

Aboriginal Advisory Committee

Monday, 9 February 2026, 10:00am

Council Committee Meeting Room and via zoom

MEETING NOTES

MEETING COMMENCED: 10:01am

IN ATTENDANCE:

Members: Ben Stainer, Kerry Boyenga, Cherie Buchert, Julie Janson, Wally Stewart, Andrew White (Batemans Bay LALC (Via Ms Teams)).

Eurobodalla Shire Council: Councillor Mick Johnson, Rhonnie South (Coordinator Community Development and Youth), Michael Lawrence-Taylor (Community Development Officer), and Melinda Rowell (Executive Assistant to Director of Community Arts and Recreation (minutes)).

Guests: Heidi Thomson (Natural Resource and Sustainability Coordinator) and Nina Bowbridge (Sustainability Supervisor).

APOLOGIES:

Councillor Laurence Babington, Councillor Amber Schutz, Kim Bush (Division Manager Community Development Participation), Roslyn Field, Rick Callaghan (Cobowra LALC), and Kathy Arthur (ESC Director, Community Arts and Recreation).

1. WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Chair, Ben Stainer, welcomed members of the committee and delivered an Acknowledgement of Country, sharing personal reflections on his family history and cultural connections. Ben spoke of knowledge passed down through generations and expressed pride in his relative, Caiden, a talented young artist whose work reflects care for Country and ancestral heritage. He also showed artwork that had been brought in for the meeting and paid respect to his ancestors during the acknowledgement.

Ben highlighted opportunities to better support Aboriginal people in the community, emphasising the need for second chance employment pathways for those leaving the justice system. He suggested options such as designated Council roles and greater engagement of Aboriginal contractors to give individuals a stronger chance to change their direction. He noted that job creation language should reflect the value Aboriginal people bring to the workforce and community. He suggested options such as designated Council roles and greater engagement of Aboriginal contractors to give individuals a stronger chance to change their direction. He noted that job-creation language should reflect the value Aboriginal people bring to the workforce and community.

Ben also raised concerns about the significant weed growth along local roads and plastic litter in local waterways. He stressed that everyone has a shared responsibility to protect the environment and care for Country.

2. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MINUTES / ACTIONS OF MEETING HELD 8 OCTOBER 2025

The Chair, Ben Stainer, confirmed that the minutes of the previous meeting had been read and were accurate. There were no objections from the other committee members.

All actions from the previous meeting were completed.

MOTION: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2025 be accepted as a true and accurate record.

Moved: Julie Janson **Seconded:** Kerry Boyenga

3. BUSINESS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS

3.1 Alterations to Aboriginal Advisory Committee Terms of Reference (ToR)

The Chair, Ben Stainer, proposed that the Committee move to vote on the motion as outlined in Rhonnie's email, which proposed alteration to Aboriginal Advisory Committee Terms of Reference.

Group discussion focused on the potential inclusion of Elders groups, changes to the nature and focus of discussions, a review of how the Committee operates and consideration of meeting participation and attendance.

Julie advised that the Committee is functioning well, expressed confidence in the current committee, and reiterated her support for Wally and Ben, consistent with the previous meeting.

Cherrie stated that she is satisfied with the current ToR.

Kerry raised concerns that, if changes were to be made to the ToR, these should occur prior to the commencement of a new Committee and ideally at the Committee establishment stage.

Vote: The Chair, Ben Stainer, called for a vote on the motion to amend the Terms of Reference.

Outcome: The motion was not carried.

Decision: The Aboriginal Advisory Committee Terms of Reference will remain unchanged at this time.

Nina added that, as an observer of today's meeting, the Committee may invite individuals to attend meetings in an observer capacity, either generally or for specific purposes. And noted that individuals can apply to have items placed on the agenda.

Due to audio issues, Ben briefly discussed with Andrew his personal approach to the Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country and the proposed alterations to the ToR. He noted that the committee's decision that the AAC ToR will remain unchanged at this time. And mentioned that Elder groups may be invited to attend the meeting as observers. If individuals or groups wish to raise an issue, they are required to apply to be placed on the agenda and present their item.

ACTION/S:

3.1.a. Rhonnie to send a copy of the Aboriginal Advisory Committee ToR to Andrew.

4. AGENDA ITEMS

4.1 Draft Biodiversity Strategy – Presentation by Heidi Thomson (Natural Resource and Sustainability Coordinator)

Heidi Thomson introduced herself and provided background on the development of Council's Draft Biodiversity Strategy, outlining progress to date. Committee members received both electronic and hard copies, and Heidi presented a supporting PowerPoint.

She advised that the Strategy is scheduled to go to Council in April to seek endorsement for public exhibition. Her presentation highlighted key consultation findings, noting that community feedback consistently identifies nature, biodiversity, and the environment as among the highest community priorities within Eurobodalla. There is concern regarding biodiversity decline and future environmental health.

Heidi emphasised that today's focus is on Caring for Country, identifying gaps, and discussing what the Strategy should address moving forward.

4.2. Caring for Country – actions within Council's Draft Biodiversity Strategy

Heidi read through the actions of Council's Draft Biodiversity Strategy and welcomed feedback from the committee on required changes.

Key Discussion Points:

- **Traditional Owners / Native Title**

Wally expressed concern that Traditional Owners and Native Title groups were not identified as key stakeholders. Native Title is active in the region and covers six Shires and therefore must be considered a primary stakeholder in the Strategy.

Later discussions emphasised that “Yuin Nation” may be the most appropriate terminology, rather than separating groups into smaller categories.

Suggestion was to remove the term “Traditional Owners” and replace with culturally accurate wording such as “Yuin Nation”. Yuin Nation people are one group and should not be divided.

- **Language, Grammar and Terminology**

Julie raised capitalisation issues within the Strategy.

Ben emphasised that the language used throughout the Strategy needs to be 100%.

- **Sea Country**

Councillor Mick Johnson noted the draft does not reference the ocean.

Heidi advised that Council has other strategies for waterways, estuaries, wetlands and riparians, and the intent was to avoid duplication.

Wally emphasised that State waters form part of the Native Title claim, and that there is significant biodiversity within the ocean. He stated that Sea Country needs to be incorporated into the Strategy.

Heidi agreed to add Sea Country as a value in the Strategy.

- **Climate Change**

Julie highlighted the need for a strong section on the impacts of climate change, noting that everything is interconnected and that climate change affects all aspects of the natural environment.

- **Education and Induction**

Cherie expressed concern that many people come onto our Country without understanding proper protocols, which can lead to damage.

Ben suggested developing an induction or education process for all visitors and Council staff to support respect for Country. He noted this aligns with Action 2.1 – Caring for Country, empathising a simple, consistent introduction for everyone. Ben also mentioned the importance of having a recognisable logo to support this approach.

Heidi advised this could be addressed within action planning.

- **Underwater Impacts and Marine Health**

Wally emphasised the seriousness of the underwater impacts, referencing the White Rocks documentary and successful awareness raising through underwater camera footage shown in schools. He stressed cultural and ecological importance, noting the connection between land, ocean and community reliance on healthy reef systems. It's everybody's problem, no reef there will be no fish.

- **Signage**

Wally proposed updating signage to include QR codes linking to stories or videos showing the health and significance of systems. This initiative would be useful for tourism and education.

Ben noted that updated signage should be guided by Aboriginal knowledge.

- **Grants, Funding and Resourcing**

Ben raised the idea of a “blue water levy” similar to the environmental levy, or an option on the rates to donate money.

Heidi noted challenges for Councillors regarding rate structures.

Wally emphasised the need for funding to support on ground restoration. A simple letter of support from Council would greatly assist the community in progressing restoration works and accessing available grants. He noted that the Community has been lobbying for support for 3-4 years, and that securing funding remains the primary barrier to commencing on-ground works.

- **Employment at Council**

Ben and Julie discussed the importance of developing Indigenous employment pathways and highlighted the need for HR involvement to help attract and recruit Indigenous applicants. They noted that experience gained through Landcare programs can be valuable for these roles.

Heidi advised that Council does have Indigenous identified roles, however, these positions often remain unfilled. She also noted that Council already partners up with Landcare.

- **Partnerships and Alignment**

Andrew highlighted that the Batemans Bay LALC already have strategic frameworks and suggested implementing to fit in with Council's strategy. He noted that cultural practice is both spiritual and knowledge based and needs to be understood holistically. Sought clarity on how Council can incorporate and implement Aboriginal strategies.

Heidi noted that many Councils are developing Biodiversity Strategies and alignment will be important.

Wally emphasised the importance of working together and upcoming Native Title committee developments.

- **Additional Items Raised:**

Julie highlighted the importance of recognising the totem as a sacred animal for Indigenous people and emphasised the cultural significance it carries. Ben and Julie discussed the connection between animal totems, Aboriginal health, and the health and wellbeing of the wider community.

Wally suggested engaging school children in a competition to create artwork inspired by the totem, supporting both cultural education and community involvement.

Ben reinforced the message that caring for Country is everyone's responsibility. This theme could be central to the logo or project title: "It's everyone's responsibility."

Heidi supported the concerns raised and agreed that further exploration of sea Country issues and feral animal impacts would be beneficial.

Kerry raised concerns regarding the phrase 'calling it loving Country' and suggested that the preferred expression may be 'love and respect' to better capture meaning and intention.

Wally noted that a Welcome to Country is not delivered on his boat. Instead, he reads aloud the statement currently used on board, which conveys the message: "*If you come into our Country, you respect it.*" He provided examples and stories illustrating how simple, clear messages can communicate expectations and meaning effectively.

- **Feedback on Draft Strategy Process**

Heidi advised the Committee that once the draft Biodiversity Strategy is formally advertised, the Committee is encouraged to make a submission. She noted that she will prepare and circulate a re-draft of the Biodiversity strategy. The draft is planned to be finalised in late February before being presented to Council.

Heidi commented that other Councils are preparing their biodiversity strategies, and alignment across Councils will be important. The committee agreed that collaboration is essential.

Julie stated that the presentation delivered to the Committee was excellent and commended the team.

ACTION/S:

4.2.a. Committee members to provide Heidi with list of items (actions) they want changed in the Draft Biodiversity Strategy.

4.2.b. Andrew to send copies or a link of Batemans Bay LALC strategies to Heidi.

4.2.c. Heidi will prepare and circulate a re-draft of the Biodiversity strategy.

4.3. NSW Government Cultural Knowledge Standards Framework – Presentation by Rhonnie South (ESC)

Councillor Mick Johnson noted that Rhonnie had been scheduled to present this agenda item; however, she became unwell and was unable to stay for the presentation. He advised that Rhonnie provided printed materials for distribution at the meeting and advised that she will also send an email to the group containing relevant links available on Council's website.

Michael added that the NSW Government has only recently released the Framework. He noted that the Framework is highly relevant for Council and for all those working in this space. Michael also highlighted the connections between the Framework and ongoing heritage studies. He advised that he will share information with the group regarding where the Framework can be accessed.

ACTION/S:

4.3.a. Rhonnie to circulate information in relation to her presentation.

4.3.b. Michael to circulate information to the group on where the NSW Government Cultural Knowledge Standards Framework can be accessed.

4.4. (Action from previous meeting) Presentation on Native Title – Wally Stewart

Ben noted that this item will be carried forward and listed as the first item on the agenda for the next meeting.

(Kiama Council Native Title Partnership Workshop – Kiama Pavilion February 18 & 19)

As mentioned above, this item will be carried forward and listed as the first item on the agenda for the next meeting.

4.5. (Action from previous meeting) Presentation on White Rock Documentary – Wally Stewart

As mentioned above, this item will be carried forward and listed as the first item on the agenda for the next meeting.

5. GENERAL BUSINESS

5.1. Cultural Tour for Councillors and Council Staff

As mentioned above, this item will be carried forward and listed as the first item on the agenda for the next meeting.

5.2 Possum Art Competitions

Julie provided an update on the Possum Art Competitions, noting that the Indigenous Arts Prize will be held at the Mechanics Institute. The competition has not been formally advertised; instead, flyers are being distributed throughout the community.

5.3. Vice Chair Appointment

Julie enquired about the appointment of a Vice Chair. Councillor Johnson advised that he is willing to step in and provide support in the absence of Ben. Ben advised that will approach Anita Mongta to discuss the Vice Chair role.

ACTION/S:

5.3.a. Ben to make contact with Anita about Vice Chair position.

NEXT MEETING: TBA

MEETING CLOSED: 12:15PM