



DJAARA WATER STRATEGY CALLS FOR CHANGE

Wednesday 28 June

Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DJAARA) is calling for involvement in water management, and a share of water entitlements in the Djaara **gatjin** (water) strategy *Dhelkunyangu Gatjin* (“working together to heal water”), released today.

Dja Dja Wurrung Group CEO Rodney Carter said **djaara** (Dja Dja Wurrung People), the Traditional Owners of **djandak** (Dja Dja Wurrung Country), had been excluded from water management decisions, and access to water rights since colonisation.

“Our Ancestors looked after this Country and we are duty-bound to look after it for the next generation – including the water that falls on and flows through Country, Mr Carter said.

“Since colonisation, management decisions have caused irreparable damage to our rivers, lakes and swamps. We have been unable to fulfil our cultural obligations to care for waterways, because we have been excluded from participation in water management.

“We have limited opportunities to contribute our lore and our knowledge to heal waterways. We are also prevented from participation in the water economy.

“This is despite DJAARA’s 2013 Recognition and Settlement Agreement with the State of Victoria, which acknowledges that Djaara, as Traditional Owners, are required to be included in the management of natural resources, including water.

“The Djaara Gatjin Strategy provides a pathway for government water agencies to meet their obligations under the agreement and, more importantly, to improve water management and heal country.

“DJAARA embraces the spirit of **ngaldurrong** (working together) and we look forward to partnering with water agencies to implement *Dhelkunyangu Gatjin*,” Mr Carter said.

Coliban Water Managing Director Damian Wells welcomed the Djaara Gatjin Strategy.

“This strategy sets a transformational direction toward water justice in central Victoria, and we welcome DJAARA’s leadership,” Mr Wells said.

“Restoring Traditional Owner water rights is well overdue.

“We can find better ways to collectively heal Country and we will follow DJAARA’s lead.

“Coliban Water continues to embed Traditional Owner aspiration in our operations and major projects. A big opportunity in the medium term will flow from modernising the Coliban Rural Water system.

“We aim to realise significant water savings from this project, and we aim to attract investment to enable these water savings to be shared with Traditional Owners in the form of returning water rights.

“Some initial water return to Djaara has already occurred that proves the project concept. This water return was enabled following water efficiency investment in our rural water network.

“We recently returned 5 megalitres of water rights to Djaara, that will likely be used at the Larni Yirrip campground site located in Kangaroo Flat,” Mr Wells said.

In 2019, legislation was passed to enshrine Aboriginal cultural values and knowledge in water and catchment management into law, and to include Traditional Owners in these processes.

The Victorian Government’s *Water is Life*, a key deliverable from Victoria’s water plan, *Water for Victoria* (2016), sets out clear pathways to increase Traditional Owner resourcing for, and role in, the care and management of water landscapes.

Victorian Water Minister Harriet Shing recently met with Rodney Carter to discuss *Dhelkunyangu Gatjin*.

“I congratulate Dja Dja Wurrung on the release of the Gatjin Strategy and setting such a comprehensive vision for water on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, Minister Shing said.

“I look forward to working with Djaara to see what we can achieve as we strengthen water management partnerships between Traditional Owners and the water sector, and the Gatjin Strategy sets out Djaara’s clear expectations for how we can continue to progress this important work.”

The Djaara Gatjin Strategy is designed as an overarching strategy to sit alongside *Water for Victoria* to guide water management on Dja Dja Wurrung Country.

As part of the strategy, DJAARA plans to establish a Gatjin Authority to manage its water obligations, which would become an integral part of Victoria’s water framework.

Dhelkunyangu Gatjin is available at <https://djadjawurrung.com.au/resources/>.

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