

What we heard

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

Listening report: Round 2



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 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 Government of South Australia 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 respectfully Acknowledges this term is not universally used by all First Nations peoples in South Australia.



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# Background

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

The co-design process is being led by Department for Environment and Water (DEW), in partnership with South Australian Native Title Services (SANTS), Landscape SA, SA Water and the Environment Protection Authority (EPA).

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, and secure access to water in rural and remote communities.

To support these commitments a South Australian Framework to Advance First Nations' Water Interests (The Framework) is being co-designed with Traditional Owners.

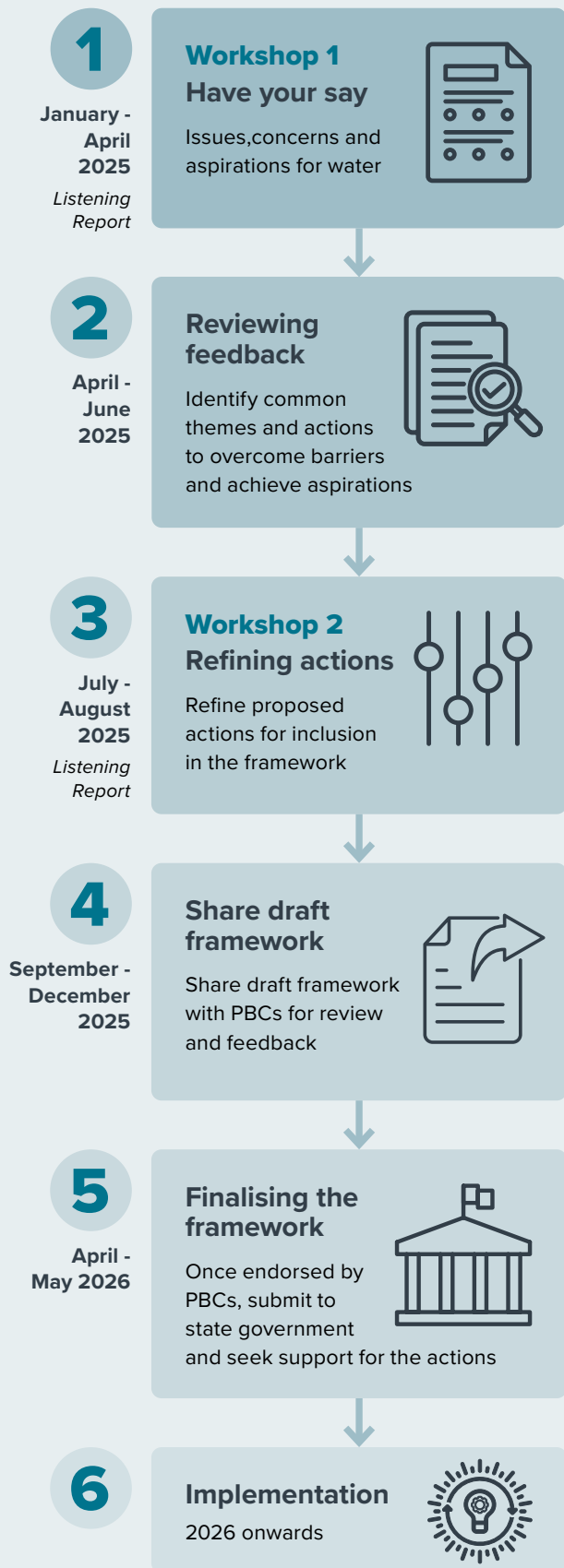
The Framework will identify actions to:

- 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.
- Secure safe and reliable access to water for rural and remote communities.
- 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.

A committee has been established to provide project oversight and governance arrangements throughout the project lifecycle. Committee members include representatives from SANTS, First Nations of South Australia Aboriginal Corporation, DEW, Landscape SA, SA Water and the EPA.





## Project timeframes

Five phases of the project are being undertaken to co-design The Framework, incorporating two rounds of workshops.

Once The Framework is complete, it will be submitted to the Government of South Australia for consideration. Pending approval, implementation will progress from 2026 onwards.

Original project timeframes have been updated as a result of a request for further engagement with Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) representatives to seek feedback and endorsement of the framework prior to submitting it to the state government.

## Consultation summary

A series of workshops were held in multiple locations across the state between July and August 2025.

These workshops built upon the first series of workshop discussions, by exploring pathways and actions to ensure equitable participation in water planning and management.

Round 2 of the engagement aimed to:

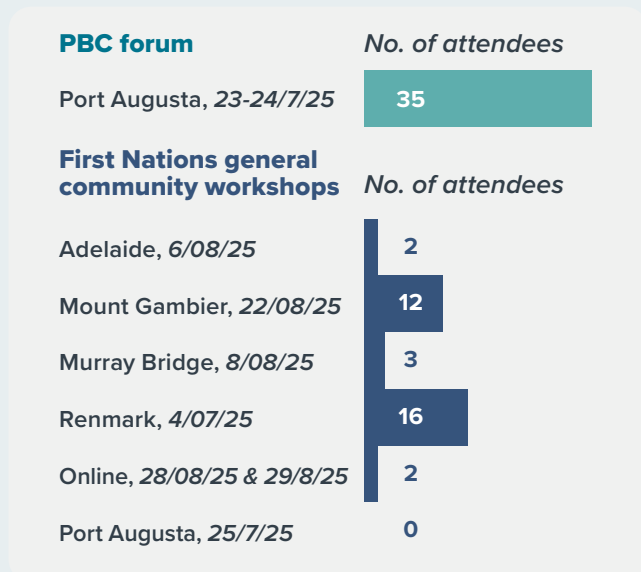
- Reflect on what we heard during the first round of workshops, confirming shared concerns, aspirations and priorities for water planning and management.
- Identify any gaps or missing information to ensure barriers were fully understood and opportunities for progress clearly defined.
- Review proposed actions developed in response to previous feedback and aspirations identified by First Nations communities.
- Clarify the scope of influence focusing on water planning, management and distribution within the limits of state government responsibilities.

**This report sets out what we heard in Stage 3 – the second round of workshops.**

# Methodology

## Two representatives from each South Australian PBC were invited to attend an in-person workshop in Port Augusta.

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



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

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

PBCs and organisations represented at the workshops included:

- Arabana Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Burrendies Aboriginal Corporation
- Dieri Aboriginal Corporation
- Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Kurna Yerta Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Kokatha Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Malyangapa Aboriginal Corporation
- Narungga Nation Aboriginal Corporation
- Nao Aboriginal Corporation
- Ngadjuri Aboriginal Corporation
- Ngadjuri Adnyamathanha Wilyakali Native Title Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC

- Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- South-East Aboriginal Focus Group
- The River Murray and Mallee Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC
- Wirangu Aboriginal Corporation
- Yandruwandha Yawarrawarrka Traditional Land Owners (Aboriginal Corporation) RNTBC
- Yankunytjatjara Native Title Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC

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 ways to ensure equitable participation in water planning and management.

Feedback was captured through:

- Notes written on butchers' paper summarising key points of the discussion.
- Feedback in workbooks, allowing each participant to answer each question in their own words during, and after, the workshop.
- Detailed notes written by workshop staff.

Workshop participants were also given the opportunity to provide further feedback out of session via survey, workbook responses and/or email.

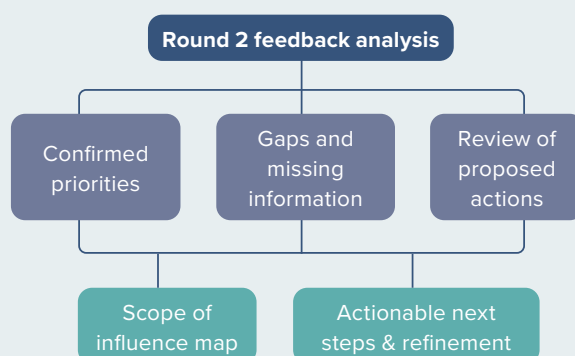
## Analysis of feedback

Feedback was systematically compared with Round 1 findings to identify areas of confirmation, emerging issues, and shifts in community priorities.

Responses to proposed actions were evaluated to determine levels of support, identify refinements, and highlight opportunities for co-design.

The findings were then mapped against the state government's scope of influence to distinguish between issues that can be directly addressed through water policy, water management and planning processes, and those requiring broader cross-government collaboration or advocacy.

This process ensures that Round 2 feedback directly informs the development of The Framework, providing a clear evidence base for future decision-making and implementation.



# What we heard: Summary of common themes

## Conversations during Round 2 engagement workshops confirmed the importance of all themes identified through Round 1 engagement workshops.

Feedback provided in Round 2 was more detailed and action-oriented. The following information provides a snapshot summarising what we heard and outlines the evolution of themes in the [Listening Report – Round 1](#).

Key themes have been categorised under the following headings:

- Framework considerations
- Guiding and engagement principles
- Elevating cultural authority in decision-making
- Self-determination
- Maintaining cultural obligations
- Economic and employment opportunities
- Water access and ownership
- Safe and secure water for communities

## Framework considerations

*Embedding First Nations leadership and values in water governance is essential to establishing a strong and culturally grounded framework.*

There is a call for legislative and policy frameworks that recognise cultural authority, provide consistent support for PBCs, and ensure culturally safe engagement. Building trust, continuity, and accountability remain key challenges, with funding, resourcing, and long-term capacity building identified as priorities.

We heard that framework considerations must include meaningful implementation, monitoring, and clear accountability mechanisms to ensure that commitments are upheld and that First Nations communities are actively involved in shaping and evaluating outcomes. Resourcing will be key to progressing any actions in the framework.

We heard that cultural knowledge needs to be valued and respected with representatives compensated for the knowledge and time that they share.

Truth-telling and recognising the spiritual and cultural significance of water to First Nation peoples are foundational to The Framework. They provide the context for understanding historical and ongoing injustices, and the need to bring cultural and western perspectives together to manage water and better outcomes for Country and communities.

## Additional feedback

### Truth telling

- **Integrate truth-telling** mechanisms within water governance frameworks to strengthen reconciliation efforts. This means sharing historical exclusion of First Nations knowledge and cultural authority in water planning and management, and the importance of water to First Nations people.

- **Recognition:** Recognise the importance of truth telling through a spiritual and cultural lens; the critical unbroken connection to water.
- **Historical impacts:** In The Framework describe history, impact of colonisation, and changes seen to water and surrounding landscapes.
- **Initiatives:** Support truth-telling initiatives and storytelling projects to capture historical and cultural impacts on water resources.
- **At local level:** Explore opportunities to support truth telling at a local level going forward.
- **Relived trauma:** Acknowledge the trauma of truth telling; reliving grief by explaining degradation and loss of water, and its impact on culture and spiritual anchors.

### Valuing First Nations knowledge

- **Culture needs to be valued on par with western science:** Progress is made for other values (e.g. biodiversity) but not for cultural outcomes. This will require a shift in mindsets, so there needs to be education. Our cultural knowledge must be on par with scientific knowledge.
- **Recognise work by Nations:** what's already happening and don't take credit for what Nations are progressing.
- **Signage to share our stories:** This can help share our cultural connection to water sites – the western perspective is shared, but signs could also be sharing Aboriginal stories and histories.
- **Education to broader community:** Integrate cultural knowledge into educational curricula.

## Approach

- **Strengthen legislation and policy frameworks:** Review Native Title and water legislation to strengthen water rights, inclusivity and fairness.
  - Use the framework to strengthen legislation, policy, and governance structures, supporting First Nations' aspirations for water management and cultural recognition.
- **Success is:** More water in First Nations hands, stronger legislation and involvement at a local level.
  - We need licences and to be involved in water planning.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Framework actions should include clear lines of accountability and be embedded across government departments.
  - Policies must reflect shared principles and measurable outcomes.
  - Strengthen transparency around water allocation and licensing.
- **Sustainable funding models:** Long-term funding commitments are necessary to avoid short-term or symbolic actions.
  - Provide funding and contacts to support PBCs engagement, ensuring cultural knowledge is valued.
  - Establish revenue mechanisms and pilot projects.
- **Longevity:** Embed state government bipartisan support to strengthen long-term commitment. Ensure consistency and long-term impact; policies should have cross party agreement and not be subject to political shifts.
  - Hoping there is a future state written into The Framework, so that it has longevity beyond government changes.
- **Capacity building:** We need the capability and confidence to understand The Framework and system it will operate in. How will legislative changes and decisions impact on the ground?
  - Need more workshops to understand the system, where The Framework fits in. Revisit/recap previous information each time, as it can be a sense of information overload at workshops.
- **Finalising The Framework:** Come back to the PBCs before The Framework is submitted to the government. Bring all water people together to talk to the group.
  - Can we get enough information to cover all the issues that need to be covered in The Framework? Worried there's not enough time to have these conversations.

## Partnerships and collaboration

- **Strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships** that respect cultural values and ensure sustainable outcomes for water and Country. We need to come together to look after Country.
- **Important to build the relationship first.** Work together as allies, create a safe space for us to have a voice. Country connects us, Nations and people working in agencies with us. Walking together on the same path. Enable these sorts of partnerships.
- **Reduce government silos:** Create interagency coordination mechanisms to reduce silos and make sure all water agencies are talking and working together, closing any operational gaps.

## Roles and responsibilities

- **Be clear:** We need a clearer understanding of what each water agency is trying to achieve and how. As well as roles and responsibilities, key players.
- **Diagram** of roles and responsibilities.
- **Coordination** between departments would help and helps us know who to go to. Clearly articulate government roles as it's frustrating when people get the run around when trying to resolve issues.
- **Consider who needs to be part of this:** Where's the drainage board in this? They need to be part of this.
- **Local government** have a role and need to be on board with actions and should align with heritage act protections.

## Implementation

- **Lead agency:** Will DEW lead going forwards, with South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network (SAACCON) or SANTS oversight? We support this. With Water Minister and Cabinet backing. We want confidence that implementation will happen faithfully. DEW and SAACCON/SANTS reporting back to the Minister on delivery of actions within The Framework.
- **Reporting:** There needs to be checks and balances to ensure agencies follow The Framework, the Minister signs off on the water allocation plan. If agencies are not following The Framework, they need to provide a reason to the Minister about why not.



# Guiding and Engagement Principles

*Guiding and engagement principles were highlighted in Round 1 as foundational to The Framework to set out how all water agencies should work with First Nations to implement the identified actions. Engagement principles would then ensure that actions are implemented in a culturally safe and appropriate way. Feedback was provided on a set of draft principles and is set out below.*

## Additional feedback

### Guiding principles

- **Stronger language:** Words in the principles could be more precise. Stronger language. 'Consider' sounds flippant.
- **Cultural awareness:** Training in government agencies needs to be more genuine, more doing than reading. Hands on, build a better understanding through Aboriginal-led training.
  - You can't learn culture on a computer. Must have cultural understanding by going out on Country and talking to Traditional Owners. Learn how to include it in everyday work, not just project based. Invest in relationships at the grassroots level.
  - Recommend that Welcome to Country be supported, it is important and needs to be better understood by western society.
- **Respect-based relationships:** Relationships can be transactional (still need to pay for time and knowledge) – we want respect-based relationships.
  - Building relationships from the ground up.
- **Ongoing partnerships:** formalised and legal i.e. work in formalised partnership and on an ongoing basis.
- **Value cultural perspectives:** Equally value cultural perspectives – there's a long way to go. Outcomes benefit everyone.
  - Important to know what First Nations values and aspirations are. This needs to be included in any strategies and processes going forward.
  - Water is important to Aboriginal people – it is a part of us. Need to make non-indigenous people understand this.
  - Engage with community to better understand cultural flows, importance of water, obligations.
- **Respect cultural areas:** Acknowledge, respect and integrate Aboriginal culture and perspectives that cross regions e.g. songlines.
  - How are First Nations interests being considered in shared border zones? Potential to have greater Traditional Owner connections to influence/work together with other governments on groundwater.
- **Recognise cultural load:** family, community, business – mob are carrying a lot.
- **Resourcing:** Financially support PBCs.
  - There's inequity in the process – representatives are paid a minimal amount while high paid staff are talking to us. Need to be paying for our time as experts in our culture.
  - Renumerate for time and expertise. Place value on the sharing of traditional knowledge and culture.
- **Power shift required:** The power shift is too hard (for government). The power shift is the meaningful thing.
  - Government manages all the resources and makes all the rules and policies.
- **Equality of inclusion:** mob need to be included in every conversation to do with land and water.
- **Build allies:** The biggest battle is convincing people to support First Nations outcomes. Influence the next generation to be allies. We need help to bring people on board to support our traditional rights to water.
  - Tackling racism from stakeholders on Country.
  - Influence the next generation to support Traditional Owners.

# Additional feedback

## Engagement principles

- **Respect cultural authority:** decision-makers in PBCs and those that care for Country are different; recognise First Nations governance structures.
  - Cultural authority sits with PBCs, state government agencies should have direct engagement with PBCs regarding issues that need to be discussed.
  - Include Native Title holders, common law holders and Traditional Owners in engagement/consultation. Not all areas have PBCs. Representation needs to extend beyond that. APY and Maralinga Tjarutja are not PBCs.
  - Governments must speak to someone in the Nation who has the knowledge about water, and someone who has the cultural authority to speak on behalf of the group.
  - Replace the term “elevate” with “strengthen and maintain” cultural authority to recognise its existing strength.
  - Let PBCs set the relationship/agenda.
  - There needs to be respect for individual Nations.
- **Respect cultural protocols:** Information provided at engagement forums needs to go back to communities for consideration.
  - Representatives can’t make a decision without talking amongst their groups.
  - There’s a rush to get things done e.g. by caretaker period, but this doesn’t consider complexities of working with First Nations. There needs to be a change at the foundational level, consult on timeframes – are they appropriate?
- **Report back:** Be involved in the reporting back – train us to do reporting, share information back to communities.
- **Engage on Country:** Go out to sites with Traditional Owners, get out on Country.
- Meet with PBCs and Board on their Country.
- Government needs to visit Country to understand the issues. The issues are many from housing, education, food security, recognition from industry of Native Title and water – water is vital for survival.
- **Involve youth:** Train young ones so they can work within government in the future. Manage engagement fatigue.
  - Make sure a Traditional Owner is in the room, and a young person.
  - Involve young people in workshops, include interactive activities to teach them. The barrier is not being allowed to bring kids on excursions. Invite the whole family.
  - Train young people, as young as possible. Spark their interest in primary school and create pathways into government for them.
- **Acknowledge impacts of staff changes:** Within agencies, it relies on who the staff are, connections are created and then staff leave. The relationship and knowledge exchange need to start all over again. Must acknowledge this in The Framework to ensure continuity of actions.
- **Requires a cultural shift:** Need a cultural shift to make inclusion the norm.
- **Talk together:** Need people to sit together and talk i.e. Aboriginal people, industry, everyone who takes water and uses land needs to be part of the water conversation.
- **Coordinate engagement:** State and Australian Government needs to work better at coordinating engagement e.g. SA Water, DEW, Murray-Darling Basin Authority, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water – there is significant engagement fatigue on similar issues. There’s value in collaboration between departments on similar issues.
- **Tailor information:** Work with key Nation reps to help tailor information, reduce overwhelm at workshops.

## Elevating cultural authority in decision-making

*Elevating cultural authority in decision-making was highlighted as a key priority. Communities emphasised the need for self-determination, shared decision-making, and stronger representation across all levels of water governance.*

First Nation peoples are seeking to be included in all levels of decision-making, including to oversee the implementation of The Framework. Statewide and regional governance groups are suggested to ensure ongoing conversations and involvement at all levels. An annual water forum is also suggested to allow all Nations to come together with water agencies to talk about progress and priorities. This will also provide a space for shared learning.

## Additional feedback

- **Representation at the decision-making table:** Must include representation on steering committees and boards. Would like to see a shift from Advisory Groups to having representatives at the decision-making table. Strengthen legislation around this.
  - Embed Aboriginal representation at all decision-making tables affecting water and land.

- **Statewide oversight of the framework:** Suggestion for a statewide coordination group representing all Nations to ensure a unified voice. The statewide group could meet quarterly to start, then move to biannual or annual forums. This group could talk to government about priorities and oversee implementation of The Framework.
  - There needs to be a standalone water committee that is First Nations established and led; to determine our own priorities. A place for dialogue and to inform policy (state and national). Governments could then tap into this group and ask them about water.
  - It needs time commitment, it's always the same people representing mob, succession planning is important. Bring young people in as they are the future pathway.
  - Any group needs to be representative across the state, Nation driven is essential.
- **Shared decision-making:** Establish committees with government officials and First Nations representatives to support consistent collaboration.
  - Government and mob to meet in the middle.
- **Embed cultural safety:** Whatever structure is put in place, cultural safety must be embedded. Representatives on the body must have backing from their mob.
- **Annual water forum:** An annual forum is supported, it provides an opportunity to share best practice models, case studies and learnings. Hold the annual forum first and build the governance bottom up from community.
- **Elevate the weight of culture:** Decision-making must heavily weight the cultural perspective. Make sure cultural value is properly considered and weighted.
  - Integration of First Nations priorities into local council, state, and federal policy frameworks.
  - Get decision-makers out on Country before making decisions, can't learn culture on paper. This will foster two-way learning.

## Self-determination

*It was requested that the importance of self-determination be made clearer, as it was not strong in the summary of Round 1 discussions. Examples were provided where self-determined projects are progressing and getting good outcomes for Country and community. Examples include projects returning flows to water sites, creating habitat, providing access to Country and opportunities to share cultural knowledge. It was also acknowledged that each Nation can only speak for itself, not other Nations, and that aspirations will differ across the state.*

## Additional feedback

- **Identify Nation based aspirations and challenges:** Would like to see the next step being Nation workshops with each group to work through aspirations and support needed.
  - Identify key issues in each area and then work towards prioritising the issues to be addressed.
  - Come to each mob to talk to us about our water issues, we can't speak for other mob.
  - Work with each PBC on aspirations and a fair share of water resources.
- **Funding for self-determined projects:** Funding is often small amounts or not sustainable. Would like to see funding for cultural sites and indicator species to show health of Country – this is an aspiration. Could be included in environmental plans/strategies to use as a measure of how well we're looking after the health of Country (and water).
  - Would like to see a mechanism to allocate funds to Nations, that goes into a trust, with funds then allocated for on-ground projects for Traditional Owners.
- **Equitable support for Nation groups:** PBC resourcing differs across the state. New PBCs' are just getting established. Not everyone has a Healthy Country Plan yet. Groups need different levels of support to make it an equitable space.
- **Protect cultural knowledge:** If people want our knowledge, they need to come to us and pay us for it. And then we need to decide whether we give it to them or not.
  - Intellectual Property, ownership of knowledge, Indigenous Data Sovereignty. Standard government clause would be good e.g. in procurement, clause in contracts is not currently suitable. Nations to do the final check of information collated.
  - Cultural use and occupancy mapping, including continued use and occupancy of our landscapes.

# Maintaining cultural obligations

*Supporting First Nations to maintain cultural obligations through water planning and management recognises First Nation peoples enduring connection to Country and their responsibility for its care.*

The importance of considering cultural science and values alongside western science was highlighted to ensure that the two knowledge systems are guiding water management decisions. First Nations' knowledge can provide critical insights into resilience and sustainability.

The impacts of development and water use on the health of Country were raised as critical concerns and communities are calling for stronger protections for cultural heritage sites. There have been significant and devastating impacts on important water places, with impacts on songlines and culture. In some places, water is no longer there.

We heard that incorporating cultural values into water management will require capacity building to better understand western water management frameworks, and training in government agencies to build cultural awareness and understanding. Working in partnership and on an ongoing basis will be required to facilitate identifying First Nation's values and aspirations, to then include them in strategies and processes. This will also facilitate better protections for significant sites, stories and species.

Data sovereignty, knowledge transfer within and between Nations, and mentorship are also essential to ensuring traditional practices can continue and be passed onto the next generation.

## Additional feedback

### Cultural significance of water

- **Impacts of development and water use:** The decline of water affects cultural sites, we can't teach our kids because the water is gone.
  - Whatever was there has been taken – all the flora and fauna that was there is gone so we can't live there anymore to survive.
  - Water is our lifeblood. Water is life. You take the water away, the Country dies. The Country is a part of us.
  - Indenture Act is a breach of human rights. The Indenture Act needs to be abolished. Oak Dam and Arcoona – take of water impacts on our storylines and native species like black swans, there has been no consultation.

### Protection of cultural sites

- **Stronger protections for cultural heritage:** DEW needs to work with other agencies that manage cultural heritage so there is stronger protection of sites.
  - Landscape Boards include some of this consideration but a lot of it is about protecting wells and other prescribed areas. Could improve the Landscape Act to protect non-prescribed areas.
  - Aboriginal Heritage Act needs to be reviewed/revised.
  - Fines need to be greater for disobeying the Act.

- Local councils need to be following protocols to protect cultural heritage; works at water sources e.g. springs
- **Promote environmental stewardship:** encourage farmers to put aside swamps in good condition and hold water in the landscape.
- Incentivise other alternatives to pumping a bore, options to reduce use, efficiencies etc, to protect the environment.

### Cultural objectives in water projects and planning

- **Identify cultural objectives:** Need the cultural objectives and to work in partnership – cultural stories, share them and work towards outcomes. Needs funding and capacity building.
  - Embed requirements into staff roles so it's not just a 'nice to have'.
  - Lore and culture need to be taken into consideration with respect to water management. Need to look after culture and stories.
  - We need more say in where cultural assessments for planning purposes happen, not just driven by Landscape Boards and DEW.
  - Competing interests for water in our region – it's challenging to help maintain cultural obligations through water allocation plans.
- **Holistic land and water management:** Land and water must be looked at together, not separately. They go hand in hand.
- **Information about water planning:** Share information about water resources in each region. Would like to see mapping of water resources in each Nations' Country.
  - Is there any information from universities that can be shared? About the geographic area and water resources?
  - Need an understanding of use, requirements, data to tell the story.
  - What is the take of water for commercial vs domestic use? We would like a proper audit of who is taking water from the region and for what purpose.
  - Data is needed at the local level to support decision-making.
- **Cultural monitoring:** When we are involved in waterway assessments, we don't find out what happens after; what are the outcomes? Share the process. We want to get back out to the site again to see the outcomes, a debriefing is needed.
  - We want to be more involved in the process; reports could be shared more broadly too, to learn how the data is analysed and used.

## Knowledge sharing and collective learning

- **Knowledge sharing:** Our aspiration has always been to pass knowledge onto younger generations. This importance should be outlined in The Framework.
  - We need legal access to important cultural sites, plus facilities for camping – this will help us pass on knowledge to younger generations, all cultural knowledge to be shared.

- **Sharing cultural perspectives through stories:** Waterholes need to be looked after by First Nation peoples. It's all part of our songlines but there is nothing there to show our connection – we really want to share these stories.
  - Sharing cultural stories through media, positive stories, help build an understanding of connection to Country. Showing how important water is. There's the opportunity to highlight the importance of water to us.

## Economic and employment opportunities

*Access to meaningful work and economic participation is sought to enable communities to shape their own futures, strengthen cultural resilience and address the historic disadvantage experienced by First Nations communities.*

First Nations economic aspirations are deeply connected to land, water, and cultural knowledge. Economic and employment opportunities are sought in land and water management, including through ranger positions, monitoring, on-ground projects, and pathways into the water sector.

We heard that employment opportunities must be designed in partnership with communities, ensuring they reflect local priorities, values, and strengths.

An ongoing mechanism is sought to provide a sustainable revenue stream to support First Nations outcomes. This is in acknowledgement that others gain economic value from water and land, but there are no benefits back to Nations.

## Additional feedback

### Economic aspirations

- **No economic benefits to Nations:** Economic value of water needs to come back to Country. Our land and waters are being used by farmers and other industries who make a profit. Aboriginal people receive nothing from their gains. We want economic benefits too.
- **Ongoing funding mechanism:** Establish a legally protected First Nations water fund, with transparent administration and allocation for cultural, environmental, and economic initiatives.
- **Business opportunities:** Contract work (in projects and other business) to be given to PBCs. This is additional to the Reconciliation Action Plan employment target.
  - Utilise ranger groups to provide a fee for service.
  - Support PBCs to do business growth.
  - There are other ways to make money from water, you don't have to trade water. Nations could be providing monitoring and doing assessments, there's an economic opportunity there.

### Employment aspirations

- **Jobs on Country:** Water rangers, all along the river, monitoring and science (water quality testing)
  - Groundwater – scientists to monitor, build capacity of a First Nations person to do this work.
- **Create employment pathways:** Provide resourced pathways for employment, education, and capacity building for each Nation, ensuring equitable support across regions.
  - Scholarships e.g. for ecologists. Education is needed everywhere, starting in schools.
  - Few opportunities for career progression in regional areas compared to metropolitan centres.
  - Are there VET programs? Want more scientists, get kids thinking about water.
  - Certificates 1-4 and diplomas are more suitable for kids in the bush.
- **Develop long-term employment strategies:** Call for long-term employment strategies, not just project-based roles.
  - Need better models for employing our mob at all levels in various positions.
  - First Nations Liaison Officers to be a conduit between government agencies and Traditional Owners, to help invest time into building relationships and creating mutual respect. Need people on the ground rather than in policy.
- **Support opportunities for youth:** Provide mentorship and traineeships to link youth to water industry careers.

## Water access and ownership

*Water access through water ownership is an aspiration that can provide the opportunity for a regular income, revenue generation and job creation, reducing dependency on government. Combining water and land ownership provides opportunities for leasing, local water use enterprises and economic development.*

We heard that water ownership provides a chance for succession planning through training younger people, as well as an opportunity for self-determination – the right to choose how and where water is used, and support projects and infrastructure.

Capacity building is needed as part of increasing levels of water ownership – there's a need to better understand water markets and support the business infrastructure needed to own and manage water.

### Additional feedback

- **Increase First Nations water ownership:** Secure Aboriginal ownership and custodianship of water. First Nations organisations must own water allocations to exercise decision-making.
  - Permanent rights. How much water will be set aside?
- **Enabling mechanisms:** Support PBCs and other Aboriginal organisations with resourcing, training, and governance pathways to own and manage water.
- **Support planning to identify water and business needs:** Groups need to be supported to understand

how they want to use water before they know how much allocation of water they need. That's the first step.

- Can be leveraged for economic, social, and environmental outcomes.
- If there is an opportunity for grant applications, can the timing be considered? So there is enough time to spread information to First Nation groups and they have enough time to consider it and get the paperwork for applications completed.
- **Capacity building:** More information on buybacks and water trading would be helpful.
  - We need to understand what's available, how it all works.
  - Chance for younger people to learn about it and get ahead for managing the volume in future.
- **Build understanding:** It will be critical to share why this is happening and why it's important – it will help to reconcile dispossession of water in the past. Get everyone on board with it. Everyone needs to be at the table and in it together. Looking after Country together.

## Safe and secure water for communities

Access to safe and secure water is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of community health and wellbeing. Poor water quality is linked to chronic health issues. We heard that this often means needing to buy bottled water due to unsafe supplies.

Ensuring water quality and community health requires investment in infrastructure and technology that is both effective and culturally appropriate. We heard that these systems must be designed and maintained in partnership with First Nations communities, reflecting local knowledge, priorities, and aspirations.

Prioritising safe and secure access to water is called upon to address immediate health and infrastructure needs, allowing First Nations to continue living and working on Country and upholding their deep cultural and spiritual connections to water and Country.

### Additional feedback

- **Improve water quality:** Safe drinking water is not available in communities, which is impacting health.

Rainwater tanks were taken away and now we have to drink water from the tap. We're drinking calcium, it's not safe to drink.

- We need quality drinking water. Maybe rainwater tanks and desalination plants for clean water.
- **Community led:** Put more funds into community to do this work. Funding needs to be prioritised for mobs' benefit.
  - Allocate targeted funding to communities for water infrastructure, monitoring, and engagement.
  - Communities want to participate in monitoring and infrastructure planning.
- **Collaboration:** Implement cross-agency collaboration for housing and water supply projects.
- **Monitoring and reporting:** Conduct regular water quality assessments and publicly report results so communities know if water guidelines are being met.
  - Establish transparent monitoring systems for water quality and usage.

# Additional PBC Water Forum – November 2025

A draft framework, informed by feedback from the two rounds of workshops, was shared at an additional workshop with PBC representatives on 25-26 November 2025. The additional workshop was requested through Round 2 of workshops to allow each PBC to review the draft framework and provide feedback and endorsement before submitting it to the Government of South Australia for consideration.

Feedback at the workshop supported the key themes and requested further changes or additions to the draft framework. Key feedback included:

- Update the terminology throughout The Framework from 'First Nations' to 'Aboriginal'.
- Be clearer that water is life – water looks after everything.
- Include an overview of cultural authorities in South Australia.
- Include an overview of the National Water Agreement and explain how The Framework and priorities links to national commitments.
- Suggested to translate The Framework into other languages.
- Be clearer about what the next steps will be as part of implementation.
- Highlight legislative reform as a foundational priority.
- Concerns raised around the damage being caused to

cultural heritage due to water using activities; this is urgent to address.

- Concerns around emerging industries and water requirements – where will this water come from? The impacts on water and cultural heritage need to be considered.
- Would like to see Executive and leadership team from all water agencies talking to us. Key decision makers in the room with us to have leader to leader conversations.

In addition to making the above changes, PBC representatives requested more time to consider the draft framework and have discussions with Boards and communities about what is included.

Another PBC Water Forum was requested to bring representatives back together again to provide final feedback and a decision (backed by each PBC) to endorse The Framework. This forum is proposed to be held after the state election in 2026.

## Next steps

An updated draft of The Framework was shared with each PBC for review in December 2025, to be discussed at an additional PBC forum in April-May 2026,

and final feedback prior to submission to the Government of South Australia for consideration.





## 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.

