

Media Release

The Hon Harriet Shing MP

Minister for Water

Minister for Regional Development

Minister for Equality



Thursday, 29 September 2022

WATER IS LIFE – PART OF VICTORIA’S WATER FUTURE

The Andrews Labor Government is increasing involvement in water management for Victorian Traditional Owners as part of the *Water is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap*.

Minister for Water Harriet Shing visited the world heritage listed Budj Bim site in southwest Victoria to launch ‘Water is Life’ - building on self-determination for Aboriginal people in Victoria.

‘Water is Life’ sets out the opportunities for Traditional Owners to access and manage water for spiritual, cultural and environmental purposes. It is also a framework to create and maintain a careful and considered balance between the rights and entitlements of everyone involved.

Water is Life has been developed in consultation with Victoria’s Traditional Owners and includes Nation Statements from involved Traditional Owners. Engagement with Traditional Owners, the community, and the water industry will continue to define what the outcomes look like in each region.

The Labor Government is investing \$3.35 million over two years for the initial delivery of the ‘Water is Life’ roadmap as well as \$18 million for Traditional Owner led projects.

Victoria has so far returned 5.86 gigalitres of water to Traditional Owners across the state - supporting the self-determination of Traditional Owners by providing opportunities to manage water in ways that best meet their needs.

This included when the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation were allocated a 2,500 megalitres of water entitlement of the Palawarra (Fitzroy River) for the first time in March 2022. Entitlements such as these will be used to restore cultural water flow paths in the UNCESO World Heritage Listed Budj Bim Cultural Landscape.

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

The ‘Water is Life’ Aboriginal water access roadmap will not affect irrigators’ water entitlements or allocations, nor will it mean that irrigators need to pay any additional fees and charges.

Quote attributable to Minister for Water Harriet Shing

“Traditional Owners have enduring cultural, spiritual, and economic connections to land, water and resources. They have managed land and water sustainably over thousands of generations on Country, and these connections deserve respect and recognition.”

Quote attributable to Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Gabrielle Williams

“Traditional Owners have long called for a greater role in the management of our waterways. Water is Life will provide greater opportunities to bring this to life as an important step on our journey to treaty.”

Quote attributable to Member for Western Victoria Gayle Tierney

“Budj Bim is one of the world’s oldest and most important cultural sites and this water allocation will ensure its cultural history can continue for generations to come.”

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