The Story of the ‘Koorabung’

The “Wind Behind”



25 June 2026

Origins

Meaning ‘wind behind’ in Dharug dalang

The ‘Koorabung’, (Gurabung) is a beautiful vintage 35ft timber passenger vessel, carrying up to 11 people.

She was custom built in 1928 in Sydney Harbour and has been generously offered to the Dharug peoples by Lesley Laing, the current owner. Lesley became sole owner of the boat when Aunty Chris Burke, a respected Dharug Elder, passed away in 2016.

This generous sharing allows for Dharug peoples to conduct important cultural business on Ngurra/Country and to meet cultural custodial obligations to care for Country and her waterways.

The Koorabung has been undergoing extensive timber repairs throughout 2022-25 and is being caringly restored to return her as much as possible to her previous condition.





History

The Koorabung is a very rare, almost antique 35' Rabbits Class Motor Sailer with Douglas Fir planking over spotted gum framing. Locally built in 1928 in Sydney Harbour, she has one of the finest lines and practical sheer for a Motor Sailer.

- LOA 11 m
- Beam 3.4 m
- Draft 1.4 m
- Deck 11 m
- Construction
  - Hull – Oregon, carvel construction
  - Keel - Spotted Gum

Fitted up are 2 small 7"×12' bilge keels with a full fore and aft traditional keel. At a 5'10" draught, one single, large rudder blade, attached from a 2" shaft, in a quadrant set-up, cabled to a capstan chain on the helm in the wheelhouse midship.

Koorabung has two 4-cylinder Perkins diesel engines, complete with an unusual but elegant reverse angle wine-glass transom with a teak boarding platform.

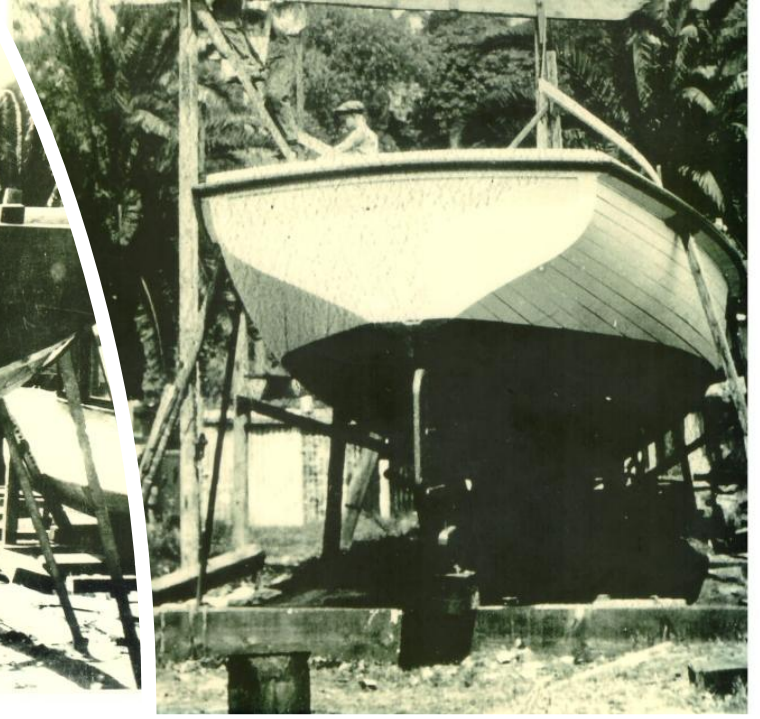
The Koorabung originally had an aft cabin and was owned by the Kuring-Gai Motor Yacht Club Commodore back in the 60s. At this time the Koorabung had the aft cabin removed and replaced with a larger cockpit area undercover.



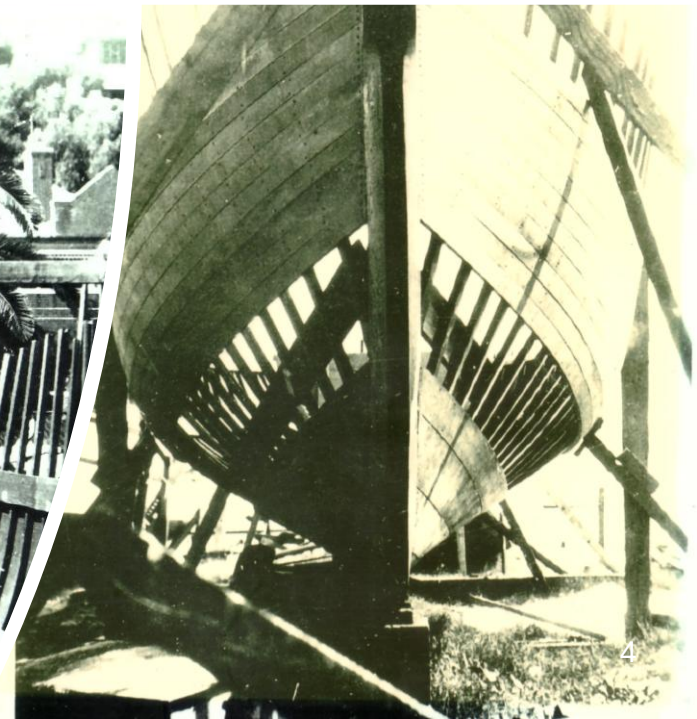


History









History





Vision

With the ‘Koorabung’, Dharug community through the Yarramundi Kids Foundation aims to establish a social enterprise to:

- Promote Dharug presence in a contemporary setting by utilising the waterways as main thoroughfares, as was done prior to colonisation.
- Strengthen and revitalise ‘old knowledge’ of indicator plants and animal movements that promote the preservation and reconnection with Dharug Ngurra (Country), through continued observation conducted on the water,.
- Conduct cultural mapping and other research projects involving Dharug waterways upon the Durrumburra/Lane Cove River, as well as the Dyarubbin/Hawkesbury and other waterways.
- Reconnect and familiarise Dharug people with the waterways and how the Dharug traditionally used the waterways as a means to collect resources and conduct trade and other cultural business.
- Protect and maintain the remnants of traditional sites such as old stone fish traps.
- Educate communities about the past and what happened to our people.
- Build capacity within community and enable riparian and other waterway research.
- Help highlight to the broader community the importance of environmental care for Country and the need to preserve healthy waterways.
- Allow collaboration between groups who wish to help promote and advance the Dharug people and Caring for Country.

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The Koorabung – Restoration in progress



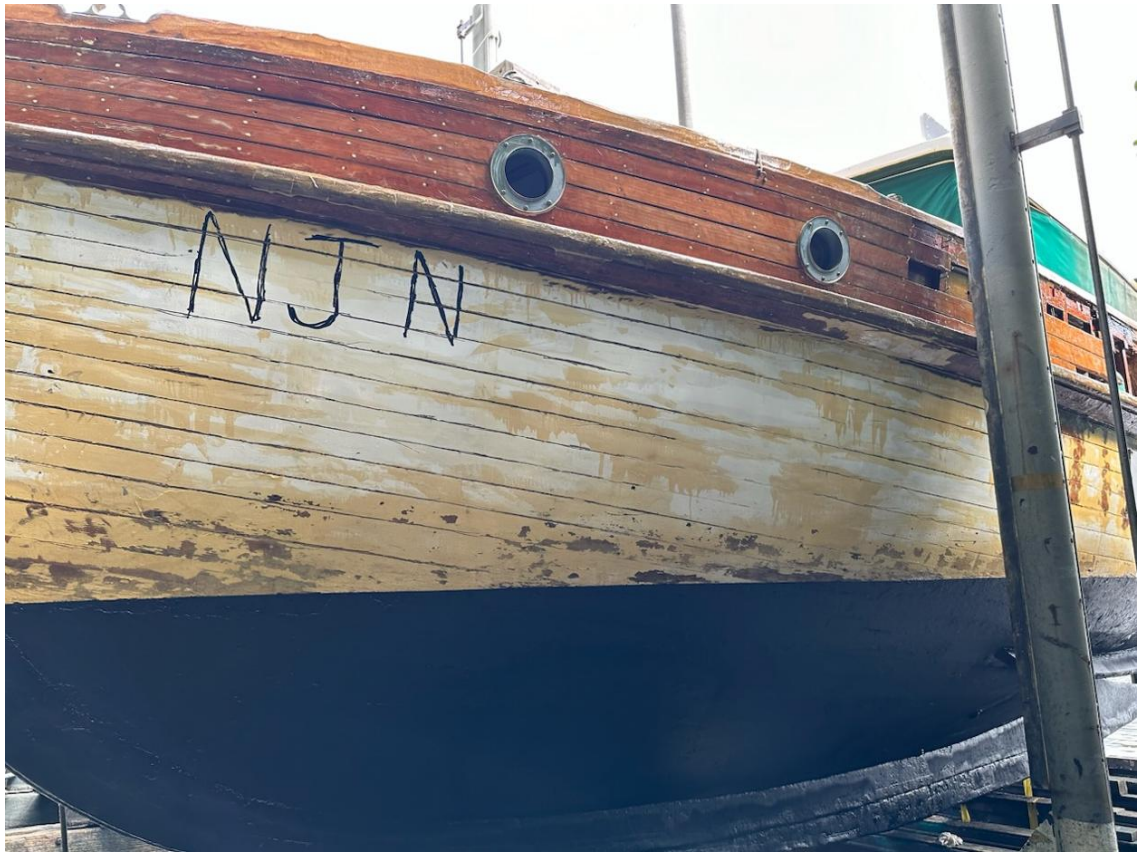






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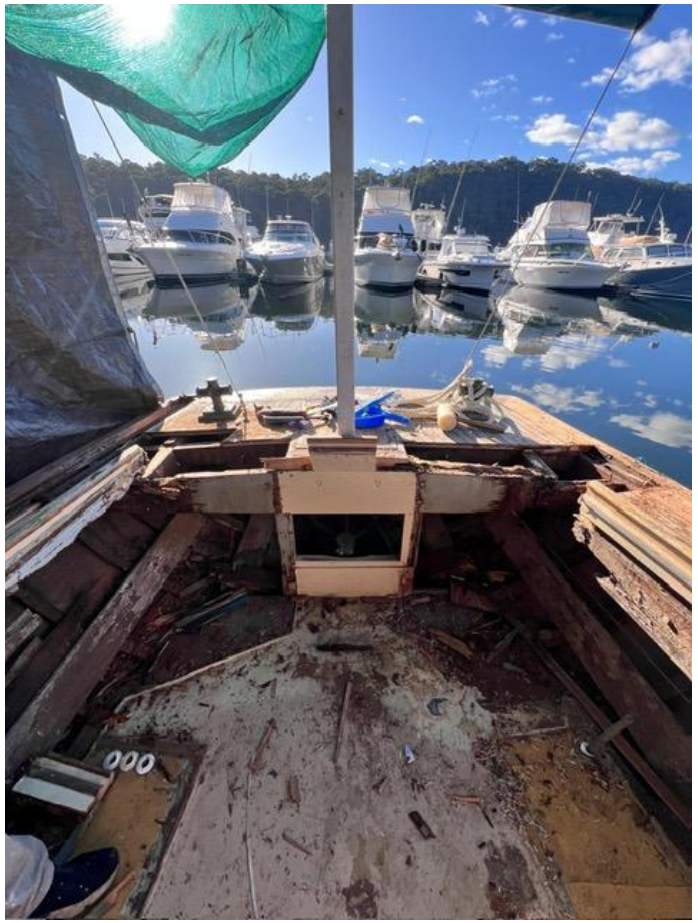


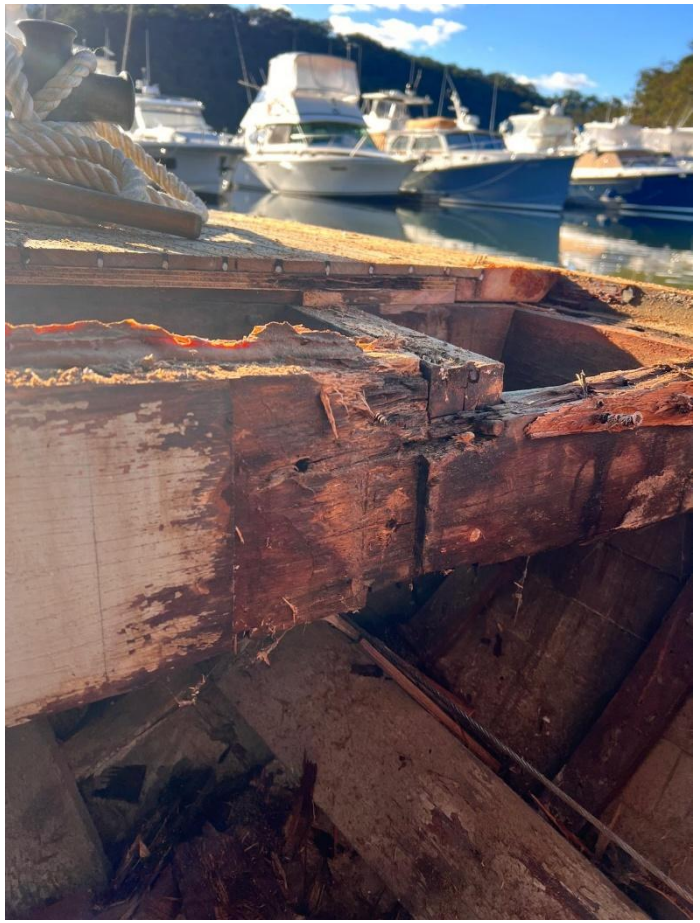


The Koorabung – Restoration in progress

@Roseville Marina with skilled restoration work conducted by Sinclair Shipwrights







The Koorabung – Restoration in progress





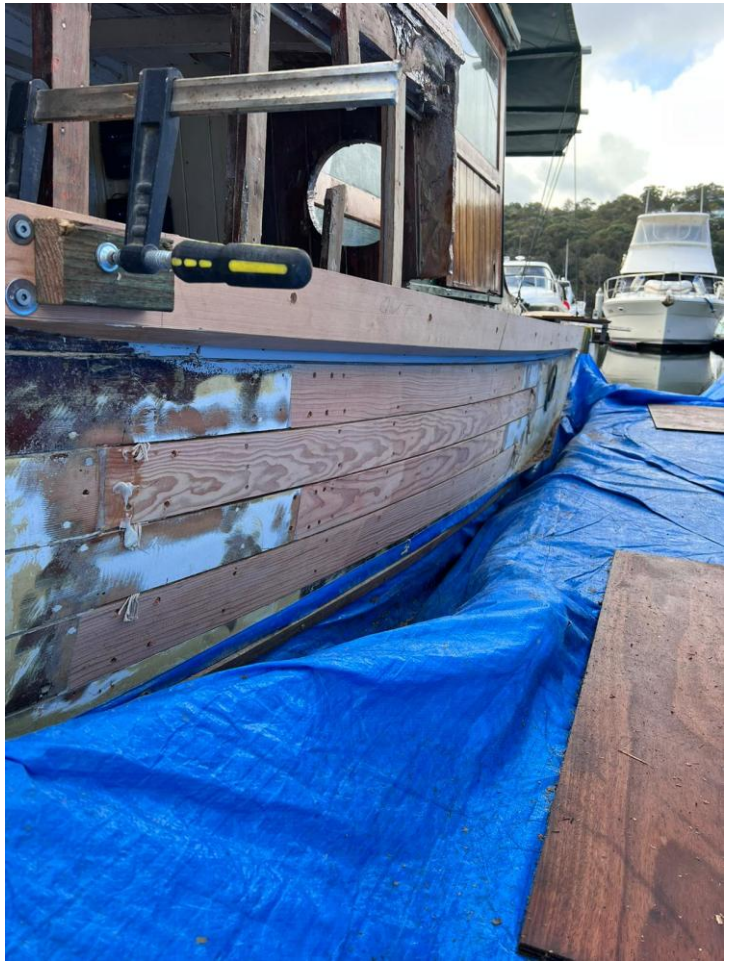






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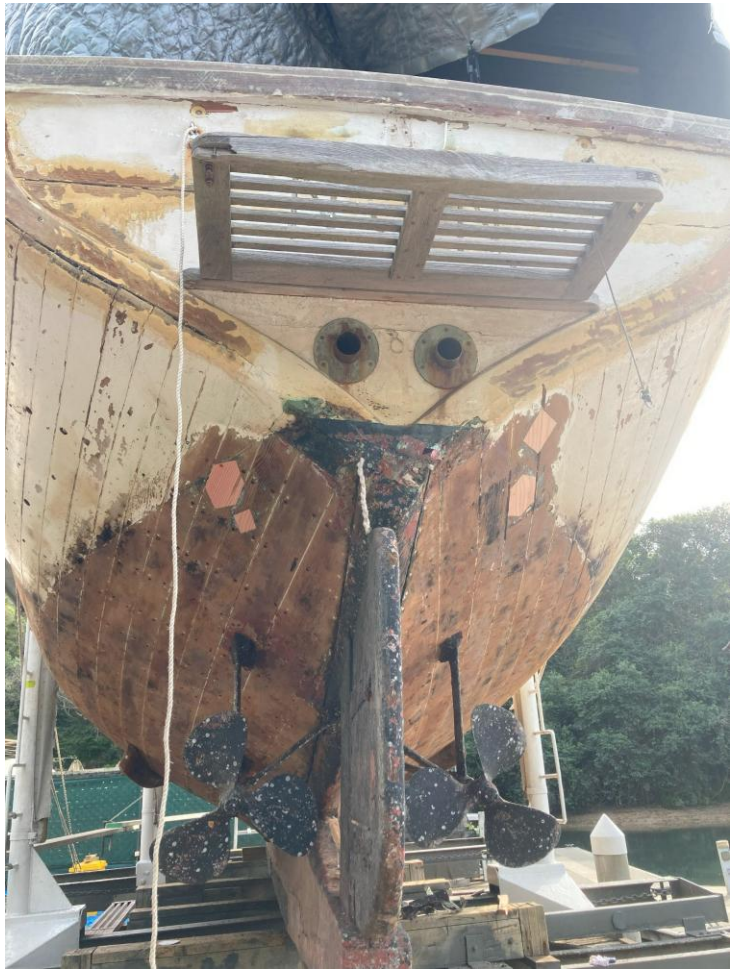


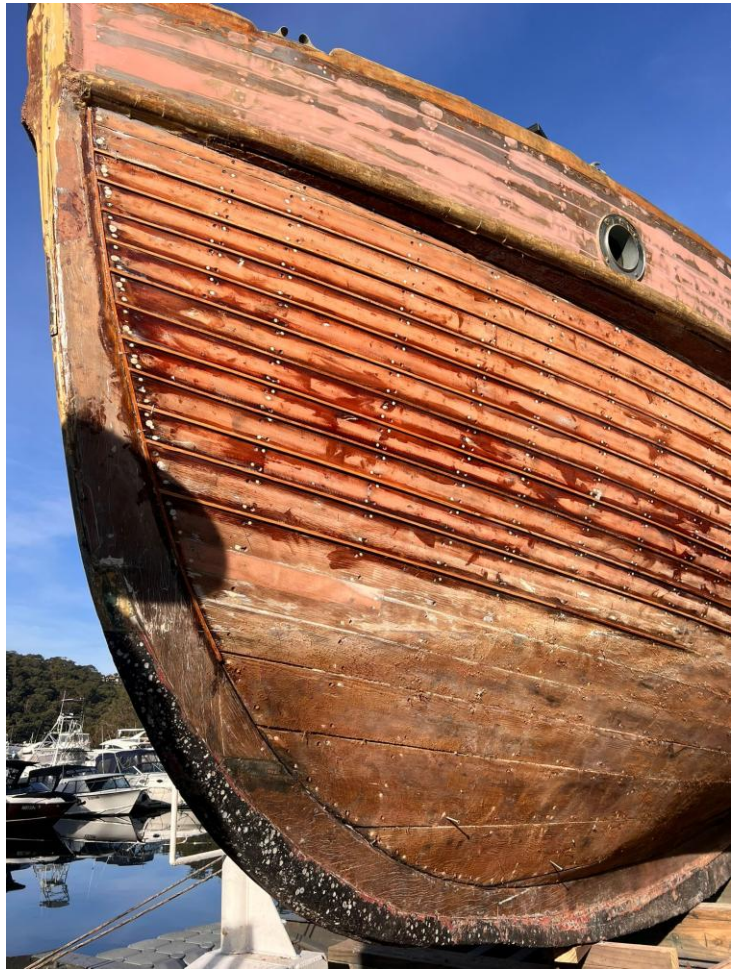


The Koorabung – Restoration in progress

@Roseville Marina with skilled restoration work conducted by Sinclair Shipwrights







The Koorabung – Restoration in progress

Hull refastened, recaulked, sealed and painted.







The Koorabung – Resting quietly







The Koorabung – Current and future restoration works

Koorabung is currently undergoing a major re-fit, staged as funds become available. To date generous funding contributions have been made by Stockland and private donors. The Yarramundi Kids Foundation was recently successful with a grant application to Greater Sydney Landcare for funding to go towards the remaining restoration works.

Works completed by Sinclair Shipwrights to date include:

- Removal of old paint from the hull back to bare timber, resplined, re-fastened and re-painted.
- Below the waterline the hull has been re-fastened, re-caulked and skin fittings and valves replaced.
- The top decks have all been replaced with marine grade ply and re-epoxy sheathed in fibreglass. These will be painted in the future for ease of ongoing maintenance.
- New ribs were fitted where there were rotten and split original structures.
- Major structural beams were replaced under the wheelhouse and in the stern.
- Some cockpit and cabin sides were repaired and rotten sections of the rudder replaced.
- Future repairs to include finishing and repainting of all repaired surfaces, new decking floor in the aft section, restoration of galley and toilet amenities.
- Restore interior cupboards doors, draws and bunk bases and clean, dry out and paint bilges and any accessible areas below the water line on the internal hull.
- Engines to be removed to provide greater access for engine maintenance, drives serviced and returned to operation and vessel recommissioned and surveyed to take passengers.
- Current status is that the vessel is now structurally sound with top deck structural, cosmetic and mechanical work left to complete. A full cover has been made to provide protection during harsh weather in between stages of repair.
- To date Koorabung has had approximately $160,000 spent. The budget for future stages of restoration is circa $200,000.
- Further fundraising will be sought to assist with ongoing operation and maintenance costs.



This initiative is made possible by the NSW Landcare Enabling Program, a collaboration between Local Land Services and Landcare NSW, supported by the NSW Government. Thank you to Greater Sydney Landcare for their support.

Support the restoration of the Koorabung

Donate to Yarramundi Kids Foundation now to help restore the Koorabung and support learning on Dharug Cultural waters.

YARRAMUNDI KIDS FOUNDATION LTD

Account BSB 082-356

Account number 404484814

Contact us on info@ykf.org.au

