



# Moruya aged-care facility

Connecting with Country

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# Contact

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## Acknowledgement

Anyngkarrinjarra ki-awarawu\* - being still on Country

We pay respect to their spiritual and physical belonging to Country and continuous living culture, their elders past and present, and those who will come through in the future.

\*From the Yanyuwa language of Balarinji's origin community Borroloola NT

# Protocols

## CULTURAL SENSITIVITY NOTE

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this report may contain names, images or descriptions of people who have passed. These might appear in discussions, images and historical accounts.

Cultural safety in this report aligns with the NSW Government Architects framework position. Cultural safety in this report and in its design outputs is about creating a socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually safe space where there is no challenge or denial of a person's identity. For Aboriginal people this means feeling safe, valued and able to participate in their cultural, spiritual and belief systems, free from racism, discrimination and lateral violence. (Government Architect NSW 2023)

## CULTURAL SAFETY NOTE

Balarinji strives for cultural safety in our community approach. In a co-design context, we promote the following values:

- shared respect, shared meaning and shared Knowledge
- the experience of learning together with respect and deep listening
- foster environments that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination in decision-making.

## TERMINOLOGY NOTE

There are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural groups across Australia, many of whom like to be called by the name of their particular group/s. In this report, we refer to cultural groups by their specific names where possible. The terms 'traditional owners/custodians', 'Aboriginal' and/or 'Torres Strait Islander' have been used when general terms are necessary (e.g. to encompass multiple groups) or when specific cultural group names are not known. Other terminology (e.g. 'First Nations' or 'Indigenous') may also be used when quoted or with acknowledgement that these more generic terms also have international meaning and value and should not be used interchangeably with 'Aboriginal' and/or 'Torres Strait Islander'.

## REPORT LIMITATIONS

Limitations in developing design principles through consultation with Aboriginal community:

- 'Designing and Connecting with Country' is generated from community consultations and walking on Country experiences. This interpretation and the corresponding design principles are not intended to bring us culturally closer rather than being prescriptive. They represent a perspective, or collective wish for the ongoing wellbeing of Country and are offered as respected insights from community and Country.
- This report can be considered a living document. It is not a template for design production, rather, a platform for everyone involved on the Moruya aged-care facility project to collectively approach how we connect with, and care for Country. Collectively, means practicing reciprocity in your design practice – checking with community how your design decisions impact Country. The report is intended as a central cultural reference in the Moruya aged-care facility project design governance framework and is limited to this project and Country.

## Permitted Purpose

This Connecting with Country report has been prepared for IRT. The Confidential Information contained within the report remains the Intellectual Property of the locally connected elders, knowledge holders and community members who have co-developed this Connecting with Country Report with Balarinji. It is provided as a commercial-in-confidence document.

To observe Intellectual Property protocols, Balarinji and the locally connected elders, knowledge holders and community members engaged on the project confirm that we permit the distribution of this co-developed report for review only (Permitted Purpose), and under the following conditions.

The Recipient may only:

- Use this report for internal review. To share this report publicly the project team must request an anonymised version of the report, ensuring all stakeholders names and personal details are redacted prior to sharing publicly.
- Use Intellectual Property or Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) within the report for the purpose of the Moruya aged-care facility project and must ensure it is not used or reproduced for another purpose outside of the project; and
- Should the Recipient or others desire to use the Intellectual Property or ICIP provided for purposes other than the Moruya aged-care facility project, authority must be sought from and given by Balarinji, elders, knowledge holders and community members engaged by the project.

**The Permitted Purpose is to enable information sharing, while at the same time protecting Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property. It promotes the continuation of collaboration with traditional knowledge holders so the project is grounded in the unique culture and narrative of the project site, and knowledge holders specific to the report will continue to be properly engaged and recognised in all future co-design processes.**

# 01 | Executive summary

Balarinji is assisting IRT and their design consultants with Connecting with Country for their new aged-care facility in Moruya on the South Coast of NSW. Moruya is part of Brinja-Yuin Country on which the project is located.

This report aligns with the NSW Government commitments to Connecting with Country through the Government Architect's Connecting with Country Framework. In this project, connecting with Country is a collaboration with local knowledge holders to incorporate Aboriginal values, knowledge, and cultural practices into the project, to promote the sustainable stewardship of Country. This report has an international and national context of First Nations rights recognition, social policy, legislation, design standards and research.

At the time of writing, the IRT's design team are at the stage of early master planning and community consultation. Concepts of urban planning, landscape and architecture have been formed and are being tested through options investigation. In this context, connecting with Country has a role to inform the design with respect to cultural living practices of living on Brinja-Yuin Land, site-specific knowledge of endemic species, cultural responses to topography, and bringing to mind design implications for non-human and more-than-human kin.

Through Balarinji's Connecting with Country Methodology of identifying and consulting with local knowledge holders and walking on Country, the report develops Country-centered design principles organised under the NSW Architects Connecting with Framework:

- Healthy Country
- Healthy Community
- Protection of Aboriginal Heritage
- Cultural Competency and,
- Better Places

The principles act as a reference for IRT's design team to make connection to Country within their respective disciplines.

The next steps are for the design team to take time with this report to develop their respective responses to Country through their master planning. Balarinji will be available to assist the design teams to integrate their design responses.

Balarinji will ensure that traditional knowledge holders that contributed to this report will have access to its outcomes.

# 01 | Executive summary

## 1.1 Country

The proposed Moruya aged care facility will be located on Brinja-Yuin Country. It is situated on the southern perimeter of the Moruya township in the Eurobodalla Council area.



Figure 1-1. IRT Site Location

# 01 | Executive summary

## 1.2 Project

The project is being developed by aged-care providers IRT. Their proposal is for a new village-style residential aged-care facility on a green-field site. The facility will have on-site amenities including a health-care center, library, clubhouse and café to support community connection and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> IRT has expressed its interest in developing a facility that is integrated with the broader Moruya community.

IRT's vision aligns with the Eurobodalla Council's identified need for an increase of senior's housing. Council has also indicated that this type of project should exhibit qualities of a well-connected, walkable, vibrant, active facility with a strong sense of place and balance with the environment.

Balarinji's role in the project is to assist IRT and their design consultants with Connecting with Country advice to align the project with the Government Architect NSW Connecting with Country Framework and broader national and international commitments.



Figure I-2. Walking into the project site

1. IRT

# 01 | Executive summary

## 1.3 Method

This Connecting with Country report for IRT is part of a wider context of First Nations rights recognition, social policy, legislation, design standards and research. It aligns with the NSW Government Architects objectives for promoting meaningful engagement with First Nations peoples and caring for Country. The report fits with the intended outcomes of the Connecting with Country process - 'Healthy Country', 'Healthy Community', 'Protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage', 'Cultural competency' (including alignment with National Standard of Competency for Architects), and 'Better Places'.

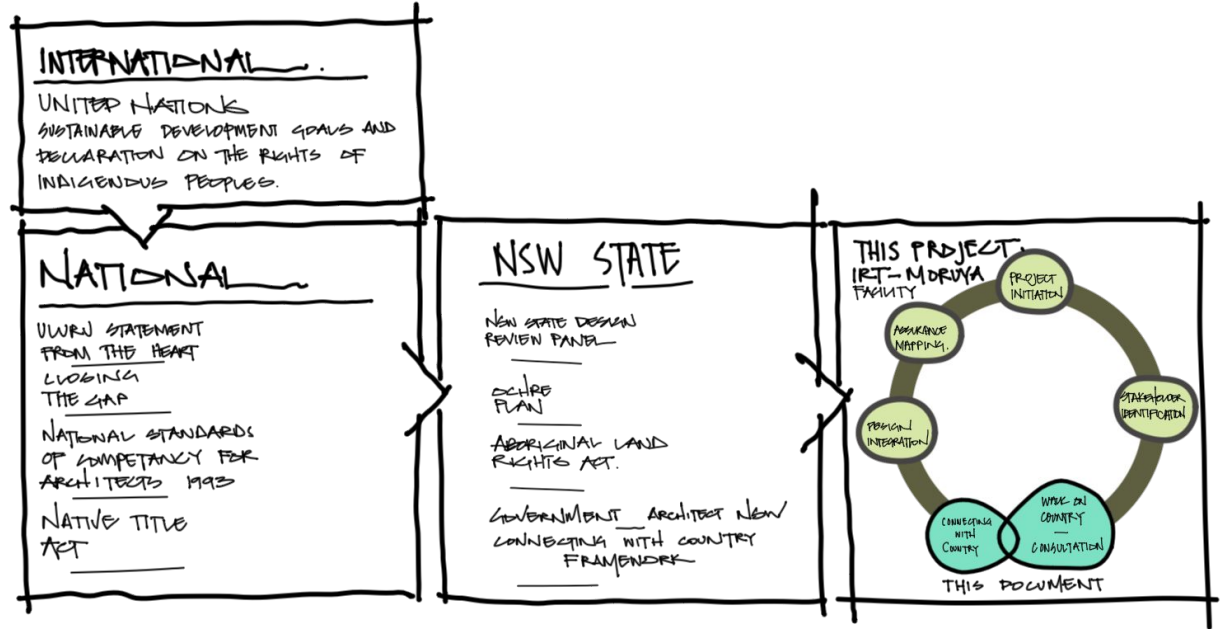


Figure 1-3. IRT Aged Care Facility. Connecting with Country Method

## 02 | Connecting with 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 and intangible, knowledges and cultural practices, identity and reciprocal relationships, belonging and wellbeing. Country also includes people, more-than humans, flora and non-breathing entities.<sup>2</sup>*

Country is comprehended through this document beyond the western notion of understanding a location. It includes sky, water/sea, human, non-human, more than human. In this project, we draw from traditional Aboriginal knowledge construction practices of Walking on Country and consulting with Traditional Knowledge holders to build a Country-centered context for IRT's proposed aged care facility.

2. Danielle Hromek – “Understanding Country” – An Approach for Engaging with Country. 2020

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.1 Consultation

This section presents the discussions conducted with local Knowledge holders during July and August 2025. These consultations were held both face-to-face and online. For clarity, the topics of discussions are organized into common threads to reflect the range of things raised and discussed. The threads are intended to provide reference points for the design teams with respect to listening to the voice of Local Knowledge Holders as they progress their design concepts. The threads are:

- Culture
- Geography, and
- Protocols and History

#### 2.1.1 CULTURE

##### Cultural Authority, Protocols and Knowledge Sharing

*“Bingie, which’s a little town – Bingie means full belly, that’s a birthing pregnancy area. So, it’s a very feminine country there.”*

The Traditional Knowledge holders spoke of their cultural authority through their lived experience, established cultural obligations, and intergenerational knowledge systems. Particular emphasis was placed on the recognition (by the design teams) of matriarchal lineages and women’s cultural business, exemplified through sites such as Bingie swamp, with established protocols governing gender-appropriate engagement practices.

##### Language Revitalisation and Cultural Education

*“Using the language from that country, because that’s the other thing, I think that sometimes people do, non-Aboriginal people, they’ll hear a name that appeals to them. But making it relevant to, like, if it’s an aged care facility, you know, there are words that we use for our old men and our old women and so it’d be really nice to really, one, to include language, but to use language that’s relevant to the facility that’s being built.”*

The Dhurga language constitutes a fundamental component of cultural continuity within the region. The consultation participants advocate for the systematic integration of local Aboriginal language across multiple means, including public signage, nomenclature for buildings, rooms, and geographical locations, as well as broader landscape applications.

The consultation findings indicate that language is regarded as a spiritual medium that facilitates direct connection between community members and Country.

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.1 Consultation

#### Naming, Representation and Story Telling in Design

*“Language is one of the most important things because it holds that magic and connectedness to everyone. We talk to the land, the land holds that language so when we speak to the animals or the trees in language, they react because that’s the only language they knew or know for thousands of years. It’s really important that language is incorporated. It shows they’re respectful and that we can move forward and walk together as a community instead of being separated all the time. It’s important for us to not only teach our people, but teach the wider community around us so they have an understanding of who we are as people.”*

Consultation findings indicate strong recommendations for cultural recognition and integration initiatives. These include correcting local place names such as Mantle Hill, and incorporating Aboriginal language in meaningful and respectful ways across institutional settings. Participants recommended embedding cultural storytelling elements within building design and landscape planning. The consultation identified needs for sharing Aboriginal histories through interpretive signage, educational trails, art installations, and designed gardens. Additionally, participants emphasized acknowledging the positive contributions of Aboriginal peoples to local development and community survival, including their role in providing food security during flood events.

#### 2.1.2 GEOGRAPHY

##### Deep Connection with Country

*“That area was a tribal gathering area and camp place as well. There were big ceremonial gatherings near the headlands there, south head also on the Northern side as well. That was because of the abundance of food and rivers and big ceremonial grounds and gathering places.”*

The Traditional Knowledge holders spoke of their ancestral and contemporary connections to Country. It encompasses Yuin Country from Moruya to Narooma, Bega, Broulee, the Shoalhaven River, Tuross, and extending beyond – as far as the Pilbara. They spoke of the riverine systems, wetland environments, and coastal zones within this region possessing spiritual, ecological, and cultural significance, functioning as traditional songlines and historical trade corridors. These locations are regarded as sacred sites that serve as primary elements of personal identity, intergenerational family heritage, and collective community welfare.

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.1 Consultation

#### Dreaming Stories, Totems and Song Lines

*“Birribarn, which is the Coastal emu, it has a big story there, and it comes and it goes up into the high country. So one of our big dreaming stories is the Coastal emu used to be head of skin and a really short version is, ego, greed, power, you know, started to power play, you know, charm up, and do wrong way and then so Narra nurra or bulln-bulln, the lyrebird, it was an elder of that skin see, and he spoke to the other other elders of the tribe and then they had this kind of you know, up and coming fulla that’s the eagle in Mirong. And Mirong was showing all the good behaviours and you know, ways of the good leader. Anyway, so time came and the coastal emu Birribarn and the eagle had a big standoff, and they went all around down in the country, and they had a big battle, and they went right down to a place called a little place called Buckin, which crosses over into Gunni country and then they went up towards Jindabyne and it ended up being the eagle Mirum, took his rightful place as skin”*

The Dreaming stories of Moruya area include Birribahn (emu) and Mirrung (eagle) narrative, the black swan (Gunyung) Dreaming, and regional bunyip stories. These stories collectively establish connections between land stewardship, moral frameworks, and governance systems. Traditional songlines traverse the geographical area, predominantly following riverine corridors and ridgeline formations, serving to connect language groups and regional territories.

#### Environmental and Ecological Knowledge

*“Also the Cherry tree is really important for us, ceremonial and as well as holding that story. We call our cherry mamaadja and it also means eldest sister. Cherry Ballad is the European name. It was one of the first plants gifted to us from creator to use because it’s a medicine plant but it’s also good for making wood artefacts and we also used the leaves to do smoking ceremonies and we eat the cherries also. It’s one of the only plants that has the seeds on the outside of the fruit.”*

The consultation participants possess deep traditional ecological knowledge systems, encompassing multiple knowledge domains. These include sophisticated temporal frameworks utilising 12-13 seasonal moon calendars, and established cultural indicators incorporating flowering wattle patterns, wind system variations, and fish migration seasonality. The knowledge held by the Brinja-Yuin community encompasses extensive understanding of native flora, including spotted gums, bush cherry, wattles, and tea trees, utilized for subsistence, medicinal applications, weaving practices, and ceremonial purposes.

Additionally, traditional fire management methodologies form an integral component of the Brinja-Yuin knowledge system.

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.1 Consultation

#### Cultural Heritage and Protection

*“... when the bulldozers go in, they might need to have somebody who knows about Aboriginal artefacts to be on site. So that if they disturbed it and they could actually spot them before they buried them...And that way, they might be able to be collected and even displayed or something somewhere in the final building or something.”*

The geographical area demonstrates significant potential for cultural artifact deposits, including silcrete tool scatter sites and sacred site locations. Topographical features such as creek systems, and riverbank formations are conceptualized as living archival repositories. Consultation participants have articulated strong recommendations for the implementation of on-site cultural monitoring protocols, particularly during excavation and earthworks activities, to ensure the protection of archaeological materials and culturally significant landscapes.

#### 2.1.3 PROTOCOLS AND HISTORY

##### Historical Dispossession, Sovereignty and Justice

*“When we were 30 miles out to sea catching fish, white people down the bottom, came up and started tearing our house down. Photos in the newspaper. In the museum over there. In the newspaper the whole lot.”*

Participants spoke of historical accounts of forced displacement, land dispossession, violence, and institutional racism feature prominently in consultation findings. Participants identified persistent and unresolved grievances regarding systemic injustices, including the forcible removal of families, exclusionary practices by council and government entities that marginalized

Consultation participants maintain assertions that Aboriginal sovereignty remains intact and was never formally relinquished.

##### Cultural Safety and Representation

*“In existing homes everyone’s all mixed together. Sometimes Aboriginal people like to be with other Aboriginal people. If there was a section, a dedicated room. If I was in there I would like to be able to mix with mob.”*

Consultation participants emphasized the imperative for establishing culturally safe environments that encompass both physical design elements and emotional-spiritual considerations. Physical design requirements include the incorporation of soft landscaping features, access to native plant species, and the provision of familiar outdoor environments. Participants expressed concerns regarding potential post-development inaccessibility or unwelcoming environments within the proposed spaces. The consultation findings indicate that design approaches must authentically reflect Aboriginal presence and cultural values, avoiding tokenistic representations. The requirement for genuine cultural integration extends beyond superficial design elements to encompass meaningful cultural expression and community accessibility.

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.1 Consultation

#### **Inclusive Identity and Shared Custodianship**

*“But if there’s any acknowledgement of people that it’s more inclusive rather than exclusive. But our stories are common stories. So regardless of how we identify as a subgroup if you like, it’s important that I think all our stories are valued and any portrayal of our people, perhaps is inclusive and not exclusive and not definitive because we can’t even agree on that ourselves.”*

The consultation process identified diverse expressions of cultural identity across the regional area, including Brinja, Walbunga, and Thowra affiliations. Participants expressed caution regarding non-Aboriginal determinations of community membership and belonging. Community representatives emphasised the importance of inclusive approaches and collaborative storytelling practices, prioritizing unity over inter-group divisions within the consultation framework.

#### **Local Aboriginal Employment and Procurement**

*“It would be good to be able to try and maybe get pulled together a bit of a database of who they are and to maybe put a target of Aboriginal employment onto the program. Not just the construction phase of it. But maybe even, you know, the developmental stages around architecture.”*

Consultation participants demonstrated strong advocacy for Aboriginal-led economic development initiatives. Recommendations include establishing Indigenous procurement targets exceeding minimum requirements, with local targets of 15-20% identified as appropriate benchmarks. Participants emphasized the engagement of local Aboriginal contractors, skilled trades personnel, and cultural guides throughout project implementation. The development of a comprehensive database documenting local Indigenous business enterprises was identified as a priority requirement. Consultation findings indicate that Aboriginal community involvement should be integrated across all project phases, encompassing planning, design, construction, and operational stages

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.2 Walk on Country

*“Walking Country is a cultural practice of Aboriginal peoples. It involves ‘moving through, sensing, and listening to what Country is telling us’ while facilitating knowledge sharing”<sup>3</sup>*

The Walk on Country was held on the 17th July 2025. The walk was led by an Elder of the Brinja-Yuin community with design consultants and IRT representatives attending. Balarinji facilitated the walk.

#### 2.2.1 THE WALK

A cohort of stakeholders including client representatives, client-side project management, urban planner and Balarinji joined Brinja-Yuin Elder, Patricia Ellis OAM on a walk on Country in July 2025.

The weather was cool and dry. A large mob of Kangaroo were in the valley of the creek that runs at the north western part of the site.

The walk group met at the south-eastern entry to the site. After an overview of the project from IRT at the entry to the property, the group moved onto the site.

The group moved towards the closest mature tree as a place to talk about Country. Patricia Ellis articulated how the topography of the site could be read as the high, north-facing parts being favoured as having access to northern light and protection from cold seasonal southerly winds. She noted that there were health reasons as the location was sufficiently away from the creeks to not contaminate the drinking water source.



Figure 2-1. Kangaroo tracks. Non-human kin

Figure 2-2. Walk - Talking about Country

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.2 Walk on Country

The group naturally moved towards the next mature tree. It was indicated that the trees were quiet old and looked to have been marked by Aboriginal people with manufactures stone tools. One tree looked to exhibit a canoe shape on its south facing bark surface. Given its proximity to the creek that flows to the Moruya River, it was thought to be an example of a 'canoe tree'.

Heading north across the ridgeline Patricia Ellis picked up a small piece of stone. She explained that it was a tool artefact made from Silcrete. She explained the practice of tool making and how a large stone would be carried across Country and chipped into a tool when needed. She placed the stone tool back on the ground.



Figure 2-3. Stone tool found

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.2 Walk on Country

The group continued around the site following the topography of the northern creek line. Patricia Ellis stopped at a number of places to point out the various endemic plants that she could identify as having cultural meaning, practical use, or medicinal value. Whilst this information was noted, their inclusion in a future design context will require a specific approach and strategy as part of the landscape design through consultation with Traditional Knowledge holders. In a broad sense, many of the plants that were shown to the group could be used for craft/art such as weaving, food or medicinal. This knowledge could be made available to future residents to a cultural narrative and landscape design to enhance their daily in their activities and connection with Country.

Towards the end of the walk, the group passed the creek on the northern boundary and stopped on the long grass just below a small dam on the eastern side of the property. Patricia Ellis noted how the long, lush grass just below the dam was the sleeping location of the large Kangaroo mob.



Figure 2-4. Plants - Fishing line making

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.2 Walk on Country

The walk ended at a dam on the eastern side of the property. The walk had looped around from the eastern entry to the site towards the natural water courses on the northern side of the property. The walk were punctuated by natural features such as the mature gums or other plants. The reflected on the age of the trees to reflect on what this place would have been like pre-colonial times. Having tracked along the northwest water course valley – talking about plants and animals, Patricia Ellis spoke of the water at the dam and how the presence of frogs and ducks indicated a clean – sustainable ecosystem “otherwise, they (the frogs and ducks) would’ve left”. The frogs were also evident (from their sound) in the larger water course at the northern and western part of the site indicating a healthy ecosystem.



Figure 2-5. Walk on Country

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.2 Walk on Country

#### 2.2.2 Walk – Discussion

This section provides insights from the discussion during the walk on Country. The content is reflective and narrative in style. Each piece of conversation is complemented with a corresponding design perspective. A summary diagram is included in at the end.

#### Being on Country: Past living practices are still relevant

Patricia Ellis spoke of how Aboriginal people living practices were directly dictated by the nature of Country and their care for It's systems.

Keeping dwelling areas appropriate distances from watercourses supported the health of the ecosystem and the community by not disturbing the water ecology and not contributing contamination.

Positioning locations for dwelling on higher north facing ground out of the prevailing winter wind protected the people and contributed to thermal comfort. Patricia Ellis indicated how this would have manifested on the site pointing out where people would have situated themselves to avoid the wind (see diagram below). A discarded stone tool was found by Patricia Ellis on the higher ground and discussion turned to this as evidence of previous dwelling location on the higher protected ground – supporting the earlier hypothesis of dwelling site preference for protection from the southerly wind.

Much of this knowledge of designing for environmental conditions can be found in contemporary design practice. Patricia Ellis's description of the site provides direct First Nation knowledge and narrative for situating and creating comfortable dwelling spaces.

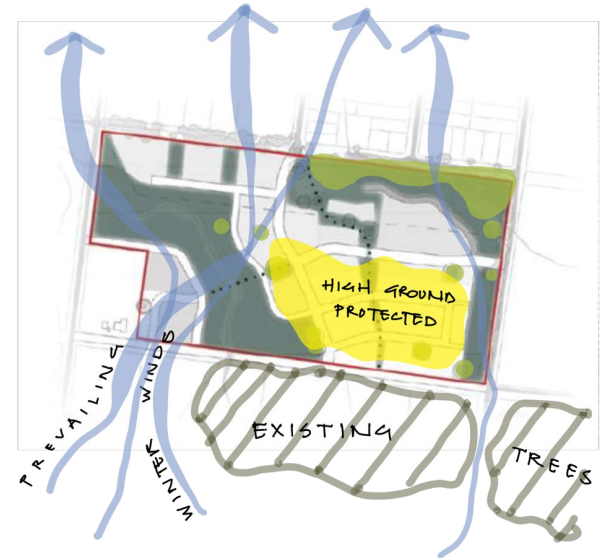


Figure 2-6. Conditions that influence living on Country

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.2 Walk on Country

#### **Maintaining knowledge: Memory is held in Country**

“A process of unlearning of anthropocentric behaviour and relearning key relationships is crucial”<sup>4</sup>

There are a number of very old trees on the site. Considered as kin, their age indicates they have been residents of this place and witnessed changes over time – possibly hundreds of years. They are a temporal connection to the past as well as a physical presence on Country. They are the holders of knowledge on this specific location. Their protection and celebration of their place on the site is to be carefully woven into the design and narrative of place.



4. Hromek. 2020. An Approach For Engaging with Country

Figure 2-7. Non-human kin

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.2 Walk on Country

#### Stories of place: Interpretive history (of Country)

Patricia Ellis indicated there are many opportunities for the telling of stories of Country. These can be drawn from the Dreaming through to post-colonial stories of the timber industry (that felled many of the trees in the area), bushrangers that frequented the South Coast and local shipwrecks.

There is much opportunity to build a rich narrative of place that extends to the start of time through to contemporary renderings of the location. A narrative overlay of the master planning will reveal opportunities for a strategic approach to associating the planning and design with different stories and the application of these stories in terms of naming of buildings and places/art installation/surface treatments.

Other stories are more difficult to tell. Patricia Ellis shared the history of cultural segregation but also how the Aboriginal community helped the Moruya community in times of environmental crisis. Truth telling is essential on the path to reconciliation and should not be shunned as an opportunity in creating a full understanding of place. The telling of the contribution of the Aboriginal community in supporting the Moruya community is also an important story. A sensitive acknowledgement of the cultural history will require a corresponding design approach to the content and format of this telling of history to make it present and meaningful. As with all design with Country and history, it is important to undertake this process in consultation with Local Knowledge Holders.

#### Placemaking I: Knowing and understanding where you are

Patricia Ellis told the walking group about how younger community members were taken to the high hills that form an escarpment above Moruya. From this location they were shown the extent of their Country and made aware this was theirs and that they were free to go anywhere on their Country. She indicated that this practice ensured connection with Country and a way of setting protocol for being on Country.

There is an opportunity to build on this narrative protocol in a contemporary context. Many of the future residents of IRT's aged care facility will not be from Moruya. Drawing from the Brinja-Yuin cultural practice of showing and describing Country to those that are developing their knowledge, there is design opportunity to build in amenity of identity that the residents can associate with whilst also offering a destination for the broader community to connect with. Ensuring the cultural reference of "knowing the Country you are on" is articulated, design for a sense of belonging and welcoming can be developed as an individual strategy that attracts various design intentions of social gathering and exchange.

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.2 Walk on Country

#### Placemaking 2 – Activity on Country

Patricia Ellis told the group how Aboriginal people led industrious lives. Older people would educate youth on toolmaking, rope making and plant identification for various uses. A contemporary rendering of these practices often appear in urban settings as purpose-driven social gathering spaces such as men's sheds, seed propagation groups, various artist studios that teach, and maker spaces.

IRT's new facility has an opportunity to draw on traditional practices of Country and merge with a contemporary amenity of social production spaces. Whilst initially having a practical focus, a series of social production spaces across the aged-care village could serve as focal points for residents and places for social integration with the broader community. IRT indicated its goal for community inclusion and access across the site. The programming and design of a series of spaces (that could be a revenue source as rentable spaces) could provide the catalyst for integration for the community and interest for the residents.

#### Sustainability Implication from Walking on Country

Sustainability was discussed over the period of the walk. It was discussed in a number of ways:

- **Food.** Aboriginal people did not deplete food resources. Their practice was to selectively harvest particular food sources and leaving evidence of what was harvested so the next group would understand which food source to harvest whilst the other recovers. Whilst modern availability of food at all seasons and volumes create other questions of being sustainable, the central premise of the cultural practices of selective harvesting and forewarning of community is one of living in balance with Country and showing communal responsibility.
- **Fire.** Patricia Ellis spoke of the traditional land management of the shaping of the tree canopy through selective forestry. She spoke of the formation of the tree canopy in a wedge formation fronting the predominant fire direction. This deflected the fire up – leaving a relatively protected area.

- **Non-human kin habitat** – Whilst walking, Patricia Ellis pointed out the habitats of non-human kin. Old trees support the possums, sea eagles and black cockatoos. Banksia trees are called 'apartment blocks' as they support many species. Frogs and ducks were noted as evidence of healthy water ecosystems. Snakes were noted as being abundant (apparently more scared of humans than the other way around). They are also integral to the health of the ecosystem.

A common thread in the sustainability conversation was the notion of 'giving-back'. Being sustainable means not being extractive, but contributing to a whole system whether community, across kinship or good practice of maintaining Country in balance.

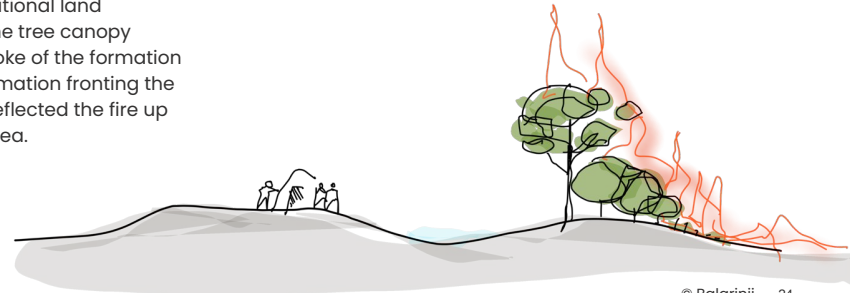


Figure 2-8. Traditional fire management

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.2 Walk on Country

#### **Socio-economic Implication from Walking on Country**

A question was asked by the group during the walk about the traditional practices of looking after old people.

Patricia Ellis spoke of looking after their old people until they couldn't at which time, (these days) would then go to a facility like IRT. This will need further conversations, but it was made clear that the caring for a family member is part of cultural responsibility. This will have cross-cultural implications for the way that people come into care and the inclusion of family as part of the persons care (and corresponding amenity).

Patricia Ellis spoke of the success of various health services institutions in the area that train and employ Aboriginal people. IRT indicated this was part of their plan. This inclusion also has the potential for 'seeing ourselves in this place' and other cultural safety practices.

#### **Landscape implication from Walking on Country**

Patricia Ellis noted that every native plant has a medicinal, sustenance, practical or spiritual significance. Opportunity exists to map the landscape in this context so that the new design can include these plants and their narrative across the new facility offering residents an enhanced connection with Country.

Protecting the water ecology was also prominent in the discussion during the walk. The health of the water systems is directly related to the protection and caring for Country.

## 02 | Connecting with Country

### 2.2 Walk on Country

#### Summary diagram

The diagram documents the conversation over the walk in a graphic representation. It includes other elements like IRT's goal to integrate the broader Moruya community by suggesting indicative nodal points in the development where social and cultural activity can happen.

Further attention is drawn to the area to the north-west of the site that is directly across from the adjoining Moruya Cemetery. This has been indicated as potentially being a culturally sensitive location. This responds to the stories of Aboriginal people not having access to burial sites in the cemetery and the practice of burying people on the perimeter of the cemetery. The location being adjacent to the cemetery is noted to reflect this story.

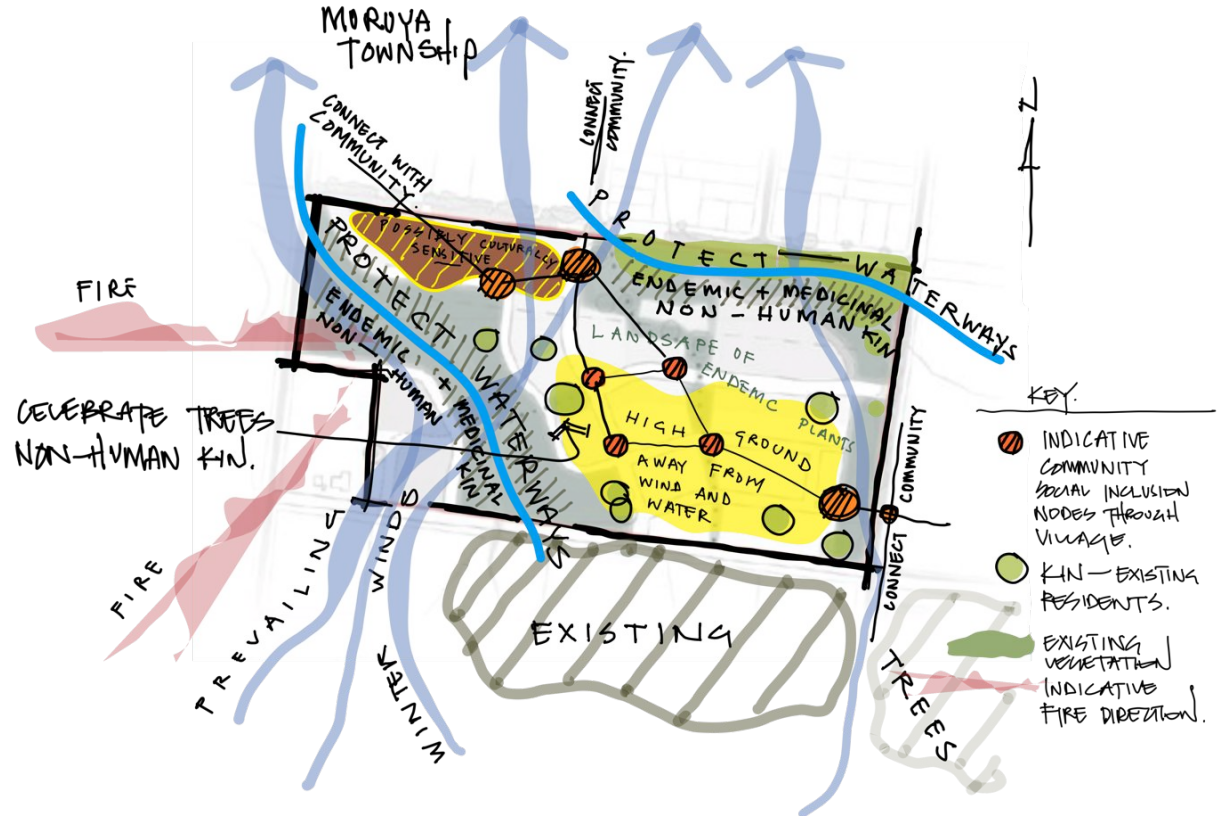


Figure 2-9. Summary of Walk on Country

## 03 | Country-centred Design Principles



For this report we have drawn from traditional Aboriginal knowledge construction practices of Walking on Country and consulting with Traditional Knowledge holders to build a Country-centred context for IRT's proposed aged care facility. This section brings together the knowledge as a set of design principles. Whilst drawn from the traditional knowledge construction, the principles are framed by, and support the NSW Government Architect Connecting with Country Framework outcomes of: 'Healthy Country', 'Healthy Community', 'Protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage', 'Cultural competency' (including alignment with National Standard of Competency for Architects), and 'Better Places'.

The content of this section acknowledges the extent of master planning already undertaken by the design team. Its purpose is to provide reference principles going forward as the design team further develops the planning.

### 3.1 P1 – HEALTHY COUNTRY

#### P1.1 – Protect existing ecological systems.

Design needs to protect water and Sky Country. Ensure manipulation of the topography and introduction of new surfaces does not negatively impact on the water ecology.

Ensure lighting design does not interfere with the traditional travel routes and locations of food resource for non-human kin (birds/flying fox and others).

#### P1.2 – Retain natural systems including supporting regeneration of endemic plants.

Endemic plants are currently found across the site. Existing plant environments can be regenerated and introduced throughout the landscape design.

## 03 | Country-centred Design Principles



### 3.2 P2 – HEALTHY COMMUNITY

#### P2.1 – Inclusive community

IRT has indicated a desire for the new aged care facility to be open and inclusive. They have a goal for the aged care community to be intermingled with the broader Moruya community. In the context of Connecting with Country, the design for inclusive community needs to exhibit qualities of all cultures being welcomed into the village. These spaces should be carefully designed at scale and amenity for all ages, cultural rituals, larger gathering through to chance meeting spots that link across the village north to Moruya and throughout between key worker housing and the village.

#### P2.2 – Active community

The small stone tool that was found during the walk indicates the site of IRT's new facility has a long history as a community gathering place. Before European colonisation, Indigenous people lived here, made tools, and shared their knowledge and skills with others.

This historical context of an active, productive community provides important guidance for designing the contemporary aged care facility. Just as this site once fostered knowledge-sharing and community contribution, the new development should include spaces where residents can remain active and engaged. These areas should enable residents to share their skills, stay productive, and contribute meaningfully to the broader community.

By incorporating active and inclusive amenities throughout the village, the design can honor the site's heritage while supporting residents' wellbeing and community connection. These types of spaces can support the sharing of Aboriginal cultural heritage as well as other cultures.

#### P2.3 – Culturally Safe Community

Community consultations showed that the Brinja-Yuin people have a traditional matriarchal social structure that continues to be important in their community today. To create healthy community design that connects with Country, the facility should incorporate this matriarchal perspective into its planning. This approach can help ensure the spaces are welcoming, inclusive, and safe for all users.

## 03 | Country-centred Design Principles



### 3.3 P3 – PROTECTION OF ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE

'It is critical that Aboriginal cultural heritage is protected in the built environment, both through the design and development of projects, and by acknowledging and respecting the rights of Aboriginal people and community over their cultural intellectual property.'<sup>5</sup>

At all stages of the development, the project team undertake their work with respect to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property of Aboriginal people. This refers to Indigenous peoples' rights to their cultural heritage based on the fundamental right to self-determination. Cultural heritage includes all aspects of cultural practices, traditional knowledge, resources and knowledge systems developed by Indigenous people as part of their Indigenous identity.

*"... when the bulldozers go in, they might need to have somebody who knows about Aboriginal artefacts to be on site. So that if they disturbed it and they could actually spot them before they buried them...And that way, they might be able to be collected and even displayed or something somewhere in the final building or something."*

Consultation indicated the need for Aboriginal Knowledge Holders to advise on cultural heritage on the site as the development progresses.

Cultural heritage can further be respected and maintained through naming places/spaces/buildings.



Figure 3-1. Scar tree on the IRT site

5. NSW Government Architect. Connecting with Country Framework. 2023

## 03 | Country-centred Design Principles



### 3.4 P4 – CULTURAL COMPETENCY

#### P4.1 – Design Consultants Competency.

The 2021 National Standards of Competency for Architects Performance Criteria provides a reference for the design team Cultural Competency. Specific competency criteria are (summarised):

- PC3 (project planning – considering implications for Country),
- PC8 (implementing culturally responsive and meaningful engagement processes with Aboriginal people)
- PC15 (compliance with legal and ethical obligations relating to copyright, moral rights and others)
- PC17 (understanding and design for aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for caring for Country)
- PC27 (Understanding how to embed the knowledge, perspectives and world views of Aboriginal people)
- PC34 (engaging with and communicating culturally responsive methods),
- PC36 (creatively engage with Aboriginal people to produce a coherent Country-centred design),
- PC45 (selection of standards, materials, etc that does not negatively impact Country)
- PC50 (engage with Aboriginal people appropriately throughout all stages of the project for a meaningful and respectful outcome).



Figure 3-2. Ngunnawal artist Bradley Mapiva Brown in front of his artwork at Canberra Hospital

## 03 | Country-centred Design Principles



### 3.5 P5 – BETTER PLACES

#### P5.1 – Knowing what Country you are on

This design principle seeks to ensure that future residents are aware of the Country that they are on. This principle reflects on the traditional knowledge sharing of Country and seeks to embed this through the design of the village. In a contemporary context, this can be achieved through wayfinding, signage, opportunities for (historic and truth telling) story-telling and cultural engagement.

#### P5.2 – Design with Country

The design principle seeks to contextualise the design by appropriately working with materials of Country so that the village is part of Country.



Figure 3-3. Coexist with elder non-human kin and community (Neeson Murcutt Neille)

## 04 | Next steps

- Design team to take time with this report to develop their respective responses to Country.
- Balarinji is available to assist the design team to integrate their design responses.
- Balarinji will follow their method of closing the loop of consultation, walk, reporting and feeding the outcomes back to those consulted and contributed to this report..



**Thank you**

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