



# Strengthening connections

## Murray-Darling Basin Authority Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2019-21

November 2019 – November 2021







## Acknowledgement

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Owners, and their Nations, of the Murray-Darling Basin, who have a deep spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic connection to their lands and waters. The MDBA understands the need for recognition and inclusion of Traditional Owner knowledge and cultural values in natural resource management associated with the Basin. The approach of Traditional Owners to caring for the natural landscape, including water, can be expressed in the words of Darren Perry (Former Chair of the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations):

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*‘the environment that Aboriginal people know as Country has not been allowed to have a voice in contemporary Australia. Aboriginal First Nations have been listening to Country for many thousands of years and can speak for Country so that others can know what Country needs. Through the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations and the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations the voice of Country can be heard by all’.*

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*This report may contain photographs or quotes by Aboriginal people who have passed away.*

Front cover image: Artwork being created by staff of the MDBA during NAIDOC Week 2019. The artwork was inspired and facilitated by Dale and Calvin Huddleston, men of the Ngardi NT and Wiradjuri NSW Nations. We thank them for their expertise and generosity in sharing their cultural knowledge.



MDBA Chief Executive (cE) Phillip Glyde painting during 2019 NAIDOC week



## Chief Executive Foreword

I am delighted to present the second Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) for the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. I am proud of our Agency and staff's achievements made in our reconciliation journey, and look forward to the innovation of its next steps.

An organisation-wide appreciation of First peoples' historic and contemporary stories means we can build stronger partnerships together. These stronger partnerships with First peoples strengthens our understanding of what it means to 'care for Country' and enriches our water management through participatory relationships.

This Reconciliation Action Plan:

- forms an essential part of our efforts to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples employed at the MDBA,

and improve career and mentorship pathways within the Australian Public Service

- complements the MDBA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, helping ensure we stay the course to deliver on our reconciliation actions
- commits us to continue to promote an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, cultures, heritage and aspirations.
- builds on our enduring partnership with two independent, peak Aboriginal First Nations organisations, the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) and Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN).

I am excited we are taking the next steps forward in the reconciliation journey. Every MDBA staff member, regardless of background, has a part to play in bringing the country closer to national reconciliation. I encourage all staff to participate in events that deepen their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures – and embed reconciliation as an everyday practice in the MDBA.

Together, we make a personal and professional contribution to make further steps towards reconciliation and cultural understanding – sharing learnings and achievements across the organisation.

Phillip Glyde  
Chief Executive



## Statement from the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations and the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations

This plan provides an opportunity for the MDBA to demonstrate genuine commitment to the basic value of 'caring for Country' while working in partnership with Aboriginal First Nations' peoples on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

We hope that, through implementation of this plan over the next two years, MDBA staff will come to better understand how the continued misappropriation of Aboriginal First Nations' Country, water and knowledge impacts on our identity, wellbeing and opportunities.

A more culturally aware MDBA will encourage understanding of our cultural responsibilities to water and

Country, and promote Aboriginal First Nations' values and interests in water research, planning and management.

This will be better achieved when MDBA staff understand our social and economic circumstances, value our perspectives and recognise our rights to be involved in land and water management.

Water is critical to the cultural survival of over 40 First Nations across the Murray Darling Basin. The MDBA has a profound role to play in progressing real outcomes that support our strength and self-determination.

The Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations and Murray Lower Darling Rivers

Indigenous Nations support this plan for strengthening connections. As cultural awareness at MDBA grows, we expect our partnership to become more meaningful and effective.

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*The Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations and the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations provide an Aboriginal First Nations' perspective on natural resource management and cultural issues for implementing the Basin Plan.*





*Ngunnawal Lore man Richie Allen and Richie - Bud - Allen Jnr with Carol Bruce at National Reconciliation Week 2019 Smoking Ceremony*



## Our vision

**Our vision is to increase our knowledge and respect of Aboriginal First Nations' values, which will help strengthen our connections with the Traditional Owners of the Murray-Darling Basin. We believe the health of the Basin will benefit from meaningful partnerships with Traditional Owners.**

Based on advice from both the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations, and other Traditional Owner groups in the Basin, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority will use the term 'Aboriginal First Nations or First people' to refer to all relevant Traditional Owner groups in the Basin, who have the authority with respect to land and water management. We also recognise the broader First Nations community (which includes non-Traditional Owners), Torres Strait Islanders and South Sea Islanders, who reside in the Basin.

### Our plan for cultural connections

As employees of the MDBA it is important we understand the historic, as well as the current circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. An understanding of the impacts of colonisation and dispossession will develop awareness of why we have a responsibility to strengthen our relationships with Aboriginal First Nations' peoples in the Basin.

We want to improve awareness and relationships at all levels within the MDBA and recognise and promote the rights and interests of Aboriginal First Nations' peoples in water management. The behaviour and attitudes of MDBA staff will be positively influenced by a greater appreciation and knowledge of Aboriginal First Nations peoples' cultures and connections to Country.

Water policy and management needs to properly take account of Aboriginal First Nations' interests and aspirations in water to achieve more comprehensive outcomes.

We can contribute to progressing these important issues by:

- helping staff to develop their cultural understanding and promoting opportunities for ongoing communication and interest
- strengthening existing relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and MDBA staff, and building new ones
- sharing learnings and achievements across the organisation
- making the MDBA a more welcoming and sought after place of employment for First Nations' peoples
- giving more visible recognition to the work and cultures of First Nations' peoples.

This action plan outlines a work program which will be implemented over two years to contribute to connecting with First Nations' cultures through relationships, respect and opportunities.





*Gavin Hesse and Robert Clarke (Brewarrina)*



## Our business

The MDBA is an independent statutory authority established by the Water Act 2007 (Cth) to manage the water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin on a sustainable basis for the long-term benefit of the Australian community.

We work in collaboration with other Australian Government agencies, Basin state governments, local governments, regional bodies, local Aboriginal First Nations, industry groups, landholders, environmental organisations, research organisations, scientists and Basin communities, and the broader Australian community.

Our workplace includes more than 300 employees across five staff locations; Adelaide, Albury-Wodonga, Canberra, Goondiwindi and Toowoomba. We also have a network of Regional Engagement Officers throughout the Basin that connects the MDBA with key local stakeholders and supports coordination and implementation of

water management at the local level. MDBA currently has four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed. Our work is regionally-focused on areas within the Murray-Darling Basin, but these are managed in accordance with national level interest. There is also international interest in our work from natural resource managers.

In February 2019, the former Minister for Agriculture and Water announced a permanent Indigenous position on the board of the MDBA, the Authority, increasing the membership from 6 to 7. At the time of writing this appointment is being progressed through legislation.

The MDBA's stakeholders are diverse groups or individuals who have an interest in the development and implementation of the Basin Plan and the activities of the MDBA. These comprise:

- people living in the basin and the broader Australian community
- industry, conservation, recreation and community groups
- local governments
- Aboriginal First Nations of the Murray-Darling Basin
- Basin Community Committee
- Basin Officials Committee
- MDBA staff and contractors
- state government agencies and departments – scientific, technical and policy
- Commonwealth Government agencies and departments – scientific, technical and policy
- science & research communities.





## Our RAP

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Owners, and their Nations, of the Murray-Darling Basin, who have a deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to their lands and waters. The MDBA understands the need for recognition of Traditional Owner knowledge and cultural values in natural resource management associated with the Basin.

The approach of Traditional Owners to caring for the natural landscape, including water, can be expressed in the words of the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations Board:

*“As the First Nations peoples (Traditional Owners) we are the knowledge holders, connected to Country and with the cultural authority to share our knowledge. We offer perspectives to balance and challenge other voices and viewpoints. We aspire to owning and managing water to protect our totemic obligations, to carry*

*out our way of life, and to teach our younger generations to maintain our connections and heritage through our own lore and customs. When Country is happy, our spirits are happy.”*

For our work on Water Resource Plans with our state partners, MDBA has an advisory relationship with both the Murray Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) and the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN). For internal government networks, MDBA do not have their own Advisory Group. However, members of the MDBA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employee Network (ATSIEN) and the Chair of the MDBA Strengthening Connections Committee attend Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employee Network meetings at the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

The Senior Executive support staff participation in all inclusion events. We're delighted that our MDBA RAP

Working Group (under the MDBA Strengthening Connections Committee) includes the SES Indigenous Champion, the SCC Chair, ATSIEN Ambassador and MDBA workers of all levels and backgrounds. Collectively, the MDBA RAP Working Group champions the RAP internally. The inclusion of the RAP Working Group under the wider Strengthening Connections Committee reflects that it is our collective responsibility to socialise acts of reconciliation throughout the MDBA.

We've made progress since our first RAP – having information sessions on Cultural Flows, ATSIEN-led Country and Culture sessions, and more staff participating in cultural learning opportunities than ever before. We look forward to building on relationships, principles of respect and seeing opportunities for engagement and improved cultural learnings during the lifecycle of our second RAP.

# Relationships

Building strong relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians will broaden understanding and awareness of cultural matters across the organisation and enhance the knowledge that is gathered to manage water across the Murray-Darling Basin.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
1. Establish, maintain and expand mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	a. Continue to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement. b. Promote development of new relationships with relevant organisations/individuals (such as universities, local Canberra Indigenous employment group, Indigenous Business Australia, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, First Nations' authorities, local First Nations' service providers). c. Develop a Cultural Protocols and Engagement Guide as the one document – to build on the existing Aboriginal Partnerships Action Plan. This document will ensure adherence to the principles of engagement and protocols for working with First Nations peoples (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and Akwe:Kon – voluntary guidelines for the conduct of cultural, environmental and social impact assessments). This will guide ongoing development of appropriate communication and engagement targeted to First Nations peoples in the Murray-Darling Basin. d. Engage with Traditional Owners when developing new projects or programs. e. At least one seminar per year, run by First Nations' presenters, to discuss different aspects of Country in the Basin and promote cultural awareness opportunities and celebrate important cultural dates.	Review July, 2020 & 2021	General Manager Aboriginal Partnerships Chief Operating Officer ED Water Resource Planning and Accounting ATSIEN Ambassador
2. Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and other employees to build relationships through participation and planning for National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	a. Plan our own NRW activities at MDBA. b. Publicise our internal NRW events and promote external NRW events to our staff. c. Register all our NRW events on the Reconciliation Australia's NRW website. d. Encourage all staff (via Chief Executive mandate) to attend at least one event at NRW week. e. Make sure all supervisors understand staff are allowed and encouraged to attend as work time. f. Include an APS Census survey point in MDBA section question about staff participation at NRW events. g. Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff.	Weekly during May and early June/first week of July, 2020 & 2021	SCC Chair Chief Executive Indigenous Champion Chief Operating Officer Director People and Culture
3. Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and other employees to build relationships.	a. Plan and implement programmed events and activities, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RAP Seminars, events where prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are guest speakers</li> <li>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander movie screenings</li> <li>Cultural tours of Country – e.g. as part of team building days.</li> </ul> b. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and other employees are supported and encouraged by managers to build relationships through celebration of culturally significant events outside of NRW and NAIDOC week i.e. the Rufus River Memorial Day and participation at the APS Indigenous Yarns event.	Review July, 2020 & 2021	SCC Chair ATSIEN Ambassador Director, People and Culture



## Relationships (continued)

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
4. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	a. The Chief Executive will reinforce MDBA's dedication and commitment to reconciliation throughout the calendar year. This ensures reconciliation is socialised as the work of all at the MDBA, not only Strengthening Connections and the ATSIEN.	July 2021	SCC Chair
	b. Communicate our commitment to reconciliation publically on our website, intranet and all corporate documentation and our interaction; externally and internally.	July 2021	MDBA Executive Authority
	c. Participation in Reconciliation working group activities with other portfolio organisations.	July 2021	SCC Chair
	d. Explore opportunities to positively influence our external stakeholders to drive reconciliation.		
5. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	a. Review anti-discrimination policy (Unacceptable Behaviour Policy/Diversity and Inclusion policy) for our organisation annually. This review must include consultation with ATSIEN and SCC.	December, 2019 & 2020	Chief Operating Officer Director, People and Culture SCC Chair ATSIEN Ambassador
	b. Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors to consult on our anti-discrimination policy.	June 2020	SCC Chair Chief Operating Officer
	c. Hold a seminar for senior management on the effects of racism.	Review June 2020 & 2021	Indigenous Champion SCC Chair ATSIEN Ambassador

# Respect

Respecting the cultures, histories, lands, experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is integral to MDBA's genuine engagement with these groups. Mutual respect will strengthen relationships and provide more outcomes for water management via a strong relationship of trust with respect to our core functions of Running the River, Implementing the Basin Plan and Running the Business.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
6. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	a. Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation. b. Implement the Cultural Learning Strategy for our staff. c. Consult local Traditional Owners and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors on the development and implementation and maintenance of a cultural awareness strategy.	December, 2019	Chief Operating Officer GM Aboriginal Partnerships SCC Chair
	d. Continue to promote and support MDBA staff participation in the Jawun Program. e. Provide opportunities for RAP Working Group members, HR managers and other key leadership staff to participate in formal and structured cultural learning.	Review December, 2019 and 2020	Chief Operating Officer SCC Chair ATSIEN Ambassador Chief Executive/Division Heads General Managers Directors/Assistant Directors Director of People and Culture
7. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	a. Develop a Cultural Protocol document, including protocols for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country. Provide resources and activities to increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.	Update December, 2019 & 2020	SCC Chair GM Aboriginal Partnerships SES Indigenous Champion
8. Ensure Traditional Owners of Country are acknowledged at significant forums, events and meetings.	a. Ensure a local Traditional Owner or Custodian to provide a Welcome to Country or other appropriate cultural protocol at significant events each year. Significant events include regionally-based Authority meetings, NRW / NAIDOC week events and where possible, for other events/meetings as otherwise advised by ATSIEN. b. Include an Acknowledgement of Country or other appropriate protocols at the commencement of important meetings.	Review December, 2019 & 2020	Chair SCC MDBA Secretariat Chief Risk Officer ATSIEN Ambassador
9. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	a. RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event. b. Encourage all staff (via Chief Executive mandate) to attend at least one event at NAIDOC week. c. Make sure all supervisors understand staff are allowed and encouraged to attend as work time. d. Include an APS Census survey point in MDBA section question about staff participation at NAIDOC week events. e. Promote and encourage participation in external and community NAIDOC events to all staff.	July, 2020 & 2021	SCC Chair Chief Executive Indigenous Champion Chief Operating Officer Director People and Culture



# Opportunities

Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and communities demonstrate that MDBA is an accessible organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a place of employment and as a place that values and seeks First Nations' knowledge in its business and work with water management.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
10. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop and maintain a recruitment, retention and professional development strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, through consultation with current MDBA ATSIEN staff. HR policies sit within the Indigenous Employment Strategy and the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.</li> <li>b. Indigenous Graduates and Trainees (IAGDP) to join into the MDBA Graduate Cohort program of activities.</li> <li>c. MDBA to seek to employ, at minimum, 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in Canberra or regional offices. Executive to be apprised of progress towards this goal twice per annum.</li> <li>d. MDBA to become an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' employer of choice through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating in IAGDP.</li> <li>• Provide Reverse Jawun secondments.</li> <li>• Provide regional office positions.</li> <li>• Permanent and temporary staff arrangements.</li> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student internships.</li> </ul> </li> <li>e. MDBA to review recruitment methods, and how to better attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the Agency, in consultation with MDBA ATSIEN.</li> <li>f. Provide an appropriate mentor or support system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. This includes buddying and external support links (i.e. Winnunga Nimmityjah Health Service) in welcome packs.</li> <li>g. Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.</li> <li>h. Increase advertising pathways to effectively reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the community.</li> <li>i. Continue to support and resource contracting governments to have 'Indigenous identified positions' such as in the Lake Victoria and Living Murray programs, and at sites along the River Murray.</li> </ul>	Review December, 2019 & 2020	Director People and Culture SES Indigenous Employment Champion Chief Operating Officer SCC Chair ATSIEN Ambassador
11. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement strategy (one-pager), including use of Supply Nation businesses. Double the Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Target of 3% to 6%.</li> <li>b. Increasing and promoting the opportunities for procurement of goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to staff.</li> <li>c. Develop commercial relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses.</li> </ul>	Review December 2019 & 2020	Chief Operating Officer Director, Procurement and Planning SCC Chair Facilities and Securities Manager

## Opportunities (continued)

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
12. Review and update MDBA education programs and tools to explicitly include First Nations' perspectives and content.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. New and existing MDBA Education products appropriately reflect the Australian Curriculum's cross-curricular emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture, with focus on connection to Country, language, ways of life and experiences, and social diversity.</li> <li>b. Leverage the expertise of Aboriginal First Nations' members of partner organisations and education providers.</li> <li>c. Ensure an appropriate mix of dedicated Aboriginal First Nations' content is included in all third party Education program delivery conducted on the MDBA's behalf.</li> </ul>	Review December 2019 & 2020	Education Manager (Asst. Director Media & Education)
13. Partner with Traditional Owners and a local school to develop educational linkages and a charity partnership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Goodooga Central School has been identified, with NRW week activities fundraising for this partner school.</li> </ul>	May 2020 & 2021	SCC Chair ATSIEN Ambassador



# Governance

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
14. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working group (Strengthening Connections Committee) to drive implementation of the RAP.	a. Maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the Strengthening Connections Committee.	Review July 2021	SCC Chair Director, People and Culture
	b. Review and update Terms of Reference for the SCC.	August 2019	SCC Chair
	c. Meet quarterly to drive and monitor RAP implementation.	December 2019, March, June, September & December 2020, March & June, 2021	Convener of the RAP Project Management team
	d. Meet with Executive twice annually on progress with RAP implementation and opportunities for improvement.		
	e. Define and maintain appropriate systems to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.	Review August, 2019 & 2020	SCC Chair Convener of the RAP Project Management Team Director, People and Culture
	f. Appoint and maintain an internal RAP Champion from senior management. RAP Champion to socialise acts of reconciliation as business-as-usual practice.	August, 2019 and 2020	Chief Executive in consultation with the Executive Committee and ATSIEN Ambassador
	g. Define resource needs for RAP implementation.		
15. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.	a. Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	September 2019 & 2020	Chair SCC Director, People and Culture
	b. Report RAP progress to all staff quarterly.	By end of each quarter per financial year	Chair SCC
	c. Publically report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings, annually.	November 2019 & 2020 (after the RAP Survey)	Executive Director of Partnerships and Engagement
	d. Participate in Reconciliation Australia's biennial Workplace RAP Barometer.	April 2020	Chair SCC
16. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	a. Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	July 2021	Chair SCC

Published by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority

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MDBA Publication No 52/19  
ISBN (print): 978-1-925762-59-4  
ISBN (online): 978-1-925762-58-7

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#### Cataloguing data

Title: Strengthening Connections – Reconciliation Action Plan 2019–21, Murray-Darling Basin Authority Canberra, 2019. CC BY 4.0

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#### Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the Murray-Darling Basin

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority pays respect to the Traditional Owners and their Nations of the Murray-Darling Basin. We acknowledge their deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to their lands and waters.

The guidance and support received from the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations and our many Traditional Owner friends and colleagues is very much valued and appreciated.

Aboriginal people should be aware that this publication may contain images, names or quotations of deceased persons.

Back cover image: Coolamon at 2019 NRW Smoking Ceremony.

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