

Sovereign First Nations of the Murray Darling Basin Water Statement 2016

Delegates for 46 Sovereign First Nations of the Murray Darling Basin, who gathered in Canberra, ACT on the 9th and 10th August 2016:

Reaffirm the deep significance of water, waterways and water dependent ecosystems to our communities,

- as a defining element of our cultural identity, traditions, lore, customs and beliefs
- as a source of wellbeing for Country and people.

Stress that our Nations are witnessing the daily impacts of an inequitable water allocation framework, which has marginalised and disregarded Sovereign First Nations people's rights, values and interests.

Recognise that tireless advocacy by Sovereign First Nations and their allies has driven some important progress towards greater recognition of First Nations water rights, through reform in water policy at a State and Federal level.

Note that we are at a critical time in the implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan and the recognition of Sovereign First Nations' rights to shape water policy and to enjoy the beneficial use of water resources.

Recognise that implementation of the Basin Plan does not signal the end of our Sovereign First Nations work, but rather the beginning. We have a vision to sustain and build momentum to develop a world-leading First Nations' water rights framework.

Highlight that NBAN and MLDRIN are committed to securing cultural rights and interests in the landscape of the Murray Darling Basin for the interests of our future generations in order to leave an everlasting legacy for the Sovereign First Nations that we represent.

The Sovereign First Nations of the Murray Darling Basin call on *all* Basin jurisdictions to:

- Urgently address the continuing threats to our wellbeing, cultural identity, heritage, ecological knowledge and spirituality from over-allocation and defective management of the rivers and waterways of the Murray Darling Basin; and to:
- Support the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) and Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) to empower Sovereign First Nations to: fulfil our cultural responsibilities- under our lore, to care for Country, contribute to best-practice water management and secure sustainable livelihoods.
- Commit to ongoing funding and support for MLDRIN and NBAN, in light of the considerable ongoing work required to meet policy requirements including
 - development and accreditation of Water Resource Plans,
 - ongoing development of environmental watering priorities

- The Northern Basin Review and SDL adjustment mechanism
- Commit adequate and secure funding for Basin governments to develop effective, innovative and equitable programs for engagement that build relationships and capacity and generate lasting benefits for Sovereign First Nations
- Develop Water Resource Plans (under the Basin Plan) that give effect to Traditional Owners' objectives and outcomes, informed by active engagement and the free, prior and informed consent of Sovereign First Nations.
- Commit to implement the findings of the [National Cultural Flows Research Project](#). Work with MLDRIN and NBAN to ensure that the outcomes of the project are fully incorporated into water law and policy for the whole of the Murray Darling Basin.
- Develop a legislative and policy reform process dedicated to addressing the historic dispossession of Sovereign First Nations from our rights and interests in water.
- Collaborate with us to develop mechanisms to allow Sovereign First Nations to secure water entitlements for cultural, environmental and economic purposes and to secure our cultural economy through access to water

The Delegates reaffirmed our commitment to achieve Cultural Flows defined as:

“Water entitlements that are legally and beneficially owned by the Nations of a sufficient and adequate quantity and quality to improve the spiritual, cultural, natural, environmental, social and economic conditions of those Nations. These are our inherent rights.”

-MLDRIN Echuca Declaration, 2007



Delegates from the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN), Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) and State Government representatives at the Gathering in Canberra