

REFLECT

Reconciliation Action Plan

July 2025–June 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

South Gippsland Water acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as Australia's First Peoples. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the Original Custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We pay our deepest respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the continued cultural, social and spiritual connections that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have with the land and waters and we recognise and value that the Traditional Owner groups have cared for and protected them for thousands of generations.

In the spirit of reconciliation, we remain committed to working in partnership with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in our region to ensure their ongoing contribution to the future of the water management landscape while maintaining their cultural and spiritual connections.

Our region



Two-way learning – a path to reconciliation

The Aboriginal Traditional Owners of the land and water upon which we work have looked after and in turn, been looked after by the land for thousands of generations.

Aboriginal use of the land over that time is reflected throughout South Gippsland's landscape. Many places are of enormous spiritual and cultural importance.

South Gippsland Water's Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan is about two-way learning. It brings together cultural and scientific knowledge and experience, different governance processes, and interweaves different thinking – Gunaikurnai, Bunurong and English.

Working together means learning from each other, respecting each other's cultures and finding innovative ways to bring together different ways of seeing and interpreting the landscape and its people.

South Gippsland Water recognises we are at the beginning of our journey.

Our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan embraces the challenges, builds on lessons learnt by ourselves and others, and above all, recognises the good will of all of the partners to continue our journey together. It will be used to lay the foundations and prepare our workplace for future Reconciliation Action Plans and reconciliation initiatives.

Managing Director

Robert Murphy



Board Chair

Nicola Hepenstall



Statement from CEO of Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia welcomes South Gippsland Water to the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program with the formal endorsement of its inaugural Reflect RAP.



South Gippsland Water joins a network of more than 3,000 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have made a formal commitment to reconciliation through the RAP program.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement. The program's potential for impact is greater than ever, with close to 3 million people now working or studying in an organisation with a RAP.

The four RAP types – Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate – allow RAP partners to continuously develop and strengthen reconciliation commitments in new ways. This Reflect RAP will lay the foundations, priming the workplace for future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives.

The RAP program's strength is its framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities, allowing an organisation to strategically set its reconciliation commitments in line with its own business objectives, for the most effective outcomes.

These outcomes contribute towards the five dimensions of reconciliation: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance.

It is critical to not only uphold all five dimensions of reconciliation, but also increase awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and leadership across all sectors of Australian society.

This Reflect RAP enables South Gippsland Water to deepen its understanding of its sphere of influence and the unique contribution it can make to lead progress across the five dimensions. Getting these first steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations South Gippsland Water, welcome to the RAP program, and I look forward to following your reconciliation journey in the years to come.

Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia

Our business

Employment

Currently our organisation has no known staff that identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. While the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff is currently not known, we will work within this RAP to determine culturally appropriate ways to understand this. An Independent Aboriginal Board Delegate sits on our Board.

South Gippsland Water employs 134 people. Our head office is based in Leongatha, Victoria. We have other depots and offices across the region including Korumburra and Wonthaggi. Based in south-east Victoria, our business delivers quality water services to 23,000 customers in our region.

Our values as a business

South Gippsland Water is proud to be part of our diverse and growing community. We respect people from all walks of life – whether they be our staff, customers or partners.

START SAFE 
WORK SAFE 
HOME SAFE 

-  **Inclusive**
-  **Respectful**
-  **Reliable**
-  **Innovative**
-  **Sustainable**

Cultural heritage

South Gippsland Water stands to greatly benefit from the knowledge of First Peoples in our region. We recognise how important it is to adequately recognise those who choose to share their knowledge with us.

It is important our staff understand how they may inadvertently impact cultural heritage sites when laying pipes or conducting other infrastructure projects above and below ground, as well as on waterways. As a business we are committed to respecting Cultural Heritage Overlays where they exist, but it is also imperative we work with First Peoples of the region to identify and preserve any cultural heritage that may be present, but perhaps not formally documented, on the sites we manage. We can learn to better manage our land and water resources through the expertise of First Peoples.

Treaty

The Yoorrook Justice Commission has recorded living testimonies from Victorians who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Yoorrook, meaning ‘truth’ in the Wamba Wamba language, has seen people share their stories over the past four years, providing South Gippsland Water with a library of evidence it can access to enhance our understanding of First Peoples’ experiences.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap represented a fundamental shift in the approach of Governments to working towards a more equitable nation, built on genuine and meaningful partnerships with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector, Traditional Owner groups and the wider Aboriginal community. This shift has been driven at the national level by the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peaks (coalition of peaks), and here in Victoria by the Aboriginal Executive Council (AEC) and other key Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). This led to the Victorian Government producing its own Closing the Gap agreement in 2022.

South Gippsland Water is committed to the following measures under Closing the Gap:

- Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities through our development of an employment strategy under this RAP.
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples enjoy long and healthy lives. We contribute to this outcome by providing quality water services to people in our region, offering particular supports for customers who need financial assistance.

Victoria may also be the first state to negotiate a Treaty with First Nations Peoples.

Victoria’s Treaty process seeks to reset the relationship between First Peoples, the State and all Victorians. Treaty and treaties will be the primary mechanism for transferring decision-making power and resources to communities in Victoria. It will provide a new foundation and resource base for Aboriginal Victorians to steer issues and decisions that affect their lives.

The First Peoples’ Assembly is the democratically elected and statewide body that represents all First Peoples in Victoria in the Treaty process, as the presumptive First Peoples’ Representative Body under the Advancing the Treaty Process with *Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018*.

In addition to building relationships with First Nations, South Gippsland Water’s first Reconciliation Action Plan is designed to create awareness of Treaty concepts.

Native Title

Gunaikurnai’s Recognition and Settlement Agreement is an important element to our region, impacting all Crown land, national parks and reserves (for example, Tarra Bulga National Park), and other areas that come under joint management. It is important we understand and recognise this agreement when considering the use of our sites and assets.

Commitment to Water is Life, Victorian Government policy

Bunurong

Through the Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy, Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation specified where Government instruments and tools need to be changed to remove barriers to accessing water.

The land council stated that they seek water return of unallocated water sources on Bunurong Country, both from rivers and groundwater. Bunurong Elders have also stated they have interest in alternative water sources, including the significant recycled water held on Bunurong Country.

Bunurong have provided the following advice in relation to their aspirations:

- Access and control of water to continue a cultural connection to place and Country;
- Involved in, and have control of decisions regarding the management of water on their Country, its use and distribution;
- Water and water places to be reinstated to Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation people as part of cultural rejuvenation projects;
- Actively manage their cultural landscape;
- For water retailers and government bodies to partner with land councils at the commencement of projects and policies that regard the use of water and water places within Bunurong Country;
- Seek to build meaningful and productive relationships with Government departments and water authorities; and
- Work with government departments, other Traditional Owner groups and water authorities in developing strategies that preserve, integrate and promote Bunurong and all Aboriginal rights and sovereignty into contemporary landscapes.

Gunaikurnai

Gunaikurnai made a powerful statement in the Water for Life policy which we have reflected upon while writing this Reconciliation Action Plan;

“ *Empowering Traditional Owners to influence management and decision-making processes that include Gunaikurnai waters. Gunaikurnai people are rights holders, not ‘stakeholders’. This needs to be facilitated through inclusion in legislation, policy and partnership agreements, not just be dependent on relationships. We are interested in leadership and control over water landscapes, not just consultation on decisions others have already made. The Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy was an example of embedding Traditional Owners into policy development across all levels from the outset. Models that deliver important outcomes such as these need to be included in all other water processes. But, caution that this exact model won’t necessary ‘roll out’ well for other processes – each deliverable must be co-designed and outcomes driven...*”

“ *(The land council) is asked to participate in and contribute to many water and broader Country management proposals. Our staff are already stretched thinly. We need resourcing for more staff, and opportunities for training to better understand all the processes we are asked to contribute to.*”

Our work to date

We're working with Gunaikurnai and other Gippsland government agencies and partners to produce an employment plan. As a member of the Bass Coast South Gippsland Reconciliation Network, we work with other partners to support events such as NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week.

In 2023 we officially opened the Yarram Water Tower mural project. Senior Gunaikurnai Elder and artist Sandra Patten drew on her knowledge to create the base of the mural. Featuring the five shields of Gunaikurnai, representing Country, water, food, shelter and tracks. The 'sea of hands' welcoming and symbolic of reconciliation.

South Gippsland Water is incorporating recognition of Gunaikurnai and Bunurong into our branding, including Sandra Patten's artwork, with her permission.

Our REFLECT Reconciliation Action Plan

South Gippsland Water is committed to partnering with First Peoples in our region. We want to work with First Peoples to better understand the land and water which we manage. Our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan is our commitment to this process and begins our journey towards reconciliation; detailing the actions we will take to increase cultural awareness and safety within our organisation and our broader regional Victorian community in 2025.

To recognise the importance of this RAP, our Managing Director Robert Murphy will lead our approach. We will report quarterly to our Safety, People and Culture Executive Committee and the Safety, People and Culture Board Committee.

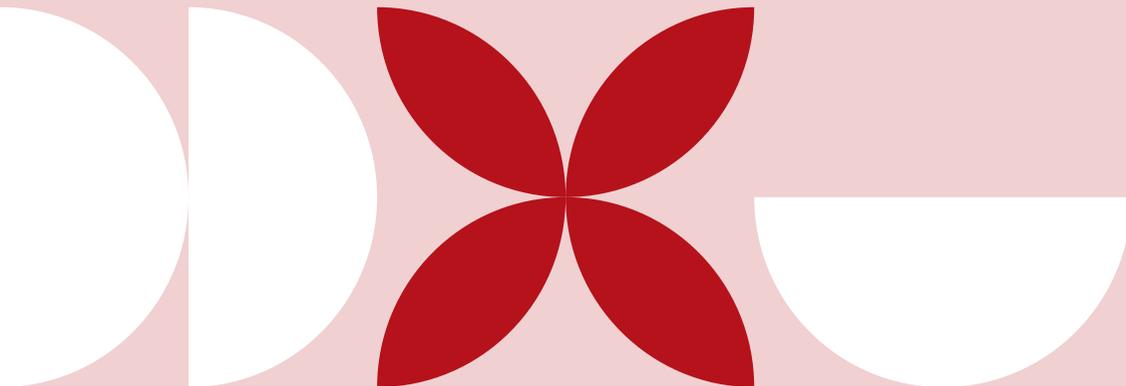
We have an Equity, Inclusion Diversity Plan and Gender Equality Action Plan working group from which we will form a Reconciliation Working Group to govern implementation of this RAP.

To support implementation of this RAP we will consider assigning appropriate budget in the 2025–26 financial year.

South Gippsland Water will continue to seek out ways to better engage with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples in our region. Senior leaders within our organisation will take carriage of actions under this RAP to ensure we deliver on our commitments.

It forms part of the work we are doing under our Gender, Equity and Diversity Plan to ensure inclusivity continues to be a focus in our workplace.

We want the actions outlined to help us to work with First Nations and Traditional Owners to achieve the next steps in our journey towards reconciliation using the RAP framework to guide us.





Relationships

Action	Deliverable	Timeline			Responsibility
1. Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	Identify Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Identify and consult with a 'community champion' to advocate on our behalf.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Communications and Engagement Team Leader
2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff. National Reconciliation Week runs from 27 May to 3 June.	Deadline 20 May 2026	No review period	Completed as of 27 May 2026	Managing Director
	Reconciliation Action Group Working Group members to participate in an external National Reconciliation Week event.	Deadline 20 May 2026	No review period	Completed as of 27 May 2026	Learning and Organisational Development Co-ordinator
	Encourage and support staff and to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate National Reconciliation Week.	Deadline 20 May 2026	No review period	Completed as of 27 May 2026	Learning and Organisational Development Co-ordinator



Relationships

Action	Deliverable	Timeline			Responsibility
3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff by distributing the Reconciliation Action Plan and holding a workshop for all staff to discuss.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Lead: Learning and Organisational Development Co-ordinator Support: Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Lead: Learning and Organisational Development Co-ordinator Support: Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Establish a dedicated section of the SGW website that demonstrates our commitment to reconciliation and our progress in this area. Ensure resources are allocated to ensure content, upcoming events and engagement are up to date	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Communications and Engagement Team Leader
4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination. Meet all requirements legislated by Victorian Government.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Corporate Planning Senior Officer
	Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs. Incorporate into actions in our next Equity, Inclusion and Diversity Plan if identified.	Deadline 3 December 2025	Review 17 December 2025	Completed 14 January 2025	Executive Manager People, Safety and Culture



Respect

Action	Deliverable	Timeline			Responsibility
5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation through ongoing cultural awareness training.	Deadline 3 December 2025	Review 17 December 2025	Completed 14 January 2026	Learning and Organisational Development Co-ordinator
	Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation.	Deadline 3 December 2025	Review 17 December 2025	Completed 14 January 2026	Learning and Organisational Development Co-ordinator
	Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation.	Deadline 3 December 2025	Review 17 December 2025	Completed 14 January 2026	Learning and Organisational Development Co-ordinator
	Engage with a local Aboriginal artist to create a series of materials to acknowledge the cultural significance of the land and waters upon which we work.	Deadline 3 December 2025	Review 17 December 2025	Completed 14 January 2026	Lead: Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Develop a cultural learning plan for South Gippsland Water staff.	Deadline 3 December 2025	Review 17 December 2025	Completed 14 January 2026	Learning and Organisational Development Co-ordinator



Respect

Action	Deliverable	Timeline			Responsibility
6. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples by observing cultural protocols.	Identify First Peoples as Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area through production and sharing of a map indicating areas.	Already complete			Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Increase staff understanding and implement cultural protocols across the organisation such as Welcome to Country and acknowledgement of Traditional Owners at start of all meetings. To coincide with RAP launch.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2026	Lead: Customer, Strategy, and Technology General Manager Support: Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Include symbols, artwork, signage and interpretative information at our sites and through our community engagement processes.	Deadline 4 March 2026	Review 18 March 2026	Completed 14 January 2026	Communications and Engagement Team Leader
7. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week (first week of July).	Deadline 10 June 2026	No review required	Completed 25 June 2026	Managing Director
	Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area.	Deadline 10 June 2026	No review required	Completed 25 June 2026	Communication and Engagement Team Leader
	RAP working group to participate in a NAIDOC Week event.	Deadline 10 June 2026	No review required	Completed 25 June 2026	Communication and Engagement Team Leader



Opportunities

Action	Deliverable	Timeline			Responsibility
8. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.	Develop a formal strategy for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation. To coincide with NAIDOC Week 2026.	Deadline 13 May 2026	Review 10 June 2026	Completed 25 June 2026	Executive Manager People, Safety and Culture
	Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities. Must be complete in September to inform reporting requirements.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Executive Manager People, Safety and Culture
	Recruit an independent Aboriginal delegate to the South Gippsland Water Board.	Already complete			Managing Director
	Ensure all job advertisements encourage more diverse people to consider roles.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2026	People and Culture Team Leader
	Continue to take an active role with the GEA/ GLaWAC Aboriginal Employment Working Group to progress Aboriginal employment opportunities and outcomes. Review involvement at plan's end.	Ongoing			Executive Manager People, Safety and Culture



Opportunities

Action	Deliverable	Timeline			Responsibility
9. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	Commit to recording procurement from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses under the Victorian Government Procurement Board – noting the requirement for 1% of all contracts to be undertaken with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Chief Financial Officer
	Finalise a Managing Director’s letter of agreement with Bunurong Land Council that will outline a series of actions to support improved social and economic outcomes. Note this is already underway.	Deadline 18 June 2025	Review 25 June 2025	Completed 10 July 2025	Lead: Customer, Strategy, and Technology General Manager Support: Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Research effective procurement strategies in similar organisations to understand best practise for our future First Nations procurement strategy.	Deadline 3 December 2025	Review 17 December 2025	Completed 14 January 2026	Chief Financial Officer
	Investigate new ways to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander business owners.	Deadline 3 December 2025	Review 17 December 2025	Completed 14 January 2026	Chief Financial Officer



Governance

Action	Deliverable	Timeline			Responsibility
10. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	Draft a Terms of Reference for the Reconciliation Working Group based on advice provided by Reconciliation Australia.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Maintain a Reconciliation Working Group to govern implementation.	Deadline 3 December 2025	Review 17 December 2025	Complete 14 January 2026	Learning and Organisational Development Co-ordinator
	Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG.	Deadline 3 December 2025	Review 17 December 2025	Completed 14 January 2026	Learning and Organisational Development Co-ordinator
11. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Appoint a senior leader to champion our Reconciliation Action Plan internally.	Already complete			Managing Director
	Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on Reconciliation Action Plan commitments.	Deadline 6 August 2025	Review 20 August 2025	Completed 27 August 2025	Corporate Senior Planning Officer



Governance

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
12. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.	Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link to access the online RAP Impact Survey.	June annually	Corporate Senior Planning Officer
	Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date to ensure we do not miss out on important Reconciliation Action Plan correspondence.	June annually	Communications and Engagement Team Leader
	Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Survey to Reconciliation Australia.	30 September annually	Corporate Senior Planning Officer
13. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	Commence planning in April 2026.	2 April 2026	Corporate Senior Planning Officer
	Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	2 April 2026	Corporate Senior Planning Officer

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