

MURRAY LOWER DARLING RIVERS INDIGENOUS NATIONS

# MLDRIN



2014/15 ANNUAL REPORT



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FROM COVER PAGE: Members of the Dulbinya Dancers, performing by the Murrumbidgee River during a MLDRIN Meeting on Wiradjuri Country in Wagga Wagga. The name of the group comes from Wiradjuri word DULBINYA (Worship).

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Uncle Moogie (Major Sumner), Ngarrindjeri Elder performs a smoking ceremony at MLDRIN's workshop in Goolwa, South Aus-

# ABOUT MLDRIN



## OUR VISION

THE LAND, WATER, AIR AND PEOPLE  
RECOGNISED AS ONE HOLISTIC LANDSCAPE,  
PROTECTED AND SUSTAINED  
BY OUR SOVEREIGN PEOPLE.

MLDRIN is an independent, representative confederation of Sovereign First Nations from the Southern Murray Darling Basin. 24 Aboriginal Nations make up our organisation, with two representatives from each Nation. Our Board of Directors administers the Not-for-Profit Company. MLDRIN was established in 1998 and has grown to take on a range of work evolving from our Member Nations' commitment to care for their traditional lands and waters.

### Our core work includes:

- Advising the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) on all matters relevant to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal people in the Southern Murray Darling Basin, in particular, the implementation of the Basin Plan
- Having an active role in Natural Resource Management and water planning

- Providing a forum for our member nations to keep informed, deliberate on issues and provide feedback and advice to decision makers across all levels of Government
- Advocating for our member Nations' rights and interests in land and water, specifically to progress the recognition of Aboriginal water rights and Cultural Flows
- Providing leadership and capacity building for our member nations

### MLDRIN's Member Nations:

Maraura ,Taungurung , Wadi Wadi , Ngarrindjeri , Waywurru, Barkindji, Wegi Wegi, Nyeri Nyeri, Ngintait ,Tatti Tatti ,Wamba Wamba, Yita Yita, Mutthi Mutthi, Latji Latji, Yaitmathang, Barapa Barapa, Nari Nari, Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wergaia, Wotjabaluk, Wiradjuri, Dhudoroa, Wolgalu

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

## 2.

I am pleased to say that, through MLDRIN's work in 2014/15, First Nations' rights and interests in water have gained increasing recognition.

2014/15 has been a year of growth and opportunity for MLDRIN. The company has consolidated and improved on its ability to act as a representative voice for Traditional Owners across the Southern Murray Darling Basin.

The National Water Commission in its National Reform Assessment 2014, found that leadership on Indigenous water issues by organisations such as MLDRIN has been crucial to facilitate the inclusion of Indigenous interests into national and state water policy frameworks. The Report of the Independent Review of the Water Act 2007 also recognised that inclusion of Indigenous interests was a key area of 'unfinished business' in water reform. This recognition attests to our ongoing efforts and advocacy.

MLDRIN has worked actively and constructively with the MDBA, State Governments, regional agencies, water managers and external stakeholders to progress our vision. We have raised our public profile while establishing MLDRIN as a truly independent organisation. This consolidation will position MLDRIN to undertake the extensive work of research, engagement and providing advice on the accreditation of Water Resource Plans that will be required in coming years.

The funding agreement signed with the MDBA in 2014 has allowed MLDRIN to proceed with the core

business of engagement and representation. It has ensured that we can hold Full Delegation gatherings, providing the MDBA and other agencies with a unique opportunity to consult with Traditional Owners from across the geographically vast Murray Darling Basin. It has ensured that we can employ an Executive Officer to manage the considerable administrative workload of the company. The base level of funding is essential to keep MLDRIN functioning and meeting targets.

In 2015/16 and subsequent years leading up to 2019, MLDRIN will need to increase capacity and establish systems to take on an expanding workload. Facilitating consultation over the development of Water Resource Plans (WRPs) and providing advice on the accreditation of those plans is vital work that MLDRIN is preparing for. This will need to be supported through more outreach with First Nations communities, public forums, capacity building and fact-finding. There is also an increased demand for MLDRIN to provide feedback, advice and submissions as well as to attend conferences, presentations and workshops.

The Board recognises that the hard work undertaken in 2014/15 has positioned the company well, but that we will need to increase capacity considerably in coming years. Additional funding, training and human resources will be needed.

We look forward to the challenge.





From left, Neil Ward (MDBA, Aboriginal Partnerships Team), Darren Perry (Ngintait, MLDRIN Chair), Rene Woods (Nari Nari, MLDRIN Deputy Chair)

# 2014 / 15

# ACHIEVEMENTS

# AT A GLANCE

3.

- Finalised a two-year funding agreement with the MDBA
- Provided ongoing, constructive advice and information to the MDBA, State Governments and water management agencies, on behalf of First Nations
- Successfully advocated for reform in the Commonwealth Water Act 2007, to meet First Nations interests.
- Built engagement and discussions towards a partnership with Commonwealth and State Governments on achieving First Nations water rights.
- Built MLDRIN's profile as a voice for First Nations in mainstream and social media
- Pursued strategic engagement with key stakeholders including irrigators, environmental NGOs, CMAs, legal experts and research institutes
- Strengthened internal and external communications through a new Communications Strategy, newsletter and improved management
- Provided planning advice and oversight for the development of the Aboriginal Waterways Assessment tool.
- Contributed to a review of the National Cultural Flows Research Project
- Conducted a knowledge stocktake and capacity building in Water Resource Planning for our Delegates



# PROGRESS ON ACTIVITIES

## 4.

The following sections detail MLDRIN's work in relation to key activities included in our Funding Agreement with the Murray Darling Basin Authority.



The MLDRIN Board by the banks of the Macquarie River near Dubbo. Absent: Arthur Kirby.

# Basin Plan Implementation

a)

MLDRIN has strengthened its reputation as a key 'go-to' body for advice on Basin Plan implementation issues relevant to the region's Traditional Owners (TOs).

MLDRIN meetings offer an invaluable forum for MDBA staff to raise and discuss Basin Plan implementation issues relevant to TOs. Staff from

various departments of the MDBA, as well as State Governments and water planners have attended to gain advice and input on various matters. Basin Plan implementation issues considered throughout the period are detailed in the following sections.



# Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

## i.

MLDRIN recognizes that a significant knowledge gap hinders understanding of how water reform and Basin Plan implementation will affect Aboriginal people. Research indicates that the Basin's 75,000+ Aboriginal people own less than 1% of the region's water and continue to be marginalized from mainstream water management. However, methodologies for monitoring the impact of policies and legislation on these realities are only in their infancy.

As the Basin Plan has not been fully implemented, it is too early to determine impacts on Aboriginal people and communities. As implementation progresses, especially as Water Resource Plans are rolled out, we need to be able to measure if policies are having a beneficial impact.

MLDRIN has played a key role in advising on development of the Aboriginal Waterways Assessment tool, which offers a methodology for assessing the cultural health of waterways, and hence documenting change over time as a result of management of environmental and other flows.

MLDRIN has also reviewed a report on a limited Socio-Economic Survey of Aboriginal Water Related Issues in the Murray Darling Basin. We recognise this as an important contribution to understanding the impacts of the Plan, but would like to see this project rolled out on a larger scale to deliver statistically significant data.

MLDRIN has a strong aspiration to be active partners in socio-economic, environmental and cultural monitoring and assessment of the Basin Plan's impacts. A start has been made in 2014/15 but much more work is needed.

This is an area which needs increased resourcing and partnerships with government, research institutes and NGOs.

MLDRIN is very keen to continue working with the MDBA and other agencies to develop and improve approaches for monitoring the impacts of the Basin Plan on Aboriginal people.



# Incorporating cultural perspectives in Basin environmental watering and planning

## ii.

Culturally responsive management of environmental water is a key pathway for achieving improved outcomes for First Nations people across the Basin. MLDRIN advocates that Aboriginal Environmental Outcomes should be a key objective of environmental water management. Better management of e-water can go some way to fulfilling Aboriginal rights and aspirations articulated in the concept of Cultural Flows.

Over the period, MLDRIN's approach has been to provide high-level advice to Governments, support member nations in specific, on-ground projects and promote the role of Aboriginal ecological knowledge in environmental watering. This approach has contributed to a growing recognition of the need to include cultural objectives in environmental watering. There is still much to be done to ensure that the full and effective participation of Traditional Owners is consistently included across the Basin and to ensure that TOs are progressing towards a goal of owning and managing environmental entitlements within the framework of Cultural Flows.

Throughout 2014/15 MLDRIN has provided consistent, quality advice to MDBA and other agencies about how cultural perspectives can be incorporated in Basin environmental watering and planning. MLDRIN has also engaged with a diverse range of stakeholders to help build an agreed approach to incorporating Aboriginal cultural values.

MLDRIN provided a detailed and timely submission and met with key MDBA staff to discuss the development of the Basin Wide Environmental Watering Strategy (EWS) throughout August - September 2014. Recommendations and feedback from MLDRIN's submissions and meetings were incorporated into the final EWS document. This included the recognition of Indigenous involvement

in environmental watering through the use of a case study.

In March, MLDRIN's Chair initiated discussions with the MDBA Chair and Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment to provide for MLDRIN representation on the Southern Connected Basin Environmental Water Working Group and other environmental water consultative committees. Representation on this committee will allow for further direct input regarding incorporation of cultural values in environmental watering and capacity development to support future Aboriginal watering activities. MLDRIN also produced a briefing paper for The Parliamentary Secretary and ALP Shadow Environment Spokesperson, communicating the importance of incorporating cultural objectives in environmental watering.

The Board and individual delegates have initiated engagement with key stakeholders including the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) and CEWH Local Engagement Officers. The Board and delegates have provided high-level advice and local Traditional Owners perspectives on environmental watering. MLDRIN has also initiated engagement with NGOs, such as the Nature Foundation of South Australia, who are already undertaking environmental watering activities.

**MLDRIN's Chair and other delegates have attended numerous meetings and workshops on environmental watering throughout the period, including:**

- Presenting to National Irrigator's Council on cultural values in environmental watering and Cultural Flows
- Attendance and presentation at Wentworth Environmental Watering Conference April 2015

- Participation in Victorian Environmental Water Holder, Environmental Water Matters seminar 10 September 2014
- Participation in the Darling Anabranch Adaptive Management strategy April, 2015
- Attending meetings with Murrumbidgee EWAG regarding cultural values in environmental watering
- Regular MDB Peak Bodies meetings throughout 2014/15
- Engagement with Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder local engagement officers at MLDRIN meetings and with delegates.

MLDRIN Director and Barapa Barapa Delegate Neville Whyman is a key member of the flagship Barapa Barapa Water for Country project. The project is trialing approaches to incorporate Aboriginal cultural values in environmental watering in the Gunbower Forest. The MLDRIN Board has provided advice to North Central CMA staff on this project.

In partnership with MDBA, MLDRIN developed the terminology of 'Aboriginal Environmental Outcomes,' to describe the cultural benefits of environmental watering. This concept has been used to generate improved understanding of Aboriginal aspirations in water management.

The MDBA has shown willingness to understand and include cultural objectives in environmental watering, however high-level planning documents are yet to include Aboriginal values in targets and objectives. Regrettably, the 2015/16 Basin Annual Environmental Watering Priorities were completed without consultation with MLDRIN or Traditional Owners from the Southern Basin. MLDRIN is concerned about the precedent this sets and looks

forward to further opportunities for consultation on the Annual Priorities.

In 2015\16 MLDRIN wants to explore partnerships with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and MDBA to develop a more active role for MLDRIN and Traditional Owners in environmental water management. MLDRIN has long-term aspirations to build capacity and manage environmental allocations. Our work throughout 2014-15 has built a solid foundation to pursue these aspirations.

# Best practice Aboriginal engagement and outcomes in water resource planning



MLDRIN has advocated strongly for effective implementation of the requirements for consultation with First Nations in the development of Water Resource Plans, under the Basin Plan. Our member nations see this as an opportunity to drive significant improvements in consultation processes and partnerships with government, as well as to secure outcomes from the Basin Plan water reform process.

MLDRIN's strong advocacy on this front was reflected in Conclusion 1.2 of the Report of the Independent Review of the Water Act 2007, which stated that 'The effective implementation of the Basin Plan water resource plan requirements relating to Indigenous values and uses is essential to ensuring that these requirements translate into a positive step forward in integrating Indigenous peoples' objectives into Basin water planning frameworks.' Ensuring this 'effective implementation' is a key objective of MLDRIN.

The MLDRIN Board and delegates have provided regular advice to State Government representatives and the MDBA through regular meetings and engagement. Relevant MDBA staff and representatives from all Southern Basin States attended and presented at MLDRIN meetings in Wagga Wagga (March 2015) and Goolwa (June 2015) regarding approaches to Water Resource Planning. Feedback from delegates has helped to inform each States' approach and guide best practice.

MLDRIN meetings throughout 2014/15 have provided a unique opportunity for State Government representatives and MDBA staff to share approaches to engagement, from various jurisdictions. The meetings help fill a significant gap in building a consistent approach to implementing WRP requirements.

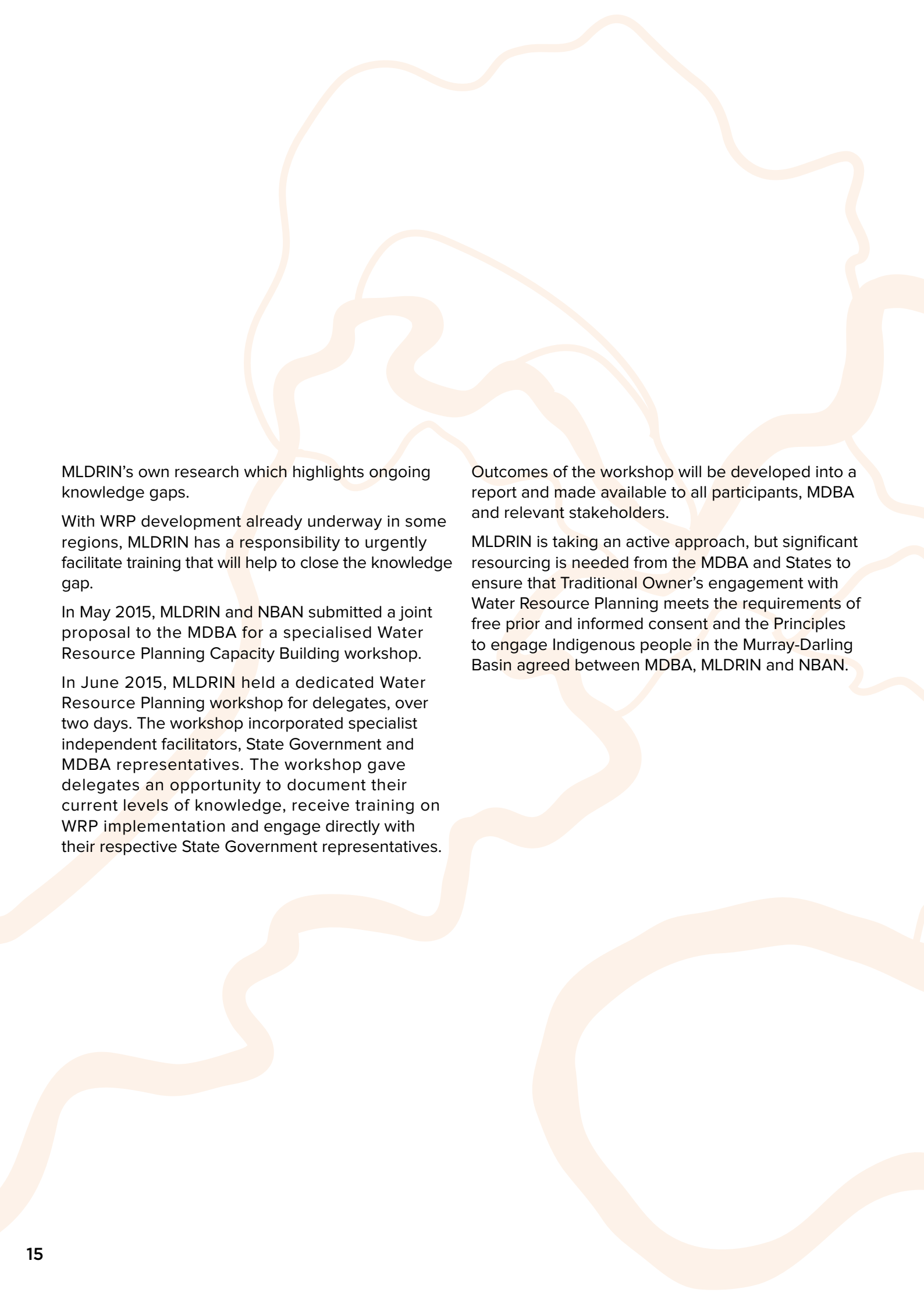
**MLDRIN has contributed to key outcomes throughout the period including:**

- Development of maps and guidance detailing First Nations interests in Water Resource Plan Areas
- Development of the Yarns Woven document, which provides guidance to State Governments on the implementation of Indigenous consultation requirements for Water Resource Plans
- Development and review of the Aboriginal Waterway Assessment tool (AWA). The AWA provides a possible methodology for Nations to document and communicate Indigenous values and uses, while informing Water Resource Planning.
- Development of a Victorian Aboriginal Water Reference Group for Water Resource Plan development. MLDRIN provided advice alongside MDBA and Victorian Traditional Owners.

At the March Wagga Wagga meeting, MLDRIN committed to nominate delegates to attend a proposed Water Resource Planning meeting with States and the MDBA. Nominations were taken. We look forward to progressing this opportunity with the MDBA.

A key focus for MLDRIN in 2014/15 and into 2015/16 has been to increase capacity amongst our member nations, to allow them to actively and effectively engage in the Water Resource Planning process. Initial surveys highlight the need for a considerable investment of resources in capacity building for Water Resource Planning participation. In a cursory survey of Aboriginal people across the Basin conducted by the MDBA, 67% of respondents indicated that they did not know how water is managed in the region. This is supported by





MLDRIN's own research which highlights ongoing knowledge gaps.

With WRP development already underway in some regions, MLDRIN has a responsibility to urgently facilitate training that will help to close the knowledge gap.

In May 2015, MLDRIN and NBAN submitted a joint proposal to the MDBA for a specialised Water Resource Planning Capacity Building workshop.

In June 2015, MLDRIN held a dedicated Water Resource Planning workshop for delegates, over two days. The workshop incorporated specialist independent facilitators, State Government and MDBA representatives. The workshop gave delegates an opportunity to document their current levels of knowledge, receive training on WRP implementation and engage directly with their respective State Government representatives.

Outcomes of the workshop will be developed into a report and made available to all participants, MDBA and relevant stakeholders.

MLDRIN is taking an active approach, but significant resourcing is needed from the MDBA and States to ensure that Traditional Owner's engagement with Water Resource Planning meets the requirements of free prior and informed consent and the Principles to engage Indigenous people in the Murray-Darling Basin agreed between MDBA, MLDRIN and NBAN.

# Cultural Flows Research

b)

The National Cultural Flows Research Project is conducting groundbreaking, collaborative work to secure a future where Indigenous water allocations are embedded within Australia's water planning and management regimes. A review of the project initiated in November 2014, following concerns expressed by MLDRIN and others, has provided an important opportunity to take stock of progress and challenges to date and orient the project to meet its objectives.

MLDRIN Delegates and members of the Research Committee have played a key role in the ongoing review of the project. MLDRIN Delegates participated in interviews for the independent review panel and provided advice on the engagement of contractors, site selection and engagement protocols.

MLDRIN's Board and Delegates contributed to the review, assessed the review report and attended meetings with MDBA.

MLDRIN is committed to this unique project and believes the review was timely and necessary. The project is now moving forward, with a new project officer and renewed support from the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and other agencies. Implementing the findings of the review in 2014/15 will ensure positive progress.



# Indigenous Engagement, Communications and Education Advice



MLDRIN has continued to perform its role as a source of independent advice on indigenous engagement, communications and education materials for the MDBA and other agencies. In 2014/15 MLDRIN delegates were available to provide high quality advice and recommendations consistent with best practice engagement protocols. MLDRIN has performed an important role as a broker between Government agencies and Basin Traditional Owners.

MLDRIN meetings provide an important opportunity for MDBA and other agencies to gain direct feedback from Basin Traditional Owners on a range of engagement and communications activities and products. MLDRIN also facilitates engagement with the MDBA by providing contact details and assisting communication with relevant Traditional Owners.

**Throughout 2014/15 MLDRIN has assisted MDBA to develop communications and engagement tools including:**

- The Aboriginal Partnerships Action Plan, attended meetings with MDBA staff and NBAN reps and provided input and advice.
- The 'Strengthening Connections' document. MLDRIN provided advice and reps attended and promoted the launch of the document.
- The Aboriginal Style Guide: MLDRIN provided feedback at Full Delegation
- The follow-up to the Yarn on the River document, discussing implementation of requirements relating to Aboriginal interests in the Basin Plan
- Aboriginal Waterway Assessment Report, MLDRIN representatives attended meetings, provided

comments and feedback on the draft.

- Maps and guidance detailing First Nations interests in Water Resource Plan Areas

**MLDRIN has also provided strategic advice on key Aboriginal engagement and communication processes undertaken by MDBA and other agencies. These include:**

- Groundwater Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) Review: MLDRIN provided direct feedback on Aboriginal engagement processes for the review of SDLs in three groundwater resource units. MLDRIN submitted a proposal to coordinate Aboriginal consultation for the review.
- Aboriginal Waterways Assessment: MLDRIN provided strategic advice on the development of the tool and implementation of a pilot program, including selection of sites, communication with TOs, review of research findings and protocols for the rollout.
- Aboriginal Submissions Database: MLDRIN representatives advised on approaches and protocols for operationalizing a database developed from submissions made by Aboriginal people and organisations in response to the draft Basin Plan.

MLDRIN also actively supported amendments to the Commonwealth Water Act which would ensure that engaging with Traditional Owners is formally integrated into the MDBA's functions. Delegates raised the proposal with the Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment and received a commitment to progress this amendment. This amendment strengthens and supports MDBA's Indigenous engagement and education activities.



**In addition to advising the MDBA, MLDRIN has also responded to requests for advice from various agencies and jurisdictions including:**

- Victorian Government DELWP: advising on development of Aboriginal Water Reference Group and approach to Water Resource Planning
- Victorian Indigenous Facilitators Network: advising on development of guidance for CMAs.
- Department of the Environment (COAG Joint

Steering Committee for the revision of the Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality). Providing advice on incorporation of cultural and spiritual values in the Guidelines.

With increased capacity in 2015/16, MLDRIN will work to produce high-quality materials, reports and briefings that provide independent advice on matters relevant to Basin First Nations.



MLDRIN Delegates and the Dulbinya Dancers beside the Murrumbidgee at Wagga Wagga.

# Meetings And Gatherings

d)

Meetings and gatherings are the core business of MLDRIN. Our Full Delegation gatherings provide a crucial opportunity for Traditional Owners from 24 First Nations to communicate their views to governments. They also provide a mechanism for the MDBA, State Governments and NRM agencies to engage directly with Traditional Owners, improving cultural awareness, policy development and implementation.

## **In 2014/15 MLDRIN held:**

Three Full Delegation Gatherings: Mildura (November 2014), Wagga Wagga (March 2015), Goolwa (July 2015), attended by delegates from 24 Nations.

Four Executive meetings: Canberra (Joint with NBAN – Aug 2014), Mildura (November 2014), Canberra (February 2015), Wagga Wagga (March 2015), Dubbo (May 2015).


MDBA and State governments and local agencies were invited and actively engaged in all MLDRIN meetings. A major milestone for 2014/15 was to have representatives from all four Southern Basin States and Territories in the room, alongside MDBA and Traditional Owner representatives. MLDRIN's meetings are providing a unique forum for representatives of multiple jurisdictions to share approaches on implementing requirements for Aboriginal engagement.





MLDRIN Chair Darren Perry (left), Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) Chair Fred Hooper (centre) and outgoing MDBA CEO Dr. Rhondda Dickson at the launch of the Strengthening Connection document, the MDBA's first Reconciliation Action Plan.





*“The Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) Water and Catchment Group is committed to providing increased participation and opportunities for Indigenous people in all facets of water management and planning, and in particular around Water Resource Plans. MLDRIN meetings offer a valuable opportunity to get feedback and input from Traditional Owners from across Victoria and the Basin. We look forward to continuing our work and collaboration with MLDRIN in advancing this important area of work.”*

Catherine Lewis

Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning

*“The South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources aims to increase the participation of Aboriginal Peoples in the planning and development of water resource plans, as well as continued collaboration in the implementation of water resource management. MLDRIN meetings allow for attendees to openly and honestly discuss critical issues that affect Aboriginal Peoples and provides the opportunity to work on issues across jurisdictions at a national scale, improving cross-border relationships and management arrangements.”*

Michelle Benison

Senior Policy Officer

Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, South Australia

*“The NSW DPI Water’s - Aboriginal Water Initiative aims to improve Aboriginal involvement and representation in water planning and management within NSW. We’ve been working alongside MLDRIN for some years now. We attend the regular MLDRIN meetings and this allows our team to discuss the big issues facing the Basin and NSW Aboriginal Communities. We hope this relationship continues to grow in the coming years.”*

Bradley Moggridge

Team Leader Aboriginal Water Initiative

NSW DPI Water

# Communications

e)

In 2014/15 MLDRIN has significantly improved internal communications processes and strengthened our outreach with external stakeholders and the general public. The Board endorsed a new Communications Strategy, which establishes key audiences, communication tools and targets. At the core of the strategy is MLDRIN's commitment to effectively communicate with our member Nations and the broader Aboriginal community of the Basin.

**Key outcomes for 2014/15 include:**

- Establishing a new MLDRIN News quarterly newsletter. The first edition was circulated to member Nations and a range of other stakeholders with excellent feedback.
- Building MLDRIN's presence on social media. New MLDRIN Facebook and Twitter accounts have been established, with regular updates promoting the organisation's work and collaboration with the MDBA. Recent posts have reached over 10,000 users.
- Mainstream media: MLDRIN has commented on important developments in water policy. Our media releases have generated coverage on ABC Country Hour, the Koori Mail, National Indigenous Radio Service, SBS Radio and the National Indigenous Times newspaper.
- Regular updates and improved accessibility for the [www.mldrin.org.au](http://www.mldrin.org.au) website, allowing MLDRIN delegates to access minutes and correspondence via a secure member's section.

In addition, our Delegates have actively engaged with a diverse range of stakeholders through conferences and events including:

- Participation on Expert Panel discussion for the International Rivers Symposium (September 2014)
- Deputy chair and delegates attended and participated in presentations on Aboriginal Water Rights at the World Parks Congress (November, 2014)
- In February, 2015 the Chairperson presented at Environmental Justice Australia's 'Water Citizenship' conference, highlighting MLDRIN's role in progressing Aboriginal water rights.
- Meeting with National Irrigator's Council (August 2014) and presentation at National Irrigator's Conference (May 2015).
- Participation in Victorian Environmental Water Holder seminar September 2014
- Presentations on water reform and Aboriginal rights at the National Native Title Conference, June 2015



Uncle Moogie (Major Sumner)  
performing a Welcome to Country  
at Goolwa, South Australia.



# PROGRESS ON OBJECTIVES

## 5.

**MLDRIN has worked hard throughout the period to fulfill the objectives of our funding agreement with the MDBA. Positive progress in line with each of the objectives is detailed below:**

**Objective a)** to provide for and to facilitate the participation, input and advice of MLDRIN and, through and with it, the Sovereign First Nations, in agreed MDBA projects, including those described in Attachment A of Schedule 2.

MLDRIN has taken an active role in engaging First Nations and our Delegates in agreed MDBA activities. The Board and Delegation have facilitated participation, input and advice on a range of activities including: Consultation for Water Resource Planning, incorporation of cultural objectives in environmental watering and development of communication and engagement tools and processes. MLDRIN has helped broker relationships between MDBA and First Nations, working on projects such as the ACFHI, while providing a forum for Nations to present their opinions and discuss projects. The Board is extremely conscious of the need to maintain the inclusive and representative nature of MLDRIN. To this end, greater outreach has been initiated with Member Nations who do not currently have sitting delegates or who have lower levels of engagement. Objective a) entails a long-term commitment to maintaining a representative organization and building relationships with MDBA and other agencies. This objective is progressing well.

**Objective b)** to encourage a coordinated and consultative approach between MLDRIN and, through and with it, the Sovereign First Nations, to assist the MDBA to achieve their obligations and policy and legal commitments with respect to the

protection and management of water resources, natural resources and Sovereign First Nation's Intellectual and Cultural Property;

In 2014/15 MLDRIN has taken steps to activate strategies for participation, recognition and ownership in water and natural resource planning and capacity building as outlined in our Corporate Plan 2012-17. This entails speaking with a strategic unified voice about cultural and natural resource matters, while coordinating a consultative approach with individual First Nations, for matters pertaining to each Nation's Country. The MDBA is able to access this coordinated and consultative network in order to inform, engage and develop partnerships with Basin Traditional Owners. High-level, Basin-wide issues can be dealt with at Executive or membership level, while local issues can be referred to respective First Nations. The Board can also assist and facilitate individual Nations as they engage. This two-tier system allows for efficient, effective and equitable participation of First Nations, assisting the MDBA to meet policy and legal commitments stipulated in the MDBA Indigenous Engagement Principles, Basin Plan, National Water Initiative and UNDRIP.

Again, this Objective reflects an ongoing commitment that is progressing well. In 2014/15 MLDRIN has built on its key role as a coordinated, representative body that can facilitate engagement with First Nations across the Basin. However, we recognize there are significant challenges in resourcing effective coordination between and within nations, given the geographical scope of the region. Additional resources to develop greater outreach and coordination programs would significantly enhance our capacity in this area.

**Objective c)** to provide a mechanism for the

provision of coordinated and strategic advice from MLDRIN and, through and with it, the Sovereign First Nations, on and regarding matters of common concern to MLDRIN, the Sovereign First Nations and the MDBA; and

MLDRIN has delivered on its commitment through the Funding Agreement with the MDBA to provide a mechanism for the provision of advice and information. The Board has ensured that MDBA staff are informed and able to participate in all MLDRIN meetings in 2014/15 as stipulated in the agreement. MDBA staff submit proposed agendas and utilize the agreed meeting time to deliberate on a range of issues. Outcomes and actions arising from MLDRIN meetings are recorded and implemented by the Board and Executive Officer. MLDRIN meetings also provide opportunities for MDBA staff to engage directly with specific Nations and representatives on local issues. This procedure is operating as an effective mechanism, coordinating the flow of information from MDBA to Member Nations and vice versa.

In addition, the Chair, Deputy Chair and selected delegates have made themselves available to attend meetings and provide consistent advice on a range of specific projects and issues.


The Board is confident that MLDRIN has delivered well on this objective in 2014/15. In the coming period, a more formal approach and additional resources will be needed to process the growing workload of requests for information, feedback and advice. A clearly defined mechanism, coordinated by the Executive Officer and incorporating working groups and input from external experts will be trialed in 2015/16.

**Objective d)** to facilitate the development and maintenance of strong, collaborative and co-operative relationships between MLDRIN and, through and with it, the Sovereign First Nations, and the MDBA, by capitalising on opportunities, making the most effective use of resources and maximising benefits to all of the parties in areas of common interest.

In 2014/15 MLDRIN has built on a strong collaborative relationship with the MDBA. Working together, on projects such as the Strengthening Connections document, the Aboriginal Waterways Assessment tool and the Aboriginal Submissions Database, has allowed MDBA and MLDRIN to deliver tangible outcomes. These outcomes can be applied to benefit Traditional Owners and provide guidance for Commonwealth and State agencies. MLDRIN asserts that the guidance and input of First Nations is essential to ensure that the MDBA's work reflects best practice. This collaborative engagement thus advances the common interests of all parties.

As we establish an independent footing, MLDRIN has capitalized on opportunities to build relationships with key decision makers and stakeholders including politicians, journalists, irrigators, NGOs and water managers. We have taken a proactive and informed approach, participating in water planning and building capacity wherever opportunities arise.

We have used our financial and human resources effectively to ensure the diligent management of the organization and meet KPIs outlined in the funding agreement. Where possible, we have initiated projects essential to meeting the long-term objectives of the company, including capacity building and public engagement.

The background of the page is decorated with several thick, wavy, orange-colored lines that meander across the white space, creating a fluid, organic pattern.

Our current funding agreement allows MLDRIN to sustain the core business of meetings and administration. Additional capacity can be activated through complimentary funding for important projects. There are significant opportunities for improvement in meeting some objectives, particularly the provision of advice and accreditation role for Water Resource Planning, which are reliant on extra funding. Additional funding to allow MLDRIN to complete key projects would also allow us to assist MDBA to meet policy and legal commitments.





