Aboriginal Cultural Values

An Approach for Engaging with Country

Djinjama

Cultural Design
& Research

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Island View Beach, Yuin Country

Acknowledgement of Country

Nura,[1] or Ngura,[2] are words for Country. To be clear, when talking about Country, it is not the countryside or the area outside of metropolitan spaces being referred to, it is the lands to which First Peoples belong, yearn for, find healing from and will return to. Country is the places from which Ancestors originated and still exist within as life forces. Country cannot be owned or tamed, as Country is also a relationship that must be honoured and nurtured.

Using the language for and of Country, I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Nura throughout Australia and abroad, and their continuing connection to culture, community, land, sea and sky. I pay my respect to Elders and Knowledge Holders and express my gratitude for their continued sharing of knowledge and culture. I acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and these lands remain a contested space for many First Peoples.

Recognising Country, Elders and Custodians is a form of mutual respect between First Peoples. It is based on an ancient tradition which situates me in a living reciprocal action between people, narrative and Nura.

1. Uncle Noel Butler is a Budawang Elder of the Yuin nation and Dhurga language Knowledge Holder. Uncle Noel provided this translation for Country in Dhurga, the language of the author's Ancestors.

2. Elder Uncle Greg Simms descends from the Gundungurra (water dragon lizard people) of the Blue Mountains and the Gadigal (whale people) of the Dharug nation, as well the Budawang (beach plover people) of the Yuin nation. Uncle Greg provided this translation for Country in Dharug, the language of the land on which the author lives and works.

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Those who arrived in our Ancestors' time did not understand that the bush they saw around them was not a wilderness, but a culturally managed landscape; that life in all its shapes watched them anxiously from the ground, the water, the sky; and that there was not a single grain of sand beneath their feet that was not part of a thinking, breathing, loving land. In their language, the British described and catalogued the land as an object, not grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, sister, brother and family. And by being named as the land, [C]ountry became hidden – for … 'words like "mountain", "tree" and "wind" are no invitation for them to show us their presence.' Unlike Indigenous people, who had lived in cooperation with [C]ountry for so many, many years, the British would cause the rapid extinction of numerous plant and animal species. This devastation was itself a product of a worldview in which land was, and could only ever be, an inert possession.

(Kwaymullina, 2008, p. 11)[3]

3 Ambelin Kwaymullina belongs to the Palkyu people from the Pilbara in the north west of Western Australia.

Overview

This document provides an approach for engaging with Country—and therefore community and culture—as part of planning, design and environmental management disciplines. Also included is an overview of a process for developing a masterplan framework for caring for Country. This writing is specifically directed towards planners, environmental managers, architects, designers, engineers, public servants, developers and decisionmakers who are directly affecting Country through their work. The approach encourages all working in these fields to develop their own understanding of and relationship to Country and those First Peoples who relate to it. As such, there is a discussion about understanding Country included specifically in relation to the built environment.

Forewords

Language, Terminology and Acknowledging

There is no terminology that is unanimously agreed upon for referring to the many diverse groups who comprise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Australia. In this document, the terms 'First Peoples' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably to refer to those groups and people whose stories say they have always been here, whose Ancestors[4] pre-date colonisation, and who identify as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Where appropriate, 'Aboriginal' or 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander' are also used.

The land now known as Australia is home to numerous Indigenous groups with differing names and languages. As their names originated from an oral tradition with multiple dialects, and colonisers have not always well understood Indigenous ways of forming words, there are many ways of saying and spelling them (Foley, 2001; Tobin & Davison, 2018).[5][6][7] Now-Australia is acknowledged as contested space, both physically and politically. Systemic colonial practices of erasure and assimilation have caused complicated contestations between some of these groups triggering power struggles that disassociates those with long connections and belonging to place (Foster, Paterson Kinniburgh, & Wann Country, 2019).[8][9] In Indigenous knowledge systems and worldviews there are many ways of knowing, many truths and diverse perspectives. Likewise, there are many truths about places containing diversity in the knowledges, stories, histories and understandings of that place. Therefore, the land now known as Australia is also a shared space. First Peoples' spaces had and still have overlaps, interstitial spaces, merged areas, fluidity and nebulosity. All are respected and acknowledged in this writing.

We all stand on the shoulders of Knowledge

4. Some words in this writing are given capitals (i.e. Country, Dreaming, Ancestors) to express they are relating to the Indigenous meanings for those words. Likewise some words are written as plurals (i.e. knowledges, peoples) to acknowledge the diversity of and between First Peoples.

5. Uncle Dennis Foley identifies as a Koori; his matrilineal connection is Gai-mariagal of the Guringah language group, and his father is a descendant of the Capertee/Turon River people of the Wiradjuri.

6. Aunty Jacinta Tobin is a Borborngal (kangaroo) and Canamadagal (possum) person of the Dharug nation.

7. Joel Davison is a Gadigal man.

8. Shannon Foster is a D'harawal Saltwater Knowledge Keeper.

9. Jo Paterson Kinniburgh is of Karyouacou/West Africa heritage.

Holders, Elders and Ancestors (or perhaps, in non-Indigenous ways of understanding, other experts, researchers, scholars, scientists) and it is important to acknowledge their contributions to our ways of thinking and doing, and any resulting work. Many ideas contained in this document originate from an Indigenous worldview. Therefore, in this document in the first instance an Indigenous person's work has been referenced, they are noted in the footnotes to acknowledge they come from a position of authority to share that knowledge. Furthermore, like in academic contexts when research or study is successfully undertaken one might acquire the title of Doctor or Professor, in Indigenous contexts those who have substantially contributed to their communities are honoured with the title of Aunt or Uncle. These are respectfully reflected in this writing.

Positioning

At points in this document it is not possible to completely remove the Indigenous identity of the author from the writing in the report – and nor is it appropriate to do so. This is for several reasons; firstly, as argued by Shawn Wilson,[10] Indigenous researchers and authors (and, it could be argued, designers, planners, architects, public servants, decisionmakers) have the responsibility to 'place themselves and their work firmly in a relational context'. He continues, 'We cannot be separated from our work, nor should our writing be separated from ourselves (i.e., we must write in the first person rather than the third). Our own relationships with our environment, families, ancestors, ideas, and the cosmos around us shape who we are and how we will conduct our research' (2007, p. 194).

10. Shawn Wilson is Opaskwayak Cree from northern Manitoba, Canada.

Secondly, this writing addresses the Aboriginal experience of Country. It contends it is imperative that First Peoples are the voices of Country. Therefore, as a Budawang woman of the Yuin nation, at times it has been important this voice, Danièle's voice, was speaking in alliance with those whose knowledges this document is grounded upon.

Furthermore, when working in Indigenous contexts it is important to contextualise and position oneself. Reflecting on and understanding one's identity, role and purpose within Indigenous communities provides our position in regard to our Country and community and how we associate with others within those networks. It is our way of indicating how we relate to and are related to others. It indicates to whom we are accountable for our actions and words, and to which lands we have responsibilities and obligations. It is also an important principle for non-Indigenous peoples to engage with when working in Indigenous contexts. Following this process promotes cultural safety, trust and recognition of our accountability for our own actions and intentions.

With these understandings, the author is introduced below.

About the Researcher

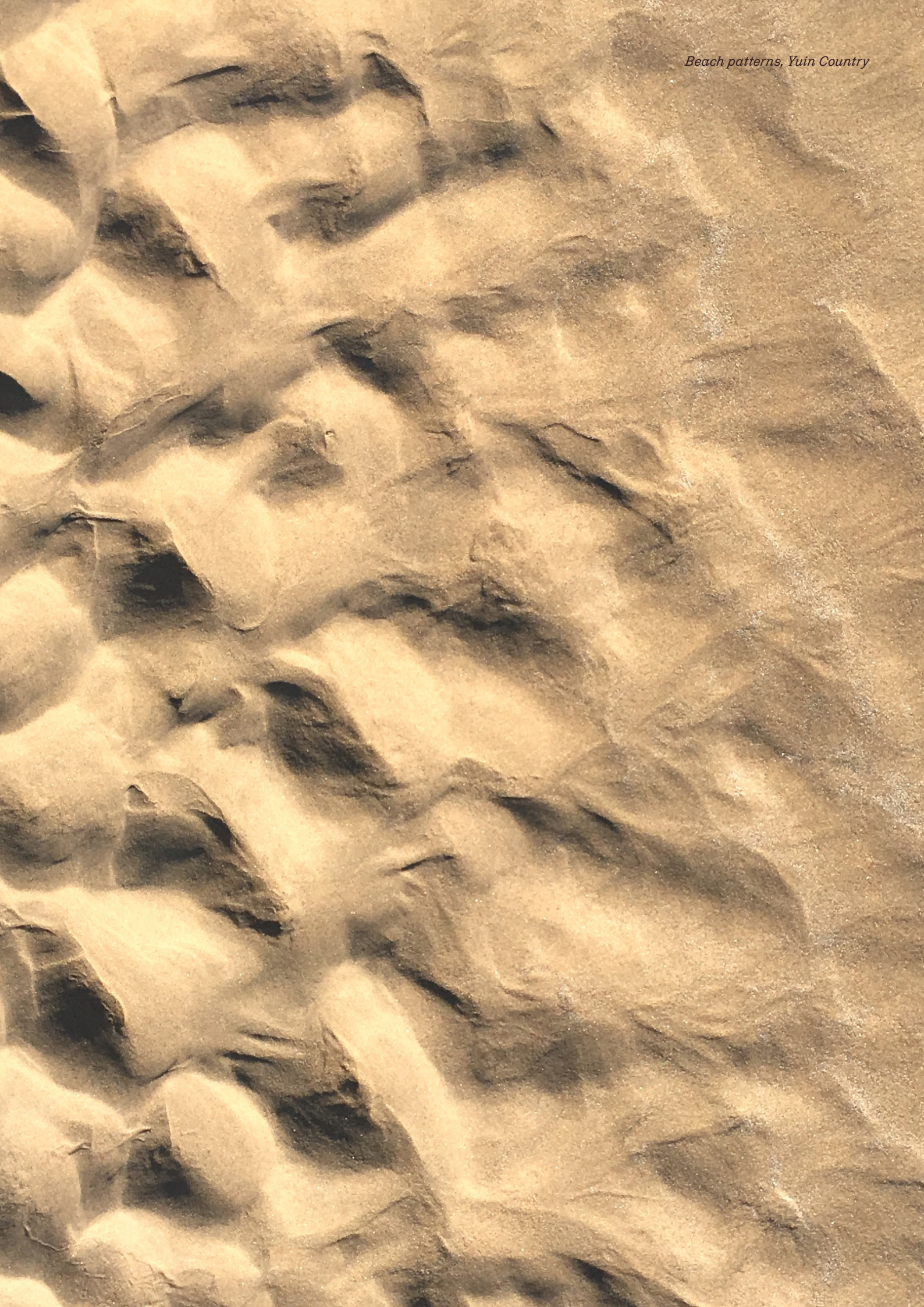
Dr Danièle Hromek is a Budawang (beach plover) woman of the Yuin (black duck) nation, her Ancestors were Dhurga speakers, a language Danièle is working to relearn. She is descended from the Black Cleggs of the Brown family, who were dispossessed of their Country in the late 1800s, and travelled north to kin in Browns Crossing, near Eungai. Danièle herself was born on Gadigal lands in Sydney. She went on to spend much of her formative years between Bundjalung Country on the Far North Coast and Awabakal Country around Newcastle. Danièle therefore has kin connections in the coastal areas of

New South Wales including in Greater Sydney.

Danièle also has French and Czech heritage and through these diversely divergent heritages has all her life had the need to walk in two worlds and code switch between multiple ways of expressing linguistically. She regularly is given the role of being a “bridge” between cultural expressions— essential in her work as a researcher, educator and designer.

Danièle works in the spatial disciplines specifically considering Indigenous relationships to space and Country. Her research investigates how to Indigenise the built environment by creating spaces to embed Indigenous rights and culture. It contributes an understanding of the Indigenous experience and comprehension of space, and investigates how Aboriginal people occupy, use, narrate, sense, dream and contest their spaces. Danièle’s research rethinks the values that inform Aboriginal understandings of space through Indigenous spatial knowledge and cultural practice, in doing so considers the sustainability of Indigenous cultures from a spatial perspective. Danièle’s practice works in the intersection of architecture, interiors, urban design, performance design and fine arts. Her work often considers the urban Aboriginal condition, the Indigenous experience of Country and contemporary Indigenous identities.

Through her doctoral project she continued developing the process gifted by generations of Aboriginal Ancestors in which design happens in collaboration with Country. Danièle examined and further elaborated approaches to the design process that cement Country at the centre, as well as methodologies of cultural practice. Danièle brings these to her research and design practice with the objective of designing flourishing futures for First Peoples and for culture.



Beach patterns, Yuin Country

To be clear, when talking about Country, it is not the countryside or the area outside of metropolitan spaces being referred to, it is to the lands to which First Peoples belong, yearn for, find healing from and will return to.

Country is the places from which Ancestors originated and still exist within as life forces. Country cannot be owned or tamed, as Country is also a relationship that must be honoured and nurtured.

Introduction

Countless First Peoples' stories say they come from the land, the land is their Mother and through the Dreaming[11], Country formed them and their ways of knowing, being and doing. Country holds knowledges, Laws[12] and lore[13] like an eternal library (Burarrwanga et al., 2014).[14] As such, with First Peoples as interpreters, Country as 'land library' can direct the planning and design of the built environment, as well as instructing the management of diverse ecosystems.

With this understanding, the purpose of this document is to provide an approach for engaging with Country as part of planning, design and environmental management disciplines. Also included is an overview of a process for developing a masterplan framework[15] for caring for Country. This writing is specifically directed towards planners, architects, designers, engineers, public servants, developers and decisionmakers who are directly affecting Country through their work. The approach encourages all working with Indigenous peoples and impacting Country to develop their own understanding of and relationship with Country and those First Peoples who relate to it. Therefore, there is a discussion about understanding Country included, specifically in relation to the built environment.

Furthermore, this document aims to encourage a change in perception in which Indigenous peoples are seen as being guests, to being hosts in and on their Country (Beaumont, 2020 pers. comm. 29 April).[16] Therefore, this approach does not replace engagement with the Indigenous community; on the contrary, as part of Country Indigenous peoples are key to ensuring the correct understandings of Country.

This document also aims to provide guidance and language related to Country in order to begin to

11. The Dreaming is used to describe the dynamic perpetual action of creation during which Country and all entities that share Country are continuously being created. From the Dreaming come all Laws, groupings, identity, spirituality, kinship structures and capacities for Aboriginal peoples to be innovative and resilient.

12. Laws (with capital L) are those embedded in Country through the process of the Dreaming as a set of rules or guidelines for every entity to follow. The Laws of the land are not changeable by humans. In contrast, law (small l) refers to imported laws that have been imposed on rather than part of Country.

13. Lore refers to knowledge or tradition passed from generation to generation through story, song and other cultural expressions.

14. Laklak Burarrwanga, Banbapuy Ganambarr, Djawundil Maymuru, Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs, Ritjilili Ganambarr are all Yolŋu people, from Bawaka in North East Arnhem Land.

15. The term masterplan could be interchanged for strategic plan or plan of management.

16. Dave Beaumont is a Wiradjuri man. Dave recognises the contribution of Uncle Phil Bligh.

understand each individual person's relationships with and responses to Country. In doing so it provides a means of opening the conversation for an engagement with the First Peoples who relate to Country, and a means of starting a consultation with Country itself.

Finally, this document expresses urgency in behavioural changes in relation to giving voice back to Country. It questions the efficacy of anthropocentric management systems for making decisions about how the land, waters and skies are cared for, advocating instead for solutions that start with Country at the centre.

Purpose

This document does not aim to provide a step-by-step guide to connecting with Country. In fact, it is not possible for a document to do so as one's relationships are one's own responsibilities. Each individual must make their own steps to engage with Country. We all must seek our purpose in the engagement process and amend our actions in regard to our behaviour on Country and with First Peoples.

A process of unlearning of anthropocentric behaviour and relearning key relationships is crucial. The voice of Country has been silenced by colonial processes,[17] and, along with it the voices of First Peoples – indeed those who have the capacity to best hear Country and translate what it needs. Embedded in the outlined approach is a call to shift governance systems from anthropocentrism to Country-centrism – particularly important in places where important decisions are being made about future access, land-use and development. It is each of our individual responsibilities to take action. Currently actions are being undertaken within a system that continues to silence those voices that most need to be heard. However, with the right grounding in Country, every

17. 'Colonial processes' includes dispossession, assimilation, detainment, separation, control, erasure, amongst others.

decision made has the capacity to make a positive difference. As such, this document asks us to take a moment to re-evaluate the enduring impacts of the decisions we make and the actions we take. Consider our role in the current system, and which voices we are enabling or including.

Relationships all need continuing care, time and attention, and therefore it is important to take time in our relationships with Country. This approach is inherently different from the way professionals in the built environment or decisionmakers in government may be used to thinking, in which they are required to weigh up evidence, analysis, risk evaluation and so forth. To understand and know Country it is important to take the time to let go of those factors feeding into immediate decisions, and to place oneself in a more open position.

The approach outlined here differs from conventional consultation strategies that set out a way of engaging with Indigenous peoples. Regularly such strategies aim to provide information about a project with the role of the strategy being to talk to or inform those Indigenous peoples who might be impacted by the project. Typically, it is a choice that information provided through consultation be taken on or disregarded, information collected but not necessarily acted upon. Indigenous consultation can also be used as implications of consent or validation for the project which may have ethically questionable intentions or outcomes that may not be communicated to those consulted. Whereas this approach asks for readers to take a stance of listening, both to First Peoples and to Country.

Western systems and worldviews have a tendency to compartmentalise knowledge, in doing so creating experts in particular fields or disciplines (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Duran, 2006). [18] [19] There is a risk in this means of structuring the world only one element of a place, site or ecosystem is considered without

18. Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley is a Yupiaq man from Alaska.

19. Eduardo Duran is Pueblo/Apache and Lakota through the Hunka and the Yellow Horse family.

understanding how it impacts other elements. For instance, in Aboriginal ways of knowing the world, water is intrinsically linked to fire and air, and not considering all elements could pose a danger to the ecosystem in question. As such, this approach does not specify recommendations for any type of Country, but recognises the interconnectedness between all, be they land Country, sky Country or water Country.

Additionally, within many Indigenous communities is the sense they are the most researched people in the world, and due to past experiences, there exists mistrust and concern about taking part in consultations. This can lead to consultation fatigue or avoidance. Those aiming to consult with Indigenous communities must also have awareness of the broader priorities and challenges for those communities. Often other cultural responsibilities related to caring for Country either are or become a greater priority than the consultation topic. First Peoples were given the responsibility of caring for Country during the Dreaming and Country is literally still cared for by Indigenous communities. Non-Indigenous stakeholders need to recognise this, both from an ethical perspective and as an authentic recognition of cultural responsibilities promotes reciprocal relationships. Conventional consultation strategies can neglect to recognise these actual responsibilities, whereas in the approach outlined in this document those responsibilities become shared by all as they engage with Country. This document therefore needs to work in collaboration with conventional consultation strategies in order to create a more holistic means of engagement.

Taking these factors relating to developing personal enduring relationships with communities and Country, reconsidering the extent of the site or ecosystem, and giving opportunities for cultural futures to be considered, can reduce consultation fatigue and avoidance. Considering these factors forces a change in the nature of the engagement and the numbers

undertaking the consultations. It also creates development and change in those working in these disciplines in their relationships with, responsibilities to and actions towards Indigenous peoples – and Country. In doing so, ethical behaviours are embedded not only into the project but the people.

Critically, a key purpose of this report is to raise awareness about the importance of healing. Creating space for silenced voices is a key aspect of healing. The voice of Country has been unheard by western systems since colonial processes arrived, and the agency of First Peoples to translate that voice. A tangible aspect to healing is the capacity for Aboriginal peoples to be able to access Country. Much Country is locked off behind fences and under concrete. Aboriginal people are unable to access this Country, unable to undertake the necessary reciprocal actions of care creating a deep sense of mourning for that Country. Those working in and making decisions for the built environment are in a unique position to be able to create opportunities for mutual actions of care to occur, and through those actions, healing.

Context

In Yuin Country on the South Coast of New South Wales, Uncle Bruce Pascoe[20] has been working on a project cultivating native foods with an aim to bake loaves of bread from perennial native plants, including murnong[21] [yam daisy], kangaroo grass, Panicum decompositum (native millet) and mandadyan nalluk[22] [dancing grass]. While colonial processes impacted the transmission of the original methods for baking bread from native grains, knowledges are being recovered or revived, partially through information retained in the Aboriginal community, in part through colonial records, and also trial and error. Uncle Bruce comments that there is nothing new about the

20. Uncle Bruce Pascoe is of Bunurong, Yuin and Punniler panner heritage.

21. Murnong is the eastern Kulin word for the daisy yam.

22. Mandadyan nalluk translates to 'dancing grass' in a far South Coast language.

processes they are using. He says,

> Some of the things work and some of them don't. We just have to be really patient. The old people had 120,000 years to get this process right, so if we have some failures .... you've got to put it in perspective. The emotional toll of reviving this knowledge is in understanding how much has been lost. While there's grief, there's also triumph. It's very easy to despair. So we try not to use words like 'lost'. We try to use words like 'found' and 'recovered'. And that's what I'm looking at. I'm looking at recovery (Allam & Moore, 2020).[23] [24]

The recommendations in the approach outlined in this document are likewise acknowledging the millennia that Indigenous Ancestors worked to develop and maintain their relationships with Country, to know and be able to read Country. Using these ancient techniques, Ancestors managed – or designed – the land in collaboration with Country, with related knowledges passing from generation to generation through narratives and cultural practice (Hromek, 2019). An understanding of these techniques can guide current planning, design and ecological management processes with the appropriate direction by First Peoples.

When non-Indigenous people turned up on Sydney's shores, they found a landscape which they described to be like a beautiful extensive English park.[25] What they did not realise is they had arrived in a place that was managed sustainably by Aboriginal peoples over thousands of years in which the cultural and physical futures of many generations ahead were considered and ensured. Regrettably, this means of visioning – or designing – their futures was disrupted as colonial forces swept across the continent. First Peoples are still recovering from the traumas of this disruption, yet nonetheless carry with them narratives, knowledges and relationships that can be valuable to ensure sustainable management of ecosystems.

Like Indigenous peoples, Country has not been

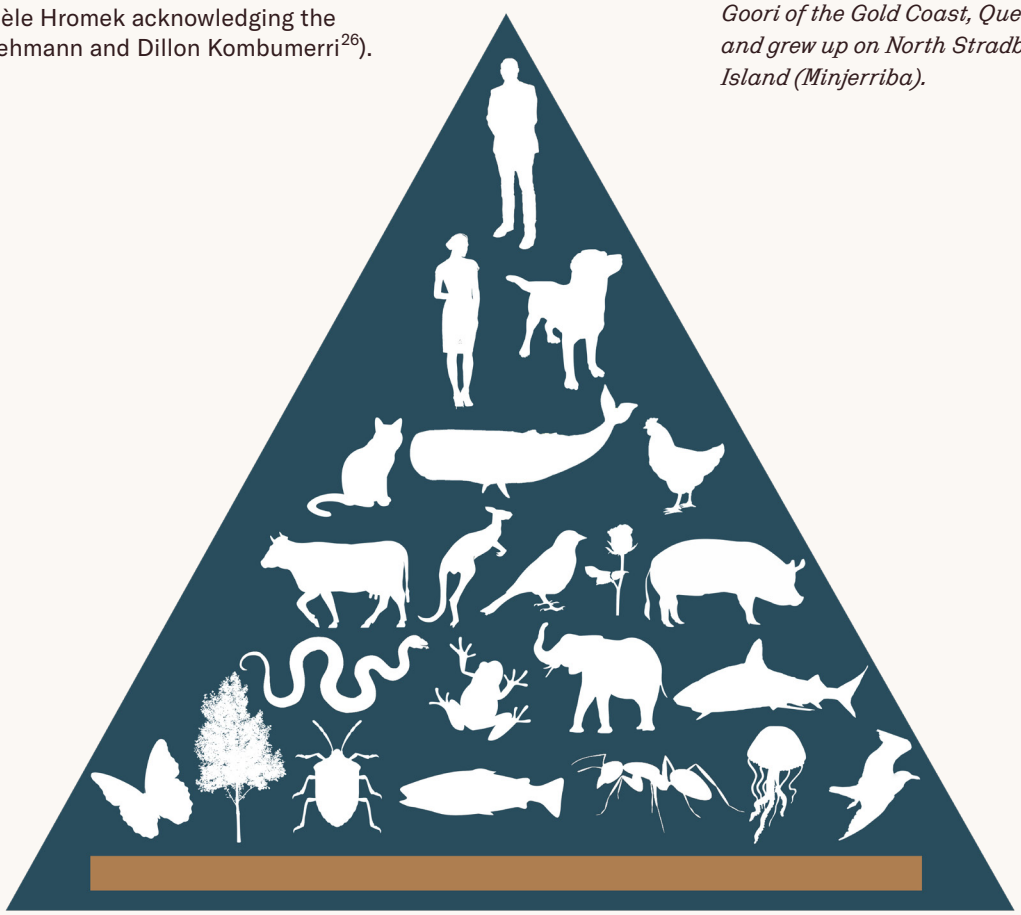
23. Lorena Allam is descended from the Gamilaraay and Yawalaraay nations of north west NSW.

24. Isabella Moore is an Australian, and Native, African Peruvian woman.

25. For instance, Thomas Mitchell (1839) described the countryside in inland New South Wales as consisting of 'open forest which, growing gradually thinner, at length left intervals of open plain ... we crossed a beautiful plain; covered with shining verdure, and ornamented with trees which, although dropt in nature's careless haste, gave the country the appearance of an extensive park'.

heeded by now-Australians as Aboriginal ways of knowing and caring for the land were set aside for Western ideals. With Western principles arrived value systems that enabled importation of foreign species, consumption, exploitation, destruction of ecosystems and disconnection from the Laws of the land. These values have created an anthropocentric and hierarchical way of understanding the relationship between people and earth, in which humans are alienated from Country, and the land – understood as property – exists to satisfy human desires. The management of the land, waters and airs currently occurs under the governance systems and values of human-centredness. However, as seen through the changing climate, extremes in weather and related unprecedented global events, anthropocentrism has failed to manage the necessary relationships between land, more-than-humans and people.

Figure 01. Hierarchical approach
(Redrawn by Danièle Hromek acknowledging the work of Steffan Lehmann and Dillon Kombumerri[26]).



26. Dillon Kombumerri is a Yugembir Goori of the Gold Coast, Queensland and grew up on North Stradbroke Island (Minjerriba).

In contrast, Indigenous peoples' ways of relating to Country understand that humans are simply one part of a broader ecosystem, and the health and welfare of each member of this system is dependent on the health and welfare of the whole. The relatedness, interconnectedness and interdependency of all elements within that system keep all in balance as no single entity is privileged over any others (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Duran, 2006).

Figure 02. Relational approach
(Redrawn by Danièle Hromek the work of Steffan Lehmann and Dillon Kombumerri)

Aunty Mary Graham[27] (2019) furthers these ideas through a relationist ethos in which there are two basic precepts, those being the land is the source of the law, and you are not alone. Graham indicates the two most important relationships in life are, in the first instance, the relationships between land and people, and the second amongst people themselves, with the second always being contingent upon the first. The first precept establishes, 'The land, and how we treat it, is what determines our humanness. Because land is sacred and must be looked after, the relationship between people and land becomes the template for society and social relations' (Graham, 2019, p. 2). As such, all meaning comes from the land – or Country. Regarding the second precept, Graham says people are connected and made by their relationships with not only each other, but between every being that shares Country and therefore sustaining and strengthening these relationships is of utmost importance.

27. Aunty Mary Graham is a member of the Kombumerri peoples.

Another understanding of these notions is explored in the philosophy authored by Uncle Dennis Foley (2003, pp. 46-47) in which he describes three interrelating spheres: the physical, human and sacred. He says:

> The physical world is the base that is land, the creation. The land is the mother, and we are of the land .... The land is our food, our culture, our spirit and our identity .... The human world involves the knowledge, approaches to people, family, rules of behaviour, ceremonies, and their capacity to change. The sacred world is not based entirely in the metaphysical, as some would believe. Its foundation is in healing (both the spiritual and physical wellbeing of all creatures), the lore (the retention and re-enforcement of oral history), care of [C]ountry, the [L]aws and their maintenance.

Figure 03. Three Interrelating worlds

(Drawn by Danièle Hromek acknowledging the work of Dennis Foley (2003), Victor Steffensen[28] (2020), Institute for Aboriginal Development (n.d.))

28. Victor Steffensen is descended from the Tagalaka people of far north Queensland.

In Aboriginal ways of knowing the world, humans are understood as being nature. Humans, like non-humans, belong in this place on this planet as we evolved here together. Non-humans alongside humans hold equal positions and entitlements to ecosystems, places, habitats, sites, Country. As descendants of the land and custodians of Country, First Peoples understand their obligations to practice care of Country in every action. However, Country is now shared by non-Indigenous peoples also, and the responsibility to care for Country now extends to all people.

The challenge is, how can Country and culture be visioned, designed, planned, implemented in an already contested and congested space?

Bhundoo, Yuin Country

Engaging with Country—
An Approach

Country intuitively has its own methodology; a relational[29] methodology guided and inspired by Country (McKnight, 2017).[30] Indigenous knowledge systems, Laws and beliefs, which come from the Dreaming and Country, inform the past, present and future, and change in interpretation through dreams and lived experience.

Indigenous knowledge systems also continually establish Indigenous ways of life, providing moral codes, rules and laws for behaviour based on the principles of respect, reciprocity and obligation (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009). [31] [32] On this basis, Indigenous ideologies are formed and guided by cultural worldviews, paradigms, protocols, principles, contexts and behaviours – and Country. These values form an integral part of Indigenous methodologies and require critical thought about the processes and outcomes used, particularly when it is Indigenous community's experiences, knowledges and interests that lie at the centre of a project (Porsanger, 2004; Smith, 2012). [33] [34]

The Indigenous methodologies that inform the approach outlined hereafter include the following principles (developed by Karen Martin-Booran Mirraboopa (2003),[35] whose framework extends on the work of Rigney (1999)[36] and West (2000)[37]):

- recognise Indigenous worldviews within which Indigenous knowledges and realities are distinctive and fundamental
- honour Aboriginal social customs as essential processes through which they live, learn and situate themselves
- emphasise the social, historical and political contexts which shape Indigenous peoples' lives, experiences and futures
- privilege the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and lands

29. Relational refers the way in which two or more people, things or ideas are connected. It may be through kinship or other networks. Relationality is the state of being relational.

30. Anthony McKnight is an Awabakal, Gumaroi, and Yuin man.

31. Aileen Moreton-Robinson is a Geonpul woman from Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island), Quandamooka First Nation (Moreton Bay) in Queensland.

32. Maggie Walter is a member of the Palawa Briggs/Johnson Tasmanian Aboriginal family descended from the Pairrebenne people of Tebrakunna Country, North Eastern Tasmania.

33. Jelena Porsanger is Skolt Sami, originally from the Notozero region.

34. Linda Tuhiwai Smith is a Māori academic who affiliates to the Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou iwi.

35. Karen Martin-Booran Mirraboopa is a Noonuccal woman from North Stradbroke Island (south east Queensland) with Bidjara ancestry (central Queensland).

36. Lester-Irabinna Rigney is a Narungga, Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri man.

37. Japanangka errol West is a Tasmanian Aboriginal.

⟶ include or consult with Indigenous peoples not as objects but participants

⟶ share and protect knowledge

⟶ use appropriate language and processes

By incorporating these theoretical understandings into a practical approach for design and planning, Country is centred, as in Aboriginal worldviews Country is that which holds all knowledges, histories and memories alive in its ‘land library’. Indigenous Ancestors developed cultural generational relational generative iterative collaborative communal processes of design and planning through their care and management of Country (Hromek & Gothe, 2020). Their descendants have the heritage and narratives to approach land management using this ancient methodology in which Country is at the centre.

Gulaga Mountain, Yuin Country

Understanding Country

Country, for First Peoples, relates not only to the cultural group and land to which they belong, it is also their place of origin in cultural, spiritual and literal terms. Country includes not only the land but also waters and skies, and incorporates the tangible[38] and intangible,[39] knowledges and cultural practices, identity and reciprocal relationships, belonging and wellbeing. Country also includes people, more-than-humans, flora and non-breathing entities.

38. Tangible heritage includes buildings and historic places, monuments, artefacts, etc., which are considered worthy of preservation for the future. These include objects significant to the archaeology, architecture, science or technology of a specific culture. Tangible cultural heritage has a physical presence (UNESCO, 2003).

39. Intangible heritage includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts, food and medicine heritage and digital heritage. Intangible cultural heritage is commonly defined as not having a physical presence (UNESCO, 2003).

Figure 04. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nation groups

The excerpt below originates in (Hromek, 2019) in Chapter 3: Always Is.

> So, Country is known – people sing for it, there are dances known, taught and danced for it, it has its stories that are taught, learned and told. It has its mysteries. It has its rituals. It can be painted, it can be harvested, and one can care for and love it, (Dodson, 2007, p. 3).[40]

40. Michael, or Mick, Dodson is a member of the Yawuru peoples from the Broome area of the southern Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Country holds everything and the potential for everything. Indigenous space is part of Country and simultaneously has Country in it. It is therefore always full of the everything and the potentiality of Country. It could never have been empty or terra nullius. According to Mick Dodson, 'We are talking about the whole of the landscape, not just the places on it ... All of it is important – we have no wilderness ... None of it is vacant or empty, it is all interconnected' (2007, pp. 2-4).

Notably, Country is a lived experience and a heritage, and includes all people who have belonged and will belong to it. For Oliver Costello,[41] Country is holistic. It is the spaces, the places, the relationships, the connections. Country is everything that exists and everything that does not, everything we know and do not know (Yarn with Costello, 2015 on 28 August).

41. Oliver Costello is a Bundjalung man from northern New South Wales.

Extending this idea, Kevin O'Brien[42] (2011) describes connection to Country as being experienced and understood through the senses and seared into memory. He states (2012):

42. Kevin O'Brien is a descendent of the Kaurareg and Meriam people.

> Country is an Aboriginal idea. It is an idea that binds groupings of Aboriginal people to the place of their ancestors, past, current and future. It understands that every moment of the land, sea and sky, its particles, its prospects and its prompts, enables life. It is It is revealed over time by camping in it and guides my way into architecture. There is no disenfranchisement, no censorship and no ownership. Country is a belief. It is my belief.

Brian Martin[43] adds to the discussion by stating that Aboriginal culture is created by the reality of Country, where all things are extracted through memory and continual practice. His philosophical approach sees Country as a grounding of the metaphysical (or theoretical) into the material (or physical). 'Country is the basis of Indigenous ideology and it specifically constitutes and is constituted by the relationship between memory, life and culture, which are embedded in land' (2013, p. 187).

Country includes everything in the landscape: land, water and sky; it soars high into the atmosphere, deep into the planet crust and far into the oceans. Country – which incorporates ground, space, site, environment – is aesthetic, environmental, social, spiritual and political. It is geology and geography, landscape and terrain. It writes the ground and imparts the knowledges that afford its care. Cultural connection to Country encompasses narratives and knowledges, incorporating traditions, practices and art, linked to identity, language and community.

Country is inherent rather than owned or earned; we become connected at birth and rights to Country are immediately obtained along with the responsibilities to care for it as we learn through life. This does not change with colonisation; likewise, our kin networks never change (Dodson, 2007).

Country is more than just a place marked on a map in a geographical sense. Nor is it passive scenery for humans to play out their lives. Anthony McKnight discusses Country as 'decentr[ing] the human authorship privilege of overseer, creator, controller, implementer, and owner' (2015b, p. 2). He indicates that Country provides opportunities to reimagine and mutually create how we consider and practice knowledge, because Country holds our knowledges in place, as a source for us to connect and reconnect to the land and to ourselves.

While the processes of colonisation do affect Indigenous spaces, Uncle Greg Simms (Yarn with Simms, 2015 on 28 October) says that Country is unaffectable, only our relationships with Country can be affected. Likewise, affected

43. Brian Martin is of Bundjalung and Muruwari descent.

relationships are also reclaimable and reparable. Uncle Greg speaks of Country as a place to return to for healing, a place of comfort, strength and nourishment. He discusses changes to the land, saying,

> It is still our spirit Country; our spirit still lies there. No matter that they build city on it, it is still a place we can always go back and heal … it is all changed but it is still Country. You still get healing from that place. Just go back, take off your shoes, walk around on the land to regenerate the soul. Call out the spirits of your ancestors. That is what the Old People taught us. We have got to go home to talk to the Old People, talk to the spirits of our ancestors.

Since Country cannot be divided, while the land may be damaged or traumatised by colonial processes, like a broken arm, it can heal through Country. Thus, if one part is removed physically, the songs and stories keep it in place, in memory, and its knowledges remain intact (Burarrwanga et al., 2014).

Aboriginal peoples maintain a strong belief that if we care for Country, it will care for us. As custodians of the land, waters, and airs, First Peoples have a deep and ongoing connection to these elements through their inheritance and experiences of Country. It is important to note that while Country changes, the narratives of Country still exist, if not perceptibly, in memory (Kombumerri & Hromek, 2020). First Peoples engage with these narratives through traditions of storytelling, performance, singing and language, ensuring the stories adapt to new events, technologies and information, now including non-Indigenous peoples who today share Country.

Methods of Engaging With Country

Lived experiences, corporeal activities and engaging the senses is a way of approaching Country, as, according to Kevin O'Brien (2011), 'Country is experienced and understood through the senses and seared into memory'. Outlined below are a number of methods of action that make up part of the approach. They rely on the vital leadership of Indigenous peoples as a means of engaging with Country.

Hearing Country, Sensing Country and Walking Country, outlined below, are some examples of many methods of connecting with Country, which, with appropriate Indigenous peoples as guides, can be engaged in the planning or environmental management process.

Hearing Country

Aboriginal peoples know Country to be living, sentient and aware. Therefore, Country communicates to all entities that share Country including humans. More-than-humans also communicate through their own language and Law (Burarrwanga et al., 2014). As only one part of Country humans must listen and hear the

communications from Country through observation, awareness and respect.

Listening acknowledges the importance of time spent in spaces and on Country; observing deeply the messages of Country as they come, waiting for them to be ready in space, in the right space at the right time. Listening to Country is more than just hearing with ears; it is hearing with other parts of oneself at a profound level, it is the search for understanding and meaning that invites the responsibility to get the story (information) right while understanding that the story changes over time (Atkinson, 2002).[44] Hearing Country requires stillness and patience while listening with other parts of the body. Hearing Country is a means of caring for Country, as with listening comes a responsibility to act.

As a method of connecting to Country, First Peoples have practiced hearing Country over millennia. Embedded in First Languages is the explanation for the intrinsic ability First Peoples have to hear Country. Therefore, many Aboriginal groups have language words for listening to Country. For instance:

- Dadirri, from the Ngangikurungkurr people of Daly River in the Northern Territory, means contemplation, silent awareness or inner deep listening and quiet, non-obtrusive observation and hearing without ears (Ungunmerr-Bauman, 2002)[45]
- Gamilaraay people have the words winangar [listening] and gurri [deep] so winangargurri has a meaning like deep listening (Judy Knox cited in Atkinson, 2002)[46]
- In Bundjalung, gannga- means know, hear, feel as well as muse, worry about, meditate, understand (Muurrbay Language Resource Centre, n.d.)
- Ngara is a common word in a number of languages from around Sydney and the South

44. Judy Atkinson is of the Jiman people of the Upper Dawson in Central West Queensland, and the Bundjalung of Northern NSW.

45. Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Bauman is an Elder from Nauiyu (Daly River) from the of the Ngan'gityemerri language group.

46. Judy Knox is of the Tamworth Gamilaraay people.

Coast of New South Wales. Jakelin Troy[47] (1994) says in the Sydney Language, ngara means to listen, hear, think. In D'harawal ngara means to listen and to heed, and to heed what is learned (Bodkin, Andrews, & Bodkin-Andrews, n.d.).[48] [49] [50] Dhurga has similar meanings for the word ngara, to listen or hear. Anthony McKnight (2015a) cites the importance of ngara-minga as listening, to really hear Country, with minga meaning mother but also relating to Mother Earth.

47. Jakelin Troy is a Ngarigu woman whose Country is the Snowy Mountains of NSW.

48. Aunty Fran Bodkin is a descendant of the D'harawal people of the Bidiagal clan.

49. Uncle Gavin Andrews is a D'harawal Traditional Descendant.

50. Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews is a member of the D'harawal people of the Bidiagal clan.

Country still speaks and probes all who share Country to listen and learn with the descendants of Country as interpreters. Referring to and hearing Country as the guide for planning and design ensures people are likewise planned and designed for. Knowledge Holders are the most appropriate guides for listening to Country, they know Country best and can direct the best way to engage in hearing Country.

Sensing Country

To sense Country is to more than listen, it is actively seeking the sense of Country. Uncle Greg Simms (Yarn with Simms, 2018 on 10 January) says to pay attention when travelling for the changes from one Country to another as each feels different. It is also important to sense Country when not in movement. While it may be easier to feel Country in the countryside where it is quiet and nature's beauty abounds, it is also essential to sense Country in urban contexts because despite there being much sensory interference, Country still exists in the city and it is important it is heard and responded to.

Sensing the messages of Country requires awareness of the connections around you, being open, alert and conscious that people are not at the centre of all. Oliver Costello describes the intangible spirit of Country, which can be sensed when read respectfully

by those who best know Country. Land and memory operate side by side, a simultaneous collective connectedness, and thus the memory of land becomes tangibly visible on the landscape despite any changes that occur. Costello says that through memory the land can respond, remember ecosystems, repopulate displaced species, re-establish itself. It is our role to listen to the messages of the land, hear what the land is teaching, support Country. In doing so, stories emerge and re-emerge, the memories of place rematerialise (Yarn with Costello, 2015 on 25 November).

Engaging the senses in relation to Country, as a starting point, means sitting still and feeling everything, every movement of every hair, smelling every scent on the breeze and being completely present in the corporal sense. More than this, sensing Country is about perceiving how Country feels. Observing the ambience, sensations and textures of a place. It is also about being open and alert to notice the changes in Country, between different ecosystems or within the same environment. Engaging the senses as a means for planning, managing and designing for a place is best guided by Knowledge Holders with deep connections to places. Working with them in this process ensures the experience is rich and authentic, and the true communications from Country can be embedded into the management and care of a place.

Walking Country

Moving through Country is part of Aboriginal storytelling in which the stories are repositories of knowledge that originate from the land. Movement, for Aboriginal peoples, is not nor has it ever been wandering, rather a focused action of custodianship and care for Country. To learn Country through being on Country and walking Country is to experience it, is to hear its stories, is to know it. Narratives are in and of the land, and our knowledges are grounded in

View from Gulaga Mountain to Wallaga Lake, Yuin Country

Country. Aboriginal stories are woven spatially as part of walking the land (Hromek, 2019).

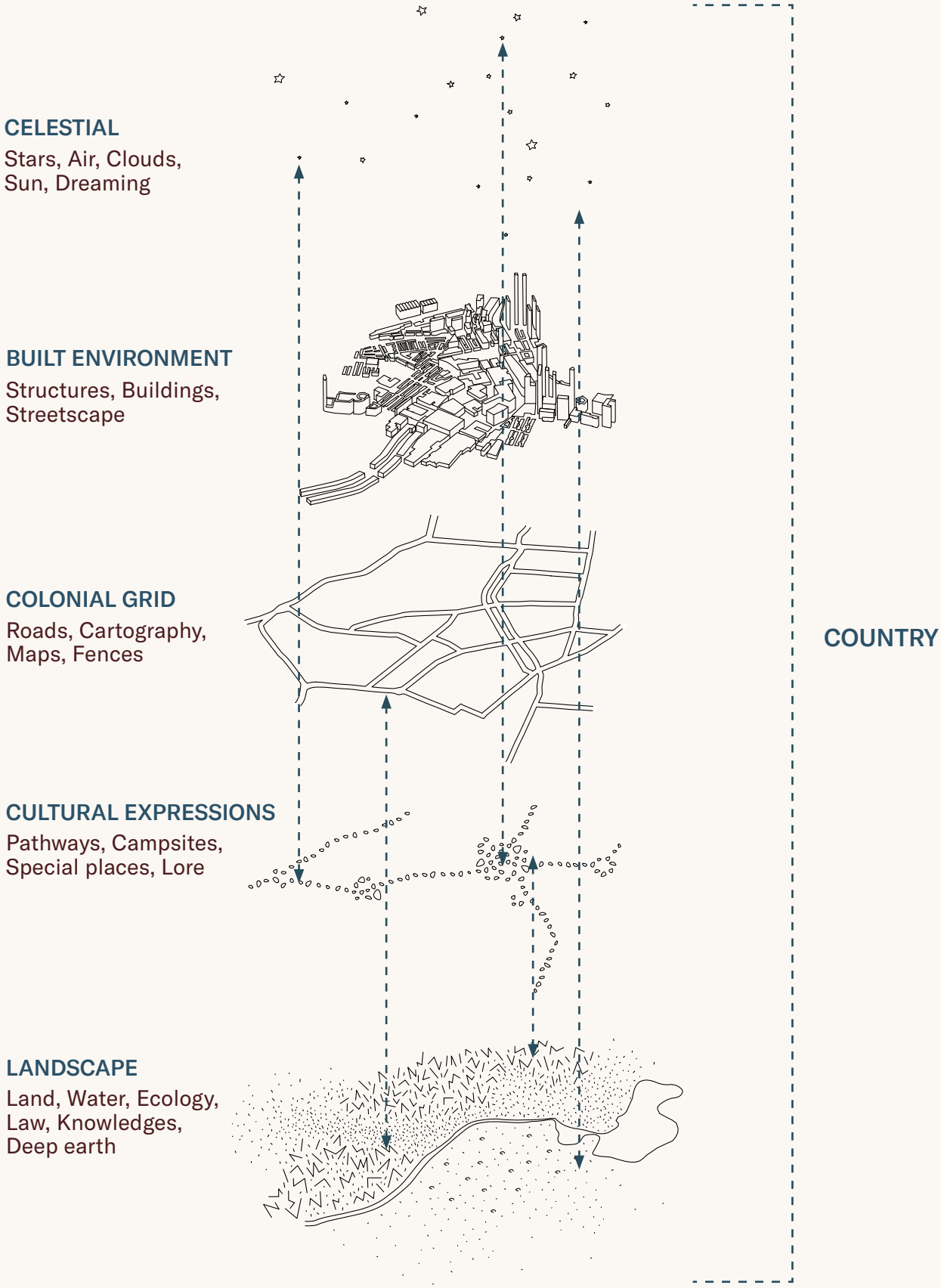
Walking Country with Knowledge Holders together enables participants to connect to place, draw inferences and associations and discuss observations as they are made. Site visits are established practices for planners, engineers and urban designers which lends itself to walking Country, being guided, engaging the senses, and listening to the stories that make up that place (Hromek & Kombumerri, 2019).

Country and the Built Environment

Country is diminished by reducing it to individual places disconnected from the system. All landscapes have Aboriginal cultural heritage values including both tangible and intangible elements as well as physical and spiritual aspects containing places and values relating to traditional, historic and contemporary time periods (NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, 2005). Cultural landscapes represent the combined works of nature and of man that are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time. Cultural landscapes are influenced by the physical constraints and opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal (UNESCO, 1996).

Figure 05. describes the relationship between the land and waters, cultural expressions, the colonial grid, the built environment and the celestial realm as all being part of Country, with each layer influencing each other. For instance, many now-roads follow original pathways cared for and managed by Aboriginal people using fire, which often followed star patterns or landscape formations.

Figure 05. Country and the Built Environment



Accordingly, Country now includes the built environment. Country extends deep into the planet crust, high into the stratosphere, and far into the oceans. Comprehending Country as being not only the land, but the waters and airs demands custody towards all elements of Country including sustainable care of structures, roads and infrastructure. This can be understood through the lens, for instance, of materiality. The materials used in the planning or building process such as stone, clay, timber or concrete, originate from Country and therefore belong to Country. Recognising construction materials as part of Country is one way of ensuring those working in the built environment are responsible to Country. It requires sustainable and accountable actions of care towards the materials chosen and ongoing maintenance.

Relating With Country

Via genuine long-term relationships with community that go beyond the extent of a single project, all participants in projects that impact Country need to develop genuine enduring personal relationships with Country – imperative for this approach to be successful. To do so authentically this also requires genuine enduring personal relationships with Indigenous peoples. Regrettably, in the past many Indigenous knowledges have been appropriated without permission or attribution. This has caused mistrust within Indigenous communities, and necessarily they have hidden many knowledges to ensure their safety. In order to build trust, examine intent to ensure it is not for personal gain or individual recognition. Act ethically and in accordance with the Laws of the land, and protocols of the community (for instance refer to Hromek & Janke, 2017). [51]

In Aunty Mary Graham's relationist ethos are four

51. Terri Janke descends from the Meriam people of the Torres Strait Islands and the Wuthathi people of mainland Australia.

essential attributes; *custodial ethic, locality, autonomy and balance* (2019). As Graham indicates, these attributes are key to developing genuine connections to Country.

Custodial Ethic

It is fundamental the Laws of the land, laws between people and ethical behaviours are daily practice and in all aspects of life. Caring for Country (looking after the land, waters and air) is the basic foundation for existence on this planet and it is how people and non-humans know how to also live with and care for each other. While Aboriginal laws do not try to change human behaviour, they do set out how behaviour should be handled to promote peace and stability. Understanding custodianship as a key element of developing a connection to Country is important to ensuring ethical behaviours. Ethics and values come from empathy and caring for entities outside ourselves (Graham, 2019).

Locality

Locality refers to not only connections to Country and non-human entities, but also the region from which Indigenous peoples come, the characteristics of the land and the areas of care of their group/s. Graham indicates, 'Identity and character come from the land itself, the shape and the form of it; whether it is desert, rainforest, saltwater, freshwater, mountains, or plains, every part of the land has its own character. So the character of the land is the basis of the character of the people, not just in terms of our relationist ethos, but in the actual character of the people' (2019, p. 4). The ancient stable connections Aboriginal peoples have had to Country are fundamental to understanding ancient relationships between peoples, and for acting responsibly towards specific locations in collaboration with those ancient relationships.

Autonomy

Strong foundations of autonomy, both individual and within Aboriginal groups, created an absence of hierarchy. Every person is autonomous, and nobody is more or less important than another. As such, everyone has a place within the group with none being treated as greater or lesser – also true for non-human entities. Graham reveals, 'Governance structures included [E]lders who had authority that was earned through proper conduct – by following the [L]aw. Authority and power were separated, so that the cohesion and strength of the group was always maintained' (2019, p. 5). Without respecting autonomy, there is the chance habits of hierarchical societies can create imbalance to a project or group.

Balance

Balance is fundamental to Aboriginal societies. Balance is sought in all aspects of lives, including between people and land, each other, people and more-than-humans, females and males, families and groups. Achieving balance and harmony requires ego – a 'volatile substance' according to Graham (2019, p. 6) – be respected and acknowledged to enable active management and containment. Balance needs to be nurtured to ensure harmony is sustained within individuals and groups.

These four attributes require attention in daily practice. As relationships are built so too are proper ethical actions, values and knowledges, as well as attachments to places, personal autonomy and identity (Graham, 2019).

In Aboriginal Law and culture, a person is believed to find their individuality within a group setting, and to behave as a discrete entity or to consciously isolate oneself limits one to being an observer in an observed

world (Graham, 2019). It is therefore important for all, including non-Indigenous people, to respectfully participate and experience, be educated, observe and follow protocols, listen to and share stories, learn their places in the community and ecosystem, respectfully connect and relate, find their places in the group, experience culture-based activities, cultural sharing and contemplation based on cultural integrity, practice observation and sensitivity, monitor non-verbal instructions as much as verbal, engage and join in, commiserate and celebrate. Those who impact Country in their work must themselves engage in the process rather than remaining observers or relying on external consultants.

Reading Country

Country provides opportunities to reimagine and mutually create how knowledge is considered and practiced, because Country holds knowledges in place, as a source to connect and reconnect to the land and to oneself. Country, as teacher and writer, ‘decentres the human authorship privilege of overseer, creator, controller, implementer, and owner’ (McKnight, 2015b, p. 2).

While on the ground in urban spaces it can be difficult to read the flows and shapes of Country —the landscape has been levelled off by colonial processes that flattened surfaces, removed landmarks and laid on top concrete, asphalt and glass—from above, from sky Country it is possible to still see the forms of Country underneath the layers of urbanisation. Likewise, from water Country it is possible to experience the flows and movement of Country and to sense its sentience.

In relation to Yuin Country on the South Coast of New South Wales, Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison (2013, p. 9)[52] explains:

> Mother Earth births everything for us.
>
> Father Sky carries the water and oxygen for us to breathe.
>
> Grandfather Sun warms the planet, warms our body, gives us light so we can see, raises the food that the Mother births and raises most of our relations, all our plants and trees.
>
> Grandmother Moon moves the water and gives us the woman-time and our birthing.

We, Yuin people, believe the earth is our mother, that Mother Earth birthed us and continues to nourish us, even if her nourishment for us now comes in different ways in than it used to. From above the forms and shapes of Mother Earth are evident. Also, Father Sky can be seen showing a different sky painting every moment as the winds move the clouds across the blue skies, becoming all shades of grey, pink, yellow, orange and purple and occasionally letting their precious rains fall. Grandfather Sun rises every morning bringing warmth and light, giving the gift of starting every day anew. Grandmother Moon moves the saltwaters and also in the female body, reminding how intrinsically connected humans are to Country, the lands, the waters and the skies, as this is also how we recreate.

52. Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison is an Elder and Lawman of the Yuin people from the South Coast of New South Wales.

It is important to remember *all* Country is still cared for. First Peoples continue to carry out cultural practices that ensure care of Country in all contexts be they urban or rural – as do more-than-humans. Birds, bats, possums, lizards, skinks, spiders, caterpillars, ants all take seriously the actions of responsibility given to them through the Laws written during the Dreaming. Their ancient cultural memories keep them connected to places. The 'land library' communicates how to care for Country. Their songs and sounds still carry their stories of that Country perpetually in memory and voice, as it is held in First Peoples.

Reading Country through the three *physical, human* and *sacred* spheres recognises that places have both tangible and intangible aspects, as well as physical and spiritual elements that need to be planned and designed for.

The process of reading Country gives authority to Indigenous peoples as the knowers of the places they are related to. This Country-led approach asks for their observations and inspirations from Country and expressions of culture to be foregrounded. It asks for a deeper history and multi-layered interpretation of places to be included beyond colonial records to provide a more comprehensive cultural filter to a place. It gives agency to First Peoples to be the cultural guides of Country, in doing so ensuring the building, construction, development and protection of the environment continues with Country at its centre. However, it also requires an engagement with Country as part of broader process, in which all participants are developing their own relationships.

It is inappropriate for non-Indigenous people to be reading Country without the authority and guidance by Indigenous peoples.

Uncle Gavin Andrews advises that when a site is being developed the extent of the Country considered – or read – should be as far as you can see from the site (Andrews, 2020 pers. comm. 10 June). This differs from development activities in which a site is contained within a boundary line, in doing so separating bioregions and ecosystems. It also recognises the multiple scales at which Country is planned for, managed or designed – from the scale of Land Use and Infrastructure Implementation Plans (LUIIP) to a single plot. Recognition and reading of the broader cultural landscape are as integral to a site as reading the individual site itself. Understanding the Country through a reading by appropriate First Peoples is imperative to ensuring that the site is designed, planned for and managed with Country.

It is not the role of this approach to reveal the methods or knowledges First Peoples use to read Country. Rather it advocates for a cultural fund in every project across infrastructure, planning, architecture, and smaller insertions into the built environment – whether they have perceived Indigenous cultural values or not. It is also key the reading occurs prior to every stage and scale.

Co-Design With Country

Guided by First Peoples, those who directly impact Country must embed practices of co-design in which Country is at the centre of the process. Country intuitively tells us what it needs, not only for balanced ecosystems, but also appropriate design and infrastructure. Using Country's inherent methodology of hearing, sensing and reading Country uses the indicators of Country itself as informants for planning activities.

Like scientists, engineers or architects spend many years learning their skills and building up their experience, so too do Indigenous Knowledge Holders. It is the right of Knowledge Holders to hear and read Country, and it is not appropriate for others to do so unless given the appropriate training, guidance and authority by Custodians. A project is richer with Indigenous people involved as they inherently bring multiple perspectives and worldviews to the project that are unlikely to be considered without their input. It is imperative to ensure appropriate benefits flow to not only the Knowledge Holders but the broader community.

It is also important systems and processes change to systems Indigenous peoples can not only be the primary consultant on, but also be the proposers of projects, i.e. the process of Scope—Bid—Design—Deliver for architecture, governmental pre-qualification

schemes, or requests for tender. Current systems are westernised, complex, use complicated language, and are often unapproachable, and therefore exclusive. For instance, in current governance structures an alternative system may look like:

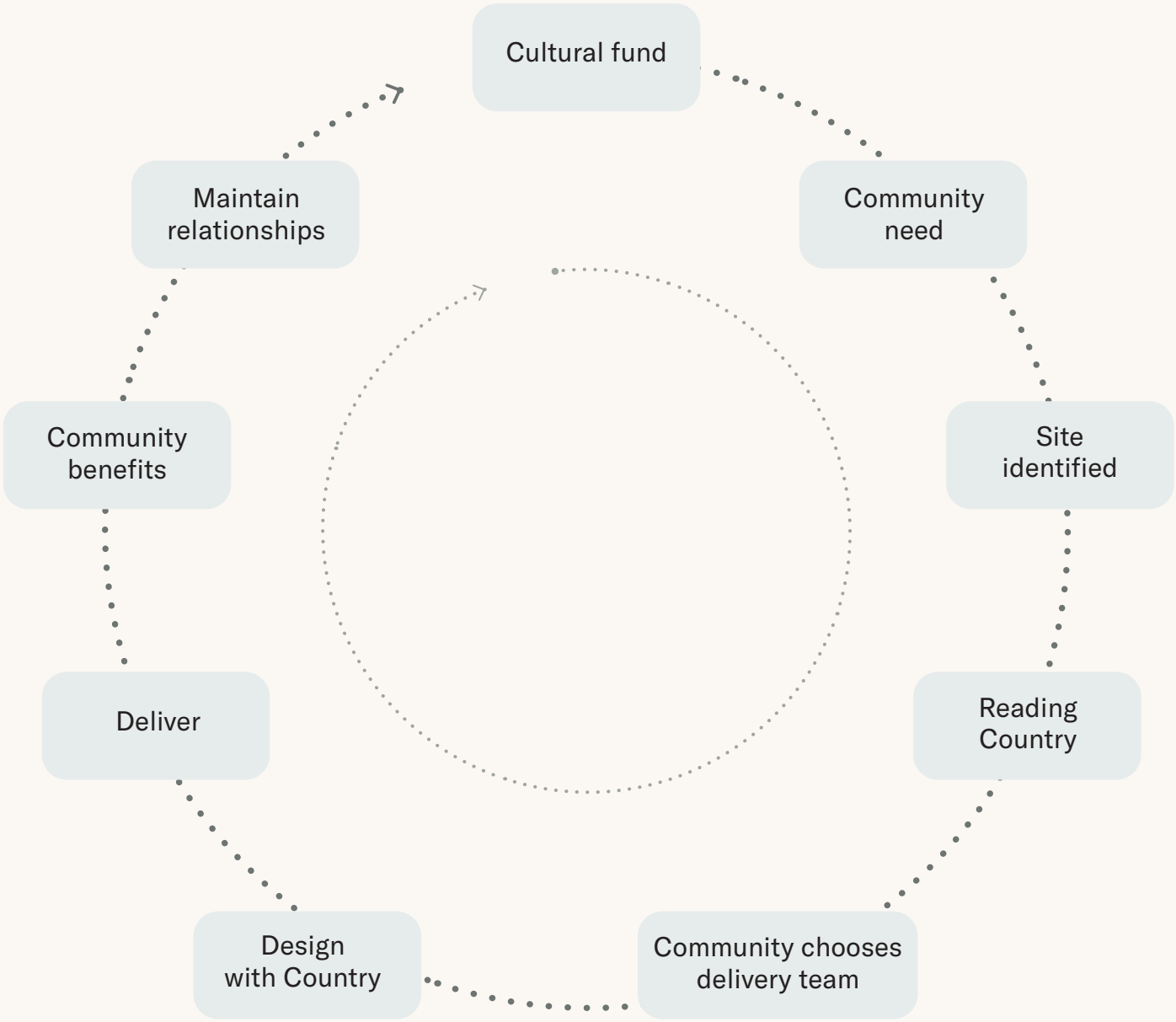


Figure 06. Possible alternative planning process

Additionally, projects should come pre-prepared with clauses in contracts that respect Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property rights, that ensure Intellectual Property and Copyrights remain with First Peoples, and that have Non-Disclosure Agreements that specifically protect Indigenous Knowledges from non-Indigenous impacts.

In this approach, it is key to build genuine enduring relationships with communities including mutual long-term agreements and goals. Within the cultural safety of that relationship, and at the appropriate time and space, it is possible to ask the following types of questions:

- What cultural protocols exist within their group/s, and how would they like to engage with those within your shared relationship?
- How, where and with whom they would like to share? (i.e. do not assume everyone wants to share or people can just “come along” to listen to what they are sharing)
- What does it mean to respect cultural traditions, knowledges, values and practices?
- How they would like to be involved in the planning and engagement process?
- How they would like to share their cultural values in relation to the place?
- What does a balanced ecosystem look like in the place?
- What does healthy culture look like in the place?
- If they would like to share their means of connecting with Country?
- If they might share their vision for the future of culture and Country in that place?
- How can a masterplan for Aboriginal culture and heritage can be developed in which

cultural values are part of the planning process?

- How would they like to be involved in developing a masterplan for the future of Country and culture?
- How can the planning and engagement process embrace their sovereignty?
- How can we all live here *forever*?

The above questions are key to establishing meaningful relationships based on trust and an acknowledgement of cultural practices and respect for Country. However, it is important to understand that some questions may only be suitable to be raised with Knowledge Holders once a relationship has been developed, at the right time and in the right space.

Moruya River, Yuin Country

Masterplanning with Country —An Overview

Aligning architecture, ecological management and infrastructure activities with Country offers a chance to develop a framework, or masterplan, for Aboriginal culture and heritage in which cultural values, both tangible and intangible, are part of the planning process. In order to develop this masterplan, it is imperative that the vision for the future of culture and Country is understood. This masterplan framework proposes an engagement with First Peoples who have relationships with specific places or cultural landscapes, in which they are provided space to envision their cultural futures in order they can be designed for in collaboration with Country. It uses Indigenous theories and methodologies as well as methods of connecting with Country and culture to develop a framework for designing flourishing futures for Country and culture. It suggests this work is done in conjunction with individual intentions to develop personal, enduring relationships with Country and with First Peoples.

Providing spaces for healthy culture to flourish in Country is the inevitable aim of the masterplan framework. While Country holds all memories, histories and narratives of places perpetually, Country is also sentient and has a future. From Country comes languages, Laws, values and cultural expressions, and to ensure these expressions of Country are healthy, design, planning and implementation are required, both for community and Country. This demands a move away from *anthropocentric thinking* to *relational sensing*, and from understanding land as ownable object to sentient entity of which we are all custodians with care responsibilities. Due to their work directly impacting the spaces and places of Country, designers, planners, architects, engineers, infrastructure developers, land managers, civil

servants and decisionmakers have a responsibility to create a personal relationship with Country starting with a connection with or sense of belonging to a place. Without a personal relationship with the land there is a chance of falling into anthropocentric behaviour. They also need to create space for healthy cultural futures to be part of the planning process, both in intentions and in practice.

It is not possible within the scope of this work to detail this entire process, however an overview of three phases are outlined below in which a masterplan for the care of Country could be developed[53] (Ridges, 2019 pers. comm. 17 June). The phases in this masterplan framework build upon the approach described previously. From these three phases it is possible to influence the language, form, use, and governance and controls relating to a site undergoing changes, further shaping principles, targets and levers within current planning processes.

While it is clear this is a long-term process that requires commitment and relationships beyond the cycle of a single project, some points could happen or commence immediately.

53. With thanks to Mal Ridges whose insights and reflections guided these outlined three phases.

Knowledges and Narratives

Building associations and relationships

- Connect with Indigenous groups and peoples who hold Knowledge about places to understand the culture, narratives and health of a place, ecosystem or bioregion
- Align with and be led by community values
- Create a sense of personal belonging, responsibility and custodianship of places
- Seek multiple perspectives to find common ground regarding the development of places
- Determine the core values of places, as guided by Indigenous communities
- Prioritise local Knowledges
- Interrogate how First Peoples are being treated as hosts rather than guests in a place and project

Respectful actions

- Interrogate and minimise impacts on Country
- Support First Peoples to read Country to provide background and context of histories, stories, memories of places. Support includes both time and space within a project and economic provisions
- Use the correct languages of and for places
- Ensure Indigenous Knowledges and practices are protected
- Incorporate Indigenous community values within ecosystems
- Develop iterative methods of delivery in which community are part of the journey not observers to it

- Interrogate whether processes and methods of working are anthropocentric and hierarchical, or methodologies that reflect Country and community values
- Protect Indigenous Knowledges by ensuring Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property rights, Intellectual Property and Copyright are respected
- Develop processes for ensuring community Knowledge remains as belonging to community, for instance Non-Disclosure Agreements for non-Indigenous participants

Learning and unlearning

- Commence acts of un-learning, including recognising anthropocentric hierarchical thinking; challenge the need to defend enshrined belief or value systems
- Critical examinations of non-Indigenous interpretations to understand ecological health of ecosystems—understood through an Indigenous lens
- Respect the agency of Country as planner and designer

Dreaming, Visioning and Design

PHASE 02

Strengthening relationships and connections

- Awaken or re-awaken relationships with Country
- Develop personal connections with Country and culture guided by First Peoples through cultural practice, yarning, walking Country, sensing Country (smelling, listening, feeling)
- Enable Country, Ancestral Knowledges and principles, intergenerational, intercultural,

interdisciplinary and intergender to be part of the process

Creating time and space

- Iteratively develop design and planning principles and visions based on values of places
- Allocate space for Knowledges and cultural practices to re-awaken and re-invigorate
- Provide space for cultural transmissions and expressions to continue
- Allow space and time for the vision of the future of landscapes, Country and culture to emerge
- Understand the need for and capacity of time, for instance, the ever-presence and ever-creation of the Dreaming
- Create space for storytelling, ceremony and celebrations

Addressing limitations

- Recognise limitations of colonial environmental law and governance systems to protect and care for culture and Country, and develop transitional measures that lessen or neutralise them
- Address systemic threats and vulnerabilities to values and principles

Living the Outcome

PHASE 03

Nurturing relationships and healing

- Maintain relationships and connections with Country, community and culture
- Plan for how humans can live in a place forever

- Embrace the first laws as a foundation for governance, i.e. The land is the law and You are not alone
- Continue recreating places to allow new stories, Knowledges, ceremonies, cultural transmissions to be generated
- Bring co-benefits to all entities of Country, including humans and more-than-humans and Country itself
- Engage across disciplines and ecosystems to encourage broad endorsement

Creating endurance and integrity

- Adapt anthropocentric thinking—hierarchical acts into relational sensing—Country-centred approach
- Create new economies within ecological limits, cultural values and social goals
- Rework governance (laws, ethics, values, institutions, education, rules) of places and bioregions to reflect first laws
- Consider the capacity of a healthy bioregion to determine what human activities can occur there and how human society can nest within that system
- Monitor the realisation of the vision for healthy culture and masterplan for Country
- Create measurements for success of the vision and masterplan
- Prioritise means and practices to ensure resilience is maintained despite delays or obstacles
- Embrace changing circumstances and opportunities; work within limitations to circumnavigate boundaries

Handkerchief Creek,
Yuin Country

Conclusion

There is some urgency in the behavioural changes required in order to give voice back to Country. Country has been speaking to us with increasing insistence yet within the confines of current systems and processes it is challenging to heed. Authentic long-term relationships between those impacting Country and community, culture and Country itself are required for this approach to be successful. Ethical behaviours that come from a non-anthropocentric viewpoint while respecting the Laws of the land and protocols of communities are also implicit in the approach.

This approach and the outlined framework are simply the starting point for engaging with Country. It is not possible for a document alone to make a difference. It needs to become a plan for action, the start of changes of behaviour, the beginning of transforming ways of thinking, and actual actions being taken. This document needs to work in collaboration with conventional consultation strategies in order to create a more holistic means of engagement, in which Country is no longer excluded from the conversation.

While systems, structures and processes may be slow to change, individual people work in the institutions that uphold these systems, structures and processes. Thus, this approach needs those whose work impacts Country to take personal responsibility beyond the scope of a project, workplace or job. It is acknowledged this type of work demands persistence and resilience, as well as apologies and recompense when things go wrong. Most importantly, it calls for sharing celebrations of successes together, as Country gives back to those who give to Country.

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While this work was undertaken for the Marine Estate Management Strategy, this approach does not specify recommendations for any type of Country, but recognises the interconnectedness between all, be they land Country, sky Country or water Country.

Footprint on beach, Yuin Country

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View towards Baranguba, Yuin Country