



# Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander

Engagement plan



WESTERNPORT  
WATER

**Talking, walking and working together, we will build trust, respect and strengthen relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians to progress positive social change and lead reconciliation activities within our sphere of influence.**



## Acknowledgement

Westernport Water acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as First Nations People and that the land, sea and water are of spiritual, cultural and economic importance. We recognise that we provide services on the traditional lands of the Bunurong Peoples of the Kulin Nation. The Bunurong peoples have managed the land and water resources for thousands of years. We acknowledge them and their continued connection to this place, as we go about managing the water resources today.



**WARNING:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that the following report may contain images of deceased persons.



Reconciliation Australia and the  
Bass Coast Reconciliation Network  
Welcomed to Country by Uncle Mark Brown

## Foreword from the Managing Director, Dona Tantirimudalige

I am proud to present  
Westernport Water's Aboriginal  
and Torres Strait Islander  
Engagement Plan 2025-28.

This Engagement Plan is a core deliverable under Reconciliation Australia's RAP Framework and a key step in Westernport Water's reconciliation journey. It demonstrates our commitment to working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and complements our Working Together Protocols, which have been in place since January 2019.

The Plan sets out how we will support meaningful participation, self-determination, and inclusion, particularly in relation to water. It also provides a framework for delivering on the priorities of both the Victorian Government and Westernport Water's strategies and policies, helping to ensure our work is culturally informed, respectful, and future-focused.



Together, we have an opportunity to walk alongside Traditional Owners and First Nations peoples in the spirit of respect, collaboration, and shared purpose. By embedding its principles into our everyday work, we will help shape a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard, valued, and reflected in the decisions that impact Country and community.

**Dona Tantirimudalige (she/her)**  
Managing Director, Westernport Water

Above: Managing Director, Dona Tantirimudalige and Board Deputy Chair, Chris Newton celebrate the launch of the Corporations third RAP

## Endorsed by the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group

"This document has been developed in collaboration with, and formally endorsed by, the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group, reflecting our shared commitment to advancing reconciliation and strengthening respectful relationships."



Partnership gathering with the Bunurong Land Council and regional partners on Phillip Island

## Our purpose

Westernport Water will service a healthy community through clever collaboration and protect the environment for future generations because we care.



## About us

The core functions of Westernport Water are to provide drinking water, recycled water, and wastewater services to properties and communities throughout its district in accordance with the Westernport Water Customer Charter 2023-28. Westernport Water is one of 18 water corporations operating under the State Government of Victoria. We are responsible for servicing over 23,688 customers from 27 townships across an area covering 300 square kilometres, including Milawul (Phillip Island) and mainland communities from The Gurdies in the north, to Archies Creek in the southeast.

Westernport Water accesses water from various sources. The primary water supply is derived from the Tennent Creek catchment via Candowie Reservoir, with additional water entitlements on the Bass River, the Corinella Aquifer, and a connection to the Melbourne Water Supply System.

## About the Engagement Plan

Westernport Water's RAP Working Group has developed this Engagement Plan to highlight the different ways we engage and connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. It builds upon work done by previous RAP Working Group members and is a key deliverable of our Innovate RAP 2023-26. The Plan outlines our approach to building respectful relationships, supporting meaningful engagement, and ensuring the aspirations of the Bunurong are recognised and reflected in our planning and decision-making processes.

The Plan explains how we deliver on a range of relevant Victorian Government and Westernport Water strategies and policies. It builds on the foundations of our previous Reconciliation Action Plans and reflects our belief that meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is essential to developing lasting relationships, deepening cultural understanding, empowering Traditional Owners, and advancing reconciliation.

## The Bunurong Land Council

The Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC) is the Registered Aboriginal Party for and on behalf of the Bunurong people. They are the Traditional Owner organisation that represent the Bunurong people of the South-Eastern Kulin Nation. The BLCAC aims to preserve and protect the sacred lands and waterways of their ancestors, their places, traditional cultural practices, and stories.

This Plan was formally reviewed and is supported by the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

**Bunurong Land Council**  
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

[www.bunuronglc.org](http://www.bunuronglc.org)

## Engagement values

- **Care** – to make a difference and do the best we can, together. Our actions show that we care about who we are, what we do, and each other.
- **Courage** – we can achieve great things when we are prepared to step forward. Showing leadership in our sphere of influence takes courage.
- **Commitment** – to do great work, because we care about doing the best we can together. This includes a commitment to incorporate the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in water management.
- **Recognition** – we recognise, acknowledge and value Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander knowledge and views in water and land management and will actively learn from one another.
- **Respect** – we respect people's rights, obligations and roles as Traditional Owners of the land, sea and waterways and we will demonstrate and promote respect for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.



## Engagement principles

- **Be open and transparent** – we will foster trust by being transparent, honest, and open in our communications. We remain open to feedback and committed to listening and learning from one another to strengthen relationships and grow together.
- **Share** – we will share knowledge and information related to culture, environment and natural resource management and support partnership opportunities, collaborations and initiatives.
- **Empower** – where possible, we will empower Traditional Owners, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to progress the land and water management interests of the Bunurong.
- **Partner** – we will work in partnership with Traditional Owners, the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community on projects to support participation in water resource management.



## Strategic alignment

This strategy outlines the key guiding documents and directives that promote participation, support self-determination, and enable the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the planning and management of water resources. The overarching strategies and policies include:

- Statement of Obligations
- Minister for Water's Letter of Expectations
- Water for Victoria – Victoria's Water Plan
- Water is Life Roadmap
- Westernport Water's Corporate Plan 2025-30



## Supporting truth-telling and Treaty

### Yoorrook Justice Commission

We remain committed to supporting truth-telling and the legacy of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. As Victoria's first formal truth-telling process, Yoorrook has played a vital role in exposing the historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples since colonisation. With the Commission's final reports now tabled in Parliament, we acknowledge the powerful truths shared, including the recognition of genocide and systemic discrimination. Westernport Water supports the continued journey of truth, justice, and Treaty, and we will work alongside Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to listen, learn, and embed meaningful change across our organisation and sector.

### Treaty

We are committed to becoming Treaty-ready by building respectful partnerships with Traditional Owners, integrating cultural values into our work, and supporting self-determination through meaningful engagement, procurement, and employment practices. We recognise that the Treaty is a vital step towards justice, healing, and a stronger future for all Victorians.

As an ally, we will work closely with First Peoples' communities, staff and partners, so they can set the directions and priorities.

We will take steps to ensure our teams are on board and culturally competent to help increase awareness and understanding of First Peoples' cultures, histories, and the Treaty process.

## Priority focus areas

Over the past decade, we have worked closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Traditional Owners on a journey of reconciliation, aiming to understand, learn, and contribute to a better future that supports the national reconciliation movement. Westernport Water's key focus areas will guide our efforts, build trust, understanding, and collaboration:



# 1. Partnerships



We are committed to working in genuine partnership with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities, grounded in mutual respect, trust, and shared goals. Through shared learning and collective action, we can amplify impact and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable future.

**We will:** Deepen relationships by working in partnership with Traditional Owners, the Bunurong, as well as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, to sustain mutually beneficial relationships by:

- strengthening community engagement through established working groups
- creating opportunities that support self-determination
- supporting Aboriginal-led solutions through the Bass Coast Reconciliation Network
- supporting the establishment of Barrithbarrith, Gathering Place.



Adam Magennis - National Reconciliation Week event on Bunurong Country Rhyll

## Policy/strategy



### Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan

Our third RAP demonstrates our ongoing commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community. It gives voice to the true history of the country we love and care for. Reconciliation is a key priority for our business, and we are committed to delivering one hundred actions and deliverables outlined in this plan as we progress on our reconciliation journey and contribute to Australia's national reconciliation movement.

### Communications and Engagement Plan 2023-26

This Plan guides how the organisation communicates with, engages, and educates its customers, community members, partners, and stakeholders. The plan lists Westernport Water's key initiatives, projects, and activities. By implementing this plan, we seek to foster positive relationships, increase awareness of our services, build water literacy, and enhance the overall customer experience.

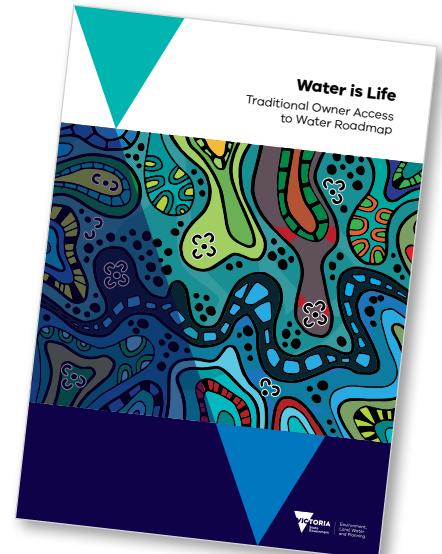


### Working Together Protocols

These protocols are an expression of our commitment to talk, walk and work together to build trust, respect and strengthen relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. The protocols outline culturally appropriate practices adopted by Westernport Water and the members of the Bass Coast Reconciliation Network, guiding staff and stakeholders on culturally appropriate practices, reinforcing our commitment to reconciliation, respectful consultation, and supporting Aboriginal-led outcomes across our operations.

### Water for Victoria (WfV)

WfV is Victoria's strategic plan for a future with less water as Victoria responds to the impact of climate change and a growing population. In alignment with this plan, we are committed to managing water in a way that supports a healthy environment, a prosperous economy, and thriving communities. We will continue to address the Minister's key priorities for the water sector by building strong customer and community engagement and partnerships in planning and service delivery. Our approach focuses on strengthening local relationships by working with the Bunurong Land Council and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to recognise and support cultural values and promote economic inclusion across the sector.



### Water is Life – Traditional Custodian Access to Water Roadmap

Water is Life is a pathway to genuine, meaningful outcomes for Traditional Owners. Water is Life recognises the central importance of the relationship between people and Country, embodied in the cultural water paradigm. Caring for Country and water can deliver thriving cultural economies and benefits for Traditional Owners, existing entitlement holders, and all Victorians.

## Established groups

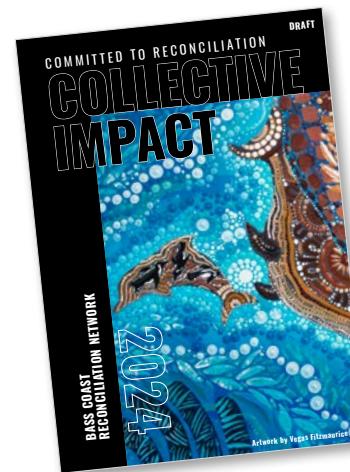
### Westernport Water Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group (RWG)

The RWG is the governing body that oversees progress against Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) commitments. The RWG is responsible for the development, implementation, and reporting phases of Westernport Water's RAP and provides a platform to enable two-way communication and consultation between the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community and Westernport Water.

Membership includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and community members, employees from across the organisation, and senior leaders. The group is designed to ensure meaningful input from the registered Aboriginal Party, the Bunurong Land Council, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders.



*Left: NAIDOC Art Show – Lead by the Bass Coast and South Gippsland Reconciliation Group in partnership with the BCRN.*



### Bass Coast Reconciliation Network (BCRN)

The BCRN is a group of organisations, individuals and community groups from across the Bass Coast that come together in a joint approach for reconciliation and recognition. They share in a collective vision and champion reconciliation and recognition with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

BCRN members focus on outcomes to respectfully move forward to achieve broader goals for reconciliation and recognition across the Bass Coast. Coming together, members share their time and resources to develop meaningful and direct action that gives the community confidence and consistency in one cohesive regional body.

Network members have worked together for over six years and helped one another to build trust, relationships and turn good intentions into real outcomes for the community.

Members of the BCRN include Phillip Island Nature Parks, Westernport Water, Bass Coast Shire Council, Bass Coast Health and My Community Libraries, as auspicing and funding bodies and includes the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and supporting organisations Bass Coast/South Gippsland Reconciliation Group and West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.

### Reconciliation Action and First Nations Strategy Community of Practice

The Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) is committed to reconciliation in the water sector and supports its members in leading reconciliation efforts in their local communities. This forum provides a means of sharing learnings, challenges, ideas and solutions as members navigate their respective maturity journeys of reconciliation.



*Bass Coast Reconciliation Members at the Ngangga festival on Milawul during NAIDOC week 2025.*

### First Nations Peoples Network

A community for First Nations professionals across all disciplines in the water sector that come together and share their career journeys in water and provide a support function for water sector employees.

## We will enhance partnerships and amplify our impact by:

How	Why
<b>Consulting with Bunurong Traditional Owners early about projects to inform key strategies and projects</b>	Allowing adequate time for Traditional Owner engagement, aims to ensure information shared is understood and genuinely considered
<b>Working with Victorian water corporations and RAP organisations to learn from one another</b>	To find efficiencies and relieve pressure on Traditional Owners, resulting from a coordinated approach
<b>Actively supporting the Yoorrook and Treaty processes</b>	To help establish an official record of the impact of colonisation on Traditional Owners and First Peoples in Victoria
<b>Seeking opportunities to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander led outcomes</b>	To support self-determination and incorporate aspirations for Country, culture and community into strategic plans
<b>Acknowledging the contributions of Aboriginal peoples, culture and heritage</b>	To recognise and honour the rich history, enduring connection to Country, and invaluable role of Aboriginal peoples in shaping community and identity
<b>Participate in a water industry partnership with the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation</b>	Develop regional water group and a joint statement of commitment to deliver Water is Life outcomes



## 2. Economic development



We will grow our economic impact by increasing procurement from Aboriginal businesses, enabling participation in our supply chain, and supporting Aboriginal entrepreneurship and self-determination through tailored initiatives and capacity-building support.

Good supplier engagement will help Westernport Water meet its social procurement objectives and support improved economic outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses and enterprise.

### Policy/strategy

#### Westernport Water's Procurement Strategy 2025-28

This Strategy is geared to maximise value for money, drive positive social and sustainable procurement outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.

#### Victoria's Social Procurement Framework

Puts social and sustainable outcomes at the centre of procurement activity with clear deliverables and outcomes that support Aboriginal peoples, enterprises and businesses. The objective of the Social Procurement Framework is to focus procurement activities and resources on achieving prioritised social and sustainable outcomes. As a Victorian Government Agency, our procurement decisions have a far-reaching impact on the economy, environment, and community.

#### Victorian Aboriginal Business Strategy

Supports a whole-of-Victorian-Government commitment to support business development, stimulate entrepreneurship and provide overall better outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

#### Delivering Water for Victoria – priority focus areas are aligned with:

- Action 6.4 – build jobs and capacity
- Action 10.8 – increase Aboriginal inclusion in the water sector
- Action 10.9 – support economic development through Aboriginal participation and procurement.



Bass Coast and Reconciliation Australia leadership come together for Reconciliation on Milawul

We will grow our economic impact by increasing procurement from certified suppliers by:

How	Why
<b>Developing opportunities for the purchase of goods and services from Aboriginal businesses</b>	To grow the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses that we work with
<b>Streamlining procurement processes for the engagement of Victorian Aboriginal businesses</b>	To support economic development through Aboriginal participation and procurement
<b>Creating a social procurement register of accredited Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander suppliers</b>	To support Victorian social enterprises and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses to work with us
<b>Seeking funding opportunities that prioritise collaboration with certified suppliers</b>	Funding opportunities will enable us to leverage additional resources and increase the scale and impact of our projects.

# 3. Employment



We aim to attract, support, and retain Aboriginal staff by creating a culturally safe workplace, promoting career pathways, and embedding cultural awareness and education throughout our teams. We will also support broader skills development and education initiatives that enable long-term career growth.

**Westernport Water and the Victorian water industry are committed to increasing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participation in water management by:**

- supporting and promoting cultural diversity and capability
- strengthening education and skills training offerings for Aboriginal employees
- building cultural awareness, competency and responsiveness.

## Policy/strategy

### Westernport Water's People Strategy 2025-28

Our People Strategy is our blueprint for building a high-performing, engaged, and future-ready workforce. It brings together capability development, a proactive attraction and retention plan, wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, and workplace health and safety, enabling our people to thrive. It will guide Westernport Water's approach to managing and developing its workforce, building on its strong culture and ensuring Westernport Water is a place where everyone belongs.

### Delivering Water for Victoria – priority focus areas are aligned with:

- Action 6.4 – build jobs and capacity
- Action 10.8 – increase Aboriginal inclusion in the water sector.

**We will enhance employment outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people by:**

How	Why
<b>Tailoring recruitment practices to target and attract applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people</b>	To attract and grow the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees
<b>Maintaining cultural leave for dates of significance through the Enterprise Agreement</b>	To support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to participate in cultural activities.
<b>Providing skills training, mentoring and coaching opportunities in accordance with the People Strategy</b>	For the mutual transfer of knowledge and skill and the development of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees
<b>Encouraging participation in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employee network/s</b>	By providing access to networking opportunities to forge relationships and strengthen connections
<b>Building Aboriginal &amp; Torres Strait Islander cultural competency</b>	To foster a culturally aware and safe organisation
<b>Creating opportunities to empower employees to shape decisions and co-design solutions.</b>	Empowering employees supports staff to grow and succeed, enhances trust and fosters a workplace culture that values diversity

# 4. Cultural values



We are committed to respecting and protecting cultural heritage, recognising Aboriginal people as the First peoples. This includes working with Traditional Owners to incorporate cultural water values into planning and environmental initiatives, and supporting opportunities for Aboriginal-led environmental stewardship.

**We will support initiatives to heal Country, protect the plants, animals and overall health of rivers, wetlands, floodplains and Western Port, by:**

- engaging Traditional Owners on the return of unallocated water, where water is allocated but unused
- engaging on programs for improving local or regional environmental issues
- implementing programs for environmental protection or rehabilitation
- engaging Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses
- committing to protect cultural heritage by going over and above the minimum requirements.

## Policy/strategy

### Westernport Water's Urban Water Strategy (UWS)

The UWS is the key planning tool in delivering safe and sustainable water supplies for our cities and towns. This UWS includes plans for securing water supplies over the next 50 years, given the uncertainties associated with population growth and climate change. UWS aims to support the development of resilient and liveable communities while balancing social, environmental, and economic costs and benefits across the water cycle.

### The Sustainable Water Strategy

The SWS is a long-term plan developed to secure a sustainable supply of water in Victoria's regions. The Victorian Government is working with the water sector and Traditional Owners to develop a Central and Gippsland Region SWS and Westernport Water will factor this into the update of its UWS.

### Master Plans

As part of our Site Master Planning for both the Cowes and King Road Wastewater Treatment Plants, we will embed our commitment to respecting and protecting cultural heritage by working in partnership with the Bunurong. This includes incorporating cultural water values into environmental planning, and actively engaging Traditional Owners in discussions.

**Delivering Water for Victoria – priority focus areas are aligned with:**

- Action 6.1 – recognise Aboriginal values and objectives in water
- Action 6.2 – consider Aboriginal values in water planning.

### We will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led actions and solutions:

How	Why
<b>Engaging with Traditional Owners on the benefits of Aboriginal Waterway Assessments and other tools developed by Traditional Owners</b>	Learn from and incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into water planning, management and strategy
<b>Developing procedures to ensure compliance with relevant legislation in relation to the protection of cultural heritage</b>	Further develop governance to provide confidence that activities and information are being managed in accordance with best practice
<b>Working in partnership with Traditional Owners the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation to protect the environment and cultural heritage</b>	Protect cultural heritage by including the aspirations of Aboriginal people in water strategies and planning.
<b>Considering unallocated water and how this resource may be shared to support cultural and/or environmental outcomes</b>	Improve access for Aboriginal people to water for economic development and or cultural purposes
<b>Exploring opportunities to celebrate Boonwurrung language and culture.</b>	Using Boonwurrung language provides a daily acknowledgement of Country, promotes cultural awareness, and demonstrates our ongoing commitment to reconciliation for the devastating effects of colonisation on Bunurong peoples and language.

## Projects and our commitment

Through its corporate planning process, Westernport Water will identify projects and initiatives that require consultation with the Registered Aboriginal Party, the Bunurong Land Council. When assessing and planning projects, we commit to engaging early, about place-based discussions on Bunurong Country.

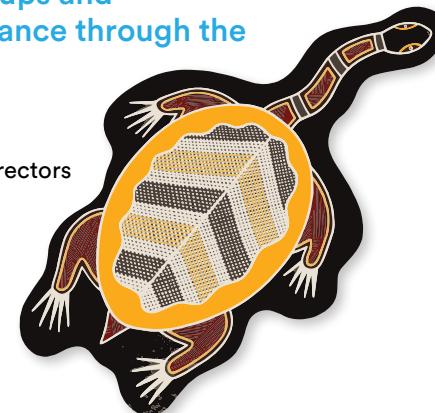
We will work with the Bunurong on a timeframe that best suits their priorities and objectives and will empower Traditional Owners to care for their Country by:

- strengthening relationships and clearly defining who is talking to who
- investigate opportunities to incorporate Traditional ecological knowledge in water and catchment management
- considering water handback, access to, or control over the use of unallocated water
- Identifying opportunities to enable access to waterways where we have management responsibility
- identifying cultural values and the aspirations of the Bunurong people in water management and planning.

## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the following people, groups and organisations for their knowledge and guidance through the development of this strategy.

- Westernport Water's RAP Working Group
- Westernport Water's Leadership Team and Board of Directors
- The Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Bass Coast Reconciliation Network members
- Barrithbarrith – Gathering Place Steering Committee.



**Prepared by**

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