

# Rivers, the veins of our Country

Twelve case studies of First Nations involvement in managing water for the environment in the Murray-Darling Basin 2020-2021

## Replenishing Dharriwaa

*Yuwaalaraay Country*

Outstanding environmental, cultural and social outcomes have all combined to raise the spirits of collaborative partners at the Ramsar site of Narran Lakes following water for the environment flows in 2020 and 2021.

Narran Lakes, which is known as Dharriwaa to the Yuwaalaraay/ Euahlayi people, has been an important meeting place to Aboriginal groups for thousands of years. The site is internationally recognised because of its cultural and ecological importance.

Jason Wilson, chair of Narran Lakes Nature Reserve Joint Management Committee, who is also a Local Engagement Officer for the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO), said Narran Lakes inundated with water for the environment for the second year in a row replenishing critical nesting habitat that can support up 200,000 waterbirds in the expansive wetlands.

“The bird life is incredible when water inundates the Narran Lakes complex. There are birds that come from far away and the general local birds as well – it is a time of feasting when these beautiful birds come. Now we monitor, now we are learning and teaching our youth to harvest and now we feel a great sense of pride when we see these birds continuing to share our Dreaming Stories and meet at Narran Lakes as it was created for,” he said.

Interim Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder Hilton Taylor visited the Narran Lake Nature Reserve in late March 2021 as the floodwater arrived.

“These flows are critical to the recovery of the internationally significant Narran Lakes, following seven years of drought. Commonwealth water for the environment is starting to make a difference to restoring this precious ecosystem,” he said.





Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder Hilton Taylor with CEWO Local Engagement Officer and Narran Lakes Joint Management Committee Chair, Jason Wilson, at Dharriwaa in March 2021 as floodwaters arrived  
Credit: CEWO



Tanya Morgan, who is a Youalaroi Traditional Owner from Narran Lakes Country, said the water that has come to Narran Lakes has been life giving.

“From being so dry and seeing the vegetation come back to life makes our soul sing, that’s why we feast, dance and have ceremony, we feel so connected to Dharriwaa Gooni-Ma, Mother earth Narran Lakes our Meeting Place,” she said.

During his CEWO engagement work Jason Wilson has observed that some vegetation is recovering well, while other areas are still showing signs of stress following seven years of drought.

The replenishing flows over the past two years have supported more than 47 waterbird species,

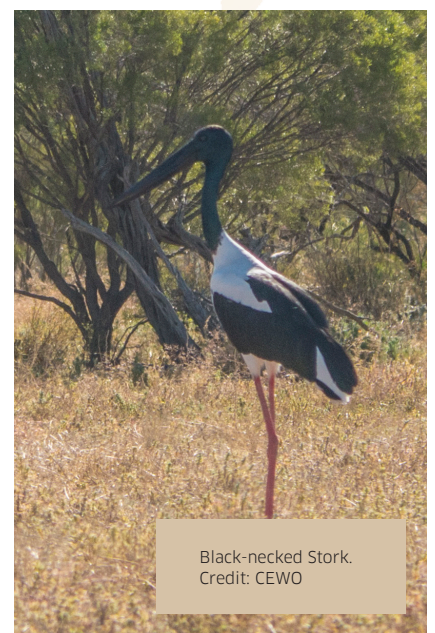
including migratory species such as the white-winged black tern, the first sighting in northern inland New South Wales over the last decade. Threatened species including broilgas, black-necked stork, blue-billed duck and freckled duck have also been observed.

The University of New South Wales is collaborating with the CEWO and other Commonwealth and state government agencies to monitor breeding of ibis and other colonial-nesting waterbirds in the region. The CSIRO is also working with the CEWO to track waterbird movement in the northern Murray-Darling Basin, including when birds visit the Narran Lakes.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority will continue to identify the Narran Lakes as a priority for environmental watering to help vegetation recover, increase the chance of waterbirds breeding and bring benefits for other animals around the lakes that are of cultural importance.



CEWO Local Engagement Officer Jason Wilson explaining the cultural significance of Dharriwaa to stakeholders.  
Credit: CEWO



Black-necked Stork.  
Credit: CEWO