



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Resources South-East Qld Placenames

This Information Guide has been developed to support individuals and communities in their research into placenames of South-East Queensland, particularly those from an Aboriginal language background.

Aboriginal placenames generates a lot of discussion and queries regarding meanings, translations, etc. – the landscape of South-East Queensland had traditional names prior to the settlement of Moreton Bay. Some have been maintained in placenames or landmarks, others have been lost and replaced by introduced names; there also seems to be a growing trend of dual-naming to revive traditional names.

The following list is a selection of traditional placenames and meanings originating from the main Aboriginal groups of the South-East Queensland Region – Butchulla, Jandai, Ngugi, Nunukul, Turrubul, Wakka Wakka, Yugambah, Yugara and Yugarabul peoples¹.

- **Banyo** (Turrubul) – means ‘ridge’.
- **Barambah** (Wakka Wakka) – from ‘Buranba’ which means ‘Westerly wind’.
- **Beerburum** (Kabi Kabi/Undanbi) – from ‘*Bir-barram*’ which means ‘sound of wings of the King Parrot’.
- **Beerwah** (Kabi Kabi/Turrbal) – means ‘up in the sky’ [from *birra* = sky; *wa*(ndum) = go up/rising up].
- **Boonah** (Yugarabul) – from ‘Buna’ which means ‘a bloodwood tree’.
- **Bribie Island** – traditionally known by the Kabi Kabi people (Jindoobarrie Clan) as ‘*Yarun*’, which means ‘hunting ground’.
- **Brisbane** – named by Oxley after Governor Brisbane, however the traditional name for the area was ‘*Mianjin / Meean-jin*’ (Yugara / Turrbal) which refers to the spike of land which formed Petrie’s Bight.
- **Buaraba** (Yugara) – name taken from an early pastoral run which means ‘place of dry bushes’.
- **Bulimba** (Yugara) – several meanings, however believed to mean place of magpie larks/Peewees [from ‘*bulum*’ = magpie lark; *ba* = place of].
- **Bundamba** (Yugara) – from ‘*Bundanda*’ which means ‘axe place’ [*bundan* = axe; *da* = place of].
- **Caboolture** (Yugara / Turrubul / Kabi Kabi) – from ‘*kabul*’ which means carpet snake in several South-East Queensland languages; i.e. ‘place of the carpet snake’.
- **Canungra** (Yugambah) – from ‘*gungungai*’ which means ‘a long flat or clearing’.
- **Capalaba** (Yugara) - means place of the scrub possum; derived from ‘*kappella*’ which is a ring-tailed scrub possum and ‘-ba’ which means place of.
- **Coochiemudlo** (Nunukul) – from ‘*Coodgee Mudlo / Kutchi mudlo*’ means ‘red rock’.

¹ Note: some names may be derived from clans or dialect groups within these main language nations, e.g. Goenpul, Mununjali, Undanbi, etc.

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South East Queensland Placenames (continued)

- **Coochin** (Kabi Kabi / Turrubul) – means ‘red soil’ (locality on Sunshine Coast).
- **Coochin Coochin** (Yugarabul) – means ‘red clay/earth’ (property near Boonah).
- **Coolabunia** (Wakka Wakka) – means ‘sleeping koala’ [from ‘*Koala*’ and *buani* = sleeping].
- **Cooloola** (Kabi Kabi) – from ‘*kululu*’ which means ‘Cypress Pines’.
- **Coolum** (Kabi Kabi) – from ‘*gulum*’ meaning ‘without or wanting’ [refers to blunt nature/shape of mountain]; there is a Dreaming story associated with this placename.
- **Coomera** (Yugambah) – refers to a species of wattle tree; the bark was used to stun fish.
- **Coonowrin** (Kabi Kabi) – from ‘*conoong-warrang*’ which means ‘crooked neck’.
- **Coorparoo** (Yugara) – from ‘*koolpurrum*’ which refers to mosquitoes – this was also the name given to Norman Creek; however a second possible meaning is ‘gentle dove’ [refers to the sound made by the dove].
- **Cooroy** (Kabi Kabi) – from ‘*kuru*’ which means ‘grey forest possum’.
- **Deebing Creek** (Yugara / Yugarabul) – from ‘*dibing*’ which means ‘mosquito / midge fly’.
- **Doboy** (Yugara) – from ‘*dubee*’ which means ‘mud crab’.
- **Doomben** (Yugara) – from ‘*dumben*’ which means ‘a tree fern’.
- **Dugandan** (Yugarabul) – from ‘*dugai / tugai*’ which means ‘place on rising ground or mountain spur’.
- **Dundathu** (Butchulla) – from ‘*dhan-dauwa-dhu*’ which means ‘place of dead trees’ [refers to a site on the Mary River where Pettigrew & Sims established a sawmill in the 1850’s].
- **Elimbah** (Kabi Kabi / Undanbi) – means ‘place of grey snakes’ [*yilam* = grey snake; *ba* = place of].
- **Enoggera** (Turrubul) – from ‘*Euogerra*’ a contraction of ‘*youara-ngarea*’ which means ‘song and dance’ [refers to a ceremonial site at Enoggera used for dances].
- **Fisherman Island** – traditionally known by the Jandai people as ‘*andacah*’, which means ‘mullet’.
- **Fraser Island** – traditionally known by the Butchulla people as *k’gari*.
- **Gatton** – named after the town in Surrey (UK), but traditionally known by the Yugara people as ‘*Boona*’ (means a bloodwood tree).
- **Gayndah** (Wakka Wakka) – from ‘*kunda*’ which means ‘a mountain range’.
- **Gin Gin** (Wakka Wakka) – from ‘*Kwin Kwin*’ which means ‘red soil / red soil country’.
- **Goomeri** (Wakka Wakka) – from ‘*gumerr*’ which means ‘wooden shield’.
- **Goodna** (Yugara) – means ‘dung’.
- **Gowrie** (Wakka Wakka) – from ‘*kowari*’ which means ‘place of scrub’ [from ‘*kowa*’ = scrub].
- **Grandchester** – originally named “Bigge’s Camp”, it became Grandchester in 1865; however it was traditionally known by the Yugara people as ‘*Goojabila*’ which means ‘honey’.

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South East Queensland Placenames (continued)

- **Grantham** – named after an early pastoral run, but traditionally known by the Yugara people as '*Goanumby*' which means 'green bark' – so called because the inner bark of ironbark trees was collected from this area for humpies.
- **Gympie** (Kabi Kabi) – from '*Gimpi*' which means 'stinging tree'.
- **Helidon** – named after an early pastoral run, but traditionally known to the Yugara people as '*Yabarba*' (means 'kurrajong').
- **Helidon Spa** – traditionally known by the Yugara people as '*Woonarrajimmi*' (means 'where the clouds fell down' – there is a local Aboriginal Dreaming story that describes how the springs were formed).
- **Indooroopilly** (Yugara) – means 'gully of leeches' [from '*nyindur*' meaning leeches; *pilli* = gully].
- **Ipswich** – named after Ipswich in the UK, however the traditional Yugara name for the area was '*Doolmoor*'; while the Yugarabul people called it '*Dulmah*'.
- **Jeebropilly** (Yugara / Yugarabul) – means 'gully of sugar glider' [from '*jeebro*' meaning sugar glider; *pilli* = gully].
- **Jumpinpin** (Yugambah) – means 'pandanus root'; according to Steele (1984) the roots were beaten until fibrous and then used as chewing ropes for eating honey.
- **Kalbar** (Yugarabul) – from '*galbar*' which means 'dead/whitened trees'.
- **Kurilpa** (Yugara / Turrubul) – means 'place of fawn-footed melomys' [kuril = fawn-footed melomys; pa = place of]. **Note:** previously thought to mean/refer to a water rat species, e.g. white-tailed water rat; however this appears to be incorrect.
- **Laidley** – named by Cunningham after James Laidley (Deputy Commissary, Sydney), but traditionally known by the Yugara people as '*Milgero*' (meaning not recorded/unknown).
- **Laidley Creek** – as previous, but traditionally known by the Yugara people as '*Goonanje-gerrara*' (means 'going down creek'); this refers to the Gatton and Helidon groups crossing the creek as they are 'going down' towards Moreton Bay.
- **Lake Clarendon** – named after early run, traditional name for the area is unknown.
- **Ma Ma Creek** – claimed to be a corruption of '*Mia Mia*' (bark huts) but this word originates from Western Australia; it may have been a borrowed name used by early settlers. The traditional name for the area is unknown.
- **Maroochydore** (Kabi Kabi) – means 'place of the black swan' [from '*murukutchi*' = black swan/red-bill; *dha* = place of]; there is a Dreaming story associated with this placename.
- **Maroon** (Yugarabul) – from '*murrun*' which means 'sand goanna'; there is a Dreaming story associated with the name/area.
- **Milbong** (Yugarabul) – named after 'One Eye Waterhole' – *Milbong* means 'one eye dead or gone'.
- **Moggill** (Yugara / Turrubul) – from '*mugil / magil*' which means 'water lizard'.
- **Moogerah** (Yugarabul) – means 'thunder'; this refers to the storms which develop along the ranges surrounding Cunningham's Gap.
- **Mooloolaba** (Kabi Kabi) – from '*Muluaba*' which means 'place of black snakes' [*mulu* = black snake; *ba* = place of].
- **Moorooka** (Yugara) - believed to be derived from '*mooroonga*' which means ironbark.

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South East Queensland Placenames (continued)

- **Moreton Bay** – traditionally known by the Ngugi people and neighbouring groups as ‘*Quandamooka*’; this term is also used to refer to people of Moreton Bay.
- **Moreton Island** – traditionally known by the Ngugi people as ‘*Moorgumpin*’, which means ‘place of sand hills’.
- **Mount Cordeaux** (Cunningham’s Gap) – traditionally known by the Yugarabul people as ‘*Niamboyoo*’.
- **Mount Mitchell** (Cunningham’s Gap) – traditionally known by the Yugarabul people as *Coonyin-nirra*.
- **Mundoolun** (Yugambah) – from ‘*Mundheralgun*’ which means ‘death adder’.
- **Murrarie** (Yugara) – from ‘*mudherra*’ which means ‘sticky / messy earth’.
- **Murphy’s Creek** – named after Peter Murphy (servant/travelling companion of Patrick Leslie), but traditionally known to the Yugara people as ‘*Tamamareen*’ (means ‘where the fishing nets were burnt in a grass fire’).
- **Mutdapilly** (Yugara / Yugarabul) – means ‘sticky gully’, referring to the black soil in the area – area was also known as Ten Mile Swamp [‘*mutda*’ meaning sticky/muddy ground; *pilli* = gully].
- **Nambour** (Kabi Kabi) – from ‘*Nambur*’ which means ‘red-flowered tea tree’.
- **Ninderry** (Kabi Kabi) – means ‘place of leeches’ [from ‘*nyindur*’ meaning ‘leeches’].
- **Nindooimba** (Yugambah) – from ‘*Ninduimba*’ which means ‘place of remains of a fire’.
- **North Stradbroke Island** – traditionally known by the Nunukul / Jandai groups as ‘*Minjerribah*’, which means ‘Island in the sun’.
- **Pimpama** (Yugambah) – from ‘*pimpimba*’ which means ‘place of soldier birds (noisy miners)’ [*pimpim* = soldier bird; *ba* = place of].
- **Pinkenba** (Turrubul) – from ‘*Binkinba*’ which means ‘place of land tortoise’ [from *Binkin* = tortoise; *ba* = place of].
- **Purga** (Yugara / Yugarabul) – from ‘*pur-pur*’ which means ‘meeting place’.
- **South Stradbroke Island** – traditionally known by the Nunukul / Jandai groups as ‘*Currigee*’ which is derived from ‘*curragee*’ meaning currajong trees; a second reference suggests the mouth a river, possibly referring to the place where the Coomera River entered the Bay.
- **Tabralga** (Yugambah) – from ‘*Dhaberigaba*’ which means ‘place of clubs/nullas’.
- **Tallebudgera** (Yugambah) – means ‘rotten or decayed logs’; [from ‘*Talle*’ = trees/logs; ‘*Budhera*’ = rotten or decayed] – refers to the practice of the local people placing timber (preferably oaks) in the water to attract teredo (type of mollusc) which was a source of food.
- **Tallegalla** – despite sounding Aboriginal, the word is derived from Latin and refers to several species of ‘scrub turkey’ which are prolific in the district; the locality is also known as Two Tree Hill.
- **Tarampa** (Yugara) – name taken from early pastoral run which means ‘place of the wild lime’ [*turum* = wild lime; *pa* = place of].
- **Tewantin** (Kabi Kabi) – from ‘*dauwadhan*’ meaning ‘dead tree or logs’ [refers to when the area was first used for sawmilling].

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South East Queensland Placenames (continued)

- **Tibrogargan** (Kabi Kabi / Undanbi) – refers to the mountain and the Dreaming Story associated with the Glasshouse Mountains; derives from ‘*jeebora*’ which means sugar glider and ‘*gaggalin*’ which means ‘biting’; name is also used for several features in the area, e.g. Tibrogargan Creek.
- **Tingalpa** (Yugara) – means ‘place of stunning fish plant’ [from *tangul* = plant used for stunning fish and *pa* = place of].
- **Toowong** (Yugara) – from ‘*tuwung*’ which means ‘koel / cuckoo’.
- **Undulla** (Yugarabul) – corruption of the word ‘*nandulla*’ which means silver leafed wattle.
- **Urangan** (Butchulla) – from ‘*yuangan*’ which means dugong; a second reference suggests it may be derived from ‘*yerengen*’ which refers to a small shellfish.
- **Wamuran** (Kabi Kabi) – from ‘Wamuran’ who was a local leader/warrior; Mervil Wamuran also known as King Jacky Delaney [King of Stoney Creek].
- **Warill** (Yugara / Yugarabul) – means ‘creek’ or ‘river’; used in several placenames, e.g. Warrill View, Warrill Creek.
- **Willawong** – language origin is unknown, possibly an introduced word from Southern States; means the junction of two creeks which may be a reference to Oxley and Blunder Creeks.
- **Wongawallan** (Yugambah) – refers to ‘*wonga*’ meaning ‘pigeon’ and ‘*wallan*’ meaning ‘water’; a second reference suggests it is derived from ‘*wangum-wulam*’ which means a cut/scarred cheek.
- **Woombye** (Kabi Kabi) – from ‘*wamba*’ which means ‘black myrtle tree’; the timber was used for axe handles.
- **Woogaroo** (Yugara) – means a ‘whirlpool’; a second reference suggests it means ‘cool or shady’.
- **Woolloongabba** (Yugara) – from ‘*woolloon-capemm*’ which means ‘whirling water’ – refers to series of waterholes originally located there; a second reference refers to a ‘fighting place’.
- **Wulkuraka** (Yugara / Yugarabul) – from ‘*woolcooracca*’ which means ‘flowering gum tree’; a second reference refers to ‘plenty of kookaburras’.
- **Wynnum** (Yugara) – from ‘*winnam*’ which means ‘breadfruit or Pandanus tree’.
- **Yeronga** (Yugara) – from ‘*yarungnga / yarung*’ which means ‘gravelly place’; a second reference refers to ‘*yorong*’ which means rain.
- **Yeerongpilly** (Yugara) – means ‘sandy or gravelly gully’ [from ‘*yarungnga / yarung*’ = sand/gravel and ‘*pilli*’ = gully].

Note: This list is merely a selection of placenames from South-East Queensland and provides an insight into the traditional names for country used by Aboriginal groups. Many words were ‘shared’ across neighbouring groups and may have a shared meaning in several languages.

Further information on Aboriginal placenames can be obtained from a range of sources including: Traditional Owner Groups, Indigenous Language Centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations, Historical Centres and Museums, Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management as well as community members.

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Sources in State Library of Queensland Collections:

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Further Details

For further information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages at the State Library of Queensland, please contact:

kuril dhagun, State Library of Queensland

Stanley Place, South Brisbane Qld. 4101.

PO Box 3488, South Brisbane Qld. 4101.

Telephone: (07) 3842 9836 Fax: (07) 3842 9893

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