



# CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY STRATEGY

383 Kent Street



## Introduction

The Connecting with Country Strategy has been written to inform Country centred design at the 383 Kent Street redevelopment.

This document introduces how we understand Country, explains how we Acknowledge and Connect to Country and provides an overview of the site from First Nations, geological and botanical perspectives.

It then provides an assessment framework for the development of Country centred design at the site that is linked to strategic goals in the GANSW *Connecting with Country framework* and a site specific strategic goal. Each strategic goal has related indicators for success specific to this project that will be used to assess the extent to which Country has informed design.

We look forward to seeing Country and culture embedded into the future built environment to create a place for listening, learning and celebrating the world's oldest living culture.

We aim to empower the voices of Traditional Custodians and guide the creation of a space within the Metropolitan area of Sydney that allows both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to develop a further sense of Connection to Country.





## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Gadi Country, the Cultural Landscape that we are working upon. We acknowledge the custodianship of its people and the privilege and responsibility to Connect with Country.

We acknowledge all First Nations people and their ongoing connection to culture, lands and waters and their valuable contribution to the community. We recognise, acknowledge, and extend our respect to many others who have custodial obligations for Country and have been connected to Sydney for many generations, including their Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the Sydney area as an ancient cultural landscape that shifted and changed over time. The unique elements of Gadi Country, with freshwater streams meeting a deep, sheltered harbour environment, connect the ocean to the inland freshwater areas through an extensive waterway system, providing a place of diversity and connectivity.

The 383 Kent Street redevelopment provides an opportunity to acknowledge Country, including all elements of Country, the salt and freshwater environments and the connection to the wider cultural context of the Sydney area.

Often words of acknowledgment are spoken or given to Country, as we have above. But for you to know and introduce yourself to Country you must sense and feel its presence, hear its stories, the sounds, the colours, the smells and her spirit.

It is not the words as ritual, but the feeling, the thought that connects us to her and each other, reminding us of our custodial responsibility.



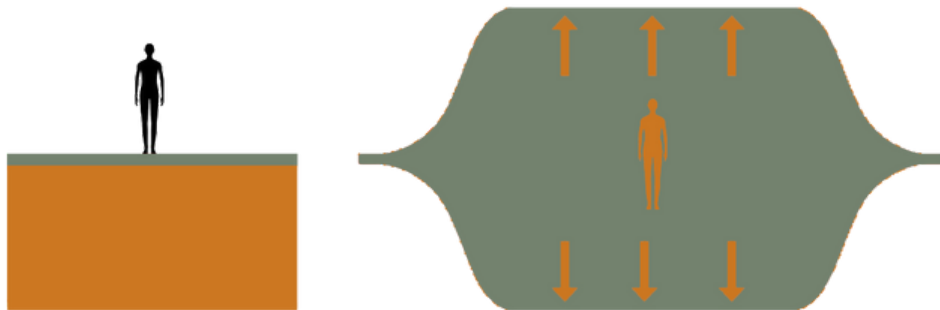
## What is Country?

Country is all encompassing. Everywhere we go, we are within the connected system of Country. Everything we do impacts everything around us, and everything that happens around us, influences us. Country is often misunderstood as just the ground we stand on, but it's so much more. It can be thought of as a reciprocal series of interconnected elements that reaches deep into the earth, and all the way into the sky.

Our knowledge is stored within the landscape and nurtured through an oral tradition, through dance, stories, song, and art, carefully designed and maintained. The natural cycles of Country inform our lore, telling us when it is the right time to engage with certain species and how to look after Country. In return, Country looks after us, providing refuge, comfort and wellbeing, both physically and mentally.

Country is a responsibility, not a right and it is there for all who respect and cherish her.

Today we may not always be able to see Country instantly, but if we call to her, we can always sense her and again feel her embrace.



## Connecting with Country

To connect with Country is to work within the reciprocal system of Country and to develop a further understanding and appreciation of the cultural knowledges and practices stored within. This encourages physical and emotional wellbeing for people and healthy Country.

Being connected to Country transcends language and culture. It is an interlaced system of action, emotion and experience. It highlights the many values that are similar across the cultures of our contemporary communities. Everyone can feel connected to Country.

Connecting to Country supports a socially inclusive, resilient, and innovative community that cherishes the wisdom and kinship of all cultures, captured through the lens of custodianship, creating a wellbeing for all.



## Country at 383 Kent Street

### First Nations Context

The 383 Kent Street site is on a sandstone rise, with the Tank Stream valley catchment to the east and the Tumbalong (Darling Harbour / Barangaroo) shoreline to the west. The site would have been very close to the 1788 shoreline, as much of the land west from about Sussex Street is reclaimed land.



Figure 1: Tank Stream valley catchment area within Sydney CBD area. The dotted black line is the 1788 shoreline and the solid black line is the current shore line. The catchment area for the Tank Stream, the marsh at the head of the Stream, the Tank Stream itself (centre) are shown in blue. The approximate site location is at the red rectangle (Source: Yerrabingin)

Pre colonisation the shoreline was close to the current Sussex Street, with *Figure 2* showing a semi-circular rise or promontory along the eastern coastline of Darling Harbour close to 383 Kent Street. This would have been a place to view across the water to Pirrama (Pyrmont) and beyond to Wanne Country (from Darling Harbour along the western harbour shore towards Parramatta) as well as back eastwards into the Tank Stream valley in Cadi Country.

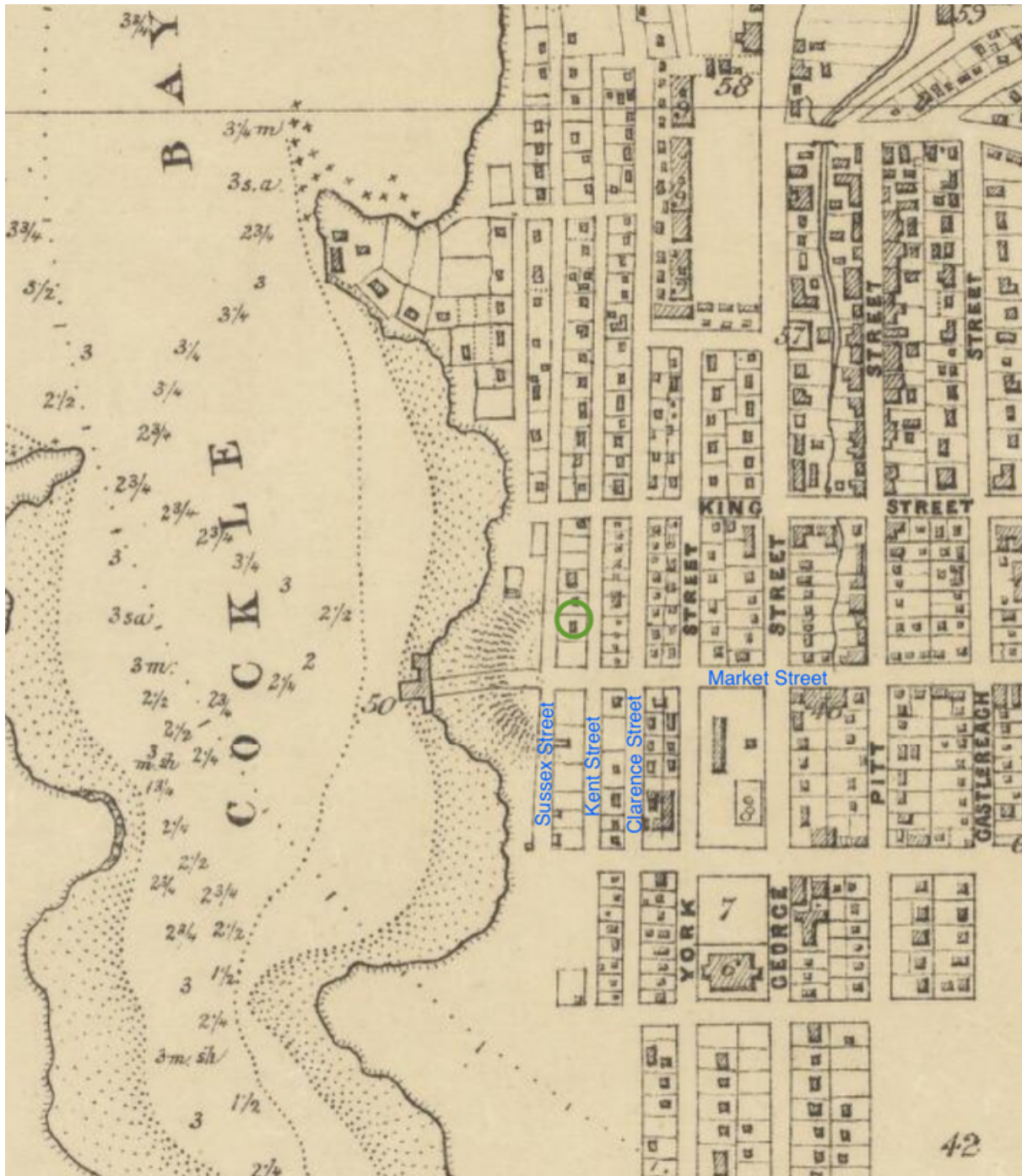


Figure 2 Approximate site location at green circle. The Tank Stream can be seen, starting at Market Street, running between George and Pitt Streets. Source: Excerpt from Plan of the town and suburbs of Sydney, August, 1822, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-229911701/view>, with Yerrabingin additions

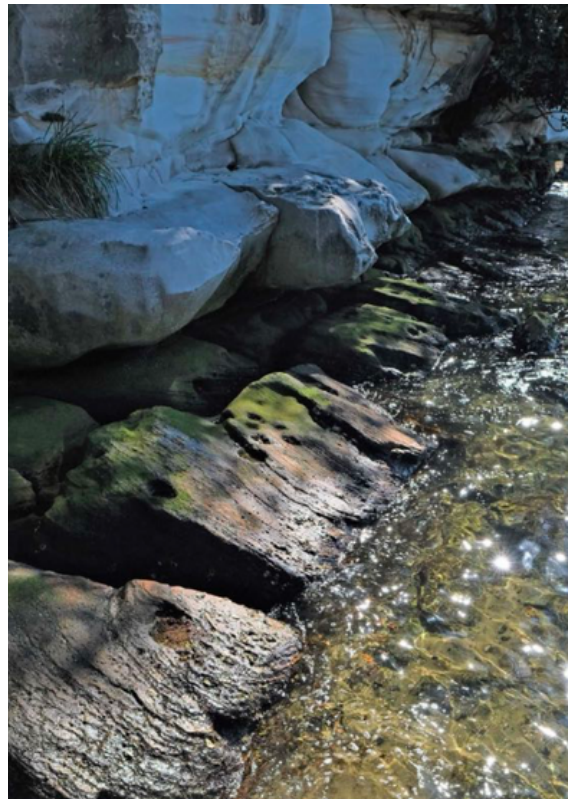
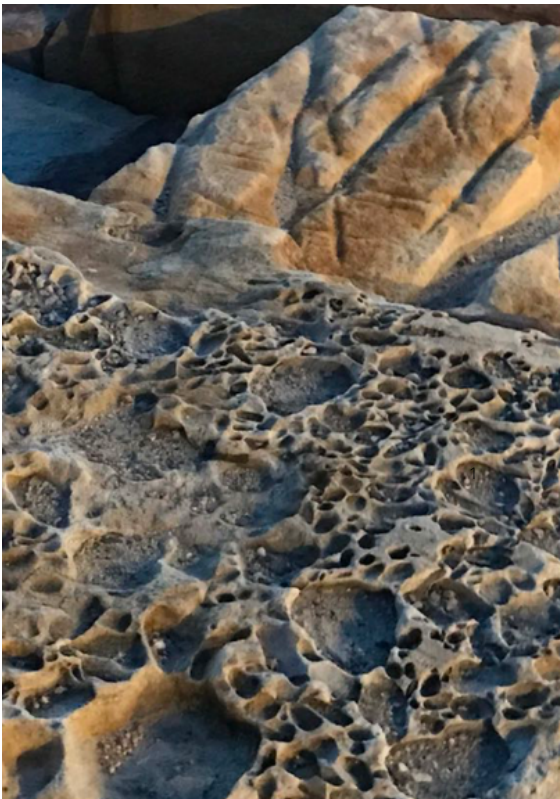


## **Geological Context**

The Sydney Harbour area was created by changing water levels over thousands of years, with a freshwater stream, now known as the Tank Stream, finding its way from wetlands in eastern Sydney down through a valley that dipped between higher sandstone ridge areas at Macquarie and George Streets.

The shoreline changed over thousands of years as sea levels rose and fell, settling to the current level about 6000 years ago. The site is approximately in the area that would have been between the Tank Stream valley and the coastline of Tumbalong, sitting on a sandstone rise between fresh and saltwater environments. This was an alternatively watery and dry place, with salt water and fresh water changing places over thousands of years. The water weathered sandstone rock found in Gadi Country is a reminder of this history.

Post colonisation, the coastline and landscape has been dramatically altered, obscuring much of the natural landscape. The history of this Country can be seen in the weathering of sandstone rock and the harbour waters.





## **Botanical Context**

The 383 Kent Street site sits between the saltwater environment of the Eastern shore of Tumbalong and the freshwater environment of the Tank Stream valley catchment.

### **Freshwater Environment**

Recent archaeological research within the Tank Stream valley catchment at 200 George Street found that the dominant vegetation type would have been casuarina swamp forest (*Allocasuarina/Casuarina*) in the estuary of the Tank Stream or stands growing along the lower reaches of the stream, with ground fern (*Calochlaena dubia*) dominating the damp sites. Salt tolerant Swamp-oak (*Casuarina glauca*) and River-oak (*C. Cunninghamiana*) would have lined the banks of permanent freshwater streams. The sandstone ridges in Gadi Country would have been home to Angophora and Banksia.

### **Saltwater Environment**

The environment to the west of the site is a saltwater environment, at the shore of Tumbalong. Archaeological research about 500 meters southwest of the site, at Darling Walk Midden, which was on the 1788 shoreline found a midden with Sydney cockle shells, Sydney rock oysters and mud whelks within an area of mudflats. Amongst the shells were ten Aboriginal stone artefacts made of several types of stone that were the remains of a campsite. This research tells us that Gadigal people sat by the bay, cooking and eating shellfish collected from the mudflats of Tumbalong.



## Assessment Framework

This section outlines the framework for assessing Country focused design at 383 Kent Street.

This Strategy has been informed by the GANSW *Designing with Country discussion paper* and the GANSW *Draft Connecting with Country framework*. The GANSW *Designing with Country discussion paper* introduces the importance of engagement with Aboriginal people and organisations in the design process to achieve the best design outcomes. It explores good design in Australia as including the Aboriginal worldview of Country.

The *Draft Connecting with Country framework* guides how Aboriginal knowledge can be used in the design and planning of places. GANSW worked with Aboriginal consultants, organisations and LALCs and local and state government to draft the framework. The framework emphasises that good design in Australia will be informed by the Aboriginal concept of Country. Good design prioritise Aboriginal ways of knowing and connecting to Country and require co-design of projects with Aboriginal people.

This CwC Strategy has been informed by the GANSW documents. It has been developed to support the creation of a culturally appropriate and meaningful design in the public sphere. It aims to outline what is involved in Acknowledging Country in design and how consideration of the interconnecting nature of Country can be incorporated into design at this site to ensure good outcomes for the health of Country and people.

The Strategy has drawn on the strategic goals of the GANSW *Connecting with Country framework* and has developed a further strategic goal about Acknowledgement of Country to ensure that the design considers the local context and relationships. The first goal listed below is developed specifically for this project, and the remaining goals are from the GANSW *Connecting with Country framework*.



## Indicators for Success

Related to the strategic goals of the GANSW *Connecting with Country Framework* are the Preliminary Indicators for Success. The table below includes the Strategic Goals and related indicators that will help inform the creation of a space that works with and acknowledges Country. The indicators in italics are the high-level indicators from the *Connecting with Country Framework* and the indicators below are site specific indicators developed to assess Country focused design in this project.

Strategic Goals	Preliminary Indicators for Success	Y/N
<p>1. Country is acknowledged by exploring the elements of Country (Water, Wind, Sky, Forest, and Deep Country) and the interconnected nature of these elements. The design is developed in response to the unique expression of Country at the site.</p>	<p><i>Built form and landscape are influenced by/reflect Country at the site.</i></p> <p><i>The design has considered the interconnected nature of all of the elements of Country.</i></p> <p>Site Specific:</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference the natural geology and topography of the site.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the movement of wind throughout the site.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a physical connection to sky on site.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference the endemic vegetation of the landscape.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the movement of people and animals across the site.</li> </ul>	
<p>2. Impacts of natural events such as fire, drought, and flooding, exacerbated by unsustainable land- and water-use practices, will be reduced.</p>	<p><i>Increased programs to monitor the health of Country (with a view to measuring health of Country and community in the future)</i></p> <p>Site Specific:</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrate the natural movement of water across the site.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the impacts of natural events such as fire, drought, and flooding on the site.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate sustainable land- and water-use practices on the site.</li> <li>• Incorporate naturally sourced and sustainable materials.</li> </ul>	



<p>3. Aboriginal cultural knowledge will be valued and respected. Aboriginal knowledge-holders will co-lead design and development of all NSW infrastructure projects.</p>	<p><i>Improved cultural competency (across teams and individuals within agencies)</i></p> <p>Site Specific:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-design with Aboriginal community members from the area.</li> <li>• Incorporate significant local Aboriginal stories and narratives into the design.</li> <li>• Incorporate references to local Aboriginal cultural knowledges and practices into the design to educate users of the space about Aboriginal life and culture on site.</li> </ul>	
<p>4. Aboriginal people will have access to their homelands so they can continue their responsibility to care for Country and protect sensitive sites.</p>	<p><i>Demonstrated commitment by client agencies to build direct relationships with relevant Aboriginal communities on Country</i></p> <p><i>Increased Aboriginal participation in lead consultant teams as well as in project co-design, decision-making, and governance</i></p> <p><i>Increased awareness of, and protection for, cultural values and Aboriginal knowledge (Aboriginal culture and heritage as well as intellectual property)</i></p> <p><i>Demonstrated co-design of engagement processes with community on Country</i></p> <p>Site Specific:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a culturally safe space for local Aboriginal people to gather on site.</li> <li>• Consider and incorporate future employment and business opportunities for local Aboriginal people.</li> <li>• Respect the local Aboriginal cultural and land uses of the site.</li> </ul>	