

# Rivers, the veins of our Country

Nine case studies of First Nations involvement in managing water for the environment in the Murray-Darling Basin 2022-23

## Lake Boort – A case study by Djaara

### Protecting the future of the waterway

*Author: Caitlin Dunolly-Lee, Dja Dja Wurrung Enterprises trading as DJANDAK*

Yung Balug Clan have cared for the Boort Wetlands as part of a holistic cultural landscape for thousands of years, and it holds ancient lore and presence that is a vital legacy for Yung Balug people living on and managing the Boort landscape today. The wetlands and surrounding land in the Boort region are rich in cultural heritage, with sites and artefacts of cultural practices present throughout the landscape. The rivers and floodplains are valued as food and fibre sources and contain many sites of significance (such as camp sites and meeting places).

Yung Balug and Djaara have been advocating for cultural flows, water rights (water governance) and returning water to the rivers and wetlands. Djaara and Yung Balug have been promoters for environmental watering at Lake Boort for a number of years, with conversations leading to input into the 2021-22 Seasonal Watering Proposal for Lake Boort, developed by the North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA). Djaara guided the development of a target water level for Lake Boort by ensuring alignment with the watering requirements (depth and season) for culturally significant species, such as Spiny Flat-Sedge.

In 2022, Djaara and North Central CMA co-delivered the first delivery of water for the environment to Lake Boort. One low level partial fill was delivered in autumn/winter to 'prime' the wetland after a long dry period, and one larger top up followed in winter/spring to reach culturally significant vegetation.

*Photo Credit: Lake Boort by Djarra*





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Lake Boort by Djarra*

Following the second watering, Yung Balug conducted a Traditional Welcome Water to country Ceremony and Smoking Ceremony which provided an opportunity for Yung Balug to directly connect with their culture and highlight the importance of their involvement in caring for the waterway.

During the fill and draw down Yung Balug through DJANDAK have conducted a range of monitoring across the Lake Boort complex, including fire and vegetation species mapping and the return of Djandak Wi burning to the landscape. Culturally important species, such as weaving grasses, were also monitored to understand how they change and respond to the watering throughout the year. Combined with Djandak Wi monitoring, this insight enables examination of indicators of climate change and aids in informing plant selection for future revegetation, watering and fire events.

Other monitoring conducted by DJANDAK included general observations of condition, i.e.

water quality, photo points, effects of floods and watering on Cultural sites, general tree and vegetation health and ecological vegetation class studies, and drone and aerial mapping. The monitoring of Lake Boort with

water in the landscape helps to give an idea of condition benchmark to be better able to understand future changes in the condition of the wetland, whilst also building capacity within Yung Balug to be able to take over water management roles and undertake Djaara designed monitoring in the future.

Cultural Heritage monitoring and mapping has also been completed by the Cultural Heritage team at Djaara with development of a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the wetland underway. Through this process, Yung Balug are gathering pieces of a greater story to explore and potentially secure a World Heritage listing for the site into the future.



*Photo Credit: Lake Boort by Djarra*