

Policy - Traditional Owners

Policy

Commitment

Southern Rural Water (SRW) acknowledges and recognises Aboriginal people as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waters on which we work and live. We respect Aboriginal culture and the deep and ongoing connection Aboriginal people have to Country.

We commit to foster mutual understanding and respect, to build trust and develop meaningful working relationships with the Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal communities across our region.

We intend that these relationships will raise cultural awareness and deliver improved employment and economic benefits through participation in the water sector.

Objectives

We will work with Traditional Owners in our region to understand their priorities and objectives, and learn how we can help them to achieve their goals. In doing so, we will deliver on Water for Victoria priorities (see definitions) and the Minister for Water's Letter of Expectations (see definitions) in relation to recognising and including Aboriginal values for water:

- We support Traditional Owners' desire to reconnect to their cultural values of water.
- We support the economic development aspirations of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to be able to invest in their own future growth.
- We support training, skills development and capacity building and will promote employment opportunities within Southern Rural Water.
- We will provide cultural competency training for Southern Rural Water staff, customer committees and board.
- We will engage with Traditional Owner groups to consult on significant groundwater or surfacewater applications.
- We will advise Traditional Owner groups of opportunities to purchase or otherwise access water.
- All significant events and meetings involving stakeholders and communities should commence with an Acknowledgement of Country (see definitions).
- A Welcome to Country ceremony may be requested of the respective Traditional Owners for formal ceremonies and events, particularly where they have a wider community interest and participation.
- A Smoking Ceremony may be requested for the opening of major projects. This allows opportunities for healing of Country.

This policy focuses on building resilient working relationships with Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal communities, so that progress may be made with mutual respect and full understanding of each other's positions and priorities.

Water for Victoria priorities and the Minister's Letter of Expectations provide guidance on Aboriginal engagement and participation in the water sector.

Definitions

Water for Victoria priorities are those identified in *Chapter 6: Recognising and managing for Aboriginal values* and in *Chapter 10: Jobs, economy and innovation*. DEWLP will partner with CMAs and water corporations to:

Action 6.1 Recognise Aboriginal values and objectives of water

Action 6.2 Include Aboriginal values and traditional ecological knowledge in water planning

Action 6.3 Support Aboriginal access to water for economic development

Action 6.4 Build capacity to increase Aboriginal participation in water management.

Action 10.8: Increase Aboriginal inclusion in the water sector

Action 10.9 Support economic development through Aboriginal participation

The Minister for Water's **Letter of Expectations** (LoE) states that:

SRW will better recognise and manage Aboriginal values by:

- a. committing to include these values in water planning
- b. generating economic opportunities through supporting access to water
- c. increasing Aboriginal participation in water management.

Under '*Leadership and Culture*' the LoE also states that:

- SRW will develop strategies that will increase gender equity and Aboriginal inclusion, participation and engagement.

Acknowledgment of Country: if you are clear who the Traditional Owners of an area are:

- **"We are meeting today on the traditional lands of the [Traditional Owner group's name] people and I wish to acknowledge them as Traditional Owners [or 'custodians']. I would also like to pay my respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today."**

If you are uncertain who are the Traditional Owners of an area, or if the area is still in contention:

- **"I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land we are meeting on today. I pay my respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today."**

Effective date and review date	This policy takes effect on 5 June 2019 (Board Meeting No. 306), replacing the policy approved at Board Meeting No. 286 on 8 February 2017. The policy is due for board review in April 2021.
Who is affected	This policy applies to all Southern Rural Water staff.
Rationale	Southern Rural Water aims to build meaningful and mutually beneficial working relationships with Traditional Owners across our region. This will enable us to better consider the values and needs of these important stakeholders in our decision-making and actions, and to support their ongoing connection to Country.
Contact	For more information on this policy, contact the Manager People and Culture, the General Manager Customer Service or the Communications and Engagement Manager.
Related documents	<p>The Southern Rural Water Corporate Plan.</p> <p>The GLaWAC-GEA Partnership Agreement (2018) between the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and the Gippsland Environmental Agencies, of which SRW is a founding member.</p> <p>Traditional Owner rights are enshrined in the <i>Water Act 1989</i> for Traditional Owner groups with a formal natural resource agreement under the <i>Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010</i>.</p> <p>We also have obligations under the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i>, the <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i> and <i>Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2016</i>, with respect to high impact activities in areas of cultural heritage sensitivity.</p> <p>More information available through the DELWP Aboriginal Water Unit and the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council.</p> <p>The Southern Rural Water Risk Appetite Statement.</p>
Communications	This policy will be made available on Southern Rural Water's website and communicated to staff, customers, stakeholders and community.