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Science Agency

Indigenous water values, rights, interests and development goals in the Victoria catchment

Hearing the voices of Indigenous people in the Victoria River catchment, Northern Territory.

The Victoria River Water Resource Assessment is a research project being led by CSIRO in partnership with the Australian Government's National Water Grid Authority. Scientists are investigating opportunities for water, agricultural, and other related development in the catchment. The work includes research focused on Indigenous people – the water values they have, the rights they hold, and the development goals that are important to them.



Listening to Indigenous views on water and related development opportunities

Indigenous people have lived on the country for many thousands of years, developing deep knowledge of the landscape and strong connections with it. Economic development can provide jobs and income, but it can also put extra pressure on the country as the number of people and businesses grow and water use increases.

This project will provide better information for the government and communities when considering future water, agricultural and other water-dependent development options, such as tourism and bush foods. This includes looking at development possibilities, but the project does not directly propose or promote water development. In this project, CSIRO is listening to interested Indigenous people about what water issues exist and what kinds of future development paths they want for themselves and their communities.

Indigenous views might include the need to protect important or sacred places and to maintain water levels in the rivers for Indigenous hunting and fishing. They might also include goals and ideas for Indigenous economic development. This could be an Indigenous-run business that needs a secure water supply or Indigenous employment in businesses run by others that also need water. This valuable information will provide foundations for better future communication between Indigenous people, government planners, and private developers.

Kirsty Wissing and Kristina Fisher are the main researchers on this project, supported by Marcus Barber. Kirsty has worked for Indigenous land councils in the past and on water issues overseas. Kristina Fisher is an Ewamian woman from Queensland Gulf Country who has 30 years of experience working in Indigenous community engagement positions. Marcus Barber has worked in many other catchments in the Northern Territory (and other states) on Indigenous water rights and interests. The main research will happen in 2022 and 2023, with results to be shared from 2024.

How can I be involved?

The team want to interview Indigenous people with cultural connections to the Victoria River catchment. The team will consult with the Land Councils and local Indigenous organisations and leaders about the best way for people to participate. The work focuses on senior people able to speak for country and about development issues. Free, prior, and informed consent is very

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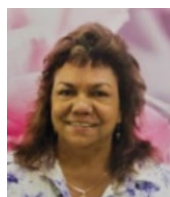
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important, and people can choose not to be involved at all, or to only answer some questions. They can choose to do an interview by themselves, come through an organisation, or have a group meeting. The team may ask who else is important to talk to – who other key Traditional Owners are. The information the team collects will be stored on computers at CSIRO and will be used to create a public report about Indigenous water values, rights and interests in the Victoria River. No words or statements will be made public without the permission of the speaker and the team will consult communities to share the information and invite feedback. Other CSIRO staff can share information about future possibilities for the area from their studies of soil, water, and agriculture.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about this research, you can contact Kirsty using the contact details below. This research has ethics approval from CSIRO Ethics and their contact details are also below.

Building on work done elsewhere in northern Australia

Our CSIRO team has conducted similar work across northern Australia. In each area, we investigated soil and water resources, water capture and storage options, agriculture, aquaculture, and other possibilities, and the risks and impacts of development. The Assessment will not assume any particular development pathway or recommend one form of development over another. The project does not seek to replace any planning processes, and it will not recommend changes to existing plans or planning processes. The results, however, can be used to inform planning decisions by citizens, communities, councils, investors and state and federal governments.



Kristina Fisher



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For further information

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