

# ABORIGINAL ARTS AND CULTURE

VISION STATEMENT  
NSW ABORIGINAL ARTS  
AND CULTURAL STRATEGY  
2010 – 2014

‘To foster a vibrant Aboriginal arts and cultural sector that affords Aboriginal people greater opportunities to participate in, share and strengthen their culture through arts practice; and develop careers and businesses in the arts and cultural sector’

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## OVERVIEW

Aboriginal Australians are part of the oldest living culture in the world. Aboriginal arts and cultural expression is based in traditions and practices that have existed for millennia and that have continued to evolve through more than 200 years of colonisation and other global social, cultural and economic changes.

Aboriginal arts and cultural expression is a vital part of contemporary Aboriginal society and is an important element of the social fabric of Aboriginal people and communities throughout Australia.<sup>1</sup>

Bega Valley Shire Council recognises that Aboriginal arts and cultural expression is fundamental to the social, cultural and economic well-being of Aboriginal people in the Shire.

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 Katungal, from the word “Katung; which means by the sea<sup>2</sup>. The area we now know as the Bega (Biggah) Valley Shire is the traditional country of Aboriginal communities with distinct cultures and language groups, the Bidawal, the Thaua, Ngarigo and the Djiringanj.

**“Sites throughout the Shire demonstrate occupation by these rich cultures to be in excess of 6,000 years. These people nurtured an organised and active culture many thousands of years older than the creators of the great pyramids of Giza. Some of the oldest physical record of human occupation and activity to be found anywhere in the world are located beneath our noses here in the Bega Valley Shire”<sup>3</sup>.**

Arts and cultural expression has always played a vital part in Aboriginal society and continues to be an important element of the social fabric of Aboriginal people and communities. Aboriginal people see their culture and heritage as an important part of their modern day life in having that connection to the land and its people.

Supporting and fostering creative endeavours has the ability to strengthen community resilience and well-being, and can be the catalyst for greater community engagement throughout the region, enhancing principles such as reconciliation.

South East Arts’ Aboriginal arts and cultural action plan outlines a regional specific approach that identifies and assesses synergies for Aboriginal arts and cultural

development. These synergies have been identified utilising the Aboriginal communities’ arts and cultural needs and aspirations within the region in relation to current Aboriginal arts and cultural frameworks such as the NSW Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Strategy. The adopted action plan gives direction to South East Arts and to Bega Valley Shire Council in building partnerships with local Aboriginal artists and communities.

Below is a snapshot of existing Aboriginal art and cultural activities within the Shire. The information for this section has been derived through the personal knowledge and research of Dr. Anne Marshall through her contribution to the Sapphire Coast Cultural Heritage and Tourism project.

## CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL ART

Essentially, there is still a very different approach to art in Aboriginal culture. There is a big emphasis on storytelling, history, the sacred in life and relationship to country. There are decrees about who can represent various aspects of the story, which is tied to family and heritage.

### Contemporary Aboriginal woodcarvings

Between 2001 and 2002, a young local Aboriginal woodcarver, Jason Campbell, created an exceptional set of woodcarving panels telling the story of European and Aboriginal interaction.

The woodcarvings have been produced as storyboards telling the story of the Murunna Point area. The story follows a journey across a bridge from the past to the present. There are 15 storyboards, carved from Cyprus pine that starts with a time before man and show the journey through time, and the connection to local flora and fauna.

### Contemporary Aboriginal painters and printmakers

Aboriginal people on the Far South Coast have seen a resurgence in their visual



arts and crafts in the last 15 years. In the absence of community based cultural training, many artists have attended TAFE and private courses and have formed closely knit groups that fluctuate and change as people move locations and interests. One of the best known local artists is Cheryl Davison who has works in collections overseas and in the National Gallery as well as private collections all over Australia. Cheryl is committed to passing on and teaching others about Aboriginal culture at the same time as creating beautiful artworks. Together with Don Atkinson, Cheryl runs workshops to teach both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people skills and understandings of the relationship between traditional crafts, art making, the stories and country.

### Traditional Aboriginal song and dance

Traditional Aboriginal dance and song is upheld through the Gulaga Dancers from the Wallaga Lake and Narooma area. The Gulaga Dancers perform at a variety of functions through the region.

## HERITAGE STORIES

The Bega Valley Shire Aboriginal Heritage Committee worked collaboratively with more than forty Koori elders from the Bega Valley Shire to record and compile their oral histories. Twenty-six of these stories have now been published into the 'Koori Heritage Stories' book, which was launched in November 2012. The collection of stories aims to foster a better understanding of how it has felt to be a Koori person in the Bega Valley Shire.

The storytellers offer an intergenerational perspective on Koori culture, heritage and history and reveal how attitudes, policies and practices have impacted on them over time. The stories speak of the many unique ways Koori people identify as a distinct cultural group; through kinship; through knowing country; through language and through shared histories.

## Heritage trails - Bundian Way

The Bundian Way is a 265 km ancient Aboriginal route linking the Australian Alps to the coast. It connects Targangal (Mt Kosciuszko) to the Bilgarera coastal site (Fisheries Beach) on Tullenmullerer (Twofold Bay).

The Bundian Way is of outstanding heritage significance as it represents the key traditional walking pathways that connected Aboriginal people to the land for trade, inter-tribal relationships and ceremonial events. This route was used later by the Europeans, mostly guided by Aboriginal people, to explore and settle new areas. Planning is currently underway to provide an Indigenous heritage tourism experience associated with the Bundian Way. It is envisaged that this will give visitors a range of different experiences that reflect different aspects of the landscape and the stories. The gateway to the route is the Monaroo-Bobberer-Gudu Keeping Place at Jigamy, next to Pambula Lake.

When finalised, information about this outstanding heritage tourism experience will be promoted through Council and the Australia's Coastal Wilderness and Sapphire Coast Tourism programs.

## References

1. Arts NSW, NSW Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Strateg – Key Issues for Discussion, 2010
2. NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, The Aboriginal People of the Monaro, 2000.
3. NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, The Aboriginal People of the Monaro, 2000.

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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

Bega Valley Shire Council  
02 6499 2222  
[council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au)