



Federation of
Victorian Traditional
Owner Corporations

Media Statement

Wednesday 1 March 2023

The price of water has doubled since 2016

Very little can be bought today at the price it was bought in 2016. Water is no exception.

The Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council's commitment to implementation of the Commonwealth's \$40 million Aboriginal Water Entitlements Program is a step in the right direction. But it's also a step back.

As shown in [Assessing the value of Victorian water entitlements](#), developed by Marsden Jacob for the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations, the price of high reliability water shares has increased exponentially since this commitment was originally made in 2016.

That water shares prices have doubled in the subsequent 7 years means that \$40 million purchases half of what it did, significantly affecting the decisions to be made and outcomes Traditional Owners have long called for.

Let's place Traditional Owners front and centre in management of water to heal Country and generate economic development opportunities. The Ministerial Council's acknowledgement of the difference between Environmental and First Nations' Water is an important distinction. Water is culture to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; its use to heal and manage Country may produce environmental outcomes but they remain separate concepts.

Paul Paton, CEO of the Federation, said that:

"It is essential that to genuinely respect Traditional Owner responsibilities to Country and Culture, we must see a fundamental shift towards recognising Traditional Owner rights to manage Country and its resources used to heal Country."

The Federation calls on the Victorian and federal governments to move forward to recognise that waterway health, closing the gaps and economic development can all be furthered through an integrated focus on Traditional Owner access to and ownership of water; but this has to be a meaningful contribution and recognise the proper authority of Traditional Owners in speaking for Country.

For Traditional Owners, culture is embodied in Country, in practice and in people. Cultural heritage is therefore far more than the many artefacts located within the vicinity of waterways, but also comprises the dreaming stories, law/lore, totemic relationships, songs, ceremonies and ancestral spirits. As such water is sacred, water is culture, water is life.

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About the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is the Victorian state-wide body that convenes and advocates for the rights of Traditional Owners while progressing wider social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives. We support the progress of agreement-making and participation in decision-making to enhance the authority of Traditional Owner Corporations on behalf of their communities.

The Federation was established in 2013 by Traditional Owner Corporations who recognised that through a path of working together Traditional Owner Groups could be stronger and could advance their shared interests in policy engagement, and in creating economic opportunities and caring for Country.

About Paul Paton

Paul is a Gunnai and Monaro man with a long involvement in reconnecting individuals and communities with language, culture and identity. He has held several executive roles and directorships including as the Executive Officer at the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and as a Director on the Board of First Nations Legal & Research Services.

Paul is committed to building on the Federation's success as a key organisation that strengthens the voice of Traditional Owners in Victoria. He brings his knowledge, skills and networks to work closely with Traditional Owners across the State to support their aspirations for community and Country whilst taking up the challenge for self-determination and Treaty.

Further Information

[Assessing the value of Victorian water entitlements - A Marsden Jacob Report](#)

[Traditional Owner water use case study evaluation - A Marsden Jacob Short Report](#)

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