

Media Release

Geographical Names Board commemorates reawakening of Aboriginal languages at 400th meeting

Thursday, 7 March 2024

The Geographical Names Board (GNB) has held a special event at the iconic NSW State Library to celebrate its 400th meeting, highlighting the rich history of the GNB and its role in shaping NSW through place naming.

Since its establishment in 1966, as the authority in NSW for naming mountains and rivers along with suburbs, railway stations and other geographic features, the GNB has officially recorded over 65,000 place names.

Since June 2001, the NSW Government has supported a dual naming policy for geographical features and cultural sites. Currently the GNB has assigned 45 dual names, including significant landmarks such as Dawes Point / Tar-ra, Macquarie River / Wambuul, Cockatoo Island / Wareamah, and Mount Panorama / Wahluu.

Central to the 400th milestone event is a special focus on the reawakening of Aboriginal languages through place naming, which is a recognised way of preserving First Nations languages. |

Additionally, it aligns with the United Nations' declaration of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages which bring attention to the urgent need to encourage preservation, revitalisation and promotion of language that is critically endangered.

A display of surveyors' and explorers' notes was featured at the NSW State Library, providing a rare glimpse into historical records that document the early capture of place names across the State.

The event also celebrated the service of Dr. Peter Orlovich, who has been an integral part of the GNB since its establishment. Dr. Orlovich has made a substantial and significant contribution to the GNB, as both a sitting member and advisor for more than 50 years, contributing to the identification and research of historic place names across NSW.

Dr Orlovich played a key role in the Anzac Memorial Place Names Project, assisting the GNB to identify 1701 hometowns of enlistees for the First World War. Soil samples were collected from each of these sites for display in the ANZAC Memorial Hall of Service artwork.

The 400th meeting took place on Tuesday 5 March, and the post-meeting event featured notable guests including the Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government Jihad Dib, NSW Surveyor-General Narelle Underwood, as well as representatives from Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Department of Customer Service, Geographical Society of NSW, State Library, Multicultural NSW, Local Government NSW, and Royal Australian Historical Society.

Quote to be attributed to Surveyor-General of NSW Narelle Underwood

“For its entire history, the NSW Geographical Names Board has been instrumental in ensuring our deep connections to places are acknowledged and maintained.”

“Through respectful and community-driven place naming the Board has been able to ensure that the names of the places we live, work, and play are meaningful and reflect contemporary Australia; our diversity, history, identity and values.”

“Our ongoing work to formally recognise Aboriginal Place names across NSW and promote Aboriginal languages in place naming is testament to the commitment the Board has to active Reconciliation in NSW and Australia more broadly.”

Quotes to be attributed to Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government Jihad Dib

“The 400th meeting of the Geographical Names Board is an opportunity for us to honour the past, celebrate the present, and look forward to the continued commitment of the Geographical Names Board in shaping the cultural and linguistic landscape of New South Wales.”

“This milestone not only reflects the Board's commitment to the naming of places, but also highlights its dedication to the reawakening of Aboriginal languages within the geographical landscape of NSW.”

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