

# MINUTES

## ABORIGINAL REFERENCE GROUP

10:30AM ON THURSDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2025



PRESENT	
Brad Anderson	Brendan Newton
Aunty Michele Moore	Aunty Leanne Olive
Aunty Bev Armer	

IN ATTENDANCE	
Armando Reviglio - Chair	Cr Ann Martin – Councillor
Jacinda Marando – Minute Taker	Trudy Costa – Coastal Environment Officer
Alison Bradford – Community Development + Engagement Manager	Joel Thompson – Coordinator Heritage
Sam Crosby – Education and Outreach Specialist	Sofia Gibson – Manager Community Culture and Engagement (Acting)
Jackie McIntosh – Horticulturalist - Display Collections Botanic Garden	Vimala Colless – Community Development Worker Multicultural
Tanzila Afrin – Work Placement Student	

### 1 WELCOME & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

### 2 APOLOGIES –

Apologies were received and accepted on behalf of Aunty Sharralyn Robinson, Kathleen Cambourn & Cr Jess Whittaker.

### 3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Nil

### 4 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 15 MAY 2025 –

Minutes were confirmed by Brad Anderson, Leanne Olive and Cr Ann Martin. Nothing that there was an error on item 5 NAIDOC Grants of the previous minutes. The committee agreed to fund five larger NAIDOC events, not four.

### 5 BUSINESS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES –

**Expression of Interest Nomination Form** – The Expression of Interest Nomination Form for the Aboriginal Reference Group was shared with previous members for their review and input. Amendments to some of the wordings were made based on feedback to ensure cultural appropriateness.

**New Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Officer positions** – Wollongong City Council recently conducted interviews to appoint two Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Officers. The Aboriginal Engagement Officer position is currently under review and the outcome will be advised when known, but there will be a third Aboriginal specific position

### 6 CULTURE MIX –

Vimala shared a detailed update on the Culture Mix Festival being held on Saturday 20 September 2025, including the Aboriginal programming and cultural elements featured throughout the day. The festival will showcase many Aboriginal exhibitions, cultural display stalls, and interactive workshops that celebrate Aboriginal culture. These activities aim to foster cultural understanding, with opportunities for festival goers to engage directly with Aboriginal artists, storytellers, and performers.

## 7 ARTIFACTS – BOTANIC GARDEN DISCOVERY CENTRE

An update was provided about the large collection of Aboriginal artefacts that have been housed in the Wollongong Botanic Gardens Discovery Centre for over 30 years without proper storage or preservation. The collection has been catalogued and the artefacts stored to ensure they are safely archived and protected.

The catalogue was forwarded to the Powerhouse Museum, which has been working to trace the provenance of the items, however, this process has proven to be challenging. While the museum has established provenance for some of the artefacts, not all connections have been made. Markings and designs on the artefacts are being used to help identify their origins.

A report was shared to seek advice, direction, and approval regarding the artefacts going forward. The group discussed options in the event that the artefacts cannot be returned to their rightful Country, including potential display at schools for educational purposes, within Wollongong City Council libraries or incorporate the collection into the new Warrawong Community Centre.

Preservation efforts will continue until a suitable outcome is reached. It was agreed at the meeting that Council staff will contact the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council to arrange a viewing of the artefacts to support verification and guide next steps.

**Bush Tucker Garden Update** – Wollongong Botanic Garden has a bush tucker space which has become a popular feature within the Garden. The team is now exploring ways to further embed cultural elements into the garden, as well as develop appropriate signage and interpretive elements, with guidance being sought from the Aboriginal Reference Group on how to do so respectfully and culturally appropriately.

The original gunyah structure within the garden has collapsed, and there is a need to rebuild it as part of a renewed cultural project. Safety considerations will be essential in the reconstruction. A temporary gunyah is currently on display, but it lacks the full cultural components intended for the space.

Advice was sought on how to move forward. During discussions, a question was raised about who should build the new gunyah – and it was suggested that this is considered Aboriginal men's business. This presents an opportunity to engage with the Koori's Men's Group, if appropriate.

To progress the initiative, it was proposed an Expression of Interest (EOI) be prepared and presented at the next meeting for consideration.

## 8 LAKE ILLAWARRA ENTRANCE –

A presentation on the Lake Illawarra Entrance Options Study was shared. Significant erosion has occurred in the Lake Illawarra entrance channel since the lake was opened in 2007. On going tidal changes are undermining channel infrastructure and natural and cultural assets. UNSW Water Research Laboratory (WRL) was commissioned to do a study to manage the problem and various options were presented, with 5 options being shortlisted for Stage 2 Entrance Options assessment. Community engagement for this project was held between 18 November and 20 December 2024.

The two most popular options were option 4 and option 5.

Option 4 – Staggered groyne field with armoured bed. This was the most popular choice due to its balance between environmental protection and recreational use. The cost is estimated between \$145m and \$240m. Some concerns are that it could be an eyesore or intrusive. A few respondents mentioned the need for maintenance due to potential cutting and erosion of the groynes.

Option 5 – Remove training walls and sand nourishment to restore the natural conditions and reverse the damage by going back to a natural state of the lake. Cost is approx. \$35m to \$70m. The concerns of this option provided by the community engagement sessions were mainly regarding deterioration – flooding, poor water quality and odour are some of the concerns if the lake periodically closes.

In May 2025, findings were presented to Wollongong Council as recommendations to consider options 4 and 5, and to continue studies and investigations along the Windang foreshore.

Due to the highly sensitive archaeological material in the area, Council is prioritising the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage and has engaged a consultant to explore the proposed options. Heritage NSW will be informed of any future actions.

The team have been actively reviewing similar case studies around Australia and erosion impacts, attending relevant conferences, and engaging with new stakeholders to present findings and gather feedback — an ongoing and evolving process.

A recent water DNA survey was conducted to identify animal species present in the Lake. Excitingly, the results confirmed the presence of platypus.

## 9 ABORIGINAL REFERENCE GROUP – RECRUITMENT

An update was provided regarding the Expression of Interest (EOI) Nomination Form for the Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG), which has been distributed throughout the Aboriginal community to encourage submissions. The deadline for submissions is Friday, 31 October 2025.

It was recommended that a reserve list be established to allow for future selection if needed. One position within the Aboriginal Reference Group remains vacant and will be filled through this process. The next meeting, scheduled for Thursday 13 November 2025, will mark the formalisation of the new ARG membership, where selected members will be confirmed and the reserve list finalised.

## 10 GENERAL BUSINESS

**Australia Day 2026 Community Event Update** – An update from Wollongong City Council Events Team was shared regarding the planning of the annual Australia Day Community Event at Wollongong Harbour on 26 January 2026. It was acknowledged that 26 January is a difficult day for many in our community and that they key outcome for Council is to bring community together.

There have been conversations with Brendan Newton from Yindyamarra Cultural Experience who has confirmed his attendance in the event doing drop-in art workshops with painting of small wooden boomerangs and ochre stencil artworks with an opportunity for storytelling and sharing culture.

A Welcome to Country will be booked through Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation, however, a Smoking Ceremony has been deemed inappropriate for the 26 January 2026 event.

**NSW Treaty Consultation in September** – On Monday 15 September 2025, there is a community gathering for treaty yarns with the NSW Treaty Commission held at 4 Wentworth Street Port Kembla. There are two sessions available, session 1 from 10am – 12pm and session 2 from 5pm to 7pm. The NSW Treaty Consultation is a 12 month statewide listening process led by independent Aboriginal Commissioners who have been appointed to travel across the state and speak directly with Aboriginal communities about one question: Do Aboriginal people in NSW want a treaty or other formal agreement-making process and if so, what should that look like? This consultation is only for Aboriginal community members.

**Illawarra Indigenous Business Expo** – Come and connect with First Nations businesses at the Illawarra Indigenous Business Expo on Friday 31 October 2025 from 11am to 2pm at Novotel Wollongong North Beach. The day will be filled with inspiring Indigenous businesses showcasing their services and products.

## 11 ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED AT THE NEXT MEETING

- Progress updates about issues related to Lake Illawarra.

If you would like to propose an item for discussion, please forward the information to Armando Reviglio for inclusion at an upcoming meeting.

## 12 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 13 November 2025 at Towri Centre, Wollongong Botanic Garden.

The meeting concluded at 12.10pm.

**ACTION SUMMARY**

Item	Action	Officer	Status
7	Prepare an EOI for Bush Tucker and Gunyah to be presented at the next meeting	Sam Crosby	Not Actioned Yet
8	Results of water DNA survey to be shared with former members of the Aboriginal Reference Group	Trudy & Joel	Not Actioned Yet