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# Crown land year in review 2023 - 24

Update on the delivery of *Crown land 2031*  
State Strategic Plan for Crown land

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November 2024

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# Acknowledgement of country

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

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**Published by NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure**

[dpie.nsw.gov.au](http://dpie.nsw.gov.au)

Title: Crown land year in review 2023-24

First published: November 2024

Department reference number: DOC24/401418

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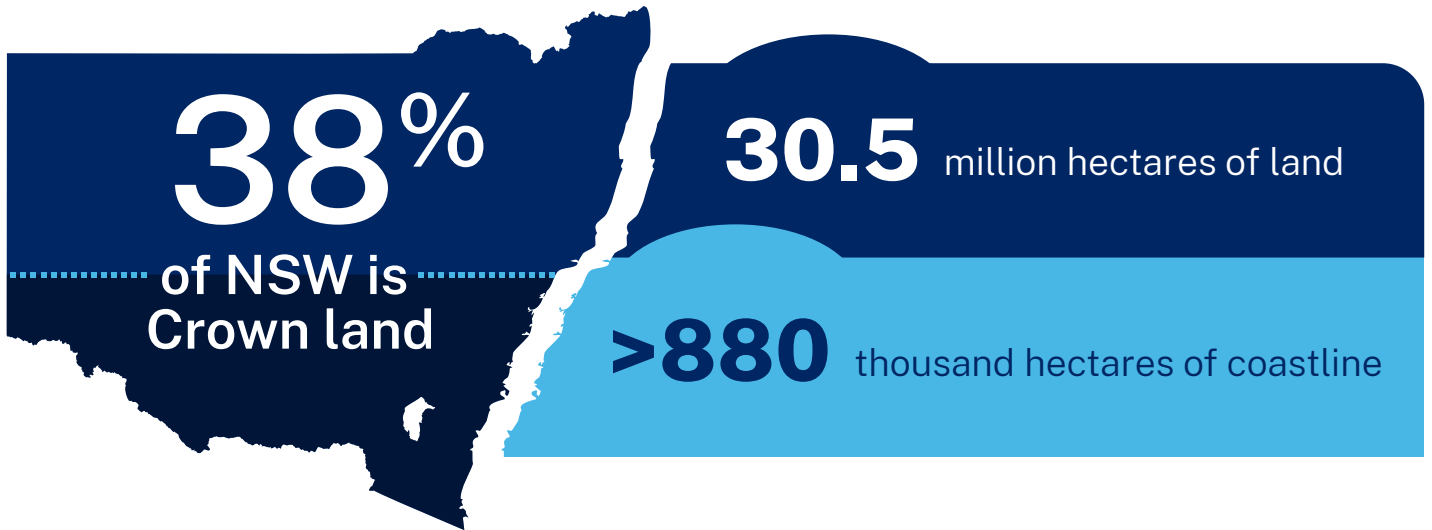
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# The value of Crown land



## Supporting health and wellbeing



**850+**

**Community facilities**  
including community halls, surf clubs,  
Scout and Guide halls



**940**  
Cemeteries



**260**

**Showgrounds  
and racecourses**



**2500+**  
Sporting  
facilities



**4000**

**Parks and passive  
recreation areas**



**160**

**Childcare & aged  
care facilities**

## Participation in managing Crown land



**Reserves managed  
by Crown land  
managers**

**1200**

**Crown land managers**



**2500**

**Volunteers managing statutory land manager boards**

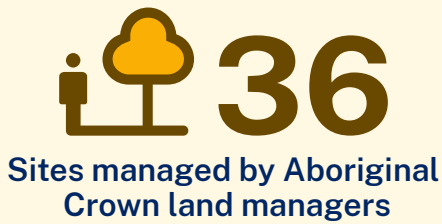
**4%**

**Board members  
who identify as  
culturally or  
linguistically  
diverse**

**Women  
board members**

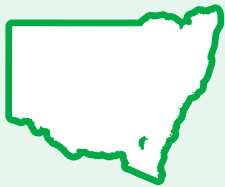
**30%**

## Supporting Aboriginal people to care for, protect and manage land



### Protecting our environment

**128,000**



hectares  
reserved for  
conservation  
purposes



**28** Biodiversity  
conservation  
agreements  
in place

### Supporting climate resilience



**2**

Renewable  
energy sites

**2100**  km  
bushfire tracks and trails

### Supporting economic opportunities



Data within this infographic is continually evolving and metrics are current as at October 2024

# About us

The Crown Lands division within the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure is responsible for managing Crown land in NSW.



Crown land, which includes many parks, reserves, roads, assets, infrastructure and cemeteries, is held by the NSW Government on behalf of the public. It is a unique and complex estate covering around 38% of NSW.

It comprises rangelands, forests, grasslands and mountainous terrain through to waterways, expansive stretches of coastline and the marine estate beyond our shores. The Crown estate – land, assets and infrastructure – is diverse and can be used in many ways.

The government and the community work in partnership to manage the Crown estate. Over 17,000 reserves are directly managed by Crown Lands, and we work with a network of community organisations such as local councils, corporations and volunteer boards who manage 8,200 reserves. We also oversee the management of 220 commons. A portion of the Crown estate is also managed through tenures. This includes western land leases and other leases and licences.

## Our Priorities

*Crown land 2031 – State Strategic Plan for Crown land* guides the management and use of Crown land and its assets and infrastructure to deliver public value in innovative ways. The strategic plan aims to better manage, use and activate Crown land to support local communities, tourism, Aboriginal land rights and interests, public amenity and the environment.

There are 5 key priorities in the plan. These are to:

1. strengthen community connections with Crown land
2. accelerate economic progress in regional and rural NSW
3. accelerate the realisation of Aboriginal land rights and native title in partnership with Aboriginal people
4. protect cultural heritage on Crown land
5. protect environmental assets, improve and expand green space and build climate resilience.

# Our achievements

We are making significant progress towards delivering the priorities set out in *Crown land 2031*. We have been putting in place the foundations for transformation and future success. The following sections outline a selection of our key achievements in 2023–24.

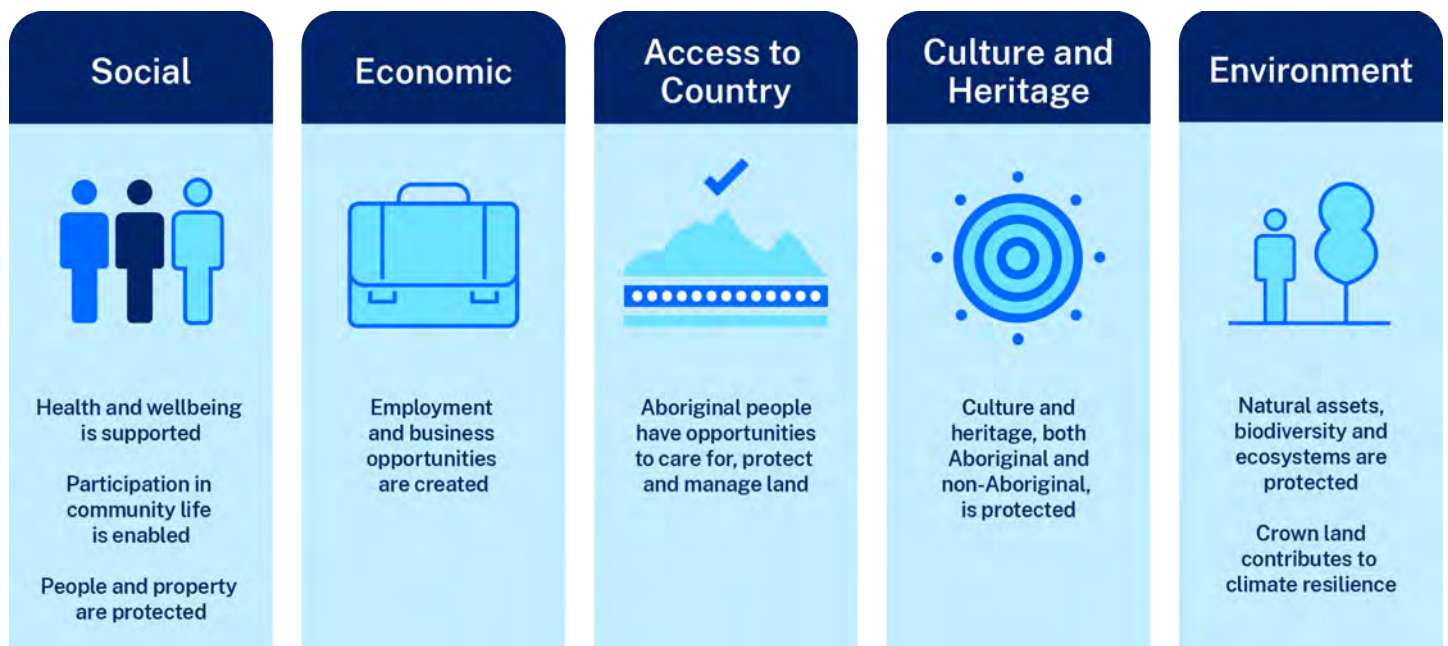
## Community connections

We have been working to strengthen community connections and maximise the public value derived from Crown land.

## Delivering public value

Public value can be described as the positive outcomes or benefits that Crown land provides to the people of NSW.

Our public value framework identifies key outcomes and benefits under 5 domains:



The framework helps us to make decisions that maximise the public value derived from Crown land and better communicate the public value of Crown land.

We are developing new decision-making tools to further strengthen how public value is incorporated into our decisions. The tools focus on the use and management of Crown land. We are also expanding our public value data to help us measure and track our impact.

## Maintaining assets for the community

The Crown estate includes a diverse range of natural assets, built assets and community infrastructure.

Crown land is used by communities across NSW for a wide variety of purposes from farms, parks, reserves, roads and cemeteries to showgrounds, campgrounds and commercial and industrial sites. It provides essential space for recreation, business, tourism and biodiversity.

We are continuing to modernise our systems to help us better manage Crown land assets and provide safe and equitable access for a range of community uses. Our asset management framework guides our investment

decisions and ensures we continue to derive value from the Crown estate and its assets and keep pace with changing community expectations.

We are finalising a comprehensive register to help us better understand our assets. This will enhance decision-making about how we use, maintain and invest in our assets and inform the development of strategies, tools and programs to help us deliver public value from the Crown estate.

While we are working to reform our approach to managing assets, we continue to deliver asset renewal and upgrades across NSW. During the 2023-24 financial year, we delivered over 1,700 projects on Crown land sites across the state.



### New facilities opened at Burwood's Martin Reserve

Residents can enjoy new facilities at Martin Reserve in Croydon Park after a \$414,000 upgrade delivered new play equipment, barbecues, shaded picnic tables, toilets and a water bubbler. The upgrade was a joint project between Crown Lands and Burwood Council.

The project, funded by Crown Lands, included installing:

- an upgraded playground with new play equipment and a rubber 'soft fall' base for safe play
- 2 new shaded picnic tables, 4 bench seats and a new water bubbler
- Exeloo automated public toilets, rubbish bins and public barbecue facilities
- new accessible pathways and wayfinding signs.

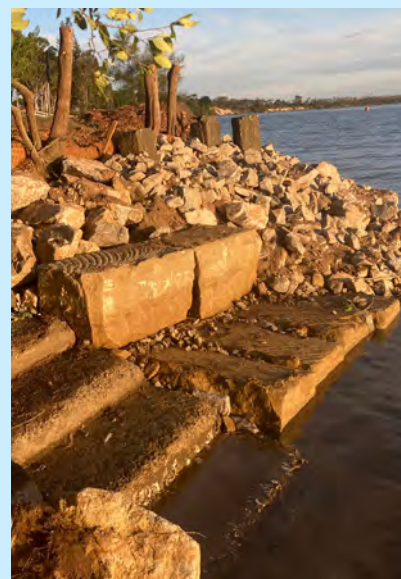
The upgrades have made Martin Reserve a more enjoyable open space for children and families to stay and play. It is now a more accessible and connected local park that has been enhanced to reflect the diversity of our community.

### Safer and more enjoyable access to Bellinger River at Mylestom

Upgrades to Mylestom foreshore mean that locals and tourists can safely and comfortably access the Bellinger River.

The improvements, worth \$108,000, included repairs to failing and unsafe areas of the riverbank, additional water access points, seating and native landscaping.

The foreshore at Bellinger River is very popular. The upgrades have made the area more appealing, and visitors and locals can now more comfortably enjoy the waterway and reserve.







## Public wharf upgrades to support community recreation at Lake Illawarra

A public wharf and 2 jetties at Lake Illawarra have been upgraded to improve safety and support community recreation.

The NSW Government invested almost \$1 million for Crown Lands to complete the upgrade projects at Dix's Wharf at Lake Heights and Kanahooka Boat Ramp.



The \$814,863 Dix's Wharf upgrade involved the complete replacement of the wharf's timber structure and the installation of a non-slip fibre-mesh walkway. A new path has also been constructed for better public access to the boat ramp and water. New benches for seating have been installed in an adjoining parkland grassed area.

A separate project at Kanahooka Boat Ramp involved more than \$138,073 worth of upgrades to 2 jetties to bring them in line with modern standards.

The upgrades have made these facilities safe and contemporary and are a welcome addition to the amenities. Residents and visitors can better enjoy the wonderful asset that the lake represents for the Illawarra region.



## Transforming customer experience

We have established a customer service strategy to optimise our customers' experiences and transform how we interact with and responds to our customers. Since establishing the strategy, we have:

- engaged with 5,200 of our customers through an annual survey to understand their needs and to drive ongoing improvements
- partnered with Service NSW to improve customer interactions, with 27% of customer enquiries now resolved at the first point of contact
- used behavioural insights to improve how we communicate with our customers
- commenced a website project to simplify and enhance our content to make it easier for customers to find information and facilitate more self-service via the website
- transitioned our application forms to online forms for increased accessibility

- developed a framework to build the capability of our staff and drive customer-centric service delivery.

The strategy will ensure it is easier to do business with Crown Lands. Under the strategy, we will implement more modern and efficient systems and adopt a customer-centric approach to our interactions.

We will continue to implement the actions in the strategy, including:

- progressing our website improvement project
- undertaking a 'Chatbot' self-service pilot on the Crown Lands website
- trialling the use of artificial intelligence technology to automate and validate the data customers provide in online forms when applying for a conveyancing search.

## Supporting our volunteers

The Crown land manager network manages thousands of public reserves across NSW on behalf of their communities. Volunteers are a vital part of that network, and we have been working to deliver programs to better support them.

### Investing in volunteers

We are adapting and strengthening our Crown land manager network so we can continue to meet community needs.

The feedback we receive from annual reporting informs how we design and improve our Crown land manager model to unlock better ways to support our volunteers.

We are developing a strategic roadmap to guide reforms that will strengthen our volunteer network and deliver strong community connections.

During the 2023–24 financial year, we started a new pilot program to improve accounting and record-keeping

practices by funding a comprehensive bookkeeping system. So far, we have trained and supported nearly 40 volunteer boards to implement the new system.

We have seen evidence that the pilot program has improved practices and the quality of documentation. It has also improved the financial skills and computer literacy for participants. Having more efficient activities and processes has meant that volunteers have more time to spend on other land management priorities.

### Celebrating our volunteers

Volunteers play a significant role in managing Crown reserves such as recreational facilities, nature reserves, community halls and showgrounds. Their efforts greatly benefit the community.

Annually we celebrate our volunteers through the Crown land manager awards program. The awards recognise the outstanding efforts of hard-working Crown land volunteers and organisations who go above and beyond to devote their time to help manage local Crown land reserves and support their communities.



### Crown land managers honoured during National Volunteer Week

During National Volunteer Week, we acknowledged and thanked all Crown land managers across the state who provide outstanding service to their community.

Three Crown land managers were honoured for a combined 96 years of volunteer service on the board of the historic Lambton Mechanics Institute, located in Lambton, Newcastle.

Dr Ron Robinson, Pamela Ellen and Kevin Goodwin, who have each served over 30 years on the institute's board, received Crown Lands Service Recognition Award certificates for their outstanding contributions at a ceremony at the Lambton Mechanics Institute in May 2024.

Another 2 long-term Crown land managers were also honoured for their volunteer duties after nearly 100 years of combined service to their communities.

Garry Walters was recognised for 50 years managing 2 Crown land reserves in the NSW central-west village of Elong Elong. We also extended appreciation to Barry Bartrim, who dedicated 49 years of service as a member of the Tyalgum Public Recreation and Preservation of Native Flora and Fauna Reserve Land Manager board. Both Mr Walters and Mr Bartrim have now retired from Crown land management.



Communities across NSW rely on volunteers to ensure Crown land is managed effectively and to everyone's benefit. Over 600 long-term Crown land volunteers received award certificates for their service.

## Crown Reserves Improvement Fund

The Crown Reserves Improvement Fund supports our Crown land managers by providing funding for repairs, maintenance projects, pest and weed control, new recreational infrastructure and environmental initiatives. In 2023–24, the Crown Reserves Improvement Fund offered funding for 144 projects totalling over \$14.5 million in grants.

The funding program also transitioned to the whole-of-government grants management system, the SmartyGrants platform. This system significantly improves the application experience for our Crown land managers, allows for centralised reporting and ensures we comply with the NSW Government's Grants Administration Guide.



### Nail Can Hill Reserve mountain bike network upgraded

The Nail Can Hill mountain bike trail network has been upgraded thanks to a \$157,382 investment funded by the Crown Reserve Improvement Fund.

The much-needed maintenance, upgrades and realignment throughout 11 kilometres of track included repairing erosion, general trail maintenance, installing appropriate drainage and closing illegal trails. New features such as jumps, rollers and bridges were also installed along the network. Now the tracks are smoother and flow better, making them more enjoyable for beginners and experienced riders.

The work was done sensitively to protect wildlife, including a species listed as vulnerable. We also protected important Aboriginal assets as part of the project.

Bushwalkers, horse riders, trail runners and mountain bike riders all enjoy exploring Nail Can Reserve. These trails are now sustainably constructed and can be safely enjoyed by the whole community.

### Lake Windamere reopened for recreation

Community access to a popular Crown land reserve in the central-west of NSW has been restored after severe erosion caused by heavy rain has been repaired.

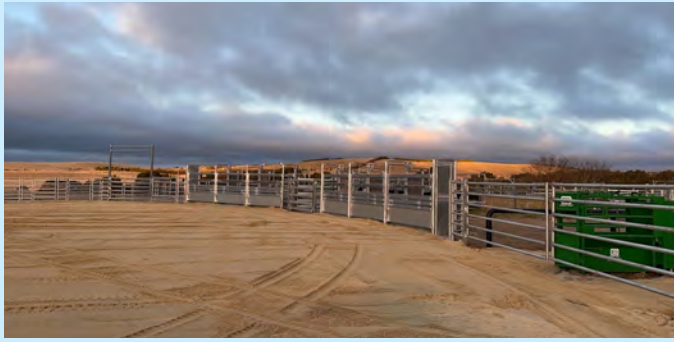
The \$149,755 restoration and upgrades in Lake Windamere Under Canvas Camping Reserve at Cudgegong, which were funded by the Crown Reserve Improvement Fund, included patching the erosion and sealing the 1.3-kilometre access road with bitumen.

The reserve is in a beautiful natural setting and its quality amenities are used for a wide range of outdoor activities including daytrips, boating, kayaking, camping, fishing, bird watching and bush navigation activities.

The reserve was left off-limits to families, nature lovers and the wide range of community groups that regularly use its facilities after bad weather washed away large sections of its gravel access road.

The repair work to seal the road will allow safe, all-weather access and save on future maintenance costs.





## Upgrades for Bungendore Rodeo, Equestrian Sports and Recreation Ground

Improvements at Bungendore Rodeo, Equestrian Sports and Recreation Ground will benefit locals and visitors and enable a wider range of people and groups to use the area for multiple activities.

The \$370,000 upgrades, funded by the Crown Reserves Improvement Fund, included replacing old timber fencing with new steel fences, earth works to make the arena better and safer, remediation of ground surfaces, drainage improvements to help protect against erosion and repair of the natural amphitheatre.

The upgraded infrastructure has enabled the site to become a multipurpose facility that can be enjoyed by a wider range of user groups, from hosting rodeos, equestrian demonstrations, camp drafting and polocrosse to music festivals, field days and other community events.

## Accelerating economic progress

We have been contributing to regional tourism by enhancing popular tourism sites and promoting a greater diversity of use and access through strategic initiatives.

### Improving tourism sites

Reflections Holidays, which manages various holiday parks on Crown land across NSW, has been promoting tourism through site upgrades, events and new cultural and strategic initiatives.

Reflections Holidays holiday parks offer unique accommodation and camping grounds on community land in some of the state's most beautiful locations. Reflections Holidays reinvests all profits back into the parks and reserves it manages on behalf of the people of NSW.

During the 2023–24 financial year, Reflections Holidays invested \$18 million in new accommodation, ranging from premium family and accessible cabins to tiny homes and glamping tents. Reflections Holidays invested a further \$4 million to upgrade facilities in its coastal and inland parks to benefit the NSW visitor economy and ensure the NSW public continue to enjoy accommodation options and modern park facilities.

In 2023, Reflections Holidays' Jimmys Beach site was named Holiday Park of the Year (more than 100 sites) at the Caravan and Camping Industry Association NSW's 2023 awards.





## Building meaningful cultural connections

In 2023, Reflections Holidays launched its Reconciliation Action Plan to build meaningful cultural connections with Aboriginal communities on Country at its holiday parks.

As part of the action plan, Reflections Holidays partnered with Crown Lands on an Aboriginal tourism experiences pilot program to deliver cultural activities at its parks, working with Aboriginal organisations.

The program included activities such as bush tucker gardens and creative workshops and was celebrated with the launch of an art trail created by Worimi artist Tyson Jolly at Reflections Holidays' Jimmys Beach site in September 2024.



## Outback camping improved with Penrose Park upgrades

Camping is now safer and more enjoyable at Penrose Park Recreation and Campground at Silverton after Crown Lands completed a major \$2.5 million upgrade to infrastructure at the reserve.

The upgrades included replacing old amenities blocks that were approaching the ends of their lives with 3 new amenities blocks.

Other improvements included upgrades to electrical, water supply, hydraulic and fire system infrastructure and new power supply points with inbuilt water taps at camping sites.

Other works at the reserve included 2 new barbecue shelters and a new park entry sign and display map.

The upgraded facilities and amenities will boost booking numbers and improve the visitor experience.

The major investment will also benefit locals and help the tourism industry cater for more visitors to the Broken Hill region, supporting more jobs.





## Path forward for Hume and Hovell Track

A 10-year strategic plan to upgrade the iconic Hume and Hovell Track and better support the visitor economy and communities along its route has been completed.

The strategy was developed by Snowy Valleys Council with consultant SMA Tourism, in partnership with Crown Lands and Destination Riverina Murray.

The Hume and Hovell Track is one of NSW's best walks, covering 426 kilometres of scenic landscapes from Yass to Albury, including grasslands, woodlands, forests, alpine, wetlands and farms.

Extensive consultations were held to develop the strategic plan, which identifies a range of opportunities and gives recommendations to make the track better for bushwalkers, campers, families and visitors.

## Sustainability projects

Using Crown land to deliver renewable energy projects will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support the NSW Government's commitment for the state to be net zero by 2050. It will also contribute to job creation and economic growth and increase energy security and public value.

During the 2023–24 financial year, we worked closely with Hydrostor (A-CAES NSW Pty Ltd) to facilitate the development of the Silver Energy Storage Project on Crown land at Broken Hill. The project represents a \$1 billion investment in the state's electricity network, providing an estimated 260 employment opportunities during the construction phase and 70 ongoing jobs once the project is complete.

The project will rely on advanced compressed air energy storage (A-CAES) technology that will deliver long-duration energy storage of 8 or more hours to power grids servicing Broken Hill and NSW. This will provide a more reliable energy supply by capturing clean energy produced in part by solar and wind renewable energy sources and distributing this energy when most needed during peak demand.



# Realising Aboriginal land rights and interests

*Crown land 2031* recognises the importance of Aboriginal land rights and native title interests. It supports a partnership approach with Aboriginal land holders to promote enterprise and economic development.



The strategy supports reconciliation with Aboriginal people in NSW by brokering a greater diversity of access and use with Aboriginal landowners.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 creates a system of legal rights to compensate Aboriginal communities for the dispossession of their land by allowing the return of some Crown land to Aboriginal land councils. Under the Act, local Aboriginal land councils have a legislated role to deliver social and community benefits with the economic benefits derived from claimed land.

During 2023–24, we granted 296 Aboriginal land claims equating to 1,989 hectares of land granted to 55 local Aboriginal land councils.

Over 30% of claims granted under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act have been granted since *Crown land 2031* commenced in 2021. This equates to 1,462 claims being granted within the last 3 years.

We have also established the Local Aboriginal Land Council Strategic Advisory Group to provide Crown Lands with advice on matters that impact on local Aboriginal land councils and their communities.

The program of work we are undertaking to realise Aboriginal land rights and interests is aligned with and contributes to achieving [NSW's commitments to Closing the Gap](#) (Target 15A).

The Closing the Gap framework is an Australian Government strategy that aims to reduce disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians on key health, education and economic opportunity targets. Closing the Gap Target 15A aims to achieve a 15% increase in landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests by 2030.



## New home planned for Moree Local Aboriginal Land Council

Moree Local Aboriginal Land Council is progressing plans to establish a new operating base after a successful Aboriginal land claim on Crown land on a former ambulance station site in the town.

Currently, Moree Local Aboriginal Land Council is based in leased premises in Auburn Street. Securing the site, which includes the former ambulance station building, provides a property from which the land council can operate, helping reduce its costs.

## Land parcel at Beryl returned to the Aboriginal community

Crown Lands granted an Aboriginal land claim that will see a significant parcel of land located in the state's central-west returned to the local Aboriginal community.

The Mudgee Local Aboriginal Land Council will take ownership of the 89-hectare parcel of land located within Beryl Reserve in the village of Beryl.

The ruggedly beautiful site is predominately made up of natural bush with a small river running through it. The site will be returned as freehold land to the Mudgee Local Aboriginal Land Council, which advises it will undertake important cultural assessment work at the site and liaise with the Mid-Western Regional Council to determine its future use.

This is a great example of how community outcomes can be delivered through the realisation of Aboriginal land rights. Returning land to local Aboriginal land councils helps support environmental, cultural, social and economic outcomes.



## Orange Aboriginal Land Agreement

Crown Lands delivered its commitment under the Orange Aboriginal Land Agreement by completing the transfer of 86 hectares of land to Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council across 2023–24.

The transfer will drive local cultural, social and economic outcomes, as well as the realisation of Aboriginal land rights as intended in the Aboriginal Land Rights Act through the return of land to Aboriginal ownership.

As an example, Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council is using some of the land to partner with Orange City Council, Regional NSW and Crown Lands to explore the opportunity to develop the Bloomfield Health Precinct, which is a site that comprises a series of land parcels owned by multiple stakeholders.

This precinct will unlock significant economic value by delivering new housing (including social and affordable homes), adaptive heritage reuse, commercial spaces, health expansion space and public domain.



## Land at Collarenebri returned to Aboriginal community

Nine parcels of Crown land at Collarenebri in north-west NSW have been returned to the local Aboriginal community following a successful land claim.

A total of 1 hectare of land across nine lots in High Street and Narran Street have been returned as freehold land to the ownership of Collarenebri Local Aboriginal Land Council following the claim by NSW Aboriginal Land Council.

Minister for Lands and Property Steve Kamper and Crown Lands Deputy Secretary Mel Hawyes visited Collarenebri in June 2024 to handover the title of the land.

Collarenebri Local Aboriginal Land Council aims to use these land blocks to benefit the local community, including addressing the shortage of housing for families in the Collarenebri area.



## Aboriginal management of Crown land

We have been working to encourage the greater involvement of Aboriginal people in Crown land management.



### New board to manage Dirawong Reserve

The Dirawong Reserve Land Manager Board at Evans Head will now include a majority of Aboriginal community members, acknowledging their deep connection and strong interest in the reserve. The new community board has been appointed for up to 5 years to oversee the management of the popular Dirawong Reserve at Evans Head.

The reserve is significant to the Bundjalung people, with the Federal Court in 2013 recognising their non-exclusive native title rights over the reserve.

In the mythology of the Bundjalung Nation, the Dirawong is an unseen spiritual creature also known as the goanna spirit. The Crown land reserve was gazetted on 9 January 1987 for the purposes of Aboriginal heritage and the preservation of fauna and native flora.

The new board will oversee the management of the reserve to protect the recreational and cultural values of the site.

# Protecting cultural heritage

We have been working to identify and protect cultural heritage, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, on Crown land.



Many Crown land reserves and assets have a rich and complex history, and we are committed to ensuring culturally significant sites are identified, protected and maintained for current and future generations.

We play an important ongoing role in protecting cultural heritage and Aboriginal heritage in NSW. While we have made progress, we acknowledge there is still a great deal of work to do.

## Heritage scar tree protected at Coonabarabran

Crown Lands worked with Coonabarabran Local Aboriginal Land Council and community members to protect an important scar tree on Crown land near Coonabarabran in north-west NSW.

Scar trees are trees that have been left with distinctive markings created by Aboriginal people while obtaining bark to make shelters or other objects, or for art-work or other ceremonial uses, depending on the local Aboriginal culture.

Fencing and a steel cage have been placed around the scar tree. A sign designed by Aboriginal artist Nikita Ridgeway has been erected to highlight the tree's significance.

The tree is an important landmark that has both cultural and historical significance as a record and insight into the way local Aboriginal communities interacted with the environment and natural resources.



## Historic Norah Head Lighthouse gets new lease on life

Norah Head Lighthouse Reserve, one of the Central Coast's most iconic Crown land sites, is welcoming visitors after more than \$400,000 in upgrades were completed.

The lighthouse improvements were funded from the Crown Reserves Improvement Fund and included repairs, maintenance and repainting of the keeper's quarters and installation of a new security gate.

The lighthouse and its reserve attract more than 100,000 visitors each year for coastal sightseeing and whale watching, and it is a popular location for weddings.

Visitors can stay in furnished keepers' cottages that offer sweeping sea views a short walking distance from beaches and rock pools.

Reflections Holidays began its role as Crown land manager of Norah Head Lighthouse Reserve in September 2023.

Expressions of interest were invited from the public to become members of a Community Liaison Group to help ensure the Norah Head Lighthouse Reserve is protected for future generations.

Norah Head Lighthouse is of great historical significance to the Central Coast, with 120 years of local history. The Community Liaison Group will play an instrumental role in ensuring the lighthouse continues to be cared for and that community and visitors can continue to enjoy it.



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# Protecting environmental assets and building climate resilience

We are committed to identifying, protecting and expanding our environmental assets, improving and expanding green space and building climate-change resilience.

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## Coastal management

Much of the coastal land along NSW, including most beaches, headlands, estuaries and waterways, is Crown land. This includes surfing reserves, regional harbours, river entrance breakwaters and holiday parks.

We administer and regulate a diversity of activities on coastal Crown land and work with local councils and public authorities on complex issues that are unique to the coastal environment. This includes:

- beach erosion
- coastal and tidal inundation (flooding)
- unstable coastal cliffs
- unstable coastal lakes or watercourse entrances.

In October 2023, we published Coastal Crown Land Guidelines to ensure a clear and consistent approach to coastal Crown land management in NSW. The guidelines help departmental staff, councils and stakeholders to manage coastal Crown land in an integrated and strategic way and make it easier for everyone to understand how decisions are made.

Importantly, the guidelines integrate Crown land management with coastal management programs and plans of management, supporting collaboration with local councils and other Crown land managers as they develop and implement strategic approaches in response to complex coastal issues.

During 2023–24, we progressed several coastal projects to help protect and sustain the coastal and marine estate, and we helped councils and other stakeholders to prepare and implement coastal management programs.

We also continued to lead and contribute to actions in the NSW Marine Estate Management Strategy 2018–2028 (MEMS). We led two MEMS projects: ‘Commercial dredging best practice’ and ‘Breakwall governance and management’, and we provided advise and feedback on 18 coastal management programs.



## Stockton Beach nourishment

In September 2023, Crown Lands worked with NSW Public Works so that sand dredged from Newcastle Harbour could be used to nourish Stockton Beach.

A Crown land licence was issued to NSW Public Works, enabling the deposition of 130,000 m<sup>3</sup> of sand dredged from the harbour entrance in the surf zone just off Stockton Beach. The project has helped to improve amenity for beach goers and build up the sand buffer between the ocean and public assets while a larger mass nourishment campaign is being investigated.



## Flood recovery program

We have been administering funding to restore Crown land assets impacted by storm and flood events. A total of \$10.6 million in funding, provided by the Australian and NSW governments, has been allocated to 22 local councils for 45 repair and recovery projects.

Projects included the repair of showgrounds, sports fields, retaining walls and walkways as well as works on foreshores and natural areas.

We have also completed a flood impact assessment of Crown Land assets that were affected by the extreme flood and storm events in 2022. This involved identifying flood-impacted assets, evaluating the damage and risks and estimating repair costs for both built and environmental assets.

The data will help us establish a response hierarchy based on the asset's condition and risk rating to the public and environment and will guide future repair and remediation projects. This work has also enhanced our preparedness and response capabilities for future disaster events.

### Flood recovery projects completed on the NSW north coast

Residents and visitors have had safe road access restored after Crown Lands completed more than \$85,000 worth of flood repairs on 2 Crown roads in the Ballina and Lismore regions.

Crown Lands invested \$60,000 to repair a damaged road and bridge abutment at Coopers Lane West at Main Arm, near Mullumbimby, which were heavily damaged and restricted vehicle access.

More than \$25,000 has also been invested to repair a flood-damaged section of Cawongla Road at Larnook, in the Lismore area.

These projects are part of ongoing work across the state in response to the February 2022 flood event.

Crown roads provide important access links for many regional areas, and residents on the North Coast have suffered over the past 12 months because of flood damage. These community projects may be small in nature but are big on impact and will deliver immediate benefits for residents and visitors.



## Emergency management strategy

We are now responsible for a range of emergency management functions as a supporting agency under the State Emergency Management Plan (December 2023). The plan lists Crown Lands as responsible for a portfolio of built assets and infrastructure and for providing expertise and resources across the full spectrum of prevention, preparation, response and recovery efforts. Our responsibilities include providing advice on Crown land assets and infrastructure, providing hazard mapping for Crown lands, coordinating impact data to inform recovery priorities, providing liaison officers into state operation centres and administering recovery grant programs.

We are finalising a Crown Lands Emergency Management Strategy and Supporting Agency Plan that will outline our long term emergency management approach and program as well as the specialist support we will provide to the State Emergency Management System and other agencies.

## Fire trail management

We are working in collaboration with the Rural Fire Service to conduct helicopter aerial inspections of fire trails on Crown land. The aerial inspections are also supported by on-the-ground trail maintenance by the Soil Conservation Service to ensure firefighting crews and their vehicles have ready access to fight fires.

During the 2023–24 financial year, more than 720 fire trails were inspected by helicopter covering more than

3,600 kilometres of Crown land, as well as areas of national park, state forest and other adjoining land.

The fire trail network keeps our communities, wildlife and properties safe by providing access for firefighting equipment and personnel. Trails can also provide evacuation routes for residents during emergencies.

Other uses include supporting access for infrastructure maintenance, managing invasive species, studying plant and animal populations and for recreational activities such as bushwalking.

Helicopter inspections are an efficient way to check remote locations, cutting inspection times from months to weeks while providing an overview of the Crown land fire trail network.



## Bushfire safety projects completed at Batlow and Albury

Two major bushfire mitigation projects will help keep communities safer with the completion of an asset protection zone for the town of Batlow and a range of fire trail upgrades near Albury.

A 3-month joint Crown Lands, Rural Fire Service and Soil Conservation Services project upgraded the Wild Dog, Featherstone, Bretts and Polkinhorne fire trails west of Albury.

Crown Lands and the Rural Fire Service also completed a 2-kilometre-long asset protection zone to provide a defensible fire break between homes and forest land west of Batlow.

Crown Lands undertakes about 800 projects each year to maintain and upgrade fire trails and asset protection zones so we are prepared ahead of bushfire seasons.



## Cultural burn program

Cultural fire management is an ancient, safe and sustainable land management activity. It is a practice implemented by Aboriginal people primarily for maintaining and improving the health of Country, culture, its people and kin. It follows protocols involving Elders and knowledge holders who lead and conduct burns in a way that recognises cultural lore and the health of Country. A guiding principle of the practice is right fire – right time – right country.

The Crown Lands cultural burn program sits within the broader Crown Lands bushfire program. It continues to develop and strengthen relationships and partnerships through engagement and planning with traditional owners and local Aboriginal land councils across the state.

During the 2023–24 financial year, we supported several cultural fire management projects and activities on various landscapes across Wiradjuri Country in the south-west of the state.

We continue to undertake and support cultural fire management, with new partnerships and projects identified:

- in Wiradjuri Country at Albury
- in Yorta Yorta Country along the Murray River
- in Yuin Country on the south coast
- along the mid and north coast of NSW with the support of Traditional Owners.



### Local Elders share cultural burning knowledge at Batemans Bay

Crown Lands attended a cultural burn at Nellingen to learn about and engage with Aboriginal knowledge systems that have cared for Country for millennia.

The cultural burn was organised by Batemans Bay Local Aboriginal Land Council. It provided an opportunity to renew culture through fire while promoting knowledge sharing.

Crown Lands is supporting an Aboriginal community-led expansion of cultural burning to heal Country and assist with bushfire mitigation.



## Remediation and clean-up of sites

We are responsible for managing environmental assets and ensuring environmental values on Crown land are identified, enhanced and protected. In 2023–24, we undertook a range of projects to remediate Crown land sites.

### Reserve clean-up for community and culture use

Budding central west arborists are getting trained on the Drayton Valley Reserve north of Rylstone as North East Wiradjuri Co Ltd (NEWco) works to clean up the reserve and put it to use as a community education and cultural resource.

The not-for-profit education and cultural company has been removing rubbish from the reserve with assistance from Watershed Landcare at Mudgee to make it safe.

NEWco has been organising accredited skills training to clean up and sustainably manage the reserve. The training, provide by Local Land Services and Tocal College, includes conservation and ecosystem management with an indigenous specialisation.

The Kandos-based company says the reserve has strong potential to support cultural education. It is home to significant plant communities like callitris

gracilis native pines, scribbly gum trees, eucalyptis cannonia trees and bush tucker plants like geebung, native cherries and lomandra.

There are other plants that can be used for cultural weaving and tool and rope making, as well as interesting varieties such as trigger plants noted for bopping bees on the head to prompt pollination.



### Urunga Wetlands transformed to a nature lover's paradise

Urunga Wetlands used to be one of NSW's most polluted sites. Today it is a nature lover's paradise and a rare freshwater coastal oasis for multiple bird varieties.

The polluted site was transferred to the NSW Government as Crown land. A \$10 million clean-up treated and contained more than 36,400 tonnes of contaminated soil and sediment. This transformed the area, which continues to evolve as a flourishing wetland habitat.

The Bellingen Birders group, with up to 80 active members, has been undertaking regular bird surveys since the wetlands opened following the major NSW Government remediation project in 2017.

The surveys have found the revived wetlands are now home to 123 different bird species, a virtual alphabet from Australasian Darters to Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos.

The Urunga Wetlands transformation is a great example of a long-term, multi-year clean-up. It required comprehensive investigation, planning and ongoing monitoring to transform the site. Community outcomes are being realised with the site now attracting an estimated 10,000 visitors each year.





## Derelict boathouses removed from Atherton Drive Reserve

Crown Lands facilitated the removal of 5 dilapidated and unsafe former boathouses from Atherton Drive Reserve in Urunga on the Coffs Coast, returning over 1,000 square meters of green, open space to the local community.

The unused boathouses were in poor condition and contained asbestos sheeting and other materials that posed a risk to the public and the environment if left to deteriorate further.

The now rehabilitated land is accessible to the public as open green space right by the water.

The foreshore area will be an ideal spot for recreational activities such as picnics, sightseeing and fishing.



## Improved environmental outcomes

We are responsible for managing natural assets on Crown land in NSW. This includes areas of high ecological, cultural, historical heritage and recreational value and areas with high aesthetic and scenic values.

We protect and manage the environment across NSW by working with a range of agencies and stakeholders. We support our Crown land managers so they can fulfil their natural asset management responsibilities and ensure positive environmental outcomes.

### Seahorse hotels provide additional habitat and encourage breeding

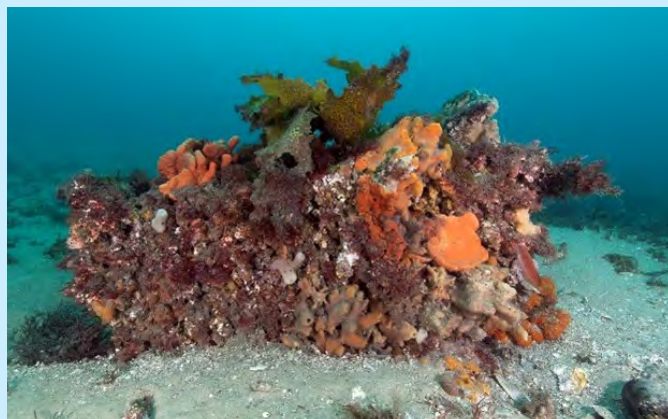
A species of seahorse known as White's seahorse is the only endangered seahorse in Australia and is endemic to the east coast of Australia.

Major flooding events in 2021 and 2022 along the east coast, particularly in the Port Stephens estuary, led to a significant decline in the already small population.

To help the recovery of the White's seahorse population in Port Stephens, artificial habitats known as 'seahorse hotels' have been installed in locations where natural habitats have been lost.

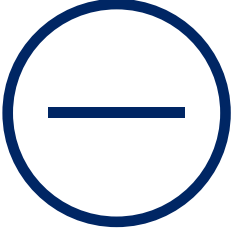



Crown Lands worked with a range of authorities and granted access to marine land to support the Pipeline Seahorse Hotel project and ensure impacts on seahorse habitats and water quality were minimised.



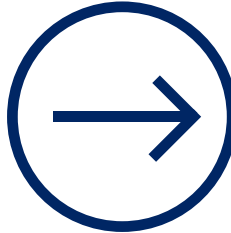
The conservation project involved installing several seahorse hotels at the Pipeline dive site in Port Stephens, which is famous for its marine macro life. The seahorse hotels were designed to attract marine organisms that provide habitat and food sources for the seahorses.


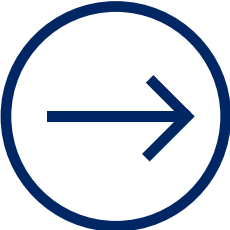






# First action plan update

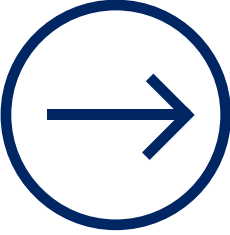

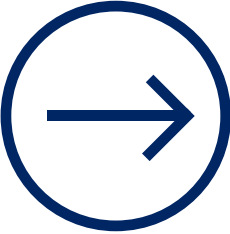
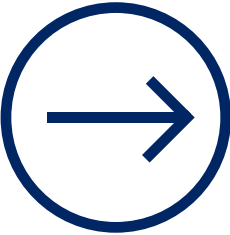
We will implement *Crown land 2031* through successive 3-year action plans. The first action plan was published in April 2022 and lays the foundation to reform how we manage and use Crown land. This section gives a progress update on the delivery of the first action plan as of 30 June 2024.



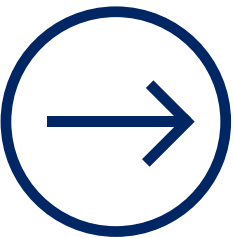
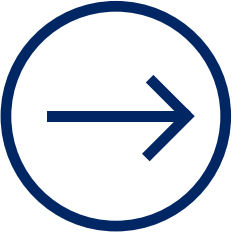
Status meaning			
			
<b>Not started</b> Work has not yet commenced	<b>In progress</b> Work has commenced and progressing	<b>Completed</b> Work is now complete or transitioned to business as usual	<b>Closed</b> Work will not go ahead




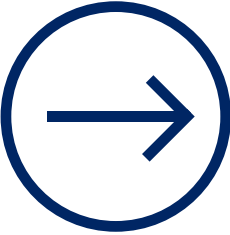
Action	Status	Update
<b>Focus area 1 - Public value framework</b>		
<b>1.1</b> <b>Build and test a public framework</b> that will define, measure and report on the values generated by the Crown estate <b>Due: December 2024</b>		We have developed a public value framework that outlines how Crown land is valued, how this value can be measured and communicated and how it will be incorporated into decision-making.  We will continue to review and refine our framework as our experience using public-value thinking in decision-making grows.
<b>1.2</b> <b>Develop a set of measures for reporting</b> on the public value generated by the Crown estate <b>Due: Jun 2024</b>		The first set of measures, as outlined in the value of Crown land infographic, have been included within this report and will be expanded as our data grows.
<b>1.3</b> <b>Embed public value tools and instruments to support decision-making</b> in the access and use of the Crown estate <b>Due: Dec 2024</b>		We are developing new decision-making tools to assess the public value of different use and management options for Crown land. This will allow us to further strengthen how public value is incorporated into our decisions.



Action	Status	Update
<b>Focus area 2 - Aboriginal land rights, land ownership and native title</b>		
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Work with Aboriginal people to create opportunities</b> to own, manage and access Crown land and be a preferred supplier of products and services  <b>Due: December 2024</b>	
<p>We have targets to support Aboriginal employment opportunities and encourage the sustainable growth of Aboriginal businesses.</p> <p>The department has refreshed its Aboriginal Procurement Strategy.</p>		
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Establish policies and practices that recognise Aboriginal cultural heritage</b> on Crown land and support Aboriginal people's connection to Country. This action will support all Aboriginal people's participation in the management of Crown land.  <b>Due: June 2023</b> (revised to December 2024)	
<p>We are working to record Aboriginal sites within our asset register. This will allow us to better manage and protect significant sites in partnership with Aboriginal people.</p> <p>The scope and timeframe for this package of work has been revised to ensure it is fit for purpose.</p>		
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Deliver resources and training</b> to build capability in Crown land managers and users about Aboriginal rights and cultural connections to Crown land  <b>Due: June 2024</b>	
<p>Completed in the previous reporting period.</p>		

Action	Status	Update
<b>Focus area 3 - Data and information availability</b>		
<p><b>3.1</b> <b>Identify system and data improvements</b> to enhance customer experience and improve decision-making. Improvements will provide a more reliable, secure system adaptable for future needs</p> <p><b>Due: December 2022</b></p>		<p>Completed in the previous reporting period.</p>
<p><b>3.2</b> <b>Improve integration with other systems</b> by combining spatial and other land management data relating to Aboriginal interests, tenures and reserves in the one system</p> <p><b>Due: December 2023</b></p>		<p>We have identified a range of opportunities to improve data integration.</p> <p>We have established a register for ongoing tracking and prioritisation of potential projects.</p> <p>Prioritisation of this work will take into consideration business needs, available budget and resources.</p>
<p><b>3.3</b> <b>Make more departmental data and spatial information accessible</b> to customers, government agencies, industry and the public. Publicly available maps will promote better access and use of the Crown estate</p> <p><b>Due: December 2023</b> (revised to December 2024)</p>		<p>A range of work has been completed to increase the availability of data and spatial information to customers and stakeholders.</p> <p>Crown land spatial data and information is now available on the <a href="#">NSW Planning Portal</a>.</p> <p>A self-service webpage is now available for customers to conduct online searches and access information.</p> <p>A data strategy has been developed to guide ongoing system and technology improvements to increase our ability to share data.</p>

Action	Status	Update
<b>Focus area 4 - Asset management and land allocation reform</b>		
<p><b>4.1</b> <b>Design and begin delivery of a prioritised asset management framework.</b> Key to this will be developing a risk-based approach to building a comprehensive asset register. This will start with an audit to establish what natural, cultural and built assets are in the Crown estate and their risks and opportunities</p> <p><b>Due: December 2024</b></p>		<p>We are implementing an asset management framework to guide investment decisions and support a more strategic approach to managing our assets.</p> <p>We are implementing key actions outlined in our first Strategic Asset Management Plan for Crown land.</p> <p><b>Next steps:</b> We are continuing to develop a comprehensive asset register and lifecycle management direct managed assets.</p>
<p><b>4.2</b> <b>Develop strategies for investment in Crown land,</b> support appropriate economic development and respond to current challenges such as housing shortages and climate change</p> <p><b>Due: June 2023</b> (revised to September 2023)</p>		<p>A plan has been developed to help us work with partners and communities to unlock opportunities to maximise public value.</p> <p>The plan guides Crown Lands to ensure assets and services provide appropriate return to the people of NSW.</p>
<p><b>4.3</b> <b>Develop a climate change adaptation plan</b> to protect environmentally sensitive land and assets and manage risk and resource allocation</p> <p><b>Due: December 2024</b></p>		<p>We are finalising our first climate change adaptation plan, which will be released shortly.</p> <p>The adaptation plan outlines specific actions that Crown Lands will take to mitigate risks and adapt to climate change.</p> <p>It brings together existing and new programs of work and seeks to strengthen and embed consideration of climate in our decision-making.</p>
<p><b>4.4</b> <b>Design and deliver training, tools and assistance programs for Crown land managers</b> to better manage assets for public benefit</p> <p><b>Due: December 2024</b></p>		<p>We have delivered a range of tools and training materials to support our Crown land managers.</p> <p>We have also completed a review to provide insights about our current Crown land manager network.</p> <p><b>Next steps:</b> Findings from the review are now being used to develop a road map to better support our Crown land managers into the future.</p>

Action	Status	Update
<b>Focus area 5 - Customer experience</b>		
<p><b>5.1</b> <b>Develop and apply a strategy to optimise customer service</b> through more modern, efficient systems that allow for self-service and easy information access</p> <p><b>Due: December 2022</b> (revised to December 2023)</p>		<p>A customer service strategy has been developed to achieve a customer-centric approach.</p> <p>The strategy was informed by evidence collected through a customer needs analysis. Over 3,000 customers provided insight into what they want and need.</p>
<p><b>5.2</b> <b>Review and reform customer transactions</b> by exploring ways to streamline processes and digital capability, giving customers a range of self-service options. The department will investigate transitioning activities, where practical, to a dedicated customer service entity such as Service NSW and Revenue NSW</p> <p><b>Due: June 2023</b> (revised to December 2023)</p>		<p>We are now partnering with Service NSW to deliver a contemporary and streamlined customer experience.</p> <p>Our application forms are now online, improving ease and accessibility.</p> <p>A new licencing matrix is in place to inform and expedite decision-making on matters including permits and deemed licences.</p> <p>Improvements to our sales and enquiries application process, including a new smart online form, have decreased processing times.</p> <p>We have streamlined Crown road purchase applications to reduce timeframes and provide clear and proactive information to our customers.</p>
<p><b>5.3</b> <b>Give customers clearer guidance</b> by developing and aligning policies and procedures with Crown land 2031 priorities</p> <p><b>Due: June 2023</b> (revised to December 2024)</p>		<p><b>Next steps:</b> We are simplifying and improving our website information and navigation to provide clearer guidance.</p> <p>The timeframe has been extended to ensure all our website content is reviewed and optimised for usability.</p>
<p><b>5.4</b> <b>Contribute to regional tourism</b> by promoting greater diversity of use and access through strategic initiatives, partnerships and networks</p> <p><b>Due: June 2023</b> (revised to June 2024)</p>		<p>We conducted a series of stakeholder workshops to establish a practical approach to tourism for Crown land that will deliver social and economic benefits for NSW.</p> <p>A tourism action plan is being developed to guide internal decisions and priorities to ensure our activities support regional tourism.</p>

Action	Status	Update
<b>Pilot</b>		
<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Housing partnerships –</b> partnering with Aboriginal people, other areas of government and local communities to use suitable Crown land for social and affordable housing development</p> <p><b>Due: December 2023</b></p>		<p>Completed in the previous reporting period.</p>
<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Activate spatial tool –</b> making Crown land data publicly available to give communities and stakeholders greater insight into their relationship with public land and access to information about that land</p> <p><b>Due: June 2023</b></p>		<p>The pilot will not progress as part of the First Action Plan.</p> <p>The public can now identify Crown land and roads via the <a href="#">NSW Planning Portal</a> Spatial Viewer.</p>
<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>Commercial marinas –</b> establishing new commercial leasing arrangements within a high-value sector. Contemporary lease terms will be negotiated with commercial marina operators who use and occupy Crown land to provide secure tenure, investor confidence and a commercial return to the NSW Government</p> <p><b>Due: December 2023</b></p>		<p>A new marina leasing framework has been developed. Lease terms under the new framework are being negotiated with several commercial marina operators.</p> <p>The framework will continue to be rolled out as operators are transitioned.</p>
<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>Solutions brokerage –</b> increasing the use of Aboriginal land agreements and Indigenous land use agreements to settle multiple Aboriginal land claims and interests and work with Aboriginal stakeholders to unlock opportunities from access to lands</p> <p><b>Due: December 2023</b> (revised to June 2024)</p>		<p>A new framework to increase the use of Aboriginal land agreements is being developed in consultation with a local Aboriginal land council reference group. This includes the development of a new Aboriginal land agreement template.</p> <p><b>Next steps:</b> Finalise and implement the new framework.</p> <p>The timeframe was extended to allow comprehensive consultation and co-design with key stakeholders.</p>

Action	Status	Update
<b>Pilot</b>		
<p><b>5</b> <b>Aboriginal tourism experiences</b> – partnering with Aboriginal people to explore how Aboriginal culture can be protected and shared through visitor experiences delivered by or in partnership with Aboriginal service providers</p> <p><b>Due: December 2023</b></p>		<p>We partnered with Reflections Caravan Parks to trial new and authentic Aboriginal cultural immersion experiences, including activities in its holiday program.</p>
<p><b>6</b> <b>Open space</b> – targeting investment to enhance green and open space networks across the Crown estate, in partnership with Crown land managers</p> <p><b>Due: December 2022</b></p>		<p>Completed in the previous reporting period.</p>



