



## Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

21<sup>st</sup> July 2017

Angus Hume  
Chair, Our Catchment Our Communities Strategic Reference Group  
Integrated Water and Catchments Water and Catchments |  
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Dear Angus

### **Response to the State-wide Framework for Catchment Partnership Agreements from the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations**

The creation of Catchment Partnerships offers the promise for collaboration on catchment initiatives that is welcomed by the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations (FVTOC). Collaboration in these fora have the potential to ensure early conversations amongst partners about each other's priorities, in order to identify opportunities to work together, but also and importantly to prevent conflict and duplication. They also offer another mechanism for partners to act on their obligations under Australian and Victorian legislation and policy, described, for example, in the Aboriginal Participation Guidelines for Victorian Catchment Management Authorities.

We would like to highlight some important issues revealed in this Draft State-wide Framework for Catchment Partnership Agreements. The Framework as it is does not make explicit connections to legislative and policy directions related to Traditional Owners, which if included could strengthen partnerships and lead to better outcomes for Traditional Owners. Nor does it appear to recognise Traditional Owners as 'Tier 1' partners, as per the first list of Standard signatory members in all partnerships. The following points are proposed as a way of addressing these issues:

1. In order for this Framework to be consistent with legislative requirements under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act (2010) a statement ought to be included under Section 2. The Role of the Catchment Partnership, such as:  
"Ensure Settlement Agreements with Traditional Owner Corporations are understood and Participation Strategies are supported by partners"
2. Under Section 3 State-wide Principles and under Community Focus point 3, move away from describing 'the community' as one entity, which is misleading and reinforcing of an 'us and them' mindset. Suggested rephrasing is:  
"Partners will have a 'no closed door' approach in which all stakeholders can be directed appropriately no matter which partner they approach" (dropping the word agency to reflect that partners may be other than agencies)
3. The list of Standard signatory members in all partnerships does not include Traditional Owners. They are instead included in the Region Specific signatory members. Why was it decided to take

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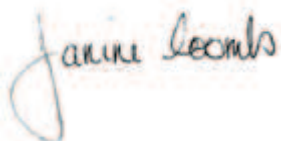
this course? Representing the interests and rights of Traditional Owners in the first list would ensure these rights and interests would receive equal prominence and consideration to the priorities of the other partners at this level. Relationships with Traditional Owners are dependent on region specific arrangements. However, the statement as it stands now "Partnerships will seek suitable representation from" is not strong enough to ensure all is done to guarantee Traditional Owner interests are fully supported alongside other partners' priorities.

4. Inviting Traditional Owners to the primary partner category of course raises issues of resourcing. Traditional Owner participation in these forums will need resourcing, in line with attendance of other partners. But in some cases Traditional Owner groups span several CMA regions, requiring their attendance at each Partnership forum. Support for capacity building activities for all partners to ensure discussions are relevant and meaningful to Traditional Owner interests is also important. For example, generating understanding of the Traditional Owner Settlement Act and the obligations that flow from the Participation Strategies. We ask that Traditional Owner participation in Catchment Partnerships and associated capacity building be resourced.
5. The decision making processes are very prescriptive and potentially clash with Traditional Owner ways of decision making. These need careful consideration and potential flexibility in light of the membership of each Partnership.
6. Traditional Owner Participation Strategies under the TOSA (2010) need to either be mentioned under 'Annual Plan/Statement of Priorities' as having equal prominence to the Regional Catchment Strategies and/or be listed as relevant State legislative obligations in Schedule Two.
7. Whilst the Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) Framework provides an adequate place to begin collecting data it is not clear how the data would be analysed, how the Partnerships would approach improvement and indeed who the Partnerships are answerable to should improvements prove inadequate. Improvement is a critical element of any MER Framework and so ought to be included as an explicit expectation in this document.

Please feel free to call me with any questions (M: 0417 837 549) or liaise with Mike Nurse of the Federation Secretariat (E: [nrm@fvto.com.au](mailto:nrm@fvto.com.au); T: 03 9321 5340; M: 0428 751 467).

We look forward to working in very positive spirit with the Department on this important program.

Yours sincerely



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