

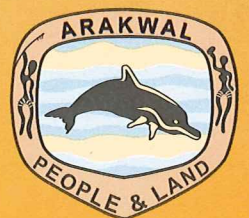


Arakwal National Park

Our place, Our heritage



Arakwal National Park and Tallow Creek from the air - photograph L. Wellman/NPWS



The Importance of Country

"We want to see Country how it used to be. We want to continue to look after Country and want it to look after us. We want our people to be back on Country, caring for and using Country like we always have. We want to share parts of our culture with the community so they learn about and respect Country like we do. We want everybody to work together to keep Country clean and healthy."

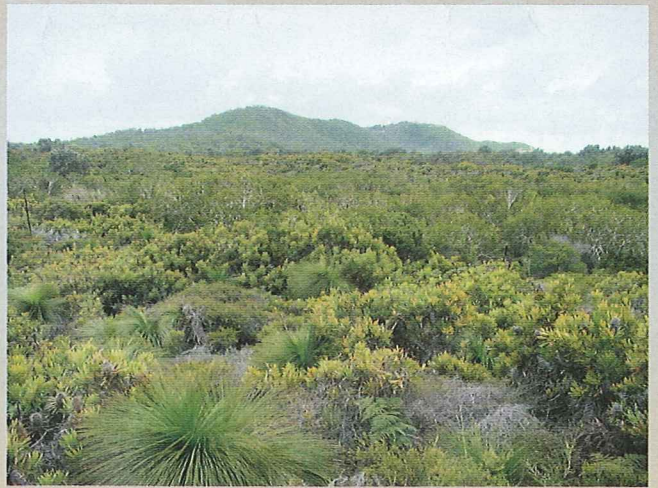
Aunties Lorna Kelly, Dulcie Nicholls and Linda Vidler, 2003.

The Byron Bay Arakwal people are part of the wider Bundjalung nation and lived in the area before the arrival of non-Aboriginal people. The ancestors of the present Arakwal Elders have passed on the traditions and cultural practices that are alive in many of their descendants today. Arakwal National Park protects the 'homelands' of the Elders, allowing their connection to Country to continue.

The park contains a number of vegetation types that are both ecologically and culturally important. The Byron Bay Arakwal people feel a special attachment to the wallum heathland, which they know as 'Honeysuckle Country' due to the delicious nectar produced by the banksia trees. 'Honeysuckle Country' provides important animal habitat and a range of culturally important plant foods. The threatened Eastern Chestnut Mouse was recently recorded in this country.

The 'Swamp and Paperbark Country' in the northern part of the Park contains wetlands of State significance including Cibus Margil swamp. These areas help 'filter' stormwater, provide an important habitat for frogs and before sandmining were used as 'shopping lakes' by Elders and their families, being a rich source of wild foods and other materials. Other habitats in the Park include regenerating rainforest, beach and mudflats and eucalypt forests.

Honeysuckle country – Arakwal National Park heathland - photograph N. Graham/NPWS



Clay Heath: An endangered ecological community

The Wallum Banksia community in the Park has been classified as Byron Bay Dwarf Graminoid Clay Heath, an endangered community. This type of heath is restricted to the Byron Bay area and less than eight percent of its original distribution remains. A threatened ground orchid *Diuris byronensis* is only found in this heath. Surveys have been undertaken to monitor the distribution of this orchid. A recovery plan for the clay heath and associated species is currently in preparation.

Bringing back the frogs

Surveys have shown that Arakwal National Park is an important area for frogs. There are at least twelve species of native frogs, including significant populations of the threatened Wallum Froglet and Wallum Sedge Frog. Pests such as Cane Toads and Mosquito Fish that breed in a former sandmining dredge pond threaten these frogs. Subject to an environmental assessment, it is proposed to regenerate this pond to a wetland, thereby reducing breeding opportunities for pest species.

The joint management of Arakwal National Park ensures that Arakwal people have a say in the management of the land'

A Special Place

Arakwal National Park adjoins Cape Byron State Conservation Area. It is 183 hectares in size, including a three kilometre stretch of Tallow Beach. The Park is part of the ancestral lands of the Byron Bay Arakwal people and is where the living Elders, Aunties Lorna Kelly, Dulcie Nicholls and Linda Vidler were born and raised. It is an important part of Country that contains sacred sites and special places. It also provides protection to threatened coastal vegetation and is an important corridor for wildlife in an area that is increasingly under pressure from coastal development.

Joint Management

'The joint management of Arakwal National Park ensures that Arakwal people have a say in the management of the land'

Yvonne Stewart, Chairperson, Arakwal National Park Management Committee.
October, 2002.

Arakwal Elder Lorna Kelly with the Premier, Bob Carr celebrating the creation of Arakwal National Park - photograph Jacklyn Wagner courtesy the Northern Star



The Arakwal Management Committee celebrating the international award for 'Distinguished Achievements in Wildlife Preservation' - photograph L. Walker/NPWS



On October 28th, 2001 an historic agreement allowed the creation of Arakwal National Park through an Indigenous Land Use Agreement, the first of its kind in Australia. This agreement acknowledged the rights of the Byron Bay Arakwal people as traditional owners and also provided separate land for housing Arakwal Elders, a cultural centre and employment of Arakwal people.

The Arakwal Agreement is an example of active reconciliation and has been so successful it is being used as a model for resolving other Native Title claims across Australia. In 2003 the success of this Agreement was internationally recognised with an 'Award for Distinguished Achievements in Wildlife Preservation' from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

The partnership between the Byron Bay Arakwal people and the National Parks and Wildlife Service is strengthened through the good working relationship established by the Joint Management Committee for the National Park. The Committee is made up of three Arakwal Corporation members, three representatives of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and one Byron Shire Councillor.

Joint management ensures that scientific knowledge and the rights, interests, skills and knowledge of the traditional owners are respected and integrated in all of the Park's management programs.

An Arakwal National Park logo, representing the connection of the Byron Bay Arakwal people to the land and sea of Arakwal National Park, accompanies the National Parks and Wildlife Service logo on all uniforms, signs and publications. This 'dual-badging' is symbolic of joint management in operation.

Using Country

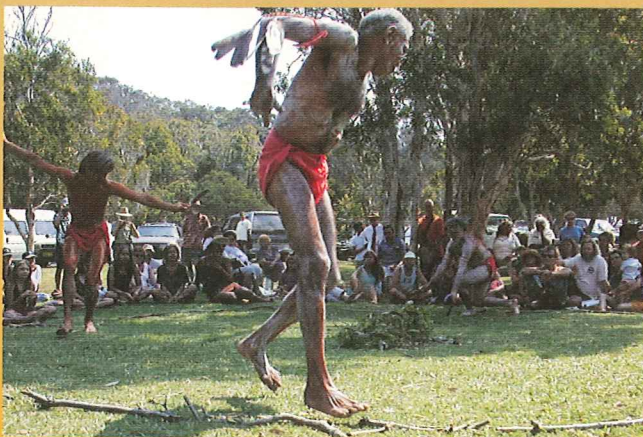
We want to see this country shared with all people so they enjoy and look after it too. We want to see Byron Bay Arakwal people gain employment by sharing parts of their culture with visitors on Country. By doing all this we will ensure the country is used in a respectful way.

Arakwal National Park Management Committee, 2004.

The Byron Bay Arakwal people have traditionally harvested a variety of resources such as vines for baskets in the rainforests; eels, fish, prawns and mud crabs in the creeks; and shellfish along the beaches. Plants were collected for use as food, medicine and material throughout Country. A number of native plants such as 'Pig Face,' 'Midgem,' 'Five-Corners plant' and 'Breadfruit tree' provided berries and fruits.

The traditional owners want to ensure that they can continue to sustainably use wild resources in the national park for the benefit of their people. Aboriginal people maintain their cultural identity and links with Country through cultural learning passed on through family generations. Providing opportunities for cultural use on national parks is important as few areas of undeveloped Country remain where the transfer of cultural knowledge and skills can be undertaken.

Men's dance at the celebration of the first anniversary of the creation of Arakwal National Park - photograph S. Coulston/NPWS



Arakwal Elder Linda Vidler and Mick Kay find some bush tucker during the wild resources study in the Park - photograph Australian Museum



Sharing their cultural knowledge with others is important to the Arakwal Elders. The proposed cultural centre adjoining the Park will allow visitors to learn more about Country and provide employment on Country for Arakwal people. Visitors to the Park will also continue to be welcome to enjoy activities such as surfing, beach walking, bushwalking and bird watching.

Bush Lollies

Byron Bay Arakwal Elders rate Midgem the best of all their foods. Elders recall wandering through the 'Honeysuckle Country' munching on Midjem - their favourite 'bush lolly'. Today they still place a high value on this food, which is a common plant in the Park.

*Please note that it is illegal to harvest plants within the National Park without the consent of the NPWS

Looking After Country

We want to work as partners to help look after this country: the Byron Bay Arakwal People, National Parks and Wildlife Service and the wider community working together as one. We want to repair the country so the native plants and animals continue to return and the water is clean. We want to care for it by removing the weeds and managing fire to make the country safe and healthy. By doing all this we will fulfil past, present and future cultural obligations.

Arakwal National Park
Management Committee, 2004.

The Byron Bay Arakwal People have looked after, and in turn been looked after by, these lands for many generations. Today the involvement of Byron Bay Arakwal people in looking after Country occurs on a day to day basis through the employment of their people in the National Park and through the joint management committee.

Due to intensive sand mining in the 1960's the landscape of the Park has been changed leading to a decline in the abundance of native plants and animals including culturally important wild resources. Impacts included the removal of a series of lakes to the east and south of Honeysuckle Hill, the dredging, straightening, and polluting of Tallow Creek, and the introduction of plants that don't come from the area.

Byron Bay Arakwal Community members, Department of Environment and Conservation staff and Elder Linda Vidler at Tallow Creek - photograph Australian Museum



Yvonne Stewart, Elders Lorna Kelly, Linda Vidler and author and bush tucker expert Tim Lowe studying wild resources in the Park - photograph N. Graham/NPWS



It is hoped that future generations will enjoy a landscape much like the one the Arakwal ancestors knew. The plan is to progressively replace bitou and other weeds with native vegetation. Restoration will include revegetation with culturally important plants, which are currently being grown for planting in the Park. Control of pest animals such as rabbits will also improve the natural and cultural heritage of the Park.

Restoring the dunes

The sustainable harvest of pigface fruit along Tallow Beach is an important activity for traditional owners to maintain links with Country. The frontal dune in the Park contains post-sandmining planting of she-oaks and banksias, with an understorey of Bitou bush or coastal wattle. Restoration of these dunes to their natural vegetation is of primary importance to the Byron Bay Arakwal people to provide dune stability, habitat and a place where cultural use can be sustained.

Planning for Country

You are invited to comment on the draft plan of management for Arakwal National Park.
A copy of the draft plan is available on the website www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au or by telephone on 02 6685 8565. Submissions in writing are welcome and should be forwarded to:

The Planner - Arakwal National Park
National Parks and Wildlife Service
PO Box 127
BYRON BAY 2481

Public submissions close 28th February 2005



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The NPWS is part of the Department of Environment and Conservation