



**AUSTRALIAN WATER ASSOCIATION**

**INNOVATE**

**Reconciliation Action Plan**

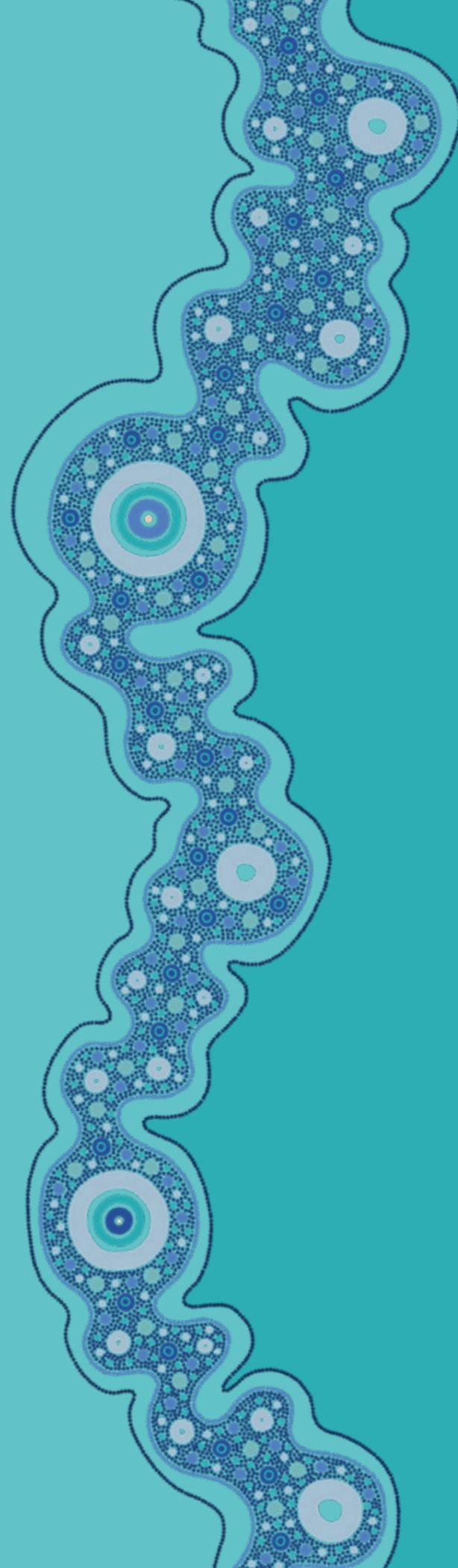
January 2026 - January 2028



**AUSTRALIAN  
WATER**  
ASSOCIATION

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Australian Water Association acknowledges the Traditional Custodians across Australia, where we live, work and play, for their deep connection to our precious waters and land. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and the ancestors who have cared, protected and nurtured Country for many thousands of years.



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# STATEMENT FROM THE CEO OF RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA

Reconciliation Australia commends the Australian Water Association on the formal endorsement of its inaugural Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Commencing an Innovate RAP is a crucial and rewarding period in an organisation's reconciliation journey. It is a time to build strong foundations and relationships, ensuring sustainable, thoughtful, and impactful RAP outcomes into the future.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement.

This Innovate RAP is both an opportunity and an invitation for the Australian Water Association to expand its understanding of its core strengths and deepen its relationship with its community, staff, and stakeholders.

By investigating and understanding the integral role it plays across its sphere of influence, the Australian Water Association will create dynamic reconciliation outcomes, supported by and aligned with its business objectives.

An Innovate RAP is the time to strengthen and develop the connections that form the lifeblood of all RAP commitments. The RAP program's framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities emphasises not only the importance of fostering consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, but also empowering and enabling staff to contribute to this process, as well.

With over 5.5 million people now either working or studying in an organisation with a RAP, the program's potential for impact is greater than ever. The Australian Water Association is part of a strong network of more than 3,000 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have taken goodwill and intention, and transformed it into action.

Implementing an Innovate RAP signals the Australian Water Association's readiness to develop and strengthen relationships, engage staff and stakeholders in reconciliation, and pilot innovative strategies to ensure effective outcomes.

Getting these steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations to the Australian Water Association on your Innovate RAP and I look forward to following your ongoing reconciliation journey.

Karen Mundine  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
Reconciliation Australia



# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO OF AWA

We are proud to present the Australian Water Association's Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan – a significant step forward in our commitment to deepening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and embedding reconciliation across the water sector.

Our Reflect RAP laid the foundations for learning, listening and building early partnerships. This Innovate RAP strengthens and expands that work, guided by our purpose to inspire, connect and transform and by our values of being empowered to act, having the courage to transform, and recognising that together we go further. These values call on all of us – staff, volunteers, members and partners – to take meaningful action, to challenge the status quo where needed, and to work in genuine partnership with First Peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold deep cultural, spiritual and practical knowledge of water and Country, grounded in stewardship practiced over tens of thousands of years and continuing today. Yet many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continue to experience inequities in water-related outcomes – including access to safe and reliable water services, participation in water governance and decision-making, and representation in the water workforce.

As the national peak body for the water sector, AWA recognises both the responsibility and opportunity to help address these challenges by elevating First Peoples' voices, supporting culturally informed water management, and strengthening pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation across the sector.

Over the past two years, we have made important progress: celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership at our events, strengthening relationships through Voices from the Bush, collaborating closely with WSAA through our joint RAP Advisory Group, and expanding learning opportunities for our staff and members. These steps have taught us that reconciliation cannot sit alongside our core work, it must be part of how we lead, how we connect and how we shape the future of the sector.

This Innovate RAP outlines how we will continue to build cultural capability, foster respectful relationships, create opportunities, and strengthen our governance. It also acknowledges that we still have much to learn. Our journey is not one of reaching milestones, but of building trust, demonstrating respect, and ensuring equitable access to safe, sustainable water services for all communities.

We extend our gratitude to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, members, volunteers and partners who have guided us so far. We look forward to continuing this journey together – learning, collaborating and taking action to support a water future grounded in cultural knowledge, shared stewardship and lasting reconciliation.

Corinne Cheeseman  
**Chief Executive Officer**

Kevin Werksman  
**President**





## OUR VISION FOR RECONCILIATION

The Australian Water Association is dedicated to co-creating a water future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge, perspectives, and partnerships are integral to managing Country. Through co-design, we work to ensure equitable water access, strengthen community resilience, and uphold shared stewardship of Country for generations to come.

### How our vision relates to our business:

Our commitment to reconciliation means recognising the First Peoples of Australia as respected partners in water management. By embedding cultural competency, valuing lived histories, and integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge, we strive to create an inclusive, sustainable, and just water future.

Together, we will ensure shared stewardship of Country, reflecting the wisdom, rights, and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## OUR BUSINESS

The Australian Water Association (AWA) is a national, member-based, not-for-profit organisation and registered charity that champions sustainable water management in Australia. With over 6,000 members, AWA represents the full spectrum of the water sector, engaging with professionals across utilities, industry, government, and academia. AWA's core business is to share knowledge, connect people with purpose, and transform the water sector to ensure water security, economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and improved public health outcomes.

AWA employs a dedicated team of 41 staff members. While the majority are in Sydney on Cammeraygal Country, 9 team members are based interstate in Victoria (Wurundjeri & Bunurong Country), Tasmania (Lutruwita Country), South Australia (Kurna Country), Western Australia (Noongar Country) and Queensland (Kubi Kubi, Turrbal and Jagera Country).

AWA is governed by a skills-based Board of Directors who are also geographically dispersed, with most in Sydney on Cammeraygal Country, and additional team members located across other Australian states and territories, including Wurundjeri Country, Whadjuk Noongar Country, Turrbal Country, Jagera Country, Awabakal Country, Yolngu Country

and Larrakia Country. We are supported by over 400 volunteers who contribute to various committees and specialist networks, including branch committees in every state and territory. As Australia's largest water network, AWA operates nationally, with additional international development and trade programs in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Our sphere of influence extends across a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, including utilities, water service providers, government agencies, educational institutions, community organisations, and international partners.

While we currently do not have any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, we are committed to increasing representation through culturally appropriate recruitment, retention, and professional development initiatives. Furthermore, our membership and elected volunteer network comprises many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including a current Board member.

As part of this Reconciliation Action Plan, we are committed to exploring culturally safe and respectful ways to understand how many of our members and volunteers identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This will help us to better understand and support their perspectives and priorities in the water sector. Beyond this, AWA is committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water leaders, businesses, and communities to ensure their voices and perspectives are embedded in our work, particularly through our reconciliation initiatives.

## OUR PURPOSE

To inspire, connect and transform the water sector.

## OUR VALUES

### Empowered to Act

In partnership, we are trusted to make decisions, take initiative and deliver results that will transform the sector, and uplift our capability

### Courage to Transform

We amplify our impact by being brave, taking risks, as we lead and influence the sector

### Together we go Further

AWA will inspire connection both within and beyond the water sector to drive innovation and positive change

These values guide our reconciliation journey by encouraging all staff to take ownership of meaningful action, lead brave conversations that challenge the status quo, and work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These values ensure our reconciliation commitments are lived every day, driving sector-wide change through respect, inclusion, and collaboration.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION

AWA is committed to promoting and developing activities that improve the understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and connection to water and Country. We understand that greater and more meaningful engagement and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is required to achieve a sustainable water future for all. Through our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), we aim to continue to lay the foundations for meaningful relationships, increased cultural safety, and reconciliation outcomes in alignment with our strategic goals.

AWA's Strategy 2030 directly supports and advances actions under the Innovate RAP by embedding reconciliation principles across its three strategic pillars. Through *Inspiring System Change*, AWA commits to amplifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and embedding Traditional Knowledge in water management. *Fostering Cross-Sector Collaboration* aligns with the RAP's goals by creating inclusive spaces that welcome First Peoples' participation and partnerships. Finally, *Growing Sector Capability* supports cultural learning and workforce diversity by expanding development opportunities that help attract, retain, and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the water sector.

As part of our commitment to reconciliation, AWA has established a RAP Advisory Group (RAG) in partnership with the Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA). This advisory group, which includes staff from both AWA and WSAA, as well as over 50% representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water professionals, plays a crucial role in guiding the implementation of our RAP. The insights and advice of the advisory group ensure that we are embedding cultural safety and awareness into our activities.

This collaboration with WSAA allows both organisations to benefit from shared resources and expertise, enhancing the effectiveness of our reconciliation initiatives. Through our RAP and our new Strategy 2030, we aim to embed greater cultural awareness, facilitate deeper engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and contribute to a sustainable, inclusive water future.

## OUR JOURNEY TO DATE

The AWA is developing an Innovate RAP to deepen our commitment to reconciliation, building on the foundation laid during the completion of our Reflect RAP. Our goal is to embed reconciliation into the water sector by fostering respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This aligns with our core values and strategic objectives, aiming to create meaningful, long-term relationships that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water professionals and communities. Through this RAP, we seek to advance our commitment to diversity, equity, and the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge and contributions within the water community.

AWA's journey towards reconciliation began with the Reflect RAP, which was launched in June 2023. It provided us with a foundation to deepen engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and enabled us to build stronger relationships and understanding. Our Innovate RAP represents the next phase of this journey, where we intend to develop and strengthen these relationships, continue to embed Traditional Owner voices within our organisation, and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge in the water sector.

Our RAP is championed by AWA's CEO who plays a pivotal role in driving reconciliation efforts across the organisation. The RAP is sponsored by AWA's Head of International and Industry Programs. Together, they ensure that the RAP's objectives are integrated into AWA's core business operations and strategic goals.

AWA's RAP Working Group is made up of internal staff and is responsible for overseeing the development, implementation, and reporting of our Innovate RAP. The group is led by the RAP

Sponsor (Head of International and Industry Programs), with project support from our Project Lead - International and Industry Programs and Content & Education Lead.

While there are currently no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff within the Working Group, we acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation is a requirement for Innovate RAPs. As a small not-for-profit organisation, AWA does not currently have the capacity to appoint a dedicated Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff member to support RAP governance. However, we are deeply committed to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices guide our reconciliation work in a culturally safe and meaningful way.

To meet this commitment, the RAP Working Group works in close partnership with the AWA-WSAA RAP Advisory Group, which includes a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members. This Advisory Group plays a vital role in shaping the direction of the RAP and advising on its development, ensuring the actions we commit to are grounded in lived experience, respectful of culture, and aligned with the aspirations of First Peoples across the water sector. The Advisory Group operates under a Terms of Reference that commenced in January 2025 and will remain in place for the duration of AWA's Innovate RAP. AWA also works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water professionals and community stakeholders throughout our activities, embedding collaboration and inclusive engagement into our approach.

Looking ahead, AWA remains committed to building stronger relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including through culturally safe recruitment, professional development, and partnerships.

# RECONCILIATION ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE DEVELOPING OUR FIRST RAP

Since launching our Reflect RAP in June 2023, AWA has made considerable progress in its reconciliation journey. Our Reflect RAP laid the foundation for stronger engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, while also guiding the development of policies like our proposed anti-discrimination policy and initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement and employment pathways. Additionally, our national events in both 2023 and 2024 offered our members a platform to reflect on reconciliation and engage in discussions around Cultural Knowledge and water management.

These case studies highlight how AWA is working to elevate Traditional Owner leadership and knowledge in the water sector, providing meaningful platforms for collaboration and understanding:

## Ozwater

AWA continues to celebrate and elevate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and leadership at our flagship conference, Ozwater. Working closely with Traditional Owners, the event features culturally significant elements such as Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremonies, yarning circles, Traditional Owner-approved language in branding and signage, and program themes that highlight First Peoples Knowledge and participation.

As part of this commitment, Ozwater has showcased powerful keynotes from Aboriginal leaders. In 2023, Yawuru/Bunuba woman, lawyer and social innovator Cara Peek challenged delegates to build cultural intelligence, confront biases, and recognise water as a fundamental human right. In 2025, Jack Buckskin, a proud Kurna, Narungga and Wirangu man, opened the conference with a Smoking Ceremony and Welcome to Country before delivering a keynote exploring the enduring connection between water, language and Country.

These moments reinforce our commitment to reconciliation and continue to deepen cultural awareness, reflection and dialogue across the sector.



**Kuma Kaaru Dance Group performing at the Ozwater'25 Gala Dinner, led by Jack Buckskin (Kurna, Narungga and Wirangu), whose leadership and cultural knowledge were also shared through Welcome to Country and keynote address at Ozwater'25.**

## Voices From the Bush

In August 2024, AWA and WSAA co-hosted the second Voices from the Bush national conference on Arrernte Country in Alice Springs. The event brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, Traditional Owners, community members (both Traditional Owners from Arrernte Country and from other Nations across Australia), water professionals and policymakers to share knowledge and discuss practical solutions to water security and sanitation challenges in regional and remote communities. With scholarships supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water professionals to participate, the conference provided a culturally safe platform to amplify First Peoples' voices and strengthen collaboration across the sector.



## FURTHER CASE STUDIES REFLECTING POSITIVE PROGRESS

### Remote and Regional Scoping Project

In 2024, AWA led a comprehensive initiative to review water access inequalities in remote and regional Aboriginal communities, with a focus on partnerships with Traditional Custodians. Through workshops, causal mapping, and consultations with over 80 stakeholders, AWA identified systemic barriers and strategic opportunities in water governance, collaboration with First Peoples, and community education. The project, which has informed the development of this RAP, proposed four transformative programs: strengthening water outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, promoting regional water careers, advancing knowledge exchange, and integrating water, health, and housing solutions. These initiatives aim to empower local communities, amplify First People's voices, and advocate for equitable, sustainable water services nationwide.



**Lauren Liddle, Senior Community Liaison Officer at Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation, delivering a Welcome to Country at the Welcome Reception of the Voices from the Bush Conference 2024 on Arrernte Country.**

**Dr Phil Duncan, Traditional Owner of the Terry Hie Hie lands of the Gomeri Nation, sharing a cultural practice during an on-Country cultural immersion, applying ochre collected from a local dry riverbed to give safe passage on Country.**



### Learning opportunities for staff and members

AWA continues to build cultural understanding across our staff and membership through meaningful learning experiences. Our team has participated in cultural learning sessions, including a Cultural Onboarding course facilitated by Dr Phil Duncan, Traditional Owner of the Terry Hie Hie lands of the Gomeri nation, and cultural awareness activities such as the Aboriginal Harbour Heritage Tour in Sydney.

In partnership with WSAA, we have also delivered National Reconciliation Week webinars that showcase Aboriginal leadership in the water sector. The 2024 session highlighted Water Corporation's Aboriginal Engagement Strategy and the Aboriginal Communities Water Services Program supporting 142 remote communities, while the 2025 webinar—Bridging Now to Next—featured insights from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders across the sector. These opportunities continue to encourage listening, reflection and deeper cultural understanding across the AWA community.

As we move forward with our Innovate RAP, we aim to continue this progress by further embedding reconciliation into our events, policies, and organisational culture, strengthening our partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as we continue our reconciliation journey.



# RELATIONSHIPS

## Building trust through connection, listening and collaboration.

Strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are essential to AWA's purpose to inspire, connect and transform the water sector. These relationships help us honour diverse ways of knowing, elevate First Peoples' voices in sector dialogue, and co-create a future where water is managed more justly and sustainably.

We recognise that truth-telling, listening and collaboration are foundational to reconciliation. By working alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples - including our members, volunteers, partners and communities - we are better equipped to understand lived experience, cultural values, and governance systems that have cared for water and Country for generations.

We will continue to leverage our national network to support culturally safe spaces for knowledge-sharing and co-design, ensuring First Peoples' voices are embedded in the work we do, from technical programs to advocacy, events and beyond. These relationships not only support inclusion and equity, but also strengthen our influence, relevance and impact across the water sector. They bring our values of collaboration, inclusion and respect to life, and help position AWA as a trusted connector in driving system-wide change.

### Focus area:

Building strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is essential to delivering on AWA's strategic priorities, particularly our commitment to Foster Cross-sector Collaboration and Inspire System Change. These relationships enable us to honour and elevate Traditional Knowledge, support culturally safe co-design, and create the inclusive partnerships needed to address complex water challenges. By strengthening these connections, we contribute to a more sustainable water future grounded in equity, shared knowledge, and collective impact.

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 1. Establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement.</li> </ul>	March 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead - International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement an engagement plan to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.</li> </ul>	April 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead - International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<b>ACTION 2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff.</li> </ul>	May 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Content and Education Lead <b>Support:</b> Marketing Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event.</li> </ul>	27 May - 3 June 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.</li> </ul>	May 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Content and Education Lead <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organise at least one NRW event each year in collaboration with WSAA.</li> </ul>	May 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead - International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Register all our NRW events on Reconciliation Australia's <a href="#">NRW website</a>.</li> </ul>	May 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Marketing Coordinator <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.</b>		
• Develop and implement a staff engagement strategy to raise awareness of reconciliation across our workforce.	February 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
• Communicate our commitment to reconciliation publicly.	January 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Marketing Coordinator <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
• Explore opportunities to positively influence our external stakeholders to drive reconciliation outcomes.	February 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of Strategic Relationships and Advocacy <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
• Collaborate with RAP organisations and other like-minded organisations to develop innovative approaches to advance reconciliation.	July 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of Strategic Relationships and Advocacy <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<b>ACTION 4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.</b>		
• Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs	June 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> CEO
• Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors to consult on our anti-discrimination policy. • Refer back to RAG to see if they have ideas/examples of wording.	June 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> CEO
• Develop, implement, and communicate an anti-discrimination policy for our organisation. • Refer back to RAG to see if they have ideas/examples of wording.	June 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> CEO
• Educate senior leaders on the effects of racism.	December 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs <b>Support:</b> Project Lead – International Development

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 5. Develop and implement a Roadmap to amplify First Peoples' voices from regional and remote communities.</b>		
• In consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors, develop a roadmap and content to showcase impactful First Peoples' water programs and networks.	December 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
• Build cultural competency through facilitation of access to training and communications for AWA members. Promotion of cultural competence training by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to members.	December 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Content and Education Lead <b>Support:</b> Project Lead – International Development
• Foster trust in the sector through storytelling of early and ongoing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in water management.	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Editor & Content Marketing Lead <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<b>ACTION 6. Lead the Voices from the Bush conference with WSAA.</b>		
• Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, communities and businesses to explore new opportunities to grow the Voices from the Bush conference, driving change and directing the conversation shaping a sustainable, equitable water future for all across our nation's rural and remote regions.	September 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of Events, Awards, and Digital <b>Support:</b> Project Lead – International Development
• Facilitate attendance of the RAP Working Group at Voices from the Bush, supporting culturally respectful engagement, and helping identify ongoing opportunities for collaboration and action arising from the conference.	September 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of Events, Awards, and Digital <b>Support:</b> Project Lead – International Development



# RESPECT

## Honouring cultures, protocols and enduring connection to Country.

Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights is foundational to AWA's purpose to inspire, connect and transform the water sector. As an organisation grounded in collaboration and systems change, we recognise that deepening respect helps unlock new ways of thinking, fosters cultural safety, and ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard and valued across the sector.

### Focus area:

Respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights supports AWA's strategic goals to *Inspire System Change* and *Foster Cross-sector Collaboration*. Embedding cultural learning, protocols and First Peoples'-led perspectives into our work strengthens cultural safety and integrity, and ensures that our sector transformation is grounded in truth, equity and shared knowledge. These actions are essential to building a more just and sustainable water future.

Embedding respect strengthens AWA's ability to lead, influence and connect. It builds cultural understanding within our team and membership, equipping us to engage meaningfully with First People stakeholders, support inclusive decision-making, and contribute to long-term reconciliation. This work enhances our workplace culture, supports retention and pride among current and future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers and staff, and creates shared value across everything we do.

By learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems and celebrating the enduring connection to Country, we honour the past, inform the present and help shape a water future that is just, sustainable and inclusive.

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 7. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation.</li> </ul>	February 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead - International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult local Traditional Owners and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors to inform our cultural learning strategy.</li> </ul>	March 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead - International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop, implement, and communicate a cultural learning strategy document for our staff.</li> </ul>	April 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead - International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide opportunities for RAP Working Group members, HR managers and other key leadership staff to participate in formal and structured cultural learning.</li> </ul>	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead - International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<b>ACTION 8. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.</li> </ul>	February 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead - International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop, implement and communicate a cultural protocol document, including protocols for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country.</li> </ul>	April 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of Events, Awards, and Digital <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invite local Traditional Owner or Custodians to provide Welcome to Country ceremonies or other appropriate cultural protocols at significant events each year.</li> </ul>	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027 <small>(reporting)</small>	<b>Lead:</b> Events Coordinator <b>Support:</b> Head of Events, Awards, and Digital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include an Acknowledgement of Country or other appropriate protocols at the commencement of important meetings.</li> </ul>	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027 <small>(reporting)</small>	<b>Lead:</b> Company Secretary <b>Support:</b> CEO

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 9. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.</b>		
• RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event.	July 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead - International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
• Review HR policies and procedures to remove barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week.	February 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> CEO
• Promote and encourage participation in external NAIDOC events to all staff.	July 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead - International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead

**ACTION 10. Prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices at key events.**

• Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers and thought leaders for Ozwater, Voices from the Bush and National Water Week.	Ozwater: May 2026 & 2027 Voices: September 2026 NWW: October 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Head of Events, Awards, and Digital <b>Support:</b> Events Coordinator
• Dedicate sessions led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts focused on water management.	Ozwater: May 2026 & 2027 Voices: September 2026 NWW: October 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Head of Events, Awards, and Digital <b>Support:</b> Events Coordinator
• Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and stories through communications aligned with key national dates, such as National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day (4 August), International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (9 August), and NAIDOC Week (early July). These campaigns aim to raise awareness, celebrate cultural strength, and connect the water sector to the broader national reconciliation conversation.	July, August 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Editor & Content Marketing Lead <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 11. Ensure respectful use and attribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge and content</b>		
• Seek guidance from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners and advisors to better understand cultural IP considerations and permission protocols.	June 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Content and Education Lead <b>Support:</b> RAP Advisory Group
• Conduct an internal review of AWA's current content, resources and platforms to identify where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge, language, stories, or imagery is used.	September 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Content and Education Lead <b>Support:</b> Digital Producer
• Update policy and procedure documents to ensure respectful language, where necessary.	September 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Content and Education Lead <b>Support:</b> Digital Producer

**ACTION 12. Embed reconciliation principles into AWA's governance frameworks, policies and content management systems.**

• Conduct a review of AWA's organisational policies and procedures to identify gaps or missed opportunities to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, cultural protocols, and reconciliation commitments.	March 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
• Develop a Cultural IP protocol or set of guiding principles to support respectful use, attribution, and protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and content across AWA platforms, programs and publications.	June 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Content and Education Lead <b>Support:</b> Head of Communications and Corporate Services
• Integrate the Cultural IP protocol and reconciliation commitments into relevant governance documents (e.g. editorial guidelines, partnership MOUs, onboarding materials, policy templates).	June 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Content and Education Lead <b>Support:</b> Head of Communications and Corporate Services
• Establish a review mechanism to ensure future policies and procedures are developed through a reconciliation lens and consider cultural safety, inclusion and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	June 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead



# OPPORTUNITIES

## Creating space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, knowledge and businesses to thrive.

Creating employment, training and economic opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is essential to building a more inclusive, capable and future-ready water sector. As a national organisation with strong networks across government, utilities, service providers and research institutions, AWA is uniquely positioned to influence workforce pathways, procurement practices and professional development opportunities across the sector.

For AWA, this work strengthens our own organisation and the broader water community by increasing representation, enhancing cultural capability, and embedding diverse perspectives into water decision-making and service delivery. By fostering meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, businesses, educators and Traditional Owners, we aim to break down systemic barriers and enable access to the systems, platforms and careers that shape the sector.

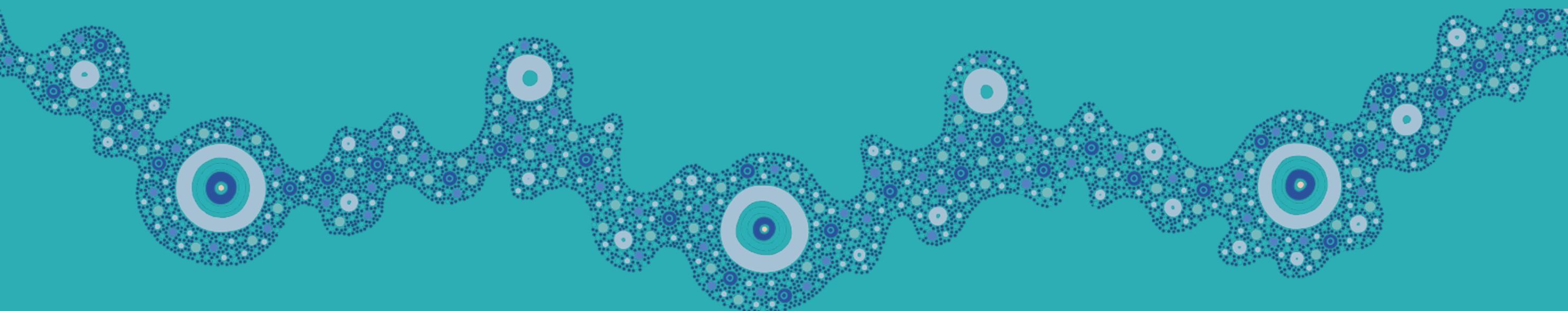
Through targeted actions including recruitment, retention and procurement strategies, as well as leadership of the Careers in Water initiative, we're focused on building long-term, culturally appropriate pathways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, so they may thrive in the water sector. These opportunities are not only essential to reconciliation, but they also bring fresh insight, strengthen our workforce, and help us deliver on our values of collaboration, inclusion and impact.

### Focus area:

Creating genuine opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples supports AWA's strategic priorities to *Grow Sector Capability* and *Inspire System Change*. By strengthening employment pathways, supplier diversity, and culturally appropriate training across the water sector, we help build a more inclusive and skilled workforce. These actions not only enhance AWA's ability to connect people and knowledge — they also support the transformation of systems and structures to be more equitable, responsive and future-ready.

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 13. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention, and professional development.</b>		
• Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.	March 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> CEO
• Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AWA members to consult on our recruitment, retention and professional development strategy.	June 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
• Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development strategy.	December 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> CEO
• Advertise job vacancies to effectively reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.	January 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
• Review HR and recruitment procedures and policies to remove barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in our workplace.	March 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People & Culture <b>Support:</b> CEO
<b>ACTION 14. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.</b>		
• Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement strategy.	July 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of Communications and Corporate Services
• Investigate Supply Nation membership.	January 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
• Develop and communicate opportunities for procurement of goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to staff.	August 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
• Review and update procurement practices to remove barriers to procuring goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.	March 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of Communications and Corporate Services
• Develop commercial relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses.	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027 <small>(reporting)</small>	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of Communications and Corporate Services

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 15. Lead the Careers in Water initiative with our members, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the water sector.</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with AWA members, Traditional Owners, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainers to advance region-specific water management training delivery.</li> </ul>	June 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Industry Program Lead - Water Careers and Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for culturally appropriate employment and training approaches.</li> </ul>	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027 (reporting)	<b>Lead:</b> Head of People and Culture <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote certification programs and water careers within First People communities, and connect sector leaders, trainees, and training providers to build clear workforce pathways.</li> </ul>	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027 (reporting)	<b>Lead:</b> Industry Program Lead - Water Careers and Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead





# GOVERNANCE

Strong governance ensures our reconciliation commitments are embedded across AWA's systems, leadership and culture. Through clear accountability, transparent reporting and active engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors, we will track progress, share learnings, and continually improve. Strengthening governance helps us deliver on our purpose to inspire, connect and transform the water sector, ensuring reconciliation is not an initiative, but an integral part of how we operate and lead.

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 16. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG.</li> </ul>	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish and apply a Terms of Reference for the RWG.</li> </ul>	January 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet at least four times per year to drive and monitor RAP implementation.</li> </ul>	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027 (reporting)	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
<b>ACTION 17. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define resource needs for RAP implementation.</li> </ul>	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027 (review & update)	<b>Lead:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs <b>Support:</b> Project Lead – International Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments.</li> </ul>	September 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs <b>Support:</b> CEO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define and maintain appropriate systems to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.</li> </ul>	January 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs <b>Support:</b> Project Lead – International Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain a senior leader to champion our RAP internally.</li> </ul>	June 2027	<b>Lead:</b> CEO <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 18. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.</b>		
• Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss out on important RAP correspondence.	June 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
• Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link, to access the online RAP Impact Survey.	August 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
• Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Survey to Reconciliation Australia.	September 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
• Report RAP progress to all staff and senior leaders quarterly.	March, June, September, December 2026 & 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs
• Publicly report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings, annually.	November 2026 & 2027 <small>(at AGM)</small>	<b>Lead:</b> Head of Communications and Corporate Services <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
• Investigate participating in Reconciliation Australia’s biennial Workplace RAP Barometer.	April 2026	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Content and Education Lead
• Submit a traffic light report to Reconciliation Australia at the conclusion of this RAP.	January 2028	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>ACTION 19. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.</b>		
• Register via Reconciliation Australia’s <a href="#">website</a> to begin developing our next RAP.	June 2027	<b>Lead:</b> Project Lead – International Development <b>Support:</b> Head of International and Industry Programs





## ABOUT THE ARTWORK

### 'At the Heart of all Life'

© Amy Allerton

Water is at the heart of all life, from the beginning of creation to creating a vibrant future. Wherever we live, work and play, water flows within us and all around us, connecting us to each other and to Country.

Water is at the heart of ensuring our communities can thrive, economies can prosper and our environments can flourish. The power of water is immense and invaluable, bringing healing to our communities, sustainable solutions to our industries and restoration to our ecosystems.

As AWA connects us together, we collaborate, innovate and share with Elders, community, government and industry to fulfil our roles as caretakers for the water, to ensure that life perseveres.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

### Amy Allerton

Amy Allerton is the founder and Director of Indigico Creative, a graphic designer and contemporary Aboriginal artist. Amy is a Gumbaynggirr and Bundjalung woman whose family's traditional land is located in the Clarence Valley in a rural area called Cangai in NSW. Amy's identity is strongly grounded in Gomeroi culture, history, dreaming, art and language having been born and raised in Tamworth, NSW, where she still lives with her husband, Rick, and two children.

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