

# SA Constraints Measures Early Works project

## Pomberuk Co-Design Working Group



The Pomberuk Co-Design Working Group was formed as part of the SA Constraints Measures projects' (SA Constraints) commitment to incorporate Ngarrindjeri Knowledge into better management of enhanced high flows for environmental benefits and community resilience, and to ensure the protection of this culturally significant site. The project received a commendation in the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and Practice in waterway management' category at the 2024 Australian Stream Management Awards.

Pomberuk is part of the Ngarrindjeri and Others Native Title Claim (Part A) and has a deep spiritual, cultural and historical significance to the Ngarrindjeri people. The area is strongly associated with Ngurunderi (Ngarrindjeri Ancestral Being) and Pondi (giant Murray Cod), with the large granite boulder approximately 200 m south-east of Pomberuk believed to be a physical indication of one of Ngurunderi's footprints. The bank at Pomberuk is also the entrance of the Rocky Gully wetlands, which supports a number of Ngarrindjeri Ngartjis (totems).

For the protection of this culturally significant site, SA Constraints is designing bank stabilisation solutions, with construction dependant on additional funding. As Pomberuk is subject to high flows, this work will provide protection for areas of cultural and historical significance during environmental water delivery.

Because of the cultural importance of the site, SA Constraints is committed to ensuring Ngarrindjeri knowledge and views are incorporated into designs and implementation proposals. To achieve

this, a collaborative co-design working group was established, including Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation, Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee and Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority representatives.

Workshops were independently facilitated to achieve consensus across the different Ngarrindjeri stakeholder groups, resulting in agreed processes to ensure the cultural and historical values of the site were enhanced and not negatively impacted by bank stabilisation works. Outcomes from the workshops included:

- agreement to co-design bank stabilisation
- agreed design principles and cultural expectations
- consensus on desired site aesthetics
- Ngarrindjeri guidance on materials and vegetation plantings
- a detailed bank stabilisation design.

In addition, cultural heritage surveys and Ngarrindjeri Yarlumar Ruwe (Sea Country) assessments were undertaken to achieve a holistic approach to incorporating Ngarrindjeri cultural values and knowledge for Caring for Country.



*Pomberuk area where the working group is co-designing the bank stabilisation.*

## **Embracing First Nations involvement and expertise through key decision-making roles during design, planning and delivery.**

The SA Constraints Measures project bank stabilisation design for Pomberuk was driven by the Ngarrindjeri vision for the site, and broader area of Mobilong and Toora, to be a place for passive recreation, cultural connection and enhancement of the natural environment.

A co-design working group was established and, along with Yarlular Ruwe (Sea Country) assessments and on-Country workshops, enabled opportunities to bring together contemporary and older Ngarrindjeri knowledge, provide a space where Ngarrindjeri could share the importance of Pomberuk, and have cultural knowledge guide the design process.

In undertaking the bank stabilisation design process, the working group collaboratively worked to mitigate any risks to cultural heritage from bank stabilisation works and shaped project outputs with a focus on acknowledging the cultural connection to the lands and waters, and an

understanding that ecological and cultural values are closely intertwined.

Members were actively involved in each step of the bank stabilisation design process, offering valuable input and advice, including sharing knowledge with engineers regarding appropriate materials and aesthetic considerations for Pomberuk, with the aim of enriching cultural practice and experience.

Members also provided advice on plant selections, with the incorporation of rushes that could be utilised in the traditional practice of weaving, included in designs.

Group members included representatives from:

- Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation
- Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee
- Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority
- Rural City of Murray Bridge
- SA Water
- Department for Environment and Water.

## **Incorporating effective traditional Aboriginal knowledge and management practices, which enhances the overall outcomes of the project.**

In February 2023, Ngarrindjeri community members and the Department for Environment and Water met on Ruwe (Country) at Pomberuk to undertake Yarlular Ruwe (Sea Country) assessments. The assessments encompassed the area between the railway precinct and the connecting Rocky Gully Wetland, located in the northern region of Murray Bridge.

The Ngarrindjeri Yarlular Ruwe assessment is a tool used to enable a holistic approach to Caring for Country. The assessment aims to understand the cultural health of an area by incorporating Ngarrindjeri knowledge and culture, taking into account Ngartjis (totems), the surrounding environments and the site's ecology, as experienced by Ngarrindjeri people.

The Yarlular Ruwe assessments play a valuable role in the SA Constraints Pomberuk project by heavily guiding the design and implementation of key activities, informing the effective management of associated risks, and leveraging opportunities within the landscape.

The Yarluwar Ruwe assessment process will ensure Ngarrindjeri values, traditions and heritage are protected, enhanced and managed during current and future on-ground works, ultimately ensuring Ngarrindjeri knowledge is incorporated and cultural values are protected, contributing to the wellbeing of Ngarrindjeri people.

Ngarrindjeri Yarluwar Ruwe assessments contribute to ensuring Ngarrindjeri values are incorporated into the design of bank stabilisation works being delivered at Pomberuk, and are an excellent example of project staff and First Nations people working together to re-engage with the land and move forward for cultural and ecological benefits.

## **Providing a platform for recognition, trust, empowerment, knowledge sharing and ongoing support for traditional Aboriginal knowledge and practice in waterway management.**

The Pomberuk Co-Design Working Group was established to ensure project strategies and actions were shaped by Ngarrindjeri obligations to protect their cultural heritage and maintain their rights and responsibilities to Country. It built a platform for Ngarrindjeri shared knowledge to be incorporated into current and future works at the Pomberuk site, and a tangible way of committing to the Ngarrindjeri Healing Country Plan, enabling Traditional Owners to work with the SA Constraints team to find areas of common ground and work towards a more sustainable future.

The first task of the working group was to develop an agreed set of design principles for any works that will occur at Pomberuk. The final key principles are:

- Protect and enhance Ngarrindjeri cultural heritage values
- Create a place for passive recreational enjoyment by bringing together land, water, culture and people
- Improve the connectivity of the wetlands to the river
- Create better habitat and natural environment
- Use materials that suit the natural features of the location, such as local stone and native plants

- Be cognisant of what else might occur at Pomberuk/Hume Reserve beyond the bank stabilisation works and not preclude opportunities that might emerge through that design process

Planning is underway to progress Pomberuk site designs to construction, which will require further input from the Co-Design Working Group and the broader Ngarrindjeri community. This will include knowledge of Pomberuk site management and its connection to the Rocky Gully wetlands.

The Pomberuk Co-design Working Group is now an established forum that will continue to foster Ngarrindjeri collaboration, knowledge sharing, communication and involvement to enhance the management of the River Murray in future works.



*Pomberuk area where the working group is co-designing the bank stabilisation.*

### **More information**

For more information on the Pomberuk Co-Design Working Group or the SA Constraints Measures project:

- Email us at [SAconstraints@sa.gov.au](mailto:SAconstraints@sa.gov.au)
- Visit [environment.sa.gov.au/constraints](https://environment.sa.gov.au/constraints)

*The South Australia Constraints Measures project is being delivered by the Government of South Australia and funded by the Australian Government, as part of the Basin Plan.*