

Calls for action to end 'Guringai' identity fallacy

By NICK PATON



THE Metropolitan local Aboriginal land council (MLALC) in NSW is urging people to refrain from referring to

themselves as Guringai if they identify with belonging to the Sydney region.

The MLALC is responsible for the protection, preservation and promotion of all Aboriginal culture and heritage within its boundaries including the entirety of Sydney's Northern Beaches, Hornsby, North Sydney, Mossman, Ku-ring-gai, Willoughby, Ryde, Lane Cove, and Hunters Hill local government areas.

MLALC chief executive Nathan Moran told the *Koori Mail* that the Land Council is aware of a number of individuals who identify as Guringai and claim to be traditional owners of Northern Sydney.

"This is a fallacy," Mr Moran said.

"And totally disrespects the required process to qualify for traditional ownership under the respective *NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act and Commonwealth Native Title Act.*"

Mr Moran said the MLALC supports the request on behalf of the Guringay/Gringai people to stop referring to Guringai as the traditional people of Northern Sydney.

"Given this is an apparent colonial misrepresentation and/or error caused potentially by Guringay people being reported in the 1830s as coming, visiting and fishing on Gadigal country," Mr Moran said.

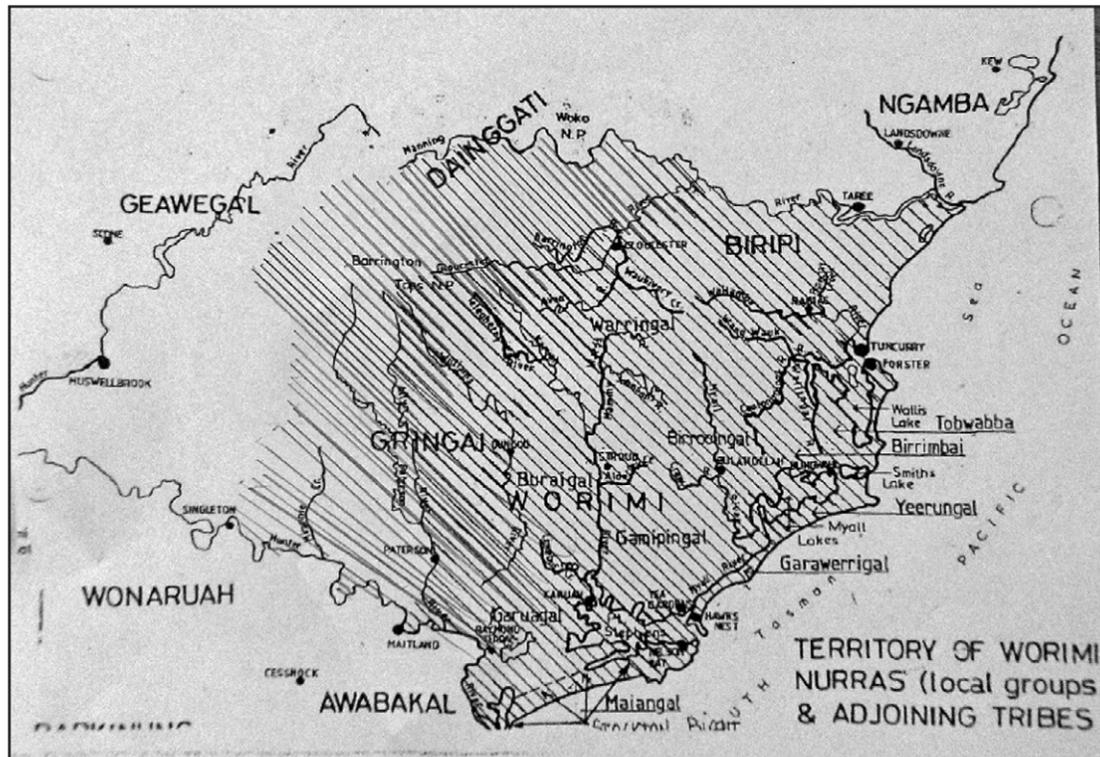
Guringay/Gringai Biripai Worimai warrior and Australian Rwandan War veteran Bob Syron said he is absolutely thrilled about government and private organisations removing any reference to Guringai people belonging and/or claiming to originate from the Sydney region, to better reflect the true custodians of the area they are referring to.

"Because the word Guringai has no connection to Sydney," Syron said.

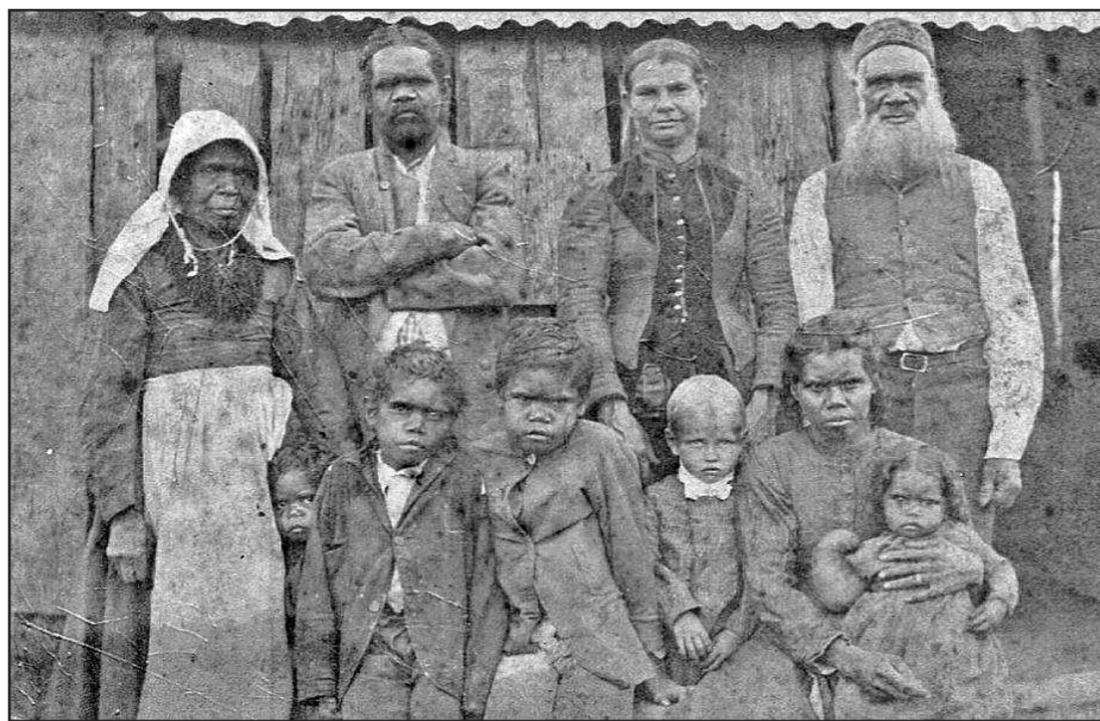
"Guringai is not the language group of the Sydney area, or a tribe, and the word Ku-ring-gai, which is historical fiction and has been changed to Kuringai and Guringai, is not from the Central Coast or Northern Beaches of Sydney either.

"Little do most people know that the word Ku-ring-gai, which we see most commonly in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park in NSW, actually comes from the poor work of anthropologist John Fraser, who at the time was well known to plagiarise other people's research.

"And so he took bits of this and stitched them with bits of that and all of a sudden he'd coined the word Ku-ring-gai, and it took form, being completely made up,



Bob Syron is pleased to see acknowledgement and recognition being given to the right people. All pictures: Robert Syron



Mr Syron has an extensive connection to country through his ancestors the Cook family from the Barrington area of NSW.

and continues to be incorrectly used by the people of Sydney."

Director of Greater Sydney Branch of the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) Deon Rensburg said the NPWS are also on board, and have begun the removal of all use of the term that denotes Guringai as a tribe or language group in Northern Sydney, including web content, interpretive signs and brochures.

Syron said his language group, Guringay/Gringai, has been extensively recorded from the Port Stephens, Barrington and Dungog areas.

He said NSW NPWS have done the right thing in acknowledging that Guringay/Gringai tribal boundaries do not extend from the lower mid north coast to

Sydney, supporting their decision in amending their references.

"So this means people from the Ku-ring-gai area of Sydney should not be referred to as a Guringay/Gringai tribal clan or language group, as the area is not actually where the Guringay/Gringai are from, as people might believe," Syron said.

"Instead, this area would be closer to the clans of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation than it would be to the true Guringay/Gringai up north – but I don't like to speculate because the Sydney area is not my country.

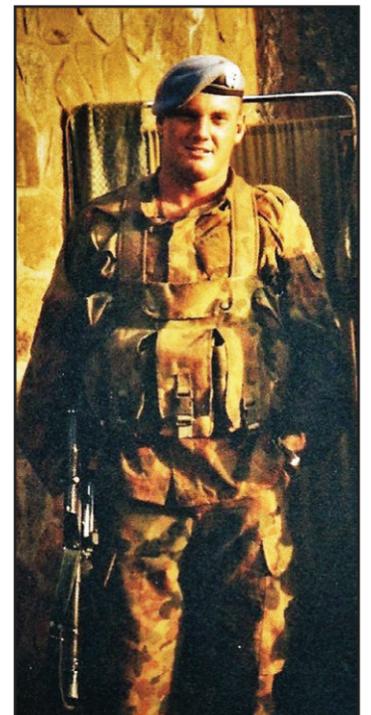
"The Guringay/Gringai Biripai and Worimai are all descendants of the Guthang, or Kuthung, language group and all I am doing is trying to honour the

wishes and hard work of all the ancestors who have gone before me.

"Look, I say 'high five' to those people who discover later in life that they are connected to Aboriginal people, but when you discover that you're an Aboriginal person you need to then follow cultural protocol and actually connect to your local Aboriginal communities.

"Do the research and find out who you are, and make your connections, and if it turns out that you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, you need to find out about your language, and find out about your culture, and your customs, and your totems – before you go firing at the hip and making ridiculous claims.

"What I'm hearing a lot from



Guringay/Gringai Biripai Worimai warrior Bob Syron.

Aboriginal people right across Australia is we have these people coming in, with a relatively recent discovery of Aboriginal ancestry, and before they get involved with their community at all, they go off and make what can often turn out to be highly unsubstantiated claims."

Syron said that instead of approaching the community they are claiming to be part of, with real and genuine concern and proper consultation, some people claiming to be of Aboriginal descent are starting all kinds of businesses, off the back of their newfound identity, all for the benefit of lining their own pocket.

"And it's disgusting. It's culturally wrong and it's historically wrong when this type of thing happens in our communities," he said.

As a registered Aboriginal owner of Guringay/Gringai and Worimai lands, Syron said it is highly disrespectful to take another mob's language, group, or tribal name, and use it as your own.

"And I'd go as far as to say that these people are bastardising our Guringay/Gringai language and culture. I have no choice other than to honour all of my old people who have gone before me, and I will spend the rest of my life fighting for the acknowledgement of what it truly means to be Guringay/Gringai.

"This is about changing history. And I'm talking about a grossly inaccurate and misleading interpretation of the many different language groups of Aboriginal people from around Australia, mainly recorded erroneously over the last 200 odd years."

For more information on the Guringay/Gringai and Syron's fascinating family history visit <https://hunterlivinghistories.com/2018/08/15/the-kabook-watoo/>