

# MLDRIN News

Quarterly news update from  
the Murray Lower Darling  
Rivers Indigenous Nations

Summer, 2015/16



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## Changes to Water Act 2007

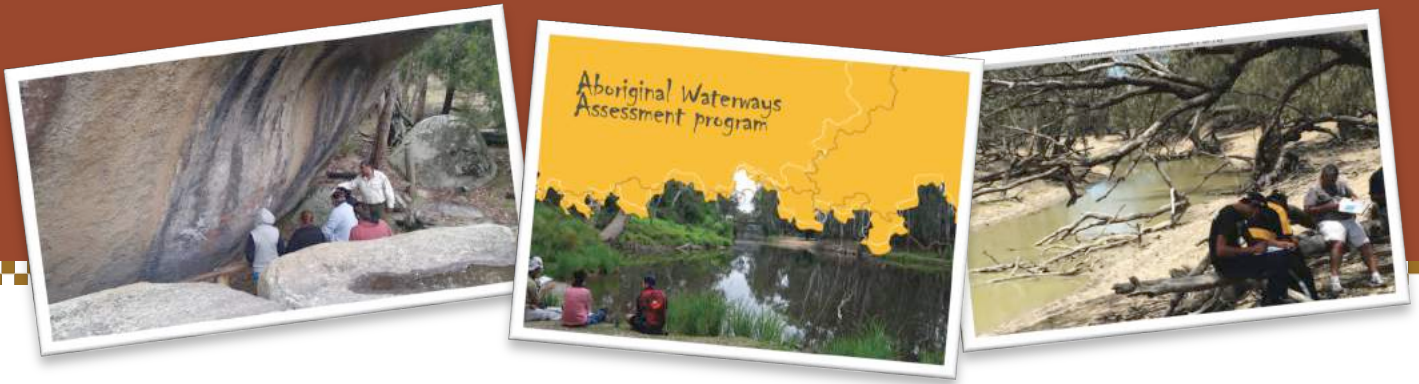
In December 2015, the Commonwealth Government introduced a Bill to amend sections of the *Water Act 2007*, the key national legislation covering management of the Murray Darling Basin. The Bill includes some small, but positive steps, to improve opportunities for Aboriginal involvement in water management. MLDRIN, along with the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN), NGOs and other allies, had argued for more meaningful changes to the Act which would have helped to address the 'unfinished business' of water reform: recognition of Aboriginal rights and achievement of Cultural Flows. The changes support improved engagement with Aboriginal communities, but fall far short of addressing the underlying inequity of a water allocation system, which is based on the dispossession of Aboriginal people.

MLDRIN continues to build the case for comprehensive reform to recognize the rights of Aboriginal people to manage and use water resources. See Page 4 (below) for details of the changes.



## MLDRIN In the news!

MLDRIN has successfully promoted the importance of Aboriginal water rights and water reform in the Murray Darling Basin through stories on the National Indigenous Radio Service, ABC, 93.7 FM Koori Radio Sydney, Koorie Mail newspaper and 3CR Radio Melbourne. Like our facebook page for updates: [www.facebook.com/mldrin](http://www.facebook.com/mldrin)



# Aboriginal Waterways Assessment

## New report highlights opportunities

Traditional Owners have rights and aspirations to determine how water is managed on Country. The Aboriginal Waterways Assessment (AWA) is one tool that has been developed to empower Aboriginal people to make informed decisions and advocate for better land and water management. In December the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) released a report highlighting outcomes from a pilot of the AWA run with Traditional Owners from three different regions across the Basin.

The AWA pilot report includes 37 research findings that highlight the benefits and challenges of using the tool. Traditional Owners from the Dhudhuroa, Waywurru, Gamilaraay, Wamba Wamba and Barapa Barapa Nations, as well as MLDRIN and NBAN delegates provided feedback on the report. Participants in the pilot program found that the AWA was a valuable tool to document the cultural health of waterways and bring people together on Country.

MLDRIN will be continuing to work with Traditional Owners, the MDBA, State Governments and other stakeholders to see that the AWA can be used to improve the capacity of Aboriginal Nations and organizations to secure enhanced Aboriginal environmental outcomes. Through support from the MDBA MLDRIN delegates have received training on the application of the AWA and preparation of reports and data. To find out more about the AWA and read the report visit: <http://goo.gl/EGKHRW>

## Consultation on NSW Water Resource Plans

The NSW Aboriginal Water Initiative (AWI) will be consulting with Aboriginal people in the Lachlan region throughout February and early March 2016. The AWI will hold a series of meetings and workshops, providing local TOs and Aboriginal organization with an opportunity to provide input in Water Sharing Plans and Water Resource Plans for the Lachlan area.

Meeting will be held in towns across the region including Condobolin, Peak Hill, Cowra, Forbes, Parks, West Wyalong and Young. MLDRIN strongly encourages all interested people to attend to have your say on how water is managed. You can view info about the AWI's consultation program at <http://goo.gl/x5oL5g> or via the MLDRIN Facebook. For more info: Lillian Moseley: 0459 840 781 [lillian.moseley@water.nsw.gov.au](mailto:lillian.moseley@water.nsw.gov.au)





# 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.

## Meeting with Ministerial advisors

In November and January, MLDRIN delegates met with Advisors for Senator Barnaby Joyce (Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources) and Senator Anne Ruston (Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources). Chair Darren Perry outlined the importance of maintaining momentum on implementation of the Basin Plan and Indigenous engagement requirements for water resource plans. He also highlighted aspirations for a dedicated fund to acquire water rights for Aboriginal people. MLDRIN looks forward to strengthening engagement and communication with key State and Commonwealth Ministers to progress our members' interests.

## Presentation to Murray-Darling Basin Plan Inquiry

MLDRIN Chair Darren Perry and Director Grant Rigney presented evidence to the Senate Select Committee into the Murray Darling Basin Plan in December. Grant Rigney, as representative of the Ngarrindjeri Regional

Authority (NRA) highlighted the necessity for adequate environmental flows to support the natural and cultural values of the Coorong and Lower Lakes. Darren Perry outlined the need for secure, adequate resourcing for Aboriginal engagement activities. A vocal lobby group, spearheaded by Coalition and Cross-bench MPs, have been calling for the Basin Plan to be 'paused' or halted and questioned the value of environmental watering. Interestingly, key representatives of the irrigation and farming sector spoke in support of the Plan at the recent Committee hearings. The final report of the Committee is due to be presented to the Senate by 17<sup>th</sup> March. You can read the transcripts from the hearings here: <http://goo.gl/OBgWKR>

## AWA in the ACT

MLDRIN Dhudhuroa delegate Ronald Hughes participated in the Aboriginal Waterways Assessment (AWA) program run by Ngambri Traditional Owners in the ACT in November. Ronald had previously participated in the Dhudhuroa/Waywurru AWA trial in the Victorian high country. The Murray Darling Basin Authority supported Ronald to

receive additional training in the preparation of reports and data arising from the fieldwork undertaken in the ACT. This training will allow Ronald to help facilitate further use of the tool by Victorian Traditional Owners. It also helps build capacity within MLDRIN to support member nations to identify and communicate water-related cultural and environmental needs. The use of the AWA tool in the ACT was an important step towards improving partnerships between local Traditional Owners and the ACT Government. It is hoped that information from the AWA will be able to inform the water resource plan which is currently being prepared for the ACT region.

## AGM and Chowilla Visit

MLDRIN held its Annual General Meeting in November, at Berri in South Australia. Delegates from 20 different First Nations attended to discuss a range of topics and review the Company's annual report and financial reports. A highlight of the meeting was a special field trip to the Chowilla floodplain and environmental regulator. Representatives from the First Peoples of the River Murray and Mallee Region



## Continued...

highlighted some of the positives and negatives of having large-scale environmental infrastructure on Country. The visit was especially relevant for delegates, given that a number of 'supply measure' infrastructure projects are planned along the Southern Murray, including the construction of new levees and regulators. Delegates can view the minutes from the Berri AGM on the MLDRIN secure intranet page (password needed for access) <http://www.mldrin.org.au/intranet/meetings/>



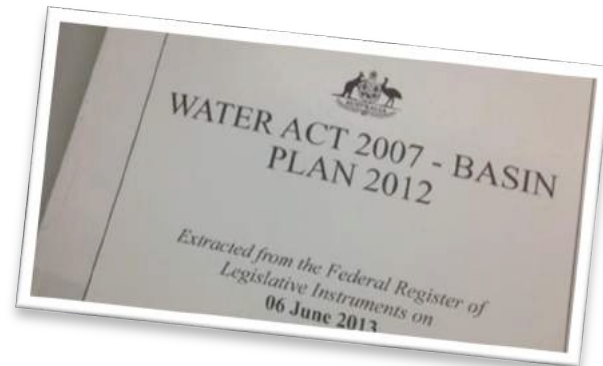
## Ramsar Culture Network

MLDRIN has become a member of the 'Bio-Cultural Diversity Thematic Group' a new network established under the Ramsar Convention. The group will support local Indigenous communities to collate and communicate information about the bio-cultural diversity values of wetlands. There are over 2000 Ramsar listed wetlands globally. Many of Australia's 65 Ramsar sites are places of great significance and value to Traditional Owners. It is vital that the cultural values of these places are recognized and respected.

## Water Act 2007 changes

The Australian Government has introduced a number of changes to the Water Act 2007. The changes mostly focus on improving or reinforcing requirements to engage with Aboriginal people on water management. For example, the Act would be changed to ensure that Water Resource Plans would have to be prepared 'having regard' to Indigenous values and uses.

The functions of the Murray Darling Basin Authority would also be expanded to include engaging with the Aboriginal community 'on the use and management of Basin water resources.' There are also two changes that provide for enhanced participation of Aboriginal people in decision making. The criterion for appointment to the Murray Darling Basin Authority would be amended to include 'expertise in Indigenous matters relevant to Basin water Resources'. It will also now be required for the Basin Community Committee to include 'at least 2 Indigenous persons' with expertise in Indigenous matters relevant to Basin water Resources.' To read the full Bill visit: <http://goo.gl/xOIuul>



## Cultural Science in Ramsar management

MLDRIN representative Grant Rigney recently returned from Mexico, the first part of a bilateral exchange with Australia to explore 'cultural science' as a tool for managing Ramsar wetlands. Deb Bogenhuber from The Murray Darling Freshwater Research Centre and Amy Della-Sale from the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority made up the Australian delegation.

Delegates were hosted by the Mexican Commission for Natural Protected Areas, CONANP and toured in the state of Chiapas in the

south of Mexico, visiting six Ramsar wetlands and remote Indigenous communities. The visit culminated in World Wetlands Day celebrations at La Encrucijada Biosphere Reserve, an estuarine and coastal lagoon reserve with some of the world's



largest mangrove forests. Delegates were received as guests of honor and had an opportunity to present to the community and CONANP staff, with wonderful translation from Laura from CONANP. The Mexican delegation will be visiting Australia later in the year and we are looking forward to a long collaboration into the future to embed cultural science within the management of Ramsar sites.





## SA Nations Meeting

There will be a Nations Water Workshop looking at Aboriginal involvement in water resource planning in the Murray Darling Basin on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2016.

Aboriginal Nations from across the SA Murray Darling Basin are invited, along with Traditional Owners from areas of Victoria and NSW that border SA. More info contact MLDRIN or email: [Sylvia.roughan@sa.gov.au](mailto:Sylvia.roughan@sa.gov.au)



## Coorong bird life recovering

It's nice to read good news about the Murray River now and then! Staff from the SA Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, as well as the Goolwa to Wellington Local Action Planning Association, say a breeding boom among waterbirds shows that the Coorong and Lower Lakes are slowly recovering from the Millennium Drought that gripped the state through much of the 2000's.

<http://goo.gl/3hfWaw>

## Victoria's new Aboriginal Water Unit

There are some exciting changes afoot in the way that the Victorian Government engages with Aboriginal people over water management. The Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP) have established an Aboriginal Water Unit (AWU) within the broader portfolio of the Sustainable Irrigation Programs. The AWU will be dedicated to engaging with Aboriginal people and seeing that the requirements of the Basin Plan are being met.

In January 2016, the First Aboriginal Water Officer, Troy McDonald, was employed as part of the unit. The Aboriginal Water Policy Officer's initial task will be to ensure the establishment of an Aboriginal Water Reference Group (AWRG). The AWRG will be made up of Victorian Aboriginal community members and will guide and support the work of three Regional Aboriginal Water Officers, who will engage directly with communities on key water management issues.

The Aboriginal Water Unit will undertake an extensive and collaborative engagement process to ensure a Victorian Government response to Indigenous requirements is supported and is consistent with the Basin Plan expectations as well as delivering upon the key outcomes outlined within Munganin-Gadahaba, DELWP's Aboriginal Inclusion Plan 2016-2020.

DELWP aims to support communities to connect to water for cultural, economic, customary and spiritual practices by:

- Enabling Victorian Traditional Owners access to water;
- Engaging Traditional Owners

in the management of water and;

- Increasing Aboriginal employment and business opportunities in water management.

A task for the Aboriginal Water Officer will be to ensure the coordination of a number of pilot projects as well as providing support for Regional Aboriginal Water Officers (RAWO). At this point - where RAWO are positioned has not been decided and will be determined by informed discussion with MLDRIN and other stakeholders. The time-line for the advertisement and recruitment of Regional Aboriginal Water Officers has not been set, however the aim is to have these positions well in place in the first half of 2016. DELWP will provide real time updates as to when this is set to occur alongside its partners in MLDRIN.

**Troy McDonald** (pic below) was recently appointed in to the role of **Aboriginal Water Policy Officer**, Troy's cultural connections are Gundijamara and Gunai. Troy has been involved in Aboriginal policy related programs on off for 30 years. Troy most recent role was A/g Health Promotion Officer, Department of Health and Human Services, South Division, and prior to this he was employed as the Senior Aboriginal Planning Officer for DHHS, Gippsland,







## 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](mailto: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