

SUCCESS STORIES

Aboriginal Land Rights Achievements in NSW



New South Wales
Aboriginal Land Council



LAND RIGHTS NOW



“This proposed legislation (the Aboriginal Land Rights Act) takes the first step in this State towards redressing the injustice and neglect of real Aboriginal need since Captain Phillip stepped upon the shores of Port Jackson in 1788. The Government has made a clear, unequivocal decision that land rights for Aborigines is the most fundamental initiative to be taken for the regeneration of Aboriginal culture and dignity, and at the same time laying the basis for a selfreliant and more secure economic future for our continent’s Aboriginal custodians.”

Frank Walker, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Second Reading Speech, Aboriginal Land Rights Bill, 24 March 1983.

ABORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS

Following recommendations from the 1978-1981 Inquiry of the NSW Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines the Aboriginal Land Rights Act was passed by the NSW Parliament in 1983.

The Aboriginal Land Rights Act was enacted in recognition of, and in an attempt to remedy, the ongoing effects of the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples in NSW. The preamble of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act recognises that:

1. Land in the State of NSW was traditionally owned and occupied by Aborigines;
2. Land is of spiritual, social, cultural and economic importance to Aborigines;
3. It is fitting to acknowledge the importance which land has for Aborigines and the need of Aborigines for land;
4. It is accepted that as a result of past Government decisions the amount of land set aside for Aborigines has been progressively reduced without compensation.

The Aboriginal Land Rights Act was passed by the NSW Parliament to facilitate the return of land in NSW to Aboriginal peoples through claim over Crown land. A network of Aboriginal Land Councils was established to acquire and manage land as an economic base for Aboriginal communities, as compensation for historic dispossession and in recognition of the ongoing disadvantage suffered by Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal Land Councils represent not only the interests of their members, but of the wider Aboriginal community.



The Inquiry of the NSW Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines

The Select Committee was chaired by the then Labor member for Woronora, Maurice Keane MP. The terms of reference of the Select Committee required it to inquire into and make recommendations about:

- The causes of the socio-economic disadvantages of Aboriginal people, particularly in the areas of housing, health, education, employment, welfare and cultural issues;
- The effectiveness of the Commonwealth/State arrangements in Aboriginal Affairs; and
- Land rights for Aboriginal people in NSW.

The Select Committee was assisted in its work by an Aboriginal Taskforce established to maintain close contact with Aboriginal communities during the course of the inquiry through liaison, facilitating field trips and community meetings. It released its first report in August 1980 which dealt with land rights and the protection of sacred and significant sites.

A second report, released in April 1981, dealt with the socio-economic issues and inter-governmental arrangements on Aboriginal Affairs.

The cross-party Select Committee made a range of findings on land rights and the protection of sacred and significant sites based on the evidence and submissions received during its inquiry process.

These findings formed the basis for its recommendations on the establishment of a land rights system as well as an Aboriginal Heritage Commission in NSW. The Committee emphasised that the granting of land rights was of paramount importance to Aboriginal people in NSW and recommended that the land rights system comprise of local community councils to advocate for Aboriginal peoples rights and to support decision making at a local level.



ABORIGINAL LAND CLAIMS

The intention of Aboriginal land rights was to enable ‘Vast tracks of Crown land (to) be available for claim (to) go some way to redress the injustices of dispossession...’¹. A core function of Aboriginal Land Councils is the claiming of land under the compensatory mechanisms of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act for the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples from land in NSW. Section 36 of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act sets out the definition of claimable Crown land as being land that is vested in Her Majesty (that when a claim is made for the land) are able to be reserved or able to be lawfully sold or leased, or are reserved or dedicated for any purposes, under the Crown Lands Act, are not lawfully used or occupied, that does not comprise of land which in the opinion of the Crown Lands Minister are needed or likely to be needed as residential lands, are not needed or likely to be needed for an essential public purpose, are not the subject of an application for the determination of native title or an approved determination of native title. Land that falls within this definition must be granted to the claimant Aboriginal Land Council. A successful determination of a land claim generally delivers freehold title to land which includes rights to certain minerals in the freehold land. This freehold can be dealt with for example via sale, lease and the owner of the freehold land (the Aboriginal Land Council) has the same rights as other freehold owners, subject to compliance with the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Aboriginal Land Councils can be granted lands that are to be managed as national parks or other form of reserve via a ‘lease back’ arrangement with the NSW Government, sometimes known as ‘joint management’.

Aboriginal Land Councils are also entitled to make agreements with other landowners or persons in control of land to access land for hunting, fishing and gathering, and have rights to apply for access permits. As at September 2025, there are 42,781 land claims that are still pending Government determination; 6579 of which were lodged before 31 December 2000 and 156 undetermined; with 7691 of these having been lodged from ALRA enactment to 15 September 2005 (over twenty years ago) and 583 undetermined.

¹ Frank Walker, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Second Reading Speech, Aboriginal Land Rights Bill, 24 March 1983

Brewarrina Common Land Claim

The resolution of the Brewarrina Common Land Claim was a landmark achievement for Aboriginal Land Rights in New South Wales. First lodged in 1984, it was the oldest unresolved Aboriginal land claim in the State. The claim concerned the Brewarrina Common, a site of great cultural, historical, and spiritual importance to local Aboriginal people. For generations, the Common has been a gathering place and a symbol of connection to Country.

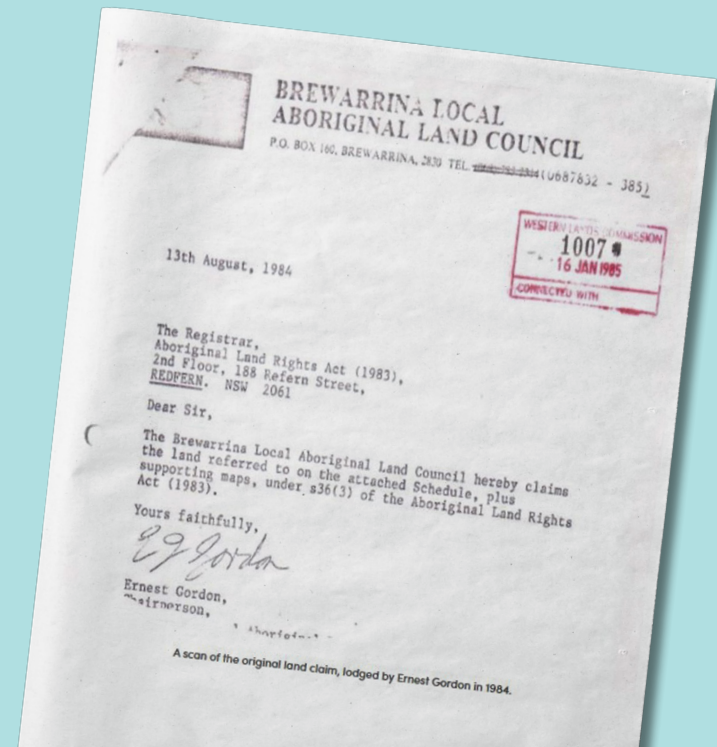
For nearly 40 years, the claim remained unresolved, passing through governments and legal processes. Yet the Brewarrina community, supported by the NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC), never gave up. Their persistence reflects the strength of Aboriginal communities in standing firm for land justice.

In August 2024, the claim was finally resolved through an Aboriginal Land Agreement between Brewarrina LALC, NSWALC, and the NSW Government. This Agreement transferred ownership of the Common to the Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC).

The outcome was extremely significant as it was recognised that the land holds such value for so many reasons:

- Cultural protection – ensuring the Common is preserved and cared for by those with the deepest cultural ties.
- Community empowerment – giving the LALC the ability to determine the future use of the land.
- Economic opportunity – providing a foundation for development that can create jobs, training, and investment in Brewarrina.

The Brewarrina Common resolution shows how the land rights system delivers long-term justice. It proves that, even in the most complex cases, Aboriginal people's rightful connection to land can be recognised and restored. It is a proud moment not only for the Brewarrina community but for all who believe in the enduring value of land rights in NSW.



CROWN LAND IN NSW

Aboriginal people's interests in land is multifaceted and includes, but is not limited to, the use and management of land for culture and heritage purposes as well as providing economic development opportunities for Aboriginal peoples.

Under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, Aboriginal Land Councils can make claims over unused and unneeded Crown land as compensation for dispossession and as such the use and management of Crown land and Aboriginal land rights are intertwined.

Crown land has significant Aboriginal culture and heritage values and retains cultural and spiritual significant as well as providing important opportunities to lay the basis for a self reliant and more secure economic future for Aboriginal peoples.



“ In recognising prior ownership, the Government thereby recognises Aboriginal rights to obtain land. The Government believes the essential task is to ensure an equitable and viable amount of land is returned to Aborigines.”

Frank Walker

THE NSW ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council is the peak body representing Aboriginal peoples in NSW. The NSW Aboriginal Land Council is an independent, self funded, non government organisation. Pursuant to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council has the following functions amongst others:

- The acquisition, control, and management of (and other dealings in) lands, including claiming land;
- The protection and promotion of Aboriginal culture and heritage in NSW;
- The facilitation of business enterprises; and
- The provision of advice to the NSW Government on matters relating to Aboriginal land rights.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council provides support to the network of 121 Local Aboriginal Land Councils in NSW.

The Aboriginal Land Council network operates as a two tiered structure – the NSW Aboriginal Land Council which operates from Parramatta and five Zone offices (Dubbo, Queanbeyan, Coffs Harbour, Charlestown and Broken Hill) and 121 Local Aboriginal Land Councils, which are governed by elected Boards.

THESE ARE

9

ABORIGINAL
LAND COUNCIL
REGIONS

IN NSW



Every four years, members of Local Aboriginal Land Councils vote for a Councillor to represent their region. In addition to representing the interests of Local Aboriginal Land Council members, Councillors direct the affairs of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council in accordance with the Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

Current Councillors

- 1 Raymond Kelly**
CHAIRPERSON
SYDNEY/NEWCASTLE REGION
Cr Kelly is a Dhanggati/
Gumbayngirr man.
- 2 Ross Hampton**
DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON
WESTERN REGION
Cr Hampton is a Wiradjuri /
Ngiyampaa man.
- 3 Grace Toomey**
CENTRAL REGION
Cr Toomey is a Wiradjuri
woman from Dubbo.
- 4 Peter Smith**
MID NORTH COAST REGION
Cr Smith is a Dungutti man.
- 5 Diane Randall**
NORTH COAST REGION
Cr Randall is a Yaegl woman.
- 6 Charles Lynch**
NORTHERN REGION
Cr Lynch is a Gomerioi man.
- 7 Anne Dennis**
NORTH WEST REGION
Cr Dennis is a Gamilaraay
woman.
- 8 Danny Chapman**
SOUTH COAST REGION
Cr Chapman is a Walbunga
man from the Yuin nation.
- 9 Leeanne Hampton**
WIRDAJURI REGION
Cr Hampton is a Wiradjuri /
Ngiyampaa woman from
West Wyalong.

The Aboriginal Land Council network is the largest member based Aboriginal network in Australia.

Key priorities of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council are to:

- To continue to secure and manage land for the benefit of Aboriginal people in NSW;
- To continue to improve the governance of the land rights network, including its financial and political sustainability, to ensure its long term viability and legitimacy;
- To drive economic development across the land rights network to support the Aboriginal people of NSW to achieve greater economic independence;
- To continue to ensure the benefits derived from the land rights network continue to support the social needs of our people; and
- To protect and promote Aboriginal culture, heritage and the environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

Aboriginal population in NSW:

It is estimated that there were 983,700 Aboriginal people in Australia at the most recent ABS Census. 278,000 Aboriginal peoples live in NSW, or 28.2% of the total Aboriginal population. Only Queensland has a comparable population with an estimated 237,303 Aboriginal peoples living in that state. To put these figures into perspective, there were more Aboriginal peoples living in NSW than the whole of South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory combined (220,300).

LOCAL ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCILS

There are 121 Local Aboriginal Land Councils in NSW. Local Aboriginal Land Councils are autonomous organisations with similar functions to the NSW Aboriginal Land Council in their own area – to acquire, use, manage and control land, to protect and promote Aboriginal culture and heritage, to implement a Community Land and Business Plan and to facilitate business enterprise. Local Aboriginal Land Councils work for their members and the wider Aboriginal community living in their local area.

They assist in matters relating to the areas of housing, legal, employment and other day-to-day matters involving Aboriginal people in accordance with functions detailed under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Local Aboriginal Land Councils are governed by a Board that is elected every four years. All Aboriginal people who are 18 years or over can apply to become a member of a Local Aboriginal Land Council. Members either reside in the Local Aboriginal Land Council area or have a cultural association to the area. Local Aboriginal Land Councils undertake a number of activities including the protection and restoration of Aboriginal culture and heritage, training, educational talks and tours promoting the protection of Aboriginal culture and heritage, site assessments, identification and surveying Aboriginal culture and heritage, researching, investigating and making Aboriginal land claims, the provision of suitable and affordable housing, training and employment programs and youth, Elders and family programs and events.

Introduction

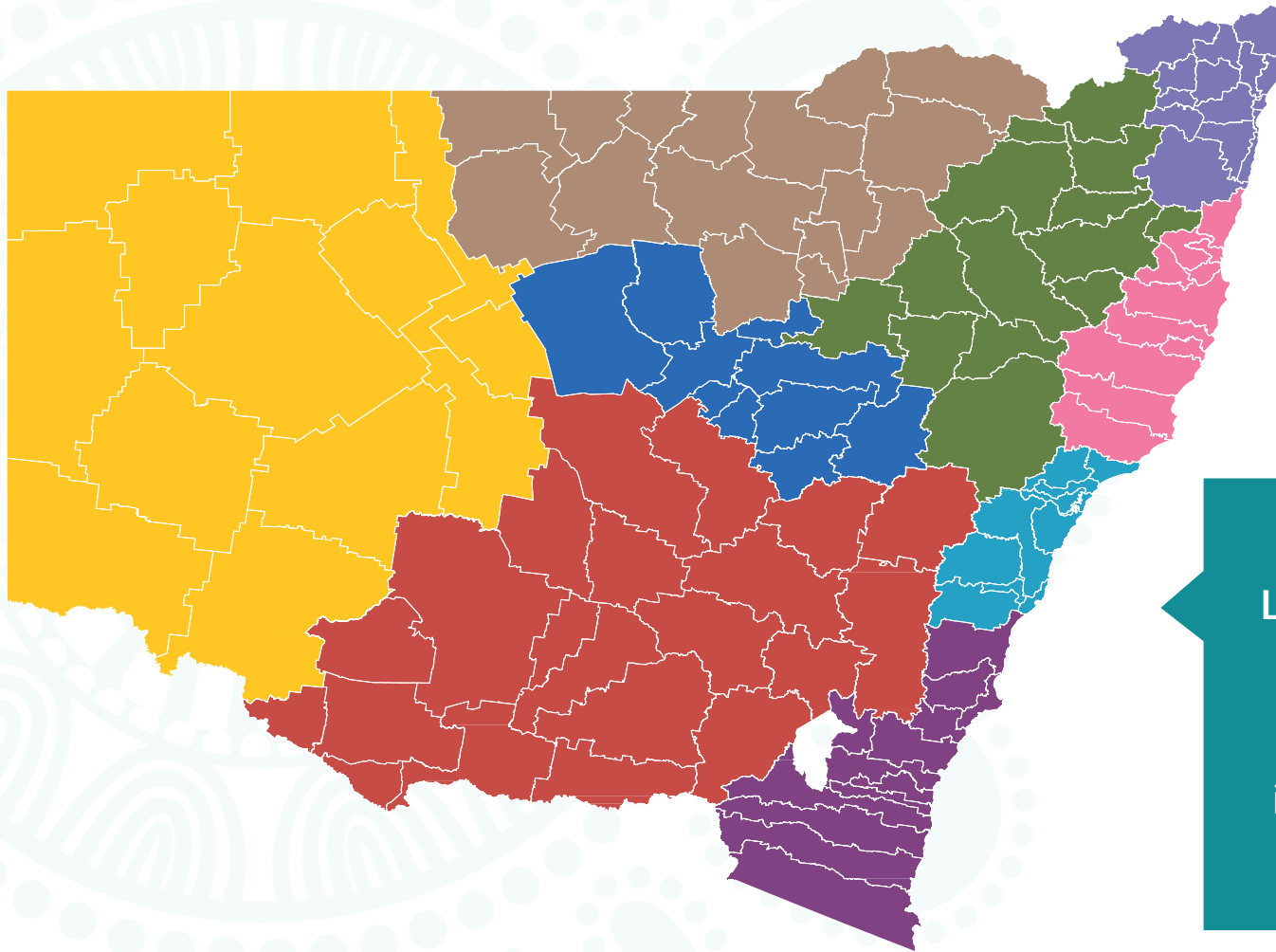
This report celebrates the diverse achievements of the Aboriginal Land Rights Network in New South Wales and the powerful impact that Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) are having in their communities. Across urban, regional, and remote areas, LALCs are leading initiatives that deliver real and lasting change reconnecting people to Country, culture, and opportunity.

Under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983, the Land Rights Network has become a key driver of self-determination and community strength. Through the return, activation and management of land, LALCs are creating local solutions that meet local needs, whether it's creating economic pathways through enterprise, restoring cultural practices, supporting youth leadership, or building community infrastructure.

These case studies reflect the adaptability, vision, and resilience of Aboriginal communities. They show what's possible when Aboriginal people are supported to lead on their own terms, drawing on cultural knowledge, community governance, and a shared commitment to securing a better future for generations to come.

Key Impacts Across the Land Rights Network:

- **Economic Development and Employment:** Building community-owned businesses and employment initiatives rooted in local values and aspirations.
- **Youth Empowerment and Leadership:** Creating pathways for young people into employment, education, and cultural governance.
- **Cultural Continuity and Pride:** Strengthening identity through programs in language, land care, cultural events, & intergenerational knowledge-sharing.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Delivering locally designed and culturally safe services that respond to community priorities.
- **Community Infrastructure and Visibility:** Investing in places and spaces that bring people together and increase access to culture, services, and opportunity.



**The 121
Local Aboriginal
Land Councils**
are governed
by a Board that
is elected every
two years.

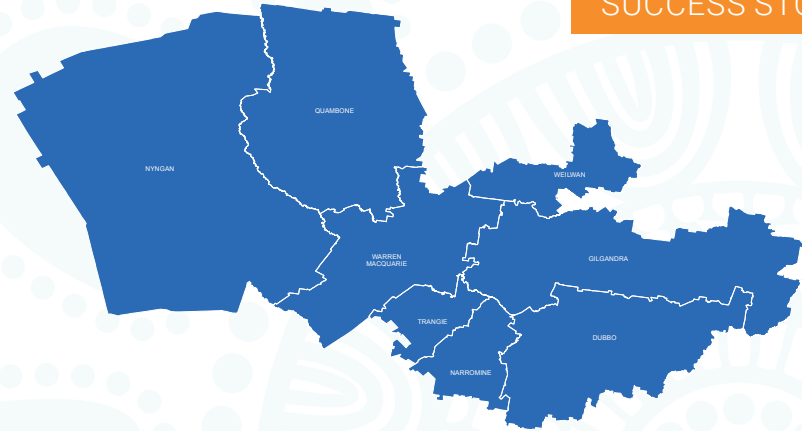
CENTRAL

The Central Region has a population of 12,028 Aboriginal people which is 13.2% of the whole population. Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the Central region include Dhubu-Gu, Gilgandra, Mudgee, Narromine, Nyngan, Trangie, Warren, Weilwan and Wellington Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

Trangie LALC – Building Community Through Culture and Connection

Trangie Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC), located in central-western NSW, is a vibrant hub of cultural revitalisation, community services, and youth engagement. A key milestone in their recent achievements is the expansion of the Trangie Cultural Centre, officially opened in July 2023 after COVID-related delays. The extension added a new exhibition space, offices, storage facilities, and kitchen and bathroom renovations, enabling the team to operate under one roof and offer a broader range of services.

Beyond physical infrastructure, the centre has become a place of gathering, healing, and connection. It plays host to school cultural tours, youth dance groups, community events, and essential support services, positioning Trangie LALC as a cornerstone of both cultural identity and social support for the community.



Key Success Factors

- **Strong, Stable Governance:** A dedicated and long-serving board provides consistency and leadership. Their vision was instrumental in the development of the Cultural Centre and broader community programs.
- **Leadership and Succession Planning:** The transition to a new CEO was underpinned by years of internal mentorship and training, ensuring continuity and embedded local knowledge.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Trangie LALC has fostered strong relationships with organisations such as Thrive, NSW Health, and local service providers. These partnerships have expanded the reach and impact of its initiatives. NSWALC provided \$150k of funding to support the expansion, this was used for initial planning stages and to help secure planning consent for the works, as well as construction.
- **Cultural and Community Programming:** The Cultural Centre supports tours, workshops, performances, and events that bring together schools, families, and service providers, enhancing visibility and engagement.
- **Multi-Use Community Space:** The centre also acts as a Driver Reviver station, community information hub, and shared office space for services such as Birrang's driver licensing program and drug and alcohol counselling.

Impact

- **Increased Community Visibility and Access:** The expanded Cultural Centre ensures the facility is open five days a week, with volunteer support on weekends. The LALC is now a well-known and respected presence in Trangie, reducing community fragmentation and increasing trust.
- **Youth Engagement and Membership Growth:** Programs like the youth dance group have nurtured a sense of belonging and

connection among younger community members. Some participants are now transitioning into LALC membership, strengthening the organisation's future.

- **Health and Wellbeing Outcomes:** The 'Belly for New Life' program, in partnership with NSW Health, supports young Aboriginal mothers through art, culture, and maternal health education. It addresses critical service gaps by providing trusted, culturally safe engagement points.
- **Service Integration:** The LALC acts as a connector, helping community members access external health, education, and social services they might otherwise not know about. From paediatric care to licensing support, the Centre enables wraparound services with cultural safety at the core.

Key Learnings

- **Cultural Centres Are Catalysts:** Investing in physical spaces where people can gather, learn, and connect with culture can dramatically shift community cohesion and wellbeing.
- **Youth Are the Future:** Engaging children and young people early builds pathways to leadership and lifelong connection to culture and community.
- **Strong Governance Underpins Success:** A committed board and structured succession planning ensure resilience and strategic continuity during leadership transitions.
- **Partnerships Expand Possibility:** Collaboration with health, education, and community organisations allows LALCs to leverage resources, address gaps, and deliver more comprehensive outcomes.
- **Programs Must Be Locally Led and Culturally Grounded:** Trust, relevance, and effectiveness are greatest when initiatives are designed with and for the community they serve.

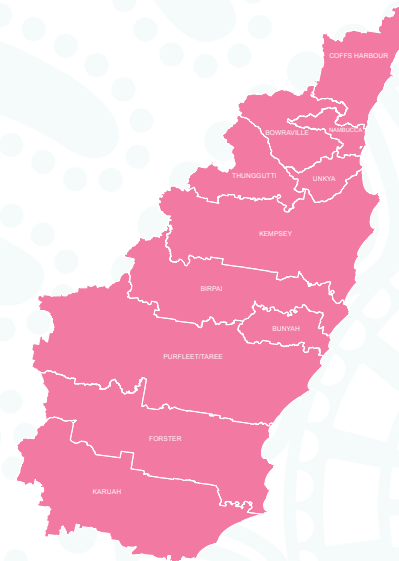
MID-NORTH COAST

The Mid North Coast Region has a population of 18,009 Aboriginal people which is 5.9% of the whole population. Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the Mid North Coast region include Birpai, Bowraville, Bunyah, Coffs Harbour, Forster, Karuah, Kempsey, Nambucca Heads, Purfleet/Taree, Stuart Island, Thungutti and Unkya Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance: Building Stronger Communities Through Culture

The Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance (SWFW) was incorporated in 2010 and is a not-for-profit organisation governed by a board representing ten Local Aboriginal Land Councils on the Mid North Coast of NSW. They include Karuah, Forster, Purfleet Taree, Bunyah (Wauchope), Birpai (Port Macquarie), Kempsey, Thungutti (Bellbrook), Unkya (Macksville), Bowraville and Coffs Harbour LALCs. SWFW is a leading Aboriginal arts and cultural organisation that works across the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. It exists to celebrate and preserve Aboriginal cultural heritage through innovative arts programs and events, empowering Aboriginal communities and promoting social cohesion.

Operating through collaborations with local communities, Elders, and artists, SWFW facilitates projects that foster intergenerational cultural exchange, build professional skills, and create inclusive, culturally rich environments. The organisation also runs the National Aboriginal Design Agency (NADA), a social enterprise focused on commercialising authentic Aboriginal art and creating economic opportunities for artists.



Key Success Factors

- **Strong Community Partnerships:** Collaborations with local Elders, artists, schools, and organisations ensure culturally grounded and locally relevant programming. Through the former Business Enterprise Program, NSWALC supported Saltwater Freshwater to develop a robust business case, unlocking significant funding for the purchase of its new headquarters.
- **Integrated Cultural and Skills Development:** Programs blend cultural heritage with practical skill-building across storytelling, visual arts, dance, and design.
- **Diverse Program Portfolio:** From masterclasses and weaving workshops to large-scale festivals, SWFW caters to different ages, communities, and interests.
- **Social Enterprise Model:** The National Aboriginal Design Agency (NADA) generates income while supporting Aboriginal artists and sustaining SWFW's broader work.
- **Youth Engagement:** Programs such as dance camps and the Children's Art Book Project encourage early cultural connection and pride among young people.
- **Events as Cultural Catalysts:** The Saltwater Freshwater Festival unites communities, attracting thousands of attendees and spotlighting Aboriginal performers, artists, and storytellers.

Impact

- **Cultural Preservation and Knowledge Sharing:** Initiatives like the Aboriginal Stories Project and Women's Master Camp have enabled the recording and transfer of cultural knowledge across generations.
- **High Community Engagement:** Flagship events like the Saltwater Freshwater Festival bring together over 3,500 people annually, with significant Aboriginal participation and artist employment.

- **Social Cohesion:** Community-based programs and public events improve trust, safety, and mutual respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.
- **Economic Opportunities for Artists:** Through NADA and event participation, Aboriginal artists access new markets and income streams.
- **Personal Development:** Participants in arts-based programs report increased self-esteem, stronger cultural identity, and improved social connections.
- **Employment and Skills Growth:** Programs employ Aboriginal people in arts, mentoring, education, and logistics, and foster pathways into creative industries.

Key Learnings

- **Arts as a Vehicle for Healing and Growth:** Cultural arts programs are powerful tools for community resilience, particularly in times of social or economic stress.
- **Sustainability Requires Innovation:** While grant funding remains essential, initiatives like NADA demonstrate the value of social enterprise in supporting long-term cultural work.
- **Cultural Inclusion Builds Bridges:** Events that bring Aboriginal and non-Indigenous communities together through shared cultural experiences foster greater understanding and reduce division.
- **Ongoing Support is Vital:** Stable funding is necessary not only for program delivery but also for organisational infrastructure and long-term planning.
- **Empowerment Starts Early:** Programs engaging youth from primary school through to young adulthood cultivate pride, leadership, and cultural continuity.

NORTH COAST

The North Coast Region has a population of 12,966 Aboriginal people which is 4.5% of the whole population. Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the North Coast region include Baryulgil Square, Birrigan Gargle, Bogal, Casino-Boolangle, Grafton Ngerrie, Gugin Gudduba, Jali, Jana Ngalee, Jubullum, Muli Muli, Ngulingah, Tweed/Byron, Yaegl Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

Transfer of Sandhills Land to Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council

In a landmark achievement coinciding with its 40th anniversary, the Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) has secured ownership of 3.79 hectares of land within the Sandhills precinct in Byron Bay. This significant land transfer from the NSW Government to the Tweed Byron LALC was achieved through an Aboriginal Land Agreement (ALA), following 18 years of persistent advocacy and three years of collaborative negotiation.

The transferred land forms part of the broader 13-hectare Sandhills Estate, situated adjacent to the Byron Bay CBD and previously utilised for sand mining. The agreement also includes the transfer of the current police station site on Shirley Street and the Fire and Rescue site on Kingsley Street. This ALA was reached as part of a wider \$28 million emergency services precinct project, which will house new police and fire services for Byron Bay.

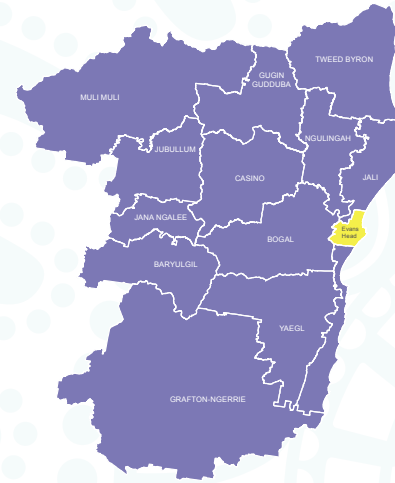


Image: Jeff Dawson, Byron Shire Echo

Key Success Factors

- **Long-Term Commitment and Persistence:** The Tweed Byron LALC's unwavering dedication over 18 years was central to the eventual success of the land claim.
- **Collaborative Negotiation:** The outcome was made possible through effective collaboration between the Tweed Byron LALC, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, Crown Lands, Byron Shire Council, and emergency services stakeholders.
- **Strategic Vision and Advocacy:** The leadership of the Tweed Byron LALC Board and Chief Executive Officer Leweena Williams and the played a critical role in maintaining momentum and articulating a vision that emphasized mutual benefit.
- **Support from Local and State Partners:** Key figures and institutions, including Byron Shire Council and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, provided consistent support and recognition of the broader value of the agreement.

Impact

The transfer of the Sandhills site has multiple potential layers of impact:

- **For the Tweed Byron LALC:** The acquisition of the land represents not only the realisation of long-standing land rights but also the potential for future social and economic development. It marks a significant milestone in their efforts to achieve self-determination and long-term sustainability.
- **For the Byron Shire Community:** The development of a new emergency services precinct will enhance public safety infrastructure, benefiting all residents. Moreover, the restoration of degraded wetlands within the precinct reflects a broader environmental and community benefit.

- **Symbolic and Cultural Significance:** The successful land transfer reaffirms the importance of recognising and settling Aboriginal land claims. It sets a positive precedent for future agreements and demonstrates respect for Aboriginal sovereignty.

Key Learnings

- **Persistence:** Complex land claims take time, patience, and determination. This case underscores the value of long-term advocacy and strategic patience.
- **Partnerships:** Effective collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders is vital. Open communication, shared goals, and mutual respect can lead to transformative outcomes.
- **Land Rights Create Broader Benefits:** Settling land claims isn't just about returning land—it's about generating social, economic, and infrastructural benefits that serve the whole community.
- **Importance of Strong Leadership:** The vision and leadership provided by Aboriginal community leaders were key to keeping the process focused and progressing.

NORTHERN REGION

The Northern Region has a population of 17,696 Aboriginal people, which is 8.4% of the total population. The region's 14 Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) include Amaroo, Anaiwan, Armidale, Ashford, Coonabarabran, Dorrigo Plateau, Glen Innes, Guyra, Moombahlene, Nungaroo, Red Chief, Tamworth, Walhallow and Wanaruah.

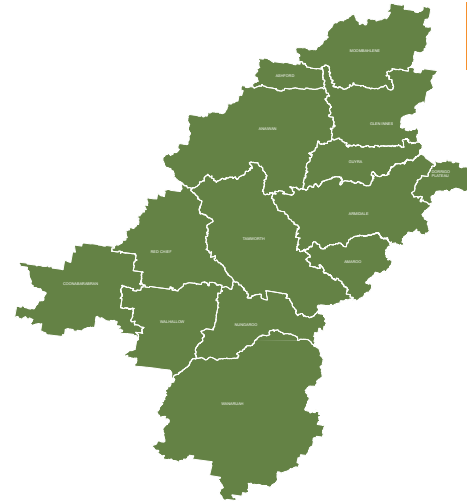
Walhallow Community Infrastructure Project

In 2024, Walhallow Local Aboriginal Land Council (WLALC) was awarded \$1.54 million under the Australian Government's Growing Regions Program. The Walhallow village has a rich cultural heritage and is home to 90 Aboriginal residents, with over 400 more in the surrounding areas.

The Walhallow Community Infrastructure Project (WCIP) was initiated as part of its Community Land and Business Plan. Led by WLALC in partnership with Benchmark Certified, the WCIP aims to transform key community assets into vibrant, functional, and Culturally significant facilities that support health and wellbeing, education, tourism, and long-term economic development.

Learn more:

alc.org.au/newsroom/walhallow-secures-major-boost



Why this program was a success

- **Strategic Partnerships and Support:**
 - ▶ NSWALC provided support through business development and community fund grants.
 - ▶ The partnership with Benchmark Certified, who led the business feasibility study, grant applications, and ongoing program management.
- **Community-Led Vision:**
 - ▶ Deep community consultation.
 - ▶ Strong leadership from WLALC CEO Jason Allan and its Board.
- **Cultural Integration:**
 - ▶ Gamilaroi history and identity is showcased, and there is strong alignment with broader cultural initiatives.
- **Clear Socio-Economic Outcomes:**
 - ▶ The WCIP integrates infrastructure renewal with business development, skills training, and cultural tourism to drive self-sustainability and employment.

Impact

The WCIP is expected to deliver broad and lasting benefits across cultural preservation, community development, and economic participation:

- **Infrastructure Revitalisation:**
 - ▶ Modernisation of the Annie Taylor Health Post to meet accessibility and service standards.
 - ▶ Transformation of the old preschool into the Dhuwi Walhallow Aboriginal Cultural Centre for exhibitions, programs, and events.
 - ▶ Refurbishment of the Walhallow Community Hall as a vibrant and inclusive gathering place.

- **Cultural Empowerment and Education:**
 - ▶ A platform for Elders to pass on knowledge and language in both English and Gamilaroi/Gamilaraay.
 - ▶ A living archive and learning hub for future generations.
- **Economic and Employment Opportunities:**
 - ▶ Job creation during construction and through tourism and hospitality enterprises.
 - ▶ Upskilling of community members through *Certificate III in Tourism*.
- **Tourism Development:**
 - ▶ Walhallow is establishing itself as a key Aboriginal tourism destination within the Liverpool Plains region.

Key Learnings

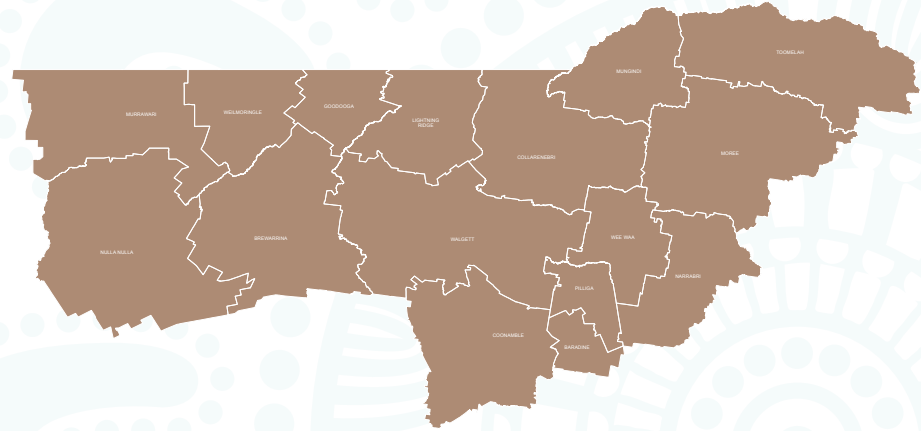
- **A holistic vision is essential:** Incorporating culture, business, infrastructure, and community wellbeing has a greater impact and attracts broader support.
- **Culture is an economic asset:** Investing in Cultural Heritage creates economic and social opportunities, particularly in tourism and education.
- **Planning enables success:** Feasibility studies, business plans, and strategic documents are vital in securing funding and driving outcomes.
- **Community ownership drives change:** The active involvement of community members is key to the success and sustainability of every initiative.
- **Strategic partnerships catalyse growth:** Benchmark Certified's partnership with WLALC is a proven model of how Aboriginal organisations can build capacity, unlock funding, and deliver intergenerational change.

NORTH WESTERN REGION

The North Western Region has a population of 9,218 Aboriginal people which is 22% of the whole population. Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the North Western region include Baradine, Brewarrina, Collarenebri, Coonamble, Goodooga, Lightning Ridge, Moree, Mungindi, Murrawari, Narrabri, Nulla Nulla, Pilliga, Toomelah, Walgett, Wee Waa and Weilmoringle Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

Lightning Ridge Local Aboriginal Land Council (LRLALC) – the Power of Partnerships

The Lightning Ridge Local Aboriginal Land Council (LRLALC), located in north-western New South Wales, has been striving to improve economic, social, and wellbeing outcomes for its community. Facing limited resources, LRLALC actively sought partnerships to support its development goals. A significant turning point came with its collaboration with the Dr. Steve Burroughs Foundation, a philanthropic group with strong connections to national corporate donation networks. Through this partnership, LRLALC received an array of donations—ranging from lawn maintenance equipment to high-quality household goods and digital infrastructure. These initiatives have helped kickstart community services, build capacity, and foster employment pathways.



Key Success Factors

- **Strategic Partnerships:** Steve's ability to mobilise donations—through personal networks and corporate partners like Briggs & Stratton and Microsoft— provided vital in-kind support to the LRLALC.
- **Community-Led Decision-Making:** LRLALC leadership took initiative in bypassing bureaucratic delays and directly engaging with supporters to meet community needs.
- **Equal distribution:** Items like Sheridan bedding, furniture, and new clothing were distributed equitably across the community and offered to other LALCs, fostering trust and inclusion.
- **Digital Hub Creation:** A fully equipped digital unit with computer, internet and printers (donated and supported by Steve and his networks) provides access to telehealth, online learning, job services and government services.
- **Launch of Lawn Maintenance Social Enterprise:** The initial \$15,000 donation helped LRLALC start a lawn care business. Over two years, it has grown into a multi-community operation with regular contracts, notably with Australian Unity Home Care.

Impact

- **Improved Community Wellbeing:** Access to quality home goods, clothing, food, and technology has had a tangible impact on Aboriginal people in the community.
- **Digital Inclusion:** The digital unit offers private access to essential online services, including Revenue NSW, Centrelink, job applications, and education.
- **Employment and Economic Growth:** The lawn maintenance business now services multiple towns, generating income and enabling the hiring of a project officer and administrative support to the LRLALC, freeing up the LALC CEO's time to apply for grants and provide strategic leadership.

- **Empowerment and Upskilling:** Local staff have been mentored into roles involving bookkeeping, service delivery, and grant support, with potential for long-term leadership opportunities.
- **Community Resilience During COVID-19:** Through Steve's support, LRLALC distributed hard-to-find supplies to community members including Covid tests, sanitiser, PPE, and food boxes.

Key Learnings

- **The Power of Trust-Based Partnerships:** A single, well-connected partner can catalyse long-term transformation when trust and responsiveness are mutual.
- **Small Investments Can Spark Big Change:** An initial in-kind donation launched a successful business enterprise, generating ongoing revenue and employment.
- **Flexibility Enhances Impact:** The ability to access and distribute donations to meet local needs and share surplus with neighbouring communities has increased LRLALC's regional role and reputation.
- **Digital Access is Foundational:** Secure, well-equipped digital spaces are essential infrastructure for rural Aboriginal communities, supporting health, education, and economic opportunity.
- **Community Capacity is Already There:** Opportunities for employment and learning can reveal hidden skills and potential within community members.

SOUTH COAST REGION

The South Coast Region has a population of 20,151 Aboriginal people, which is 3.4 % of the total population and includes 13 Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs): Batemans Bay, Bega, Bodalla, Cobowra, Eden, Illawarra, Jerrinja, Merrimans, Mogo, Ngambri, Nowra, Ulladulla and Wagonga.

Bega LALC Community Hub: Empowering Youth

Over the past three years, Bega LALC has expanded its programs to meet community needs, securing NIAA funding to create a culturally safe community hub and additional grants to support stable jobs and improved services for Aboriginal youth.

Bega LALC's suite of youth initiatives includes:

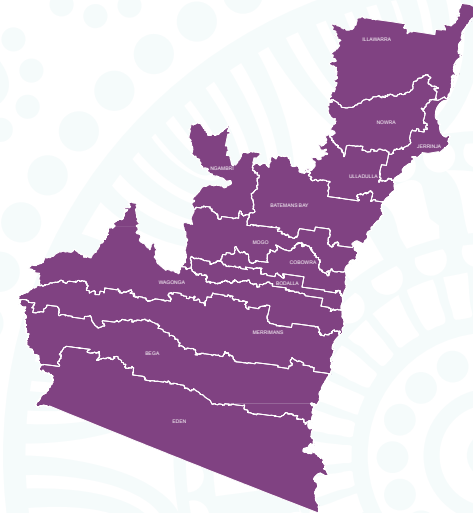
Aboriginal Community Connector program: A NSW Coalition of Peaks (CAPO) initiative, funded by the NSW Department of Education, linking Aboriginal students with support to reach their learning potential and strengthen cultural connection. The program includes the following initiatives - **Surfing with the Mob, Wake Up Well Program and Language and Arts Project.**

Other programs include:

Koori on the Move: Supports young people to get their learner licence.

Youth Training Café: Hands-on hospitality training using bush tucker ingredients.

Junior Ranger Program: Cultural and environmental learning supported by local Elders who participate in camp and on Country activities.



Key Success Factors

- **Integrated, Wrap-Around Program Design:** Youth activities are connected across themes like culture, education, employment, and wellbeing, ensuring holistic support.
- **Community-Led Approach:** Programs are co-designed with the community, ensuring cultural relevance and stronger participation.
- **Collaboration and Coordination:** Staff roles are interconnected to prevent burnout and ensure continuity, even when team members are on leave. The LALC also works collaboratively with other LALCs in the region and across NSW building alliances where they are delivering similar projects.
- **Responsive and Adaptive Leadership:** The CEO drives funding applications, advocacy, and new partnerships, aiming to ensure the organisation evolves with community needs.
- **Social Enterprise Model:** Programs like the café and catering venture generate income while offering practical experience, creating a self-sustaining ecosystem.
- **Peer Accountability:** Youth take ownership of the café's success, supporting each other, holding peers accountable, and creating a strong team culture.

Impact

- **Transformational Youth Outcomes:** Youth who were previously disengaged, socially isolated, or not attending school are now thriving—working, studying, participating in group activities, and building confidence.
- **Skill Development:** Young people are gaining hospitality, barista, lifesaving, driving and environmental management skills.

- **Community Connection:** Participants report stronger ties to peers, Elders, and the broader community, fostering belonging and mutual support.
- **Economic Empowerment:** The transition from casual to permanent employment and the establishment of a social enterprise provides financial stability and job pathways.
- **Adult Participation:** Adults are also benefiting from programs like the driver mentorship, reducing transport barriers and supporting employment.

Key Learnings

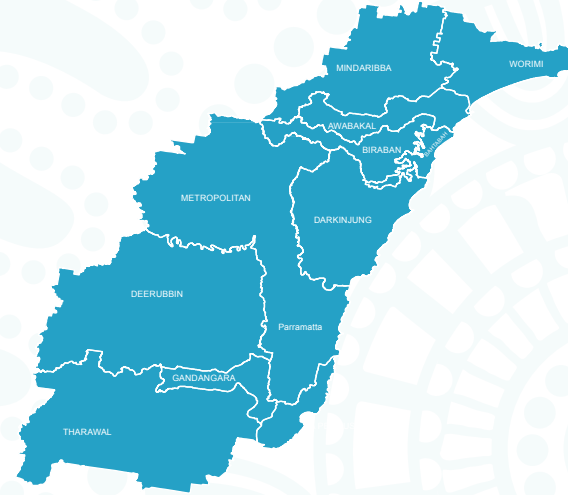
- **Sustainable Funding is Critical:** Programs like the Youth Training Café and Koori Youth on the Movement deliver measurable outcomes but remain vulnerable due to short-term funding. Long-term investment is needed to sustain and scale impact.
- **Succession Planning:** Recognising the importance of having a succession plan the CEO actively mentors staff and provides opportunities for staff to step into leadership positions within the LALC.
- **Support Beyond Compliance:** Bega LALC seeks a shift from compliance-heavy oversight to proactive support, including grant identification, strategic funding alignment and procurement opportunities.
- **Strategic Alliances Multiply Impact:** Partnerships with other LALCs, government departments, and external consultants enhance resource-sharing, program design, and advocacy.
- **Future-Focused Vision:** Plans for expansion into horticulture, tourism, a sister café in Jindabyne, and more comprehensive training pipelines demonstrate a forward-thinking, scalable model of Indigenous social enterprise.

The Sydney Newcastle Region has a population of 95,155 Aboriginal people which is 1.8% of the whole population. Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC) in the Sydney Newcastle region include Awabakal, Bahtabah, Biraban, Darkinjung, Deerubbin, Gandangara, La Perouse, Metropolitan, Mindaribba, Tharawal and Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

Awabakal Local Aboriginal Land Council: Holistic Leadership and Land Activation

The Awabakal Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC), based in Newcastle, NSW, has undergone a transformative journey over the past three years. From an organisation with minimal staff and programs, the LALC has evolved into a vibrant, youth-focused, community-first organisation. This revitalisation has been driven by a strong emphasis on cultural revitalisation, economic development, and holistic community engagement. Core to their approach is building the next generation of Aboriginal leaders through employment, cultural education, and strategic long-term planning.

Key initiatives include the establishment of a self-funded community centre at the former Whitebridge Bowling Club, a thriving junior ranger and traineeship program, cultural burning and land management efforts, and the reintroduction of culturally significant events like debutante balls and NAIDOC awards. These programs aim not just to deliver services, but to reconnect Aboriginal youth with culture, country, and community.



Key Success Factors

- **Strong Youth Focus:** Half of the LALC's staff are under 20 years old. Employment and education opportunities are designed to foster skills, leadership, and a passion for land rights.
- **Community-Centred Governance:** Strategic decisions are made with and for the community, guided by a 30-year strategic plan prioritising intergenerational benefit and sustainability.
- **Strong Leadership:** A values-driven leadership style focuses on positivity, inclusion, and relationships, which has transformed internal dynamics and community perceptions.
- **Holistic Support Systems:** New housing initiatives include wraparound support services linking residents with healthcare, training, and employment pathways.
- **Self-Funded Infrastructure:** The new community centre was entirely self-funded, demonstrating financial discipline and independence.
- **Cultural and Social Programming:** Events like cultural burns, NAIDOC celebrations, and community sports days have re-engaged members and strengthened cultural pride.

Impact

- **Youth Empowerment:** A pipeline from school-based traineeships (SBATs) to full-time employment has fostered career development and boosted engagement among local Aboriginal youth. One junior staff member progressed from receptionist to ranger after discovering her passion for working on Country.
- **Cultural Continuity:** Cultural burning practices and knowledge-sharing between elders and young people support the transmission of traditional ecological knowledge.

- **Stronger Community Bonds:** Events like debutante balls and barefoot bowls foster relationships across generations and bring joy and cohesion to community life.
- **Increased Visibility and Trust:** The LALC's profile has grown within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Membership has risen significantly, and stakeholders now seek their views and involvement.
- **Improved Reputation and Governance:** Emerging from administration and past governance challenges, the LALC is now recognised as a leading example of transformation, resilience, and innovation.

Key Learnings

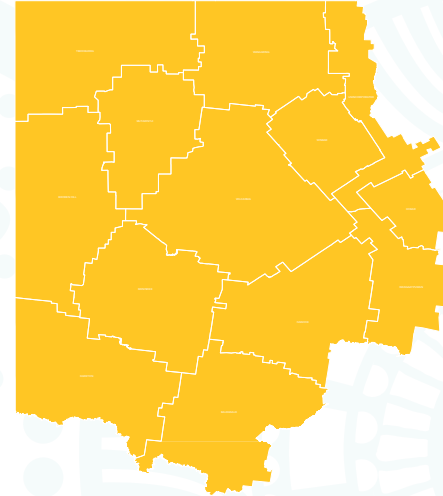
- **Youth Are the Key to Long-Term Change:** Investing in young people creates a vibrant workforce and supports cultural and leadership succession.
- **Do What You Can with What You Have:** The LALC demonstrated that success doesn't have to wait for government funding. They launched major initiatives using internal expertise and resources.
- **Strategic Planning Pays Off:** Every initiative is linked to future outcomes, with reinvestment built into each success.
- **Cultural Safety and Identity Matter:** Programs rooted in Aboriginal ways of knowing and being—not just employment or service delivery—strengthen community identity and wellbeing.
- **The Importance of Relationships:** The LALC's collaborative leadership style, grounded in community joy and trust, has been fundamental to their growth.
- **Visibility Drives Engagement:** A visible, active, and culturally strong LALC builds trust and encourages wider participation and membership.

The Western Region has a population of 3,624 Aboriginal people which is 11% of the whole population. Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC) in the Western region include Balranald, Broken Hill, Cobar, Dareton, Ivanhoe, Menindee, Mutawintji, Tibooburra, Wangaaypuwan, Wannaaring, Wilcannia and Winbar.

Wangaaypuwan Local Aboriginal Land Council: Building a Path to Self-Determination and Cultural Stewardship

The Wangaaypuwan Local Aboriginal Land Council (WANLALC) represents the aspirations of the Ngyiampaa/Wangaaypuwan people to reclaim, manage, and protect their ancestral lands. The seeds of this vision were planted in the early 2000s, when Elders spoke of their desire to own and access culturally significant sites across Country. A major milestone came in 2004 with the handback of Mount Grenfell Historic Site under a Joint Management arrangement.

The formal establishment of WANLALC began with a land council application on 21 June 2012 and culminated in the Council's inaugural board election on 23 June 2023. Operating under an Assistance Agreement with NSWALC for its first year, WANLALC became a fully funded Land Council on 1 July 2024. With a focus on caring for Country, economic development, and local empowerment, WANLALC has quickly become a dynamic force in Western NSW.



Key Success Factors

- **Community-Led Vision:** From the beginning, WANLALC was driven by the voices and cultural guidance of Traditional Owners and Elders. Their longstanding desire for land ownership and stewardship continues to shape Council priorities.
- **Strategic Planning and Partnerships:** WANLALC engaged Benchmark in 2024 to develop a robust Business Plan and Business Case. They are also developing an MOU with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) to train and collaborate with Rangers.
- **Successful Funding and Grant Applications:** Within two years of operation, WANLALC secured funding for office infrastructure through the NSWALC Community Benefits Grant (\$150,000) and gained approval for a major Rangers Program through NIAA.
- **Capacity Building:** WANLALC members have sought to build their service capacity and civic engagement through roles such as Justices of the Peace, enhancing community accessibility to essential services.
- **Environmental and Cultural Stewardship:** The Wangaaypuwan Rangers initiative positions Aboriginal people at the centre of environmental management, providing culturally informed land care across significant ecological and cultural sites.

Impact

- **Local Employment and Training:** The Wangaaypuwan Rangers will create direct employment for Aboriginal men and women in the region. The program also supports upskilling in environmental management and collaboration with government agencies.
- **Cultural and Environmental Protection:** Ranger activities will be guided by Traditional Owners, ensuring cultural priorities are embedded in the management of sites like Yathong, Nombinnie, and Round Hill Nature Reserves.

- **Self-Determination:** By gaining full funding status and securing independent infrastructure and staffing, WANLALC is stepping into its role as a self-determined community authority.
- **Service Provision:** The appointment of community members as JPs enhances legal access and community governance, while the planned office space will create a permanent and visible home for the Council's operations.
- **Regional Influence:** WANLALC's growing presence is enabling cross-border engagement and potential fee-for-service work, creating economic and social ripple effects across the region.

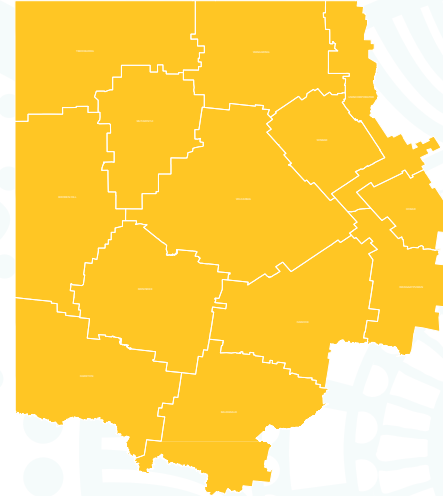
Key Learnings

- **Strong Foundations Take Time:** The journey from aspiration to operational Land Council took over a decade, highlighting the need for persistence, planning, and community unity.
- **Invest in Relationships:** Early partnerships with Benchmark, NPWS, and NIAA have been pivotal to WANLALC's success. Building trusted relationships remains central to sustainable outcomes.
- **Local Voices Lead Best:** Ranger activities shaped by Traditional Owners ensure cultural integrity and practical relevance in land care. This local authority is key to genuine success.
- **Diversify for Sustainability:** By pursuing fee-for-service opportunities and strategic grants, WANLALC is creating a pathway to financial independence and scalable impact.
- **Empowering Local Leadership:** Supporting community members to become JPs and lead governance initiatives strengthens the Council's self-sufficiency and presence.

Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council: Growing Stronger Together – the importance of partnerships

Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) serves a close-knit community of 126 members, 97 of whom are voting members. Governed by a board of nine local individuals and managed by a CEO, the LALC functions with the support of dedicated volunteers and partnerships with various community organisations. The LALC's current Community Land and Business Plan (CLBP), in place until 2025, prioritises partnership building, community care, economic development, and growing both membership and leadership capacity.

Despite limited funding and a remote location, Menindee LALC has established successful collaborations with Menindee Central School, Kutanya, Mungkalinya, and Mirrimpilyi to deliver programs that connect culture, youth development, and local economic opportunities. The LALC purchased a local supermarket and operates an agricultural enterprise at Appin Station, and was supported by NSWALC to conduct business feasibility work under the former and subsequent NSWALC Community Fund grants for fencing, land management and shop fit-out.



Key Success Factors

- **Strategic Partnerships:** The LALC's partnership with Menindee Central School enables youth training programs, cultural events, and economic initiatives such as the Coco Blak Café and catering service. Collaborations with Kutanya and Mungkalinya enhance cultural education, community visibility, and in-kind support.
- **Volunteer-Driven Operations:** Volunteers play a key role in property caretaking, cleaning, administration, and retail support, reducing operational costs and building community investment.
- **Youth Engagement and Training:** Through traineeships for students and employment in the Junior Rangers Program and Darling River Supermarket, the LALC is fostering future leadership and skills development.
- **Enterprise Innovation:** By acquiring and operating the Darling River Supermarket and managing Appin Station, the LALC is translating economic development goals into action. These enterprises support employment and community access to goods and services.
- **Resilience and Adaptability:** Despite challenges in staffing and funding, the LALC continues to adapt by leaning on partnerships and pursuing grant opportunities, with a long-term vision for community and cultural sustainability.

Impact

- **Youth Employment and Skills:** Ten young people are employed through the supermarket and café, while others have gained skills through the Junior Rangers and afterschool programs.
- **Cultural Revitalisation:** Initiatives like the Wreath Program and Mission-based activities reinforce cultural identity, support healing, and promote intergenerational connection.

- **Community Access and Inclusion:** The supermarket, takeaway, and catering services provide access to affordable food and social spaces, while events and memorial services encourage broader community involvement.
- **Economic Development:** Through strategic enterprise management, the LALC has created local jobs and service delivery in a remote region, directly addressing goals outlined in their CLBP.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Administrative support from student trainees enables continued service delivery despite limited staffing.

Key Learnings

- **Youth are the Future:** Investing in young people through education, employment, and leadership opportunities is vital for the LALC's long-term sustainability.
- **Collaboration Amplifies Impact:** Partnerships—especially with schools and Aboriginal organisations—enable shared resources, stronger programming, and deeper community engagement.
- **Low-Cost Innovation is Possible:** With limited resources, the LALC has creatively leveraged volunteers, partnerships, and grant funding to meet community needs and grow enterprise.
- **Enterprise Requires Long-Term Planning:** Operating the supermarket and Appin Station has brought success but also highlighted challenges in management and funding. Sustainable planning, support for enterprise leadership, and external investment are needed.
- **Cultural Sites Need Investment:** The Old Mission remains central to community identity and education. Increased funding is needed to maintain the site and expand its use as a cultural and educational resource.

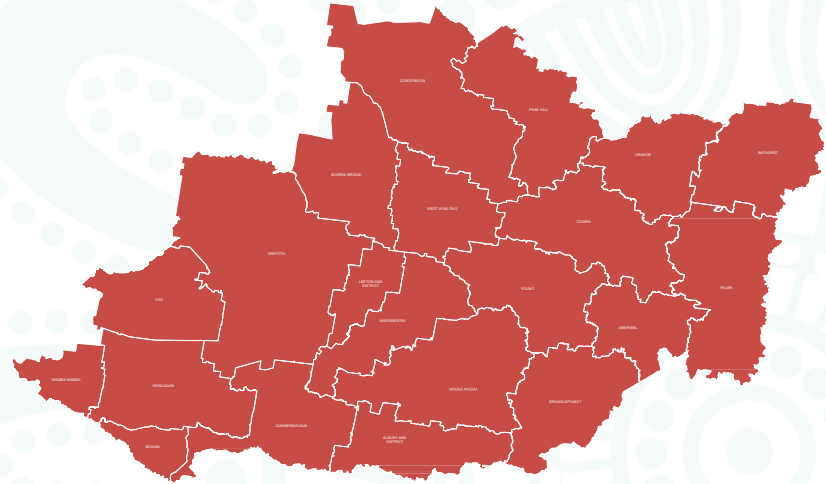
The Wiradjuri Region has a population of 26,321 Aboriginal people, which is 5.1% of the total population. Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC) include Albury and District, Bathurst, Brungle–Tumut, Condobolin, Cowra, Cumeragunja, Deniliquin, Griffith, Hay, Leeton and District, Moama, Murrin Bridge, Narrandera, Onerwal, Orange, Peak Hill, Pejar, Wagga Wagga, Wamba Wamba, West Wyalong and Young.

Murrin Bridge LALC: Strengthening Community through Land, Housing, and Youth Empowerment

Murrin Bridge LALC has recently undergone a significant transformation - strengthening Community wellbeing, housing stability, Cultural connection, and youth engagement in the process.

Murrin Bridge LALC is embedding sustainable development and cultural visibility across the region through a range of initiatives, including land activation, property management, youth leadership and employment pathways. Partnerships with local shires, Crown Lands, employment agencies, and peak housing bodies have also positioned Murrin Bridge LALC as a central hub for advocacy and action.

A key land activation project includes the development of residential housing on LALC-owned land to provide long-term, affordable accommodation for Community. A second development is underway near Lake Cargelligo, which will include additional housing and a cultural hub designed to support tourism, cultural connection, and economic development.



Key Success Factors

- **Community-Driven Solutions:** Many successful initiatives emerged from grassroots ideas, such as the community-led clean-up efforts, later supported by employment agency Yilabara.
- **Strong Partnerships:** Effective collaboration with Lachlan and Cobar Shires, Crown Lands, Mid Lachlan Aboriginal Housing Corporation, and emergency services enabled shared projects and infrastructure upgrades.
- **Youth Leadership Pipeline:** The council has successfully engaged youth in governance roles, with a youth advisor championing representation at state and national levels.
- **Holistic Property Management:** A shift to strategic leasing and the inclusion of professionals (real estate agents, solicitors) has improved outcomes for LALC-owned land and fostered plans for agricultural diversification.
- **Cultural Integration:** Efforts are being made to integrate cultural spaces into land development, highlighting sacred sites and embedding cultural identity in public projects.

Impact

- **Housing Security and Support:** By working closely with housing providers and residents, Murrin Bridge LALC has helped reduce tenant distress, advocate for rent relief, and improve property conditions.
- **Employment Pathways:** Partnerships with employment agencies and the RFS/SES have led to new job opportunities, local mitigation crews, and plans for youth-run maintenance businesses.
- **Community Cohesion and Pride:** Community-led clean-up programs and cemetery maintenance have fostered pride and ownership. Infrastructure upgrades, like a new water tank and improved fire safety systems, have increased community safety.

- **Youth Engagement and Development:** The LALC now includes youth on its board and supports skill development and leadership opportunities, helping to grow future leaders from within.
- **Recognition and Inspiration:** The community's progress has been acknowledged by external stakeholders, including a visit from the Governor and positive feedback from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA).

Key Learnings

- **Build from Community Strengths:** Supporting locally initiated ideas empowers the community and leads to more sustainable outcomes.
- **Youth Inclusion is Crucial:** Actively bringing young people into leadership roles ensures the continuity and cultural resilience of the LALC.
- **Housing Reform Needs Advocacy:** Dealing with legacy issues from past housing arrangements requires strong advocacy and collaboration with providers and peak bodies.
- **Relationships Drive Success:** Ongoing dialogue with local councils, schools, and service providers ensures coordinated, impactful community support.
- **Visibility and Storytelling Matter:** Sharing success stories strengthens morale and inspires other communities to pursue similar pathways.