THE OURIMBAH PROTOCOL

INFORMED CONSENSUS THROUGH DIALOGUE

Community and State Forests working towards sustainability

April 2003

OURIMBAH

Nourimbah is a traditional word of the Darkinjung People of the Central Coast. *Nora* meaning to dance and *bah* meaning place of. For thousands of years the Darkinjung and invited tribes would gather at Ourimbah for lore ceremonies. It is where you receive your belt of life, a belt which is made of human hair from your family, this would be worn around your waist until the ceremony was over. Both men and women wore this belt, if you disrespected the ceremony this was considered throwing the belt of life and you were punished. Ourimbah was the place of your education. You were taught everything about yourself and your country. Two ceremonial rings on the western side of the rail line in Ourimbah, are now on private property or have been destroyed. A small cave with handprints exists near the Ourimbah school.
Kevin Duncan, Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council and State Forests of NSW

Europeans saw Ourimbah's forest as a very different resource. Logs over 100 feet long went from Ourimbah to build Sydney's wharves. Early writings record impressions of incredibly tall closed forest, and impenetrably rugged gully systems. Timber getters settled in the area to cut rainforest timbers—especially red cedar—before 1820, then farmers came to clear *their selection.* The oldest school north of Sydney was established in the fledgling township. Recently, the impact of Sydney's expansion has accelerated, and the landscape is being consumed by suburban development.
Paraphrased from *Ourimbah Recollections,* Ourimbah School & Community, 1992

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PREAMBLE

The Central Coast, between Sydney and Newcastle, is a region known for its remarkable biological and physical diversity – rainforests, wetlands, lakes, rivers, mountains, rich agricultural floodplains and a spectacular coastline. It is also a place that has sustained and nourished human communities for over two thousand generations. We acknowledge the Darkinjung people as the original custodians of this place.

To our detriment, Aboriginal knowledge and understanding of the local environment has been disregarded. In particular, indigenous peoples recognise that we rely on a living ecosystem of which we are an integral part, not a separate component.

The timber industry was the driving force for the European settlement of the region in the early 1800s. The long history of harvesting—and disturbance by fire—has left a mosaic of old growth and regrowth, rainforest and sclerophyll forest, functioning and degraded ecosystems. Because of the rugged terrain patches of ground remain undisturbed by modern society, in areas hitherto inaccessible.

This natural legacy forms the backdrop to the most rapid population growth in Australia. Socio-economically, the region has one of the state's lowest per capita income levels. As with many Australian landscapes, there is a legacy of serious environmental degradation, as a consequence of land use patterns over the past two hundred years.

The State Forests of the region are still an enormous public asset which provide a wide range of benefits to the community. Access to these forest resources has been the focus of conflict. State Forests of NSW has embraced the objective of ecologically sustainable forest management, and is responding to community values and expectations. Multiple community requirements can best be satisfied where the parties solve problems in an open, visible, civil and co-operative manner that emphasises communication, mutual accountability, honesty and trust – *informed consensus through dialogue.*

In developing the "Ourimbah Protocol", several organisations, representing a wide range of interests, have worked together in an attempt to create an ethical foundation for their future actions. We believe that through this collaboration—each of the partners approaching the forest and its problems very differently—we can constructively explore our differences and find sustainable solutions that go beyond individual agendas to extend our vision of what may be possible. The Partners to this agreement have made a commitment to explore mechanisms for management of conflict in forest use, and jointly to explore and develop new opportunities to reclaim their place in the decision making process to provide tangible social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits to the whole community.

THE PARTNERS

The Combined Community Organisation (Gosford District) Inc (CCO).

The CCO—representing 21 active community organisation on the Central Coast—initiated this dialogue to increase community understanding of and participation in forest issues.

Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council (DLALC).

DLALC is a major land owner on the Central Coast, and already participates in formal joint management of some areas of State forest in the region. It represents over 800 local aboriginal residents. The Darkinjung have a special relationship with the land—materially, culturally and spiritually—and a responsibility to it, as stewards and custodians of the land, its artifacts, art and stories.

Central Coast Landcare Network.

The Central Coast Landcare Network is a long-standing consortium of landcare groups actively involved in the rehabilitation and restoration of degraded lands in the region.

The Sydney Rainforest (TSR).

TSR is active in the provision of expertise and resources for the management and rehabilitation of rainforest and riparian ecosystems.

State Forests of NSW (SFNSW), Hunter Region.

SFNSW, Hunter Region is one of the major land and natural environment managers on the NSW Central Coast. State Forests is committed to learning from this partnership and exploring the lessons learned for application in other areas.

This partnership is not an exclusive arrangement between the Partners, further community participation is welcome. New partners would adopt the agreed protocol to join this dialogue.

WHY ARE WE WORKING TOGETHER?

A number of pressing environmental management issues exist on the Central Coast. In particular, areas of high priority are:

- significant cultural and ecological areas
- biodiversity
- water
- remnant and riparian vegetation
- fire management
- recreation management.
- a timber industry that is sustainable

We are working together to address these issues. We believe that we can do this by creating more robust, fair and sustainable forest management that acknowledges the needs and values of the wider community and thus improve the social, cultural, environmental and economic setting for the Central Coast. We see transparency of actions and equity of outcomes as important attributes of sustainability.

This community does not need to be empowered by a remote bureaucracy. The local knowledge needed to sustain this community and to address its cultural, economic, social and environmental concerns in a balanced, open and honest way can only come from within the community itself.

There exists amongst the Partners a common reverence for the forest. We believe that this group can work towards the common goal of responsible collaborative stewardship of this natural living ecosystem, to assist restoration of ecological balance applying appropriate knowledge and actions. The forest is a shared meeting place for our diverse cultural values and beliefs, a precious asset to be shared and nourished by the whole community, a recreational retreat and a haven for unique native flora and fauna. It is also a vast resource providing fresh air, clean water and great material and spiritual wealth.

WHERE WE WORK

The Partners thus far have agreed to undertake activities together within the DLALC boundary as delineated in Map 1. Where the Partners propose to undertake activities outside the DLALC boundary, engagement protocols will be invited from the appropriate LALC and other groups within that community.

FOREST VALUES

The State forests of the Central Coast hold a special appeal to the local and wider community. Different individuals and groups have different desires, expectations and requirements of these forest areas.

Forests are places of cultural and spiritual values; a place of employment; a sink for carbon; a source of valuable and unique natural resources; a place for quiet bush camping; a place of solitude and reflection. People from the whole community feel physically, mentally and spiritually refreshed by forests.

Everybody has an interest in clean air and water. There is a substantial rural community reliant on natural creek systems, and town water is extracted from the two major rivers. All of the forest is water catchment for someone, and all of the creeks should be given the same respect.

The Darkinjung believe that we all belong to the land, and the creeks are the lifeblood of the country. From a catchment health perspective, intact riparian systems are of the utmost importance in maintaining the integrity and productivity of the landscape. The steep, rugged gully systems found here contain abundant creeks, springs and soaks. The temperate climate, generous rainfall, and generally fertile soils have produced a highly productive forest ecosystem, which still contains undisturbed areas of high conservation value.

The recreational opportunities offered by the State forests of the region are enormous. They also bring unique management challenges. In particular, proximity to the large urban population of Sydney (only an hour away) adds substantial pressure to the recreational requirements for forests in this area, but also provides potential for the development of forest-centred ecotourism.

Responsible forest management aims to avoid the sacrifice of one value for another and in doing so moves towards sustainability in all of its activities.

Respecting each other

- We come to this partnership as equals, to be mutually supportive, share information openly, and to act with integrity, free of 'pejorative language'. Our conclusions will be reached on the basis of informed consensus. When differences occur, we will seek independent facilitation, or applied research, to advance our understanding and achieve constructive outcomes.
- We will recognise the intellectual property and cultural rights of all the Partners.
- We will consult respectfully with our communities and will be accountable to them for our agreed outcomes.
- We are committed to a formal risk assessment of all proposals, to assess economic, operational, environmental, cultural and social impacts. We will in this way show respect for the values and interests of all the community groups party to this protocol.

Respecting the forest

- We acknowledge, with respect, the lie of the land. We recognise that no two places are the same, and we will approach each place in good faith, according to our best understanding at the time. In actively managing these forests, we will apply the Precautionary Principle to Adaptive Management techniques, and continue to foster active community involvement and responsibility in the management of this important asset.
- We acknowledge, with respect, the lore of the land. We are committed to a participatory process, to develop a deeper understanding of forest values and to improve the sustainability of forest management. We will employ the best and most current scientific and community knowledge, but will explore innovative solutions. We will respect holistic forest values at all times.
- We are committed to conserve, restore and sustain forest ecosystems, with particular emphasis upon old growth forest remnants, creeks and riparian vegetation, pristine ecological communities, threatened species and their habitat and artifacts of prior indigenous occupation.

OUR AREAS OF CONSIDERATION

We will consider the following areas that are of current interest to the community:

- To address our greatest concerns—that some timber harvesting may occur in inappropriate areas, and that creeks are not always afforded the respect due to them—we will initiate community driven projects to investigate and review forest management practices and processes. Some concepts for consideration include: investigation of new forest harvesting and silvicultural techniques; investigation of the use of GPS and GIS technology to improve compliance monitoring; consideration of the application of guidelines for management of ecological values such as rainforest, old growth, and flora and fauna habitat; investigation of unique fire management approaches.
- Projects that encourage greater knowledge and "ownership" of, and participation by, local community and special interest groups in responsible forest management.
- Projects to facilitate access for groups with unique expectations from within the forest, for example groups seeking spiritual engagement, or educational experiences or places for on-ground landcare-type activities..
- Management for the health and sustainability of the whole forest ecosystem, not simply its individual parts.
- Identification of techniques developed by this partnership that are unique, and realisation of the commercial potential of this intellectual property.

PLAN OF ACTION

Based on their list of issues to be addressed, the Partners plan to focus their initial activities on actions outlined in Our Plan, below. The Partners propose to work together to implement the agreed action plan using an adaptive management approach and to address other activities and issues as they arise.

FUNDING

We acknowledge that all the partners have independently contributed resources to achieve the current consensus (with no remuneration from any agency). We will seek funding for our future activities from SFNSW and other appropriate natural resource management or environmental repair funding agencies.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE AGREEMENT

It is anticipated that this document will be reviewed after each twelve (12) month period. This first review is scheduled for April 2004.

The Partners will meet 3 monthly to review progress on the action plan, to identify new actions and to review priorities.

SIGNATORIES

This agreement does not create any legal relationship between the Partners or a legal liability of one to the other or by either to any third party which would not have existed had this agreement not been entered into.

The Partners signed this agreement on the 7th day of May 2003.

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The Sydney Rainforest

COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS		PROJECTS	AIMS	ACTIONS	TIMETABLE
Transparency and Empowerment	Building trust with the community needs to start with the forest management process. These projects are aimed at establishing visibility in planning and implementation of forestry activities.	Community operational harvest planning program.	Consider the current harvest planning process. Develop a shared understanding of harvesting regulations. Involve the community in a tangible and real way in the harvest planning and implementation process.	Develop a pilot program using selected compartments. Focus on identifying stakeholders, means of involvement and communication methods. Consider evaluation methods for tracking changes in attitudes and behaviour.	Commence by 30 April 2003.
		Community forestry audit program.	Provide the community with an opportunity to undertake audits of forestry activities and be involved in resolving issues that arise.	Using the compartments agreed, above, develop a pilot framework and model for a community audit program.	Commence development by 30 April 2003.
				Scope a project to investigate the use of Geographic Positioning Systems and Geographic Information Systems to assist in harvest planning and regulation.	Commence development by 30 April 2003.
		Documentation of the development of The Ourimbah Protocol	Publish a record of the process that the Partners have undertaken to develop this agreement.	Prepare and publish report.	Complete by 31 May 2003.
Innovation	The ability to balance potentially competing objectives with respect to community expectations of forest use is greatly improved through the identification of opportunities through new and innovative solutions.	Forest Residue Utilisation Project	To explore the opportunity to utilise forest residue (harvesting waste) in rehabilitation and restoration projects undertaken by Landcare groups.	Establish a working group to implement a pilot program.	Establish by 31 May 2003.

		ForestCare.	Investigate the opportunity to develop a ForestCare program where the community can be actively involved with the care of State forests.	Establish a working group to develop terms of reference and areas of consideration. Identify members of working group.	Working group established by 30 June 2003.
Alternative Opportunities	Forests are about many things. These projects offer alternative, community focused solutions and present new opportunities for a wide range of forest uses.	Watagans Recreation Management Plan.	Develop a community driven recreation management planning process for the State forests of the Central Coast.	Identify relevant stakeholder groups. Establish methodology and process. Focus on identification of issues and the development of innovative solutions to address these issues and deliver new opportunities.	Process established by 31 May 2003.
Culture	Forests are important culturally and spiritually to the whole community. These projects target cultural heritage and awareness for the Central Coast forests.	Warre Warren Interpretive Trail	Enhance, augment and implement the Warre Warren project primarily funded by the Darkinjung Care for Country grant.	Establish a working group chaired by Darkinjung LALC to oversee the project and source additional funding opportunities and further developments.	First meeting by 30 April 2003.
Learning and education	These projects are specifically targeted at learning and education outcomes for the whole community.	World Environment Day forest celebrations.	Develop a suite of activities for World Environment Day to celebrate the forests and their importance to the community.	Establish a working group to progress.	First meeting 30 April 2003.
		Forest research	Facilitate access to the forests for researchers and students. Utilize data collected for adaptive management processes	Identify and approach relevant educational institutions.	
		Community forest tours.	Continue to run community tours focusing on issues and areas of interest to the community.		Ongoing.