



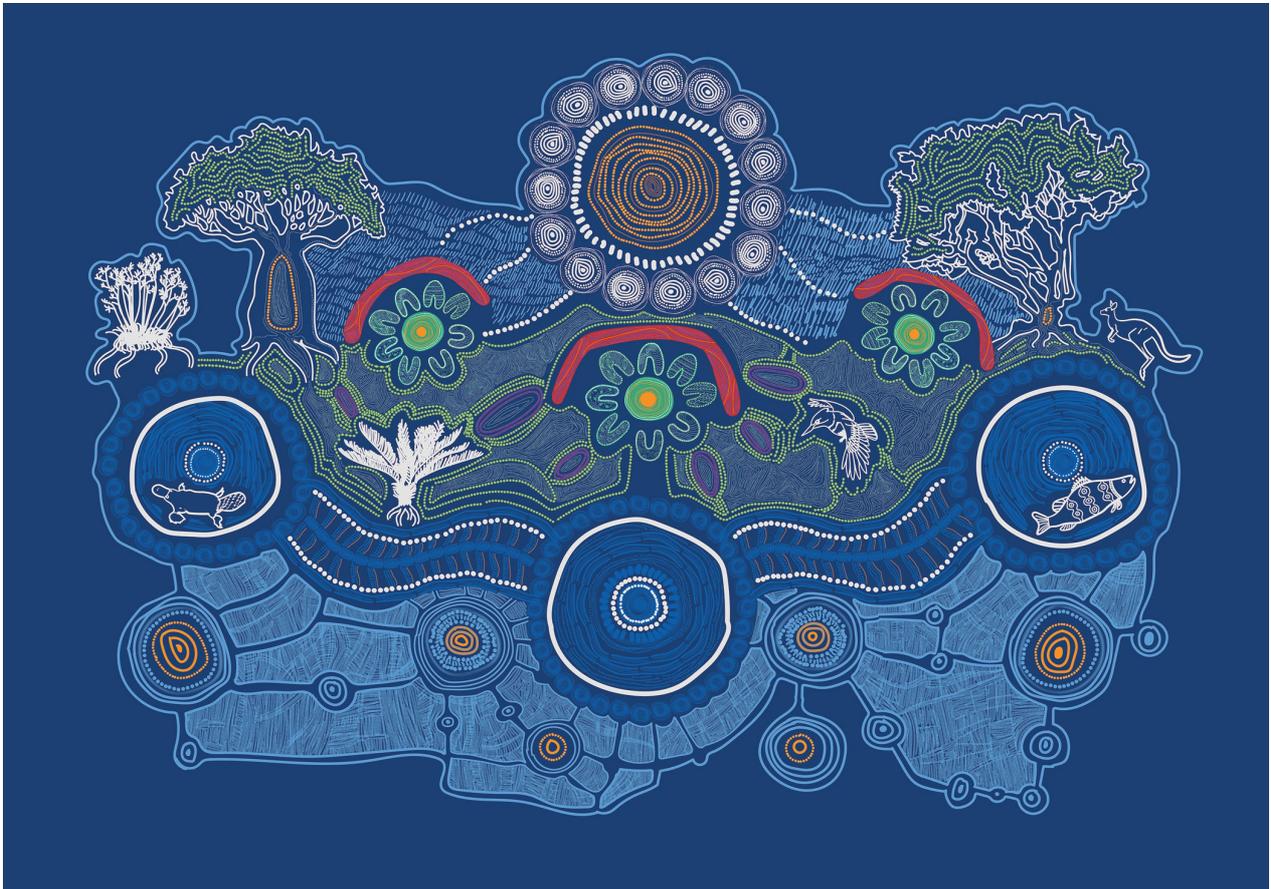
REFLECT

RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

OCTOBER 2022 – APRIL 2024



Artist: Anna Dowling



About the artwork

The artwork shows the water cycle and healthy water systems in Australia. The importance of the sun (top), native vegetation, animals, and people (gathering at humpies) are shown here. Water systems are connected and flowing above and underground while rain flows to these areas. The important role of water in cooling and greening environments is highlighted. The many circles and cycles in the artwork reflect the water industry's adoption of circular economy practices – an area in which much is being learnt from First Nations people.

About the artist

Anna was born in Adelaide, South Australia and is a descendant of the Badimia people of the Yamatji region in Western Australia. Working in ink on paper, she reflects on her mixed cultural heritage and draws on traditional symbols and patterns. At age 21, Anna Dowling was the recipient of the 2014 Don Dunstan "Our Mob" Emerging Artist Prize. In 2015, Anna was a finalist in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NAATSIA) and in 2016 was awarded the Max Indigenous Art Award (youth category winner) at Parliament House in Sydney.

FOREWORD



I am proud to introduce the inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan for the Water Services Association of Australia.

The Australian and New Zealand water industry of today is privileged to walk in the footsteps of those that came long before. WSAA itself operates within the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri and Gadigal people (Melbourne and Sydney), and our members across Australia and New Zealand, operate on so many more traditional lands and communities.

The original inhabitants of these lands practiced care for water, care for Country, and care for people, through knowings and practices developed over millennia. They have a deep and enduring relationship with water and water bodies. They know this land well, and have been part of it since long before European settlement and the introduction of Western management approaches. We acknowledge that we have much to learn from First Nations peoples, and we look forward to deepening our existing connections, relationships, programs of work and information-sharing activities, to further that learning.

We acknowledge the painful history that arose with European settlement in this region, and the ongoing challenges Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander peoples face in the areas of health, education, employment, and social outcomes. Access to basic water and sanitation services is something that many people today take for granted, and our industry is working to provide all people everywhere with that same level of service. Water is intrinsic to life, to Country, and to cultural heritage and beliefs.

Reconciliation is a vital part of the urban water industry's evolution. As the peak body for the industry, WSAA looks forward to making our contribution, both within our own organisation, and as part of the broader service we provide to our members who are spread across all of Australia and New Zealand. Many of our members are well advanced on the reconciliation path, having completed several RAPs, whereas others – like ourselves – are just starting out on their RAP journey. Our role is to bring the industry together to foster networks, share information and learning, undertake joint project work, and help all water utilities to progress forward, from whatever their current stage.

WSAA's vision is to be customer-driven, enriching life. One of the Priorities in our WSAA Strategy 2021 – 2023 is Driving progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, including a focus on uplift of regional, remote and First Australians water services. In our Climate Change Position, we commit to Develop lasting relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and businesses to ensure a partnership and stewardship approach to our shared challenges in water resource management. Preparing this RAP is an important step towards this, and builds on our engagement and activity to date. One of our great strengths is the forums that we create where people can learn and share openly, which helps to heal the wrongs of the past, and work out how we can truly collaborate going forward.

We look forward to delivering the commitments we make in this RAP, together with our staff, members, partners, suppliers, and other stakeholders, including Reconciliation Australia. By working together, we can make great strides towards our vision of enriching life.

Roch Cheroux
Chair, WSAA
Managing Director, Sydney Water



Reconciliation Australia CEO Statement



Reconciliation Australia welcomes Water Services Association of Australia to the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program with the formal endorsement of its inaugural Reflect RAP.

Water Services Association of Australia joins a network of more than 2,200 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have made a formal commitment to reconciliation through the RAP program.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement. The program's potential for impact is greater than ever, with close to 3 million people now working or studying in an organisation with a RAP.

The four RAP types – Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate – allow RAP partners to continuously develop and strengthen reconciliation commitments in new ways. This Reflect RAP will lay the foundations, priming the workplace for future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives.

The RAP program's strength is its framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities, allowing an organisation to strategically set its reconciliation commitments in line with its own business objectives, for the most effective outcomes.

These outcomes contribute towards the five dimensions of reconciliation: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance.

It is critical to not only uphold all five dimensions of reconciliation, but also increase awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and leadership across all sectors of Australian society.

This Reflect RAP enables Water Services Association of Australia to deepen its understanding of its sphere of influence and the unique contribution it can make to lead progress across the five dimensions. Getting these first steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations Water Services Association of Australia, welcome to the RAP program, and I look forward to following your reconciliation journey in the years to come.

Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia

Contents



01
Our business

03
Our RAP

05
Our partnerships/current
activities

07
Actions

08
Relationships

09
Respect

10
Opportunities

11
Governance

Our business

The Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) is the peak industry body representing the urban water industry. It was formed in 1995 as a non-profit organisation to foster the exchange of information between industry, government and the community, and to promote sustainable water resource management.

The urban water industry is committed to anchoring its services to customers' values, and to enrich communities where water services have broad economic, environmental and social values. In line with this WSAA has four primary objectives:

- influence national and state policies on the provision of urban water services and sustainable water resource management
- promote debate on environmentally sustainable development and management of water resources and the community health requirements of public water supplies
- improve industry performance and establishing benchmarks and industry leading practices for water service processes; and
- foster the exchange of information on education, training, research, water and wastewater management and treatment and other matters of common interest.

To implement these objectives and activate the water industry, WSAA supports collaboration and knowledge sharing through a structure of Committees and Networks. WSAA membership is available to public or private utilities, organisations or businesses providing water and/or sewerage services or organisations that have an interest allied to the urban water industry. There is a not for profit business within WSAA called The Water Conservancy, which provides independent

water efficiency expertise, facilitation and excellence as an authority on water efficiency.

WSAA currently employs a total of 22 staff, all in Australia, a number of whom work flexible hours. Currently our organisation has no known staff that identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

WSAA's geographic reach comprises two levels. Our offices are on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Gadigal peoples (Melbourne, Sydney). However, we are a national organisation spanning all of Australia, and New Zealand. WSAA members provide water and sewerage services to over 24 million customers in Australia and New Zealand and many of Australia's largest industrial and commercial enterprises.

A key part of our role is to help all of our member water utilities progress forwards on issues of industry or national significance, from whatever point they are at – be they 'the leaders' or those less advanced. We do this by sharing information, network contacts and resources. Our relationship with New Zealand is also a key asset; currently Watercare (Auckland) and Wellington Water are our members, but we work closely with WaterNZ (our counterpart association with national coverage). These relationships mean we can benefit from two-way sharing with New Zealand as well. New Zealand has many relevant parallel issues.



Figure 1 WSAA members across Australia and New Zealand

WSAA has two office locations, one at Docklands in Melbourne (Wurundjeri Country) and one in central Sydney (Gadigal Country). However, like a lot of organisations we now have many staff working from home for substantial parts of their week – and our homes are mostly located within the Melbourne and Sydney urban and peri-urban areas.

Our RAP

As a national peak body for the urban water industry, we play a leadership role on issues of national and local importance to our industry. We believe reconciliation, and overall improvement of the recognition, understanding and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, is vital for us to thrive and reflect modern values as an organisation and a leader in our domain.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and practices with regard to water and land management, and appropriate access to water, and their progress towards self-determination, are key areas of intersection with European approaches and culture. We believe that we can and should do better at working together and taking shared approaches to these issues. Understanding reconciliation, and attempting to heal the wounds of the past, are essential steps.

We also recognise that this is a key priority for our members (water utilities in Australia and New Zealand), and so we want to be walking a journey of reconciliation in step with them, noting that for each organisation the path and aspects of the journey will be unique. One of our key strengths and purposes at WSAA is to share information and resources to help all our members progress forward, from whatever point in their journey they are at.

Further, the people of WSAA, care about reconciliation and have expressed desire to feel more knowledgeable and better skilled at managing issues that interface with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or priorities. Implementing a RAP will allow us to explore these issues and raise our understanding, our confidence, while also contributing to and supporting the broad social benefit that the RAP program as a whole has created in Australia.

For our first (Reflect) RAP, we appreciate the guidance that has been provided by Reconciliation Australia, to help us pinpoint where the thinking and activity can begin. The suggested actions align well with our internal expectations of the sorts of issues we would

like to consider and develop, so we have adopted them with few changes. They provide a good platform for us to spend time as an organisation over the next year and beyond, considering how we can positively influence reconciliation, and expand our growing understanding and knowledge into all that we do.

A fundamental desire is that we implement our RAP in a business-wide way – involving people from various parts and levels of the business, and different locations. As such we have tried to work on the RAP in the spirit of collaboration from the start. This includes inviting people from all areas to participate, and be involved in identifying and later delivering the actions.

At a broader level, we have 4 key committees that bring together leaders of the water industry from across Australia and New Zealand. Each committee has a different focus (liveability, customer, people and culture, operations). We will ensure that activity relating to our RAP is shared among the committees and pursued in line with that committee's remit.

We will form a RAP Advisory Group in partnership with the Australian Water Association (AWA), the other national member-based water industry association. Our organisations have various similarities that mean it will make sense to form one Group that can oversee the work of both WSAA and AWA. We may also undertake certain actions in partnership with the AWA as well. Our RAP Advisory Group is intended to include staff from WSAA and AWA, staff from our members (water utilities around

Australia), as well as other individuals with relevant expertise and work areas. We are terming this a RAP Advisory Group rather than Working Group, because the members of the Group are mainly not our employees. WSAA and AWA staff will deliver most of the work, and so we consider that the role of the Group is more advisory in nature, they are not required to play a role in implementing the actions.

While WSAA has not prepared a RAP before, we work closely with the water utilities across Australia and we have closely followed their journeys in developing their own RAPs. We have seen some of the interesting thinking and examination of existing practices and approaches that development of a RAP can trigger, as well as the many constructive outcomes.

We also have a cross-national group called our Reconciliation and Heritage Community of Practice. This has dozens of members, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous, from across Australia. The group is a forum to discuss issues of importance to Aboriginal peoples and anyone who engages with Aboriginal issues, First Nations practices and knowledge, and cultural heritage aspects of land and water management. The group meets periodically (every few months) and has proved a very valuable forum for sharing contacts, knowledge, ideas and developing directions for the industry.

We have also long celebrated Aboriginal cultures, knowledge, role in water management, and perspectives, and celebrate this at our various events, forums and at key moments in the calendar such as NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week. Preparing our first RAP will let us do this with more depth of understanding.

We have already informally approached some prospective members of our RAP Advisory Group and outlined our broad plans. WSAA nominates our Liveable Communities Advisor as its RAP Champion, to drive and champion internal engagement and awareness of the RAP.



Our partnerships/current activities

WSAA does not have formal community partnerships in place with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. However, we do a lot of advocacy work on related issues. We also organise, or participate in, various forums through which we interact with people from different communities.

We have long championed the need for better understanding of Aboriginal priorities and recognition of their knowledge and contributions to land and water management over time. Our activities include:

- Formation of the Reconciliation and Cultural Heritage Community of Practice, which brings together First Australians and non-Indigenous peoples from water utilities across Australia, to discuss matters of significance including land and water management, cultural values of water, cultural flows, self-determination, engagement with First Nations communities
- We regularly feature information sessions at our various committees about First Nations issues for information-sharing, knowledge enhancement, and helping to identify best practice approaches.
- WSAA and the Energy Charter, who work on common issues including customer and community engagement between the water and energy industries, has created a dialogue series about First Nations engagement. The group is extremely well attended and has run knowledge sharing sessions and also listening sessions.
- WSAA has commissioned an extensive body of work to understand the complex arrangements involved in supplying water to remote Aboriginal communities across Australia. The work includes mapping the servicing, administrative and legal arrangements, and identifying recommendations for improvement in service outcomes.
- We have commissioned a pod-cast series in which around 10 of our water utility members are participating called Making Waves, which will profile some lesser-heard voices and their views on water-related issues.



ADAM LOVELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WSAA AT THE INAUGURAL VOICES FOR THE BUSH CONFERENCE AUGUST 2022. IMAGE COURTESY: AUSTRALIAN WATER ASSOCIATION

- We partnered with the AWA in commissioning a video called *Talking Water* which profiled Aboriginal peoples' sacred relationship with water and country. We show this video at events, functions and on our website.
- We are also partnering with the AWA in organising and sponsoring Voices For the Bush, the inaugural conference for our industry on water for rural, regional and remote communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander themes will feature prominently at the conference.
- We have commissioned Aboriginal experts in their field for policy and other work, including hiring them to speak at forums, or review or contribute to written work.
- We also participate in forums created by others for example First Nations related sessions in the Ideation Summit of Sydney Water, Isle and Think-Lab.

Actions

As a peak body, WSAA has a relatively small staff base, and typically involves many staff in cross-functional projects and activities. Given the strategic importance of the RAP, we will seek active involvement from all WSAA staff. The 'Responsibility' column entries are indicative only.





Relationships

Action	Deliverable	Timeline (Indicative only)	Responsibility (Indicative only)
1. Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence. 	December 2022	Executive Director Manager, Customer and Community
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations. 	April 2023 (Progress check January 2023)	Manager Environment and Technology Research
2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff. 	May 2023	Liveable Communities Adviser
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event. 	June 2023 Lead: Manager Policy and Strategy Support: Manager, Customer and Community	Lead: Manager Policy and Strategy Communications Manager
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW. 	June 2023	Communications Manager
3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff. 	September 2022 Ongoing to April 2024	Executive Director
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey. 	February 2023	Manager Policy and Strategy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey. 	June 2023	Manager, Customer and Community
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a vision for reconciliation for WSAA. 	October 2023 (Progress check April 2023)	Manager Liveable Communities
4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination. 	April 2023 (Progress check January 2023)	Lead: Manager Environment and Technology Research Support: Manager, Productivity & Performance Improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs. 	August 2023 (Progress check April 2023)	Manager, Productivity & Performance Improvement



Action	Deliverable	Timeline (Indicative only)	Responsibility (Indicative only)
5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation. 	February 2023	Manager Liveable Communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation. 	November 2022	Manager, Productivity & Performance Improvement
6. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area. 	October 2023 (Progress check April 2023)	Lead: Manager Policy and Strategy Support: Manager, Customer and Community
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols. 	February 2023	Liveable Communities Adviser
7. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week. 	July 2023	Manager Liveable Communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area. 	July 2023	Manager Liveable Communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event. 	July 2023	Manager Policy and Strategy



Opportunities

Action	Deliverable	Timeline (Indicative only)	Responsibility (Indicative only)
8. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation. 	April 2023	Lead: Director Business Excellence Support: Manager, Productivity & Performance Improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities. 	December 2022	Manager, Productivity & Performance Improvement
9. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a business case for procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses. 	February 2023	Business Manager
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate Supply Nation membership. 	February 2023	Business Manager





Action	Deliverable	Timeline (Indicative only)	Responsibility (Indicative only)
10. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form a RWG to govern RAP implementation. 	November 2022	Manager Policy and Strategy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft a Terms of Reference for the RWG. 	November 2022	Manager Liveable Communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG. 	November 2022	Manager Policy and Strategy
11. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define resource needs for RAP implementation. 	November 2022	Manager Liveable Communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments. 	December 2022	Executive Director
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a senior leader to champion our RAP internally. 	October 2022	Liveable Communities Adviser
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments. 	December 2022	Lead: Asset Program Adviser Support: Solution Designer, Data Analytics
12. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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, annually	Manager Liveable Communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link, to access the online RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire. 	1 August, annually	Manager Policy and Strategy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia. 	30 September, annually	Manager Liveable Communities
13. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP. 	January 2024	Manager Policy and Strategy



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