

Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning Our Future'

Summary

DEECA's First Peoples Self-Determination
Reform Strategy 2026–2031



We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria’s land and waters, and their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom have ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

Disclaimer: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this document may contain quotes and images of First Peoples who have passed.

We are committed to genuinely partnering and meaningfully engaging with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Communities in Victoria to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices, and their broader priorities in the 21st century and beyond.

Mirring – ‘Country’

DEECA honours and pays our deepest respect to Tom Day III, a proud Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta and Wemba Wemba man. Our Aboriginal cultural identity, Mirring (Country) is one of Tom’s many incredible legacies. DEECA is both privileged and honoured to have collaborated with Tom to co-design Mirring, and his impact across our department will not be forgotten.

Uncle Brendan Kennedy, Tati Tati Elder

The name of the strategy, Pupangarli Marnmarnepu is Wadi Wadi and Mutti Mutti language for ‘Owning Our Future’ and embodies what it means for Traditional Owners to be self-determining.

Mutti Mutti, Tati Tati and Wadi Wadi language is used throughout Pupangarli Marnmarnepu. The Mutti Mutti, Tati Tati and Wadi Wadi Kulingi (people) are Murray River First Nations. Their Tyalingi (language) is part of the Western Kulin/ Murray River languages. DEECA thanks Mutti Mutti, Tati Tati and Wadi Wadi Traditional Owners for providing their language to name this strategy.

Cultural knowledge, consent and use of information

Any cultural knowledge shared through engagement remains with Traditional Owners and knowledge holders. Pupangarli Marnmarnepu incorporates Traditional Owner feedback. However, it does not reproduce sensitive cultural information. Notes were taken to accurately capture feedback to inform drafting. When attribution or details were sought for inclusion, consent was requested and provided. Feedback has been reported in a de-identified manner to protect Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property and Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

DEECA would like to thank the many Traditional Owner groups across Victoria who generously shared their time, insights and lived experiences to help refresh and shape Pupangarli Marnmarnepu. Through open, honest and respectful engagement, Traditional Owners spoke about their priorities, interests and rights on Country. Their openness has been critical in informing the direction of Pupangarli Marnmarnepu and strengthening its focus on genuine self-determination.



Purpose of Pupangarli Marnmarnepu

Pupangarli Marnmarnepu (2026–2031) is a strategy to enable First Peoples self-determination by transforming how DEECA works with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians.

Pupangarli Marnmarnepu provides a framework to strengthen cultural authority and drive change across four interconnected domains:



PEOPLE



SYSTEMS



COUNTRY



ACCOUNTABILITY

This enables decision-making power, leadership and resources to progressively transfer to Traditional Owners and First Peoples.

It embeds respect for rights, dignity and cultural authority into DEECA's workforce, systems and partnerships, supporting Traditional Owners' priorities for Country, culture, land and water, with clear accountability for outcomes.

Pupangarli Marnmarnepu also aligns DEECA's responsibilities with international, national and state obligations and commitments to First Peoples self-determination. For more information please read the full strategy available on DEECA's Website.

How to use this strategy

Pupangarli Marnmarnepu is a practical guide for how DEECA does business. All staff are expected to use it to inform:

- day-to-day decision-making and advice
- policy, program and project design and delivery
- engagement with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians
- leadership, accountability and use of authority.

This strategy should be applied early and consistently – not as a check at the end of processes. Staff should use it to ask:

- how to embed Traditional Owners' perspectives into scoping, development and design of policies, programs, projects, and initiatives
- who holds decision-making authority
- whether engagement transfers power or only seeks input
- how systems and processes may enable or block self-determination
- how outcomes for Traditional Owners are defined, measured and reported.

The four domains provide a common structure to guide action across DEECA and support sustained, outcomes-focused change led by Traditional Owners.

DEECA's role in enabling First Peoples self-determination

Traditional Owners define what self determination and self-governance mean for them. DEECA's role is to respect that authority and remove barriers that prevent Traditional Owners in Victoria from exercising their right to self-determination.

The policy landscape shown below situates Pupangarli Marnmarnepu within broader state and national self-determination commitments. It also illustrates how this strategy's implementation will drive system-wide reform across DEECA to support self-determination and improve outcomes.

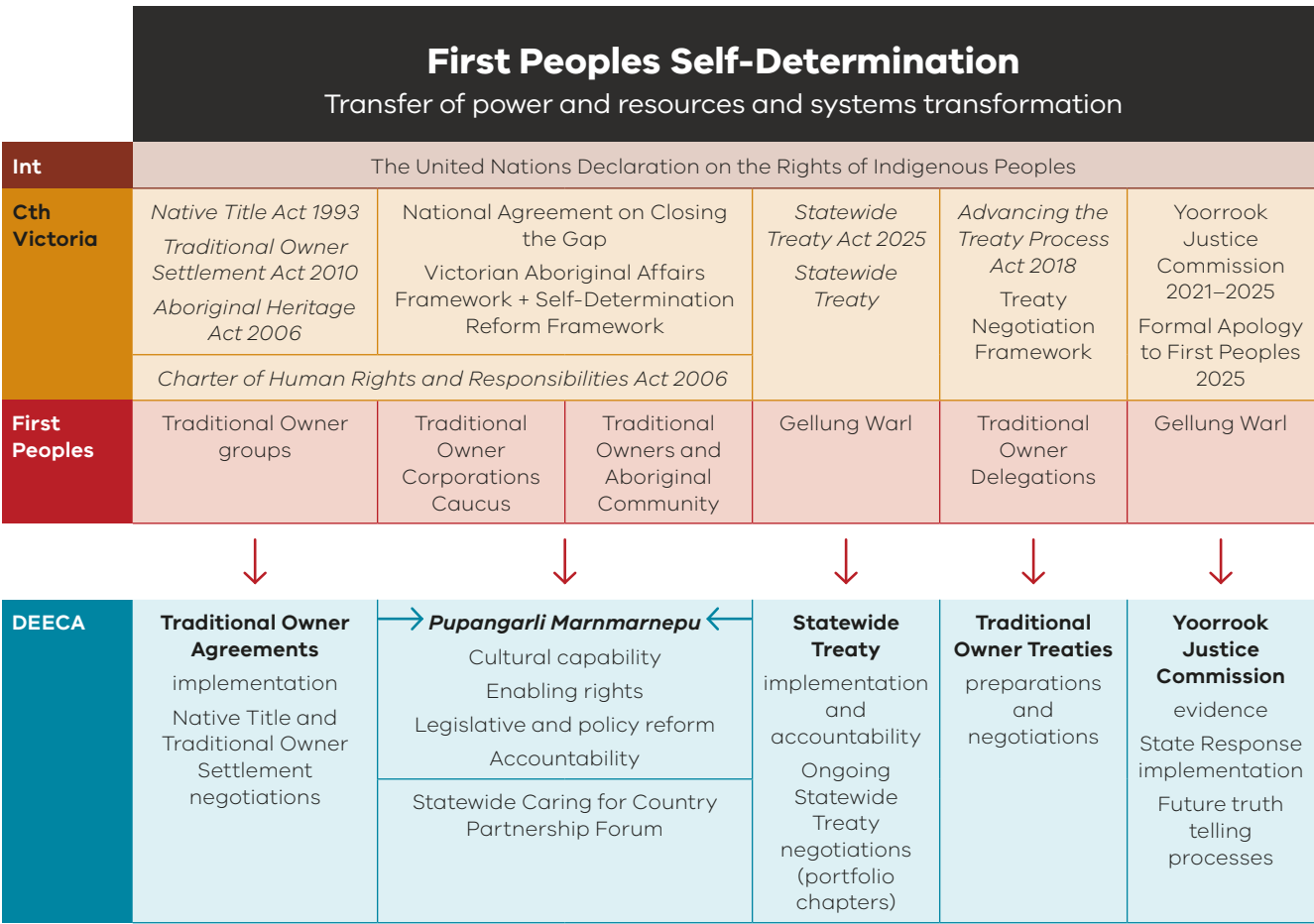


Figure 1: First Peoples self-determination diagram

Review, reflection and the next phase

Since the initial Pupangarli Marnmarnepu (2020–2025), the policy and institutional environment have shifted significantly. The work of Yoorrook and the commencement of Statewide Treaty in Victoria have heightened expectations around Aboriginal authority, accountability and outcomes. This has increased both the momentum and complexity of implementation.

This refreshed five-year Pupangarli Marnmarnepu builds on the foundations of its predecessor while aligning with shifts in the policy environment. It strengthens cultural authority as the basis for setting DEECA's strategic direction, outcomes and priorities to respond to First Peoples self-determination.

In addition to drawing on an independent evaluation of the first iteration of this strategy, this refresh was also guided by extensive engagement with Traditional Owners and DEECA staff.

Pupangarli Marnmarnepu outlines broad outcomes, indicators and measures that inform yearly priorities to be implemented in partnership with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians.

Below: DEECA's First Peoples Self-Determination Division staff at the Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum at Gariwerd in 2024



Outcomes and Accountability Framework

The Outcomes and Accountability Framework defines the outcomes under Pupangarli Marnmarnepu and how they will be measured to strengthen DEECA's accountability to the strategy. Outcomes and measures are informed by:

- existing national and state obligations. For more information please read the full strategy available on DEECA's Website.
- priorities of and feedback from Traditional Owners and DEECA staff.

This framework acknowledges the accountability role of Gellung Warl. DEECA will work with Gellung Warl to agree on reporting and accountability arrangements, including data sharing agreements.

Refreshed whole-of-Victorian government strategies will inform this work, including a new Victorian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan and the state response to the Yoorrook for Transformation final recommendations.

All domains are enabled by DEECA staff who adhere to and respect DEECA's Traditional Owner and Aboriginal Community Engagement Framework.

“Measurable targets serve as benchmarks against which the State and First Peoples can assess progress, ensuring that commitments translate into tangible results.”¹

Outcomes, measures and enablers are listed in the tables.

Outcomes are statements that describe a desired end state for individuals, organisations and communities. There is one overarching outcome statement per domain.

Contributing Outcomes are important pre-conditions for the overarching outcome statement to be achieved.

Three types of **Measures** track progress towards the outcomes:

- **Targets** quantify the size, amount or degree of change required to contribute to an outcome (for example, a percentage amount by a certain date).
- **Indicators** clarify the nature and direction of the desired change that contributes to an outcome. For example, it may increase or decrease.
- **Qualitative measures** describe important, non-numeric performance expectations to contribute to an outcome.

Measures in bold align with existing systems and processes for collecting evidence and data, enabling progress to be monitored and evaluated.

Measures not in bold do not yet have established data collection systems, reflecting Pupangarli Marnmarnepu's expanded focus on self-determination outcomes for First Peoples. DEECA will establish the necessary processes to collect, monitor and evaluate these measures in line with Traditional Owner expectations.

¹ Yoorrook Justice Commission, *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report (2025)*, Volume 1, p. 37

People

DEECA is a culturally safe and capable department, supported by a strong First Peoples workforce, that works in genuine partnership with Traditional Owners to build workforce capability and deliver priorities for Country.

DEECA’s practices are not consistently applied in a culturally safe or rights-based way, which constrains Traditional Owner authority and First Peoples self-determination.

Contributing outcomes	Outcome measures	Self-determination enablers
1.1 DEECA strengthens Traditional Owner Corporation workforce and capability through coordinated support, place-based approaches, and partnership workforce models.	• Increase in DEECA and Traditional Owner Corporation staff who have participated in Traditional Owner Corporation Knowledge Exchange program (Indicator). • Capacity and capability support is planned, and funding is sought as core business and reviewed over time, and seeks to cover the cost of culturally safe delivery, including in remote areas (Qualitative).	• Prioritise culture • Transfer power and resources
1.2 DEECA staff consistently work in culturally safe ways that respect Traditional Owner cultural authority, and racism is identified, addressed and prevented.	• 100% of First Peoples staff report a culturally safe workplace (Target). • 100% of DEECA staff complete Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training (Target). • 100% of DEECA staff have Aboriginal Cultural Capability Goals as part of their Professional Development Plans (Target). • All DEECA staff adhere to and apply the First Peoples Language Guide consistently and appropriately to their work (Qualitative). • Executives and managers respond to cultural safety issues and instances of racism early and appropriately (Qualitative). • First Peoples staff access supports (for example: the Aboriginal Staff Network) to ensure they are culturally safe at work (Qualitative).	• Prioritise culture • Address racism and promote cultural safety



Contributing outcomes	Outcome measures	Self-determination enablers
1.3 Strong First Peoples workforce participation and retention in all DEECA Groups and at all levels.	• First Peoples staff make up 3% of DEECA employees (Target). • 50% of the DEECA First Peoples workforce are women (Target). • 20% of the DEECA First Peoples workforce are in VPS6 and executive positions (Target). • Desirable roles are available for First Peoples, particularly roles relevant to the Aboriginal Community, such as in Treaty, engagement, employment, and cultural policy (Qualitative). • Executives and line managers support First Peoples staff to undertake training matched to their learning and development goals (Qualitative). • First Peoples staff develop skills and knowledge which support them to grow into more senior roles at DEECA (Qualitative).	• Address trauma and support healing • Address racism and promote cultural safety • Transfer power and resources

Progress on the People domain is aligned with and will be delivered in part through internal DEECA workforce and cultural capability strategies and guidance.

A suite of guidelines and frameworks is also being designed to support DEECA staff to consistently implement a culturally safe workplace. This includes:

- a culturally safe recruitment framework and supporting toolkit for hiring managers
- guidance on Aboriginal cultural capability goals for all Victorian Public Service levels.

“ ‘The government must also enhance the cultural capability of its workforce, ensuring accountability and measurable outcomes based on Traditional Owners’ experiences.’²

2 Yoorrook Justice Commission, *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report (2025)*, Volume 2, p. 298

Systems

DEECA's systems, funding and planning settings remove barriers and consistently enable Traditional Owners to lead, deliver and govern work on Country.

Fragmented systems limit First Peoples self-determination. DEECA must align governance, funding and delivery to enable shared decision-making and lasting partnerships with Traditional Owners.

Contributing outcomes	Outcome measures	Self-determination enablers
2.1 Advance Traditional Owner economic development and prosperity by supporting long-term planning, enterprise growth and delivery of self-determined works on Country.	• Increase in the number of Aboriginal-owned businesses and Traditional Owner enterprises engaged (Indicator). • Increase in spend on Aboriginal-owned businesses and Traditional Owner enterprises (Indicator). • Increase in proportion of funding agreements that are multi-year and indexed, enabling Traditional Owner workforce stability (Indicator). • Increase in multi-year, higher value agreements supporting funding to Traditional Owners for core, recurring programs (Indicator). • Increase in funding models that include core operating costs in addition to direct program delivery (for example, administration, travel, vehicles, safety gear, insurance, governance time), resulting in fewer interruptions and less cost shifting onto Traditional Owners (Indicator). • Removal of internal DEECA procurement barriers to engage Traditional Owner enterprises and Aboriginal-owned businesses (Qualitative).	• Transfer power and resources

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‘Self-determination requires the transfer of genuine power, authority and resources to First Peoples. This includes decisions about systems design, revenue raising, resource allocation and powers of and appointments to bodies and institutions, including accountability and oversight bodies, so that these are led by First People’.³

3 Yoorrook Justice Commission, *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report (2025)*, Volume 1, p. 145



Contributing outcomes	Outcome measures	Self-determination enablers
2.2 Embed Traditional Owner priorities in DEECA planning and policy settings, so programs and approvals enable Traditional Owner-led delivery and cultural practice on Country.	• DEECA budget submissions and work plans align with Traditional Owner-authored strategies (for example Country Plans), and Traditional Owners can see their priorities reflected in requested and funded activities (Qualitative). • Policy, permit and approval frameworks and settings are consistent across DEECA sectors and Regions and remove unnecessary barriers to Traditional Owner-led activity (for example, clearer exemptions and streamlined pathways, fewer inappropriate third-party access approvals, and less red tape and rework) (Qualitative). • Statewide frameworks for each sector for engaging with and enabling Traditional Owner delivery are developed, understood and consistently delivered (Qualitative).	• Prioritise culture • Transfer power and resources
2.3 Make engagement and decision-making consistent across DEECA, so Traditional Owners can influence early, choose their level of engagement, and avoid duplication and consultation fatigue.	• Traditional Owners can see DEECA's forward agenda and decision points, with clear contacts and better lead times to self-determine their involvement and influence early (Qualitative). • DEECA engagement with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Community is purposeful and staged with appropriate timeframes, clear feedback and closure, and faster issue resolution through clear escalation pathways (Qualitative). • DEECA staff understand the process for Traditional Owners to self-determine how they are involved in DEECA work, with DEECA executives accountable for ensuring staff capacity to enable this (Qualitative).	• Address racism and promote cultural safety • Transfer power and resources
2.4 Recognise and enable Indigenous Data Sovereignty.	• Guidance and direction for staff on how to respect Indigenous Data Sovereignty is implemented across DEECA's policy settings by 2028 (Qualitative). • Traditional Owners have authority over the collection, use, access, and reporting of data about Country and biocultural values, with joint data governance and management systems in place (Qualitative).	• Transfer power and resources

Progress on the Systems domain is aligned with internal DEECA policies and guidance relating to social procurement, Indigenous Data Sovereignty, and First Peoples monitoring and evaluation.

DEECA provides guidance to staff to support the consistent application of First Peoples self-determination across project planning and delivery. Requirements for embedding First Peoples' priorities into the DEECA budget process are explained and refreshed annually. Guidance on good practice grants management with First Peoples is also under development.

Country

DEECA recognises Traditional Owners as rights holders on Country and upholds their cultural authority, so they lead decisions and actions affecting land, water, fire, biodiversity, climate action, energy, resources and cultural landscapes.

Traditional Owner rights and authority have not been consistently recognised or enabled, resulting in limited ability for Traditional Owners to lead decisions, access Country and deliver outcomes across land, water, fire and cultural landscapes.

Contributing outcomes	Outcome measures	Self-determination enablers
3.1 Traditional Owner priorities are integrated into co-led strategies and plans for all DEECA portfolio areas.	- DEECA Groups are working with relevant First Peoples-led governance to understand Traditional Owner priorities within their portfolio area (Qualitative). - As self-determined by Traditional Owners, DEECA Groups have Traditional Owner-led strategies and/or plans in place as relevant to their portfolio areas and in response to Yoorrook Justice Commission evidence, findings and recommendations (Qualitative). - Increase in the proportion of Traditional Owner priorities which are embedded in Pupangarli Marnmarnepu Implementation Action Plans (Indicator).	- Prioritise culture - Transfer power and resources - Address trauma and support healing
3.2 Enable Traditional Owner-led cultural fire through consistent decision-making frameworks, support, and appropriate escalation pathways.	Number of Cultural Burns planned and approved against a seasonal target set annually with Traditional Owners (Target). Number of Cultural Burns delivered against a seasonal target set annually with Traditional Owners (Target) – noting achieving targets may be limited by weather conditions. - Reduced roadblocks, and fewer region-by-region negotiations through more consistent processes for Traditional Owner-led cultural fire (Qualitative). - Traditional Owner-led burns occur without repeated re-negotiation, supported by consistent statewide standards, improved training access and clear escalation pathways (Qualitative).	- Prioritise culture - Transfer power and resources - Address trauma and support healing
3.3 Strengthen water governance, cultural flows and economic prosperity by enabling Traditional Owner access, ownership and management of water.	Increase in the water entitlements held by Traditional Owners (Indicator). - Traditional Owners are recognised as decision-makers in caring for water landscapes (Qualitative). - Address and remove barriers within the water sector and Victorian water entitlement framework to increase Traditional Owner access to water (Qualitative). - Traditional Owners are supported to partner with the water sector to design, deliver and manage water-related services (Qualitative).	- Prioritise culture - Transfer power and resources - Address trauma and support healing



Contributing outcomes	Outcome measures	Self-determination enablers
3.4 Enable Traditional Owner rights and access to Country by advancing land access and return pathways.	Closing the Gap Target 15: increase of 15% on 2020 levels on the area of land mass and sea Country subject to Aboriginal legal rights or interests by 2030 (Target). Increase in land under Aboriginal Title Area (Indicator). Increase in area jointly managed between DEECA and Traditional Owners (Indicator). - Once land is returned, options within DEECA control are explored to transfer additional resources to Traditional Owners to support rehabilitation (Qualitative).	- Prioritise culture - Transfer power and resources
3.5 Enable access to Country in line with formal agreements or through approval processes that recognise Traditional Owner authority.	- Reduce the administrative burden associated with frequent permit re-approval requirements (Qualitative). - Regulatory and permit frameworks and guidance embed the Traditional Owner role with clear rules to support cultural practices (for example, wildlife, native seed collection) (Qualitative).	- Address racism and promote cultural safety - Transfer power and resources

Progress on the Country domain is aligned to and will be delivered in part through the implementation of the [DEECA Water is Life Roadmap](#).

Other key Traditional Owners-led strategies that inform DEECA priorities on Country include:

- [Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy](#)
- [Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy](#)
- [Victorian Traditional Owner Native Food and Botanicals Strategy](#)

More First Peoples-led portfolio-specific strategies are also under development, including the DEECA First Peoples Renewable Energy Strategic Plan. Work on Country will also be shaped by progressing the [Victorian Critical Minerals Roadmap](#) (Theme 4: Sharing the Benefits of Victoria's Minerals).

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‘Yoorrook heard that when First Peoples care for Country, it benefits everyone.’⁴

4 Yoorrook Justice Commission, *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report (2025)*, Volume 2, p. 35

Accountability

DEECA is accountable for delivering commitments to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians, with transparent reporting, Aboriginal-led oversight, and corrective actions when commitments are not met.

DEECA’s commitment to self-determination risks relying on individual effort instead of delivering sustained, measurable change for Traditional Owners. Evidence shows that this can happen when outcomes, strong measures, and embedded leadership accountability are not clear, and when the real consequences of failing to deliver commitments are not considered.

Contributing outcomes	Outcome measures	Self-determination enablers
4.1 DEECA fulfils its legal obligations to relevant Traditional Owner Corporations in accordance with established agreements	10% natural resource management minimum procurement spend is met for Traditional Owner Groups with a Natural Resource Agreement (Target). - DEECA meets Traditional Owner Native Title and Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 procedural rights (LUAA, NRA processes) (Qualitative). - DEECA meets government obligations under Statewide Treaty (Qualitative).	- Prioritise culture - Transfer power and resources
4.2 DEECA is accountable for delivery of self-determination, with transparent tracking, and agreed escalation when commitments are not met.	- DEECA Groups maintain a minimum of 70% Traditional Owner satisfaction with DEECA's approach to self-determination (Target). - Gellung Warl and Traditional Owner Groups view DEECA as an exemplar partner that has addressed systemic injustice and transferred power and resources to enable self-determination (Qualitative). - DEECA transparently reports commitments under the Closing the Gap reforms and targets (Qualitative). - There is documented evidence of early involvement and Traditional Owner influence in DEECA business (Qualitative). - There is documented evidence on the report back to Traditional Owners on the outcomes of engagements and partnerships (for example, 'you said/we did' reporting) (Qualitative). - Agreed escalation pathways are used to resolve non-delivery, with corrective actions agreed and applied (Qualitative).	- Transfer power and resources - Prioritise culture - Address racism and promote cultural safety - Address trauma and support healing



Contributing outcomes	Outcome measures	Self-determination enablers
4.3 DEECA operates in genuine partnership with Traditional Owners and demonstrates shared decision-making through Traditional Owner-led governance mechanisms.	- Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum, portfolio specific and regional forums focus on systemic reform and decision-making, with adequate time and authority to resolve or escalate issues (Qualitative). - Statewide, portfolio specific and regional forum priorities are progressed and completed in line with Traditional Owner expectations (Qualitative). - DEECA maintains a formal and ongoing partnership with Gellung Warl in accordance with Statewide Treaty and agreed governance arrangements (Qualitative).	- Transfer power and resources - Prioritise culture - Address trauma and support healing

Progress on the Accountability domain is aligned with, and will be delivered in part through:

- the implementation of the Traditional Owner Agreements Accountability Framework
- reporting on the progress of DEECAs First Peoples commitments to the SCfCPF, and DEECA executive and ministers, as relevant to their portfolios.

“ ‘...a First Peoples-led accountability mechanism to hold government to account is essential to create change and engender trust and confidence in government systems and processes.’⁵

5 Yoorrook Justice Commission, Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report (2025), Volume 1, p. 37

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