



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests

Communique #4, December 2023

24th meeting, Adelaide, 13–14 December 2023

The Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests met on Kurna land in Adelaide, South Australia, on 13–14 December 2023. The South Australian Department for Environment and Water hosted the meeting. We enjoyed a warm Welcome to Country by Mr Jack Buckskin.

On day 1 of the meeting, we acknowledged the conclusion of our Health Check, which took place between September and November 2023 and involved:

- One-on-one structured discussions between members and co-Chairs to evaluate the performance and governance arrangements of the Committee.
- Skills and diversity refresh of current members to identify potential gaps in skills and experience.
- Expression of interest process to establish a pool of suitable applicants to fill future vacancies.

The 2024 membership for the Committee will be published on our webpage in early 2024.

We enjoyed speaking to representatives from the Aboriginal Lands Trust and South Australian Native Title, who shared several water issues and challenges that align with themes raised by other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples during 2023, including:

- Access to quality and quantity water for remote communities.
- Poor water infrastructure leading to water wastage and huge costs to communities.
- Equity between industry, agriculture, and community regarding access to water.

On day 2 of the meeting, we were pleased to be joined in person by many of our jurisdictional partners from around Australia. We launched our two strategic products, developed during 2023:

- Insights Paper: Pathway to enduring recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' water interests in national water reform initiatives.
- Timeline showing the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' water interests, advocacy, and reform.

We also spoke about the Committee's key focus areas for 2024, which include:

- Build our reputation, profile, and visibility.
- Strengthen Committee Secretariat governance.
- Nurture our relationships and knowledge sharing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, jurisdictions, and water ministers.
- Reinforce our strategic position to better influence water management and planning decisions.
- Anticipate emerging water issues and critical developments, and how these might impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Achieve progress and commitment from governments towards agreeing to a Closing the Gap Inland Waters target.
- Achieve enduring recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' water rights and interests in the National Water Initiative.

- Contribute to the development of a national water holding arrangement/model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Towards the end of day 2, we valued the opportunity to hear from the South Australian Department for Environment and Water and the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board about some of the ways they are working to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Cultural authority and decision making in water planning and management.

Next meeting

Our next meeting is a virtual meeting on 1 February 2024, followed by an in-person meeting in Gayini (Nari Nari Country), Southwest NSW, from 27–29 February 2024.

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