



Upcoming events

- NAIDOC Week 6–13 July 2008
- Department of Water staff Indigenous training workshop 21–25 July 2008



“Got this place from my father ... there are many important sacred places in this country, and I must look after them. I thought and thought about my country, and about asking for it... We want to live in harmony with others ... and look after all our places. We will stay and fight for our country, and never let it go again... This is our place. Our fathers and grandfathers hunted here. We in turn should look after these things [sacred sites, objects], then when we die our sons will get them and care for them.” Jonathan Ford, Indigenous natural resource management officer

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Department leads from the front



Paul Rosair

As the director responsible for the Department of Water’s Indigenous Support Unit (ISU), people often ask me how I became involved in the Aboriginal affairs area.

In my previous roles working for the state, I spent time developing an affinity with the local Aboriginal community members working in water resource management.

While working for the Department of Environment I had the opportunity on several projects to strengthen partnerships with Aboriginal communities across the state. The need to establish an Indigenous affairs unit became more apparent during this work, as a means to address the issues being identified by department staff and to ensure our organisation complied with all state and federal legislation in this area.

The Indigenous affairs coordinator position held by David Collard in

Department of Water aims to develop a strong partnership between the Aboriginal community and the department. Several of the initiatives developed to assist this partnership have proven to be successful and others are being developed to ensure protocols are adhered to.

Some of these initiatives include:

- the Aboriginal cross cultural awareness workshops – almost 70 per cent of staff in the department have participated
- Joint Management Land Agreement – Kimberley Region
- the Regional Aboriginal Artwork Program – four pieces of Aboriginal artwork representing three regions – South West, South Coast and Swan/Avon
- the development of the *Aboriginal employment and development strategy* – this includes four tiers:
 - Aboriginal Training Program - five Aboriginal natural resource management trainees employed on a 12 month training program
 - school-based traineeship program developed for implementation in 2008/2009
 - work-experience program developed for implementation in 2007/2008
 - Aboriginal cadetship program developed for implementation in 2008/2009.

In my role as the director of business and regional operations, I have the responsibility for Aboriginal affairs and support the Indigenous Support Unit to coordinate

Department in alignment with NWI on access

Under the National Water Initiative the Commonwealth Government has identified the issue of Aboriginal access to water and the following paragraphs specifically identify some strategies the department will use to achieve this:

52. The Parties will provide for indigenous access to water resources, in accordance with relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation, through planning processes that ensure:

- i) inclusion of indigenous representation in water planning wherever possible; and*
- ii) water plans will incorporate indigenous social, spiritual and customary objectives and strategies for achieving these objectives wherever they can be developed.*

The department has developed an engagement framework with the assistance of the Indigenous Support Unit and this was used in the recent development of the South West

regional water plan.

This was the first regional plan to be initiated in Western Australia and it is proposed that the framework for engagement and consultation will be used to formulate other regional plans across the state.

53. Water planning processes will take account of the possible existence of native title rights to water in the catchment or aquifer area. The Parties note that plans may need to allocate water to native title holders following the recognition of native title rights in water under the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993.

The engagement framework highlights the need to consult with the Aboriginal land and sea councils across the state, and it is proposed to develop a memorandum of understanding with each of these councils. To ensure traditional owners have input into these regional water plans, it is proposed to develop memorandums of agreements to

identify any allocations made to the native title holders.

54. Water allocated to native title holders for traditional cultural purposes will be accounted for.

The department will soon be establishing two water accounting trials to test the viability of allocating water to native title holders for traditional, cultural purposes in Western Australia. The two sites proposed include Carrabooda (northern metropolitan region) and Carnarvon (Gascoyne region) where the department has existing infrastructure to assist the measuring or accounting process.

The department, with the assistance of the Indigenous Support Unit, has recently engaged a consultant to prepare a policy paper on Aboriginal access to water. This policy paper will assist development of appropriate legislation to ensure Aboriginal interests are included within the water planning, allocation and licensing processes.

Department leads from the front

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Aboriginal affairs issues and strategies within the department. This is critical to ensure the agency and its staff complies with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 (WA)* and the *Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993*.

In addition to ensure proper protocols are adhered to in Aboriginal engagement and consultation, the Indigenous Support Unit have developed guidelines for all staff to complete their duties.

Over the past seven years I have represented the department on the

Council of Australian Governments working group on advancing reconciliation that reports to the natural resource management (NRM) and primary industries ministerial councils.

This membership has enabled the department to highlight the issues surrounding potable water supply to the remote Aboriginal communities across the state. It must be noted that during this time, the effects on NRM project delivery within the remote regions of Australia as a result of the roll-back of the Community Development

Employment Project was a significant challenge that required addressing.

While the Indigenous Support Unit completes the coordination and delivery of a professional service, the department is deeply committed to Aboriginal involvement in its operations at all levels.

The Indigenous Support Unit is an important part of this department's future and we look forward to its continued success.

Paul Rosair
Director Business Operation
Department of Water

First heritage workshop a success

On 22 April 2008, seven staff members completed the department's first heritage workshop at Walyunga National Park, north-east of Perth.

The group had the chance to learn about cultural areas, Indigenous artefacts, bush foods, water holes and most importantly, how to survey and report Indigenous findings.

The group was also given the privilege of entering amazing sites with a traditional owner to learn how Indigenous people regard the sacred values of lands and sites, and how they lived and survived in this area for many years.

Walyunga is considered a rich archaeological site, and a research officer took participants into the field to try and find artefacts.

Indigenous support project officer, Charon Ryder, said she found the heritage workshop to be "a very important and significant area for Aboriginal people".

"For instance, the areas where Aboriginal men were allowed to go (men's business) was very strong, spiritually and powerful, and is a place under Aboriginal law where women are not allowed," Charon said. "Similarly, women have their own law places too."

"It gives a perspective on how sites are meant to be managed without causing disturbance to sacred values, which can have drastic consequences for Aboriginal law. As recorded in native title and state heritage legislation, this can bring sickness to individuals and the community.

"Workshops like this highlight that management is required, but it has to be approached in certain ways.

"It taught us many things, and why it is so important when we talk about heritage projects connected to land that we consider all of these things before we approach the land, because there are sites and cultural materials still there."

Indigenous training program intake

The *Indigenous employment and development strategy* has finally made its mark on the composition of the department's staff.

In October last year, five young Aboriginal men commenced the training program and are now Aboriginal natural resource management trainees based in the Atrium, Mandurah, Geraldton, Kununurra and Ellam Street offices.

This year the department will extend the recruitment process. Based on the success of the first intake, the department will commit further funds to continue the program in 2008–2009.

In August, subject to the successful placement of existing trainees, the Aboriginal affairs coordinator will seek applications from across the state to ensure another strong field of talented and committed young Aboriginal people are offered the opportunity to come and work for the Department of Water.

The benchmark has been set, and if the next intake is anything like the first, then the department will be well on the way to achieving its aim to increase the number of Aboriginal people employed within the agency. It should be noted that the Aboriginal training program under the *Indigenous employment and development strategy* is a direction supported by corporate executive with the aim to achieve the 2.9 per cent under the department's *Equity and diversity plan*.

If you know of any Aboriginal people interested in joining the department, then please direct them to David Collard of the Indigenous Support Unit on 6364 6441.



Department staff Barry Lawrence and Jonathon Ford with traditional owner Barry McGuire, and Department of Environment and Conservation officer James Maher.

Aboriginal NRM across the state

Aboriginal natural resource managers from across Western Australia have endorsed a declaration calling on the state government to work towards a stronger involvement of Aboriginal people in managing the state's natural resources.

In May 2008, the delegates of the State Aboriginal Natural Resource Management Conference in Perth, including Aboriginal community members and state and federal natural resource management (NRM) professionals came together to discuss NRM matters affecting Western Australians.

The conference endorsed and strongly encouraged the full involvement of Aboriginal people in all state NRM project development, infrastructure and associated activities.

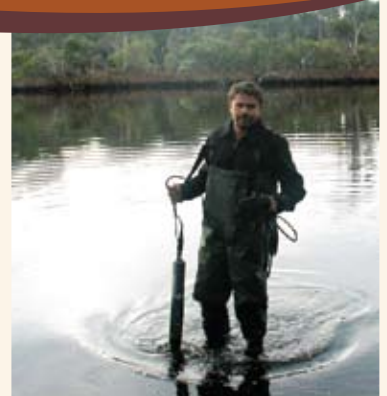
The declaration also included a statement about the incorporation of Aboriginal culture and belief systems in local, regional and state NRM proposals and activities, as well as respecting these cultures and belief systems.

The conference was held over two days at the Burswood on Swan convention hall, and was attended by 70 delegates. The program

included information on the strategic management of Aboriginal managed lands, the new direction in federal funding for the Caring for Our Country program as well as current and new best practice models in natural resource management.

The conference was hosted by the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council and supported by the Australian Government through the departments of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry and Indigenous Affairs; as well as the Indigenous land management facilitator, the councils for the catchments of Swan, Northern Agricultural, Avon and South West; as well as the Rangelands Catchment Group and South Coast Natural Resource Management group.

The South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC) is a representative body for the traditional owners of the South West of Australia, the Nyungar people. SWALSC's main role is to work with its members to achieve resolutions for native title claims in the south west as well as advancing the Nyungar culture, language and society.



Jonathan Ford

My vision for the future

My name is Jonathan Ford and I'm the Indigenous natural resource management officer in Mandurah.

I have been employed with the Department of Water for over seven months. I work in the Peel regional office.

My vision for the future is to see more Indigenous staff working within the department, this will help improve a better understanding of our culture, to see the department have a greater relationship with the Indigenous community and to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land.



More than 70 delegates attended the two day conference.



A circle of hands demonstrated the meeting's commitment to resolution.

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