



Saltwater Freshwater Festival

# INNOVATE RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

January 2024 to January 2026

## SUMMARY





# A MESSAGE

FROM BLUE SKY COMMUNITY SERVICES' CEO

Ruth Thompson  
CEO, Blue Sky  
Community Services

Blue Sky Community Services has been delivering services in Northern NSW for almost 50 years. Our organisation works to foster more inclusive communities, and support people to thrive. Throughout our history we have worked in close partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in our region to support positive outcomes, and we continue to do so. We greatly value these partnerships and acknowledge the tremendous strengths that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples bring to the communities we work in.

We acknowledge the unique history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the challenges they have faced. We acknowledge that while there have been some positive steps forward, there is a great deal of work still to be done to achieve reconciliation between Australia's First Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. Blue Sky Community Services has put in place a number of initiatives towards reconciliation and has developed this Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to articulate and strengthen our organisation's commitment to reconciliation, building on the progress made in our previous RAP. We greatly look forward to working collaboratively with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and local communities as we work towards achievement of the RAP's goals.

**We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land where we live and work and their continuing connection to land, water, sea and community. We pay respects to Australia's First Peoples, to their unique and diverse cultures, and to Elders past, present and future.**

Artwork: "Better Together" by Lachlan Skinner (Gumbaynggirr)





# A MESSAGE

FROM RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA CEO

Karen Mundine  
Chief Executive Officer  
Reconciliation Australia

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement.

With close to 3 million people now either working or studying in an organisation with a RAP, the program's potential for impact is greater than ever. Blue Sky Community Services continues to be part of a strong network of more than 2,200 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have taken goodwill and transformed it into action.

The four RAP types — Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate — allow RAP partners to continuously strengthen reconciliation commitments and constantly strive to apply learnings in new ways.

An Innovate RAP is a crucial and rewarding period in an organisation's reconciliation journey. It is a time to build the strong foundations and relationships that ensure sustainable, thoughtful, and impactful RAP outcomes into the future.

An integral part of building these foundations is reflecting on and cataloguing the successes and challenges of previous RAPs. Learnings gained through effort and innovation are invaluable resources that Blue Sky Community Services will continuously draw upon to create RAP commitments

rooted in experience and maturity. These learnings extend to Blue Sky Community Services using the lens of reconciliation to better understand its core business, sphere of influence, and diverse community of staff and stakeholders.

The RAP program's emphasis on relationships, respect, and opportunities gives organisations a framework from which to foster connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples rooted in mutual collaboration and trust.

This Innovate RAP is an opportunity for Blue Sky Community Services to strengthen these relationships, gain crucial experience, and nurture connections that will become the lifeblood of its future RAP commitments. By enabling and empowering staff to contribute to this process, Blue Sky Community Services will ensure shared and cooperative success in the long-term.

Gaining experience and reflecting on pertinent learnings will ensure the sustainability of Blue Sky Community Services' future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, providing meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations Blue Sky Community Services on your second Innovate RAP and I look forward to following your ongoing reconciliation journey.





## OUR VISION FOR RECONCILIATION

Blue Sky Community Services' vision is for communities where everyone belongs. Reconciliation is essential for creating places where all people can thrive, and everyone is included. Our vision for reconciliation is:

### INCLUSION AND BELONGING:

- Where inclusion means every person is valued, has the opportunity to develop their strengths and make their own choices, and fulfil their cultural responsibilities.

### RECOGNITION:

- Of the importance of connection to Country, culture, language and connection between people.
- Of the importance of walking alongside each other, supporting, bridging gaps and appreciating each other's differences, strengths and gifts.

### PARTNERSHIP:

- Accountability and transparency in the work we do, including the implementation of reconciliation activities.
- Ensuring culturally safe practices with individuals, families, services and communities in an inclusive, respectful and effective manner.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are supported to achieve their goals and dreams in a way that recognises their rich history and cultures, unique strengths and unique challenges.
- Working in partnership with local Aboriginal Services and organisations to create opportunities to collaborate and develop local reconciliation activities.

## OUR BUSINESS

Blue Sky Community Services has its headquarters on Gumbaynggirr Country in Coffs Harbour, and delivers services and projects across the Mid and North Coast of NSW. We deliver programs that support sector development, youth, families, people with disability, older people and other people who are experiencing vulnerability. We also deliver projects that build strong and inclusive communities. All our services work to increase opportunities for reconciliation, working with and in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples wherever possible. Blue Sky Community Services has a long-standing commitment to reconciliation, and employs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working on Gumbaynggirr, Dunghutti, Biripi, Worimi, Bundjalung and Yaegl homelands. At the time of commencement of this RAP we had a staff of 72, with 4.2% of our workforce being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.



## OUR RAP

As a non-Indigenous organisation, Blue Sky Community Services is a strong proponent of reconciliation. We recognise the importance of not speaking on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We value, respect and learn from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, staff, participants and communities. It is their voices that we have listened to, and made every effort to reflect, throughout our Reconciliation Action Plan. Blue Sky Community Services seeks to work in a way that ensures opportunity for reconciliation within the organisation. Blue Sky Community Services also seeks to work under the leadership and direction of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members, to create opportunities for reconciliation in the communities where it operates. Blue Sky Community Services has enacted strategies to work appropriately and successfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We recognise and appreciate the importance of cultural humility and are committed to continued self-evaluation and self-critique, allowing staff to not only learn about one another's culture but also examine their own individual beliefs and cultural identities. This RAP has created an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, community members and staff to reflect on what we do and how we do it, and to contribute ideas and strategies to further strengthen our approach to reconciliation.

The working group that developed this Reconciliation Action Plan includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members as well as non-Indigenous staff from across the NSW Mid North Coast. This RAP has been developed by the following staff members:

- Melanie Jacobs - Inclusive Communities Manager, RAP Working Group Lead and Champion
- Chontelle Mallie - Youth and Family Facilitator
- Aaron Tzannes - Case Manager: Momentum Youth Housing
- Sue Currie - Program Manager: Families, Young People and Communities
- Katie Clark - Team Leader: Families, Young People and Communities
- Terry Robb - Executive Manager: Service Delivery and Quality

The RAP working group reviewed our previous Reconciliation Action Plan, collated new ideas and provided additions and feedback. Once the RAP group developed the first draft of the new RAP, members then met with local Aboriginal Elders, community members and leaders to collate further feedback on our first draft. The RAP working group then incorporated those suggestions and ideas to develop this current Reconciliation Action Plan.



## OUR RAP (CONT.)

Blue Sky Community Services would like to acknowledge the following community members who provided suggestions and feedback to assist with the development of the RAP. We thank you for your support and look forward to continuing to work together.

- Tamara Dobson (Biripai country)
- Aunty Noeline Skinner (Gumbaynggirr country)
- Lachlan Skinner (Gumbaynggirr country)
- Aunty Yvette Pacey (Dunghutti/Gumbaynggirr country)

Examples of actions Blue Sky Community Services has already implemented towards reconciliation through our previous RAP, and development of this RAP, include:

### CREATING A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE ORGANISATION:

- Employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, including traineeships
- A flexible approach to staff management that recognises the unique needs and commitments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- Cultural training for all staff
- Trauma-informed practice training for relevant staff
- Encouragement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for all positions
- Welcome to Country conducted by Elders at events
- Acknowledgement of Country at all meetings
- Acknowledgement of Country and display of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags on all emails
- Welcome in local Aboriginal language on the door of all offices
- Display of locally-bought Aboriginal artwork in our offices
- Creation of an Aboriginal version of the Blue Sky Community Services logo by an Aboriginal artist, which is regularly displayed on signs and promotional material

### ESTABLISHING NETWORKS AND COLLABORATIONS:

- Development of extensive networks with Aboriginal services and community members
- The delivery of a wide range of collaborative projects including ones with Aboriginal service providers
- Projects with a specific focus on outcomes for Aboriginal people
- Design and implementation of projects with Aboriginal community members
- Relationships built with local Indigenous leaders in all areas we work across
- Assistance of Aboriginal leaders to enact grassroots projects and collaboration on social and cultural gatherings
- Facilitating cultural competency training for the community sector in collaboration with Aboriginal organisations



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## OUR RAP (CONT.)

### SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL-LED PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS:

- Participation in Aboriginal events such as NAIDOC and the Bowraville Memorial Cup

### PROGRAMS REFLECTING BOTH PARTICIPATION AND CULTURAL SAFETY FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES:

- Identifying the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in programs in relation to population data to ensure we are effectively engaging with the Aboriginal community
- Achieving a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in programs than the proportion of population indicated from census data

### COLLABORATIONS:

- Working party member of the Mid North Coast District Homelessness Implementation Subgroup to develop an Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy
- Working party member of the NAIDOC working group committee
- Working with a range of providers to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members know about, and are able to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme effectively
- Continuing to foster the existing mutually beneficial partnership with One Mob Media, including Blue Sky's provision of a space for One Mob's studio on Blue Sky premises, as well as a venue for workshops and other community activities they deliver

### ON REFLECTION, SOME OF THE CHALLENGES WE FACED, AND LESSONS LEARNED, DURING OUR PREVIOUS RAP INCLUDE:

- COVID-19 and associated restrictions affected face-to-face consultation, relationship building and collaboration. This directly impacted the development and implementation of our engagement plan.
- Additional resourcing was required in our People and Culture team to support the development of our cultural learning strategy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development strategy. Now that we have increased resources in this team, we are positive that we can progress these actions.
- Balancing the importance of engagement and consultation with Elders, key stakeholders and community members, whilst being mindful of the many demands on their time, and being respectful of not over-consulting.
- Developing RAP deliverables to ensure that the RAP is integrated into everything we do in our day-to-day work rather than through standalone initiatives.
- Continuing to explore ways to increase First Nations representation in our RAP working group.



## RELATIONSHIPS

Blue Sky values strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Blue Sky acknowledges that relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are essential to understand, appreciate and connect appropriately to the many and varied groups, organisations, businesses and communities. Blue Sky also acknowledges the importance of kinship systems, protocols and family connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the relationship to Country. Blue Sky is committed to improving relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and respecting the relationships that are important to them.

### OUTLINED BELOW ARE OUR COMMITMENTS IN THIS AREA.

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- Establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.
- Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).
- Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.
- Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.



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## RESPECT

Blue Sky Community Services is committed to showing respect for Country, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ancestors, Elders past, present and future, land and waters. Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is essential for delivering services that are person-centred and that recognise the strengths of every person.

### OUTLINED BELOW ARE OUR COMMITMENTS IN THIS AREA.

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- Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.
- Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.
- Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.
- Show respect to local communities through office decorations and publications



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## OPPORTUNITIES

Blue Sky Community Services employs and develops staff in a way that optimises opportunities for reconciliation in our team. Blue Sky Community Services has a target to increase our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to a minimum of 7.3% by 2026. We believe that the makeup of our workplace should reflect the diversity of the communities we work within. When choosing suppliers, Blue Sky Community Services supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and operated businesses wherever possible. We recognise the importance of supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses with a view to increasing opportunities and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### OUTLINED BELOW ARE OUR COMMITMENTS IN THIS AREA.

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- Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention, and professional development.
- Increase usage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers.



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## GOVERNANCE

The Blue Sky Community Services Board of Directors, Executive and Leadership Teams are committed to the successful implementation of our Reconciliation Action Plan. Communication on the progress of the implementation and associated learnings is also a high priority to continue to lead reconciliation within our sector.

### OUTLINED BELOW ARE OUR COMMITMENTS IN THIS AREA.

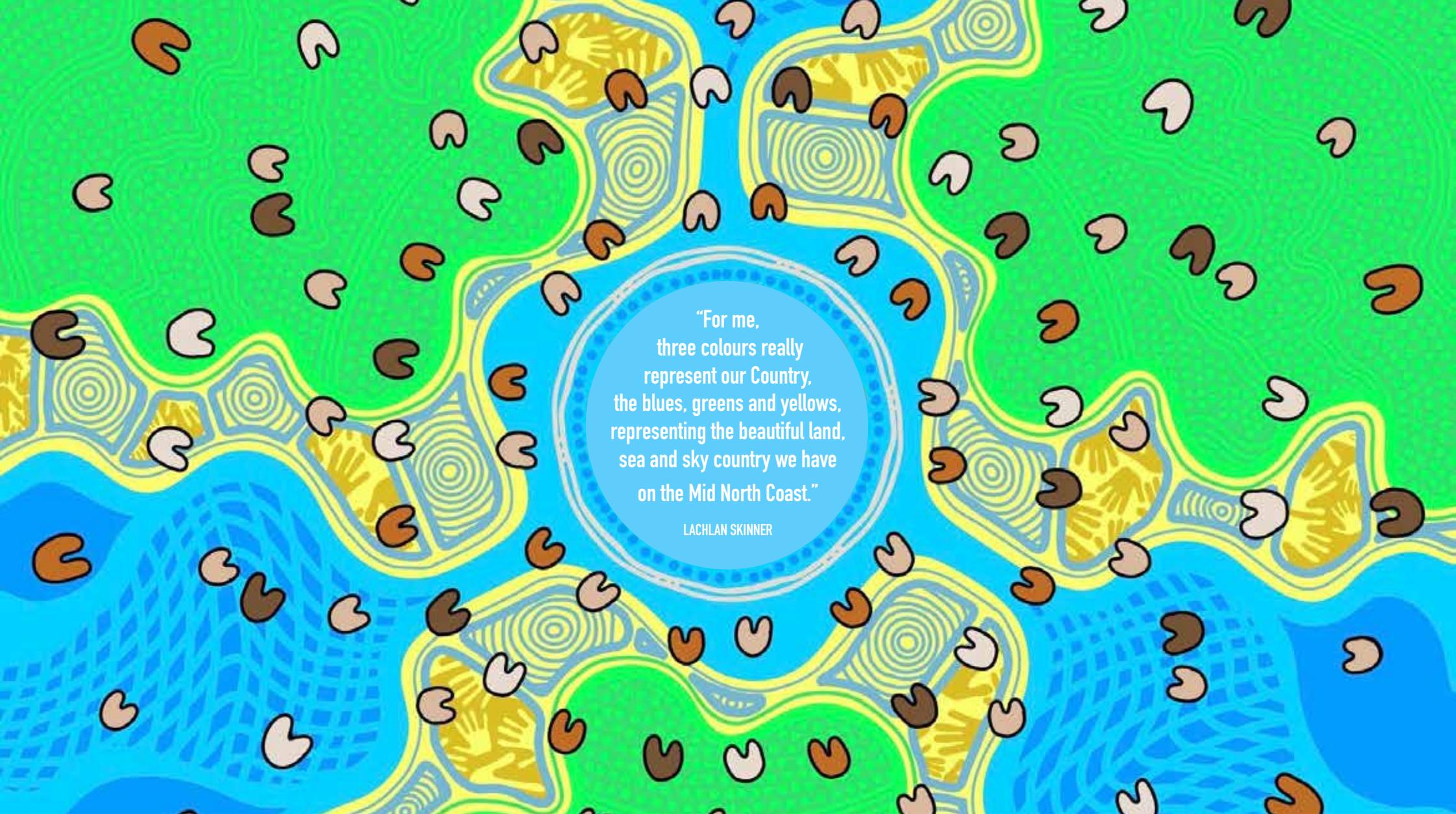
- Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.
- Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.
- Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.
- Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.
- Ensure that the Blue Sky Community Services Board of Governance and Executive Team have a connection with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For more information please contact Melanie Jacobs,  
Inclusive Communities Manager/RAP Working Group Lead,  
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“For me,  
three colours really  
represent our Country,  
the blues, greens and yellows,  
representing the beautiful land,  
sea and sky country we have  
on the Mid North Coast.”

LACHLAN SKINNER

## BETTER TOGETHER

A profound representation of reconciliation, encapsulating the profound journey towards understanding and respecting of differences. The artwork features symbols representing people of all colours living, working and playing; these symbols span across the entire artwork, reminding us of the communities we serve. The circle of people in the centre of the artwork represents the reconciliation journey, ensuring both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people are included in this process and that this journey is not solely on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Communities. The colours in the artwork represent the Mid North Coast.

LACHLAN SKINNER