



Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Our Vision

“Healthy waters and thriving river Country sustained by empowered and connected First Nations peoples.”

Our Purpose

“Uniting the Sovereign First Nations peoples of the southern Murray Darling Basin to work in solidarity, secure water justice and heal our waterways by empowering our people to exercise their cultural rights and obligations.”

Goal 1

Achieving Water Justice for our people

Objective 1) Nations enjoying ownership of water entitlements and cultural flows

Strategies

- Pursue opportunities for water acquisition through existing government programs at State and Federal levels
- Build Nations' understanding of water markets and water trading within the Southern Basin
- Build the moral, political and legal case for ongoing water justice reforms
- Leverage our Cultural Flows Program to secure water ownership and cultural flow outcomes for First Nations

Objective 2) Nations co-managing water held for the environment

Strategies

- Pursue agreements with all water holders and river operators (including the CEWO, VEWH, MDBA) to provide for co-management of held environmental water
- Build political and institutional support for co-management of environmental water

Objective 3) Nations' Native Title and other water rights recognised in law and policy

Strategies

- Ensure recognition of Native Title water rights and pursue opportunities to maximise benefits for rights holders

Goal 2

Healing our waterways and river Country

Objective 1) Healthy waterways that sustain our stories, cultural values and traditional economy for future generations

Strategies

- Capitalise on MLDRIN's role in Basin Plan implementation to address policies that impact on our connection to waterways
- Build a powerful First Nations voice, advocating for sustainable waterway management and meaningful water recovery

Objective 2) Rivers and Country connected, from the mountains, across the floodplains, and to the sea

Strategies

- Secure commitment to including First Nations objectives in the management of environmental water
- Promote our vision of the Basin as one, interconnected system and pursue policies and water sharing rules that support connectivity
- Highlight a vision for free flowing rivers and resist new dams and damaging infrastructure that disconnect our waterways

Objective 3) Understand the risks of climate change and work to mitigate the impacts on our waterways

Strategies

- Map the likely cultural impacts of Climate Change on Basin waterways and Collaborate with partners, to scope options for improving community resilience
- Pursue changes to water policies and planning that reflect climate change impacts, including reduced water availability and sea level rise

Goal 3

Empowering First Nations as waterway guardians

Objective 1: First Nations' fulfilling our cultural rights and obligations by managing waterways and catchments

Strategies:

- Leverage MLDRIN's Cultural Flows and AWA programs and work with Nations to apply water planning tools that identify FN's water values and objectives
- Actively support Nations to take up leadership roles in water planning and catchment management on Country
- Promote employment of Traditional Owners in the water and NRM sectors
- Secure adequate, sustainable funding for First Nations' waterway managers

Objective 2) Nations demonstrating excellence in water planning, assessment and monitoring

Strategies:

- Work with Nations, water management agencies and experts to refine the AWA tool, Cultural Flows methodology to ensure rigour and effectiveness
- Actively support the development and use of culturally appropriate water planning and assessment tools by Nations
- Establish and support a community of practice for First Nations waterway managers throughout the Basin
- Promote 'mainstreaming' of First Nations water knowledge as a key input to water planning, on First Nations' terms

Objective 3) Nations' agency and self-determination is further strengthened through membership of MLDRIN

Strategies:

- Work with Nation decision-making and governance bodies to design and implement waterway and catchment projects
- Ensure that all MLDRIN projects and activities strengthen the self determination of Member Nations

Goal 4

Transforming the water story

Objective 1) The Australian public understands that water and rivers are sacred living entities, with rights to flow, flourish and sustain

Strategies:

- Develop a communications strategy to shift the settler-colonial water narrative
- Promote models of management and governance that respect the rights of rivers and traditional custodians

Objective 2) The status of First Nations as the original waterway stewards, with inherent rights and responsibilities to water is reflected in law and policy

Strategies:

- Pursue opportunities to secure water access and management rights through treaty making processes in Southern Basin States
- Promote the concept of a First Nations reserved water right as a foundation for Australia's water regime

Objective 3) Water is liberated from commodification and viewed as part of a holistic, interconnected system that nourishes life, land and culture

Strategies:

- Develop a position on the effectiveness and equitability of water markets to inform our advocacy in pursuit of water justice
- Highlight the nexus between land use, water allocation, river health and cultural survival

Goal 5

Standing as a model for good governance and empowering collaboration

Objective 1) Nations are well represented and actively participating in our confederation

Strategies:

- Ensure all Nations have the opportunity to shape and participate in MLDRIN-led projects and activities

Objective 2) MLDRIN provides an outstanding example of strong Indigenous governance

Strategies:

- Empower the MLDRIN Board as an effective and accountable governance body
- Build the strength of the Full Delegation as a culturally authoritative decision making body that strengthens the self determination of Member Nations

Objective 3) MLDRIN supports development of equitable models for First Nations water ownership and governance and provides unique value as a source of information underpinning collaboration between Nations

Strategies:

- Build the value of the MLDRIN Full delegation as a forum for information sharing and collaboration
- Model innovative approaches to governance and collaboration to underpin ownership of water and advance water justice