



**ILLAWARRA
LOCAL ABORIGINAL
LAND COUNCIL**

Sandon Point Aboriginal Place Interpretation Strategy

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Acknowledgement

It is important that before embarking on this Journey together, we stop and take a moment to be aware of our surroundings. It is important that we stop whatever it is we are doing, look around us, and just be present with our environment. Before any Journey it is important that we appreciate that what we know has been gifted to us from Country. This is why we Acknowledge that all things come from Country; that the knowledges and perspectives we will be sharing all come from Country; and that most of this walk we will take together will be on Country. We Acknowledge the ancient and sacred knowledges, the ancient and sacred stories and the ever-present Dreaming embedded within Country. This is why we also Acknowledge traditions and custodianship, as it is these practices that have taken care of this Country since its creation.

Sandon Point is a deeply significant and sacred space and place. One that has been utilised since creation for ceremony, gathering and business. It is a space and place where all the Aboriginal peoples of this coast would come and engage in the appropriate and respectful Acknowledgement of Country. Sandon Point, today, is an ancient and sacred burial ground that requires the utmost reverence, responsibility and reciprocity when interpreting its histories and stories with our broader communities.

We Acknowledge the sacredness of this space and place and the significance of this work that we are undertaking in recognising that the interpretation of this site is a deep and meaningful Acknowledgement of Country.



Image 1. Sandon Point looking north across McCauley's Beach (Illawarra Mercury 2013)

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Executive Summary

Aboriginal people have lived in Australia since the time of its creation. The Australian Aboriginal culture is recognised as the oldest living culture in the world. **Aboriginal cultural heritage consists of places, traditions, beliefs, customs, values, and objects** that represent the **living history** of past Aboriginal generations and are of **important cultural and heritage significance to Aboriginal people and the Country that we all now share**. Aboriginal cultural knowledge provides **crucial links between the past and present** and represents an essential part of the identities of Aboriginal people and all Australians into the future.¹

The Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council (ILALC) has been engaged by Wollongong City Council (WCC) to develop an Interpretation Strategy for the **Sandon Point Aboriginal Place**. Sandon Point was declared an Aboriginal Place in 2007² by the NSW Government for its value as a **meeting place for Aboriginal groups, a chief's meeting place and the presence of significant middens and burials** of Aboriginal People. **Historic values** refer to the association of the space and place with aspects of Aboriginal history. Historic values are not necessarily reflected in physical objects, but may also be intangible and relate to stories, memories or lived experiences.

To inform this Interpretation Strategy, engagement with the **broad range of community stakeholders** with an interest in the Sandon Point area was key. The **consultation** approach adopted for this **Interpretation Strategy** involved a **mixed methods approach**, including an online survey, in-person consultations, community forums, a pop-up tent at Sandon Point to connect with passers-by and public review of two drafts of this report (Interpretation Strategy). Due to **COVID-19 restrictions** and the inability to have large numbers of people gather, ILALC relied heavily on the dissemination of an online survey to gather community contributions from November 2020 to May 2021. Through these various approaches, **community mapping** was undertaken to identify individual and community connections with the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place and broader landscape that is known as Sandon Point.

Goals and priorities for consultations during phase 1 of the Interpretation Strategy included identifying **how many signs** would be required, **where signs should be positioned**, and **what sort of information** should be on the signs to reflect the significance of the space and place and the interests of the various community groups connected to it. From the consultations conducted in this **first phase** of the Interpretation Strategy, interest in the following **key themes** emerged:

- **Aboriginal Heritage;**
- **Flora and Fauna; and**
- **SPATE/ contemporary Aboriginal history.**

Following the **public exhibition and validation** of the first draft of this report, **phase 2** of this **Interpretation Strategy** saw edits to the report based on community feedback and the development of suggested wording for the signs, signage designs and mock-ups of what the completed signs might look like and discussion around the locations of the signs. The

¹ <https://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/about-our-heritage/aboriginal-cultural-heritage/>

² <https://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2007/05/17/1924906.htm>

signage mock-ups were **presented to key stakeholders** through online, hardcopy and in person (where possible) modes for comment.

The **four signs** proposed in this document **will underpin the strategy for the whole area** and set the context for future initiatives around this significant site as opportunities arise. **The final installation of these signs will be completed in 2022 in collaboration with Wollongong City Council and the Aboriginal community.**

This Interpretation Strategy seeks to develop the **content, design and approach for signage** relevant to these three contextual and key themes. It is recommended that actions for further development in possible future phases of the interpretation include the **commissioning of additional signage and public art to capture secondary themes** and planning for community and educational events to continue the sharing of knowledge and **foster broader community appreciation of and respect for the space and place.**

Aim of Interpretation Strategy / Our Vision

At a **Sandon Point Aboriginal Place Joint Management Agreement meeting** held on 26 October 2018, **interim interpretive signage** (refer to [Annex 1](#)) and installation locations on existing poles were **approved**. The interim sign locations were identified as key points of public access to the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place. In Joint Management Agreement meetings before October 2018, it was agreed that interpretive signage should include language and be installed at **beach access points** when they were being upgraded. This signage was approved and agreed upon as the interpretation could be easily changed and replaced by more appropriate interpretation (sign design, messaging, and locations) in the future.

The **aim of this report** is therefore to be able to **better represent the views, voices, aspirations, ideas, wants, needs and all things in between of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities** in relation to what they feel is required to be represented through signage and public art in and around the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place. The aim is to, with integrity, **represent these views, identify common themes of interest and describe what is meaningful to these communities**, and articulate how these communities want the space and place to be represented through signage and public art. **Our vision** is to respectfully bridge the stories of this space and place to afford the broader community an authentic, relatable, deep and respectful understanding of Sandon Point, its Aboriginal cultural heritage, the natural environment and its settler story, allowing for **a more holistic and intimate relationship with this space and place**.

This Interpretation Strategy also seeks to **increase the protection of the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place**, the ancient and sacred burial grounds, and to construct a broader platform through which education, respect, and reciprocity is displayed regarding the cultural heritage of the Place. This Interpretation Strategy is an opportunity to **build awareness of and respect** for the connections of the Aboriginal community to the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place. The **purpose of this Interpretation Strategy** is to:

- **Facilitate a pathway for reconciliation** and foster reverence and respect for the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place;
- **Build deeper connections** between all who care about Sandon Point and the Aboriginal cultural heritage and stories embedded within the space and place;
- **Identify opportunities** for knowledge sharing and increased awareness of Aboriginal culture, heritage, customs and Country on a broader level;
- **Provide a platform** for authentic community engagement to facilitate the improvement of the health and wellbeing of the site and its broader landscape; and,
- **Identify a process** for bringing down the fences that surround/ protect the burial site.

This Interpretation Strategy, through consultation with the Aboriginal community and broader stakeholders, endeavours to take potential locations for signage to final locations and **identifies the story to be told at the proposed locations**. Although current funding is linked to community consultation and signage interpretation, design and installation on the ground, this Interpretation Strategy seeks to **encourage further consideration for event, public information campaign, public art and vegetation management funding in future years** to continue educating and engaging local residents, the broader community and even tourists

to better understand Aboriginal world views and invite a deeper appreciation of the significance of the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place.

Ultimately, our vision is that not only Aboriginal Australians, but all Australians, through the signage and processes attached, develop a deeper relationship with, as well as reverence and respect for and knowledge of the space and place. In regarding Aboriginal heritage as being as important as colonial/ settler heritage, **all Australians can come to revere and recognise Aboriginal heritage as a shared Australian heritage.**



Image 2. Sandon Point Aboriginal Place



Image 3. Sandon Point Aboriginal Place

Strategic Context

In order to frame this Interpretation Strategy, including the approach taken to identifying and engaging with relevant stakeholders, developing the emerging themes from the consultations carried out and creating meaningful signage, it is necessary to highlight the context within which the history and story of Sandon Point, and specifically the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place, has and continues to emerge.

The **Sandon Point and McCauley's Beach area** is a beautiful, rugged piece of the Illawarra coastline, situated in the suburbs of **Bulli and Thirroul**, which is valued and fiercely championed by all who use the area for a **variety of purposes** ranging from **traditional beach activities** such as swimming and surfing to **advocating for Aboriginal Heritage and Cultural protection**. The land to which this Interpretation Strategy refers to is shown in Figure 1 below. The **Sandon Point Aboriginal Place** at Bulli is approximately **14 hectares** of McCauley's Beach-front land, bounded on the west by the public pedestrian-cycle way, from Hewitt's Creek footbridge to Sandon Point Surf Club.



Figure 1. Sandon Point Aboriginal Place boundary

In 2001 ILALC sought an Aboriginal Place Declaration of the Sandon Point area from the New South Wales (NSW) Government. In **February 2007** the **‘Sandon Point Aboriginal Place’** was declared by the NSW Minister for the Environment under **Section 84** of the **National Parks & Wildlife Act 1974**. The site is located at the foot to the descent into the Illawarra and was a place of ceremony, cultural exchange and gathering. Over thousands of years of occupation, **this site has come to develop multiple and diverse histories**, including its **Aboriginal heritage** (traditional and contemporary), **settler history** and **environmental diversity**. These have in large part informed the reflections and suggestions collected during the community consultation and are reflected in the **key themes** identified in developing this Interpretation Strategy.

Aboriginal Heritage

Traditional history

Prior to the coming of the white man, **Aboriginal communities** in the Illawarra were made up of **distinct family groups and extended families**. All members had specific responsibilities, based on age and gender. The **traditional language** of the Illawarra clans was **Dharawal** (a local word for cabbage palm). It was spoken and understood from **Sydney in the north, west towards the Blue Mountains and Goulburn, and as far south as Bega**. Clan boundaries were well defined, and each clan was responsible for ensuring the well-being of their lands. In accordance with traditional beliefs, the people had a **spiritual attachment to the flora, fauna** and even the topography. **Totems and dreaming stories** reinforced a sense of **attachment to, and protection of, the land**. Conservation of the natural environment was practiced and refined, alongside day-to-day utilisation of available resources. Aboriginal people saw themselves as part of the land, not separate from it.³

As a coastal dwelling, hunter-gatherer society, the Illawarra people survived on a **rich diet** of seafood, local animal life such as kangaroo, wallaby and possum, and a wide variety of plant life, which was used not only for nourishment but also as **medicinal aids** and in **ceremonies** as the basis for body ornaments and tools. The variety of **subsistence resources** in the Illawarra included marine, estuarine, freshwater, large sandstone escarpment and hinterland flora and fauna. Movement across different terrain types and resource areas may have been dictated by the season or purpose.⁴ Mammals such as kangaroos and wallabies and arboreal mammals such as possums were used as a food source. Bones and teeth were used as points or barbs for hunting spears and fishing spears. Animal skin, fur and sinews were also used for personal adornment and in making cloaks.⁵

The Aboriginal people in the Illawarra and South Coast had specific areas set aside for **initiation ceremonies**, with many identified by bora rings. A huge circle was marked off using rocks and it was here that the initiates would begin the process of initiation. At this stage all members of the clan were involved. Even the painting of the initiates was a part of the ceremony. **Every Aboriginal clan in Australia had distinct markings** so that when a

³ Organ, MK and Speechley, C, Illawarra Aborigines, in Hagan, JS and Wells, A (eds), A History of Wollongong, University of Wollongong Press, 1997, 7-22.; Wesson, S. *Murni Dhungang Jirrar: Living in the Illawarra*.

⁴ Smith M & M Tetlaw, Waniora Point Precinct Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment, Biosis Pty Ltd, 15 July 2020.

⁵ Attenbrow V 2002. *Sydney's Aboriginal Past: Investigating the archaeological and historical records*, University of New South Wales Press Ltd, Sydney.

number of different clans, sometimes from all over the country, would meet for a corroboree, each person was immediately recognisable according to clan affiliation.⁶

Sandon Point, in particular, is understood as a **highly significant meeting place for Aboriginal people along the east coast of NSW and inland as far as the Blue Mountains**. The connection between this land and Aboriginal people is long and ongoing. As a **ceremonial site**, this area saw exchanges between people from surrounding language groups including Gundungarra and Wiradjuri people travelling to the coast to exchange foods and raw materials, whilst the Dharawal and Awabakal (Central Coast region) shared ceremonies.⁷ Both historical accounts and contemporary studies have indicated that Sandon Point was also a **burial site** and contains high density artefact scatters identified north of Sandon Point, in an undisturbed back dune system. One recorded **shell midden** located on the headland landform indicates that use of the area by Aboriginal people occurred consistently for an extended period of time.⁸

In May **1975**, **Aboriginal burial remains** (a skull) were **discovered** in a midden at **McCauley's Beach**, Thirroul, following erosion caused by extremely high surf. The skull was exhumed by local police and transferred to an unknown Sydney repository.⁹ Then again in **1998**, a burial was uncovered by storms at McCauley's Beach that has been archeologically tested and dated to be **6,000 years old**. Excavation by archaeologists found the skull to be of an Aboriginal man, aged about 40 when he died. His **in situ skeletal remains were intact**, arranged in a certain position with grave goods, and he had been buried with ceremony near the base of the midden. These signs indicated that the man buried was of the highest stature within the traditional Aboriginal societal hierarchical systems.

Aboriginal cultural heritage broadly refers to things that relate to Aboriginal culture and hold cultural meaning and significance to Aboriginal people. There is an understanding in Aboriginal culture that **everything is interconnected**. In essence **Aboriginal cultural heritage** can be viewed as **potentially encompassing any part of the physical and/or mental landscape**, that is, 'Country'. Aboriginal people's interpretation of cultural value is based on their 'traditions, observance, lore, customs, beliefs and history'. The things associated with Aboriginal cultural heritage are continually and actively being defined by Aboriginal people. These things can be associated with traditional, historical, or contemporary Aboriginal culture.¹⁰

Contemporary history/ SPATE resistance

The **Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy (SPATE)** was established at McCauley's Beach in **December 2000** with the **aim of protecting important Aboriginal heritage sites and raising awareness of their cultural significance**. Yuin Elder Uncle Guboo Ted Thomas re-named this area '**Kuradji**' during a Sacred Fire Ceremony at the Embassy in February

⁶ Organ, MK and Speechley, C, Illawarra Aborigines, in Hagan, JS and Wells, A (eds), A History of Wollongong, University of Wollongong Press, 1997, 7-22.

⁷ Sandon Point and McCauley's Beach Plan of Management, Wollongong City Council, February 2015.

⁸ Smith M & M Tetlaw, Waniora Point Precinct Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment, Biosis Pty Ltd, 15 July 2020.

⁹ Organ, MK, Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines, 1770-1900, Report to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Canberra, 1 December 1993

¹⁰ DECCW 2010a. *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Consultation Requirements for Proponents*, Department of Environment and Climate Change, Sydney NSW.

2001. **SPATE represents Aboriginal sovereign rights to protect Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites from desecration** and was formed as a political protest of proposed residential development at Sandon Point and to monitor and protect the heritage of Sandon Point as cultural custodians.



Image 4. Sacred Fire Ceremony

SPATE previously **hosted public events, organised by the North Illawarra Reconciliation and Treaty Group (NIRTG), and provided a base and open-air classroom for Cultural Education activities.** Sandon Point Aboriginal Place was used for sharing Aboriginal culture with non-Aboriginal community as well as the **teaching and transmission of knowledge** to younger generations of Koori.

In **2001** the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council sought an **Aboriginal Place Declaration** for the area. Aboriginal places are **defined as a place that is or was of special Aboriginal cultural significance.** In 2007 the NSW Minister for the Environment declared Sandon Point as an Aboriginal Place under Section 84 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974, in respect of the ongoing cultural connection of Aboriginal People to this land. **Aboriginal cultural heritage** is valued by Aboriginal people as it is used to define their **identity as both individuals and as part of a group.** More specifically it is used to provide a **connection and sense of belonging to Country** and a link between the present and the past.

Wollongong City Council (WCC) has been in conversation with the Aboriginal community about Sandon Point Aboriginal Place for several years. In 2011, Council commenced the preparation of the **Sandon Point and McCauley's Beach Plan of Management (PoM).** On 23 February **2015**, Council endorsed the PoM and Aboriginal Place Management Plan to guide the management of the area. This is **supported by a Vegetation Management Plan.** The PoM guides future Council activities on the land including the erection of signage, improving access to the beach, improvements to the shareway and vegetation management. Through the **Sandon Point Aboriginal Place Joint Management Agreement** (a voluntary **memorandum of understanding** between Council and Aboriginal community organisations) WCC has met and worked together with the community to safeguard Sandon Point and McCauley's Beach. The Joint Management Agreement includes **five Aboriginal community organisations:** Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council (**ILALC**), Korewal Elouera Jerrungarah Tribal Elders Aboriginal Corporation (**KEJ**), Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy (**SPATE**), **Wadi Wadi Commaditchi Aboriginal Corporation**, and **Wodi Wodi Elders Council.** A signing ceremony and celebration was held at Sandon Point on 16 November 2016. Fourteen Joint Management Agreement meetings with 39 people have been held between 2014 and 2019.

Other **key events in recent years** where WCC has talked to the wider community about their understanding of the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place have included:

- **Hundreds of conversations** between Council's community land management officer and stakeholders who passionately care about how to best manage Sandon Point and McCauley's Beach ever since Council came into ownership of land at McCauley's Beach in December 2010. **Interpretive signage was often requested** to understand the significance of the Place over the years.
- The **Lord Mayor's Sandon Point and McCauley's Beach forum** held in December 2017 attended by 37 people representing 16 organisations. Understanding the significance of Sandon Point Aboriginal Place was a key desire of many of the residents and community organisations who attended the summit.
- The application process for the **Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit (AHIP)** to implement the 2015 Sandon Point and McCauley's Beach Plan of Management between 2016-2019. There are 27 Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) to this AHIP. Involving local Aboriginal artists in the interpretation of the significance of Sandon Point was a key request by the RAPs. The AHIP was granted in April 2019.

Settler/ Colonial Heritage

The sailby of the bark **Endeavour** in April **1770** is noteworthy in that correspondents on board were the **first to record brief notes about the local Dharawal people and environment**. The most interesting detail is associated with the unsuccessful attempt by Cook and party to land near **Woonona Point** on Saturday, 28 April 1770. Before being forced back to their ship by a turbulent surf, they observed a group of people on the beach and nearby rocky headland, awaiting the landing, with bark canoes laid up on shore.¹¹

Those in Illawarra would have had to come to terms with the changing situation relatively quickly as there were **direct and immediate effects of the invasion to the north**. Escaped **convicts** early on made their way from Sydney to a safe and secluded Illawarra, located just 50 miles to the south, though the journey was difficult through dense forest and over rugged terrain. When explorers George Bass and Matthew Flinders visited Lake Illawarra in March 1796, they were informed by the local people that a number of such escapees, both male and female, were living amongst them and growing potatoes and corn. This news was not widely disseminated at the time, for it was in the best interests of the authorities at Sydney to continue to instil fear amongst the convicts with regards to the Aborigines in adjacent, unsettled areas.¹²

The **first generation of white settlers** were, by the 1830s, referring to the region as 'the Garden of New South Wales', reflecting the **widespread agricultural and pastoral exploitation of the coastal plain**, and to Wollongong as the new 'Brighton', after the English seaside resort of their homeland. Development of the area quickly resulted in substantial profits for landlords. From the Parish map for the area, it appears that the **first land grant in Thirroul** was made to **Samuel McAuley** (later referred to as McCauley) on 1 June 1855. Subsequent generations have participated in the transformation of this nineteenth

¹¹ Organ, MK and Speechley, C, Illawarra Aborigines, in Hagan, JS and Wells, A (eds), A History of Wollongong, University of Wollongong Press, 1997, 7-22.

¹² Organ, MK and Speechley, C, Illawarra Aborigines, in Hagan, JS and Wells, A (eds), A History of Wollongong, University of Wollongong Press, 1997, 7-22.

century garden into a twentieth century industrial complex, with the resultant success soundly based upon the use of local resources. Since 1849 **coal** has formed the basis for continuing industrial development, whilst throughout the century **timber, wheat, corn, cattle and dairy** products were the commodities in demand.¹³

The effects of the issue of land grants in Illawarra after 1816 were immediate. European farming and grazing practices resulted in the **destruction of traditional Aboriginal food supplies**. Kangaroos, wallabies and possum, along with many other native animals and birds, were frightened away by the cattle and sheep, and hunted by the Europeans with their guns, horses and dogs; **native grasses and plants were destroyed** by stock feeding, to be replaced by crops of corn and wheat. Those who survived barbarities during those first decades of the introduction of European civilisation to Illawarra had a number of options – stay on and work for their new masters in **servile positions**; move to other parts of the State where traditional society was yet to be attacked; or live on in **camp**s at the fringes of white settlement, maintaining some semblance of independence and link to traditional life. All three options were adopted to varying degrees.¹⁴

Previous **industrial land use at Sandon Point** has included **cedar logging, whaling, clay quarrying, brick manufacture, sand extraction, the Bulli Cokeworks and the Bulli to Sandon Point tramway**. Other historical land use and disturbance at Sandon Point has included vegetation clearance (with most timber removed by the 1850s), ploughing, diversion of Woodlands Creek to flow into Tramway Creek, possible widening of Tramway Creek, spoil dumping, installation of services, vehicle tracks and extensive deposition of fill. Coal mining and related industries have been associated with the Sandon Point area since the first coal mine opened at Bulli in 1863. A tramway operated between the Bulli Mine and a jetty at Sandon Point, with a section of the tramway still in use until 1981.¹⁵



Image 5. Bulli Jetty (From the collections of Wollongong City Libraries and the Illawarra Historical Society)

Tourism was also a key industry in the Thirroul area. This was due to the construction of the railway, beginning in 1882 and completed from Kiama to Sydney in 1888. This made the area easily accessible to people from Sydney and Robbinsville, as Thirroul was then still known, became a popular family seaside holiday destination with boarding houses and

¹³ Organ, MK and Speechley, C, Illawarra Aborigines, in Hagan, JS and Wells, A (eds), A History of Wollongong, University of Wollongong Press, 1997, 7-22.

¹⁴ Organ, MK and Speechley, C, Illawarra Aborigines, in Hagan, JS and Wells, A (eds), A History of Wollongong, University of Wollongong Press, 1997, 7-22.

¹⁵ Therin Archaeological Consulting 2003. *Sandon Point Aboriginal heritage assessment*, Report to Wollongong City Council; Wollongong City Library, *Thirroul*, Available at: <https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/explore-our-past/your-suburb/suburbs/thirroul>.

holiday cottages in demand. This changed when the coal mines and the railway marshalling yards came to the area, and tourists chose to spend their holidays in neighbouring Austinmer, where a seaside holiday atmosphere remained.¹⁶

Established in 1984, the **Northern Illawarra Residents Action Group (NIRAG)** was formed in reaction to proposals to build coal bins on the Tramway Creek floodplain and **concerns for over-development** and its impacts on the environment.¹⁷ NIRAG was heavily involved with the Community Picket, established at the end of Hill Street on 3 March 2001, which was supported by over 300 community volunteers and the Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy (SPATE), to protect the headland, wetlands and Aboriginal Heritage from overdevelopment. The Picket was staffed 24/7 for five years until it was destroyed by fire in February 2006.



Image 6. Hill Street Community Picket – 3 March 2001 to 24 February 2006

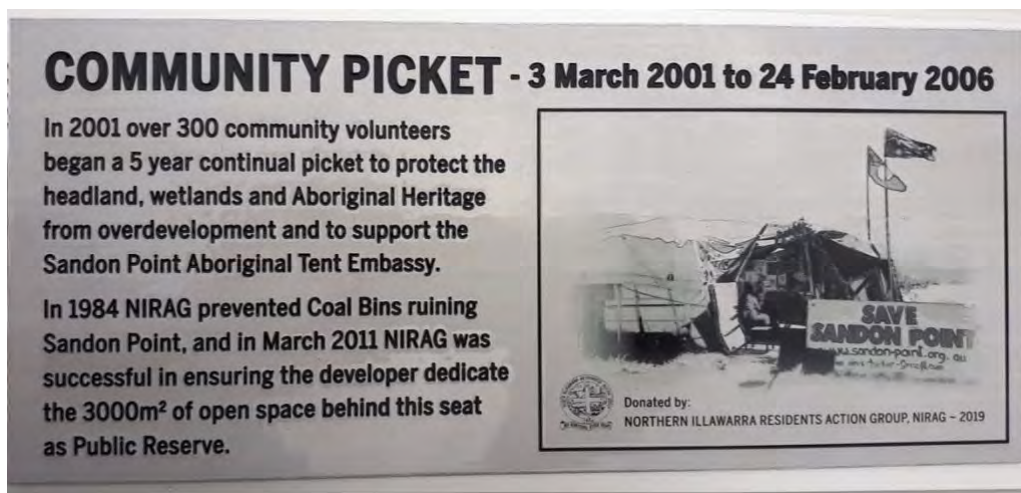


Image 7. In March 2011 NIRAG was successful in ensuring the developer dedicate the 3000m² of open space behind this seat as Public Reserve. This plaque was put in place in December 2019 (refer to Image 8). An additional plaque was added to a nearby table in January 2022 (refer to Image 9).

¹⁶ Wollongong City Library, *Thirroul*, Available at: <https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/explore-our-past/your-suburb/suburbs/thirroul>
¹⁷ Dearden, R. 2021. *Alex Peterson remembered for his 'outstanding contribution'*. Available at: <https://www.southcoaster.com.au/news/alex-peterson-remembered-for-his-outstanding-contribution-and-long-years-of-service#3>



Image 8. Community Picket plaque in situ (bench)



Image 9. Community Picket plaque in situ (table)

The North Illawarra Reconciliation and Treaty Group (NIRTG) was formed in 1998 aiming to advance the reconciliation and treaty process at a national, state and local level. It is a mixed group with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members and one of its main functions has been to support the work of SPATE. This support has taken many forms. Some members of NIRTG were involved in supporting the custodians of the sacred fire who brought the ceremony to establish SPATE, a cultural process supervised by Yuin elder and lawman Uncle Guboo Ted Thomas. NIRTG was the co-host of all 13 of the annual celebrations of the founding of SPATE held each December between 2001 and 2013.¹⁸

In recent decades, Sandon Point Beach and McCauley's Beach have become increasingly popular for **beach-related activities** such as swimming, surfing, surf lifesaving, exercising dogs on the off-leash portion of the beach, and fishing. There are existing boatsheds, on the northern side of Sandon Point which are related to **fishing activities** on Sandon Point Beach. These have been used by individuals since the 1940s. The shed structures have heritage value related to the area's recreational and economic history and are listed as local heritage items in the Wollongong LEP 2009.

¹⁸ NIRTG

Wedding ceremonies are often held on Sandon Point headland in the open lawn areas and occasionally at McCauley’s Beach only in a designated area outside of the northern boundary of the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place. Along with a Trig Station there are markers commemorating the role of the Bulli Jetty to the Illawarra economy, one marker for James John “Fuzz” Hughes, a 16-year-old surfer who lost his life while surfing the point and one for Paul Mason “Jinxy” Jones who was a founding member of the Sandon Point Board Riders Association.

Environment

Thirroul lies between the Pacific Ocean and a section of the Illawarra escarpment known as Lady Fuller Park. It is adjacent to Bulli Pass Scenic Reserve. **Cabbage Tree palms** were once plentiful in the area. These trees were highly prized by both Aboriginal people and European settlers. They have diminished with development, although some still grow along the escarpment and the sides of Bulli Pass. The flora in the area belongs to the **subtropical / warm temperate rainforest** group, termed Mixed Notophyll Vine – Fern Forest, and occurs on the level sections of the escarpment where the soils have developed an accumulation of moisture and nutrients.¹⁹

The Wollongong soil landscape is characterised as a **marine landscape** and is present within beach and foredune landforms. **Extreme wave erosion** occurs during high seas and storm surges and many beaches and foredune systems are significantly eroded by wave action. Comparisons of the coastline between 1948 and 2018 show that it has moved significantly, especially in proximity to Whartons and Slacky Creek.²⁰

The majority of the Wollongong area would once have been covered by open forest with warm temperate rainforest occurring along the escarpments and littoral rainforest in the hind dune areas. The **dominant tree species** of the open forest would have been: Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus saligna*/*E. botryoides*), Blackbutt (*Eucalyptus pilularis*) and Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*). The littoral rainforest would have included *Euroschinus falcate*, *En sieberi*, *Leptospermum laevigatum* and Coastal Banksia (*Banksia integrifolia*) whilst coastal eucalypts would have included *Eucalyptus amplifolia* and *Eucalyptus botryoides*. This vegetation group would have provided **resources for food, medicines or raw materials for artefact manufacture**. It provided habitat for small marsupials such as possums and echidna which provided protein while various plant materials including rhizomes and seeds would have been gathered for sustenance. The large trees would have provided bark to manufacture coolamons (food and water carrying vessel) canoes and shields.²¹

McCauley’s Beach north of Sandon Point is in the coastal floodplain of the Hewitts, Woodlands and Tramway creeks’ catchment between Thirroul and Bulli towns. Despite encroaching suburban development, the remaining open space **supports significant biodiversity** with more than 150 species of native birds surveyed on site. **A variety of**

¹⁹ Wollongong City Libraries, *Thirroul*, Available at:

<https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/explore-our-past/your-suburb/suburbs/thirroul>

²⁰ Hazelton P & Tille P 1990. *Soil Landscapes of the Wollongong-Port Hacking 1:100,000 Sheet map and report*, Soil Conservation Service of NSW, Sydney.

²¹ Hazelton P & Tille P 1990. *Soil Landscapes of the Wollongong-Port Hacking 1:100,000 Sheet map and report*, Soil Conservation Service of NSW, Sydney.; Wesson, S. *Murni Dhungang Jirrar: Living in the Illawarra*.

habitats exist here: ocean, rock platforms, beach, dunes, creeks, estuary, wetland, grassland, coastal scrub, open forest and a heritage-listed remnant of Turpentine Forest.

Flora surveys for ILALC's '**Kuradji Vegetation Management Plan**' (2010) showed the significant vegetation of the site includes **Endangered Ecological Communities (EEC)**, Freshwater Wetlands, Swamp Sclerophyll Forest and Swamp Oak Forest on Coastal Floodplain, each listed under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 (which in 2016 it was replaced by the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016).

Many of the animals and 248 species of native plants found in the Sandon Point area have special meaning in Aboriginal culture. **Living cultural resources** include traditional foods, medicines, woods, leaves and barks used in Koori ceremony, art and healing. At Sandon Point Aboriginal people and others have been undertaking bush regeneration activities soon after the 1998 storms revealed the significance of the area. These activities were initiated while the land was owned by Sydney Water (a condition of sale) and continue today under Council's ownership of the land.

The current vegetation community locations shown in Figure 2 are the result of many years of **bush regeneration activities by community groups**, ILALC, contractors and WCC.²² NIRAG began revegetation of the site with two Coast Care grants in 1999 and 2000. The Community Coast Care project, a Caring for Country project funded by the Australian Government between 2009-2013, was the winner of the 21st NSW Coastal Conference 'Community Involvement Award' in 2013. This project sought to support native vegetation in the Aboriginal Place using bush-care principles. Community members, school groups and volunteers were involved in assisting the Illawarra Aboriginal community in protecting Sandon Point Aboriginal Place. Endangered Ecological Communities (EEC) are on the land and are afforded protection under the **Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016**. This protection has been difficult to achieve with the **area subject to vandalism, acts of fire, tree drilling and cutting** over the years. The Berrim Nuru Environmental Services, ILALC's 'Green Team', continues to conduct revegetation, weed control and site maintenance work around Sandon Point to assist in resorting the culturally sensitive natural areas around this site.

The **revegetation** north of Sandon Point is located above the boat sheds where walkway access has been installed. This revegetation was installed containing the plants species found within the Coastal Headland Banksia Scrub vegetation type. Removal of this vegetation in this area has the potential to increase the **risk of slope failure** and/or speed up **coastal erosion**. On the eastern end of this revegetation, east of the boat sheds, is a small remnant population of Coastal Headlands Grasslands, listed as an EEC under the TSC Act. The remaining patch contains mainly Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda australis*) which is the dominant plant species of this vegetation type.²³

This current arrangement of vegetation communities whilst disturbed reflects the range of coastal zone estuarine and alluvial vegetation communities that are likely to have previously occurred in this location.

²² Wollongong City Council, 23 June 2014, Sandon Point and McCauley's Beach Vegetation Management Plan (VMP).

²³ Wollongong City Council, 23 June 2014, Sandon Point and McCauley's Beach Vegetation Management Plan (VMP).



Figure 2. Current Vegetation Communities - Sandon Point & McCauley's Beach

Our Approach

Phase 1 – Identification of values & connection to place to inform draft Interpretation Strategy

The **consultation approach** adopted for this Interpretation Strategy during phase 1 included **mixed methods** – an online survey, in-person consultations, community forums, and a pop-up tent at Sandon Point to connect with passers-by. Through these various approaches, **community mapping** was undertaken to **identify individual and community values and connections with the place** – sharing an understanding of importance and knowledge of the space and place and recognising that all insights are valid.

Due to **COVID-19 restrictions** and the inability to have large numbers of people gather, ILALC relied heavily on the dissemination of an **online survey** to gather community contributions from November 2020 to May 2021. ILALC has also attempted to engage in **one-on-one consultations** with the WCC's **five recognised Aboriginal stakeholder groups** – ILALC, KEJ, SPATE, Wadi Wadi Commaditchi Aboriginal Corporation, and Wodi Wodi Elders Council – online, over the phone and in-person. Limited responses were received. To gather inputs from **ILALC's membership base** and the **broader Aboriginal community**, the same approaches as mentioned were also utilised. Engagement with the **non-Aboriginal community** of the local region included two **in-person consultations** at the Thirroul library, an in-person consultation at the Sandon Point SLSC and a **pop-up station** on the walkway beside the original site of the Sandon Point Community Pickett, on what we were able to identify as the busiest weekend day and time.

Recognising the **dynamic and continuous nature of Aboriginal culture**, consideration was given to both the **tangible and intangible aspects** linking people over time to their community and land. Respecting the right of Aboriginal people to protect, preserve and promote their cultural heritage, **priority was placed on actively engaging with relevant Aboriginal community organisations and individuals.**

In line with seeking to engage in meaningful, useful and effective community consultation, this Interpretation Strategy invited timely community inputs through **inclusive and interactive forums** with a strong community focus. The **decision-making process for developing this Interpretation Strategy was clearly outlined to community members during consultations** for them to better understand the importance and impact of their involvement in the process. **A first draft** of the Interpretation Strategy following phase 1 consultations was made publicly available and **invited further community feedback before finalisation** of the action plan.²⁴ It is also envisaged that **the Interpretation Strategy will be an ongoing, iterative initiative** that will expand over time and actively invite continued community input²⁵.

²⁴ Carson, L & K Gelber. 2001. *Ideas for Community Consultation – A discussion on principles and procedures for making consultation work*. A report prepared for the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning. http://activedemocracy.net/articles/principles_procedures_final.pdf; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. 2016. *Best Practice Consultation Guidance*, Available at: <https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/best-practice-consultation.pdf>

²⁵ Mozeley, F., Whelan, J. and J. MacLeod. 2016. *People Power Manual: Community Organising Guide*. The Change Agency & Pasifika.

Online Survey – Phase 1

In lieu of commencing community consultations in late 2020, ILALC developed an online survey to gather **community inputs on their connection to, use of and interest in the Sandon Point area**. Overall, **71 responses** were collected and several examples of similar initiatives from across Australia were shared, helping to further develop this Interpretation Strategy. The Google Forms survey (refer to [Annex 2](#)) was disseminated through social media platforms (including Facebook), flyers promoting the in-person consultations and QR codes located around Sandon Point – Hill Street, Aragan Circuit, Sandon Point carpark, Corbett Avenue, bridge at McCauley Beach, beach accessway sign at the southern end of McCauley Beach. Both valuable **quantitative and qualitative data** was able to be collected through this platform.

In-person Consultations – Phase 1

In-person consultations with both the **Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities** were advertised through social media platforms, local businesses in Thirroul, the Thirroul Library and District Community Centre, Aboriginal Community network – National Indigenous Australians Agency, and personal networks (including with Uncle Dave Kennedy, Uncle Richard Archibald, Dootch Kennedy, Uncle Pete), ILALC membership circulars, letter box dropping flyers, Wollongong City Council intranet and a pop-up stand at Sandon Point. These consultations allowed for **direct, personal contributions from a broad range of community stakeholders** and specifically sought input around:

- **How many signs** would be required,
- **Where** signs should be positioned, and
- **What sort of information** should be on the signs.

Priority has been given to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders who have invested in long term relationships with the caring custodianship of the site being represented through the Interpretation Strategy. These stakeholders include specifically **SPATE, KEJ Tribal Elders Aboriginal Corporation, Wadi Wadi Coomaditchie Aboriginal Corporation (WWCAC), Wodi Wodi Elders Council, ILALC, local Thirroul residents and NIRAG**.

Phase 2 – Development of proposed signage and updates to Interpretation Strategy

Guided by the community feedback received and the three **key themes** identified during phase 1, the **second phase** of the Interpretation Strategy saw revisions to the report (as outlined in Table 1 below) and the development of proposed signage text, designs and locations. The **four signs** outlined in the Signage Interpretation section below **will underpin the strategy for the whole area** and set the context for further, ongoing engagement with this significant site. **This updated version of the Interpretation Strategy** was released for public review with additional amendments made in response to community feedback received (as outlined in Table 1 below). **The final installation of these signs will be completed in 2022 in collaboration with Wollongong City Council and the Aboriginal community.**

What our communities told us

Summary of Phase 1 consultation outcomes

Community consultation activities undertaken during the preparation of this Interpretation Strategy (as summarised in Table 1 below) revealed a desire by the community to **showcase the Aboriginal Heritage of the area** and for the area to **retain its natural character and unique identity**, while providing **opportunities to increase public awareness** of recent developments and community resistance movements.

Through the various consultation methods used, approximately **60 individuals were consulted in-person** and another **71 individuals provided inputs through ILALC's online survey**. The majority of inputs were received from the broader community however **Aboriginal Community members represented approximately 20% of the total individuals engaged** in consultations regarding this Interpretation Strategy. The consultation tools used, community inputs received, and emerging themes are summarised by type of consultation group in Table 1 below. The survey tool and example signage and public art presented to the various stakeholders can be found in [Annex 2](#).

The following **key themes** were identified:

- **Aboriginal Heritage,**
- **Flora and Fauna, and**
- **SPATE/ contemporary Aboriginal history**

It was also strongly felt that the installation of **signage and public art**, both **permanent and temporary**, as well as **cultural engagement and educational activities** could provide a **long-term avenue for encouraging the broader community to learn** about the significance of and to collectively care for the place and space.

A **summary** of the groups consulted, the consultation dates and the key themes are represented in **Table 1** below. A more **detailed discussion of the consultations** held with each community group and the data collected through the survey can be found in [Annex 3](#).

Summary of Phase 2 consultation outcomes

From the **community feedback received** on drafts of this Interpretation Strategy, **edits** were made to the **Strategic Context section** of this report (as outlined in Table 1 below) and the approach for sharing a second version of the report was revisited to ensure greater community engagement. As a result, additional inputs were received from NIRTG, who has worked closely with SPATE for many years and has been a consistent contributor to public consultations, meetings and public submissions concerning development applications, Plans of Management, Aboriginal cultural heritage reports and flora and fauna studies concerning Sandon Point. **The proposed signage text, designs and locations** disseminated for public review are set out in [Annex 5](#).

Table 1. Consultation Summary

Community Groups Invited to Participate in Phase 1 & Phase 2 Consultations	Consultation Date/ Location	Key Themes Informing the Current Interpretation Strategy (Themes expressed by multiple groups/ individuals)	Secondary Themes Identified (Themes expressed by some groups/ individuals)
<p>Aboriginal Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ILALC membership base - Broader Aboriginal community - Particular groups identified by WCC 	<p>6 May 2021 University of Wollongong</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aboriginal Heritage, both pre-invasion and contemporary, to express the areas significance and describe the people, land, burials and dreamtime stories - Showcasing the role of revegetation in protecting against erosion, including highlighting the flora and fauna identified through the coast care project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of a keeping place - Removal of dogs on McCauley’s Beach/ Rezoning - Ideas on how to develop future art works or signage with art
<p>Broader, Non-Aboriginal Community/ Thirroul Residents</p>	<p>28 April & 11 May 2021 Thirroul District Community Centre</p> <p>1 May 2021 Sandon Point pop-up tent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The SPATE and 300-person community picket - Aboriginal Heritage, including burials and gatherings, highlighting why this space and place is so important and how old the remains are - Flora and fauna (especially birds, trees and ocean) 	
<p>Sandon Point SLSC</p>	<p>2 May 2021 SP SLSC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aboriginal Heritage - Flora and fauna 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Settler history – whaling and first settler in Illawarra late 1700s - Ocean/sea life
<p>Survey Respondents</p>	<p>November 2020 – May 2021</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aboriginal Heritage - Aboriginal Place Declaration - Vegetation types and Natural Area 	

Community Groups Invited to Participate in Phase 1 & Phase 2 Consultations	Consultation Date/ Location	Key Themes Informing the Current Interpretation Strategy <i>(Themes expressed by multiple groups/ individuals)</i>	Secondary Themes Identified <i>(Themes expressed by some groups/ individuals)</i>
	Online (Google Forms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SPATE - Sandon Point Protest 	
<i>All Community Groups identified above</i>	30 July 2021 – 13 August 2021 (Public review of draft Interpretation Strategy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NIRAG provided suggested edits for the community picket portion of the Interpretation Strategy – the Strategy has been updated accordingly - More opportunities are needed for community members to comment on the Interpretation Strategy – Phase 2 of the Interpretation Strategy includes a longer period for public review and additional channels for sharing the report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Interpretation Strategy needs to tell more of the story of Contemporary Cultural significance and the struggle – possible future initiatives such as public art and community and educational events will seek to provide more opportunities to continue to expand on this theme as opportunities arise
<i>All Community Groups identified above</i>	21 December 2021 – 28 January 2022 (Public review of second draft Interpretation Strategy as well as signage text, designs and locations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - North Illawarra Reconciliation and Treaty Group (NIRTG) provided suggested edits. The strategy has been updated accordingly. - NIRAG provided suggested edits to the signage text and strategy. As a result, additional details have been added to the strategy as relevant and the word ‘helped’ has been added to sign 3 (Annex 5) to better describe NIRAG’s role in the formation of the community picket. - Information on the award-winning Caring for Country project was added 	

Community Groups Invited to Participate in Phase 1 & Phase 2 Consultations	Consultation Date/ Location	Key Themes Informing the Current Interpretation Strategy <i>(Themes expressed by multiple groups/ individuals)</i>	Secondary Themes Identified <i>(Themes expressed by some groups/ individuals)</i>
		<p>to the strategy document in response to an individual submission.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two individual submissions spoke to the carpark location for the entrance sign – one wanting the sign to be installed within the Aboriginal Place on the lawn close to the northern boundary of the carpark and close to the cycleway; and one requesting a taller and less wide sign design that would take up less space in the existing carpark location. These comments will be considered during construction and installation of the signs. - One verbal submission critiqued the sign design and location but ended with the sign designs as set out in the strategy being adequate and better than no signs. 	

Location Map

Existing infrastructure at Sandon Point and McCauley's Beach Plan of Management includes:

- 6 improved beach access points
- 5 existing temporary interpretive signs
- 2 water bottle refill stations
- 7 Joint Management Agreement approved interpretive signs
- 1 Community Picket Bench with commemorative plaque
- Location of two benches that no longer afford a view of the ocean that could be moved and make a place for a sign or public art

Figure 3 represents the **suggested locations for the installation of Interpretive Signage** as conveyed through the **community consultation** process during phase 1. **Based on these suggested locations**, considerations such as visibility of the signs, site perspective, integration with the natural environment, access points, technical constraints, quantity of existing signs in the area, among others, were taken into account to identify the **four locations represented in Figure 4**.

As noted above, **these four signs and their nominated locations will underpin the strategy for the whole area** and set the context for further, ongoing engagement with this significant site. **Additional locations identified in Figure 3 may be revisited** as opportunities for commissioning public art and expanding on key and secondary themes through community and educational events are explored.



Figure 3. Suggested Interpretive Signage Locations from Community Consultations



Figure 4. Proposed Interpretive Signage Locations for 4 thematic signs

Signage Interpretations

One of the **key aims of this Interpretation Strategy is to frame the ideology and perspectives required to influence the content that will be displayed on the signs and to shape potential future public art and community and educational events** around the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place as opportunities present themselves. The four signs will be installed early in 2022 in collaboration with Wollongong City Council. **Signage mock-ups, including proposed text and signage designs, for these four (4) signs can be found in Annex 5.** The proposed text and signage designs in Annex 5 are the result of consultations conducted during phase 1 of this Interpretation Strategy and feedback gained on the draft report. Suggestions for text for each of the signs were developed during the **second phase** of the Interpretation Strategy based on the key themes of Aboriginal Heritage, Flora and Fauna, and SPATE/ contemporary Aboriginal history that emerged from phase 1 consultations. Two of the four signs are welcome signs with the same text and display the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place map. The map is orientated differently depending on the point of entry to the space and place (from the north or from the south). The remaining two signs, titled “Sacred Site” and “Gathering Place”, go into more detail around the key themes of Aboriginal Heritage, Flora and Fauna, and SPATE/ contemporary Aboriginal history. Based on feedback received from NIRAG in January 2022, wording on sign 3 “Sacred Site” was amended from *(NIRAG) established* to *(NIRAG) helped establish a Community Picket*.

It is envisaged that this will be an **ongoing and expanding project** over time and that **these four signs will set the context** of the signage, public art and community and educational activities to be developed and extended in the region. The “wrap” section of each proposed sign (where there is text and/or a map displayed) in Annex 5 can also be updated over time at a minimal cost thanks to advances in signage design.

Implementing the Interpretation Strategy

The **timeline below** maps the major milestones of this Interpretation Strategy.

Table 2. Implementation Timeline

Activity	Nov 2020 – May 2021	June 2021	July 2021	August 2021	September 2021	Oct/Nov 2021	December 2021	January 2022	February 2022	2022 – onwards
Phase 1 – Consultation to inform draft Interpretation Strategy	X									
Phase 1 – Interpretation Strategy draft Report & review		X	X							
Phase 1 – Report shared with key stakeholders – exhibited for public review			X	X						
Phase 2 – Development of signage mock-ups and amendments to Interpretation Strategy based on key stakeholder feedback					X	X				
Phase 2 – Signage mock-ups shared in updated Interpretation Strategy for public review by key stakeholders							X	X		

Activity	Nov 2020 – May 2021	June 2021	July 2021	August 2021	September 2021	Oct/Nov 2021	December 2021	January 2022	February 2022	2022 – onwards
Finalisation of Interpretation Strategy based on feedback and key stakeholders notified								X	X	
Construction of 4 foundational signs based on the 3 key themes									X	
Final Interpretation Strategy informs planning for future public art, signs and events around key and secondary themes ²⁶										X

Please Note:

- Wollongong City Council provided the funding for the development of this Interpretation Strategy by ILALC. Wollongong City Council will use the finalised strategy when considering any future additional interpretive signage, future public art or community events. Wollongong City Council funding of Interpretation Strategy implementation is subject to future decisions of Council such as, but not limited to, Council’s 4-year Delivery Plan and 1-year Annual Plan (in other words future Council 4 year and 1-year budgets).
- Wollongong City Council sees this strategy as directly linked to the Sandon Point and McCauley’s Beach Plan of Management and will provide a copy of the finalised Interpretation Strategy on Council’s Community Land page on Council’s website, along with periodic updates on the progress of implementing the strategy over the coming years.
- Wollongong City Council has grant funding from the State Government for the installation of the proposed 4 foundational signs in Annex 5 of this Interpretation Strategy before 30 April 2021. To meet the funding agreement deadline for sign installation the designs do not include artwork, but future updates to the wrap part of the signs could include artwork designed by local Aboriginal artist as Interpretation Strategy initiatives are further implemented with Council funding or through other future funding sources.

²⁶ These other activities are beyond the scope of this current project and are subject to future funding.

Conclusion


Underpinned by the historical significance of the space and place and the valuable community inputs received, the **next priority** of this Interpretation Strategy is to **install the contextual signage around the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place** as outlined in the Implementation Timeline (Table 2) and in Annex 5. If the location of the entrance sign at the carpark changes when installed in early 2022, due to traffic safety concerns expressed, this interpretation strategy will be updated to reflect the final location.

Following the finalisation and installation of these 4 foundational signs in early 2022, there is **considerable value in exploring secondary themes** identified by the community in Phase 1 of this Interpretation Strategy and **extending the project to include additional public art, signs, educational activities and community events** as opportunities arise. The timing and scale of additional expressions of the significance of this space and place will be subject to future funding opportunities.

The context and community feedback summarised in earlier sections of this current Interpretation Strategy seek to **manage the complexity between Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives and Western ideas** around the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place. The ideas and approach presented here seek to **move away from perpetuating tokenism** in order to **express meaningfulness from an Aboriginal perspective** without constructing an exclusive space. This Interpretation Strategy seeks to reflect all aspects and constructs of this space and place.

Annexes

Annex 1. Existing interim signage



wollongong
city of innovation

Sandon Point Aboriginal Place



For thousands of years, Aboriginal people have had a connection to this land as shown by the existence of middens, oral and written histories and the discovery of a 6,000 year old burial. A 14-hectare area east of the cycleway from McCauleys Beach to Sandon Point Headland has been declared an Aboriginal Place by the New South Wales Government. The area has cultural significance to the Aboriginal Community and is protected by the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974.

Please show your respect and only use the sign posted beach access points, put litter in bins and keep dogs off the dunes and rock platforms.

Annex 2. Google Forms Survey

Sandon Point Aboriginal Place - McCauley's Beach Interpretation Strategy

The Illawarra Local Aboriginal Lands Council has been engaged by Wollongong City Council to assist in the development of an Interpretation Strategy for the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place and McCauley's Beach area.

The aim of this Strategy is to enable members of the community to contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of the significance of this area, while allowing us to all celebrate its story and history.

Due to the restrictions around COVID and the potential health challenges that confront our community we have decided to start our initial engagement through the use of this survey.

The consultation period will take place between November 2020 and May 2021 and seek the views from the community on how they would like to see this culturally important area recognised through signage and/or art installations.

It is thereafter expected that a draft strategy will be presented to Wollongong City Council in June 2021.

Thank you for your contributions and participation.

ILALC

*Required

General Questions

1. What age group do you fit within? *

Mark only one oval.

Under 20

20-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60-69

70+

2. How often do you visit the area? *

Mark only one oval.

- Daily
- Weekly
- More than once a week
- Monthly
- More than once a month
- Every 3 months
- Every 6 months
- Yearly

3. What is your association to the area? *

Tick all that apply.

- Aboriginal Community Member
- Local McCauley's Estate Resident
- Thirroul Resident
- Bulli Resident
- Visitor
- User of Dog's off leash area
- Surfing Community Member
- Surf Club Member

Other: _____

4. What is important to you about this area? *

Tick all that apply.

- Aboriginal Heritage
- Settlement Heritage
- Vegetation and Natural Area
- McCauley's Beach
- Dog off leash area
- Access to surfing area

Other: _____

5. How would you like to see the importance of this area represented? *

Tick all that apply.

- Signage
- Public Art
- Vegetation planting and management

Other: _____

Signage

Signage can be used to recognise the importance of an area and ensure that areas create a sense of belonging. We are interested in what you might like to see on signs in this area.

6. What do you believe is important to be displayed on the signage? *

Tick all that apply.

- Aboriginal Heritage
- Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy
- Aboriginal Place Declaraion
- Settlement Heritage
- Vegetation types
- Sandon Point Protest (Community Opposition)

Other: _____

7. What style of signage would you like to see? *

Below are some examples of signage. Is there a style of signage that you like? Please add other examples at the end of this questionnaire.

Tick all that apply.



Option 1



Option 2



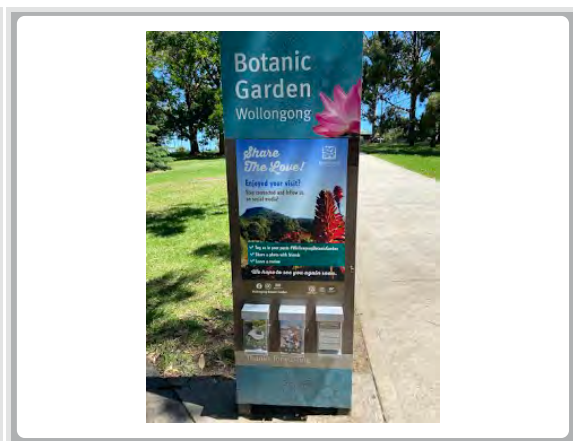
Option 3



Option 4



Option 5



Option 6



Other: _____



If you have other ideas please comment where it indicates other.

Natural Area and Vegetation

Natural areas and vegetation can provide the community with a feeling of connection. We would like to understand how you believe we can demonstrate the importance of this site through the natural environment.

8. What type of vegetation is important to you?

Tick all that apply.

- Native vegetation
- Shade producing vegetation
- Native Ground Covers
- Species that would be endemic to this type of landscape

Other: _____

9. How would you like to see this natural area promoted?

Tick all that apply.

- Workshops
- Signage providing information on plant species
- Brochures or information booklets
- Labels associated with particular plants
- Planting days

10. What do you think we could be doing to improve the vegetation in this area

Sculptures and Public Art

Sculptures and public art can be used to express a sense of belonging to an area and allows the community to express connection through various forms. We are interested in what forms of public art you might like to see in this area.

11. Do you think Public Art should be installed in the area? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No *Skip to question 16*

12. What would you like to see promoted through a public art installation?

Tick all that apply.

- Aboriginal Heritage
- Settler Heritage
- Surfing
- Surf Life Saving
- Community Protest
- Aboriginal Place Declaration

13. Should public art be a fixed permanent display or changeable?

Mark only one oval.

- Permanent
- Changeable
- Both permanent and changeable installations.

14. Should a specific area be identified for a public art installation or should it be randomly located across the area?

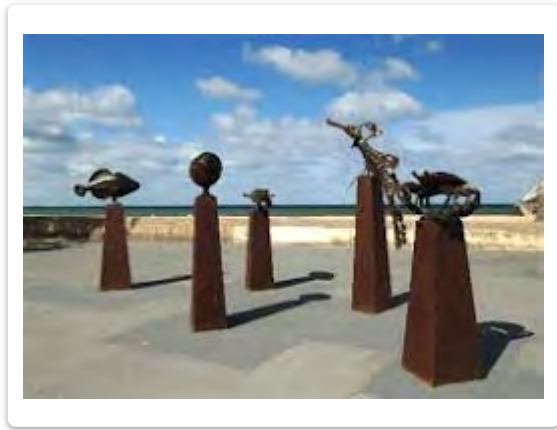
Mark only one oval.

- Specific Area
- Multiple zones

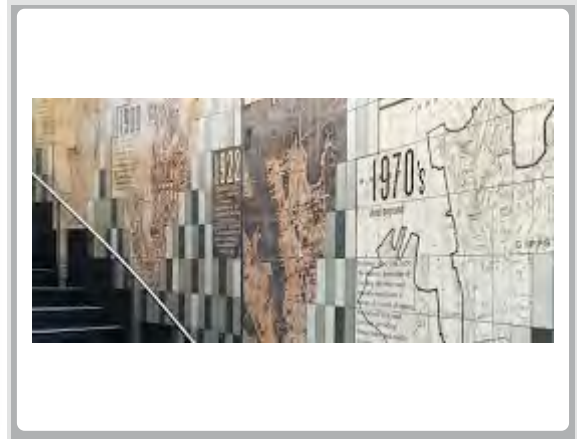
15. What style of public art would you like to see?

Below are some examples of public art. Is there a style of public art that you like? Please add other examples at the end of this questionnaire.

Tick all that apply.



Option 1



Option 2



Option 3



Option 4



Option 5



If you have other ideas please comment where it indicates other.

Other: _____

Additional Information

This section of the survey seeks to provide supporting information that may allow us to better understand your connection to the area. This is your opportunity to let us know about concerns, opportunities or what you really like about this area, so that we can get a sense of the opportunities for greater engagement with this important location.

16. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss about the area?

17. Is there any person or group that you believe should be consulted as they may hold knowledge in relation to this area? Please provide details below.

18. Future Workshops and Information Sessions *

This question relates to the operations of the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council only and is not associated with activities of Wollongong City Council. The Land Council will be seeking to engage with the community through workshops and forums and many topics in the next year. Would you be interested in being informed of any activities in the following areas?

Tick all that apply.

- Aboriginal culture and heritage
- Climate Change
- Coastal Management
- Not Interested

Other: _____

19. Are you willing to be contacted to discuss your responses? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No Skip to section 6 (Thank you for participating in our survey.)

Please provide your contact details below.

20. Name *

21. Email Address *

22. Phone Number

Do you have information about the McCauleys Beach - Sandon Point area that you would like to share? If so, please send to sandonpoint@ilalc.org.au

Thank you for
participating in
our survey.

The Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council and Wollongong City Council
share a vision of creating a better community for everyone to enjoy.

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

Annex 3. Consultation Outcomes – Detailed Community Feedback

Aboriginal community

Members of the Aboriginal community were **contacted directly** to participate in an **in-person community forum** hosted at the **University of Wollongong in May 2021**. For those that were unable to attend, their inputs were received through direct **phone communication**. During consultation, **community members were presented with a map of the Aboriginal Place at Sandon Point, examples of signage and public art installations at other sites** and were asked the following **four questions**:

1. Where do you feel the best place for signage would be?
2. How many signs would you feel are needed in this space and place?
3. What type of signs would you think best for this space and place?
4. What would you like to see represented on signage in the area?

The floor was also opened up for broader discussion so that individuals could raise any other themes or topics they felt needed to be expressed.

From discussions with the Aboriginal community, the following **key themes** emerged:

- **Aboriginal Heritage**, both pre-invasion and contemporary, to express the areas significance and describe the people, land, burials and dreamtime stories
- **Removal of dogs** on McCauley's Beach/ Rezoning
- Showcasing the role of **revegetation** in protecting against erosion, including highlighting the flora and fauna identified through the coast care project
- Establishment of a **keeping place**

As with the Sandon Point struggle, there is hope that this Interpretation Strategy will continue the **shift in focus from being solely archaeological to be more inclusive of the anthropological significance of the space and place** and should be reflected in the content of the signage.

In terms of **environment**, there is significant community concern that the significance of this space and place for the Eastern seaboard is not sufficiently highlighted. **Denying construction of boardwalks through the trees in this sacred space and place** and ensuring that **dogs are kept well away from the burial site** are **key priorities for the Aboriginal community**.

Discussion around the need for a **keeping place** also came up several times. This would ideally include a cool room and museum, provide a space for educational tours for schools, a residential site and a kiosk. The exact location for this is somewhat underdetermined.

Additional, yet less prevalent, **themes** that emerged during discussions included:

- Extending the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place to the Plan of Management boundary
- Highlighting the significance of the three creeks

For the design of the signs and public art, these should effectively draw people to the space and place more than once, encouraging them to **reflect and 'feel' the space and place** – what am I walking on? The use of **local language** and **local artists** to develop the new signage designs and messages that will replace the existing text and graphic from 2018 was

strongly encouraged. **Suggested methods for ongoing, broader community engagement and knowledge sharing** included:

- Community events
- School children/ youth involvement
- Temporary or digital artworks
- Carvings
- Public art submissions through ILALC – ILALC then to tender to WCC (process of individuals tendering directly to WCC too lengthy) Use language ‘presentation’ rather than ‘competition’ (softer)
- Creating opportunities for connections between traditional custodians and other Aboriginal people from other places and with the non-Aboriginal community
- Progressively installing additional interpretive signage over time

The **beach access points** and **turpentine forest** were identified as the **best locations** for placing up to 5 or 6 signs. Reference was also made to **similar initiatives** on **Fraser Island** and around **Uluru**.

Broader, non-Aboriginal community

Members of the broader, non-Aboriginal community were invited through **social media, community forum and WCC platforms** as well as the distribution of flyers to participate in **consultation sessions held in April and May 2021 at the Thirroul District Community Centre**. For those that were unable to attend, their inputs were sought through the ILALC **online survey**. A **pop-up tent** was also setup at Sandon Point on the first Saturday in May 2021 to engage with passers-by. During the three consultations, community members were **presented with a map of the Aboriginal Place at Sandon Point, examples of signage and public art installations at other sites** and were asked the following **four questions**:

1. Where do you feel the best place for signage would be?
2. How many signs would you feel are needed in this space and place?
3. What type of signs would you think best for this space and place?
4. What would you like to see represented on signage in the area?

The floor was also opened up for broader discussion so that individuals could raise any other themes or topics they felt needed to be expressed.

From discussions with the broader, non-Aboriginal community, the following **key themes** emerged:

- The **SPATE** and 300-person **community picket**
- **Aboriginal Heritage**, including burials and gatherings, highlighting why this space and place is so important and how old the remains are
- **Flora and fauna** (especially birds, trees and ocean)

Additional, yet less prevalent, **themes** that emerged during discussions included:

- History of the old jetty
- Coal activity (past & remnant) in the region
- Information on the whale processing plant
- Reclaiming the remaining undeveloped land (NIRAG position)

The general consensus was that as much information as possible should be provided.

Preferences for the design of the signs and public art included a **focus on natural materials** such as wood that would blend more easily into the natural environment and incorporating art within the design of the signs themselves. The **rusty style of sign** presented in the online survey (refer to [Annex 2](#)) was also popular. There was also the suggestion of including the **seat and plaque** on Sandon Point as a memorial. **NIRAG and Rotary** have identified themselves as **wanting to participate in the development and installation of the signs and public art**.

In order to engage people in the space and place, it was thought that **numbering the signs or providing directions/ arrows to create a trail** and help tell a story could be effective. Incorporating **QR codes** linked to additional information/ resources for those interested in a particular aspect of the information represented on the signs was also popular. **Teaching tools**, including excursions, guided tours and encourage children to **share new knowledge** with their parents, were all considered **ways of adding value to the signage**. In terms of making the space and place inclusive, it was suggested that verbal and written information could be provided. Due to the history of vandalism in the area, it was suggested that **cameras** would be **needed around the site to protect it**, especially so that the fences could be taken down. The idea of building a boardwalk through trees was also raised.

It was suggested that **the signs should be placed at all access points** (seven in total) as well as on and around Sandon Point and be made different sizes depending on the type of access point. A sign near **Hill Street** should be specifically about the tools/ artefacts found there during the most recent development. Examples of **similar initiatives** in **Byron Bay** and **Ballina** were also shared by those who attended the consultation (refer to [Annex 4](#)).

Sandon Point SLSC

Discussions with members of the Sandon Point SLSC were held on the **first Sunday in May 2021** at the Surf Club. During consultation, members were **presented with a map of the Aboriginal Place at Sandon Point, examples of signage and public art installations at other sites** and were asked the following **four questions**:

1. Where do you feel the best place for signage would be?
2. How many signs would you feel are needed in this space and place?
3. What type of signs would you think best for this space and place?
4. What would you like to see represented on signage in the area?

They were also invited to share any other themes or topics they felt needed to be expressed.

From discussions with the SLSC members, the following **key themes** emerged:

- **Settler history** – whaling and first settler in Illawarra late 1700s
- **Aboriginal Heritage**
- **Flora, fauna and ocean/sea life**

More **minor themes** that were also raised included, surfer culture, whale watching and the inclusion of all history more broadly.

There was a strong desire for the **fences to be taken down** and for **signage to be made of natural materials** rather than steel. **Engagement with schools** was also seen as a priority. The SLSC already hosts 1,500-2,000 school children/ year for surf awareness sessions. The President of the club, Ken Holloway, suggested that these **surf awareness sessions and cultural tours of the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place could be combined** for a more

holistic experience and to provide maximum information. The idea of building a boardwalk through trees was also raised to open up the bush space but locals didn't want to see the space and place become touristy.

Hewitts Creek and Slacky Creek were identified as key locations for signage. Examples of **similar initiatives from Laguna Beach** were referred to and it was suggested that **public art** should be developed in partnership with **Bellambi Public School** as they have prior experience in art installations.

Online Survey Respondents

Both **quantitative and qualitative data** was collected through a **Google Forms survey** (see [Annex 2](#)). This was promoted on the ILALC Facebook page, circulated amongst members and broader community groups, QR codes placed around Sandon Point and shared during in-person consultations.

Through the survey, the following **key themes** emerged:

- **Aboriginal Heritage**
- **Aboriginal Place Declaration**
- **Vegetation types and Natural Area**
- **SPATE**
- **Sandon Point Protest**

Less prominent themes included:

- Settlement Heritage
- McCauley's Beach
- Dog off leash area

From the survey results, the **preferred signage designs** (refer to [Annex 2](#) for images of signage) were identified as:

- Option 3 – bronzed look (43.7%)
- Option 1 – sign with roof shelter (32.4%)
- Option 4 – bronzed look (31%)
- Option 5 – sign on sandstone block (19.7%)

There was a strong preference for **public art representing Aboriginal Heritage and the Aboriginal Place Declaration** and for artwork to be in the form of statues. The consensus was for **signage to combine text and art**. Additional open-ended responses also called for the **hosting of workshops on Aboriginal culture, coastal management and climate change**. There was also a strong preference for **artwork** to be both **permanent and changeable** and spread across multiple zones/ locations. Some examples of similar initiatives were also submitted through the survey.

Annex 4. Public Art/ Signage examples received through community consultations

Ballina example

Ballina features a coastal walk with a number of cultural signs prepared in collaboration with elders from the Bundjalung people. Each set of signs has a QR code that linked to the pages listed below. The community member who provided this example from Ballina noted however that some of the signs had deteriorated significantly and were very hard to read. It will be important to note the materials used for the design of signage at Sandon Point as these signs will be installed in a similar environmental setting.



Embedded QR code links:

- <http://www.discoverballina.com.au/crpath/entry-lookout-tablet.html>
- <http://www.discoverballina.com.au/crpath/entry-node-tablet.html>
- <http://www.discoverballina.com.au/crpath/node3-tablet.html>
- <http://www.discoverballina.com.au/crpath/node4-tablet.html>
- <http://www.discoverballina.com.au/crpath/node6-tablet.html>
- <http://www.discoverballina.com.au/crpath/node5-tablet.html>



Byron Bay example



Annex 5. Proposed Signage Scope

The signage designs represented below have been generated from the community ideas/ feedback received during the first phase of this Interpretation Strategy. From the **Aboriginal community**, there was a strong desire for the design of the signs to **effectively draw people to the space and place** more than once, encouraging them to **reflect and ‘feel’ the space and place**. This ongoing engagement could also offer an opportunity for continual learning about the significance of this space and place over time. The broader non-Aboriginal community had a keen preference for the design of the signs to be non-intrusive and **blend easily into the natural environment**. Incorporating **QR codes** linked to additional information/ resources (both permanent and changing) for those interested in a particular aspect of the information represented on the signs was also popular. This is **an option that might be explored in future** when the signs need updating (i.e. to be ‘rewrapped’). QR codes have therefore been included in the proposed designs in Annex 5 below but **will not be printed on the signs to be installed in early 2022 as content development is subject to future funding and consultation with the Aboriginal community**. This approach may in future complement the **hosting of workshops on Aboriginal culture, coastal management and climate change**. Several examples of similar initiatives were provided through Phase 1 of this Interpretation Strategy and were carefully considered in developing the designs and mock-ups showcased below.



Sandon Point Aboriginal Place

Signage scope

Phase 1

- 1 Place entrance sign, southern
- 2 Place entrance sign, northern
- 3 Interpretive Plinth sign, sacred site
- 4 Interpretive Plinth sign, gathering place

SANDON POINT Aboriginal Place



Welcome to the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place

Since the time of creation, Aboriginal people have had a deep connection to this landscape, the escarpment, the flatlands, the coastline and the waters. Ceremonies of storytelling, song and dance, initiation and burials have been performed here from that time until now. It is through this continuity that this place and space is recognised and revered as highly significant and sacred.

We ask that you respect this connection and tread lightly as you pass through or engage. The story, the song and the spirit of this place is strong and enduring.

Welcome



Scan here to learn more about Sandon Point Aboriginal Place



←
QR codes added in the future subject to funding and further consultation with the Aboriginal Community

1 Place entrance sign - Southern

Main Sign - 100mm x 100mm x 2200mm reclaimed hardwood timber posts (incl. 600mm in ground). 1300mm x 300mm / 1300mm x 650mm x 6mm aluminium sign panels. Digitally printed both sides on 3M non-reflective cast vinyl with a UV protective over laminate. Timber dressed all round and oiled finish. Aluminium panels fastened using stainless steel security screws.



SANDON POINT Aboriginal Place



Welcome to the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place

Since the time of creation, Aboriginal people have had a deep connection to this landscape, the escarpment, the flatlands, the coastline and the waters. Ceremonies of storytelling, song and dance, initiation and burials have been performed here from that time until now. It is through this continuity that this place and space is recognised and revered as highly significant and sacred.

We ask that you respect this connection and tread lightly as you pass through or engage. The story, the song and the spirit of this place is strong and enduring.

Welcome



Scan here to learn more about
Sandon Point Aboriginal Place



←
QR codes added in the future subject to funding and further consultation with the Aboriginal Community

2 Place entrance sign - Northern

Main Sign - 100mm x 100mm x 2200mm reclaimed hardwood timber posts (incl. 600mm in ground). 1300mm x 300mm / 1300mm x 650mm x 6mm aluminium sign panels. Digitally printed both sides on 3M non-reflective cast vinyl with a UV protective over laminate. Timber dressed all round and oiled finish. Aluminium panels fastened using stainless steel security screws.



Preferred placement:



Plan B placement:



SANDON POINT Aboriginal Place



Sacred site

In 1998, large seas unearthed a skull within the sand dunes of McCauley's Beach. This archaeological find was identified to be an Aboriginal man of significant cultural status, dated at 6,000 years old.

This ancient relic became an impetus for local Aboriginal activists and community volunteers to form an alliance and resistance to the development and desecration of this sacred site. The Northern Illawarra Residents Action Group (NIRAG) helped establish a Community Picket at the end of Hill Street in support of the Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy (SPATE) which was built behind the dunes where the skull exposed itself.

A campaign to protect the site followed including radical action, extensive court cases, and state government interventions until in 2007 the site was declared an Aboriginal Place by the NSW Government. Today, this area is protected by the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974.



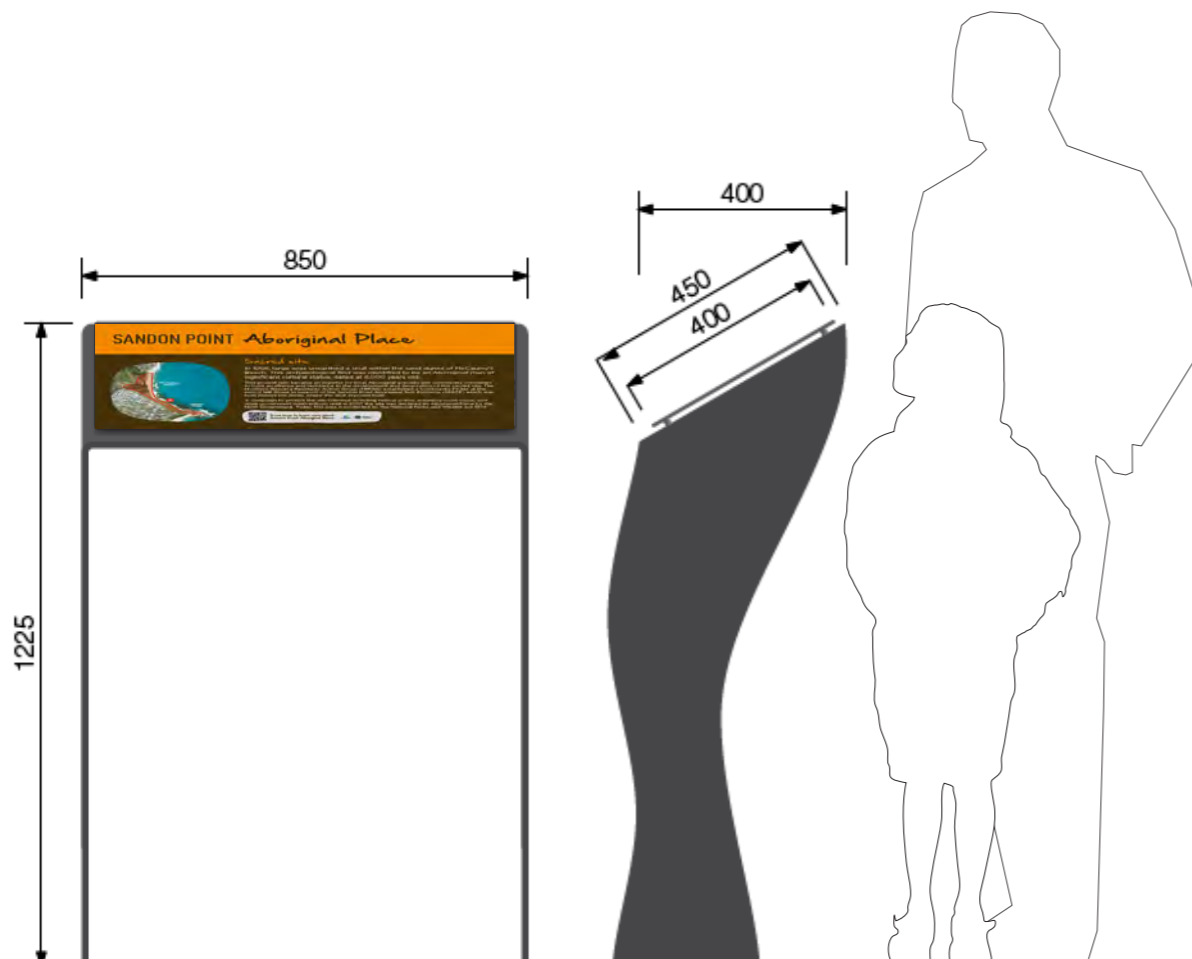
Scan here to learn more about Sandon Point Aboriginal Place



↑ QR codes added in the future subject to funding and further consultation with the Aboriginal Community

3 Interpretive Plinth sign - sacred site

IN1 Large - 850mm x 1225mm x 12mm steel. Free standing, surface mounted sign. Galvanised and 2pac painted single nominated colour. C/w 6mm 2pac painted aluminium face plate, fixed with 6mm stainless steel screws. 20mm holes in base plate for mounting.



SANDON POINT Aboriginal Place

Gathering place

Precontact, this was a gathering place where the Aboriginal peoples from the north, south and west would meet to conduct important business. The presence of littoral rainforest and coastal eucalypts supported this, providing people with the required nourishment and medicines, and resources to construct tools, canoes and sacred objects.

The native flora and fauna of this area has been impacted greatly since colonisation and settlement. Since the site's Aboriginal Place declaration in 2007, dedicated bush regeneration by the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council (in partnership with Wollongong City Council) has seen the rejuvenation of the site through the widespread removal of invasive species and reintroduction of a number of native flora (Iomandra, blue flax lily, austral rush, tall sedge, waraburra, golden guinea vine, pigface, warrigal greens). This regeneration is culturally significant to the protection and healing of this sacred site.



Scan here to learn more about Sandon Point Aboriginal Place



↑ QR codes added in the future subject to funding and further consultation with the Aboriginal Community

4 Interpretive Plinth sign - gathering place

IN1 Large - 850mm x 1225mm x 12mm steel. Free standing, surface mounted sign. Galvanised and 2pac painted single nominated colour. C/w 6mm 2pac painted aluminium face plate, fixed with 6mm stainless steel screws. 20mm holes in base plate for mounting.

