

**NGARRINDJERI LOWER MURRAY
RECLAIMED IRRIGATION AREAS
WORKING GROUP**

**POSITION PAPER
MAY 2005**

***Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan (Listen to what
Ngarrindjeri people have to say)***

**TOWARDS A JUST PARTNERSHIP IN THE USE,
MANAGEMENT AND ENJOYMENT OF NGARRINDJERI
RUWE (LANDS AND WATERS – COUNTRY)**

*The land and waters is a living body.
We the Ngarrindjeri people are a part of its existence.
The land and waters must be healthy
for the Ngarrindjeri people to be healthy.
We are hurting for our country.
The Land is dying, the River is dying,
the Kurangk (Coorong) is dying
and the Murray Mouth is closing.
What does the future hold for us?*

(Tom Trevorrow, Chair, Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee, 2002)

Ngarrindjeri Lower Murray Reclaimed Irrigation Areas Working Group (NLMRIAWG)

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Summary

The River, Lakes and Coorong are a connected, living, spiritual being. Ngarrindjeri people are part of this being. These lands and waters are Ngarrindjeri Ruwe. Ngarrindjeri people have always made this clear to non-Indigenous people (see for example: Taplin 1879, Hemming *et al* 1989, Berndt *et al* 1993, Bell 1997, NRWG 1999, Hemming, Trevorrow and Rigney 2002).

The Ngarrindjeri Nation is seeking a just partnership with the government of South Australia in the use, management and enjoyment of Ngarrindjeri Ruwe. Ngarrindjeri people believe that this can be achieved through Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan agreements (see Hemming & Trevorrow 2005).

In 1999 the Ngarrindjeri Ramsar Working Group (NRWG) provided a community-endorsed statement about Ngarrindjeri connections to country, laws governing the Ngarrindjeri relationship to what non-Indigenous people call the environment, and suggestions for partnership building in the management of Ngarrindjeri Ruwe (NRWG 1999). These issues and recommendations were repeated in the more recent report on the implications of the Murray Mouth closure for the Ngarrindjeri Nation (Hemming, Trevorrow & Rigney 2003).

The Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation's (DWLBC) Lower Murray Reclaimed Areas Irrigation (LMRIA) project has begun to develop a strategy aimed at recognising and respecting Ngarrindjeri interests, knowledge and expertise. This position statement is designed to provide some directions for proceeding further down the pathway of recognition, respect and partnership.

Ngarrindjeri people need time and resources to develop a plan for Ngarrindjeri Ruwe focussing on the River, surrounding wetlands and associated 'natural resources'. This planning process has begun and it is hoped that a Ngarrindjeri management plan for the Lower Murray Irrigation areas can be developed as part of the DWLBC project. This will provide a framework for making decisions about the management of irrigation in South Australia.

Ngarrindjeri people require resources from the State Government so that proper management can be achieved. This will enable Ngarrindjeri people to develop a creative and high achieving First Nation. Ngarrindjeri people have made it clear that this will benefit all South Australians.

Ngarrindjeri people need to have the opportunity to play a leading role in saving Ngarrindjeri Ruwe (country). A respectful partnership between the Ngarrindjeri Nation and non-Indigenous South Australians will lead to a healthier future for all.

Ngarrindjeri people argue that water allocations for irrigation in the South Australia should contain a percentage for Ngarrindjeri cultural use.

Ngarrindjeri people should be equal partners in planning, management and decision-making concerning Ngarrindjeri Ruwe – River Country/Lakes Country/Sea Country. This can be negotiated through Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan agreements.

Background

As a result of Ngarrindjeri negotiations with Department of Water Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC), and Ngarrindjeri involvement in the Woods Point and MacFarlane's cultural heritage surveys, a process was suggested to allow for initial Ngarrindjeri consideration of issues emerging from the LMRIA Project. An agreement between DWLBC and the Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee, Native Title Management Committee and the Ngarrindjeri Tendi established the preliminary framework for Ngarrindjeri involvement in 'cultural heritage surveys' (aimed at dealing with heritage and native title issues). A number of broad issues emerged from the initial surveys – they related to cultural heritage, Ngarrindjeri 'natural resource management', and native title.

A preliminary briefing paper was developed by the NLMRIAWG and presented to a meeting of key Ngarrindjeri committee representatives at Camp Coorong 29th April, 2005. This paper was developed to provide a basis for Ngarrindjeri leadership's consideration of issues and decision-making. The position outlined in the present document emerges from:

- community-based discussions;
- community policy development;
- attendance of Ngarrindjeri working party members on Irrigation project surveys (Woods Point & MacFarlane's);
- directions of the Ngarrindjeri members of the Working Group;

- and discussions and directions from the Camp Coorong Ngarrindjeri community organisations meeting (29th April 2005).

Time and resources have placed limits on this initial Ngarrindjeri Nation position paper. It is designed to provide a pathway to the development of a partnership between DWLBC (and other relevant government organisations) and the Ngarrindjeri Nation in the improved management of the Ngarrindjeri Ruwe and River Murray irrigation in South Australia. It is also expected that Ngarrindjeri rights and interests in Ngarrindjeri Ruwe (lands and waters – country) are recognised and respected in new partnerships between Ngarrindjeri and government.

Aims

The following key aims have been identified:

- To develop a culturally respectful planning process for the LMRIA;
- To identify a strategy for enabling Ngarrindjeri interests in Ngarrindjeri Ruwe to be recognised, respected and part of the planning process;
- To develop a Ngarrindjeri framework management plan for the irrigation areas on Ngarrindjeri Ruwe;
- To develop draft Ngarrindjeri management plans for each irrigation area on Ngarrindjeri Ruwe;
- To design a 'survey' process that enables respectful and appropriate consideration of Ngarrindjeri interests in each irrigation area, and in the area as a whole;
- To use Ngarrindjeri management planning as a basis for the negotiation of a broader Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan agreement or agreements setting the foundations for future partnerships in the use, management, and enjoyment of Ngarrindjeri Ruwe.

Strategy

The following summary provides an overview of the strategy envisaged by the NLMRIA working group:

- Establish an initial agreement to set the framework for the initial 'survey' process – this has been done;
- Seek resources for the Ngarrindjeri Nation to enable leadership and appropriate committees to professionally engage with the requirements of the LMRIA project and related NRM/Heritage projects (some resources have been approved);
- Modification of the 'traditional' heritage survey to combine broader cultural and Ngarrindjeri 'natural resource issues';
- Establish a NLMRIA working group to develop this position paper and make recommendations relating to the direction of the overall project;
- It is proposed that the NLMRIA working party continue to meet at least every two weeks to review the survey process and work towards the development of a Ngarrindjeri framework management plan for the LMRIA;
- This working party will consider the reports of those taking part in the individual surveys and make recommendations to the Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee/Ngarrindjeri Native Title Management Committee and Ngarrindjeri Tendi;
- Draft Ngarrindjeri management reports (or at least the identification of key issues) for each irrigation area will be developed by the working party;
- Derek Walker (Ngarrindjeri natural resource management/policy expert) and Steve Hemming (researcher, anthropologist/historian)

will spend approximately 1 day preparing for each working party meeting;

- Administrative support for the process can be provided by the Indigenous Partnerships Project;
- A broader nation meeting will be required to consider the Ngarrindjeri framework management plan;
- A parallel process of negotiation of a Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan agreement relating to the management of the LMRIAs should begin between Ngarrindjeri leadership and appropriate government representatives;
- A Ngarrindjeri framework management plan and associated Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan agreement will allow for strategic decision making that incorporates Ngarrindjeri interests in Ngarrindjeri Ruwe.

What is needed?

- A commitment from DWLBC to the Ngarrindjeri strategy outlined in this NLMRIA Position Paper.
- The establishment of a process of regular meetings between DWLBC and Ngarrindjeri leadership to discuss key issues.
- The allocation of some resources for the continuation of the NLMRIA working party and proposed broader nation meeting.
- *Ministerial Considerations:*
 1. Support for the negotiation of a Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan agreement covering the LMRIAs.
 2. The development of a strategic approach to funding natural resource management and related heritage issues for Ngarrindjeri Ruwe. It has been proposed that the State Government consider consolidation of funding into Ngarrindjeri Ruwe so that a Ngarrindjeri secretariat/land management group can be established to support the existing complex work of the Ngarrindjeri peak bodies – the Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee, the Ngarrindjeri Native Title Management Committee, the Ngarrindjeri Tendi and the Ngarrindjeri Natural Resource Management Committee.

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