



Australian Government

Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation



The ILSC GROUP

## CENTRAL REGION

# Regional Indigenous Land and Sea Strategy 2024 to 2028

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



## 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) is a regional extension of 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 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.

# 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) Central Region.

Our three new RILSS – for our Central, Eastern 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 Central Region that align with the ILSC's core mandate include:

- prioritising key activities to progress the return of ILSC-held properties to Indigenous ownership
- continuing to invest in fishing related projects and progressing water related rights and interests

- identifying opportunities where we can support and invest in the improved management and Caring for Country in collaboration with Commonwealth, territory, and state programs, as well as regional partners
- removing barriers to support land and water management activities on Country, including working with relevant stakeholders to support economic development opportunities
- developing sector strategies to amplify benefits for Indigenous peoples who are actively involved in, or would like to participate in, one of the five priority sectors identified during consultation for the NILSS
- 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 First Nations people.

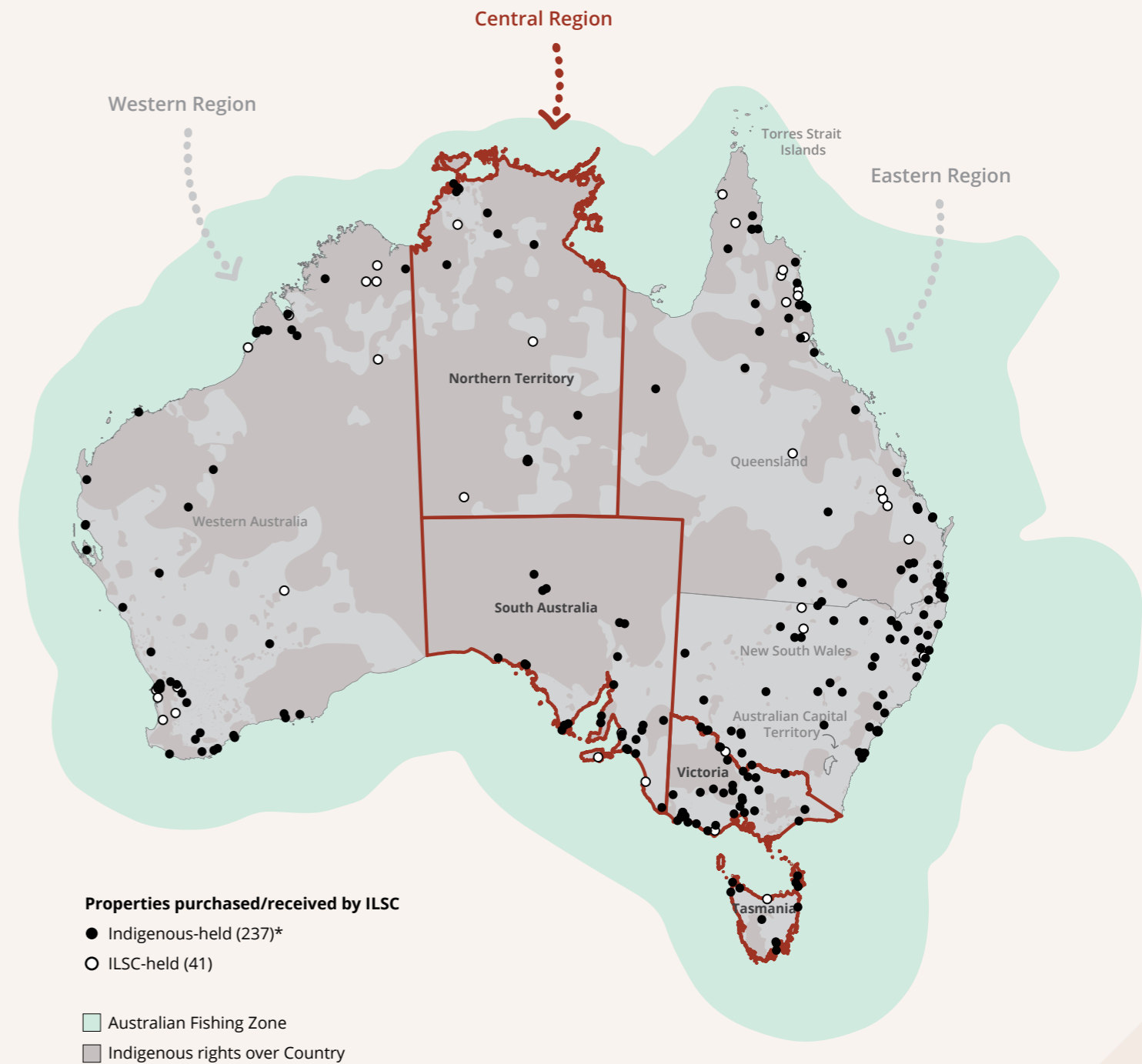
We look forward to partnering with First Nations peoples and delivering positive change across the Central Region.



**Ian Hamm**  
Chairperson, ILSC Board  
Yorta Yorta



**Joe Morrison**  
Group Chief Executive Officer  
Dagoman/Mualgal



### Properties purchased/received by ILSC

- Indigenous-held (237)\*
- ILSC-held (41)

- Australian Fishing Zone
- Indigenous rights over Country

\*Refers to properties held as a direct result of ILSC actions

NOTE: This strategy contains maps and descriptions of the areas of Country where various types of rights in Country are recognised as being held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations and entities. The ILSC accepts that these maps and descriptions are indicative and do not represent a complete or consensus view of the extent of these rights. The ILSC recognises that all Country holds a continuous connection to Traditional Owners, irrespective of the formal recognition or otherwise of the rights and interests of Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders in particular Country.

# Message from Central Divisional Manager

The ILSC's Central Region stretches from the tropical Tiwi Islands, NT, home of the Tiwi people, to Bruny Island, Tas, home of the Nuenonne Nation.

Across such diversity, we must be adaptive, responsive, and flexible in our approach, acknowledging that similar issues and needs may require different solutions for different Country.

Our division's commitment is to take the NILSS information and tailor it to a place-based approach that speaks to this diversity of landscapes and peoples.

Since the NILSS launch in June 2023, we have tested the priorities and commitments we made with key regional stakeholders, identifying how these might be applied across the Central Region.

We were delighted that many of our regional stakeholders stated the NILSS has correctly captured the information and aspirations they provided during their NILSS engagement.

The RILSS is confirmation of the partnership approach the Central Division has committed to – we intend to develop and maintain these partnerships, aligning and achieving our aspirations through a shared understanding of the ILSC's role.



**Mark Anderson**  
Central Divisional  
Manager

Together, we can create pathways to meaningful change for Indigenous peoples.

As a division we are committed to self-determination for Indigenous peoples by removing barriers across the ILSC, supporting Indigenous people to move forward, and by influencing others where we can.

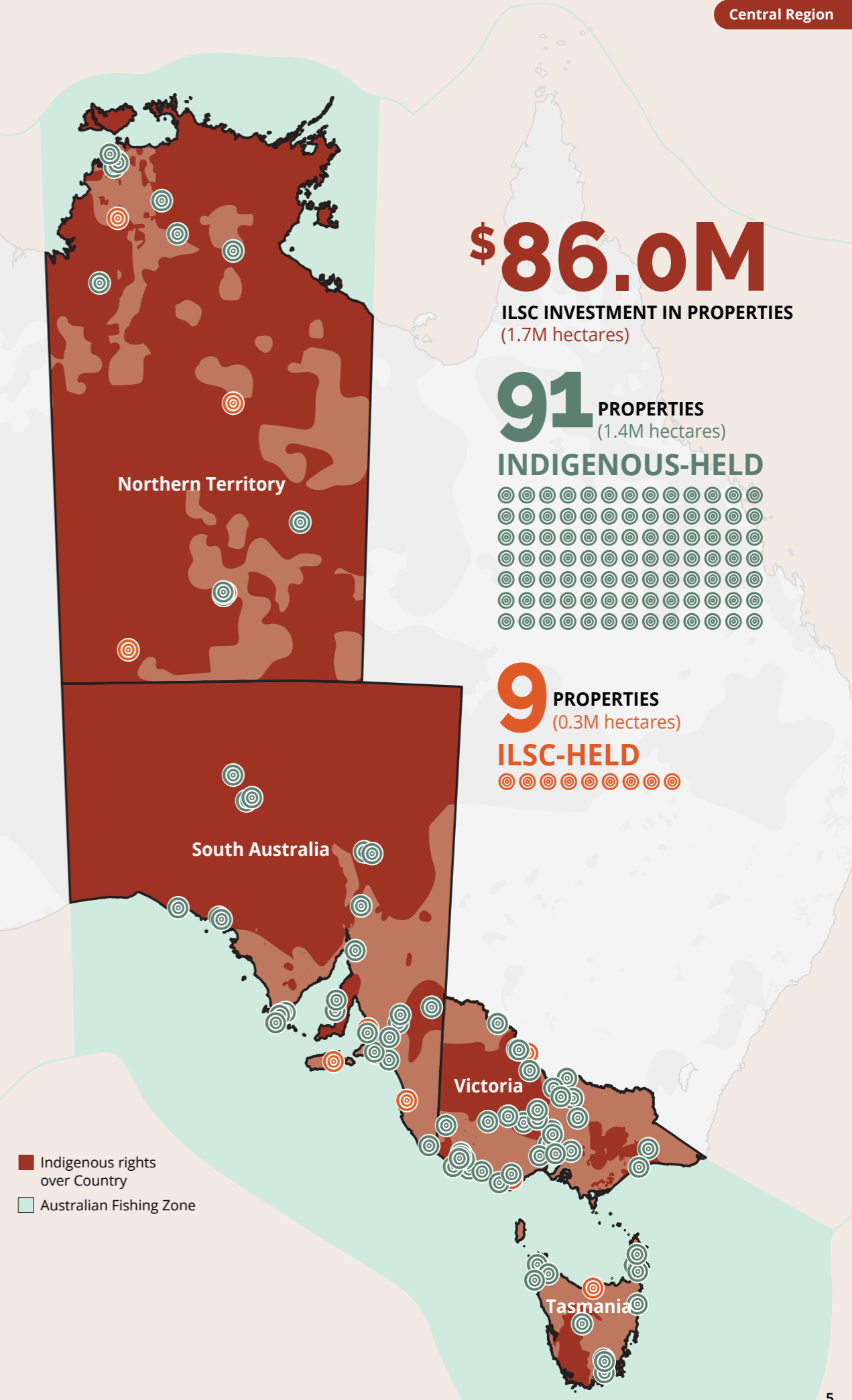
We will do our best to operate in partnership with Indigenous people; and we will be open, transparent, accountable, and respectful, providing autonomy and choice in how we work together.

I would personally like to thank and congratulate all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, together with broader stakeholder groups, who contributed their time, effort, knowledge, and passion to provide the ILSC with their views on what better looks like, and the role they would like to see us play in achieving these outcomes.



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](http://www.ilsc.gov.au) for the NILSS and a detailed consultation report.



# Central Region snapshot



## Geography

The Central Region includes:

- Northern Territory
- South Australia
- Tasmania
- Victoria

Together, they cover a total land area of 2.63 million square kilometres (263 million hectares).

The states and territory also include marine waters which extend from the coast to 5.5 kilometres out to sea, adding a further 160,000 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 the mainland Australia.

## Indigenous population

Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics Final 2021 Census data (Table 1), the Central Region had a population of 241,109 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. The Northern Territory had the highest proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people relative to its total population size (30.8%). Combined, the states and territory within the Central Region comprise about one quarter (24.5%) of Australia's total Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population (983,469 people).

	Northern Territory	South Australia	Tasmania	Victoria	Australia*
<b>Aboriginal only</b>	73,101	49,721	31,140	74,263	901,655
<b>Torres Strait Islander only</b>	917	1,195	1,361	2,463	39,538
<b>Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</b>	2,469	1,153	1,356	1,970	42,516
<b>Total Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander</b>	<b>76,487</b>	<b>52,069</b>	<b>33,857</b>	<b>78,696</b>	<b>983,709</b>
<b>Non-Indigenous</b>	171,664	1,750,532	533,382	6,469,126	24,701,703
<b>Total</b>	<b>248,151</b>	<b>1,802,601</b>	<b>567,239</b>	<b>6,547,822</b>	<b>25,685,412</b>
<b>% of total (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population)</b>	30.8%	2.9%	6.0%	1.2%	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 Central 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 Central Region the area of land under Indigenous ownership, management arrangement, or other special rights makes up 80% of South Australia, 77% of the Northern Territory, 38% of Victoria, and 24% of Tasmania (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 183 determinations that Native Title exists in the Central Region (24 exclusive and 159 non-exclusive) covering approximately 96 million hectares.

- **South Australia:** in 1966, the South Australian Government transferred control of land reserved for Aboriginal people to the Aboriginal Lands Trust, and land rights were also acknowledged in the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act 1981 (SA)* and the *Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act 1984 (SA)*. There have been 43 determinations that Native Title exists (five exclusive and 38 non-exclusive) and as at 1 July 2023 there were a further 12 registered claims.
- **Tasmania:** The *Aboriginal Lands Act 1995 (Tas)* did not establish a claims process, but vested 12 areas, in the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania to be held on trust for the benefit of Aboriginal people. There have been no determinations that Native Title exists and as at 1 July 2023 there were no registered claims.
- **Victoria:** Prior to the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)*, the return of Country was on an ad hoc basis under six separate Acts. The *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (Vic)* provided for the state to recognise Traditional Owners and certain rights in Crown (public) land. These rights have been recognised across Agreement Areas totalling approximately 3.49 million hectares of public land.

There have been five determinations (non-exclusive) that Native Title exists in Victoria and as at 1 July 2023 there were three registered claims.

In addition, formal Treaty negotiations are set to commence in early 2024. The Victorian Government has committed to negotiating Statewide and Traditional Owner Treaties with First Peoples over broad subject matter in accordance with the Treaty Negotiation Framework agreed with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria in 2022. The proposal is for one overarching Statewide Treaty and multiple local treaties with individual Traditional Owner groups, covering matters as diverse as political representation, land and water, and economic development.

- **Northern Territory:** Approximately 50% of land is Aboriginal freehold<sup>1</sup> under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)* and, through the High Court's 2008 Blue Mud Bay decision, about 85% of the coastline. Pastoral leases cover 45% of the Territory, and a further 5% is also available for claim under the *Native Title Act*. There have been 135 determinations that Native Title exists (19 exclusive and 116 non-exclusive), and as at 1 July 2023, there were 21 registered claims.

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

STATE/ TERRITORY	Area ('000 hectares) <sup>^</sup>					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		
NT	134,837	66,016	61,601	4,567	40,262	<b>103,552</b>	<b>77.0</b>
SA	98,430	22,217	20,259	14,908	57,767	<b>79,083</b>	<b>80.0</b>
Tas	6,829	69	68	1,555	-	<b>1,624</b>	<b>24.0</b>
Vic	22,742	111	12	429	8,518	<b>8,579</b>	<b>38.0</b>
<b>Australia</b>	<b>768,909</b>	<b>133,501</b>	<b>141,356</b>	<b>32,708</b>	<b>337,173</b>	<b>437,679</b>	<b>57.0</b>

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

<sup>^</sup> To convert hectares to square kilometres, divide by 100

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

1. Aboriginal freehold land is inalienable freehold title, meaning it can't be sold. It is referred to as 'schedule one' land and is formally held by an Aboriginal land trust. Source: nt.gov.au

## ILSC investment

Since 1995, within the Central Region, the ILSC has invested more than \$118 million buying properties and supporting projects that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's access to, and management of, Country. This includes the purchase of 105 properties totalling 1.69 million hectares valued at more than \$85 million. On 30 June 2023, almost 90% of these properties (91 of 105), had been returned to the care and control of Indigenous corporations (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 bought 19 properties within the Central Region (1 remote, 10 rural and 8 urban) and funded 128 management projects valued at \$32.1 million.

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

ILSC PURCHASED / RECEIVED	Vic*	Tas	SA	NT <sup>#</sup>	TOTAL
Number of properties purchased or received	43	12	32	18	<b>105</b>
Area purchased or received (ha)	6,975	19,307	834,759	830,986	<b>1,692,026</b>
\$ Value (purchase cost)	\$31,940,751	\$9,315,885	\$18,530,566	\$26,201,165	<b>\$85,988,367</b>
INDIGENOUS-HELD					
Number of Indigenous-held properties	🎯 39	11	26	15	<b>91</b>
Area Indigenous-held properties (ha)	5,154	19,072	831,990	494,183	<b>1,350,398</b>
ILSC-HELD					
Number of ILSC-held properties	🎯 2	1	3	3	<b>9</b>
Area ILSC-held properties (ha)	1,707	235	114	336,802	<b>338,858</b>
ILSC MANAGEMENT PROJECTS <sup>^</sup>					
Number of management projects	16	8	42	62	<b>128</b>
\$ Value management projects	\$3,463,849	\$660,521	\$13,386,481	\$14,581,224	<b>\$32,092,075</b>

Source: ILSC

<sup>^</sup> 1 July 2015 to 30 Sep 2023

\*Menera is located in NSW but managed by Central Division and included in Victorian figures

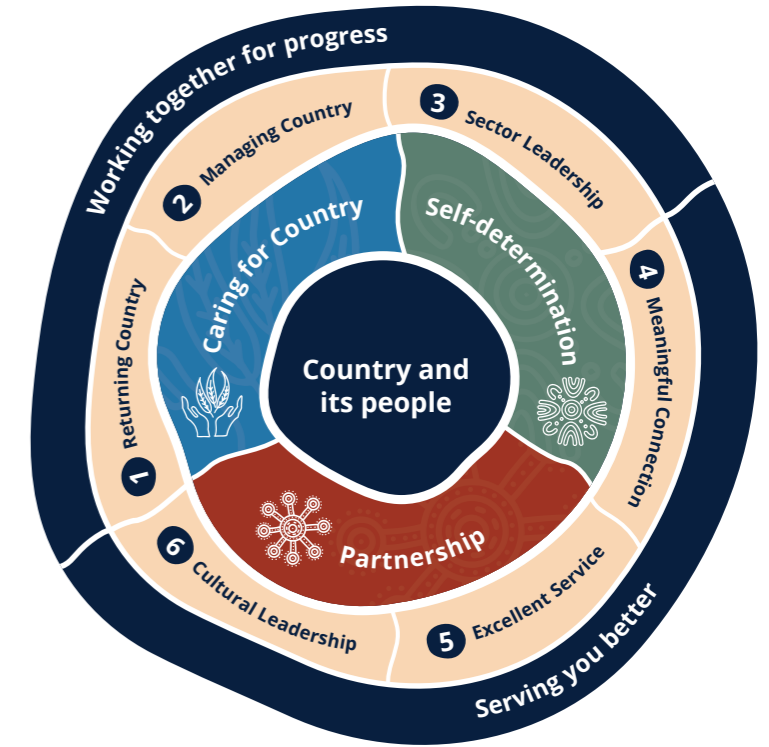
<sup>#</sup>Ayers Rock Resort not included

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.

# 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.



Diana's Basin, Palawa Country, Lutruwita (Tas)

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](http://www.ilsc.gov.au)

## 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.

The Taungurung Land & Waters Council 'Garden Range Rock Art Site' Divestment Ceremony held in March 2023. Taungurung Country (Vic)  
Credit: Taungurung Land & Waters Council



## 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 the Country, capability and resources needed to achieve their aspirations.

### 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.





## 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 care and control.

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 Central 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 Indigenous 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 nine ILSC-held properties in the Central Region by 2028 including: St Marys, Fish River, and Banka Banka West (NT); Warriparinga, Murrays Lagoon, and Samphire Swamp (SA); Falbala (Vic); Menera (NSW); and Panatana (Tas)
- Transfer ownership and management of existing ILSC-held agribusiness operations, Gunbalanya Station and Gunbalanya Meatworks (NT)
- Work with the community to undertake steps to successfully transition ownership of the Yulara (NT) property and develop a future sustainable relationship for the management of Yulara Tourism Operations
- Advocate for the prioritisation of Indigenous groups where state or territory government agencies seek to hand-over property
- Continue engagement and discussion with government and non-government agencies, peak bodies, and not-for-profit or private organisations to identify opportunities to support the purchase and return of Country
- Grow our understanding of Aboriginal water needs and aspirations, including for sea Country; continue investment in fisheries and aquaculture related projects; progress the return of water related rights and interests; and develop a five-year purchase and financing plan in collaboration with partners
- Consult and identify equity gaps where Indigenous nations have no or limited access to Country and prioritise the purchase of Country for these nations
- Identify and formalise relationships with partners to leverage ILSC investment and develop the capacity and capability of Indigenous groups and people to secure the return of Country

Yellow-tailed black cockatoo's at Diana's Basin. Muwinina Country (Tas)  
Credit: Tasmanian Land Conservancy and photographer Andy Townsend



Dja Dja Chair, Trent Nelson leading the Smoking Ceremony at the Djakitj launch event in May 2023. Djandak Country (Vic)  
Credit: Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and photographer Stuart Walmsley



## 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 and corporations 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, and start-up support for the ILSC’s two externally funded programs that are managed from the Central Division: the Savanna Fire Management (SFM) Program and Real Jobs Program.

### 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
- Facilitate planning activities to identify and address opportunities and threats to ILSC-held and granted properties, including realising opportunities to maximise outcomes for holders of Country
- Lead the transition of the SFM program from funded projects into ongoing sustainable enterprises including addressing the significant governance and participation barriers for Indigenous people
- 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
- 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 provide economic, employment, and other positive outcomes
- Participate in an audit of ILSC-granted properties to identify risks and opportunities
- Identify and promote opportunities for stakeholder investment (e.g. government agencies, peak bodies, and not-for-profit or private organisations) that supports projects managed by holders of Country

### 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 to renewable sources.

There are opportunities for Indigenous 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 Indigenous 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
- Continue engagement and discussion with Northern Territory, South Australian, Victorian, and Tasmanian governments to include an Indigenous voice in the development of renewable and clean energy market policy
- Partner with First Nations Clean Energy Network (FNCEN) 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.

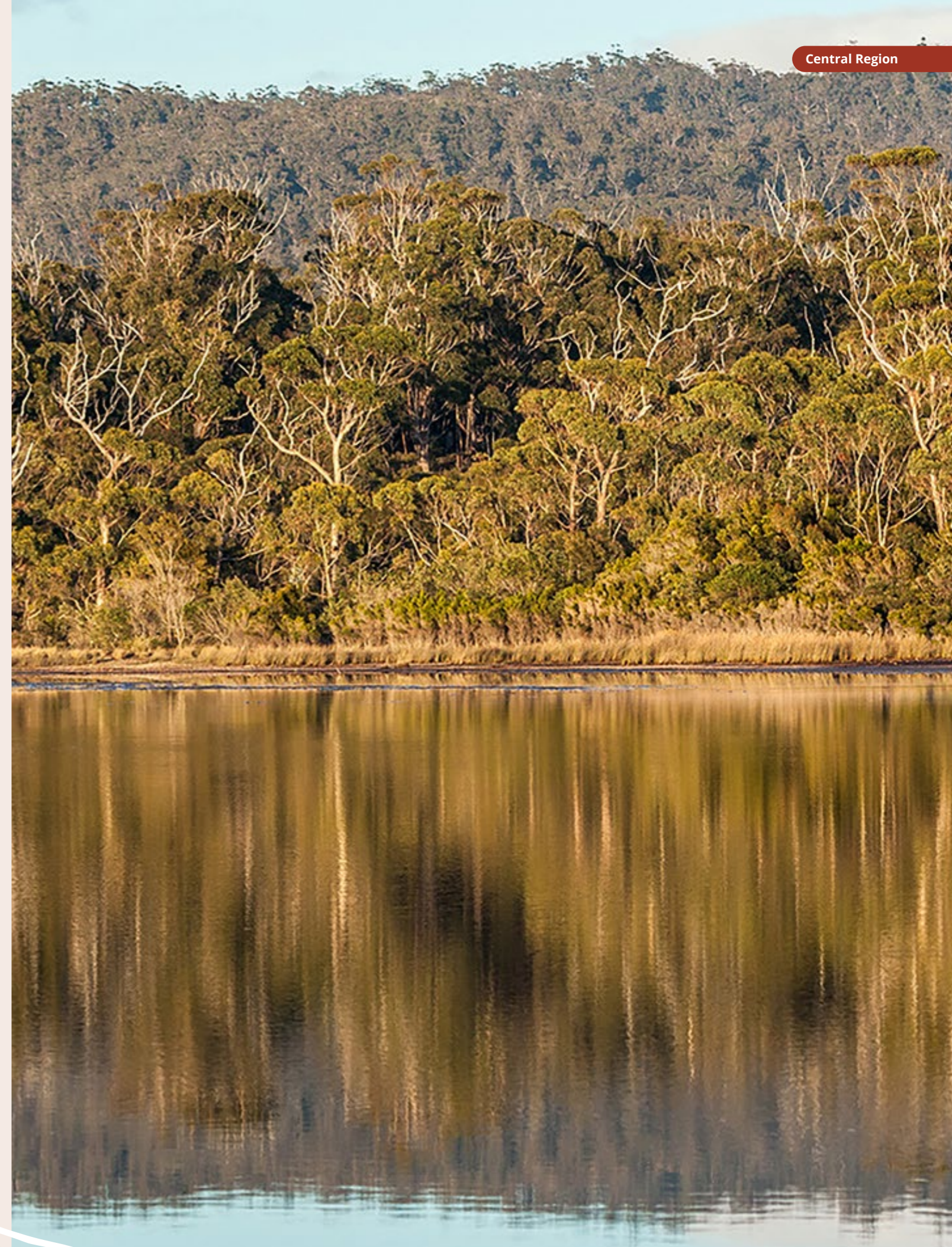
Within the Central and Eastern Regions, the Murray-Darling Basin water network presents a complex regulatory environment due to different state, territory and national laws that determine who has access to, and ownership of, water across the region. Also, water quality is a barrier to development in some locations, particularly for remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

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

Our focus will be on supporting the capacity of these groups to represent and advocate on behalf of Indigenous peoples. 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 peoples 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
- Participate in developing a five-year access to water plan to inform Central Region priorities
- Work with communities across the Central Region to assist in empowering Indigenous participation in water policy and decision-making processes



## 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 greater 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 Indigenous peoples, as well as government and non-government organisations, to build connections and identify opportunities that 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 First Nations 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, including through identifying and collaborating with commercial partners for large-scale projects that support Indigenous peoples seeking ownership of commercial fishery or aquaculture opportunities



Sunset on Ngarrindjeri Nation (SA)



## 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 are then traded to organisations who want to offset their own emissions.

The money made from selling carbon credits can support Indigenous activities 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.

Image: Savanna Fire Management activities  
Tiwi Country (NT)

## 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) and other industry groups to explore and strengthen the participation, leadership and power of Indigenous people and businesses in the carbon industry, including protecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)
- 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 host an annual forum and producing informative documents)
- Support Indigenous land managers to access carbon project opportunities – e.g. through start-up assistance via the NT-based Savanna Fire Management (SFM) Program; expansion of the SFM carbon project zone into the Tanami region; and through collaboration with state and industry partners

## Environmental markets

Environmental markets encourage nature repair by placing a dollar value on natural assets (e.g. clean air, water, fertile soils, vegetation) 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 (e.g. biodiversity offsets and accreditation, cultural fire credits) including through the Australian Government's proposed Nature Repair Market and Biodiversity Certification Scheme(s), 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 framework that embeds the 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 and secure environmental, cultural, and economic outcomes, so First Nations groups can continue to benefit from the return and Care for Country

Left-right: Taungurung Land & Waters Council CEO Matt Burns with Indigenous Land & Sea Corporation GCEO Joe Morrison at the Garden Range Divestment Ceremony held in March 2023. Taungurung Country (Vic)  
Credit: Taungurung Land & Waters Council



## 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 ownership and management of 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
- 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 and address 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 and territory agencies and service providers – including land councils; Aboriginal lands trusts; and other representative bodies – to maximise inter-government approaches and provide relevant support to Indigenous landholders
- Strengthen relationships with key Commonwealth agencies, such as the 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: ILSC GCEO Joe Morrison with Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation staff and rangers at the opening of the new ranger base. Traditional land of the Gunditjmarra people (Vic)







## 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 peoples
- 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 peoples
- 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 to the right: Once built the Mparntwe Health Hub will provide Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Aboriginal Corporation a purpose-built, integrated and centralised health hub that supports significantly improved health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal people. Mparntwe on Arrernte Country (NT)  
Credit: Central Australian Aboriginal Congress



# 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.

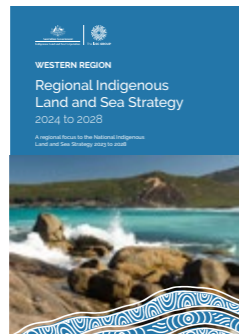
This supports our commitment to ‘working together’ and allows us to continue to be led by the views and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.

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.

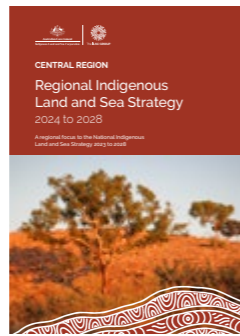
We will also formally report our progress through our compliance report – the ILSC’s Annual Report – and through an Annual NILSS Report which will be published in December each year.



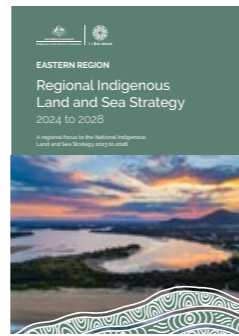
NILSS – 2023 to 2028



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

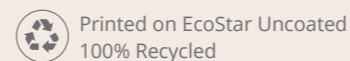
- Review and adjust what we are doing
- Adapt and make changes where needed

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



APY Art Centre Collective gallery (SA)  
Credit: APY Art Centre Collective

Version 1.1 (December 2023)



**Central Division  
(SA, Vic, Tas, NT)**  
Level 7, 70 Franklin Street,  
Adelaide SA 5000  
GPO Box 652  
Adelaide SA 5001  
T (08) 8100 7102  
F (08) 8100 7150  
E centraloffice@ilsc.gov.au

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**