

# Indigenous water needs for the Fitzroy River

Project update, January 2019

Sue Jackson, Griffith University



Northern Australia  
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This project is collaborating with Traditional Owners in the Fitzroy River catchment to investigate water requirements and governance principles for the Fitzroy River that are consistent with Aboriginal peoples' social, cultural, environmental and economic interests in water.

## What's new?

We have worked over the last few months with Goonyandi Aboriginal Corporation, Kija Claimant Group, Walalakoo Aboriginal Corporation, Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation and Yanunijarra Aboriginal Corporation/Yi-Martuwarra to progress our understanding of Aboriginal principles for healthy water flows and for the management of water within the Fitzroy River catchment. We've also worked together to document underlying relationships between water, places, people and other beings. These were achieved through the following activities:

- We hosted a workshop to record language words and expressions around water and the river country with experts from three Aboriginal languages of the catchment. This work was designed to respond to local requests to work within Indigenous frameworks and knowledge systems. A language recording in Nyikina was edited and, in collaboration with Walalakoo Aboriginal Corporation, it was shared with Derby Community Radio (6DBY) for broadcast.
  - With Nyikina-Mangala people and the Nulungu Institute, we completed a mapping project led by Walalakoo Aboriginal Corporation, relating to significant river places that are part of the Nyikina creation story. This covered more than 100km of river in the downstream section of Nyikina country. We also made a short film about this trip with a Nyikina-Mangala Traditional Owner, for the Nyikina-Mangala rangers.
  - We've co-designed and drafted a Nyikina seasonal calendar centred on water with Nyikina Traditional Owners. One senior Nyikina Traditional Owner presented the draft calendar at the National Native Title Conference in Broome, and we now have a near-final version that has been approved by Walalakoo Aboriginal Corporation directors.
  - We've documented, together with Nyikina Traditional Owners, a Nyikina language framework to talk about the water dependency of plants and animals.
- We recorded and produced a short film with a senior Goonyandi artist about his understanding of the river and its meaning. Senior Traditional Owners from different language groups have also viewed and approved the film. It won the Environmental Message Prize at the Mud and Saltwater Film Festival in Broome (however it was not screened at that time because of sorry business).
  - We conducted on-country trips with Goonyandi, Nyikina, Yi-Martuwarra and Kija Traditional Owners in several locations and recorded stories and names for significant water places.
  - We've engaged in conversations with Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs) around water planning. We are working on a draft report comparing conventional approaches to environmental flow assessment with Aboriginal water governance principles, which we will submit to PBCs in 2019 for feedback.
  - Finally our interactions with other Hub projects – the *Showing and sharing knowledge* case study in the Fitzroy catchment, and *Environmental water needs of the Fitzroy River* – have assisted our understanding of Indigenous water uses and relationships in the catchment, including the links with plants and animals.



This project is focused on the Fitzroy River catchment in Western Australia.

## What's next?

- Develop our relationship with Tiya-Tiya Aboriginal Corporation, Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation, Jaru Claimant Group and Warrwa Claimant Group
- Complete the Nyikina seasonal calendar
- Complete the work with Nyikina Traditional Owners on the Nyikina framework for water dependency
- Continue the language work around water especially with Goonyandi, Walmajarri, Bunuba and Nyikina languages, and work towards more language outputs on the topic of water and its linkages with people and environments
- Finish a draft report comparing conventional approaches to environmental flow assessment with Aboriginal water governance principles, and obtain feedback from PBCs and the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council in 2019.

## Project summary

This project aims to support Aboriginal peoples' involvement in water management. It is identifying linkages between Aboriginal peoples' values, practices and water regimes, and eliciting knowledge as well as objectives for the future management of land and water resources. Results will contribute to improved water planning and management, and enhance the capacity of Indigenous organisations to influence allocation decisions, water policy and regional development solutions.

## Outputs to date include

1. Jackson S & Laborde S. 2018. New river council will give traditional owners in the Kimberley a unified voice. *The Conversation*, 21 June 2018.
2. Jackson S. 2018. Water and Indigenous rights: Mechanisms and pathways for recognition, representation and redistribution, *WIREs Interdisciplinary Reviews*.

3. Jackson S. 2018. Building trust and establishing legitimacy across scientific, water management and Indigenous cultures, *Australasian Journal of Water Resources*. DOI: 10.1080/13241583.2018.1505994

## Further information

Contact project leader, Sue Jackson at [sue.jackson@griffith.edu.au](mailto:sue.jackson@griffith.edu.au) or Sarah Laborde at [s.laborde@griffith.edu.au](mailto:s.laborde@griffith.edu.au)

Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation, Goonyandi Aboriginal Corporation, Jaru Claimant Group, Kija Claimant Group, Tiya-Tiya Aboriginal Corporation, Walalakoo Aboriginal Corporation, Warrwa Claimant Group, Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation and Yanunijarra Aboriginal Corporation/Yi-Martuwarra are collaborators in this research.

The project page can be found on the [Hub website](#), along with the [project start-up factsheet](#).

This project is due for completion in June 2020.



This project is supported through funding from the Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program



Kimberley Land Council  
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[nespnorthern.edu.au](http://nespnorthern.edu.au)

[nsp.northern@cdu.edu.au](mailto:nsp.northern@cdu.edu.au)



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January 2019