



Booroongen Djugun
Aboriginal Corporation

'WHAT'S IN A SWAMP?'



Corporate name:	Booroongen Djugun Aboriginal Corporation
Trading as:	Booroongen Djugun College
Address:	337-351 River Street Greenhills via Kempsey
Postal address:	Locked Mail Bag 2 Kempsey NSW 2440
Telephone:	02 65625556
Fax:	02 65627078



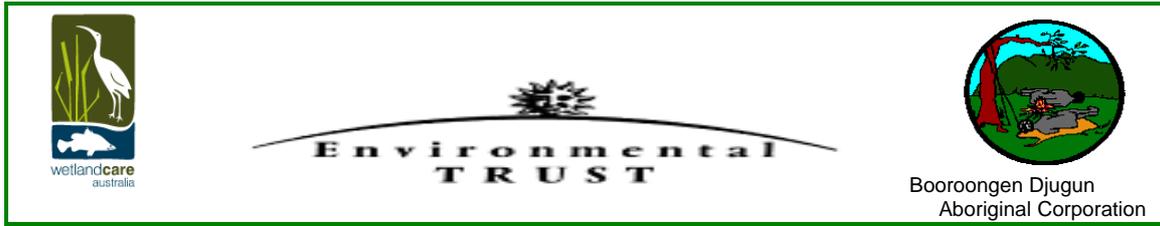
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*“Mother Nature is just about tired of us,
sick and tired of us,
for not taking care of the planet.*

*I know and understand those things,
because I was taught that,
when I was a little girl”.*

Aunty Maggie J Morris
Gumbaynggir / Dunghutti Elder
1922 - 2004





JUSTIFICATION

NSW WETLANDS POLICY

Principle Nine (9)

The adoption of a stewardship ethos and cooperative action between land and water owners and managers, Government authorities, non-Government agencies, and the general community is necessary for effective wetland management.

- 9.1** Community involvement in managing and rehabilitating wetlands will be promoted and supported by providing technical and financial assistance.
- 9.2** Education and awareness of the values and functions of wetlands and their management will be encouraged.
- 9.3** The development of sound scientific understanding of the physical, chemical and biological processes in wetlands will be promoted.



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Background

This is the report for stage one of the “What’s in a Swamp” project.

It is now apparent that what started out as a simple idea to improve Aboriginal youth’s access to an outdoor educational resource will continue to progress well past its original design as the community contributes ideas.

The idea originated when a local Aboriginal woman, who was mentoring two Aboriginal students at a local high school with their educational needs, found that access to physical sites in the Kempsey area, which was absolutely necessary for elements of the geography course, was extremely difficult. Most suitable landforms were in private hands or too far away for economic access.

Mainstream landowners in the Macleay area generally are not cooperative in allowing Aboriginal youth access to “their” property.



Counting Species Macro Invertebrates



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Objectives

Booroongen Djugun Aboriginal Corporation had a small wetland on its 60 acre block of land.

This block is within the urban boundaries of Kempsey and includes an Aboriginal Aged Care Facility (the Elders) and an accredited Aboriginal College (youth) and other services for the Aboriginal community.

The Executive of the Booroongen Djugun College decided to examine the possibilities of an outdoor learning experience being created around the wetland.



Outdoor learning experiences created around the wetland



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The Project Design

The project

- had to fit the learners' needs from a comfort / access / safety perspective.
- it had to reflect the Aboriginality of the organisation and the majority of individuals and groups likely to use the area.
- it had to have an environmental focus. It had to be sustainable environmentally and economically.
- IT HAD TO HAVE OWNERSHIP BY THE COLLEGE ELDERS



Elders having their say!



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Method

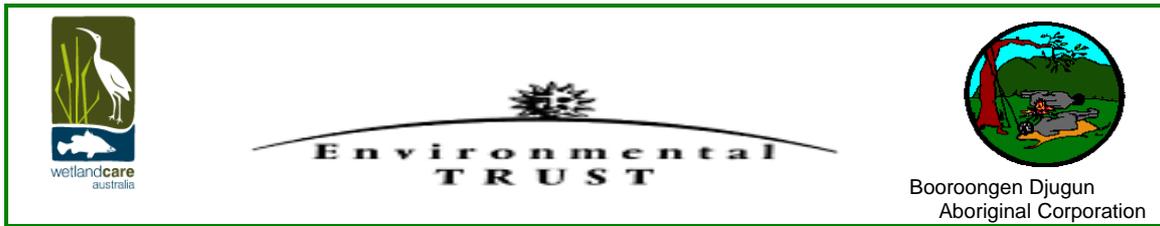
The three main methods used were CONSULTATION, CONSULTATION and CONSULTATION.

By doing this, a priority of needs was established that included:

- shade tables and chairs for students,
- a base line of technical information on the water quality,
- macro invertebrates and plants of the wetland,
- suitable interpretive signs designed and created by local Aboriginals,
- construct a fence around the wetland that would eliminate domestic stock but allow kangaroos and wallabies access
- clear half the enclosed wetland site of feral / noxious plants. Identify and signpost economic / environmental weeds on the remaining half.



Elders inspecting Interpretive Signs



Implementation

Once again consultation and, in particular with the Elders, was the key, the Aboriginal artwork was done by local Aboriginal artists that the Elders recommended.

The fencing was done by individuals that had a connection with the Aged Care Facility.

Technical information was gathered by a University of New England Masters student in conjunction with the Department of Land and Water Conservation.

The economic / environmental weeds were signposted in a way that aids learning not just what they are but what they affect and where they originated from.



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Feral / noxious weeds were eliminated from approximately half the area using students of a Certificate II course in Conservation and Land Management. Two wetland plant species – Quillrods (Phragmites) and Cumbungi (Typha species) were planted by a group of young people (8 – 14 years) to reduce silt input to the wetland.

Scientific data that measured the health of the wetland was gathered and recorded. This work was done by WETLAND CARE AUSTRALIA and enables future comparisons of the wetlands health, which can be done by Aboriginal students.



Planting Cumbungi (Typha Species) to catch silt



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Media

Media has been deliberately limited to one event. There is the potential to encourage unsustainable use of the area before Booroongen Djugun College establishes user friendly / area friendly guidelines.

THE MACLEAY ARGUS FRIDAY DECEMBER 10, 2004

Building a stronger future

Positive lessons at camp
By Angus Green

THINGS are really starting to happen for the young Aboriginal community in Kempsey, often thanks to Booroongen Djugun College in West Kempsey.

On Tuesday more than 20 Aboriginal children aged eight to 15 camped at the swamp behind the college as part of a 'What's in the Swamp' project.

The kids found out how to make damper, learned some hands on skills about water conservation and how to respect wetlands and the bush.

The project came about because Booroongen Djugun College elders wanted a place where the youth of the Aboriginal community would feel comfortable, and where they could exchange positive ideas and knowledge.

The NSW Government's Environmental Trust Fund and the College jointly funded the project, seeing the benefits in maintaining links in an Aboriginal community with a program that empowers them to be more involved in natural resources.

The history of Aboriginal culture and the elders' knowledge of the resources complements and adds value to mainstream methods.

Booroongen Djugun Aboriginal Corporation Chief executive officer Don Morris said the land was significant and Aboriginal owned in the current legal sense.

"We are now more considerate and inclusive in our management style, filling the role

Learning the right way: Dughutti elders and local children enjoying last Tuesday's camp

as custodians of the land," he said.

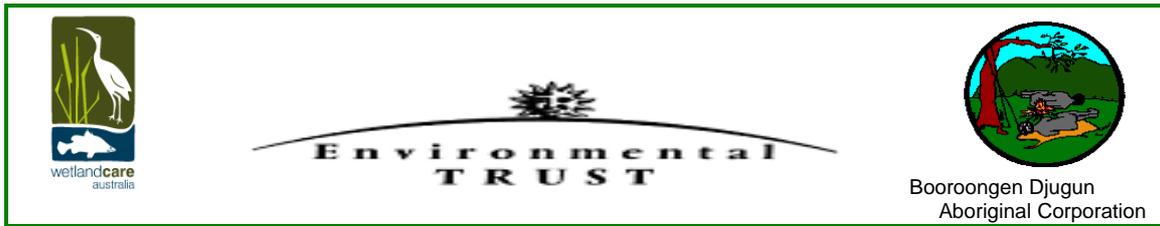
By teaching the kids the same respect for what is theirs, we can get them to have a positive frame of mind about the land from a young age before they are corrupted in the education system by the darker elements of peer pressure."

Don Wade, who facilitated the overnight stay for the young people, said it was a successful way of addressing anti-social behaviour.

"It's great to have someone close to town where the young can go and learn just by being in their surroundings," he said.

Their genuine inclusion in developing future management strategies for the project and having a sense of ownership to the area are a big plus.

There are too many people in this town saying 'something needs to be done to stop the youth committing crimes', and not enough institutions getting up and doing something constructive about it."



Project difficulties

The major issue was that the project took two years, approximately, to complete instead of the one year proposed.

The major strength of the project was the continuance of involvement by the Booroongen Djugun College Elders. They were consulted on what could be considered very minor issues – where the shade tables should go, which direction a sign should point etc.

Once this consultation methodology had commenced it had to continue. As the Elders made a collective decision on these issues, getting them all together was difficult but rewarding.

It was also difficult at times, to coincide Aboriginal youth / Elder attendance with the gathering of scientific information.

This “getting together” was a policy of the project and although difficult and time consuming, added value for those participating and the project.



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The Future

The project area is being used by Aboriginals doing Certificate level courses in Natural Resource Management. The Elders are using it as a quiet place where they can just relax. It is being used by Aboriginal youth to interact with Aboriginal Elders. Mainstream youth and a local Aboriginal Year 1 Primary School have used the area. Aboriginal youth have used it for general recreation.

These activities will be encouraged and enlarged on where practical. "What's in a Swamp" is a catalytic project for Booroongen Djugun College and there is an ongoing process where users and visitors are encouraged to contribute ideas that will continue to add value to the original concept.



Study Tables



Suggestions already include:

1. A safe 1km walking trail radiating out and back to the swamp for day / night use (flora identified with signs / spotlighting fauna).
2. A native vegetation plan for the adjoining 20 acres with domestic stock excluded (stock now excluded following recommendation).
3. A barbecue is built to increase amenity of area (firewood management guidelines).
4. Modest site sympathetic accommodation to allow visitors to experience site / formal learning etc.

All these suggestions have merit and will be considered against the normal criteria of benefits / economic restraints.



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The Unexplained

During the implementation of this project, a senior community Elder passed away. She had all through her life been concerned with Aboriginal culture and heritage, the environment and had a particular passion for a better future for Aboriginal youth. She was strongly supportive of “What’s in a Swamp”.

Within the “What’s in a Swamp” project boundary was a medium sized Camphor Laurel tree that had survived a three year’s-earlier attempt at poisoning and partial ringbarking and was thriving.

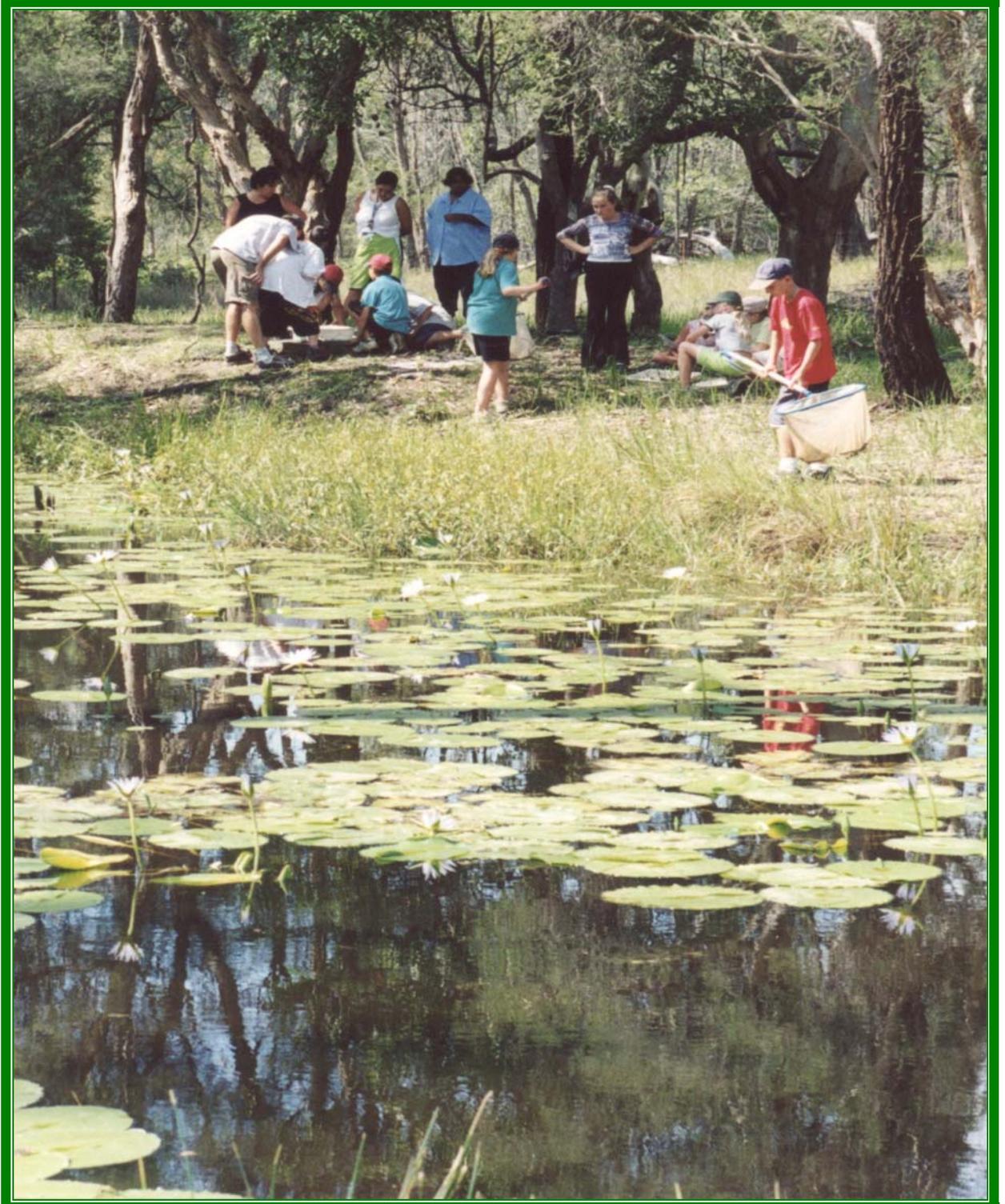
A group of young people planted a fig tree near this Camphor Laurel in her memory with the hope that it would eventually smother and kill the Camphor Laurel. A very short time afterward the Camphor Laurel tree died.



**Planting Fig Tree alongside Camphor Laurel,
the Camphor Laurel died!**



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**What was once a neglected swamp down the back paddock,
has become a valuable community asset...**