



Water Factsheet

This factsheet was informed by the Water Discussion Paper authored by Bradley Moggridge (a proud Murri from the Kamilaroi Nation and water scientist).

Water is Country. When we say 'Country', we mean everything under the care and control of Indigenous Australians – land, fresh - and salt-water, animals and plants, places, landscapes, cultural connections and cultural knowledge, stories, songs, traditions, intellectual property etc.

Water rights were lost as a result of historical dispossession, water colonisation and settler laws preventing Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders from having access to water for cultural, spiritual, customary and economic purposes. For Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, rivers, wetlands, aquifers and other water bodies have diverse and interdependent cultural, social, spiritual, customary and economic significance. Water dependent cultural values can encompass, among many others, creation sites, burial places, language, gender specific values and culturally specific environmental conditions to support totemic or cultural keystone species.

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders continue to be disadvantaged in efforts to access, protect and use water. For example, a recent study by Hartwig and Jackson 2020¹ in the Murray Darling Basin, the most productive agricultural area of the country, found that NSW Aboriginal people collectively hold only 0.2% of all available surface water whilst comprising 9.3% of this area's population. Despite the Murray Darling Basin being the focus of intense multi-jurisdictional regulatory attention for many decades, Indigenous ownership is virtually nil and Indigenous voices in water management and decision making is lacking.

In the rest of the country, particularly where there are less developed water management systems and processes, Traditional Owners are resorting to legal challenges to protect water. An example of this is the challenge to the controversial 40 gigalitre licence proposed for Singleton Station in the Northern Territory.

There is a significant opportunity for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders now the ILSC can assist people to acquire water and fund water management activities and related enterprises.

Challenges

- Current regulation and planning around the access, use, management, benefit and value of water does not provide for the diverse cultural values of water nor Indigenous peoples' aspirations for water.
- Difficult to enter a complex and already over-allocated market where water prices fluctuate significantly and there are frequently exuberant prices in dry times for those wanting to enter the water market.
- Inequitable legislation that favours settlers, investors and mainstream producers over Indigenous people.
- Limited access to capital and other funding to acquire water rights and allocations, and for the protection and /or management of water.
- Lack of knowledge (water literacy) by Indigenous people of the regulatory frameworks for water, particularly understanding complex legal rules and government processes and the need to apply for water licences, and understand the rules for actually accessing the water when it is licensed and requirements around infrastructure to pump and store it.
- Limited means of access to the consumptive pool.

1. Hartwig, L.D., & Jackson, S. 2020. The status of Aboriginal water holdings in the Murray-Darling Basin. ARI Report No. 2020/004. Australian Rivers Institute, Griffith University, Australia.



Northern Australia
Aquaculture Project



Kings Run,
Tasmania



Wanna Mar Stehr tuna
fishing, Port Lincoln, SA

Opportunities

- Recommit to strengthening Indigenous water rights and a strong National Water Initiative refresh.
- Improve water literacy – providing support for Indigenous people to access and develop culturally appropriate information on accessing and acquiring water.
- Ensure the availability of new water or unassigned water is provided to Indigenous people first.
- Reduce barriers for access to the consumptive pool.
- Commit to cultural flow methodology.
- Ensure funds to purchase water and water entitlements made available by governments are shared equitably.
- Build a strong platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and decision making in water policy and processes.
- Enable access to and fund research.

Tell Us What You Need

How can the ILSC best support your participation in the securing water? Should we:

1. Provide information on where water enterprise opportunities exist and how to take advantage of those opportunities? e.g. agribusiness, aquaculture.
2. Help to build your business planning and capabilities? e.g. feasibility studies, capacity building, links to technical advisors and networks
3. Link you with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and groups to learn from each other? including sharing ideas, lessons and business models that work, supporting conferences etc.
4. Actively support Indigenous-led organisations, networks, alliances and initiatives to have a greater voice in industry development and government?
5. Provide funding and research support for projects? e.g. projects protecting and managing rivers and wetlands.
6. Other suggestions?

Projects supported by the ILSC

The ILSC has not specifically acquired water since its expanded powers enable it to do so in 2019. ILSC support for projects broadly relating to water include:

- acquiring land with agribusiness or aquaculture enterprises (with associated water access, leases or licences);
- supporting a water quality lab enterprise;
- provision of essential water infrastructure and treatment systems to support communities and their enterprises; and
- installation of solar pumps for multiple bores on pastoral properties.

To find out more about what we do please go to www.ilsc.gov.au and check out our Project Profiles.



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The ILSC GROUP

Join The Conversation



Come along to one of our face-to-face sessions or join an online session. Visit our website to book in.



Complete the on line survey.



Phone us on 1800 818 490 for a confidential chat.



Email your submissions to NILSS@ilsc.gov.au to share your thoughts.



Get your full Information Pack: visit www.ilsc.gov.au, or email NILSS@ilsc.gov.au.



A feedback report summarising what we have heard from you and how we will use this important information will be available on the website.



www.ilsc.gov.au