

# OUR CULTURAL PLACES

Culture is recognised as our sense of place in the world. It represents our values and beliefs, our identity and our quality of life.



## OVERVIEW

Cultural places are those with importance or symbolic significance to the community, often playing an important role in collective memory, identity and spirituality. The Bega Valley is rich in physical, natural and social cultural assets which play a fundamental role in creating our communities sense of cultural identity.

## OUR HERITAGE AND 'SENSE OF PLACE'

The unique natural environment of the Bega Valley is considered an inspiration to many of our local communities and to our visitors. At the Bega Valley 'Creative Industries' workshop held in late 2011, workshop participants identified that one of the significant sources of inspiration to their creativity was their surrounding environment, and the connection they feel to their 'place'.

The Bega Valley has a wide range of existing cultural and natural heritage experiences. The region's heritage experiences range from museums, historic buildings and sites, art and cultural attractions, National Parks, events, festivals and tourist drives.

**“We are inspired by our regions wildness, its diverse natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, a shared sense of place, the creativity within our communities, and by the potential for art and culture to express and celebrate our distinctive, contemporary regional identity to ourselves, to Australia and to the world”**

EXCERPT FROM SOUTH EAST ARTS  
ARTISTIC STATEMENT

In addition to these physical products and locations, the Bega Valley's cultural heritage is underpinned by numerous stories, heroic tales, folklore and both Indigenous and European culture and beliefs. The cultural heritage of the Bega Valley and the opportunity this brings to tourism development is explored by Sapphire Coast Tourism (SCT) (<http://www.sapphirecoast.com.au/heritagetourismproject.php>) through the Heritage Tourism Strategy. The SCT Cultural Heritage Project identifies three 'iconic stories' as heritage experiences for the region. These include:

### Killers of Eden

This is a collection of stories and experiences behind the Killer Whales, and their association with Aboriginal and whaler communities in Eden.

### In the Shadow of the Mountains

There is a local saying that, “if you sleep in the shadow of the mountains, you are destined to return”. This story explores the magnetic attraction of the regions geological, natural and cultural history, the fertile valleys, rugged coastline and the magnificent mountains that created them. The story shows links to the Indigenous and European stories of the three significant local mountains – Gulaga (Mt Dromedary) in the North, Mumbulla (Biamanga National Park) in central Bega and Balwawan (Mt Imlay) in the South.

### Meeting of the Waters

The meeting of the waters story links both the geological and cultural history of the region to its enterprises and attractions. The picturesque coastline which has been a drawcard for holiday makers for generations has geological significance.

The Sapphire Coast is where the warm ocean currents from the Coral Sea meet the Antarctic waters from the Bass Strait at the place where three tectonic plates meet. This unique combination explains why the region has the most abundant marine life outside the Great Barrier Reef and is a mecca for marine research the world-over.

### CULTURAL HERITAGE

Cultural heritage and cultural expression are distinctive to each community. Sapphire Coast Tourism's Cultural Heritage Working Group with the Bega Valley Shire Council are in the development stage of design briefs for branding, town signage and information bays to attract and inform 'the experience seeker' tourist market. At this stage, the workshops are specifically related to three tourism gateways of Bermagui, Eden and Bemboka, and the major centres of Merimbula and Bega.

The development of cultural tourism signage is the next development from the iconic stories identified - Killers of Eden, In the



Shadow of the Mountains and Meeting of the Waters which have been further researched and developed into material that can be used on multi platforms for the tourist market. Tourism signage is the next stage of the project and will be looking at icons, style and colour and most importantly what represents the town visually and defines its ‘personality’ and attributes” and makes it special for local people and visitors.

## KEEPING PLACES

People of the Monaro and Yuin nations are the original inhabitants and custodians of the land and waterways of southern New South Wales from Cape Howe to the Shoalhaven River. The groups of Yuin communities living in coastal areas are known as the Katungul, from the ‘Katung’ which means the seas<sup>1</sup>.

The area we now know as the Bega Valley Shire is the traditional country of a number of Aboriginal communities with distinct cultures

and language groups: the Bidawal, the Thaua, Ngarigo and the Djiringanj. There are two Aboriginal Keeping Places that hold significance for our Aboriginal communities; Umbarra which is north of the Bega Valley Shire and Monaroo Bobberrer Gudu,, however at the time of writing neither were open for general public access.

## ASSETS

### Halls

There are over 22 community halls in the Shire, of which 20 are managed by committees of Council. Our community halls provide the opportunity for musicians, artists, community groups, market groups and social groups to host events for their surrounding community, and are also utilised as meeting places.

Community halls are a hub of activity and provide a strong focal point for communities



with regular classes, courses and gatherings held in each of the halls weekly. Annually over 200 events such as music concerts, dances, exhibitions are held in the community halls across the Shire. This is in addition to the regular class and booking use of the halls.

## Galleries

The Bega Valley has a strong network of galleries, including the Bega Valley Regional Gallery ([http://www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au/cp\\_themes/default/page.asp?p=DOC-KGX-42-36-17](http://www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au/cp_themes/default/page.asp?p=DOC-KGX-42-36-17)) and numerous community, commercial and private galleries which provide opportunities for local artists and are key driver in attracting cultural tourism.

The Bega Valley Regional Gallery is the only Council supported gallery in the South East region and opened in 1988 due to the growing interest in art in the community and the recognised need for space to support

this. The Bega Valley Regional Gallery is one of approximately 40 regional galleries in NSW.

Despite being one of the smallest regional galleries, it attracts over 10,000 visitors every year through a comprehensive schedule of exhibitions and public programs. The gallery has a professional curator who manages an exhibition program highlighting the work of local artists and contemporary artists from around Australia. The Gallery hosts the biannual Shirley Hannan National Portrait Award, the highest valued prize of its nature in regional Australia. The long-running annual Bega Art Prize (previously the Caltex Art Prize) features the work of artists from across the South East region.

## Sporting grounds and recreational facilities - 'Spaces and Places'

Recreation is many things to many people. It is what people choose to do in their free time for the purpose of physical activity, enjoyment and relaxation. Recreational activity can be an opportunity for everyone living in or visiting the Bega Valley to engage in a vital element of life. Recreational spaces and places have important social benefits for the wider community. They provide an opportunity for social interaction which helps promote community cohesion, and also play an important role in the lifestyle of the Bega Valley community.

## Libraries

Library and society are interlinked and interdependent. *'Society without libraries has no significance, and libraries without society has no origin...it is regarded as 'social institution', a product of society for its cultural advancement<sup>2</sup>.* One of Council's main cultural services expenditure is through the management of the Bega Valley Library Service, which supports four libraries and a visiting service across the Shire.

The Bega Valley Shire Library with four

localities, Bermagui, Bega, Merimbula and Eden has a membership of 23,170. In the collection year of 2012 the total book circulation was 217,339, with the visitation numbers for 2012 at 166,506 visitors across the four libraries. In 2012 there were 4,383 bookings for free wireless access; this is an increase of 83% on the 2011 collection year. In addition to traditional library activities, the Bega Valley Shire library service hosts community education events, with a total of 249 events held over 2012 attracting 1,747 attendees.

The Bega Valley Shire Library provides services to our academic community through partnerships with University of Wollongong (UoW), Australian National University (ANU), Bega TAFE and AUSWIDE. Through the holding of academic collections and providing research and mentoring support to university staff and students, the library plays a vital role in enabling students to receive support to pursue their studies.

The library service is committed to partnering with local organisations to promote library resources and to reach potential adult new readers. Consistent with the BVSC Community Strategic Plan, the library is well placed to ensure that local residents have equitable access to adult literary resources via the Shire's libraries.

The creativity of our community is also further developed through programs and initiatives of the library services. For example, the 'media room' in the Eden branch library provides resources for students and the community to develop skills in film making and editing. The 'Media Room' was first opened in early 2012 and has been a popular resource with courses delivered for local schools and other members of the Eden community.

## Museums

At the time of writing there are four museums in the Shire in facilities owned / managed by BVSC with exhibitions open to the public. The Eden Killer Whale Museum

(<http://www.killerwhalemuseum.com.au>) has been in operation for over 80 years and is recognised as one of the most progressive and innovative museums in regional NSW. The museum has real life displays, educational and historical information about whales and the marine environment. The museum employs a professional curator and has strong visitation throughout the year.

The Sapphire Coast Marine Discovery Centre ([www.sapphirecoastdiscovery.com.au](http://www.sapphirecoastdiscovery.com.au)) is a not-for-profit organisation established by community volunteers, with an aim to raise awareness about the local coastal environment and bring community members and marine experts together. The centre is closely affiliated with local schools and universities and government agencies engaged in marine research and conservation, and is also closely linked to the Killer Whale Museum.

The visiting public are able to actively participate in marine conservation themselves, with marine biologists at hand to lead tours and provide resources. Every year the Sapphire Coast Marine Discovery Centre hold a weekend entitled the "Marine Science Forum", where nationally renowned marine scientists converge to give high-level presentations about issues affecting the marine ecosystem.

The Bega Pioneers' Museum and Historical Society (<http://www.thebegavalley.org.au/6394.html>) is situated in a historical old hotel built in 1858 – 59 in Bega. The museum showcases every aspect of early Bega – industries, clothing, material, machinery, transport, household effects as well as family histories. The collection of over 200 framed photographs of pioneers is one of the largest in NSW. The museum also offers a family and general history research service.

The Old School Museum Merimbula / Imlay Historical Society (<http://thebegavalley.org.au/oldschoolmuseum.html>) is housed in the old Merimbula schoolhouse. The museum artefacts concentrate on the Merimbula and

old Imlay Shire areas. The building itself is a story on its own, operating as the Merimbula schoolhouse until 1946, then restored and handed over to the Historical Society in 1973.

The Bermagui Historical Society is supported and run by local volunteers. The dedicated volunteers manage and coordinate the museum hosted in the community centre, and hold regular meetings to discuss writing and publication of historical articles, the coordination of historical tours, site visits, functions and fundraisers. The society deliver conservation workshops to apply principles of proper storage and display techniques to help others in the preservation of our valuable history.

Local cemeteries play an important a role in understanding the heritage of our towns and villages. Bega Valley Shire Council's library service in partnership with the community run cemetery tours for the public which are extremely popular and provide a unique insight to our past.

In addition to the operating museums, the Tathra Wharf Museum area is currently being reviewed with a local community incorporated body.

## References

1. (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, The Aboriginal People of the Monaro, 2000)
2. (Khanna, J.K. (1987). Library and Society. New Delhi: Ess Ess Publications).

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### CULTURAL SETTING REPORT

The Cultural Setting Report is available via the Council website [www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au](http://www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au) Hard copies are available on request.

### CONTACT

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