



# Traditional use



## An introduction to Sea Country

When Aboriginal people use the English word 'Country' it is meant in a special way. For Aboriginal people, culture, nature and land are all linked. Country takes in everything within the landscape; landforms, waters, air, trees, rocks, plants, animals, foods, medicines, minerals, stories and special places. This diverse area has sustained Aboriginal people for thousands of years and is deeply interconnected in our cultural makeup. Customs, beliefs and the ongoing cultural practices of Aboriginal people are shaped by this connection. ([Parks Australia](#))

Sea Country includes the islands, beaches, headlands, rocky shores, ocean and estuaries, and holds spiritual significance for cultural practices and activities.

Evidence of past Aboriginal use of these coastal and sea environments can be found in many places, and includes large stone fish traps, middens adjacent to beaches and estuaries, and tool-making sites on rocky headlands.

These places are sacred to the Traditional Owners who are entrusted with the continual use and preservation of these sites

and the knowledge that they hold. The continued use of Sea Country is maintained by traditional lore that the Elders pass down. Traditional lore promotes the sustainable use of Sea Country and its resources.

### For more information

*Click or Scan the QR Code*



**South Coast Sea Country**  
Interactive school resource

Garidjwaraga (3 Canoes) by Leanne Barford



# Sea tucker

Aboriginal communities in NSW still collect traditional foods from the sea, resources that have been relied upon for thousands of years. These foods come from all the different coastal habitats.

## Estuaries and mangrove swamps

Mangrove worms, yabbies, crabs, fish and oysters (pictured).



## Saltmarshes

Samphire (pictured), pigface, crabs.



## Dunes and beaches

Pipis, warrigal greens (pictured), pigface, lilly pillly.



## Rocky shores

Turban snails, periwinkles (pictured), mussels, oysters, octopus, sea urchin, fish.



## Open ocean

Fish, octopus, squid, cuttlefish (pictured).



Photo credits: Kelly Coleman (samphire and warrigal greens), Sean Phillipson (cuttlefish)

# Seasonal calendar

The calendars we use are based on 12 months of the year and within that four seasons roughly dictate the weather we should expect.

Aboriginal seasonal calendars are a bit different. They highlight the connection between plants, animals, land and weather. Seasonal calendars are used to determine things such as when different foods can be harvested, when the landscape can be burnt, when to hold cultural activities and more, depending on the Aboriginal group.

## Seasonal examples

When the coastal wattle is flowering, schools of mullet are travelling along the south coast and are ready to be harvested.

When white berries develop on the coastal bearded heath in the Jervis Bay region, it is a sign that the bream are ready to be harvested.

The flowering of the gymea lily indicated the migration of whales at the start of winter.

The blossoming of the white flower indicated the presence of lobsters in the water around Port Stephens.



Right: Coastal bearded heath in flower.  
Below: Gymea lily flower and coastal wattle (Kelly Coleman)



# Middens

A midden is a mound made up of the remains of shells, fish bones, charcoal, the bones of mammals and sometimes tools.

Middens are generally found at important sites where people from the area, or neighbouring areas, have gathered. They are found near places of good fishing or abundant shellfish on the coast, such as in estuaries, on beaches and dunes, and near rocky headlands.

Middens vary in size, which reflects how they are used. Large middens may show they are used for large gatherings and ceremonies at particular times, while a family group may regularly use smaller middens.

Due to the accumulation of debris, a midden that has been used for a long time can become very large. Excavation and carbon-dating have established that some middens are more than 4,000 years old.



Middens can include broken down shells, bones and charcoal.

Shellfish remains may include mussel, oyster, warrener, pipi, abalone, limpets, turbo and whelks.



# Respect and sustainability

By respecting Country we ensure that the landscape is managed sustainably for the future. Always leave something behind for a new generation of plant or animal to thrive to support future human generations.

One of the main cultural systems that influences connection to Country is assigning totems for individuals, communities and Aboriginal Nations. Through totem lore, Aboriginal people are connected to certain animals, plants, landscape features, and weather. Some people have more than one totem. These totems are considered family, and Aboriginal people must protect and manage them.

For example, if your totem was the white-bellied sea-eagle, you cannot hunt the sea-eagle and you have to make sure there are trees for them to nest in and food for them to eat. This has helped to prevent animals and plants from going extinct.

Below: White-bellied sea-eagle and nest (Kelly Coleman)  
Bottom: Flying in for a fish carcass (Jessica Robertson/DPE)

