



Media Statement

Thursday 29 September 2022

Water is Life

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations welcomes the release of [*Water is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap*](#) and congratulates the Andrews government and Minister Shing on recognising the fundamental responsibilities of Traditional Owners for water.

We have worked closely with Traditional Owners to inform *Water is Life*, supporting the development of Nation Statements, which assert their sovereignty and describe the cultural importance of water to their communities.

The inclusion of their Nation Statements in *Water is Life* shows a significant shift in the way policy is being developed in Victoria. Across the diverse voices of Traditional Owners provided in their Nation Statements, there is a common refrain that Traditional Owners must be enabled to realise their rights to water and to be decision makers as rights holders, equal to the State. To do this, systemic change is needed through legislative and policy reforms that provide pathways to improve access to, ownership, and management of water by Traditional Owners.

“Traditional Owners see their Nation Statements as a starting point for their voice to influence water justice, noting that as their management of water on Country increases so may their Statements, allowing each Traditional Owner group the flexibility to adapt.”

Paul Paton, CEO, Federation of Victoria Traditional Owner Corporations

It is essential that, unlike other government policies developed with Traditional Owners, *Water is Life* is not left to languish on a shelf. We must maintain the momentum and shift from policy development to implementation planning and sustainably funded delivery.

However, it is critical that this is not rushed. Implementation must be co-designed and undertaken through a process of engagement that enables Traditional Owner Corporations and organisations to work with their communities, especially Elders, to ensure proper self-determination of plans and programs.

“Water is Life is significant but there are many more steps along the journey to continue to implement a fundamental shift towards recognising Traditional Owner knowledge and responsibilities.”

Paul Paton, CEO, Federation of Victoria Traditional Owner Corporations

Whilst this is a step of great importance, we need to make sure that we don't take our foot off the pedal, that we continue to transfer real decision making to Traditional Owners and that we don't stop now.