



Green Gown Awards
Australasia

Benefitting Society

2020 Case Study



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

The Awabakal and Worimi Hunter Water Story project

The Awabakal and Worimi Hunter Water Story was initiated by the Hunter Water Corporation for their Lower Hunter school community programs. The project's aim was to write a story about water conservation, and how to respect the use of water in times when water scarcity is growing in urban and rural Australia, and at the same time supporting quality education with a focus on equity and Reconciliation.

Aboriginal secondary students from Newcastle High School wrote the story and university academics and Creative Industries students together documented, illustrated, designed and produced the book. The Where's Our Water book(s) shares messages of care of Country, care of water and care of our future through language and creative storytelling for a sustainable future. The project connects directly to learning through the symbolic use of animals that carry learning power attributes such as working together. Kookaburra who is curious and turtle who is wise help the protagonists Ella and Timmy to solve the problem of water shortages and spread the message of water conservation. The story embeds a traditional Aboriginal Story of Tiddalik the Frog. Key words about water, animals and the land were then translated

by Aboriginal language experts and ratified by the two Land Councils, Awabakal and Worimi, and endorsed by the Muloobinbah Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG).

Local schools, the university, industry and Aboriginal community members collaborated. It was led by a University of Newcastle academics and staff with Aboriginal community members active at all levels of the project. The project created a website and the distribution of a free ebook. The team designed a model of practice that can be co-opted by other universities / communities wishing to work with schools and Aboriginal communities in other regions of Australia. The project has gained recognition across industry and education at State level and beyond.

FIND OUT MORE



Environmental & Social Benefits

This was a unique collaborative project that modelled the principles of reconciliation, consultation and collaboration. The benefits include:

Aboriginal Language in Regional Sustainability Education: Two books produced with Worimi and Awabakal Aboriginal Community support provide a first ever opportunity for all young students in the lower Hunter and beyond to commence their engagement with Aboriginal language through reading and speaking the language.

Innovation in Creative Project Design: Honoring care for the land and the sustainability of Aboriginal culture to the next generation. The project foregrounds the potential for all industry to embrace Aboriginal culture and allow their educational programs to embed contemporary Aboriginal storytelling as a vehicle to carry sustainability messages.

The Art of Contemporary Aboriginal Sustainability Story Telling: A project connects past footprints of art and culture with contemporary messages of care of the land and water while connecting ancestral materiality, intellectual traditions, storytelling and language.

Leadership & Engagement

Reconciliation and Sustainability Leadership: Driven by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people.

Leadership, managerial stewardship and teamwork across macro and micro levels of project management: | liaison with Hunter Water Corporation; | understanding contractual obligations of partners; | financial management; | cultural nuances, enacting reconciliation across all project levels; | Aboriginal leaders and community maintain their cultural integrity and leadership; | working with school within the NSW Department of Education operational guidelines; | working with UoN staff in Studio Zed; | collaborating with an international educator and **Jearni** reimagining learning; | coordination of virtual and physical objects for the exhibition (video, photography, organising workshops) **Museum of Art and Culture Lake Macquarie**, yampang: museum-story will be the venue.

Sustained engagement: Achieved through trust, leadership and the enactment of the reconciliation, consultation and collaboration for sustainability learning outcomes about water usage.

Aboriginal Community collaboration: Aboriginal research colleague Emeritus Professor John Lester, Aboriginal educator Deirdre Heitmeyer and Aboriginal community members Saretta Fielding Aboriginal artist and Kerrie Keers the chair of the AECG who introduced the team to the wider Aboriginal education community.

Student engagement: Engaged Aboriginal students and the tertiary design students to drive a project that could carry the ancestral voices of the Aboriginal communities, the custodians of the land.

Tertiary student engaged authentic learning experience: Through the Studio Zed, Work Integrated Learning (WIL) experience through engaging with industry, Aboriginal artist and Aboriginal secondary students.

Research Engagement: Based on best practice ethical standards of research between Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal researchers and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders.

Wider Societal Impact

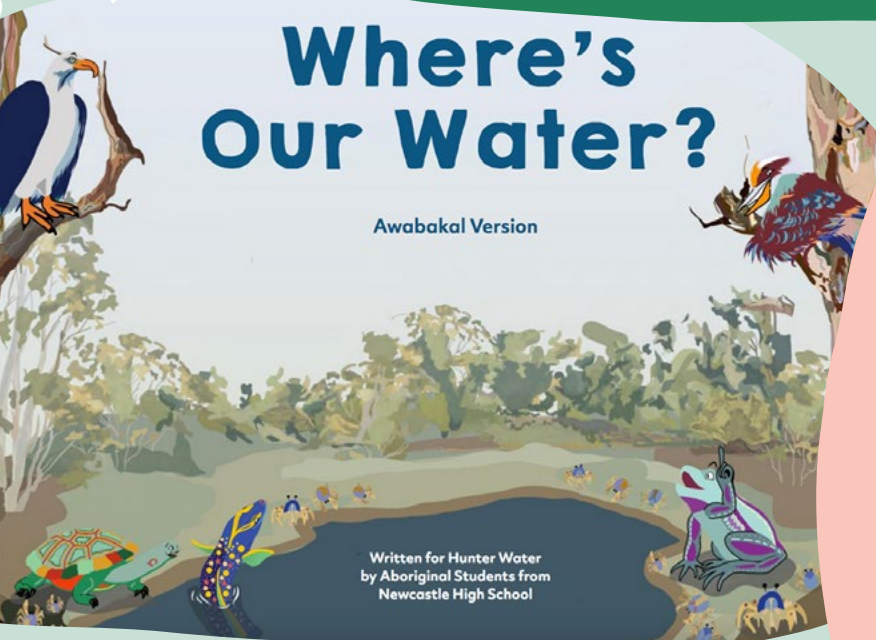
Replication, Reconciliation and Sustainability Impact: It addresses the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation. The thrust was to write a story about water conservation, how to respect the use of water in times when water scarcity is growing in urban and rural Australia. Goal 4 & 5: Quality Education with a specific focus on equity and through the lenses of reconciliation and gender equity. The protagonists of the story are an Aboriginal boy and girl, Timmy and Ella. Together they identify the problem and together (with the help of the animals and drawing on ancient wisdom) they consider how to meet the water sustainability goals. Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being. The story is about care of people, care of land and the spiritual and physical wellbeing and health of community through water sustainability. The learning video of the Aboriginal students (accessible from the Water website) tracks the growth of self-esteem and identity of the secondary students', the key qualitative indicators of sustained health and wellbeing.

The idea of circularity for sustainability can be carried through a socio-cultural ecology and has historical and philosophical origins. These principles are present in the generative design elements of the book *Where's Our Water*. It is at the very heart of Aboriginal storytelling. Aboriginal ancestral story telling speaks to the contemporary ideas of wasteful consumption behaviours, respecting human and natural systems, preserving the ancient wisdom of sustainability grounded in less greed, care of land, water and people

The project also provides a potential model to be replicated across other industries to embrace Aboriginal culture and allow their educational programs to embed contemporary Aboriginal storytelling as a vehicle to carry important social and community messages, such as sustainability. It is a project that has successfully connected past footprints of art and culture, such as ancestral materiality, intellectual traditions, storytelling and language, with contemporary messages of care of the land and water, which can be replicated in other communities and regions for wider social benefit.

Embeds learning power attributes and worldviews around sustainability: The animals in the story draw on the Aboriginal traditions of metaphoric reasoning. The animals are clever, curious, they collaborate and are wise. They work with the children, Ella and Timmy to solve the complex problems that relate to the interdependency of man and nature. [the project is a] highly sophisticated outcome, with learning power demonstrated at every level of the programme... it integrates the diverse and often conflicting worldviews of the corporate, indigenous and educational stakeholders. A superb outcome which was hard won and an industry first, with the potential to continue its influence in community engagement around sustainable development in the region'. Professor Ruth Crick, Director, Jearni Ltd UK and UTS, Sydney.

The impact of this collaborative project was so impressive that the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group was keen to showcase this to the state and wider Aboriginal communities.



Top 3 Learnings

A collaboration between business, industry and education with Aboriginal gate keepers and Land Councils, municipal councils, Indigenous nations and artists, designers and academics that honors Aboriginal people and their culture

The story is a vehicle to carry sustainability messages and preserves Awabakal and Worimi language across cultures and ages

It embeds cross educational collaboration with Aboriginal communities, NSW Department of Education, industry, and business and provides work integrated learning opportunities for tertiary design students