



VIRTUS HERITAGE INNOVATE

Reconciliation Action Plan

June 2021 - June 2023



Company Director's Message

Cultural heritage is critical and interrelated to identity and health, it is what we value today, cherish from our past and hand down and protect for future generations, our children and children's children to learn from, engage and value for years to come. As archaeologists and heritage practitioners, we are privileged to work on Country with First Australians and we continue to be committed to working respectfully and sensitively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners and communities.

Archaeology in Australia is based on a history of institutional racism and injustice towards First Australians, which continues to exist today. As a company and individually our team is committed to social justice and advancing reconciliation through honest and sensitive consideration and realisations of historical atrocities and the continued injustices experienced today by First Australians. Following the Burra Charter (ICOMOS, 2013) principles and best heritage practice, conservation of cultural heritage and cultural values will continue to be our first consideration for projects and a critical part of our role to educate, promote and seek out, wherever possible, with clients and proponents. Although archaeological salvage is often part of a process of destruction of cultural heritage places and sites, we will continue to:

1. Strive to advance locally culturally appropriate approaches to cultural heritage projects that respect cultural values;
2. Provide opportunities for more meaningful cultural engagement and partnerships with Traditional Owners and Local Aboriginal Land Councils, where culturally appropriate;
3. Continue promotion and development of national cultural heritage conservation projects in eastern coast of NSW and western Cape York, Queensland and assisting First Australians with pro bono community grant projects; and
4. Continue to lead with non invasive and culturally appropriate scientific methods such as geophysical tools to identify, protect and manage cultural places.

As Company Director, I am committed to ensuring our sustained focus on the reconciliation actions contained within this Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan during these dynamic and challenging times with our team, drawing on our values of integrity, respect, innovation and experience.

Dr. Mary-Jean Sutton

Our Acknowledgement

Virtus Heritage acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and the Traditional Custodians of the states and territories of Australia. We recognise the Traditional Owners of the lands we frequently work within - the Bundjalung (northern NSW), Wonnarua (Hunter Valley, NSW), Awabakal (Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, NSW), Biripi and Worimi (Taree/Manning Valley/Great Lakes, NSW) peoples and many other Traditional Owners throughout Australia. We acknowledge Traditional Owners and historical families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the primary determinants of their

cultural heritage and recognise the contested nature of archaeological (scientific) values to cultural (social and spiritual) values. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging in maintaining cultures, Country and their spiritual and historical connections to the lands and waters. We acknowledge that it is a privilege to work on Country with Elders and families. We acknowledge and respect the trust and responsibility we have as archaeologists, heritage practitioners and consultants to work with families and communities to identify, assess and manage cultural places, landscapes and knowledge.



Our Vision

Our vision for reconciliation is of an Australia where equity exists for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is for an Australia where all people share the same standard of living and opportunities to prosper with equality in all areas of life including employment, education and life expectancy and quality.

It is for an Australia where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the primary determinants of their cultural heritage, not just on policy papers but where recognition is manifest in all actions. It is to strive for honest and meaningful engagement in cultural heritage where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised as owners of their cultural sites, places and landscapes.

Our vision is to work with Local Land Councils and approved native title claimant corporations, as well as First Australian community based organisations to promote, reform, celebrate and educate the broader community on the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage and the unique place of First Australians in our society. Our vision is to promote broader community understanding and acceptance of the history of injustice in Australia for First Australians, and to address ignorance encountered in our day to day business, research and grant projects, as well as

our broader professional and personal lives. We will continue to acknowledge and celebrate the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our society. We will continue to expand our own contributions to:

- ◇ Close the gap in disadvantage; ‘Close the Gap’ is a campaign pioneered by Oxfam to raise awareness of the ‘Closing the Gap’ framework, Council of Australian Governments (COAG) initiative.
We are committed to closing the gap through exploring opportunities for greater Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement be that in all projects including fieldwork, training and collaborative community research.
- ◇ Lift the visibility of First Nations’ expertise, excellence and contributions to Australian archaeology and cultural heritage;
- ◇ Acknowledge and support the rights, languages and cultures of Indigenous communities;
- ◇ Challenge racism; and
- ◇ Promote equal opportunity and outcomes for all Australians.





Our Business

Virtus Heritage provides expertise in historical research, archaeology and heritage management across Australia and internationally. Our team specialises in the investigation, assessment and management of archaeological sites and cultural landscapes, in consultation with our clients, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and groups, local communities and statutory agencies. Our interdisciplinary team, affiliations and technical partnerships allow us to match each project with the necessary academic skills, professional experience and local expertise. Our heritage advice and reports are prepared by experienced professionals and communicated clearly, balancing statutory reporting and legislative requirements with client needs and community expectations. It is our privilege to work as archaeologists with clients and communities to develop assessments and investigations that recognise the links between people and place, providing ethical and practical heritage outcomes. Our website (www.virtusheritage.com.au) provides details on services.

The recognition, preservation and celebration of the cultures and heritages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is core to our business. We believe that this heritage is integral to community wellbeing and identity through the valued stories, places and material culture that we pass down to future generations. The cultural heritage management and archaeological investigations we undertake play an important role in recording, assessing and interpreting this culture. We are committed to national reconciliation. We perceive our professional role to strive for continued strong advocacy for broad respect of First Australians' histories and cultures, and to address injustice in institutional racism, by promoting cultural heritage projects with meaningful community engagement.

The Virtus Heritage core team is comprised of twelve employees which includes a director, principal archaeologists, senior

archaeologists, HR, creative consultants & administrative support staff, but expands as required due to the project driven nature of our work. Our team operates out of locations in Gold Coast, QLD; Sunshine Coast, QLD; Sydney, NSW; Newcastle, NSW; Dunedin, New Zealand; and our home base in Pottsville, NSW, as well as traveling the nation and abroad to undertake fieldwork and provide our clients with on the ground expertise.

Our team includes the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, and engagement of First Australians on commercial projects as joint venture partners (Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council collaborated on three projects from 2018 – 2020), casual and permanent employees (Traditional Owners from Mapoon were employed from 2010 to 2020 on a casual basis), and consultants and contractors (artists and expertise for cultural awareness training and Welcome to Country, catering for functions and conferences). Since mid-2019 three of our team identify as a First Australian. One team member is employed on a permanent basis recently being advanced from a casual employee into a managerial role and two are employed on a casual basis.

We engage and partner with First Australian experts, cultural knowledge holders and groups, on a regular basis on projects locally, interstate and internationally. We have celebrated recent awards and nominations for innovation and excellence in cultural heritage in 2019, locally and regionally within NSW, as well as nationally. The experiences, knowledge and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community groups are integral to our projects, to the identification and preservation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to achieving good heritage outcomes for our clients and the communities in which they operate. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

groups and people also contribute and share their time, knowledge and expertise in many aspects of our archaeological fieldwork, including survey, test excavation, monitoring, surface collection, site recording and salvage works. Over 2018-2020, this role included joint venture partnerships and advocacy for equal or greater pay than archaeologists for First Australians.

We work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on cultural heritage, historical and geophysical investigations. We are also honored to have created affiliations with a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, businesses and individuals which enable us to collaborate on shared projects and activities. Tweed Byron LALC, Coffs Harbour LALC, Awabakal LALC, Worimi LALC, Mindaribba LALC, Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Bandjalang Aboriginal Corporation, Tjungundji Aboriginal Corporation, Mapoon Land and Sea Rangers, Yaegl Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Githabul Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation - are all parties that we have either commercial projects or community research projects with and also provide opportunity for employment and sub consultancy work.

The expansion of a research and development component in our company since 2019, has also enabled us to provide additional opportunities to First Australians pro bono to protect cultural heritage places through assisting with grants and research projects. The affiliations we share also allow us to provide sponsorship and other opportunities such as cultural exchange between our organisations, conference attendance and researching and presenting the outcomes of our collaborations in archaeology to our professional associations and the broader community.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan

Our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan is based on the pillars of Relationships, Respect and Opportunities which continue as commitments as part of our earlier Reflect and Innovate RAPs.

Our Innovate RAP Working Group includes:

- ◇ Representation from the CEO, Tweed-Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council (TBLALC);
- ◇ Traditional Owners of Mapoon;
- ◇ Cultural Heritage Officer, Mapoon Land and Sea Rangers;
- ◇ Representation from the Business Manager of Bandjalang Aboriginal Corporation (BAC).

The individual members that are directly affiliated with this Working Group are:

- ◇ Dr Mary-Jean Sutton, Company Director & Principal Archaeologist, Virtus Heritage (RAP Champion and Co-ordinator)
- ◇ Leweena Williams, CEO, Tweed-Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council
- ◇ Rob Appo, Project Office, Byron Shire Council
- ◇ Aunty Diane Nicholls, Elder, Tjungundji Aboriginal Corporation
- ◇ Jason Jia, Cultural Heritage Officer, Mapoon Land and Sea Rangers and
- ◇ Afzal Khan, Business Manager, Bandjalang Aboriginal Corporation

We acknowledge the valuable ongoing contribution they continue to make to our reconciliation efforts.

Our Reconciliation Journey

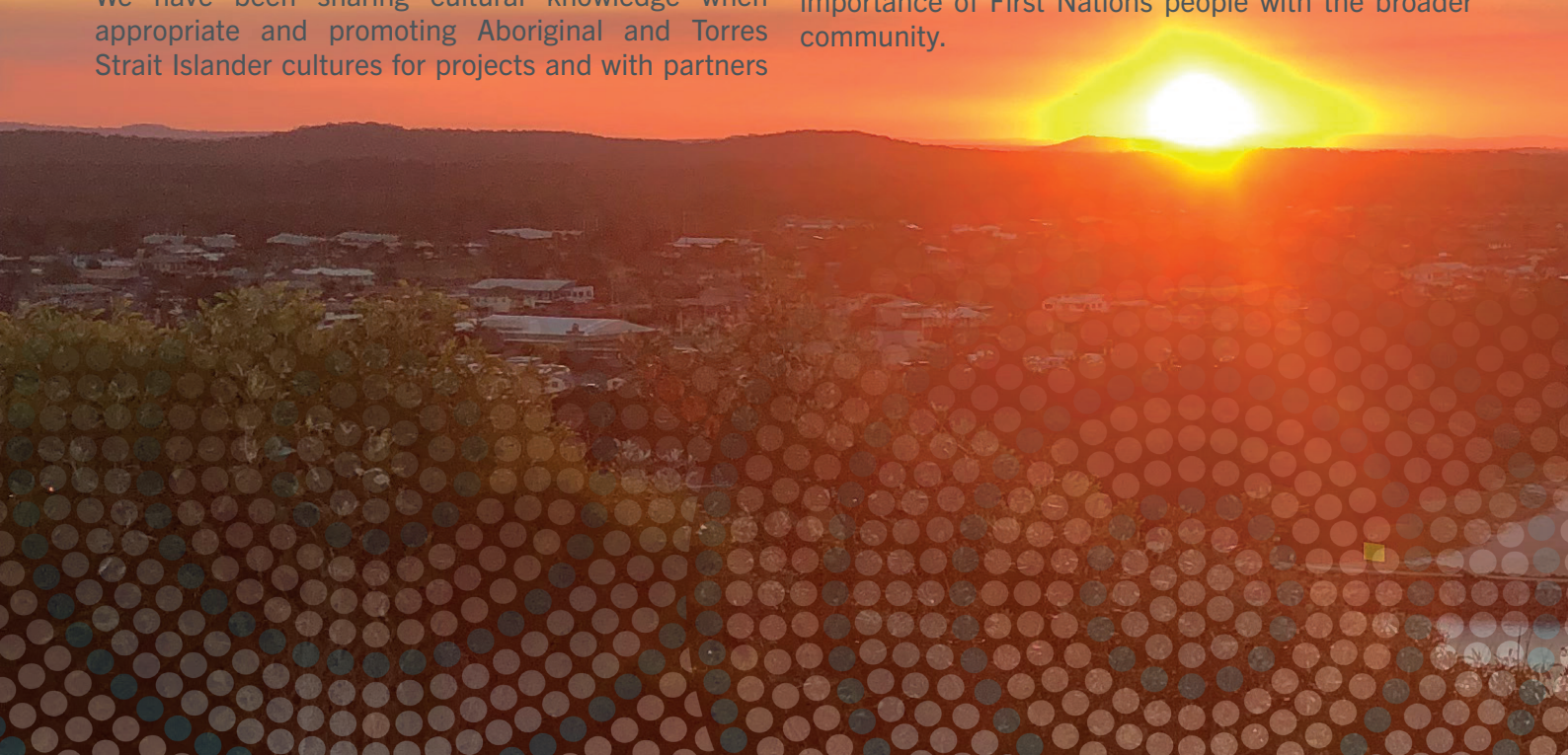
Learning and Sharing Cultural Knowledge

Our people continued to learn about cultural heritage, histories and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures throughout our project work and core business and through the development of research grants and community projects. Projects included Post Bushfire Disaster Recovery surveys in northern NSW in partnership with Yaegl, Bandjalang, Western Bundjalung and Githabul native title claimants; and cultural knowledge sharing days on Country at Fingal with Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council with our team and at Evans Head with Bandjalang Aboriginal Corporation. We have continued to develop educational tool kits with communities we work with for school children that summarise cultural histories and archaeological investigations at Hastings Point, Kingscliff, Evans Head and Newcastle.

We have been sharing cultural knowledge when appropriate and promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for projects and with partners

on our social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn accounts and our company website and bi-annual newsletter). Our newsletter features stories on projects and achievements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations we are partnering with to promote cultural heritage.

We have continued to assist with building and encouraging relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and the broader Australian community as part of our core commercial business and also through our continued community and research focus in Aboriginal cultural heritage which is a continual development and part of our key learning process. We directly undertake projects that encourage better relationships and understandings of Aboriginal cultural heritage and the importance of First Nations people with the broader community.



Bandjalang Cultural Heritage Training - Evans Head

December 2019

As part of one of our projects, the Department of Defence and Bandjalang Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) worked together on Country, bringing people together to learn about culture, history and heritage. Some activities included meetings to discuss the project at BAC's offices in Coraki and working together on site. One activity held on 28 May 2019 on the Evans Head Air Weapons Range included a site recording and stone artefact knapping training session with Defence and BAC facilitated by Virtus Heritage. This day on country included attempts to relocate an old midden site recorded on AHIMS and also exchanges between BAC and Defence on cultural knowledge and cultural perspectives for the greater region. As a way to come

together and show respect for the cultural values of country and acknowledge these values to BAC, Defence and BAC held a smoking ceremony with OPEC and project team members including Virtus Heritage and GHD prior to remediation beginning on site on 27 August, 2019. The smoking ceremony included words by Elder, Uncle Warren Williams and Uncle Tony Wilson. BAC and Defence are looking forward to working together more actively on country to manage cultural heritage in the future. An educational tool kit and community summary report of the project was developed in partnership with BAC and Defence as an outcome to share cultural knowledge.



Flt Lt Jason Van Rysbergen and Afzal Khan making stone artefacts at the Evans Head Air Weapons Range as part of the stone artefact knapping workshop (Source: M. Sutton)



BAC sites officer, Defence and Virtus Heritage undertaking a site survey to relocate Aboriginal objects at Evans Head Air Weapons Range (Source: M. Sutton)



The Team

our reconciliation journey ...

Getting Involved and Supporting Communities

Throughout the year, we have sponsored NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week activities within the localities we work, including school children activities with Coffs Harbour and District LALC, assisting with barbeques for the Tweed Aboriginal Advisory Committee's NAIDOC activities, and getting involved and supporting events for National Reconciliation Week (NRW). We have assisted First Australian communities with whom we work, to submit research grant and community funding applications including Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council, Tjungundji Aboriginal Corporation and Bandjalang Aboriginal Corporation, and other organisations and families when we can.

Small but important ways in which Virtus Heritage has supported Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities during NRW included the contribution of a \$500 sponsorship to the Wonnarua and Awabakal womens healing workshop at Dangar Island. Bernadette Allen attended a quiz night on invitation from Tweed Shire Council with members of the local community and Virtus Heritage donated a book as one of the prizes. All team members were involved in private/more personal dialogues and discussions about reconciliation including books, discussions with community members about current or future projects and/or watched pertinent films and documentaries such as The Tracker & Rabbit Proof Fence amongst many others.

We continue to support Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander businesses and services, where we can, including partnerships in fieldwork and cultural training packages (such as the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council with training on country for the Hunter Valley Flood Mitigation Scheme), corporate events (such as Elders from the Tweed region for Welcome to Country, and Aboriginal catering companies, such as Sista's Catering and First Food Co), as well as personal retail and services (for example company Christmas gifts from Haus of Dizzy).

In all of our projects we have worked creatively and in tandem with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, communities and organisations to protect, record, promote and celebrate the cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This will be shown throughout the document. We believe that the investment we make in improving understanding and awareness of this heritage plays an important role in shaping First Nations peoples' identity, connecting people to their community and country and contributes to safe and strong communities.

In the implementation of our Reflect & Innovate RAPs, we were also able to more effectively target and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, and we look forward to strengthening and formalising some of these partnerships for the mutual benefit of our organisations and building new relationships during the implementation of our second Innovate RAP.

'Bandjalang people are as one to this ancient and rare land. The Bandjalang Aboriginal Corporation Prescribed Body Corporate is a newly developing business entity that governs ancient traditional lore and customs on behalf of our ancestors to include present and future generations on Bandjalang Country. Bandjalang has an established unbreakable bond with Country. Forging a strong cultural relationship with Dr Mary Jean and Virtus Heritage family has structured in our planning minds, a desirable home base or hub to work towards.'

We envisage to grow with our approach to continue a collaborative framework with various key stakeholders in achieving meaningful relationships into our way of life. As we define our cultural meaning by definition in contemporary or mainstream ways as business, social and economic values is yet to be achieved.

Bandjalang and Virtus Heritage cultural heritage portfolio involves in the following conduct on country with local key stakeholders;

- 1 – Bandjalang, Virtus Heritage and Australian Defence Force 2 day cultural heritage workshop training*
- 2 – Evans Head Air Weapons Bombing Range removal of explosive ordnance waste on Bundjalang National Park*
- 3 – Ground Penetrating Radar assessment and management of Coraki cemetery (Bogal Local Aboriginal Land Council and Richmond Valley Council)*
- 4- Bandjalang Bushfire Recovery on Cultural Heritage Values and Assessment post Fire (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Office of Heritage and Environment)*

Bandjalang and Virtus Heritage are committed to continuing to provide strong leadership to the implementation of our Innovate RAP and to ensuring that we deliver on the commitments we have made to date and beyond. We strongly believe in these commitments and to the tangible differences that they can make towards reconciliation. Our approach will ensure our vision and commitments are enshrined in all aspects of our business and in the way we work together with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners and communities.'

Testimonial from Afzal Khan - Business Manager - Bandjalang Aboriginal Corporation

our reconciliation journey ...

Forging and strengthening new and existing partnerships and creating opportunities

Partnerships with Tweed Byron LALC

We have been incredibly privileged and very excited to be working in partnership with Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council (TBLALC) on several projects. They include our first excavation together at Lions Park Kingscliff and as a subconsultant on Hastings Point ACHMP for the Headland as well as for a due diligence assessment on a shed. We have also partnered with TBLALC on the future Coffs Harbour ACHMD, Mary-Jean - Company Director and Leweena Williams (CEO, TBLALC) will be working closely together to develop consultation workshops in 2020 and a future national toolkit on the identification and management of unmarked graves and cemeteries. We are looking forward to undertaking more partnership projects and have lots of big plans on the horizon.

In September 2019 Virtus Heritage attended the Fingal Surf Club along with the TBLALC for a cultural training/ exchange celebration. Uncle Victor Slockee presented a Traditional Owner's address about the significance of Acknowledgment of Country and Welcome to Country, and we held a celebration and lunch and finished the day with a walk to the Fingal Headland with the Williams family, on which many topics relating to culture and heritage were discussed and knowledge exchanged.

In 2020, Virtus Heritage completed its first joint venture project with the TBLALC. Lions Park on Kingscliff foreshore was undergoing refurbishment to improve the functionality of the park while also improving accessibility and recreation facilities for park



Some members of Virtus Heritage and TBLALC working at Kingscliff

users, as part of Tweed Shire Council's Kingscliff Foreshore Revitalisation Project. The park is within a registered AHIMS Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Story Place, listed for intangible values. During trenching as part of park refurbishment works, an Aboriginal shell midden was encountered. As such, all works ceased and Tweed Shire Council engaged Virtus Heritage to prepare an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment, with an accompanying AHIP application to mitigate against harm to this Aboriginal resource.

The AHIP included a programme of auguring, monitoring of works with community collection, and salvage of identified cultural material, and was undertaken in partnership with the TBLALC. Eighteen artefacts and 5,828 whole/partial shell specimens were recovered during these works. This site demonstrates that Aboriginal middens and occupation deposits are still being identified in contexts disturbed by European land use practices. The material recovered

also provides tangible evidence of intensive Aboriginal occupation and activity in the Kingscliff area, in a place previously known only for intangible values. The site is of high cultural significance to the local Aboriginal community as a continued connection to country. In consultation with, and participation of all registered Aboriginal parties, the salvaged material has been re-buried within the parkland, in an area adjacent to its original location which will not incur any impacts in the future.



our reconciliation journey ...

Building and encouraging relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, organisations, and the broader Australian community

We have continued to assist with building and encouraging relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and the broader Australian community as part of our core commercial business and also through our continued community and research focus in Aboriginal cultural heritage. We have assisted through our RAP committee and newsletter sharing and forging new partnerships between Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander LALCs and native title organisations. Through co-presenting with Awabakal LALC and Awabakal Descendants Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation we presented on cultural heritage and threats to conservation in the Newcastle-Hunter Valley region for the Hunter Environmental Institute. A presentation which drew over a hundred participants including other Aboriginal organisations. Through co-chairing with Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council and Mapoon family member two sessions at Australian Archaeological Association Conference, on cultural mapping and culturally appropriate scientific tools, we brought together twelve different presentations from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people from across the nation and international experts which was well attended with a conference with nearly 900 delegates to share knowledge and also capacity build younger community members confidence to discuss and present their research and work. We assisted with sponsorship applications for Aboriginal & Torres Strait

Islander presenters from the Awabakal, Tjungundji and Tweed-Byron communities.

We have now co-authored with Mapoon Traditional Owners five research publications on the Mapoon burial mounds. See below for some of these references.

Sutton, M-J. et-al. 2019. Creating and renewing identity and value through the use of non-invasive archaeological methods: Mapoon unmarked graves, potential burial mounds and cemeteries project, western Cape York peninsula, Queensland. *Archaeology in Oceania*. DOI: 10.1002/arco.5205

Conyers, L.B. et-al. 2019. Dissecting and Interpreting a Three-Dimensional Ground-Penetrating Radar Dataset: An Example from Northern Australia. *Sensors*. 19, 1239. doi:10.3390/s19051239

St Pierre, E. et-al. 2019. Reimagining life and death: Results and interpretation of geophysical and ethnohistorical investigations of earth mounds, Mapoon, Cape York Peninsula, Queensland, Australia. *Archaeology in Oceania*. Vol. 54: 90–106. DOI: 10.1002/arco.5179

Through developing grant applications to assist with community projects and also undertaking several conservation management plans for commercial projects, we have also directly supported numerous Aboriginal organisations to protect and promote Aboriginal culture. We directly undertake projects that encourage better relationships and understandings of Aboriginal cultural heritage and the importance of First Nations people with the broader community.



Leweena Williams of TBLALC, Aunty Maria Pitt & Aunty Dale Williams





Local Government Conference Sista's Catering

Virtus Heritage held a business stall at the NSW Local Government Expo as part of a sponsorship package in October 2019. As part of this stall, we assisted Wonnarua woman Tracey Skene, and her co-founders, newly formed Sista's Catering to showcase their native plant flavoured chocolates, cordials and teas. We also assisted circulating their business information to assist in marketing their beautiful products, alongside posting on social media linking to this event and to online marketing for Sista's Catering.




A lovely spread of Sista's Catering native plant flavoured food and drinks


Protecting and conserving Aboriginal cultural heritage

We have managed and directed projects with conservation outcomes for Aboriginal cultural heritage as part of research and commercial projects. Projects which include Mt Gilead Project, south western Sydney; Hastings Point Headland, NSW; Saltwater National Park, NSW; Bundjalung National Park, Yuraygir National Park, NSW; Mapoon, western Cape York, Queensland; Rocky Knob Aboriginal Place, Hexham; Noosa, Queensland; and Bass Point Reserve, NSW.


Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Values Report
June 2020
Prepared for NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service




Bandjalung Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Values Post-Fire Assessment
Bandjalung Native Title Claimant Lands, NSW




Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Values Report
June 2020
Prepared for NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service




Western Bundjalung Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Values Post-Fire Assessment
Western Bundjalung Native Title Claimant Lands, NSW



Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Values Report
June 2020
Prepared for NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service



Yaegl Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Values Post-Fire Assessment
Yaegl Native Title Claimant Lands, NSW



Jason Jia working on the Mt Gilead project

Coraki GPR Project

Virtus Heritage also worked with a team of people including Afzal Khan, Business Manager at Bandjalang Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) to use GPR to survey a cemetery at Coraki, NSW. Prof. Conyers was our GPR expert to interpret the exciting finds. This project has led us to work with other Aboriginal communities in regard to how GPR can be used as a culturally appropriate tool when investigating unmarked graves.

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Virtus Heritage have been working closely with Afzal on several projects and are very happy to announce his ongoing membership to our RAP team.



Lewis Williams and Afzal Khan at Dumbartung (Way of the People) Aboriginal Corporation – Cultural Heritage Centre Western Australia Native Title Council Operation and Management Training Workshop 2019.

Moonee Beach GPR Project

At Moonee Beach, Coffs Harbour, in the Mid North Coast of NSW, two grids of ground-penetrating radar (GPR) data were collected within the Coffs Harbour Local Government Area on 10 December 2019 to search for and map buried artefacts and human produced features on behalf of Coffs Harbour and District Local Aboriginal Land Council (CHDLALC).

One area, just to the southwest of the beach near a playground within the Moonee Beach Reflections Holiday Park was chosen by CHDLALC, as a small beach cliff adjacent to the test site has produced a variety of artefacts, indicating buried cultural materials nearby. Those materials include quartz crystals and stone artefacts with abundant amounts of charcoal. CHDLALC identified this area as having important cultural sites and potential for human burials based on oral history and Elders knowledge. The area is located on an uplifted beach terrace capped by aeolian sand (wind-blown) and a top soil layer.

A second grid of GPR data was collected to the south in an area where shell middens could be seen in outcrop along the beach cliff nearby. Those shells were of whelk and oysters that were also found on the ground surface where the data was collected.

Moonee Beach is an important cultural landscape to Gumbaynggirr people, as it is the location of the place of creation for the northern Gumbaynggirr people, a mother place where all the clans began.

Virtus Heritage thoroughly enjoyed working on this projects with our amazing team of RAP's and Prof. Lawrence Conyers (GPR Specialist).



Prof. Larry Conyers with a member of the Coffs Harbour and District Local Aboriginal Land Council Green Team



The Coffs Harbour and District Local Aboriginal Land Council Green Team with Elle Lillis undertaking GPR survey at Moonee Beach



Moonee Beach

Australian Archaeological Association Conference and Business NSW Awards



From left: Dr. Mary-Jean Sutton, Prof. Lawrence Conyers, Dr. Emma St. Pierre, Andrewena Diane Nicholls, Leweena Williams, Bernadette Allen, Elle Lillis, Simon Pearce



Bernadette Allen and Mary-Jean Sutton 'Excellence in Business' Award in 2019

With TBLALC's CEO, Leweena Williams and Rob Appo, Mary-Jean co-chaired a conference session on cultural mapping at the 2019 Australian Archaeological Association (AAA) conference. Similarly, Emma and Professor Lawrence Conyers co-chaired a session at the same conference with Jason Jia, Mapoon Land and Sea Rangers on use of scientific tools which are culturally appropriate for archaeology to Indigenous people.

The conference sessions involved supporting Traditional Owners and Indigenous land managers across the country presenting on cultural heritage projects. Our collaborators and clients, including Simon Pearce, GHD and Roger Mehr of DPIE presented on their research and work. Elle Lillis also presented a poster on the Hunter Valley Flood Mitigation Scheme research project on behalf of the DPIE HVFMS team. Virtus Heritage and TBLALC assisted with financial sponsorship of several Indigenous presenters from Mapoon.

Virtus Heritage won awards in 2019 for Business Excellence and Excellence in Innovation for our collaborative approach to heritage projects and for innovation in geophysical applications for heritage particularly through the introduction and use of GPR.



Relationships

Virtus Heritage is committed to maintaining and growing our strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, groups and individuals. These relationships are integral to ensuring that we fulfill our role in appropriately recognizing, recording, preserving, celebrating and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage within the communities we work.

Focus Areas:

Effective Relationships - to develop relationships with our clients and further collaborate with our partners and communities through continuing to bring our values to work.

Integrity - to show our integrity and uphold the highest standards in our dealings with clients, regulators, communities and stakeholders.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
1. Continue to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement. Review, update and implement an engagement plan to continue to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations, building on existing relationships and connecting with new partners. 	<p>June 2021</p> <p>June 2021</p>	<p>RAP Coordinator, Principal Archaeologist</p> <p>RAP Coordinator, Principal Archaeologist</p>
2. Build further relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff. RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event. Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW. Organise at least one NRW event each year. Register all our NRW events on Reconciliation Australia's NRW website. 	<p>June 2021, 2022</p> <p>27 May - 3 June 2021, 2022,2023</p> <p>May 2021, 2022</p> <p>May 2021, 2022</p> <p>May 2021, 2022</p>	<p>RAP Coordinator</p> <p>RAP Coordinator</p> <p>HR Manager, RAP Coordinator, Principal Archaeologist</p> <p>RAP Coordinator, Principal Archaeologist</p> <p>RAP Coordinator</p>
3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence with all stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review, update and implement strategies to engage our staff in reconciliation. Communicate our commitment to reconciliation publicly. Explore opportunities to positively influence our external stakeholders to drive reconciliation outcomes. Collaborate with RAP and other like-minded organisations to develop ways to advance reconciliation. 	<p>June 2021</p> <p>June 2021</p> <p>June 2021</p> <p>June 2021</p>	<p>Principal Archaeologist & HR Manager</p> <p>Principal Archaeologist & HR Manager</p> <p>Principal Archaeologist & HR Manager</p> <p>Principal Archaeologist & HR Manager</p>
4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs. Review, update and implement and communicate an anti-discrimination policy for our organisation. Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors to consult on our anti-discrimination policy. Educate senior leaders on the effects of racism. 	<p>June 2021</p> <p>June 2021</p> <p>June 2021</p> <p>June 2021</p>	<p>Principal Archaeologist RAP Co-ordinator</p> <p>Principal Archaeologist RAP Co-ordinator</p> <p>Principal Archaeologist RAP Co-ordinator</p> <p>Principal Archaeologist RAP Co-ordinator</p>



Respect

Virtus Heritage is committed to continuing to promote respect for country and Aboriginal heritage in all that we do. We continue to acknowledge that it is a privilege to work on country with Elders and families and we respect the unique relationship Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with the lands and waters as Traditional Owners and Custodians. We believe that respect, recognition and investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage is central to our role as an organisation and continually improving and maintaining wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Focus Areas:

Respect for Country - to act with and promote respect for country and heritage when working with clients and the community.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation. Consult local Traditional Owners and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors on the development and implementation of a cultural learning strategy. Review, update and implement and communicate a cultural learning strategy for our staff. Provide opportunities for RAP Working Group members, HR managers and other key leadership staff to participate in formal and structured cultural learning. 	June 2021 June 2021 June 2021 June 2021	Director, Principal Archaeologist, HR Manager Director, Principal Archaeologist Principal Archaeologist, HR Manager & RAP Coordinator Principal Archaeologist
6. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgment of Country and Welcome to Country protocols. Review, update and implement and communicate a cultural protocol document, including protocols for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country. Invite a local Traditional Owner or Custodian to provide a Welcome to Country or other appropriate cultural protocol at significant events each year. Include an Acknowledgment of Country or other appropriate protocols at the commencement of important meetings. 	June 2021, 2023 June 2021, 2023 June 2021, 2023 June 2021, 2023	HR Manager & RAP Coordinator Principal Archaeologist RAP Coordinator, HR Manager & Principal Archaeologist RAP Coordinator, HR Director
7. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event. Review HR policies and procedures to remove barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week. Promote and encourage participation in external NAIDOC events to all staff. 	July 2021, 2022 July 2021, 2022 July 2021, 2022	HR Manager & RAP Coordinator HR Manager & RAP Coordinator HR Manager & RAP Coordinator



Opportunities

Virtus Heritage is committed to continuing to collaborate effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and peoples and to recognising and maximising the benefits that the contribution of First Australians brings to our program of work and to community outcomes. We will work together to ensure that the knowledge, talent and expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are further integrated into our operations through procuring services which offer synergies with our aims and bolster networking, training, employment and engagement outcomes for First Australians.

Focus Areas:

Innovation - to innovate and be leaders, setting benchmarks in archaeology, cultural heritage, history and archaeological science.

Diligence and Flexibility - to always seek to exceed client and community expectations by delivering efficient and effective outcomes that recognise individual and statutory requirements.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
8.	Investigate opportunities to improve and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes throughout our workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities. Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to consult on our recruitment, retention and professional development strategy. Review, update and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development strategy. Advertise job vacancies to effectively reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. Review HR and recruitment procedures and policies to remove barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in our workplace. Increase the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in our workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> October 2021 Principal Archaeologist & HR Manager October 2021 Principal Archaeologist & HR Manager November 2021 HR Manager November 2021, 2022, 2023 Director & HR Manager December 2021 Director & HR Manager December 2021 HR Manager
9.	Investigate opportunities to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity within our organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and update procurement policies and procedures to ensure there are no barriers to procuring goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. Review, develop and communicate a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses that can be used to procure goods and services across the Virtus Heritage workforce. Review, update and implement at least one more commercial relationship with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned business. Consider Supply Nation membership. Investigate opportunities to create a partnership with the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce which represents the voices of over 4500 First Australian owned businesses to enhance our procurement of services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 2022 Office Manager & RAP Coordinator January 2022 Office Manager & RAP Coordinator March 2022 Director & RAP Coordinator April 2022 Director & Principal Archaeologist April 2022 HR Manager, RAP Coordinator, Office Manager

10.	Provide training opportunities for RAP partners and staff members to be trained on Country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with our RAP partners and working group members from Tweed Byron LALC are and provide training to RAPs in unmarked grave management and how Virtus Heritage use Ground Penetrating Radar to locate unmarked graves. 	July 2021, 2023	RAP Coordinator
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commit to cultural 'Love-Ins' on Country for the men and women respectively of Virtus Heritage, Tweed Byron LALC and Bandjalang Corporation. 	July 2021, 2023	RAP Coordinator
11.	Co-host networking opportunities and conferences to build further relationships and provide professional opportunities to our RAP partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with Worimi LALC to co-create a RAP conference for networking and capacity building. 	August 2021, 2022	RWG & RAP Coordinator
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide sessions on Cultural Mapping and management of coastal sites 	August 2021, 2022	Archaeologists
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RWG will look to further engage and network with Awabakal, Minderrabah, Tweed Byron, Bandjalang, Yaegl, Githabul, Wijabul Wia-bal, Tjungundji Corp and New Mapoon Aboriginal Corp for events. 	August 2021, 2022	Principal, RWG & RAP Coordinator

Governance

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
12.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG. Establish and apply a Terms of Reference for the RWG. Meet at least four times per year to drive and monitor RAP implementation. 	June 2021, 2022	RAP Coordinator
		May 2022	RAP Coordinator
		Jan, April, July, October 2021, 2022, 2023	RAP Coordinator
13.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define resource needs for RAP implementation. Engage our senior leaders and other staff in the delivery of RAP commitments. Define and maintain appropriate systems to track, measure and report on RAP commitments. Appoint and maintain an internal RAP Champion from senior management. 	January 2022	RAP Coordinator
		May 2022	Director
		June 2022	RAP Coordinator
		June 2022	RAP Coordinator
14.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia. Report RAP progress to all staff and senior leaders quarterly. Publicly report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings, annually. Investigate participating in Reconciliation Australia's biennial Workplace RAP Barometer. 	September 2021, 2022	RAP Coordinator
		Jan, April, July October 2021, 2022, 2023	RAP Coordinator
		Jan, April, July October 2021, 2022, 2023	RAP Coordinator
		2022	RAP Coordinator
15.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP. 	December 2022	RAP Coordinator



Contact Us:

If you would like further information about our RAP, please contact:

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To find out more information about Reconciliation Australia please see: <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/resources>
With special thanks to Aunty Andrewena Diane Nicholls for her contributions to artwork within this document.
Thank you to all of our friends who are featured and photographed. It couldn't of happened without you!

