



# Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander (ATSI)

in the Camden LGA



*Working together towards a connected cohesive community*

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SHIRES ASSOCIATION NSW POLICY ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT PEOPLE**

Local Government recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a right to self-determination, practical reconciliation and quality of life equal to the wider community.

Local Government:

- acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners of their own lands by including Aboriginal people in official Council ceremonies using local customary protocols such as 'Welcome to Country' and by encouraging the flying of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags;
- recognises the establishment of Council Aboriginal Consultative Committees is important in providing a mechanism for direct consultation with and participation of Aboriginal communities;
- recognises the importance of including Aboriginal people in Council social/community planning under the regulation;
- acknowledges that it has a role to play in the improvement of both the environment of villages and existing infrastructure in villages;
- recognises the role of regional and local Aboriginal authorities in planning and providing for local communities and acknowledges the need for an integration of resources between these authorities and other agencies of all spheres of government;
- encourages greater participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Local Government political life, seeking to facilitate election campaign initiatives within the community;
- facilitates access to facilities, services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- supports initiatives that bring about a profound reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community.

## DEFINITION OF THE TERMS 'ABORIGINAL' AND 'TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER'<sup>1</sup>

Indigenous Australians are the original inhabitants of the Australian continent and nearby islands and the descendants of these peoples. Indigenous Australians are distinguished as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, who currently together make up about 2.5% of Australia's population.

The Torres Strait Islanders are indigenous to the Torres Strait Islands, which are at the northern-most tip of Queensland near Papua New Guinea. The term "Aboriginal" has traditionally been applied to indigenous inhabitants of mainland Australia, Tasmania, and some of the other adjacent islands.

There is great diversity among different Indigenous communities and societies in Australia, each with its own unique mixture of cultures, customs and languages. In present day Australia these groups are further divided into local communities.

Although there were over 250–300 spoken languages with 600 dialects at the start of European settlement, fewer than 200 of these remain in use – and all but 20 are considered to be endangered. Aboriginal people today mostly speak English, with Aboriginal phrases and words being added to create Australian Aboriginal English.

## LOCAL HISTORY

Aboriginal history in the Macarthur region is yet to be written by Aboriginal people. What we do know from other writers<sup>2</sup> and what continues to be of importance to local people<sup>3</sup> follows.

### Land

Camden sits at the intersection of three Aboriginal tribal boundaries. The people of the Camden town location, the western Cowpastures and the adjoining mountainous areas are Gundungurra. The eastern Cowpastures are Tharawal, and the people to the northeast of the Nepean River are Dharug.

The Gundungurra dialect was spoken in all the country between Burragorang and Picton, and as far as Goulburn, Crookwell and Yass. The Dharug dialect, very closely resembling the Gundungurra, was spoken at Campbelltown, Liverpool, Camden, Penrith and possibly as far east as Sydney.

Another tribe or perhaps sub-group of aborigines in the Camden or Cowpasture area was called the Cubbitch Bartha, the name coming from words for the white pipe clay. The Camden area has few rock outcrops. Rock engravings and cave paintings can be found in the surrounding bushland areas of Hawkesbury Sandstone. Burragorang Valley and the area between Campbelltown and the coast have scattered Aboriginal relics.<sup>4</sup>

### Traditional way of life

People hunted kangaroo and possum in the forest grasslands. They camped by the rivers to fish and to catch eels and water birds. They harvested seasonal fruits and vegetables, especially yams which grew in big yam beds by the rivers and the creeks.

People lived in extended family groups of about twenty five members. They met regularly with other bands and with neighbouring tribes to feast, celebrate and perform religious observances. They also traded a local valuable white pipe clay, which was widely used to decorate bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous\\_Australians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_Australians)

<sup>2</sup> historical societies in Campbelltown and Camden, Camden Advertiser, Macarthur Chronicle

<sup>3</sup> based on informal community consultations

<sup>4</sup> see Camden's Cultural Plan 2008-2013

## The Appin Massacre

In 1812 Governor Macquarie granted large tracts of land to Camden farmers causing conflict between Indigenous people and white settlers. In 1816 Governor Macquarie sent out three detachments of the 46<sup>th</sup> regiment to “chasten ... hostile tribes and to inflict terrible and exemplary punishments on them”. The main party was based at Camden. They frightened many Aboriginal people, shot several and took half a dozen prisoners and when they came upon a camp at Appin one night, they killed fourteen Tharawal and Gundagurra men, women and children. This event, since referred to as the Appin Massacre, is commemorated with an annual event at Cataract Dam.

## Population decline

Although the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population rapidly declined in the 1800's, there was still a large community in the area in the 1820's as evidenced by a Corroboree at Camden with over four hundred Aboriginal people taking part. However by 1914, Werriberrie, described as the “chief man of the Gundungorra Aboriginals of the Burraborang Valley” was said to be the last of his tribe.

## THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

The question of Aboriginal identity is one that has preoccupied Australian law courts for twenty seven years and this preoccupation has often had a detrimental affect on people.

“In 1983 the High Court of Australia defined an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander as "a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives".

The ruling was a three-part definition comprising descent, self-identification and community identification. The first part – descent – was genetic descent and unambiguous, but led to cases where a lack of records to prove ancestry excluded some. Self and community identification were more problematic as they meant that an Indigenous person separated from her or his community due to removal or a family dispute could no longer easily identify as Aboriginal.

As a result there arose court cases throughout the 1990s where excluded people demanded that their Aboriginality be recognised. In 1995, Justice Drummond ruled "either genuine self-identification as Aboriginal alone or Aboriginal communal recognition as such by itself may suffice, according to the circumstances." This contributed to an increase of 31% in the number of people identifying as Indigenous Australians in the 1996 census when compared to the 1991 census.

Judge Merkel in 1998 defined Aboriginal descent as technical rather than real – thereby eliminating a genetic requirement. This decision established that anyone can classify him or herself legally as an Aboriginal, provided he or she is accepted as such by his or her community.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous\\_Australians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_Australians)

## POPULATION OF PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFIED AS ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AT THE 2011 CENSUS

<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Camden LGA 2011</b>			
<b>Age Groups</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
0-4 years	79	73	152
5-14 years	162	134	296
15-24 years	108	103	211
25-44 years	129	135	264
45-64 years	74	84	158
65 years and over	19	17	36
<b>Total Persons</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>1,118</b>

### DISTRIBUTION OF ATSI POPULATION ACROSS CAMDEN LGA SUBURBS

In 2011, 2% (1,118) of the Camden Council area's population identified themselves as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent compared to 1.2% (54,745) in the Greater Sydney Area.

The three suburbs with the highest percentages of Aboriginal residents were:

- Narellan Vale (3.8%)
- Spring Farm (2.8%)
- Narellan - Smeaton Grange (2.4%)

<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Camden LGA 2011</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Total pop.</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Camden	59	3,242	1.8
Camden South	73	4,342	1.7
Cobbitty - Bringelly	9	1,047	0.9
Currans Hill	117	4,966	2.4
Elderslie	71	4,261	1.8
Grasmere - Ellis Lane	41	2,722	2.0
Harrington Park - Kirkham	106	8,315	1.3
Leppington - Rossmore - Catherine Fields	67	5,323	1.3
Mount Annan	234	10,540	2.2
Narellan - Smeaton Grange	85	3,522	2.4
Narellan Vale	134	7,250	3.8
Spring Farm	36	1,309	2.8
<b>Camden Council</b>	<b>1,118</b>	<b>56,720</b>	<b>2.0</b>
Greater Sydney Area	54,745	4,391,672	1.2

In comparing the populations of neighbouring local government areas we find that the number of Aboriginal people living in Camden is similar in size to that of the Wollondilly area being 2.3% (1,036) whilst 3.2% or (4,729) Campbelltown residents identify as being Aboriginal.

## STUDENTS ENROLLED AT CAMDEN LGA SCHOOLS

There are currently 301 students at Camden schools who identify as Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander or "Indigenous".

High Schools Yrs 7 - 12	Enrolment numbers			Indigenous	Indigenous
	Girls	Boys	Total	%	Number
<b>At April 2013</b>					
Camden High School	555	556	1,111	3%	33
Mt Annan High School	344	353	697	4%	28
Elizabeth Macarthur High, Narellan	460	477	937	3%	28
Elderslie High School	527	436	963	3%	28
Magdeline Catholic High, Narellan	561	433	994	1%	10
St Benedict's Catholic College	80	58	138	1%	1
			<b>4,840</b>		
<b>Combined Schools Yrs K - 12</b>					
Macarthur Anglican, Cobbitty	365	387	752	0%	0
Mt Annan Christian College	301	298	599	1%	5
Oran Park Anglican College	37	53	90	0%	0
			<b>1,441</b>		
<b>Primary Schools Yrs K - 6</b>					
Camden Public School	154	155	309	3%	9
Camden South Public School	312	342	654	3%	19
Cobbitty Public School	115	106	221	2%	4
St Paul's Catholic, Camden	300	315	615	2%	12
Elderslie Public School	263	132	131	3%	4
Mawarra Public School, Camden	203	203	406	1%	4
Mt Annan Public School	283	329	612	2%	12
Narellan Public School	152	130	282	6%	17
Narellan Vale Public School	381	418	799	4%	24
Leppington Public School	47	64	111	3%	3
St Clare's Catholic, Narellan Vale	316	289	605	2%	12
Harrington Park Public School	392	407	799	2%	16
Currans Hill Public School	236	241	477	5%	24
St Justin's Catholic, Oran Park	93	92	185	3%	5
			<b>6,206</b>		
<b>Special Needs Schools</b>					
Mater Dei	52	90	142	2%	3
Aspect Macarthur, Cobbitty	7	88	95	0%	0
			<b>237</b>		
<b>TOTAL K - 12</b>			<b>12,724</b>		<b>301</b>

## COMMUNITY ACCESS ISSUES FOR CAMDEN COUNCIL

- Statistically low numbers of self-identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in the community can lead to non-recognition and lack of resourcing of this population
- A legacy of the history of colonisation and in particular of 'stolen generations', is that there are still a lot of older people who do not identify publicly as Aboriginal, even if they do privately. Therefore statistics are only a guide, not an absolute.
- The historical legacy of Australian Government involvement with Aboriginal people is such that they are usually distrustful of all levels of government and thus often difficult to engage.
- Politics exist within and between Aboriginal communities and this can make partnership projects with groups and organisations difficult.

- Anecdotal reports from Aboriginal support agencies indicate that there is a perception in the Macarthur region that Camden Council and the community of the Camden LGA generally has limited respect for Aboriginal people.

## **IDENTIFIED COMMUNITY NEEDS**

The following needs have been identified through broad community consultation:

- Acknowledgement of local history
- Acknowledgement of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities
- Respect of cultural traditions, knowledge, values and practices
- Opportunities for active participation in civic decision making processes especially around land use planning and service delivery
- Acknowledgement of the traditional custodianship of land at public meetings and community events
- Acknowledgement of traditional custodianship on welcome signs into the area
- The preference for the permanent flying of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- Acknowledgement that Aboriginal knowledge is complex and specialised and should not be expected to be given freely
- Increased access to both Aboriginal and mainstream facilities, services and activities
- Opportunities for consultation and negotiation regarding activities of relevance to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

## **WHAT IS COUNCIL DOING TO ASSIST ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITIES**

Camden Council –

- Employs a Community Development Officer to investigate the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and to advocate on behalf of these communities as well as plan and facilitate the development of resources, networks and partnership projects with individuals, groups and organisations.
- Supports significant days such as NAIDOC, Reconciliation Week and the Appin Massacre commemoration.
- Supports an Aboriginal residents advisory group
- Continues to expand the Library collection of Aboriginal literature, DVD's etc to ensure it reflects community needs and interests.

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SUPPORT SERVICES IN CAMDEN LGA<sup>6</sup>  
OR MACARTHUR<sup>7</sup> (servicing residents of the Camden LGA)**

<b>Who</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>Target Group</b>
Mura Nanga Mai	Family Healing program	Ambarvale	Aboriginal individuals and families
Tharawal Aboriginal Land Council	General support services	Picton	Aboriginal individuals and families
Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation	Medical, dental, paediatric, GP and medical specialist services, childcare services, brighter futures early intervention programme, mothers and babies programme	Airds	Aboriginal individuals and families
Oorunga Wandarrah Multifunctional Aboriginal Childrens Service	Long day care, preschools	Campbelltown	Aboriginal 0-5 year olds
Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group	Raises awareness of issues and promotes a partnership to bring about change for Indigenous people	Campbelltown	General community
Camden Council – Aboriginal Communities Officer	Network, information and resource development. Support of the Mygunyah Camden Aboriginal Residents Group	Narellan Camden	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities Camden LGA
Camden Museum	Historic artefacts including some Aboriginal artefacts	Camden	General community
Mt Annan Botanic Garden	Sorry Garden – acknowledgement of the Stolen Generation	Mt Annan	Stolen Generation and families
Centrelink	Aboriginal Officer providing income support assistance	Campbelltown	Aboriginal individuals and families
Camden Hospital	Aboriginal day centre and home assistance program	Camden	For carers and people with disabilities 45+
KU Sydney South West Inclusion Support Agency	Support staff to include CALD and ATSI children in before and after school and activities	Narellan	0-12 year olds
Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council	Transport, employment services etc.	Liverpool	Aboriginal individuals and families
Campbelltown Family Support Service – NABU Team	Family support service	Campbelltown	Aboriginal families on the Macarthur area
Birrung Gurung	Intensive family support service	Macarthur, Bankstown, Fairfield, Liverpool, Wingecarribee	Aboriginal families with a child or young person with a disability

<sup>6</sup> Some of these resources are services specifically targeting Aboriginal communities to access individuals and families into mainstream services, others provide educational resources for the general community.

<sup>7</sup> As indicated in Council's online Community Directory at July 2013 see [www.camden.nsw.gov.au/directory](http://www.camden.nsw.gov.au/directory)

