

Media Release

The Hon Lisa Neville MP

Minister for Police
Minister for Water



Friday, 25 March 2022

WATER FOR TRADITIONAL OWNERS IN SOUTH WEST VICTORIA

Traditional Owners in Victoria's south west will receive a water entitlement for the first time, as a result of the Andrews Labor Government's commitment to Aboriginal values and aspirations for water.

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation will receive 2.5 gigalitres of unallocated water in the Palawarra (Fitzroy River) system in Southwest Victoria.

The corporation plans to use the water in the UNESCO World Heritage Listed Budj Bim Cultural Landscape – recognised in 2019 for its cultural values to the Gunditjmara community.

Maintaining the flow of water over Country is an essential aspect for managing the cultural values of Budj Bim, which contains the world's most extensive and oldest aquacultural system. A complex system of channels, weirs and dams were developed by Gunditjmara to trap, store and harvest kooyang (short-finned eel).

Southern Rural Water has worked closely with Traditional Owners to plan and undertake the public notification process as part of the application assessment, which received comments supporting the allocation and no objections.

Through *Water for Victoria*, the Labor Government is supporting Aboriginal access to water for economic development, increasing inclusion in the water sector and Aboriginal participation in water management.

Aboriginal water values were enshrined into law for the first time across Victoria with the *Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2019*.

To date, the Labor Government has returned 2 gigalitres of unallocated water from the Mitchell River in Gippsland to the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and earlier this year 1.36 gigalitres of water savings from the Connections Project was set aside for Traditional Owners in northern Victoria.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

"Traditional Owners have a deep and ongoing connection to land, water and resources – that's why it's so important we support their access to water."

"We'll continue to work with all stakeholders to explore ways to meet Aboriginal aspirations for water – particularly where unallocated water is identified or where infrastructure projects produce additional water through reduction in losses due to evaporation and seepage."

Quote attributable to Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation Denis Rose

"Water is life for Gunditjmara Country and its people. Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation are thrilled by this announcement. By keeping this water within the Palawarra (Fitzroy River) system, it means we can continue to care for our Country just as our ancestors have for thousands of generations."