

WRP Fact Sheet 3

Traditional Owner contributions

Victoria's water resource plans

Traditional Owner engagement has been a major focus during the development of Victoria's water resource plans. Traditional Owner groups from the Wimmera-Mallee and across northern Victoria were invited to collaborate to ensure that the plans reflect their aspirations for water.

Developing contributions

Traditional Owner aspirations for how water is managed and shared in the river systems of Victoria's water resource plan areas have not been well integrated into water planning to-date.

Engaging with Traditional Owners for the development of Victorian water resource plans (WRPs) provided an opportunity to have deeper conversations and identify objectives and outcomes for water on Country.

Traditional Owners in the water resource plan areas

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) consulted with Traditional Owner groups with and without formal State recognition. The approach was influenced by guidance provided by the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations which extends engagement obligations beyond the formally recognised groups under legislation.

Traditional Owner groups who provided a contribution to Victoria's North and Murray WRP and/or Wimmera Mallee WRP include:

- Barapa Barapa
- Dhudhuroa, Waywurru and Yaitmathang
- Dja Dja Wurrung
- First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee: Ngintait, Nyeri Nyeri and Latji Latji
- Tati Tati Wadi Wadi
- Taungurung
- Wadi Wadi

- Wamba Wemba
- Weki Weki
- Wotjobulk (represented by Barengi Gadgin)
- Yorta Yorta

Note: Djab Wurrung and Bangerang did not submit a contribution for the Water Resource Plans.

Values and uses

Engagement focused on how water is valued and used for spiritual, cultural, environmental, economic and social purposes. This information has helped the Government understand the wide-ranging ways in which Aboriginal people have valued and used water since before European settlement right up to today.

Some themes for values and uses discussed during the engagement are outlined below.

Overarching cultural and spiritual values: creation stories, songlines, totems, language, beliefs, values, identity and belonging, ancestral links, ceremony, health and healing

Plants and animals: hunting, fishing and traditional harvesting of plants for food, fibre, shelter, tools, transport, and medicine

Cultural sites: men's sites, women's sites, ceremonial grounds, scarred trees, burial sites, middens, earth mounds, stone tool scatters, fish traps, mission and reserve sites for living

Social values and uses: swimming, fishing, family gatherings, meeting places, camp sites, mission and reserve sites for living, health and wellbeing

Participation: decision-making, responsibilities, training, education and governance

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Economic values: employment, water entitlements, water use, water trade, fishing

Water assets: cultural flows, natural flows, clean water, rivers, creeks, lakes, wetlands, tributaries, floodplains.

Objectives and outcomes

Water plays a key role in supporting cultural values and use. Healthy Country allows for continued cultural practices and customs. Regular themes for objectives and outcomes that have emerged across each Traditional Owner group include:

- caring for Country
- employment, procurement, training and enterprise
- traditional ecological knowledge as a guide for the management of waterways
- more opportunity for ownership, use and trade of water entitlements
- recognition as equal partners alongside other representatives in the water industry
- two-way knowledge sharing between scientific and cultural perspectives
- adequate resourcing beyond paying for expenses
- intergenerational knowledge sharing to restore cultural practices around waterways

Refer to each Traditional Owner contribution for further information regarding specific aspirations for water resources.

Engagement process

Victoria recognised that identification of Traditional Owner water objectives and outcomes required a collaborative approach tailored to meet the needs of each group. The approach aimed to maximise the opportunity for Traditional Owner groups to determine their objectives and outcomes for water and preferred means of engagement with Government. The engagement included:

- employment of Aboriginal water officers
- the development of water advisory groups within respective Aboriginal Corporations
- Aboriginal waterways assessments
- on-Country meetings, gatherings, workshops and cultural events
- training and capacity building activities

The contributions developed with Traditional Owners outline expectations held by Traditional Owners for water resource management, including preferred means of engagement, objectives and outcomes for water management, values and uses of water and key areas of interest for Traditional Owner groups.

Traditional Owner contributions provide insight into Traditional Owner aspirations for future involvement in water management, planning and decision-making.

Water resource plans

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan (Basin Plan) requires the development of WRPs to support consistent management of Murray-Darling Basin water resources across all Basin States (see *WRP Fact Sheet 1 Water Resource Plans*).

Victoria developed two WRPs:

- Wimmera-Mallee Water Resource Plan
- Victoria's North and Murray Water Resource Plan

To obtain a copy of Victoria's WRPs visit DELWP's website at <https://www.water.vic.gov.au/mdb/mdbp/water-resource-plans>

Traditional Owner requirements

Under Basin Plan, Victoria was required to engage with Traditional Owners to support development of its WRPs. Engagement with Traditional Owners related to:

- the development of Traditional Owner contributions to identify relevant objectives and outcomes for water resource management with regard to values and uses of water
- identification of risks to the availability and quality of water

WRPs must also have regard to native title, cultural heritage, cultural flows and support the retention of (at least) current protections of the values and uses of water by Traditional Owners.

Note: Under WRPs, entitlements have not been created for Traditional Owners. Obtaining access to water continues to occur through Victoria's entitlement framework.

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Recognising risk under WRPs

Basin Plan requires WRPs to identify medium to high risks to the continued availability and condition (quality) of water. Victoria assessed risks to water with reference to types of beneficial uses.

In recognition of a lack of clear understanding of Traditional Owner values and uses for water and how it has been or can be impacted by changes to availability and quality of water, a high level of uncertainty was applied to the identification of risks to Traditional Owner values and uses of water. Therefore, these risks were all rated higher to account for uncertainty and increase the importance of improving understanding of Traditional Owners uses for water and involvement in water resource management.

Victoria's Aboriginal Water Policy outlined in *Water for Victoria* is a core strategy for addressing these risks.

Upon accreditation of the WRPs, Victoria is required to report the management and mitigation of risks identified in WRPs on an annual basis to the MDBA.

Annual reporting compels Victoria to continually improve their engagement with Traditional Owner groups and to work towards Traditional Owner aspirations for water resource management in Victoria as identified in Traditional Owner group contributions to WRPs.

The Risk Assessment Report is provided at Appendix B to the Wimmera-Mallee Comprehensive Report and Victoria's North and Murray Comprehensive Report.

Find out more

Included in each WRP Comprehensive Report is a chapter dedicated to Aboriginal values and uses including the detailed contributions developed with each group. More information regarding the engagement can be found in Appendix D of both Comprehensive Reports.

A standalone document has also been published entitled ***Traditional Owner objectives and outcomes: Compilation of contributions to Victoria's water resource plans***. It includes all Traditional Owner contributions across both WRPs.

Find out more about Victoria's WRPs at www.water.vic.gov.au/mdb/mdbp/water-resource-plans

Find out more about DELWP's Aboriginal Water Program at www.water.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-values/the-aboriginal-water-program

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