

Media Release

The Hon Harriet Shing MP
Minister for Housing
Minister for Water
Minister for Equality



Thursday, 12 October 2023

RETURNING WATER TO GIPPSLAND'S TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Allan Labor Government is returning water to Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners in Gippsland – strengthening their connection to Country through better cultural water management.

Minister for Water Harriet Shing announced that Southern Rural Water has issued Gunaikurnai Land and Water Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) two licences for cultural water use – one of 200 megalitres at Buchan Munji, as well as 500 megalitres of water for the Tambo River.

At Buchan Munji, GLaWAC intends to hold the water in an aquifer for cultural purposes and to restore and maintain the health of Country.

These water licences support Gunaikurnai connections to Country and support GLaWAC to own and manage water for spiritual, cultural, environmental, and social economic purposes.

The Labor Government is working with Traditional Owners to improve their access to water and their involvement in water management, benefiting Traditional Owners and all Victorians through the release of *Water is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap*.

This builds on a 2,000 megalitre water licence from the Mitchell River in Gippsland to GLaWAC in 2021 and another 2,500 megalitres of unallocated winter fill water from the Palawarra (Fitzroy River) system to Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation in southwest Victoria for cultural purposes.

The Government acknowledges and respects that Traditional Owners have a deep and ongoing cultural, spiritual and economic connection to land, water and resources.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Harriet Shing

“Currently Traditional Owners hold less than 0.2 per cent of all water access entitlements in Victoria and that’s why the Water is Life roadmap is so important – this work has begun but there is still a long way to go as we continue to support the return and management of water to Traditional Owners.”

“These two water licences are the result of extensive collaboration between Southern Rural Water and GLaWAC and will ensure better spiritual, cultural and environmental outcomes.”

Quotes attributable to GLaWAC CEO Daniel Miller

“Returning water rights to Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners opens a door long closed, restoring the custodial rights to say how, if and when to call on water for Country, and water for mob.”

“The return of these licences are a tribute to the Elders who have fought for many years for water justice, and paves the way for strengthened sharing of traditional knowledge, customary practice and a self-determined future.”

Quotes attributable to Member for Eastern Victoria Tom McIntosh

“These allocations for GLaWAC will help facilitate cultural connection and healthier waterways. We have so much to gain from engaging with Traditional Owners when it comes to the management of our natural resources.”

Quote attributable to Southern Rural Water Managing Director Cameron FitzGerald

“Southern Rural Water is committed to supporting Traditional Owner groups with self-determination. We are very proud of our role to support these water allocations.”