



Department of **Water and
Environmental Regulation**



**RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN**

INNOVATE

RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

August 2022 to August 2024

LEARNINGS,
CHALLENGES AND
ACHIEVEMENTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Department of Water and Environment Regulation (the department) acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which we live and work throughout Western Australia and pay our respects to Elders past and present. The department recognises the practice of intergenerational care for Country and its relevance to our work and working with the community.

The department continues to move forward with a shared commitment to protect and conserve Country for our future generations.

Country is a term used by Aboriginal people to describe the lands, waterways, and seas to which they are intrinsically linked. The Acknowledgement of Country has been endorsed by the Yarning Circle and approved by the Aboriginal Empowerment Board.

ARTWORK AND DESIGN

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Paige Corunna, a Whadjuk Noongar woman with Wajarri Yamatji and Palyku ancestral connections, was the talented lead artist behind the artwork contained in the Reconciliation Action Report (RAP) and this document. Paige produced this work, aged 19, while working in our Corporate Communications branch as part of the WA Public Sector Commission's Aboriginal Traineeship Program.



Paige says: "This artwork showcases the 'Journey to Reconciliation'. The colourful circles represent some of the pathways to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – unity, listening, learning, communication, respect, opportunities and meaningful relationships. The white circles represents the different turning points through the journey: recognising the journey to reconciliation – understanding the journey to reconciliation, and – committing to the journey to reconciliation."

Paige now works for the Queensland Government, helping preparations for the 2032 Brisbane Olympics as Executive Correspondence Officer for the Games Venue and Legacy Delivery Authority.

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July 2025

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Acknowledgements

For more information about this report, contact Senior Manager Aboriginal Engagement and Partnerships – Jillian Collard

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A Note on Language Use

In this document, we respectfully refer to both **First Nations people** and **Aboriginal people**, recognising the diversity and cultural significance of these identities.

The term **Aboriginal people** is used in recognition of the First Peoples and original inhabitants of Western Australia. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples together make up the First Nations of Australia, we acknowledge that **Torres Strait Islander people living in Western Australia have distinct cultures, identities, and histories.**

While this document primarily focuses on **Aboriginal people in Western Australia**, including those who also identify as Torres Strait Islander, we acknowledge and honour the contributions of **Torres Strait Islander peoples** to Western Australia’s society, economy, and communities. The principles and strategic directions outlined may also be relevant to Torres Strait Islander peoples, and this is acknowledged throughout as **First Nations people**.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (the department) proudly presents this report as a reflection of its ongoing journey towards reconciliation with First Nations people. This journey, guided by the department's Innovate Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) for 2019-21 and 2022-24, is rooted in a deep respect for Country, culture and community.

Reconciliation is not a destination but a continuous path of learning, listening and partnership. The department's commitment to reconciliation is grounded in the belief that environmental stewardship and cultural respect are intrinsically linked. The department acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across WA and recognises their enduring connection to Country. Through its RAPs, the department has sought to embed reconciliation into the heart of its operations - across governance, policy, workforce and community engagement.

This report outlines the department's achievements across three key pillars: relationships, respect and opportunities. It highlights the establishment of the Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group (AWEAG), the implementation of cultural learning frameworks, and the development of employment and procurement strategies that support First Nations peoples.

Key milestones include:

- The launch of the department's first and second Innovate RAPs.
- The creation of culturally safe spaces and learning opportunities for staff.
- Strategic partnerships with Aboriginal ranger groups and Traditional Owners.
- Membership with Supply Nation to support Aboriginal businesses.
- The integration of Aboriginal knowledge into water and environmental planning.

While progress has been made, the department acknowledges the challenges faced - particularly in meeting employment targets and ensuring sustained genuine engagement. These experiences have provided valuable lessons and reaffirmed the importance of Aboriginal-led processes, cultural safety, and long-term relationship building.

Looking ahead, the department remains committed to walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with humility, curiosity, integrity and purpose. This report is both a reflection and a reaffirmation: that reconciliation is a shared responsibility, and that together, we can build a future where Country is cared for, cultures are celebrated, and communities thrive.



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

As the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's head office is in Joondalup, on Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar, I would like to say "kaya" ("hello") and thank you for taking the time to read this final report on our second Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

I am committed to walking together with our state's Aboriginal peoples. I stand in solidarity with them and recognise the importance of collective responsibility and accountability towards reconciliation.

I am delighted that we have completed 90 per cent of the commitments we made when we launched this RAP in August 2022 under my predecessor Michelle Andrews. Thank you to everyone, within and outside our department, who worked hard to contribute to this.

The final 10 per cent uncompleted RAP commitments are still priorities for us including increasing Aboriginal employment in our agency to achieve 3.4 per cent workforce representation.

In late 2024 I was pleased to announce that we had made two additional Aboriginal senior leadership appointments to the new roles of Senior Aboriginal Advisor Approvals and Senior Aboriginal Advisor Climate and Sustainability. They bring fresh, welcome perspectives to the work we do protecting our environment and water resources and embedding the closing the gap outcomes in our ways of working.

I am proud to chair our department's Aboriginal Empowerment Board, which is made up of our Corporate Executive, key senior leadership roles and Aboriginal staff. It oversees the delivery of our reconciliation outcomes and guides our commitment and vision for ongoing reconciliation and the engagement and empowerment of Aboriginal peoples and communities through our business activities.

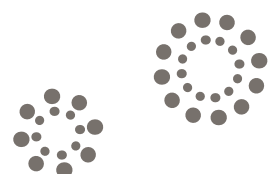
Of course, the end of this Innovate RAP does not mean that our reconciliation work is finished.

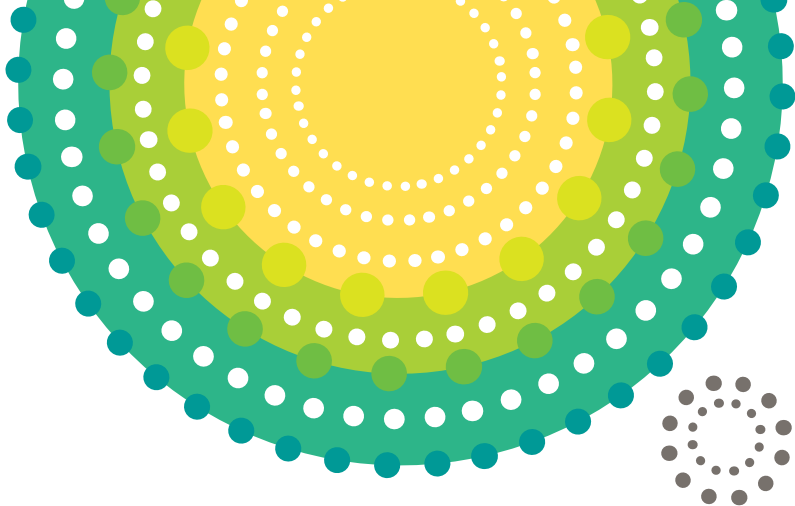
We are committed to delivering our projects and services in alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the state's *Closing the Gap Jurisdictional Implementation Plan 2023-2025 and Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy*.

We are focused on ongoing collaboration with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal businesses through Indigenous Land Use Agreements, and in this report the you will read of the progress we have made here with South West Regional Corporations, the Yamatji Nation and the Tjiwarl people.

As an organisation, we embrace our commitment to actively engage in reconciliation efforts and I look forward to helping guide our agency as we do this.

Alistair Jones
Director General





MESSAGE FROM SENIOR ABORIGINAL LEADER

As a proud Whadjuk, Ballardong, Wilmen Woman of the Noongar Nation, it has been an honour to walk alongside the department on its reconciliation journey. I pay my deepest respects to my Elders past and present, and to all First Nations people across this land. On Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar - where I live and work - I acknowledge the enduring strength, wisdom, and resilience of our people, who have cared for Country and waterways for tens of thousands of years.

Reconciliation is not a destination - it is a shared responsibility and a lifelong journey. It calls on all Australians to walk together with courage, open hearts and minds, to listen, to learn and to act. The year 2023 was a challenging one for our mob, reminding us of the importance of unity, truth-telling, and cultural strength in the face of adversity.

The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program provides a powerful framework for organisations to reflect, grow and lead. It encourages us to embed reconciliation through relationships, respect and opportunities - principles that are essential to creating meaningful and lasting change.

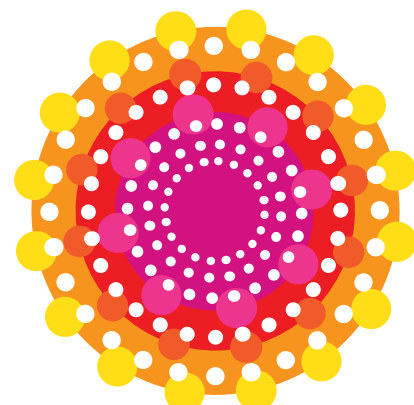
As we look ahead, we recognise the need to do things differently. We are entering a new chapter - one that aligns our reconciliation efforts with the broader priorities of the Western Australian Government, including the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the WA Government Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy. This alignment ensures that our work is not only meaningful within our department, but contributes to systemic change across government.

We are committed to transforming the way we work - to centre Aboriginal voices in decision-making, to embed cultural knowledge systems in our policies and programs, and to deliver outcomes that reflect the aspirations of First Nations people. This is about leading with cultural integrity, acting with accountability, and ensuring that our actions today shape a better, more inclusive future for generations to come.

As we move forward on this next chapter of our reconciliation journey, I invite you to join us. Let's walk together with strong purpose and compassion, to create lasting change and a future where our children and grandchildren can thrive - strong in culture, proud in identity, and connected to Country.

Gnalla moort, gnalla boordiya, gnalla katitjin.
(Our people, our authority, our knowledge.)

Jillian Collard





OUR COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION

The department demonstrates a heartfelt and evolving commitment to reconciliation, grounded in respect, partnership and shared responsibility. Across both its 2019-21 and 2022-24 RAPs, the department has consistently acknowledged the deep cultural, spiritual, and historical connections that First Nations people have with Country, and the vital role these connections play in environmental stewardship.

The department's reconciliation journey is not just a policy – it is a living, breathing commitment to walk alongside Aboriginal communities, to listen deeply and to act meaningfully. The department's vision is clear: to build a future where First Nations people are empowered, respected, and meaningfully included in all aspects of environmental and water resource management.

From the establishment of Aboriginal Water Environmental Advisory Group (AWEAG) to the integration of Traditional Owner knowledge in projects such as the Murujuga Rock Art Strategy and the Bindjareb Djilba Protection Plan, the department has shown that reconciliation is about more than words – it is about action, learning and shared growth.

The department's RAPs reflect a strong desire to:

- embed reconciliation into our business planning and governance structures;
- build strong, respectful partnerships with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations;
- create a culturally safe and inclusive workplace where Aboriginal voices are heard, valued and empowered;
- support Aboriginal employment, leadership and procurement through targeted strategies and partnerships, including our membership with Supply Nation;
- listen, learn and grow through cultural awareness, on-Country experiences, and community-led engagement.

Our RAP is a living commitment to change. It reflects our aspiration to be a department that leads by example, that learns from the past, and that works collaboratively to build a better future. We know that reconciliation is a shared responsibility, and we invite all our staff, stakeholders and partners to join us on this journey.

Together, we are building a future where Country is cared for, cultures are celebrated, and communities thrive.



An aerial photograph of a coastline. The top of the image shows turquoise ocean water with white surf breaking onto a sandy beach. Below the beach is a rugged, eroded landscape of red-orange earth and rock, with deep gullies and ridges. A white, cloud-like shape is superimposed on the image, containing text.

OUR RECONCILIATION VISION

The department envisions a future where First Nations peoples are respected partners in caring for Country. Our vision is to build strong, outcome-focused relationships that support cultural, social, spiritual and economic wellbeing.

We are committed to embedding Aboriginal knowledge and values into our work, creating a culturally safe and inclusive workplace, and empowering communities through genuine engagement and opportunity.

Through listening, learning and walking together, we aim to protect Country, celebrate culture, and support thriving communities across WA.



GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Strong governance and leadership are the cornerstones of the department's reconciliation journey. Our approach ensures that reconciliation is not only embedded in our strategic direction but also championed at the highest levels of the organisation.

Aboriginal Engagement and Partnerships branch

As part of the department's strengthened governance and commitment to reconciliation, the Aboriginal Engagement and Partnerships (AEP) branch was established to strategically lead and coordinate the department's approach to Aboriginal engagement, partnerships, and support for regulatory processes.

The AEP branch plays a central role in building the cultural capability and confidence of department staff to engage meaningfully with Aboriginal communities, organisations and leaders. Its work ensures that Aboriginal voices are not only heard but are actively contributing to decision-making processes across the department's operations.

A key focus of the branch is to reform and guide agency-wide engagement practices - particularly in regulatory contexts - to ensure they are culturally respectful, legally sound, and aligned with obligations under native title and Aboriginal heritage legislation. The branch is committed to developing exemplary public sector processes and guidelines that foster genuine collaboration with Aboriginal communities and uphold the principles of self-determination and cultural integrity.

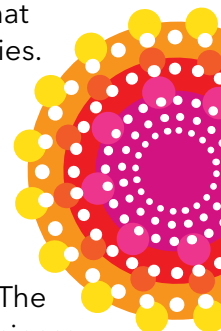
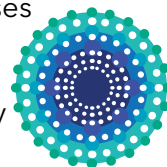
To support this, the AEP branch leads and coordinates two key governance arrangements:

- **The Aboriginal Empowerment Board (AEB):** a strategic internal mechanism that ensures Aboriginal perspectives are embedded in high-level decision-making and policy development.
- **AWEAG:** an external advisory group comprising respected Aboriginal staff and leaders from across the state, providing cultural advice and guidance on environmental and water-related matters.

Together, these structures provide a robust and culturally secure framework for engagement, ensuring that traditional knowledge, values, and aspirations are central to the department's work, and that Aboriginal people are empowered to shape outcomes that affect their Country and communities.

Role of the RAP Champion and Corporate Executive

The Director General serves as the RAP Champion, leading with cultural integrity and driving meaningful change across the department. This leadership role is critical in ensuring that reconciliation is prioritised in decision-making, resource allocation and organisational culture. The AEB provides strategic oversight and is responsible for embedding RAP commitments into business planning and performance frameworks. Their active involvement reinforces that reconciliation is a shared responsibility across all levels of leadership.





Establishment and evolution of the Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group (AWEAG)

Established in 2019, AWEAG plays a vital role in guiding the department's reconciliation efforts. Co-Chaired by the Director General and a respected Aboriginal leader, AWEAG brings together prominent Aboriginal leaders, and community representatives from across WA. The group ensures that Aboriginal knowledge, values and priorities are meaningfully incorporated into the department's strategies, policies and programs. AWEAG has become a trusted voice and a key mechanism for two-way engagement, cultural advice and accountability.

Transition from RAP Working Group to Aboriginal Empowerment Board

Recognising the need for a more strategic and streamlined governance model, the department transitioned from a traditional RAP Working Group to a formal Aboriginal Empowerment Board. This Board (Chaired by the Director General) includes Corporate Executive, Senior Aboriginal Leadership, AWEAG Co-Chair and senior representation from across the department including Aboriginal voices. The Board meets quarterly to monitor progress, address challenges, and ensure that RAP deliverables are implemented effectively. This evolution reflects the department's commitment to elevating Aboriginal leadership, embedding cultural governance, and aligning reconciliation and Closing the Gap outcomes with broader organisational and whole-of-government priorities.

Continuing to build on my leadership journey, gave me the courage to take that next step and take part in this initiative to expand my skills at the executive level. It's been an exciting opportunity that gave me the confidence to elevate, and contribute to the executive, the department and the sector. I've enjoyed my experience on the initiative and look forward to the future and continuing my leadership opportunities.

- Jillian Collard



Yarning Circle members

The Yarning Circle is a culturally safe and supportive space for Aboriginal employees across the department. It provides a trusted environment for staff to connect, share experiences, and discuss matters that are important to them – both personally and professionally.

The Yarning Circle plays a vital role in:

- **creating a culturally safe workplace** where Aboriginal staff feel respected, valued and empowered;
- **building strong connections** among Aboriginal staff and with the broader department workforce;
- **providing an Aboriginal lens** across departmental initiatives, ensuring cultural perspectives are embedded in decision-making;
- **raising and addressing workplace matters**, including human resources issues, in a culturally appropriate and supportive way;
- **supporting professional development**, offering opportunities for growth, mentoring, and leadership;
- **influencing policy and program design**, by ensuring Aboriginal voices are heard and meaningfully contribute to shaping the department's approach to Aboriginal outcomes.

The Yarning Circle is not only a space for support – it is a mechanism for influence. It ensures that Aboriginal perspectives are reflected in the department's policies, programs, and strategic direction, helping to deliver outcomes that are culturally informed, inclusive and impactful.

Women in Executive Leadership Development Experience Initiative

The appointment of Jillian Collard to the new role of Director Aboriginal Engagement and Partnerships reflects the department's priorities of greater inclusion of First Nations Australians and women in leadership roles. It was announced during Reconciliation Week, on 29 May 2023, that Jillian would be joining the department's Corporate Executive, for 12 months from 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024, as part of the Public Sector Commission's Women in Executive Leadership Development Experience Initiative.

KEY FOCUS AREAS AND ACTIONS

The department's RAP is built around three core pillars – relationships, respect and opportunities each supported by clear, measurable actions. These focus areas are designed to embed reconciliation across the department's operations, culture and partnerships, and align with whole-of-government priorities such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy.



1. Relationships

The department is committed to building strong, respectful and enduring relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations. This includes:

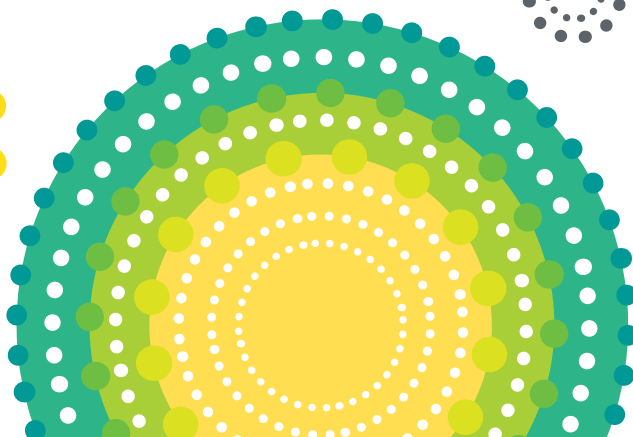
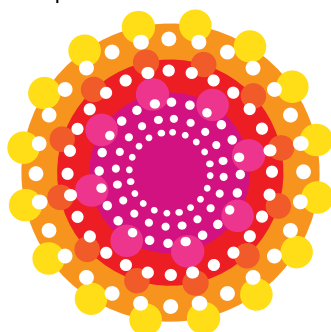
- ⦿ strengthening partnerships with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal land and sea councils, and community leaders;
- ⦿ supporting and participating in National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week;
- ⦿ promoting reconciliation through the department's sphere of influence, including collaboration with other public sector RAP organisations;
- ⦿ establishing culturally appropriate engagement tools and guidelines to support staff in building meaningful relationships;
- ⦿ ensuring Aboriginal voices are heard in regulatory and policy processes through mechanisms like AWEAG and AEB.



2. Respect

Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and knowledge systems is central to the department's work. Key actions include:

- ⦿ developing and implementing an Aboriginal Cultural and Native Title Learning Framework to build cultural capability across the department;
- ⦿ embedding cultural protocols such as Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country in departmental events and communications;
- ⦿ supporting dual naming projects and cultural heritage recognition initiatives;
- ⦿ delivering programs that incorporate Traditional Owner knowledge, such as the Murujuga Rock Art Strategy, Bindjareb Djilba Protection Plan and the Waterwise program;
- ⦿ ensuring cultural perspectives are considered in environmental planning and policy development.





3. Opportunities

The department is focused on creating sustainable and meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through:

- ⦿ increasing Aboriginal employment and retention through a dedicated Recruitment, Retention, and Career Development Strategy;
- ⦿ establishing culturally safe spaces such as the Aboriginal Employee Yarning Circle to support staff wellbeing and leadership;
- ⦿ expanding procurement from Aboriginal businesses through a department-wide Aboriginal Procurement Strategy and Supply Nation membership;
- ⦿ supporting Aboriginal-led environmental initiatives and ranger programs that align with the department's regulatory and conservation goals.



4. Governance and accountability

To ensure these actions are implemented effectively, the department has embedded strong governance structures, including:

- ⦿ the RAP Champion (Director General) and Corporate Executive providing strategic leadership;
- ⦿ transitioning from a RAP Working Group to a formal Aboriginal Program Board to oversee implementation.
- ⦿ Regular monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of RAP progress, including participation in Reconciliation Australia's RAP Impact Measurement and Barometer.

These focus areas reflect the department's commitment to walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a spirit of partnership, truth-telling, and shared responsibility. They are not just actions – they are steps towards a more inclusive, respectful and reconciled future.





Commitment to knowledge sharing and staff empowerment

As part of our ongoing reconciliation journey and in alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy, the department is committed to creating a culturally informed and inclusive workplace.

To support this, we established the Aboriginal Hub as a dedicated internal platform that provides staff with access to resources, tools and information on Aboriginal initiatives. This platform will serve as a central hub for:

- Cultural learning materials and protocols (e.g. Welcome to Country, Acknowledgement of Country).
- Updates on Aboriginal programs, partnerships and community engagement initiatives.
- Guidance on applying an Aboriginal lens to policy, planning and regulatory processes.
- Tools to support culturally respectful engagement with Aboriginal communities.
- Opportunities for staff to participate in cultural events, training and professional development.

This initiative will ensure that all staff have the knowledge and support they need to contribute meaningfully to our reconciliation commitments. It will also reinforce our goal of embedding Aboriginal perspectives across the department's work and fostering a culturally safe and capable workforce.

By providing this platform, we are not only sharing knowledge - we are empowering our people to walk together in partnership with Aboriginal communities, now and into the future.

Responsibilities in native title and Aboriginal water outcomes

The department plays a key role in supporting native title settlements and progressing Aboriginal water outcomes across WA. The department is responsible for delivering commitments under multiple native title agreements and actively participates in settlement negotiations as required.

The department's responsibilities include:

- supporting Aboriginal access to water resources and land through negotiated agreements;
- embedding cultural values and Traditional Owner priorities into water planning and environmental management;
- coordinating cross-government and community engagement to ensure Aboriginal voices are central to decision-making;
- leading internal reform through the Native Title Settlement Reform Roadmap and the Native Title Working Group, which oversees planning, delivery and monitoring of commitments;
- ensuring governance and accountability through approved Terms of Reference and alignment with broader Aboriginal empowerment strategies.



These responsibilities reflect the department's commitment to reconciliation, cultural integrity, and delivering tangible, high-quality outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities.

Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs)

The State Government has committed to resolving native title compensation matters through agreement with native title parties. The department plays a pivotal role in progressing commitments under three native title settlements and is represented on the steering and implementation committees overseeing delivery of Indigenous Land Use Agreements.

South West Native Title Settlement

Customary activities: The department is working in partnership with South West Regional Corporations to facilitate access to public drinking water source areas for some customary activities. Work is progressed through the South West Public Drinking Water Source Working Group, co-chaired by the department and Water Corporation.

Yamatji Nation ILUA

Groundwater reserve: In a historic first, the 2020 Yamatji Nation ILUA provides members of the Yamatji Nation with access to and rights to trade the use of 25.8 GL of groundwater under the Yamatji Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve.

Support and training: The department supports Yamatji Nation with key components of the ILUA including the use or trade of a 25 GL per year groundwater reserve, funding for groundwater investigations to explore viable water resources within the reserve and to provide accredited water monitoring training and employment. Support for managing these commitments is also provided by an Aboriginal Liaison Officer funded through the settlement.

Tjiwarl Palyakuwa ILUA

Water resource agreement: The Tjiwarl Agreement recognises the spiritual relationship of Tjiwarl people to water, the importance of access to water resources and the need for input into the management of water on Tjiwarl Country. Through the Tjiwarl Water Working Group, the department supports Tjiwarl undertaking a study of water resources on Tjiwarl Country and to identify and protect their cultural, economic and environmental values. The department also supports Tjiwarl to access information related to water licensing and permitting as well as early engagement with water licence and permit applicants.





ESTABLISHING LASTING RELATIONSHIPS AND STRONG PARTNERSHIPS



At the department, we know that real progress starts with strong relationships. That's why we're focused on building **lasting, respectful partnerships** with Aboriginal communities, organisations, and corporations – grounded in trust, shared goals and two-way learning.

Over the past year, we've partnered with **26 Aboriginal organisations** across the state. These partnerships aren't just about projects – they're about making sure Aboriginal voices are heard and valued in how we manage water and the environment.

From co-designed agreements to on-Country collaboration, we're working together to create better outcomes for people, culture and Country.

Murujuga Rock Art strategy implementation and partnership with the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation

The department is committed to the ongoing protection of Murujuga's rock art by working in partnership with the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation (MAC). MAC represents five language groups who come together to care for Murujuga land and sea Country, known collectively as Ngarda Ngarli.

In recognition of MAC's ongoing leadership, we renewed our longstanding partnership with MAC in October 2023. As part of this, funding was extended to support MAC's involvement in and oversight of the Murujuga Rock Art Monitoring Program.

In December 2023, the department and MAC jointly released the first year results from the Murujuga Rock Art Monitoring Program, the most extensive scientific study to date to examine the impact of industrial air emissions on the rock art engravings of Murujuga.

This year, MAC rangers Glen Aubrey and Kasziem Bin Sali and our Aboriginal Project Officer Matt Palfrey completed the first of five university level micro credentials on air quality monitoring, which are essential to support ongoing implementation of the monitoring program.

Matt says "working on Country with rangers gives an opportunity to build the relationship between MAC and DWER. It helps get a better on-ground understanding of how we can best work to support MAC in managing the program."



Partnering with Yamatji Water Company

As part of our commitment under the Yamatji Nation Southern Regional Agreement, we're proud to be working with the newly established Yamatji Water Company to deliver water monitoring services across the region.

This partnership is more than a contract – it's about supporting Yamatji-led economic development and building long-term capability. Through a tailored training program supported by the department, Yamatji people have gained accredited skills in water monitoring, with hands-on experience at our Geraldton office and placements with industry partners like ILUKA Resources, 29 Metals, and Water Corporation.

With further funding secured, this program will continue to grow, enabling Yamatji Traditional Owners to deliver services not just to us, but to other agencies and the private sector.

It's a great example of how we're embedding self-determination and sustainable outcomes into how we work on Country.

Walking together on Bindjareb Country

We're proud to continue walking alongside the **Bindjareb people** through our partnership with **Winjan Aboriginal Corporation, Harvey Aboriginal Corporation, and the Waroona Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation.**

Together, we're delivering the [Bindjareb Djilba Protection Plan](#) and supporting Healthy Estuaries WA, guided by strong cultural governance through the **Bindjareb Djilba Kaadadjan Bidi Yarning Circle.**

Yarning is cultural. When we gather, we productively yarn to walk together, be stronger together, across Bindjareb Country to realise our custodial responsibilities to look after our waterways.

– Lesley Ugle, Bindjareb Elder

This Bindjareb-led approach has helped shape strategic plans that reflect community priorities – like developing a **ranger program** and **cultural mapping** – embedding cultural knowledge into how we care for Country.

It's a great example of what's possible when we listen, learn and lead together.

Walking together with Danjoo Koorliny

We're proud to continue our connection with **Danjoo Koorliny** – a powerful, Aboriginal-led movement focused on creating long-term change as we walk together towards 2029 and beyond.

In **March 2024**, some of our team attended the **Danjoo Koorliny Social Impact Summit**, exploring the theme of Cultural: Survival, Resilience, Strength and Celebration. It marked the halfway point in a 10-year journey of shifting outcomes across culture, community, environment and economy.

Our partnership goes beyond attendance. In 2022, **Winsome MacLaurin**, our Waterwise Cities Program Manager, took part in a **year-long secondment** with Danjoo Koorliny. This two-way learning experience helped strengthen ties, shift perspectives, and support better outcomes for both Aboriginal people and the environment. It's partnerships like this that help us grow, listen, and lead with purpose.



Partnering with the Pilbara Ranger Network

Our partnership with the **Pilbara Ranger Network (PRN)** is all about walking together to support Traditional Owner aspirations to care for Country – especially when it comes to water.

It kicked off in 2021 with a shared goal: build stronger relationships and co-design practical ways to work together. The first big step was the **Pilbara Water Forum** in July 2022, which brought together 85 participants from 10 Traditional Owner groups and department staff. It was a powerful few days of two-way learning, connection, and shared purpose.

The final day's **on-Country workshop at Millstream** helped shape a long list of priorities, and the department committed to turning that goodwill into action.

Since then, a **co-design Water Working Group** – made up of PRN, PBCs and department staff – has been working through those ideas and narrowing them down to a focused list of practical, ranger-led priorities we can deliver together over the next three years.

This is what strong partnerships look like: built on respect, driven by community, and focused on doing the work – together.

Jawun Secondment – a truly rewarding experience

Since joining the **Jawun Secondment Program**, 12 department staff have had the chance to spend six weeks working alongside Aboriginal organisations – sharing their skills while learning deeply about culture, history and community. “Jawun” means “to be a friend” in the Kuku Yalanji language, and that spirit of connection is at the heart of the experience.

John Edwards, our Work Health and Safety (WHS) Manager, recently returned from his secondment in the Pilbara. He worked closely with **MAC** and other local groups, helping to strengthen their WHS systems and embed cultural safety into everyday practices.

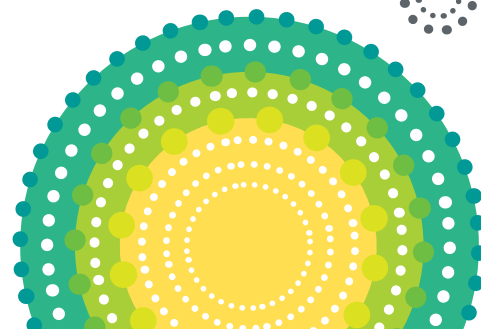
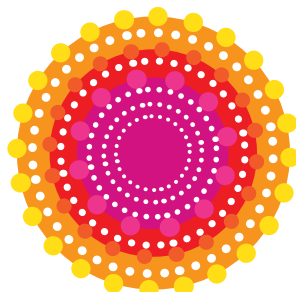
MAC really made me feel like part of the mob. They were open, generous, and deeply committed to sharing their aspirations and challenges. – John Edwards

John also supported MAC with property management planning, cultural protocols, and even helped shape messaging for their iconic rock art tours. He joined Elders at a **Circle of Elders camp** and visited **Murujuga National Park**, gaining firsthand insight into the cultural and environmental priorities of the region.

Outside of work, John explored the Pilbara's stunning landscapes – from **Coral Bay** to **Karijini National Park** – and built lasting relationships along the way.

It's an experience I'll never forget. The bonds you form, the stories you hear, and the impact you can make – it's powerful. I'd absolutely encourage others to get involved. – John Edwards

The Jawun program is open to **Level 7 and above**, and it's a great way to live our value of **'Better Together'** while supporting Aboriginal-led development.



STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH MERGED KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS



The department's collaboration agreements with the **Karajarri Traditional Lands Association (KTLA)** and **Nyamba Buru Yawuru** represent a leading example of how government and Traditional Owners can work together to deliver sustainable, culturally informed outcomes for water management.

These agreements, developed under the **La Grange Groundwater-Dependent Ecosystems Investigation**, go beyond consultation – they are built on **co-design, mutual respect, and two-way learning**. They reflect the department's commitment to embedding the principles of the **Aboriginal Engagement Strategy**, the **WA Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy**, and the **National Agreement on Closing the Gap Initiative** into everyday practice.

Merging knowledge systems: a new way of working

A standout feature of these partnerships is the **integration of traditional ecological knowledge with scientific research**. Karajarri and Yawuru Elders, cultural advisers and rangers have worked alongside department scientists on over eight field trips in 2023-24, contributing to:

- **site selection** for groundwater and ecosystem monitoring
- **cultural mapping and heritage surveys**
- **marine and vegetation sampling**
- **bilby surveys and groundwater well installations.**



This collaborative approach has directly shaped key outputs like the **La Grange Groundwater Allocation Statement**, ensuring that cultural values and local knowledge are embedded in water resource management.

By combining traditional and western scientific methods, the partnership is delivering more holistic, place-based insights into the health of groundwater systems and their connection to ecosystems – including the nearshore marine environment.

Building capacity and empowering communities

The collaboration also supports long-term capability through the co-development of a **Certificate II in Water Monitoring** with North Regional TAFE. This formal qualification recognises the skills of KTLA rangers and Yawuru Country managers, enabling them to lead monitoring efforts and contribute to regional water management.

A model for future partnerships

These agreements are the result of years of relationship building and reflect a shift towards **Traditional Owner-led project development**. They include clear commitments, shared responsibilities, and governance structures that respect cultural protocols and intellectual property.

This model sets a new benchmark for how state agencies can work in partnership with **Traditional Owners – not just delivering projects, but walking together to shape the future of Country.**



Tackling waste challenges together

In 2024, the Waste Authority began reviewing WA's waste strategy – and this time, **regional and Aboriginal communities are a key focus.**

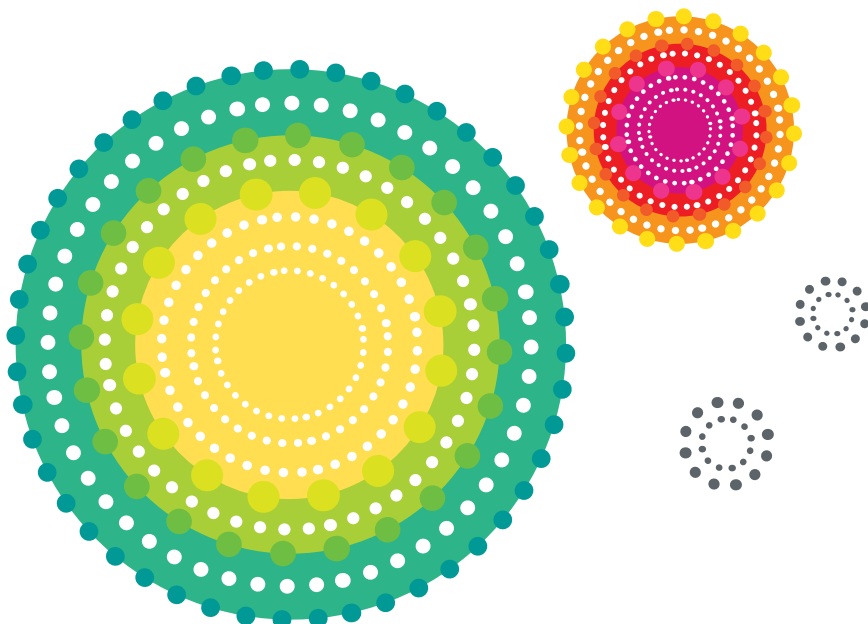
Previous strategies didn't fully reflect the realities of waste management in remote areas. The upcoming ***Waste Strategy - Beyond Waste - Western Australia's Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2025-2030*** aims to change that, with a dedicated priority to improve infrastructure, services, and support for these communities. This aligns with **Closing the Gap Target 9B**, which aims to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households have access to essential services – like waste management – that meet or exceed jurisdictional standards.

This work also supports **Priority Reform 1: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making**, by ensuring Aboriginal voices are actively shaping the strategy and its outcomes.

To inform the strategy, the team travelled across the **East Kimberley** – visiting Kununurra, Wyndham, Warmun, Halls Creek and Balgo – to hear directly from communities and organisations about the challenges they face. Issues like legacy waste, high transport costs, limited infrastructure, and the need for local training were front and centre.

The message was clear: **get the basics right** – safe landfills, reliable collection – and tailor solutions to each community's needs.

This feedback is now shaping the final strategy and a five-year roadmap of actions, helping ensure that everyone, no matter where they live, is part of WA's circular economy future.





Voices from the Bush – listening, learning and connecting

In September 2024, department staff joined over 200 delegates at the *Voices from the Bush* conference in **Mparntwe (Alice Springs)** – a key national event focused on sustainable water futures for remote and Aboriginal communities.

Why it matters

The conference directly supports **Closing the Gap Target 9B**, which aims to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households have access to essential services – like safe, reliable water – by 2031. For the department, it was a chance to listen, learn, and strengthen our role in delivering water services to over 140 remote communities across WA.

What we heard

- The event was deeply moving, with First Nations delegates sharing personal water stories that highlighted the emotional and cultural importance of water.
- There was a strong sense of **hope, connection and shared purpose** – with government, service providers, and communities all in the room, ready to make a difference.

What we learned

- Staff gained valuable insights into how other states are managing remote water programs.
- The experience reinforced the importance of **partnerships with Traditional Owners** and tailoring solutions to local needs.
- It also highlighted the power of **two-way learning** – combining technical expertise with lived experience and cultural knowledge.

It was a very emotional experience... the room was full of energy and people felt they wanted to make a real difference. – Haley Brunel

We gain a better understanding to identify opportunities to engage and establish successful partnerships. – Christa Loos

This kind of engagement helps shape how we move forward grounded in respect, collaboration, and a shared commitment to better water outcomes for all communities.



Good news story

Wearing culture with pride

Across the department, staff are proudly wearing new polo shirts designed in collaboration with Traditional Owners – each one telling a unique story of Country, culture and connection.

In the **Pilbara**, the North West Region teamed up with **MAC** and artist **Jade Churnside**, a MAC ranger, to create a stunning design titled ‘*Afternoon walk with the beach stone curlew*’. Inspired by Jade’s time on Country, the artwork reflects the vibrant red earth and blue coastline of the region. Jade and the department’s Adrienne Sanders worked closely together through the design and licensing process – learning as they went and building a strong creative partnership.

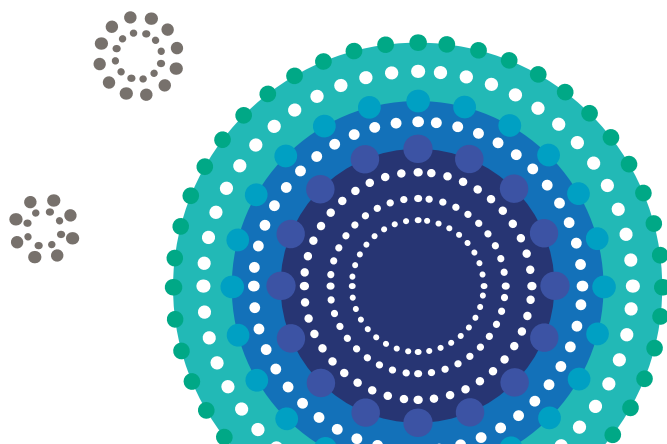
Jade was so proud to see her design on the shirts – and our team is just as proud to wear them.
– Adrienne Sanders

On the **South Coast**, the region’s new polo features artwork by **Menang artists Michael and Tameka Cummings**, a father-daughter duo. Their design celebrates cultural storytelling and intergenerational knowledge.

It was incredibly special to work alongside my dad and share our story through art.
– Tameka Cummings

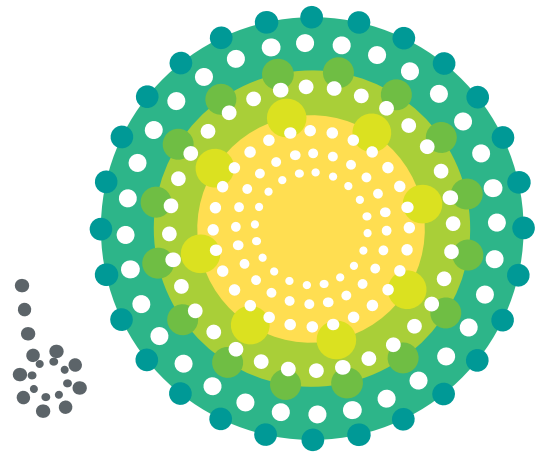
We’re thrilled to have our own design – and the team wears it proudly.
– former Regional Manager Brett Ward

These polos are more than just uniforms – they’re a celebration of culture, collaboration, and the strong relationships we’re building across the state.



CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND LESSONS LEARNED

As we reflect on our journey through the 2019-2021 and 2022-24 Innovate RAPs, we acknowledge both the progress made and the challenges encountered.



Challenges

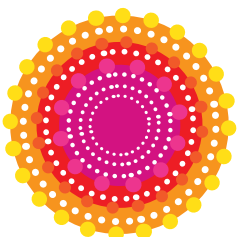
- ⦿ **Meeting employment targets:** one of the most significant challenges has been achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets. Despite strong intent, the need for more culturally secure pathways require a deeper strategic focus.
- ⦿ **Resource allocation:** Ensuring we have the right resources committed to delivering RAP commitments. Embedding new ways of working particularly in balancing operational demands with long-term reconciliation goals has proved complex.
- ⦿ **Engagement fatigue:** Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal communities often face consultation fatigue. The department recognises the importance of respectful, meaningful, and non-extractive engagement that honours Aboriginal-led processes.

Opportunities

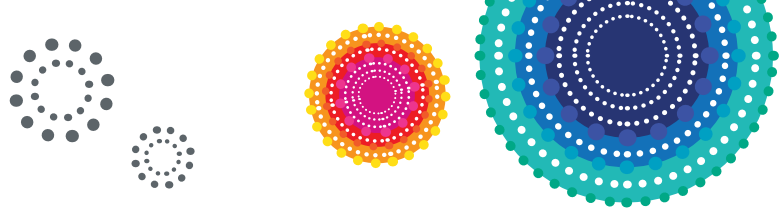
- ⦿ **Cultural learning and leadership:** the development of an Aboriginal Cultural and Native Title Learning Framework offers a powerful opportunity to embed cultural understanding across all levels of the department.
- ⦿ **Procurement and partnerships:** the implementation of an Aboriginal Procurement Strategy has opened doors to support Aboriginal businesses, creating economic opportunities and fostering long-term partnerships. As part of this commitment, the department is a proud member of Supply Nation, enabling access to a broad network of verified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and reinforcing our dedication to supplier diversity.
- ⦿ **Empowering Aboriginal voices:** Initiatives like AWEAG and the Bindjareb Djilba Protection Plan have demonstrated the value of Aboriginal leadership in shaping environmental policy and practice.

Lessons learned

- ⦿ **Reconciliation is a journey, not a destination:** the RAP process has reinforced that reconciliation is ongoing. It requires humility, adaptability, and a willingness to listen and grow.
- ⦿ **Cultural safety is foundational:** creating a culturally safe workplace is not a one-time initiative but a continuous commitment that must be embedded in recruitment, retention and leadership development.
- ⦿ **Respectful two-way learning is transformative:** when Aboriginal knowledge systems and Western science come together – such as in water management and environmental planning – the collaborative outcomes are richer, more sustainable and more inclusive.



A SHARED PATH AHEAD



As we move ahead, the department remains committed to walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with open hearts and minds. We will continue to reflect, adapt, and act with integrity – ensuring that reconciliation is not just a plan on paper, but a lived reality in our policies, partnerships and everyday practices.

Strategic summary: reconciliation progress and path ahead

The department has demonstrated strong commitment to reconciliation, achieving a **90 per cent completion rate** across 61 RAP deliverables – an impressive milestone that reflects sustained effort and accountability.

Key achievements

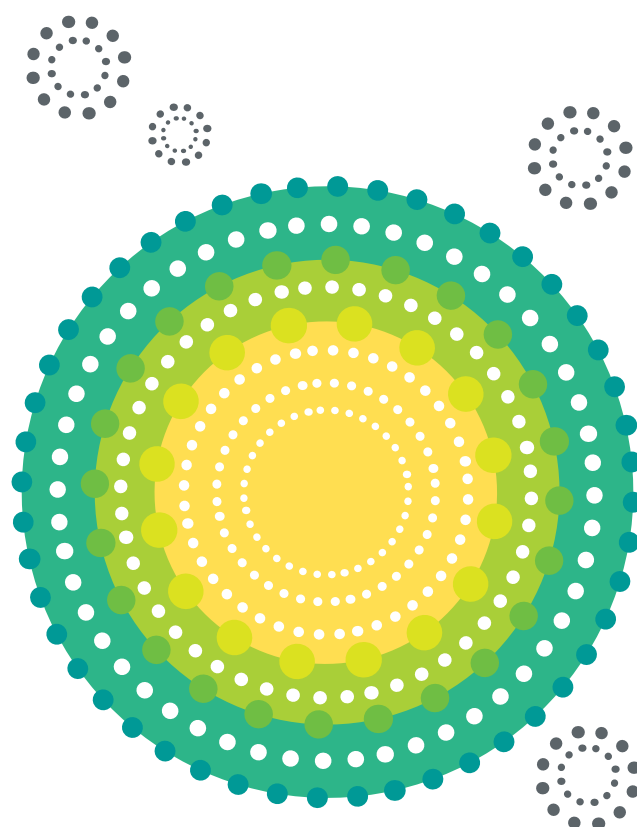
- ⦿ **33 deliverables completed**, with most others either in progress, ongoing, or being refreshed.
- ⦿ A **Power BI RAP dashboard** has been developed to track and visualise progress, increasing transparency and staff engagement.
- ⦿ This progress positions the department as a leader in embedding reconciliation into core business practices.
- ⦿ Our agency has genuinely changed many of our processes to recognise and embed Aboriginal knowledge and culture.

Strategic focus

- ⦿ **Prioritise development of engagement tools** and best-practice resources for staff.
- ⦿ **Leverage the RAP dashboard** to identify areas needing targeted support or acceleration.
- ⦿ **Align future actions** with the Closing the Gap Roadmap and Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy to ensure continuity and impact.

Key challenges

- ⦿ A critical gap remains in **developing practical tools and resources** to support staff in building meaningful relationships with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations.
- ⦿ Addressing this challenge is essential to operationalising the **Aboriginal Engagement Strategy** and ensuring consistent, culturally appropriate engagement across the department.



RECONCILIATION IN ACTION – WHAT WE’VE BEEN UP TO

Why this matters

We’re continuing to build stronger relationships with First Nations communities, learn from their knowledge, and create a more inclusive and respectful workplace. Here’s a quick look at what’s been happening – and where we’re heading.

Leadership and regional engagement

- Jillian Collard joined our Corporate Executive for 12 months – an exciting step for Aboriginal leadership in our department.
- Our Executive Team visited the Mid West and Kimberley, connecting with communities, supporting flood recovery, and exploring green energy opportunities.
- As part of our strategic uplift, the Senior Aboriginal Leadership Team was established to elevate Aboriginal leadership and embed Aboriginal ways of working across the Department. It represents a whole-of-agency commitment to long-term systems change, challenging existing norms and driving transformational change and approaches to policy, engagement and service delivery.

Learning and cultural awareness

- Voice to Staff Program helped staff understand the Indigenous Voice to Parliament through panels, speakers and community briefings.
- ‘Acknowledge This’ training made learning about Acknowledgement of Country personal, meaningful and engaging.
- Professor Stephen van Leeuwen shared practical insights on respectful engagement with First Nations people.
- Cultural training progress:
 - 340 staff completed Diverse WA Cultural Competency e-learning in 2023-24.
 - 95 completed face-to-face Cultural Awareness training.
 - 41 completed Acknowledge This training.
 - 5 staff took part in the Jawun cultural immersion secondment.

Community partnerships and skills building

- We partnered with the KTLA and North Regional TAFE to launch a Water Monitoring Certificate, recognising and formalising the skills of local rangers.
- In the Kimberley, we’re working closely with Traditional Owners to support long-term recovery after the 2023 floods.

Stories that move us

- Mechelle Turvey shared her powerful story of loss, strength, and staying true to herself.
- The Mia Mias documentary gave us a deeper understanding of the Stolen Generations and the healing power of art.
- Our graduates hosted a screening of Looking Black, sparking honest conversations about Indigenous storytelling in the media.

Celebrating culture

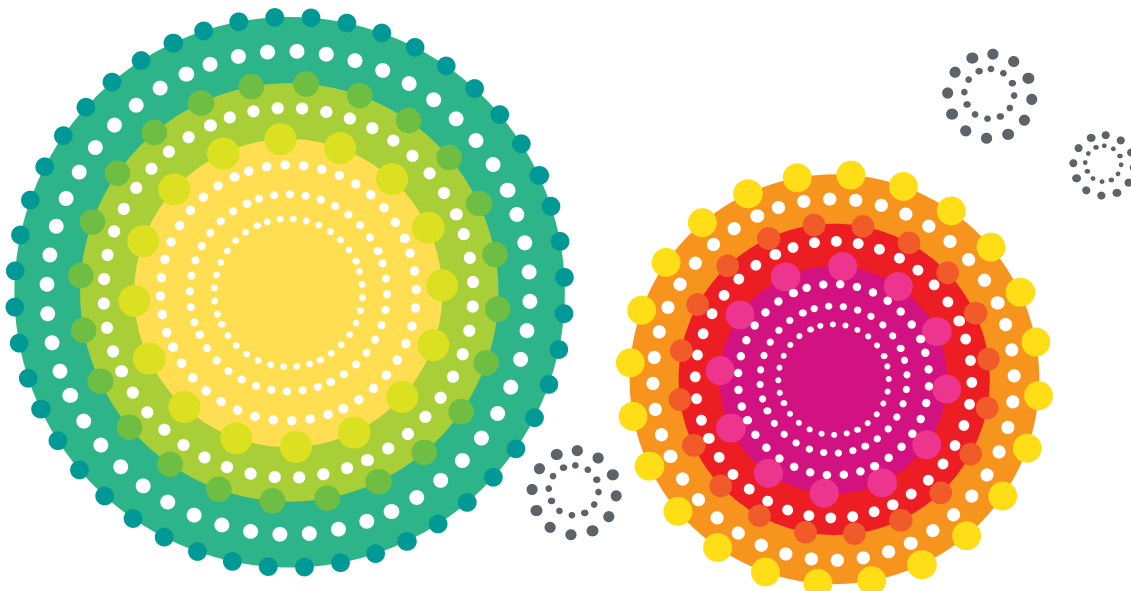
- During National Reconciliation Week, we joined their virtual breakfast, watched the national address, and raised \$2,448 for Wear It Yellow - matched dollar-for-dollar by generous foundations.
- NAIDOC Week was packed with events: smoking ceremonies, art exhibitions, and Deadly Denim workshops that combined sustainability with Indigenous creativity.

Workforce representation goals

- Our target for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment is 3.4 per cent (43 employees).
- For 2024-25, we're aiming to grow from 11 to 18 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees - an increase of 7.
- This is a key focus area, and we're committed to creating pathways and support for Aboriginal employment across the department.

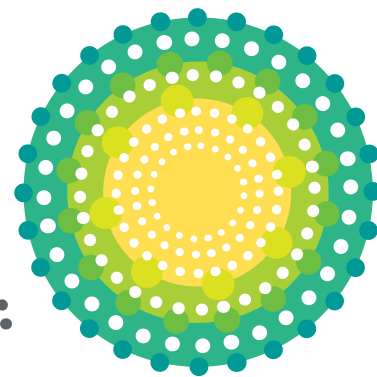
Celebrating progress

- A special morning tea was hosted by Director General Alistair Jones and the Aboriginal Engagement and Partnerships Team to celebrate business areas that delivered on their RAP commitments.
- Alistair acknowledged their leadership, saying:
"These are the teams that are leading the way in our reconciliation journey. Their efforts are commendable and should inspire all of us to do more."



WHAT'S NEXT?

- ⦿ Keep embedding cultural learning into our everyday work.
- ⦿ Continue developing Aboriginal employment and opportunities.
- ⦿ Look for more ways to connect with regional communities.
- ⦿ Track our progress with clear goals and measures.
- ⦿ Keep supporting and developing Aboriginal leadership across the department.
- ⦿ Stay committed to walking together on this journey.



What's next on our reconciliation journey

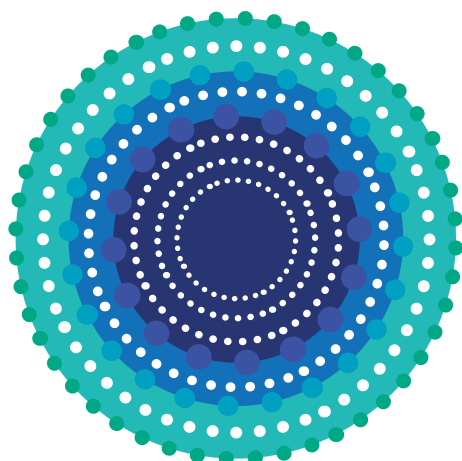
We've wrapped up our second **RAP** – and now we're stepping into a new chapter.

We're taking everything we've learned so far and building on it through our **Closing the Gap Roadmap**. This roadmap will guide how we work with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations – making sure we're not just meeting commitments, but creating real, lasting change.

Here's what's ahead:

- ⦿ **New direction, same foundation:** while our RAP may be complete, the values of **respect, relationships and opportunities** remain at the heart of what we do. These principles will carry through into the Roadmap work.
- ⦿ **Transforming how we work:** we're focusing on **Priority Reform 3** of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap – changing the way we do business to better serve and engage with Aboriginal communities.
- ⦿ **Listening and learning:** we're kicking off a broad consultation process with staff and stakeholders across metro and regional WA.
- ⦿ **Working together:** we'll continue collaborating with the **Yarning Circle, Aboriginal Empowerment Board** and **Aboriginal Water Environmental Advisory Group** to guide our approach.
- ⦿ **Staying accountable:** this work helps us meet our obligations under the **Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy**, National Agreement on **Closing the Gap** and broader **State Government commitments**.
- ⦿ **Keeping you in the loop:** the AEP team will keep everyone updated as we go.

This is more than ticking boxes – it's about real change, built on respect, relationships and shared goals. A roadmap to show our commitment to doing better, together.





RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN

CONTACT DETAILS

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