

Media Release

The Hon Lisa Neville MP

Minister for the Coordination of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning – COVID-19
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for Water



Thursday, 12 November 2020

WATER FOR TRADITIONAL OWNERS A VICTORIAN FIRST

Water ownership in a river system will be made available to Traditional Owners for the first time in the state's history thanks to the Victorian Government.

In a significant step recognising Traditional Owners' deep connection to water – the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) will receive two gigalitres of unallocated water in the Mitchell River.

Minister for Water Lisa Neville confirmed Southern Rural Water will make a further four gigalitres of unallocated water available on the open market – half in the coming months and the remainder next year.

Traditional Owners' connection to water is a key part of *Water for Victoria* – the Government's long-term strategy for managing the state's water resources.

This also builds on the Government's *Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2019*, which embeds recreational and Aboriginal cultural values into the planning and operations of water resource managers.

The Government has invested \$5 million to develop a roadmap to support Aboriginal use and access to water and continues to work with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians to identify opportunities for Aboriginal enterprises to establish and develop water related businesses.

This announcement comes 10 years since the Gunaikurnai people gained native title over much of Gippsland and entered into the first Traditional Owner Settlement Agreement issued by the Government.

This agreement led to the first joint management plan for parks between the Gunaikurnai and the Government, which is now being successfully implemented across 10 parks and reserves.

The next Sustainable Water Strategy for the Central and Gippsland Region will consider how water is shared and the opportunity for Traditional Owners' to have a voice.

Stakeholders, residents and businesses will have an opportunity to provide input into the Sustainable Water Strategy for Central and Gippsland Region next year. The Strategy will consider how water resources in the region are best shared to provide for agriculture, communities, the environment towns and business use.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

"Traditional Owners have cultural, spiritual, and economic connections to land, water and resources through their relationship with Country – having managed land and water sustainably over thousands of generations."

"I want to see the water sector and Traditional Owners working closely together, with water entitlements supporting business, cultural, recreational and environmental outcomes for Aboriginal communities and the broader region."

Quote attributable to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gabrielle Williams

"This is a significant milestone for Traditional Owners – the first time that water has been made available in this way – and a step that recognises both their connection to Country and our responsibility to protect it."

Quote attributable to CEO of Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation Roger Fenwick

"This is a momentous outcome for the Gunaikurnai that recognises the importance of gaining rights to water to restore customary practices, protect cultural values and uses, gain economic independence and heal Country."

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