



Australian Government

Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation



The ILSC GROUP

EASTERN REGION

Regional Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy 2024 to 2028

A regional focus to the National Indigenous
Land and Sea Strategy 2023 to 2028



Front cover image: Cullunghutti Mountain in the distance on Jerrinja Country (NSW)
Photographer: Amy Hutchinson

Acknowledgement of Country

In all our activities we pay our respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands, waters, and skies on which we live and work.

We honour the resilience and continuing connection to Country, culture, and community of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.

We recognise the decisions we make today will impact the lives of generations to come.

A note on language:

The terms 'Aboriginal peoples and/or Torres Strait Islander people', 'Aboriginal', 'Indigenous' and 'First Nations' may be used interchangeably throughout this document. Using these terminologies, we seek to acknowledge and honour diversity, shared knowledge, and experiences as well as the right of individuals and communities to define their own identities.

The C in Country is capitalised throughout this document as Country for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people represents the lands, waterways, seas, skies to which Indigenous people are connected. It is so much more than a physical place, containing complex ideas and meaning about lore, place, custom, language, economy, spiritual belief, cultural practice, wellbeing, family, and identity. It is inseparable from people, community, and self, and cannot be separated into land, water, and, sea – it is all one.

Warning

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this publication **may** contain the names or images of people who have died.

About this strategy

This Regional Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy (RILSS) provides a regional focus to the National Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy 2023-28 (NILSS), the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation's (ILSC) chief policy document under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005*.

Each regional strategy – one for the ILSC's Central, Eastern and Western divisions – includes:

- a snapshot of the region's geography, Indigenous population, Indigenous rights over Country, and ILSC investment (**page 6**)
- a summary of the NILSS guiding principles, impact, and strategic priorities (**page 11**)
- a set of priority actions linked to the NILSS six strategic priorities (**page 13-31**).

Collectively these strategies provide the ILSC with the framework to guide how we will work and what we will achieve until 2028.

Talaroo Hot Springs,
Ewamian Country (Qld)

Welcome from the ILSC Chair and GCEO

Welcome to our Regional Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy (RILSS) for the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation’s (ILSC) Eastern Region.

Our three new RILSS – for our Eastern, Central and Western Regions – have been re-aligned to the ILSC’s divisional boundaries to ensure our delivery of each strategy is connected to our operations and has a clear point of accountability.

They each outline local approaches to the strategic priorities and commitments made in our National Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy (NILSS) 2023-28 – and they reflect the need for additional consultation and engagement during their first year of implementation.

As we learn more about what our stakeholders need and want, we anticipate that some of our commitments will evolve and change. These details will be reflected in our Annual NILSS and RILSS Action Plan published in August each year.

We recognise the broad range of needs and differences in Country and opportunity across Australia.

To address this, we will work in partnership with representative groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to understand and support their aspirations, and look at new ways we can assist with expanding Indigenous rights over Country.

Some of the key opportunities within the Eastern Region that align with the ILSC’s core mandate include:

- identifying and formalising relationships with like-minded partners to leverage our investment in returning and managing Country
- building resilience and ensuring long-term outcomes are generated through formalising partnerships with key support agencies and industry groups responsible for Indigenous employment, skilling, and capacity and capability development

- removing barriers to supporting land and water management activities on Country
- developing sector strategies in consultation with Indigenous people and sector leaders, providing an opportunity for us to build and adopt shared goals, and to create a platform that prioritises opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation
- being more present on Country through attending regional events and forums that focus on delivering support services and other initiatives aligned to the return and management of Country.

Both the NILSS and the RILSS set out our priorities, commitments, and the difference we intend to make together up until 2028.

We are committed to a process of continuous improvement as we become a leader and demonstrate best practice service delivery for Indigenous peoples.

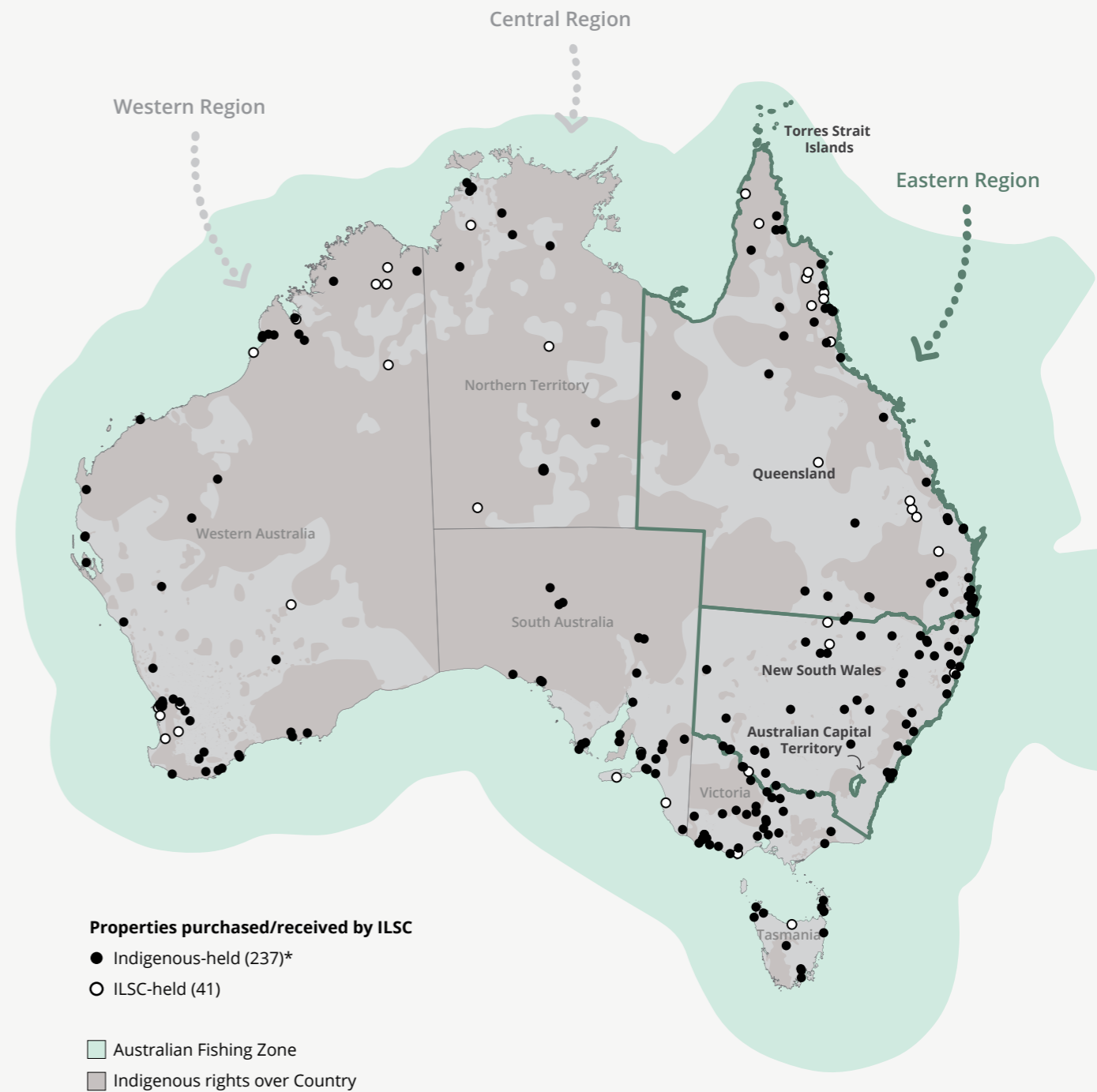
We look forward to partnering with Indigenous organisations and delivering positive change across the Eastern Region.



Ian Hamm
Chairperson, ILSC Board
Yorta Yorta



Joe Morrison
Group Chief Executive Officer
Dagoman/Mualgal



Message from Eastern Divisional Manager

The ILSC's Eastern Region includes some of Australia's most unique and iconic areas – from the expanse of the 48,000 square kilometre Torres Strait region in the north, to the Baaka (Darling River) of the lower Murray-Darling Basin in the south.

It is also home to a diversity of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples and many Traditional Owners, landholders, land councils, communities, corporations, and business operators, each with specific needs and aspirations.

This strategy is a direct result of listening to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the Eastern Region and has been guided by the views expressed during regional consultations across the Torres Strait, Queensland, New South Wales, and the Australian Capital Territory.

We aim to improve environmental, social, cultural, and economic outcomes from Country (land and water) through supporting increased ownership and management opportunities across the Eastern Region's urban, regional, and remote areas.



Mark Denning
Eastern Divisional Manager

Our focus and commitment are to build on the ILSC's performance and increase our relevance to the current and future Country needs of Indigenous Australians.

Delivering this strategy presents an enormous opportunity for investment in the future prosperity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

With a commitment to acknowledge and build on the existing capabilities of the region's Indigenous people, we will remain a key partner to enable genuine self-determination over Country.

As always, we look forward to doing this together with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the Eastern Region.

\$134.2M

ILSC INVESTMENT IN PROPERTIES
(2.0M hectares)

102 PROPERTIES
(1.4M hectares)

INDIGENOUS-HELD

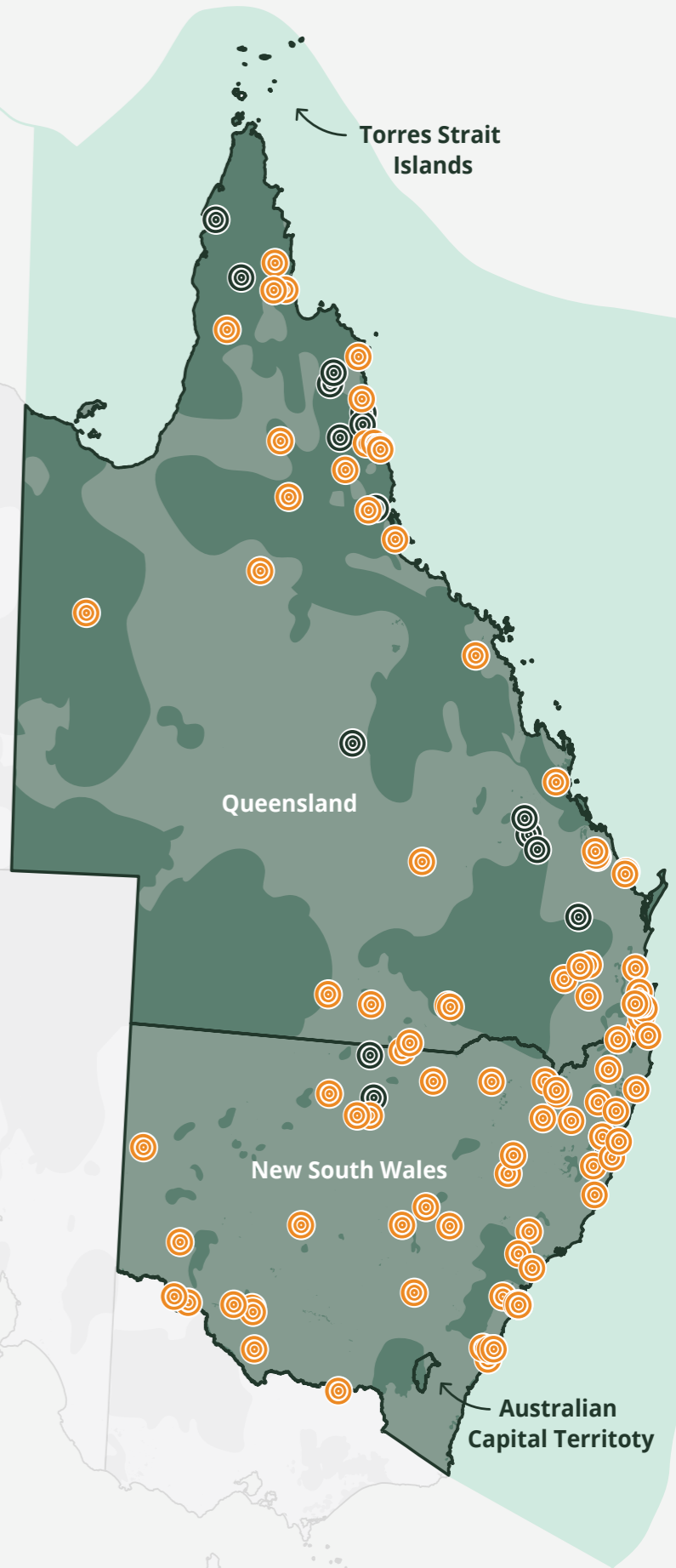


18 PROPERTIES
(0.5M hectares)

ILSC-HELD



■ Indigenous rights over Country
■ Australian Fishing Zone



The NILSS and RILSS are underpinned by what we heard during our largest ever effort to listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' aspirations and priorities for Country, as well as their thoughts on the current and future role of the ILSC.

Visit www.ilsc.gov.au for the NILSS and a detailed consultation report.

Eastern Region snapshot



Geography

The Eastern Region includes:

- Queensland (inclusive of the Torres Strait)
- New South Wales
- Australian Capital Territory

Together, they cover a total land area of 2.53 million square kilometres (253 million hectares).

The states also include marine waters which extend from the coast to 5.5 kilometres out to sea, adding a further 130,000 square kilometres. The area of sea Country from 5.5 kilometres to 370.4 kilometres out to sea, is managed by the Australian Government and referred to as the Australian Fishing Zone. This expanse of sea around Australia is more than eight million square kilometres and is larger than mainland Australia.

Indigenous population

Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics Final 2021 Census data (Table 1), the Eastern Region had a population of 622,354 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. New South Wales had the largest Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population in Australia (339,710 people), followed by Queensland (273,119 people). With the addition of the Australian Capital Territory (9,525 people) the Eastern Region comprises nearly two thirds (63.3%) of Australia’s total Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population.

	New South Wales	Queensland	Australian Capital Territory	Australia*
Aboriginal only	326,927	222,309	8,971	901,655
Torres Strait Islander only	5,971	25,169	241	39,538
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	6,812	25,641	313	42,516
Total Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	339,710	273,119	9,525	983,709
Non-Indigenous	7,757,352	4,942,695	442,983	24,701,703
Total	8,097,062	5,215,814	452,508	25,685,412
% of total (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population)	4.2%	5.2%	2.1%	3.8%

*Includes Other Territories (Jervis Bay Territory, NSW; Territory of Christmas Island, WA; Territory of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, WA; Norfolk Island, Qld)

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians 30 June 2021

Indigenous rights over Country

Before 1788, Indigenous peoples had undisputed care, control, and connection to all lands and seas of the Eastern Region. Following colonisation, the rights and interests in Country flowing from these relationships were extinguished through the doctrine of Terra Nullius.

It was not until 1966 that the first movement to formally return the care and control of land and waters to Indigenous peoples began in South Australia. Other states and territories began returning Country to Indigenous peoples through different types of legal processes over future decades.

In 1993, the introduction of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) which operates across Australia, resulted in significant changes to the recognition of Indigenous peoples’ rights over Country. Depending on the existing land rights arrangements within each state or territory, as well as discussions between Traditional Owners and governments, today’s legal framework and process to determine Indigenous access, ownership, and management of Country across Australia is varied and complex.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) – the science and economics research division of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – produced a report titled *Australia’s Indigenous land and forest estate (Dec 2020)*. This report brings together information from multiple sources to present what it refers to as the ‘Indigenous estate’, which maps the extent of land and forest over which Indigenous peoples and communities have ownership, management, co-management, or other special rights.

This Indigenous estate is described by four categories:

- **Indigenous owned:** freehold land or forest that is owned by Indigenous communities, or land or forest for which ownership is vested through other mechanisms
- **Indigenous managed:** land or forest that is managed by Indigenous communities
- **Indigenous co-managed:** land or forest that has formal, legally-binding agreements in place to include input from Indigenous people in the process of developing and implementing a management plan
- **Other special rights:** land or forest subject to Native Title determinations, registered Indigenous Land Use Agreements, and legislated special cultural use provisions.

According to this report, within the Eastern Region the area of land under Indigenous ownership, management arrangement, or other special rights makes up 50% of Queensland, 45% of the Australian Capital Territory, and 6.1% of New South Wales (Table 2).

With specific reference to Native Title determinations, claims and settlements (included within ‘Other special rights’ of the Indigenous estate report), as at 1 July 2023 there were 262 determinations that Native Title exists (115 exclusive and 147 non-exclusive) in the Eastern Region covering approximately 62 million hectares.

- **New South Wales:** the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW) (ALRA)*, was enacted to facilitate the return of Crown land in NSW to Aboriginal people and go some way to address the injustices of dispossession. Under the ALRA, a network of 121 Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) provide critical community infrastructure and opportunity for Aboriginal community economic development and community growth. As most of the state is subject to extinguishing tenures (unable to be recognised), there are not extensive areas where Native Title might be recognised, resulting in 20 determinations that Native Title exists (three exclusive and 17 non-exclusive). As at 1 July 2023 there were seven registered claims.
- **Queensland:** Under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991 (Qld)* and the *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991 (Qld)*, land reserved for Aboriginal people could be transferred to Aboriginal people as trustees to hold the land for the benefit of future generations. The Acts also made provision

for claims over specified areas of land to be heard by a Land Tribunal which could make recommendations to the Minister. According to the Queensland Government, more than 4.5 million hectares of land have been transferred under these Acts. There are 242 determinations that Native Title exists (112 exclusive and 130 non-exclusive). As at 1 July 2023, there were a further 44 registered applications.

- **Australian Capital Territory:** There have been six Native Title claims made but no determinations and, as at 1 July 2023, there were no registered claims. The *Aboriginal Land Grant (Jervis Bay Territory) Act 1986 (Cth)* vested land in the Jervis Bay area in the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council. In 2001, the ACT Government and the Ngunnawal People entered into a joint management agreement regarding Namadgi National Park, known as the Agreement Between the Australian Capital Territory and ACT Native Title Claim Groups.

Table 2: Area of land by Indigenous ownership, management arrangement or other special rights

STATE/ TERRITORY	Area ('000 hectares)^					Total land area in the Indigenous estate*	Total land area in the Indigenous estate (%)
	Total land area	Indigenous owned	Indigenous managed	Indigenous co-managed	Other special rights		
ACT	236	-	-	107	-	107	45.0
NSW	80,131	447	444	3,171	1,920	4,862	6.1
Qld	173,002	8,847	6,626	4,358	84,046	86,887	50.0
Australia	768,909	133,501	141,356	32,708	337,173	437,679	57.0

*The total land area is not the sum of the areas in the preceding columns as some land has more than one attribute

^ To convert hectares to square kilometres, divide by 100

Sources: ABARES – Australia's Indigenous land and forest estate (Dec 2020); Australian Law Reform Commission, Connection to Country: Review of the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth), National Native Title Tribunal (NTV), and National Land Council

ILSC investment

Since 1995, within the Eastern Region, the ILSC has invested more than \$163 million buying properties and supporting projects that enable Indigenous access to, and management of, Country. This includes the purchase of 125 properties totalling 1.97 million hectares valued at more than \$134 million. On 30 June 2023, more than 80% of these properties (102 of 125), had been returned to Indigenous ownership (Table 3).

Demand for ILSC investment to buy and manage Country remains strong.

Since July 2015, on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the ILSC has purchased 12 properties within the Eastern Region (three remote, three rural and six urban) and funded almost 100 management projects valued at \$29.5 million.

Table 3: Eastern Region – Land and Sea Country (from 1995 to 30 June 2023)

ILSC PURCHASED / RECEIVED	Qld	NSW (incl ACT)	TOTAL
Number of properties purchased or received	63	62	125
Area purchased or received (ha)	1,635,397	333,559	1,968,955
\$ Value (purchase cost)	\$66,169,888	\$68,031,052	\$134,200,940
INDIGENOUS-HELD			
Number of Indigenous-held properties	48	54	102
Area Indigenous-held properties (ha)	1,104,756	265,460	1,370,216
ILSC-HELD			
Number of ILSC-held properties	12	6	18
Area ILSC-held properties (ha)	473,841	38,121	511,962
ILSC MANAGEMENT PROJECTS^			
Number of management projects	66	27	93
\$ Value management projects	\$21,426,702	\$8,112,290	\$29,538,992

^ 1 July 2015 to 30 Sep 2023

NOTE: Occasionally, property purchased and granted by the ILSC is released from Indigenous control. This may occur because the property is no longer fit-for-purpose or due to administrative actions.



Visit our website to find out more about the ILSC's:

- National Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy 2023-28
- contribution to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- 2022 NILSS Consultation Report.

www.ilsc.gov.au

Our NILSS framework

Country and its people are at the heart of everything we do.

This captures the reason for the ILSC's existence and what our stakeholders told us was most important to them, while reflecting the all-encompassing nature of Country within Indigenous culture.



Guiding principles

Caring for Country

- Care for and consider Country in all that we do
- Support Indigenous people to look after Country their way
- Recognise the custodianship of past generations and act with future generations in mind

Self-determination

- Remove barriers to self-determination across the ILSC
- Support Indigenous people to move toward self-determination on their terms
- Influence others to uphold and maximise self-determination

Partnerships

- Work with Indigenous peoples as equal partners
- Be open, transparent, accountable, and respectful
- Provide autonomy and choice in how we work together

Impact by 2028

Working together for progress

By 2028, in partnership with Indigenous people, we have an expanding and diverse Indigenous economy, determined by Indigenous people and organisations who have improved access to Country, capability and resources needed to achieve their aspirations.

Serving you better

By 2028 we are a highly capable and appropriately resourced organisation that is deeply connected to our stakeholders, using influence and partnership to support systemic change to benefit Indigenous people and the Indigenous economy.

Strategic priorities

1 Returning Country

Indigenous rights and interests in Country are expanded and maximise self-determination.

2 Managing Country

Indigenous-led initiatives on Country have grown and Indigenous managers of Country are more capable, and better equipped to be sustainable, now and into the future.

3 Sector leadership

Indigenous people and organisations have greater influence on priority sectors and are driving sector progress at scale.

4 Meaningful connection

Trusting and mutually beneficial partnerships are established and maintained with our partners that enable us to meet the goals of the NILSS.

5 Excellent service

Our services are tailored to meet the needs of the Indigenous organisations we work with and are delivered by a highly capable organisation.

6 Cultural leadership

Indigenous people recognise us as a culturally capable leader, and we have influenced our partners to improve their practices.

Cultural custodian Suzanne Thompson on Iningai Country managing a cultural cool burn at Marra Wonga Story wall at Turraburra (Gracevale Station) (Qld)
 Credit: Yumbangu Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development Aboriginal Corporation



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1 Returning Country

Indigenous rights and interests in Country are expanded and maximise self-determination.

Since our establishment in 1995, we have been buying Country to return to Indigenous people.

However, as more Indigenous corporations have access to Country, the demand for ILSC assistance to buy land, water, and related rights is shifting.

We are committed to improving the way we work towards returning Country to Indigenous ownership and expanding and capitalising on Indigenous rights over Country. This includes undertaking an assessment of all ILSC-held properties in the Eastern Region to progress their return.

We will review locations where Indigenous nations have no, or limited, access to Country and prioritise these areas. This might involve helping to negotiate the hand-back of Country, supporting policy reform, or partnering with major investors to improve access to larger parts of Country. It may also mean our involvement in projects as brokers or facilitators rather than as a financial partner.

Our focus will also be on increasing Indigenous ownership of water or water-related rights. How we achieve this will require research and collaboration with partners working in this sector to understand how we can add value.

To create impact, we will review and improve our property buying service; be more responsive to the market to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and secure quality and fit-for-purpose Country.

While we will undertake specific work to progress our service in this direction, we remain open to all opportunities to purchase land, water, and related interests.

Priority actions

- Prioritise the return of Country with an aim to grant all 18 ILSC-held properties in the Eastern Region by 2028 including: Western Cape Residential College, Wawu Dimbi, Gracevale Station, and Merepah Station (Qld); and 27-31 Cope Street Redfern (Levels 1 and 2); and Old Pooncarie Mission (NSW)
- Undertake an assessment and identify new operators for ILSC-held agribusiness, Crocodile Welcome Station (Qld)
- Advocate for the prioritisation of Indigenous groups where state or territory government agencies seek to hand-over property
- Where possible, support the transfer of Crown, Western Land, Pastoral, and other forms of lease, to freehold or other title that provides superior rights of tenure for Indigenous groups
- In collaboration with partners, determine water needs and aspirations (including for sea Country) and develop a five-year purchase plan to secure available water rights through access to ILSC programs, referral to potential partners, or other available opportunities
- Identify and formalise relationships with partners to leverage ILSC investment and develop the capacity and capability of Indigenous groups and people to seek the return of Country
- Identify opportunities for the purchase of environmental, cultural and heritage sites in partnership with government and non-government agencies, not-for-profit, private, and other environmentally focused organisations
- Continue engagement and discussion with Qld, NSW, and Torres Strait Native Title Representative Bodies and Land Councils to identify locations where Indigenous nations have no or limited access to Country, and support the return of Country to these nations

Opening day in Goodooga store. Euhalayai Nation (NSW)



2 Managing Country

Indigenous-led initiatives on Country have grown and Indigenous managers of Country are more capable, and better equipped to be sustainable, now and into the future.

Since our establishment, we have been assisting Indigenous people to sustainably manage their assets and realise their aspirations by investing in a broad range of ‘management projects’ – from kindergartens, schools, and childcare to aged care, social enterprises, arts and cultural centres, farming equipment, and numerous business cases and feasibility studies.

We will improve our management service and work with Indigenous people to provide the support needed to sustainably manage Country – skills, knowledge, resources, partners, funding – and address barriers that limit success or restrict self-determination. This includes the continued delivery of *Our Country Our Future* services.

Priority actions

- Support Indigenous land and sea ranger groups in the management of Indigenous-held Country, through building awareness of, and providing access to, *Our Country Our Future* services for investment and collaboration with Commonwealth, territory, and state programs
- Promote and leverage opportunities for holders of Country to benefit from the Australian Government’s commitments to protect the environment
- Build resilience and seek to achieve long-term outcomes through the return and management of Country by formalising partnerships with key support agencies, industry groups, and peak bodies responsible for Indigenous employment, skilling, and capacity and capability development
- Ensure Indigenous voices are represented through continued ILSC representation in state, territory, and Commonwealth working groups and steering committees on the design of policy, processes, and programs that involve Indigenous-held Country
- Identify opportunities for the preservation and protection of environmental, cultural, and heritage sites in partnership with government and non-government agencies, not-for-profit, private, and other environmentally focused organisations
- Promote opportunities and investment by peak agencies and organisations involved in natural resource management into projects on Indigenous-held land/waters, including ILSC-granted properties
- Remove barriers to supporting land and water management activities on Country (e.g. where a lack of infrastructure is in the way of economic development opportunities)
- Support management projects that explore/deliver opportunities for communities and organisations to invest in environmental, carbon, or renewable energy projects that provide efficiencies, continuity of service, and/or economic, employment, and other positive outcomes

3 Sector leadership

Indigenous people and organisations have greater influence on priority sectors and are driving sector progress at scale.

Through this priority, we want to create change that benefits Indigenous people who are actively involved in, or would like to participate in, one of the five sectors identified during consultation for the NILSS:

- renewables and clean energy
- inland water
- fisheries and aquaculture
- carbon
- environmental markets.

These sectors were chosen because of the current opportunities they present for Indigenous people.

They are either in a growth phase, or there could be a competitive advantage for Indigenous people through increased awareness and recognition of the positive contribution Indigenous peoples can make through participation in these sectors.

During the next five years, we want to ensure Indigenous people and organisations have greater influence across these sectors, as well as an opportunity to drive change and support the development or adoption of strategies.

In consultation with Indigenous people and sector leaders, we will complete a nationwide assessment of Indigenous-led opportunities in each sector, developing strategies and plans for implementation from July 2024. From year two of this strategy, we will start to implement the regional aspects of the sector strategies.

Each strategy will provide an opportunity for us to advocate, influence, and partner with government and representative bodies to build and adopt shared goals. And they will create a platform that prioritises opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in these sectors.

Through this process we will deepen our understanding of sector needs and opportunities across Australia, developing skills, capacity, policy, and appropriate governance models to increase knowledge and build capability of interested stakeholders.

We also acknowledge there may be growing interest and opportunity in other sectors. We will be responsive to Indigenous innovation and emerging opportunities that align with our strategy.

Renewables and clean energy

The renewables sector, which includes any power source that can be replaced at a greater rate than it is used (e.g. solar, wind, green hydrogen, and bioenergy), is steadily growing as the economy shifts from coal, oil, and gas-powered electricity generation.

There are opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – such as those with ownership of land or land rights near major power grid hubs and transmission lines – to participate in project development and operations in this sector.

We will continue to support small-scale projects that provide direct, positive outcomes for holders of Country and communities.

However, our focus will be on increasing Indigenous participation in, and opportunity from, the growth of the renewables sector. This may include identifying and assisting with the development of commercially viable projects that demonstrate benefits at scale to Indigenous people.

It might also include finding suitable funding partners or working with government to develop policy that gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people an opportunity to gain equal benefit when commercial renewable energy operations are established on Country.

Priority actions

- Work with Indigenous corporations and industry who want to be active partners in developing renewable energy projects on Country, to develop economic participation frameworks that recognise and respect the connection and cultural importance of Country
- Assist Indigenous communities with access to independent advice on renewable projects to enable informed decisions about potential industry partners and what is needed to achieve commercial success
- Support ILSC-held and granted property participation in this sector by providing timely review of renewable project consent applications
- Continue engagement and discussion with Qld, NSW, ACT government representatives to include an Indigenous voice in the development of renewable and clean energy market policy
- Partner with First Nations Clean Energy Network, and other industry groups and peak bodies, to explore and strengthen the participation, leadership, and influence of Indigenous people and businesses in the renewables sector

Inland water

We know that inland water – including rivers, wetlands, waterholes, and other water bodies – holds deep cultural, social, and spiritual importance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As well as providing environmental and sometimes commercial benefits, inland waterholes and wetland systems often include sacred sites of immense cultural significance.

Yet, up until recently, Indigenous people's access, rights, and interest in inland water had largely been excluded from decision-making. As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership of inland water is very limited across Australia.

The ILSC's ability to prioritise increased Indigenous access to inland water and involvement in water resource management is essential.

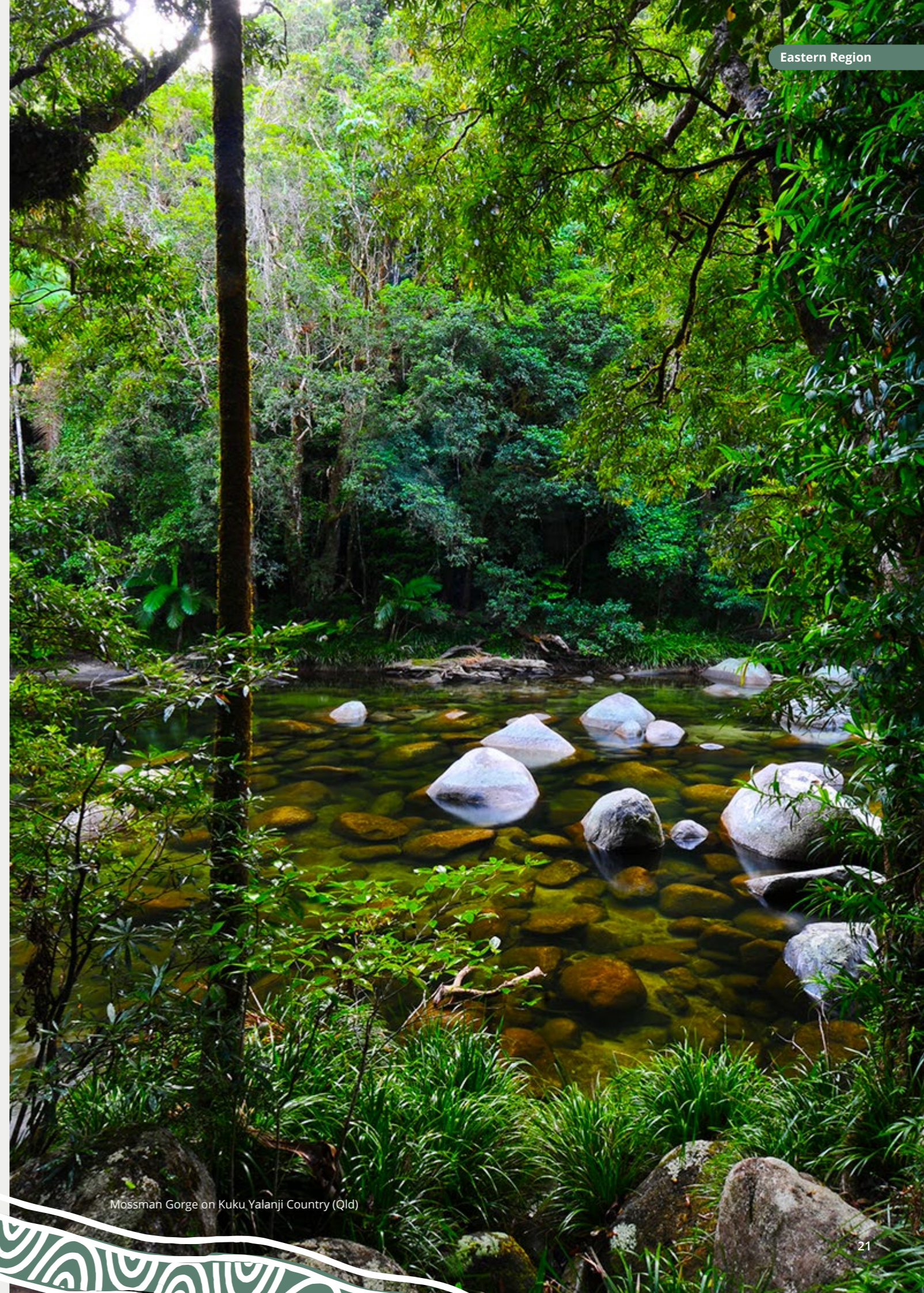
Within the Eastern and Central Regions, the Murray-Darling Basin water network presents a complex regulatory environment due to different state, territory, and national laws that determine who has access to, and ownership of, water across the region.

Acknowledging the complexity of Australia's inland water markets, we will partner with sector organisations and groups who actively represent the interests of Indigenous people in relation to inland water.

Our focus will be on supporting the capacity of these groups to represent and advocate for Indigenous interests in water. This could include making sure Indigenous voices in water management and decision making are heard, and that there is access to culturally appropriate information on accessing and buying inland water.

Priority actions

- Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and representative groups to define objectives and guiding principles, and support opportunities for increased understanding, access, and use of inland water allocations
- Work collaboratively with partners to map whole-of-catchment (regulated and unregulated) water systems, and the associated policy environment around Murray-Darling Basin and other regulated water catchments and irrigation schemes
- Partner with Commonwealth, state, and territory agencies (including the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder), to increase Indigenous participation and outcomes in water markets and the associated decision-making processes of the Murray-Darling Basin
- Advocate for new water or unassigned water to be provided to Indigenous people first



Mossman Gorge on Kuku Yalanji Country (Qld)

Fisheries and aquaculture

There is significant Indigenous interest in having an increased presence across sea Country.

Increased Indigenous involvement in fisheries and aquaculture can generate employment opportunities, lead to new Indigenous business operations, and improve Indigenous influence and leadership in the development and management of this sector.

Currently, the Australian system of allocating rights to catch seafood through fishing licences and quotas provides little for Indigenous catch. Other barriers to entry in this sector include prohibitive costs (e.g. for licences, equipment, and servicing), the limited availability of licences and quotas, and access to the training necessary for running a successful fishing or aquaculture operation.

Our focus for this sector will be to position Indigenous peoples for success and to help accelerate pathways to self-determination.

Specifically, we will support strategy, leadership and coordination that assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to gain more ownership and control over sea Country. This includes helping advocate for increased Indigenous involvement and recognition of traditional rights, interests and knowledge; providing

funding assistance for establishing and growing projects; taking advantage of existing, new, and emerging opportunities; and working at the individual, business, and industry level to enhance Indigenous capability.

We will also work in partnership with government and non-government organisations to build connections and identify opportunities we can act upon.

Priority actions

- Advocate for greater inclusion, representation, and co-design opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in resource management and decision-making regarding sea Country, commercial fisheries and aquaculture
- Work with Indigenous groups to address knowledge gaps, define priorities, and understand and evaluate existing fisheries and aquaculture opportunities based around traditional sea Country foods (e.g. abalone, native oysters, crayfish, and mud-crabs)
- Consider funding large-scale projects and ways to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups seeking ownership of freshwater, sea, and ocean-bearing harvests

Eulimbah at sunrise, Gayini, Nari Nari Country (NSW)
Photographer: Annette Ruzicka



Carbon

The carbon sector represents an opportunity for some holders of Country to be funded to restore the health of Country by 'farming carbon' – keeping and building carbon stocks in the landscape.

Carbon farming projects align the specific Caring for Country aspirations of Indigenous people with the need to reduce harm from climate change. This can be achieved through a market system that awards a carbon credit for every tonne of carbon stored or emissions avoided. These carbon credits can then be traded to organisations who want to offset their own emissions.

The money made from selling carbon credits can support Indigenous people on Country, create employment, and boost Indigenous businesses.

Examples of carbon farming include savanna fire management (which draws on Indigenous cultural fire knowledge); planting trees; removing grazing pressure to allow a forest to restore naturally; changing the way livestock is managed; and blue carbon.

To earn carbon credits in Australia, a landholder must follow a Clean Energy Regulator (CER)-approved methodology which sets out how the land must be managed to create carbon credits.

Priority actions

- Drive Indigenous outcomes by working with government and industry to elevate Indigenous knowledge and develop standards for new carbon and offset methodologies that recognise cultural practices (including Indigenous-led and co-produced models)
- Partner with the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network (ICIN), government, and other industry groups to explore and strengthen the participation, leadership, and power of Indigenous people and businesses in the carbon industry
- Look to provide independent advice on carbon projects and opportunities for managers of Country to enable informed decisions about feasibility and potential industry partners
- Where relevant, invest with Indigenous partners in the development of new methodologies and approaches that can expand Indigenous participation and secure Indigenous rights
- Support the sharing of Indigenous experiences with the carbon sector, and provide learning opportunities (e.g. through assisting ICIN hosting an annual forum and producing informative documents)

Environmental markets

Environmental markets encourage nature repair by placing a dollar value on natural assets (e.g. clean air, water, and fertile soils) that are key to plant, animal and human health.

There is growing international recognition that we need these systems to support the sustainability of human populations and their related activities; and this has been reflected in the emergence of environmental market systems such as Natural Capital Accounting; environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG); European Union's Nature Restoration Law (rewilding); IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards; and other contemporary concepts.

This creates an opportunity to engage with and position First Nations groups alongside and within these emerging environmental market systems, aligning Caring for Country aspirations and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) with frameworks that demonstrate integrity and transparency around what is being done, why it is being done, and the difference it is making, therefore being accountable to investors.

The emerging restoration and repair economy, alongside growing global concern and increasing government and corporate action around biodiversity loss and climate change, has the potential to see environmental markets become a rapidly moving and significant sector for Indigenous peoples.

Priority actions

- Support the establishment of an Indigenous experts' group in collaboration with the Australian Government and other partners to engage with the rapid policy development in this sector
- Work with Indigenous groups to leverage opportunities in nature-based solutions from Country (i.e. biodiversity offsets and accreditation, cultural fire credits) including through the Australian Government's proposed Nature Repair Market and Biodiversity Certification Scheme(s), the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, the Qld Land Restoration Fund, and other emerging systems that can credit Indigenous Caring for Country practices
- Investigate opportunities related to Caring for Country, and work with partners to contribute to the development of an environmental markets framework that embeds Indigenous interests and knowledge alongside environmental and cultural outcomes
- Advocate for continued funding and support for current Indigenous ranger programs
- Identify potential partners and work with Indigenous landholders to identify opportunities to enter or benefit from environmental markets to secure environmental, cultural, and economic outcomes, so First Nations groups can continue to benefit from the return and Care for Country

Jumbun community members participating in the 2023 NAIDOC March. Girramay Country (Qld)
Photographer: Marky G Enterprises



Serving you better

By 2028 we are a highly capable and appropriately resourced organisation that is deeply connected to our stakeholders, using influence and partnership to support systemic change to benefit Indigenous Australians and the Indigenous economy.

4 Meaningful connection

Trusting and mutually beneficial partnerships are established and maintained with our partners that enable us to meet the goals of the NILSS.

5 Excellent service

Our services are tailored to meet the needs of the Indigenous organisations we work with and are delivered by a highly capable organisation.

6 Cultural leadership

Indigenous people recognise us as a culturally capable leader, and we have influenced our partners to improve their practices.



4 Meaningful connection

Trusting and mutually beneficial partnerships are established and maintained with our partners that enable us to meet the goals of the NILSS.

Our work supporting Indigenous people to own and manage Country is strengthened when we work with like-minded partners and build on existing programs and initiatives. We must know what these other initiatives are and work closely with our partners to align our efforts and resources.

We are committed to embedding consultation and engagement activities across all the work we do.

This includes building networks with Indigenous stakeholders, government, corporate, and not-for-profit groups to foster partnerships and grow the potential for co-investment on Country.

We will do our best to listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' needs and keep improving our knowledge of, and collaboration with, our partners. We will work together to review our activities and determine the highest priorities where we can explore opportunities to connect Indigenous peoples with capability partners, funding partners, and/or expert advice.



Priority actions

- Be more present on Country – attend regional events and forums that focus on delivering support services and other initiatives aligned to the return of Country and management of Indigenous-held land/water
- Identify and develop culturally appropriate co-investment partnerships where we can align projects and processes and leverage funding and resources to maximise positive outcomes for Indigenous people
- Support and inform a whole-of-organisation review of policies and processes to identify barriers and opportunities to meaningful engagement that results in long-term, culturally appropriate outcomes
- Align our actions with the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- Continue to work with Traditional Owner Group Entities and Prescribed Bodies Corporate, also developing relationships with state partners and service providers – including Aboriginal Affairs NSW; Qld Department of Treaty; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts – to maximise inter-government approaches and provide relevant support to holders of Country
- Strengthen relationships with key Commonwealth agencies, such as the Torres Strait Regional Authority; National Indigenous Australians Agency; Indigenous Business Australia; and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- Consult with a broad range of stakeholders and identify opportunities to create and expand networks, linking similar projects and communities of practice to strengthen knowledge transfer, capacity development, and sector relationships

Image: The new headquarters for the Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance Aboriginal Corporation, housing a gallery (shown), workshop and retail space Gumbaynggirr Country, Coffs Harbour (NSW)
Credit: Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance and the Trees Photography



5 Excellent service

Our services are tailored to meet the needs of the Indigenous organisations we work with and are delivered by a highly capable organisation.

We can improve our services to better support the needs of Indigenous organisations.

Within our capacity and resourcing, we will look at offering a broader range of support to keep up with changing needs and new ways of working. This includes providing accessible services tailored to the different needs of Indigenous organisations, no matter their capability, aspirations, and preferred pathway to self-determination.

It also means reviewing our internal systems and processes to increase opportunities for connection with Indigenous people and organisations.

Priority actions

- Participate in a review of our services and programs, including the *Our Country Our Future* program, to identify areas for improvement and develop services that align with the NILSS
- Review our policies and processes to identify barriers to both self-determination and creating culturally appropriate partnerships, as well as opportunities to prioritise Indigenous leaders, organisations, and initiatives
- Consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities on information needs and preferred ways to share information
- Publish Annual Action Plans and an Annual NILSS Report to provide progress updates against the NILSS and RILSS delivery
- Support Indigenous participation across sectors through the timely review of consent applications to provide benefit for landholders with access to Country

6 Cultural leadership

Indigenous people recognise us as a culturally capable leader, and we have influenced our partners to improve their practices.

We want to be recognised by Indigenous people as a leader and form best-practice ways of upholding our guiding principles of Caring for Country, Self-determination, and Partnership.

This means stepping up as a culturally capable leader.

We will make sure our work with community is consultative, and that we gather information on what culturally appropriate leadership looks like and share this with others.

Priority actions

- Participate in the development of the ILSC's cultural leadership strategy, including a review of staff training and induction processes to better support the needs of Indigenous communities
- Implement our Indigenous Employment Strategy – which includes building and maintaining a strong, valued, and respected Indigenous workforce – to enable us to provide better service and achieve greater outcomes in partnership with Indigenous people
- Develop an Indigenous evaluation framework guided by an Indigenous Advisory Panel that will recommend evaluation principles, protocols, priorities, and improvements, including to existing measures used in Portfolio Budget Statements
- Continue to promote the work of the ILSC, Indigenous groups and our partners, including using social media to encourage awareness of Indigenous success, innovation, determination, and to promote collaboration amongst these groups



Image: Queensland Murray Darling Catchment Ltd St George ranger base in St George (Qld)



Implementation and reporting

As we deliver the NILSS and the RILSS, we will continue to listen, adapt, and respond as the world changes around us.

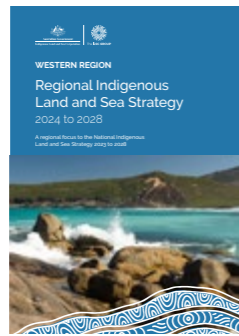
This supports our commitment to ‘working together’ and allows us to continue to be led by the views and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.

Being accountable and transparent is important to us and, each August, we will publish an Annual Action Plan to say what we plan to do during the year ahead.

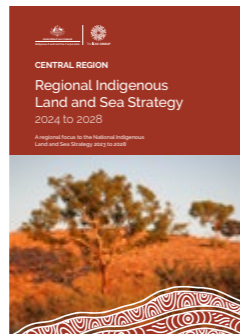
We will also formally report our progress through our compliance report – the ILSC’s Annual Report – and through an Annual NILSS Report which will be published in December each year.



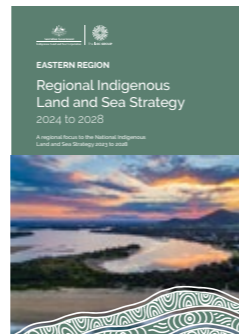
NILSS – 2023 to 2028



RILSS Western



RILSS Central



RILSS Eastern

Implementation

Reporting

2023–24

- Maintain ‘business as usual’ services and act where we have certainty
- Build knowledge, research, and conduct an internal review
- Determine details and agree what we are going to prioritise during the next four years
- Start making any necessary internal changes

2024–26

- Implement changes based on what we learn during Year 1
- Monitor changes to determine if they are effective

2026–28

- Review and adjust what we are doing
- Adapt and make changes where needed

- Annual NILSS/RILSS Action Plan (August)
- Annual NILSS Report (December)



Children preparing for the cultural performance at the Saltwater Freshwater Divestment Ceremony in August 2023. Gumbaynggirr land in Coffs Harbour (NSW)
Credit: Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance and the Trees Photography



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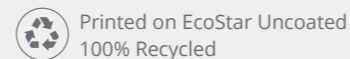
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Version 1.0 (December 2023)



Established in 1995 under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act*, we provide for the contemporary and future land/water needs of Indigenous people, particularly those unlikely to benefit from Native Title or Land Rights. We work with our Indigenous partners to grow their economic, environmental, cultural, and social capital by supporting their acquisition and management of land and water. In redressing dispossession, we provide for a more prosperous and culturally centred future for Indigenous people.

The Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation is a Commonwealth entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.



Australian Government
Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation



The **ILSC GROUP**