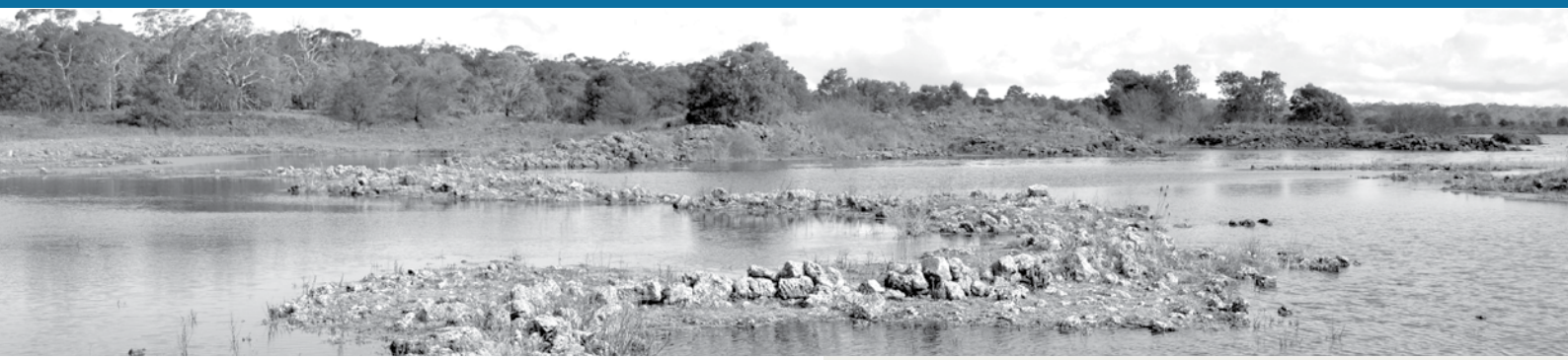
Aboriginal Participation Guideline
For Victorian Catchment Management Authorities



Victoria's Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) acknowledge and respect Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities and organisations. We recognise the diversity of their cultures and the deep connections they have with Victoria's lands and waters.

We value partnerships with them for the health of people and country.

CMAs and their people pay their respects to Elders past and present, and they acknowledge and recognise the primacy of Traditional Owners' obligations, rights and responsibilities to use and care for their traditional lands and waters.

CMAs seek to fulfil particular roles and responsibilities

in enabling effective Aboriginal participation in natural resource management. These include:

- Supporting the Australian Government's commitment as a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Responsibilities set out in Australian and Victorian legislation and policy, including Traditional Owner agreements, Native Title, Aboriginal Heritage, the National Water Initiative, Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act as well as the Catchment and Land Protection Act
- Existing and future Traditional Owner settlement arrangements
- The Council of Australian Governments' commitment to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage
- Commitments set out in documents such as the Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Framework, Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy and the Community Engagement and Partnerships Framework for Victoria's CMAs
- The intentions and agreements set out in the CMAs' Regional Catchment Strategies and in other specific plans and strategies, including Traditional Owner Country Plans and Joint Management plans

This Aboriginal Participation Guideline:

- Acts on CMAs' commitments to engage and work with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to manage and improve the health of land and waters
- Acts on CMAs' commitments to be transparent in supporting Traditional Owner and Aboriginal community aspirations for recognition of rights, reconciliation, participation, employment and economic development through natural resource management
- Acts on CMAs' commitments to strengthen their cultural competency
- Builds upon CMAs' existing experiences, procedures and work practices
- Complements CMAs' Community Engagement and Partnerships Framework

The Guideline:

- Establishes a state-wide approach for use by CMAs to respond to regional variations in cultural diversity, experience in working with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities, and natural resource management priorities
- Needs to be applied consistently by CMAs to ensure the full and effective participation of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities in catchment management across Victoria
- Although designed for use by CMA staff, can be used by other stakeholders and partners

An Implementation Plan supports this Guideline by providing information on how to turn the Guideline into action. It includes details on the key principles, strategies and actions that support effective participation, and it includes measures to assess the performance of CMAs in improving the participation of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities in their catchment management activities.

Photo: Lake Condah, a site of national cultural significance
Courtesy of Glenelg Hopkins CMA

2016

Key principles and Actions

The following key principles and actions set the foundations for working with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities and organisations, and for ensuring their participation in CMA projects and programs.

What does this mean for the CMA organisation?

- We will integrate Aboriginal engagement and participation in the planning, governance, implementation and review of our programs and projects
- Our people will be actively supported to engage Aboriginal communities and to build partnerships
- Our Aboriginal engagement and participation approaches will be well planned, tailored, targeted and evaluated
- We will provide meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal people to contribute to strategies and initiatives
- We will work transparently and respectfully with Aboriginal people, and establish clear roles and expectations

What does this mean for the individuals working for the CMA?

- Our induction procedures and training programs will build our cultural competency
- Our workplace arrangements will support proper engagement with Aboriginal people
- We will seek advice from people with experience in Aboriginal engagement
- We will prioritise obtaining the free, prior and informed consent of Traditional Owners before we undertake projects that affect their rights to lands or waters
- We will actively seek to involve Aboriginal people in programs and projects according to their interests
- We will involve Aboriginal people from the outset in programs and projects where they have interests
- We will be clear and open in our discussions about project deliverables and available resources
- We will recognise and celebrate the mutual benefits of working with Aboriginal communities

Finding Common Ground

Making engagement and participation effective and enduring is as simple as starting a conversation. Two-way working can affect both Aboriginal people and CMA people in different ways; there are many practical ways to help overcome familiar challenges.

"...How do I start? Who do I speak with?"

- Get advice from people with experience in Aboriginal engagement, especially those experienced with the Groups that have an interest in your work
- In making contact, be up-front about your concern to engage in the proper way; follow the Group's advice on how to proceed
- Face-to-face, personal contact often works best
- Spend time joining in with existing Group activities to build rapport, understanding and mutual respect; use this to identify interests, capacities and processes to build on

"...What if that doesn't seem to be working?"

- Try to understand why: Did a previous engagement go wrong in some way? What can be learnt – how could the situation be handled differently? What opportunities and pathways might exist now?
- Make fresh contact with the Group. Be prepared for some angst; listen and acknowledge past errors, difficulties or conflicts
- If necessary get professional help in resolving conflict
- In working to (re)establish a relationship, work from what the Group identifies as priorities – either in processes or activities
- Identify common interests
- Develop a common language and be clear about formal agreements

"...What can we achieve together?"

- Have honest discussions about aspirations and realities
- Identify opportunities to build on
- Be creative; generate options for overcoming current constraints
- Talk with senior people in both organisations to understand the broader scope to build capacity and attract funding
- Explore ways to expand partnerships, attract funding, harness expertise, reduce duplication and improve integration
- Start now; build opportunities to develop capacity and initiate activities to strengthen resilience

How will we Track and Measure Progress?

How will we account for our performance?

- We will develop monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and improvement (MERI) processes to help improve our engagement skills so that we can increase our participation with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities in natural resource management
- MERI must be participatory; in collaboration with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities, we will develop practical ways to assess our performance against agreed outcomes
- The supporting Implementation Plan details a checklist of key outcomes against the principles and strategies outlined in this Guideline. It provides a foundation for measuring our progress in improving our participation with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities in catchment management
- The Implementation Plan checklist will ensure a level of consistency across CMAs, while also allowing for regional diversity, and it allows for varied experience in working with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities
- We will develop innovative and culturally appropriate ways to share the results and successes of our partnerships and collaborations, and we will learn from our actions so that we continually improve

Need more Information or Support?

For further information, please contact your relevant Catchment Management Authority.

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