

On-Country Connections

You spoke, we listened.

Welcome to the second edition of On-Country Connections, a Mallee CMA newsletter designed to keep Traditional Owners in the know with work underway across the region.

Here, you will hear from the Mallee CMA Aboriginal Engagement Team on topics including recent and upcoming environmental water deliveries, engagement and events, Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP) and more.

We'd love to hear your feedback, thoughts, ideas and suggestions, so please reach out at any time.

We are here to listen.

Reconciliation Week 2025

The theme for this year's Reconciliation Week was "Bridging Now to Next".

Mallee CMA staff came together to celebrate with talks from our Aboriginal Engagement Team about what Reconciliation Week means to them.

A wonderful morning tea was also had, with Mallee District Aboriginal Services providing traditional food such as Wattle Seed Scones, Davidson Plum Jelly Cakes and Sausage Rolls with River Mint infusion and Bush Chutney.

It was a wonderful way to come together and mark a very important occasion.

NAIDOC Week

Mallee CMA was proud to partner with local Elders and staff from Parks Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), Forest Fire Management and Agriculture Victoria to celebrate NAIDOC 2025 under the theme of "The Next Generation: Strength, Vision and Legacy."

NAIDOC Week marked a powerful milestone: 50 years of honouring and elevating Indigenous voices, culture and resilience.

This year, the Uncle Ralph Harradine Caring for Country Award was awarded to Jackson Hannah in recognition of his dedication to caring for Country and working with Traditional Owners.

Thank you to everyone who came together to celebrate the achievements and the bright future ahead, empowered by the strength of our young leaders.



Uncle Willie Hannah playing the didgeridoo at the NAIDOC flag raising.



Aboriginal artefacts were on display for staff to learn about.



Kobe Brown from Mallee CMA, with Uncle Willie Hannah and Thomas Harradine.



Uncle Willie accepting the Uncle Ralph Harradine Caring for Country award on behalf of his son and 2025 recipient Jackson Hannah. Presented by the 2024 recipient Bradd Baldock, from Parks Victoria.

Murray Hardyhead released at Brickworks Billabong

Small but mighty, critically endangered Murray Hardyhead (*Craterocephalus fluviatilis*) fish have found a new home in Brickworks Billabong at Merbein. The collaborative project between the First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation

and the Mallee CMA saw tiny fish, typically between 30mm to 80mm in size, translocated from Lake Koorlong to Brickworks Billabong, with the aim of further continuing the population growth.



Mallee CMA, Nature Glenelg Trust and First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation came together for the release of the Murray Hardyhead into Brickworks Billabong.

Native Garden Project Hattah-Kulkyne National Park

Based on feedback from Traditional Owners, an exciting new native garden project is underway at the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park Visitor Centre!

As part of The Living Murray project, Mallee CMA is working with Traditional Owners to establish the garden, which will feature an array of native and Bush Tucker plants and herbs, as well as tables and chairs for the public to enjoy. An irrigation system will also be installed to ensure the new plants are well cared for and able to thrive.

The garden is expected to be completed in the coming months.

Aspirations Project Lake Wallawalla

We're working with Traditional Owners, Parks Victoria and the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee to protect Lake Wallawalla's cultural heritage.

Around 5kms of decaying fencing will be replaced, and 3kms of new fencing added, to help preserve and protect the important cultural values in this area.

Formal recognition of native title for the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee

On 18 July 2025, the Federal Court recognised that the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee hold native title over Crown land and waters in the Mallee region.

This is an historic consent determination as it is the first time the Federal Court has recognised native title in Victoria along the Murray River.

It is also the first time in Victoria that the Federal Court has recognised exclusive possession native title rights over certain freehold land owned by Aboriginal organisations.

This is the highest form of native title rights and brings Victoria in line with other Australian jurisdictions.

Any existing interest-holders – such as people with leases or licences over Crown land – are unaffected by this determination.

Mallee CMA congratulates the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee and looks forward to continuing to work together to care for Country.

Field work at Lindsay and Wallpolla Islands

A block of field work is currently underway at Lindsay and Wallpolla Islands to inform Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPs) for the Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP). Traditional Owners are working on Country, together with Mallee CMA staff and archaeologists from Ochre Imprints to undertake the field work, which will help further develop the CHMPs.

These CHMPs are an important part of the rigorous environment and planning approvals process (known as an Environment Effects Statement or EES) that is currently being completed for the Lindsay and Wallpolla projects. The EES is expected to be completed this year and will bring together a wide range of information on the potential environmental benefits and impacts of the proposed Lindsay and Wallpolla projects.



Traditional Owners, Mallee CMA staff and archeologists undertaking VMFRP field work at Wallpolla.

Watering Mallee wetlands

Environmental watering activities planned for Spring are proposed for the following locations (subject to funding, water availability and seasonal conditions).

Event	Start Date
Stockyards (Lindsay Island)	Spring 25
Mulcra Horseshoe (Mulcra Island)	Spring 25
Sandy Creek and Lilyponds (Wallpolla Island)	Spring 25
Finnigans Creek (Wallpolla Island)	Spring 25
Wallpolla Horseshoe (Wallpolla Island)	Spring 25
Brickworks Billabong	Spring 25 Autumn 26
Catfish Billabong	Spring 25
Lake Hawthorn	Spring 25 Autumn 26
Lake Koorlong	Spring 25 Autumn 26
Musk Duck Wetland	Winter 25
J1 Creek	Spring 25
Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Wetlands	Spring 25

Traditional Owners have often mentioned how important it is to them to visit sites during watering. We will be working on making this happen by inviting Traditional Owners to view watering activities. Please keep an eye out for invitations. Events for viewing watering will be unpaid events.

Water Literacy Program

Feedback from participants who attended the Water Literacy program has been really positive, with 6 sessions delivered to Traditional Owner groups over the past 6 months.

These sessions – which are knowledge sharing opportunities about how the Murray River works – have received some great feedback from participants, including:

- “We go to lots of engagement things but this really shows a good demonstration and is a lot more interesting.”
- “The main activity is in line with how we learn, via a hands on and visual approach, and telling a story in the natural environment.”
- “Improving our water knowledge will help us in dealings with government organisations. We want to make real changes, not just tick a box in a project.”

The Water Literacy program has strengthened partnerships with Traditional Owners in the Mallee CMA region and increased the level of understanding of water-related topics.

Traditional Owners say they feel more empowered to contribute to natural resource management initiatives and conversations about collaborative efforts to combat the effects of river regulation on the Mallee landscape.

In particular, Traditional Owner groups have said they want to maintain the interactive learning approach, methods and materials used to convey complex water-related information. In response to this, additional sessions will be run this year and planning is now underway. We will be in touch with Traditional Owner groups as details are confirmed.

The Mallee CMA Aboriginal Engagement Team really enjoyed the chance to connect with everyone who participated, and we thank each and every one of you for your valuable time.

If you have any thoughts, feedback or questions on the Water Literacy program, please reach out – our team are always here to engage, listen and take your feedback and opinions on board.



Traditional Owners from Latje Mumthelang building their Murray Darling Basin River model, as part of the Water Literacy Program (June 2025 MCMA)



Latje Mumthelang Traditional Owners participating in Water Literacy activities, (June 2025 MCMA)

Fun Facts: Spotlight on Threatened Species

Mallee Emu-wren

- 1) Australia's smallest bird by weight, coming in at an average of 5 grams
- 2) Name derived from their long, decorative tail feathers which resemble an emu's
- 3) Mainly use the spiky *Triodia* grasses for shelter and breeding. May help thermoregulate and provide protection against predators.
- 4) Recently taken into captivity for the first time, where they are showing great breeding success.
- 5) Have disappeared from much of their historic range including from the entire South Australia largely as a result of large-scale bushfires and fragmented habitat. Only 3 known populations remain, all in Victoria.



Photo Credit: Nicole Brooker via ALA (Record: Observations:198877066 | Occurrence record | Atlas of Living Australia)

Aboriginal Engagement Team



Kenneth Knight

Manager Aboriginal Partnerships and Engagement



Steven Bowden

Coordinator Aboriginal Partnerships and Engagement



Claire O'Connor

Aboriginal Partnerships and Water Officer



Kobe Brown

Aboriginal Partnerships and Water Officer

claire.oconnor@malleecma.com.au kobe.brown@malleecma.com.au

To speak to the Mallee CMA Aboriginal Engagement Team, please call 5001 8600

PLEASE NOTE: Executive Manager Land, Water and Traditional Owner Partnerships Ian Curwood and Indigenous Partnerships and Engagement Officer Wayne Pryor have left Mallee CMA. We thank them both for their work and dedication during their time with Mallee CMA, and wish them both all the very best for their future.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and organisations of the Victorian Mallee. We recognize the diversity of their cultures and the deep connections they have with their lands and waters. We value partnerships with them for the health of People and Country.

We also pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging; and recognize the primacy of Traditional Owners' obligations, rights and responsibilities to use and care for their traditional lands and water.

