

# YARNUPINGS

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OFFICE NEWSLETTER ISSUE #1 April 2026



Lane Cove  
Council



northern  
beaches  
council





# YARNUPINGS

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OFFICE NEWSLETTER

ISSUE #1 MARCH 2026

## WELCOME TO THE FIRST ISSUE OF YARNUPINGS FOR 2026

Included in this are photos from the wonderful Yarn Up with Karen Smith. Phil ponders on the value of silence and also the trail-blazing Freedom Rides of the 60s.

WE have Easter egg baskets for the Jarjums and a hot cross bun recipe for you to try.

Please enjoy this edition of Yarnupings for 2026.

**THE AHO TEAM – BRENT, PHIL, KAREN, KYLE, SUSAN**

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## COVER PICTURE

The cover image for this edition was taken in Lane Cove. The bush was full of these golden banksias. Magpies were warbling and tiny warts were crawling in and around the flowers. Not too far from the Lane Cove River, this spot was magic and we stopped and listened to the bird song.

We shared the video of the magpie song over on Instagram, so check out [@aboriginalheritageoffice](#) and enjoy the sweet sounds of the Australian bush.



## PICTURE OF SERENITY

What are some of the favourite natural places of your neighbourhood? A beach or waterway? A patch of bush or a big tree? Where cheeky cockatoos squawk each evening or the thump of a wallaby can be heard? Or simply that patch of blue sky with clouds waving hellos and winking goodbyes?

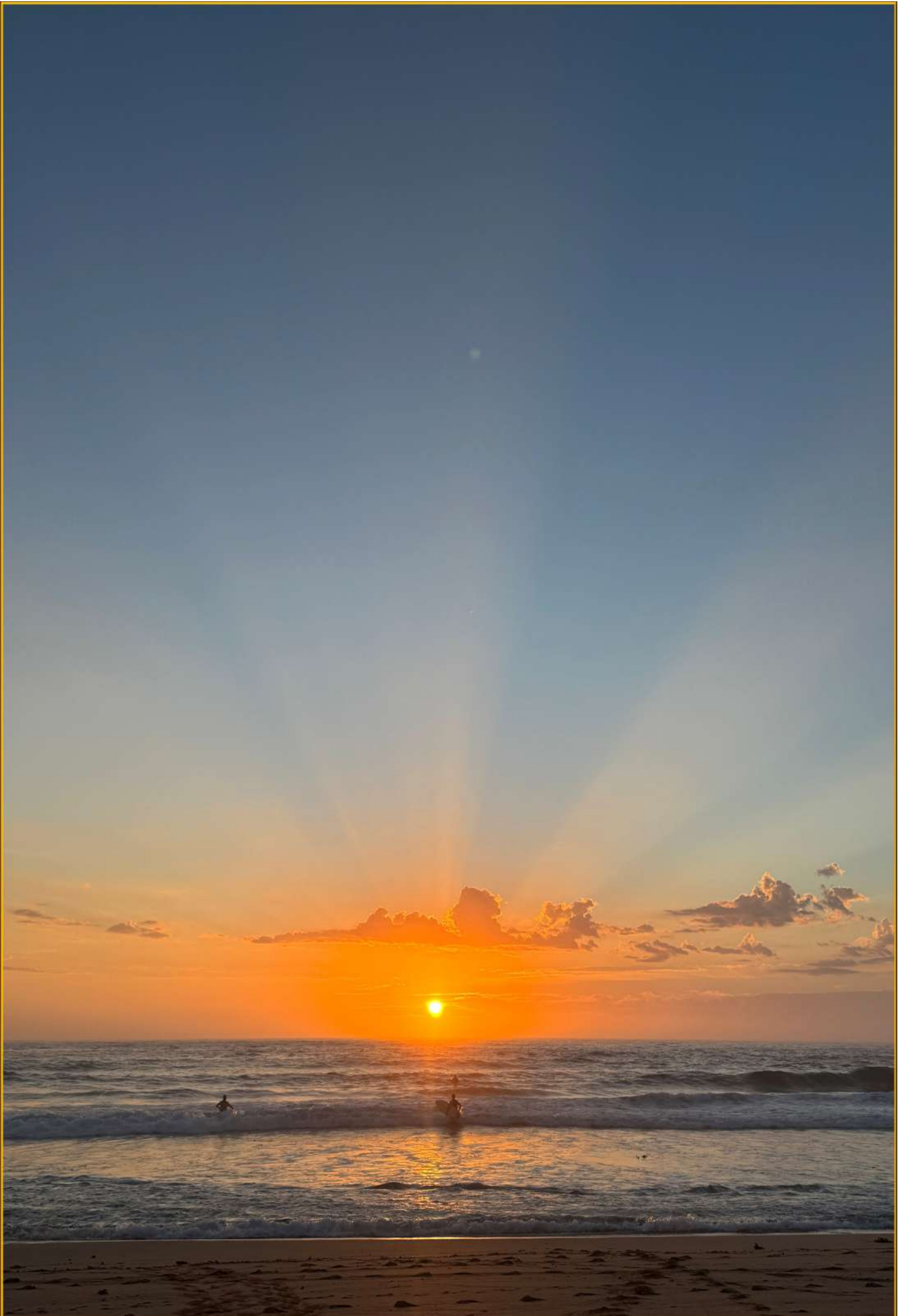
This region is extra special for all the reserves and spaces hiding from the hurry of traffic and hustle of Things to Do.

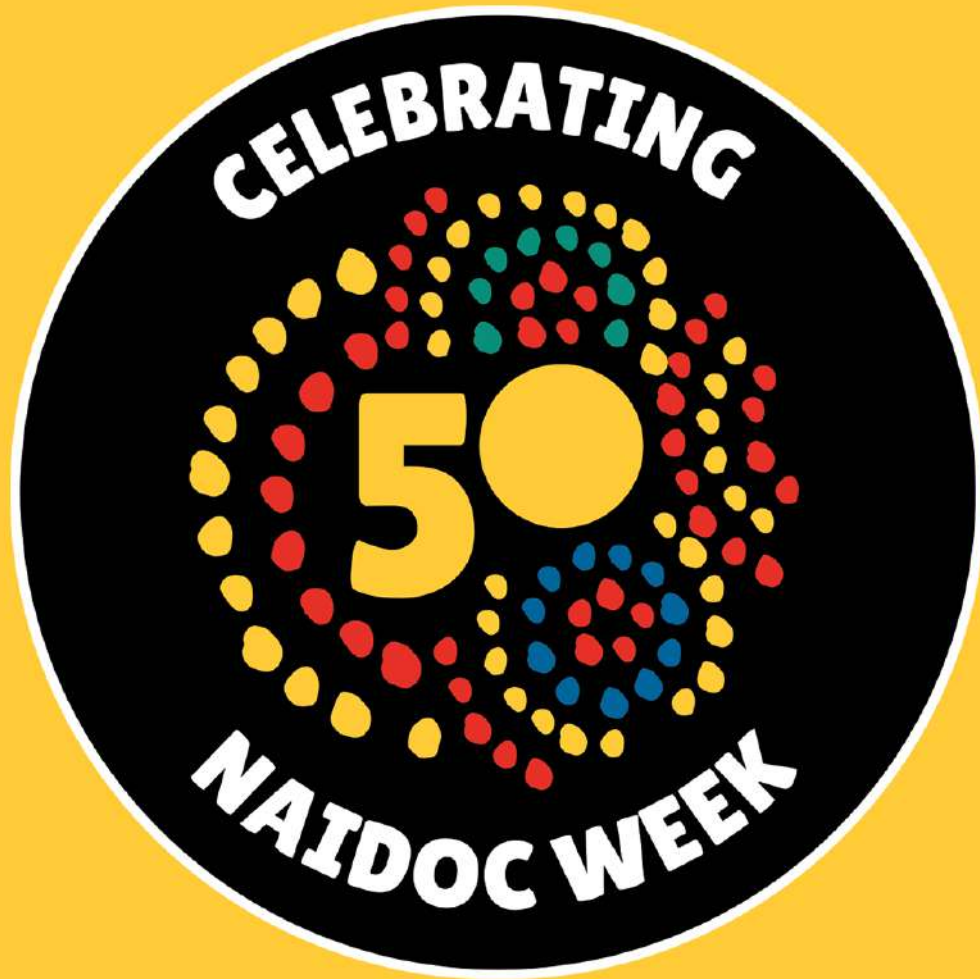
If you're not able to get out right now, we've brought the outdoors to you! Settle back and place yourself into the landscape of the Picture of Serenity coming up. Indigenous peoples continually invite us to connect to Country. So, switch off your normal senses and switch on in a different way.

Scientific studies show that simply looking upon a lovely serene image of nature will help to lower stress. So, if you're having a day where you may not feel like you are able to get outside as much as you may like, take a moment or two to breathe deeply and enjoy the image. It's good for you.

Full image for you to enjoy on the next page.







**■ NAIDOC  
WEEK ■  
50 YEARS  
DEADLY ■  
5-12 JULY 2026**



# IN SILENCE

BY PHIL HUNT

Last November I had the opportunity to go to Kangaroo Island for a 10 day silent retreat. There wasn't much time to see the island other than where I was staying. Kangaroo Island is intriguing as the first Europeans didn't report any Aboriginal people living there. Yet the archaeology shows activities going back at least 16,000 years. The 'contact' period was brutal and survival stories are moving. Contemporary connections appear to be special and well regarded.

How do you write about a silent retreat?

Hmmm.

No talking, no communicating. No phones. No books. An emphasis on reducing habitual mental and physical habits and returning to the breath and to the present. The body and the mind are the basis of all our experience and perhaps the least understood things in our lives.

If you are like me, you will be skimming the sentences looking for the most interesting bits of the story. The pith, the gist. Bypass the unnecessary and humdrum words and phrases. Past the words, the words, so many words, palabras, Worte, Слова, kata-kata , คำพูด. Is there anything in this paragraph worth slowing for?

In between, perhaps something tasty or intriguing, then more words of filling. Like thoughts that rush, stroll, lurch and outrage though the mind like unwanted guests, words can fill us up and leave no space for anything else. It is hard to order the mind to stop talking, *deja de hablar*, *wangkantja wiya*, *berhenti berbicara*, 話すのをやめる, *shhh...*

One morning I watched the sun moving via its peeking through the skylight. How long since I've noticed its speed? No wonder the mornings go so quickly, and the afternoons darken to night, and then the week has gone again. During a couple of mornings of clear weather, I had the pleasure of the rising sun moving across my face after finding a gap in the trees. Into shadow and then winking cheekily through the leaves.

Howling gusts from the giant landless oceans west pumelled we retreatants deeper into our own largely uncontrolled thoughts, while the other creatures employed their ancient skills to respond. The birds, riding the gales, are awe inspiringly skilled. I've never seen big ants get bowled over in gusts before. Sometimes they just stayed indoors.

"We acknowledge this land beneath us forms part of the traditional lands of Australian Aboriginal people.

# IN SILENCE

BY PHIL HUNT

We stand here with respect for the spiritual ancestors of this land, for the Aboriginal women brought here from mainland South Australia and Tasmania, and their descendants.

May all hurts be healed, may all suffering cease and may all be at ease."

These are the thoughtful words at entrance of De Tong Ling, the Buddhist retreat centre. I knew about the sealers and whalers, how they arrived before many explorers and colonisers. The hard men who were the muscle at the pointy end of a ruthless industry built on cultures of greed, desperation and exploitation. As author Jarrod Diamond succinctly put it, 'guns, germs and steel' gave colonial newcomers the edge against peoples around the world who had no wish for any of it.

There has been an ongoing debate about First Nations connections to the island. Local archaeologist Neale Draper kindly shared some of his papers with me. You can see changes in perspective in the over 220 years of written commentary. From Flinders in 1802 to researchers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Assumptions that the island was not possible to get to since the end of the glacial period are based on limited evidence. As some Indigenous people explained to Neale, "White people always write about their culture without asking them what they actually know and do" (Draper, 2015: 238).

Some survivors of the early kidnapers stayed on. Their descendants remain. There are long connections from the mainland as well. The so called 'islands of the dead' have always been places for the living too.

The archaeology, to an archaeologist, is interesting, but sometimes it can detract from what is more important. Consider some old stone tools that in and of themselves do not quench the thirst or satiate the hunger of any species, nor provide shelter from the storms. That can't initiate revegetation of cleared fields. That have cultural importance, but in a context



where academic debates can give those educated in a particular way more influence in land use planning than to Indigenous custodians trying to nurture the battered bush. Sometimes the analysis needs to be freed from words and intellect.

Perhaps a return to silence.

Even one hour of quiet, of retreat, of deliberate not-doing-other-things, is a luxury. Is it easy to be silent? Well, it is relatively easy to close the mouth and lower the eyes. Quieting the mind is the real adventure! Our amazing minds want to know, to experience, to share. Deliberately putting stimuli out of reach forces the mind itself to find remedies for things we don't like. Boredom, discomfort, agitation. If we are only happy when we're happy, what is lasting happiness and what are its causes? Is boredom a negative, or simply a label we give for moments of something that we could relabel? If others seem to ruin our happiness, and we can't control them, are we doomed to misery? Modern lives are busy, complex, stressful. We go

on holiday to recover, and yet - there's that expression: Wherever you go, there you are. Same body, same mind, at the mercy of external conditions.

Attention is the sound of silence. It is a place beyond the noise and the news. In our attention we are alive to the soul of another. Stan Grant (2025)

There are different ways to learn about our own minds. 'Meditation' is a word to describe an action, in which there are many traditions. While a formal place to meditate is helpful, it isn't essential. The Buddha himself had his great realisation while sitting under a tree. He gave his first teaching and also passed into his final meditation under trees. First Nations peoples offer us lessons in valuing such long lived and peaceful local residents. And listening, looking deeply. Imagine the trees, the waters, the other species around us not as competitors but family members. Imagine a different perspective of your own backyard. Imagine being on a planet full of colour, elements, sights and sounds, extraordinary life.





I can't speak for the wisdom of those who have millennia of experiences sitting and walking these old landscapes. There are multiple paths and ways, different languages and methods to guide us to understanding ourselves, and what is not self, and what the difference might mean. Learning something, and then watering it in with silence and observation, might not be a bad way to allow something worthwhile to grow. It's just a breath away.

God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass - grow in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls. Mother Theresa

Neale Draper, 2015, Islands of the dead? Prehistoric occupation of Kangaroo Island and other southern offshore islands and watercraft use by Aboriginal Australians. *Quaternary International*, 385: 229-242

Stan Grant, 2025, The awe of silence, The Saturday Paper: [https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2025/07/19/the-awe-silence?utm\\_source=socialflow&utm\\_medium=facebook](https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2025/07/19/the-awe-silence?utm_source=socialflow&utm_medium=facebook)

Mother Theresa,

<https://www.artisticdailyprayers.org/teresa-of-calcutta.html>

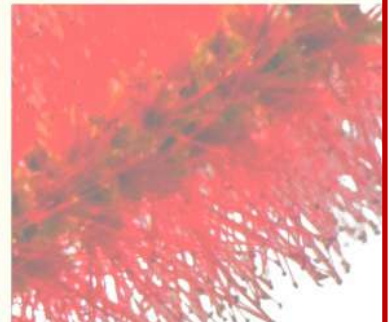
# YARN UP WITH KAREN SMITH

On Thursday March 12<sup>th</sup>, the Aboriginal Heritage Office held another instalment of its ongoing series of "Yarn Up's." The special guest speaker was none other than the AHO's own Education Officer, Karen Smith. Karen has been involved with the AHO for more than 15 years in her role educating schools and community groups across the region. Currently Karen is in her last months before retirement, and the AHO team deemed her to be worthy to present an insight to her own life. Karen did not disappoint.

The event was held at the Manly Art Gallery and was attended by more than 75 people from across the community of the North Shore. The audience was treated with stories, anecdotes and insights streaming from Karen's youth to her vast experience as a singer and performer around the globe, and up to her current role and involvement with the Aboriginal Heritage Office. It was a wonderful evening, full of laughter and positive energy. Everyone who attended left with a sense of learning and insight into the life of a very special individual, Auntie Karen Smith.



# YARN UP WITH KAREN SMITH



# FREEDOM RIDES

BY PHIL HUNT

The AHO connected with our local government comrades at Canterbury Bankstown Council at the Lyora Matta First Nations Cultural Hub in February. We had wanted to for a while but their Freedom Rides event was the perfect opportunity.

It was also an employment forum and a few organisations had stalls and introduced themselves. As one speaker from UWS eloquently explained, her mature age degree that she obtained was made possible because of the courage of those who forged the way. People like Charlie Perkins.

We had the opportunity to meet Aboriginal employees and others from local Council, state government, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and education services. It is often the case that the news is dominated with frightening world events and controversial issues at the national and state levels. It is always amazing and inspiring to see how many great initiatives are happening at the local level.

If you don't know much about the Freedom Rides, check out the below for more. It's not that long ago in some respects, but a long way in others.

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/1965-freedom-ride>



The SAFA group in front of their hired 'Freedom Ride' bus. Photograph reproduced with permission of Wendy Watson-Ekatein (nee Golding) and supplied by Ann Curthoys.

# IMPORTANT DATES

## FOR 2026

26th  
May

### National Sorry Day

National Sorry Day acknowledges the Stolen Generations – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from their families.



27th  
May

### Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

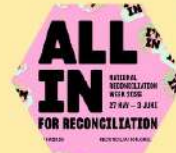
This date marks when over 90% of Australians voted “yes” to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the census and allow the federal government to make laws for them.



27th  
May-3rd  
June

### National Reconciliation Week

National Reconciliation Week is a time to recognise and honour the strength, resilience, and enduring cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It highlights truth-telling about Australia’s history while calling for real change – supporting self-determination, respect, and justice.



3rd  
June

### Mabo Day

Mabo Day recognises the historic High Court decision that overturned the idea of terra nullius and acknowledged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ connection to land through Native Title.



5th July-  
12th July

### NAIDOC Week

NAIDOC Week celebrates the history, culture, and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is an important opportunity for communities across Australia to come together, learn, and honour the world’s oldest continuing cultures while recognising ongoing contributions and leadership.



4th  
August

### National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day

This day celebrates the strength, culture, and future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It highlights the importance of identity, family, and community in supporting young people to grow strong in culture and proud of who they are.



# SANDPAPER FIG

*FIGUS CORONATA*

The AHO, in our Bush Tucker Garden, has a gorgeous Sandpaper Fig growing. It's rough, beautifully textured leaves are often a surprising delight for visitors to feel. I thought it was time we showcase our Sandpaper Fig because it is actually a stunner of a plant.

A hardy species, the sandpaper fig can withstand cold climates, poor soils, low lights and some neglect, which is probably why it does so well in our garden!

While our plant has not yet grown any fruit, we hope that it will. The fruit is a deep purple-black colour when ripe. Apparently the fruit is quite small and can be eaten fresh.

Did you know that Sandpaper Figs, like all Ficus trees, can only be fertilised by one particular type of wasp? Funnily enough, they are called Fig Wasps. Even more interesting, each fig has its own unique fig wasp species.

Traditionally, the sandpaper fig was used as — you guessed it — sandpaper. Perfect for smoothing wooden tools.

The leaves were also used medicinally to relieve insect bites.

Drop into the AHO Museum in Freshwater and come and have a look at our sandpaper fig.

Reference:

<https://roundglassustain.com/wild-vault/fig-wasps>

<https://tuckerbush.com.au/sandpaper-fig-ficus-coronata/>



FIG WASP



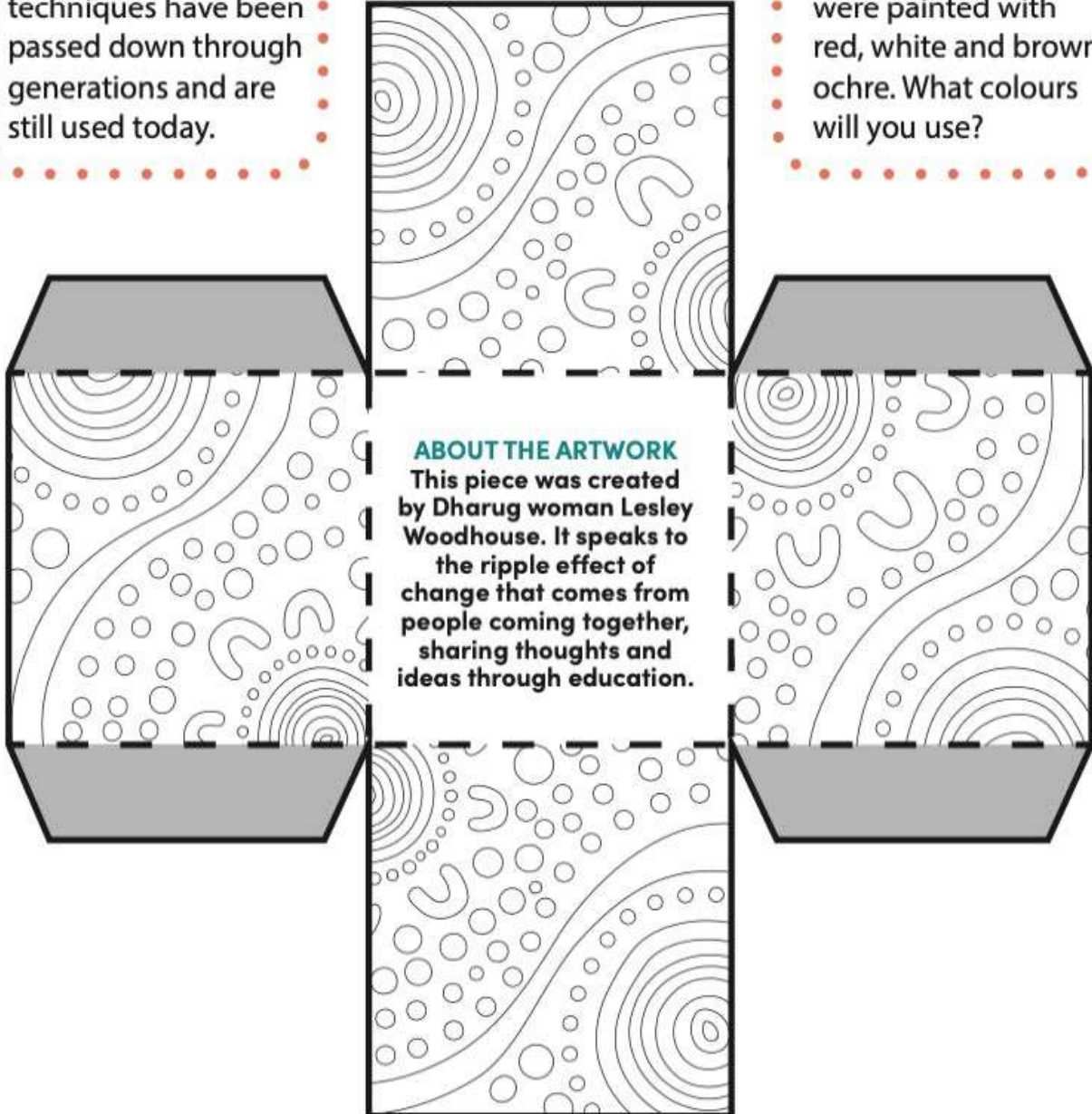
# WINGARU EGG BASKETS

## Didge Ya Know?

Aboriginal weaving techniques have been passed down through generations and are still used today.

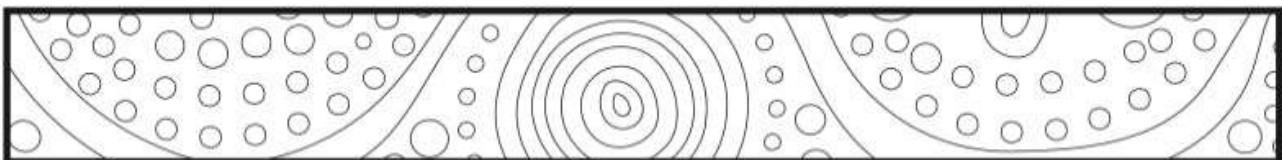
## Didge Ya Know?

Traditionally, baskets were painted with red, white and brown ochre. What colours will you use?



### ABOUT THE ARTWORK

This piece was created by Dharug woman Lesley Woodhouse. It speaks to the ripple effect of change that comes from people coming together, sharing thoughts and ideas through education.



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut along the outside lines and fold along the dashed lines.
2. Put glue on the shaded sections and join up the sides.
3. Attach your handle with glue or staples.



# Australian Native Spiced Hot Cross Buns



## Ingredients

### For the buns

625g strong white flour  
1 tsp. Salt  
1/4 tsp. cinnamon anise, powder  
1/4 tsp. lemon myrtle, powder  
45g butter (grated)  
90g sugar  
2-3 finger limes, peel finely and diced  
1 1/2 tsp. yeast (dried is fine)  
1 free range egg  
275ml luke-warm milk  
75g muntries (fresh, dried or frozen and thawed)  
50g ribberries (fresh, dried or frozen and thawed)  
50g Chocolate chips

### For the glaze

1/4 cup self raising flour  
600ml water

## Method

Sieve flour, salt and spices in mixing bowl. Rub in butter with your fingers. Add zest, yeast and sugar. Beat eggs separately and then add to the mix along with the milk. Mix to a soft dough. Turn out onto a lightly floured bench and work in the mixed fruit. Knead lightly for about 3-5 minutes.

Grease a large mixing bowl lightly with butter or oil. Shape the dough into a large ball, place in the bowl and cover with a clean tea towel. Set aside in a warm place for an hour.

Turn out onto your lightly floured again work surface and 'knock back the dough', which is just another very quick knead. Put back in the bowl, cover for another 30 minutes to prove (rise some more).

Preheat your oven to 200.C and line a baking tray with baking paper. Mix self-raising flour and water.

Turn out one more time and divide the mixture into 6 large or 12 small pieces and form them into individual balls and flatten with your fingertips. Cover and rest for a final 15 minutes. Pipe crosses onto the buns. Place in the oven and bake for 10 minutes.

Reduce oven temperature to 180°C and bake for a further 15 minutes. Brush buns with jam, syrup or honey while hot.

**Recipe by Rebecca Sullivan from NITV**

<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/easter-recipe-australian-native-spiced-hot-cross-buns/ldk3mzsro>