



Summary of community and stakeholder engagement

Kamay Botany Bay National Park

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Introduction

On 29 April 2020, it will be the 250th anniversary of the first contact between Aboriginal Australians and the crew of the Endeavour, this is also described as the first meeting of two cultures. The upcoming anniversary has precipitated a fresh look at the 2008 master plan for the Meeting Place in the Kurnell Precinct of Kamay Botany Bay National Park and the opportunities it offers to present this nationally significant place as one that respects, and interprets, the many layers of history evident.

The Office of Environment and Heritage commissioned community engagement specialist, Context Pty Ltd (Context) to work with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), on the roll out of a targeted community and stakeholder engagement program in the design of a new master plan for the Kurnell Precinct. Groups engaged included, but were not limited to:

- Aboriginal communities
- the local Kurnell community
- park users and visitors
- school and education users.

To help guide engagement during the drafting stage of the master plan project, a community and stakeholder engagement plan was prepared. The engagement plan focused on the delivery of a series of engagement activities targeted to defined community and stakeholders, and based on their known or likely interests. Context worked with NPWS to deliver these engagement activities and to analyse and report on the results.

Context and NPWS worked closely with the design team, run by Neeson Murcutt Architects, during the drafting of the Kurnell Precinct master plan to ensure the community and stakeholder feedback directly influenced the design of the master plan.

At the same time as preparing the Kurnell Precinct master plan, NPWS has been preparing a new plan of management for the entire Kamay Botany Bay National Park. The draft plan of management sets out the broad priorities and actions for the management of the national park over a medium to long-term timeframe. Any proposals in the Kurnell Precinct master plan must be consistent with the plan of management. For NPWS, the two plans are distinct in purpose and there are certain statutory requirements to be met.

In planning the engagement activities, it was recognised that communities and stakeholders will see the two processes as being about park planning and management. Therefore, the community and stakeholder engagement plan recommended that people engage in the planning for Kamay Botany Bay National Park as a whole, with the NPWS and design teams to then identify the relevance of the feedback received in relation to the plan of management, to the master plan, or to both. Community and stakeholder engagement on the project is ongoing.

Who have we engaged with?

Before the project commenced, NPWS and Context considered the range of individuals, communities and organisations and the nature of their likely interest/s in the project. The following framework was used to help define individuals, communities and stakeholders to target for engagement during the planning stage of the project. It seeks to distinguish, first, those with an interest in the park (and its planning and management) and those with an interest in the story (that is the 250th anniversary of the first meeting of two cultures at Kamay Botany Bay National Park and all that existed prior to and is seen to flow from it).



In relation to the Park – which was the primary focus of the planned engagements – it distinguishes those with:

1. a general interest in parks – the broad community
2. an interest in park planning and management – park advocates (volunteers, conservation groups etc.)
3. a specific interest in the park – park users and neighbours
4. a deeper connection to the park or landscape or Country – connected communities.

NPWS prepared an initial list of stakeholders likely to have an interest in the planning for Kamay Botany Bay National Park and 2020. The list was then reviewed, revised and added to. The stakeholders can be grouped as follows:

- Aboriginal communities (local community)
- Aboriginal organisations (primarily locally based)
- the local Kurnell community (local organisations, businesses, residents)
- park users - recreation (user groups)
- park visitors (casual and regular visitors including specific communities)
- school and education users (Environmental Education Centre, schools that use the national park, NPWS Discovery Schools Program)
- park users – businesses (those that offer services within the national park)
- park advocates and volunteers (i.e. conservation groups, friends, volunteers)
- history, heritage and cultural interests (i.e. those engaged in research and writing about history, landscape, botany etc.)
- NPWS staff.

What input was sought from community and stakeholders?

A framework of topics and questions was prepared to guide the face-to-face and online engagements in the first stage of the project. These questions examined:

- participants' aspirations, issues and ideas
- their sense of connection to Kamay Botany Bay National Park, or parts of the park
- how participants are feeling about this project, the place and the park management.
- the level of engagement that communities and stakeholders might be seeking into the future
- other concerns or matters that need consideration.

Engagement opportunities to date

A community reference panel was established prior to the start of the master plan project. This panel provided input into the project brief, the site analysis and the development of the overall master plan design and has reviewed the draft master plan. The community reference panel included Aboriginal community members, representatives from the offices of state and federal members of parliament, local government and community and interest groups; including the Sutherland Historical Society, the Captain Cook Society and the Australian National Maritime Museum.

A design review panel was established by the Office of the Government Architect to review the work of the design team and to ensure that best practice in design is adhered to. The panel has reviewed the master plan and provided feedback twice to date.

The key engagement activities which have helped to inform the design of the master plan and contents of the plan of management to date include:

- **online survey:** designed by Context and available online
- **Culture Day:** an on-site open day for Aboriginal community. Activities were designed to attract families. Held at Kurnell and informal interviews were undertaken
- **onsite survey:** offered at Kurnell, with face-to-face interviews with visitors in the park
- **Kids Quiz:** a short Kids Quiz was made available to schools using the Botany Bay environmental Education Centre located in the Kurnell Precinct of the national park
- **stakeholder workshops:** A series of workshops with stakeholders helped to inform the design of the master plan. Participants came from a wide variety of backgrounds, including Aboriginal community representatives, historians, cultural institutions, ecologists, park user groups and NPWS park managers
- **information evening (Aboriginal community):** a session held at La Perouse Public School, providing interested community members with information about the master plan project and the opportunity to share their ideas
- **presentation to La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council:** a presentation on the master plan project was made at a meeting of the local Aboriginal land council
- **interviews:** Context conducted interviews, either in person or by phone with:
 - Aboriginal community organisations
 - Aboriginal community members – in addition to the culture day interviews and the stakeholder workshops, Context ran group and individual interviews
 - park users – recreation groups: for example, including disability and other persons' groups
 - park users – business: for example, interviews with organisations covering surfing events, eco tour pass holders and the NSW Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries) who run fishing workshops and expos in Kamay Botany Bay National Park
 - Botany Bay Environmental Education Centre
- **focus groups:** focus groups were held with:
 - Kurnell local community, attended by local residents and business people
 - Kurnell Public School students
 - Park advocates and recreation user groups, including volunteers involved in bush regeneration and whale counting, and recreation user groups including scuba diving, outdoor recreational council and scouting interests

- **other material:** a range of other material was analysed, including:
 - Kurnell Public School: winning essays from 2015 and 2016 and across several year grades on the history of Kurnell
 - comments received in the Visitors Book at Kurnell Visitor Centre.
- **Project presentations:** made to a range of key stakeholder groups, including but not limited to, culturally and linguistically diverse network groups in Sydney's Eastern and Southern suburbs, NSW Heritage Council, Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy, Australian National Maritime Museum, Sutherland Shire Council, Botany Bay Environmental Education Centre, Swedish community representatives, NSW Treasury.

The community and stakeholder perspective

A series of themes, issues and opportunities emerged from the community and stakeholder engagement activities undertaken during the planning phase of the master plan project to date. The following nine themes were identified:

- values and connections
- Caring for Country, caring for 'our' park
- sustaining Aboriginal connections
- marking 2020 (the 250th anniversary of first contact)
- facilities for visitors
- creating an engaging experience
- education and learning
- restoring the landscape
- getting to Kurnell.

Values and connections

Across all the community and stakeholder groups there is a remarkable consistency of values that they hold for Kamay Botany Bay National Park. Kurnell offers a special combination of history, nature and people places, and it is this combination that is loved. People visit Kurnell to walk, go diving, have picnics, experience nature and be with family and friends. Some people bring their visitors here, many go whale watching and some come to learn about history.

Groups come to Kamay Botany Bay National Park as well: disability and older groups, eco-tour businesses bring groups, schools visit and some ethnic communities visit, too. These extended family and community picnics considered important as social glue in urbanised Western Sydney. There are a few annual cultural events that attract large groups of people to La Perouse and Kurnell, such as NAIDOC week, anniversary of Cook's landing and Bastille Day, along with recreation events like Cape Fear Big Wave Surfing event, triathlons, and fishing events. For divers, the park offers exceptional shore based diving in a beautiful marine environment.

Those who live close to the Kurnell section of the park feel a strong connection to it. For them it is part of home. Children from Kurnell Public School expressed pride in being 'Kurnellians', and a strong connection to their local history and landscape. No doubt a similar sense of connection is true for the La Perouse side as well, although this has not been examined at the same level of detail in this project.

Kamay Botany Bay National Park has a loyal cohort of visitors. Across all the communities and stakeholder groups, a high proportion visit often and have visited the national park over many years.

Across all the stakeholders and communities, people like the walking tracks, whale watching area, the monuments and Monument Walk along the foreshore, the cliff area near The Steps, and the picnic areas near the foreshore (Commemoration Flat). Less popular, are Alpha House which is currently closed to the public, Cook Stream, the 'Cricket Pitch' and significantly, the existing Visitor Centre.

The qualities valued most are captured by the words 'beautiful' and 'calm'. People love Kurnell's natural qualities and its closeness to the city is part of these values. Its cultural values are both its 'Aboriginal history and connections' and the 'connection to the Cook expedition in 1770'. There is a general desire to know more about Aboriginal history from Aboriginal people. For some, these connections are spiritual and strongly reflective. The experiential qualities of Kurnell are highly valued too.

Caring for Country, caring for 'our' park

From the community engagement undertaken, the first thing that people are seeking is better care and maintenance of the park in general. While different people emphasised aspects according to their own knowledge and experience of the park, essentially the message is consistent – the park is considered poorly maintained and becoming increasingly rundown.

For Aboriginal people, caring for the park, means caring for Country, in all its aspects. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring Aboriginal people are involved in caring for Country, bringing their knowledge, skills and connections into land management practice, interpretations, communication and education.

Sustaining Aboriginal connections

For the Aboriginal community, recognising that this community includes traditional owners and Aboriginal people with other long associations with the park is important. Kamay Botany Bay National Park is part of Aboriginal Country, meaning that it is deeply valued and respected. For Aboriginal community members, feeling welcome is critical; they want the opportunity to spend time at Kurnell with family, to share stories and pass on knowledge. Practicing culture is important and there is a strong desire to share culture with non-Aboriginal people.

Being involved in planning, design, decision-making and hands-on management are all important to Aboriginal community members. The opportunity to present aspects of Aboriginal culture is very appealing to Aboriginal community members and they are keen to take more active roles if these are offered. There is a feeling that Aboriginal knowledge is not as well respected as it should be and they would like to see this change, working together with NPWS would offer such an opportunity.

For some of the older community members, there is a strong view that it is time for these aspirations to be recognised and steps to be taken to ensure they can be achieved.

Marking 2020

Community and stakeholder groups put forward a number of suggestions on how the 250th anniversary could be respectfully commemorated in 2020. These included:

- abolishing the entry fee
- taking steps towards joint management with the local Aboriginal community

- asking questions about the politics and memory around Cook and Aboriginal history
- local employment could be created through park and tourism services that are developed progressively from now to 2020 and beyond, this should include Aboriginal training and employment
- bringing Dharawal language into the park through naming and interpretation
- think beyond 2020 and ensure resourcing doesn't dwindle again after 2020.

Facilities for visitors

Basic facilities are regarded as inadequate to meet visitor needs and expectations; the requests across all groups are for more of the basic facilities, for example:

- toilets: the number of toilets and the location of toilets are considered inadequate, poorly maintained and some are hard to find
- seating and shelter at Cape Solander: the whale watching volunteers would appreciate better facilities at Cape Solander, such as seating, and most of those consulted suggested that the whale watching platform needs to be extended and toilets should be provided, along with an area of all-weather shelter
- rubbish bins and waste collection: visitors are seeking this service in key locations, e.g. Cape Solander and parking areas
- way-finding signage: these are needed throughout the park, especially on the walking tracks
- walking tracks: in many places, these are heavily eroded and include boggy sections that need boardwalks over them
- picnic and barbeque areas: there is a desire for more picnic and barbeque facilities in some locations (e.g. Commemoration Flat and near the Kurnell Park entry), and for some facilities under shelter, especially for groups that visit. For older persons and disabled groups, they need easy access to sheltered facilities
- drinking water: a number of people, including school students, requested drinking water be provided, especially near the picnic and barbecue areas
- car parking: at peak visitor times, car parking overflows the parking provided within the park and impacts on residents. A number of suggestions were made about how to address the peak visitor period car park situation.

Entry Fee

For locals, having to pay to go into the park is something they are not happy about. Recreation users also raised this as an issue. Other revenue streams were suggested.

New facilities

The most widely desired new facility is a café, with a café like the one at Audley mentioned numerous times. A café was considered as offering an extra attraction in the park.

A camping area within the Kurnell section of the park was proposed to offer a new recreational opportunity, designed to support:

- Aboriginal culture camps
- school groups
- camping sites associated with the development of a long-distance walking track from the northern side of Sydney, down to Royal National Park and beyond.

The Visitor Centre

The existing visitor centre is not well liked; with most comments about the centre being negative. It is seen as dark, enclosed and unconnected to the landscape that it is part of. It is also seen as too small and lacking nearby all-weather shelter areas for school groups to leave their lunches go to when there are multiple groups visiting.

The contents of the visitor centre – including the display – are criticised as being static, unchanging, and too focused on the Cook expedition, neglecting Aboriginal history and Aboriginal perspectives on Kamay Botany Bay National Park. Suggestions include more interactive activities within the Visitor Centre.

There is no one Aboriginal perspective on Kamay Botany Bay National Park or the Kurnell Precinct of the park, although there are many shared viewpoints and memories: memories of visiting with parents, collecting resources, memories of looking across the bay from La Perouse, disconnection after the ferry service closed and more. For the Aboriginal community, designing a new visitor centre would offer them the opportunity to contribute to the design so that they would feel 'immersed in Country' when they come to the visitor centre. One aspect of the visitor centre could be as a keeping place.

Addressing specific needs

For those who visit the park to enjoy specific recreation activities – particularly diving – there are specific facilities that they are seeking:

- **Diving** is a popular activity in both sections of the park, and the marine environment is regarded as remarkably beautiful and in good condition, given the impacts on Botany Bay over recent decades. Divers are seeking access improvement: handrails, repair of steps, hard standing for vehicles and changing into their gear.
- **Walking the tracks** is probably the most popular activity at Kurnell, but the condition of the walking tracks and poor signage is of concern to users. Better maintenance of the tracks is needed, and boardwalks should be built over boggy sections of tracks (this is very important for those using wheelchairs and walking frames). There is also some interest in additional walking tracks, especially long-distance tracks.
- **Road cyclists:** increasing numbers of road cyclists was raised as a safety concern, but there were no suggestions as to how this issue could be addressed.
- **Cycling on track:** some of the tracks are shared walking and cycling paths, and some would like more cycling tracks, or a mountain bike trail.

From interviews with organisations that regularly take groups of older, or disabled people to the park at Kurnell, they use the visitor centre and areas nearby, including the path down to and along the foreshore. They would value some specific improvements including: easily accessed, sheltered picnic tables and barbecues, a good network of accessible paths, toilet facilities near each accessible picnic area. They also need easy access from bus parking bays to the facilities that they are most likely to use.

Another specific issue is for those in wheelchairs or wheeling prams or pushers from the car park to locations they want to visit. In some locations this involves walking along the road edge which is difficult and at times unsafe.

Using Alpha House

Throughout the consultations, potential uses for Alpha House were suggested, as well as the need for more active maintenance and conservation of the building and surrounds.

There is a keen interest in being able to visit Alpha House and to see it better maintained and actively used. The uses suggested were varied, reflecting people's own experiences of

Alpha House in the past, and their imaginings for its future. The strongest message is that Alpha House should be maintained, interpreted and open to visitors. A combination of uses/users was suggested. Examples include:

- education space for school visits
- Aboriginal elders as a meeting space, for craft work and for teaching/ sharing knowledge
- as a space for an artist in-residence program, for example linked to Hazelhurst Gallery and with a public art/co-creation component
- as an interpreted space, with stories of past uses, Aboriginal connections in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Creating an engaging experience

Welcome

The entry to the park is not well liked; it fails to welcome the visitor and the entry drive through industrial and suburban Kurnell could be improved. Tree planting along the entry roads, undergrounding of powerlines and continuation of the local program to collect rubbish was suggested.

The forms of welcome that could be offered could be: welcome by park staff available on-site, welcome in the form of information about the park, what's on and where to go (e.g. a signboard and park map), and opportunities to book cultural tours and other activities in the park.

Activating the park

Many ideas on how the park can be activated were raised including changing displays and exhibitions at the visitor centre, a wider range of seasonal and holiday activities and new types of events. These were seen as a good way to attract new audiences and encourage repeat visitors. Specific ideas include: summer movies, music, functions, café, open-air markets, popup events and exhibitions and temporary art installations.

Aboriginal community members indicated that they would like to offer cultural activities to visitors, as guides and as the primary interpreters of their culture, history and stories.

Telling all the stories

Across all stakeholders and communities there was a desire to hear more about Aboriginal history and connection to Kurnell, particularly from Aboriginal people directly. There is a keen interest to hear the 'real story' of the encounter between 'two cultures', but also to go beyond this as a 'monument in time' story. Telling all the stories also refers to a desire expressed in some of the consultations to extend the stories told, and to encourage multiple perspectives.

The return and display of significant objects related to Kurnell, and particularly those associated with the landing of the Cook expedition, was raised in some of the consultations, as was the power of an object to heighten the experience of the story. A risk is that the object becomes the story, and in one stakeholder workshop, it was suggested that the absence of a significant object could be more powerful than its presence. On the other hand, the return of significant objects has the power to heal and to right a past wrong. For local school children, the fact that important Aboriginal objects and tools aren't in the museum is more than just a disappointment; they keenly want to be able to see and engage with these objects.

There are many important objects from archaeological excavations at Kurnell that could be displayed, for example, fish hooks.

The use of Aboriginal names and language is another way to bring a stronger Aboriginal presence into the park at Kurnell.

Going digital

Many suggestions related to digital interpretation as a way of making the Kurnell stories more available and engaging.

Guides

Aboriginal guides available onsite, or in the visitor centre, would be welcomed by many visitors who would like to learn more about the impact of Cook's landing on Aboriginal people as well as learn about plants, and their uses. Or if guides are not available, other ways of hearing about the views of Aboriginal people towards the Kurnell area would be appreciated, for example, in the form of interpretive signs or digital apps. The Aboriginal community would like to see employment opportunities for their community that include being guides and educators within the national park.

Multilingual options could help engage some groups more effectively with the park and the stories.

The soundscape at the Burrawang Walk is said to be popular; however, regular maintenance is needed as it sometimes does not work. There is also the opportunity to add more stories and voices.

Interpreting nature

There are opportunities at Kurnell to offer more interpretive experiences connected to nature, for example of the walking tracks and at the whale watching platform, using a combination of guided walks, self-guiding with maps and/or digital apps and signs.

The idea of an interpretive garden near the existing visitor centre that contains examples of the plants collected by Banks and Solander with information on the Aboriginal knowledge of the plants was tested in the stakeholder workshops and was generally supported.

The volunteers consulted pointed out that they are often asked to interpret the natural environment to visitors, demonstrating the need for more active interpretation in the park. They also proposed that letting people know about conservation activities and the opportunity to volunteer could be part of building interpretation through active engagement.

Engaging kids

Activities and activity areas for children was a suggestion from the local community and Kurnell school students. While some people framed this as a 'children's playground', others suggested the need for more activities and activity areas.

Education and learning

The existing visitor centre provides a space for the Botany Bay Environmental Education Centre, both office space for the staff and a teaching/learning space. However, the space available is small and there are often too many school groups, making the space available inadequate. There is also the question of having a diversity of offerings for students.

There is a need for some outdoor all-weather shelters available for school groups. These would also provide options when there are several school groups in the park at the same time and the space in the visitor centre is too small to accommodate them.

Interaction with Aboriginal Elders and knowledge-holders would be valued as part of the school program at Kurnell.

While the focus at Kurnell is on learning about history, the bushland areas also offer the opportunity to learn about native plants and their uses.

Restoring the landscape

The values expressed across the range of community and stakeholders and activities they enjoy across the park, suggest that the combination of a 'natural bush landscape' and an 'historic landscape' associated with post-colonial settlement remains an appropriate landscape management approach.

Management of some areas of the landscape to increase natural regeneration was suggested. Volunteers involved in bush regeneration have identified the need for an ecological survey and evaluation of the native and exotic vegetation within the Kurnell Precinct.

For local school children, the loss of wildlife within the park that is their backyard is significant. They would like to see a return of these species.

Historic plantings

While some Aboriginal people find the historic plantings offensive, as they symbolise colonial occupation of their land, Aboriginal people also enjoy the open grassy picnic areas and have important memories of visits to the park over many decades, collecting shells and other resources and picnicking together on the foreshore and on the grassy areas.

Botany Bay

Botany Bay is at the heart of the park landscape and yet it is not part of the park. Development of wharves and a ferry service would help bring Botany Bay back into the experience of the whole landscape and the park.

For Aboriginal people, the whole of Botany Bay is part of Country and they are seeking a land and sea management approach to the whole area. Using the ferry to offer interpretive cultural tours around Botany Bay is another way of bringing the Bay into greater awareness for park visitors.

The freshwater stream

For the local community and park visitors, the freshwater stream still requires improvement and better maintenance as it is an important landscape element and part of the first contact story.

Illegal activities

Access into the park by trail bikes, off road vehicles and horses is of concern to the local community and to those who observe their impact on the natural environment. Similarly, the dumping of rubbish and vandalism are of concern. Suggested actions included: greater surveillance in known problem areas, CCTV cameras, and more personnel onsite to enable enforcement. In terms of illegal access, fencing was proposed.

Getting to Kurnell

Getting to Kurnell was raised as an issue by many park visitors and especially Aboriginal people living at La Perouse who wish to maintain a closer connection to the Kurnell section of the park. Most people who were consulted during the project wanted to see better public transport connections and the return of the ferry service between La Perouse and Kurnell.

Conclusions and recommendations

Through community and stakeholder engagement during the first stage of the project, NPWS has learnt that the park needs to be ready to respectfully commemorate the 250th anniversary in three distinctly different ways:

- physically ready
- culturally ready
- activated.

Being **physically ready** implies that the park – its landscape, infrastructure, facilities, way-finding and interpretation – presents well for the activities likely to occur there in 2020 to a wide audience of interested people nationally. The expectation is that Kurnell will inevitably be one of a number of focal points to mark the Cook expedition. However, physically ready should not be read as just focusing on 2020. The park has an existing and diverse audience of park users, as well as two strongly connected communities – Aboriginal people with traditional, familial and long connections to this locality, and the Kurnell community with different connections.

Being **culturally ready** recognises the important connection that Aboriginal people have to Botany Bay, Kurnell and La Perouse. Consultations revealed the widely held desire for a greater Aboriginal presence in Kamay Botany Bay National Park.

Activated implies that Kamay Botany Bay National Park and especially Kurnell is activated through programs and activities that help visitors engage with the multiple stories of the place, the Aboriginal people of the place (through interpretation and direct contact) and with the environment itself. Kurnell is important as a place of cultural contact (i.e. when the Cook expedition landed), and as a potential place of cultural meeting. Kamay Botany Bay National Park is also a park enjoyed by many different people and for a very wide range of reasons, and this role should continue to be recognised and supported in the lead up to 2020, and as part of 2020. The desire for and value of activation comes through strongly from the consultations.

Ongoing engagement

NPWS wants to continue to hear the community's ideas and views on how best to protect and enhance the special values within Kamay Botany Bay National Park and there are numerous ways of getting involved in the master planning project, including:

- accessing information through the NPWS online engagement portal
- viewing the master plan and making formal submissions during the public exhibition period for the draft master plan and draft plan of management. Details of the exhibition process will be widely notified. Information materials and supporting documents will be available via the web and at accessible local venues.
- If you are interested in receiving updates on the master plan and consultation opportunities please [register your contact details](#).