

Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council



Everyone who has an association with the river, whether Indigenous or not, talks about how important it is. It is the River of Life.¹

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The Place, our River Country

The Martuwarra (Fitzroy River) is an iconic, heritage listed unregulated river system of global value and significance. For Australia's original peoples of the Martuwarra, the River was formed in the beginning of time by Nyikina ancestor, Woonyoomboo. Woonyoomboo is the human face of the Martuwarra and in partnership with our sacred ancestral spiritual living being created the Martuwarra valley tracts.² Woonyoomboo was an explorer, map maker and scientist who named the places, animals, birds, fish, plants and living water systems. These environmental and cultural values are recognised in both the Western Australian Aboriginal and National Heritage Listings.

A Federation of Traditional Owners

In 2016, Traditional Owners expressed a collective vision for the Martuwarra in the Fitzroy River Declaration³. In 2018 we established the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council (MFR Council) as a 'collective governance model to maintain the spiritual, cultural and environmental health of the catchment'.⁴ The Traditional Owner members of the Council are Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, Gooniyandi Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, Walalakoo Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, Yanunijarra Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation and the Yurriyngem Taam native title claim group as represented by the Applicant (Parties). As a result, the MFR Council considers the Martuwarra to be communal property an 'asset in the commons' that belongs to all of us. The River must be promoted and protected for the benefit of present and future generations.

We are a federation of Traditional Owners who have come together to stand with ***One Mind and One Voice*** as a united Council of Senior Elders from Traditional Owner Groups of the King Sound, Fitzroy River, and its Catchment. Our work is grounded in First Law and the guardianship system of rights, responsibility, and

¹ Poelina, A. (2017). Protecting The River of Life. In K. Aigner (Ed.), *Australia: Vatican Museums Indigenous Collection* (pp. 217–223). Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press. Retrieved from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/publications/products/australia-vatican-museums-indigenous-collection/paperback>

² C Hattersley (ed), *Nyikina Stories: Woonyoomboo and Jandamarra* (Madjulla, Inc. 2009)

³ Fitzroy River Declaration - Available at <http://majala.com.au/news/protecting-the-fitzroy-river-catchment>

⁴ Poelina, A., Taylor, K. S., & Perdrisat, I. (2019). Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council: an Indigenous cultural approach to collaborative water governance. *Australasian Journal of Environmental Management*, 26(3), 236–254. doi:10.1080/14486563.2019.1651226

obligations. As guardians of the living sacred ancestor we honour six distinct sacred ancestral Rainbow Serpent traditions Yoongoorookoo, Galbardu, Kurrpurrngu, Mangunampi, Paliyarra and Kurungal. As the MFR Council of Elders we maintain and share a sophisticated cultural knowledge and practices which empower us as guardians to be the voice of the Living Waters of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Catchment and its right to live and flow.



Combined united voice of the Fitzroy Catchment Traditional Owners directing the regions' future

We Care!

There is no investment into understanding or preventing social impact risks to our people and/or the cumulative impact limits required to maintain a clean environment to protect our human and Indigenous specific rights. The commodification of water, which prices water as a 'resource' in Australia's south has resulted in river catchment scale environmental damage⁵. The Indigenous wisdom and leadership that has emerged in response to the Murray-Darling Basin catastrophe provides 'critical lessons' which we can share and learn from. Over the past 150 years, we have strongly advocated for better land and river management as well as addressing cumulative threats at a catchment scale. In a time of growing uncertainty of food, water, and energy security we need to protect our rivers as the lifeblood and life force of our Country!

More Information

To contact the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council please email us - contact@martuwarrafitzroyriver.org

- Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council website - <https://www.martuwarrafitzroyriver.org>
- Fitzroy River Declaration - <http://www.majala.com.au/news/protecting-the-fitzroy-river-catchment>
- Fitzroy River Science Statement - <http://www.fitzroystatement.org/statement>
- Martuwarra Fitzroy River Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/MartuwarraFitzroyRiver/>
- Martuwarra Fitzroy River Twitter - <http://www.twitter.com/martuwarra>

⁵ A significant example is the impact on volume and quality of water in the Murray Darling Basin, which the Australian government has recently tried to repress from a UN report (Brewster 2018).