

Media Release

The Hon Harriet Shing MP
Minister for Housing
Minister for Water
Minister for Equality



Friday, 18 October 2024

RETURNING WATER IN THE BIRRARUNG TO TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Allan Labor Government is returning water from the Birrarung (Yarra River) to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners – delivering important cultural values and ongoing connections to land and water.

Minister for Water Harriet Shing today announced the transferred of 1,405 megalitre water licence from the former Amcor paper mill's to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation for cultural use.

The Government supports Traditional Owners to self-determine the use of returned water consistent with the *Water is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap* and is working in partnership with Traditional Owners to improve access to water and involvement in water management.

This return supports water justice for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners and is also in line with *Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo* (the Yarra Strategic Plan) and the Central and Gippsland Sustainable Water Strategy.

The former Amcor paper mill water license had been held by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and managed by Melbourne Water.

Since 2021, Victoria has now returned 6,605 megalitres of water to Traditional Owners across the state – supporting their cultural responsibility to care for Country.

This has included three licenses issued to Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation for 200 megalitres at Buchan Munji, another 500 megalitres in the Tambo River and 2000 megalitres in the Mitchell River in Gippsland.

In southwest Victoria, a 2,500 megalitre licence was issued in the Palawarra (Fitzroy River) system to Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation in 2022.

Quote attributable to Minister for Water Harriet Shing

"This transfer of 1,405 megalitres in the Birrarung will support Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Traditional Owners to access and manage water for spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic purposes."

Quotes attributable to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation Spokesperson

"The Birrarung water licence is an important step in our fight for water justice, but there is still a long way to go. It's a welcome step in the journey towards a future where Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural rights and responsibilities are respected and embedded in the way we work together. The Birrarung is alive, has a heart, a spirit and is part of our Dreaming."

"Since our beginning it has been known that we have an obligation to keep the Birrarung alive and healthy—for all generations to come. We, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, the First People, and the Birrarung, belong to this Country. This Country, and the Birrarung are part of us."