

## Council divided over 'colonial' statue to honour Indigenous woman



*Artist Djon Mundine has suggested the creation of a large carving of Indigenous figures in the cliff face opposite the Sydney Opera House.*

By Andrew Taylor  
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The City of Sydney is divided over how best to commemorate an 18th century Indigenous woman, with lord mayor Clover Moore warning a statue - backed by the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council - may be colonialist and inappropriate.

The proposal from councillor Kerryn Phelps is to build a monument to Patyegarang, a Gadigal woman who taught her language to the First Fleet naval officer Lieutenant William Dawes.

The council will take the issue to its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory panel following a heated discussion between councillors last week.

Cr Moore said the council was committed to commemorating Patyegarang in a way that was "both impactful and culturally appropriate", but: "We are wary that for many, commemoration through statues of individuals is considered a particularly Western or colonial approach."

The Black Lives Matter movement has reignited global debate about statues of controversial historical figures. In Sydney, a statue of Captain James Cook was defaced, and there were calls for the monument to be removed entirely.

Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council chief executive Nathan Moran said a statue of Patyegarang would provide "much needed balance" to existing monuments of mainly non-Aboriginals and men of the British colony.



*The statue of Captain Cook in Hyde Park, which was defaced last month.*

He said the Land Council understood statues were "not relevant" in traditional First Nations cultures, but "for over 100 years we have seen colonial society erect statues to honour their people very widely".

Tempers flared at last week's council meeting after Cr Phelps said the Land Council's relationship with the City of Sydney was "not a happy relationship ... they feel excluded".

Cr Moore said Cr Phelps' comments were "unfair", while councillor Jess Miller suggested that no one group represents the views of the entire Indigenous community.

The council stoush follows a call from Indigenous artist Djon Mundine for a carving of Patyegarang on a rock wall in Walsh Bay.

"The traditional imagery in the society of what is now the Sydney Basin, was the engraved-line, silhouettes that remain today, that reinforce the bond of people to the land," he said.

Mr Mundine also resurrected his decades-old proposal for a large-scale carving of in a cliff opposite the Sydney Opera House. Mr Mundine's *The Song of Bennelong and Pemulwuy* was included as part of the 2010 Biennale of Sydney, but was never created.

Mr Mundine said statues were "individual, narcissistic" and favoured by authoritarian regimes.

"The history of statues belong to empires: Greek, Roman, Chinese, and in the case of Europeans, most probably reached a high point in the late empire years of the 1800s," he said.

Cr Phelps' call for an Indigenous monument follows the alleged defacing of the Captain Cook statue in Hyde Park by a staffer of Greens MP David Shoebridge and the vandalism of other statues of Cook and former prime ministers.

The council has commissioned a number of public artworks commemorating Aboriginal history including *bara*, which will sit on the Tarpeian Precinct Lawn above Bennelong Point.

"Council has been committed to re-balancing the work of previous Australian governments, at all levels, which has focused on memorialising colonial history and largely ignores First Nations history," Cr Moore said.

Labor councillor Linda Scott said the council should "urgently progress" public consultation for a permanent monument of Patyegarang, considering rock carvings, statues and other art forms.

"In light of the Black Lives Matter global movement, it is right for the City to examine the appropriateness of continuing to display statues of old white men, led by the views of our Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander communities," she said.

Chris Fox, senior lecturer in art processes and architecture at the University of Sydney, said the statue had become a "global flashpoint" in regard to how to depict history: "Perhaps it is time to rethink how we represent our past as we negotiate our future."