

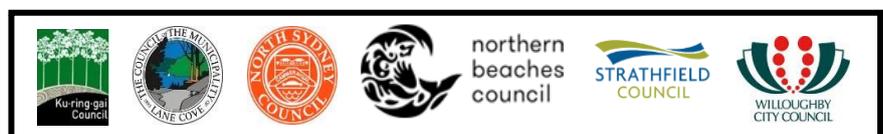
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OFFICE



The Volunteer Site Monitoring Program Report

2021-2022

Written and compiled by the
Aboriginal Heritage Office
Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Northern
Beaches, Strathfield and Willoughby Councils.



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The Aboriginal community of the region,
Aboriginal Heritage Office volunteers,
Heritage NSW,
Councillors and Council Staff,
Aboriginal Heritage Office staff and consultants.



Figure 1 Volunteers attending Training

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the works carried out by the Aboriginal Heritage Office under the Volunteer Site Monitoring Program (VSMP) for the financial year 2021-2022 for local residents of Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Northern Beaches, Strathfield and Willoughby Councils. New ongoing funding and the current 2020-2025 Five Year MoU has allowed the appointment of a permanent - Volunteer Coordinator.

OBJECTIVES

The program objectives were to:

- Reconnect with former volunteers;
- Obtain new volunteers;
- Organise and carry out training for all volunteers;
- Where possible, increase the number of sites being monitored and site reports being submitted to improve management of sites;
- Ensure Work, Health and Safety practices are adhered to; and
- Continue the ongoing engagement with volunteers.

ONGOING PARTICIPATION

Volunteers were gained from AHO predominately through the website. Each significant event, eg Reconciliation Week or NAIDOC Week, we receive a spike in enquiries. We also see an increase in enquires with each COVID lockdown. The AHO museum attracted walk-ins who were sometimes interested in becoming volunteers and there have even been a few development applicants who, after a property site inspection have become interested in the volunteer site monitoring program. Training sessions are held throughout the financial year. We were fortunate enough to hold one induction in person this year. All other inductions have been held and continue to be held via Zoom.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The Volunteer Site Monitoring Program operates under Northern Beaches Council (NBC) standards, and adheres to Volunteering Australia Standards and Work, Health and Safety (WHS) processes and procedures. The Volunteer Coordinators collaborated in 2021 to update the Volunteer Induction Handbook based on experience with the existing processes.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

The AHO's newsletter continues to update readers of recent AHO activities and provides information on the volunteer program. Each year, National Volunteer Week is in May and this year we celebrated and recognized our long-serving volunteers. We have 41 volunteers who have given their time and energy to preserving the Aboriginal cultural heritage in their area for five or more years. We even have a few that are almost at 15 years service!

RESULTS

The VSMP is successful with 116 volunteers and continues to increase. The result is an enhanced awareness and appreciation for Aboriginal heritage and history amongst the community. The Volunteer Site Monitoring Program helps the AHO monitor sites by keeping them informed of damage that may otherwise go unnoticed for longer. The number of volunteer site reports received enables an improved standard of site management for a significant number of these priceless cultural heritage sites. The program continues to run safely, and without incident.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report provides information about the importance of Aboriginal heritage and the Volunteer Site Monitoring Program (VSMP), a background to the program and works carried out under the program. The report summarises the results of the program for the financial year 2021-2022. The staff and consultants of the Aboriginal Heritage Office and its volunteers run the AHO VSMP. It is in partnership with Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Northern Beaches, Strathfield and Willoughby Councils.

1.1 2022 OBJECTIVES

The Volunteer Site Monitoring Program was established in 2008. The 2021-2022 program objectives were to:

- Continue the ongoing engagement with volunteers;
- Reconnect with former volunteers;
- Recruit new volunteers;
- Organise and carry out training for all volunteers;
- Where possible, increase the number of sites being monitored and site reports being submitted to improve management of sites;
- Increase the quality of reports being submitted and;
- Ensure Work, Health and Safety practices are adhered to.

1.2 WHAT IS THE ABORIGINAL HERITAGE OFFICE?

In 2000, four Councils in northern Sydney joined forces to establish an Aboriginal heritage position responsible for identifying and protecting Aboriginal sites in the area, providing education and training to Council staff and residents, and providing expertise in Aboriginal heritage generally. This was the first position of its kind in Australia at local government level. The AHO now partners with six councils, Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Northern Beaches, Strathfield and Willoughby Councils. It remains the only office of its kind in Australia.

Some of the successfully completed projects and initiatives carried out by the AHO include:

- Establishing Aboriginal heritage policies and guidelines;
- Recording and visiting sites;
- Producing Site Management Reports for each Council;

- Training Council staff;
- Producing brochures and a website for the public on Aboriginal heritage issues;
- Undertaking public education programs, school programs, etc.
- Preparing reports and mapping areas of potential Aboriginal heritage for each Council;
- Providing advice to Councils on development and zoning issues;
- Providing advice to other local and state government agencies;
- Specialised studies such as the Rock Art Recording Program and the Coastal Erosion Monitoring Program.

1.3 WHAT IS ABORIGINAL HERITAGE?

Aboriginal people have been living on this continent for at least 65,000 years, making them part of the longest living culture in the world. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, Aboriginal people populated every landscape, from the coast to the desert interior – not one group but many, speaking hundreds of different languages and with variable belief systems, traditions and cultures. In the course of everyday life, each family left evidence of their daily activities. The remains of seafood meals over decades, centuries and millennia are now known as ‘shell middens’; the stone implements used by craftsmen to shape other tools and for daily tasks become ‘stone artefacts’; and the pictures painted or carved into stone become ‘rock art’, ‘engravings’ or ‘petroglyphs’. These are the physical archaeological sites and remains that are encompassed by the term ‘Aboriginal heritage’.

The term also encompasses other places of significance to Aboriginal people. Landforms or landscape features, or places associated with traditional activities or significant events are important to local people. A place can be significant as a landscape, and for its individual physical remains.



Figure 2 Engraving Site

1.4 HOW SIGNIFICANT ARE THESE SITES?

Each individual site is considered to be of high significance by the Aboriginal community. Overall, they have local, regional, national and international significance. Their significance arises from their age (in the Sydney region some are dated over 30,000 years with most being at least 4,000 years old), the style of art and engraving, their level of preservation in the context of Australia's biggest city, the representative variety and amount of different site types.

Sydney Harbour itself is heritage listed and the Aboriginal heritage is an important component identified in Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment 2005). All of these sites are important to the custodians, the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council (MLALC), to local Aboriginal people and to Aboriginal communities across Australia where they symbolise the survival of Aboriginal culture even where the impacts of invasion have been the longest and hardest felt. The heritage of the region is also important to the wider public. Local residents have grown up with the sites and many have undertaken Sites Awareness Training to learn more. There are many local people involved in the reconciliation movement who appreciate Aboriginal heritage and are active in trying to protect it. Visitors travelling within Australia and abroad both value the heritage and appreciate the opportunity to see, at first hand, Aboriginal heritage in Sydney, not just the 'outback'.

1.5 BENEFITS TO ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

The primary benefit of this program is to Aboriginal communities in that it has contributed greatly to the both the recording and protection of Aboriginal heritage sites. The regular monitoring and reporting of a site's condition greatly improves the standard of its management. This helps to ensure that these sites that hold such significance to the Aboriginal community (and Australia as a whole), are preserved for future generations.

The Volunteer Monitoring Program has been running for some time, and it is Aboriginal people who have determined the purpose and scope of the program. The management of Aboriginal heritage sites must be carried out in a way that is respectful to the culture to which they belong. As Aboriginal people have developed the program, it is run with a strong sense of cultural awareness. Practices that may have been culturally sensitive, such as site interpretation, were avoided. Instead, the program maintains a stringent focus on accurately locating sites and regularly monitoring them for change. The program has been widely endorsed and praised by members of the Aboriginal community.

By providing education and training, participating volunteers gain an increased awareness and appreciation for Aboriginal heritage and culture. This enhanced cultural awareness is not confined only to participants but also has a broader social benefit as the message diffuses amongst volunteers' friends, family and colleagues.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 WHAT DOES THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM INVOLVE?

Essentially, the program allows interested members of the community to participate in the protection of Aboriginal heritage sites in their area.

The first stage for interested participants is to engage with the Co-ordinator. This is done via email or through a phone call. They are then sent the position description, which outlines their roles and responsibilities. If they respond that they are interested, then they are sent registration paperwork to fill in and an induction time is organized. Inductions can be completed either via Zoom or In-person, depending on convenience, location and Government restrictions. The 2021-2022 year saw the continuation of inductions taking place online via Zoom. This continuation of this induction process has proven to be positive, with potential volunteers captured at the point of peak interest.

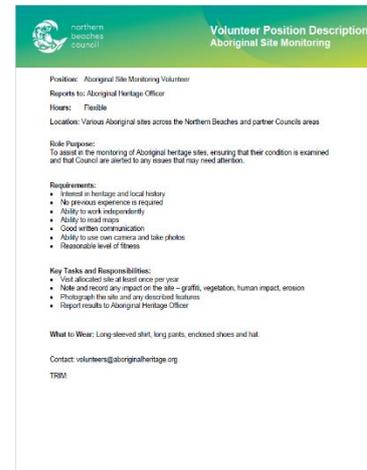


Figure 3 Volunteer Position Description

Once training is completed, volunteers are allocated a suitable site to locate and monitor. Sites are usually allocated near where they live, work or bushwalk. Consideration is paid to each volunteer's level of fitness, confidence and experience in a bushland environment. A site card is provided to volunteers to assist in locating their allocated site. A monitoring form is also sent out to assist with capturing information whilst out on site. Assistance is provided to the Volunteers, from the AHO, in order to locate the allocated site and the AHO Archaeologists are on hand to advise the Monitors of any enquires or requests for assistance that the Volunteer Monitors may need.

The Volunteer Monitors' Site reports are submitted either via the AHO website or email, allowing staff to review information regarding a site's condition, view recent pictures and assess if any action is required.

Attachment 4 provides an example of a volunteer site report.

2.2 WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM?

The Volunteer Monitoring Program assists the AHO in two of its primary roles, namely in improving awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal heritage amongst the community and assisting in the monitoring and ensuing management of Aboriginal heritage sites within the partnering Councils. Concurrently, the program provides a unique opportunity for people looking to help protect the heritage and history of the area in which they live.

The AHO frequently receives inquiries from individuals, by phone, email, at the office and whilst we are out in the public, who are looking to gain a greater understanding of what life would have been like in Sydney before European settlement. Upon learning of the wealth of Aboriginal heritage sites throughout Sydney, many people then ask how they can help to protect such significant vestiges of

Sydney's story. Key recommendation 6.5 of The Northern Sydney Aboriginal Social Plan (2011: pp. 46) suggested that,

"Northern Sydney Councils promote the value of Aboriginal culture and heritage to all community members and priorities protection, care and ongoing maintenance as a measure of value to the whole community."

The volunteer program has been overwhelmingly popular as it provides the education and opportunity to contribute to Aboriginal site protection. Such an opportunity is in growing demand amongst communities that are increasingly becoming aware of and engaging with the region's Aboriginal past.

The regular monitoring of a site greatly improves the chances for its preservation. There are over 800 Aboriginal heritage sites within the partnering Councils of the AHO. The previously mentioned Social Plan (2011) also recommended that:

"Northern Sydney Councils work with relevant agencies and Aboriginal organisations to ensure best practice in providing protection, care and effective management of Aboriginal sites and objects. (Key Recommendation 6.3, pp. 45)"

Limitations on resources and staff numbers at the AHO make the task of monitoring every site at regular durations very difficult. The AHO volunteers monitor several sites that in turn allows the staff and consultants of the AHO valuable time to monitor and record additional sites as well as achieve a regularity of site monitoring reports and records that would not have been possible otherwise. A further benefit of the program is that particular sites may be more susceptible to damage due to nearby construction, vandalism, pedestrian or cycle traffic, and natural processes. By having a site regularly monitored by a volunteer, the AHO greatly improves the chances of detecting the potential for harm to a site before irreversible damage occurs.

By compiling reports submitted for one particular site over an extended period, staff at the AHO can gauge whether the site is being gradually impacted, what the cause of such impact may be and consider potential solutions.

The project also fits in with key recommendations of the:

- Foreshores Aboriginal Heritage Promotion Report, 2007;
- The AHO Business Plan;
- Coastal Erosion of Aboriginal Heritage, Northern Sydney 2015;
- Coastal Erosion of Aboriginal Heritage, Northern Sydney 2019;
- Rock Art and Rock Engraving Project, Northern Sydney 2019
- Aboriginal Site Management Report for each Council.

The Volunteer Monitoring Program strikes a mutually beneficial balance between addressing a demand within the community for education regarding Aboriginal heritage, providing an opportunity to contribute to its protection while at the same time directing such interests in a way that improves standards of site management.

2.3 THE PROGRAM UP UNTIL 2022

As previously mentioned, the program has been running in various forms for several years. It first started prior to the official formation of the AHO as a pilot program called Site Care within North Sydney Council. The pilot program was designed and run by AHO staff and consultants whilst in previous positions with the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council and National Parks and Wildlife Service and involved North Sydney Council's Bushland Management staff prior to the establishment of the AHO. The pilot faltered due to the lack of a suitable framework to expand.

After the establishment of the AHO, the program was re-established through a grant from the Federal Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. Funding was provided between 2007 and 2008 and allowed for the hiring of a consultant to establish the program and coordinate its day-to-day running. Operating across several Councils with numerous sites being monitored, the program was extremely successful. In fact, further grant funding was provided by the Australian Government's Indigenous Heritage Program. The period of funding ran from 2009 – 2010. As interest in the program exceeded what was anticipated, efforts were focused on the provision of volunteer training and the establishment of a system that saw experienced volunteers coordinate the efforts of participants for each region. A system was also developed that allowed volunteers to fill out and submit monitoring reports via a [Site Report page](#) on the AHO website.

Over the years, the amount and frequency of site reports has varied considerably. In those years when the AHO was able to obtain funding or grants for the Volunteers Program the amount of volunteers and the frequency of submission of the site monitoring reports increased. Conversely, when no such funding was available, such as during 2009, 2012 and 2016, or when there was a loss of a staff member, such as in early 2018, the statistics do suggest that if adequate support is not provided to volunteers, the program begins to suffer from a level of volunteer attrition. This is because to maintain participating volunteer's interest, a certain amount of time must be committed to consistently manage the program. Adequate staffing and resources, and good administrative systems ensure regular correspondence and the prompt allocation of new sites to monitor should interest in previous sites dwindle. Such support also allows for the organizing of events and get-togethers to ensure volunteer engagement and interaction with the program. If an efficient system within available resources is not available to provide such management, volunteer attrition is inevitable.



Figure 4 Volunteer Inspection of rock art site in Ku-ring-gai

3.0 THE VOLUNTEER MONITORING PROGRAM 2021-2022

The key objectives of 2021-2022 were to continue the ongoing engagement with volunteers, reconnect with former volunteers, recruit new volunteers and increase the quality of the reports submitted.

3.1 VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

The volunteer coordinator role ensures that the Volunteer Site Monitoring Program has an active and present person to engage volunteers and to recruit and induct new people. They are not only involved in running the Volunteer Site Monitoring Program but also writing the Aboriginal Heritage Office's newsletter, Yarnupings.

The key role of the coordinator is to be a first point of contact for communication between the AHO and the Volunteer Site Monitors. A full-time staff member ensures that volunteer queries are responded to promptly and tasks actioned, freeing up other staff and consultants to focus on additional duties. The regular and prompt correspondence with volunteers is essential for participation growth and volunteer retention.



The volunteer coordinator is also responsible for program promotion across all six partnering Councils (see Figure 4 for an example of one of our flyers), especially through our newsletter and website. By having a designated volunteer coordinator to keep track of all incoming and current volunteers, there is no doubling of effort, and no missed communication. This ensures that all volunteers are included and welcomed into the program.

3.2 TRAINING 2021 AND 2022

The details of individuals who indicated their interest in participating in the program are collected upon inquiry. In 2021-2022, interested parties received emails with further information regarding potential training dates and a link to view the volunteer video on our website. 25 new volunteers were inducted during the 2021-2022 financial year.

Continuing in alignment with the health advice and restrictions that were put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteer training has predominately been via Zoom. Interested parties were sent the Volunteer Site Monitoring position description which outlines the roles and responsibilities and physical capabilities required for the role. Should the interested party agree to the position description, the volunteer coordinator arranges a casual phone conversation to meet and greet the potential volunteer, to learn more about them and make them feel welcome. When the potential volunteer agrees to the position description, either a Zoom or in-person meeting is then set up. Each induction takes approximately 60 minutes. Once this induction is completed and the required paperwork returned, then the new volunteer is given information about the site they will be monitoring.

The Zoom training provides more detail about the expectations of volunteers within their role. Volunteers complete a full Sites Awareness module that includes methods of locating, monitoring and producing reports for their allocated sites. Volunteers are briefed on how to submit online site reports via the AHO website. It is stressed throughout the training that the location of sites is to remain strictly confidential.

The Work Health and Safety induction ensures that volunteers are fully aware of any potential risks associated with their role as Volunteer Site Monitors, and how to eliminate these risks.

Template forms for Volunteer Applications, Role Agreements, Code of Conduct developed specifically for the program are given to and completed by all Trainees (Attachment 1).

A Pre-Monitoring Checklist (Attachment 2) is provided to volunteers for completion before undertaking each monitoring outing. This checklist prompts volunteers to check whether they have all required equipment, as well as providing a reminder to check predicted weather conditions. The checklist also asks volunteers to ensure they have reviewed relevant maps, location descriptions and satellite imagery so that they are familiar with potential hazards. The most important aspect of the Pre-Monitoring Checklist is that it ensures that volunteers have made their intentions known to a reliable contact in case something goes wrong. Similar to the 'Intentions' system commonly used by hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts, volunteers inform their contact of where they are monitoring, when they are departing, when they intend to return and to contact the AHO in the unlikely event of a volunteer not returning from a monitoring outing. Volunteers are also instructed to inform the AHO of their intentions if they are unable to leave such details with others.

A Volunteer Site Monitoring Form is also provided to newly inducted volunteers which is offered as simple prompt for capturing information whilst out of site. All forms and practices are explained to new volunteers during their initial training session.

Installments of the latest AHO newsletter kept interested potential volunteers up to date with when training sessions, Yarn Ups, and other community events are happening. It serves to create a rapport and means to maintain contact with all volunteers throughout the year.

3.3 VOLUNTEER MONITOR REPORTING

In the financial year 2021-2022, sixty-seven (67) Volunteer Monitor Site Reports were received. The percentage of reports received per council is shown in Table 1.

2021-2022 Volunteer Monitor Reports Received

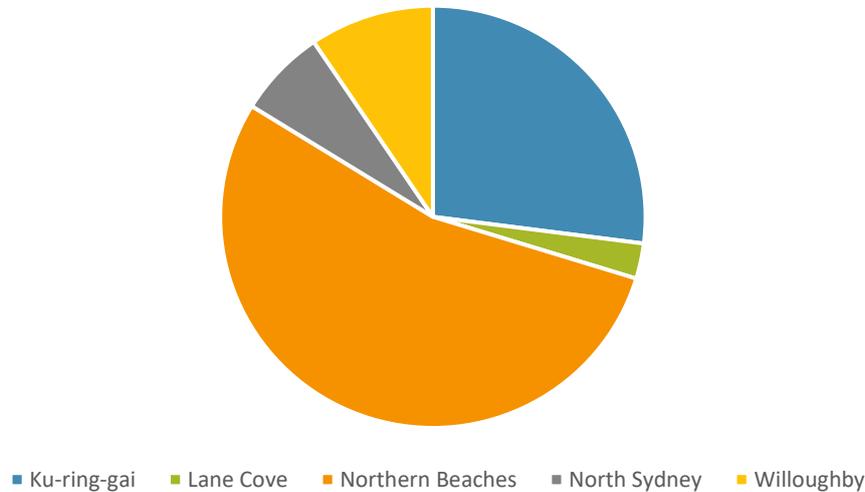


Table 1 Volunteer Monitoring Program Site Monitoring Reports Received 2021-2022

The submissions were down this financial year compared with the previous financial year, with 74 reports being turned in. Of the 116 active volunteers, 55 submitted reports (45%). The number of volunteer site reports was expected to continue to increase in the 2021-2022 year due to the significant uptake of new volunteers, however the incessant wet weather meant that many sites were inaccessible and others had significant numbers of leeches, meaning that many volunteers were unable to visit their allocated sites.

It is clear that a specified contact at the AHO is needed to engage with volunteers. With constant engagement, reminders, newsletters and encouragement, the volunteer program continues to grow and gain momentum.

Table 2 shows the spread of volunteers across the six partner councils. These numbers were taken from reports received in the last financial year, and indicate which volunteers remain active, or have joined in the last 12 months. As Northern Beaches is now a conglomerate of Pittwater, Manly and Warringah Councils, it is unsurprising that they have the most volunteers in their area. Greater encouragement of participants from Strathfield and Lane Cove Councils is clearly needed. While there are only three recorded sites in Strathfield, having a couple of volunteers from this LGA would be encouraging.

2021-2022 Volunteer Monitors by Council

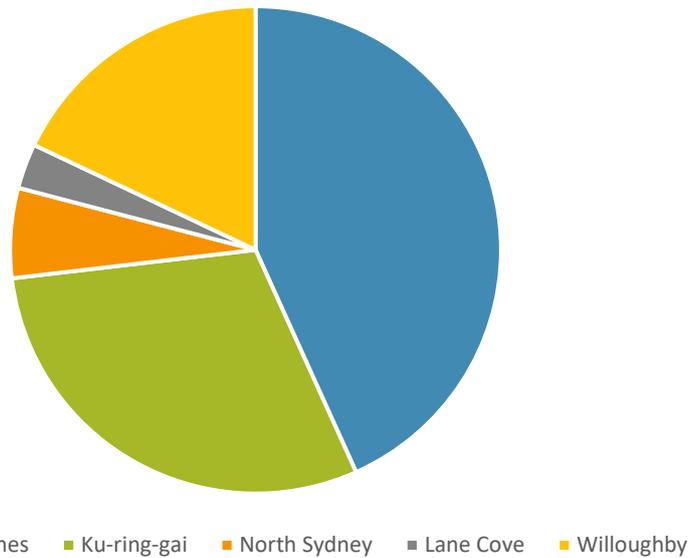


Table 2 Volunteer Site Monitors per council 2021-2022.

3.4 PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The Volunteer Site Monitoring Program followed on from previous years, using the same databases and methods of record keeping. The databases were updated so that retired volunteers were not sent communication they did not want. Records are kept of interested participants, correspondence, site suitability, site allocation, site reports, photos, volunteer contact details and retired volunteers. Details regarding address, email, phone number, allocated sites, training dates and Work Health and Safety inductions for all volunteers, past and present, are also retained while still providing appropriate privacy restrictions. The improved database continues to ensure that the management of both volunteers and sites is done in the most efficient, effective, sustainable and safest way possible, while maintaining volunteer privacy and site data confidentiality.

Information was included in the Volunteer database regarding form completion, document registration and whether inductions had been completed. This allowed all staff, consultants and managers to track required actions and completed tasks to effectively manage the process of updating WHS practices.

By having a designated volunteer coordinator, there was one person who was aware of all volunteer comings and goings, allowing for effective communication. It meant that duplication of effort and miscommunication is avoided. The cohesiveness of the Volunteer Site Monitoring Program database assisted in reducing much of the complexity involved in the management of tasks. This also made information regarding volunteers, site reports and sites monitored more accessible.

The program has always run safely and without incident. The Volunteer Induction Handbook is distributed for all AHO volunteers to read, acknowledge and sign. The Handbook addresses the principles of volunteering, rights of volunteers, manual handling techniques, incident reporting,

insurance, grievances/complaints, responsible behavior and Code of Conduct and dismissal procedure.

All relevant forms, templates, training material, guidelines and other documents were recorded on the Northern Beaches Council's record management system. This ensured that there was a permanent record of documents required to demonstrate the safe management of the program.

The Volunteer Monitoring Program is managed with safety as the highest priority and no incidents of concern have ever occurred. The continual updating of WHS practices throughout various aspects of the program has helped ensure that practices comply with legislative standards.

3.5 VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Retaining participants is a common challenge faced by volunteer programs. In order to retain the interest of participants it was imperative to be aware of their motivations behind getting involved in volunteer work generally, as well as understanding what drew them to the Volunteer Site Monitoring Program specifically.

Many participants look to engage in volunteer work as a means of meeting like-minded people and developing friendships. Another common motivation is to participate in an activity that allows individuals to 'give back' to the community. With a growing awareness and appreciation for Aboriginal heritage and history, there is also an increasing desire to assist in its protection. Those who participate in the VSMP echoed these motivations. Many also mentioned that to be able to undertake volunteer work in an outdoor bushland environment was also of great appeal.

The training element of the program is effective in providing volunteers with the education they are interested in regarding traditional Aboriginal ways of life and the impacts of European settlement. As the training sessions are held in groups, they also provided a great opportunity for volunteers to meet and interact with new people.

The volunteer work itself plays a direct role in the effective management of the Aboriginal heritage sites within the participants' area. As such, the volunteer site monitors are able to contribute to the preservation of Aboriginal heritage in a very real and beneficial way.

While the volunteer program is effective in connecting with the motivations and interests of participants, the program has still suffered from volunteer attrition in the past. After discussions amongst those involved in the management of the program as well as consulting with the volunteers themselves, several reasons were identified as being possible causes for diminished interest and engagement. Unlike similar volunteer programs such as Council Bushcare groups, the work of a volunteer site monitor is undertaken individually, rather than in a group. While this does allow volunteers to carry out their site monitoring when it suits them, it may also lead to a lack of motivation as is common when working alone. There was usually an increase in the reports received when emails went out from the volunteer coordinator, even if the emails were about events or the newsletter. These reminders that they are a part of a team help volunteers to remain interested in the program.

The first half of the 2021-2022 financial year has seen a steady, continued increase in community interest in volunteering with the Aboriginal Heritage Office. Continuing mandatory lockdowns of non-essential workers throughout 2021-2022 meant that people were spending an increased amount of

time at home. Looking for a way to keep active and engaged, community members sought out volunteering opportunities. The second half of the financial year, has seen a decline in the interest in volunteering and monitoring events as the population returns to work.

In order to address issues regarding volunteer attrition, several strategies are used to ensure continued volunteer engagement with the program. A quarterly newsletter updates readers of recent AHO activities and provides information on the volunteer program. Volunteers were also given the opportunity to provide feedback on the program through a survey. The responses were compiled and analysed and the Volunteer Site Monitoring Program incorporated the review.

The AHO newsletter is an important means of keeping in touch with volunteers and updating them on recent events and projects. The quarterly newsletter provides many articles and editorials that discuss a variety of aspects to do with Aboriginal history and heritage. Volunteers often mention that the newsletter is also of great interest to them due to the inclusion of material relevant to Indigenous communities of today. The newsletter continues to be an important aspect of the volunteer program. Volunteers like to be informed of what the AHO staff are up to and learn about different aspects of Aboriginal heritage. The newsletter is a way of communicating with volunteers and keeping them interested in the program and informed about the AHO.



Figure 5 AHO 'Yarnupings' Newsletter

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 VOLUNTEER NUMBERS

It can be difficult to determine exactly how many volunteers are participating in the program at any one time. This is because a volunteer may not submit a report for some time but still be in regular contact with the office and eventually recommence monitoring their site or sites. Furthermore, a volunteer may have failed to inform the AHO that they are no longer participating in the program. Assumptions that a volunteer is no longer participating come after they have repeatedly failed to respond to emails or phone calls.

This year, 25 new volunteers have received training and are in regular contact with the AHO. Around a dozen more former volunteers recommenced their site monitoring and sent in site reports. We received emails from twelve people wishing to be removed from the program as they were no longer able to volunteer.

There are a number of reasons a volunteer no longer wishes to be part of the program. Age, mobility and health are factors for many of our volunteers. While we ask the volunteers upon joining to inform us of any health issues, circumstances change. We also confirm with our volunteers what level of physical capability they have and allocate sites accordingly. However, many of our volunteers have been monitoring their sites for a number of years and in some instances, volunteers have experienced a decline in health and mobility and as such, are unable to continue monitoring sites.

Another challenge in volunteer retention is in maintaining interest. While the lack of change in a site is a good result from a site preservation perspective, it may not make for the most interesting monitoring observations. Participants may seek more than one site to monitor.

4.2 VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Continuing in alignment with the health advice and restrictions that were put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteer training has predominately been via Zoom. Interested parties were sent the Volunteer Site Monitoring position description which outlines the roles and responsibilities and physical capabilities required for the role. Should the interested party agree to the position description, the volunteer coordinator arranges a casual phone conversation to meet and greet the potential volunteer, to learn more about them and make them feel welcome. When the potential volunteer agrees to the position description, either a Zoom or in-person meeting is then set up. Each induction takes approximately 60 minutes. Once this induction is completed and the required paperwork returned, then the new volunteer is given information about the site they will be monitoring.

The Zoom training provides more detail about the expectations of volunteers within their role. Volunteers complete a full Sites Awareness module that includes methods of locating, monitoring and producing reports for their allocated sites. Volunteers are briefed on how to submit online site reports via the AHO website. It is stressed throughout the training that the location of sites is to remain strictly confidential.

Participation in the program increased, not only through the recruitment and training of new volunteers, but also by reconnecting with volunteers that had not been active for some time. Regular newsletters as well as social events such as Yarn Ups have provided an opportunity to re-engage with inactive volunteers and provided the motivation and support that encouraged them to resume site monitoring.

4.3 SITES BEING MONITORED

Increasing the frequency of monitoring for an individual site helps to improve its management and protection. However, increasing the number of different sites being monitored provides much needed assistance in the monitoring workload of the AHO and saves resources and time.

4.4 NUMBER OF SITE REPORTS

As previously mentioned, monitoring the significant number of sites within the boundaries of the six partnering Councils is an immense workload. Having even one site monitored by a volunteer provides a great deal of assistance to the staff and consultants of the AHO.

There is evidence that there is increasing public interest in site monitoring and Aboriginal heritage. The program not only benefits the AHO, but the broader community who love to be involved.

ATTACHMENT 1 POSITION DESCRIPTION



northern
beaches
council

Volunteer Position Description Aboriginal Site Monitoring

Position: Aboriginal Site Monitoring Volunteer

Reports to: Aboriginal Heritage Officer

Hours: Flexible

Location: Various Aboriginal sites across the Northern Beaches and partner Councils areas

Role Purpose:

To assist in the monitoring of Aboriginal heritage sites, ensuring that their condition is examined and that Council are alerted to any issues that may need attention.

Requirements:

- Interest in heritage and local history
- No previous experience is required
- Ability to work independently
- Ability to read maps
- Good written communication
- Ability to use own camera and take photos
- Reasonable level of fitness

Key Tasks and Responsibilities:

- Visit allocated site at least once per year
- Note and record any impact on the site – graffiti, vegetation, human impact, erosion
- Photograph the site and any described features
- Report results to Aboriginal Heritage Officer

What to Wear: Long-sleeved shirt, long pants, enclosed shoes and hat.

Contact: volunteers@aboriginalheritage.org

TRIM:



Aboriginal Heritage Office

Volunteer Pre-Monitoring Checklist

General Checks

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hat | <input type="checkbox"/> Water |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunscreen | <input type="checkbox"/> Camera (if required) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recording sheet and pen | <input type="checkbox"/> Site card(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile phone with full charge | |

Safety Checks

- I am confident with the area's topography, density of bushland and my route.
- If you have any concerns regarding these issues you can find more information using Google maps, satellite aerials, call and speak to the AHO staff or request that a new site be allocated to you. Our phone number can be found at the bottom of the page.
- I am aware of the local weather conditions and fire danger rating.
- Information can be found at www.bom.gov.au, www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or if you are unable to access the internet you can call the staff at the AHO for advice.

Intentions Log

On Departure

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Time of departure: _____

Area or park where you are monitoring: _____

Planned time of return: _____

Contact person: _____

Contact person's phone number: _____

- My contact person is aware of the location I am monitoring in, my intended time of return and to contact the AHO if they have not been able to contact me within 3 hours of my intended return time.
- If you are unable to use a contact person and are monitoring during business hours between Monday to Friday, you can call the staff at the AHO and inform them of your intentions.

On Return

Time of return:

- I have informed my contact person that I have returned.

Signed: _____

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Tel: (02) 9936 8267

Email: ahovolunteer@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au Website: www.aboriginalheritage.org

ATTACHMENT 3 VOLUNTEER SITE REPORT

Volunteer Site Monitoring Report KUR-043

From: [REDACTED] 27/12/2013 2:34:06 PM
To: info@aboriginalheritage.org
Subject: Site Report for Site 45-6-1109

Site Recording

Site Number:	45-6-1109	Date of Recording:	26/12/2013
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Condition of Site
The site is not near any significant human activity, thus there is no sign of rubbish, graffiti or weeds. The native canopy cover surrounding the cave seems to be a good protection to biotic and abiotic factors such as erosion. The hand stencil is very faint and is nearly unrecognizable; the charcoal is still a prominent feature on the wall; the red ochre is still present. The directions to the site are quite vague, and there is no track leading down there.

Action Requested:
no action required.



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