

Image credit: John Morton

Australia's Biggest Ecological Restoration Plan

A funding proposal to bring the
Murray-Darling Basin back to
health



Queensland
Conservation
Council



Nature
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environment
victoria



Conservation
Council SA

**The Murray-Darling
Conservation Alliance works
across the country of over
40 First Nations. We pay our
respects to traditional owners
past and present, recognise
their continuing contribution
to caring for country, and
acknowledge that sovereignty
was never ceded.**



Image credit: Erik Peterson

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A message from the Conservation Alliance Chair, Jono La Nauze



We all know the line – a land of drought and flooding rains.

This boom-and-bust cycle, the heartbeat that drives so many Australian ecosystems, is epitomised in the vast floodplains of the Murray-Darling Basin. Here, the combination of a cyclical climate and the extraordinary flatness of the Australian interior creates an enormous floodplain dotted with more than 30,000 wetlands covering over 5.5 million hectares.

The ebb and flow of water is the key driver of these ecosystems. Rivers that dwindle to a stream you can jump over, periodically swell into inland seas dozens of kilometres wide. These floodwaters bring new life – aquatic plants, insects, frogs, fish, and waterbirds that fly from the other side of the Earth to breed here, in our backyard.

I was lucky to grow up on the Murray, just west of Albury where the river farewells the mountains and embraces its expansive floodplain. Weekends and long summer evenings were spent exploring the hills and valleys on horseback. On hot summer days we would cool off in the river.

As a teenager an uneasy feeling crept in, that I was in love with someone else's Country. So as a young adult, I accepted the invitation by Yorta Yorta people to join their struggle for land rights, starting with a campaign to protect the largest river red gum forest in the world, the Barmah-Millewa state forest, and bring it under Yorta Yorta stewardship.

Throughout the decade-long campaign we promoted the Barmah-Millewa as the 'Kakadu of the South' and yet the entire time I only saw it flooded in historic photographs. The millennium drought that shocked the nation was tough on flood country like Barmah. In an overallocated water market, the environment had no buying power and very few legal rights. It was the powerful irrigation sector that got most of the water.

In the face of this crisis, I joined the national campaign to give our rivers a right to their own water. And in 2012 we achieved a significant milestone – the \$13 billion Murray-Darling Basin Plan that promised to return 3.2 trillion litres of annual flows to the environment.

Unfortunately, a decade on only two-thirds of this water has been recovered and climate change is already eroding that share. What we achieved in 2012 was enough to stave off disaster, but not enough to secure a healthy future for the basin.

Time is now running out. If we do nothing, future droughts will change the landscape forever. The warning signs are there to see. In March 2023, for the second time in five years, millions of fish suffocated in the Murray-Darling and formed a carpet of dead fish spanning many kilometres long. This was during a wet period.

This is where our proposal for a new national campaign delivered by the Murray-Darling Conservation Alliance comes in.

Leveraging the established networks and experience of four conservation councils, the Alliance will fill a significant advocacy gap, build long-term community power in key hot spots across the Basin, and deliver a paradigm shift in protection of this precious and fragile landscape. And because any conservation campaign in Australia is ultimately about First Nations Country, a genuine collaboration with Traditional Owners will be at the heart of our work.

The resources needed to lead a campaign of this scale and scope is estimated at \$7 million over four years. It's a large sum but we believe that it can generate a \$10-15 billion investment into a first-of-its-kind climate adaptation and resilience Basin plan in 2026.

The moment is right. For the first time in years, we have a federal government committed to delivering real change for our rivers. But they need a national voice advocating for rivers to create the pressure necessary for bold and courageous reforms.

Between now and June 2023, our task is to gather \$500,000 of seed funding to recruit key positions in the national 'strategic strike' team, secure community organising capacity in each of the Conservation Alliance members and kick off campaign activities like research and media outreach. Multi-year commitments to support the campaign are also welcome to help secure the remaining \$6.5 million over the following four years.

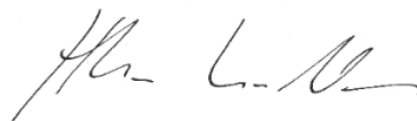
We are grateful for the Besen Family Foundation's willingness to champion this proposal. They have made the first critical investment of \$50,000 with the hope it will encourage others to come on board.

On behalf of the Murray-Darling Conservation Alliance, I am asking you to join them and make this ambitious campaign possible with a generous gift. It is only by joining forces that we can deliver Australia's biggest ecological restoration plan.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this proposal, please contact me or Camille, Environment Victoria's Key Relationships Manager on 0433 633 363 or c.warambourg@environmentvictoria.org.au.

We would also welcome any suggestions you have on how to support this critical work in other ways – for example by making introductions, providing in-kind support and advice, or by championing this project on fundraising platforms.

Thank you for your support.



Jono La Nauze,

**Environment Victoria CEO
Murray-Darling Conservation Alliance Chair**

Email: j.lanauze@environmentvictoria.org.au

Australia's largest river system at risk of collapse

The Murray-Darling Basin is an intricate system of rivers, lakes, and wetlands, covering 14% of the Australian continent.

Its rivers and floodplains are teeming with native flora and fauna. Due to heavy rates of land clearing in many catchments, these waterways often provide a vital refuge and safe passage through a landscape severely depleted of native habitat.

Scientists estimate that major wetlands cover over 5.5 million hectares of the Basin. The total extent of floodplain across the 23 river valleys would be even greater, but has not been completely mapped. 16 of the largest wetlands of the Basin are recognised under the Ramsar

convention as globally important for their role supporting unique plants and animals, including birds that migrate from as far as Siberia.

The natural flow regimes that created these wetlands have been disrupted, in some cases catastrophically, by over a century of river regulation and water extraction, predominantly for irrigation. In the southern half of the basin, large headwater dams capture winter and spring rains, depriving millions of hectares of wetland of replenishing floodwaters in all but the wettest of years. In the north, extensive systems of weirs and levees – many of them built illegally – ‘harvest’ floodwaters and direct them into massive private dams.



Despite historic government commitments to save the Murray-Darling, most notably the 2012 Basin Plan, these ecologically and culturally significant ecosystems remain at risk of collapse.

Climate change is already having an impact - median annual inflow to the Murray over the past 20 years is around half that of the preceding century – and this will only worsen in future. In total there are now 286 flow-dependent species listed as threatened in the basin, including 3 species of invertebrate, 6 frogs, 45 waterbirds, 15 fishes and 217 plants. The total waterbird and native fish populations are estimated to be around 10% of their pre-colonisation levels.

This ecologically significant place is also central to Australia's economy. About 2.3 million people, including more than 40 First Nations, call the Murray-Darling Basin home. Agriculture is a major industry in the Basin and accounts for around 40% in value of Australia's total agricultural production. Tourism is also significant, bringing in around \$11 billion per year to the regional economy.

However, despite the region's natural abundance in resources, many Basin communities are feeling left behind. They are experiencing familiar rural dynamics: migration from smaller towns to growing regional centres, and mid-sized towns benefitting or suffering from rapid technological changes in the agricultural supply chain that have reduced employment and raised capital costs. Smaller farmers are hit the hardest by climate change, challenging commodity prices, and the consolidation of the agriculture sector.

While this change started with the abandonment of protectionist policies like import tariffs and price reserve schemes in the 1990s, it became more muddled with water during the Millennium Drought. Through the 2000s, liberalisation of the water market saw new participants: almonds and institutional investors. Smaller, diverse businesses emerged

from the drought in a new, far more competitive world.

The introduction of the Basin Plan was an easier explanation for these drastic changes, rather than tracing decades of reforms and foregone interventions. There is a misperception that the Plan is to blame for many of the complex socio-economic issues faced by Basin communities, and this has been a major barrier to its full implementation.

Traditional Owners largely dispossessed of water and cultural rights

First Nations maintain ancient cultural traditions and knowledge systems critical to healing Country and restoring rivers to health. Yet across the Murray-Darling Basin, Traditional Owners are still largely dispossessed of water rights – from the ownership of water, to the authority to make decisions about what happens to the rivers that are the lifeblood of their Country.

In the 2000s, the collaboration between environmental groups and First Nations protected over a quarter of a million hectares of globally significant red gum wetlands along the Murray, Goulburn, and Murrumbidgee rivers. Any meaningful campaign in the Murray-Darling Basin should not only have a moral foundation of advancing the priorities of First Nations, it will be more powerful as a result.

The Murray-Darling Conservation Alliance has well-established relationships and active campaigns with prominent Nations such as the Yorta Yorta, Ngarandjerri and Barkandji as well as with peak body Murray & Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations. The Alliance is presently engaging with these groups to establish their aspirations for the next Basin Plan, appetite for collaboration and the resources they require to campaign for water justice. Future iterations of this funding proposal will incorporate the outcomes of this engagement.

The 2012 Murray-Darling Basin Plan: an imperfect response to this crisis

The Basin Plan agreed in 2012 was always a political compromise. The amount of water to be recovered for the river was much lower than science recommended and the impacts of climate change on rainfall and river flows were deliberately glossed over. Nonetheless it did establish a framework for restoring rivers on a scale not seen anywhere else in the world and was a major step forward – if it could be delivered as intended.

Years of weak governance, mismanagement and bickering between Basin states have allowed big irrigation interests to undermine the Plan and rig the rules in their favour. As a result, progress toward the water recovery target has stalled and is way behind schedule.

Out of the 3,200 GL (3.2 trillion litres) of water the plan was supposed to allocate to the environment every year, only 2,100 GL has been recovered. Furthermore, restrictive state government policies and poorly placed physical infrastructure have blocked environmental water holders from delivering water to extensive areas of floodplain. This is despite over \$200 million allocated to overcoming these ‘constraints to delivery.’

The combined effect of these failures means that whilst flows at the Murray Mouth have improved, only a tiny proportion of floodplain habitat upstream has benefited from environmental flows in the decade since the Plan became law.

A 2020 study by the Australian National University found that over a five-year period, only nine of 19 river valleys received environmental flows under the Basin Plan, watering a tiny 3.8% of the total wetland extent across the Basin. The authors concluded:

In summary, our evaluation of environmental watering indicated limited outcomes for environmental water delivery to achieve wetland conservation across the Basin. Environmental water delivery has not supported floods of the magnitude, duration and extent required to maintain or improve the condition of wetlands and their woody vegetation communities... Without significant changes in approach, including a fundamental rethink of what objectives are practical and achievable under climate change, it is likely that environmental watering will fail to protect more than a minority of Basin wetlands into the future.



Watch our video that explains why the rivers of the Murray-Darling Basin are sick – and how we save them:

envict.org/mdb-video

A short window for change

Despite its imperfections, the framework provided by the Basin Plan remains our best hope for securing a future with living rivers. The Commonwealth Water Act (2007) requires that the Basin Plan is reviewed in 2026, giving us this crucial window of opportunity to address the gaps and failures in the current Plan.

Confidential soundings of senior figures in government and industry indicate there is potential support for a major funding package in the order of \$10-\$15 billion. This is what we estimate would be required to set aside more water for the river, restore floodplain habitat and support irrigation-dependent communities into a hotter, drier climate.

Political stars aligned across the Basin

The political landscape has shifted at both federal and state levels creating favourable conditions for influencing positive reforms for the Basin. For the first time in a decade, we have a new Australian government with election commitments to deliver the first Basin Plan in full, despite acknowledging that it will be impossible to achieve the original deadlines for water recovery.

The Albanese government has also publicly committed to taking action on First Nations water rights, including a long-overdue \$40 million set aside to begin recovering water entitlements for Traditional Owners in the Basin. We are directly engaging with the Commonwealth and applying public pressure for the delivery of these election promises.

Having Labor governments in power in all Basin states means greater potential for overcoming historical resistance to the Basin Plan, especially in the big upstream states of New South Wales and Victoria. In New South Wales, the incoming Minns government has shown interest in a more environmentally progressive approach to the Basin Plan, although it did not make substantive promises as part of its election campaign.

In Victoria, the irrigation lobby is still holding inordinate influence over the Andrews government, and our challenge is to activate large progressive and pro-environment constituencies to try and shift their position.

In South Australia, where the most severe effects of over-extraction have been felt for some time, both sides of politics support environmental water recovery. Labor, however, has historically been more aggressive and strategic around the Ministerial Council table where important decisions about the Basin are made. The Malinauskas government has continued this tradition and shown support for the Albanese government's renewed commitment to delivering the Basin Plan.

With multiple teams and a presence at the local, state and national level, our campaign can leverage this window of opportunity. Through coordinated actions we will hold Basin governments to their election commitments and push the boundaries of what is politically possible to achieve.

Industry leadership willing to engage

Confidential soundings with industry leaders in the cotton and rice industries indicate a willingness to talk and find solutions to increase the long-term resilience of the Basin. They too believe that the new federal government will implement reforms and that it is in their interest to be part of these discussions. Resistance is lower than in previous years thanks to several profitable wet years.

We want to capitalise on this opportunity by bringing together key stakeholders across the Basin and creating single or multiple stakeholder agreements covering key issues such as water purchases, biodiversity, community initiatives and irrigation rationalisation. There is no guarantee we can reach agreement on an acceptable outcome, but if unsuccessful, the fact we have attempted negotiation in good faith will strengthen our credibility with policymakers and the community.

People on the ground willing to champion change

Our campaign will utilise the networks we have built over decades of campaigning in the Basin, to elevate the voices of farmers, businesses, First Nations, and community groups who want change and who share the view that healthy landscapes go hand in hand with healthy communities. They have seen the impacts of climate change – unprecedented floods following unprecedented droughts. If these groups are supported and their voices elevated, the debate can change – moving past the frame of environment vs farmers to ‘healthy catchments and landscapes benefit everyone’.

Together, we will call for environmental water recovery, recognition of cultural water rights and diversified regional economies based on sustainable industries adapted to a changing climate. Having strong local voices will help sustain momentum, keep authorities accountable and prevent the risk of backsliding, like in the previous decade.

The Murray river floodplain.
Credit: Doug Gimesy



Three critical milestones

There are three key milestones the Conservation Alliance is targeting to push our agenda:

1. “Basin Plan 1.1” – a rescue package to get the current plan back on track

We want to secure a new intergovernmental agreement and federal legislation to maximise the outcomes achievable under the current Basin Plan. Doing so will speed up ecosystem recovery, reduce the scale of the challenge in 2026, and build our political capital by demonstrating our ability to influence the politics of the day.

Between now and the end of 2023, Commonwealth Water Minister Tanya Plibersek is developing a plan for how the Albanese government will deliver the existing Basin Plan “in full.” Confidential engagement with the Minister indicates that this will require negotiating with state governments and the Senate. A public campaign will maximise what the Minister can achieve and ensure that the environment is not outgunned by irrigation lobbyists.

2. Federal election in 2025

The next federal election is due in May 2025, although it could be held sooner. With the next Basin Plan due in 2026, this is optimal timing to secure commitments to making the Basin Plan a major reform backed by serious funding. Without such a commitment, the potential to achieve significant outcomes in 2026 will be greatly diminished. Election commitments need to be secured well in advance, so our campaign will aim to lock in these commitments by the second half of 2024.

3. Negotiations over Basin Plan 2.0 in 2026

The Water Act requires a wholesale review of the Basin Plan in 2026 and steps out a process for amendments to the Plan. Regardless of any election commitments, this review will be hotly contested by stakeholders and state governments.

Throughout its two-year gestation, the first Basin Plan frequently led national news headlines. It sparked the resignation of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority Chair and was subject to the constant threat of a High Court challenge by the South Australian government. Even once the final deal was clinched, it had to survive two disallowance motions, one in each house of Federal Parliament. Our campaign will need to be at maximum strength throughout 2026 and potentially into 2027, depending on where it lands in the parliamentary calendar.

2023	2024	2025	2026
Ministerial Council about water buybacks	Election commitments	Fed election	Delivering (ongoing pressure)

Learning from the past

Two of the Conservation Council CEOs along with our Strategy Adviser Sean Halse were intimately involved in the development of the first Basin Plan.

We have used this experience along with stakeholder interviews and a review of documented campaign evaluations from 2012 to draw out lessons that will guide our tactics and strategies to maximise our chance of success:

1. Conservationists and allied stakeholders need to make clear early on what is non-negotiable.

In 2012, by the time the federal government began to feel real pressure to do more for the environment, the die had already been cast. What environmental stakeholders and the South Australian government were demanding was beyond the range of policy options that had been modelled and costed.

This time, bottom lines must be communicated clearly and early. Environmental water requirements should follow the latest scientific research, and this should be the starting point from which decision-makers identify options for river management.

Through a strategic communications campaign, we will ensure that communities and the environment own the narrative and are top of mind in the public debate when negotiations start.

2. Launching another 'I Love Murray' campaign

Overwhelming community support in South Australia drove political commitments inside both the Liberal and Labor parties at state and federal level. Whilst not strong enough to secure everything needed at the time, South Australian ambition provided a bulwark against a ferocious, well-funded and sustained attack by the irrigation lobby.

The 'I Love Murray' campaign was a key plank in mobilising the South Australian community and politicians.



Remarkably, the reform maintained bipartisan support that even Barnaby Joyce was unable to unpick.

A key plank in mobilising the South Australian community was the 'I Love Murray' campaign ran by the Adelaide Advertiser. It created a positive voice for the rivers in South Australia that also resonated in other parts of the country. Our plan is to launch a similar 'I Love Murray' campaign.

3. Building sustained community power from the grassroots to the national level

In 2012, the environmental movement was able to achieve as much as it did because conservationists were well organised.

A clear national voice was orchestrated by groups like the Australian Conservation Foundation, whilst the Wentworth Group provided a credible independent science voice. State and grassroots groups were aligned in strategy and messaging, enabling intense local pressure to be exerted on individual federal MPs and state governments.

But the 2012 Basin Plan should not have been seen as the end point of the campaign.

The irrigation lobby kept up its attacks leading to significant backsliding by both state and Commonwealth governments over the following decade.

At the same time NGOs, including the Australian Conservation Foundation which had led the coordination of Murray-Darling Basin campaigning, shifted their attention to the climate crisis, and defending a raft of important environmental institutions that came under attack from the Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison governments.

Unlike in 2012, there is currently no national voice for protection of the rivers of the Basin.

Our close friends at the Australian Conservation Foundation and WWF Australia are strongly supportive of our campaign and will provide important contributions at key moments, but they do not have capacity to provide the full-time campaign leadership they did last time.

A multi-layered campaign to maximise our success

This multi-layered campaign will have impact in **each state** as well as **nationally**. Its design has reinforcing strategies that maximise our chance of creating lasting change.

The campaign follows a two stage approach with advocacy goals that can deliver the biggest ecological restoration plan in Australia's history:

PHASE 1

Get Basin Plan 1 back on track by securing commitments to increase funding allocation of \$1-2 billion to secure the additional 450GL promised for the environment by 2024.

PHASE 2

Secure a \$10-15 billion Basin Plan 2.0 – a first-of-its-kind climate adaptation and resilience plan by 2026. This includes catchment management, environmental water, habitat restoration, invasive species control and First Nations caring for Country.

The new paradigm created by our campaign will provide incentives to landholders to do things differently. It will acknowledge that irrigation is not the only economic game in town, that agriculture can be resilient and viable, and that industries such as tourism and services will be critical for the future of the region.

A new backbone entity and multiple teams

Unlike in 2012, there is currently no national voice for protection of the rivers of the Basin. Our close friends at the Australian Conservation Foundation and WWF Australia are strongly supportive of our campaign and will provide important contributions at key moments, but they do not have capacity to provide the full-time campaign leadership they did last time.

The Wentworth Group will once again provide an essential scientific voice that is distinct from, and must remain independent from, the voice of environmental campaigners who are free to apply significant pressure to political and corporate targets as required.

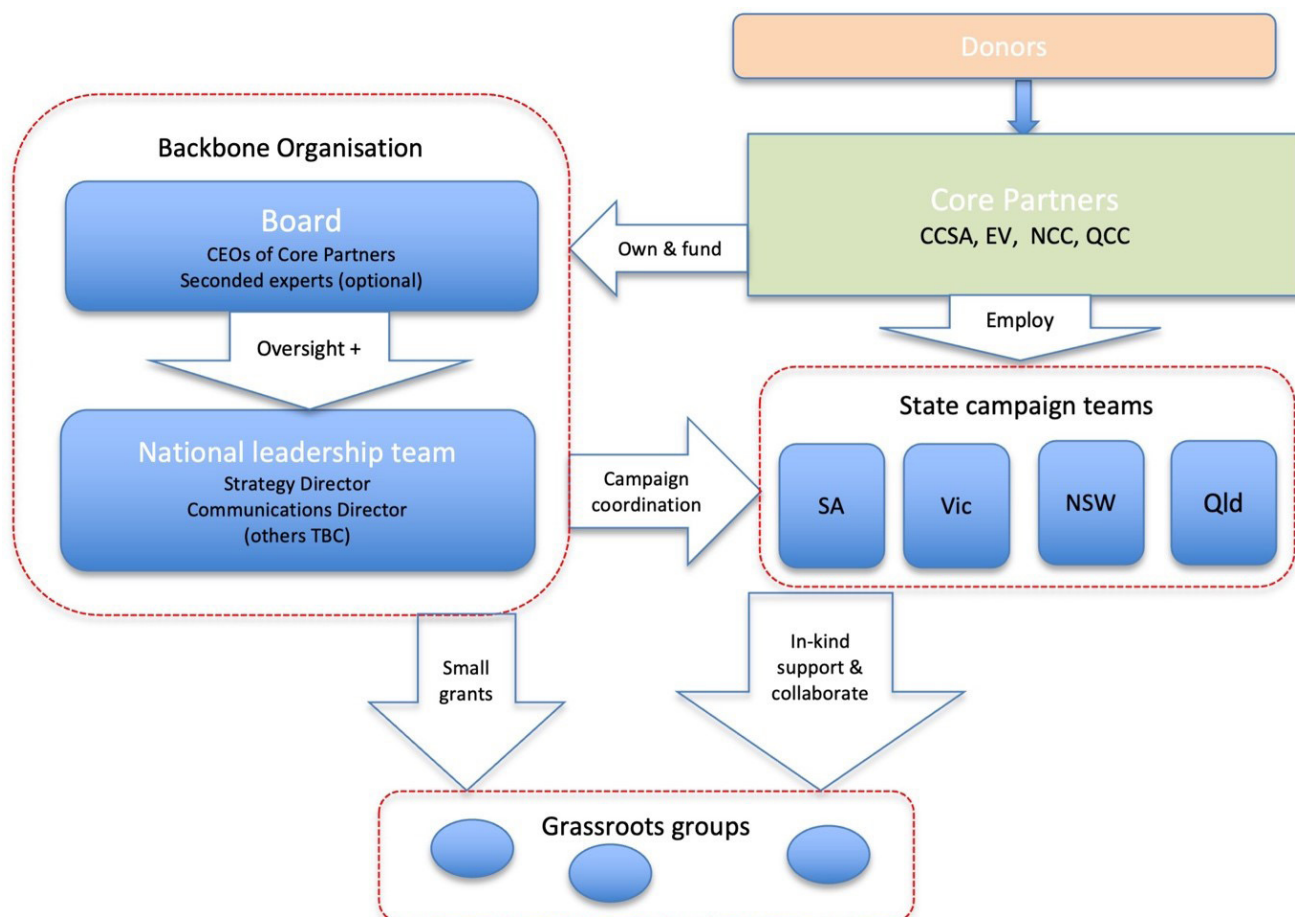
The new Water Trust will play an important role in facilitating dialogue and trust amongst stakeholders and with governments, but as an impartial actor it cannot play the role of advocate for either the environment or First Nations.

With your support, we can build **a new backbone entity – the Conservation Alliance** – that uses the established networks, experience and in-house capacity of four conservation councils in the Basin and that will be solely dedicated to the Murray Darling Basin campaigning.

The core capacity will consist of:

- **A strategy 'strike team'** of campaigners and strategists that will focus on political engagement, progressing stakeholder agreement(s), Traditional Owners engagement and the corporate campaign. This team will also include a full-time senior media adviser to drive all communications.
- **Community campaigners:** two campaigners in South Australia for community work and to help with the I Love Murray campaign, one campaigner in NSW, one campaigner in Victoria and a part-time resource in Queensland. Based in the Conservation Councils, this team will train and mobilise grassroots leaders, support the existing Lifeblood Alliance, lead state-based advocacy and harness the digital communications capacity and supporter base of each Conservation Council.
- **A campaign board:** to ensure the campaign stays on track a board consisting of the CEOs of the conservation councils and seconded experts will oversee the campaign workstreams outlined below.

The proposed governance model enables engagement with experts, stakeholders, government and business through the Board as outlined in this graph. A national leadership team will have a clear mission to drive the campaign, undistracted by competing internal priorities of the core members. It will also be capable of making decisions quickly to drive and coordinate action across a distributed network of NGOs and grassroots activists.



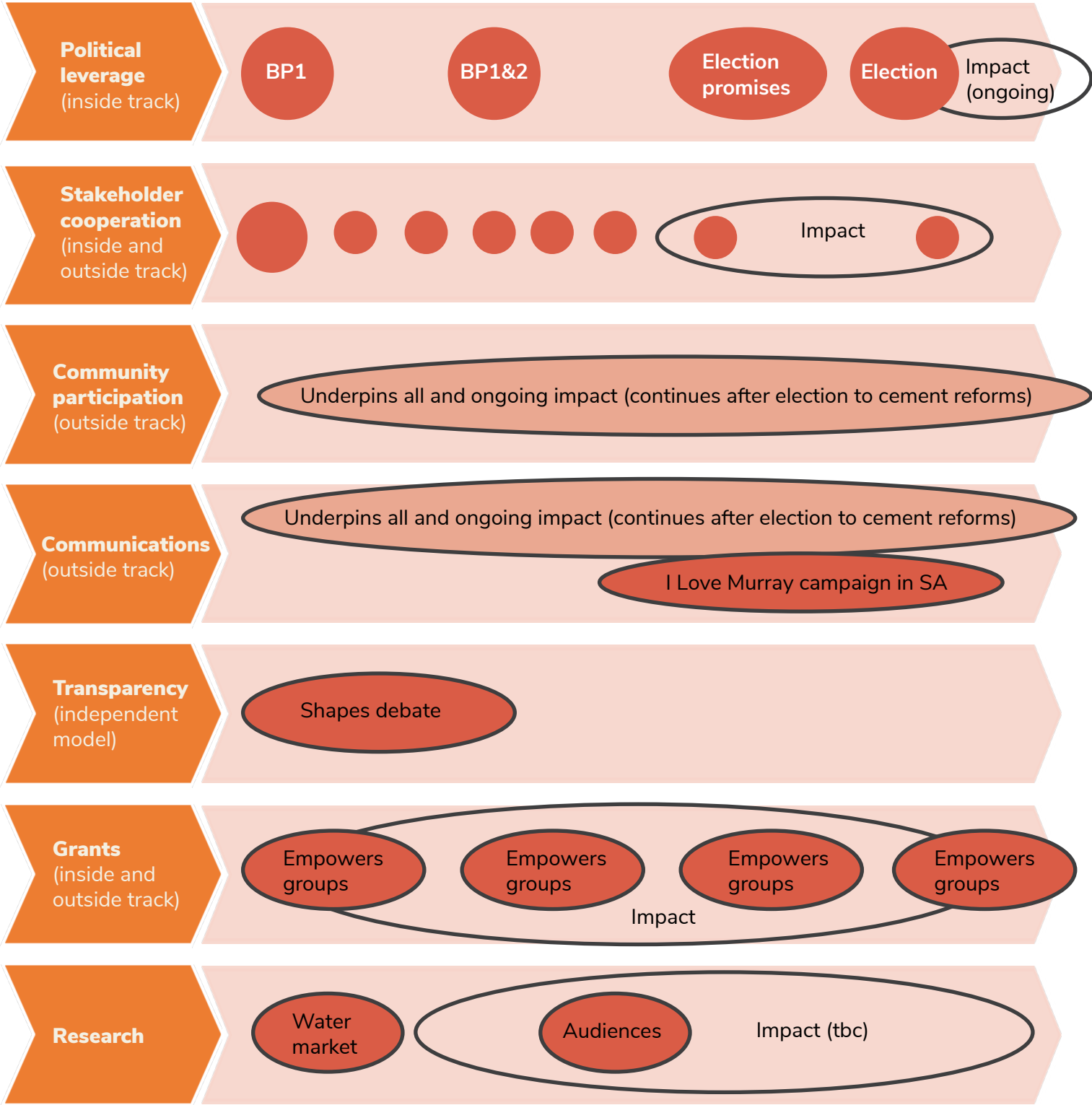
Campaign workstreams

Workstream	Rationale	Example of actions
Political Leverage Access and trust	<p>Engagement with federal and state governments to solidify political will, policy and legislative requirements and the significant funding required to protect the Basin's rivers and catchments at scale.</p> <p>It can also help coordinate engagement of other groups such as the Lifeblood Alliance- an unpaid network of environmental, Indigenous and community groups- and the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists.</p>	Stakeholder Agreement(s): starting with an agreed Statement of Principles, we aim to reach an agreement on as many issues as possible to ensure that the science and data used as the basis for discussion is not disputed by the negotiating parties.
Media Fast response, continual drumbeat	<p>A national communications campaign that covers social media and traditional media to build community awareness, put the Basin front of people's mind, and encourage a paradigm shift about the issue.</p> <p>This workstream should be adequately resourced to provide a continual drumbeat, respond immediately to key media opportunities, and ramp-up public pressure at each critical milestone.</p>	<p>Message testing research: develop message boards and test what message creates a united front between metropolitan environmentalists and regional communities.</p> <p>I Love Murray media partnership with the Adelaide Advertiser to help solidify political will.</p>
First Nations Engagement	<p>A strategy to engage with and support Traditional Owners deliver their objectives around Aboriginal rights and cultural water.</p>	<p>Consultation with First Nations who will lead this element of this campaign</p>

Workstream	Rationale	Example of actions
<p>Community</p> <p>Build community power in Basin hot spots</p>	<p>Community is critical to the longevity of the campaign outcomes and stop backsliding on commitments by politicians. We want community to be part of the solution and be at the negotiation table. This campaign will involve local community organisers on the ground to identify, activate, and trained local leaders in places where there is significant resistance to change as well as in places where there is an opportunity to strengthen existing voices for change, including South Australia.</p> <p>This workstream will work with existing state-based campaigns and the relationships that have been developed by each conversation council.</p>	<p>Community grants: to existing local groups to maintain their community presence and to expand campaign messages in appropriate way to people they know and live next door to.</p>
<p>Research</p> <p>Filling information gap and increasing transparency</p>	<p>To date the true extent of the crisis is not understood. As a result, the government successfully hides behind the complexity to shy away from delivering courageous reforms.</p> <p>This campaign will fill important information gaps that will be used to reinforce the other strategies of this campaign, from the media workstream to community building and political leverage.</p>	<p>Water barons analysis: we need to understand the impact that large institutional investors, who potentially control up to 60% of the water market, are having on farming and the environment</p> <p>Water use model: an independent body such as the academy of science or a technology company will be engaged to build and host an independent, non-government source of truth of water use in the Basin and the impact of different scenarios. The model will be used for stakeholder engagement and communicating the narrative.</p>

Timeline

Q2 2023	Q3&4 2023	2024	2025-2026
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Indicative budget

The campaign budget is iterative and will be reviewed at each phase of the campaign.

Additional resources may be required for First Nations water justice campaigning once discussions with individual Nations and peak bodies have been completed.

Description	Per annum (AUD)	4-year cost (AUD)
Annual costs	\$1,705,000	\$6,820,000
National team	\$700,000	\$2,800,000
State team	\$450,000	\$1,800,000
Conservation Alliance Board (CEO's time)	\$60,000	\$240,000
Communications	\$100,000	\$400,000
Grassroots grants	\$125,000	\$500,000
Ongoing research	\$30,000	\$120,000
Staff travel and overheads	\$240,000	\$960,000
One-off costs		\$150,000
'I Love Murray' campaign		\$50,000
Hydrological model		\$100,000
Contingency - 5%		\$348,500
TOTAL		\$7,318,500

The legacy - healthy landscapes and communities

A future with living rivers in the Murray-Darling Basin will require a better Basin Plan with sound targets for catchment management and restoration.

This new plan must right the wrongs of historic over-extraction and the exclusion of First Nations, whilst future-proofing regional communities with effective climate adaptation and resilience measures.

We know the ingredients to make this possible: a national voice advocating for rivers and creating the pressure needed for courageous reforms, sustained community pressure, strategic communications to reframe the crisis in the Basin, and coordinated actions across New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, and Queensland.

With your support, we can launch this ambitious national campaign and deliver together Australia's biggest ecological restoration and climate resilience plan, targeting over 5.5 million hectares of wetland habitat and 286 flow-dependent threatened species.

This is the legacy our intervention can create:

- **The environment is guaranteed enough water** to restore and maintain key ecosystems and species according to the best available science.
- Environmental water holders have the ability to **deliver water to floodplain wetlands** at the right time of year with sufficient frequency to maintain flow-dependent species.
- **Over 1 million square kilometers of catchments are better managed** - biodiversity improved, landscapes functioning better and more resilient.
- The old paradigm of 'environment vs farmers' has shifted to **'healthy catchments and landscapes benefit everyone'**.
- **First Nations peoples have a seat at the table**, are listened to and cultural water is managed according to the objectives they set.

With the next El Nino around the corner, we have a few short years to rebuild the resilience of the Basin's ecology and communities. Together, we can bring this proposal to life and protect this ancient and precious landscape for future generations.

Our rivers are our lifeblood. Let's unite to protect them. Thank you.

Tati Tati and Wadi Wadi
Traditional Owner Brendan
Kennedy. Credit: Doug Gimesy



Appendix: Our Board



Sean Halse
Strategy Advisor, Murray-Darling Conservation Alliance

Sean was the Deputy Chief of Staff to then Water Minister Tony Burke when the Basin Plan was finalised and put in to law. Since then he has worked on water issues for governments, NGOs and business. He has been a strategist inside government, and has a wide scope of experience on water issues outside government - developing communications and engagement strategies on water issues, policy papers on water and climate, business cases on water projects and strategic plans on environmental protection. Sean is experienced in developing and delivering big policy and lasting change. In addition to helping deliver the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, he was the Minister's advisor on the Tasmanian Forestry Agreement, the Indigenous rangers program and the Australia's national network of marine reserve.



Jono La Nauze
CEO, Environment Victoria

Jono has worked on environment and land justice campaigns in and around the Murray-Darling since 2001. He negotiated a landmark Cooperation Agreement between Murray & Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) and seven state and national environmental NGOs that underpinned the successful campaign to establish a 250,000 hectare river red gum reserve system incorporating numerous Indigenous joint management agreements. He was a nationally prominent voice in the establishment of the Basin Plan as the Australian Conservation Foundation's national campaigner.



About Environment Victoria: Environment Victoria has been working for the protection of Victoria's rivers and waterways for more than 20 years. The organisation was part of an alliance of environmental groups pushing for a strong Basin Plan when it was first negotiated a decade ago, and continues to act as a watchdog for its full implementation in Victoria.



Nature
Conservation
Council

Jacqui Mumford
CEO, Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC)

Jacqui Mumford has a diverse background in strategic leadership, philanthropy, organising and environmental compliance. She brings this wealth of experience into her new role as CEO of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, alongside a passion for climate action and environmental protection. An inspirational speaker, Jacqui knows how to work with the diversity of stakeholders, environmental groups and policymakers across NSW to ensure a better deal for nature.

About NCC: The Nature Conservation Council of NSW is the state's leading environmental advocacy organisation. Representing over 180 conservation groups and 80,000 people across NSW, the organisation is supported by a dedicated team of leading ecologists, scientists, campaigners and community organisers working to build a stronger, more diverse and effective voice for nature.



Conservation
Council SA

Craig Wilkins
CEO Conservation Council SA (SACC)

Craig has worked in the areas of public health, social services, environmental change and politics for over 30 years in for-purpose organisations, in the public service and in Parliament House. For the last 9 years he has been the Chief Executive of South Australia's peak environment body, the Conservation Council of SA. Craig knows how to mobilise South Australian politicians, communities and importantly – the South Australian media.

About SACC: The Conservation Council of SA is the lead community environmental voice for the Murray Darling in SA. The organisation was a prominent advocate at the start of the Basin Plan, and has since partnered with ACF to deliver the Healthy River Fellows program, held community rallies and events at the Murray mouth and on the steps of Parliament House, and kept SA's Federal representatives accountable and focused on standing up for the river.



Queensland
Conservation
Council

Dave Copeman
Director, Queensland Conservation Council (QCC)

Dave is an experienced campaigner and community organiser, who has spent 25 years organising for social change in Queensland and internationally. He is committed to building people power, and was the founding lead organiser of the Queensland Community Alliance. He has also worked as a union, human rights, and pro-democracy campaigner, and a political advisor. Dave continues the long legacy of environmental activists within his family, who have worked for generations to protect Queensland's natural wonders.

About QCC: The Queensland Conservation Council is Queensland's peak environment non-government organisation, representing the interests of over 50 member groups across Queensland. Since the early 2000's, QCC has been actively engaged in the development of state and national water management plans, policies and programs, including the Water Act 2007 (C'th) and the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

