



Response to Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council comments
made on 2GB interview broadcast on 16 January 2026

21 January 2026

We, the Baramadagal Darug People of Burramatta / Parramatta / Baramada land and waterways, speak from our own family governance, cultural law, and responsibilities to Country. We do not speak for all Aboriginal peoples, nor do we purport to speak for every person who identifies within broader Darug language-group narratives across the Sydney Basin. We speak from Baramadagal Country and the obligations carried by our lineages.

This statement responds to the 2GB interview broadcast on 16 January 2026, in which Mr Nathan Moran, in his capacity as CEO of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council (MLALC), raised serious concerns about cultural integrity, verification, and government engagement practices. Although not mentioned in the interview, we understand through Community that Mr Moran is a proud Biripi and Dhungutti man. A transcript of the full interview is attached and marked **Annexure “A”**.¹

We thank Mr Moran for raising issues he considered appropriate; however, we respectfully consider that aspects of the framing require clarification, and we provide that context below.

1. Where we agree: the issues regarding integrity are valid

We agree with the core concern that government agencies, local councils, major institutions, and corporate procurement systems have repeatedly failed to undertake proper due diligence when commissioning “cultural services”, including Welcome to

¹ James Willis, ‘Land Council boss slams Government over cultural dealings’ (2GB, 16 January 2026), [link accessible here](#).

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Country, cultural advisory contracts, and the creation of public narratives about place.

We have repeatedly warned such institutions across Western Sydney, specifically the City of Blacktown Council, but also including large sporting bodies and arts, culture, and museum sectors, about the risks of commissioning cultural authority from persons and businesses where the cultural standing to speak for a specific place, clan area, or family group is unclear, contested, or not accountable to that Country.

We also share concerns where:

- a) one individual who may have valid genealogical claims, vouches for businesses and other individuals who do not, and where they derive financial benefit or social capital from doing so, without ensuring cultural protocols inform that proximity and endorsement;
- b) organisations presenting as “Dharug” do not ensure integrity of membership; and
- c) ‘cultural centres’ are led by non-Aboriginal CEOs without a plan for inclusive Darug Community Controlled Ownership, or transparent cultural governance processes and culturally safe pathways to address community identity issues.

These problems are compounded by market dynamics where “culture” becomes a product, and those most likely to be funded are often those most culturally curated to non-Indigenous institutions, rather than those carrying the deepest place-based responsibilities.

2. Where we diverge:

a. “verification” cannot be reduced to one colonial test

We reject the idea that cultural belonging and authority, or First Law legitimacy can be reduced to a single colonial framework, whether that is native title outcomes, membership of a land council, or narrow interpretations of “the law” as administered by the state.

Native Title is not a cultural authority system. It is a colonial property law framework that requires Indigenous peoples to prove continuity under conditions produced by invasion, dispossession, institutionalisation, and forced assimilation. Only one family group has attempted claims in Native Title law in Western Sydney, which have been unsuccessful, this does not reflect on or preclude other family groups like ours from bringing such a claim at any point.

International human rights observers have criticised the burden of proof this can impose, particularly in highly colonised regions. The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples (2017) observed the following:

“In order to succeed, claimants under the Native Title Act must prove that they have had an uninterrupted connection to the area being claimed, and that they have

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continued to practice their traditional laws and customs. This is an extraordinary challenge and burden of proof in the context of the historical forced removal and dispossession policies of Australia".²

The Rapporteur went on to recommend that Australia: "*Review the system with multiple and overlapping legal regimes applicable to native title claims at the federal, state and territory levels, with a view to aligning them with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which does not contain norms requiring proof of continuous occupation of land.*"³

For MLALC or any institution to imply that the absence of registered native title holders equates to an absence of cultural authority is dangerous. It rehearses the false idea that Aboriginal identity and responsibility exist only when recognised by the state. In reality, First Laws continue to operate, and Traditional Owners and Custodians carry obligations irrespective of what settler systems currently recognise.

It is also relevant that there are currently no registered Native Title holders across the Sydney region, and the absence of determinations does not establish the absence of peoples, nor the absence of lawful cultural authority. In a system shaped by intense settlement and legal barriers, native title outcomes cannot be treated as a proxy for the existence of living communities or for place-based authority. Native title determinations covering capital-city regions are rare and often limited by settlement history.

It appears that Mr Moran has wilfully misconstrued the legal pathways for Traditional Owners and Custodians of this area, or perhaps unknowingly, given that culturally he would not be eligible to pursue such pathways. However, in advice we have received regarding Native Title, as a family group who was not party to any unsuccessful claims, we understand that at any point in time we can bring such a claim either with other family groups who can substantiate their claims to the extent that we can, or irrespective of what other family groups chose to do.

In 2022 we were advised by a NSW State Government Director of Native Title, that more Native Title determinations had been favourably determined in the previous 5 years, than what had been favourably determined between 1993 and 2019, as the Government had come to better comprehend what was possible under the *Native Title Act*. Such legislative pathways need to be understood as processes that are still evolving and can cause harm while they do, Aboriginal people reserve the right to strategically engage with them at points in time which would be most favourable to any outcome they can possibly produce.

Mr Moran also chose to stay completely silent on the current processes that are currently being undertaken, which our family is engaged in, to establish an Aboriginal Owners List under the *Office of the Registrar, Aboriginal Land Rights Act*, for a cultural area that includes much of the Sydney Basin. We have already been

² United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on Her Visit to Australia*, UN Doc. A/HRC/36/46/Add.2 (August 8, 2017), para. 99, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g17/234/24/pdf/g1723424.pdf>

³ *Ibid*, para 118(a)

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engaged in these processes for years, and they may take years to conclude. In any event the outcome of such processes will not suddenly “make us Aboriginal people”, they only have the capacity to recognise what already is and has always been.

Cultural authority is place-based and relational: families belong to place; responsibilities arise through kinship, history, and law/lore; and authority must be accountable to those relationships. The state cannot conclusively certify this through a single administrative mechanism.

b. We reject homogenisation narratives, erasure narratives and the weaponisation of them

We are concerned that parts of the interview relied on broad-brush characterisations that effectively homogenise Aboriginal cultures and identities across the Sydney Basin, as though a single institution, framework, or narrative can conclusively define who holds cultural authority everywhere in this region.

This approach is inconsistent with how Aboriginal cultural authority actually operates. Cultural authority is place-based, relational, and accountable to specific Country and kinship responsibilities. Merging distinct family groups, histories, and governance into a single generalised “Aboriginal”, or even “Dharug”, story risks reproducing the very harms the interview purported to address.

The question is not whether we exist; it is (a) whose identity claims can genuinely comprise the Darug-speaking peoples, and (b) whether institutions are doing the work required to engage the right people for the right place, in the right way.

c. We reject racism in all its forms

We also note the risk the program itself identified: if comparable generalisations about Aboriginal peoples were made on air by a non-Aboriginal commentator, they would likely be recognised as unacceptable and potentially career-ending. The fact that such generalisations can be aired when spoken by an Aboriginal person does not remove their impact. Broad statements that question the existence, legitimacy, or belonging of peoples in a region can function as racialised erasure narratives, and in that sense can be experienced as fundamentally racist in effect, even where the speaker’s underlying concern about institutional due diligence has merit.

In our view, the valid points raised about failures regarding cultural integrity were overshadowed by a framing that treated Western Sydney’s Dharug-speaking lands as though they can be narrated through a single lens, rather than through the lived, specific, and continuing stories of the families who belong to those places.

Claims that a well-documented peoples “never existed” or that identity and culture can be wholly dismissed are harmful, inaccurate, and socially dangerous, particularly in the lead-up to 26 January, a period that predictably intensifies racialised pressure and cultural violence toward Aboriginal communities.

d. On language and knowledge: the historical record is complex

The interview's treatment of language and "source" is oversimplified. The historical record of language documentation, informants, and naming across the Sydney Basin is complex and cannot be responsibly represented through brief on-air commentary.

As one example, the claim that R H Mathews who was quite prolific in documenting Aboriginal languages across the south-east,⁴ had no informants for his language notes is not accurate. Mathews' records include named informants, including references such as "Mrs Wm Lock - Dharuk" and "Jimmy Cox - Dharruk" in published and archival materials which are partially Annexed hereto and marked **Annexure "B"** and **Annexure "C"** respectively.

Variation in spelling of language words and names is common across Aboriginal languages, especially in archival materials. This does not invalidate the language, but rather reflects challenges in representing the sounds of Aboriginal spoken languages using a writing system for European languages.

We agree that cultural knowledge must be handled with integrity, attribution, and accountability. We also note that language revitalisation is occurring across the continent, including in highly colonised areas, and umbrella terms i.e. "Dharug" is often used to group more complex and fine-grained linguistic networks local languages connected through family and place. These realities do not negate living kinship and responsibility; they underscore why rigorous, accountable cultural governance matters.

e. Conflicts of interest and structural incentives must be visible

Land councils are statutory bodies created under colonial legislation. They can do important work, but nothing in the legislation they are created under names them as a sole cultural authority for Country, and their governance models cannot, and do not, replace First Laws.

The public deserves a transparent discussion of how state frameworks determine recognition, funding eligibility, and procurement pathways and how those frameworks can exclude place-based family governance while rewarding forms of legitimacy that are simply easier for governments to administer.

3. Next steps

a) Commit to UNDRIP as the governing framework

In the absence of the Australian Government having made a serious attempt to implement UNDRIP into State and Federal laws and practices since 2009, Institutions should expressly adopt UNDRIP as the baseline standard guiding policy, procurement, and engagement with Traditional Owners / Custodians, including the rights to self-determination, to maintain and strengthen

⁴ Isabel McBride, "Robert Hamilton Mathews (1841–1918)", Australian Dictionary of Biography, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mathews-robert-hamilton-4169>

governance institutions, and to free, prior and informed consent in matters affecting Country, culture, identity, and community governance.

b) Adopt nation (re)building governance approaches in engagement practice

Institutions must recognise that nation (re)building is an evidence-informed global approach used by Indigenous and colonised peoples to restore and strengthen governance, culture, and decision-making after initial invasion and disruption. Cities claiming to be global leaders need to meet the Traditional Owner / Custodian Community on this level. Engagement should therefore support, not undermine, the continuation of place-based cultural governance and accountable Traditional Owner decision-making for specific Country.

c) Procure cultural authority through place-based governance, not corporate legibility

Cultural services must not be procured through generic “Sydney-wide” categories, including LALCs, or brand-based Aboriginality. Procurement must be designed to identify and engage the families and governance groups with responsibilities to the specific Country impacted, including clan and lineage governance, rather than relying on convenience lists, marketing profiles, or single colonial verification tests.

d) Require culturally safe due diligence pathways that do not escalate community harm

Where there is uncertainty or dispute, institutions must pause and implement culturally legitimate due diligence processes, rather than accelerating contracts. Due diligence must avoid defamatory public framing, erasure narratives, or reliance on unrelated litigation outcomes as a proxy for cultural authority.

e) Invest in truth-telling and governance capability in the Sydney Basin

The Sydney Basin’s intense settlement history has magnified archival complexity and governance disruption. Institutions must resource community-led truth-telling, genealogical recovery, and governance strengthening, and must not restrict this work to statutory bodies alone. Funding should support place-based governance structures to function and to resolve questions of cultural authority through culturally legitimate methods.

f) Public accountability: procurement transparency and reporting

Institutions should publish procurement and engagement standards, including how cultural authority was identified, what ICIP protections apply, and how disputes are handled. Public reporting (including disaggregated data where appropriate) is necessary to reduce repeated harm and to rebuild trust.

Conclusion

We understand other family groups belonging to the Western Sydney area are still meeting to discuss their response to Mr Moran’s claims, that is a matter for them, they cannot speak on these matters concerning our lineage because we have

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separate interests and factors that affect such claims. This statement only purports to speak as Baramadagal people with connection to the Dharug language group.

We welcome genuine engagement on cultural integrity. The issues we face across Western Sydney are a predictable consequence of colonisation and while not specific only to us, they are experienced to extreme degrees by us, due to major cities and infrastructure being built on our lands.

We do not welcome erasure narratives, or the reduction of living cultural authority to narrow tests that were never designed to reflect our laws, kinship systems, or our survival.

We remain willing to participate in processes that strengthen cultural governance in Western Sydney, provided those processes are respectful, place-based, evidence-informed, and do not treat our participation as consent to the displacement of First Law authority.

Issued by: Baramadagal Darug Tribal Governing Council
www.baramada.com

With acknowledgements to: Julie-Ann Christian (PhD Candidate, Indigenous Knowledges); Tula Wynyard (PhD Candidate, Indigenous Languages); and Jayne Christian (BA, LLB, GDLP, FDRP).

Annexure "A"

Full transcript of interview with Nathan Moran on 2GB radio on 16 January 2026

James Willis: Look, there have been many important stories dominating the news cycle in recent months, and governments have been dealing with a full plate, which is why it's important for us to not let some vital issues fall off the agenda. It wasn't all that long ago that our country was being told to understand the importance of listening to Aboriginal voices and how we weren't doing enough to hear the wants and needs of Indigenous people. Well, I just wonder how this story I'm about to tell you fits into that narrative.

For quite some time, the boss of Sydney's largest Aboriginal land council has been raising the alarm with the New South Wales government and a number of sporting bodies and local councils and using his voice to warn them that they have been dealing and acknowledging a group of Indigenous people who, according to Australian law, have self-identified. They have failed on multiple occasions in native title claims, and its members overwhelmingly are not known to local land councils in New South Wales.

Now, this is the law, but instead, they continue to be employed and engaged across a range of government and council projects and initiatives. The group of people is well-known in the Australian landscape as the Darug people, or Darug people. I think there's four different spellings that are often cited, which may go over your head at first mention, but I can assure you, you will see the name Darug pop up somewhere in your life in Sydney in the not-so-distant future. This is a problem. Nathan Moran is the CEO of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, and he's with me in the studio this morning. Nathan, good morning.

Nathan Moran: Morning, Merry New Year's. Merry New Year's. Great to see you,

James Willis: and I know that this is frustrating for you because you are doing your best to try and empower Indigenous people to make their own choices. And part of the problem overall, before we talk about this...

This case is that the Aboriginal population grew by 25% between 2016 and 2021 in the census. So this practice of self-identifying, how widespread and how problematic is this?

Nathan Moran: Here, 25% in the last period. Before that, it was 35%, James, in the reporting period up to 2016. And that doesn't go with birth rates, does it? It doesn't line up with birth versus death. This is the difference between those who are born as Aboriginal and those who choose to identify as Aboriginal. And we've acknowledged that statistics and certainly doing data by allowing people to self-identify doesn't really qualify what you'd call effective data or effective counting of populations.

But nonetheless, that's the process that we're subject to. But Aboriginal people since the 90s have been calling that out against the ABS to say, stop that, please. Please ensure that they're confirmed as Aboriginal according to the laws of native title and land rights in New South Wales. Unfortunately, that's fallen on deaf ears. But I bring you to 226 and even 225, 224. Our challenge now is there's a growing number of people who are self-identified have now become traders and trading and supposedly being paid as cultural providers. Well, that's a fallacy. And that's what I've been trying to address. And certainly in my time, I've been in this job since 2014. We've been addressing the facts around Darug that they have no proven connection, no proven actual realities of having a language, having any culture.

The facts that native title, they failed on numerous occasions seems to have been forgotten by many. But I started in 2014, that was within 10 years of the last decision against them. But I've seen the state government now award them contracts to provide cultural narratives, including the Sydney Harbour Bridge, whereby government's going to pay them and have paid them tens of thousands of dollars to provide cultural advice for cultural language that they claim is Darug language. Well, facts now, fact checking.

In the court proceedings, Darug were proven to not have a language.

The first reference of the word Darug in your right, it's had four different variations. The first was D-H-R-R-O-K. Now, that was by R.H. Matthews in 1890 and 1891, an untrained person with no background in anthropology or history, returning from north of the Macdonald Valley on the north side of the Hawkesbury. That's known as Darkinjung country. He came back and described or recorded the word Dharug. And then over time, it's now become Darug. But at the start is, R.H. Matthews didn't have a verified informant for the word he just wrote down. To put forward language, one must affirm it's come from an Aboriginal source. Any cultural narrative should have an Aboriginal source. And this is the problem for us. At Metro, we're responsible to protect culture, preserve Aboriginal culture.

First thing is, make sure it's authentic. Well, not allow bullshit, not allow people in our language, as gammon, to be sold as us. Don't propagate us, but now don't plagiarize us. And when we see cut and pasting of the first language of Australia, provided by Padyegarang, and or another man named Colby, Colby being Gadigal, Padyegarang being Gamaragal from the inner part of Sydney, that language was given firsthand and verified. But we're seeing that in that dictionary, there is no Dharug word. There is no reference to this name. But now, fast forward to 2026, people want to put on the international airport Dharug language entries. Local governments like Blacktown want to acknowledge them as the traditional owners. Well, let me just... Let's do some fact-checking.

James Willis: Let's go through them, because to play devil's advocate with you, there are a lot of government agencies, a lot, who acknowledge and engage with the Dharug people day-to-day. Parramatta Council, Cumberland City Council, they all acknowledge on their websites and through their programs the Dharug people. Hills Shire Council, the Sydney Metro project and the extension out to the new airport. We've just had a brand new train fleet arrive in Sydney, which are named after the Dharug word for Emu. Now, are you saying, like...

Nathan Moran: It is a great example of bastardisation.

James Willis: But I mean, this is widespread.

Nathan Moran: This is ridiculously... It's so far widespread. It's like trying to pull back the tide, but it is not authentic. It's not an actual culture.

This is a made-up culture. This is a bastardisation of the actual culture of Sydney, be they the actual 'Gal 'groups who identify with the common word, Eora. The Burramattagal are Parramatta. The Cabarigal are the people around Liverpool. This is a fallacy that unfortunately now has recreated people to be something they are not. They never had a cultural language known as Darug, but it's taken over, and we just wanna see culture protected, preserved, the authentic culture.

James Willis: Okay, so you've had multiple native title claims.

Nathan Moran: Sorry, conversely, nearly every one of those government departments asked them to withdraw, what I foresee is their lack of diligence to do some research, to actually do some fact-checking. What is Darug? What's the source of it? If they could just do that, they

should look up the native title court decisions, read the summary of the decisions, find out that they critiqued, they failed the test, and they are not a culture of Sydney. But nonetheless, government ignores its own laws, and unfortunately, those underneath them, I can't blame them, they just follow what's said, and it's government who leads this. Government could defix this today.

James Willis: But you are appointed, and you are the legislated body, and there are two ways, basically, and there's meant to be a three-part test for someone to identify as Aboriginal, and we know that doesn't happen. But when you're dealing with government projects, local councils, sporting events, and all those things, you've raised this directly with the Premier's office and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, David Harris. Do they understand this issue, or there's a part of me that thinks, if we've done all of this with a group of people that have no native title claim and are not members of land councils... It's almost too late, and they'd be worried about having to go back, but I mean, they're trying to close the gap and bring everyone together. And by doing that, they could have potentially acknowledged the wrong people.

Nathan Moran: And they have. And this is what we're trying to address, is cultural authenticity, cultural integrity here at Metro Local Aboriginal Land Council. We're responsible to the edges of Parramatta Council, Cumberland. None of those local councils seem to understand the law. I'm hoping through this process we can educate more that there is a way to fact-check. When you're doing intellectual, even legal cases, you must verify the source. Well, let's do the same with culture. Let's not allow people to say it is, so therefore it is. That is hearsay. That is not acceptable. Culture is verified. It has factual evidence to support this, like sources for that. There is no source for Dharug. I acknowledge the feedback from Minister Harris and Premier is, that's a hard thing to turn back. It wasn't done just by them, and I'll acknowledge it was done by the Labor government going back to Bob Carr, who failed us miserably when Dharug failed Native title, but provided them a cultural centre known as Muru Mittigar, which despite them failing to be proven as Aboriginal people, they were provided the first government-funded Aboriginal cultural centre in Sydney. Now, that is the problem. That's where it started. Despite the law saying they're not, despite evidence saying they're not, they just ignored it, the then Labor Party in New South Wales government, and gave them a cultural centre. They have birthed this. They have created this problem. And I hope that they can foresee that not this current one, not the one before it, but as a continuum, they have all failed the test of integrity. Now, if you talk about effective use of Aboriginal funding in Close the Gap, we're seeing millions of dollars going to Dharug Incorporated bodies. There's a number of companies trading as Dharug. They're private companies. They're receiving government procurement, government funding that's meant to be prescribed for Aboriginal. I ask government to ensure that they're using Aboriginal funds effectively and to ensure that they're actually Aboriginal and stop allowing non-Aborigines to trade as us.

James Willis: The issue here is that, you're right, there are billions of dollars that are being spent on Indigenous programs every year. We are trying to close the gap. But I think as a taxpayer, I would want that to be going to people who are verified as Indigenous. And you realise, Nathan, that if I was making the claims you were this morning, this would probably be my last shift on air. I'd be declared as a racist. I'd be cancelled. But you have a right, and I could only imagine, and I have to go to the news in a second, but I just want to ask you, just as an opportunity, explain how hurtful it is when you see someone perform a Welcome to Country or a culture that you, from your understanding, has not been verified, speakers and Aboriginal person at events, at sporting events, everything. How hurtful is that?

James Willis: National events, international events, it is demoralising to us to see people who are not us stand up and pose as us, even then try and provide language that's not them. They have no context on. It comes across as disrespect, ultimate disrespect. In our culture, you'd be speared for posing as us without authority. That's at a minimum. But unfortunately, in today's society, we just want them to be called out on verifying, authenticating their Aboriginal. And I'd say to everyone, it's not a great subject to talk about, but Dark Emu exposed. I'm not here to support, you know, some people's opinions, but I'm here to deal with the facts. Aboriginality fraud is rife in this country. It's now allowing people to access funding, misleading the general public and acknowledging cultures that are not true. I want to make sure we're authentic in this country and we don't bastardise the actual culture.

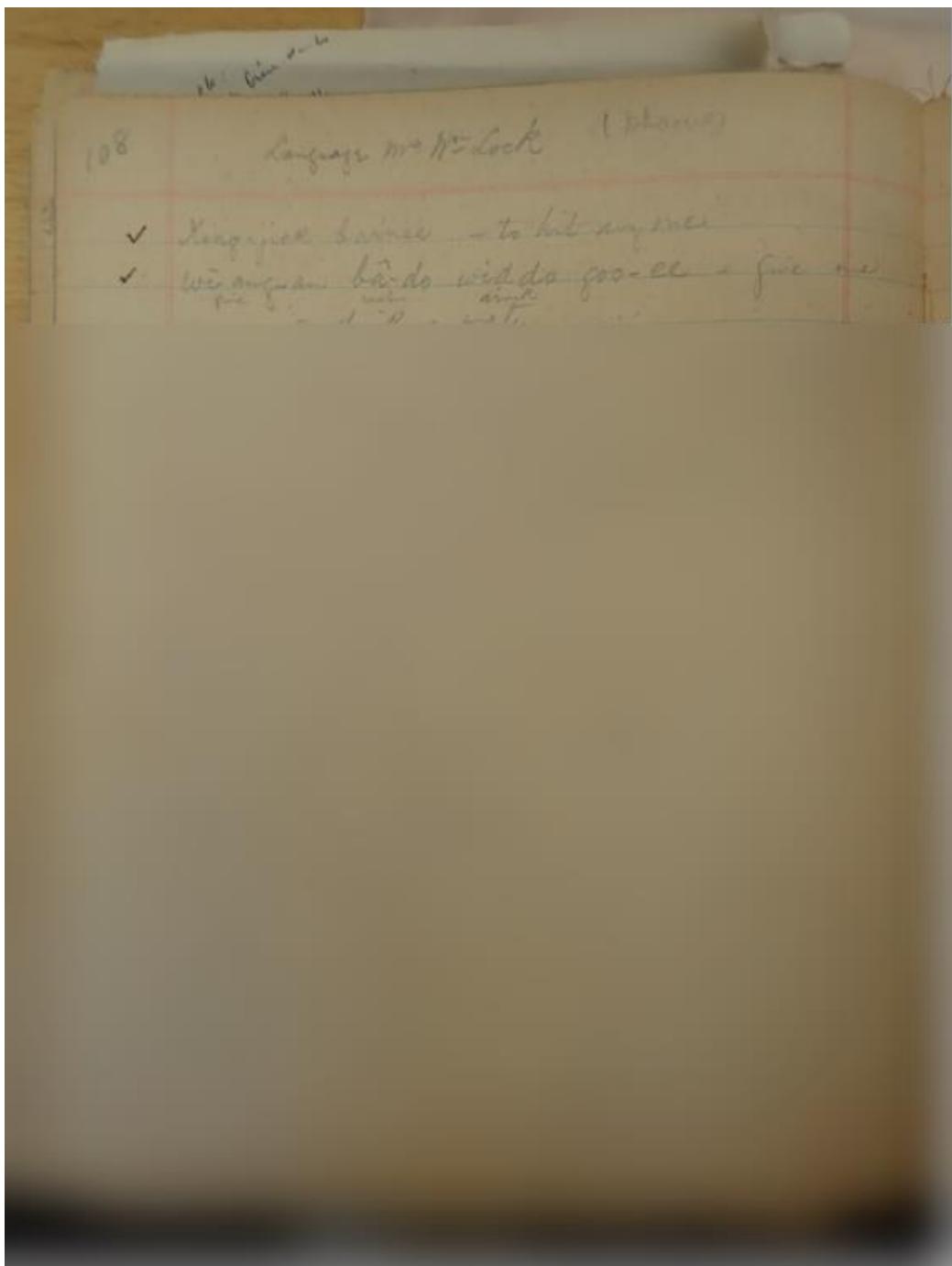
James Willis: And the problem is, to take a cynical approach to all of this, whether it be an ASX listed company, a small business, a government agency, people are either too afraid to ask for proof, or it's just a box ticking exercise for them to say, we have a First Nations program, we have delivered this First Nations outcome. And for them, it makes them feel good or it makes their company look good, but it doesn't actually fix the problem.

Nathan Moran: So locally, Sydney Festival engages people from out of state. They're not us. They're not the local Aboriginal community. And we see the Dharug being promoted as culture of Sydney through the Sydney Festival, one of the most preeminent festivals. It's a bastardisation. It's a lie. Fact check people, please.

The people never existed. Now we promote them and we pay them.

James Willis: Nathan, I really appreciate your time. Thank you for joining us this morning. That is Nathan Moran, who is the CEO of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council. And Chris Minns, David Harris, government agencies, you've just heard that. This is an Aboriginal man that has been fighting for these things for a long period of time, who is rightly very angry and says that you have been dealing with groups that are not verified. And as a taxpayer, I'm concerned by that as well. And we went through a referendum where we were told that this was the most important thing to be listening to Aboriginal people. Well, you've just heard someone rightly fired up, that wants some answers on this and some explanation and to do the right thing and make sure you are dealing with people that have been verified as Indigenous and not self-identified. In simple terms, follow the law.

Annexure “B”



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Annexure “C”