

What's happening at Toorale?

An update on the Toorale Water Infrastructure Project



The Toorale Water Infrastructure Project is located in Toorale National Park (Toorale) about 65 km south-west of Bourke in north-western NSW.

Toorale was jointly purchased with the Australian Government and added to the NSW reserve system to protect its outstanding environmental and cultural values. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder holds the Toorale water access licences for both the Warrego and Darling (Baaka) rivers. These licences are used to deliver environmental benefits on Toorale and in the Darling (Baaka) River.

The Toorale Water Infrastructure project ensures that the important values of Toorale are maintained or enhanced, while achieving greater flexibility to pass more water to the Darling (Baaka) River.

Phase 1 of the project concluded in October 2019 with the removal of Peebles Dam. Phase 2 is underway with the modification of Boera and Homestead dams. These modifications, including new regulators and fishways, will:

- enable more water to flow to the Darling (Baaka) River when downstream needs are a priority
- provide for ongoing watering of important habitats on Toorale when needed
- support fish passage between the Warrego and Darling (Baaka) Rivers.

Aboriginal cultural heritage

The area around the junction of the Warrego and Darling (Baaka) rivers, including Toorale, is part of Country of the Kurnu-Baakandji Aboriginal People. Toorale has over 600 known Aboriginal (including Aboriginal post-contact) sites across many parts of the former pastoral station such as stone artefacts, stone quarries, scarred trees, cooking ovens, freshwater shell middens, stone arrangements, ancestral burial ground and tool manufacturing sites. Much of the local stone on Toorale is suitable for manufacturing tools for everyday use. Stone used was silcrete, chert, and quartz. A subsurface artefact from Toorale has been dated at over 50,000 years old (Biosis 2018).



The Kurnu-Baakandji have a deep and continuing connection to Country, including:

- an intrinsic connection to the land, water, plants and animals of Toorale
- a formal Aboriginal joint management arrangement for the park
- visits, camping and culture camps where families celebrate, renew kinship relations and practise customs, and elders can share traditional knowledge with younger generations
- an extensive history of Aboriginal occupation and activity prior to, during and after non-Aboriginal movement into Country.
- extensive and varied Aboriginal sites on both sides of the Warrego River Western Floodplain which demonstrates that the floodplain existed prior to non-Aboriginal pastoral use
- a history of generations of Aboriginal people and families working as stockmen, horse breakers, domestic workers, drovers, shearers, yard builders and fencers, and in recent times, as cotton chippers and shearers on the irrigation property, and as field officers for National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).



Toorale Joint Management Committee

The Toorale Joint Management Committee (JMC) consists of 12 representatives nominated by the Kurnu-Baarkandji/Paakandji community, plus the NPWS Area Manager (Bourke). The JMC has numerous roles, which are defined in a Memorandum of Understanding with NPWS. Notably, the JMC provides advice to NPWS on a range of management issues on Toorale, hence their involvement in the Water Infrastructure Project.

Barbara Allen, Chair JMC says:

The JMC is there to make important decisions for people and Country so has been involved in all aspects of the project since its beginning. From site surveying to artefact identification, fishway design to decision making and project planning. We are custodians of the Darling River and have a close connection to the river on park. The water is part of our being and all actions to do with water will impact Aboriginal people.

This sentiment is repeated by Gary Currey, JMC member and Aboriginal Joint Management Coordinator, NPWS:

The Kurnu-Baakindji traditional owners worked with National Parks, DPE [Department of Planning and Environment] Water for the Environment and the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment to get a great outcome. Key issues included: respectful management of Aboriginal heritage; colour design of infrastructure to blend into the environment; and Aboriginal employment opportunities for the local traditional owners and Aboriginal community members in Bourke.

During construction activities in Phase 2, the project continues to minimise impacts on and support Aboriginal cultural heritage through adherence to site construction plans, with site monitoring by Aboriginal traditional owners and Aboriginal staff. Consultation with the JMC is ongoing, including on the Operation and Maintenance Plan which will inform how and when water is passed through Toorale to the Darling (Baaka) River.



Stay up to date

This project is funded by the Australian Government in collaboration with the NSW Government.

The Department of Planning and Environment (the department) will continue to keep stakeholders and communities informed of progress throughout the year. Find more information, including previous studies done for the project, on the department's Environment, Energy and Science [Toorale Water Infrastructure Project webpage](#), or for specific enquiries, email the Project Team at toorale.project@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Cover photo: Warrego floodplain, Toorale National Park, Chris Ghirardello/DPE; p. 2 top: examples of some of the many artefacts recorded on Toorale, Biosis, bottom: Kurnu Baarkandji Aboriginal site monitors working alongside archaeologists to salvage cultural material on Toorale, OzArk; discussing the project on site with the JMC, Sonya Ardill/DPE.

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