

Reconnecting River Country

Working with First Nations communities

In the Murray-Darling Basin there are physical structures, river management practices and operational limits restricting flows and the use of water across the landscape.

These constraints result in rivers connecting to their floodplains less often than is needed to maintain the health of Country. During prolonged dry periods, this can have catastrophic impacts on the health of native flora and fauna relying on river and wetland flows to survive and thrive.

These rivers and wetlands are of great cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic importance to First Nations people. This connection provides valuable insights into the management and maintenance of our waterways, riverscapes and the land.

Addressing these constraints supports the continuity of First Nation's cultural practices, knowledge and values by improving river system health and restoring Country.

The NSW Government is committed to working with First Nations communities to consider closely and meaningfully the water-dependent cultural values and uses important to First Nations communities as part of developing the Reconnecting River Country Program.

Program benefits for First Nations communities

The program has the potential to deliver a range of outcomes benefitting First Nations people. The program proposes to:

	Prioritise the connection between healthy Country and a healthy, vibrant and sustainable First Nations culture and community.
	Provide opportunities for First Nations people to have meaningful and equitable input in program decision-making processes.
	Connect with bordering Nations to achieve shared outcomes.
	Facilitate cross-cultural communication and knowledge sharing.
	Identify, invest in and implement strategies to successfully achieve Aboriginal Participation in Construction (APIC) commitments for the Department of Planning and Environment.
	Recognise the value and expertise of First Nations participation by ensuring remuneration is provided when specialist expertise is engaged.
	Identify procurement opportunities where First Nations organisations can take part.

Engaging with First Nations communities

We will work with First Nations people across the project area using a Nation-by-Nation approach, with a focus on face-to-face talks and on-Country workshops. This will enable First Nations people to continue their role as custodians and contribute to water management decisions within their cultural boundaries.

Formal reference groups will be established in the Murrumbidgee River and Murray River program areas for First Nations people. The aim being to support transparent, equitable, fair and consistent engagement with a broad range of potentially affected First Nations communities.

The role of reference group members is to:

- represent the views and interests of the program's most affected First Nations communities
- provide feedback and advice on key elements of the program
- road test selected program information and communication products.

The NSW Government will also work with key First Nations organisations, such as the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, Local Aboriginal Lands Councils and Native Title groups to ensure they are engaged on, and included in, key elements of the program.

A vision for healthy Country

We will work with First Nations people to define the values and assets benefitting from, or being impacted by, inundation within the program areas. First Nations people will be able to provide information on their aims and desired outcomes for the management of water dependent cultural values

and uses. There will also be opportunities to discuss preferred flow options as part of realising cultural benefits and mitigating impacts.

The NSW Government acknowledges the principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and the information provided by First Nations people during the engagement process will only be used with the appropriate cultural approvals and permissions in place.

Acknowledgement

The Department of Planning and Environment acknowledges we work on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and water. We show our respect to Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

Find out more

To find out more about upcoming engagement opportunities please contact us or get in touch with your local engagement officer.

For more information about the program:

Visit [subscribe for updates](https://water.nsw.gov.au/RRCPUdates)
water.nsw.gov.au/RRCPUdates

Phone 1300 081 047

Email admin.rtcp@dpie.nsw.gov.au

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