

# Dharriwaa Elders Group



The carbeen tree (gaabiin in Yuwaalaraay language).  
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## **RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT BREWARRINA REGIONAL VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN<sup>1</sup>**

### **About the Dharriwaa Elders Group**

The Dharriwaa project is managed by a Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (WAMS) sub-committee comprising of elders and WAMS board members - the Dharriwaa Elders Group. The project was born at its first Management Committee meeting 20 November 2000, and includes:

- Regular culture and language camps for elders and youth
- Establishing a database of local cultural heritage information
- Recording of cultural and language knowledge of the elderly
- Development of projects to assist local cultural and language knowledge and its use
- Exploring community development opportunities led by Dharriwaa Elders

Dharriwaa project

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<sup>1</sup> We recommend that the name be changed to the Brewarrina Native Vegetation Management Plan

## Introduction

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The Brewarrina region<sup>2</sup> retains the highest percentage of native vegetation in the state.

The retention of native vegetation and Aboriginal knowledge of it are two precious resources of NSW. Together these resources provide an opportunity for the Aboriginal population of the Walgett region to “plug back in” to management of country. They also provide opportunities for a region struggling economically that needs to find sustainable land use alternatives to unviable cropping.

This moment in history presents a challenge for NSW. If the people of NSW want to take advantage of the opportunities presented by its surviving native vegetation and Aboriginal cultural heritage then it would reject further development of the Brewarrina Region and implement a Plan that incorporates Aboriginal concerns and participation.

Inadequate provision has been made for concerned Aboriginal people to participate in the development of this plan, or to respond effectively to it.

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- Narran Lake and its system (including the Narran River, associated lakes and other waterways, including its habitat, archaeology, geology etc) must be given the highest conservation value and protected from cropping, grazing and clearing.
- The Brewarrina region’s surviving native vegetation including its dead timber must be retained to offset the loss of native vegetation in the rest of NSW.
- Aboriginal people<sup>3</sup> must be an equal partner in the implementation processes of native vegetation management. Protocols approved by an Aboriginal non-profit agency endorsed by custodians / elders must be applied in the continuing development, implementation and monitoring of native vegetation management and planning procedures
- Aboriginal people will strive to retain ownership of their knowledge. NSW will benefit from the active application of this asset in native vegetation management processes.
- Incentives and cost-sharing for conservation can be achieved by agencies assisting landholders and Aboriginal representatives<sup>4</sup> to make land management agreements.
- Cropping is not an economically viable use of land in the Brewarrina region.
- The Plan should provide economic modelling for alternative land uses and the negative and cumulative impacts of clearing (including the social, economic, biodiversity, habitat, world greenhouse gasses and cultural impacts).
- The Plan must recognise, evaluate and promote the biodiversity value of native vegetation and habitat and ensure that biodiversity is protected and valued. It must also recognise, evaluate and promote the Aboriginal cultural value of native vegetation and habitat and ensure that Aboriginal knowledge of native vegetation is respected, protected and valued
- The Plan is unfair as those who benefit most from this “clearing” Plan are the landholders who are a minority of the population.

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<sup>2</sup> with its neighbouring Walgett region

<sup>3</sup> represented by an Aboriginal non-profit organization endorsed by elders / custodians

<sup>4</sup> as above

- Future scientific research and the data available to the Brewarrina Vegetation Management Committee from government agencies<sup>5</sup> would prove that the Plan is an unfair instrument primarily designed to benefit landholders interested in further development, and is not in the long-term interests of the region or its native vegetation, animals and peoples and their sustainability.
- There must be ongoing scientific research into the implications of the Plan
- The Plan arbitrarily declares clearing levels with no justification. No further clearing of native vegetation can be justified. This Plan does not advocate “No Nett Loss” ! Local concerned Aboriginal communities were not party to deciding these thresholds. Current clearing under exemptions must also be mapped and tracked.
- The true economic and social context of the Plan is unrepresented.
- The Plan’s map “Draft Zoning Map Brewarrina Shire” is shocking for its omissions including the low or nil value given to the many waterways, riparian areas, native vegetation and cultural jewels of the region.
- The substantial Aboriginal knowledge of heritage and landscape still possessed in the region is alluded to in A4.3 but is not incorporated into the intent of the Plan. There is no recognition of cultivated areas of native vegetation and other Aboriginal land and resource management practices of the past or present.
- Threats to native vegetation other than clearing need to be addressed by the Plan. They include competition for resources from exotic species, infection by genetically modified pollen and salinity. The Plan needs a management strategy for identifying plants vulnerable to these and other threats, reducing the threat and regenerating the native vegetation.
- Threats to koala and other native animal habitat need to be addressed by the Plan. The Plan needs a management strategy for identifying vulnerable fauna and their threats, reducing the threats and decreasing vulnerability.
- Landholder goodwill cannot be relied upon in matters of development. The conservation management process must not be voluntary and it must be nurtured and monitored. Management processes and practices, targets and priorities must be regulated. Local Aboriginal people will prove invaluable to assist agencies to perform these tasks. Aboriginal knowledge must be used to determine native vegetation management needs and priorities. Aboriginal skills, experience and presence must be used to manage native vegetation.
- Aboriginal people must be involved in the verification, certification, assessment and monitoring of development applications. This process must also approve any clearing in the case of a public utility, clearing single trees, or “thinning” or “minimal tree clearing for on farm use”. There should be no exemptions. Our position is in response to the poor local track record of landholders in this regard.
- Aboriginal knowledge must be used to determine what significant vegetation communities are present on land included in development applications (verification), and in the decision-making regarding development applications (ie assessment). Aboriginal communities must also make equal contributions in monitoring compliance. In the above implementation processes a non-profit Aboriginal group representing the local Aboriginal communities and endorsed by elders and custodians of the countries relevant to the development must be resourced to be an equal decision-maker with landholders. Currently local and

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<sup>5</sup> eg information from the Northern Floodplains Regional Planning Project, the Western Catchment Management Blueprint, the Catchment Management Board, DLWC and NPWS technical representatives.

regional land councils and other groups with heritage funding are working towards this goal around NSW. The government agencies' roles are to enable these stakeholders to make effective decisions according to law and the best national interest, and to resource information and research from native vegetation, wildlife, cultural heritage and other experts.

- The self-assessment of Aboriginal cultural heritage by the land owner/land user is unacceptable. Landholders are unable to make appropriate native vegetation decisions without Aboriginal involvement / participation so exemptions are unacceptable.
- We recommend that financial incentives be available to encourage the support of the local Aboriginal community to protect, manage and enhance sites of cultural heritage. Landholders will mostly not have the knowledge or ability to manage these areas to the satisfaction of Aboriginal custodians. The local Aboriginal community needs landholder support and agreement to protect, manage and enhance sites of cultural heritage. Protocols for this process are needed that satisfy elders and other responsible agencies. The protocols will include the verification, assessment and monitoring process undertaken by a non-profit Aboriginal organisation endorsed by elders and agencies, and would often include a site search by NPWS and consultant archaeologists.
- There is no mechanism in place to police or enforce regulations regarding Aboriginal cultural heritage. How will we know about breaches and how can we respond to them? An Aboriginal non-profit organization must be involved in management planning, implementation and monitoring processes.
- Agreements need to be made between landholders and Aboriginal custodians regarding protection, management, access and sharing of future costs and income generated from the country in question and indigenous knowledge of it. Targets and performance indicators need to be developed to track the management of these areas.
- Aboriginal people will always retain copyright for their knowledge. Benefits for landholders and Aboriginal individuals contributing management knowledge and other items can be negotiated, according to agreements negotiated by a non-profit Aboriginal community organisation endorsed by elders and custodians and assisted by government agencies. Together landholders and Aboriginal people can develop an exciting future for the Walgett region.
- The Brewarrina Regional Vegetation Committee (RNVC) should be renamed the Brewarrina Regional Native Vegetation Committee (RNVC)
- The Brewarrina Regional Native Vegetation Committee (RNVC) should have equal participation from Aboriginal representatives nominated by non-profit Aboriginal organization endorsed by elder/custodians. As well as these individuals, seats on the RNVC must be set aside for representatives from the Local Aboriginal Land Council and other local concerned Aboriginal organizations. Councillors from the ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council must also have seats on this committee.
- Aboriginal people's interests must be incorporated effectively into native vegetation planning and management and currently they are not.