



**RECONCILIATION  
ACTION PLAN**

**REFLECT**

**Rous County Council**



**July 2016 - July 2017**

## About the Artist:

Rous County Council acknowledges Sheldon Harrington Snr (1961-2015) as the artist for the images used in this document. Sheldon Harrington Snr is a Widjabal descendent and artist. Sheldon played a key role in the development and execution of joint on-ground projects that protect and enhance natural and cultural values in water supply catchment areas (*Water Walks* and *Reconnecting to Country*), in association with Rous County Council, the Widjabal people and the local communities. Through his work with Rous County Council, Sheldon integrated sustainability principles with local Aboriginal culture and best management practice for catchment lands, fulfilling a responsibility to contribute culturally appropriate material and content including lore, location-based information (not including sensitive site information) and other key messages.

Sheldon Harrington Snr was a key contributor to the partnership established between Rous County Council and the Widjabal people, which was established primarily to improve cultural awareness and to stress the importance of land and water to country and people. The contract between Widjabal elders and Rous County Council primarily deals with the need for all of us to look after land and water as people. This working relationship is about Rous County Council acknowledging the ancestry, heritage, country, identity and language of the people from this country. Rous County Council acknowledges Sheldon as a proud Bundjalung man that contributed greatly to our joint community education and reconciliation projects. We are working together for future generations to make Australia a better place. This work does not impact on Native Title claims or claimants.



## **ABOUT ROUS COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **WHO ARE WE?**

Rous County Council is located on the North Coast of NSW. As a mid-size organisation in the region, we employ between 80-100 staff. Our operations cover all aspects of managing a large water supply, from administrative and governance functions to construction, water treatment, and dam maintenance. Council's operations are overseen by our General Manager and executive team.

### **WHAT DO WE DO?**

Rous County Council is the regional water supply authority providing potable water in bulk to the Council areas of:

- Lismore (excluding Nimbin); Ballina (excluding Wardell); Byron (excluding Mullumbimby); and Richmond Valley (excluding land to the west of Coraki).

Reticulation of the water within the urban centres is the responsibility of the constituent member Councils.

### **WHAT DO WE VALUE?**

Council endeavours to conduct all business activities in accordance with our values. As an organisation, we believe in the value of strong community engagement, and are proud to have a respected and productive relationship with our constituent councils, and the local community.

### **COUNCIL VALUES**

#### ***Integrity***

We will not undertake any work activity in an unsafe manner. We will behave professionally and ethically in our decision making and practices.

#### ***Commitment***

We will work to continuously improve our workplace safety program to ensure that it effectively safeguards employee and visitor safety and welfare.

We will promote leadership, initiative and a culture of work/life balance.

We will value diversity in our workplace and foster a culture of inclusion.

#### ***Trust***

We recognise the importance of our activities as custodians of our region's drinking water. We will be a reliable provider of high quality drinking water.

#### ***Social Responsibility***

We will consider the social and environmental impact of our activities not just the economic impact. We recognise our social and environmental responsibility and our role in shaping community behaviour.

#### ***Accountability***

We will be accountable for our actions and decisions.



## OUR BUSINESS

Rous County Council is the regional water supply authority located in the North Coast of NSW. Council provides potable water to an area that is approximately 3,000km<sup>2</sup>. A County Council, Rous County Council covers four local government areas and its Council consists of representatives from the constituent Councils of Lismore, Ballina, Byron and Richmond Valley. A population of around 100,000 is serviced by Council's water supply system.

Rous County Council's regional supply network includes over 40,000 connections within the reticulation areas, and about 2,030 retail connections to the Rous County Council trunk main system within the constituent Councils. Its operation covers all aspects of managing a large water supply, including administration, governance, construction, water treatment, and dam maintenance. The organisation employs approximately 74 full-time equivalent employees. In a recent organisation-wide staff survey, in which 40% of staff participated, two people identified themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

The principal source of Rous County Council's supply network is Rocky Creek Dam. The dam sits on Widjabal/Wiyabal country of the Bundjalung nation and Rous County Council has a long-standing relationship with the Widjabal/Wiyabal people.

## OUR RAP

Bundjalung people have lived in the region for many thousands of years in a sustainable relationship with the natural environment. The water catchment areas managed by Rous County Council are a part of the natural landscape that forms the identity, culture, spirituality and resource base for the Widjabal/Wiyabal people of the Bundjalung nation. Despite the significant changes of the past 200 years, the Widjabal/Wiyabal people still maintain a responsibility and deep relationship with the land and water. Rous County Council acknowledges this relationship and deeply values their traditional laws, knowledge and lessons about places and sustainability.

Rous County Council conducts all business activities in accordance with its values of Integrity, Commitment, Trust, Social Responsibility, and Accountability. As an organisation, Rous County Council believes in the value of strong community engagement, and is proud to have a respected and productive relationship with the Traditional Custodians of the land on which Rous County Council catchments sit. In 2002, through a collaborative partnership between Rous County Council and Traditional Custodians, two environmental sustainability projects, Reconnecting to Country and Water Walk, were delivered.

The Reconnecting to Country and Water Walk projects strengthened relationships between Rous County Council and the Widjabal/Wiyabal people, improved catchment health and created an approach for sustainability education that incorporated the cultural values and perspectives of Traditional Custodians. The projects created a sense of Aboriginal history and heritage through appropriate



signage at catchment areas. A cultural awareness training kit was also developed in partnership with Traditional Custodians. The resource formed part of Rous County Council's water education programs at schools and in the wider community and is regarded as an invaluable educational resource by the community.

Annually, Rous County Council has participated at the Lismore NAIDOC Family Day celebrations to further promote its education programs and resources. Another event supported by Rous County Council is the annual Big Scrub Rainforest Day. Established in 1999 and held every year since, the Big Scrub Rainforest Day is recognised both regionally and nationally as one of Australia's premier annual Landcare community engagement and education events. To date, Rous County Council has invited the Widjabal/Wiyabal people to open and participate in this annual event.

Through these projects, Rous County Council realised the importance of working together with the Traditional Custodians, of current and future natural resource areas within its management, to restore ecological, cultural and social values that are unique to the region. To build on and strengthen the project-specific reconciliation work undertaken to date, Rous County Council has decided to develop a RAP, which will be an ongoing and organisation-wide program. Through this RAP, Rous County Council seeks to:

- Improve relationships between Rous County Council, Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Enhance its workforce awareness, understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- Lay foundations to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and procurement in the organisation.

In 2013, the Council resolved to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan. A group consisting of Rous County Council staff (Corporate Services Director, Manager Governance, Distribution Systems Assets Manager, Catchment Assets Manager and Human Resources Coordinator) was formed to develop the RAP. This RAP Working Group focussed on the areas that Rous County Council could best influence positive change to advance reconciliation. Traditional Custodians and relevant local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders were also consulted during the development of Council's RAP.

Targets have been set for 2016/17 in the three key areas of the RAP. These targets will form part of Council's primary planning document, The NSW Local Government Integrated Planning and Reporting. The Corporate Services Director, Manager Governance and Human Resources Coordinator are responsible for implementing the RAP and ensuring targets are met. The Corporate Services Director is the Servicing Manager for the RAP program and will provide regular RAP progress reports to Council's management team and a RAP Advisory Group.

The RAP Advisory Group, which is being established, will consist of a Rous County Council Councillor, Traditional Custodians, Local Aboriginal Land Council representatives and other relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. The RAP Advisory Group will provide advice to Council to support the implementation of the RAP.





## OUR PARTNERSHIPS/CURRENT ACTIVITIES

The Reconnecting to Country and Water Walk projects have helped to establish strong relationships between Rous County Council and Traditional Custodians. As a result of these projects, Widjabal/Wiyabal people continue to be represented in Council's catchment stakeholder groups and they are consulted with on a needs-basis in the management of the catchment areas.

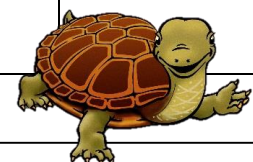
Rous County Council offered a diverse range of educational programs about water in schools and the wider community. The educational programs promoted information and messages about the value of water, local water supply, healthy catchments, and sustainable water use. The learning resources were created in partnership with Widjabal/Wiyabal Elders to deliver messages about water and sustainability from Traditional Custodian perspectives. These resources continue to be made available to local schools in the region.

Although these projects have contributed to the development of invaluable local resources, knowledge, and experiences, there is recognition that a longer-term strategy and ongoing initiatives are needed to further advance reconciliation. This RAP paves the way for this.

Over the next 12 months, Rous County Council commits to:

<b>Relationships</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
1.1 Establish RAP Working Group	Form a RAP Working Group that is operational to support the development of our RAP, comprising of Rous County Council Management.  Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented on the RAP Working Group  RAP Working group to meet quarterly to support the implementation of the RAP	Jul 2016  Jul 2017  Sep/Dec /Mar/Jun 2016, 2017	Corporate Services Director (MCC)
1.2 Establish RAP Advisory Group	Form a RAP Advisory Group, comprising of a Rous County Council Councillor, Traditional Custodians of current water catchment areas, Local Aboriginal Land Council representatives and relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.	Jul 2016	Corporate Services Director (MCC)

1.2 Establish RAP Advisory Group (continued)	RAP Advisory Group to meet with RAP Working Group twice annually to support the implementation of the RAP.	Nov 2016 May 2017	
2. Develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations to support positive outcomes	<p>Consult with Widjabal/Wiyabal and Bundjalung Elders, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, Aboriginal Advisory Groups and relevant Aboriginal organisations within the four constituent Council areas to identify Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters within the four Council areas.</p> <p>Develop an Engagement Plan, for inclusion in Rous County Council's Future Water Strategy, to work collaboratively with Traditional Custodians of current and future catchment and natural resource areas.</p> <p>Communicate the Engagement Plan to all staff to ensure Traditional Custodians of current and future catchment and natural resource areas are consulted according to the plan.</p> <p>Deliver an annual event to strengthen relationships between Councillors and Traditional Custodians of the water catchment areas managed by Rous County Council.</p> <p>Develop a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations that we can approach to enhance our reconciliation journey.</p> <p>Develop a list of RAP organisations and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate on future reconciliation initiatives.</p>	<p>Dec 2016</p> <p>Mar 2017</p> <p>Jun 2017</p> <p>Jun 2017</p> <p>Jun 2017</p> <p>Jun 2017</p>	Corporate Services Director (MCC)
3. Participate and celebrate National Reconciliation Week (NRW)	<p>Host a NRW event that provides opportunities for employees and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to build relationships.</p> <p>Register our NRW event on the Reconciliation Australia website.</p> <p>Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources to staff.</p> <p>Encourage staff to attend the NRW event.</p> <p>Our RAP Working Group to attend an external NRW event.</p>	27 May - 3 Jun 2017	Corporate Services Director (MCC)
4. Raise internal and external awareness of our RAP	<p>Develop and implement a plan to engage and inform staff of their responsibilities within the RAP.</p> <p>Develop and implement a communications plan to raise awareness amongst staff and stakeholders about Rous County Council's RAP commitments.</p>	<p>Jul 2016</p> <p>Sep 2016</p>	Corporate Services Director (MCC)



## Respect

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
5. Engage employees in cultural learning opportunities to increase understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements	Conduct a review of cultural awareness training needs within our organisation.	Sep 2016	Human Resources Coordinator
	Investigate other opportunities to increase workforce awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements in partnership with the four constituent Councils.	Mar 2017	
	Consult with Widjabal/Wiyabal Elders to review and update existing cultural awareness training kit and deliver Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training to Councillors and senior management.	Mar 2017	
	Integrate cultural awareness training requirements for employees into Rous County Council's 2017/18 Training Plan.	Mar 2017	
6. Participate and celebrate in NAIDOC Week	Capture data and measure our staff's current level of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements.	Jun 2017	Human Resources Coordinator
	Raise awareness and share information amongst employees of the meaning of NAIDOC Week which includes information about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.	Jul 2016, 2017	
	Continue the partnership with Lismore City Council by continuing to support Lismore's NAIDOC Family Day and providing opportunities for Rous County Council employees to participate at the event.	Jul 2016, 2017	
	Promote local NAIDOC Week events to all staff.	Jul 2016, 2017	
	Ensure our Advisory Group participates in an external NAIDOC Week event.	July 2016, 2017	



## Respect (continued)

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
7. Raise internal understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols	Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols policy to engage employees in understanding the meaning and significance behind Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.	Dec 2016	Corporate Services Director (MCC)
	Develop and implement a plan to raise awareness and understanding of the significance behind Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.	Mar 2017	
	Include a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country at public events and meetings hosted by Rous County Council.	Jun 2017	



## Opportunities

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
8. Investigate opportunities to improve and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes within our workplace	Capture baseline data on current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to inform future employment and development opportunities with Rous County Council.	Sep 2016	Human Resources Coordinator
	Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation.	Dec 2016	
	Advertise job vacancies within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks including in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply.	Dec 2016	
	Communicate cultural leave provisions available for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees.	Mar 2017	
	Seek opportunities to employ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interns, trainees or employees.	Mar 2017	
9. Investigate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity	Develop an understanding of the mutual benefits of procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses.	Dec 2016	Manager Governance (MGHS)
	Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses based in the four constituent Council areas.	Dec 2016	
	Review Procurement Policies and Procedures to identify opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses to supply goods and services to Rous County Council.	Jun 2017	



## Tracking and Progress

Action	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
10. Build support for the RAP	Integrate RAP progress reporting into Integrated Planning and Reporting processes.	Sep 2016	Corporate Services Director (MCC)
	Complete and submit the RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	Sep 2017	
	Define resource needs for Innovate RAP development and implementation.	Jul 2017	
11. Review and Refresh RAP	Liaise with Reconciliation Australia to develop a new RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements.	January 2017	Corporate Services Director (MCC)
	Submit draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal review and endorsement.	Aug 2017	

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