



**Cultural Connections Narrative Report**  
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Project of Dr Charlie Brennan t/a Sacred Places

Centre for Ecological Learning

Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance

Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife

Great Eastern Ranges 'Glideways' project.

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We acknowledge this beautiful nurturing place.

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## Great Eastern Ranges initiative 'Glideways' project

This project is a collaboration of Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance, Great Eastern Ranges initiative, Centre for Ecological Learning / Dr Charlie Brennan.

This report is on the 'Cultural Connections' component of the wider Great Eastern Ranges 'Glideways' project funded by Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife. Other components include:

- 1) Albury Conservation Company – 'Armchair monitoring of Squirrel Glider nest boxes in Thurgoona a remote possibility into reality'.
- 2) K2W – 'Glideways Teaching and School Activities Package'.
- 3) Hinterland Bush Links Project – 'Restoring glider habitat in the Reesville Wildlife Corridor'.
- 4) Central Victorian Biolinks – 'Boosting Glider conservation on Private Land Central Victoria'.

For further information on the GER Glideways project go to <http://www.glideways.org.au>.

## Project Rationale

This report is written as a reflective and instructive account of the process of how this 'Glideways Cultural Connections' project came about and progressed through its stages.

Increasingly, connectivity conservation is being adopted as the best way to go about conserving our environment and the species and ecosystems that constitute it. The central tenet of this approach is to identify key wildlife corridors in the landscape and to then attempt to reverse the fragmentation of habitat along these corridors.

Fragmentation renders species and ecosystems vulnerable to multiple, and potentially compounding, threats of climate change, invasive species, urban impacts, disease and so on. This reversal can come in the form of protective measures such as bush regeneration, fencing, in-fill planting to re-create connectivity and through the installation of stepping-stone planted areas amongst other on-ground measures. This approach is generally accepted good science and best practice conservation, though with some interesting exceptions (Franzen, 2015).

This whole-of-landscape management approach also necessitates the formation of cross-sectoral co-operative arrangements between the various and different landowners and land managers in any

given connectivity conservation initiative. This requires organisations and people, often with very different priorities, practices and values, to work together. These are typically, government departments, farmer groups, mining/forestry interests, conservation organisations, environmental advocates, community educators and Indigenous community groups. In Australia the Great Eastern Ranges initiative (<http://www.greasternranges.org.au>), amongst several others, has been bringing together literally 100's of organisations to implement its vision of 3,600 km's of connected landscapes up and down the east coast of Australia. 'Connecting nature, connecting communities', as Wyborn (2015) points out requires application of other practices beyond the original scientific imperative.

As organisations have adopted connectivity conservation as the organising principle for conservation, their funding, resources and time have been invested into mapping corridors through detailed data collection of the distribution and movements of species, particularly threatened species. Mapping is compiled, stakeholders engaged and implementation plans devised. Funding is sought and alliances enter into dialogues as to how to manage projects. Increasingly, this conservation is top-down, professional and technical and well removed from the bottom-up, community-based Landcare conservation movement that so galvanised a generation of Australians in the 1990's and beyond (Tennent & Lockie 2013).

Significantly, this shift in emphasis to this technical approach requires different skills and draws participants from particular NRM, conservation, ecology and management discipline areas. This is in line with the wider shift in government policy (ibid) to a corporate outcomes-based approach (ibid) over the last decade. In short, the ascendancy of corridor mapping has tended to be another step away from community-based conservation.

### Great Eastern Ranges & connectivity conservation

There can be little doubt that cross-sector and whole-of-landscape conservation is genuinely exciting and innovative. The following is a story from Great Eastern Ranges Newsletter of April 2015: ‘Stories from the field – Continuing to inspire’

Most GER supporters will be familiar with the GER Forum, held August last year, but if you didn’t get the chance to attend, you can still see our [Stories from the Field](#) segment on You Tube.

Presented by eight speakers from across the GER landscape, each provided a welcome snapshot of connectivity conservation in their region. With topics as varied as strategic property acquisitions to help preserve the endangered Southern Cassowary in far north Queensland to the integration of

connectivity conservation principles into curricula in Hunter Valley educational institutions, it was interesting to see a common theme emerge – the need for connected communities as well as connected habitat.

Charlie Brennan, Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance Facilitator, says the short films evoked a lively discussion at a recent Jaliigirr Alliance meeting where partners discussed future strategies to more-closely integrate communities, ideas and goals into an ongoing conservation relationship.

“We all understand that unless there are connected ecologies, landscape resilience and biodiversity plummets, but we are yet to fully appreciate just how important connected communities are to landscape-scale conservation too.

“Alliances - organisations of people, ideas and goals - are becoming increasingly common with cross-sector arrangements rapidly emerging as dominant public policy, particularly when applying for government funds for conservation projects. But, alliances are also important for other reasons as well,” Charlie says.

“Stories from the Field showcased the broad range of support for GER and the value of working cross-tenure and across social boundaries to create a greater collaborative and community-

driven approach to conservation.

"Aligning organisations with community priorities can save species from extinction and instill conservation values in the formative years of the next generation. The value of talking with local communities, listening and learning about how people read the land and what is significant to them creates synergies between people and places, and understanding how broader connections enable you to reach out beyond the corridor area and achieve so much more in practical terms such as investment and volunteerism are all valuable reminders of the power of connecting people to the land and each other," he says.

"Connectivity describes something that is happening to many aspects of our lives," adds Charlie. "It's more than just the latest rhetoric. Apart from being the ecological principle and dynamic basis of life, it describes the hyper-connected world of people, places and organisations and the rapidly forming and shifting aesthetics, ideas and networks we encounter daily, where no one story or arrangement is fixed anymore."

"If we can learn to tap into the dynamic that initiatives such as the Great Eastern Ranges brings, and harness its productive energy, then we have a better chance of investing in conservation activities that will produce a lasting legacy."

## Other perspectives denied

There can be no criticism of the intentionality, or indeed the level of inter-organisational innovation, of the corridor mapping approach. What can be seen as a problem however, is the implicit displacement of others ways of knowing. There is a reverence to 'science' that effectively precludes other discipline perspectives, in particular social scientific, social ecological, cultural studies, and ecopsychological (i.e. Roszak 1995) approaches. In the industry such approaches are often seen to be 'soft', 'vague', 'touchy-feely' and generally lacking in rigour and frankly an indulgence. Advances in other understandings of knowledge and epistemology (i.e. social ecological) have generally yet to register with the NRM and conservation sector. Embodied knowledges of, for instance, working with farm communities and Aboriginal communities can look very different to scientific and positivist approaches to understanding environmental matters and the world in general. The narrative of connectivity conservation, as valuable as it is, and as it becomes more widely accepted, is in danger of displacing other narratives. These are often the complex, practice-based stories of farmers and Aboriginal people (Sommerville & Perkins 2010) amongst other groups.

The 2013 Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance 'Acknowledging Sense of Place' project (Appendix 1) was an explicit initiative attempting to acknowledge a range of understandings of relationship with environment. Similarly, the 2014 Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance 'Living Country' event (Appendix 2) at Wenonah Head in Bellingren LGA was supported in response to Aboriginal perceptions, and voicing of this problem. Both projects were led by Dr Charlie Brennan through Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance and supported by volunteers.

### Inspiration for this project

This Cultural Connections project grew out of a series of conversations at the 2014 Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance Mount Hyland November Retreat. This retreat was the culmination of 3 years of cross-sector Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance (comprising 20 organisations) dialogue, connectivity work, mapping, projects, on-ground works, training and so on. From a connectivity conservation point of view, the event and the preceding 3 years were seen as genuinely successful. However, as you would expect at a gathering of 30 or so organisations and 80 people, tensions had occurred especially when it came to future commitments. The greatest tension though came, not for the first time, from the differences between NRM and conservation sector perspectives and Aboriginal

perspectives of land and Country. And again, not for the first time, Elders became deeply offended at dealing with Country through what was perceived as a 'business' perspective. One Elder took the floor and told all assembled that they needed to tune into 'humanity' and 'heart'. Another Elder more cryptically asked the assembled conservation managers, the rhetorical question, 'you don't think yous (sic) invented corridors do you?'

These wise and insightful words became the basis for this Cultural Connections project. Corridors through the landscape have existed for as long as life has moved. Human corridors have existed, here in Australia, as long as people have been here i.e. for up to 100,000 years. The contemporary way of seeing the land as mapped conservation corridors is unintentionally in danger of displacing other ways of seeing, remembering and celebrating land. This project aimed to support this (other) understanding of Cultural Corridors.



## Project Concept Emerges

This conversation was taken to a GER Regional Coordinators funding meeting and became folded into the proposed larger FNP/GER 'Glideways' project (<http://www.glideways.org.au>) as it emerged. In turn this opportunity was offered to Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance/Dr Charlie Brennan to develop due to prior experiences of organising the 'Acknowledging Sense of Place' and 'Living Country' projects.

The design of the project was left relatively flexible and open to finding what Elders would like to see for such an event. This ensured that what was proposed wasn't just seen as yet another wave of colonisation: of conservation agencies ticking off boxes of outcomes. This, understandably, led to tensions between the need for this flexibility and the needs of funding bodies to know what they were actually endorsing. The people organising the funding and project proposal realised that this kind of initiative needed a lot more latitude and freedom than standard conservation, NRM and environmental education projects. Effectively this kind of project entails the creation of a certain kind space and then seeing what will emerge. This is a very different approach to making detailed contracts to ensure set outcomes occur. This can also be seen as adopting 'emergent strategy' <http://interactioninstitute.org/emergent-strategy/>

As this potential project developed I tried to take the project outline to a prominent Elder. In the phone conversation to arrange a meeting I mentioned Cultural Corridors. Immediately I was told that this could not go ahead as in previous projects, over the years, information, offered in confidence, had apparently been published by conservation agencies without permission. Goodwill had been betrayed. No meeting was arranged.

This was conveyed back to the project designers/funders and it was clarified that no actual information was to be sought in this project. The project was not to be seen as any kind of mapping or cultural mapping. The project was simply (!) to aim to acknowledge cultural connection to land. Any sense that such a project could be a form of cultural appropriation or a box-ticking exercise will close down any kind of conversation.

Bauman in 'You Mob all agree' points out that there is a vast difference between consultation versus something 'done to' Indigenous people (2007 p.1). Furthermore Hunt argues that 'what works is ...an appreciation of – and cultural competency to respond to – Indigenous history, cultures and contemporary social dynamics and to the diversity of Indigenous communities: valuing the cultural skills and knowledge of community organisation and Indigenous



people’.

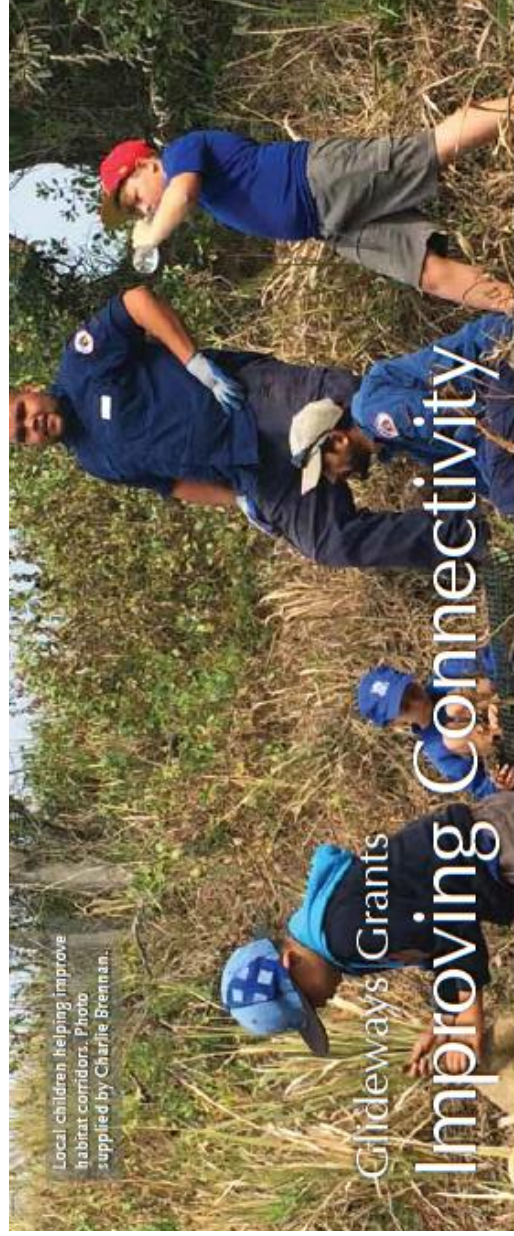
‘What doesn’t work are hurried one-off ‘consultations’ that are organised without Indigenous input into their design, where parameters for discussing the analysis of the problem and possible solutions are centrally determined and to take proper account of Indigenous aspirations, ideas of well-being and social contexts’.  
(2013, P.7)

The project was given the go ahead by Great Eastern Ranges/Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife. Some weeks later meetings were again arranged with Elders and this time discussions to design the Cultural Connections project and event went

surprisingly well, like hitting some kind of seam of energy. Two meetings in two days led to three more spontaneous or quickly arranged meetings. Themes of discussion were around what would the Elders like? What kinds of activities? Where? For whom? Including whom? An event was conceived.

In consultation with Elders a poster was designed and distributed through community. Importantly the poster was designed in such a way that the actual event was given plenty of room to evolve.

The project outline, which was the first publicity for the project and the event poster are provided overleaf.



The Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife recently granted \$15,000 to the Jaligirr Biodiversity Alliance to carry out important cultural and ecological connections, with a focus on improving glider habitat in northern New South Wales.

There are several glider species listed as threatened or endangered due to habitat loss. The Glideways Grants aim to address this by supporting connectivity projects which are linking glider habitat. FNPW is administering the Glideways Grants in partnership with the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative (GERI).

*Written by Dr Charlie Brennan, Centre for Ecological Learning.*



Supporting cultural education.  
Photo supplied by Charlie Brennan.

& Coffs Harbour), and more extensively along the 3,600 km's of the Great Dividing Range.

Locally, there has been a high degree of success through on-ground projects, as demonstrated through the Jaligirr Biodiversity Fund and many other projects. However through consultations with Indigenous partners of the IBA and also between the GER central team and regional facilitators, it is apparent that further acknowledgment of the Cultural Connections with corridors that have existed for 10,000's of years is needed. This project aims to address this need in our local community and to become the basis for similar initiatives in other places and communities.

These are early days for this important project. The final details are presently being worked out with Elders through processes of deep listening. The underlying principle of this

project, amongst others, is the empowerment of Indigenous groups in the Jaligirr area through organising projects centred upon respect for Country, Culture and Elders. This Cultural Connections project is building upon other recent IBA initiatives.

2014 'Living Country' brought school children, Elders, bush regenerators and conservation leaders together at Wenona Head to pay respect to country, plant trees and learn Gumbayngirr with Muurbay Aboriginal Language and Cultural Cooperative.



School children helping out with the revegetation planting. Photo supplied by Charlie Brennan.

In 2013 to 2014 a GER funded 'Sense of Place' project explored and acknowledged peoples' emotional, social and cultural connections to place through interviews, mind-mapping, group conversations as well as through artistic representation.

This new cultural project will be drawing on these past project successes, to instigate a program that will ultimately improve the understanding of cultural connections and assist with improving wildlife connections for our gliders.

For further information about this project, email Dr Charlie Brennan [cwbrennan@gmail.com](mailto:cwbrennan@gmail.com) or visit <http://www.charliebrennan.info> or <http://www.cel.org.au>



Glider like this Squirrel Glider will be helped out by this project.  
Photo: Brisbane City Council.





Event to be held at The Stables  
Church St, Bellingen  
Behind CWA

Saturday December 5th  
2 pm to 7 pm  
2015



# GUMBAYNGGIRR LIVING LAND LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Respected Gumbaynggirr Elders invite you to attend the first Gumbaynggirr Living Land, Language and Culture event.

A unique Welcome to Country, Elders' stories, insights into the language, traditional dancing and singing will be showcased, with an opportunity for youth to yam with the elders over a meal.

It is a free event open for anyone to attend. There will be food supplied but please RSVP by Tuesday, 1st December.

To RSVP or for more information please email  
Charlie Brennan at:  
[centreforecologicallearning@gmail.com](mailto:centreforecologicallearning@gmail.com)

Jalligirr Biodiversity Alliance, Great Eastern Ranges, Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife Glideways Project



## Project considerations

Every community, set of people, situation and place are different. There can be no 'checklist' of potentially competent outcomes for this kind of project. To believe so would be the ultimate misunderstanding!

The following are considerations we bore in mind as we helped support the Gumbaynggirr Living Land, Language & Culture event.

### Emergent Planning / Make a space

#### Emergent planning

This is a very different approach to making detailed contracts to ensure set outcomes occur. This can also be seen as adopting 'emergent strategy'. <http://interactioninstitute.org/emergent-strategy/>

#### Make a space

Effectively this kind of project entails the creation of a certain kind space and then seeing what will emerge. Rather than detailing the outcomes of an event the approach needs to be of creating a safe and supported space to see what emerges given the opportunity.

#### Respect & listening

Measham et al. (2009) ask what are the terms of engagement in the Australian NRM conservation sector? Clearly there is a tendency for control over consensus. It can't be stressed enough that this does not work. Indeed what is needed is respect and listening. See below.

#### Innovation

The inter-organisational zone of connectivity conservation alliances is a place where innovation has potential. The interrelating of a wide range of values and practices requires flexibility and experimentation of new approaches.

### Elder-Centred / It's all about relationships

#### Elder-centred

Elders, Aboriginal community, culture and the land are the centre. This is challenging to NRM bureaucracies who are used to exercising control. The 'normal' hierarchies are to some extent redundant and this really needs to be understood.

#### Building relations

T. Bauman and R. Williams (2005) point out that 'for Indigenous peoples, and indeed many other stakeholders, it may be that a primary goal of any dispute management and decision-making process is one of maintaining relationships rather than a single-

mindful focus on finalising or producing discrete outcomes' (p.1). We started talking with people we had good relations with and the project built for there. This relational approach is highly interpersonal and not so formal.

### **Invited into relationship not information gathering**

At no stage is this about information gathering. As we progressed we continuously checked to know we were getting backing. This is particularly for back from Elders, Aboriginal community, organisations, the broader community. Are we bringing people with us...? If not we need to go back and renegotiate. When successful we were invited into relationship.

### **Trust over time / projects have integrity and sustained**

According to Hunt (2013) 'community engagement requires a relationship built on trust and integrity: it is a sustained relationship between groups of people working towards shared goals'. As previously mentioned, this project built upon the previous events and projects – 'Jaliigirr Sense of Place' and 'Living Country' projects.

## **Form project team**

### **Event management / logistics**

This is all about making ideas and ideals become practicalities. There is a wealth of information available on logistics, running sheets, allocation of tasks, getting resources, budgeting and so on.

### **Heart-centred / committed whatever it takes**

Heart has to be the principle motivation, and this is a hard one for many people to understand, or empathise with. The heartfelt feeling of the project is the main thing and all other considerations are secondary. As a team there was a sense we were fully committed. As the enthusiasm and energy built for the project we checked our intentions regularly - why are we doing this? Really, personally?

### **Networking / flexible**

We meet and communicated face-to-face, by email, Facebook, Skype and so on. Dialogue and networking continuous as we worked up different options, negotiating and consulting with Elders, community, different people, funding bodies and conservation organisations. This took a lot of patience and concentration!!

### **Risk and success**

The project remained high risk right through to the end. It's nervous, knife-edge, and its uncertain it will work out. Who will turn up? What

about weather exposure? And so on. We check in about how we are with the risks. We ask, that is our minimum level of success? Is there even one? In this context..

## Media & Promotion

### Everything is an event

The event is the focal point but also what happening before and after the event is also the event including the media. The 'medium is the message'. Taking advantage of media interest to foster additional media exposure – i.e. additional BBB interview.

### Take this seriously

Start up once there is enough agreement over the details. Time, place, schedule. Draft posters and discussed, Facebook event created. Website dates claimed. Posters designed over a week of brainstorming, design, distributed.

## Healing

### Historic context/ Cultural competency

Through historic & social processes the culture, language, stories, songs and ceremonies of the Gumbaynggirr have largely been

silenced, displaced, fragmented and/or denied. In such/most unWestern the environment is not seen a separate; everything is about Country and so cultural landscape connections have also tended to have become silenced, denied.....and so on.

### Think/feel in terms of 'healing'

There can only be one kind of way of thinking/feeling in this context – i.e. in terms of healing. Community healing, family & land <http://healingfoundation.org.au/community-healing/>

### Culture and the land are the same

Tune into Country. In this worldview there is no such thing as environment; a western construct that speaks of disconnection. Tuning into country and understanding the energy of place and places is paramount. This is not just land, it's everything.

### Humility/ Social inclusion

Martin (2013) sums up the complexity of social inclusion, 'in a context where there has been a long and fraught history of state-instituted discrimination and exclusion, often under legislative provisions, and where Aboriginal people continue to suffer from multiple and interlinked disadvantage as measured by standard socio-economic indicators, policy frameworks predicated on social inclusion appear attractive'.

‘However, challenges are posed for social inclusion policy frameworks by the well-documented maintenance of particular Aboriginal worldviews, which may be inimical to certain forms of participation in the wider society, and by evidence that there are many Aboriginal people who, while they seek better access to the goods and services of the wider society, nonetheless have no desire to join it or to share many of its values, lifestyles and locales’.

### Be really open to learning

#### Open to Learning

Be conscious of the language used and the assumptions embedded in language – we are prone to this. The team found themselves cored several times around their assumptions in this project. Be educated through listening to Elders and Country.

#### How to be an effective change agent/educator in this space?

The model of education in NRM and environmental education tends to continue to be ‘how can we get them to understand’, ‘how can we get the information out’ etc. This is positivist education with ‘empty vessel’ or ‘front end loader’ assumptions of how education works. In this sense this sector is way behind developments in education that have been adopted by other discipline areas. Other models of

education are far more experiential, participatory, active and reciprocal.

The educational role here is more of being a change agent. The learning is in all directions and unpredictable. The event is the whole process. That includes all conversations, negotiations, designing, who is working with whom, media, including the land and spirits. This is a very non-western realm.

#### Consider the Shamanic / ecopsychological

The problem becomes less about one of discipline area to one of consciousness paradigms. Go with the energy. For more on Shamanism go to the works of Mircea Eliade.

An excerpt from Dr Charlie Brennan’s thesis on ecopsychology:

An ecopsychological approach to understanding place practice emphasises, acknowledges and imagines emotionality, symbolism and myths that mediate relationship to and with place, nature and the other than - human....

An ecopsychological perspective offers, and requires, a psychic loosening (Tacey, 1995; Hillman, 1995) that allows a rediscovery of latent and forgotten emotionality, symbolism and myth of place (Illich, 1986; Schama, 1995). It constitutes a re-animation of everything ‘cut’ (Hillman, 1995) in the Cartesian schemata, but this is not something



that can be just taught; it requires a strange de-structuring of self/place relationship ....

Further, an ecopsychological approach to place shines a problematic light upon mainstream environmental education messages (Palmer, 1998). The unproblematised use of the term 'environment' points to deeper pitfalls (Brennan 2011, p.241).



## Gumbaynggirr Living Land, Language and Culture Event December 5<sup>th</sup> 2015

### The Program

1:30	Meet & Greet. MC Les Boulle. Jane Grant, Nat Vuille & Charlie Brennan
2:00	Welcome to Country - Michael Jarrett and Janugiina
2:30	Janaaga Performing Arts Group Woolgoolga High School Choir - Mr Guy Wright, Larry Handcock, Aunty Jo Hine
3:00	Mayor Mark Troy Michael Jarrett and Les Boulle
3:15	Keeping Land Alive Culturally - Chelsea Marshall
3:45	Gumbaynggirr: The fun Language! Michael Jarrett
4:15	Dancers - Binderay, Gloria Mercy, Graham Donovan
4:30	Late afternoon cakes & BBQ
5:30	Honouring and Respecting Place - Charlie Brennan
6:00	Janugiina - Singing for Gumbaynggirr Land, Language and Culture - Larry Handcock, Michael Jarrett, Aunty Jo Hine
6:45	Closing Ceremony - Elders, Michael Jarrett, Binderay
7:00	Completion

## Setting up





The event!









Event celebrates Indigenous culture to support conservation in Bellingham Valley

**ABC Coffs Coast** By Fiona Poole

Posted 8 Dec 2015, 12:30pm

Hundreds of locals flooded into Bellingen's new sustainability co-working centre on a rainy Saturday to meet Gumbaynggirr elders and hear the stories which connect their people to the valley.

The inaugural Gumbaynggirr Living Land, Language and Culture event aimed to celebrate traditional and cultural land relationships.

It was funded by Jalligirr Biodiversity Alliance, Great Eastern Ranges, and the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife Glideways Protect.

"Conservation can get a bit technical and business like," event organiser Dr Charlie Brennan said.

"The elders expressed that we needed to do something to address that, so the idea was to run a cultural event in the middle of town on a busy pre-Christmas Saturday."

About 190 people attended the event, exceeding organisers' expectations.

"We committed to an outdoor set-up and it poured with rain of course, but we had faith that it would work out well," Dr Brennan said.

"Someone after said that it felt like an historical event, being able walk off the street and enjoy Gumbaynggirr culture as if it was an ordinary thing, as if it was how it should always be."

Students from Woolgoolga High, dancers, musicians and local language teachers ran performances and workshops throughout the day.

Elders Michael Jarrett and David Carriage performed a traditional smoking ceremony to close.

"Everyone loved it and the elders felt both appreciated and invigorated," Dr Brennan said.

"Now we gather ourselves, and enjoy what happened, but there's certainly an intention to make this an annual event."

**Topics:** indigenous-culture, community-and-multicultural-festivals, indigenous-music, community-and-society, bellingen-2454

**More stories from New South Wales**



**PHOTO:** A Gumbaynggirr elder chats with young dancers before they go on stage at the festival in Bellingen. (Supplied: Jay Black)

**MAP:** Bellingren 2454



**PHOTO:** Dancers perform traditional Gumbayngirr dance and song in Bellingin. (Supplied: Charlie Brennan)



## Healing Our Place



The 'Gumbaynggirr Living Land, Language & Culture' event took place at the newly opened Bellingen Sustainability Centre, managed by the Bellingen Shire Learning Alliance, a collaboration of 15 sustainability groups. The buildings have been named 'The Stables' as one of the buildings is the heritage police station horse stables. The history of that place is forest to

cleared farmland, to police station, to Telstra depot to youth space (Y2A). When the new Bellingen Youth Hub gained funding and was subsequently built these buildings and the land around became underused, semi-abandoned and run down.

In mid-2015 modest funding was found to help this run-down place to be converted into the Bellingen Sustainability Centre. Over 4 months the buildings and the surrounding land were cleaned, weeded, mulched, painted, planted and generally upgraded and cared for. Behind the scenes organisations negotiated this shared space; how it would be used, funded, marketed and so on. In early

November it was opened with the help of celebrity gardener Costa Georgiadis.

In the time that we had been refurbishing the buildings it was apparent to us working there that there was a bad feeling about the place - this included the actual old police stables.



When working out the arrangements of the Gumbaynggirr Living Land & Culture event Elders walked around the buildings and site. Our feelings about the bad energy of the place were supported but also an area to the East of the buildings was identified as a special place – high, facing the escarpment, above the Bellinger River. In my imagination I could see a fire there.

What happened in these buildings was an example of healing land. Elders came to the place and carried out ceremony. No details of this are available.

As the event details became clearer and firmer, it was apparent there would be a closing ceremony; a smoking that would require a fire pit. The day before I worked with a highly skilled bobcat driver and together we dismantled a rusty old fence that divided the ceremony area from the regenerating rainforest below. An abandoned concrete BBQ, and concrete slabs were removed and soil, then mulch spread.

On the day the fire pit was positioned and prepared. Kindling and logs in position.

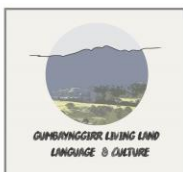
Community gathered around the smoking. Ceremony was carried out. The air was thick with spirit. An historic moment.





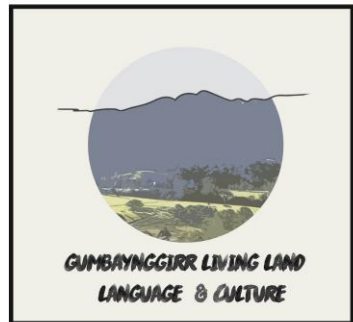








Another pictorial depiction of this.



*This place, formerly an old Telstra depot and youth centre. Old rusty wire fence and disused concrete BBQ. Removed. Connection to trees. View to the escarpment restored.*

*Area mulched and fire pit positioned.*

*Elders carry out smoking ceremony. Late in the day. Our place being healed.*

Centre for Ecological Learning, Jalingirr Biodiversity Alliance, Great Eastern Ranges, Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife  
Dr Charlie Brennan at [cwsbrennan@gmail.com](mailto:cwsbrennan@gmail.com)



## Late in the day. Our place being healed.

An old industrial site and youth space was transformed into a sustainability centre. Local Elders and Aboriginal community carried out ceremony. This is 'late in the day' because this kind of work is arguably overdue; our difficult histories are relatively recent but we have been aware of the need for this for many years.

Place is spoken in language – Gumbaynggirr!!.  
Place is sung into being.  
Bad old spirits can move along refreshing this place.  
This is our place being healed. A literal place, here is in the centre of Bellingen town, but also our sense of place and belonging here in Gumbaynggirr Country and bigger places.





## After the Event

The event is not over when the event day is done; you have to 'keep the energy going.....!'.

In postmodern theory the event is not just the event day – it's the whole project from start to finish including all the networking, publicity and the various depictions and representations of the 'event'. There is a window to make the event much bigger and more powerful – the carry the resonance further...

Mostly importantly the Elders and community were happy with the cultural day. Some were more than happy – powerfully moved.

There was some feedback around the day being too long, some confusion about the program and so on.

## After tasks

- Gather reflections - from participants, performers, organisers as well as people who wandered into the cultural day.
- Everything that was assembled and erected needs to be packed down. Everything that was borrowed needed to be returned in orderly manner.
- All who helped, contributed, volunteered, participated etc. need to be acknowledged privately or publicly.
- The event can be so much bigger if the media is worked.

## Planning ahead to 2016

Already this event is being seen as the inaugural event. Planning starts in late January for next year's December 3<sup>rd</sup> event. Sponsors and funding bodies being talked with....





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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Sense of Place narrative report

Drop-box link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/gxod8m3venx6uap/Developing%20SoP%20report%20-%20narrative-Final-6Dec2013.pdf?dl=0>

### Appendix 2 – Living Country event report

Drop-box link:

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/60wy6nvf18gn4nu/JBA%20Partners%20Living%20Country%20Meeting%2028May2014\\_Final.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/60wy6nvf18gn4nu/JBA%20Partners%20Living%20Country%20Meeting%2028May2014_Final.pdf?dl=0)

### Appendix 3 - Feedback on GER reporting template

GER reporting questions & responses -

1. **Intended achievements for Jaliigirr & GER corridor**

**Increased influence of Aboriginal cultural perspectives on the principles, organisation & operations of a conservation-based partnership arrangement. To what extent was this achieved?**

2. **Why act?**

**There is a need to continually widen NRM perspectives that is inclusive of Aboriginal cultural perspectives. To what extent was this achieved?**

The following need to be considered in response to these questions:

- Time scale for this to be achieved is very long.
- Willingness to share on behalf of Elders & community is determined by Elders.
- The emphasis moves to Elder-centred building relations/trust.
- Not box-ticking/report writing but about relations & respect.
- For success NRM organisations need to think in terms of:
  - Integrity & heartfulness - not 'business'.
  - Humility to Elders, Practice & places - not social power over.
  - Innovation & cultural respect needed.
  - The need for social history to be acknowledged.

-

**Community engagement, communication & promotion:**

**Outcome 1: This project will increase awareness on the presence & values of glider populations in our region, led from Aboriginal cultural perspective.**

- This is overly directive and specific. See above.

**Outcome 2: Aboriginal community members (supported to) take a leading role in imparting their knowledge & wisdom on cultural connections in the landscape**

- This is overly directive and specific. See above.
- Information is not imparted. A successful outcome is to be invited into relation (to Elders, community, culture & country) maybe and the depth of relationship offered is determined by Elders.

**Outcome 3: Partners & community improve their understanding of cultural landscape connections**

- The following needs to be understood:
  - Through historic & social processes the culture, language, stories, songs and ceremonies of the Gumbaynggirr have largely been silenced, displaced, fragmented and/or denied.
  - In such/most unWestern the environment is not seen a separate; everything is about Country and so cultural landscape connections have also tended to have become silences, denied..... and so on.
  - This celebration of Gumbaynggirr culture – in the middle of a town on a busy pre-Christmas Saturday – and available to public is an explicit attempt to acknowledge the rich culture of this place. Even though this was a relatively small gesture it was, however, described by some event participants as ‘an historic moment’ for this reason in this region.
  - This event directly involved 190 people, 60 of whom were Elders and community, but the media (print, radio & social media reached an estimated 20,000 people in the region.
  - The experiential /process report, media reach & direct interactions all ensuing from this project will have an unknown reach & influence.
  - An Aboriginal perspective might see this kind of event and ceremony as having an unknown but potentially powerful transformative nature.