**Citation - Uncle Rob Cooley**

Honorary Fellowship – Friday, 10 May 2024, 2.30pm

Presiding Pro-Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Uncle Rob Cooley to you for admission as an Honorary Fellow of the University in recognition of his substantial contributions to Australian country and community and for his enduring collaboration with the University’s Indigenous researchers to better understand marine and coastal management practices.

Uncle Rob Cooley is a saltwater man with connections to Gamay-Botany Bay and the NSW South Coast. His knowledge of sea country is extensive, reflected through his regular invitations to serve as expert on many panels including the Changing Oceans Forum, the Seaweed Forests Festival, the Ocean Lovers Festival and the Australian Marine Science Association conference. Uncle Rob’s contributions to Indigenous communities and public society in general have led to great public recognition. Through his work as a ranger for the past 30 plus years, Uncle Rob has worked towards influencing change through active participation in land and sea management to care for Country in a sustainable manner. For their work on nationwide whale protection during migration, Uncle Rob and the Gamay Rangers were made honorary members of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services, the first time Australia had provided this honorary title to a ranger group.

Uncle Rob is currently the Senior Ranger and Leader of the Gamay Rangers, a group of Indigenous Rangers who undertake natural and cultural resource management activities on cultural areas within Gamay and on conservation land owned by the La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council. Leading the coastal management of Gamay, Uncle Rob has promoted co-design and co-leadership in coastal management, bringing public awareness to Indigenous Knowledge of Coastal and Marine systems. His openness to collaboration and to education has led the Gamay Rangers to collaborate in many research initiatives, including a project collaborating with Indigenous researchers from the University of Sydney to better understand shellfish and their complex habitats, and another undertaking outreach activities in Primary Schools.

Under his leadership, the Gamay Rangers have become a reference, and an example of how coastal management should be co-managed including Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science, so younger generations can care for Country and the community in a sustainable manner.

Over the past three decades, Uncle Rob’s responsibilities have included Land Management, Bush Regeneration, Dune Stabilisation, Bushfire Management, Area Hygiene & Safety, Cultural Heritage Management, Marine Mammal Management and Rescue, visitor services and Historic Structure Management. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Uncle Rob, with the rest of the Gamay Rangers, coordinated a cultural net hunt of mullet which is founded on traditional knowledge from the Gamay region, that provided 300 meals to people in need during Sydney’s lockdown. Protecting and releasing beached and netted whales is also now a role that the Gamay rangers are by law permitted to do. As the whale is of significant cultural importance, this is a huge step forward in bringing cultural aspects and western understanding together.

Uncle Rob is an important knowledge holder for Gamay, a carer and protector of its habitats and he continues to learn from the Elders and his own lived Stories. His activism is exemplary and, together with the Gamay Rangers, provides crucial role models for Indigenous Youth. He and the Rangers have continuously displayed outstanding leadership and collaboration in natural and cultural resource management, in raising public awareness of Indigenous Knowledge coastal and marine environments whilst supporting and advocating for education in providing sustainable coastal management and the protection of Australian fauna. Overall, this is a recognition of the work Uncle Rob and all the Gamay Rangers have done and continue to do for our environments, communities, education and illustrates the importance that an institution like the University of Sydney recognises in Indigenous Knowledges.

Presiding Pro-Chancellor, I present to you Uncle Rob Cooley and invite you to confer the title of Honorary Fellow of the University upon him.