



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Water and Environmental Regulation**



RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN

INNOVATE

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RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN PUBLIC REPORT 2021

OUR LEARNING, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

DECEMBER 2021

*We're working for
Western Australia.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which we live and work within Western Australia.

We acknowledge their unique and continuing connections and contributions. We pay our respects to their cultures, and to their elders – past, present, and emerging. We extend recognition and respect to all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, and indigenous nations around the world.

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OUR COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION

Regulation of water and environment is not only about licensing, meeting key performance indicators and achieving milestones. It's about building a more equal society in environmental protection and management. It's about people and their health and wellbeing, and the social and economic benefits on lands and waters.

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (the department) launched its first Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in May 2019 and progressively implemented reconciliation actions. In May 2021, we started drafting our second RAP 2021-2023.

The department recently completed a RAP Impact Report 2021. We believe we achieved most of what we embarked on delivering but we know there are areas we could do more. We employ over 948 staff and have 17 offices across seven regions. We currently employ nine self-identified Aboriginal staff, of which five are permanent full-time, one permanent part-time, one junior level full-time and two staff on short-term contracts. Recently we advertised four positions dedicated to employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples under section 50d of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*.

The role of environmental protection in reconciliation

Reconciliation is about building respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

It is our vision to achieve a healthy environment and have sustainable water resources, to support a liveable and prosperous Western Australia (WA) that is valued by all. We recognise the traditional custodians of this state, and their practice of intergenerational care for country and its relevance to our work.

As the lead State Government agency in water and environmental regulation, we are deeply committed to reconciliation by investing and supporting the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our water and environmental planning and policy development.

Our reconciliation vision is to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples engaged within our workforce and our partnerships to maximise opportunities for a healthy environment and sustainable water resources.

By increasing staff knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures we will be able to build the foundations for a future of positive relationships between our organisation and Aboriginal communities in WA.

Our RAP focuses on the key elements of building **Relationships**, creating **Opportunities** and fostering mutual **Respect** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The department recognises that creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with Aboriginal communities and people is integral to successfully delivering on the sustainable management and protection of WA's water and environment.

**A message from
the Director
General**



I am delighted to present a final update on the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's first Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan and report that we have achieved a huge number of the actions we committed to while continuing to work on those not yet fulfilled.

It is particularly pleasing that this was achieved in the middle of a global pandemic. Rather than using COVID-19 as an excuse for less action, we used it as an opportunity for us to work even harder on reconciliation.

This success is the result of teamwork by our RAP working groups past and present, my predecessor Mike Rowe who led from the top, and all of the work areas that have helped the RAP team meet our commitments. This included many staff with passion for reconciliation and advancement of Aboriginal people, and who are our RAP champions.

This report of our achievements, learnings and challenges tells a story of how our department has a focus on genuine long-term partnerships where we walk together and deliver outcomes that are sustainable and Aboriginal led.

Many of our action commitments that commenced just over two years ago, are now business as usual for the department.

This includes ongoing advice from a dedicated Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group, incorporation of State Aboriginal procurement policy into our everyday procurement processes, and participation in the Public Sector Commission's Aboriginal Traineeship program.

Our core business functions of sustainably managing water resources and the environment have natural alignment with the aspirations and cultural obligations of Aboriginal Western Australians for healthy country.

Our commitment to increase engagement, participation and employment outcomes for Aboriginal peoples in stewardship of land and water, is enhancing our work, and forms an integral component of some of the department's most significant projects and initiatives.

As Director General I am committed to Aboriginal participation in all aspects of our business, including projects that deliver water and environmental benefits, restore function to country, and support Aboriginal social, cultural and economic wellbeing.

We are on a solid footing to take our lessons of the last two years on board and achieve even more over the next two.

I look forward to continuing our Reconciliation journey at DWER.

Michelle Andrews

A message from DWER Reconciliation Action Plan Chair



Our department is committed to having a real impact on Aboriginal communities and making positive changes in their lives. We also realise we can better use the knowledge of Aboriginal people to help protect the environment and water in Western Australia.

Our first RAP focused on the key elements of building 'Relationships', creating 'Opportunities' and fostering mutual 'Respect' with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We have made significant achievements in all three of these areas.

In regard to Respect, we have programs providing employees with cultural learning opportunities to increase appreciation of Aboriginal history and achievements. We also promote Aboriginal rights within DWER and have embedded cultural protocols, such as Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, to ensure there is a shared meaning of Reconciliation.

In regard to Opportunities, we have growing employment and business outcomes inside the department and externally.

Relationships are being fostered through dedicated frameworks ensuring engagement and involvement of Aboriginal people and organisations in all areas of our work, building opportunities for real and lasting partnerships.

One of the biggest lessons of our first RAP is the more we work at it, the better at it we get.

In preparation for our second RAP, internally we are embedding our actions and commitments into forward business planning.

This will be in parallel with our external focus led by the department's first Aboriginal Engagement Strategy supported by dedicated new positions to be filled by Aboriginal staff, one of our major RAP commitments of 2019-21.

As RAP chair, and Executive Director Strategy and Engagement, I look forward to continuing realisation of our reconciliation vision and driving our Aboriginal engagement further as we prepare for the launch of our next RAP in 2022.

Nygarie Goyal

RECONCILIATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES

As part of our ongoing commitment to reconciliation, we are pleased to present this progress report on our two-year Innovate RAP. Our reconciliation vision is built on a healthy environment with socio-economic outcomes and cultural wellbeing for Aboriginal people in WA.

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns created some setbacks and limitations in our staff resourcing and reaches. Despite this, the closed borders in WA have seen people enjoy freedom and economic growth to some extent, and we have made good progress against our RAP goals in many areas and within our spheres of influence.

We are progressively achieving our goals in several government initiatives in relation to Aboriginal engagement, staff cultural training, supplier diversity, procurement and cultural awareness.

We continue to learn from our experience and are working to improve our performance in achieving reconciliation action and goals. We are sharpening our focus on the areas we can

do better in by setting higher ambitions and improving cohesion.

For example, the department has formed four formal environmental partnerships which include positive outcomes for traditional owners on country.

One of these partnerships is with the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation (MAC). This focuses on the protection and preservation of the ancient petroglyphs (rock art) on the Dampier Archipelago and Burrup Peninsula from industry emissions.

The purpose of the [Murujuga Rock Art Strategy](#) is to preserve this culturally and spiritually important rock art by providing a long-term framework to oversee and implement a world's best practice monitoring and analysis program. This involves establishment of an Environmental Quality Management Framework, implementation of environmental quality criteria, monitoring and analysis to determine changes in the rock art and the establishment of governance to ensure that monitoring, analysis and reporting



BRING TOGETHER
WALK TOGETHER

The Traditional Owners of the Bindjareb Djabba (Peel-Harvey estuary) and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (the department) have partnered for Bindjareb Noongah. This strong partnership was a commitment to meaningful engagement in the development of the Bindjareb Protection Plan, an election

This information sheet provides explanatory notes to assist with the interpretation of the Bring Together Aboriginal Framework

are undertaken with traditional owners in such a way as to provide confidence to them. The intent of this strategy is to train MAC Rangers in field techniques to monitor the rock art, because it is their heritage, and we want MAC to have ownership of the monitoring program.

In February 2021, the [Yamatji Nation Indigenous Land Use Agreement](#) was reached, as the department negotiated a comprehensive water package for the Yamitji people. The unique Yamitji ILUA includes land, housing, tourism opportunities, revenue streams and access to water for southern Yamatji people in Geraldton. The environmental package includes reservation of water for culture, economic use and sustainability as well as funding to train Yamatji people in groundwater monitoring and contracts for delivery of departmental groundwater monitoring programs.

The department also formed a partnership with the traditional owners of Bindjareb Djilba (Peel-Harvey estuary). This has empowered Bindjareb elders to develop their own overarching water plan, the Bindajreb

Gabi Wonga (the water story). The [Bring Together Walk Together Aboriginal Partnership Framework](#) is a pathway to foster, build and maintain strong partnerships with Aboriginal people in environmental matters.

The department is also forming an increasing number of service delivery partnerships with Aboriginal businesses and has contracted an Aboriginal consultant to review our human resources policies in recruitment, employment and retention of Aboriginal people in our workforce.

One such partnership was for the environmental clean-up following the Wooroloo bushfires. We set up procurement systems, processes, contracts, approvals and the financial arrangements across government, with the contract awarded to an Aboriginal business specialising in hazardous waste removal. Our environmental pollution response team, the procurement team and the Aboriginal clean-up business worked collaboratively to protect the environment and communities after the event.



ESTABLISHING LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

As we expand our reconciliation mission in environmental and water regulation and protection, we aim to work with and develop strong and sustainable relationships with traditional owner partners and businesses all over the state.

We believe that as the state's largest environmental and water regulator, we can help support and grow broader relationships with traditional owners

In 2020, we were a sponsor for the water symposium as part of the [Danjoo Koorliny Walking Together Social Impact Festival](#). Danjoo Koorliny is a large-scale, long-term systems change project designed to help us all walk together towards 2029. It is led by local Aboriginal leaders, elders and academics who meet with government officials and private industry to highlight and discuss social, environmental, cultural and economic issues with a contemporary and historical lens.

The department, in partnership with Perth Natural Resource Management and the Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Noongar Knowledge project (University of Western Australia), shared and learnt with Whadjuk Noongar elders and leaders. The partnership is an example of working inclusively and collaboratively with local traditional owners and embracing culture while co-designing working relations and building strong partnerships to achieve shared goals in water and environment planning.

We have also been working collaboratively with the Nyamba Buru Yawuru (NBY) and Karajarri Traditional Lands Trust Association (KTLA) over several months to develop draft collaboration agreements. These agreements are built on mutual respect and include opportunities for two-way capacity development which meets the department's responsibilities and supports the land management aspirations of both groups. We are working collaboratively with KTLA and NBY and anticipate the agreements will be finalised in the new year.



OUR CHALLENGES AND RESULTS

After the launch of our RAP in 2019, the department started the next phase of its journey towards reconciliation and implementation of our commitments. This journey was undertaken to ensure that we are well positioned to endorse effective and mutually beneficial initiatives as part of future RAPs.

Our employees are embracing the spirit of reconciliation and some have learnt more about the story of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The COVID-19 pandemic however, has thrown plenty of unexpected challenges our way.

Finalising the internal Aboriginal Employment Strategy and the development of an Aboriginal Employment Strategy was held up because of delays in recruiting a consultant specialising in Aboriginal affairs, engagement and employment. We have now awarded a contract to an Aboriginal consultant who will review our Human Resources policies, including recruitment processes, to support employment, training and professional development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our workforce.

Despite these challenges, the department has completed 84 per cent of our 2019 Innovate RAP commitments, with 16 per cent still in progress with the department's Human Resource team.

Our approach, as outlined in our Innovate RAP, is focused on our priority areas. These areas are aligned to Reconciliation Australia's key action areas, shown in following pages.



RAP visions Our highlights

- Race relations
- Aboriginal art and designs are an integral part of our official documents and building design. All artworks are commissioned and designed by renowned local Aboriginal artists in our regional offices.
 - Welcome to Country ceremonies by local traditional owners are held for events such as NAIDOC and NRA weeks.
 - Acknowledgement of Country is well established in our meeting rooms, gatherings and Director General communications.
 - Our department choir sings an Acknowledgment of Country song for events, and it performed with the Madjilil Moorna choir from Perth.
 - The Aboriginal Water and Environment Advisory Group (AWEAG) is a key stakeholder group providing input into statewide policy matters.
 - Mandatory Cultural Awareness Training from the Public Sector Commission was rolled out to staff.
 - NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week are celebrated with pride. This has included:
 - a morning walk in Mirima National Park in Kununurra, to engage with interpretive information about local culture and ecology
 - participation in the Gathering of the Tribes event in Denmark
 - South West region staff attending cultural awareness training
 - Mid West region staff visiting the Gwoonwardu Mia Gascoyne Heritage and Cultural Centre which features a permanent exhibition, gallery and an ethnobotanical garden that celebrates the five Aboriginal language groups of the Gascoyne Region
 - Swan Avon region staff having a morning tea with a prominent local elder
 - a number of formal events at the Joondalup Office. This included a Reconciliation Week presentation, "More than a word", with guest speaker Christine Sindley, and a Welcome to Country and blessing from a Whadjuk Noongar elder
 - the creation of posters for meeting rooms to help staff start each meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country
 - sponsorship of a banner to celebrate National Reconciliation Week (NRW) and events in three regions - Perth, Geraldton and Broome
 - Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week information on social media including Twitter, LinkedIn pages.
- Historical acceptance
- Our leaders are instrumental in highlighting Acknowledgement of Country during meetings and official gatherings.
 - Our leaders and staff made commitments in support of reconciliation, truth telling and historical acceptance during Reconciliation Week 2021.
 - Our water allocation plans and environmental impact assessments have high regard for Aboriginal cultural, social and economic wellbeing.
 - A Myalup groundwater investigation was undertaken to confirm aquifer health, and a cultural study was conducted to understand the cultural significance of the water system. This project worked collaboratively with the Gnaala Karla Booja people, traditional owners of Myalup wetlands systems in the south-west coast of WA. The project and cultural studies include traditional perspectives of water systems in the region.

RAP visions Our highlights

Historical acceptance (continued)

- Staff in the Mid West office engaged in a unique collaboration with local Aboriginal artists that resulted in a painting depicting the value of water to Aboriginal community. The painting tells the story of the valuable connection between water, the land and people. It took about two months to complete and involved four Aboriginal artists and the contributions of 16 department staff. The painting was commissioned from a desire to connect with local Aboriginal people and to acknowledge the value of their knowledge about the region's environment and water resources.
- Connecting to Country with Bindi Bindi Dreaming was a presentation by Whadjuk Noongar woman Marissa Verman during NAIDOC Week. Passionate about empowering youth and educating them on Noongar culture, Marissa and her team work with local schools through storytelling, teachings, bush tucker programs and youth mentorship programs. Marissa's work aims to empower future leaders and connect people to country and culture. Her important work aims to ensure this knowledge is passed on to future generations.

Institutional integrity, equality and equity

- Our Ministers continue to announce funds and projects in Aboriginal communities. This includes \$60.3 million over six years for the Green Jobs Plan – a WA Recovery program that aims to create up to 1,000 new conservation jobs. The target groups for conservation jobs include Aboriginal people, as well as other groups who's employment was disrupted by the COVID pandemic or who have not otherwise benefited from economic recovery activities. Conservation jobs and participating in the restoration economy can increase Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander peoples' cultural and economic wellbeing. Green jobs will be created through the department's \$15 million Native Vegetation Rehabilitation Scheme and \$8 million Offsets Funds for Recovery programs, which also provide on-the-job training and investment in equipment. Led by Greening Australia in the state's south-west, Wadandi Rangers have undertaken training in seed picking and conservation as well as land management work around the Karridale area, while Wheatbelt Noongar Boodjar Rangers in Northam have bought seed processing equipment and been trained in seed collection and treatment. The next stage of this program will see more Aboriginal people and businesses engaged to grow the seeds into seedlings, prepare land for revegetation, and then plant out in areas that have been previously cleared.
- The department has sponsored a scholarship for Chontarle Bellottie, a Wardandi woman and member of AWEAG, to participate in the Peter Cullen Trust Science to Policy Leadership Program.
- Jim Morrison from Yokai delivered a special presentation during NAIDOC Week. Jim is a Goreng Noongar elder, a traditional custodian of WA's southern coast. He is a prominent activist, advocate and leader in Aboriginal advancement. He has been working to address the rights of the Stolen Generations and their families, encompassing Aboriginal child protection, mental health and suicide issues in Aboriginal communities, equity and culturally safe services, prison reform, and Aboriginal employment, education and training.

WHERE TO NOW

We are building our capability in Aboriginal recruitment and employment. We are also exploring ways to improve our Aboriginal engagement processes and address emerging issues including native title settlement and land use agreements with traditional owners.

For employment pathway programs, we have co-developed a Certificate II in Groundwater Sampling and Monitoring with Broome TAFE, in response to the aspirations of the different ranger groups we are working with. We will be providing industry specialists for training support, supplying access to monitoring equipment, and financially supporting the rangers to attend. In addition to this we are also committed to increasing our Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander employee numbers by offering graduate programs and as well as professional employment that leads to permanency.

We continue to learn from our experiences to build our capability. In our next RAP we will carry on focusing on the key elements of cultural education, engagement and participation of Aboriginal people in the stewardship of land and water. Employment will be given greater focus in the coming years. We encourage feedback, the sharing of stories and collaboration as to how we may better and continue our reconciliation journey.

We know this is just the beginning of our reconciliation journey, and that we must continue to be transparent and accountable in our efforts to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in WA, the rest of Australia and beyond.

We hope that by sharing our journey we can inspire others to embark on their own reconciliation paths.







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