to work on the NSW Sites of Significance Survey. This gave these individuals an opportunity to work on and engage with Country around the state. They recorded the 'place-based stories' of older Aboriginal people in an attempt to get a better understanding of contemporary Aboriginal concerns about cultural heritage.<sup>177</sup> In the process of working closely with Elders and recording stories and sites they learnt about their own cultural heritage. The creation of the Sites of Significance Survey team was therefore in itself significant, because it marked 'the entry of Aboriginal people into the field of heritage management at the government level.'<sup>178</sup>

Since the 1970s more and more Aboriginal people have been employed by NPWS (now a part of the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH)) and other land management agencies to work in cultural heritage management. More recently, Aboriginal people have also been employed to work in NRM. The creation of 'identified' positions of rangers and field officers target Aboriginal people to work on Country on OEH-managed lands. The creation of cadet marine ranger positions specifically facilitates Aboriginal people working on and managing Sea Country in NSW marine parks. The Byron Bay Marine Park has one Aboriginal marine ranger who went through this program, and the Batemans Bay Marine Park currently employs an Aboriginal cadet marine ranger who is also studying at university.

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<sup>177</sup> Johanna Kijas, *Revival, Renewal and Return: Ray Kelly and the NSW Sites of Significance Survey*, Department of Environment and Conservation NSW, Sydney, 2005, p. 5

<sup>178</sup> Denis Byrne, Helen Brayshaw and Tracy Ireland, *Social Significance: a discussion paper*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sydney, 2001, p. 24

These types of positions enable a small number of Aboriginal people to work on Country, but the type of work they do does not necessarily incorporate or acknowledge Aboriginal methods and traditions of natural resource management.

Catchment management authorities (CMAs) also employ Aboriginal people who work closely with local Aboriginal communities to implement NRM programs. However, even where such programs employ Aboriginal people to work on Country, funding cycles often limit their capacity to employ people long-term (and therefore provide employment security) and provide capacity-building opportunities. Permanent or ongoing funding sources are required in order to develop self-sustaining NRM enterprises.

**Green Teams:** 'Green Teams' are groups of Aboriginal people engaged in cultural and natural resource management employment and training. Along the coast, green teams provide some Aboriginal people with opportunities to not just work on but manage Country, as well as to receive education and training to support their work in environmental restoration and rehabilitation, and related fields.

In the Nambucca region, three Green Teams were created between 2003 and 2011. Members have received training for TAFE qualifications in Conservation and Land Management (CALM), and work experience in NRM and related fields. Some of the work undertaken by these groups includes dune stabilisation, rainforest regeneration, riverbank rehabilitation, cleaning up Aboriginal lands and constructing boardwalks, pathways and cycle paths. There is, therefore, a mix of environmental restoration work and construction work, and since there is not enough environmental management work in the Nambucca area to sustain the full team, they are also developing a range of construction skills such as carpentry and concrete laying which can be applied both in environmental management work and broader areas.<sup>179</sup>

While much of the Green Teams' time is spent on environmental restoration and construction work, they have enjoyed some opportunities to engage in environmental management. One of their largest projects, the construction of a boardwalk along part of the estuary of the Nambucca River, was built with the agreement of the RTA (now Roads and Maritime) to open up a causeway to restore the river estuarine flow, an important environmental goal for local Aboriginal people. The boardwalk also incorporated cultural signage.<sup>180</sup> Through working with Elders on projects such as this, members of the Green Team are not only learning job skills, but are gaining cultural education as they spend time on Country with Elders. Cultural heritage management is an important part of the training and the work that team members do, and they 'really appreciate' opportunities 'to work around sites of particular significance'.<sup>181</sup>

In addition to the social, economic and health benefits, the members of Green Teams enjoy the cultural benefits associated with increased opportunities for local Aboriginal people to again be employed to work on Country. Their work often combines western knowledge and skills with cultural knowledge and sensitivities. Like working in fishing or other maritime industries, it enables people to spend time outdoors and on Country, and facilitates the passing on of cultural knowledge between generations.

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<sup>179</sup> Janet Hunt, *Looking after Country in New South Wales: Two case studies of socioeconomic benefits for Aboriginal people*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU, Canberra, 2010

<sup>180</sup> Hunt, *Looking after Country in New South Wales*, p. 30

<sup>181</sup> Hunt, *Looking after Country in New South Wales*, p. 38

Unfortunately, Green Teams have limited funding opportunities. Many funding sources are only short term, making it difficult to create reliable long-term employment for those who undertake the CALM training. A Land and Sea Management Agreement currently being negotiated on the far south coast of NSW seeks to secure permanent and ongoing funding from multiple government agencies to ensure long-term employment for Aboriginal people working in NRM fields such as Green Teams. On the north coast, the Many Rivers Regional Partnership Agreement between Aboriginal groups, all levels of government and industry groups seeks to increase Aboriginal employment opportunities in NRM and other areas.<sup>182</sup> It established the Green Team Development Unit Aboriginal Corporation in 2009 (now known as the Green Teams Alliance) which co-ordinates work for and supports over 70 Green Teams which are undertaking substantial contract work in the region.<sup>183</sup>

## Planning

Some Aboriginal communities have developed Land and Sea Country Plans or other planning documents which list their priorities for working on and caring for Country, and identify pathways towards achieving certain goals.

A *Land and Sea Country Plan* for Aboriginal people with traditional, historical and contemporary connections to land and sea Country within the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council region was finalised in October 2010. The Plan outlines past and present NRM work undertaken by Aboriginal people in the region, and identifies key opportunities for future engagement activities. It is designed to assist government agencies and community organisations (such as OEH, the Southern Region CMA, local government, Forests NSW and Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries)) to guide development of partnership programs with Aboriginal people; guide investment and partnership opportunities and develop an understanding of Aboriginal people's aspirations in cultural and natural resource management.<sup>184</sup>

A number of agreements and strategies currently exist which have the potential to provide opportunities for Aboriginal cultural and NRM activities in the Eden LALC region. The Eden Regional Forestry Agreement (1999), for example, identifies a commitment by NPWS to 'employ and train Aboriginal staff and provide contracting opportunities', and recognises the importance of increasing opportunities for Aboriginal people to gain land management training and employment, and to manage their own Country. The 2003 Forests NSW and Eden LALC Memorandum of Understanding lists one of its goals as the promotion of 'active participation of the Aboriginal community in the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage and areas in the comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) reserves system (and) provide for Aboriginal access for cultural activity and provide for Aboriginal economic activity using forest resources.' The 2003 Eden LALC/NPWS Statement of Joint Intent focuses on culture camps, cultural activities and cultural tourism opportunities, identifying a number of locations for these activities. The Plan finds that:

...based on existing agreements, many opportunities for Aboriginal participation in NRM ... are provided for across the Region on public lands managed by local and state governments. In the main, these agreements are not applied to their full extent. The common barriers hindering the attainment of identified goals, according to the agencies involved, are funding, communication, training, capacity levels and a general lack of understanding about what potential exists within the agreement.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/communities-regions/many-rivers-regional-partnership-agreement?HTML>

<sup>183</sup> <http://greenteamsalliance.com.au/about/>

<sup>184</sup> Donaldson et al., *Land and Sea Country Plan*, p. 3

<sup>185</sup> Donaldson et al., *Land and Sea Country Plan* p. 22

The biggest limitation in past NRM work has been the tendency to fund short-term projects which offer few opportunities for capacity-building. A group of Eden LALC land and sea country rangers have been involved in a variety of NRM work over recent years, acquiring skills and qualifications such as boat and driving licences, revegetation, midden recording, aquatic pest management techniques and construction of retaining walls. However their work has been sporadic, dictated by funding opportunities and work availability.<sup>186</sup> The Eden LALC is keen to create a sustainable ranger program in order to 'maintain staff, build skills and a reputation in the NRM field'.<sup>187</sup> With dedicated training and funding, the rangers could be employed in site interpretation, protection and monitoring; fire fighting and hazard reduction burns; pest species control on land and sea; revegetation and vegetation management; field maintenance; coastal debris collection; and cultural mapping.<sup>188</sup>

The community is keen to pursue other economic and cultural NRM enterprises including participation in the aquaculture and tourism industries; the economic and cultural use of state forests; and activities directed towards the maintenance and transmission of cultural knowledge, such as culture camps.<sup>189</sup>

### **Aboriginal people working on Sea Country in northern Australia**

In central and northern Australia, Aboriginal people are engaged in substantial and ongoing NRM work, largely on Indigenous owned and managed land. Generally, they work over far larger areas than is possible in NSW. The Yugul Mangi Land and Sea Management Corporation, for example, operates in an area of approximately 20,000 square kilometres of south-east Arnhem Land.<sup>190</sup> The Djelk Rangers in the north-east Northern Territory work over an area of approximately two million hectares of ocean and islands.<sup>191</sup> These groups and the Yirralka Rangers in north-east Arnhem Land are employed in similar land and sea management work. On land, these rangers are involved in fire and weed management, and feral animal control. Their sea country management work is equally varied, ranging from collecting and identifying ghost nets (discarded fishing nets), to conducting illegal foreign fishing vessel patrols for the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), and provide monitoring and reporting of fishing vessels to the Northern Territory Government.<sup>192</sup> They also monitor turtle and dugong habitats.

This NRM work provides important social, economic, health, environmental and cultural benefits to participating Indigenous communities.<sup>193</sup> In addition to providing meaningful work opportunities for Indigenous people, some of the cultural benefits include cultural heritage protection, intergenerational cultural knowledge transmission, and an increased sense of identity and confidence, especially for

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<sup>186</sup> Donaldson et al., *Land and Sea Country Plan* pp. 43–45

<sup>187</sup> Donaldson et al., *Land and Sea Country Plan* p. 45

<sup>188</sup> Donaldson et al., *Land and Sea Country Plan* pp. 47–53

<sup>189</sup> Donaldson et al., *Land and Sea Country Plan* pp. 56–60

<sup>190</sup> <http://caepr.anu.edu.au/poc/partners/Yugulmangi.php>, accessed 22/12/10

<sup>191</sup> [http://caepr.anu.edu.au/poc/partners/Djelk3\\_activities.php](http://caepr.anu.edu.au/poc/partners/Djelk3_activities.php)

<sup>192</sup> [http://caepr.anu.edu.au/poc/partners/Yirralka3\\_activities.php](http://caepr.anu.edu.au/poc/partners/Yirralka3_activities.php),  
[http://caepr.anu.edu.au/poc/partners/YM3\\_activities.php](http://caepr.anu.edu.au/poc/partners/YM3_activities.php)

<sup>193</sup> Janet Hunt, *Social benefits of Aboriginal engagement in natural resource management*, The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, 2009, pp. x–xi

young people.<sup>194</sup> Preliminary research suggests Aboriginal people engaged in cultural and NRM work in NSW benefit from similar outcomes.<sup>195</sup>

The opportunities for NRM work depend to a large extent on land tenure, the perspective of non-Aboriginal land managers and the availability of funding. In northern Australia, the scope for Aboriginal involvement is far greater because of the comparatively larger proportion of Aboriginal-owned land there than in NSW.<sup>196</sup> In northern NSW, a 'cultural connections' model has been developed to assist Aboriginal communities to 'access ecological, cultural and economic benefits through biological and cultural diversity management' on Aboriginal-owned lands. It is designed to empower Aboriginal communities who initiate and drive the program, with the assistance of tools provided by government and other agencies. To September 2010, nine Indigenous communities had used the Cultural Connections model to develop products for their communities and as a tool to access funding to manage biological and cultural diversity on their lands. Activities carried out include property management plans and fire plans, cultural mapping, weed control, fencing, building paths and the creation of Green Team enterprises.<sup>197</sup>

However there are a variety of other opportunities for working on both privately owned (non-Indigenous) and public land, and in protected areas.<sup>198</sup> Co-management agreements over national parks or other land tenures provide good opportunities for Aboriginal people to contribute to management planning processes and also work on Country. The large proportion of coastal land in NSW which is incorporated into protected areas provides a strong opportunity for developing long-term NRM agreements with local Aboriginal communities. Managers of coastal national parks are already strong facilitators of culture camps, with four out of the five culture camps featured in the *Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water Annual Report 2009–10* located on the north and south coasts.<sup>199</sup>

Land tenure is not the only barrier. A 2004 study of a group of Bundjalung people's perceptions of their participation in natural resource management processes found that Aboriginal knowledge of western science and environmental management processes was a significant barrier to effective consultation/participation in NRM decision making processes. It argued that, while 'it is widely accepted that optimal environmental protection will only arise through a collaboration of western science and Indigenous knowledge systems', Aboriginal people are disempowered by education disadvantages and consultative structures in which they feel their input is 'merely tokenistic'.<sup>200</sup> The authors concluded that:

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<sup>194</sup> Hunt, *Social benefits of Aboriginal engagement in natural resource management*, pp. x–xi

<sup>195</sup> Hunt, *Social benefits of Aboriginal engagement in natural resource management*, pp. xi–xiii

<sup>196</sup> Hunt, *Social benefits of Aboriginal engagement in natural resource management*, p. 18

<sup>197</sup> 'Cultural Connections: Indigenous communities managing biological and cultural diversity for ecological, cultural and economic benefit', Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW, Sydney, 2010.

<sup>198</sup> Hunt, *Social benefits of Aboriginal engagement in natural resource management*, p18; Hunt, *Looking After Country in New South Wales*, p. 2

<sup>199</sup> Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, *Annual Report 2009–10*, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, Sydney, 2010, p. 106

<sup>200</sup> David Lloyd and Fiona Norrie, 'Identifying Training Needs to improve Indigenous community representatives input into environmental resource management consultative processes: A case study of the Bundjalung Nation', *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 20 (1), 2004, pp. 103, 108



...the development of an education and training program for Indigenous people involved in western based resource management can be considered cultural awareness training in western constructs and institutions. By increasing knowledge of 'White' processes within Indigenous communities, a sense of empowerment is likely to be fostered, providing for ease of communication and further encouraging voluntary and thus more valuable input into natural resource management processes.<sup>201</sup>

Jessica Weir argues that this should work both ways. She suggests that 'the stakeholder or interest group model in environmental management... denies, or is blind to, Indigenous peoples' governance relationships with country. Natural resource managers need to recognise that Indigenous people have their own methods for determining what is happening, why, and what the appropriate response is'.<sup>202</sup>

The opportunities for land and sea country management work in the Gulf Country of the Northern Territory are vastly different to those in NSW due to land tenure, population density, and the difficulties for government monitoring of quarantine, customs and fishing in the vast areas off the north of Australia. However the Cape Byron Marine Park's Aboriginal dive team, which provides services for the Marine Park as well as conducting cetacean rescues, indicates a possible path for similar marine based NRM work off the NSW coast. Other possibilities may include working for fisheries, marine parks, or for agencies such as the coast guard.

## Cultural mapping

Mapping of ancestral territories... is a key instrument currently used by local communities to re-vindicate land and resource rights and to illustrate existing systems of natural resource management.<sup>203</sup>

Mapping provides Aboriginal communities in Australia and overseas with a way of identifying and illustrating their connections to lands and resources that can lead to positive outcomes for communities. As David C Nahwegahbow, Anishinabe lawyer from Ontario, Canada explained, 'after European contact, [traditional] oral communications were given less and less weight, and First Nations were put at a profound disadvantage in negotiating about their lands and resources... You have to be able to show the impact to a people who are not themselves land based. So you need to draw them a picture'.<sup>204</sup> Mapping facilitates the conveyance of cultural knowledge in a way that can be understood by government agencies, which rely on maps in their land and resource management processes. Internationally, therefore, mapping 'has emerged as a common language bringing traditional knowledge and local values into the planning and resource management arena'.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Lloyd and Norrie, 'Identifying training needs', p. 110

<sup>202</sup> Jessica Weir, 'Murray River Country: an ecological dialogue with traditional owners', AIATSIS, Canberra, 2009, p. 69

<sup>203</sup> Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend, Michel Pimbert, M. Taghi Farvar, Ashish Kothari and Yves Renard, *Sharing Power: Learning-by-doing in co-management of natural resources throughout the world*, IIED and IUCN/CEESP/CMWG, Cenesta, Tehran, 2004, pp. 147–8

<sup>204</sup> David C Nahwegahbow, foreword, Terry Tobias, *Chief Kerry's Moose: A guidebook to land use and occupancy mapping, research design and data collection*, Union of BC Indian Chiefs and EcoTrust Canada, Vancouver, 2000, p. vi

<sup>205</sup> 'Award winning GIS program helps First Nation regain control over Haida Gwaii', *Eco Trust Canada* [<http://ecotrust.ca/>, published 15 June 2008, viewed 15 August 2008]. For other international examples of successful Indigenous NRM and land tenure mapping see Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend, et al., *Sharing Power*, pp. 148–9, 158–160



In Australia and abroad, maps, which give Aboriginal people a tool for negotiating with government agencies, have the potential to empower those Aboriginal communities, and to give them a greater say in NRM processes and activities. In British Columbia, Canada, a number of mapping projects initiated by EcoTrust Canada (a non-government organisation) have resulted in notable power shifts, whereby the government now negotiates far more regularly with First Nation communities whose connections to place and to natural resources have been mapped.<sup>206</sup> In New Zealand's North Island, mapping is being used to give the Ngati Hori People a voice in the local council's decision-making process regarding water allocation; it is therefore seen as a way of facilitating the community's participation as traditional guardians of the Karamu Stream in an ongoing discussion in which they had no voice previously.<sup>207</sup> In this situation, mapping also has the potential to restore cultural connections to a place – to get people back onto Country, and thinking about ways of managing that Country.<sup>208</sup> This is just one example from New Zealand, where there is growing use of GIS by Maori people who are keen to represent their attachment to the environment and capture traditional knowledge in new ways before it is lost with the deaths of Elders. In a prominent model, different levels of information are made available for different audiences, and information that is particularly sensitive is linked to a specific person through a database system.<sup>209</sup>

In Australia, recent cultural mapping projects include *Mapping Mulan*, a book which brings together Aboriginal and scientific knowledge of the Lake Gregory area of the Kimberley 'to record traditional stories and oral histories, to make photographic and video documentation of campsites, archaeological and geological sites, bush food and bush medicine, and to record place and family names'.<sup>210</sup> A bright and visually arresting product, *Mapping Mulan* 'carried its own cultural legitimacy' because the Traditional Owners 'controlled the information that went onto it and chose the symbols to represent locations and activities ... It was a language rescue operation too'.<sup>211</sup> Local enthusiasm for this project has led to new mapping projects by the community, including the mapping of vegetation types and fire scars as part of an environmental management plan.<sup>212</sup>

A 2003 atlas created by the Yanyuwa community of the south west Gulf of Carpentaria also became an important forum for that community's cross-generational knowledge and cultural exchange. The atlas was 'monitored, controlled and collaborated on by traditional culture-owners of the Yanyuwa community', and highlights the sharp distinctions between Yanyuwa narratives and European 'narrative assumptions and conventions'. It also 'powerfully demonstrates how

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<sup>206</sup> Melanie Durette and Manuhua Barcham, 'Water flow allocation and Indigenous national resource mapping: Empowering Communities', Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research Seminar, Canberra, 30 July 2008. See also [www.ecotrust.ca](http://www.ecotrust.ca)

<sup>207</sup> Durette and Barcham, 'Water flow allocation and Indigenous national resource mapping'

<sup>208</sup> Durette and Barcham, 'Water flow allocation and Indigenous national resource mapping'

<sup>209</sup> Garth Harmsworth, 'Indigenous Values and GIS: A method and a framework', *Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor* 6 (3), December 1998

<sup>210</sup> Kim Mahood, 'Mapping outside the square: cultural mapping in the south-east Kimberley', *Aboriginal History*, 30, 2006, p. 1

<sup>211</sup> Mahood, 'Mapping outside the square', p. 9

<sup>212</sup> Kim Mahood, pers com 31 March 2009

Yanyuwa people have husbanded resources and a knowledge of place, of which the colonists and mainstream culture are largely unaware'.<sup>213</sup>

Any cultural mapping projects need to be carefully managed to ensure that Indigenous participants are empowered rather than disadvantaged by the process of sharing traditional or cultural knowledge.<sup>214</sup> Community retention of ownership of the maps, and capacity to control access to them, is integral to ensuring the community is empowered by the mapping process. But just as important is the role of Indigenous people in creating the maps themselves. Ideally, cultural mapping also needs a focus on action, rather than on the collection of 'mere data and information'.<sup>215</sup> Positive outcomes of cultural mapping can range from improved information sharing and better communication between government and communities<sup>216</sup> to the creation of protected areas or natural resource management policies which are guided by a proper understanding of the resource use needs of Indigenous communities.<sup>217</sup>

Below is a 'participation ladder' which identifies the spectrum of community involvement in and benefits from cultural mapping programs.<sup>218</sup> It highlights that the greater control of the mapping process communities have, the more ownership they will have of the process, and of the outcomes.

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<sup>213</sup> Frances Devline-Glass, 'An Atlas of the Sacred: hybridity, representability, and the myths of Yanyuwa Country', *Antipodes* 19 (2), December 2005, pp. 127–140

<sup>214</sup> Jefferson Fox, Krisnawati Suryanata, Peter Hershock and Pramono Albertus Hadi, 'Mapping Boundaries, Shifting Power: The Socio-Ethical dimensions of Participatory Mapping' in Goodman, Michael K, Boykoff, Maxwell T, Evered, Kyle T (eds), *Contentious Geographies: Environmental Knowledge, Meaning, Scale*, Ashgate, 2008, pp. 203–218

<sup>215</sup> Borrini-Feyerabend et al., *Sharing Power*, p. 157

<sup>216</sup> Stephanie Duvail, Olivier Hamerlynck, Nandi XI, Mwambeso Pili Revocatus and Richard Elibariki, 'Participatory Mapping for local management of natural resources in villages of the Rufiji District (Tanzania)', *The Electronic Journal on Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 26 (6), 2006

<sup>217</sup> Shankar Aswani and Matther Lauer, 'Incorporating fishermen's local knowledge and behaviour into geographic information systems (GIS) for designing Marine Protected Areas in Oceania', *Human Organization* 65 (1), 2006, pp. 81–102; Supaporn Anuchiracheeva, Harvey Demaine, Ganesh Shivakoti and Kenneth Ruddle, 'Systematizing local knowledge using GIS: fisheries management in Bang Saphan Bay, Thailand', *Ocean and Coastal Management* 46, 2003, pp. 1049–1068

<sup>218</sup> Robert Chambers, 'Participatory Mapping and Geographic Information Systems: Whose Map? Who is Empowered and Who Disempowered? Who Gains and Who Loses?' *Electronic Journal on Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 2006, pp. 25, 2, 1–11, 25

	Outsiders' objectives include:	Roles/Relationships		Actions		Ownership
		Outsider	Local people's	Outsider'	Local people's	
<b>TOTALITARIAN</b>	State political control	Dictator	Slave	Command	Comply	Outsiders'
<b>NOMINAL</b>	Cosmetic legitimisation	Manipulator	Puppet			
<b>EXTRACTIVE</b>	Obtain local knowledge for better planning	Researcher/Planner	Informant			
<b>INDUCED</b>	Gain action through material incentives	Employer	Worker			
<b>CONSULTATIVE/INSTRUMENTAL</b>	Improve effectiveness and efficiency	Rational economiser	Collaborator			
<b>PARTNERSHIP</b>	Share responsibility and power	Co-equal partner	Co-equal partner			
<b>TRANSFORMATIVE</b>	Facilitate sustainable development by local people	Facilitator/Catalyst	Analyst/Actor/ Agent			
<b>SELF-MOBILIZING</b>	Support spontaneous action	Supporter	Agent/Controller	Support	Initiate	Local People's

**Source:** Robert Chambers, *Participatory Mapping and Geographic Information Systems*, 2006

In the coastal areas of NSW, community-driven cultural mapping activities could be used by Aboriginal people to claim a greater stake in NRM processes and activities, or to contribute to Aboriginal Place nominations. Maps are a spatialised way of depicting Aboriginal connections to the coastal environment in the post-contact period. They can highlight both cultural resource use and resource management activities of the past and present, and continuities over time.

### Cultural mapping in marine parks

In NSW marine parks, where zoning maps are integral to park management practices, mapping offers local Aboriginal communities a particularly effective way of communicating their fishing interests. It also has the potential to facilitate a greater participation by Aboriginal people in the management of marine protected areas, and a greater input into decisions regarding NRM.

Aboriginal communities living in or adjacent to the Cape Byron Marine Park in far northern NSW, and the Port Stephens–Great Lakes Marine Park north of Sydney are currently mapping their interests in the marine park areas with a view to informing future Cultural Resource Use Agreements between themselves and the NSW Marine Park Authority. Cultural Resource Use Agreements are guided by the Marine Park Authority's *Aboriginal Engagement and Cultural Use of Fisheries Resources Policy*, which aims to both encourage the involvement of Aboriginal people in the planning

and management of NSW marine parks, and to support and provide for the cultural use of fisheries resources in NSW marine parks.

The policy defines cultural resource use as:

The collecting of native and introduced plants and animals and other natural materials for subsistence, medicinal and other cultural purposes. Cultural resource use may also refer to the activities associated with visiting or interacting with a place or landscape, such as culture camps.

The emphasis of any Cultural Resource Use Agreements is expected to be about harvesting marine resources such as fish and invertebrates rather than NRM activities. However, there is clear scope for developing agreements with the MPA – either in the form of memoranda of understanding or through the creation of Special Purpose Zones – which facilitate greater involvement by local Aboriginal people in the management of the marine park environment. The Arrawarra Headland Special Purpose Zone, in which Garby Elders are permitted to look after the Arrawarra fish trap and use it for cultural purposes as well as harvesting, is a case in point.

## Conclusion

Aboriginal people have never been displaced from the NSW coastal environment although they lost ownership of much of their land in the course of white settlement. For the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, Aboriginal people lived and camped in coastal areas, travelled along various coastal pathways and worked in coastal districts. They maintained cultural connections to Sea Country, lived off the resources of the sea, and often sold or traded marine resources such as fish and shellfish. The 'footprints' of this cultural life remain across the coastal landscape in the form of shell middens and the remains of camp sites.

As the twentieth century progressed, work became harder to obtain in some industries, and access to many places became more difficult. But Aboriginal people continued to access and use the coast and its resources where possible. The growing popularity of the coast, initially among summer tourists and later by 'sea-changers', substantially increased the residential population of coastal areas and the formal occupation of previously vacant Crown lands. Coastal camping places which had been used by Aboriginal families year after year were privatised or subjected to new restrictions as councils or state government took over their control. The tightening of the commercial fishing industry and new legislation around recreational fishing imposed new limits on catching fish and collecting shellfish, both for personal and commercial use. Changes within Aboriginal communities themselves, such as increasing car ownership, changed the way people moved around and experienced the environment: their Country.

Efforts are being made, both by Aboriginal communities and government, to provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to continue to maintain cultural connections with Sea Country, and to continue accessing, living and working in the coastal environment. Such efforts are not about returning Aboriginal people to a pre-contact past, but are a continuation of ongoing practices and connections.

The gazettal of a number of Aboriginal Places, specifically because of their significance as camping and resource collection places in the recent past, acknowledges their ongoing importance to Aboriginal culture today. Culture camps, Green Teams and the co-management of national parks, offer Aboriginal people the opportunity to interact with Elders on Country, to learn cultural knowledge about the coastal environment, and to play a role in managing that environment. These are but the latest episodes in a history of Aboriginal coastal occupation and caring for Country that extends back many thousands of years.

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