

## Improving community health when returning safely to country

Amanda McKenna, Bega Valley Shire Council, NSW



# Camping For Health: Improving Community Health Returning Safely to Country

### Background:

Camping plays a major role in the lives of Aboriginal people, throughout much of the twentieth century communities have camped along the New South Wales coast on a seasonal basis. Families stayed at these campsites during holidays, in between work and during particular fishing seasons, these camps provided opportunities to reconnect with each other, friends and country.

Today communities continue to gather at the campsites, with some choosing to remain permanently for a variety of reasons. *The Camping for Health: Improving Community Health when Returning Safely to Country project* looks at how we can improve sanitation methods on a campsite in Wallagoot, NSW.

The Bega Local Aboriginal Land Council (BLALC) has developed a Master Plan for the site encompassing future projects based on:

- Tackling homelessness in the Community by providing a safe and secure site for emergency temporary housing,
- Providing cultural education programs,
- Supporting current work training programs onsite (Cultural burning programs etc.), and
- Providing for an Aboriginal community campground.



Consultation with BLALC - Left-Right: Donna Aldridge (Chairperson for BLALC) Amanda McKenna (EHO Cadet BVSC) and Glenn Wilcox (BLALC CEO)

Working within the framework of the Master Plan, Bega Valley Shire Council's (BVSC) Environmental Health Officer Cadet proposed a joint pilot project to improve sanitation outcomes by constructing toilet facilities at the campsite.

**Where basic sanitation facilities are missing health of the community can suffer. By providing suitable amenities the risk of exposure to raw sewage will be reduced. This is important to reduce/prevent potential infections including diarrhoea, gastroenteritis and hepatitis A. Inadequate hand washing can lead to a number of infectious diseases that can be spread from one person to another. These diseases include gastrointestinal infections, for example; salmonella, and respiratory infections, like influenza. Washing hands properly can help prevent the spread of germs (bacteria and viruses) that cause these diseases (Health, B 2017).**

The purpose of sanitation is to provide a healthy living environment for everyone, to protect the natural resources (such as surface water, groundwater, soil), and to provide safety, security and dignity for people when they defecate or urinate (BMC 2008). This pilot project will reduce the potential for local pollution of the land and water at Wallagoot.

### Project aims:

- Protect and promote healthy living practices on a 44.32Ha parcel of BLALC community land at Wallagoot.
- Construction and installation of suitable sanitation facilities [accessible toilet and capacity for hand washing] achieving critical healthy living practice 3 "Removing waste safely" from the nine Healthy Living Practices – Housing for Health.
- Protect the natural environment through the installation of a toileting system specifically designed to protect groundwater and surface water from contamination. [The site is located adjacent to a sensitive coastal lake system and a National Park].
- Establish and build on relationships with community members, creating strong pathways for mutual knowledge-sharing and further shared projects to improve health outcomes.
- Improve the working knowledge of the community's living, health and environment conditions.
- Strengthen opportunities for collaboration between LALC and BVSC and other stakeholders.

### Phase 1: Community Engagement and consultation:

Since 2015 BLALC has undertaken significant community consultation with the local community as part of the development of the Master Plan for development of the site. In discussions with the BLALC CEO and Board it was confirmed that this pilot project is consistent with the Master Plan.

Consultation and engagement with the community associated with this project will primarily focus on:

- Identifying a suitable site on the land for the facility
- Supporting the development of skills and knowledge associated with the operation and maintenance of the facility.



Discussing the area and choosing the location for the pit toilet