

MLDRIN News

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

Winter, 2016



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Pipeline plan raises concerns

A plan to build a \$320M, 270km long pipeline from the Murray River, near Wentworth in NSW, to supply Broken Hill's water supply has raised concerns from Traditional Owners, environmentalists and water users on the lower Darling River.

NSW Premier Mike Baird announced the pipeline plan in June. It is intended to 'solve' the long running problem of securing Broken Hill's water supply. But the announcement has raised a number of questions including: will the pipeline mean further restrictions to flows down the Darling River? How will NSW source the water to supply Broken Hill, out of the Murray River? Will there be impacts on downstream users? What other options have been explored?

Most concerning, some have claimed that the pipeline solution will allow the NSW Government to avoid recovering water for the environment from large cotton farms upstream on the Darling.

NSW Deputy Premier Troy Grant said the switch to the pipeline would mean farmers upstream on the Darling would have more water: 'This historic project will have benefits across the basin as it reduces the need for further buybacks of productive water,' he said.

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Yinyamarra Yambuwan wins Media Award

A film shot entirely in Wiradjuri language hjas won the NSW Premier's Multicultural Media Award. *Yinyamarra Yambuwan* or 'respecting everything' is a powerful short film that conveys the beauty and complexity of Aboriginal philosophy and connection to place. For more info: <http://goo.gl/HYWrWN>



Indigenous Water Justice

MLDRIN & NBAN delegates attend US water conference

In June, MLDRIN Deputy Chair and Nari Nari Delegates Rene Woods attended an important Indigenous Water Justice Symposium at the University of Colorado in Boulder. The gathering focused on three aspects of water justice: distributional, procedural and representative justice. Sessions were structured to explore issues relating to three trans-boundary river Basins: the Colorado River Basin (Mexico/U.S.), Columbia River Basin (Canada/U.S.), and Murray-Darling Basin (Australia). Rene Woods was joined by NBAN

Chairperson Fred Hooper, Murray Darling Basin Authority Staff and independent researchers. Rene and Fred presented on the challenges and opportunities for achieving Indigenous water rights in the Murray Darling Basin. Discussions highlighted the contrast between Australian conditions and the United States, where many First Nation groups hold water rights in law, but are unable to access their entitlements. This has prompted litigation supported by the Native American Rights Fund, based in Boulder. A presentation and dinner

was held with Fund, so that attendees could learn about their activities and funding model. Other key outcomes of the trip included a discussion with the United States EPA, regarding Indigenous engagement for major basin planning projects and plans for ongoing dialogue between First Nations across the Columbia, Colorado and Murray-Darling Basins. MLDRIN would like to thank the MDBA for providing funding to support the trip, which helps build connections and understanding about our work.

AWA Funding in Victoria

In May, MLDRIN received funding from the Victorian Government to run six Aboriginal Waterways Assessment (AWA) projects in Victorian Water Resource Plan areas. The funding is an exciting opportunity for Traditional Owners to use the AWA tool and document the cultural values and environmental health of waterways on Country. All information and data arising from the projects will

be handed back to Traditional Owners, to support effective engagement in water planning. MLDRIN has opened an expression of interest (EOI) process for the projects. All Traditional Owner groups within the Victorian Murray Darling Basin are invited to submit an EOI. Decisions on the role out of the projects will be informed by an Independent Panel. MLDRIN believes that all Traditional Owner groups should have the opportunity to run

cultural mapping and assessment projects, if deemed effective and appropriate by the community.

You can download an expression of interest form and additional information from the MLDRIN website (www.mldr.org.au)

For a direct website link visit: <http://goo.gl/JkXzbh> or contact our Executive Officer at: info@mldr.org.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.



Glenelg River assessment

In May and June, MLDRIN delegates and staff participated in the first stages of an Aboriginal Waterway Assessment project (AWA) on the Glenelg River, in South West Victoria. Working with Gunditjmara Traditional Owners and the Barengi Gadjin Land Council, MLDRIN will deliver the AWA, providing valuable information to help local groups achieve their water management objectives. In May a project scoping and introduction meeting was held, as well as a field trip to the cricket ground at Harrow, where renowned Aboriginal Cricketer Johny Mullagh played. In June, MLDRIN delegates participated in a four-day trip down the Glenelg, to assess sites and trial the AWA tool. The full assessment will occur over a week, later in 2016. All data and reports generated from the project will be the property of Traditional Owners and used to influence management of environmental flows on the Glenelg. The long term objective is to build up the case for dedicated cultural flows on the Glenelg River.

NSW Enviro Water Workshop

In May, MLDRIN representatives attended an environmental watering workshop hosted by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage. The workshop brought together scientists

environmental water managers, Parks and Wildlife staff, Traditional Owners and many others to discuss achievements and challenges for environmental watering in NSW. The concept of 'shared benefits' from environmental watering was a key topic discussed throughout the day and MLDRIN reps highlighted the importance of incorporating cultural values into water planning.



Water Resource Plan Meeting

In June, the second Water Resource Plan Joint Meeting was held in Canberra and attended by representatives of all Basin State governments as well as MLDRIN, NBAN and the MDBA. The Joint Meeting is focused on engagement with Traditional Owners in the development of water resource plans (WRP), under the Basin Plan. MLDRIN and NBAN have a formal role providing advice to State governments and assessing WRPs against Basin Plan requirements.

Attendees heard about the approach taken by NBAN and the QLD Government in the development and assessment of the 'four pack' WRP. MLDRIN presented a new discussion paper and all States provided updates on their progress with WRPs. A key area of work in the coming months will be for MLDRIN to undertake an assessment of the ACT water resource plan, which is the first to be completed in the Southern Basin.

GIS and NVIVO Training

Traditional Owners from the Southern Basin received training in two new software tools this June. The MDBA provided training for three delegates on the use of Nvivo, a social research tool that will allow MLDRIN to search and analyze content in the Aboriginal Submissions Database. The Database contains information



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provided by Traditional Owners in submissions for the Draft Basin Plan. Funding from the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and MDBA also allowed MLDRIN to provide training for three delegates in the use of ArcMAP. This software will allow MLDRIN to prepare our own maps and record information for six Aboriginal Waterways Assessment projects that DELWP has funded in the Victorian Murray Darling Basin.

Victorian Water Plan Meet

Delegates representing Victorian Nations on MLDRIN met with the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations NRM Subcommittee in July for an



important discussion about the new draft Victorian Water Plan. The *Water for Victoria* discussion paper, released in March, includes some important new policy commitments to support Aboriginal management and ownership of water. However, delegates at the meeting discussed the lack of dedicated funding to support Aboriginal engagement and entrance to the water market. An outcome of the meeting was a statement, which sets out a list of improvements and changes to the Plan and was agreed upon by all in attendance.

Deniliquin Strategy Day

In May, Board members and delegates took part in a strategy day to identify MLDRIN's goals and plan out pathways to achieve them. The training was provided by Nicola Paris of CounterAct, an advocacy training organization based in Melbourne. The training focused on the critical pathways to achieving cultural flows, including building political support and encouraging improved capacity and governance within member nations.

The group also considered ways to communicate and engage MLDRIN's membership more effectively. The outcomes of the day have been written up into a report that will be provided to MLDRIN delegates.



SA Water Planning meet

MLDRIN Staff and delegates from the Ngarrindjeri and Maraura Nations met with South Australian Department of Environment, Natural Resources and Water (DEWNR) staff in July to discuss a new approach and funding to support Aboriginal engagement in water resource planning for the next two years. Delegates provided feedback on a proposed 'River Country Plan' for SA. Stay tuned for more details.

Cultural Flows Project Update

The National Cultural Flows Research Project is a groundbreaking multi-disciplinary study that aims to ensure that Indigenous water allocations are embedded within Australia's water planning and management regimes. There has been some major developments in the project over the last year. Fieldwork has commenced at the two case study sites (Toogimbie wetlands in the Southern Basin and Gooraman Swamp in the North). Consultants Rural Solutions have begun working with the Traditional

Owners in these two sites to develop a consistent methodology that allows groups to: identify water-dependent cultural values, quantify watering requirements to sustain those values and monitor the health and well-being outcomes of cultural flows. This research will inform recommendations for policy and legal changes that will entrench cultural flows in the way water is allocated.

MLDRIN reps sit on the Planning and Research Committee for the Project. Some key outcomes for the Committee this year include:

- Appointment of Gunditjmara

man Damein Bell as the new Independent Chair for the Committee

- Confirmation of arrangements for intellectual property and heritage consents.
- Consolidation of the Research Committee with inclusion of Basin governments and other agencies.

The project will be completed in late 2017. For more information visit: www.culturalflows.com.au





SA Nations Meeting

In the last newsletter, we reported on the South Australian Indigenous Nations Water Workshop held in April. Now you can view a great short video about the workshop at:

<http://goo.gl/JkXzbh>

The workshop helped to highlight key aspirations for involvement in water planning for Traditional Owners in South Australia.



Standing up for Barka!

In June dozens of Barkindji Traditional Owners took to the streets of Wilcannia to protest against the poor treatment of the Darling River (*Barka*) by the NSW and Commonwealth governments. Low inflows and rules that allow extraction of large volumes of water for upstream cotton farming, mean that the Darling ceased to flow for much of lower reaches. The protest in Wilcannia highlight the cultural importance of the River to Barkindji people. For a full report visit:

<http://goo.gl/MjRcno>

Broken Hill Pipeline continued...

By reducing the need to make water available for Broken Hill from the Darling River or Menindee Lakes, the pipeline could allow users upstream to hold onto their water. Reducing evaporation losses from the Menindee lakes means 'there should be no need for the Commonwealth to enter the water market and buy water from productive users,' NSW DPI Water Deputy Director General Gavin Hanlon said.

The management of the Darling River has huge implications for the Barkindji Traditional Owners who draw their group name and identity from a connection to the River. Barkindji community spokesperson Murray Butcher has described the State of the Darling as 'a desecration to [Barkindji] identity, culture and way of life that we have kept for thousands of years'.

NSW Greens MP Jeremy Buckingham has accused Mike Baird of 'condemning the Darling to death' and allowing the river to be 'sucked dry' by upstream irrigators. The Greens have argued that the \$500m would be better spent buying back Cubbie Station, on the Culgoa River, to ensure healthy flows on the lower Darling. They have also argued for improved infrastructure to make the management of the Menindee lakes more efficient.

This issue further highlights the relevance of Cultural Flows to the future management of Australia's inland rivers. Barkindji people must be able to sustain their ancient cultural traditions as well as build sustainable livelihoods. The key to achieving this is equitable access to water resources. Ownership of water will give Traditional Owners a seat at the table.

Victorian Water Plan discussions ongoing

In Victoria, Traditional Owners are continuing to engage with the State Government about recognition of Aboriginal water rights in a new Water Plan for the State. The *Water for Victoria* discussion paper spells out the Government's policy response to Traditional Owners' claims for equitable access to water resources. While the paper makes some positive commitments, it falls short of providing funding to support acquisition of water by Traditional Owner groups. A number of meetings between Traditional Owner representatives and Victorian Government staff have taken place over the last few weeks, leading up to the Plan's proposed finalization in September.

MLDRIN believes that the Water Plan represents significant progress in recognizing Aboriginal water rights, including the investment of \$4.7m over four years to establish an Aboriginal Water Unit in Victoria. We also recognize that the Plan is just the start of a process to identify Traditional Owner objectives, build capacity and mount a convincing case for funding to enter the water market.

MLDRIN has been working closely with our Victorian membership as well as the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations to ensure that Plan delivers concrete outcomes.





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