



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Water and Environmental Regulation**



RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN

INNOVATE

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RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

LEARNINGS, CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

DECEMBER 2020

*We're working for
Western Australia.*

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INTRODUCTION

Department of Water and Environmental Regulation vision for reconciliation

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (the department) was established on 1 July 2017 by amalgamating the Department of Water, Department of Environment Regulation, and the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority. The department launched its first [Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan](#) (RAP) in May 2019.

Our reconciliation vision is to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples engaged within our workforce and our partnerships to maximise opportunities for a healthy environment and sustainable water resources. We seek to ensure our staff have a deep understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, and for our organisation to have enduring and genuine relationships with Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.

The department's 2019-20 RAP focused on the key elements of building '**Relationships**', creating '**Opportunities**' and fostering mutual '**Respect**' with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The department recognises that creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with Aboriginal communities and peoples is important and necessary to lead and excel in the sustainable management and protection of Western Australia's waters and environment.

The department employs 956 staff in 17 offices across seven regions. The department has nine self-identified Aboriginal staff that are currently employed, of which six are permanent full-time staff, one is a permanent part-time staff member and two employees are on limited-period contracts.

Acknowledgement of country

The department acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which our offices are located.

- Perth and the south-west - Noongar people
- Geraldton - Naaguja people and Yamatji-Marlpa people
- Karratha - Ngarluma people and Yamatji-Marlpa people
- Broome - Jugun-Yawuru people
- Kununurra - Miriwung Gajerrong people

We acknowledge the unique and continuing connections and contributions of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples in Australia. We pay our respects to their cultures, and to their elders past and present.

The department's RAP Working Group

Mike Rowe, Director General, is the RAP Champion, and he is assisted by the RAP Working Group consisting of individuals from the department's various business areas. These members bring in their expertise and knowledge to the working group while implementing actions assigned to their business areas. As a member of the Corporate Executive and the RAP Program Sponsor, the RAP Working Group is chaired by Dr Nygarie Goyal.

**A message from
the Director
General**



I am pleased to present this progress report on the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's Innovate - Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), 2019-21.

It is our vision to achieve a healthy environment and have sustainable water resources, to support a liveable and prosperous Western Australia that is valued by all. We recognise the traditional custodians of this state, and their practice of intergenerational care for country and its relevance to our work. To achieve our vision, we seek to listen, learn, and build strong partnerships with our Aboriginal stakeholders, as well as provide genuine opportunities for indigenous peoples within our workforce and through our business. Building and developing relationships with Aboriginal people and communities will also help protect and promote Aboriginal cultures and histories, as well as provide opportunities for social and economic benefit.

From encouraging our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members to celebrate their heritage with us, supporting initiatives such as the Aboriginal Traineeship program, and working collaboratively with ranger groups, I'm proud to see how we are already contributing to reconciliation in Western Australia.

However, while we have made great progress against our current RAP commitments, I recognise the work still to be done. Work to deliver outcomes in the areas of fostering widespread cultural awareness, achieving our employment commitments and the development of an Aboriginal Engagement Strategy was impeded this year by the COVID-19 pandemic. To rectify this, we have refocused our efforts and we are committed to delivering on these critical milestones in the months ahead.

I acknowledge and thank the support provided by the members of the Aboriginal Water and Environment Advisory Group in helping guide the department's policy development. I also thank all those involved in developing this RAP and I look forward to continuing to be guided by our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, partners and stakeholders on our reconciliation journey.

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Mike Rowe', set against a dark blue background.

Mike Rowe

**A message from
the RAP Working
Group Chair**



Reconciliation is a journey and we are committed to building and developing relationships with Aboriginal people and communities that will help protect Aboriginal cultures and histories in water and environmental management, as well as provide opportunities for social and economic benefit. Creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with Aboriginal communities and people is also important for our department in its mission to lead and excel in the sustainable management and protection of Western Australia's water and environment.

The department's RAP aims to achieve a positive shift towards seeing reconciliation as a core priority, that is embedded in our policies and practices.

We recognise that reconciliation is a journey and requires long-term commitment. Our learnings in the department's first Innovate RAP will guide our future actions in embedding Aboriginal culture, traditions and values in water and environmental planning. We acknowledge the important stewardship role and intergenerational care that Aboriginal people and communities have for our country and its relevance to our work.

Nygarie Goyal
Nygarie Goyal

OUR RAP JOURNEY

We are pleased to present this progress report on our Innovate – Reconciliation Action Plan, 2019-21.

We have made good progress against our RAP goals and recognise that some aspects have been more challenging, given resourcing challenges and the impacts of COVID-19. We are making progress in achieving our goals in several initiatives in relation to Aboriginal engagement, cultural awareness training for staff, supplier diversity and broadening cultural awareness within the organisation. We also recognise that there is a need to finalise the Aboriginal Engagement Strategy and complete the review of human resource governance and policies in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples employment, practices and policies to enhance the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

OUR RAP PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS AT A GLANCE

After launching our RAP in 2019, the department began its reconciliation journey to bring together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples, understanding and respecting each other's perspectives, recognising the past and building a future together. We recognise that reconciliation can only happen where there is a true commitment to fair treatment and equal opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through implementing our RAP commitments via workplace inclusion. This two-year plan contains our key aims and initiatives to support and contribute to better social, environmental and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our employees have embraced the spirit of reconciliation and learnt more about the culture and history of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

The department's approach, as outlined in our Innovate RAP, is focused on our priority areas. We have tracked our progress on key action areas.



RAP visions The department's achievements - progress

Race relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established an Aboriginal Water and Environment Advisory Group to provide input to the department on policy matters.• Rolled out information on paid cultural leave which was a new leave type under the Public Sector Agreement.• Commissioned Wadjuk Noongar Aboriginal artist Sharyn Egan to create artwork for the department's new office building in Joondalup. From the original canvas painting, artwork was installed on all glass panelling on the ground floor.• The department's choir performed with the Madjtil Moorna choir from Perth. The event was organised for NAIDOC Week celebration 2019.
Historical acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acknowledgement of country is embedded in meetings and official gatherings within the organisation.• To inspire and engage staff, the department launched the Bindjareb Noongar Water Perspectives – a short film during National Reconciliation Week 2020. The water story was a gift from the Bindjareb Noongar elders, traditional owners of the Bindjareb Djilba (Peel-Harvey estuary) region.• During Reconciliation Week 2019, an elder from the Mid West (Aunty Gloria Fogarty) was invited to speak about connection to land and culture as well as the assistance provided by Aboriginal bush rangers.• The department published articles on the intranet communicating to all staff the activities and projects that were planned during National Reconciliation Week 2020. Topics included<ul style="list-style-type: none">- the Murujuga Rock Art update- Esperance groundwater engagement- the cultural and historical significance of the Kent Street Weir- Bindjareb Noongar Water Perspectives film- Lake Argyle Water and Land- Cultural Value for Future Generations.• The department released the Murujuga Rock Art Strategy and commenced implementation of the strategy in partnership with the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, representing the Traditional Owners of Murujuga.
Institutional integrity, equality and equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In recognising the traditional custodians and their practice of intergenerational care for country and its relevance to our work, the department is progressing environmental and water initiatives with Aboriginal people and communities in many parts of the state.• The department engaged with Aboriginal people in the region and increased their participation on projects such as the Pilbara Environmental Offset Fund (PEOF).• The department entered into Noongar Standard Heritage Agreements with the six Noongar Agreement Groups involved in the South West Native Title Settlement. The agreements give the department new opportunities and clearer processes for engaging with Noongar people in the south-west.• Notable highlights are our commitment to 3 per cent procurement from First Nations suppliers and enforcing the core principle of 'Respect'.• We celebrated NAIDOC week and Reconciliation Week with pride and increased staff awareness of Aboriginal histories and cultures in our core business.

OUR PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

We have made great progress against our current RAP commitments as well as commitments beyond our RAP obligations. Alongside this progress, we recognise that some aspects have been challenging, particularly in the areas of fostering widespread cultural awareness, achieving our employment commitments as well as the development of an Aboriginal Engagement Strategy. Delivery was impeded substantially by COVID-19, particularly as there are co-dependencies and inter-relationships with a number of RAP commitments.

RAP categorys	Challenges
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Relationship	
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As we all know, 2020 has been a challenging year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 proved to be an obstacle in the department's delivery of its RAP commitments. Staffing was diverted to necessary functions identified by government as part of the COVID-19 recovery effort. These functions included maintaining core regulatory service delivery, ensuring contingency plans were in place for essential services and continuing to address compliance issues.

The department made 19 commitments in relation to building 'Relationships' and achieved eight commitments. The remaining 11 commitments have not been delivered to date. Most RAP commitments that were not achieved are either one-off actions for delivery or require dedicated resources to develop documentation.

Respect	
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The department made 15 commitments in relation to creating 'Respect'. The department achieved six commitments and the remaining commitments require development of guiding principles and processes. This will include engagement with our Aboriginal partners and stakeholders throughout the state for implementation.

Opportunities	
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The department made 13 commitments in relation to creating 'Opportunities'. Progress on these commitments has been a challenge because of resource and time constraints. There is a need to undertake a review of human resource policies and practices that will shape training, as well as employment retention policies and strategies.



OUR RAP LEARNINGS

As identified, COVID-19 proved to be an obstacle in the department's delivery of its RAP commitments. Work was diverted to other necessary functions identified by government as part of the COVID-19 recovery effort. These functions included maintaining core regulatory service delivery, ensuring contingency plans were in place for essential services and continuing to address compliance issues.

We learnt the need to clearly identify resource requirements when developing and implementing policy-related initiatives, particularly when implemented across the department.

We will, however, continue to learn from our experiences, which will aid the development of our future RAP. We will continue to focus on the key elements of cultural education, engagement, and participation of Aboriginal people into stewardship of land and water. We have learnt the importance of working with Western Australia's traditional owners, both directly and indirectly on water and environmental matters. Developing sound relationships with Aboriginal communities requires a sustained journey, not just a short-term action.



OUR STORY

Bindjareb Noongar water perspectives

The Traditional Owners of the Bindjareb Djilba (Peel-Harvey estuary) and the department have partnered for Bindjareb Noongar water perspectives. This strong partnership was forged through a commitment to meaningful engagement with traditional owners in the development of the Peel Harvey-Estuary Protection Plan, an election commitment of the McGowan Government. In line with the National Water Quality Management Framework, it is important for the cultural and spiritual values of the Bindjareb Djilba to be embedded into the plan and that Bindjareb Noongar water perspectives are well represented.

The partnership has empowered Bindjareb elders to develop their own overarching water plan, the [Bindjareb Gabi Wonga, the Bindjareb water story](#). The elders developed their Yaakan (turtle) model for the plan based on cultural knowledge. Bindjareb elders and the department have shared and threaded knowledge systems to bring together cultural knowledge and Western ways.

The Bindjareb Gabi Wonga is empowering Bindjareb people to share their vision, goals and priorities for water planning – for example, the overarching plan is informing the Peel-Harvey Estuary Protection Plan, the Waterwise Perth Action Plan, and the Water Quality Improvement Plan for the Peel-Harvey estuary. The Bindjareb Gabi Wonga is the Cultural Intellectual Property of Bindjareb

people. For more information about this plan please message the elders directly at bindjarebgabiwonga@gmail.com.

There has been interest in the way that Bindjareb elders and the department have approached partnership engagement. Together, the elders and the department developed the Bring Together, Walk Together Aboriginal Partnership Engagement Framework (Figure 1). This framework communicates a pathway to forge, build and maintain strong partnerships for Aboriginal land and water outcomes and has been endorsed by the department's Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group and the Danjoo Koorliny movement.



Figure 1, Bring Together Walk Together Aboriginal Partnership Engagement Framework, Walley Grant, 2020



The explanatory notes for the Bring Together, Walk Together framework is in draft. Key messages are in the [Our Knowledge, Our Way in caring for Country Best Practice Summary Guidelines](#) (CSIRO, 2020). The Guidelines support this framework and are a good reference for now.

Bindjareb elders and the department continue to Bring Together, Walk Together. Through [Healthy Estuaries WA](#) we are working towards developing an implementation plan for the Bindjareb Gabi Wonga; and the design of the Bindjareb Waterways Assessment Program. The Bindjareb Waterways Assessment Program will bring together cultural knowledge and Western science and be a tool for Aboriginal people to look after special places, linking in with the department's Healthy Rivers program and Winjan Aboriginal Corporation's recently funded Aboriginal Ranger Program.

Please view a [short video](#) that communicates the values of the Bindjareb Gabi Wonga.

The inspiration behind Sharyn Egan's beautiful artwork

NAIDOC WEEK 2020 - Always Was, Always Will Be

Sharyn Egan is an acclaimed Whadjuk Noongar artist known for her work in painting, sculpture and weaving.

Her work is an important part of the department's Prime House head office in Joondalup. Sharyn's work was so inspiring that she was selected to design the incredible artwork that features on the wall panels on the ground floor. Her artworks and paintings were influenced by water as the source for all life, with water providing a focus for meaning in life, social interactions and the interactions with the creatures around us.

Sharyn's artworks represent the lakes and ancient pathways through to the modern highways and roads around the department's headquarters and Perth.





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