

Preface

Reimagining Sustainability in Precarious Times originated in the traditional country of the Darug, Gundungurra, and D’harawal peoples of Greater Western Sydney. Aunty Fran is a D’harawal elder and in her chapter performs the traditional welcome and introduction to D’harawal country. In her chapter the story of the great ceremonial site of Yandel’ora, the Land of Peace, in D’harawal country offers a metaphor for the gathering of the diverse places and people in this book.

D’harawal Stories of Cycles and Seasons: Land, Water, and Fire

Aunty Fran Bodkin, D’harawal Elder

Dadyi’barlang’o’neeya yuoli birrong gumadagul ngurang.

We acknowledge the guardians of the Spirit of This Land,

Darimi naway buldyan bidigal duga’o’ngung

And give our respect to the elders, past and present

Ngiyinee bulima nandirita

May you always see the beauty of the Earth

Ngiyinee dingan duroowan bata.

May you always taste the sweetest fruit

Ngiyinee gadaloong ganbee miwoona

May you always feel the warmth of the flame.

Ngiyinee nguwaga gambata gana

May you always smell the perfume of the flowers

Ngiyinee ngara djarnaba gurong.goorong.

May you always hear the laughter of the children.

Didjariguroo o’ngya.

We thank you.

Introduction

The prime resource is knowledge, knowledge that has been gathered throughout the millennia, compiled, and stored within the memory of all those who ensure availability of all other resources and the sustainability of the supply of those resources. And, as for all things, there is a law called the Law of Truth, within which is hidden the Truth of Being and the Truth of Law. Together this Law of Truth and its elements ensured the availability and the sustainability of all resources throughout the tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of years of our occupation of This Land.

In the dreaming it was realised that in order to live, we needed to ensure the availability of those resources we needed to sustain ourselves. Over generations we observed and experienced those conditions on This Land, recording in story and song what we had learned, how the times of day were important for certain duties, how the changes in the weather were rhythmic, recurring year after year, and how other, longer cycles either lengthened or shortened the pulse of the rhythms. We learned that the availability and sustainability of those resources upon which our life depended could be extended if we respected the Land rather than used it.

Observation and Experience: The Science of the D'harawal Peoples

The relationship between the annual seasons and the larger climate cycles was recognised and used by the D'harawal people throughout the millennia that they occupied This Land. This relationship was a complex one when compared with today's simplistic regard of all cultures in Australia, that, firstly, there are only four seasons in an annual cycle and the annual cycle is the only cycle controlling our natural resources.

Although the catchment of the five rivers of the D'harawal is the subject of this chapter, every major river catchment in Australia has its own set of annual seasons; some may indeed have four; however, others may have six or even eight, but others may have just two. Thus, the Aboriginal people of Australia recognised that we could not use the same resource management systems over the entire country and that each major river catchment had its own set of annual seasons that were in turn influenced by an 11–12-year cycle.

The Annual Weather Cycle

There are six seasons in the annual D'harawal calendar. Each of which has a set of indicators, one animal or bird and one plant. It was forbidden to hunt and kill the creature that signifies a particular season. No season begins on the same day each

year, nor does it continue for the same length of time each year, simply because it is affected by the larger cycles within which it may occur.

The first annual season is the Time of Ngoonungi, or Flying Fox, and begins when they gather in great numbers just on sunset over the Boora Birra (Sow and Pigs Reef). This activity coincides with the bright splashes of red of the waratah appearing throughout the bushland.

The second annual season is the Time of Parradowee, or the Great Eel Spirit, and begins when the Great Eel calls his children to him and the mature eels scramble down the rivers in huge numbers making their way out to sea never to be seen again. This activity coincides with the blooming of the *Acacia binervia*, which announces the presence of many fish in the bays and estuaries.

The third annual season is the Time of Burran or Kangaroo, when the mating activity of the kangaroos and their cousins is most frantic. The flowering of the *Acacia implexa* at this time informs the D'harawals that this is the hottest time of the year and fires are not to be lit in bushland.

The fourth annual season is the Time of the Quoll, or Native Cat, when this little creature's spine-tingling cries for a mate can be heard throughout the woodlands at night. It is also the time of the ripening of the fruit of the lilly-pilly and is a warning that cold weather is on its way.

The fifth annual season is that of Burrugin, or Echidna, and begins when the spiny anteater female runs frantically through the woodland, closely followed, usually nose to tail, by a train of up to ten males, each trying to jostle the other out of the line. It is also the time when the *Eucalyptus tereticornis* begins its long period of blooming and is a reminder to prepare the implements for gathering and for the ceremonies to be held during the Time of Ngoonungi.

The sixth annual season is that of Wiritjiribin, the Lyrebird, when the male lyrebird begins to build his dancing mound and his calls ring out through the woodlands as he experiments to find out which combination of his many calls more readily attracts the female. It is also the time that the flowers of the *Acacia floribunda* appear, which signifies that the fish are running in the rivers.

The Mudong (11–12 Year) Climate Cycle

The Mudong Cycle has eight distinctive seasons, which has a profound effect upon all the seasons of the annual cycle. The occurrence of the Southern Aurora in the sky during the time of the season of Ngoonungi (generally around late September or early October) signifies the reference point in time of the beginning of the Mudong Cycle. Unfortunately, in the Sydney region, it is getting more and more difficult to view these lights when they occur because of the environmental and light pollution of the atmosphere. However, at times they can still be seen from the plateaux of the Nattai and the Wollondilly Rivers.

The first season of the Mudong is that of Djuli, a time of heat and drought and of sudden, violent storms, and is signified by the massive flowering of the *Acacia*

decurrens, a forewarning of the coming season of wildfires. The season of Djuli can last up to 20 moons.

The second season of the Mudong, Dyirringong, is a relatively short one, lasting less than a year. It is when the weather starts to cool, with storms becoming less violent, but more frequent, and there is a marked increase in wildlife. The grasses remain green for a longer time than usual. This season can last between eight and 12 moons.

The third season of the Mudong is that of Dagurayagu, a time of cold, wet weather, when the rivers flood and young children and old people will become ill. An indicator is the lessening of fish in the rivers and estuaries, but an increase in the numbers of shellfish along the beaches. The season of Dagurayagu can last between 17 and 20 moons.

The fourth season of the Mudong is the Goray'walan, a time of warm, wet weather; it is a time when there is a marked increase in the numbers of fish in the rivers and a marked increase in the numbers of ducklings. This season lasted at the most only 15 moons.

The fifth season of the Mudong is the Kanguama, a time of uncomfortably hot, wet weather, when the frequency of rain is reduced, but the intensity of the storms increases. This season is marked by the increase in insect-borne diseases of man, bird, and animal and by the occurrence of weakness in plants. It rarely lasts any longer than 12 moons.

The sixth season of the Mudong is called Dulamai and is cooler and drier, and with the cooler weather, there are a decrease in the occurrence of rain and a reduction in the numbers of insect species, and the health of the people, animals, and plants improves. During this season the golden orb spider does not spin its beautifully intricate webs, so necessary for the treatment of injuries. This season rarely lasts more than 12 moons.

The seventh season of the Mudong is Illagunuman, a cold, dry season with infrequent storms and occasional hailstones. The cold winds during this time seem to be even more chilling; frost lies on the ground longer during the day and occurs more frequently than in any other of the seasons. The Illagunuman lasts about 15 moons.

The eighth season of the Mudong is that of Garuk, when the weather gets warmer and still drier. The appearing of vast numbers of cicadas during the annual Time of Ngoonungi, and of Christmas beetles during the Time of the Kangaroo, is an indicator of very hot and very dry times coming. The Garuk usually lasts between 12 and 15 months.

The Garuwanga or Dreaming Cycle

The Garuwanga Cycle is the longest cycle of all, lasting from 12,000 to 20,000 years. It has four seasons, and our position in this cycle is judged only by the sea levels.

The Time of Fire, or Darimi Ganbi, is the hottest season and has a devastating effect on the Lands of the D'harawal, with droughts, fires, and violent storms. It was

also a time when the sanctuaries were most important and any travel through these areas was absolutely forbidden. No matter how hungry the people were, violating the laws of these sanctuaries was punished severely, with whole generations of families bearing the punishment, rather than the perpetrator. During the Time of Darimi Ganbi, many species would become extinct or flee to other more suitable climates. The signifier of the coming end of this season is when the sea willy-willies come onto land and take away anything that stands in their way. At the present moment, we are coming to the end of this cycle.

The Cooling Renewal or Darimi Mariyungwaian is a time of plenty when species that have disappeared during the Time of Darimi Ganbi are replaced either by either new species or with the return of former species who have followed their preferred climatic regimes and the boundaries of the sanctuaries are adjusted to include the requirements of the new and surviving species. It is a time when the sea levels begin to fall and the Land of the D'harawal moves eastwards.

Time of Cold or Darimi Tugarah is marked by, at least, the appearance of frost on the ground every day, although some stories speak of the time when ice covered the earth for many generations. It is also a time of great drought and when the five rivers of the D'harawal join together into one large river 2 days walk eastwards from the Teralba (South Head). It is a time of war when the people fight with each other over scarce resources.

The Time of Warming Renewal is when the weather gradually grows warmer and wetter. Plants and animals flourish, and as the sea levels rise, the D'harawals move westwards towards the foothills of the mountains, their places of sanctuaries, and the sacred place of the Beginning.

The Gathering Place

In the early 1800s, a settler in the vicinity of the area now known as Mount Annan stood on top of a hill on his land grant and looked across the plains. In disbelief he stared at the campfires below and hastily made his way to Sydney Town where he reported seeing the 'campfires of 100,000 blacks' on the area between Mount Annan and Glenfield Farm. This was the last reported sighting of the big meetings that used to be held at Mount Annan.

In the Old Days when the three sisters (the three planets) danced in a straight line in the western sky, it was time for the senior knowledge holders and their acolytes to make their long trek to the place called the Land of Peace Between Peoples (Yandel'ora) where meetings were held and laws were made which were common to all those peoples living in the eastern part of Australia. These were meetings in which disputes were settled, marriages were arranged, and exchanges of stories were made, occurring once every generation and always during the season of the Ngounungi, or Flying Fox (early spring), when there was plenty of available food. They were meetings where weapons were not allowed, where inter-peoples' disputes were settled, and where children were exchanged.

In 1988, when many of the Aboriginal peoples from all over Australia came to visit Sydney for the Long March, we had the chance to talk to the descendants of those who attended those meetings and discovered that the Tjapagai came down from what is now the Cairns area and that they had seasons similar to ours and stories of sea level falls and rises, when the Great Barrier Reef was completely out of water, and that the Marooch from the Southern Queensland area also attended the meetings; the Pitjinjara said that they had stories of their great grandmothers walking past the three sisters to come across from South Australia.

Many of the major songlines that cross the continent of Australia intersect at Yandel'ora, the place of the great gathering. The public version of the story that is central to Yandel'ora tells how Galinga the frog caused fighting between all of the animals as they came to the waterhole to drink – kangaroo, native turkey, kookaburra, wombat, eagle, and golden finch. Their fighting so angered the spirit woman that she banished their ability to speak a common language. She said 'if you want to speak to each other you'll have to come to the lyrebird who will be the only one who will be able to speak all languages'. This is the children's version of the story and relates to the lyrebird's perfect mimicry of all the sounds around them, including the voices of all other animals. Thereafter, the lyrebird people called the gathering, and the big mobs of people were fed by trapping the migrating eels as they moved between the ponds. Today, Mount Annan is consecrated within Mount Annan Botanic Gardens in D'harawal country in south-western Sydney. It is a place for the gathering of native food and medicinal plants with the largest seed bank in the southern hemisphere and a place that remains a gathering place for people to learn its stories.

With this chapter I welcome you to the gathering place of this book and the diverse people, places, and stories that come together in its pages.

Frances Bodkin
D'harawal Woman of the Bidjigal Clan

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