



Australian Government



MURRAY-DARLING  
BASIN AUTHORITY

# Cultural flows

Water is vital to Australia's First Nations. First Nations people have a spiritual obligation to care for surface water and groundwater resources, as part of their commitment to caring for Country.

Cultural flows are water entitlements that are legally owned and managed by First Nations to improve the spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic conditions of these Nations.

Cultural flows are not consistently part of the water management system in Australia, and achieving this will take time.

## Cultural flows and water for the environment are different

Water for the environment keeps our rivers healthy and sustains plants, animals and fish. River health is important to First Nations, but water for the environment and cultural flows are different.

Cultural flows have a range of other objectives, improving the spiritual, cultural, social, environmental and economic conditions of First Nations.

Cultural flows benefit practical activities like fishing, hunting, ceremonies and harvesting medicinal plants and herbs. Cultural flows also preserve and protect important assets including burial mounds, scarred trees, and campsites which helps to maintain connections to Country.

Identity, wellbeing, capacity building and intergenerational teaching are also key components of cultural flows.

## Key facts

**Water is vital to Aboriginal culture, spirituality, identity and wellbeing.**



There are more than **40 First Nations** in the Basin.



First Nations are **involved in water planning and management.**



Dedicated cultural flows are **not currently part of the water management system in Australia.**



The Murray-Darling Basin Authority is committed to supporting the **establishment of dedicated cultural flows.**



The Australian Government has committed **\$40 million** to establish and support First Nations investment in cultural and economic water entitlements and associated activities within the Basin.



**Dedicated cultural flows** will help achieve meaningful cultural outcomes for First Nations.

## Aboriginal partnerships

First Nations in the Basin are involved in water research, planning and management through equitable, inclusive and respectful partnerships.

The health of the Basin benefits from meaningful partnerships with First Nations and all Basin governments.

## Commitment to change

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) is committed to supporting the establishment of dedicated cultural flows.

Collaborative partnerships between the MDBA, First Nations and Basin governments are exploring ways of integrating cultural flows as a part of water management in the Basin.

The Australian Government has committed \$40 million of funding to establish a water investment program that supports Aboriginal communities to plan for and implement cultural and economic entitlements.

## MLDRIN and NBAN

The Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) and the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) are the two peak First Nation-based organisations in the Basin with a primary focus on natural resource management.

MLDRIN and NBAN comprise of Traditional Owner nominated representatives from Aboriginal Nations across the Basin.

The MDBA works with MLDRIN and NBAN on a number of projects to ensure First Nations within the Basin contribute to water management and planning.

Their knowledge makes them invaluable partners in water management across the Basin. They contribute to water research, policy and management.

## National Cultural Flows Research Project

The National Cultural Flows Research Project, a project driven by and for Aboriginal people has, over seven years, sought to establish a national framework for cultural flows.

The framework, released in 2018, provides the first guide and method for future planning, delivery, and

assessment of cultural flows. This research is thought to be the first robust legislative and policy framework for cultural flows anywhere in the world.

The project provided a framework that enables Aboriginal cultural water use and values to be described and measured with quantifiable water volumes for the first time. The National Cultural Flows Research Project has clearly demonstrated it is possible to measure and deliver cultural flow outcomes.

This is the first step—developing a new Basin-wide approach to cultural flows will take time. Now, with this project, there is a clear and consistent method for determining, delivering and assessing cultural flows.

The project also recommended future work to build capacity in Aboriginal communities to advocate for and manage cultural flow allocations to protect Aboriginal values and interests in water.

The planning and research committee for the project included MLDRIN, NBAN and the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance. The MDBA was a proud contributor to the project and continues to support the future work of establishing cultural flows.

For more information on the project, visit [www.culturalflows.com.au](http://www.culturalflows.com.au)



### Connect with us.

The MDBA has offices in Adelaide, Albury-Wodonga, Canberra, Goondiwindi, Griffith, Mildura, Murray-Bridge, Toowoomba, and regional engagement officers around the Basin.

☎ 1800 230 067

@ engagement@mdba.gov.au

🌐 mdba.gov.au