

# Worimi Sea Country (Garuwa) Artworks

A CULTURAL INTERPRETATION





## Introduction

Worimi People of the temperate east coast have many special animals that live in garuwa (sea country).

**Djarrawarra** (mulloway), for example, is a culturally significant fish known as the 'greatest one' (wakulgang). This makurr (fish) lives in all garuwa environmental areas including buna (beaches), waraapiya (harbours), bandaa (lakes) and bila (river) systems. Worimi fishers regard djarrawarra as the prize catch, a species that requires high levels of skills and passed on knowledge to be successful at catching it.

**Biiwa** (mullet) is another garuwa species that is highly regarded by Worimi People. Biiwa can be found in all waterways and provides a reliable source of djagil (food) for Worimi communities. Biiwa annually migrates north along the coast to spawn, as it does it passes through many different Aboriginal nations. This creates an inter-tribal responsibility to manage biiwa to ensure sustainability for east coast communities.

**Wubaray** (black dolphin) is a totemic animal of high importance to which Worimi People are spiritually linked. For generations Worimi People have interacted with dolphins whether it be gindal (playing), burugil (swimming) or even giribal (hunting) in conjunction with them. Belief is that wubaray created Port Stephens in the dreamtime, and that Worimi People are descendants of wubaray.

Garuwa cultural values are:

1. Worimi People have strong cultural connections to garuwa.
2. All garuwa animals are culturally important for Worimi People.
3. Worimi People have a cultural responsibility to take care of garuwa and its inhabitants.
4. Garuwa interactions need to be maintained to continue our cultural connections.
5. Interconnectivity between land and garuwa environments should be maintained.
6. Sustainable management of garuwa resources should be continued to ensure the availability of stocks for future generations.



### ABOUT THE ARTIST

## Melissa Lilley

Melissa Lilley is a proud Yankunytjatjara woman from Central Australia, a descendant of this ancient land, has been traditionally taught to share her culture through interpretive art. Melissa produces artworks that are culturally connected through traditional Aboriginal stories, and uses techniques that are a continuation of a living history that is thousands of generations old. Moving from the desert region many years ago, she married into a traditional Worimi family from Port Stephens and learned the ways of coastal mobs of New South Wales. This move into a sea country community has subsequently enabled her to combine the best of both worlds and develop an art form of unique characteristics.

Melissa has been producing cultural artworks for over 25 years, and has developed an expertise in the field of cultural interpretation. This recognition has been achieved after many years of being taught by traditional artists, spending time with her Elders and learning from other traditional Elders from various Aboriginal nations. The development of her cultural understanding and teachings by traditional people is continuous, and will allow her to share the ethos that makes her who she is for many years to come. Melissa has forged a successful art business called Manta Waru Girambit, developing many interpretive artworks that are representative of nominated traditional lands while ensuring cultural protocols and sensitivity are adhered to. In her native language of Yankunytjatjara, Manta Waru is translated as earth fire, which is representative of people who have been connected to the Manta 'earth' for many generations. Girambit, which in Gathang language means saltwater, is acknowledgment to the long attachment and cultural reverence that Worimi People have to sea country. In her artworks, Melissa has been able to bring together two traditional living cultures, respectfully creating a unique artistic blend that is representative of both desert and saltwater countries.

Melissa's artistic designs portray a vision of respecting and protecting the environment, as well as all living things that are sustained by it. She enjoys sharing her cultural knowledge and that of other Aboriginal nations with the wider World, and insists it is the reason she continues her cultural education through her artworks. Melissa's method of using artwork to instruct has enabled her to promote traditional Aboriginal values while acknowledging and respecting her ancestral teachings. This will ensure that desert and salt water Aboriginal culture is preserved and passed on to her children and for future generations.

# Djarrawarra Wakulgang – Mulloway: The Greatest One



## BACKGROUND STORY

To the Worimi People of the temperate east (baara) coast (mulumun), the mulloway (djarrawarra) is recognised as 'king' (maathang) of the sea country (garuwa) systems, or quite simply, the 'greatest one' (wakulgang). This sea country (garuwa) fish (makurr) gets this highly respectful status because of its large (djukal) size, predatory behaviour, its elusiveness and wisdom it possesses. High levels of traditional teachings, knowledge and skills must be acquired to successfully catch (yarugi) this fish (makurr) whether by fishing line (yirawaan) or fishing spear (dhatay). For generations, older traditional fishers have imparted their knowledge of the mulloway (djarrawarra) onto select younger (guurumul) community members. This was done to preserve their hunting (giribal) knowledge, cultural understanding of this fish (makurr) and to stress the importance of protecting this species for future generations.

## ARTWORK INTERPRETATION

Starting in the centre of the painting (bilbay) you find a single mulloway (djarrawarra) and underlying light -coloured (watuun) lines which represents its movement within the different sea country (garuwa) environments. On the land (barray) environments around the edges are different Worimi communities with adults being indicated by large u-shaped symbols and children (burraydjarr) by the smaller ones. Within the circle you will see (nyaanyiy) some of the men (guri) have special markings (bayirayibal) that identify them as the ones with traditional knowledge and the skills to catch (yarugi) the mulloway (djarrawarra) and care of their community. In the top circle you will see footprints (yabang) heading away (wuunaliyn) from the main community, the small (mitji) circle represents traditional men (gurri) passing on knowledge to the next generation while indicating the continuity of the customs and lore. The colourful dots on the land (barray) masses depict the coastal (mulumun) environment which is lush with many (manday) natural resources. It also shows how Worimi communities along the coastline live with the land and have very little (mitji) impact on the surrounding natural environment.



Djarrawarra Wakulgang – Mulloway: The Greatest One  
© Melissa Lilley (Mombie), 2019

# Mandaygang Biiwa: Big Mob Mullet



## BACKGROUND STORY

The mullet (biiwa) is highly regarded by coastal (mulumun) Aboriginal people as an important food (buwatja) source. The mullet (biiwa) is a schooling species that spends most of its time close (bapay) to the water (bathu) surface and has a tendency to live (yalawagi) and feed in reasonably shallow (natha) water (bathu). This natural behaviour made the mullet (biiwa) susceptible to Worimi fishers and was easily caught by net (barrin) or by spear (dhatay).

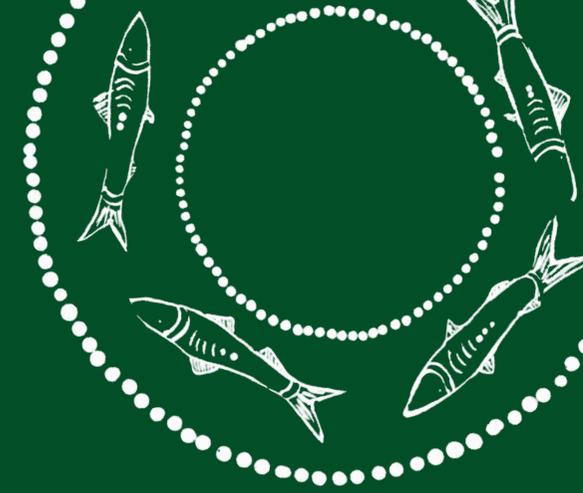
The mullet (biiwa) is a migratory fish (makurr) that move from protected waters (bathu) in early autumn and begin to congregate at the mouth (garrga) of estuaries and beaches (buna). As the westerly (waka) winds (wuruma) become more dominant, oceanic (garuwa) waters (bathu) become calmer (banma) which provide the perfect conditions for the mullet (biiwa) to begin their long (gurraarr) journey (yawutung) north (burru).

## ARTWORK INTERPRETATION

Land (barray) masses are covered with colourful dots which represents the diverse and lush coastal (mulumun) environment that has plenty (marruwang) of natural resources. Within the land (barray) masses depicted are the different communities who live with the land (barray). The communities are depicted by the small (mitji) groups of u-shaped symbols which represent people (guribiyn) with different colour and markings representing the different tribal family or clan groups.

Also depicted are song (guthi withi) lines which link different tribal groups. This represents the trade, alliances and communication between tribes when the mullet (biiwa) are on the move. Communities are distributed north (burru) and south (waang) along the coast (mulumun) line which demonstrates the many (manday) Aboriginal groups who rely on the mullet (biiwa). Across the painting, mullet (biiwa) can be seen (nyaanyila) leaving (wuunagi) the rivers and estuaries, schooling and heading out to sea (garuwa) to travel north (burru). As the mullet (biiwa) migrate, they pass through many (manday) different Aboriginal communities and tribal areas, who all rely on the seasonal movement of this important sea country (garuwa) resource.

# Wubaray: Black Dolphin



## BACKGROUND STORY

The black dolphin, or in Gathang language 'wubaray', is a sea country (garuwa) and totemic (bakuwi) species of high importance to Worimi People. As wubaray is found in every part of Worimi sea country (garuwa), all clans and communities had interactions and connection with this animal. Worimi people admired wubaray for its sea country (garuwa) navigation and hunting (giribal) abilities, and also for the way it taught and nurtured its young (guurumul). Wubaray's high (djukal) levels of intelligence enabled it to have great knowledge of fish (makurr) movement and had the ability to adapt and efficiently hunt in changing sea country (garuwa) environments.

Worimi People have always had a close (bapay) connection and association with wubaray, and have been known to 'hit' (bunggila) the water (bathu) with their hands (matjarr-garay), stomp their feet (djina) or push (yulba) their spears (gamay) into the sand (buna) to call in the dolphins. Dolphins would respond by herding schools of fish (makurr) into the shallow (natha) waters (bathu) and then drive them onto the dry (bulgi) sand (buna). Worimi People would then collect the stranded fish (makurr) from the shoreline for their personal use, while the dolphins would teach their young to hunt and to eat (dhagi) the rest of the catch.

## ARTWORK INTERPRETATION

Depicted in the centre of the painting (bilbay) are two wubaray and their represented totemic (bakuwi) links to the Worimi People. The three (bularr wakul) circles in the water (bathu) represent the islands (djimban) in Port Stephens that were believed to be created (wubala) by wubaray. The footprints (yabang) coming from sea country (garuwa) give tribute to the dreaming in traditional times, with Worimi People being seen as descendants of wubaray. The markings on wubaray are replicated on the people which shows the continued connection that wubaray has with Worimi People, and illustrates the sacredness of wubaray for the Worimi. Connections with wubaray will continue for many generations to come.



Wubaray: Black Dolphin  
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# Port Stephens-Great Lakes Marine Park

Port Stephens-Great Lakes Marine Park extends from Cape Hawke near Forster south to Birubi Beach at the northern end of Stockton Beach. The Marine Park is approximately 980 km<sup>2</sup> and includes:

- offshore waters to the three nautical mile limit of NSW waters;
- all of Port Stephens, the Karuah River, the Myall River, Myall and Smiths Lakes, and their creeks and tributaries to the tidal limit.

The Marine Park contains a diverse range of habitats, including beaches, seagrass beds, mangroves, saltmarsh and open waters, which all support distinct groups of plants and animals. Its diverse marine life includes many dolphin, turtle, fish, invertebrate, seabird and seaweed species, and threatened species such as the Gould's petrel, little tern, grey nurse shark, black rockcod and green turtle.

The Marine Park offers quality recreational fishing and productive commercial fishing grounds, aquaculture, many popular scuba diving sites, and regionally significant tourism activities such as whale and dolphin watching.

The Department recognises that the Aboriginal people of NSW have a continuing custodial relationship with the land, sea and their resources. This extends to maintaining spiritual links to and caring for Country. Cultural use of fisheries resources is an integral part of the Aboriginal relationship with Country.

The Worimi People have long standing spiritual and cultural interests and traditions in the land and waters of the Marine Park. A number of significant Aboriginal cultural and spiritual sites have been located within and adjacent to the Marine Park. These include middens, burials, scarred trees, ceremonial bora rings and various open camping sites for cultural and family gatherings.

# Hunter Marine Park

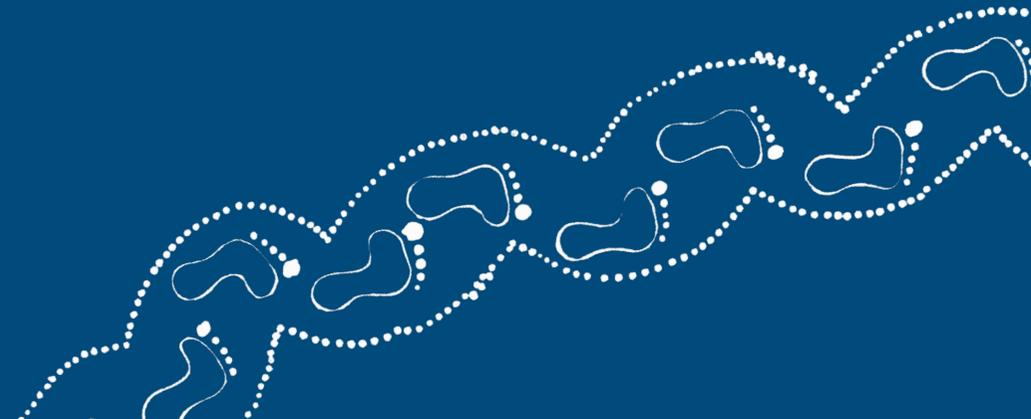
The Hunter Marine Park extends from the New South Wales state water boundary to approximately 100 kilometres offshore. The marine park covers 6257 km<sup>2</sup>, with depths ranging from 15 metres to 6000 metres, from shallow shelf rocky reefs out to the deep ocean.

Part of a migratory pathway, tuna, albatross and humpback whales feast here on their travels, benefitting from upwellings of nutrient-rich waters where ocean currents meet the canyons. The area provides habitat for the Indo Pacific spotted bottlenose dolphin and seabirds such as the wedge tailed shearwater and southern giant petrel.

The park is one of the few places the threatened grey nurse shark calls home and has been regularly sighted on the Outer Gibber Reef. Over 50 of the fish species that live in this area are endemic; they aren't found anywhere else.

Fishing is a significant activity in the region, and includes commercial fishing, recreational and charter fishing and game fishing tournaments.

Parks Australia recognises and respects the ongoing cultural responsibilities of Indigenous people to care for sea country and the deep understanding and experience that Indigenous people can contribute to the management of Australian Marine Parks. Parks Australia also acknowledges that Indigenous people have been sustainably using and managing their sea country, including areas now in marine parks, for thousands of years and is committed to building partnerships with traditional owners and Indigenous people with responsibilities for sea country.



# Worimi Saltwater Songlines

Worimi sea country culture revolves around the seasons. For generations Worimi people have used elements such as the moon, stars, winds, plants and animals of sea country to assist with understanding the natural environment. This knowledge guided our people to productive areas where resource use and activities would be optimised at certain times of year. These traditional practices and knowledge created connections with sea country and form part of the song-lines that extend along the coast.

The paths on the outside of the painting represent the natural elements that inform Worimi people of seasonal change. These paths lead to the centre, providing the knowledge of resource availability and indicating where and when to conduct sea country activities. The seafood in the centre of the painting depicts the bountiful resources available and illustrates the connection Worimi people have with sea country.



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For more information please visit:

**Australian Marine Parks** – [www.parksaustralia.gov.au/marine](http://www.parksaustralia.gov.au/marine)

**NSW Marine Parks** – [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/marine-protected-areas/marine-parks](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/marine-protected-areas/marine-parks)