

MLDRIN News

Quarterly news update from the
Murray Lower Darling Rivers
Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN)



Spring, 2016

In this issue

- Page 1 Victorian Water Plan
- Page 2 Cultural Assessment on
the Glenelg River
MLDRIN AGM brings in a
new Board
- Page 3 What have we been up to?
- Page 4 What have we been up to?
Thank you Darren Perry
- Page 5 Victorian Water Plan
(cont.)
River Symposium Report

Victorian Water Plan an historic step

In October, MLDRIN welcomed the launch of a new Water Plan for Victoria. The *Water for Victoria* plan sets 69 actions under nine themes including Water for Agriculture, Waterway and Catchment Health and Climate Change. A key feature of the plan is the inclusion of a dedicated chapter on Recognising and Managing for Aboriginal values. Launching the plan on October 19th, Victorian water Minister Lisa Neville announced funding of \$4.7 million to underpin improved recognition and management of Aboriginal cultural values related to waterways, as well as \$5 million to develop a roadmap towards Aboriginal participation in water markets.

MLDRIN welcomed *Water for Victoria* as an exciting and historic step towards justice and wellbeing for Aboriginal people. The reforms establish a new benchmark in the recognition of Aboriginal water rights in South Eastern Australia. Victoria will now have a dedicated Aboriginal Water Unit, which will be crucial to meet commitments in the Murray Darling Basin Plan as well as State policies and legislation.

Turn to page five for more information and details about the content of the plan...

Standing with Standing Rock

In September, Victorian MLDRIN Delegates, Traditional Owners and allies highlighted their solidarity with Native American water protectors who are struggling to protect traditional lands from the impacts of the Dakota Access Pipeline. To find out more about this groundbreaking movement visit

<http://standwithstandingrock.net/>





Cultural values on the Glenelg River

Aboriginal Waterways Assessment

In October, MLDRIN was thrilled to take part in an Aboriginal Waterways Assessment (AWA) on the Glenelg River (or *Bochara*), in South West Victoria. MLDRIN Facilitators worked alongside Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation, Barengi Gadjin Land Council and Glenelg Hopkins CMA to deliver the week-long field work program. Participants visited 8 sites along the Glenelg and recorded information about cultural values and environmental health. The information will be used to prepare

quantitative data that will help Traditional Owners to advocate for their priorities and objectives.

The AWA process also allows Traditional Owners and waterway managers to share knowledge, stories and information.

Glenelg key to cultural values

During the field trip, the cultural significance of the Glenelg River was highlighted. Traditional use of the waterway is continued through fishing sporting events and work on Country. The project partners

hope that the AWA data and reports will help to support improved management of the river through environmental water releases from the large Rocklands Reservoir and other Natural Resource Management activities.

The Glenelg River AWA is part of a larger *Towards Cultural Flows* project, coordinated by the Glenelg Hopkins CMA, with funding from the Victorian Government. MLDRIN looks forward to working with Aboriginal groups across the state to roll out more AWAs in the near future.

2016 MLDRIN AGM brings in a new Board

On the 11th and 12th November, MLDRIN held its 2016 Annual General Meeting on Wotjabaluk Country at Horsham, Victoria. Representatives of 16 Member Nations were in attendance. Delegates endorsed the Annual Report and Financial Report for 2015. The Board was pleased to report that MLDRIN's revenue grew in the last financial year, due to project funding from State

governments and the MDBA. Delegates also endorsed an updated Travel Policy and discussed the group's vision for 2016-2017.

Every two years, MLDRIN elects a Board of Director's oversee the organisation's operations. This year has seen some changes with a new Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson elected, as well as two new Directors. The new Board has an exciting and challenging

two years ahead! The new Board consists of: Rene Woods (Chair), Stephen Atkinson (Deputy Chair), Grant Rigney, Coral Peckham, Stewart Taylor, Alice Williams and Gayle Madigan. MLDRIN would like to thank outgoing Board members Bella Kennedy and Neville Whyman for their commitment and contribution to MLDRIN over the last two years.



What have we been up to?

MLDRIN delegates and staff have been out and about engaging with key partners and working on country across the Southern Murray Darling Basin.

NBAN-MLDRIN Joint Meeting

In August, MLDRIN teamed up with the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) to hold a big Joint Gathering in Canberra (see above). It was the first time the two organisations had met together since 2010. The meeting was attended by MDBA Chief Executive Officer Mr Phillip Glyde, and representatives from all Basin State Governments. Delegates released a First Nations Water Statement, highlighting Traditional Owners' aspirations for equity and sustainability in the management of waterways across the Basin. Read the Water Statement here: <https://goo.gl/qggytH>



management at a special workshop held in Canberra last month. The ACT Government has begun work on a Water Resource Plan for the region, but has recognised more needs to be done to support Traditional Owner participation. The workshop has opened a new dialogue, building off an Aboriginal Waterway Assessment run in late 2015. MLDRIN was also pleased to welcome Ngunnawal man Bradley Bell to attend our most recent Full Gathering in Horsham as an observer. Membership on MLDRIN and opportunities for participation will help ACT TOs ensure water resource planning reflects their rights, interests and objectives.

EJA Partnership

MLDRIN is excited to announce a new partnership working with Environmental Justice Australia (EJA) to progress Aboriginal access

to water in Victoria. EJA is a community legal service specializing in planning and environmental law. EJA staff have worked with MLDRIN over recent years to support improved outcomes in water resource planning. Now, thanks to funding provided by Victorian Legal Aid, EJA and MLDRIN will develop a program of strategic advocacy to advance Victorian Traditional Owners rights to manage and own water. EJA Lawyer Bruce Lindsay will be working closely with MLDRIN staff and member nations to identify innovative models of engagement and pathways to access water.

ASL Conference, Ballarat

In September, MLDRIN's outgoing Chair Darren Perry presented at the Australian Society for Limnology conference, held in Ballarat. Darren's presentation was



NSW Heritage Reforms

MLDRIN Directors recently met with NSW Office of Environment and Heritage Staff working on the development of stand-alone Aboriginal Cultural Heritage legislation for the State. The proposed reforms offer a great opportunity to build innovation and best-practice into cultural heritage management. More info: <https://goo.gl/oPGKH2>

ACT Meeting

Traditional Owners (TOs) from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) took up an opportunity to voice their aspirations for water

Continued...

Part of a special 'Indigenous Water Knowledge' session, which drew together updates and insights from key projects and researchers from around Australia. MLDRIN Barapa Barapa member Uncle Neville Whyman also presented on the Barapa Barapa Water For Country project.

SA MLDRIN Reps meet

MLDRIN representatives from South Australia have begun regular meetings with Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) staff, to discuss water resource planning and Indigenous engagement. DEWNR has started work on a River Country Plan for the South Australian Murray, which will involve Traditional



owner groups in workshops and cultural mapping activities to identify priorities for water management. There will also be a second Nations Meeting to be held in Adelaide on the 15th and 16th December, as a follow up to the successful gathering at Calperum Station in April. MLDRIN will continue to support this important engagement.

Basin Plan amendments

The Basin Plan is set to hit the news again before Christmas, as the MDBA announced a series of proposed amendments this week.

On Tuesday 22nd, MDBA Chair Neil Andrew announced the outcome of the Northern Basin Review (NBR). The NBR involves a review of environmental and socio-economic data in order to set a revised sustainable diversion limit (SDL) for the Northern part of the Basin. The review will mean less water will be recovered from farmers to support environmental and cultural values.

MDBA and the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) have undertaken a socio-cultural survey with Traditional Owners

in the Northern Basin to assess the importance of environmental flows to Aboriginal well-being. There will also be a three-month long public consultation process running from the 22nd November till February 2017.



MLDRIN has urged all Basin governments not to reduce water recovery for the environment. For more information visit: <https://goo.gl/2PWc5y>

MLDRIN volunteer team

Finally, we are pleased to announce that MLDRIN is building a team of skilled volunteer researchers to assist us to services to our members. Watch this space for more details...

Thank you Darren Perry!

Over the last 5 years Darren Perry has been a powerful voice for First Nations' water rights. As Chair of MLDRIN, and Ngintait member, Darren led our organization through challenging times and built our reputation and capacity as a peak body representing Traditional Owners in all aspects of water management.

At our 2016 AGM, Darren stood down as Chair and Ngintait member. He will be sorely missed. Darren will go onto to pursue evolving commitments as Chair of

the First Peoples of the Millewa Mallee Native Title Claimant's group and Chair of the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations NRM Subcommittee. We are confident that his skills and judgment will be put to good use.

Alongside a team of Directors and MLDRIN's membership, Darren was instrumental in securing closer engagement with Basin State governments on water resource planning, funding from the Victorian Government to run Aboriginal Waterway Assessment projects in Northern Victoria and major outcomes included in the

Water for Victoria plan, launched in October. Darren's legacy as Chair of MLDRIN will continue to deliver outcomes for Aboriginal people for decades to come.





MLDRIN Awarded

MLDRIN has been recognized for our work as advocates for the rivers and wetlands of the Murray and Lower Darling. In September, Acting Chair Rene Woods received the award from Environment Victoria CEO Mark Wakeham, at the 2016 Community Environment Awards.



Have your say on Basin Plan changes!

On the 22nd November, the Murray Darling Basin Authority announced a number of proposed changes to the Basin Plan. These changes could mean that farmers and other users will be able to take more water out of the river than was originally planned. There will be a three-month public consultation process and MLDRIN encourages all member Nations to have their say in the process. For more information on the changes and how to make submissions:

<https://goo.gl/rgKp6m>

Victorian Water Plan continued...

Chapter 6 of the Water for Victoria plan includes four 'actions' for the State Government and water management agencies. Broadly, these actions include commitments to:

- Recognize Aboriginal cultural values of waterways
- Support Traditional Owners to access water for economic development
- Ensure that Water Corporations, CMAs and other agencies work with Traditional Owners
- Build the capacity of Traditional Owner groups and the water sector to deliver on these commitments

As part of the Plan, an Aboriginal Reference Group will be established to 'co-design' policies and oversee implementation of the four actions. MLDRIN has been working closely with the Victorian Government, the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations and other stakeholders to determine the make-up and functions of the new Reference Group.

As part of these discussions, a 2 day workshop was held in September, with a diverse range of attendees from Victorian Traditional Owner groups. The workshop discussed options for determining appointments to the new reference group and opportunities available to Traditional Owner groups within the current water entitlement framework.

MLDRIN would like to recognize the hard work and enthusiasm of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff working within the Victorian Government to progress this crucially important work.

RiverSymposium Report

In September, MLDRIN's Acting Chair Rene Woods (pictured below) and Executive Officer Will Mooney travelled to Delhi, India to attend the 19th Inter-national RiverSymposium. The MLDRIN representatives presented on the national Cultural Flows Research Project and Aboriginal Waterways Assessment program to a keen international audience.

A key highlight of the conference was learning about the Basin 'Report Card' approach being developed by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Basin Report Cards allow complex data about social and environmental outcomes for river basins to be compiled into a simple 'grade' or score. MLDRIN Delegates have explored options to adapt the Report card approach to monitor outcomes of Aboriginal communities.

MLDRIN reps also learned about work being undertaken to document cultural values of rivers in India. Rene and Will presented alongside Neha Khandekar (from the People's Science Institute) who is working with traditional communities along the Ramganga River in India, to identify linkages between environmental flow delivery and socio-cultural outcomes. The next River Symposium will be held in Brisbane in 2017. MLDRIN looks forward to being involved.





Help MLDRIN speak as a strong, united voice for Sovereign First Nations

Since 1998 MLDRIN has worked to ensure that the voices of Sovereign First Nations from the Southern Murray Darling Basin are heard loud and clear. We need your support to hold governments to account and achieve big wins for our people. Eligible First Nations who do not currently have Delegates attending MLDRIN meetings are warmly invited to apply. Please email executiveofficer.mldrin@gmail.com for more info

"The land, water, air and people recognised as one holistic landscape, protected and sustained by our sovereign peoples"

MURRAY LOWER DARLING RIVERS Indigenous Nations

Maraura

Waywurru

Tatti Tatti

Barapa Barapa

Taungurung

Barkindji

Wamba Wamba

Nari Nari

Wadi Wadi

Wegi Wegi

Yita Yita

Yorta Yorta

Ngarrindjeri

Nyeri Nyeri

Mutthi Mutthi

Dja Dja Wurrung

Wiradjuri

Ngintait

Latji Latji

Wergaia

Wolgalu

Dhuduroa

Yaitmathang

Wotjabaluk