An Introduction to the Aboriginal peoples associated with Wog Wog

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1. About this Document

This document is a short introduction to the original residents and owners of southeastern New South Wales (NSW), the region in which the Wog-Wog habitat fragmentation experiment is located. As the author, I did my best to thoroughly research these people and their history, but I have found few sources that provide this information. Therefore, this document should not be considered a conclusive or authoritative report on the subject, but instead a first attempt at understanding a complicated history, which can be further developed over time to eventually inform some manner of reconciliation and reciprocity. In addition to information, I also provide at the end of the document an annotated bibliography of resources I found most informative, as well as a list of aboriginal-led organizations I discovered which may be receptive to future efforts of reciprocity and reconciliation.

1. The Aboriginal Peoples in and around Wog-wog

Before European settlement the area that would encompass New South Wales hosted at least 70 aboriginal languages and dialects. Each language group had several clans that were each linked to certain areas of land. Groups of people would travel through the region for a variety of reasons, including resource sharing, ceremony, and warfare.

There are three groups of people that resided in or near Wog-wog; the Ngarigo, the Bidhawal, and the Yuin. Of the three, I have only been able to find specific information on the Yuin people, and it is still unclear to me whether the other two groups are totally distinct from the Yuin, or if they are subgroups of the larger Yuin language group.

1. Aboriginal History in Southeast New South Wales Following Colonization

The settlement of Australia by Europeans began in 1788 when the English established a settlement at Port Jackson (now Sydney harbor), 200-300 miles north of Wog-wog. Though I could not find details on the initial relationship between aboriginal peoples and white settlers in southeastern NSW, from what I gathered it seemed to follow a pattern observed in other parts of the country. The relationship would begin friendly, but would descend into open conflict as whites took up more and more land and resources. This would result in a decrease of the aboriginal population, and the survivors being dependent on the whites for basic survival needs.

Initially, aboriginals in southeast NSW fed explorers and early settlers, provided information on the landscape, and guided them to resources. This was done at times out of kindness, and at other times as part of an economic exchange. As European pastoralism started taking up more of the landscape however, aboriginal groups resisted using guerilla warfare tactics such as ambushing individuals and small groups, attacking cattle and isolated settlements, and burning crops and buildings. White settlers, especially those further from centers of government, would often respond violently through random shootings or massacres of men, women, and children. On top of this, European diseases, transmitted by the white settlers as well as by whaling and sealing vessels that sailed into the area beforehand, likely impacted the local aboriginal population as well.

The disassociation of aboriginals from their land became more extensive when the discovery of gold in the Snowy Mountains at the end of the 1850’s caused a gold rush in southern NSW. The resulting population boom led to the development of roads, coach services, and roadside inns, and higher demand for agricultural products. Greater white population and development also increased the prevalence of enclosed, small-scale land plots, limiting the amount of land aboriginal peoples could live on.

This led to aboriginals in southeast NSW becoming more actively involved in the new economic system, working in fishing, timber, agriculture, domestic labor, and in some instances as self-employed farmers and contractors. Greater development by whites may have also spurred the creation of aboriginal reserves, government-sanctioned settlements for aboriginal peoples that started appearing in the region in the 1860’s. Many of these reserves were short lived and occupied by individual families (or even unoccupied), raising questions about their organization and effectiveness that I was unable to answer.

The Aborigines Protection Board was established in 1883 by NSW, initially to oversee the distribution of necessary goods to destitute aboriginals and later to manage and form aboriginal reserves. In 1909 the Aborigines Protection Act reconstituted the organization, giving it power over where aboriginal people lived, how they handled their personal finances, and how they raised their children. Though there was less oversight and surveillance further from aboriginal preserves, it was more difficult for aboriginal children to attend school in other areas due to opposition by white parents. This drove many aboriginal parents to reside in or around Wallaga Lake station, the only aboriginal reserve in southeast NSW with a school.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout Australia were given full citizenship rights in 1967 as the result of a referendum. This allowed aboriginals to be counted as part of the population, and gave the federal government power, along with state governments, to legislate for aboriginals. In 1972 the federal government proclaimed a policy of self-determination for aboriginals, in which aboriginals were to decide the pace and nature of their future development. This led to the establishment of the New South Wales land trust in 1974, which was given freehold title to former reserves, and allowed to purchase property and develop or mine any of its lands. New South Wales also passed the aboriginal land rights act in 1983, which recognized that NSW was owned and occupied by aboriginal people, and acknowledged the importance of land in their culture. It also created a system of land councils at the state, regional, and local levels which received title to land held by the land trust.

1. Annotated Bibliography

Eurobodalla Shire Council. *Tracing events of the Dhurga speaking people* [Brochure]. <https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/138906/Dhurga-Timeline-Brochure.pdf>

This brochure provides a concise, detailed timeline of indigenous history in the southern coast of NSW, from prehistory to the present day.

Goulding, M., & Waters, K. (2005). *Eurobodalla aboriginal cultural heritage study; South coast New South Wales*. Goulding heritage consulting pty ltd. <https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/138881/Aboriginal-Heritage-Study-Stage-1.pdf>

This in-depth report on the aboriginal peoples in and around Eurobodalla shire council provides a wealth of information on aboriginal history and culture. Though it focuses on the Eurobodalla area, north of Wog-wog, the first-hand accounts and information it provides ranges throughout the southern coast of NSW.

Reading 1: Aboriginal people of NSW. (2020, June). In *Working with indigenous Australians*. <https://www.workingwithindigenousaustralians.info/content/Resources_2_Readings_1.html>

This webpage provides a concise description of aboriginal history in NSW from prehistory to the present day.

Reynolds, A.J., & Georgeson, T. (2020, May 27). After the fire: a journey through Yuin country. *Atmos*. https://atmos.earth/australia-wildfire-indigenous-fire-practices-history/

Though this article did not inform the document directly, it illustrates the relationship local aborigines have with the land and with wildfire. I believe it will be good background reading for future reconciliation efforts.

1. Relevant Aboriginal organizations

**New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council:** The state’s peak representative body in Aboriginal affairs, and the largest member based aboriginal organization in the state. It’s goal is to protect the interests and further the aspiration of the aboriginal community in the state. The organization is made up of local councils throughout the state, I believe the two closest to Wog-wog are Eden and Bega.

**Firesticks:** An indigenous, Australian based non-profit with the goal of empowering indigenous communities to protect and enhance their land and wellbeing through reviving cultural knowledge practices. They seem to place a particular emphasis on cultural fire practices.