BUSINESS PLAN

Cultural water management in a changing climate, lessons from abroad to grow our next generation of leaders.

June 2023





We recognise and acknowledge the unique relationship and deep connection to Country shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as First Peoples and Traditional Owners of Australia. We pay our respects to their Cultures, Country and Elders past and present. We extend the same respect to Indigenous and Traditional Owners globally. We are committed to supporting close involvement and participation of Traditional Owners in water and climate research and management.

The artwork above is by Indigenous artist Vicki Golding. This piece was commissioned by Alluvium and has told our story of water across Country, from catchment to coast, with people from all cultures learning, understanding, sharing stories, walking to and talking at the meeting places as one nation.

Purpose

This paper introduces the Alluvium Foundation and presents a proposal to empower the next generation of Traditional Owner leaders to manage cultural water and cultural flows.

Problem statement

Management of cultural water and cultural flows is a complex and rapidly-emerging space that needs well informed policy and strategy. The provision of cultural water based on historical water use needs to be considered in a future of climate change and over-allocated water resources. Who will provide leadership in this space? A small number of recognised Traditional Owner people are already in constant demand to service government projects, workshops and think-tanks. How can future leaders be equipped to support the future discussion and guidance needed to advance cultural water and cultural flows policy, strategy and planning in Victoria?

Summary of the proposal

The Alluvium Foundation is seeking financial support to co-fund a number of international study tours that will allow Traditional Owners to meet other Traditional Owner water-managers in relevant countries, like New Zealand and Canada. They will discuss cultural water and cultural flows policy, and how that policy can be integrated into contemporary water management. The program will target up and coming (next generation) Traditional Owners leaders in the water or climate adaptation space to support their development into state and national leadership roles. The project will culminate in a summit to allow participants in the project to present and discuss their finding and thoughts, along with a broader facilitated panel discussion process.



Background

Cultural water

Water is central to the cultural, social and spiritual identity of Australia's First Nations people, as well as to their livelihoods. 'Cultural flows' are water entitlements owned and managed by First Nations to improve the spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic health and well-being of Traditional Owners and Country. Cultural flows are distinct from water for the environment, however they can complement each other. Cultural flows are underpinned by the principle of First Nations' control over waters they have ancestral connections with, and the exercise of self-determination in relation to those waters. Cultural flows are yet to be consistently included in contemporary water management in Australia.

Cultural water & changing climate

Climate change is affecting waterway flow volumes, timing and duration and river health. Environmental and consumptive water managers are adjusting policy, strategy and planning to respond to a changing climate. Traditional cultural water management and uses which we are working to include in contemporary water management in Australia may also need to consider their relevance and applicability in the light of climate change impacts.

Cultural water, changing climate & lessons from abroad

Australia is not alone in advancing the concept of cultural water and cultural flows and many countries are also progressing policy, strategy and planning around the integration of cultural water in contemporary water management. As with all elements of policy development, being exposed to how others approach the problems and solutions can broaden our knowledge.

What we are doing

The Alluvium Foundation will fund a number of study tours to allow Traditional Owners to meet and discuss cultural water and cultural flows policy and structural integration into contemporary water management in countries we think we can learn from. We will take the learnings from these study tours to produce a discussion paper to address four key questions:

- 1. What challenges do other countries face and how aligned are those challenges with Australia?
- 2. What innovative approaches are other countries pursuing to manage challenges?
- **3.** How has climate change and adaptation been considered/incorporated into cultural water management thinking?
- 4. What has been most successful and how applicable is it to the Australian context (political, policy, geographic, etc)?

The program will target up and coming (next generation) Traditional Owners leaders in the water or climate adaptation space to support their development into national leadership roles.

The project will culminate in a summit, either embedded into a conference, or run independently by the Foundation. Participants in the project would present and discuss their finding and thoughts and then facilitate a broader panel discussion process.

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Governance

The project will be overseen by the Foundation Board, and a project Steering Committee.

Delivery

This project will be delivered over the 2023/24 financial year.



