



Australian Government



National Water Grid®

First Nations water infrastructure National Water Grid Fund

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Water security projects

Safe and reliable water is fundamental to human health and wellbeing. Many First Nations communities in regional and remote Australia face water security challenges, such as contaminated water, not having enough water, or limited or unreliable access to water.

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments, First Nations organisations and representatives and other experts to identify, prioritise and deliver fit-for-purpose and culturally responsive water infrastructure projects that provide better water to First Nations communities.

Through the National Water Grid's \$150 million commitment, the Government supports infrastructure solutions that recognise and address the specific water challenges faced by communities. Projects may include, but are not limited to, replacing leaking pipes, drilling and equipping bores or installing water treatment systems. Planning and business case projects can also be considered to inform infrastructure solutions.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of water infrastructure projects, state and territory governments are encouraged to develop holistic approaches to address water insecurity and to also fund complementary activities like community education.

Closing the Gap

Funding for First Nations water infrastructure was announced as part of the 2023 Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan. Funding will support progress towards achieving many Closing the Gap Targets, particularly Target 9b on essential services.

Closing the Gap Target 9b

By 2031, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households:

- within discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities receive essential services that meet or exceed the relevant jurisdictional standard
- in or near to a town receive essential services that meet or exceed the same standard as applies generally within the town (including if the household might be classified for other purposes as a part of a discrete settlement such as a "town camp" or "town based reserve")

Broader benefits of addressing water insecurity include:

- building resilience to climate change
- enabling sustainable economic development
- improving community wellbeing and health.

These benefits can reduce barriers to living on Country.

States and territories encourage Indigenous participation during project delivery by promoting employment opportunities and engaging First Nations businesses. This supports progress towards Closing the Gap Target 8 for employment.

The Australian Government has also committed \$5 million to build local water understanding and capability. This will empower First Nations people to make informed decisions about water infrastructure.



Excavating trenches in Maningrida, Arnhem Land, NT
Credit: Power and Water Corporation

First Nations engagement

Water has an important role in the cultural, social and spiritual identity of First Nations people, who are stewards of Australia's water systems. The Government works with states and territories to ensure community voices are heard, and that views, aspirations and priorities can be incorporated in infrastructure decision-making. Projects should be designed in collaboration with communities and use Traditional Knowledge where possible.

Engagement with First Nations communities is a core principle for all National Water Grid projects, and projects will not proceed without endorsement from relevant Traditional Owners or community representatives.

National Water Grid Fund

The National Water Grid Fund supports water infrastructure for productive and community use. It aims to improve water security while being economically, environmentally, socially and culturally responsible. Funding decisions are guided by the National Water Grid Investment Framework.

In the October 2022-23 Budget, the Government broadened the purpose of the National Water Grid Fund to enable investment in essential town water projects in regional and remote communities. This change means that funding is available for water infrastructure projects in First Nations communities.

The commitment of \$150 million towards water security in First Nations communities provides a pathway for projects that will improve water quality, availability and access in communities.

Accessing funding

State and territory governments are responsible for bringing forward National Water Grid funding proposals with a co-funding contribution for consideration. Funding is provided to the relevant state or territory government as the delivery partner.

State and territory governments are responsible for regulating, planning, managing and allocating water resources.

First Nations representatives and private proponents are encouraged to work with states and territories to bring forward ideas for Government consideration.

The National Water Grid Investment Framework sets out the strategic objectives, eligibility criteria and principles for investment. Information about requirements for First Nations participation in project delivery can be found in the Indigenous Employment and Supplier-Use Water Infrastructure Framework and Indigenous Participation Plan template within the Program Administration Manual. The Investment Framework and the Program Administration Manual are available on the National Water Grid website (www.nationalwatergrid.gov.au).

Better water leads to better life outcomes, and the National Water Grid encourages projects that can deliver benefits across sectors such as health, housing and education.



Further information about the National Water Grid is at www.nationalwatergrid.gov.au.

Email us at NWGA.FirstNations@dcceew.gov.au. We can connect you with relevant state or territory contacts so you can share information about water security and progress projects.

Engage with us early so we can better understand the water security challenges in regional and remote First Nations communities and advise if projects may be suitable for National Water Grid funding.