



## Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group and Committee on Aboriginal Water Interests Joint Meeting 23 May 2023 Communique

The Aboriginal Water and Environmental Advisory Group (AWEAG) held its 15<sup>th</sup> meeting on 23 May 2023 at the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) where they hosted the Committee on Aboriginal Water Interests and staff from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water for a joint meeting. The meeting was co-chaired by AWEAG Co-Chairs Michelle Andrews and Jason Barrow and CAWI Co-Chairs Grant Rigney and Rene Woods.

Members were welcomed to country on the banks of Doondalup ('the lake that glistens'), also known as Lake Joondalup, by respected Nyoongar elder Kevin Fitzgerald.

The main items presented and discussed included the following:

### **Members Water Stories**

AWEAG and CAWI members shared stories and learnings from their own work in various fields of water management and legislation.

### **How Water is Managed in Western Australia**

DWER staff Susie Williams, Regional Manager North West, provided valuable insights on water management in Western Australia. The reliance on groundwater in Western Australia distinguishes it from other states. Different management approaches are established for the various types of groundwater. The department has implemented a framework that allows for adjustments to license and allocation limits based on new information. Currently, not every region in Western Australia is covered by a groundwater allocation plan and the department adopts a risk-based approach to water planning and management.

Members discussed issue related to compliance requirements, native title water allocations and processes that may impact on the water source.

### **Water opportunities through Native Title**

DWER staff Fleur Coaker, Regional Manager Mid West Gascoyne, provided an introduction and background to the Yamatji Nation Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA). The agreement was negotiated by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, on behalf of the State. This is a settlement, not a ruling, convened by the Federal Court.

Ms Coaker spoke about the Ms Coaker the water component of the compensation package that allows for the ongoing management of water on country by Traditional Owners. Up to 30 percent of available water allocations are calculated to be held in reserve solely for Yamatji Southern Regional Corporation (YSRC).

Ms Coaker spoke about the collaboration between Yamatji Southern Regional Corporation and DWER and lessons learned. DWER has been allocated funding for position to support the implementation and assist the YSRC navigate the regulatory process

## **Water Reform**

DWER staff Dr Daniel Nevin provided an overview of the Western Australia legislative context for water management. The drafting of the Water Reform Bill is currently proceeding, and the introduction of the new legislation will signify a major change that has taken decades to arrive at.

A key element of the proposed legislation is explicitly recognising Aboriginal interests in land, culture, heritage, and traditional knowledge related to water management. The language in the legislation will be updated to reflect this, ensuring that water planning, protection of water sources and waterways, and drinking water security are all addressed. The new legislation will ensure that Aboriginal needs are considered in water allocation planning and licensing, allowing for the setting aside of Aboriginal reserves without an obligation for their immediate use. It will also provide tools to respond to climate change.

## **Reflection Session**

The meeting fostered connections promoted knowledge exchange and provided invaluable guidance from an enhanced national Aboriginal perspective to inform legislative reforms by the Western Australian government.