



IMPACT REPORT 2025

 Watertrust Australia Ltd

**Helping Australians work together for
better and fairer water outcomes.**

A scenic landscape featuring a river or lake in the foreground, framed by tall, dense grasses. In the background, a dense forest of eucalyptus trees stretches across the horizon under a clear blue sky.

Watertrust Australia acknowledges the Traditional
Custodians of waters, sea and land throughout Australia
and their continuing connection to culture and Country.
We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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About Watertrust Australia

Water decisions shape daily life. They influence the health of rivers and wetlands, the reliability of town water supplies, people's livelihoods and cultural places.

Watertrust Australia is an independent not-for-profit organisation that helps Australians work together for better and fairer water outcomes. We create space for people with different interests – communities, governments, industry and First Nations peoples – to weigh evidence alongside lived experience so choices are clearer and outcomes last.

Chair's Foreword

Our fourth year of operations has been an incredibly significant year for Watertrust. In addition to on-boarding a new CEO with a vision for the future, our groundwork in the Upper Murrumbidgee exposed many, for the first time, to the benefits of a deliberative approach for this complex water issue – an approach the Commonwealth Government is now requesting be undertaken. We also could not be more pleased with the completion of our Mid-Term Impact Review. The review is a significant milestone that has only served to reinforce the confidence in our work and its importance for Australia.

The Board's search for a new CEO lead to the appointment of Karen Hutchinson in July 2024. Karen's experience, drive and vision for Watertrust was evident this year as she has set about reshaping the Watertrust team and inspiring a focus on pace and impact. Her ability to translate the important work of Watertrust to a compelling narrative has grounded our work and has positioned us well for the future.

An exciting and clear example of our impact has been the release of the Terms of Reference for the Snowy Deed Review. The Commonwealth government has specifically embedded a deliberative process in their Terms of Reference and Request for Tender for the Review. Watertrust's groundwork to introduce and demonstrate the value of structured decision making as a way forward for the Upper Murrumbidgee River captivated the community. The feedback from stakeholders that were part of our demonstration workshops has been positive and inspiring – labelling this approach as a gamechanger and the best chance for a fair outcome.



The Watertrust mission, to change how water policy is made in Australia, was always a bold and ambitious idea. This year we tested our progress towards this mission. An independent eminent expert panel, chaired by Dr Neil Byron, supported our Mid-term Impact Review and the findings exceeded expectations. The review concluded that significant progress has already been made and the consistent feedback from those involved in our work was just how important and valuable Watertrust's role is. This year our work was recognised by government policy makers in South Australia, the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth.

Finally, I'd like to thank and acknowledge the Board and our Expert Advisory Panel and Influence Advisory Committee members who have continued to shape our vision and impactful work program. In particular, I'd like to recognise the contribution of Leith Boully, whose influence, leadership and vision helped establish Watertrust and shape its guiding ambition to do better for communities and catchments across Australia. Leith's legacy will continue to inspire how we work and who we work for.

Kathryn Fagg
Chair

CEO Message

What a privilege to work with a team that believe in what they are doing and the difference it can make. I joined Watertrust last year having spent the best part of 30 years involved in the policy arena and watching water and catchment dilemmas unfold. From that lived experience it was clear to me that people come to water challenges with very different values, wants and perspectives. Despite these differences, everyone is genuinely seeking some common ground and a good outcome. These outcomes are better, fairer, and more enduring when people are heard and invited to be part of the solution.

This is what Watertrust does. It puts people at the heart of good policy and we're getting runs on the board. In the past twelve months we have created enough interest in the importance of deliberation for the Commonwealth government to commit to a deliberative engagement process for the Snowy Review. We have also helped South Australian water agencies, in the grip of an increasingly dry spell, come up with two viable solutions for integrated water management governance. These solutions have now been captured in that state's 20-year Infrastructure Plan. At the recent Water in the Bush gathering, the Northern Territory government acknowledged our work in supporting the stuck Western Davenport water planning process and is now using those recommendations as a template for Adelaide River water allocation planning.

Watertrust is more than the sum of its parts. One of our strengths is our connection to local, national and international expertise. At the local level we strengthened Watertrust itself this year, welcoming two new Principals, whose expertise and deep connection to people and place expand our national capability. Chris Cumming and Mike Peat have both hit the ground running, scoping projects in Northern Victoria and the Lower Balonne adding to Watertrust's portfolio. This new tranche of work is focussing on the power of community and the importance of connectivity to unlock deadlocks and find workable solutions. We also launched our first internship, reflecting our commitment to fostering emerging leaders and building capacity that endures well beyond Watertrust itself.

At the National level Craig Copeland joined our Influence Advisory Committee and we hosted an insights forum and theory of change workshop that brought together thought leaders from across water, policy and deliberation sectors to challenge our thinking and chart our future impact. We were also able to draw on international experience and knowledge



to support our work in Adelaide and the Murrumbidgee as well as inform our Mid-Term Impact Review.

This year we took the important decision to bring forward our Mid-Term Impact Review from year five to year four of our operations. The review is an important hold point for our philanthropic funders and essential to give them confidence that our mission is sound and achievable. The review was conducted independently from Watertrust and supported by an independent expert panel. It assessed our impact, including outcomes achieved to date and lead indicators of future impact. The review has been shared with our funders and concluded that we have achieved significant progress towards our mission and are ahead of our impact trajectory. In short, our mission is ambitious, sound and well on the way to achievable. The review also reinforced the value of our independence.

Time and time again, throughout our work and our impact review we have heard that our independence, the gift of philanthropy, is a game changer in contested environments. It de-risks opportunities for decision makers and gives confidence to stakeholders that they will be heard. That coupled with our convening power, based on knowledge and extended networks, and connection to place is bringing diverse perspectives to the table, building trust and identifying workable solutions.

To everyone who stayed with the difficult conversations this year — thank you. Your persistence turned debate into problem-solving. Together, we are proving that by holding trust, evidence and shared responsibility at the centre, we can make decisions that last and make a real difference for Australia's water future.

Karen Hutchinson
Chief Executive Officer



Our Purpose Our Approach Our Impact

Across Australia, decisions about water too often stall. Governments become tied up by rules and political risk, and communities lose faith that consultation will lead to real change. When that happens, water systems suffer and so do the people, industries, and environments that rely on them.

Watertrust exists to change this. We create settings where people who don't always agree can come together, share evidence and lived experience, and weigh the hard choices that shape our shared future. By making these processes fair, transparent and inclusive, we help rebuild trust, opening space for governments to act with confidence and for communities to see that their voices matter.

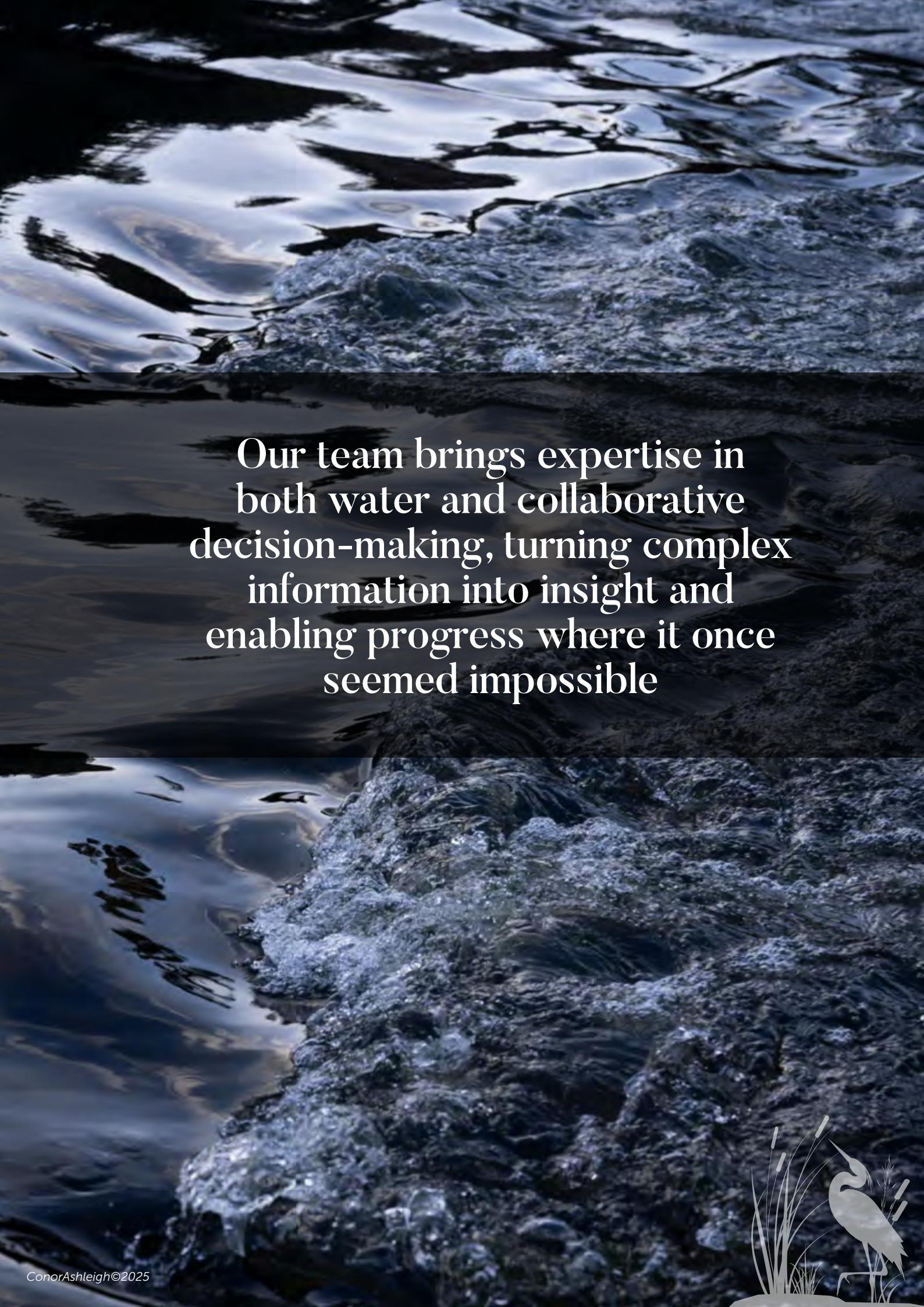
Our independence means we can focus on what unites rather than divides. It allows participants to engage knowing they won't be pushed toward

a side and helps keep attention on what can be agreed and delivered. It also gives decision-makers the confidence to participate, creating space to experiment with new ways of working and making decisions.

Our team brings expertise in both water and collaborative decision-making, turning complex information into insight and enabling progress where it once seemed impossible.

We are already seeing change. Stakeholders who had walked away are returning. Governments are committing to new ways of working. And the people most affected by decisions are shaping the solutions.

Each step forward shows that change is possible, that water decisions in Australia can be trusted, lasting, and deliver healthier waterways and stronger communities for generations to come.



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Case studies

Collaboration that unlocked a national review

Upper Murrumbidgee River,
ACT & NSW

Watertrust created the conditions for collaboration to explore new ways to resolve deadlocks in one of Australia's most complex and politically sensitive water systems. Through a Decision Sketch workshop, senior officials from the Commonwealth and three state governments, along with agencies responsible for energy, environment and finance, joined regional and community stakeholders to experience how a deliberative process could resolve deadlocks about how flows from Tantangara Dam can better balance river health, irrigation, power generation and town water supply.

Watertrust's independence and convening power made it possible for these groups with competing interests to work together, exploring a new approach. Using a structured decision making process, they compared seven mock water release scenarios, weighing evidence and lived experience side by side.

The workshop cracked open a long-stalled issue, showing that deliberation can defuse politics, and set a model for how complex national water decisions can be made more fairly and transparently. It highlighted that even long-contested issues can move forward when the right process is in place. The Commonwealth subsequently released a Terms of Reference for the review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed (SWOID) that calls for a deliberative process.

Challenge: Decisions about flows from Tantangara Dam involved multiple governments, agencies and communities, each with different priorities. Progress was slow and confidence in the process limited.

What changed: Building on groundwork laid by local stakeholders, Watertrust created space for senior officials from the Commonwealth and three state governments to work directly with regional, community and industry participants.

What we did: A Decision Sketch workshop explored the power of a deliberative process, testing seven alternative water-release patterns, combining evidence and lived experience to shape shared advice.

Impact so far: Demand for a deliberative approach to the SWOID review was created. The Terms of Reference for the review and the Approach to Market both called for a deliberative process.

Why this matters: Watertrust showed that when the right people, evidence and process come together, even the most complex water issues can be tackled collaboratively and fairly.



Restoring confidence in Western Davenport

Western Davenport, NT

By 2023, the Western Davenport water planning process had become highly strained. Committee members expressed uncertainty about the evidence base underpinning water allocation limits and relationships between stakeholder and government participants had broken down.

Watertrust was invited to help restore engagement and rebuild confidence in the process. Acting as an independent facilitator, our role was not to redesign the plan or deliver consensus, but to steady the process by providing clearer information pathways and creating space for open and respectful discussion.

These steps helped clarify the evidence base, confirm responsibilities and rebuild trust between participants. In April 2024, all members signed a piece of advice to the Minister on water allocation, a clear sign of renewed confidence and shared understanding, even amid ongoing political uncertainty.

Watertrust's independence was pivotal. One participant reflected, "We could have honest discussions rather than being compromised at every point... they saved the situation." A government stakeholder added that Watertrust's involvement "provided much-needed independence" and helped "take the heat out of" a difficult process.

In 2025, lessons from this work are informing practice. The Northern Territory Government has committed to draw on Watertrust's Lessons Learned report to guide other planning processes, including new committee guidelines and approaches to community engagement. These shifts highlight the importance of independence and transparent facilitation being embedded in how water planning is carried out, setting a solid foundation for future work shaping NT water management practice.

Challenge: The Western Davenport water planning process was creating a divide between stakeholder and government participants. Committee members were increasingly uncertain about the value of their advisory role and trust between community, industry and government had broken down.

What changed: Watertrust brought stability and independence at a time when trust in the process was extremely low. Our involvement supported participants to voice their perspectives constructively and negotiate credible and fair advice to the Minister.

What we did: We revised consultation materials to ensure diverse views were accurately represented, facilitated structured discussions, and provided neutral process support during a highly sensitive period.

Impact so far: All committee members contributed to shared advice to the Minister. Watertrust's lessons learned are being considered by the NT Government as they review process design. Participants reported that Watertrust's involvement reduced conflict and helped keep the process functioning.

Why this matters: This experience showed that independence and credible evidence can rebuild trust even after years of disagreement. It also provided a tested model for how small, resource-limited jurisdictions can make difficult water decisions with confidence and legitimacy.

"That was the real benefit: with Watertrust you had someone neutral; someone who took the time to understand all sides and who we trusted to keep the process on track."

Paul McLaughlin Western Davenport Water Advisory Committee member,
NT Melon Grower



Turning collaboration into reform

Greater Adelaide, SA

Fragmented responsibilities and competing mandates had stalled progress on water governance in Greater Adelaide. Everyone knew the challenges, but there was no trusted forum to work through them together. Efforts to improve coordination had lost momentum, and confidence that change was possible had faded.

Watertrust helped restart progress by convening a process that brought all key players to the same table and kept them there. Over 18 months, 156 people from 51 organisations took part in workshops, interviews and forums exploring how integrated water management could work in practice.

To give participants confidence that reform options were credible, Watertrust strengthened the evidence base through research and independent analysis of governance arrangements across Australia. Its impartial facilitation allowed participants to focus on substance rather than boundaries, creating space for open discussion and joint problem solving.

The process produced two clear governance options ready for government consideration: a new statutory authority for integrated water management planning with regional subsidiaries to reflect local conditions; and a centralised model placing planning, assets and services under the state water utility to create a single line of accountability.

Participants described the process as constructive and inclusive, noting that it "helped increase people's understanding of a holistic approach." One senior official said it "showed that an independent process could bring people together without a vested interest in the outcome."

In March 2025, South Australia's 20-year Infrastructure Strategy referred directly to Watertrust's governance work, reinforcing its relevance and setting a clear path for implementation once a decision is made.

The Greater Adelaide experience showed that when evidence, independence and inclusion come together, even complex reform becomes possible. By turning long-standing discussion into decision-ready options, Watertrust helped move policy from principle to practice.

Challenge: Fragmented responsibilities had stalled progress on water governance in Greater Adelaide, with no trusted forum for agencies and councils to work through solutions together.

What changed: Watertrust brought 156 people from 51 organisations into a single, independent process that kept them engaged and focused on what could work in practice.

What we did: Strengthened the evidence base through research and independent analysis, then facilitated open workshops and forums to co-design workable governance options.

Impact so far: Two clear options are now ready for decision, and South Australia's 20-year Infrastructure Strategy refers directly to this work, setting a path for reform.

Why this matters: By combining independence, evidence and inclusion, Watertrust helped turn long-standing discussion into decision-ready reform for Greater Adelaide's water future.

A photograph of a sunset over a calm river. On the left, a large tree with long, sweeping branches is silhouetted against the sky. The sky is a vibrant orange and pink. On the right bank, a dense forest of eucalyptus trees is reflected in the water. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

Our Foundations -Relationships, Knowledge and Influence

Leadership and Capability

Watertrust strengthened its leadership and capability to support national work on fair and durable water decisions.

This year, Watertrust welcomed significant additions to its team, marking an important step in strengthening our capability and influence. Karen Hutchinson was appointed Chief Executive Officer, bringing a clear vision to guide our next phase of growth. Two new Principals also joined the organisation, expanding our depth of expertise across agriculture, water, ecology, government and community engagement. Chris Cumming brings extensive experience in land management, government and community leadership, enhancing Watertrust's convening power to influence contested reforms. Mike Peat adds deep knowledge of water policy, ecology and community relationships in the Northern Basin, further strengthening our capacity to shape Basin reform and deliver trusted, lasting outcomes.

We also welcomed our first intern, Mikayla Hyland-Wood, whose six-month placement provided hands-on experience in collaborative water governance and meaningful contributions to our work. Her time with Watertrust reflects our commitment to supporting the next generation of leaders in water reform. Alongside these appointments, new roles in governance, policy and communications have reinforced our internal systems and project delivery, positioning Watertrust for even greater impact in the years ahead.

Connection with People and Place

Relationships deepened across regions, keeping national work grounded in local knowledge and trust.

Throughout the year, Watertrust deepened its engagement with communities and stakeholders across Australia, drawing on our place-based expertise to deliver impact where it matters most. In the Northern Basin, we strengthened relationships with First Nations leaders, graziers, irrigators and local councils, focusing on connecting local discussions and laying the groundwork for a collaborative process to identify shared priorities. Our ongoing presence and partnerships in the region continue to build trust and understanding across diverse perspectives.

Watertrust contributed to the One Basin CRC project on future governance for water-limited communities, supporting the co-design of inclusive and resilient regional governance models. One Basin CRC pilots are underway in SA and NSW, and scoping is underway in northern Victoria. Further north, visits to Katherine and Alice Springs strengthened relationships with community organisations, Traditional Owners and government representatives, helping shape the design of future deliberative processes. Insights from this regional engagement have been shared through national forums and networks, reinforcing that trust, connection and collaboration — grounded in local knowledge and relationships — remain the foundation for fair and lasting water decisions.

Fairness in Water Policy

Embedding fairness in practical decision-making.

Fairness is central to how communities expect water to be managed, yet there has been limited shared understanding of what fairness looks like in practice. Watertrust's fairness initiative is working to address this by developing a clear, usable guide that supports more transparent and inclusive decision-making.

As a foundational initiative for Watertrust, our fairness work informs how we collaborate, convene, and engage across all our projects. The framework is being shaped through research and conversations with people across the Murray–Darling Basin and other regions, helping us build a common language for what fairness can mean in real policy contexts. We are now testing and refining these principles through live policy challenges, including in the Mount Lofty Ranges Water Allocation Plans and the Upper Murrumbidgee deliberative work. These practical applications are helping us understand how fairness can support better processes, stronger relationships, and more trusted outcomes, providing a pathway for water decision-making that is not only technically sound, but genuinely responsive to community expectations.

Expert Panel Chair Dr Neil Byron described Watertrust's base of relationships, knowledge and influence as "just pure gold" and said the organisation had "gone well beyond proof of concept."

Our Mid-Term Impact Review

An independent Mid-Term Impact Review, overseen by an Expert Panel, confirmed that Watertrust has moved beyond proof of concept to demonstrable impact, building strong relationships, deep knowledge and trusted influence across the water sector.

The Review tested our progress against Watertrust's renewed Theory of Change, which was refined and validated with internal and high-profile external stakeholders at our Theory of Change Workshop. The Theory outlines the challenges we are addressing, who we seek to engage, and the actions needed to make progress. It clarifies what must shift to achieve fairer and more durable water decisions. The enthusiasm shown through the collaborative workshop demonstrated strong alignment and goodwill for our mission, reinforcing that now is the time for this work.

Findings showed that progress had exceeded expectations at this stage, with visible impact across multiple projects and clear indicators now in place to track progress and guide continuous learning.

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere thanks to the independent Mid-Term Impact Review Expert Panel for their enthusiasm, guidance, and expertise throughout the review process.

Dr Neil Byron – Chair

Dr Anne Bardsley

Dr Wendy Craik AM

Mr Phillip Glyde

We also express our appreciation to the many stakeholders who shared their insights and valuable contributions, helping to shape and strengthen the findings of the Mid-Term Impact Review.



Creating the Conditions for Change

Our refined Theory of Change outlines how Watertrust enables fair and durable water decisions. It defines the challenges we address, who needs to be involved, and the actions that make progress possible. It also describes what must shift in relationships, understanding and decision systems for outcomes to endure.

We look for early signs that the right people are engaged, that they understand one another's perspectives, and that they can keep working together as complexity grows. We also test whether solutions are practical and specific, with responsibilities and timing agreed. When these conditions are in place, decisions move forward and governance systems strengthen, creating the foundation for healthier waterways and more resilient communities.

A **Theory of Change** explains how and why an organisation's work leads to the outcomes it seeks to achieve. It maps the connection between our activities, the changes we aim to influence, and the long-term impact we aspire to create.

For Watertrust, it defines how our work contributes to fairer and more durable water decisions by identifying the stakeholders we engage, the challenges they face, the strategies we employ, and the outcomes we expect over time. It also serves as a shared framework for learning, reflection, and accountability, helping us measure progress, understand what is working, and adapt as we go to create lasting impact in Australia's water decision-making systems.



Our purpose: to advance healthier waters, catchments and communities by breaking deadlocks and improving water-related decision processes

THE CHALLENGE

Across Australia, those who use, engage with, and make decisions about water often have different values, competing interests and unequal power.

Communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, environmental groups and industry water users feel frustrated, excluded and/or overwhelmed by existing decision-making processes and do not trust them to identify and achieve workable and timely water outcomes.

Decision-makers are navigating complex frameworks, siloed structures and political interests.

These factors make it challenging to manage water sustainably for environmental, cultural, economic and social outcomes.

OUR STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES

ENGAGE WITH STAKEHOLDERS across the water sector to build willingness to participate in deliberative decision processes*



CONVENE DELIBERATIVE DECISION PROCESSES* to reframe policy deadlocks, explore multiple perspectives and identify workable solutions



SYNTHESISE EVIDENCE to make it accessible, accurate and appropriate to address the issues that require deep deliberation



ENGAGE WITH DECISION-MAKERS that manage Australia's waters and catchments to increase their capacity and support for deliberative decision processes*



Theory of change

SHORT- TO MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, environmental groups, industry water users and public servants participate in deliberative decision processes.* They are appropriately resourced and empowered to actively engage.

UNDERSTANDING AND RELATIONSHIPS

Stakeholders with divergent interests, who participate in deliberative decision processes*
(a) increase their understanding of the evidence-base
(b) feel heard, respected and valued
(c) understand the views and values of those with divergent interests, and
(d) build relationships, which endure beyond a specific process.

WORKABLE SOLUTIONS

Stakeholders with divergent interests collaborate to develop workable solutions to specific water governance and management issues.

DECISION-MAKER SUPPORT

Decision-makers support and/or participate in deliberative decision processes* to resolve specific water-related issues.

LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES

PEOPLE: DEADLOCKS ARE BROKEN OR AVOIDED

Stakeholders with divergent interests accept the outcomes of water-related deliberative decision processes* and continue to collaborate



SYSTEMS: DECISION-MAKING SYSTEMS CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Deliberative decision processes* are replicated for water-related issues and, over time, are adopted for other issues.



WATER: HEALTHIER WATERS, CATCHMENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Decision-makers adopt the recommendations of water-related deliberative decision processes*, which consider environmental, cultural, economic and social outcomes.



- Status quo stakeholder consultation and decision-making processes do not result in effective and enduring decisions
- There is a need for culturally informed engagement approaches when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

* *“Deliberative decision processes” - inclusive engagement approaches that provide time and resources for learning, considering different values and perspectives, and finding common ground for informed collective decisions*

Underlying hypotheses/assumptions:

- Better process leads to better outcomes.
- By engaging people across the water system, the process will weigh up environmental, cultural, economic and social outcomes.
- Stakeholders are willing to overcome lack of trust and overwhelm to try something new
- Existing power dynamics can be shifted through different ways of working
- Sufficient funding to sustain participatory processes over longer periods of time

Making Change Happen

When people come together, take the time to understand each other's perspectives, and stay engaged as issues grow more complex, real change becomes possible. These are the moments when decisions start to be made differently, grounded in trust, evidence, and shared responsibility.

Across our projects, we brought people in early and kept them working together with information that was clear, practical, and relevant as decisions evolved. This approach made trade-offs more transparent, reduced disputes later on, and gave decision makers workable options they could confidently act on.

Even when conversations were challenging, people stayed at the table. Evidence and lived experience were considered side by side, deepening understanding and refining the options. Adjustments were made in real time, with responsibilities and timeframes agreed and recorded collectively.

By involving decision makers earlier and linking their participation to tangible next steps, we created the conditions for decisions that will endure—and make a real difference on the ground.

A snapshot of how this has played out across Watertrust's work in 2025 follows, and in the next section three initiatives are showcased that demonstrate how the work moves from discussion to decision.

Active engagement

People with different roles and rights take part from the start and are supported to stay involved.

When people with different interests are involved from the outset and stay engaged, their advice reflects more of what matters and difficult issues are surfaced sooner.

In 2025, participation widened and held strong. In each of Watertrust's major projects, stakeholders stayed at the table, showing that the settings

created made participation worthwhile. Across these settings, engagement led to clearer next steps, fewer late disputes and a shared sense that the work was worth continuing.

In action:

- Watertrust facilitated structured decision-making with 26 stakeholders from across the Upper Murrumbidgee River region, including senior government advisers. Decision makers now have firsthand experience of how deliberative tools can turn contested water policy debates into constructive, solution-focused dialogue.

Understanding and relationships

People understand the evidence better, feel heard and respected, and build lasting relationships with others who might see things differently.

Understanding and relationships grow when stakeholders with divergent interests increase their grasp of the evidence base, feel heard, respected and valued, understand each other's perspectives, and build relationships that endure beyond a single process. Watertrust strengthened these conditions by building trust in the data, creating space for difficult conversations and supporting collaboration grounded in respect.

In action:

- In Western Davenport, Watertrust's independent facilitation helped rebuild trust and deliver joint advice to government, leading the Northern Territory to commit to a new, collaborative way forward informed by this work.
- Watertrust visited the Condamine–Balonne region in the Northern Basin, meeting with First Nations representatives, graziers, irrigators, and local councils. The visit strengthened relationships and deepened local connections.

Workable solutions

People with different interests work together to shape practical solutions that can be delivered.

Workable solutions are reached when stakeholders with divergent interests collaborate to develop practical and specific responses to water governance and management issues. These solutions only count when responsibilities and timing are clear, and when people involved can explain and stand by what has been agreed.

In action:

- Watertrust's governance recommendations and Integrated Water Management model have been recognised in *South Australia's 20-Year State Infrastructure Strategy 2025*, with reform pathways now being advanced through Watertrust-facilitated engagement.

Decision-maker support

Decision-makers take part and act on the work.

Decision-maker support is visible when people with authority use the work to set direction and put next steps on the public record. This is how dialogue turns into decisions. Across the initiatives, senior officials stayed engaged from design through to delivery, showing confidence in the process and readiness to use its results.

In action:

- The Commonwealth has released the *Terms of Reference for the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed Review*, adopting deliberative and evidence-based approaches that align closely with Watertrust's proven methods for water reform.
- Building on our *Future Integrated Water Management Governance Arrangements for Greater Adelaide* report, Watertrust was invited to be involved in the Mount Lofty Ranges, where governments and communities are confronting complex decisions about how to allocate water to balance multiple values in the face of a changing climate.

Change happens through well-designed and inclusive processes that turn disagreement into shared understanding and help people move from difficult discussions to workable decisions. The experiences in the Upper Murrumbidgee, Greater Adelaide and Western Davenport show that when the right conditions are in place, good process leads directly to better outcomes.



Year in Review

These milestones show how building leadership, deepening evidence and testing new methods laid the groundwork for system change.

Expanding evidence and trust

- Finalised Cape York report on First Nations participation in ecosystem services. First Nations and policymakers in Queensland now have a credible national reference point for participation in ecosystem services.
- Completed the first national analysis of how equity, fairness and justice appear in Australian legislation. Policymakers now have a clear platform for embedding fairness in water policy decisions.
- Structured decision-making introduced into early stages of the Upper Murrumbidgee water deliberations. Stakeholders in a contested region have now experienced a practical way to work through disagreement.
- Watertrust helped shape two governance models for integrated water management in Adelaide. The South Australian Government now has clear options they can act on, drawn from collective expertise and input.
- Documented lessons from Western Davenport planning in our *Lessons Learned: Collaborative water allocation planning in the Northern Territory* report. Northern Territory now has a reusable model for collaborative and transparent planning.

Deepening national influence

- Held an Insights Forum at the Shine Dome where our partners and advisers came together to critique and support our foundational work on Fairness and our future impact strategy.

Proving deliberative methods work

- Demonstrated structured decision-making with 26 Upper Murrumbidgee River stakeholders, including senior government advisers. Decision makers now have tangible experience that deliberative tools can shift contested debates in water policy.
- Published a national guide on *Structured Decision Making as a Tool for Better Water Policy*. Policymakers and practitioners now have a reference to design fairer and more collaborative processes.

Reframing fairness in policy

Launched *Water, Law and Concepts of Equity: Preliminary Review*. Establishes fairness as a practical policy requirement, not just an aspiration.

Turning lessons into national influence

- Released the *Western Davenport Lessons Learned report*. Other jurisdictions now have a tested model for transparent and collaborative water planning.
- Published a literature review of more than 100 works and visually mapped contested fairness concepts for accessible use. Policymakers now have evidence and tools to embed fairness in policy.

Catalysing cross-sector change

- Watertrust was invited to join community leaders, Traditional Owners, scientists and Senator Katy Gallagher for dialogue at Tharwa Bridge catalysed by concerns for the Murrumbidgee. National leaders are hearing how deliberative methods can work in contested settings.
- Launched the *Policy Made Better* newsletter. Stakeholders now have a regular national platform to track reform and Watertrust's influence.
- Surveyed more than 2,500 Murray–Darling Basin residents on their perceptions of fairness; key finding: values and identities drive judgments. The first representative dataset on fairness in Basin communities and a turning point for reform.
- Released a *Key Concepts Guide* for embedding fairness in water policy decision making. Policymakers now have concise tools to make fairness part of governance.

Influencing water policy development

- The Commonwealth released the *Terms of Reference – Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed* review, adopting deliberative and evidence-based methods. Water reform aligning with Watertrust's proven approach.
- Watertrust governance recommendations and Integrated Water Management model recommended in the *South Australia's 20-year State Infrastructure Strategy 2025* report. South Australia now has reform pathways developed through Watertrust engagement.
- Presented Watertrust tools, approaches and fairness work to the Victorian Catchment Management Authority network. Strengthened relationships with regional leaders who now have access to Watertrust models and frameworks.

Sharpening impact pathways

- Watertrust's Theory of Change workshopped and refined by thought leaders from water, philanthropy and future generations. Watertrust now has clearer outcomes and measures to track impact.

Extending reach and visibility

- Watertrust visited Condamine–Balonne in the Northern Basin, and met with First Nations Representatives, graziers, irrigators and councils. Local stakeholders now have stronger connections with Watertrust leadership.
- CEO keynote at Australian Water Partnerships Partners Forum framed fairness as foundational to legitimacy. Fairness emerging as central to national water policy debate.
- Watertrust shared governance insights from the Adelaide Integrated Water Management initiative with select stakeholders at the Australian Water Association's OzWater'25 Conference. National water industry leaders now have access to governance reforms options in Adelaide.

Watertrust's impact is real

- Independent review findings showed strong progress toward Watertrust's short- and medium-term goals, with clear early signs of system-level change beginning to emerge.
- Regional visit to the Upper Murrumbidgee reinforced trust during finalisation of the SWOID review Terms of Reference. Stakeholders now have confidence the process is fair and durable.

Looking Ahead

The next phase of work is about turning visible progress into lasting change. An independent Mid-Term Impact Review confirmed that Watertrust's approach is improving how difficult water decisions are made. It also outlined clear signals to watch, including workable solutions found in contested spaces, deadlocks unlocked with stakeholders accepting decision outcomes and continuing to collaborate, and decision makers paying attention with Watertrust's methods being reflected in public plans and reviews.

The review also highlighted the need to deepen engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Stronger First Nations leadership and participation in deliberative processes will be essential to ensure future decisions are both fair and durable.

Across projects, early signs of lasting impact are already visible. In Greater Adelaide, two options for improving metropolitan water governance are ready for government decision and are referenced in South Australia's 20-year infrastructure strategy. In the Upper Murrumbidgee, Watertrust's structured approach informed the Terms of Reference for the SWOID review. In Western Davenport, all committee members signed one set of recommendations to the Minister, showing that with a trusted process, agreement is possible even in difficult settings.

This year has been a year of growing recognition and impact. Next year we will leverage this success for even greater impact, particularly targeting the Murray-Darling Basin. As we refine our impact strategy we expect to be delivering progress towards longer-term outcomes, with decisions that last and systems that work more fairly. **Watertrust is making system change possible and the progress is already starting to show.**



Acknowledgements

Our work is made possible through the gift of philanthropy that enables our independence. We are deeply grateful to the individuals and foundations whose generosity enables us to stay impartial, build trust, and focus on fair and lasting water outcomes.

We also thank our many partners across communities, governments, research institutions and industry who contribute their time, expertise and collaboration to help us make progress on complex water challenges.

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- Wright Burt Foundation
- Yulgilbar Foundation

Partners

- Australian Academy of Science
- Gilbert + Tobin
- One Basin CRC



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Who We Are

Board Members

- Kathryn Fagg, Chair
- Leith Boull*[†]
- Andre Carstens
- Paul Conroy
- Deborah Nias
- Robbie Sefton
- Rob Vertessy**[†]
- Tim Gordon

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- Robbie Sefton
- Karlene Maywald
- Rob Skinner
- Susan Worley
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- Fran Sheldon
- Craig Simmons
- Geoff Syme
- Poh-Ling Tan
- Simon Toze
- Glen Walker

* Retired from the Board May 2025

** On leave of absence

Management & Staff

- Karen Hutchinson, Chief Executive Officer
- Kylie Clarke, Company Secretary
- Kane Aldridge
- Peter Horne
- Kate Peake
- Chris Cumming
- Mike Peat
- Leila Noble
- Mikayla Hyland-Wood

Vale to a champion for community, leadership and water reform

This year we honour **Leith Boull**, one of Watertrust's founding Directors and a leader whose impact on Australia's water policy landscape spans decades.

From the earliest conversations about what better water policy could look like, Leith brought deep insight, fierce commitment to community voices, and an insistence on lasting, meaningful change. Her clarity, conviction and care are woven into the DNA of Watertrust and will continue to guide us in the years ahead.





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