

Community visit to Darkinjung country, Central Coast

The scenic Darkinjung country on the NSW Central Coast put on a spectacular day for participants of a Ngara Yura Program community visit in late July 2017.

Those attending enjoyed a tour of scenic coastlines, nature walks and viewings of rock carvings followed by a “yarn-up” with the local community. Our group of 20 was warmly welcomed in central Gosford before departing to explore three locally significant cultural places. At Pearl Beach our host, Uncle Gavi Duncan, welcomed us with song. He spoke of the first contact that occurred here on 2 March 1788 when Governor Arthur Phillip led a small party of officers on an exploratory voyage only five weeks after the landing of the first fleet. We learnt of the Aboriginal *kanyini* and of the four principles of culture being land, lore, kinship and spirit. He also spoke of the hardship that followed that initial peaceful meeting.

Our second stop was Ettalong Lookout which offered spectacular views across Broken Bay and to the Hawkesbury River. We learned more about the area’s history and the unique native flora including how yellow wattle can be used in fishing, and the seeds of Sydney golden wattle can be used to make bread and the leaves a soap.

The third stop was the sacred Bulgandry Place in Brisbane Water National Park, a site rich in rock engravings of creation stories, dugong, kangaroo, fish, and grinding grooves.

The afternoon featured a “yarn-up” with the local community. Uncle Des Benton gave the welcoming Acknowledgement of Country.

The word “barang” means “tomorrow” in the Darkinjung language. The Barang Regional Alliance leads Empowered Communities for the NSW Central Coast region as the backbone organisation. Bara Barang, our host organisation, is an Aboriginal Central Coast Corporation. Through innovative programs and services to engage Aboriginal people and youth it aims to create a self-determined and empowered community to improve school retention, build leadership and promote vocational learning and employment opportunities.

Regional Youth Support Services (RYSS) provided the venue for the afternoon’s discussions. RYSS is a leading, locally-based youth specific charity service, delivering frontline youth support and innovative engagement strategies to young people in the area.

Of particular interest to judicial officers was the Indigenous Justice Program run by RYSS. This program is offered to



Admiring the scenic Ettalong lookout.



Uncle Gavi Duncan explains the dual properties of the Sydney golden wattle.

Indigenous young men and woman between the age of 14 and 18 who are on, or at risk of being on, court-imposed orders. This program involves assistance to better their health, cease offending behaviours, engage with culture, further their education, and gain employment.

In attendance, invited by the community, was his Honour Judge Matthew Myers AM, a judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia and member of the Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council. Judge Myers shared some of his work as an ALRC Commissioner leading the current inquiry into the high incarceration rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.¹ This was also an opportunity to strongly encourage submissions to the inquiry which may be made anonymously through the ALRC website.

¹ See Australian Law Reform Commission, *Incarceration rates of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal People*, Discussion Paper 84, 2017.

A key challenge for the community is access to legal representation. With the departure of the Aboriginal Legal Service, only the Wyong Community Legal Centre is able to offer legal services and has very limited capacity to assist. The community also has a large number of stolen generation peoples, in some cases up to three generations. This has a significant impact on the number of Aboriginal youth that lack a sense of connection to their culture, increasing the need for organisations such as RYSS and Bara Barang. Another area of concern for the community is accessibility to housing and Indigenous youth employment; however it was encouraging to hear the work that RYSS and other organisations are doing to assist.

Ngara Yura Program community visits provide a unique opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences. One memorable exchange during the yarn-up was when a local community member shared his struggles with drugs and family breakdown and his experience going through the juvenile justice system. Although his life had been back on track for many years, a recent brief stint in incarceration provided him with insight into current issues affecting offenders in prison and the alarming rates of drug use. He also noted that this was the first time he had met a member of the judiciary outside a courtroom and further, without being sentenced.

Words and pictures: Sarah Collins, Manager, Programs, Judicial Commission.



The afternoon's "yarn-up" gave judicial officers the opportunity to hear about issues of community concern including access to legal representation, youth employment and housing.

Judicial Commission wins ARA gold award for 2015–16 annual report



Pictured at the awards night are Ernest Schmatt PSM, Chief Executive, Judicial Commission and Kate Lumley, Manager, Communications and Publications.

The Judicial Commission has gained a gold award for its 2015–16 annual report at the Australasian Reporting Awards (ARA) held in Melbourne on 21 June 2017. This is the Commission's seventh consecutive gold award. The report was also nominated as a finalist in the governance reporting special award.

Since 1950, the ARA has promoted quality reporting for public and private sector organisations.

To receive a gold award, a report must demonstrate overall excellence in annual reporting and provide high quality coverage of most aspects of the ARA criteria; full disclosure of key aspects of the core business; and outstanding disclosures in major areas. A report that achieves a gold award is a model for organisations in the same field to follow.