



Queensland  
Government

Department of Regional Development,  
Manufacturing and Water



# Reframing relationships with First Nations peoples

Our plan for being and working together

**2023–2026**

## Acknowledgment of Country

The Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country. We recognise the ongoing spiritual and cultural connection Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with land, water, sea and sky. We pay our deep respects to their Elders past and present, support future leaders, and acknowledge First Nations peoples' right to self-determination.

## Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water

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### Footnote

This document uses the general term 'Indigenous' when citing legislation or referring to proper names and titles or international covenants, such as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The term 'First Nations peoples' is used as a collective term to refer to the many Indigenous people of Australia. It has been selected as it recognises various language groups as separate and unique nations. Where the context involves Queensland Government legislation, then the more specific 'Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples' is used. The department recognises there is a wide range of nations, cultures and languages across mainland Australia and throughout the Torres Strait. Given this diversity, respectful language use depends on what different peoples and communities find appropriate. Reference: [The Australian Government Style Manual](#).

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# Message from the Acting Director-General



First Nations peoples of Australia have lived on this continent for more than 60,000 years and I recognise the ongoing spiritual and cultural connection Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with land, water, sea and sky.

I also acknowledge the intent and impact of past legislation and have a strong passion and commitment to improving the lives of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## We can all make a difference

I believe that we are all able to influence the places we work and the communities we live in and have the opportunity to increase our awareness of the richness that First Nations peoples bring to our state.

As Acting Director-General, I have responsibility for leading the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water and its more than 600 employees to reframe our relationship with First Nations peoples. This is a process I embrace, as I believe we, as a department, and as individual public servants, have the opportunity to improve the health outcomes, connection to Country and business opportunities for First Nations communities across the state, through our department's business outcomes.

## Doing better together

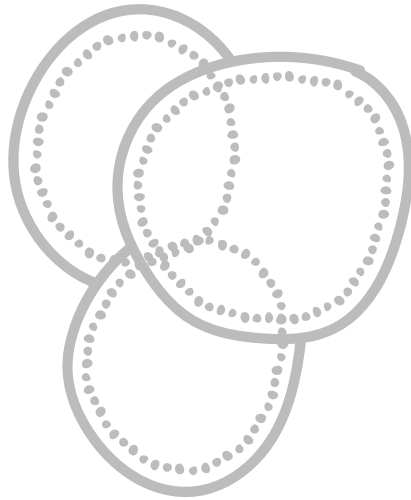
During my 25 years with the Queensland Government, I have been privileged to work with extraordinary people and have witnessed the benefits that inclusion of First Nations peoples brings to decision-making.

Our department's role is to drive growth for Queensland by managing sustainable water resources, leading innovation in manufacturing and developing our regions. From our 30 offices across the state, we work to create a Queensland where communities, business and water resources are sustainable and resilient.

Within our direct sphere of influence relating to First Nations peoples is the work we do in developing the water plans that cover 95% of the state, regulating drinking water quality, the provision of grants to regional councils and businesses, and implementing strategies to uplift and promote manufacturing businesses.

We deliver many services directly to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, so our focus is that in providing those services, we do better together. We know that strengthening relationships through listening, learning and understanding will better guide and inform our actions.





## Building on our achievements

Our achievements to date have included:

- ✓ creating and implementing a legislative water planning framework that recognises and protects cultural values and uses of water in statutory water plans. This includes providing economic opportunities through allocation of water, with over 600,000 gigalitres now available in reserves for First Nations peoples across Queensland
- ✓ ensuring economic benefits for local First Nations communities from new bulk water infrastructure, with the Rookwood Weir (Managibei Gamu) Indigenous Land Use Agreement resulting in positive outcomes for the local Traditional Owners
- ✓ supporting First Nations businesses through manufacturing grants programs.

## Looking ahead

This *Reframing Relationships with First Nations peoples – our plan for being and working together, 2023–2026* builds on these and contributes to the Queensland Government's 2019 Statement of Commitment to Reframing the Relationship, made as part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Its implementation will fulfill our commitment under the *Public Sector Act 2022*.

This plan is a living document and will be amended over time to incorporate more perspectives as we grow our understanding and practice.

There will be challenges to be met and overcome. We will work out how to overcome these challenges by listening to, and collaborating with, First Nations peoples.

Among other things, this plan states our intent to co-design policies, improve our engagement practice and increase the number of First Nations peoples that we engage with and employ.

I am looking forward to taking this journey together.

**Linda Dobe**  
Acting Director-General, DRDMW

# Departmental artwork

Our commitment to meaningful engagement with First Nations communities runs through all of our work, all across Queensland. To help bring this idea to life, in late 2023 the department commissioned a First Nations artwork, *Connections Across Country*, created for us by Wakka Wakka man and Executive Director of Gilimbbaa creative agency, David Williams.

## Artwork story

This artwork was created to tell the story of the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water and its significance to a thriving and sustainable Queensland.

The department is a team that cares about each other and the people it serves and values the essential connections it makes along the way.

At the centre of the artwork are the First Nations voices, knowledge, and perspectives that are vital to the department's work. Circular elements representing regional development, manufacturing, and water are closely connected.

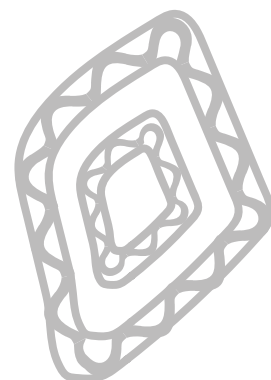
The department's collective journey to build and maintain authentic and meaningful relationships radiates from the centre.

First Nations manufacturing and innovation is represented by boomerangs throughout, and Queensland's diverse landscapes can be seen.

The department is dedicated to creating better opportunities for Queensland's regions to improve the lives of all who live there – for today and for generations to come.

By strengthening its relationships with First Nations peoples all over Queensland, the department's connections across Country can help build a more prosperous and equitable state to be shared and enjoyed by all.

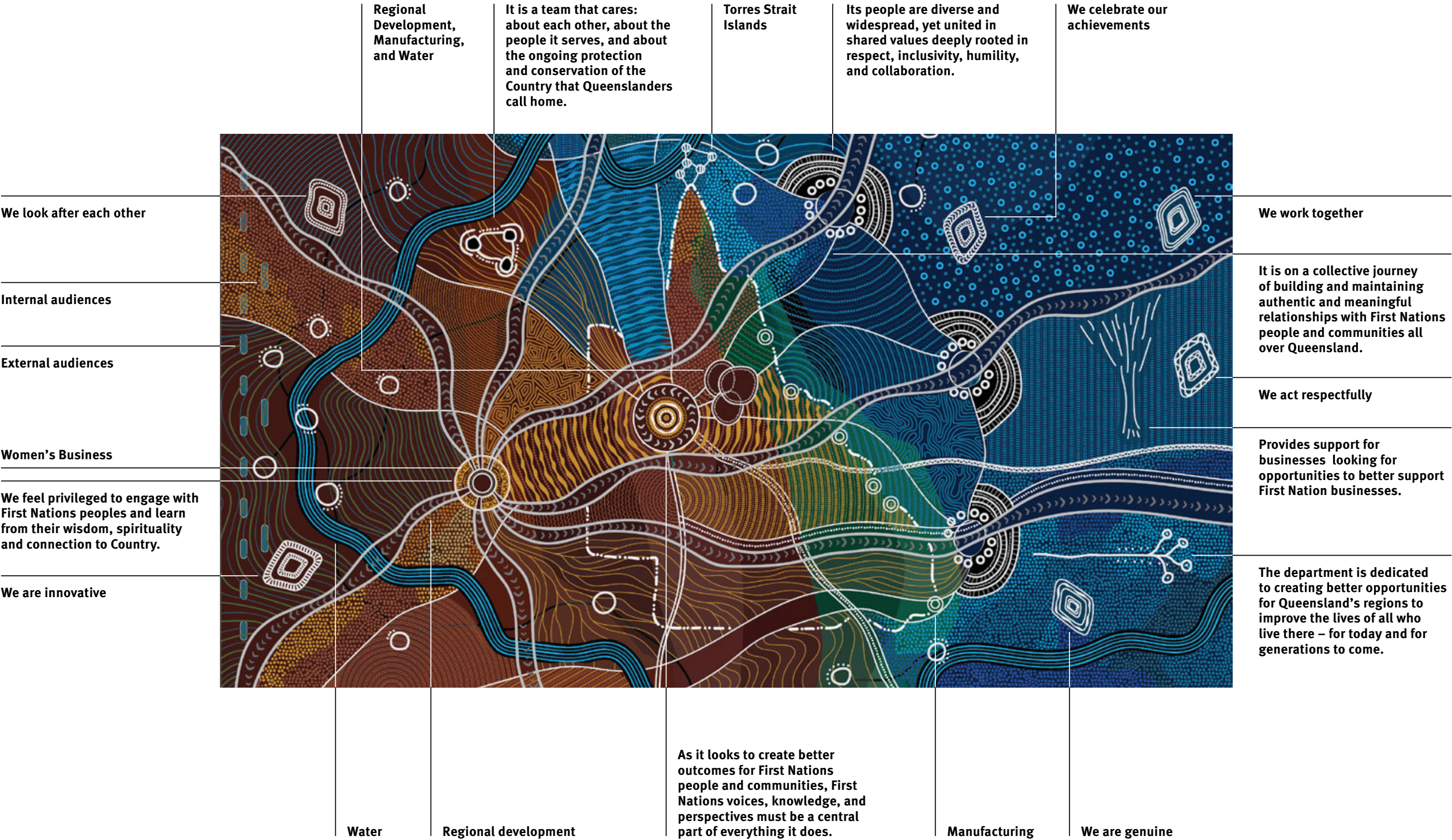
**David Williams, artist**





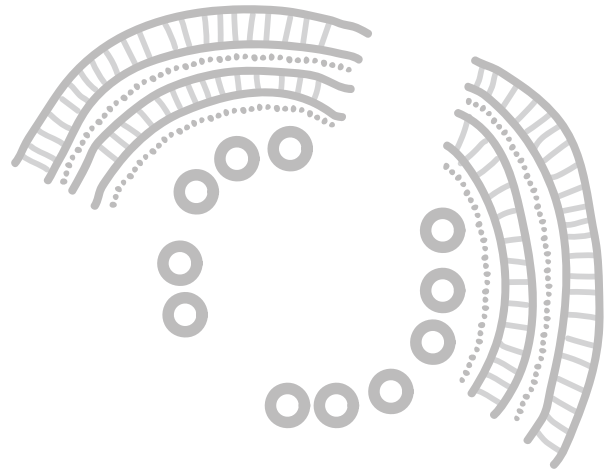
Artwork symbolism

An explanation of the symbols included in the artwork is provided below:





# Why we need a plan



Queensland is alive with the long history of First Nations peoples who have lived on Australia's mainland and its islands for more than 60,000 years.

The department recognises that First Nations peoples have rights and interests in the Country on which we work. The work we do in our regional development, manufacturing and water business streams is inextricably connected with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We are committed to progressing self-determination by learning from and working with First Nations peoples to incorporate their priorities and perspectives in decision-making and operations.

The department has existing and strong partnerships with many First Nations communities across Queensland. This *Reframing Relationships with First Nations peoples – our plan for being and working together, 2023–2026* (the plan) seeks to build on these and support the creation of new relationships.

The plan addresses the 8 objectives set out in the *Public Sector Act 2022* (the Act) and contributes to the delivery of the:

- › [\*Queensland Government Reconciliation Action Plan June 2023–June 2025\*](#)
- › [\*Queensland Path to Treaty\*](#)
- › [\*National Agreement on Closing the Gap Queensland Implementation Plan\*](#)
- › [\*Queensland Indigenous Procurement Policy\*](#)
- › [\*DRDMW's Equity and Diversity Plan 2023–26\*](#).

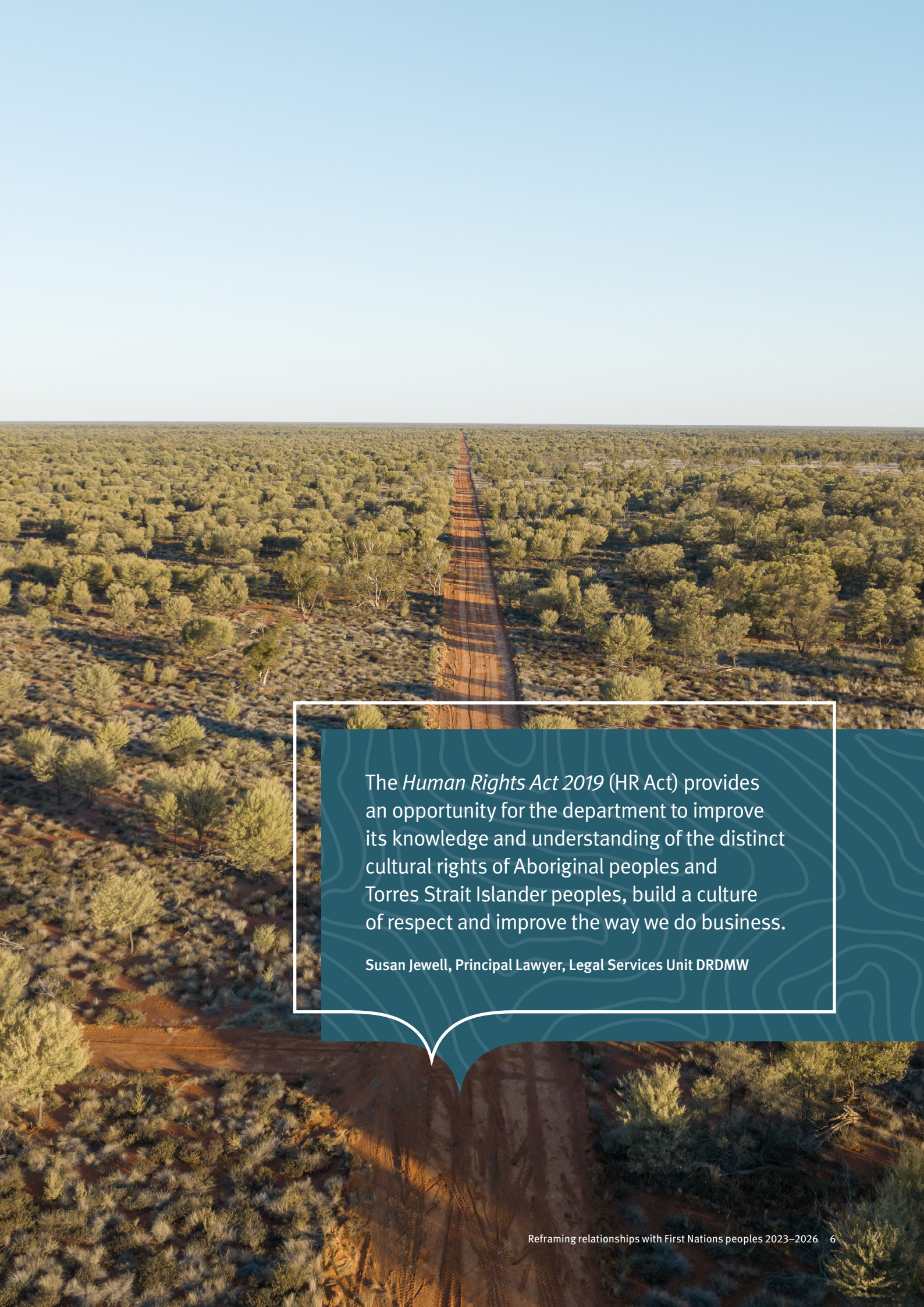
Additionally, this plan reflects the protection, promotion and respect of human rights in decision-making, action and implementation, in accordance with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the *Human Rights Act 2019*.

In accordance with the Act, this plan will be subject to an internal audit as soon as practicable after 30 June 2024.

Nothing about us, without us.

DRDMW Interim First Nations Advisors'  
meeting, February 2024





The *Human Rights Act 2019* (HR Act) provides an opportunity for the department to improve its knowledge and understanding of the distinct cultural rights of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, build a culture of respect and improve the way we do business.

Susan Jewell, Principal Lawyer, Legal Services Unit DRDMW





## Our work to date

### Background

Our relationship with First Nations peoples is critical to our work.

DRDMW delivers a wide range of services to government and community. Our main touch points with First Nations peoples include:

- › engagement in relation to water planning and assessment
- › compliance and regulation of drinking water quality and supporting councils to meet their legislative obligations
- › coordination of major infrastructure projects
- › administration of regional development grants
- › support for First Nations businesses, including training as part of the broader manufacturing strategy.

According to our 2023 Working for Queensland survey data, almost 30% of the department's employees deliver services and/or work directly with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. According to the Equal Employment Census to June 2023, 1.04% of DRDMW employees identify as First Nations peoples of Australia.

One of the drivers to improve the department's engagement practices has been to better fulfill requirements under *Queensland's Water Act 2000* (Water Act) designed to ensure that water can be made available to provide cultural, social, and economic benefits to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait peoples.

### Statement of commitment to First Nations peoples

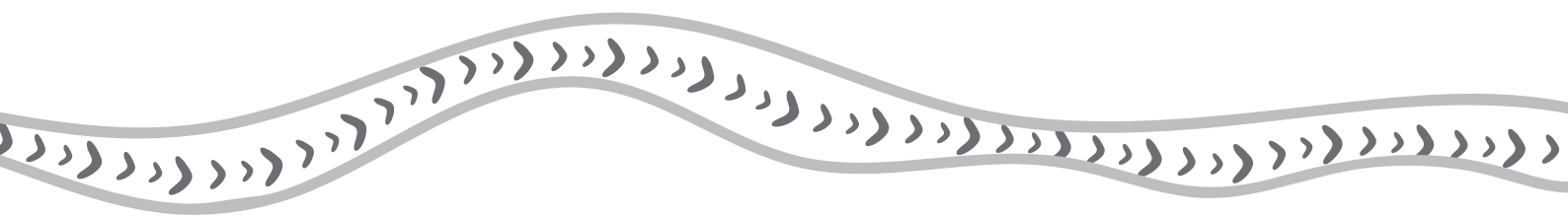
To initiate progress toward lasting change and demonstrate accountability for inclusive cultures, the department's leadership team has developed a statement of commitment to First Nations peoples.

The statement, launched in December 2023 to employees, is structured around the concept of 'Head, heart and hands', and articulates the department's commitment to work with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and move towards a genuine pathway of co-design in our work.

The statement has guided the development of this plan.

A great relationship is the ongoing partnership between two entities built on a solid foundation of trust and respect.

Ed Swann, Senior Policy Officer,  
First Nations, Climate and Water  
Security, DRDMW



## Engagement so far

Putting water into the hands of First Nations peoples is an important priority for the department. The Water Act provides for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples to take water without limitation for cultural or traditional purposes. Indigenous unallocated water reserves have been established in a number of water plans to achieve cultural, social and economic outcomes in many parts of the state.

As the water plans that cover 95% of Queensland are reviewed and replaced, DRDMW is working with First Nations peoples to understand and reflect their cultural values associated with water and economic aspirations.

Highlights of our engagement so far include working with:

- › Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation, Butchulla Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, Jinibara Peoples Aboriginal Corporation and Kabi Kabi People Aboriginal Corporation in the development of the Mary Basin water plan, with additional engagement also undertaken with Wakka Wakka Native Title Aboriginal Corporation
- › Traditional Owners in the Queensland Murray Darling Basin to share information and continue to discuss cultural values associated with water
- › several groups, including the Mbarbaram Aboriginal Corporation, in the development of the Barron water plan
- › Darumbal Peoples Aboriginal Corporation in relation to the construction/upgrade of Rookwood Weir (Managibei Gamu)
- › the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Corporation in relation to over 60 gigalitres of unallocated water reserves on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island)

- › Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations that are land holders under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* or *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991* and native title holders in relation to Cape York Peninsula Heritage Area water licences, in the Cape York water plan area
- › Kanolu, Wadja, Bidjara, Widi, Woorabinda, Wulli Wulli, and Yuwi peoples across the Fitzroy Basin and Pioneer water plan areas
- › the Dugalunji Aboriginal Corporation supporting DRDMW to set up a pilot project testing the effectiveness of novel eDNA techniques to monitor pest fish distribution across the Georgina Diamantina Plan area.

Nationally, DRDMW continues to work with other states, territories and the Australian Government to progress national water reforms including to refresh the National Water Initiative and establish new targets for increasing Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples access to, ownership of, and management of water as part of the National Closing the Gap agreement.

Additionally, in the past 12 months, the department has taken steps to build our internal capacity, in this area including:

- › establishing a Path to Treaty Sub-committee and maintaining a Cultural Capability Network to coordinate our work and share learnings
- › identifying and delivering programs to build employee awareness and cultural understanding
- › developing strategies to increase the number of First Nations employees in our department under our Equity and Diversity Plan 2023–2026.

# Case studies

The following section outlines examples of actions taken and outcomes achieved so far.

## Listen, learn, experience

One of the ways the department is building understanding of one of the world's oldest continuous cultures is by participating in on-country experiences hosted by local First Nations peoples.

With more than 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups in Queensland, the department is supporting staff to make connections with the First Nations peoples who are near to the places where they live and work.

The department has committed to increasing opportunities for staff to participate in meaningful and impactful experiences with First Nations peoples, including on-Country experiences, on the basis that connections can be made through showing respect towards cultures and learning about their history and art.

As part of this, about 18 staff from the Regional Development and Manufacturing branch recently participated in a hands-on country eco tour as part of a team workshop held in Cairns.

Staff were hosted by Traditional Owners from the Mandingalbay clan of the Yidinji Nation, visiting marine wetlands and rainforest just 10 minutes by boat from the Cairns city centre.

At the Mandingalbay Yidinji rangers' base, staff were welcomed to Country with a smoking ceremony before First Nations guides shared their knowledge on an interpretive walk on the Mayi Bagan Rainforest Trail.

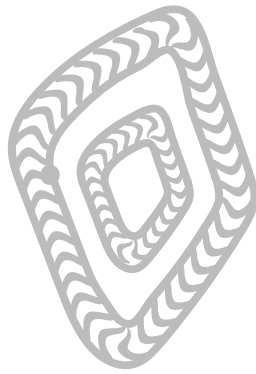
Staff also learnt about native foods, bush medicines, tools and traditional shelters. A yarning circle also took place to learn about Aboriginal traditions, history, customs, and artefacts.

The rangers play a role in the management of the area through tasks such as invasive animal and plant control, protection and management of significant sites, revegetation and fire management.

They are also in the process of developing a traditional ecological knowledge recording program to assist with documenting, recording and transferring Mandingalbay Yidinji knowledge and culture from current to future generations.

Many staff members found the experience not only supported a local regional business but has meant they see the country around them in a different way.

According to the department's Manager of Strategic Projects, Joanne Manson: 'The eco tour to the Indigenous Protected Reserve showed staff how a small group of Traditional Owners are working together to look after country and how they promote their culture through story telling.'



Natural Resource Officer Crystal Kirchhof added: ‘The tour has given me a greater appreciation of First Nations traditions and culture that are in existence in our back yard – which is vibrant and strong.’

They [cadetship and some Darumbal language names for the assets] are the result of our negotiation dealings, which we see as a bare minimum compared against the kind of extraction from the area, but it’s really important for us to ensure that we have a presence and that what’s important to us, our priorities and values understood as well, that suits our aspirations into the future. So these major projects are really important for us.

**Malcolm Mann, Director, Darumbal People Aboriginal Corporation**

## **Working with First Nations people on Rookwood Weir (Managibei Gamu)**

Fundamental to the department’s collaboration with First Nations people on the Rookwood Weir Project was early engagement and building trust over time to identify shared goals and aspirations.

The project captures water in the lower Fitzroy River for use across Central Queensland. The river is known by the Darumbal People Traditional Custodians of the land as Tunuba.

The project involved construction of the weir and completion of enabling works that will upgrade existing infrastructure to support the operation of the weir by bulk water supplier, Sunwater.

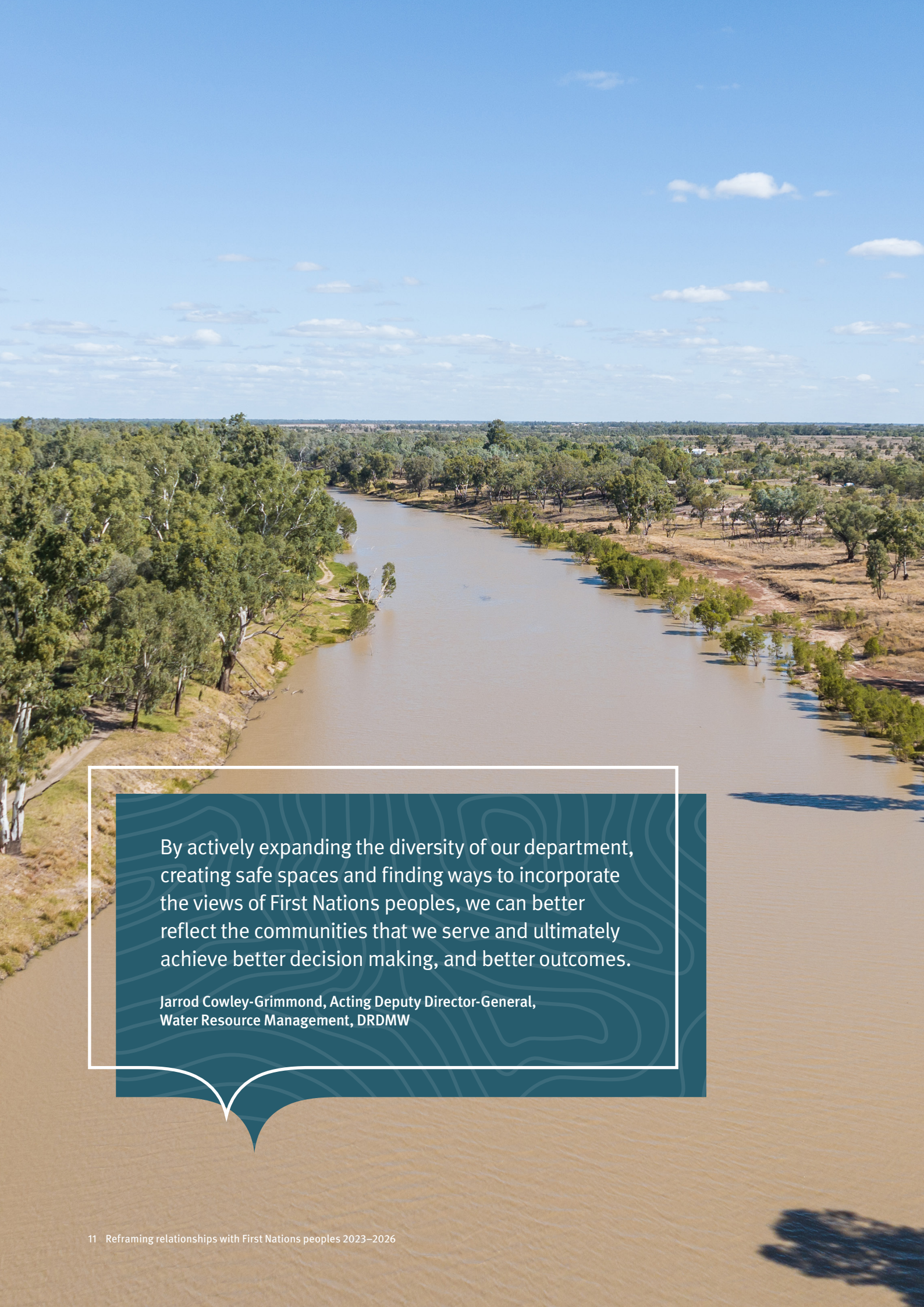
The Darumbal People Aboriginal Corporation (DPAC) are the recognised Traditional Custodians and native holders of the land at the weir site.

In 2022, the department entered into an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) with DPAC.

The formal agreement between the Queensland Government, Sunwater and DPAC allowed for the inclusion of several ongoing benefits from the Rookwood Weir Project and opportunities to implement a range of initiatives, to connect with traditional language and culture.

Negotiations on forming the agreement allowed for understanding very different world views of water and its management. For example, all parties discussed the differences between western notions of water rights and the First Nations view of holistic custodianship of land and water.





By actively expanding the diversity of our department, creating safe spaces and finding ways to incorporate the views of First Nations peoples, we can better reflect the communities that we serve and ultimately achieve better decision making, and better outcomes.

Jarrold Cowley-Grimmond, Acting Deputy Director-General,  
Water Resource Management, DRDMW



DPAC gifted the traditional language name Managibei Gamu meaning ‘keeping-saving water’ to be used in addition to the English language name Rookwood Weir. Both names will be used on signs and documents.

DPAC will receive a water allocation from Rookwood Weir (Managibei Gamu) once it is commissioned. This will give DPAC the option to use an ongoing revenue stream to support cultural and education programs for their community.

The agreement also ensures business and employment opportunities are provided through the weir’s ongoing operation with a particular focus in environmental management. Sunwater employed a Darumbal man as an Indigenous Cadet and continues to provide environmental contracting opportunities for DPAC-affiliated businesses for the operation of Rookwood Weir (Managibei Gamu).

The department is committed to building on the learnings gained on the Rookwood Weir Project and adapting them to other major water infrastructure projects.

## Creating a safe place for sharing knowledge and expertise

The Queensland Indigenous Councils Water Operator Network (QICWON) brings together water operators from councils involved in delivering water to Indigenous communities.

The formation of this forum where water treatment plant operators can come together to openly discuss ways to ensure safe drinking water is provided to remote Indigenous communities, has been an important first step in building peer support and technical capability.

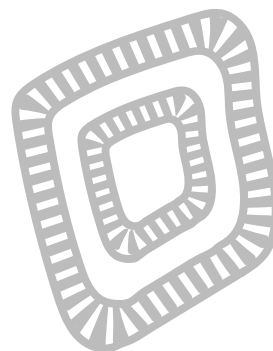
The group meets quarterly to provide strategic direction and leadership to address current and emerging issues and challenges confronting their councils and water quality. The meetings are facilitated by the department’s Water Supply Regulation team and Queensland Health.

The group’s members share a desired outcome to supply safe and reliable drinking water to communities (now and in the future) in compliance with the regulatory requirements of the *Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008*.

In doing so, they discuss solutions to common concerns ranging from the impacts of high water demand to water treatment plant upgrade projects, budget constraints and difficulties attracting and retaining staff.

They also look at professional development matters including training, qualifications and career paths. The network provides a formal mechanism to share key awareness of emerging issues and participation in education sessions.

Building and supporting networks like QICWON is one way the department can help First Nations peoples have more of a say over management of assets and services that impact them.



## Knowing our shared history

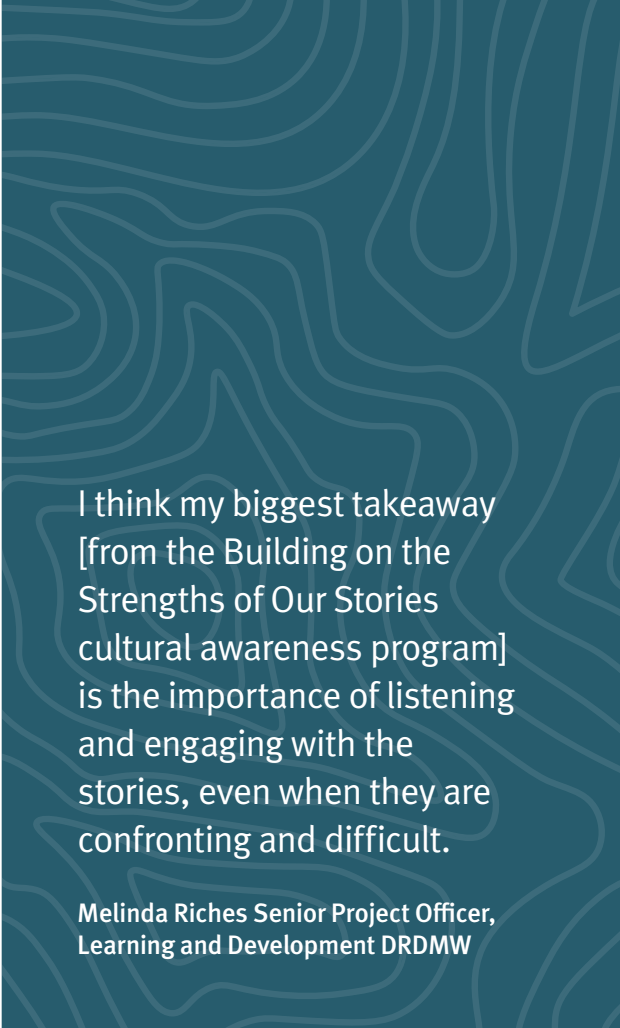
The department's Path to Treaty Sub-committee is continuing to build cultural capability for our staff and promote the part that truth-telling plays in reframing our relationship with First Nations peoples.

A key initiative has been encouraging staff to participate in the Building on the Strengths of Our Stories cultural agility program (BOTS). The program is a joint initiative, developed and delivered by the Department of Resources in partnership with Regional Economic Solutions (RES) and aligns with the Queensland government Path to Treaty commitment 'Truth-Telling' and further strengthens our responsibility to reframe our relationship with First Nations peoples.

The partnership between the Department of Resources and Leann Wilson from RES is a genuine collaboration and has seen the program's success through skilled facilitation of highly sensitive content, utilising the ancient cultural practices of lore and storytelling delivered in a culturally safe environment.

The facilitation of the program is built on the knowledge and expertise of Ms Leann Wilson and the Department of Resources' Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Futures Team.

The program includes elements of the Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts (DTATSIPCA) 'Living under the Act' presentation and includes Ms Wilson's cultural lore (e.g. yarnning circle and green ribbon blue ribbon story). The story draws on Ms Wilson's significant industry, public and private-sector professional expertise and the Futures team's personal experiences.



I think my biggest takeaway [from the Building on the Strengths of Our Stories cultural awareness program] is the importance of listening and engaging with the stories, even when they are confronting and difficult.

**Melinda Riches Senior Project Officer,  
Learning and Development DRDMW**

BOTS takes participants on a journey to lead and inspire change and draws upon the ancient practice of storytelling to engage participants on a journey of truth-telling. The program unpacks the intentions of legislative frameworks enacted on First Nation peoples. The program builds a depth of understanding around cause and effect and how this shapes current circumstances and practices. The approach challenges participants' thinking beyond the rhetoric and move towards a true shared space of understanding and collaboration.

To date, about 30 members of the department, including the leadership team, have completed the course.

Course participant Cheryl Cleghorn said the stories shared were as important as they were personally challenging: 'Hearing the personal stories of the facilitators and how past legislative decisions impacted their families, gave me a greater understanding of the history, which contradicted some of what I learnt at school. The course highlighted ways we can ensure First Nations people's views and needs have been considered in our decision-making. I've come away with greater confidence that, moving forward, the work we do will be more inclusive and collaborative'.

# How we will be together

## Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to outline how DRDMW will strengthen relationships with First Nations peoples and communities in the development and implementation of internal and external departmental policies, procedures and practices.

The department is committed to respectful, constructive and fruitful partnerships with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and working together to reframe our relationship.

## Guiding principles

In reframing our relationship with First Nations peoples, all actions and engagement will be directed at achieving good outcomes together and will be underpinned by the following principles. We will be:



**performance-oriented** – use governance arrangements to monitor our progress, uphold performance and identify and implement improvement opportunities



**accountable** – deliver what we commit to and communicate results to First Nations peoples, communities, organisations, and non-Indigenous landholders, stakeholders, departmental employees, the Minister and the public



**locally informed** – acknowledge the historical, cultural, social and economic circumstances of each community to make locally informed decisions



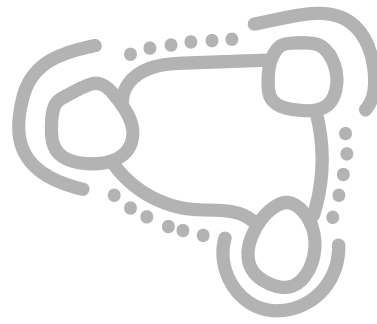
**culturally informed** – acknowledge the diverse lore, culture and custom of Traditional Custodians and communities to make culturally informed decisions



**trauma-informed** – better understand the root-cause factors that underpin intergenerational trauma to inform engagement and decision-making



**healing-informed** – build collective community decision-making and genuine and mutually respectful relationships to make healing-informed decisions that contribute to restoring balance and harmony for people, and with the land, water, sea and the environment.



## Our engagement approach

The authentic relationships we build together will be guided by the following five-step model and subject to conversations with the local Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the best process to follow.

### Establish

- › Define a clear and measurable objective for the engagement.
- › Identify/research the First Nations peoples related to a project/topic of discussion.
- › Check relationships owners in the department and possible engagement underway by other departments.
- › Develop clear messaging and discussion points.
- › Select most appropriate communication channels.
- › Create plan for initial meeting and connection.

### Build

- › Implement initial engagement plan.
- › Initiate two-way learning.
- › Encourage two-way communication and active participation.
- › Provide valuable and relevant content.
- › Foster a sense of community and belonging.

### Nurture

- › Continuously listen and respond to feedback.
- › Personalise/tailor content and interactions to take account of various groups' needs.
- › Include in formal stakeholder forums as valued party.
- › Offer incentives for continued engagement.
- › Provide ongoing support and resources.

### Sustain

- › Regularly evaluate and analyse the interactions and environment.
- › Adjust strategies, tactics and engagement practices based on feedback and data.
- › Continuously innovate and maintain interest.
- › Maintain consistent and reliable communication.

### Value

- › Provide educational opportunities/experiences or opportunities for growth.
- › Collaborate to co-create content or solutions.
- › Facilitate agency to inform decision-making.
- › Recognise and appreciate engaged individuals/groups.

### Developing our First Nations peoples water strategy together

DRDMW is working alongside Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop a new way of working.

Of utmost importance is the need for the development and content of this strategy to sit comfortably with First Nations peoples' views of time and space.

At the basis will be a program of rich engagement conducted over three years, featuring trauma-informed listening, understanding and healing.

Year 1 is about on-Country listening to history, storylines, Dreaming, concerns and aspirations. The listening will nurture relationships and trust and inform a listening report (June 2024).

The Listening Report will detail progress and outline the engagement and co-design approach for Year 2 and Year 3.

### We know we will have been successful when ...

- ✓ In our thriving relationship of the future, mutual respect will be fostered through two-way learning and First Nations' stakeholders will have true agency to inform our decision-making.
- ✓ Our inclusive workforce will be locally informed, culturally informed, trauma-informed, healing-focused and have more First Nations leaders and employees, cultivating a safe, inclusive environment.
- ✓ Together, we will be actively promoting the development of First Nations communities and businesses, forming strong partnerships to deliver on critical initiatives such as access to quality drinking water, and developing water plans that recognise the wisdom and provide benefit to the Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Queensland.
- ✓ Our negotiations and agreements will be founded on good faith and our track record for performance will be a testament to our shared commitment.

Early engagement will become the norm rather than part of the journey.

Mick Elliott, Manager, Gladstone Manufacturing Hub, DRDMW



# What we want to achieve

Our implementation actions in Appendix A detail what the department will do to deliver on this plan. They fulfill Action 17 of the *Queensland Government Reconciliation Action Plan June 2023–June 2025* and address the objectives listed in section 21 of the *Public Sector Act 2022*, including:



recognising and honouring Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Queensland



engaging in truth-telling about the shared history of all Australians



recognising the importance to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the right to self-determination



promoting cultural safety and cultural capability at all levels of the department



working in partnership with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples to actively promote, include and act in a way that aligns with their perspectives, in particular when making decisions directly affecting them



ensuring the workforce and leadership of the department are reflective of the community they serve

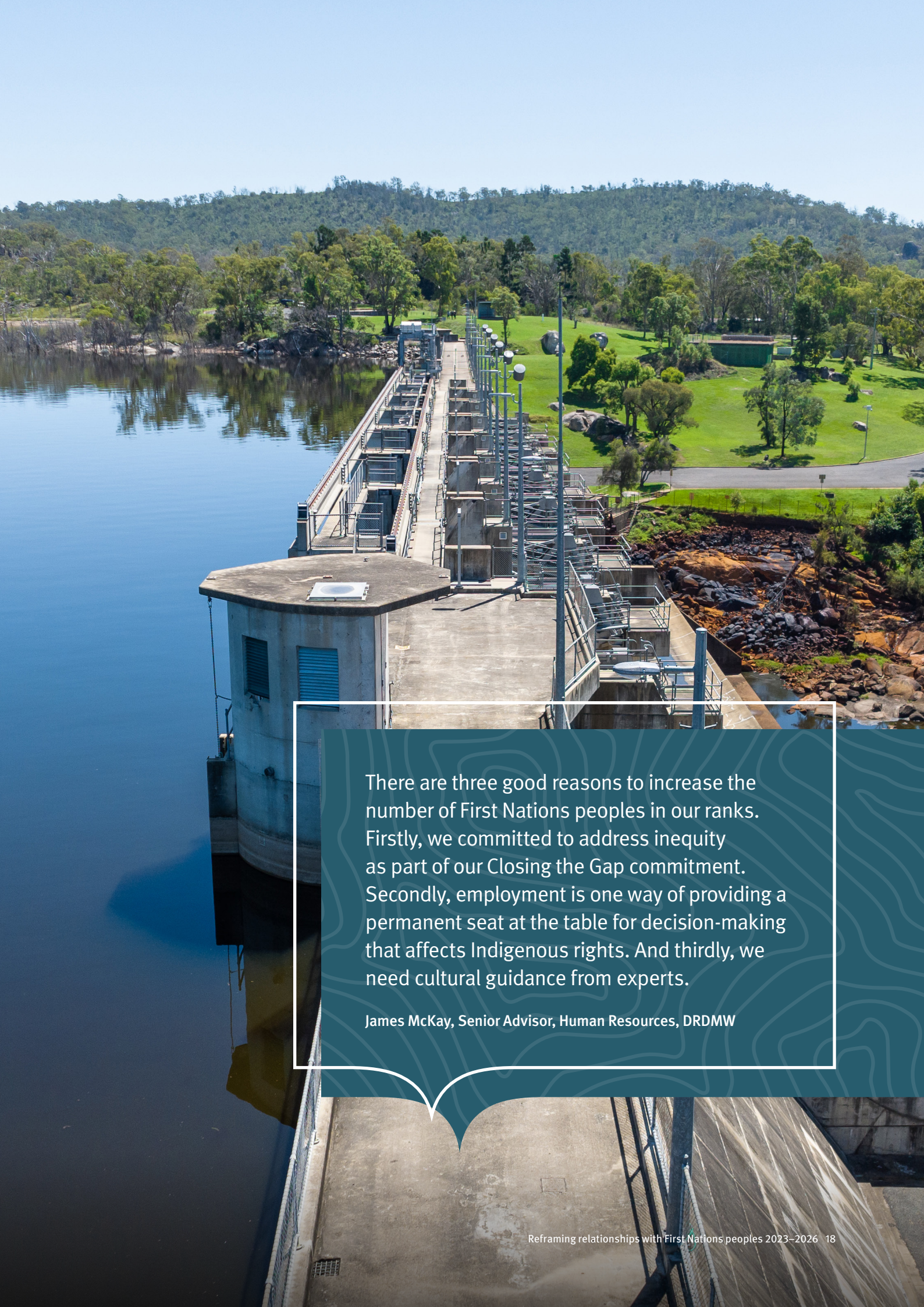


promoting a fair and inclusive public sector that supports a sense of dignity and belonging for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples



supporting the aims, aspirations and employment needs of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the need for their greater involvement in the public sector.






There are three good reasons to increase the number of First Nations peoples in our ranks. Firstly, we committed to address inequity as part of our Closing the Gap commitment. Secondly, employment is one way of providing a permanent seat at the table for decision-making that affects Indigenous rights. And thirdly, we need cultural guidance from experts.

James McKay, Senior Advisor, Human Resources, DRDMW





A challenge I've always been faced with in the past when consulting with mob is the way our legislation and policies are designed and implemented via a number of federal, state and local government bodies. It's often confusing and can be a huge barrier to successful on-ground initiatives.

Rachael Burgess, Manager, Stakeholder Engagement,  
Strategic Water Initiatives, DRDMW



# Overcoming the challenges – a partnership

We recognise challenges exist in reframing our relationship with First Nations peoples and the department is committed to working with First Nations peoples as follows:

## Build understanding

- › **Different world views:** Understand the relationship First Nation peoples have with Country (including land, sea and waterways) and between each other, and identify how this impacts water planning and water services, regional development and promoting manufacturing and recognising the role of the government.
- › **Uncomfortable truths:** Be prepared to face the impact of past governments and participate in the sharing of stories, experiences and knowledge to foster healing and reconciliation.

## Strengthen engagement

- › **Terminology:** Have a common understanding of what terminology means in practice (e.g. self-determination, co-design, water entitlements, non-urban water etc.).
- › **Engagement practices:** Identify with whom and the best way to consult. For instance, some water plan areas have more than 50 First Nations Traditional Owner groups with diverse views. Bringing the right people together requires, time, budget, skills and relationships.
- › **Deadlines:** Strengthen current engagement practices to effectively incorporate meaningful consultation and ensuring agency to inform decision-making, while meeting legislative timeframes.

- › **Negotiation and communication:** Use skilled facilitators and negotiators when required. For example, land use agreements may require skilled negotiators, with an understanding of relevant legislation (i.e. *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth)) to achieve joint outcomes. Consider use of community-specific engagement practitioners and brokers who specialise in cultural ways.

## Walk the journey together

- › **Collaboration strategies:** Adopt strategies that include First Nations peoples at the table and build the cultural capability of other stakeholders and departmental officers to achieve integrated outcomes.

## Make a long-term undertaking

- › **Enduring commitment:** Change takes leadership, time and resources, and a commitment that remains a priority beyond electoral cycles and notwithstanding many competing priorities. To achieve this, the department's commitment must be reiterated often, with concrete examples of improvement documented and celebrated.

## Plan development and governance

The development of this plan has involved department-wide consultation with employees and been guided by advice from the department's Interim First Nations Advisors.

The voices of our First Nations employees have been prominent and valued. The department's leadership have been active drivers of its progress and implementation. The department's Cultural Capability Network has also been an important contributor.


The department has also consulted with officers from the Public Sector Commission and DTATSIPCA to ensure compliance with our obligations under the *Public Sector Act 2022*.

After publication on the department website, the plan will be reviewed regularly and amended from time to time to incorporate more voices from the First Nations peoples we engage with.

The department's Path to Treaty Sub-committee is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this plan and will monitor its progress.

In line with the Act, an internal audit will be conducted as soon as practicable after the completion of each financial year.

This plan is a living document, and we will continue to listen to all stakeholders and update it as our understanding grows, and our practice improves.



I am dedicated to ensuring we're focused on embedding the key actions identified in this plan so that we can move forward with the right intent and continually improve.

**Wietske Smith, Co-chair, Path to Treaty Sub-committee (as Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services, and member of the Departmental Leadership Team)**



## Appendix A: Actions to implement the plan

These actions have been built around eight objectives set out in the *Public Sector Act 2022*.



## Recognition and honouring

**Objective 1:** Recognising and honouring Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Queensland.

Action	Group lead	Links to other plans/strategy	Implementation timing
Develop a leadership commitment statement acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	Extended Departmental Leadership Team	Equity and Diversity Plan	December 2023
Develop a First Nations artwork for the department as part of our visual identity and use for the statement of commitment, lanyards, strategic plan, annual report, templates, PDs, uniforms etc.	Corporate Services (Media and Communication)		December 2023
Promote culturally significant Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples events, dates and campaigns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› National Reconciliation Week including National Sorry Day</li> <li>› NAIDOC Week</li> <li>› International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples</li> <li>› National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day</li> </ul>	Corporate Services (HR)	Equity and Diversity Plan Cultural Capability Action Plan RAP* (Actions 5, 8)	Ongoing



\* *Queensland Government Reconciliation Action Plan June 2023–June 2025 (RAP)*  
<https://www.dsdsatsip.qld.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-partnerships/reconciliation-tracks-treaty/reconciliation-action-plan>

## Truth-telling

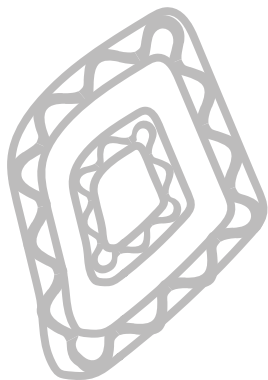
**Objective 2:** Engaging in truth-telling about the shared history of all Australians in a way which is trauma-informed and healing-focused.

Action	Group lead	Links to other plans/strategy	Implementation timing
Establish a research team to undertake a systematic review of departmental decisions associated with water management.	Water Resource Management (SWI)	First Nations Water Strategy	Subject to finalisation of the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry guidelines
Explore opportunities for staff to engage in impactful experiences with First Nations people to understand histories, perspectives and build knowledge (e.g. on-Country experiences).	Corporate Services (HR)	RAP (Actions 11, 14)	December 2024
Implement building on the Strengths of our Stories awareness program for departmental staff to provide insights into the legislative frameworks enacted on First Nations people and how this shapes current circumstances and practices.	Corporate Services (HR)	RAP (Action 11)	June 2024

# Importance of the right to self-determination

**Objective 3:** Recognising the importance to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the right to self-determination

Action	Group lead	Links to other plans/strategy	Implementation timing
Review and develop departmental protocols for engagement with First Nations peoples regarding water matters.	Water Resource Management (SWI) Corporate Services (Media and Communication)	First Nations Water Strategy RAP (Action 1)	2024



## Cultural capability and safety

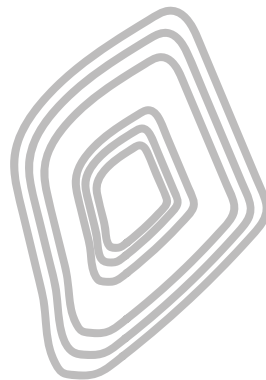
**Objective 4:** Promoting cultural safety and cultural capability at all levels of the department.

Action	Group lead	Links to other plans/strategy	Implementation timing
Review of mandatory training package (Starting the Journey) to identify if fit for purpose and alternative offerings.	Corporate Services (HR)	Learning and Development Strategy RAP (Action 11)	June 2024
Develop a Leadership Capability Framework that includes a focus on Cultural Awareness and Safety.	Corporate Services (HR)	Workforce Strategy Learning and Development Strategy Equity and Diversity Plan Cultural Capability Action Plan RAP (Action 11)	December 2024
Develop and implement capability initiatives to enable key roles to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› engage and co-design with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples</li> <li>› partner in a way that aligns with First Nations perspectives.</li> </ul>	Corporate Services (HR) Water Resource Management (SWI)	First Nations Water Strategy RAP (Action 11)	June 2025
Continue to operate the Cultural Capability Network.	Corporate Services (HR)	Cultural Capability Action Plan RAP (Action 11)	Ongoing
Explore options for dedicated employee assistance support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.	Corporate Services (HR)	Equity and Diversity Plan Cultural Capability Action Plan	June 2024
Establish a DRDMW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee network.	Corporate Services (HR)	Equity and Diversity Plan	October 2024

## Partnerships and decision-making

**Objective 5:** Working in partnership with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples to actively promote, include and act in a way that aligns with their perspectives, in particular when making decisions directly affecting them.

Action	Group lead	Links to other plans/strategy	Implementation timing
Develop a First Nations Water Strategy	Water Resource Management (SWI)		Mid-2026
Establish a permanent First Nations Advisory Group to provide input into departmental strategy, policies and programs that may impact Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	Corporate Services (HR)	First Nations Water Strategy RAP (Action 1)	October 2024
Establish a Cultural Partnerships team to support community engagement, co-design and partnerships with regards to water allocation and decision-making.	Water Resource Management (North Region)	First Nations Water Strategy	June 2024





## Workforce and leadership

**Objective 6:** Ensuring the workforce and leadership of the department are reflective of the community they serve.

Action	Group lead	Links to other plans/strategy	Implementation timing
Review all AO8, Senior Officer and Senior Executive Service positions for targeted recruitment opportunities and accessibility prior to recruitment commencing.	All groups	Equity and Diversity Plan RAP (Actions 15, 16)	July 2024
Develop a talent-sourcing strategy that considers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› establishment of identified and targeted positions for roles that have a direct influence on strategies and/or service delivery to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples</li> <li>› entry pathway opportunities.</li> </ul>	Corporate Services (HR)	Equity and Diversity Plan Workforce Strategy RAP (Action 15)	December 2024
Review and redesign existing recruitment process, guidelines and templates to remove accessibility barriers for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	Corporate Services (HR)	Equity and Diversity Plan Workforce Strategy RAP (Action 15)	June 2024
Establish relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment providers to widen the reach of job listings beyond traditional recruitment channels.	Corporate Services (HR)	Equity and Diversity Plan RAP (Action 15)	June 2025
Continue participating in the Career Pathways Program to progress career development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	Corporate Services (HR)	Equity and Diversity Plan Cultural Capability Action Plan RAP (Actions 15, 16)	Ongoing
Develop a suite of HR metrics for executive leaders to support accountability for achievement of diversity targets across all business groups.	Corporate Services (HR)	Equity and Diversity Plan Workforce Strategy RAP (Action 15)	June 2024

## Fair and inclusive, with dignity and belonging

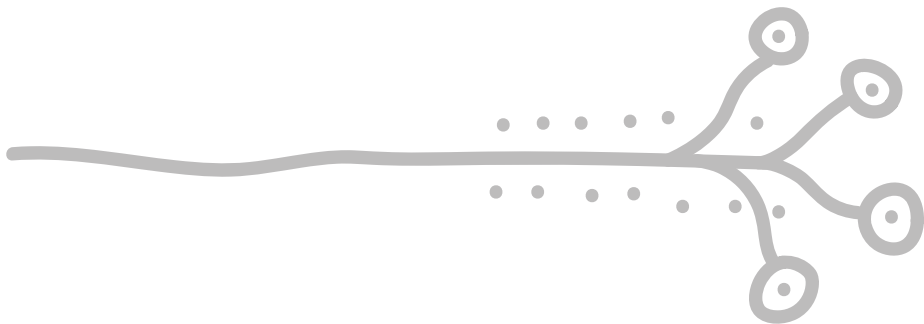
Objective 7: Promoting a fair and inclusive public sector that supports a sense of dignity and belonging for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Action	Group lead	Links to other plans/strategy	Implementation timing
Implement a suite of capability initiatives that listens to First Nations peoples' voices and fosters a safe and inclusive workplace culture including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› cultural capability</li> <li>› unconscious bias</li> <li>› anti-racism and anti-discrimination strategies</li> <li>› respectful relationships/bystander</li> <li>› human rights.</li> </ul>	Corporate Services (HR)	Equity and Diversity Plan Workforce Strategy Cultural Capability Action Plan RAP (Actions 1, 11)	December 2024
Develop and implement a recruitment and selection training package that focuses on equity and diversity considerations and inclusive selection methodologies.	Corporate Services (HR)	Equity and Diversity Plan Workforce Strategy	June 2024
Share and celebrate success stories of individuals, projects and/or programs that highlight cultural diversity.	Corporate Services (Media and Communication)	Reframing the Relationship Plan	Ongoing

# Aims, aspirations, and employment

Objective 8: Supporting the aims, aspirations and employment needs of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the need for their greater involvement in the public sector.

Action	Group lead	Links to other plans/strategy	Implementation timing
Continue to promote the Queensland Indigenous Procurement Policy and embed processes to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to compete in the provision of services and goods.	Corporate Services (Finance)	Cultural Capability Action Plan RAP (Action 14)	September 2024
Develop a First Nations Manufacturing Strategy with the objectives of increasing the participation of First Nations peoples in the manufacturing sector and increasing the capability and use of Queensland First Nations manufacturers in government procurement.	Regional Economic Development (Manufacturing)		2024



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