


GAYINI HEALTHY COUNTRY PLAN





WATER HAS ITS OWN IDENTITY, IT IS ITS OWN LIVING BEING MAKING ITS OWN PATH THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE, UTILISING THE VEINS OF MOTHER EARTH TO REPLENISH AND MOVE ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE.

RENE WOODS



Photo @ Annette Ruzicka

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BACKGROUND

Gayini is 85,000 hectares of important, internationally significant Murrumbidgee floodplain in southern NSW. In May 2018, Nari Nari Tribal Council, The Nature Conservancy, Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group and the Centre For Ecosystem Science at University of NSW were successful in a competitive expression-of-interest process run by the NSW government for the future management of Gayini. In July 2018, management of the property was transferred to Nari Nari Tribal Council. On 20 December 2019, ownership of Gayini was transferred to Nari Nari Tribal Council.

The Land and Water Management Plan prepared by the NSW Government in 2018 set the aspiration that future management of the property would focus on three areas of equal importance:

- **Environmental protection** - Important natural habitats on the property including extensive wetlands of lignum, river red gum forests, lakes and floodplains will be enhanced and protected. This includes habitats for threatened animals and plants like the Australasian bittern, Australian painted-snipe, southern bell frog and Mossgiel daisy.
- **Indigenous engagement and participation** - Opportunities for Indigenous employment, improved health, education and reconnection to country will be provided.
- **Sustainable development** - A diversified range of commercial activities that will boost the local economy and provide ongoing employment in the region around Hay and Balranald, NSW. Proceeds of the commercial activities will be reinvested into environmental works.

Gayini represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a new, sustainably managed and financed conservation property for the benefit of people and nature.

Gayini represents an exciting new and unique model of management, with Traditional Owners at the centre, driving adaptive management supported by evidence and informed by their knowledge, experience and those of their government and non-government partners all with shared values and a commitment to deliver effective long-term management to achieve a flourishing natural and cultural landscape, focused on the three pillars of environment, culture and economics.

Gayini is a place where current and future generations will benefit from the integration and sharing of all forms of knowledge through co-learning from traditional ecological knowledge, traditional aboriginal knowledge, western science, landholder/local/community which are all recognised and respected.

Gayini is shaped by water. Environmental and cultural flows are essential for maintaining and restoring the Gayini environment and livelihoods of its people, with benefits for downstream and upstream communities. We depend on availability of adequate water to sustain environmental, cultural and socio-economic values and rely on significant infrastructure to allow maintenance of refuges and connectivity, while also delivering ecosystem services, including improved water quality, improved native plant, fish, frog and waterbird communities. Our management is also essential to maintenance of downstream ecological communities within the connected system, such as those in Yanga National Park, and downstream on the Murrumbidgee River.

The outstanding environmental and cultural values of the Gayini and its connected wetland, river, groundwater and dryland ecosystems with those in Yanga National Park and Great Cumbung wetlands represent an area of regional, national and international significance, making it a potential candidate for listing as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Gayini Healthy Country Plan

It is intended that the Gayini Healthy Country Plan maintains the goals that guided the development of the Land and Water Management Plan (LWMP) and provides a structure for ongoing adaptive management.

This document provides an overview of the Gayini Healthy Country Plan. This document has been extracted from the Gayini plan documented in Miradi database form. Significant additional content is available in the Miradi format based on discussions and workshops Feb-May 2019 with First Nations stakeholders, agency stakeholders and members of the project team and from a workshop held in Hay 28-29 November 2020

Review of the plan will be designed to be inclusive, encourage participation and knowledge exchange and to encourage and assist participants to develop understanding and knowledge about the plan, the key activities underway and the effectiveness of these activities.





Photo @ Annette Ruzicka



VISION AND SCOPE

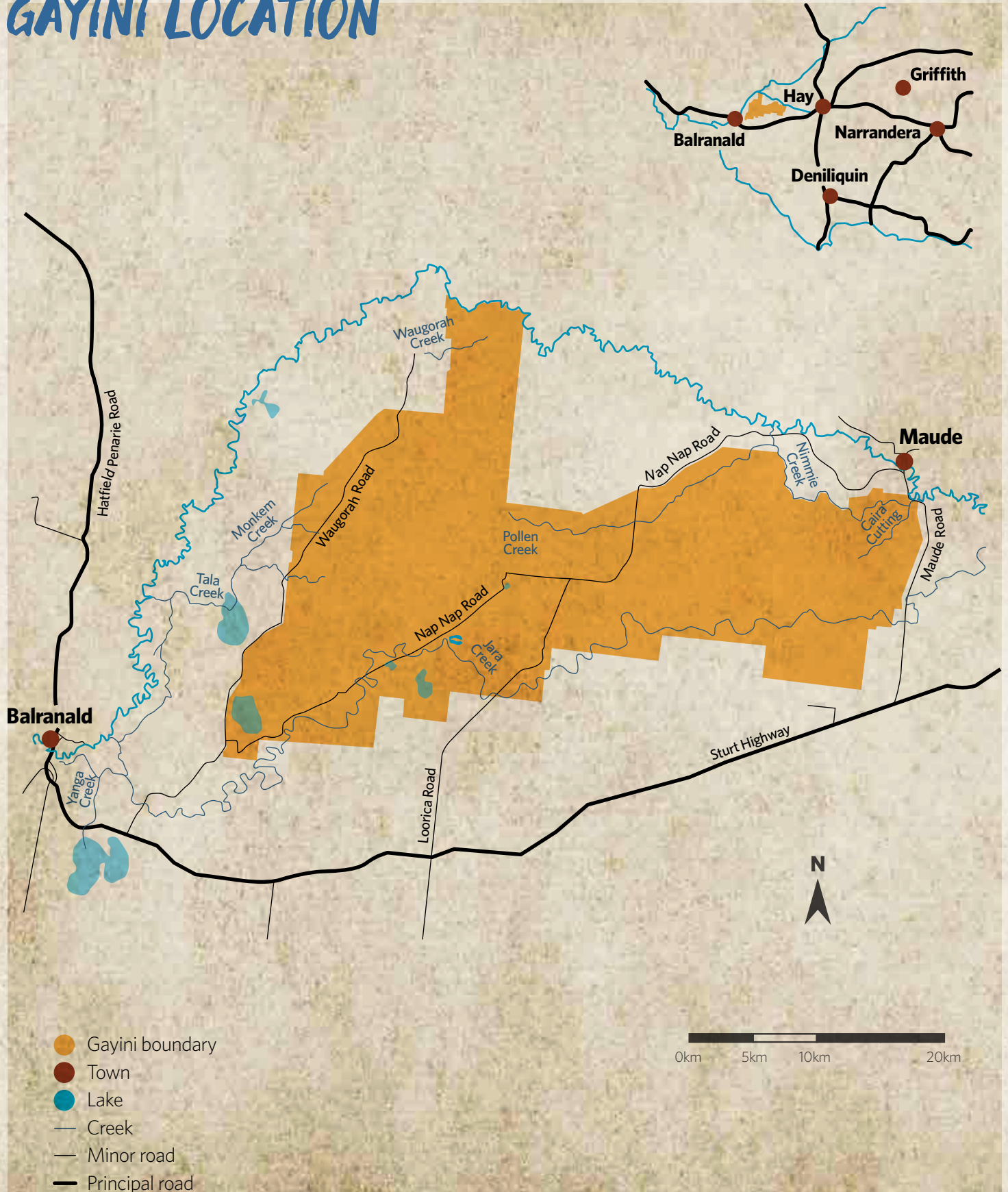
Gayini means water. Gayini is a place of water, a cultural landscape of large wetlands layered with the footprints of our old people on country.

Today we leave our own footprints across Nari country from the southern side of the Lachlan River at Booligal downstream to Balranald up the Murrumbidgee to Hay in the east and south to Boobooban and Dry Lake. At Gayini songlines will be re-established and cultural and natural values will be sustained and enhanced for future generations, improving people's health and wellbeing. We will establish Gayini as a core part of the Nari Nari Tribal Lands as a place of pride for First Nations People.

Vision

Nature at Gayini thrives, and the traditional peoples of Gayini heal its land and waters. In return Gayini heals its people, so they can enjoy culturally, socially and economically sustainable and fulfilling lives.

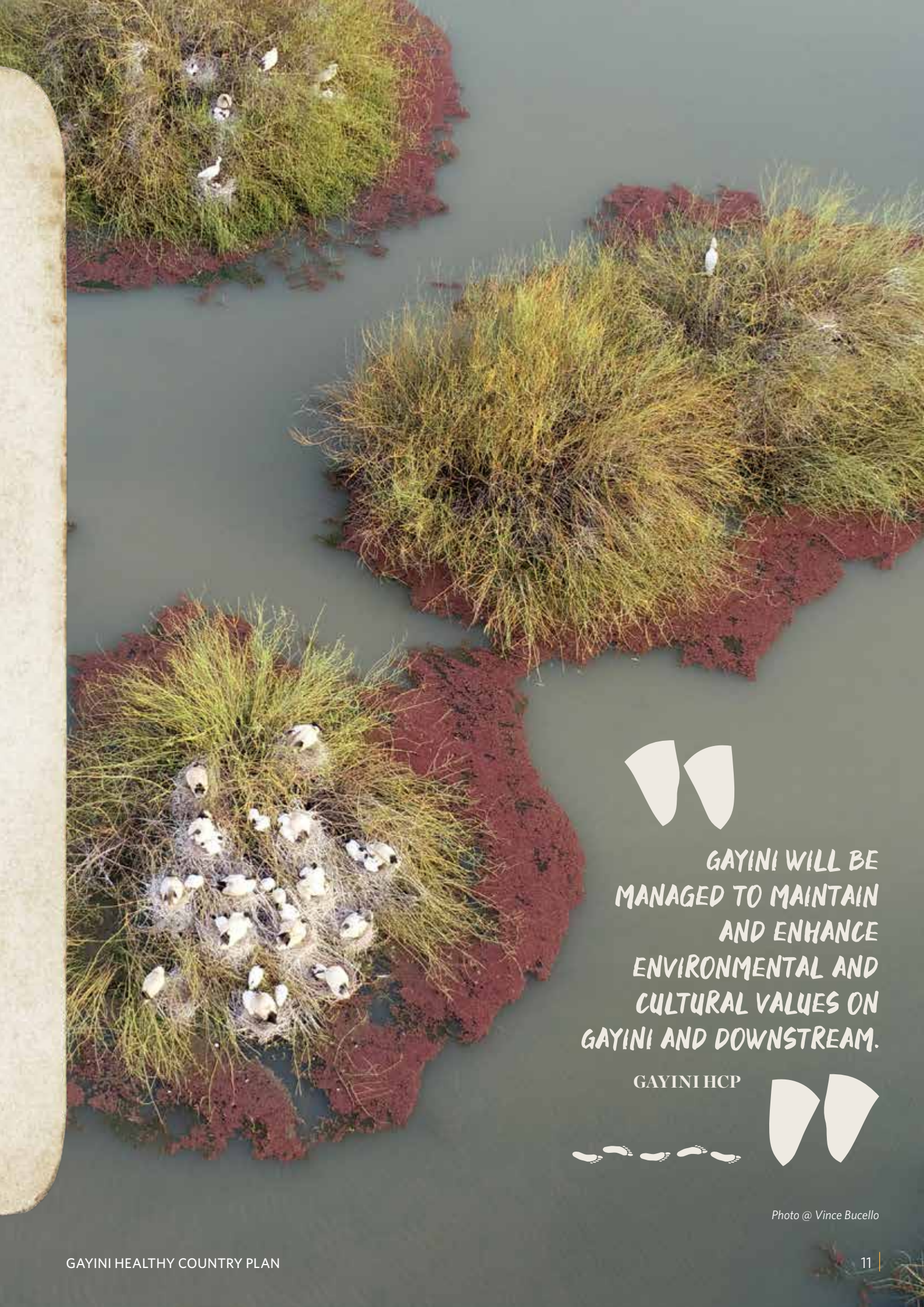
GAYINI LOCATION



- Gayini boundary
- Town
- Lake
- Creek
- Minor road
- Principal road

0km 5km 10km 20km





**GAYINI WILL BE
MANAGED TO MAINTAIN
AND ENHANCE
ENVIRONMENTAL AND
CULTURAL VALUES ON
GAYINI AND DOWNSTREAM.**

GAYINI HCP



Photo @ Vince Bucello

FOCUS OF THE PLAN

WHAT WE CARE ABOUT

The plan identifies important things or 'targets' to look after in order to make our vision a reality. The diagram on page 14 outlines the key areas of focus for this plan: cultural, environmental and socio economic. In order to plan our management, we have grouped things together so we can identify our priorities. In doing so we do not forget that they are interconnected. Our management will seek to implement activities that bring multiple cultural, environmental and socioeconomic benefits.



CONNECTION TO COUNTRY IS PART OF OUR IDENTITY, OUR CONNECTION TO MOTHER EARTH AROUND OUR NATION AREA. IT IS NOT JUST THE LAND AND WATERS, IT'S THE BIRDS, ANIMALS, THE SKY, THE LIVING AND BREATHING OF COUNTRY EVERY DAY THAT DRAWS US BACK TO COUNTRY. IT IS HOME, WHEREVER WE ARE IN THE WORLD.

RENE WOODS





Photo @ Annette Ruzicka

KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

G Good

F Fair

P Poor

F Lore and Culture

F Tangible Cultural Heritage

Gayini - Water dependent systems

G Red Gum country

P Native Fish

F Black Box Country

F Southern Bell Frog

F Lignum Country

G Waterbirds

F Bush Medicine

F Food Plants

Dryland

G Native Shrubs and Saltbush Country

F Red Soil Country

F Native Wildlife and Totem Animals

Health and Wellbeing

Economic Opportunity

Gayini Culture

The opportunity to reconnect with culture is fundamental to the Gayini Vision. Elements of culture we will specifically focus on include Lore and Culture, Tangible Cultural Heritage, Bush Medicine, Food Plants, Native Wildlife & Totem Animals.

Lore and Culture

Lore and Culture is experienced and enhanced through access to country and living culture. It is fundamental to culture that there is the opportunity for First Nations people to have ownership, and involvement in decision making for country. Being on country allows knowledge transfer across the community and provides opportunities for people to practice Men's business and Women's business. Knowledge of language and use of language on country is central to identity. Due to the lack of historical access Lore and Culture was assessed to be in fair health.

Key indicators of health:

- The number of people on country
- How elders feel, how young people feel
- The extent language has been documented
- The number of people learning language

Tangible Cultural Heritage

Gayini is a rich cultural landscape where over 1,100 cultural heritage artefacts including burials, mounds, hearths, modified tress including ring trees and stone artefacts show our past elders footprint across the landscape. These sites and mounds across Gayini allow us to again follow our elders footprints and to navigate the older flooded ways that were there in fast floods thousands of years ago. First Nations connection to Gayini and the Lowbidgee Floodplain dates back around 50,000 years. Multiple historical and ongoing archaeological assessments and surveys and documented significant Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, some of which have been carbon dated and range in age up to 49,300 years old. It is expected that more sites will be found as surveys continue. We will continue to protect maintain and enhance the Culture and Heritage on Gayini and ensure that this knowledge is passed on to the next generation. Tangible Cultural Heritage was assessed to be in fair health.

Key indicators of health:

- The proportion of sites protected (e.g .with ground cover)
- How elders feel

Bush Medicine, Food Plants, Native Wildlife & Totem Animals

There are many important bush medicines on Gayini, for example old man weed, saltbush and emu bush. Traditional foods include nardoo, pigface, native grasses, acacia, yams, quandongs. Culturally important native wildlife includes the bush stone-curlew, black swan, painted snipe, black cockatoos, red kangaroo, grey kangaroo, emu, crayfish, mussels and turtles. The current health of these plants and animals was assessed as fair.

Key indicators of health:

- the distribution and abundance of important species.

Gayini Water Dependent Systems

Water is key to life on Gayini and is the key determinant of health for many groups of plants and animals. In order to look after all the plants and animals we have assigned them to the following groups so we can keep track of their health.

Red Gum Country

Red gum country includes plants and animals in river and creek channels, lagoons and swamps and provides a home for important animals including crayfish, turtles, mussels and winter active frogs. Scar trees are found in this country. Water and fire are important to keep this country healthy. Although there has been some clearing of trees and grazing in the past currently red gum country is in good health.

Key indicators of health:

- Extent of red gum vegetation community
- Condition of red gum vegetation community
- Flooding regime
- Fire regime
- Presence of characteristic animals

Black Box Country

Black Box Country occurs along channels and creeks. This country includes all the plants and animals that live with black box especially hollow dependent animals. Currently Black Box Country is rated as in fair health overall due largely to the loss in its extent over time with changed water regimes. The condition of the remaining black box vegetation is considered good.

Key indicators of health:

- Extent of black box vegetation community
- Condition of black box vegetation community
- Flooding regime

Lignum Country

Lignum Country includes all the plants and animals that live with lignum including river cooba. Lignum Country has been extensively impacted by previous farming operations with significant removal of vegetation and changes to how water regimes work. Its overall health is ranked as Fair. Where lignum vegetation still exists it is in good condition and there is significant potential for recovery with changed management practices and reinstatement of more natural watering regimes.

Key indicators of health:

- Extent of lignum vegetation community
- Condition of lignum vegetation community
- Flooding regime

Native Fish

Native fish at Gayini include the threatened silver perch and Murray cod which are likely to occur in the Murrumbidgee River and larger creek systems. Small bodied fish such as the Murray hardyhead, southern pygmy perch, southern purple-spotted gudgeon and olive perchlet which are floodplain users are largely missing. Reductions in the frequency and duration of small-medium flow events prevent regular connections between the river and floodplains and are the major problem for these smaller fish. The overall health of native fish has been assessed as Poor.

Key indicators of health:

- The abundance or number of fish
- Presence of diverse species groups
- Age structure of fish populations

Southern Bell Frog

By looking after the threatened southern bell frog we are also looking after summer active frogs and the Australasian bittern. Keeping water in the large open shallow lakes is good for southern bell frog breeding, pelicans and swans. Although threatened the health of southern bell frog populations on Gayini is ranked as Fair.

Key indicators of health:

- The total number of southern bell frogs
- The number of sites with southern bell frogs present

Waterbirds

There are many waterbirds at Gayini and in wet times there are big breeding colonies. Nationally threatened waterbirds include the Australian painted snipe and the Australasian bittern and NSW threatened species like the freckled duck and the blue-billed duck are also found. The black swan, painted snipe and bittern are also culturally important species. Waterbird health is currently assessed to be Good.

Key indicators of health:

- Total waterbird abundance
- Frequency of colonial waterbird breeding events at key sites
- Success of colonial waterbird breeding events at key sites
- Number of species present across all waterbird functional groups
- Presence and abundance of culturally important species

Gayini Dryland Systems

Native Shrubs & Saltbush Country

This country does get wet in the largest flood events but is more often dry and includes plants and animals living in prickly wattle shrubland, black bluebush shrubland and old man saltbush shrubland. The threatened Mossgiel daisy is found on this country and is abundant. Overall health is currently rated as Good.

Key indicators of health:

- Extent of native shrubs & saltbush vegetation community
- Condition of native shrubs & saltbush vegetation community
- Number of Mossgiel daisy

Red Soil Country

Red Soil Country includes remnants of the NSW threatened ecological community "Sandhill Pine Woodland in the Riverina of the Murray-Darling Depression and NSW South Western Slopes bioregions". Many burials are found in this country. This country has been heavily impacted by past grazing practices and is considered to be in Poor health.

Key indicators of health:

- Extent of Red Soil vegetation community
- Condition of Red Soil vegetation community
- Recruitment of sandhill pines

Gayini Socioeconomic Opportunity

In addition to looking after culture and nature we will focus on two additional social and economic outcomes from the operation and management of the Gayini.

Economic Opportunity

The self-sufficient operation of the Gayini is a key outcome. Sufficient resources are required to maintain and improve the health ratings for all of our focus areas. The contribution of Gayini to regional economic outcomes is also important in the medium to long term.

We will assess success through the following indicators:

- funds earned by property-based enterprises
- number of employees
- number of traineeships/cadetships
- number of people completing training

Physical and Mental Wellbeing

By being involved in management of Gayini there is an opportunity to heal and improve physical and mental health and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations people. The main way we will assess how we are progressing is through the perceptions of our elders and young people.



HEALTH ASSESSMENT

The property has been extensively utilised and modified for cropping and grazing which has had significant impacts on cultural and ecological health.

Focus	Health status
Gayini Culture	
Lore and Culture	F
Tangible Cultural Heritage	F
Bush Medicine	F
Food Plants	F
Native Wildlife & Totem Animals	F
Gayini Water Dependent Systems	
Red Gum Country	G
Black Box Country	F
Lignum Country	F
Native Fish	P
Southern Bell Frog	F
Waterbirds	G
Gayini Dryland Systems	

Focus	Health status
Native Shrubs & Saltbush Country	G
Red Soil Country	F
Gayini Socioeconomic Opportunity	
Economic Opportunity	Not Specified
Health and Wellbeing	Not Specified

Health ranking scale

- VG** **Very Good:** Most desirable status; requires little intervention for maintenance
- G** **Good:** Within acceptable range of variation; some intervention required for maintenance
- F** **Fair:** Outside acceptable range of variation; requires human intervention
- P** **Poor:** Restoration very difficult; may result in extinction



OUR PEOPLE MANAGED THIS AREA FOR 50,000 YEARS AND LEFT THEIR FOOTPRINTS ON THE COUNTRY. NOW IT'S OUR TURN TO PROTECT, MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE OUR CULTURE AND COUNTRY AND LEAVE OUR FOOTPRINTS ONCE AGAIN.

IAN WOODS





GAYINI REPRESENTS A ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE A NEW, SUSTAINABLY MANAGED AND FINANCED CONSERVATION PROPERTY FOR THE BENEFIT OF PEOPLE AND NATURE.

GAYINI HCP



THREAT ASSESSMENT

The operation of past threats is accounted for in the health ratings for our management focus areas. The likely impact of future threats has been assessed to help define ongoing management priorities.

The highest level ongoing threats are assessed to be:

- Inappropriate watering
- Invasive species – particularly deer, pigs, cats, foxes, lippia and exotic fish
- Lack of respect for First Nations culture.

Medium level threats include:

- Boxthorn, Noogoora burr and other weeds
- Impacts of kangaroos and rabbits

Low ranked threats were inappropriate grazing and wildfire. Some threats like Botulism and Chytrid fungus are currently being investigated.

Photo @ Annette Ruzicka

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Our strategies are designed to restore cultural and ecological health, address the most serious threats and to build economic resources and management capacity. A key consideration in the first 10 years of management is to ensure we have the resources and expertise available to develop a property management model that is sustainable into the future.

Our Priority strategies to improve health and reduce high ranked threats are outlined below.

01 | Stronger Culture

Access and Visitation Strategy

Access and Visitation will improve connection to country through a range of activities such as Back to Country visits, special events, cultural values assessments and training. This strategy will be developed together with the Cultural Heritage Restoration, Training and work Recovery strategies.

Cultural Heritage Restoration works

Building knowledge about cultural values and their current health is a high priority. Through survey and mapping programs connections to country will be reinvigorated and the process of restoration commenced.

Training Strategy

Opportunities to provide training for First Nations and non Aboriginal people will be investigated. Improving health and economic outcomes for First Nations people will be a specific focus in addition to training that builds knowledge about Gayini and develops local skills to support good management.

Work Recovery Strategy

The work recovery program will promote the rehabilitation and recovery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from alcohol and other drug (AOD) abuse using a culturally secure, evidence based and holistic approach. The program will also provides participants with work experience that increases their likelihood of gaining ongoing employment at completion.

02 | Water Management

Watering Plan

Gayini will be managed to maintain and enhance environmental and cultural values on Gayini and downstream. The detailed watering plan will be developed to explicitly consider cultural values.

03 | Pest Plant and Animal Management

Pest Plant and Animal Management

Pest Plant and Animal Management is essential to restoring environmental and cultural values. Where possible these programs will be run in cooperation with neighbouring landholders and Yanga National Park. Animal pests that will be an initial focus include deer, pigs, foxes and rabbits. Weed management will aims to address significant African boxthorn infestations and other widespread weeds including Noogoora burr.

04 | Grazing management

Grazing Management

Sustainable grazing provides an important potential income stream to support management activities. Based on the findings of the baseline vegetation assessment and local expert knowledge the recommended grazing enterprise for Gayini is periodic cool season grazing to

- take advantage of palatable, weedy annual plants (medics and annual pasture grasses, e.g. barley, rye and bromes)
- allow spelling from grazing during the warmer months when palatable, perennial native plants are flowering and setting seed.

Indigenous Land Corporation partnership

This strategy seeks funding and capacity building support to develop a sustainable First Nations owned and managed grazing enterprise on Gayini.

05 | Fire management

Fire Management

Fire Management aims to reduce the impact of wildfire on the natural and cultural values, ensure the safety of people and protect built assets and infrastructure. Over time cultural burns may be used to improve the health of Gayini.

06 | Threatened Species Management

Threatened species management

Threatened species will be largely managed through the implementation of other strategies. Special purpose projects may be developed to fund additional actions and monitoring - for example - a Saving our Species Grant to protect and conserve the Australian painted snipe and other threatened wetland dependent species, including the freckled duck, blue-billed duck and Australasian bittern has been secured by Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group.

07 | Vegetation Restoration

Vegetation restoration

Vegetation across some parts of the property are in poor condition after previous cropping and grazing activities. Where required, we will actively restore areas through planting key native species. Restoration of native grasses to provide ground cover is an early priority.

08 | Governance and Establishment

Governance

Governance of Gayini will have a strong focus on regular opportunities to provide advice and review progress.

Infrastructure

This strategy covers general maintenance activities and costs. Infrastructure maintenance related to specific to management activities may be included in relevant strategies for example maintenance of fire breaks in the fire management plan, maintenance of watering infrastructure in the watering plan.

Payments for environmental services

This strategy includes exploration of funding opportunities on Gayini not directly linked to specific management strategies.



IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The Implementation Plan is regularly reviewed and updated by the Core team and Implementation team as funding become available. The Implementation Plan will be strongly informed by recommendations from the Aboriginal Elders.

Monitoring is fundamental to effective adaptive management. Input and output indicators will be reviewed regularly to ensure the workplan is being implemented as planned and achieving planned short-term results.

Indicators to assess the health of the property have been developed and will be monitored, in conjunction with other regional programs, to enable a 5-year assessment of the impact of our activities.





GAYINI IS A RICH CULTURAL LANDSCAPE WHERE OVER 1,100 CULTURAL HERITAGE ARTEFACTS INCLUDING BURIALS, MOUNDS, HEARTHES, MODIFIED TREES INCLUDING RING TREES AND STONE ARTEFACTS SHOW OUR PAST ELDERS FOOTPRINT ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE.

GAYINI HCP



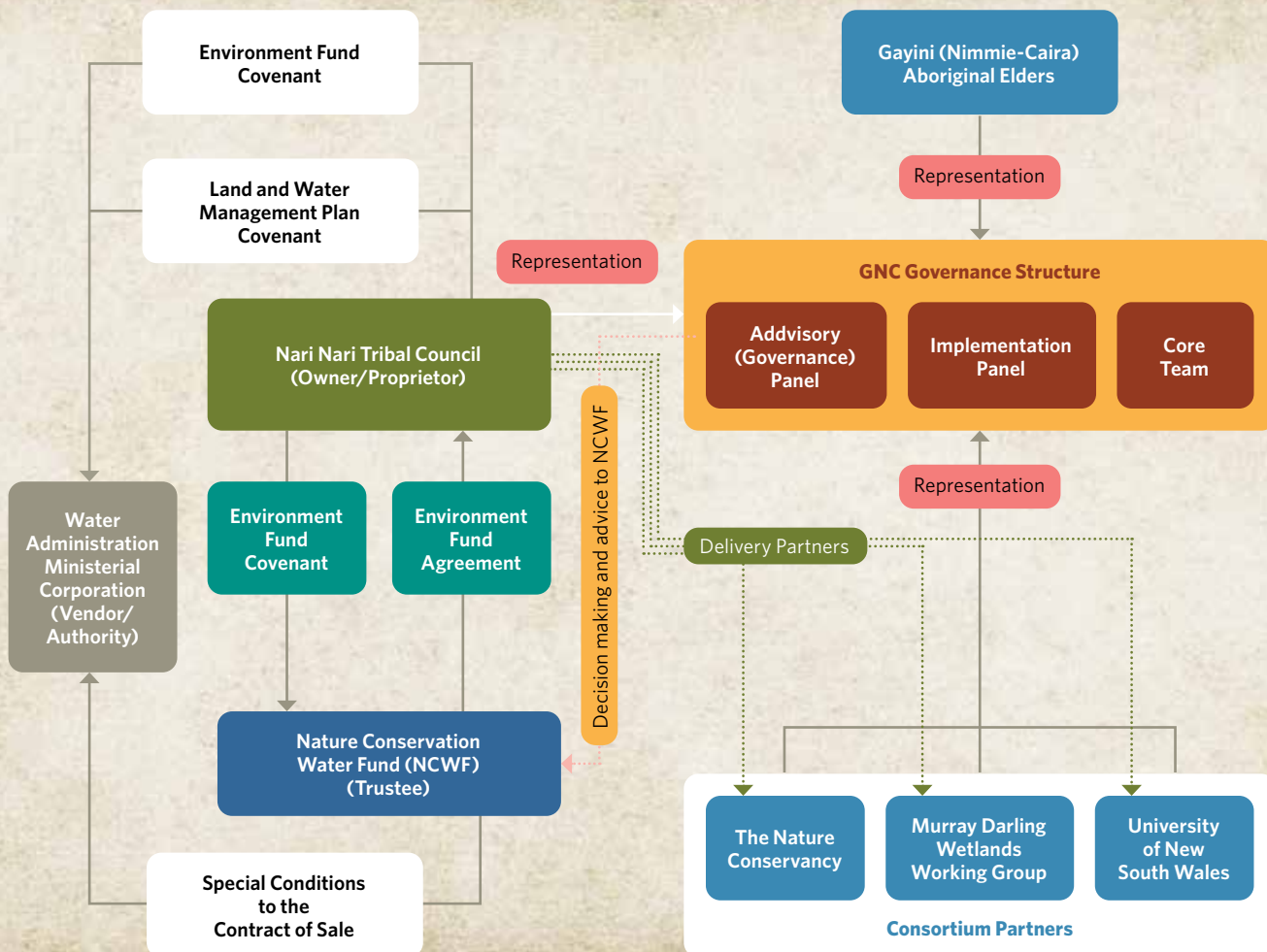
GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

There is a special focus in the Governance structure on ensuring that there is a clear communication channel between First Nations people with connection to and interest in Gayini and the project consortium of Nari Nari Tribal Council, The Nature Conservancy, Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group and the UNSW Centre for Ecosystem Science through the Aboriginal Elders.

Day to day management is overseen by a Core Group of staff from the consortium partners. Implementation matters are regularly reviewed by the Implementation Group made up of representatives from each of the partners and the Government agencies who retain responsibility for delivery of ongoing actions or monitoring.

Overall decisions are made by the Advisory Panel comprising senior representatives of each consortium partner.

The Gayini Nimmie-Caira Land and Water Management Plan established a series of objectives for the property and this Healthy Country Plan builds on the LWMP to provide a framework for adaptive management.



NARI NARI TRIBAL COUNCIL SEASONAL CALENDAR




DECEMBER - MARCH

-  Fire season
-  Cod open season
-  Native seed collection
-  Southern Bell Frog breeding

MARCH - JUNE

- Wet season 
- Cultural burning 
- Cray breeding season 

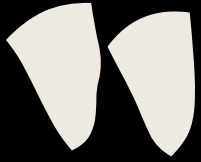


-  Fire season
-  Cod & Yellowbelly, Swan, Snake and Southern Bell Frog breeding season
-  Watering season

- Rain season 
- Emu breeding season 
- Cray season 
- Watering season 

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER

JUNE - SEPTEMBER



**NARI NARI TRIBAL COUNCIL THANKS
EVERYONE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO, AND HAD
INPUT TO THIS HEALTHY COUNTRY PLAN.**



Photo @ Annette Ruzicka

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