Lake Macquarie

Aboriginal Community Plan
2012-2015

Lake Macquarie City Council
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Meaning of the Artwork

Artist: Jim Ridgeway

ANTI BO KA
AWABAKAL PARAI TA

“This is the place that remains Awabakal Country”

This is Awabakal Country, it is the place that for many generations our people have lived and died. The country has for thousands of years sustained the needs of our people with abundant supply of food, shelter, tools and weapons, things that are needed for everyday life. Awabakal People have always respected and appreciated this land, they have given their lives to protect it, and although driven to the point of extinction, we have survived.
Disclaimer

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Acknowledgements

Lake Macquarie City Council and the author of this document, Council’s Aboriginal Community Development Officer wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land over which this plan was developed, The Awabakal People. Council would like to pay respects to knowledge holders and community members of the land and acknowledge and pay respects to Elders both past and present.

Council wishes to acknowledge the strength, resilience and cultural identity of Aboriginal¹ People residing in the City of Lake Macquarie and the positive contribution those individuals make to the local community.

The Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 would not have been possible without the support and direction from members of the Aboriginal Community. Stakeholders including representatives from local service providers, organisations and officers from government departments also played a vital role in the development of the plan and Council wishes to thank those who contributed (please see appendix 1 for a full list of consultation partners). Council wishes to express gratitude to those who will play a future role in implementing the key strategies identified in this document.

Council wishes to thank Uncle Jim Ridgeway for the use of his artwork ANTI BO KA AWABAKAL PARAI TA “This is the place that remains Awabakal Country” throughout this document.

¹ For the purpose of this document the word Aboriginal refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
Foreword Mayor

The City of Lake Macquarie is home to the Awabakal People, the traditional custodian’s of the land.

The Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 was developed within a strength-based framework, highlighting the strengths, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal People within the City of Lake Macquarie.

In 2002 Council made a commitment to Aboriginal people in the City of Lake Macquarie, a commitment articulated in the document, A Commitment by Lake Macquarie City Council to Aboriginal People of the City of Lake Macquarie. The Commitment was co-signed by the Mayor and elders of the Aboriginal community and it highlights a range of actions that Council has pledged to implementing so as to promotes the strength, capacity, and awareness of Aboriginal People within Lake Macquarie.

Protecting Aboriginal Heritage in the City of Lake Macquarie is paramount and a key factor in ensuring Aboriginal Culture is protected and enhanced for generations to come. In 2011, Council adopted the Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Strategy, which highlights a range of specific actions that aim to protect Aboriginal culture and heritage in the City of Lake Macquarie.

Both of these documents, along with the Aboriginal Community Plan will play a vital role in service delivery for Aboriginal people in Lake Macquarie.

A number of organisations and individuals contributed to the development of the Aboriginal Community Plan and I would like to thank them for their direction and commitment to the production of the plan.

I will also like to take this opportunity to highlight the efforts that will be undertaken in implementing the actions identified in this plan, and in particular, the stakeholders that will assist Council staff in achieving those. These documents should never become tokens that are set aside once printed and signed; they should guide us in addressing the needs, in partnership, of our significant Aboriginal community.

Mayor of Lake Macquarie, Councillor Greg Piper
August 2012
Executive summary

The Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 highlights the needs of Aboriginal residents in the City of Lake Macquarie. The plan aims to identify key areas of need, prioritising and identifying possible strategies and suggesting ways in which identified needs can be met. The plan also aims to highlight current strategies that are working or have worked well in the past and identify ways to build upon those strategies from a strength-based framework.

Aboriginal people are still the most disadvantaged group of people living in Australia today. The Commonwealth Government integrated Closing The Gap strategy aims to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a particular focus on children. This plan aims to address to some degree all of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) targets or “building blocks” which include Early childhood, Schooling, Health, Economic Participation, Healthy Homes, Safe Communities and Governance and Leadership (COAG, 2009, National Indigenous Reform Agreement).

This plan recognises the strength and resilience of community at a local level and the contribution this can have in Closing the Gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal People living in Australia today. The Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 understands that these targets are ambitious and a high level of cooperation between community members, Council, government departments, stakeholders and service providers is required to start tackling the target areas in the Closing the Gap strategy.

The purpose of this plan is to set clear, measurable targets that aim to improve the overall health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people living in Lake Macquarie, providing opportunities for equal access to services and supportive foundations in which cultural identity is encouraged and supported.

The Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 is outcome focused and aims to highlight effective partnership opportunities. A notion of shared responsibility enables reconciliation and self-determination for Aboriginal people living in Lake Macquarie.
The needs of Aboriginal People can differ significantly compared to the rest of the population for a number of reasons. The impact of colonisation has had a devastating effect on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people. Lack of educational and training opportunities has had a negative effect on employment outcomes. Preservation of culture and heritage and regaining cultural identity is important in ensuring culture is passed on for generations to come. Cultural awareness and education is the first step in achieving reconciliation between Aboriginal people and the Australian population. Overall, sufficient support structures for families, Elders, kinship structures and opportunities for individuals to enhance their cultural identity must be in place before any of the above areas can be addressed.

The Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 was developed in consultation and partnership with Aboriginal community members and stakeholders and was designed as an avenue to facilitate a consistent approach to service delivery for Aboriginal People in Lake Macquarie.

Being the first of its kind, Council recognises that this plan is simply one approach to servicing the needs of Aboriginal community members in Lake Macquarie and that this document will be a living document, changing as required with the ever-changing needs of the community and capacity of stakeholders.
Australian Aboriginal people are one of the world’s longest living Indigenous peoples. Lake Macquarie is home to the Awabakal People with 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey data indicating that 5,593 Aboriginal People reside in the Local Government area, representing 3% of the total population of the LGA (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011, Community Profile series).

The Estimated Residential Population of Lake Macquarie is 200,849 (Source: Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2009–10 (cat. no. 3218.0) which is based on census counts by place of usual residence.

Social and community planning is an integral part of the development of Council’s Community Strategic Plan. Council’s Social Plan and subsequent plans assist in the preparation of the Community Strategic Plan as an opportunity to highlight specific issues that are important for specified social/community groups. The role that community plans have in shaping the Community Strategic Plan therefore highlights the need for Council to have a standalone Aboriginal Community Plan.

Council’s Social Plan 2009-2014 is a strategic document that identifies key trends and important issues citywide, and in response to these, sets priorities, goals and actions (LMCC, Social Plan 2009-2014). The Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 priorities are similar to that of the Social Plan in which it aims to clearly identify the current needs of the Aboriginal community, proposing strategies to address those needs by identifying stakeholders to assist this process.

The plan is a strategic document that sits along side other plans to support Council’s Social Plan. The other plans include: Ageing Population Plan, Lake Macquarie Crime Prevention Plan, Youth community Plan, Lake Macquarie Disability Action Plan, and the Children and Family Services Strategy. The Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 will be an integrated document linking in with these plans as well as two existing documents previously implemented by Council.
A Commitment by Lake Macquarie City Council to Aboriginal people of the City of Lake Macquarie is an important document that was adopted by Council in 2002, and jointly signed with Land Councils in the City. The Commitment statement was re-signed by the new Council in 2008. The document highlights a range of actions that Council has committed to implementing which overall promote the strength, capacity and awareness of Aboriginal people in Lake Macquarie and recognises the positive contribution made by Aboriginal People in the City (LMCC, Commitment Statement, 2002). The Statement of Commitment is to be reviewed at the commencement of the new term of Council or mid-term when requested by the Aboriginal Consultative Committee.

The Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Strategy (LMACHMS) adopted by Council in 2011 specifically aims at protecting culture and heritage across the City. Devastatingly, over 40% of the City’s Aboriginal Heritage has been either disturbed or destroyed. Under this framework a series of priority recommendations have been identified to promote opportunities for protection, enhancement and enrichment of Aboriginal Culture throughout the City. Strategies and actions in this Aboriginal Community Plan reflect the recommendations of the LMACHMS (see priority issue 6: Caring for Country).

The Aboriginal Community Plan links in with both the Commitment Statement and Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Strategy, ensuring consistency in approach to Council’s actions and priorities and service delivery for Aboriginal people across the City.
To ensure the Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 was an adequate representation of the needs of local Aboriginal community, a range of consultation and information gathering techniques were implemented. Informal and formal consultation techniques allowed a better understanding of the needs of the community and an opportunity for community members to suggest possible strategies that may assist in reducing or eliminating those needs. A strength based approach allowed community members to highlight what strategies have worked and are working well in the community. Conversations with stakeholders have allowed the strategies identified in this document to be realistic based on the current and future capacity of stakeholders.

The following points highlight the process involved in developing the plan:

- Collation and review of existing information including a concise literature review on existing Council Plans, Government Policy Documents, relevant research and statistical data
- Formal and informal consultations with community members, community groups and relevant stakeholders including service providers, local organisations and representatives from government departments
- Discussions with current services providers regarding their capacity of service delivery
- Consultation forum/s and drop in days held during the exhibition period of the Draft Plan to receive feedback from community members and stakeholders

The consultation process will continue as the plan is implemented by Council, with regular reviews of each priority issues action done in consultation with members of the Aboriginal community and relevant stakeholders.
Priority Issue 1: Health

Background Information

The health status of Aboriginal people is significantly lower than the Australian population and has decreased since colonisation in 1788. This is evident in the current gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

The Department of Health and Ageing report on *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2010* noted the gap in life expectancy at birth between Aboriginal peoples and the rest of the Australian Population to be 11.5 years for males and 9.7 years for females. This means that for an Aboriginal child born in 2012, their life expectancy is significantly lower than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

A number of chronic health diseases affect Aboriginal people at higher rates than the rest of the Australian population. These include heart disease, respiratory disease, kidney disease and diabetes (NSW Health, *Chronic Disease in Aboriginal Communities Report*). Low birth weight is twice as common for babies born to Aboriginal mothers, and according to the Department of Health and Ageing, the rate is increasing. Aboriginal children are also three times more likely to suffer from severe otitis media (chronic ear disease) and suffer oral health problems at a rate twice as high than their counterparts.

The context in regards to health status of Aboriginal people is complex with a range of factors contributing to the overall health status. Historically dispossession of land, loss of culture, forced removal of children and family separation have had a devastating effect on health status. Economic factors including poverty and high rates of unemployment affect access to preventative health care, healthcare services and medications. Environmental factors including overcrowding in housing, physical isolation, lack of transport, poor food supply, and lack of recreational activities have all impacted and continue to impact on the poor health status of Aboriginal people (NSW Health, *Chronic Disease in Aboriginal Communities Report*).
Council recognises the positive impact that community education and awareness around prevention can have on minimising instances of chronic disease, and the importance for Aboriginal People to have equal access to services.

In regards to service delivery of health, the area of Lake Macquarie falls into the Hunter New England Area Health Service which has the highest number of Aboriginal people compared to any other area health service in NSW at 32,307 (NSW Health, Clinical Services Redesign Program, September 2010). Chronic disease is prevalent across Aboriginal Communities with data collected by NSW Department of Health indicating that in the period of 2008/2009, 1,245 Aboriginal patients discharged form public hospitals over the age of 15 years suffered a chronic disease. The report identifies that many of the poor health outcomes related to the low socio-economic status and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal People in NSW with factors including: diseases triggered by poverty, poor access to education, low incomes, overcrowded housing & poor nutrition.

In alignment with these health outcomes stands the issue that factors contributing to chronic health care are often complex, which can lead to Aboriginal People presenting to health services in the later stages of the condition, often resulting in higher rates of complication and death (NSW Health, Clinical Services Redesign Program, September 2010).

The NSW Department of Health identifies that although rates of smoking are declining within the mainstream population, rates of use are still significantly higher in Aboriginal communities and “remains unacceptably high among Aboriginal People”. Reporting rates indicate that for the period of 2002-2005, 43.2% of Aboriginal People living in NSW aged 16 years and over were current smokers. The NSW Department of Health Strategic Directions for Tobacco Control in NSW 2011-2016 Discussion Paper states that “A problem of this size demands a comprehensive, sustained and coordinated response from governments, non-government organisations and the community.”

At a local level, Council in partnership with the Cancer Council have established “Smoke Free Outdoor Areas” in which smoking in public areas such as parks, swimming pools and Council Property is prohibited and support community actions campaigns designed to create community awareness around the consequences smoking can have on overall health and wellbeing of people and communities.
The issues relating to health highlighted throughout the consultation process were complex with the majority of them relating to service delivery at a State Government level. Given this, Council recognises the Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 as a strength based approach and an opportunity to facilitate partnership and collaboration opportunities between service providers. Council also recognises the impact that community action at a local can have on service delivery and change in policy and is committed to community groups to advocate for increased services.

Specific issues raised by community members and stakeholders include:

- Lack of suitable transport available to medical appointments (for families with young children and elderly people)
- Appropriate services not available in the local area
- Waiting times for health services are increasing
- Information around preventative health strategies and programs is needed
## Action Plan

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<th>Responsibility and partners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure community members and leaders are able to effectively advocate for increased health and related services</td>
<td>Provide community members with the skills to advocate for increased services</td>
<td>Deliver a community advocacy education session targeted at Aboriginal community members and workers</td>
<td>Ability to advocate effectively for increased health and related services</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department Community advocacy training provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek better access to health services</td>
<td>Assist in improving awareness around services of community transport providers access to health services and providers</td>
<td>Provide community members with relevant information on community transport providers</td>
<td>Awareness and better access of community transport providers</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower rates of preventable chronic disease for Aboriginal residents living in Lake Macquarie</td>
<td>Work with service providers to promote existing early prevention and screening programs</td>
<td>Hold community education information sessions Distribute health information to target groups</td>
<td>Increase the number of health services accessed by Aboriginal people</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Staff Health Providers, NSW Health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Background information

Education

Traditionally, Aboriginal people learn through storytelling and passing down of oral history. This is an important part of culture and creates a key foundation for contemporary educational outcomes for Aboriginal people (Anderson, 2007, Beyond Bandaids).

Historically, Aboriginal people were not provided with the same access to educational opportunities as non-Aboriginal People. This has affected adult literacy levels and has had a generational effect on young people today. Aboriginal children and young people are under-performing compared with non-Aboriginal students against every educational measure, and whilst targeted programs are being implemented there is still a significant gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regards to educational outcomes.

Attainment of an educational qualification generally means a higher chance of obtaining meaningful, ongoing employment and can also have a positive impact on reductions on the rate of chronic disease including heart disease and diet related illness (AHRC, 2008, A statistical overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia).

The NSW Department of Education and Training identifies that Aboriginal education and training involves continuous, lifelong learning and includes:

- delivery of quality education and training to Aboriginal students in schools (including where relevant preschools), TAFE Institutes and community education settings
- education about Aboriginal Australia for all students
- mandatory Aboriginal cultural education through professional learning and career development experiences for all staff
- identifying and engaging the NSW AECG Incorporated and Aboriginal communities as partners in Aboriginal education and training

Partnership, collaboration and the understanding of education as a shared responsibility is vital in ensuring that the above educational outcomes are reached. For Aboriginal people to thrive in learning environments a holistic approach must be implemented. For tertiary education institutions, specific Aboriginal support structures assist in this process. For primary and secondary education in government schools, local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group’s (AECG) play an important role in ensuring NSW schools adhere to local cultural and community protocol in the delivery of educational outcomes (AECG, 2010, Partnership Agreement 2010-2020).

Council recognises that education in NSW is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Communities, although actions at a local level can have a positive contribution to Aboriginal education.

It is important that Council, in conjunction with knowledge holders and traditional owners provide information and resources to the local community, including school students, on the Aboriginal History of Lake Macquarie.

Employment and training opportunities

For Aboriginal People, employment opportunities can have a positive effect, not just on the individual that partakes in work but also on the immediate and extended family. Unemployment rates are significantly higher for Aboriginal people. The 2006 Census data indicates that the unemployment rate for Aboriginal People was 16%, and whilst this is a decline from 2001 and 1996 data at 20% and 23% respectively, it is still significantly higher than non-Aboriginal people (AHRC, 2008, A statistical overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia).

Reconciliation Australia notes that unemployment can have an impact on life expectancy as it is linked to poor health, living standards, self-esteem, imprisonment and substance abuse (Reconciliation Australia, 2009, Indigenous Employment Factsheet). Council are committed to supporting employment opportunities for Aboriginal People across the City. This also includes promotion of employment opportunities within Council.
In the 2010-2011 reporting period, Council had approximately 1100 employees including both indoor and outdoor staff. As this document was being developed a review of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) data including Aboriginality data was being undertaken.

It is vital that Council supports existing Aboriginal staff and provides a supportive workplace environment, which includes opportunities to participate in cultural development, communication with other Aboriginal staff and career advancement opportunities.

Issues raised through the consultation process

**Education**

- Lack of adult literacy and numeracy programs
- Shortage of resources available on the local Aboriginal history of Lake Macquarie
- Lack of resources to provide opportunities to support children and young people in engaging with their culture

**Employment**

- Unemployment is a significant issue for Aboriginal community in Lake Macquarie
- Lack of information about Council vacancies
- Need for Council to be more proactive in Aboriginal Employment
## Action Plan

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<th>Timeframe</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunities for students to have a better understanding and appreciation of the local Aboriginal history and culture of Lake Macquarie</td>
<td>Engage students in local Aboriginal history and culture through Council's existing cultural activities/programs</td>
<td>Continue to build the collections and promote the Aboriginal Knowledge Centres at the Charlestown, Toronto and Windale library branches to students and teachers Continue supporting the City Art Gallery's Aboriginal Reference Group</td>
<td>Students provided with information and exposure to local Aboriginal History and Culture</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>LMCC Library, Leisure and Cultural Services Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to increase literacy and numeracy skills</td>
<td>Provide Aboriginal people with the opportunity to partake in a program designed to increase literacy and numeracy skills</td>
<td>Develop and implement a short course on adult literacy and numeracy skills program in partnership with relevant stakeholders</td>
<td>Increased literacy and numeracy skills of individuals that participate in the program</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department Government departments Training provider (eg. TAFE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a workplace environment in which Aboriginal staff are encouraged and supported</td>
<td>Investigate an opportunity to provide a support network for existing Aboriginal employees</td>
<td>Discuss particular strategies with existing staff and develop an Aboriginal employee support network</td>
<td>Supportive network provided for Aboriginal staff</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>LMCC Human Resources Department LMCC Community Planning Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase rates of Aboriginal people working in Council</td>
<td>Promotion of Council as an employer of choice to Aboriginal people</td>
<td>Distribute an electronic fortnightly list of current vacancies through the Aboriginal Employment Interagency Attend Aboriginal specific job markets and career expo’s Investigate opportunities to create identified positions within the organisation</td>
<td>Increase the rates of Aboriginal people working in the organisation</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>LMCC Human Resources Department</td>
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</tbody>
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Priority Issue 3: Children & Youth

Background Information

Council’s Children and Family Services Strategy 2009-2014 states that the NSW standard practice defines children to be those aged between 0-11 years of age.

‘Early Childhood’ is one of the key building blocks identified in the Closing The Gap policy endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments. The report identifies that “for an equal start in life, Indigenous Children need early learning, development and socialisation opportunities” (COAG, National Indigenous Reform Agreement-Closing The Gap, p.6). To achieve this Aboriginal children must have equal access to early childhood education and care, family support services, parenting programs, and adequate childhood health services. Cultural education is also a significant part of the development of Aboriginal Children and opportunities to encourage this are vital.

Within the City of Lake Macquarie, 2006 Census count data indicates that of the 4,297 Aboriginal people, 1,318 are aged between 0-11 years (ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2006) which equates to 30% of the overall population. Given this, adequate support and resources must be provided to families and service providers to ensure that the overall wellbeing of Aboriginal children is maintained. A positive start to a child’s life can increase their overall life chances.

Council recognises that all children should receive the opportunity to be physically and emotionally healthy, live within safe and supportive family and community environments and have access to services, supports and opportunities that encourage their positive development (LMCC, 2009, Children and Family Services Strategy, p5).
Community Services NSW has the responsibility of investigating child protection reports and taking action to minimise the risk of harm to children and young people in NSW. In the reporting period 2010-2011, the Hunter Central Coast region had 16,631 Risk of Significant Harm reports lodged (Community Services NSW, Annual Statistics Report).

The Annual Statistics Report also states the rate of reports involving Aboriginal children and young people are significantly higher than non-Aboriginal children and young people, with 187.4 per 1,000 Aboriginal children and young people reported at Risk of Significant Harm in 2010/11, compared with 32.8 per 1,000 of non-Aboriginal children and young people. While the issues surrounding child protection reports are complex, Council recognises that community service providers can play a vital role in ensuring support structures and early intervention programs are implemented to ensure the highest level of well-being for Aboriginal children is maintained.

The development of an Integrated Aboriginal Child and Family Centre at Toronto will provide an opportunity for families to access early childhood, health and family support services that will improve the overall health and well-being of children in the Toronto and surrounding areas.
Youth

The 2006 Census identified that there were 1,173 Aboriginal people aged between 12-24 years (ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2006) which equals to 27% of the overall population.

For Aboriginal Youth, needs can differ significantly compared to non-Aboriginal Youth. Aboriginal youth who’s primary caregiver were removed when they were a child are likely to use drugs or alcohol at twice the rate of those who have not (Youth Action and Policy association NSW, Working with Aboriginal Young People). With almost all Aboriginal families having some type of connection with the Stolen Generations this is likely to affect a high number of Aboriginal young people.

In the 2011 National Survey of Young Australians a total of 2,634 (5.8%) of respondents identified of being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander decent with 31.4% of respondents from NSW (National Survey of Young Australians, Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander Summary). In regards to education and employment 73.9% of respondents were studying full time, which is an increase from the 2012 study although still significantly lower than their non-Aboriginal counterparts recorded at 90.6%.

For students that finish their Higher School Certificate and go onto further study (traineeships, apprenticeships, TAFE or University education) their life chances and employment prospects are increased significantly (LMCC, October 2007, Youth Plan).

For Aboriginal students a high sense of cultural identity can have a positive impact on the likelihood of an individual achieving key education milestones including finishing secondary and tertiary studies. It is vital for Aboriginal students to have access to information and resources that promote their sense of cultural identity, which may include contact with Aboriginal Community members including Elders and role models.

Issues raised through the consultation process

• Early childhood places not available based on family’s needs
• Resources and/or training unavailable on how service providers can deliver culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal clients
• Aboriginal Youth should be encouraged to be more involved in the decision making of their local community
• Lack of cultural support for Aboriginal Youth including positive role models and information about culture
## Objective Strategy Outputs Outcomes Timeframe Responsibility

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure equal access for Aboriginal children to partake in adequate early childhood education and care</td>
<td>Provide information to Aboriginal families on early childhood education and care services in Lake Macquarie</td>
<td>Promote Councils Family Day Care service to Aboriginal families throughout the LGA</td>
<td>Increase number of early childhood education and care services accessed by Aboriginal families</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>LMCC Family Day Care LMCC Community Planning Department</td>
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<td>Develop an information pack on early childhood education and care options in Lake Macquarie</td>
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<td>Work with Council’s Children and Families Planner to ensure service providers have resources on culturally appropriate service delivery</td>
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<td>Ensure equal access to services for Aboriginal children and families</td>
<td>Support the establishment of the Integrated Toronto Aboriginal Child and Family Centre</td>
<td>Continue to attend Local Reference Group meetings and related community events that support and promote the centre</td>
<td>Adequate support and input provided into the establishment of the centre</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department</td>
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<td>Work with the Local Reference Group to establish programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher sense of cultural identity for children and youth</td>
<td>Support community groups and organisations to provide programs or activities that promote cultural identity</td>
<td>Provide a budget allocation in which organisations can apply for funds to run programs that enhance the cultural identity of children and youth</td>
<td>Programs that enhance the cultural identity of children and youth are implemented</td>
<td>Years 1, 2 and 3</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department Service Providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunity for Aboriginal youth to be involved in decision making on local issues</td>
<td>Have input from local Aboriginal Young People on the decision makings of Council and local issues</td>
<td>Promote Council’s Youth Advisory Council vacancies to Aboriginal Youth in the LGA</td>
<td>Representation from Aboriginal Youth on Council’s Youth Advisory Council</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Community Planning Department</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Priority Issue 4: Supporting Families

Background information

The demographics of Aboriginal people in Lake Macquarie indicate a growing younger population including young families. Supporting and maintaining kinship and family systems in Aboriginal society is vital in maintaining culture.

Culturally appropriate delivery of family support programs can have a significant impact on the health and well-being of Aboriginal people as will practice that recognises culture as a key factor to wellbeing (National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Closing the Gap).

The generational impact of the stolen generations was, and continues to affect many Aboriginal people and communities significantly. Issues around grief and loss can have a significant impact on the way in which a family will engage with service providers. Given this, the Closing the Gap Annual Paper suggests that Aboriginal communities are more likely to access family support services if an Aboriginal employee is delivering the program or working within the organisation.

It is vital that Aboriginal people are provided service in a non-judgemental environment and that support workers are aware of the differences in specific needs of their clientele. For organisations that service a high number of Aboriginal People this way mean specific training around service delivery which is usually provided by the funding body. For smaller organisations a cultural education or awareness session incorporating culture, traditions and kinship values may be adequate in ensuring service providers have a greater understanding of Aboriginal People and communities.
Elders are the blueprint of Aboriginal Community, bringing a wealth of knowledge and fostering important connections to country. Traditionally there is no age at which an Aboriginal Person becomes an “Elder” as this status was given to an individual that reached a certain level of cultural knowledge and experience and respect. In contemporary society, an Aboriginal Elder is someone that holds high regard in the community in which they live in.

For Home and Community Care, Aboriginal People can receive individual care packages from the age of 50 years. This takes into account the lower life expectancy and the presence of higher needs of Aboriginal elderly people compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

The needs of Aboriginal elderly people can differ to the rest of the population. Many Aboriginal elderly people provide the caring role, both informally and formally for grandchildren and extended families, which can impact on the individual physically, emotionally and financially. Given this, it is vital that relevant support structures are in place to support Elders in their caring roles.

Social inclusion is important in ensuring Aboriginal elderly people stay connected to the community in which they live. Participation in events such as reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week ensure connection to culture. Council recognises the asset of Aboriginal elderly people in the City in the role they play in community cohesion and commit to providing support so that this can continue into the future.
Disability in Aboriginal families

For Aboriginal Families, disability is twice as likely to affect them compared to a non-Aboriginal family. The National Indigenous Aged Care Issues Paper states that two thirds of Aboriginal People aged 55-64 and one half of people aged 45-54 years has a disability or long term health condition which translates to a higher need for service provision at earlier age (Aged and Community Services Australia, 2005, p.2). Due to kinship structures in Aboriginal Communities, disability is often managed within the family with responsibility placed back on individual members of the family of the person with the disability.

Organisations that service clients with a disability in Lake Macquarie are able to provide a range of services to people with a disability and their families. Council recognises the importance of promoting these services to Aboriginal families.

Issues raised through the consultation process

• Need for young parents and families to engage with family support services
• Lack of communication between service providers about programs and activities and lack of cross referral with services
• Service providers need more information and resources in providing family support services to Aboriginal Clients
• Lack of social activities for Aboriginal elderly people
## Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To gain a better understanding of the needs of Aboriginal people and how to effectively provide services to meet those needs</td>
<td>Provide information about culturally appropriate practice and service delivery</td>
<td>Hold one cultural awareness session per annum open to workers in organisations that provide services to Aboriginal people</td>
<td>Improve service delivery for Aboriginal people</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department Cultural awareness Provider</td>
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<td>Develop and distribute a resource that contains information on culturally appropriate practice that organisations can refer to</td>
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<td>2 years</td>
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<td>Increase awareness of the organisations that provide services to Aboriginal People in Lake Macquarie</td>
<td>Provide information about services</td>
<td>Promote organisations in Council’s Koori Grapevine Aboriginal newsletter</td>
<td>Information regarding services provided to Aboriginal People</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase communication regarding programing and activities between service providers that provide services to Aboriginal People</td>
<td>Provide information on existing partnership and collaboration opportunities</td>
<td>Promote the Lake Macquarie Interagency network to organisations</td>
<td>Information provided to service organisations</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase social cohesion for Aboriginal elderly people</td>
<td>Provide an opportunity for Aboriginal elderly people to participate in a range of social activities</td>
<td>Promote Council’s Seniors Program to Aboriginal Elderly people</td>
<td>Opportunities provided for Aboriginal people to participate in social activities</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department</td>
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Priority Issue 5: Reconciliation and Community Education

Background information

Reconciliation is about unity and respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. It is about respect for Aboriginal heritage and valuing justice and equity for all Australians (Australian Government, [www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/reconciliation](http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/reconciliation)). Adequate consultation with the Aboriginal Community is vital in ensuring that Reconciliation is achieved.

Community education is the key to achieving reconciliation between Aboriginal people and the Australian population.

Recognition of Aboriginal history across the City is an important step in educating the wider community about the local Aboriginal Heritage of an area. Interpretative signage gives community members the opportunity to learn local dreaming stories.

Celebrating significant days such as Reconciliation Day, Sorry Day, and NAIDOC Week are ways in which the whole community can be involved and learn more about Aboriginal culture and way of life.

Reconciliation Australia is a national organisation that promotes reconciliation between Aboriginal People and the broader Australian community. Reconciliation Australia refers to reconciliation as “everyone’s business” and states that reconciliation is about building better relationships between Aboriginal people and the wider community for the benefit of all Australians ([http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/about-us](http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/about-us)).
Issues raised through the consultation process

- Aboriginal culture should be recognised more throughout the City
- Community education is needed to combat racism and discrimination
- Council should lead the way in supporting and promoting local Aboriginal history
- Council’s website, visitor centre and libraries should have more information about local Aboriginal History
## Action Plan

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<tr>
<td>Ensure that Council consultation processes are appropriate and meet the needs of the Aboriginal Community</td>
<td>Consult with Aboriginal community members, leaders, organisations and Land Council’s regarding best practice</td>
<td>Develop a consultation report in conjunction with stakeholders that highlights the most effective consultation mechanisms</td>
<td>Appropriate consultation method adopted throughout Council practice</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve awareness and recognition of Aboriginal People in the City of Lake Macquarie</td>
<td>Consult with Aboriginal community members and leaders on appropriate practice</td>
<td>Develop a policy on Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country before Council ceremonies, events and Council meetings</td>
<td>Culturally appropriate practice implemented at Council ceremonies, events and Council meetings</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a recommitment to the Aboriginal residents of Lake Macquarie</td>
<td>Revise Council’s Commitment Statement</td>
<td>Revise Council’s Commitment to the Aboriginal people of Lake Macquarie in conjunction with community representatives</td>
<td>Council’s Commitment statement revised</td>
<td>Within 12 months of the start of new Council</td>
<td>LMCC Community Planning Department Community representatives</td>
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<td>Objective</td>
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| Ensure widespread community awareness and participation in Aboriginal history and culture | Provide information and resources for community members and organisations willing to participate in national celebrations of significance for Aboriginal People | Develop a calendar of national celebrations with suggested ways organisations can participate and distribute to service providers  
Provide an ongoing budget allocation in which organisations can apply for funds to run activities or events to celebrate NAIDOC week  
Provide information on Council’s Website about the Aboriginal History of the Lake Macquarie  
Provide information and resources at Council’s Libraries and Visitor Centre | Increased awareness and participation in Aboriginal history and culture | 1 year | LMCC Community Planning Department |
| Highlight the local achievements of Aboriginal People | Provide an opportunity to recognise achievements | Continue to publish and distribute Council’s Koori Grapevine newsletter | Aboriginal peoples achievements recognised | Ongoing | LMCC Community Planning Department |
Aboriginal people in Australia have been the custodians of the land for over 40,000 years and have strong connections to Country. Protecting and maintaining culture and heritage is a key priority for Aboriginal People and is vital in ensuring cultural information is passed down to younger generations. For Aboriginal People the land is a great provider, of food, water, health (physical and spiritual) and culture.

Council is committed to supporting Aboriginal Community members and groups in ensuring cultural and heritage values throughout the City are protected. As identified in Priority Issue 5: Reconciliation and Community Education, appreciation of Aboriginal culture and heritage can also be protected by providing information and education to the widespread community on the significance of ensuring culture and heritage is enhanced and sustained for future generations.

The Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Strategy (LMACHMS) was adopted by Council and 2011 and aims to achieve sustainable management of Aboriginal cultural and heritage values across the City. The strategy defines Aboriginal cultural heritage values as a combination physical objects, places and other elements of the landscape that are associated with, or explained by, traditional lifestyles or community stories.
The LMACHMS identifies the responsibilities that Council has in regards to protection and enhancement of Aboriginal Culture and Heritage in the City of Lake Macquarie. The legislation in which protection is ensured comes under a number of state and commonwealth acts including:

- Local Government Act 1993
- Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983
- National Parks and wildlife Act 1974
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
- NSW Heritage Act 1977 &

The strategy includes a list of detailed recommendations in which priority is allocated on a needs and capacity basis and was developed in consultation with community members and stakeholders including land councils, traditional owner groups and Office of Environment and Heritage.

Effective implementation of the strategy including the recommendations is vital in ensuring Aboriginal culture and heritage across the City is protected. Rather than identifying new priorities and recommendations, the Aboriginal Community Plan has identified some the high priority actions identified in the LMACHMS. This ensures a better use of resources and consistency in the approach to protection of culture and heritage in The City of Lake Macquarie.
Issues raised through the consultation process

- Lack of consistent approach to culture and heritage projects
- Concern that culture and heritage in the City is not adequately protected
- Confusion regarding who to consult with in regards to works that may affect culture and heritage
- Lack of information and training on site identification and responsibilities
## Action Plan

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<tr>
<td>Support organisations to develop programs and projects that support and enhance Aboriginal culture and heritage across the City</td>
<td>Provide resources, information, support and assistance to groups that identity strategies to protect culture and heritage in the City</td>
<td>Continue to fund projects that enhance Aboriginal culture and heritage across the City eg. Clean up the Lake Program</td>
<td>Programs and projects supported</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>LMCC Sustainability Department</td>
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<td>Provide information, support and assistance to groups aiming to protect Aboriginal culture and heritage in the City</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>LMCC LandCare Resource Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek input and participation from Aboriginal Community and groups regarding cultural and heritage matters in the City</td>
<td>Ensure information is provided to relevant Council departments on the legislation protecting Aboriginal culture and heritage for Council projects</td>
<td>Develop a manual and circulate to relevant departments</td>
<td>Adequate input and representation from knowledge holders</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Community Planning Department Heritage Planner</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Develop a consultation register that highlights the relevant stakeholders including Land Council’s and Traditional Owner Groups to be consulted on projects that may affect Aboriginal Culture and Heritage in the City</td>
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</table>
Conclusion and future directions

Council recognises that the Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan 2012-2015 is simply one approach to servicing the Aboriginal residents of Lake Macquarie, and that a partnership between Aboriginal community, service providers, and government departments is vital in ensuring that the priority areas of this document are addressed. Council recognises that the Closing the Gap targets are achievable, with a targeted and facilitated approach to service delivery.

The priority action plans and subsequent strategies identified in this document reconfirm Council’s commitment to the Aboriginal people of Lake Macquarie and ensure the strength, resilience, and determination of Aboriginal people in Lake Macquarie is supported and encouraged. This plan will be evaluated and reviewed on a 12 monthly basis in conjunction with community members and stakeholders to ensure that the outcomes identified are being implemented successfully.

The It is often noted that Aboriginal Children are the Elders of tomorrow. Given this, it is vital that we make an adequate investment into the children and young people of today by ensuring that they are provided with equal opportunities in regards to education, health and employment outcomes. Maintaining and enhancing cultural identity and opportunities to engage in culture is important and will maximise the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people.
Council wishes to thank the following organisations whose representatives provided input into the Lake Macquarie Aboriginal Community Plan.

Aboriginal Affairs NSW
Awabakal Local Aboriginal Land Council
Awabakal Newcastle Cooperative
Bahtabah Local Aboriginal Land Council
Cancer Council NSW
Community Activities Lake Macquarie
Department of Attorney General and Justice
Department of Education and Communities NSW
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Heart Foundation NSW
Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority
Hunter Medicare Local
Housing NSW
Lake Macquarie Youth Development Officer
Landcare Resource Office
Milibah School as Community Centre, Windale Public School
Nar-rah Bah School as Community Centre, Fennell Bay
NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
The Canopy Family Support Service
Toronto Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Local Reference Group
Toronto Aboriginal Community Justice Group
Toronto Aboriginal Community Working Party
Toronto West Youth Group
Westlake’s Aboriginal Elders Incorporated
Wollotuka Institute University of Newcastle

Lake Macquarie City Council staff from the following departments:

• Community Planning Department
• Sustainability Department
• Human Resources Department and
• Integrated Planning Department
References


Lake Macquarie City Council (2009) *Social Plan 2009-2014*, Community Planning Department, Speers Point NSW.

Lake Macquarie City Council (2007) *Youth Community Plan 2007-2012*, Community Planning Department, Speers Point, NSW.


Working with Aboriginal Young People.

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