

WANNON WATER

Reconciliation Action Plan

September 2021 to
September 2022



Acknowledgement

Wannon Water and the Victorian Government proudly acknowledge Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich cultures and pays their respects to their Elders past and present. We recognise the intrinsic connection of Traditional Owners to Country and acknowledge their contribution to the management of land, water and resources.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Peoples and as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal peoples and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches us. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards the equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.

Message from the Chair and Managing Director

We recognise, acknowledge, respect and value the depth of knowledge and connection to Country of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also acknowledge that we live and work on the land and waterways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have cared for and lived on for thousands of years.

We have had the opportunity to listen and learn from Elders and Traditional Owners in our region and we value and are grateful for the opportunity to hear stories of hurt, strength, resilience and great engineering feats. We know we have a lot more listening to do as an organisation as we continue to learn about and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of our shared identity in south west Victoria and across Australia.

We are committed to genuine, meaningful action and will continue to seek out and build relationships and work in partnership to deliver the actions and outcomes in this Reconciliation Action Plan.



Image: Wannon Water Managing Director Andrew Jeffers and Chair Jacinta Ermacora.

Our business

Wannon Water's purpose is to deliver water and sewerage services and improve the lives of people in south-west Victoria.

As a key regional organisation, Wannon Water also strives to be an influential community partner, contributing to the wellbeing and prosperity of the region as a whole. It is fundamentally important to Wannon Water now and for future generations:

- To deliver water and sewerage services
- To create value for our customers and communities
- To keep people at the centre of everything we do
- For our region to explore and fulfil its potential.

While our primary functions are around providing water and sewerage services, we have a strategic direction that calls for us to go 'beyond water for strong communities'. A strong community is a reconciled community.

Wannon Water is Victoria's second largest regional urban water corporation by area, covering 23,500 square kilometres and a total population of 100,400. Our region, the Great South Coast, extends from the Otway Ranges to the South Australian border and includes the major centres of Warrnambool, Portland and Hamilton. Our three offices are located in these major centres.

It is a region with significant cultural value, including the Ramsar-listed Glenelg River estuary and Discovery Bay wetlands, UNESCO world heritage listed Budj Bim Cultural Landscape, the Indigenous Protected Areas of Deen Maar, Tyrendarra, Kurtonitj, Tae Rak (Lake Condah) and Framlingham Forest, as well as the Tower Hill Game Reserve, Moyjil, Gariwerd (Grampians) and the Great Ocean Road.

The use and management of water by people to support communities and a flourishing environment has been a part of our region for

many thousands of years. We thank our ancestors and Traditional Custodians for their respect for Country, care for the land and waters, and wisdom that made it possible for Wannon Water and our predecessors to continue to manage our precious life giving water resources.

Wannon Water employs approximately 215 employees, two of which identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (2019 survey data), across a range of professions including science, technology, engineering, maintenance and business administration.

Wannon Water is committed to supporting an inclusive and diverse workplace that represents the community we serve and that results in improved organisational and personal outcomes. Equality is achieved when people are able to access and enjoy the same rewards, resources and opportunities regardless of their unique identity. Fully unlocking the value from an equitable workplace requires cultural and procedural change. We are committed to an outcome where inclusion, respect and equality is a business and cultural norm.

Cover image: A waterway in the Tyrendarra Indigenous Protected Area's kooyang aquaculture complex. The area is at the southern part of the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape and located within Gunditjmarra Country. Photograph by Wannon Water General Manager Strategic Services Ian Bail.



Our RAP

Our reconciliation journey to date has been focussed on building relationships and increasing understanding and awareness of Aboriginal cultures, histories and knowledge.

Through our employee surveys we have seen a positive shift in perceptions, with 72% of respondents agreeing that there is a positive culture within Wannon Water in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. This is a 12% increase compared to 2018. We acknowledge there is still work to be done.

It is important that we are genuine in our approach to reconciliation and in the implementation of our Reconciliation Action Plan. We have developed the following outcomes for each of the core pillars:

1. Relationships

We have strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Traditional Owners, Custodians, groups and organisations and we are walking together to achieve outcomes in our shared communities.

2. Respect

We recognise, acknowledge and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights and we respect Country.

3. Opportunities

We understand the needs of our different Aboriginal communities and we use our influence and resources to improve the lives of people in south-west Victoria and enable self-determination.

4. Governance

We are committed to, and are effective in delivering our Reconciliation Action Plan commitments, always ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are represented and heard.

Wannon Water's champion for the development and implementation of the Reflect RAP is Joanne McBain, Executive Strategy and Innovation, a member of the executive team at Wannon Water.

Wannon Water established a RAP Working Group in 2020. During implementation of this Reflect RAP, Wannon Water will review opportunities to ensure it has an effective and representative working group with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation.

Current membership includes:

Wannon Water - Executive Strategy and Innovation, Diversity and Learning Officer, Records Administrator, Manager Asset Planning, Natural Assets Project Officer, Water Quality Analyst

Community - Interim CEO Framlingham Aboriginal Trust.

We wish to thank members of the community who share their knowledge with us, in particular Uncle Locky Eccles, Uncle Rob Lowe, Uncle Lenny Clarke, Mel Steffensen, Emily Falla and Brett Clarke.



Partnerships and activities to date

Increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation

The State of Victoria and the Minister for Water have set the expectations for Wannon Water and like organisations to better recognise and support self-determination of Aboriginal cultural values and economic inclusion in the water sector.

This is outlined (in part) in *Water for Victoria: Recognising and managing for Aboriginal values* (released in 2016) and we continue to integrate our commitment and activities within our Corporate Plan each year.

A plan to begin increasing knowledge in these areas was developed, which included offering a variety of cultural awareness training, cultural interactions, the formation of an Aboriginal inclusion working group, and the commencement of internal education via community activities.

Since 2017, we have increased our employee understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation through these avenues and through the information and stories we share on our intranet.

A review of cultural learning needs occurred in 2019. Our on Country experiences planned for 2020 were impacted by COVID-19. An e-learning resource will be available to all employees in May 2021, with cultural awareness tours set to re-commence.

Promoting local Aboriginal water values, uses and objectives

Examples include:

- Conducting a series of Great South Coast Integrated Water Management (IWM) forums and practitioner workshops to recognise Aboriginal values and objectives. The Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation shared its vision for the landscape

restoration and economic development of the Budj Bim World Heritage area. Traditional Owner feedback was used to draft the vision for the Great South Coast IWM Forum and Strategic Directions Statement and local language was incorporated into the vision statement.

- Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and Gunditj Mirring Aboriginal Water Officers are part of the IWM Practitioners Network.
- Incorporating traditional ecological knowledge into water planning and management using Aboriginal Waterway Assessments and other tools developed by Traditional Owners. Supporting "record edits" to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register (VAHR) through the use of Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMP). Promoting the CHMP process throughout the organisation by engaging with all employees on their importance and relevance.
- Presenting a video on Budj Bim narrated by Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC) and the Aboriginal Water Officer at Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority (GHCMA) for Wannon Water employees regarding the value of cultural water.
- Participating in the Catchment Partnership Agreement Aboriginal Engagement Project facilitated by Wadawurrung at Barwon Water.

Killara Kooyang Project

Wannon Water and Deakin University partnered with the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC) which saw the development and implementation of an eel aquaculture facility at Budj Bim in South West Victoria.

The goal of the Killara Kooyang Project was to re-establish traditional eel farming and restore its integral role in Gunditjmarra society. It also has the potential to generate economic return to the Gunditjmarra community through the sale of smoked eels and interpretive tours for visitors.

Employment pathways

Wannon Water works with local employment agencies to provide workplace opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is a supporter of the local Jobs Fair initiative operated by the Gunditjmarra Aboriginal Cooperative.

Wannon Water also sponsors at least one diverse candidate (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants) a year for the local Leadership Great South Coast program.

Worn Gundidj Seed Program

This is an initiative that offers use of Wannon Water-owned land to Traditional Owner groups for the growth and development of particular Indigenous bush foods.

Heywood Water Tower Art Project

Through conversations and the relationships we have built, we were able to support an initiative that sees the Heywood water tower as a canvas for a large-scale mural.

The project, run through Leadership Great South Coast program, will 'serve as a conversation piece highlighting the significant sacrifices made by all our Gunditjmarra service men and women, resulting in positive steps toward reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of our community'. <https://lgsc.org.au/projects/>

Financial Inclusion Action Plan (FIAP)

The FIAP is our commitment to take practical actions to improve financial wellbeing for our customers, employees, supply chain and community partners. Through the development and delivery of this first foundational action plan, new relationships were formed with Aboriginal health service organisations.

Economic and social outcomes

Wannon Water's Social and Sustainable Procurement Strategy was endorsed in January 2020 and prioritises support for the sustainability of Aboriginal business sectors through an increase in our direct spend with the Victorian Aboriginal business sector.

This strategy and the priority outcomes that it sets, provides the lever for Wannon Water to continue to provide opportunity to Aboriginal business by providing direct procurement opportunities (ie Request for Quote). To ensure that this strategy can deliver this outcome, further tools are required to create greater visibility of Aboriginal business that can provide goods and services. This may include the development of a local Aboriginal Business Register which could be developed for the Great South Coast region.

Support public health outcomes through delivery of water and sewerage services

- Great Tasting Water Project (Heywood)
 - Wannon Water has been looking at opportunities to improve the quality and taste of tap water in Heywood, thereby increasing tap water consumption and associated health and environmental benefits for the community and visitors to the Budj Bim Cultural landscape. Community and stakeholder engagement has occurred and we continue to develop the business case to progress the project.
- Framlingham Water and Infrastructure Upgrade - We have been working with the Framlingham Aboriginal Trust, Aboriginal Victoria and others to support initiatives that aim to re-establish robust water and sewer infrastructure owned by the community. We were engaged by the Department of Premier and Cabinet to replace a major water main through the trust's land servicing about 30 houses and the project is progressing well. Through 2021, a new pipeline will be installed to ensure the supply to all homes and buildings within the Trust is secure and the water pressure is consistent to modern municipal standards. Through the project, we have benefitted from increased cultural knowledge of the area.

Cultural awareness

At Wannon Water, we understand that it is still early days and that our employees need support in better understanding the context for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our service region.

We continue to develop our collective knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures by providing cultural awareness opportunities, hearing from local Elders, celebrating National Reconciliation Week and being active members of the local Wata Waetnanda ('come together' in Peek Whurrong language) community group.

Our all employee event in 2019 was held during National Reconciliation Week and we invited members of the community to join us as we received a Welcome to Country and a performance by local singer/songwriter Brett Clarke.

In 2020 we partnered with Uncle Locky Eccles and Mel Steffensen to run a Peek Whurrong language session over zoom with our employees and their children, at a time when students were schooling from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was through the relationships we had established in the Wata Waetnanda community group that we were able to pursue such an idea.

1. Relationships



Outcome: We have strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Traditional Owners, Custodians, groups and organisations and we are walking together to achieve outcomes in our shared communities.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
1.1 Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence.	December 2021	Branch Manager Communications & Engagement
	Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	December 2021	Branch Manager Communications & Engagement
	Meet with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal groups and Aboriginal organisations within our service area to understand what's important for Country and for our shared communities (eg Eastern Maar Country Plan).	September 2022	Executive Strategy & Innovation
1.2 Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff.	May 2022	Diversity & Learning Officer
	RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event.	27 May - 3 June 2022	Chair RAP Working Group
	Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.	27 May - 3 June 2022	Diversity & Learning Officer
1.3 Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff and review progress each year.	October 2021	Managing Director
	Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey.	March 2022	Chair RAP Working Group
	Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.	March 2022	Chair RAP Working Group
	Continue to support and be an active member of Wata Waetnanda community group. Review and reflect on progress and participation each year.	June 2022	Diversity & Learning Officer
1.4 Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination.	August 2022	Executive People & Resilience Executive
	Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs	August 2022	People & Resilience



2. Respect

Outcome: We recognise, acknowledge and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights and we respect Country.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
2.1 Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation and review for gaps and opportunities.	August 2022	Diversity & Learning Officer
	Conduct regular reviews of cultural learning needs within our organisation.	July 2022	Diversity & Learning Officer
	Update our meeting room names to include the Indigenous name for the water sources and systems that are referenced in consultation with local Traditional Owners and language experts.	February 2022	Branch Manager Corporate Services
	Establish a video library of existing stories and knowledge that employees can easily access and be informed of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, languages and histories.	August 2022	Records Administrator
	Work with Traditional Owners, neighbouring water corporations and catchment management authorities to identify opportunities for shared on Country cultural learning and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water knowledge transfer.	August 2022	Manager Asset Planning
2.2 Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area and review progress.	June 2022	Manager Asset Planning
	Increase staff understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.	December 2021	Diversity & Learning Officer
2.3 Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week	Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week.	July 2022	Diversity & Learning Officer
	Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area.	July 2022	Diversity & Learning Officer
	RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event	July 2022	Diversity & Learning Officer

3. Opportunities



Outcome: We understand the needs of our different Aboriginal communities and we use our influence and resources to improve the lives of people in south-west Victoria and enable self-determination.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
3.1 Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.	Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation.	July 2022	Executive People & Resilience
	Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.	July 2022	Executive People & Resilience
	Develop and build ongoing relationships with secondary schools and existing student groups (eg Clontarf Foundation – Warrnambool Academy, Kalay Academy Warrnambool, Kackay Warrnambool).	July 2022	Senior Advisor People & Training
3.2 Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	Investigate and develop tools to create greater visibility of Aboriginal business that can provide goods and services as part of implementing Wannon Water’s Social and Sustainable Procurement Strategy.	September 2022	Branch Manager Corporate Services
	Investigate Supply Nation membership and promote other accessible procurement platforms.	February 2022	Branch Manager Corporate Services
2.3. Recognise and support self-determination of Aboriginal cultural values and economic inclusion in the water sector	Increase our understanding of Aboriginal cultural values in water planning.	July 2022	Branch Manager Asset Planning
	Identify opportunities to increase Aboriginal participation in water management and decision making.	July 2022	Branch Manager Asset Planning



4. Governance

Outcome: We are committed to, and are effective in delivering our Reconciliation Action Plan commitments, always ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are represented and heard.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
4.1 Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	Maintain a RWG to govern RAP implementation.	September 2022	Executive Strategy & Innovation
	Draft a Terms of Reference for the RWG	October 2021	Chair RAP Working Group
	Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG.	December 2021	Chair RAP Working Group
4.2 Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	Define resource needs for RAP implementation.	March 2022	Executive Strategy & Innovation
	Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments.	October 2021	Executive Strategy & Innovation
	Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.	June 2022	Executive People & Resilience
4.3 Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.	Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	30 September 2022	Diversity & Learning Officer
4.4 Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	June 2022	Diversity & Learning Officer

Contact

For public enquiries about this Reconciliation Action Plan please contact:

Name | Jo McBain

Position | RAP Working Group Chair/Executive Strategy & Innovation

Phone | 0447 101 346

Email | joanne.mcbain@wannonwater.com.au



Image: Kooyang (eel) Trap, Hopkins River, Framlingham.

Photograph by Wannon Water Manager Asset Planning Brad Clingin.



Wannon Water
PO Box 1158
Warrnambool Vic 3280

Telephone 1300 926 666
Email info@wannonwater.com.au

wannonwater.com.au

