

# Barren Box Wetland Cultural and Heritage Management Plan



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## **Barren Box Cultural & Heritage Management Plan**

In 2005 Murrumbidgee Irrigation (MI) Ltd commissioned Biosis Research Pty Ltd to undertake archaeological and cultural heritage assessments at Barren Box Swamp, now known as Barren Box Storage and Wetland (BBSW), located 30kms north-west of Griffith. As a result of archaeological investigations a significant number of Aboriginal archaeological sites and areas have been identified.

This Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) is designed to guide the protection and preservation of culturally sensitive archaeological sites within BBSW and to address cultural, social and educational issues.

The most important issue in the development and implementation of the Cultural & Heritage Management Plan for BBSW is community consultation. Due to the significance the area holds to local Wiradjuri people, it is vital that the community maintain a sense of ownership over any discussions, planning and works carried out as part of this project.

Consultation should involve several groups within the area and **must** include the Griffith Local Aboriginal Land Council (GLALC) and members of the wider Griffith Aboriginal community. Other bona-fide Aboriginal groups or individuals with a cultural interest in the Aboriginal cultural heritage of the area will also be consulted as required.

There was continual community consultation in the development of this plan. Initially, the concept was raised at a general meeting of the Griffith Local Aboriginal Land Council, followed by numerous community update meetings to ensure interested community members were kept informed.

### **Cultural Material**

- ***Site relocation***

Artefacts removed in the original excavation works are of cultural significance and need to be returned to the original area. Community consultation, whilst acknowledging that items will need to be relocated, expressed a strong desire that a designated 'keeping place' be established to retain artefacts in the locality with interpretation signage for education purposes.

- ***Further Archaeological Investigation***

There will also be further investigation of the wetland area, initially through archaeological and cultural heritage survey. Further excavation and dating of oven

hearths around the Mirrool Creek / Barren Box Storage and Wetland confluence should be investigated. The scope of any proposed investigation will be developed in consultation with the community and the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC).

Further archaeological investigation will assist in achieving a greater understanding of local Aboriginal cultural heritage by the wider community and aid in the rehabilitation of the wetlands. It is also anticipated that education programs for high school students may also be incorporated into further investigations with the assistance of BIOSIS and the local Aboriginal community members engaged to assist.

- ***Site protection & Management***

Working with key stakeholders, particularly the Aboriginal community in the protection of sites is extremely important. It ensures that community members realise just how important they are in the protection of significant areas. Ensuring that everyone is aware of the relevant legislation is also important. Consultation will also continue with officers of Department of Environment and Climate Change.

- ***Use of 'spotters' etc***

Employment of local Aboriginal people to work with contractors and Murrumbidgee Irrigation in further onground works.

### **Education / Community Awareness**

- ***Cultural centre***

In order to provide educational opportunities and increase community awareness the development of a cultural centre should be considered. The purpose of a cultural centre would be to hold cultural camps and cultural activity days. Activities would include Wiradjuri language classes, making boomerangs, spears and other wooden implements out of mulga and similar materials. Explaining the significance of the area to our children will encourage younger generations to play an active role in future management and protection of the area.

The area would form part of an interpretive program which informs residents and visitors to the area of the history of Aboriginal occupation highlighting the cultural landscape of the area, native plants and resources utilised by Aboriginal people, and where appropriate, traditional stories associated with the area. Interpretation of cultural heritage within the wetland cell should be considered, such as signage, heritage trails and a cultural centre. Aboriginal community groups will be consulted regarding interpretation of the Aboriginal heritage of BBSW. This will include obtaining advice on

themes and text displayed on interpretive signage, information brochures and education programs. The use of Indigenous plants and in particular, plants of cultural value for Aboriginal people, in wetland rehabilitation and general revegetation works will also be implemented in consultation with the local Aboriginal community.

Murrumbidgee Irrigation should consider commissioning public artwork to enhance the development and communicate relevant themes. It is expected that some of the artwork will deal with Aboriginal cultural themes and may be commissioned from local Aboriginal artists.

- ***Replication of sites***

The replication of sites using the salvaged artefacts should be undertaken at BBSW. Site replication would be undertaken by the local Aboriginal community and would aim to be an extension of the interpretive program, which would provide visitors to the area some history of Aboriginal occupation highlighting the cultural landscape of the area. The replicated sites would provide an overview of the native plants and resources utilised by Aboriginal people, and where appropriate, traditional stories associated with the area.

Using salvaged artefacts in the replica sites will help the protection of any undisturbed Aboriginal sites.

- ***Discovery ranger tours***

Train local Aboriginal people in a similar way to the 'discovery rangers' engaged by Department Environment and Climate Change to provide guided tours. These tours would provide participants with an insight into the history of Barren Box and how the artefacts were used traditionally.

### **NRM Activities**

Natural Resource Management needs to incorporate the local Aboriginal community. The significance of BBSW to the local community needs to be reflected in all activities undertaken with involvement encouraged at every opportunity.

- ***Planting***

Significant revegetation of the wetland cell will be undertaken as part of the wetland rehabilitation process. Revegetation works will be undertaken using locally native species and the inclusion of plants of former cultural significance to Aboriginal people will be prominent in revegetation. While revegetation will restore the ecology of Barren Box Wetland it will also provide protection to archaeological sites that would have otherwise been subject to damage via exposure and/or erosion.

- **Fire management**

Fire management through traditional methods is a means of passing cultural practices down to younger generations. It also ensures that damage caused during the summer months will be kept to a minimum. A fire management plan will be developed with the assistance of Murrumbidgee Irrigation and Department of Environment and Climate Change. It is envisaged that implementation of the plan will involve local members of the Indigenous community, local fire service and DECC staff. The development of fire trails will require further survey work by the Aboriginal community prior to any works being undertaken. Before we go too far with this we need to understand the impact this will have on revegetation works particularly black box.

- **Invasive species control**

Feral animals and noxious weeds cause considerable damage to our natural environment. Controlling this damage through a well developed control plan, will ensure damage caused by feral animals and weeds will be minimised. Invasive species control will be addressed as part of the wetland rehabilitation plan but it is expected there will be involvement from the Indigenous community in the implementation of the invasive species control plan.

## **Engagement**

- **Community input**

It is essential that the outcomes generated by this plan are community driven. The community will be engaged in all aspects of the CHMP with a particular emphasis on involvement in cultural activities, site relocation/replication, and revegetation projects.

In addition, the community will be fully engaged in any future survey work under this management plan to define the nature and extent of cultural resources of the wetland cell, and to formulate appropriate management strategies.

## **Capacity Building of Community Members**

- **Training**

Providing local Aboriginal people the opportunity to undertake training and develop skills in conservation and land management is important, so that they can feel confident in having more involvement in future natural resource management projects, particularly those with more of a cultural focus. It is planned that the community members who work on the wetland rehabilitation will undertake training in conservation and land management and gain skills in site identification and recording (using GPS/PDA), and knowledge of native plants and their uses, traditional medicines and bush tucker.

- **Employment of community members**

It is important to consider the creation of employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people in conservation and land management.

The Griffith LALC has requested that two fulltime cultural officers be employed by Murrumbidgee Irrigation to undertake all cultural heritage management at BBSW. These officers could be the existing Cultural & Heritage Officer along with a 'Discovery Ranger' and both would be involved in projects such as rehabilitation works, upgrade works, and general day to day management. Murrumbidgee Irrigation will engage representatives of the local Aboriginal community to inspect areas prior to future disturbance, and members will always be employed during archaeological investigations and on-ground works.

Aboriginal representatives will also be engaged to provide advice in undertaking management of archaeological sites and conservation areas. Induction for contractors will be carried out to ensure they are aware of cultural heritage management requirements and have a basic knowledge of cultural sensitivity.

### **Research**

- **Further studies**

- Sites
- Archaeological
- Anthropological

### **Link to other Projects**

The potential to work in partnership with the Aboriginal community on various future projects is unlimited. The Three Ways Cultural Park development, Barren Box Wetland Rehabilitation and Mirrool Creek rehabilitation are all potential projects which would build upon and strengthen the partnership between Murrumbidgee Irrigation and the Griffith Aboriginal community. There has also been discussion between both groups in the past on the development of a native nursery on LALC owned land, which would create numerous employment opportunities within the community and would eventually be a viable enterprise.

## **Site types**

- ***Ceremonies Places***

Commonly places (Bora Rings) where ceremonies were undertaken (Men's and Women's Business) and Stone Arrangements can be known as Secret or Ceremonial.

- ***Burial sites and Places***

Burial sites and Places are special to Aboriginal people and respecting these ancestors is important. Burials are normally found in sandy deposits such as source bordering dunes, lunettes and sand hills, although burials have been recorded across a wide range of locations.

- ***Fish traps***

Fish traps whether temporary or permanent, would have been placed in many parts of the river, creeks and drainage channels. Other recorded examples of fish traps are located at Balranald and the well-known extensive complex at Brewarrina.

- ***Modified trees***

Modified trees are among the common site type found on the Riverine plains usually occurring on various types of Box or Gum trees (*Eucalyptus sp.*) and are characterised by a scar or marking left from bark removal. In this region *Callitris sp.* or Pine trees were marked or incised to demarcate Burial grounds and are generally associated with sand features (dunes, lunettes).

- ***Aboriginal occupation***

Occupation (Aboriginal Resource gathering and Habitation) these include ovens, hearths and middens associated with artefactual material (shell, bone, stone axes, flakes, grinding dishes, anvils, hammer stones, etc).

**References:**

- Biosis Research Pty Ltd 2006. Barren Box Swamp Cultural Heritage Management Plan. Report for Murrumbidgee Irrigation, Griffith Local Aboriginal Land Council Griffith NSW.
- Meredith, S. 2004. Aboriginal Heritage Study for Barren Box Swamp Embankment Construction and Rehabilitated Wetland. Report for Murrumbidgee Irrigation Limited. Griffith, NSW.