



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



RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN

INNOVATE

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INNOVATE RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

MAY 2019 TO MAY 2021

*We're working for
Western Australia.*

The background of the page is a photograph of a waterfall cascading over rocks. The water is in motion, creating a blurred effect. At the top left and bottom of the page, there are decorative borders. The top border features a green and blue wavy line with white and blue dots of various sizes. The bottom border features a blue and orange wavy line with white and black dots of various sizes.

Acknowledgement

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which we live and work, and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise the practice of intergenerational care for Country and its relevance to our work. We seek to listen, learn and build strong partnerships. We aim to provide genuine opportunities for Aboriginal people within our workforce and through our business.

"The sound of the words that say there is a Reconciliation Action Plan for me is like water running over stones. You hear the bubbles coming up, and as they burst, each one of them has a new word in it that we can all listen to and hear and understand, and then put that new word into practice."

- Noel Nannup

Message from our Ministers



The McGowan Government is committed to genuine reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Western Australians.

Over many decades, Labor governments have led and supported reconciliation, and will continue to work towards a society where the injustice and inequalities of the past are addressed and overcome. It is important our nation's First Peoples enjoy the same rights and opportunities as all other Australians.

For the McGowan Government reconciliation includes recognition, respect and celebration of all of the nation's Traditional Owners and Custodians' cultures throughout Australia.



Maintaining healthy water resources and protecting the environment are shared goals for Aboriginal culture and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation.

Also central for our Government and the future of Aboriginal people is providing economic opportunities that allow communities to thrive and ensures a sustainable and healthy environment.

Aboriginal views and expertise are valuable and contribute to responsible management of our water resources and the environment.

The McGowan Government is seeking recognition of Aboriginal spiritual, social and cultural values and rights in legislation and policies that manage water resources and the environment.

We commend the Department on its work to progress reconciliation and endorse the actions it has committed to over the next two years.

The Department has the McGowan Government's full support to further reconciliation commitments on behalf of all Western Australians.

A white, stylized signature of Hon Stephen Dawson MLC on a dark blue background.

Hon Stephen Dawson MLC
Minister for Environment

A white, stylized signature of Hon Dave Kelly MLA on a dark blue background.

Hon Dave Kelly MLA
Minister for Water



Message from the Director General

I am pleased to present the first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) of the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation. This RAP builds on the lessons learnt from the 2015-17 RAP developed by one of our former agencies, the Department of Water, and a review by the department's RAP Working Group on what is currently working well across our agency, and what needs to improve.

It is our vision to achieve a healthy environment and have sustainable water resources, to support a liveable and prosperous Western Australia 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. To achieve our vision, we seek to listen, learn, and build strong partnerships with our Aboriginal stakeholders. We aim to provide genuine opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within our workforce and through our business. Building and developing relationships with Aboriginal people and communities will also help protect and promote Aboriginal cultures and histories, as well as provide opportunities for social and economic benefit.

From encouraging our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members to celebrate their heritage with us, supporting initiatives such as the Aboriginal Traineeship program, and working collaboratively with ranger groups, I'm proud to see how we are already contributing to reconciliation in Western Australia.

I am committed to ensuring this RAP is a meaningful document that guides and informs our organisation by improving our governance, processes, work and decision making. This plan identifies the actions and initiatives that we have committed to implement over the coming two years.

I acknowledge and thank all those involved in developing this RAP and I look forward to continuing to be guided by our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, partners and stakeholders as we continue our reconciliation journey.

I call on all colleagues to be part of this journey and I look forward to working with you as we put our plan into action.

Mike Rowe
Director General

Message From Reconciliation Australia



On behalf of Reconciliation Australia, I am delighted to see the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) of Western Australia continue the reconciliation journey of its predecessor agencies and endorse its first Innovate RAP as a new department.

Through the development of an Innovate RAP, the DWER continues to play an important part in a community of over 1,000 dedicated corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have formally committed to reconciliation through the RAP program since its inception in 2006. RAP organisations across Australia are turning good intentions into positive actions, helping to build higher trust, lower prejudice, and increase pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Reconciliation is no one single issue or agenda. Based on international research and benchmarking, Reconciliation Australia, defines and measures reconciliation through five critical dimensions: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance. All sections of the community—governments, civil society, the private sector, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—have a role to play to progress these dimensions.

The RAP program provides a framework for organisations to advance reconciliation within their spheres of influence. This Innovate RAP provides the DWER with the key steps to establish its own unique approach to reconciliation. Through implementing an Innovate RAP, the DWER will strengthen its approach to driving reconciliation through its business activities, services and programs, and develop mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

We wish the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) well as it embeds and expands its own unique approach to reconciliation. We encourage the DWER to embrace this journey with open hearts and minds, to grow from the challenges, and to build on its successes. As the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation reminded the nation in its final report:

“Reconciliation is hard work—it’s a long, winding and corrugated road, not a broad, paved highway. Determination and effort at all levels of government and in all sections of the community will be essential to make reconciliation a reality.”

On behalf of Reconciliation Australia, I commend the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) on its RAP, and look forward to following its ongoing reconciliation journey.

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Karen Mundine', positioned above the printed name and title.

Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia

WHO WE ARE

Our business

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (the department) was established on 1 July 2017 by amalgamating the Department of Water, Department of Environment Regulation and the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority. The department works to ensure the State's water resources and environment are healthy and able to support a strong economy and thriving communities, now and in the future.

The department employs over 940 staff and has 17 offices across seven regions. The department has 12 self-identified Aboriginal staff that are currently employed, of which nine are based in Perth and three at regional offices.

Our Reconciliation Vision

Our reconciliation vision is to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples engaged within our workforce and our partnerships. We want our staff to understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

We want a future with positive relationships between our organisation and Aboriginal communities in Western Australia to maximise opportunities for a healthy environment and sustainable water resources.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan

We recognise that creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with Aboriginal communities and people is important for our department in its mission to lead and excel in the sustainable management and protection of Western Australia's water and environment.

To achieve this we want to learn more about Aboriginal cultures and values and how they intersect with our work. We also want our work to increase job and other opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Director General Mr Mike Rowe is the champion of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The RAP Working Group (RWG) has representatives from all work areas of the department and has been established to prepare the RAP. The working group will oversee the development and implementation of the plan as well as monitor and evaluate its progress. The RWG is comprised of staff members only, and includes Aboriginal staff representation. It is intended that the RAP will be considered by external stakeholders.

The department has established an Aboriginal Reference Group consisting of people from various regions of the State. It is envisaged this group could provide further input and guidance to the development and implementation of the RAP in the future.



OUR RAP JOURNEY



Dr Noel Nannup

National Reconciliation Week

"Water is the giver of life, and everything in the catchment is a part of you and you are a part of it."
Nannup, Noel 'Caring for everything' Heartsick for Country: Stories of Love, Spirit, and Creation

Under the core value of Respect, the department invited Noongar Elder Dr Noel Nannup to speak to staff as part of National Reconciliation Week.

Dr Nannup's eloquence has already gained notoriety among the department's water sensitive urban design professionals, through the quote from his essay Caring for Everything, in which he embodies the merging of Noongar values and the modern concept of the city as a water supply catchment, or as Dr Nannup told staff, his job is: "Bringing ancient cultural knowledge and scientific principle together."

Dr Nannup has been involved with the development of 29 Reconciliation Action Plans.

"The sound of the words that say there is a Reconciliation Action Plan for me is like water running over stones. You hear the bubbles coming up, and as they burst, each one of them has a new word in it that we can all listen to and hear and understand, and then put that new word into practice."

Dr Nannup entertained and enlightened staff for an hour around the theme *Don't keep history a mystery*, and with wisdom learned from his own life, and his Elders, shared his views on the reconciliation process, and how it can and is being achieved.

"One of the things I wanted to leave with you as a result of this opportunity is to build on what you already know if you know something about Aboriginal people, and their struggles and culture, and if you don't, then to give the basis for you to begin your journey of understanding."

"And what you will conclude from it, without a shadow of a doubt, is that in the equation someone has been wronged."

Dr Nannup told DWER staff the RAP process is one where some will embrace it wholeheartedly, some will sit on the fence, and others will not participate at all. He stressed on a number of occasions his view that while it is important that reconciliation begins with an acceptance that there has been an injustice, RAPs are about moving forward positively and with goals in mind.

*Don't keep
history a
mystery*

"I know how difficult it is when we carry baggage, and if we burden that with more baggage, we reach a point where we become confused."

"Please don't take on any more baggage, just remember we've got an opportunity to go to the future, and that has to be our ultimate aim, is to focus on that future, and as we focus on it, it will bring us the joy that we need to balance—a problem shared is a problem halved."

Enforcing the core principle of Respect, and increasing staff awareness of Aboriginal histories and cultures, Dr Nannup said his experience in western education is that when people have difficulty with the concept of truth, then the best way to address the gap in knowledge is to deal with facts, and that the Aboriginal worldview is not fable, but instead, full of facts.

As an example he used the fact of how his ancestors deliberately propagated local grass for seeds as a food source, against the myth that Aboriginal people lacked an approach to food propagation or the concepts of agriculture and food production.

"We baked our first loaf of bread 38,000 years before any other modern culture, and that is a fact." Dr Nannup said teaching the fundamentals or the 'facts' of Aboriginal society is for the...ie. important reconciliation process.

On my learning journey, I went away and thought 'what is the best thing I can tell people about Aboriginal people, so that they can begin to understand?'

"What I concluded was—how we used the land, how we as people existed on that land, what did we have to control the use of the land, and how we were able to eke out an existence over a very long period of time. How did we govern ourselves to exist in a space like that for as long as we did, without imploding? We have to give thought to this if we are going to truly understand."

Dr Nannup said there are fundamental concepts that he believes everyone should become familiar with as a starting point when learning about Noongar society and cosmology. The first was the concept of the six seasons, and how it directed the movement of Noongars through time and across the land.

Other concepts he shared were the highly developed social order starting with the Noongar moiety or 'skin' system that controls marriage and other social relationships between clans, and the totemic system that links the birth of individuals

to nature, and the merging of spirit and land into nature during the dreamtime.

"When you are born your grandmother has a dream, and she dreams her granddaughter is going to have a child, and that child comes through that dream from a certain location in the landscape, and that landscape just happens to be along the six seasons' cycle."

Dr Nannup said the Reconciliation Action Plan is a discussion—a way of changing the way we think—and RAPs are like little fires: "they will get stronger and stronger and they overlap one day."

"Each and every one of us is caught in a transition stage, a transition from not knowing, to being able to embrace each other, and work together, in total. Reconciliation Action Plans, when they are in place, they have a goal that has to be achieved...and we have to do that collectively."



**Executive Director Corporate Services
Geoff Gilbert and Dr Noel Nannup**



Professor Colleen Hayward AM

NAIDOC Week address

The department invited Professor Colleen Hayward to present the annual NAIDOC Week address to staff. Under the core principle of Respect the past and current departments have used the NAIDOC Week address to foster greater understanding and awareness of the viewpoints of Aboriginal people regarding the past, the present and the future, so as to foster a more culturally aware and sensitive workplace.

Introduction and Welcome to Country was from Rose Walley on behalf of the Whadjuk Noongar people. Rose explained how important this practice is as a sign of respect for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

"It's an ancient protocol that is still practised today, and it's about respecting each other's boundaries. You don't just walk in. It's like walking in to someone's house, when you walk in you knock on the door, they sit you in a safe place, they don't invite you in to their rooms, because to you that is sacred, and the same applies to Noongar people, we have our own sacred places that the Custodians know where they are, so when one moves through a country, they need to be invited by the Custodian."

Professor Hayward introduced herself as a member of the Goreng (Koreng) clan of the Noongar Nation centred around the modern day area of Katanning, Gnowangerup and Broomehill.

"We are freshwater people and many of us have birds as our totems, mine is the white cockatoo."

"For those of you who know about totems, or even have one of your own, they tend to pick us rather than the other way around, they speak to our character in some way – so what may you ask does being aligned to the white cockatoo say about my character?"

"Well if you've ever spent time in the wheatbelt or some other country areas, you may have observed the habits of these creatures."

"They are the ones that when other creatures are quietly drinking or otherwise going about their business, simply interrupt with their own priorities."

"They are a bit bossy, and certainly noisy in the process as they push their way to the front of the queue. I prefer to talk about that in terms of knowing one's mind, and being brave enough to speak it."

Because of Her, We Can

Professor Hayward shared her views on the importance of the connections between mothers and daughters and the land.

"The link to country enables us all."

Like many Aboriginal people with shared cultural backgrounds, Professor Hayward explained that because her mother was not Aboriginal, her maternal links to Aboriginality are through her father's mother, her paternal grandmother. Professor Hayward shared that her grandmother was part of a generation of women that fully observed Traditional relationships such as directed by familial 'skin' groupings, but also understood that their children and grandchildren needed to be educated in the ways of the new world.

"Like too many others of her era, she faced the hardships that came with living on a reserve—areas of land generally outside the particular town boundary where there was no power and no main water supply."

"They were a strong bunch the women of that generation. They recognised and acted upon the imperative of educating their children, not only in the old ways, but in the new ways as well."

"This meant that my father was sent to school, even though it was at a time when most other Aboriginal people were denied an education in the western sense."

"He went on to become the first formally trained Aboriginal teacher in the State and then the State's first Aboriginal school principal."

Professor Hayward shared how she was guided by positive gender role models in her parents, with both overcoming adversity in their pursuit as educators – her father overcoming racial barriers and her mother overcoming sexist barriers prevalent at the time – and who as a couple had faced bias from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia for their cross-cultural marriage.

"They were extremely strict in ensuring we children were brought up in an environment that was very protected and safe—some of this was protection and safety from the racism that they faced, other aspects were protection and safety from the violence and abuse that had become prevalent in the Aboriginal society, still other aspects were protection and safety from the discriminatory practices that were the policies of the governments of the day."

"Because so much of my father's upbringing was by the women of his family, my father grew up respecting women and our abilities."

"In times when Aboriginal people were generally discriminated against and offered less in terms of education and other life chances, he did not treat my sisters and me differently to my brothers."



Rose Walley with staff (left to right) Humera Blakers, Siobhan O'Hara and Joseph Mateljak NAIDOC Week 2018.

"My schooling happened at a time when Aboriginal children were still being removed from their families under government policies that saw people from the welfare visit and check on us on a regular basis. I should remind you that mum and dad were both university trained, both professionals, and still as kids, I can remember the monthly visits."

"We went to the primary school where dad taught and at a time when lots of other Aboriginal children were not allowed to even attend school."

Professor Hayward described the challenges she and other women went through in gaining tertiary education opportunities, and then in the workplace, including the fight for equal opportunity, equal pay and respect for women's rights in the workplace, and the foundation that her family upbringing and education provided.

"Mum and dad both used to say that education was the foundation for everything in life—it ensures chances that you would not otherwise get. How right they were. I am so thankful that they had that view. I know every day of my life that I would not, could not, have done even half of what I have done in my life without that wisdom."

"I am also thankful that other Aboriginal families are now seeing the benefit of that foresight and vision. From each of my parents I learnt that barriers in life are generally those that we set for ourselves. That is not to say that life will be easy, but that we shouldn't set our sights low, that we should never

consider accepting second best, and that it is okay to challenge whatever might seem unacceptable, including if such things are the norms of the time."

"And so to now. You no doubt know that Aboriginal people do not present favourably against any indicator we might use to measure the status or development of a society—in this case the Australian society. This applies to health, housing, education, employment, social economic status. As a generalisation, we are born less healthy, live more poorly, are more likely to spend time in incarceration, and then die younger than the broader Australian population."

Professor Hayward detailed the impacts of this on early childhood health and development, and pressures on Aboriginal families to overcome the 'gap' illustrated by the standing of Aboriginal people on the Human Development Index.

"In terms of that index, Australia as a general population is currently ranked in the top four in the world, something that when we hear it almost automatically instils in us a sense of pride. That is until you hear that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations are assessed separately from the rest of the Australian population, our ranking is 103."

"This is part of what is meant when people talk about lessening the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes."



Professor Hayward ended with her vision for a better future for Aboriginal people, women and wider Australian society. This included a greater incorporation of the Aboriginal cultural viewpoint into Australian culture starting out with respect for land and sacred places, and re-invigoration and greater recognition of Aboriginal language and culture.

"I see the added recognition and appreciation of our diversity as nations of people. I see this applying to those of us who might not obviously look to be Aboriginal, like all the blonde haired, pale-skinned next generations of my own family. I see a recognition of our symbols, such as our flag and our colours, and an unquestioning understanding that our cultures like everyone's, are living evolving things, not static in time and not expected to be so."

"There will be a sense of enduring growth, a real promise of a positive and rewarding future, and there will be pride, for Aboriginal people in our Aboriginality, and for non-Aboriginal people for becoming part of a nation state that has found its true place based on tens of thousands of years of history and culture."



RAP in the workplace

Relationships

Jawun secondment



Jawun is an organisation that achieves progress through a partnership model which emphasises working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples rather than simply providing services to them.

It provides the opportunity for corporate and government professionals to be seconded to work in Aboriginal organisations, where they experience cultural-awareness as well as help provide capacity for the organisations to achieve their own goals.

The Western Australia Public Sector Commission partners with Jawun to provide government secondees to its programs.

DWER employees Lydia Kirke and Josephine Searle have both represented the WA public sector in this program, working out of Broome in the Kimberley region.

Lydia has a legal and legislative background, and was seconded in 2015 to work with Aarnja Ltd, a Kimberley Aboriginal membership organisation that works with governments, business and communities to create innovative and sustainable

opportunities that empower Kimberley Aboriginal people. Aarnja is working with Aboriginal leaders, communities and organisations on the State Government's Regional Services Reform project.

Josephine is a hydrogeologist, and was seconded in 2018 to the Land and Sea Unit of Nyamba Buru Yawuru (NBY) Ltd, a not-for-profit company owned by the Yawuru Native Title holders through their corporate group structure.

NBY has the responsibility to generate income from Yawuru's land, community, social and cultural capital and is a key driver in the local economy, playing a leadership role in partnership with industry, and local and state government, to transform the Broome and Kimberley economy based on investments in beef, tourism and agriculture.

Both Lydia and Josephine provided their expertise to their hosts during the secondment.

In return, they were provided with a life-changing experience and informed insight into the challenges facing these Aboriginal organisations.

Lydia and Josephine have brought this understanding back to our organisation for the benefit of the department, as well as its stakeholders. Lydia said one of the highlights of her secondment was attending a Kimberley Futures meeting.

“Aboriginal leaders from across the Kimberley gather for this meeting and being able to meet and spend time with so many engaging, passionate and knowledgeable leaders provided an invaluable insight into contemporary Aboriginal culture in the Kimberley.”

Josephine said her secondment has deepened her awareness of the links between culture, heritage and the environment that the Yawuru people have.

“This awareness can be incorporated into the ecological and water resource assessments carried out by the department, and reinforces our organisational goal of including Traditional knowledge and values in our water and environmental management.”



As a field scientist working with water resources and water dependant ecosystems, Josephine said she was fascinated and impressed by the quantity and diversity of environmental related work this, and many other Aboriginal ranger groups and organisations, work on simultaneously.

“By bringing this knowledge back into DWER, we are better able to understand the competing demands on our Aboriginal stakeholders, and ensure we plan and adapt accordingly.”

Josephine has maintained her relationship with Yawuru by committing to involvement in their Technical Advisory Group.

Lydia and Josephine are both strong advocates within our organisation for raising cultural awareness, and continue their contribution to reconciliation through work on the Reconciliation Action Plan, and representing DWER on various government and industry committees involving Aboriginal engagement and policy development.



RAP in the field

Ranger Partnerships



Field work provides opportunities to learn and work together

The department's work with Aboriginal ranger groups in northern WA is contributing to reconciliation by improving trust and understanding, fostering respect, as well as providing capacity building and some employment opportunities for ranger groups.

DWER conduct water resource assessments across the State, to provide appropriate scientific information to manage WA's water resources sustainably.

This work includes investigation and monitoring of groundwater, surface water and ecological systems. Current DWER projects spread across northern WA cover the Traditional lands of the Karajarri, Yawuru, Gooniyandi, Nyangumarta, Nyikina Mangala and Walmajarri People.

The department's engagement with rangers in this work recognises that Traditional Owners have a long-standing and ongoing association with water, which is also intrinsically linked to spiritual beliefs and cultural practices. The Aboriginal obligation to look after country has strong alignment with the department's mission to sustainably manage and protect water and the environment. It also recognises that Aboriginal rangers are qualified natural resource managers that have been established to extend this Traditional obligation into contemporary natural resource management frameworks led by government and NGOs. With this perpetual interest in the land and water, and appropriate skill sets, the Karajarri, Gooniyandi and Nyikina Mangala rangers and Yawuru Country Managers were perfectly placed to both advise our project teams as well as carry out work 'on country'. Paid work from the government supports ranger groups' independence and self-sufficiency as well as providing jobs and income for individuals from the community. It also provides the opportunity

for field training and an exchange of knowledge between the scientific approaches to managing water and the practices of the Traditional Owners.

“One of the most significant benefits to working with Traditional Owner ranger groups, is the extra pair of hands we get with the field work,” according to hydrogeologist Jo Searle, who has worked on a number of field based projects with local Aboriginal assistance in the north west.

“It’s a great chance to engage with the local community, and build understanding and trust.”

“DWER and the Traditional Owners we’ve worked with have a shared desire to see water resources managed effectively, and by working together we’ve built an understanding that both parties have knowledge to contribute.”

Environmental water planning officer Michelle Antao has also worked on a number of field-based projects in the north west including coordination of ecological field work for the La Grange groundwater plan, employing and working alongside Karajarri and Yawuru rangers to select appropriate wetland and vegetation sites, measure and record various data on vegetation health and distribution, and collect groundwater and soil samples from the water table.

“Working with Karajarri Rangers and Yawuru Country Managers provided otherwise unattainable knowledge about ‘country’, as well as health and safety benefits for us,” Michelle said.

“These projects are in remote, inaccessible and unsurveyed areas, and in these situations ranger local knowledge on location of groundwater dependent ecosystems, and how to access them, has been instrumental in ensuring the success of the project and the safety of field staff.”

Department staff have also played their part supporting work under the Commonwealth funded National Environmental Science Programme (NESP) in the Fitzroy catchment, where research agreements have been made with Native Title Prescribed Body Corporates (PBCs) for environmental and cultural

water requirements projects on the Fitzroy River.

Environmental water planning officer Robyn Loomes says of her work alongside the rangers and Traditional Owners of the Gooniyandi and Nyikina-Mangala people, and Yi-Martuwarra Traditional Owners: “I have been lucky enough to accompany NESP on most of their field trips to date, including camping out on-country a couple of times.

“Work involves selecting appropriate, often remote, river pools and off-channel wetlands of the Fitzroy and the Margaret rivers, to undertake fish and vegetation surveys and sampling to support the first ever Fitzroy Water Allocation Plan.”

“This involves a lot of serious four-wheel driving in areas we could not have accessed or even found on our own, where rangers and Aboriginal locals help teach us how to drive safely on deep river sands without getting bogged.”

All of our field scientists working with Aboriginal rangers and Traditional Owners in the North West region agree that meaningful engagement that transforms into mutually beneficial long-term partnerships is essential to improved environmental outcomes that support Aboriginal cultural connection and obligations in regard to water resources and water dependant ecosystems.



RAP in action

Respect and Opportunities

Training and culture combine for Noongar waterways values work

A desire for the Regional Estuaries Initiative (REI) to incorporate Aboriginal values into their website, and a Public Sector Commission training program placement in the department's Corporate Communications Branch, were combined to produce a department first project finding Noongar names and values for key estuaries of the south west.

The department's External Affairs Manager Peter Collins worked with Noongar PSC trainee Kiara Clark-Indich to provide a training opportunity for her to learn research and publication techniques, while engaging with her Noongar culture on this important job embodying respect for and incorporation of Aboriginal values into estuary protection work.

The task was to work with Traditional Custodians to identify key values for six estuaries—Peel-Harvey, Leschenault, Vasse Wonnerup, Hardy Inlet, Wilson Inlet, and Oyster Harbour—crossing several boundaries of tribes and clans of the Noongar nation.

Work included a literature review of language reports, cultural surveys and existing libraries of information. It then involved identifying and engaging appropriate people and groups to agree to work on this for incorporation to the website.

The local Custodians of the stories for the Peel-Harvey estuary were Kiara's Binjareb Noongar family, which bought an extra element of connection—and cultural negotiation and navigation—to the process, with Kiara working with her Uncle George Walley for a great end result for all parties.





With three of the REI estuaries—Leschenault, Vasse Wonnerup and Hardy Inlet—in Wadandi Noongar areas, the literature review and research led to the work of the Undalup Association and its Wadandi Traditional Custodians Iszaac and Wayne Webb, who are well known in the Cape to Cape areas for their work in preserving and sharing local Aboriginal culture and traditions.

The relationship built with the Webbs assisted with the Wilson Inlet values, where the Webb's Pibulman connections to country had seen them already working with neighbouring Menang and Pibulman Custodians from the south coast area on standardising naming and spelling for features in the area around Denmark. Menang Elder Vernice Gillies of the Albany Heritage Reference Group Aboriginal Corporation and who works at the WA Museum Albany, guided the project on the Oyster Harbour names and values.

As Dr Nannup and Professor Hayward both stressed to the department's staff in the NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week addresses - the benefits of education to enable greater recognition and incorporation of Noongar values into all aspects of our life, is essential.

With this in mind, it was a great result of this project that Kiara was inspired to take up units at Curtin

University that will provide her with more research and writing skills in the future.

Kiara says of her experience working on the project: "Before commencing my research, I didn't know what to expect and how much time and effort would be needed to capture all the relevant information."

"I also didn't realise how much of a desire I had to want to learn more about my culture."

"Being part of this project made me want to further educate myself, so I took the steps needed and am now majoring in Public Relations and Anthropology, as I do not want to limit myself."

Peter said the general feeling from everyone who had been involved in the project was that there was a real hunger for this type of information.

"This is of interest to many people and by doing this work we are recognising that Noongar people here in Western Australia are a living culture with a history that has obviously been very involved with the environment and its ecology."



“Work like this helps break the ugly cycle of the devaluing of the rich information provided by Aboriginal people which is often taken and used without any recognition of its source, or respect of its origins.”

The project learnings of respect and partnership were incorporated in the project methodology to balance the needs of the department and the need to follow a process that is respectful to both the past and the present, and that also takes into account work that may be taking place among Noongar people with differing and joint connection to areas.

“People want to know more, and Noongar people have a lot of information to share, and under the right circumstances, want to share that information, and enjoy the collaborative process of working together to bring it out in language other than Noongar, which is something that we bought to the process, bringing about a two-way-exchange,” Peter said.



It was also rewarding to see Kiara’s professional development in communications intersecting with her cultural heritage, and working with her to support that and achieve learning outcomes as well as a great result bringing together respect, partnerships and opportunity.

The fact that the RAP is active in the previous and current department has provided the confidence for projects like this to be attempted and supported.

“We approached this carefully to ensure we fitted in as best as we could with the work that Noongar people are doing in this field. It was a great learning experience for all of us and a general consensus that we would all like to work together in the future to do more of this.”



Noongar Nation Kaadadjan

The Noongar Nation is made up of 14 tribal language groups and the traditional lands of these groups combined takes in the south west corner of Western Australia, ranging from Geraldton to Albany, and inland from Mullewa to Esperance. More than 80 per cent of the State's population lives in traditional Noongar country.

The department's head office is in the traditional lands of the Whadjuk Noongar people.

Noongar Elder Professor Noel Nannup expressed to DWER staff the importance as a stage of reconciliation to become familiar with, and understand, fundamental concepts of Noongar culture, such as the concept of the Six Seasons, and how it directed the movement of Noongars through time and across the land.

This description of the Six Seasons was put together by Bindjareb Noongar Kaadadjan (knowledge) leader George Walley for use in educating DWER staff and our stakeholders about the Six Seasons, and is also directly relevant to Bindjareb Noongar values for the Peel-Harvey Estuary.

Six Seasons



Birak (December - January)

Birak is the warm time and getting hotter. The waterways have reached their peak and begin to subside through evaporation. The karil (blue manna crabs) are nearly at the right size and the kaarda (race horse goanna) have hatched and growing as they move away from their home. People enjoy the warmer weather around the waterways with marine foods and swimming.



Boonaroo (February - March)

Boonaroo is the hottest time of the seasons. People stay close to the waterways to keep cool and for the marine foods. The karil are the right size and plentiful, the kaarda are hunted as well as the yongka (kangaroo) and wetj (emu).



Djeran (April - May)

Djeran is still hot there are noticeable cooler changes in the weather and preparations are made to remake the winter shelters including the bibol (paper bark tree) bark for both the flooring and the roof. The salmon schools swim along the coast and people enjoy the beach camping and reef spear fishing to feed families.



Makaroo (June - July)

Makaroo is the time when the rain comes with the southerlies and some people stay on the (kwongan) plain and some families go to the Kaada Moornda (darkened hills known as the Darling Range). It is the time where the waterways become replenished and the coastal plain and hills are soaked which benefits plants and animals. It is time to take the bountiful supply of swan and duck eggs. After mating maali (swans) moult and become flightless for some weeks which make them vulnerable.



Djilba (August - September)

Djilba is the second cold time with continued rains. The regeneration and new growth begin which continues into later seasons. It is a time where the land is refreshed and flowering plants begin to show their colours. People commence their coming back into the kwongan to experience a very wet coastal plain with rivers overflowing into the large swamp areas.



Kamarang (October - November)

The land is a visual explosion of colours from plants, and animal new births continues into the warmer seasons. The weather is warming up to have more drier days. People enjoy the abundance of plant regeneration and animal abundance. The consistent warmer weather turns the land grasses to a beige of dryness but people take advantage of the warmer season and the bounty of bush foods and bush medicines.

**George Walley, Bindjareb Noongar Kaadadjan Leader
January 2019**

OUR RAP COMMITMENTS



RELATIONSHIPS

We recognise that we can do better in engaging with Aboriginal people.

We recognise the importance of the natural world to Aboriginal people and their cultures.

We accept that given the First Peoples' extensive history and connection to the Australian continent, we can learn considerably more about managing the land, air and water by involving appropriate Aboriginal people and views in that work. We need to develop and share values that are consistent with each other by working together to build trust and make a difference.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
The RAP Working Group (RWG) actively monitors the development and implementation of the RAP actions, tracking progress and reporting.	RWG oversees the development, endorsement and launch of the RAP.	May 2019	Chief Human Resources Officer & RWG Chair
	Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented on the RWG.	May 2019 May 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer & RWG Chair
	Meet at least twice per year to monitor and report on RAP implementation.	June 2019 January 2020 June 2020, January 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer & RWG Chair
	Establish Terms of Reference for the RWG.	July 2019	Chief Human Resources Officer & RWG Chair
Celebrate and participate in National Reconciliation Week (NRW) by providing opportunities to build and maintain relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.	Organise at least one formal department organised NRW event each year.	May 2019 May 2020 May 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer & RWG chair
	Register all NRW events via Reconciliation Australia's NRW website.	May 2019 May 2020 May 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer & RWG Chair
	Support an external NRW event.	May 2019 May 2020 May 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer & RWG Chair
	Ensure our RAP Working Group participates in an external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.	May 2019 May 2020 May 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer & RWG Chair
Develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations to support positive outcomes.	Enter into an agency-wide standard heritage agreement between DWER and Noongar agreement groups consistent with the combined South West settlement agreement developed by the Department of Premier and Cabinet.	May 2020	Director General
	Seek to develop similar agreements with all Aboriginal groups we work with.	May 2021	Director General

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
	Form a Water and Environment Aboriginal Advisory Group to provide advice on strategic, operational and regulatory matters.	June 2019	Director General
	Encourage and support regional staff to maintain ongoing connections with our Aboriginal stakeholders.	May 2020	Director General
	Support through advice to government the provision of high quality water and sewerage services for remote Aboriginal Communities.	May 2020	Director General
	Develop and implement an engagement plan to work with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.	December 2020	Director General and Executive Director Strategy and Engagement
	Meet with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement.	May 2021	RWG Chair
Raise internal and external awareness of our RAP to promote reconciliation across our business and sector.	Develop and implement a communications plan to support implementation of the RAP.	August 2019	Manager Communications
	Promote reconciliation through ongoing active engagement with all stakeholders.	May 2021	Director General RWG Chair
Engage with Aboriginal peoples and groups to ensure that a holistic approach to water and environmental stewardship occurs.	Increase engagement and participation of Aboriginal peoples into stewardship of land and water.	May 2021	Executive Director Science and Planning
	Develop and implement a process for including Aboriginal peoples, values and perspectives into our science and management of land and water.	May 2021	Executive Director Science and Planning



RESPECT

We recognise the need to move with the national initiative to promote a greater understanding and respect of the cultures and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their knowledge and relationship to the Australian natural environment we work in. We recognise the need to work with Aboriginal peoples to use their knowledge and understanding to shape better water resource and environmental management outcomes. By seeking and recognising the input from Aboriginal peoples, we show our respect for the past, the present and the future.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Engage employees in continuous cultural learning opportunities to increase understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements.	Provide ongoing regionally specific cultural awareness training opportunities for staff with recognised Aboriginal service providers.	July 2019 January 2020 July 2020 January 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Ensure aligned education resources are available for staff pre and post training including suitable online training modules.	July 2019 January 2020 July 2020 January 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Seek, endorse and encourage staff to pursue external cultural learning opportunities.	July 2019 January 2020 July 2020 January 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training strategy for our staff which defines cultural learning needs of employees in all areas of our business and considers various ways cultural learning can be provided (online, face to face or cultural immersion).	July 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Investigate opportunities to work with local Traditional Owners and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultants to develop cultural awareness training.	January 2020 July 2020 January 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Provide opportunities for RWG members, RAP Champions, HR Managers and other key leadership staff to participate in cultural training.	January 2020 July 2020 January 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and rights within DWER.	Include Noongar cultural advice and artwork into the design and operation of the new DWER office Prime House in Joondalup.	July 2019	Executive Director Corporate Services
	Identify linkages with heritage and cultural legislation in drafting of new water resources management bill and review of the Environmental Protection Act 1986.	May 2020	Executive Director Strategic Policy

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Engage employees in understanding the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols, such as Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, to ensure there is a shared meaning.	Include an Acknowledgement of Country at all key staff events and key external events managed by DWER.	July 2020	Manager Communications and RWG Chair
	Ensure Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country guidelines are updated, well known and available to all staff.	July 2019 July 2020	Manager Communications and RWG Chair
	Ensure managers and staff are made aware of cultural and bereavement leave access under the Public Sector General Agreement and support Aboriginal staff members in attending cultural and bereavement events.	July 2019 July 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Develop a list of key contacts for organising a Welcome to Country and maintaining respectful partnerships.	May 2020 May 2021	Manager Communications and RWG Chair
	Invite a Traditional Owner to provide a Welcome to Country at significant events, including NAIDOC Week.	July 2019 July 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to engage with their culture and communities by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	Review HR policies and procedures to ensure there are no barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week.	May 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer
	Provide opportunities for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to participate with their cultures and communities during NAIDOC Week.	July 2019 July 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer



OPPORTUNITIES

We have offices based in the regions, and our staff during the course of duties for the department work in areas that are in the Traditional lands of Aboriginal tribes, where Aboriginal groups and people may also hold Native Title and other rights.

We engage with communities when we investigate, manage and monitor water resources, and for providing environmental approvals.

We have a number of procurement contracts in the regions to undertake works that can utilise local work/business interests including Aboriginal people, organisations and enterprises.

We can proactively seek engagement of Aboriginal groups and businesses to help develop programs for managing the environment and water resources.

We can engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses in delivering services to the department under the Aboriginal Procurement Policy.

We strive to utilise local Aboriginal knowledge and experience to support, guide and educate our staff while they are undertaking work on Traditional country, particularly in remote wilderness areas.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Investigate opportunities to improve and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes within our workplace.	Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Retention Strategy, including expanding opportunities to engage Aboriginal rangers in our work.	December 2019	Chief Human Resources Officer
	Engage with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to consult on employment strategies, including professional development.	June 2019 January 2020 June 2020 January 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Review HR and recruitment procedures and policies to ensure there are no barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and future applicants participating in our workplace.	June 2019 January 2020 June 2020 January 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Collect information on current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to inform future employment opportunities.	June 2019 January 2020 June 2020 January 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Advertise vacancies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media.	June 2019 January 2020 June 2020 January 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Recruit an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RAP coordinator.	July 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Investigate opportunities to improve and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes within our workplace.	Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to participate and /or develop professional mentoring networks.	June 2019 June 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Develop a cultural mentoring network for existing staff and managers.	June 2019 June 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
Utilise opportunities to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity within the organisation.	Implement State based policy on procurement for goods and services from Aboriginal businesses and regularly report on procurement from Aboriginal businesses.	June 2019 January 2020 June 2020 January 2021	Executive Director Corporate Services
	Develop and communicate to staff a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses that can be used to procure goods and services.	June 2019 January 2020 June 2020 January 2021	Executive Director Corporate Services and RWG Chair
	Develop at least one commercial relationship with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander owned business.	December 2019	Executive Director Corporate Services and RWG Chair
	Investigate Supply Nation membership or equivalent service.	December 2019	Executive Director Corporate Services and RWG Chair
Investigate opportunities to support the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.	Investigate opportunities for community philanthropy such as scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	June 2019 June 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair



GOVERNANCE, TRACKING PROGRESS AND REPORTING

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Report RAP achievements, challenges and learning to Reconciliation Australia.	Complete and submit the RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia annually.	30 September 2019 30 September 2020	RWG Chair
	Investigate participating in the RAP Barometer.	May 2020	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
	Develop and implement systems and capability needs to track, measure and report on RAP activities.	May 2021	Chief Human Resources Officer and RWG Chair
Report RAP achievements, challenges and learning internally and externally.	Publically report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings and build into our communications plan.	December 2019 December 2020	Executive Director Strategy and Engagement Manager Communications
Review, refresh and update RAP.	Liaise with RAP working group and Reconciliation Australia to develop a new RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements.	November 2020	RWG Chair
	Send draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for review and feedback.	December 2020	RWG Chair
	Submit draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal endorsement.	April 2021	RWG Chair

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RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN
INNOVATE

CONTACT DETAILS

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**CULTURAL CREATIVE
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