

# 5. Speaking with the community

## 5.1 Methodology

Speaking with the community is essential in understanding the values of The Gully held by The Gully community, the Aboriginal and broader community. The values of The Gully identified through the engagement process have shaped the Plan and will guide the future management and protection of The Gully.

Community engagement for the preparation of this Plan included a combination of methods which sought to notify and engage with The Gully community, being former Gully residents, their families and their descendants as well as reserve users, the local Aboriginal community and the broader Blue Mountains community.

The communication methods and activities used during the initial phase of the community engagement included:

- The *Have Your Say* page on Council's website. A central communication tool for the project: [bluemountainshaveyoursay.com.au/gully-plan](http://bluemountainshaveyoursay.com.au/gully-plan)
- Written notification to stakeholders
- Media release (Jan 2019)
- Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)
- Site posters
- Surveys and interviews with key interest groups

Three separate surveys were undertaken as part of the review of The Gully Plan review. These included:

- a short questionnaire at a NAIDOC Week event held in The Gully on 14 July 2018 - 10 respondents
- interviews/questionnaire with Gully families 4 September 2018 to 22 March 2019 - 14 respondents
- Have Your Say online survey, 1 November 2018 to 27 February 2019 – 93 respondents

Refer to the Talking with the Community Stakeholder Engagement Report for The Gully Aboriginal Place Plan of Management Review for more information on the consultation and engagement process. It can be viewed at: [bluemountainshaveyoursay.com.au/gully-plan](http://bluemountainshaveyoursay.com.au/gully-plan)

## 5.2 NAIDOC Week responses

The NAIDOC Week survey was carried out on 14 July 2018 during the NAIDOC Week event held in The Gully. The surveys identified that Aboriginal cultural heritage and natural beauty were the most common values nominated by respondents. Other values identified included:

- the respect given to the people who have lived here in the past
- the peace and serenity
- connection with Country and kinship
- links to the past and present Aboriginal people, history and spiritual importance

Key messages on what needs to be done that came from the NAIDOC Week questionnaire were:

- restore as much as possible to original state
- protection of sacred keeping place
- keep it as a sanctuary for the plants and animals: remove weeds; increase biodiversity
- education opportunities for local community including school children

Key messages on how The Gully should be managed were:

- to remain as it is
- working together to make a meeting place
- local Aboriginal peoples and non-indigenous work together
- preserve the local culture and celebrate the future together
- the importance for all cultural groups to feel welcome to visit The Gully
- protecting land and environment

## 5.3 Gully community responses

Interviews with known families who lived in The Gully and their descendants, and families with a connection to The Gully was carried out between September 2018 and March 2019. Where face to face interviews were not possible, they were conducted over the phone, or a copy of the interview questions was provided along with a reply paid envelope. Follow up letters and phone calls were made to all known families through their last registered contacts, of those who had not responded within the first two months. In total 14 people responded through The Gully family Interviews.



NAIDOC in The Gully 2018

The Gully families were asked an extended series of question on the value of The Gully, what's important to them and why. They were also asked whether there were activities they felt threatened The Gully and its values, how they thought The Gully should be managed in the future, and about the treatment of cultural information and fire management. Questions were based on providing guidance on the future management of The Gully in accordance with the *NSW Government Guidelines for Developing Management Plans* and in relation to public use and recreation of The Gully.

Overwhelmingly, the importance of The Gully is the connection to family and place. Despite the forced removal, the connections to The Gully of former resident and their families remains strong:

- I was there as a child.
- my Great grandfather lived there and my mother was born there.
- The Gully is very important as it represents a place and connection with our family history. It is important for handing down knowledge.

Ongoing family connections, and family history are the primary reasons for why The Gully is so important to families that lived there. All cited their memories of The Gully, what it was like, with many fond memories of family and childhood and the social connection with other families in The Gully:

- you could go for a walk and get a drink of water in lots of places, it would come out of the sandstone.
- so our heritage isn't lost and we don't forget where we were born, so our descendants know who we are.
- We went yabbing down the creeks. We made apple pies and blackberry pies.

The hurt and pain of the race track construction is also a primary reason why the story of dispossession that occurred in The Gully maintains high importance locally. The pain and continuing trauma of this event is still very present for many Gully families to this day.

- my Grandmother died on the day the bulldozer was to smash her home of forty years
- there was no justice shown to the people of The Gully at that time .The Council failed to let those who lived there know what was going on. Work went ahead without regard to these people

To protect The Gully and its values, continuing with Swampcare and Bushcare and community education about the history of The Gully were the main issues raised:

I hope by educating the public about what happened there in 1957 that something like that does not ever occur again

The Gully should be kept the same, just keep it special, left alone

However the historic impacts on The Gully by the race track remains ever present:

what is important is all gone. You can't recreate it. The race track ruined everything  
most of the bush is gone compared to what was there

Activities that have support from many Gully families included recreation such as walking, running, bike riding, dog on-leash walking, and education and conservation work such as Bushcare:

develop a Cultural education and learning program

it should be a place for all people to meet including Darug

education, understanding respect are core values that should be promoted and taught

a bush tucker garden and cooking area

Activities deemed to be unacceptable in The Gully included motor bike riding, cars, development of more houses, camping, dog off-leash and disrespecting other people's values.

Other key messages that came talking with the community included:

- all the people in The Gully were battlers, that's why they got on so well, we used the term Happy Valley
- there is a need for 'cultural maintenance' – a documentary on The Gully, tell the cultural stories. Use the documentary as part of an education program and tool to engage
- trust amongst us and the authority in charge of the management of The Gully
- change the name from Catalina to The Gully. Shouldn't have to use that name.

## 5.4 Site user survey responses

The online Have Your Say survey for The Gully Plan of Management provided insight into how The Gully is used by local residences and visitors. The survey sought to understand what people valued about The Gully and their views on how it should be managed. The online survey ran from 1 November 2018 to 27 February 2019. Promotion of the survey was done through site posters, Council's social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) and a press release.

Site users were asked what they value about The Gully. The preselected options showed that the 'Natural Values' (24%) followed by 'Peace and quiet' (22%) then 'Aboriginal Cultural Heritage' (21%) and the 'Opportunity to exercise' (18%) were the predominate values held by site users. See figure 2.

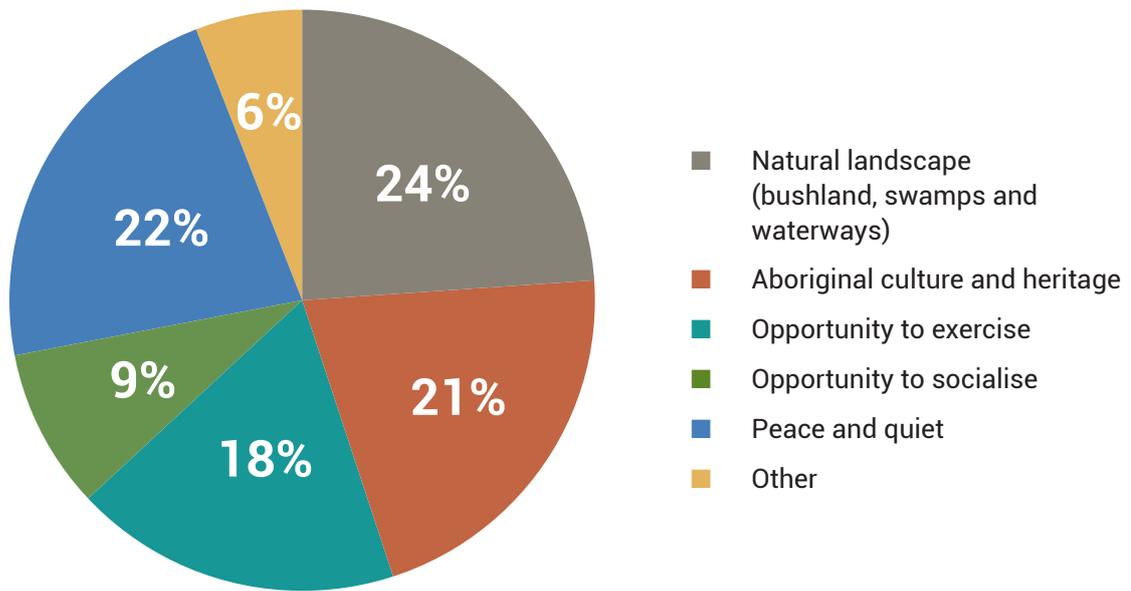


Figure 2: The Gully values – site user survey

When asked to nominate what they valued about The Gully, the values remain similar, with a number of other values being nominated. Refer to Figure 3.

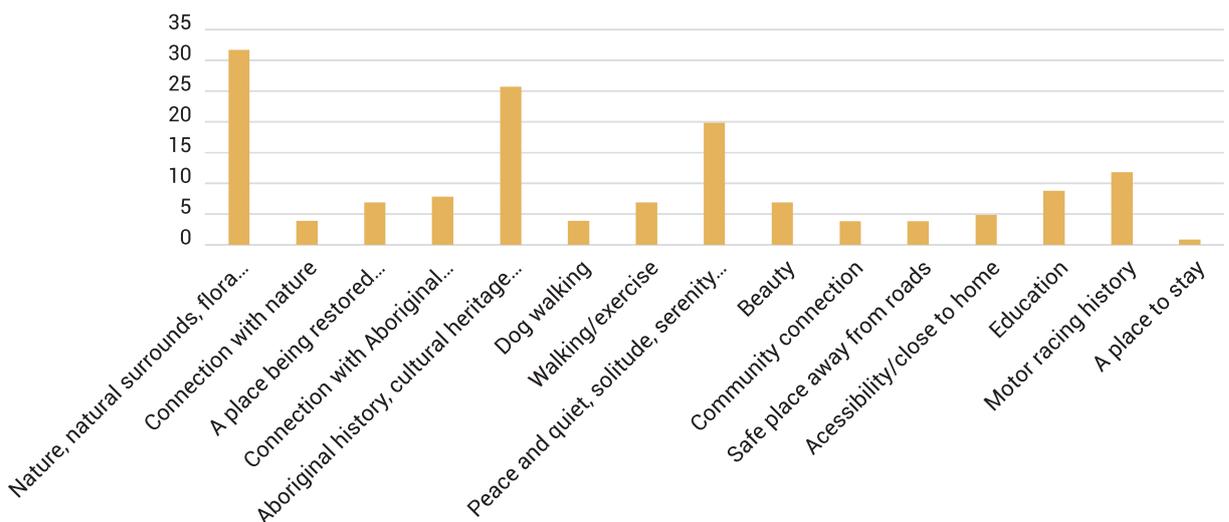


Figure 3: The Gully values – respondents' own words categorised

Comments that reflect how many respondents felt about The Gully include:

- The Gully is a very special place, I value the Aboriginal Community understanding and connection that I am able to access and engage with there. The swamp and surrounds, the peace and quiet, the flora and fauna of The Gully. It is a really beautiful place
- I value the opportunity to commune with nature, alone, and feeling secure and safe, walking my dog
- the indigenous history and how it's being returned to them, and the opportunity to learn and connect
- The Gully is a fabulous teaching tool. The signage, the native bushland and the nature paths help tell a story of what life was like there
- the fact of it being itself, a living place which is recovering from despoilment
- it is a quiet breathing space for Katoomba, giving a rural feeling although it is urban
- The Gully is the rare gift of an open space with thousands of years of human history to meditate on as you keep fit and enjoy the seasonal changes in the natural environment. Knowing that the springs feed the wetlands that become the Kedumba River that feeds water to Burratorang is priceless. It where you can observe a natural system at work in an increasingly unnatural world

The race track held value for some for the racing memorabilia, and also the now modified use for walking, exercise and a learning space for children to ride their bikes:

- it was one of the greatest racetracks in Australia, where many of Australia's greatest racers competed

Asked about how they would like The Gully to be in the future, responses were strongly reflective of how people valued The Gully, and the activities they undertook in The Gully:

- Protecting and maintaining natural beauty and peace of The Gully:
  - the natural and cultural aspects continue to be protected and valued
  - never to be compromised by developments and install wildlife corridors to join Megalong and Jamison Valleys
  - The Gully should be a place of contemplation, discovery, surprise and pleasure
- A place of cultural learning and education:
  - the opportunities for Aboriginal knowledge to be passed through the community
  - acknowledging the past and sharing the future re stories and environment
  - celebrate our local indigenous culture, educate, inspire and connect the community back to the bush
- Protecting and valuing the Aboriginal culture:
  - a place to visit and recognise Aboriginal culture and history
  - a place where the Aboriginal culture is celebrated and shared with the broader community
  - cared for as an Aboriginal Place, environmental and water protection, local cultural meeting place

- The importance of Aboriginal involvement in management and decision on The Gully's future:
  - returned as close as possible to its pre-1788 state in consultation with Indigenous peoples
  - cared for and managed by Traditional Owners
  - fully owned and controlled by the local Aboriginal people
- Better facilities – toilet blocks, walking tracks, cafés:
  - public toilets and signs to them are desperately needed
  - I would love for McRae's Paddock to be regenerated, weeds removed and planted with native plants. It could be turned into a walk like the Charles Darwin Walk, providing a link from town to the cliff line
  - a true community space: kids playground, wetlands for birds, off-leash dogs ( with many more people using the space), a place to buy coffee, a bike circuit for children, people really use the space
- Recreation and exercise:
  - a place where health and fitness are encouraged and supported for the whole community and where the history of The Gully can be appreciated by all
  - play equipment for 0-5 year olds and equipment for 10-15 year olds
  - an exercise route
  - like to see it remain open to dog walkers, joggers, etc.

Findings from the Have Your Say survey demonstrated strong and commonly shared values of the Aboriginal heritage and culture of The Gully, and the importance of protecting environmental values of The Gully. The survey also demonstrated an acknowledgment and respect among many site users, recognising the importance of the Traditional Owners and Aboriginal community to be given precedence in decisions on the future management of The Gully.

The survey also documented two known issues of conflicting views among stakeholders, these being dog off-leash and use of the race track for motor sport memorabilia.

Overwhelmingly The Gully is valued by site users for its environmental, cultural, peaceful and recreational amenity values. It is also a place of formal sporting activity and tourism set within the residential setting of Katoomba Township. The formal sporting activities, passive recreation and the tourism around Katoomba Falls typically occurs without impact or threat to the cultural values and sacred and significant Aboriginal sites within The Gully.

The community engagement work undertaken to date identified three main areas of competing interest where values held by stakeholders are in conflict with the established values of The Gully. These include:

- access for dog off-leash within The Gully
- access to motor racing events, displays and celebration of motor racing history
- organising and promoting use of the old race track

