



First Nations Environmental Water Guidance Project

*MLDRIN Member Nations
2020-21 Priorities Report*



Contents

An important note on Nations' participation in environmental water planning	2
1. Background to the Project.....	4
2. About this report	5
3. Participating Nations and data collection	6
4. Using and analysing the contributions.....	10
4.1 Themes	11
4.2 Data analysis - Categories and Sub-categories	12
5. 2020-21 Priorities.....	14
5.1 Priority themes	14
5.1.1 <i>Waterways and places in need of watering</i>	14
5.1.2 <i>Species in need of watering</i>	20
5.1.3 <i>2020-21 Priorities for MDBA categories</i>	22
5.2 Issues and participation themes	31
5.2.1 <i>Threats and Issues</i>	31
5.2.2 <i>Preferences for participation and involvement</i>	33
5. Conclusion and next steps.....	36
5.1 Recommended actions	38



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An important note on Nations' participation in environmental water planning

MLDRIN acknowledge the First Nations of the Southern Murray Darling Basin and their elders past, present and emerging. First Nations hold the knowledge, stories, custodial obligations and cultural knowledge that have always ensured the health of waterways and river Country.

First Nations' sovereignty and active custodianship over Country, land and waters has never been ceded or abdicated. Each Nation holds the cultural authority to speak for water, rivers and river Country within their traditional region. MLDRIN member Nations have articulated our perspectives, rights and responsibilities relating to water management in the Echuca Declaration 2007.

First Nations across the Southern Basin wish to clarify that by participating in the FNEWG Project and environmental water planning more generally, no Nation has approved of or authorised the settler-colonial water regime that has been imposed on their Country. The Echuca Declaration states that 'the Crown, Colonies, Commonwealth and States of Australia have been negligent in the management of the lands and waters of the Indigenous Nations causing ecosystem collapse, severe water quality degradation, extreme stress upon river ecologies and species extinction at a scale and rate which is unprecedented.' This negligence has brought 'gross and widespread detriment to the cultural economy of the Indigenous Nations and degradation of significant landscapes and sites of spiritual and cultural importance'.

First Nations fundamentally oppose the commodification and compartmentalising of water into 'consumptive' and 'environmental' resources. Our vision for sustaining Country encompasses a holistic understanding of land, water and people as interconnected elements.

The nature of the responses provided by participating Nations for this project are limited by the compartmentalised nature of the water management regime and by limited resources and constrained access to Country. The detail, depth and complexity of Nations' localised water-related objectives and interests cannot be conveyed in this report alone. Water holders and water management agencies must continue to strengthen engagement with all Southern Basin First Nations to support those Nations to articulate objectives for water management and shape water planning in a way that supports self-determination. .

Southern Basin First Nations Environmental Watering Priorities Statement 2020-21

Representatives of sixteen First Nations across the Southern Murray Darling Basin have made information about their priorities for the use of environmental water in 2020-21 available, as part of the First Nations Environmental Water Guidance project.

*First Nations share common concern for **all** major rivers across the region. Notably, multiple Nations submitted priorities relating to the Murrumbidgee, Baaka (Darling River), Lachlan, Campaspe, Murray and Edwards-Wakool systems. First Nations understand that declining river health and low-flows in one part of the Basin can affect communities and cultural outcomes across the region.*

Nations want to see improvements in water quality and the volume and timing of flows in all major rivers, and particularly in degraded river systems. Improved seasonality of flows, informed by First Nations' science and traditional knowledge, is a key to sustaining the cultural health of major waterways. Addressing barriers and constraints, such as barriers to fish movement, is essential to sustain the interconnectivity, which underpins our stories and cultural values. Improving the health of tributary waterways and ensuring adequate flows, is also a key to revitalising major rivers. Nations recognise that Basin Plan targets for environmental water recovery are inadequate to support revival of the ecological and cultural health of our waterways. More must be done to restore the balance.

Participating Nations' contributions stressed the significance of wetlands, billabongs and floodplains. Nations want to see life return to these culturally significant places through watering activities that create connectivity between rivers and floodplains and restore the hydrological cycles of degraded wetlands, thereby supporting cultural values and resources.

Participating Nations identified key plant and animal species that are most in need of watering in the 2020-21 watering year. These species are all of totemic significance to diverse clans and Nations. Key culturally significant fish such as Murray Cod, Golden Perch (Yellowbelly) and catfish were identified as priorities by most Nations. More than half of all contributing Nations highlighted black swans, pelicans and duck species as culturally significant waterbirds that would benefit from environmental watering. Improved health and abundance of old man weed and other medicinal plants were noted as priorities for vegetation, alongside improved outcomes for river red gums, black box, cumbungi and lignum.

Critically, Nations stressed the importance of considering outcomes beyond fish, waterbirds and vegetation. Nations also want to see improved outcomes for aquatic fauna such as turtles, yabbies, mussels, frogs, platypus and rakali (water rat). The contributions also stressed the importance of environmental watering in sustaining healthy populations of important terrestrial fauna such as kangaroo and emu.

Participating Nations have identified a range of key threats to the cultural health of waterways as well as preferences for improved participation in environmental water planning for 2020-21. Water holders should consider these preferences alongside the detailed, locally specific watering objectives produced by Nations. It is essential that water holders continue, and strengthen, direct engagement with First Nations to empower our participation in environmental water planning and delivery.

1. Background to the Project

First Nations in the Murray Darling Basin want environmental water, held by the Commonwealth and Basin States, to be managed in a way that supports our objectives, cultural values and connection to Country. Water management agencies have reciprocal obligations to give genuine and realistic consideration to First Nations values and uses when making decisions about the use of environmental water. The First Nations Environmental Water Objectives (FNEWG) project aims to bring these interests and obligations together to improve the health and wellbeing of Country and communities.

The Basin Plan requires the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) to have regard to First Nations' values and uses when preparing the Basin-wide Annual Environmental Watering Priorities ('the Annual Priorities') and the Basin-wide Environmental Watering Strategy ('BWS'). MLDRIN, the MDBA and Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) have been working to establish an effective and equitable mechanism for Aboriginal environmental watering objectives and outcomes to be included into the Environmental Watering Framework for the Murray- Darling Basin.

In October 2018, MLDRIN produced a project plan for the FNEWG project and in December 2018, MDBA and MLDRIN completed a funding agreement to resource this important work. The FNEWG Project will take place over the following three stages, through to June 2020:

- Stage 1 - Identify Nations to participate in the development of 2020-2021 Priorities: MLDRIN will produce a Collaborative Design Report to detail Nations' interests, resourcing needs and participation challenges.
- Step 2 - Work with Nations to collate watering objectives: MLDRIN will engage with Nations and collate Nations' watering objectives into a report and convene a forum to produce advice to the MDBA and Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWO)
- Step 3 - Convene a Nations' Review Workshop: Nations will review the success of the 2020-21 Project and MLDRIN will lead development of a project plan for the 2021-22 planning cycle.

This report fulfils MLDRIN's commitment to produce an Environmental Water Objectives Summary Report, as part of Stage 2 of the Project. This report will be used to inform further discussion between MLDRIN Member Nations and contribute to the preparation of the 2020-21 Annual Priorities. As the CEWO and State water holders plan delivery actions for the coming year, these First Nations objectives will be part of the high-level guidance that informs how and where environmental water should be used.

2. About this report

This report provides a summary and analysis of environmental watering objectives and priorities for the 2020-21 watering year, provided by sixteen Nations across the Southern Murray Darling Basin. Section 3 details the participating Nations and methods used by each Nation to collate their objectives.

The report aggregates information provided by the sixteen participating Nations to identify shared objectives, priorities and issues across eight key themes including:

- Waterways and places in need of water
- Species in need of water
- 2020-21 Priorities for MDBA categories:
 - Native Fish
 - Vegetation
 - Water birds; and
 - Flows and connectivity
- Waterway threats and impacts; and
- Preferences for First Nations' involvement and participation

Section 4 details the method used to aggregate inputs from the Nations and produce the lists, charts and summary findings included in the 2020-21 Priorities section (Section 5). The Conclusion and Recommended Actions section details options for use of this information in the preparation of the 2020-21 Annual Priorities and identifies key recommendations to ensure First Nations inputs are respected and actioned through the environmental watering framework.



3. Participating Nations and data collection

MLDRIN provided information and guidance about the FNEWG project through regular communication with member Nations. Details of the FNEWG Project design were discussed at MLDRIN Full Gatherings in Wagga Wagga (November 2018), Canberra (April 2019) and Mildura (November 2019). In addition, correspondence, face-to-face meetings and phone calls were used to engage directly with Delegates and Nation representatives. MLDRIN distributed an information sheet and Nation Priorities Template to assist Delegates to collate relevant information.

Representatives from sixteen Nations across the Southern Basin submitted inputs to inform the 2020-21 Annual Priorities. A variety of methods were used by Nations to collate this information, sometimes working in collaboration with MLDRIN staff. The *Collaborative Design* submitted as part of Stage 2 of the project details the significant disparity between Nations across the Southern Basin in terms of resourcing, internal capacity, governance arrangements and project experience. These differences mean that some Nations are better equipped to provide detailed input into environmental water planning than others. The *Collaborative Design* report details options to address this disparity.

Methods used by Nations and MLDRIN to collate information for the priorities included:

- One-on-one interviews with MLDRIN Nation Delegate, with information collected by MLDRIN staff and approved by Delegates.
- Informal community discussions and interviews led by Nation delegates, with information submitted by Delegates
- Formal internal consultation processes with Advisory Groups established within Nations, with information submitted by an authorised contact of Aboriginal Water Officer
- Individual responses to MLDRIN's Nation Priorities Template, with information collated and submitted by Delegates

Table 1 below lists the sixteen Nations which provided inputs to the 2020-21 Priorities Report, the relevant delegates or contact points and methods used to collate contributions.

Table 1: Contributing Nations, with details of Delegates, contributors and methods used to collate inputs

Nation	State	Delegate/Participants	Method
Nyeri Nyeri	VIC	Delegate: Susan Baxter	Nyeri Nyeri Nation is part of the First Peoples of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (FPMMAC). The Nyeri Nyeri Delegate wished to submit information independently to the FNEWG project. MLDRIN staff conducted a face to face interview with the Delegate, who was then able to review her responses and seek input from other community members. Objectives and outcomes developed by the FPMMAC for the Northern Victoria Water Resource Plan have also been included in the detailed Nations Priorities spreadsheet.
Latje Latje	VIC	Delegate: Melissa Jones. Participants: Shane Jones	Latje Latje Nation is part of the FPMMAC. MLDRIN Staff engaged directly with Nation Delegate in an initial face to face meeting, to decide on an approach for collating inputs. A second meeting was held with the Delegate and another Latji Latji community member, in which MLDRIN staff assisted them to address the questions in the Nation Priorities Template. Objectives and outcomes developed by the FPMMAC for the Northern Victoria Water Resource Plan have also been included in the detailed Nations Priorities spreadsheet.
Barapa Barapa	VIC/ NSW	Delegate: Neville Whyman	Inputs from Barapa Barapa Nation were collected during a half-day, one-on-one interview with the Delegate, conducted by MLDRIN Staff. The Barapa Barapa delegate was also happy for the Nations detailed Objectives and Outcomes, developed for the Northern Victoria Water Resource Plan to be included. These have been listed in the detailed Nations Priorities spreadsheet.
Wemba Wemba	VIC/ NSW	Delegate: Stewart Taylor	Wemba Wemba is a cross border nation with a strong platform for involvement in water planning processes on the NSW side through the Weraï Land & Water Corporation. The MLDRIN Delegate completed the Nation Priorities Template, focussing on the NSW portion of Wamba Wamba Country, drawing on interviews with key elders and information from existing

			Watering Plans developed by the corporation.
Tati Tati/Wadi Wadi	VIC/NS W	Delegate: Brendan Kennedy. Participants: Chris Kennedy, Melissa Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, Kathleen Terrick and Joyce Kennedy	MLDRIN staff provided a briefing on the FNEWG project to Tati Tati/Wadi Wadi community members during a workshop on-Country in mid 2019. The group decided to produce a report detailing their contributions, based on conversations taking place for the development of a seasonal calendar. A detailed report was prepared by Tati Tat/Wadi Wadi community members, with support from the Delegate, and submitted to MLDRIN. Tati Tati/Wadi Wadi Objectives and Outcomes, developed for the Northern Victoria Water Resource Plan have been listed in the detailed Nations Priorities spreadsheet.
Dja Dja Wurrung	VIC	Participants: <i>Kapa Gatjin</i> Water Advisory Group members, Aboriginal Water Officer (AWO) - Caitlyn Dunolly-Lee	Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation have a Traditional Owner Settlement Agreement with the State of Victoria and employ an Aboriginal Water Officer (AWO) that coordinates the <i>Kapa Gatjin</i> Water Advisory Group. The AWO submitted detailed inputs on behalf of <i>Kapa Gatjin</i> for the FNEWG Project, utilising MLDRIN's Nation Priorities Template. Dja Dja Wurrung Objectives and Outcomes, developed for the Northern Victoria Water Resource Plan have been listed in the detailed Nations Priorities spreadsheet.
Taungurung	VIC	Participants: <i>Baan Ganalina</i> , Water Advisory Group members, AWO - Alejandro Voysest	Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation employ an Aboriginal Water Officer (AWO) that coordinates the <i>Baan Ganalina</i> Water Advisory Group. The AWO submitted detailed inputs on behalf of <i>Baan Ganalina</i> for the FNEWG Project, utilising MLDRIN's Nation Priorities Template. Taungurung Objectives and Outcomes, developed for the Northern Victoria Water Resource Plan have been listed in the detailed Nations Priorities spreadsheet.
Waywurru	VIC	Delegate: Liz Thorpe	The Waywurru Delegate participated in a face to face interview with MLDRIN staff, responding to the Nation Priorities Template and reviewing the results of a recently completed Aboriginal Waterway Assessment.
Wadi Wadi	VIC	Delegate: Judy Baxter. Participants: members of the Kennedy and Firebrace family groups	The Wadi Wadi Delegate conducted interview with Elders and community members on Wadi Wadi Country and collated inputs in response to MLDRIN's Nation Priorities Template.

Mutthi Mutthi	NSW	Participants: Mutthi Mutthi Elders: Patsy Winch and Maureen Reyland, Kaleana Reyland	MLDRIN staff coordinated with Mutthi Mutthi elders to collate their priorities. A face-to-face interview was conducted to outline the project and work through the Nation Priorities Template. Mutthi Mutthi have had limited opportunity to participate in environmental water management, and welcomed the opportunity to participate.
Yita Yita	NSW	Participants: Bobby Kennedy, Chris Kennedy	Community members Chris and Bobby Kennedy took the lead in consulting with Yita Yita community and collate inputs based on the Nation Priorities Template. MLDRIN staff provided a project briefing and assistance with interpreting the Template questions.
Nari Nari	NSW	Delegate: Rene Woods	The Nari Nari Tribal Council and Nari Nari Delegate provided input in response to the Nation Priorities Template, drawing on detailed watering objectives contained in existing Country Plans and other water management plans developed by the Nation.
Maurura	NSW/S A	Delegate: Kingsley Abdulla	Maurura is a member of the First People of the River Murray & Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (RMMAC). The Maurura Delegate compiled responses to the Nation Priorities Template based on local knowledge, existing water planning contributions and discussions with community members. Unfortunately, due to competing commitments MLDRIN staff were unable to attend an RMMAC board meeting to workshop priorities responses.
Ngaywang	SA	Delegate: Christine Abdulla	Ngaywang is a member of the First People of the River Murray & Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (RMMAC). MLDRIN staff conducted a one-on-one interview with the Ngaywang Delegate, to address questions in the Nation Priorities Template based on local knowledge and discussions with other community and RMMAC members. Unfortunately, due to competing commitments MLDRIN staff were unable to attend an RMMAC board meeting to workshop priorities responses.
Wiradjuri (Northern region)	NSW	Delegate: Coral Peckham	The Northern Wiradjuri Nation is based around the Dubbo region and includes the Macquarie River. MLDRIN staff travelled to Dubbo and conducted a face-to-face interview with the Delegate and an on-Country trip to discuss contributions to the 2020-21 priorities, using the

			Nation Priorities Template .
Ngunnawal	ACT	Delegate: Brad Bell	MLDRIN staff conducted a face-to-face interview with the Ngunnawal Delegate and another Ngunnawal community member during a visit to ACT. The Delegate responded to questions provided in the Nation Priorities Template, reflecting on Objectives and Outcomes contained in a draft ACT Water Resource Plan.

While all Southern Basin First Nations were invited to participate in the FNEWG project and submit contributions for the 2020-21 priorities, MLDRIN has not been able to secure responses or inputs from the following Nations

- Yorta Yorta
- Ngarrindjeri
- Barkandji
- Wolgalu
- Weki Weki
- Ngintait
- Dhudhuroa
- Wiradjuri (Southern and central region)

There are a range of reasons why some Nations have not participated in the 2020-21 project, including: competing Nation business and project obligations, withdrawal from active MLDRIN membership, communication challenges with delegates and Covid-19 social distancing restrictions. MLDRIN urges the MDBA and the CEWO to work directly with Nations that have not participated in the current project, to ensure their priority waterways, key species and objectives are considered in ongoing planning. As MLDRIN refines the FNEWG project through subsequent iterations of the environmental water planning cycle, it is hoped that a strengthened understanding of the project benefits will support these Nations will to submit detailed contributions.

4. Using and analysing the contributions

The information provided by participating Nations is a valuable input to water planning across the Southern Basin. Nations' contributions include detailed, locally-specific preferences and objectives relating to waterways, key species and cultural values. MLDRIN's approach to organising this information for maximum benefit and impact is informed by two key principles:

Respecting each Nations' contribution: Each Nations' individual input stands alone as a piece of guidance for how environmental water should be managed on Country. MLDRIN has collated the full response provided by each Nation into a consolidated Nations' Priorities Spreadsheet which is included as an appendix to this report. Water holders should refer to the individual Nations' inputs, and engage directly through Nations' nominated decision making processes, to inform water planning for specific sites and waterways.

Identifying shared priorities: In order to guide the way environmental water is managed across the whole Southern Basin, MLDRIN has also conducted an analysis (see below for details) to identify shared priorities across the eight key themes. The intention of this analysis is to highlight waterways, species and watering needs that were most frequently identified across all Nations' contributions. The intention is **not** to identify 'winner and losers' or trade one set of priorities off against another.

The information in this report should be considered in light of these two key principles. All Nations' priorities are of equal value. By understanding shared priorities, water managers, working in collaboration with First Nations, can ensure that water planning maximises positive impacts.

4.1 Themes

MLDRIN used the Nvivo social research software to identify shared priorities across eight key themes:

- Waterways and places in need of water
- Species in need of water
- 2020-21 Priorities for MDBA categories:
 - Native Fish
 - Vegetation
 - Water birds and
 - Flows and connectivity
- Waterway threats and impacts; and
- Preferences for involvement and participation.

The Nvivo analysis involved the following steps:

- All Nations' priorities inputs were compiled into a consolidated Nations Priorities Spreadsheet (see Appendix 1) and uploaded into Nvivo.
- MLDRIN's Research and Training Officer reviewed all the inputs and created a structure of 'nodes', or categories and sub-categories, in Nvivo to capture the eight key themes and sub-categories within those themes. (A detailed breakdown of these nodes is included in Appendix 2.) For each of the eight key

themes (eg. 'places in need of watering, 'species in need of watering'), there were numerous sub-categories for species and place names. Further sub-categories were created based on a reading of the references contained within the Nations' inputs.

- The Research and Training Officer recorded all references in the Nation contributions under the relevant sub-categories.
- The Research and Training Officer also recorded 'attribute' information against each of the 16 participating nations' inputs. Attributes included: the state(s) or territory in which each nation is located (noting that four nations are cross-border nations); survey respondent/delegate details; and each nation's existing participation levels in Aboriginal Waterway Assessments (AWAs) and Water Resource Plans (WRPs). This information was used to generate a 'snapshot' of existing participation and involvement across the Southern Basin, as well as in each state and territory.
- The Research and Training Officer ran 'queries' in Nvivo to identify the frequency of references to particular sub-categories under each theme.
- The results were exported to an Excel spreadsheet, which was used to filter and sort the data to generate tables of results. The process of filtering and sorting the data in Excel was used to generate outputs such as: lists of Basin-wide priority waterways, priority key species, and preferences for involvement across the Basin and in specific states and territories.
- The results of these queries and analysis are included in Section 5 below.

4.2 Data analysis - Categories and Sub-categories

During the data analysis process, responses to the eight key themes were organised into categories and sub-categories based on the content of Nations' inputs. The following categories were used to organise the responses:

- Places
- Species
- Issues and Impacts
- Objectives and Aspirations
- Other themes.

These categories were further divided into sub-categories based on a reading of Nations' responses. Sub-categories for Places and Species were created based on references to specific places and species names that occurred in Nations' contributions.

Within the 'Issues and Impacts' and 'Objectives and Aspirations' categories, sub-categories were determined based on a reading of Nations' responses. These were organised under Ecological, Management and System-wide, Participation and Involvement, Site-specific, and Social sub-categories, which were used to generate

results such as priorities for flows and connectivity, waterway threats and impacts, and preferences for participation and involvement.

Sub-categories under the 'Other themes' category were determined based on a reading of Nations' responses to a question in the Nations Priorities Template, which asked Nations to identify other key themes or categories that should be include in the framework for setting the Annual Priorities.



5. 2020-21 Priorities

5.1 Priority themes

Nations provided contributions to the 2020-21 Basin Annual Environmental Watering Priorities in response to a set of questions provided by MLDRIN in the Nations Priorities Template. The questions covered:

- Objectives developed for Water Resource Plans, Aboriginal Waterway Assessments or other plans of management
- Waterways or wetlands most in need of watering in the 2020-21 watering year
- Plant or animal species most in need of watering in the 2020-21 watering year
- Preferences for involvement in environmental water planning in the 2020-21 watering year
- Priorities under the four themes used by MDBA to prepare the Annual Priorities (River flows and connectivity, Vegetation, Water Birds and Fish)
- Key threats to the cultural health of waterways; and
- Guidance on other priority themes that should be considered

The results below highlight shared responses to these key questions and other issues that were identified through analysis.

A note on tables and charts: All tables included in the results section below have a common format. In the middle column, they show the frequency of references to a particular priority category (eg 'Murray River' or 'medicinal plants'). In the right hand column they show the number of Nations which have made references that fall under that category. This format allows the reader to see the total number of references to each priority, across all Nations, as well as the number of individual Nations who made reference to that priority. All charts used in the report have been produced using the total number of references to each category, rather than the number of Nations that referred to each category.

5.1.1 Waterways and places in need of watering

MLDRIN reviewed all Nations' responses to highlight the places and waterways that were most frequently identified as being in need of watering in 2020-21. Results of this analysis are shown in two forms. The first (Figure 1 and Table 2) shows the most frequently mentioned places and waterways by waterway *type*. This allows us to gain an understanding of which kinds of waterways were most referenced in the Nations' responses. The second (Table 3) lists the ten most frequently referenced waterways by *name*, showing the number of individual references and the number of Nations who referred to each waterway or place.

Figure 1: Waterways and places in need of watering, by type

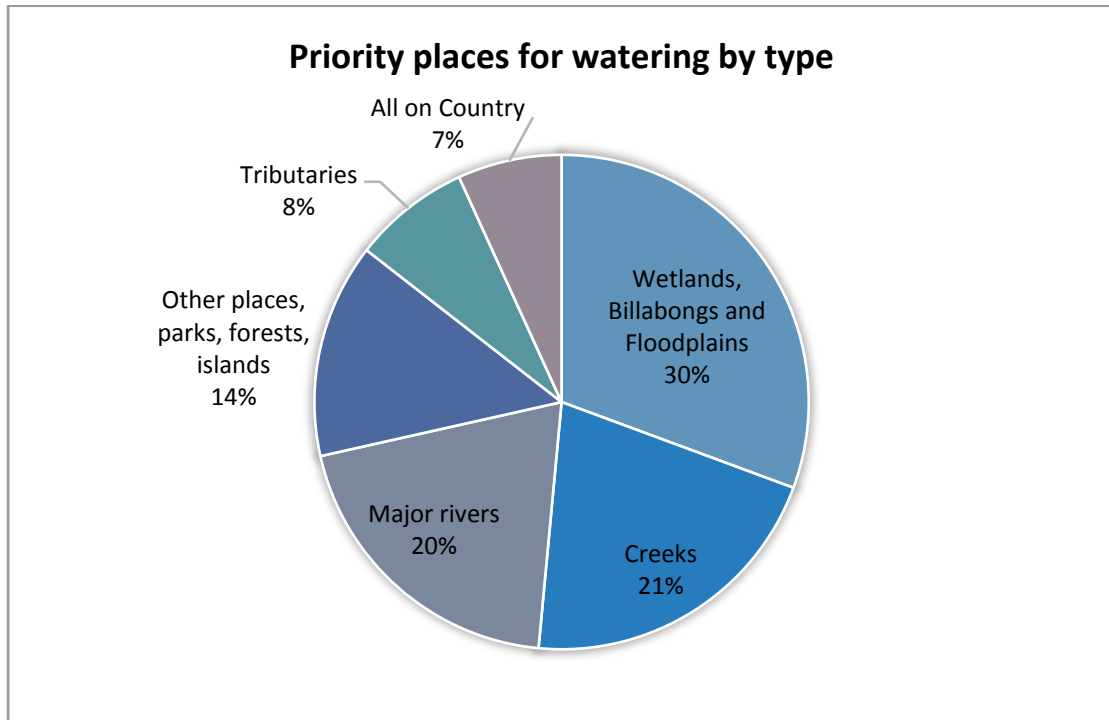


Table 2: Waterways and places in need of watering, by type

Priority places for watering by type	References (out of 235)	Number of Nations
Wetlands, Billabongs and Floodplains	72	13
Creeks	49	12
Major rivers	47	14
Other places, parks, forests, islands	33	10
Tributaries	18	5
All on Country	16	12

The results shown in Figure 1 and Table 2 highlight the importance of ‘lateral connectivity’ through the frequent references to wetlands, billabongs, floodplains and creeks in Nations’ contributions. Although there were fewer specific references to major rivers, fourteen of the sixteen participating Nations made reference to management of flows in the main channel of key rivers. Twelve nations also highlighted a holistic view of water management, referring to ‘whole of Country’ outcomes in their contributions.

Table 3: Waterways and places in need of watering, by name

Priority places for watering by name	References (out of 202)	Number of Nations
Murrumbidgee River	10	4
Campaspe River	9	2
Tang Tang Swamp	9	1
Coliban River	8	1
Baarka (Darling River)	5	4
Lachlan River	5	3
Lake Boort	5	1
Murray River	4	3
Ita Lake	4	1
Margooya Lagoon	4	1

Tables 4 to 8, below, list the most frequently referenced waterways by name, according to the waterway type categories used in Table 2. It is important to note the results shown in Tables 3 to 8 identify the number of references to specific waterways and places. As such, frequent references to a specific waterway made by any one contributing Nation will be reflected in the results. The far right column in these tables indicates the number of individual Nations which referred to each waterway or place in their contributions. This result helps to identify common priority waterways across different Nations.

Table 4: Wetlands, Billabongs and Floodplains in need of watering, by name

Wetlands, Billabongs and Floodplains	References (out of 72)	Number of Nations
Tang Tang Swamp	9	1
Lake Boort	5	1
Ita Lake	4	1
Margooya Lagoon	4	1
Billabongs (general)	3	3
Dry Lake	3	2

Floodplains (general)	3	3
Gayini Nimmie Caira	3	1
Great Cumbung Swamp	3	1
Lake Lyndger	3	1
Reedy Lake	3	2
Yanga Lake	3	1

Table 5: Creeks in need of watering, by name

Creeks	References (out of 49)	Number of Nations
Bendigo Creek	7	1
Reedy Creek	3	2
Abercrombie Creek	2	1
Billabong Creek	2	2
Box Creek	2	1
Cooliqungah Creek	2	1
Creeks (general)	2	1
Fiddlers Creek	2	1
Five Mile Creek	2	1
Kinypanial Creek	2	1
Old Camp Creek	2	1
Pimpari Creek	2	1
Uara Creek	2	1
Yanga Creek	2	1

Table 6: Major rivers in need of watering, by name

Major Rivers	References (out of 47)	Number of Nations
Murrumbidgee	10	4
Campaspe	9	2
Baarka (Darling)	5	4
Lachlan	5	3
Murray	4	3
Edward River	2	2
Goulburn River (Waring)	2	1
King River	2	1
Loddon River	2	1
Macquarie River	2	1
Wakool River	2	2

Table 7: Other places in need of watering, by name

Other places	References (out of 33)	Number of Nations
Weraí Forest	3	2
Balranald	2	1
Deniliquin	2	1
Gunbower	2	1
Mildura	2	2
Oxley	2	1

Table 8: Tributaries in need of watering, by name

Tributaries	References (out of 18)	Number of Nations
Coliban River	8	1
Coliban (Lower)	2	1
Stony Creek	2	1
Yass River (Yaa)	2	1

Of note in the above tables is the recurrence of references to the Murrumbidgee River and Baaka (Darling River) in contributions provided by multiple Nations (four Nations for each). Likewise the Lachlan, Murray, Campaspe and Edwards-Wakool river systems were all mentioned by multiple Nations. It is important to note that a number of Nations identified the Baaka (Darling River) as a priority for watering, despite the fact that this river is not part of their traditional Country. This result highlights the interconnectedness of cultural outcomes and the importance of a whole-of-system perspective. First Nations understand that cultural responsibility for sustaining river health, and the outcomes of custodianship, extend beyond the boundaries of one Nation's Country. Declining river health and low flows in the Baaka affects outcomes across the whole Southern Basin.

In providing these results, MLDRIN is not making a determination of which waterways and places should benefit from watering in 2020-21. Rather, these responses were to serve as an input for discussions between First Nation participants in a forum planned as part of the FNEWG project. This forum would consider a range of other qualitative inputs as well as information about the Resource Availability Scenario. Due to Covid-19 restrictions MLDRIN was not able to convene this forum.



5.1.2 Species in need of watering

MLDRIN reviewed all Nations' responses to highlight the plant and animal species that were most frequently identified as being in need of watering in 2020-21. Results are shown in three tables below. Table 9 shows the most frequently referenced species across *all* classes (fish, birds, mammals, plants etc). Again the tables show the number of references to each species, while the far right-hand column shows the number of individual Nations that referenced that species.

Table 9: Most frequently referenced species in need of watering, all classes

Key Species (All)		
Species	Total references (out of 396)	Number of Nations
Murray Cod	18	15
Turtles	14	11
Yellowbelly (Golden Perch, Callop)	13	12
River Red Gum	13	8
Macroinvertebrates (general)	12	6
Yabbies	12	10
Frogs	12	8
Native fish (general or all)	11	7
Birds (general or all)	11	8
Kangaroo (all species)	11	9
Catfish	10	10
Old Man Weed	10	7
Black Box	10	7
Pelican	10	8
Swan	10	9
Emu	10	9
Murray Cray	10	7
Shrimp	10	8

A number of contributing Nations noted the absence of aquatic fauna and other terrestrial fauna in the established priority categories used by MDBA to determine the Annual Priorities. From a First Nations' perspective, water is a source of life, sustaining healthy Country and impacting on outcomes for all classes of life in addition to fish, waterbirds and vegetation. Therefore, tables 10 and 11 below list the species that were most frequently referenced under two additional categories: aquatic fauna and other fauna.

Table 10: Most frequently referenced species in need of watering, Aquatic fauna

Aquatic Fauna		
Species	Total references (out of 76)	Number of nations
Turtles	14	11
Yabbies	12	10
Frogs	12	8
Murray Cray	10	7
Shrimp	10	8
Platypus	7	6
Mussels	6	4
Rakali (Water rat)	5	5



Table 11: Most frequently referenced species in need of watering, other fauna

Other Fauna		
Species	Total references (out of 51)	Number of nations
Macroinvertebrates	12	6
Kangaroo	11	9
Emu	10	9
Possum	3	3
Quoll	3	1
Wallaby	3	3
Dingo	2	1
Goanna	2	2

The frequency of references to aquatic fauna (turtles, yabbies, frogs) and other terrestrial fauna (kangaroo, emu) is an important feature of the overall results for species. While these species are not currently considered as part of the MDBA's established framework for setting Annual Priorities, these are clearly of significance to First Nations. They may also be seen as important indicator species, for understanding the cultural health of water and waterways.

5.1.3 2020-21 Priorities for MDBA categories

The following three tables identify the most frequently referenced priorities for fish, vegetation and waterbirds. These priority categories were drawn from the established framework which the MDBA uses to identify the Annual Priorities each year. Section 5.1.3.4 below details responses to the River Flows and Connectivity category. Participating Nations were asked to identify their highest order priorities for each of these categories, but also to reflect on whether the four established categories were adequately inclusive of outcomes relevant to First Nations.

5.1.3.1 Priorities for Native Fish

Table 12 lists the most frequently referenced priorities for Native Fish. The shared significance of Murray Cod, Golden Perch and Catfish, to many Nations is clearly evident in the results.

Table 12: Most frequently referenced priorities for Native Fish

Native Fish		
Species	Total references (out of 70)	Number of Nations
Murray Cod	18	15
Yellowbelly (Golden Perch, Callop)	13	12
Native fish (general or all)	11	7
Catfish	10	10
Silver perch	4	4
Blackfish	2	2
Black Bream	2	2
Macquarie Perch	2	2
Smaller fish (general)	2	2

5.1.3.2 Priorities for Vegetation

Table 13 lists the most frequently referenced priorities for vegetation. A number of species were identified as a priority for watering by multiple Nations, most notably: River Red Gum, Old Man Weed and other medicinal plants, Black Box, lignum and cumbungi.

Table 13: Most frequently referenced priorities for vegetation

Vegetation		
Species	Total references (out of 114)	Number of nations
River Red Gum	13	8
Old Man Weed	10	7
Black Box	10	7
Cumbungi	9	6
Lignum	8	5
Medicinal plants (general)	7	9

Kangaroo grass	4	2
Nardoo	3	3
Black Wattle	3	2
Weaving grasses (general)	2	1
Yam daisies	2	1
Native tobacco	2	2
Phragmites	2	2

5.1.3.3 Priorities for Water birds

Table 14 lists the most frequently referenced priorities for water birds. Pelican, swans (including black swan) and duck species were commonly reported priorities.

Table 14: Most frequently referenced priorities for water birds

Waterbirds (birds)		
Species	Total references (out of 69)	Number of Nations
Birds (general or all)	11	8
Pelican	10	8
Swan	10	9
Ducks (all species)	9	8
Brolga	6	2
Bittern	4	2
Sea eagle	3	3
Black Swan	3	3
Eastern Bittern	2	1
Darters	2	2
White-bellied Sea Eagle	2	2
Shags	2	2

5.1.3.4 Priorities for river flows and connectivity:

Nations' inputs regarding priorities for river flows and connectivity were organised into categories as part of MLDRIN's analysis to help aggregate data and identify shared preferences. Local, Nation-specific detail relating to these priorities can be found in the Nations' Priorities Spreadsheet (Appendix 1). MLDRIN's analysis identified eight key categories for the river flows and connectivity priorities. The frequency of references under these categories are shown in Figure 2 and Table 15

Figure 2: Most frequently referenced priorities for river flows and connectivity

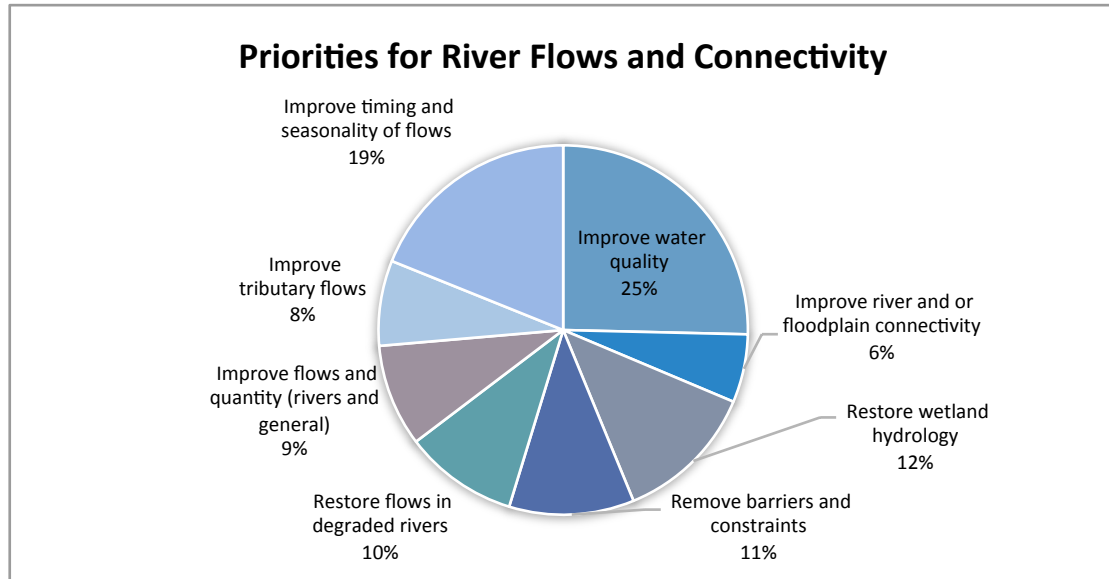


Table 15: Most frequently referenced priorities for river flows and connectivity

Priorities for River Flows and Connectivity	Total references (203)	Number of nations with this objective
Improve water quality	51	15
Improve timing and seasonality of flows	38	12
Restore wetland hydrology	25	8
Remove barriers and constraints	22	10
Restore flows in degraded rivers	20	8
Improve flows and quantity (rivers and general)	18	9
Improve tributary flows	15	10
Improve river and or floodplain connectivity	12	7

Table 15 demonstrates that all key river flows and connectivity priorities are shared across multiple Nations, with very strong emphasis on improving water quality and improving the timing and seasonality of flows.

5.1.3.4.1 River Flows and Connectivity: categories and key quotes.

The following passages provide an explanation of each of the River Flows and Connectivity categories developed for MLDRIN's analysis, and include select quotes illustrating relevant content from the Nations' contribution.

Improving water quality- *References within 15 Nations' contributions*

This category includes references to poor water quality, including black water events, algal blooms, water that is not drinkable or safe for swimming, as well as references to improved water quality and "healthy water" as priorities.

- "Unhealthy water is having a huge impact on the mental health of Mutthi Mutthi people."
- "Poor water quality - people can't even swim in our rivers."
- "Poor water quality - no flow and water looks stagnant."



Timing and Seasonality - *References within 12 Nations' contributions*

This category includes references to the timing and release of environmental water and flows. Includes references to timing of releases, “unnatural” flows, flows released “at the wrong time”, “backwards” or “upside down” waterways. Includes references to inappropriate, unseasonal and/or decreased flooding frequency. Also includes references to flow rates (eg. unseasonably high flows leading to riverbank erosion and suspended sediment loads), water temperature (eg. cold water pollution in summer due to releases from dams).

- “Swans and all water birds need water at the right time to breed. Environmental water doesn’t match up with the natural cycle.”
- “Mimic more natural flows in winter and summer. Currently many of the regulated rivers are ‘upside down’.”
- “All species are interlinked. The cycles of life around rivers have all been interrupted. The balance isn't there anymore. Everything interlinks, including Aboriginal health and wellbeing.”

Restore wetland hydrology - *References within 8 Nations' contributions*

This category includes references to the restoration of hydrological cycles and water regimes in wetlands, billabongs and swamps that may be disconnected and/or receive flows at a frequency and quantity that does not support the environmental and cultural health of wetland ecosystems.

- “Restoring water regime and environmental conditions to disconnected wetlands and other significant sites degraded by inappropriate or harmful management actions.”
- “Dead turtles and native birds stuck in the lake while Yanga was drying up.”
- “Ramsar listed wetlands not getting the required water.”

Remove barriers and constraints - *References within 10 Nations' contributions*

This category includes references to barriers and constraints such as: operation of pumps without fish screens; lack of fish ladders; infrastructure such as weirs, locks, dams and drains; and constraints associated with a lack of infrastructure at unregulated waterways.

- “Fish migration and fish ladders, lacking across all rivers. Impounding and limiting fish movement.”
- “Huge pumps on our river systems – sucking out native fish, mussels, yabbies.”
- “We are also working with various water organisations to block a drain in the Swamp that prevents it holding water after rainfall events.”
- “River regulation at weirs and locks affecting flows to creeks.”

- “Improvement of water delivery infrastructure to Tang Tang Swamp and Bendigo Creek.”

Restore flows in degraded rivers - *References within 8 Nations’ contributions*

This category includes references that call for the restoration of flows in degraded rivers. This includes references to rivers that currently have “no flow” and are “barely running”, as well as those which need continued flows or additional flows and watering to restore river health.

- “Murrumbidge was focus of concern regarding water diversions - ‘River was almost dead’”.
- “The Baarka needs to flow, even though it’s not in my Country it’s impacted my Country for not flowing.”
- “Secure flows for dry areas of the Coliban; particularly to support better water quality/quantity and the reintroduction of native fish populations.”

Improved flows and quantity (in rivers or in general) - *References within 9 Nations’ contributions*

This category includes references to a lack of water, poor water supply, rivers and places not receiving adequate flows, and calls for improved flows and quantity of water in rivers, or in general.

- “Lack of water supply, poor water quality and lack of water for a healthy ecosystem.”
- “Lack of water for fish and bird breeding.”
- “Our cultural sites are no longer receiving water.”
- “Continue flow through the lower Bidgee.”

Improving tributary flows - *References within 10 Nations’ contributions*

This category includes references to tributary flows, including a lack of flows, concerns regarding extraction from tributaries and calls for increased flows, restoration of tributary health and flows in creeks.

- “Stop a lot of the extraction from the tributaries into the main rivers.”
- “Old Camp Creek - Dry. Strong connection to family history and contemporary cultural practices.”
- “Clean up Bendigo Creek upper catchment to improve downstream water quality (at Tang Tang Swamp) for the native water bird/brolga population.”

Improved river and floodplain connectivity - *References within 7 Nations' contributions*

This category includes references to the connection between rivers, floodplains and water bodies such as wetlands, billabongs and swamps.

- "River connection with wetlands and billabongs."
- "Connectivity and healthy flows in the north east, Stoney Creek, Reedy Creek, Kiewa River."
- "Connection/relationship between waterways."
- "One of the more significant impacts of river flow regulation is the broken connection between the river and the floodplain area and also its connection with the associated wetlands, swamps and billabongs, now disconnected from the main river channels, which urge for the restoration of old hydrological regimes."

5.1.3.5 Other relevant categories

Participating Nations were asked if there were any other categories or considerations that they thought were important to help determine priorities for the management of water on Country, in addition to the existing four priorities categories used by the MDBA.

The need for consideration of other water-dependent species (beyond fish, vegetation and water birds) was noted by half of the participating nations, as was consideration of social values, namely health and wellbeing (physical, emotional, spiritual) and the benefit of environmental water to communities. One contributing Nation noted that the existing, four-category framework '[d]oesn't include other fauna species that rely on water. What about people? Water quality. Cultural sites that need water to survive.'



The need for inclusion of Cultural and Social Values and Uses in the MDBA's priorities framework was noted by seven nations, including references to historical and contemporary practices, the ability for people to connect to Country and water-dependent cultural sites and cultural heritage. One contributing Nation noted that there '[s]hould be a fifth category [of] Cultural/Social Use to identify the social, historical and contemporary ways the water and land are valued and prioritised by TOs.'

A holistic perspective of Country, which considers kinship and the interconnectedness of the land, water, plants, animals and people was referenced by approximately one third of nations. For example, one contributing Nation noted that '[a]ll species are interlinked. The cycles of life around rivers have all been interrupted. The balance isn't there anymore. Everything interlinks, including Aboriginal health and wellbeing.'

Finally, there were six references from five nations that related to the inclusion of further ecological themes including water quality, floodplains, and ecosystem 'preservation and management'.

Table 16 below shows the frequency of reference to five key additional categories recommended by Nations for inclusion in the annual priority setting process.

Table 16: Most frequently referenced additional categories for inclusion

Other Themes	Total references (43)	Number of nations
Water-dependent species	10	8
Wellbeing	10	8
Cultural and Social Values and Uses	9	7
Holistic perspective	8	5
Ecological (assorted)	6	5

5.2 Issues and participation themes

Participating Nations were asked to submit their views on key threats and issues facing waterways on Country as well as their preferences for participation and involvement in environmental water planning during the 2020-21 watering year. MLDRIN analysed all responses and created categories to help identify shared concerns and preferences.

5.2.1 Threats and Issues

The following table (Table 17) and chart (Figure 3) shows the frequency of references to threats and issues grouped under six key sub-categories, as well as the total number of Nations that provided responses relevant to each sub-category. The six sub-categories are:

- Climate-related threats and issues
- Ecological threats and issues
- Management and System-wide threats and issues
- Participation and Involvement threats and issues
- Site-specific threats and issues
- Social threats and issues

Table 17 lists the specific threats and issues identified by Nations, grouped under the six sub-categories. Figure 3 and table 17 below show that Ecological threats and issues accounted for more than half of the total references across all sixteen nations. Flows and Connectivity issues accounted for the majority of those Ecological issues. Site-specific issues (referenced by 15 nations), combined with broader management and/or system-wide issues (referenced by 14 nations), accounted for approximately 40 per cent of the total references to threats and impacts. The remainder of the total references were split across participation and involvement, health and wellbeing, and climate-related issues.

Figure 3: Most frequently references threats and issues by sub-category

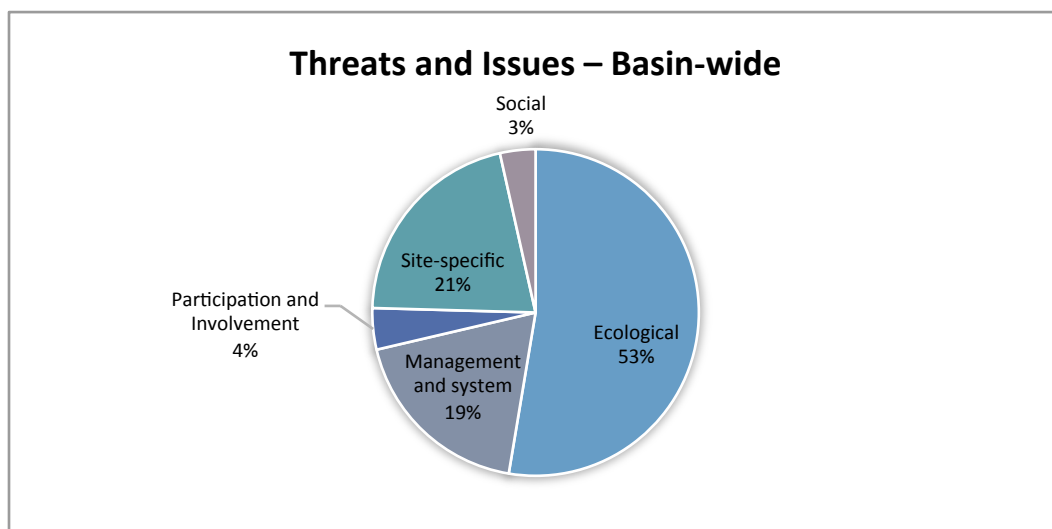


Table 17: Most frequently references threats and issues, detail

Threats and Issues – Southern Basin		Total references	Number of Nations
Threats and Issues (total overall)		347	16
Climate-related threats and issues		5	4
Ecological threats and issues		180	16
Breeding grounds, nurseries, cycles disrupted		6	4
Flows and Connectivity		103	15
	Barriers and Constraints	17	10
	No water and or lack of flows	28	12
	Seasonality and Timing	21	10
	Water quality	37	15
	Algae	8	5
	Black water	5	5
	Salinity	2	2
Loss of wildlife		24	11
	Fish kills	2	2
	Poor fish health	3	3
Vegetation condition		18	8
Weeds and Pests		29	15
Carp		13	12
Management and system threats and issues		64	14
Commodification of water		2	2
Critical human water needs		1	1
Cultural values and uses not considered		3	2
Irrigation and Farming		21	12
	Almonds	7	6
	Cotton	4	4
Over-allocated system		11	8
Poor management and planning		11	8
River regulation		11	4
Participation and Involvement threats and issues		14	5
Site-specific threats and issues		72	15
Access		12	7
Cultural heritage degradation		7	5
Erosion, slumping, dust		18	15
Impacts from recreation		12	9
Rubbish, waste, pollution		15	9
Site sick or degraded (general)		8	7
Social threats and issues		12	8
Health and wellbeing (spiritual, mental and/or physical)		12	8

5.2.2 Preferences for participation and involvement

To support an understanding of the way Nations want to be involved in environmental water planning in 2020-21, MLDRIN conducted an analysis of Nations' contributions to identify thirteen specific categories of preferences for participation and involvement. The following tables and chart show the frequency of references relating to each of the thirteen categories across the whole Southern Basin (Figure 4 and Table 18), as well as within each state and territory (table 19). Across the Southern Basin, improved 'Engagement and Consultation' was the most frequently referenced priority. This was closely followed by 'Traditional Owner (TO) decision-making and management', and 'Funding and resourcing', to enable Nations to fully participate in waterway management and watering decisions on Country. Results in the state-by-state breakdown (Table 18) show greater frequency of references to key preferences from Nations located within the state of Victoria, when compared to NSW and SA Nations. This may indicate greater confidence in opportunities for participation in environmental water planning, given reforms made to the Victorian water framework in recent years.

Figure 4: Most frequently referenced preferences for participation and involvement

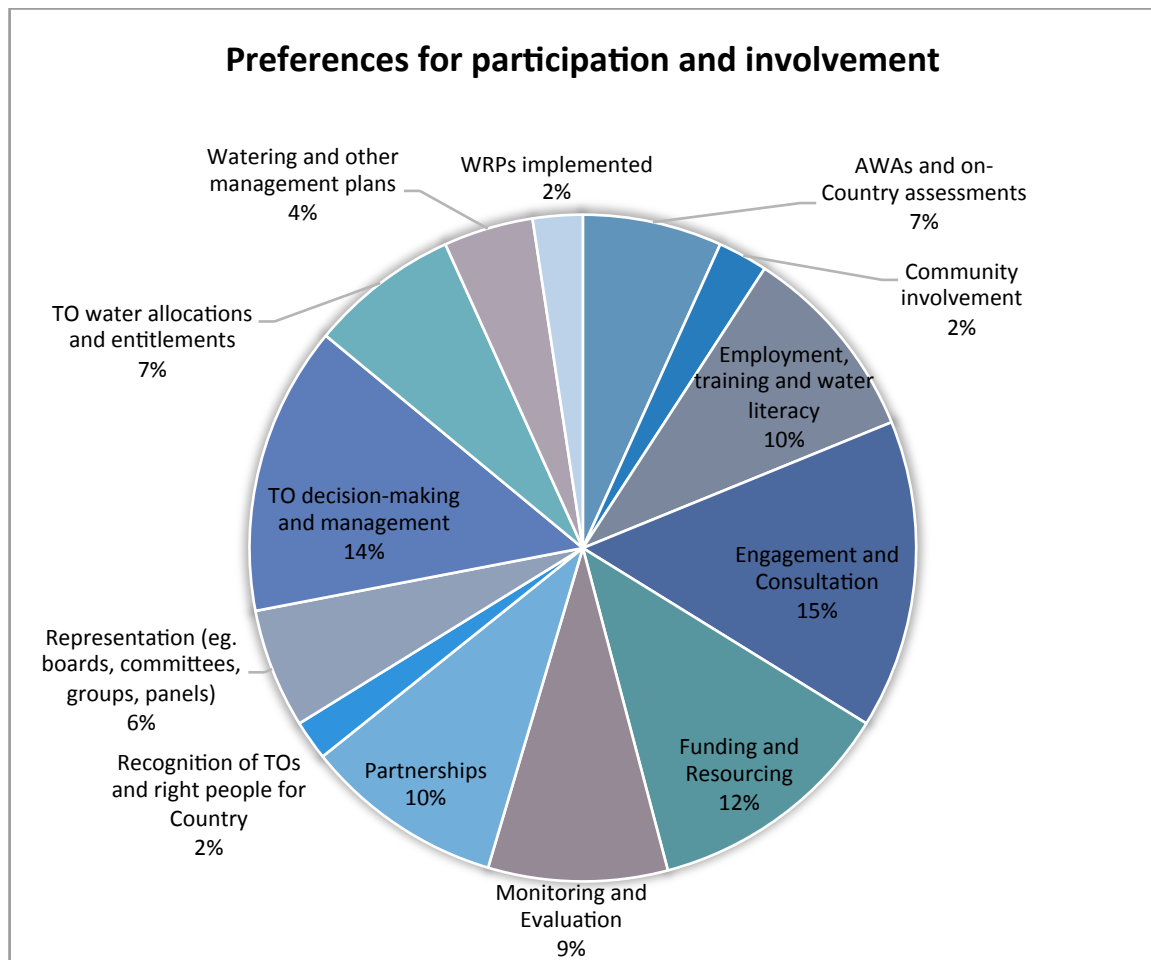


Table 18: Most frequently referenced preferences for participation and involvement

Preferences for participation and involvement	References	Number of Nations
TOTAL	207	16
AWAs and on-Country assessments	14	8
Community involvement	5	3
Employment, training and water literacy	20	11
Engagement and Consultation	31	14
Funding and Resourcing	25	10
Monitoring and Evaluation	18	8
Partnerships	20	5
Recognition of TOs and right people for Country	4	3
Representation (eg. boards, committees, groups, panels)	12	8
TO decision-making and management	29	11
TO water allocations and entitlements	15	6
Watering and other management plans	9	3
WRPs implemented	5	5

Table 18: Most frequently referenced preferences for participation and involvement, by States

Preferences for Participation and Involvement						
Number of references by State	ACT	NSW	SA	Victoria	Total references	Number of nations
Engagement and Consultation	1	17	1	15	34	14
TO decision-making and management	3	6	3	20	32	11
Funding and Resourcing	2	8	4	14	28	10
Employment, training and water literacy	0	9	0	14	23	11
Partnerships	0	4	0	16	20	5
Monitoring and Evaluation	2	5	2	9	18	8
TO water allocations and entitlements	1	4	2	9	16	6
AWAs and on-Country assessments	4	3	1	7	15	8
Representation (eg. on boards, advisory committees, groups, panels)	1	6	0	7	14	8
Watering and other management plans	1	0	0	8	9	3
Community involvement	2	0	2	1	5	3
WRPs implemented	0	2	0	3	5	5
Recognition of TOs and right people for Country	0	1	0	3	4	3

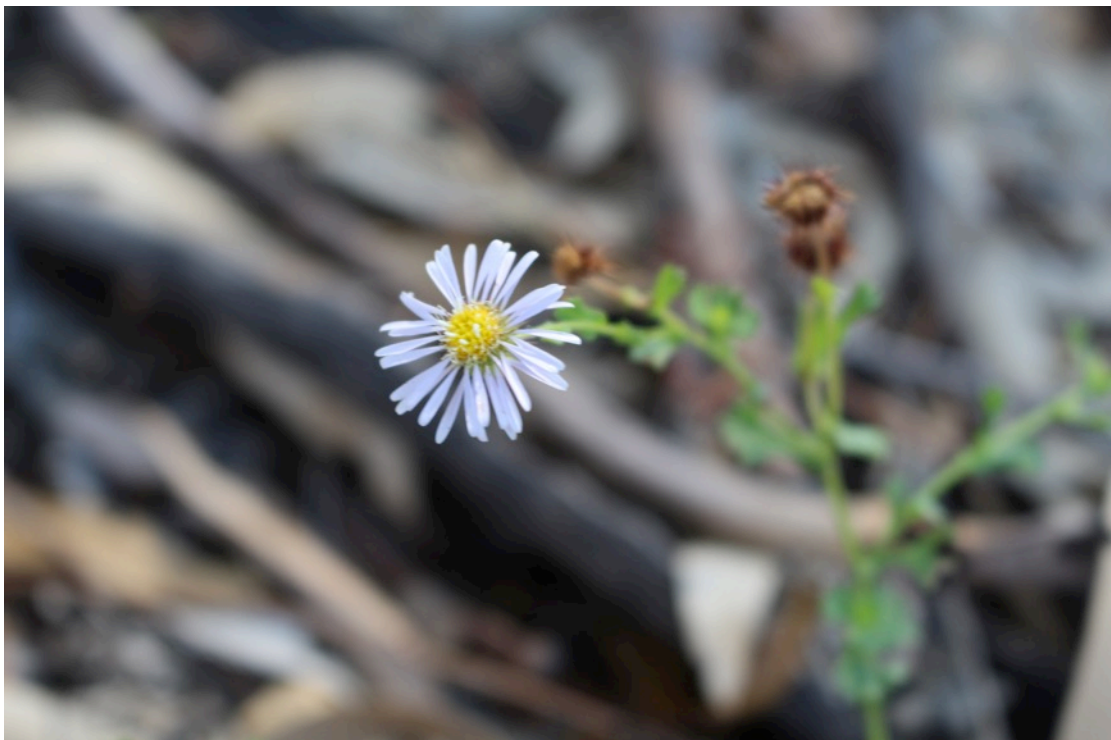
5. Conclusion and next steps

This report summarises shared priorities and common interests and concerns regarding use of environmental water in the 2020-21 watering year. This summary information is intended to:

- Provide guidance to inform the development of the 2020-21 Basin Annual Environmental Watering Priorities
- Inform delivery of environmental water held by Commonwealth and State agencies water holders
- Strengthen First Nations' research and advocacy
- Inform development of policy and resourcing by highlighting aspirations for improved participation and involvement.

The results presented in Section 5 identify key shared priorities, but cannot be considered as inputs to water planning in isolation. As part of the FNEWG project, a First Nations Environmental Water Forum was scheduled, to provide participating Nations the opportunity to review key findings and deliberate on the content of guidance to be provided to MDBA and water holders. This forum would also have provided an opportunity to consider the current cultural health of waterways and water availability scenarios across the Southern Basin. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions this forum could not be held.

MLDRIN has drafted a statement, drawing on the findings presented in this report, to synthesise Nations' priorities and provide strong guidance to the MDBA and other water planners. This statement, was reviewed, amended and approved by participating Nation representatives in a teleconference held in May 2020.



Southern Basin First Nations Environmental Watering Priorities Statement 2020-21

Representatives of sixteen First Nations across the Southern Murray Darling Basin have made information about their priorities for the use of environmental water in 2020-21 available, as part of the First Nations Environmental Water Guidance project.

*First Nations share common concern for **all** major rivers across the region. Notably, multiple Nations submitted priorities relating to the Murrumbidgee, Baaka (Darling River), Lachlan, Campaspe, Murray and Edwards-Wakool systems. First Nations understand that declining river health and low-flows in one part of the Basin can affect communities and cultural outcomes across the region.*

Nations want to see improvements in water quality and the volume and timing of flows in all major rivers, and particularly in degraded river systems. Improved seasonality of flows, informed by First Nations' science and traditional knowledge, is a key to sustaining the cultural health of major waterways. Addressing barriers and constraints, such as barriers to fish movement, is essential to sustain the interconnectivity, which underpins our stories and cultural values. Improving the health of tributary waterways and ensuring adequate flows, is also a key to revitalising major rivers. Nations recognise that Basin Plan targets for environmental water recovery are inadequate to support revival of the ecological and cultural health of our waterways. More must be done to restore the balance.

Participating Nations' contributions stressed the significance of wetlands, billabongs and floodplains. Nations want to see life return to these culturally significant places through watering activities that create connectivity between rivers and floodplains and restore the hydrological cycles of degraded wetlands, thereby supporting cultural values and resources.

Participating Nations identified key plant and animal species that are most in need of watering in the 2020-21 watering year. These species are all of totemic significance to diverse clans and Nations. Key culturally significant fish such as Murray Cod, Golden Perch (Yellowbelly) and catfish were identified as priorities by most Nations. More than half of all participating Nations highlighted black swans, pelicans and duck species as culturally significant waterbirds that would benefit from environmental watering. Improved health and abundance of old man weed and other medicinal plants were noted as priorities for vegetation, alongside improved outcomes for river red gums, black box, cumbungi and lignum.

Critically, Nations stressed the importance of considering outcomes beyond fish, waterbirds and vegetation. Nations also want to see improved outcomes for aquatic fauna such as turtles, yabbies, mussels, frogs, platypus and rakali (water rat). The contributions also stressed the importance of environmental watering in sustaining healthy populations of important terrestrial fauna such as kangaroo and emu.

Participating Nations have identified a range of key threats to the cultural health of waterways as well as preferences for improved participation in environmental water planning for 2020-21. Water holders should consider these preferences alongside the detailed, locally specific watering objectives produced by Nations. It is essential that water holders continue, and strengthen, direct engagement with First Nations to empower our participation in environmental water planning and delivery.

5.1 Recommended actions

It is critical that Commonwealth and State and Territory agencies respond to Nations' contributions for the FNEWG projects in a meaningful way. Nations' priorities can be addressed and actioned through a range of processes including:

- Basin-scale environmental water planning
- Water delivery planning at the Southern Basin scale
- Planning for site specific water delivery; and
- Development of broader policy and legal settings responding to First Nations water rights and interests

MLDRIN has identified recommended actions for key agency stakeholders and First Nations below.

First Nations

- Review the shared priorities and areas of common interest and concern presented in this report
- Leverage the findings in this report, and First Nations water statement, to support arguments for site-specific water delivery that addresses shared priorities and achieves aligned cultural outcomes
- Leverage the preferences for participation and involvement highlighted in this report, as well as MLDRIN's *FNEWG Collaborative Design Report*, to strengthen advocacy for policy reform to recognise First Nations water rights and interests

Murray Darling Basin Authority

- Review the summary findings included in this report and the detailed responses provided in the Nations' Priorities Spreadsheet to identify possible amendments and improvements to the framework for determining Annual Priorities
- Clarify how MDBA will include and give effect to First Nations' environmental water guidance through the 2020-21 Annual Priorities
- Report back to MLDRIN and participating Nations on how FNEWG contributions will shape the 2020-21 Annual Priorities

Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and State water holders

- Consider the summary findings included in this report and the detailed responses provided in the Nations' Priorities Spreadsheet as direct, culturally authoritative guidance to inform planning for delivery of environmental water in 2020-21
- Continue to build and strengthen direct engagement with First Nations to understand detailed objectives for environmental water use

- Report back to MLDRIN and participating Nations on how FNEWG contributions will inform planning for water delivery in 2020-21
- Complete a First Nations Engagement Strategy to coordinate direct involvement with First Nations

State departments and agencies with responsibility for First Nations' water policy

- Review the preferences for participation and involvement highlighted in this report, as well as MLDRIN's FNEWG *Collaborative Design Report*, to better understand capacity gaps and aspirations for involvement in environmental water planning.
- Acknowledge the disparity of opportunities available to First Nations, as a result of different policy and funding settings in different jurisdictions
- Progress policy reform and funding opportunities to meet State obligations and support effective involvement of First Nations in water planning

A First Nations' watering event

MLDRN believes there are powerful opportunities to coordinate environmental water delivery in a way that addresses shared First Nations priorities and objectives across the Southern Connected Basin. A coordinated watering event, designed in collaboration between First Nations, water holders and state and regional agencies, and targeting cultural outcomes across the Southern Basin, could generate a range of benefits including:

- Showcasing a concrete commitment to incorporate cultural values in environmental water planning
- Building confidence, wellbeing and positive relationships across the region
- Providing an opportunity to activate important custodial responsibilities
- Fostering vocal champions for environmental watering
- Highlighting the human and cultural component in caring for Country

MLDRIN urges the MDBA, water holders and all agency stakeholders to work with First Nations organisations to progress tangible cultural outcomes from use of environmental water.