"You cannot teach a land ethic... people learn by being involved with nature"
- Anon

The Great Kai'Mia Way

The aim of the Great Kai'mia Way project is to create a network of way-marked routes for informal recreation linking river foreshores, parks, bushland reserves, public transport and other facilities in the Georges River region, by making connections between existing tracks and trails; encouraging this and future generations of people to explore and experience:

- The rich diversity of wildlife and plants
- Rivers waterways and catchment processes
- A wealth of Aboriginal heritage
- Stories of the area's colourful history

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Forward

The vision of The Great Kai'mia Way was the establishment of over two hundred kilometres of sustainable walking tracks and cycleways to link Botany Bay, the Woronora valley, large parts of southern and western Sydney, and the Illawarra Escarpment. The vision arose from community concern for the Georges and Woronora Rivers and Botany Bay and an acknowledgement that parts of these river systems were under great environmental stress. The Great Kai'mia Way originated from a need for people to connect with our river systems. The aim was to enhance an understanding through interaction, thereby promoting people to love, value and look after them.

In August 2002, the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre and Georges River Environmental Alliance obtained funding from PlanningNSW's Georges River Foreshores Improvement Program to conduct feasibility studies for creating the Great Kai'mia Way through the Georges and Woronora River catchments. The project was managed by Project Coordinators and Natural Area Campaigners based at the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre. Stage one of the project was completed and route options were plotted along the Georges and Woronora Rivers catchments for walking tracks, cycleways, and even water transport. This report, a detailed feasibility study, was produced with directions for the next steps to make the vision a reality.

The project was a collaborative work involving broad participation, including: Indigenous Elders; Local Aboriginal Land Council representatives; six state government and two local government agencies; a number of schools; and no less than 24 community groups and NGO's. A diverse range of community groups, from precinct residents' associations, wildflower and bushcare groups to cycling, canoe and Rotary groups participated. Partnering with stakeholders was valued as a strategic cornerstone of the project; the study was launched at a public forum and stakeholder participation was facilitated throughout the project in both formal and informal meetings and working groups and through a representative Advisory Board. A fundamental principle of the project was that of stewardship. It was hoped that the participating organisations would play an ongoing role, taking the vision of the Great Kai'mia Way to the next step of progressive implementation in partnership with landholders, land managers and the community.

At the time of writing – nearly 20 years after the official launch of the Project and Feasibility Study Report in 2004 – it is inspiring to read the scope and depth of the study. The original vision has not been implemented as a system of interconnecting active transport routes branded The Great Kai'Mia Way. However, The Way has been described as a concept rather than a blueprint for implementation; in this sense the project has proved invaluable, having been referenced for many years by councils, government agencies and community groups. Natural systems are connected systems and municipal boundaries bear no relationship to natural systems. Consideration of this interconnection was too often ignored by planning authorities. The Great Kai'Mia Way advocated for the natural systems– such as wildlife corridors and water catchments - to be incorporated into municipal planning.

Clearly, more needs to be done by planning and governance authorities to further the vision of The Great Kai'Mia Way, to incorporate interconnected natural systems into development that can truly be sustainable. A 2019 NSW Upper House Inquiry into Koala Populations and their Habitat found that disruption of wildlife corridors by roads and development was preventing koalas from roaming and breeding. Too many koalas are being killed on roads and too little suitable habitat is left. The koala is on track to become extinct by 2050 unless government acts to protect these animals and their bushland home. The cute and popular koala is just one species, but similar challenges apply to a distressing number of native animals, birds, reptiles, insects and plants.

This document, encapsulating the original project website into a single, searchable resource, is intended to make the concept of The Way more accessible and easier to navigate. It is hoped that the original vision of the study will continue to guide and inspire, connecting communities - both human and natural – in the spirit of mutual flourishing and respect.

Tassia Kolesnikow
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