

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal  
Level 16,  
2-24 Rawson Place  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Via email: [REDACTED]



**New South Wales  
Aboriginal Land Council**  
ABN 82 726 507 500  
alc.org.au

Dear Mr. Dehlsen,

**RE: IPART reviews into water pricing**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the proposed Water Management and Rural Bunk Water Pricing.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council (**NSWALC**) is the peak Aboriginal representative body in NSW. Securing the return of land and waters to Aboriginal people is at the heart of our future.

As Aboriginal people, our lands and waters are central to our being, and are essential to the spiritual, social, cultural and economic survival of our communities. NSWALC, and the network of Local Aboriginal Land Councils (**LALCs**) across NSW, work to improve, protect and foster the best interests of all Aboriginal peoples in NSW.

Overall, NSWALC:

- Does not support proposals to introduce of fees and charges for Aboriginal sub-category licences. We seek a guarantee that Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Land Councils will remain exempt from fees and charges for Aboriginal sub-category licences.
- Seeks assurances that any proposals to increase water bills will not negatively impact on Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Land Councils. Further work is needed to ensure appropriate safeguards and exemption mechanisms are in place.

**Prices for Aboriginal subcategory licences**

Currently there is no cost to Aboriginal people or Aboriginal organisations to apply for and hold an Aboriginal subcategory licence (i.e. High Security [Aboriginal Cultural] Licenses, High Security [Aboriginal Commercial] Licenses, High Security [Aboriginal Community Development] Licenses Cultural, Commercial or Community development Licence.

NSWALC does not support introducing fees and charges for these licence categories.

NSWALC seeks confirmation that fees and charges will not be introduced for these licences categories.

**Proposed price increases for Regulated, Unregulated, Groundwater and Water Bills**

NSWALC is concerned that for Aboriginal Land Councils that have licensed access to water, the additional costs proposed by IPART would impact significantly on a LALCs ability to maintain ongoing ownership of

**ALWAYS WAS ALWAYS WILL BE ABORIGINAL LAND**

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water and a water licence. LALCs operate on a very limited budget and any additional / ongoing cost would be a barrier to them seeking increased ownership of water to achieve social, cultural and economic outcomes for Aboriginal communities in NSW.

Many LALCs are in rural and remote communities and will be directly affected by the proposed price increases.

For LALCs who draw metered water directly from the source for domestic purposes (rivers, lakes, bore water), not supplied via Local Government Councils, they will be required to pay more when the quality of the water and availability is not guaranteed.

It is unacceptable that prices be imposed Aboriginal people to access water for cultural purposes.

### **Closing the Gap Agreement**

The Productivity Commission<sup>1</sup> has highlighted the lack of progress by governments to date in delivering water outcomes to Aboriginal people. They have signalled the need for governments to work with First Nations peoples to secure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's interests in water.

The NSW Government has committed to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap which provides an important framework for governments to work in partnership to ensure Aboriginal people maintain distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationships with water, advance Aboriginal people's rights and interests in water, as well as improving health and economic outcomes.

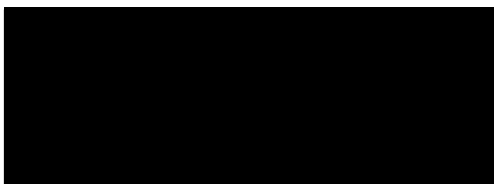
In order to meet its commitments, the NSW Government must facilitate increased access to water for Aboriginal people. The introduction of new water fees and charges for Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Land Councils will introduce additional barriers and significantly undermine the NSW Governments' ability to meet its commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

NSWALC is committed to working with the NSW Government, partners and Aboriginal communities to empower and advance water rights for all Aboriginal people.

We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss these matters at the earliest available opportunity.

If you would like further information about this submission, please contact the NSWALC Strategy & Policy Unit on [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



**James Christian PSM**  
Chief Executive Officer  
NSW Aboriginal Land Council

Date: 15 April 2021

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/water-reform-2020/draft/water-reform-2020-draft.pdf>