

Thirriwirri

Confidence · Capability · Connection

NSW National Parks and Reserves Joint Management Reform

Regional Aboriginal Workshop Aboriginal Community Engagement Report

November 2022 – February 2023

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Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of all the lands of NSW and recognise their ongoing connection to and custodianship of lands, seas, and skies. We recognise the strength of Aboriginal communities, their self-determination, traditions, and histories.

Executive Summary

Between November 2022 and February 2023, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) convened consultations with First Nations people across NSW on the development of a new joint management model for the entire NSW national parks estate. These consultations were the first phase of a three staged consultation process to develop a new model. Consultations included a range of stakeholders including people from Local Aboriginal Land Councils, Elders, traditional owner groups, existing joint management boards, Aboriginal organisations, as well as individual community members.

Thirriwirri was engaged to facilitate Regional Aboriginal Workshops (RAW) in 16 locations and online, that were open to all Aboriginal people interested to share their aspirations and views on a new model for joint management. The NPWS encouraged people with some knowledge of the national parks estate, caring for Country, or the existing joint management arrangements to attend. The workshops included people, more often than not, without direct experience in the current joint management arrangements. The participants provided rich insights into the aspirations, barriers faced by, and perceptions of, a diverse range of interested Aboriginal stakeholders.

Alongside the RAW workshops, the NPWS facilitated 10 workshops with the existing Custodian Network, which is made up of the 33 groups currently in joint management agreements across the State. During the rollout of RAWs, the NPWS also invited Aboriginal people to provide input in writing via an online survey and sought perspectives from internal Aboriginal staff, as well as engaging with non-Aboriginal staff with experience in the joint management of parks.

Consultation approach

The NPWS and existing Custodians Network identified four key themes to guide round one of the consultations:

1. Management of Country
2. Economic Benefit
3. Governance and Decision Making
4. Ownership

The NPWS then developed a detailed consultation question for each theme, as well as two additional questions to seek ideas on what Successful Partnerships and Visions of Success could look like under a new joint management model.

The RAWs and online sessions were structured on an 'open house' consultation model to enable one on one or small group conversations, and a focus on deep listening. The same six questions were asked at all workshops to ensure consistency in information and opportunity. Scribes were assigned to each conversation to capture everyone's input.

This report provides a record of the RAW workshops facilitated by Thirriwirri. The report includes an overview of the consultation approach and a summary of the rich discussions with First Nations people. The feedback received from the NPWS-led Custodians Network workshops, written submissions and internal NPWS consultations are reported separately. Taken together, they will inform the NPWS in the development of a new joint management model.

RAW consultation outcomes

Engagement across the state varied. Participation in the initial stages was low, but tended to improve as the sessions progressed, and the online workshops proved to be popular.

People provided a great depth of input. Many provided broad statements that spoke to aspirations, as well as more localised responses, sometimes without consideration of the parameters of national parks management. Where there was existing knowledge, or an existing joint management relationship, the responses were more specific, detailed and solution or outcome focused. The richness of these responses provided a window into the aspirations of Aboriginal people, including ideas untied from current or perceived legislative and management constraints.

This report reflects peoples' responses to the series of six questions asked regarding the consultation themes. In summary these include:

In terms of **Management of Country**, people emphasised that Healthy Country is at the centre of everything. People highlighted that a new joint management model needs to forge more opportunities for Aboriginal people to be involved in caring for Country including managing pests, supporting endangered plants and animals and cultural burning. The new model was also seen as an opportunity to embed cultural knowledge in the ways parks are managed; to recognise that cultural knowledge is as valuable as environmental science; and to allow for the exchange of cultural and environmental knowledge and education between Aboriginal people and the NPWS. A key thing that people wanted out of a model was greater access to parks to care for Country, including sites of significance, and to connect with Country and maintain culture.

Under the **Economic Benefit** theme, people identified a range of employment and business opportunities that could be generated through Aboriginal-led tourism ventures (eg bush tucker tours, cultural tours etc), the management and maintenance of parks, management of pests and threatened species (eg running an accredited bush regeneration program, growing native plant stocks) cafes, cultural centres and infrastructure. However economic benefit was seen as more than about jobs, but as being a source and catalyst for cultural, emotional and social wellbeing for communities. People also stressed that economic drivers should not outweigh cultural and social drivers, and the need to get the right balance to ensure resources are not exploited. People also said that Aboriginal knowledge holders need to have a role in determining the appropriate activities that can be carried out on Country/in parks. People identified a range of things needed to support these aspirations including tailored training; start-up resourcing; capacity development in communities, NPWS, and other stakeholders; and NPWS career pathways, recruitment strategies and Aboriginal procurement strategies. While people understood that the payment of commercial rent and park entry fees to Aboriginal owners was not in scope for this proposal¹, some still raised that the payment of rent should be considered, and provided models and options that might contribute to addressing equity and affordability issues. Participants also identified opportunities to

¹ The proposal seeks to handback title of all NSW national parks to Aboriginal owners on the condition it is leased back to the NSW Government to continue its use and management of a national park. The NSW Government has said that the payment of commercial rent, and the payment of park entry fees, to Aboriginal owners is outside of the scope of this proposal.

generate economic benefits to communities from royalties and fees derived from third parties accessing parks for commercial purposes.

In terms of **Governance and Decision Making**, people raised a number of potential governing structures, had varying ideas about how governing bodies might cover a number of parks within the one cultural area, and consistently said that there will not be a one size fits all solution. People called for equal or majority Aboriginal representation on any joint management governing body, with a view also put forward that the governing body should consist of Aboriginal people only. It was consistently said that Aboriginal communities need to determine/decide who speaks for Country and who should represent their communities on joint management governing bodies. People also reflected that the process of determining governing body structure and membership will take time, and in recognition of the dispossession and dislocation from the Country, that some communities may need to reconnect with that Country and/or build capabilities to support joint management. There was also discussion of the need for the NPWS to build its capability in being able to embed shared decision making, improve its cultural competency and increase the number of Aboriginal people in senior roles/decision making roles.

Under the theme of **Ownership**, people said that the development of a model to hand back the national parks estate into Aboriginal ownership needs to be considered alongside other land-based legislation, policies and reforms including native title, Aboriginal cultural heritage reforms, Crown land reform and the land rights system. People also wanted clarity in terms of what rights and benefits would come with ownership. This was considered important for transparency, to understand impacts and to build trust in recognition that some fear the national parks reforms could diminish existing rights. In terms of ownership arrangements – that is holding title of parks once ownership is handed into Aboriginal ownership – people said this will take time to resolve and needs to be worked out on a location-by-location basis. Options canvassed for further exploration included trust arrangements, the establishment of new bodies or alliance bodies under new legislation or using the land rights legislation and land councils as a model. It was also suggested that a policy review should be undertaken to examine the options for a statutory authority and all other options.

People identified a range of core elements needed to achieve **Successful Partnerships** under a new joint management model including equal partnerships and authorised decision-making – that is NPWS and community representatives being considered equal, being empowered to make decisions together and having those decisions upheld. People also highlighted the need for mutual respect, listening, transparency, accountability and clear rights and responsibilities. The need to respect cultural leadership was consistently raised across the workshops. People also recognised the need for ‘give and take,’ recognising that representatives won’t always agree. People also highlighted the need for proper time and resourcing to be afforded to the partnership, especially recognising the responsibilities and obligations community representatives hold to go back to Country and to continually engage with the communities they represent.

In terms of **Visions of Success**, many raised a desire to not only own the parks outright, but to be able to transition from joint-management to full-community management, even though this is not within the scope of the NSW Government proposal to establish a new joint-management model. People also spoke of their aspirations to see Country healthy and that by having more say, more access and a direct role in caring for Country in parks, it will support healthy Country, reinvigorate culture and support healing and wellbeing.

NB: - The terms ‘First Nations’ and ‘Aboriginal’ are used interchangeably throughout this document – usually reflecting the term used by participants. Thirriwirri uses the term ‘First Nations’ in our own language.

Background

Aboriginal joint management is an arrangement between the NSW Government and Aboriginal owners and Custodians to share responsibility for the management of national parks and other conservation reserves. In July 2022, the NSW Government announced that it would seek to develop a new model for the joint management of the entire NSW national parks estate. This estate equates to around 10 percent of the land mass of NSW and includes many culturally significant places.

By expanding Aboriginal joint management across the national park estate, the NSW Government aims to deliver economic benefits for Aboriginal communities by increasing Aboriginal employment and creating additional opportunities for Aboriginal businesses, as well as strengthening the role of Aboriginal communities in national park decision-making and enhancing the protection of cultural heritage.

In developing a new joint management model, the NSW Government has committed to working alongside Aboriginal people to understand the aspirations and challenges of joint management, as well as engaging more broadly with all stakeholders once the voices of Aboriginal people have informed the Government's thinking. To achieve this, a three-stage consultation approach has been agreed.

- **Stage One** Focused on understanding aspirations and issues of Aboriginal people. This stage includes regional workshops, online workshops, and workshops with the existing joint management partners.
- **Stage Two** Will invite comment on a draft model developed based on input from Stage 1, from Aboriginal stakeholders, and now also targeted non-Aboriginal stakeholders.
- **Stage Three** A proposed model will be refined following Stage 2 and released for public comment.

In the pre consultation period, the NPWS Aboriginal Joint Management team and existing Custodians Network identified four key themes for consideration in round one of the consultations:

1. Management of Country
2. Economic Benefit
3. Governance and Decision Making
4. Ownership

These themes were based on the knowledge and experience of existing joint management partners and were intended to assist Aboriginal people with aspirations for joint management to meaningfully inform a new model alongside those already engaged in joint management. Following this, two additional areas for consultation were identified - Successful Partnerships and Visions of Success – as these are key issues central to the overall design to the model. The NPWS developed a detailed consultation question on each theme and the two additional areas for consideration to guide stage one consultation discussions (located at Appendix A).

Engagement Summary

Between November 2022 and February 2023, the NPWS convened 16 Regional Aboriginal Workshops (RAWs or the workshops) and three online sessions held via MS Teams – 19 workshops in total (details in Table 1). Diagram 1 shows the workshop locations (red dots) overlaid on the national parks estate.

The workshops were open to all interested Aboriginal people, with a focus on engaging those with some knowledge of the national parks estate, caring for Country or existing joint management arrangements. A total of 187 Aboriginal people participated across the 19 workshops, representing a diverse range of involvement in land management including Local Aboriginal Land Councils, native title stakeholders, Elders and traditional owner groups, existing joint management boards, Aboriginal organisations, and individual community members, as well as a broad geographic spread (further detail below).

NPWS engaged Thirriwirri to lead the facilitation of both the RAWs and online sessions. Through these workshops, Aboriginal people, mostly without direct joint management experience, engaged in small, facilitated discussions about their aspirations and views on the development of a joint management model for the entire NSW national parks estate. NPWS staff assisted in facilitating discussions.

The ‘open house’ method used provided space for structured, one on one, or small group conversations, and focussed on deep listening. To ensure consistency in information and opportunity, the same six questions were asked at all workshops (located at Appendix A), with a set of prompts available to facilitators only where the participants were struggling to link their responses to the question themes. Scribes were assigned to each conversation to ensure input was captured.

Overall management of the consultation was led by the Aboriginal Joint Management team within NPWS. This involved the engagement of community, with support from the relevant NPWS area office, and the management of logistics and support including invitations, venues, catering and scribing. At times, Thirriwirri supported the engagement of communities through its own networks and stakeholder relationships.

The engagement by Aboriginal people across NSW was varied. In the initial stages, participation numbers were low. This improved as the sessions progressed. The online workshops were initially anticipated to be a less appealing mode of engagement but ended up being popular.

While overall participation numbers may appear small, the engagement approach led to quality, focussed discussions with stakeholders who had opportunity for their voices to be heard in the early development of the model. Many of those spoken to who chose not to attend indicated they were confident that the people in their communities who have been involved in land management issues over the years were attending, were better informed about the issues being consulted on, and would adequately represent their interests.

In addition to the RAWs and online workshops facilitated by Thirriwirri, NPWS led 10 workshops with the existing Custodian Network, made up of the 33 groups currently in joint management agreements across the State. NPWS also invited written submissions from Aboriginal people, in the form of an online survey covering the same questions asked in the RAWs. RAW participants were also encouraged to provide additional information via the survey, and to share the survey with others who were not able to attend the RAW. NPWS also sought the perspectives of their Aboriginal

staff, as well as non-Aboriginal staff with experience in joint management. The feedback received during NPWS-led consultations is not included in this report.

Table 1: Regional Aboriginal Workshops and Online Sessions
Face to face RAWs

Katoomba	10 November 2022	Armidale	01 February 2023
Newcastle	14 November 2022	Broken Hill	08 February 2023
Bulahdelah	15 November 2022	Campbelltown	13 February 2023
Grafton	21 November 2022	Wagga Wagga	21 February 2023
Nowra	21 November 2022	Griffith	22 February 2023
Narooma	22 November 2022	Moama*	23 February 2023
Redfern	01 December 2022	Moree	28 February 2023
Kempsey	02 December 2022		
Dubbo	08 December 2022		

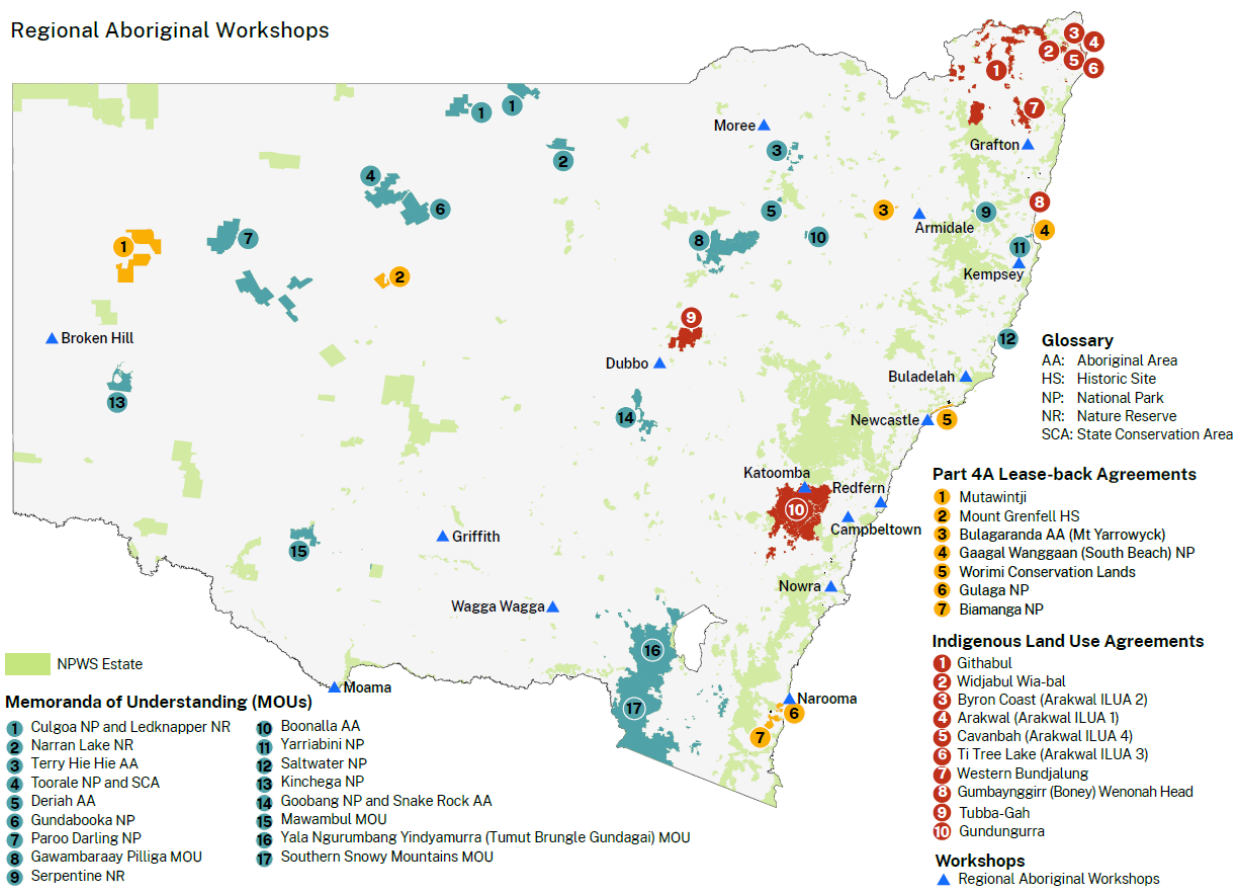
*Thirriwirri did not facilitate this session

Online Sessions

09 December 2022
14 February 2023
27 February 2023

Diagram 1

Regional Aboriginal Workshops



Who Participated

People were invited to identify where they were attending from, as well as whether they were attending in their capacity as a community member, or in relation to their role in an organisation, for example a Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC), native title group, Traditional Owners group, community organisation etc. Where participants did not specify an organisation, they were recorded as a “community member” for the purpose of data collection.

Where non-Aboriginal people sought to attend in order to represent an Aboriginal organisation they worked in, they were advised that the consultation was focussed on hearing from Aboriginal people. In some instances, non-Indigenous attendees elected to stay with other representatives from their organisations to observe only, in other instances they opted to leave. Some Aboriginal organisations impacted by this approach expressed disappointment that their representatives were not permitted to fully participate.

Based on the information provided by attendees, there were a diverse range of participants. People identifying as attending from a LALC made up almost a third of all participants (29 per cent). People from community organisations, traditional owners and community members each represented roughly 15 per cent of attendees. It was recognised that many participants had multiple reasons for attending, including being affiliated with multiple organisations, groups and communities. Government employees, including NPWS staff, made up 18 per cent of all participants, and it was recognised that those attendees were participating as Aboriginal community members, outside of their roles in government.

There were a small number of participants from interstate. One group identified their Country as crossing between NSW and Victoria. Although it is well understood that state borders are often unrelated to First Nations Country, this group highlighted the need to ensure communication about the round two consultations reaches First Nations people whose Country crosses state borders. There were also participants who identify with Country in NSW but currently live interstate. The online sessions provided the opportunity for these stakeholders to contribute their views.

Table 2: Attendance breakdown

		Organisation Type					Grand Total	
		LALC	Community member	Community Org	Traditional Owner	Government		Other
Location	Online	4	11	7	5	18	2	47
	Nowra	8	3		1	2	1	15
	Wagga Wagga		1	6		5		12
	Kempsey	4	2	1	3	1	1	12
	Armidale	5		3		2		10
	Griffith	5	5					10
	Redfern	6	2		1			9
	Campbelltown	3		1	3	2		9
	Newcastle	4	4					8
	Grafton	2	2	4				8
	Moree		7				1	8
	Bulahdelah	4		3				7
	Narooma	1			3	2	1	7
	Katoomba			1	6			7
	Broken Hill	6					1	7
	Dubbo	2	2	2				6
	Moama				5			5
Total	54	39	28	27	32	7	187	

Table 2 shows the total participants at each location by their primary stakeholder type, as indicated to facilitators.

Diagram 2: Attendees by participant 'interest'

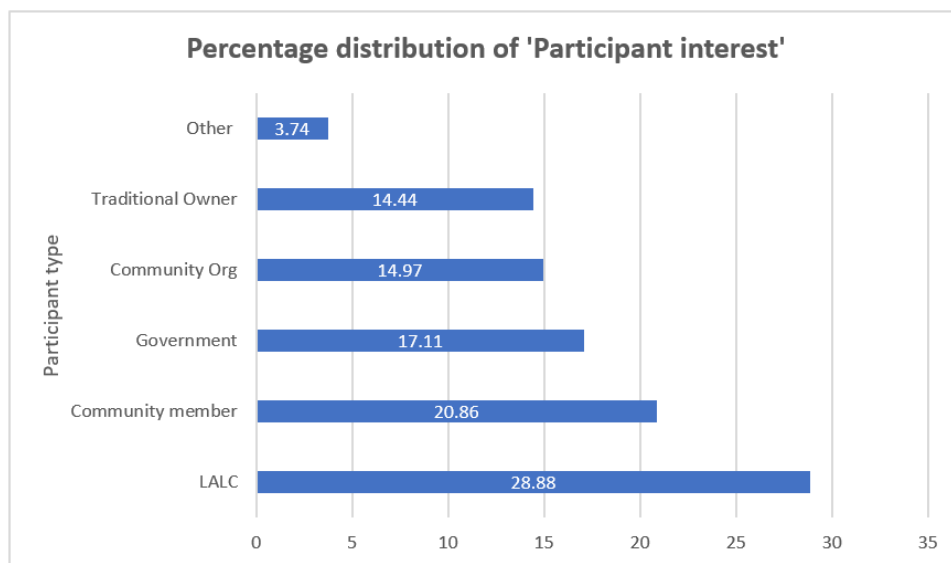


Diagram 2 shows the percentage of attendees representing each participant interest type.

Consultation Outcomes by Themes

The four consultation themes - Management of Country, Economic Benefit, Governance and Decision Making, and Ownership - provided a central focus for the facilitated discussions during stage one consultations. The sessions also afforded an opportunity for people to provide insights on what they think a 'successful partnership' and 'vision of success' would look like under a new joint management model.

A range of views emerged during the facilitated discussions in relation to each of these key themes. Responses to some questions overlapped with others. For example, multiple people discussed the concept of 'decision-making' in response to the *management of Country* question, as well as in response to the *governance and decision-making* question. For reporting purposes some overlapping responses are covered under the theme that appeared most relevant (for example, the relationship between the joint management model and other land-based policies and reforms was raised in Governance and Decision Making and Ownership themes, but the points raised were most relevant to Ownership), while other comments are included under multiple themes (for example, issues to do with training are covered under Management of Country, Economic Benefit and Governance and Decision Making themes).

It was clear at the workshops that many participants needed more time to consider the questions put to them, given how strategic and important the topics were for the future of Country, and many noted opportunities to provide further input in the second and third consultation rounds.

While not directly sought, some participants provided feedback about the consultation workshops themselves and about the overall consultation. These comments have not been included in this report, but provided directly to the NPWS so that it can be considered in the way forward.

Following is a summary of themes and responses participants provided to the consultation questions.

Management of Country

RAW participants were asked '*When thinking about **Management of Country**, how would you like to see national parks and reserves jointly managed on your Country?*' Where necessary, facilitators prompted discussion by asking '*What does healthy Country look like?*' and '*How can Country be managed to be healthy?*' Below captures the common themes and many of the specific issues raised by participants.

Healthy Country is at the centre of everything

In many ways, people across each workshop expressed that healthy Country is central to everything - as a core tenet, ethos, or value – and that culture and being able to practice culture on Country is central to healthy Country. It was also said that 'healthy Country means healthy people' and that by 'looking after Country, Country will look after and bring health to the people'.

Parks as a venue for learning, education and knowledge sharing

The opportunity for parks to be used as a venue for cultural and environmental education was consistently raised across the workshops. This was identified as a way to support culture, land management and economic outcomes, the latter also being discussed under the theme of Economic Benefit.

In terms of culture, people expressed an aspiration for parks to be used as a place to '*broaden education about caring for Country*' and deepen peoples' '*relationship with Country*'. People highlighted that cultural knowledge is '*handed down through songs, dance and stories*', which '*is a big part of caring for Country*'. People said that where cultural knowledge has been disrupted because of dispossession and dislocation, access to community-led learning on parks is an opportunity for this knowledge to be regained. People raised the opportunity for parks to be a place where old people work with young people, passing on knowledge and training up young people in caring for Country – 'succession planning' in effect.

It was suggested that a new joint management model should enable knowledge sharing and exchange between Aboriginal people and NPWS regarding land management. It was said that the NPWS should include Aboriginal people in staff training/education on land management, so this knowledge is shared between community groups and not exclusively held within NPWS. '*[There's] massive science activity undertaken on NPs – existing arrangements need to be brought back to the table and re-set under new JM arrangements – communities need a say and science needs to reflect community cultural expectations.*' It was also said that land management approaches used by NPWS need to be broadened and informed by Aboriginal cultural knowledge (more below).

Pest and weed management and supporting culturally significant plants and animals

People expressed that Aboriginal communities want to play a more active role in the management of pests and weeds, and the management of culturally significant and threatened plants and animals. Ideas ranged from:

- enabling Aboriginal people and knowledge holders '*to influence reserve acquisition to better be able to manage threatened species (and culturally significant sites)*';
- resourcing communities to work on conservation projects, and care for sick and injured native and threatened animals and marine life - noting people already do significant

voluntary work in this space, for example volunteer work on sea turtle conservation near South West Rocks; and

- providing space and facilities on parks/Country, for example access and use of unused buildings, to care for sick and injured animals and for community to come and learn about conservation.

People also identified economic opportunities that would stem from communities playing a greater role in the management of pests and threatened species, for example running an accredited bush regeneration program, developing businesses that grow native plant stocks.

Aboriginal people must be able to connect and work for Country in parks and reserves

People expressed that Aboriginal communities would like to be a central part of the management of their Country in parks and reserves. People raised examples of how this could happen, including using the skills and knowledge of registered Aboriginal owners as a conduit to engaging communities in work on Country. People also said there was a need to apply traditional owner knowledge on how to manage that Country to be healthy and to learn where the special places are on Country – to understand *‘what is sacred within the park and where things needed to be protected and kept secret.’*

Resourcing the management of parks was raised multiple times in various locations and groups. *‘[Where] there is a joint management agreement – what happens with resourcing?’* Understanding what ongoing support and commitment (financial and other resources) will be available to Aboriginal people to co-manage land is necessary in understanding how land management/caring for Country responsibilities can be fulfilled – *‘will people be paid annually’, ‘we need to have the same equity and the same operational budget needs to be transferred to us.’* (Resourcing is also raised below under the consultation themes of Economic Benefit and Governance and Decision Making, and under this theme in the section on ‘cultural burning’).

Across the workshops people expressed that Aboriginal people should be totally involved and immersed in the parks, beyond the management of Country. It was said that *‘we want people on Country delivering and feeding off country and we want to encourage and educate our people’*. There were also lots of stories of how communities are reconnecting with Country and reawakening languages and culture. A positive example where NPWS supported a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that enabled a group of people to get together with kids to celebrate Country (Saltwater) was cited.

During the workshops, people spoke of how colonisation has impacted the ability of some communities to connect with Country and that government needs to be aware that it might take time to reconnect and that not all communities will be ready on ‘day one’.

One attendee expressed the view that only people living on Country – 24/7 – should be involved in maintaining, protecting, and caring for Country. The concern was that people living off Country did not have the ability to know the subtle changes, and to know what Country needs, and should therefore not have a direct say in the management of Country. It was further stated that, if those people want to have a say in the management of Country, they need to get back to Country, be on the ground and emersed in Country.

Cultural knowledge must be embedded in the management of Country

Across the workshops it was said that cultural knowledge needs to be recognised and valued as highly as environmental science. It was felt that there is a greater level of importance put on ‘managing land in parks as a business’ over ‘caring for Country’. It was expressed that the new

model needs to create space for broader perspectives and for land to be managed according to cultural knowledge. *'We'd do it using traditional ways, based on song lines and bloodlines....'* It was said that the interpretation of culture is not something to be done by NPWS, it should be driven by communities and knowledge holders. For example, it was said that the NPWS *'has this conservation ethos as part of the work that you do. The 'lock it up to conserve it' mentality. But for us, if you don't have people in the country then it's not healthy. It needs people to care for it. This means allowing our people to have our cultural days, camps on Country, to care for it.'*

Across the workshops people said that sacred sites and significant places need to be taken care of and protected. People gave many heartbreaking examples of damage and destruction of sacred sites, middens, scar trees and other places. It was felt that a greater level of importance is given to the protection of threatened species than looking after Country. People want to have influence to tell people to stay away from sacred sites, including secret sites - *'land can't be managed if you don't understand it'; 'spiritual content' should not be 'waivered'; 'we have had experiences where a walking track in a park went through a sacred site, sacred sites need to be diverted around'.*

There were views expressed that the right people should be able to inform how culture is managed. Also, that proper work needs to be done within communities to determine who are the right people to be speaking to matters - *'the real knowledge holders – there's people that think they know Country and there's people that hold the knowledge – we've got to try to do it properly with the guidance from knowledge holders.'*

Cultural authority must be recognised

Issues raised here intersect with the workshop responses under the Governance and Decision Making theme.

Across the workshops people expressed that decision-making over cultural heritage must involve Aboriginal people. Views ranged from the need for proper and meaningful consultation with Aboriginal custodians, to Aboriginal people and custodians needing veto power over what happens at places of significance - *'it comes down to our mob having our say on Country. This is where it will succeed the most, talking about caring for Country.'*

The issue of Aboriginal Cultural Intellectual Property was also raised, in terms of use of Aboriginal cultural knowledge. *'If people want to come and learn culture, we welcome them. Just don't steal our knowledge and go off and make money off it....'*

People raised the need for equal responsibilities and rights in having a say on how *'Aboriginal community aspirations sit with what the general public want out of the park.'* People also highlighted the need to support *'ongoing custodian connection and ability to direct and manage the affairs of the park in a cultural way'*. One example shared was *'Aboriginal people should also have the right to issue fines for breach of Aboriginal heritage. We should be able to issue fines for an equitable management.'*

Aboriginal people need to be decision makers on access to Country and her resources

Across the workshops people expressed a clear need for Aboriginal owners to have a say or be the decision makers about permission to access Country (see more under Governance and Decision Making themes below).

The current system of permits and notification was seen as onerous, lacking transparency and being unresponsive to the needs of Aboriginal people seeking to maintain cultural practices and care for Country. There were many examples provided of barriers and hurt caused by the current system, but also suggestions about how a new model could overcome this. This includes that Aboriginal

people be part of the decision-making process on access, especially in relation to sacred and culturally significant sites and places. Another suggestion was that park Plans of Management include a focus on access issues, providing clear information on approved access for cultural purposes and places closed to general access. People also spoke of a need for dialogue with landholders adjacent to park boundaries to support access to culturally significant sites.

People also raised issues around access to, and the management of natural resources – plants, medicine, animals, etc – and the need for Aboriginal decision making to enable access and use for cultural and other purposes. This issue was also raised consistently under the Economic Benefit theme below.

Cultural burning is a priority for healthy Country

Burning was identified as a priority for healthy Country – *‘management of Country means looking after the plants and animals and caring for country [through] cultural burns.’* People consistently said that any new joint management model would need to allow for cultural fire management as a way to manage Country. Across the workshops people said this would support hazard reduction, weed control, enable the protection of sacred and significant sites, and bring back endangered and at-risk plants and animals.

Across the workshops people said that burn plans would need to consider cultural values and priorities, and *‘respect the knowledge of our Elders and really listen to their recommendations on how to care for Country’*. It was said that what happens now is mostly about science and not visual inspection, which differs from traditional practices – *‘the good old-fashioned [way] looked at the bush to make a judgement [on what] needs to happen’*.

People reflected on how land has been managed since colonisation, the changing landscape and the 2020 fires. There was a sense that now is the time to re-set and manage things differently. Ideas included thinking about how to resource teams who do cultural burns and changing the relationship with the Rural Fire Service.

Economic Benefit

RAW participants were asked *‘When thinking about Economic benefits, what economic opportunities from joint management of Country would you like to see for Aboriginal people?’* Where necessary, facilitators prompted discussion by asking *‘Expanding Aboriginal joint management across the national park estate will deliver economic benefits for Aboriginal communities by increasing Aboriginal employment and creating additional opportunities for Aboriginal businesses: ‘What employment and training opportunities would you like to see from park management?’ and ‘What opportunities do you see for Aboriginal businesses and joint ventures, such as cultural and nature-based tourism and land management on park?’* Below captures the common themes and many of the specific issues raised by participants.

Joint management could open up a range of economic AND social and cultural outcomes.

Across the workshops communities expressed that a new model of joint management could create opportunities for communities to connect to cultural heritage and bring about a range of economic, social and cultural benefit. *‘It’s a good thing economically for people because of the opportunities, but also mentally and also spiritually.’*

It was raised across the workshops that access to parks and Country should not be considered in terms of financial benefit only. People said *‘economic benefit doesn’t just have to be money in the*

pocket,' *'we should get access for cultural practice'*. People added that the new model needs to recognise the social and cultural benefits, healing benefits and other benefits that *'give back'*, for example opportunities to go camping on Country deepens connections to Country and builds understanding of how to better care for and manage Country. Other examples of how being able to work on Country would support wellbeing and broader community outcomes include learning language, youth programs and providing space for community-led on-Country intervention to tackle youth crime.

Joint management should be driven by caring for Country

People raised the tension between using cultural assets as economic drivers and being able to care for Country, and highlighted the need to safeguard and protect Country. *'Tourism is a great thing, ecotourism. Aboriginal people should be the ones doing it on Country. But it can go too far down that road – it can get exploited. We have to get the right balance'*. People spoke of their overriding obligations to Country and to care for Country, including the need to look after sites, plants, animals and marine life. People also raised the need to be able to practice ceremony associated with this - *'we got the poor old whales coming onto the beach and they are taking them off Country and reburying. As they get beached, culturally, we [need to get] out and do ceremony every time.... Decision needs to be made with traditional owners'*.

Ideas to support economic activities while caring for Country included having *'country rangers out on park who manage and act as caretaker custodians'* and *'having laws and licences, guided [and policed] by Aboriginal people, so that fishing and hunting is sustainable.'* It was also said that Aboriginal people having control over, and working in activities on the park, for example cafes, camping sites, etc will not only provide economic opportunities but will ensure Aboriginal people have a say over what activities are sustainable culturally.

Aboriginal employment and business opportunities must be driven by local aspirations

People consistently raised the need for job opportunities on park, including ongoing roles for communities. People raised that opportunities should range from on the ground jobs such as rangers, parks management and administration, to opportunities in tourism, museums and shops. Across the workshops people raised that there are not enough Aboriginal business and employment opportunities being opened up through park infrastructure projects - *'there are big infrastructure projects on park, and yet I would say most black fellas are locked out of those opportunities.'*

The need for more Aboriginal people in decision making roles was also consistently raised— *'[currently] black fellas are involved in guidance rather than decision making.'* People raised that Aboriginal people will *'always have to care for Country'* and how important it is that the new model has *'Aboriginal people in jobs making decisions for the land'*. Ideas for achieving greater Aboriginal voices and employment in parks included:

- Having traditional owners working on Country alongside the NPWS and creating cultural officer roles on Country.
- Creating and filling more Aboriginal positions, including on Country, with more opportunities for permanent employment (including cultural heritage officer, ranger, maintenance and facilities management roles).
- Listing all vacant roles as 'identified' in the first instance as a way to enable more Aboriginal employment.
- NPWS using 'Aboriginal participation in procurement policy' to create more employment and business opportunities in construction and maintenance projects.
- In terms of establishing career pathways, ideas ranged from having clear pathways from field officers to managers; to open career pathways so people develop their skills to work

towards different opportunities; school to work pathways to support a continuous link for young people between training and employment.

- Creating more opportunities for training, and for people to learn on Country, including in the areas of weed and pest management etc
- Creating careers in culture, which could include the natural environment through a cultural lens. People suggested tailoring training to support people to supplement their cultural knowledge with scientific knowledge, for example *'Aboriginal people have cultural fire knowledge, but we want to learn how to do hazard reduction too, and vice versa sharing our cultural knowledge'*.
- Encouraging and supporting young people into archaeology and natural resource management.

In terms of training, people raised that this needs to be meaningful and linked to real jobs – *'don't train us for the sake of training us – we need real businesses etc'*. It was raised that training workshops need to have clear outcomes, including job opportunities - *'I'd like to see... training and jobs [commitments] put...in black and white [on] how this can be achieved'*.

Community-led cultural and eco-tourism should be prioritised

The economic value of tourism, including cultural and eco-tourism, was highlighted across workshops. People were clear that Aboriginal people should be delivering tourism on Country – *'[we need] the respect to determine what's the appropriate activities to occur on national parks'* and *'we could make people know when they do visit our Country, they get firsthand knowledge and experience off mob.'* There was also discussion about the need for the right people/knowledge holders to be decision makers, and that Aboriginal people/communities need to determine this.

Ideas raised during the workshops for tourism ventures and activities on parks included:

- Aboriginal led cultural centres on parks.
- Aboriginal businesses – existing and new – taking-up opportunities to run cultural tours, bush tucker tours, Discovery Rangers.
- Providing Eco Passes to Aboriginal people for parcels of land on parks for community led cultural tourism activities.
- Cultural burning as part of cultural tourism activities.

People raised the need to find the right balance to ensure resources are not exploited, used or accessed inappropriately. *'There are tourism opportunities with culture, our sites and shelters. There's been talk in the community about having these advertised, letting people know this is what's in the area. But the other side is we don't want public viewing, signage.'* In this context people again raised the need to ensure Aboriginal cultural knowledge holders decide what activities and uses are appropriate.

People flagged many barriers and ideas on how the new model could support Aboriginal-led tourism ventures including:

- Supporting communities and Elders - who have the cultural knowledge, but may need support in meeting first aid, legal, business establishment, literacy requirements.
- Aboriginal cultural knowledge may not be understood by government officials who need to support tourism activities. People identified the need for cross cultural exchanges and capacity building for both community and the NPWS to build understanding and meaningful support for community tourism ventures.
- Responding and resourcing community aspirations and plans *'[in consultations] on the draft plan of management in our national parks we spoke about ... [how] for the past 4 years, we've been [asking to use disused] space for the local Aboriginal community for tourism,*

for education [activities]... But after consultation, when the draft plan came out, it said for their office to go to that space, not even for our community. So, if we do this joint model, we need places and spaces.'

- In developing ventures there's a need to understand the broader market, the potential influx of new tourism ventures, and real revenue opportunities that might be available. It was suggested that Destination NSW could assess the bigger picture and support communities with strategy advice.
- It was said that NPWS 'red tape' needs to be reduced to make it easier for communities to attract customers and make income.

Access to resources on parks and reserves

Across the workshops people raised the importance of being able to access parks without undue barriers. Further to comments about the use of resources for cultural purpose under the Managing Country theme, people raised a range of social, cultural and economic opportunities stemming from access to parks including:

- Re-setting third party access to build community benefit - *'it's OK for third parties to pay rent to have access to NP eg beekeepers, but existing arrangements should be re-set under the new joint-management agreement.'*
- Learning and practicing Aboriginal culture (songlines, languages, ceremony) through cultural camps, youth camps, men's business and women's business.
- Unlocking infrastructure on parks for community use, including for cultural camps, crafts and other businesses for sales, cafes – *'we would like to see an agreement that community can use NPWS infrastructure'*.
- Accessing and harvesting of bushfoods for sale and use in camps, medicines and healing.
- Managing endangered and culturally significant animals and marine life.

National parks rent/fees should be on the table

Notwithstanding the Government position that market rent and park fees will not be considered in any new joint management model, across a number of workshops people raised the need for rent, royalties and fees to be on the table.

Views put forward include that park entry fees are a big revenue raising opportunity and that a portion should come to the owners - *'with ownership – we would be getting the entry fees'*. It was felt also that entry fees should go directly back to the Aboriginal owners of the park in recognition of the number of visitors attending their cultural sites – *'fees should go back to Country to look after Country'*. Another view was that the 'rent' should support capacity building and work on Country - *'resourcing local mob to work'*.

In terms of equity, people asked that given that some parks are big earners, should all income from parks be combined and distributed? *'Should it go into a State-wide fund and be distributed out to local communities equally, just like the allocation goes into the State Land Council and goes out'*. To only have one community benefit from big earning parks was not seen as equitable. It was also raised that some communities might not have a park in their area, and would that mean they get nothing?

Adding to this it was put forward that money from non-Aboriginal enterprise in parks should get paid back in royalties and distributed out to Aboriginal communities. With such a model it was asked how do you assess royalties and determine what's acceptable? Also, what levels of royalties would make it beneficial to enact such a scheme?

Country to be utilised as a teaching space

Further to comments people made under the theme of Managing Country (Parks as a venue for learning, education and knowledge sharing), people consistently raised opportunities to use parks as a training area, for purposes such as cultural education and cultural leadership.

People suggested the new model could *'utilise parks as a classroom for cultural leadership, teaching people about culture.'* It was said that rather than going to a formal university, *'we could have on-Country education with [Elders] teaching. Rather than learning from writing in books'*. It was also said that *'some custodians can run programs to get disengaged youth to get into the bush and learn... creating pathways for learning... they can then go and do some ecological science degree... This will set them up for a future'*. It was raised that supporting new approaches might require a cultural shift in NPWS and education institutions.

Governance and Decision Making

RAW participants were asked *'When thinking about **Governance and decision-making**, how would you like to see decisions made under joint management of national parks and reserves?'* Where necessary, facilitators prompted discussion by elaborating *'Existing governance arrangements for joint management include boards of management and committees. This consultation is seeking advice on what governance arrangements can be developed that are practical and sustainable and can include a framework for Aboriginal decision-making that supports cultural practices and governance and the delivery of day-to-day management activities. Who could be involved and how? Who could negotiate on behalf of joint management partners? How can one joint management agreement cover multiple parks?'* Below captures the common themes and some of the specific issues raised by participants.

Governing body constitution and membership

In terms of governing body membership many felt that at least 50/50 representation of Aboriginal and Non-Indigenous people was critical, with many also saying a majority of Aboriginal representation of 51/49 or greater was needed. This was considered important to support power sharing, to level the playing field and to recognise the historical marginalisation/exclusion of Aboriginal people in caring for Country on parks. It was also seen as an acknowledgment of the primacy of Aboriginal cultural knowledge.

Many people expressed that experienced and specialist non-Aboriginal board members are needed to provide necessary expertise to succeed. Others talked to the importance of cultural knowledge, including *'it shouldn't be an academic panel. Should be focused on community caring for country.'* There was also a view that governing bodies should be made up of all Aboriginal people only.

In terms of inclusiveness, people expressed the need for fair representation of families, young and old, and it was said that *'we don't get anywhere when we become about just a few families.'* People highlighted the need to have young people on the governing body – *'getting them ready to take it on'* and *'teaching them so that they can become cultural knowledge holders.'*

Also, in terms of inclusiveness, it was raised that people should not be excluded because they are not recognised as native title holders or Traditional Owners - *'they forget about the fringe dwellers. Not the ones from the missions, people like us who have always been here, living in the town...we get overlooked.'* Similarly, that *'we need a heightened voice for the traditional owners but [also] have a space for others.'*

Across the workshops people raised the need to recognize diversity within Aboriginal communities and the importance of locally driven approaches - *'local input must be forefront.'* The model should be flexible and adaptable so that Aboriginal communities are able to care for their Country using localised approaches and their discretion - *"with different tribes, different languages and different people....the model has to be localised and flexible.'*

People also expressed the need to have the ability to get people to the table who aren't necessarily part of an 'organisation.' *'These people are knowledge holders, Elders and others. Just because they're not part of a group shouldn't cut them out of the conversation and decisions.'*

There was broad agreement that Registered Owners should be at the table. It was said that where there are determined native title claims, native title holders should be at the table. Another view was that all native title holders should have say about all parks within their claim boundary. An example was provided where every native title claimant had a vote in a local mining issue which set a local precedent *'to say they all had a say on what happens on national parks. There is not a board there, they are applicants.'* It was also said that *'land councils should be a voice at the table, but not an overbearing voice'*. People raised that the representation needs to be balanced out through a neutral process.

In terms of deciding who can speak for Country and who should represent communities on governing bodies there was universal consensus that these are decisions for communities – this is further discussed below in the section 'Formation of joint governing body'.

Governing body structures, scale and boundaries

Discussion across the workshops honed into how the joint management arrangement would be constituted and built. Many highlighted the need for representativeness, equity, and inclusiveness. Issues of scale were also raised, that is whether governing bodies could cover multiple parks.

In terms of joint management governance structures, some suggested that alliances should be formed with all the local knowledge holders, or organisations, and highlighted the need to ensure there is fair representation and enough people in the room to talk, as *'decisions should not come from just one or two people, [or] with people getting shouted down.'* *'You need to be listening to the group. Let the group speak. It's not down to what an individual says.'*

There were ideas about the governing body being a company solely set up for that purpose – not dealing in any other businesses. (This discussion overlapped with issues of 'ownership', which are discussed under that theme below.) That company would be publicly accountable and transparent. People also said that conflicts of interest need to be carefully managed, with transparency and rules around sitting on multiple boards in the same area.'

Another idea was to consider a staged-hybrid approach with the governing body including a mix of Traditional Owners and key organisations in the early stages, and as Traditional Owner capacity builds, moving to a governing body that has Traditional Owners solely representing the voice for Country and co-management. This was said to recognise the long length of time that Aboriginal people have been dispossessed from that Country, while the NPWS has been able to take time to develop their park management capabilities since the growth of national parks in the 1970s.

In terms of scale, and whether joint governing bodies should be in place per park or cover multiple parks along cultural lines, people raised a number of issues including needing to take into account cultural associations and cultural landscapes. *'Talk to us. We need an alliance among all our groups and to elect a committee with a voice for us. Then boundaries for sub-tribes need to be taken into*

account. We are a big jigsaw. I am only a piece of the puzzle. The governance structure needs to take this into account.'

Many people agreed that governing bodies working across multiple parks could work well, others did not. An option raised was whether governance should be built along song lines connecting a series of existing parks and the major cultural features within those parks. *'It's not about the size of the park, it's about the connected landscapes. If you look at the major cultural features from here – ... major places... with the ancillary ones around... the governance model [could include] a major governance group [of] registered owners [and] sub-committees for the ancillary.'* If the lease back was under the umbrella of major parks only (rather than all parks including what could be considered ancillary parks), it might be a more affordable option in terms of fewer management bodies and fewer 'rent' commitments. This comment also relates to the issue of rent discussed above (under the Economic Benefit theme).

Across some workshops people raised the possibility of establishing overarching committees at a regional and/or state level, and possibly feeding into a national group, as a mechanism to *'discuss the myriad land management and conservation issues'*, exchange ideas and address common issues. *'Need for a state-wide if not national, Aboriginal led caring for country committee for leadership.'* Different ideas included having the body representative of joint-management bodies, or elected, and/or with the inclusion of experts to enable the focus on specific issues, for example fire.

Overall, it was clear 'scale' needs to be worked through on a place-by-place basis - *'it's about whose country the park overlays... there are different countries in each park... that's the stuff we gotta work on... sub committees, committees, family groups... they need to come together and figure that out. We need to base governance and decision-making culturally.'*

In terms of boundaries, this was recognised as a complex issue – *'there are a few boundaries to consider: community boundary, native title boundary, land council boundary and national park boundary and communities that don't align with any of those.'* It was suggested that 'cultural areas' need to take account of both land council boundaries and native title. Some people suggested using national park boundaries, others land council boundaries - *'if I just look at land council and national park boundaries, you also need to acknowledge native title people within that claim need to also have a say.'* Others talked about the importance of working with native title registered bodies to determine boundaries. It was also said that *'too many LALCs would have pushback on boundary realignment.'*

Throughout the workshops people raised boundaries in the context of the NPWS structure and how decision-making about Country is often removed from Country. It was said that the new joint management arrangements, and governing body boundaries, provide an opportunity for the NPWS structure to align to cultural boundaries. This would allow day to day decision making to align with joint management governance arrangements and enable decisions to be made with proximity to Country.

Who should speak for Country, recognition of cultural authority

The issues people raised about recognising the primacy of Aboriginal cultural knowledge are covered under the Managing Country theme. There was considerable discussion under this theme on who has cultural authority, and how government and the NPWS need to recognise that cultural authority in a new joint management model.

In terms of cultural authority, and who can negotiate and speak for Country in a new joint management model, people consistently said that any process to identify who can speak for Country *'won't always be easy and will take time.'* *'You will have a whole range of perspectives from the land*

councils, Elders, community, etc'. People spoke of recognition through various legislation – native title claimants and holders under the native title legislation; Aboriginal Owners under land rights legislation – and how Traditional Owners is a different term without legal definition. Across the workshops it was clear that Aboriginal communities, Elders and knowledge holders need to have conversations and decide who has authority to speak for Country. *'If national parks are handed back to Traditional Owners, we need to work out who they are.'*

There were lots of discussions about the role of land councils as governing bodies and in terms of ownership. Views were expressed that land councils include members from outside their area who do not have cultural authority akin to traditional owners in speaking for Country. Other views expressed that land councils are representatives of their community, *'are respected'* and should be *'the first point of call'*.

Some people went further to say that governance needs to include people who are actively caring for and have a connection to the landscape. Some said decision-making should sit with the people who have cared for the landscapes, not people living off Country or who have not maintained a direct connection to Country. A view was expressed that positions on the joint governing body should sit with traditional owners rather than descendants as *'traditional owners have been caring for that area, descendants could be living anywhere.'* Views were also put forward that family or genealogical lineage alone is not reason enough for people to be registered as an authority, that there should be a need to demonstrate continuing connection to Country or to community – *'members need to have a certain level of understanding of community. You need to be connected to community and Country, be a true advocate for community.'*

In terms of how the NPWS and government should recognise cultural authority, people raised the need for Aboriginal people to be at the table as true equals and being really listened to and heard – *'don't ask us to keep on proving something is culturally significant to us. Not having to jump through hoops.'* People said the model needs to allow for custodians to be at the decision-making table as opposed to *'being consulted.'* It was also said that whatever the process for deciding who has the authority to speak for Country *'it's about putting it back in the hands of the community. We want the best input from community – government needs to be very careful about guiding that. Not controlling it like a mission manager.'*

People raised that it is essential that NPWS staff, at all levels, understand and appreciate the relationship Aboriginal people have with Country and the significance of that relationship. It was said that this could assist NPWS staff with their respectful engagement and conscientiousness of the value this holds for Aboriginal people. *'Employees of NPWS [need] to undergo cultural awareness training to get that understanding of the connection that Aboriginal people have with Country and why is it so important to them.'*

Formation of joint governing body

Across the workshops people also raised that Aboriginal communities need a formal role in the selection of the joint governance body membership and appointments. People highlighted that communities know who the right people are - knowledge holders, those with cultural authority – and should be decision makers in the appointment process. *'If the community says this man or woman or family knows lots about this stuff, they know it from a few generations... that man or woman should represent that Country.'* *'Must have self-determination and input with local people.'*

People grappled with the potential complexities of appointment processes that involve community decision making. It was said that these conversations must start by understanding who the native title holders, traditional owners and knowledge holders are. Ideas included running open

nomination processes, or inviting nominations based on eligibility criteria (skills, knowledge, cultural authority, reputation/standing) and then going through a process of election, or having nominees go through a selection process. For example, *'anyone interested in putting in the work, come to the table and then it will be a slow process of elimination.'* An alternative suggested was *'find out who are all the people and put them all in a room, tell them 'we want 10 people, you decide who they should be.'* It was cautioned that *'some Elders might want to negotiate, some might not. But they would know the families and clans associated with the areas.'*

It was raised that a one size fits all approach will not work, and the need for flexibility to allow varying locations to decide their approach. The need for sufficient time and resources to allow for a proper, community-led, formation processes was also raised.

There was also recognition across the workshops that joint governing board selections – given these will involve both Aboriginal community representatives and other representation – will require overall agreement between Aboriginal communities and government - *'the decisions are going to come from both sides. Not just one side. No matter who they are, the government or the Aboriginal community.'* People asked about the role and decision-making powers of Government and the Minister, including if there were veto powers to block joint governing board appointments or decisions. People said *'if we elect someone it should not have to be approved by a white minister! If Aboriginal people select someone that should be who it is!'* and *'[we] need politicians involved on your side and being supportive.'*

Aboriginal decision-making on park access and use

Consistent with comments made under earlier themes (Managing Country and Economic Benefit), the need for Aboriginal people to be the decision-makers on access to culturally significant sites in parks was also stressed under this theme. *'The main thing is being able to go on Country and not have to have a key for the gate. That's the struggle I've had. The beauty that this opportunity represents is that we can have more access for cultural reasons.'*

In terms of management of natural resources, people said a new model will need custodianship to guide decision making for access and use of plants, medicine, animals – *'we have to do the right thing around managing them, but we still need to be able to access them for cultural purposes.'* It was said that *'we need another board of Elders, basically they would have the say, the ones to answer to parks [would] need approval from the Elders.'*

Aboriginal people should be in NPWS in decision-making roles

Across the workshops people spoke of there being a power imbalance. While there were a couple of examples to the contrary, in the main, decision-making was seen to sit within the NPWS, with Aboriginal knowledge holders playing an advisory role. Even with the hand back of parks to Aboriginal ownership, it was questioned whether the Minister will still hold ultimate power on what happens on parks. *'Minister's role and responsibility in all of this – struggle with it. At the stroke of the pen he could abolish the land councils. There needs to be some other protections.'*

The need for Aboriginal people to have a real voice in decision-making, and for NPWS to genuinely enable shared-decision making in the new joint management model was consistently raised - *'it's about making sure that our views are being represented at the leadership level. We need to reflect and replicate the grass roots level.'*

To support this people identified that change is needed with the NPWS, including around how it can embed shared decision-making into its practices and grow its Aboriginal cultural capability. Ideas for embedding more Aboriginal decision-making in parks management included:

- Legislative change to recognise real power sharing.
- Empowering Aboriginal co-managers to enforce more LORE
- Enabling Aboriginal leadership governance models (for example, advisory groups) across environment and land management portfolios to inform decisions.
- Employing more Aboriginal people in senior NPWS positions.
- Providing Aboriginal rangers the same power as other rangers and ensuring Discovery ranger coordinators are identified roles – ‘If there were more opportunities for Aboriginal people, then our mob would put their hand up. Having teams like Gamay rangers doing the bush regeneration work’.
- Ensuring Aboriginal identified cultural heritage positions are funded and implemented.

A concern was raised that for Aboriginal people to be part of decision-making processes in NPWS that more knowledge needs to be shared about park operations and decision-making within NPWS – ‘*cultural people don’t know about the internal workings of national parks.*’ People raised a range of ideas to support training (eg. ranger training, natural resource management) and knowledge sharing (caring for Country and land/parks management) under earlier themes.

Skills development in decision-making processes, collaboration, values

Issues of skills development were raised across the workshops and under most of the consultation themes (see Management of Country and Economic Benefit). In terms of governance, people raised the need for people to hold both cultural and corporate knowledge and have strong communication (listening, being able to convey messages and advocate) and collaboration skills. The importance of holding the right values was also raised. ‘*Need cultural knowledge but also corporate knowledge. We need people who can read reports, decipher information..... corporate knowledge and cultural knowledge need to be considered and aligned.*’

People provided ideas that would support governance and decision-making capacity building and skills. These included opportunities for knowledge transfers on Country, an exchange system where people can experience how other joint management sites are operating. In depth governance training for joint governing bodies was proposed, with a suggestion that this include streams on day-to-day management and how cultural management plans should be developed and managed. Training should be tailored and accessible to people without formal education qualifications, with opportunities for mentoring. Young people could also be resourced to start learning now. Training on values and behaviours was thought to be of benefit as well.

Ownership

RAW participants were asked ‘*When thinking about **Ownership**, what does ownership look like to you under joint management into the future, and why?*’ Where necessary, facilitators prompted discussion by elaborating ‘Each joint management arrangement will need to identify ownership arrangements and how the title will be held. What do you think the ownership arrangements could be? How come? How could ownership relate to Native Title? Should it be a consistent approach or decided on a case-by-case basis?’ Below captures the common themes and some of the specific issues raised by participants.

Joint management, native title and cultural heritage should be considered together

Across the workshop people raised the need to consider the new model alongside existing land-based legislation, policies and reforms. This includes considering the intersections between a new

parks joint management model, native title, Aboriginal cultural heritage reforms, Crown land reform and the land rights system. *'You might find people like me, thinking about what it means. Aboriginal Acts are before parliament at the moment, and these are the Acts that protect our assets. Crown land reform is leading me to think this way. Representatives are surely thinking this way too.'*

It was said that proposed changes to cultural heritage legislation and Crown land reforms needs to be considered at the same time, and that *'it would be good if these reforms were simplified [and connected].'* People also wanted to understand the native title implications – *'native title is a blanket over the state legislation..... need legal people to [identify] how that's going to interplay.'*

People also wanted to see a process that would bring people together to work through these issues *'[we need] a negotiation process.... need to have the legal advice.... both groups. It could bring risks to us, to the people managing that space.'* The mapping of the national parks joint management reform against the current land management system was suggested as a way to identify intersections, alignment, risks and mitigations – *'so as not to undermine or detrimentally impact the existing processes and outcomes.'*

Trust was also identified as an issue, and concern that this reform might diminish existing rights – *'[is this a] backdoor way without using the native title system or land rights system.'* Having transparency around all the land reforms was seen as key to upholding integrity and accountability and building trust – both with government and within communities - *'it's very complicated – you have the LALC, the TOs, native title. We can be our own worst enemy – argue amongst ourselves to get on the same page. Would love to see it happen (joint management), but don't know how you'd do it.'*

Unknown scope of benefits and rights that would come with ownership of the parks

People raised that the legislative mechanisms to support a new joint management model are currently unknown. People want to understand the extent of control, autonomy, custodianship, economic benefits that would come to community and what would sit with the joint management governance body. People said *'something to be said around inherent rights and interests that we have in land and the fact that giving the parks estate to us locks us into the conservation commitments' and 'do you own it or not? That's a bit of a dilemma.'*

Who should own, or be included in ownership models, will take time to resolve

Across the workshops it was clear that there could not be a *'one size fits all'* approach in terms of who should hold title once park ownership is handed to community. *'For a model for 10% of the state - there's no way there will be one that works everywhere.'* It must be case by case. Trust structures and statutory bodies were proposed as mechanisms to hold title in perpetuity for community and ensure security over tenure. People also raised the need to carefully consider safeguards that *'outlive political agendas, in perpetuity.'* *'We need something firm in legislation to ensure the security of our places and assets.'*

People also raised the option of having land councils hold title, as the *'[land rights legislation] provides a governance structure ... that can protect us and that needs to be adopted to provide security to the joint management group.'* Others said that *'we need to look broader than the [land council system]... legislation can be used to create a statutory body [that give guidance] on rights and responsibilities'*. People also raised risks to the land council network – *'what happens if the land council folds, then where does the title go. To NSWALC? What happens if NSWALC folds? Do we need to think of a different mechanism? Whether that's through native title or something else.'* Generally, people did not think that setting up a corporation would be effective in terms of holding the assets

for community in perpetuity - *'under the ORIC and ASIC..., but if we went under that model, they could sell them off.'*

It was said that there needs to be a policy review to look at options for a statutory authority and all other options. *'We need to think more about where [this will] have a domino effect, and where will be the blockages. We could still be talking about this in 15 or 20 years, not the timeframes they're thinking.'*

Successful Partnerships

In addition to two questions based on the four consultation themes set by the NPWS in partnership with the Custodian Network, RAW participants were asked about their ideas and aspirations for a new joint management model. The first of these questions related to 'successful partnerships.' RAW participants were asked *'Joint management relies on a successful partnership. From your experience of joint management or partnerships with NSW Government agencies or others, what would a successful partnership to manage Country on national parks and reserves look like? Where necessary, facilitators prompted discussion by elaborating 'What's the best version of a partnership between Aboriginal owners and NPWS? Below captures the common themes and some of the specific issues raised by participants.*

Partnership must be underpinned by trust, respect and equal say

People said that the model will need to embed Aboriginal ways of doing things and that there's a need to co-design what proper partnership will look like. People provided lots of examples of both effective and poor partnerships and identified core elements of effective partnership including:

- Equal partnership: the new model must be based on an equality and equal partnership, with fair representation – *'round table board meetings with equal say from everyone – someone at the top but not the boss.'* People said that NPWS and community representatives must be considered equal – *'Area Manager and Elder should have equal rights to decisions.'*
- Authorised joint decision-making: People called for the group to have real decision-making authority. People raised the need for group decisions to be respected - *'not just making recommendations for other people to consider or reject', 'don't pick and choose which decisions are joint.'* People also said that Government needs to provide space and allow for Aboriginal people to step up – *'having community and [NPWS] staff out on Country, talking [through] issues collectively, deciding collectively how something needs to be managed and controlled.'*
- Mutual respect and authentic relationships: joint management partnership must be underpinned by respect and authenticity - *'respect is a foundation,' with 'no 'them and us' (we recognise that's hard).'* People also raised that investment in relationship building is needed – *'government needs to put in the effort to build relationships on the ground.'*
- Transparency and integrity: People identified the need for *'open dialogue'*, being *'very upfront – you are going to have to deal with this and that.'* People also called for ethical approaches and put simply, *'no gaslighting.'*
- Listening: People highlighted the need to *'listen to learn'* to build understanding and to allow problem solving together. It was asked whether listening can be put into policy.

- **Accountability:** Across the workshops people called for accountability and good faith actions – *‘do what you say you’re going to do, not give excuses because you don’t have the budget;’* for example, *‘if the board decides the tree stays, the tree stays.’*
- **Resourcing:** People raised the need for proper resourcing, including time, for people to fulfil their roles in the partnerships, which includes their obligations back to Country and the communities they represent. *‘Respect that we can’t make the decisions at the table, without the space, time and resources to bring it back to our constituents.’*
- **Give and take:** *‘It is 50/50.’* People said the partnership needs to be constructive, *‘with an ability for both parties to discuss, agree or disagree.’* It was also said that *‘a successful partnership would be one where government can let go of some things. That would be the basic. From my experience – they say they give you this and this, but at the end of the day, the government has the final say.’*
- **Respect for cultural leadership:** It was said that *‘cultural aspects need to be held in high regard.’* It was asked whether the joint management legislation or policy could enshrine that *‘culture is always first’ - ‘respect traditional use of the land,’* respect for knowledge and *‘respect and trust of the Country itself.’* People raised the importance of ground-up approaches and said the partnership must allow for women’s and men’s business.
- **Cultural understanding and awareness:** People raised that training is needed *‘on both sides. Our mobs have got to learn how to deal with that mob too, both ways.’* Another person said *‘white and black working together managing country. I love to present my Country to visitors’ researchers etc. I educate them and I see proof of what the Old People told me – and when the science backs it up – I feel pride. There are two worlds, and we have to work in both – when they align – it’s a special feeling.’*
- **Clear rights and responsibilities:** People said the partnerships need to be clear on the roles and functions of each party, and that this needs to be documented, with code of conduct, cultural codes of conduct, cultural protocols built into the model. *‘A key element is trusting what each should do and be responsible for and let them go and do it, which doesn’t mean doing everything all together all the time.’*

Visions of Success

The second question to prompt ideas and aspirations for a new joint management model beyond the four consultation themes related to overall ‘visions of success.’ RAW participants were asked *‘Reflecting on what we have talked about, what is your vision for successful joint management of Country on national parks and reserves?’* Where necessary, facilitators prompted discussion by elaborating *‘If there was a new approach to Aboriginal joint management of national parks, what could it mean for you?’* Below captures the common themes and some of the specific issues raised by participants.

Long term aspiration for ownership, autonomy, unrestricted access

‘Dream for healthy country – no disturbance, access, no pets’

Across the workshops people raised an aspiration to not only own parks, but to manage and run parks. People expressed the desire for *'local mob doing what [the NPWS] does now, in every aspect of it;'* that *'in 10-years' time we are running all National Parks, we got cultural tourism, cultural practices, burns. All quality indicators to Close the Gap should be checked;'* and that *'for me in my area, [there] would be an established timeframe for a full takeover and control to make the government redundant in that space with the confidence from government that it's going to be measured, looked after, the same services or more...'*

Others said that they want genuine co-management – *'we would rather a park be truly jointly managed with mob rather than feeling that we are reporting to government'*.

Across the workshops people hoped the new joint management model would provide ease of community access and use of parks for cultural purposes. People said *'we want to go back to Country and not have to wait on NPWS for permission and conditions attached;'* *'community would know they have the right to enter the park and use it however they've been set up to be able to do [so]'* and that *'[we'd] not just [be] working in the parks, [but] using the park.'*

Some people also highlighted the need for communities to have a *'policing role'* on parks to combat damage and destruction of important places– *'that's my home and I'm always watching it and [want to be able to protect it against] poisoning and destruction.'*

People spoke to experiences in North America where First Nations people are managing parks and homelands, and involved in key role including the fire brigade, police etc.

Healthy Country, cultural renewal and healing should be at the heart of the new reform

Across the workshops people raised the *'ultimate goal'* was to see *'Country healthy'*. From this the benefits of maintaining culture and connection – healthy people and communities – would flow – *'healthy Country benefits everyone.'* People said that this would involve *'having Aboriginal people on Country, caring for Country;'* *'seeing ceremony again;'* and *'seeing all those connected landscapes....having opportunities to have cultural daysto teach kids, reinvigorate language, and have the ability to practice culture'*. Healing and wellbeing was also consistently raised – *'cultural benefits [from access to land] will help with wellbeing, grow young peoples hope, reset community social parameters.'*

People raised the importance of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and leadership in caring for Country – *'it has to align (with our cultural values) or it won't work, our people won't want to work with you and it won't work.'* Another person said *'Healthy country has Mob on it, with access to land for cultural and employment opportunities working with government to manage the land together.'*

People spoke of the need to restore the land to get it back to being healthy. A view was also put forward that the land should be restored to how it was at the point of first contact – pre colonisation. This view went to the extreme of saying Healthy Country means the removal all things that were not present in 1788, including all buildings, introduced species and other infrastructure.

Conclusion

This report reflects the ideas and aspirations of Aboriginal people attending the RAWs and online workshops, for a new joint management model of national parks in NSW. The NPWS will use the information gathered from these discussions to inform the development of the new model, which once developed, will be released for further consultation with Aboriginal people, and a broader range of stakeholders.

Thirriwirri would like to acknowledge and thank the people who participated in this consultation process, including those travelling significant distances, for the generosity and depth of the information they shared.

Appendix A

National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Aboriginal Joint Management Model

Stage 1: Regional Aboriginal Workshop questions

Facilitator questions

Purpose of this document

This document provides a script of six questions for facilitators to ask during the Regional Aboriginal Workshops as part of Stage 1 consultation on developing a new Aboriginal joint management model for NSW national parks.

The text in italics is only used if more clarity is needed about the questions.

Four themes to guide the development of a new Aboriginal joint management model

In initial discussions with the NPWS Joint Management Custodians Network, four key themes were identified to guide the development of the new joint management model: Management of Country, Economic benefits, Governance and decision making, and Ownership.

Question 1. When thinking about **Management of Country**, how would you like to see national parks and reserves jointly managed on your Country?

- *What does healthy Country look like?*
- *How can Country be managed to be healthy?*

Question 2. When thinking about **Economic benefits**, what economic opportunities from joint management of Country would you like to see for Aboriginal people?

Expanding Aboriginal joint management across the national park estate will deliver economic benefits for Aboriginal communities by increasing Aboriginal employment and creating additional opportunities for Aboriginal businesses.

- *What employment and training opportunities would you like to see from park management?*
- *What opportunities do you see for Aboriginal businesses and joint ventures, such as cultural and nature-based tourism and land management on park?*

Question 3. When thinking about **Governance and decision-making**, how would you like to see decisions made under joint management of national parks and reserves?

Existing governance arrangements for joint management include boards of management and committees. This consultation is seeking advice on what governance arrangements can be developed that are practical and sustainable, and can include a framework for Aboriginal decision-making that supports cultural practices and governance and the delivery of day-to-day management activities.

- *Who could be involved and how?*
- *Who could negotiate on behalf of joint management partners?*

- *How can one joint management agreement cover multiple parks?*

Question 4. When thinking about **Ownership**, what does ownership look like to you under joint management into the future, and why?

Each joint management arrangement will need to identify ownership arrangements and how the title will be held.

- *What do you think the ownership arrangements could be? How come?*
- *How could ownership relate to Native Title?*
- *Should it be a consistent approach or decided on a case-by-case basis?*

Ideas and aspirations for a new Aboriginal joint management model

Question 5. Joint management relies on a successful partnership. From your experience of joint management or partnerships with NSW Government agencies or others, what would a successful partnership to manage Country on national parks and reserves look like?

- *What's the best version of a partnership between Aboriginal owners and NPWS?*

Question 6. Reflecting on what we have talked about, what is your vision for successful joint management of Country on national parks and reserves?

- *If there was a new approach to Aboriginal joint management of national parks, what could it mean for you?*