



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests Communique #3, October 2023

23rd meeting, Darwin, 30 October–2 November 2023

The Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests met on Larrakia land in Darwin, Northern Territory, on 30 October–2 November 2023. The Northern Territory Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (DEPWS) hosted the meeting.

Larrakia Nation Traditional Owner, Mr Trent Lee, provided a Welcome to Saltwater Country ceremony.

The Committee visited Manton Dam and the Adelaide River off-Stream Water Storage Project (AROWS) to learn more about how both projects are considering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' water interests in water planning and management decisions. The Committee learnt that some communities are participating in discussions with DEPWS regarding how to maintain the riparian zone along rivers affected by the Manton Dam. The AROWS project can hold around 250 GL of water at full supply (approximately half the water volume in Sydney Harbour) and when completed, will supply 60.2 GL per year to the Darwin region.

The Committee spoke to DEPWS about the background to water ownership and management in the Northern Territory and heard about several water allocation plans that are in development, including the Adelaide River Catchment Water Allocation Plan; Georgina Wiso Water Allocation Plan; Tennant Creek Water Allocation Plan; and the Western Davenport Water Allocation Plan.

The Committee valued the opportunity to discuss water matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their communities with the Northern Land Council; Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority; Central Land Council; and Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory.

The Committee also valued the opportunity to speak with representatives from DEPWS, the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Logistics, and Department for Territory Families, Housing and Communities about water security and water quality matters. The Committee heard that most of the water in remote communities is bore water and infrastructure and maintenance of water systems are a logistical challenge.

The Committee learnt more about the Northern Territory Government's Indigenous Essential Services Program, which provides water and sewerage to remote communities and outstations. The Committee also heard about the Northern Territory Government's plan to establish an Aboriginal Water Advisory Council (AWAC).

Next meeting

Our next meeting is an in-person meeting in Adelaide on 13–14 December 2023.

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