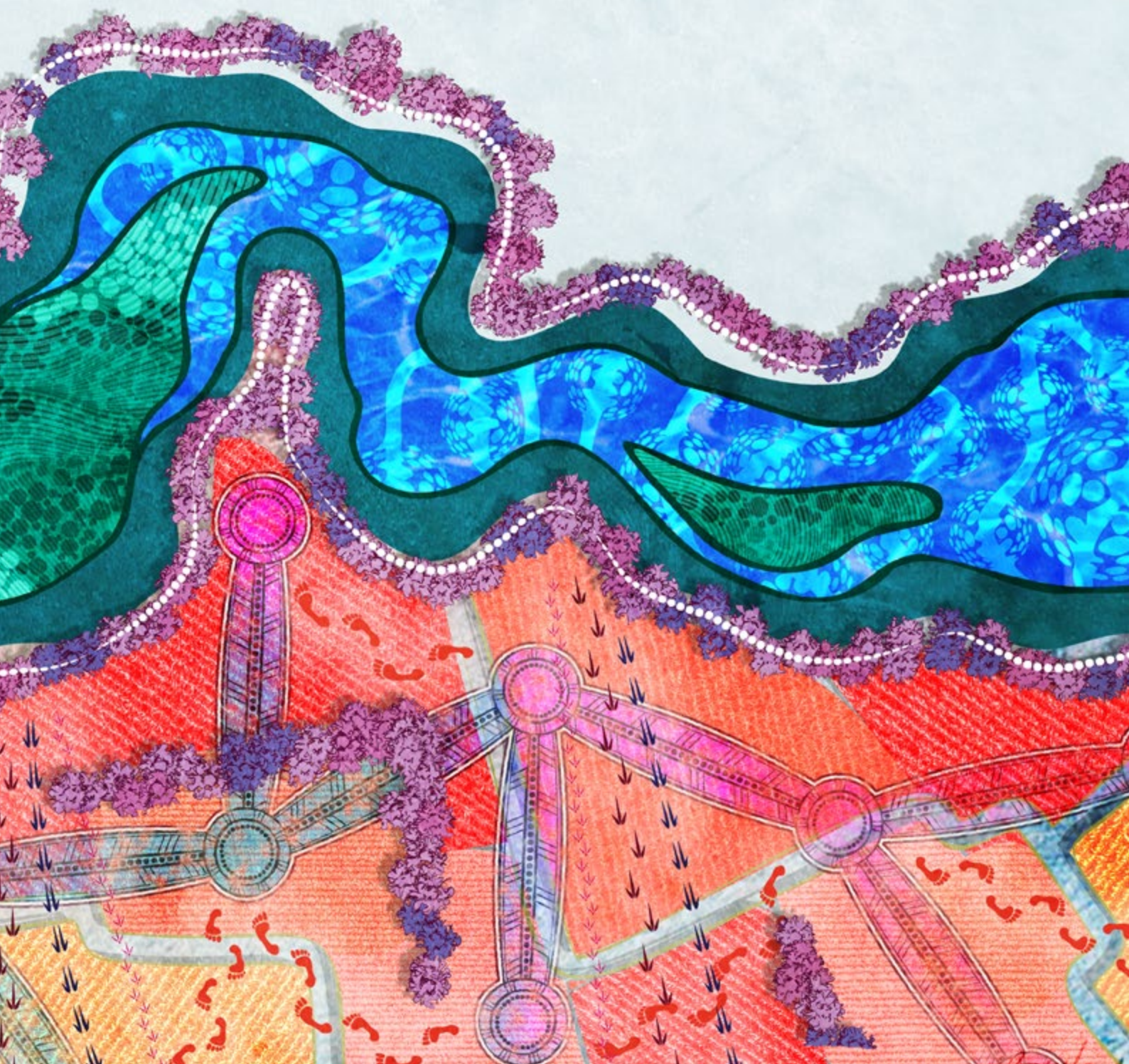


NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy





NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy

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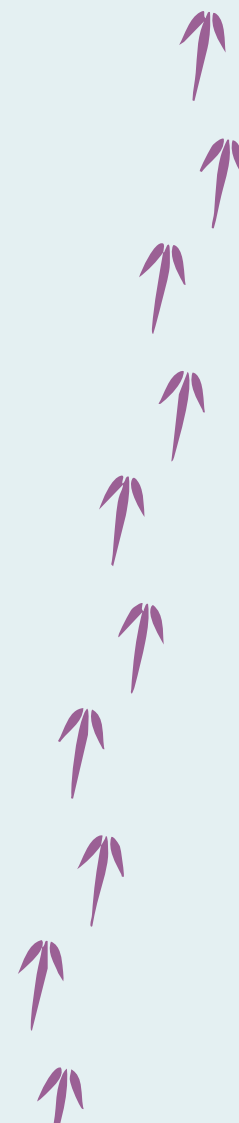
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Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands, water and sea Country. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and future leaders.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

We show our respect through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work. We seek to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places where Aboriginal peoples and communities are included socially, culturally and economically to self-determine their own futures.

Language used in this strategy

This strategy uses the term ‘Aboriginal peoples’ throughout. This is based on community feedback on preferred terms during consultation in 2024.

We acknowledge Aboriginal peoples’ right to self-determination, and we respect their choice to describe their own cultural identities, which may include this or other terms.

Connection to water and Country

Water holds deep and enduring significance for Aboriginal peoples across NSW. It is understood as a living entity and an integral part of Country, culture, identity and community.

Water connects people to their ancestors, stories and responsibilities to care for Country. It exists in many forms; fresh, salt, muddy, and across many places including rivers, wetlands, billabongs, floodplains, springs and saltwater Country. These waters sustain biodiversity and carry cultural knowledge through generations. Cultural values are part of a broader cultural landscape where storylines, totems and species movement link places across Country.

This strategy recognises the cultural, spiritual, social and environmental importance of water to Aboriginal peoples. It supports the continuation and revitalisation of these connections by promoting meaningful involvement in water management and planning, and by exploring opportunities for access, ownership and care of water into the future.



The artwork

Ghi-dhuray – Connection to the River (Wiradjuri -having river)

The design depicts an aerial view of a river, flanked by farmland. The intent of this piece is to convey how the introduction of farming practices and the land's mistreatment has destroyed many of our cultural practices and connections to the waterways that our people depended on for thousands of years.

It also speaks to the disruption farming has caused to the habits and life cycles of the wildlife which once depended on the waterways also.

The image also tells the story of the shrinking of our waterways from what were once mighty rivers and lakes, now reduced to dry riverbeds and claypans in some places and mere creeks and ponds in others.

It is hoped that people will understand that it has been our responsibility to care for these lands and waterways for generations, and to see them in their current state causes our collective spirits to feel a great sense of shame and sorrow, for we have failed our ancestors.

The background of the top half of the page features a vibrant, stylized artwork. On the left, a large, colorful fish-like creature with pink, purple, and blue scales and a prominent eye is depicted. To its right, a man in a dark jacket stands in profile, looking towards the artwork. The background is a deep blue with faint, glowing patterns and symbols, including a circular motif with a central dot and a series of concentric circles. The text "About the artist" is overlaid on the lower part of this image.

About the artist

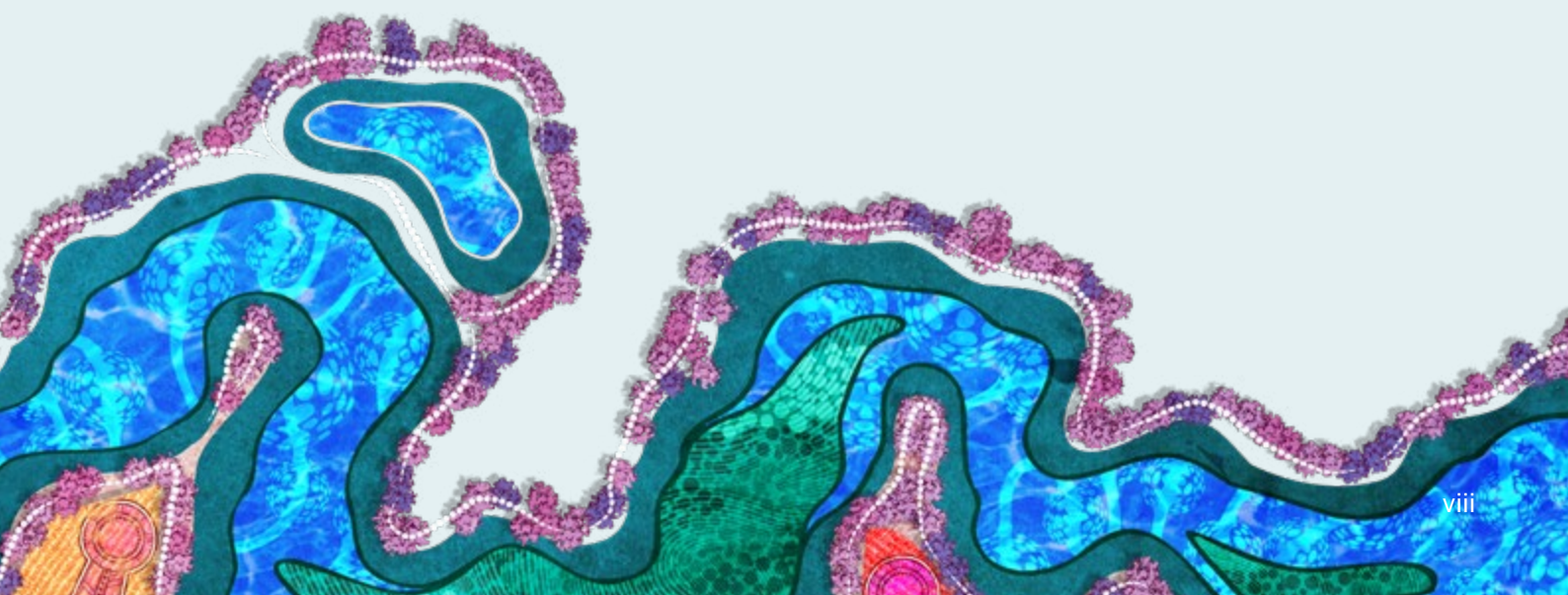
“As a proud Tubba-gah man from Dubbo in the Wiradjuri Nation, I respectfully acknowledge all nations which the department operates on. I acknowledge this artwork will be viewed off my home country of the Tubba-gah people and therefore ask you accept this artwork as an offering on behalf of my family as a gesture of continuing the legacy of the knowledge of our ancestors.

I would also like to pay respect to all traditional custodians of the country whose ancestral lands we all walk upon. I thank the Elders for their wisdom, courage, and sacrifice and pledge my commitment to preserving their legacy for future generations.”

– Nathan Peckham

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About the NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy

This is the first Aboriginal Water Strategy for NSW.

Many people have recognised the need for an Aboriginal Water Strategy, including government, Aboriginal peoples, communities, Traditional Owners, Native Title groups, and representative organisations including NSW Aboriginal peak bodies and other stakeholders. We listened to and worked with these partners to help shape this strategy.

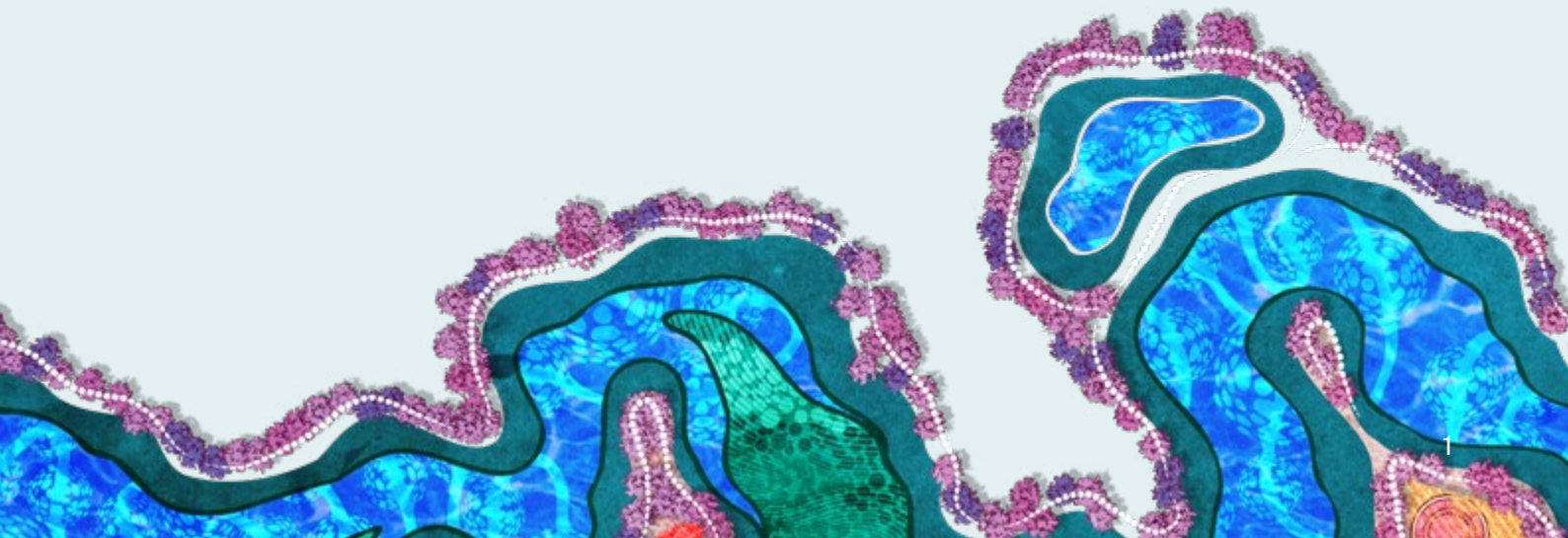
The 2021 NSW Water Strategy and the department's Strategic Plan both state that a NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy is a government priority. Priority 2 of the NSW Water Strategy says we will 'recognise Aboriginal peoples' water rights and values, and increase access to, and ownership of water for cultural, social, educational, and economic purposes'. This is one of the ways we will ensure our water planning and management includes water for Aboriginal peoples, and that there are ways they can be involved in decision making about water.

This Aboriginal Water Strategy (the strategy) reflects the NSW Government's commitment to working with Aboriginal peoples to deliver water related cultural, spiritual, social, environmental and economic benefits to Aboriginal communities. This strategy recognises the significance of water to Aboriginal peoples as a key part of their connection to Country and the lifeblood of culture and communities.

This strategy describes both what we can do in the short term and what we are aiming for long term through change and reform. These include developing policies and investing in programs that will build towards those changes.

Some of the proposed reforms are challenging. They will require genuine and ongoing partnerships with Aboriginal peoples to succeed. Changing water management policy and reforming legislation takes time and will require consulting with many stakeholders and different government bodies.

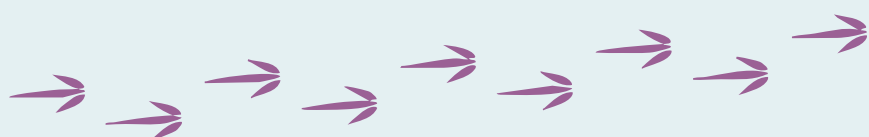
We need to ensure we get these reforms right so they enable Aboriginal peoples' aspirations, needs, expectations and self-determination.



Closing the Gap in water outcomes in NSW

The NSW Government supports the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the agreement). The agreement has 4 priority reforms, with NSW recognising an extra fifth priority. These reforms aim to 'close the gap' between the socio-economic outcomes achieved by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. They were developed with input from Aboriginal peoples' voices.

The reforms seek to change government organisations to better respond to the needs of Aboriginal peoples and keep organisations accountable. They are meant to make sure Aboriginal peoples have a genuine say and voice in design and delivery of policies, programs and services that affect them. This strategy outlines ways to help enable these reforms, and work towards the listed outcome of Aboriginal peoples maintaining a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters.



Voices that shaped the strategy

This strategy was driven by Aboriginal peoples, communities, organisations and water interest groups. We thank all those who shared their experiences, cultural knowledge and fearless voices to help develop it.

In 2024 the department asked for feedback on the draft NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy and Action Plan. We are grateful to the many partners who informed this work, including:

- NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC)
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs)
- Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN)
- Members of the 12 NSW Regional Aboriginal Water Committees (RAWCs)
- Native Title Service Provider for Aboriginal Traditional Owners in NSW and the ACT (NTSCORP)
- Lead Aboriginal Outcomes agencies, including Aboriginal Affairs NSW, the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and the NSW Cabinet Office.

To every participant, we thank you for your time, commitment and insights. You have shaped this strategy and Aboriginal water outcomes in NSW.

“Aboriginal peoples have a profound connection to water. It is a sacred element that sustains the lifeblood of Aboriginal peoples’ Country, culture and communities.”

The feedback said the NSW Government needs to be more accountable and clearer in what it is doing. This includes acknowledging that Aboriginal peoples have historically been excluded from water rights and decision-making, and reflecting truthfully on this.

It also argued for culturally safe knowledge sharing and respect for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) and data sovereignty. It called for genuine collaboration with government across political cycles, and for empowerment through building the capability of Aboriginal peoples and education about rights and compliance.

We have taken these messages seriously and have reflected them in the strategy’s structure, language and commitments. This includes clearer ways to monitor and report progress, explicit references to cultural safety and ICIP, greater roles for Aboriginal peoples in water governance, and more focus on empowering Aboriginal peoples to participate fully in water management.



Protecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights

Recognising the cultural significance of the knowledge shared with us, and in line with the department's ICIP Protocol, we took steps to protect Aboriginal peoples' rights to their cultural heritage while developing this strategy.

This includes respecting the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as described in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and ensuring that cultural knowledge was only used with permission and cultural approval. We will continue this approach in all forms of water planning, policy, and engagement. We will also use these principles to guide the way we implement this strategy.

Turning vision into action

Our Vision

To ensure Aboriginal peoples' water rights, traditional values, and cultural obligations to care for Country are asserted and upheld across NSW and traditional peoples have greater access to and ownership of water for cultural, spiritual, social, and economic purposes.

The strategy has 4 key priorities that Aboriginal peoples have told us matter most. These priorities will guide us towards lasting and meaningful change.

Each priority has a list of what we will do over the next 12 months. These things have been chosen because they are clear, practical and funded. This ensures we can deliver on the commitments outlined in this strategy.

However, this is just the beginning. We will be working on these priorities long-term, and we will partner with Aboriginal peoples to build on this work over time. The strategy is a foundation for future action as more opportunities, resources and ideas emerge.

"We need to ngarrangga (listen deeply) to each other; walk together, value our differences, acknowledge our strength and have the courage to take action to implement change wherever it is required, for the betterment and care of Country and all peoples."¹

We are also strengthening how we work with Aboriginal peoples to support improved outcomes. These activities will underpin the 4 priorities and are essential to reaching the strategy's aims.

These include:

- applying the NSW Government Aboriginal Procurement Policy and meet the spending targets
- supporting Aboriginal employment, career development and a culturally safe workplace
- providing cultural capability training for all staff to build understanding and respect for Aboriginal cultures
- giving senior leaders mentoring opportunities with Aboriginal staff to learn about Aboriginal knowledge and to help Aboriginal staff grow and lead.

¹ Dr Aunty Rhonda Radley (2024), Birrbay/Dhangagati, Chairperson Aboriginal Peoples Knowledge Group, Voice of Country: State of the Environment Report





PRIORITY 1

Increase Aboriginal peoples' access to and ownership of water to support cultural, social, economic and intergenerational outcomes

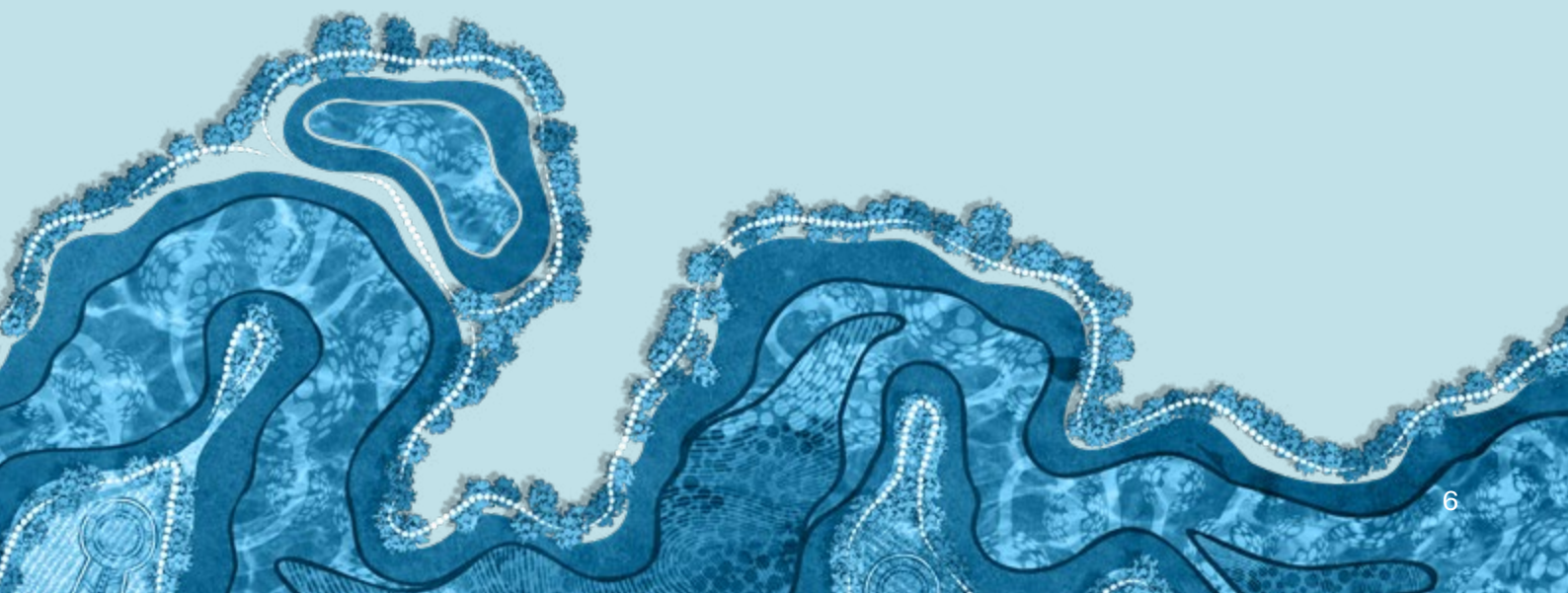
Aboriginal peoples have strong cultural and spiritual ties to water. Yet many Aboriginal communities do not have access and appropriate opportunities to care for and use rivers, lakes, billabongs and cultural sites.

Economic, policy and systemic barriers have prevented Aboriginal peoples from acquiring or using water for cultural and economic purposes. This continues existing inequality. Aboriginal peoples have not always been included in water rights systems and lack access to water entitlements, limiting their ability to manage water on their own terms. This has also limited their opportunities to use water to produce an income.

To address these challenges, priority 1 is about:

- using Aboriginal peoples' voices in water management frameworks
- increasing the amount of water under Aboriginal use and control
- improving systems for culturally appropriate access and participation
- providing better access to land and waterways.

The aim is to support sustainable, self-determined water management that respects cultural connections. It should promote social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal peoples now and for generations to come.



What we're already doing

We have taken important steps to improve Aboriginal peoples' access to and management of water. These steps lay the foundation for further progress. They include:

- making sure Aboriginal Cultural Water Licences can be applied for in all water sharing plans across the state
- not charging application fees and annual water management charges for Aboriginal Cultural Water Licences
- updating water sharing plans to clearly explain the rules about secondary or incidental commercial benefits
- entering into a funding agreement with the Australian Government to support Aboriginal peoples in the NSW Murray Darling Basin with cultural flows planning².

² This work is part of the Commonwealth Cultural Flows Planning for Cultural Economies Program.



A trail of blue footprints of varying sizes and orientations, starting from the top left and winding down towards the bottom left of the page.

Actions we will deliver

Continuing to deliver on this priority will involve:

- developing a NSW Closing the Gap water target, working with Aboriginal peak organisations and based on broader engagement
- making unassigned water and water from surrendered licences available for Aboriginal use and control, and exploring other ways for increased Aboriginal ownership of water including for economic purposes
- minimising or removing administrative barriers to Aboriginal cultural specific purpose access licences, including not charging fees, and simplifying applications to be more accessible, culturally appropriate, and fit for purpose
- supporting Aboriginal peoples and entities to understand what is needed to get works approvals and licences to extract, use, and manage water for a range of purposes
- supporting Aboriginal peoples to develop water plans that reflect their goals and working across government to remove barriers and help communities access, own and use water
- working with Aboriginal peoples, landholders and agencies to find ways to improve access to waterways and other culturally significant water dependent sites
- identifying opportunities to leverage the Australian Government's Land and Water Partnership program to achieve Aboriginal and environmental outcomes
- working with Traditional Owners to improve the recognition and exercising of their native title rights in water management.

Cultural watering plans: a pathway for partnership and reform

In 2023, the department ran a pilot program to create Cultural Watering Plans together with Aboriginal peoples across NSW. The plans were made by talking and working with communities on-Country. They show each community's cultural water goals and priorities.

The plans help communities speak up for their water rights and guide government on how to better support Aboriginal-led water management.

Key outcomes of the pilot included:

- an increase in Aboriginal Cultural Specific Purpose Access Licences
- stronger, trust-based partnerships between communities and government
- better understanding of how government can support Aboriginal peoples water goals.

The success of the pilot has paved the way for future plans across NSW.



PRIORITY 2

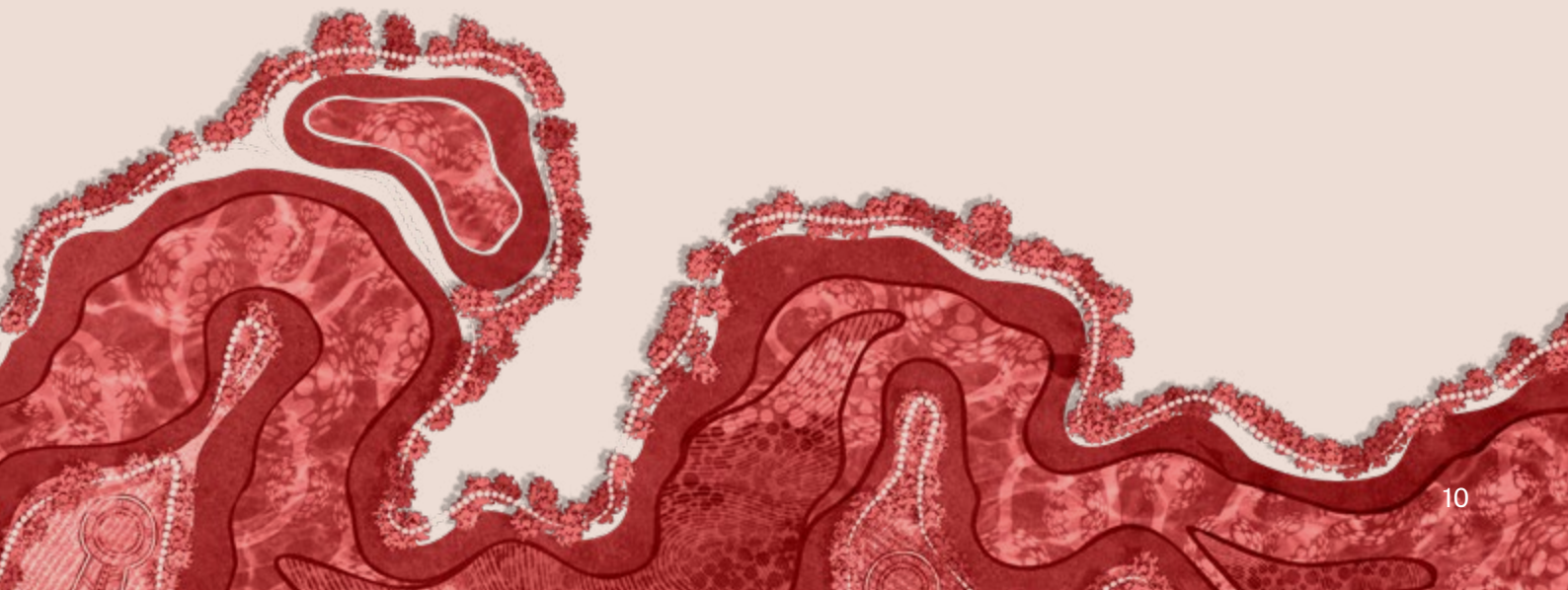
Strengthen the role of Aboriginal peoples in water management through representation, engagement and respectful partnerships

Aboriginal voices have too often been left out of water governance, with government not providing meaningful ways to participate. Aboriginal peoples have not been adequately resourced or informed to enable them to have their say in decision-making. The NSW Government acknowledges these failures and seeks to include Aboriginal peoples in water management by building more inclusive, transparent and accountable systems of engagement.

To address these challenges, priority 2 is about:

- building meaningful and enduring partnerships with Aboriginal peoples, grounded in trust, cultural safety and shared authority
- strengthening Aboriginal participation in water governance by embedding culturally appropriate Aboriginal engagement, including recognising cultural authority on Country in our practices
- developing culturally appropriate information, tools and processes to help improve Aboriginal peoples' understanding of water management.

These approaches should ensure Aboriginal peoples can participate in ways that reflect their rights, responsibilities and aspirations for Country.



“If you take this (the Gwydir River), you take away our spirits, you take away our artery, our life, our bloodline... Water is central to how we interact with our cultural landscapes... It’s not just about the land, it’s about gali (water) and where land meets gali... the Gwydir (river) is our artery... I am the river and the river is me³”

³ Phil Duncan (2021), Traditional owner Terry Hie Hie lands of the Gomeroi Nation, NRAR’s first Indigenous board member

What we're already doing

Work we have done so far to include Aboriginal peoples in water management includes:

- engaging with Aboriginal peoples on all NSW water sharing plans, water resource plans, regional and groundwater strategies
- partnering with Aboriginal peoples to deliver Water for Country and help develop Long Term Watering Plans for each NSW inland valley
- strengthening our policy partnership with peak Aboriginal organisations, the NSWALC and NTSCORP, by collaborating to develop a water target for NSW under the Closing the Gap National Agreement
- establishing Aboriginal training and procurement opportunities through our projects under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, such as the proposed Wilcannia Weir replacement project
- enabling a nationally accredited training program for First Nations tradespeople to become certified Duly Qualified Persons to install and validate non-urban water metering equipment, with support from the Australian Government.

A series of stylized footprints in shades of brown and tan, arranged in a winding path along the left edge of the page.

Actions we will deliver

Continuing to deliver on this priority will include:

- recommending governance arrangements for Aboriginal water ownership and management to help carry out a NSW Closing the Gap water target
- exploring with NSW Regional Aboriginal Water Committee members how to best involve Aboriginal peoples in water management decisions
- developing a plan to improve remuneration and travel support for Aboriginal peoples when involved in water management
- continuing work with the Gomeroi Nation to finalise the remaining Water Resource Plans that still need to be re-submitted to the Australian Government
- improving opportunities and capacity for NSW Aboriginal peak and community-controlled organisations to inform water policy and program design
- continuing to work with Aboriginal peoples in decision making about management of environmental water, including through the department's Environmental Water Advisory Groups.



Aboriginal voices in water management

Regional Aboriginal Water Committees (RAWCs) are a culturally safe forum for Aboriginal communities to share knowledge, raise concerns, and shape water management decisions that affect Country and culture.

Since their establishment in 2023, 132 committee members across 12 committees have played a vital role in strengthening Aboriginal involvement in water planning across NSW.

From 2023 to 2025, RAWCs have:

- held over 40 meetings across NSW
- had input into over 200 actions
- involved nearly 50 water staff from the department.

This partnership has built stronger relationships and provided valuable insights into what Aboriginal communities need. RAWC input continues to influence key planning documents, including water sharing plans, regional and groundwater strategies.



PRIORITY 3

Respect, recognise and embed Aboriginal knowledge to care for Country and support culturally informed water management

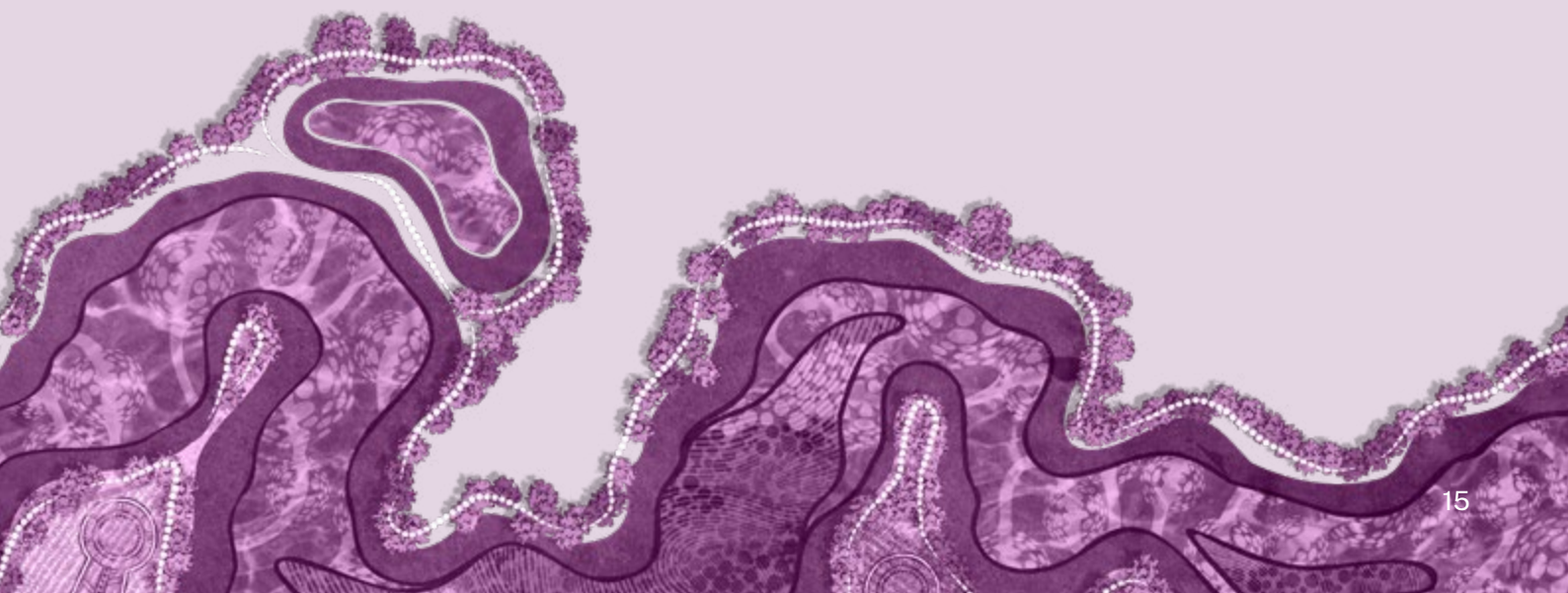
The water sector has not always worked effectively with Aboriginal peoples to share suitable information about how water is managed and regulated. This has limited the ways they have accessed water. There is also not enough understanding of Aboriginal peoples' water traditional values and interests around water rights, and their knowledge and science is poorly used in water management.

Aboriginal peoples have expressed their desire to share their knowledge around caring for Country, and to have their knowledge appropriately protected.

To address these challenges, priority 3 is about:

- recognising and embedding the cultural significance of water
- respecting ICIP rights and upholding Aboriginal data sovereignty
- building broader awareness of Aboriginal perspectives and entitlements among all stakeholders.

This work aims to ensure that Indigenous knowledge is recognised, and shapes the way water is understood, valued and managed across NSW.



What we're already doing

We aim to communicate better with Aboriginal peoples to make it easier for them to become involved in water management. This means continuing to engage and ensure we have two-way knowledge sharing, while respecting, protecting and using Aboriginal data and knowledge.

Work we have done to improve our communication and shared knowledge includes:

- demonstrating respect for ICIP in our continuing work with the Gomeroi Nation on 4 water resource plans
- committing to Aboriginal community capacity building and developing water literacy about environmental water releases under relaxed constraints, in our Reconnecting River Country Program
- delivering Yurringka Thulu Aboriginal Cultural Capability training sessions to 200 of the department's Water Group staff.

Reconnecting River Country: embedding cultural knowledge in river restoration

The Reconnecting River Country Program is a key Murray-Darling Basin initiative that will help create healthier functioning river systems in the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys.

A dedicated Reconnecting River Country Program First Nations Reference Group has helped shape the approach to on-Country assessments in the Murrumbidgee Valley and provided input into the final business case.

The assessments in 2023-2024 enabled place-based discussions. In these, Aboriginal communities shared their aspirations for culturally significant sites and identified opportunities to protect, enhance, and access Country to ensure healthy ecosystems.

Ongoing engagement helps ensure the Reconnecting River Country Program remains culturally appropriate, locally informed, and supports both ecological outcomes and connection to Country.

Actions we will deliver

Continuing to deliver on this priority will include:

- continuing to support Closing the Gap commitments and work with other agencies to provide data to Aboriginal organisations. This will be in formats that support local and shared decision making, while respecting ICIP and data sovereignty
- developing culturally appropriate information to improve understanding of complex water management topics including rules, policies and processes
- delivering capacity building and water literacy training for future environmental water releases under the Reconnecting River Country Program Murrumbidgee Project
- providing NSW input to Australian Government materials to support the Murray Darling Basin Plan review, so that the materials accurately and appropriately inform Aboriginal communities about NSW water licensing and approval rules and processes
- supporting cultural science and joint management programs, such as fish and wetland monitoring in the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee catchment. This will enable two-way knowledge exchange and support Nations to lead or co-design monitoring and evaluation efforts
- setting up a records and information management framework system that respects and promotes Aboriginal data sovereignty and ensures appropriate control of ICIP.

Protecting Country and culture

Gayini (Nimmie-Caira) was purchased in 2013 by the NSW Government, with support from the Commonwealth Government, from a group of private landholders. In 2017, a consortium led by The Nature Conservancy, including the Nari Nari Tribal Council, the Murray-Darling Wetlands Working Group, and the University of NSW, was successful in tendering for the future management of the 86,000 hectares of important wetlands, woodlands, and culturally significant sites.

The area is full of cultural heritage, including burial sites, scar trees, shell middens, rivers, lakes, and floodplains that have been important to Traditional Owners for thousands of years. The project supports Aboriginal-led care for the land, restores the environment, and manages water sustainably, while giving all Aboriginal peoples the chance to connect with and look after this Country for generations to come.



PRIORITY 4

Recognise and support the importance of healthy water systems to Aboriginal wellbeing, culture and connection to Country

The waterways of NSW are deeply culturally and spiritually significant to Aboriginal peoples. Our policies and programs need to better consider Aboriginal cultural water needs and protect cultural and heritage sites.

We heard a very clear message that this strategy should include measures to protect and preserve water related sites that are culturally significant. This included protecting and preserving water-dependent landscapes and overall water quality. Water quality issues, water scarcity and climate change have damaging effects on water ecosystems and river flows. These issues affect the health of Country and in turn, affects the health of Aboriginal peoples and communities.

To address these challenges, priority 4 is about:

- caring for Country by using culturally informed water management
- protecting sacred and culturally important water-connected places
- ensuring Aboriginal communities have access to safe and reliable water services.

These objectives reflect the fundamental connection between healthy water systems and the physical, cultural and spiritual wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples.

What we're already doing

Work we have done to support caring for Country, culture and community includes:

- supporting safe and effective services to 63 Aboriginal Communities under the Aboriginal Communities Water and Sewerage Program since 2008
- committing to engaging with Aboriginal communities in cultural values monitoring by December 2026, as part of the Reconnecting River Country Program Murrumbidgee Project.



Rehabilitating Country: A collaborative approach to justice and environmental repair

A \$2.9 million, 3-year project was secured by the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) for the rehabilitation of Wingecarribee Swamp in the NSW Southern Highlands. The works are part of an enforceable undertaking with a mining company, following allegations of unauthorised surface water take at one of its mines.

Rather than pursue legal action, NRAR accepted a community-focused restoration project as restitution. The project is being delivered in close collaboration with the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council, which will ensure that cultural knowledge, training, and employment opportunities are embedded into the restoration effort.

Wingecarribee Swamp holds deep significance for the Gundungarra people, Traditional Custodians of the area. The project models restorative justice, delivering tangible outcomes for both the environment and community.

A trail of green footprints starts from the bottom left and goes up towards the top left of the page.

Actions we will deliver

Continuing to deliver on this priority will involve:

- developing ways to monitor and evaluate delivery of Aboriginal cultural objectives in water sharing plans
- improving transparency about how water management decisions consider principles in the *Water Management Act 2000*, including protecting features significant to Aboriginal peoples
- identifying any legislative changes that could strengthen Aboriginal water rights and protect cultural values (both tangible and intangible). These should include responding to impacts, where harm may be demonstrated, through restorative action
- establishing a cultural values monitoring program for the Reconnecting River Country Program for sites benefited or affected by relaxed constraints environmental water releases
- delivering the Aboriginal Communities Water and Sewerage Program to support the operation, maintenance and upgrade of water and sewerage services at over 60 eligible Aboriginal communities
- working together with Aboriginal peoples to identify important water sites and take the necessary steps to protect and manage them, respecting cultural knowledge and rights.



“When you walk along the rivers and creeks of our land — knowing that everything is connected and has an important job to do — it heals you. We have a cultural obligation to protect our water from current and future threats, so that our kids and their kids can enjoy these waters just like our old people did.... We need to protect our water: for our plants and animals, for our elders and children, for our culture, and for all those downstream of us”⁴

4 Guyra Local Aboriginal Land Council and Banbai Rangers (2023), Cultural Watering Plan

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting are vital to delivering the strategy well, and essential to give Aboriginal peoples and communities confidence that we are making real progress on the intended outcomes.

We will work with Aboriginal peoples to design how we measure, track and report on progress. This will follow the NSW Treasury First Nations Investment Framework and focus on genuine relationships and partnerships so that outcomes are defined, measured, analysed and reported in ways that are culturally informed, relevant and meaningful.

Priorities for implementation may change over time. For example, in response to funding availability or to adapt approaches to suit local contexts and community needs. The implementation plan will be updated as things change.

We will report regularly on progress, aligning with Closing the Gap reporting, and share updates publicly. This will help to continuously improve the way we deliver the strategy and identify changes that may be necessary to achieve its outcomes.

Action plan

This action plan outlines how we will deliver the Aboriginal Water Strategy in 2025-2026. The tables on the following pages detail the actions that will be taken to deliver each of the strategy's 4 key priorities.

The priorities will be underpinned by enabling actions that will strengthen the way we work with Aboriginal peoples:

Enabling action	Lead
Apply the NSW Government Aboriginal Procurement Policy and meet spending targets	DCCEEW
Support Aboriginal employment, career development and a culturally safe workplace	DCCEEW
Provide cultural capability training for all staff to build understanding and respect for Aboriginal cultures	DCCEEW
Give senior leaders mentoring opportunities with Aboriginal staff to learn about Aboriginal knowledge and to help Aboriginal staff grow and lead	DPHI

PRIORITY
1

Increase Aboriginal peoples' access to and ownership of water to support cultural, social, economic and intergenerational outcomes

Action	Lead
Develop a NSW Closing the Gap water target in collaboration with Aboriginal peak organisations and informed by broader engagement.	Water
Make unassigned water and water from surrendered licences available for Aboriginal use and control and explore further mechanisms to increased Aboriginal ownership of water including for economic purposes.	Water
Minimise or remove administrative barriers to Aboriginal cultural specific purpose access licences, including waiving fees, simplifying application processes to ensure it is accessible, culturally appropriate, and fit for purpose.	Water
Support Aboriginal peoples and entities in understanding requirements for works approvals and licences to extract, use and manage water for a range of purposes.	Water
Support Aboriginal peoples to develop water plans that reflect their goals and work across government to remove barriers and help communities access, own, and use water.	Water
Work with Aboriginal peoples, landholders and agencies to find ways to improve access to waterways and other culturally significant water dependent sites.	DPHI
Identify opportunities to leverage the Australian Government's Land and Water Partnership program to achieve Aboriginal and environment outcomes.	DCCEEW
Work with Traditional Owners to improve the recognition and exercise of native title rights in water management.	Water



Strengthen the role of Aboriginal peoples in water management through representation, engagement and respectful partnerships

Action	Lead
Recommend governance arrangements for Aboriginal water ownership and management to help carry out a NSW Closing the Gap water target.	Water
Explore with NSW Regional Aboriginal Water Committee members how future engagement and collaboration can most effectively involve Aboriginal peoples in water management decisions.	Water
Develop a plan to improve remuneration and travel support for Aboriginal peoples to enable meaningful involvement in water management.	DCCEEW
Continue work with the Gomeroi Nation on a pathway to finalise the remaining Water Resource Plans that are pending re-submission to the Australian Government.	Water
Improve opportunities and capacity for NSW Aboriginal peaks and community-controlled organisations to inform water policy and program design.	Water
Continue to work with Aboriginal peoples in decision making about management of environmental water, including through the department's Environmental Water Advisory Groups.	CPHR

PRIORITY
3

Respect, recognise and embed Aboriginal knowledge to care for Country and support culturally informed water management

Action	Lead
Continue to support Closing the Gap commitments and work with other agencies to provide data to Aboriginal organisations. This will be in formats that support local and shared decision making while respecting ICIP and data sovereignty.	DCCEEW
Develop culturally appropriate materials and guides to improve understanding of complex water management topics including rules, policies and processes.	Water
Deliver capacity building and water literacy training for future environmental water releases under the Reconnecting River Country Program Murrumbidgee Project.	Water
Provide NSW input to Australian Government materials to support the Murray Darling Basin Plan review so that the materials accurately and appropriately inform Aboriginal communities in NSW about NSW water licensing and approval rules and processes.	Water
Support cultural science and joint management programs, such as fish and wetland monitoring in the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee catchment, to enable two-way knowledge exchange and support Nations to lead or co-design monitoring and evaluation efforts.	CPHR
Set up a records and information management framework system that respects and promotes Indigenous data sovereignty and ensures control of ICIP.	DCCEEW

PRIORITY
4

Recognise and support the importance of healthy water systems to Aboriginal wellbeing, culture and connection to Country

Action	Lead
Develop ways to monitor and evaluate delivery of Aboriginal cultural objectives in Water Sharing Plans.	Water
Improve transparency about how water management decisions involve consideration of principles in the <i>Water Management Act 2000</i> , including protecting features significant to Aboriginal peoples.	Water
Identify any legislative changes that could strengthen Aboriginal water rights and protect cultural values (both tangible and intangible), including responding to impacts, where harm may be demonstrated, through restorative action.	DCCEEW
Establish a cultural values monitoring program for the Reconnecting River Country Program for sites benefited or impacted by relaxed constraints environmental water releases.	Water
Deliver the Aboriginal Communities Water and Sewerage Program to support the operation, maintenance and upgrade of water and sewerage services at over 60 eligible Aboriginal communities.	Water
Work together with Aboriginal peoples to identify important water sites and take the necessary steps to protect and manage them, respecting cultural knowledge and rights.	Water