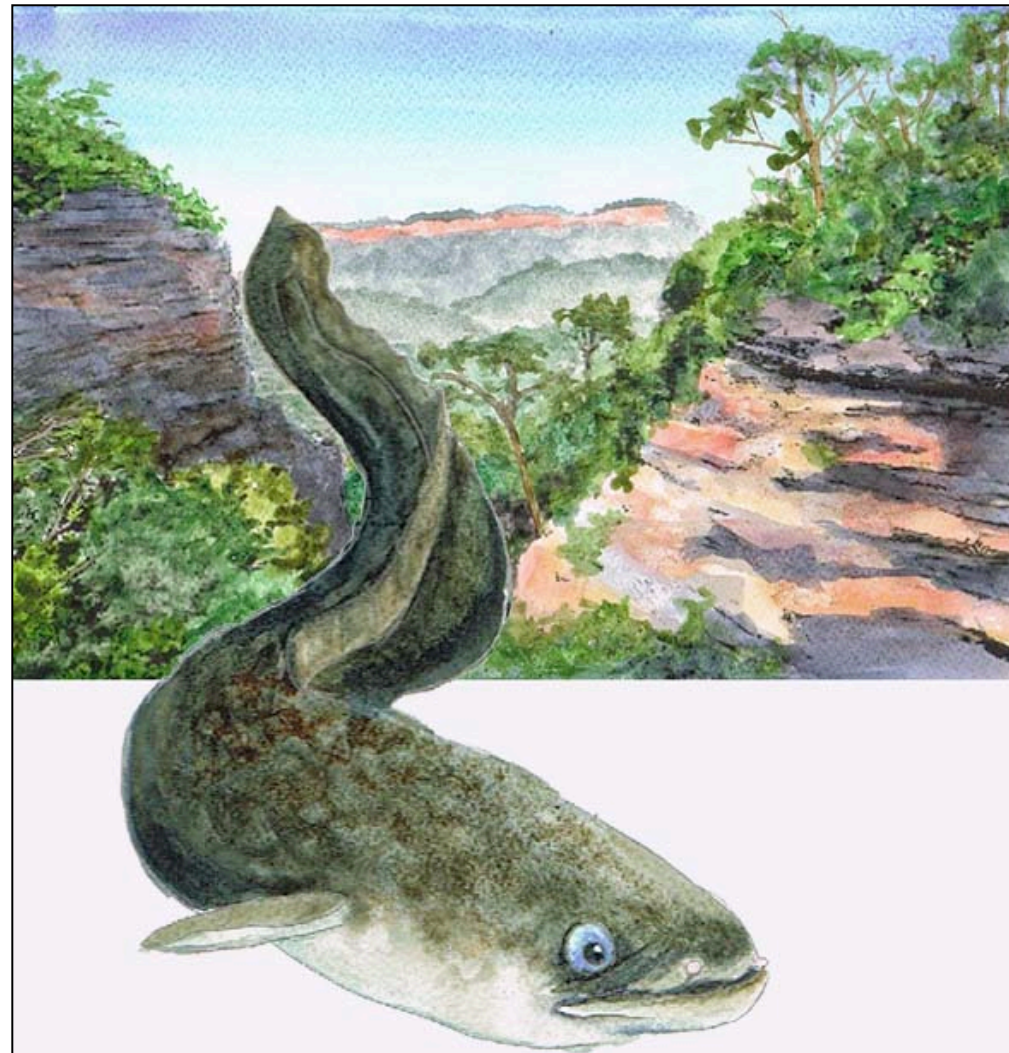


# D'harawal

DREAMING STORIES

## Boora Birra

THE STORY OF SOW AND PIGS REEF



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# Foreword

Throughout the past two hundred years, society has come to regard the Koori Dreaming stories as something akin to the fairy stories they were told as children.

However, for thousands upon thousands of years, the stories in this book were used as a teaching tool to impart to the youngest members of the clans the laws which governed the cultural behaviour of clan members. The successive attempts to destroy the Koori culture and assimilate The People into the Euro-centric population were unsuccessful, and the Dreaming Stories were able to continue in their disguise as charming legends where animals became the heroes and the heroines.

Historians and anthropologists have studied the Koori culture since they first arrived on this continent, and have come to the conclusion that the D'harawal culture is dead. Of, course, this has been done without reference to the descendants of that culture, and without even asking the proper questions. The D'harawal culture is not dead, it is a strong, living, vital culture of the Sydney and South Coast regions that just had to go underground for a while to be able to survive. Now that the right questions have been asked, we have the key to unlock a vast wealth of knowledge of this part of the country in which we live.

It is difficult to explain to a society based on commerce fuelled by the profit motive, that D'harawal culture is not based on the ownership of tangible things like land and dwellings and possessions, but it does have a very strong sense of ownership of information. That information, particularly in story form, was not traded, but could be given, and given freely, but its ownership was respected, those stories were not told or passed on by those to whom they had been given, but the knowledge in them was used by the receiver whilst ever they walked in the Land of the D'harawals, This Land.

It is hoped that our present society is now mature enough to be able to accept the Koori Dreaming stories as they were, as they are, and as they were always destined to be; tools to teach the Children of The People about living with Earth, the Mother, in peace and harmony.



Each story contains several layers of knowledge, the first of which are the secrets. Which can only be passed on or discussed with persons of the same level of knowledge or higher than the story teller. These secrets are never told within a legend, but are remembered separately from the legend itself. These are very important components of any legend, and it is the knowledge of the secrets which determines the level of the person's worthiness to ownership of that story.

The next layer of knowledge within the stories was the law, or laws, to be obeyed. The laws of the stories were told and often repeated after the telling of each story, after which the laws were discussed and their application in life demonstrated in a variety of ways.

The third layer of knowledge contained in each story was the lessons which could be learned from the story and the lessons were taught to all members of the group as well as visitors. These lessons introduced Peoples to the means to live in harmony with each other, and the land and its resources.

In this series of D'harawal Law Legends, there are many lessons to be learned. The D'harawals believed that children learned better and more quickly when they were encouraged to work through a problem, rather than be told the answer. By sharing the stories of our ancestors with you, it is hoped that not only will you recognise and learn the lessons and laws of the Peoples of This Land, but you will also come to understand and respect the culture of The People and our feelings and relationship with the land.

The stories do not in themselves act as an instruction manual - rather they point the way and encourage The People to think, to learn and to live. It is hoped that by sharing our stories, you too may be able to think, to learn and to live in This Land.

With understanding and respect for each other we can learn to more easily share This Land and live together in peace and harmony.

*Frances Bodkin*





THE STORY OF SOW AND PIG REEF

# Boora Birra

A long time ago, when there was no evil in This Land, the sea was further to the east than it is today, and the place called Boora Birra stood high in the deep valley which it guarded. This valley was the home of the Parra'doowee, the Eel Dreaming Spirit.



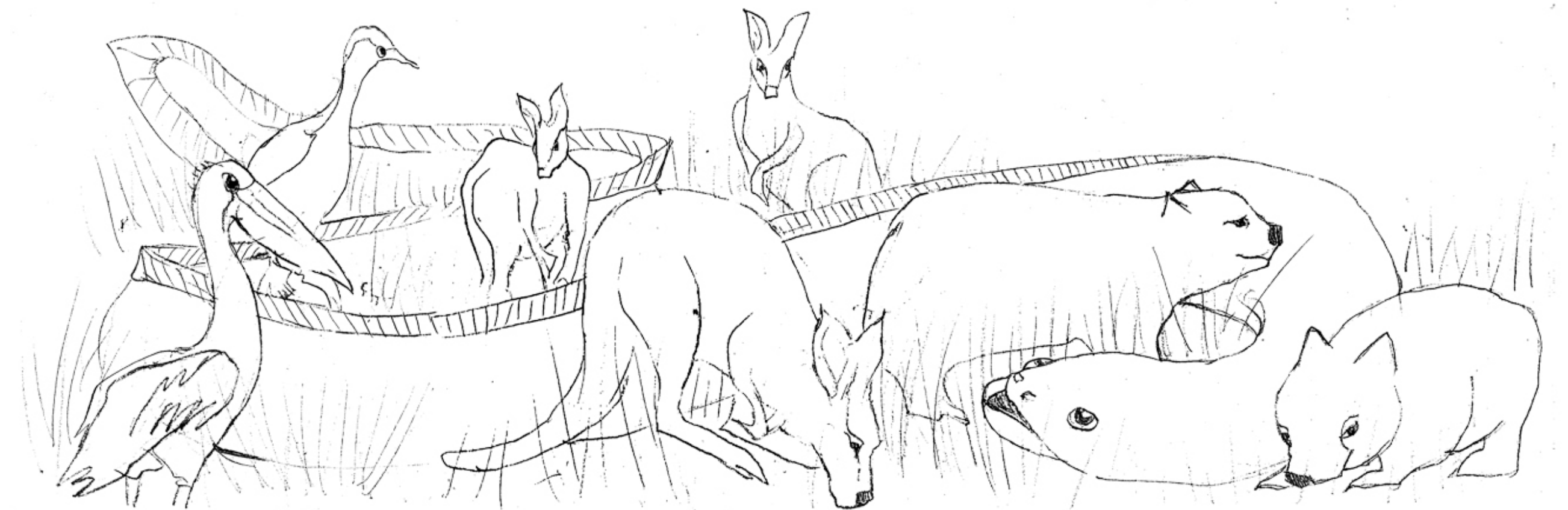
Now Boora Birra was a special place for women, who, when needed, carried out the ceremony called Butoowee there. Every child, when they reached a certain age, was taken to the Boora Birra where they were taught certain things, and received protection from any evil spirits which could enter them and cause them to do evil things.

Because the land between the deep valleys and the sea shore was flat and easy walking, with plenty of food, The People preferred to live there, rather than in the highlands or the valleys where food was difficult to gather, and hunting was even more difficult.

The kangaroos and wombats came down on to the flat lands to eat the sweet grass and tender new shoots of the shrubs that grew there. They became fat and lazy and easy to catch. The People became fat and lazy, too. The sea shore was rich with shellfish, the rock pools along the shore teeming with fish, and the flatlands provided fruit and tubers as well.

But The People not only became lazy, they also became forgetful. The men no longer honoured the spirits of the animals they hunted and killed, and they wasted much of their prey, eating only the parts they liked most, and leaving the remainder to rot away.

However, it was not only the men who forgot the laws and the ceremonies. The women, too, did not attend to their special duties. They no longer taught their children the ways of The People, they no longer paid their respects to the Earth Mother, or gave thanks for the food they received so easily.



And they became so lazy that they no longer bothered to take the long walk upon the blooming of the Marrai-uo, up to the valley of the Eel Dreaming, where the great bare rock, the Boora Birra guarded the Parra Doowee, and where the special ceremony was performed that protected the children from the evil spirits that caused them to break the laws.

Without the protection of the ceremony, the children became vulnerable to the evil spirits, and they grew to manhood and womanhood without being taught the laws, and why it is necessary to obey those laws.

They laughed at the old people who tried to tell them that terrible things would happen if they neglected the ceremony and the laws.

And they formed themselves into bands that roamed the flatlands bringing terror to man and animal, young and old alike, destroying the gunyas of the old, stealing fishing spears and hunting weapons, and using them to fight the members of other bands.

Gradually the older people and those young ones who still obeyed the laws moved into the Valley of the Parra Doowee, and the highlands beyond the Boora Birra, leaving the flatlands to the lawless ones.

But the lawless ones grew tired of tormenting each other and conducted forays into the valleys.

The People heard them coming and would conceal themselves high upon the Boora Birra, and from this vantage point the People watched the bands of lawless ones roam up the valley, and they watched with trepidation as one band approached the home of the Great Eel.







Long before this time of which we speak, it had been the custom of each warrior to take his turn to guard the home of the Great Eel, but with the forgetting of the ways of The People, this duty was left to one man, Kamarai, who remembered the old ways. He grew so old carrying out his duties that none of The People remembered him as a warrior.

Kamarai heard the noise of the approaching group, and leaving the meal of berries that he was enjoying, went to welcome his visitors. It had been so long since he had seen another of The People, he was concerned that he remembered the proper protocols. But his smile of welcome faded into a grimace as he was quickly surrounded by the lawless ones who laughed at his clumsy actions as he tried to avoid the jabbing of their spears. Finally, bleeding from many wounds, the old man fell to the ground.

Meanwhile, in a deep pool in the river the Great Eel heard the commotion and heard the cries of help from his old friend. It swam up to the surface of the pool, and peered toward the direction of Kamarai's cries.

The lawless ones saw the Great Eel and threw their spears at him in fear as it pulled itself up out of the water. Its great body moved towards its old friend as the last spear of the lawless ones struck its tail. When it saw that Kamarai had died of his wounds, it cried out in grief and pain, and struck the ground with its great tail, dislodging the spear.



The Earth began to shake violently, and a great chasm opened up in the ground, following the fleeing lawless ones and swallowing them as they fled towards the flatlands. Then a great storm came in from the sea, and the waves crashed across the flatlands until they reached the cliffs that marked the beginning of the highlands.

The waves crashed against the cliffs, crushing those lawless ones who had not been dragged down into the depths by the Sea Spirits and dealt with in a suitable manner.

As the waters rose and invaded the valley, the Great Eel saw the women and children stranded on the Boora Birra, and it told them to climb into his back and it would take them to safety.

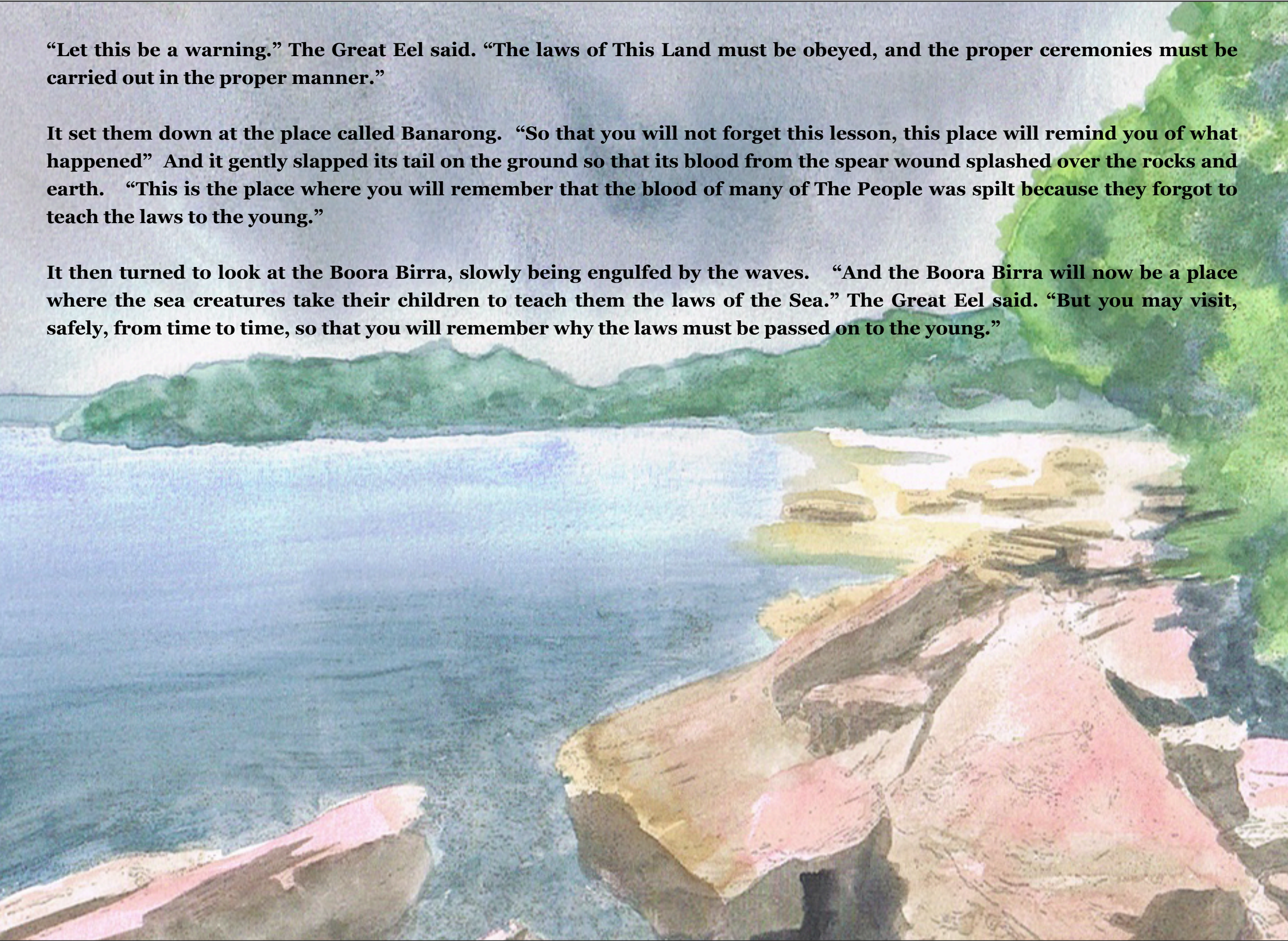




**“Let this be a warning.” The Great Eel said. “The laws of This Land must be obeyed, and the proper ceremonies must be carried out in the proper manner.”**

**It set them down at the place called Banarong. “So that you will not forget this lesson, this place will remind you of what happened” And it gently slapped its tail on the ground so that its blood from the spear wound splashed over the rocks and earth. “This is the place where you will remember that the blood of many of The People was spilt because they forgot to teach the laws to the young.”**

**It then turned to look at the Boora Birra, slowly being engulfed by the waves. “And the Boora Birra will now be a place where the sea creatures take their children to teach them the laws of the Sea.” The Great Eel said. “But you may visit, safely, from time to time, so that you will remember why the laws must be passed on to the young.”**



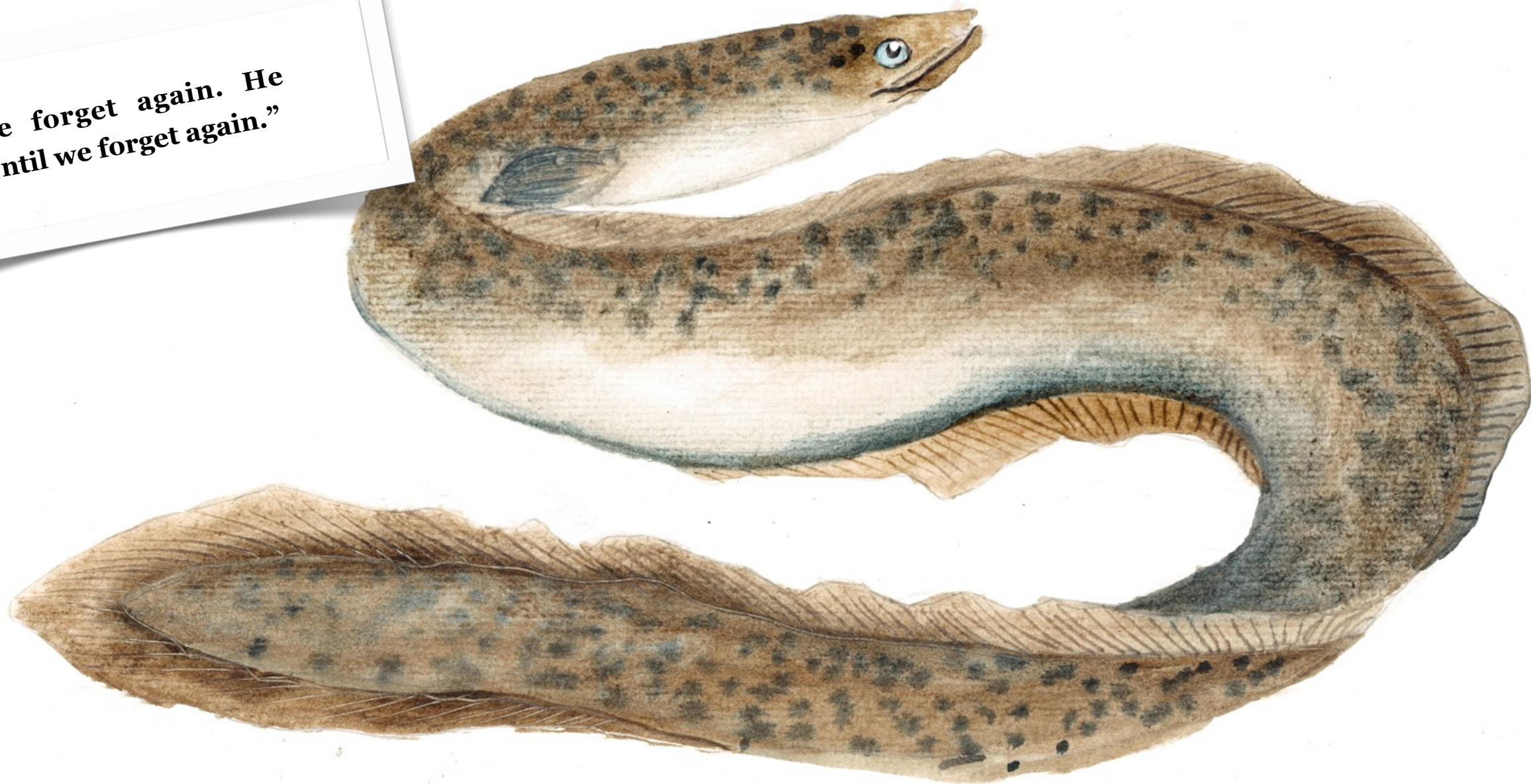


“But because good lessons can always be learned from evil, this place will be safe for The People, to hunt and to fish, and live and teach the laws.”

The Great Eel slipped silently into the water, and with a splash of its tail, disappeared beneath the waves. The People watched the waves, hoping for a glimpse of the Great Eel as it made its way to its new home.

One of the children, a young boy, went to the water’s edge, then looked back at his mother and smiled. And spoke in a voice that was not his.

**Until we forget again. He  
said. “Until we forget again.”**





## **The Law of the Story of the Boora Birra Reef.**

The laws of This Land must be obeyed, and the proper ceremonies must be carried out in the proper manner. It is very important that adults take the time to teach children the laws, so that when they grow up, they will know how to live together and to care for the Earth.

## **Lessons from the Story.**

A long time ago Sydney Harbour was just a small river at the bottom of a valley.  
The sea shore was a days walk from where it is today.  
The Spirit of the animals killed for food must be honoured.  
Children must be protected from evil spirits that caused them to break laws.  
The Earth will repay the evil that is done to it.  
The red on the rocks at Banarong is to remind The People of what will happen if they neglect the proper ceremonies and rituals.  
Good lessons can always be learned from evil.

**Now, if you listened carefully, you will have learned some more words from the D'harawal language. Can you remember them?**

**Boora Birra** - The D'harawal name for the Sow and Pigs reef. As you travel on the ferry across to Manly, you will see a marker buoy on the right hand side of the ferry. It marks the shallow waters of the reef.

**Parra Doowee** - The D'harawal name for the Eel Dreaming Spirit - which looks after the Parramatta River.

**Butoowee** - The ceremony to teach children the laws and protect them from evil spirits which cause them to break laws.

**Marrai-uo** - The Sydney Golden Wattle.

**Banarong** - The D'harawal name for Rose Bay.



# Some information about Parra, the short-finned eel:

Southern Shortfin Eel,  
*Anguilla australis*

## Description

Long, tubular body with dorsal, tail and anal fins forming one fin. Small gill opening on each side of the head. Large mouth extending to below the small eye. vertical gill openings. Dorsal fin begins just forward of the anal fin. Back and sides may be olive-green or vary from pale green to olive-brown, sometimes with coppery tints above and silvery sides. Belly is greyish to silvery-white. Fin colour is dark like the back.

## Distribution

Common and widespread in rivers along the Eastern coast of Australia.

## Habitat

Prefers low-lying swampy streams and lagoons. Although it occurs in a wide variety of habitats it is essentially a still-water species. Common in many southern Victorian lakes. Studies of tagged eels indicate that maturing adults in freshwater establish home ranges of about 400 m.

## Biology

Known to occur to 1.1 m and 6.8 kg, but is usually smaller. Appears to go into hibernation if water temperature falls below 10°C. Hibernating or otherwise there are records of eels going without food for up to 10 months. Opportunistic omnivore although it is primarily carnivorous.

Adult eels are known to take fish of various types, worms, insects, small crustaceans, molluscs and water plants. Feeding appears to follow a seasonal pattern, being most intense at night in shoreline shallows during spring and summer. Mature migrating adults vary from 6 to 24 years of age, spending up to 14 years in freshwater. Spends most of its life cycle in freshwater and migrates downstream to spawn at sea when sexually mature.

One of the most interesting features of freshwater eels, is the huge migration they make to a spot somewhere south east of New Guinea in the Coral Sea. This is the sole spawning site for all Australian and New Zealand freshwater eels, with some eels having to travel in excess of 3,000 kilometres to get there.



They begin their lives at this spawning site, at a depth of 200 m, as tiny transparent larvae. They are carried southwards by the ocean currents that parallel the east coast of Australia, and swing east past Tasmania and then north to New Zealand. Along the way, they feed on microscopic organisms and develop into transparent, leaf-shaped larvae or leptocephali and eventually metamorphose into 'glass eels' which are eel-shaped, but extremely small and still transparent. At this stage, they move closer to land and commence migrating towards estuaries.

The ability of eels to reach Australian waters is believed to be dependent on the formation of relatively erratic eddy currents, which split off from the main east Australian current and transport the developing larvae through Bass Strait. Their attraction to an estuary depends on the ability of glass eels to detect freshwater flows from rivers. In years when river flows are low and estuaries may even be closed, recruitment of glass eels is correspondingly reduced or may be zero.

Short-finned glass eels enter estuaries mainly during mid winter to late spring, while long-finned glass eels enter estuaries from mid summer to late autumn. Short-finned eels spread along the entire Eastern coastline. Some glass eels will quickly pass through the estuary and migrate upstream and others will remain in the estuaries for some time. They all gradually take on the dark pigmentation of freshwater eels and at this time they are known as elvers. Some elvers remain in the estuary until they mature, but most will migrate upstream in secondary migrations, known as "eel fares", which involve glass eels and elvers of several age groups moving inland into rivers, creeks, lakes and swamps.

Male short-finned eels generally mature when eight to twelve years of age, whilst females mature in ten to twenty years and long-finned eels can take double this time to mature. At maturity, eels undergo a number of changes in preparation for the spawning migration. After a period of voracious feeding, and significant growth, their eyes become larger and their skin takes on a silvery appearance. Internally, their gonads begin to develop and their digestive system closes down and starts to degenerate. Now known as 'silver' eels, they migrate back to the sea during late summer and autumn. They quickly move into deeper water and in total darkness swim north against the current to reach the Coral Sea. By the time they arrive, they have basically used up all their energy resources and are little more than a skeleton with gonads. They spawn and die and their young commence the cycle over again.

<https://vfa.vic.gov.au/education/fish-species/short-finned-eel>