



## 2022 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Two Path Strong – strong in culture and strong in education

Destination Name: Coffs Coast

Country: Australia

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Submission category: *(Please check one of the boxes that indicates the focus of your story)*

*Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module 'Good Practice Story'.*

- Governance, Reset & Recovery
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

*Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module "Good Practice Story".*

*Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact [top100@greendestinations.org](mailto:top100@greendestinations.org)*





## DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

*Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.*

### Issues faced

*What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice?*

This is a story about how Aboriginal tourism on the Coffs Coast helped build the first bilingual Indigenous language school in New South Wales, Australia.

In times of environmental uncertainty and a desire to protect the planet's natural assets for future generations, Aboriginal culture and language has the ability to connect First Nations people and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the importance of caring for country.

Aboriginal Australia is divided into several Nations, and then into smaller tribal (clan) groups. The **Gumbaynggirr Nation** covers a large area of the Mid North Coast of New South Wales.

The Gumbaynggirr people have occupied this land for thousands of years, forming one of the largest coastal Aboriginal Nations in New South Wales. They are renowned as the 'sharing people' – the land was so fertile and rich that they commonly shared food and other resources with people from neighbouring Indigenous Nations. Gumbaynggirr is not only the Nation but also the language group.

At the time of European arrival, approximately 250 Aboriginal Nations were present in Australia, encompassing around 500 separate language-speaking groups. Today it is thought that only 90 languages remain, with 70 of these close to extinction. Although officially listed as critically endangered, Gumbaynggirr is one of the surviving languages, spoken fluently by less than 30 people.

Learning an Indigenous language such as Gumbaynggirr can be integral in affirming and maintaining a young person's wellbeing, self-esteem and a strong sense of identity. This is because Indigenous languages contain complex understandings of a person's culture and their connection with their land. They don't just carry information. Languages also link to a deeper connection to land, environmental sustainability, Dreaming stories, medicinal, and historical experiences.

### Methods, steps and tools applied





### *How was the good practice implemented?*

In 2010, local Gumbaynggirr man Clark Webb established Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation (BMNAC) with a simple but BIG dream to ensure that Aboriginal communities, and in particular young people are **'two path strong'** – strong in culture and strong in education. To achieve the corporation's goal in revitalising and re-imagining the education of Aboriginal children in the Coffs Coast region, BMNAC developed a collection of award-winning Aboriginal tourism businesses connecting visitors to language and culture, and a popular café featuring native foods. All profits from these tourism businesses are directly reinvested into the corporation, creating a long-term sustainable financial income stream for the development of BMNAC education programs.

Today, visitors to the Coffs Coast can connect with Gumbaynggirr stories, see their art and taste some of their traditional delicacies with memorable award-winning BMNAC experiences. These include:

**Wajaana Yaam Adventure Tours** - all guides are Gumbaynggirr People or Aboriginal people with strong ties to Gumbaynggirr Country and, on the 2.5-hour paddling tours held on three idyllic local creeks, guides share ancient stories about the landscape, and introduce visitors to its bush tucker (Indigenous foods) along the way.

**Giingan Gumbaynggirr Cultural Experience** - Gumbaynggirr culture through stories, song and dance. Giingan Gumbaynggirr Cultural Experience is an award-winning cultural experience where visitors watch the Wajaarr Ngaarlu dancers perform and take part in a smoking ceremony. The Giingan Gumbaynggirr Cultural Experience includes an interpretative walk along ancient Aboriginal country featuring Dreaming stories along the way.

**Nyanggan Gapi Café** - 100 per cent of Nyanggan Gapi Cafés proceeds go to BMNAC programs, including school learning centres. Visitors can try Indigenous flavours in a wattleseed brownie or lemon myrtle and mixed berry muffin, along with coffee made from locally roasted coffee beans by Blackwhite Espresso.

### Key success factors

#### *What helped you tackle the issues?*

From little things BIG things grow. In 2022, BMNAC launched the first NSW school to teach children in both English and their local Indigenous language, The Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School. The school welcomed 15 inaugural students from kindergarten through to year 2 in 2022, with plans to grow, year level by year level, as the cohort progresses through to high school. Clark Webb, now CEO of the Corporation, said plans for the school began before he was born, and he felt a sense of relief knowing that traditional teaching would be returning to the area.

*"Our community has been educating our children for many thousands of years and we just had a little break for a couple of hundred"* – Clark Webb.

Staying true to the Corporation's vision 'two path strong', the school focuses on Gumbaynggirr language, knowledge of country and Gumbaynggirr philosophies with a focus on academic achievement.

BMNAC recently announced a major grant of \$5.4 million from the NSW State Government to expand their Aboriginal tourism offerings, which will continue to financially support the future development of the Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School. The grant will allow BMNAC to create a new Indigenous ECO Resort offering high quality camping within the Orara East State Forest. The Indigenous ECO Resort is planned to offer up to 30 'glamping' style pod tents and connect with tours and activities in and around the Coffs Coast focusing on Aboriginal culture.





## Lessons learned

*While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome?*

As noted in the NSW Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan 2017-2020, Aboriginal tourism operators face a unique set of cultural considerations in finding harmony between tourism, culture and the environment, and achieving the appropriate balance between cultural integrity and responsiveness to market demands.

After 15 months of assessment by Ecotourism Australia, in 2021 the Coffs Coast was recognised as NSW's first Certified ECO Destination. This certification establishes the region as a world leader in environmental tourism and proves the destination's strong, well-managed commitment to living culture and traditions. Through the Coffs Coast Tourism Strategy, and the completion of the ECO Destination Certification, the local Coffs Harbour City Council (CHCC) outlines how it will continue to support the local Aboriginal tourism sector to meet these opportunities and challenges. Further, in 2019 CHCC adopted the 'Yandaarra Shifting Camp Together – A Guide for Aboriginal Cultural Awareness and Engagement' strategy. 'Yandaarra – Shifting Camp Together' advocates a collaborative approach towards the protection of Aboriginal culture in the local government area and helps provide social and cultural understanding by acknowledging and celebrating Aboriginal perspectives and world views.

## Results, achievements and recognitions

*What were the qualitative and quantitative results of the good practice?*

BMNAC's Aboriginal tourism experiences have been instrumental in developing a deeper understanding of Gumbaynggirr culture within the local community. This deeper understanding has allowed the corporation to better communicate their message and goals to the wider community, and have a positive influence on the cultural identity of the Coffs Coast.

With support of its Aboriginal tourism experiences, BMNAC has consistently delivered high standard Gumbaynggirr language programs for over 13 years. BMNAC now employs over 10 full-time staff who teach Gumbaynggirr language across preschools, primary schools, various community groups and the Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School, reaching more than 100 young people and approximately 30 adults each week with language education.

For non-Indigenous students, learning a local Aboriginal language provides an insight into a better understanding of the world's oldest living cultures. For the wider community, BMNAC's revitalisation and teaching of Gumbaynggirr language encourages us all to reflect on the importance of language, and the important relationship between First Nations people and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Language in itself is a vessel for transmitting knowledge, ideas and shared meanings, therefore can be recognised as an important step towards a reconciled Australia.

*'At its heart, reconciliation is about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples, for the benefit of all Australians.'* – Reconciliation Australia

Supported by the NSW Government through Destination NSW, the NSW Tourism Awards are the pinnacle in NSW tourism excellence. In 2019 and 2021, BMNAC was awarded Gold in the category of 'Excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism'. Tourism Australia recently recognised BMNAC's Aboriginal tourism products as extraordinary cultural experiences.

## Additional references





Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from YouTube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL (not WeTransfer).

**Supporting links & resources:**

Supporting Images – [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/18i\\_Ga-GsxqhUZecoBuzpJboilx-V7Mkl](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/18i_Ga-GsxqhUZecoBuzpJboilx-V7Mkl)

Gumbaynggirr Culture Video (editable version can be provided on request) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn6KveGDrt0>

Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation - <https://bmnac.org.au/>

Giingan Gumbaynggirr Cultural Experience - <https://www.welcometocountry.com/products/giingan-gumbaynggirr-cultural-experience>

Wajaana Yaam Adventure Tours - <https://www.welcometocountry.com/collections/wajaana-yaam>

Nyanggan Gapi Cafe - <https://nyanggangapi.com/>

2021 NSW Tourism Awards - <https://media.destinationnsw.com.au/media-releases/winners-2021-nsw-tourism-awards-announced>  
Gold Award, Excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism - The Giingan Experience by BMNAC

2019 NSW Tourism Awards - <https://dncnsw.com/2019-nsw-tourism-awards/>  
Gold Award - The Giingan Experience by BMNAC  
Silver Award - Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours by BMNAC

**Additional references:**

Key Data – NSW Aboriginal People, 2020, p1- [https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/media/website\\_pages/new-knowledge/facts-and-figures/KEY-DATA-ABORIGINAL-PEOPLE-SEP-2020.pdf](https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/media/website_pages/new-knowledge/facts-and-figures/KEY-DATA-ABORIGINAL-PEOPLE-SEP-2020.pdf)

NSW Government, 2021, Increasing the number of Aboriginal young people reaching their learning potential - <https://www.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/increasing-number-of-aboriginal-young-people-reaching-their-learning-potential>

Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan 2017 – 2020 - <https://www.destinationnsw.com.au/about-us/strategies-and-plans/aboriginal-tourism-action-plan>

NSW's first bilingual school of Aboriginal language to open in Coffs Harbour - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-10/first-indigenous-bilingual-school-in-nsw-opens-in-coffs-harbour/100605498>

Discover how the Coffs Coast became NSW's first Certified ECO Destination - <https://www.coffscost.com.au/article/nsw-first-certified-eco-destination/>

Yandaarra Shifting Camp Together – A Guide for Aboriginal Cultural Awareness and Engagement - <https://www.coffsharbour.nsw.gov.au/files/sharedassets/public/community-and-recreation/mycoffs-connect/yandaarra-shifting-camp-together.pdf>

Reconciliation Australia, 2020, p1 - [https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ra-letstalk-factsheet-languages\\_final.pdf](https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ra-letstalk-factsheet-languages_final.pdf)

