Murray–Darling Basin Indigenous River Rangers Program

Grant Opportunity Information

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This paper provides information about the opportunity for Indigenous organisations to bid for part of the $3.1 million funding available to establish around four Indigenous river ranger groups to work on waterway health projects that support environmental and cultural outcomes across the Murray–Darling Basin (the Basin) for one year.

The Murray–Darling Basin Indigenous River Rangers Program (Program) is part of the Murray–Darling Communities Investment Package announced by the Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia, the Hon Keith Pitt MP, on 4 September 2020. Minister Pitt and the Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP, announced the new Program on 8 September 2020.

The Program recognises Indigenous Australians’ connection to country and the diversity of environmental and cultural practices across the Basin. The Program aims to provide Indigenous organisations an opportunity to use their knowledge and connection to country to contribute to managing and restoring waterway health in the Basin. The river ranger groups will be funded for one year commencing 1 July 2021. The Program will employ around 20 full-time equivalent Indigenous rangers as well as a number of ranger coordinators.

The Program grant opportunity guidelines are expected to be published late in the first quarter of 2021.

Draft Program Objectives and Grant Outcomes

Program Objective

The Program will enable Indigenous Australians, organisations and communities to contribute to managing and restoring waterway health across the breadth of the Murray-Darling Basin, while developing or improving leadership, employment and economic opportunities for Indigenous people in the water and land management sector and related fields.

Grant Outcomes

Required outcome

The grant proposal will be required to identify at least one waterway health project the rangers group will be working on that supports environmental and cultural outcomes. The proposal should outline the problem/issue to be addressed, how the rangers group will address it and the outcome that will be achieved at the end of the one year period.

Examples of activities that could contribute to waterway health outcomes and case studies of recent works are included in the attachment.

Desired Outcomes

In addition to an environmental outcome, proposals should demonstrate how they will contribute to one or more of the following outcomes:

- Indigenous river rangers participate in learning and development training designed to develop skills and improve employment opportunities for Indigenous people in the water and land management sector,
- Indigenous river rangers contribute to the identification, documentation, monitoring and protection of important environmental and cultural sites in the Murray–Darling Basin, and their cultural uses and values,
- Indigenous river ranger groups, communities and organisations enhance their ability to engage with water planning and management processes, in the Murray–Darling Basin,
• Indigenous communities increase their engagement in water management and waterway health in the Murray–Darling Basin, including through knowledge sharing between Indigenous experts and water planners and managers,

• Indigenous river rangers engage traditional owners, elders, and young people in activities that, through connections to and caring for country, improve environmental, cultural and waterway health in the Murray–Darling Basin.

Proposals may include agreements with government, business or other organisations to secure or improve access to waterways, training, reporting tools or for other purposes that assist with the delivery of the rangers’ proposal.

Next Steps

The grant funding round for the Program is expected to open late in the first quarter of 2021 and will be announced on GrantConnect. Interested parties can register on GrantConnect to receive notifications for forecast and newly published grant opportunities. Interested parties will have approximately four weeks to submit a proposal after the grant opportunity is published.

Further information is available in the attached Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and information on waterway health outcomes. This information and any other provided during the process will be made available at niaa.gov.au.
Murray–Darling Basin Indigenous River Rangers Program FAQ

**Funding**

Funding for the Murray–Darling Basin Indigenous River Rangers Program will be determined by an open, competitive grant process. This means:

- The grant opportunity and guidelines will be published on GrantConnect.
- Indigenous Organisations will need to apply for funding.
- Any Indigenous organisation meeting the eligibility criteria can apply.
- Applications will be assessed against a range of criteria and against other applications. The overall value of the proposal, whether it presents an opportunity for new Indigenous organisations to contribute to water management and the geographic range and distribution of projects throughout the Murray-Darling Basin may be taken into account.
- The criteria will be finalised and published in the grant guidelines.
- The Program funding is limited to one year.

**Significant dates**

Grant opportunity guidelines are expected to be published on GrantConnect late in the first quarter 2021.

- The grant round will be open for about four weeks; organisations will have this time to develop and submit their application in response to the guidelines.
- The NIAA will negotiate with successful organisations to establish financial, reporting and outcome requirements.
- The Indigenous river rangers groups are expected to begin operating on 1 July 2021.

**Grant opportunity guidelines**

The Program grant opportunity guidelines are currently being developed. These will provide further details regarding:

- eligibility requirements and assessment criteria,
- guidance on the grant application and required documents,
- roles and responsibilities of potential partner organisations,
- outcomes, reporting and Key Performance Indicators.

**Eligibility**

While the grant opportunity guidelines are yet to finalised, key eligibility criteria will likely require organisations and/or proposals to:

- Demonstrate ownership, or access to, country (lands and/or waterways) in the Murray–Darling Basin to be managed through the Murray–Darling Basin River Rangers program.

  **AND**

- Demonstrate necessary governance structures, organisational capabilities and environmental management experience to deliver Program outcomes.

  **OR**

- Demonstrate partnership(s) with another organisation(s) that has(ve) the appropriate ownership or access rights to the land and/or waterways to be managed. Partner organisations may also provide assistance, advice or capacity-building for other capabilities such as governance and water management.
  
  - Please note proposals may be required to demonstrate that funding will not be used to deliver actions or responsibilities of or funded by state and territory governments.

- Include a copy of a signed agreement with any partners to confirm willingness, capacity and types of support they will provide the applicant to deliver the project and its outcomes.
Please note that Indigenous ownership is not a requirement for the partner organisation. The applicant can invite Indigenous or non-Indigenous organisations, which may be government or private organisations, to assist them to deliver the grant outcomes in a number of ways.

AND
- Demonstrate Indigenous community support to establish an Indigenous river rangers group.
- Demonstrate the applicant has an Australian Business Number (ABN).

Please note, advice on the assessment criteria cannot be provided prior to publication of the grant guidelines.
**Waterway health outcomes and case studies**

Examples may include:

- Restoring, improving and protecting country connected to waterway health, for example:
  - habitat or habitat connectivity for water-reliant wildlife (which could include threatened and migratory species), or
  - habitat following, or in preparation for, extreme events (e.g. drought, fire, low-oxygen blackwater events), or
  - vegetation in and along waterways to:
    ▪ provide food and habitat resources for native species, or
    ▪ support fish migration and breeding opportunities.

- Supporting Australian Government priorities and obligations that contribute to waterway health in the Basin, for example:
  - Murray–Darling Basin Plan objectives, or
  - national and international environmental and culturally-significant sites in the Basin (e.g. Ramsar or World Heritage-listed sites)

- Monitoring and mapping that contributes to waterway health in the Basin, for example:
  - environmental and culturally-significant plants, animals and places, or
  - river, wetland or floodplain habitat, or
  - water quality, or
  - water-related cultural practices.

- Management and maintenance that contributes to waterway health in the Basin, for example:
  - control of invasive plants and animals
  - native seed propagation and revegetation
  - earthworks
  - fencing and erosion control.

Please note these are examples only and not an exhaustive list of activities that could meet the required Program outcome.

**Case studies**

Rivers, the veins of our country - Ten case studies of First Nations involvement in managing water for the environment in the Murray–Darling Basin, 2018-19. Available in pdf format [here](#). Some of the stories are included in the Australian River Restoration Centre’s webpage at: [Rivers, the veins of our country – Australian River Restoration Centre (arrc.com.au)](#)

[Southern Connected Basin Environmental Water Committee Annual Reports | Murray-Darling Basin Authority (mdba.gov.au)](#), specifically 2017-18 pages 9, 10 and 11) and 2018-19 (pages 11 and from 13)

Please note: This list is not comprehensive. Case studies may be updated at a later date.

**Other useful resources**

Commonwealth Environmental Water Office:

*Healthy Rivers, Healthy Communities. A pocket guide to water for the environment* [Healthy Rivers, Healthy Communities. A pocket guide to water for the environment | Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment](#)

*Water use in catchments* [Water use in catchments | Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment](#)
Water Management Plan 2020-21 | Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Murray-Darling Basin Authority:

Proposed and operational water resource plans Water resource plans | Murray-Darling Basin Authority (mdba.gov.au)

Preliminary guide to Murray-Darling Indigenous groups by water resource plan area
Map of the Murray-Darling Basin

About the Basin

- More than one million square kilometres
- More than 77,000 kilometres of rivers, including four of Australia’s longest
- More than 30,000 wetlands, 16 internationally recognised
- 9,200 irrigated agriculture businesses
- More than 40 Aboriginal Nations
- Contains Australia’s largest river red gum forest (66,000 hectares)
- 120 species of waterbirds and 46 species of native fish
- Home to 2.5 million people
- $8 billion tourism industry