Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Victor Dominello has praised a gathering of more than 140 Aboriginal Elders from eight different communities at the Murrook Cultural Centre in Williamtown today (29 March).

Mr Dominello said the event is a valuable opportunity for Elders to share experiences, exchange ideas and inspire each other.

“The collective wisdom of Aboriginal Elders is a truly unique asset,” Mr Dominello said.

“The NSW Government has provided $1,500 in funding for this event because we recognise it is a valuable opportunity for Elders to come together to discuss their aspirations and their concerns.

“I’m delighted that so many respected Elders from across the Hunter and Central Coast regions will be attending.

“I acknowledge the contribution of the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council to this important event, as well as the Aboriginal community organisations who are transporting Elders from other areas,” Mr Dominello said.

Chairman of the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council, Uncle Neville Lilley, said: “These gatherings are a tremendous concept. They give our Elders an opportunity to come together across our traditional boundaries when we wouldn’t normally because of the distance. We can get to know each other, encourage each other, and hear what other Land Councils are doing.”

Uncle John Ridgeway, a senior Worimi Elder from the Port Stephens area, welcomes the gathering: “It’s great to see so many different faces from different parts of the country in gatherings like this. We’ve got to get different ideas from each other. I often visit different schools doing Welcome to Country and playing my guitar and I love being around the children, they are so important,” Uncle John said.

Today’s Elders gathering will be the fifth such event. The first was a small morning tea at Blackbutt Reserve in September 2010 to celebrate the recognition of Aboriginal people in the NSW Constitution. The Elders who attended took the opportunity to discuss the challenges facing their communities and to share their different strategies for overcoming these challenges. Numbers have continued to grow at each gathering and today’s event will include Elders from Worimi, Biripi, Darkinjung and Awabakal country who will travel from Port Stephens, Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Karuah, the Central Coast, Forster, Gloucester and Taree.