



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests [Communiqué #11: Meeting 36, Launceston, Lutruwita/Tasmania, 10 – 12 March 2026](#)

The Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests (CAWI) met on the land of the Palawa from 10 to 12 March 2026. CAWI was welcomed to Country next to the Kanamaluka/Tamar River by Ms Brooke Bourke and Mr Joel Williams. The meeting was hosted by the Australian Government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department).

All CAWI members attended the meeting in-person except for Mr Nathan Brennan, who attended virtually. Ms Kay Blades was endorsed as CAWI's Chair for 2026, alongside Ms Bianca Lena as Deputy Chair. CAWI representatives on the National Water Committee sub-committees were also agreed by the committee.

CAWI received an update on a range of water policy work underway by the Australian and state and territory governments, including the National Water Agreement, National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Inland Waters Target 15c, the Cultural Flows for Cultural Economies grants program, the Aboriginal Water Entitlements program and the Murray—Darling Basin enduring water holding arrangements.

The committee progressed the series of information sheets and videos, which aim to build First Nations people's water literacy and assist governments to understand First Nations peoples' connection to water. The information sheets and videos are nearly finalised and will be published on the department's website in due course.

At CAWI#36, the committee met with the Hon Bridget Archer MP, Tasmanian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and officials from the Tasmanian Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, to discuss First Nations water interests and challenges in Lutruwita/Tasmania. CAWI advocated for Tasmania to sign the new National Water Agreement and encouraged continued engagement with Palawa and greater integration of land and water rights into government policy.

CAWI met with representatives from several First Nations organisations and individuals from Lutruwita/Tasmania, including the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, the Cape Barren Island Aboriginal Association (CBIAA), along with members of the Pakana Rangers, Tayaritja Milaythina Muka/Sea Country IPA Team and Truwana Rangers. The Committee also met with Palawa knowledge keepers Elder Auntie Dr Lola Greeno, Ms Darlene Mansell, Ms Nindarra Wheatley, Ms Vanessa Greeno and Mr Adam Thompson.

The Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania discussed the work they are doing to return land to Palawa and emphasised the need for increased integration of land and water rights. From a range of stakeholders, the committee heard concerns around pollution of the Kanamaluka, the logjam on the Nile River and the need for consultation with Palawa before infrastructure works are undertaken.

CAWI undertook a field trip to Truwana/Cape Barren Island, where the committee had the opportunity to hear from the CBIAA and Truwana Rangers about their pride in the level of self-determination practised on the island, and of the infrastructure issues and the need for support in addressing ongoing water security issues. Both groups acknowledged the support provided through the National Water Grid Fund project.

Through the engagements an overarching theme emerged: a general need was expressed for better access to information around water rights and how these could be exercised in relation to land and sea Country. CAWI was pleased to hear of strong support for Ranger programs to care for Country, support self-determination and provide jobs for First Nations youth. The committee notes that Rangers expressed an aspiration for greater responsibility in caring for waterways and catchments, but understands that this would need to be supported by improved water literacy through culturally appropriate water training.

Next meeting

CAWI's next meeting will be held virtually in May 2026.

Other CAWI activities and ongoing work

Submissions

Since the last communiqué, CAWI has prepared submissions for several policy processes that interact with First Nations water interests, including:

- the *National Statement for First Nations in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry discussion paper*
- the *National Food Security Strategy discussion paper*
- the *Implementing Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030 discussion paper*.

CAWI was considerably involved in drafting of the National Water Agreement through 2025, and continues to be involved in developing the Commonwealth Action Plan and has offered to support development of jurisdiction action plans in due course.

CAWI is currently preparing a submission to the *Murray—Darling Basin Plan Review discussion paper*, works with the states and territories on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Inland Waters Target 15c, and will be providing input to the Productivity Commission's *Inquiry into National Water Reform* and the independent review of the *Water Act 2007* (Cth) this year.

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