

What we heard

Co-design of a South Australian framework to Advance First Nations' Water Interests

Listening report: Round 1



Government of South Australia
Department for Environment
and Water

LANDSCAPE
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
WATER



Glossary of terms

- **Aboriginal:** A broad term that groups First Peoples of mainland Australia and most the islands, including Tasmania, Fraser Island, Palm Island, Mornington Island, Groote Eylandt, Bathurst and Melville Islands.
- **Traditional Owner:** Refers to individual people who are members of a First Nation and have rights and cultural obligations to speak for specific parts of Country.
- **Mob:** A colloquial term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to refer to a group of people connected by family, kinship, Country, or community. It can describe one's extended family, a specific cultural group, or a broader collective of First Nations people.

These terms are used throughout this document, and often interchangeably, reflecting terms used in discussions during engagement.

The Department for Environment and Water uses First Nations to refer to community members more generally, that have ancestral connections to their Country.

Acknowledgement of Country

The South Australian Government acknowledges Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Nations of the lands and waters we live and work upon and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging. We acknowledge and respect the deep spiritual connection and the relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people have to Country. First Nations peoples is used throughout this document in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the sovereign people of this land. It recognises various language groups as separate and unique sovereign nations. The Department for Environment and Water (DEW) respectfully Acknowledges this term is not universally used by all First Nations peoples in South Australia.



Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Glossary of terms..... | 2 |
| Acknowledgement of Country..... | 2 |
| Background | 4 |
| Methodology | 6 |
| What we heard: Summary of common themes | 7 |
| Framework considerations | 7 |
| Theme 1: Truth telling | 7 |
| Theme 2: A spiritual and cultural lens..... | 7 |
| Theme 3: Valuing First Nations Knowledge | 7 |
| Theme 4: Approach | 8 |
| Theme 5: Engagement | 8 |
| Theme 6: Governance – shared decision-making..... | 8 |
| Theme 7: Implementation | 8 |
| Theme 8: Partnerships and collaboration | 8 |
| Maintaining cultural obligations | 9 |
| Theme 9: Cultural significance of water..... | 9 |
| Theme 10: Cultural objectives in water projects and planning..... | 9 |
| Theme 11: Knowledge sharing and collective learning | 9 |
| Employment and economic opportunities | 10 |
| Theme 12: Employment aspirations..... | 10 |
| Theme 13: Economic aspirations..... | 10 |
| Theme 14: Water ownership aspirations..... | 10 |
| Safe and secure water for communities | 10 |
| Theme 15: Community water supply aspirations | 10 |
| Detailed feedback on key themes..... | 11 |
| Framework considerations | 11 |
| Theme 1: Truth telling | 11 |
| Theme 2: A spiritual and cultural lens..... | 12 |
| Theme 3: Valuing First Nations knowledge..... | 12 |
| Theme 4: Approach | 13 |
| Theme 5: Engagement | 14 |
| Theme 6: Governance – shared decision-making..... | 15 |
| Theme 7: Implementation | 17 |
| Theme 8: Partnerships and collaboration | 17 |
| Maintaining cultural obligations | 18 |
| Theme 9: Cultural significance of water..... | 18 |
| Theme 10: Cultural objectives in water projects and planning..... | 18 |
| Theme 11: Knowledge sharing and collective learning | 19 |
| Employment and economic opportunities | 21 |
| Theme 12: Employment aspirations..... | 21 |
| Theme 13: Economic aspirations..... | 22 |
| Theme 14: Water ownership aspirations..... | 22 |
| Safe and secure water for communities | 23 |
| Theme 15: Community water supply aspirations Aspirations..... | 23 |

Background

A South Australian Framework to Advance First Nations' Water Interests is being co-designed with Traditional Owners.

Australian governments have historically excluded First Nations people from water management, which continues to affect the wellbeing of First Nations people and their ability to care for Country.

Governments have since increasingly recognised the value of First Nations perspectives and understanding of water across our various landscapes.

The *Landscape South Australia Act 2019* requires the integration of traditional First Nations knowledge into decision making.

The Government of South Australia has committed to work with Traditional Owners and peak bodies to improve water planning processes and outcomes within the state.

South Australia's Implementation Plan for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap also commits the state government to increasing First Nations corporations water access entitlements.

To support these commitments, the Department for Environment and Water (DEW) in partnership with Landscape SA, is co-designing a South Australian Framework to Advance First Nations' Water Interests (The Framework) with Traditional Owners.

The Framework will identify actions to:

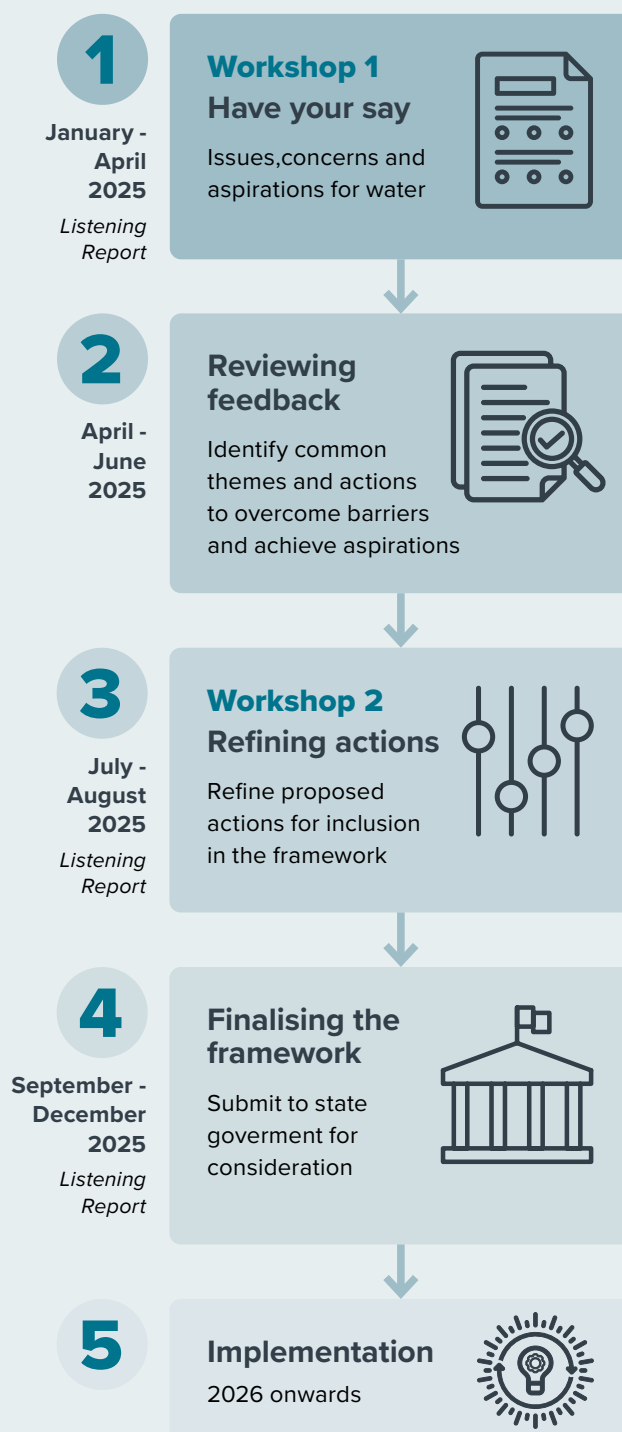
- Strengthen recognition of cultural authority in water planning and management.
- Secure access to water for economic, social, environmental, spiritual and cultural purposes.
- Increase First Nations' ownership of water entitlements.
- Ensure there is a consistent approach to First Nations' water interests within the state, while allowing for flexibility to meet individual group needs.

The identified actions will enable First Nations' water interests to be advanced within or alongside existing water management frameworks.

DEW is coordinating efforts with South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network (SAACCON) and SA Native Title Services (SANTS) to establish project oversight and governance arrangements throughout the project lifecycle.

Project timeframes

Four phases of the project are being undertaken to co-design The Framework, incorporating two rounds of workshops. Once The Framework is complete, implementation will progress from 2026 onwards.



This report sets out what we heard in Stage 1 – the first round of workshops.

Consultation summary

DEW, in partnership with Landscape SA, hosted a series of workshops in multiple locations across the state between 30th January and 30th April 2025.

These workshops, along with feedback gathered via email, workbooks and surveys formed round 1 of the engagement process, providing various opportunities for First Nations people in South Australia to share their insights, aspirations, and concerns regarding water management and planning.

Round 1 of the engagement aimed to:

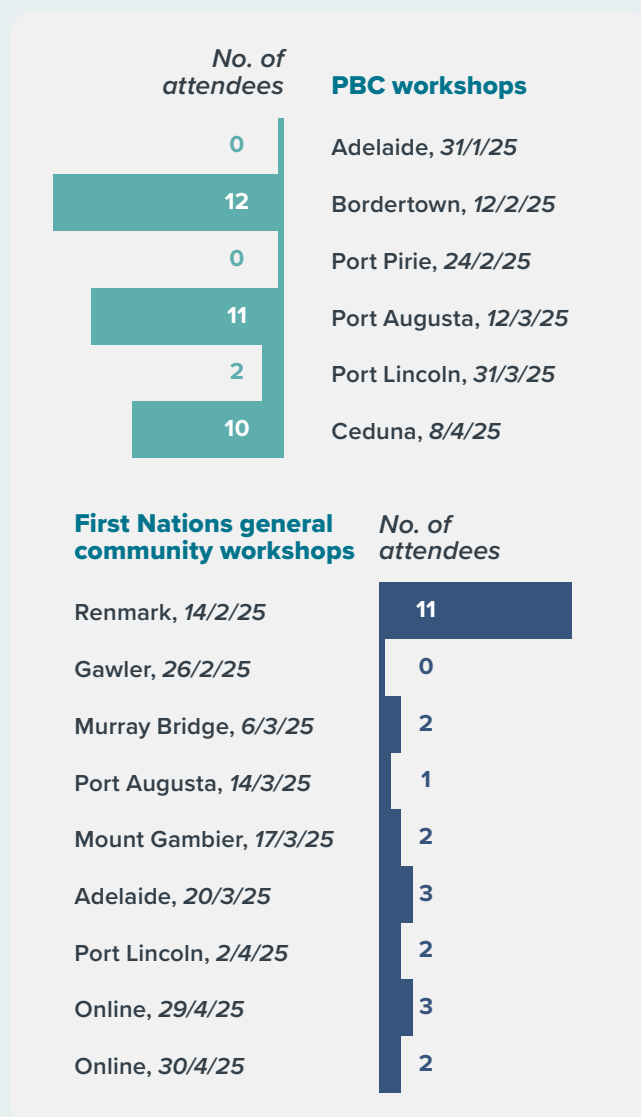
- Share information about the development and purpose of The Framework.
- Understand the issues, concerns and aspirations of First Nations Peoples regarding access to water for spiritual, cultural, social, environmental and economic purposes.



Methodology

Two representatives from each South Australian Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) were invited to attend an in-person workshop at one of the following locations: Adelaide, Bordertown, Port Pirie, Port Augusta, Port Lincoln and Ceduna.

Additional in-person workshops for First Nations general community members were held in Renmark, Gawler, Murray Bridge, Port Augusta, Mount Gambier, Adelaide and Port Lincoln. Two online workshops were also held to further support participation.



Invitations to participate in PBC workshops were sent to all South Australian corporations that hold and manage native title rights and interests on behalf of native title holders.

PBCs and organisations represented at the workshops include:

- Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation
- Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation
- The River Murray and Mallee Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC

- Arabana Aboriginal Corporation
- Ngadjuri Adnyamathanha Wilyakali Native Title Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Barngarla Determination Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Yankunytjatjara Native Title Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Tjauwara Unmurru Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Wirangu Aboriginal Corporation
- Ceduna Aboriginal Corporation
- Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation
- Maralinga Tjarutja Council
- Oak Valley (Maralinga) Community Council
- Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Community Council
- South-East Aboriginal Focus Group

First Nations' general community workshops were promoted via social media and newsletter articles. A poster, factsheet and website information were shared with Aboriginal community-controlled agencies and other stakeholder advocates, encouraging circulation amongst their networks.

All workshops were facilitated by South Australian Aboriginal-owned business KSJ Consulting Service Pty Ltd.

Participants were asked a series of questions designed to encourage discussion about their water needs, aspirations, concerns and barriers. Feedback was captured through:

- Notes written on butchers' paper summarising key points of the discussion.
- Feedback workbooks, allowing each participant to answer each question in their own words during, and after, the workshop.
- Mentimeter (a web-based platform that can be accessed by scanning a QR code) so participants could ask questions and provide feedback anonymously.
- Detailed notes written by workshop staff.

Feedback was also received out of session via survey, workbook responses and/or email.

Analysis of feedback

The information shared during round 1 of the engagement has been analysed to identify common/shared themes. These themes are presented throughout the rest of this document.

Next steps

Actions to address the identified themes will be explored during round 2 of the engagement (July to August 2025).

What we heard: Summary of common themes

Key themes that emerged as the most frequently raised topics of discussion have been categorised under the following headings:

- Framework considerations
- Maintaining cultural obligations
- Economic and employment opportunities
- Safe and secure water for communities

A brief summary of the themes within each category, and the key elements for consideration in The Framework, are outlined below. For a more detailed overview of the feedback received within each theme, refer to the next section 'Detailed feedback on key themes'.

Much of the feedback provided overlaps within and across themes, reflecting the inherently holistic nature of First Nations' perspectives on water, land, culture, and community.

We heard that this interconnectedness means that actions or challenges in one area inevitably impact others, and any effective response must consider the whole system rather than addressing issues in isolation.

We also heard that, because of this interconnectedness, The Framework should apply across government to all agencies with a role in managing or delivering water.

Framework considerations

We heard The Framework should outline essential, underlying elements that must be included in the document and serve as the building blocks for actions to progress First Nations' water interests.

Theme 1: Truth telling

- **Historical exclusion:** Water rights were originally distributed through settler systems that excluded First Nations people – this legacy of inequity underscores the need for a framework to guide more inclusive water planning and management in the state.
- **Education and understanding:** Greater public understanding of Aboriginal history, Native Title, and the spiritual importance of water can shift community and industry attitudes – education should be embedded in The Framework.
- **Caring for Country:** The Framework must tell the full story – how Aboriginal people cared for land and waters, the degradation over 150 years, and what that history means for today and the future.
- **Colonial impacts on Country:** Western intervention has severely damaged water systems and cultural heritage – traditional knowledge, Dreamtime stories and water values are at risk, reinforcing the urgency for change.
- **Health and quality impacts:** It's critical to share the reality of water quality issues in regional, rural and remote areas, and their ongoing health impacts in First Nations communities.

Theme 2: A spiritual and cultural lens

- **Reflect spiritual and cultural significance:** Water holds deep spiritual, cultural and ecological value – connecting people, places, and traditions. The Framework should reflect this unbroken relationship and connection to Country and promote shared learning

through a spiritual and cultural lens. Water is an intricate part of who First Nations people are.

- **Recognise intangible heritage:** Traditional knowledge, creation stories, spiritual and cultural practices and values are intrinsically linked to water. First Nations have an obligation to care for Country, to maintain cultural practices and pass on cultural knowledge to future generations.
- **Embed throughout the whole framework:** Capture and reflect the importance of water to First Nations people, water is scarce, sacred and precious. The Framework needs to move beyond Western views of water and be framed from a First Nations perspective.

Theme 3: Valuing First Nations Knowledge

- **Equally value cultural and scientific knowledge:** Respect and integrate traditional knowledge alongside Western science – First Nations expertise must be recognised, protected, and embedded. Recognise First Nations values in water decisions.
- **Reintroduce the old ways of doing things:** It doesn't always have to be the Western way. First Nations people are experts in land and water management. Learning from Aboriginal water management will benefit everyone.
- **Protect cultural knowledge:** Protection of cultural intellectual property must be embedded within The Framework.

Theme 4: Approach

- **Not business as usual:** The Framework must be a living, evolving document that amplifies First Nations voices and avoids tokenistic or static approaches.
- **Clear principles and structure:** Establish guiding principles, shared definitions, and describe the full water management system – including all responsible agencies and how First Nations can engage.
- **Achievable, accountable, and inclusive:** Set measurable targets with built-in accountability; align with Closing the Gap and PBC strategies, ensuring realistic, tangible and inclusive outcomes.
- **First Nations at the centre:** First Nations interests, values, and strategic plans must guide water governance; Nations must be visibly leading and informing decisions.
- **Educational:** Communities and government to understand First Nations expertise of water; provide opportunities for First Nations to share this knowledge. Also provide opportunities for mob to understand water management from a Western approach.
- **Strengthen the legal basis:** Ensure requirements to address First Nations' interests in water planning and management are locked-in to future proof outcomes, and that legislation isn't conflicting. Legislation could recognise intangible spiritual connection, allowing consideration of the cultural impacts on lands and waters.

Theme 5: Engagement

- **Early engagement and continuity:** Ensure ongoing involvement from the start, not just at the end, and maintain engagement throughout the entire process regardless of internal issues that may exist within Nation groups.
- **Collective decision-making:** Allow adequate timeframes and processes for Nations to make a collective decision; work with the right people who can speak for Country.
- **Work with, not on behalf of, Nations:** Government should walk alongside Nations, not lead or speak for them – engage with PBCs from a Nation perspective, not from the agenda of departments/agencies.
- **Principled engagement:** Be clear that agencies must work with Traditional Owners and outline well-defined engagement principles that has support from senior leadership – be genuine and honest, build relationships and allyship, work in a culturally respectful way (with cultural integrity), allow adequate time for input, and transparent open two-way communication.
- **Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC):** Consultation must be early, inclusive, and with relevant Traditional Owner group/s, who have authority to speak on behalf of the group/s, to meet FPIC standards.
- **Resourcing and capacity:** Provide funding, sitting fees, and long-term support to enable meaningful, sustained participation without overburdening individuals who may already be stretched thin. Capacity building and cultural shift needed in agencies too, so processes don't rely on one ally within an agency.
- **Remove silos:** Government works in silos, but everything is connected. Nations don't separate out Country and neither should government.

Theme 6: Governance – shared decision-making

- **Embed First Nations governance:** Design programs and decisions around First Nations values, with Traditional Owners meaningfully involved from the start to finish. A genuine ongoing partnership.
- **Cultural governance models:** Incorporate traditional governance methods (e.g. message sticks) and use culturally resonant symbols within The Framework.
- **Real decision-making power:** Ensure First Nations people, especially PBC representatives, have seats on main decision-making boards, not just advisory roles. Representatives must have authority and backing of their community.
- **Equal and empowered participation:** Create a level playing field where all Aboriginal voices, including elders and youth, are respected and heard by those in power. People in power need to hear direct from mob.
- **Dedicated statewide representation:** Consider establishing a First Nations water advisory or oversight body for SA to lead statewide discussions on water interests, with potential regional or catchment-based models. Resourced to be involved and maintain continuity.
- **Connected and accountable governance:** Link governance structures to South Australia's First Nations Voice to Parliament and report progress regularly; adapt models to reflect each Nation's unique decision-making structures.

Theme 7: Implementation

- **Whole-of-system adoption:** The Framework should guide all agencies which manage, control or deliver water, creating consistency and avoiding repeated messaging from First Nation Peoples.
- **Clear responsibilities:** Inform all agencies of their roles and responsibilities to ensure coordinated action and social accountability.
- **Local impact:** Ensure actions within The Framework are filtered down to the local level.
- **Resourced implementation:** Secure adequate funding and resources to support meaningful and sustained delivery of framework actions.
- **Focus on delivery:** Shift from planning to implementation – start conversations about how to bring The Framework to life.

Theme 8: Partnerships and collaboration

- **Better coordination across government:** Strengthen collaboration between all levels of government and across departments for holistic water management.
- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Encourage integrated conversations that address interconnected water issues, not siloed approaches.
- **Learn from success stories:** Build on effective programs – such as those led by Landscape Boards, within schools, with farmers, and private sector partnerships with Nations.
- **Expand funding opportunities:** Increase the number and reach of funding bodies to support collaborative and culturally informed water initiatives.

Maintaining cultural obligations

Water holds deep cultural, spiritual, and ecological value. It's interwoven with Dreaming and supports spiritual, cultural, and social obligations. First Nations values and interests need to be elevated to ensure cultural obligations can be maintained and knowledge can be passed on to future generations.

Theme 9: Cultural significance of water

- **Sustains culture:** Healthy water systems sustain cultural heritage sites (e.g. scar trees, burials) and enable intergenerational knowledge sharing through on-Country activities.
- **Supports traditional customs:** Water is vital for practices like hunting, fishing, weaving, medicine, and caring for Ngatji's (totems).
- **Cultural flows:** To us it means uninterrupted, natural water flows that maintain the surrounding environment and biodiversity. This is essential to care for Country properly, and to practice culture.

Theme 10: Cultural objectives in water projects and planning

- **Cultural objectives and outcomes:** These must be integrated into water planning on equal footing with environmental goals (e.g. using cultural indicators).
- **Planning and management:** Inclusion of First Nations priorities in water projects to ensure better cultural outcomes (e.g. protection of cultural sites). For example, this can be done through Aboriginal waterways assessments and seasonal management activities.
- **Decision making:** There's a need for greater First Nations involvement in decision-making about water flows to support cultural responsibilities and outcomes.

Theme 11: Knowledge sharing and collective learning

- **Intergenerational knowledge transfer:** Elders play a key role in educating youth, ensuring cultural practices tied to water are maintained across generations – must get people out on-Country to practice culture.
- **Learning from other Nations:** Support for inter-First Nations knowledge exchange to share success stories and strengthen our own Nation's capacity. This can be done through a biannual water forum, and site visits to other's Country.

Challenges

- **Environmental impact:** Water extraction and altered flows (e.g. dams, pivots, Great Artesian Basin extraction) are damaging sacred sites, ecosystems, and hindering cultural practices. Water is disappearing and sites won't come back. We have an obligation to care for Country – it's hurtful to see this destruction.
- **Cultural impact:** Loss of natural flow cycles disrupts critical cultural species and cultural resources, contributes to ecological decline and cultural erosion, resulting in loss of knowledge.
- **Protection of cultural sites:** Cultural heritage protection laws are weaker than native vegetation laws – need stronger protections, buffer zones, and deterrents for damage while also protecting cultural knowledge about specific site locations.
- **Engagement processes:** Worried about the future impacts of new developments. Any development that may impact on Native Title land must be negotiated. PBCs must be consulted early for any water-related activity; a clear, timely communication process is needed in The Framework.
- **Access to land:** Limited access to private land restricts cultural practices, knowledge sharing and assessments of cultural sites and health of Country. Building respectful partnerships with landholders can enable access and shared stewardship of cultural landscapes.
- **Limited decision-making power:** First Nations often lack capacity, resources, and early involvement in decisions that impact water and cultural obligations. We must be included from the beginning, not just consulted at the end, ensuring our voices shape outcomes.

Employment and economic opportunities

Employment and economic opportunities enable First Nations communities to manage land and water resources according to cultural values and priorities, supporting long-term self-sufficiency and self-determination.

Theme 12: Employment aspirations

- **Local employment opportunities:** Create more on-Country jobs for First Nations people in land and water management.
- **Jobs in the water industry:** More jobs along the water lifecycle and in major government projects, analyse the opportunities. Build capacity for mob to work in the water space. Jobs at all levels, not just traineeships. Ensure culturally safe places to train and work.
- **Employment pathways:** Develop pathways into water industry jobs, including training, mentoring, and education.

Theme 13: Economic aspirations

- **Self-sufficiency:** Water can provide economic opportunity, to become self-sustaining. All aspects go together – spiritual connection and economic advantage.
- **Ownership and management of Country:** Support First Nations ownership and management of land and water; Promote land buybacks to reconnect people to Country.
- **First Nations levy:** Propose a First Nations levy to resource communities and support self-determination. A way to provide benefits to First Nations for the use of their lands and waters.
- **Business opportunities:** Understand and explore economic and employment potential through mapping out opportunities and capacity-building.
- **Business partnerships:** Partner with farmers and private landholders for shared economic benefits.

Theme 14: Water ownership aspirations

- **Self-determination:** The right to decide how and where to use water, for example for business or environmental protection. Increase the level of ownership to support self-determination.
- **Generate income:** Create opportunities for economic development and enterprise; potential to lease owned water to generate income and foster independence.
- **Self-sustaining:** Create opportunities to transmit cultural knowledge to young people, succession planning, and share learnings between Nations. Employ own water managers for water allocations and broader management.
- **Water literacy:** Emphasise the need to improve water literacy, including scientific and legal understanding. Properly equip Nations to be able to own and manage water entitlements.

Challenges

- **Inequity:** Others benefit economically from water, but First Nations are left out. There's no revenue or benefits back to Nations.
- **Poverty:** A lot of Aboriginal people are living in poverty and need economic opportunities.
- **Lack of employment opportunities:** Training exists, but there are often no jobs available at the end of it.

Safe and secure water for communities

First Nations people don't want to leave their homelands; the land is deeply tied to identity, culture, spirituality, and way of life. People living in regional, rural and remote areas need safe and reliable access to drinking water and water for household purposes, like for cleaning and personal hygiene.

Theme 15: Community water supply aspirations

- **Readily accessible:** Ensure access to secure, clean water of sufficient pressure for all First Nations communities to support health and growth of community.
- **Equity of access:** Regional, rural and remote areas must have the same standard/quality of water and services as urban areas.
- **Holistic approach:** Use a holistic, collaborative approach – bring all relevant parties to the table (e.g. government departments for health and housing, communities etc.) to share resources and solutions for real progress.
- **Long-term solutions:** Focus on generational infrastructure rather than quick fixes, using community-led, fit-for-purpose, solution-based approaches.
- **Affordable infrastructure:** Regulatory change is needed to ensure affordable infrastructure is available to regional, rural and remote communities.
- **Train locals:** Train local people to manage water solutions, building skills and local capacity.

Challenges

- **Poor water quality:** Poor water quality affects health – lack of desalination, filters, or rainwater tanks; health and housing are closely linked.
- **Ageing infrastructure:** Ageing infrastructure is degrading water quality (e.g. lead pipes), especially in remote areas.
- **Inequality and inaction:** Persistent inequality and lack of government action – remote communities feel overlooked despite repeated advocacy.
- **Struggle to meet demand:** Service providers are harder to get in rural and remote areas. At the same time, population growth is increasing pressure on already stretched housing and water services.
- **High costs:** The costs to fix or maintain infrastructure in remote locations is extremely expensive.

Detailed feedback on key themes

This section provides a detailed overview of the feedback received on the 15 key themes under the four categories:

- Framework considerations
- Maintaining cultural obligations
- Economic and employment opportunities
- Safe and secure water for communities

To improve readability, where there is substantial feedback on key themes, feedback has been organised and grouped under relevant sub-headings.

Framework considerations

Theme 1: Truth telling

Historical exclusion

- The Framework should discuss the historical exclusion of Aboriginal people in the water space – this story needs to be told.
- Truth telling is needed – water was given out based on the settler system, this left First Nations people out, they weren't recognised as existing users. Important to tell this story to share why there is no ownership and why we need to do better.
- Explain the context around how we've gotten to this point in time, and this is why we now need to create greater equity in the water system through this framework to guide First Nations water management in this state.
- Describe where we are now – First Nations people want access to water for cultural and economic purposes.
- Preamble – position of economics and the rights of water (a human right).
- Talk about the past, why the present looks like it does, and the future risks.
- Describe the historical relationship and what things used to look like in The Framework.
- Share stories – wisdom and history is critical to tell. Share the story of how Aboriginal people looked after lands and waters. 150 years of degradation since then.
- Old people haven't seen things progress and get resolved, fighting their whole life and haven't seen a resolution and have now died. Places where they were born are dying, affects people's wellbeing to see this.
- Need to share the context and reality about water quality and health impacts.
- The First Nations story is important – including the unresolved issues of limited water supply and water quality issues, ongoing for 25 years. Needs to be better education around truth-telling and Aboriginal history so attitudes in general community changes.
- Don't want to see the stories buried – must be shared with the wider community.

- Images and voices, not just words.
- Native Title has been negative in some ways, boundaries don't align with people's Country, divisive, truth telling is needed here.
- People have benefited from agriculture, First Nations people have been pushed into a corner, no economic standing.
- There are positives – connections to waterways, how water was managed in the past. There's some stuff we can't fix but how do we move forward with this wisdom and history?

Colonial impacts on Country

- Some water resources no longer exist because of Western intervention. It is a kick to the guts to see what Country looks like now, you couldn't live off it. Speaks to why there is a need for The Framework to exist.
- Landscapes are highly modified; Country is sick and this is impacting on people.
- Through colonisation, traditional knowledge is being lost. The land is suffering, and our Dreamtime stories are suffering.
- Water values are under threat, Country and Dreamtime are under threat.
- Cultural loss – no matter how much physical care we do, excessive groundwater extraction and disturbance to water systems continues to have an impact and affect Country.
- Culturally important species and the techniques that go into weaving are threatened. We want to keep the story going but this becomes difficult when the water is diminished, or the quality is compromised.
- Don't want to lose red gums – some could be up to 1000 years old.
- Compliance and accountability are key issues.
- Include visuals of what waterways used to look like, and how they look now.
- Vegetation clearance – what is the impact on water? Need more regenerative farming to restore the landscape – carbon plantings, biodiversity etc, but farmers are worried the trees (for carbon farming) will use more water.

- Impacts of desalination – we are worried about the impacts on sea life. This is saltwater Country – local mob have a strong connection to saltwater, food sourced from the ocean.
- Impact of lack of water on critical cultural species (weaving rushes, bush medicine plants).
- There are precious sites, what's left is important, they shouldn't be put at risk, there's no consideration of the waterholes.
- Look after the sites we have left, have spiritual respect for these. So much of it has been devastated and is now gone.

Theme 2: A spiritual and cultural lens

- Share the deep and unbroken connection to Country.
- Embed cultural significance of water throughout the whole framework.
- Intangible heritage, stories about how a water source was created.
- Is there a narrative about what water means to culture and First Nations? Needs to be told within The Framework.
- Essence of The Framework needs to capture and reflect the importance of water to Aboriginal people, the relationship with water and caring for Country, and how learning from Aboriginal water management will benefit everyone.
- It's about how we take care of our environment including water and learn from Aboriginal people – we've been managing water for thousands of years sustainably. The mainstream system could learn from that, it will be about survival of humanity.
- Capturing the commonalities, as the basis for a narrative, take the message out, who the messenger is and how the message is delivered and makes an impact.
- Share the history of living on the river, on Country, fishing and trading.
- Inland salt lakes and river systems, they're all connected and they connect the people, people come together because of the water.
- We would be given responsibility to look after that water source and manage it and customary practices to undergo. We didn't live in isolation, there were trading routes that followed a water system that connected us and enabled mob to practice certain customs.
- There's records of First Nations' people actively managing waterways, keeping wetlands wetter for longer.
- Oral histories around accessing groundwater, and sea level change, some history is sleeping and is now being reborned.
- There used to be an abundance of swan and duck eggs, but would always leave some, sustainable management is part of the story too.
- The relationship with water has been disrupted because of redistribution of water flows – anomalies about access to water, pastoralists and others have access to water.
- Needs to be educational, provide some definition or narrative of the spiritual significance of waterways for Aboriginal people, could shift the thinking of industry to understand it a bit better.

Theme 3: Valuing First Nations knowledge

- Equally value First Nations knowledge
- Listen to First Nations people.
- Value First Nations knowledge and input.
- Showcase Aboriginal ways of doing things.
- Bring a First Nations perspective into land management decisions.
- Traditional practices for managing water and ecosystem health must be incorporated into modern management systems.
- Cultural knowledge should be valued on par with scientific knowledge.
- Bring Western and cultural perspectives together, learning different perspectives.
- Nations need to be taken seriously, we've seen the changes. Don't just listen to scientists, mob knows their Country. Country is in people's hearts.
- First Nations knowledge needs to be put at the same level as everyone else, with an equal say as anyone else sitting around the table.
- Reintroduce the old ways of doing things, not the Western way all the time.
- Aboriginal Waterways Assessments have supported site access and incorporation of First Nations priorities into water planning.
- Aboriginal people must be included in monitoring – reckless to exclude them.
- Lack of recognition of First Nations values in water decisions.
- It hurts as Traditional Owners to see others coming onto our land and telling us what to do.
- More education is needed for government and people in positions to make decisions around water to understand that First Nations people are experts in land and water management – ancestors were the original scientists.
- Representation on the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board Water Advisory Committee spreads awareness of First Nations water issues.
- Want to see mob at the front talking about water on their own behalf. Where are the Aboriginal people to present the information?
- Opportunities for Aboriginal people to share information about First Nations water, not just non-Indigenous people. For example, through supporting attendance at international and local water conferences.
- Protection of intellectual cultural property/knowledge – need to protect information from appropriation.
- Keep knowledge safe – work on Intellectual Property.
- Divulging of secret/sacred sites shouldn't be expected, this creates more visitation and litter/pollution.
- Support PBCs to develop Healthy Country Plans or strategic plans – resourcing and funding to produce them.
- Traditional Owners should be the driver of Healthy Country Planning, government the enabler/facilitator, not the decision-maker.
- Everything is connected – water is required for everything to be healthy, this supports the link to Healthy Country Plans.

Theme 4: Approach

Approach to The Framework

- Can't be a business-as-usual approach.
- First Nations Water Rights instead of First Nations Water Interests.
- Framework needs to be enabling.
- Elevate aspirations of First Nations people.
- Work towards a way to amplify voices.
- A living, breathing document is needed, not another one that gathers dust.
- Develop a model for the next generation, a structure for the future, a sustainable model through engagement.
- The time, pace and strategic approach are critical – not trying to do too much at once, what can we contribute now.
- The Framework should share principles agreed to by Aboriginal people.
- The Framework should share the tangible and intangible aspects.
- How can we elevate the authority of PBCs in The Framework?
- Share the decision-making framework as it stands.
- The Framework needs to establish a guiding set of principles so that all water policies and projects are designed with those principles in mind. The Framework also needs to include definitions so it's clear what the expectations are.
- The Framework can influence policy – need to think about impacts of policy on the ground.
- More than protocols – the identified actions must lead to real and tangible outcomes.
- The Framework needs to put in place something to help the government make decisions that lead to practical outcomes.
- Framework to influence projects, but can't raise false hopes, has to be achievable.
- Water must support social, cultural, and economic needs of First Nations communities.
- Bring people together as part of a story instead of being left out.
- Historic information is important to build the foundation on.
- There should be shared strategies in the PBC strategic plans and The Framework.
- How can First Nations strategic plans be fed into the processes? They have input from community members and provide direction for the group endorsed by all.
- What is the function of The Framework? What does it ask/demand of all water users in the state? Outline the way The Framework will drive what, who and how.
- Start with the positives – nothing can survive without water. Aboriginal people have been looking after it for thousands of generations.
- Share how Nations worked together, a First Nations construct not just a Western construct.
- Framework needs to speak the language First Nations people want, reflecting the relationship with water i.e. ownership is a Western construct.
- The Framework should include guidelines on how water is monitored and assessed. Both require transparency and accountability.
- Start small and things grow.
- Build on what we've got.
- Work towards achievements.
- Embed cultural heritage values into The Framework.
- Protection of cultural intellectual property must be embedded within The Framework.
- Any outcomes need bi-partisan support from government, locked-in to legislation, protect from future changes – need to future proof outcomes.
- Video showing how the waterways are connected, importance of water to culture in SA, like Vic has done.
- Videos to share the reasons behind decisions made now, explain why they were done for future generations.
- What is happening in other states – Lake Eyre Basin committee, Great Artesian Basin committee, strategic plans, may be some lessons learnt through what they've been doing, could consider learnings here, may be no lessons.
- Data sovereignty – Aboriginal people have a right to access water data, share the information and keep it clear so that it can be understood, not technical jargon.
- Any obligations for licensees/corporations to give back to communities? This could put The Framework into action.

Describe the current water management system

- Who is responsible for what? There needs to be a 'mind map' of all the agencies responsible for managing water, so Nations can understand the entire water system and where to go to get answers.
- There also needs to be education opportunities for mob, to understand water management from a Western approach.
- Limited capacity within community to navigate complex contemporary water management processes – need for upskilling.
- Educational piece around who to talk to about what – where do people go, how transparent is it, where can issues be raised? For example, SA Water approached for a cultural flows conversation, but allocation of River Murray water is not done by SA Water.
- Framework should paint the picture of what's currently happening in the water space, and how we join the dots so all water policies/programs align or complement each other.
- The Framework should include a picture of the water ecosystem rather than lots of words, the key players, engagement principles.
- Mob want to see one point online where they can see the review of Water Allocation Plans in each region. A map and timeframes, what stage each plan is at.
- A document setting out the role of each organisation that has responsibility to manage water in the state would be helpful.

Describe the current water management system cont.

- Include all the agencies that have responsibility to manage water across the state, and how First Nations are involved in water planning and management across the whole water system in SA. Paint a picture of who is doing what and opportunities for First Nations people to be involved.
- The Framework could join the dots to other plans, such as the Biodiversity Act, that require water to then enact actions within other plans. A framework to support existing plans and objectives.
- Describe the water resources and realities within each region and across the state – map back to an implementation plan based on solution-based regional or community focussed approaches.
- The water allocation plan and The Framework need to align, the water allocation plan could set up the enabling settings for when The Framework is ready to be implemented. Need some time to determine the enabling reforms.
- Consider the whole system – who uses the water upstream and downstream, all to have a say in how water is used.
- Framework to look at how much water is used by all industries.
- Communities should have a say about how and where water is used, because it is all connected.

Accountability

- Reflect the agencies that have responsibility to manage water (who does what) and show accountability (who will be responsible for delivering which part).
- Embed actions for accountability within The Framework.
- Would like to see KPI's in The Framework as part of the targets.
- It needs to be aspirational and have achievable and measurable targets. With built-in accountability for each water agency.
- The Framework needs to create realistic targets/actions to be achieved within a certain timeframe.
- Best way to achieve the targets is to have a staggered approach with built-in timeframes and measurables.
- Framework should include indicators like Closing the Gap principles to make sure agencies are working effectively and aligned to best practice.

Strengthen the legal basis

- Make sure legislation isn't conflicting.
- Needs to be a review of all the different Acts, to reflect changing times, or make sure policy reflects what needs to happen and change.
- Don't recognise how Acts reflect each other, they work in isolation from each other, can't come up with clear policy positions to fill the gaps.
- Cross-referencing between legislation – what other Acts may need to be updated to reflect what is needed?

- Need an understanding of how the legislation connects and overlaps – need to do mapping. Where do the changes need to take place to see real change? We need to know what trumps what. This will help us know what needs to be taken on first.
- Want to see a legal basis, have this strengthened – where are Aboriginal people in the Landscape South Australia Act? E.g. secure ownership, locked-in.
- The Framework could include a recommendation to change legislation to allow water allocation plans to allocate water to First Nations organisations.
- The Victorian Government recognises this terminology [intangible spiritual connection] within their Heritage Act, could South Australia do the same? It means you can start thinking about cultural impacts on land/water.

Theme 5: Engagement

Engagement approach

- Support continuity in involvement so capacity can be maintained and built upon.
- Engage early and keep engaging, even if Nations are having their own in-house issues – this isn't a reason to stop engaging.
- Decisions need to be made as a collective, allow for this in processes and timeframes.
- Be clear about the purpose of the conversation – tell the real story and real purpose.
- Transparent and honest conversations about things happening from agencies.
- Shift the conversation to be based on First Nations agenda, rather than governments.
- Government should be coming on the journey with mob, not the other way around.
- Governments should be looking to engage under the Native Title Act, not the Landscape South Australia or other Acts.
- First Nations people need to be part of the beginning stages of projects, not coming in 3/4 of the way through.
- Decisions that are being made for communities without asking what the community wants – sometimes get involved in the conversation right at the end, when we should be brought into the conversation early in the process.
- By involving Nations early there's an opportunity for employment and connection.
- Spending time on Country provides a chance to connect to Country in a modified landscape and to pass knowledge onto younger generations.
- Listening ear of government, then follow up with action – don't have one visit and leave and never come back.
- Agencies speaking to the wrong people – this is a huge barrier especially if there's Native Title in place.
- Government needs to work with PBCs not just one individual.
- There needs to be consistency in the way in which each government agency engages with First Nations. Are there processes that have worked before? How can we learn from them?

Engagement approach (continued)

- First Peoples Working Group meets bi-monthly with water managers, increasing transparency and opportunities for input.
- Need to future proof the process – so it doesn't rely on one ally, capacity building of other staff.
- Include requirements that Traditional Owners are involved e.g. in the Basin Plan, environmental water planning – this encourages agencies to make it happen. Can include principles in The Framework; improves recognition and influence in water management.
- Government silos – everything is connected, Nations don't separate out Country.
- Review and evaluate – nobody is telling us if our projects are working or not.

Engagement principles

- Write principles of engagement into The Framework (how we will work with First Nations to implement the identified actions).
- The principles of engagement will require a departmental cultural shift too – needs the support of senior leaders, cultural change in organisations, so that actions are implemented in a culturally safe and appropriate way.
- Be genuine.
- Be honest.
- Build relationships.
- Build allyship.
- Allow reasonable time for input.
- Keep the communication up and running, open and transparent.
- Find alignment in values and principles, can then work better together.
- Work with Nations in a culturally respectful way, cultural integrity.
- Come and talk to us properly, down at our language level.
- Consultation should happen early and with the right people who can speak for Country, Free Prior and Informed Consent.

Challenges: Resourcing and capacity building

- Not enough funding for First Nations to be involved in decision making.
- Resourcing to be involved in processes and maintain continuity.
- More resources and funding needed for full participation in water planning and management
- Need for increased funding and capacity-building to ensure meaningful participation.
- Salaried positions or sitting fees, individuals can't afford unpaid input.

Theme 6: Governance – shared decision-making

Embed First Nations governance

- Create programs and governance arrangements that uplift First Nations – embed First Nations values and principles into these.
- First Nations interests and values must be included in water decision-making.
- Government departments to work in partnership with Aboriginal communities and leaders to embed traditional governance structures into government decision-making processes.
- Potential to include message sticks in governance arrangements – this is how decisions were made in the past, a process in the right order. Display this in The Framework through symbols as this resonates more.
- There is a decision-making power imbalance and convoluted processes, a lot of players. This could be explained in the preamble of The Framework.
- We are no longer in the days where conversations were led by us, there's a layer of Native Title now and PBCs. Agencies/private business/NGO's that are leading and organising conversations.
- Decision-making – that's the important thing, decision-making positions.
- An across government approach would be good.
- Somewhere organisations go to raise issues, and Traditional Owners can keep the organisations accountable.
- Where are the DEW leaders and decision makers? They need to be hearing direct from mob, it's our story to tell.
- Mob want to talk to people with decision making authority.
- Key community members could submit The Framework to the Ministers on DEW's behalf, rather than the other way around.
- Access to the Minister – The Framework can only be successful if it comes down from the Minister; we want to present The Framework to the Minister.
- Connect with decision-makers, state government needs to understand water systems and ensure projects can happen.
- There needs to be strong governance arrangements. Suggest The Framework has an accompanying implementation plan setting out who will carry what actions. Will need to operationalise governance for The Framework.
- Any program and governance arrangements should be written into strategic business plans, not just a Reconciliation Action Plan.
- Use co-management – it seems to be going well, they meet regularly, talk about what needs to be done, they are including Traditional Owners.

Equal and empowered participation

- First Nations people need to be at the table where decisions are made; at the beginning and the whole way along.
- Need to have the right people around the table, with the authority and backing of their community. Board members have been elected by their mob to represent them. They are making big decisions, and those people are liable to their communities.
- A seat at the table as high up as possible.
- Confident, capable people in the right seats making decisions.
- We have people with education, use that education.
- Representative bodies – people from the PBCs need to sit on government boards too e.g. Landscape Boards. On the main board, not the sub-boards/advisory boards.
- The Framework should identify groups/boards/bodies which should have First Nations representation.
- Want Aboriginal people sitting on the board with all other decision makers, rather than sitting on a sub-committee that has an advisory role.
- Resourcing to be involved in processes and maintain continuity.
- Would like to see a South Australian representative on CAWI (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests) to create national linkages.
- Need a mechanism to tap into existing structures to make sure agencies are getting advice from Aboriginal people e.g. Voice to Parliament, still some level of representation if not at the Board table, three – or four – pronged approach.
- A substantive seat at the table with organisations or corporations – a genuine partnership where Traditional Owners are engaged as an ongoing commitment.
- Involve First Nations people if there is a legislative review.
- Want a level playing field for all Aboriginal people, whether on a Board, an elder, a young person etc.
- For all Aboriginal people to have a say in how water is used and monitored.
- Should it be a statewide First Nations representative group, or a region-by-region group, or catchment based?
- A committee/group for land and water matters could be established by the Landscape Board and have a representative from each PBC – they could have involvement in having oversight of the actions within The Framework.
- Could have a natural resources body and then subcommittees for biodiversity, water etc.
- Proposed regional Aboriginal Engagement Committee – they could provide advice or feedback on statewide issues including The Framework.
- Decision making models/structures need to be appropriate for each Nation, so it may look different for each region.
- The Framework is a statewide document but should flow down to a local level, make sure local groups are engaged appropriately.
- PBCs need to work together, would like to see Nations unify and have a local group that is region-specific that sets its own priorities.
- Could put options back to Nations in round 2 of the workshops. Set out the challenges to address and the options.
- Share the models around water that have been suggested, seek advice on the models and what representation looks like in water.
- Advisory Committee – needs more teeth, elevated status. Equal partnership – Council model? Like in Victoria?
- What is the role of The Voice? Water group could support The Voice.
- Is the Voice the place to pursue government accountability?
- Need to connect the Voice to Parliament and any governance set up by The Framework – there could be a regular report that goes to The Voice on how it's all going.
- The Voice is a direct link into Parliament, we should be making use of this group to advocate for water/actions within The Framework.
- Each Nation needs their own voice, local voices are not necessarily representative.
- Need a way to connect and streamline all the governance structures/bodies that have been put in place to manage Country. Multiple agencies are working in the environment.
- Government funded entity?

Dedicated statewide representation

- Once The Framework is in place, how do we keep governments accountable, and keep agreements in place even if the government changes?
- How will actions in The Framework be coordinated? Set up an advisory body to review the draft framework that includes people who have been part of the workshop discussions?
- Consider a state First Nations water representative body, that government agencies can talk to about water topics, an oversight group to provide a voice and represent SA First Nations' water interests – need to resource the group and build their capacity.
- There should be a First Nations advisory body that has oversight of all First Nations water interests within the state, to lead discussions on water interests as it relates to them.

Challenges: Resourcing and representation

- Not enough funding for First Nations to be involved in decision making.
- Resourcing to be involved in processes and maintain continuity.
- Representatives are having to wear multiple hats to contribute to a range of topics – there is consultation burn out.
- Over-committed people are often approached, they are already stretched thin.
- Is there an even playing field for Aboriginal people?
- Aboriginal people are coming to the table from a deficit position, there isn't equality.
- Limited decision-making power and resource access affects ability to uphold cultural obligations.
- Lack of capacity to make decisions and access resources to manage water severely limits the communities ability to uphold cultural obligations such as caring for Ngatji's.

Theme 7: Implementation

Whole-of-system adoption

- Inform all other water agencies about The Framework and what their responsibilities are to deliver actions (make sure there is social responsibility within the entire water ecosystem).
- Should be a tool used by all water agencies, rather than having to say all the same things again.
- Government landowners, council landowners, and SA Water must collaborate.
- Ensure local level actions filter down.
- Who are the key players, what is their role, who is the body that supports The Framework (is it DEW?), need to have conversations about this and how it will be used.
- There needs to be proper allocation of funding and resources to support actions within The Framework.

Resourced implementation

- Government has to commit funding to the actions for there to be real tangible change.
- First Nations organisations need resources to operate/ function properly, internal resourcing needs to be agreed by the PBCs.
- Where could funding come from for regional projects? Not just from local landholders.
- How do we gather funding from all over to keep protecting lands and water? Not just making farmers pay a levy, or receiving one off grants.
- Lack of resources for full engagement in water planning and management.
- Need for more funding from DEW and The Living Murray for water-related activities (e.g. floodplain monitoring, water coordinator roles).

Theme 8: Partnerships and collaboration

- All levels of government need to be working more closely together, and enabled to work across areas.
- Better coordination between agencies so water issues can be dealt with – wholistic conversations.
- Learn from good examples.
- Replicating successful projects.
- Good examples where private industry is partnering with Nations e.g. to manage wetlands, building in heritage components to projects. More funding bodies would help.
- Good programs with Landscape Boards – schools and farmers.

Maintaining cultural obligations

Theme 9: Cultural significance of water

Water sustains culture

- We have to look after our children and future generations, leaving things for our kids is a priority.
- Healthy Country.
- Water supports spiritual, cultural, and social obligations.
- Maintain connection to Country.
- Caring for Ngatji's/totems dependent on water in rivers, soaks, and rock holes.
- Water for yabbies, swan eggs, breeding areas, these all need water.
- Traditional customs: fishing, hunting, basket weaving, bush plant foods, medicines.
- Leaders of communities have responsibilities and obligations to care for water, wildlife and the environment, but this is all impacted by water use and impacts upstream.
- Wetlands are a meeting place – cultural obligation to revitalise the wetland.
- Water management supports regrowth of traditional resources.
- More flowing water instead of stagnant pools.
- Growth of riparian trees for tools (spears, digging sticks, canoes, coolamons).
- Maintaining/restoring heritage sites (middens, burials, scar trees, river red gums, black box trees).
- Protect cultural heritage sites – burials, scar trees, sites where there's evidence of ancestors.
- Traditional practices: cultural flows mimic flood seasons, allowing regrowth of nardoo, reeds, and habitat for yabbies, shrimp, mussels, swans, and ducks.

Cultural flows

- What does this mean in SA? If we can describe cultural flows, can say what the impact of interrupting them is. 200 years of impacts. Impact on biodiversity – birdlife, fish, food sources. Dams, irrigation, redirection of water.
- Are definitions used for cultural flows the same at a national, state and regional level? What does it mean for SA Nations? It might mean the flow of the river/water itself – it should flow naturally with no objects blocking the flow.

Theme 10: Cultural objectives in water projects and planning

- Greater involvement in water planning and projects to make sure cultural objectives and outcomes are included.
- How can cultural outcomes/objectives to be a key driver?
- More input/control to ensure flows are supporting cultural outcomes/objectives – plant and animal species, protection of important cultural sites; to allow cultural practices to continue – “when the water comes back, totems come back”.
- Need to bring cultural objectives into environmental water planning. For example, swans are not an environmental water priority but they are a cultural priority, swans are a totem for some people.
- Environmental perspective is first, cultural interests need to be elevated (cultural indicators to be looked at alongside environmental indicators).
- Nations to target the best areas where water can be maintained in a changing climate, identify where to target culturally, to maintain cultural values.
- Get people out on Country to undertake cultural practices in water projects e.g. monitoring activities, helps to pass on cultural knowledge.
- Caring for Country and efforts to focus on restoring waterflows to culturally important areas and making these accessible to Traditional Owners.
- Build on Aboriginal Waterways Assessment process – have more involvement beyond the assessment process, e.g. through monitoring.
- Better relationship with landholders to facilitate access to cultural heritage sites on private property.
- Connection – this is extremely important. Women's and men's business in and around water needs to be protected. Migratory shorebirds kinship – this is a global group, a good case study of First Nations involvement and environmental outcomes.
- Want more involvement with breeding fish, yabbies and mussels and replanting native vegetation.
- Seasonal management.

Theme 11: Knowledge sharing and collective learning

- Need to capture and transfer cultural knowledge from Elders to young people. Teaching young people through on-country trips.
- Ability to continue family use of river and wetland areas strengthens community and enables intergenerational knowledge transfer.
- Knowledge sharing, First Nations learning from one another in the water space.
- Visits to other's Country would be good to learn from other projects underway.
- Support connecting Nations from other places to share success stories and learnings e.g. from another capital city.
- How do we move forward on a water summit/ symposium, bring everyone together? Keen for water conversations where mob can all come together to talk about what we want.
- Support a symposium/forum to talk about current/ future needs, not say the same things – pathways to move forwards.
- State Forum – all PBCs together.
- Learn from one another – support a biannual water forum to share learnings and hear examples of success (keynote speakers), and have an action workshop as a collective.
- Opportunities for collaboration and engagement with international Indigenous groups on migratory bird protection.
- Celebration events and education initiatives to bridge generational gaps and increase awareness of cultural and environmental interdependencies.

Challenges: Impacts of water use on natural systems

- Absence of water flows is impacting on species, animals and traditional materials for weaving etc. There are some good projects to reintroduce species.
- Water is disappearing, lakes and wells are drying up, systems won't come back.
- Changes to the flow of water means nesting time has been out of whack, seasons have changed and there are less flood events.
- Can't maintain cultural practices due to the change in flows, knowledge is being lost.
- Trees need water – Cooba trees used for cultural practices are dying because of the lack of flows from flooding, scar trees are dying.
- In the Mallee region there are rock holes but too many pivots are taking water out; groundwater extraction is impacting on soaks.
- Seasons have changed which affects the migration and breeding of animals.
- The natural, seasonal and predictable flows have been taken away.
- Objects are stopping the flow of the river, which then degrades the land and environment surrounding it and downstream areas.
- Disconnection of wetlands and floodplains from the river.
- The extraction of water taken out of the Great Artesian Basin by pastoralists has caused a lowering of the aquifer and extensive physical damage not only of mound springs but all our Country.
- Mining is taking a lot (too much) water from the Great Artesian Basin, there is real concern about the impact this is having on water for Country.
- Pumping of water out of springs has caused a reduction in flows – it's hurtful to see the destruction. We have an obligation to care for Country. Springs are drying up, we are losing history.
- There are at least 60 more years of extraction for Olympic Dam, can Nations have influence over this? Doubtful that Great Artesian Basin use will reduce.
- The Roxby Downs (Indenture Ratification) Act 1982 overrides everything else.
- Over-extraction is an issue in the regions.
- People are wanting to use more water, but there is already a depletion of water – water levels in aquifers are dropping.
- Witnessed the demise of freshwater soaks over time, severe depletion, birds, ducks and fish are dependent on the freshwater soaks.
- Pesticides and herbicides running in water destroys the quality. Monitoring and accountability of this need to be strong.
- Lack of water allocated to First Nations.
- Buildings and infrastructure need to be considered in The Framework.

Challenges: Threats to cultural sites

- The most important thing is if our sacred sites have waterholes in them, they have to be protected.
- Need to put in place stronger deterrents for those who damage Country E.g. cattle farmers who put infrastructure in place where it shouldn't be because it disrupts to flow of water.
- Sandhills are burial grounds – they used to be surrounded by water and plants used to grow around the sandhills. Because they don't have regular floods, the reeds and other plants are dead, which is now causing erosion. It would be good to plant trees to stop the erosion.
- Carp is killing reeds and tress – need to get rid of Carp.
- Local council doesn't take obligation to look after cultural sites seriously.
- There are no rules around having buffer zones near cultural sites – would like to see rules around the things you can and can't do, written within the water allocation plan.
- More protection is needed for ancestors bones in sandbars, boats park and people camp there.
- There are stronger laws around native vegetation than for protecting cultural heritage – need to strengthen cultural heritage laws.
- Would like to see a process to consult with PBCs for any water activity, so they can advise about the cultural appropriateness of water take from a water resource.
- Need greater rigour around notifiable acts and pastoralist activities, they impact on the land.
- Any development that may impact on Native Title must be negotiated.
- It's sometimes cheaper for people to pay the fine. Fines need to be higher.
- We are aware of people doing works without the right approvals, what are the processes? Do people know they need to get a permit from the Board to put in a dam? How is it notified to the PBC?
- The communication process could be included in The Framework (for water activity consultation) – allow enough time for PBCs to respond to a request and allow different ways of communication.
- Less government speak when contacting PBCs on this (water activity consultation), include maps of the location of the water resource.
- People not listening, not reading the signs.
- Could there be an Aboriginal person doing compliance? Through rangers or an Aboriginal owned business?
- Future impacts of new developments e.g. mining, hydrogen, renewable energy.

Challenges: Access to land

- Access to land is an issue, most properties are privately owned.
 - Need access to land to then access water for cultural practices.
 - Need access to land and water to pass on knowledge to the younger generation.
 - Lack of access to sites to enable community to continue their connection with sites, teach young people traditional knowledge, and ability to provide meaningful input into water planning and management.
 - Important for cultural connection, to still have access and visit.
 - Can't have water without land.
 - We can't just head to waterholes when we want to.
 - Spiritual connection doesn't cease just because land is now privately owned.
 - Gates at electric fences affecting access.
 - There isn't access for Traditional Owners to water sites, it's insulting as Traditional Owners to need a permit. Is there another way to monitor our access, rather than going through the red tape?
 - Don't need to own land freehold, National Parks are important.
 - Management of parks. Employing Aboriginal rangers is a positive.
 - SA Water working with communities for easier and more reliable access to Country and surrounding areas.
 - Assessment on private land is needed to check cultural sites and the health of Country.
 - Aboriginal Waterways Assessments are an opportunity for private landholders to talk to us and get out on Country where access would normally be challenging.
 - Working with landholders to preserve land and cultural heritage. This needs to be the messaging.
 - Need to debunk myths around Native title, not taking land away from current owners but we have a cultural obligation for sites on private land. What messages are needed?
 - Would like to work out a beneficial relationship between First Nations and private landholders, so they can look after the land (do a cultural land and waterway assessment) – case studies around landholders allowing access to land might encourage more people to do this.
- Good examples of sharing information at field days and volunteer celebration days.

Employment and economic opportunities

Theme 12: Employment aspirations

- Increase On-Country employment for First Nations people.
- More jobs along the water lifecycle, analyse the opportunities – rangers, contractors for wetland pumping, monitoring and compliance etc.
- Opportunity for Aboriginal people to be part of the water industry.
- Would love to see mob working on Country, on water supplies to remote communities, and long-term planning.
- Needs to be capacity building for mob to work in the water space.
- Employ Aboriginal people in major government projects, through understudy roles, and build capacity and upskill staff throughout the project.
- There are longer-term projects coming up on Traditional Owner land, how could we negotiate employment? Not just on-ground, but for young or middle-aged people wanting to further advance their career and education. Build employment opportunities into these projects.
- Boards to be involved in role descriptions and employment opportunities for major government projects.
- Agencies to include job targets in Reconciliation Action Plans for various roles, not just traineeships.
- Procurement target of 4% is focussed on administration not project work – we want qualified positions.
- Provide scholarships for water positions in government agencies.
- Water rangers – could we have some scholarships?
- Encourage students through STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).
- Training and education for our people to work in the water space. It would be great to see an Indigenous water scientist to come out of this.
- We need a pathway into these jobs, and support provided along the way. Need to drum into primary school kids, and high school, provide support behind the student to finish school and go onto pursue higher education through scholarships, or into any other job they want.
- Can get people towards executive roles, leadership positions, a direct benefit back to the community or group.
- Would love to see a Chief Executive of a government agency being an Aboriginal person, who has won it on merit.
- Sponsor and support, scholarships to support those who want to live in two worlds.
- How can SA government support Aboriginal businesses and capacity building? Grow ranger roles and have cultural oversight over every opportunity.
- Are there opportunities for multi-agency support or connection?
- Resource Nations to undertake water works e.g. monitoring of waterways.
- Have an officer employed to look at different projects and how many Aboriginal people are employed.
- Use local contractors.
- Need culturally safe places to train and work.
- Train local people to fix water issues, instead of paying a contractor to come in.
- Use local contractors.
- Need qualified and trained people to work in the water testing jobs, checking for disease, contamination.
- Most important thing would be if you are going to focus on water, and you want people interested, make sure there are jobs at the end of it.
- We get trained, but no job after – we are the most trained people in the world, but no real jobs out in the community.
- Indigenous Land and Sea Council – applications through them could be a good avenue. With Indigenous Land and Sea Council and Landscape Board input – opportunity to make projects work. Young people's inheritance – a reason to learn and gain qualifications.
- Train and encourage young people to grow and pursue their dreams, through caring for Country. This includes access for spiritual and cultural purposes, to learn and continue passing onto next generation.
- Country kids struggle to gain opportunities to learn. Potential environment projects that could open these opportunities up for mob.

Theme 13: Economic aspirations

- All aspects go together – spiritual connection, economic advantage.
- Water is a lifeline – it can provide economic opportunity, grow enterprises, become self-sustaining.
- Fully realise employment and economic opportunities through capacity-building and mapping out opportunities.
- First Nations people to own and manage land and waters.
- Would like to see a First Nations levy to provide resources to Nations to support self-determination.
- Levies collected – money raised from water, could go back to community organisations.
- Compensation – some Traditional Owners want this due to use of water on their Country. For example, the take of water for livestock or mining. There is clear evidence to show that Traditional Owners have protested mining being set up at some locations.
- Rent for water? Compensation to Traditional Owners for accessing resources?
- Benefits for First Nations people for the use of their lands and waters.
- Some industries have rent paid via a licence e.g. for fishing, or a right to take people on tours through National Parks, but should be free to access.
- Could be running eco-tours led by Traditional Owners on council managed sites.
- Carbon farming, crops, market gardens, community run cattle projects, water plays an important role.
- Land handbacks.
- Buybacks – buy some of the land, put in levee banks, revegetation, reconnect First Nations people to land.
- Make economic considerations of freehold land adjacent to wetlands – can't isolate water from land, but it's mostly owned by private landholders.
- Business opportunities: Tourism, cultural and environmental monitoring, water delivery (pumping), cultural assessments, and heritage work supporting community members and ranger teams.
- Opportunity to partner with farmers and other private landholders for an economic benefit to mob?
- Future investments to consider whether benefits could extend to First Nations communities – incorporate needs into designs.

Theme 14: Water ownership aspirations

- Increase the level of water ownership to support self-determination.
- Water ownership – supports control and decision-making around water.
- Water ownership can create opportunities for the future, employment and capacity building – supporting the transmission of cultural knowledge to young people, succession planning; and to share learnings between Nations.
- Economic outcomes from water ownership (irrigation, leasing water, environmental water pumping).
- The right to choose, seeking power over decisions, where/how to use water – owning water would allow this. Could use water for business opportunities of leave it in the system, excited by the Aboriginal Water Entitlements Program opportunity.
- Could own water and lease it out.
- Build capacity around water ownership – kit Nations up to be able to own and manage water entitlements.
- Employing our own water managers for water allocations and broader management.
- The Framework needs to have clear definitions around who can be recognised or supported to own water – guidelines already exist under the CATSI (Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act. The definition needs to be accepted by PBCs.

Challenges

- There are no benefits to Nations.
- No revenue back to Nations, other states have strategies where money goes to Nations.
- There's no compensation for the water being taken from cultural sites.
- Where are the benefits for Traditional Owner groups? If it is going to happen anyway? Can they negotiate a reduction in the take or economic opportunities?
- No equity when Aboriginal communities have to pay for water.
- Household bills are going up but corporations are getting water for free.
- Income is a key issue, Aboriginal people are living in poverty, need economic opportunities.
- Other people have water for economic rights, why don't mob?

Safe and secure water for communities

Theme 15: Community water supply aspirations Aspirations

- Access to secure and quality water for communities, including sufficient pressure to allow for community growth.
- Prioritise wellbeing – this is everyone's concern.
- Clean health – we wouldn't have some diseases if we had filtered water.
- Long-term solutions rather than a band aid fix – generational infrastructure.
- Solutions focussed discussions.
- Individual communities have a say in solution-based approaches and run the solution.
- Solutions need to be place based, fit for purpose – get technical experts to come in and talk to mob about what would be suitable.
- Opportunity to train local people to provide the solution.
- Equity of access – remote locations should have the same level of access to quality water to meet all critical human water needs.
- Holistic approach to water issues – cross-collaboration between all parties with influence, all come to the table and share resources to make it work for real progress to be made.
- Need change in regulation to provide infrastructure that's affordable to remote and regional areas.

Challenges

- Water quality is an issue (for drinking and household purposes) – the Department of Health needs to be involved.
- Housing links with water quality, which has a direct relation to the health of First Nations people.
- Water quality relates to everything and everyone, if there's no good quality water coming out – you'll see the results.
- First priority is human consumption. People have been left for years without good quality water, this should already have been addressed.
- Water quality has been a problem for such a long time.
- We don't have desalination plants or water filters for our taps, or rainwater tanks – housing took them all away.
- First Nations can't just pack up and leave.
- Population growth – homelands are growing and evolving and housing is an issue already.
- Ageing infrastructure, pipes are getting old, consuming lead when turning the taps on.
- Cost and maintenance of infrastructure in remote areas are extremely expensive, service providers are harder to get.
- Before colonisation we didn't need infrastructure to move water to where we were.
- There needs to be education for mob/community about ways to improve water within households.
- Water efficient appliances – Aboriginal people can't afford these so miss out on the savings. Need to subsidise the cost or something to help mob access these.
- We've raised these issues with Ministers and Senators, but there's been no action.
- We're sick of talk, we want action.
- The whole community uses the water, only white people have filters or rainwater tanks, we need to use the water coming out of the tap.
- Inequality – remote areas forgotten, city people have water tanks, why don't we?
- Government works in silos.
- Government makes decisions without thinking about the outcomes e.g. wanting to shut water off to a homeland, no thought of the health impacts that would have happened.



Stay up to date on the South Australian Framework to Advance First Nations' Water Interests

Scan the QR code to receive updates, learn about upcoming workshops, and follow the progress of the co-design process.



With the exception of the Piping Shrike emblem, other material or devices protected by Aboriginal rights or a trademark, and subject to review by the Government of South Australia at all times, the content of this document is licensed under the Creative Commons. Attribution 4.0 Licence. All other rights are reserved. © Crown in right of the State of South Australia 2025 | FIS 1086669