

Traditional Owner Beneficial Uses of Water

The draft State Environment Protection Policy (Waters) improves recognition of the importance of water quality to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians.



The Fighting Gunditjmara Warrior, Portland

Beneficial use – Traditional Owners’ and Aboriginal Victorians’ Cultural Values

The current State Environment Protection Policy (Waters of Victoria) (SEPP (WoV)) recognises the beneficial use – ‘indigenous cultural and spiritual values’. The draft SEPP (Waters) renames the beneficial use to ‘Traditional Owners’ and Aboriginal Victorians’ cultural values’. The change reflects stakeholder feedback, and is consistent with *Water for Victoria 2016*, which recognises that water has cultural importance for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal people and commits to providing opportunities for greater Aboriginal participation in water planning and management.

SEPP (WoV) currently protects this beneficial use for surface waters. The draft SEPP (Waters) extends this beneficial use to groundwater, protecting this beneficial use for all Victorian waters.

Environmental quality indicators

Where possible, beneficial uses have objectives and measurable indicators to demonstrate that they are being protected. Some beneficial uses, including ‘Traditional Owners’ and Aboriginal Victorians’ cultural values’, do not have identified environmental quality indicators and objectives specified in the draft Policy.

Table 1: Proposed beneficial use in the draft SEPP (Waters).

Beneficial use	Beneficial use purpose or intent
Traditional Owners’ and Aboriginal Victorians’ cultural values	Water quality that is suitable for traditional owner cultural needs and that will ensure that traditional owner cultural practices can continue. For example, traditional aquaculture, fishing, harvesting, cultivation of freshwater and marine foods, fish, grasses, medicines and filtration of holistic water holes/camps.

In some cases, the indicators and objectives for another beneficial use may protect Traditional Owners’ and Aboriginal Victorians’ cultural values. For example, beneficial uses including: water dependent ecosystems and species, water based recreation, and consumption of aquatic foods may protect Traditional Owners’ and Aboriginal Victorians’ cultural values.

Where existing objectives and indicators are not specified for a beneficial use, the draft SEPP (Waters) allows for the environmental quality objectives specified in the *Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality* (the Guidelines) to apply.

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Where values are not protected by indicators and objectives specified under the Guidelines then Traditional Owners should be engaged in the development of environmental quality indicators and/or objectives through local management and planning processes for waterways and catchments. This acknowledges that indigenous water-dependent values are geographically and culturally specific to individual Traditional Owner groups.

Engagement allows Traditional Owners (in partnership with waterway managers) to communicate water dependent values, articulate objectives for water quality, identify traditional indicators of water quality condition and to inform the setting of regional targets.

SEPP Implementation Plan

A specific action has been included in the draft SEPP (Waters) Implementation Plan that Traditional Owners should be engaged in the development of environmental quality indicators and objectives through local management and planning processes for waterways and catchments where not specified under the policy sufficient to protect this beneficial use.

Table 2 – Implementation Plan Actions

Implementation Plan Action	Details of implementation action	Implementation Responsibilities	Related SEPP (Waters) Clause
Engage traditional owners to develop site specific environmental quality indicators and objectives for the protection of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians' cultural values	Traditional owners should be engaged (through local management and planning processes for waterways and catchments) to develop environmental indicators and objectives for the protection of this beneficial use, where existing indicators for other beneficial uses are not providing adequate protection.	DELWP/EPA	14. Beneficial uses of all waters 15. Beneficial uses of groundwater 16. Beneficial uses of surface water 17. Environmental quality indicators and objectives

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