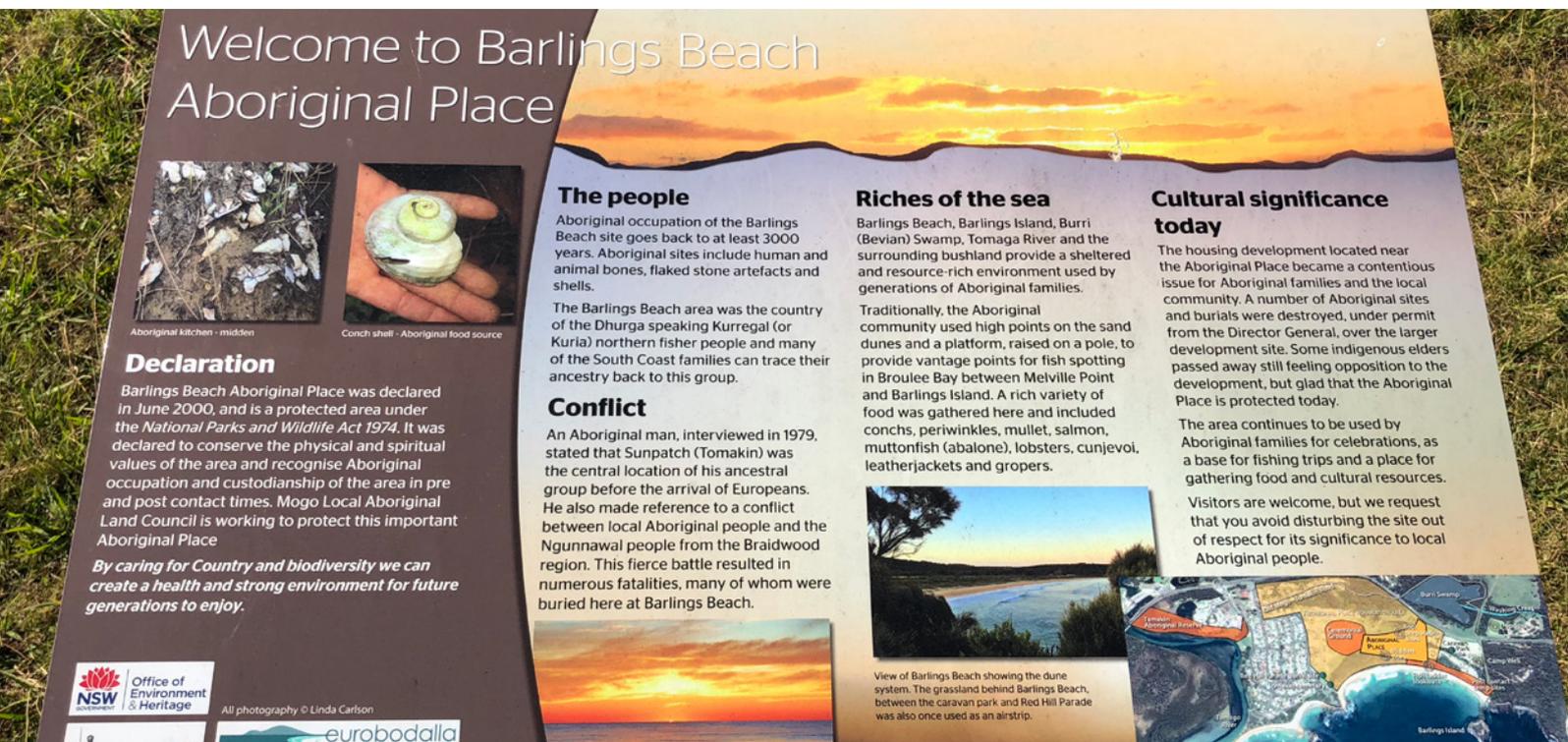


Barlings Beach Aboriginal cultural heritage case study

Preparing your heritage property for the impacts of climate change



Welcome to Barlings Beach Aboriginal Place

The people
Aboriginal occupation of the Barlings Beach site goes back to at least 3000 years. Aboriginal sites include human and animal bones, flaked stone artefacts and shells.
The Barlings Beach area was the country of the Dhurga speaking Kurregal (or Kuria) northern fisher people and many of the South Coast families can trace their ancestry back to this group.

Riches of the sea
Barlings Beach, Barlings Island, Burri (Bevia) Swamp, Tomaga River and the surrounding bushland provide a sheltered and resource-rich environment used by generations of Aboriginal families.
Traditionally, the Aboriginal community used high points on the sand dunes and a platform, raised on a pole, to provide vantage points for fish spotting in Broulee Bay between Melville Point and Barlings Island. A rich variety of food was gathered here and included conchs, periwinkles, mullet, salmon, muttonfish (abalone), lobsters, cunjevoi, leatherjackets and gropers.

Cultural significance today
The housing development located near the Aboriginal Place became a contentious issue for Aboriginal families and the local community. A number of Aboriginal sites and burials were destroyed, under permit from the Director General, over the larger development site. Some indigenous elders passed away still feeling opposition to the development, but glad that the Aboriginal Place is protected today.
The area continues to be used by Aboriginal families for celebrations, as a base for fishing trips and a place for gathering food and cultural resources.
Visitors are welcome, but we request that you avoid disturbing the site out of respect for its significance to local Aboriginal people.

Declaration
Barlings Beach Aboriginal Place was declared in June 2000, and is a protected area under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. It was declared to conserve the physical and spiritual values of the area and recognise Aboriginal occupation and custodianship of the area in pre and post contact times. Mogo Local Aboriginal Land Council is working to protect this important Aboriginal Place.
By caring for Country and biodiversity we can create a health and strong environment for future generations to enjoy.

Conflict
An Aboriginal man, interviewed in 1979, stated that Sunpatch (Tomakin) was the central location of his ancestral group before the arrival of Europeans. He also made reference to a conflict between local Aboriginal people and the Ngunnawal people from the Braidwood region. This fierce battle resulted in numerous fatalities, many of whom were buried here at Barlings Beach.

View of Barlings Beach showing the dune system. The grassland behind Barlings Beach, between the caravan park and Red Hill Parade was also once used as an airstrip.

Aboriginal kitchen - midden
Conch shell - Aboriginal food source

Office of Environment & Heritage
All photography © Linda Carlson
eurobodalla

Barlings Beach Aboriginal Place is a declared Aboriginal Place under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. The 8.9-hectare property, located in Tomakin, New South Wales, is owned and managed by Eurobodalla Shire Council and is of cultural significance to South Coast Aboriginal people.

Site history and heritage

Named after the first European to settle and farm there in 1852, Barlings Beach is within the traditional lands of the Dhurga-speaking Kurregal (or Kurial) people, who utilised the coastal land between Wagonga Inlet and Lake Conjola.

Barlings Beach is significant to Aboriginal people as a camping, meeting, ceremonial and burial place from pre-European times. It was also a source of marine resources (such as fish and shellfish) for families from the nearby Tomakin Aboriginal Reserve. Barlings Beach continues to be an important fishing place for their descendants and a place to connect to culture and Country.

Archaeological sites have been found in the Barlings Beach area, including stone artefact scatters and shell middens, which have been dated from 3,000 years ago up to relatively recent times.



Challenges

Barlings Beach and other Aboriginal sites on the nearby coastal dunes are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Rising air temperatures are already increasing ocean temperatures and acidity. The Mogo Local Aboriginal Land Council has expressed concern over whether these changes will impact traditional marine resources. To date, there has been little research on how these changes will impact the diversity and abundance of preferred marine species.

The area is expected to experience an increase in average temperatures and severe fire weather, including increased bushfires, in the future. With expanding urban development adjacent to the property, active vegetation management within the Aboriginal Place may be needed to manage fuel loads and reduce the risk to neighbouring properties.

Without climate change mitigation, sea levels are currently projected to rise 23 cm above 2014 levels by 2050 and 72 cm by 2100. These rising sea levels will increase the severity of storms and sea surges. Research by Eurobodalla Shire Council on the impacts of rising sea levels and storm surges suggests that it is likely that by 2100:

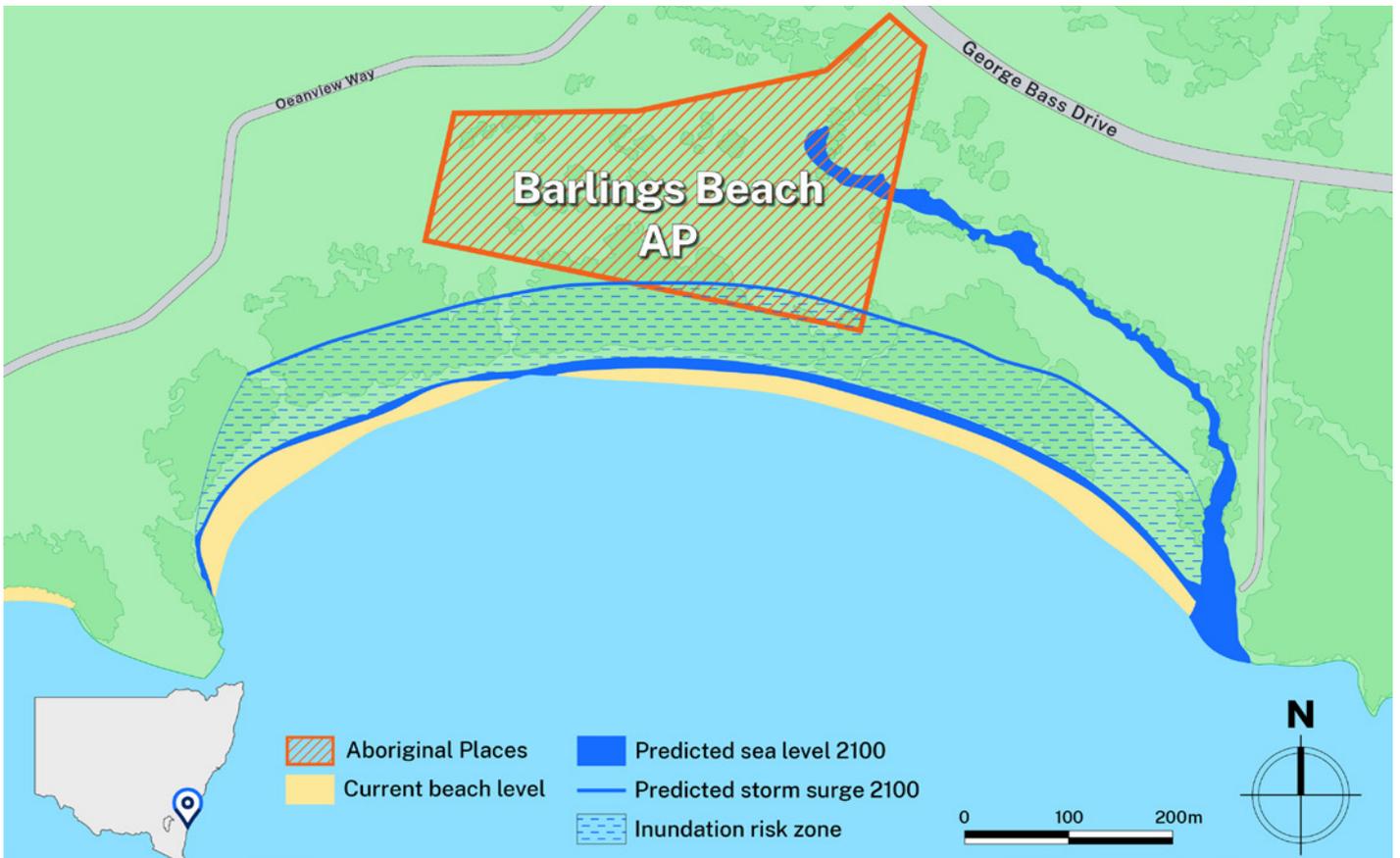
- One recorded Aboriginal site will be destroyed due to coastline erosion
- Another recorded Aboriginal site is likely to be destroyed
- Unknown subsurface Aboriginal sites in the foredunes will be lost and/or exposed
- Barlings Beach Aboriginal Place itself will remain intact, although the creek line which runs through the place will become more of a wetland.

Current management, future opportunities

A management plan has been prepared for the Barlings Beach Aboriginal Place. However, the plan does not currently address future climate change impacts or fire management. Eurobodalla Shire Council has also adopted the South Coast Regional Sea Level Rise Planning and Policy Response, which provides insight into how coastal beaches, including Barlings Beach, may be impacted by rising sea levels and storm surges.

Any future management opportunities would need to be developed in collaboration with the Mogo Local Aboriginal Land Council, South Coast Aboriginal Elders, relevant specialists (such as archaeologists and marine biologists) and Eurobodalla Shire Council. Such opportunities could include:

- More active management of the place to avoid a build-up of vegetation and bushfire fuel
- Further engagement with the local Aboriginal community to understand how the impacts of climate change on cultural wellbeing and the values of Barlings Beach could be managed
- Exploration of options for further archaeological investigation and potential salvage of Aboriginal sites that are likely to be lost to coastal erosion and rising seas.



Lessons

- Cultural places and landscapes in coastal environments face multiple impacts of climate change, including extreme bushfires, rising sea levels and storm surges.
- The 2019–2020 South Coast bushfires have shown that areas of natural vegetation adjoining residential areas require active management (through a fire management plan or similar) to address bushfire risks.
- Management opportunities for Aboriginal places must be led by the Aboriginal community.
- Proactive actions to stabilise or salvage eroding and vulnerable coastal dunes could be required to protect and conserve Aboriginal sites and objects, particularly Aboriginal ancestral remains.
- Warming oceans may impact the availability of traditional resources, such as fish and shellfish, which could negatively impact on

References

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Cover photo: Barlings Beach Aboriginal Place interpretive sign (NOHC). Page 2 left to right: Excavations at Barlings Beach suggest Aboriginal occupation from at least 3,000 years ago (NOHC), Barlings Beach shore and foredunes (NOHC) and Barlings Beach Aboriginal Place looking towards Barlings Island (NOHC).

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