



Western Sydney Airport – Consultation on an Aboriginal Keeping Place

Public Summary
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Prepared by Murawin Pty Ltd for the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Country and pay respects to the Darug Traditional Owners and other Knowledge Holders who care for the land and waters that are the subject of this report.

We recognise the continuing living Culture¹ of Aboriginal people.

We acknowledge all the Aboriginal people who have and will contribute to the discussion of an Aboriginal Keeping Place associated with the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport (the Airport).

We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

1. Introduction

Murawin Pty Ltd (Murawin) was engaged by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (the Department) to consult with stakeholders regarding a potential Aboriginal Keeping Place at the Airport. This document summarises the approach taken to consultation and the findings from the consultation process.

Keeping Places are institutions particular to contemporary Indigenous Australia where collections of artefacts and other Cultural materials are held under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community control, primarily for reasons of Cultural custodianship.

¹ In this document, wherever possible we have spelt 'Culture' with a capital C when referring to Aboriginal Culture and Cultural practices. This is to acknowledge that Aboriginal Culture is a specific set of practices distinct from the general meaning of the word culture, and includes the intellectual property attached to those practices and knowledge associated with those practices.



A Keeping Place is a long-term Cultural asset, and its physical location, configuration, governance, management and decision-making processes are all dependent on the long-term involvement and commitment of Aboriginal stakeholders. When open to the public a Keeping Place may also have secondary purposes, such as for education, tourism, display, retail, or any other function thought appropriate by the Aboriginal community.

The Department has a responsibility to consult with stakeholders on a potential Keeping Place under Condition 11 (4) of the Western Sydney Airport Plan, which states:

The Infrastructure Department must consult with relevant Aboriginal stakeholders and relevant government agencies with the aim of establishing, with the support and collaborative action of governments and other stakeholders, an Aboriginal cultural heritage 'keeping place' that would provide secure, above ground storage of artefacts and enable future access for cultural purposes, interpretation, education or research.

The discovery of Aboriginal artefacts on the Airport site and subsequent investigations into their significance is also a primary driver to engagement with the Aboriginal community about a Keeping Place.

2. Country

The Airport site is in the Mulgoa Valley on the traditional lands of the Darug Nation, close to the border with the Gandangara Nation.

The Country of the Darug people spans the inland plains encompassing Parramatta through to the base of the Blue Mountains. The traditional Country of the Gandangara people encompasses the Blue Mountains itself, along with parts of Southwest Sydney.

A number of significant archaeological finds have been unearthed along nearby waterways, including the Nepean River, Cosgroves, Kemps, Badgerys and South Creeks.

Under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (NSW), LALCs have a responsibility to improve, protect and foster the best interests of all Aboriginal persons within their boundaries.

Under Cultural lore, Traditional Owners have a responsibility to ensure artefacts are kept on Traditional Country.

The Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council (Gandangara LALC) asserts its responsibility to look after artefacts in the area on behalf of all Aboriginal people. While Gandangara is the only LALC in the area, the Darug people run an organisation called Muru Mittigar. Muru Mittigar has no standing as a LALC but was mentioned frequently during forums as a potential place to be connected with an Airport Keeping Place given that it already operates as a Culture / Keeping Place for Darug artefacts



3. Consultation overview

The Aboriginal community of Western Sydney is as diverse and complex as any community that has had to deal with large-scale cultural, social and political upheavals. A key responsibility of Murawin's role was to ensure and provide a space in which all stakeholders could have their voices heard and their aspirations and stories articulated. In fulfilling this responsibility, Murawin's engagement was grounded in the concept of Ngarra, which is a term from the Dunghutti language variously meaning to listen, hear, think, perceive and want.

To ensure all relevant Aboriginal stakeholders were able to be identified, Murawin undertook an initial stakeholder mapping process, which fed into the Stakeholder Engagement Plan. Once the Department accepted the plan, Murawin began consulting with:

- the Darug Traditional Owners and Elders;
- the Gandangara LALC;
- Muru Mittigar;
- other Aboriginal people living in the area;
- relevant government departments and agencies; and
- local government councils.

There is currently no specified site for a Keeping Place, so questions relating to the Keeping Place were kept open and generative. The three main questions considered in the forums were:

- What could a potential Keeping Place look like (that is, what should its functions be)?
- Where could it be located?
- How might funding and governance arrangements work?

Murawin held four forums on 19 and 20 August and 9 and 29 October 2020. The forums were initially to be face-to-face but later moved to an online videoconference format due to COVID-19. While there is a Cultural preference for face-to-face yarns in the Aboriginal community, the online format was necessary in the circumstances. The focus of each forum was as follows:

- Forum 1 was especially for Aboriginal stakeholders, and explored what the Keeping Place might look like, where would it be located, and how would its governance arrangements would work.
- Forum 2 was for government stakeholders and relevant non-government organisations, exploring how the Keeping Place should be funded and managed, and what was not available for consideration.
- Forum 3 brought together all relevant stakeholders to identify and discuss the emerging potential models for a Keeping Place.
- Forum 4 was for Aboriginal and government stakeholders, and centred on discussing concrete Keeping Place models that were presented by Murawin, drawing on the outcomes of Forums 1-3.

Murawin also undertook some one-on-one consultations with community leaders as the consultations progressed.



4. Overall findings

Consultations were attended by a wide stakeholder group including Traditional Owners, representatives of the Gandangara LALC, Representatives of Muru Mittigar, Indigenous representatives from Local Councils and Government, and local community members.

Participants agreed on many matters, including the importance of a Keeping Place and what might be achieved by a Keeping Place.

The agreements and findings are set out below.

Finding 1: Importance of a Keeping Place

All stakeholders agreed on the Cultural importance of a Keeping Place in being properly able to look after the artefacts found during excavations at the Airport.

Finding 2: Agreement of basic principle to include all Aboriginal stakeholder voices in the governance of a Keeping Place

There was agreement that the governance structure should include all Aboriginal stakeholder voices. There was acknowledgement that stakeholders want the Keeping Place to be commissioned.

Finding 3: Agreement on what might be achieved by a Keeping Place

There was agreement about the types of things a Keeping Place might achieve:

- the keeping of artefacts;
- a Cultural place with opportunities for education, learning and healing for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people;
- a legacy for future generations;
- a place of storytelling for Western Sydney Aboriginal mobs;
- an income stream from tourism at the Airport that could make the Keeping Place sustainable; and
- a place that promotes Aboriginal healing and wellbeing.

Finding 4: Agreement as to sustainability of a Keeping Place

There was agreement that a Keeping Place must be sustainable – that is, not a project that gets one off capital to be built with no sustainable income.

Finding 5: Agreement as to concept for the model of a Keeping Place

There was basic agreement for a “hub-and-spoke” model – meaning that a Keeping Place could potentially be situated over multiple sites. This would allow for:

- a place at the Airport that can serve as a Welcome to Country and generate income;
- a site at or run by Gandangara LALC; and
- a site at or run by Muru Mittigar – a Darug run organisation.

All these sites were discussed as potential locations, with no final agreement as to exact locations.



Finding 6: Ownership and control of a Keeping Place is not settled due to historical, not Cultural, reasons

Culturally, all parties agree on the need to keep artefacts in Culturally appropriate facilities.

Gandangara LALC considers that it is in the best position to own and control the Keeping Place given its legislative responsibilities and jurisdiction over the area and resources. Darug Traditional Owners consider this is incompatible with Aboriginal lore and the Darug Traditional Owners having full control over Darug artefacts.

The Darug Traditional Owners and the Gandangara LALC were not able to agree on ultimate ownership and control of a Keeping Place, but this should be a catalyst for the Department to facilitate an agreed way forward.