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Central Coast

First Nations Accord 2022

We acknowledge we live, work and play on Darkinjung Country. We pay our respects to Elders, past, present and emerging and recognise their continued connection to these lands and waterways. We acknowledge our shared responsibility to care for and protect our place and people.

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Acknowledgement

- We acknowledge that the Central Coast is a land with Traditional Custodians that had ancestral connections to country spanning back thousands of years, and which are evident in the landscape and cultural sites across the region
- We acknowledge that these were people of the First Nations of Australia
- We acknowledge that Traditional Custodians protected and defended this land
- We acknowledge that the Central Coast has become home to thousands of First Nations people from across Australia, who now care for country and community
- We pay our respect to the Elders of the past and the legacy that have left
- We pay our respect to the Elders of the present and their teachings
- We pay our respect to the young leaders, and those who are yet to come
- We cherish the rich and enduring culture of the First Nations People
- We regret past hurts, disconnection to land, family and community
- We honour Indigenous wisdom, knowledge and connection to land
- We recognise that reconciliation is built on trust and affirmative action
- We acknowledge the connection between First Nations People and Country and their important role in shaping the future of the Central Coast

Preamble

From Central Coast Council Administrator

As Administrator of Central Coast Council, I am proud to represent a community that is home to so many First Nations People, and deeply respect their enduring connection to land, culture, and community.

The First Nations People have been custodians of this land for at least 60,000 years. The Central Coast area is a treasured place to the First Nations People, with many significant sites of cultural heritage. Central Coast Council acknowledges that we deliver services, programs and activities that are on land traditionally owned by First Nations People.

We acknowledge that Australia's Colonial past is the source of much pain and suffering. We apologise for wrongs committed against People of the First Nations that still exist today.

This Accord is an important step forward in the journey of reconciliation.

Through this Accord, we commit to the strengthening of bonds between Council and the First Nations People of the Central Coast, and commit to reconciliation, Closing the Gap and working together for a positive future.

This Accord will become our shared vision for the future of our whole community.

Signed, on behalf of Central Coast Council
by Administrator Rik Hart

Introduction

The Central Coast First Nations Accord is an agreement between First Nations Leaders and Central Coast Council.

It aims to set an agenda that will guide signatories on how best to work together and further reconciliation.

The Accord is designed to complement and build on the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council (DLALC) and Central Coast Council.

It will build upon the sentiments of the agreement and set a vision where Council will understand, acknowledge and value the contribution of First Nations people and their enduring connection to land and culture, as a critical part of the Central Coast and something that contributes to all Australians living here.

This Accord is an important step forward in the journey of reconciliation. Whilst the MOU laid a foundation, this document will guide the future. As residents continue to explore and learn more about reconciliation, Central Coast Council must reaffirm and demonstrate its commitment to learning, growing and new ways of thinking.

The Accord is a promise to our First Nations People that we will not only continue to support the principles of cooperation, but also listen to history and support Aboriginal people to realise their future. It is hoped that The Accord will become our shared vision for the future of our whole community.

This Accord works in alignment with Government frameworks such as Local Decision Making and delivers against the Local Government Association's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap).

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Background/ Context

First Nations People have been custodians of this land for at least 60,000 years but it is likely that their connection extends well beyond this. There are thousands of registered sites of cultural significance on the Central Coast, and it is a very treasured place to the First Nations People. The Aboriginal community itself is also to be celebrated with many inspiring young people, high achievers and respected Elders all calling the Central Coast home.

First Nations People are resilient, and their culture is alive. In order to move forward, we must acknowledge how we got here. Australia's Colonial past is the source of much pain and suffering.

Wrongs were committed against People of the First Nations that are still present today. Natural elimination and the forcible removal of children will impact the community for generations.

Our area is one of the largest and fastest growing Aboriginal communities in Australia with many moving here for the environment, opportunity, and connection to family. This population grew by 38 per cent between the 2011 and 2016 Census reporting periods, with significant growth expected to continue into the future. This population continues to experience higher levels of disadvantage than that of non-Indigenous people, often requiring targeted and more intensive services.

The Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council is the largest non-government land holder on the Central Coast, giving them the ability to take care of their community and create programs that are meaningful. Under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW) (ALRA), Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council has a number of functions including land acquisition and management, culture and heritage protection and promotion, the provision of approved community benefits, and financial stewardship. This provides Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council remit over the traditional boundaries of land extending from the Hawkesbury River in the south, Lake Macquarie in the north, the McDonald River and Wollombi up to Mt Yengo in the west and the Pacific Ocean in the east.

Central Coast Council delivers services and programs that are on land traditionally owned by First Nations Peoples.

Memorandum of Understanding

In 1983, the NSW State Government, passed the Aborignal Land Rights Act to enable and empower Aboriginal people to lead and govern their own communities. This authority was in the form of Local Aboriginal Land Councils, who are responsible for the health and wellbeing of their people.

At its meeting in May 2018, Council committed to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council.

The MOU provides a framework for co-operation that recognises Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council as a custodian of Aboriginal land, cultural sites and landscape within the Central Coast region.

The MOU considers and respects this appointment and is the context upon which it was developed.

This MOU will be reviewed periodically as part of a continuous improvement and growth approach, that will ensure that Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Central Coast Council can continue to work together to maximise opportunities and outcomes in an ever changing economic, cultural, environmental and political climate.

Regional Approaches

Barang Regional Alliance is the voice of the local First Nations Community, made up of six Aboriginal organisations from across the Central Coast: Bara Barang Corporation, Gudjagang Ngara Li-dhi Corporation, NAISDA, Ngaimpe Aboriginal Corporation – The Glen, Mingaletta Aboriginal Corporation and Yerin Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Health Services Ltd.

The alliance works together in partnership with government and other key stakeholders, to reform the ways that Indigenous policies and programs are designed and delivered in the community.

Mandates of the Alliance are:

- Structural reform - changing the systems, policies, and practices so that they are better suited to fit with the local Indigenous community
- Aboriginal-led decision making and partnerships - working with communities to make sure that decisions are based on community knowledge and what actually happens on the ground
- Regionally driven investment - the delivery of investment decided at a local level specific to the Central Coast
- Tailored services based on need - services designed and delivered based on what the community looks like and needs

Council's work in Bridging the Gap

Since 2007, and with the appointment of a targeted Indigenous role, Central Coast Council has delivered programs that help to Bridge the Gap.

The Bridging the Gap Foundation was established as an urgent priority when research showed there was an unequal life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Health and education outcomes were identified as major contributors to this gap.

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NGURA PROGRAM

Ngura means 'Place' in local language and it is the title given to one of the Central Coast's most successful Indigenous programs. The Ngura Health and Education Program has been running for 14 years and is delivered in partnership with the Department of Education.

Each Term, up to 20 Indigenous students participate from local high schools. The program teaches Level 1 in Indigenous Leadership, Level 1 in Aboriginal History and Level 1 in Sport and Recreation. The aim of the program is to engage the students in an alternative style of learning where they can meet others with the same background, explore their own cultural identity and connect with local Elders. Each student is mentored throughout their high schooling career, often participating in the program more than once. Learning more about their culture and building stronger connections to place is important. It creates a sense of belonging and young people learn how to give back to their community.

Many graduates have gone onto further education and returned home to become the next generation of First Nations Leaders. The Ngura Program was recognised for excellence at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference in 2017 for Senior Projects in Indigenous Leadership. This was Central Coast Council's first internationally recognised achievement.

MALIGA PROGRAM

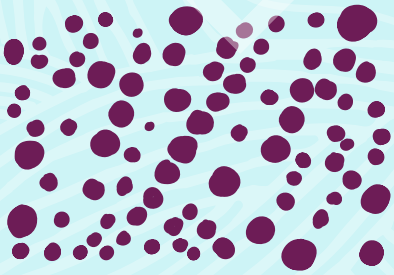
Maliga means 'Shine' in local language and it is the title of an Indigenous Arts and Culture showcase which takes places during Reconciliation Week. The program provides a multidisciplinary platform in the visual, performance and literary arts for young Indigenous people 3-18 years of age. They are given an opportunity to present visual stories based on connection to place and cultural identity. The program incorporates an Artist in Residence and a Public Program to enhance and showcase the diversity of Indigenous arts practice. Maliga has been running for 7 years and is a critical pathway for Indigenous young people who want to learn more about culture and have a keen creative interest. Many young emerging Indigenous artists got their start in Maliga and have since become legitimate local artists.

COMMUNITY-LED PROGRAMS

Central Coast Council supports several community-led programs each year that focus on early- intervention for Indigenous children and young people. Some of these include a literacy and reading exchange between local Elders and preschool children, a football tournament where non-Indigenous and Indigenous high school students compete for reconciliation, a surfing camp where over 100 students gather to learn about water safety and connect to their Elders, as well as annual whole-of- community celebrations for NAIDOC week. This suite of programs has seen real change in the areas of health, education and cultural recognition; three of the four pillars to Bridge the Gap.

INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Central Coast Council will develop an Indigenous Engagement Framework, which will guide Council in consulting with our Indigenous community when we develop our plans and strategies.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The waterways have always been a focal point of Indigenous culture. Council's environmental education programs such as the Kayak Tours and Catchment Crawls were developed in conjunction with the local Indigenous Community.

A video of a Local Elder was also captured that offers an amazing insight into what the waterways mean to the local Aboriginal people of the Central Coast and how the waterways are a vital part of Aboriginal culture and connection to the land.

Our Commitment to the Future

Strengthening Engagement and Working in Genuine Partnership

Aligned to Priority Reform One of Closing the Gap, stakeholders will build and strengthen structures that empower Aboriginal people and contribute to shared decision making, that will allow us to accelerate place-based outcomes.

- We commit to meaningful and cooperative engagement with First Nations Leaders through the establishment of a broad based Aboriginal Advisory Committee.
- We commit to acknowledge Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council are the authority on matters relating to culture, land, and community.

Working with And Strengthening the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector

Aligned to Priority Reform Two of Closing the Gap, stakeholders recognise that Aboriginal community- controlled organisations and services are better for Aboriginal people, achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal people, and are often preferred over mainstream services.

- We commit to strengthening the relationship between Council and Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council through a revised MOU, and a review of the MOU every three years to ensure that both parties are able to maximise outcomes for the community.
- We commit to ongoing investment and leadership in the areas of health and education, working in partnership with Aboriginal leaders and community-controlled organisations that represent and service the First Nations community.

Strengthening Culture and The Way That the Central Coast Council Does Business with First Australians

Aligned to Priority Reform Three of Closing the Gap Priorities, we will work together to deliver systemic and structural reforms to our relationship and the way that we work together, to improve the way that the Central Coast Council responds to the needs of First Australians.

- We commit to embed and practice meaningful cultural safety, including the identification and elimination of institutional discrimination and unconscious bias to improve the relationship with, and outcomes for, First Australians living on the Central Coast.
- We commit to supporting First Nations Cultures by working with the community to identify the history of Aboriginal people on the Central Coast, recognising the unique history that and cultural heritage that the region has.
- We commit to improving the culture of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people including (but not limited to) participating in National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week each year.

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- We commit to delivering cultural awareness training and development opportunities to Council staff in partnership with the local Aboriginal community and parties to this Accord.
- We commit to recognising Aboriginal people's ongoing connection to place through Welcome to Country ceremonies or Acknowledgement of Country statements at large meetings and public events.
- We commit to promote, include, and celebrate the pre-colonial history & heritage of First Nations People throughout the community.
- We commit to support strategies and programs to recruit and retain Aboriginal employees across organisations within the Region.
- We commit to finding more employment opportunities for young Aboriginal leaders.
- We commit to explore avenues and support partnerships to develop regionally significant tourism projects.
- We commit to support the capacity of Aboriginal community groups to design and run targeted programs, events, and activities.
- We commit to participate in local and regional networks to facilitate positive outcomes for the community under closing the gap and other federal and state government initiatives.
- We commit to advocate for and with the local Aboriginal community to State and Federal Governments and service providers on community issues.
- We commit to cooperate on matters of joint development and projects for economic growth including housing development.
- We commit to support people's right of choice to Treaty, Self-determination, Constitutional Recognition and/or Sovereignty.

Shared understanding of the needs of the community

Aligned to Priority Reform Four of Closing the Gap, we recognise that shared access to local data and information will help us shape the way we respond to the needs of the growing Central Coast Aboriginal community. Shared access to data and information will help us work together to meet current and future needs.

- We commit to sharing data and information at a regional level where not restricted due to legislative requirements, to ensure that the Central Coast Council and First Nations Leaders can make informed decisions that meet the needs of the Aboriginal community.

Central Coast Council looks forward to a future where the relationship with First Nations Leaders is strengthened, young leaders are empowered, and collaboration is genuine.

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Artist Statement

The artwork is a representation of gunni thakun (Mother Earth) giving birth to all living things in Australia. It shows how important our women are to our culture and how they must be respected and treated at all times. The designs inside her shows the different lores and stories, with each representing those same values. The inside of her body is filled with red, white and yellow ochre, to show how special she is as a woman, including the colours in her legs being symbolic of the country and salt water people. The surrounding designs represent stories and the creation of the lore in line with all the different country's within Australia.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Kyle Waters is a Kamilaroi descendant who lives on the Central Coast, NSW. He is an emerging young artist and former winner of the Maliga Indigenous Arts and Culture Showcase 2018 (Elders Choice Award). Kyle has participated in many community-led programs, funded by Central Coast Council including the Ngura Health and Lifestyle program. Since graduating, Kyle has become a promising young creative and his work been acquired by the Department of Education and Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council and his designs are featured on coffee mugs, magnets, footy boots and boomerangs.

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