



**Western Murray
Land Improvement Group**

Koondrook Perricoota Little Forest Traditional Flow Environmental Water Planning Case Study

October 2021





Project Planning

Bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders for project development and achieving a valuable and community-wide, wealth-building outcome is core business for the Western Murray Land Improvement Group (WMLIG).

A recent demonstration of our ability to facilitate this invaluable cooperation – from the ground up – has been delivered by the Koondrook-Perricoota Little Forest traditional flow environmental watering project.

Involving 10 months of project planning time, we brought the community together with other stakeholders, including government agencies and industry groups, for information sharing and project development.

This has allowed the determination of where common interests converge and joint, agreed actions can expedite a process.

One of WMLIG's values is to empower our community through knowledge exchange, education, and local decision-making. This co-design approach provides a meaningful engagement model, that is inclusive and participatory.

This 'bottom-up' approach requires more upfront resources but results in a higher level of project 'buy in', 'ownership', trust, and appreciation of the benefits for the community.

WMLIG's case study and 'lessons learned' from project planning for the traditional flow environmental water event provides not only valuable insights for the WMLIG Board for due diligence purposes; but also, for government agency consideration to understand both the level of resources needed for effective co-design; and other valuable cross-community outcomes that are delivered via a co-design process.

Over the 10 months of community engagement activities and in-kind support, the following was carried out:

- Seven community reference group meetings
- One open community KP Forest forum titled 'Toward a New Water Balance'
- 22 individuals attended planning meetings
- 8 organisations and government agencies actively involved
- 135 hours of neighbouring landholder volunteer time
- 97 hours of Traditional Owner consultation and working group time
- 84 hours of WMLIG planning support time
- 70 hours of subject matter expert engagement
- 5,780 km (\$4,161) travelled to attend meetings and site visits
- \$33,000 in kind and WMLIG general ledger fund labour

In addition, there have been considerable resources allocated to this project by the NSW Forestry Corporation.

Other government agencies that have provided a valuable contribution to the project include CEWO, NSW DPIE, MDBA and Murray LLS. The resources from these departments are already covered by existing programs and the labour has not been determined for use in this case study.



Project Co-benefits

For WMLIG, the project provides an important community learning process that creates the social licence to deliver an environmental water project and a socio-ecological outcome.

The project provided a valuable opportunity for an Indigenous representative to chair community meetings - an important leadership experience and professional development outcome and at the same time, neighbouring landholders, WMLIG staff and Traditional Owners shared local knowledge, cross-cultural learnings and aspirations.

Five Traditional Owners were employed for cultural heritage assessments over two culturally-rich sites. The first site selected was dismissed due to not receiving unanimous support from all neighbouring landholders.

Apart from the direct economic benefits, the project provided customary, cultural, and future business development opportunities for Traditional Owners; and fostered and built on the trust and relationships that have started an ongoing conversation for future collaborative projects at other sites.

It is anticipated the project will provide a valuable showcase to the broader community of what can be achieved from a community-led environmental water project and a higher level of understanding of what can be achieved with targeted environmental water in the much more expansive Koondrook-Perricoota Forest in the long term.

Lessons Learned

WMLIG's case study provides compelling evidence to support upfront investment in co-design.

We recognise that diversity builds strength. Once people are joined in a common goal, they are committed to that joint outcome and a solid working relationship is actively developed.

WMLIG is concerned that government agencies in particular do not comprehend the importance and volume of work required for effective co-design.

WMLIG regards the facilitation and execution of such co-design as 'cheap insurance' to ensure a successful project outcome. Too often we see project plans developed without the contribution of those who are ultimately affected by the decisions from the outset.

Co-design in a holistic community sense is not on the radar.

Given the volume of planning for the Little Forest Traditional Flow, funding for many shovel-ready projects only provides for a 10% administration component for the entire project; with pre planning costs expected to be absorbed by the project proponent. This is inadequate for not-for-profit and/or registered charity organisations to be expected to deliver upon this proven working model.

The process requires the ability to successfully recognise and facilitate all participants, including subject matter experts with a specialised skillset who can help execute a project using best practice and in the most cost-effective way.

There are valuable opportunities to use this model for other sites right across the Murray Darling Basin.



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If governments are serious about engaging communities to deliver successful agreed outcomes, they need to resource upfront planning effectively.

These outcomes create a major flow-on effect resulting in a seismic shift in community consciousness, and a cohesive solutions-based, 'can-do' mindset for the benefit of all sectors.