



25 August 2017

The Executive Officer
Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Subject: Submission to the inquiry into the management, governance and use of environmental water

1 Introduction

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is the peak body representing Traditional Owner Corporations across Victoria. The Federation was established in 2013 to unite Victorian Traditional Owners and provide a platform for our shared views. Our corporations represent thousands of individual Traditional Owner members, all of whom depend on water for wellbeing, the ability to care for Country, protect sacred sites and create opportunities for economic development.

For all our members, water is our future. Participating in the modern water economy is the key to delivering on the development goals of our communities, and for achieving self-determination.

Our vision is for an equitable and sustainable water management regime which recognises the rights of Traditional Owners to use, develop and control water resources on and under our Country.

In practice this means having access to the consumptive and non-consumptive pools, enabling us to fulfil our cultural responsibilities and to provide for the cultural, spiritual, social and economic well-being of current and future generations - while at the same time promoting the conservation of water resources and delivering benefits to the wider community.

We are committed to restoring the health of our inland waters and protecting all of the values associated with these waters.

We work together to coordinate the management of water resources, acknowledging that waterways link our communities. We have a cultural responsibility to avoid adversely impacting others downstream or via groundwater systems.

We have the right to practice our culture, which depends on having healthy waterways and water bodies.

We have knowledge of Country and cultural obligations to manage our traditional waters in a way that respects our ancestors and provides for future generations.

In particular we support the forthcoming appointment of an Aboriginal Water Commissioner to the VEWH, to further provide expert advice to the VEWH on Aboriginal values, rights and interest in water for Country.

2 Response to the Terms of Reference

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations (the Federation) welcome the opportunity to provide a response to the Terms of Reference and views this as an important step in the process towards

PO Box 431 North Melbourne VIC 3051

(03) 9321 5388

info@fvtoc.com.au

www.fvtoc.com.au

ABN: 40 164 514 121

creating equitable access to and management of the Victorian water system (surface and groundwater) to support our values, responsibilities and purposes.

There is a significant shared benefit for Traditional Owners to be obtained from environmental watering that improves the health of rivers and wetlands and that protects and enhance environmental values.

We would like to make specific comments as follows. These comments have relevance to all four matters in the Terms of Reference and more specifically relate to point 3. (Regarding the more efficient use of environmental water):

2.1 Shared benefits from environmental watering

Environmental watering and connectivity of the system are important to Aboriginal people. There is a causal relationship between a healthy environment (Country) and strengthening culture, strengthening social systems and subsequent participation in the redress of poverty and marginalisation.

Recommendation:

- We seek greater alignment between environmental and cultural objectives in decisions making for environmental watering, to maximise the shared benefits of environmental watering for Victorian Traditional Owners.
- We support the management of environmental watering through the VEWH and believe that this will optimise the use of environmental water using tools such as carryover and minimise risks of Blackwater events.

2.2 Towards cultural flows.

Although it is likely that environmental outcomes for Traditional Owners have been indirectly achieved from environmental watering in Victoria, there are few examples of environmental water being actively delivered or modified to protect or enhance Aboriginal cultural values or uses in Victoria. There can be significant differences between cultural and environmental watering objectives in terms of species or other environmental outcomes that may be prioritised in determining where to allocate an environmental flow.

Recommendation:

Actions to better provide for Aboriginal cultural outcomes using environmental water include:

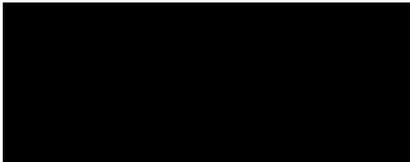
- Improved engagement. This is supporting Traditional Owner Corporations and waterway managers (and other agencies) to build relationships. These relationships will be the first step to better understand the values and aspirations Aboriginal people have when it comes to environmental water management at a regional scale.
- improving Traditional Owner participation in the Victorian environmental watering program, especially in environmental water planning, through mutual capacity building and the joint development of culturally appropriate water planning and management tools.
- Research to increase understanding of Indigenous cultural values related to water and their associated water requirements (including timing and flow profile and cultural governance arrangements) for various cultural outcomes.
- Development of restoration and management practice for water ways and their associated cultural and ecological values. This requires a respectful integration of western science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, to develop and modify practice in an adaptive management regime.

Should you have any queries, please contact Mike Nurse of the Federation Secretariat (E: [REDACTED])



We look forward to continuing to work in very positive spirit with Minister Neville and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder on this important program.

Yours sincerely



Janine Coombs
Chair
Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner
Corporations

PO Box 431 North Melbourne VIC 3051
(03) 9321 5388
info@fvto.com.au
www.fvto.com.au
ABN: 40 164 514 121