



First Nations Co-Design Values Report

93 - 107 Cecil Ave - Castle Hill
Bediagal, Dharug

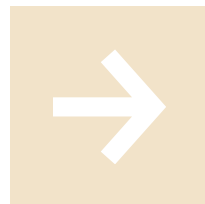


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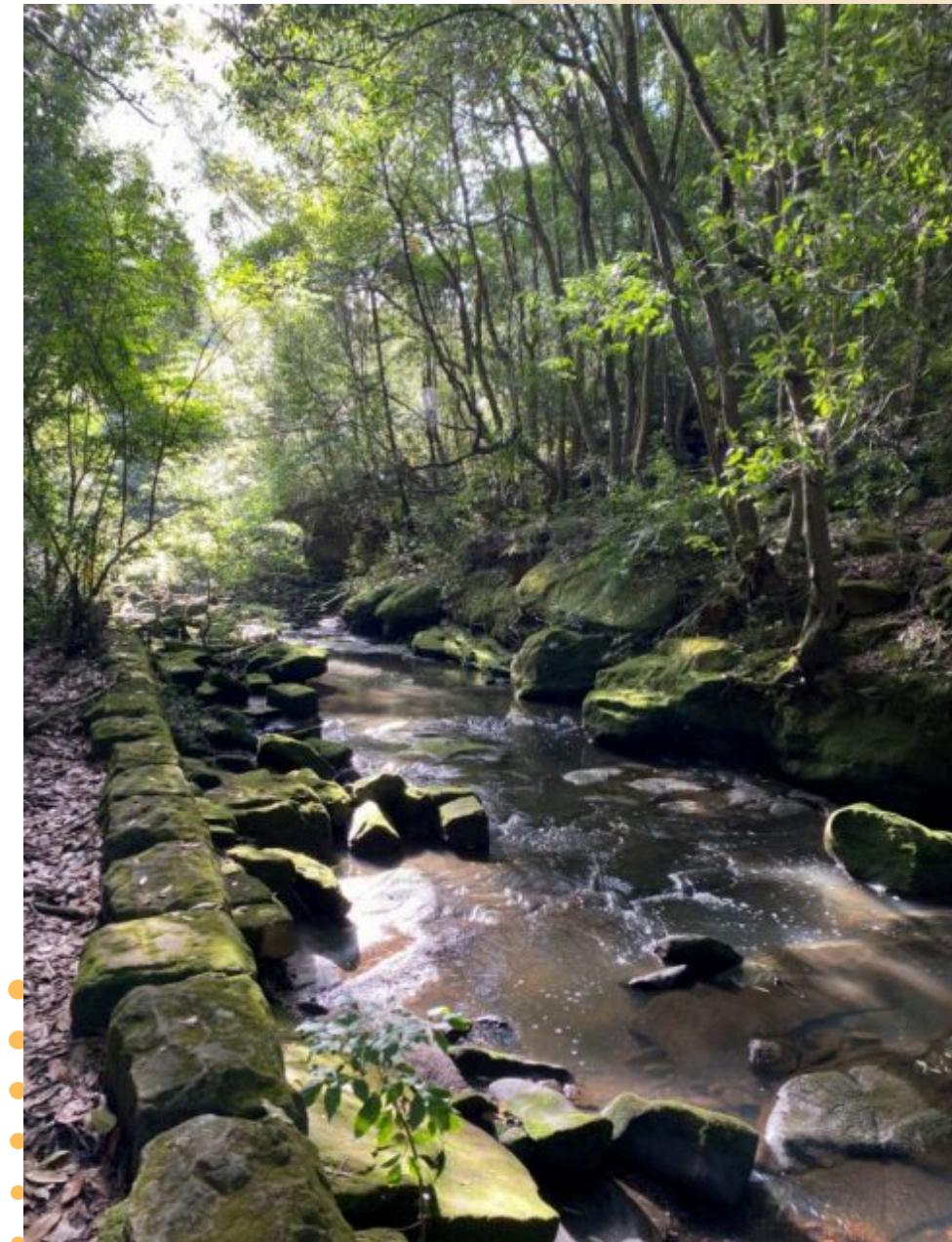


Acknowledgement to Country



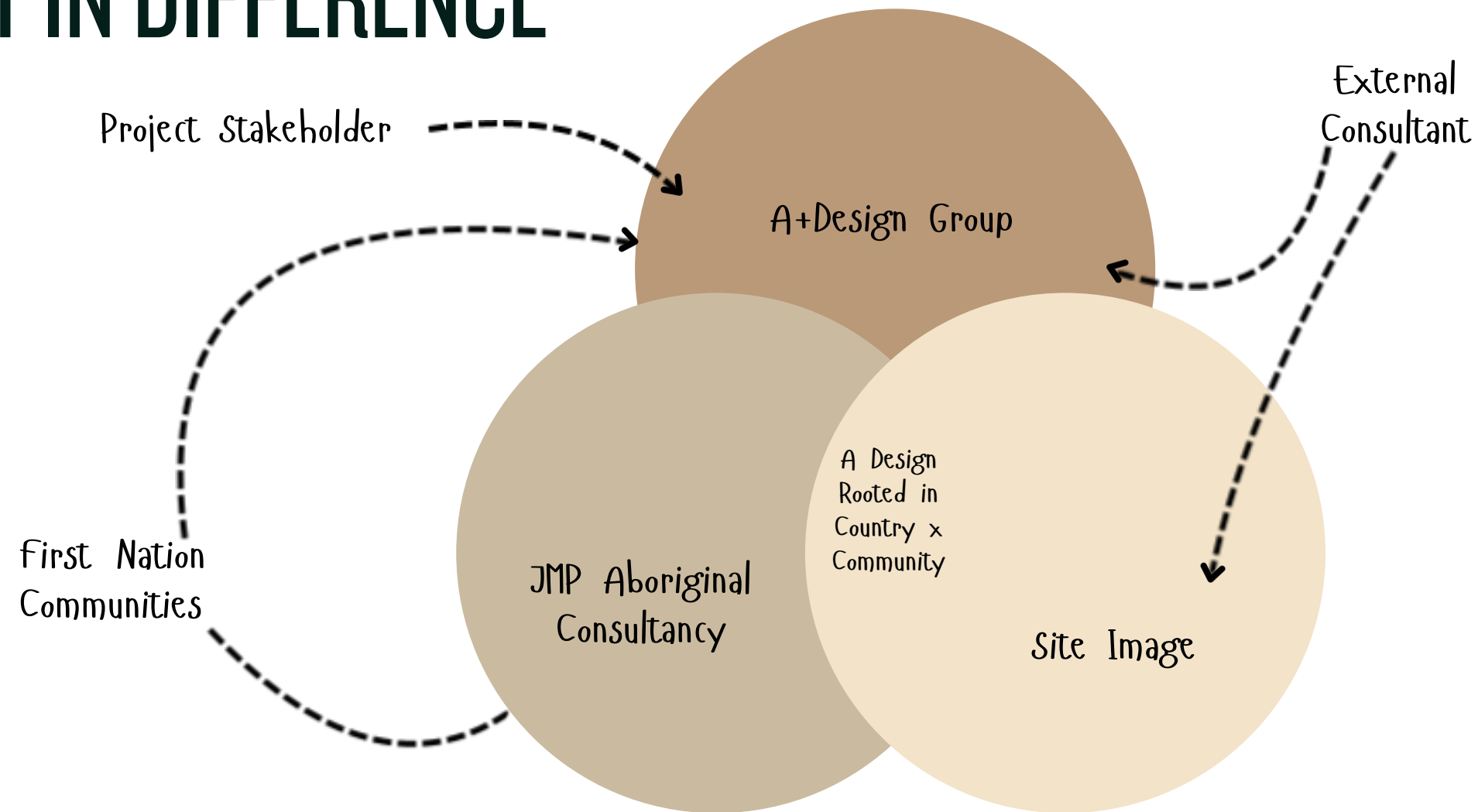
"I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we design and construct our Projects, the Dharug people of Castle Hill. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today. The Dharug people have cared for this land for tens of thousands of years, nurturing its rivers, plants, animals, and knowledge systems. As we design and construct on this Country, we recognize their enduring connection to this land, sea, and sky, and the rich cultural heritage they bring to our shared community.

May we walk together with mutual respect, learning from the strength and wisdom of the Dharug people and honouring their ongoing contributions to this land. To best represent the Dharug People in the Connecting to Country and embedding their cultural views into our Project."



Flat Rock Creek

OUR POINT IN DIFFERENCE



Culturally Grounded Leadership and Local Knowledge

JMP is led by First Nations professionals with strong connections to community, culture, and Country. Our leadership brings a lived understanding of Aboriginal values and protocols, ensuring our work is deeply respectful and place-based. We engage directly with Traditional Custodians, Elders, and knowledge holders to guide each stage of a project—from early conversations to final outcomes. This grounded approach ensures that our advice is not only culturally appropriate, but also community-informed, locally relevant, and rooted in long-term relationships.

Integrated Design and Cultural Strategy

JMP specialise in weaving Aboriginal cultural knowledge into the fabric of planning, design, and development projects. Through genuine co-design processes, we work alongside Traditional Custodians, architects, planners, and stakeholders to ensure cultural narratives, values, and principles are not just acknowledged but actively embedded in built and natural environments. This includes interpreting site-specific stories, cultural markers, language elements, and ecological knowledge into meaningful design outcomes that speak to place, identity, and community. Our approach goes beyond compliance supporting long-term cultural visibility, education, and connection to Country in every project.

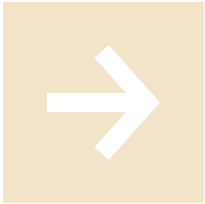
Cross-Sector Experience and Multidisciplinary Capability

JMP brings broad experience across infrastructure, urban planning, environmental restoration, education, and cultural heritage sectors. Our team includes Aboriginal professionals with expertise in civil design, planning, cultural heritage, ecology, and engagement—allowing us to provide integrated cultural advice across all phases of a project. Whether supporting early-stage concept development, cultural due diligence, or ongoing stakeholder engagement, our multidisciplinary approach ensures that cultural values are embedded holistically, not added as an afterthought. This capability allows us to navigate complex project requirements while maintaining cultural integrity and responsiveness to community needs.

Trusted Facilitators of Place-Based Cultural Engagement

Through a proven track record of delivering meaningful, place-based engagement through Connecting with Country processes. We facilitate Walks on Country, cultural mapping sessions, and design input workshops that bring together Traditional Custodians, project teams, and stakeholders. Our methods create space for dialogue, relationship-building, and cultural learning ensuring that Country is not just acknowledged, but actively listened to and embedded in project outcomes.

Connecting to Country Overview

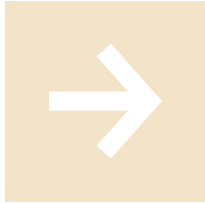


How to Design with Country

By understanding Country, we Design better on Country for Country. If I give, you give we all receive!

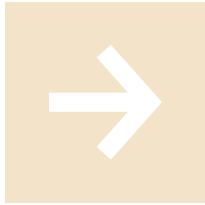
Questions to ask yourself?

- What is your Cultural and Spiritual Foundation
- What are the similarities, not the differences between our Traditional and Modern Australia.
- How do you look at Country?



Connecting to Country Aim

Is to guide Project Teams with the connection that First Nations people culturally have with the language Regions that has been handed down thru time. This is to enable greater design outcomes, that is of benefits all during the process of connecting to country.

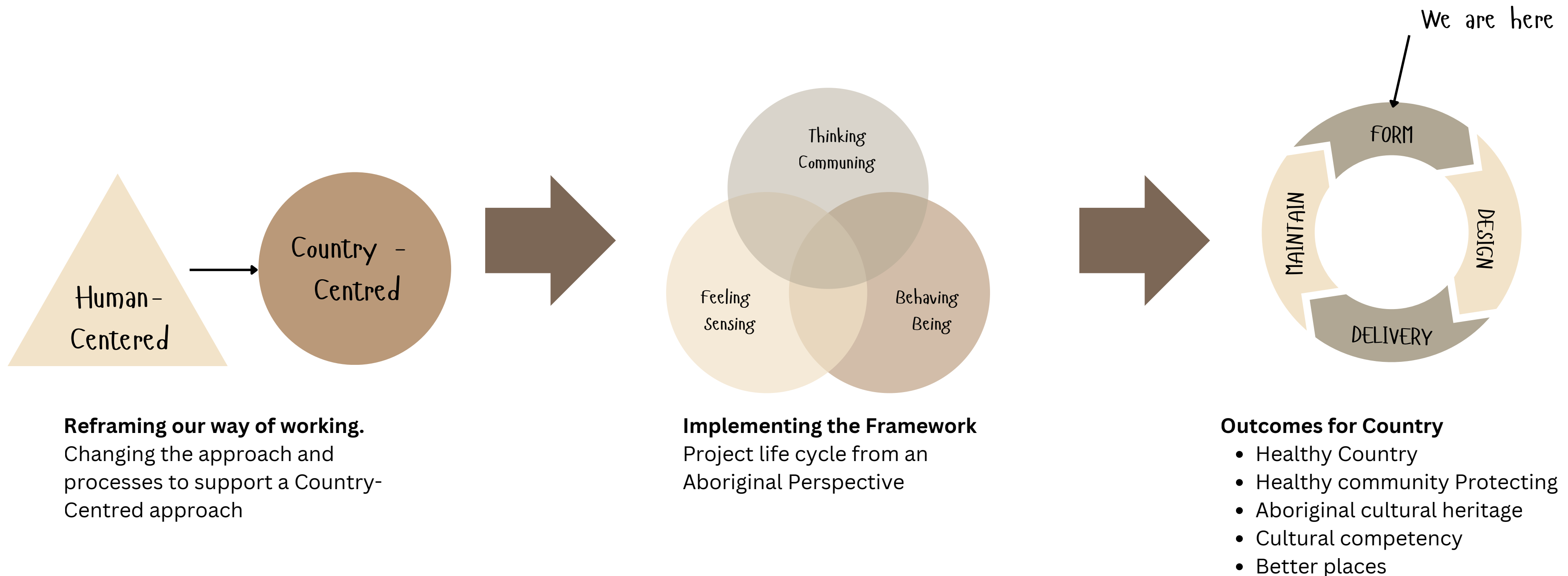


Our Methodolgy

JMPAC approach is to guide our design Teams through the Connecting to Country process. By gaining a greater understanding and education of the cultural narrative on the traditional lands where our Projects are situated. This is done by exposing our design teams to research of the anicent pass. Meeting with our elders within the communities to hear first hand on cultural values and recommdations within the design. Then allowing our design teams the creative journey via the anicent values of our people.



Connecting to Country Commitment



Connecting to Country Commitment Source: Connecting with Country Framework Figure 5



Walking in Two worlds

What is your Cultural and Spiritual Foundation

Western Methodologies and Paradigms

Western research methodologies are grounded in structured, systematic inquiry that emphasizes objectivity, empirical data, and repeatability. These approaches are common in engineering and project management:

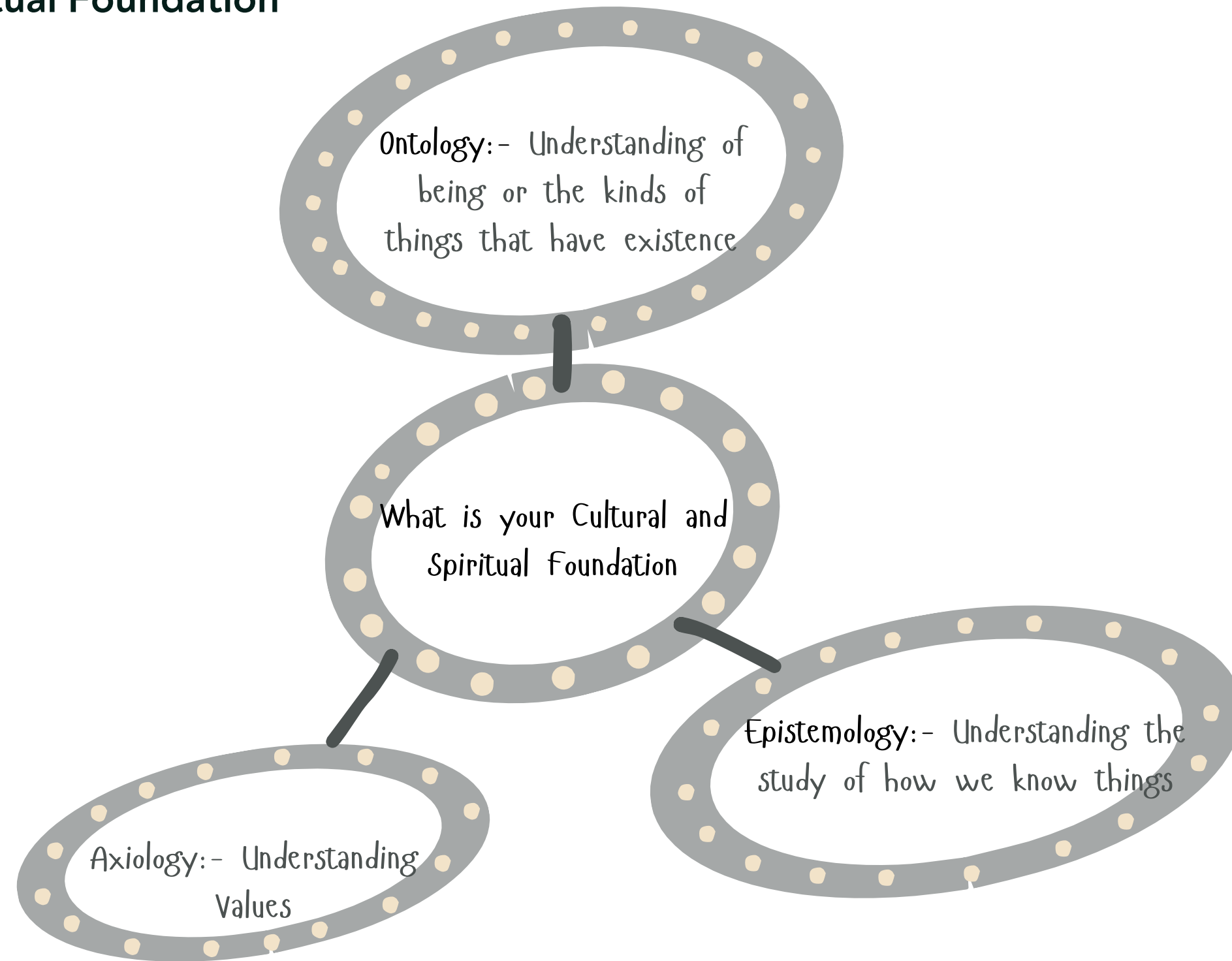
Positivism & Post-Positivism: Engineering projects rely on measurable, empirical data to guide decision-making. The assumption is that knowledge can be objectively gathered through observation, mathematical modelling, and experimentation.

Systems Thinking: Widely used in civil engineering and infrastructure design, this method breaks down complex projects into components but may overlook Indigenous perspectives on interconnected relationships with Country.

Evidence-Based Practice: Engineering standards, codes, and best practices rely on historical data and scientific validation, often excluding traditional ecological knowledge and lived experiences of First Nations peoples.

Project Management Frameworks (e.g., Agile, Waterfall): These methodologies focus on efficiency and deliverables but may not accommodate community-led decision-making or cultural protocols.

While Western methodologies have led to technological advancements, they often fail to acknowledge Indigenous worldviews, particularly the relational, spiritual, and place-based connections to Country.



Indigenous Methodologies and Paradigms

Indigenous research methodologies are relational, place-based, and centred on respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. These approaches prioritize lived experience, storytelling, and community engagement:

Relational Epistemology: Knowledge is not just extracted but built through relationships with people, Country, and cultural practices. In engineering projects, this means working with communities rather than on communities.

Yarning & Storywork: Instead of structured surveys or interviews, knowledge is shared through conversations and storytelling, allowing for deeper cultural insights.

Place-Based Knowledge & Cultural Mapping: Indigenous research prioritizes local knowledge, often expressed through Aboriginal Values Mapping, which aligns closely with your work in cultural value mapping for civil design.

Whole-of-Community Approach: Your Aboriginal engagement model already integrates this methodology by ensuring co-design, resolution outcomes, and Traditional Owner involvement. Walking on Country as a Research Method: Unlike traditional site analysis, Walking on Country immerses engineers in Indigenous knowledge systems, offering a lived understanding of place that Western methodologies struggle to capture.



First Nations Customs and Spirituality



Sydney from North Shore

Aboriginal Lore

Aboriginal lore refers to the traditional laws, customs, and spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, passed down through generations. Unlike Western legal systems, which are documented and enforced through formal institutions, Aboriginal lore is embedded in the oral traditions, songs, ceremonies, and practices of Indigenous communities. It serves as a comprehensive framework guiding aspects of daily life, social relationships, cultural responsibilities, and environmental stewardship.

Central to **Aboriginal lore** is the concept of "Country," which encompasses land, water, air, and all living things. Aboriginal lore recognizes that people are deeply interconnected with their environment and that each individual has a custodial role in caring for the land. This stewardship is based on respect for the sacred sites, ancestral spirits, and cultural practices that sustain both people and nature.

Aboriginal lore also delineates specific roles for men and women, often referred to as **"Men's Business"** and **"Women's Business."** These roles embody responsibilities, ceremonies, and knowledge that are gender-specific, ensuring that cultural knowledge is preserved and practiced within the community. Kinship systems form another essential component of Aboriginal lore, structuring complex relationships between family, clan, and tribe and reinforcing the importance of mutual respect, cooperation, and community.

Deeply rooted in respect, reciprocity, and a holistic view of existence, **Aboriginal lore** remains a powerful force that sustains Aboriginal cultural identity, guides ethical conduct, and fosters harmony between people and Country. It is not merely a set of rules but a way of life that connects past, present, and future generations with an enduring commitment to the land and each other.



Image:Jingili man with well-marked cicatrices, Powell Creek, Central Australia, September-October 1901

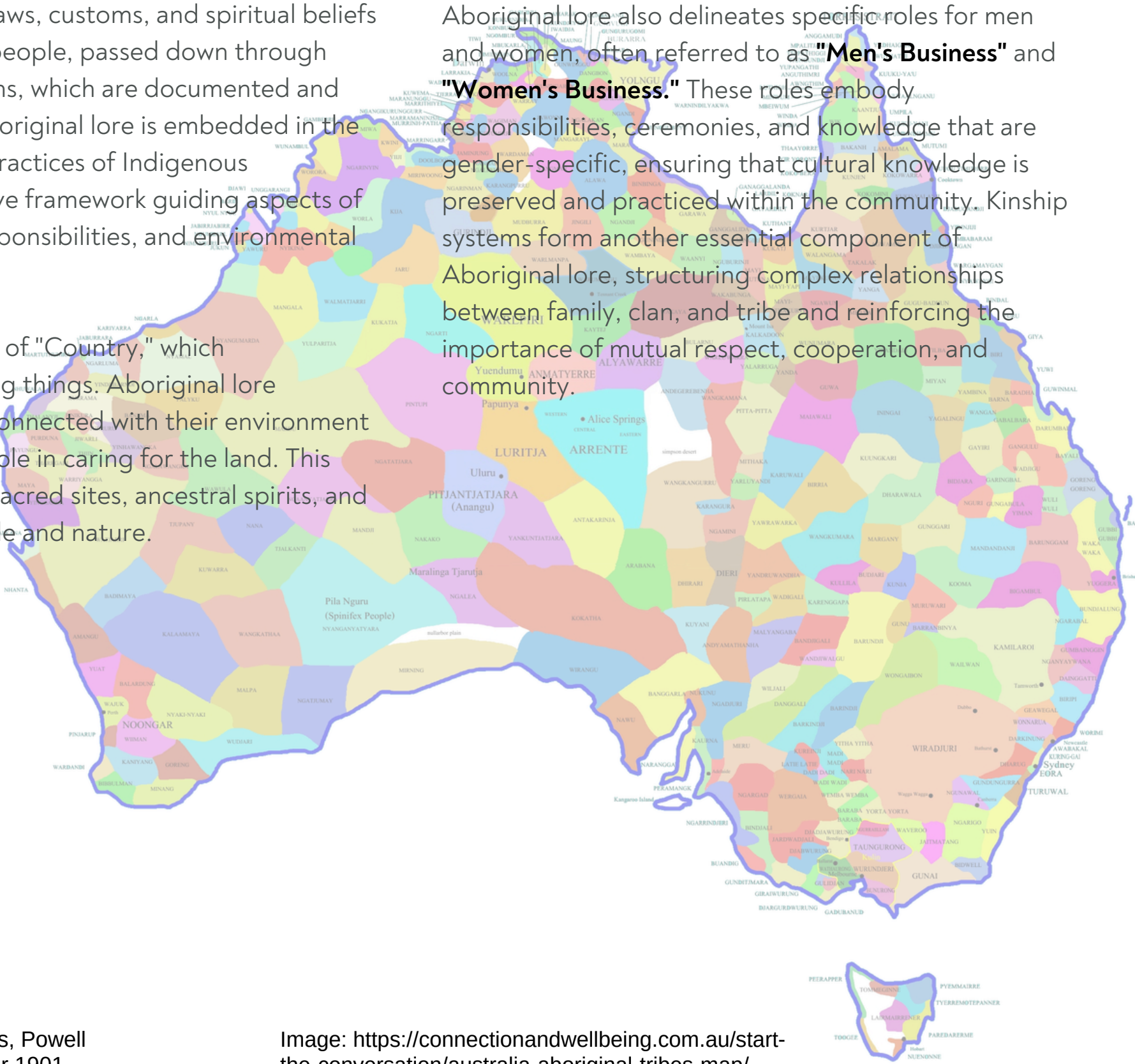


Image: <https://connectionandwellbeing.com.au/start-the-conversation/australia-aboriginal-tribes-map/>



Aboriginal rock art is one of the most enigmatic draws of Australia's Kimberley region./Liz Jack

Sky Country

The Role of the Sky in Aboriginal Culture

In Aboriginal culture, the sky is much more than a physical space above the earth. It is a realm filled with spiritual significance, representing the home of ancestral beings, spirits, and celestial entities. Many Aboriginal cultures view the sky as a direct reflection of the world below, where the past, present, and future coexist in a complex, interconnected web. The stars, the moon, the sun, and other celestial phenomena are seen as crucial parts of the landscape, with each having its own stories, meanings, and associations.

Sky Country is not confined to the physical heavens; it also extends to the stars, the Milky Way, the moon, and the sun, all of which are seen as powerful forces with deep cultural significance. Aboriginal peoples view these celestial bodies as active participants in the creation of the world and as ongoing influences on daily life.

The Practical and Spiritual Use of Sky Country

Sky Country's influence is practical as well as spiritual. Aboriginal people have long used the stars for navigation, especially in the vast, open landscapes of the Australian outback. The constellations serve as guides to travel across vast distances, particularly when hunting, gathering, or engaging in trade. The stars also offer a way to track seasonal changes, with certain constellations appearing at specific times of the year, signaling the best times to harvest certain foods or conduct ceremonies.

At the same time, Sky Country remains a space of profound spiritual significance. The stars and the sky continue to be seen as the dwelling place of ancestors and spirits, with certain celestial events, such as eclipses or meteor showers, being interpreted as messages from the Dreamtime.

The Dreamtime and the Stars

Central to the Aboriginal understanding of the sky is the Dreamtime or Dreaming – the sacred, mythological period when ancestral beings, often referred to as "totemic ancestors," traveled across the land and sky, shaping both the physical and spiritual world. These beings include creatures such as birds, reptiles, and mammals, as well as celestial beings like the sun and the stars. They created the natural features of the land, taught people how to live, and established the laws of the world.

The stars and constellations are often associated with stories of the Dreamtime. For example, the Emu in the Sky is a famous Aboriginal constellation that appears in the dark spaces of the Milky Way, representing the Emu – a bird that is a central totem for many Aboriginal groups. This constellation is significant not only for its cultural meaning but also for its practical use in navigation and understanding seasonal cycles. Similarly, the Seven Sisters or Pleiades star cluster is one of the most widely recognized star groups in Aboriginal culture, appearing in numerous creation stories and representing ancestral women, often associated with themes of pursuit, migration, and spirituality.

The stars, therefore, serve not only as a guide for Aboriginal peoples in terms of time and place but as a constant reminder of their spiritual connection to the ancestors and the Dreamtime.

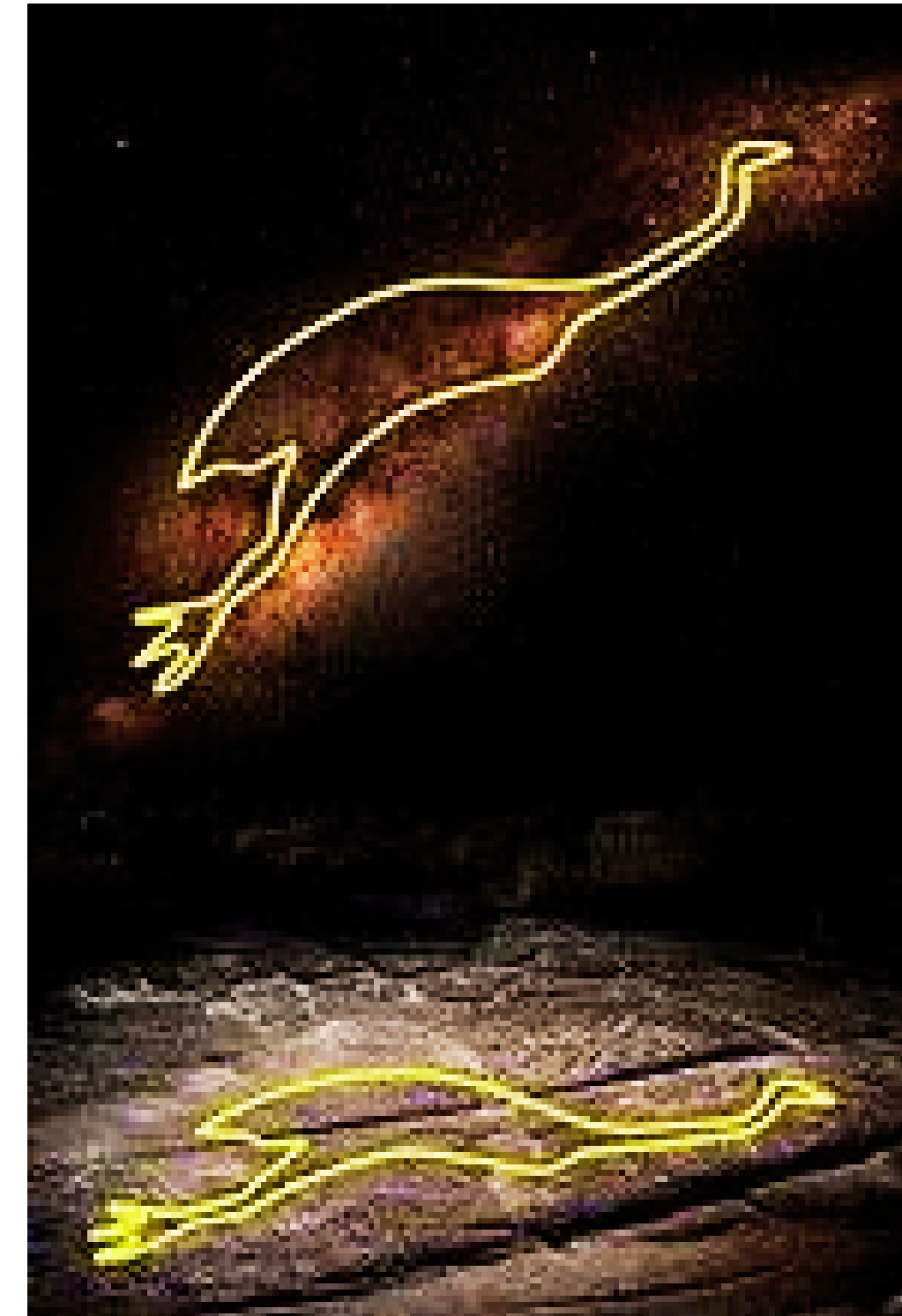


image:facebook/aboriginal astronomy/

Aboriginal Seasons

Aboriginal seasons are a key aspect of how Aboriginal Australians understand and relate to the natural world. Unlike the four-season system commonly used in Western cultures (spring, summer, fall, and winter), Aboriginal cultures recognize a diverse set of seasons, often ranging from six to seven, and these seasons vary depending on the specific climate, geography, and local environmental conditions of each region.

The Aboriginal understanding of seasons is intricately tied to the land, plants, animals, weather patterns, and the cultural practices of different communities. The cycles of nature and the movements of the sun, moon, and stars play a central role in the Aboriginal seasonal calendar, which provides guidance for hunting, gathering, cultural ceremonies, and sustainable land management practices.

Aboriginal seasons are a sophisticated and deeply rooted system that ties together the physical, spiritual, and practical aspects of life. These seasonal systems provide Aboriginal communities with the knowledge necessary to navigate the land, hunt and gather resources sustainably, and align with the rhythms of nature. More than just a means of tracking time, the seasons serve as a map of relationships – between people, land, and the ancestral spirits that inhabit both. Understanding Aboriginal seasons is a way of understanding the unique, intimate connection that Aboriginal peoples have with the natural world, one that has been honed and passed down over tens of thousands of years.

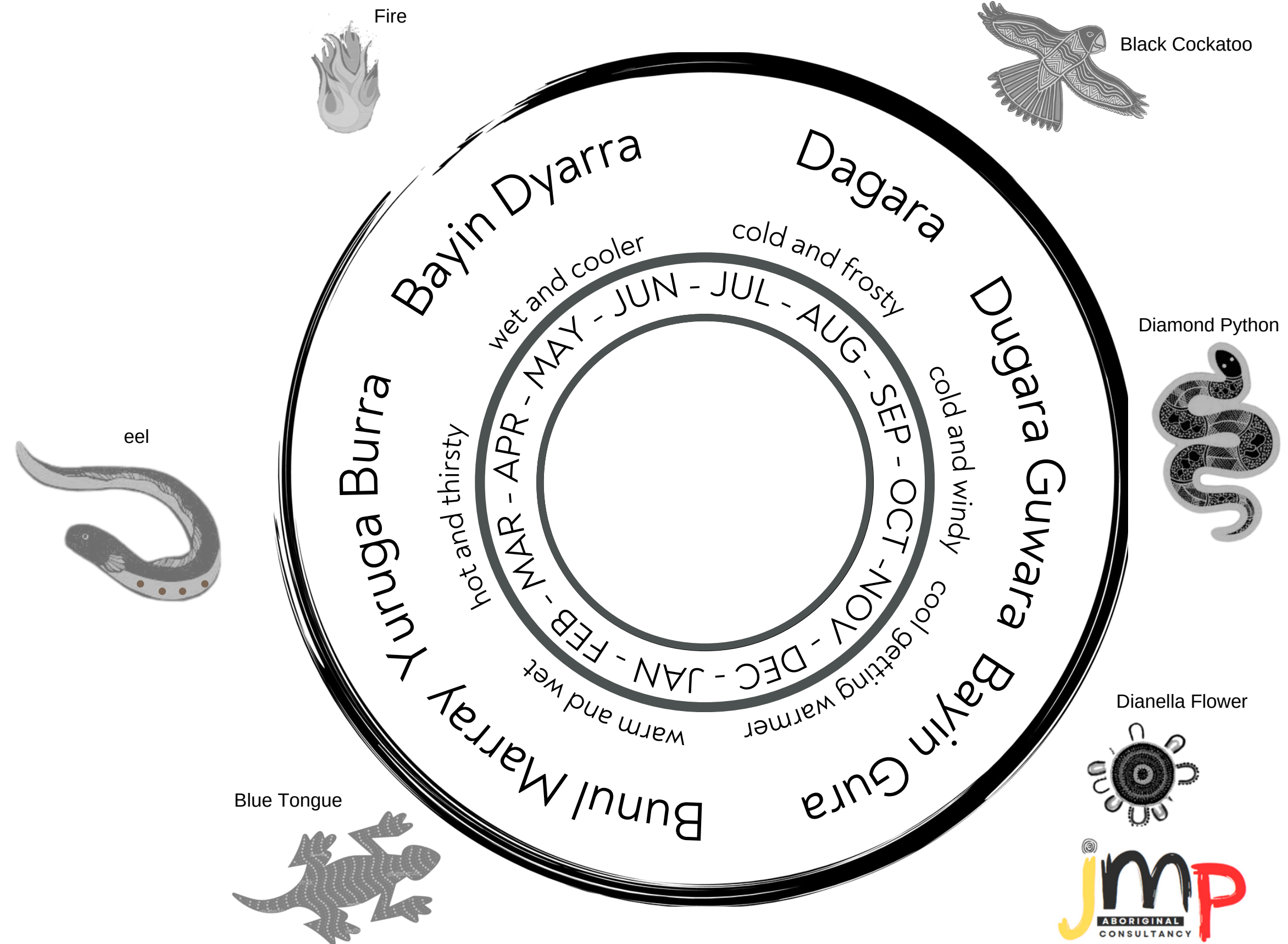
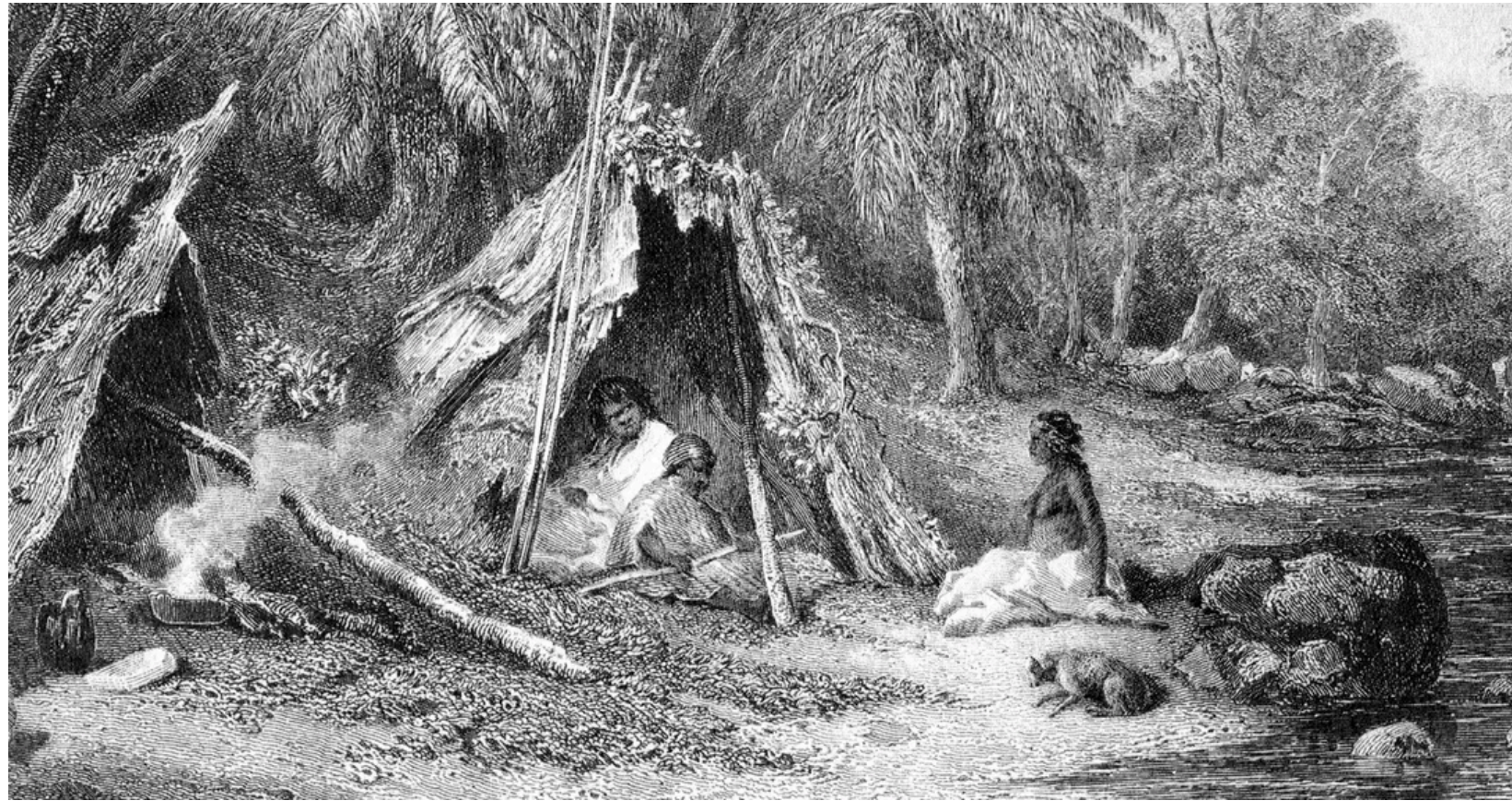


image: Weather cycles Dharug from the 2025 Western Sydney Parklands Trust, part of Greater Sydney Parklands



The First Architects

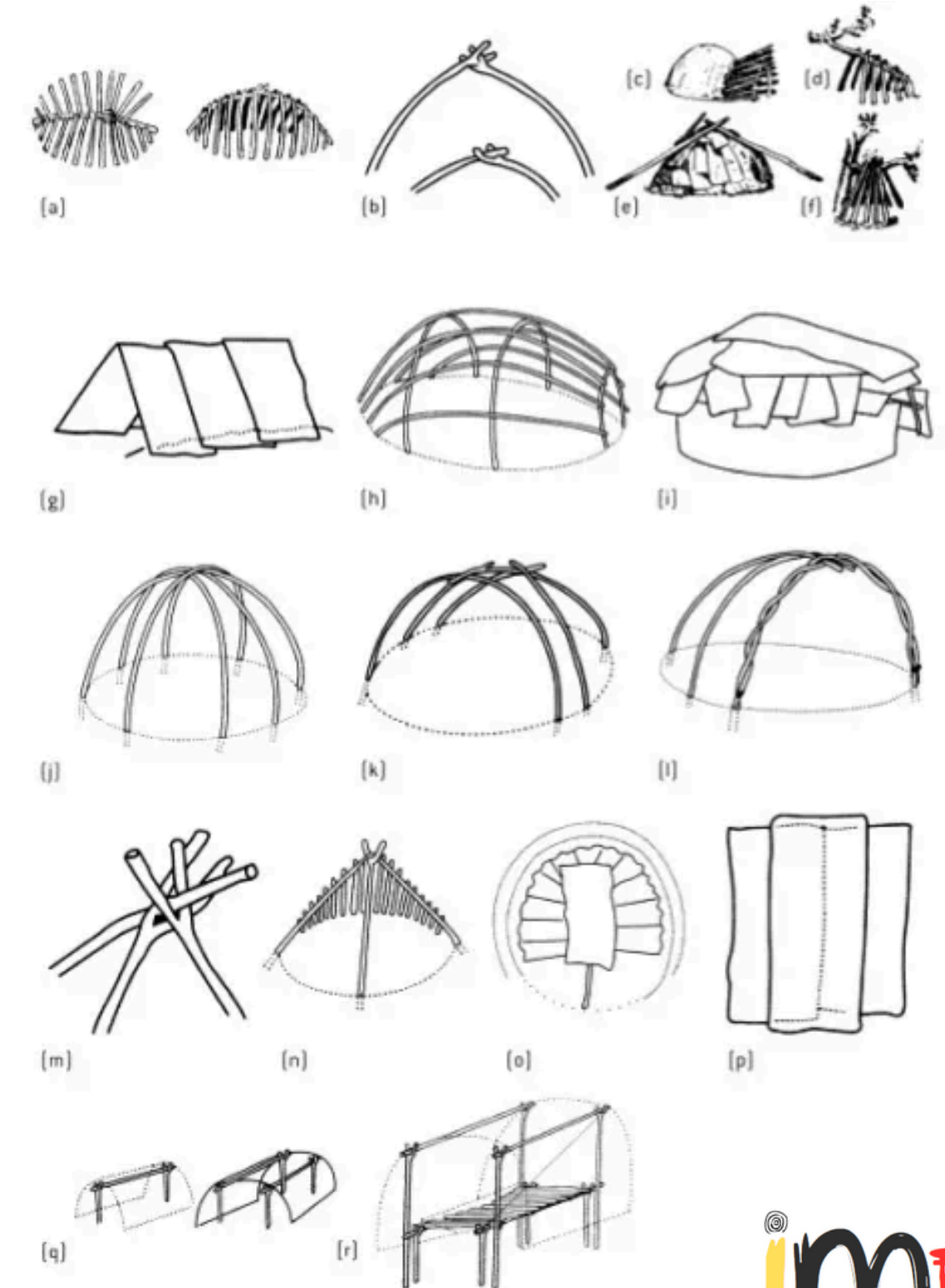


A 19th-century engraving of an indigenous Australian encampment,

Aboriginal people are often regarded as the world's first architects, not in the conventional sense of modern construction, but in the way they have skillfully and sustainably designed, created, and maintained their environments for millennia. The deep connection that Aboriginal Australians have with their land, their profound understanding of nature, and their intricate systems of knowledge allowed them to become pioneering architects of the landscape, long before Western architectural practices evolved.

The Architecture of the Land

Aboriginal architecture is not always about physical buildings in the way Western societies define them. Rather, it is about the environment itself – the landscape, waterways, seasonal cycles, and ecosystems – all of which were intentionally shaped and managed by Aboriginal people. Their architectural feats can be seen in the way they lived harmoniously with the land, transforming the natural world to suit their needs, while simultaneously protecting and sustaining it.



Walter Roth: Studies of Aboriginal ethnoarchitectural forms, Queensland, 1897. Via Wikipedia

Bediagal (Dharug) Culture



Bediagal Traditional Culture Overview

Bediagal

The Bediagal (also spelled Bidjigal, Bejigal, Bedeagal, Biddegall) are a coastal clan of the Dharug language group, traditionally custodians of lands across what is now western, northwestern, southeastern, and southern Sydney—including the Georges and Cooks Rivers, Salt Pan Creek, the Hills District, and the Bidjigal Reserve

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bidjigal>

Bediagal People of Rouse Hill

Their country spanned from Hills Area in Sydney to Botany Bay areas like La Perouse and Salt Pan Creek like many other clans groups with in the Dharug Language group co existed with other clan groups of the Dharug Language in sharing their culture.

Cultural Practices & Society

Fire and smoking ceremonies held spiritual significance as respect for country, serving to cleanse places and communicate with ancestors from the past.

Men acted as protectors and hunters for the larger animals. Where women were fishers, shell gatherers, nurturers, storytellers—and renowned for coastal shellwork.

Totems were an important part of respect for country and sustainability, This was important as each clan and individual had their own totem. The purpose of the totem was the each clan and person protection animal for ecological and sustainability.

Historical Significance

The Bediagal were the first of many Aboriginal group encountered by the arriving First Fleet and by Arthur Phillip in 1788. They mounted strong armed resistance, led by leaders like Pemulwuy, engaging in guerrilla warfare from 1788 until around 1817. The smallpox epidemic of 1790 devastated their numbers, with estimates ranging up to half of the population—many perished.

A documented massacre also occurred near Windsor in 1794, when settlers killed Bediagal people in the Hawkesbury region. (For further reading see below)

https://www.salienceatsydney.org/blog/2021/07/14/killing-times-on-the-hawkesbury-river/?utm_source=chatgpt.com



Pemulwuy

*"Warami budyari naady'unya Dharug
Ngurrawa"
means "hello, welcome, good to see
you on Dharug Country"*

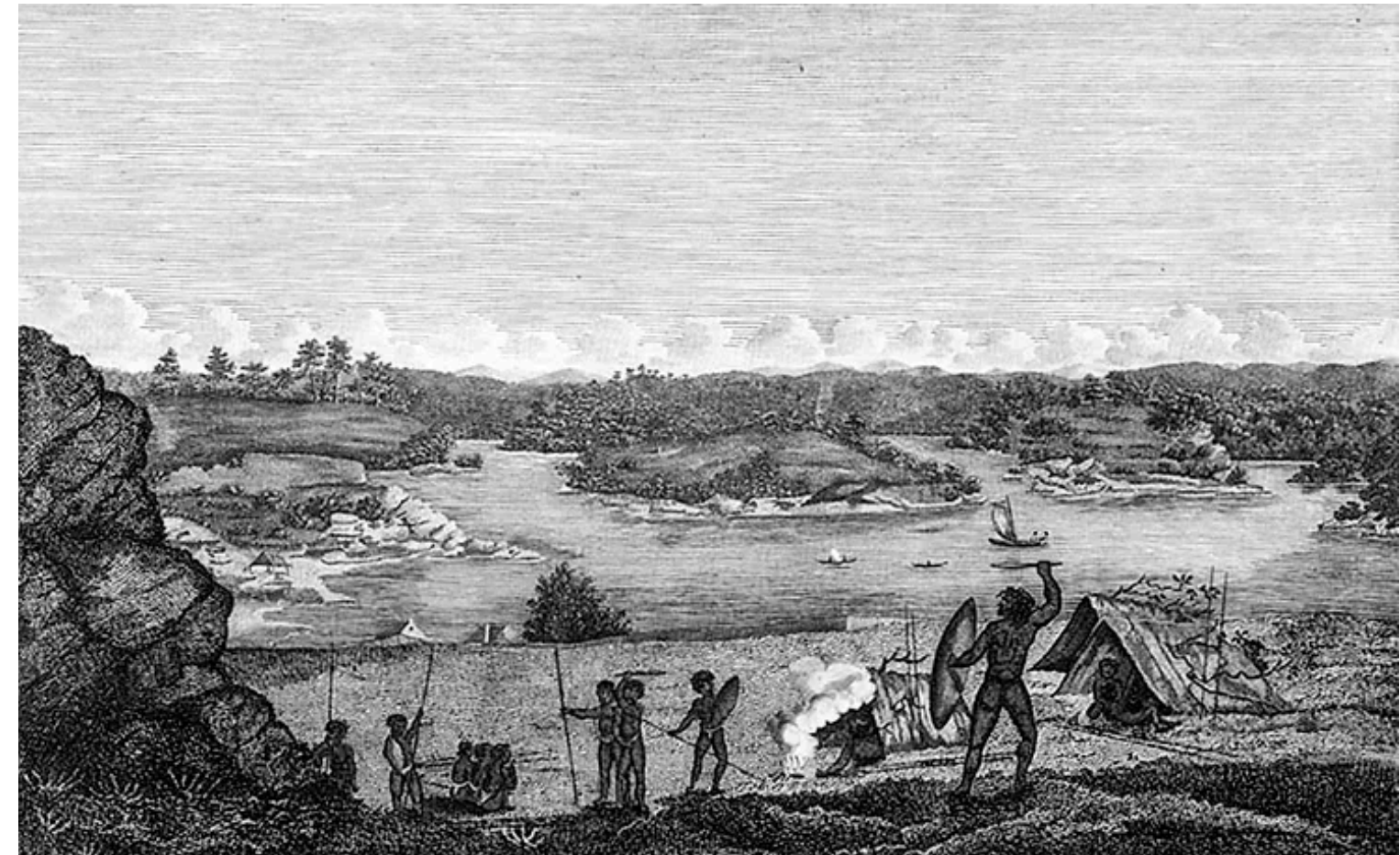


Image: "Native Camp Near Cockle Bay with a view of Parramatta River. Taken from Dawes Point." Probably Memel (Goat Island) in centre. 1813 engraving by John Eyre



Bediagal Culture - Overview continued

Impact of Colonization

- The arrival of the First Fleet (1788) and subsequent European settlement led to land dispossession, disruption of traditional food sources, and introduced diseases like smallpox, which devastated the local population.
- Conflict and resistance occurred as the Bediagal and other Darug clans defended their land from encroachment, though they were eventually displaced.
- By the mid-19th century, many Dharug people were forced into missions or assimilated into settler society, but their cultural connections remained.

Contemporary Recognition

- Today, the Dharug people's history and heritage are acknowledged in local conservation efforts and cultural revitalization programs.
- Aboriginal sites within the Rouse Hill Area continue to be protected and recognized. But many have been damaged due to the progression of developments and infrastructure.

The Bediagal/Bediagal people are a deeply rooted coastal Dharug clan, central to the first encounters with European colonists. Their society centered on fishing, shellwork, fire rituals, strong clan identities, and resistance leadership by Pemulwuy. Despite suffering dramatic disruption through disease and frontier violence, their culture endures through rock art, monuments, protected lands, and ongoing ceremonial events.



Artwork :Fishing, Sydney Harbour 1790



Image : Nawi, Bark Canoe

Bediagal Culture - Overview continued

Bediagal

Aboriginal people have occupied the continent for over 40,000 years and it is through the Dreaming that Aboriginal people mark the beginning of time when the Rainbow Serpent moved across the land creating the rivers as it travelled and when Biame, the sky spirit, helped shape a barren and featureless world and gave the Aboriginal people the laws of life by which they live.

Over the five to eight thousand years Aboriginal people have inhabited the Sydney region they formed family clans and these clans formed nations. Spiritual connection to the land was everything to the Aboriginal people who inhabited this land; family, plants, animals, sea, land and sky were all Country and as individuals they too were a part of Country. Their role was to care for Country and they learnt to do so through storytelling, song and sharing of Traditional Knowledge.

Resources: <https://georgesriver.org.au/learn-about-the-river/aboriginal-culture>



Image:-Shell Midden. Source: Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania



Image:-Grinding Stones. Source: Australian Museum



Image:-Grinding GroovesSource: flickr.com



Image:-Campsite Source: flickr.com



Image:-Aboriginal Tools: Pinterest

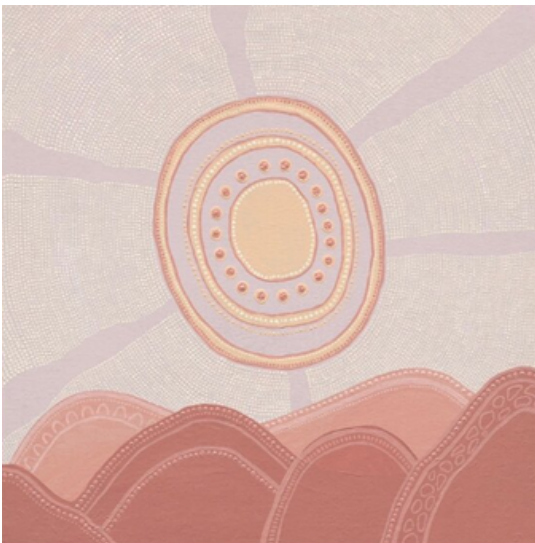
Bediagal (Dharug) Influence in Design



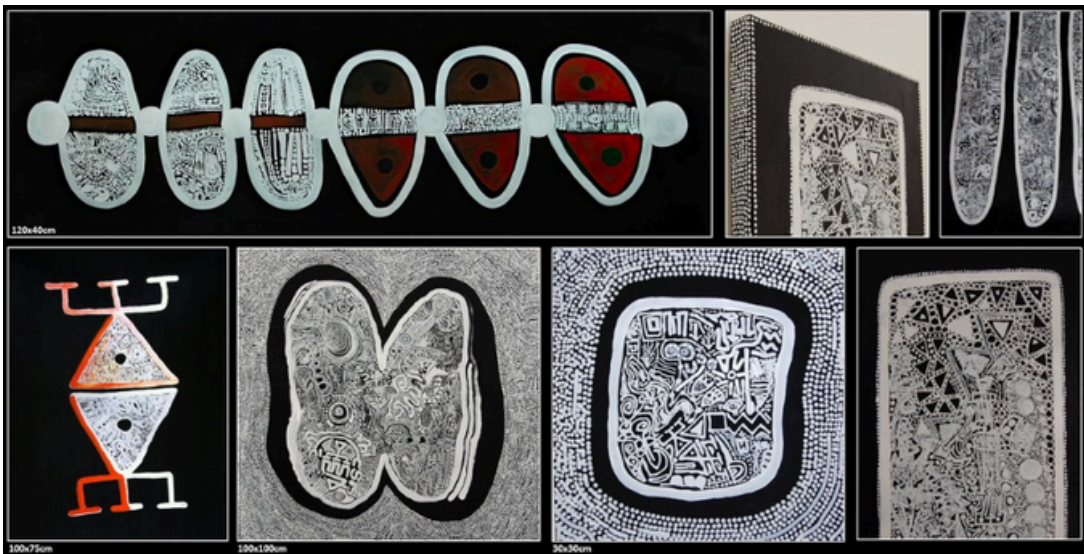
Artefacts and Art



Artwork: Melissa Barton



Artwork: Kyrilee Shields



Artwork: Adam Law



Image:-A variety of fishing spears, shields, stone hatchets, clubs and swords by Charles Alexandre Lesueur (1807) Mitchell Collection/State Library of NSW



Women's yam sticks, a paddle (bottom) and a heavy digging stick photo by Joy Lai)



A portable grindstone with muller or topstone (photo by Grace Karskens)



Artwork: Adam Laws

Dance and Practices



Welcome to Country smoking ceremony performed by an Aboriginal elder, wikipedia

Welcome to Country

A Welcome to Country is a formal ceremony performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to welcome visitors onto their traditional lands. This practice is an ancient tradition that has been adapted to modern contexts, often taking place at the beginning of events, such as public ceremonies, festivals, and significant gatherings. It is a way for the local Indigenous people to acknowledge the ongoing connection they have to the land and to ensure that visitors understand and respect the customs and cultural importance of the place they are entering.

Smoking Ceremony

A Smoking Ceremony is another important Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ritual, often conducted as part of the Welcome to Country but also in other contexts, such as cleansing a space or marking an important event. The smoking ceremony involves the burning of native plants, usually leaves from specific trees, to produce smoke that is believed to have cleansing, healing, and protective properties.

Aboriginal Dance is a significant cultural practice that holds deep spiritual, social, and historical meaning for Aboriginal Australians. It is an expression of identity, connection to the land, and a way to communicate stories, traditions, and ancestral knowledge through movement, music, and symbolism. Aboriginal dance is integral to ceremonies, rituals, and celebrations, and it serves as a living connection between the people, their ancestors, and the natural world.

Aboriginal dance is much more than just an art form; it is a living cultural practice that carries profound spiritual, social, and historical significance. It connects Aboriginal people to their ancestors, the land, and the cosmos, and it serves as a means of transmitting knowledge, preserving culture, and honoring the natural world. Through movement, music, and symbolism, Aboriginal dance continues to be a powerful tool for storytelling and expression, providing a deep connection to the past while remaining a vibrant part of Aboriginal life today.

Key Aspects of Aboriginal Dance

- Storytelling and Dreamtime Narratives
- Connection to the Land
- Ceremonial and Ritual Significance
- Costumes and Body Decoration



Wiradjuri man Joe Williams dancing at #YarriJackyJackyCorroboree22 Source: Darkeye Photography



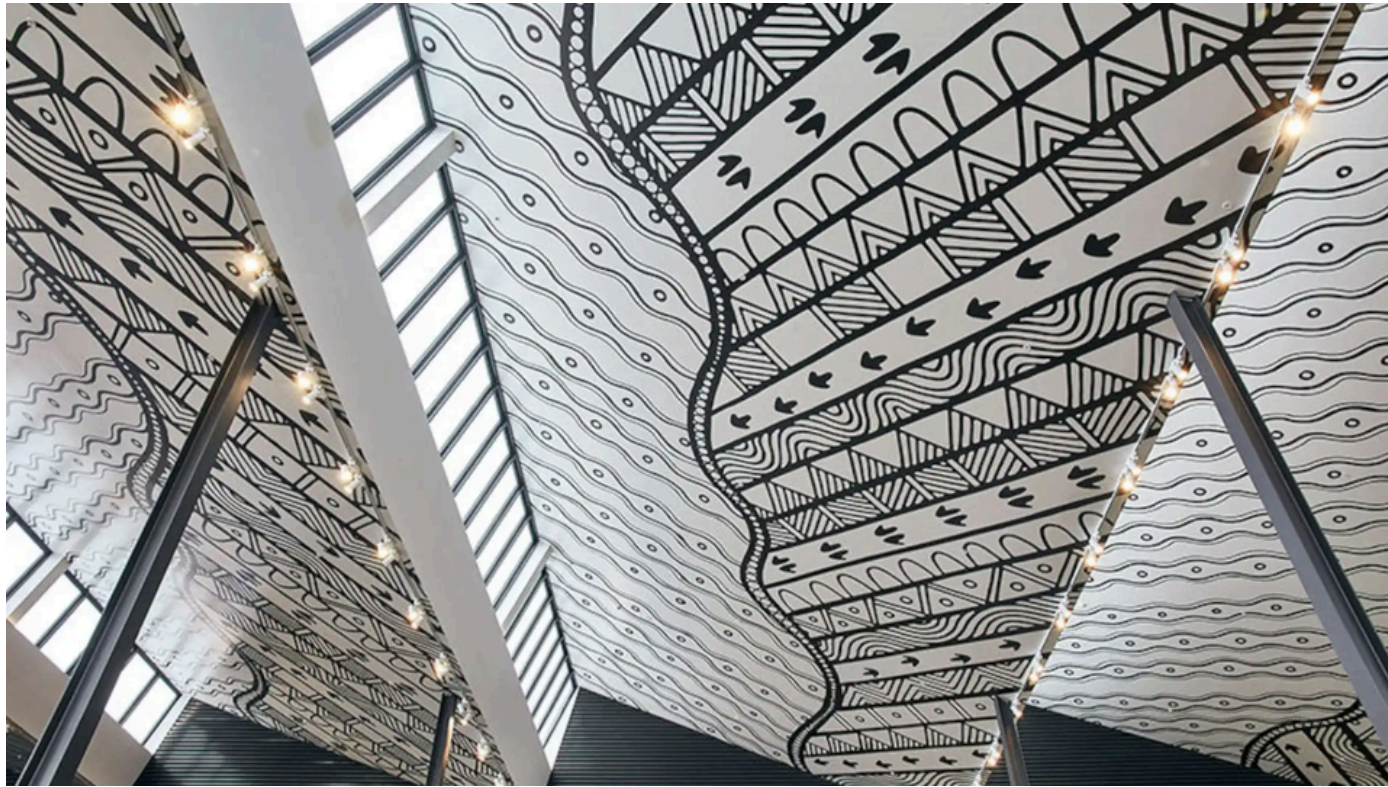
Major James Wallis' engraving of Dyarubbin at Windsor showing a group of Aboriginal people around a camp fire at Dowlaba, near the mouth of Wiannamatta/South Creek in about 1816. Bulyayorang/ Windsor is on the high bank on the left. A big flood has roared through and destroyed the wharf. (SLNSW)



First Nations Design Elements

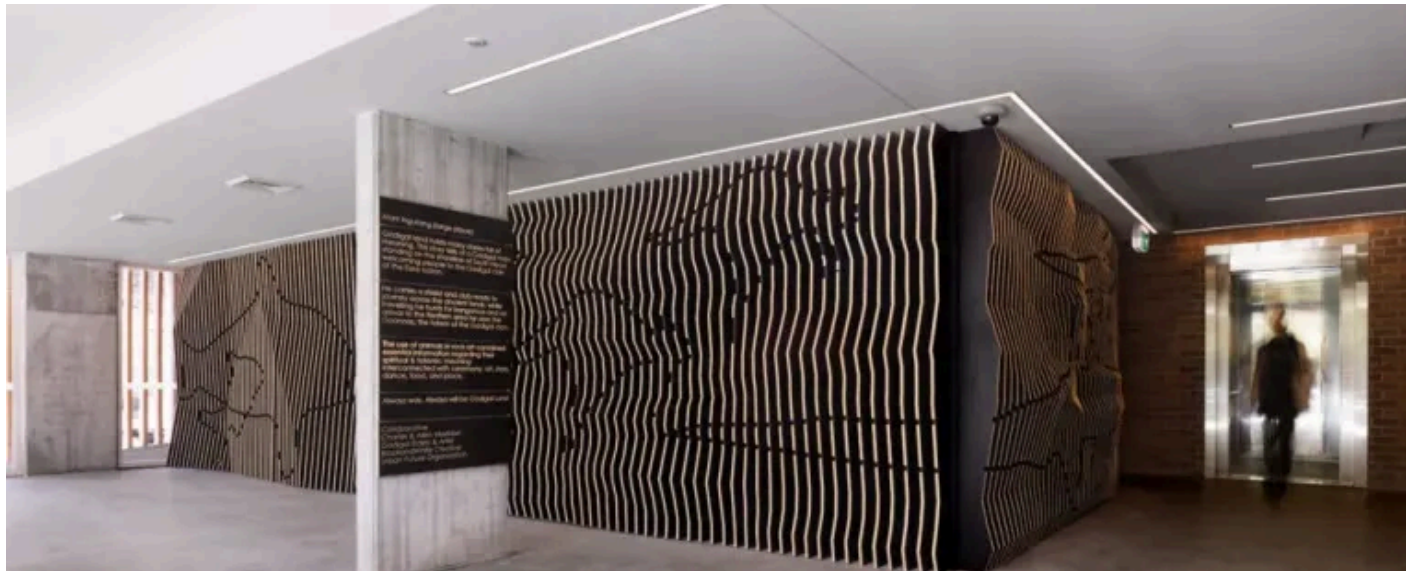


Ceiling Treatment



Yagan Square, located in Perth's CBD

Interior Design



Marri Ngurang (large place) installation by Charles and Allen Madden – Gadigal Elders and Artist, BlackandWhite Creative, Urban Future Organization. Photo: Luke Butterly Photography

Facade Design



An Indigenous perspective: Burrinja Cultural Centre, In Melbourne's Dandenong Ranges.

Pavement Design



Ballarat Line Upgrade



Bluey Roberts, Rainbow Serpent 1989.
Concrete Pavement Photo Sam Roberts

Entry Statement



Image credit: Scott Cameron Photography. Connection To Country—a project of Mili Mili's at Royal North Shore Hospital, New South Wales.



Burraja Bush Tucker Garden - Wodonga

Other Uses

- First Nations language
- Wayfinding

Garthering Area



Kindy Garden McDowall | Tessa Rose

Shading Area



The shade canopy Image: Courtesy of University of Tasmania

Scuptures / Public Art



Macquarie Group 1 Elizabeth Street Public Art - Balarinji

Immersion Area



Burraja Bush Tucker Garden - Wodonga



Major James Wallis' engraving of Dyarubbin at Windsor showing a group of Aboriginal people around a camp fire at Dowlaba, near the mouth of Wiannamatta/South Creek in about 1816. Bulyayorang/ Windsor is on the high bank on the left. A big flood has roared through and destroyed the wharf. (SLNSW)

Walking with First Nations



Walk On Country / Design Input Session



Walk on Country

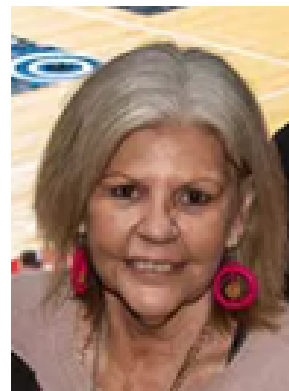
Took place on the 16 th of July 2025 For 93 - 107 Cecil Ave - Castle Hill to create a cultural narrative with Elder Aunty Thelm Rudd, Uncle Paul Webb and Richard Burrell from Murru Mittigar



Design Input Session

Was conducted after the Walk on Country back at the Remy's Cafe which allowed the Elders and Design Team to collaborate and blend Modern Design with the influence of Indigenous Traditional input.

Our Elders



Aunty Thelmarie Rudd
Aunty Thelm is a Dharug Women and respected elder on the with the Dharug community



Uncle Paul Webb
Uncle Paul is a Dharug man that grew up in the Dharug local area and is respected elder.



Richard Burrell
Richard is a Nursey Manager at Murru Mittigar and Plant specialist of the Dharug Nation



“Theme's around all 3 Blocks”

Aunty Thelm Rudd



Walk On Country / Design Input Session - cont.

“Plants to deadened the noise”

Uncle Paul Webb



*“Bush tucker garden sense of being
in country by using the garden ”*

Aunty Thelm Rudd



“Soft design approach to suburburber”

Aunty Thelm Rudd



*“Castle Hill Geology ” How to blend Mainstream existing landscape with tradition
Country approach”*

Aunty Thelm Rudd

*“Native species can handle a drought
better than non natives”*

Uncle Paul Webb



Connecting 2 Country - Comments

Cultural

- Seed collection by Murru Mittigar and reseedling to replant removed tree back to the site.
- Embracing Country not religion
- If the land is sick we are sick.
- The site is on the border of the Cumberland plan and Wianamatta geology
- Down creek soil is much richer Darling Mills Creek
- Traditional animals tread lightly compared with introduced animals since arrival.
- High points were camps
- Smoking ceremony at start of construction, This will require Dharug people for a smoking.
- Native plants are better for drought and maintenance
- 6 Season's plant's are there relationship with the animal's

Design

- A Lot of introduce species trees (How to blend introduced species with native without disturbance)
- Rocky outcrop design
- Castle Hill Geology " How to blend Mainstream existing landscape with tradition Country approach
- Tell the story of country in the communal areas and public open space
- Green roof opportunity
- Soft design approach to suburburber
- Roof top garden with Bush tucker garden and QR codes for greater understanding and education
- Totem's of the area
- Animals of the area to be incorporated through out the open and communal areas and resting area
- Plants to deadened the noise
- Semi circular design for seating areas "similar to yarning circles" to promote inclusion and connection with one another
- Sandblasting of Design into hard surfaces to tell the story of Dharug Culture and country
- Design the buildings with the 6 Season's/ 6 Stories or 6 Animals that represent Dharug Culture and plants that represent each of the seasons
- Internal Corridor Design inspired by Dharug Artists
- Entry Statement for each building inspired by the 6 season's / 6 Stories or 6 Animals and to relate to the Car Park Design with Carpark wayfinding
- Water catchment
- 6 season's Colour ~ Platte & tone's into the facade and Landscaping
- Public Art Strategy in incorporate Dharug artist's themes
- Information built into the communal areas clan groups of Dharug Language speaking area
- Water drinking station for both Human & pet's
- Children play area by connecting to Country and Story for a family inclusion area
- Each building to exhibit the 6 colours of the season of the Dharug 6 seasons

Artist - Local Dharug



Melissa Barton is a contemporary Aboriginal artist living on Dharug Country. Melissa is a proud Boorooberongal clan woman of the Dharug nation, with her connections to Aboriginal culture dating back thousands of years.



Kyrilee Shields and I'm a proud Darug and Darkinjung woman. I attempt to capture this in my paintings, I gather my inspiration to create my artworks which are a celebration of my freedom to express my cultural identity; a freedom that was denied my mother, and all my maternal grandmothers going back to pre settlement.



Adam Laws grew up within the knowledge of his cultural background, as a descendant of the Dharug and Darkinjung people of the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains regions of New South Wales, Australia. As a member of an extended family network of artisans and cultural practitioners, Adam began contributing to his families output of creativity at an early age.



Geology - Wianamatta Group

Rouse Hill, located in the Sydney Basin, is primarily underlain by the Wianamatta Group, specifically the Bringelly Shale. This geological formation consists of shale, claystone, laminite, fine to medium-grained lithic sandstone, rare coal, and tuff. A notable feature within this group is the Rouse Hill Siltstone Member, which is typically a homogenous siltstone unit at the base of the Wianamatta Group.



Bringelly Shale



Ashfield Shale



Minchinbury Sandstone

Colours - Wianamatta Group



Landscape - Cumberland Wood Land

Cumberland Plain Woodland's colors and tones are largely defined by its dominant tree species: Grey Box (*Eucalyptus moluccana*), Forest Red Gum (*E. tereticornis*), and Narrow-leaved Ironbark (*E. crebra*). The understory, when present, adds to the color palette with shades of green from grasses and shrubs like Blackthorn (*Bursaria spinosa*).



Forest Red Gum

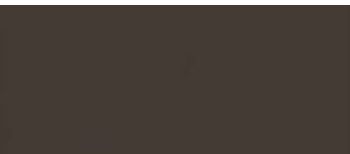


Grey Box



Narrow-leaved Ironbark

Colours - Cumberland Wood Land



Connection 2 Country - Design Themes

Design Outcomes in this chapter are high level design ideas taken from the design input session on how Dharug and Modern Aboriginal ideology that may be implemented by consideration of the Design Team



Project Site 93 - 107 Cecil Ave - Castle Hill

Cecil Avenue sits within the established residential suburb of Castle Hill in north-west Sydney, an area that has transformed significantly over time. Originally agricultural land supporting orchards and market gardens in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Castle Hill gradually suburbanised as Sydney’s urban footprint expanded. Key historic events in the broader locality include the early colonial “Government Farm” established by Governor King in 1801 and the Castle Hill Convict Rebellion of 1804, one of the earliest armed uprisings in Australia, reflecting tensions within the fledgling colony’s convict system and frontier society. Over the decades that followed, the area evolved from rural farmland into a thriving residential hub characterised by diverse housing, commercial development, and community facilities, with properties along Cecil Avenue reflecting this suburban growth pattern.

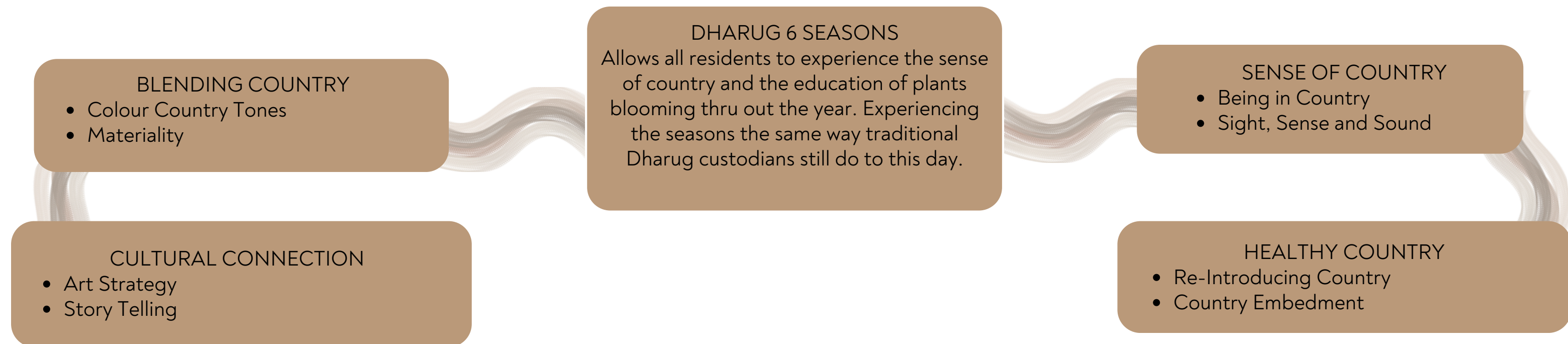
Long before European settlement, the land that now includes Cecil Avenue lay within the traditional territory of the Bidjigal people, a clan group of the larger Darug language group that occupied much of the western Sydney region. The Darug and Bidjigal peoples maintained deep cultural, social, and economic connections to Country through songlines, resource use, and ceremonial practices that shaped the landscape long before roads and subdivisions appeared. The Bidjigal leader Pemulwuy is a prominent figure in early colonial history; he led resistance efforts against encroachment on Aboriginal lands in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, including actions near Castle Hill, and is commemorated today in local place names such as Bidjigal Reserve. While much of the historic Aboriginal presence around Castle Hill was displaced or suppressed during early settlement, contemporary efforts to acknowledge and celebrate this heritage continue through reserves, educational projects, and local history initiatives that recognise the enduring connection of First Nations peoples to the land.



Bring First Nations Design to Light

Architectural and Landscaping

The "Connecting to Country" process places significant emphasis on integrating cultural narratives, values, and traditions into design projects that engage with the land and Indigenous communities. This design approach is rooted in the belief that architecture and art should not only serve functional and aesthetic purposes but also acknowledge and reflect the deep cultural connections between people and the land they inhabit. The themes and narratives in cultural design discovered during the Design input Session are deeply tied to Indigenous perspectives and histories, weaving together stories, symbolism, and connections to the environment in meaningful ways.



Cultural Connection to Country

Aboriginal peoples use art and storytelling as living ways of maintaining cultural connection – not just to share information, but to care for Country, pass on law, and strengthen identity across generations. These practices are inseparable from land, place and community.

Cultural Connection

What it involves

Cultural Connection is about making Aboriginal presence, knowledge and story visible in the landscape in ways that are respectful, authentic and developed with Traditional Custodians. It goes beyond decoration, embedding cultural meaning through art strategies, storytelling, language and spatial design. This may include permanent or temporary artworks, subtle patterning, interpretive elements and references to local histories, Songlines, seasonal cycles and cultural practices. Importantly, it is guided by cultural authority, ensuring stories are shared appropriately and with consent.

How it connects to Country

Story gives meaning to place. Cultural expression helps people understand that the landscape holds memory, law and identity, not just physical form. By revealing these layers, Cultural Connection strengthens recognition of Aboriginal presence as ongoing – reinforcing respect, understanding and connection to Country.

Examples:

- Integrate site-specific artworks developed with Traditional Custodians that reflect local stories, materials and cultural themes.
- Use subtle patterns or textures inspired by Country (such as water flow, landform or vegetation) embedded into paving, walls or structures.
- Incorporate local Aboriginal language in signage or interpretation to acknowledge ongoing cultural presence and knowledge.
- Share place-based stories through interpretive elements that explain connections to land, seasons and movement across Country.

Art is another powerful form of storytelling. Rock engravings, paintings, carvings, weaving and contemporary artworks all communicate stories of place, movement, animals, plants and law. Patterns and symbols often map Country, showing pathways, water sources or important sites, and are created with cultural authority and purpose rather than decoration.

Together, art and storytelling embed memory into the landscape. They help people understand that Country holds history, law and spirit, and that Aboriginal culture is ongoing and adaptive. Through these practices, cultural identity is strengthened, knowledge is protected, and connection to Country is continually renewed.

Storytelling is a primary way knowledge is shared. Stories carry teachings about the Dreaming, Songlines, seasons, behaviour, and responsibilities to Country. They are told through spoken word, song, dance and ceremony, often linked to specific places in the landscape. By retelling stories, cultural knowledge stays alive, and people remain connected to Ancestors and Country over time.



Songline Connection to Country

Aboriginal Songlines

Aboriginal Songlines are ancient pathways that trace the journeys of Ancestral Beings during the Dreaming, when the land, life and law were created. Passed down through song, story, dance and art, Songlines act as living maps, recording knowledge of Country, culture and connection across generations.

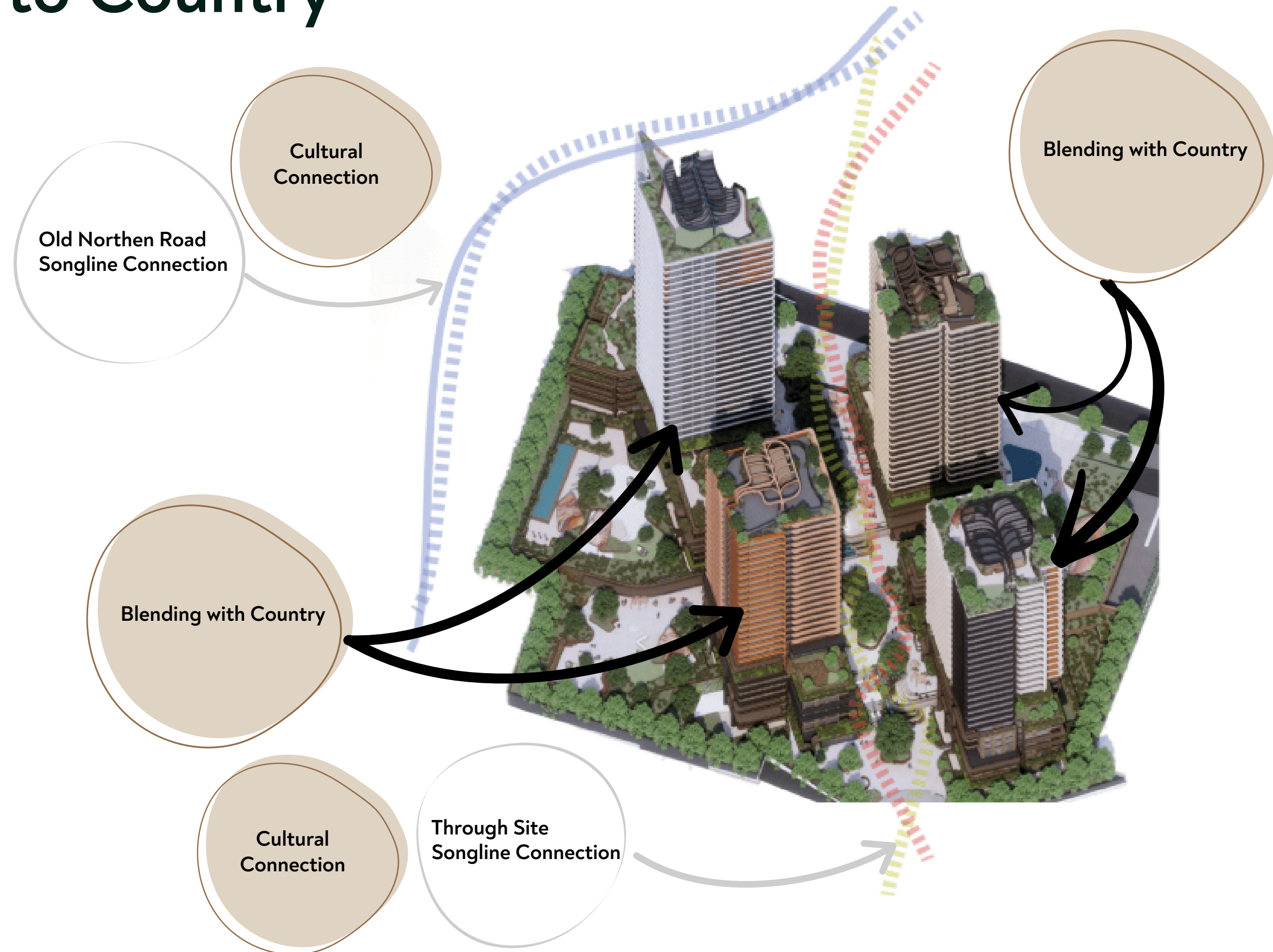
They link people to place, guiding movement, responsibility and care for the land. Still remembered and respected today, Songlines reflect an ongoing relationship between culture, landscape and identity, extending far beyond modern boundaries.

Connection to site

The pathway through the centre is shaped by the remembered presence of an ancient Songline that once followed this ridgeline. Drawing on its calm, rhythmic nature, the route unfolds as a gentle, winding walk from Roger Avenue to Castle Hill Metro. It is a place made for people, for Country, and for slow, thoughtful movement through the landscape.

Planting along the route responds to the six seasons, expressing changes in colour, fragrance and texture as Country transitions. Along the journey, six totems and embedded artworks act as markers of story, identity and connection.

Together, these elements form a living passage where culture, ecology and everyday life come together once more, allowing the Songline to be experienced again.



Cultural Connection to Country (Blending with Country)

Blending Country

What it involves:

Blending Country is about designing in a way that responds to the natural character of the land, ensuring the built environment sits with the landscape rather than over it. This includes the use of natural, locally inspired materials, textures and forms that reflect the surrounding geology, soils and vegetation. Colour palettes are drawn from Country itself – earthy tones, stone hues and seasonal vegetation shifts – allowing structures and pathways to visually soften into their setting. Design also responds to existing landforms, ridgelines, tree canopies and water flows, minimising disruption and reinforcing natural patterns of movement.



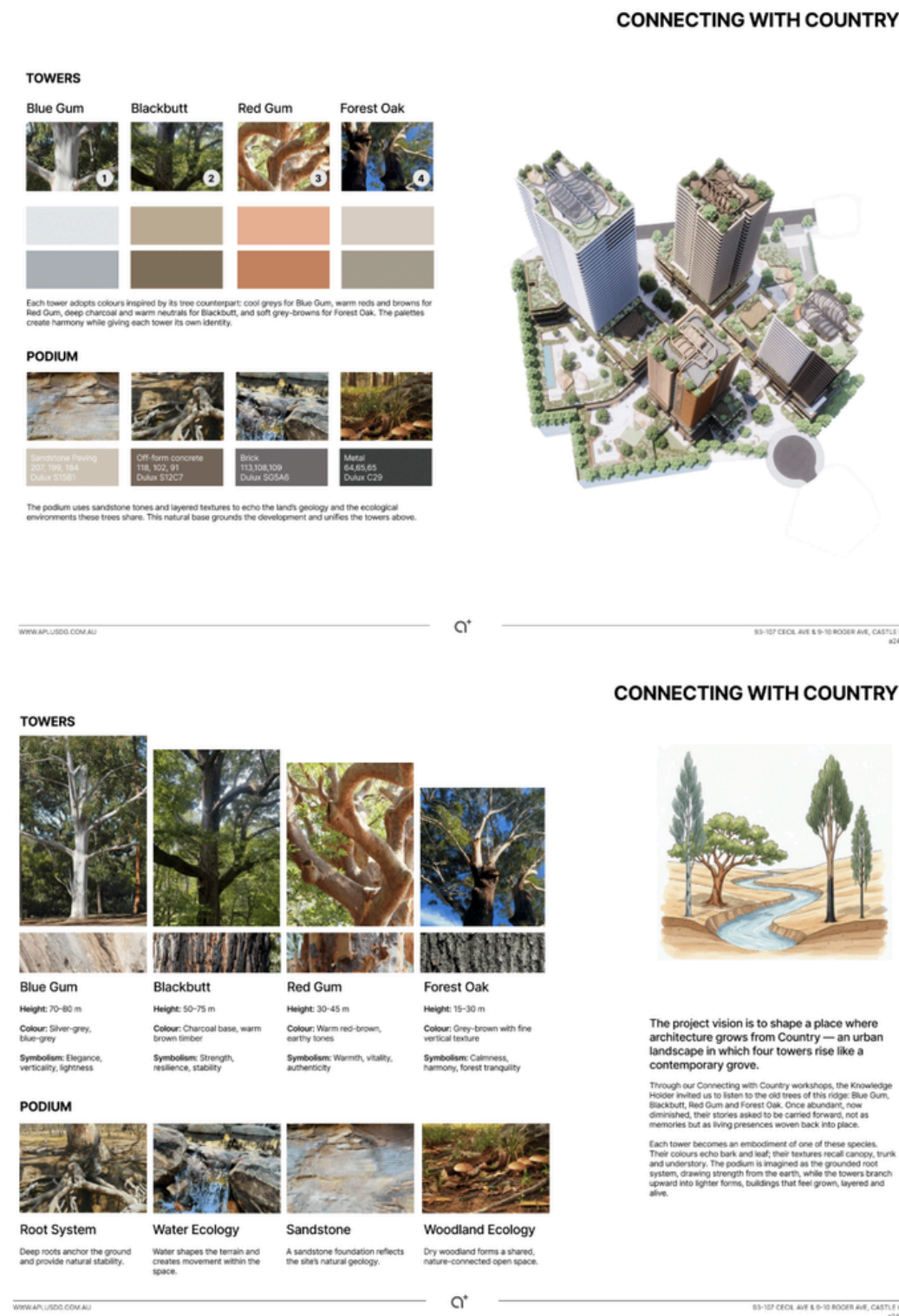
Examples:

- Materiality
- Country colour tone palette



How it connects to Country:

When materials, colours and forms echo the landscape, places feel grounded, familiar and respectful. This approach recognises Country as the primary designer, acknowledging that the land holds knowledge shaped over thousands of years. By working with these cues rather than overriding them, contemporary spaces support continuity between cultural, ecological and built environments, allowing people to experience a deeper connection to place without dominating or erasing the presence of Country.



- Use locally inspired stone, timber and earthy colour palettes that reflect surrounding soils, rock and vegetation.
- Align paths and built forms with natural contours and ridgelines rather than imposing rigid layouts.
- Prioritise endemic planting and layered vegetation structures that reflect local bushland patterns.
- Apply natural textures and finishes that weather over time, echoing bark, stone and earth.
- Design spaces that frame existing trees, landforms and views, encouraging slower, more reflective movement through Country.



Cultural Connection to Country (Blending with Country)

We use **Blue Gum**, **Red Gum**, **Forest Oak** and **Blackbutt** trees when Blending with Country because they already belong to the landscape ecologically, culturally and visually, particularly across Dharug / Bidjigal Country in and around Castle Hill. Their use helps new spaces feel grounded, familiar and respectful rather than imposed.

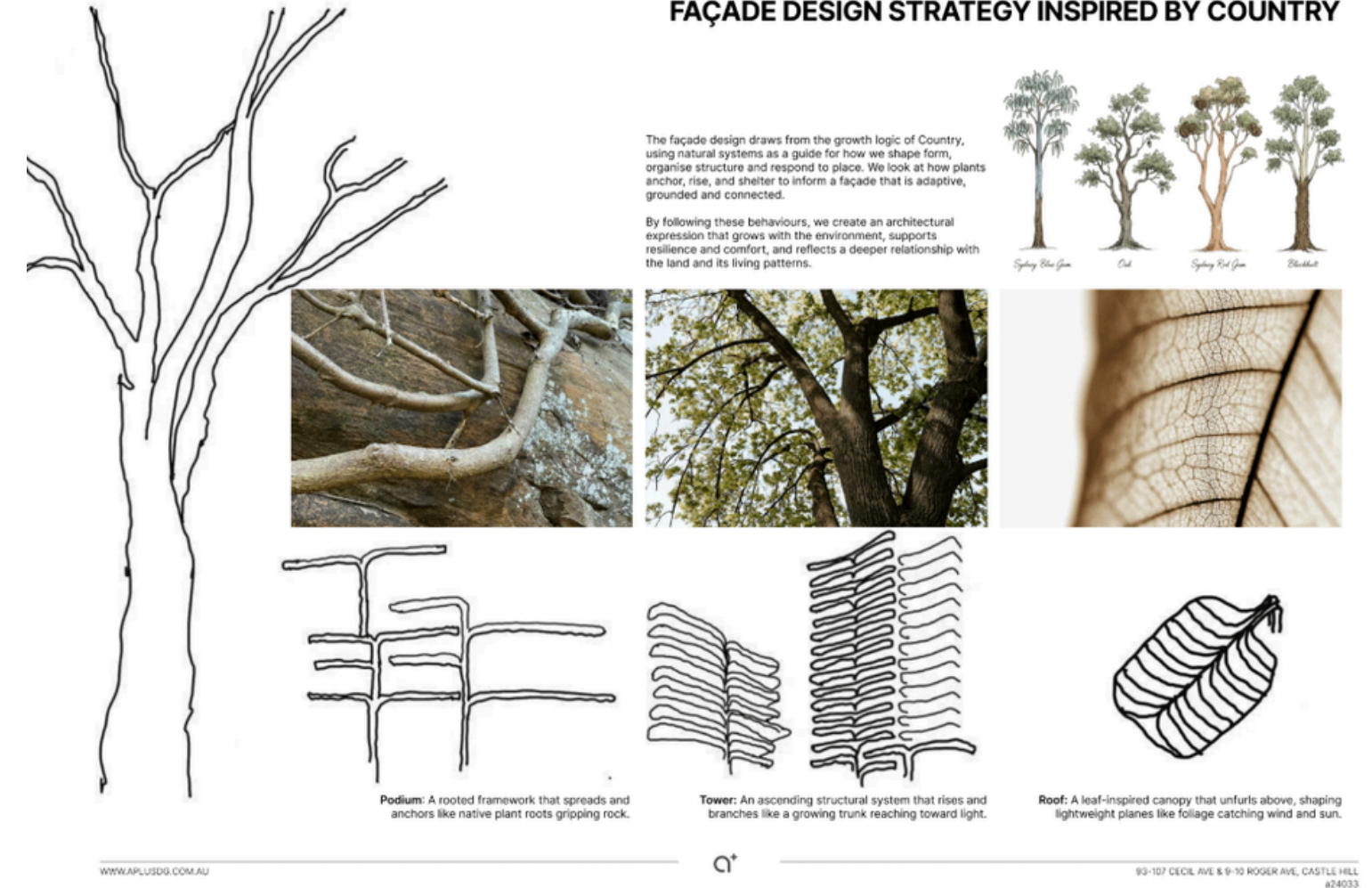
Blue Gum trees are tall, long-living canopy trees that define the character of local bushland. Their colour, scale and seasonal flowering reflect the natural rhythms of Country, helping spaces visually blend into the existing landscape while supporting birds and insects.

Red Gum trees are closely linked to water and low-lying areas. Using them reinforces natural drainage lines and ecological patterns, making landscapes read as part of Country's structure rather than decorative planting.

Forest Oak trees bring fine texture and movement, with soft needle-like foliage that responds to wind and light. They add sensory richness and reference long-standing woodland environments, helping spaces feel calm and grounded.

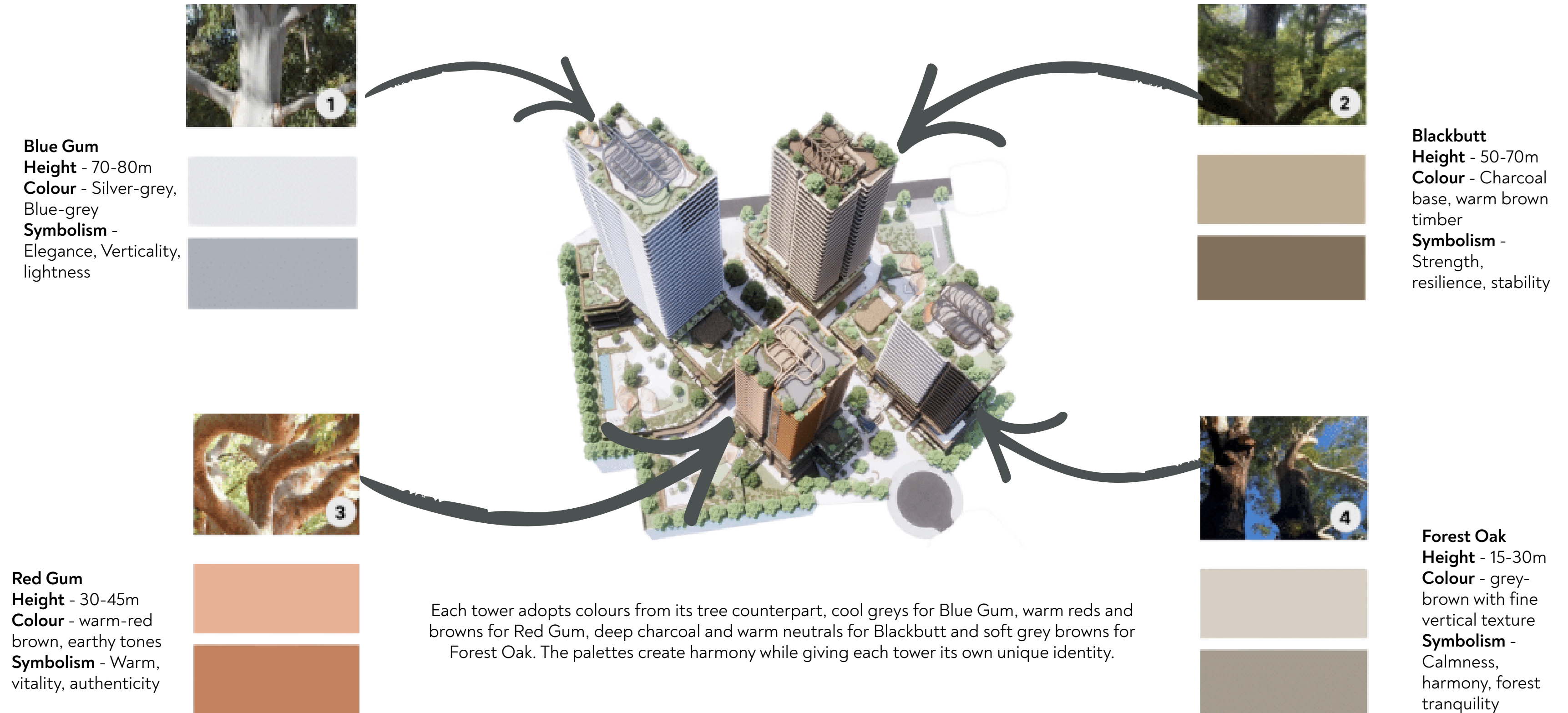
Blackbutt trees are strong ridge and slope species, known for their distinctive bark and resilience. Their form and durability reflect the strength of Country and help anchor landscapes visually, particularly along movement corridors and elevated areas.

Together, these species mirror the natural structure of Country – canopy, mid-storey and woodland layers – supporting biodiversity, seasonal change and cultural continuity. By using trees that already shape the land, blending with Country becomes intuitive, respectful and enduring.



Connection to Country (Flora) Towers

Aboriginal peoples have strong cultural connections to Blue Gum, Blackbutt, Red Gum and Forest Oak trees, which are understood as living parts of Country. These trees provided materials, medicine and habitat, while also marking important places and supporting healthy ecosystems. Caring for them reflects ongoing responsibilities to Country, reinforcing the deep relationship between land, culture and people.



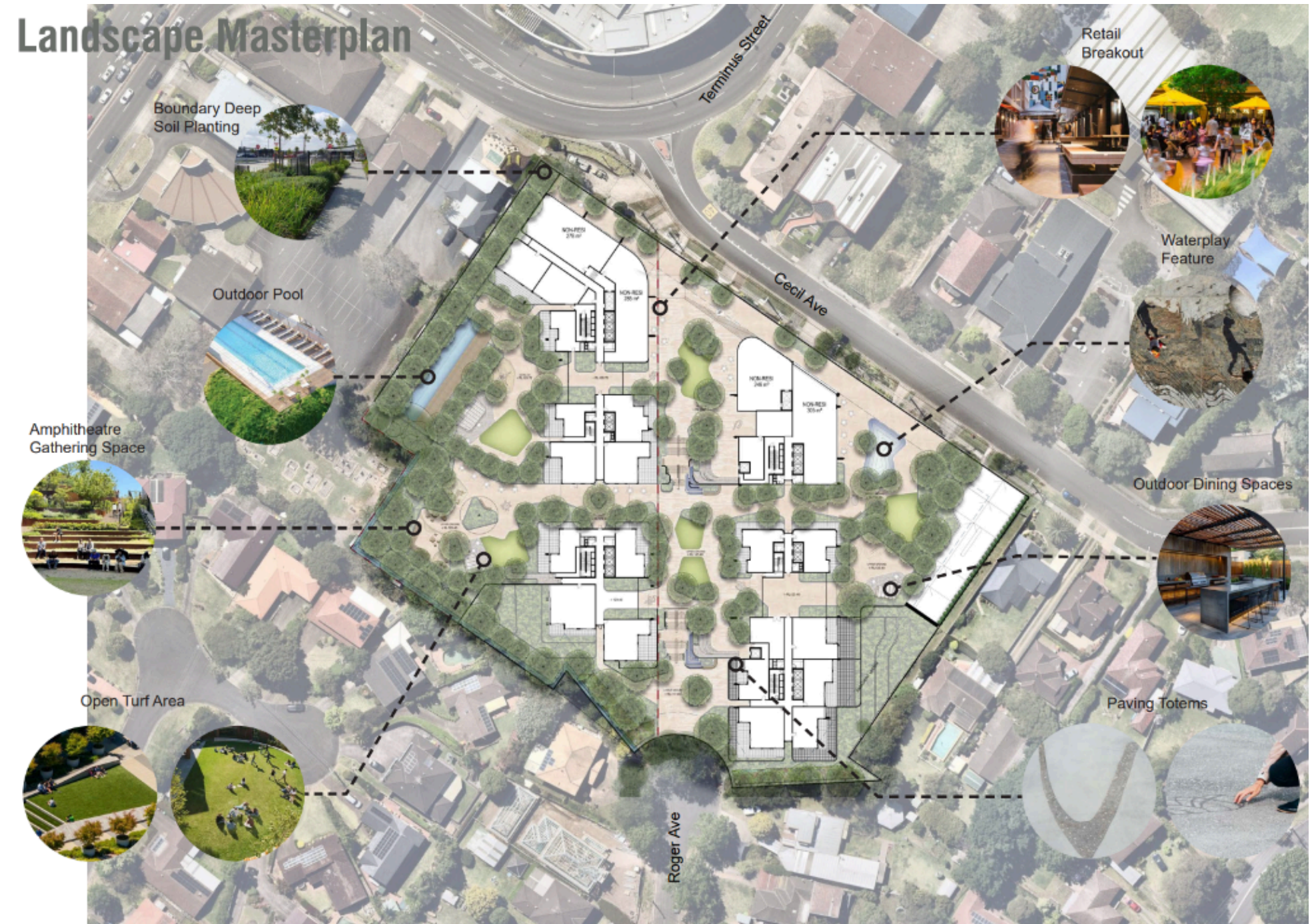
Connection to Country - Healthy Country

Healthy Country is a core Aboriginal principle that recognises land, water, plants, animals and people as part of one interconnected living system. Country is not something separate from people – it is alive, relational and responsive. Caring for Country is therefore both an environmental responsibility and a cultural obligation, passed down through generations.

In **Aboriginal knowledge systems**, a healthy landscape shows clear signs: clean and flowing water, diverse plant life, thriving animals, balanced fire and intact landforms. These conditions are maintained through ongoing care practices such as respecting seasonal cycles, protecting important species, allowing natural regeneration and minimising unnecessary disturbance. When these systems are disrupted, it affects not only the land, but cultural wellbeing, identity and continuity. Healthy Country also emphasises long-term thinking. Decisions are made with future generations in mind, prioritising resilience and renewal over short-term outcomes. This includes restoring native vegetation, supporting biodiversity corridors, managing water naturally, and allowing landscapes to function as ecosystems rather than ornamental spaces.

In contemporary settings, designing for **Healthy Country** means working with natural processes rather than controlling them. It encourages water-sensitive design, protection of mature trees, use of endemic plants, creation of wildlife habitat and respect for existing landforms. Importantly, it also involves listening to and learning from Aboriginal knowledge holders, recognising that cultural care and ecological care are deeply connected.

Ultimately, **Healthy Country** supports mutual wellbeing – when Country is cared for, it continues to provide, teach and sustain. In turn, people remain connected, responsible and grounded in place, strengthening both ecological and cultural resilience over time.



Cultural Connection to Country

Dharug Six Seasons Planting



Materials, colours, and textures inspired by the Wianamatta Group geology, reflecting the natural character of Country.

Healthy Country What it involves

Healthy Country reflects Aboriginal responsibilities to care for land, water and all living systems. It involves restoring and protecting native vegetation, supporting biodiversity and creating habitats for animals, insects and birds. Design responds to natural processes such as water flow, soil health and seasonal change, using approaches like water-sensitive design and minimal disturbance to landforms. Healthy Country also recognises cultural practices of custodianship, where caring for Country is an ongoing relationship rather than a one-off action.

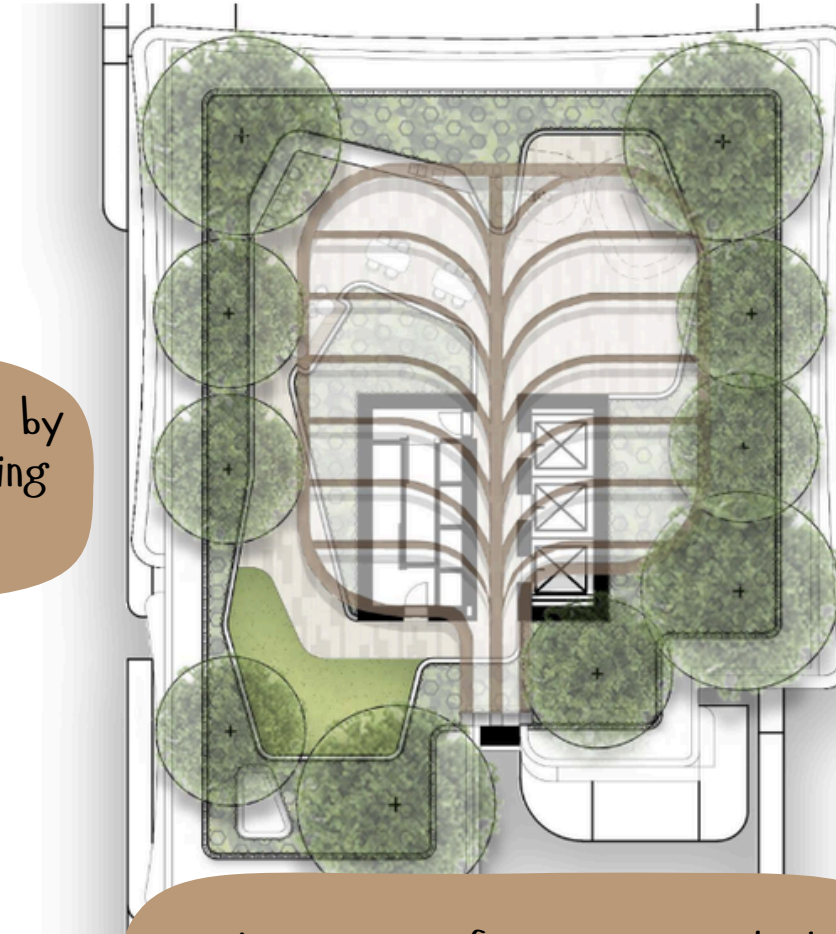
How it connects to Country

In Aboriginal worldviews, people and Country are inseparable – when Country is healthy, people are healthy. Caring for land, water and living systems sustains cultural continuity, strengthens ecological resilience and supports long-term wellbeing for both Country and community.

Examples:

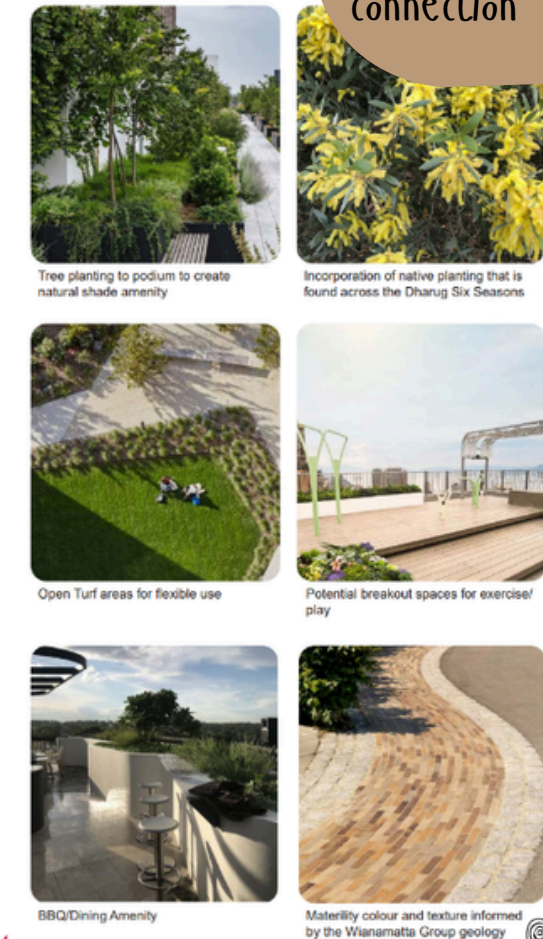
- Reintroduce and protect endemic plant species to restore local ecosystems and support biodiversity.
- Design water-sensitive landscapes that slow, filter and reuse water in alignment with natural flows.
- Retain existing trees and natural landforms wherever possible to maintain ecological and cultural continuity.
- Create habitats for native fauna through layered planting, hollows and sheltered spaces.

Communal Open Rooftop Space



Breakout spaces for exercise and play, encouraging movement, wellbeing, and connection with Country.

Open turf areas designed for flexible use, supporting gathering, play, and connection to Country.



Cultural Connection to Country

Healthy Country

What it involves

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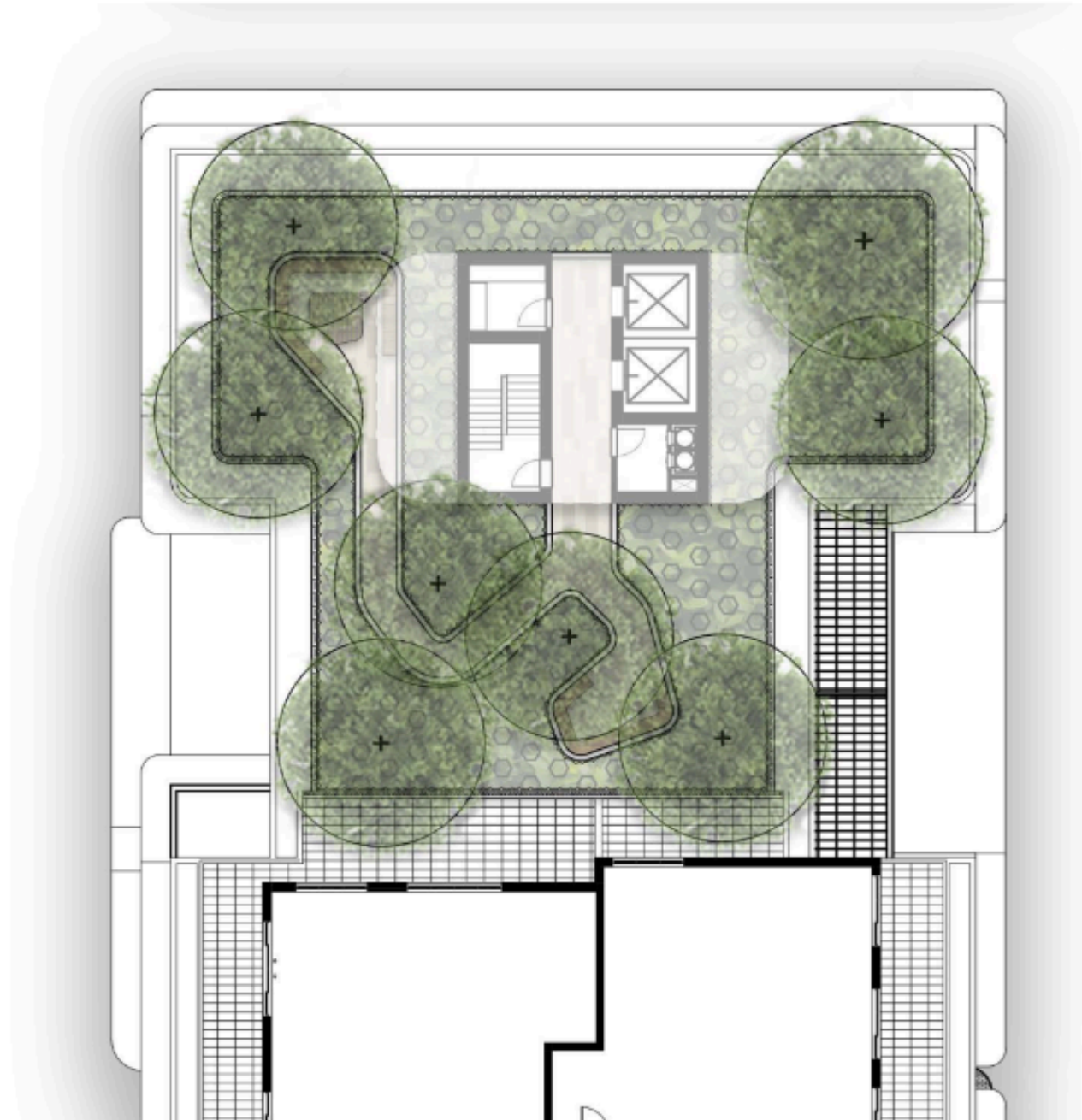
In Aboriginal worldviews, people and Country are inseparable – when Country is healthy, people are healthy. Caring for land, water and living systems sustains cultural continuity, strengthens ecological resilience and supports long-term wellbeing for both Country and community.

Tree planting on the podium to provide natural shade and enhance amenity, connecting people with the living landscape.

Examples:

- Reintroduce and protect endemic plant species to restore local ecosystems and support biodiversity.
- Design water-sensitive landscapes that slow, filter and reuse water in alignment with natural flows.
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Passive Rooftop Space



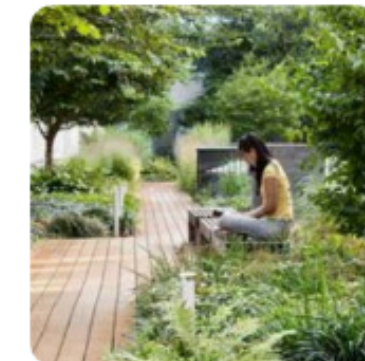
Seating nodes along pathways create moments of rest and reflection, connecting people with Country as they move through the landscape.



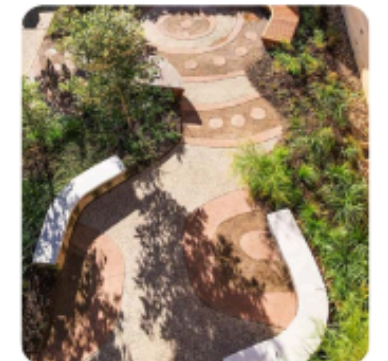
Tree planting to podium to create natural shade amenity



Incorporation of native planting that is found across the Dharug Six Seasons



Seating nooks along pathways to provide nodes of rest



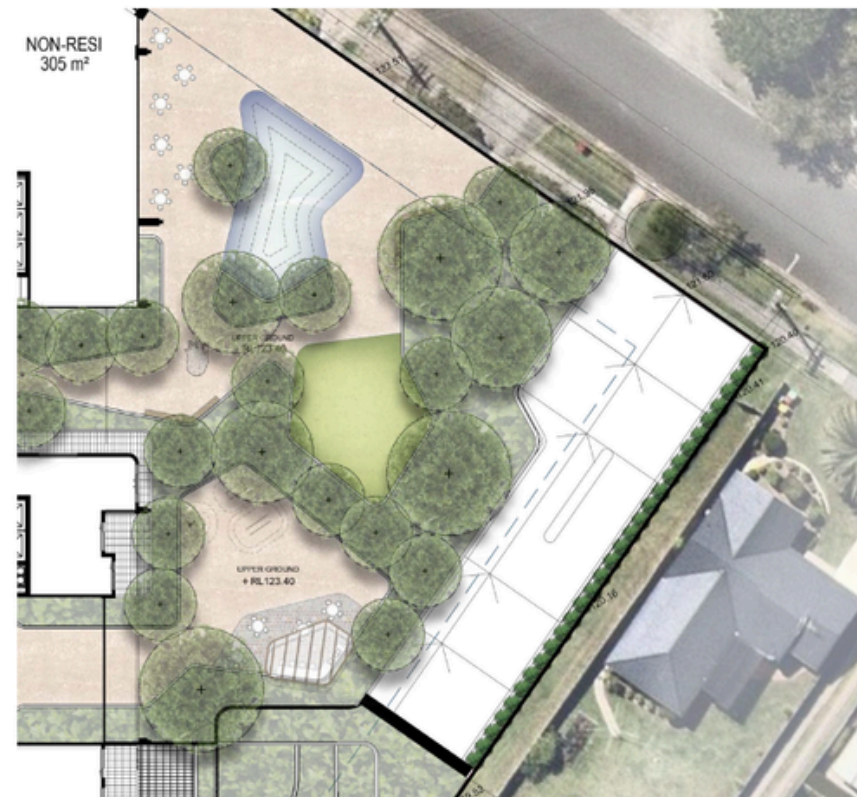
Natural paving tones/patterns further reinforce the importance of site geology (Michinbury Sandstone, Ashfield Shale)

Native plantings celebrating the Dharug Six Seasons, reflecting seasonal change and cultural knowledge.



Cultural Connection to Country

Stage 1 Private & Communal Open Space



Waterplay features celebrating the connection between freshwater and saltwater Country, and their significance to Dharug Country and life.



Outdoor gathering and dining spaces to support connection, sharing and community.

Healthy Country What it involves

Healthy Country reflects Aboriginal responsibilities to care for land, water and all living systems. It involves restoring and protecting native vegetation, supporting biodiversity and creating habitats for animals, insects and birds. Design responds to natural processes such as water flow, soil health and seasonal change, using approaches like water-sensitive design and minimal disturbance to landforms. Healthy Country also recognises cultural practices of custodianship, where caring for Country is an ongoing relationship rather than a one-off action.

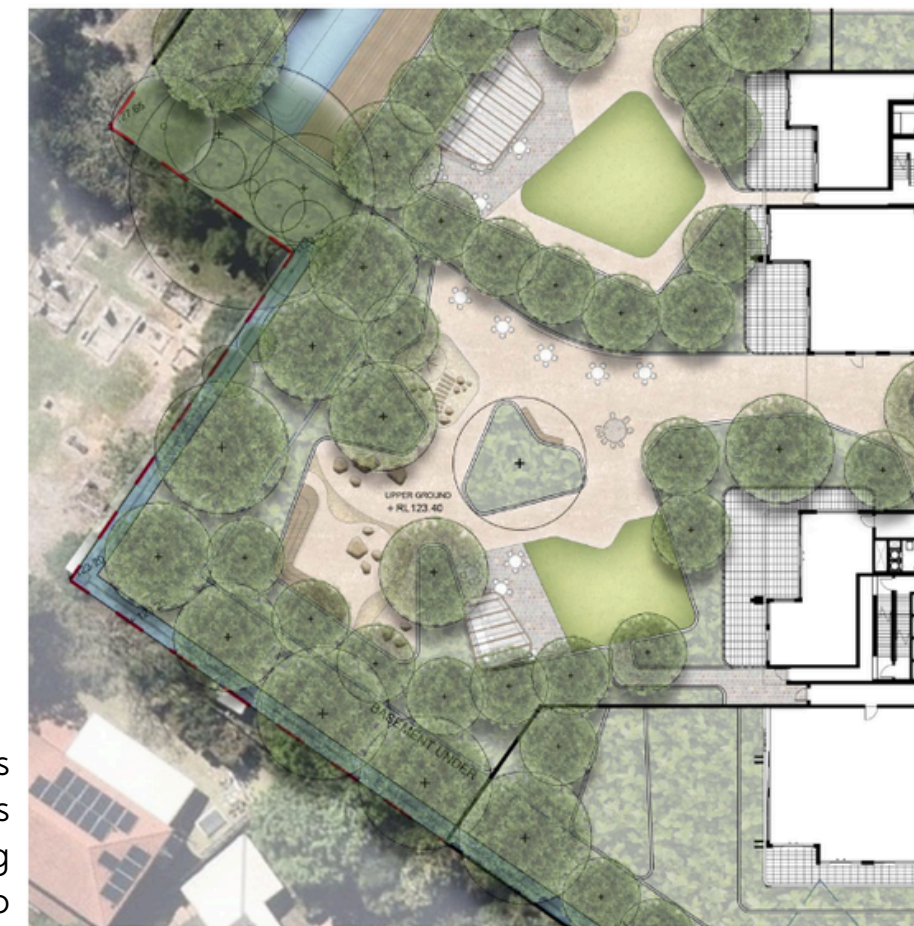
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Examples:

- Reintroduce and protect endemic plant species to restore local ecosystems and support biodiversity.
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Amphitheatre Area

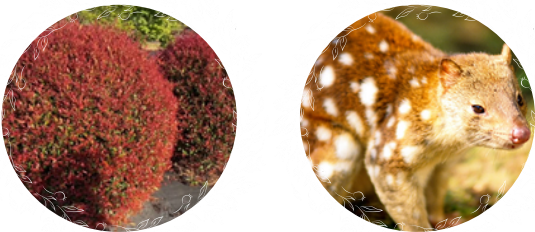


Paving tones and materials guide movement and rest, supporting intuitive wayfinding while reflecting the character of Country.

Dharug Six Seasons

Bayin Dyarra

Falling across May - June and is characterized as **Wet and Cooler**. During this time the ripening of the **Lillypilly fruits** (**Lillipilli *Acmena smithi*** fruits. During this time the cries of the **eastern spotted-tail quoll** is seeking a mate and can be heard in the forests and woodlands



Yuruga Burra

Falling across March - April and is characterized as **Hot and Dry**. During this time the Hickory Wattle *Acacia implexa* and the **Blueflax Lilly** bloom. During this time male **Kangaroo's** become more aggressive.



Bunul Marray

Falling across Jan - Feb and is characterized as **Warm and Wet**. During this season, the **Great Eel spirt** calls his children (the freshwater eels) to migrate from the rivers and creeks to the ocean to mate. It is also a time when the Golden yellow flowers of the **(Coast Myall) *Acacia binerva*** blooms

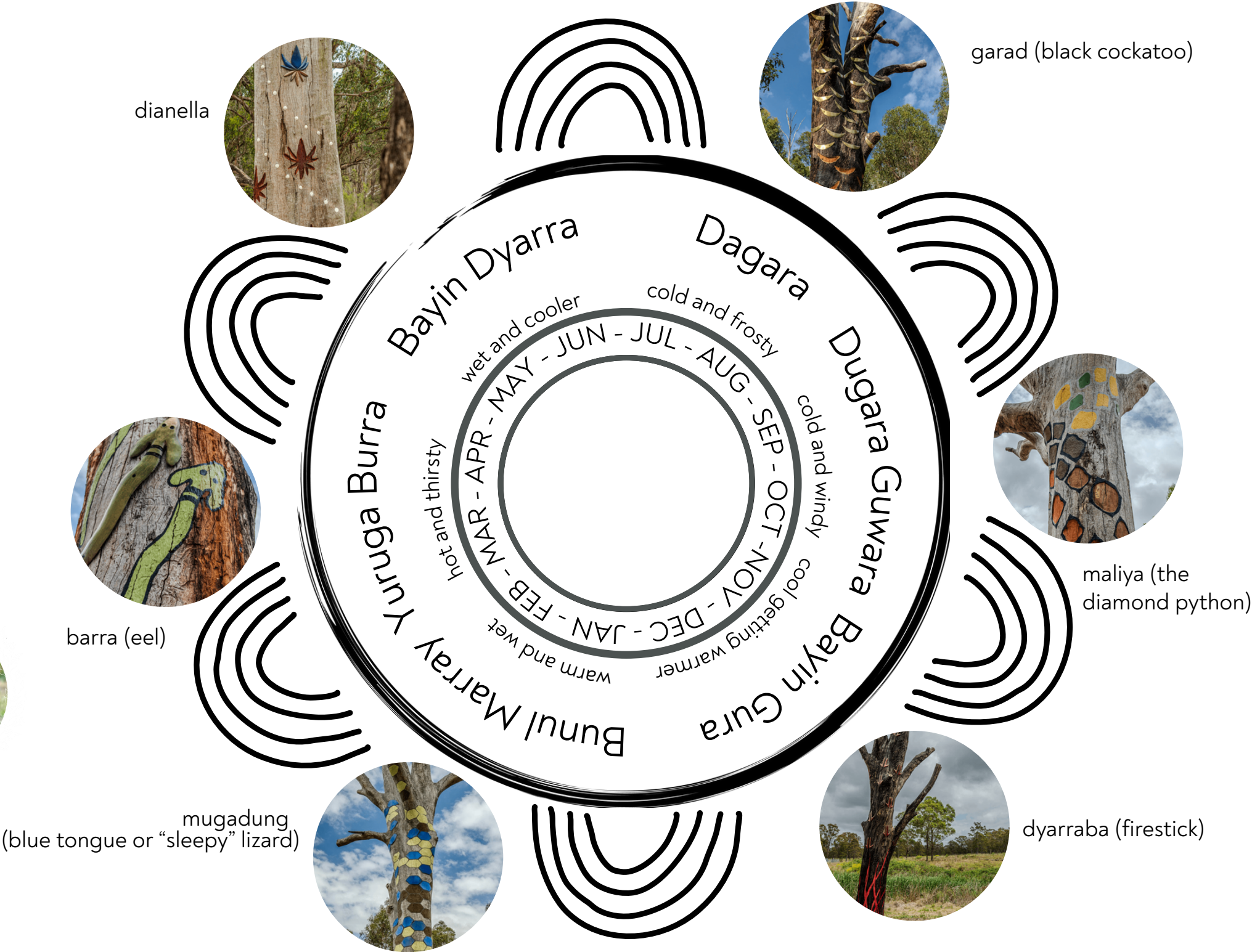


image:Weather cycles Dharug from the 2025 Western Sydney Parklands Trust, part of Greater Sydney Parklands

Dagara

Falling across July - Aug and is characterized as **Cool and Frosty**. During this time the the male **echidnas** are observed following females in an effort to mate. The **Forest Red Gum *Eucalyptus tereticornis*** is in flower.



Dugara Guwara

Falling across Sept - Oct and is characterized as **Cold and Windy**. Its time when the **Lyrebirds** are active, building their dancing mounds, and the ***Acacia floribunda*** flowers are indicating fish are running in the rivers. The subsequent flowering of *Acacia decurrens* marks the end of the **cold - windy weather** and the start of gentle spring rains.



Bayin Gura

Falling across Nov - Dec and is characterized as **Cool and getting warmer**. Its This period is also associated with the gathering of flying foxes and the blooming of the **Waratah** and **Gymea Lily**.





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